

**LEGENDARY MYTHICAL CREATURES
& HINDU MYTHOLOGY
– A Collective Analysis**



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For Paper I – Vedic, Epic and Puranic Mythology
Myths from this mythology

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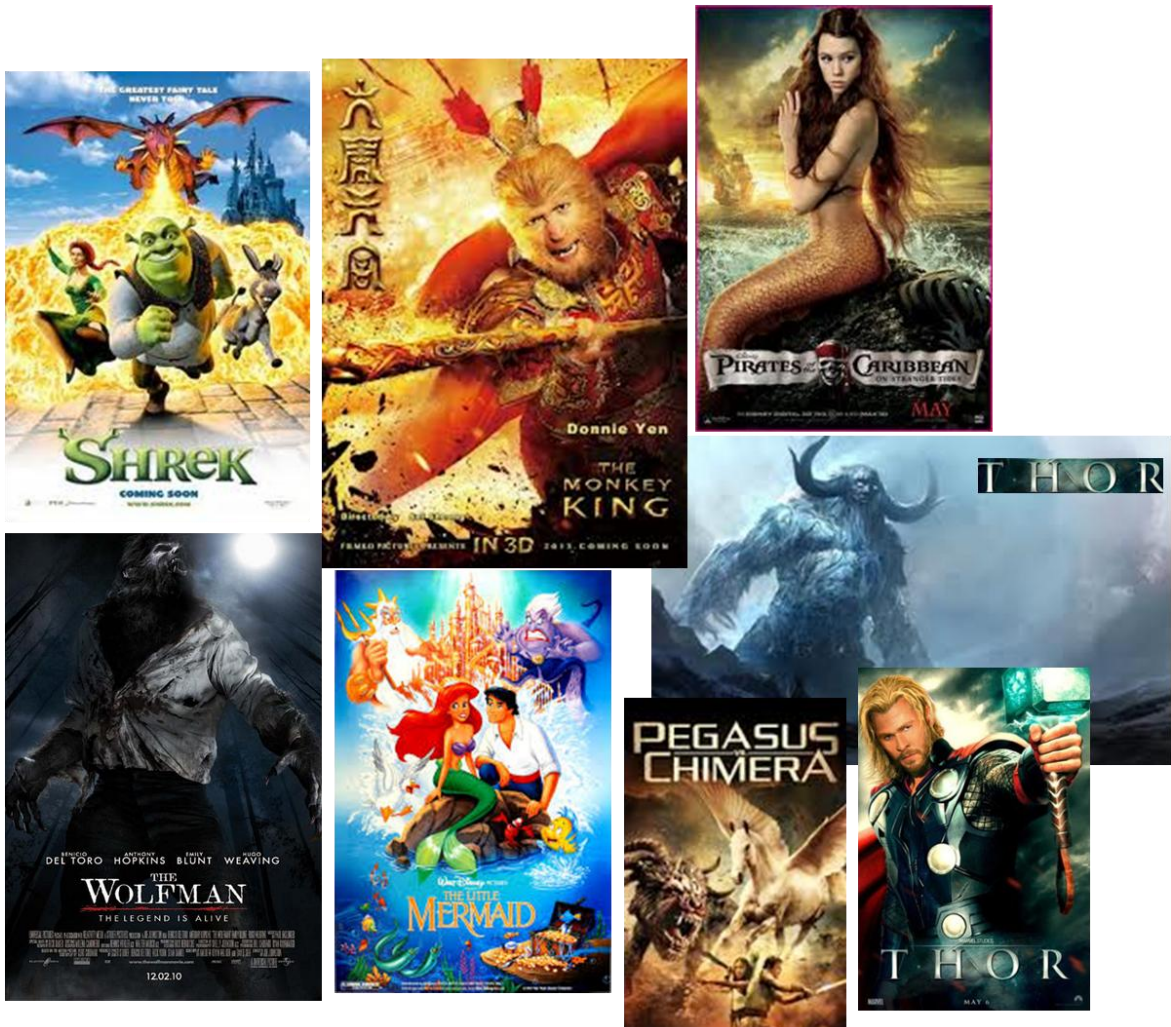
- ✧ For the sake of continuity all references to the asterisk marked (*) are made in the Bibliography section at the end of this document
- ✧ All images are sourced from Google Images

SECTION I

✂ Backdrop

It is rightly said that, to interpret any subject matter, one must appreciate the context and period that it has been written within. Thus, before we begin an evaluation of the concerned topic for this paper, let us look at some **images that bombard us on a daily basis**, a part of our everyday lives and conversations, and so much a part of our subconscious.

Below is a collage of some latest Hollywood movie posters:



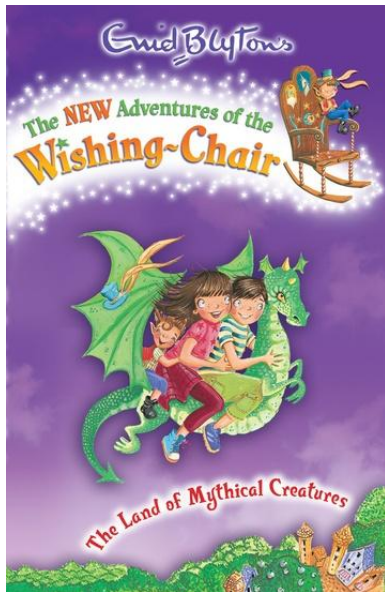
A look at our very own Bollywood movies:



And yes, some very recent books and games that children worldwide are today extremely familiar with:



Relevant to the above, an experience closer to the heart and home:



