



VEDIC india

This series takes a close look at facets of Vedic India that are alive even today.



know more about ravana

This article is a researched article and borrows heavily from printed and electronic encyclopedias as well as material provided by our panel of research scholars, astrologers, academics and pundits.

On the occasion of Diwali, we bring an article based on Ramayan. This year we discuss the merits of Ravana – perhaps the most misunderstood of the characters in Ramayan. Ramayan is a literary masterpiece worshipped by a billion Hindus in whose life this epic plays a central role and for whom the text is a repository of ancient clues to almost all the woes afflicting man. The story of Ram carries all the force and tangibility of faith and religion in India. All Hindus have an effortless mastery over the story and almost all of them have learnt it from their enthusiastic grandmothers, aunts and uncles.

Narrated below are the various facets about Ravana and his family that will be little known to many readers.

Ravana

Ravana is the primary antagonist character of the Hindu epic Ramayana; who was the Rakshasa king of Lanka. In the classic text, he is mainly depicted negatively, kidnapping



Sri Rama's wife Sita, to claim vengeance on Sri Rama and his brother Lakshmana for having cut off the nose of his sister Surpanakha.

Ravana is described as a devout follower of the god Shiva in addition to his tribe's religious beliefs, a great scholar, a capable ruler and a maestro of the Veena. He has his apologists and staunch devotees within the Hindu traditions, some of whom believe that his description as a ten-headed person (Dasamukha or Dasagriva) is a reference to him possessing a very thorough knowledge over the 4 Vedas and 6 Upanishads, which made him as powerful as 10 scholars.

Ravana also authored Ravana Sanhita, a powerful book on the Hindu astrology. Ravana possessed a thorough knowledge of Ayurveda and political science. He is said to have possessed the nectar of immortality, which was stored under his navel, thanks to a celestial boon by Brahma.

Ravana was born to a great sage Vishrava (or Vesamuni), and his wife, the daitya princess Kaikesi. He was born in the Devagana gotra, as his grandfather, the sage Pulastya, was one of the ten Prajapatis or mind-born sons of Brahma and one of the Saptarishi (Seven Great Sages Rishi) in the first Manvantara. Kaikesi's father, Sumali (or Sumalaya), king of the Daityas, wished her to marry the most powerful being in the mortal world, so as to produce an exceptional heir. He rejected the kings of the world, as they were less powerful than him. Kaikesi searched among the sages and finally chose Vishrava, the father of

Kubera. Ravana was thus partly Brahmin and partly Daitya. Ravana later conquered Sri Lanka from his half brother Kubera and became the King of Lanka.

His brothers were Vibhishana, Kumbhakarna and AhiRavana. Through his mother, he was related to the daityas Maricha and Subahu. Kaikesi also gave birth to a daughter, Meenakshi ("girl with fish like eyes"), although later she was dubbed the infamous Shoorpanakha "winnow-like nails".

His father Vishrava noted that while Ravana was aggressive and arrogant, he was also an exemplary scholar. Under Vishrava's tutelage, Ravana mastered the Vedas, the holy books, and also the arts and ways of Kshatriyas (warriors). Ravana was also an excellent veena player and the sign of his flag had a picture of veena on it. Sumali, his mother's father, worked hard in secret to ensure that Ravana retained the ethics of the Daityas.

Following his initial training, Ravana performed an intense penance (or tapasya) to Brahma (the Creator God), lasting several years. During his penance, Ravana chopped off his head 10 times as a sacrifice to appease Brahma. Each time he sliced his head off a new head arose, thus enabling him to continue his penance.

At last, Brahma, pleased with his austerity, appeared after his 10th decapitation and offered him a boon. Ravana asked for immortality, which Brahma refused to give, but gave him the celestial nectar of immortality.



◀ continued from page 11

किंवदन्ती about Ravana

The nectar of immortality, stored under his navel, dictated that he could not be vanquished for as long as it lasted.

Ravana also asked for absolute invulnerability from and supremacy over gods, heavenly spirits, other rakshas, serpents, and wild beasts. Contemptuous of mortal men, he did not ask for protection from these. Brahma granted him these boons in addition to his 10 severed heads and great strength by way of knowledge of divine weapons and magic. Thus Ravana known as 'Dasamukha' (Dasa = ten, mukha = face).

King of Lanka

After winning these boons, Ravana sought out his grandfather, Sumali, and assumed leadership over his army. He then set his sights on capturing the island city of Lanka.

Lanka was an idyllic city, created by the celestial architect Vishwakarma for Lord Shiva and acquired by Kubera from Lord Shiva as boon, the treasurer of the gods. Kubera had generously shared all that he owned with Ravana and the latter's siblings, who were Kubera's half-brothers and half-sister through his stepmother Kaikeyi. However, Ravana demanded Lanka wholly from him, threatening to take it by force. Vishrava, their father, advised Kubera to give it up to him, as Ravana was now undefeatable.

