



मार्कण्डेय कथा Legend of Markandeya

Long, long ago, there lived a sage called Mrikandu, son of the wise rishi Mrigshringa of the Bhrgu clan. Mrikandu had been married to Marudvati, a virtuous and pious woman, for several years but the couple had remained childless. Being devout worshippers of Lord Shiva, they decided to perform great austerities, rituals and offer prayers to Him in the hope that Marudvati would be blessed with the boon of a child.

On completion of the rituals, prayers and sacrifices, Lord Shiva was highly pleased and appeared before the couple. He asked them whether they wanted a wise and exceptionally intelligent son who would only live for sixteen years, or an ordinary child with average intelligence who would have a long life. Both Mrikandu and Marudvati asked the Lord to grant them the boon of an intelligent son, even if he was destined to live a short while on earth.

The Birth of Markandeya

Soon, Marudvati gave birth to a healthy, lively baby boy and he was named Markandeya. As prophesied, the child grew up to be a highly gifted boy who became well-versed in the Vedas, Shastras and other holy scriptures at an early age. He was the apple of his mother's eye and the pride of his

father who rejoiced in him every day. The days rolled by into months and the months into years. Before their loving eyes, Markandeya had grown into a healthy, strapping young lad who was fast approaching his sixteenth birthday...

As the days sped by, Markandeya noticed that his parents had started to look very sad and forlorn. He asked his father, "Pitashree, Why are you looking so sad these days?" Rishi Mrikandu gravely replied, "Vatsa, when through the grace of Lord Shiva you were granted as a boon to us, we were told that you would only live to see sixteen summers. We are saddened by the thought that we will soon be losing a wonderful and devoted son like you, in the prime of his youth."

Devotion to Lord Shiva

I Markandeya comforted his father by saying, "Pitashree, don't be sad. Lord Shiva is very fond of His devotees. I have read in the Puranas that He has saved so many virtuous people from death. From now on, I will pray to Him night and day. Do not worry... Lord Shiva will save me, too!"

Markandeya built a Shivalinga near the seashore and began worshipping it day and night by making ritual offerings and chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. The day when he was to turn sixteen finally dawned, and saw Markandeya absorbed in the worship of the Lord. But on seeing Yama, the Lord of Death, coming towards him riding on a black buffalo, the young bhakt threw his arms around the Shivalinga and clung to it, praying loudly to Shiva for protection.

Confrontation with Death

I Yama, without a thought, swung his long noose that fell around Markandeya's neck, as well as the Shivalinga. With a strong tug, he tightened the noose and began dragging the boy, along with the lingam, away. Enraged that Yama would dare to throw a noose around His form, Lord Shiva emerged in a fiery blaze of light and thundered at Yama, "How dare you touch even a hair of a devotee who is engaged in My worship!!" and flung His trishul (trident) at Yama, killing the Lord of Death. For this act, Shiva also became known as 'Kaalakaalaya' – 'the One who brought death, to Death himself'.

Blessed with Eternal Life

I Shiva then blessed Markandeya with eternal life, proclaiming that he would forever remain sixteen. Markandeya fell at the feet of the Lord and praised Him profusely, thanking Him for saving his life. He then went home to his parents who were overjoyed to see him alive.

The devas or gods who had witnessed the whole event, then pleaded with Shiva to revive Yama, as a world without death would create a heavy burden on earth. Shiva then revived Yama but admonished him not to trouble His devotees ever again.

Enshrined for Posterity

I Since that day, the fiery form of Shiva that appeared to save Markandeya has been referred to as 'Kaalasamhaara

Murti' or 'Kalri'. This dramatic legend of Shiva saving Markandeya from Yama is represented in a metal sculpture and worshipped at Thirukadaiyur, a remote temple town in Tamil Nadu. This is the place where Markandeya conquered death and became one of the eight chiranjeevis* or eternal beings.

Even today, thousands of devotees throng here to celebrate 'Shashti Abda Poorthi' or their 60th Birthday in the belief that the blessings of Shiva enshrined in it will add years to their lives.



* The eight chiranjeevis: Ashwathama • Hanuman • Kripacharya
• Mahabali • Markandeya • Parashurama • Vibishana • Ved Vyasa

युग युग में मार्कण्डेय Markandeya through the Ages

When the young Markandeya was saved by Shiva, the Lord's 'Anugraha Shakti' descended upon him. He had gained enlightenment and become a 'jivan-mukta' – meaning that he was no longer bound by death or time, and had passed beyond the cycle of birth and death. While the story of his liberation from the clutches of Yama comes down to us chiefly from the Skanda Purana, there are other versions of the story in the scriptures that differ in only minor details.

In the time of the Great Flood

One of the main sources regarding Markandeya's life, after he was saved from Yama, is the Narasimha Purana. It is recounted that the earth having once completed its four yugas was in the stage of 'pralaya' or final dissolution. The only witness to this cosmic deluge was Markandeya, who by now was renowned as a great sage or rishi. As he was praying on the banks of the Subhadra river one evening, he saw the sea rising and waves as high as mountains rushing towards him. He was swept away in the great flood and wandered thus for millions of years.

One day, while swirling around in the great waters, Markandeya saw a large banyan leaf floating towards him