

The Sangha period - a general overview of society, literature and grammar

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Abstract

The Sangha period is the golden age that laid the social and cultural foundation of ancient South India. This period from B.C. 300 to A.D. 300 is recorded in history through the writings of Tamil scholars. The distinctive literary style that integrated nature and human emotions through 'thinas', a strong administrative system, and the high status of women are the characteristics of this period. This article examines in detail how grammar books like the Tolkappiyam organized language and life, and how foreign trade and warfare were.

Keywords: Sangha period, Tolkappiyam, Akam, Akkam, Thinas, Moovendars, Muziris, Kapilars, Purananuru, Malayalam grammar

Political structure and rule of the Moovendars

During the Sangha period, Tamil Nadu was ruled by three dominant dynasties: Chera, Chola, and Pandya. They were called 'Moovendars'. The Chera kings ruled over present-day Kerala and the western parts of Tamil Nadu. They made Kodungallur (Vanchi) their capital and engaged in global trade through the port of Muziris. The Cholas ruled over the Cauvery basin and implemented large-scale irrigation projects such as Kallana under the leadership of Karikala Chola. The Pandyas, based in Madurai, focused on the pearl trade and the protection of Tamil Sanghas. Although the king was the supreme ruler, the 'Aimperunguzhu' (a five-member cabinet) and the 'Enperayam' (an eight-member governing body) played an important role in the administration. Local governing bodies known as 'Avai' in each village ensured the justice system and dispute resolution.

The concept of Thina: Geography and human emotions

The way of life of Sangha society was inextricably linked with the land. The geography was divided into five 'Thinas' namely Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai. Each Thina had its own gods, professions, music and special emotions. The themes of the poems were the secret meeting of lovers in the mountainous region of Kurinji and the waiting for the return of their lover in the forest region of Mullai. The field region of Marutham symbolized marital discord, the seashore longing, and the dry land separation. Even the plants, birds, and animals that formed the backdrop of the poems reflected the human emotions of their respective regions. For example, while hunting and honey collection were important in Kurinji, scientific farming methods and irrigation contributed to the prosperity of the people in Marutham.

Women's social status and literary contribution

During the Sangha period, women had a very active and respectable position in society. They were free to get an education and choose their own partners. The heroines who talk about love and longing in the 'Akam' poems reveal the mental freedom of the women of that time. More than just being the heads of households, they had a decisive influence on politics and literature. The poetess Avvaiyar was highly respected as a peace messenger among the Pandya, Chera and Chola kings. The works of more than forty poetesses, including Kakaipadiniyar and Velli Veethiyar, are included in the Sangha texts. Women are depicted in the 'Purananurool' as mothers who are proud of their sons and husbands who died in wars, which speaks of their valor.

Sangha literature is mainly divided into two categories, 'Pathinen Melkanakku' and 'Pathinen Kizhkanakku'. Of these, the Melkanakku works are the true reflections of the Sangam period.

Ettuthokai (Eight Collections): This is a collection of eight different poetry collections. The 'Purananooru' of this is rich in historical information. It contains 400 poems on the valor, charity and death of kings. The work 'Patituppathu' is the most important for Kerala history. It includes ten poems sung by ten poets about the ten Chera kings (only eight of these ten poems are available today). 'Akananooru', 'Nattinai' and 'Kuruntokai' are beautiful inner poems that describe the various aspects of love in the context of the Thinas.

Pattupattu (Ten Long Poems): This is a collection of ten long poems. 'Thirumurukattupadai' is about the worship of Lord Murugan. 'Madhurai Kanchi' describes in detail the life of the people of Madurai, the capital of the Pandya kingdom, and its Naalangadi (day market) and Allangadi (night market). The poem 'Nedunalvadai' is an example of a style that describes love and nature equally.

Eighteen works: These are 18 works composed in the late Sangha period. Most of these are ethical works. 'Thirukural' written by Thiruvalluvar is the most important work in this. It contains 1330 kurals touching all aspects of life. 'Naladiyar' and 'Pazhamozhi Nanuru' also belong to this category.

Aimperumkappiyam (Five Epics): The epics 'Chilapathikaram', 'Manimekhali', 'Sivaka Chintamani', 'Valayapati' and 'Kundalakesi', composed towards the end of the Sangha period, are marvels of Dravidian

literature. Chilapathikaram, written by Ilango Atikal, is also a journey through the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms.

