

# Gaṇeśa, Grounding and Yogic Storytelling



Embodied Philosophy



Embodied Philosophy | Free Webinar  
Monday, February 28, 2022 @ 7:30pm-9:00pm ET  
Dr. Raj Balkaran | <https://rajbalkaran.com>

# Talk Genesis



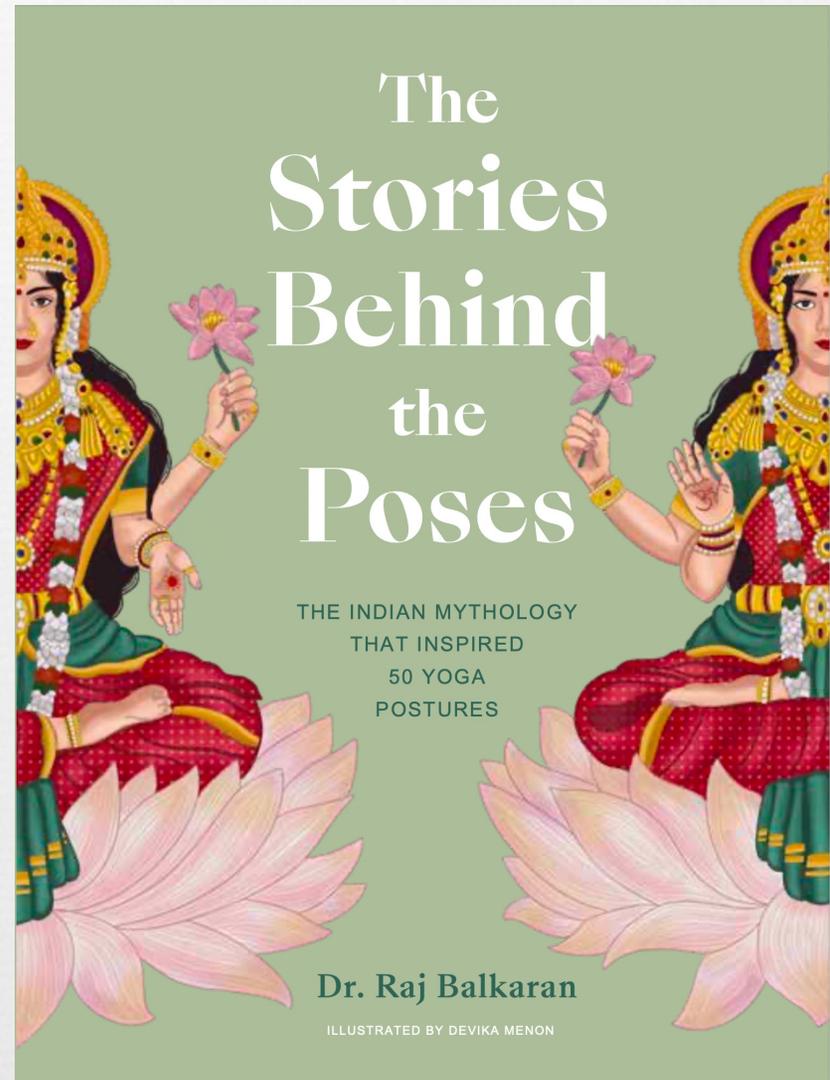
Yoga as Fitness?

Yoga and Hindu Mythology

Book Project

50 Poses

50 Stories



# Talk Format



- ❧ Part I – Grounding and Gaṇeśa
- ❧ Part II – The Power of Myth
- ❧ Bonus
  - ❧ Part III – Śiva's Blue Throat
  - ❧ Part IV – Sītā, Daughter of Earth



# Opening Mantras



# Ganeśa



**gaṇānāṃ tvā gaṇapati-gaṃ havāmahe  
kaviṃ kavīnāṃ upamaśra-vastamam |  
jyeṣṭha-rājaṃ brahmaṇā brahmaṇas-pata  
ā naḥ śṛṇvann ūtibhis sīda sādhanam ||**

We honor you, Gaṇeśa, leader of all the hosts of gods,  
Poet among poets, of the highest renown.  
King among elders, Lord of sacred words,  
Hearing us, sit down in this place, with your kindness and riches.

# Sarasvatī Mantra



- ☞ sarasvati namastubhyaṃ varade kāmarūpiṇi  
vidyārambhaṃ kariṣyāmi siddhirbhavatu me sadā
- ☞ I bow to you, Sarasvatī, O Giver of Boons and Fulfiller  
of Desires, as I now commence my study; may success  
be with me always!

# Guru Mantra



**gurur brahmā gurur viṣṇuḥ gurur devo maheśvaraḥ |  
guruḥ sākṣāt paraṃ brahma tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ ||**

The teacher is Brahmā, God of Creation.  
The teacher is Viṣṇu, God of Preservation.  
The teacher is Śiva, God of Destruction.  
The teacher is clearly the Supreme Spirit.  
I bow to that sacred teacher.

# Durgā Devī



**sarva-maṅgala-māṅgalye śive sarvārtha-sādhike |  
śaraṇye tryambake gauri nārāyaṇi namo'stu te ||**

O auspiciousness of all auspiciousness,  
The benevolent one who accomplishes all aims.  
The refuge, the three-eyed goddess,  
Salutations to you, O Durgā.

# Mahāmr̥tyunjaya Mantra



tryambakam yajāmahe  
sugandhim puṣṭi-vardhanam  
urvārukam iva bandhanān  
mr̥tyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt  
R̥g Veda VII.59.12

We worship the three-eyed one,  
who is fragrant and who  
nourishes all beings. As is the  
ripened cucumber freed from its  
bondage (to the vine), may He  
liberate us from death for the  
sake of immortality.



Part I  
Grounding and Gaṇeśa



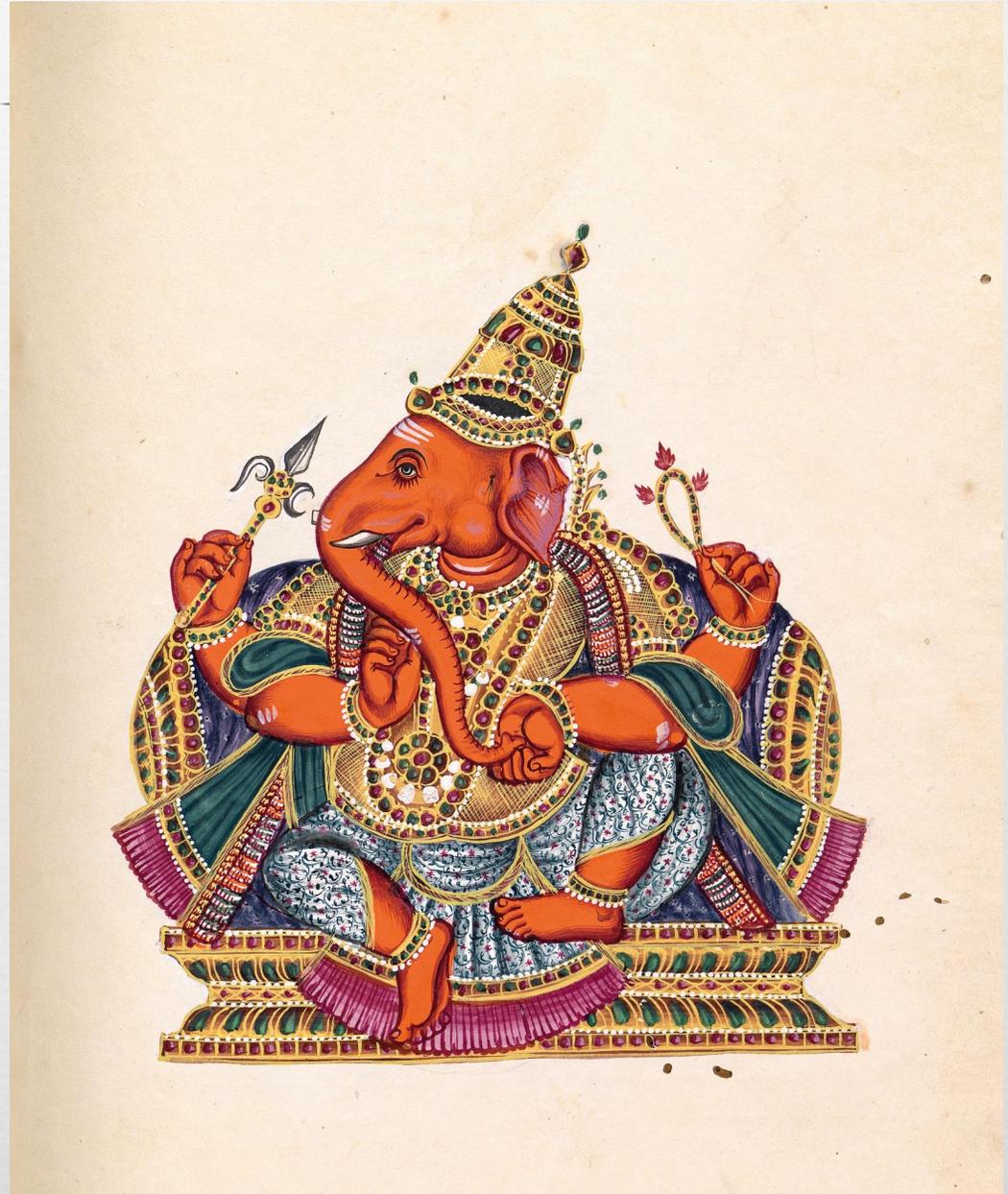
Mythological Storytelling





# Gaṇeśa's Iconography

- ❧ Round Belly
- ❧ Seated
- ❧ Elephant Head
- ❧ Axe



# Question



How did Gaṇeśa get an  
Elephant Head?

