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**TAMIL – SANSKRIT INTERACTION  
IN THE AGASTYA MYTH**

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## TAMIL - SANSKRIT INTERACTION IN THE AGASTYA MYTH

### 1. Interaction in India.

Indian Society, so aptly described by Tagore as an Ocean of Humanity, has been formed through the interaction and coming together of various racial, cultural and lingual streams (1,143 et seq). Six racial types have been identified; with four distinct speech-families, they have evolved 'language cultures'. The language cultures or languages too are not exclusive and are known to have influenced, each the other, in many respects.

Among these, the Kirātas are said to have touched only the fringe, by local influence. The Austric, Dravidian and Indo-European have been main partners in the interaction. The latter two with their many descendant tongues have come down to us in distinctive forms. Mutual borrowings between them have been recognized. The matter of Dravidian loanwords in Sanskrit is taken as 'unquestionably one of the most important subjects... in the history of cultural diffusion and inter-action within India' (2, 46).

These borrowings are as old as the Rigveda to start with and have continued in later ages. It is obvious that the Rigvedic borrowings themselves arose out of long contact and interaction in the earlier ages. The mechanism by which the mutual borrowings could result in radical language changes was absorption and not displacement of the peoples. 'The end result is that the languages of the two families, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian seem in many respects more akin to one another than Indo-Aryan does to the other Indo-European languages' (3, 175; 186).

The mutual influence can also be traced in the descendant languages of the two families. This writer has brought it out for Tamil and Marathi which have been held to belong to the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan Family respectively (4).

### 2. The Common Myths

The cultural absorption process could not and did not end with only lingual borrowings. Spiritual borrowings took place too (1). Speculations on world phenomena took the form of myths in all early human societies. Their interaction naturally gave rise to the common myths adopted by the resultant composite society as an integral part of its common heritage, to be handed over from generation to generation and to be held across language boundaries. Thus, the stellar constellation Pleiades probably took its Sanskrit name *matrkā* from Austric origins (1, 153). The mother-stars come to be named individually in *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* (3.1.4). They are

recommended for worship in S'atapatha Br. (2.1.2.). They become mothers to Skanda in Mbh. (3.219.15). Skanda- Kartikeya comes to be praised as Murugan in Tirumurukāṛṇṇapaṭai. He is recommended for invocation for welfare in childbirth in Caraka Samhita. It enjoins the attendant of a lady-in-pains to utter in her ears, the charm :

*Prasūṣya tvamavikliṣṭamavikliṣṭā S'ubhānane*  
*Kārtikeyadyutim putram Kārtikeyābhirakṣitam*  
Bring forth, you fair-faced female, without pains a  
painless son, having the lustre of Kartikeya and the  
protection of Kartikeya.

All this indicates the process of interaction of myths. The interaction in narration and composition of mythical episodes has been brought out by Subramoniam (6.14.)

### 3. Myths and Words

Words have been recognised as an important factor in the formation and development of myths. Either one may be origin of the other. Play on words has often led to the construction and reconstruction of mythical stories. The clever speakers of a language exploit this medium fully. Their field is greatly enlarged when two or more language - groups interact. The specialist class of literary composers allows its imagination to run riot to invent a variety of anecdotes expounding the myths for mass consumption. All this has great relevance to the Indian situation. In the past, the interaction-principle has been applied by scholars to myths in languages belonging to the same 'family'. It can be extended to the myths accepted by a composite people speaking languages of different 'families'.

As a starting point Max Muller's observations (5, 21) deserve attention, as they will apply with the substitution of 'Indian' for 'Aryan'.

The different branches of the Aryan family of speech possessed before their separation, not only common words but likewise common myths.

The best solvent to the old riddles of mythology is to be found in an etymological analysis of the names of Gods and Goddesses, heroes and heroines. Unless we hold that these names were imposed miraculously they must have had a reasonable purpose and whenever we can discover that reasonable purpose, we have come as near the very conception of Gods and Goddesses as possible

Max Muller cautioned that 'Ordinary etymological rules may not apply to undeciphered words'. He himself provided an object-lesson of this principle in the mythicised version of his own name. 'Mokṣamūlara' would defy etymology and meaning if the origin were not known. For

the Indian myths, we have to consider Tamil and Sanskrit as the interacting languages. The tentative rules that should apply in the case of these two languages need to be defined to some extent.

Linguistic criteria for borrowings from Tamil into Sanskrit have been defined by Burrow (3.164). Very briefly they are : uncertain I E etymology for the Sanskrit word, wide currency of the etymon as a basic element in Dravidian languages, some antiquity for it in Dravidian, derivability from a Dravidian root, comparative lateness of appearance of the Sanskrit word and finally applicability of possible phonetic criteria and semantic developments. Emeneau has made two significant additions. First: if the word denotes something peculiar to the Indian geographical or social scene, a Dravidian origin is more probable than the IE one and second: “Comparative simplicity and avoidance of the assumption of tortuous phonological and semantic developments should also be aimed at, following the general practice of all disciplines (Occam’s razor) and may well tip the scales for borrowing from Dravidian rather than for an IE etymology that has been suggested.’

We can see telling illustrations of the application of Emeneau’s additions in well-known myths. The classic example of Hamilton bridge in Madras being called as Ambaṭṭan bridge by the Tamil-speaking natives and therefore coming to be rechristened ‘Barber’s Bridge’ has given rise to a twentieth century myth reported by Thurston (7,49). The Max Muller - Mokṣamūlara phenomenon is mentioned above; Verrier Elwin (8, xv) alludes to the story of Kach-Mach Raja illustrating a very common tendency in name - making. According to him it is not impossible that the story (the Raja being born of the union of a tortoise and a fish) grew up out of the word rather than the word from the story.

Some myths in Marathi have been explained on these lines by the present writer, (4) as they are associated with Gods (Saraḍes’vara = Vishnu) deities and idols (the ‘ropenet’ on Vithoba’s head being from *cimili* which has the other meaning of ‘tuft of hair’ in Tamil) place-names (*Theur* from *tēūr* in Tamil rather than Sthāvara in the Puranas) or semi-religious practices (*māle*, a form of asking alms) from Māl the Dravidian deity.

In his investigations concerning the meaning of the name Vidarbha (9, 25) the highly interesting possibility struck that the As’maka myth in Mbh. was born out of similar interaction between Tamil and Sanskrit and that the myth related to the Agastya tree itself. This Paper takes the investigation further in the same direction on the basis of Vedic and Epic sources in Sanskrit, Sangham literature in Tamil and Folk traditions and Folklore in Maharashtra and elsewhere. The interpretations draw upon and are supported by the botanical and medicinal properties of plants enumerated in standard works.

#### 4. Trees in Life, Literature and Myth

Trees have occupied a dominating place in the life and culture of every people in one or the other state of their evolution from primitively up. And there appears to be a close connection between the myth and veneration about a tree with its utility in everyday life, its properties as a medicine, its aesthetic appeal or in short any striking character, the 'vibhūtimat sattva' as the Gita puts it, which manifested its divinity to the primitive mind. This can be seen in all literatures handed down to us from the earliest times.

