

THE NATURE OF SACRED POWER IN  
OLD TAMIL TEXTS

BY

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1. A lovely Old Tamil poem, *Akanāṇṇūru* 22, by a female poet, Veripāṭiya Kāmakkaṇṇiyār (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> Cent. A.D. if not earlier; certainly not later) runs as follows:

In that confused time  
when no one realized  
that it was the broad fragrant chest  
of the chieftain in the countryside of forests and waterfalls  
descending from high mountains where *aṇaṅku* dwells  
which caused [my] desire and suffering,  
the women of ancient wisdom proclaimed:

“She will be soothed  
by worshipping Neṭuvēḷ  
whose strong arms are famous  
for wiping out those  
who do not bow to him.”

In the awe-inspiring midnight,  
to invite Muruku,  
red millet mixed with blood  
was scattered as offerings,  
to the loud singing in the shrine,  
the spear was garlanded,  
the threshing-floor polished,

while [my] lover came to cure me  
of the debilitating illness of love,

like a mighty tiger who moves fast,  
 hiding in a shelter watching the elephants as its prey,  
 so that the watchmen of the large house  
 in our beautiful home  
 do not see him.

He wears wreaths with many flowers  
 buzzing with honey-bees,  
 which grow in plenty near the waterfalls  
 on the slopes fragrant with sandal.

He comes to fulfill the desire of my heart  
 with his lust,  
 and whenever I make love to him  
 so that I swoon in the soul's ecstasy,

I must laugh, really,  
 when I see the waste  
 spent here on the useless priest with the spear!

This poem, composed by a woman poet whose name may be paraphrased as 'The Lovely Eyed One who Sang About Religious Frenzy', is indeed of great importance for the investigation of the early cult of Murukaṅ-Neṭuvēḷ. However, in this paper it is used as a point of departure for a research into the nature of the sacred power, for it contains the term and concept which is the object of the investigation: *aṇaṅku*. When the countryside of the clandestine lover is described at the very beginning of the poem, *aṇaṅku* is said to be the attribute of the *neṭuvarai ucci*, 'the summit of the high mountain'. What— or who— is the *aṇaṅku*?

2. It is always safe to begin with an etymological approach: *DED* and *DEDS*<sup>1</sup> (under 56b) say *aṇaṅku* v. to suffer, be distressed, be slain; to afflict; n. pain, affliction, killing; and the related etymon found—apart from Tamil—in Kannada, Tulu and Telugu,

<sup>1</sup> *DED*: T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau, *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, Oxford 1961.

*DEDS*: T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau, *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, Supplement, Oxford 1968.

has an over-all meaning of 'suppressing, depressing, ruining, destroying', possibly to be compared with Gondi *ancānā* 'to press'. Apart from these meanings, we have in Kannaḍa and Telugu meanings which are related and which may prove important for our investigation: 'to subdue, control; to hide; to submit, to subject, to yield'.

But surely that is hardly the meaning occurring in our poem, unless we would agree with a translation running something like "the mountain-tops where pain, or affliction, dwells", or "the distressing, oppressive mountain-tops". I could not accept such interpretation in a poem of the genre *kuṛiñci* (montane love-poetry) in which the mountains are depicted as the natural and fitting setting for spontaneous love-making (*kaḷavu*). I have never, in ancient Tamil poetry, come across a negative evaluation of mountains; on the contrary, for the classical Tamil poet, mountains are always beautiful, full of joy, inspiring positive emotions—in particular in the *kuṛiñci* genre where they are always described as the joyful setting of the spontaneous love-union. Hence the meaning of *aṇaṅku* in *Akam* 22 must be different.

3. Consulting the *Tamil Lexicon* we find: pain, affliction, suffering, disease; fear; goddess who takes away one's life by awakening lust or by other means; beautiful damsel, as resembling a celestial damsel; devil; dancing under religious excitement, especially possession by Skanda; beauty; form; young offspring; *aṇaṅkutāḱku* in *Tirukkuraḷ* 918 means possession by a demoness of lust or harm.

We are confronted here with too many meanings, out of which three or four could indeed be applied, though we have to eliminate some as late or only lexical. Surely these meanings show either a very different nature of the texts in which they are contained, or different stages of semantic evolution. Dr. N. Subrahmanian's *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index* (1966) gives us twelve meanings, most of them important for our investigation; arranged in rough temporal sequence, they are as follows: (a) In later Old Tamil texts, but certainly not in our text and those strata of texts of which it is a part, *aṇaṅku* means a demoness who appears in pretty form and slays youths, identified with Mohinī. (b) In our

strata of Old Tamil texts, *aṇaṅku* is glossed as fear, or source of fear; also as any frightening deity or fear-evoking ghost or demon. (c) In scattered, slightly later occurrences, it means 'pain caused by fear of *aṇaṅku*' (*Kalittokai*); Varuṇaṇ, the god of the littoral (*neytal* tract; 'domestic god' (*Maturaikkāñci* 164); 'divinity' in the general sense (*Cilappatikāram*, *Maṇimēkalai*).

Considering these *early* meanings, *aṇaṅku* seems to point to a more general and underlying meaning of a *fear-provoking divine or demoniac force*; and taken with its basic etymology (oppress, depress; subdue, control; hide), it is a force which functions oppressively or as a hidden subduing factor; an *awe-inspiring power, causing fear, affliction, pain*.

4. But, as I shall try to point out, even this meaning is not general and basic enough to fit those contextual slots where none of the above meanings (including the most general one arrived at thus far, i.e. an awe-inspiring power causing trouble and pain) would fit. We need something yet more general and more fundamental which would cover and embrace all the contexts (about four dozen, see further) in which the term *aṇaṅku* occurs; and I would suggest that we use, tentatively and as a term to work with, the phrase 'hieratic power' or 'sacred power': a power which was considered to be dangerous, which could be manifested, invoked, or driven away, but which was not always malevolent. For a threatening, malicious power, always destructive, always terror-provoking, the ancient Tamils had another very important term, viz. *cūr* (cf. *DED* 2250 *Ta. cūr* to frighten, to be cruel; n. fear, suffering, affliction, sorrow, disease, cruelty, malignant deity, *Ma. cūr* fiend, affliction, disgust; *DEDS* *Ta. cūrppu* a cruel, ferocious deed).

5. The clue to this conclusion is provided, on the one hand, by detailed investigation of the various contexts in which the two terms occur; on the other hand by an analogy drawn from a general opinion of students of comparative religion. A. Foucher, in his introduction to Alice Getty's valuable monograph on Gaṇeśa (1936), writes: "We know too well that in popular superstition every genius or saint has two aspects, one benevolent and

one malignant, now causing, now curing, the evils over which he is supposed to preside'. In early pre-Aryanized Murukaṅ, we recognize precisely this feature: he causes but also cures the force which he is supposed to generate — he causes but also removes *aṇaṅku*. When a person is depressed, manifesting the symptoms of *aṇaṅku*, he or she (most often she) is supposed to be possessed by Muruku who is the source and cause of *aṇaṅku*, and, after the person's problem has been diagnosed as such by *mutu-vāy-peṇṇir*, the soothsaying women of unfailing wisdom, a *vēlaṅ*, Murukaṅ's priest with the spear, is invited to perform the exorcism, i.e. to remove the *aṇaṅku*. However, very often, a simple love-longing is mistaken for *aṇaṅku* (cf. our poem *Akam 22*, and a great number of similar poems, right up to *Cilappati-kāram*, canto 24); in these contexts, *aṇaṅku* is *not* a terribly dangerous, fearful depression, but rather a melancholic mood of love-longing, a desire for the union with the lover, often feigned by the young woman. Cf. also *Aiṅkuṇūru* 250 by Kapilar: “. . . the truth is that . . . the one who filled with *aṇaṅku* (painful longing) her young breasts (*iḷamulai*) which bear ornaments, is the lord of the forest (*kāṇakkīlavōṇ*, i.e. her lover), not the victorious, manly *Vēl* (= Murukaṅ)”.

The other kind of force, always malevolent, i.e. *Cūr*, is never caused by Murukaṅ; it is also never exorcised; Murukaṅ is never invited to cure or remove it; above all, love-desire is never mistaken for *cūr*; *cūr* is never feigned. As far as this terror-provoking destructive force is concerned, the early Murukaṅ struggles with it, and destroys it. This is the Dravidian basis of the later story of the gigantic war between Skanda-Murukaṅ and Śūrapadma-Cūraṅ, the embodiment of Fear, and the chief of the antigods.

More important, however, are those contexts in which *aṇaṅku* can only be understood as an awe-inspiring, potentially dangerous, sacred or mysterious power, neither malevolent nor beneficial.

I shall in the following deal with *aṇaṅku* so as to try to answer the following set of questions:

- (a) What or where is the *seat* of *aṇaṅku*? Where does it dwell?  
Where is it to be found, where does it manifest itself?

- (b) Who is the *source* of *aṇaṅku*? With what agent is it combined? What or who is the cause of *aṇaṅku* -if any?
- (c) What is the *function* of *aṇaṅku*? What does it cause, how does it manifest itself? With what kind of patients is it combined?
- (d) Is it *beneficial*, *malevolent*, or both? Or neither?
- (e) What is the method to *remove*, destroy or annul it? What is done to *evoke* it, to bring it about?
- (f) How—if at all—did the concept of *aṇaṅku* develop in time?

Before proceeding systematically according to the queries outlined above, it is necessary to return once more to the important distinction between *cūr* and *aṇaṅku*, mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> Is there at least one Old Tamil text where the two concepts would occur simultaneously as two *distinct* forces?

*Akam* 158, a poem by the great poet Kapilar (ca. 140–200 A.D.) in the *kuṟiñci* (montane) genre, very complex in its implications, very subtle in its suggestions, quite superb in its effects, and significantly connected with Murukan, is indeed such a text.

