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Painting of Parvati with green skin, arrayed in jewelry and holding a lotus. Tamil Nadu, ca 1850. British Museum Public Domain Compared to other goddesses of Indian mythology, Parvati is set apart for two reasons. Firstly, she is known for practicing extreme asceticism, a set of practices normally reserved for two reasons.
men in ancient Indian society. These practices include leaving home, living on only one meal a day, meditating for hours, holding one arm above ones head for years at a time, making four fires and sitting between them during the hottest part of the day, dressing in tree bark, and so on. In this way, she mirrors her husband Shiva, also known as an
ascetic god. She is also important due to her identification with a number of different goddesses such as Ambika, Sati, and Annapurna. Worshippers see her as either a manifestation of one of these goddesses or as the ultimate source of them. Aside from her
asceticism and association with mountainous areas, Parvati is worshipped as a goddess of hearth and home, marriage, and family. But she is by no means a passive goddess. According to one tale in the Shiva Purana, she grew so angry at the death of her child Ganesha that she summoned an army of celestial warrior goddesses and assaulted the
heavens. She was only calmed once Ganesha was brought back to life. Parvati also actively pursues her own goals; for example, she undertook her extreme asceticism in order to impress Shiva and convince him to marry her. Even after this plan succeeded, Parvati had to persuade him to be properly married in accordance with orthdox Hindu
Brahmanical rites. Later, Parvati insisted on having a child despite Shivas reluctance and mockery. Having tamed the wild god Shiva, who usually keeps a safe distance from normal society, she has become the embodiment of domestic home life. The fact that both Parvati and Shiva enthusiastically practice austerities in the mountainsthe antithesis of
the orthodox Hindu householder idealmakes them a complicated couple. The etymology of Parvatis name is straightforward: it derives from the Sanskrit parvata, meaning mountain or mountain
Himavan and Himavat (also meaning mountain). In this sense, Parvati means either Mountainous One or Daughter of the Mountain. Parvati or Prvat[PAR-vuh-tEE]/ parti /Parvati has a fluid relationship with a number of other goddesses found in Hindu literature and mythology. She is often characterized as the source of, or the same being as, the
following goddesses:Sati (), VirtuousDurga (), Impassable or Tough GoingKali (), Black or TimeAnnapurna (), Full of FoodAmbika (), MotherMany of Parvatis epithets reflect her strong association with mountains:Shailasuta (), Daughter of the MountainGurir (), Daughter of the Moun
KingGirisha (), Mistress of the MountainUma (), MotherShakti (), (Feminine) PowerParvati is often depicted holding such objects as a lotus, vase, rosary, mirror, or trident. She is sometimes shown gesturing, an indication that she is granting boons. Because of the lengths Parvati went to in order to marry Shiva, she is known as a goddess of fertility.
love, marriage, and the householder ideal in generala foil to her starkly ascetic husband. Yet the extreme austerities she practices high in the Himalayas also make her a symbol of asceticism and shakti (feminine power). Due to Parvatis status as a symbol of both domesticity and shakti, family is essential to her mythology. Her most important
relationships are with her husband, Shiva, the god of destruction, and her sons Ganesha and Karttikeya, gods of removing obstacles and war, respectively. Skanda Karttikeya Ganesha AndhakaWhile Parvati does not appear in Vedic literature, literary and numismatic sources from the first few centuries BCE and CE reference a figure that possibly
served as her prototype. In the Kena Upanishad (3.12) we read:sa tasminnevke striyamjagma bahuobhamnmumhaimavat thoyca kimetadyakamitiAt that very spot [Indra] came upon a woman, Uma, Daughter of Himavati, radiant in appearance, and said to her, What spirit is this? This passage establishes that a figure named Uma, who was also the
daughter of the mountain, was already in circulation in the later centuries BCE, although it is uncertain whether she can be identified as the same figure who would later become Parvati or Sati-Parvati. More reliable dating comes from the coinage of the Kushana king Huvishka (ca. 150 CE). One gold coin in particular shows an image of Huvishka on
the obverse and an image of two gods on the reverse. The figures are labeled as (Ooma) and (Wesho) in Baktrian, a Central Asian-Iranian language that used a modified form of the Greek alphabet. The Baktrian spelling corresponds to Uma, a name for Parvati, while Wesho is sometimes identified with Shiva or Herakles. Gold coin of King Huvishka
with Uma (Parvati) and Wesho (possibly Shiva) on the reverse. Minted in western India, ca. 150 CE. British Museum poddesses in Hinduism Several scholars have postulated that Parvati originated from pre-Aryan goddesses of the Indian subcontinent, who gradually merged and were
adopted into Vedic and Brahmanical traditions. According to David Kinsley, It is quite possible that Prvats early history and origin may lie with a goddess who dwelled in the mountainous regions and was associated with non-ryan tribal peoples Such a goddess who dwelled in the mountainous regions and was associated with non-ryan tribal peoples.
on the fringes of society.[2]The origin of Hindu goddesses in General is a concern for Cornelia Dimmit and J. A. B. van Buitenen, who note the almost complete lack of goddesses in Vedic literature. They agree that their origin, along with many traits of Vishnu and Shiva found in the Hindu Puranic texts, can be traced to non-Aryan Indian peoples that
coexisted with the early Aryan invaders who made up the upper classes: Almost every goddess in the Puras is married to a god, with the exception of the fierce and war-like Durg and Kl. Perhaps the marriage of gods and goddesses in the early
history of Indian culture.[3] Wendy Doniger expands on this idea and postulates a two-stage development for Hindu goddesses: first the Indo-Aryan male gods were given wives, and then, under the influence of Tantric and ktic movements which had been gaining momentum outside orthodox Hinduism for many centuries, these shadowy female figures
emerged as supreme powers in their own right, and merged into the great Goddess here refers to Mahadevi, an all-powerful and creative goddess according to Shakti traditions claim that Mahadevi is none
other than Parvati herself. Before her life as Parvati, she lived as the goddess Sati, daughter of Daksha, who was the embodiment of the Hindu ideal of a virtuous wife. When her father insulted both Sati and Shiva by not inviting them to a ceremony, Sati grew so incensed that she killed herself by
walking into a fire. According to the Devibhagavata Purana, Because of this offence, Sat burnt that body, which [Daksha] had begotten, in the fire of her yoga, with a desire to demonstrate the dharma of suttee.[5] The goddess Sati eventually gave her name to the now-abandoned Hindu practice of widows committing suicide by throwing themselves
onto the funeral pyres of their husbands. David Kinsley sees Sati as a mediating figure. On one side stands the worldly, established, orthodox religious life, characterized by the householder ideal. On the other stands the ascetic lifestyle in which one remains celibate and homeless, wandering from town to town and living without a family. By marrying
Shiva, Sati bridged these two poles. When she kills herself, Kinsley writes, she precipitates a clash between these two worlds, between Daka and iva, which is initially destructive but ultimately beneficial and creative.[6]When Shiva learned of Parvatis death, he was so distraught that he carried her charred remains over his shoulder. In the process,
fifty-one pieces of her body fell to the earth and became religious sites. Her yoni (vagina) fell to the earth last, and Shiva came down to earth in the form of a linga (phallus) so that he could stay with her forever. In one tale, Parvati was born with two sisters, and all three desired Shiva for a husband. At the time, the entire cosmos was threatened by a
terrible demon (as was often the case), this time in the form of the buffalo demon Mahisha. His fierce power came from a blessing which said that he could only be killed by Shivas shakti, or immense feminine power. All three sisters began practicing asceticism at the age of six, and their efforts so impressed the gods that they suspected one of the
girls might eventually slay Mahisha. The gods took the eldest daughter, Ragini, to heaven and asked the creator god Brahma if she was the one. But Brahma i
into the twilight. After losing her first two daughters, their mother Mena told Parvati, O, dont![7] to stop her from practicing austerities and meeting the same fate as her sisters. But it was too late: Parvati sat in the mountains, her mind fixed on the god who holds the trident, whose banner bears the bull, and having united with Rudra (Shiva) in her
heart, she continued to practice intense tapas.[8]When the gods came to take Parvati to heaven, her brilliance so astounded them that they stood in awe of her radiance and could not approach her. Brahma announced that Mahisha was as good as slain already, for Parvati was the one. Some time later, Shiva came to Parvatis fathers house to rest. He
immediately recognized his former wife Sati reborn and set out to test her resolve. When she went to the mountains to perform austerities and worship Shiva, he disguised himself as a hermit and taunted her, saying that her soft hands and rich clothes made her unsuitable to marry a god who wanders clad in ashes and animal skins. He even hurled
insults against Shiva (himself) to see how she would react. But Parvati refused to entertain the strange, wandering be swayed from her desire, he dropped the illusion and grabbed her as she
