THE NATURE OF SACRED POWER IN
OLD TAMIL TEXTS

BY
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1. A lovely Old Tamil poem, Akanēgūr 22, by a female poet, Vehipāṭīya Kāmakkānuṟ in (ca. 3rd 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 aṉaṅku dwells
which caused [my] desire and suffering,
the women of ancient wisdom proclaimed:

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

In the awe-inspiring midnight,
to invite Mārukā,
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, 
hideing 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 LovLy Eyed One who Sang About Religious Frenzy’, is indeed of great importance for the investigation of the early cult of Murukaş-Neturêk. 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: agañku. When the countryside of the clandestine lover is described at the very beginning of the poem, agañku is said to be the attribute of the netwarai ucci, ‘the summit of the high mountain’. What— or who— is the agañku?

2. It is always safe to begin with an etymological approach: DED and DEDS say agañku v. to suffer, be distressed, be slain; n. pain, affliction, killing; and the related etymology—apart from Tamil—in Kannada, Telugu, and Urdu.

has an over-all meaning of ‘suppressing, depressing, ruining, destroying’, possibly to be compared with Gondi ancala ‘to press’. Apart from these meanings, we have in Kannada 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 kūṭhēci (montane love-poetry) in which the mountains are depicted as the natural and fitting setting for spontaneous love-making (kuḻam). 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 kūṭhēci genre where they are always described as the joyful setting of the spontaneous love-union. Hence the meaning of agaṅku 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; agaṅku in Tirukkuṟaḷ 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, agaṅku means a demoness who appears in pretty form and slays youths, identified with Mohini. (b) In our
strata of Old Tamil texts, *apāṇku* 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 apāṇku’ (*Kollitālakā*); Varuṇaṇapur, the god of the littoral (*nēṟṟal* tract; ‘domestic god’ (*Mātraṇkāḷcāri* 164); ‘divinity’ in the general sense (*Cilappatikāram, Maṇimkālal*).

Considering these *early* meanings, *apāṇku* seems to point to a more general and underlying meaning of a *fear-provoking divine or demonic 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 *apāṇku* 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. *cāṛ* (*cf. DED* 2250 *Ta. cāṛ* to frighten, to be cruel; n. fear, suffering, affliction, sorrow, disease, cruelty, malignant deity, Ma. *cāṛ* fiend, affliction, disgust; *DEDS* *Ta. cāṛppu* 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. Poucher, in his introduction to Alice Getty’s valuable monograph on Gaṅgeśa (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 Murukaṇ, we recognize precisely this feature: he causes but also cures the force which he is supposed to generate — he causes but also removes aṇakku. When a person is depressed, manifesting the symptoms of aṇakku, he or she (most often she) is supposed to be possessed by Murukku who is the source and cause of aṇakku, and, after the person’s problem has been diagnosed as such by multi-uty-peṟṟir, the soothsaying women of unfailing wisdom, a veḷaṟ, Murukaṇ’s priest with the spear, is invited to perform the exorcism, i.e. to remove the aṇakku. However, very often, a simple love-longing is mistaken for aṇakku (cf. our poem Akam 22, and a great number of similar poems, right up to Cilappattikāram, canto 24); in these contexts, aṇakku 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 Aiṭkuṟuṇāṟu 250 by Kapilā: “...the truth is that... the one who filled with aṇakku (painful longing) her young breasts (iṟṟuṟulai) which bear ornaments, is the lord of the forest (kīṟkkiḻerag, i.e. her lover), not the victorious, manly Veḷi (= Murukku)”.

The other kind of force, always malevolent, i.e. Cūr, is never caused by Murukku: it is also never exorcised; Murukku 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 Murukku struggles with it, and destroys it. This is the Dravidian basis of the later story of the gigantic war between Skanda-Murukku and Śrīrapadma-Cūr, the embodiment of Fear, and the chief of the antigods.

More important, however, are those contexts in which aṇakku 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 aṇakku so as to try to answer the following set of questions:

(a) What or where is the seat of aṇakku? Where does it dwell?

Where is it to be found, where does it manifest itself?
(b) Who is the source of agastaka? With what agent is it combined? What or who is the cause of agastaka—if any?
(c) What is the function of agastaka? 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 agastaka develop in time?

Before proceeding systematically according to the queries outlined above, it is necessary to return once more to the important distinction between cīr and agastaka, mentioned above. 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 kāṭhūri (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 (iṭṭi) of the heroine (talaiitt) speaks to the foster-mother (kēsili-i-tāyi):

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

8 In somewhat later development, when agastaka was personified, it is obviously distinguished from pīkg, cf. Maturakkōttel 652 which mentions pīkg agastaka, i.e., two distinct categories of personified dangerous forces, taking different forms roasting through the night: in this context, pīkg (cf. DED 3633 Ts. 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 agastaka is mentioned as another, very probably less malevolent or dangerous 'ghost' or 'demon'. In medieval commentaries, though, this distinction was obviously lost: thus in Pērkiyana's (13th Cent.) commentary on Telkippiyum III 252.1 agastaka is glossed as one of the sources of fear and it covers such 'demons' and 'ghosts' as pīkg, pāțan (c. kāṭu), 'corpse-eating female demons, etc. For the author of this aphorism of Telkippiyum, agastaka was one of the sources of fear (naṭanam). The aphorism says: "Fear has a fourfold source: awe-inspiring, sacred power (agastaka), (wild) beasts, robbers and kings."
has stopped, its noise ceased,
I saw (kaṇṇavaṇ) her,
his heavy earrings flashing
like lightning in the sky,
his thick curly hair loose on her back,
walking very stealthily,
like a peacock (מַגִיל) coming down from a mountain,
as she climbed the platform in the field
and descended.
Mother (מַגִיל),
on the slope where the כָּרֶד dwells,
where our garden (נַּעַּלוֹפָּל) is,
an aכָּרֶד comes wearing bright flowers
and taking whatever form it wants [to take]
(tַמְּרַעְמְתּוֹ וּרְעָמְתּוֹ aכָּרֶד וּרְעָמְתּוֹ וּרְעָמְתּוֹ)
and dreams delude those who sleep,
seeming so as if they were actually happening.
This girl (יוֹנָל) trembles
even when she is alone without a light.
If an owl in the מַרְדֶּד tree
which [stands] in the courtyard (מַרְאֶד)
hoots fearfully,
her heart seems to break
and she seeks refuge.
And our father (כְּנִבָּיְמְעֶד)
as strong and wrathful as Murukaŋ,
is at home,
and has let loose his dogs (תַּגַּי).
similar to a pack of tigers (פַּלִּי).
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 Murugan and Vaiñj). 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 'ural' symbol in India.
the girl, intoxicated by the love-making, comes back home. She is also likened to, or even partly identified with, apațku, the mysterious power which comes (varum), taking whatever shape it wishes, and deludes those who sleep making their dreams (kaqam) seem true reality (agawag wày). 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 Cûr, the malevolent spirit causing terror, lurking outside in the garden on the slope. Finally, the father (unlai) is compared to Murukaq; since Murukaq 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 (kaqunqèf) and the anger (cìsan) of her Murukaq-like father, and his pack of dogs.

