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Muruga Worship in Tamil Country Exposed by Ettuthogai Literatures

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Abstract

One of Tamil Nadu's most well-liked deities is Muruga. In Tamil country, the worship of Muruga is quite old. The discovery of the prehistoric urn-fields at Adichchanallur attests to the undeniable age of the Muruga religion among the Tamils. It has mouthpieces made of gold leaf, iron spears, and bronze cocks that resemble those used by contemporary Muruga worshipers. The Sangam classical works must be consulted in order to trace the evolution of Muruga worship. The eight anthologies are the most important source of information on the Muruga religion, which peaked during the Sangam era. The date of Sangam anthologies is much debated and there has been a great deal of controversy over the existence of the Sangam as an academy of poet and also over the fixation of the age of the Sangam. A conservative estimate would prove beyond doubt that the first two centuries of the Christian era was the age of extant Tamil classics. Numerous references about Lord Muruga in the anthologies portray His cult and afford a glimpse of His original form. Muruga is known by several names in the anthologies, they are Murugu, Sey, Murugan, Velan, Neduvel and Sevvil. The purpose of this paper is to identify the cult of Lord Muruga. The worship of Lord Muruga, His close association, frenzied worship and temples of Lord Muruga.

Keywords: Literature, Sangam Classical, Murugu, Sey, Murugan, Velan, Neduvel and Sevvil.

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Introduction

One of Tamil Nadu's most revered deities is Muruga^[1]. In Tamil Country^[2], the worship of Muruga is extremely old. The discovery of the prehistoric urn-fields at Adichchanallur^[3] attests to the undeniable age of the Muruga religion among the Tamils. It has mouthpieces made of gold leaf, iron spears, and bronze cocks that resemble those used by contemporary Muruga worshipers. The Sangam classical works must be consulted in order to trace the evolution of Muruga worship. The eight anthologies are the most important source of information on the Muruga religion, which peaked during the Sangam era.^[4]

The date of Sangam anthologies is much debated and there has been a great deal of controversy over the existence of the Sangam as an academy of poet and also over the fixation of the age of the Sangam. A conservative estimate would prove beyond doubt that the first two centuries of the Christian era was the age of extant Tamil classics. Numerous references about Lord Muruga in the anthologies portray His cult and afford a glimpse of His original form. Muruga is known by several names in the anthologies, they are Murugu, Sey^[5], Murugan, Velan, Neduvel and Sevel. The purpose of this paper is to identify the cult of Lord Muruga. The worship of Lord Muruga, His close association, frenzied worship and temples of Lord Muruga.

In an instance Narrinai speaks of Lord Muruga as Kurinjikilavan^[6]. The word Kurinjikilavan is slated to be an ancient deity of the Tamils, who reside on the hill tracts called Kurunji. Besides the red Kandal flowers found in the hills are said to be associated with Muruga, who was considered to live in or to be represented by the Vengi tree. From this it is clear that even to-day the Kandal flowers and Vengi tree found in the hill tract are closely associated with Muruga worship.

Ahananaru supplements our knowledge of the worship of Murugattrupadutal by a frenzied dance called veriyatal with the divine place called Veriyatukkalam with certain additional details. Ahananuru relates the possession of a young girl by Muruga^[7]. The mother of the victim invites the priest called one Velan to Perform the veriyatal, the frenzied dance worship and a ram sacrifice. In order to avoid any catastrophe, the priest Velan^[8] prescribes the performance of Muruga

worship with the veriyatal^[9]. Further, a reference states a special structure was erected. Similarly an altar was also raised. Along with that structure, they conducted Muruga worship. At the altar, the lance and the flag of Muruga were planted and adorned with garlands of Kadampu flowers. On this occasion ram sacrifice was offered. Later on red millet or tinai mixed with the blood of the sacrificed animal^[10] was sprinkled all-round the place of worship. This ritualistic worship seems to have taken place even at mid-night and sometimes it may have lasted throughout the night.

Besides, the warrior folk called Malavar in Tamil offer their own sacrifice to Lord Muruga. On a hillock near some bushes a sculptural stone or a pillar set up in token of victory. They decorated such a pillar with peacock's feathers. They beat the drum of the barren tracts Mullai called Thudi and offer the sacrifice of a ram with the fermented juice of toddy to Lord Muruga. In addition to the warrior folk worship, Purananuru has few-references to state Lord Muruga as a war God of the Tamils^[11]. For instance one Sangam poet Kapilar calls Cereaman Celvakkatunkovaliyathan, the Chera ruler as brave mighty Cey (Muruga) in the heroic battle field. It explains how Muruga is used as the standard of comparison to ancient Tamil monarchs.

Besides, a term Anankudai Murugan Kottam found in Purananuru, speaks of the temple of Muruga. The kottam, an interesting word is in usage even today and a temple dedicated to Muruga is known by the term kottam. The word kottam is derived from the word kotu meaning mountain. The temple of the God of the mountains has significantly come to be known as kottam till today. In addition to kottam, Ahananuru makes mention of Alaivai and Parankunru the important worship place of Lord Muruga. From the above mentioned references it may be seen that an elaborate worship offered to Lord Muruga in Temples.