One fine Sunday morning, my six-year old daughter was extremely excited to wake up early. She could see that her parents didn't share half her enthusiasm to be up anytime soon. But did we have a choice – we were forced to rouse, as she wanted to immediately share with us the *'most fascinating dream ever'*, she said. And then what followed was not any less intriguing. While the flow of the dream she narrated was absorbing in itself, what caught my attention were the elements of the same – it had an ogre, a unicorn, a pixie, a flying dragon, a griffin, a sphinx and a mermaid amongst others – and she was extremely glad to have

dreamt of them. When my husband innocently inquired about how she managed the feat of dreaming up all these characters all at once – she simply answered at once, *'Papa, haven't you ever heard of mythical creatures that once existed?'*

It is interesting to see such a strong relevance and influence of these age old beliefs and stories about mythical beings in our current times. The market is abound today with the presence of these mythical creatures, from the oldest mythologies, continually affecting contemporary art, literature, theatre, movies, games, toys et al. No doubt creativity is reinventing the same wheel, but in several positive aspects it is important that they remain popular for as long as they can, as will be discussed further as a part of this paper.

*Charles Gould**, in his book *Mythical Monsters (1886)* puts it aptly when he says, “I have but little hesitation in gravely proposing to submit that many of the so-called mythical animals which throughout long ages and in all nations have been the fertile subjects of fiction and fable, come legitimately within the scope of plain matter-of-fact Natural History, and that they may be considered, not as the outcome of exuberant fancy, but as creatures which really once existed, and of which, unfortunately, only imperfect and inaccurate descriptions have filtered down to us, probably very much refracted, through the mists of time.”

While elves, fairies, goblins, gnomes, pixies, dragons, mermaids, unicorns and the likes are more popular, the mythical creatures from our very own Hindu mythology are equally mesmerizing – be it gods, demi-gods, apsaras, asuras or other mystical creatures. Apart from the popular creatures widely prevalent, there are many such lesser known captivating beings with a story and rationale of their own.

✧ Significance in Hindu Mythology

While the **Vedas** takes us through the mentions of a seven-headed flying horse, Indra's elephant - *Airavata*, *Abi* - the serpent, *Makara*, the divine *Ashvins*; the **Upanishads** contain detailed descriptions of other horses and cattle. There are many interesting **epic creatures** mentioned in our Hindu scriptures. The **Puranas** too are replete with mythical beings like devas, asuras, danavas, daityas, yakshas, rakshasas, gandharvas, apsaras, kinnaras and kimpurushas to mention a few. The **Garudapurana** for instance, contains life-histories of fishes and turtles. There are also **religious books** dedicated to specific animals - Nagamahdimya, Nandipurdoa, Mayiratrahimya and Pashu-puriltia are only a few of them. These writings are older than other scriptures of the world; but they contain very modern concept such as, **origin of life, organic evolution, proximity of mankind to nature and environmental science**. These supernatural creatures are hence an essential part of our mythology.

Going further, we will be looking at some very fascinating mythical creatures from Hindu Mythology. These are citations with references from ancient texts and the folklores associated with them. A complete list of all these mythological creatures and beasts that are and ever were in our scriptures, is simply **too massive to even try to compile** and still be able **to give each creature the spotlight** it deserves.

There are **many variations** and recorded facts on each and every creature - and yes, some are in fact much more popular than others and information is more easily found. Sometimes, the recorded history on these mythical beings changes the image we had envisioned of a particular being and its purpose.

Stories about these fantastical beings have originated from different societies around the world. However, a comparative study shows us how we see **parallels in different cultures**. For example, **Gandharvas** are

ancient Indian mythological creatures with a human head and a body of a horse or bird. Does this sound familiar? Researchers have traced the origins of the **Greek centaur** back to the Gandharvas. There are similarities between the **Roman Vampire** and the **Vetala** from Hindu mythology, as is the case with **Himalayan Yeti** and the **North American Sasquatch**.

As we try to understand the myths behind these creatures in our mythology, it is also important to begin with the basics and consider why mythical creatures are **quintessential to analyse** and study in great detail. It is key to have answers to some fundamental questions – What are they? What is their **origin**? Why do they become so **significant** even in present times? What is their **function and purpose** in a myth? What are their characteristics? What are its **impacts and effects**?

✧ What are mythical creatures?

Legends, folktales, myths and spiritual stories of peoples around the world have always been filled with mythical creatures. From the earliest tales told around the fire to the books and movies that delight and terrify us today, the **human imagination** has populated the world with a marvelous variety of magical and menacing animals, monsters, spirits and gods.

Some of the fabulous creatures of story-telling and legend appear in **multiple traditions**. Dragons and other winged serpents for instance appear in the legends of virtually every culture, from Ancient Egypt, Babylonia, India and China to medieval Europe and Mesoamerica. Other creatures reflect the concern of a particular geography, such as the mermaids that swim through the stories of sea-faring peoples. Terrifying giants, zombies and vampires have haunted world folklore from ancient times to today.

They are all creatures that might be considered **liminal**, or inhabiting a borderland between the gods and humans, or between good and evil.

The ‘good’ aspect is related to divine beings - usually called gods and goddesses, there are also demigods. Many other supernatural creatures have a ‘frightful’/ ‘evil’ aspect - ghosts, zombies, demons and vampires, for example, which are now popular subjects for horror films. Yet there are several that fall in the ‘*in-between*’ category – like fairies and mermaids!

All of these magical creatures never fade from **popular awareness**. The form they take over the centuries may vary, but they seem to be embedded into our consciousness. They appear repeatedly in literature around the world and in movies, advertisements, video games and modern books in many cultures.

Some would say they inhabit an archetypal realm. In any case, they obviously serve a need for **mystery and enchantment**, even in our own **technological and scientific age**. Perhaps we especially need them now to balance things out and remind us that everything cannot be explained rationally!

