

LORD MURUGAN AND HIS SIX ABODES IN TAMIL NADU AN EFFICACY IN PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

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Abstract

The name Murugan evokes a response that takes one to the facet of something very holy and philosophical and at times, the esoteric. He has been regarded a God of the Tamil people (Tamil Kadavul). Known by several names, including, Karthikeya, Shanmukha, Palaniandavar, Dandayudhapani, Shiva Kumara, Saravana, Swaminatha, Kumaraswami (Bachelor God) and has been syncretized with the Vedic deity of Subrahmanya. Wherever one finds the Tamil people, the community, Murugan is the symbol of divinity.

Murugan temples in Tamil Nadu number in the thousands, but a devotees wish to go to Arupadai Veedu (six abodes/war houses) temples located at Palani, Swamimalai, Thiruthani, Thiruparankundram, Tiruchendur and Pazhamudircholai as mentioned in the Sangam Literature works of Nakkeerar (Thirumurugatrupadai) and Arunagirinathar (Tiruppugal) ushers in the element of pilgrim tourism giving it a greater dimension to a phenomenal deity. The chapter studies the opportunities of tourism promotion at the destinations. It has been seen that, the way the destinations pertaining to Lord Murugan are visited is something worth understanding, which will provide for a dynamic understanding of how pilgrimage tourism can be promoted to the visitors, who throng to these places in large numbers.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism, Lord Murugan, Six Abodes

Introduction

Subbaraman Kumaran (Kumaran, 2023), Professor of Management at the Alliance University (www.alliance.edu.in), Bangalore, has a unique distinction within his family, when, as they grew, the siblings realised, their father had named all the children, after the various names of Lord Murugan. Was it just a coincidence? Was it the belief in Lord Murugan? Prof. Kumaran mentions, “my father, Subbaraman, Telugu by birth and my mother Sitalakshmi were primordial believers of Lord Vishnu in His most revered form in Tamil Nadu, *Perumal*. The impact, influence of the Tamil *Kadavul* i.e., Lord Murugan on my parents was so phenomenal that four children they had, were named after Lord Murugan. Murugesan, Kumaran, Saravanan, and Karthikeyan.” Though Lord Murugan evokes a lot of piety and peace in the Southern part, it is not that he is completely unknown in other parts of Bharat, India. He is called Skanda and He is one of the Deities. along with Vishnu, Narayana, Siva, Rudra, Ganesha, Sakti, Brahma, among the major deities mentioned; apart from the Devatas, like Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Vayu to mention a few. Though the Vedas do not refer to Lord Muruga, Skanda is an important name that comes up. A Stuthi on Ganesha states ‘Skanda Purvajah’ meaning elder to Muruga. The Sangam Literature and *Tholkappiyam* mentions Lord Muruga as the Parpdal of the period and thence the importance to the deity. *Tholkappiyam* refers to Lord Murugan as, “the red god seated on the blue peacock, who is ever young and resplendent, as the favoured God of the Tamil (Ramani, 2013).” R. Shivakumar (Shivakumar, 2023) a Lawyer turned Philosopher, who is trying to understand and share ideas and beliefs about the meaning of life states, “Lord Muruga, also known

as Karthikeya symbolises bravery, strength, and victory over evil. The meaning of His Life has deeper significance which delves into the spiritual realm. Lord Muruga represents the power of the awakened Kundalini, the energy, which lies dormant within every individual.” Shivakumar further adds, “The process of meditation is said to involve a shifting of the focal point across six stages or *chakras*, from the *muladhara chakra* based at the bottom of the spine to the thousand-petal *sahasra chakra* located at the top of the head. These six stages symbolize the six abodes of Lord Muruga and Lord Murugan is also credited to be the source of the twenty-five eternal tattvas or principles.” Thus, Lord Murugan is esoteric to some, as one devotee whom the authors met, mentioned, with a glow on his face, “The Lord is my best friend, He is with me always, my good and in my troubles.” True, Lord Murugan like his brother Lord Ganesh, is an epitome of a multitude of aspects, some esoteric, some known, and thence, He has been observed, studied, and looked upon by the devotees to bless them from time immemorial.

Sangam literature has also documented the Kurinji flower (*Strobilanthes kunthianus*) which blooms once in twelve years in various parts of Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu and the nearby environs. Ramakrishnan (2018) mentions, “the ancient literature has documented the Kurinji in its *Agam* or love poetry. From times immemorial, the flower has become part of religious traditions, beliefs, and folklore. The area where the flower blooms is presided by the ‘red speared God of war, youth, and beauty i.e., Murugan,’ and one can say Kurinji flower and the deity have become synonymous. Some of the local tribes of the hills (known as *Malayalis*, i.e., hill (Malai) dwellers) believe that Lord Murugan married Valli, the daughter of a Tribal Chieftain by garlanding her with Kurinji flowers.” In many ways Lord Kartikeya is a mysterious god. In North Bharat (India) he has been virtually forgotten and there is only one temple in Kronch Parvat, Kanakchauri, Rudraprayag, Utrakhland. In the east he is remembered once a year during Kartik Puja. Then during Durga Puja, he stands beside Devi Durga with Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Ganesh as they present the perfect portrait of a divine family. In the west too he is not as important as his generous brother Ganesh. If there is only one temple dedicated to Lord Kartik in North Bharat, then how come we hear about Lord Murugan in South Bharat more than what we hear in the North.

Lord Murugan and Tourism, the opportunity

Considering the spread of temples and monuments pertaining to Lord Murugan across India, Bharat, and the devotion that He commands with his disciples not only in India but across the Indian Diaspora spread across the world, it is clear, that tourism, can and will be promoted in a huge manner. As we are aware, India is a phenomenal illustration of Pilgrim Tourism, and one needs to capitalize on the destinations focussing on Lord Murugan and all the stories that surround him. Even if the six abodes of Lord Murugan are localized to the province/state of Tamil Nadu and a few areas in the northern part of India in the Himalayas; considering the visitations that take place, the numbers are large, and this an occurrence throughout the year.

By now one can understand the immense opportunity the Tourism, Travel and Hospitality ecosystem of Bharat has, to promote the destinations of Lord Murugan. As mentioned by Gopal (2021), the Tourism Administration does organize package tours which are immensely popular with the those who want to cover the six-abodes in one go. This is a unique experience. The authors of the Chapter did attempt traveling and ensuring that all the abodes were covered in the shortest time possible, where one gets to understand the essence of Lord Murugan. Figure (1) amply demonstrates the visitation numbers that will surely attract the Tourism administrators to ensure for the sector.

District	Year (2020)	Domestic	Foreign
Dingidul (Palani)	8157770	8083175	74595
Madurai (Pazhamudircholai & Thiruparkundram)	13958585	13877565	81020

Thiruvallur (Thirutani)	2583687	2583687	0
Thanjavur (Swamimalai)	6328151	6253134	75017
(Toothukudi) Thiruchendur	5299598	5298065	1533

Figure 1: Tourist Statistics to the Destinations (2020) (TN Tourism, 2020)

“The popularity of Lord Murugan and the temples related to him cannot be denied,” mentions Anil Moghe (Moghe, 2023), who has been a Tour Guide with the GoI, MoT for nearly four decades. He further adds, “though TTDC, of the Government of Tamil Nadu does conduct customized tours to the six houses, the other neighbouring states viz., Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala too should initiate tours towards the destinations, which will help a larger population to reach out to the Lord Murugan destinations.” Pradeep (Pradeep, 2023) another Tour Guide who has been guiding International Inbound and domestic tourists with the GoI, MoT from 1988 mentions that, “Cultural, Heritage and Pilgrimage tourism is popular in Tamil Nadu, considering the variety of temples that are found in various destinations. Lord Murugan is popular not only among the domestic visitors, but also those who visit Bharat from Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, and other countries. The destinations pertaining to Lord Murugan, should be popularized by the Indian Embassies and GoI, MoT tourist offices that are located across the world, which will help visitors to plan their trips to Bharat and visit the Holy shrines, which are very uniquely poised to welcome visitors.” He continues further and mentions that, “the three A’s of tourism, Attraction, Accessibility, Accommodation, all juxtapose themselves with the Lord Murugan destinations not only in Tamil Nadu, but also in Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.”