The friend (*tōḷi*) of the heroine (*talaivi*) speaks to the foster-mother (*ceveli-t-tāy*):

Do not scare me by saying,  
 'At midnight (*naṭunāl*) when  
 darkness is thick  
 and the rain—after it had poured down  
 from great clouds, with lightning and thunder—

<sup>2</sup> In somewhat later development, when *aṇaṅku* was personified, it is obviously distinguished from *pēy*, cf. *Maturaikkāñci* 632 which mentions *pēyum aṇaṅkum*, i.e., two distinct categories of personified dangerous forces, taking different forms roaming through the night; in this context, *pēy* (cf. *DED* 3635 Ta. etc., found also in Central Dravidian, in the meanings 'devil, goblin, fiend; ghost, spirit', but also, in Central Dravidian, 'god; spirit; demon; idol') is mentioned as one class of demoniac force, while *aṇaṅku* is mentioned as another, very probably less malevolent or dangerous 'ghost' or 'demon'. In medieval commentaries, though, this distinction was obviously lost; thus in Pēraciriyar's (13th Cent.) commentary on *Tolkāppiyam* III 252.1 *aṇaṅku* is glossed as one of the sources of fear and it covers such 'demons' and 'ghosts' as *pēy*, *pūtam* (< *bhūta*-), 'corpse-eating female demons, etc. For the author of this aphorism of *Tolkāppiyam*, *aṇaṅku* was one of the sources of fear (*accam*). The aphorism says: "Fear has a fourfold source: awe-inspiring, sacred power (*aṇaṅku*), (wild) beasts, robbers and kings."

has stopped, its noise ceased,  
 I saw (*kaṇṭanen*) her,  
 her heavy earrings flashing  
 like lightning in the sky,  
 her thick curly hair loose on her back,  
 walking very stealthily,  
 like a peacock (*mayil*) coming down from a mountain,  
 as she climbed the platform in the field  
 and descended.  
 Mother (*aṇṇai*),  
 on the slope where the *cūr* dwells,  
 where our garden (*nam paṭappai*) is,  
 an *aṇaṅku* comes wearing bright flowers  
 and taking whatever form it wants [to take]  
 (*tām vēṇṇu uruviṇ aṇaṅku varumē*);  
 and dreams delude those who sleep,  
 seeming so as if they were actually happening.  
 This girl (*iva!*) trembles  
 even when she is alone without a light.  
 If an owl in the *marā* tree  
 which [stands] in the courtyard (*maṇṇra*)  
 hoots fearfully,  
 her heart seems to break  
 and she seeks refuge.  
 And our father (*entaiyum*)  
 as strong and wrathful as Murugaṇ,  
 is at home,  
 and has let loose his dogs (*nāy*),  
 similar to a pack of tigers (*puli*).  
 She is much too afraid, isn't she,  
 to have done this (i.e. what you have  
 suggested)?

The heroine meets her lover in a grain field (like Murugaṇ and Vaḷḷi). In a way, she is identified with the rain, the source of fertility (black hair = cloud, heavy earrings = lightning), by the poet. She herself is like a peacock descending from the hill: a peacock, intoxicated with the rain, dances—an 'uralt' symbol in India;

the girl, intoxicated by the love-making, comes back home. She is also likened to, or even partly identified with, *aṇaṅku*, the mysterious power which comes (*varum*), taking whatever shape it wishes, and deludes those who sleep making their dreams (*kaṇavu*) seem true reality (*naṇaviṇ vāy*). But of course, the girl's friend denies that anything like a clandestine rendez-vous takes place. How could it be—the heroine is afraid that she will become the prey of the Cūr, the malevolent spirit causing terror, lurking outside in the garden on the slope. Finally, the father (*entai*) is compared to Murukaṇ; since Murukaṇ is the all-powerful god, the father obviously represents the greatest obstacle of all for the girl to meet her lover. However, the heroine's love and passion overcomes even the terrible strength (*kaṭuntīṇal*) and the anger (*cīṇṇam*) of her Murukaṇ-like father, and his pack of dogs.

What is most interesting in the context of our investigation is the distinction between *cūr* and *aṇaṅku*. While *aṇaṅku* comes (*varum*) taking whatever shapes (*uruvu*) it will (in our particular case a shape which puts on *-vēy-* red flaming flowers *-cuṭarppū*), and while the girl is either "possessed" by this *aṇaṅku* or identified with it or at least likened to it (in her and its power to delude), *cūr* is something quite different: *cūr* is the fear which haunts "the slopes of our garden", the evil which the girl fears, which represents the natural and supernatural dangers of a rainy night in the mountain forest. Since Murukaṇ is mentioned quite explicitly (16), and the *aṇaṅku* is said to wear red flowers (red being the colour of Murukaṇ, and red flowers being one of the most frequent attributes of the god), we may probably infer that in fact the *aṇaṅku* which comes and creates reality-like dreams is the sacred power caused by or emanating from Murukaṇ who is (among other things) the god of fertility, spontaneous love (*kaṇavu*) and eternal youth; in fact, that it is Murukaṇ's *aṇaṅku* which helps the heroine to "delude" her guardians and her father, to overcome the terror (*cūr*) of the night, and to meet her lover.

The importance of this poem is thus as great as its beauty. It has established for us:

- (a) the all-important distinction between *cūr* 'terror, fear, personification of fear' and *aṇaṅku* 'awe-inspiring sacred power';



- (b) the malevolent, fearful nature of *cūr* and (in *this* context) the benevolent (for the girl at least) nature of Murukaṇ's *aṇaṅku*;
- (c) the intimate relationship between *aṇaṅku* and Murukaṇ;
- (d) the close but obviously antagonistic relationship between Murukaṇ's *aṇaṅku* and *cūr*;
- (e) the intimate relationship between *aṇaṅku*, Murukaṇ, and love and love-making in the *kuṛiñci* 'montane' region.

The first question to be answered now in some detail is: What or where is the seat of *aṇaṅku*? Where is it to be found?

6. Very often, particularly in the earliest strata of Tamil texts, *aṇaṅku*, mostly in the basic and general meaning of sacred power, is said to dwell in different natural places, in different natural environments almost all of which have one feature in common: they are lofty, great, and awe-inspiring. The most frequent dwelling place of *aṇaṅku* are the mountain-peaks: thus *Puṛam* 52.1 speaks of *aṇaṅkuṭai neṭuṅkōṭu* "the high mountain top where sacred power dwells", *Akam* 22.1 of *aṇaṅkuṭai neṭuvarai yucci* "the peak of the high mountain where sacred power resides", etc.; also, mountain slopes, cf. *Perumpāṇāruppaṭai* 494.5 *aṇaṅkuṭaic cāral* "the mountain-slope(s) where sacred power dwells", *Puṛam* 151.11 *aṇaṅkucāl* "the slope of sacred power", cf. also *Akam* 158.7-9. Another natural habitat of *aṇaṅku* is water, in particular the sea, cf. *Maṇimēkalai* 17.12 *aṇaṅku uṭai aḷakkar-vayīu* "the belly of the ocean where the awe-inspiring sacred power dwells"; *Aiṅkuṛunūru* 174.1 *aṇaṅku uṭai paṇitturaiṭ toṇṭi yaṇṇa* "like Toṇḍi (= Tyndis) with its dewy harbour where the sacred power dwells", *ib.* 28.1 *uṇṭurai aṇaṅku* "the mysterious power of the watering place"; cf. also *Akam* 240.8 *aṇaṅkuṭaip paṇitturai* "the misty harbour filled with *aṇaṅku*". *Paṭirrupattu* 88.6 speaks of *aṇaṅkuṭai kaṭampu* "the *kaḍambu* tree in which sacred power dwells",<sup>3</sup> and this is not surprising when we remember that there is a very intimate connection between the god Murukaṇ and *aṇaṅku*, and that the *kaḍambu* tree is specially sacred to Murukaṇ.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Anthocephallus indicus* A. Rich.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Tirumurukāruppaṭai* VI 225.

7. *Aṇaṅku* dwells not only in natural phenomena, but also in man-made edifices: thus *Puṛam* 247.4 speaks of “the front of the house where *aṇaṅku* stays” (*aṇaṅkuṭai munṛil*), *Maturaikkāñci* 578 of “the excellent house where *aṇaṅku* dwells” (*aṇaṅkuṭai nallil*), the same text 693 of *nalleyil aṇaṅkuṭaittōṭṭi* “the gateway of a strong fortress where *aṇaṅku* dwells” (cf. also *Patirruppattu* 62.11). But probably most important in this connection is *Puṛam* 392.8 which mentions *aṇaṅkuṭai marapiṇ iruṅkaḷam* “the two [kinds] of *kaḷam* which is the proper place where *aṇaṅku* dwells”. The two kinds of *kaḷam* (cf. *DED* 1160) are threshing floor and battle-field: in the heroic and agricultural society of ancient Tamilnāḍu these two places are indeed in a particular way filled with the sacred power. *Akam* 99.9 mentions a temple filled with sacred power (*aṇaṅkuṭai nakar*); and *Puṛam* 369.6 speaks of “time pervaded by sacred power” (*aṇaṅkuru poḷutu*).<sup>5</sup>

8. Another large set of phenomena in which the awe-inspiring power was considered to be immanent are certain objects, instruments and weapons.

*Maturaikkāñci* 29, when describing the battlefield, speaks of a hearth made up of the heads of men and filled with the dangerous sacred power. It seems that musical instruments were also considered to possess this sacred force, cf. *Porunarāruppaṭai* 20 which mentions the *yāl* ‘lute’ which looks like an adorned bride and is the seat of *aṇaṅku*. Weapons were obviously considered to possess the immanent mysterious power, cf. *Akam* 167.8 *aṇaṅku-ṭaippakaḷi* “The arrow[s] possessing secret power”, and, similarly, *Maturaikkāñci* 140 which speaks of weapons (*tuppu*) filled with *aṇaṅku*. But probably the most interesting object connected with the sacred power was *kaḷaṅku*, the molucca-bean (*Caesalpinia bonducella*, cf. *DED* 1134) which was used in the shamanistic divination technique. *Narṛinai* 282.5 speaks of *aṇaṅkuru kaḷaṅkiṅ mutuvāy vēlan* “the *vēlan* priest [of Murukaṅ] [using the technique] of *kaḷaṅku* beans filled with sacred power”; and the same text

<sup>5</sup> Further contexts indicating places filled with *aṇaṅku* are *Maturaikkāñci* 164 describing a city destroyed by enemies’ invasion and mentioning places which were abandoned (*akal*) by the sacred force (glossed as ‘domestic deity’ which had lived there) (*vaḷaṅku*); cf. also *Maturaikkāñci* 353.

