

## SUBRAHMAṆYA

(Murugan, Skanda, Saravanabhava, Kārttikeya, Kumāra)



As the second son of Lord Śiva he's the embodiment of skilful action, just as Gaṇeśa is the personification of wisdom. Skilful action (*kuśala karma*) is that which is direct at *Ātma-bodha* — self-realization. The several and collective human perfections are all personified in Subrahmaṇya. When all the five senses and the mind as the co-ordinating factor are sublimated and directed towards enlightenment then one attains super-consciousness.

Lord Subrahmaṇya was born from the Tejas or intense energy of Lord Śiva in order to relieve the gods of the oppression of Tārakāsura who had gained a boon of invincibility from Brahmā.

Tāraka-asura means the “demon-of-salvation” and he represents those factors which hinder real progress in both material and spiritual terms. The demon personifies our selfish delusions of what we *think* is in our own self-interest but is actually not. A person with a migraine headache for example may think it in their best interest to have a hole drilled in their head to relieve the pressure — a

misadventure which would surely result in death!! So we as individuals and as a society are addicted to the pursuit of short-term self-interest goals which in the long term are detrimental to us. We see this in the environmental and economic policies of short-sighted administrators.

Skilful Means and real Universal Wellbeing requires that this demon of short-term self-interest be dispatched — requiring immense effort!!

The 6 heads represent a number of concepts associated with spiritual growth and progress.

1. the organs of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*) i.e. touch, taste, hearing, smell, sight, and the mind as the 6<sup>th</sup>.
2. the six seats of consciousness in the subtle body — known as the cakras. Mūlādhāra, svadhiṣṭhāna, maṇipūra, anāhata, viśuddha and ājña. The path of sādhana is a journey through these states of ever expanding consciousness.

3. They represent the 5 states of matter (earth, water, fire, air and ether) and the jīva.
4. The 6 qualities of the Supreme Being — omniscience, non-attachment, omnipotence, sovereignty, grace and glory.

He was born as 6 separate beings and was the coalesced into a single entity with six heads and twelve arms. This is also indicative of the 5 kośas or sheaths and the jīvātman. The food sheath, the vital sheath, the mind, the intellect, and bliss sheath and the individual Self. The 12 arms are symbolic of the skill and talent to perform multiple tasks and to progress skilfully materially. Both spiritual and material progress are inseparable from a well harmonised and integrated vision of the world and our place in it.

Subrahmaṇya has many forms each one depicting a different aspect of his complex personality. As Skanda or Kumāra he is the embodiment of chastity (*brahmacārya*) and conservation of the vital essence (*retas*)

considered as essential for spiritual practice. In this form he appears as a young lad, a religious student clad only in a loin-cloth (*kaupinam*) and carry his spear.

As Ṣaṇmukha or Subrahmaṇya he is married to two wives:—

**Valli** (the earth) was the daughter of a humble farmer, unsophisticated and uneducated. She represents the casual or informal means of progress and growth. Through intuition and common-sense one can sometimes become more wise than an highly educated professor.

The other wife was **Devasena** (army of the gods) or **Devakunjari** (divine celestial elephant) — these names are suggestive of ability and power of action. The Devas rose to their high position through sheer endeavour. Indra became king of the gods through the skilful performance of 100 yajñas. The eminence of the celestials is due to skilful means alone.



## Accoutrements

Among his many weapons the most important is the Spear. The spear (*kunta* or *vēl* in Tamil) represents the focussed mind directed at the goal to be obtained or the enemy to be slain in the form of self-referent desire (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), delusion (*moha*), arrogance or feeling of superiority (*mada*), niggardliness (*lobha*), and malicious envy (*mātsarya*).



A weapon which is unique to Subrahmaṇya is the **tanka** or chisel used by sculptors and stone-masons — *śilpis*. It represents the work that needs to be done on ourselves in order to manifest our true essence nature. The figure is already present in the stone, but it takes the skill of the sculptor to liberate it. In the same way the Jīvātman is present within the body/mind casing, it takes the skill of a *sādhaka* to reveal it.

Subrahmaṇya's vehicle is the **Mayūra** — peacock which represents pride, arrogance and notions of superiority which need to be controlled in order to cultivate skilful means.

Another creature associated with Subrahmaṇya is the insignia of cock which appears on his standard. The cock always symbolizes the immanent dawn of realization. The tame snake too is his companion, indicating the taming of anger and maliciousness.

