

Navagrahas : The Planetary Deities

Introduction:

Invoking the Lord in the form of planetary deities is one of the unique forms of worshipping God seen in the Vedic culture. The planetary deities are perceived as playing a significant role in the life of an individual. Specific prayers are offered to God who is invoked in the form of various planetary deities called grahas.

NAVAGRAHA DEVATAS:

SURYA DEVATA - THE SUN GOD

Because the sun's essential nature is light, it is called the atmakara-ka or the presiding deity of the atma. The sun governs a person's confidence, authority, and status. The sun is also the presiding deity of the eyes and rules the sign Leo. The Visnu Purana (2.8.15) states that the sun does not move; nor does it rise or set. Rising and setting imply appearance and disappearance.

CHANDRA DEVATA - THE MOON GOD

The moon is the presiding deity of the mind and emotions. This devata is depicted with crescent moon/ holding lotus buds in his hands. He rules the sign of Cancer.

KUJA DEVATA - THE MARS GOD

The deity Kuja is also known as Mangala or Angaraka. In the Puranas he is also described as Karttikeya, the son of Lord Siva and Goddess Uma. He is depicted as wearing red clothes and carrying a spear. He governs the qualities of courage and bravery, and presides over siblings and health. He rules Aries and Scorpio.

BUDHA DEVATA - THE MERCURY GOD

Budha is the deity who presides over intelligence. He governs a person's teaching capacities. He is depicted as holding the Vedas in one hand and a sword, a mace, and a shield in his other hands. He rules Gemini and Virgo.

GURU DEVATA - THE JUPITER GOD

Guru is the presiding deity of religious inclinations and prosperity. He is also the presiding deity of married life for women. He is described in the Puranas as Brhaspati, the preceptor of the devatas. He is often depicted in a standing posture with four hands, in one of which he holds a weapon called the vajra-ayudha. He rules Sagittarius and Pisces.

SUKRA DEVATA - THE VENUS GOD

Sukra is the presiding deity of material comforts, arts, culture, and aesthetics. He is also the presiding deity of love and married life for men. In the Puranas he is depicted as being the preceptor of King Bali. Sukra is depicted as standing with his hands folded. He is the ruler of Taurus and Libra.

SANI DEVATA - THE SATURN GOD

Sani is the presiding deity of longevity, calamities, and difficulties in life, and, at the same time, of renunciation and spiritual wisdom. He presides over painful experiences and inner growth. In the Puranas, he is considered the son of the Sun God. He is depicted with a dark complexion, bearing a mace, and moving at a slow pace. He has a crow as his vehicle. His eyes are generally blindfolded because of the belief that his glance is very powerful and may bring misfortune. He rules Capricorn and Aquarius.

RAHU AND KETU DEVATAS - THE RAHU GOD AND THE KETU GOD

Rahu is the presiding deity of worldly desires and Ketu is the presiding deity of moksha, or freedom from limitations. Astronomically, they are not planets but the northern and southern nodal points of the moon. They are closely connected to each other astrologically. Mythologically, they are born of a raksasa (demon). The upper half of Rahu's body is similar to a man, while the lower half is like a snake. Conversely, the upper half of Ketu's body is similar to the head of a snake, while the lower half is like a man. They do not rule any signs but give the effects of the ruler of the signs where they are situated.

In many Indian temples, there is an altar dedicated to the nine planetary devatas. They are placed in the following manner, facing specific directions as pointed by the arrows:



Before leaving the temple, one offers prayers to these deities by circumambulating nine times around the altar, while chanting the Navagraha Stotram or the following prayer:



*arogyam pradadatu no dinakarah candro yaso nirmalam
bhutim bhumisutah sudhamsu-tanayah prajnam gurur-gauravam
kavyah komalavagvilasamatulam mando mudam sarvada
rahurbahubalam virodhasamanam ketuh kulasyonnatim*

May the Sun give us long life and good health; the Moon, pure fame; the son of the Earth (Mars), charisma and prosperity; the son of the Moon (Mercury), intelligence; Jupiter, respectability; the one possessed of the qualities of a poet (Venus), the capacity for unsurpassed and melodious speech; the one of slow gait (Saturn), continual joy and pleasure; Rahu, strength and the destruction of enemies; and Ketu, growth of the family.