

Skanda, the commander of the army of Gods is well known deity. He is more popularly known in the south India as God Subrahmanya. In addition to these names, he is known by several other names, like Karttikeya, Kumara, Shanmukha, Saravanabhava, Senani, Tarakajit, Kraunchabheta, Gangaputra, Guha, Agnibhu and Svaminath.

In the Matsya Purana,¹ there is a mention of Kumara as a son of Agni. According to it, the seed of Agni was born as Skanda. In the same Purana, this deity is also described as a son brought up by six Krittika mothers and therefore he is named as Karttikeya.

Many Puranic legends tell the stories of his bravery. It is said, he took the leadership of the Gods and destroyed the demon Tarkasura.²

The origin of Skanda has been also described in Ramayana.³ In Ramayana it is said "While Shiva was performing austerities,

the other deities went to Brahma and asked for a General in the place of Mahadeva, their former commander. Brahma replied them that in consequence of the curse of Uma, no son could be born of any wives of the Gods but Agni could be get a son on Ganga and that off spring might become the General of the Gods."

The Vana-parvan of the Mahabharata⁴ has another account of the birth of Karttikeya. According to it, Karttikeya was borned at the request of Indra to Brahma, to provide Devasena a proper husband who would be able to over come all the enemies of the Gods. Devasena and Daityasena are the daughters of Prajapati. Here also, Agni and Svaha are shown as the parents of Skanda or Kumara.

Several forms of Skanda are described in the Puranas and Iconographical texts. Different texts have different varieties, accordingly an image of Skanda should be with two, four, six or twelve hands.

Skanda is not so popular in north India as in the south. This might be the reason why very few images of Skanda are found in this area. As such, only bihanded and four handed varieties of Skanda are found in the region under study. Therefore, the Iconographical aspects of only those forms are discussed here.

The Kumara-tantra⁵ recommends that the image of Skanda should be represented with one face and two arms. The right hand of the deity should keep a Danga while the left one should rest upon the hip.

The Bruhatsamhita,⁵ while describing two handed Skanda, has referred to Shakti only and is silent on the article of the other hand. The Matsya Purana,⁷ the Rupamandana⁸ and the Rupavatara⁹ state that the bihanded Skanda or Karttikeya should carry Shakti and Cock in his two hands. While, the Shilparatna¹⁰ has changed one article, and substituted Thunderbolt in the place of Cock in the left hand.

The four handed Skanda, according to the Amshumadbhedagama, should have Abhaya Mudra, Shakti, Cock and Aksamala in his hands.¹¹ While the Sritatvanidhi describes this variety differently. The front two hands of the deity should be kept in the Varada and Abhaya Mudra and the back hands should carry the Kukkuta and Vajra.¹²

According to the Matsya Purana the four handed Skanda should carry Shakti, Noose, Sword and Varada Mudra or Abhaya Mudra.¹³ However, the Vishnudharmottara Purana differs in the articles of four handed Skanda. It maintains that the right hands should carry a Cock and a Bell while left one the Vaijayanti Banner and Shakti.¹⁴ The Shilparatna, prefers the deity with the Lotus, Abhaya Mudra, Shakti and Cock in his four hands.¹⁵ The Rupamandana¹⁶ and Rupavatara¹⁷ describe the God holding the Shakti, Noose, Sword and Varada or Abhaya Mudra, same as described by the Matsya Purana.

The Vishnudharmottara Purana, says that the image of Kumara should be with six faces, but Skanda, the another form of Kumara should not possess six faces.¹⁸ According to the Agni Purana, Skanda has either one head or six heads.¹⁹ The Matsya Purana and the Rupamandana are silent about the faces of Skanda. The Vishnudharmottara Purana,²⁰ the Matsya Purana²¹ and the Rupamandana²² have clearly stated the peacock as the vehicle of Kumara or Karttikeya. However, the Vishnudharmottara Purana,²³ says that the other three forms of Kumara or Karttikeya viz. Skanda, Vishakha and Guha, do not possess the peacock as vehicle.

The image of Skanda or Karttikeya or Kumara signifies the idea of youth and spirit as the very name indicates. His vehicle, articles in the hands, name of the wife, all symbolise energy and strength. In the Brahmanical Mythology he is rather known as the God of war and the General of the Heaven.