Foreign trade and economic prosperity

Foreign trade through ports like Muziris and Thondi on the coast of the Arabian Sea brought the economic boom of the Sangha period. There are many references in the Sangha texts to the Yavanas (Greeks and Romans) coming in ships with gold and wine and exchanging pepper, pearls, ivory and cotton clothes. Pepper was called 'Yavanapriya' at that time. Roman coins found in various parts of South India indicate the depth of this trade relationship. The revenue from exports enabled the Chera, Chola and Pandya kings to maintain large armies and financially support famous poets and artists. Markets were called 'angadis', and day and night markets were active during that time.

Religious Belief and Cultural Life

Religion during the Sangha period was based on nature worship. It was based on the worship of clan gods. Each clan had its own gods. The god of hunters, Muruga (Cheon), the god of shepherds, Mayon (Vishnu), and the god of farmers, Indra, were prominent at that time. The worship of natural forces and dead heroes was common. Later, Buddhist and Jain religions took root in South India and influenced the thinking of Sangam literature. Music and dance were part of the life of the people. Singers and dancers called 'Panar' and 'Viraliyar' traveled around the country to perform and receive gifts from kings. String instruments like Yash were popular at that time.

War customs and ethics

Wars during the Sangam period were not just about seizing power, but were also a manifestation of heroism and dignity. Before the war began, the practice of stealing the cattle of the enemy country (anirai kavarthal) existed. This was to save the poor people and animals from the horrors of war. The custom of erecting 'Hero Stones' (Hero Stones) for the heroes who died in war and worshipping them as gods was widespread. Historical records show that the Chola king Karikalan fought against neighboring countries to prove his valor. Showing cowardice in war was considered a great disgrace. Works like 'Purananuru' remind us that fighting while deceived was against the justice of the time.

Tholkappiyam: And Malayalam Grammar

The Sangha period is a period of great cultural and literary and artistic achievements under the Pandya Chola Chera dynasties between the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD. The Sangha period was a period of great achievements in terms of culture and literature. The concept of Thina and the social environment in which women played an important role are noteworthy features of the Sangha period. Geographically, many parts of present-

day Kerala are the sources of Sangha culture and literature. Many works such as Manimekhali, Chilapathikaram, and Tholkappiyam were composed from the land of Kerala where the Tamil Sanghas ruled. Over time, about 12 Dravidian languages, including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, and Tulu, evolved from the original Dravidian language, which was the mother tongue. During the Sangha period, the Tamil race was dominant in Kerala as well, or it was a period when the original Dravidian language was used as the literary language. It must have been the literary language of all the people belonging to the Dravidian tribe, including Kerala and perhaps other states. The works of the Sangha period were also written in such a language. Many examples from the Sangha period Tamil grammar work, Tholkafiyam, are used by the authors in the Malayalam grammars, Lilathilakam, Keralapaniya and other grammar books. We can find expressions in the language that we used in the past and that are not in use today but are still continued by the Tamil people in the Tholkappiyam and other grammar books in Malayalam. Somewhere in the course of the evolution of languages, we have abandoned many expressions. But Tamil, which first evolved from the Dravidian language, shows the characteristics of the original Dravidian language.

The Tholappaiyam is famous as the oldest and most important grammar book in the Tamil language. This text has recorded the words and grammar rules of the Malayalam language. Since it was written in the language used during the Sangha period, the Tholkapiyam will always be a source of inspiration for the study of Malayalam grammar. However, it must be said that today's grammarians have not been able to use the Tholappaiyam properly. Since the author is not known, the author of Tholappaiyam is described as Tholappaiyar. The word Tholkappiyam is formed by combining two words, "Thol" and "Kappiyam", which can be said to mean "old poetry". There is no way to know who the author of this work is. Therefore, the name of the book is added to the name of the book and it is said that it is written by Tholkappiyanar. This book, which is divided into 1603 sutras, has sections such as Ezhuthikaram, Chollathikaram and Porulathikaram. Tholkappiyam's logical thinking is evident from the fact that he investigates areas ranging from the color level of language to the beauty level. While Tholkappiyam, which explains letters in Ezhuthikaram and words in Chollathikaram, discusses taste, ornamentation and circle in Porulathikaram. In addition to dividing the inner and outer poems into sections, the Tholkappiyam explains how each hero, heroine, and companion should speak in each situation and what types of similes should be used.

Prof. Naduvattam Gopalakrishnan says that Tholkappiyanar is not only a grammarian but also a multifaceted personality.. Tholkappiyam is a grammar book written keeping in mind the common colloquial language (vazhakku) and the literary language . Moreover, he also mentions the ancient sages on the subject. Chilapathikaram and Tholkappiyam are two works that provide undeniable evidence about the language of East Kerala. It can be assumed that Tholkappiyam was written after the Sangha period.

The first work to be adopted for the description of the Kerala language based on the Tholkappiyam and the Nannul is the 14th century Lilathilaka. Nothing is said about the colloquial language of Kerala in the above-mentioned works. However, the author of Lilathilaka called that language Kerala language after realizing that the language

of Kerala was the language that was set aside as the Malayan language and called it Kerala language.

