

LORD SHASHTA: Sashta means 'one who rules all the creatures' implying reference to the Supreme. The word also means pervade, pure, great and king, which descriptions include the individual Self. The philosophical significance of Lord Sashta is on par with other Vedic such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra and Agni. Having popular worship in South India, Shashta cult is syncretises and unites Shaivites and Vaishnavites. According to legends Shashta is said to be the son of a union between Shiva and Mohini, the female form of Vishnu.

AIYANAR: Among the Tamil speaking population, Shashta is known by the name Aiyandar. Stone carvings from the Arcot District dating the 3rd century refers to Ayanappa, a shrine to Chattan (Shahsta). There is also another similar inscription in Uraiyur near Tiruchirapalli. 'Chattan' is also referred to in Silappatikaram, works from Sangam literature.

BRAHMANDA PURANA mentions Shashta as Harihara Suta or son of Shiva and Narayana. The Purana describes how Shashta during his tenure on earth conducted discourses on Vedas and Vedantas to the galaxy of Gods and sages.

THEVARAMS: The 7th century works by Shaivite sages contain reference to Shashta. Sage Thirujnanasambanthar praises Shashta-Ayyandar as a celibate god, invincible, brave in warfare. He takes abode alongside bhootaganas of Shivaperuman.

STHALA PURANA: The sthala purana of Thirvanaikkaval Temple was recorded by sage Kasyapa. He informs that Shashta served Lord Shiva in this sthala. He was blessed with a vision of Lord Siva's instruction to take abode in the outer sanctorum. Apparently Shashta continues worshiping Lord Shiva during Thiruvadirai days.

ADI SANKARA: The great acharya referred to Ayyanar in Sivanandalahari. In the Southern tradition, Adi Sankaracharya is taken to be divine soul portion or 'Deivamsam' of Sri Shashta. This is parallel to Thirujnanasambanthar seen as a divine soul portion of Lord Skanda; Sundarar is seen as a divine soul portion of Alalasundarar.

SHASTA CULT: This movement took off in Kerala. There are stone inscriptions dated back to 855 CE in the Padmanabhapuram Shivan Temple. Shashta is celebrated in both Shiva and Vishnu temples. This later saw the warrior deity Ayyappa being identified with the Shashta cult. There have been several deities linked to the name Shashta. Both Ayyappa and Skanda are warrior deities. Dharma-Shashta is said to be Ayyappa and Brahma Shashta is Skanda. Both were associated with indigenous people.

PURUSHA SUKTA: The Vedas declare the nature of the Supreme Truth as Brahman. Atma and Paramatma is also a reference to Brahman. Otherwise they name it as Sat, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra etc. 'Ekam eva advitiam' – there is only one Supreme Cause. In the Vedas, Lord Maha Sashta is the Supreme being. In the Purusha Sukta, found in all four Vedas, the Supreme Brahman is described as the being who exists everywhere. This most important Vedic hymn praises the transcendental "cosmic man" – the Parama Purusha, the personification of the all-pervading Brahman- who is none other than 'Sashta.'

VEDA VAKYAS: There are even more direct Veda vaakyas on our Lord Sashta. Yajur Veda makes a reference 'Sashta adhipathir vo asthu' Sashta is the ultimate ruler, a reference to the supremacy of Sashta over every being. The Maithrayini Upanishad states 'Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Sashta, Pranava and Brahman – is one and the Same. Lord Shiva is referred to as Sarva Sashta in the Kalagni Rudropanishad.

SASTHA TEMPLE: Lord Sashta is the Primary deity with two consorts – Poorna and Pushkala. Sashta has taken eight divine incarnations for His divine missions. Out of his eight incarnations, the most popular avathara or incarnation is stationed at Sabari hills as Ayyappa. But this is a brahmachari manifestation of Shashta. Other than the Sabari Malai Ayyappa temple in Sabarimalai, there are innumerable shrines of note.

MYTHOLOGY: Kerala is reclaimed from the sea by Lord Parasurama. Thereafter he installed Devi Shrines along the west coast and installs Shashta on the hills of Western Ghats on the eastern side. Sabari Malai temple is the most prominent. There are several places where Shashta is the guardian angel or grama devata. Why did Lord Shashta descent?

Lord Dattatreya was born as the combined forces of the Trinity. Their consorts combined to be born as Leelavathi to Rishi Galava. Dattathreya and Leelavathi joined in wed-lock and lived happily. Over time Dattathreya yearned to go back and merge in Trinity. Leelavathi opposed this, and Datta cursed Leelavathi after an altercation to be born a Mahishi, a She-buffalow. Leelavathi, in turn cursed Dattathreya to be born as a Mahishan, He-buffalow. Both curses took effect. Leelavathi became Mahishi and Dhattatreya became Mahishan.