# One Upon a Time



Pārvatī was Lamenting  
Śiva's absence...







# Question



Why is Gaṇeśa foremost  
among the multitude of Hindu gods?

# One Upon a Time



The ancient Vedic priests had  
an important question...





# Core Significations



- ❧ Auspicious Beginnings
- ❧ Remover of Obstacles
- ❧ Grounding
- ❧ Wisdom (vidyā)
- ❧ Intellect (buddhi)
- ❧ Inward Turning



# Esoteric Insight



∞ Chakra: Mūlādhāra

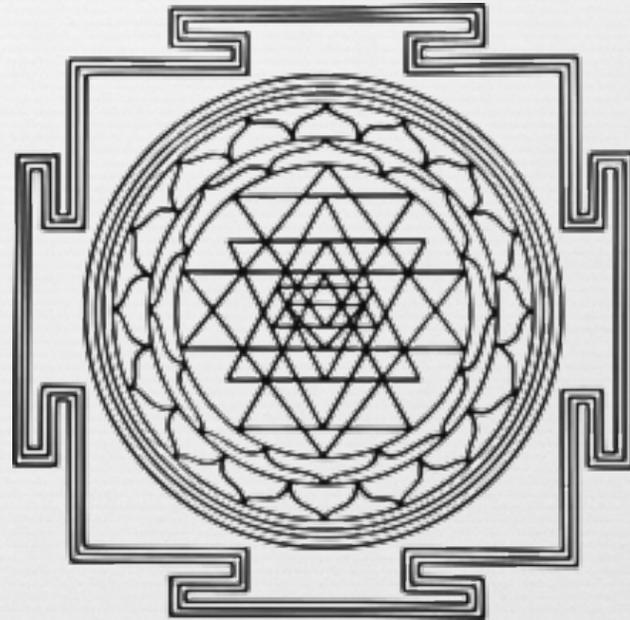
∞ Element: Earth

∞ Sense: Smell

∞ Planet: Mercury

∞ Day: Wednesday

∞ Sound: Gaṃ

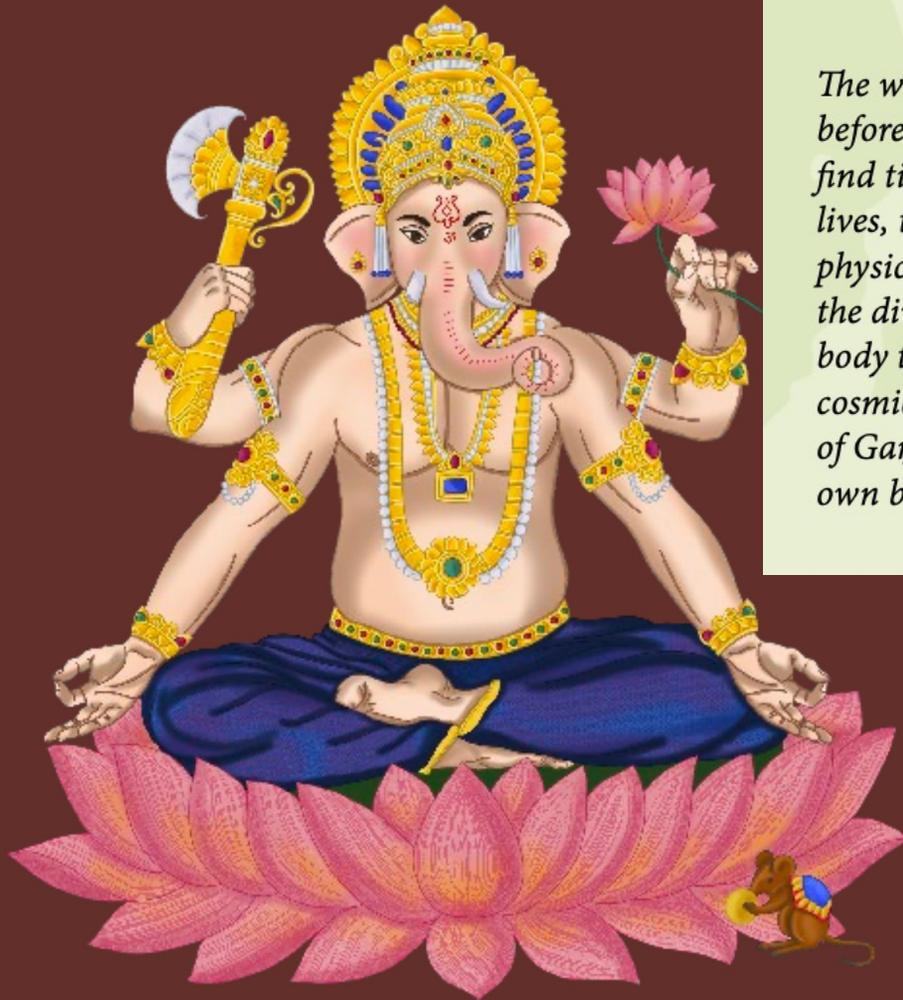


# Siddhāsana



- ❧ Perfection Pose
- ❧ Deep Relaxation
- ❧ Meditation
- ❧ Breathing
- ❧ Accomplishment





*The wisdom of Gaṇeśa resides in taking the time to calmly look inside before rushing headlong into action. Though it may seem difficult to find time for meditation and yoga practice amidst the busyness of our lives, this story shows us why it must nonetheless be pursued. The physical practice of yoga is ultimately an exercise in the embodiment of the divine interplay of Śiva and Pārvatī; a way for us to inhabit the body that affords us the insight into the relationship between these cosmic principles. When you sit in Siddhāsana, contemplate the wisdom of Gaṇeśa and remember the divine play that lies at the heart of your own being.*

# PERFECTION POSE

## SIDDHĀSANA

### THE POWER OF YOGIC MEDITATION

#### THEMES

Wisdom

Insight

Awareness

**L**ONG AGO, WHEN THE AGE WAS YOUNG, the Brahmin priests were performing rituals for the welfare of the world. They were wise, and understood the importance of auspicious beginnings—that how a thing begins can often color the way that it turns out. They rightly emphasized the importance of starting a relationship on the right foot, or getting up on the right side of the bed. So, a very important question arose: Who among the gods should be worshipped first? They completed a fire sacrifice to the great lord Śiva whereby, along with special herbs and clarified butter, their intention to learn which god should be worshipped before all others was carried up to Śiva’s abode. The prayer entered the mind of Śiva, and so he interrupted his meditation to visit and consult with his consort, Pārvatī, the wise earth goddess. Pārvatī was delighted to see him, and even more so to learn of his inquiry.

“Well,” she said with a glint in her eye and an air of mystery in her smile, “surely it should be one of our two sons, Kārttikeya or Gaṇeśa. They contain the best of us!”

Śiva agreed that this was an excellent idea, and the two of them agreed that whichever of their sons could prove himself worthy would be the rightful recipient of the honor.

“But how will we determine which of them is more worthy?” Śiva wondered aloud.