✧ Why learn about Mythical creatures?

The same reasons we need to study myths - the guiding principles remain identical.

If we look at a **comparative study** of the myths around these creatures, we can easily see attempts to **create and identify shared themes and characteristics** among different cultures. As a part of sacred stories, these beings are closely linked to **religion or spirituality**. And just like a myth, in the society in which it is told, the story of a mythical creature is also usually regarded as a **true account** of the remote past.

In her extensively researched book on this topic titled, *The Mythical Creatures Bible: The Definitive Guide to Legendary Beings*, author *Brenda Rosen** suggests that accounts sent home by **early travelers**, explorers and traders are filled with fabulous creatures. Some were probably garbled descriptions of real animals – where she talks about the Camelopard, which ancient Romans described as having proportions of a camel and skin of a leopard with two backward-curved horns – a description that seems to fit the features of a giraffe. Others are likely **fanciful exaggerations** aimed at elevating the tellers' reputation and include the fanciful sirens and sea monsters of sailors' stories or the giant wolves and magical stags stalked by hunters in European folktales.

Rosen evaluates how gods appear in the animal form in many spiritual traditions. In ancient Egypt the goddess Hathor, who personifies the Milky Way has the head of a cow, while Anubis, the god of the dead is jackal-headed. Sacred animals are also divine helpers. The winged steed carries Prophet Muhammad on his miraculous journey. Creation stories

include many marvelous creatures, from the devilish snake of Genesis to the Giant Turtle that supports the earth in Native American legend. Often in these creation myths the world is brought into being when a hero slays a supernatural creature, such as the monster from whose corpse the Babylonian hero Marduk fashions heaven and earth.

She states, ‘almost all of these creatures were **born from the experiences of our ancestors** – we come to understand the family we are a part of. It is a mistake however, to associate the creatures only with ancient history. The marvelous beings that pervade today’s fantasy novels and manga comics, role-playing video games, TV Shows and popular movies are modeled closely on the creatures of traditional mythology and folklore. **The beings help us explore the roots of contemporary myths and inspire artwork, stories and projects.**’

If we consider relating the traits to the *Functions of Myth* as proposed by *Joseph Campbell** we will see that they equally justify the reason for the existence and creation of these creatures in a myth:

- *Campbell says, the first and most distinctive – vitalizing all – is that of eliciting and supporting a sense of awe before the mystery of being - This would also be one of the foremost reasons for human beings to find the missing linkages between what they thought existed or did not exist. Some classic examples could be the frost giant from Norse Mythology, or the reality of the Wolfman.*
- *The second function of mythology is to render a cosmology, an image of the universe that will support and be supported by this sense of awe before the mystery of the presence and the presence of a mystery – and all these creatures are no doubt, mystery and fascination galore.*
- *A third function of mythology is to support the current social order, to integrate the individual organically with his group – All such creatures can be directly associated with specific personality traits that guide human behavior in a society – as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, norms that also help set behavioral and cultural codes.*
- *The fourth function of mythology is to initiate the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him toward his own spiritual enrichment and realization – the enchanting presence of these beings, their magic and global influence on man in current times for holistic transformation, gives us good reason to validate this.*

It is evident how we keep looking back even today, to make these mystical beings a part of our everyday lives through a variety of media, because we as humans we want constant reassurance of that one divine creator being there somewhere for us, and taking us closer to nature.

To substantiate this *Mircea Eliade** states that 'by telling or reenacting myths, members of traditional societies detach themselves from the present and return to the mythical age, thereby bringing themselves closer to the divine and reproduce the conditions of the mythical age.'

Finally reading the tales of gods, semi-divine heroes/ heroines, nature spirits and supernatural beings that are told in every culture rekindle a sense of wonder and deepen one's faith. Like the frog that becomes a prince, mythic tales can inspire a quest for spiritual and personal transformation.

✂ Mythical Creatures - Universal Characteristics & Functions

Irrespective of culture and religion mythical beings demonstrate specific features that constitute their charisma and reason for their occurrence:

- Traditional stories - legends, folklore, myths – almost certainly arose from attempts by early peoples to understand and explain the natural and spiritual world, some having much leisure for contemplative reflection.
- A mythical creature renowned in folklore and myth is mostly unverifiable but popularly accepted as possibly factual.
- They are characteristic of non-human element. All such creatures are a form of nature spirit, often described as metaphysical, supernatural or preternatural.
- Generally, the narratives existed as part of a culture's story telling tradition before they were written down.
- Most mythical creatures reflect the world view of a particular country culture or geographical and historical conditions.
- They are all a reflection of nature and an astonishing variety of mythical creatures are a sign of the riotous fecundity of nature.
- They control some aspect of the natural world. In Japan they have a belief that earthquakes are caused by the underground movements of a dragon-headed beetle called Jinshin-Mushi.
- In current times when animal species and indigenous cultures are threatened with extinction, these stories deepen our connection to

the natural world and strengthen our commitment to diversity and our ecological future.