About the Vedic literature it has been stated that 'At the back of the Vedic priest, there always lurked the primitive magician-medicine man' (14,25). Unfortunately, uncertainty of the meanings and interpretations of words and hymns denies us the possibility of unravelling these connections from the texts alone. The position is not so bad in respect of ancient Tamil literature, whose idiom and vocabulary can be understood fairly unambiguously even to-day. This coupled with the cultural and lingual interaction, provides us the equivalent of a bilingual document that helps in deciphering an unknown script. The literary references can be cross-checked with the remnant folk traditions in Maharashtra which is the acknowledged meeting ground of the two dominant cultures in India, Aryan and Dravidian.

The Tolkāppiyam division of literary themes into *Tinai*'s (15) is itself dominated by names of trees. Of these, 'marutam' signifying the region of plains with fields, stands for the tree *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Saj* in Hindi and *Ain* in Marathi. Its leaves are eaten by cattle and its gum is used as incense and as a cosmetic. The gum is said to be eaten by Santals (18, 304; 427). The Gonds and Bhumias of Eastern Mandla believe that their God resides in this tree, among others (20, 383; 386). That there can be mix-up in the traditions about two trees can be realised from the fact that the botanical name for *marutam* is also given as equivalent for *venkai* (DED 4541).

The *Kāntal* flower (*Gloriosa superba*, Marathi *Kaḷalāvī*) is considered specially sacred to Murugan in Sangham literature (13, 257). The plant flowered, it is said, at a time usually considered auspicious for marriage. The sanctity appears to have arisen from its medicinal properties rather than its beautiful flowers with finger-like petals: Its root powdered and reduced to paste is applied to the navel, suprapubic region and vagina to promote labour; starch obtained from the root by washing is used in gonorrhoea. Its use as an abortifacient has been mentioned by old Sanskrit writers (16, 108). The Marathi name is in fact derived from this quality of the plant; *kaḷa*: smarting pain, labour pains and *lāvī*: that which causes (19.472). Caraka's injunction for prayer to Kārtikeya is of a piece with *Kāntal* being sacred to Murugan.

*Atampu* (*Ipomoea biloba* Marathi *Maryādavela*) gets passing mention in Sangham literature (25). It is a prostrate creeper with large rose-purple flowers common throughout Maharashtra state on sandy sea shores, where it serves to bind the sand. In some villages of the Konkan, this creeper is twined round the cot of a Hindu mother on the sixth day after her confinement to

serve as a protection against the visit of *Satavī* (the sixth? Goddess of the child's destiny). No authority is found for this in the sacred books (18, 489). It is possible to postulate that the Tamil and Marathi names signify the same meaning: the quality of the creeper to obstinately hold against attack; and that the folk tradition in Konkan is a remnant of a common partly forgotten ritual based originally on this quality.

## 5. The Agastya Myth

'Agastya is another seer mentioned in the RV'. This is all the mention that Agastya receives in Macdonell's Vedic Mythology (10, 147). Comparing this to the eleven pages devoted to Soma, the microscopic position of Agastya in Vedic lore can be well appreciated. This is in striking contrast to the achievements with which he is credited in the Epics and in the Tamil tradition (28). On their strength, Agastya has generally been considered the pioneer Aryan sage who made *Dakṣiṇāpatha* habitable. Echoes of the Agastya-Lopāmudrā dialogue (RV 1.179) and the hymns ascribed to Agastya (RV. 1.170, 1. 187) are preserved in the Epics: Lopāmudrā is Agastya's wife; at her commanding demands, Agastya approached king after king for fulfillment of her desire for wealth and splendour as precondition to union; he consumed and digested the demon Vātāpi and subjugated his brother Ilvala; in aid of the Gods, he gulped the ocean (*Varuṇālayam*) and had the Kāleya demons put to death or abscond to the netherworld. The Epic stories of Agastya's exploits against Vātāpi and the ocean have been absorbed in folklore, often in mixed-up versions. For example, the story current in Chitpāvanas, among whom 'the Nordic type predominates' (1,146) adds a third demon, Ātāpi to Ilvala and Vātāpi, sends Ilvala into hiding in the ocean and moralizes how as a result of this vicious company the ocean came to be gulped and urinated down by Agastya (29, 161).

History has been sought in the Agastya story. He is stated to be the only historical figure among Agastyas, a contemporary of Alarka; a sage who erected a hermitage in the trans-Vindhyan region; his story is said to be narrating the important part played by Brahmanas in the spread of Aryan civilisation over Southern India (1. 292; 319).

## 6. Agastya in Tamil

Knowing the deep and intimate relation between myths and words, it is well for us to consider the words in Tamil related phonetically to Agastya, but basically Dravidian in origin. We have (11, 12, 13)

*Akattiyān*

name of the sage Agastya.

<i>akam</i>	mind, sexual pleasure, 'marutam, love-theme, house, inside (cf Marathi <i>aga</i> : word for addressing a female)
<i>akattan</i>	householder (cf Marathi <i>agatya</i> : regard, consideration)
<i>akattiṭu-tal</i>	to hold in the arms, embrace
<i>akarci</i>	ascetic life, separation.
<i>akatti</i>	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i> (Marathi <i>Agastā</i> , <i>Hadagā</i> , <i>Heṭi</i> )
<i>akal</i>	to increase, grow, spread, extend (cf Marathi <i>aghal</i> <i>paghal</i> : extensive)
<i>akal</i>	small earthen pot having a wide mouth.
<i>akal</i>	to excavate, dig out
<i>accam, acci</i>	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i>
<i>accan</i>	father
<i>accam</i>	dread, terror (Malayalam <i>awe</i> cf.: Marathi <i>acambā</i> : surprise, amazement),
<i>Potiyil Muniyan</i>	the sage Agastya.
<i>potiyil, potuyil</i>	Common meeting place of village elders, structure built around a Banyan or Marutam ( <i>Terminalia tomentosa</i> ) tree, the deity resided in it in the stump called the <i>kantu</i> (cf. Marathi <i>Khandu</i> , <i>Khanduba Khandoba</i> ); the hill abode of Agastya

The Tolkappiyam details *akattinai* or love-themes of seven kinds of which *peruntinai* or unequal love is one. The *Paripāṭal* (11.11) describes how the star Agastya having arisen, appears like fighting with the asterism *Mithuna*.

The most striking feature is the similarity of words denoting the sage and a particular tree.

## 7. Agastya the Tree

As in the illustrations given above in S.4, so for Agastya the tree, we can correlate the character, quality and utility of it as described in **16, 17, 18, 19** with some of the myths connected with Agastya, the sage.

Agastya, *Sesbania grandiflora* is a fast growing tree grown about temples. The association with temples is in itself, highly suggestive of the sanctity attached to the tree. This, therefore, provides us the first clue toward identification of the tree with the sage.

