

The Story of Lord Hanuman's Birth and Early Life



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Lord Hanuman is a Hindu deity. The story of his meeting with Bhagwan Ram and his subsequent activities and accomplishments have been narrated in great details in all Ramayanas and other Ramakathas. However, the story of his birth and early life is practically missing except some interpolations with varying accounts. Hanuman is generally recognized as the son of Kesari the mighty king of Sumeru Hill and a forest dweller (vanar) and his wife queen Anjani. Kesari is credited with killing terrible demons. Hanuman's real name has been mentioned Sundar and his jaw was broken by falling down while watching the sun and hence called Hanuman, a person with deformed jaw. He got proper education in Vedic system as appropriate for a prince. On the contrary the various Ramakatha sources mention Wind God, Shiva and several others as father and a cursed apsara born as Anjana. As a child Hanuman swallowed sun and was hit by Indra's thunderbolt in his jaw. He got his education from by flying and following. The authors of source books on Hanuman such as Catherine Ludvik explain these fantastic accounts by commenting that Ramastory (Ramakatha) is not history but rather a legend.

There are variant accounts of Lord Hanuman's birth, birthplace and parentage He has been mentioned as the son of Lord Shiva, Kesari and the Wind God. Similarly, his birthplace is mentioned in different places such as present day Bihar, Karnatak etc. Lord Hanuman has been uniformly described as a man of great learning and wisdom but depicted by some as a monkey with a tail. All Ramayanas however agree on one point. His great strength and wisdom his achievements and most important his closeness with Lord Shri Ramaji made him the most fascinating and popular God of Hindus. This paper presents a brief narration and discussion on the birth and early life of Lord Hanuman.

1. Introduction

Lord Hanuman is a Hindu deity. The story of his meeting with Bhagwan Ram and his subsequent activities and accomplishments have been narrated in great details in all Ramayanas and other Ramakathas. However, the story of his birth and early life is practically missing except some interpolations with varying accounts. Hanuman is generally recognized as the son of Kesari the mighty king of Sumeru Hill and a forest dweller (vanar) and his wife queen Anjani. Kesari is credited with killing terrible demons. Hanuman's real name has been mentioned Sundar and his jaw was broken by falling down while watching the sun and hence called Hanuman, a person with deformed jaw. He got proper education in Vedic system as appropriate for a prince. On the contrary the various Ramakatha sources mention Wind God, Shiva and several others as father and a cursed apsara born as Anjana. As a child Hanuman swallowed sun and was hit by Indra's thunderbolt in his jaw. He got his education from by flying and following. The authors of source books on Hanuman such as Catherine Ludvik explain these fantastic accounts by telling that Ramastory (Ramakatha) is not history but rather a legend.

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2. Myth of Hanuman's Vanar (Monkey) Origin

Hanuman is called Vanar presumed to mean a monkey but it actually refers to a group of people living in forests (Vān - forest, nara - human). Valmiki Ramayana presents them as humans with reference to their speech, clothing, habitations, funerals, consecrations etc. It also describes their monkey-like characteristics such as their leaping, hair, fur and a tail. Rama himself describes a number of qualifications of Hanuman such as knowledge of Vedas and grammar and great ability of speech. These clearly establish the human attributes of Lord Hanuman.

According to Jain texts, Hanuman is a human of vanara clan whose emblem is the monkey. Many scholars have argued in favor of people with perhaps monkey banner.

G. Ramadas infers from Ravana's reference to the kapis' tail as ornament (bhushan) that it is long appendage in dress worn by men of the Savara tribe. Since the women did not wear this dress Valmiki does not describe them as "vanaras" monkeys.

The common depiction of Lord Hanuman is as a 'monkey' with a long tail based on the later belief. According to Philip Lutgendorf, devotionism to Hanuman and his theological significance emerged long after the composition of the Ramayana, in the 2nd millennium CE. His prominence grew after the arrival of Islamic rule in the Indian subcontinent.

One recent book on Hanuman writes "Sri Hanuman belongs to the monkey race. He represents a stage of evolution much lower than the lowliest of human beings. His is the story of an individual lowlier than a Chandala, rising to the stature of a god by sheer strength of character and one-pointed devotion." (Hanumat Vibhuti page 28).

Father Bulke in his Ramkatha has discussed this in great length. He describes Vanar and Reechh as forest dwellers with banners of monkey and bear. He compares this with British Lions and Russian Bears based on their flags. Based on his decades of association with forest tribes he mentions that Hanuman gotra people still living today.

3. Birth of Hanuman

Shre Ramcharit Manas and Valmiki and other Ramayanas and Ramakathas are mostly silent about the birth of Hanuman and his parents. Father Kamil Bulke in his book Ramakatha has discussed about the birth of Hanuman. The Adi Ramyan of Valmiki is silent about Hanuman's birth. The later version includes the story of Hanuman's birth in Kiskindhakand Sarg 66. This is considered a later interpolation. This describes how Anjana was impregnated by Windgod who was attracted by her beauty.

