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## Depiction of Lord Skandha Kumara's Myths in Sinhala Lyrical Literature

**RG Hansamala Udeni Menike**

Department of Sinhala and Mass Communication, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Corresponding Author: **RG Hansamala Udeni Menike**

### Abstract

Lord Skanda Kumara, revered and commonly known as the Hindu God of War, is also one of the central deities from the Sandesha Period (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century) in Sri Lanka, with many myths surrounding him embedded in Sri Lankan culture. This paper aims to explore how these myths have influenced the reconstruction of modern Sinhala lyrics in Sri Lanka during the 1970-1990 era. Through a textual analysis of nine purposively selected Sinhala songs, the research examined the ways in which the mythology of Lord Skanda Kumara is woven into contemporary lyrics. Songs are the result of the collaborative efforts of the singer, musician,

and lyricist. While the music intensifies the meaning of the lyrics, it is the singer's role to bring the composition to life for the listener. This study focuses on the collective effort that shapes the final song. The findings suggest that by incorporating myths of Lord Skanda Kumara into modern Sinhala lyrics, lyricists have successfully made these traditional myths more accessible and relevant to a wider audience. This research contributes to our understanding of the function of mythology in cultural communication and highlights the significance of Lord Skandha Kumara's myths in Sinhala lyrical literature.

**Keywords:** Lord Skanda Kumara, Sinhala Lyrics, Myths, Cultural Communication

### Introduction

Song is a medium that expresses the spirit of music and is enjoyed by both the young and the elderly. Contemporary Sinhala songs have a relatively short history and were shaped by influences from *Nurthi* and *Nadagam*—two forms of drama based on North and South Indian theatrical traditions. Sinhala songs developed into their current form during the Gramophone era in the early 20th century. As a result, gramophone-era songwriters were the first independent creators of Sinhala songs, making a turning point in the development of this genre. Songs are the result of the collaborative efforts of the singer, musician, and lyricist: While the music intensifies the meaning of the lyrics, it is the singer's role to bring the composition to life for the listener. The lyrical composition expresses the song's linguistic identity, while the music enhances and deepens the meaning of the lyrics. This article aims to explore lyrical compositions centered around Lord Skanda Kumara, drawing on the myths associated with him that are prevalent in Sri Lankan culture.

Mythology is a generational legend, deeply rooted in the culture: It was never just a collection of unbelievable stories for the people of the East, as it reflects and symbolizes various aspects of life, including different life stories and human experience. In contrast, Western perspectives often viewed mythology merely as stories of gods. However, these myths are more than just fictional tales, but with unknown authors. They can be classified into different categories, such as legends, folktales, and fairy tales: They are not merely ancient narratives, but rich expressions of culture and human understanding. It is both a learning and socialization process in broad contexts (Mahendra, 2003: viii-ix)<sup>[6]</sup>. Mythology can be applied to a wide range of discourses or events as a form of verbal criticism even though it is primarily considered apolitical in nature. Mythic criticism may disregard the existence of structures and dominance (Kallis, 2009: 671)<sup>[2]</sup>. However, they seem to connect human imagination regardless of time, place and culture, casting as a derivative and displacement of mythic consciousness. The universe of myth rests on the "origin" of human consciousness and culture (Leitch, 1988: 119)<sup>[5]</sup>.

The Lord Skanda Kumara is known by many names such as Kumara, Mahasen, Kanda Kumara, Kandaswamy, Kadiresha, Arumuga, Devenapati, Siddhasena, Yudharanga, Karthikeya, Shanmatura, Murugan, Shadanana, Shanmukha, Tarakari, Subrahmanya, Brahmashasta, Gangeya, Ganga puthra, Swaminatha, Rudrasunu etc (Knapp, 2005:186)<sup>[3]</sup>. According to Mythology, Lord Skanda Kumara, who is known as lord of war, was believed to be also born on the need for war. The mythical story states that seeing that Gods were about to be defeated in the battle of Sura Asura, the gods came to the Maha

