

Murukan and Tamil Nadu (South India).
A Geographical Approach of a Hindu God.

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Introduction to Murukan and to few epistemological and methodological elements.

Murukan, who is considered nowadays as one of the two sons of Shiva, is one of the most persistent and popular Hindu gods of South India, whose main temples are confined in a very distinct territory : Tamil Nadu. He is believed to be a powerful god, and a protector of Tamil people. As his name suggests (from “*muruku*” in Tamil), he is a teenager who embodies and refers to youthfulness, beauty, but also to courage and power. A peacock is his vehicle, and a lance (*vēl*) is his main attribute. (Moreover, he is the one that young couples worship when they want to have a baby).

But what is striking is the fact that Tamil Hindus have culturally appropriated this deity and his temples in their territory. Also Murukan reveals features worthy of geographical interest: on the one hand by the historical and mythical spatialization of his cult localized and claimed in this particular area; and on the other hand, by the dynamic forms of the socio-spatial integration and adaptation of this god and his temples in Tamil territory, in landscape (Murukan is the “Lord of the hills”), in the cultural and political spheres, in castes, and finally, in the locality. Thus, the analysis of the social and spatial integration of Murukan and his temples, on the global scale of Tamil Nadu, in landscape, and on local scale, seems to be worthy of a great interest for geographical and religious knowledge of Tamil territory.

Besides, we have to define the main epistemological and methodological ways that are necessary to apprehend the implications of a Hindu god like Murukan in geography. In this respect, during this presentation of the geographical aspects of Murukan, we will try to point out few of the main methodological themes and approaches that must not be forgotten in the geographical analysis of a Hindu deity, although this short presentation can not claim to be exhaustive.

We can begin by asserting that geography can focus on religion. For instance, the famous work of Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how gods and their history significantly reflect the history and culture of man’s ecosystems. The history of geography of religion will not be dealt with here, but in accordance with the tradition developed by geographers like

Pierre Deffontaines, David Sopher, Manfred Büttner, Paul Claval, Singaravelou, Guy Dimeo, etc..., we do consider religion as a social fact that manifests itself on space. Thus, as a geographical material, religion can be analysed by structural, sociological, and phenomenological points of view.

First, it must be considered that interdisciplinarity, which is quite famous for its relevance in geography and in social sciences, is crucial for religious studies due to the global meanings and implications of religion in societies. So, geography has to pay attention to the studies of anthropologists, sociologists, indologists, historians of religion, etc... For instance, as we will explain in this presentation, it is undeniable that Hindu myths have to be known. They are fundamental for the understanding of the cosmology and social relations which are connected (*Purusha* and castes system) and which have a deep impact on the production of space and on the construction of the environment. Religion and gods can be understood - as Louis Dumont did with Aiyanaar (Dumont, 1953) - as parts of a superstructure that reflects itself on the domain of beliefs, symbols, behaviours, social relations, and on infrastructure. Then, as a feedback in a cyclic process, all these elements influence the society in accordance with the principles of the superstructure. Space is a context in which social relations take place, but also a factor of structuration. Secondly, religion is an element of society that has its own “function”, and which is necessary for the “functioning” and the reproduction of the society according to a shared model of society. These both epistemological views are particularly useful for a study of a god in geography in so far as these approaches can be considered as introductions to the later systemic view that characterizes an important geographical branch, and that is fundamental for religious studies.

In this respect, we can add, and this is crucial for the geographical study of Murukan, that gods, as part of every socio-spatial system, tend to reflect the cultural environment of man; and so, when the social, cultural, or “natural” contexts change the imageries by which gods are understood also change. So, geographers have to include religion and gods into systemic conceptions of relations between space, nature and culture, with respect to the “Geography of Belief Systems “ that is interested in the interactions between religion and environment (Singh, 1987).

