ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SIVA CULT IN ANCIENT TAMILS
THE SIVA CULT IN THE SANGAM AGE

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Religion has been playing a very significant role in the life of mankind since very early times. A religion may survive and adapt itself to a series of cultural changes. It has been the basis of Indian thought and life and the guiding principle of Indian civilization through the ages more particularly in Tamils. Lord Siva is not traceable in most ancient ancient archaeological and literary sources and the Siva cult, which has taken a hold in the Tamil speaking land during the Post Sangam Epoch.

In the proto-historic period, the religious life of the Tamils must have been influenced by fear and sustained by hope. In the next stage there is reason to believe, that it was totemic, the worship of natural objects. The worship of natural objects and the ascription of sacredness to semi-animate and inanimate objects constituted totemic cult. In this regard trees having been regarded as sacred, the residing spirits in them were worshipped. In due course the Tamil Gods were included in the Vedic pantheon as a result of synchronization of Aryan and Dravidian cults in South India and caused virtually many changes in the cultural history of Tamils.

For tracing Siva Cult, one must wait until the Post Sangam Literature especially Kalittogai, Paripatal, Thirumurugatruppadai and Epic Silappadhikaram to collect substantial evidences which could help to reconstruct the early concept of Lord Siva and the development of His worship in Tamil Country. 1 This paper portrays the origin of Siva cult in Tamil Country and how the cult had its hold in Tamil Speaking land in due course of time.

Of the early Tamil classics, the Tolkappiyam stands foremost. It is the earliest extant available work on Tamil Grammar. It is ascribed to the period between the fifth century B.C. and the second century A.D. The Tolkappiyam deals exhaustively with the literary canons and conventions of Tamil language, cultural and historical traditions of the ancient Tamils. 2 In Tolkappiyam there is a statement kotinilaykandalivalli. Kotinilay, which represents the Sun. The term valli stands for the Moon, while kandali signifies katavul that is a power, which exists without support. The expression katavul means, one who transcends thought, word and deed. In another reference four Gods namely, mayon, ceyon, ventan and varunan are mentioned as presiding deities of mullai, kurinji, marutam and neydal regions respectively. 3 In these regions, the dominating elements of the society were the shepherds, the hunters, the agriculturists and the fishermen. They had their own Gods for each of their geographical divisions. Apart from Tolkappiyam, there are other works, which are excellent products of the Tamil genius and are more secular than later day compositions. They are collections of poems of different poets, who are said to have adorned the Sangam or the academy, or the assembly of poets. They are generally referred to as Sangam classical works. 4 The Sangam classics have been classified into two groups called the Ettutokai, or the eight Anthologies and the Pattupalai, or the ten Idylls. The date of the Sangam works is a subject of controversy and there has been a great deal of debating over the existence of the Sangam as an academy of poets and also over the fixing of the age of the Sangam. But a conservative estimate would place it in the first two centuries of the early Christian era 5, which was the age of the extant Tamil classics.
They reflect the Tamil way of life and culture including the cult of Lord Siva. The descriptions found in Sangam Classical works reveal the early modes of worship and His original forms of Tamil deities. The names most often associated with the deities in early Tamil literature are mayon, ceyon, ventan and varunan. The absence of anthropomorphic form reveals that Lord Siva not belonged to a purely a cult of the Tamils.

In order to trace the Siva worship in Tamilaham, it is necessary to consider the Post-Sangam literature Kalittokai, Paripatal and Tirumurukarruppataiand epics like Silappatikaram and Manimekalai. Regarding the date of the Post Sangam works namely several modern critics are of opinion that these are of a later date. The Sanskrit influence, the puranic episodes, the social institutions and the manner of compositions also assign them to a later date. There are however several other factors which attribute the work to an author of a period of the Tevaram. But the most striking feature is the grammatical peculiarities in these works, which are quite similar to those of some of the other early Tamil classical works. It can be estimated that the later Sangam works may be assigned to a period between the Sangam classical age and Pre-Pallava age, that is the first half of the third century A.D. Before describing these works, it is essential to analyse the trend of the contemporary period. Siva and Visnu worship began to appear. During this period the worship of Siva gradually gained ground. The worship of Tamil Murukan was fused with the Siva cult in the Tamilaham. More over the period is a blend of the Dravidian and Aryan Gods, and this is reflected in the contemporary Tamil literature including the one on Lord Siva. It is because the works like Ramayana which was popular in North India. Brahmins became officiating priests in Temples.