Although Ravana usurped Lanka, he was nevertheless regarded as a benevolent and effective ruler. Lanka flourished under his rule, to the extent that it is said the poorest of houses had vessels of gold to eat and drink off, and hunger was unknown in the kingdom.

Devotee of Lord Shiva

Following his conquest of Lanka, Ravana encountered Shiva at his abode in Kailash. Ravana at first went to meet Shiva. Nandi the vehicle of Shiva, refused to let Ravana in. He got annoyed and started teasing Nandi. Nandi in turn got annoyed and cursed Ravana that Lanka would be destroyed by a monkey. To show Nandi his love for Shiva, Ravana attempted to uproot and move the mountain on a whim. Shiva, annoyed by Ravana's

arrogance, pressed his littlest Toe on Kailash, pinning him firmly and painfully under it. His ganas informed Ravana of whom he had crossed, upon which Ravana became penitent. He plucked his nerves and used them as strings to compose music and sang songs praising Shiva, and is said to have done so for years until Shiva released him from his bondage.

Pleased with his resilience and devotion, Shiva gave to him the divine sword Chandrahast (Chandra-Moon, Has-laugh, literally 'the laughter of the moon' but referring to the shape formed by a crescent moon which resembles a smile). It was during this incident that he acquired the name 'Ravana', meaning "(He) Of the terrifying roar", given to him by Shiva - the earth is said to have quaked at Ravana's cry of pain when the mountain was pinned on him. Ravana in turn became a lifelong devotee of Lord Shiva and is said to have composed the hymn known as Shiva Tandava Stotra.

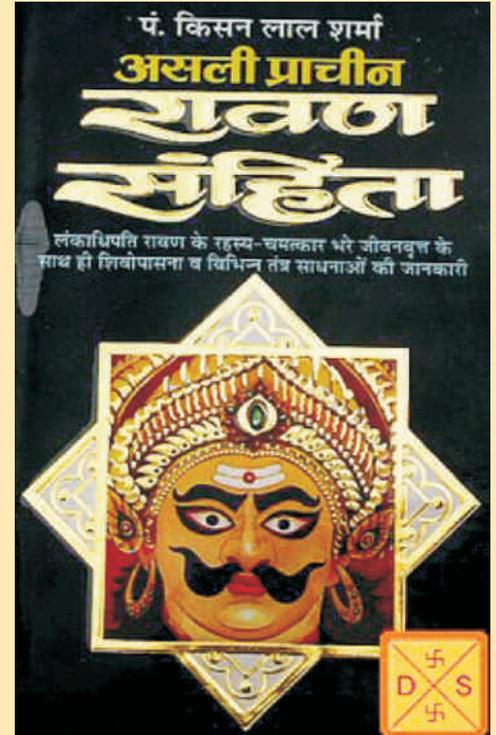
Emperor of the Three Worlds

Kubera at one point chastised Ravana for his cruelty and greed, greatly angering him. Proceeding to the heavens, Ravana fought and defeated the devas, singling out his brother for particular humiliation. By force he gained command over the devtas, celestials, and the serpent races. At the time of the Ramayana, set several hundred years later, Ravana is shown as dominating all human and divine races - so much so that he can command the Sun's rising and setting.

Vishnu's cursed doorkeeper

In the Bhagavata Purana, Ravana and his brother, Kumbhakarna were said to be reincarnations of Jaya and Vijaya, gatekeepers at Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu and were cursed to be born in Earth for their insolence.

These gatekeepers refused entry to the Sanatha Kumara monks, who, because of their powers and austerity appeared as young children. For their insolence, the monks cursed them to be expelled from Vaikuntha and to be born on Earth.



Ravan Samhita is a text or scripture narrated by lord Shiva and written by Ravana. By practicing it one can predict the future. Ravana, the demon king was himself a great astrologer and it is said that there was nobody who could match his genius during his times. Ravan Samhita is the testimony to his great astrological knowledge and is considered as the standard book of reference by astrologers even today.

God Vishnu agreed that they should be punished. They were given two choices, that they could be born about 7 (Seven) times as normal mortals and devotees of Vishnu, or 3 times as powerful and strong people, but as enemies of Vishnu. Eager to be back with the Lord, they choose the latter one. Ravana and his brother Kumbhakarna were born to fulfill the curse on the second birth as enemies of Vishnu in the Treta Yuga. The curse of first birth was fulfilled by Hiranyakashipu and his brother Hiranyaksha in Satya Yuga when they were both vanquished by earlier avatars (incarnations) of Vishnu and the curse of third birth was fulfilled by Dantavakra and Shishupala in the Dwapar Yuga when they were slain by Krishna. ■