What is most interesting in the context of our investigation is the distinction between cûr and apațku. While apațku comes (varum) taking whatever shapes (wàwau) it will (in our particular case a shape which puts on -wêg- red flaming flowers -cèfappwà), and while the girl is either “possessed” by this apațku or identified with it or at least likened to it (in her and its power to delude), cûr is something quite different: cûr 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 Murukaq is mentioned quite explicitly (16), and the apațku is said to wear red flowers (red being the colour of Murukaq, and red flowers being one of the most frequent attributes of the god), we may probably infer that in fact the apațku which comes and creates reality-like dreams is the sacred power caused by or emanating from Murukaq who is (among other things) the god of fertility, spontaneous love (kałun) and eternal youth; in fact, that it is Murukaq’s apațku which helps the heroine to “delude” her guardians and her father, to overcome the terror (cûr) 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 cûr ‘terror, fear, personification of fear’ and apațku ‘awe-inspiring sacred power’;
(b) the malevolent, fearful nature of cār and (in this context) the benevolent (for the girl at least) nature of Murukāṇ’s aṇaṅku;
(c) the intimate relationship between aṇaṅku and Murukāṇ;
(d) the close but obviously antagonistic relationship between Murukāṇ’s aṇaṅku and cār;
(e) the intimate relationship between aṇaṅku, Murukāṇ, and love and love-making in the kuṟiḷci ‘mountain’ 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 Puyam 52.1 speaks of aṇaṅkuai neṭukōṇi “the high mountain top where sacred power dwells”, Akam 22.1 of aṇaṅkuai neṭurvasi gucci “the peak of the high mountain where sacred power resides”, etc.; also, mountain slopes, cf. Perumpraṭṭāppai 494.5 aṇaṅkuai evarai “the mountain-slope(s) where sacred power dwells”, Puyam 151.11 aṇaṅkuai “the slope of sacred power”, cf. also Akam 158.7–9. Another natural habitat of aṇaṅku is water, in particular the sea, cf. Maṇinēṭalai 17.12 aṇaṅkuai अजकर्त्यञ्जु “the belly of the ocean where the awe-inspiring sacred power dwells”; Aiṇkunāṭi 174.1 aṇaṅkuai पौर्णितसरित तोष्टि गाय ‘like Toṣḍi (= Tyndis) with its dewy harbour where the sacred power dwells’, ib. 28.1 उष्णाय aṇaṅku “the mysterious power of the watering place”; cf. also Akam 240.8 अणकतूरप पौर्णितसरित “the misty harbour filled with aṇaṅku”. Patraṭṭappai 88.6 speaks of aṇaṅkai aṇkampu “the kaṇambu tree in which sacred power dwells”, and this is not surprising when we remember that there is a very intimate connection between the god Murukāṇ and aṇaṅku, and that the kaṇambu tree is specially sacred to Murukāṇ.4

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4 Anthocephalus indica A. Rich.
4 Cf. Tirumurunāṭṭappai VI 225.
7. Aŋaṅka dwells not only in natural phenomena, but also in man-made edifices: thus Puram 247.4 speaks of “the front of the house where aṅaṅka slays” (aṅaṅkaññita marāpati), Maturakkāñci 578 of “the excellent house where aṅaṅka dwells” (aṅaṅkaññita nallit), the same text 693 of nallit aṅaṅkaññita lāti “the gateway of a strong fortress where aṅaṅka dwells” (cf. also Poliyuppattu 62.11). But probably most important in this connection is Puram 392.8 which mentions aṅaṅkaññita marāpati īrākañam “the two [kinds] of kalaṇam which is the proper place where aṅaṅka dwells”. The two kinds of kalaṇam (cf. DED 1160) are threshing floor and battle-field: in the heroic and agricultural society of ancient Tamilnadu these two places are indeed in a particular way filled with the sacred power. Akam 99.9 mentions a temple filled with sacred power (aṅaṅkaññita nakañ); and Puram 369.6 speaks of “time pervaded by sacred power” (aṅaṅkaññita pāţatu).

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

Maturakkāñci 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. Puramārappaṭoṭi 20 which mentions the viţ ‘lute’ which looks like an adorned bride and is the seat of aṅaṅka. Weapons were obviously considered to possess the immanent mysterious power, cf. Akam 167.8 aṅaṅkaññita āppakaṭi “The arrow[s] possessing secret power”, and, similarly, Maturakkāñci 140 which speaks of weapons (tappu) filled with aṅaṅka. But probably the most interesting object connected with the sacred power was kalaṇku, the mullea-bean (Caesalpina bonducella), cf. DED 1134) which was used in the shamanistic divination technique. Nagariṇai 282.5 speaks of aṅaṅkaññita kalaṇku yēravu yēlāj “the yēlāj priest [of Murukaṇ] [using the technique] of kalaṇku beans filled with sacred power”; and the same text

\footnote{Further contexts indicating places filled with aṅaṅka are Maturakkāñci 164 describing a city destroyed by enemies’ invasion and mentioning places which were abandoned (kalu) by the sacred force (glossed as ‘domestic deity’ which had lived there) (kalaṅku); cf. also Maturakkāñci 353.}
47.8 mentions āṇāku aṭi kāṭāku “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 Murukāṇṭ 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 (veḷag) is qualified by the attribute mutuvē “ancient truthful wisdom”. In later texts, we find Māl, i.e. Viṣṇu as Tīṟumāḷ, holding the discus-weapon filled with the sacred power (Pāripāṭal XIII.6): this shows beyond doubt that in some contexts, āṇāku denotes a power which is in fact beneficial, destroying enemies of gods and men.\(^6\)

9. In a few poems, āṇāku 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. Kāṇṭakolai 308 mentions āṇāku in connection with the male-elephant (veṭṭam). Purunpāṭrāṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟram 258 speaks of aṇākaiyai yadd “lions filled with the mysterious power” and Purunpāṭrāṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟram 130 speaks of the strong lion’s whelp which pursues the deer and kills the elephant. Nāṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟ所所 travelling power. 

