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Tamil Language

EELANADU AND THE TAMIL SANGAMS

Paper presented by

S. AMBIKAIPAKAN, B. A.

Emeritus Principal, Vaidyeshwara Vidyalaya, Jaffna

at the

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SEMINAR
OF TAMIL STUDIES, MADURAI



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EELANADU AND THE TAMIL SANGAMS

S. Ambikaipakan, B. A.

Eelanadu was closely connected with the Tamil Sangams from the very beginnings. The seat of the first Tamil Sangam was Ten-Madurai. At that time, Eelanadu and Pandinadu formed part of what was known as the Lemuria Continent. Eelanadu was represented in the first Sangam by Murinjiyur Mudinagar. This Mudinagar is believed to have been a king of Jaffna.¹

Nagas who produced a number of Sangam poets, about fifteen in number in the third Sangam, seem to have occupied parts of Tamil Nadu and Eelanadu, specially Jaffna from pre-historic times. The occupation of Jaffna by the Nagas is proved by a reference to Nagadipa, which forms part of Jaffna, in the Mahavamsa, a Ceylonese Chronicle. There is also reference to Nagadipa in Manimekalai. It is not known what the original language of the Nagas was. Some are of opinion that it was Elu. According to Father Gnana-prakasara, the Sinhalese language has developed from it.²

As a result of the deluge which swallowed Ten Madurai, Eelanadu was separated from the main-land. It was, perhaps, as a result of this deluge, that the works of the first Sangam have not survived. Then Kapadapuram became the seat of the second Sangam. A number of works seem to have been produced during this period, but only Tholkappiam has survived.³

Kapadapuram itself was destroyed by floods. Then Vada Madurai, the present Madurai, became the capital of the Pandyan Kingdom and it also became the seat of the third Sangam. We are on firm ground as regards the third Sangam is concerned. We have not only a list of poets but also their works. Several poets from Eelanadu participated in the activities of the third Sangam. Eelathu Poothanthavanar was one of them. There are seven verses composed by him in Ahananuru, Natrinai and Kurunthogai.

Elanaganar, probably a ruler of Jaffna and Neelakandanar of Musiri were two poets of Eelanadu who listened to the exposition of Iraiyanar Ahapporul Urai.⁴

How some usages found in old Tamil have been well-preserved in Eelanadu is brought out in the following passage taken from the History of Ceylon published by the Ceylon University. "The antiquity of Tamil in Ceylon is borne out by the fact that some words of the Sangam period are still in common use among the peasantry of Jaffna, though they have fallen into disuse in South India, the original home of the Tamil language; such words as "Aitu" and "Atar" are cases in point. Moreover some usages found in old Tamil, which have completely disappeared from popular speech in South India are still current in Jaffna. The medial demonstrative U which is exemplified in words like "Utu" (உது) and "Uvan" (உவன்) and the interrogative termination "e" occurring in words like "Vantare" (வந்தாரே) are now unknown in South India; except among scholars well-versed in Tamil literature. An endearing expression used in addressing a female child as "Mahane" (son) which is mentioned in Tholkappiam, the grammar of the Sangam age, is met with in ordinary usage among the people of Jaffna."⁵

The Jaffna Kingdom

After the lapse of several centuries, the credit of reviving the Sangam tradition goes to the Ariyachakravarthies who established an independent Tamil Kingdom in Jaffna in the 13th Century⁶

There was a great deal of literary activity as a result of the patronage given by kings. In this respect two kings stand out prominently. One was Singai Segarajasegaran (1380 — 1414) and the other was Nallur Pararajasekaran (1478 — 1519). During the reign of Segarajasekaran, a treatise on medicine and Segarajasekara Malai a work on astrology were produced. It is not known who the author of Segarajasekaram was. Segarajasekara Malai was written by Soma-sanma. Though these two books deal with technical subjects, we get a lot of information about the kings who supported them.⁷

It was during the reign of Nallur Pararajasekaran that the Tamil Sangam was set up. It is said that Pararajasekaran's brother Segarajasekaran and nephew Arasakesari were responsible for setting up the Tamil Sangam. These two persons collected valuable manuscripts from Madurai and other places and set up a library at Nallur called Saraswathy Mahal. They invited scholars from Tamil Nadu to participate in the activities of the Sangam. A treatise on medicine called Pararajasekaram was produced during this period. Arasakesari, about whom we have mentioned earlier, translated Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa into Tamil verse.⁸

The Jaffna Kingdom came to an end with the capture of Jaffna by the Portuguese in 1621 and with it the Tamil Sangam started by the Tamil kings ceased to exist.

