

# Character Analysis of Ganga

Indian mythology is considered to be one of the richest elements of the Indian culture; very single mythology teaches us a lesson that has to be learned. One such narrative is the mahabhartha said to be “the longest epic poem”. The mahabhartha has given us an understanding of several characters. One such character is goddess Ganga.

Ganga is considered the purest of all the sacred rivers in India and it is much more than a source of water. There is a myth that says that Ganga came on earth to bring salvation to mankind and anyone who bathes in it would be purified of all his or her sins.

The Bhagavata purana says Lord Vishnu in one of his incarnation appeared as Vamana in the sacrificial arena of Asura king Mahabali. In order to measure the universe he extended his left foot to the end of the universe and made a hole in its covering with the nail of his big toe. Through the hole, the pure water of the causal ocean (Divine Brahm –water) entered this universe as the Ganges River. It is held safely by Lord Shiva on his head to prevent destruction of bhumi (Mother earth) then it is released from lord Shiva’s hair to flow in the country according to Hindu mythology.

As Ganga travelled to the nether worlds, she created a different stream to remain on earth to help purify unfortunate souls. She is the only river to follow from all three worlds (Haven, Earth and Hell). Ganga is said to be Holy River, if so then why doesn’t the holiness of Ganga spread to all the cities of its bank? Why only a particular place is allowed to receive an advantage? Why not the other places of the world?

According to the Hindu scriptures, Skandha purana, the goddess Ganga is foster mother to Lord Subramaniya, who was actually a son of shiva and Parvathi.

The Hindu Epic, Mahabharata tells that the eight Vasus cursed by Vashishta requested Ganga to be their mother. To meet their request Ganga incarnated herself as a human.

One day, King Shantanu of Kuru Kingdom was walking by the Ganges River, he saw an incredibly beautiful women. She was the goddess Ganga herself in human form, but Shantanu did not know this. The King was so enormed by her beauty, he at once asked Ganga to marry him. He put his heart, Kingdom and everything at her feet and made this request.

Ganga pleased with the king’s love replied to him “I shall accept to marry you on one condition. You must never ask me from where I come? or the true nature of my origin. You must also never question me on any of my actions- whether good or bad, normal or cruel. You must stand by me during all counts. If you act against any of these conditions, I shall leave you then and there”. King Shantanu was deeply in love with Ganga, he accepted all her conditions without questioning.

It was a surprise for everyone when they got to know Ganga's conditions laid upon Shantanu. Why would Ganga make such a condition? Which guy in his full senses would agree to such an abnormal condition? The reasons get revealed later in the story; we have to remember two things: 1. That Ganga did not lie. She was upfront with her expectations. It was upto the king to either accept her as she was or walk away. This is a lesson that each one of us can take in our relationships that we face today. 2. To remember is that How a law of Karma works. What may seem as a ridiculous at one time, will seem reasonable later on.

Shantanu and Ganga's marriage was a perfect one. They lived a life of serene happiness and love. Ganga was very much true to Shantanu and this made him to love her even more. Time passed and they were blessed with a newborn son. Immediately Ganga took the child to the Ganges and drowned, killing the newborn. She then walked back to the palace with a smile on her face. Shantanu was agonised by this. He could not believe what he had just seen but he did not ask anything to Ganga, as he had promised her that he will not question her actions. He wanted to ask but the promise had stopped him.

As the years passed, Ganga gave birth to six more children and each one she dropped in the river as soon as it was born and killed it. Shantanu grieved by her action but did not ask any question and bore the pain with restraint.

Ganga being a goddess killed her seven sons immediately after their birth, Is it even possible for a mother to do such a horrific act of infant filicide? We are always told that mother child relationship is very special and begins long before the child is even born. The specified reason cannot be counted in any circumstances. Is it possible any mother to kill their own child? Where did the idea or the concept of motherhood go? We always boost on the fact that Ganga is the holiest among all. Can the act of infant filicide be considered a holy one? Is this what the word holy mean?

When the eighth child was born Ganga took the child to the river with the same intension. Shantanu could not control himself anymore. He cried out "Stop you heart less women. Why do you do this wretched act? Why do you do when no mother would do like this. You are as insane as you are beautiful." As Shantanu restrained Ganga from doing the horrible act, Ganga replied "Dear king you have broken the promise you made to me. Because of this the time has come to me to leave you, before leaving I shall answer your question and reveal my origin and the reasons for my actions." "I am goddess Ganga and I'm in this human form as a result of sage Vashishta's curse on the eighth Vasus. In Hinduism the Vasus are attendant deities of Indra and later Vishnu they are eight elemental gods representing aspects of nature. They name Vasu means Dweller or dwelling. They are eight among the 33 gods. They means "the fire, the earth, the wind, space, the sun, the sky, the moon and the stars.

One day the above eight Vasus were travelling on a holiday trip with their wives. When they came across sage Vashishta's ashram they saw "Nandhini", Vashishta's divine cow, outside the ashram. One of the

wives was very much impressed by the beauty of the cow, she requested her husband to Prabhasa, to bring the cow to her. Prabhasa was not interested and told we are Devas the cow nor the cow's milk is no way useful to us. Even though the milk gives everlasting life. Being Devas we are already enjoying immortality. Moreover sage Vashishta is very fond of Nandhini and it would be improper on our part to violate his integrity. In spite of his repeated attempts his wife did not accept. She made imploring requests and melted Prabhasa's heart. He agreed and the eight Vasus take away Nandhini and her calf by force and disappeared before Vashishta comes back to the ashram.

When Vashishta returned and found Nandhini missing through his divine vision, saw the eight Vasus are taking away the cow. He cursed the eight Vasus.

When the eight Vasus came to know about the curse, they ran to Vashishta and fell at his feet requesting for his forgiveness. Vashishta said the curse cannot be lifted and has to follow its course. But the effect of the curse can be reduced. He said – Go request goddess Ganga to be your mother on earth and ask her to relieve you of your birth as soon as born. So that you may return to the heavens without long years of suffering. THIS Reduction in effect I grant to seven of you who supported Prabhasa in his act of stealing. Since Prabhasa was the one who actually stole the cow, the curse will remain in full effect in him and he will have to live his full lifetime on earth like a man. But he will live a great life and be regarded as one of the best souls to have ever walked the earth. Saying this Vashishta went back into meditation.

The Vasus got pacified, approached Ganga and requested her to be their mother on earth and throw them into the river as soon as they are born. Ganga agreed and came to earth and became Shantanu's wife to carry out the task.

After telling this story, Ganga took the infant with her and left Shantanu. She brought him back to Shantanu after 18 years and said “this is the eighth son I bore you. His name is Devavrtha. He learned the Vedas from Vashishta and is well skilled in all forms of sciences and archery from Parasuram and others. Then she drowned in the river Ganges.

Ganga killed her seven son's one after the other without hesitating. Then why did she stop when it came to her eight sons? She knew that he was cursed as well like the others, then why did she stop? Can this also mean that she wanted at least one of her son to live a life?

Shantanu was overjoyed at getting his son back who was glowing like a person of divine origin. He raised his son from there on – full of love this son, Devavrtha goes on to become the famous Bhishma in Mahabharata.

It is true that Ganga is the holiest and the purest among all. But according to me in this incident of Mahabharata, Ganga not only violated the role of being the holiest, she also violated the role of a mother, and her acts cannot be justified .