Gods, temples, landscape and territory can be understood in accordance with these epistemological points of view, but the importance of freedom of action and man’s subjectivity should not be forgotten for approaches of religion in so far as faith is also, and in large part, an expression of self. So geography should not focus only on external manifestations of religion even if they are necessary and meaningful. For a long time,

geography has studied religion only through what Paul Claval called the “periphery” of religious facts (Claval, 1992); that is to say that geography was focused only on external aspects of religion but not on its phenomenological and existential dimensions, that are fundamental. Indeed, if we want to understand a maximum of the socio-geographical meanings of religion, we have to consider also the sphere of existence, the actual experience of religion by individual. Moreover, Martin Heidegger depicted spatiality as a projection of our existence on earth. And according to Kant, space is a pure form *a priori* of sensitive intuition of man, and then a fundamental way we have of seeing and of feeling reality. In this respect, the methodology of Humanistic Geography (like mental maps,...), introduced by Yi-Fu Tuan, should also be mobilized due to its phenomenological and existential approaches that are essential for religious studies. So geography has to pay attention to the ways people imagine “natural”, social and cultural environments and how they live and feel their insertion into these environments. Religion and faith have a role to play in the mental and phenomenological relations of individuals with their environment. In this respect, since it belongs to the sphere of perception and conscience, space is not homogenous. Places do not have the same meanings, especially religious ones, and every individual acts according to his own perception and relation with space and places.

Then, the geographical approach of a Hindu god like Murukan implies a double task:

- to define the functional, structural, and symbolic insertions of Murukan by Hinduism in Tamil landscape, territory, and social system.
- to explore the mental representations of Murukan and his temples that Hindus from Tamil Nadu have, in order to know the meanings – that can be individual or social - of Murukan temples.

This is what we are going to do in this presentation, dealing with the close relationship between Murukan and Tamil Nadu. I will present some results I have found about the geographical implications of Murukan in Tamil Nadu in order to explain and to illustrate some epistemological and methodological approaches and themes that must be used for the geographical understanding of a Hindu god. To be more precise, we will focus on temples, territory, landscape, and their involvement in the Tamil socio-spatial system¹, with, a focus on the local scale towards the end of my presentation.

¹ The socio spatial system derives from the socio spatial formation introduced in geography by Guy Di Meo. This tool is a model for territorial analysis that combines infrastructure and superstructure of a social system.

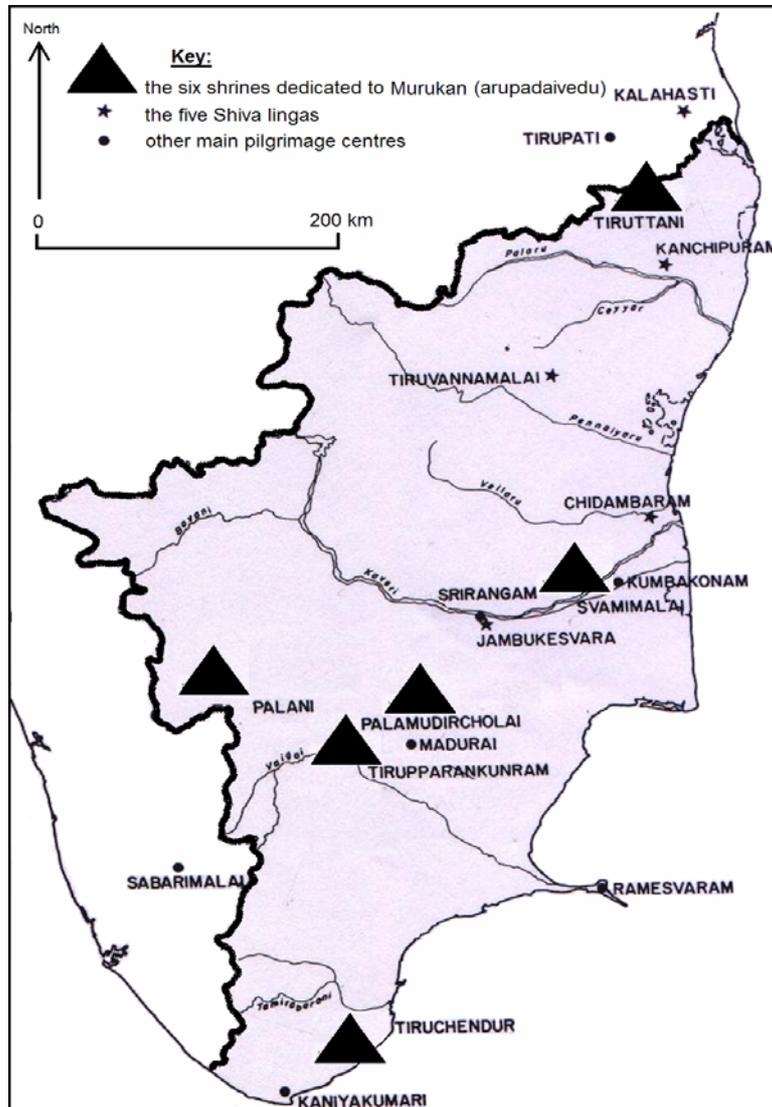
1. *Tīrtha and kṣetra: key-words of the Hindu geography.*