10. Certain deities and demons were believed to possess āṇāku. Among the divinities, the most powerful ancient Tamil god, Murukku-Murukaṅṭ, is most frequently mentioned as the one who has the sacred power: Pāṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟ所所 aṭi aṅkāṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟ所所 temple of Murukāṇṭ filled with the sacred power”. Nāṟṟṟṟṟ所所 386.8 says: “I shall give [you] a precious vow (aṟṟṟṟṟṟ所所 possessing sacred power [of Murukāṇṭ as witness]”. According to Kāḷītattai 105.15, Indra is said to be filled with āṇāku. And Pāṟṟṟṟ所所 1, devoted to Tīṟumāḷ (identified with Viṣṇu), mentions aṇākaiyai v unnṟṟṟṟ所所 [Tīṟumāḷ’s] unique strength possessing aṇāku” (line 48), and “the heads [of Tīṟumāḷ] possessing sacred power” (aṇākaiyai v unnṟṟṟ所所), another indication of aṇāku considered as beneficial, positive, grace-bestowing power.

\(^6\) The text says explicitly “tum aṭi aṅkāṟṟṟ所所 nent “un discours redoutable (i.e. aṇākaiyai) qui donne aussi la fréquence de ta grâce” (transl. F. Gros).
Besides Murukaṇ, Tirumāl, and Indra, the asuras (aṅgār) also possessed the supernatral, mysterious power, cf. Pūgam 174.1 (aṅkakāṭai aṅgār), and the same phrase in Pattrappattu 11.4.

Tirumurukāppappālai 280 speaks of aṅkakāṭai aṅgār nīlai tūjī, i.e. of Murukaṇ 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 beneficient, and as we shall see later, had to be carefully diagnosed and controlled by shamanistic techniques. The most "original" meaning or conception of aṅkakāṭu seems to be indicated by Pūgam 247 which speaks of a place in front of the hut full of this ominous power where a herd of innocent deer (matamāṇa) slumbers in the light of a fire kindled by forest-men (kāṅnar) with the help of dry fire-wood (matimara viṇaka) brought by [the tamed] elephants—an image which can be even today encountered in the tribal milieu of the jungles of the Nilgiri mountains.

11. Did this ominous, sacred power have its seat in human beings, too? One poem in the ancient anthology Pūgam (362.6) speaks of the army of men similar to the aṅkakāṭu 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 aṅkakāṭu dwells in this context is the female breasts.

In Akam 161, the tūjī (female companion) describes how the heroine weeps so that cool drops wet her finely shaped young breasts (iṭānmalai) on her chest where light-coloured spots (the sign of puberty) spread, vexing because aṅkakāṭu is there (aṅkakāṭu ega wālta). Akam 177.19 mentions aṅkakāṭai ega vāl'ta “the

1 As late as in Chinikattāndamī (10th Cent.) 177 it is said, “Light-coloured beauty-spots (aṅkakāṭu) have spread where the handsome aṅkakāṭu has taken seat.” This seems to refer to the process of having attained puberty, which was
shapely breasts filled with sacred power'. In Aiṭk. 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 (aṇākku) has taken seat there, and it is dangerous.8

In Narṭisai 9.5–9, a hero says to his sweetheart not to worry (varamiṭṭikumati), and exhorts her: "Put bright shoots of lovely puṇṇu' on your shapely breasts adorned by spots (signs of puberty and coming of age) so that the sacred power occupies [them, or stays there, aṇākku koṭi].

In a lovely description which reminds us of an image occurring in Kālidāsa’s Kumaraṇīpūrṇa, Puramāruṇiṇīpūrṇa 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 (taraṭta) because aṇākku dwells in them.

In Aiṭkumāṇkumūrya 250, the heroine’s young breasts (īḷamalai) are afflicted by aṇākku; it is not, however, the victorious Vēl (= Murukan) who is responsible, but the lord of the forest (kāṇakkanūg, i.e. her lover. Here, we have aṇākku (in the form aṇākkīyōgē ‘he who causes aṇākku’) in the sense of love-illness, love-longing.

Aṇākku, then, either takes its special seat in a woman’s breasts, probably after she had come of age and became sexually desirable,9 or she may, on the other hand, be possessed by aṇākkiu

accompanied by aṇākku, the dangerous and mysterious power, taking seat in the woman’s breasts, and by the light-coloured spots, termed aṇākku (cf. DDID 2188 (a) yellow spreading spots on the body of women, regarded as beautiful, appearing on the alaiti (Man’s Veneris) and the breasts—the two parts of female body which obviously belong to the most exciting eroticogenic zones.

8. ... nīy manaṣāya [aṇākku ṅaṭṭāṭīyō] aṇākku niṣṭhēya eva-aṇākku niṣṭhēya nēṭī. 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.

9. Cf. DDID 3561 Ts. puṇńu, puṇńu, puṇńum, pattrī Indian beech (Pongamia glabra).

9. Kāṇṭholōdin 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 aŋaŋku 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 aŋaŋku, 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 Murukaŋ, or she is “possessed” by love-longing and this “love-illness” is diagnosed (by the wise old soothsaying women or by the selag, the priest of Murukaŋ) 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 murukaŋ är aŋaŋku “the hard sacred power of Murukaŋ”, or Kugācippūta 174–5 which mentions the women dancing under the spell of the sacred power of Nejuvel. But this “genuine” possession by the god’s aŋaŋku 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 aŋaŋku, the supernatural awe-inspiring power?

