

POSITION OF TAMIL WOMEN IN SANGAM PERIOD

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Abstract: Patriarchal society was there in Sangam age. The Sangam literature says that women had the status not equal to men. Sangam age was an age of war. Even though they needed more men to fight in the war, they did not hate the birth of the female child. They expected eagerly for the birth of male child. The loyal women were respected highly in the society. The loyal women worship was started in this period. Sangam women were good at singing, dancing and music. Those who were good at music were called 'paanini'. 'Avvaiyar' was the famous poetess of this age. There were 58 poems written by Avvaiyar in the Sangam literature.

Keywords

Mudin Magalir, Sangam literatures, paanini, pratiloma marriage, Anuloma marriage.

1 Sources

The research article is based on the edited volumes of Tamil Sangam Literary works. The sources of information will include number of published books.

2 Introduction

Third century B.C to Third century A.D (600 years) is called as Sangam age in Tamil History. Tholkappiam, Aganaanuru, Kurunthogai, Pura-Nanuru, Madurai Kanji, Nartrinai, Nedunelvadai, Tirukural, Naladiyar and Silapathikaram are some of the pieces of Sangam literature. They have shown a clear picture about Sangam women and their status.¹ Women of the Sangam age had much responsibility. Though husband earned money, it was her duty to preserve it for the maintenance of her family.² Patriarchal society was there in Sangam age. The Sangam literature says that women had the status not equal to men. They had to follow lots of rules, which were not meant to men. There was no evidence for punishing a man who left his wife and went to prostitute.³ There were evidences, which show that the Sangam age women were treated worst. For example, in Naladiyar, a Tamil king named Nannan imprisoned his enemy's wives in a war. He shaved their hair and made it as a rope to tie the elephant.⁴

Sangam age was an age of war. Even though they needed more men to fight in the war, they did not hate the birth of the female child. They expected eagerly for the birth of male child.⁵ Sangam age did not determine the marital age for the women.⁶ The parents arranged their girl's marriage with brave men. A history says that bridegroom paid for the bride's price of which half of the amount would go to the bride and another half would go to her father. The bride had the right to keep that money for her own purposes.⁷ According to Tholkappiam, frightening, understanding, bashfulness and learning are good characteristics of a woman and also humility, peace, truthfulness, speaking good words also included in this list.⁸

In Sangam age women played an important role but there was no evidence that women were the ministers in king's court. The Sangam literature said that queens were with kings and supported them to rule the country wisely. Loyalty and virtuousness were considered as good virtues of women and they were praised. 'Kalithogai' says that loyal women could bring rain through their virtuousness.⁹ They were spiritual

too. Virgins worshipped Lord Muruga to get a good husband. Married women worshipped Lord Siva for their husband's good health and long life. They worshipped Lakshmi for wealth. They also worshipped 'Kotravai' the goddess of war to get victory in the war. So there was goddess worship in the Sangam age.¹⁰

2.1 Education

'Aganaanuru' says that Sangam women were good in education. For an example, Sangam literature says that there were 26 poetesses in that period. 'Avvaiyar' was the famous poetess of this age. There were 58 poems written by Avvaiyar in the Sangam literature.¹¹ She also wrote many ethical works, chief of them being Atti Chudi, Konrai Ventam, Ulaka-Niti, Mutturai Nalvazhi, Nanneri, Niti-Neri-Vilakkam, Niti-Venba and Aranericharam.¹² Sangam women were good at singing, dancing and music. Those who were good at music were called 'paanini'.¹³

In Sangam period, the king gave first place to the learned men. When the mother heard that her son was a great learned man, she would be happier than the day on which she gave birth to him. It is said that it was the duty of the father to give education to his son.¹⁴ In the matter of education women were given equal importance. Women were taught Iyal (literature) Isai (music) and Natakam (Drama) and men were given training for developing their physical stamina. Women who were proficient in Iyal, Isai and Natakam were known as 'Mudukkuravai'. Ilango Adigal in his famous Tamil epic, Chillapathikaram characterizes Kannaki as Mudukkuravai.¹⁵ Some of the educated women counseled the kings in the battlefield. They were brave and equal to men in many other aspects. Some of the famous sangam poetesses were Avvaiyar, Kakkai Pattiniyar, Okkur Masathiyar, Natchellaiyar, Nappasalaiyar, Nannagaiyar, Anjil Anjiyar, Adi Manthi, Paari Mahalir, Kopperum Pendu, Pon Mudiyaar, Mudanthama Kanniyar, Vennikuyathiyar and Velliveedhiyar.¹⁶

