

# Ganesha – college essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Vinayagar or Ganesha is best known as the God of new beginnings. This aspect of the God can be explained by the stories of his origins. The Padma Purana tells that Ganesha was the son of Shiva and Parvati and was born a perfect and normal child. At Parvati's invitation, the other gods and goddesses came to see the new baby and to bestow their blessings upon him. Unfortunately, Parvati's brother Sani had been cursed by his wife so that if he looked at anyone, that person was reduced to ashes. Parvati was so proud of her son that she insisted that Sani come to admire him.

Only a quick sideways glance from Sani was enough to cause Ganesha's head to fly off his shoulders. Brahma was also present and promised that the transplantation of the head of the first living creature seen would enable the child to live. Vishnu set off at once and returned with the head of an elephant. A more popular tale comes from the Shiva Purana. Parvati wanted to bathe but did not want to be disturbed. She created a boy from the dirt of her body to stand outside and guard against intruders. Her husband Shiva returned from hunting to find his access to his wife blocked by a stranger and angrily cut off the boy's head.

Parvati was grief-stricken, so to soothe her, Shiva sent his men out to find the first animal they could that was sleeping with its head pointed north. When they returned with the head of an elephant, Shiva attached this to the boy's neck and promised that from then on, all men would call upon Ganesha at the beginning of any new enterprise. Another tale explains why Ganesha is also known as the remover of obstacles and why he is always the first deity invoked in any Hindu ceremony or festival. Shiva wanted Ganesha and his brother Subramanya (also called Kartikeya) to circle the world.

Subramanya dutifully set off around the world, but Ganesha simply circled his parents, saying that to him, his parents were the world. This greatly pleased Shiva who decreed that henceforth, people would worship Ganesha before beginning any important task. A similar story relates how Ganesha won his two wives. In this version both brothers wished to marry the same two women, and decided that whichever of them was the first to circumnavigate the world would become the bridegroom. Kartikeya set off on foot, but Ganesha stayed home and studied the scriptures.

Kartikeya's travels took years and by the time he returned, Ganesha had married the pair. He justified this by explaining that through his studies and learning, he had gone around the world in a lesser time than had his brother. Ganesha's two wives are Buddhi, whose name means wisdom and intelligence, and Siddhi, whose name denotes prudence, prosperity, and success in undertakings. Thus Ganesha is also patron god of these very attributes. After all his studies, Ganesha was very knowledgeable of the scriptures and had become an excellent scribe.

In this way, he became the god of education, literature, and the fine arts. Images of Ganesha are full of symbolism. He is most often depicted as a short man with an elephant head, yellow skin, a pot-belly, and four arms. His human body represents earthly existence while his elephant head represents the soul, or atman, and is a reminder of his wisdom and understanding. The large size of his head represents the cosmos, and his fat belly denotes the capacity to face all of life's experiences, whether they be good or ill.

Ganesha's large ears illustrate his ability to be a good listener and assure his devotees that he hears all their pleas, while his large eyes show his perceptiveness. The wide mouth symbolizes the human desire for earthly pleasures and his elephant trunk shows that he is capable of great strength or precise delicacy in his actions. Ganesha has one intact tusk, and one that is broken. The most common story of how this came to be is that Ganesha's pen broke while he was writing down the Mahabhrata at the dictation of Vyasa, one of the major characters in the epic.

Not wanting to miss a word, Ganesha broke off his own tusk to replace the pen. He is often shown holding this broken tusk which symbolizes the sacrifice necessary to acquire wisdom. Ganesha's four arms demonstrate his omnipresence and omnipotence. The objects held on right side of his body represent the reason which must overcome the emotion represented by those held on the left side. In his upper hands he variously holds a noose, paasam, an elephant goad, ankusha, an axe, and a lotus. The axe and lotus say that one must sever worldly attachments and conquer the emotions to obtain wisdom, while the noose is used to trap illusion.

