

= Ganesha =

Ganesha ( / ɡəˈnɛʃə / ; Sanskrit : गणेश , Gaṇeśa ; listen ) , also known as Ganapati and Vinayaka , is one of the best known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon . His image is found throughout India , Sri Lanka and Nepal . Hindu sects worship him regardless of affiliations . Devotion to Ganesha is widely diffused and extends to Jains and Buddhists .

Although he is known by many attributes , Ganesha 's elephant head makes him easy to identify . Ganesha is widely revered as the remover of obstacles , the patron of arts and sciences and the deva of intellect and wisdom . As the god of beginnings , he is honoured at the start of rituals and ceremonies . Ganesha is also invoked as patron of letters and learning during writing sessions . Several texts relate mythological anecdotes associated with his birth and exploits and explain his distinct iconography .

Ganesha emerged as a distinct deity in the 4th and 5th centuries CE , during the Gupta period , although he inherited traits from Vedic and pre-Vedic precursors . He was formally included among the five primary deities of Smartism ( a Hindu denomination ) in the 9th century . A sect of devotees called the Ganapatya arose , who identified Ganesha as the supreme deity . The principal scriptures dedicated to Ganesha are the Ganesha Purana , the Mudgala Purana , and the Ganapati Atharvashirsa .

= = Etymology and other names = =

Ganesha has been ascribed many other titles and epithets , including Ganapati ( Ganpati ) and Vighneshvara . The Hindu title of respect Shri ( Sanskrit : श्री ; IAST : śrī ; also spelled Sri or Shree ) is often added before his name .

The name Ganesha is a Sanskrit compound , joining the words gana ( gaṇa ) , meaning a group , multitude , or categorical system and isha ( īśa ) , meaning lord or master . The word gaṇa when associated with Ganesha is often taken to refer to the gaṇas , a troop of semi-divine beings that form part of the retinue of Shiva , Ganesha 's father . The term more generally means a category , class , community , association , or corporation . Some commentators interpret the name " Lord of the Gaṇas " to mean " Lord of Hosts " or " Lord of created categories " , such as the elements . Ganapati ( गणपति ; gaṇapati ) , a synonym for Ganesha , is a compound composed of gaṇa , meaning " group " , and pati , meaning " ruler " or " lord " . Though the earliest mention of the word Ganapati is found in hymn 2.23.1 of the 2nd-millennium BCE Rigveda , it is however uncertain that the Vedic term referred specifically to Ganesha . The Amarakosha , an early Sanskrit lexicon , lists eight synonyms of Ganesha : Vinayaka , Vighnarāja ( equivalent to Vighnesh ) , Dvaimātura ( one who has two mothers ) , Gaṇadhīpa ( equivalent to Ganapati and Ganesha ) , Ekadanta ( one who has one tusk ) , Heramba , Lambodara ( one who has a pot belly , or , literally , one who has a hanging belly ) , and Gajanana ( gajānana ) ; having the face of an elephant .

Vinayaka ( विनायक ; vinayaka ) is a common name for Ganesha that appears in the Purāṇas and in Buddhist Tantras . This name is reflected in the naming of the eight famous Ganesha temples in Maharashtra known as the Ashtavinayak ( Marathi : अष्टविनायक , aṣṭavinayaka ) . The names Vighnesh ( विघ्नेश ; vighneśa ) and Vighneshvara ( विघ्नेश्वर ; vighneśvara ) ( Lord of Obstacles ) refers to his primary function in Hinduism as the master and remover of obstacles ( vighna ) .

A prominent name for Ganesha in the Tamil language is Pillai ( Tamil : பிள்ளை ) or Pillaiyar ( பிள்ளையார் ) . A. K. Narain differentiates these terms by saying that pillai means a " child " while pillaiyar means a " noble child " . He adds that the words pallu , pella , and pell in the Dravidian family of languages signify " tooth or tusk " , also " elephant tooth or tusk " . Anita Raina Thapan notes that the root word pille in the name Pillaiyar might have originally meant " the young of the elephant " , because the Pali word pillaka means " a young elephant " .

In the Burmese language , Ganesha is known as Maha Peinne ( မဟာပေါင်း , pronounced : [ mʰà pèiˈné ] ) , derived from Pali Mahā Vinayaka ( မဟာဝိနော ) . The widespread name of Ganesha in Thailand is Phra Phikanet . The earliest images and mention of Ganesha names as a

major deity in present @-@ day Indonesia , Thailand , Cambodia and Vietnam date from the 7th- and 8th @-@ centuries , and these mirror Indian examples of the 5th @-@ century or earlier .

In Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist areas he is known as Gana deviyo , and revered along with Buddha , Vishnu , Skanda and others .

= = Iconography = =

Ganesha is a popular figure in Indian art . Unlike those of some deities , representations of Ganesha show wide variations and distinct patterns changing over time . He may be portrayed standing , dancing , heroically taking action against demons , playing with his family as a boy , sitting down or on an elevated seat , or engaging in a range of contemporary situations .

Ganesha images were prevalent in many parts of India by the 6th century . The 13th century statue pictured is typical of Ganesha statuary from 900 ? 1200 , after Ganesha had been well @-@ established as an independent deity with his own sect . This example features some of Ganesha 's common iconographic elements . A virtually identical statue has been dated between 973 ? 1200 by Paul Martin @-@ Dubost , and another similar statue is dated c . 12th century by Pratapaditya Pal . Ganesha has the head of an elephant and a big belly . This statue has four arms , which is common in depictions of Ganesha . He holds his own broken tusk in his lower @-@ right hand and holds a delicacy , which he samples with his trunk , in his lower @-@ left hand . The motif of Ganesha turning his trunk sharply to his left to taste a sweet in his lower @-@ left hand is a particularly archaic feature . A more primitive statue in one of the Ellora Caves with this general form has been dated to the 7th century . Details of the other hands are difficult to make out on the statue shown . In the standard configuration , Ganesha typically holds an axe or a goad in one upper arm and a pasha ( noose ) in the other upper arm . In rare instances , he may be depicted with a human head .

The influence of this old constellation of iconographic elements can still be seen in contemporary representations of Ganesha . In one modern form , the only variation from these old elements is that the lower @-@ right hand does not hold the broken tusk but is turned towards the viewer in a gesture of protection or fearlessness ( abhaya mudra ) . The same combination of four arms and attributes occurs in statues of Ganesha dancing , which is a very popular theme .

= = = Common attributes = = =

Ganesha has been represented with the head of an elephant since the early stages of his appearance in Indian art . Puranic myths provide many explanations for how he got his elephant head . One of his popular forms , Heramba @-@ Ganapati , has five elephant heads , and other less @-@ common variations in the number of heads are known . While some texts say that Ganesha was born with an elephant head , he acquires the head later in most stories . The most recurrent motif in these stories is that Ganesha was created by Parvati using clay to protect her and Shiva beheaded him when Ganesha came between Shiva and Parvati . Shiva then replaced Ganesha 's original head with that of an elephant . Details of the battle and where the replacement head came from vary from source to source . Another story says that Ganesha was created directly by Shiva 's laughter . Because Shiva considered Ganesha too alluring , he gave him the head of an elephant and a protruding belly .

Ganesha 's earliest name was Ekdanta ( One Tusked ) , referring to his single whole tusk , the other being broken . Some of the earliest images of Ganesha show him holding his broken tusk . The importance of this distinctive feature is reflected in the Mudgala Purana , which states that the name of Ganesha 's second incarnation is Ekdanta . Ganesha 's protruding belly appears as a distinctive attribute in his earliest statuary , which dates to the Gupta period ( 4th to 6th centuries ) . This feature is so important that , according to the Mudgala Purana , two different incarnations of Ganesha use names based on it : Lambodara ( Pot Belly , or , literally , Hanging Belly ) and Mahodara ( Great Belly ) . Both names are Sanskrit compounds describing his belly ( IAST : udara ) . The Brahmanda Purana says that Ganesha has the name Lambodara because all the universes ( i.e. , cosmic eggs ; IAST : brahm???as ) of the past , present , and future are present in him . The

number of Ganesha 's arms varies ; his best @-@ known forms have between two and sixteen arms . Many depictions of Ganesha feature four arms , which is mentioned in Puranic sources and codified as a standard form in some iconographic texts . His earliest images had two arms . Forms with 14 and 20 arms appeared in Central India during the 9th and the 10th centuries . The serpent is a common feature in Ganesha iconography and appears in many forms . According to the Ganesha Purana , Ganesha wrapped the serpent Vasuki around his neck . Other depictions of snakes include use as a sacred thread ( IAST : yajñyopavṛta ) wrapped around the stomach as a belt , held in a hand , coiled at the ankles , or as a throne . Upon Ganesha 's forehead may be a third eye or the sectarian mark ( IAST : tilaka ) , which consists of three horizontal lines . The Ganesha Purana prescribes a tilaka mark as well as a crescent moon on the forehead . A distinct form of Ganesha called Bhalachandra ( IAST : bhālacandra ; " Moon on the Forehead " ) includes that iconographic element . Ganesha is often described as red in color . Specific colors are associated with certain forms . Many examples of color associations with specific meditation forms are prescribed in the Sritattvanidhi , a treatise on Hindu iconography . For example , white is associated with his representations as Heramba @-@ Ganapati and Rina @-@ Mochana @-@ Ganapati ( Ganapati Who Releases from Bondage ) . Ekadanta @-@ Ganapati is visualized as blue during meditation in that form .