## AYYAPAN or DHARMA SĀSTA



Ayyapan is the son of Lord Viṣṇu and Śiva. The energy of compassion (*dayā*) of Viṣṇu and wisdom (*jñāna*) of Śiva coalesced into the divine refulgence *tejas* personified as Ayyapan. He is the embodiment of **Tapas** or austerity — deep meditation which generates the internal heat of both compassion and wisdom. His worship is confined almost entirely to the state of Kerala in South India. His iconography is simple — he sits in a yogic posture displaying the *varada* and *abhaya* mudras.

Sometimes he is shown riding on a tiger carrying a bow and arrows — symbolizing the harnessing of our courage and sagacity and directing it at the achievement of spiritual development.

## HANUMĀN

Hanumān is one of the heroes of the Rāmāyana and he's the embodiment of wisdom (*jñāna*) and devotion to God (*bhakti*) as well as courage and fortitude (*bala*). He is the quintessential spiritual **vīra** or hero/warrior who is humble and submissive but also capable of immense acts of valour in the cause of Dharma. He's totally dedicated to the Lord and to the preservation of the Dharma.

He is usually depicted as a humanoid monkey in the posture of submission standing in front of the temple or shrine of Lord Rāma. When enshrined alone he is usually shown holding up the mountain or brandishing his favourite weapon the club or *Gadā*. The club represents Cosmic Order (*Rta*) as well as Karma.



## KĀMA DEVA

Kāma Deva or the God of Desire is most primal drive in the universe and therefore a force which must be reckoned with. In some places he is worshipped at the time of marriage. In the Atharva Veda (9:2:19) Kāma is mentioned as the supreme divinity, the impeller of creation. Kāma Deva is the principle god among the group known as the Viśvedevas or Universal Principles who are invoked in ceremonies pertaining to the ancestors. The other Viśvedevas being:



1. *Vasu* — Dwelling Place
2. *Satya* — Truth
3. *Kratu* — Will, Intelligence, Sacrifice
4. *Dakṣa* — Ritual Skill
5. *Kāla* — Time
6. *Kāma* — Lust or Desire
7. *Dhṛti* — Forbearance
8. *Kuru* — Action, Ancestor of the Kauravas
9. *Purū-ravas* — Cry of Abundance
10. *Mādrava* — Cry of Joy
11. *Rocaka* — Pleasantness, Beauty
12. *Dhvani* — Flame
13. *Dhuri* — Leadership

Kāma is said to be Self-born but in some texts like the Harivamśa he is said to be the son of Lakṣmī. Kāma is the personification of Desire in general, but the most specific and powerful of all desire-forces is the libido or sex-drive.

Kāma has 2 wives:— 1. **Rati** — the pleasure obtained from intercourse and 2. **Prīti** — love and affection for another.

He also has a younger brother named **Krodha** — Anger, a daughter named **Tṛṣṇā** — thirst or craving, and a son named **Aniruddha** — the Unobstructed. His best friend and eternal companion is **Vasanta** — spring, and he is always accompanied by the demons called the **Māras** — strikers or killers. He is served by the Gandharvas and the Apsaras.

### The Accoutrements

Kāma Deva is the presiding deity of the mind, the god of beauty and youth. He is usually pictured as a handsome proud adolescent riding a parrot. He carries a bow made of sugarcane with a string comprised of bees. He holds five arrows.

**Śuka** — the parrot symbolizes Truth for whatever is taught to the parrot is repeated verbatim. The parrot does interpret or process what it hears and learns but only repeats it exactly.

**Ikṣu-kodaṇḍā** — the sugarcane bow. Sugarcane is sweet at the oldest part signifying that true love comes with age. The leaves of the sugarcane are sharp and capable of cutting one, the powder from the leaves is also a severe irritant, indicating that desire is always accompanied by hurt. This idea is further strengthened by the bees forming the string of the bow. Bees produce honey but they also sting. Honey cannot be gotten without some risk of pain!

**Pañca-bāṇa** — the five arrows symbolize the five flowers associated with romance as well as the five senses which are all affected by the active libido. Desire is fulfilled through all the senses — sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell.

**Vasanta** — Kāma deva is most active when accompanied by his mate Spring, all the biological universe is aroused and active in reproduction.

**Māras** — wherever Kāma goes the Striker follow. All desire is accompanied by suffering in some form — either suffering from the intensity of the love or deprivation of it or its loss. It is well attested that Love so very easily turns into Hate, which is another aspect of the same Love force.

Some of Kāmadeva's names are:—

*Madan* — "He who intoxicates with love."

*Manmatha* — "He who agitates the mind."

*Māra* — "He who injures."

*Pradyumna* — "He who conquers all."

*Anaṅga* — "He who is without a body."



Sculptures on the façade of the Khajuraho temple