



## AIR-INDIA CALENDAR 1974

### THE CHARIOTS OF THE GODS

Nowhere is the world so densely populated with Gods as in India. Where every phenomenon of nature, be it thunder, lightning, dawn or dusk, has its own individual deity, and the Hindu pantheon runs to three hundred and thirty million and three Gods!

Glorious Gods. Endowed with a super-abundance of heads and hands which manifest their super-human powers. Clothed in heroic legends and a 'chaos of myths', confusing, even frustrating, yet always and utterly fascinating. Moving about the heavens on their *Vahanas* (chariots), birds or beasts as exotic as their Lords. Like the seven-headed horse of Surya, the man-bird (Garuda) of Vishnu, the four-tusked elephant of Indra. Each God has a *vahana* assigned to him almost arbitrarily. For primitive imagination is a law unto itself, unschooled by restraining disciplines of logic!

Hinduism, the religion that cradled the ancient civilization of Aryavarta, is still very much of a living force in the India of today. And the Gods are still worshipped and invoked by rite and ritual that has barely changed. There are the Vedic Gods, personifications of the pure elements: sun, moon, wind, water, fire, thunder, lightning. And there are the Hindu Gods of a more philosophic tradition, personifications of the cosmic forces of creation and destruction, good and evil, life and death.

We chose 12 of these larger-than-life Gods and commissioned 12 of our distinguished contemporary artists to depict them for us, in the colour and idiom of our day. Each is a personal vision that does not necessarily conform to iconographic canons. Poetic licence in word and picture has given imagination free reign. To create, as with the first vision, a thing of joyous beauty.

1. Ganesha, the Elephant God. Invoked before any undertaking as the remover of obstacles. A trunkling-eyed, elephant God who acquired his one-tusked elephant head when, in a fit of rage, he cut off his real head in fury, supplanting it with an elephant head to bring him back to life, and so pacify the terrified gods. Ganesha scuttles across on his elephant.

2. Indra is the Vedic God of Thunder. Who wields the beautiful rain. Waging war on the gods of drought and famine with his weapons, the thunderbolt and the rainbow. His *vahana* is a white elephant who came out of the milk ocean and it was named for *amrita* (ambrosia).

3. Kartikeya, the son of Lord of Love, Lord of the roosting Apurva, the celestial nymphs, the *Rati* (passion). Who carries a bow made of lightning and a ring with a line of burning hair. With which he playfully shoots the five flower-tipped shafts of desire at innocent maidens, and seduces women and ascetic sages!

His *vahana* is the pea-green parrot.

4. Vishnu, the Preserver, the second God of the Hindu Triad. A beautiful blue deity, 'as glorious as the Meridian Sun'. Who, to save the world from danger, has descended to the earth nine times in various guises. As the valiant Rama of the Ramayana, the beloved Krishna of the Gopis, even as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Who will come, yet again, for the tenth time, outside a pure white chariot, to herald the end of Kali Yuga, the present Age of Darkness.

His *vahana* is Garuda, the mighty man-bird.

5. Brahma the Creator, the first God of the Hindu Triad. Scripture recounts how, having created a woman from his own immaculate substance, he wished to gaze upon her surpassing beauty. But she turned away from him. Whereupon another head issued forth from his body. And then a third and a fourth. And then a fifth, which Shiva nipped off with his nail when it started to bubble about the superiority of Brahma over Shiva. Brahma is the fountainhead of all knowledge, from his four heads, the four Vedas spring.

His *vahana* is a fleshy swan.

6. Varuna is the Vedic God of Water, the Prime Mover of the Universe. Guardian of Rta, the cosmic laws. With his naked eye, the sun, he watches the universe. With his hoop he lassoes the sinner who breaks his immutable laws.

His *vahana* is a chariot drawn by seven graceful swans which each represent milk, curd, unclarified butter, rice-gruel, sugar cane juice, spirit wine and the seven seas of salt.

7. Shiva, the Destroyer, the third God of the Hindu Triad. Who is clad in tiger-skin, and has three eyes. And whose nail, a blue from drinking the poison vomited by the snake during the churning up of the ocean for ambrosia. Who dances the cosmic dance according to the rhythmic movement of the universe and is so called Nataraj, Lord of the Dance. Through his dishevelled locks the terrible Ganga, sacred river of the Hindus, flows. So he is worshipped as the God of generation, under the locks of the legs and the feet, the male and female organs.

