TAMIL LITERATURE AND INDIAN CULTURE

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Features of Tamil Language

► Spoken in Tamilnadu, the southern most state in India.
Features of Tamil Language

► Belong to the Dravidian family of languages.

► One of the classical languages of India.

► The earliest written record is Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions dated to 3rd century BCE.

► Possess the oldest literature among the Dravidian languages known as ‘Sangam’ literature dated between 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE.
EIGHT ANTHOLOGY (ettuthogai)

- Narrinai
- Kurunthogai
- Ainkurunuru
- Akananuru
- Purananuru
- Pathirruppathu
- Kalithogai
- Paripadal
‘Sangam’ Literature

TEN SONGS (pathuppattu)

► Tirumurugarruppadai
► Porunarruppadai
► Perumpanarruppadai
► Sirupanarruppadai
► Malaipadukadam
► Pattinappalai
► Mullaippattu
► Kurincipattu
► Nedunalvadai
► Maduraikanchi
‘Sangam’ Literature

TOLKAPPIYAM

► Tol (old)

► Kappiyam (kavya)
Literary Conventions of Sangam Poetry

- **Akam**
  (interior, private, love poems)

- **Puram**
  (exterior, public, war poems)
Literary Conventions of Sangam Poetry contd...

- **Tinai Concept.** Five fold geography of *Akam* poems namely,
  - **Kurinchi** (mountainous tracts)
  - **Mullai** (Forest tracts)
  - **Marutam** (River valleys)
  - **Neytal** (Coastal tracts)
  - **Palai** (barren tracts) is unique to Tamil literature.
Contents of Sangam Literature

► Akam poems are love poems. They are further classified into

- Premarital love (*kalavu*)
- Wedded love (*karpu*)
Contents of Sangam Literature (contd...)

► The love poems are lyrical in nature.

► Lovers are nameless, idealized characters.

► There are just hero, heroine, mother, heroine’s friend, hero’s charioteer, bards figure in the love poems.
Contents of Sangam Literature (contd…)

► *Puram* poems are war poems.
► Heroism is celebrated in these poems.
► It is typified in the concept of *Canror* (noble ones).
► In fact the medieval commentators called the Sangam poetry as “*Canror Ceyyul*” (The poetry of the noble ones).

Sangam literature is ‘secular’ in content. The ideals are to be achieved in this world.
Akam (Love) Poems

► Kurinchi (mountainous tracts) – Premarital clandestine love.

► Mullai (Pastoral tracts) – Wedded love. Patient waiting (iruttal) on the part of lovers.

► Marutam (river valleys) – Wedded love. Anger (Utal) between the couples due to hero’s extra-marital affairs.

► Neytal (Coastal tracts) – Wailing of heroine due to separation (irankal).

► Palai (Barren tracts) – Elopement of lovers, separation of lovers.
Example of Kurinchi Poem

Kuruntokai 25 (On Premarital clandestine love)

What she said:

Only the thief was there, no one else. And if he should lie, what can I do? There was only a thin-legged heron standing on legs yellow as millet stems and looking for lampreys in the running water When he took me
Example of Mullai Poem

What she said:

These fat Cassia trees are gullible
The seasons of rains that he spoke of
when he went through the stones of the desert
is not yet here
though these trees have put out
Long arrangements of flowers
On their twigs
As if for a proper monsoon

(Translation: AK Ramanujan, 1985)
Example of Akam Poem

► Kuruntokai 40

What is my mother to yours?
How is my father related to yours?
And I and you
How did we two meet?
Like the waters of rain pouring down on red soil
The two loving hearts themselves
Blended with each other

Translation: Kamil Zvelebil
You stand against the pillar of my hut and ask me:
Where is your son?
I don’t really know.
My womb is only a liar for that tiger.
You can see him now only in the battlefields.