The authors, who are well travelled within India and to other countries, have been travelling to the various destination of Lord Murugan for almost three decades. The visits to the destinations pertaining to Lord Murugan by each of the author helped in the articulation of a multitude of facets for the study. The authors spoke with many devotees and stakeholders involved in the tourism sector in the State of Tamil Nadu, and helped augment a paper which aptly describes the war-God, Lord Murugan. The authors met with the community members in each destination, who supported in the collation of information and inputs that are critical to the study. The authors to get the views of the business stakeholders of tourism, travel, and hospitality, had multiple free-wheeling discussions and an unstructured interview method was adopted to ensure that the respondents speak about the efficacy of the Lord Murugan related Tourism Pilgrimage destinations in India. In fact, the respondents, some of whom had about four decades of experience in the Tourism segment, did not want to be cowed down with a restricted questionnaire, which would limit their thoughts on the subject. The unstructured interviews were conducted i) face to face, and ii) over digital media, viz., WhatsApp and Zoom as well. This provided for a leverage to ensure, a larger number of stakeholders were connected to, and opinions were derived. The authors got to speak with and deliberate with a total of twelve stakeholders, each of them having close to three to four decades of working experience in the domain of tourism, travel, and hospitality were spoken to over a period of eight months to illicit information and inputs that have gone into the chapter. The authors believe that the information received from the stakeholders, are reliable, relevant, and valid to the chapter on Lord Murugan. Another important facet to note is that the stakeholders, whose opinions were taken for the chapter, have travelled across the Lord Murugan destinations in India and overseas multiple number of times and hence, they were able to assuage the efficacy of tourism promotion in the pilgrimage destinations related to Lord Murugan.

Literature on Lord Murugan

Lord Murugan has been an enigmatic personality in the Indian religious and philosophical scenario. Much has been written about Lord Murugan from times immemorial especially in the Tamil Language. Works in English too do not lag. Some of the works that the authors reviewed are as follows.

Clothey (1978) whose magnum opus, *The many faces of Murukan, the History and meaning of the South Indian God*, which has been considered as one of the finest works on Lord Murugan, was reviewed time and again, when the authors wanted to retrieve answers for questions that were innate about Lord Murugan. Fred W., Clothey being a leader and a pioneer in the field of Ritual Studies and ethnographic fieldwork and documentation of the religious practices in India, the work proved to be a blessing for the authors.

Harappan and the Dravidian, an old mystery in a new light and Tamil traditions on Subrahmanya, Murugan are two works written by Zvelebil in 1965 and 1991 respectively, that became source of information and knowledge. These works are a must to analyse the various nuances of Lord Murugan and the way the disciples understand Him.

A more recent work by Viswanathan (2014) titled, *Lord Murugan Karthikeya Katha* was referred to understand the way the disciples interpretate the philosophy of Lord Murugan. This provided the authors an opportunity to understand one of the most important deities much better.

Balasubramanian (2021) recent publication titled: *Murugan: The Lord of war, the God of Wisdom* provided for a philosophical approach to the authors, who were guided the finer aspects of what Lord Muruga is to the people, the devotees. The work provides for an understanding of Lord Muruga that is worth diving into.

Krishnan (2023) and his work, *Six Shrines of Muruga* which provided for a pictorial depiction of the six houses, and information about the events in the six-destinations is a classic for the future on Lord Murugan. The coffee table book, engulfs the reader and the researcher to go deeper into Lord Murugan and the stories that surround Him.

Justification for the research

The pilgrim destinations, pertaining to Lord Murugan, in Tamil Nadu, have attracted millions of pilgrims and general visitors over the years, and still attract not only from within India, but also from the Indian diaspora across the world. Hence, a study of this genre is justified as it will provide information and an understanding for the readers and the prospective visitors. One aspect that the authors would like to share is that, one of the important destinations pertaining to Lord Murugan, Kronch (Cronch, Croanch) Parvat in the Northern part of the Indian Nation, was not really known to the devotees in South India. The study articulates important and unique facts about Kronch Parvat which is close to Himalayas, thus setting into motion an opportunity to promote a Lord Murugan related pilgrim destination in the North and thereby provide a connect to the six war houses in the South.

Kronch (Cronch, Croanch) Parvat (Latitude/Longitude: 30.3860° N, 79.0993° E) and Karthik Swami

While there are many stories about this temple, the most popular one dates to the era when Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati's two sons, Lord Kartik, and Lord Ganesha - were asked to circumambulate the universe seven times. Lord Kartik set off on the expedition as directed by his parents, undertaking the challenging task of taking seven rounds of the universe, whereas, Lord Ganesha took rounds of his parents, referring to them as his universe. When Lord Kartik returned and learnt of how Lord Ganesha had completed the task and won the appreciation of Lord Shiva, he was enraged. The Puranas say that an angry Lord Kartik left Kailash, his parents' abode, and arrived at Kronch Parvat. Some legends say that after this, Lord Kartik went to a mountain in Southern Bharat, where he was known as Skanda, one of his many names apart from Lord Muruga, Lord Murugan, and Lord Subramanya.

Others say, Lord Kartik was so furious, he sacrificed his physical self at Kronch Parvat to appease his parents.

Uttarakhand tourism board (Uttarakhand Tourism, 2023) organized 108 *Vazampuri Shankh Pooja* and *Kalash Sthapana* on 16th May 2023 to connect this temple of Lord Karthik at Kronch Parvat with *Aarupadai Veedu* (the six houses of Lord Muruga) of Tamil Nadu and all the major *Peethadi Pathis* and *Mathadipathis* from Tamil Nadu. The temple situated on a ridge atop the Kronch Parvat, is the only temple of Kartikeya in Uttarakhand (Kartik Swami, n.d.). Kumar (2023) enumerating the temple complex (Illustration 1a) at Kronch writes, the temple placed at an altitude of 3,050 meters above sea level, is located on a hilltop near the village of Kanakchauri in Rudraprayag at a three kilometres distance, followed by a 380-step climb (Uttarakhand Tourism, n.d.) Tourism leading to the temple. Kanakchauri is forty kilometers from Rudraprayag and one can easily reach the place from any part of Bharat via Dehradun (Illustration 2). Firstrek (n.d.) refers to the trek as a thrilling experience from Kanakchauri village, and on reaching the temple of Lord Kartik, one gets to see the 360° (Illustration 3) of the Himalayan range, which is breathtaking. Kumar (2023) speaks of the spectacular views of the Himalayan peaks from west to east, that include, Bander poonch, Kedarnath Dome, Chaukhambha Peak, Dronagiri, Nanda Ghunti, Trishul, the Nanda Devi range of peaks, Meru, and Sumeru Parvat. Rawat (2021) makes a pertinent reference to the way Lork Kartik, the God of War is referred locally in Kronch Parvat, as *Swaminath Danda*, and he is the presiding deity to the 360 villages that surround Kronch Parvat.



Figure 1a: Pictures of the Lord Kartik temple (Firstrek n.d.)