Brahma for help. Knowing that war cannot be won unless “Tharaka” the mightiest star among the Asuras is killed, the Maha Brahma said that only a son of Ishvara could win the war. By that time, Ishvara was still in asceticism. The great Brahma thought that by having Kamadeva break the chastity of Ishvara and attracting his mind towards Parvati, the prince will be born out of this marriage, Lord Skanda Kumara, will be fit to perform the feat. At the same time, Kama Deva tried to break Ishvara's chastity according to Brahma's wish, the body of Kama Deva was demolished by fire, and he became Ananga. However, the attempt did not fail. Ishvara was attracted to Parvati. Seven days after the birth of Lord Skanda Kumara, Tharaka Asura was killed by him (Sivaraman, 2006: 18-80)<sup>[10]</sup>. Gods won the war owing to Lord Skanda Kumara and because of that he was regarded and worshipped as the presiding deity of war. Hence, research about Lord Skanda Kumara warrants research.

### Research problem and research objectives

Myths about deities exist in literature yet are generally confined to a specific religion: They rarely extend beyond people of the religion. However, songs, a very common form of arts exceed beyond boundaries, limitations and other differences such as ethnicity, religion, gender and age. Thus, songs allow myths to be shared across diverse listeners: This warrants research. Therefore, this study was to explore how myths of Lord Skanda are represented in Sinhala songs and thereby how these myths have become widely accessible to listeners. The study, hence, examined how myths about Lord Skanda Kumara have influenced the construction of Sinhala lyrics.

### Research Methodology

The methodology for this study involved a textual analysis of nine purposively selected Sinhala songs to examine the representation of the myth of Lord Skanda Kumara and its cultural significance. The songs were selected based on their thematic significance to the deity and the importance of mythological references. The analysis focused on how the lyrics incorporate slices of Lord Skanda's mythology and how these representations align with or reflect cultural, social, and religious contexts within Sri Lankan society. The study also examined how the use of myth in these songs contributed to the circulation and reinterpretation of ancient myths in contemporary culture. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which Lord Skanda's myth is embedded in modern Sinhala lyrics, highlighting both the literary and cultural significance of the songs for the socialization processes. In all the following quotations from the songs, the names of the lyricist are provided respectively.

### Discussion

The analysis confirmed that the story of Lord Skanda Kumara has been the subject of his form, physical characteristics, supernatural bold power to many of our lyricists. That is, the above-mentioned facts have been communicated to the general society through these lyrics.

### Vehicle Peacock

It is interesting to note that as a common feature, almost every song about Lord Skandha Kumara mentions the peacock vehicle. Generally, according to Hindu mythology, every deity owns an animal-vehicle. Accordingly, Lord

Skandha Kumara's vehicle was a peacock. The peacock was called 'Paravani' (Knapp, 2005:186)<sup>[3]</sup>. That is one special feature which distinguishes Lord Skandha Kumara from other gods. In all the following examples, the lyrics are related to the peacock.