- Mythical creatures help us understand ourselves. Fabulous creatures are often symbolic of human traits – symbolizing both our divine qualities and our shadowy parts that we despise and fear.
 - As mentioned above, they help in setting and exemplifying norms of acceptable behavior and code of conduct in a society. Not everybody is going to be happy to be called an Asura or a Pishacha!
 - In supplementing this, they fulfill several distinct socio-cultural objectives.
 - The beings often bridge the gap between religion and folk beliefs.
 - Some creatures are generally beneficent others are mischievous or overtly malicious. All reveal something significant about the hearts and minds of the people who tell stories about them.
 - For this reason probably, imaginary beings fill our dreams and haunt our nightmares, carrying messages from the inner-world. Understanding and interpreting these symbols could open new windows of insight.
 - Some mythical creatures gain popularity over others depending on the contextual features they represent.
 - They can be both real and imagined.
 - They are classified according to specific attributes, cultures, types and behaviour norms – bigfoot, dragons, dwarves, fairies, giants, flying, reptilian, aquatic, celestial, humanoid and so forth.
- Mythical creatures are known to possess sacred and magical powers. Many of the mythical creatures explored have supernatural abilities, more powerful than mere humans, but less potent than supreme deities worshipped in the worlds faiths.
- *Charles Gould* in his book connects them to the co-existence of man with extinct animals.

I am here compelled to conclude in the words of *Charles Gould* from *Mythical Monsters (1886)*: ‘Before the days of Darwinism, what courage was requisite in a man who propounded any theory a little bit extravagant!’

End of Section I

SECTION II - CITATIONS

Mythical Creatures - Hindu Mythology (*Vedic, Epic and Puranic*)

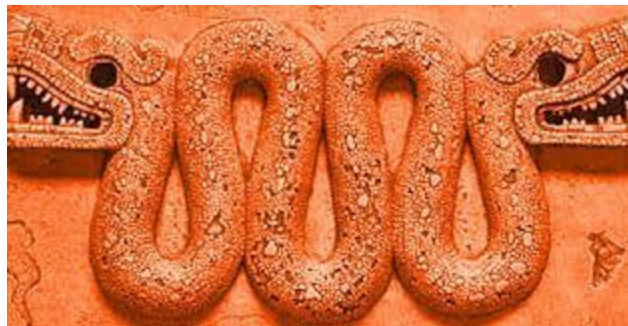
Below is a compilation of some of the mythical beings that are found to be especially interesting and captivating in Hindu scriptures – both popular and lesser known. Animals/ beings that are a part of Hindu Mythology with specific symbolic attributes, incarnations and vahanas of gods, goddesses, demi-gods, asuras have not been included as a part of the current listing. This is solely a collection of some of the most manifest mythical creatures with specific stories and related functions. As mentioned earlier, the exhaustive list is just too gigantic to do justice to every creature and to highlight its role in the myth.

These have been compiled **alphabetically** for ease of flow. The creatures have been described with the **myths supporting** them and the **scripture** that cites its narrative. They can all be studied as **exhibiting and reflecting the aspects** that have been discussed in Section I of this paper. The **comparative view** with other mythologies has been mentioned wherever possible.

Citations (*listed alphabetically*):

Ahi

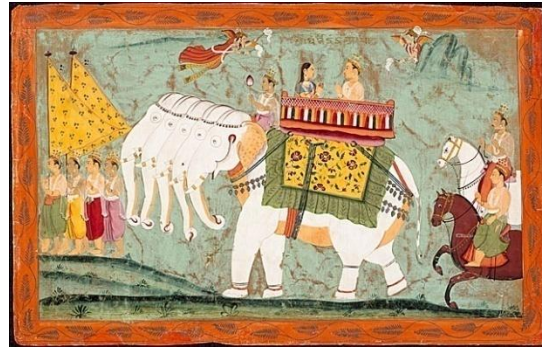
Mentioned in the Vedas, it is a vast Dragon or serpent that is large enough to drink all the waters of the earth. It lives in the mountain range that surrounds the world according to Indian myth.



At one time when it drank all the waters of the world, the god Indra found Ahi in the mountains and slew it releasing all the waters again. This story may be symbolic of how water is frozen at Winter and melts back to water during Spring. The Ahi is known for stealing women and cows and endangering fertility. It later gained significance as Vritra, mentioned further.

Airavata

The pure white winged elephant of Indian mythology. It is the mount of the Vedic god Indra who was stunned by its beauty. Airavata has the ability to suck up the water of the earth and spray over all the land creating rain, which was its gift to man. It



is also one of the sixteen elephants that holds up the earth and lies in the eastern quarter. It is also said the origin of Airavata came from Brahma who opened a cosmic egg while reciting mantras. Sixteen elephants manifested from each half of the shell, eight males each with four tusks and eight females. The strongest of these elephants was Airavata. All sixteen elephants hold up the earth. According to the Ramayana, the elephant's mother was Iravati. In the Mahabharata he is listed as a great serpent. There is a reference to Airavata in the Bhagavad Gita as well.

Ananta Sesha

It is the thousand-headed serpent in Indian Mythology. His name means 'Infinity'. Balarama is incarnation of Ananta. Ananta is said to hold the whole universe in his hood. When coils forward creation takes place.



When he coils backwards the universe ceases to exist. For this reason he is given the name 'Shesha' which means remainder as he remain when coiled back and nothing else exists. Ananta is said to spend most of his days singing praises to Lord Vishnu.

Before Balarama, Laxman, the brother of Rama was also an incarnation of Ananta. In the Bhagavata Purana it states: "The foremost manifestation of Krishna is Sankarshana, who is known as Ananta. He is the origin of all incarnations within this material world. Previous to the appearance of Lord Krishna, this original Sankarshana will appear as Baladeva, just to please the Supreme Lord Krishna in His transcendental pastimes." *Bhagavata Purana 10.1.24*

At one time moved into the waters and its wriggling movements created the churning of the ocean and an enchanted drink of immortality. It has the ability to spit fire and has an instant deadly poisonous bite. Ananta uses seven of its heads as a bed for Vishnu. Eventually Ananta will destroy the planet as it does at the end of each era.