Speaking about Kronch Parvat, Murali Krishna G (Krishna, 2023) a Historian, an Explorer, Teacher, and a Tour Operator of Pilgrim destinations in Bharat, mentions, “for people from South Bharat, Kronch Parvat and the story of Lord Karthikeya is an enigma, and breathes life to the vibrant life of Lord Muruga. Having been to Kronch Parvat multiple number of times, the belief in the Lord only increases and accompanying more pilgrims gives me a sense of satisfaction. Kronch Parvat, for its Historical heritage, its religious spectre and the philosophy attached to the destination, besides the environmental and natural beauty should not be on the bucket list of destinations for the traveller in anyone, it is a must visit destination. The experience, that one derives, is not innate, but palpable when one reaches the place of Lord Karthikeya and one surely gets into a trance during the stay at the temple and at the Parvat.”

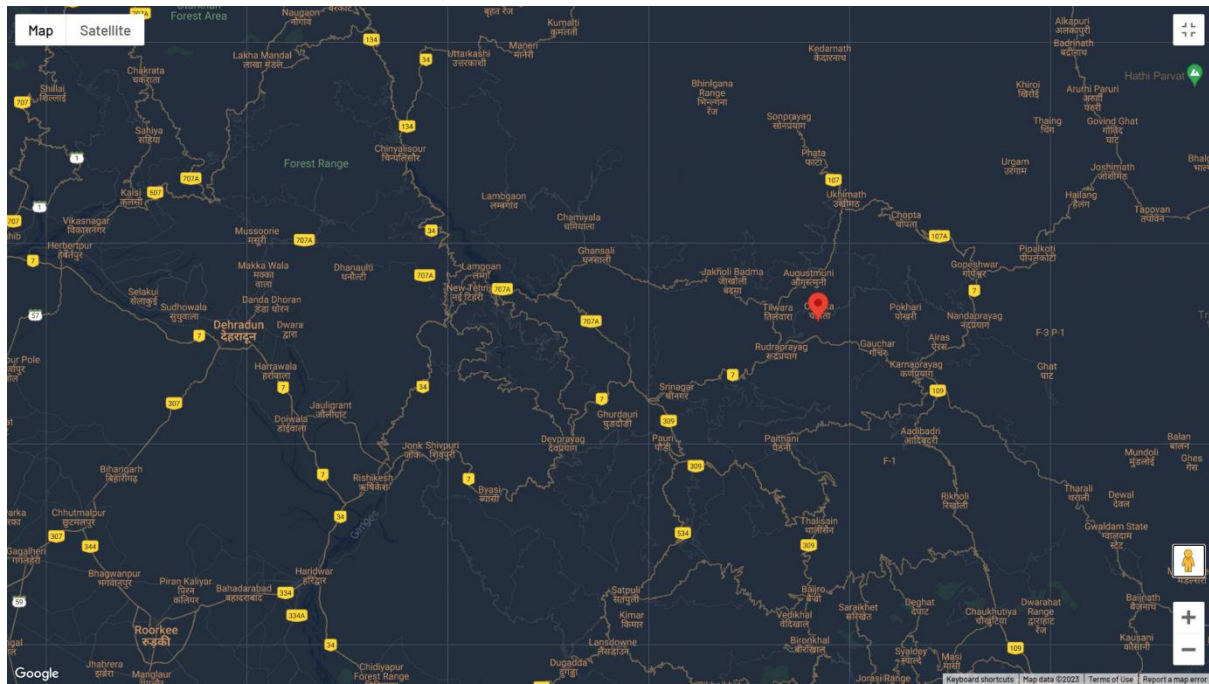


Figure 2: Satellite map, showing location of Kronch Parvat (Firstrek, n.d.)

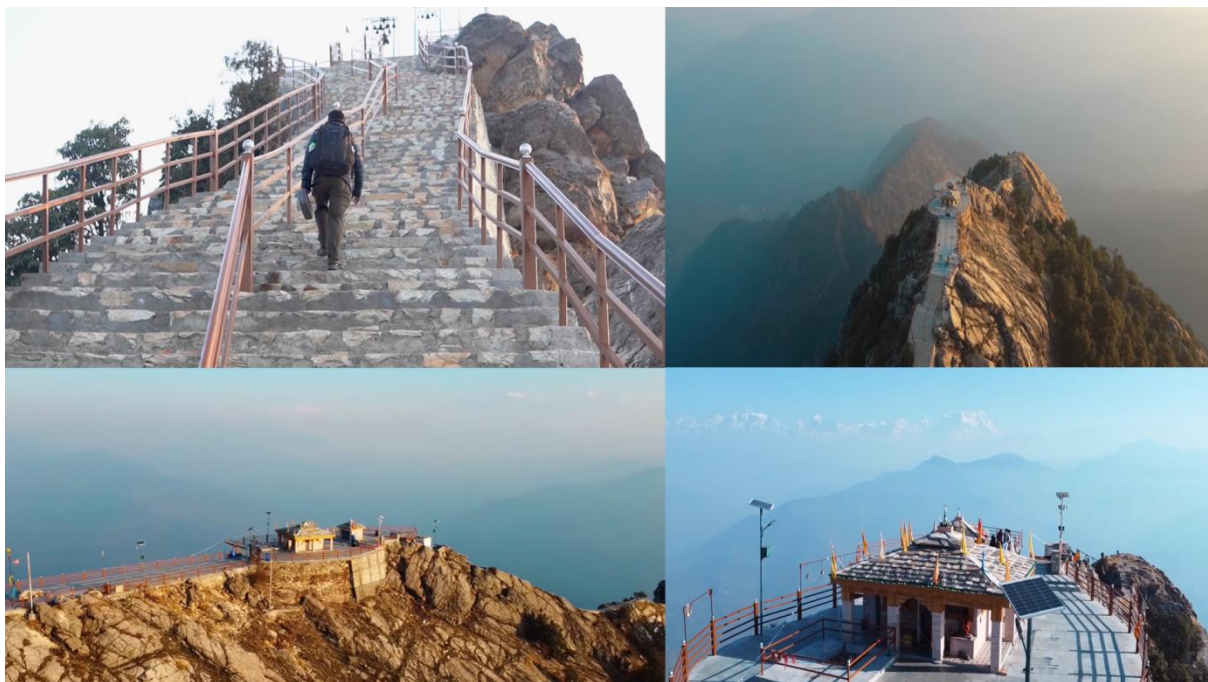


Figure 3: Drone view of Lord Kartik Temple, Kronch (Rawat, 2021)

Murali further adds, “for Bharatiyas (Indians) from the Southern part, Kronch Parvat, is important considering the *Aarupadai Veedu* (the six houses of Lord Murugan) and the linkage to the Lord. The origin of the Lord Murugan story from Kronch about his commitment to his parents and the subsequent anger, leading to his movement to the South and He becoming the Tamil *Kadavul* (God of the Tamils), is something that one needs to investigate deeper and understand the philosophy of Lord Murugan, for each destination pronounces something to the world and the community of people.”

***Aarupadai Veedu*, the Six houses of Lord Murugan**

Suveer Gupta (Gupta, 2023), a businessman and a globetrotter, at a point in time, felt that he has not probed Bharat enough during his lifetime and made a conscious decision to travel across Bharat, the Nation with its vibrant Culture and bounties of Heritage. Suveer focused on the six houses of Lord Murugan. His research and planning ensured that he along with his family got to travel to all the six houses and other important points of pilgrim concerning Lord Murugan. Suveer states, “my experiences with visiting the 6 abodes of Lord Murugan have been nothing short of being out of this world and surreal. My personal assimilation is that each of the abodes represents the points of a six-pointed star or the Hexaware and each of these points are an imbalance of an emotion in our being or not. Hence if something is more in alignment with what should be the Darshan will be that much easier and the converse also true. That said any person wanting to visit all the abodes should be aware that Lord Murugan does not give His Darshan very easily and if there is a calling, He will make sure you listen to him.” Ask any pilgrim to proceed to any of the place related to Lord Murugan, it is an arduous task to reach the destination, but once we reach, then the pleasure seeing the deity makes us believe more in Him.

