
Skanda, the Merciful, and His devotees

P. R. Kannan

In the Skanda Puranam

Mercy is the greatest attribute of Lord Skanda, which brings him closest to his devotees. Upanishad says that compassion and charity was advised by Prajapati the most essential quality to be cultivated by humans. Skanda's birth itself was out of the mercy of Siva and Devi towards Devas who were tortured by Surapadma and his brother Asuras. As one of his Balalilas, Skanda killed all Devas during an encounter; he brought them back to life at the prayer of Brihaspati; thus he eliminated the ego of power of the Devas. The Tamil Kandapuranam refers to the six faces of Skanda as all representing compassion. When he was a kid, a Brahmin, who was performing a yagna, encountered a gigantic goat which suddenly emerged out of the sacrificial animal and violently attacked the whole world. Skanda brought the offending goat under control and made it his first vehicle. He taught a lesson to a haughty Brahma and jailed him. Skanda was unique in his accomplishments; he preached Pranava to Siva and later to sage Agastya.

During the first great war, when Krauncha 'devoured' Veerabahu and the army of Skanda inside his mountain, it was Skanda who used his *Vel* (spear) to destroy the mountain and bring out the army safe and sound. He then sent his brother Veerabahu as emissary of peace to Soorapadma. Veerabahu was not offered a seat in the royal assembly of Soorapadma. Skanda materialized a beautiful royal throne for Veerabahu. Skanda also appeared in the dreams of Jayanta and other Devas who were in Soorapadma's

prison and assured them of good times ahead. During the subsequent war with Soorapadma, Skanda protected Veerabahu at least on three critical occasions. Once Veerabahu was immobilized by Bhanukopa using Mohanastram; Skanda countered by employing Amoghastram. The second time Veerabahu was thrown far into the sea by the use of Sammohanastram; Skanda sent his *Vel* (spear) to bring him back. The third time Simhamukha bound Veerabahu with the chain of Maya and threw him into the Udayagiri; Skanda again rescued Veerabahu using his deft arrows. When Veerabahu killed Bhanukopa after a protracted battle, Skanda gave him a boon. Veerabahu did not opt for the position of Brahma or Indra; but prayed for unwavering bhakti at the lotus feet of Skanda. Skanda blessed accordingly saying that the devotion he granted him was never bestowed even upon Devas, whose commander Skanda was.

When Soorapadma stood alone on the battlefield on the second day, having lost all his weapons including chariot, Skanda gracefully permitted him to leave, rest and return fully armed the next day. This is reminiscent of what Rama did to Ravana as conveyed in Valmiki Ramayanam. In the last day of the war, Skanda showed Visvarupa to Soorapadma on the battlefield; Soorapadma temporarily recognized the divinity of the little boy who was waging the terrible war. He appeared in the form of a gigantic mango tree, which was dissected into two parts by the *Vel* (spear) of Skanda. The peacock and cock, which emerged now, were very aggressive and rushed

towards Skanda. Skanda quietened them gracefully and blessed them with Vignana, the highest Advaitic spiritual experience. The fearful Asura thus turned into the divine vehicle and flag, worthy of devotees' reverence.

Skanda then answered the long standing prayer of Devasena and Valli by marrying them. During the courtship with Valli there was an occasion when Valli's own father and other kith and kin who opposed the marriage initially were all killed by the mere sound raised by the cock on Skanda's flag. Skanda very compassionately brought all of them back to life.

Skanda himself declares in Skanda Puranam: If someone treats me badly, I shall tolerate it. But those who trouble devotees of my lotus feet, whether they be Devas, Danavas or others, are sure to meet their punishment at my hands" Such is the mercy of Skanda.

In Modern Times

It is believed that during the time of Adi Sankaracharya, one Abhinavagupta wrought upon the master some severe illness through 'Aabhi-chara Prayoga'. Adi Sankara got himself completely cured at Tiruchendur, where he composed the famous 'Subramanya Bhujangam'. The vibhuti given on 'Panneer leaf' at the temple is considered efficacious in curing the severest of physical and mental illnesses. Kachchiappa Sivacharya wrote the classical Kanda Puranam in Tamil after Skanda appeared before him and blessed him with the initial words.

