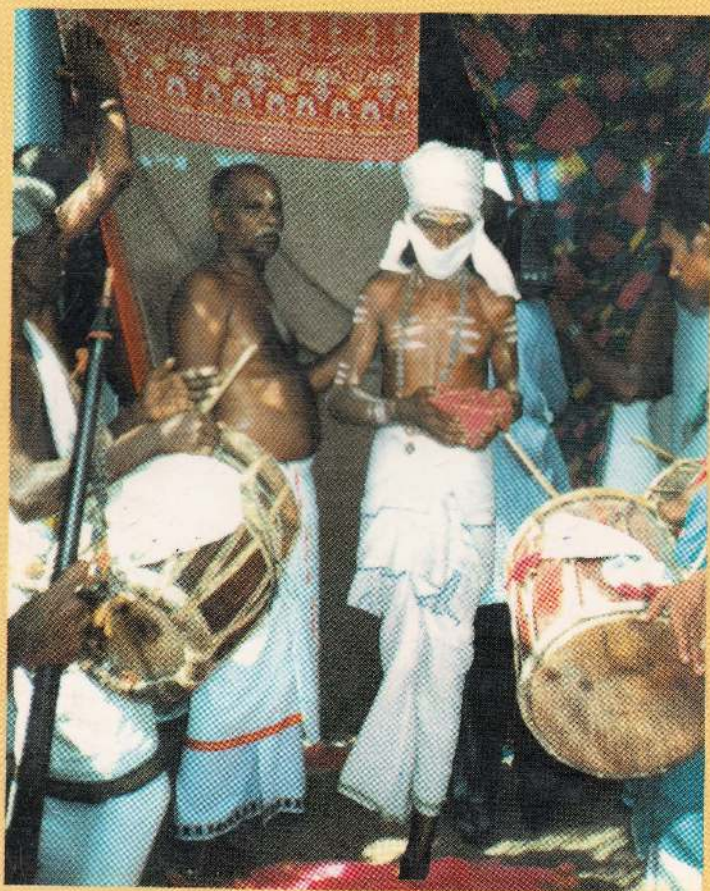


Cult of Murugan in Eastern Sri Lanka



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The Cult of Murugan in Eastern Sri Lanka

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CULT OF MURUGAN IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MURUKAN - SKANDA

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1st Dec. 2001.

The International centre for study of Murukan – Skanda was established with the first International Conference Seminar at Institute of Asian Studies , Chennai in the year 2000. Second conference was held in Mauritius.

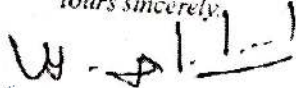
Originated as a regional cult, Murukan worship gradually developed into a national cult and at present blossomed forth into an international one. The main aim of the conference is to disseminate the knowledge gained by mutual dialogue and free exchange of thoughts on Murukan cult for the benefit of entire community at large.

Dr.N.Shanmugalingan, Head, Dept. of Sociology participated and presented research papers in the first two conferences. At the first conference he presented a valuable paper which reveled the continuing and changing patterns of Murukan cult in Eastern Sri Lanka. At the Second International Conference at Mauritius Dr.Shanmugalingan's presentation dealt with the Unique features of Kathirkama Cult in Sri Lanka .

Dr. Shan's deep knowledge in the field of Sociology/ Anthropology and his continuous thirst for research are revealed in these presentations . Dr. Shan's research work on The Cult of Murukan in Eastern Sri Lanka is being released now.

In this context I am very pleased to express my greetings and best wishes to Dr.N.Shanmugalingan.

Yours sincerely,



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DR. G. JOHN SAMUEL)

Chairman - ICSMS

Eastern Sri Lanka is a region, wherein various ethnic groups, including the tribal Veddhas, have been living together. Tamil speaking Hindus are the major group in Batticaloa and their social formation is based on a rigid *Kudi* (Matrilinial Clan) system. This region is popular for Kannakai, Mother Goddess worship and also for Skanda- Murukan worship. Skanda – Murukan is known as Velāuthasāmy, Kumarathan, Kumara-thambiran and lately Muruka Kadavul in this region. The cult practice of this region vary from ancient patterns to modern types. Although Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka is rich with such ritual traditions, very little studies have been carried out in this regard. This study analysis, the Skanda- Murukan radiations in the Socio-Anthropological perspective.