turned to leave, saying: If you leave me, where will you go? O iv,[9] I will not leave you alone. I have tested you, blameless woman, and find you firmly devoted to me. Because of your modesty! Become my wife
forevermore! The two then flew away to Mount Kailasha. In time, she did her part to defend the cosmos by slaying the buffalo demon Mahisha. Another version of the story explains that Parvatis desire to marry Shiva was tied to her desire to defeat the demon Mahisha. Another version of the story explains that Parvatis desire to marry Shiva was tied to her desire to defeat the demon Mahisha. Another version of the story explains that Parvatis desire to marry Shiva was tied to her desire to her desire to marry Shiva was tied to her desire to he
blessing that only the child of Shiva could slay him. Naturally, Taraka understood this to mean that he was invincible, for Shiva was the archetype of the unmarried ascetic, unlikely ever to have children. Knowing this, the gods impressed upon Parvati the need for Shiva to bear a child and sent her to seduce him. In time she was successful, and their
war-god son Skanda went on to slay the demon. After winning Shivas hand, Parvati explained that their previous marriage (when she was Sati) had not been performed correctlyher father had not worshipped the planets properly marriage: Hence, o lord, you
will celebrate marriage in accordance with the rules for the fulfilment of the task of the gods. The customary procedures of the marriage shall certainly be followed. Let Himavat know that an auspicious penance has been performed well by his daughter.[10]At first, Parvatis parents were unsure whether to agree to their marriage. After all, Shiva had
no family, no mother and father, and no great fortune to speak of. He lived as a hermit in the Himalayas, smeared himself with ashes, and spent time in graveyards and cremation grounds. Parvatis mother, Mena, said bluntly to her husband:O lord of mountains, I shall not give my daughter endowed with all good accomplishments to iva with ugly
features, ignoble conduct and defiled name I would rather drown myself in the great ocean. I shall never give my daughter to him.[11]It was only through the intervention of seven sages sent by Shiva that they changed their hearts. The sages praised the god and spoke of all his good qualities. Most of all, they reminded Himavan and Mena that Parvati
was destined to bear the son who would slay Mahisha and Taraka, and that the planets would soon be in the proper alignment to ensure a healthy child.[12]According to Parvatis wishes, they were married in a traditional Brahmanical Hindu ceremony, with all the gods, gandharvas, and apsaras[13] in attendance as the couple circled the sacrificial
fire.Watercolor painting of the marriage of Parvati and Shiva. Vishnu watches while the four-headed god Brahma performs a fire sacrifice and Parvati's father, Himavan, pours water over the couple's hands to seal their wedding, ca. 1830. British Museum. London. Trustees of the British MuseumPublic DomainA number of episodes with Parvati and
Shiva involve everyday relationship problems that escalate to mythological proportions. Shiva once playfully jabbed at Parvati that while his skin was white as a crescent moon, hers was as dark as a blue lotus, and he compared the two of them to a black snake wrapped around a white sandalwood tree.[14] Presumably still joking, he declared, You
offend my sight. Parvati did not take kindly to this and replied that he was quick enough to overlook his own faults and project them onto her. Since one of Shivas nicknames is Mahakala, meaning Great Death or Great Black One, it was hypocritical for Shiva to call her Kali (meaning Black). She left in a fury and swore to practice asceticism in the
mountains until her skin turned golden. When Shivas attempts to de-escalate their fight failed, he lamented, Truly, the daughter is like her father in all her ways Your heart is as hard to fathom as a cavern of Himlaya and you are as difficult to enjoy carnally as snow. [15] Parvati created a massive lion from the powerful, angry curses that she swore at
her husband. In time, her ascetic practices caught the attention of Brahma, who offered her a blessing. Parvati asked for a golden body so that her husband would stop calling her dark-skinned. Brahma agreed, and a dark-skinned goddess mount, and she
became known as Kaushiki, meaning Sheath, because she had once formed Parvatis outer layer. Parvati then returned to her husband to display her new golden skin. Phyllite statue of Gauri-Parvati with four arms. Ganesha arises from a lotus held in her surviving left hand. Pala dynasty, ca. tenth century CE. Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic
DomainParvati is the mother of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god. More details about her relationship with Ganesha can be found in his origin story and in Shivas mythology. According to one story, Kali was born in the middle of a furious battle between demons and the goddess Parvati. The demon army, led by the asuras[16] Chanda and Munda,
arrayed itself with its footmen, horsemen, chariots, and elephants and charged straight at the goddess. Parvati grew so enraged at their attempts to kill her that her face grew black as ink. Then suddenly: there issued forth from between her eyebrows Kl, with protruding fangs, carrying a sword and a noose, with a mottled, skull-topped staff, adorned
with a necklace of human skulls, covered with a tiger-skin, gruesome with shriveled flesh. Her mouth gaping wide, her lolling tongue terrifying, her eyes red and sunken, she filled the whole of space with her howling.[17]After springing out of Parvatis face, Kali went on to slay the demon army, down to the very last chariot.Parvati and Durga are often
identified as the same figure in different forms. Stories vary regarding Durgas origins; the Vishnu Purana claims that she arose from Vishnu himself as the power that makes him sleep or as his magical, creative power.[18]The Skanda Purana says that a powerful demon once threatened the entire cosmos. To defeat him, Shiva asked for help from
Parvati, who took on a more violent and warlike form. After slaying the demon, she became known as Durga, meaning inaccessible, danger, distress.[19] Another tale from the same text says that a buffalo demon once tried to marry Parvati as she was practicing meditation in the mountains to win over Shiva. When the demon refused to take no for an
answer, she became the goddess Durga and slew the demon. Other tales say that Durga arose from the discarded skin developed not into Durga but into the goddess Kaushiki, who then created the goddess Kali. Regarding Parvati and her
relationship with the concept of shakti, David Kinsley notes: The idea that the great male gods all possess an inherent power by which or through which they undertake creative activity is assumed in medieval Hindu mythology. When this power, or akti, is personified it is always in the form of a goddess. Parvati, guite naturally, assumes the identity of
Shivas akti in many myths and in some philosophical systems. [20] As shakti represents the active power of a male god, Parvati assumes an active role in her relationship with Shiva, whether by pursuing him for marriage or convincing him to have children. She urges the otherwise indifferent and detached Shiva towards creation and procreation.
Without her, Shiva is inert. Their relationship is also expressed in a more philosophical sense, with Shiva representing purusha, person or spirit, and Parvati representing prakriti, or nature. The latter, like shakti, is the active force that compels the otherwise passive purusha. Kinsley explains this complex shakti relationship by emphasizing their
complementary natures: Just as in the mythology Prvat is necessary for involving iva in creation, so as his akti she is necessary for his self-expression in creation. It is only in association with her that iva is able to realize or manifest his full potential. In short, the two are actually onedifferent aspects of ultimate realityand as such are complementary,
not antagonistic.[21] Painting of Parvati playing music to attract Shiva's attention. Shiva sits on his tiger-skin rug next to his mount, Nandi, so enraged at having his meditation interrupted that his hair stands on end. Guler, Himachal Pradesh, nineteenth century. Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainThe complex and complementary relationship
of Shiva and Parvati is personified in the figure of Ardhanarishvara, literally the half-woman lord or the lord who is half woman. This divine character is split down the middle, with Shiva usually forming the right half and Parvati forming the left. As A. L. Basham writes, An interesting iconographical development is that of the Ardhanarishvara, a figure half
the union of male and female. The Gauri Habba (or Gowri Habba) festival comes just before Ganesha Chaturti, a major holiday for Parvatis son Ganesha comes the next day to bring her back home. The festivities are centered around women;
activities include creating small idols of Parvati out of turmeric, decorating clay idols, and giving packets of small gifts to married women. The festival of Navaratri, or Nine avatars, forms, or manifestations. Observations of the festival
vary from region to region in India, with some areas feasting on others. The particular gods or goddesses to be celebrated vary as well, with Durga having greater pride of place in eastern India. Being so closely associated with Shiva, images of Parvati often appear in Shiva temples. But Parvatiwhether as Parvati herself, as
Sati, or as one of her associated goddessesis the central figure in many temples. In her former life as Sati, she ended her own life after her father insulted Shiva. Shiva was so distraught at her death that he carried her own life after her father insulted Shiva. Shiva was so distraught at her death that he carried her own life after her father insulted Shiva. Shiva was so distraught at her death that he carried her own life after her father insulted Shiva.