1. *Mayurasana hinda pana Tedathi Suridune Kanda Rajane*  
(Saman Chandranath Weerasinghe)  
(Meaning - Lord Skandha Kumara spreads his glory sitting on his peacock seat)
2. *Ruhuna Pura Theda Pathura Wajabena Wadahiti Kande*  
*Rana Mayura Asuna Ara Wada Un Kanda Surinde*  
(Karunarathna Abeyssekara)  
(Meaning - Lord Skanda Kumara, who lives on Mount, which is located in Ruhunupura of Sri Lanka, sits in his peacock seat.)
3. *Dura atha ratin wadinne – Bathi dewa balaya labanne*  
*Rana Mayura Asun Daranne – Rath warna dara Dilenne*  
(Upali Danawalawithana)  
(Meaning - The Lord Skandha Kumara comes from another country and receives the power of piety and resides in the seat of the peacock, wearing red and shining.)
4. *Mayurasana Matha Wajabena Thedathiwa Uthurana Hadakin Pudedemu Bathiyena* (Clarence Wijewardene)  
(Meaning - We offer our heartfelt offerings to the Lord Skandha Kumara who sits gloriously on the peacock seat.)
5. *Mayurasana matha wada sitina kadha suriduni Oda theda radana*  
(Hema Sri De Alwis)  
(Meaning - The bravery and majesty of Lord Skandha Kumara who sits on the peacock seat remains.)
6. *Kiri wehere koth karalla mathin nagena daham ralla Sadu danan dewi puadwan Manik gan there*  
*Eran mayura asun ara – Dolos athaka barana dara Ruhunupure oda thedawan – Kadira Suridune*  
(Ranasinghe Premadasa)  
(Meaning - The Dharma is seen on the lines of white Stupa. Its named Kiri wehera. Decent people worship the glorious Lord Skandha Kumara of Ruhunupura, who has twelve hands, adorned with ornaments, seated on a peacock, on the bank of the river which is called “Menik”.)
7. *Eran Mayura Asun ara Siras hayaka ruwin lakala kadira suridune*  
(Sunil Ariyaratne)  
(Meaning -The Lord Skandha Kumara, with a handsome figure and six faces, sitting on the peacock.)

As mentioned above, 'Monara' or 'Mayura' (Peacock) is a significant symbol of Lord Skanda Kumara. The peacock symbolizes Lord Skanda Kumara. “Kawadi” is the dance used to worship Lord Skanda Kumara when referring him. It is a dance that carries a small palanquin decorated with peacock feathers (Narayan, 2007:97)<sup>[9]</sup> The Mayura Vannam, which is one of the 18 Vannams composed during

the Kandyan era (17th and 18th centuries), features a song about the peacock, and includes descriptions of Lord Skanda Kumara, as the peacock is his vehicle. The Vannam was a more popular art form during the Kandyan era.

*Satahara Siwwara balathi dhidathara surinduneyi kadhira*

*Katharagam, pura surindu wahana karathi rana monara (Kuamarathunga, 2021:203)*

*(The vehicle of Lord Skandakumara, who spreads his power to all four directions and resides in the Katharagama area, is the peacock.)*

During the Anuradhapura era, there was also a type of Vannam that was unique to the style of singing and dancing. These do not belong to the above mentioned Vannams used during the Kandyan era. These 'Vannams' are referred to as 'Rajarata Ekawisith Vannam' (21 Vannams of the Rajarata). Among these Vannams, there is also a 'Mayura' Vannam. Similar to the aforementioned Mayura Vannam, it also describes the peacock as the vehicle of Lord Skanda Kumara.

*Darayi sayawath thrisula welawi hasthayenma dara*

*Asayi melesata mayura Wannama devi anin Kadira (Kuamarathunga, 2021:330)*

*(armed trident in hand to listen about the peacock.)*

*(With his spear (Velayudha) in hand and having Six-faces, Lord Skanda Kumara commands people to listen to description of his vehicle peacock)*

However, due to the importance of this symbol of divinity, many Sri Lankans refrain from harming or killing peacocks. They believe such actions are disrespectful or inauspicious. This cultural belief is so strong that it has become problematic for agriculture in some areas with peacock populations (The Sunday Times, Feb 09, 2020). Accordingly, the above facts show how much the peacock symbol has affected the Sri Lankan people because of Lord Skanda Kumara.

### Sculptures

Similarly, Skandha Kumara has 18 sculptures namely, Skandihara, Skanda, Senapati, Subrahmanya, Subrahmanya, Gajavahana, Saravanabhava, Karthikeya, Kumaraswamy, Shanmukha, Tharakari, Senani, Brahma Sastha, Valli Kalyana Sundara, Bala, Kauncha Petha etc. All of this is due to the physical nature of the Lord Skandha Kumara. He has six faces, twelve eyes and twelve hands. He holds various objects in those twelve hands. It is believed that God had a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other hand. Not only that, but the Ketheriya (Battle Axe), shield, a book, elephant goad, trident, the sword, the stick, the conch shell and the Thomaraya (A Swadeshi Weapon), and the flag with the image of a fowl in the other hands (Wickramagama, 1997:7) [12]. The examples mentioned in the description below are comprised in the Skanda Yaga describing the complete figure of the perfect Lord Skanda Kumara with the above features.

