

## **The legend behind the River Ganges**

Since the Vedic age till now, river Ganges has been worshipped as a Goddess. She is the most important river in India, beside Rivers Indus and Saraswati and is still considered holy by devout Hindus. There are many legendary myths related to goddess Ganga or Ganges, where she has been stated to be originally residing in Heaven and she descended to Earth to relieve humans of their sins, which is mentioned in Ramayana, the mythological epic of Hindus.

### **The Fable**

Once upon a time, an ancestor of Lord Rama and the ruler of Ayodhya, King Sagar carried out Ashwamedha Yagya successfully 99 times, sending his horse around the world that returned every time unchallenged back to his kingdom. This success story didn't please Indra - the King of God's at all, who conspired to spoil King Sagar's 100<sup>th</sup> attempt at this yagna. Indra, this time abducted the Yagna horse in Kapila Muni's Hermitage.

When 60,000 princes of Ayodhya arrived at hermitage of Kapila Muni, they misunderstood the hermit to be the kidnapper of the horse and attacked him, only to be burned into ashes by the sage. King Bhagiratha, grandson of King Sagar, in a bid to rescue his ancestors begged Kapila Muni, to help him with a solution. The sage's answer was to bring the heavenly river Ganges to Earth, which could bring all the dead princes to life.

To make amends for the deeds, King Bhagiratha mediated and observed strict penance for the salvation of his ancestor's souls to Bramha for a 1000 years. Lord Bramha being satisfied with King Bhagiratha's devotion granted him his wish according to which, Ganges would descent on Earth washing away the ashes of his ancestors, releasing them of their curse and allowing them to enter Heaven. However, along with the boon, Bhagiratha was also cautioned that he has to pray to Lord Shiva requesting him to hold Ganges in his long tangled hair, to sustain her enormous weight and speed.

Lord Shiva allowed Ganga to settle in his hair letting trickles of Ganga water to meander through his locks and reach Earth washing away King Bhagiratha's ancestors' ashes. For this myth, Lord Shiva is known as Gangadhar.

### **Manifestation of Goddess Ganga**

Goddess Ganga is described as an extremely fair goddess with four arms and three eyes. With the three eyes she is Trikaldarshini, which means she can see through all the three times - past, present and future. In her four hands, she holds a lotus, two jars full of fertile water that brings prosperity to mankind and blesses the entire humanity with peace.