powerful gods Shiva and Parvati, is one of the most popular gods in modern Hinduism and is widely worshipped throughout South and Southeast Asia. Even people in predominantly Buddhist countries, such as Thailand, devoutly worshipped throughout South and Southeast Asia. Even people in predominantly Buddhist countries, such as Thailand, devoutly worshipped throughout South and Southeast Asia.
far exceeds the number of stories about him, as there are relatively few myths of Ganesha compared to other popular figures like Vishnu and Shiva. He has the head of an elephant and rides upon a mouse. This portly god often appears in iconography with four arms holding a bowl of modaks (sweet dumplings), his broken tusk, and an axe, noose, or
trident. Statues commonly portray him with a hand raised, palm facing outward in abhayamudra, a gesture meant to dispel fear. The etymology of Ganesha is straightforward: the name is a compound word formed of two parts. The first, gaa (), in its simplest sense refers to a troop, multitude, gang, or tribe. [1] In this context, however, it refers to a
group of lesser gods who have devoted themselves to Shiva and Parvati as servants and warriors. The second component, isha (), means lord, master, husband, ruler. In this way, Ganesha simply means that he is lord of Shivas attendants, or captain of the guard.[2]Ganapati is another popular name for Ganesha and is similar in meaning: pati () also
translates as lord, master.[Guh-NAY-shuh]/ ge /Ekadanta (), One TuskGanapati (), Lord of GanasCambodara (), Lord of GanasLambodara (), Lord of GanasLambodara (), Lord of GanasLambodara (), Lord of GanasCaneshvara (), Lord of GanasLambodara (), Lord of GanasCambodara (), Lord of GanasCamboda
sweet modak buns. In his hands he often bears some combination of a trident, noose, goad, or axe; his broken tusk; a lotus; and prayer beads. With a free hand he sometimes gestures in abhayamudra. His vehicle is a small mouse. Seated Ganesha holding a bag of modaks, his broken tusk, an elephant goad, and snakes. Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, ca. 14th15th century. Metropolitan Museum of ArtPublic DomainBecause Ganesha broke off his own tusk so that he could continue writing, and poetry. Although he displays the great martial prowess of his father, Shiva, and is able to fend off armies of gods and demons, he is not
primarily known as a warrior. Above all else, worshippers pray to him as a remover of obstacles both mundane and extraordinary. Scholars in the early twentieth century identified Ganesha as a natural progression from a rural harvest god, with Gupte arguing that Ganesha as a natural progression from a rural harvest god, with Gupte arguing that Ganesha as a natural progression from a rural harvest god, with Gupte arguing that Ganesha once bore the name Mushaka Vahan, He Whose Vehicle Is a Mouse, or Mouse and extraordinary.
Rider.[3] As the rat is always a pest for farmers and agricultural workers, Ganeshas use of a rat as a vehicle symbolized that the god had conquered the rodent and was therefore a godsend for farmers. Gupte also argues that Ganeshas nickname, Ekadanta (One Tooth), originally meant a scythe or plowshare. Thani-Nayagam disagrees with this
characterization and instead identifies Ganesha as a fusion of several different pre-Aryan malign spirits who inhabited forests and jungles.[4] As such, he was a god who had to be worshipped and appeased before any of the other gods in order to avoid obstacles and supernatural catastrophes. Other explanations abound, including the possibility that
century CE.[5] He suggests that warfare between tribes was the cause for this transformation: a tribe whose patron god was an elephant conquered a nearby tribe whose patron deity was a rat. Ganesha riding on a rat then symbolized the tribes conquered a nearby tribe whose patron deity was a rat.
the most popular gods of Hinduism today, there are remarkably few stories featuring him as a central character. What stories there are have a number of variants in Hindu mythology. The reason for Ganeshas beheading differs greatly depending on the tale, but most agree that it happened not long after his birth. All the myths state that either Parvati
alone or Parvati together with Shiva gave birth to him, while the beheading is blamed on Shiva or the god Shani, who corresponds to the planet Saturn. Birth by Parvati Alone and Beheading by ShivaThe most well-known version of Ganeshas birth and beheading comes from the Shiva Purana. Parvati was enjoying a relaxing stretch of time at home
while Shiva was away in the mountains on one of his many meditation retreats.[6] While talking with her friends Jaya and Vijaya, she lamented that the servants, soldiers, and attendants that guarded their house were all Shivas men, subservient to him alone rather than to both of them. How wonderful it would be, Jaya and Vijaya said, to have at least
one person they could call their own who was not under Shivas thumb. But they would have to make one. Soon after, Shiva came into her bathroom as she was bathing, and the goddess stood up, shocked that no one had stopped him. She would have to fix this, she thought, and resolved to create a guardian who would watch her door and protect her
without a single thought to Shiva. The next time she took a bath, she scuffed off some of the dirt and fashioned the boy Ganesha out of it. In this way, Ganesha was born without any help from Shiva at all. Parvati rejoiced, dressed him in fine clothes and ornaments, and told him, You are my son. You are my own. I have none else to call my own. [7] The
boy bowed respectfully and asked what duties he was to perform. She told him to guard her door and to let no one in without her permission. To carry out these orders, she gave him a staff to fight off anyone who tried to intrude upon her chambers. Not long after, Shiva came home from his meditation and found the young god, of huge stature even
then, blocking his path and refusing his entrance into Parvatis chambers. No one, Ganesha said, not even Shiva himself, may enter without his mothers permission. Pressing his luck even further, Ganesha began to shoo his father away by whacking him with a staff. Shiva was confused and grew angry at being denied entrance to his wifes
chambers. Even when Shiva announced who he was and proclaimed that this was his own house, Ganesha did not allow him through. He simply beat his father again with his staff as if Shiva were a common vagabond. With both their tempers rising, Shiva backed away and had his Ganas (attendants and warriors) ask Ganesha for the meaning of all
this. Approaching the young god, they said that they, as Ganas, were the real doorkeepers of the house, but since they recognized him as a Gana himself, they would not kill him. They accused the boy of being a jackal sitting on a lions thronemerely playing at being tough. Shive insisted that they remove the haughty boy by force, but they were unable
to move him. Ganeshas words were calm and certain: Shiva had ordered his warriors to make way for his entrance, while Parvati had ordered her servant to stop him. These two orders could not be reconciled. They were at an impasse, and he would not allow anyone through. At last the matter came to real blows as the Ganas left and returned arrayed
for war. Shivas mount, Nandi, grabbed Ganeshas leg as the thousands of Ganas rushed at him with a great gnashing of teeth. But Ganesha was able to wrench his leg free and smash the Ganas with a heavy iron club, shattering hands and legs and fracturing kneecaps and spines. Before long, they fled like frightened deer, and Ganesha went back to
his station. He had stood against thousands unfazed. Attracted to the sounds of battle, Indra, Vishnu, and all the gods came to see what was the matter and bowed before Shiva. Trusting in the creator god Brahmas great wisdom and skill in debate, Shiva sent him to negotiate. But Ganesha was in no mood: he brandished his iron club at Brahma and
shooed him away just as the creator god assured him that he sought a peaceful solution to their problem. Now truly incensed, Shiva summoned all his heavenly armies with their ghosts, spirits, and frightful beasts and rushed at Ganesha a second time. But these too were beaten back. Even all the gods together failed to break the boy, and the heavens
hells, and earth shook with their battle. Lightning-hurling Indra and discus-bearing Vishnu fled along with the others. They warred with the boy a third time, now with Shiva at the head of their army. Ganesha struck down his fathers trident, cutting Shivas powerful bow and five of his hands along with it. The gods efforts seemed doomed to fail as
Ganesha hurled his club and struck Vishnu, but Shiva seized the opportunity and cleaved the weaponless boys head with his trident. There was little time to celebrate their victory, however; just as the gods began to shout for joy, Parvati cried out in despair and grief at the death of her son. O what shall I do? she wailed. Where shall I go? Alas, great
misery has befallen me. How can this misery, this great misery be dispelled now? My son has been killed by all the gods and the Gaas. I shall destroy them all or create a deluge.[8]Crying out in agony, she then created hundreds of thousands of Shaktis, powerful heavenly warriors, and commanded them to wreak havoc on the gods and all the worlds
and heavens. Her deluge was unleashed. By the Shaktis fury, worlds and gods burned as if made of dried grass. Fearing that the assault might cause the cosmos to end prematurely, the gods held a meeting to decide what to do. Parvati was adamant: only her sons life, properly restored, would end the destruction. All versions of the myth agree on the