Methodology

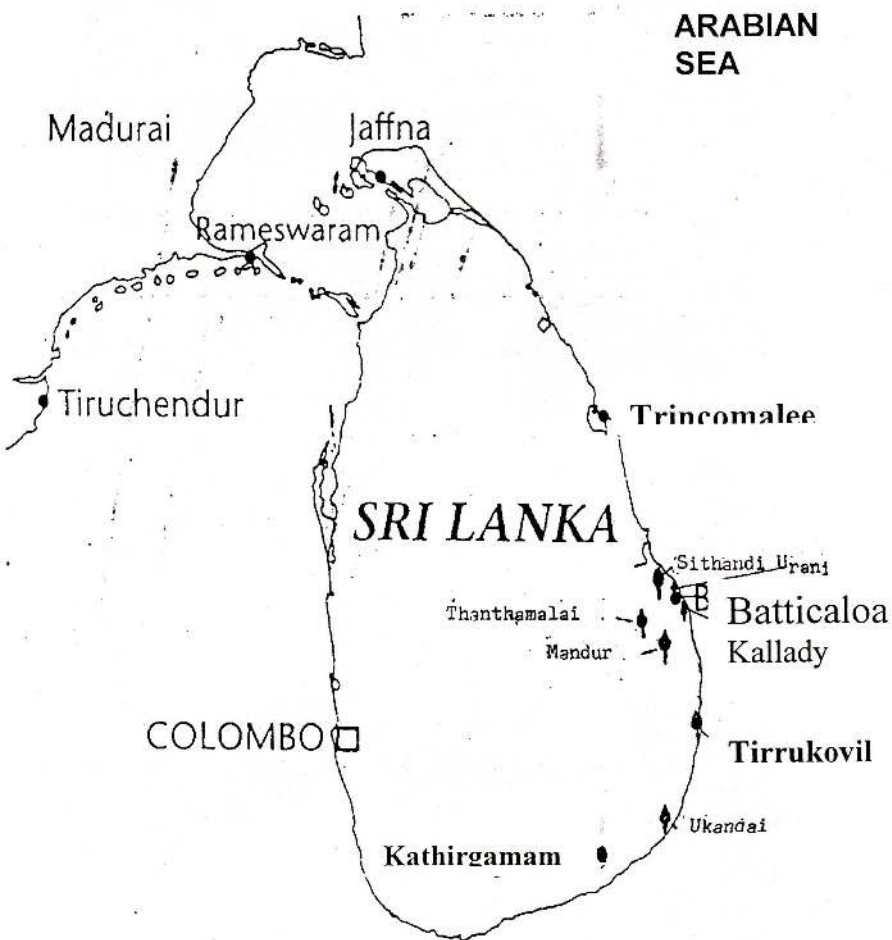
The data obtained from field work in Ancient worshipping centres, New temples and the modern cultic groups are the primary sources of this study. The traditional temples of Mandūr. Thirukkōvil, Ukandai, Thanthamalai, Sithāndi have been

selected together with a few recent temples for in-depth study.

The symbol of worship, worshipping pattern, location of the temple, Temple structure, Temple administration, class structure of the devotees were looked into and in addition the historical development of the temples was also examined.

Participant and non-participant observations have been made during the annual festival times. Interviews were carried out with the devotees by using judgement sampling technique. Temple authorities were also interviewed in detail. People have been very cooperative. Temple authorities gave the information with pride and prestige.

In addition, systematic observations have been made of newly emerged cultic group of Murukakadavu! headed by a new *Sittar*, Thanthā malai Samy.



Murugan Temples in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka



Veddha Arathi Penkal

Skanda-Murukan Temples of the Eastern Region, Sri Lanka

Case Study 1

Mandur Murugan Temple

The Mandūr Murukan temple is situated along the Batticaloa lagoon, about 20 miles south of the Batticaloa town itself. The temple is popularly known as *Thillai Mandūr* or *Chinna Kathirgamam*. The temple is shrouded in myths, most of these center round the Veddhas, some of these are described below:

Myth I

God after successfully defeating the Asuras was returning East, when he was encountered by the Vāhūra hills. God in his anger split the hill into two with his *Vēl*. Three bright rays emanated from this each one of the rays traveled in different directions. One of these reached Mandūr and sheltered within the "Thillai trees", which came to be patronized by the Veddhas.

Myth II

During the Chola rule, the queen Seerpathathevy left for the Northern Kingdom (Sinha Nāgar), but before leaving handed over her golden *Vēl* to *Seerpathakulam* members, and requested them to cherish it. To this day, members of this group are given prominence at all temple functions.

Myth III

The origin of the temple is centered around the Veddhas itself, who for their protection and safety used their weapons, the bow and arrow as symbols of worship.

Myth IV

Another myth relate to the might of the God Skanda – Murukan. Some of the European soldiers after the conquest of the East, moved to the temple to rob, but they were swarmed by wasps, the frightened soldiers fled for their lives, leaving behind their weapons. The latter are still kept in the Sanctum Sanctorum to pronounce the might of the God residing at Mandūr.