The two verbs occurring most frequently with aŋaŋku are u’lai ‘possess’ and aŋu ‘dwell, reside, be joined with’. In the great majority of instances, we have the following construction: X + u’lai + aŋaŋku, i.e. ‘X possesses or has aŋaŋku’, where X stands for a place/time or an object or a person, e.g. aŋaŋkuuippagātayai (Aitk. 174.1) ‘the misty harbour having aŋaŋku’, arawūyukkam aŋaŋkuu neiukkōsā (Nār. 168.8) ‘the high mountain-top where the waterfall roars, possessing aŋaŋku’ (cf. also Pāg. 52.1), aŋaŋkuuippayalai (Akam 159.6) ‘the distressful how possessing aŋaŋku’, aŋaŋkuu arawu (Nār. 386.6) ‘the snake which has aŋaŋku’; aŋaŋkuuaiukaŋampu (Pātīrap. 88.6) ‘the kafampu-tree which has aŋaŋku’. Even abstract qualities ‘have’, ‘possess’ causes aŋaŋku (aŋaŋkūtaju, 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?”

“... Nejuvel | aŋaŋku kalāt aŋuhalan.

11 Kafampu is Nabora Culumba, Bokh, a tree which is particularly sacred to Murukaŋ, though Temil is also occasionally associated with it. The shaman of the hill region (selag), wearing white straps (tēqōti) of palm tree stalks and the leaves and the flowers of kafampu, performed the exorcism of Murukaŋ’s drupadhi.
agnakku: agnakkutai aracil (Ngr. 386.6) 'rare vow possessing supernatural power'. What is however most important in our search for the cause and source of agnakku is the fact that even persons—i.e. deities and/or sub-divine but super-human persons—are said to 'possess', to have agnakkutai (agnakkutai Murukan), in Kalittokai 105.15 Indra (Vedicatang), too, has agnakkutai, and the asuras, too, have the supernatural, magic, sacred power (in Pugam 174.1).

With the verb-stem yatu 'dwell, be joined with', the construction used is exactly analogical: thus we have agnakkutaproluta (Pug. 369.6) 'the time joined with agnakkutai' (i.e. the time of the day which is filled by the sacred power in a special manner) or agnakkutai kovakkut muwuyy ovelag (Ngr. 282.5) 'the ovelag-priest of ancient truth [using] the Moneesa-beans in which agnakkutai dwells'; abstract notions occur, too, in such construction: agnakkutai karpufu (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. karumpafai tijham ugaayawal agnakkut (Nagr. 39.11) '(her) shoulders which have [the sweetness and flexibility of] sugar-cane possess supernatural power'. Also, agnakkutai occurs in the position of a simple attribute: Pugam 25.6 agnakkutaiyum parantailai 'the hard battlefield [where] agnakkutai

which was believed to have caused the sickness of the girl (et. Akam 98). He also danced the dance of possession (eef) around this tree and planted a flag on it (Akam 382). Cited Xavier S. Thandi Nayagan, Natire Poetry in Tamil, Singapore, 1963, p. 58: 'The Kafampu tree was the tree most sacred to Murukan. His spirit was supposed to dwell in the tree, and a particular Kafampu tree at the foot of the Tiruapparnamunai hill was the object of great devotion.' It was also a tutelary tree of the Kafampu tribe or race of people who were conquered by the Chera king Cethathirvan. Maqimthulam IV-49 and Chidappathuram XXIV.61 speak of Kafampu “the god of the k-tree” referring to Murukan, and in Puripalat 8126 Murukan is called kafampumuiruvelag “the Lord who resides in the kafampu tree,” while Puripalat 8.61 invokes the same god as Kafampumuliteraga ‘To Tol qui as une gauchilde luxuriante de kafampu aux groupes en roseaux!’ (G. Gross).

18 Though in the absolute majority of cases the part of the human body par excellence which possesses agnakkutai 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).
[dwellls], or agašš(a)unškaḫḫuššu agīl (Pug. 78.2) 'our chief who [has] fierce strength, hard [and filled with] agaššu'.

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 agaššu. The magic, supernatural sacred power is simply there; i.e., the sacred, the nounemon, is manifested by a power which is thought to be inherent in a number of places (mountain-tops and mountain-slopes, waterng 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 agaššu or to be joined with it. None of these is said to cause or to generate agaššu; agaššu is inherently present in them. One among the divine persons, is, however, more frequently than all others connected with agaššu—god Murukaš; and in Naṣṣaṣṣa 34.7,14 the sacred power is qualified as his agaššu. However, not even Murukaš is described as causing or even being the source of agaššu. We may probably interpret some of our textual evidence (e.g. Naṣṣaṣṣa 165) as indicating an identification of Murukaš and agaššu (see below).

Soon enough, the nounemon 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: Naṣṣaṣṣa 319.8 speaks of agaššu kūl kifaru (the midnight when agaššu emerges on its legs—but this stage will be dealt with later.

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

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

14 Naṣṣaṣṣa 34.6-7: "... though [you, i.e. Murukaš] know [well] that the rare [love]-sickness is not [caused by] your agaššu (ningaššu-nuṣšiššim)." Cf. also Akum 89.10 where the old soothing women diagnose the illness of the girl as caused by murukaš-nuṣšaššu 'Murukaš's hard agaššu'.
this non-personalized form, aqāhkū, 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 aqāhkū as dwelling in certain qualities, it is always the awe-inspiring properties of the human body or mind which aqāhkū represents: thus the chief or lord who possessed fierce and hard strength, which was almost supernatural because it was filled with aqāhkū, evoked fear in his foes and awe in his friends (Pūgam 78.2). However, and this is the important point to stress, the sacred power, though awesome, was not thought of as intrinsically malevolent: In Nāṟṟiyar 386, the hero (nāṟṟu) of the montane region gives a precious promise (arukē) filled with (Murukkāg’s) aqāhkū to the heroine—certainly an auspicious occasion whereby the sacred power is thought of as awesome but benevolent. Again, in Akun 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 aqāhkū kāpu ‘chastity filled with sacred power’—surely a situation where the awe-inspiring aqāhkū is thought of as beneficial.

