

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**THE REVERED PERUMALE IN TIRUPPUKAL: A CASE STUDY**Ramalingam Iyakanoo ^{*1}; Rajantheran Muniandy ²**MJSSH**
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Social Science and Humanities¹ Department of Indian Studies, University Malaya, Malaysia.Email: ramabarathi@yahoo.com² Department of Indian Studies, University Malaya, Malaysia.Email: rajanmun@um.edu.my

*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/293>**Abstract**

Tiruppukal is a devotional poetry composed by poet-saint Arunagirinathar to promote glory of Lord Murugan, the ancient god of Tamils. A preliminary literature review of the text revealed the name *Perumale* (Perumal), synonymous with names Tirumal and Vishnu among Tamil *Vaishnavites*, is more often quoted in comparison to Murugan. Thus, this article tries to analyse Arunagirinathar's intend in promoting name *Perumale*. This article approaches the subject using qualitative research incorporating library-based and descriptive methods to analyse and evaluate Arunagirinathar's such intend. Findings revealed that *Perumale* is a conceptual term means "Great One" or "Lord of Lords" even though has connotation to deity Perumal. The name *Perumale* is used in social and linguistic contexts to depict Murugan as the Great God of the Tamils. Arunagirinathar also portrayed Murugan's attributes and his three forms to alleviate Him from the Tamil folklore deity to a Great God of the South India. Arunagirinathar also used *Perumale* to syncretize Murugan and Skanda to bridge a cultural and religious unity between the North-South (India) while stamping Him with pan-Indian identity. Further, Lord Murugan's bond of kinship with various divinities and deities of Hindu pantheon in context with name *Perumale* portrayed Him as Supreme Being in par excellence with Siva and Vishnu as well as illustrates sense of oneness, coexistence and harmonious interaction which binds the various Hindu divides. Thus, Arunagirinathar by means of the *Perumale* has portrayed Murugan as a pan-Hindu god who transcends religious and philosophical barriers in Hindu pantheon.

Keywords: *Tiruppukal*, *Perumale*, Arunagirinathar, Murugan, Vaishnavism, Saivism, Vishnu, Siva.

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Introduction

The term *Perumale* is the exclaimed form derived from the name *Perumal*. Etymologically, the word *Perumal* is combination of two Tamil words, *perum* means “the great” and *al* means “being” (Kathirraiver Pillai, 1981). Thus, *Perumal* means the “the Great Being”. In relation to this, The *Tamil Lexicon* (1982), defines the term *Perumal* as person of eminence or Lord, title of Cera kings, God, and *Tirumal* (Vishnu). According to Roshen (2014), *Perumal* is also revered as *Tirumal* by Tamil *Vaishnavites*. *Perumal* is said to be another name for Lord Vishnu, who is revered as the Supreme Being in *Vaishnavism* (Zvelebil, 1973). *Vaishnavism* is one the major Hindu denominations.

Tiruppukal or *Thiruppugazh*, means “Holy Praises” or “Divine Glory” (Karthikeyan, 2022). *Tiruppukal* (TP) is an anthology of Tamil devotional hymns composed by the great saint-poet Arunagirinathar of 15th century CE (Clothey, 1978). Arunagirinathar, who had succumbed to life of debauchery was reduced to a life of penury and inflicted with many diseases, tried to end his life but was saved and graced by Lord Murugan. Thus, Arunagirinathar having reached a new vision, embarked on a pilgrimage to more than 200 Murugan abodes composing as many as 16,000 devotional hymns dedicating to Lord Murugan (Chengalvaraya Pillai, 2019). *Tiruppukal* is considered a unique central medieval Tamil work because Arunagirinathar portrayed the image of Lord Murugan as well as the other deities using rhythmic hymns in full splendour and glory. *Tiruppukal* is also a confluence philosophical and devotional literatures from the various sects of Hinduism compared to the other devotional literatures that rarely depict such a mixer. Among Tamil poets no one had willingly and expressively shared the dark side of one’s personality except Arunagirinathar himself. Arunagirinathar had written a soul wrenching tale in detail while ridiculing himself about his overindulgence and uncontrolled impulse in seeking sexual pleasure emphasizing devotion, virtue and righteousness as way of life here and here after.

