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Vasu

In Hinduism, the **Vasus** are attendant deities of Indra, and later Vishnu. The Ashta Vasus are described in the Ramayana as the children of Kasyapa and Aditi and in the Mahabharata as the sons of Manu or Brahma Prajapati. They are eight elemental gods (called "Aṣṭa-vasu", 'Eight Vasus') representing aspects of nature (The Five Elements - Pancha Bhoothas) and also representing cosmic natural phenomenon (The Sun, The Moon and The Stars). The name **Vasu** means 'Brilliance' or 'Wealth Givers'. They are eight among the [Thirty-three gods].

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Eight Vasus

There are varying lists of the eight Vasus in different texts, sometimes only because particular deities have varying names. The following are names and meanings according to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and according to the Mahabharata as normally equated:

Brihadaranyaka		Mahabharata	
Name	Meaning	Name	Meaning
<u>Prithvi</u>	 "earth"	<u>Dharā</u>	"Earth"
<u>Agni</u>	 "hot fire"	<u>Anala</u> (also called Agni or Pavaka)	"Fire"
<u>Vāyu</u>	 "wind"	<u>Anila</u>	"Wind"
<u>Varuna</u>	<u>Svadhishthana</u> "water"	<u>Āpa</u>	"Water"
<u>Āditya</u>	"eternal", a very common name for the	<u>Pratyūsha</u>	"Sun"

	sun <u>Surya</u>		
<u>Dyaus/Akasha</u> /Akash	 "sky"	Prabhāsa	"Sky or Ether"
<u>Chandramas</u>	 "moon"	<u>Soma</u>	"Moon"
Nakstrani	 "stars"	<u>Dhruva</u>	"Motionless", the name of the <u>Polestar</u>

Though the *Shatapatha Brahmana* uses the *Brhad-Aranyaka* names, most later texts follow the *Mahabharata* names with the exception that Āpa 'water' usually appears in place of Aha. The *Vishnu Purana* equates Prabhāsa with the lights of the 27 Nakshetra (Constellations/Lunar Mansions) and Dhruva with Akash Tatwa, that is "space", Dhruva seemingly taking over Aha's role when Aha is replaced by Āpa.

Ramayana and Mahabharata

In the *Ramayana* the Vasu is child of the Aditi and Kashyapa. The *Mahabharata* relates how the Vasus, led by "Prithu" (presumably here a male form of Prithvi), were enjoying themselves in the forest, when the wife of Prabhasa(also referred as Dyu) spotted an excellent cow and persuaded her husband Prabhasa to steal it, which Prabhasa did with the agreement and aid of Prithu and his other brothers. Unfortunately for the Vasus, the cow was owned by the sage Vashishta who learned through his ascetic powers that the Vasus had stolen it and immediately cursed them to be born on earth as mortals. Vashishta responded to pleading by the Vasus by promising that seven of them would be free of earthly life within a year of being born and that only Prabhasa would pay the full penalty. The Vasus then requested the river-goddess Ganga to be their mother. Ganga incarnated and became the wife of King Shantanu on condition that he never gainsaid her in any way. As seven children were born, one after the other, Ganga drowned them in her own waters, freeing them from their punishment and the king made no opposition. Only when the eighth was born did the king finally oppose his wife, who therefore left him. So the eighth son, Prabhasa incarnated, remained alive, imprisoned in mortal form, and later became known in his mortal incarnation as Bhishma.



The wife of one of the Vasus is tempted to steal the wish-bearing cow

Other uses

Vasu is also the name of the eighth *chakra* (group) of *Melakarta* ragas in Carnatic music. The names of *chakras* are based on the numbers associated with each name. In this case, there are 8 *Vasus* and

hence the eighth *chakra* is *Vasu*.^{[1][2]}

See also

- Hindu deities
- List of Hindu deities
- Thirty-three gods
- Aditya
- Rudras
- Ashvins
- Indra
- Prajapati

References

1. *South Indian Music* Book III, by Prof. P Sambamoorthy, Published 1973, The Indian Music Publishing House
2. *Ragas in Carnatic music* by Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy, Pub. 1990, CBH Publications

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