

THE CULT OF MURUKAN IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL SRI LANKA A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

S. K. Sitrapalam

I

The Archaeological data gathered in recent times from Thamilakam and Sri Lanka have given useful information regarding the development of civilization in both regions. Accordingly, it is now accepted that the authors of Megalithic Culture of Thamilakam are the Tamils who developed the civilization as portrayed in the Sangam literature. In Sri Lanka too the Archaeological research conducted since 1970, shows that the spread of the above Megalithic Culture that paved the way for the emergence of civilization in Sri Lanka and in Thamilakam¹. This culture was superimposed by the North Indian cultural penetration associated with Buddhism in the 3rd Century B.C. In short, Sinhalization was a culturalization associated with the spread of Buddhism and its consolidation².

The study of Sangam literature shows as to what extent the indigenous cult of Murugan became Sanskrities and got synthesized with the cults of Skanda, Karthikeya, Mahasena, Kumara, Visaka

of North India during the early centuries of the Christian Era. This pan Indian development is also noticeable in the Sangam classics such as Thirumurukattupadai assignable to 2nd/3rd century A.D. Nevertheless, unlike Thamilakam, there are no Tamil literary sources in Sri Lanka co-eval with the Sangam period. Available Tamil literature dates back to medieval period only and the evidences found here too are meager to construct either the development of any other details. As a result, one has to fall back on the Sangam literature to elucidate the cultural elements associates with the cult of Murugan in Sri Lanka. On the other hand in the Buddhism Literary sources namely Mahavamsa and Culavamsa there are stray references scattered here and there that too with the events connected with Buddhism only. However, the Sinhalese Sandesa poems preset some more details of this cult. Nevertheless in the early Brahmi inscriptions dating back to Pre-Christain era³, although the form 'Murugan' is absent yey the Sanskritization of this cult is evident

from the Prakritised names such as Kadali (Skanda), Kumara, Guha, Kati (Karthikeya), Visaka, Swamidatta, Mahasena, etc. his in turn vouchsafes that the cult of Murukan in Sri Lanka is as old as that of Thamilakam and went through the same Sanskritization process as in Tamilakam. This is confirmed by the Archaeological and Anthropological sources as well. Unfortunately, there are no architectural monuments of this cult that have survived during this period. Hence, when all available evidences such as literary, epigraphical and sculptural sources are correlated one on a better footing to get an overall perspective of this cult in Ancient and Medieval Sri Lanka.

The perusal of the Sangam literature shows that cult of Murukan did not undergo anthromorphism during this phase. Instead, his worship was centred around the spear (Vel), dancing in frenzy (Veriyatal) by the priest Velan who had a spear in his hands while dancing animal sacrifice, offering of good and Kuravai dance were the other aspects of the worship. The dance was also performed in Kottam. Valli is mentioned in Natrinal as his consort. In anthropological terminology Murukan - Vallimarrriage could be interpreted as a fusion of

Dravidian culture with that of the Austoloid / Veddoid culture. The cult of Teyvayanai is a later addition to this cult.

Murugan in the form of Skanda appears in Anthropomorphic form only in the Somaskanda sculptures of the Pallava period dates back to 6th / 7th century A.D. As mentioned above Vel or spear was the earliest symbol of this God. This is also confirmed by the presence of the symbol in the Archaic Temples of both Thamilakam and Sri Lanka even today. As Vel was carried by the priest at the performance of the dance both the priest and the God name to be known as Velan. The antiquity of this cult is vouchsafed from Adiccanallur. Besides spear his cock emblem and the mouth pieces used by the kavadi bearers have also been unearthed here. The finds are datable to 1000 B.C. Similar tool as seen from the illustration of the report has been unearthed from the Urn burial site of Pomparippu of Sri Lanka which is in fact an archaeological parallel to Adichchanallur. ⁴ Urn burials also have been reported in Kataragama, one of the famous archaic Murugan Temples of Sri Lanka. Spear also has been found at Kantarodai and Pinwewa in Sri Lanka⁵. Similarly, spear has also been depicted as a graffiti mark on the pottery from the Megalithic sites⁶. Peacock and spear

appear as symbols in the early coins of Sri Lanka. For instance, in the Laksmi plaques of the Pre-Christian era while spear appears on the obverse, peacock is depicted in the reverse⁷.

The worship of Vel reminds us of the concept of Padai Veedu or military camps mentioned in Tirumurugarrupadai. They are Tirupparankunram, Seer Alavay, Avinankudi, Eraham, Palamudirsolai and Kunrutoradal. It is even surmised that Kunrutoradal is actually a reference to Kataragama in Sri Lanka. Besides Seer - Alavay which is on the coast all the other Temples are on the hills. Seer Alavay offers a close parallel to Sella-Sannithy Temple, an Archaic Murugan Temple of Northern Sri Lanka. Even the concept of Padai Veedu is now surviving in the names of the Archaic Murukan Temples of Eastern Sri Lanka. Here all the Ancient temples are known as Tirippadai Temples and auspicious or sacred form 'Tiru' is added to Padai (Weapon / Vel) in order to attribute sanctity to these Temples. In all these Temples Vel (spear) is the main center of worship. Tirukoil, Periyaporaitivu Chitra Velautha Swami Temple, Mandur Kandasvamy Temple, Chithandi Kandasamy Temple, Ukanthamalai Murukan Temple and Verugal Chitra

Velauthasswamy Temple are some of them. It is also important to note the appearance of the form 'Velautham', weapon of Murukan being associated with some of the Temples. Vel continues to be worshiped in the sanctorum. Even in some other Temples which have gone through the process of Sanskritisation, Vel Sanskritisation, Vel continues its place in the sanctum sanctirium. Noted examples are Kandaswamy Temple at Nallur and Maviddapuram.