47.8 mentions *aṇaṅku aṇi kaḷaṅku* “the molucca-beans which [reveal] the knowledge of the sacred power”. The technique used was as follows: the unripe beans of the molucca plant were strewn before an image of Murukaṅ by the priest who chose one of them according to certain occult indications to diagnose the nature of a person’s possession or to advise what should be done; the priest (*vēlan*) is qualified by the attribute *mutuvāy* “ancient truthful wisdom”. In later texts, we find Māl, i.e. Viṣṇu as Tirumāl, holding the discus-weapon filled with the sacred power (*Paripāṭal* XIII.6): this shows beyond doubt that in some contexts, *aṇaṅku* denotes a power which is in fact beneficial, destroying enemies of gods and men.<sup>6</sup>

9. In a few poems, *aṇaṅku* is also linked with some animals; again, the animals mentioned are the mighty, awe-inspiring animals—in fact the two most powerful and fearful animals living in India: the lion and the elephant. *Kuṟuntokai* 308 mentions *aṇaṅku* in connection with the male-elephant (*vēlam*). *Perumpāṇāruppaṭai* 258 speaks of *aṇaṅkuṭai yāḷi* “lions filled with the mysterious power” and *Porunarāruppaṭai* 139 speaks of the strong lion’s whelp which pursues the deer and kills the elephant. *Narriṇai* 168.8 mentions the snake (*aravu*) possessing *aṇaṅku*.

10. Certain deities and demons were believed to possess *aṇaṅku*. Among the deities, the most powerful ancient Tamil god, Muruku-Murukaṅ, is most frequently mentioned as the one who has the sacred power: *Puṟam* 299.6 speaks of *aṇaṅkuṭai murukaṅ kōḷḷam* “the temple of Murukaṅ filled with the sacred power”. *Narriṇai* 386.6 says: “I shall give [you] a precious vow (*aruñcūḷ*) possessing sacred power [of Murukaṅ as witness]”. According to *Kalittokai* 105.15, Indra is said to be filled with *aṇaṅku*. And *Paripāṭal* I, devoted to Tirumāl (identified with Viṣṇu), mentions *aṇaṅkuṭai yaruntīṭal* “[Tirumāl’s] unique strength possessing *aṇaṅku*” (line 43), and “the heads [of Tirumāl] possessing sacred power” (*aṇaṅkuṭaiyaruntali*), another indication of *aṇaṅku* considered as beneficial, positive, grace-bestowing power.

<sup>6</sup> The text says explicitly *taṅ-ṇ-aḷi koṇṭa-v-aṇaṅkuṭai nēmi* “un disque redoutable (i.e. *aṇaṅkuṭai*) qui donne aussi la fraîcheur de ta grâce” (transl. F. Gros).

Besides Murukaṅ, Tirumāl, and Indra, the *asuras* (*avunar*) also possessed the supernatural, mysterious power, cf. *Puram* 174.1 (*aṅaṅkuṭai yavunar*), and the same phrase in *Patirrupattu* 11.4.

*Tirumurukāruppaṭai* 289 speaks of *aṅaṅkucāl uyar nilai talī*, i.e. of Murukaṅ who has restrained his highest form which is abundant with supreme awe-inspiring power in order not to frighten his devotee.

These and similar contexts show that the sacred was manifested through a power which was believed to be inherent in certain places, objects, and demons, as well as in deities, a power which was dangerous, potentially malevolent, but also beneficial, and as we shall see later, had to be carefully diagnosed and controlled by shamanistic techniques. The most "original" meaning or conception of *aṅaṅku* seems to be indicated by *Puram* 247 which speaks of a place in front of the hut full of this ominous power where a herd of innocent deer (*maṭamāṅ*) slumbers in the light of a fire kindled by forest-men (*kāṅavar*) with the help of dry fire-wood (*muḷimara viṅaku*) brought by [the tamed] elephants—an image which can be even today encountered in the tribal milieu of the jungles of the Nilagiri mountains.

11. Did this ominous, sacred power have its seat in human beings, too? One poem in the ancient anthology *Puram* (362.6) speaks of the army of men similar to the *aṅaṅku* which has taken [different concrete] shapes. This seems to be, however, an isolated case of a poetic simile. On the other hand, there is one very particular, very concrete, and very important situation in which the sacred power takes its seat in a human body. Without exception, the place where *aṅaṅku* dwells in this context is the female breasts.

In *Akam* 161, the *tōli* (female companion) describes how the heroine weeps so that cool drops wet her finely shaped young breasts (*iḷamulai*) on her chest where light-coloured spots (= the sign of puberty) spread, vexing because *aṅaṅku* is there (*aṅaṅku eṇa uṇutta*).<sup>7</sup> *Akam* 177.19 mentions *aṅaṅkuṭai vaṅamulai* "the

<sup>7</sup> As late as in *Civakacintāmaṇi* (10th Cent.) 177 it is said, "Lightcoloured beauty-spots (*aṅcuṅaṅku*) have spread where the handsome *aṅaṅku* has taken seat." This seems to refer to the process of having attained puberty, which was

shapely breasts filled with sacred power". In *Aiñk.* 363.3–4 we read: "You think that there are beauty spots on your breasts; but my afflicted heart thinks that there is the sacred power there"; i.e. you think that there is just a physical manifestation of your coming of age in the form of the light-coloured spots on your breasts; but I know better: the sacred power (*aṇaṅku*) has taken seat there, and it is dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

In *Narriṇai* 9.5–9, a hero says to his sweetheart not to worry (*varuntātēkumati*), and exhorts her: "Put bright shoots of lovely *puṅku*<sup>9</sup> on your shapely breasts adorned by spots (signs of puberty and coming of age) so that the sacred power occupies [them, or stays there, *aṇaṅku koḷa*].

In a lovely description which reminds us of an image occurring in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhava*, *Porunarāṇṇuppaṭai* 35–6 says: Her raised, shapely young breasts, overspread with beauty spots and set so close that the rib of a palm-leaf could not part them, are vexing (*urutta*) because *aṇaṅku* dwells in them.

In *Aiñkuruṇūru* 250, the heroine's young breasts (*iḷamulai*) are afflicted by *aṇaṅku*; it is not, however, the victorious Vēḷ (= Murukan) who is responsible, but the lord of the forest (*kāṇakkilavōṇ*), i.e. her lover. Here, we have *aṇaṅku* (in the form *aṇaṅkiyōṇē* 'he who causes *aṇaṅku*') in the sense of love-illness, love-longing.

*Aṇaṅku*, then, either takes its special seat in a woman's breasts, probably after she had come of age and became sexually desirable,<sup>10</sup> or she may, on the other hand, be possessed by *aṇaṅku*

accompanied by *aṇaṅku*, the dangerous and mysterious power, taking seat in the woman's breasts, and by the light-coloured spots, termed *cuṇaṅku* (cf. *DED* 2188 (a) yellow spreading spots on the body of women, regarded as beautiful), appearing on the *alkul* (Mons Veneris) and the breasts—the two parts of female body which obviously belong to the most exciting erotogenic zones.

<sup>8</sup> . . . *niṇ mulaiya | cuṇaṅkena niṇaitinīyē | aṇaṅkena niṇaiyūm en-ṇ-aṇaṅkuru neñē*. Significantly, it is the male hero who speaks here, with an afflicted, troubled heart: he feels irresistibly drawn to the young girl who has just become sexually attractive.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *DED* 3561 Ta. *puṅku, puṅku, puṅkam, pūnti* Indian beech (*Pongamia glabra*).

<sup>10</sup> *Kuṇṭokai* 337 throws some light on this: "The buds of [her] breasts have blossomed; from [her] head fall soft thick tresses of hair; the compact rows of [her] white teeth are full [having completely replaced her] baby teeth; [on her body] a few spots (= signs of puberty) have appeared. I know her, because she

as an afflicting, troublesome force. In the first case, the *aṇaṅku* in her breasts functions so that the breasts are vexing men's hearts, i.e. arousing men's desire and longing. In the second case, she is herself vexed by *aṇaṅku*, the source of which is elsewhere; there are, in such cases, again two alternatives: either the woman is "genuinely" possessed by the sacred power of Murukaṇ, or she is "possessed" by love-longing and this "love-illness" is diagnosed (by the wise old soothsaying women or by the *vēlaṇ*, the priest of Murukaṇ) wrongly as the "genuine" possession by the god. For this "true" possession cf. e.g. *Akam* 98 where the heroine is said to be afflicted by *murukaṇ āṛ aṇaṅku* "the hard sacred power of Murukaṇ", or *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 174–5 which mentions the women dancing under the spell of the sacred power of Neṭuvēl.<sup>11</sup> But this "genuine" possession by the god's *aṇaṅku* must be investigated in detail further.

12. The next problem which will be attacked here is much more difficult: what or who is the source and cause of *aṇaṅku*, the supernatural awe-inspiring power?

The two verbs occurring most frequently with *aṇaṅku* are *uṭai* 'possess' and *uru* 'dwell, reside, be joined with'. In the great majority of instances, we have the following construction: X + *uṭai* + *aṇaṅku*, i.e. 'X possesses or has *aṇaṅku*', where X stands for a place/time or an object or a person, e.g. *aṇaṅkuṭaiṭṭuṭai* (*Aiṅk.* 174.1) 'the misty harbour having *aṇaṅku*', *aruviyārkkum aṇaṅkuṭai neṭuṅkōṭu* (*Nar.* 168.8) 'the high mountain-top where the waterfall roars, possessing *aṇaṅku*' (cf. also *Pur.* 52.1), *aṇaṅkuṭainōṇṇilai* (*Akam* 159.6) 'the distressful bow possessing *aṇaṅku*', *aṇaṅkuṭai aravu* (*Nar.* 386.6) 'the snake which has *aṇaṅku*'; *aṇaṅkuṭaikkaṭampu* (*Patirrup.* 88.6) 'the *kaṭampu*-tree which has *aṇaṅku*'.<sup>12</sup> Even abstract qualities 'have', 'possess'

causes *aṇaṅku* (*aṇaṅkutaṅku*, i.e. she afflicts me with desire and longing). She does not know it, the naive and incomparable daughter of the great old rich man; how indeed will she be?"

<sup>11</sup> . . . *neṭuvēl* | *aṇaṅkuru makaṭir āṭukaṭam*.