Saint Arunagirinathar of the fifteenth century is the most towering name among Skanda bhaktas. In his younger days, he repented for his evil ways and attempted suicide by falling from the Vallala tower of the Arunachalesvara temple at Tiruvannamalai. Skanda, mounted on his peacock, appeared and rescued him during the fatal drop. The merciful lord guided him to sing his praises starting with the word 'Muthu'. The



soulful compositions of the saint are many - Tiruppugazh, Kandar Anubhuti, Kandar. Alan-karam, Kandar Andadi etc. These songs have stood the test of time and are very popular even today in spite of the tough classical Tamil in which they are couched. At Tiruchendur Arunagirinathar had the darshan of dancing Nataraja in the idol of Subramania. Tiruchendur is also believed to be the place where he defeated a poet Villiputhuran by composing some difficult songs in praise of Skanda. The saint reformed the arrogant poet.

Kumara Guruparar, who was born dumb, was brought by his parents to the Tiruchendur temple at the age of five. They observed austerities for 48 days. At the end of this period, Skanda appeared in the night in the dream of the child and wrote on his tongue the Shadakshari mantra. The child immediately broke into the devotional song 'Kandar Kalivenba'. He was then blessed by Goddess Meenakshi at Madurai, who appeared as young girl. Saraswati blessed

him with mastery of Hindi language. Mounted on a lion, he faced the Sultan at Kashi. He established a mutt at Kashi at Kedarghat.

Another great devotee, Devaraya Swamigal, composed the ever-popular Kandar Shashti Kavacham at Tiruchendur. Like some of the Tiruppugazh songs, this Kavacham has some mystic syllables of deep significance. Kumara Gurudasa Swamigal, popularly known as Pamban Swamigal, is the author of 'Shanmukha Kavacham' and 'Kumara Sthavam'. In 1923 he met with an accident while walking on the road at Chennai. The wheel of a horse-cart ran over his leg. He was hospitalized and the British doctors who treated him gave up all hopes for his recovery. But the saint was confident and said: "After singing Shanmukha Kavacham, if I am not cured, people will lose faith". On the eleventh day, he saw two peacocks dancing their way towards him. Lord Subramania himself lay beside him as a child. Needless to say he was instantly rid of all his illness.

Ramana Maharshi was hailed as an Avatara of Skanda by his distinguished disciple, Kavyakanta Ganapathi Muni. In his famous 'Ramana Gita'. Ganapathi Muni asserts in his address to the Maharshi: Oh Brahman, through God given vision, I behold you again and again as Subramanya, the best of Brahmanyas, in human form" (11:7). Muthuswami Dikshitar, the great Carnatic music composer was blessed by Skanda at Tiruttani. Appearing as an old man, the Lord dropped a piece of candy in the mouth of Dikshitar on the steps of the temple. Dikshitar,

who instantly became composer of soul-stirring songs on Devi, Skanda and other divinities. He used 'Guru Guha' as his signature in all his compositions.

The great Tamil scholar, Ki Va Jagannathan was a great devotee of Tiruppugazh. He quoted Seshadri Swamigal as saying that Tiruppugazh is Mahamantra, each letter of which has been approved by Skanda. When his mother's life was ebbing, Ki. Va. Ja sat at her head and recited Tiruppugazh continuously. His relatives had to intervene and say to him: "Yama is afraid of coming near her as you are reciting Tiruppugazh. Stop the recitation and prostrate to your mother." Immediately the soul left the body.

Vallimalai Sachchidananda Swamigal spent his lifetime at Vallimalai worshipping Skanda and got his darshan. He got rid of his persistent stomachache in twelve days by praying to Skanda and applying Vibhuti. He propagated Tiruppugazh with great enthusiasm. Pandrimal Swamigal used to materialize typewritten articles on Skanda in five minutes whenever required. Vadalur Ramalinga Swamigal had darshan of Skanda as brilliant light and composed Tiruarutpa. Porur Chidambaranath Devar was another famous Skanda devotee, who has contributed to the rich literature of hymns on the lord. Credit goes to Kripananda Variar for popularising Kanda Puranam and inspiring Skanda Bhakti through his scintillating discourses. The list of notable Skanda devotees is endless. Come! let us pray at the lotus feet of the child Kumara for everlasting devotion and knowledge of the supreme. ♦