

Lord Murukaṇ as the Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi in various Abodes – A Study

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Abstract

Murukaṇ, variously known as Subrahmaṇya, Skanda/Kantaṇ, Kārttikeya and Kumara is a popular theme in Indian art since the Kuṣāṇa period. Tamil literary sources are dated since the Caṅkam Age (c. third century BCE¹ to second century CE) in the classical corpus literature. It is necessary to specify these forms because a folk form associated with Paḷaṇi, one among the six centers of Murukaṇ cult in ancient Tamilnāḍu². The Lord is known as Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi (moṭṭai-āṇṭi "the shaven-headed mendicant"). The name is backed by a myth. This article is aim to bring the history of Lord Murukaṇ as Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi.

Keywords: Skanda/Kantaṇ, Caṅkam, mūṣika, mayilvākaṇam, kāṇikkai, Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi, etc.,

Murukaṇ, variously known as Subrahmaṇya, Skanda/Kantaṇ, Kārttikeya and Kumara is a popular theme in Indian art since the Kuṣāṇa period (first century CE) of which some rare specimen are housed in the National Museum, New Delhi. Tamil literary sources are dated since the Caṅkam Age (c. third century BCE¹ to second century CE) in the classical corpus literature. These include the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Pattuppāṭṭu*, *Eṭṭutokai* (including *Paripāṭal*) and some (e.g. N. Subrahmanian² take into account the Twin Epics (*Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*) and the Eighteen Minor Works³. The *Amarakośa* (dated 500 CE) lists a number of names such as Kārttikeya (Ta. Kārttikēyaṇ), Mahāsenā (Devasenāpati), Śārajanmā (*śāra* = *darbha* or *kusa* grass, Ta. naṇal "reed" Sachaarum spontaneum), Śaṭānanah (Śaṇmukha), Pārvaṭinandanah (Pārvaṭi-putra), Skandaḥ (Ta. Kantaṇ), Śaktīdharah (Ta. Vēlaṇ or Vēlāyutam), Kumārah (Kumara) and so on⁴.

1 We keep in mind the references to Cōḷa. Pāṇḍya, Kēraḷa-putra and Satyaputra in the Girṇār Edict of Aśoka Maurya (273-243 BCE). Vide, R.K. Mookhrji, *Asoka*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, p. 223.

2 See the author's *Saṅgam Polity* (Bombay 1966) and *Pre-Pallavan Index* (Madras 1966/1990).

3 The Tamil University in its recent publication of the classical Tamil literature includes the *Patinenkīlkaṇakku* (Eighteen Minor works) in the list. See *Cemmoḷit-Tamiḷ* (Taṇcāvūr: The Tamil University 2010).

4 Cited in Raju Kalidos, "Iconography of Skanda-Murukaṇ: Flashes of Insight", *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies*, XVI: 2 (1999), p. 80; also *Temple Cars of Medieval Tamilaham* (Madurai 1989).

The *Śrītattvanidhi* (1.3.102-118) citing the *Śaivāgama-Śekhara* specifies seventeen canonical forms of Skanda. They are Nānaśakti-Subrahmaṇya, Skanda, Agniajāta, Saurabheya-Skanda, Gāṅgēya, Saravaṇotbhava, Kārttikeya, Kumāra, Śaṇmukha, Tārakāri, Senāni, Guha, Brahmācāri, Deśika, Krauñcabhedana, Śikhivāhana (Ta. Mayivākaṇam) and Velāyudha (Ta. Vēlāyutam = Śaktidhara). It is necessary to specify these forms because a folk form associated with Paḷaṇi, one among the six centers of Murukaṇ cult in ancient Tamilnāḍu⁵. The Lord is known as Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi (*moṭṭai-āṇṭi* “the shaven-headed mendicant”). The name is backed by a myth.

