

# Durga and the buffalo demon

## A Hindu story

**Key ideas: good and evil, pride, greed**

More than anything, Mahisha, the buffalo demon, wanted to live for ever. So he went to Brahma, the creator god, and said 'Lord, give me immortality'. Brahma replied, 'All who are born must die'. Mahisha thought for a while. 'Then, Lord, if I have to die, let it be at the hands of a woman.' 'Very well,' Lord Brahma told him, 'let it be so'.

Mahisha was delighted. He could not imagine how any woman could kill him, and this meant he could achieve his aim to be all-powerful. 'We will attack heaven itself,' he told his men. 'All the gods will bow before me'. Mahisha and his demon army defeated the god Indra and his followers in a fierce battle. Mahisha sat on Indra's throne and proclaimed: 'From now on I alone shall be worshipped.'

Meanwhile, the gods assembled secretly at the home of Lord Shiva. 'We are helpless against Mahisha,' they complained. 'Why should evil triumph over goodness like this?' At that moment, an intense light began to shine from the gods' faces. The beams of light met in the middle of the room making a brilliant ball of brightness, out of which emerged a figure. It was a female form, with many arms.

This was Durga. As she stood there, Shiva offered her his own spear. Others gave her weapons with which to attack Mahisha, until each of her countless hands held a fearsome instrument of death. Durga mounted the back of a lion and rode towards Mahisha's palace.

Mahisha strode out to meet her, sword in hand. 'How dare you, a woman, threaten me?' he bellowed. 'Tremble with fear, Mahisha,' she replied. 'I come armed by the gods. Remember what you said to Brahma? 'If I die let it be at the hands of a woman.' Well, I am a woman. You will die at my hands'.

Mahisha's men attacked Durga but as her lion strode through the warriors she destroyed hundreds of them. Mahisha turned himself into the form of a fierce buffalo. He charged at Durga, snorting and bellowing as he ran. As he reached her, Durga leapt on him and pinned him down. Mahisha struggled to free himself and half of him, in his real form, began to emerge from the body of the buffalo. At this, Durga struck and Mahisha fell dead at her feet.

The gods filled the skies with their shouts of joyful victory. 'Durga, we praise you!' they cried. 'You are one who destroys evil and upholds goodness'.