‘Some people use the leaves and flowers of this plant for *puja* of *pindas*... at the time of *shradh*’ (**16**, 495). This applies to Maharashtra as much as to Tamilnadu. Besides exhibiting a common cultural bond between the two peoples, it is one more indication of a common ancestry. The association with ancestor-worship is very significant. This should suggest the primeval pre-religion regard for the tree as a symbol of the departed souls. It is the identity of ‘*accam*’ the tree with ‘*accan*’ the father(s). This is supported by Tolkappiyam (*Eluttu*: 82) which mentions ‘nine words which belong to neuter gender where *n* will not change place with m’ (**15**, 37) and *accam* is not one of them.

How this identity came about can be easily seen. Agastya is a short - lived tree six to nine meters high, which means very fast-growing. It is ‘flowering and fruiting at all seasons of the year.’ The flowers are white and red and very showy. In fact, it has the largest flower of the pod-bearing trees, a fact which has been recognised in its botanical name ‘*grandiflora*’. Significantly enough, this feature has also been immortalised in its name ‘*heti*’ in the Vidarbha dialect of Marathi. *Heṭi* can only be derived from Tamil *eṭu* meaning, simply, ‘flower’, or The Flower.

All these characteristics make the tree a symbol of prosperity, spread or extension and transience too. These are the features depicted by many of the Tamil words phonetically close to *Akattiyān*.

The tree is ‘cultivated’ in many parts of India but it is ‘indigenous’ from Malaya to North Australia. Does this fact provide some clue to the identification of the primitive tribe which worshipped it or held it as a totem? Many tribes even today have their own trees to be planted at common meeting places in the villages. This is what Agastya could have been. *Potiyān* (*Potuvan*), his Tamil name is directly related to: *poti* the meeting place in the village and *potu* : general public.

## 8. Agastya the Father in Rigveda

The identity of Agastya with *pitar*’s (ancestors) can be substantiated by the Rigveda. The RV Hymn 1.187 containing eleven *rks* is ascribed to Agastya and is assumed to have victuals



(*annam*) as its subject. Religious tradition prescribes its singing at the feeding of Brahmins for the *śrāddha* ceremonies (21, 179). The Hymn is in fact addressed to ‘The Father’ (*pitā*) and the meaning ‘Food’ has perhaps been thrust on it, when its origins were forgotten. If we imagine the primitive tribe making its offerings to the totem Agastya symbolising the ancestors, with a sacrificial fire under the *poti* tree, just as its present-day descendants do with other trees (20), we get at the real content of the hymn : ancestor-worship.

The epithets applied to the ‘*accan*’ are seen to apply to ‘*accam*’ also. The forefather’s three-fold powers (*trito vi ojasā*) may signify the fruit's quality of curing ‘Tridosh’ pains. Tasteful and sweet (*svādu, madhu*) should be the fruit that improves taste and the flowers that are cooling and improve appetite. And so are the Father's elixirs contained in the pollens (*tava tye pīto rasā rajamsi anu viṣṭhitah*) The bark of the tree is very astringent and is recommended as a tonic; so that they who taste those juices, go about with their heads held high (*tuvigrīvā iverate*). ‘Our protector be’ (*asmākamavitā bhava*) is an apt prayer to the Tree of which the leaves are alexiteric i.e. protective against infection (16, 193). That the leaves are anthelmintic or destructive to worms is perhaps alluded in ‘with your beautiful banner, one may, with impunity slay the reptile’ (...*cāru ketunā tavāhimavasāvadhīt*). In the seventh rk there is an explicit request to the forefathers to come and partake of all that is provided (*aram bhakṣyāyāgamyāḥ*)

The rks 8 to 10 show change of meter. All three contain a refrain addressed to *Vātāpi*. Both the refrain and reference to *Vātāpi* are important in that, they provide the link between RV and Mbh in the matter of the latter-day mythical story. As Geldner has remarked, the meaning of *Vātāpi* is ‘unanalysed and uncertain’ (22, 286). Treatment of the Hymn as directed to primeval ancestor-worship through victual offerings enables application of the interaction principle in deciphering the meaning of *Vātāpi*.

It is suggested that *Vātāpi* is not ‘the body’ as Sayana interprets it, nor ‘friend of *Vāta*’ as Geldner proposes, but a preparation used as offering; that it is a *sanskritisation* of the primitive Dravidian description of the preparation - which is even to-day the normal one for *śrāddha* ceremonies. Tamil *vāṭṭu* : roasted or fried flesh or vegetable; *vāṭṭal*: anything roasted; *vāṭṭam* : sumptuousness; *appam* : round cake of rice flour and sugar fried in ghee; all these taken together would lead to *vāṭṭa appam* - *vāṭṭāppam* - *vāṭṭappa* - *vātāpi* - a simplified sanskritised name. The original folk-prayer perhaps entreated the fried *appam* to grow sumptuous (*pīva id bhava*) and offer nourishment to the ancestors as well as their progeny since it was stuffed with all kinds of fluids and herbs (*apāmoṣadhīnām parimśam*) and the products of milk and barley (*gavāśīro yavāśīro*).

*Vātāpi* also contains *Karambha* which has been interpreted to be a barley-flour ball (*saktupiṇḍa*). One is not convinced that such a ball by itself could be preventor of maladies (*vṛkka*) as Sayana puts it. *Karambha* as a herbal product (*oṣadhi*) to be added to food would fit in better. Tamil

*karampai* is a low-spreading, spiny, evergreen shrub; equivalent of *cirukalā* which has *Carissa spinarum* as its botanical name. Along with the similar species *Carissa carandas*, it has the common Marathi name *Karavanda*. Its 'raw fruit is made into pickle. It is also employed in tarts and puddings; for this purpose it is superior to any other Indian fruit' (18, 365). It is to be noted here that this plant has not been included in the medicinal plants (16).

## 9. Arboreal Matrimony

The dialogue between Agastya and Lopāmudra (RV, 1.179) has been variously interpreted. Corresponding to Agastya, Lopāmudra could be a tree as well. Tamil *iluppai* - *mutirai* provides the most probable basis for language-interaction. The initial *i* comes in because Tamil words may not start with *l*. (15, 61-65). For sanskritisation, the initial *i* is elided and the almost universal equivalence of Tamil *i* with non-existence of vowel in Sanskrit (*tir* = *tr*) is employed. *Iluppai* is *Bassia latifolia* or *Madhuka indica* - the Mahua tree. *Mutirai* means a leguminous plant - a meaning which applies to the Madhuka tree. More significant is the base root *mutir* : to grow old, which fits in with the description of Lopāmudrā in the hymn.

*Iluppai* is a popular temple-tree in Tamil country but it is essentially a native of the forests of Central India and thrives in the Deccan trap of Maharashtra. It has been alluded in Sangham literature quite often (25). More than that, it is extremely popular among many Central Indian tribes who have a large store of folklore connected with it (8). It is a kind of *kalpavṛkṣa* to the Adivasi, providing him with food, medicine, drink and light. The Bhumia's main God resides in the Mahua among others (20, 383). It is planted in the *Devkhulla* or the public worship-place of the clan *Irpachi* (23, part II). In fact the clan-name itself is the name of the tree. A branch of the tree is placed by many tribes as the wedding post round which the bride and bride-groom must process (8, 335). This association of the tree with marriage has continued among the Hindu elite as well, as references from Kalidasa would show (18, 668). Madhuka flowers strung together were, considered decoration for the bride Parvati in Kumara-sambhavam (7, 12) or the garland of acceptance by the *svayamvara* bride Indumati in *Raghuvamśa* (6.25).