The worship of Lord Murugan is so popular in Tamil Nadu, that the six sacred temples, abodes, referred as *Aarupadai* or *Arupadaiveedu* ushers in an attribute to the pilgrim, which is one of sacredness. These six temples are located at:

	Place Name	Significance	District	Distance from Chennai	Important City close to the destination
1	Thiruthani: Arulmigu Thiruthani Swamy Temple	He is enshrined as <i>Tanikaslam</i> . Marriage with Srivalli.	Thiruvallur	86 Kilometers	Arakonam
2	Swamimalai: Arulmigu Swamimalai Swaminatha Swamy Temple	Worshipped as Balamurgan or as Swaminathaswamy. Preaching the <i>PraNava Mantra</i> i.e., OM (ॐ) to His Father, Lord Shiva.	Thanjavur	296 Kilometers	Kumbakonam
3	Palani: Murugan Temple	The Lord worshipped as <i>Dandayudhpaani</i> The Lord lost the <i>Gnanapalam</i> (fruit of knowledge to Lord Ganesh)	Dindigul	489 Kilometers	Kodaikanal Madurai
4	Pazhamudircholai: Murugan Sholaimalai Temple	The Lord is worshipped as <i>Kurinjinilamkizhavan</i> Darshan to devotees with both his Consorts. At the foothill the Alagar Kovil is visited by all pilgrims who come to Pazhamudircholai	Madurai	448 Kilometers	Dindigul

5	Thirupparankundram: Arulmigu Subramanya Swami Temple	Worshipped as <i>Subramanyan</i> . Marriage with Devyani.	Madurai	464 Kilometers	Dindigul
6	Thiruchendur: Murugan Temple	The Lord is called, <i>Senthilnathan</i> Destroying the <i>Asurasurapadman</i>	Toothukudi	638 Kilometers	Toothukudi Tirunelveli

Figure 4: The Six Abodes of Lord Murugan

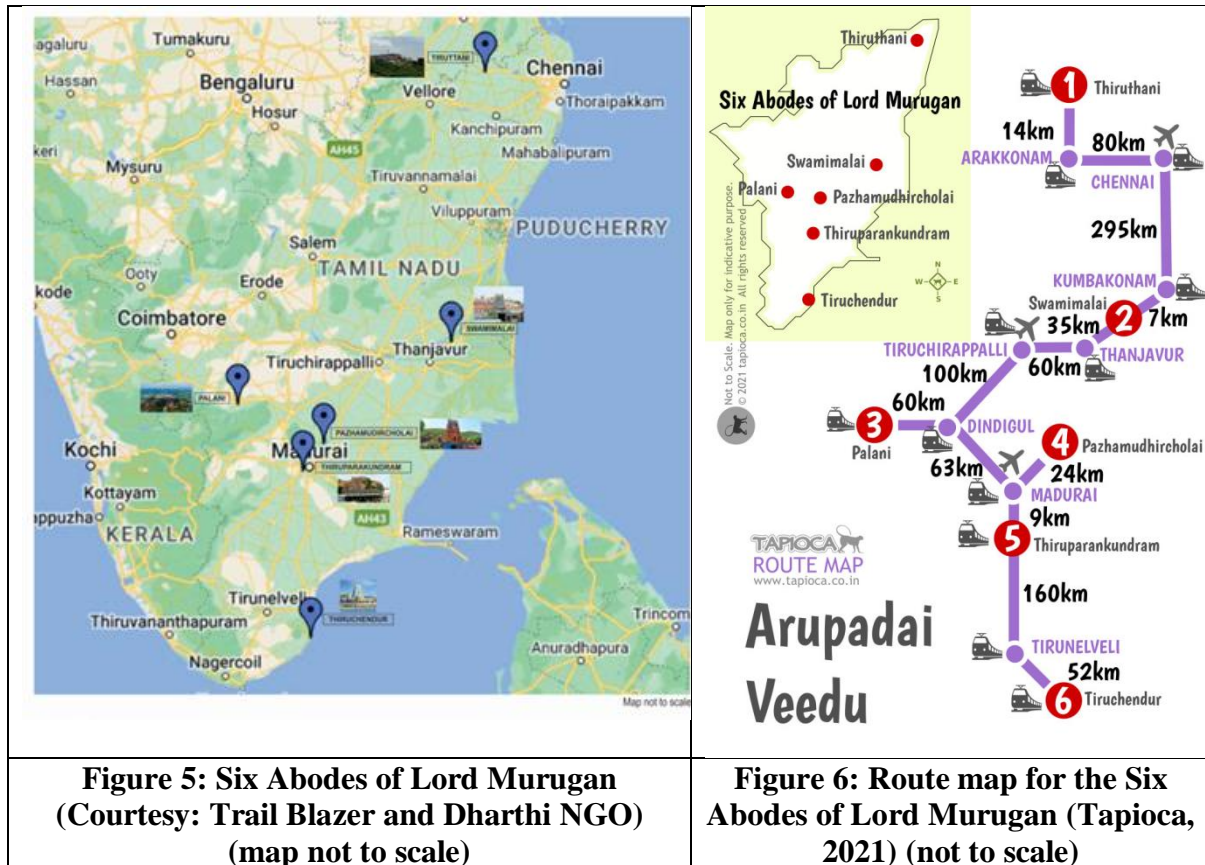


Figure 5: Six Abodes of Lord Murugan (Courtesy: Trail Blazer and Dharthi NGO) (map not to scale)

Figure 6: Route map for the Six Abodes of Lord Murugan (Tapioca, 2021) (not to scale)

From a Historical perspective, the six abodes of Lord Murugan find mention in the Tamil Sangam Literature. Sundararajan (Sundararajan, 2023), Curator at the Government Museum, Chennai (<https://www.chennaiuseum.org/>) mentions, “the six most sacred houses of Lord Murugan have been mentioned in the Sangam literature. Mention can be found in *Thirumurugatrupadai* (some sources refer to the book as, *Tirumurukarrupatai* – Guide to Lord Murugan), written by Nakkerar and *Thiruppugazh* by Arunagirinatha, which speaks about the historicity of Lord Murugan.” Sundararajan delves deeper in the literature and mentions that, “*Tirumurukarrupatai* speaks of six sites of Lord Murugan and His association with animals like the elephant, peacock, and rooster (Penkower and Pintchman, 2014), it is the association of Lord Murugan to these animals that is critical.” Sundararajan further adds, “He has been portrayed as a beautiful god of the forests and the hills, and bears a Lance, the ‘vel’ which makes the *Velmurugan*.” “The more we read into the Sangam literature, we can see information about Murugan being married to a hunter-maiden, *Valli* and His second wife, *Devasena*, referred to as *Tevayanai* in the Tamil literature.”