Besides Vel, Kalam also figured in the worship of Murukan. Although the custom of Veriyatu is losing its popularity in Thamilakam in Kerala (old Cera Country), it is even performed to this day and known as Tiraityattam or Peyattam here. Kalam is also called 'Yantra' in Kerala. One could see the continuity of this custom at Kataragama even today. For Murukan here is represented in the form of 'Yantra' or magical diagram, which is covered with a veil cloth.

The form 'Velan' occurs in the Pre-Christian Brahmi inscriptions. This could mean either God himself or the priest. This occurs as 'Vela' here. These are found in the districts of Anuradhapura, Amparai and Matale of

Sri Lanka. Handagala inscription⁸ from Anuradhapura speaks of a cave of Parumaka Vela (Velan). Parumaka Vela (Velan) also figures in the inscriptions of Omunagala and Upapidakalkande of Amparai district⁹. Nilagame inscription from Matale district also refers to the cave of Gamika Vela (Velan)¹⁰. It may however be noted that here the titles Parumaka (Parumakan) and Gamika denoted the high ranking officials of the Pre-Christian era. It is very likely that either the Velan priests who were present at the time of the introduction of Buddhism donated these caves to Buddhism or they continued to have their older name indicative of their original faith even after their conversion to Buddhism. It is also significant to note that one of the Sangam poets known as Īḷattu Pūtaṅ Tēvanār, who hailed from Sri Lanka has referred to Velan Veṟiyāttu ecstatic dance in honour of Marukan'. This occurs in Kuruntokai 11 as follows

Veṟiyeṇa Unarnta Vēlan nūy
maruntu

Ariynākutal annai Kāniya

Sangam literature speaks of Velan priests who belonged to the non agamic tradition of worship. Even today in the ancient Temples of Murukan in Sri

Lanka the worship is performed by the priests who follow a non-agamic tradition. At Kataragama these priests are know as Kappuralas. Brahmin priests perform worship only at the shrine of Teivayanai which is of course a later addition to the cult of Murukan at Kataragama in the 17th cebtury. Kappukanar is the term used for the priests who perform worship at the Murukan Temples in Eastern Sri Lanka. Normally in all these Temples Vel or Yantra in the sanctum sanatorium is covered with a veil of cloth when worship is performed. Covering of mouth by a piece of cloth during the performance of worship by the priest is also another significant custom in these Temples. Katampu tree was also associated with the cult of Murukan in Ancient times. In Mahavamsa Katampugroves are mentioned as sacred groves during the Pre-Buddhist period.

Sanskritization and synthesisation of indigenous Murukan cult as in Thamalakam is also evident from the study of the Pre-Christian Brahmin inscriptions. In the seinscriptions the other names of Murukan such as Skanda, Kumara, Guha, Kati(Kritika-Kartikeya), Visaka, Mahasena, Samidatta, are found as the names of the

donors which in turn reflect their original faith. Visaka is found in these inscriptions at Amparai, Anuradhapure, Kegalle, Kurunagala and Vavuniya districts¹². Piccandiya inscription from Puttalam district refers to Mahasena¹³. Reference is also made to Samidata from Miyunguna Vihara inscription from Amparai district¹⁴. Kadali, according to Paronavitana, is a form of Skanda figures in the two inscription from Anuradhapura district¹⁵. The form Kumara which stands first in the order of occurrence among the names of Murukan of this inscription is referred to in the inscription of Anuradhapura, Hambantota, Kandy, Monaragala, Polonnaruwa and Pattalam districts¹⁶. While the form Guha figures in the two inscriptions at Anuradhapura¹⁷, the form Kati (Kartikeya) figures in a solitary inscription found in the same district¹⁸. it is also relevant to note as mentioned earlier these inscriptions reflect the names of the donors who belonged to the class which was both politically and economically affluent such as Parumakas, Gapatis, Baratas, ect. The above facts clearly confirm that the cult of Murukan which was popular in Ancient Thamilakam particularly in the Pandyan region was also equally popular in Ancient Sri Lanka. This is also further

corroborated by the presence of Pandyan element in the myths of Vijays's marriage to Pandyan princess as well as the names of the some of the early kings of Sri Lanka such as Panduvasideva and Pandukabhaya datable to Per - 4th century B.C as well as by the coins of Pandyan origin dating back to early centuries of the Christian era.

II

It is only in the above context one has to take cognizance of the view of Bechert¹⁹. who argues for the presence of a common early stratum of religious beliefs centred around Murukan between Thamilakam and Sri Lanka. According to him the Early Sangam work Tolkappiyam (Porulatikaram, 5), mentions a group of four tutelary duties presiding over the four regions of Thamilakam. They are Mayon for Mullai (forest region), Ceylon (Murukan) for Kurinci (Mountain region), Ventan for Marutam (Plains) and Varunan for Neytal (coastal) region. Bechert through his study of the folk religion of the Sinhalese argues the survival of this tradition of four group of divinities in the Buddhist Sinhalese folk religion even today as in the old Tamil religion. These cults according to him, are retaining to a great extent the aboriginal modes of worship. This was due to the different

structure of the Sinhalese religion where the cults of Gods were placed at the low level below Buddhism. Therefore, the impetus for a further development of the ideas of Gods was less than with the Tamils where the cult of the Gods formed the higher level of religion.