Once the *devaṛṣi*-Nārada went to the Kailāsa and handed over a wonderful fruit, cinematically *ñāṇappaḷam* (fruit of wisdom) to Śiva and suggested the fruit be given to any one of his sons after testing their worldly wisdom⁶. The condition was that the fruit should not be split or shared by two. How to do it? The *munigaṇas* suggested the fruit may be given to anyone who circumambulates the worlds and arrives at the Kailāsa first. On listening to this competition, Murukaṇ mounted his fast flying *mayilvākaṇam* (cf. Śikhivāhana above) and started his navigation. Gaṇapati was short and stout, and his vehicle was the slow moving *mūṣika*. He could neither sit on the rat nor the bandicoot move fast to come round the worlds. Therefore, he thought the father and the mother is the first gods and teachers for a schoolboy. If one comes round his own father and mother, it is equal to coming round the worlds. He undertook the small trekking to move round his parents thrice on the Kailāsa (= the Meru, Axis mundi), and claimed the fruit. The syndicate of Śiva (*gaṇas*) approved the claim of Gaṇapati. He was awarded the fruit.

5 *Āviṇaṇkuṭi* in the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, one among the Pattuppāṭṭu among the Caṅkam classics. However, Bāladevarāya (Pālaṇṭēvarāyaṇ) in the *Kantasaṣṭikavacam* notes both Paḷaṇi and Āviṇaṇkuṭi.

6 The episode was dramatically told in the Tamil movie, ‘Tiruvilaiyāṭal’, acted by Sāvitrī Gaṇesh and Shivāji Gaṇesh and directed by A.P. Nāgarājaṇ. D.D. Shulman, “Murukaṇ, the Mango and Ekāmreśvara Śiva: Fragments of a Tamil Creation Myth”, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 21 (1979), pp. 27-40.

Murukaṇ completed his entourage, *sarvalokapradakṣiṇa*, seated on *mayil* and came to claim the fruit⁷. He was told Gaṇapati had won the fruit. The displeased Murukaṇ left the Kailāsa and came to the south to create a world of his own. Therefore, this is the “Creation myth” (cf. Shulman 1979 cited in note 6). He chose Paḷaṇi Hills⁸ and stood on the hill in mendicant form. This form of the Lord is known as Moṭṭai-āṇṭi, *moṭṭai* (shave the head), *āṇṭi* (mendicant). It is perhaps after his event that devotees that throng to the hill offer their locks as *kāṇikkai* (meek submission), known as *moṭṭai*⁹ in Tamil folk tradition.

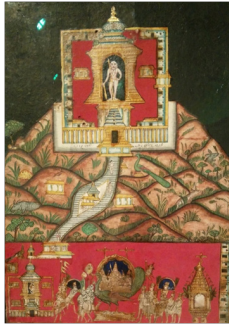
The author in course of his research for the doctoral degree has noticed some sculptures and paintings of Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi that are unreported in scholarly studies. Again, the theme is also quite new to informants¹⁰.

7 This form is known as Sarvalokapradakṣiṇamūrti (Kalidos 1989: 128-29). A stucco image to this effect is found in the Vīrakāḷiyamaṇ temple, Singapore. The stucco image shows Gaṇapati receiving the fruit from Śiva (Fig. 5) and Moṭṭai-āṇṭi in the middle.

8 The hill on which Murukaṇ stands, subjoined by the Itṭumpaṇ-malai, are outcrops of the Western Ghats running south of Utakamaṇṭalam (Ooty). It is to the northwest of Koṭaikkāṇal at the southern foothills of which Tēvatāṇappaṭṭi (infra) is located.

9 A popular habitual parlance with the Tamils is to enquire a person with shaven head “Paḷaniyā Tirupaiyā” (whether the *moṭṭai* is from Paḷaṇi or Tirupati).

10 Dr R.K.K. Rajarajan (Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram) and Dr R.K. Parthiban (IIT, Hyderabad) were of great help for mustering these photographic evidences.



Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi atop the Palāṇi Hills

A Tañcāvūr Painting¹¹ of the eighteenth century in private collection illustrates Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi standing atop the Palāṇi Hills (Fig. 1). The *garbhagrha* on top the hill houses Moṭṭai-āṇṭi as Taṇṭāyutapāṇi (Daṇḍāyudhapāṇi) holding a stick (*daṇḍa*>*daṇḍanāyaka*)¹² in a hand. The painting, if it could be dated in the eighteenth century, shows the temple on the hill, a small *gopura* and the Āviṇaṅkuṭi temple at the foothills. Another temple midway up-hill, the golden chariot and the massive wooden *tēr* (temple car) are shown at the bottom of the painting. Murukaṇ, the *sarvālaṅkārapriya*, seated with Vaḷḷi and Devasenā on the peacock are included. This painting suggests the Moṭṭai-āṇṭi anecdote was popular since the 18th century when the Marāṭhas ruled over the Tamil country with their base at Tañcāvūr. It could be understood the episode was a later innovation vis-à-vis the Tamil *Kanta Purāṇam*¹³. It is purely a Tamil folk idiom, which custom of *moṭṭai* cannot be precisely dated. Moṭṭai-āṇṭi is popular calendar portraiture. This form of Murukaṇ was earlier reported in Kalidos (1989: 126).

11 See *Marg* (Vol. 69: 4, 2018) that has published some precious collections from Śrī Kuldip Singh.

12 For elaboration of concept see R.K.K. Rajarajan, “*Caṇḍikeśvara in Myth and Iconography: Violence and Reconciliation*”, *Indologica Taurinensia*, XLV (2019), pp. 157-195.

13 Authored by Kacciappa Civācāriyār, the work is dated in 1350-1400 CE (Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, pp.185-86), the original *Skanda Purāṇam* dated during 700-1150 CE (W.D. O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, p. 18).



Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi, Tēvatāṇappaṭṭi

A wall painting is reported from the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple, Tēvatāṇappaṭṭi (*devadānam*)¹⁴. The temple is away from the village on the main road linking Tiṇṭukkal-Vaṭṭalakkunṭu with Periyakuḷam-Tēṇi amidst agricultural fields. Visited large number of people on Tuesdays and Fridays and on festive occasions, the temple is more a *grāmālaya*. Some paintings pertaining to the mythology of Murukaṇ are drawn on walls of the temple of which one is Moṭṭai-āṇṭi.



Stucco images, Cuvāmimalai

A graphic illustration of the theme, it finds a lad standing on a hillock. He is nude but for a *kōvaṇam/kaupīṇa* that hides the genitalia. The boy holds a long *daṇḍa* in the right arm, and so the iconography is Daṇḍāyudhapāṇi mixed with Moṭṭai-āṇṭi (Fig. 2). The left hand is rested on the thigh in *ūruhasta*

14 Denotes tax-free lands granted to *brāhmaṇas* by rulers of the land. This area was under jurisdiction of the *zamīndārs* of Vaṭakarai (Parthiban *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 74 [2013]). The temple at the entrance to the *garbhagrha* includes the portrait sculptures of the *zamīndārs* of Eḷumalai. It seems the area around was the fief of the Telugu *zamīndārs*.

mode. The Lord is graced with a beaming face, the head shaven and fixed with *rudrākṣamālā*, symbol of renouncement of worldly pleasures. A halo goes round the *moṭṭai*. Two *rudrākṣamālās* are tied round the head, and two more as *kaṅkaṇa* and *keyūra*. Normally, these are in precious metals and gems; cf. Fig. 1 Mayūravāhana at the bottom.

A series of stucco images depicting Moṭṭai-āṇṭi, Vaḷḷi-Sevasenā samedā Subrahmaṇya, Sarvalokapradakṣiṇamūrti (two illustrating Murukaṇ and Gaṇapati and Mayūravāhana-Ārumukaṇ flanked by Vaḷḷi and Devasenā appear at the gateway of the Murukaṇ temple Svāmimalai (Fig. 3), the paṭaivītu, celebrated in the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*.