Temple Structure

A permanent temple was put up in 1215 – 1248 by King Naga, the structure of the temple is a replica of that in Kathirgamam. In the outer courtyard there are two shrine rooms, one of there is for Theivayānai Ammān and the other for Valli Amman. In the inner courtyard there are two shrine rooms one for Pillayar and the other for Nāgathambiran. There is a worshipping platform for Kumāra-thambiran. In addition there are nine stone *Pitas*, one representing Valli's brother, and the other eight, the *Attathikku Palakar*, meaning those in charge of the eight directions.

Worship Patterns

Ancient and is identical to that in Kathirgamam. The officiating Priest is called *Kappukanar*, equivalent of Kappurala of Kathirgamam. The Priest is chosen from the Seerpathakulam. The Veddhas are also given equal importance, the *Arathi Pen* for instance is chosen from the Veddha group.

The devotees offer as in other temples cooked food, fruits etc., some of them cook milk rice and sweet meats in the outer courtyard. At present with the people the soldiers offer live poultry to the God requesting for God's protection.

Annual Festival

The annual temple festival of 20 days, starts with the hoisting of the flag and ends with the water cutting ceremony, which falls on a full moon day in the month of August. A 'Sacred box', representing the deity is taken in procession in a covered *vāganam*, on its way is brought to the Valli Shrine for a while before returning to the main temple. On the last day, following the water cutting ceremony, Murukan rests in Valli's Shrine for the rest of the day. During the procession *Arathi Penkal* and the Veddha representatives faint, and they recover only after being carried to the Valli Shrine before the lowering of the flag on the last day, with the lowering of the flag, the festival is declared over and the Vannimai (Vannakar) is informed that successful manner in which the festival has been conducted.

The day ends with the management taken in procession to a feast prepared by the Vannakkar, Vellalar, *Kannkakapillai* and the Thesa Vannimai, (the authorities of the surrounding villages).

The ritual importance and prestige given to the administrators like Vannakar and others is so strong which reinforce the continuity of the administrative structure. In addition the present day socio Political problems have helped to maintain this administrative structure. To a question about any changed in administration or temple structure one of the leading authorities said, "We should preserve our traditions not only for our prestige, but also for our regional identity".

On the 3rd day after the water cutting ceremony, the Veddhas celebrate by cooking what is called a *peravial* consisting of milk, rice sweat meats and venison and offer the same to kumarathambiran in earthen pots.

'Kandashasdi' is another important festival, celebrated for 6 days in the month of October. On the last day, during the divine marriage of Murukan to Valli and the devotees divide into two groups, one representing the bride party and the other the bride – grooms party and exchange *'Seervarisa'*, just as in a village wedding. At the end of the fasting, devotees cook milk rice and offer it to the *'Kannikai'* (Maiden).

Case Study – 2

Ukanthai Malai Murugan Temple

Ukanthai Temple is at the foot of the Ukanthai Malai a prominent hilly area, in the Eastern region. Murukan temple is at the foot of the hill. This is another place where King Ravana is said to have rested and worshipped on his way to Koneswaram in Trincomalee.

According to another myth, the third ray from Vāhūra hill, reached here and sheltered on this hill, hill tops are favourite sites for Murugan temples.

There is yet a third myth according to which, Valli and Murugan left in a boat to reside on tops are of the Ukanthai Malai. The temple is located along the Eastern shores of the country, along which the pilgrims travel to Kathirgamam. In places like Panama, Kumana, which are close to the temple, Tamils and Sinhalese lived in harmony, until the breakdown of the ethnic war.

Temple structure

Valli Malai gets its name after the Valli Amman temple on this hillock. An image of Pillayar and a *Vel* are also found in this temple.

The temple for Murukan is small and is only about 3 feet high. In front of this temple instead of the Murukan's *Vaganam* the '*Myl*', there is the shrew, the *Vaganam* for Pillayar. Close to these temples is a platform under a tree with a fixed *Vel*, and this may have been the original symbol of worship.

In front of Valli Amman temple are 8 water holes, one of these is referred to as 'Saravana Poikai' and are said to be sunk during the Vanniyar rule.

Worship Pattern

Regular *Pujah* are conducted and annual festivals are held for 15 days and the last day falls on the New Moon in July. Worship pattern is of folk

tradition, yet on the first day of the festival the flag is hoisted, but there is no *kodithambam*.

During the procession, the *Vel* is carried in a tray dressed in silk, and hence referred to as "*Pattu Sāmy*" At the end of the water cutting ceremony, the procession is taken to *Valli Nāchchiar* shrine. Here milk rice is cooked by a few selected people and offered to the Gods.

Ascetics are said to reside in the hillocks scattered along the sea-shore. A prominent *Samadi* is seen here, and this is said to be the resting place of one of the famous Ascetics who lived here.