The ankusha is used in India to control elephants and signifies the power to produce movement from inertia and helps Ganesha to remove obstacles in order to propel mankind down the right paths. In his lower left hand Ganesha may hold a string of beads which symbolizes that pursuit of knowledge is continuous, or a conch shell, shankha. This shell is thought to be lucky and to bring wealth. It is blown before the start of many ceremonies, its sound a symbol of the cosmic universe. The lower right hand is open in the varada

mudra, which is an upright hand gesture carrying a blessing, and also means the granting of wishes or boons.

This hand may sometimes hold a chakra, a small emblem which is an energy center. Sometimes the lower left hand will be held palm open and pointing down in the abhaya mudra which grants protection and shows fearlessness. Ganesha wears red and yellow clothing, the red denoting activity in the world and the yellow, purity, peace, and truthfulness. There is a snake around Ganesha's waist which represents all forms of energy. His right foot or leg is often crossed over his left, again demonstrating the need for knowledge and reason to overcome emotion.

Ganesha is often depicted holding tray of ladoos, a popular sweet, which represents wealth and prosperity. Sometimes he is seen to be holding a laddoo in in his trunk, demonstrating the discovery of the sweetness of the atman. There is a mouse at Ganesha's feet which represents the ego. When Ganesha rides this mouse, he is demonstrating the conquest of ego in order to obtain wisdom and humility. Mice are also known for their ability to gnaw through most anything, which further illustrates Ganesha's aspect as the remover of obstacles.

While the above description of Ganesha is the most common, this god has 32 forms in which he may appear, along with 108 names, each with its own meaning. Ningyo has previously posted a diagram which illustrates the some of the symbolism of Ganesha's form. Other examples of Ganesha's characteristics can be found in the traditional tales which are told about this god. Ganesha's sacred day is the fourth day of each new moon. Ganesh

Chaturthi, his birthday festival, falls in the Hindu lunar month of Bhadrapada, which corresponds with our late August/early September.

During this festival, worshippers celebrate by holding fund raising events, participating in or viewing public musical and dancing performances, and by feasting and noisemaking. People create artistic idols of Ganesha and parade about with them, with the end of the festival signaled by the immersion of these into water. Legend warns that to look at the moon on the night of the Ganesh Chaturthi will cause a person to be falsely accused. If this is done inadvertently, the curse can be broken by reciting the story of the Syamantaka Jewel from the Puranas. The first prayer of a Hindu is always to Ganesha or Vinayagar.

Vinayagar is invoked at the beginning of all ritualistic worship. Recitation of holy songs begin with the recitation of a Vinayagar mantra or song.

Vinayagar also has a place in Buddhist temples and among the Jains.

Vinayagar is also known as Vigneshwara or Vighnaharta, the Lord of; and destroyer of obstacles. When we do evil things or when the time is not right, He places obstacles in our path. When we take the correct path, He removes the root of our troubles. Vinayagar is one who drives away all sorrows, difficulties and miseries. He confers happiness and peace on his devotees.

He is the master of the powers Buddhi and Siddhi. Vinayagar is also one of the six Gods the worship of whom was popularized by Adi Shankara; the other five being Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Skanda (Murugan) and Surya. This system was named Shanmatham (6 forms). It is said that Ganesha was born when the eternal couple contemplated on AUM, the Pranava mantra. Viewed

sideways, Lord Ganesha resembles the symbol AUM. That's why Ganesha is called AUMkara and worshipped first. Vinayagar Worship Vinayagar worship is very simple. It is the most informal too. If we do not have a statue or picture of Him, no problem.

We can make a conical shape out of clay, earth, wet turmeric powder or santhanam (sandalwood) paste and it becomes Vinayagar automatically. A simple offering of arukkampul (fresh green grass,) is enough as an offering. There is a mythological story which reveals how the practice of offering of arukkampul to Ganapathi became a practise. Once, the story goes, Parvathi and Parameswara were playing a game of dice with Nandiswara (Lord Siva's vehicle, the bull). Although Iswara lost the game, Nandi declared Him as the winner. Enraged at this unfair decision, Parvathi cursed Nandi that he would be afflicted with an incurable disease.