Clothey (1978) in the seminal book, *The many faces of Murukan, the History and meaning of the South Indian God*, mentions, “we are fortunate in Murukan to have a god, who in at least a

rudimentary form, was worshipped in very early strata of Tamil Society prior to any Brahmanization of South India, but who at the same time persists and changes through virtually all the cultural changes that occur in the region.” Zvelebil (1991) a well-recognized Dravidologist who wrote *Tamil Traditions on Subrahmanya, Murugan* considers Murugan to be the nephew of God Vishnu (the part of the Trinity, with Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma), who is called Mayon or the ruler of the worlds. Murugan has been called as the God of Composite Nature. This clearly means that Lord Murugan has been in the circle of religion in South India in general and Tamil Nadu (Tamil Country), in particular, for a long time. Saravana, an ardent devotee of Lord Murugan states, “He can be considered as the Lord of the commons, and it is the commons who visit him with much fervour and devotion. It is not about the six-abodes of Murugan, every village in Tamil Nadu and in the neighbouring states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, do have temples dedicated to Lord Murugan, some have their History which runs into many hundred years, some are new, may be a few decades old. What we need to see is the fervour with which people worship and believe in Lord Murugan, that builds aura around him, that has continued and will continue, not only in India but in other parts of world, where there are people of Bharatiya (Indian) origin and those who speak Tamil as their Mother tongue, be it, Malaysia, Mauritius, or any other country.”

Lord Murugan temples in South Bharat

The discussion the authors had with Saravana, who brought about a thought process about the importance and uniqueness of the six abodes; but then there are destinations in Tamil Nadu and other states in South India, where Lord Murugan is worshipped with utmost reverence. Illustration (7) provides the reader the other important Lord Murugan destinations in Tamil Nadu that visitors/Pilgrims alike travel to along with the six abodes. It is not that the other destinations, other than the six abodes are not important, they are. Nandagopal (Nandagopal, 2023), a Tour Operator based in Pondicherry, who does inbound tourism, mentions, “guests who come from Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius and other nations, when they visit Bharat for Culture, Heritage and temple tourism, and if they visit Tamil Nadu, make a specific mention to coopt the Lord Murugan circuit and add other temples of Lord Murugan, that do not fall under the six houses.” This gives a clear understanding that visitors to Bharat, do know about the various temples that are to be visited.

Kishore Shivagupta (Shivagupta, 2022), a Custom Travel Delight Planner and a Travel Junkie himself, who owns Trip Kraft India (<https://www.facebook.com/TripKraft/>), mentions, “the Murugan travel circuit is a popular one in Bharat; besides, the temples (the six houses and other important temples in Tamil Nadu), I get requests to plan trips to important temples in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala (Illustration 8) as well. This is with my domestic travelers, whom I service all through the year.” Kishore even confirmed, “that the Lord Murugan temple destinations, are pilgrim destinations that can be promoted all-round the year.” He continued, “given the good access by road, rail, and air the destinations have; besides of course, people traveling on their own, the Murugan circuit is surely and well sought after one. I have seen visitors clubbing destinations like, Palani, Pazhamudicholai, Tiruparkundram with Madurai and completing the circuit. Once done, they carry on with the other temples in the group of six abode temples.” This brings us to a point which Arumugam Gopal (Gopal, 2021), a Tourist Officer with the Government of India (Bharat), Ministry of Tourism (GoI, MoT) (<https://tourism.gov.in/about-us/indian-tourism-offices>), states, “prospective visitors who are going to the Murugan circuit for the first time, ask about the distances from important cities like Bangalore, Chennai, Salem and about the accommodation facilities in the Murugan temple destinations and then proceed to the places as required. Some even ask if there are any tour packages organized by either, the Provincial Governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.” Gopal states, “there are multiple tour packages offered by both the Provincial Governments, and the Government of Tamil Nadu, through the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) (<https://www.ttdconline.com/aarupadai-vedu-tour.html>) organizes a four-day Aarupadai Vedu Tour which is popular with the tourists from Tamil Nadu and other states alike.”

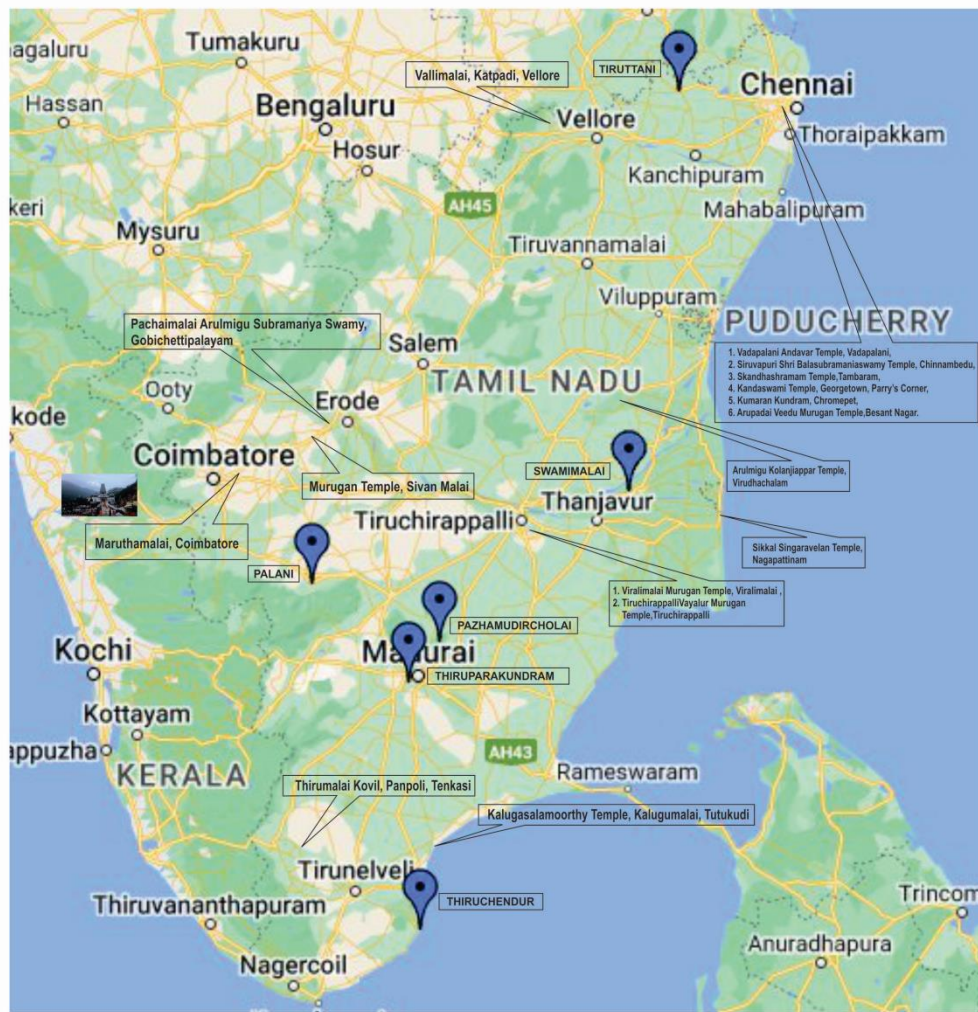


Figure 7: Important locations/destinations with temples dedicated to Lord Murugan, along with the six abodes (Courtesy: Trail Blazer and Dharthi NGO) (map not to scale)

Illustration 8 showcases the six abodes of Lord Murugan in Tamil Nadu and the important Pilgrim destinations related to Lord Murugan in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, besides, the destination of Kronch in Uttarakhand.

