

MURUKAN

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD

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Murukan is the most venerated God of the Tamils from the time of their known history. He is the god of the Kurunci people – hill and surrounding regions. The word Murukan stands for beauty, youth, victorious and so on. There are two words, Ceyon and Murukan used to denote him from the very early period. The earliest Tamil grammar *Tolkappiyam* assigned to the closing years of BCE or the beginning of CE is “Ceyon” while the *Purananuru* and other Sangam works mention him as Murukan. No known Tamil work earlier than these exist to give us information about Muruka. Among the Sangam works two group of works namely *Paripadal* and *Thirumurugarrupadai* That give great details about Murukan are considered later by some scholars. They themselves are not sure how late they are, because their view is based on subjective assessment and not based on any scientific evaluations. So much so there are as many dating as there are these writers. All the rest of the Sangam works are considered early and these would include *Pattupattu*, *Purananuru*, *Ahananuru*, *Narrinai*, *Kalittokai*, *Ainkurunuru*, *Kuruntokai*, and *Patirrupattu* are considered as early texts. Though the two group of poems mentioned earlier the *Paripadal*, and *Murugarrupadai* are considered later yet the information available in them may be close to the others mentioned and may be taken to reflect the tradition found in them.

It is seen that Tolkappiyar refers to Murukan as “Ceyon” (Kumara). Professor P.S.Sastry who was the first to translate the whole of *Tolkappiyam* into English and was a brilliant scholar of Tamil and Sanskrit has cited many passages from *Mahabharata* and Tamil literature wherein the Tamil passages are seen as direct translations of the Sanskrit passages. Those who read them can see for themselves his claim. I have gone through both the citations and have no hesitation in saying that Sastry is right in his conclusions.

I will cite some verses from other works which are early works. A verse in *Purananuru* (no 56) refers to four gods as the protectors of the world. They are Rudra Siva, Muruka, Balarama, and Krishna. Among them Muruga is referred to by the word Ceyon and Murukan

Manimayil uyariya mara venri pinimuka urti on ceyyonum

First the verse mentions him as Ceyyon (Kumara red in color) with peacock in his flag, and rides on an elephant and was ever victorious. Later in the same verse he is called Murukan who invariably achieves what he strives for.

Murukottiye enniyatu mudittalin

The descriptions of the four gods mentioned in this verse are as follows. Rudra Siva who has the bull in his flag, his matted locks of hairs are red like fire; he has his throat like a black gem. He wields an axe and is ferocious like the God death in his attack on enemies that can not be warded when it falls. The next is Ceyyon (Kumara) who would accomplish what ever he sought for. The third is Balarama, white in color like that of Conch shell from sea, wield the invincible plough as his weapon and is known for his tremendous strength. The fourth is Krishna, gem blue in color, who is also terrific and holds an eagle on his flag. He is the most famous god.. The verse says that these are four gods who are protectors of this universe. These earliest traits mentioned for “Ceyon” are seen along with the puranic accounts of all the other gods mentioned with him. The poem was sung by Nakkirar of Madurai, the son of Kanakkayanar on the Pandya. He is the same Nakkirar who sung the poem *Thiru murukarrupadai*, which is considered a later

work. Why? We will not go into that question now except saying that it is not appropriate to take it a later work.

The puranic iconography and legends are fully developed in *Purananuru*, *Aham*, *Kalittokai*, *patirrupattu* and other sangam works. For example the *purananuru* (verse 55) sung by Marudan Ilanagar, on Pandya Nanmaran refers to the destruction of the three cities, *Tripurasamhara* by Siva in detail. Siva is said to have taken the lofty Meru mountain in his hand as bow and with the terrific serpent as bow string and a single arrow consisting of Vishnu, Agni and Vayu destroyed the cities, sending them into flames and gave victory to the Devas. He had the third eye on his fore head which also sported the crescent moon. This verse shows that pan Indian puranic accounts are reflected in the earliest group of Sangam literature. The same poems reflect the local legends *Talapurana* when it says Muruka destroyed the demon Surapadma on the wavy sea off the Thiruccendur shores and calls him “Sendil Neduvel”..

This again is not an isolated reference. A verse in *Ahananuru* (266) refers to “Cey” (Kumara) as one who won the battle on the wavy sea at Alaivay that is “*Thiruccir alaivay*” the early name of Thirucchendur.

