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RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CHRONOLOGY OF TAMIL LITERATURE DURING THE CHOLA DYNASTY

SAKTHIVEL S

Ph.D. Research scholar (Full-Time), Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

#### Abstract

The Chola Dynasty, one of the most influential and long-lasting empires in South India, left an indelible mark on the cultural and literary landscape of the region. Spanning several centuries, the Chola Dynasty's reign saw a flourishing of Tamil literature, marked by remarkable poets, scholars, and patrons of the arts. In this article, we will explore the chronological development of Tamil literature during the Chola Dynasty, from its early beginnings to its zenith. These two prominent Chola rulers were ardent patrons of literature. Their reigns marked significant milestones in Tamil literary history.

**Key words:** Kalingattuparani, Divya Prabandham, Pukalentippulavar, Perundevanar

#### Introduction

Chola literature, a term synonymous with a remarkable epoch in South Indian history, corresponds to the era when the illustrious Chola dynasty ascended to power, governing the region with unprecedented stability and influence. This literary renaissance spanned from the ninth century to the 13th century, characterized by a unique confluence of factors that nurtured a flourishing Tamil literary tradition. Notably, this period was devoid of foreign invasions, internal strife, or widespread chaos, facilitating an environment conducive to cultural development. One of the key catalysts for this literary blossoming was the ascendance of Saivism and Vaishnava devotional

movements, which infused spirituality and devotion into the literary works of the time.

The Chola monarchs, renowned for their patronage of the arts and literature, played a pivotal role by providing both financial support and a platform for poets and scholars to flourish. Their benevolence towards the creative minds of their court created a fertile ground for literary excellence in the Tamil language. This epoch, often hailed as the golden age of South Indian art and literature, leaves historians in awe, thanks to the wealth of written treasures that have withstood the test of time. Many inscriptions from the Chola period offer valuable insights into the literary landscape of the time, showcasing a diverse array of

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writings. These can be broadly categorized into Bhakti literature, Tamil grammatical treatises, eulogies dedicated to the Chola kings, and various forms of praise literature. The legacy of Chola literature endures as a testament to the intellectual and cultural vibrancy of this remarkable era, where the confluence of royal patronage, spiritual fervor, and poetic creativity gave rise to a literary tradition that continues to captivate scholars and enthusiasts alike.

### **The Sangam period and its continuity**

The Chola dynasty's rule, marked a remarkable era of literary and cultural flourishing in South India. This epoch witnessed a rich tapestry of literature and intellectual pursuits, with a particular emphasis on Tamil and Sanskrit literature. Here are some advanced English words to describe this period and its legacy. The Sangam period was characterized by a flourishing of literature, art, and culture, with the Chola dynasty playing a pivotal role in its patronage. The Chola kings and princes were appreciative patrons of poets and scholars, supporting and fostering a vibrant literary environment. During this time, the literati of South India produced numerous literary works of great significance, contributing to the rich tapestry of the region's cultural heritage. Many texts from this period, such as the Divya Prabandhanthas, Tiruvacakam, and Pantikovai, are considered canonical in Tamil literature, showcasing their enduring importance. The period saw a significant influx of Sanskrit literature, with notable figures like Kumarala and Sankara making significant contributions to the literary landscape. The Sangam period was marked by a cultural syncretism, as Tamil and Sanskrit literary traditions coexisted and influenced each other, creating a unique blend of literary expression.

The patronage of literature by subsequent dynasties, including the Pallavas and Pandyas, ensured the continuity of South Indian culture and its literary traditions. The texts produced during this period, such as Devarnam and Bharata Venpa, continue to be revered and studied as important cultural and literary treasures. The Sangam period and its literary achievements left a lasting intellectual legacy, shaping the cultural identity of South India and influencing subsequent generations of scholars and writers. The Sangam period and its

subsequent continuity under various dynasties remain a testament to the enduring power of literature and culture in shaping the history of South India.