A perplexing feature was noticed when 1328 documented hymns of *Tiruppukal* were analysed. *Tiruppukal* holds more than two-thousand names and epithets of various gods and divinities. Among these names, the name *Perumale* is most mentioned and prevalent name in *Tiruppukal*. It is mentioned as many as 1179 times in contrast to the name *Thambirane* 126 times, *Ari* (Hari) 95 times, *Mal* (*Tirumal*) 67 times, *Aran* (Siva) is listed 43 times and lastly the name *Sivan* (Siva) 42 times. Besides these, the name *Murugan* or similar in pronunciation is the least mentioned name. It is mentioned only twenty times. Based on the number of occurrences of the said names, thus arise a question, why did Arunagirinathar gave more prominence to the name *Perumale* in a text which promotes the glory of Lord Murugan? This is the focus of this paper.

Methodology

This article presents a case study based on the name *Perumale*. By employing such an in-depth study approach, the article aims to provide a detailed description of the poet Arunagirinathar’s view and opinion towards the name *Perumale* and their theological implications. Furthermore, the topic has broader implication for understanding the syncretic nature of Hindu religious practices in South India, where deities, beliefs and practices from different traditions often coexist and interact in religious discourse. This case study, a qualitative research incorporates library-based and descriptive analysis methods. The library-based method is helpful in evaluating, validating, or refuting views and opinions of Arunagirinathar based on the writings of scholars and renowned writers. The focus of this research is the name *Perumale* which is very often quoted in comparison

to the name “Murugan” in the text *Tiruppukal*. *Tiruppukal*, a documented and published text is used as the primary source to identify and collect relevant data embedded in the hymns of the said text. Subsequently, the data obtained was interpreted, illustrated, supported, and validated using data obtained from the various secondary sources which are also in the form of texts and wide variety of published or scholarly documented materials. The final phase of the research was done using descriptive analysis to analyse and interpret data from secondary sources to answer the research question, why did Arunagirinathar gave more prominence to the name *Perumale* in *Tiruppukal*, in which he himself promoted the glory of Lord Murugan, who is also his patron god.

Research Background

The name *Perumal* is absent in Tamil classical texts. Further, the name *Tirumal* which is quiet often associated with the name *Perumal* is also absent in Tamil classics. The *Tolkappiam* (Tolkappiar, 2001) (the most ancient extant Tamil grammar text composed around 150 BCE to 250 CE) refers *Tirumal* as *Mayon*.

Mayon meya katurai ulagamum, (Porul, 951)
(Mayon, the dark-complexioned deity of pastoral land)

According to *Tolkappiam* (Tolkappiar, 2001), the ancient Tamils classified their land into four *tinai*, landscapes, namely *kurinji* (mountainous region), *mullai* (pastoral land), *marutham* (agricultural) and *neithal* (seashore). The people of each landscape worshiped a patron deity, such as *Ceyyon* (Murugan) in *kurinji*, *Mayon* (Tirumal) in *mullai*, Indra in *marutham* and *Varunan* (deity of rain) in *neithal* land (Natchathiraivani, 2022; Alphonsa, 2017). Among these deities, Murugan and Tirumal were most worshipped deities.

Beside this, the *Paripatal* (Lofty Rhyme), (Kesikan, 2002), contains six poems about *Tirumal*. *Paripatal* is a Tamil classical ode (a blend of poetry and music) composed around third century CE, which promotes Murugan and Tirumal worship (Seshadari, 1996; Tieken, 2003). However, this text too uses the name *Mayon* instead of Tirumal or Perumal. Paripatal quotes Him as,

“*Mayon, O, Dark One.*” (Paripatal, 3:1).

Thus, the name *Mayon* only appears in all the classical poems instead of the name *Tirumal* or *Perumal*.