= = = Vahanas = = =

The earliest Ganesha images are without a vahana ( mount / vehicle ) . Of the eight incarnations of Ganesha described in the Mudgala Purana , Ganesha uses a mouse ( shrew ) in five of them , a lion in his incarnation as Vakratunda , a peacock in his incarnation as Vikata , and Shesha , the divine serpent , in his incarnation as Vighnaraja . Mohotkata uses a lion , Mayāreṣvara uses a peacock , Dhumraketu uses a horse , and Gajanana uses a mouse , in the four incarnations of Ganesha listed in the Ganesha Purana . Jain depictions of Ganesha show his vahana variously as a mouse , elephant , tortoise , ram , or peacock .

Ganesha is often shown riding on or attended by a mouse , shrew or rat . Martin @-@ Dubost says that the rat began to appear as the principal vehicle in sculptures of Ganesha in central and western India during the 7th century ; the rat was always placed close to his feet . The mouse as a mount first appears in written sources in the Matsya Purana and later in the Brahmananda Purana and Ganesha Purana , where Ganesha uses it as his vehicle in his last incarnation . The Ganapati Atharvashirsa includes a meditation verse on Ganesha that describes the mouse appearing on his flag . The names Mṛṅgākavāhana ( mouse @-@ mount ) and Ṛkṣaketana ( rat @-@ banner ) appear in the Ganesha Sahasranama .

The mouse is interpreted in several ways . According to Grimes , " Many , if not most of those who interpret Gaṇapati 's mouse , do so negatively ; it symbolizes tamoguṇa as well as desire " . Along these lines , Michael Wilcockson says it symbolizes those who wish to overcome desires and be less selfish . Krishan notes that the rat is destructive and a menace to crops . The Sanskrit word mṛṅga ( mouse ) is derived from the root mṛ ( stealing , robbing ) . It was essential to subdue the rat as a destructive pest , a type of vighna ( impediment ) that needed to be overcome . According to this theory , showing Ganesha as master of the rat demonstrates his function as Vigneshvara ( Lord of Obstacles ) and gives evidence of his possible role as a folk grāma @-@ devatā ( village deity ) who later rose to greater prominence . Martin @-@ Dubost notes a view that the rat is a symbol suggesting that Ganesha , like the rat , penetrates even the most secret places .

= = Associations = =

= = = Removal of Obstacles = = =

Ganesha is Vighneshvara or Vighnaraja or Vighnaharta ( Marathi ) , the Lord of Obstacles , both of a material and spiritual order . He is popularly worshipped as a remover of obstacles , though

traditionally he also places obstacles in the path of those who need to be checked . Paul Courtright says that " his task in the divine scheme of things , his dharma , is to place and remove obstacles . It is his particular territory , the reason for his creation . "

Krishan notes that some of Ganesha 's names reflect shadings of multiple roles that have evolved over time . Dhavalikar ascribes the quick ascension of Ganesha in the Hindu pantheon , and the emergence of the Ganapatyas , to this shift in emphasis from vighnakart? ( obstacle @-@ creator ) to vighnahart? ( obstacle @-@ averter ) . However , both functions continue to be vital to his character .

= = = Buddhi ( Knowledge ) = = =

Ganesha is considered to be the Lord of letters and learning . In Sanskrit , the word buddhi is a feminine noun that is variously translated as intelligence , wisdom , or intellect . The concept of buddhi is closely associated with the personality of Ganesha , especially in the Puranic period , when many stories stress his cleverness and love of intelligence . One of Ganesha 's names in the Ganesha Purana and the Ganesha Sahasranama is Buddhipriya . This name also appears in a list of 21 names at the end of the Ganesha Sahasranama that Ganesha says are especially important . The word priya can mean " fond of " , and in a marital context it can mean " lover " or " husband " , so the name may mean either " Fond of Intelligence " or " Buddhi 's Husband " .