Ashvins

The Ashvins or Ashwini Kumaras in Hindu mythology, are two Vedic gods, divine twin horsemen in the *Rigveda*, sons of Saranya (daughter of Vishwakarma), a goddess of the clouds and wife of Surya in his form as Vivasvat. They symbolise the shining of sunrise and sunset, appearing in the sky before the dawn in a golden chariot, bringing treasures to men and averting misfortune and sickness. They are the doctors of gods and are devas of Ayurvedic medicine. They are represented as humans with head of a horse. In the epic *Mahabharata*, King Pandu's wife Madri is granted a son by each Ashvin and bears the twins Nakula and Sahadeva who, along with the sons of Kunti, are known as the Pandavas.



The Ashvins can be compared with the Dioscuri (the twins Castor and Pollux) of Greek and Roman mythology, and especially to the divine twins Ašvieniai of the ancient Baltic religion. The Ashvins are mentioned 376 times in the *Rigveda*, with 57 hymns specifically dedicated to them.

Apasara



Apasara is a female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. Apasaras are beautiful, supernatural female beings. They are known to be youthful and elegant, and superb in the art of dancing. They are often the wives of the Gandharvas, the court musicians of Indra. They dance to the music made by the Gandharvas, usually in the palaces of the

gods, entertain and sometimes seduce gods and men. As ethereal beings who inhabit the skies, and are often depicted taking flight, or at service of a god, they may be compared to angels. Apsaras are said to be able to change their shape at will, and rule over the fortunes of gaming and gambling. Urvashi, Menaka, Rambha and Tilottama are the most famous among them.

The Rigveda tells of an Apsara who is the wife of Gandharva; however, the Rigveda also seems to allow for the existence of more than one Apsara. The only Apsara specifically named is Urvashi. An entire hymn deals with the colloquy between Urvashi and her mortal lover Pururavas. The Bhagavata Purana also states that the Apsaras were born from Kashyap and Muni. Later Hindu scriptures allow for the existence of numerous Apsaras, who act as the handmaidens of Indra or as dancers at his celestial court. In many of the stories related in the Mahabharata, Apsaras appear in important supporting roles. The epic contains several lists of the principal Apsaras.

Bagala

A crane-headed god in Hindu legend, Bagala controls black magic, poisons and disguised forms of death. She causes people to worry of their death and the death of loved ones. She holds torture instruments in her left hand and the tongues of her enemies in her right. She is also depicted as holding a mace and wearing yellow.



Daitya/ Danava/ Asura/ Rakshasa

In Hindism, the Daityas are a clan or race of Asura as are the Danavas. Daityas were the children of Diti and the sage Kashyapa. They were a race of giants who fought against the Devas because they were jealous of their Deva half-brothers. The female Daityas are described as wearing jewelry the size of boulders. Danavas are Hindu Demons of gigantic proportions. They had some viscous leaders which included the infamous Bali. Like the Daityas, they made war on the gods but were eventually banished to the bottom of the ocean by Indra. In Hinduism, the Asuras are non-suras, a different group of power-seeking deities



besides the suras, sometimes considered naturalists, or nature-beings, in constant battle with the devas. A **Rakshasa** is said to be a mythological humanoid being or unrighteous spirit in Hinduism. Rakshasas are also called man-eaters (*Nri-chakshas*, *Kravyads*). Often Asura and Rakshasa are interchangeably used.

Shukra was known to be their Guru. Some famous names in this category would be Vibihishana, Kumbhakarna, Ravana (*the key asura anagonist in the epic*) from the Ramayana; Ghatotkacha and Hidimba from the Mahabharata. Some other Puranic references include Mahishasura, Raktabija, Bhasmasura, Rahu and Narkasura among others.

In early Vedic texts, both the asura and the Suras were deities who constantly competed with each other, some bearing both designations at the same time. In late-Vedic and post-Vedic literature the Vedic asuras became lesser beings. According to the Vishnu Purana, during the churning of the ocean the daityas came to be known as *asuras* because they rejected Varuni, the goddess of sura or wine; while the devas accepted her and came to be known as suras. In order to explain the demonization of asuras, mythology was created to show that though the asuras were originally just, good, virtuous, their nature had gradually changed. The asuras (anti-gods) were depicted to have become proud, vain, to have stopped performing sacrifices, to violate sacred laws, not visit holy places, not cleanse themselves from sin, to be envious of devas, torturous of living beings, creating confusion in everything and to challenge the devas.

David Frawley, an American-Hindu teacher, asserts that many ancient European peoples, particularly the Celts and Germans, regarded themselves as children of Danu, with Danu meaning the Mother Goddess, who was also, like Sarasvati in the Rig Veda, a river Goddess. The Celts called themselves *Tuatha De Danaan*, while the Germans had a similar name. Ancient European river names like the Danube and various rivers called Don in Russia, Scotland, England and France reflect this. The Danube which flows to the Black Sea is their most important river and could reflect their eastern origins.

Farasi Bahari

Lesser known, these are magical green Water Horses that live at the bottom of the Indian Oceans. They graze near the coast during certain days of the year. People leave their horses near this area and remove themselves hoping that the Farasi Bahari will mate with their steeds. No one can come near them because they flee at the scent



of man. If any horses are successfully mated, they will produce green horses that gallop fast with eternal endurance due to their lack of lungs. They have been compared to *Hippocamp*, the horse of Poseidon, a Greek deity. It has typically been depicted as a horse in its forepart with a coiling, scaly, fish-like hindquarter.