Apart from these, the chapter 15 of *Garuda Purana*, a *Sanskrit Vaishnavism* literature which promotes God Vishnu, said to be composed around the first millennium CE contains 1000 names and epithets of Lord Vishnu (Dutt, 1908). However, this text too does not contain the name *Perumal*. Another Sanskrit text, *Vishnu Sahasranama*, also contains 1000 names and epithets of Lord Vishnu (Gietz 1992). This text also does not contain the name *Perumal*.

The discussion regarding the etymology of the name *Perumal* could not be concluded without referring to the temples bearing this name. At present, there are seven prominent *Perumal* temples in Tamil Nadu. Among these temples, Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Perumal Temple is the one of the oldest and functioning temples in South India, and the deity Ranganathaswamy

(Vishnu) is referred as *Nam Perumal* (Our God) or *Periya Perumal* (Great Perumal) (Perumalaiyengar, 2009). Moreover, Arunagirinathar also refers the deity of this temple as the ‘*Periya Perumal Arangar*’ (*Arangar*, the Great Perumal) (*Tiruppukal*, 140) Thus, it cannot be denied that the name *Perumal* was and is still being used to refer to Lord Vishnu.

Further, based on etymology, scholars believe both the words *Perumal* and *Tirumal* can be traced their origin to a tribal confederacy known as the *Mallas* in ancient India, which was Tamil name for the people of mountains (Heras, 1947). Gustav Salomon Oppert (1893) further explains that both these terms were originally titles conferred by the ‘Mallas’ upon their chiefs and kings, and this was eventually employed as an epithet for the deity Vishnu, until its original meaning was widely forgotten over the course of time. Beside this, the name *Perumal* was also employed in its original usage as an honorific title for rulers in some regions of Kerala in South India. In fact, the name *Perumal* was the indigenous title for the Chera kings who ruled the present-day Kerala between 844 CE-1124 CE, who were referred as ‘Chera *Perumals* of Makotai’. This title was also used to refer certain Chola and Pandiya kings of Tamil Nadu, South India (Oppert, 1893).

There is another term, *Peruman* similar to *Perumal*. The term *Peruman* is a popular term among Tamils, which is used in reference to God, especially Siva. The term *Peruman* is defined as ‘Sivan, king and great one’ (Kathiravel Pillai, 1998). Kathiravel Pillai explains that based on the grammar text named *Nannul*, the suffix ‘an’ in the term *Peruman* has undergone gradual change into ‘al’. However, he supports that both the terms also imply the meaning ‘the Great One’ or ‘the Great God’. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the name *Perumal* is a Tamil term based on etymology of the word as well the name is only used in Tamil texts in synonym to *Tirumal* in Tamil or *Vishnu* in Sanskrit. Thus, the name *Perumale* is a general term for God to imply as ‘the Great One or Lord’.

Findings

The study has identified that name *Perumale* is used as suffix in association with 146 various names and epithets in *Tiruppukal*. The table below shows some of the said names and epithets used in *Tiruppukal*.

Table 1

Names and Epithets in Reference to Name Perumale in Tiruppukal

| No. of Hymn | Used Phrase or Verse | In Reference to |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|
| 4-6 | <i>Saravanap Perumale</i> | Saravanan (Born in a pond surrounded by reeds) |
| 17 | <i>Kanthap Perumale</i> | Kanthan (Fragrant nature) |
| 37 | <i>Sentamizhp Perumale</i> | God of classical Tamil |
| 39 | <i>Mutthevar Perumale</i> | Trinity of Hinduism |

