

# Lord Murugan In The Vedas

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## Abstract

The worship of Lord Muruga is not only an ancient religious practice of the Tamils but it is also being a bridge to connect the civilization, culture, beliefs and tradition of them. The Sanggam literature hails Lord Muruga as the Lord of the Kurunji land. But even the *Vedas* which were written long before the Sanggam literature praise Lord Muruga with special superiority. Among the four Vedas namely *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharva*, *Rig Veda* is considered to be the oldest. Even in the *Rig Veda*, there found many pieces of information about Lord Muruga. Lord Muruga is referred to as Agnibhu, Sadasapati, Skanda and Subramanya. What do the names means? What is the significance of Lord Muruga in the *Vedas*? The article aims at giving a clear insight into all these aspects. In order to prove it with evidence, the Vedic verses and Maha Vakyas of Lord Muruga are also given with their meaning. Furthermore, in order to reinforce the points, research materials found in *Ramayana*, *Bagavath Gita* and *Upanishads* are also incorporated.

Keywords: Lord Muruga, *Veda*, Skanda, *Upanishad*, The Tamils, Hinduism, Maha vakyas.

*Tat Kumārāya vidamahe Kārttikeyāya dhūmahī - tanno Skandah  
pracodayāt  
(Maitrāyani Samhita – Krsna Yajurveda)*

Let us meditate on Lord Kumara, also known as Karthikeya. May Lord Skanda inspire and illumine our mind and understanding

*Tat Purusāya vidamahe Mahāsenāya dhūmahī - tanno Sanmukhah  
pracodayāt  
(Taittirīya Āranyaka)*

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Let us meditate on The Lord, who is also the Deva force. May Lord Sanmukha inspire and illumine our mind and understanding.

## Background

Lord Murugan remains the centre of an entire spiritual culture and civilization of millions of Tamils and non-Tamils world-wide. The antiquity of Murugan worship has been proven with ample evidence from archaeological findings across South Asia and South-East Asia. From ancient times to the present age, the worship of Lord Murugan has continued to find an honoured place in the annals of different cultures, especially amongst Tamils. The purpose of this paper is to substantiate with citations, the reverence shown towards Lord Murugan in the Vedic scriptures. By tracing through the various names in Vedic references to Lord Murugan, this paper fulfils its objective.

## Introduction

Lord Murugan, the eternally young, Divine form of God has been worshipped, adored and loved by many names including Skandan, Shanmugan, Subramanya, Saravanabhavan, Guhan, Kartikeyan etc. Etymologically, the term, *Muruku* in Tamil denotes divineness, youthfulness, happiness, vitality etc. (Sethupillai, R.P. 1976, 12). The name, *Muruka* contains the three divine eternal functions – creation (*sristi*), protection (*sthithi*) and destruction (*samhara*) as evidenced by three syllables in the name: *MU* – *Mukundan* (Vishnu), *RU* – *Rudra* (Siva) and *KA* – *Kamalan* (Brahma) (1976, 14). The evolution of the devotion and following of Lord Murugan who, during later times, developed into one of the most popular and prominent deities in Hinduism, takes its origin from pre-Vedic times. The tradition was already established in the era of the *Rig Veda*. For example, the term, *Kumāra* appears in the *Rig Veda* (RV 5.2.1-3) as the deity endowed with fiery golden teeth and golden complexion as follows:

Kumāram māta yuvatih samugham guhā bibharti na dadāti pitre  
anīkam asya minajjanāsah purah pashyanti nihitam arātau  
kam etam tvam yuvate kumāram pesī bibharsi mahisī jajāna  
pūrvī hi garbhah sharado vavardhā pashyam jātam yad asūta  
mātā

(RV. 5.2.1-3)

Unknown to many, the post-Vedic scriptures and epics written in Sanskrit continued with the reverence shown towards Lord Murugan. *Skanda Purāna* states, *Skandasya kiirtimatulām Kalikalmasha nāshiniim*, i.e. reading of Lord Skanda's story removes all sins of this Kali Yuga. In *Ramayana*, Sage Vālmiki notes that Queen Kausalya, Lord Rama's mother invoked the blessings of Lord Skanda when Rama took leave of her prior to his departure to the forest (Ayodhya Kānda, Sarga 25, stanzas 11-12). Similarly, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna declares that among all commanders, He is *Skanda* (*Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 10, verse 24).