# Part II

## The Power of Myth

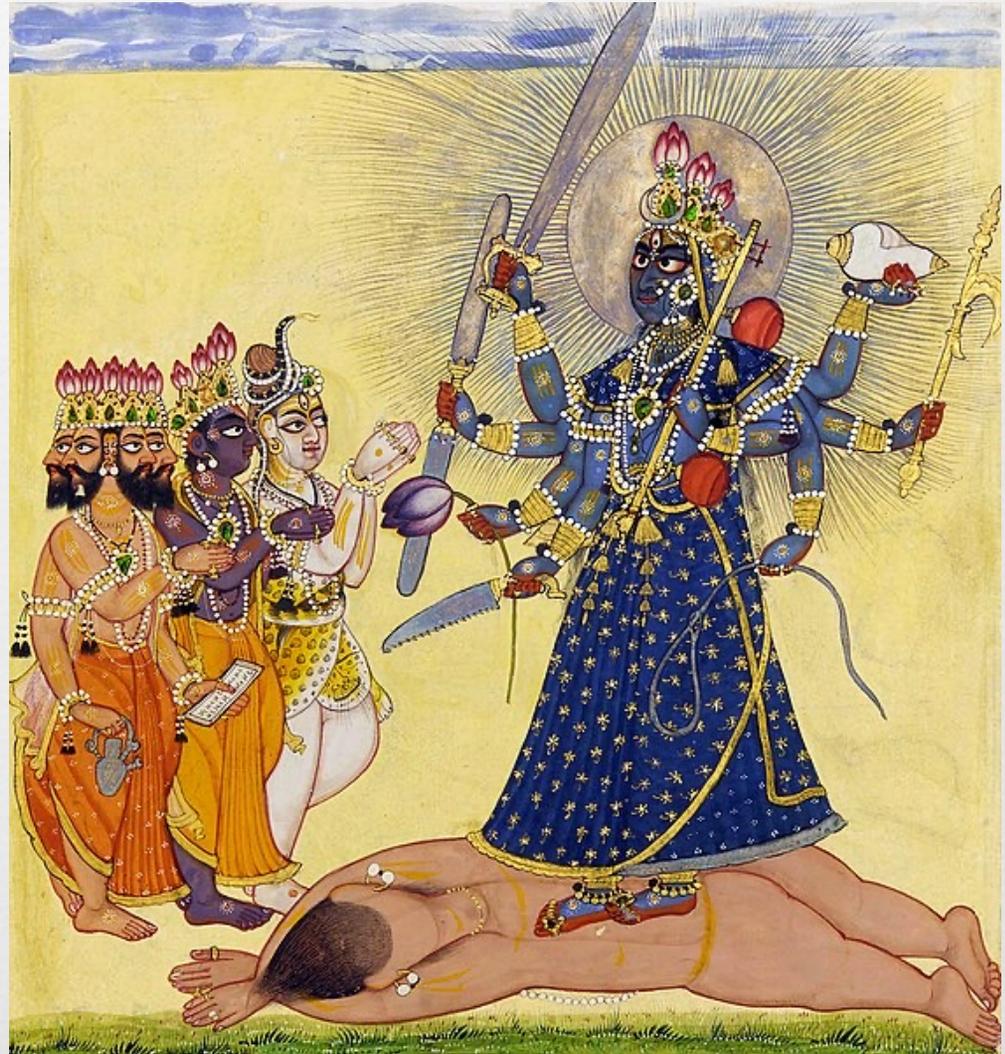


Concepts, Ideas, Connections



# Storytelling Applications

- ∞ Entertainment
- ∞ Marketing
- ∞ Persuasion
- ∞ Teaching
- ∞ Life Stories
- ∞ Values



# The Power Mythology



Worldviews, Meaning

Beliefs, Values

Cultural Conditioning

Big Questions

Other Realities



# Indian Mythology

- ❧ Didactic
- ❧ Values
- ❧ Ideology
- ❧ Symbiosis



# Dimensions Mythological Storytelling

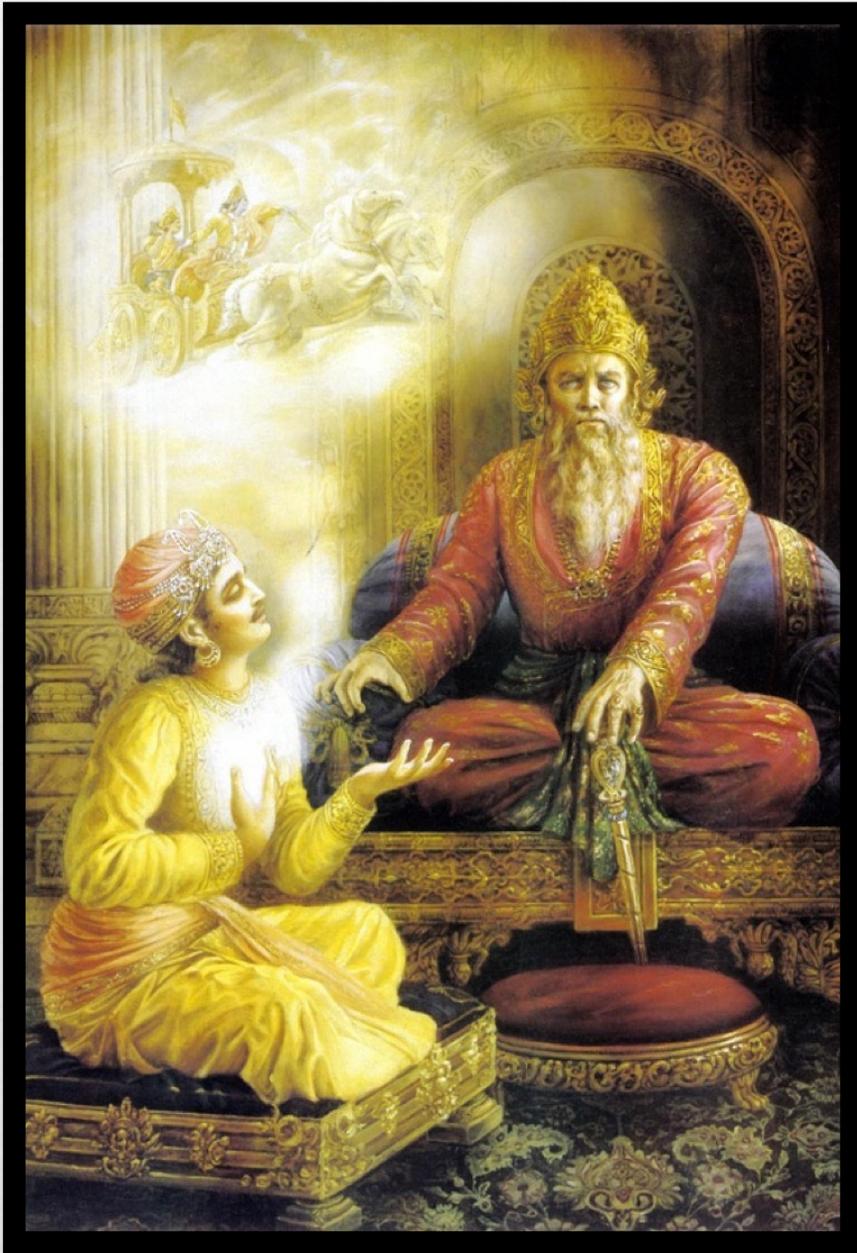


- ∞ Cosmological
- ∞ Sociological
- ∞ Metaphysical
- ∞ Pedagogical

# Inner vs Outer World



- ∞ World vs Worldview
- ∞ Outer World vs Inner Life
- ∞ Consciousness vs Computation
- ∞ Operating System for Meaning Making
- ∞ Wisdom
- ∞ Paradox



# The Interplay of the Three Worlds



The World *Behind* the Text  
Sociocultural World / Actors  
authoring text

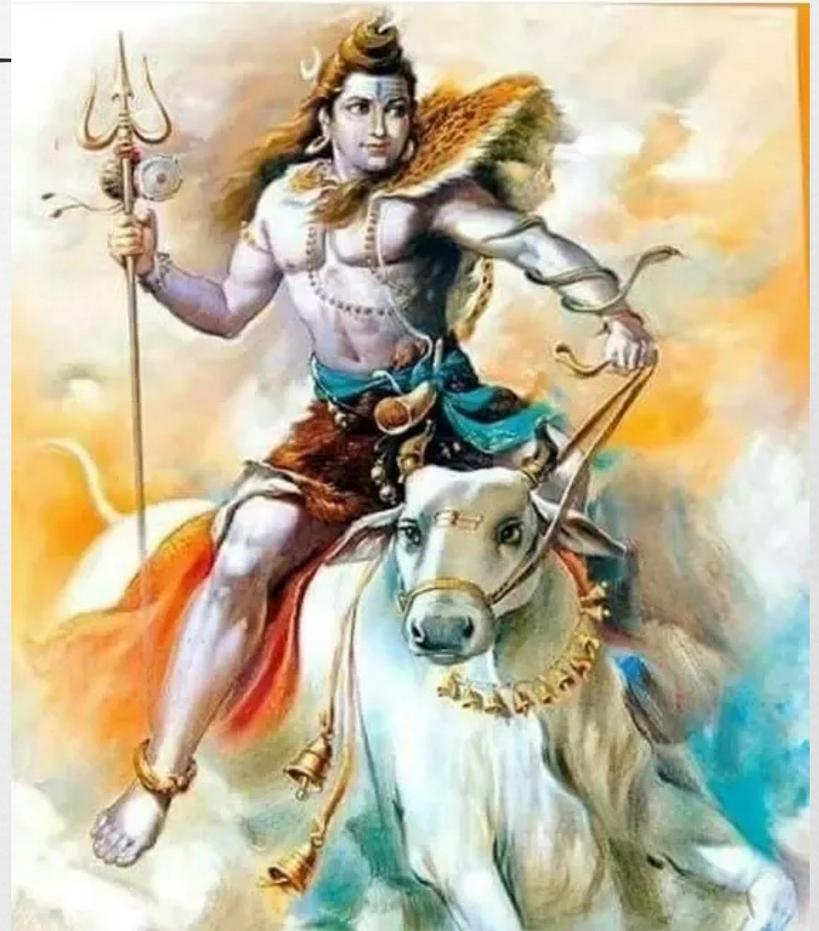
The World *Within* the Text  
The Narrative at Hand

The World *in Front* of the Text  
Our present day world and how we  
relate to the text

# The Purāṇic Ethos



- ∞ Ancient Lore
- ∞ Days of Old
- ∞ Idiom of Devotion (bhakti)
- ∞ Vedic → Sacrifice  
(worldly)
- ∞ Yogic → Asceticism  
(other-worldly)
- ∞ Epic/Purāṇic → Double Helix