It is interesting to note that eventhough the attributes, Shakti and Cock are seen in the four handed variety of Skanda found in the area under study, it seems that, the textual directions regarding the remaining two attributes have conspicuously been disregarded by the sculptors. However, in most of the images, the deity is endowed with six heads, as fixed by the texts, only four or three of which are visible.

Skanda or Karttikeya with two hands

I Type (Shakti or Danda and Cock)

The Vijayasambha, Chittor Fort fortunately preserves an

image of Karttikeya representing this form, on its sixth floor. It is interesting to note that the name 'Karttikeya' has been inscribed below the image. The deity is shown standing in Dvibhanga pose. The traditional vehicle of Karttikeya, the peacock is seen here. One more example of this form showing the deity seated in Ardhaparyanka asana, is found in the Mahavir Swami temple, Ayad. The presence of peacock is noted.

The Ganapati templet situated in the compound of the Eklingji temple, Eklingji, is also having one specimen representing the deity seated in Ardhaparyanka asana. His left hand is missing. The Shakti in his right hand and the presence of peacock are noted.

II Type (Noose and Jangha hasta)

This form of Skanda is found on the inside wall of the Ganesha Pole, Chittor Fort, wherein the deity is shown standing in Dvibhanga pose. He is shown with peacock vehicle.

Skanda or Karttikeya with four hands.

I A Type (Cock, Staff, Goad and Shakti)

The Vijayastambha, Chittor Fort preserves this form of Karttikeya. He is standing in Dvibhanga pose, and the vehicle peacock is also found near him. As seen in the bihanded variety, the name 'Karttikeya' has been also found inscribed below this image.

I B Type (Sword, Shakti, Cock and Jangha hasta)

An image of this form standing in Dvibhanga pose is found on one of the niches of the Kumbhashyam temple, Chittor Fort, (Fig.1). In this image peacock is seen but partly broken. Three heads of the deity are visible.

I C Type (Sword, Shakti, Shield and Bijora)

One sculpture of this type is found on the door frame of the Lakulisha temple, Eklingji. It is a seated image in Ardhaparyanka asana and mounted on the vehicle peacock.

II A Type (Assamala, Shakti, Cock and Kalash)

One specimen depicting this form is found in the Mahasatiyan, Ayad. It is a seated image in Ardhaparyanka asana and with peacock vehicle.

II B Type (Abhaya+Aksamala, Shakti, Cock and Kalash)

This form of Karttikeya is well preserved in the templet located in the north to the Samadhiswar temple, Chittor Fort, (Fig.2). He is seated in Ardhaparyanka asana and mounted on peacock vehicle. Three faces of the deity are visible in this illustration.

A partly damaged image of this form is found in the Amare-swar Mahadev templet, in the compound of the Eklingji temple, Eklingji. The deity is shown standing in Dvibhanga pose. The

peacock vehicle is also seen, however the first three hands of the deity are missing, only lower left hand is survived, and carries a Kalash.

II C Type (Varada+Aksamala, Shakti, Cock and Bijora)

An image of this type is found in the niche of the western wall, Gangodhhava (Kund), Ayad. It is seated image in Ardhaparyanka asana and beautifully mounted on the peacock vehicle, (Fig.3). The articles placed in lower two hands are partly damaged. As seen in other images, three faces of the deity are clearly visible here.

REFERENCES :

1. Matsya Purana, 158/24-41; 159/1-3.
2. Ibid., 146/12-14.
3. Rao, T.A.G., EHI, II/II p.415.
4. Ibid., p.417.
5. Ibid., p.433.
6. Bruhatsamhita, 58/41.
7. Matsya Purana, 260/50.
8. Rupamandana, 5/31.
9. Rupavatara, 8/40.
10. Shilparatna, II/25/66.
11. Amshumadbhedagama, 48/6.
12. EHI, II/II p.434.
13. Matsya Purana, 260/50-51.
14. Vishnudharmottara Purana, III/71/3-6.
15. Shilparatna, II/25/65.
16. Rupamandana, 5/31-32.
17. Rupavatara, 8/40-41.
18. Vishnudharmottara Purana, III/71/3-6.
19. Bhattacharya, B.C., Indian Images, Calcutta, 1924, p.26.
20. Vishnudharmottara Purana, III/71/3-6.
21. Matsya Purana, 260/50-51.
22. Rupamandana, 5/27.
23. Rupavatara, 8/40-41.