Liquor distilled from Mahua is an important ingredient in the religious and social ritual of the tribals. On Diwali day the Gond and Bhumia pour a full cup of liquor on the ground, with the prayer 'Ancestors, drink' (20, 73)

The expressed oil is used for lighting or cooking by the tribals. The oil is considered sacred for the lamps to be lighted in the evening worship of deities in Tamilnadu.

It is no wonder that this deified tree of versatile utility required to be married. *Tulasi* marriage is even now prevalent in Maharashtra. The custom has its origin in primitive ritual. When a mango tree yields its first fruit, the Gonds perform a ceremonial wedding for it. They regard the tree as

the child of the owner, It is considered improper that the tree should give its fruit before its marriage is celebrated (20, 491).

The Agastya tree could be a suitable match for the *Iluppai* bride. This could be fully confirmed if direct evidence was available about a tribe or clan with Agastya for its deity or totem. Indirect evidence is, however, available. The list of Gotras among the Central Indian Tribes shows one as *Ajam- Ahka - Ahake* (23). This Reference favours the assumption that the clan-system is at least as old as the use of the Dravidian language by the tribes. If so, the suggestion of Fuchs to derive *Ahka* from *ahi* : dragon or serpent would need reconsideration. *Ahka* is far more near to *akam*, *accam* and *Akatti* in Tamil.

### 10. Fact and Fancy in the Dialogue Hymn

The Agastya-Lopāmudrā dialogue in RV 1.179 can be put in the *akattiṇai* (Love-theme) category of Tolkāppiyam. All the interpretations given to it accept its evocative content related to conjugal union and sexual satisfaction. Geldner sees in its references, to steering a ship (*abhyajāva*) and digging with shovels (*khanamānaḥ khanitrah*), repeated images of sex fulfilment. He feels that the discipline brought in by the Indian tradition rests on a misunderstanding (22, 257). So this is a duet in the strict sense of the term.

The reference to two *varṇas* in the last *ṛk* is considered by Geldner, as possibly related to both castes, of Agastya the *Brāhmaṇa* and his wife who was a princess (22, 258). Could not the two *varṇas* refer to two primitive tribes as above? That would bring out the real original purpose of the hymn: a folk song sung at a festival, men and women alike taking part in a kind of fertility rite and prayer for progeny and prowess (*prajāmapatyam balam*). The festive ritual is extant in a modified form in Maharashtra, the *hadagā* (Agastya tree) worship undertaken at the time of the sun's station in the *Hasta* asterism. As will be seen later, the connection between Agastya and *Hasta* is not a twist of word-mythology, though '*hadagā*' is considered to be derivative of *hastagā*, and pictures of *hastins* (elephants) are worshipped on the occasion. Far more striking is the content of songs, sung on this occasion, now restricted to young females. References to the 'hairy poodle' occur in them, reminding us of the repeated allusions to *vṛṣaṇah* in the RV dialogue.

Man the mortal is filled with excessive desire (*pulukāmaḥ*), it is said. '*Pulu*' is equated to '*puru*' by Sayana. Tracing it to Tamil may provide a more satisfying meaning. *pul* : *flesh*, *pullu* : to embrace or unite, will explain *pulukāma* as one who ardently desires sexual union, one who has carnal desire which gives rise to the feeling of guilt or sin (*sīmāgah*).

The 'ur-folksong could very well be describing the material qualities of the two botanical species *Sesbania grandiflora* and *Madhuka indica*. The cut and dry scientific descriptions correspond to the highly explicit folk-imagery so nicely as to leave no doubt about the identity of the trees with the deified personalities.

*Iluppai-Lopāmudrā-Madhuka indica* is (17, 173) a large evergreen tree with a yellowish grey, slightly furrowed bark. Its leaves are clustered and the flowers crowded near the ends of branches. So, age alters the grace of limbs (*mināti śriyam jarimā tanūnām*). The flowering time is in spring (April-May); the autumn's days and nights and dawns only advance the age (*śaradah dosāvasto uṣasi jarayantīh*).

*Agastya-Sesbania grandiflora*, is short-lived, about half the height of iluppai, flowering at all times of the year, hence eternally young. Both factors make iluppai conscious of her old age (*jarimā*). The light brown smooth bark gives *agastya* the young ascetic's look. The tree bears showy flowers of two hues, white and pink: the grim ascetic rears both the shades (*ubhau varṇau ṛṣirugraḥ puṣa*) - the white of penance and the pink of desire.

## 11. Soma, the Iluppai Juice

The mention of *Lopāmudrā* occurs, like that of *Agastya*, only once in the hymn (*Lopāmudrā vṛṣaṇam nī riṇāti*) The activity or achievement ascribed to her in it is characteristic and noteworthy. 'This *Lopāmudrā* may consummately go unto me the producer of semen' (Sāyana) or 'Lopāmudrā draws the bull out' (Geldner) are both meanings implying an invigorating quality in *Lopāmudrā*. This confirms her identity with *Iluppai: Madhuka indica*, for its 'flowers mixed with milk are useful in impotence due to general debility'. (16, 136).

There may not then remain much to doubt that this is the Soma referred in the very next *rk* (*imam nu somam*) ! Any lurking doubt can be set at rest by simple apposition of the Soma lore abstracted by Macdonell (10, 104) and the plant's descriptions given by the Gazeteer (16, 17, 18) supplemented by the folklore collected by Verrier Elwin (8) given below in that order, separated by the colon (:).

The part of the Soma plant which is pressed, is called *ansu*, shoot or stalk : The pedicels or stalks are 5 to 7.5 cm long, sub-erect, anthers 16-20 in two series, flowers yield on distillation a spirit. : The Dhanwars' Bara Deo told Kalar and Kalarin, 'Bring flowers from the Mahua tree, soak them in a new pot ...'

The colour of the plant and juice as well as of the God, is described as brown (*babhru*) or ruddy (*aruna*) but most frequently as tawny (*hari*) : A large evergreen tree, its bark is dark yellowish-

grey; inner bark red milky; the stalks are ruddy, petals have formed into a tube which is yellowish.

Soma is mixed with water in the vats...In several passages the addition of both water and milk is mentioned. Soma is the fertiliser of the waters, also an impregnator; hence he is a bestower of fertility : Flowers yield on distillation a spirit, mixed with milk are useful in impotence : Budra Sadra and his wife gathered mahua flowers, put them in a new earthen pot, poured in water, and set it on one side.

Its mysteriously exhilarating and invigorating action surpassing that of ordinary food or drink led to Soma being regarded as a divine drink...of which when pressed by men and mixed with milk, all the Gods drink. This confers immortality on the Gods and on men. Thus Soma naturally has medicinal power also : The plant is cooling, fattening, aphrodisiac; cures leprosy, ulcers, fatigue; heals wounds. Flowers are good in heart diseases. Fruit is tonic, cures blood diseases, thirst, bronchitis, consumption : Mahaprabhu came to a Raja's feast given to his Bondo and Gadaba subjects and said, 'why are you so dull ?' They replied, 'There is no fire in us.' Mahaprabhu showed them how to distil spirit from the mahua flowers and from that day there has been laughter and dancing in the world.