### **The expansion of the Chola Empire**

Ushered in an era of profound transformation, not only on the political front but also in the realm of literature. The ascent of the Cholas in South India marked a significant turning point, evoking a tidal wave of emotions that left an indelible mark on the literary landscape. This unique confluence of political power and literary expression yielded an astonishing tapestry of words and verses that reflected the spirit of the age. The Chola Empire's emergence as a dominant political force was intricately linked with the burgeoning literary works of the time. This correlation becomes evident when we compare the ornate meikirtis, or prasatis, and the eloquent style found in Chola inscriptions with the simpler texts of earlier periods. What stands out most prominently is the shift from the classical language of Sanskrit, favored by the educated elite, to Tamil, the vernacular spoken by the common people.

The Chola meikirtis, especially during the reign of the first Rajaraja Chola, serve as a shining testament to the literary prowess of the era. These inscriptions, except for a few exceptions, exude grandiloquence, employing a river-like flow of verses to narrate historical events with immense vitality. Such meikirtis hold a revered place in Tamil literature, bearing witness to the flourishing literary landscape of the time. Beyond the prasatis of emperors, Chola inscriptions encompassed a wide array of literary genres. Notable examples include the Chidambaram and Thiruarurg inscriptions, which recount the history and achievements of Naraloka, a hero who served under Kulothunga Chola I and Vikrama Chola, achieving great renown. Furthermore, inscriptions discovered in places like Atti, Vayalur (Vailoor), and Vridhachalam feature prasatis dedicated to Kaadavas. These inscriptions showcase the skilled use of poetic forms like Venba, Asiriyappa, Kalippa, Vanchippa, and others. Despite the inherent complexities of Tamil prosody, these poets navigated its intricacies with

finesse, eschewing obscure words and artificial sentence structures. These inscriptions, with their rich eulogies, rank among the most distinguished prasatis of the Chola emperors. It is abundantly clear that these verses were the creation of erudite court poets, and their widespread usage and encouragement played a pivotal role in nurturing the growth of secular literature during this era.

### **Extinct literature referred to in Chola history**

Inscriptions from antiquity offer us glimpses into a bygone world, where the titles of certain books appear, almost as if by accident. Yet, beyond these mere mentions, our understanding of these texts remains a vast unknown. Once celebrated and revered, these literary creations have since slipped through the fingers of time, leaving us in the dark as to whether their renown was a result of literary brilliance or the author's local prominence, or perhaps a more personal influence. From the sparse crumbs of information we possess, gleaned from the names of these enigmatic tomes, the inscriptions, and the contexts in which they are referenced, one can discern a certain curiosity and affinity among the populace of that era. It seems that these works resonated with the people of the time, receiving a warm embrace.

The inaugural monarch of the Chola dynasty, a figure unparalleled in his splendor, inspired the creation of both a dramatic composition and an epic saga. These works bear the titles "Rasarasechara Natakam" and "Rasarasa Visayam." Originally intended for performance during festivities at the venerable Thanjavur Periyakoil, the former, and for recitation within the hallowed precincts of the Tirupundurthi temple, the latter. Trusts were instituted to ensure the continued performance and scholarly exploration of these literary gems, yet whether they were penned in Tamil or Sanskrit remains an enigma. It's important to note that the drama does not revolve around the life of Rajarasa Chola; instead, it seemingly aimed to convey the grandeur of constructing the magnificent Thanjavur temple, embellished with tales that delve into the heart of Saivism.

### **Peruṅkatai**

"Udayanan Katha" is a Tamil adaptation of "Pragathu Katha," a significant literary work attributed to Kongu Velir, a renowned poet hailing from the Kongu region. The origins of this text likely trace back to the concluding years of the Pandya-Pallava era. Unfortunately, we possess scarce information about the life of Kongu Velir, the genius behind this composition. Adiyarku Nallar, celebrated for his exceptional contribution to "Silapathikaram," mentions in his writings that "Udayana Katha" was composed following an extensive study of numerous texts during the Second Sangam period. The exact year of its creation is somewhat ambiguous, but historical analyses propose that it might have been authored in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or even earlier. Remarkably, this belief about the "Story of Udayana" persisted well into the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, during the time when Adiyarku Nallar himself lived. He provides an invaluable rendition of the remaining sections of this work in Agavalpa, which is particularly suited for Varuna's poems. The author's style is marked by its precision and clarity, earning "Udayanan Katha" a distinguished position in the realm of Tamil literature, revered as one of the finest specimens.