Gandaberunda



Ancient religious Hindu texts (Vishnu Puranas) annotate the Gandaberunda to be a personification of Lord Vishnu. This mythical bird formed the royal emblem of the Wodeyaar Kings of the princely state of Mysore, in Karnataka. Shown with two heads and beaks, connected to one

body the Gandaberunda is believed to possess unimaginable strength. Several depictions have been found in Indian texts and historic art portraying the bird as carrying an elephant in each of its talons and beaks out of Narasimha (Vishnu) emerged an even more fearful form: Gandaberunda, having two heads, fearful rows of teeth, black in complexion and with wide blazing wings.

Gandharva

In Hinduism, the gandharvas are male nature spirits, husbands of the Apsaras. Some are part animal, usually a bird or horse. They have superb musical skills. They guarded the Soma and made beautiful music for the gods in their palaces. Gandharvas are frequently depicted as a singer in the court of Gods.



Gandharvas are mentioned extensively in the epic Mahabharata as associated with the devas (as dancers and singers) and with the yakshas, as formidable warriors. They are mentioned as spread across various territories. In Hindu theology, gandharvas act as messengers between the gods and humans. In Hindu law, a Gandharva marriage is one contracted by mutual consent and without formal rituals.

Ganesh

Ganesh, Ganesa, also known as Ganapati and Vinayaka is a widely worshipped deity in the Hindu pantheon. His image is found throughout India and Nepal. Devotion to Ganesha is widely diffused and extends to Jains, Buddhists, and beyond India.



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. The principal scriptures dedicated to Ganesha are the *Ganesha Purana*, the *Mudgala Purana*, and the *Ganapati Atharvashirsa*.

Garuda

The Garuda is a large mythical bird or bird-like creature that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

In Hindu religion, Garuda is a Hindu divinity, usually the mount (*vahana*) of the Lord Vishnu. Garuda is depicted as having the golden body of a strong man with



a white face, red wings, and an eagle's beak and with a crown on his head. This ancient deity was said to be massive, large enough to block out the sun. The story of Garuda's birth and deeds is told in the first book of the great epic Mahabharata. According to the epic, when Garuda first burst forth from his egg, he appeared as a raging inferno equal to the cosmic conflagration that consumes the world at the end of every age. Frightened, the gods begged him for mercy. Garuda, hearing their plea, reduced himself in size and energy.

Kamadhenu

Kamadhenu, also known as Surabhi, is a divine bovine-goddess described in Hindu mythology as the mother of all cows. She is a miraculous "cow of plenty" who provides her owner whatever he desires and is often portrayed as the mother of other cattle. In iconography, she is generally depicted as a white cow containing various deities within her body. All cows are venerated in Hinduism as the earthly embodiment of the Kamadhenu.

Hindu scriptures provide diverse accounts of the birth of Kamadhenu. While some narrate that she emerged from the churning of the cosmic ocean, others describe her as the daughter of the creator god Daksha, and as the wife of the sage Kashyapa. Other scriptures narrate that Kamadhenu was in the possession of either Jamadagni



or Vashista (both ancient sages), and that kings who tried to steal her from the sage ultimately faced dire consequences for their actions.

Kimpurusha



Kimpurushas were described to be lion-headed beings. (literally translated "Is it human?"), analogous to the word *Kin + Nara (Man)*, shows that Kinnaras and Kimpurushas were related or probably the same tribe. The lion head may be an exaggeration of their heavily bearded head. In some Their lion-headed reference in the sources and them staying in the mountains suggest that they could be Kirata. Kirat-or Kirati- means people with lion nature. In the Mahabharata, they were mentioned as related to other exotic tribes like the Rakshasas, Vanaras, Kinnaras (half-men, half-horses) and Yakshas. Sage Pulaha was linked with the Kimpurushas. Arjuna, during his conquest of northern kingdoms also visited the Kimpurusha Kingdom. Arjuna, Crossing the White mountains, subjugated the country of the Kimpurushas ruled by Durmaputra, after a collision involving a great slaughter of Kshatriyas, and brought the region under his complete sway.

Kinnaras

Kinnaras are heavenly creatures half-bird half-human. In South-East they are depicted as half-bird half human. They are good at playing musical instruments, like the Vina or lute. Kinnara woman called Kinnaris are beautiful woman from head to waist. They are good at poetry, playing musical instruments, and dancing. Their character is clarified in the Adi parva of the Mahabharata. Puranas mention them as horse-headed beings. Puranas mention about an Asura *Hayagreeva* who was horse-headed.



The epic *Mahabharata* mentions Kinnaras, not as horse-headed beings but as beings who were half-man and half-horse i.e. like a Centaur. *Mahabharata* and the Puranas describe regions north to Himalayas as the abode of Kinnaras. Another reference in the epic considers them as a sub-group of Gandharva.

Matsya



Matsya is the avatar of Vishnu in the form of a fish. Often listed as the first avatar in the lists of the ten primary avatars of Vishnu, Matsya is described to have rescued the first man, Manu, from a great deluge. Matsya may be depicted as a giant fish, or anthropomorphically with a human torso connected to the rear half of a fish. Matsya forewarns Manu about an impending catastrophic flood and orders him to collect all the grains and all living creatures of the world in a boat.

Makara

Makara is a sea-creature in Hindu mythology. It is generally depicted as half terrestrial animal (in the frontal part in animal forms of elephant or crocodile or stag, or deer) and in hind part as aquatic animal, in the tail part, as a fish tail or also as seal. Sometimes, even a peacock tail is depicted.



Makara is the vahana (vehicle) of the Ganga - the goddess of river Ganges (Ganga) and the sea god Varuna. It is also the insignia of the love god Kamadeva. Kamadeva is also known as *Makaradhvaja* (one whose flag a makara is depicted). Makara is the astrological sign of Capricorn, one of the twelve symbols of the Zodiac. It is often portrayed protecting entryways to Hindu and Buddhist temples. Makara is also the emblem of Kamadeva, the vedic god of love and desire.

