

2. Images of Skanda-Kārttikeya-Murugan : An Iconographic Study, Haripriya Rangarajan, Sharada Publishing House, Delhi, 2010, Pages-268 including 5 Appendices and Bibliography and excluding 20 (i-xx) Prelim pages and Plates (mentioned as Figures) numbering 87. Price: Rs.2700.

This book is the result of hard work done by the author for years. We already have some very good publications on the cult of Skanda-Kārttikeya in the form of the books authored by P.K. Agrawala, A.K. Chatterjee and Upendra Thakur to name a few which were published some 30-40 years back but there has been a gap since then. It is very well established that Skanda-Kārttikeya is one of the most popular deities of South India till today but none of these works did so much justice to his cult in South India as that of Dr. Rangarajan. The author has rare distinction of focussing equally on his cult in various parts of the country as she has herself travelled and lived for years in these regions. Another important lacuna which I felt in many previous works has been a total lack of contemporary cult of such deities in various parts of India, e.g., as we are reading the Skanda-Kārttikeya of past centuries with not much importance in contemporary religious life. The author who herself is a very devout lady could well understand the dogmas and

philosophies of Skanda-Kārttikeya worship and so has included all the important aspects of contemporary Skanda-Kārttikeya worship in her writings.

The author has very intelligently divided the book into nine chapters along with five appendices. The first chapter is based on the etymology of various names of Skanda-Kārttikeya as Kumāra, Skanda, Kārttikeya, Naigameya, Subrahmaṇya and Ṣaṇmukha. She has drawn all the references from the Vedic, *Brāhmaṇa* literature to the epics and the *Purāṇas* for these names as well as their etymology. List of more than 108 names (actually 133) from the *Skanda Purāṇa* is informative. According to the *Śāstras*, the deity Ṣaṇmukha represents Śiva in his five faces and the sixth face denotes the Śiva-Śakti union. His one face represents *Prāṇava*, the second face teaches *Jñāna* to Paramaśiva (his father) who is 'sat' (truth) and the third face is always on the verge of helping his devotees. The fourth face removes the ignorance of the devotees. The

fifth face leads the devotees to obtain intuitive knowledge of *brahman*. *Yogīs* say that the sixth face denotes the Śiva-Śakti union. She also gives examples of the symbolism of Śaṅmukha's faces and hands as described by great Tamil poets namely Nakkirar, Aruṇagirināthar.

The second chapter gives a detailed account of the birth of Skanda-Kārttikeya as mentioned in the epics and the *Purāṇas*. It also talks about the worship of Skanda as a *Gr̥ha-davatā*. An account of some of the *tīrthas* or cities mentioned in various *Purāṇas* along with their possible identification is also given. The third chapter of the book deals with the cult of Skanda-Kārttikeya during the early historic period including the earliest reference in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, Buddhist texts *Mahāmayūri*, *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Laitavistara* and Jiana text like *Āyārāṅga Sūtra*. Details of the Skanda-Kārttikeya cult evidences are given from the coins of Kuṣāṇs, Yaudheyas, Guptas and others. Various epigraphical evidences have also been quoted by the author.

The fourth chapter talks about the synthesis of Murugan and Skanda in Tamil country about which many of us are not well aware. She informs that nowadays in Tamil Nadu people worship Murugan in the following names such as Subrahmaṇya, Kārttikeyan, Arumugan, Velan, Velāyudham, Velāyudhaperumal, Kandan, Ilaya Pillaiyar, Svāmināthan etc. She also mentions a number of names by which Bāla-murugan is known in Tamil Nadu.

The earliest reference to Murugan as the presiding deity of the mountains is found in the *Sangam* work called *Talkappiyam*. Importance and antiquity of *Velan* has been described by her specifically. Then the author interestingly tells how and when the cults of South Indian hill-god merged with the North Indian war-god. It is also interesting to know that in South India Skanda was born of no father and is said to be the son of Mother Goddess Korravai who was the goddess of victory and fertility and then in later times how he was made a son of Rudra-Śiva.

The fifth chapter describes the esoteric significance of the birth of Skanda. She mentions that *Satguru* is counterpart of Lord Skanda who alone can lead the *Jīva* to the higher level of spiritual plane. The reason is that *Satguru* is the personification of Skanda's Śakti, whereas Skanda is the personification of "Universal Sādhanā Śakti". Esoteric importance of six faces, twelve hands and his *āyudha Vel* is given in detail. The sixth chapter describes the important temples of Lord Skanda in Tamil country. These are at: Tirupparangkundram, Tiruchchendur, Avinakudi alias Palani Hill, Swamimalai, Tiruttani and Pazhamuthirsolai, Virali malai, Vayalur, Sikkal, Enkannvelan (Enkann), Ettukudi, Mayilam, Villudaiyanpattu, Chennai, Kazugachalam, Vadapalani, Uttaramerur, Sennimalai, Kandankudi, Jnanamalai, Panmozi, etc. The sacred places where Murugan worshipped Lord Śiva are also described, viz., Tiru Edai Kazi,

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Kumarakkottam in Kanchipuram, Kizvelur, Pullirukku Velur, Peruvelur, Ilayanarvelur. Important temples of Skanda in Andhra Pradesh are at : Udayanapuram, Thottagam, Kidnagar, Haripad, Manjeswar and those in Karnataka are at : Subrahmanya and Subrahmanya Ghati. North Indian temples (ancient ones) have also been mentioned here.

The seventh chapter deals with the iconography of Skanda where all the iconographic types and forms of Skanda imagery have been mentioned along with the Sanskrit texts as quoted from various ancient texts. The last (eighth) chapter deals with icons of Skanda-Kārttikeya in detail. The author has tried her best to incorporate as much images as are known in this chapter. It is difficult to agree with her identification of Fig. 72 as Soma Skanda since it is possibly a part of *Sapta-mātrkās* and represents standing Virabhadra and Brāhmī holding a child. Her identification of Aparājita (Fig. 78) as

relating to Skanda cult is also doubtful as this deity is clearly related to Tāntric Buddhism.

Keeping aside slightly unprofessional description in one or two instances, this book is a welcome addition to the scholastic world. The way the author has covered South Indian Skanda cult, the esoteric meaning of the cult, and the temples of Skanda in whole of South India is really commendable. It gives an idea on how to include North and South India in good proportions to present a comprehensive study of an Indian cult. Dr. Rangarajan must be congratulated for her sheer passion and dedication to present such a proportionate study in such a simple language and manner which any reader with a little concentration can understand.

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