He further opines that it is not surprising therefore, that the cult of the Gods could retain certain archaic features in the Sinhalese Culture which were lost in South India. According to him in the group of four divinities in the Sinhalese folk religion Mayon (Uppulavanna), Murukan (personified as Skanda and lord of Kataragama) are even today retain their older features, as number one and two in the order of importance as in Ancient Tamilakam. The last two such as Sumana, Vimhisana, in different periods were replaced by Natha and Pattini respectively. What is important here is that the rise of importance of these Gods is traceable in the Sinhalese literary works and inscriptions dates back to 14th century as this period witnessed the gaining importance of folk religion against the Buddhistic nature during the preceding period. As in the case of Gods of the Sangam period each of these four great gods was the patron of a certain part of

the Island. Tradition concerning the wife of Murukan namely Valli belongs to the stock of indigenous religion. The cult of Devasena was brought here as late as the 17th century.

In order to substantiate his argument Bechert further enumerated the similarity between the Tamil and the Sinhala folk religion as follows. A group of four Gods protect the different parts of the country. Mayon like Uppulavanna has the first and Ceyon like the lord of Kataragama has the second rank in this group. Mayon like Uppulavanna is characterised by blue colour. Ceyon like lord Kataragama by red colour. Ceyon like the lord of Kataragama is the God of the Hills. He finally concluded by saying that these common characteristics of Sinhala and early Tamil religion seem to be earlier than the identification of Murukan with Skanda of North India.

III

With regard to the Temples of Murukan, according to Tamil tradition recorded in the "Yalpana - Vaipavamalai, Vijaya, the mythical founder of the Sri Lanka Civilization built a Temple for 'Kadirai Andavar' around 6th century B.C. The Yalpana aipava Malai²⁰ has the following to say.

"On the north he constructed Thiruththampa - lesuran - Koyil and Thiruth-thampa lesuvari Amman Koyil at Thiruth thampalai, at the foot of Keerimalai. Near the last mentioned two Kovils he caused a third to be built which he dedicated to Kathirai - Andavar"

Although some may try to locate the Kadirai - Andavar Temple with the temples of Murukanat Kataragama , the fact that this is mentioned as having existed in close proximity to the other Temples as Keerimalai. would indicate that this would have been a precursor to the Temple of Murukan at Maviddapuram.

There seems to have been some Hindu Temples in Anuradhapura city itself. These Hindu Gods and Goddess are usually referred to as Yakasa, and Yaksis in the Pali Chronicles. In the fourth century B.C. king Pandukabhaya seems to have settled Yaksa Kala ela on the east side of the city and Yaksa Cittaraja at the lower end of the Abaya Tank.²¹ With regard to Kala Vela who is not known from other sources, it may be said that it is a component of two words Kala and Vela. Vela as we have noted earlier is a shortened form of Velan. The

form Kala which means black seems to have been used in a derogatory sense to qualify this Yaksa Vela. Not surprisingly enough the Janis seem to have nick named Vattagamani (89-77 B.C.) as Maha Kala as he seemed to have destroyed these religion edifice. Even the author of Mahavamsa has no sympathy for him because he patronized Buddhist establishment opposed to their orthodox establishment. Hence, it is very likely that Kala could have been an allusion to the God Vela by the chronicler who had no sympathy for this worship. If this is so it is also a sheer coincidence, that the king Mahasena who has the name of the God Skanda, and also had the reputation as the destroyer of the shrines of Devas, destroyed this shrine of Vela at Anuradhapura in the fourth century A.D.²² Hence it is very likely that this shrine would have continued to be a place of worship till the 4th century A.D.

Paranavitana,²³ however, quoting from Kurudhamma Jataka would prefer an identification of Cittaraja with Kama, Hindu God of love who is also as one of his names suggests 'Manobhava' which means 'mind born' like Cittaraja. The other important element of this cult is the association of Karttika festival with this God. In fact this festival of lights which

occurs in the month of Karttika is one of the Pre-Buddhist festivals of Sri Lanka.²⁴ However, it may be stated that the Yaksha Cittarajashares many common traits with the God Murukan / Kartikeya. Like the word Cittaraja, Nurukan also means young, handsome and pleasing to the mind / heart. Moreover Karttika festival had been associated with Murukan from Ancient times.²⁵

The next tangible evidence of this cult is coming from Kataragama area itself. According to Buddhist tradition Kataragama is one of the 'sixteen great places at which the Buddha during his third visit to the Island sat on meditation. According to Mahavamsa the Kshatriyas of Kataragama and Chndanagama both of the southern most part of Sri Lanka were the special guests of Devanampiya Tissa of the Anuradhapura kingdom at the time ceremonial planting of Bo-tree there²⁶. Similarly a sapling of the same tree was planted in Kataragama, which was under the domain of the Kshatriyas. As it has been the custom of the missionary religions like Buddhism to implant their symbols in the places of non-Buddhist centers of religious worship it is very likely that the Kataragama would have been one of the

earliest centres of Murukan cult and this would have prompted the king of Anuradhapura to extend an invitation for the planing of Bo-tree Anuradhapure as well as Kataragama to assimilate them into their fold. Hence this would have been the symbol of acceptance of Buddhism and patronage to the new religion by the Kshatriya royal house of this region as evident from the Brahmi inscriptions of this region. Nevertheless, the names indicating their original faith such as the Murukan cult is also clearly evident from the study of the Prakritised Pre-Vhristian inscriptions datable to 3rd / 2nd century B.C.

