

= Kaumodaki =

Kaumodaki is the gada (mace) of the Hindu god Vishnu . Vishnu is often depicted holding the Kaumodaki in one of his four hands ; the other attributes are the chakra , the conch and the lotus . The gada is also found in iconography of some of Vishnu 's avatars .

The name " Kaumodaki " first appears in the Hindu epic Mahabharata , where it is associated with Vishnu 's avatar Krishna . The gada is depicted in images of Vishnu since c . 200 BCE . While initially unadorned , the size and shape of Kaumodaki vary in depictions . More elaborate design features like flutes and segments were added in depictions of Vishnu 's gada .

Though the weapon may be depicted as an inanimate gada , Kaumodaki sometimes appears personified as a woman known as Gadadevi or Gadanari in sculptures of Vishnu . In depictions that use this version , Vishnu rests one of his hands on her head , while she herself holds the gada , is seen emerging from it or has the gada carved on her head / crown .

The gada , regarded one of the oldest and strongest weapons , is a symbol of Vishnu 's powers . Various texts discuss the symbolism of Kaumodaki in Vishnu 's iconography .

= = Etymology = =

The etymology of " Kaumodaki " is unclear . According to a popular etymology , Kaumodaki derives its name from the Sanskrit word kumuda , the blue water @-@ lily or the blue lotus (Nymphaea nouchali) . Another theory suggests that the mace may derive its name from the epithet of Vishnu , Kumodaka or vice versa . The literal synonym of Kaumodaki , kaumudi is interpreted as " joy on the earth " . Based on the Vishnu Purana , Alain Daniélou translates Kaumodaki as " stupefier of the mind " .

= = Iconography = =

Vishnu is usually depicted as four @-@ armed with the four attributes in his hands : the shankha (conch) , the Sudarshana chakra , the padma (lotus) and the Kaumodaki gada . A popular epithet of Vishnu is Shankha @-@ chakra @-@ gada @-@ pani , " he who holds in his hands shankha , chakra and gada " . Generally , the gada is held in the lower (natural) left hand of Vishnu in contemporary images . The gada sometimes also appears in the depictions of Vishnu 's avatars Matsya , Kurma , Varaha and Narasimha .

The gada appears as an attribute in the oldest known sculpture of Vishnu (from Malhar , Madhya Pradesh) , dated to c . 200 BCE . One of the earliest images of Vishnu date to the Kushan period (30 ? 375 CE) found around Mathura , the gada does not appear in a stylised design as in later depictions , but the mace is a simple " round top @-@ heavy rod " held in his upper (back) right hand and lifted above the shoulders . In another Kushan sculpture , the gada is depicted as a long rod which is almost the height of Vishnu and is held in his upper right hand . It is depicted similar to a long pestle (musala) . A similar image found in Jhusi as well as early images from Western India depict Vishnu resting his upper right hand on the mace or holding the mace in this hand . Gupta images continue the trend of having upper (back) right hand resting on or holding the gada . The gada started being depicted in other arms . Twenty @-@ four configurations of Vishnu images are noted , where the order of the four attributes is changed .

While the hand holding the gada changed , the design of the weapon transformed too . In late medieval art , especially Pala (8th ? 12th century CE) , the size of the handle of the gada is reduced to a flute , while the top takes a highly decorated round form . In Uttar Pradesh , the handle is tapered and expands at the top ; sphere on the top also depicted with flutes . The Chalukyan gada is thick and " barrel " -shaped , while the Pallava gada is depicted thick throughout . The Cholas carve Kaumodaki thinner , but is ridged and segmented .

The Vishnudharmottara Purana describes the iconography of Vishnu . While the lotus and shankha are held in the upper hands , the lower hands rest on two dwarf figures : the personified gada and chakra . The gada personified as a slim @-@ waisted woman , holds a chamara (chowry) in her

hands and is adored with ornaments , with Vishnu 's right hand resting on her head ; chakra stands as a man on Vishnu 's left . The personified weapons known as Ayudhapurusha emerge in Gupta era (320 ? 550 CE) sculptures . The personified Kaumodaki is also known as Gada @-@ devi (the suffix devi means goddess) or Gada @-@ nari (" gada @-@ woman ") . Since the Sanskrit word gada is feminine , gada is regarded as a woman . A Gupta Vishnu in Udayagiri Caves depicts Vishnu accompanied by Gadadevi and the personified chakra . Gadadevi often appears in Vishnu images from Kashmir , including Vishnu 's four @-@ headed form Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . She holds a chamara and looks in adoration towards her master , whose hand rests on her head . She wears a crown or has an elaborate hairstyle . Apart from a lower garment , she might wear a blouse or have a bare torso . She is depicted emerging from the gada .