In the rest of this paper various vedic sources referring to the supreme reverence shown towards Lord Murugan will be presented and analysed.

## Ahmuvan – From The Formless to Formed

Ahmuvan is the name of a primary deity from the Indus Valley Civilization. He is pictured on some of the tables unearthed from the Indus Valley as an anthropomorphic figure. This deity is suggested to be associated with the Tamil God Murugan (Saloman, Richard, 1996, pp. 743-745).

The cult of Murugan worship seems to have had its beginning even before the Vedic age. Furthermore, the myths connected with Murugan are of no age. Whatever the age when the *Rig Veda*, the earliest of the four Vedas, was formulated, it was before that age that the conviction had been formed that there is One God, Brahman – the Cosmic Intelligence, raised high above all the conditions and limitations of human nature.

Accordingly God is the *pure energy* that pervades everything around us. In His formless state, He is called as “*Nirguna Brahman*”, meaning ‘God devoid of any perceivable qualities’ (Ramamoorthy, H and Nome, Master, 1995, pp. 15-22). Vedic scriptures also expand on the fact that the relationship between man and his creator is something intensely personal, subjective and exclusive. Thus arose the concept of “*Saguna Brahman*” or ‘God with qualities of name and form’ (Subramuniyaswami, Satguru Sivaya, 2003, p 235). Hence, arose the adaptive nature of Hinduism with the personalisation of the universal God – a unique and a very powerful aspect of Hinduism that is sometimes misunderstood as being polytheism.

In the following sections of this paper, we will take the different names used in the Vedic scriptures to refer to Lord Murugan. We will achieve this by analysing the various names in the Vedic scriptures used in reference to Murugan.

## Agnibhu – Son of Agni

Lord Murugan is referred in the *Atharva Veda* as Agnibhu, son of Agni, and is depicted as confounding the foes (AV.6.67.2). In the *Satapata Brahmanas* (Kanda 5, Adhyaya 1 Brahmana 13.18), He is depicted as the son of Rudra (Siva) and then as the ninth form of Agni. Lord Siva, as Rudra, is identified in the Vedic hymns with Agni. This syncretism gave rise to different legends relating to the birth of Murugan, all stories however pointing to one and the same deity.

Being the son of Lord Siva, originating from the flame arising out of His third eye, the references to Lord Murugan in the Vedas as ‘Agnibhu’, the son of Agni confirms the reverence of Lord Murugan in the Vedas. Again the *Satapatha Brāhmana* (6.1.3.18) states that Agni, born as Kumāra, had nine names, of which the ninth is Skanda. This *Brāhmana* also equates the Karitikās with Agni (2.1.2.5) as follows:

Etā vā agni naksatram yat krttikāh. pura etāh udyanti. agni vā  
etānām mithunam.

(Śatapatha Brāhmana 2.1.2.5.)

“Kumaram, the religious following of Lord Murugan or Kumaren as the essence of Agni, is clearly described in the *Rig Vedas* as a religious sect affirming the immensity and the variety of the Reality” (Aravamuthan, T.G., 1978, Volume VII, p. 129). The link of Murugan with the Agni of the Vedic period has also been put forward also by the Western Indological scholars like Max Mullar and A. Monsieur (Sethupillai, R, 1976, pp. 2-11).

## Sadasapati - He who is dear to Indra

Extending the *Saguna Brahman* gave rise to a multitude of personalised deities. In the Vedas, 'One God' became personalised as Indra, Agni, Ushas, Prajapati, Rudra etc. (Science of Mythology, p. 72). In the *Ekagni Kanda* of the *Rig Veda*, occurs the following Gayatri mantra verse referring to Lord Muruga as Lord Sadasapati:

*Sadasapatim Adbuhutam; Priyam Indrasya Kaamyam Sanim medhaam  
ayaasissam (RV 1:18)*

The above verse translates as, "I approach the wonderful Lord of the sacrificial hall who is the giver of wisdom and who is dear and desirable to Indra". It is noteworthy that, from Skanda Purana, Lord Muruga is the dearest deity to Indra as he not only freed Indra from Surabadhman, the Asura King, but also wedded Deveyanai, Indra's daughter.