The above inference is confirmed by the three inscriptions referring to Kumara which is a synonym of Tamil Murukan worshiped in and around Kataragama. The inscription as Avatigama found in a hillock which is close to Kataragama mentions a tera named Kumara²⁷. Kumara also figures in the inscriptions at Kottamu hela and Mangala about 12 miles south east and north east of Yala respectively²⁸. In fact the epigraph at Mangala even mentions two generations of the worshipers of Kumara. With regard to the origin of the word Kathirgamam / Kataragama / Kajaragama, it has been postulated that it

could either be a derivation from Kathirgamam or Karthikeyagama which means the village of divine glory or the village of Karthikeya²⁹.

With regard to the building of a shrine for this God, according to tradition a shrine of Skanda was built at Kataragama by Dutthagamani in the first century B.C. in fulfillment of a vow made by him to that deity when he started on his memorable campaign against the Tamil King Elara who was ruling at Anuradhapura. Although the present shrine is of recent origin the epigraphical sources mentioned above indicate the presence of this cult during the early centuries of the Christian Era. The foundation of Mahagama, about 10 miles to the South of Kataragama by Mahagama, a brother of Devanampiya Tissa, seems to have eclipsed the fame of Kataragama and brought the fall of the Kshatriyas of this region. For, from that time up to the eleventh century, the place is mentioned but once in Mahavamsa. Dappula I, one of the best known of the rulers of Rohana (642 AD), is said to have founded a monastery at Kataragama³⁰. With the rise of Pallava and the Pandya dynasties (6th - 9th century) we have both literary and Archaeological evidence for the popularity of the Murukan cult in

Thamilakam. There are allusions to the cult of Murukan in the Bhakti literature, namely Tēvarams, although the cult of Siva was popular. Murukan was accommodated as a son of Siva and Parvati is evident from the Somaskanda images of the Pallava period, although there were no separate shrines to accommodate the image of Murukan. The influences of this could be seen from the discovery of the Somaskanda Bronze image at Thirukketisvarm³¹ and a reference in Mahavamsa datable to 7th century A.D.³², which portrays an incident connected with this cult which took place at Trincomalee. The Mahavamsa has the following comment.

"King Kassapa had a son known by the name of Mana. He was adipada, a brave man distinguished by his good conduct. His elder brother the wise Manavamma had at one time seated himself on the bank of the river in the neighborhood of Gokannaka and had made full preparations according to custom for an incantation. He began after taking the rosary in his hand, to murmur the magic verse. To him appeared Kumara on his riding bird. The peacock pecked with its beak at the plate with the offerings, but finding no drink in the old coconut shell with its holes, out of which the water had

run, he flew at the magician's face. The latter thinking (only) of future success, offered it his eye. The peacock slit it open and drank thereout violently. Kumara was pleased the granted the Prince his prayer for wish and departed brightly gleaming through the air"

As mentioned earlier there are no elaborate descriptions of cult of the Murukan in the literature of the Pallava period but there are numerous reference to Murukan in the Tevaram hymns which suggest that the worship of Murukan was incorporated into the fold of Tamil Saivism. Murukan as the son of Siva was accorded a prominent place in the pantheon of Saivite deities and it is very likely that in Sri Lanka too as in Thamilakam Murukan as part of the pantheon of Saiva deities gained importance and it may be assumed that his centres of worship continued to flourish as in former times. This is confirmed by the evidence we have for the cult of Sivism during this period in Sri Lanka. In Thamilakam by the eight and ninth centuries Murukan had attained the status of being the patron deity of the Pandyan kings and the guardian God of their Kingdom. During this time the Murukan Temple of

Tiruccentur had risen to the position of pre-eminence among the Temples in the Pandyan Kingdom. The inscription in the region of Varakuna II at Tiruccentru records a royal grant of 1400 gold coins for the purpose of conducting worship and religious services at the Temple during the latter part of the ninth century. Markalit Tiruvatirai, Maci Makam, and Vaikaci Vicakam are mentioned in the inscription as special occasions where the rituals were conducted according to Agamic Tradition³³.

It is against this background only one has to consider the legends centering the establishment of Murukan (Kantacuvami) Temple at Maviddapuram as there was no tradition of preserving historical information in sequence in a recorded form. Marutappuralikavalli a Cola Princes is credited with the foundation of this Temple. Her father, the Cola king named Ticai Ukkira Colan is mentioned as responsible for sending artists, metallic images and other essentials including Brahmins from Citamparam for the establishment of the Temple³⁴. From the description of this legend found in Yalppanavaipavamalai, she has built a Murukan Temple following as Agamic tradition although as we mentioned earlier there have been ancient Temples

which followed the non - Agamic tradition of worship. Cola king Parantaka is also said to have invaded Northern Sri Lanka during the first half of the Tenth century (948 A.D.) and it is very likely that this Temple would have been of Cola inspiration. The discovery of the Siva Temple at Poonakery dating to the early Cola style of this period add more weight to the surmise that there was a Temple at Maviddapuram dedicated to the worship of Murulan. Kailaya Malai credits the establishment of Nallur Temple to Bhuvanekabhahu in Saka era 870. It states as follows.³⁵

"In the Saka year 870 Bhuvanekabhahu whose chest adorned with garlands of flowers constructed the city of Yalppanam and caused to build the Temple at kantatavel residing at Nallur"

Hence it is possible that the original temple built on 948 AD was enclosed by Bhuvanekabhahu in the fifteenth century AD. Hence it is very likely that the Murukan Temple at Nallur also would have come into existence during the early Cola period around this time. An inscription of Rajendra I discovered at the Jaffna fort mentions a Temple at Nallur and the donations made to it.³⁶ Probably there was a Murukan Temple

before the time of Rajendra I. Although we don't have much evidence regarding the Celvaccanniti Temple, it is very likely the unlike Nallur Kantacuvami Temple and Maviddapuram Kantacuvami Temple which must have had Agamic tradition of worship, the Celvaccanniti Kurukan Temple was non-Agamic in character. As Katirkamam area figures in the campaigns of Vijayabahu against the Colas at that time is very likely that the non-Agamic tradition of Murukan worship was followed here as well as in the Temples of Eastern Sri Lanka, and Kumarapuram Temple in the Mallaitivu district, although we don't have any details regarding these Temples³⁷.