<sup>12</sup> *Kaṭampu* is *Naucllea Cadamba*, *Roxb.*, a tree which is particularly sacred to Murukaṇ, though Tirumāl is also occasionally associated with it. The shaman of the hill region (*vēlaṇ*), wearing white straps (*veṇṇōl*) of palmyra stalks and the leaves and the flowers of *kaṭampu*, performed the exorcism of Murukaṇ's *āṛaṇaṅku*

*aṇaṅku*: *aṇaṅkuṭai aruñcūl* (*Nar.* 386.6) 'rare vow possessing supernatural power'. What is however most important in our search for the cause and source of *aṇaṅku* is the fact that even persons—i.e. deities and/or sub-divine but super-human persons—are said to 'possess', to have *aṇaṅku*, not to cause or evoke or generate it: thus in *Puṛam* 299.6 Murukaṅ has *aṇaṅku* (*aṇaṅkuṭai Murukaṅ*), in *Kalittokai* 105.15 Indra (*Vaccirattōṅ*), too, has *aṇaṅku*, and the asuras, too, have the supernatural, magic, sacred power (in *Puṛam* 174.1).

With the verb-stem *uru* 'dwell, be joined with', the construction used is exactly analogical: thus we have *aṇaṅkurupolutu* (*Puṛ.* 369.6) 'the time joined with *aṇaṅku*' (i.e. the time of the day which is filled by the sacred power in a special manner) or *aṇaṅkuru kalaṅkiṅ mutuvāy vēlaṅ* (*Nar.* 282.5) 'the *vēlaṅ*-priest of ancient truth [using] the Molucca-beans in which *aṇaṅku* dwells'; abstract notions occur, too, in such construction: *aṇaṅkuru kaṇpoṭu* (*Akam* 73.5) 'with chastity in which the magic power resides'.

Exceptionally, these verb-bases are used in other forms than in their bare stems: e.g. *karumpuṭait tōlum uṭaiyavāl aṇaṅkē* (*Narriṇai* 39.11) '(her) shoulders which have [the sweetness and flexibility of] sugar-cane possess supernatural power'.<sup>13</sup> Also, *aṇaṅku* occurs in the position of a simple attribute: *Puṛam* 25.6 *aṇaṅk(u)arum paṇtalai* 'the hard battlefield [where] *aṇaṅku*

which was believed to have caused the sickness of the girl (cf. *Akam* 98). He also danced the dance of possession (*veṛi*) around this tree and planted a flag on it (*Akam* 382). Cf. Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, Singapore, 1963, p. 58: "The *Kaṭampu* tree was the tree most sacred to Murukaṅ. His spirit was supposed to dwell in the tree, and a particular *Kaṭampu* tree at the foot of the Tirupparaṅkunram hill was the object of great devotion." It was also a tutelary tree of the *Kaṭampu* tribe or race of people who were conquered by the Chera king Ceṅkuṭṭuvan. *Maṇimēkalai* IV.49 and *Cilappatikāram* XXIV.61 speak of *Kaṭampaṅ* "the god of the k.tree" referring to Murukaṅ, and in *Paripāṭal* 8.126 Murukaṅ is called *kaṭampamar celvan* "the Lord who resides in the *kaṭampu* tree," while *Paripāṭal* 5.81 invokes the same god as *Kaṭampinōlttārōyē* 'Ô Toi qui as une guirlande luxuriante de *kaṭampu* aux grappes en rouleau" (F. Gros).

<sup>13</sup> Though in the absolute majority of cases the part of the human body *par excellence* which possesses *aṇaṅku* are female breasts, exceptionally other parts of the body are connected with the supernatural force: shoulders, lower belly (female), chest, head, skull (male), heart (female and male).

[dwells]', or *aṇaṅk(u)aruṅkaṭuntiraḷ enṛai* (*Pur.* 78.2) 'our chief who [has] fierce strength, hard [and filled with] *aṇaṅku*'.

From these and other similar instances one inevitable conclusion emerges quite clearly: we are not in a position to say what or who is the source and cause of *aṇaṅku*. The magic, supernatural sacred power *is* simply there; i.e., the sacred, the noumenon, is manifested by a power which is thought to be inherent in a number of places (mountain-tops and mountain-slopes, watering places, harbours, the sea, fortresses and fortress-gates, certain exceptional houses, temples, battlefields), objects (especially weapons, musical instruments), certain parts of the body (especially female breasts), abstract notions (chastity, vows) and divine or supernatural beings, who are said to possess *aṇaṅku* or to be joined with it. None of these is said to cause or to generate *aṇaṅku*; *aṇaṅku* is inherently present in them. One among the divine persons, is, however, more frequently than all others connected with *aṇaṅku*—god Murukaṅ; and in *Narriṇai* 34.7,<sup>14</sup> the sacred power is qualified as *his aṇaṅku*. However, not even Murukaṅ is described as causing or even being *the* source of *aṇaṅku*. We may probably interpret some of our textual evidence (e.g. *Narriṇai* 165) as indicating an identification of Murukaṅ and *aṇaṅku* (see below).

Soon enough, the noumenous power begins to be personified; places, objects, persons do not "have" it; it has, so to say, stepped out of its receptacles, and moves on its own: *Narriṇai* 319.6 speaks of *aṇaṅku kāl kiḷarum*, the midnight when *aṇaṅku* emerges on its legs—but this stage will be dealt with later.

13. What did *aṇaṅku* cause? How did it manifest itself, and with what kind of 'patients' was it combined?

Obviously, in those cases where *aṇaṅku* was thought of as residing in a number of natural places like hill-tops and hill-slopes, waterfalls, the sea; or when it was spoken of as filling the middle of the night, it evoked reverential fear, awe, dread. In

<sup>14</sup> *Nar.* 34.6–7: "... though [you, i.e. Murukaṅ] know [well] that the rare [love]-sickness is not [caused by] your *aṇaṅku* (*niṇṇaṇaṅkanmai*)."  
Ci. also *Akam* 89.10 where the old soothsaying women diagnose the illness of the girl as caused by *murukaṅ āraṇaṅku* 'Murukaṅ's hard *aṇaṅku*'.



this non-personalized form, *aṇaṅku*, as the manifestation of unknown forces in space and time, in nature, was thought of as a capricious and potentially malevolent force, which had to be carefully controlled (see below). Especially the mountains, their summits, the mountain-passes, and the mountain-slopes with waterfalls, were imagined as the abode of mysterious sacred forces.

When we read about *aṇaṅku* as dwelling in certain qualities, it is always the awe-inspiring properties of the human body or mind which *aṇaṅku* represents: thus the chief or lord who possessed fierce and hard strength, which was almost supernatural because it was filled with *aṇaṅku*, evoked fear in his foes and awe in his friends (*Puṇam* 78.2). However, and this is the important point to stress, the sacred power, though awesome, was *not* thought of as intrinsically malevolent: In *Narriṇai* 386, the hero (*nāṭaṇ* of the montane region) gives a precious promise (*aruñcūl*) filled with (Murukaṇ's) *aṇaṅku* to the heroine—certainly an auspicious occasion whereby the sacred power is thought of as awesome but benevolent. Again, in *Akam* 73, the heroine who waits in endurance and fidelity while her lover returns from his journey to obtain wealth, is praised by her companion as possessing *aṇaṅkuṟu kaṟpu* 'chastity filled with sacred power'<sup>15</sup>—surely a situation where the awe-inspiring *aṇaṅku* is thought of as beneficial.

The gods, who possessed *aṇaṅku* in a special way used it obviously in a different manner; mostly, the sacred power which emanated from Murukaṇ and Tirumāl, vexed their enemies, filled them with terror, and, in the case of Muruku, troubled and vexed the human recipients of this force. In one case at least, we know that Muruku, in order not to scare his devotee and not to fill him with dread, withheld his *aṇaṅku*, and manifested himself in a mild, friendly form (*Tirumurukāṟṟupaṭai* 289–90).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Glossed by the commentator as *aruntipōluṟṟa kaṟpu* firm chastity like that of Arundhati: Arundhati, the wife of Vasiṣṭha, is regarded as the highest symbol of conjugal fidelity and wifely devotion. It is interesting that the term *kaṭavu*, 'spontaneous erotic (pre-marital) relationship', is never connected with the term *aṇaṅku*, 'sacred power'.

<sup>16</sup> "... après avoir resserré [en lui] son état sublime que remplit de crainte, [ayant] de son antique | beauté juvénile divine fleurant bon fait la manifestation ... " etc. According to the commentators, Murukaṇ has suppressed within himself (*uḷḷaṭakkikoṇṇu*) his divine nature (*teyvallaṇmaiṟai*) which is associated with

This, and other contexts, in particular from *Paripāṭal*,<sup>17</sup> would indicate that divine *aṇaṅku* could fill the devotees with a reverential fear which would be hardly bearable. The *aṇaṅku* of the demons (e.g. *Puram* 174) was obviously meant to cause terror—and this was one of the points of departure of slightly later development when *aṇaṅku* obtained one of its main meanings of fearful ghosts or frightening gods. However, the divine *aṇaṅku* could also function as a destructive force: it is very clearly stated in a hymn to Murukaṇ from *Paripāṭal* (8) which also throws welcome light on the promise or oath made “by Murukaṇ”: the companion of the young lady reproaches the hero who has promised with a solemn oath (*cūl*), touching the sands of the river Vaiyai and the foot of the cool hill Paraṅkuṇṇu of god Vēl (= Murukaṇ) “who gives marriage” (*taru-maṇa-vēl*); she warns him not to swear by the gracious Muruku; if he does (and does not keep his oath), “certainly (*mey*), his lance (*vēl*), will devour him by virtue of [the god’s, or the spear’s] graceless *aṇaṅku*”.<sup>18</sup> In this context, though the god is full of grace (*aruḷmuruku*), the sacred power of his weapon, the spear, can be without grace, and destroy a man without compassion.

The functioning of *aṇaṅku* in human recipients will be dealt with in detail further, under a separate caption. For *aṇaṅku*, obviously, represents, in these contexts, the true power of ‘possession’ (of being possessed by the noumenon), which caused in both men and women, but particularly in women, a kind of ‘sickness’ or ‘illness’ (*nōy*) which had to be dealt with, controlled, removed. However, apart from this possession by *aṇaṅku* which must have been regarded as dangerous and unwanted, the same sacred force, emanating from Murukaṇ, caused obviously a sacred possession, a hieratic trance—again both in male and female recipients—suffering (*varuttam*) (according to Naccinārkkiniyar); he has withheld in himself his highest state which is associated with divine activities (according to *Parimēlakar*).

<sup>17</sup> In this text, *aṇaṅku* is associated also with Māyōn-Tirumāl.