Gadadevi may be depicted as a dwarf or as a normal human as in the Sheshashayi Vishnu panel of the Gupta Deogarh temple . She is depicted holding the gada . The motif of Kaumodaki holding the gada is mostly found in Uttar Pradesh and Bengal art . In another variation , Kaumodaki stands besides Vishnu with folded hands (in anjali mudra posture) with the gada depicted on the head as part of the crown or the weapon mark on her forehead , as in Chola era bronzes of the gada .

= = Development and symbolism = =

The mace or club is one of the oldest weapons known to man . The popularity of the weapons with Vishnu worshippers may have led to its depiction with the deity . The gada ? a symbol of strength ? was a common weapon for hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat and was regarded as the strongest of weapons . Vishnu 's attributes originate from his avatars , Rama and Krishna , the heroes of the ancient Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata (existing in the 5th to 4th century BCE) respectively . Both the epics narrate various characters ? gods , men and demons alike ? using the gada .

In the philosophical meaning expounded by the Vishnu @-@ worshipping Vaishnava sect , Kaumodaki symbolizes " the intellect , the power of knowledge and the power of time " . While explaining the symbolism of four attributes in Vishnu 's hands , the Gopala Tapani Upanishad says that the gada ? which represents primordial knowledge ? is held in the lower left hand , which denotes " individual existence " . The Vishnu Purana calls the gada the power of knowledge . Kaumodaki is said to " intoxicate " the mind .

According to the Vishnudharmottara Purana , Kaumodaki represents Vishnu 's wife Lakshmi , the goddess of wealth and beauty . The Krishna Upanishad equates the gada to the goddess Kali , " the power of time " . The text further says that like the invincible Time , the mace is the destroyer of all opponents .

Another interpretation suggests that the Kaumodaki symbolizes the life @-@ force (prana) from which all " physical and mental powers " arise . Vishnu 's gada also stands for discipline , complemented by his lotus , that denotes praise . While the lotus and shankha in his hands are water symbols representing life and love , the gada and the chakra are fire symbols denoting pain and destruction and command adherence to the rules of society and nature . The Varaha Purana says the gada is to teach a lesson to irreligious rulers . Vishnu is also said to clear illusion by his gada .

= = Legends = =

In the Mahabharata , Kaumodaki is described to sound like the lightning and was capable of slaying many daityas (demons) . It is granted to Vishnu @-@ Krishna by Varuna , the god of the seas . The Pandava princes were given the Khandava Forest to build their kingdom . The fire @-@ god Agni wanted to " eat " the forest to cure his indigestion . But Lord Indra opposed and created heavy rain as his friend Takshaka was living in that forest . He asked the Pandava Arjuna and his friend Krishna to aid him , as he feared the king of the gods and protector of the forest , Indra , will interfere . Arjuna and Krishna agreed and were given celestial weapons by Varuna . Krishna was given the Sudarshana chakra and Kaumodaki gada , while Arjuna got the bow Gandiva and various

divine arrows . The duo defeat Indra and Agni burns down the forest , paving way for the establishment of the Pandava capital Indraprastha .

The Mahabharata describes Vishnu holding a gada and a chakra , possibly indicating two @-@ armed images of Vishnu . The Mahabharata also records at the time of the chakra @-@ musala war , Krishna 's Kaumodaki along with other weapons appear in human form from the heavens to watch the battle . The Harivamsa , an appendix to the Mahabharata describes four of Vishnu 's weapons fall from the heavens to aid Krishna and his brother Balarama in his battle against Jarasandha . Balarama uses the plough and the club called Saunanda ; while Krishna battles with Kaumodaki and the bow Sharanga .

The Duta @-@ Vakya (" envoy 's message ") of the Sanskrit playwright Bhasa (c . 2nd century BCE ? 2nd century CE) describes an episode from the Mahabharata when Krishna depicts his Vishvarupa (all pervading " Universal form ") in the Hastinapur court and summons his weapons , who appear as humans , including the Kaumodaki . The Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa mentions about dwarf @-@ like ayudhapurushas including Vishnu 's mace .