Kalittokai otherwise known as kurunkalittokai is an Anthology of short poems. The characteristic features of the tinais (physiographical divisions) their nature and the life of their inhabitants find an elaborate and picturesque portraiture. The work is assigned to the period of later-Sangam age that is the first half of the third century A.D. The work describes Siva worship along with Murukan worship. A reference found in this work compares the hero with the Lord Murukan son of Lord Siva. The poet states that the lady, who has fallen in love with her lover praises her lover comparing him with Lord Murukan son of Lord Siva. The expression “alamarcelvanmakan” refers to Lord Murukan, the son of Lord Siva, who is seated under the palmyra tree in two places. It indicates the admission of Lord Murukan in the Saiva tradition and the gradual assimilation of Aryanisation process and origin of Siva cult among the Tamils. From this it is clear that the Siva Cult originated in the Post Sangam Epoch in Tamil Country.

In another instance found in Paripadal, we find the sentiments, we pray not for wealth and gold and enjoyment but for grace and love and righteousness. The purpose of our repeated worship of the God is that this worship should increase even as the fame of the ancient glory does. These are the characteristics of the Saints in memorable words. This idea of worship portrayed in Paripadal was greatly exemplified by the Later Saiva Saints - Nayanmars. Moreover all the Post-Sangam works stress the greatness of Tamil Saivism or Saiva Siddhanta. It is in love that there is complete self-negation and hence the Lord Siva manifests Himself only where there is love. The Saiva Saints portrays love i.e., God for Himself; not for gaining any selfish end. Whatever the austerity one may practice or the learning one may possess, one can never hope to see God without love. This is forcefully stated by Tirumular, and this prayer of Appar is well known: “Even were I to be born, a worm, grant that I may never forget thee.”

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Besides, a reference found in Thirumurukatrupada also supplements the myth relating to birth of Lord Murukan son of Lord Siva. The Lord Murukan was born of six Karttigai girls in a lake full of dharppai (a sort of grass) on the summit of the Himalaya. Here the poet mentions the saravanapoigai, where the Lord Skanda was born as mentioned in the Kumarasambhava of Kalidas. It states that the Lord Murukan increasingly came under the influence of Sanskrit myths. The references which portray various forms of Lord Murukan mentioned above indicate that the work Tirumururakkumpatai was composed, when the Puranic and mythological stories of North Indian Skanda-Karttikeya were popular. From this it is clear that the Siva Cult originated in the Post Sangam Epoch in Tamil Country.

Further the popularity of the Siva cult in Tamil Country is proved by the Post - Sangamepic like the Silappatikaram and Manimekalai. Silappatikaram is an epic par-excellence in Tamil composed by Ilangovadigal a Chera prince. It is an epic interspersed with dramatic touches. The story is of a young couple of the Vaisya community of Puhar, having for its moral the glory of wifely devotion, the power of chastity and the triumph of truth. It portrays the period of Karikala Chola, the Chera Cenguttuvan and the Pandya Nedunchehyan. The poem is assigned to the second half of the 3rd century A.D. on the basis of the story. The author appears to be the younger brother of the ruling Chera monarch. To his court, Kajabahu (A.D. 114-136) of Ceylon of the third century A.D. came at the time of the consecration of Kannaki’s temple. The epic which is the earliest and the best known of its kind contains numerous references to Lord Siva.

The Lord Murukan is referred to as the son of alamarcelvan the son of Lord Siva. Herethe poet identifies the alamarcelvan with Lord Siva who is seated under the Palmyra tree. The statement like malaimakalmakan refers to Lord Murukan as a child of the divine parents Lord Siva and Goddess Uma. It describes Lord Siva’s family which includes Goddess Uma and Skandathe son of Lord Siva and it provides a hint regarding the Somaskanda panel later times.