Nandi, seeking Parvathi's forgiveness, explained that he gave the verdict in Parameswara's favour because the latter was his master and his duty as a servant was to serve Him. Parvathi relented and said that Nandi would be freed from the curse if he offered to her son Ganesha what was most relished by Nandi. Nandi pondered for a moment and declared that what he loved most as a bull was fresh green grass. He would offer that to Ganapathi. That was how the practise of including fresh green grass among the offerings made to Ganapathi during festival occasions came into practise. VINAYAGAR CHATURTHI

Hinduism is not merely a way of life. It is also a science of life. Its concepts are scientific and based on truths discovered by the Rishis and Jnanis. People

are confused by the “ many gods” of Hinduism. According to Hinduism, God or Paramporul or Sivam or Brahmam or the Supreme is Absolute. He is Infinite. However, He can and does appear and respond in a form. The different deities of Hinduism are different facets of God. They show His functions, powers or aspects. The forms of the Hindu deities are highly symbolic and they contain many meanings and messages. VINAYAGAR The first prayer of a Hindu is always to Vinayagar.

Vinayagar is invoked at the beginning of all ritualistic worship. He is invoked before a family moves into a house. Recitation of holy songs begin with the recitation of a Vinayagar mantra or song. While there are countless Vinayagar temples, every Hindu temple dedicated to some other deity, including the Vaisnavite temple, has a statue of him. Vinayagar is not only worshipped by Hindus. He has a place in many other religions and nations of people. His name might not be the same but the figure is similar and so are the ideas that Vinayagar represents - auspiciousness, prosperity, well-being and wisdom.

Vinayagar has a place in the Buddhist temple and among the Jains. The Chinese too worship Vinayagar but with a different name. Vinayagar or Vinayagar-like deities are found in Indonesia, Japan, Afghanistan, Mexico, Brazil, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Tibet, Mongolia and Polynesia, among other places. Vinayagar is both the Lord of obstacles as well as the Remover of obstacles. When we do evil things or when the time is not right, He places obstacles in our path. When we take the correct path, He removes the root of our troubles. VINAYAGAR'S NAMES Vinayagar has many names and many forms of His own.



The word Vinayagar or Vinayagan is a combination of Vi + Nayagan. " Vi" means " No" while " Nayagan" means " head". Vinayagar literally means He who has no leader. That is, He himself is the leader of all and therefore the highest. Ganapati = gana + pati. Pati = Lord; gana = Siva's warrior attendants. Therefore it means the Lord of Siva's warrior attendants. Ganapati also has another meaning derived from the root words ga + na + pati. Ga = going (into the world of knowledge); Na = the end (of this knowledge); and Pati = Lord. Therefore the Lord of both the path and goal/end and therefore the highest. Ganesan = easan + gana.

Easen = Lord. So Lord of Siva's attendants. Vigneswaran = vigh + easwaran. Vigh = obstacles; Easwaran = Lord. Therefore it means Lord of obstacles and Remover of obstacles. Siddhivinayagar/Sithivinayagar = siddhi + vinayagar. Siddhi = powers or fulfillment; vinayagar = the top leader. This name therefore means the leader who confers powers or fulfillment on devotees. Gajamugha = gaja + mugham. Gaja = elephant; Mugham = face. It means the elephant-faced One. Gajananan carries the same meaning. THE FORM Vinayagar's form is shaped like and represents the Aum (also spelt " Om") which is the primeval, creative energy.

When the elephant cries it produces a sound akin to the Aum. The Aum is the sound symbol of Brahmam, Sivam, The Eternal, The Unchanging, the substratum of all existence. The Aum is the seat of Siva and the base of all mantras and the Vedas. The world originated from the Aum. It is the beginning and the end of all the Vedas, letters and sounds. Aum is the origin of everything and the essence in all of them. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VINAYAGAR Life evolves from lower forms into higher forms, from a lower

stage to a higher stage. There are obstacles which obstruct the unfoldment of life from the lower stage to a higher stage.

However, somehow, with time, the evolving being overcomes these obstacles and continues to progress. Our sages saw that from the amoeba right up to man, there is this upward movement with a steady direction. In man, our sages saw the unfoldment from the man-brute to the godman. Hindu sages realized that something motivates and gives direction to the unfoldment of life. They recognized that there was a cosmic intelligence guiding and providing this direction. This intelligent principle guides and helps life overcome all obstacles in its unfoldment.

