

*Origin of Durga*  
400 c. - 600 c. Bengal India  
Origin myth

The account of the myth of Durga first takes place in the seventh book of the Hindu spiritual texts known as the Puranas, the Markandeya Purana. This book is just one of the 18 puranas that are believed to have been written by Krishna Dvaipayana Vedavyasa somewhere between 400 c. - 600 c. It is thought to have been written at the time of the Gupta Empire, during what has been referred to as the golden age of India and during the reign of Maharaja Sri-Gupta. The myth itself is believed to have taken place in the north eastern part of India known as East Bengal.

In the book of Markandeya the story starts as a teaching being given to a young sage who's name is Jamini, he is also a disciple of Vedavyas's, by another more powerful and more knowledgeable sage Markandeya.

As the story goes Purandar the king of the gods (Indra) battles the king of the demons Mahishasura (asura - demon) for a hundred years and is defeated. Mahishasura assumes the title of Indra and begins to usurp the power and position of other gods and devas, and in so doing forces them to walk the earth as humans. Not only that but he is now terrorizing everyone on earth as well.

Not liking the defeat and disastrous turn of events they tell their sad story to Brahma a cosmic being who also becomes their new leader, and then too Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva start getting very upset at what they are told and they began to release a large amount of energy in the form of anger, they combined the energy of their anger with the energy radiating from the defeated gods and it starts to take the form of a beautiful goddess. (in another version it is said that the reason a goddess was created by them was that the demon god was given a special boone - for doing many puju's to a god - he was given by that god a special protection that he could never be harmed by any man or god. He in his arrogance refused protection from harm or death by a women or goddess.) The energy of the 12 different gods created the 12 different parts of the body of the goddess. Her face came from Shiva, her hair came from Yama, her arms from Vishnu, her breasts from Chandra, her waist from Indra, her thighs from Varuna, her feet came from Brahma, her toes from Surya, her fingers from Vasus, her nose from Kubera, her three eyes come from Agni (god of fire), and her ears from Pavana.

The gods then armed her with their weapons, from Shiva came the trishula, (trident spear) from Vishnu the chakra (spinning wheel), from Varuna a conch shell, from Agni came fire (shakti) a quiver, bow and arrows came from Vayu, a club (vajra or thunderbolt) came from Indra, he also gave her Airavata's magic bell (makes them unconscious) A rod (danda) came from Yama, garlands, lotus flowers and a noose (pasha) came from Varuna, a necklace of beads came from Daksha, and a vessel of sacred waters came from Brahma. She was energized by the rays of Surya, her shield and sword came from Kala. The ocean gave her clothes, jewelry and necklaces. More jewels and a lion (which she rode) came from

Himalaya. Kubera gave her wine, and a garland of snakes came from the king of the nagas (a tribe that uses snakes as totems)<sup>i</sup>. A multitude of weapons were given by other devas.

Once energized and fully armed the Goddess begins to laugh, she laughs so loud they became as roars. The noise was so loud and so fierce and the echoes were so strong that they began to shake the world. Chants of victory were sung by the devas and the sages prayed, the end of the reign of darkness was near.

Mahishasura took his soldiers to see where the sounds were coming from and found a goddess standing across the earth. Her feet created hollows in the earth and the top of her head reached the clouds. She had the appearance of a thousand arms that could encircle the earth and the loud twang of her bow could be heard in the underworld.

The battle with Durga riding on the back of her lion now began, with demon generals, their armies, their chariots, elephants and horses 'Rivers of blood flowed'<sup>ii</sup> thousands of demons were maimed and killed. It was a horrible site to see. Using all of her weapons, trees and stones as well as her fists and her lion, armies were being slaughtered.

Mahishasura very distressed at the sight of all his armies failing then takes the form of a giant buffalo who's tail creates tidal waves and who can fling mountains with his horns. Durga uses the noose given to her by Varuna to capture the buffalo but when she is about to tie him up he changes form into a lion. She cuts off the lion's head but the demon god then leaves the body grabbing the sword in the process. He then turns into an elephant and attacks Durga's lion grabbing it with his trunk. She cuts off his trunk and he turns back into a buffalo.

At this point she decides to take a moment to refresh herself (she has been fighting the demon for 9 days straight now) and stops to drink the wine she was given by Kubera, gets a little too drunk as her eyes turn red and starts again with the laughter. This does not sit well with Mahishasura and he gets really upset. He starts to roar in anger and throws mountains at her with his horns. She breaks up the mountains with her arrows stating 'Stupid demon, wait till I have finished drinking the wine. Roar as much as you want till that time comes. I will kill you then and it will be the devas' turn to roar.'<sup>iii</sup> She then finishes the wine and proceeds to jump on the back of the buffalo and pins him down with the trident she received from Shiva. As he tries to escape from the body of the dying buffalo he reverts back into his demon form and she cuts off his head with her sword. The demon army seeing him now really dead all flee the battle field. Praying, chanting, singing and dancing now begins by the gods, sages and devas, all in the praise of Durga. Nothing can stop the Mother Goddess when she decides it is so. Peace and joy have returned to the world. The sky brightens and the earth is renewed.

- i *The Markandeya Purana Great Epics of India: Purana 7 - Glossary*
- ii *The Markandeya Purana Great Epics of India: Purana 7 - p.84*
- iii *The Markandeya Purana Great Epics of India: Purana 7 - p 86*