## Hiranyagarba - The egg of golden fire

In Vedic scriptures, Lord Murugan is also depicted as connected with the Hiranyagarba, the egg of golden fire - the source of all beings. *Skanda Upakhyaana* addresses Murugan as Hiranyagarba. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* states, "Hiranyagarbaham pasyata jayamanam" (verse IV.12) declaring Rudra is Hiranyagarba who should be meditated in one's own heart. Another part says, "Hiranya garbam janayamasa puroam" (verse III.4) meaning, He (Rudra) fathered Hiranyagarba in the beginning.

Even though this may sound paradoxical that Rudra is at the same time, both Hiranyagarba and the father of it too, a deeper look into the meaning reconciles this paradox. In essence, Rudra who is the source of the golden fire (hence, in essence, the Hiranyagarba), is also its father, given that Murugan originated from the third eye of Rudra (i.e. Siva). The Satapatha Brahmana of the Vedas tells us that Rudra-Shiva was first born as a Kumara (boy) and was given nine names: Rudra, Sarva, Ugra, Pashupati, Asani, Bhava, Mahadeva, Ishana and Kumara (boy-child), his ninth name (Satapatha Brahmana, VI.1.3.8-19). In other words, this paradox must be taken to mean simply that Hiranyagarba is delineated in the aspect of the father (i.e. Rudra) who is Svayambhu, the self-born and the father manifesting himself as the son, Lord Murugan.

## Senanya - The General

In a verse from the *Rig Veda*, Lord Murugan is referred to as 'Senanya', the General (RV 1.189.1). Even though in many earlier sections of the Vedic scriptures Indra is depicted as the supreme deity, this changed in the subsequent scriptures where he became one of the Lokapalas - the king of the Devaloka, the world of the Devas with Brahaspati as his priest. As such there are many indirect references to Lord Murugan as the general of the Devasena appearing in the wars between the Devas and Asuras, the good and evil.

A stanza from the *Rig Veda* states, "He is the killer of the Rakshasas who represent falsehood and evil" (RV X.87). Furthermore in the *Yajur Veda (Taittreya Samhita IV.5)*, he is referred to as "the warrior having a firm bow and discharging swift flying arrows". In *Rig Veda* there are several references to the hidden child deity Antaryami whose symbol is Agni, the fire of Knowledge. He is depicted as a General, in order to put down the Danavas, the dark passions (RV 8.43.21; 6.8.5; 4.4.4).

Similarly there is a reference to Lord Murugan in the *Rig Veda* (1.40.2) as 'Sahasaputra' son of valour. Accordingly the Lord and His most powerful Senanya - lead the army of the Gods to victory in the path of righteousness.

### Skanda, Subramanya, Sanatkumara

In the *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* pantheon of deities, Lord Murgan is also spoken of as Skanda, Subramanya and Sanatkumara. In *Rig Veda* the name 'Subramanyom' occurs thrice as invocation and signifies the manifestation of Brahman. The chanting if Subramanyom thrice before beginning the sacrificial rituals in the Vedic age indicates the supremacy associated with the Lord Murgan, otherwise called Subramanya as follows:

*Subrahmanyoham, Subrahmanyoham, Subramanyoham!!!.*

In *Chandogya Upanishad* sage Narada having lost his peace of mind, approaches sage Sanatkumara and inquires of him the way to peace. Sanatkumara then taught Narada, 'the way that leads to light of wisdom points to Skanda', as follows:

*tasmai mrditakasayaya tamasha param darshayati bhagavan  
Sanatkumarah tam Skanda ityacaksyate*

(*Chandogya Upanishad* 7.26.2)

Here Sanatkumara is identified with Skanda i.e. Lord Murugan (Kane, History of Darmaśāstra Vol V, p.581). In his treatises on Murugan, KA Nilakanta Shastri infers that the sources of Sanskrit are somewhat shrouded in antiquity. "The true beginnings are hidden and we start somewhere in the middle". The first *Anuvāka* of the tenth *Prapathaka* of the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, where occurs the Gayatri mantra of *Parasa-Mahasena-Shanmuka*. The Gayatri of Shanmuka reads as follows:

*Tat purusaaya Vidmahe maha senay dimahi Tannah Shanhmukha  
pracodayat.*

(*Taittiriya Aranyaka*)

Both these texts are pre-Buddhist in date. The description of Skanda found in the Skanda yaga (*Parisistas* of Adharva veda edited Bolling and Negelein, 1909, pp. 128-134) included in the *Parisistas* of the *Atharva Veda* clearly refers to Lord Murugan as being associated with the peacock - *yam vahanti mayura* (2.3).