ending: Shiva told his followers to travel north and bring back the head of whomever they found first, which happened to be an ordinary elephant. With a sprinkle of holy water and the recitation of Vedic passages, the severed head attached to the body, and Ganesha sprang up full of life once more. For his bravery and service, he was named Ganesha
or lord of the Ganas. Calling card case decorated with Ganesha bearing a lotus, bowl of modaks, an axe, and a goad. Mouse vehicle visible underneath. British Museum Public Domain Birth by Parvati and Beheading by Shani According to the British Museum Public Domain Birth was a spontaneous
miracle. The story goes that after Shiva and Parvati married, Parvati marr
to have a child. Shiva, ever the ascetic god, refused and said that since he was not truly a family man at heart, he had no desire for a child, or even a wife. A wife is a ball-and-chain, he said, and a child is a noose. Moreover, since he was among the foremost of gods, he would never die and so had no need of a son to perform the necessary rites for
him. But Parvati was dead set in her desire. She promised to take care of the boy herself and raise him as a Yogi like his father, never to marry. Thus, Shiva would have no descendants apart from him to worry about. He could go back to his austerities and asceticism once they had a child. But the great god of destruction only stormed away, leaving his
wife to weep and brood. It was only when her two friends, Jaya and Vijaya, talked with Shiva that he agreed to have a child. However, Shiva was still opposed to having children the usual way. Being a wily and sometimes playful god, he took some of Parvatis clothing and fashioned them in the shape of a baby. There you go! teased Shiva. Dont be sad
now. You can have your childs kisses. And he told her to hug and kiss the bundle despite his joking. To their amazement, as soon as she treated the bundle as a real child and held it to her breast, it indeed came to life. As the mother and child shared their first moments together,
Parvati was overcome with the happiness of her childs kisses. Shiva, for his part, was less amazed with having a child than with how it came to life in the first place. He had only intended to tease his wife, but now he truly had a son, a noose. Inspecting the boy all over for auspicious or inauspicious signs, as is traditional in Indian folklore, he found an
ill omen. The boy was fated to die young, he said, because the god Shani (Saturn) had glanced upon his face. With that, the boys head fell clean off, seemingly on its own, and the lifeless body fell limp in his arms. The palace erupted with Parvatis cries at the loss of her newborn baby, but Shiva calmed her. Acknowledging that nothing was more
sorrowful than losing a son, he promised to bring the baby back somehow. Merely placing the baby back somehow. Merely placing the baby. Rather than go
himself, Shiva sent his mount, Nandi, who in this tale is more of a man-bull hybrid than the usual bull depicted in iconography. After travelling for some time, the bull came across the heavenly elephant Airavata, the mount of Indra. He drew back his weapon and was about to behead the beast when Indra himself came to his mounts defense and
attacked with trident, mace, and lightning. Nandi had the better of the elephants tusks. In a flash, he was away again to the house of his master, leaving the god Indra to mourn the loss of Airavata. The plan worked, for as
soon as Shiva placed Airavatas head on the boys neck, he sprang to life once more. They rejoiced at having their child again, and all the gods came to bless the child with gifts and honors. Indra, meanwhile, grieved and told Shiva all that had happened. In return for the loss of the elephants head, Shiva said that during the churning of the cosmic
ocean, which had not yet come to pass, Airavata would spring up out of the ocean, fully formed once more. Until then, Shiva gave Indra an immortal bull.[9]This version of the story stands in clear contrast to other myths in that Parvati assures Shiva that Ganesha will be a childless ascetic. In at least one story, it is clear that Ganesha marries twice
and has two children, although little is known of them. Birth by Shiva and Parvati Together Another version of Ganeshas association with obstacles and impediments. At one time, the devas (gods) and daityas (demons or titans) were engrossed in their never-ending war for
supremacy. The devas complained to Shiva that he granted the daityas whatever they wished when they worshipped him. Eager for the same benefits, they prostrated themselves before him and asked for a favor that would impede the daityas in their war effort. Moved by their devotion and worship, Shiva at once created Ganesha: he leapt into the
womb of his wife, Parvati, and out sprang his son. This version differs from others in that Ganesha was born with the head of an elephant straightaway rather than having his head replaced. Sages threw flower petals over the babe, and Shiva held him in his arms and proclaimed Ganesha the destroyer of the daityas. Shiva said that Ganesha was to help
the Brahmins recite the Vedas (emphasizing his role as god of knowledge and studying). He was also ordered to block the efforts ofor even killthose who strayed from the caste system by performing Vedic rites without worshipping his son would have
impediments placed in their path. Lastly, Shiva laid out those offerings appropriate for Ganeshas worship: sweets, flowers, and incense. This version of the story identifies Ganesha as a defender of the Brahmanical social order, but also a punisher of those who did not perform the duties of their caste. It also paints a curious picture of Ganesha as a god
who creates obstacles rather than removing them.[10]Beheading by ShaniThe account of Ganeshas beheading as told in the Shiva Purana begins with a dialogue between the sage Narada and the mighty god Brahma. After hearing stories of Karttikeya, Ganeshas brother, Narada asks to hear the birth story of Ganesha. Brahma himself acknowledges
that this story has several versions, which change depending on the kalpa, or age. Indian mythology characterizes existence as cyclical, even on the cosmic scale, so that the same events may pan out slightly differently in different eras. The story told above in which Shiva beheads his son occurs in the shvetakalpa. But Brahma says that in another
kalpa, it was Shani, the deified figure of the planet Saturn, who beheaded the god. Shani was also known as Kruradrish (), The Evil-Sighted One, for he had the power to viciously harm whomever he gazed upon. The story goes that after Ganeshas birth, Parvati was proudly showing off her son to the various gods and asked Shani to look at the boy. He
reluctantly did, and though he glanced for only a moment, the boys head immediately turned to ashes. The creator god Brahma then told Parvati to replace the head with whatever she could find first, which was an elephants head.[11]Stories also vary on the matter of how Ganesha lost his tusk. We have already seen one account in which Shivas bull
Nandi was responsible for the loss before Ganesha ever received his elephant head. The story in which Shiva dives into Parvatis womb says that Ganesha severing the tusk himself and firmly establishes Ganeshas character as a patron of the arts and learning. At one
time, the sage Vyasa set out to dictate the massive epic poem the Mahabharata, centered around the struggle of the Kauravas and the Pandavas for their fathers throne. Ganesha agreed to serve as scribe for the work as Vyasa was able to
dictate without any breaks or pauses in the recitation. The sage agreed but told Ganesha only to write if he understood the meaning of the verses precisely. Whenever Vyasa gave a particularly difficult or complex verse, the god had to pause and ask for an explanation. This trick gave the sage time to think of future verses. But eventually, their pace
grew so furious that Ganeshas pen broke. Rather than pause the narrative, he snapped off his own tusk to use as a pen. For this reason, Ganesha is a popular god among artists, students, and writers. Ganesha is a popular god who has no difficulty using his cleverness to beat stronger and faster opponents, even his own brother, Skanda. [12] According to
the Shiva Purana, both Ganesha and Skanda desired to get married upon reaching adulthood, and each wanted to marry before his brother. Growing tired of their sons endless bickering, Shiva and Parvati summoned them and proposed a contest. As both Ganesha and Skanda were very dear to them, they decided that whichever one could travel
around the world fastest would have the honor of marrying first. With that, the race was on, and Skanda immediately sped away across the world, fast as lightning. As the stronger and faster of the two, he was slower than his
powerful brother and would only get so far before Skanda beat him. So he came up with a plan. After going to his own house and ritually cleaning himself, he returned to his parents seven times and bowed seven times, saluting his parents with hands
together. Ever the devious one, he then announced that he had won the race and expected his marriage to begin soon. But what is the meaning of this? Shiva and Parvati said. Your brother has already left! You must leave quickly if you are to have any hope of winning the race. Ganesha was coy and said, But father and mother, I have just circled theen announced that he had won the race. Ganesha was coy and said, But father and mother, I have just circled theen announced that he had won the race and expected his marriage to begin soon. But what is the meaning of this?
world seven times! He cited the Vedas, which say that children who worship their parents will reap all the fruits of those who go on a pilgrimage and leave their parents at home will suffer as if they had murdered their parents. Pushing the matter further, Ganesha said that if Shiva and Parvati refused his marriage.
