

Kartikeya

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Unlike Ganesh Cult, Kartikeya cult was confined to South India only. In Hindu calendar the sixth day of a lunar month (Sasthi) is considered sacred to him. Tradition has it that he married 'Valli' a forest maid and 'Devasena', daughter of Indra. According to Puranas he was born as the son of Lord Siva and Devi Parvati to kill the demon Tarakasura. He is also famous in different names such as :- *Sanmatura, Sadanana or Sanmukha, Devasenapati, Saktidhara, Tarakari, Kumara, Skanda, Subrahmanya* etc. According to Sastras his mount is peacock. In an age where wars were frequent, whether to subdue an enemy or to conquer new lands, the emergence of a God of war was inevitable. The God full of youth and vigour, outstanding the luminosity of the sun was Kartikeya, the son of Siva.



It is difficult to trace the origin and the birth of Kartikeya, but in this paper an attempt has been made only to highlight the importance of Kartikeya images preserved in the Orissa State Museum. According to the story,

Kartikeya's birth took place under unusual circumstances. Indra was sitting deep in thought on the mountain, pondering on the problem who should be the commander of his armed forces. He suddenly heard the crying of a beautiful young girl on the verge of being kidnapped by a demon. Indra rescued the girl and she said that if she had a husband to protect her, she shall be free from the dangerous demons. The girl wanted a husband who was invincible, famous and a devotee of Brahma. One who could conquer the daityas and the devatas. For her Kartikeya was produced who grew up very fast and he had 6 heads, 12 eyes, 12 ears of 12 arms. So go on stories about the birth of Kartikeya legends constantly merge with imagination to pour forth hundreds of stories.

In Hindu mythology the pleiades or the seven chaste women were the wives of the seven divine sages. Six of them were raised to the sky and became the Kritikas or the pleiades and seventh one also chaste as well as pious and devoted to her husband was separately raised to the sky and became the Arundhati.

P.K. Agrawala writes Agni is credited in the Rigveda with many mothers. If they are seven in number, as his seven sisters are and as can be guessed on the basis of the tradition in the 'Yajurveda', recording seven wombs for producing Agni, similarly it is with Kartikeya's seven mothers, as Kritikas or as Rishipatnis from which one was dropped in subsequent development owing to facts observed in constellar happenings, if the Kritikas and Kartikeya myth was at all based on that or it was due to the contamination of a six faced God of separate origin with Kartikeya that one mother had to be indifferent in the origin Kartikeya for only six heads were to be produced.

The six heads of Kartikeya also represent six attributes of the duty. They are Jnana (wisdom), Vairagya (detachment), Bala (strength), Kirti (fame), Shree (wealth) and Aiswarya (Divine power).

Scholars have divided the images of Kartikeya into two types such as, type-1 without cock and type-2 - with cock, his characteristic attribute. Various texts regarding the iconography of Kartikeya are studied by famous scholar T.A. Gopinath Rao. He describes the iconography features of Kartikeya in his monograph titled "Elements of Hindu Iconography". As regards hands Kartikeya possessed two, four and more than four hands. Among these the two handed images are considered as *satvika*, four handed images are considered as *rajasika* and that of more than four hands regarded as *tamasika* in nature. According to the agamas the attributes of Kartikeya should consist of the *Sakti*, *Khadga*, *Akshamala*, *Abhaya*, *Kukkuta* and the *Khetaka* etc. Interestingly the agamas mentioned that, the images of Subrahmanya or Kartikeya should be set up in village or in a palace.

On the western portion of Parsurameswar temple at Bhubaneswar we find Karttikeya with his hair flying in the wind is shown sitting on his peacock mount. The angle at which the peacock has been carved gives the impression that it is a boat and the spear in the hands of Karttikeya looks as if he is steering a boat. Actually the spear is aimed at *asura* figures depicted below the panel. Another Karttikeya image is found in the east side of Parsuramesvara temple belongs to 9th century A.D. Karttikeya in the east side in meditation pose is shown sitting on a throne and holding a spear in his left hand and a fruit in his right. The peacock has been carved sideways below the throne. Erotic carvings are depicted in the niches on either side of the main deity.

In Muktesvara temple we find Karttikeya sitting on a Padmasana while his peacock stands on his right side and a cock on his left side, both looking up at him. The deity carries a spear in his left hand and the right hand is in *varada* pose.

Kartikeya has a very composite character, comprising diverse aspects. On one hand he is depicted as the God of wisdom as well as the God of war. But from the time when Ganesha acquired supremacy over Karttikeya and the former has been considered as the God of wisdom.

During the Kushana period i.e. the early part of Christian era the popularity of Karttikeya grew substantially. This may have been because the Kushanas were basically a martial race, so for them a God of war as a patron deity would obviously have been the right choice. This belief is corroborated by the discovery of a large number of images of Karttikeya from Mathura and the great cities of North India during the early part of 1st

century B.C. This is further corroborated by the discovery of a large number of coins of this period belonging to the Kushana king 'Huviska' bearing the image of the God of war Karttikeya.

Temples dedicated to Karttikeya are first mentioned in Kautilya's Arthashastra composed before the beginning of the Christian era. The discovery of a large number of Gupta seals shows how popular the cult of Karttikeya was at that time. Some rulers of the Gupta dynasty was at that time were even named after him such as Kumara Gupta, I, his successor Skanda Gupta and Kumara Gupta II. The Guptas were devotees of Vishnu but as generally other Gods of the Hindu pantheon are also revered by them. Kumara Gupta I was the first Gupta emperor to hold Karttikeya as the main deity as he issued the peacock type of Karttikeya coins in gold. Discoveries of Gupta images of Karttikeya have been made from many places in North India such as Varanasi, Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa also.

After the Gupta age the popularity of Karttikeya as a God declined in North India and he is mentioned more in association with Siva rather than by himself. R.G. Bhandarkar has observed that in the later medieval period it was seldom that separate shrines were dedicated to him, he having become a part of Siva's family. His image has since been always enshrined in temples dedicated to Siva. Karttikeya's role as commander-in-chief of the celestial armies is emphasized more not his qualities as a God of wisdom and learning.

Professor Banarjee observes that Karttikeya was worshipped especially in North India from early times. But since his worshippers did not get a separate status, it is presumed that they did not form a separate sect,

like devotees of the five puranic deities viz, Vishnu, Siva, Sakti, Surya and Ganapati.

So Karttikeya was worshipped under different names or aspects, such as Skanda, Kumara and Subrahmanya in South.

The State Museum has collected a series of Kartikeya images from various places of the State. Among them the six headed Kartikeya is a rare specimen. Six headed image of Kartikeya was brought from the hill fort of Junagarh by the Superintendent of Orissa State Museum, Dr. C.B. Patel. The peacock as an essential element in the iconography of Kartikeya prominently appears in the back of the image. It is made of red sandstone of the Kalachuri time. It measures 19" x 13" x 5". The upper right hand holds trident and the palm of the peacock. The lower left hand holds an indistinct object. The upper right hand is partially damaged. The figure is ornamented with heavy anklets in the half damaged foot. A big Rudrakshyamala (garland) is encircled round the neck of the image which touches the belly of the image.

References :

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