Jaffna Tamil Sangam

There was again a revival of Tamil learning in Jaffna in the latter part of the 19th century. This was due to the work of Arumuka Navalar and the Batticotta Seminary. The Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai founded by Arumuka Navalar became a centre of literary activity. Higher learning in Tamil was imparted in this school. The manager of the school was T. Kailasapillai, a son of Arumuka Navalar's brother Tham'u. He and some others associated with him felt the need for an Academy to promote Tamil studies and they decided to convene a meeting to consider the matter. Mr. Kailasapillai sent out invitations to scholars interested in this matter and a meeting was held on the 12th of April 1898 at the Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai. As convener of the meeting, Mr. Kailasapillai read out a message received from the Head of the Thiruvavadudurai Mutt, Mr. Swaminatha Iyer (later Dr.), C. W. W. Thamotharampillai, who was then in India and others. He then explained the purpose of the meeting. In the course of his address, he made the following observations. "Tamil scholars were undergoing great hardships for want of recognition and adequate remuneration. Higher studies in Tamil was undertaken more by Europeans than by the Tamils. The Madras University has not yet taken steps to promote higher studies in Tamil and it would take time to do it. Scholars in

Tamil Nadu, who were written to about this project, had given their blessings to it." He concluded by saying that the best way to promote Tamil Studies was to hold higher examinations—Bala Pandit and Pandit examinations—in Tamil and confer titles on the successful candidates.

The meeting decided to set up an academy and appointed a "College of Pandits" consisting of ten members to conduct the affairs of the Sangam. Mr. T. Kailasapillai was elected President and Mr. Vaithilingampillai, Head Master of the Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai was elected Secretary. The other members of the College were A. Kumaraswamy Pulavar, K. Vetpillai, A. Muthuthambipillai, A. A. Sithamparappillai, S. Saravanamuthupillai, S. Erambu Iyer and M. Ganesha Pandithar. It was also decided to get examiners from Tamil Nadu for the examinations held by the Sangam.⁹

This Sangam conducted classes for the benefit of the students preparing for the examinations at the Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai.¹⁰

Though the Sangam functioned from the citadel of orthodox Saivism—Navalar Vidyasalai—its membership was open to Christians also.

The first examination of the Sangam was held in 1899 and a Convocation was held on 25th April 1899 for awarding titles to the successful candidates. The function was presided over by Mr. K. Kathiravetpillai, popularly known as Wyman Kathiravetpillai, a retired Police Magistrate and a product of the Batticotta Seminary. He compiled a Tamil Dictionary which was later published by the Madurai Tamil Sangam. Mr. Kailasapillai presented the annual report. In doing so, he stressed on the need to preserve the Tamil language from foreign admixture—from foreign words and foreign idioms. He criticised the practice of some Tamils, who in framing Tamil sentences and phrases, adopted a style peculiar to English. After the presentation of the report, the chief guest of the evening presented medals to the successful candidates. It may be mentioned that the figure of Saraswathy and the name of the examination

were embossed on the medals. After this, some scholars made speeches commending the work of the Sangam. The suggestion made by Nevins Selvadurai, Principal of Jaffna Hindu College, that the curriculum should be broad-based to include some study of science was well received by those present.

The comments on this function that appeared in the press is worth quoting. "The function was also unique, being the first of the kind, held after the downfall of the native kings, who largely patronised and fostered Tamil literature and learning. Mr. Kailasapillai and his fellow-workers have earned the undying gratitude of their counterparts by the efforts they have already made and are making to improve the status and encourage the study of Tamil language and literature."

When Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy visited Jaffna in 1906, the Jaffna Tamil Sangam organised a reception in his honour and conferred the title of "Vidya Vinodhan" in recognition of his services to the cause of Indian Art and Culture.¹²

In 1913, the Madras Government set up a committee under the chairmanship of Rev. Chandler to prepare a Tamil Lexicon. The committee prepared a sample copy of the proposed dictionary and circulated it among scholars and organisations interested in the subject. One copy was sent to the Jaffna Tamil Sangam and the Sangam requested Kumaraswamy Pulavar, who had by then established a reputation as an Etymologist to submit a report on the proposals. Pulavar submitted a learned criticism on the proposals and the report was sent to Rev. Chandler. Rev. Chandler was so impressed with the report that he came all the way to Jaffna and discussed it with the members and invited Kumaraswamy Pulavar to go to Madras and serve on the editorial board but he declined.¹³