*“The son of Pavaka (Agni) was clothed in a pair of red dustless clothes. His blazing and glorious body Shone like the sun covered in two red clouds. The cock, which was given to him by Agni and which adorned his banner and which was raised over his chariot, Shone red Like the doomsday fire. His armour entered his body which was produced at his birth; it always becomes manifest when the gold is fighting. Spear, faith, lack of confusion, protection of worshippers, and the destruction of enemies, and the protection of all the worlds were all born with Skandha, O King (Mann, 2012:60-61) [7]*

*He is eternally young. He has six faces. His body color is golden. The body radiates a red glow. He can be seen with a peacock frequently. Never degrades in strength. Always carry the bells and flags of victory. He is often surrounded by mothers” (Soratha, 2000:25) [11]*

According to those myths, the following lyrics convey how the Sri Lankan people believed in the sculptures of Lord Skanda Kumara.

*Mayurasana matha wada hindina - Kanda surinduni oda theda darana*

*Hada uthurana so duka kiyami - Himi pamula ma wada watemi*

*Muhunu Sayaki Ath Dolosakin Sobana - Sawana Yomanu Kada Surindune*

*Minisata Minisa Garahanne - Mawupiyo na ohu hadunanne*

*Shakthiya Balapa Yukthiya Paaga - Puhumanaya Hada Randa*

*Wasthuwa Nila Balathala Handa - Minisa Minisatama Dei Ninda (Hemashri De Alwis)*

(Oh, Lord Skandha Kumara, who sits on the peacock throne, I offer my respects to you and express the sorrow in my heart. Oh, Lord Skandha Kumara, with six faces and twelve hands, listen to me. Humans bear grudges against each other. Humans do not even recognize their own parents. Due to the power of injustice, justice is not upheld. The only thing that fills human hearts is arrogance. They have ego in their minds. Wealth, position, and power have led them to mock humanity.)

Devotees of this song strongly believe that due to the unique physical nature of the Lord Skandha Kumara, he can see and hear all the evils that take place in the human world. The devotee has not come to God to satisfy his personal needs. He asks God to hear and speak with twelve eyes and twelve ears the misfortune that has happened to the humankind who gathers merits for the existence of God. The reason for this nature of the Lord Skandha Kumara is also explained in the Deva Purana. As per that story, the god of fire, who came in the guise of a dove, took the sperm of Shiva's child, and placed that in the river 'Ganga'. When six princesses, who were swimming in the river saw the handsome prince born

from the sperm, they started breastfeeding him and said, 'This is my son.' It states that Lord Skanda Kumara got six faces to drink milk from these six mothers. Also, once Ishvara summoned Parvati, who was amazed by a woman when she had shown six princes each time claiming that she was pregnant with Ishvara. Suspecting that this was certainly a trick of Vishnu, Parvati immediately embraced the children, calling them 'Kumara Kanda', (a mountain of princes) and the children merged and became one prince with six faces and twelve hands and one body. He is Lord Skanda Kumara (Mann, 2012:54-55 and 87-88) [7].

The lyricist points out Lord Skandha Kumara's extraordinary physical attributes, specifically his six eyes and six ears, to highlight the god's superior ability for information gathering, understanding of world complexities, and wise judgments regarding justice.