# Elements of the Cultural Imaginary



Our Values

Our Institutions

Our Laws

Our Symbols

Our Stories



# Part III

## Śiva's Blue Throat

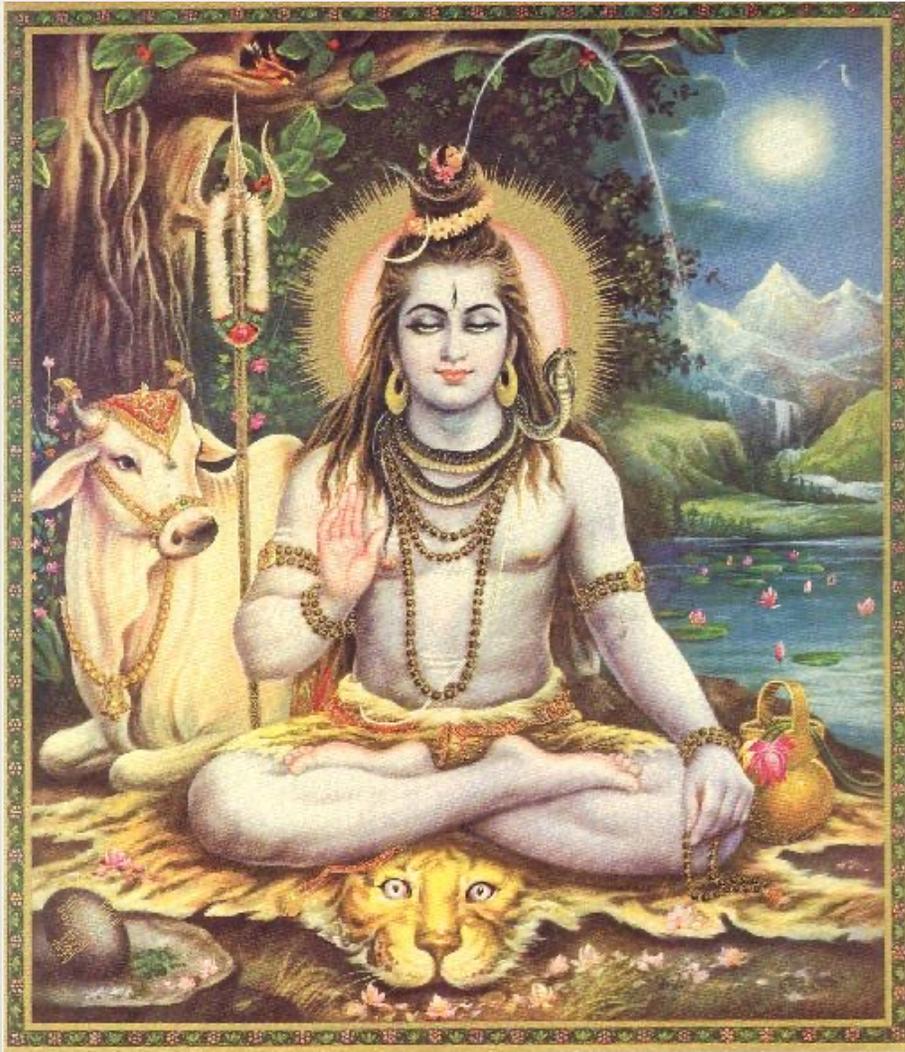


### Mythological Storytelling





# Śiva, Lord of Yogis



- ❧ Recluse
- ❧ Meditation
- ❧ Animal Skins
- ❧ Yogic Posture
- ❧ Matted Locks

# Śiva's Iconography



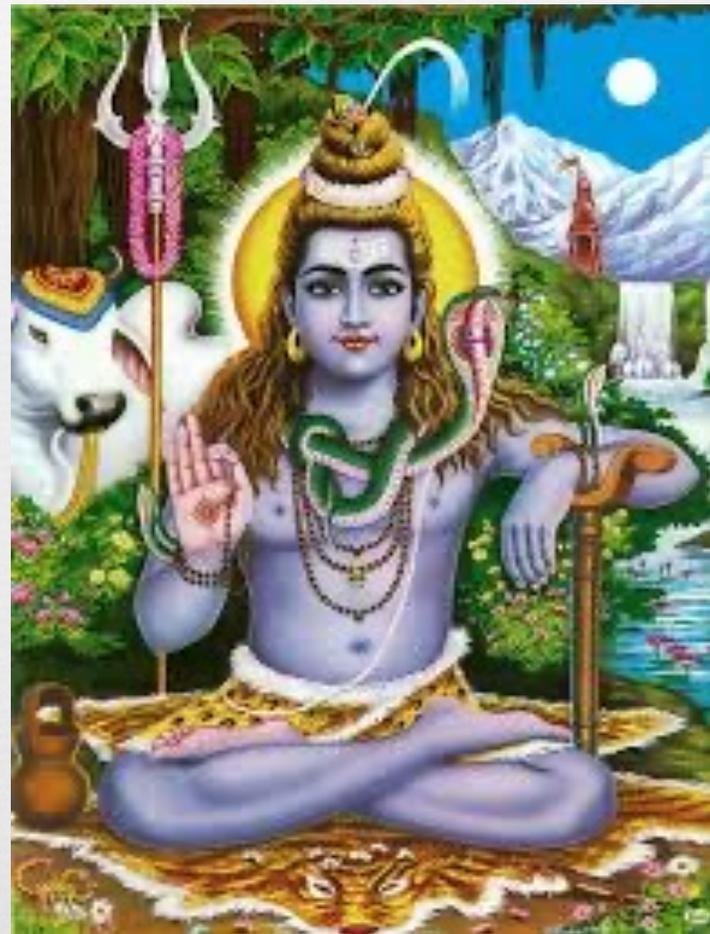
- ☞ Lotus
- ☞ Cobra
- ☞ Mountains
- ☞ Ganges
- ☞ Crescent  
Moon



# Core Significations



- ∞ Destruction
- ∞ Transformation
- ∞ Otherness
- ∞ Inwardness
- ∞ Reclusion
- ∞ Concentration



# Important Mythic Motifs



- ❧ Dakṣa's Sacrifice
- ❧ Burning of Kāma
- ❧ Descent of Ganges
- ❧ Śiva the Destroyer
- ❧ Dance of Bliss





# Ten Avatārs of Viṣṇu



- ❧ Matsya → Fish
- ❧ Kūrma → Tortoise
- ❧ Varāha → Boar
- ❧ Narasiṃha → Lion
- ❧ Vāmana → Dwarf



# Avatārs of Viṣṇu



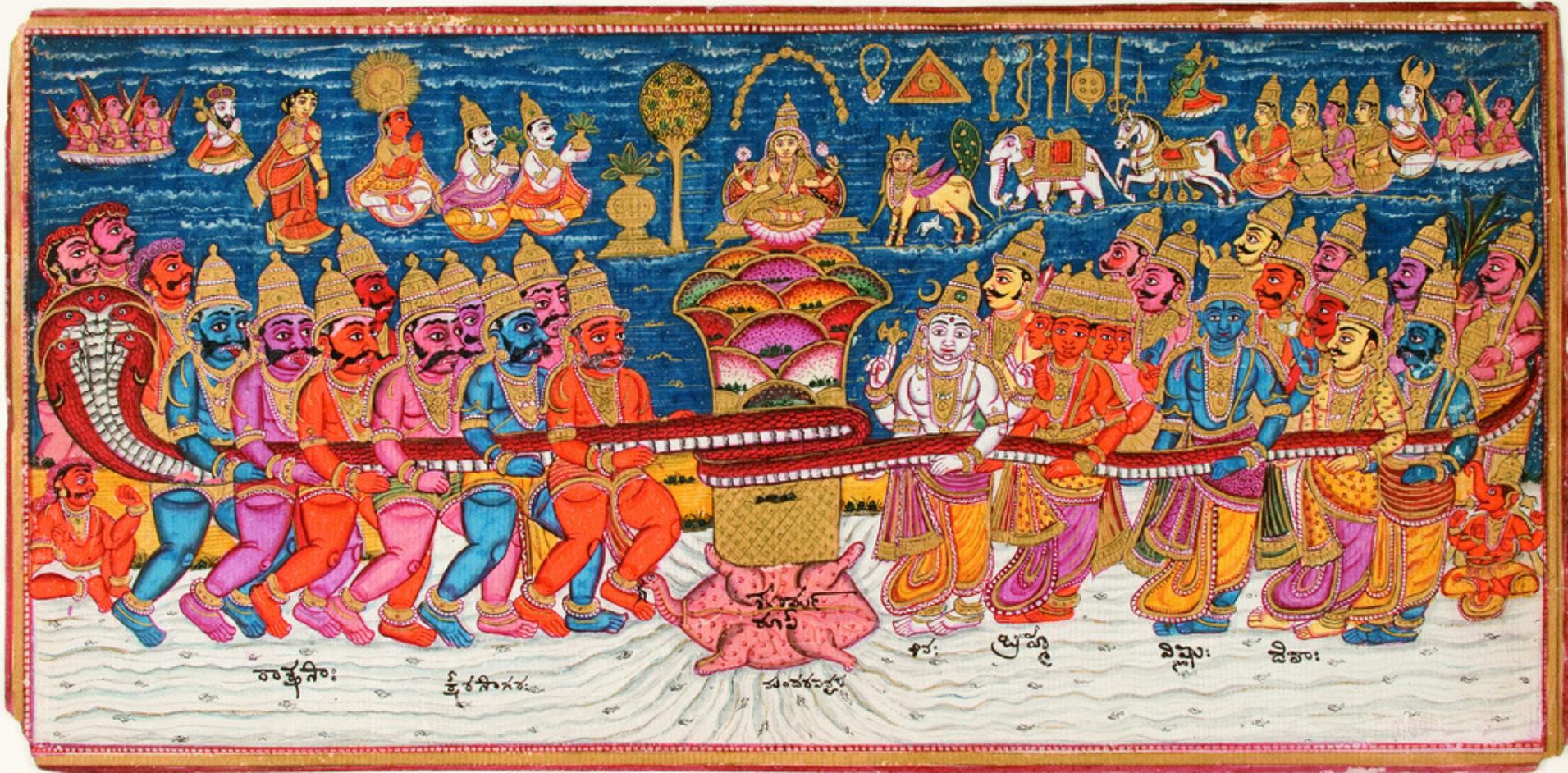
- ❧ Paraśurāma →  
Axe-Rāma, Brahmin warrior
- ❧ Rāma →  
hero of the Rāmāyaṇa
- ❧ Kṛṣṇa →  
hero of the Mahābhārata
- ❧ Buddha →  
Sidhartha Gautama of Buddhism
- ❧ Kalkī (future avatāra) →  
will bring about the end of  
the Kali Yuga