= = = Aum = = =

Ganesha is identified with the Hindu mantra Aum , also spelled Om . The term o?k?rasvar?pa ( Aum is his form ) , when identified with Ganesha , refers to the notion that he personifies the primal sound . The Ganapati Atharvashirsa attests to this association . Chinmayananda translates the relevant passage as follows :

( O Lord Ganapati ! ) You are ( the Trinity ) Brahma , Vishnu , and Mahesa . You are Indra . You are fire [ Agni ] and air [ V?yu ] . You are the sun [ S?rya ] and the moon [ Chandrama ] . You are Brahman . You are ( the three worlds ) Bhuloka [ earth ] , Antariksha @-@ loka [ space ] , and Swargaloka [ heaven ] . You are Om . ( That is to say , You are all this ) .

Some devotees see similarities between the shape of Ganesha 's body in iconography and the shape of Aum in the Devan?gar? and Tamil scripts .

= = = First chakra = = =

According to Kundalini yoga , Ganesha resides in the first chakra , called Muladhara ( m?l?dh?ra ) . Mula means " original , main " ; adhara means " base , foundation " . The muladhara chakra is the principle on which the manifestation or outward expansion of primordial Divine Force rests . This association is also attested to in the Ganapati Atharvashirsa . Courtright translates this passage as follows : " You continually dwell in the sacral plexus at the base of the spine [ m?l?dh?ra cakra ] . " Thus , Ganesha has a permanent abode in every being at the Muladhara . Ganesha holds , supports and guides all other chakras , thereby " governing the forces that propel the wheel of life " .

= = Family and consorts = =

Though Ganesha is popularly held to be the son of Shiva and Parvati , the Puranic myths give different versions about his birth . In some he was created by Parvati , in another he was created by Shiva and Parvati , in another he appeared mysteriously and was discovered by Shiva and Parvati or he was born from the elephant headed goddess Malini after she drank Parvati 's bath water that had been thrown in the river .

The family includes his brother , the god of war , Kartikeya , who is also called Skanda and Murugan . Regional differences dictate the order of their births . In northern India , Skanda is

generally said to be the elder , while in the south , Ganesha is considered the first born . In northern India , Skanda was an important martial deity from about 500 BCE to about 600 CE , after which worship of him declined significantly . As Skanda fell , Ganesha rose . Several stories tell of sibling rivalry between the brothers and may reflect sectarian tensions .

Ganesha 's marital status , the subject of considerable scholarly review , varies widely in mythological stories . One pattern of myths identifies Ganesha as an unmarried brahmachari . This view is common in southern India and parts of northern India . Another pattern associates him with the concepts of Buddhi ( intellect ) , Siddhi ( spiritual power ) , and Riddhi ( prosperity ) ; these qualities are sometimes personified as goddesses , said to be Ganesha 's wives . He also may be shown with a single consort or a nameless servant ( Sanskrit : da?i ) . Another pattern connects Ganesha with the goddess of culture and the arts , Sarasvati or ?arda ( particularly in Maharashtra ) . He is also associated with the goddess of luck and prosperity , Lakshmi . Another pattern , mainly prevalent in the Bengal region , links Ganesha with the banana tree , Kala Bo .

The Shiva Purana says that Ganesha had begotten two sons : K?ema ( prosperity ) and L?bha ( profit ) . In northern Indian variants of this story , the sons are often said to be ?ubha ( auspiciousness ) and L?bha . The 1975 Hindi film Jai Santoshi Maa shows Ganesha married to Riddhi and Siddhi and having a daughter named Santoshi Ma , the goddess of satisfaction . This story has no Puranic basis , but Anita Raina Thapan and Lawrence Cohen cite Santoshi Ma 's cult as evidence of Ganesha 's continuing evolution as a popular deity .

= = Worship and festivals = =

Ganesha is worshipped on many religious and secular occasions , especially at the beginning of ventures such as buying a vehicle or starting a business . K.N. Somayaji says , " there can hardly be a [ Hindu ] home [ in India ] which does not house an idol of Ganapati . ... Ganapati , being the most popular deity in India , is worshipped by almost all castes and in all parts of the country " . Devotees believe that if Ganesha is propitiated , he grants success , prosperity and protection against adversity .

Ganesha is a non @-@ sectarian deity . Hindus of all denominations invoke him at the beginning of prayers , important undertakings , and religious ceremonies . Dancers and musicians , particularly in southern India , begin art performances such as the Bharatnatyam dance with a prayer to Ganesha . Mantras such as Om Shri Ga?esh?ya Namah ( Om , salutation to the illustrious Ganesha ) are often used . One of the most famous mantras associated with Ganesha is Om Ga? Ganapataye Namah ( Om , Ga? , Salutation to the Lord of Hosts ) .