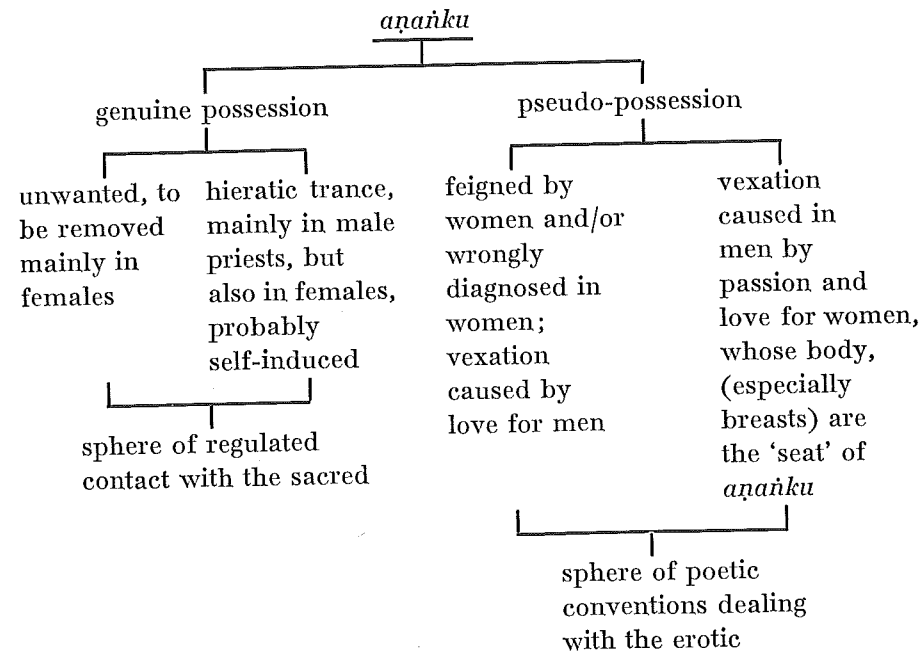
<sup>18</sup> *aruḷmuruku cūlcūlin | ninnai yaruḷil aṇaṅkāṇ mey vāriṇṇum*. For the erotic and marriage-bestowing aspect of god Murukaṇ, cf. *Kuṛiṅciippāṭṭu* 205–212 where the hero praises the joys and duties of wedded life and gives an oath to the woman, worshipping and praising the god (*kaṭavuḷ*) who lives on the top of the mountains (*malaimimicai*), and ratifying his pledge by drinking the clear sweet-water of the mountain-stream.

which was welcomed and very probably self-induced by shamanistic techniques. When this kind of possession by *aṇaṅku* was organized and controlled by a professional shaman of the god, by *vēlan*, we enter the sphere of the regulated contact with the sacred. Such contact occurred when the priest went into a trance and danced the *veṛi*; future was predicted, exorcism was performed. An early mention of this kind of possession may be found in *Kuṛiṅcippāṭṭu* 174-7: [169: We stood shaking like peacocks possessed by terror-provoking *cār*]... We lock our fingers like the leaves in the garlands twining round the *kaṭampu* tree with thick and strong trunk, resembling the women possessed by Neṭuvēḷ's *aṇaṅku* dancing on the *kaḷam* (sacrificial and dancing ground of the tribe).

14. However, we also have many instances of 'pseudo-possession' or rather, we should say, the *topic* of possession by Murukaṅ's *aṇaṅku* being used by the bardic poets as one of the *conventions* of erotic poetry. The sources of this poetic usage are two-fold: first, the institution of the wise soothsaying women who were invited to diagnose the source of trouble or illness when a young girl appeared abnormal in her behaviour. This institution was the background for the poetic convention of regarding love as illness and of the ridicule (*iḷital*), the mockery whereby a love-longing, a sexual desire, the distress and vexation caused by unfulfilled love, or the impatience of the girl in love, is ironically treated as the true possession by divine *aṇaṅku* and the exorcist is invited; only the heroine herself and her companion and friend know the truth; and often they ridicule not only the old women of soothsaying powers, but also the priest (*vēlan*) and even the god himself. Sometimes, the vexation is serious enough; *aṇaṅku* then represents the true longing of love which wants to be fulfilled.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Dr. K. Grüssner (Heidelberg University) suggested (personal communication) that the convention in Old Tamil erotic poetry of inferring the possession of a young woman by *aṇaṅku* as a false or mistaken or possibly pretended possession while in fact she was 'possessed' by her love-longing, was a reflection of the tribal manner whereby the young woman indirectly reveals being in love with a young man of the community. In the light of evidence gathered from tribal customs in contemporary India this suggestion may be considered as quite valid and rather probable.

In the second place, the concept of *aṇaṅku* as being in a special way present in the breasts of a woman who has attained puberty, developed in the bardic poetry into those conventionalized poems in which the hero is troubled and vexed by his desire of the sexually attractive young woman, "because *aṇaṅku* resides" in her breasts or Venus' mound. Here, *aṇaṅku* represents the mysterious force which accompanies the attaining of puberty and the sexual ripeness and transforms a girl into a desirable woman (cf. *Kuruntokai* 337). We have then, schematically, the following situations of the function of *aṇaṅku* manifested in human recipients:



15.1. The very important poem *Akanāṇṇu* 7 by Kayamaṇār (ca. 220 A.D.) tells us that a girl who has reached puberty is subject to a possible assault by *aṇaṅku*. Here we have thus an allusion to the genuine and unwanted possession of a woman by the dangerous supernatural power. Says the mother (or foster-mother): "You are no little girl more; you have even reached

outside the age of a young maid; your breasts are showing; your thorn-like teeth glitter . . . do not go anywhere with your companions, do not even go beyond the gates (of the house); you must be protected, for the old places of the ancient town are filled with the supernatural power which (could) assault (you) (*tāḱku aṇaṅku*)”.

What if *aṇaṅku* indeed *did* assault a woman? The clue to such a situation is provided by *Akanāṇūru* 98 (by *Veripāṭiya Kāmak-kaṇṇiyār*) in which the mother (*aṇṇai*) has not realized (*aṛintāl alla!*) that her daughter can be ‘cured’ and pacified (*taṇital*) only by the touch of the chest of her lover who lives on the mountain where the malevolent Fear (*cūr*) roams. Therefore, she has invited the wise soothsaying women<sup>20</sup> who have made their diagnosis: it is the hard *aṇaṅku* of *Murukaṇ* which has possessed her.<sup>21</sup> The remedy is described in some detail, fortunately for us: to restore the girl to her former health, beauty and splendour (11–13), the first step was to prepare the stage. This was the *kaḷaṇ* (14) or threshing floor which served also as a meeting place of the tribe or community, and as the sacred ground; at this place, a large and spacious shed (*akal perum pantar*) was erected, suitable for the dance (*āṭu*); this shed was cleaned and adorned with garlands, leaves and flowers. Then the officiant, the spear-man (*vēlaṇ*), appeared, dressed in a special (protective?) leaf-garment made of the white fibrous web of the palmyra splinters and the leaves, probably also flowers, of the *kaṭampu* tree (16). He first invoked the god, ‘praising the great fame’ of *Murukaṇ*, and then danced the *veṛi* dance, i.e. the ecstatic dance of possession, shaking the body from side to side (*tūṅkal*) and dancing for the sake of intoxicated and infatuated women (*mayaṅkiya maiyal peṇṭirkku*) so long that they could hardly endure it. Then the god would

<sup>20</sup> *Mutuvāy poy val peṇṭir*, lit. ‘the women of old sayings proficient in magic’, glossed as *kaṭṭuvicciyar*, i.e. ‘divination-women.’

<sup>21</sup> The technique of divination is indicated in the text and described in detail in the commentaries: the text just mentions the strewing of *pirappu* (cf. also *Akam* 242.9)—various kinds of paddy or rice (cf. also *Tirumur*. 234); what was very probably done was that different kinds of paddy and millet (cf. *Kuruntokai* 263–1, which mentions *tinaippirappu*) were strewn as offerings in the winnowing fans or baskets, and the different constellations and structures, probably also numbers, were interpreted in the divinator’s calculations.

bestow his favour (*nalkuṇ*) and the exhausted, withered, sick body of the possessed girl would be restored to its previous healthy splendour (18–24). The god's presence and favour (Murukaṇ is termed Neṭuvēḷ here, lit. 'Great Desired One') was manifested by *verikamaḷ*, a specific fragrance filling the *kaḷaṇ* and indicating the rise of the god's sacred power (27 and comm.).

We have, in ancient Tamil texts, a number of hints concerning the genuine possession of people by sacred or demoniac power. The person who is thus genuinely possessed is always a woman. The structure of the exorcism always involves, first, sending for the diviner (a woman or women), second, invocation and praises of and/or offering of some sacrifice to the god, and, third, the exorcism itself, performed by the shaman-priest, always different from the diviner. This is what we can reconstruct from the hints offered by Tamil texts which are roughly two thousand years old. It is striking, and gratifying, too, that *all* these basic features without exception, are found in demon possession and exorcism in South India as described by sources published at the end of the 19th–first half of the 20th century. Thus W. T. Elmore<sup>22</sup> stresses the fact that "the possessed people, with very few exceptions, are women". When he describes the process of exorcism, he first introduces the diviner who comes on the recommendation of the 'demon doctor', the diviner being usually a woman; after the diviner, the exorcist (the 'demon-doctor') comes and performs the exorcism, after reciting *mantras*, and after one or more animals are sacrificed.

Our almost two millenia-old poem describes how the exorcist (*vēlaṇ*) dances and swings his body to and fro, and speaks of intoxicated women who can hardly bear it. (Did they also take part in the dance and swaying to and fro until they were exhausted? Very probably). Elmore describes the possessed people, and their behaviour, on pp. 51–2 of his book. Another common point is the mixture of blood and rice, inevitably used in all such ceremonies: a very similar offering is mentioned in *Tirumuruḷ-āṟruppaṭai* 242 which speaks of millet red with blood; and the same text even more strikingly and explicitly, says in lines 233–4:

<sup>22</sup> Wilber Theodore Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, CLSI, Madras 1925, 47–53.

“having brought a small offering (*cil pali*) of pure white rice (*tūveḷ arici*) strewn with blood (*kurutiyoḷu viraiiya*)”. Says Elmore (p. 39): “A sheep is killed and the blood mixed with rice, which is offered as *naivedyam* . . .”. And again, on p. 50: “A sheep is sacrificed, its blood caught in a broken pot and mixed with rice. This bloody rice is then sprinkled in the four corners of the room”. Our ancient text, in l. 232, specifies the origin of the blood: *mā tāḷ koḷu viṭai* “a fat male (a buck or a ram) with large legs”.