# The Churning



# The Churning





# Book Excerpt



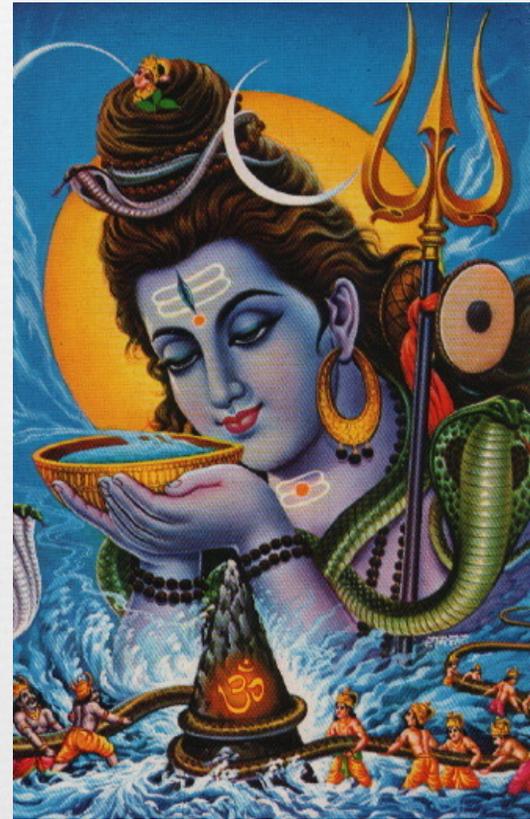
- ☞ All eyes were on the poison, including the third eye of Lord Śiva, the Destroyer, who watched from afar, in deep yogic trance in his abode on Mount Kailāśa.
- ☞ He interrupted his meditation and swiftly disembarked. Knowing that no being could withstand the potency of the oceanic toxins, he graced the scene, opened his mouth, and allowed the poison to enter it.



# Book Excerpt



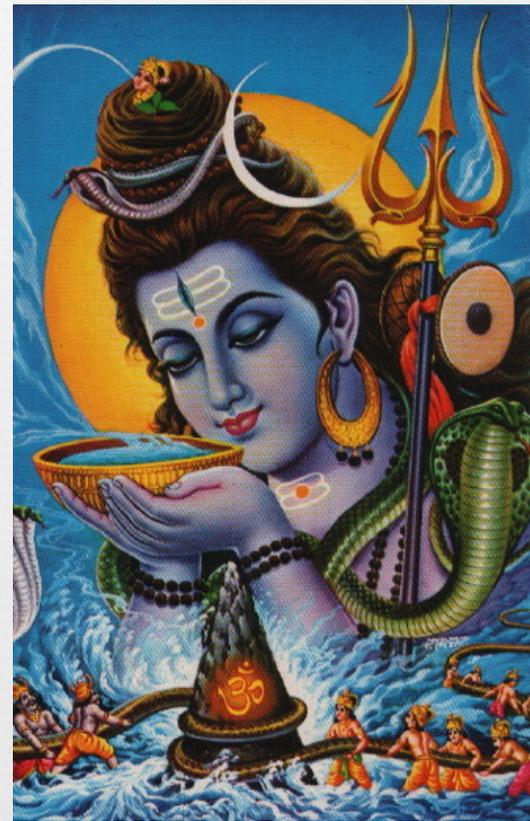
- ❧ The Daityas and Devas reeled with both relief and alarm. Would the great Śiva sacrifice himself in order to save the universe? What dreadful fate would ensue for the universe if he were destroyed?
  
- ❧ All present knew of Śiva's cosmic role. At the end of each age, he performed his dance of transcendental bliss, destroying the universe, so that Brahmā may create it anew. Countless Creations have thus issued forth, but without the Destroyer, there could be no subsequent Creation!



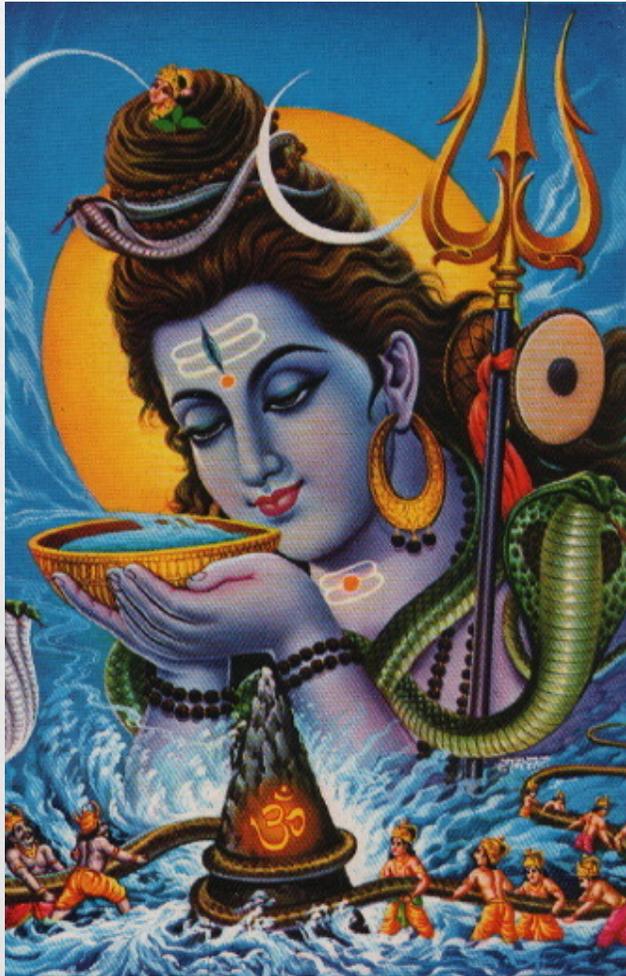
# Book Excerpt



- ❧ All eyes looked on in awe as the poison entered the mouth of Lord Śiva. To their surprise, he did not swallow it. All were perplexed by the fact that he also did not spit it out. Rather, he lodged the cosmic venom in his divine throat and, with his ascetic power, neutralized it.
- ❧ His throat turned deep blue, and from that day onwards Śiva was given the name of Nīlakaṇṭha, ‘He whose throat is blue.’
- ❧ “Glory to Śiva!” praised the entourage of demons, gods, and other celestial beings. “Glory to Mahādeva, the Great God! Glory to the Lord of the Yogis! Glory to the Blue-throated One!”



# Śiva Neutralizing Poison



# Book Excerpt



Having been purified of its dreadful poisons – like a mind freed of toxic perceptions, or like a heart unburdened by malignant emotion – the ocean began to flow more freely, cooperating with the forces acting upon it. Like the ocean of our consciousness, it started off crude, and required enormous ‘churning’<sup>3/4</sup>via introspection, meditation, and therapeutic processes<sup>3/4</sup>to become refined. gis! Glory to the Blue-throated One!”

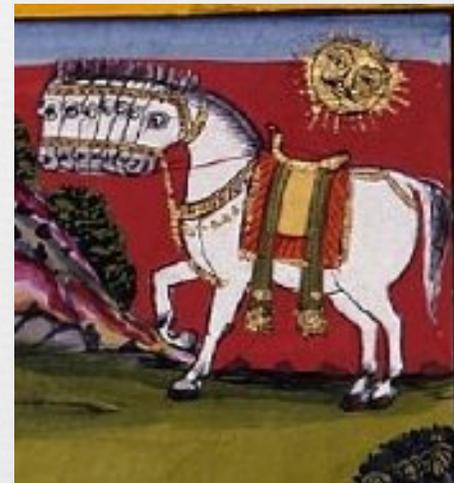




# Airāvata: The Five-Headed Elephant



# Ucchaisravas: The Seven-Headed Horse



# Kāmadhenu: The Cow of Plenty



# Candra: The Moon



# Godness Lakṣmī



# Sage Dhanvantari: The Father of Āyurveda



# Mohini





# Book Excerpt: Cobra Pose



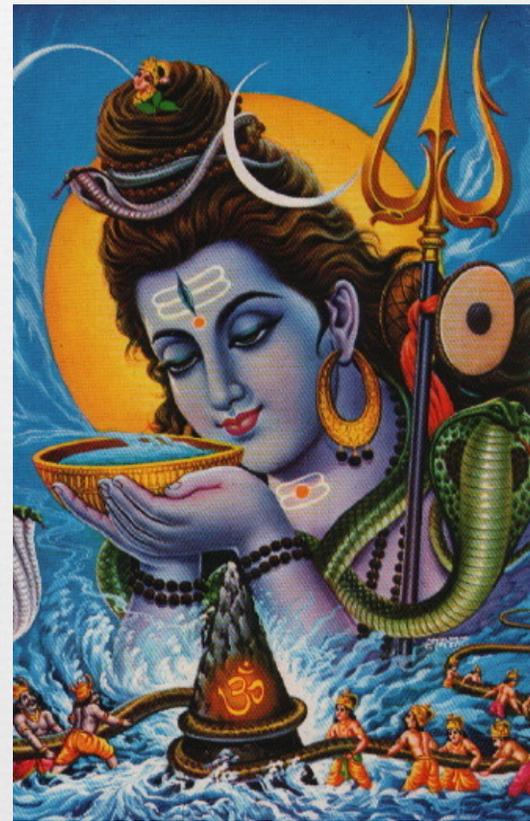
The Cobra adorns Śiva as his sacred garland. His blue throat is a symbol of auspiciousness and power, showing that while power can be dangerous, it need not be malevolent. The Cobra is also a symbol of rising Kuṇḍalinī Śakti; the divine energy that travels up the subtle spine. Once it reaches the crown, one is awakened. The Cobra's ability to stand up tall, unique among snake species, represents the unique capacity of the human spine to occupy a fully upright posture. When the Kuṇḍalinī energy at the base of the spine is awoken during spiritual practice, it dredges up the poisonous crud we need to address. Upon consistent growth, the śakti yields riches, each more refined than the last.