Geography that focuses on religion has to pay attention first to the symbolic construction of territory. This is quite a well known process of Hinduism in India that has been developed mostly by anthropologists (Reiniche, 1979; Assayag, 1997; Eck, 1998; Claveyrolas, 2003,...) but also by geographers (Bhardwaj, 1998; Delage, 2004). We will not explain this process in its globality but it is a crucial element of the relationship between geography and Hinduism that deserves explanation.

This process raises fundamental methodological issues, and the cult of Murukan in Tamil Nadu manifests interesting adaptations and variations. First, we have to pay attention to the geographical distribution of temples in a classical geographical approach, but sacred geography must be also considered. So, we are going to focus on the construction of the Tamil sacred territory by Hinduism through the Sanskrit key-concepts of sacred places – *tīrtha* (sk.), sacred “ford” - and sacred territory – *kṣetra* (sk.), “domain”, “field”, by extension *kṣetra* refers to a sacred territory-. (We refer to Sanskrit words because they fit in with a pan-indian geographical tradition of Hinduism, but even if Tamil people use the word *tīrtham*, they seem to prefer the word *ārupayāivītu* [“six houses”] than the term *kṣetra*).

Hindus from Tamil India have culturally appropriated Murukan cult and temples. Indeed, the large Murukan shrines are mostly found in this Dravidian territory of South India, but not only. Actually the Tamil region is clearly believed and claimed by literature and Tamil people as the territory of Murukan because the god has “His Six Houses” in this region - his “*kṣetra*” (sk.) -, where he is believed to have performed many feats. These “Six Houses”, referred to in Tamil as *ārupayāivītu*, are obviously considered as holy places that correspond to the other key concept of *tīrtha* (sk.). These concepts of *kṣetra* and *tīrtha* are fundamental to the geography of Hinduism in so far as the spheres of the sacred (gods, myth,...) and profane (concrete land), of the visible and the invisible, the ideal and the material, meet together in particular places and spaces in order to build a landscape and a territory where people can have contact with the divine and also experience the feeling of living in a holy territory. Even if Tamil people prefer the word *ārupayāivītu* (tam.) than *kṣetra* (sk.), these concepts of *tīrtha* and *kṣetra* are particularly useful for us due to a geographical reality that can be mapped, but also because they can be compared with the notion of territory (*kṣetra*) that can be understood as a network, or a collection, of symbolical and meaningful places (*tīrtha*).

The Six Houses (*ārupaytaivītu*) and pilgrimage centres of Murukan.
Network of six *tīrtha* for the Murukan's *ksetra*.



Personal realization, from Guilmoto, 1985.

So, Murukan has six main *tīrtha* (*ārupaytaivītu*) that correspond together to his *kṣetra*: the network of the *tīrtha(s)* of Murukan. These Six Houses are Tiruttani (Thiruvallur District), Palani (Dindigul District), Tiruchendur (Toothukkudi District), Swamimalai (Thanjavur District), Palamudircholai and Tirupparankunram (Madurai District). Tamil people visit these temples all along the year, but especially during festivals. Even if some festivals are particularly associated to one place due to myths (like *Taipūcam* at Palani, *Skanda Śaṣṭi* at Tiruchendur, or *Vaikāci Vicākam* at Swamimalai,...), most of the festivals are performed in

every pilgrimage centres. These abodes are linked by myths about Murukan life, and so create a meaningful network.