then they would be proving the Vedas themselves false. With all the pride they could muster, his parents praised his wit and tenacity and agreed that he had won the race fairly. His marriage would take place soon.[13]Prajapati Vishvarupa offered his two daughters, Siddhi and Buddhi, in marriage, and with them Ganesha had two sons: Kshema and
Labha. But Ganeshas brother, Skanda, was greatly distressed at having lost the race so underhandedly, causing a lasting rift between Skanda and the rest of his family. The ten-day festival of Ganesh Chaturthi celebrates the gods birth and descent from the Himalayas with his mother, Parvati. As many as 150,000 clay idols are made, ranging from the
small and hand-held to gigantic, 20-meter-tall statues. The faithful decorate the idols with vibrant paints and garlands and leave offerings of sweet fruits and modaks filled with coconut. Especially popular in Pune and Mumbai, the celebration culminates on the tenth day, when several thousand clay Ganesha idols are carried down into the ocean and
left to dissolve. Offerings of bananas and melons are placed on the idol of Ganesha for Ganesha for Ganesha, two of the most famous and lavishly decorated ones in South Asia are the Shri Siddhivinayak temple in Mumbai and the Shreemant Dagdusheth
Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple. Dagdusheth Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Ganesha flanked by elephants at the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati temple in Pune. Richly ornamented statue of Gana
live-action television series Vighnaharta Ganesha began in 2017 and now includes over 750 episodes centered around the mythological adventures of Ganesha Michael Butcher is a historian of ancient India who received his PhD in Asian Languages & Literature from the University of WashingtonKarttikeyason of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction
his parentage, but most sources agree that both Agni and Shiva played important roles in his conception and birth. Much like Krishna, Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets, Kumara and Murugan, meaning boy or youth. Karttikeya is often depicted as a young man or infant due to his epithets.
gods for centuries. In some versions of his birth, his very conception was the result of the gods search for someone powerful enough to defeat the demon. Karttikeya derives his name from the Krittikas, the six goddesses who personify the Pleiades constellation and who nursed him as an infant. Karttikeya can thus be translated as of the Krittikas or
numerous times in the relevant Sanskrit literature, including the Ramayana: Because the seed (skanna) flowed from the womb, the gods called him Skanda.[2]Karttikeya (), YoungMurugan (), YoungMu
SlayerSanankumra (), Ever YoungMuch like the popular god Krishna, Karttikeya is often portrayed as a child or youthful figure due to his nickname Kumara, meaning youth or boy. His mount is a peacock named Paravani that he defeated in battle and pressed into service. Karttikeya has a distinctive appearance due to his six heads, which he grew so
that the six Krittikas could all nurse him at the same time. He can also be identified by his red or golden skin and is typically shown wielding a spear. Karttikeyas parentage is a complicated matter, as Shiva, Agni, and several other gods and goddesses all played important roles in his
birth. The most common myth holds that his father and mother are Shiva and Parvati, making the elephant-headed god Ganesha his brother. His consorts are Devasena (literally Army of the Gods, stressing his martial qualities) and Valli. As with many Indic figures, Karttikeyas origins are uncertain; he does not appear in Vedic literature and is likely
                                             over centuries. A. L. Basham claims that Skanda or Kumara (other names for Karttikeya) was probably originally a non-ryan divinity whose cult became widespread in the early centuries CE before waning in the medieval period. In the south of India, his cult remained popular, and the name and attributes of the good
were imposed on the chief deity of the ancient Tamils, Murugan, by which name Skanda is still sometimes known in the Tamil country.[3] Basham explains that Murugan was originally an organization fertility and mountain god with similar characteristics to the hypermasculine mountain god Shiva. Richard Mann stresses the importance of non-Indic
elements and populations in Skandas development. Based on iconographic and early textual evidence from the Mahabharata and Ayurvedic texts, he argues that Skanda was a central part of a propitiation cult designed to protect children from disease-causing deities in and around the Mathur region. [4] According to Mann, it was the rising power of
the incoming Parthians, Indo-Scythians, Indo-Greeks, and Kushanas in the early centuries CE that spurred Skandas evolution into the god of war. Indeed, in iconography, Skanda is routinely depicted as wearing more militaristic Parthian-style clothing. By the Gupta period, Skanda had achieved the form recognizable to modern
Hindus as Karttikeya. Schist sculpture of Skanda-Karttikeya dressed as a Kushana noble. A halo, indicative of the Gandharan school, frames his head. His right arm holds a spear while his left holds a bird, possibly a chicken or peacock. Gandharan school, frames his head. His right arm holds a spear while his left holds a bird, possibly a chicken or peacock. Gandharan school, frames his head. His right arm holds a spear while his left holds a bird, possibly a chicken or peacock.
Karttikeyas birth into consideration (see below), Pranabananda Jash summarizes Karttikeya, it is undoubtedly a product of a complex intermeshing of numerous ethnic and cultural elements in its final stage. [5] Karttikeyas mythologylike
that of his brother, the elephant-headed god Ganeshalargely focuses on his birth. The main disagreement among the various surviving textual traditions is whether his father is Agni, the god of fire, or Shiva, the god of destruction. Birth by Agni and Svaha in the Mahabharata coording to the version told in the great Hindu epic the Mahabharata,
Skanda-Karttikeya is the son of Agni, the fire god, while Shiva and Parvati play no role whatsoever in his birth. The story begins long ago, when the terrible demon Taraka was oppressing the gods and overwhelming them in battle. Indra went looking for a virile hero who could lead his heavenly army and defeat Taraka once and for all. Soon he came
upon the maiden Devasena (literally Army of the Gods), who told him that her future husband would be a mighty warrior and conqueror of all the gods enemies. This power would be due to a blessing granted by her father, but only the successful suitor would receive that blessing. All the gods assembled at the hermitage of Vasishtha and six other
powerful sages, where they arranged for a great fire sacrifice. After Agni, the god of fire, had taken the oblations to heaven and returned, he gazed upon the wives of the seven sages and lusted madly for them. His desiredrove him to such despair that he resolved to go into the forest
and abandon his body (that is, commit suicide). At this time, the goddess Svaha desired Agni and resolved to seduce him through trickery. After transformed herself into a bird and dropped it into a golden pot far away on a mountain
plateau. Six times she took on the form of one of the wives, and each time she left the seed in the pot on the mountain. Within no time at alla mere four daysthe seed formed itself into the gods, demons, and even the
earth itself to the core.Indra, the king of the gods, saw Skandas great power and was afraid, fearing that one day Skanda would overthrow him. Thus, he sent the six Krittikas, the stars of the Pleiades, to slay the child.[6] But their hearts melted upon seeing the young Skanda, their breasts overflowed with milk, and they resolved to treat him as their
son. For this reason, he is known as Karttikeya, Son of the Krittikas. But Indra was not so easily foiled in his efforts: he assembled his army and attacked Karttikeya, Son of the gods, and a great bellow of flame erupted from his mouth, burning many. Seeing this, Indra
gave up his efforts and the two made peace, with Skanda-Karttikeya being appointed general of the gods army. In recognition of Skandas might, Indra arranged for him to marry Devasena, and the powerful blessing given to her by her father passed on to Skanda. Because of this marriage, Skanda-Karttikeya is also known as Devasenapati, meaning
Lord of Devasena, or, more literally, Lord of the Army of the Gods, a reference to both his marriage and his position as general. Birth by Shiva (and then by Agni and Ganga) in the Ramayana relates two different tales of Karttikeyas birth. In this epic poem, Rama and his brother Lakshmana ask the sage Vishvamitra to tell them what he
knows about the goddesses Uma (also known as Parvati) and Ganga, two daughters of the mountain god Himalaya. In the first tale, Vishvamitra recalls that, after their marriage, Shiva and Parvati spent over a hundred years consummating their love. Fearing that a child too powerful to control would come of their union, the gods asked the creator god