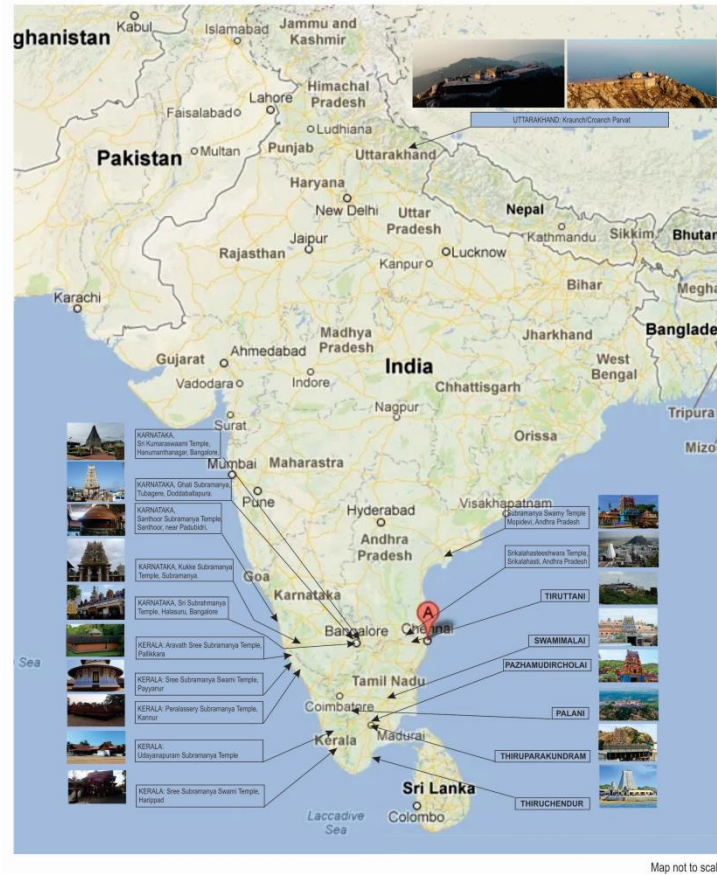


Figure 8: Map showing location of Lord Murugan temples in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, besides the six abodes in Tamil Nadu (Courtesy: Trail Blazer and Dharthi NGO) (map not to scale)

	Place Name	City with Airport Location and distance
Andhra Pradesh		
1	Mopidevi, Subramanya Swamy Temple (Krishna District)	Vijayawada: 54 Kilometers
2	Srikalahasti, Srikalahasteeshwara Temple (Tirupathi District)	Chennai: 100 Kilometers Tirupathi: 22 Kilometers
Karnataka		
3	Subramanya, Kukke Subramanya, (Dakshina Kannada District)	Mangalore: 112 Kilometers Bangalore: 300 Kilometers
4	Santhoor (near Padubidri), Santhoor Subramanya Temple (Udupi District)	Mangalore: 37 Kilometers Bangalore: 401 Kilometers
5	Doddaballapura, Ghati Subramanya Temple (Bangalore Rural District)	Bangalore: 44 Kilometers
6	Bangalore (Halasuru), Sri Subramanya Temple (Bangalore City)	Bangalore: 36 Kilometers
7	Bangalore (Hanumanthanagar), Sri Kumaraswami Temple (Bangalore City)	Bangalore: 40 Kilometers
Kerala		
8	Payyanur, Sree Subramanya Swami Temple (Kannur District)	Mangalore: 105 Kilometers

9	Kannur, Peralassery Subramanya Temple (Kannur District)	Kannur: 21 Kilometers Kozhikode (Calicut): 104 Kilometers Mangalore: 132 Kilometers
10	Pallikkara, Aravath Sree Subramanya Temple (Kasargod District)	Mangalore: 45 Kilometers
11	Udayanapuram, Subramanya Temple (Kottayam District)	Kochi: 64 Kilometers
12	Harippad, Sree Subramanya Swami Temple (Alappuzha District) (also known as the Dakshina Palani)	Kochi: 98 Kilometers Tiruvananthapuram: 100 Kilometers Madurai: 185 Kilometers

Figure 9: The destinations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala and Airport distances

1. Swamimalai (Swamimalay)

Clothey (1978) referring to the shrine that is geographically and philosophically set in the Chola land, refers to Swamimalai (Swamimalay), as the Mount of the Lord, where Murugan is depicted primarily as the Philosopher and *Guru*. Clothey speaks of the primary image of the child God perched on the shoulder of Lord Shiva imparting divine wisdom. Krishna (2023) speaking about the story of Swamimalai says, it begins with Lord Brahma. It is said that once Brahma was passing by Murugan’s abode, bragging about his status as the creator of the universe. Murugan, who was then a child, found his arrogance unsettling. So, he began asking Brahma some questions. “How exactly do you go about creating the universe?” he asked. Brahma said, “Indeed, by reciting the Pranava Mantra.” Murugan then requested Brahma to explain the mantra to him. However, Brahma stumbled right at the first word, which was ‘Om’. Murugan then knocked Brahma in the head and imprisoned him for being ignorant, and, yet arrogant. Krishna (2023) continues that, when other deities found out about what had happened, they went to Shiva to urge him to get Brahma released. Shiva then asked Murugan why he had locked up Brahma. When the boy explained his reason, Shiva said, “Oh, so do you know the meaning of the Pranava Mantra? Could you explain it to me?” Murugan then insisted that Shiva gets down on his knees, folds his arms and asks him politely—like a student would ask his teacher. Shiva does what he is told and Murugan explains the mantra to him. Hence, Murugan is worshipped as Swaminatha Swami (The god who taught the god) at this temple.



Figure 10: Temple at Swamimalai

2. Palani

Krishna (2023) speaks of Sage Narada once visited the celestial court of Lord Shiva at Mount Kailash to present to Him a fruit, the *gyana-pazham* (literally, the fruit of knowledge), that held in it the elixir of wisdom. Upon Lord Shiva expressing his intention of dividing the fruit between his two sons, Ganesha and Karthikeya, the Sage counselled Him against cutting it. There, He decided to award it to whichever of his two sons first circled the world thrice. Accepting the challenge, Lord Karthikeya started his journey around the globe on his sacred bird, the peacock. However, as we are aware, Lord Ganesha, who surmised that the world was no more than his parents Shiva and Shakti, circumambulated them. Pleased with their son's discernment, Lord Shiva awarded the fruit to Lord Ganesha. When the Lord Subrahmanya returned, he was furious to learn that his efforts had been in vain. In deep dudgeon, he decided to leave Mount Kailash, and take up his abode in a place where the land and people would be unequivocally his and for him. Thus, it was that He came to what is

today known as Palani, a name derived from the manner of His Parents trying to mollify him and prevail upon him to return to Kailash - *Gnana Pazham Nee appa* (Tamil for "You are the fruit of wisdom sire") and thus, implying that being the embodiment of wisdom, he had no need for the fruit. Thus, being the abode of wisdom, the place took on its master's name - *Pazham Nee* or *Pazhani*, anglicised as Palani. Zvelebil (1991) states Murugan is the fruit (*Pazham*) of the devotees' devotion, which is much more delicious than any fruit. Besides, Murugan gets to settle down in Palani, and after the discourse between the son and the father (Lord Shiva), both Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati agree to dwell in Palani. Thence, it can be said, that if Lord Ganesh, who received the fruit, it was Murugan who received the holy site, reunited with his parents and made the place (Palani) into a precious fruit itself.



Figure 11. Pictures of the temple at Palani

Palani Bhogars (Bogar) and the Navapashanam image of Lord Murugan

Clothey (1978) makes a reference to the fact that, the temple at Palani has patronised by the Pandya and Chera kings from times immemorial. Murugan enshrined as a young ascetic at Palani, which is associated with the powers of healing, primarily on account of the traditions nurtured by the *bhogars* or alchemists, who from prehistoric times wandered around the hills, and built the main temple and the image of Lord Murugan from a combination of medicinal and immortalizing substances.