At this juncture it is relevant to mention about the dozens the Hindu Temples survived only with the foundations / basement discovered at Anuradhapura by H.C.P Bell during the latter half of the nineteenth century³⁸. All these Temples were based on a similar plan with a vestibule (Mandapa), a middle room (Antarala), a sanctum (Garbhagrha) and with a brick basement. Two Tamil inscriptions from Anuradhapura of the tenth century AD mention the existence of Kumarakanam. This has been interpreted differently³⁹.

Initially it was interpreted as a reference to a group managing the affairs of a Murukan Temple. Recently in the light of occurrence of similar term in South Indian inscriptions it is understood as a place name. Few stone images of Skanda have been housed at the Museum of Anuradhapura.

IV

The Imperial Cola occupation of Sri Lanka witnessed the revival of Hinduism particularly Saivism. Being the patrons of Saivism they built several Hindu Temples in the areas which came under their domain. In Polonnaruwa itself nearly sixteen Hindu Temples have been discovered. Of these ten were Siva Temples, five were Vishnu Temples and one was a Kali Temple. No single monument exclusively dedicated to the worship of Murukan, has come to light so far here. However, a small temple dedicated to Murukan has been discovered adjoining the Siva Devale II at Polonnaruwa⁴⁰. Statues of Murukan along with the sculptures of Hindu Gods and Goddess, both in stone and Bronze, were discovered. Bronzed images of Murukan have been found singly as well as in Somaskanda form. Of these the important ones are Somaskanda form in Bronze discovered at Jetavana Monastery at Anuradhapura and

Murukan as Sikhivahanaskanda at Polonnaruwa⁴¹.

There is also evidence for the patronage of Hinduism by the Sinhalese kings who succeeded the Colas. Vijayabahu I who defeated the Colas was a patron of Saivism along with Buddhism. Vikramabahu II (1111 - 1132 AD) and Gajabahu II (1132 - 1153 AD) were Hindus. Both were denied consecration as they were not Buddhists. One of the inscriptions issued by Gajabahu II, namely Kapuruvadu Oya inscription found of Matale mentioned as Artisan named Da pera Rangi dage Hinabi making a petition through a high official named Nāvini Kasbalnā for obtaining a land grant for his skill in conducting the ceremonies having made paintings and various statues including images of Kanta (Kantapratima) for the festival of Ten-thousand offering (Lakspuja)⁴². On the basis of this evidence Gadakumbura suggests that the worship of Skanda would have been very popular with the Sinhalese during the Polonnaruwa period. Although Parakramabahu I is credited with the building of Temples for Hindu Gods, one is not sure whether the Temples dedicated to the cult of Murukan were also built by him.

The middle of the thirteenth century marks a turning point in the history of Sri Lanka as this century witnessed the emergence of the Tamil Jaffna kingdom in Northern Sri Lanka and the drift of the Sinhala power towards South and West of the Island. In Thamalakam the imperial Colas were supplanted by the Pandyas and Vijayanagara Empires. The cult of Murukan also underwent a further course of development since this century it got syncretized with the ideology of Saiva Siddhanta. That there was a revival of the cult of Murukan during the Vijayanagara period is also attested by contractual and literary activities associated with its development. Kantapuranam of Kacciyappa Civāccāriyar was composed in the fourteenth century. Kantapuranam was written at a time when the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy had been systematized as an independent Philosophy and so it contains expositions of the system in the course of the narration of the story. It is no wonder that Kantapuranam had become popular in the Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna and in course of time it has become to occupy a foremost place in the literature studied with the feeling of piety and thereby the Jaffna culture came to be identified as the culture of Kantapuranam. Also soul devotional hymns of Arunakirinather

such as Tiruppukal, Kantaralankaram and Kanraranuputi constitute a valuable addition to a considerably large corpus of literature of the cult of Murukan. It is very likely that kantapuranam and Tiruppukal would have started exerting greater influence on Hinduism especially in the cult of Murukan during the days of the Tamil kings of the Kingdom of Jaffna.