When imbibed, Soma stimulates the voice. This is doubtless the reason why Soma is called 'lord of speech' Vācaspati or leader of speech : A Juang folk-tale has it that because the mahua tree grew from the place where the Brahmin his dog, the tiger and jackal were burnt, so when a man drinks mahua spirit he first speaks cleverly and sweetly like a Brahmin.

The Soma plant is several times described as dwelling in the mountains or growing in the mountains...This is confirmed by the statement of the Avesta that Haoma grows on the mountains. : For habitat the plant prefers dry sandy and rocky soils, thrives in Deccan trap. It is common in Konkan – a mountainous region. : In the Lanjhia Saora folk-tale, Budra Saora and his wife lived high up on the Kinching Mountain where they could not get enough water. So Kitting gave them two mahua seeds... With the drink from its flowers they got drunk.

Soma has been brought from heaven, by the eagle. The eagle brought the Soma or madhu to Indra. : In the Baiga folktale, Bhimsen, the great giant, came to a mahua tree that had hollow full of liquor. On the branches were sitting every kind of birds who had been drinking it and nodding their heads. Bhimsen drank too and brought it back for Bhagvan to drink. And they all drank the liquor out of leaf-cups.

This hypothesis about Soma based on Tamil - Sanskrit interaction can thus be tested far more easily than others based on IE traditions.

## 12. Agastya and Ilvala.

The silken thread of the Rigvedic episode of Agastya and Lopāmudrā was continued unbroken in spinning the minor narratives, the *upākhyānas* in the Epics. It is notable that these narratives do not form integral parts or indispensable portions of the heroes' lives. They occur as legends connected with places of pilgrimage associated with the name of Agastya. Quite naturally, true to their character of *sthalapurāṇas* they combined venerated vedic myths and names with local folklore and folk-tales. In doing so, the bard-poets made full use of language-interactions and contrived at the same time to emphasize traditional Brahmin supremacy, to describe the mores of the priestly class and to allegorise their preoccupation with feasts of ancestor-worship in mythical flights of imagination. Most of these narratives are contained; in chapters 94 to 103, *Āranya*, Mbh. Critical Edition. We are able to recognise the various strands in the fabric by a close analysis of the contents.

In contrast to the traditional interpretation of the Rigvedic dialogue, the Epic narrative depicts Agastya as the keener of the two on begetting a son. That this was desired for deliverance of his own ancestors from the depths of hell, is perhaps indicative of the connection with ancestor-worship retained in social memory though forgotten in literal meanings forced on the vedic hymns.

We get the first evidence of Tamil-Sanskrit interaction, in the mention that Lopāmudra was a creation of Agastya's own, handed over by him to Vidarbharāja for being brought up. As names of kings and their lands can be interchanged, Vidarbharāja could be *Vidarbha*. This word does not have a satisfactory Sanskrit etymology. This writer has suggested (9, 33) that Vidarbha is a sanskritisation of Tamil *vitarp̄pu* : fear, which is the equivalent of *accam*. And therefore, Vidarbha is Agastya himself or itself. It is well to remind here that Vidarbha's spoken language describes agastya to this day, as *heti*, from Tamil *ētu* : flower. The bard-poet, who could well be proficient in both languages, was enabled easily to turn into adoption, what would otherwise have been an incest.

Another reversal of roles of the characters is evident in Lopāmudrā's unwillingness to yield to Agastya's advances while she yet was obliged to wear barks and ascetic garments. This is in keeping with the usual development of themes in folk-tales - a poor Brahmin's spouse exhorting him to go abroad and acquire wealth.

This folk-character is seen maintained in the style of narration of Agastya's encounters with the four kings in succession (Mbh. 3.96). Srutarvan, Vadhryasva and Trasadasyu, son of Purukutsa. each in his turn presented to Agastya, his accounts in which income and expense were equal, leaving no scope for charity; and each one accompanied him to all the succeeding donors! The three kings and Agastya finally came to beg of Ilvala, the brother of *Vātāpi*. *Vātāpi* serves as the link between the Rigvedic hymn (1.187) and the epic narrative.



Ilvala appears to be a folk-tale character. Tamil *ila*, *ilavam*, *ilavu* mean the red-flowered silken tree, *Bombax malabaricum*, *śālmali* in Sanskrit and *sāvāra* in Marathi. The inner bark of the tree yields a good fiber suitable for cordage.

The seeds yield the so-called red silk-cotton. The fiber though strong is too short and too soft to be spun; it is largely used for stuffing pillows etc. In the textile industry, this fiber could only be used to mix with others, imparting a silky gloss to the fabrics (18, 69). No wonder, Agastya was forced to approach him to satisfy the demands of a king's daughter for furnishing the nuptial chambers as sumptuously as at her father's.

The names of the other three kings are lifted from the RV, in all probability, with the object of endowing a popular tale with the impressive garb of ancient religion. For, the hymns in which they occur have little to do with Agastya in content or composition. They are certainly eulogized as donors or receivers of charity; that may be why they were considered as suitable nearest conversions for originals in Tamil, rules of etymology notwithstanding.

Differences in redactions go to justify such a view. They might represent the innovative genius of different bards reciting the verses while the memories of the nexus between the folktale and the verse-myth were not yet faded. The name *Vadhryaśva* occurs as *Bradhnaśva* in some texts like the Gita Press Edition. The Tamil noun which could answer the search for a possible origin is *pirantai*, *pirattai*, *purantai* meaning the square-stalked vine, *Vitis quadrangularis*, *Kāṇḍavela* in Marathi. Its stem and root yield a strong fibre (18,32). It grows in the driest parts of Maharashtra and is also considered an ornamental plant (18,522).

*Śrutarvan* is an easy derivation, with the suppression of short i from Tamil *cirutūru* : thicket, bushes, small shrub. The very first to be approached by Agastya, it had sufficient justification to express inability to oblige him in his search for *tuni* : cloth - which incidentally, easily converted into *dhanam* in the Sanskrit rendering.

Tamil *tiri*: roll or twist of cloth, and *catai*: ironwood tree, could come together in a narrative (with *cataiccu* as colloquial form of *cataittu*), dealing with fabrics; for, iron wood - *Memecylon edule*, Marathi *Anjan*, *Lokhaṇḍī* – is a small handsome tree of which the leaves are employed in South India for dyeing a delicate yellow (18, 216). The two words together could provide basis for the name *Trasadasyu* of vedic origin.

We can thus reconstruct the folk-tale of a people whose life and culture were founded on intimate knowledge and intensive utilization of trees, which were in turn endowed with mythical if not mystical qualities : Agastya was married to Iluppai. He desired to know her. She asked for rich apparel. The poor Agastya approached a thicket. It had nothing to give. They went to Pirantai, for she could give the fibre. She said she had none. They went to the ironwood tree, for it could dye the cloth. Ironwood declined too. They went to Ilvala. He had the soft fluffy floss. He invited them to a feast.

