

## Skanda Shasti



Skanda Shashthi Festival is observed for six days and is dedicated to Lord Skanda, the great hero of this cosmic drama described in the Skanda Purana. Lord Skanda is also known by many other names such as Kumara, Kartikeya, Subramanya, Sanmukha and Murugan. He is worshipped as the Devasenapati (General of the Devas). In the Bhagavadgita, Lord Krishna identifies Himself with Skanda among the generals: '*Senaninam-aham Skandah*'. So Skanda is not different from Sri Krishna. Also, being the son of Siva, Skanda is not different from Siva. He is a powerful manifestation of the Siva energy, created in order to subdue wickedness and establish righteousness.

The mysterious appearance of Skanda is depicted in the Skanda Purana: A threefold force of darkness, as Surapadma, Simhamukha and Tarakasura attack the celestials. The Devas, being driven out of their abode, run to Brahma for help. The Creator offers the solution: only the son of Lord Siva-Parvati can kill these powerful evil forces. So the Devas employ Kamadeva (Cupid) to rouse the divine desire in Siva when Parvati offers Him a flower. Kamadeva is burnt to ashes (later brought back to life) as Siva opens his eyes and looks at him in displeasure. The Lord ascertains by His yogic vision that the birth of Lord Skanda is absolutely necessary to destroy the powerful Tarakasura and other evil forces. Siva's seed is given to Agni (the fire God) who, unable to retain it, drops it into the river Ganges, which in turn throws it into a reed forest. This is where Lord Skanda is born; hence, He is called Saravanabhava--"born in a reed forest". Baby Skanda is found and cared for by six women representing the Pleiades - Kritika in Sanskrit. He thus gets the name Kartikeya. Skanda or Kartikeya becomes the Devasenapati (General of the Devas). His primary weapon is a mighty spear. He leads the Devas in a war against the forces of evil. On this day of Skanda Shashthi, He destroys Tarakasura, the leader of the evil forces and subdues others.

In a cloud free sky at night, when there is no moon, there are millions of stars. The word for star is 'taraka' in Sanskrit. The millions of desires, propensities, and thoughts in human beings are the 'tarakas'. When one does not perceive divinity in all beings and has devilish qualities and a restless, turbulent mind, that mind is like a Tarakasura. Skanda kills the restless thoughts, which are the enemies. Every human being has many weaknesses, which are his enemies. The six major ones are desire, anger, greed, delusion, vanity and jealousy (kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya). To destroy these six enemies, Kumara, the son of Parvati, appears with six faces. If we love Skandamata (The Divine Mother) we should be able to destroy these enemies.

The story of Skanda reminds a Sadhaka that it is impossible to confront evil without the help of God, the power of Divinity. The energy born out of the great Samadhi of Lord Siva, whom we call Skanda, is the answer. The demons were not destroyed in the ordinary sense of the term. As per the law of conservation of energy, energy does not increase or decrease in creation; it only

transforms from one kind into another. Skanda destroying Tarakasura represents the transformation of concentrated demonical energy into peaceful energies through Divine intervention. It means redirection of the energy of outward-bound desires of every kind inwards and their transformation into the peace of the Absolute to reach the ultimate Goal of life. May Lord Skanda shower His Grace upon all.