With regard to the temples established by the kings of the kingdom of Jaffna, alpanavaipavamalai attributes the establishment of the Kailasanathar Temple, Cattanatar Temple, Viramakali Amman Temple and Vejilukanta Pillaiar Temple to the first king of the Jaffna Kingdom during the thirteenth century ⁴³. Kailayamalai, in a stray verse appended to the text attributes the foundation of the Murukan Temple to Bhuvaneikabahu in 870 Saka era, Which corresponds to Christian era of 948 AD. about which we have dealt with earlier. As mentioned earlier this temple would have owed its origin to the Cola rule in Sri Lanka and the tradition recorded in the stray verse appended to the text of Kailayamalai as well as Nallur Kattiyam recited during the festival occasions at the Kantacuwamy Temple very well refer to Bhuvanekabahu who bore the title Sri Sangabodhi who

temporarily dislodged the Tamil King from power and ruled there since 1450 AD for seventeen years⁴⁴. It is very likely that with his leanings towards Hinduism, he would have enlarged the original Temple and made it more attractive. Among the Hindus as there is no tradition of recording events in sequence, this name would have been mentioned without any chronological sequence. The mention of Kantacuvami Temple at Maviddapuram in Yalppana Vaipavamalai shows that this Temple also was patronised by the Kings of the Kingdom⁴⁵. It is also very likely that Celvaccannithi Temple, with the tradition of non-Agamic mode of worship would not have attracted of the author of Yalppana Vaipanomalai since at that time Agamic tradition was popular. Even the reference in Tiruppukal, dating back to fourteen century to a Murukan Temple in the Jaffna kingdom may be a reference to the Temple at Nallur. Arunakirinathar has also composed songs in honour of lord Kurukan of Kataragama. There is also praise for Murukan at Kataragama in Pararajasekaram a medical treatise of the kingdom of Jaffna.

At this juncture it is also necessary to take cognizance of the reference to the

God of Kadiraimalai in Kailayamalai. Although it occurs in the context of Ukkiracinkan who married Maruthapiravalli and ruled at Kadiraimalai, which is according to some is Kantarodai. The perusal of the lines shows that it is a reference to Murukan residing at Kathirgamam / Kataragama. Here Kadiraimalai is described as follows⁴⁶.

"Kadiraimalaisacred to the carrier of the lance, the husband of the bow armed Veddha maid, the son of Senkadan (Siva) Kadirgaman, the wearer of the wreath of Kadamba flowers, Murukan, the nephew of Damodaran (Vishnu) the ablechief, the leader of the celestial forces, the destroyer of the Asura enemies, Kugan, Kulagan, Kumaran who takes away the troubles of his devotees Kadiraimalai, where he dispenses his grace and where he is worshiped".

Tamil inscriptions discovered at Verugal. Chitravelauthaswamy Temple and at Tirukoil are clear indications that the Temple of Eastern Sri Lanka namely Thiruppadai Kovils with the non-Agamic traditions of worship were also flourishing at this time⁴⁷.

V

With regard to the popularity of Murukan (Skanda) in Southern Sri Lanka Ariyapala ⁴⁸. in his discussion of the literature of the thirteen century shows that the worship of Vishnu and Saman were very widespread but no reference is made to Skanda worship. Siva too, was popular but his worship assumed to be associated with South Indian settlers and mercenaries rather than Sinhala Buddhists. However the perusal of the Sandesa an epigraphical sources clearly indicated that Ariyapala's comment is not convincing. Paranavitana in his discussion on medieval Sri Lanka says that references to Vishnu, Saman, Vibhisana and Skanda are found in the literature and inscriptions of the fourteenth century ⁴⁹. For, Sasadevata names Siva, Vishnu and Karthikeya among the Gods who came to pay homage to Buddha. In the paintings in the relic chamber at Mahiyangana these Gods are represented in the company of the divinities who came to laud the Baddha after defeat of mara. The Lankatilleka inscription of the middle of the fourteenth century refers to the images of this God and others to be installed in that Temple ⁵⁰. Other fourteenth century references like Nikaya Sangraha clearly refers to

Skandakumara along with Upuluvan, Saman and Vibhisana as the four guardian deities of the land. By the fifteenth century the deity is well known and there are references to him in the Sinhala pantheon. The Jinakalamalini written in Siam in 1516 refers Khattagama (i.e. Kataragama) as one of the guardian Gods of Sri Lanka. ⁵¹ On the basis of this reference, Paranavitana observed that the shrine of Kataragama, had by the end of fifteenth century acquired such a fame that it was known in countries as far away from Sri Lanka as Thailand. It is also clear that by this period the God was known by the name of his central shrine at Kataragama. Earlier he was known as Kumara or Mahasena or Skanda kumara. The new name would indicate that the Central shrine of Kataragama had come into prominence by this time. In short by this time the God of Kataragama assumed more importance than the God of Upulvan (Vishnu) at Devinuvara. However, the discovery of a Bronze image of Skanda about 3 ft height in the sea near Galle, shows that it would have been an object of worship either at the Temple of Upulvan. or Nagarisa (Sivan Temple) existed here ⁵². It is more likely on the former because the figure of Shanmuga (Six faced Murukan and

Karthikeya) have been found carved on the pillars of the Temple of Upulvan⁵³.

The Nikayasangrahaya informs us that Alakesvara III dedicated four shrines to four guardian deities at the four corners of Kotte⁵⁴. It is mentioned that one of these was dedicated to Karttikeya. The Lankatilleka inscription also mentions Karttikeya as one of the four guardian deities of Sri Lanka⁵⁵. The vast learning of the celebrated scholar Sri Rahula was believed to have been due to a boon granted by Skandakumara⁵⁶. In his Pancikapradipaya and the Kavya Sekharaya, this hierarch claims that he obtained a boon from Skanda - (Kanda - Kumarindu) at the age of fifteen which enabled him to be a master of six languages and the Tripitaka⁵⁷. The same poet in Paravi Sandesa (42) describes the feasts of Skanda as follows.⁵⁸

With joyous mind bow down and offer the tribute of your heart to the God king Mahasen, refulgent in the blaze of glory acquired what time he seized the spear against the Titan King Padura Asura, and piercing him transcended (Mount) Meru".