# Book Excerpt



☞ We mortals have much to learn from the power of Lord Śiva. If we fail to learn the lesson of Śiva Nīlakaṇṭha, we will either swallow (internalize) or spit out (externalize) the toxins of our experiences. What kind of state would we enjoy if we were able to damage neither self nor other with the toxicity of our suffering? What kind of state might our world enjoy if it remained unsullied by venom? Śiva is a potent paragon of neutralizing the poison of life, thus safeguarding the welfare of self and others.



Part IV:  
Sītā, Daughter of Earth



Mythological Storytelling



# Chapter 3



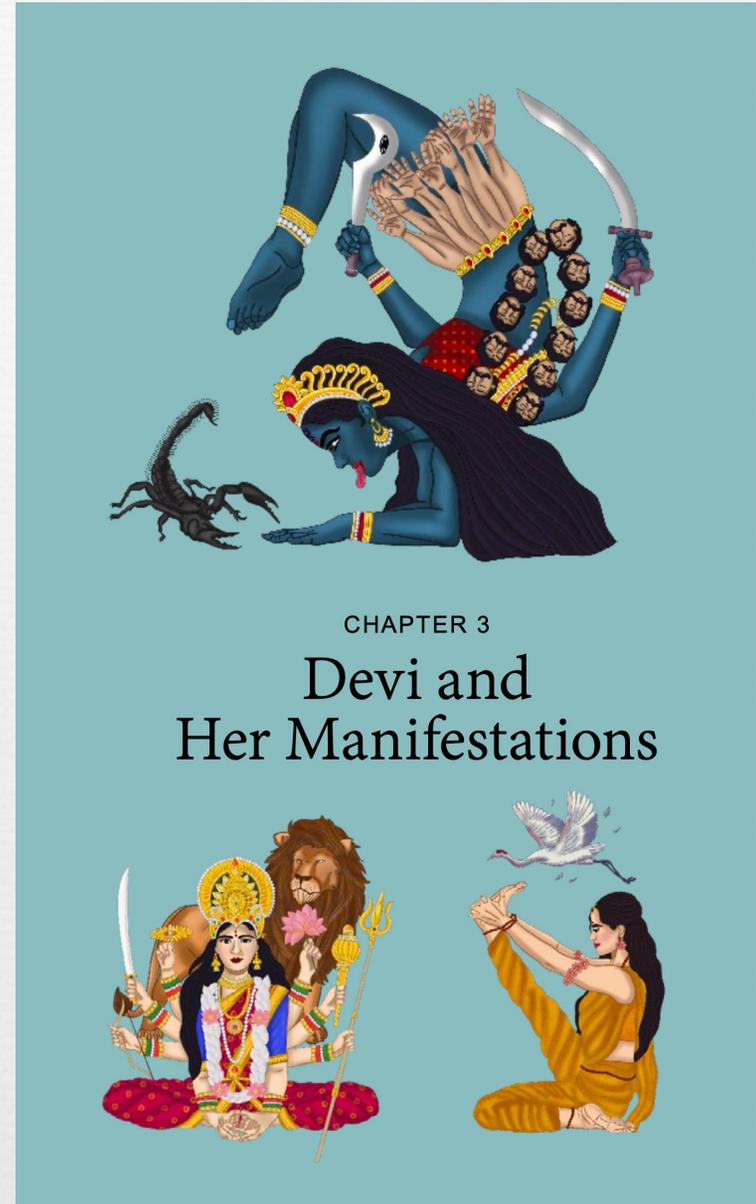
Manifestations of the Goddess

Sarasvatī

Durgā, Kālī

Sītā

Lakṣmī





# Sītā's Life Events



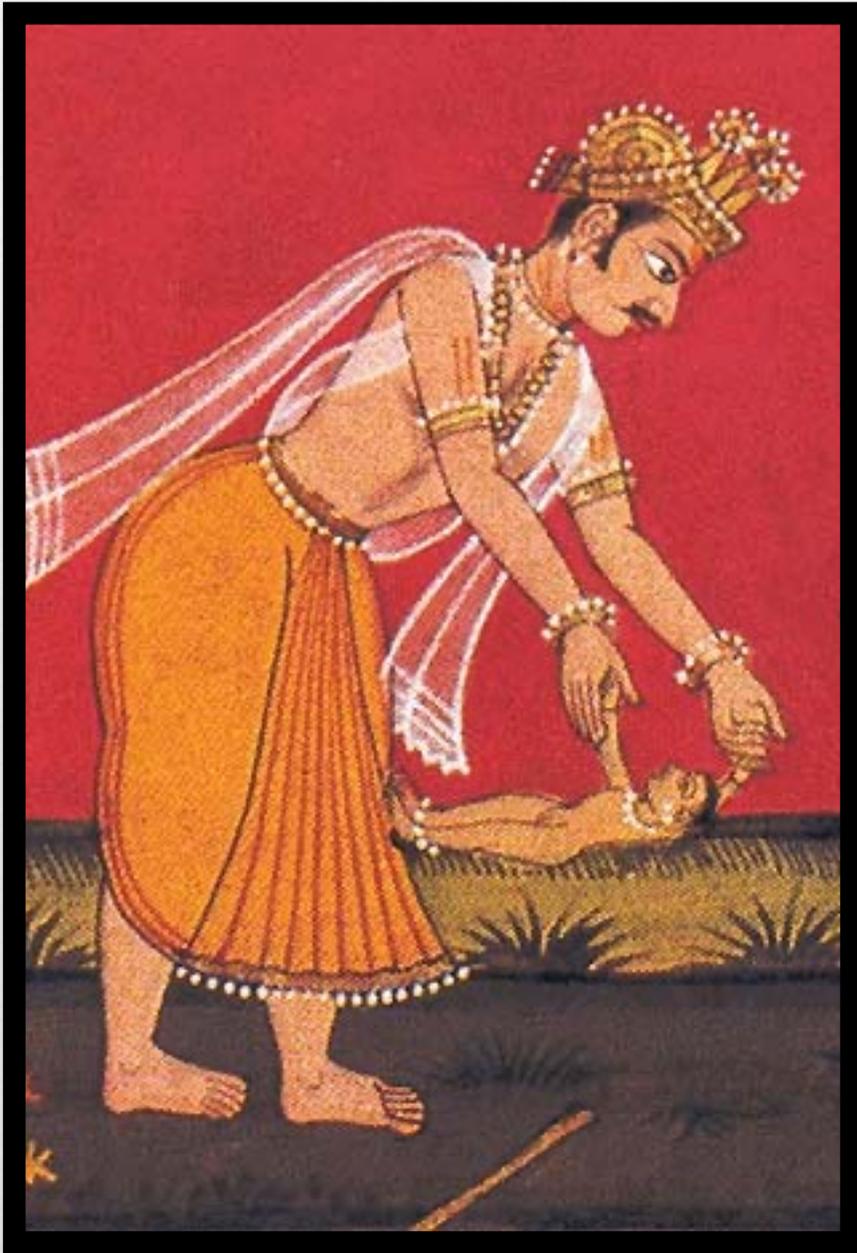
Birth

Marriage

Abduction

Fire Test

Exile



# ‘Birth’ of Sītā



King Janaka ploughing

Finds a baby in a furrow

Sītā = Furrow



# PLOUGH POSE

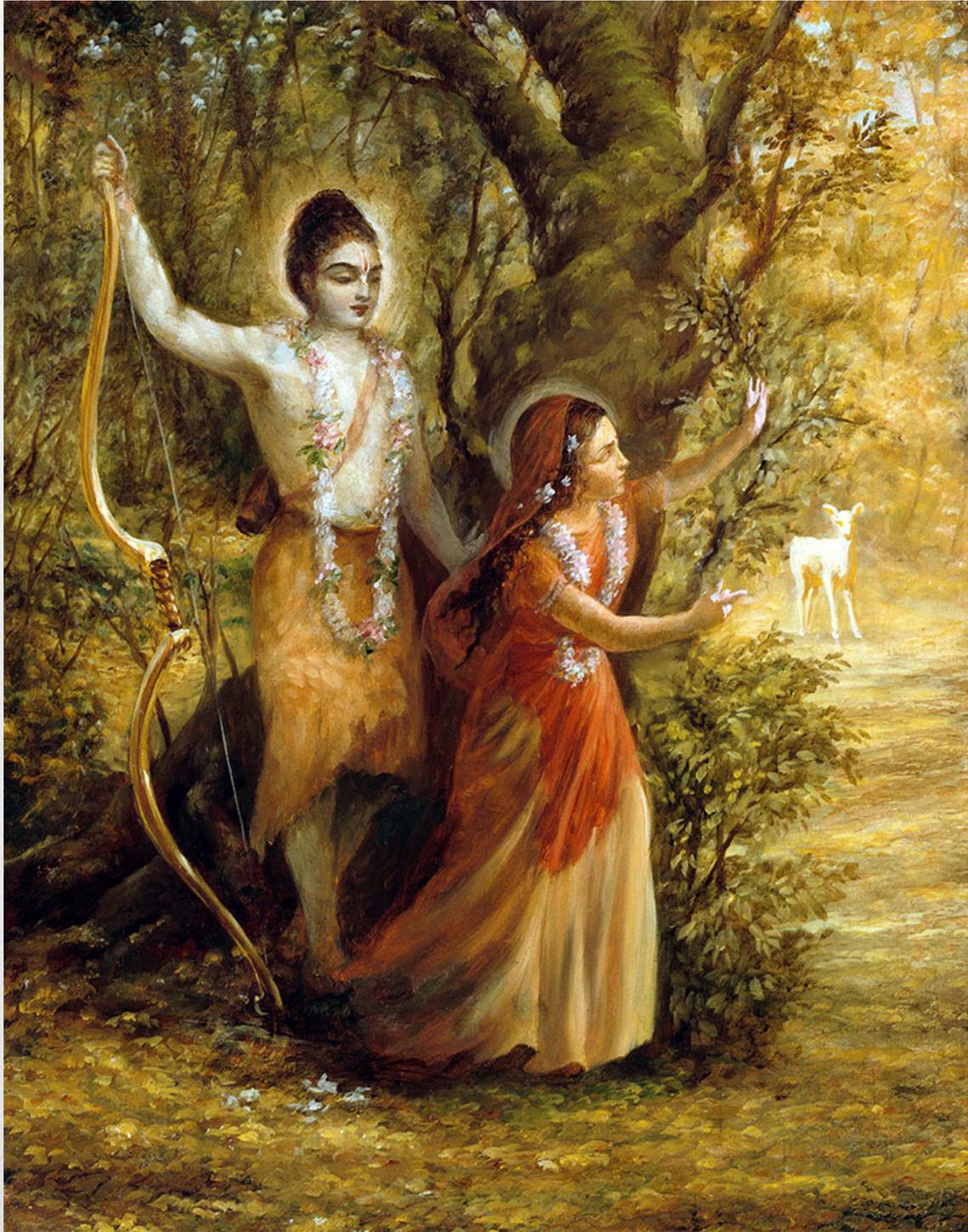
## HALĀSANA

SĪTĀ, BORN OF  
THE EARTH



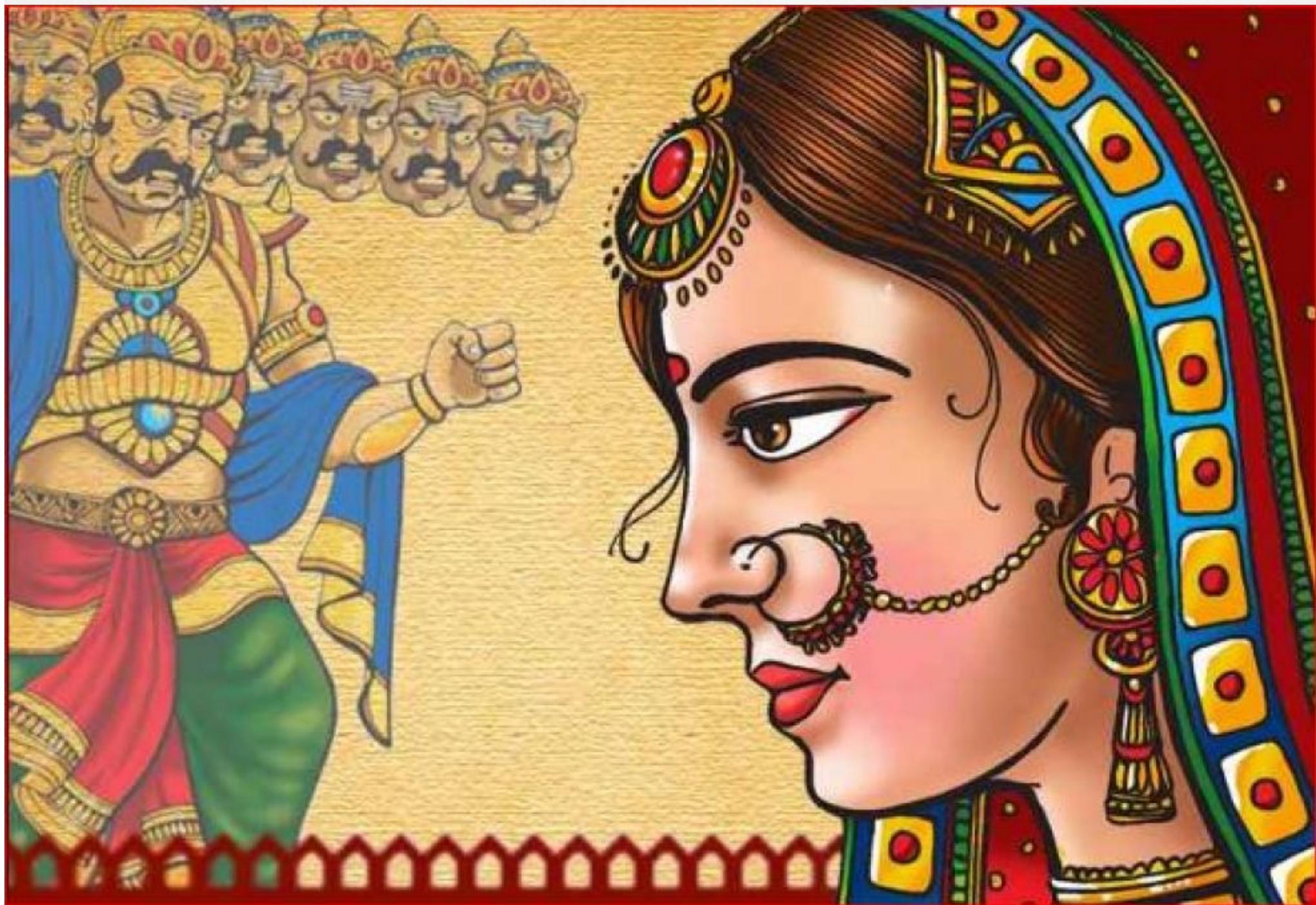
ONCE, THE GREAT KING JANAKA was ploughing the fields around his palace as part of a sacred rite. It was springtime, and with spring blooms the fecundity of the earth. The more noble a king, the more bountiful the harvest within his kingdom. And so, accompanied by the Vedic priests, Janaka was ritually tilling the soil to appeal to Mother Earth, that she might bless the kingdom and bring forth bounty. At one point, Janaka's plough came to a standstill. He could not budge it. Concerned, he called to his attendant to remove the