| | | |
|------|---|--|
| 124 | <i>Kumarap Perumale</i> | Kumaran (Eternal youthfulness) |
| 181 | <i>Velava Perumale</i> | Velavan (One who holds a lance) |
| 224 | <i>Sivanar thamakkuriya upathesa viththai arul Perumale</i> | Preached <i>Pranava Mantra</i> to Lord Siva |
| 248 | <i>Narananar marumanam kuga Perumale</i> | Kuga, nephew of Narayana (Vishnu) |
| 290 | <i>Murugan Perumale</i> | The Great Murugan |
| 339 | <i>Saravanabava Perumale</i> | Saravanabavan |
| 342 | <i>Periyavar thontha siriya Perumale</i> | Young Perumal (Young son of Siva) |
| 363 | <i>Cevvel</i> | Radiant Lord with a lance |
| 381 | <i>Murugasurar Perumale</i> | Amaresan (Murugan, Lord of celestials) |
| 483 | <i>Muttamizhp Perumale</i> | God of three literary arts of Tamil |
| 536 | <i>Velayuthap Perumale</i> | Velayuthan (One who holds a lance) |
| 540 | <i>Arumugap Perumale</i> | Arumugan (One with Six faces) |
| 608 | <i>Kumaresap Perumale</i> | Kumaresan (Son of Siva) |
| 614 | <i>Mangai umai tharu cey Perumale</i> | Uma's (Parvati) beautiful child |
| 642 | <i>Pulisaram pon thiru nadam kondar kantham Perumale</i> | Lord Kantha dances on golden stage in Puliur (Chidambaram) |
| 690 | <i>Jayamurugap Perumale</i> | Great Murugan who brings victory |
| 735 | <i>Ari thirumal avan ilaiyal umai arul bala, Perumale</i> | Uma is younger sister of Hari (Tirumal) |
| 788 | <i>Thol iraru mukam aru muruga Perumale</i> | Murugan with six faces and twelve shoulders |
| 820 | <i>Ceyye, Kove Perumale</i> | Cey (Youthful lad) Kove (The king) |
| 828 | <i>Thevap Perumale</i> | Lord of celestials (devas) |
| 1042 | <i>Thevath thevap Perumale</i> | Lord of Lords (Great god) |
| 1185 | <i>Tamizhp Perumale</i> | God of Tamils |
| 1232 | <i>Shanmuga Perumale</i> | Shanmugan (One with six faces) |
| 1247 | <i>Kavinjar usaththunai Perumale</i> | One who assists poets in their research |
| 1295 | <i>Nalandha vedaththin porulone, Perumale</i> | You are substance of the four Vedas |

It is observed that Arunagirinathar used the name *Perumale* along with the name Murugan, such as *Murugap Perumale*, *Jayamurugap Perumale* and *Murugasurar Perumale* to imply that Murugan is the Lord or the Great One. The term “Murugu” or “Murugan” had been used profusely in Sangam literature (Tamil Academy) which spanned a period between 300 BCE to 300 CE, to denote Lord Murugan (Ambiga, 1998; Nilakanta Sastri, 1958; Devapooopathy, 1994). Hence, the three epithets above have been used to imply that Lord Murugan is a Great God.

Further, Arunagirinathar uses the epithet *Tamizh Perumale* to imply that *Perumale* is the god Tamils. The name *Perumale* is used as metaphor for Lord Murugan. It is well-known and established fact that Lord Murugan is favourite god of Tamils and known as “Tamil *Kadavul*” (God of Tamils) (Balambal, 2001). He is often referred as the “Tamil *Kadavul*” because of His significant association with the Tamils and Tamil language (Surendran, 2021). Murugan is a primordial folk deity of the hills worshipped since ancient period by the Tamils. Archaeological findings at Mohenjo-Daro-Harappa in present Pakistan and Adichchanallur in Tamil Nadu has pushed Murugan worship to 7000 years back. According to John Marshall (1931) and Iravatham Mahadevan (1998), prominent archaeologists of pre and post Independent India respectively, based on the artifact labelled “Ahmuvan”, a deity of sky and space from 5000 BCE to 3000 BCE era, was confirmed related to Murugan worship. Moreover, a spear made of iron metal with rooster insignia (the rooster is the image of Murugan’s flag) aged 7000 years old was found at Adichchanallur (Sadasivan, 2003). Both the archaeological findings confirm that Lord Murugan was worshipped by the Tamils since time immemorial. Apart from this, Lord Murugan is the most popular god in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and among the Tamil diasporas. It must be noted that all the six revered abodes (known as *Arupadai veedu* or *Aatruppadai* in Tamil) and other prominent Murugan temples are also found in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil language has close relationship with Lord Murugan. Arunagirinathar extols Him as the *Sentamizhil* (classical Tamil) and *Muttamizhil* (three types of literary arts in Tamil) *Perumale*. According to the classical literary texts, Lord Murugan was a member of the first *Tamil Sangam* and the head of the second *Tamil Sangam* as He was proficient in Tamil literature and poetry (Jagannathan, 1968; Balambal, 2001). According to Jagannathan, Nakkirar (the presiding poet of the first Sangam) described Lord Murugan as the best poet who was praised by the many (*palar pugazh nanmozhi pulavar*), while Arunagirinathar says that Lord Murugan assisted poets in their research (*Kavinjar usaththunai Perumale*, 1247). Thus, Arunagirinathar had associated Tamil language with Lord Murugan to show the greatness and divinity of the language itself. Overall, the deep-rooted historical, cultural, religious, and literary significance of Lord Murugan in Tamil Nadu and the broader Tamil culture has earned him the title of the “Tamil God” or “Tamil *Kadavul*”. Arunagirinathar also used names such as Arumugan, Saravanan, Kanthan, Kumaran, Velayuthan, Velavan, Saravanabavan and Kumaresan often with name *Perumale*. In fact, these are the most common names used interchangeably with the name Murugan (Nadarajan, 1978).