Madurai Tamil Sangam

In India with the decline of the Tamil Kingdoms, the Vijayanagara Empire came into existence. The Vijayanagara emperors and the Nayak Kings who succeeded them

being foreigners, did not evince much interest in the study of Tamil. The neglect of Tamil continued even after British occupation. In these troublous times, the Saiva Mutts kept the flickering lamp of Tamil learning burning. There were no Maharajahs in Tamil Nadu as in Mysore and Tiruavancore. There were a few Zemindars and they did their best to foster Tamil learning within their limited resources. One of them was Pandithurai Devar, Zemindar of Palavannam. His father Ponnusamy Devar was also a patron of Tamil learning. He got Arumuka Navalar of Jaffna to edit and publish Thirukovayar and Thirukural with the commentaries of Nachinarkiniar and Parimelalagar respectively and Sethupuram.¹⁴

Pandithurai Devar with the help of leading Tamil Scholars founded the Madurai Tamil Sangam in 1901.¹⁵

The Jaffna Tamil Sangam, which was founded in 1898, served as a model for this Sangam. Pandithurai Devar, who was elected the first President of the Sangam, got the constitution, syllabuses and examination regulations of the Jaffna Tamil Sangam from A. Muthuthambipillai who had lived in Tamil Nadu for some time and who was a founder member of the Jaffna Tamil Sangam.¹⁶

Pandithurai Devar invited Chunnakam Kumaraswamy Pulavar to serve on the board of examiners and to contribute articles to the Madurai Tamil Sangam Journal "Senthamil".¹⁷

Others who served as examiners from Jaffna were Messrs V. Kanagasabai Pillai, the historian, and Na. Kathiravelpillai.

Kumaraswamy Pulavar began contributing articles to Senthamil in 1902 and continued to do so till his death in 1922. In all he wrote more than a hundred articles dealing with various aspects of Tamil Literature and Grammar. They were greatly appreciated by Tamil Scholars in Tamil Nadu.¹⁸

A. Muthuthambipillai also contributed articles from 1902 till his death in 1917.

As pointed out earlier, V. Kanagasabai Pillai was closely connected with the Sangam as an examiner. He also contributed articles connected with Tamil History to Senthamil. He had the distinction of presiding over the Annual Sessions of the Madurai Tamil Sangam held in 1905. His premature death soon after was bemoaned by all, especially by the Sangam. Senthamil published a critical appreciation of his contribution to historical research with special reference to his work "Tamil 1800 years ago".¹⁹

Another regular contributor to Senthamil from the beginning was Vidwan S. Ganesh Iyear of Jaffna. He had studied the epics like Chintamani, and Kamba Ramayanam and puranams like Kandapuramam and Periyapuramam under Vidwasiromani N. S. Ponnambalam Pillai, a nephew of Arumuka Navalar. During his days, Ponnambalam Pillai had no equal as a commentator on the Tamil classics in South India or Ceylon. He drew large crowds wherever he went to expound the classics. His students assiduously took down notes as he expounded them. The notes taken by his students on Kamba Ramayanam were taken by Prof. Sethupillai to the Madras University. Ponnambalam Pillai's notes on Periyapuramam were serialised in the Senthamil by G. Sathasivam Pillai, Editor, "Nagalosani" from 4th Volume.²⁰

Ganesh Iyer led the way for textual criticism of Kamba Ramayanam by giving correct readings of it in a series of articles in Senthamil.²¹ He also wrote a series of articles on various aspects of Tholkappiam which were later incorporated in his edition of Tholkappiam as appendices.

Swami Vipulananda, then S. Mailvaganam, was the first to pass the Pandit examination of the Madurai Tamil Sangam from Sri Lanka. He passed it in 1916.²²

He was followed by two ladies Kamalasini and Balam-bikai both from Pt. Pedro. It may be mentioned that their teacher was also a lady, Parpathi Ammaiyyar, belonging to an illustrious family of poets and scholars. These ladies were reminders of the women poets of the Sangam Age

S. Kanapathippillai of Madduvil passed this Pandit examination in 1924. The contributions of Swami Vipulananda and Pandit S. Kanapathipillai to Tamil studies deserve special mention.