stone that blocked his way. The attendant bent down to rummage through the soil to find a large stone-lined basket. "Sire," said the attendant, "you best come see this for yourself." Janaka came round and picked up the basket, which was bedecked with jewels. He gently opened it and to his astonishment he found inside, a precious baby girl. "Mother Earth has given me the most bountiful harvest, even before I have sown! Glory to the goddess for sending me this child. I will raise her as my very own, and her name shall be Sītā." Janaka called for his wife, Sīradhvaja, and gave her the news. She was overjoyed since they were, as yet, childless. She cradled baby Sītā in her arms and carried her off to the palace to be raised as a princess.

Sītā grew up to be a beautiful, charming, noble young lady. She was the pride and joy of her parents. Time passed,





One day, in the woods, Sītā was abducted by the demon-king Rāvaṇa, and taken to his lair on the island of Laṅkā. After much effort, and with help from the monkey-people, Rāma was able to locate and rescue Sītā. He had been completely lost without her, and was so happy to have her back. Yet there was doubt among his forest assembly about Sītā's fidelity. After all, she had been with Rāvaṇa for an entire year. To lay the spiteful rumors to rest, Sītā summoned the sacred fire from the bowels of the earth as a testament to her purity. Fire burns away what isn't pure, so Sītā surrendered herself to grace and walked through the sacred flames. So pure was Sītā that not even a hair on her head was singed. Rāma embraced her, relieved.