Brahma what they should do. Together, they all went to Shiva agreed. But, Shiva agreed him not to have a child. Out of kindness and regard for the welfare of the world, Shiva agreed. But, Shiva asked, who should receive my seed if I should shed his seed on
the surface of the earth, And the earth with her mountain groves was covered with its splendor. Then the gods as bright as the
sun, wherein illustrious Karttikeya was born of fire. [8]When Parvati discovered what had happened, she was furious at the gods for having received his seed. In her rage, she cursed the gods to be forever childless. This version is noteworthy due to the total absence of
the demon Taraka. In this account, Karttikeyas birth is not planned as a means of defeating the demon but is instead accidental, the result of Shiva letting his seed fall to the earth. The second tale concerns Parvatis sister Ganga, the divine embodiment of the great Ganga River in north India. Immediately after being cursed by Parvati, the gods went
to Brahma and asked him what they should do now. The curse was permanent, Brahma said, and the gods would never be able to bear children againexcept for Agni and the gods. Not wanting to waste any time, Agni propositioned Ganga for a child, and she
agreed. The goddess made love in the form of a heavenly nymph. Soon, her very veins were aflame with the child she was bearing, and her whole body felt as if it was on fire. She was forced to take the golden fetus out of her divine womb and place it carefully high up in the mountains. All around the golden fetus the earth turned to silver, and beyond
that copper and other precious metals. Soon the six Krittikas came to nurse the child, who grew six heads so that he could drink from all of them at once. He quickly grew powerful enough to challenge the gods enemies, and so the gods made him the general of their armies. Birth by Shiva in the Vamana PuranaAs if aware of the many competing
versions of Karttikeyas birth, the one found in the Vamana Purana offers a creative solution that allows for many different gods to be considered his parents. After interrupting the love-play of Shiva and Parvati, Agni consumed Shivas seed so that the powerful substance would not fall to the earth and destroy the cosmos. But even he, the god of fire,
was burned with searing heat. He carried it for five thousand yearsso long that his entire body became golden, thus giving him the nickname Hiranyaretas, Golden Seed. But at last he could endure the burning no longer, and he sought the river goddess Kutika. Explaining that the seed would cause untold destruction unless someone bore it, Agni
persuaded Kutika to take it within her flowing waters. After bearing the seed for another five thousand years, Kutila, too, was unable to take the terrible heat. And so she went to the creator god Brahma for counsel, who told her to throw the seed into a vast thicket of reeds high up in the mountains. After ten thousand years, he said, it would finally
develop into a child. In time, the vast thicket and all the wildlife nearby turned a brilliant golden color, and when the child Karttikeya was born at last, the six Krittikas came by and nursed him. Just as with the other versions, the boy grew six heads so that all six could nurse him at once. [9] At the time, only Brahma knew of Karttikeya birth, but when
Agni learned that the child had been born, the fire god raced as quickly as he could to the thicket, with the goddess Kutila beside him. Shiva and Parvati were each convinced that they were the rightful parents of the child. The wise Parvati suggested that the child should decide: he would be
the son of whomever he went to for protection. Everyone agreed to this, but Karttikeya would not leave anyone out. Just as he had grown six heads to satisfy all the Krittikeya went to Agni in the form of Mahasena, to Shiva as Kumara, to Parvati as Vishakha
and to Kutila as Shakha. When the Krittikas asked who the father of the child was, Shiva responded: By the name of Karttikeya he will be the immortal son of Kutila; as [Parvatis] son he will be the immortal son of Kutila; as [Parvatis] son he will be the immortal son of Kutila; as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be the immortal son of Kutila; as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be the immortal son of Kutila; as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be mine as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be mine. As [Agnis] little boy, he will be mine as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Parvatis] son he will be mine as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Parvatis] son he will be mine as [Parvatis] son he will be mine as [Parvatis] son he will be mine. As [Parvatis] son he will be mine as [Parvat
thicket, Sharadvata. Because of his six faces, the long-armed one will be called Shanmukha, or Six-Face. So will the lord, the great Yogin, be known on the earth.[10]In this way, the Vamana Purana is able to explain why many gods and goddesses claim Karttikeya as their own, as well as the origin of the various names he is known by. In many
accounts, Karttikeya is best known for slaying the demon Taraka. As the story goes, long ago the asuras and devas (titans and gods) waged an endless war for supremacy. During this time, the demon Taraka undertook many years of yogic asceticism in order to appease the creator god Brahma and receive a blessing. His asceticism grew so fierce that
he generated immense heat and burned the world. In exchange for ending this fiery destruction, Taraka demanded that Brahma bless him with a form of invincibility: according to this blessing, no god, not even Shiva or Vishnu, could harm him, and only a child born of Shiva could slay him. With this newfound invulnerability, the titan oppressed the
gods and drove them away in battle, [11] The gods, meanwhile, did all they could to ensure that Shiva enjoyed his marriage bed with Parvati so that they would have a child. In time, Karttikeva was born, and he guickly grew to be a mighty and competent warrior. For besting Indra in battle, he was appointed general over all the armies of
the gods and received Indras daughter Devasena, Army of the Gods, for a wife. When the titan Taraka heard of this child, he rushed to assemble an army. Karttikeya, though still an infant, mounted his war elephant before ultimately deciding on a fantastical flying chariot for his vehicle in the upcoming battle. Soon the two armies were arrayed against
each other with elephants, chariots, foot soldiers, and horsemen, and the roars of their battle cries echoed like thunder clouds before the ground. Gods and asuras clashed. Many warriors on the gods side challenged Taraka, among them
Muchukanda and Virabhadra, and only the boon granting Taraka near-invincibility saved him from death. Though Muchukanda pierced him with a javelin and Virabhadra shot him with a trident, he got up instantly each time. The gods put the army of the asuras to rout, and in revenge Taraka sprouted a thousand arms, mounted a lion, and sprang upon
the gods army. His lion ravaged their mountshorses, elephants, and bulls. And with his thousands of weapons, he slashed limbs and severed divine heads. He even laid low Indra, the king of the gods, striking him with his own lightning bolt. At last, Taraka and Karttikeya faced each other, and the titan mocked Karttikeya and all the gods for pitting an
infant boy against him in battle. Javelins flew back and forth between them. Each struck the other. Though the odds seemed insurmountable, a disembodied voice spoke above the battlefield to console the gods and their army and reassure them that the boy was certain of victory. After honoring Shiva, Parvati, and Vishnu, Karttikeya at last cut off the
demons head with one swift stroke. The victors rejoiced at winning the day, and Indra and all the rest showered the boy with flowers. For all of Karttikeyas might and skill in war, his elephant-headed brother Ganesha is a wily god who sometimes outwits his stronger brother. According to the Shiva Purana, both Ganesha and Karttikeyas desired to be the
first of the brothers to marry, and their parents, Shiva and Parvati, decided to settle the matter with a contest: whoever could travel around the world fastest would have the honor. With that, the race was on, and Karttikeya immediately sped away across the world, fast as lightning. As the stronger and faster of the two, he was confident that he would
soon be married. Meanwhile, the wily Ganesha stayed at home and walked around Shiva and Parvati. He then announced that he had won the race and expected his marriage to begin soon. According to Ganesha, his parents were his world, and so in walking around them he had circled the globe. They relented with great pride and admiration, and he
was married shortly thereafter.[12] Meanwhile, Karttikeya was greatly distressed at having lost the race so underhandedly, causing a lasting rift between him and the rest of the family. As is often the case with gods in Hindu mythology, Karttikeya also appears in Buddhism, where he is known in the early Pali texts as Sanankumara, Ever Young.