Krishna (2023) providing more detail on the image of Lord Murugan made by *Bhogar* states, by combining nine poisonous substances (*Navapashanam*). The deity of Palani is known as Dandayudhapani Swami, The deity at the sanctum sanctorum is made from an amalgam of nine minerals popularly called *Navapashanam*. Some people say it is a combination of medicinal herbs. It consists of the following items: *Veeram, Pooram, Rasam, Jathilingam, Kandagam, Gauri Pasanam, Vellai Pasanam, Mridharsingh*, and, *Silasat*. The deity is in a standing position with a baton in his hand. He has the look of a person who has renounced all worldly pomp. He has just a loin cloth besides the baton. He is a mute messenger of the great precept 'Renounce all to reach Me'. The image is unique in the whole world. Murugan signifies beauty and Lord Murugan of Kurinji land is the god of Beauty and Youth. Texas Murugan Temple (n.d.) mentions how the *bhogar*, the mystic, with miraculous powers, travels to China, meets with Kalanginaathar, attains enlightenment, and even reveals the technologies of flying and traveling by seacraft, as documented in the *Saptakanda*, a manuscript which reveals many details of the medicinal preparations and the experiments that were conducted. The resting place (samadhi) of *Bhogar* is close to the Sanctum Sanctorum in a cave like corridor as confirmed by Krishna (2023). At the top of Palani Hill, near the holy Murugan which *Bhogar* had crafted from nine poisonous substances, there is an opening in the Earth; it is a hole in the ground; the mouth of a cave which lies below. *Bhogar* often lowered himself into the Earth, sat in the cave, accessing Life's hidden secrets. He performed great austerities there, the magnitude of which very few in this modern age can fathom. There is a *maragadaha lingam* installed on top of this entrance cave. Krishna (2023), mentions, that, it is believed that if we do a deep meditation sitting next to this cave, we can still hear the breathing sound of Siddhar Bogar.

3. Pazhamudhircholai

Pazhamudircholai has been referred to in the Sangam literature texts *Silappathikaram*, *Ettuthogai* and *Patthupattu* and is the place where Tamil Poet and Saint Avvaiyar was tested and blessed by Lord Murugan (Temple Folks, n.d.). Krishna (2023) beautifully articulates the story about how, there once lived an elderly Tamil poetess called Avvaiyar. An ardent devotee of Murugan, she sang countless songs about his grace and power. One day, as she was walking in the scorching sun, she sought refuge in the shade of a large jamun tree. A boy who was sitting on the tree called out to her and asked if she would like him to pluck out some fruits for her. Avvaiyar was thirsty and starving, so she agreed gratefully. “Would you like roasted ones or unroasted ones?” the boy then asked. The elderly woman thought the boy was talking nonsense, but she did not want to argue, so she asked for unroasted fruits. The boy then shook the tree and many jamun fruits fell on the ground. Avvaiyar picked up a couple and blew on them to remove the dirt. “Are the roasted fruits too hot for you, *paati*?” asked the boy, laughing. Impressed by the wordplay and the ingenuity of the seemingly simple boy, the poetess asked him who he was. The boy then vanished and reappeared as Lord Murugan. He blessed her with good luck on her quest for knowledge and poetry. Temple Folks (n.d.) mentions that Pazhamudircholai is a dense forest where Valli, the consort of Lord Murugan lived. A visit to the place, brings in the essence of the deity of Nature, as many proclaim Lord Murugan to be. The dense forest has springs, and devotees’ bathe and collect the water and take it back as blessings from the Lord. The authors whilst discussing with a local priest, who spoke on the basis of anonymity, mentioned, there are various stories that surround the place of Lord Murugan and if they have come down traditions, then the occurrence in some form will be there. Hence, it is a matter of belief.



Figure 12. Temple pictures at Pazhamudircholai (pictures by the authors)

Krishna (2023) whilst discussion about the dense forest in the area, speaks about a spring and a bathing pool that is two-kilometers from the temple and named as *Akasha Ganga*. This forest has one more story related to *Siddhar Rama Devar* (one among 18 siddhars) and it is believed that Shri Ramadevar attained his *mukthi* in this forest, if you trek for 5 kms from Akasha Ganga you will reach a plain ground like place where you can see a *Shivalingam* in between large rocks. This is a very powerful place as the devotees have come across the immense energy levels at this place some people even lose their consciousness for few seconds before hundred meters to the *Shivlingam*. The place is deep in the forest area and one can reach the place only with the help and guidance of the local Tamil Nadu Forest Department (TNFD).

4. Thiruchendur

Clothey (1978) referring to the temple at Tiruchendur speaks of a Pandya inscription which refers to Varekuna Maran, dating back to 875 AD, clearly showcasing the antiquity of the destination. One observation any devotee or commoner would make when they read and visit places pertaining to Lord Murugan, is a fact that, of the six houses, all of them are in nature or near a river, Thiruchendur is on the Ocean front, the Bay of Bengal. Which makes it unique. Krishna (2023) states, Tiruchendur is considered one of the most important Arupadai Veedu, as it is believed that this is where Murugan vanquished *Soorapadma*. The commander-in-chief offered prayers to Lord Shiva and took the Shaktivel (powerful spear) bestowed upon him by Goddess Parvati and set out for the war. It is said that cornered by Murugan’s forces, *Soorapadma* transformed into a mango tree and positioned himself in the middle of the ocean. Murugan then struck him with the Shaktivel and sliced him into two. He turned one half into a rooster and put it on his flag. The other half became the peacock that

he used as his means of transportation (Clothey, 1978). Every year, this victory is celebrated by devotees at the temple over six days. During the festival, which is called *Kanda Shashti*, devotees fast for six days and offer prayers to the god of war. Zvelebil (1965) in an articulate fashion refers to one, *Arunakiri* speaking vividly about red (angry) Murugan, subduing and riding through the cosmos on his blue-peacock, comparing it to the pair (Lord Murugan and the Peacock) to a rising sun over the Ocean. The author of the *Kallatam* similarly speaks of the ocean as a primordial serpent, whose head, when pressed, gives birth to many suns, each signalling to the start of a new day. It is very clear from various sources that Lord Murugan was the angry self who ensured the defeat of the evil forces that get reflected in Thiruchendur.



Figure 13. Temple pictures a Thiruchendur (pictures by the authors)

Thiruchendur and Satru Samhara Moorthy (Vanquisher of rivals/enemies-enemy within us)

Krishna (2023) in a discussion with the authors speaks of the fact that the *prakara* (corridor surrounding the main shrine) there is a relief image of Murugan seated on a peacock and fighting the *Asura* (demon). It is here that the devotees perform the *Satru samhara homam* and get blessing from Lord Murugan to kill the enemy within us. This special *homam* also relieves one from health illness, debts, and frustrations.

A local priest, who called himself Saravanan, mentioned that there are a group of five Shiva Linga (*Pancha Linga*) behind the main shrine of Lord Murugan, which can be visited. It is believed that even the Gods (*Devas*) during the Tamil month of Markali, worship the symbolic representation of Lord Shiva. It is a belief that the *devas* come to worship this Pancha linga during the month of Markali (falls between December and January every year).

5. Thiruparakundram

The temple is located atop the Thiruparakundram Hill in Madurai. Clothey (1978) refers to Thiruparakundram, which was a capital of the Pandya chieftains as, ‘the sacred hill of the Great God.’ This is where Murugan is believed to have wed Devasena, Indra’s daughter, following the defeat of *Soorapadma*. The temple is carved into a cave on the mountain and all deities are in the form of sculptures on the walls. All rishis and gods who attended the grand wedding are depicted in the sanctum sanctorum; it is believed. Pilgrims can see shrines dedicated to Satyagireeshwarar (an avatar of Lord Shiva), Pavalakanivaiperumal (an avatar of Lord Vishnu), Durgai Amman, Vinayakar and Narada Muni besides the main shrine of Murugan and Devasena (Krishna, 2023). The other mysterious aspects reiterates Krishna (2023) about this temple is the Kashi Vishwanath temple on top of the rocky mountain, one needs to climb 1008 steep steps to reach this temple from behind the mountain, once the devotees reach, they will be surprised to find a waterbody with lots of fishes and ancient carvings on the walls of the mountain which dated back two thousand years. History says that *Siddhar Matchamuni* (one among 18 siddhas) resided here and did his worship to Kashi Vishwanath and one fine day he left his body and his soul went into pond and became a fish. The belief is that the depth of the pond is about two hundred feet and at any given point in time there is water to be found, despite the fact the place is located on a rocky mountain. About the temple complex, Clothey (1978) mentions, that the sanctum sanctorum is centred by an old rock-cut cave temple, which is ascribed to the eight century.