Case Study -3

Thirukovil Chitra Velaayutha Swamy Kovil

The temple is in the Eastern coast, about 50 miles South of Batticaloa with a very ancient history and categorized as the first Thiruppadaï Kovil. The temple is located close to the sea, where a port must, have been present and was referred to as Kandapānan Thurai. Thirukovil on the Eastern coast is where pilgrims rest on their way to Kathirgāmam for the annual festival.

According to one myth, King Ravana is said to have worshiped here on his way to Koneswaram in Trincomalee, he erected a Sivan temple at this site.

Vedddhas treasured this place as the site where one of the rays which emanated at Vāhūra hill sheltered. A murugan temple was constructed at this site. History relate the origin of the temple to Chola and Pandyan rulers.

Temple structure

The Sanctum Sanctorum faces Eastwards to the Sea, has an unusually large Vimanam and the temple architecture is typically Pandyan. In the inner courtyard are two shrine rooms for Pillayār and Nagathambiran.

Administration

Tamil Inscriptions discovered at the vicinity of the temple refers to a vast extent of Paddy land donated to the temple by those who ruled the region at various times. Inscriptions of the Māhon period refer to the manner in which the temple should be managed. Each *kudi* is given a special task to perform, and this contributes to the cooperation of all those concerned for an effective administration.

Worship patterns

Regular Pūjahs are now held, according to agamic traditions. The annual festival is celebrated for 10

days, with the water cutting ceremony on the New-moon day in July –August.

The story relating to Thangammai, the *Arrathi Pen* is very popular and is often quoted to show the might of the God. This lady was very old and one night she failed to come in time for the night puja. The Vannakar became angry and gave the rites to another lady. The old lady was very hurt, and stood in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum for hours and asked God's grace. Murugan moved by her devotion changed her into a young girl. The management deeply moved by her piety, reinstated her as the *Arathi Pen*.

Even now, devotees come to this temple when they are in difficulties particularly due to military operations in the area. They feel that it is only God who can give protection.

Case study – 4

Sithāndi Murugan Temple

This is one of the newly added *Thiruppadaï Kovil* in the Eastern region which like any other temple in the East was initially patronized by the Veddhas. However according to another myth, the temple is said to be founded by an *Andi* (ascetic) and the temple “Sithandi” probably takes its name after the founder.

Temple structure

The temple is very large with 7 Kopuram , on either side of the main temples are two Shrine rooms for Valli and Theivayanai, consorts of Murugan. There is also a temple for *Kumarathan* in the outer Courtyard. In the Sanctoum, *Vel* is the symbol of worship.

Worship pattern

It's a blend of agamic and traditional worship patterns . The annual festival lasts for 15 days. From

the 4th day onwards, special *Pujahs* are conducted in the Valli Shrine and Gods are taken in a procession around the inner and outer courtyards. It is important to note here, that the curtain in front of Theivayanai remain drawn out and all *Pujah* performed in front of the curtain.

Myil Kattu Thiruvila is a special event, where there is cultural approval by parents and relatives for love marriages or even for elephant. In the evening of the water-cutting ceremony, some of the devotees holding '*Al avadam*' visit the house of the Vannakar and return with *Seervarisai*, this is intimation of Valli's marriage to Murugan.

Kumarathan Chadangu is celebrated for six days, following the main festival, when there is heavy festivity and fortune telling or *Kaddu Chollal*. Another important event, is the *Puthir kavi Kodduthal*, when every farmer, takes in a procession a portion of the harvest as offering to the God".

Administration

The temple is rich and is the proud owner of a large extent of paddy land offered to the temple by kings and rich land lords. The youth are very dissatisfied with the administration, and recently, during the annual festival there was a clash between a lower rank caste group (barber) and the administration. The affected group, unable to do anything ran away when the others threw stones at the procession and the devotees are very unhappy about it. (Pumiputran, 1998).

Thanthamalai Murugan Temple

This temple in the South of the Eastern province is about 10 miles from Kokkaddicholai Thanthonriswaran temple, with which it has administrative links. At the top of the hill is a Pillayar temple, which is the oldest temple in this region, while Murugan temple is at the bottom of the hill. The Valliamman temple lies opposite the Murugan temple, and Krishnan temple lies further away. There is also a shrine for Muthulingaswamy. It is interesting to note here that the temple for Theivayanai Amman is a recent introduction and was constructed only in the 1980s.

Initially *Sivanadiyar*, devotees of the Lord Siva, performed the religious rites, but is now in the hands of the priests from Kokkaddicholai.

Vannakumar, manages the administration, but under the direction from Kokkaddicholai.

The annual festival is celebrated for 12 days , and each festival is given in charge of a village. During the images of Pillayar, Murugan and Sivan are taken in procession initially around the outer courtyard of the main temple, subsequently to Pillayar temple where special *Pujahs* are held. It is only after this, the procession returns to the main temple.