Our sages decided to call this intelligent principle which removes obstacles in the path of progress and aids in our unfoldment Vigneswara or Vinayagar. Also, while some Hindus consider Vinayagar simply an embodiment or symbol of philosophic or spiritual truths, others consider Vinayagar as real and existing. Hinduism accepts both streams of thought. Vinayaga baktas believe that Vinayagar exists in a greater world than ours from where He guides our destinies. VINAYAGAR REPRESENTS UNITY Vinayagar represents unity. He has a revered place in all Hindu temples including the Siva temple and the Krishna temple.

This serves to remind the overzealous Vaisnavites and the overzealous Saivites that Siva and Krishna are one and the same. Vinayagar's form also shows the unity that exists between man and animal and the need for harmony. A human body connects an elephant head to a mouse. It shows that from the lowest to the highest, all creatures are a part of God and that

man is intimately connected to all life forms. The human body being in the middle reminds man that he has to ensure a balance in nature and tread the middle-path. Again the elephant is a non-meat eater. This signifies that man should practice Ahimsa.

Man should not cause any injury to his fellow beings. We are taught to live in harmony with nature. Since the every first prayer goes to Vinayagar it shows how important the Hindu sages consider unity. And it reminds man that his foremost duty is to ensure unity in diversity which is the law of nature.

ELEPHANT AND MOUSE Hindu deities normally each have their own vehicle in the form of some animal or bird. This is to drive home the point that all beings are the vehicles of God and that they have no existence independent of Him. Vinayagar has an enormous elephant head and He is seated on a small mouse.

What is the significance of this? The elephant represents wisdom and strength. Its trunk can remove obstacles. The large head represents an expanded consciousness. It represents the highest type of consciousness. The mouse is always associated with the earth. Almost all parts of its body are in contact with the earth. It represents the lowest type of consciousness. And what connects these two? The human body. The message to the devotee is this: Man can be like the mouse which has limited consciousness or he can work his way up to achieve an expanded consciousness as represented by the elephant head.

The rat runs hither and thither, Man's mind too, ruled by impulses, runs hither and thither. However, he is also capable of being wise, hardworking and

strong like the elephant. Man's goal then is to remove his mouse qualities and enter the elephant stage. The huge elephant sitting on a tiny mouse also indicates the truth that the Atman is the same in all, irrespective of size or birth or race. Another meaning is also given to the mouse. It moves everywhere unnoticed and steals or destroys food. Like the mouse, egoism too exists unnoticed in our minds and silently wrecks havoc in our lives.

When controlled by divine wisdom, however, the ego can aid progress. **THE TRUNK** The elephant trunk is very significant. The trunk is also its nose. The elephant nose is its greatest weapon and tool. Similarly, Vinayagar having the elephant form shows that man's nose is his greatest weapon and tool. How? Breath-control. Through breath control man can attain powers. It can help him expand his consciousness and move towards Sivagati. **LARGE EARS** Vinayagar has large ears. Why? It is to teach us to talk less and listen more. Many of our problems with people arise because we listen little but talk a lot.

Before someone can finish saying what he wants to say, we interrupt. This truth can be verified at home and at meetings. Ears are used to gain knowledge. The large ears indicate that when God is known, all knowledge is known. **THE POT-BELLY** Vinayagar has a huge pot-belly. Why? Vinayagar's pot belly suggests that it can contain anything and everything. His belly is considered to be the womb of the world. We notice that His belly is something like that of a pregnant woman who holds life in her. The difference is that while the pregnant woman supports one life or perhaps two or three, Vinayagar supports and sustains all life.

He is the creative energy that brings forth life. Vinayagar's protruding belly and stories about His voracious appetite show that He can digest anything. This indicates that a man of perfection, the highly evolved man, can digest anything whether it is pain or pleasure, good or bad, honor or dishonor. He has attained equilibrium. **THE HAND** The right hand of the deities in almost all representations is held in the Abaya posture with palm facing us. It indicates that he who surrenders unto Him need not fear anything. Vinayagar assures us that we should be brave as He is with the good and noble.