Further, it is a tradition among the Tamil devotional composers to begin with a proem as invocation to God. Arunagirinathar too, prior to his *Tiruppukal* proper, has dedicated five hymns as proem (*payiram*) to invoke the grace of Lord Vinayagar or Ganesha (elephant headed God of Hindu pantheon). The four of the five hymns too ends with name *Perumale*. Three of the four hymns are cited below:

*Akkura magaludan acchiru Muruganai
akkanam manamarul Perumale. (Proem, 1)*

(Oh Lord (Ganesha), that Valli, the damsel of tribal community and your brother Murugan married by you!)

Aindhukaraththu anaimuga Perumale. (Proem, 2)
(Oh Lord, you are with five hands and elephant face!)

...maruppuudaiya Perumale (Proem, 3)
(Oh Lord, you have a single and unique task!)

The name *Perumale* in the three hymns above also apparently refers to Lord Vinayagar (Ganesha) based on the certain constructs, such as the physical features and His relationship to Lord Murugan. In Hindu *puranas* (epics), Ganesha is depicted as the son of Lord Siva and the elder brother of Lord Murugan. Sundra Shanmuganar (1990), in his repository named *Tamilnul Tokuppuk Kalanciyam*, makes the following observation about the use of the name *Perumale* in *Tiruppukal*.

Arunagirinathar ends his hymns with term Perumale in exclaimed form. Even in the poems dedicated to Vinayagar, he also ends with this term. In fact, it is norm to refer Tirumal as Perumal. However, Arunagirinathar, has used this term in reference to general meaning. It is a general term for God. (Tamil Tokuppuk Kalanciyam, p. 480)

Hence, Arunagirinathar has used the term *Perumale* as honorific title to praise effulgent glory of Lord Murugan. Thus, the names and epithets referred in context with *Perumale* are in fact the various names and epithets of Lord Murugan Himself.

Names or epithets also generally reflect particular aspect of a god's essence or role (Gonda, 1959). In reference to the names and epithets of Lord Murugan, the names such as *Cey*, *Cevvel*, *Arumugan*, *Shanmugan*, *Velavan*, *Velayuthan* and *Saravanabavan* which end with the name *Perumale* also reflect Lord Murugan's attributes. In *Tirumurukarruppada* (Guide to Lord Murugan, a devotional text composed around 4th century CE), verse 27, the author Nakkirar (1960) revers Murugan as *Cey* (the youthful lad). Kumaraguruparar (1943), another ardent Murugan devotee in his *Tiruvarur Namanimalai* (Praises of Thiagaraja Peruman) hails Him as,

Ennuyirkku okkum ilan cey. (Verse, 9)
(Oh, Youthful Lad (*Cey*), you are my life)