The temple gained importance only from 1956 when the devotees had difficulties in traveling to Kathirgamam after the ethnic violence. Later, the presence of Muthiah Swamy in the vicinity of the temple attracted ,more devotees. This Swamy is the founder of the *New Cultic group of Muruka Kadavul*.

Thanthamalai Swamy – Muthiah Munivar

Muthiah Munivar, known as *Thirtha Swamy*, hails from a very poor family, Bogavanthalava, a part of the hill country in Sri Lanka. He lost his father while young and from then on, the family responsibilities fell on his young shoulders. It is reported that about this time, two white men appeared before him and requested him to do service to people and that they would look after the family needs. Although he had a desire for this, he did not want to run away from family responsibilities. Anyway, he agreed that he would relinquish from worldly life by the age or 45. After this incident he became prosperous and an estate owner. Here we see a labourer becoming a *Mudalaly*.

At the age of 45, a mysterious figure appeared again and called him to do service, from that day onwards he meditated at Thanthamlai and prepared himself to become an ascetic, it is said

that he meditated for 12 long years standing on one foot. Since 10.10.1987, the first day of his meditation he has not bathed, has not combed his hair, so much so it is now knotted and is about 7.5 feet long. He has not taken any solid food. He lives entirely on liquid food, and that too only a very small amount is consumed daily. In spite of this, there is no foul smell coming from his body, infact, one feels the presence of a sweet fragrance when in company with the Munivar.

When any Cultic member falls sick, devotees would gather in the house of the sick to pray for a speedy recovery. The *Munivar* even arranges wedlock amongst members of this cultic groups. The wedding ceremony is simple, where groom ties a thread with a piece of Saffron fixed as the *Thali*. At the end of this, he gives a small discourse about married life to the new couple.

The practices and the preachings of this *Munivar* have a political touch, in fact it is told that the *Munivar* had once stated that he would change

his clothes only when there is peace in land once again.

One of his poems reflect his feelings as follows,

*Problems discuss here
then and there
Solution found by
Give and take
It talk delayed
Difficulties will stay
And people on roads
Shedding fears, fears.*

About the same time, he also remarked, that at the International level, there will be significant catastrophes and only good people will survive. In order to come out of all these troubles, people should pray to *Muruga Kadavul*, according to the manner prescribed by him. He also said that the God is not a man, and he should be addressed as 'Muruka Kadavul'.

Time of Prayers

Early morning 05.00 AM from.

Late morning 10.30AM from.

Noon	12.30 PM from.
Late Afternoon	04.30 PM from.
Evening	06.30 PM from.
Night	08.30 PM from.

- On Thursdays, one must get up from his bed at midnight (12.30PM) and pray.
- The period of prayer must last atleast for ½ an hour.

Dress to be worn

Males – Cheap clean clothes, white veddi and white shirt.

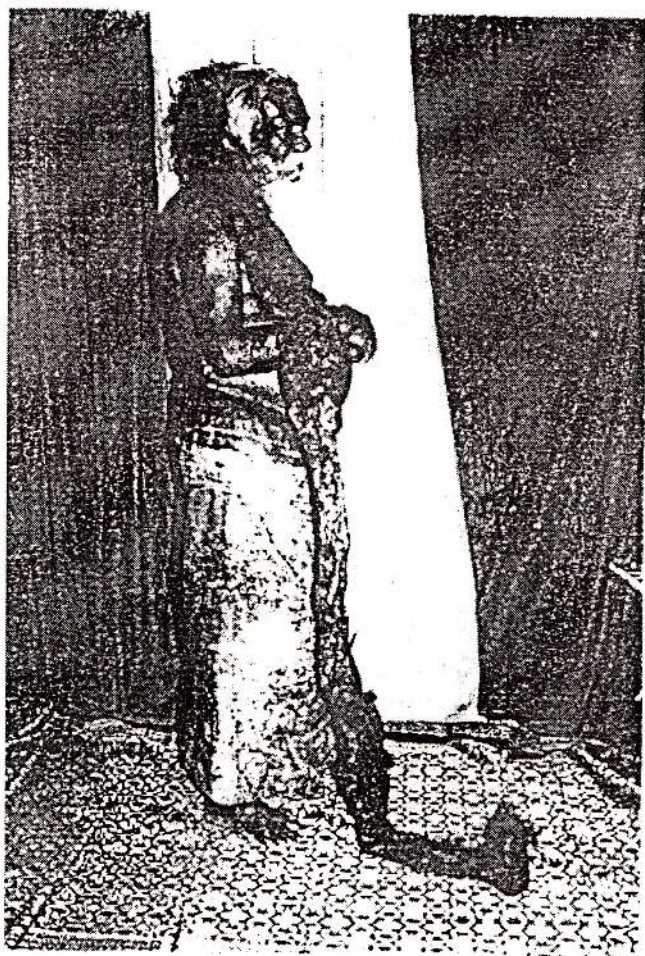
Females – Cheap clean white saree and white blouse.