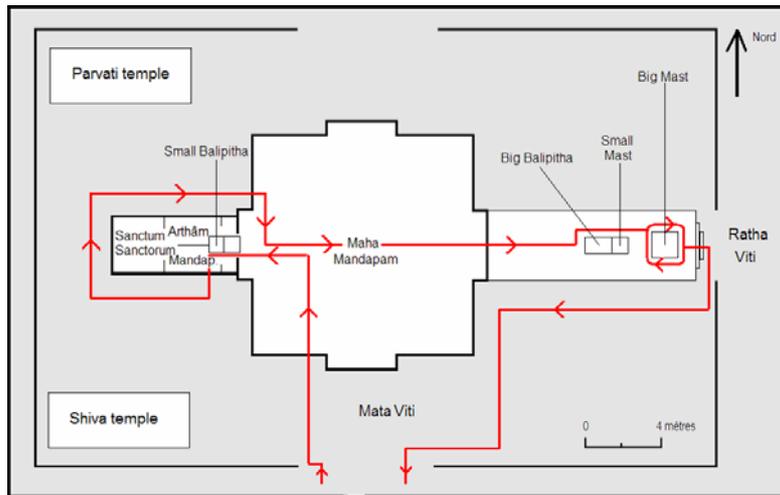
F. Clothey considers these six main temples, or *tīrtha*, as “topocosms”, that is to say as places “where the god is believed to have performed some noble feat and to be especially present today” (Clothey, 1978: 116). This concept of topocosm is interesting for our study in so far as it illustrates how Murukan is geographically deeply rooted in the mythical past and in the land of Tamil territory. It also shows that the symbolical sacralization of Tamil region by the Murukan cult is still significant today, and is intended to inspire a real feeling of living close to the divine. Moreover, this concept is relevant to geographical analysis because it legitimizes the bringing together of the geographical perspective (*topos*-) with the cosmological one (*-cosm*). Topocosm, like *tīrtha*, corresponds exactly to the meeting of nature and culture, of physical environment and man’s beliefs, in a pure “geo-graphy”, that is to say a writing on (and about) the earth by society and religion. Concerning this reciprocity between the visible and the invisible, the “natural” and the social, in such spaces like *tīrtha* or “topocosm”, we see that concrete environment gives reality to the myth while myth gives cultural and social substance to the concrete nature. This symbolic process functions dialectically and is reinforced over the course of time.

In this respect, the geography of Hinduism should consider the importance of myths and symbols rather than limiting itself to positivism. For instance Murukan’s character is very often associated with the number six: he has six pilgrimage centres, he is often depicted with six faces in poetry and iconography, he is supposed to have been raised by six goddesses (stars),... Furthermore, the Hindu temple - like the human body - is said to have six *cakras* (centers, points,...). And, according to a brahmin informer², earlier devotees had to visit the six shrines linked with the tracks of pilgrimage, under the law of *pradaṅśina* (sk.)³, the orthodox and traditional way to worship and to walk in a Hindu temple, keeping the god on his rightside (*daṅśina* [sk.]) after entering from the South (*daṅśina* [sk.]). Thus, the six pilgrimage centers of Murukan serve to sacralize and to cosmicize the Tamil region as a big temple. The relationship to the human body (lying) is clear but will not be dealt with very deeply in this short paper.

² Interviewed in March 2005 in the Ecole Française d’Extrême Orient in Pondicherry.

³ Instead of *pradaṅśina*, Tamil people refers to “*urṣavam*” when they speak about processions, but as we noticed before, we refer to Sanskrit words because they fit in with a pan-indian geographical tradition of Hinduism.

Pradaṣiṇa (sk.): The Way of Walking in a Hindu temple.
(Tamil example of the Murugan temple of Marudha Malai, Coimbatore district).



Personal realization.

For our purposes, it is important to remember that Tamil Nadu is definitely believed to be and constructed as a holy space and a holy place, due to a structural correspondence between Murukan’s territory (*kṣetra*), the Hindu temple, and the Tamil region. This point underlines the aspects of duplication and reciprocity between the local and large scales that characterizes the geography of Hinduism (we could add that the Kaveri river and the Tiruparankunram temple of Murukan are considered as the Ganga and Himalaya of the Tamil region). In addition, according to the rhetorical form of the synecdoche (Debarbieux, 1995) that considers that the part can correspond symbolically to the whole, we could infer that any Murukan temple can be understood as a duplication of any Murukan temple from the *ārupayṭaivītu*, the Murukan’s *kṣetra* (it is the case with the Murukan temples of Mailam (Villupuram Dst.) and Marudha Malai (Coimbatore District), and so as a duplication of Tamil Nadu as a holy land, in correspondence with the process involved in the sacralization of India by the *Car Dham* pilgrimage (on the four cardinal points of India⁴). This is a hypothesis where the mental and cognitive sacred geography of Hindus must confirm structural points of view and theories.