Devotees offer Ganesha sweets such as modaka and small sweet balls called laddus . He is often shown carrying a bowl of sweets , called a modakap?tra . Because of his identification with the color red , he is often worshipped with red sandalwood paste ( raktacandana ) or red flowers . D?rv? grass ( Cynodon dactylon ) and other materials are also used in his worship .

Festivals associated with Ganesh are Ganesh Chaturthi or Vin?yaka chaturth? in the ?uklapak?a ( the fourth day of the waxing moon ) in the month of Bhadrapada ( August / September ) and the Ganesh Jayanti ( Ganesha 's birthday ) celebrated on the cathurth? of the ?uklapak?a ( fourth day of the waxing moon ) in the month of magha ( January / February ) . "

= = = Ganesh Chaturthi = = =

An annual festival honours Ganesha for ten days , starting on Ganesha Chaturthi , which typically falls in late August or early September . The festival begins with people bringing in clay idols of Ganesha , symbolising Ganesha 's visit . The festival culminates on the day of Ananta Chaturdashi , when idols ( murtis ) of Ganesha are immersed in the most convenient body of water . Some families have a tradition of immersion on the 2nd , 3rd , 5th , or 7th day . In 1893 , Lokmanya Tilak transformed this annual Ganesha festival from private family celebrations into a grand public event . He did so " to bridge the gap between the Brahmins and the non @-@ Brahmins and find an appropriate context in which to build a new grassroots unity between them " in his nationalistic

strivings against the British in Maharashtra . Because of Ganesha 's wide appeal as " the god for Everyman " , Tilak chose him as a rallying point for Indian protest against British rule . Tilak was the first to install large public images of Ganesha in pavilions , and he established the practice of submerging all the public images on the tenth day . Today , Hindus across India celebrate the Ganapati festival with great fervour , though it is most popular in the state of Maharashtra . The festival also assumes huge proportions in Mumbai , Pune , and in the surrounding belt of Ashtavinayaka temples .

= = = Temples = = =

In Hindu temples , Ganesha is depicted in various ways : as an acolyte or subordinate deity ( pāṛva @-@ devatā ) ; as a deity related to the principal deity ( pariv?ra @-@ devatā ) ; or as the principal deity of the temple ( pradh?na ) , treated similarly to the highest gods of the Hindu pantheon . As the god of transitions , he is placed at the doorway of many Hindu temples to keep out the unworthy , which is analogous to his role as Parvati ' s doorkeeper . In addition , several shrines are dedicated to Ganesha himself , of which the Ashtavinayak ( Sanskrit : ?? ? ??????? ; a??avin?yaka ; lit . " eight Ganesha ( shrines ) " ) in Maharashtra are particularly well known . Located within a 100 @-@ kilometer radius of the city of Pune , each of the eight shrines celebrates a particular form of Ganapati , complete with its own lore and legend . The eight shrines are : Morgaon , Siddhatek , Pali , Mahad , Theur , Lenyadri , Ozar and Ranjangaon .

There are many other important Ganesha temples at the following locations : Wai in Maharashtra ; Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh ; Jodhpur , Nagaur and Raipur ( Pali ) in Rajasthan ; Baidyanath in Bihar ; Baroda , Dholaka , and Valsad in Gujarat and Dhundiraj Temple in Varanasi , Uttar Pradesh . Prominent Ganesha temples in southern India include the following : Kanipakam in Chittoor ; the Jambuke?vara Temple at Tiruchirapalli ; at Rameshvaram and Suchindram in Tamil Nadu ; at Malliyur , Kottarakara , Pazhavangadi , Kasargod in Kerala , Hampi , and Idagunji in Karnataka ; and Bhadrachalam in Andhra Pradesh .

T. A. Gopinatha notes , " Every village however small has its own image of Vighne?vara ( Vigneshvara ) with or without a temple to house it in . At entrances of villages and forts , below p?pa?a ( Sacred fig ) trees ... in a niche ... in temples of Vi??u ( Vishnu ) as well as ?iva ( Shiva ) and also in separate shrines specially constructed in ?iva temples ... the figure of Vighne?vara is invariably seen . " Ganesha temples have also been built outside of India , including Southeast Asia , Nepal ( including the four Vinayaka shrines in the Kathmandu valley ) , and in several western countries .