15.2. It was obviously not only to propitiate Murukan in order to dispel or remove the *aṇaku* from a possessed woman that the shaman-priest entered into communion with the sacred power, though, or course, this is the situation which is most frequently described, the majority of our texts being what they are—poems about all types of love-experience. From a number of poems in the anthologies (particularly from the *Akanānūru*, *Narriṇai*, and *Puranānūru* collections, as well as from some later texts, e.g. *Cilappatikāram*'s canto 24), we may reconstruct the structure of the *veṛi* ceremony and gather a more or less detailed description of the ecstatic dance of the *vēlan*, though some important components, unfortunately, escape us: thus, e.g. we do not have anywhere any description of the manner as to *how* the officiant brought himself into the trance—whether it was self-induced by the rhythm of the drums and the dance itself, or whether some intoxicants were used.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The ancient Tamils knew intoxicating beverages: *kaḷ* ‘toddy’ is mentioned frequently as made from *millet* (*tiṇai*), possibly also from honey; other kinds of liquor were produced by the fermentation of paddy rice (this kind of toddy was termed *tōppi*); when it was made of bamboo rice it was often stored or matured in hollow bamboo stems. *Naravu* was probably made from honey. Often toddy was brewed as hot liquor. Another popular type of intoxicating drink was the fermented juice of the palmyra (*peṇṇaipili*). A distilled and concentrated variety of toddy was known as *tēral*. Wine imported by the Yavanas from the Mediterranean area was in great demand, but was obviously quite costly. Intoxicating drinks were very popular, and they figured prominently in festivals and ceremonies. Toddy was offered to the memorial hero-stones (along with food and flowers and peacock feathers, cf. *Puram* 232). But there is no direct evidence that the ‘spearman’ priest or any other hieratic person would drink intoxicants as parts of a religious ceremony or to induce the *veṛi* dance. It seems that alcoholic drinks were

Most explicit is *Akanānūru* 22 (again by Veripāṭiya Kāmak Kaṇṇiyār). A girl of the Kuṛam tribe is in love with the *nāṭaṇ*; she is full of desire and wants him to come and make love to her; but, in agreement with the conventions of the 'montane' poetry (*kuṛiñcittṇai*), the love-affair is secret, no one knows about it; since she manifests signs of odd behaviour and physical illness, the diviners are invited, and they recommend the worship of Murukaṇ-Neṭuvēḷ, which should cure the young woman: "She will be pacified (*taṇikuvaḷ ivaḷ*, lit. soothed, i.e. the *aṇaṅku*—mentioned in line 1 itself—which has possessed her, will be removed) by worshipping Neṭuvēḷ whose strong arms have the fame of wiping out those who do not bow to him (ll. 5–7)". So, the *vēlaṇ*, the shaman of Neṭuvēḷ, the exorcist, is invited to cure the girl of her 'sickness' (*nōy*, l. 20). His function is *muruk-ārrippaṭa* 'to invite Muruku' (lit. to show Muruku the way [to come]) in the awe-inspiring middle of the night (l. 11) and thus, by dispelling or removing, driving away or re-absorbing the *aṇaṅku* (we unfortunately do *not* know which) to soothe the possessed girl. The following steps of the ceremony are then described:

1. the *kaḷam* or 'threshing floor' (public gathering ground of the tribe used for sacred purposes) is well cleaned and polished;
2. the *vēl* or spear of the 'spear-man' (*vēlaṇ*, the exorcist) is garlanded with a flower-garland;
3. the rite itself consists of
  - a. singing loudly the praises of the deity, at the sacrificial place which is termed *vaḷanakar* (l. 9), this term indicating probably a stone or wooden dais or shrine qualified as *vaḷa*, i.e. 'fertile' or bringing about 'fruition'; or, alternatively, as 'abundant, full' (of sacred power), also 'fit' or 'auspicious';
  - b. offering sacrifice (*pali koṭuttu*, l. 9) by strewing 'the shapely red millet (*centṇai*) [mixed] with blood (*kuruti*)' of the sacrificial animal, probably a buck or a ram (l. 10).

used mainly to stimulate merry-making during dances and festivals, and, of course, as facilitating agents of social relations, probably even as food.



Poem no. 182 of *Akam* (by Kapilar) mentions the spacious *kaḷam*<sup>24</sup> where the 'spear-man' (*vēlaṅ*) worships through the *veṛi*-dance (l. 17).

Most interesting is poem no. 382 by the same great poet (ca. 140–200 A.D.) which speaks of the spacious *kaḷam* where the worship is performed by (or through) the sacred power (*aṇaiṅku*) and at which it is common and appropriate to hear the rhythm of songs about *Neṭuvēl* (= *Murukaṅ*), sung by many different voices in one mode by the women who carry garlands of *kaṭampu*.

The term *veṛi-y-ayar kaḷaṅ* to denote the ritual place reappears in *Akam* 242, and *veṛi ayartal*, i.e. to worship by the frenzied dance is reintroduced as late as in *Nāḷaṭiyār* 16.1 (ca. 675–700 A.D.). *Narriṇai* 34.9, very interestingly, speaks of *veṛi maṇai*, the dwelling or house, or house-site, of the ritual dance. This song mentions, also, the 'spearman' (*vēlaṅ*) who is garlanded with the fragrant blossoms of *kaṭampu* flowering in the rainy season.

There seems to have existed, roughly, three-fold worship of god *Murukaṅ* in pre-Aryanized Tamil India.

1. The special and elaborate worship by the 'spear-man' (*vēlaṅ*) dancing in a frenzy under divine inspiration (*veṛiyāṭal*), after offering prayers and sacrificing a ram or a buck, and containing (often but probably not always) elements of divination and/or exorcism.<sup>25</sup>

2. The common worship, in which others also took part, mainly women, consisting of offering flowers, paddy, *tiṇai* (millet) and honey, and ending with the sacrifice of a domesticated male animal (buffalo? goat? ram?).

<sup>24</sup> The original meaning of *kaḷam|kaḷaṅ* (cf. *DED* 1160) is almost certainly 'threshing floor' (this being indicated by the prevailing or only meaning of this item in non-literary Dravidian languages). However, the extension of the meaning to any open space and its specification to a sacred space is also of common Dravidian origin and hence very ancient (cf. e.g. Gondi *karā* which means both threshing floor and sacred enclosure). Obviously, this was the open meeting place of the clan or tribe, where people danced (and thus it was crowded, lively, resonant with rhythmic sound, and of hard surface, like the threshing floor); sacrifices, worship, communal as well as religious dance—all these were performed on the *kaḷam*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the end of this paragraph for divination and possession observed in contemporary or almost contemporary religious rites in South India.

3. A simple and common worship by the men and women of the hill tribe consisting of the *kuravai* dance under the *vēṅkai* tree.

The spear (*vēl*) seems to have been the most important of early totemic objects. It was a lance with leaf-shaped head (cf. *Akam* 59.10) which was the prominent symbol in the battlefield (and functioned also as a sort of standard which served as a rallying symbol for the group),<sup>26</sup> and also in the tribal meeting-ground, the *kaḷam*, where religious dances and rituals were held; as such, it has always been an object of great religious respect.<sup>27</sup>

The spear was implanted in the earth or carried by the shaman who came to be called *vēl-aṅ*, 'spear-man'; it marked very probably the central point of worship and the dance of possession, since it was about the *vēl* that the dances took place. During the ecstatic dance which produced violent superexcitation of the whole physical and mental body of the officiant, the *vēlaṅ* succeeded in entering into communion with the sacred power of *Murukaṅ*. It is possible to infer (cf. *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 110–111, 240, 243–4) that the possessed priest, the *vēlaṅ*, also whirled the spear around, like the god *Murukaṅ* who is said to whirl around with two of his twelve arms the spear and the shield,<sup>28</sup> and was accompanied or accompanied himself by a musical cultus-instrument called *toṅṅakam* or *tuṭi*<sup>29</sup> which, by being whirled rapidly in the air produced a sort of deafening, humming sound and thus may have played a role in the self-inducement of the religious trance during the dance of the *vēlaṅ*.<sup>30</sup>

E. Thurston describes divination and fortune-telling which is very frequently combined with possession; thus, e.g., the *Irula* diviner is consulted in case of sickness, and will proceed as follows: "Taking up his drum, he warms it over the fire, or exposes

<sup>26</sup> S. Singaravelu, *Social Life of the Tamils*, Kuala Lumpur, 1966, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> The *vēl* or spear plays an enormous role, both as a symbol and as an object of distinct worship of *Skanda-Subrahmaṇya-Murukaṅ*. For the role the spear played in battlefield, cf. e.g., *Puram* 15, 42, 57, 95, 98, *Akam* 111.9, *Nefunālvāṭai* 176–7.

<sup>28</sup> *Tirum.* 110–11: *irukai| yatyiruvāṭṭamoṣu eḥku valantirippa* "deux mains (cinquième et sixième) sont pour faire tourner la pique—à droite—avec la grande rondache admirable (à gauche)" (J. Filliozat transl.).

<sup>29</sup> *Tuṭi*, lit. 'quivering, trepidation; speed; quickness; a small drum shaped like an hour-glass'; *toṅṅakam*, a small drum used in mountain areas.

<sup>30</sup> S. Singaravelu, *op. cit.*

it to the heat of the sun. When it is sufficiently dry to vibrate to his satisfaction, Kannimar is worshipped by breaking a coconut, and burning camphor and incense. Closing his eyes, the Irula beats the drum, and shakes his head about, while his wife, who stands near him, sprinkles turmeric water over him. After a few minutes, bells are tied to his right wrist. In about a quarter of an hour he begins to shiver, and breaks out in a profuse perspiration. This is a sure sign that he is inspired by the goddess. The shaking of his body becomes more violent, he breathes rapidly, and hisses like a snake". Gradually, he becomes calmer and talks to his listeners as if the goddess talked through him; questions are then put to the inspired man through his wife.<sup>31</sup>

C. G. Diehl<sup>32</sup> describes his own experience of having watched a man possessed by Murukaṅ "just outside Mathurai" in April 1953. "He was carrying a kāvāṭi . . . with an earthen pot attached to it. In the pot was a snake, which he was going to let loose on the Tiruparankunram hill near by . . . He was also dragging a small temple car with hooks fastened in the muscles of his back. His skin was pierced with scores of needles, his eyes were protruding and his whole appearance out of the ordinary as was his strength and capacity of enduring pain. In his normal state, I was informed, the man was a worker in the Madurai cotton mills and a member of the local trade union. Whenever he stopped on the road, people were anxiously asking him questions, serious questions that lay heavily on their minds. He was not left to guess what was in the enquirer's mind, but the question was put to him direct." According to Diehl, his state of possession lasted for hours.