“*Thirumani vilakkin alai-vay ceru-miku cey*”

Thus we do have two different sources from the Sangam texts considered earliest group and they speak about the Sthalapurana of Muruka’s exploits at Thirucchendur pointedly.

Another Sangam work *Kalittokai* (37) refers to Kunru of Velan who destroyed the demon on the waves of the sea after subduing all the enemies. He the god of spear was victorious an allusion to Muruka’s sport on the sea. Also please see the Muruka is called Velan, a term used frequently in later literature. In none of these early instances we have a description Muruka as “*Pey*” (*Pisaca*), “*Demon*” (*Bhuta*), and “*Skeleton*” as claimed by Mahadevan in his article. All of them describe him as a beautiful young and victorious

God of the pan-Indian puranic God and also as the God of the *sthala purana* Also it is necessary to stress the point that Iconographic concepts mentioned in pan-Indian Puranas and also the *Sthala puranas* are fully developed in the earliest group of Sangam classics.

There is no Tamil poem or a single data available that could be cited as earlier to this group or as put by Mahadevan “prior to the age of Sanskritisation of Tamilnad”. What has been projected by the protagonists as “The Murukan of the early Tamil society before the age of Sanskritisation was primitive tribal god conceived as a demon who possessed people or hunter. The characterization of the earliest Tamil Murukan is in complete accord with his descent from the Harappan skeletal deity with similar traits revealed through pictorial depiction of early myths and Dravidian linguistics” IM

It is a very curious argument. There is no earliest Tamil Muruka existing to show that it is before the age of Sanskritisation. The skeletal deity of the Hrappan is a hypothetic speculation (see the beginning of IM’s article) Two non existent factors are shown as proof for establishing a Demon as Murukan. Such conclusions are brought in Indian logical systems as *Reductio ad absurdum*.

There is a word in Tamil *Anangu* which is taken to refer to Demon. The real meaning of the Word is “One without a form” or “invisible“ Na *angah iti anangah*. The Murukan is derived from *Murukku* “Pey”, is an absurdity. Muruka is not a demon in literature but a destroyer of demon. I have shown earlier that the earliest description of Muruka shows him “Cey” “Kumara” who destroyed surapdma the Demon. This data occurs with other deities like Indra, Varuna, Kama, Vishnu, Rudra, Krishna, Balarama and Durga permeating the entire landscape of Tamilnadu,

Therefore it becomes necessary to examine the real source of the word Murukan. The Tamil Lexicon gives a number of meanings to the word. The most relevant meanings are

Lord, Supreme Being; *Kurunci talaivan*, Chief of hilly tract, Skanda, Suresa; *Su-rnavai Murukan* (in *Purananuru*) *Cey cemmai* (*Paripadal*) *Cevvay*, *Ilamai* (*Pattinap-*

palai) Youth, tender age, Skanda (*Divakaram*) Fragrance (*Maduraik kanci*) *Muruvu* beauty. These are the meanings obtained from Sangam works, Divakara, Tevaram etc. In none of the words cited in TL do we find the meaning Pey, Skeleton, etc. On the other hand all give the well known Puranic character only. We therefore reject the interpretation of the so called age prior to the sanskritisation of Tamilnadu. What is more curious is that these untrustworthy conclusions are taken to prove the Dravidian nature of Harappan Civilization as established. We will not give any credence to this type of speculative approach.

It must be kept in mind that when the word *Murukan* appears it appears with also the word *Ceyon* i.e *Kumaran*. The first chapter of the *Porulatikaram* of *Tolkappiyam* classifies the landscape of Tamilnadu into four regions name *Mullai*, (forest region) *Kurunci* (hill region), *Marutam* (Fertile region) and *Neytal* (coastal region) and (and also *Palai* the Desert region). This is an important classification that denotes the whole land of Tamilnadu. It is also mentioned by commentators that this classification should be used by all those either living in Tamil Nadu or outside when they write about Tamils which shows great importance to this classification as including the whole Tamil land. The *Tolkappiyam* in *Ahattinai* also mentions presiding gods for each of the region as follows

Mullai – Thirumal (Krishna)

Kurunci – Ceyon (Murukan)

Marudam - Vendan (Indran)

Neidal - Varunan (Varunan)