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

15 Glossed by the commentator as arundalippuṟṟa kāpu, firm chastity like that of Arunadhāl; Arunadhath, the wife of Vanśitha, is regarded as the highest symbol of conjugal fidelity and widely devotion. It is interesting that the term kāpu, ‘spontaneous erotic (pre-marital) relationship’, is never connected with the term aqāhkū, ‘sacred power’.

14 ‘... après avoir ressenti [en lui] son état sublime que rempli de crainte, [ayant] de son antique [beauté] juvénile divine fleurant bon fait la manifestation ...’ etc. According to the commentators, Murukkūg has suppressed within himself (ālalakkkīkkoḻu) his divine nature (lāśaṅkumāṟṟai) which is associated with
This, and other contexts, in particular from *Parippātā!* would indicate that divine *aṇāṅku* could fill the devotees with a reverential fear which would be hardly bearable. The *aṇāṅku* of the demon (e.g. *Puyam* 174) was obviously meant to cause terror—and this was one of the points of departure of slightly later development when *aṇāṅku* obtained one of its main meanings of fearful ghosts or frightening gods. However, the divine *aṇāṅku* could also function as a destructive force: it is very clearly stated in a hymn to Murukāṅ from *Parippātā* (8) which also throws welcome light on the promise or oath made "by Murukāṅ": the companion of the young lady reproaches the hero who has promised with a solemn oath (vīḍ), touching the sand of the river Vaṇāṭ and the foot of the cool hill Paraṅkūṟu of god Vēḻ (—the Murukāṅ) "who gives marriage" (karu-naṇa-vēḻ); she warns him not to swear by the gracious Murukāṅ; if he does (and does not keep his oath), "certainly (meḻ), his lance (vēḻ), will devour him by virtue of [the god’s, or the spear’s] graceless *aṇāṅku*."¹⁴ In this context, though the god is full of grace (arul-murukāṅ), the sacred power of his weapon, the spear, can be without grace, and destroy a man without compassion.

The functioning of *aṇāṅku* in human recipients will be dealt with in detail further, under a separate caption. For *aṇāṅku*, 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’ (mēḻ) which had to be dealt with, controlled, removed. However, apart from this possession by *aṇāṅku* which must have been regarded as dangerous and unwanted, the same sacred force, emanating from Murukāṅ, caused obviously a sacred possession, a hieratic trance—again both in male and female recipients—suffering (vēḻam) (according to Nacēpāṟkāṇiyar); he has withheld in himself his highest state which is associated with divine activities (according to *Parimāḷaṅkār*).

¹⁷ In this text, *aṇāṅku* is associated also with Māyūṟa-Thirumāl.

¹⁴ *arul-murukāṅ adēḻ ḫaṇṇai yam verall aṇāṅku meḻ meḻ vēḻam. For the erotic and marriage-bestowing aspect of god Murukāṅ, cf. *Kurippāṭai* 209–212 where the hero praises the joys and duties of wedded life and gives an oath to the woman, worshipping and praising the god (kóḻan) who lives on the top of the mountains (nathattēḻai), 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 ṟaṅku was organized and controlled by a professional shaman of the god, by .dtdu, we enter the sphere of the regulated contact with the sacred. Such contact occurred when the priest went into a trance and danced the ṭeḻi; future was predicted, exorcism was performed. An early mention of this kind of possession may be found in Kuriṅhēḻāppu 174–7: [169; We stood shaking like peacocks possessed by terror-provoking ṟvat]... We lock our fingers like the leaves in the garlands twining round the ṭuṟam tree with thick and strong trunk, resembling the women possessed by Neṭuṟuḷ’s ṟaṅku dancing on the ṭuṟam (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 Murukāg’s ṟaṅku 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 (tilṭal), 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 ṟaṅku 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 (.dtdu) and even the god himself. Sometimes, the vexation is serious enough; ṟaṅku then represents the true longing of love which wants to be fulfilled.¹⁹

¹⁹ Dr. K. Grünser (Heidelberg University) suggested (personal communication) that the convention in Old Tamil erotic poetry of intoning the possession of a young woman by ṟaṅku 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 apakhū 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 apakhū resides" in her breasts or Venus' mound. Here, apakhū 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 apakhū manifested in human recipients:

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genuine possession
  └── unwanted, to be removed by men, mainly in male
      priests, but also in females, probably
      self-induced

pseudo-possession
  └── hieratic trance, mainly in male

  └── feigned by women and/or wrongly diagnosed in
      women;
      vexation caused by love for men

  └── vexation caused in men by passion and love for women,
      whose body, (especially breasts) are the 'seat' of
      apakhū

sphere of regulated contact with the sacred

sphere of poetic conventions dealing with the erotic
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15.1. The very important poem Alankāra 7 by Kayamagār (ca. 220 A.D.) tells us that a girl who has reached puberty is subject to a possible assault by apakhū. 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) (tākkal apankku)"

What if apankku indeed did assault a woman? The clue to such a situation is provided by Akkāmāgur Pētir (by Vēripāyi Kumakkaṇaṇīyār) in which the mother (angal) has not realized (aṅintēl allal) that her daughter can be 'eured' and pacified (taṇītal) only by the touch of the chest of her lover who lives on the mountain where the malevolent Fear (cāt) roams. Therefore, she has invited the wise soothsaying women28 who have made their diagnosis: it is the hard apankku of Murukān which has possessed her.29 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 kalan (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 (āṭī); this shed was cleaned and adorned with garlands, leaves and flowers. Then the officiant, the spear-man (vēlaṭ), 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 kalanpu tree (16). He first invoked the god, 'praising the great name' of Murukān, and then danced the vel dance, i.e. the ecstatic dance of possession, shaking the body from side to side (tāḷkal) and dancing for the sake of intoxicated and infatuated women (mayaṇkaiyamaiyal pesēkkku) so long that they could hardly endure it. Then the god would

28 Mutumēt poy sol pesē, lit. 'the women of old sayings proficient in magic', glossed as kāppuvaṇcīyār, i.e. 'divination-women.'
29 The technique of divination is indicated in the text and described in detail in the commentaries: the text just mentions the strewn of piruppa (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. Kārṇamalai 263–4), which mentions tēppaipiruppa 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.