= = Rise to prominence = =

= = = First appearance = = =

The symbolic form and identity of Ganesha , in his classic form , is generally accepted to have occurred between the 4th- to 5th @-@ century CE . Shanti Lal Nagar says that the earliest known iconic image of Ganesha is in the niche of the Shiva temple at Bhumra , which has been dated to the Gupta period . His independent cult was well established by about the 10th century . Narain summarizes the lack of evidence about Ganesha 's history before the 5th @-@ century as follows :

What is inscrutable is the somewhat dramatic appearance of Ga?e?a on the historical scene . His antecedents are not clear . His wide acceptance and popularity , which transcend sectarian and territorial limits , are indeed amazing . On the one hand there is the pious belief of the orthodox devotees in Ga?e?a 's Vedic origins and in the Pur??ic explanations contained in the confusing , but nonetheless interesting , mythology . On the other hand there are doubts about the existence of the idea and the icon of this deity " before the fourth to fifth century A.D. ... [ I ] n my opinion , indeed there is no convincing evidence [ in ancient Brahmanic literature ] of the existence of this divinity prior to the fifth century .

The evidence for more ancient Ganesha , suggests Narain , may reside outside Brahmanic or Sanskritic traditions , or outside geocultural boundaries of India . Ganesha appears in China by the 6th @-@ century , states Brown , and his artistic images in temple setting as " remover of obstacles " in South Asia appear by about 400 CE . He is , states Bailey , recognized as goddess Parvati 's son and integrated into Shaivism theology by early centuries of the common era .

= = = Possible influences = = =

Courtright reviews various speculative theories about the early history of Ganesha , including supposed tribal traditions and animal cults , and dismisses all of them in this way :

In this search for a historical origin for Ga?e?a , some have suggested precise locations outside the Br?hma?ic tradition .... These historical locations are intriguing to be sure , but the fact remains that they are all speculations , variations on the Dravidian hypothesis , which argues that anything not attested to in the Vedic and Indo @-@ European sources must have come into Br?hma?ic religion from the Dravidian or aboriginal populations of India as part of the process that produced Hinduism out of the interactions of the Aryan and non @-@ Aryan populations . There is no independent evidence for an elephant cult or a totem ; nor is there any archaeological data pointing to a tradition prior to what we can already see in place in the Pur??ic literature and the iconography of Ga?e?a .

Thapan 's book on the development of Ganesha devotes a chapter to speculations about the role elephants had in early India but concludes that , " although by the second century CE the elephant @-@ headed yak?a form exists it cannot be presumed to represent Ga?apati @-@ Vin?yaka . There is no evidence of a deity by this name having an elephant or elephant @-@ headed form at this early stage . Ga?apati @-@ Vin?yaka had yet to make his debut . "

Some have noted the roots of Ganesha worship , dating back to 3 @,@ 000 BCE since the times of Indus Valley Civilization . In 1993 , a metal plate depiction of an elephant @-@ headed figure , interpreted as Ganesha , was discovered in Lorestan Province , Iran , dating back to 1 @,@ 200 BCE . First terracotta images of Ganesha are from 1st century CE found in Ter , Pal , Verrapuram and Chandraketugarh . These figures are small , with elephant head , two arms , and chubby physique . The earliest Ganesha icons in stone were carved in Mathura during Kushan times ( 2nd @-@ 3rd centuries CE ) .

One theory of the origin of Ganesha is that he gradually came to prominence in connection with the four Vinayakas ( Vin?yakas ) . In Hindu mythology , the Vin?yakas were a group of four troublesome demons who created obstacles and difficulties but who were easily propitiated . The name Vin?yaka is a common name for Ganesha both in the Pur??as and in Buddhist Tantras . Krishan is one of the academics who accepts this view , stating flatly of Ganesha , " He is a non @-@ vedic god . His origin is to be traced to the four Vin?yakas , evil spirits , of the M?navag?hyas?tra ( 7th ? 4th century BCE ) who cause various types of evil and suffering " . Depictions of elephant @-@ headed human figures , which some identify with Ganesha , appear in Indian art and coinage as early as the 2nd century . According to Ellawala , the elephant @-@ headed Ganesha as lord of the Ganas was known to the people of Sri Lanka in the early pre @-@ Christian era .

= = = Vedic and epic literature = = =

The title " Leader of the group " ( Sanskrit : ga?apati ) occurs twice in the Rig Veda , but in neither case does it refer to the modern Ganesha . The term appears in RV 2 @.@ 23 @.@ 1 as a title for Brahmanaspati , according to commentators . While this verse doubtless refers to Brahmanaspati , it was later adopted for worship of Ganesha and is still used today . In rejecting any claim that this passage is evidence of Ganesha in the Rig Veda , Ludo Rocher says that it " clearly refers to B?haspati ? who is the deity of the hymn ? and B?haspati only " . Equally clearly , the second passage ( RV 10 @.@ 112 @.@ 9 ) refers to Indra , who is given the epithet ' ga?apati ' , translated " Lord of the companies ( of the Maruts ) . " However , Rocher notes that the more recent Ganapatya literature often quotes the Rigvedic verses to give Vedic respectability to Ganesha .