Two images from the Vīrakāḷiyammaṇ Temple, Singapore have been tapped. Located on the *grīvakoṣṭha* of the temple, an image finds the youth, Murukaṇ standing holding the *daṇḍāyudha* in the same attitude (Fig. 4) as in the previous image (Fig. 2). The posture and other attributes are almost the same. Two *bhaktas* are found playing the *kāvaṭi*. Murukaṇ devotees carrying *kāvaṭi* all the way from their native place to the Paḷaṇi hills is a living tradition. At the other end of the *vimāna* in its intermediary direction dwarf *gaṇas* holding clubs and peacocks are posted.



Moṭṭaiyāṇṭi, Vīramākāḷiyammaṇ Temple, Singapore

Another image of Moṭṭai-āṇṭi is posted at the first *taḷa* of the *vimāna*. In this image, the Lord is lifting the *daṇḍa* in vertically upright mode (Fig. 5). Two personages are standing nearby that seem to be Agastya (left) and the demon, Vātāpi (right). When sage Agastya was moving from the Kailāsa to the Deep South, he had a confrontation with cannibalistic demon, Vātāpi. His custom was to provide food to wayfarers and swallow them. He wanted to test his might with sage Agastya. When swallowed, Agastya

went into the stomach of Vātāpi burst open the belly and came out. The demon was at last redeemed. Vātāpi is identified with Badāmī in Karnāṭaka, the capital of the Western Calukyas.



Gaṇapati receiving the fruit from Śiva, Vīramākāḷiyammaṇ Temple, Singapore

The images found in the Singapore temple are unique because the author has not traced such illustrations in the Tamil country. It is likely artists familiar with the Tamil mythology of Murukaṇ must have done this work.

The contra to Moṭṭai-āṇṭi may be found in Figure 6, which portrays Cīṅkāravēḷaṇ¹⁵ seated on peacock with Vaḷḷi and Devasenā. Murukaṇ is *sarvālankārabhūṣita* in this image, the opposite of Moṭṭai-āṇṭi. A stucco image from Kantakōṭṭam, Ceṇṇai, the Lord is six-faced, Ārumukaṇ (Ṣaṇmukha) seated on a brilliant peacock that has spread its plumage as a *prabhāmaṇḍala*. This is to suggest Moṭṭai-āṇṭi is a timely device. He is brilliant. The Lord is the alaṅkāraṇ (Periyālvār *Tirumoli* 4.3.5)¹⁶.

15 Cīṅkāram is “sentiment of love”, one among the *navarasas* (*śṛṅgāra-bhāva*). It also denotes one who is *alaṅkārapriya* (lover of decorating himself with dress, ornaments, and scents); “decoration, embellishment, beauty, especially artificial). *Cīṅkāri* means “gaily dressed man or woman” (*Tamil Lexicon*, III, 1405).

16 R.K.K. Rajarajan, “Antiquity of *Divyadeśas* in Pāṇḍinādu”, *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 73, pp. 59-104.



**Cinḱaravēlaṅ with Valli Devasenā,
Kantakōṭṭam, Ceṇṇai**

When Murukan is the world, *sarvaloka*, where is the need for the Lord to possess the worlds by

performing *pradakṣiṇa*. The worlds come round the Lord in *pradakṣiṇa*, cf. the Cosmic *tēṛ* (Fig. 1). The underlining philosophy is Paḷaṇi is the Paradise of Murukan. People from all parts of the world; strive to visit Paḷaṇi once in lifetime to have a divine *darśana* of the Lord. The Lord as Moṭṭai-āṇṭi is preaching equality and fraternity. Those that strive to possess others lands, their properties and women are false philosophers. The property of the mendicant is a begging bowl that Śiva as Bhikṣāṭana carries in a hand. This philosophy of equality was preached by Aristotle who said rulers should be philosophers.