Navagunjara

In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, Navagunjara is a creature composed of nine different animals. The animal is a common motif in the Pata-Chitra style of painting, of the Indian state of Odisha. The beast is considered a form of Vishnu as a variant of the virat-rupa (Omnipresent or vast) form



of Krishna. The version of the Mahabharata, written by Oriya poet Sarala Dasa, narrates the legend of Navagunjara. Once, when Arjuna was doing penance on a hill, Krishna emerges as Navagunjara.

Navagunjara has the head of a rooster, and stands on three feet, those of an elephant, tiger and deer or horse, the fourth limb is a raised human arm carrying a lotus or a wheel. The beast has the neck of a peacock, the back or hump of a bull, the waist of a lion, and the tail is a serpent. Initially, Arjuna was terrified as well as mesmerized by the strange creature and raises his bow to shoot it. Finally, Arjuna realizes that Navagunjara is a manifestation of Vishnu and drops his weapons, bowing before Navagunjara.

Naga/ Vasuki

Nāga is the Sanskrit and Pāli word for a deity or class of entity or being, taking the form of a very great snake — specifically the king cobra, found in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. A female nāga is a *nāgī* or *nāgini*.

In the great epic Mahabharata, the depiction of nagas tends toward the positive - "persecutors of all creatures (Book I: Adi Parva, Section 20). At some points within the story, nagas are important players in many of the events narrated in the epic, frequently no more evil nor deceitful than the other protagonists, and sometimes on the side of good. Varuna, the Vedic god of storms, is viewed as the King of the nāgas. Nāgas live in Pātāla, the seventh of the "nether" dimensions or realms. They are children of Kashyapa and Kadru. Among the prominent nāgas of Hinduism are Manasa, Sesha, and Vasuki.

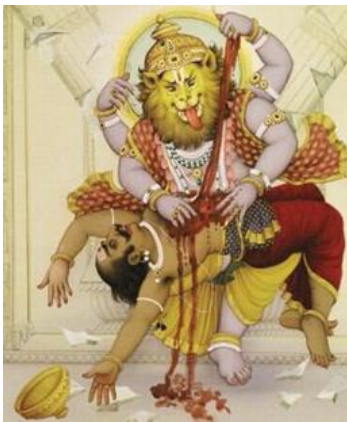


One of the three kings of Nagas, Vasuki managed to tie a rope around Mount Mandara at the churning of the ocean and thus many beings arose in the world. Krishna refers himself to being Vasuki in terms of being a serpent or a being of love. Vasuki in Buddhism is stated to have

attended the Buddha in his teachings. Vasuki also refers to a race of Nagas, snake-like beings who claim to be the children of a great serpent who was killed in a great forest fire that was created by Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

Narasimha

Narasimha, Narasingh, Narsingh and Narasingha - in derivative languages is an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu and one of Hinduism's most popular deities, as evidenced in early epics, iconography, and temple and festival worship for over a millennium.



Narasimha is often visualised as half-man/half-lion, having a human-like torso and lower body, with a lion-like face and claws. There are references to Narasimha in a variety of Puranas, with seventeen different versions of the main narrative. There is also a short reference in the Mahabharat (3.272.56-60) and a Gopal Tapani Upanishad (*Narasimha tapani Upanisad*), earliest of Vaishnav Upanishads named in reference to him. The Rig Veda contains an epithet that has been attributed to Narasimha. The avatar is described as "like some wild beast, dread, prowling, mountain-roaming" (RV.I 154.2a). There is a reference in a Namuci story in RV.VIII 14.13 that is believed to have culminated in the full puranic story of Narasimha.

Nandi

Nandi is the name for the bull which serves as the mount of the god Shiva and as the gate keeper of Shiva and Parvati. Temples venerating Shiva display stone images of a seated Nandi, generally facing the main shrine. There are also a number of temples dedicated solely to Nandi. Some Puranas describe Nandi or Nandikeshvara as bull faced with a human body that resembles that of Shiva - in proportion and aspect, although with four hands, two hands holding the Parasu (the axe) and Mruga (the antelope) and the other two hands joined together in the



Anjali(obesance). Brahma Vaivarta Purana mentions Krishna himself to have taken the form of a bull as no one else in the Universe can bear Shiva.

Pishacha



Pishachas are flesh eating demons according to Hindu mythology. Their origin is obscure, although some believe that they were created by Brahma. Another legend describes them as the sons of either Krodha (anger) or of Dakṣha's daughter Pisaca. They have been described to have a dark complexion with bulging veins and protruding, red eyes. They are believed to have their own language, which is called Paisaci. They like darkness and traditionally are depicted as haunting cremation grounds along with other demons like Bhut and Vetalas.

Pishachas have the power to assume different forms at will, and may also become invisible. They feed on human energies. Sometimes, they possess human beings and alter their thoughts, and the victims are afflicted with a variety of maladies and abnormalities like insanity. Certain mantras are supposed to cure such afflicted persons, and drive away the Pishacha. In order to keep the Pishacha away, they are given their share of offerings during certain religious functions and festivals.

Rahu & Ketu

In Hindu tradition, Rahu is a cut-off head of an asura, that swallows the sun causing eclipses. He is depicted in art as a serpent with no body riding a chariot drawn by eight black horses. Rahu is one of the navagrahas (nine planets) in Vedic astrology. The *Rahu*



kala (time of day under the influence of Rahu) is considered inauspicious. Ketu is the descending lunar node. 'Ketu' is said to be the

body of Rahu, after the head of the asura was cut off by God Vishnu, so the remaining part is a serpent body.