2. Murukan and the Tamil landscape.

Diana Eck’s “imagined landscape” is very relevant here, and situated as it is between the structural approach and the lifeworld context. This scholar has shown how the interrelation between myth and landscape and the Hindu process of duplication and

⁴ Badrinath, Puri, Rameshwaram, and Dvaraka.

multiplication of holy places in a ritual network of several *tīrtha* (sk.), can create a “mental map of *Bharata*” (ECK, 1998: 165) shared by all Hindus and how this process has contributed to the shaping of a “imagined landscape”⁵ of the Indian territory.

As we have just suggested, the imagined landscape of Hindus from Tamil Nadu is closely linked with the *kṣetra* (sk.) of Murukan and vice versa. But we also have to consider the fact that gods and their temples are associated with landscape. In fact, most of the Hindu gods have their own milieu, or “natural” environment to which they correspond. In Tamil Nadu, the *Caṅkam* poetry divided space and Tamil land in five allegorical areas⁶ (*tiṇai*) and according to the *Tirumurugārūppaṭai* (« Guide of Muruga », 400-450 A.D.) composed by the great *Caṅkam* poet *Nakkiirar*, Murukan ruled the *kuṛiñci* region (hilly area). Nowadays, Murukan is still considered as the “Lord of the hills” and most of his temples are supposed to be on hilltops (except for Tiruchendur which is located on the seashore by myths according to which this area is the battlefield where Murukan fought against the demon *asura Sūrapadma*). So, it is not possible to deal with Murukan and geography without mentioning hills due to the deep involvement of Murukan in sacred geography and in sacred landscape. He is clearly associated with hills (*Kuṛiñci*) by literature, but nowadays he is mostly associated with the Tamil word *malai* (mountains, hills), like his father Shiva. Brenda Beck has suggested that the main sacred geography of the Konku Nadu (Coimbatore area) can be understood through the complementarity between Murukan, Shiva - the two main male deities whose temples are located on hills and mountains - and the feminine Kaveri river. This social construction of landscape can be described geometrically as a triangular relationship between the feminine river and the two sets of male temples (BECK, 1979). Moreover, landscape is a spatial significative element that has been thought and constructed by the Hindu religion in order to reflect both the religious system and the system of social values. For example, mountains considered as duplications of the Mount Kailash or Shiva *liṅkam*, are associated with the ascetism and purity of Shiva, in accordance with the brahmanic conception. As Murukan is supposed to be a pure son of Shiva (he is sometimes depicted as a *brahmacārin* (sk.), like in Palani), it is normal for him to be linked with hills and mountains, although his relation with hills has origins earlier.

⁵ In correspondence with the “imagined community” introduced by B. Anderson .

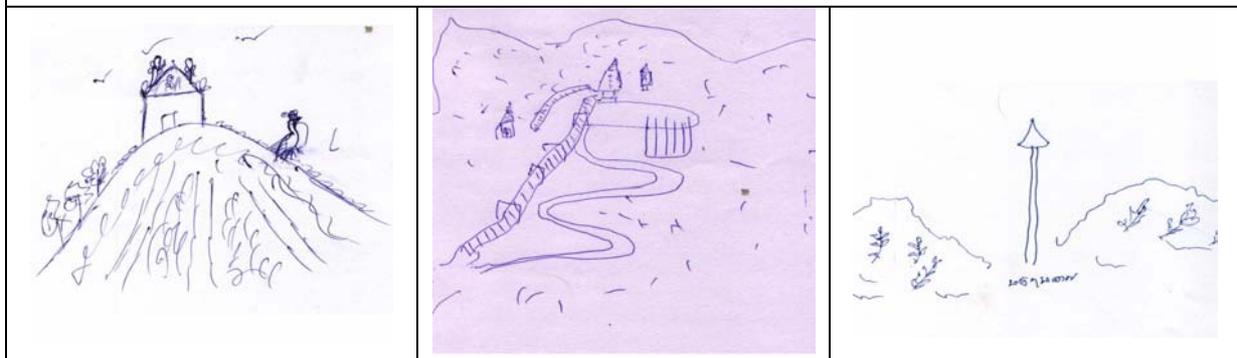
⁶ In addition to the *kuṛiñci*, there is the *marutam*, the agricultural tract, where the city is generally located and which refers to civilization; the *mullai*, the forest or pastoral land between *marutam* and *kuṛiñci* ; the *neytal*, the seashore tract, corresponding to fishing and trade; and the *pālai*, the expanse of wilderness beyond civilization. Each *tiṇai* had its own deity, and its own fauna and flora.