Translation: AK Ramanujan
Further Readings on Sangam Literature


Tirukkural: ‘The Book of Lofty Wisdom’

- Book on ethics, politics and love.
- Tiruvalluvar is the author of Tirukkural.
- According to Kamil Zvelebil, Tirukkural should have been written between 450-550 CE. (Zvelebil, 1973).
- Tirukkural has always been in the highest esteem among the Tamil people.
- No other work in Tamil literature has as many commentaries as Tirukkural.
Structure of Tirukkural

► There are 1330 two lined verses (couplets)

► There are 133 chapters with ten couplets for each chapter

► Tirukkural is divided into three broad sections –
  - *Arattuppal* (virtue/ethics)
  - *Porutppal* (economy/polity)
  - *Inpattuppal* (pleasure/love)
Structure of Tirukkural (contd...)

► 38 chapters deal with virtue/ethics (*aram*)

► 70 chapters on economic and political matters (*Porul*)

► 25 chapters on pleasure/love (*inpam*)

► It is composed in *Kural venpa* metre
Comparisons were often made of Tirukkural with *Arthasastra* on matters relating to economy and polity (*Porul*).

Kamil Zvelebil argues that the author of Tirukkural is undoubtedly to some extent indebted to Sanskritic sources like *Manavadharmasastra, Arthasastra* and so on.

“The author was part of one great Indian ethical and didactic tradition.” (Zvelebil, 1973).
Tirukkural : Tamil Element

► Tirukkural is non-Sanskritic, pre-Sanskritic ‘Tamil’ in content in matters relating not only to the chapter on pleasure/love (Inpam) but also pragmatic, universal, this-worldly conception of dharma and niti.

► The section on pleasure/love (inpam) is heavily derived from the akam poetic tradition of Sangam literature.

► There is no section on Moksha (Tamil equivalent Vitu) in Tirukkural.
Further Readings on Tirukkural


► V.V.S. Aiyar, *The Kural or the Maxims of Tiruvalluvar*, 3rd edition., V.V.S. Krishnamurthy (ed.), 1952.

From Lyric to Epic: The Silappadikaram

- The first epic literature in Tamil.
- Authored by Ilango Adigal.
- Dated between 4th and 6th century CE by Kamil Zvelebil on historical linguistic basis.
- Divided into three sections with single story revolving in order from Chola (Puhar), Pandya (Madurai) and Chera (Vanci) country.
Silappadikaram: The Story of Human Love and Tragedy

- Marriage of Kovalan and Kannagi
- Wedded love leading to extramarital affairs
- Kovalan abandons Kannagi & spends time with Madhavi, a talented courtesan
- Tussle with Madhavi leading to Kovalan’s disillusionment with her
- Returning to lead a life with Kannagi
- Kovalan & Kannagi moving to Madurai to lead a new life
Goldsmith in Madurai seize the opportunity

The Murder of Kovalan on the orders of Pandyan King

Kannagi proving her innocence

Pandyan King and Queen dies, Madurai set on fire by Kannagi

She leaves to Vanci, Chera capital, meet her husband Kovalan in a divine chariot and both ascend to heaven.
Features of Silappadikaram

► The epic celebrates the classical themes of love and war dealing with both *akam* and *puram* of Sangam literary tradition.

► The first consciously ‘national’ work of Tamil literature. The stage for the tale was three Tamil kingdoms – *Chola*, *Pandya* and *Chera*.

► It is a story of ‘human proportions’, of human *love* and *passion*, *jealousies*, *infidelity*, *charity* and *forgiveness*.
Kamban’s *Iramavataram*

- The Tamil epic reached its climax with Kamban, the ‘emperor of poets’.

- Scholars of Tamil literature consider the age of Kamban to be 12th century CE.

- Kamban’s *Ramayana* is no imitation of Valmiki’s Sanskrit version.

- Though he modeled the chapters and sections based on Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, there is a great deal of ‘Tamil’ in the treatment of episodes from the epic.
Kamban’s ‘Tamil’ Ramayana (contd…)

► Kamban has an episode on premarital love between Rama and Sita which is absent in Sanskrit version.

► Kamban used the *aintinai* (five fold geography of classical literary convention) concept in his description of Ayodhya.

► Kamban’s Rama is a human being. His ‘Rama Rajya’ was an egalitarian society without hierarchy. For Kamban, it is a victory for human nature.
Further Readings on Tamil Literature


Thank You