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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EVOLUTION OF VAISHNAVISM THROUGH SANGAM LITERATURE – A STUDY

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu accommodated many religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism and Vaishnavism, Vaishnavism survived through all the ages with ups and downs in Tamil Nadu. The following article focus on Vaishnavism in Tamil country, from the sangam Literature.

Tamilagam is the land of the Tamils, which lies in the southern region of peninsular India. It is bounded by Indian ocean on the south, Thiruvencatam Hills on the north, Bay of Bengal on the east and Arabian sea on the west. During the sangam Age, Tamilagam was ruled by three major dynasties such as sangam cheras, Sangam cholas and Sangam Pandyas. The Sangam period witnessed the worship of Murugan, Siva, Balarama and Vishnu (Tirumal). The Sangam literary works like Paripadal and Purananuru give insights into the religious condition of the Sangam Age.

Introduction

Tamil Nadu accommodated many religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism and Vaishnavism, Vaishnavism survived through all the ages with ups and downs in Tamil Nadu. The following article focus on Vaishnavism in Tamil country, from the sangam Literature.

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Vaishnavism also called Vishnuism is a part of Hinduism Vishnu is¹ considered as the Ultimate Reality, the Supreme Deity (Paratatta) of Vaishnavism. Its followers are called Vaishnavas or Vaishnavites.²

Vaishnavism in Tamil Nadu finds its earliest literary mention in the Sangam Literature dated to the 5th Century BCE. Mahavishnu or Perumal is considered as the most mentioned god in the Sangam Literature.³ Some of the earliest known mentions of Perumal and the Tamil devotional poems ascribed to him are found in Paripadal the Sangam era poetic anthology.⁴

Mayon is indicated to be the deity associated with the Mullai Tinai (pastoral landscape) in the Tolkappiyam. He is regarded to be the only deity who enjoyed the status of Paramporul (achieving oneness with Paramatma), during the Sangam Age. He is also known as *Mayaram*. *Mariyon*, *Natyon*, and *Mal* in Sangam literature.^{5, 6}

The sounds of birds on banyan trees with aerial roots, which died down when Raman who wins wars was planning strategies, in the ancient, roaring Kōdi port town belonging to the Pāndiyan king.⁷

It mentions the life of Krishna

*“Anankutai Yavunar Kanankon tolittenoc
Cen vilanku cirappin nayiru kana
Tirulkan ketutta parity nalattu
Itumpaikol paruvaryl tirak katuntiral
Ancana vuruvan tantu nirul tanku”⁸*

“Do not feel sad! On hearing that a bull had given you a garland for your washed, perfect hair, your father and brothers thought it was a firm sign from Thirumāl, and have consented to give you in marriage to the herder”⁹.

“O lord of the bright, cool ocean, where the splendid white waves break on white sand appearing like the blue garment worn beautifully on the milky white body of Balarāman, the younger brother of Thirumāl who measured the earth in three steps! But for her crescent-moon forehead that has paled like peerkai flowers and her beauty that has been lost as she cries,

I would not have known about her painful disease that she hid from me, caused by you living without

thinking about her, as gossip rose in town.

But for her beauty that was best among others that she lost and her lovely pillow-soft arms that have wasted away, I would not have known about her distressing affliction that she hid from me, caused by you deserting without consideration, as those in town joined together and slandered her.

But for great beauty like the tip of a victorious spear she lost and the continuous tears from her long, large eyes, I would not have known about her painful disease that she hid from me, caused by you abandoning her, as those in this town slander her today.

One with a wide chest with a cool flower garland! For her lost beauty to be restored, the one who trusted you when you promised before god that you would not leave, please ride your chariot hitched to proud horses with swaying manes and return in haste!

“O Lord resposing on a serpent, above your head its thousand, spread, fierce, precious heads that can spit great rage! Thirumakal is seated on your wide chest!

As Balathēvan, your skin is like the faultless, white conch shell, atop a tall bamboo, your beautiful elephant flag sways, and you bear a sharp-tipped, curved plow! O Lord with a single ear ornament!

O Lord with eyes victorious over flame-like, red lotus blossoms! O Lord with a body with the complexion like that of open kāyā flowers!

*O Lord with a chest on which Thirumakal is seated!
O lord wearing gleaming jewels with chosen gems on your chest! O Lord adorned with golden garments, appearing like a dark mountain enveloped by flames!*

O lord with a bird flag! You are the meaning of the Vēdās recited by Brahmins with skilled tongues!

Those who you placed on your right side and showered graces, worship you! she hid from me, caused by you abandoning her, as those in this town slander her today.

*One with a wide chest with a cool flower garland! For her lost beauty to be restored, the one who trusted you when you promised before god that you would not leave, please ride your chariot hitched to proud horses with swaying manes and return in haste!*¹⁰

*“Nananthalai ulagam valaiee neamaioodu
Valampuri poritha maa thaangu thadakkai
Neer sela nimirntha maa al pola
Kodu kondu eluntha kodunj selavu exile
Perum peyal pozhindha sirupun maala
Arugadi moodhur marungil pogi”*

Meaning

Earth has the largest landscape. Lord Perumal holds the wheel ornament on the one hand and Sangu on the other hand. Hence he is also called the Ulagalantha perumal as he stands on the sky and rules it. Perumal could drink the cooling water of sea, and the mountain ranges, that reached the right side of him and the rainy clouds travel fast evening. It rained on that place of Lord Perumal, where he was staying.

A fine example of the entry of Vishnu Cult in Kongu region is connected with the social life in Mullai, one of the Sangam period landscapes. The ancient Tamil of Mullai (Forest) were engaged in the occupation of cattle rearing a worshipped the deity Mayon, now identified as Lord Krishna, believed to be an avatar of Vishnu or Perumal. In other words, Vaishnavism took its roots from the social life of the

ancient Tamils of Mullai land. The Sangam literature supports this observation.¹¹

Conclusion

The Sangam literary works such as *Tholkappiyam*, *Silappadokaram*, *Paripadal*, *Patiruppattu*, *Ahananuru* and *Purananuru* yield information about Vish worship and identifies the names of Vishnu as Vasudeva, Mayon, Balarama and Ceyyon.

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