The Grand father of Sri Rahula was also a devotee of Skanda. The Hamsa

Sandesa refers to Skanda as the six faced god, and mentions the sounds of beating drums emanating from his temple and the numerous offering made to him by devotees in the shrine of Kotte⁵⁹. In the Southern sector of the city of Kotte there was a Temple of Skanda in the reign of Parakramabaha VI. The Salalihini Sandesa (V.26) describes the Temple as follows⁶⁰.

"To the South of the seat of our king there appears Skanda Temple variously decked as with cock - blazoned banners that flout from the tips of gem crested standards of gold that gleam like the shaft of the sun"

In Mayura Sandesa and Savul Sandesa passing references are made to this God Skanda in the descriptions of the two birds, which carried the messages. The peacock in the Mayura Sandesa is described as being his vehicle while the cock in the latter is mentioned as being in one of the numerous hands of Skanda⁶¹. In the reign of Vijayabahu VII there was at Kotte a Kandaswami Temple. A Temple inscription indited on a pillar recovered from the Antiquarian remains of Kotte states that it was donated to the Kandaswami Temple by a person called Accutarayan.

Another notable feature is the development of Devale institutions dedicated for the worship of the guardian Gods. This was the characteristic feature of the medieval Sinhalese Buddhism and since the fourteenth century Devales dedicated for the worship of Skanda began to make their appearance in the central and southwestern parts of the Island. The Ammadu Devale in Sabaragamuva was erected to Lord Kantacuwamy in the reign of Parakrama Bahu V (1344 - 1359 AD) ⁶². The Embekke Devale was established in the reign of Vikrama Bahu II (1357 - 1374 AD) ⁶³. Another Shrine dedicated to the same God was constructed in the reign of Bhuvanekabahu V (1374 - 1406AD) at Madagama in Sabaragamuva ⁶⁴. The Uggal Alutnuwara Devle dedicated to Skanda was also established in the fourteenth century ⁶⁵. The Devales at Kandy such as of Vishnu, Kataragama Natha and Pattini and the role they play in the Kandyan Perahera confirm as to what extent the Devales became part and parcel of Buddhism where Buddhist symbol of worship takes precedence over others.

With the coming of the Portuguese many of the Murukan Temples were destroyed. The Portuguese captain Major

Phelipe de Oliveyra who was in command of the Peninsula at the time of the take over by the Portuguese boasted as having destroyed five hundred Hindu Temples and no wonder that Nallur Kandaswamy Temple was one among them. This event is recorded both in Yalppana Vaipava Malai and in the Temple and Spiritual conquest of Ceylon. The latter work gives the following account of this destruction ⁶⁶.

"Phelipe de Oliveyra moved to Nelur on the 2nd of February and ordered the large Pagode to be razed, which the pagants felt keenly, and many a time they promised to give him whatever he wanted and to build houses for him if only he would quit it and not destroy it, but that only increased his desire to do so, for he was a great Vhristian"

Although the Portuguese have destroyed systematically all the archaeological evidences pertaining to the cult of Murukan in Jaffna Peninsula the coins issued by the kings of Jaffna namely the Cetu coins speak of the popularity of this cult during the days of the kingdom of Jaffna. In these coins Peacock and Jewel, symbols of

Murukan appear opposite to the Bull. Peacock is also depicted with the legend 'Kantan' ⁶⁷. Besides these, a Granite sculpture representing Murukan with his consorts has also survived. Postuguese having destroyed the temples of Skanda in the Kotte kingdom, made an attempt to destroy the temple Kataragama. In the year 1642 a Portuguese detachment of hundred and fifty men and two thousand Lascarins attempted to sack the shrine under the command of Gasper Figueira de Cerpe. However they were forced to turn back without effecting anything and without even seeing the Temple. Dr. P. E. Pieris has the following comment on this expedition ⁶⁸.

"Not far off buried in the depths of the fever - haunted forest, was the devale of the terrible war God of Kataragama claiming the antiquity more remote than the Sinhalese race itself. Exaggerated rumours of the immense wealth of gold and gems which were stored therein roused the cupidity of the Portuguese but some secret power appeared to shield the mystic spot and in spite of all their

efforts no hostile expedition ever crossed its sacred threshold"

Thus the cult of Murukan in Sri Lanka is old as that of the Murukan cult in Thamilakam. In both the regions it went through the process of Sanakritization. This is evident from the Sangam literature and the Pre-Christian Brahmi inscriptions both in Thamilakam and Sri Lanka. While the forms Murukan / Kantacuvamy were continued to be in vogue among the Tamils, the Sanskritised and Pan Indianised form of Murukan, namely Skanda became popular among the Sinhala Buddhists. Tamil Hindus continued to patronize this cult as part of Hinduism. This has been patronized by the Sinhala Buddhists as part of their folk religion where this cult became part of Buddhist institution. Skanda became one of the four guardian deities of the Buddhists and by fourteenth century of Postuguese destroyed many of the temples both in the kingdom of Jaffna and Kotte in the sixteenth century A.D.