### 13. Agastya destroys the Demons

At this stage the myth-maker is in familiar domain - that of feasts and feedings. His imagery dwells on the popular and pious preparations enticing to the point of over-consumption and causing pains thereafter, almost demoniac in character. The common belief of the existence of demoniac powers in the yellow-flowered silk-cotton tree (26) was utilized to depict Ilvala as demon and Vātāpi as his brother. This belief must be obviously based on the observation of the ethereal *ilava* floss moving through the high air. The floss is known as *mhātārī* (old woman) in Marathi. The Epic's narrative informs us of Ilvala's golden chariots – an explicit mythical description of the *golden ilava* seed propagated by the airborne floss. It is also said that Agastya destroyed Ilvala by a mere blow of breath (*hunkāreṇaiva*). The fluffy floss should certainly call for no mightier means!

It is significant that Vātāpi is narrated to have been turned into a goat- its flesh could form part of the preparation of that name. it used to be Ilvala's trick to feed a Brahmin with Vātāpi and then call him out by name. Vātāpi would then split the Brahmin's behind and come out laughing (*tasya pārśvam vinirbhidya* - Mbh. 3.94.9). The trick did not succeed with Agastya in whose bottoms, only wind was generated (*tato vāyuh prādurabhūdadhastasya mahātmanah*). These two revolting physiological descriptions float partly on the 'vāta' portion of *vātāpi* but perhaps wholly on the medical properties of Agastya : 'Its root removes *vata*, flowers are useful in biliousness, fruit is laxative and cures Tridosh pains; in Cambodia the juice of leaves and flowers is used in diarrhea and dysentery'. (16, 193).

Similar correlations enable us to understand the myth of Agastya 'gulping the ocean' in its mundane perspective. The expression as put in Agastya's mouth, after the exploit, is 'I have ingested that water' (*jīṛṇam taddhi mayā, toyam* - Mbh. 3.103.16). Bark of the Agastya tree could be relied upon to accomplish the feat in respect of the salt-water in the human body, for the bark is an astringent: a medicine used to contract muscular fibres and to constrict vessels to restrain discharge (16, 234).

The Kāleyas who used to attack Brāhmaṇas at night and hide into the saltwater (*varuṇālayam*) were slain after the ocean turned dry. Dead, they looked adorned with golden sovereigns earrings and bracelets. The survivors, burrowing into the earth (*vidīrya vasudhām devīm*) vanished into the netherworld. These descriptions would strongly resemble those of worms. The indigestible leaves of Agastya being anthelmintic or destructive to worms could be employed to disgorge them. The name *kāleya* could imply this meaning if derived from Tamil *kāl*: to vomit, disgorge; and *kālai* : warrior, which also provide scope for word-play so common in the formation of myths.



## 14. Kalmāṣapāda and Madayantikā

The offspring of the union of Agastya and Lopāmudrā has been called Idhmavāha (Mbh. 3.97.27). That this name occurs in RV 9.26 in a hymn addressed to soma would only reinforce the hypotheses about Lopāmudrā and Soma: But another detail mentioned in passing is of importance. It is said, the foetus grew for seven years (*garbho vavṛdhe sapta śāradān* - Mbh. 3.97.22). Thereby hangs another tale – somewhat similar.

That is the tale of *Kalmāṣapāda* accursed by Vasiṣṭha and a Brāhmaṇa's wife, to be denied consummation of union with his wife *Madayantikā*. She had, therefore, to conceive through *niyoga* by Vasiṣṭha. This foetus remained inside her for full twelve years. She had to be delivered of it by ripping her side with a stone (*aśman*) whence was the baby son named as *Aśmaka*. It was he who established Paudanya-interpreted to be a city by that name. Another *upākhyāna* tells us that *Kalmāṣapāda* had stone-legs and that *Aśmaka* and *Mūlaka* father and son, founded the countries by these names, interpreted to correspond with Vidarbha.

The myths appear to have been framed, among other things, to explain the name of *Aśmaka* country, which scholars are inclined to identify by its Prakrit name *Assaka* which appears in the *Suttānipata* also. The direct relationship of *Assaka* with *accam* needs almost no exposition. It is also supported by the mention of *Accha* country in the *Jaina Bhagavatī Sūtra*. The 'stone-content' of the stories can also be explained by the Interaction principle. Tamil *kal* : stone and *māccu* : fetters, can explain the name *Kalmāṣapāda* : one who has stone-fettered legs. If we take, instead of *māccu* another similar word *mācu* : spot, the spotted stone-legs will become evident. It is well to remember here that a satisfactory Sanskrit-based etymology of the word *Kalmāṣa* is not available.

The bard-poets' love of puns on words and their enormous capacity for inventing meanings for strange words and for inventing strange words for concealing meanings are all well-known. *Kalmāṣapāda* can be analysed to substantiate these phenomena thriving to perfection in a society with a common culture but multiple languages. This word would then represent a mixed compound employing words from different languages with adapted pronunciations irrespective of the fineries in the language of origin and alterations in meanings that such adaptations might produce for the word in the other language.

Tamil *kāl*: leg or support, is equivalent to Sanskrit *pāda*. *Māci (k) kāl*:. support in the month of *māci* or January-February. *Kal*: stone can be easily mixed up in pronunciation with *kaḷ* : toddy for which another usual word is *veṛi* which could pass for *veṛri*: betel leaf, in a mixed society with undefined modes for pronunciation of the alveolar *r* (*Veṛri* is pronounced *vetti* instead of the 'grammatically correct' *veṛri*, even to-day). *Kalmāṣapāda* thus represented to the poet, the

Agastya tree of which the seeds are sown in the *mācī* month so that the tree grows up to support the betel-vine in due course.

*Madayantikā* (wife of Kalmāṣapāda) is the Sanskrit name for *Millingtonia hortensis*, Tamil *Kāṭṭumalli*. It is a handsome evergreen fast-growing tree. It is believed to be indigenous in Burma and the Malay Archipelago. More important is the fact that its seeds are rarely met with in India. Therefore, for propagation, are used quantities of suckers which it produces from the roots. It is this quality and practice of cultivation which provided the exotic genius of the bard, the roots for *niyoga* and prolonged period between conception and delivery (bearing of seed and propagation by it) and forced delivery by cutting with a stone (propagation by cutting the suckers for which sharp flint could be employed).

Iluppai is not propagated in this manner. Why, then, was Lopāmudrā made to bear for seven years? The reason appears to lie in the similarity of the flowers of the two trees of which the illustrations can be seen in (27). The tribal totem relationship of Madayantikā with Agastya as tree might have been similar to that of Iluppai. Mixed up imagery should have led to this anti-natural allusion in Lopāmudrā's case. The similar case of *marutam* and *venkai* described in S. 4 may be recalled.