**THE FOOT** One foot of Ganesa touches the ground while the other is folded and rests on the other thigh. Why? This suggests that while we live in this world, we must tread the middle path and not go to extremes. Moderation should be our guide. **MODAKAM** In representations of Vinayagar, He is depicted as holding the modakam, a sweet cake, in one hand. There are usually modakam placed in a tray in front of him or held by His trunk. This is to show that the spiritually wise man always finds the world and life sweet as it enables him to be of service to his fellow beings of God.

It also affords him an opportunity to improve himself and progress towards Sivagati. The modakam consists of the outer flour portion and the inner sweet portion. The inner sweet portion represents the Supreme. The message is that man must dive within himself, transcend the outer, in order to find the inner treasure. **THE PASAM** Vinayagar, just like most other deities, is always shown holding a Pasa or rein/noose in one hand. The pasa has been given several interpretations. The pasa represents desires and feelings that bind. Uncontrolled desires are the seeds of bondage. Like the noose they strangle us.

The pasa shows that attachment is the cause of birth. It also shows the creative aspect of divinity. It is said that with the pasa (reins), Vinayagar guides us on the right path. With the pasa too He maintains obstacles in our path when we take a wrong turning or when the time is not right for us to do something. The pasa tells us we must bind ourselves to God for material and spiritual progress. For unfoldment we must bind ourselves through love, thavam and service to God. It suggests too that we should use our discrimination to control our desires as this conserves energy and helps us move upward.

The pasa shows He binds us with His love and will guide us. ANKUSA The ankusa is a hook-like instrument. This too has various related interpretations. The ankusa symbolizes discrimination which can pierce through delusions. It is said that Vinayagar removes obstacles and troubles in our path using the ankusa. He helps us be rid of delusions. The ankusa indicates that we must check our emotions and passions through strict self-control and thavam. Like a hook pulling at our flesh, self-control and thavam will cause pain but it must be done. We must use our discrimination to control our lower nature.

The ankusa reminds us to break away from the grip of material entanglements. . The ankusa is also said to stand for anger which hurts us. The pasa (attachment) and ankusa (anger) will not help in spirituality. So we have to get rid of anger and attachment by surrendering to Vinayagar. As the ankusa is used for destruction, it is also said that it shows the destructive or dissolving power of God. THE SNAKE Vinayagar is the presiding deity of the Mooladhara Chakra which is the foundation of the evolutionary, creative

or primeval energy called the Kundalini Sakti. It is coiled up like a snake when dormant.

When activated, this energy is said to result in an expansion of consciousness and the unfoldment of man into Godman. This results in various siddhis (powers) and therefore we have Siddhi Vinayagar. Raising this energy to the Sahasrara will bring enlightenment. A snake normally coils around Vinayagar's belly. This represents the Kundalini sakti. It reminds us that we have to awaken this energy to reach the state of expanded consciousness. The snake around the belly also shows that everything in nature (the pot-belly) is supported by energy. THE BROKEN TUSK Vinayagar's right tusk is broken. There are a few interpretations of this.

Some suggest that it means we should not be trapped between the pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain but that we should with conscious effort break its grip on us. Vinayagar uses the broken tusk as a writing instrument. This shows that a man who transcends the pair of opposites becomes creative. Our right side represents Siva (spiritual) and the left is Sakti (material). The broken right tusk indicates that one must break-off the ego for spiritual fulfillment. In worldly life however, we need the ego as otherwise we cannot live. But the ego in worldly life must be controlled by divine wisdom.

The story runs that Vinayagar and Vyasa participated in a challenge whereby Vyasa would recite the Mahabharatam without a pause and Vinayagar would write it down without stopping. In those days they wrote on palm leaves with a thick stylus. However, halfway, Vinayagar's stylus broke but he quickly

broke off His tusk to continue, writing without stopping. This story indicates that we should be willing to make sacrifices for any noble cause. STOTRAS AND MANTRAS It is said that by reciting Vinayaga Stotras, mantras and Thevaram songs we create energy which activates divine faculties in our consciousness.