His *vahana* Nandi, the bull, is also a symbol of fertility, and is specially worshipped throughout India.

8. Chandra is the Vedic God of the moon. Who rises when the ocean was churned for ambrosia. And so rises, now from the ocean every moonrise. Who being cursed with consumption for allowing the fourth of his 27 wives (the constellations), water for fifteen days of each month, and then none again!

His *vahana* is the fork-tailed antelope.

9. Agni is the Vedic God of Fire. Who was born of two brothers. And has three heads and seven arms. And seven during tongues, each with a different name, for devouring the butter poured on the sacrificial fire.

Agni's *vahana* is the early horned ram.

10. Kartikeya, the God of War. Born of Shiva's seed, without the intervention of women. Fertilized by the six floods (Kartika) wherefore he had six heads and twelve hands to receive the milk of his nurses. In some regions it is taboo for women to work on his shrine.

Kartikeya's *vahana* is the vainglorious peacock.

11. Surya is the Vedic Sun God, the Divine Violator, dispeller of darkness, bringer of light. Who alone moves according to fixed laws. Whose wife, blinded by his blinding brilliance, gave him a hundred Chakras, which means 'wheels'.

His *vahana* is a chariot drawn by seven horses or by a seven-headed horse, which always moves in a halo of light.

12. Vayu is the Vedic God of Wind. Who hatched his furious might against the golden Mount Meru. And so trapped it up into the sea where it formed the emerald side of Lanka.

Vayu's *vahana* is the fleet-footed stag.

What the naked eye cannot see, faith often can. Look into these pages with the eyes of our faith, and you will see. Magnificent visions. For the gods are in their Heavens... and all's right with the world.





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1. *Ganesha*, the Elephant God. Invoked before every undertaking as the remover of obstacles. A twinkling-eyed, pot-bellied God. Who acquired his one-tusked elephant head when Shiva, who had cut off his real head in fury, supplanted it with an elephant head to bring him back to life, and so pacify the inconsolable Parvati.

Ganesha scuttles around on his vahana, a mouse!

2. *Indra* is the Vedic God of thunder. Who brings the bountiful rain. Waging war on the demons of drought and famine with his weapons, the thunderbolt and the rainbow.

His vahana is Airavata, the four-tusked white elephant who rose out of the milk ocean when it was churned for amrita (ambrosia).

3. *Kama*, eternal youth, God of Love. Lord of the ravishing Apsaras, celestial nymphs, spouse of Rati (passion). Who carries a bow made of sugar-cane and strung with a line of humming bees. With which he playfully shoots the five flower-tipped shafts of desire at innocent maidens, married women and ascetic sages!

His vahana is the pea-green parrot.

4. *Vishnu*, the Preserver, the second God of the Hindu Triad. A beautiful blue deity, 'as glorious as the Meridian Sun'. Who, to save the world from danger, has descended to the earth nine times in various guises. As the valiant Rama of the Ramayana, the beloved Krishna of the Gopis, even as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Who will come, yet again, for the tenth time, astride a pure white charger, to herald the end of Kali Yuga, the present Age of Darkness.

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His vahana is a fleecy swan.

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His vahana is the fork-antlered antelope.

9. *Agni* is the Vedic God of Fire. Who was born of two firesticks. And has three heads and seven arms. And seven darting tongues, each with a different name, for devouring the butter poured on the sacrificial fire.

Agni's vahana is the curly horned ram.

10. *Karttikeya*, the God of War. Born of Shiva's seed, without the intervention of woman. Suckled by the six Pleiades (Krittika), wherefore he had six heads and twelve hands to receive the milk of his nurses. In some regions it is taboo for women to worship at his shrine.

Karttikeya's vahana is the vainglorious peacock.

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His vahana is a chariot drawn by seven horses or by a seven-headed horse, which always moves in a halo of light.

12. *Vayu* is the Vedic God of Wind. Who hurled his furious might against the golden Mount Meru. And so toppled its tip into the sea where it formed the emerald isle of Lanka.

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Ganesha, the Hindu God of Wisdom, and Remover of Obstacles, with his vehicle, a mouse.  
Oil on canvas by Gopinath Kulkarni.

From the AIR-India collection of contemporary Indian art.

## January 1974

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

## December

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

## February

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						1
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28		



**AIR-INDIA**





*Ganesha, the Hindu God of Wisdom, and Remover of Obstacles, with his vehicle, a mouse.  
Oil on canvas by G.S. Adivrekar.*

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Sunday

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Monday

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