## 15. Agastya in the Heavens

Human societies have commonly held celestial objects in respect and also worshipped them. The Taittiriya Samhita (5.4.1) mentions the belief : 'Of the Righteous are these the glows what are asterisms' (*sukṛtām vā etāni jyotiṣi yannakṣatrāṇi*) It is therefore, no wonder that a prominent star in the south firmament and Agastya the sage in popular imagination have been identified with each other.

The influence of the star on the myth can be seen in the fact that Agastya or Canopus as he is known in the West does not find a place in Indo-European mythology. The reason given is that in the regions north of 40<sup>0</sup> of latitude, the star is not visible to the observer (30, 69).

The name Canopus is, however, associated with Egyptian culture. Canopus is stated to mean an Egyptian human-headed vase for holding the entrails of the embalmed body. Its derivation as a star is given from the Greek *Kanopos*, Menelaus' steersman who died at Canopus in Egypt, was stellified as Canopus and identified with an Egyptian God worshipped in the form of a jar with human head (Chambers' Dictionary). We may compare this with the mode of Agastya worship : An Agastya image made of *kāśa* grass and flowers is placed on an earthen jar (*kumbha*) overnight. The offering is with curd and unsplit rice (*akṣatā*) and the image is disposed away into a pool in the morning (33, 148).

This gives us a clue to the ‘birth of Agastya in the Kumbha’. We first consider the phonetically similar Tamil words, *akal*: small earthen pot having a wide mouth, *akaḷam* : jar, large earthen pot, and also ‘incorporeity’. It is quite conceivable that the myth symbolises the associations of jars or pots in worship - in ancestor worship. The traditional association of South is with ancestors and Yama the Lord of Death. The period of the Sun’s passage toward the South (*dakṣiṇāyanam*) is assigned for the ancestors (*yatra dakṣiṇā-vartate pitṛṣu tarhi bhavati – S’atapatha Br 2.1. 3, dakṣiṇāyaṇāt pitṛlokam pratipadyante - Nirukta Ch.14*). The megaliths have been the most characteristic of South Indian monuments from prehistory and allusions to their funerary practices are found in Sangham literature. (Ancient) Indian astronomers give rules for computing the heliacal rising and setting of the star Agastya on account of certain religious ceremonies to be performed when that star appears’ (32, 353). All this also fits in with the interpretation of the RV hymns of Agastya given earlier.

The *Kumbha*-ancestry of Agastya the Star and Saint in Egypt and India must then be connected with ancestor-worship. The end of *Dakṣiṇāyana* can be a proper time for this worship. As on the earth the earthen jar (*kumbha*) is connected with Agastya the symbol of ancestor-worship, so in the heavens too, the asterism Kumbha (Aquarius) should have a connection with the star Agastya. That would provide us an explanation of the common regard for agastya in Egypt and India.

Egypt is located roughly between the latitudes 22<sup>0</sup>N and 31<sup>0</sup>N, say those of the Narmada river and Simla in India. The lower Egypt region in which the grand civilisation flourished in the 3rd millenium BC is on almost the same latitude as the Vindhya region. Hence the similarity of views of the stars. It is well known that the Cheops pyramid had provision of an opening for sighting the pole-star (named Thuban, in the constellation Draco) then occupying the North polar position in the sky (c 2600 BC). To-day Thuban's celestial latitude is about 66<sup>0</sup> i.e 24<sup>0</sup> removed southwards from the present-day pole-star. These displacements are caused by the phenomenon known as precession for earth as a rotating body which turns its axis a full circle in 25800 years. This also results in changes in the stellar houses occupied by the Sun at the time of winter solstice (and at any fixed time in different years). About the time when Thuban was the pole-star, at winter solstice, end of the *Dakṣiṇāyana*, the Sun used to be in the stellar mansion Aquarius or *Kumbha*. This phenomenon established for the myth-poet the genealogy of Agastya - he as Mana arose from within the jar in which Mitravarunau discharged their semen. (RV 7.33.13)

With its present day latitude, Agastya does not appear to an observer much above the southern horizon. When Thuban was the pole-star, Agastya too was correspondingly higher above the horizon, hence prominent and venerable. Obviously, all these millennia he has been ‘going down south’ and ‘not returning’ to his original position. So, in the myth, he came to be the virtuous one who restrained Death and made the South habitable. (*nigrhya tarasā mṛtyum, . dakṣiṇā dik kṛtā yena śaraṇyā puṇyakarmaṇā -VR Aranya, 11.81*) There is the explanatory myth related by A1

Sufi, a tenth-century Persian astronomer : Sirius (*vyādha*) sent into Southern exile his brother Canopus who had married Rigel and later ruthlessly murdered her (30, 67). The similarity of basic concepts is evident.

### 16. Agastya Worship : The Folk Tradition

Folk traditions quite naturally work out a compromise between the essentials of a myth and the physical or celestial situation of the times - again mythifically treated. Agastya worship having become part of practical ritual, changes were ushered in when the astral position of Agastya underwent significant variations in the course of millenia.

“Varāhamihira says, ‘Agastya is visible at *Ujjayini* when the sun is 7<sup>0</sup> short of the sign Virgo’. But he afterwards adds, that, ‘the Star becomes visible, when the sun reaches *Hasta* and disappears when the Sun arrives at *Rohini*’ (32, 353). This throws light on the celebration of the Hadagā festivities undertaken when the Sun is in *Hasta*. It also brings out the mythific (as different from scientific) change to *Hastins* (elephants) as the painted icons for worship. Association with the sign Virgo (*virgin*, *Kanyā* in India) is probably the mythific reason why the festivities are restricted to virgins in Maharashtra.

The tradition of Agastya worship must be quite old; Varahamihira is dated 427 *saka*, say 500 AD. “A commentator on his Brihatsamhitā quotes a former Parāśara’s rule for the oblations to Agastya on his rising.... It remains probable that Parāśara’s rule was framed for north of India when the solsticial points were, as stated by that author, in the middle of *Āśleṣā* and beginning of *Dhaniṣṭhā*” (32, 355). The period of this happening has been calculated by Dikshit as 1400 BC against Colebrooke’s 1100 BC (31, 88).

This date is consistent with the inclusion of hymns to Agastya in the RV. The very fact of this inclusion in the RV presupposes that the cult or other worship of Agastya must have been current long before the compilation of the Veda itself. RV allusions to his birth in the jar (*kumbhasambhavam*) lead us to believe that this worship must have been flourishing in 3000 BC if not earlier. The S’atapatha Br. (2-1-2) allusion to *Kṛttikās* not deflecting from the East (*pracyā diśo na cyavante*) corresponds to the same period (31, 125).

### 17. Agastya’s injunction to Vindbya.

As the most ancient Indian speculations on astronomical phenomena, Dikshit has quoted the Pañcasiddhāntikā (31,8). ‘Associated with Meru, in the high heavens, is the axis; in the lower heavens is located another pole below’. (*Meroḥ samopari viyatyakṣo vyomni sthito dhruvō*

*adhō anyah* - Ch. 13, Trailokya sansthānam). The word Meru denotes the pole of the ecliptic in astronomy and also the mountain on which the Gods reside.