Two verses in texts belonging to Black Yajurveda , Maitr?ya??ya Sa?hit? ( 2 @.@ 9 @.@ 1 ) and

Taittirīya Brāhmayaka ( 10 @. 1 ) , appeal to a deity as " the tusked one " ( Danti? ) , " elephant @-@ faced " ( Hastimukha ) , and " with a curved trunk " ( Vakratu??a ) . These names are suggestive of Ganesha , and the 14th century commentator Sayana explicitly establishes this identification . The description of Dantin , possessing a twisted trunk ( vakratu??a ) and holding a corn @-@ sheaf , a sugar cane , and a club , is so characteristic of the Puranic Ganapati that Heras says " we cannot resist to accept his full identification with this Vedic Dantin " . However , Krishan considers these hymns to be post @-@ Vedic additions . Thapan reports that these passages are " generally considered to have been interpolated " . Dhavalikar says , " the references to the elephant @-@ headed deity in the Maitrīya?? Sa?hit? have been proven to be very late interpolations , and thus are not very helpful for determining the early formation of the deity " .

Ganesha does not appear in Indian epic literature that is dated to the Vedic period . A late interpolation to the epic poem Mahabharata says that the sage Vyasa ( Vy?sa ) asked Ganesha to serve as his scribe to transcribe the poem as he dictated it to him . Ganesha agreed but only on condition that Vyasa recite the poem uninterrupted , that is , without pausing . The sage agreed , but found that to get any rest he needed to recite very complex passages so Ganesha would have to ask for clarifications . The story is not accepted as part of the original text by the editors of the critical edition of the Mahabharata , in which the twenty @-@ line story is relegated to a footnote in an appendix . The story of Ganesha acting as the scribe occurs in 37 of the 59 manuscripts consulted during preparation of the critical edition . Ganesha 's association with mental agility and learning is one reason he is shown as scribe for Vy?sa 's dictation of the Mahabharata in this interpolation . Richard L. Brown dates the story to the 8th century , and Moriz Winternitz concludes that it was known as early as c . 900 , but it was not added to the Mahabharata some 150 years later . Winternitz also notes that a distinctive feature in South Indian manuscripts of the Mahabharata is their omission of this Ganesha legend . The term vin?yaka is found in some recensions of the ??ntiparva and Anu??sanaparva that are regarded as interpolations . A reference to Vighnakart????m ( " Creator of Obstacles " ) in Vanaparva is also believed to be an interpolation and does not appear in the critical edition .

= = = Puranic period = = =

Stories about Ganesha often occur in the Puranic corpus . Brown notes while the Puranas " defy precise chronological ordering " , the more detailed narratives of Ganesha 's life are in the late texts , c . 600 ? 1300 . Yuvraj Krishan says that the Puranic myths about the birth of Ganesha and how he acquired an elephant 's head are in the later Puranas , which were composed from c . 600 onwards . He elaborates on the matter to say that references to Ganesha in the earlier Puranas , such as the Vayu and Brahmanda Puranas , are later interpolations made during the 7th to 10th centuries .

In his survey of Ganesha 's rise to prominence in Sanskrit literature , Ludo Rocher notes that :  
Above all , one cannot help being struck by the fact that the numerous stories surrounding Ga?e?a concentrate on an unexpectedly limited number of incidents . These incidents are mainly three : his birth and parenthood , his elephant head , and his single tusk . Other incidents are touched on in the texts , but to a far lesser extent .

Ganesha 's rise to prominence was codified in the 9th century , when he was formally included as one of the five primary deities of Smartism . The 9th @-@ century philosopher Adi Shankara popularized the " worship of the five forms " ( Panchayatana puja ) system among orthodox Brahmins of the Smarta tradition . This worship practice invokes the five deities Ganesha , Vishnu , Shiva , Devi , and Surya . Adi Shankara instituted the tradition primarily to unite the principal deities of these five major sects on an equal status . This formalized the role of Ganesha as a complementary deity .

= = = Scriptures = = =

Once Ganesha was accepted as one of the five principal deities of Brahmanism , some Brahmins chose Ganesha as their principal deity . They developed the Ganapatya tradition , as seen in the



Ganesha Purana and the Mudgala Purana .