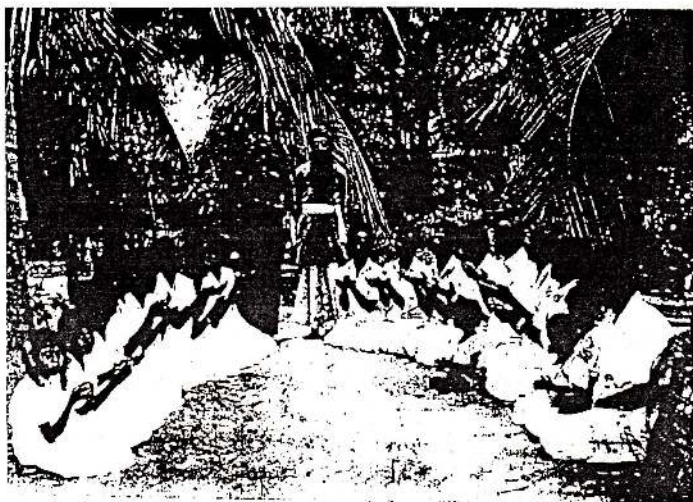
Female children

Under 12 years – Long clean white skirt, white blouse and a white shawl ones it.

The prayer should be in groups and the members should kneel down on white cloth spread out on the floor, with hands outstretched. A pot of water must be kept close to this to be used as *thirtham*.

Muthiah Munivar





Group Praying



Methodology of Muthiah Munivar

His Prayers are in the form of requests

- *"Muruka Kadavul, we the Saivits must shed away all our differences and live like the children of one mother. We should have the freedom to spread throughout the world, and live independently wherever we are please show us the path to achieve this, Oh Muruga Kadavul."*
- *Oh Muruga Kadavul, please grant me, my family, my devotees, a good education and the ability to achieve a successful life.*
- *Do not waste your life by going to Sooth sayers.*
- *Those who work for you must be paid according to the work done.*
- *You should help the poor.*
- *Do not loan money on interest.*
- *25% of your earnings should be given to the needy. There should be an equal distribution of wealth.*
- *Muruga Kadavul, protect me, my family and the true innocent devotees from fearful animals ghosts, hoonium, gun shots, fire arms, fire, water, please protect us, our Muruga Kadavulee (Muthiah Munivar, 1998).*

This cult originated in an isolated area, namely Thanthamalai. It spread in certain pockets in Batticaloa Town and in nearby villages at the beginning. Subsequently due to his criticism of Idol worship temple worship, wearing of holy ash etc. was not acceptable to the rural people and therefore could not get rooted in a wide area.

Case study – 6

Kallady – Thiruchenthur Murugan

This is one of the very recent temples also located along the Sea- shore. In the past, devotees from Batticaloa used to travel to Thiruchenthur to observe the Kandashasdi fast. However, at present with restrictions on travel devotees find it difficult to travel to India and were forced to patronize a temple closer home.

The temple had a humble beginning, a stone was placed under a Palmyrah palm, which symbolised Skanda – Murugan. In 1966, an image of the deity was presented by Sudhananda Bharathiar from South India which was initially housed in a small shrine room. At present there is a stone image in the Sanctum Sanctorum carved by Indian architects who were specially brought for this from India.

The original founder of the temple is the officiating Priest, he is popularly known as Swamy Omkaranatha Saraswathy, who had his initial training in the Shivananda tradition of Divine life society.

Worship pattern

Two unique features are identified in the worship pattern namely,

1) *Pujah* is conducted in Tamil reciting verses from *Thiruppukal*, *Kantharalangaram* and *Kantharanupu thy*.

2) The devotees are allowed to offer flowers directly to the God in the Sanctum Sanctorum. This is a practice prevalent in the Kali Amman temple, Punnaicholai, Batticaloa from a very long time.

Administration

The management of the temple is by retired government servants. Another important feature

is the fact that social needs of the people have been considered, and devotees are told that they should show no distinction between caste , class, religion or even sex and that all are equal in front of the God.

Case study – 7

Urani, Kumaraththan Temple

There is an old Temple for Kumaraththan at Urani, a nearby village in the Batticaloa town. In the past this was a forest area and the temple is said to have been patronized by the Veddhas. It is now developed as a colony and the people who settled down have discovered a stone in the form of a *Vel*. The people constructed a small temple in 1959 to house this *Vel*-like stone.