Prince Kanda became famous among the gods as a warrior god owing to his contribution to the Sura Asura War, which was mentioned earlier, which also led to his birth. According to the Mahabharata, the gods also gave him gifts when he was given the post of commander. Accordingly, the Indra Shakti or Thomara (A Swadeshi Weapon), the Shiva Velayudha (A weapon used by God Shiva), the Vishnu Vijayanthi Malawa (god Vishnu's Weapon), the Uma two-piece dress, the Ganga honey pot, the Jupiter rod, the Garuda (a mythological animal) - Peacock Vehicle, the Aruna Rooster, and the Varuna Para Ring, and the Brahma whip were presented as prizes. It is said that Lord Skanda Kumara, who was armed with those weapons and his entourage, came to Sri Lanka and destroyed the Tharaka Asura. Folklore says that he was called 'Mahasen' as he came with a large army (Soratha, 2000:27-29) [11]. There is another folklore that is called Lord Skanda Kumara "Mahasena". The lord of Kataragama is known as King Mahasen who was born in Kshatriyagrama as known as Kataragama, which was the chief city of the Royals of Ruhuna. It is also believed that it is mentioned in the oldest stanza worshipping Kiri Vehera 'Mahasena Devassa Sammana Nian' (Kataragama Devidunta Sandesha Kavi, 2002:5-9) [13]. However, the focus here is on the name "Mahasena" which means Devasenapati. Therefore, the lyricists did not forget to mention Lord Skandha Kumara's ability to defeat his enemies in these songs.

08. *The dini Viraja – Ruwini Viraja*  
*Ruhunu Suraja – Kada Dewi Raja*

*Eran Mayura Wahanayen Rupusen Bida Wadamawanna*  
*Wadahiti Kadu matha wada hida nara kala wetha setha*  
*sadanna*  
*Katharagama Bala Mahime diyatha pathala kala*  
*harinna*

*Ana Wina Was Dos Thun biya Durala Satha Raka*  
*Dewanna*  
*Manik Gange Nimala Diyen Kilikunu Soda Harinna*  
*Katharagame bala mahimen diyatha pathala kala*  
*harinna*  
(Sunil Ariyaratne)

(Meaning - Lord Skanda Kumara, who resides in Ruhunu area with glory and beauty. Come in the golden peacock vehicle, defeat the enemies. Do good to the people, from the mountain of Vadahiti. Reveal to the world, the power of the

land where you reside, Kataragama. Protect people, dispel their fears. Purify the lives of humans with the pure water of "Menik" river, and make their lives sacred. Show to the world the power of the land where you reside, Kataragama.) In this song, the lyricist focuses on the power of the Lord Skanda Kumara. He pleads for the defeat of the enemy by helping this human being in the same way that the previous enemy forces were defeated, and he begs gods to spread the glory of Kataragama (the area where God resides) throughout the world. As a faithful devotee, he recalls the ritual of bathing in the Manik River, praying God to protect himself from all sorts of wicked things and enemies that bring evil to man. He interprets it as god's washing away of their evil and bad things. There is a strong belief in the hearts of the people that even in the land where Lord Skanda Kumara resides, a special power exists. The myth that Lord Skanda Kumara is the god of war is the reason for this. Therefore, devotees firmly believe that Lord Skanda Kumara has the power to protect the people from all evil forces."

Lord Skanda Kumara chooses Kataragama as his abode not because he killed the Tharaka Asura. There is a story behind it as well. Devasena was the divine wife of this god (Knapp, 2005:187) [3]. She is also known as Thevani Amma in folklore. But on arrival to Sri Lanka, Lord Skanda Kumara falls in love with Valli Amma, the beautiful daughter of Vedda leader (indigenous leader) who lived in Sella Kataragama. When he was unable to seduce her, Lord Skanda Kumara's brother Ganapathi helped him to win her by trickery. According to myth, while trying to win Valli's heart for his brother, Ganapati gets a tusker face. Lord Skanda Kumara married Valli Amma and made Kataragama his territory and he loved her enough to live in Lanka (Hawley and Wulff, 1984:263-266) [1]. Therefore, he has become a deity of our country, who is also known by the other names of God Kataragama and God Ruhuna Kataragama, because of his love for Valli Amma (Soratha, 2000:32-45) [11]. The subject of the following song is a summary of that phenomenon.