The date of composition for the Ganesha Purana and the Mudgala Purana ? and their dating relative to one another ? has sparked academic debate . Both works were developed over time and contain age @-@ layered strata . Anita Thapan reviews comments about dating and provides her own judgement . " It seems likely that the core of the Ganesha Purana appeared around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries " , she says , " but was later interpolated . " Lawrence W. Preston considers the most reasonable date for the Ganesha Purana to be between 1100 and 1400 , which coincides with the apparent age of the sacred sites mentioned by the text .

R.C. Hazra suggests that the Mudgala Purana is older than the Ganesha Purana , which he dates between 1100 and 1400 . However , Phyllis Granoff finds problems with this relative dating and concludes that the Mudgala Purana was the last of the philosophical texts concerned with Ganesha . She bases her reasoning on the fact that , among other internal evidence , the Mudgala Purana specifically mentions the Ganesha Purana as one of the four Puranas ( the Brahma , the Brahmanda , the Ganesha , and the Mudgala Puranas ) which deal at length with Ganesha . While the kernel of the text must be old , it was interpolated until the 17th and 18th centuries as the worship of Ganapati became more important in certain regions . Another highly regarded scripture , the Ganapati Atharvashirsa , was probably composed during the 16th or 17th centuries .

Ganesha Sahasranama is part of the Puranic literature , and is a litany of a thousand names and attributes of Ganesha . Each name in the sahasranama conveys a different meaning and symbolises a different aspect of Ganesha . Versions of the Ganesha Sahasranama are found in the Ganesha Purana .

One of the most important Sanskrit texts , that enjoys authority in Ganapatya tradition states John Grimes , is the Ganapati Atharvashirsa .

= = Beyond India and Hinduism = =

Commercial and cultural contacts extended India 's influence in Western and Southeast Asia . Ganesha is one of a number of Hindu deities who consequently reached foreign lands .

Ganesha was particularly worshipped by traders and merchants , who went out of India for commercial ventures . From approximately the 10th century onwards , new networks of exchange developed including the formation of trade guilds and a resurgence of money circulation . During this time , Ganesha became the principal deity associated with traders . The earliest inscription invoking Ganesha before any other deity is associated with the merchant community .

Hindus migrated to Maritime Southeast Asia and took their culture , including Ganesha , with them . Statues of Ganesha are found throughout the region , often beside Shiva sanctuaries . The forms of Ganesha found in the Hindu art of Java , Bali , and Borneo show specific regional influences . The spread of Hindu culture throughout Southeast Asia established Ganesha worship in modified forms in Burma , Cambodia , and Thailand . In Indochina , Hinduism and Buddhism were practiced side by side , and mutual influences can be seen in the iconography of Ganesha in the region . In Thailand , Cambodia , and among the Hindu classes of the Chams in Vietnam , Ganesha was mainly thought of as a remover of obstacles . Today in Buddhist Thailand , Ganesha is regarded as a remover of obstacles , the god of success .

Before the arrival of Islam , Afghanistan had close cultural ties with India , and the adoration of both Hindu and Buddhist deities was practiced . Examples of sculptures from the 5th to the 7th centuries have survived , suggesting that the worship of Ganesha was then in vogue in the region .

Ganesha appears in Mahayana Buddhism , not only in the form of the Buddhist god Vin?yaka , but also as a Hindu demon form with the same name . His image appears in Buddhist sculptures during the late Gupta period . As the Buddhist god Vin?yaka , he is often shown dancing . This form , called N?tta Ganapati , was popular in northern India , later adopted in Nepal , and then in Tibet . In Nepal , the Hindu form of Ganesha , known as Heramba , is popular ; he has five heads and rides a lion . Tibetan representations of Ganesha show ambivalent views of him . A Tibetan rendering of Ganapati is tshogs bdag . In one Tibetan form , he is shown being trodden under foot by Mah?k?la , ( Shiva ) a popular Tibetan deity . Other depictions show him as the Destroyer of Obstacles , and

sometimes dancing . Ganesha appears in China and Japan in forms that show distinct regional character . In northern China , the earliest known stone statue of Ganesha carries an inscription dated to 531 . In Japan , where Ganesha is known as Kangiten , the Ganesha cult was first mentioned in 806 .

The canonical literature of Jainism does not mention the worship of Ganesha . However , Ganesha is worshipped by most Jains , for whom he appears to have taken over certain functions of the god of wealth , Kubera . Jain ties with the trading community support the idea that Jainism took up Ganesha worship as a result of commercial connections . The earliest known Jain Ganesha statue dates to about the 9th century . A 15th @-@ century Jain text lists procedures for the installation of Ganapati images . Images of Ganesha appear in the Jain temples of Rajasthan and Gujarat .