Kumaraguruparar uses the name *Cey* synonymous with Lord Murugan. The young Murugan's such a beauty is the standout attribute that Sangam literature dwells most on, is the universally accepted characteristics of fragrance, youth, divinity and beauty as well as the Tamils' answer to the baby Krishna cult of North India (Vaanaamaalai, 2019). Beside this, Arunagirinathar portrays Lord Murugan as the *Cevvel*, the reddish like youthful lad of rising sun holding a lance. In *Tirumurukarruppada* (1960), verse 1-3, the composer Nakkirar compares the enchanting physique of radiant nature to the reddish sun and praises Him as the unfolding of the flame. The *Paripatal*, also portrays the *Cevvel* (17.49), the radiant Lord with a lance as *mutalvan* (8:17) (Supreme Being). *Paripatal* is a Tamil classical ode (a blend of poetry and music composed

around third century CE), promotes Murugan and Tirumal worship (Seshadari, 1996; Tiekem, 2003). Balasubramanian (1985), affirms the *Cevvel* is Murugan Himself. Thus, the *Cey* and *Cevvel* portray Lord Murugan as the radiant youthful lard who holds a lance. This is one of the corporeal forms Lord Murugan (Clothey, 1978).

The two names, Arumugam and Shanmugan, are synonymous in meaning, i.e. God with six heads or faces, portray another corporeal form of Lord Murugan (Mangala Murugesan, 2003). Arunagirinathar hails Lord Murugan as *Arumugap Perumale* (TP, 540) and *Shanmuga Perumale* (TP, 1232). Arunagirinathar illustrates that Lord Murugan has six faces and twelve strong and matchless shoulders symbolizing valour (*thol iraru mukam aru muruga Perumale*: TP, 788). Each of the twelve hands is depicted holding an armour. Moreover, there are some icons displayed with six or ten hands (Rajantheran & Viknarah, 2014). The six faces connote the fullness of divinity and Lord Murugan is embodied with divine fullness and depicted as six-in-one (Clothey, 1978). The ninth anthology of *Panniru Thirumurai* (a canonical literature of twelve holy scriptures of *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy), *Tiruvisaippa*, stanza 7-9, states that the six-faced Arumugan grants *jnana* (true knowledge) to devotees to quell six “enemies within oneself” such as the lust, enmity, greed, infatuation, obsession, and malice (Seeta Letchumy, 2012). Furthermore, the multiple weapons are associated with various deities and their functions symbolize Lord Murugan embodies these deities and their functions. Thus, Lord Murugan is the divinity in total who transcends and commands them (Syambu, 2003). This multi-faced form is the departure from the single-faced anthropomorphic form of Lord Murugan. In Murugan tradition, the icon of Lord Murugan is portrayed in standing position with a single head and two hands accompanied by peacock, while the right hand clutches the lance. Kamil Zvelebil (1991) (a scholar in Tamil Literature and Murugan studies) explains that the puranic stories and the Vedic deity Skanda also known as Kartikeya, Subramanya and Shanmuga, from North India were amalgamated into original cult of Murugan. However, Lord Murugan stays unbounded by this multifaced anthropomorphic form by retaining His Tamil folk character and original form, but we still find allusions to stories from the Sanskrit epics. The syncretization of iconography of Lord Murugan and Skanda shows the pan-Indian trend in cultural evolution which evolved through the ages, setting aside territorial and cultural bias.

Arunagirinathar extols Lord Murugan as *Velava Perumale* and *Velayuthap Perumale*. Lord Murugan is hailed as “Velavan” and “Velayuthan” because He is depicted holding a *vel* (lance). In Murugan tradition, the lance which is worshipped since antiquity is the corporeal-cum-noncorporeal (*aruuruvam*) form of Lord Murugan. The lance stands for the instrumentality of power and supreme knowledge of Lord Murugan (Somasuntharam, 1988). Another epithet, *Saravanabavan* (*Saravanap Perumale*) is associated with six-lettered mantra, *sa-ra-va-na-ba-va*. This mantra depicts the abstract form of Lord Murugan to invoke His grace (Sivananda Jothi, 2012). In fact, Kumaraguruparar (1997), in his text *Kanthar Kalivenba* summarizes the three forms of Lord Murugan as follows:

Uruvum aruvum uruaruvam aki
paruva vadivam palavai. (stanza, 12)

According to Kumaraguruparar, the form and the formless become the formless-form state and the physical form becomes many.