# Sītā's Fire Test







But years later, once their exile was over and Rāma and Sītā had returned to rule, the gossip arose again in Rāma's kingdom. People can be quite petty, and gossiping about others can provide a welcome distraction from considering one's own flaws. The pernicious rumors became so widespread that Rāma's reign—and the stability of the realm itself—was threatened. So Rāma made an awful choice, and had his brother Lakṣmaṇa take Sītā out to a forest hermitage and leave her there. Sītā bemoaned her fate. She was pregnant with twins, and

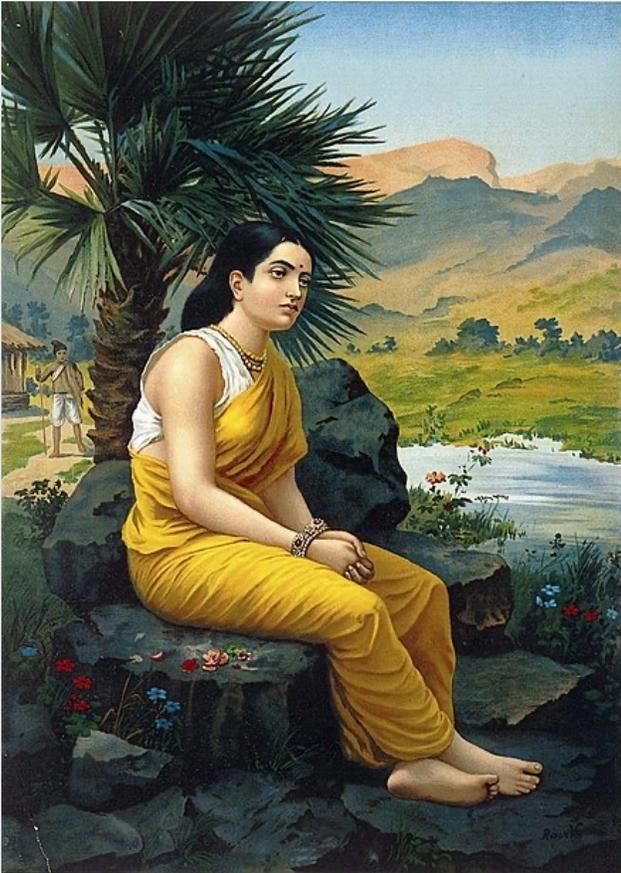


could not accept what had happened to her. She found solace in the ashram of the great sage Vālmīki, who comforted her and helped her raise her sons. Eventually, the boys learned the story of their father Rāma, and sought him out at his royal court to reconcile. But Sītā found no reconciliation in the world.

Once her sons had been accepted in the care of Rāma, Sītā bid farewell to sage Vālmīki and wandered out into the woods. In a sacred grove, she uttered a secret mantra, along with this prayer: “Mother Divine, Mother Earth, hear me, Sītā, your child. I’ve done what is right at every turn and yet, I’ve been abandoned, cast aside by the virtuous Rāma! How could this be? Why have you forsaken me?” Just then there was a rumbling in the earth, and the forest floor opened up. From it came an angelic voice: “Daughter, you are the child of my fecundity, born into the world to fulfill a purpose. You have now completed that purpose. Mortals can never attain happiness, so now that you have completed your mission among mortals, I call you to my bosom. I’ve supported you with every step you’ve taken. And you, like me, have endured the ills of man with forbearance and colossal strength. Return to me, child, where you belong, to merge with the rhythms of nature, and call forth the turning of the seasons. Return to your divine self!” And with this, the earth embraced Sītā. She was released from the burdens of her existence, and returned to the great Mother Earth.



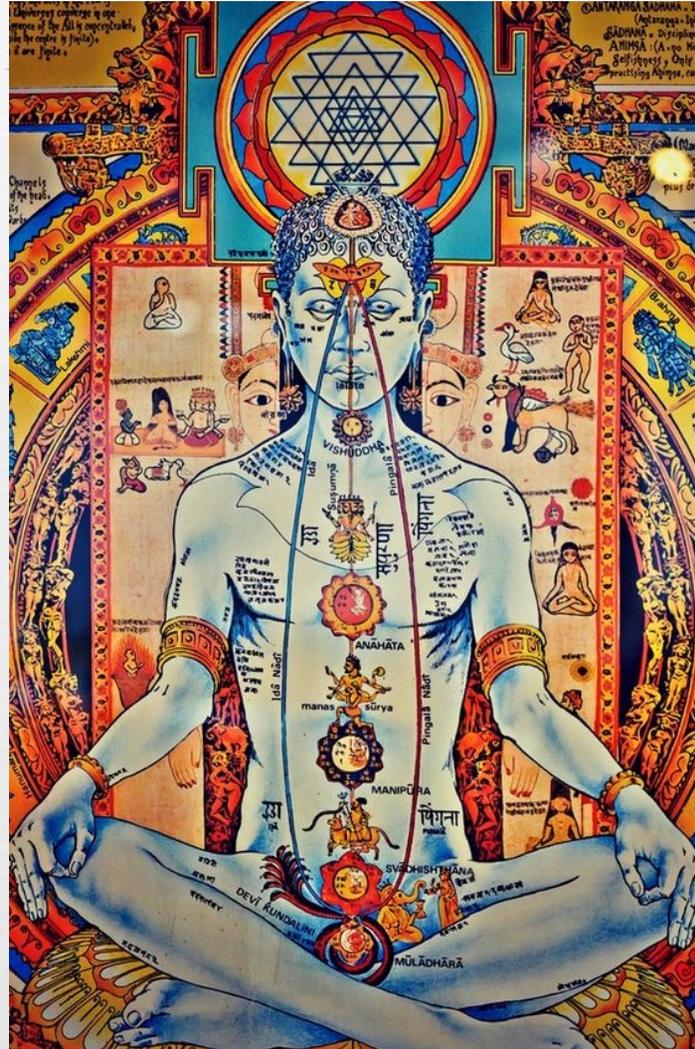
# Spiritual Significance



*As you practice plough pose, remember Sītā, born of Janaka's ritual ploughing. Remember the Rāmāyaṇa—the Tale of Rāma—as well as the Sītāyaṇa, the Tale of Sītā. Rāma is an avatāra incarnation of the great god Viṣṇu who comes to Earth time and time again to restore dharma. Sītā was part of the divine plan, created so that Rāma would have occasion to defeat the great demon-king Rāvaṇa. But there is another tale to be told here. Sītā's is a story of inversions, where grace rises, born from the womb of Mother Earth. So pure is Sītā that fire cannot burn her. Hers is feminine power which endures all things, even the test of time. She is of the earth that endures all things and nurtures all creatures. Sītā's is a tale of the feminine divine, of the inherent divinity tied to nature and the fecundity of the earth. From earth was she born and to earth she returned, once her divine duty had been fulfilled.*

# Wisdom Traditions

- ❧ Subtle Reality
- ❧ Interconnectivity
- ❧ Sentience
- ❧ Meaning
- ❧ Transmission



# Indian Worldview

∞ Samsāra

∞ Karma

∞ Ātman

∞ Mokṣa



# The Self



∞ consciousness

∞ independent

∞ bereft of  
qualities

∞ changeless

∞ timeless

∞ Boundless



# Peace Prayer



om sarve bhavantu sukhinah  
 sarve santu nirāmayāḥ  
 sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū mā kaścīd  
 duḥkhabhāg bhavet |  
 Lokāḥ samsthāḥ sukhino bhavantu  
 om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||

May all beings be at peace,  
 may no one suffer from illness,  
 May all see what is auspicious, may no  
 one suffer.  
 Om peace, peace, peace.



THANK YOU

Dr. Raj Balkaran | <https://rajbalkaran.com>

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- ☞ In honour of Shivaratri, take “Shiva Stories” FREE
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SCHOOL OF INDIAN WISDOM

SCHOLARSHIP • STORYTELLING • SPIRITUALITY

# Upcoming EP Course



- ∞ Yoga Stories of Ancient India: Decoding the Myths Behind 20 Key Yoga Poses
  - ∞ Mondays, March 14, 21, 28, April 4, 7 - 8:30 pm ET
  - ∞ Module 1 – Śiva, Lord of Yogīs
  - ∞ Module 2 – Viṣṇu and His Avatāras
  - ∞ Module 3 – The Powers of the Gods
  - ∞ Module 4 – The Wisdom of the Sages



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# Śiva, Lord of Yogīs



- ❧ Module 1 – Śiva, Lord of Yogīs
  - ❧ Cobra Pose (Bhujāṅgāsana)
  - ❧ Warrior Pose (Vīrabhadrāsana)
  - ❧ Lord of Dance Pose (Naṭarājāsana)
  - ❧ Perfection Pose (Siddhāsana)
  - ❧ Mountain Pose (Parvatāsana)



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# Viṣṇu and his Avatāras



- ❧ Module 2 – Viṣṇu and his Avatāras
  - ❧ Reclining Pose (Anantāsana)
  - ❧ Tortoise Pose (Kūrmāsana)
  - ❧ Hanumān's Pose (Hanumānāsana)
  - ❧ Three Strides Pose (Tri-Vikramāsana)
  - ❧ Eagle Pose (Garuḍāsana)



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# The Powers of the Gods



- ∞ Module 3 – Viṣṇu and his Avatāras
  - ∞ Salutation Pose (Prašānāsana)
  - ∞ Half-Moon Pose (Ardhacandrāsana)
  - ∞ Thunderbolt Pose (Vajrāsana)
  - ∞ Archer Pose (Dhanurāsana)
  - ∞ Yogic Staff Pose (Yogaḍāṇḍāsana)



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# The Wisdom of the Sages



- ❧ Module 4 – Viṣṇu and his Avatāras
  - ❧ Vasiṣṭha Pose (Vasiṣṭhāsana)
  - ❧ Viśvāmitra Pose (Viśvāmitrāsana)
  - ❧ Durvāsas Pose (Durvāsāsana)
  - ❧ Aṣṭavakra Pose (Aṣṭavakrāsana)
  - ❧ Vāmadeva Pose (Vāmadevāsana)



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