Figure 14. Temple pictures at Thiruparkundram (pictures by the authors)

6. Thirutani (Tirutanni, Thirutanni)

Thirutani (known as *Kundruthoradal* during the Sangam Age) is where Murugan is known to have come after the war and his wedding to relax and let his hair down. The mountain on top of which the temple is located is elephant-shaped. There is a story that explains this interesting anomaly. As a wedding present to Devasena and Murugan, Indra offered his pet elephant *Airavata*. However, with the elephant gone, the kingdom of devas began suffering a depletion of wealth. When he learned of this, Murugan was willing to return the *Airavata*. But Indra refused and requested him to merely have the elephant look towards Devaloka. This is why the image of *Airavata* faces the east in the temple complex. The authors had driven to the place, and found that there were 365 steps to reach the temple complex, which signify 365 days of the year.



Figure 15: Pictures of the temple in Tirutani (pictures by the authors)

Considering the three destinations of Thirutani, Clothey (1978) places efficacy on the geography of the Tamil Country states, Thirutani is the Northern outpost of the sacred domain of Murugan, with Palani being the Western Edge and Tiruchendur becoming the Southeastern boundary. Thus, a triangle is formed, which encompasses the other houses of Lord Murugan.

Conclusion, the way forward for the Lord Murugan Pilgrimage destinations in India

CRV Rao (Rao, 2023) a retired Deputy Director General (DDG) with the GoI, MoT mentions, “the Lord Murugan circuit is as important as any religious circuit in Bharat. The Tamil Nadu Government has done its bit by organizing tours and having promotion material. It is the people of Bharatiya (Indian) roots who are now in other countries that we will need to target through the Tourist Offices. Though the Social Media has ample amount of information and leads for visitors to decide, we need to promoted the Murugan circuit in a way we promoted Delhi, Agra and Jaipur and provide that opportunity for the visitors to decide upon visiting these places.” A serving Tourist Officer of Tamil Nadu, who did not want to be identified by name, mentioned that, “the brochures pertaining to Lord Murugan information have been provided for, the tour packages too have been created. What we need is Road shows in Bharat, across all the states. Like visitors travel to Rameshwaram from the Northern part of Bharat on a regular basis; the ‘Skanda Tours’ would become another way to attract visitors in large groups.” The officer was confident that the group tours would be accepted by many visitors/pilgrims, which will help the tourism system to flourish. Ayyappan (2022) reports that with Tamil Nadu emerging as a leading tourist destination India with a share of 22.9% of total international tourist visits in 2020 and nearly 140 million footfalls in the domestic segment, the Lord Murugan circuit too can be boosted to ensure the visitors visit the six-abodes without any hassles. Ayyappan (2022) also mentions, the Chennai International Airport became the gateway for 6.6% of the International visitors who visited India. Visitors from Sri Lanka were 52%, Singapore accounted for 22.5, Malaysia, 20.4%, French Nationals coming through Chenna was 18.8% and nearly 16.8% came from South Korea. The numbers clearly signify the fact that there is an interest in India, and in Tamil

Nadu and the Tourism system should make the most of it. Thence, what is to be suggested for ensuring the tourism system grows in the Lord Murugan six abodes and other destinations related to Him.

Implications of the study

The authors would like to ensure that the pilgrims and general visitors to visit the destinations pertaining to Lord Murugan, get to visit them without much of trouble, and that they are able to enjoy the destination and pay obeisance to Lord Murugan, with the best of intent. Hence, the expectation is that, the stakeholders of tourism in the destinations play a dynamic role and help usher in a quality tourism that will impact the communities, the various tourism stakeholders in the destinations.

Promotion of Lord Murugan tour packages: Tour packages to the Lord Murugan destinations should be organized on regular basis, which will ensure a larger number of visitors get to travel to the destination. The TTDC and other state governments in South Bharat (India), should become instrumental in marketing these holidays not only to the domestic travellers, but those who come from other countries as well.

The Role of Bharatiya (Indian) Railways: Bharatiya Rail (Indian Railways) has played a dynamic role in promoting various Train tour packages viz., Buddhist Circuit (Monday, 2023), the Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train which connects the Ramayan Circuit (Chauhan, 2022), Bharat Darshan and Gangtok Darjeeling special (NDTV Profit, 2018), the Panj Takht train (connects the Five Sikh Takhts) (Adnal, 2018) to mention a few. The Bharatiya Rail through the Indian (Bharatiya) Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) (<https://www.irctctourism.com>) should come up with the support of the provincial Governments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala and Rail based ‘hope-in, hope-off,’ that will help the domestic traveller to cover the Lord Murugan destination. The train can also be offered to International travellers would prefer to see Bharat through the trains.

Budget from Tourism Schemes: Travel Mail (2021) had reported that the PRASHAD scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spirituality Augmentation Drive) (PIB, 2022) of the GoI, MoT, which accounts for 15% of the tourism budget has been spent of various pilgrim destination. The PRASHAD scheme should be extended to all the Lord Murugan destinations over a period which will help in the development of infrastructure, connectivity and even make efforts to have skill human capital in the destinations which in turn will help in promoting qualitative tourism.

Use of Social Media: The Lord Murugan destinations have been covered by the ‘influencers’ in Social media over a period time. The same should be consolidated such that information is made available to anyone who wants to visit any of the Murugan destinations. The GoI, MoT should take steps to ensuring qualitative information is placed for the prospective visitors to know, which will help in decision making.

Common Website for Lord Murugan: At the present, since we speak of Uttarakhand, with Kanchi as an important Murugan destination, and the six abodes in Tamil Nadu, the destinations in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, can be brought under one umbrella, related to Lord Murugan, which will help in the accessing of information at one location, along with all detailing of accommodation and guides, and timing of the temples, which will help the visitors to plan well.

Considering the view of travellers, the opinion of Suveer Gupta (Gupta, 2023) is worth considering, he mentions, “the end game of the tourism system should be only one and that of making the devotee have a much better experience and *Darshan* such that more and more people come to these energy points of Lord Murugan to be aligned and connected to divine source and power. The destinations

by maintaining the cleanliness of the sites, and providing *Darshans* which will provide for a rich experience, a lot can be done for the Lord Murugan circuit, which will make the religious experience enriching and something to remember.” This clearly brings to perception, another avid traveller, who has transversed the Lord Murugan circuit multiple number of times, Balaji (Balaji, 2023) who believes, “all the destinations of Lord Murugan should be connected. This will surely help the visitors to plan and experience the divine destinations, and yes, visit them often, which in turn will help and support the tourism system.” As the authors were what many thought were culminating the research on the present paper, got an opportunity to visit, Mailam, a destination that is located 15 kilometers from Tindivanam and 30 kilometers from Pondicherry (Puducherry). Not to be left behind, Mailam too has its phenomenal *Sthala purana* which further encompasses a study into Lord Murugan the places that he is associated with (L’Hernault, n.d.). Thence the research and understanding of Lord Murugan continues, unabated, with each destination big or small visited creating an opportunity to promote tourism.

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