Lord Hanuman mentioned as the son of Shankar, Keshari and Wind God and depicted as a monkey with a tail. Many scholars talk about his non-Aryan origin even though he is described as a great grammarian and Vedic scholar. All sorts of mythical accounts have been generated over the years. We will briefly go over them. The simple story that comes out of the folklores in the countryside and other sources is as follows:

Kesari was the ruler or local Chief of a forest kingdom in Sumeru. He killed a demon named Sambasadan who was tormenting the sages. Kesari could not produce himself a child. As was the prevalent religious and social custom in the ancient time Kesari's brother Shankar was selected to produce a child by the prevalent custom of Niyog from Kesari's wife Anjana to continue the progeny. As Anjana refused any physical contact with Shankar the seed was collected in a tube and she was impregnated by artificial technique of blowing with air.

Some of the mythical stories reported in various sources are

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Anjana the wife of Keshari is a very beautiful woman. Vayu the Wind God sees her and gets attracted. He disrobes and makes her pregnant.
2. Puranas Lord Shiva is in the company of Vishnu in the form of Beautiful lady Mohini. His seed fell down as was picked by Wind God who took this to Anjana. She became pregnant and gave birth to Hanuman.
3. When Dasarath, the king of Ayodhya was handed the sacred payasa by Agnideva to be given to his wives so that they might have divine kids a bird snatched a fragment of this and dropped it where Anjana was engaged in worship. Pavandev delivered that fragment of pudding to the outstretched hands of Anjana who swallowed it. With that grace she gave birth to Hanuman.
4. Once Siva and Parvati were playing in the woods in the form of monkeys. Parvati became pregnant The fetus was given to Vayu, the Wind God. Vayu gave it to Anjana who was doing austerities (tapas) at that time in order to obtain a son.
5. Shiva indulges in an obscene act with Mohini(a form of Vishnu) and semen gets transferred to Anjana giving birth to Hanuman by wind god.
6. Both Shiva and Windgod enter Kesari who then unites with Anjana giving birth to Hanuman.
7. Ram as monkey mates with Anjana and produces Hanuman as described in Thai Ramajataka. Ram had become a monkey in the forest while searching for Sita and eating a fruit.
8. Produced by Ram and Sita as per Malay Hikayat Maharaj. Both become monkey while bathing in an enchanted pond. Sita becomes pregnant and Ram extracts the unborn fetus which is carried by wind to Anjana.

Philip Lutgendorf comments on this in book Hanuman's Tales "Why so many stories and can all of them be equally true? The standard answer is that the multitude of stories are ascribable to difference- of- eons, alluding to the cosmic chronology, codified in the Puranas." He also comments that needless to say these stories will be unacceptable to most modern Hindus.

4. Hanuman's Birth Places

Valmiki Ramayana locates the birthplace of Hanuman in Anjaneri/ Anjanadri(near Hampi), Karnataka. Several other places have been mentioned as the birthplace of Lord Hanuman.

1. Anjana Hill in Gumla district in Jharkhand.
2. The Anjaneri mountain near Trimbakeshwar in Nasik district., Maharashtra
3. Lakshka Hill near Sujangarh in Churu district Rajasthan.

5. Early Life and Education

The child of King Kesari and Queen Anjana was named Sundar. His jaw was broken by falling down while watching the sun and hence nicknamed Hanuman, the person with broken jaw. The Royal Prince went through his Yajnopavit Sanskar and formal vedic education befitting the prince under a teacher named Surajdev. The earlier Ramkathas typically mention Hanuman as wise and learned person. Rama himself describes the qualifications of Hanuman such as:

1. Knower of all Vedas and scriptures
2. Scholar in nine schools of grammars
3. Possessing great ability in faultless speech and sentence making

Important stories related to events in Hanuman's childhood are:

1. Believing the sun to be a ripe fruit Hanuman leapt up to the sky and devoured the sun. This caused a great consternation in the universe. The gods prayed to Hanuman and Hanuman released the sun. This is narrated in the famous Hanuman Chalisa of Goswami Tulasidas.
2. Older narration of Ramakatha mentions that as a child he saw the rising sun and jumped forward from a hillock. He fell down in a stream below and was seriously injured breaking his jaw.
3. Another version of this episode is that when Hanuman pursued the sun, he was hit by vajra, thunderbolt by Indra. His jaw was hit and distorted giving him the name Hanuman a person with distorted jaw. He fell down unconscious and his father Wind God stopped air and living beings could not breathe. Indra withdrew the effect of the thunderbolt and gods blessed him with all sorts of boons.
4. Hanuman approached Sun God for his education, but sun expressed his inability as he was always on move and changing direction. Hanuman enlarged his size and stood on leg in front of him holding his other leg in the sky. Thus, sun kept moving and educating him at the same time.
5. Hanuman was a mischievous child bothering the Rishis and disturbing their articles of worship. They cursed him that he would forget his strength unless reminded by someone. Because of this Hanuman could not help Sugriva against Vali. He went in search of Sita only after Jambvanta reminded Hanuman of his great power.

6. Concluding Remarks

The depiction of Lord Hanuman as Monkey God with a tail and his mostly obscene stories about birth have been criticised and discarded by several scholars. Father Kamil Bulke simply calls their writers "kusheelav" perhaps meaning person with corrupt mentality. Other scholars like Catherine Ludvik simply explain these fantastic accounts by telling, that Ramastory (Ramakatha) is not history but rather a legend. There are many unknown facts about Hanuman. How he ended up with Sugriv in exile. If he was present in Kiskindha earlier with King Bali why Jamavant did not remind him to accompany and fight the demon. However, one thing is undisputable, his close association with Lord Ram and Mother Sita and "his rise to the stature of a popular and powerful god by sheer strength of one- pointed devotion".

7. Reference

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