Thus, the influence of Murukaṅ's *ār aṅaṅku* 'hard sacred power', obviously may be felt in 1953 as lively as it was felt by the god's 'spear-man' priest millenia ago. However, there is also a very ancient connection which should not remain unexplored but can only be indicated here. According to the *Mahābhārata* (III.219.17-23) Skanda allowed the malevolent among the "mother-goddesses of the folk" (*lokasya mātaraḥ*) to possess and attack persons of youthful age with physical and mental illnesses, and even promised to cooperate with them in their work with a

<sup>31</sup> E. Thurston, *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India*, 1912, pp. 284-5.

<sup>32</sup> *Instrument and Purpose*, Lund, 1956, p. 223-4.

fierce aspect of his own self.<sup>33</sup> The similarity with Murukan's *āraṇaku* 'fierce supernatural power' causing possession is striking; it underlines the view that Skanda-Kumāra had originally been a non-Vedic, non-Aryan, very possibly Dravidian god associated with the village and tribal mother-goddesses and hosts of dangerous spirits and demons which attacked human beings with physical illness and mental distress. As we shall see, *aṇaku*, the sacred power of the most ancient Tamil texts, developed, itself, later into one of such dangerous, even malevolent demons. However, quite obviously, the nature of this personified *aṇaku* was rather different from other members of the field of demoniac forces—*pēy*, 'ghosts', reflecting probably survivals of animism (ghosts of dead persons), and *cūr* (developing later into the personalised *cūraṇ* > *sūra*-), the personification of fear as such.

15.3. Interesting is the motif of irony and mockery, quite frequently brought into Old Tamil poems: the possession by the sacred power is not always genuine; it is the possession by the desire of love that is responsible for the maiden's 'sickness'; but the foolish old women decided otherwise, and the exorcist is invited. Compare *Narriṇai* 34, in which we have a very rare instance of god Murukan being *directly* addressed by a human:

O Muruku, hail to you!  
 Since you have come  
 to the house of the frenzied dance  
 at the request of the spear-man  
 who has put on a garland of *kaṭampu*  
 which is fragrant in the rainy season,  
 though you knew that  
 it was *not* your *aṇaku*  
 [which has caused me this] hard illness  
 [of love],  
 you are indeed a fool  
 inspite of being a god!

<sup>33</sup> Bedekar, V. H., 'Kārttikeya (Skanda) in Sanskrit Literature, with Special Reference to the Mahābhārata: From a Folk Spirit to the Chief War-God', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. LVI, 1975, 141-77.

15.4. When a woman has attained puberty and become sexually attractive, she was thought to be filled with *aṇaṅku*, residing in her breasts and her loins. Very explicit in this connection is *Kuruntokai* 337 by Potukkayattu Kirantai, which says:

“The buds of her breasts have blossomed,  
her soft thick hair falls from her head.  
The compact rows of her white teeth are full,  
since she has lost her baby teeth,  
and a few spots (*cuṇaṅku*) have appeared  
[on her body].<sup>34</sup>  
I know her,  
and therefore she afflicts<sup>35</sup> me.  
She herself is not aware of it . . . .”

This is a frequent enough situation, so frequent in fact that it is played upon by the poets in numerous puns, e.g., in *Aiṅkuruṇāru* 363.3–4: “You think that there are spots on your breasts, but my afflicted (*aṇaṅku uru*) heart thinks that there is *aṇaṅku* [in your breasts]”;<sup>36</sup> or *Akam* 372 which quotes the mountain-slope where *aṇaṅku* dwells (l. 3) and ends with the words *nam aṇaṅkiyōḷē* (l. 16) “the woman who vexes us [with *aṇaṅku*].”

16. It seems almost certain that, in our earliest texts, the term *aṇaṅku* means an anonymous, impersonal power, an *IT*, dwelling in particular in certain places, objects, animals and persons, pervading them or being inherent in them.

However, the process of personification seems to have begun very early, and soon, by metonymy, the dangerous sacred power assumes the meaning of a personalized demoniac/divine force, a demon or a god, a goblin or a deity.

<sup>34</sup> The spots are a sign of puberty, and are considered attractive.

<sup>35</sup> Liter. “I indeed know her, therefore she causes *aṇaṅku* [in me];” *aṇaṅku* (l. 4) is a verb here which means ‘to afflict, to bother, to distress’ as well as ‘to fill with, to cause *aṇaṅku*.’ According to a commentator, the meaning is in fact “I know her because she causes *aṇaṅku* [in me];” the meaning (*karuttu*) of the whole poem being, the woman has achieved puberty (*paruvam*), and that fact fills her with *aṇaṅku* which afflicts me, cf. *Akam* 7.

<sup>36</sup> *nin mulaiya | cuṇaṅkena ninaiti niyē | aṇaṅkena ninaiyumen ṇaṇaṅkuru neñcē.*

16.1. The first stage of personification may be seen in such lines as *Narriṇai* 319.6, a poem which speaks of “the middle of the night when darkness is bewildering and when *aṇaṅku*’s legs rise”;<sup>37</sup> the (still rather vague and all-pervasive but already personified) sacred power is seen here as walking or groping or advancing through the dark night.

A somewhat different and yet similar process is seen in those texts which do not speak of awe-inspiring places as pervaded by the impersonal sacred power but as seats of a personal deity in which *aṇaṅku* is concentrated; the process of metonymy has set in. Thus e.g., in *Narriṇai* 155.6 by Parayāṇār where the adorned maid is addressed: “Are you perhaps the demones (or deity) which dwells and abides in the vastness of the great sea?”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, probably in *Akam* 240.8 which speaks of the “cool harbour inhabited by *aṇaṅku*—the deity worshipped with folded hands”. In *Narriṇai* 165.3–4, *aṇaṅku* is thought of as a personified (though still neuter in gender!) deity of the mountains.

16.2. A decisive change in the conception of the supernatural power comes with the personification of *aṇaṅku* as demon or goblin, frequently paired with *pēy*<sup>39</sup> (DED 3635) ‘devil, goblin, fiend, demon’, a term so widely spread throughout Dravidian, also for the meaning of ‘god’ (e.g. in Gondi, Kui and Kuvi), that we very probably have to reconstruct a Proto-Dravidian \**pēy*/\**pēn* for the (original?) meaning of ‘ghost, spirit, demon’. Thus *Matu-raikkāñci* 632 speaks of the dead of night when vampires (*pēy*) and demons (*aṇaṅku*) roam about assuming different forms.<sup>40</sup> From the same text it is quite clear that *pēy* and *aṇaṅku* were two kinds of supernatural beings, for in verses 160ff. they are in decisive contrast; while *aṇaṅku* is connected with an auspicious and well-faring state of the city, *pēy* definite indicates a devastated,

<sup>37</sup> *aṇaṅku kāl kiḷarum mayaṅkiruḷ naḷunāḷ*.

<sup>38</sup> *peruṅkaḷal parappiṇ amarnturai aṇaṅkō*; ‘a water-nymph’?

<sup>39</sup> This is a disputed item. On the one hand, we have a wide distribution throughout Dravidian, with meanings that seem to reflect very old and primitive animism. On the other hand, an interesting Indo-Aryan etymology has been suggested by Prof. J. Filliozat (cf. Skt. *preta*-, the spirit of a dead person) which, however, I consider as most improbable.

<sup>40</sup> *pēyum aṇaṅkum uruvukonṭāy*.

inauspicious situation: "In large halls where [men met] in assemblies the female-demons (*pēymakaḷir*) with cruel eyes and cloven feet [now] dance and sing; at gates where *aṇaṅku* used to dwell . . ." etc. In this context, *aṇaṅku* means either beneficial, auspicious sacred power, or domestic in-dwelling gods.<sup>41</sup> *Perumpāṇārrupaṭai* 457–9 connects beautifully *aṇaṅku*, in the sense of goblins or demons, with the god Cēey (= Murukaṅ) and his Mother Korṟavai:<sup>42</sup> "The goblins (male or female) try to deceive with riddles<sup>43</sup> the lovely Goddess of the *tuṇaṅkai*-dance whose large womb bore the Cēey with golden-green ornaments who slew the terrible Fear".<sup>44</sup>

There are contexts where *aṇaṅku* very probably means a household deity, a domestic in-dwelling god, the personified sacred power of the home: thus most probably in *Maturaikkāñci* 578<sup>45</sup> and 164.<sup>46</sup> In *Akam* 99.9, it very probably means deity or god in general.<sup>47</sup> But from *Akam* 167 and similar poems it is obvious that the term *aṇaṅku* has never attained the same level of meanings as *kaṭavuḷ* which was used for personified god, personified transcendence-immanence, worshipped at home and in temples. This poem mentions, in one context, the marauding tribes who are provided with cruel bows and arrows possessing terrible supernatural power,<sup>48</sup> and the god who has departed from a house devastated by them.<sup>49</sup>

It seems that by the time when the originally impersonal sacred force immanent in certain objects began to be thought of as a

<sup>41</sup> *avaiyirunta perumpotiyr | kavaiyaṭik kaṭunōkkattup | pēymakaḷir peyarpāṭa | aṇaṅku vaḷaṅku makalāṅkaṅ . . .* etc.

<sup>42</sup> Korṟavai, cf. J. Filliozat, *Le Tirumurukārrupaṭai*, 1973, p. XXIX–XXXI.

<sup>43</sup> This is not quite clear; it probably means 'tease with riddles', but may also mean simply 'propose riddles' or 'deceive with riddles' or even 'praise in riddling terms'; liter. *noṭi* 'snap the thumb and middle finger' as a sign of teasing, or idle, inconsiderate, hasty, supercilious 'talk'.

<sup>44</sup> *Kaṭuñcūr koṇṟa | paimpūṭcēey payanta māmoṭṭut | tuṇaṅkaiyañ celvikk(u) aṇaṅkunoṭṭilāṅku.*

<sup>45</sup> *aṇaṅkuṭai nallil.*

<sup>46</sup> *aṇaṅkuṭai vaḷaṅku makalāṅkaṅ.*

<sup>47</sup> *aṇaṅkuṭai nakar* 'the god's temple'.