In the period of the Vedanta literature, Skanda appears as one of the benevolent deities. This Sutra literature was composed between 600 BCE and 200 BCE (Mcdonell A, history of Sanskrit literature, p 206). In the Baudhayana Dharma Sutra, we find the names, Skanda, Shanmukha, Kumara, Shanmukha and Subramanya. This work was composed before the Apastamba Dharma Sutra which was written in 400 BCE. The testimony of this work shows that the worship of Lord Murugan was practiced well before 400 BCE. Here we find the daily libations of a householder and in this mantra is included the identification of Sanatkumara with Skanda. This is in consonance with the *Chandogya Upanishad* already quoted and in connection with penance all-knowing and possessed of all knowledge become established.

*Om Sanatkumaram tarpayami; Skadnam tarpayami;  
Indram tarpayami; Sashtim tarpayami;  
Sanmukam tarpayami; Visakhnam tarpayami;  
Jayatman tarpayami; Mahasenam tarpayami;  
Skandaparsadamam tarpayami.*

(Panikkar, Raimundo. 1979, 212)

Similarly, a Vedic reference elaborates the ritual on the propitiation of Lord Murugan through the offerings in the sacred with the following hymn:

*Āgneyam Krittikāputram Aindram kecid adhiyate  
ke ca Pāshupatam Raudram yo 'si so 'si namo stu te*

(Panikkar, Raimundo. 1979, 220)

## Conclusion

Murugan, the mystic name that fascinates and maddens the heart, the charm that cures all ills, the magic spell that keeps all evil spirits at bay, makes true devotees at once divine. This Almighty Lord worshipped by Tamils all over the world is fondly called, the "Tamil God". This paper, provided with substantiation from many sources, gives an added dimension to the pervasiveness and antiquity of Lord Murugan in the Vedic scriptures. In doing so, it has reinforced beyond doubts, the immense reverence shown towards Lord Murugan – the *Kali-Yuga Varadhan* or the Supreme Lord of the present age.

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## Hindus, A New Phenomenon?

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### Abstract

Hindus possess their own unique religious beliefs and practices and they have been insured from one generation to another for centuries. Yet the religious beliefs and practices of Hindus living in India differs from that of Hindus living elsewhere or outside India. The best exemplification of the difference is the religious practice of Malaysian Hindu as they have introduced a new form to the Hindu religious practice by building shrines for deities within their residential compound. It is a new phenomenon amongst the Malaysian Hindu community and also it is not legal as a religious institution as most shrines were illegally without the consent of the local authorities. This article is an attempt at looking at the new phenomenon, whether it is a present day Malaysian Hindu and how the phenomenon emerged in its entirety.

**Keywords:** Hindus, Malaysian Hindus, shrines, religious practices, beliefs, local authorities, Hinduism.

### Introduction

We can largely perceive the religious practices of Malaysian Hindu as through their worship of home worship, festivals and temple festivals (Aradhana).<sup>1</sup> These types of worship are passed down from one generation to another and duly and thoroughly practiced with new or old houses as well as shrines. The Hindu scholars consider traditional institutions as deep roots of religious practices of Malaysia, Indians or Malaysian Hindus particularly through the religious practices of Malaysian Indians. The domestic prayers performed by Malaysian Indians have undergone numerous changes with time and amongst the religious practices undergo changes in building shrines within the residential compound.

A number of Malaysian Indians, especially, construct within their residential compound according to their belief or their prayers for God or their family deities. These shrines usually built in rural areas make their way to urban areas where

<sup>1</sup> The research in this phenomenon had been done in the form of questionnaire and as well as fieldwork which is presented in Chapter 6 (2001) of this book.

<sup>2</sup> The author is Subramanian is a scholar in the original work of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in which he presented a number of religious beliefs and practices as well as rituals and practices of the Hindu religion. He also presented a number of religious beliefs and practices of the Hindu religion and also presented