Indeed, Murukan was known amongst the early hunting societies of the Tamil region as a lord of the hunt, a mythic hunter-chieftain and the presiding deity of the hills. Then, as agriculture developed, the god's hunting attributes persisted while characteristics associated with vegetation and fertility (peacock, rooster,...) came to be ascribed to him. Then, during the IInd and IIIrd centuries and under the patronage of Chieftain-kings, Murukan became associated with kingship, began to take on the character of a war-god, and was worshipped by many groups in urban as well as in rural settings. In fact, it seems that the city culture, over which the Pandiyas presided, helped to universalize the Murukan cult and to bring it to the cities.

A few things stand out here. First, landscape is very useful for geographers for understanding the conception of socialised space, and gods are part of the socio-spatial system that should be considered by geographers. Indeed, the evolution of the cult of Murukan reflects the evolution of the relationship between the Tamil society and its environment. Secondly, literature and myth are fundamental for the geographical analysis of a Hindu god. Tamil landscape is a social signature corresponding to a visible inscription of the cosmology and functioning of the Tamil social system.

In this respect, as landscape is a mediating element between environment and human subjectivity, it is pertinent to use the method of the Humanistic Geography as well, considering the phenomenological aspect of landscape. What are the mental representations of the devotees of Murukan temples? Are they linked with Tamil landscape? Actually, during my first field work (2003), I asked devotees of the Marudha Malai temple of Coimbatore in Konku Nadu, to draw this temple. These devotees could have drawn only the temple, the sacred complex, but their mental maps of the temple are much more revealing.

The mental representations of the Marudha Malai temple (Coimbatore) by three devotees.



Source: Personal inquiry.

As we can see from these drawings, in the mental representation of devotees, the temple area includes the mountain as well as the temple itself. Besides, other elements like the peacock or the lance⁷ (*vēl*) are also meaningful in these representations as they reveal the perception of a Murukan temple by its devotees. They confirm that myth and landscape are indeed linked together in a significant way. We can thus hypothesize that landscape is meaningful for the individual religious feeling of holiness, and that the representation of a god's temple is largely influenced by the association between the god and his landscape that is determined, in the case of the Murukan cult, by all the Tamil socio-spatial system as a whole.

3. Territory, identity, Tamil culture, and politics.

Another aspect of the incorporation of Murukan within the Tamil socio-spatial system is the political and cultural sphere. This point is also fundamental for the study of a Hindu god.

During my first field work in 2003, 65 out of the 74 devotees of Murugan I interviewed in the Marudha Malai temple of Coimbatore told me that they believed in a strong relationship between Murukan and the Tamil territory, because He is a (and maybe “the”) Tamil god (Tamil people often refer to Murukan as the “Tamil Katavul”). Actually, Murukan and Tamil identity are closely linked together. For instance, more than fifty names⁸ of Murukan are widely used as names by Tamil people. Moreover, Murukan is described by the *Tirumurugārūppātai* as the son of the *Pandiya* king⁹ *Somāsundara Mallar* and the Goddess *Mīṇakṣi*. This myth of the early *Caṅkam* literature provides a kin relationship for Tamil people with Murukan who is depicted, in a way, as a divine but also Tamil ancestor. The fact that Murukan is involved in the Tamil self identification is very significant for our geographical perspective because this identity is linked with a territory: the Tamil region. Indeed, the six *tīrtha* (sk.) of Murukan, the network of Murukan's pilgrimage centres, makes up a geographical, cultural and ritual infrastructure that puts signs in Tamil territory in a homogeneous way, superimposing the god's territory on the political and administrative ones. Thus, we can infer that the drawing of the Tamil Nadu border has been inspired (but not determined) by the ritual network of Murukan shrines. It is clear that, for cultural, political (and perhaps economic reasons), the temples of Tiruttani or Palani had to be in Tamil Nadu

⁷ The lance has come to symbolize Murukan's capacity to overcome all misfortune.