09. *Yamu sella katharagam – Oba yanna enawanam*  
*Kada kumara yalla Wallita Pem banda kataragam*

*Ananda Saroja – Raman Anuradha*  
*Nanathote Manik Gange dewi karunawai*  
*Hadu didi ganga nobedi ekata galayai*

*Me Sadukarayai – Sangeetha sadayai*  
*Hada wela sada widina ekama welawai*  
*Pada salaba datha walalu ekata hina wei*  
(Rathna Shri Wijesinghe)

The lyricist invites us to go on a pilgrimage to Kataragama, recalling that great love story. Lord Skanda Kumara, who hails from India, loves Valli knowing that she is not a goddess but a Vedda girl. He did not care about all the other things in the face of love and decided to marry Valli and stay in Sri Lanka. Known as a warlord in general, this god depicted as a very sensitive lover in the face of love. This is why the lover in this song invites his girlfriend to go to Sella Kataragama. Similarly, the God Kataragama is a deity worshipped by all castes, creeds and religions. Consequently, God has the same grace for all of them. Although people are divided by race, castes and religions,

the Sella Kataragama 'Manik River' the place where Lord Skandha Kumara and Valli met, is flowing undivided, kissing each other, showing the lesson of love to the world. There is only one glory of love in this area, no matter what kind of people come from any corner of the world. Sadukara (Buddhist Cheering), Deva Stothara, (Chanting) Bhakti Songs as well as Mrudanga (A Drum), Kavadi dance (A Native Dance) performed amidst the sound of trumpets in the song are equally dedicated to this deity as this god is a god who enjoys the worldliness of love and the afterlife.

### Conclusion

Thus, in almost every lyric about Lord Skanda Kumara, it seems that the unique physical features of this deity, his war abilities, the peacock vehicle, his glory, power, and strength, etc. are based on myths. Specifically, the peacock, which is the vehicle of Lord Skandha, is referenced in seven of the nine lyrics. Although Lord Skandha Kumara has several names, the name "Kandha Surindu" is used most often by lyricists. This is a Sinhala form of the name "Skandha". Another name by which he is referred to him is "Kadira devindu". Additionally, Lord Skanda Kumara's vision of love is particularly expressed in his love story. Another important point is that the lyrics convey an understanding of the myths associated with Lord Skanda Kumara and making them accessible to listeners. This allows the myths associated with the god's stories to be exposed to common people. These lyrics have become a literary medium that facilitates the recollection and understanding of Lord Skanda Kumara's myths.

Furthermore, lyrics also convey a positive message to society by illustrating the strength of Lord Skandha Kumara as highlighted by mythology. It can be considered song-based artistic communication. There is social interaction offered through these songs beyond mere entertainment. It also implies that song is a medium of communication that conveys knowledge, attitudes and messages.

Moreover, the main purpose of most of these lyrics are to seek the blessings from the Lord Skandha Kumara. It seems that the rhetorical poetic language used in these lyrics serves to establish devotion and faith in God, to motivate the minds of people towards worshipping Lord Skanda Kumara, and to impart knowledge and understanding to devotees about the god. Additionally, this language communicates the rituals followed in the worship of God. Accordingly, myths about Lord Skanda Kumara have been depicted in Sinhala lyrical literature in such a way as to instill devotion in human hearts; to believe in god's unique power, in the hope of doing good to people and society. The most significant aspect is that a common objective can be identified in the lyrics of the studied songs. The content of all these lyrics compositions is designed to highlight the important features of the myths associated with Lord Skanda Kumara. Moreover, greater attention has been paid to the myths unique to Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it is clear from this study that the created song lyrics have been made accessible to all devotees, transcending all boundaries, in a way that can be approached by all. Therefore, it is evident that the depiction of Lord Skanda Kumara's myths in the lyrics that formed the basis of this study has resulted in a cultural communication.

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