

THE SIMILE OF MURUKAN

The preference and preponderance in Tamil Nadu of today of the name Murukan may originate in a connection of the Deity by « comparative conjunction » with Subrahmanya, Skanda, Kartikeya, Kumara, or he may have from his own origin lent new features to those divine figures, or he may be just a Tamil name of a Divinity of original form and complexity.

Here is an aspect of the relationship Aryan-Dravidian which may dissolve itself in an unapproachable cloud of artificial differentiation.

Political as well as religious sentiments play into the questioning of originality. The demand of and the form given to Tamil Arcanai of later years can elucidate an ambiguity of sentiments. A comparison with an ordinary *Aṣṭottara Śatam* shows some preference, apart from the Tamil language, for expressions of Tamilian identity such as relevance to personal Bhakti and local colour. In the main the Deity remains the same, and research into the complexity of his manifestation continues to meet with difficult problems.

In order to elaborate a little the points reference will be made to three common texts: *Kalpapūjā* is edited at Srirangam first edition 1954 and here referred to in its 6th edition 1965. It contains also *Srīsubrahmanyāṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali*. A publication from 1967 by the Devastanam of Suvamimalai, or Tiru Ērakam, one of the six places for Murukan's appearance, has the 108 names almost identical with the *Kalpapūjā* but written in Tamil characters and with explanations in Tamil for each name. Finally there is the Tamil Arcanai for Murukan, Murukaperumāṅ Valipāṭu, nr. 2 in a series Malar Valipāṭu Varicai, originally printed as early as 1954 but brought up to date in 1971 after Arcanai in Tamil had been ordered by the Government.

It is the last text that confronts us with the tendency of making the Deity a Tamilian manifestation in « comparative conjunction » with Skanda-Subrahmanya. Briefly these are noticeable innovations.

The change of language from Sanskrit to Tamil means substituting Pōrri for Namaḥ, which as a verbal participle may imply slightly more

of an active partaking. This is more evident in some lines as when in line 16 the devotees are mentioned as friends crying out, or as when in line 76 the Deity is coming close to the worshipper, or when line 44 praises him « who is gracious to me in my suffering ».

The last line 108 runs as a prayer: « Be gracious to me ». This is possible through extending the line of praise by two words into a line of four words. Compare the opening lines. In Tamil it runs « *Aruvām uruvām Murukā pōṛṛi* », in Sanskrit « *Om Skandāya namaḥ* ».

The Tamil Arcanai thereby becomes more explanatory and less *mantra*-like. The Suvamimalai list offers Tamil explanatory translation to every Sanskrit *mantra*, but the Tamil Arcanai merges explanation into a formula substituted for the Sanskrit *mantra* and often has a different text altogether.

This is not merely a formal tribute to the Tamil language. Apart from the religious significance of understandable formulas the 108 Pōṛṛi contain direct reference to the Tamil language and its poets. Line 103 speaks of Murukan as « flourishing in the sweetness of the Tamil Language » and from 82 to 85 his most prominent bards are mentioned by name, Aruṅakiri, Nakkīrar and Kumaraḡurupara. The names of the six places for Murukan's manifestation follow suit in accordance with the fundamental text of Tirumurukāṛṇṇuppaṭai in lines 61 to 66.

References to the Tamil texts bring about a preponderance of expressions and epithets from the poetry of the hilly region, and Murukan is named « king of the beautiful Kuṛiñci » in 58. His female associate Valli, the daughter of a hunter, is mentioned by name in 56 and 71, but she is referred to also in the Sanskrit text under the term Pulindakanyā, the hunter maid. The fact that this reference to hill tribes is not missing in the Sanskrit version shows the difficulty in separating the one tradition from the other, so much more so as the puranic stories about the birth and deeds of the Deity are by no means missing in the Tamil Arcanai, e.g. 49-52. Vice versa a personal touch is not missing in Sanskrit, e.g. in n. 81 « *Āśritākhiladātre* ».

A conspicuous absence of Sanskrit concepts in the Tamil Arcanai concerns the « scaling » of some qualities like « Varna » which in Sanskrit comes as Eka, Dvi, Tri, Catus and Pañca, 46-50 respectively and Matta in 15-17 as Matta, Pramatta and Unmatta and also 42-44 Jṛmbha, Prajṛmbha and Ujjṛmbha. The last three are somewhat freely interpreted in the Suvamimalai Tamil version with hardly any strict reference to the root Jṛmbh meaning « yawn » or « expand », whereas the other two are more literally translated.

There is foundation for saying that the Tamil Arcanai strikes a tone of piety and moral aspect of Murukan which is not to the same degree found in Sanskrit. As somewhat typical may be mentioned the reference to an adoration of his feet in lines 8 and 76. Murukan is, however, very much a Deity in the Saivite tradition although he is also

pictured as the Almighty who stands for creation, sustentation and destruction, the visible and the invisible, lines 29 and 1 respectively. Light and youth are prominent with him, e.g. in 19 and 20.

Summing up the conclusion would be that Murukan does convey a Tamilian aspect as well as expressions of vital religious experience which could warrant the change of name of the common Deity otherwise known as Subrahmanya, Skanda or just Kumara, but there is not sufficient ground for doubting a common identity whatever the origin of its components might be.