This helps remove obstacles that hamper our material and spiritual progress. What is required is patience and perseverance. We must apply the Pasa and Ankusa. Also, when we concentrate on Vinayagar and sing His praises, we awaken the divine potential in us. Reciting the following mantra is said to bring auspiciousness: Aum Sri Ganesaya Namah Aum Sri Ganesaya Namah Aum Sri Maha Ganapathiyae Namah Aum Sri Gam Ganapathiyae Namah.

VINAYAGAR WORSHIP Vinayagar worship is very simple. It is the most informal too. If we do not have a statue or picture of Him, no problem.

We can make a conical shape out of clay, earth, wet turmeric powder or santhanam (sandalwood) paste and it becomes Vinayagar automatically. Even a rock or a tree with some bearing to his shape can be worshipped.

VINAYAGAR FORMS Vinayagar is usually said to have 32 different forms. Among the important forms are: Bala Ganapati, Taruna Ganapati, Bhakti Ganapati, Vighneswara, Veera Ganapati, Sakti Ganapati, Dvaja Ganapati, Siddhi Vinayagar, Uchista Ganapati, Ekatanta Ganapati, Shristi Vinayagar, Thundi Vinayagar, Yoga Vinayagar, Vighnaraja, Kshipra Ganapati, Heramba Ganapathi.

VINAYAGAR CHATURTHI CELEBRATIONS Vinayagar Chaturthi is grandly celebrated in Malaysia. All Vinayagar temples celebrate this festival. Other



temples also often celebrate it, especially if there is no Vinayagar temple in that area. Vinayagar Chaturthi falls on the 4th day of the new moon in the month of Aavani (August-September). . The celebration at home is simple. A day earlier the whole house is thoroughly cleaned. Everyone wakes up early. They take their bath. Fresh mango leaves are tied in a row at the doorway of the house. Usually ten mango leaves are used.

A banana leaf is placed at the alter or on a platform in the prayer room which has been decorated with koelam. Rice is placed on the leaf. A clay or earth figure of Lord Ganesha is made and then placed on the rice. A garland of arugampul (a type of common grass) is placed on the figure. Three betel leaves and slices of areca nut are placed beside. The presence of Lord Ganesha is then invoked through the recitation of mantras. We then perform the pooja where we welcome Him as an honored guest and offer him food and homage. We surrender unto Him.

No one is allowed to touch the figure during the prayers. As far as the Bhakta is concerned it is Vinayagar who is present and receiving his homage and oblations. The following day, the Vinayagar figure is removed from the altar and taken to either a stream, a pond, a lake, a river or the sea and immersed in the water. During the pooja the figure is not considered earth or turmeric or clay. It is God. After pooja it becomes earth or turmeric or clay again. Why use the earth to make His shape? Because the earth is the basis for our own life.

It is our support and it provides us with sustenance. We are reminded to take care of the earth and not to defile it. All that live depend on the earth. All life

is united by the earth. Again Vinayagar worship reminds us of unity in diversity. We immerse the earth in water. What is the significance of doing so? When earth and water combine life flourishes. To the agriculturalist especially water and earth take on godlike proportions. We are reminded to use them well and not to abuse them. The water represents the unchanging reality while the earth represents the changing and apparently real.

Therefore when we immerse the earth figure in water, we are reminded that the unchanging Reality, the formless, is worshipped with the aid of the perishing non-reality, the formful. It reminds us that forms and rituals are aids to our goal. We should go beyond them and realize the Supreme which is beyond names and forms. We must transcend the world of forms in order to attain Sivagati. Prayer to the god-with-form can lead to deep devotion and one-pointedness so essential to transcending the senses and achieving union with God. Except for Rishis and Jnanis, the rest of mankind uses some form of symbol or other in worship.

The Hindus are courageous enough to admit it openly and put these symbols to good use while almost all others do not admit it. The symbols help Hindus understand the indescribable better. The immersion of the earth figure into the water and its subsequent loss of existence denotes that man the ego-centric individual must allow himself to be absorbed by and into God. He must lose his individuality to gain unity with the Supreme. Vinayagar Chaturthi helps us realize the unity of all life. It teaches us to drop off our ego-centric, individualism for God-centered universalism