### **Chintamani**

'Sivaka Chintamani', composed by the Jain poet Tirutaka Devar, is regarded as the best among the Mahakavyas - the five great epics - in Tamil literature. It follows Vadipasimman's Chhatra Sudamani, the original text of which dates back to a.d. Based on the Uttarpurana written by Gunapathran in 898. Hence the Sivaka Chintamani must have been composed in the tenth century. Nachinarkinyar says that the author of Chintamani was born in the Chola dynasty. Devar wanted to rewrite the stories of Jain mythology in Tamil with romance, appeal and imagination; It is also true that he was successful in this endeavour. The Sivaka Chintamani Seyuds now available consist of 3,141 Seyuds of four lines each. The author is known to have composed over 2,700 poems of the other 445 poems, some were written by his Guru and others by someone else. Two poems are indicated by the narrator as written by the Guru. It is not known who wrote the other poems. Sivaka Chintamani was not directly responsible for writing the Periya Purana; However,

Sivaka Chintamani is known to have been the catalyst for it.

### **Valaiyapathi and Kundalakesi**

Within the corpus of five epics, Valaiyapathi and Kundalakesi hold a significant place, albeit their complete extant versions remain elusive. In select historical manuscripts, only fragmentary remnants of these narratives have been discovered. These literary treasures are believed to have originated during the era of Sivaka Chintamani. The contributions of Buddhism to the Tamil literary landscape, though valuable, are relatively scarce. Kundalakesi stands as a notable testament to this influence. Additionally, the renowned work, Manimegalai, finds its origins in the creative minds of Buddhist authors.

### **Kalladaam**

Galladanar wrote a book called Galladam, the book and the author are named after a town. There was also a Sangam poet by the name of Galladar; As his hymns, five verses are found in Purananhun and several verses in Akanahun and Kurundogai. It is also rumored that the author of Galladam based his book on Tiruchirambalakovai; This is plausible.[5] This book is written in an unconventional and artificial style. He has Sanga period style of poetry and diction. Even a cursory glance at this book reveals that it is the work of a person with pride or a penchant for learning. Each of its hundred verses depicts a nature in the interior. Coimbatore's epic love poems can be found in lifeless stone.

The author has restrained himself by compiling the verses from Thirukkovai as a model. And he tried hard to follow the language tradition that was not suitable for the time he lived and failed. He did not write it as a satire or caricature. There is a rumor that the poets of the Sangam period agreed only after Galladar's explanation of the significance of the temple. This book is set in a fancy style hence there is a saying 'Wrestle with stoned learner'. Even in recent times, some scholars and poets have held this book in high esteem. Galladar was well aware of the religious games conducted by Lord Shiva in Madurai. Galladar narrates the miracles performed by Lord Shiva for

many such as Manikkavasaka, Dharumi, Adhikadar etc.

### **Kalingathupparani**

Ancient Tamil literature that holds a significant place in the realm of epic poetry. This poetic composition was recited by the esteemed court poet Seyangonda during the closing years of Kulothungan I's reign. Let's delve into this rich and multifaceted piece of literature. Kalingathupparani is a literary gem dating back to ancient times, celebrated for its profound historical significance. It's a testament to the bygone era and the socio-political dynamics of that time. essence can be encapsulated by the proverb "Bharaniku or Seyangkondan," which reflects its inherent beauty and pride. This masterpiece carries a unique aura that has stood the test of time. Kalingathupparani is distinguished by its ability to blur the lines between history, myth, and fantasy.

The author skillfully weaves these elements together, creating a captivating narrative. Seyangonda's vocabulary is a standout feature of the work. His eloquent language, coupled with his adept storytelling, creates a rich tapestry of words that enrapture the reader. Kalingathupparani is not just a historical account of war; it's an intricate narrative that paints the battlefield with vivid details. It captures not only the events and circumstances of the conflict but also the emotions, melancholy, and sorrow that accompany it.