12 Acta Orientalia, XL.
bestow his favour (naṭkuaṅg) 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 (Murukāṅg is termed Nejvēḷ here, lit. ‘Great Desired One’) was manifested by verikanal, a specific fragrance filling the koṭaṅg 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 demonic 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 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 (vēḷaṅg) 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 Tirumuruk-Aṟṟappattu 242 which speaks of millet red with blood; and the same text even more strikingly and explicitly, says in lines 233–4:

“having brought a small offering (cīl pāli) of pure white rice (tūṇēl arići) strewn with blood (kurucīyaṭa utraṭiye)”, Says Elmore (p. 39): “A sheep is killed and the blood mixed with rice, which is offered as nāsiṣyāma . . .”. And again, on p. 59: “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 I 252, specifies the origin of the blood: mā tāḷ koḷu uṭṭai “a fat male (a buck or a ram) with large legs”.

15.2. It was obviously not only to propitiate Murukaṭ in order to dispel or remove the aghanu 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 Akanāgūtu, Nārāyana, and Paraṇāgūtu collections, as well as from some later texts, e.g. Chippattikāmaṇi’s canto 24), we may reconstruct the structure of the uṣṭi ceremony and gather a more or less detailed description of the ecstatic dance of the oṭṭag, 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.12

12 The ancient Tamils knew intoxicating beverages: tāḷ ‘toddy’ is mentioned frequently as made from miliţ (ṭīṉal), possibly also from honey; other kinds of liquor were produced by the fermentation of paddy rice (this kind of toddy was termed ṭīṟṉ); when it was made of bamboo rice it was often stored or matured in hollow bamboo stems. Nāgūṭa was probably made from honey. Often toddy was brewed as hot liquor. Another popular type of intoxicating drink was the fermented juice of the palmyn (pepparīli). A distilled and concentrated variety of toddy was known as tūṇēl. 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. Puranam 335). But there is no direct evidence that the ‘priest’ or any other hieratic person would drink intoxicants as part of a religious ceremony or to induce the uṣṭi dance. It seems that alcoholic drinks were
Most explicit is Akanāgōga 22 (again by Veripāljya Kāmak Kauūyār). A girl of the Kaṟam tribe is in love with the nāḷag; she is full of desire and wants him to come and make love to her; but, in agreement with the conventions of the ‘mountain’ poetry (kuṟṟuṟṟippāl), 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 Murukap-Neḻuvēl, which should cure the young woman: “She will be pacified (tanikvuva iitol, lit. soothed, i.e. the aṇku—mentioned in line 1 itself—which has possessed her, will be removed) by worshipping Neḻuvēl whose strong arms have the fame of wiping out those who do not bow to him (l.5–7)”. So, the nāḷag, the shaman of Neḻuvēl, the exorcist, is invited to cure the girl of her ‘sickness’ (nūy, l.20). His function is muruk-kāṟṟuppāḷa ‘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 aṇku (we unfortunately do not know which) to soothe the possessed girl. The following steps of the ceremony are then described:

1. the kaṟam or ‘threshing floor’ (public gathering ground of the tribe used for sacred purposes) is well cleaned and polished;
2. the uɬ or spear of the ‘spear-man’ (nāḷag, 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 voḷanakar (l.9), this term indicating probably a stone or wooden dais or shrine qualified as voḷa, i.e. ‘fertile’ or bringing about ‘fruition’; or, alternatively, as ‘abundant, full’ (of sacred power), also ‘fit’ or ‘auspicious’;
   b. offering sacrifice (pahi kawutu, l.9) by strewing ‘the shapely red millet (casīṭu) mixed with blood (kurutu) 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 kołam where the ‘spear-man’ (vēlag) worships through the vēt-dance (I. 17).

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

The term vēgi-ayar kołal to denote the ritual place reappears in Akam 242, and vēgi ayarat, i.e., to worship by the frenzied dance is reintroduced as late as in Nātiyāyar 16.1 (ca. 675-700 A.D.). Nātiyāyar 34.9, very interestingly, speaks of vēgi nagal, the dwelling or house, or house-site, of the ritual dance. This song mentions, also, the ‘spearman’ (vēlag) who is garlanded with the fragrant blossoms of kołampu flowering in the rainy season.

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

1. The special and elaborate worship by the ‘spear-man’ (vēlag) dancing in a frenzy under divine inspiration (vēgiyāval), after offering prayers and sacrificing a ram or a buck, and containing (often but probably not always) elements of divination and/or exorcism.

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

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34 The original meaning of kołamkalam (cf. DED 1169) 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. Goēdi kōrum 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 kołam.

35 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 karuvai dance under the oṭṭakai tree.

The spear (oṭṭ) 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), and also in the tribal meeting-ground, the kōjam, where religious dances and rituals were held; as such, it has always been an object of great religious respect.

The spear was implanted in the earth or carried by the shaman who came to be called oṭṭaḷ, 'spear-man'; it marked very probably the central point of worship and the dance of possession, since it was about the oṭṭ that the dances took place. During the ecstatic dance which produced violent superexcitation of the whole physical and mental body of the officiant, the oṭṭaḷ succeeded in entering into communion with the sacred power of Murukāṟ. It is possible to infer (cf. Tirumurukāṟṟuppati 110–111, 240, 243–4) that the possessed priest, the oṭṭaḷ, also whirled the spear around, like the god Murukāṟ who is said to whirl around with two of his twelve arms the spear and the shield, and was accompanied or accompanied himself by a musical cultus-instrument called tonaḵam or tufi, 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 oṭṭaḷ.