⁸ Guhane, Saravana, Kumaran, Velan, Vasivelan, Subrahmanya, Skanda, Karthikeya, Shanmuga, Muruga, Palani, Amuruga, Sivakumara,...

⁹South Indian dynasty.

and not in Andhra Pradesh or in Kerala (even if the Ghats and the Nilgiris Hills constitute a natural border). This does not necessarily mean that people of other states do not worship Murukan or visit Tamil temples (the Palani temple continue to cater to Malayali pilgrims).

The resurgence of the devotion for Murukan in Tamil country during the last centuries has to be considered, but this is in relationship to many other cultural and social facts: first, a revival of Tamil culture has taken place since the XIXth century, accompanied by an increase in regional pride. Secondly, the renovation and popularization of Murukan temples, and the the improvement of communication and transport facilities, have to be considered. The opening of temples to scheduled castes people¹⁰ (S.C.) and people of the “backward classes” (B.C.) have increased the number of non-brahman middle and lower class worshippers of Murukan. This is a point we should bear in mind because *bhakti* has proliferated amongst non-brahman communities, whereas the Murukan cult carries on brahmanic tradition and continues to attract brahman devotees. This *bhakti* of lower caste people has precisely been inspired by the pride in the Tamil heritage of Murukan. So, given that everybody can worship Murukan, his cult reflects an idea of social integration and of democratization that appears to be of fundamental concern for many Tamil people today.

When M.Karunanidhi, the chief Minister of the *Dravida Munettra Kazhakam* (DMK) declared in 1971 at Palani, the busiest and richest temple of Murukan, that Murukan was the “god of DMK” (Clothey, 1978: 116), the politico-cultural, and then territorial relations between Murukan and Tamil Nadu were clearly asserted. Indeed, even if this assertion must be considered as a way to consolidate a vote bank, let us remember that it was Annadurai, the cheif minister of the DMK, who created the name “Tamilnad” (tam. “Tamil country”). Thus, although DMK is quite famous for its atheism (but less than the DK and mostly concerning caste considerations), and even if political parties are not really allowed to claim a link with any particular deity, the relation between Tamil Nadu and Murukan is undeniable.

We signal this point to underline that a geographical analysis of a Hindu god must also engage with the political sphere. Indeed, the production of a collective identity in which Murukan is tied to Tamil Nadu is cemented by territory and by the Six Houses of Murukan because territory and a network of temples can be bordered, mapped, and shown (whereas collective identity can not), in order to create a collective “imagined territory” shared by all Tamil Hindus. So, Murukan’s territory is a meaningful tool for political authority, and has

¹⁰ For the first time in 1936 in Travancore.

therefore been a very important political stake for the constitution of the territorial identity of Tamil Nadu.

Thus, not only Tamil landscape, but also political, cultural, and ideological involvements of Murukan are (or have been) crucial to the socio-territorial formation of Tamil Nadu. This particularity has to be studied by geographers who are able to link the spatial dimension with the political, and symbolical ones. But to understand the reality of Murukan in Tamil Nadu, it is worthwhile to change scale, and to focus on the locality.