Sangam age mothers were brave enough to send their sons happily to the battle field. 'Purananuru' mentions the brave woman as 'Mudin Magalir' or 'Maraikudi Magalir'. Sangam mothers wanted their sons to be brave enough to die as soldiers with a great name. In Purananuru, Okkur Masathiyar a poetess of Sangam age mentioned that a woman was ready to cut off her breasts, if her son ran away from the battle field. Tholkapiyar says that a brave mother was happy and proud when she saw her dead son in the battle field with a wound on his chest. Sangam literature says that a Tamil king, 'Athiyaman' gifted a rare precious goosbery (which could give long life) to Avvayar, who was a well educated poetess. This is an evidence for the respect the educated women had from the society.¹⁷

2.2 Marriage

Sangam literature divides the life of women into seven stages. They are Paedai (first 5 years), Pedumai (5-10 years), Mangai (10-16 years), Madanthai (16-25 years), Arivai (25-45 years), Therivai (45-60 years), Perilam pen (above 60 years). The marriage was conducted after the girl's puberty.¹⁸ The wedding day was to be fixed on the basis of horoscope. There would be worship on the previous day of the wedding function. The bride would wear a garland of 'Sirissa leaves' and 'Arugam Pul tuber' (a kind of grass). There was no evidence for 'Thali' in the Sangam literature as well as in Chilapathigaram. There was no evidence of fire or appraiser to conduct the wedding ceremony.¹⁹ In Sangam age, there prevailed a custom that the bridegroom had to offer price to the bride. It was called 'Mulai Viali'.²⁰

Love marriages were very common in Sangam age. The rich men gave their daughters in marriage to the winner of the Bullfight.²¹ There were child marriages too. Kannagi and Kovalan marriage was an example for this. Chilapadigaram says that sixteen year old Kovalan married twelve year old Kannagi. This marriage was arranged by their parents. Megasthanis, author of the book 'Indica', mentioned a marriage held in the country of Pandyas. It was a marriage conducted to a six or seven year old girl by her parents.²² The Brahmins of the Pallava period were polygamous and married more than one wife. They did not confine themselves to their own caste for the purpose of marriage. The Brahmin girls married kshatriya, vaisya and sudra men too. This was called 'pratiloma marriage', while the marriage of Brahmin boys with non Brahmin

girls was called 'Anuloma marriage'. The children born out of these weddings were accepted by the society and assigned certain professions.²³

2.3 Chastity

It is termed 'Karpu' in Tamil. It is the rocky strength of the Moral purpose. 'Nanam' (Reservedness) is more to life and in value chastity is more than Nanam says Tolkappiyar. In Chillapathikaram, Ilango Adigal emphasizes that is inner taboo for woman. Love is defined as the undying affection existing between lovers. Their relationship is like body and soul and a symbol of unification and inseparable.²⁴

The Tamil classical work Chilapathikaram in which Kovalan, the husband of Kannaki was living with Madhavi fascinated by the latter's charm and grace though she was a devadasi. At one stage Kovalan regretted for his injustice to his wife and returned to his wife, Kannaki and sought her pardon. Kannaki expressed "you had been leading a life of moral turpitude condemned by men of wisdom. But I am a woman of inimitable fidelity. However when you announced your wish to go to Madurai, to eke out a living I agreed to accompany you to that city". Her love for her husband was larger than the world, loftier than skies and deeper than the sea. Due to the intense love for her husband, the wife joined him even in death. Kopperumdevi the queen of Pandian died at the moment she saw her husband's death.²⁵

The loyal women were respected highly in the society. The loyal women worship was started in this period. 'Chilapathikaram' says that the king 'Sengootuvan' prepared a statue for Kanaki and built a temple. This type of loyal women's worship derived into 'Mariamma' and 'Bhagavathi' worship in the later ages.²⁶ These information's says that women did their work well in education, literature and politics in Sangam period.

2.4 Conclusion

The women got many rights in Sangam period it includes education and marriage. 'Aganaanuru' says that Sangam women were good in education. In the same way Love marriages were also very common in Sangam age. Sangam age mothers were brave enough to send their sons happily to the battle field.

The loyal women were respected highly in this society so the loyal women worship was also started in this period.

2.5 Acknowledgement

"I hereby declare that the research article entitled "Position of Tamil Women in Sangam Period" is my original and independent work.

2.6 End Notes

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