Arunagirinathar also uses epithets such as *Thevap Perumale* and *Murugasurar Perumale* to infer Lord Murugan as the Lord or Great god of the celestials. The words, *thevar* and *surar* refer to the celestial beings. Subsequently, he uses the term *theva thevap Perumale* to refer Lord Murugan as Lord to the chiefs of the celestials. Hence, Lord Murugan is portrayed as one who transcends the Lord Indra, the king of the devas or celestials. Furthermore, he uses the term *Mutthevar Perumale* to alleviate Lord Murugan to a greatest height, as the Lord of the Trinity. The *Mutthevar* represent the Trinity of Hindu pantheon, namely Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudran. The Brahma performs the cosmic function of creation, Lord Vishnu conducts the function of preservation and Lord Rudran performs the involution. Arunagirinathar uses the name *Perumale* to portray Lord Murugan as the Great One or Lord of Lords, who transcends all the divinities and the Trinity themselves. Devaraya Swamigal (Sivagami, 2003), another ardent devotee of Lord Murugan concurs with Arunagirinathar's notion as follows:

Lord Murugan dwells everywhere. He is the Almighty. He is more powerful. He is overall. He is everything. He is Brahman (Brahman). Nothing is beyond Murugan. Lord Murugan is the saviour of this universe. He is the Supreme One, combining Siva Sakti and Maha Sakti. Lord Murugan forms the totality of manifestation and the being that underlies it. He is both immanent and transcendent.

(Devaraya Swamigal's Inspiring Divine Contributions Towards Muruganism, 2003)

Hence, Arunagirinathar concludes that Lord Murugan is the Supreme Being or *Paramporul* who transcends the Trinity.

Arunagirinathar also routinely incorporates Lord Murugan with other gods, such as Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, *Sakti* and to a lesser extent hundreds of other deities and celestial beings. He does so by building a kinship centred on Lord Murugan by associating the name *Perumale* with various divinities standing for different denominations of Hinduism. He incorporates Lord Murugan into the family of Siva and Parvati, the consort Lord Siva also known as Uma, (*Periyavar thontha siriya Perumale*, 342; *Kumaresap Perumale Mangai*, 608; *Umai tharu cey Perumale*, 614). Arunagirinathar portrays Lord Murugan as the younger son of Siva and Uma. On another occasion, he says that Murugan is no other than Siva Himself. He sings that Lord Kantha dances on golden stage in Puliur (*Pulisaram pon thiru nadam kondar kantham Perumale*, 642). According to Coomaraswamy (1918), Lord Nataraja (Siva) performs the cosmic dance symbolizing the motion of universe on the golden stage named *Ponnambalam* in Chidambaram also known as Puliur. In this context, the *Saiva Siddhanta*, one of the popular Hindu philosophies, asserts existence of a Primordial Being, who is referred as *Pati* (God) and revered as Siva. According to *Saiva Siddhanta* as well as *Saivism*, a popular Hindu religious sect which promotes doctrines of *Saiva Siddhanta*, Siva is the Absolute Reality because transcends the Trinity as they are considered His emanation forms with threefold cosmic functions such as creation, preservation, and involution (Gnanapoongothai, 2007). Lord Siva's consort Parvathi also stands for His divine power called *Sakti* through which conducts His cosmic functions. Thus, Arunagirinathar depicts Siva, Parvathi (*Sakti*) and Murugan as a single principle.