(Palai - Durga (Korravai)

Mayon meya kadurai ulakamum

Ceyon meya mai varai ulakamum

Ventan meya tim punal ulakamum

Varunan meya perumanal ulakamum

Mullai Kurunci, Marudam Neidal

Ennum colliya muraiyal collavum patume

The whole of Sangam literature is based on this classification. Sutra 5. There is another in *Tolkappiyam* no 18 in the same chapter that speaks of several other constituents of each region like God, Food, animals, tree, birds, drum, yaz, profession, inhabitants, flower, river, Village etc. These factors are called *karu*. Naccinairkkinayar, the commentator, gives a brilliant analysis of them with reference to each of this region. A study of these constituents show us that depending upon the environment and the predominant inhabitants the other factors are named as *Mullai Kurunci Marutam and Neidal* etc. Naccinarkkinayar lists all these under each region, especially the God, Food, animals etc. In addition he also gives the names of the yaz and drums they used which show they were derived from the profession

The following are mentioned for forest regions. The people inhabiting the region are called Ayars (Yadavas) coherds and sheperds, who rear cattle. Included among their livelihood is Cattle lifting from the nearby regions, and they use a particular type of drum while going on cattle lifting expedition called “*Toruk-kot parai*” The cattle lifting drum. Their yaz is called *Mullai yaz*

Similarly the Marutam people are called Ulavar, their animal is buffaloes their profession is planting and transplanting and havesting food crops. Their yaz is called *maruta yaz*. They use ethe drum called Manamuza (marriage drum and *Jallari*. The Coastal people were called as *Nulaiyar* or fisherment and they live on the sale of fish and salt. Their profession is fishing and so use the drum called fishing drum *Min padu parai*. By beating them they net a lot of fish.

The people of *Palai* are called Eyinars who live by high way robbery and their drum is called highway robbery drum.

Thus we find that every region has its own character. Under the scheme we find the people of Kurunci are called Vettuvar, Kanavar, and Kuravar. Their animals are said to be Elephant, Tiger, Boar, and Bear. Their birds are peacock and parrot They generally

practice honey gathering, chasing birds like parrot that destroy the grains, digging roots etc. Their yaz is called *Kurunci yaz*. Their drum is called “**Murukiyam** “ and “*Todnadakam*+. Please note the name of the drum they use during hunting is *Murukiyam*. It clearly indicates that the term Murukiyam is connected with hunting. That gives us the clue to the origin of the word Murukan given to Ceyon. The word for hunting in Sanskrit is “**Mrg**” or “*Mrgyana*+. It is known *Mrga* stands for animal and hunting is “*mrgyam*”. **Mrgya** changes into “**Muruku**” in Sanskrit. Such a change is quite commonly found from the Rk vedic times onwards. The word “*kru*” to do is changed into “*kuru*” in the age of Rk veda itself. see *Karoti – kurutah- kurvanti*” See Monier Williams Just as *krit* becomes *kurut – Kurute* etc in Sanskrit *Mrig* becomes *Muruk* in Sanskrit. **Muruka** stands for hunter, also the lord of hunters. Chief of hunters.. Thus it is proved beyond doubt that the Muruku standing for Ceyon (Kumara) is a direct word from Sanskrit as Varuna, Vendan Kaman, Durga etc. This has nothing to do with “Pey”, or “Bhuta” or “skeleton” as proposed by Mahadevan. Once this is understood then all the other iconographic details of Ceyon fall into position. For example Ceyon’s flag is peacock, the bird of the Kurunci region, his mount is Elephant, Yanai again of Kurunci, his weapon is spear the hunting weapon per excellence, he married a hunter’s daughter Valli, and he was given honey and *Tinai mavu* etc. It was given to him to destroy the demon who appeared as a mountain. We are right on the correct word that has the authority of linguistics, puranaic, literary, and all other criteria. We are also relieved from twisting the meaning of the word *muruku* from Murukku, twisted bangles. We come to the irrefutable conclusion that the word Murukan is derived from the Sanskrit word “Mrg”. We also are relieved of the unbelievable speculation of calling it a Dravidian word prior to the Age of Sanskritisation and connecting with Harappan skeletal figure which itself is a speculation. There is no connection between the Murukan of Tamilnadu and the Harappans.