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

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19 S. Sengaravelu, Social Life of the Tamils, Kuala Lumpur, 1966, p. 158.
20 The oṭṭ or spear plays an enormous role, both as a symbol and as an object of distinct worship of Śrānga-Subrahmanyan-Murukāṟ. For the role the spear played in battlefield, cf. e.g., Puram 15, 42, 57, 95, 98, Akam 111.9, Nāṟṟuppetṭūlati 176–7.
21 Tirum. 110-11: trukaḷ paiyirunnaṭamunū ebingu vanaṭirippa "deux mains (cinquième et sixième) sont pour faire tourner la pluie—à droite—avec la grande rotonde admirable (a gueshe)" (J. Filliozat transl.).
22 Tufi, lit. 'tremblon, trepidation; speed; quickness; a small drum shaped like an hour-glass'; toyaḷam, a small drum used in mountain areas.
23 S. Sengaravelu, 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 per-
spiration. 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.31

C. G. Diehl32 describes his own experience of having watched
a man possessed by Muruka nä “just outside Mathurai” in April
1963. “He was carrying a kāvājī ... with an earthen pot attached
to it. In the pot was a snake, which he was going to let loose on
the Tiruparanakuram 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 pro-
truding 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 Muruka nä’s ār ānākā ‘hard sacred
power’, obviously may be felt in 1963 as lively as it was felt by
the god’s ‘spear-man’ priest millennia 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” (lokanya mātārāḥ) 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

31 E. Tharstten, Omens and Superstitions of Southern India, 1912, pp. 284–5.
fierce aspect of his own self. The similarity with Muruka’s avarāṅku ‘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, avarāṅku, 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 avarāṅku was rather different from other members of the field of demoniac forces—pēy, ‘ghosts’, reflecting probably survivals of animism (ghosts of dead persons), and cār (developing later into the personified cārag > śāra-), 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 Nāṟṟippu 34, in which we have a very rare instance of god Muruka 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 katuṟṟu
which is fragrant in the rainy season,
though you knew that
it was not your avarāṅku
[which has caused me this] hard illness
[of love],
you are indeed a fool
inspite of being a god!

15.4. When a woman has attained puberty and become sexually attractive, she was thought to be filled with agaṇku, residing in her breasts and her loins. Very explicit in this connection is Kuruṭṭokai 387 by Potukkayāattu Kiranțai, 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 (cpuṇṭiku) have appeared
[on her body].\textsuperscript{34}
I know her,
and therefore she afflicts\textsuperscript{35} 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 Aiṅkaguranțu 363.3–4: "You think that there are spots on your breasts, but my afflicted (agāṇku ugu) heart thinks that there is agaṇku [in your breasts];\textsuperscript{36}" or Akam 372 which quotes the mountain-slope where agaṇku dwells (I.3) and ends with the words nam agaṇkīpōtē (I.16) "the woman who vexes us [with agaṇku]."

16. It seems almost certain that, in our earliest texts, the term agaṇku 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.

\textsuperscript{34} The spots are a sign of puberty, and are considered attractive.
\textsuperscript{35} Liter., "I indeed know her, therefore she causes agaṇku [in me]." agaṇku (I.4) is a verb here which means 'to afflict, to bother, to distress' as well as 'to fill with, to cause agaṇku.' According to a commentator, the meaning is in fact "I know her because she causes agaṇku [in me]." the meaning (karaṇi) of the whole poem being, the woman has achieved puberty (parumme), and that fact fills her with agaṇku which afflicts me, cf. Akam 7.
\textsuperscript{36} min nukalga | cpuṇṭikuṇa nityāṭī niṣṭ | apatakeṇa nityāṭघुमेण/पुणकुरुपुरातेत्वा nukalga.
16.1. The first stage of personification may be seen in such lines as Naṣāqūl 319.6, a poem which speaks of “the middle of the night when darkness is bewildering and when aqānku’s legs rise”;\(^2\) 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 aqānku is concentrated; the process of metonymy has set in. Thus e.g., in Naṣāqūl 155.6 by Parhayāfār where the adored maid is addressed: “Are you perhaps the demoness (or deity) which dwells and abides in the vastness of the great sea?”\(^3\) Similarly, probably in Akam 240.8 which speaks of the “cool harbour inhabited by aqānku—the deity worshipped with folded hands”. In Naṣāqūl 165.3–4, aqānku 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 aqānku as demon or goblin, frequently paired with pēy\(^9\) (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 Maturakāthikā 632 speaks of the dead of night when vampires (pēy) and demons (aqānku) roam about assuming different forms.\(^10\) From the same text it is quite clear that pēy and aqānku were two kinds of supernatural beings, for in verses 160ff. they are in decisive contrast; while aqānku is connected with an auspicious and well-faring state of the city, pēy definite indicates a devastated.

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\(^2\) aqānku kī biharom mā早点vāl nafandū.

\(^3\) parhayāfār parāji kāmaruṣa yāmāndā aqānku; ‘a water-nymph’?

\(^9\) 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. prāva, the spirit of a dead person) which, however, I consider as most improbable.

\(^10\) pēyom aqānku arunbhāṣā.
inauspicious situation: "In large halls where [men met] in assemblies the female-demons (pāyamakalί) with cruel eyes and cloven feet [now] dance and sing; at gates where apanaka used to dwell . . ." etc. In this context, apanaka means either beneficial, auspicious sacred power, or domestic in-dwelling gods.\footnote{\textit{Perum-pāṇārapprepaśi 457–9 connects beautifully apanaka, in the sense of goblins or demons, with the god Čey (= Murukāṉ) and his Mother Kogavai:} \textit{‘The goblins (male or female) try to deceive with riddles; the lovely Goddess of the Čey-kāṉ-dance whose large womb bore the Čey with golden-green ornaments who slew the terrible Fear’}.\footnote{\textit{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. nēṭi ‘snap the thumb and middle finger’ as a sign of teasing, or idle, inconsiderate, bashy, supercilious ‘talk’.}}