In addition to that the epic Manimekalai is a sequel to the Silappatikaram. It is a poem of thirty divisions each containing fifty to five hundred lines. It is a mine of information on the subject of Buddhism its worship, its belief, its tenets, superstition and philosophy. Apart from Buddhism, mention has also been made of Lord Murukan son of Lord Siva in the same work. The epic refers to Lord Murukanson of Lord Siva and His valour. A reference found in the epic mentions one Sudamathi, the friend of Manimekalai and the heroine. While speaking of her youthful beauty she compares her with Lord Murukan. It indicates that the Lord Murukan is an embodiment of youthful beauty. The same epic mentions the splitting of krauncha mountain for the destruction of Curan, the enemy of Lord Murukan.

In the concluding part that From the above mentioned descriptions it is clear that the concept of Tamil Murukan was fused with the elements of Sanskrit Skanda - Karttikeya. He is regarded as a composite deity as Skanda - Karttikeya. The foregoing works were written, when the Aryan influence in Tamil speaking land was felt. This process of fusion of Skanda with Murukanson of Lord Siva can also be seen in the transformation of other Vedic Gods. This kind of assimilation existed even in North India.

Silapadikaram, Manimekalai and also the Madurai kanchi, Kalithogai, Paripatal and Thirumurugatrupadai speak of Lord Siva counting Him as the first among Gods. The Silapadikaram work mentions Siva as the great one who has a body that has not been given birth to Lord Murukan, son of Lord Siva. Madurai kanchialso gives the first place to Lord Siva among Gods and speaks of Lord Siva as the one who created the five elements. Sevur Mulankilar, in his poem tells that the "Veda consists of four divisions and six branches that are inseparable from the tongue of the greatest God Siva with matted hair." This gives us a clue to determine that the Post Sangam age Tamils knew the Vedas and the six angas (Parts) of them and believed that they were the worshippers of Lord Siva. This is one of the central-tenets of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy.

It is striking that none of the Early Sangam works mention Lord Siva by name. His descriptions and deeds are given elaborately in Post Sangam works. He is mentioned by various descriptive
names and they are; Talsadaipolinda, Aruntavatton, Mudumudalvan, Iraivan, Mukketselvan, Karaimidarruannal, Nilamanimidarruannal, Piravayakkaiyon, Jaladari, Chenchadaikkadavul, Alkelukadavul, Tolmudukadavul, Adhiraimudalvan, Manimidattuannal, AlamarseIvan, Nedumudiannal, Imaiyon etc.,

Some of the names of this Post Sangam period adopted by the people viz., Iraiyanan, Ruddiram, Sattinathan, Perundevanar, Venbudi, Thakkan etc. These names are the synonyms of Lord Siva. These also alludes to the Kapalikas. Ugra is one of the eight forms of Sivathat this was familiar to the Post Sangam Tamils can be seen from the various names of Lord Siva. These names indicate the popularity of the Synonyms of Lord Siva during the Post Sangam age and also to the popularity and extensive prevalence of the worship of Lord Siva in Tamil Country. The expression 'Siva connotes the quality 'Propitious', 'Semmai', the root of this word, stands for 'red', 'justice', 'order', 'perfection' and good'. In all the Post Sangam Classical works Lord Siva, was mentioned by this word. Later on this has been extended to the Lord Murukan tradition, whom the Purana has 20 as the son of Lord Siva. In later times particularly since the Age of the Nayanmars, Lord Siva become the preeminent deity of the Saivites. Anyway by the time Manikalai (the Buddhist work) appeared, the word Siva and its derivatives like Saivam and Saivavadi were in full vogue in Tamil Country. Perhaps due to this growth Tamil Saivism developed a special philosophy, of its own in the later age. Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy which is special to the Tamils echoes some of the philosophical ideas of Manimekalai. Manimekalai, for the first time in Tamil literature, refers to the philosophical notion of God (Siva) as of eight forms. When 'Manimekalai met the Saiva-vati (exponents of Saivism), who holds that Isa is the lord of the universe, asked him to explain the nature of his deity. The Sivavati said, "Siva has as his forms the eight objects, viz., he governs the two luminaries (sun and moon), the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and other). He unites the soul and body and created the world and destroys it as an act of play. His form is made of rays of light. Mighty is He and to removes the fatigue (due to birth and death) of the soul. There is nothing else beside Him, is called Isanan. He is our God.21" It is clear that during the time of, probably before that of Manimekalai some philosophical concepts came to be associated with Lord Siva.

References
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