The altercation between Mahisa and Mahishi continued. Mahishi managed to merge with the Trinity but started perpetrating atrocities in this world and in the nether worlds. So, Mahishi is depicted as the incarnation of evil. When evil prevailed in the world and Dharma was at low ebb, the Lord Shashta had to descend on earth as Dharma Sastha. One of the purposes

Lord Ayyappa is classified under the three major heads: Shashta in the Puranas, Ayyanar in the legends and Ayyappan according to regional legends. Various Puranas such as Skanda Purana and Brahmanda Puranam, it is said that Lord Hariharaputhra was born to Shiva and Mohini in the kritha yoga. The joint force of Shiva and Vishnu was necessary to counter the demoness Mahishi. She got a boon from Brahma that she could only be slain by a child born of two positives, Hari and Hara, after a servitude to a human

being for a period of 12 years. To fulfill the boon got by Mahishi and to destroy that evil force, Sastha was born of Shiva and Vishnu. Skanda Purana states that Lord Sastha with His two consorts appeared before Indra and Indirani to seek blessings.

LORD HARIHARAPUTRA: During the Vedic era deities were worshiped as Agni or fire deities. Even during these times, Shashta stone deities were popular. Shashta was also the Ishta Devata of the forest rishis. These shrines are still visible in dense forests. But Maha Sastha as a principal deity and force, resides in his abode as Poorna Pushkala Sahitha Hariharaputra. Lord Hariharaputra is also the Kula devata of many Brahmin families. Sastha is the Supreme Lord of the Vedas. He bestows health, wealth and good life. Vedas play a significant part in the Sashta Preethi celebrations.

VIPRA PUJA: Sastha is also known as 'Vipra Pooja,' one who is worshipped by Vedic scholars. There is a belief that Sastha's worship is the only way of salvation for Kaliyuga – 'Kalau Sasthru Vinayakau' - Sastha is the only master in Kali.

VEDIC YAGNAS: Vedic yajnas such as Vajapeya, Pashubhanda, Jyotistoma, Ashwamedha are well known vedic rituals. Out of the forty samskaras a human has to perform, these Vedhic yagnas are to be done at least once in a lifetime. This is of top-most value in the life of every householder. Whatever he gets from his

farms, from his trade and commerce, whatever he earns from his job, must be shared with other members of universe.

In the Hariharaputra Sahasranama, Sastha is explicitly described as the Lord who gives the fruit of these Vedhic yagnas. Namaste which clearly explains the Vedhic yagnas which are not to be found even with the famous Vishnu, Shiva or Lalitha Sahasranamas are very clear and continuous in Sastha's Sahasranama. Taittiriya Aranyaka Says: "Where all are united, He who has entered within, that are born, and is the self of all, is beyond comprehension, He is Sastha the ruler of all things"

MANTRA: Loka Veeryam Mahaa Poojyam Sarva Rakshaakaram
Vibhum Parvathee Hirdya-anandham Saasthaaram
pranamaamyaham

Meaning: I bow to Lord Shasta, the upholder of Dharma and Sastra, who gladdens the heart of Parvathi. He is a peerless warrior who protects all. His glory is great and he deserves great reverence and devoted worship.

GAYATRI: [Om Bhotanathaya Vidhmahe; Bhava Putraya
Dheemahi; Tanno Saastha Prachothayat](#)

SASHTA DAsAKAM: Sastha is the son of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. He was born in this world to kill an ogress called Mahishi.

Sastha assumed the form of a baby and was found by a king belonging to Pandya Dynasty ruling over Pandalam of Kerala. He was named Iyappa. After his life's objectives were over; he entered in to a Temple in the forests of Kerala called Sabarimala.

I salute that God Sastha,
Who is the hero of the world,
Who is greatly noble,
Who is the lord protecting everyone,
And who gives happiness to the heart of Parvathi.1

I salute that God Sastha,
Who is being worshipped by Brahmins,
Who is saluted by the universe,
Who is the darling son of Vishnu and Shiva,
And who is becomes pleased very quickly.2

I salute that God Sastha,
Who walks like a vigorous elephant,
Who is filled with nectar of mercy,
And who is the God who removes all obstacles.3

I salute that God Sastha,
Who is the god of my family,
Who destroys my enemies,
And who fulfills all my wishes.4

I salute that God Sastha,
Who is the greatest of the clan of Pandyas,
Who is the playful god of Kerala,
And who is the God who looks after the oppressed.5

I salute that God Sastha,
Who rides on an elephant,
Who is the king of Tryambaka,
And who is near to Lord Ganesa.6

I salute that God Sastha,
Who is the personification of power of Shiva,
Who was born out of the body of Sreenivasa,
And who is the brother of him who rides the peacock.7

I salute that Sastha,
Whose mother is Dhanwanthari,
Whose father is Lord Shiva,
And who cures all diseases.8

Salutations and salutations to that Sastha,
Who is the lord of all beings,
Who is perennially ever happy,
Who shows mercy towards all beings,
And I pray, " Protect me great hero."9

I seek the protection of Sastha who loves his devotees,
Who has the peculiar pretty black body colour,
Who lives till the end of the world,
Who has dawn like hands which resemble lightning
Who has tall crown made of costly gems,
And Who has curly and pretty hair.10

Translated by Sri P.R.Ramachander.

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