Sharabha



Sharabha is a creature in Hindu mythology that is part lion and part bird. According to Sanskrit literature, Sharabha is an eight-legged beast, mightier than a lion and elephant and which can kill the lion. In later literature, Sharabha is described as an eight-legged deer. Shaiva scriptures narrate that god Shiva assumed the Avatar (incarnation) of Sharabha to tame Narasimha - the fierce man-lion avatar of Vishnu. This form is popularly known as Sarabeshwara or Sharabeshwaramurti. In Buddhism, Sharabha appears as a previous birth of the Buddha.

Uchchaisravas

In Hindu mythology, Uchchaisravas is a seven-headed flying horse, that was obtained during the churning of the milk ocean. It is considered the best of horses, prototype and king of horses. Uchchaisravas is often described as a *vahana* ("vehicle") of Indra - the god-king of heaven, but is also recorded to be the horse of Bali, the king of demons. Uchchaisravas is said to be snow white in colour.



Surya, the chief solar deity in Hinduism, is often depicted riding a chariot harnessed by seven horses or one horse with seven heads. George Harrison's Dark Horse Records music label uses a logo inspired by Uchchaisravas. *Mahabharata* mentions that Uchchaisravas rose from the Samudra manthan ("churning of the milk ocean") and Indra - the god-king of heaven seized it and made it his vehicle (vahana). The legend of Uchchaisravas, rising from the milking ocean also appears in the *Vishnu Purana*, *Ramayana*, *Matsya Purana*, *Vayu Purana*.

Vamana



Vamana is described in the Puranas as the fifth avatar of Vishnu, and the first incarnation of the Second Age or Treta yuga. He is the first avatar to appear without anthropomorphic features, although he does appear as a dwarf Namboothiri Brahmin - a dwarf as an emanation of Vishnu who overcame King Bali.

A Dwarf is a short, stout, stocky and strong humanoid creature with its origin in Norse mythology as well as other Germanic mythologies, fairy tales, fantasy fiction and role-playing games. Dwarves are much like humans, but generally prefer to live underground or in mountainous areas. Some literature and games ascribe to dwarves the ability to see in the dark and other adaptations for living underground. King Bali had conquered the three worlds of existence. The dwarf took one giant leap and covered the whole of the first world. He then covered the upper world in his next step and on his final step he covered the lower world and trampled on his head pushing him down to the lower world.

Vanara: Hanuman/ Bali



Hanuman is a Hindu deity, who was an ardent devotee of Rama according to the Hindu legends. He is a central character in the Indian epic *Ramayana* and its various versions. He also finds mentions in several other texts, including *Mahabharata*, the various Puranas and some Jain texts. A vanara (monkey-like humanoid), Hanuman participated in Rama's war against the demon king Ravana. According to Jain texts, Hanuman is a human of vanara clan whose emblem is the monkey. Several texts also present him as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. He is the son of Vayu, who according to several stories, played a role in his birth.

In the Hindu epic Ramayana, the vanara **Vali** (also known as Bali) was king of Kishkindha, a son of Indra and the elder brother of Sugriva. He was killed by Rama, an Avatar of Vishnu.



Vetala



A vetala is a ghost-like being from Hindu mythology. The vetalas are defined as spirits inhabiting corpses and charnel grounds. These corpses may be used as vehicles for movement (as they no longer decay while so inhabited); but a vetala may also leave the body at will.

There are evidences of motifs such as skull imagery in the textual tradition of the Yogini tantras that discusses 'vetala'. The vetala is a vampire. The vetala are a class of demons in Hindu mythology that have the power to enter the bodies of human or animal corpses and reanimate them. They can enter living victims as well, and manipulate them as they please. Generally, though, the vetala stick to inhabiting the bodies of dead people. This myth is also connected with burial rites or, in some cases, the circumstances of a person's death.

Vritra



In the early Vedic religion, Vritra ("the enveloper"), is an Asura and also a serpent or dragon, the personification of drought and enemy of Indra. Vritra was also known in the Vedas as Ahi ("snake"). He appears as a dragon blocking the course of the rivers and is heroically slain by Indra. As per the narration given to King Yudhisthira in Mahabharata, Vritra was demon created by Tvashtri to avenge the killing of his son by Indra, known as Trisiras or Visvarupa. Srimad Bhagavatam recognizes Vritra as a bhakta of Vishnu who was slain only due to his failure to live piously and without aggression. As per both Vedic and

Puranic (Mahabharat) references, the terrible anthropomorphic personification of Brāhmanahatya (Brahmanicide) chased Indra and forced him into hiding for his sin, and Nahusha was invited to take his place

Yaksha



Yaksha is the name of a broad class of nature-spirits, usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots. They appear in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist literature. The feminine form of the word is Yakshini. The yaksha has a dual personality. On the one hand, a yaksha may be an inoffensive nature-fairy, associated with woods and mountains; but there is also a darker version of the yaksha, which is a kind of ghost that haunts the wilderness and waylays and devours travelers.

Yali



Yali, also known as Vyala or Sarabham or Vidala in Sanskrit, is a mythical creature seen in many Hindu temples, often sculpted onto the pillars. They usually have the stylized body of a lion and the head of some other beast, most often an elephant. It is known as a Leogryph in English. Yali is a motif in Indian art and it has been widely used in

south Indian sculpture. Descriptions of and references to yalis are very old, but they became prominent in south Indian sculpture in the 16th century. Yalis are believed to be more powerful than the lion/Tiger or the elephant. In its iconography and image the yali has a catlike graceful body, but the head of a lion with tusks of an elephant and tail of a serpent. Images or icons have been found on the entrance walls of the temples, and the graceful mythical lion is believed to protect and guard the temples and ways leading to the temple.

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