Moreover, Arunagirinathar also introduces Lord Murugan as the nephew of Narayana (*Narananar marumanam kuga Perumale*, 248), the other name of Lord Vishnu and Parvathi as His sister (*Ari thirumal avan ilaiyal umai arul bala Perumale*, 735). It has been explained earlier that Lord Vishnu is the Supreme Being of *Vaishnavism*, who performs threefold cosmic functions. The followers of *Vaishnavism* in turn consider the Brahman, the Absolute Reality of *Vedanta* as the other name of Lord Vishnu (Nagaraja Rao, 1960). Further, Arunagirinathar also says Lord Murugan preached the essence of *Pranava Mantra* (the syllable *Aum* or OM chanted during meditation) to Lord Siva, an omniscient god, (*Sivanar thamakkuriya upathesa viththai arul Perumale*, 224), as well as represent the substance of the four Vedas, namely *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharvaveda* (*Nalandha vedaththin porulone*, *Perumale*, 1295). The *Pranava Mantra* is the eternal sound and symbol of the pure impersonal Absolute Reality associated with principle of creation (Shuddhananda Bharati, 1965). This *mantra* is commonly shared by the Saivites, *Siddhars* (yogis who perceive God as the impersonal one) and *Vedanta* practitioners. The Vedas, the highest spiritual texts are the pillars of *Vedanta* (Parthasarathy, 2001). Hence, Arunagirinathar portrays various gods such as Siva, Vishnu, Brahman, and Murugan as one principle and "oneness of all existence". In fact, the concept of "Harihara", a combined representation of "Hari" (Vishnu) and "Hara" (Siva) as a philosophical term and icon of equivalence of various gods and "oneness of all existence" (Leeming, 2001). In fact, Arunagirinathar continuously and throughout the *Tiruppukal* promotes concept of *avirodham*, sense of unity and brotherhood as well as religious reconciliation and harmony among various Hindu sects (Ananthanarayanan, 2018). Hence, Hinduism can be considered as the collection of 'religions' (sects) which represent different and contradicting scriptures, beliefs, practices, and philosophies. Despite these differences and contradictions, Hinduism exists as one entire system through syncretisation gods as a polycentric access to the social and spiritual life. Arunagirinathar, uses Lord Murugan as a bridge to connect various Hindu sects which vary in their philosophical thoughts and practices in their search for God while instilling the sense of oneness and coexistence among the followers various sects. Thus, Arunagirinathar through the use of the name *Perumale*, has stamped a pan-Hindu identity on Lord Murugan.

Conclusion

The etymology of the name *Perumale* revealed that it is a conceptual term means "the Great One" or the "Lord of Lords" even though it has connotation to the deity Perumal. The etymological approach do affirm the name *Perumale* does not specifically refer to the deity Perumal who is also known as the Tirumal or revered as Vishnu by Tamil Vaishnavites. The study revealed that Arunagirinathar has used the name *Perumale* in association with various contexts to portray his conception towards Lord Murugan. Arunagirinathar used the name in social and linguistic contexts to depict Him as the Great God revered by the Tamils and identified Him with Tamil language. During this discourse, Arunagirinathar also portrayed His attributes and three forms to uplift Him from the Tamil folklore deity to a height of God. Further, Arunagirinathar used the name *Perumale* to syncretize Lord Murugan and Skanda to effect a cultural and religious unity pervading the North-South (Indian) territorial bias while portraying Him as the pan-Indian god. Moreover, Arunagirinathar used the name *Perumale* in context with various celestials, deities, and the Trinity to alleviate Lord Murugan to a greatest height in the Hindu pantheon, a Supreme Being in par excellence with Lord Siva and Vishnu. Lastly, Arunagirinathar also built a kinship centred on Lord Murugan by associating the name *Perumale* with various gods standing for different denominations of Hinduism depicting sense of oneness and coexistence of the followers of various

sects, where deities, beliefs and practices from different traditions often coexist and interact in religious discourse. Hence, to a devotee, Murugan is a great god, but Arunagirinathar views Him is more than that. An in-depth study of the name *Perumale* proves that Murugan is unique because he has multiple sides; while retaining the Tamil consciousness, He transcends religious and philosophical barriers earning a pan-Hindu identity.

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