

# Bhagiratha

**Bhagiratha** (Sanskrit: भगीरथ, *Bhagīratha*) is a legendary king of the Ikshvaku dynasty who brings the Sacred River Ganges, personified as the Hindu River Goddess Ganga, to Earth, from the Heavens.

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Bhagiratha
Grandson of <u>Sagara</u>
<span></span> <div>Descent of Ganga to Earth</div>
<b>Affiliation</b> <span> </span> <span> </span> devotee of <u>Ganga</u>
Personal information
<b>Parents</b> <span> </span> <span> </span> Dilipa (father)

## Story

It is said that after Bhagiratha became prince of Sagara Dynasty, learning the awful end of his forefathers, who were unable to attain region of gods, he regretfully made over his kingly duties to his minister and went to practice austerities in the Himalayas. On the advice of his guru Trithala, he did penance for a thousand years (according to god timeline) to please Ganga, to gain the release his 60,000 great-uncles from the curse of saint Kapila. Ganga told Bhagiratha that if she were to descend from the sky to the earth, the force of her fall would be difficult to sustain. She asked him to obtain the favour from the black-haired, blue-throated god Shiva, as no one except him would be able to sustain her. Bhagirtha then did severe penance for Shiva and asked him to do so. Shiva granted him the boon, which eventually led to descent of the goddess Ganga to the earth in the form of the river Ganges, filling the sea, drunk up by Jahnu.<sup>[1][2]</sup> To commemorate his efforts, the head stream of the river is called Bhagirathi, till it meets Alaknanda River at Devprayag.

## Birth

In most accounts of Bhagiratha, he is born to his father Dilipa and his unnamed mother in an unremarkable fashion. However, a number of Bengali accounts tell how Dilipa dies without begetting an heir, leading to a rare example of a myth about female same-sex reproduction. This story may first be attested in the Bengali-script recension of the Sanskrit *Padma Purana*; it recurs in the influential, probably fifteenth-century CE Bengali *Krittivasi Ramayan*, and thereafter in other texts from Bengal such as Bhavananda's *Harivansha*, Mukundarama Chakravartin's *Kavikankanachandi*, and the sixteenth-century *Ramayana* by Adbhutacharya.

Dilipa's lack of an heir troubles the gods, because it has been prophesied that Vishnu will be born to Dilipa's line, and this prophecy cannot come true unless Dilipa has a child. Therefore, through the advice of a sage or god, two of Dilipa's widows have sex with one another and in this way one gets pregnant and gives birth to Bhagiratha. However, the baby is deformed (in the *Padma Purana* version, for example he is boneless, while in the *Krittivasi Ramayan* he is merely a lump of flesh) until he encounters the crippled sage Ashtavakra, who transforms him into a beautiful, strong child/youth. The *Krittivasi Ramayan* even goes on to describe

Bhagiratha being bullied at school for having two mothers rather than heterosexual parents. Some of the texts too use the story to provide a folk-etymology for Bhagritha's name, claiming that it comes from *bhaga* ('vulva').<sup>[3][4][5][6]:146–60[7]</sup>

## Representation in sculpture

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A sculpture of Bhagiratha can be seen beneath the spout of almost every dhunge dhara (*hiti*) or tutedhara (*jarun*, *jahru*, *jaladroni*), two types of drinking fountain found in the old settlements of Nepal. Bhagiratha is pictured sitting, standing or dancing while holding or blowing a conch. A similar figure can be seen below the gargoyles in some temples in India.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Gallery



Bhagiratha beneath the main spout of Sundhara, Kathmandu, Nepal



Bhagiratha on a jarun of Nag Pokhari, Bhaktapur, Nepal



Bhagiratha beneath the stone spout of Lamugah Hiti, Bhaktapur, Nepal



Bhagiratha on a jarun at Taumadhi Square, Bhaktapur, Nepal



Bhagiratha beneath a gargoyle at the Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur, India



Shiva, Gangadhara, Parvati, Bhagiratha (left) at the Ravana Phadi Cave, Aihole, India



Bhageerath a statue in Hyderabad, India

### See also

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- Bhagirathi Mali

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