Swami Vipulananda along with his Tamil studies, prepared for the external examinations of the London University. He passed the London B. Sc. examination in 1920. His knowledge of science enabled him to make a distinct contribution to the teaching of science through the Tamil medium. In this connection special mention may be made of two articles "The wealth of the West" and "The Light of Science" which he wrote to the Senthamil in 1922.²³

Mention also should be made to his contribution to the study of Tamil drama. He delivered a lecture on this subject at an Annual Session of the Madurai Tamil Sangam under the Presidentship of Dr. Swaminatha Iyer. At the request of the Secretary, the late Mr. T. C. Srinivasa Iyengar, he expanded his lecture into a series of articles in the Senthamil (1924 & 1925) and these were published in book form under the title "Mathangachoolamani" in 1926 as the 51st publication of the Sangam.²⁴

After passing the Pandit examination, Kanapathipillai underwent training as a teacher and became a teacher in Tamil at the Saiva Training College for teachers. He remained in this post for a number of years and was able to impart a sound knowledge of Tamil to hundreds of teachers. Apart from this, he conducted a Kaviya Padasalai on his own for purposes of imparting a sound knowledge of the Tamil classics and grammar. Three of his students from this school passed the Pandit examination of the Madurai Tamil Sangam. He was in great demand as a speaker at many literary and religious conferences. Last year the University of Sri Lanka conferred an honorary degree (D. Litt.) in recognition of his services to Tamil learning. This was the first time that a Tamil Pandit was honoured in this manner in Sri Lanka. Though past the age of eighty, he is as active as ever in the pursuit of knowledge.²⁵

Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Sangam

The Golden Jubilee of the Madurai Tamil Sangam was celebrated in May 1956 for six days. All the three aspects of Tamil—Literature, Music and Drama—were given due importance during the celebrations. The dynamic President of the Celebrations Committee, the late Mr. P. T. Rajan, brought together scholars from various parts of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka to participate in the celebrations. Dr. S. Natesan, Sir Kandiah Vaithianathan and Kalai Pulavar K. Navaratnam represented Sri Lanka at these celebrations.

Most of the work done by institutions like the Madurai Tamil Sangam has been taken over by the Departments of Tamil set up in various Universities and colleges. The first University to create a Chair for Tamil was Annamalai and the Madurai Tamil Sangam may take justifiable pride in the fact that the first Professor of Tamil, Swami Vipulananda, was a Pandit of the Madurai Tamil Sangam. Though a number of Universities are carrying on advanced studies in Tamil, yet there is room for organisations like the Madurai Tamil Sangam. These Sangams can become centres of Tamil research and specialise in the intensive study of the Tamil Classics and Grammar. This has been the age-long function of the Pandits and this ought to be preserved.

1. *South India & Ceylon*—K. K. Pillai, University of Madras, Chapter IV, Ceylon & Tamil Sangams, pages 37 & 38.
2. *Ibid*—Footnotes 1, 2 & 3 on page 36 & Tamil Culture Vol. I, No. 2 page 132.
3. *Madurai Tamil Sangam Golden Jubilee Number*—1956, page 20.
4. *South India & Ceylon*—K. K. Pillai, page 37.
5. *History of Ceylon*—Vol. I, Part I, Colombo University Press page 43.
6. *Eelamadu Tamil Kavithai Kalanjium*—Dr. A. Sathasivam, Sahitiya Mandalam, 135, Dhammapala Mawatha, Colombo 7. Page 9.
7. *Ibid*—pages 17 & 18.
8. *Ibid*—pages 50 & 51.
9. *Hindu Organ* May 4, 1898. Full account of the inaugural meeting is found on page 71.
10. *Hindu Organ*, June 22, 1898—page 82.
11. *Hindu Organ*, March 15, 1899. Account of the first convocation is found on page 60.

12. *Kalayogi Ananda Coomaraswamy*—S. Ambikaipakan, Ananda Press, Jaffna 1978.
13. *Kumaraswamy Pulavar*—K. Muthukumaraswamy Pillai, Sri Sanmuganathan Press, Jaffna 1970—pages 69 & 70.
14. *Arumuka Navalur Sarithiram*—Kanagaratna Upathiyayar, Thirumakal Press, Chunnakam, pages 42 & 72.
15. *Madurai Tamil Sangam Golden Jubilee Number 1956*—page 23
16. *Navalar Kottam A. Muthuthampipillai*—Tellippalai Mahajana College, Tamil Manram, page 16.
17. *Kumaraswamy Pulavar*—K. Muthukumaraswamy Pillai, pages 107 & 108.
18. *Ibid*—pages 220, 230 & 231.
19. *Senthamil*—Vol. 4, page 123.
20. G. Sathasivam Pillai's first article appeared in *Senthamil* Vol. IV page 96 and continued in several subsequent volumes.
21. *Senthamil*—Vol. (2), page 50.
22. *Adigalar Padiva Malar*—page 157.
23. *Ibid*—page 90 (2 & 3).
24. *Ibid*—page 90 (9).
25. *Moonravathu Kan*—Kanaga Senthinathan, Varathar Veliedu, Jaffna 1959. Pages 13, 14, 21, 22 & 23.
26. *Senthamil*—May 1956.