Although not as important in Buddhism as Indra or Brahma, a great Brahma, one of the mightiest categories of gods. Sanankumara also takes an active role in preaching to the other gods about the benefits of following the Buddha. According to the
Janavasabha Sutta, the thirty-three gods that made up much of the Vedic pantheon had assembled to discuss important matters. Sanankumara disguised himself, he spoke with each of the gods at once about the virtues of the Buddha and his
followers, changing his persuasion tactics and words to suit each particular gods disposition. Sanankumara is often cited as the author of the following Buddhist verse: The Katriya is best among those beings who favor the clan. One accomplished in wisdom and conduct is best among gods and men. [13] As the god traveled to East Asia along with the rest
of the religion, he developed into a Dharmapala, a guardian deity who protects Buddhas and their teachings. In China he is worshipped as (Ji m lu tin). Thaipusam, a three-day ceremony honoring the moment when Murugan-Karttikeya received his spear from his mother Parvati, is popular throughout Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Southeast Asia. Karttikeya
has active and thriving temples across South and Southeast Asia. The Batu Caves near Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia are notable for boasting the largest statue of Murugan in the world, painted in gold and standing 140 feet tall. Karttikeya remains a popular Hindu god to this day. In Tamil Nadu and other areas with a strong Tamil presence, such as Sri
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Lanka and Malaysia, he is widely worshipped as Murugan and is one of the most important gods in the region. Michael Butcher is a historian of ancient India who received his PhD in Asian Languages & Literature from the University of WashingtonThe four-faced god Brahma is widely represented throughout Hindu and Buddhist mythology. When not serving as the creator god, he usually acts as an advisor to his fellow deities. Many of his appearances in myth involve him playing the role of a generous lord who gives out gifts, boons, and blessings to those who practice enough austerities and asceticism to impress him. The time it takes to impress Brahma can be cosmically longsometimes only hundreds of years, but more often hundreds of millions of years. Often these gifts and blessings that render them nearly indestructible, and even the gods suffer in their fights against them. As a result, the gods must concoct complicated plans in order to kill the

demons without violating Brahmas blessings. Gouache painting of four-headed Brahma riding on his vahana, or vehicle, a goose or swan. In his hands he holds a water vessel and a book. His other hands are in Abhaya Mudra and Varada Mudra, gestures for dispelling fear and giving out blessings. He is seated in lalitasana, or sporting pose, showing that he is relaxed but ready to stand at a moment's notice. Tamil Nadu. 1830. Trustees of the British Museum Public Domain One such story sees Brahma granting the demon Hiranyakashipu the ability to no longer be slain during the day or night, by a man or animal, on the ground or in the sky, or by any weapons. Hiranyakashipu used his near invincibility to conquer the cosmos. In the end, Vishnu incarnated as the avatar Narasingha (Man-Lion) in order to defeat the demon despite these stipulations: Narasingha, being neither on the ground nor in the sky). By the time of the epics and the Hindu Puranas, Brahmas stature and importance had declined in favor of other Puranic gods, such as Shiva, Vishnu, and Ganesha. Today there are only a handful of temples devoted to the Buddhist Brahma. According to the Brahmavaivarta Purana, this unpopularity is the result of a curse on Brahma by the sage Narada, who declared that Brahma would remain largely unworshipped for three eons before gaining worshippers again. Another story from the Skanda Purana claims that his unpopularity comes from Shivas curse, which he laid on Brahma for having lied to the other gods. The origins of the name Brahma are more complicated than those of other Hindu figures such as Shiva (Auspicious) or Ganesha (Lord of the Ganas). What is certain is that the name shares semantic overlap with other notable words in Hinduismin particular, Brahman and Brahmin. Upanishadic literature, which sprung up around 500 BCE, posits the existence of a universal, genderless, and all-pervading essence to the universe and all beings within it, which it calls Brahman. The creator god Brahma is popularly characterized as a personification of that essence to the universe and all beings within it, which it calls Brahman. The creator god Brahma is popularly characterized as a personification of that essence to the universe and all beings within it, which it calls Brahman. The creator god Brahma is popularly characterized as a personification of that essence to the universe and all beings within it, which it calls Brahman. knowledge. The distinctions between Brahma, and Brahmin are blurred at times; for example, Brahma is often depicted as a wizened old sage with a beard and a white thread worn across his bodya symbol of the Brahmin caste. Brahma general demeanor and reputation likewise fit the sagely archetype. It is likely that all three terms derive from the Sanskrit verb root brh or brh, meaning swell, grow, increase, be thick,[1] which carries connotations of holiness across Indian religious path leading to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Pitmaha (), Grandfather Hirayagarbha (), Golden Embryo Prajpati (), Father of Beings Padmaja (), Lotus-Born Svayambhu (), Lotus-Born Svayambhu (), Lotusother gods of the Hindu trimurti, Brahma does not usually carry weapons; instead, he is often portrayed carrying a water jug, a mala (rosary), a ladle, a book, and/or a lotus or a swan, which serves as his vahana, or vehicle. Sarasvati, goddess of learning and the arts, is his wife.Rajasthani painting of a female worshipper offering an oblation to Four-headed Brahma. In his hands he holds a rosary, a book, and a lotus. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ca. 1675. Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, ca. 1675. closely associated with sagehood, wisdom, Brahmins, and the Vedas. With one of his most popular nicknames being Pitmaha, or Grandfather, Brahma is responsible for an untold number of people that Brahma played a more direct part in creating, notably his nine mind-born sons (listed below) and innumerable sages and priests. BhriguVasishthaAtriPulastyaMarichiDakshaAngirasKratuPulahaSanatkumaraManuAraniVodhuNaradaPrachetasHamsaYatiBrahma appears only sporadically in the earliest texts of Hindu literature, the Vedas and Brahmanas. Indeed, it is not Brahma but two other figuresPrajapati and Purushawho play the role of universal creator in these early texts. It is only with the end.[3] Later Puranic texts equate him with the established Vedic figure of Prajapati, much like Shiva was identified with the earlier Vedic Rudra. Greg Bailey notes that Brahma is listed as a deva (god) in the Shatapatha Brahman and occurs several times in the rayakas and the early and middle Upaniads. [4] Thus, by the eighth century BCE, he was at least recognized as a god. There is significant evidence that Brahma became a popular and widely worshipped god in Indian religions, notably Hinduism and Buddhist literature (beginning in the sixth or fifth century BCE), often mentioned as foremost among the gods, along with Indra. Given his prominence in early Buddhist literature and Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata, Brahma must have risen in importance over the three centuries between the late Vedic and Brahmanic texts and the beginnings of Buddhism and epic literature. Though his presence in Puranic texts. Indeed, while the other members of the Hindu trimurti, Shiva and Vishnu, continue to be widely worshipped to this day, only a handful of Brahmas major functions and deedscreating the universe and transmitting the Vedasare already done. In other words, his actions play little part in the life of ordinary Hindus. By the time of the Puranic myths, Brahma was a god associated with things of remote antiquity, and was not very active at this stage of the worlds history.[5]According to Hindu mythology, long ago the world was not hing but water, and on this water rested a giant golden egg. Brahma the creator slept within this egg for a thousand ages before finally emerging as the first being in existence. For this reason, Brahma is also known as Hiranyagarbha, or Golden Embryo. Because all of creation was held within the egg, when Brahma broke free he also released the potential for all manner of beings: humans, gods, daityas (demons), asuras (titans), lands, oceans, and islands. According to one tale in the Hindu epic the Mahabharata, Brahma created lustful women in order to distract men. As the story goes, men and women were once full of virtue and dharma (righteousness), which made the gods fearful. If these humans meditated too effectively, they would in time grow powerful enough to challenge even the gods in the heavens. Thus, the gods set out to humble humans. Brahmas solution to this problem was simple: The lord Grandfather, learning what was in the heavens. Thus, the gods, created women by a magic ritual in order to delude mankind. [6] He gave these sinful sorceresses every desire imaginable so that they would in turn agitate men and keep them from their meditations. But the creator god was not done; he next made anger to work alongside desire and anger in danger of being overthrown. A commonly depicted scene in Hindu art shows the god Brahma sitting on a lotus growing out of the preserver god Vishnus navel. As Vishnu was resting on the cosmic ocean after one of the universe, Brahma approached him and asked who he was. Vishnu responded that he was the originator and dissolver of worlds, and he urged Brahma to look inside him to see all the universe within him. Brahma responded, I am creator and ordainer, the self-existent great-grandfather; in me is everything established; I am Brahm who faces in all directions. [7] After searching the inner depths of Brahmas body, Vishnu was astonished to find that Brahma indeed held all the worlds, with its gods, mortals, and demons, within him. The creator god did the same, jumping into Vishnus cosmic form and finding no end or beginning to all the worlds contained within him. Seeing no other way out of it. For this reason, Brahma is nicknamed Padmaja, or Lotus-Born. Several texts tell the story of how human society fell from its golden period into a dark age of immorality, and how Brahma created the Varna system, or caste system, to slow this decline. According to the Markandeya Purana, the cosmic cycle had just transitioned away from the Kritayuga and reached the Varna system, or caste system, to slow this decline. According to the Markandeya Purana, the cosmic cycle had just transitioned away from the Kritayuga and reached the Varna system, or caste system, to slow this decline. former Kritayuga, humans had lived for four thousand years and had all their needs met without needing to farm, hunt, or gather. Now, desire and avarice spread, humans built fortresses and cities for protection, lifespans shortened, and they harassed each other in their struggle to live. Afflicted with hunger and at a loss for what to do, they approached Brahma for counsel. Knowing that the earth had withdrawn her bounty, Brahma milked the earth, and from it sprang cereals and plants of all kinds. He then ordained that humans would farm and cultivate these plants according to their station which was determined by their relationship to Brahma first created humanity, he did so through his own body parts: a thousand human pairs spilled from his feet. He now brought order to society through a hierarchical caste system based on which body part ones ancestors had been born from: mouth, chest, thigh, or feet. Lastly, he established the four stages of a Brahmins life and laid out which afterlife was set aside for the different groups who behaved according to their station.