The Kalinga War under Kulothungan's reign has inspired various works of literature, with Kalingathupparani being one of the prominent ones. Unfortunately, not many texts from that era have survived, making this work all the more invaluable. Kalingathupparani has withstood the test of time due to its supreme literary quality. It has outshone lesser works and continues to be a celebrated piece of Indian literature. Seyangonda's prowess as a poet remains unmatched by later poets. His contributions to Tamil literature are unparalleled, making him an enduring figure in the literary world. This section briefly mentions Ottakoothan, also known as Koothan, who was a significant figure in Tamil literature. He is hailed as the successor to Sengundar and earned recognition



and patronage from Chola emperors for his literary contributions. Ottakoothan's works include "Nalairakovai," a poem that acknowledges his worthiness and contributions. He was also acclaimed for his "Eeti Supapat," "Kavete Supapat," and "Dakkaya Parani," each with its unique qualities and narratives. In essence, "Kalingathupparani" is an ancient epic that marries history, mythology, and fiction to create a literary masterpiece. It stands as a testament to the artistry of Seyangonda and the enduring legacy of Ottakoothan in the world of Tamil literature.

## **Kamban**

Kambar, is celebrated for his rendition of the Kamba Ramayana, one of the most illustrious epics in Tamil literature. Unlike Valmiki's Ramayana, Kambaramayana is not a translation or adaptation but stands as an independent work. Kambar employs distinct narrative techniques and characterizations, showcasing his profound poetic acumen, scholarly prowess, and imaginative creativity, which remain unparalleled in Tamil literature. Numerous poets have celebrated Indian and regional languages by narrating the story of Rama, and Kambar is no exception. He infuses his work with contemporary events and the essence of Tamil Nadu, thus presenting a portrayal of Cholanadu within the framework of Kosalanadu. His narrative flourishes with vivid descriptions and poetic metaphors. Kambar demonstrates remarkable eloquence in both Sanskrit and Tamil. However, like many Tamil writers, he occasionally adheres to the conventions of "paviya" (a traditional Tamil literary form) and reflects the influence of this tradition in his writings. One such instance is his detailed exploration of the emotions of Rama and Sita during their unexpected reunion in Mithila, where he goes beyond Valmiki's account. Kambar's depiction of Sita's emotions upon receiving Rama's ring through Hanuman is another instance where he delves deeper into her feelings compared to Valmiki, who primarily mentions her happiness at the reunion with her husband. Nevertheless, Kambar offers a more concise account of events such as Dasaratha's Ashvamedha Yagna compared to Valmiki's extensive narrative. His work, therefore, represents a fusion of deep-rooted

tradition and his unique literary contributions to the epic Ramayana.

## **Conclusion**

It mentions a long-standing belief that Pugahendi was a contemporary of Ottakoothan. Ottakoothan was born in 'Kalanda' in the Thondai region and served under the Pandyan kings. When a Chola king married a Pandya princess, Pugahendi was sent to the Chola palace by the Pandya king. This led to conflicts and jealousy, causing confusion within the royal family. Eventually, the king himself intervened and pacified the conflicts between Pugahendi and others. However, it's noted that there's no concrete evidence to support this. Pugahendi is said to have composed a Kalambakam in praise of Korantai, a minor king called Senchiyargon. The text implies that Pugahendi's works were highly regarded and had a significant impact. Pugahendi became famous through his work, Nalavenpa, which narrates the story of Nalan in 400 venpa. Venpa is a poetic form similar to the Sanskrit Anutup, and it's praised for its effectiveness when used skillfully. The popularity of Nalavenpa led to the belief that many other books were written in a similar style by various authors, possibly in Pugahendi's name. However, the text emphasizes that there's a clear distinction in quality between Nalavenpa and these imitative texts. It's difficult to determine the exact timeframe of Pugahendi, but it suggests that he lived about a century after Gouthar. The text also speculates that Pugahendi couldn't have existed before Kampan, a prominent Tamil poet. Pugahendi mentions a figure named Chandran Suvarki from Muranainagar in the Malu country, but there's no further information about him in inscriptions. The text implies that Pugahendi's work shows the influence of Kampan, another well-known Tamil poet. Overall, the text delves into the historical and literary context of Pugahendi, a relatively obscure figure in Tamil literature, and speculates on his era and influences. It also highlights the significance of his work, Nalavenpa, in the Tamil literary tradition.

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