In addition to the temple, Ahananuru has provided clues to the image or icon of Muruga. In many instances the poets mention Muruga as Neduvel. The term Neduvel literally meaning the tall figure of the God and the limbs are strengthened by a reference noted by Nakkirar. He describes the figure of Lord Neduvel. Lord Neduvel is adorned by a pearl-neck lace on his broad red chest. Beside, the term Tatakkai found in the same work is nothing but Lord Neduvel

long arms. From this it is clear that the Lord seems to as a tall warrior with long hands and in one of his hands holding a lance, the traditional weapon.

In addition to the manifestation of Lord Neduvel, Narrinai has an interesting reference about Valli^[12], the consort of Lord Muruga. It is clear that in the 2nd century A.D. the story of Valli^[13] and Muruga was sufficiently known to provide a divine model^[14] for human behaviour. From this we can surmise that during the time of Ahananuru the Muruga cult in Tamil Nadu spread through the towering temples and Muruga images were in worship in the temples even before the time of the Pallavas^[15].

This paper clearly explains that the concept of Muruga appears to have originate, when tribes of Tamil Nadu evolved into a higher stage of social organization. When metals came to be used extensively in the process of production and war, they worshipped Muruga as an indigenous Tamil deity.

In the latter stage of the development of society, many tribal myths entered the Muruga cult, which produced a new concept^[16]. At this juncture, the North Indian war God Karthikcy was incorporated into the Tamil Muruga.

It seems that the North Indian Sanksrit Skanda, also known as Karttikeya, and Visakha were considered distinct deities. Skanda and Visakha seem to have been considered distinct deities in North India, even by Patanjali. Over time, the two gods transformed into one. Tamil Nadu worshipped Muruga in a different way than the North. Tamil Nadu, the region south of the Vindhya, eventually adopted certain elements of the North Indian Skanda worship as a result of Aryan influence. Even though, the cult of Muruga borrowed certain elements from the North. The other trails like the concept of Valli and the performance of Veriyatal worship are the outcome of the Tamil society. The above mentioned references clearly state that the cult of Muruga considered as the creation of the ancient Tamil society.

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Namuru tuyara nokki yannai

Velar ranta laenav velan

V.251, 12, p.372.

Kunrakuruvan katuuvut peni

Irantana petta valvali kurumal

- [9] S. Arulam pazhavanar, (ed.), *Patirrupattu*, Yalpanam, Sivanantanathan Publication, 1960, Munrampattu, v. 26, 12-14, p.179.

Murututanru karutta kaliyali mutur

Urmpil kurrat tannanin

Tiruntutolil vayavar cieyanate.

- [10] P.V. Somasundaranar., (ed.), *Kuruntogai*, Madras, T.S.S.P.S., 1978), V. 362; 1-5, p.541.

Murukayarn tuvanta mutuvay vela

Cinava lompumati vinuvauva tutaiyen

Palve raruvir cillavil mataiyotu

Cirumari konerivaru narunutal nivi

Vanankinay kotutti yayin,

Ibid., V.360; 1-2, p.538.

Veriyena unarnta vela noymarun

Tariya narutal annai kaniya.

- [11] S. Duraisami Pillai., (ed.), *Puranauru*, Fourth edition, Madras, Tenmitya Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Society, 1968.
- [12] K.V., Zvelebil, “*Valli and Murugan a Dravidian Myth*” 1.1 j. Vol. 19, (1977), pp 242-243.
- [13] P.V Somasundaram., (ed.), *Paripadal*, Madras, T.S.S.P.S, 1957, V.19;12-13, P. 296.
Vriman punaikalam ontulkil tangip
Puriman puraviyar pokkamay terar
 Ibid., V. 8., 103 – 104, p .118.
Kanavir rottatu kaypilay yakatu
Nanaviar ceppanin
- [14] E. V. Anandaramaiyer., (ed.), *Kalittokai*, Thanjavur, Tamil University, 1984., Kurinjkali, V. 39; 26 – 29, P.216
Teriyuiay niyunin lelum punara
Verayyuray teyva mavappa uvandu
Karuvay taliya matak kararayu
Konder nilaypatik kan.
 Ibid., *Palaikali*, V. 27; 15, p.149.
Curkonra cevvelar pati palanak
- [15] W. Fred Clothe., *The Many Faces of Murukan the History and Meaning of a South Indian God.*, (Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1984), p. 24
 W, Fred Clothe., says that the poetic collections in the anthologies may be dated considerably later; The *Paripatal* and *Kalittokai*, the two anthologies in the *Ettuthokai*; and the *Thirumurukaruppatai*, one of the idyll of the *Pattupattu*.
- [16] A. Kandiah., *Cult and Workship of Murukan as Reflected in the Paripatal and the Thirumurukarrupadai*, Columbs, The Open University of Sri Lanka, 1980.