<sup>48</sup> *aṇaṅkutai-p-pakalik | koṭuvil aṭavar.*

<sup>49</sup> *elutaṅi kaṭavuḷ pōkalin* 'after the god, adorned (with jewels? *aṅi*) and painted (*elutu*), has departed'.

personified dangerous power moving and living on its own, it was adopted as a fitting addition to pre-Aryan Tamil demonology which by that time recognized at least two other classes of goblins: *pēy*, and *cūr*. The first of these—whether or not connected with Aryan *preta*—seems to have represented ‘personal’ demons from the very beginning, simply because these were obviously ghosts of dead persons, either male (*pēy*) or female (*pēymakaḷir*); and indeed, even from our earliest sources, we can get a fairly clear, colourful picture of these terrible spirits<sup>50</sup> with very highly anthropomorphic but monstrous features, which fed usually on corpses, and roamed battlefields and burning grounds: it is very well possible that in these horrid ghosts, we have a blend of some animistic reminiscences with the echoes of a possible early cannibalism and personification of fear.<sup>51</sup> The second was definitely personified fear (cf. *DED* 2250 Ta. *cūr* ‘fear, suffering, affliction, sorrow, disease, cruelty’), and was much later transformed into the chief of the anti-gods, the *asura* hero Śūrapadma. But it is significant that both *pēy* and *cūr* represent always malignant, malevolent, horrid forces, and they are never a cause or source of sacred, divine possession (*verī*); whereas *aṇaṅku*, though potentially dangerous, is often even benevolent and auspicious.

16.3. A further and final stage of the personalisation and personification of *aṇaṅku* which survived as such, not only in medieval Hindu Tamil texts but was also projected into pre-modern and modern thinking and usage, is a concept of *aṇaṅku* as a *female* demon, a kind of fairy which was more often than not malicious and dangerous, but always attractive.

It seems that, for the first time—chronologically speaking—we encounter this conception of *aṇaṅku* in *Paripāṭal* 12.57 (a relatively late old Tamil text, prob. 350–400 A.D.) which compares the playful and coquettish behaviour of a woman to a man with

<sup>50</sup> For a systematic treatment of *pēy* in Old Tamil texts cf. Tamilavan, *Paṇṭait tamilarin pēykaḷ parriya karuttu*, *Ārāycci* 2(4), Dec. 1971, pp. 435–41.

<sup>51</sup> A possible Dravidian etymology of *pēy*: \**pē* ‘rage, madness’ (cf. Ka. *pē*, *hē*), cf. OTa. *pē* (*Kuṇṭokai* 87.1) ‘awe, fear’ in *maṇṇa marāatta pēmutir kaḷavuḷ* ‘the awe-inspiring god of the tree on the public gathering ground.’ But in the light of such connections as Toda *ō:n*, the god of the dead, I would connect Ta. *pēy* with the animistic notions of the spirits of dead persons.



that of *aṇaṅkorutti*, 'a fairy'; cf. the French translation of F. Gros: "comme une sorte de fée au regard d'ambrosie avait jeté les yeux sur lui, (sa femme)" . . . etc.<sup>52</sup> In decisively later texts, all other meanings of the term *aṇaṅku* tend to disappear from our texts in favour of this one meaning of a dangerous fairy which vexes and even slays young men: when we reach the *Tirukkuraḷ* (ca. 450–500 A.D.), this meaning is well-established: in 918, *aṇaṅku* appears among distichs dedicated to prostitutes, among such society as that of treacherous women, corpses in a dark room, women who love not from affection but from avarice, etc.; the embrace of *aṇaṅku* is as ruinous as that of a prostitute. In 1081, the man in love asks full of distress whether what he sees is a human female, a choice pea-hen, or an *aṇaṅku*, a malevolent fairy. And 1082 says: "This female beauty returning my looks is like an *aṇaṅku* with an army to attack me." The tradition of an *aṇaṅku* which attacks (*tāṅku*) is old; so is the tradition of the pseudo-possession by *aṇaṅku* conceived of as the vexation of a passionate love and desire; the personification of *aṇaṅku* as a female and malicious fairy is later. This concept of a pretty fairy which vexes and slays youths, identified with Mohinī,<sup>53</sup> is quite prevalent in all didactic texts between the 5th–9th cent. A.D.: it occurs in *Ācārakkōvai* 72.2 (ca. 825 A.D.), *Aintiṇaiyelupatu* 47.4 (7th cent.), *Paḷamolināṇūru* 8.3 (ca. 700 A.D.), *Tiṇaimā-laiṇūrraiṇpatu* 47.2 (8th–9th Cent.). Medieval dictionaries explain the term also as used for beautiful women who resemble celestial damsels, and as meaning 'beauty' as such. In premodern and early modern Tamil poetry, the two qualities of 'beauty' and 'divineness' were responsible for such usage as *tamiḷaṇaṅku*, 'the divine damsel of Tamil'—i.e. the personification of Tamil as an *aṇaṅku* in this sense.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *amirtaṇa nōkkat taṇaṅkorutti pārppa* . . . Says F. Gros correctly on p. 253 of his translation of the text (*Le Paripāṭal*, 1968): "allusion implicite à sa nature de "Mohini" selon les croyances populaires."

<sup>53</sup> Mohinī, the Enchantress, Lust (cf. *Mh. Bh.* 1.18–19, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.9–10, 12, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.45, *Padmapurāṇa* 3.10 etc.), was an incarnation of Viṣṇu as a lovely woman, meant to deceive the *asuras* and deprive them of ambrosia. She appeared at the time of the churning of the ocean. She also seduced Śiva. She thus became the symbol of all enchantresses and of the seductive power of women.

<sup>54</sup> Tamil, like *aṇaṅku*, is a celestial fairy, of magic power, beautiful and divine. Cf. Sundaram Pillai's (1855–1897) famous poem about South India and Tamilnadu.

17. Concluding we may probably say this: The sacred was thought of as a force immanent in certain places, objects, and beings, and not as the property of well-defined transcendent gods. The term used for the sacred was *aṇṅku*, originally conceived of as an impersonal, anonymous power, an awe-inspiring supernatural force inherent in a number of phenomena but not identified or confused with any one of them in particular. The sacred power was so completely independent of particular objects or persons in which it was believed to dwell or inhere that it might have preceded or survived them. It was impersonal, capricious, dangerous, neither auspicious nor inauspicious in itself; among the various places, it was found to inhere in awe-inspiring localities—mountain tops, the sea, the battlefield, the threshing-floor used as the place where orgiastic and sacred dances were performed; among objects, it was thought to dwell in dangerous or exceptional things like weapons and musical instruments; it also inhered in certain fear-inspiring animals (lion, tiger, snake), and in certain (probably totemic, sacred) trees. Among the early gods, it was connected most frequently with Murukan; also with Māl and Indra.

The one quality which still seems to have survived in South Indian Hinduism<sup>55</sup> is the quality of 'immanence' of the sacred, and its connection with *places*. Though the idols in temples (and at home), the *vigrahas*, are, in 'high' and speculative Hinduism, not considered the 'images' of god but 'symbolic representation' of the nameless, formless, qualityless Absolute, a mere help to conceive and meditate upon god;<sup>56</sup> the icons, the *pratimās*, are in actual practice bodies inhabited by the god and his power.

*This use of aṇṅku as the personification of Tamil shows, however, also, that there is nothing deeply and fundamentally inauspicious or malevolent in the term and the concept; if a poet of the second half of the last century who was deeply versed and intimately immersed in Tamil classics and lexicography could use the term aṇṅku to personalise the language and culture which he loved above everything, then the late-old-Tamil and early-medieval use of aṇṅku in the sense of a malevolent and murderous fairy was probably rather an aberration and abuse of the original term, meaning 'awesome, sacred force.'*

<sup>55</sup> And indeed to have spread in Hinduism in general.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. L. A. Ravi Varma, 'Rituals of Worship', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, 445-63.

Intricate ritual is described which has to be performed in order that the sacred power of the god becomes immanent in a *pratimā*. Thus, e.g., the *Kumāratantra* in its 5th part on daily worship dedicates a number of stanzas to the installation of the idol, and the ritual culminates with verse 66 which says:

O Lord,  
O master of the universe,  
make yourself present in this icon,  
out of affection,  
as long as the worship goes on.<sup>57</sup>

I suggest that the *immanence of the sacred—a sacred force inherent in certain objects at certain times*—is a heritage in Hinduism of the ancient (and non-Vedic) conception of *aṇaṅku*.

As for the connection of the sacred with *places*, it was dealt with in a path-breaking paper by Kees W. Bolle,<sup>58</sup> who writes: “. . . unless one understands the primacy of the *place*, the nature of the sacred in most of Hinduism remains incomprehensible, and the plurality and variety of gods continue to form an unsolvable puzzle. *God is universal because he is there.*” According to Bolle, the “symbolism of being there” can be seen as the mainstay of Hinduism in the vicissitudes of its history; the “being there,” the “presence,” the “topographical religiosity,” is the most tangible element of Hinduism. In our context, I would like to cite in particular the following: “At village sanctuaries, we sometimes find just an enclosure to mark the presence of a deity. It seems to me that the use of a mere enclosure is the most eloquent example of the symbolism of being there . . . You do not ask for a creed concerning theological or sociological certitudes or agricultural effectiveness when you see a mere enclosure. You do not even ask about the sex of the deity thus represented; the only thing you can say is ‘presence.’” Again I suggest that this “symbolism of being there” is another heritage in real live Hinduism of the

<sup>57</sup> *svāmin sarvajagannātha yāvat pūjāvasānakam | tāvat tvaṃ prītibhāvena bimbe 'smin sannidhiṃ kuru.*

<sup>58</sup> ‘Speaking of a Place’, in *Myths and Symbols*, Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969, 127–39.

ancient (and non-Vedic) conception of a sacred power, *aṇaṅku*, as inherent in certain places; in our oldest Tamil texts, these places are most frequently described or rather pointed out in concrete and no uncertain terms: it is the top of the hero's mountain, or the waters of a certain sea-harbour, or the slope of our garden, or the mountain-pass in our hills, or the gates of the fortress of our town, where *aṇaṅku* dwells as its inherent supernatural force. It indeed 'is universal' because it is there.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> This paper was inspired by the critical reading of George L. Hart's important and controversial book *The Poems of Ancient Tamil*, University of California Press, 1975.