Bibliography

1. Sitrapalam S.K. 1980. The Megalithic of Sri Lanka, Unpublished Ph.D., Thesis, University of Poona, Poona.
2. Goonetilleke, Susantha 1980, "Sinhalisaton; Migration or Cultural Colonisation" Lanka Guardian, Vol 3 No 1. pp 1 and 24,
3. Paranavitana. S 1970, Inscriptions of Ceylon, Colombo.
4. Sitampalam. S. K. The Urn Burial site of Pomparipu of Sri Lanka - A study - Ancient Ceylon, No. 7, 1990, Vol. 2 pp 263 - 297
5. Godakumbura C.E. 1968. Administrative Report of the Archaeological Commissioner for the Financial Year 1965-1966. Colombo
6. Sitrapalam S. K., 1980 Op cit.
7. Pushparatnam P. 2002 Ancient Coins of Sri Lanka Tamil Rulers, Chennai, pp 155-156.
8. Paranavitana S. Op. cit. 1980, 1125
9. Ibid. 403 and 477
10. Ibid. 880
11. Kurautokai 1962(ed) Comacuntaranar, Po, e(Thirunelvely) V.360
12. Paranavitana S. 1970.41, 5, 889, 356, 357
13. Ibid. 1064
14. Ibid. 417
15. Ibid 264, 266
16. Ibid, 91, 190, 575, 807, 710, 321, 1062
17. Ibid 1138, 1140
18. Ibid 4
19. Bechert. Heinz 1982. Skandakumara and Kataragama - An aspect of the relation of Hinduism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, World Hindu Conference Souvenir, (Colombo)
20. alppana Vaipava Malai 1953 (ed) Sabanathan, Kula (Colombo) P.6
21. Mahavamsa, 1960 (ed) Geiger. W. Colombo. Ch. X. v.v 84 - 88
22. Ibid Ch. XXXVII : v. 40
23. Paranavitana S. 1929 Pre-Buddhist Religious 'Beliefs in Ceylon', J. R. A. S. (C.B) N. S Vol. V. pp. 303-304.

24. Hettiarachchy T. 1972. History of Hingship in Ceylon (Colombo) p. 120
25. Clothey, F. W. 1982 Chronometry, Cosmology and the Festival Calender in the Murukan Cult, in Religious Festivals in South India and Sri Lanka (ed) Welbon Guy, R and Yogam Glenn, E. (Delhi)
26. Mahavamsa, Op. cit, ch, XIX. v. 54
27. Paranavitana, S. 1970. Op. cit 688
28. Ibid 572 and 582
29. Arunachalam, P. 1924. The worship of Murukan or Skanda, J. R. A.S (C.B). Vol. XXXIX No. 77 pp 235-250
30. Epigraphica Zeylanica, Vol III, pp. 212-214
31. Tirukketeeswaram Consecration Souvenir, 1976
32. Culavamsa, 1953 (ed) Geiger, W.Ch. LVII. W. 4-10.
33. Subramanya Aiyar, K.V. 1931-32. 'Tiruccendur Inscription of Varaguna II' Epigraphia Indica, Vol XXI. p. 100.
34. Yalppana Vaipavamalai. Op. cit. p
35. Kailayamalai 1939 (ed) Jampulinkapillai, C.V. (Madras). p. 23.
36. Indrapala K. 1971 Epigraphia Tamilica Vol. I. Part I. pp. 52-58
37. Navaratnam, C.S. 1964. A Short History of Hindusim in Ceylon (Jaffna). pp. 79-80
38. Bell H.C.P. 1892. Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report, (Colombo) 1893 Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report (Colombo)
39. Indrapala, K. 1968. The inscriptions of Kumara Kanapperurar at Anuradhapura, Cintanai 1968.
40. Bell, H.C.P. 1906. Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report Colombo.
41. Prematilleke Leelananda 1995 (ed). The Heritaga of Sri Lankan Bronze Sculptures (Colombo)
42. Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. V. pp. 394-404
43. Yalppanavaipavamalai. Op. cit. 1953. p. 26
44. Rasanayagam, S. 1926. Ancient Jaffna (Madras) P. 332
45. Yalppanavaipavamalai. Op. cit. 1956. p. 6
46. Kailayamalai Op. cit.
47. Indrapala, K. 1965 'Inscriptions from Eastern Sri Lanka', Vol. 2, No. 2. pp 35-40.
48. Ariyapala, M.B. 1968, Society in Medieval Ceylon (Colombo) p. 184

49. Paranavitana, S. 1960 History of Ceylon Vol. I Part II, (Colombo) p. 765
50. Ibid
51. Ibid.p. 764
52. Theva Rajan, A. 1993. The Galle Murukan, Daily News, March. 31, 1993.
53. Paranavitana S, 1953. The Shrine of Upulvan at Devundra (Colombo). pl. XXI.
54. Ilanga Simham H.B.M. 1992. Buddhism in Medieval Sri Lanka (Dehli) Ch. 7. p. 211
55. University of Ceylon Review. Vol.XVIII, No. I. p. 14
56. Paranavitana, S. 1960. Op, cit. p 764.
57. Ilangasimha, H.B.M. 1992 Op. cit. p. 211.
58. Ameresekere, H.E. The Kataragama God, Shrines and Legends' Ceylon Literary Register, Vol I July 1931, No 7. p. 290.
59. Inlanhasimha, H.B.M. 1992. Op. cit. p. 211.
60. Ratnaike, C. N. R. 1945. Glimpes of the Social, Religious, Economic and Political conditions of Ceylon from the Sandesas, M. A. Thesis, Unpublished, University of Ceylon.
61. Ilangasimha, H.B.M. 1992. Op. cit
62. Navaratnam, C.S. - 1964 Op. cit. p.28.
63. Ibid p.29.
64. Ibid
65. Ibid
66. Queyroz, Fernando, de. The Temporal and Spiritual of Ceylon 1930. (Trs) Perera, S. G. pp 452, 641-42.
67. Pushparatnam, P, 2002, Op. cit. p. 155-6
68. Pieris Paul, E. Ceylon - Portuguese Era (Colombo). Vol. I. p. 324

* ————— *