In 1960 the Temple was Sanskritized and an image of Murukan was housed in the Sanctum Sanctorum. The original stone *Vel* is placed where normally the *Pali Peedam* is housed.

Daily *Pujah* is conducted, and an annual festival for five days is celebrated in September. Even now, Veddhas from nearby village Kalluvankerni visit this Temple site and have their

celebrations including *Kadduchollal*, *Veriyadal* like ritual dances and only after this the Agamic Priest arrives to the next to conduct the festival *pujahs*.

The devotees are from the neighbouring areas and when questioned about the God of the Temple, they remarked, 'the Veddhas referred to him as Kumarathan, but we call him Murugan'.

Analysis and Conclusion

- 1) Tribal veddha Association : The data collected from the various case studies of the skanda-Murugan temple in Eastern Sri Lanka suggests a Veddha Association with most of them, for eg.:

(i) The importance given to veddhas at all Murugan Temples.

- a) The role given to the Veddhas in all festival processions particularly in the more ancient temples. Mandur Murugan temple is an example for this As Harrigan (1993) says the Veddhas have even the right to ambush a procession, and that they permit the procession to continue only when due recognition is given to them.
- b) The officiating priest in the older Temples is the *Kappuvanar* from the Veddha caste and he is the equivalent of the *Kappurala* of Kathirgamam.

- c) Valli Amman of the Veddha caste is given prominence, by housing her in a separate shrine in the outer courtyard. She is also given special recognition during festivals. On the other hand, Theivayanai Amman, had no place in the murugan temples until recently.
- d) The *Arathi penkal* who wave the oil lamp during festivals are also of Veddha origin. They are young children and are those who are yet to become of age, but in Kathirgamam only adult women are selected for this purpose.
- e) Importance is given to Kumarathan, the God of the Veddhas, this God is housed in a separate shrine. During the festival for this God, *Kaddulcholal* (fortune telling), *Veriadal* (Uncontrolled ritual dance) and offering of venison have a close resemblance to that cited in Sangam literature as Vithiananthan (1950) says, which is a typical form of Dravidian worship.

2) Totimic Symbol of Worshp

Most of the murugan temples in the East have no image of Skanda murukan in the sanctum sanctorum. At mandur, for example there is only a *sacred box* which is taken in the festival possession. This is identical to the practice at Kathirgamam. There is of course a speculation, that the *Vel* the emblem of Murugan is contained in the box.

Even in the other temple only the *Vel* is available in the sanctum sanctorum. Specially at the Urani Kumarthan temple only a *Vel*-like stone represented Murugan.

The report by Arumugam I(1980) in relation to the worship of *Vel* is worth referring to. According to him, the Veddhas living in the wild always had a fear for their lives from wild animals. They, therefore used the arrow, the lance as symbols of worship, requesting

for protection from wild animals. This is living example of Durkheim's (1961) Totemic worship. As Santhana (1995) says, this is also some what similar to the *kanthali* worship referred to in early Tamil literature.

3) Traditional Administrative structure.

The administrative structure is designed to accommodated the *Kudi* system. The people in-charge of administration, the *Vannakar*. the *Kapudakaran* (one in charge of stones) and the *Kannakkalar* (one who keep accounts) are all expected to follow a very rigid system of administration.

Even the caste based ritual roles are all very rigidly defined and followed. This rigid administrative system only helps to reinforce the continuity of traditional patterns of worship.

4) Changes within the tradition

Traditions are being maintained, yet within this one can witness marked changes.

- i) The process of sanskritisation is evident in some of these temples. Thirukovil is a good example of this, which came under the influence of both chola and pandayan rule.
- ii) In spite of the process of Sankritisation the temple still continue to maintain the folk traditions as well, for eg; At Sithandi along with agmic worship the age old social role of *Myil kaddu Thiruvila* is cherished and is practiced with the same significance as before.
- iii) Sanskritisation of the temples had lead to the introduction of new customs, namely the hoisting of the flag on the first day of annual festival. but there is no *Kodisthambam* to tie the flag, instead a

fresh branch of a tree is used for this purpose, even the water-cutting festival is also observed according to folk traditions at Mandur.

- iv) In some of these temples there is a separation of the ancient Veddha rituals from the main festival for eg : In Mandur; Veddha *pujah* for Kumarathan is observed on the 3rd day after the main festival. Likewise Kumarathan festival at Sithandhi is celebrated for 6 days following the main festival.

5) New Cultic Groups

The development of a new cultic group by Muthiah Munivar within the Skanda-Murukan tradition is a new innovation. Muthiah Munivar appears to have gathered the best in all religions practiced in the Eastern region like Islam, Christianity and other cultic groups like Sathya Sai Baba, Gurumaharaj to

counter balance and attract devotees. This cult spread rapidly in certain pockets of Batticaloa, but now some of them are leaving form this group because the Munivar condemned temple worship, wearing of holy ash etc. It is now confined to Thanthamalai where the cult was initially started and in few other pockets in the town area.