4. The temple in the locality: perspectives for social geography.

As the anthropologist Gilles Tarabout suggests, temples are still at the centre of the stakes of power in the locality (Tarabout, 1997: 137). Every festival, private donations, or any event in temples, provide occasions for people to show and even to improve their status, by earning a “symbolic [and social] capital”. Each village (*kirāmam* [tam.]) has its own sacred geography. The involvement of caste during temple festivals, and the geography of processions must be analysed by geographers in order to understand the socio-religious facts that influence – or that are influenced by - spatial relations. This is crucial. Indeed, festivals throw into relief the spatialized signs through which social groups identify themselves with specific geographical contexts and places in order to emphasize their singularity. Religious festivals have a great symbolic and performative power. They show the social and spatial stakes on local scale, and so, festivals are involved in the spatial construction of social relations. This symbolic power of religious festival is an opportunity for geographer to understand status. For instance, in the Murukan temples of Vadapalani in Chennai or of Kadir Kamam village in the Pondicherry area¹¹, the spatial organization of processions of Murukan festivals (and probably of most of the others deities...) reflects the degree of ritual “purity” of each group. First, the lower caste people carry lamps, then musicians play drums and announce the coming of the god, then the organizers of the festival follow, and finally we find the priest and the god. Afterwards, organizers do not follow the procession in Vadapalani temple (but they did in the temple of Kadir Kamam). Then, the divine char stops in front of each house where people wait for Murukan, and who are on the route of the procession. These devotees give offerings to the priest, and so, these people are spatially located between the lower caste (or sometimes S.C.) people and the priest. Their spatial position in the procession

¹¹ I have studied these both field works in March 2005, and Vadapalani once more during *Taipūcam* festival of february 2006. The study of the Kadir Kamam village was during the monthly festival of *Kārtittikai*.

and the fact that they give offerings to the priest gives them a “kingly” status. So the social space of procession corresponds to the social organization of the Hindu society (in correspondence with the organization of the Hindu temple). Geographers can not neglect the study of such phenomena.

But specific attributes of gods also need to be considered because their processions show the socio-territorial stakes. Indeed, as Louis Dumont had noted, the structural definition of gods is particularly relevant for the understanding of the social and caste organization of a village or of a small region (Dumont, 1953), because it influences deeply forms of spatial organization. Actually, geographers must pay attention to the relationships between gods and their temples to depict the sacred geography, and also the socio-spatial organization of the locality, because many correspondences can be found between gods and their worshippers. Indeed, to read the social function of gods means reading social functions of men, and vice versa. “The latter are not the simple reflection of the formers: there is equivalence between them that enables us to understand what one hides by what the other reveals¹²” (Reiniche, 1979: 8). For instance, the local relations between Shiva temples and Amman temples are particularly relevant for the socio-geographical analysis of a locality. Shiva is often the pure god of the upper castes area (*caturvedimangala*) whereas many Amman temples remain outside of this area, in the lower castes area. Socio-geographical events such as the settlement of temples or the progress of a festival, are clearly determined by such as these considerations.

On this point, Murukan presents interesting characteristics. He is believed to have two wives: *Devasenā*, a Brahmin, and *Valli*, depicted by the southern popular mythology as the daughter of a hunter chief. So by this wedding, Murukan gathers Northern and Southern images but also upper and lower castes. Furthermore, as we have seen, Murukan cult is linked with brahmanic ritual, but is also strongly associated with *bhakti*, and he is, in certain aspects, a god of the territory. As everyone, from brahmins to lower castes, can worship Murukan in Tamil Nadu it is interesting to investigate the spatial insertion of Murukan temples in the locality and the spatiality of the procession relating to this god, with an emphasis on the socio-territorial relations of these phenomena.

Finally, the phenomenological aspects of Murukan temples must also be mentioned. Indeed, geographical space combines the social space and the existential. Temples are main points of reference in the network of everyday life places of people, involved in the mental and subjective territoriality of any Hindu. People are linked with gods according to many

¹² « Les unes ne sont pas seulement le reflet des autres ; il y a entre elles équivalence, ce qui permet dans un registre d'expliciter ce que l'autre voile ».

social facts, from caste or *kulam* (clan, family) to various fluctuating affective considerations. So it is worth asking people about their affective relations with Murukan if we want to understand their relationship with temples as well. This is true also for the analysis of pilgrimage. The objectivity of the geographer thus consists in understanding and in connecting all the differences of subjectivity of these systems of life (upper or lower castes,...) and of perception, rather than imposing his own hidden subjectivity. The religious rituals of every day life, motivated by religious and existential spheres, make ritual places powerful spaces for the convergence of social interaction, and intense socio-territorial stakes, the strength of which is even more pronounced during religious festivals.

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