There are contexts where apanaka very probably means a household deity, a domestic in-dwelling god, the personified sacred power of the home: thus most probably in \textit{Maturākkāñci} 578\footnote{Kośavai, \textit{et. J. Filoroz}, \textit{Le Tirumāruhāṭepaśi}, 1975, p. XXIX–XXXI.} and 164.\footnote{\textit{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. nēṭi ‘snap the thumb and middle finger’ as a sign of teasing, or idle, inconsiderate, bashy, supercilious ‘talk’.}} In \textit{Akam} 90.9, it very probably means deity or god in general.\footnote{\textit{Kośavai, \textit{et. J. Filoroz}, \textit{Le Tirumāruhāṭepaśi}}, 1975, p. XXIX–XXXI.} But from \textit{Akam} 167 and similar poems it is obvious that the term apanaka has never attained the same level of meanings as kāvanai which was used for personified god, personified transcendence-immanence, worshipped at home and in temples. This poems mentions, in one context, the marauding tribes who are provided with cruel bows and arrows possessing terrible supernatural power,\footnote{Kośavai, \textit{et. J. Filoroz}, \textit{Le Tirumāruhāṭepaśi}}, 1975, p. XXIX–XXXI. and the god who has departed from a house devastated by them.\footnote{\textit{Kośavai, \textit{et. J. Filoroz}, \textit{Le Tirumāruhāṭepaśi}}, 1975, p. XXIX–XXXI.}

It seems that by the time when the originally impersonal sacred force immanent in certain objects began to be thought of as a
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: \( \text{pēy} \), and \( \text{cūr} \). The first of these—whether or not connected with Aryan \( \text{preta} \)—seems to have represented ‘personal’ demons from the very beginning, simply because these were obviously ghosts of dead persons, either male (\( \text{pēy} \)) or female (\( \text{pēyamālā\text{cūr}} \)); and indeed, even from our earliest sources, we can get a fairly clear, colourful picture of these terrible spirits 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.\(^{39}\)

The second was definitely personified fear (cf. \( \text{DED 2250 Ta. \ cūr} \) ‘fear, suffering, affliction, sorrow, disease, cruelty’), and was much later transformed into the chief of the anti-gods, the \( \text{asura} \) hero Šrāpadāna. But it is significant that both \( \text{pēy} \) and \( \text{cūr} \) represent always malignant, malevolent, horrid forces, and they are never a cause or source of sacred, divine possession (\( \text{veer} \)); whereas \( \text{apauku} \), though potentially dangerous, is often even benevolent and auspicious.

16.3. A further and final stage of the personalisation and personification of \( \text{apauku} \) 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 \( \text{apauku} \) 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 \( \text{apauku} \) in \( \text{Purāṇa 12.57} \) (a relatively late old Tamil text, prob. 550–400 A.D.) which compares the playful and coquettish behaviour of a woman to a man with

\(^{39}\) For a systematic treatment of \( \text{pēy} \) in Old Tamil texts cf. Tamilavān, \text{Purāṇam tāmilavar puṇhal pura\vı\vıha hattatā,} \( \text{Āvēsæl 2}(4), \text{Dec. 1971}, \text{pp. 435–41} \).

\(^{40}\) A possible Dravidian etymology of \( \text{pēy} \): ‘\( \text{pē}\) ‘rage, madness’ (cf. \( \text{Ka. pē, hē} \)), cf. \( \text{O\vı\vı} \text{. pē (Karunakar 87.1) \text{‘owe, foue}’ in manya marattu puṇmati karpah\vı\vıf ‘the awe-inspiring god of the tree on the public gathering ground’\). But in the light of such connections as \( \text{Toda ņs}, \text{the god of the dead, I would connect Ta. pēy} \) with the animistic notions of the spirits of dead persons.
that of apankhoratti, “a fairy”; cf. the French translation of F. Gros: “comme une sorte de fée au regard d’ambroisie avait jeté les yeux sur lui, (sa femme)” . In decisively later texts, all other meanings of the term apankku 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 Tirukkuṟṟaḷ (ca. 450–500 A.D.), this meaning is well-established: in 918, apankku 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 apankku 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 apankku, a malevolent fairy. And 1082 says: “This female beauty returning my looks is like an apankku with an army to attack me.” The tradition of an apankku which attacks (lākku) is old; so is the tradition of the pseudo-possession by apankku conceived of as the vexation of a passionate love and desire; the personification of apankku as a female and malicious fairy is later. This concept of a pretty fairy which vexes and slays youths, identified with Mohini, is quite prevalent in all didactic texts between the 5th–9th cent. A.D.: it occurs in Āeṭṟakkōvai 72.2 (ca. 825 A.D.), Attiṟavaiyelpatu 47.4 (7th cent.), Paṇamolaiyai 8.3 (ca. 700 A.D.), Tirukkuṟṟaḷ 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 tamiḻapānku, ‘the divine damsel of Tamil’—i.e. the personification of Tamil as an apankku in this sense.43


43 Mohini, the Enchantress, Laxi (cf. Mh. 8th. 1.18–10, Bhaṭagamatapadai 8.9–10, 12, Bhaṭagamai 1.49, Padmaṇabādai 3.10 etc.), was an incarnation of Viṣṇu as a lovely woman, meant to deceive the auras 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.

45 Tamil, like apankku, 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 ṣapākū, 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 inhere 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 Murukaṇ; also with Māl and Indra.

The one quality which still seems to have survived in South Indian Hinduism⁶⁶ is the quality of *immanence* of the sacred, and its connection with places. Though the idols in temples (and at home), the *ṣigrāhan*, 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;⁶⁶ the icons, the *pratiṅga*, are in actual practice bodies inhabited by the god and his power.

This use of ṣapākū as the personalization 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 ṣapākū to personalise the language and culture which he loved above everything, then the late-old-Tamil and early-medieval use of ṣapākū in the sense of a malevolent and murderous fairy was probably rather an aberration and abuse of the original term, meaning ‘awesome, sacred force.’

⁶⁶ And indeed to have spread in Hinduism in general.
Intricate ritual is described which has to be performed in order that the sacred power of the god becomes immanent in a pratītī. Thus, e.g., the Kumārakāvya 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.\(^{\text{19}}\)

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 ātman.

As for the connection of the sacred with places, it was dealt with in a path-breaking paper by Kees W. Bolle,\(^{\text{18}}\) 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

\(^{17}\) vāmin sarvaśṛngāḥ bhūtvā yatād prātmukhānām | tāvat bhūvam pratkācittvān bhūte

ancient (and non-Vedic) conception of a sacred power, agañka, 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 agañka dwells as its inherent supernatural force. It indeed “is universal” because it is there.¹⁰

¹⁰ 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, 1970.