Consider the Tamil words *mē* : excellence; *mēl* : that which is over or above, sky, West ; *merku* : West ; *mēṛuku* : glitter, lustre. All the ideas associated with Meru are seen to be contained in the Tamil words. It is proposed that Meru is an interaction word. A Western mountain could be mythically called *Meru*.

Sangham literature alludes to ‘Caiyam’: Sahyādri, the hill called the *Merumalai* or the Western hill (13, 397). The Sanskrit name ‘Sahya’ (bearable ?) cannot be considered to be very meaningful. Tamil Caiya from *cēṇ* : height would be an appropriate base for the interaction word *Sahya adri* : the high mountain on the West (*mēṛku*), the mountain Meru.

Support is given to this suggestion by the physical fact that the Sahyādri range lies in a direction at an angle with the North-South axis, almost equal to the angle made by the ecliptic axis with the polar axis.

Vindhya in Sanskrit has been given an etymology ‘*vidadhāti karoti bhayam*’ (that which causes fear). Tamil *Viṇṭu* : sky, heaven, cloud - would by association satisfy the concept of the mountain much better. The cerebrals are considered a Dravidian gift to Indo-European. In interaction words, they would easily convert into dentals. The physical fact that the Vindhya mountain lies roughly East-West along the Tropic of Cancer ( $23\frac{01}{2}$ N Latitude) helps us decode one more myth.

Mbh (3.102) gives the story summarized below. The mythical allusions are explained in physical terms side by side:

The sun used to circumambulate the Meru mountain every day : The sun does this to the Sahyādri which lies North South. So Vindhya asked the sun to do the same to him, to which the sun replied, ‘This route was assigned to me by those by whom was this world created.’ : To move in the East-West direction and about a North-South mountain is surely the only natural course for the sun to follow. Thus spoken, the mountain (Vindhya) suddenly started growing up, wanting to block the way of the sun and moon : The latitude of the Vindhya does it effectively for the sun in the sense that the maximum northward passage of the Sun is up to this circle ; for the moon also this is roughly true.

There was, therefore, no need for consternation among the Devas who reportedly approached Agastya with the request to restrain Vindhya. Agastya is said to have told Vindhya that he was required to go South for some work, so Vindhya should maintain the status quo and await his return. And having made the settlement thus, to date this son of Varuna does not return from

the southern country (*adyāpi dakṣiṇāt deśāt vāruṇirna nivartate*). This is a direct allusion to the southern location of the star Agastya.

## 18. Conclusion

The Ramayana has described Ilvala's stratagem thus : assuming the Brāhmaṇa form and speaking the refined (Sanskrit) language, Ilvala invites the learned (*dhārayan brāhmaṇam rūpam ilvalah sanskṛtam vadan, āmantrayati viprān* VR. Aranya. 11.56). This verse almost mythically describes linguistic interaction operating in the formation of Indian myths. Because Sanskrit attained the status of the language of religion and ritual, the phenomenon is easily discernible in Sanskrit texts. Interaction has, however, not been a one-way traffic and myths in other languages have also been subject to the same process. This process has not so far been studied in depth-mainly perhaps on account of compartment-formation which has occurred as a result of the division of languages into linguistic families considered mutually exclusive. This enquiry is an effort to study the mythical words and episodes in their Indian cultural setting.

By their very nature and function, myth-words are semi-artificial creations which cannot be expected to follow rules of etymology developed on the basis of the natural evolution of languages. At most a few phonetic criteria could be developed after the study of more myths on the lines of this enquiry. A few salient observations can be made :

- ◆ On account of the sanctity imparted to Sanskrit, the general tendency is to sanskritise a word for mythicising it.
- ◆ Tamil *i* in the beginning of words containing subsequent *l r* is elided in sanskritisation.
- ◆ Tamil *i* added to a consonant is often treated as a no-value vowel and compound letters are formed in the myths.
- ◆ Addition of the *h* sound to Tamil vowels is common.
- ◆ Distinctions of *r ṛ*, *l ḷ* and *n ṅ* in original Tamil words are suppressed according to convenience.

- ◆ Between Tamil and Marathi words, equivalence of Tamil alveolar  $\underline{r} \ \underline{l} \ \underline{n}$  with Marathi  $rh \ lh \ nh$  is noticed almost as a general rule. Transference of the  $h$  sound to other components of words is often noticed.
- ◆ Dialectical variations provide fertile ground for myth words.  $t, s$  etc are substituted for  $c$ .
- ◆ Cerebrals tend to be dentalised in the interaction process.
- ◆ Mixed compounds of words from different languages are common. They may be formed by substituting words of equivalent meaning or sound from the other language.
- ◆ Etymologies should satisfy the overall meaning semantically rather than individual word-changes phonetically.

Even more than the linguistic, the cultural aspect of this process is important. We find :

- ◆ Myths are common to various peoples of different racial and linguistic stocks. They may, however, assume forms difficult to recognize and many accretions may take place in meaning and expression.
- ◆ Trees form the original subjects of numerous myths. The analysis of myths must take account of their qualities and uses for medicinal and other purposes as well as their totem values.
- ◆ Astronomical phenomena form the foundation for many myths. In dealing with them, it is necessary to visualize the conditions existing in antiquity.
- ◆ Other natural phenomena and social or production practices are also depicted in the myths. The analysis must therefore rest on a number of disciplines.
- ◆ Folk-tales of antiquity are adapted in the myths by personifying the natural objects. Personification into Vedic deities or sages is common in the Epic and Puranic literature. Latter-day folk-tales in their turn, rely on similar borrowings from the Epics and Puranas.
- ◆ In dealing with myths evolved from earlier folk-traditions, it is necessary to establish a kind of communion with poetic imagination and primitive imagery put together.
- ◆ Even the most insignificant ritual in an insignificant group may provide a key to the ancient origins of a myth. As both the civilised and the uncivilised groups of today were at one time in the primitive stage, equal weightage would have to be given to the remnant rituals amongst them.
- ◆ Myths do not necessarily depict history in the conventional sense. They can certainly be used as documents for evolving a history of the evolution of culture in history.

Interaction has been a kind of biochemical process in the formation of Indian Culture. Unidisciplinary analyses have given misleading results in the understanding of its evolution.



Interaction of disciplines is called for, also in the study of myths and of the culture they sustain, overcoming the bounds of language, race, region and time.

### REFERENCES

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### Tamil - Sanskrit Interaction In The Agastya Myth

This Paper breaks new ground in investigating the Agastya myth in Indian culture on the Interaction principle. Drawing on the Vedic and Epic sources in Sanskrit, Sangham Literature in Tamil and Folk traditions and Folklore in Maharashtra and elsewhere, it unravels the entire myth step by step on the basis of linguistic interaction, word mythology, tribal practices, botanical and medicinal properties of trees and astronomical phenomena over many ages. With poetic sensitivity and scientific rationality it puts forward hypotheses which might startle by their very simplicity- Agastya : the *accam* or *Hadagā* tree, star Canopus and a symbol of ancestor-worship; Lopāmudrā : the mahua tree; Soma : the mahua spirit, Ilvala: the Salmali tree; Vātāpi: the *vadā*, Meru : the Sahyadri range, and Vidarbha : the Agastya country.