[8] by the time of the epics and the later Puranas (ca. 200 CE), Indian religions had developed to recognize the law of karmaseen, for example, in the Vishnu Puranas account of Brahmas creation of the universe. Here, karma is an immutable law of the universe affecting all creatures: animals, humans, demons, titans, and even gods. Although all creatures are destroyed at each cosmic dissolution, they are not released from rebirth, but are reborn according to the reputation of their former good or bad karma...Thus the lord Brahm, the First Created again, they were created again, they were created again, they will have these qualities; and this pleased him.[9]This version of creation makes use of three primal substances: rajas (passion), tamas (darkness), and sattva (goodness). By cycling through bodies composed of these substances and then discarding them, Brahma created innumerable things. As he was concentrating on creation, tamas infused his body, and demons sprouted out of it. He discarded that body and it became the night. He took another body, this time infused with rajas, and the gods sprang out of his mouth. After he discarded that body became the evening twilight. He took a fourth body made of rajas, and humans were born. That body became the morning twilight. In this same way came hunger, rakshasas (demons), and gandharvas (heavenly singers and dancers). However, Brahma did not make all of these beings intentionally, so he next set his sights on creating things of his own free will. From these efforts came birds, sheep, goats and other livestock, grasses, fruits, and vegetables. At the beginning of every kalpa (eon), he repeats this process, and each creature inherits the karma accrued from actions in earlier lives. A number of tales mention a quarrel between Shiva and Brahma that led to Shiva either cursing the creator god or severing his fifth head. One story says that after Brahma split himself into two so that the first male and female could be made, he became entranced with his sister/daughter/wifes beauty. [10] The two mated, and humans were born. Not wanting to let her out of his sight, he grew three other heads so that he could always spy on the modest woman. She eventually got fed up with his lecherous behavior and said, How can he unite with me after engendering me from himself? For shame! I will conceal myself.[11] And she took off into the sky as well. But soon the creator god was not content to simply watch, and he pursued her across the sky in the form of a bull. From this assault, cows were created. She continued to transform into different animals, and he in turn took on the male forms of those animals and mated with her. In this way, all the various creatures of the earth were born. Shiva, watching these pursuits in disgust, at last loosed an arrow from his bow. The shaft pierced through Brahmas animal head so swiftly that it fell clean off, and Brahma was reduced to only four heads once more. Another account of Brahma to create the universe, Brahma spent a thousand years meditating in preparation. During this time, he eulogized Shiva, worshipped him, and contemplated his mysteries. In a curious twist to the usual trope of Brahma appearing to meditators, Shiva appeared to Brahma and offered him a blessing. Brahma appearing to meditators, Shiva appeared to Brahma and offered him a blessing. Brahma appearing to meditators, Shiva appeared to Brahma and offered him a blessing. one of Brahmas heads, saying that Brahmas should not have asked for such a thing. But Shiva met Brahmas son. But even this small part of himself, Shiva warned, would obscure Brahmas luster.[12]A different tale from the Skanda Purana speaks of a contest between Vishnu and Brahma to see if they could reach the top or bottom of a gigantic pillar of fire that had erupted before them. Vishnu could not reach the top, lied to all the gods and said that he had plucked a flower from the tip. After Brahma uttered this lie, Shiva strode out from the pillar of fire. For Vishnus honesty, Shiva decreed that he was to be worshipped just as much as Shiva was, with temples of his own. But as for Brahma, Shiva was not pleased. He created Bhairava, a manifestation of Shivas might, and ordered him to cut off the head that had tricked the gods. The being grabbed hold of Brahmas hair and prepared to sever his fifth head. The creator god shook so much in fear that his garland and clothes grew disheveled and were reduced to tatters. It was only Vishnu, begging for Shiva to spare Brahma, that saved his head (for the time being). But for Brahmas lie, Shiva decreed that Brahma was to have no temples of his own, no festivals, and no worshippers. This is one explanation for why Brahma is so unpopular compared to Shiva and Vishnu.[13]Haribhadra, the seventh-century Jain monk and scholar, told his own version of the tale. It begins with the gods gathered together discussing their lineage and the names of their mothers and fathers. When it was time to discuss Shivas parentage, no one seemed to know. But Brahma grew angry, saying that it was unbelievable that others would think he did not know; after all, he knew everything. When the creator god began to open his mouth to announce the names of Shivas parents, Shiva sliced off his fifth head with the nail of his right little finger, using it as a sword blade. Thus, the secret of Shivas lineage was kept safe, and Brahma lost a head. Brahma lost a head. Brahma lost a head Brahma beginning of a cosmic age (Sanskrit kalpa, Pali kappa), after the dissolution of the old universe. Brahmas Place in Buddhist Cosmology important distinction between the Buddhist gods). Brahmas life span may last for millions of years (or 84,000 kalpas), but he is ultimately subject to old age and death.[14] For this reason, it is more accurate to think of Brahma as a celestial status, a class of beings, or a position rather than a single, immortal, and self-arisen (Sanskrit svayambhu) being. Brahmas role in Buddhism is quite different from that of the Hindu Brahma. While the Hindu Brahma acts as a heavenly advisor to other gods and favors to those who impress him by performing austerities, the Buddha himself fills this role since he is the greatest of beings, ranked higher even than gods. One of the few characteristics the two Brahmas share is their function as creator gods. However, this, too, is a tenuous connection: Brahma is rarely classified as a creator god in early Buddhist texts, and creation itself is relatively unimportant in the Buddhist worldview. Nevertheless, he remains a powerful god. Korean painting on a hemp scroll of Brahma, or Beomcheon (center), surrounded by his attendants in his heavenly paradise. As conceived in Buddhism, Brahma rules over a heavenly kingdom of his own, a paradise of pleasures and music. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ca. late 16th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art public DomainOne story in particular demonstrates Brahmas more limited status in Buddhist traditions. At one time, the Buddhist monk Kevaddha sought answers to big cosmological questions such as the limits of the universe. Using his psychic powers gained through meditation, he visited various higher realms and heavens and asked the gods what they knew. When pressed for answers, each and every god eventually admitted that they did not know the limits of the universe, telling him to ask even more powerful beings. After making his way through all the different levels of gods, he eventually reached Great Brahma, who told him: I am, oh monk, Brahma, the Great Brahma, the father, and lord of all who are and will be. Ahamasmi, bhikkhu, brahm mahbrahm abhibh anabhibhto aadatthudaso vasavatt issaro katt nimmt seho sajit vas pit bhtabhabyna. [[object Object]] But when pressed further, Brahma revealed that he, too, did not know the answers to such questions. He told Kevaddha to go and ask the Buddha, who was the only truly omniscient being in the universe. From this we can see that, according to the Buddhist worldview, Brahmas claim that he is the greatest and wisest of all beings is nothing more than a delusional boast. However, it is important to note that Brahma remains a god in Buddhism and is undoubtedly a wise and powerful being. Within the endless cycle of life, death, rebirth, and redeath, beings born as a Brahma are close to their final birth. And those beings who have the good fortune to be born as a Brahma and the BuddhaDespite his more minor status in Buddhism, Brahma is not a passive god. Just after the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he was uncertain whether to share the Dharma, a collection of teachings on how to end suffering. [16] The truths he had discovered in his quest for nirvana were too difficult for most people to comprehend, he reasoned, and he would never be able to pierce through listeners delusions. As the Buddha wrestled with these thoughts, Brahma appeared before him and urged him to teach: Venerable one, may the Lord teach the Dhamma, [17] may the well-gone [18] one teach the Dhamma. There will be those who understand the Dhamma.desetu, bhante, bhagav dhamma. Santi satt apparajakkhajtik, assavanat dhammassa atroti.[19]Brahma argued that while most people would be unwilling or unable to put the Buddhas teachings into practice, a few certainly would. It was for those few that the Buddha should teach His words swayed the Buddha, who went on to share the Dharma and found the religion of Buddhism. This story presents another peculiar subversion of the Hindu trope of Brahma appearing to ascetics to grant them blessings. Rather than grant the Buddha a wish because of his great meditations, in this tale it is Brahma who wants something from the Buddha: teachings leading to nirvana for all beings. Bimaran Reliquary casket with images of the Buddha, Indra, and Brahma (center) faces the Buddha while holding a water jug and raising his right hand. A second Brahma appears on the opposite side. Gandhara, ca. first century CE. Trustees of the British MuseumPublic DomainLater Buddhist commentators paint this exchange in a different light. According to Buddhaghosa, writing in Sri Lanka in the fifth century CE, the Buddhaghosa in t having the creator god come to earth and beg the Buddha a degree of legitimacy and a divine seal of approval. It had the added effect of making it clear that the gods considered themselves to be beneath the Buddha in the cosmological hierarchy. The Bonten Festival in Tochigi, Japan is held in late November in honor of Bonten, the Japanese Buddhist form of Brahma. The Jagatpita Brahma in India. Thanks to the spread of Buddhism across Southeast, Central, and East Asia, the Buddhist Brahma is more commonly worshipped outside of India The Thao Maha Phrom Shrine in Bangkok, Thailand is a popular shrine to Phra Prohm (Mahabrahma, or Great Brahma entered China and Japan through the spread of Buddhism. In China, one can find temples to Brahma under the name of Fan Tian (). In Japan, Brahma developed into Bonten or Daibonten, commonly depicted along with Indra as an attendant of the Buddha. Brahma remains an established and respected god among Hindus throughout South as Vishnu, Shiva, or Ganesha. Michael Butcher is a historian of ancient India who received his PhD in Asian Languages & Literature from the University of Washington

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