

Stories about Rishis

Stories from the Puranas Retold

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Introduction

Our gods and goddesses have strong and vibrant personalities as described in the hymns of the Vedas and the stories in the Puranas. Most Hindus have heard these stories in childhood and have an easy familiarity with the ways of life and living that the gods display in their various Avatars. There is always a take-away message in the stories - sometimes it is ambiguous and leads to more questions; sometimes the message simply defines good and evil, right and wrong - but always, there is the possibility of relating to ones own personality and ones own situation. No doubt, this is why the stories have endured. I for one carry a sense of comfort that there is a special god/goddess to recall in a certain situation. The stories actually hold our faith, allowing us to accept all the gods as one and the one god as many.



There is also the matter of images. In a way the images of India - the great idols in worship, the wayside shrines, the calendar art images, the great and the small sculpture - are abstraction of the stories and the personal message of the stories.

In this book, written entirely for the web, the stories have been cast in a simplified mould. The intent is to familiarize the new visitor and to aid recall for the old friend.

All the images were commissioned by me with Tribal and Folk Artists. We had only to tell them the story and they drew the pictures. They knew the stories! Language was no barrier. Some readers may be familiar with the styles of Indian Folk and Tribal Art and will instantly recognize the Madhubani, the Warli, the Oriya and Bengal folk art. For others, given below is a chart :

An attempt is made in the stories to show the harmony between the gods and goddess; time coalesces and the gods are present at each others life events, a general value system emerges; the invocation is of god love rather than god fear.

We hope the reader enjoys this presentation of ancient text and is encouraged to delve deeper into our well of faith.



Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



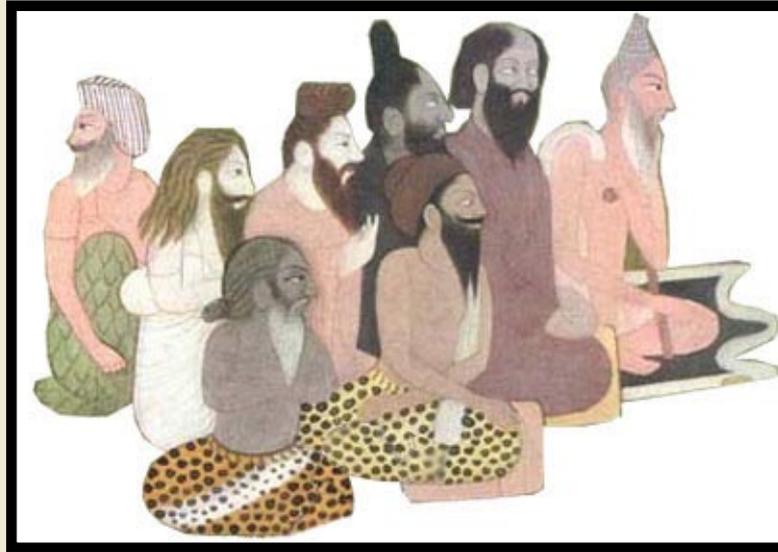
Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



RISHIS, SAGES, and POETS

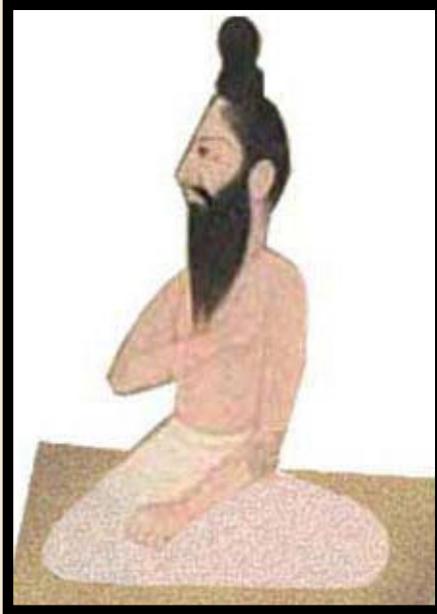


The Rishis are important players in the Hindu scriptures. They are described as poets to whom the four Vedas were revealed. They were learned men who performed austerities, knew the ritual practices, and through penance and prayer answered the questions of gods and men.

The names and tales of Brigu, Pulastaya, Daksha, Vashishta, Vishwamitra, Vyasa, Valmiki, Narada, remain even today in everyday memory. Though not deities, some of them are regarded as the mind-born sons of Brahma, who, at the dawn of creation brought forth both the population and the social order.



BRIGHU



Bhrigu was one of Brahma's mind-born sons and a prajapati, one of the first fathers. He was the officiating priest at Daksha's great sacrifice to which Shiva and Sati were not invited. He sided with Daksha in humiliating Shiva and as a consequence, one of Shiva's ganas chopped off his flowing beard.



...Brighu



Bhrigu had an eye for beautiful women. He spotted a maid who was betrothed to a demon. He was moved by her beauty and married her. The demon was distraught and approached Agni for help. Agni helped him find the maid and had her carried home. Brighu was furious and cursed Agni saying that each time that he, Agni, lost control and got angry he would devour everything, Agni remonstrated. He had only spoken the truth and done his duty. The curse for not doing one's duty was already severe - seven preceding and seven succeeding generations would have been cast

into the nether world. He added that he too had the powers to curse but he respected the sage as the mouthpiece of the gods. Also, at the sacrifices, it is the sage who has to pour the ghee over Agni. How then could he curse him? Brighu heeded the reason in this and tempered the curse saying that Agni would also purify all that passed through him



...Brighu



Brighu also did a good and kind act. Divodasa, the king of Kasi was defeated in a battle. His whole family was slaughtered by one Vitahavya. The unhappy king went to the sage Bharadvajya who conducted a sacrifice for him. The result was that an heir, Pratardana was born to him. Pratardana vowed to take revenge on Vitahavya. Vitahavya fled to the hermitage of Brighu for protection. Pratardana approached Brighu and asked him to give up his enemy. Brighu replied that there are no warriors in a hermitage. Pratardana touched his feet for this learning and went on to become a good and kind king of Kasi and to become a chanter of the Vedas.



...Brighu



Brighu was also very caring about his fellow sages. Once an evil king Nahusha obtained superhuman powers such that at his one glance people were reduced to becoming his slaves. Nahusha went to the sage Agastya and soon had him bound hand and foot. He then tied Agastya to his chariot and kicked him to make him move. Agastya called for help and Brighu heard. He hid in Agastya's hair to avoid Nahusha's burning and evil gaze. Unseen by Nahusha, he pronounced a great curse and Nahusha fell from the heavens, an ugly brown snake on earth, to be hated by men for all time.



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