6) Modern Tradition

The tradition at Kaladdy Murukan temple is unique to Skanda worship. Here *Pujahs* are conducted in Tamil and direct participation by devotees when they are permitted to offer flower directly to the deity in the Sanctum sanctorum.

7) Youth Agitation

Recently an upraisal by the youth against the caste based administration structure of these temple. The incident at Sithandi during the annual festival this year is an example of this.

Sociological factors behind continuity and change within continuity

1) Geographical Isolation

The temples are located in hilly areas or in isolated villages or in forest areas, hence these temples have little access to the outside world. As a result changes taking place in the other parts of the country hardly reach these areas or the temples. Mandur. Thanthamalai and Ukanthail are good examples of this isolation. Therefore in these temples old traditions are preserved to this day.

2) Unchanging social structure of *kudi* based (*Vannakar*) administration

i) Those who hold positions in temple administration enjoy all the privileges associated with the *kudi* based administrative system. They have however

given importance to the Veddha traditions as well, this has contributed to the maintenance of old traditions. Further, the Veddhas have merged with the main population and now identify themselves as Vedda vellalar. This has helped to stabilize them and to maintain their identity.

- ii) In the ancient days importance was given to kings and rulers at all temple functions. Now in the absence of kings, the place of importance is given to administrative heads. This has helped to maintain a link with the temple and local administrations.

3) Socio - political need

The Eastern region at present is a war torn area. The people with no help have no alternative but to look up to the gods for help. Under these circumstances its natural that the people look

upto a warrior god and Skanda-Murugan fulfilled this need. It is interesting to note, that the security forces also come to Mandur temple, offering fowls, requesting that their lives be safed in return.

Even the new cultic group of Muthiah Munivar pray to the God asking for their protection, and protection of the people and their surroundings from all forms of danger.

4) Strong religiosity and innocence of the devotees

The religious customs does not yield for any change as devotees are quite content with the existing practices. The people are poor, and hence their strong religiosity, as such a need for change did not arise.

5) The impact of the strong folk traditions of the East

Folk traditions still dominate in the East, even the right to conduct *pujah* in Tamil or offer of flowers

directly to the deity by the devotees have permitted only within the existing folk traditions. It must be emphasized that its the existing tradition at Kali temple, Punaicholai that have been introduced into Kaladdy Murugan temple. The non-availability of a personality like Arumuga Navalar in the Eastern region may be one of the causes for non- sankritisation of the temple. But on the other hand it is note worthy that Arumuga Navalar himself failed in relation to his objection to the installation of the spear in the sanctum sanctorum at Nallur Murugan temple in Northern SriLanka.

6) Regional Identity

The ritual traditions of the Eastern region is somewhat related to regional identity. With the rise of Tamil nationalistic movements, the interest to preserve these traditions have increased. The field data obtained from Vannakar is evidence of this.

7) Kathirgamam web and the Valli-Veddha link

A common web of worshipping pattern extends from Kalthirgamam in the south to the East of Sri Lanka and this is maintained via the annual *karai Yathirai* (Pilgrimage from the North and East) which the devotees undertake year after year during the annual festival. They always make the journey along the sea coast stopping at Murugan temples on their way.

The existing totimic elements like the sacred box, *Vel* like stone *Vel* in all these temple, indicate a link between these temples. The ritual importance given to Valli in the Eastern region contributes to the uniqueness of the Skanda-Murugan cult in the east having similarities to that in Kathirgamam. This is also a cultural solution to the gerontological problems, (Shanmugalingan 1984). Even in difficult times, as Harrigan (1997) says, *Karai yathirai* is continuing as a living tradition from Batticaloa.

In toto this new data reiterate the *proto-megalithic* origin of Murugan. Kailasapathy (1968) refer to the Cult and worship of Murugan as very ancient and that it is indigenous to the Tamil country. He further stated that at the later stage it survived as a cult in mountainous areas, just as Druidism did in Roman Britain. Symbols and the ritual traditions of the ancient Muruga worship are surviving in the Eastern region of Sri Lanka. Importance given to *Valli* in this region reflects , the Dravindian involvement in Skanda Murugan cult.

It is further observed that the urban areas are more accommodating towards the changes and the novel practices. But in isolated villages, changes faces stiff oppositions. It is interesting to note that the ancient worshipping centers like Ukandai Malai have paved the way for juxtaposition

of ancient and modern modes of rituals and worshipping patterns. Here the isolated forest ecology is helpful to this new blend of traditions and there by making these cultic centres , a unique cultural system.

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