In the description of the Kerala language, Lilathilaka mainly relied on the Tolkappiyam and the views of its later commentators..

In the oldest grammar treatise of the Dravidian language, the author mentions that there were spoken varieties of 12 regions of the ancient Tamil kingdom.

In the Tholkappiyam, the words are divided into four; Earkol - words that can be understood by scholars and common people; Tirikol - synonyms and homonyms; Tikaikkol are words that are unique to different regions of ancient Tamil. Vadakol contains derivational words (words of Sanskrit words). Examples: Karanam, Kamalam, Karam.

Each of the 12 regions, including the Centamil kingdom, has its own words in use. In the Tamil grammar treatise Nannool, 18 regions are mentioned where the Tamil language has no access.

These places are identified as Sinhala - Sri Lanka, Yavana - Mediterranean, Java - Indonesia, China, Tulunadu, Konkan, Kannada - Karnataka, Kollam (Kerala), Andhra-Telangana, Kalinga - Odisha, Mysore, Magadha, Bengal, Myanmar, Kosala. Since Nannul is a later work, it can be concluded that the politics of South India had evolved to a more complex level.

In Tolkappiyam, it is mentioned that the ending -a has changed to -i in literary Tamil, "Akaram aikaram thirintu". So in Tamil it is Thalai (head) and Malai (mountain), not Thalai and Mala as in Malayalam or Telugu. In Kannada and Tulu it has changed to '-e'. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the early form of Tamil, these words ended in '-e'.

Also, according to Tolkappiyam, the symbols 'a' and 'e' are found only in Tamil poetry. But in Malayalam, these symbols are used in literature and speech.

E.g. Malayalam:

Malayalam: ā maram (that tree) ī maram (this tree)

Tamil: anta maram, inta maram

Kannada: ā mara, ī mara

Telugu: ā ceṭṭu, ī ceṭṭu

Furthermore, gender marking at the end of a verb is common in all Dravidian languages, except for a few Dravidian languages like Malayalam. This gender marking is not commonly found in the oral tradition of Malayalam. However, it is found in various early literary works. Senthami had developed as a literary language even before Malayalam, so it is important to note that its influence on literature was inevitable. As Ulloor says, Leelathilakam is not to be considered in this regard. Leelathilakam is not Malayalam, but a proposed grammatical work on the macronic language Manipravalam. Since its author's aim was to set a standard for a literary style like Manipravalam, it influenced Senthamil.

The Sangha period is not just a historical period, but the source of South Indian civilization and thought. When evaluating this period and its features, important facts - When examined linguistically, it can be seen that Malayalam and Tamil sprouted from the same root before becoming two independent languages. The 'Pazhanthamizhu' or 'Kodumtamizh' that existed during the Sangha period was actually a direct evolution of the Proto-Dravidian language. It is from this common heritage that Malayalam and Tamil later grew into separate identities. Therefore, the most important grammar book of the Sangha period, Tolkaṭṭiyam, is the foundation stone not only for Tamil but also for the primitive grammatical structure of Malayalam. If we examine the later Malayalam grammar books like 'Leelavathilakam', the influence of the rules and expressions of the Sangha period is clearly visible. The truth that these two languages are brothers born from the same cultural womb is revealed by the studies of the Sangam period. Works like Eṭṭu Thokai, Pathu Pattu, and Patinen Kizhkanakku composed during the Sangam period are invaluable contributions to world literature. The foresight of the poets of that time, who divided human life into 'Akam' and 'Puram' and linked every movement in nature with human emotions (Thinakal), is amazing. These works did not confine themselves to mere religious frameworks, but upheld universal values like love, valor, justice, and brotherhood. Works like 'Purananuru' in it still stand as authoritative documents for historians to understand the politics and warfare of that time. The literature of that time speaks of how much women were respected by the society of the Sangam period. The influence that poetesses from Avvaiyar to Velli Veethiyar had in the royal courts indicates the importance of women's education. The freedom given to women in love and marriage, and the depiction of heroic mothers who were proud of their sons who died in war, demonstrate how high the status of women was at that time. It was an egalitarian and beautiful society, where there were no strict restrictions of the caste system, and where the castes were divided on the basis of occupation and geography. In short, the Sangha period is the identity of the Dravidian people. Malayalam and Tamil, which have separated from the same original language, still cherish that cultural tradition. There is no doubt that the Sangha period's thinking, which saw nature and man as one, will remain a beacon for future generations. It is the duty of every Dravidian language lover to preserve and study that great heritage of two thousand years ago.

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