



THE RELIGION AND TAMIL POETS OF KONGUNADU

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Abstract

The poets were considered to be the supreme soul in Kongu Nadu. They travelled various places of the world and learnt the culture of the people. The people were not educated much in those days but they gave much respect to the teachers. The people who were belonging to high class got the education. Men, women, King, trader and businessmen were the poets in those days. The poets mostly sang of the inside life and outside life. The couplet which sings about the inside life mostly based on the love feelings of the people. The couplet which sings about the outside life mostly based on the narration of war and death. These classical couplets narrate about the life history of the Kongu Nadu people. The poets were mostly lived in poverty during Kongu reign. They earned the money by prizing the Kings and became wealthy men through their songs. They mostly got the elephants and horses as the prizes. They sold their prizes for their livelihood. Sometimes the Kings offered lands and gold coins to them. The people like Kings, traders and land owners educated with the only purpose of spreading the Tamil language through their songs. The people who were belonged to village mostly were not educated. All the Kings not supported the poets.

Keyword; Kongu Nadu. Tamil Poet.

INTRODUCTION

There were plenty of poets in Kongu Nadu. The most of the poets sung about the King's Victory in the form of couplet. The poets were Anjiyathimagal Nagaiyar, Athiyaman Vinnathanar, Arisilkilar, Umbarkattu Elankannanar, Avvaiyar, Karuvur Kannambalar, Karuvur Kathambillai Sathanar, Marutham Padiya Elankadungo, Perunthalai Sathanar and Karuvur Kalingathar. Avvaiyar was one of the famous poets in Kongunadu. The name Avvaiyar is a combination of Tamil word avvai. The Avvaiyar who lived during the Sangam period is considered to be contemporary to poets Parinar, Kabilar and Thiruvalluvar. She attributed as the author of seven verses in Narrinai, fifteen in Kurunthokai, four in Akananuru and Thirty three in Purananuru. The legends state that she was a court poet of the rulers of the Tamil country.

The tradition claims that she was a sister of Kabilar, Thiruvalluvar, and Athiyamaan. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar refutes this claim based on his studies that all four of them were most likely of different walks of life, thus from different caste backgrounds and hence impossible to be siblings. Thirukovilur is an ancient temple town in Tamil Nadu. This is where demon andhaka was killed by Lord Shiva. Sangam epics recount that it was here that avvayar was blessed with a vision of her lord slaying andhaks and she has dedicated verses to the same.

She sang Vinayakar Thiruakaval when lord Ganesh displayed his dancing form to her at great ancient temple of Thillai Chidambaram. Vinayakar Torukaval is an

extremely esoteric work. The Lord Kottavai was the God to the solders. There was a temple in between Kongu Nadu and Chera Nadu. Kongu people were worshipped the Bhoota. Elanjeral Irumporai built the Temple for Bhoota in the capital of Karur country. Bhota was worshipped in the various parts of Tamilnadu by the people. It is noted in the Silapathigaram in Indira Kathai.

The Statues of Religion in Kongu Nadu

The Kongu people worshipped the Gods like Shiva, Thirumal, Murugan and Kottravai. The majority of the Kongu people worshipped the Lord Murugan. The temples were built on the top of the hills for Lord Murugan. The Kongu country's Thiruchenkodu hill was famous for the temple of the Lord Murugan. The people worshipped the Lord Thirumal too. Selvakadungo Vazhiyathan Mayavannam worshipped the Lord Thirumal. He contributed the village called Ogathur to Thirumal Temple. Bhramins worshipped Thirumal in the form of Kannan.

Bhoota was considered to be bad spirit in those days but in classical days Bhoota was the God of good spirit. The names of Bhoota were given to the people. There were some Tamil classical poets having the names of Bhoota. Those are as follows: Elambhoothanar, Elathup Bhoothan Devanar, Karumpillai Bhootanar, Karur Perunj Sathukathu Bhootanar, Kavan Mullai Bhoothanar and etc.

There is a saying that Kannaki became the goddess in the Kongu Nadu. Kokilaj Koshar built a temple for Kannaki in Kongunadu. The archeologists revealed the truth that Kokilaj Koshar built the temple for Kannaki in Thiruchenkodu hill and that temple became the Arthanarishwarar temple later. The people of Kondu Nadu often celebrated the festivals in the temples. The followers of Bowtha and Jaina religions also found in Kongu Nadu.

The priests of these religions were lived in the forest and caves. There is no evidence of them in Classical writings. The writings which were found in the caves proved that the people of Bowtha and Jainava lived in Kongunadu. The people made the bed and pillow for the priests by shaping the rocks. The names of the people who were helped them were written on the rocks in Birami language. The Murugan temple which is located on the hill of Thiruchenkodu is oldest temple in Tamilnadu.

Sekkilar and Periyapuramam

We often go to temple and worship the Gods and Goddess like Lord Shiva and Amman. The devotees, who are going to the temple usually, round the temple. Most of the devotees ignore the sixty three Nayanmars in the temple and some make a glance at them but none gives much more attention to them. The histories of Nayanmars are not known by the majority of the people. The histories of these Nayanmar are clearly presented in *Periyapuramam*. It is also known as *Thiruthonda Puranam*.

Sekkilar was born at Kundrathur in Thondai Nadu. He was born in Velalar family. The real name of Sekkilar was Arunmozhi Rama Dhevan. The archeologists mentioned Anabaya Cholan as Kulothungan. He was ruling Kongu Nadu during A.C. 1133-1150. Sekkilar was the court poet during his reign in Kongu Nadu. The King Kulothungan was one of the reasons to sing Thiru Thoda Puranam.

When Kulothunga Cholan became the King of the Kongu Nadu he released his enemies from the prison. He started to rule his country with morality and peace. He was admired by the talents and knowledge of Sekkilar and he made him to be Chief

Minister in the court. Kulothunga Cholan was showing much more interest in arts. He spent most of his time by reading classical books.

He read Seevaga Sinthamani in several times and admired of its language even he lost himself in the characters of Seevaga Sinthamani. Sekkilar was worried about the condition of the King. Sekkilar was the sincere devotee of the Lord Shiva and the followed the religion called Shivam. He built a temple for the Lord Shiva in Kundrathur and made special poojas to the lord Shiva. He believed that Shivam religion can be spread by building the temples.

One day Sekkilar went to Kulothungan's palace and blamed him for studying the books other than the Lord Shiva's miracle and also he told him that the stories which he was studying were no more useful to life. Kulothungan suddenly accused him that the stories which proposed by Sekkilar were not having the clear origin and asked him to explain the origin of the Lord Shiva and devotees' biography.

Sekkilar told Kulothungan that he wanted to mention to read the history of the priests who were sincerely worshipped the Lord Shiva and made the miracle. He told to him that Sundhramoorthy Nayanar sung the songs about their activities towards religion. These songs were compiled as *Thiruthonda Thiruvanthathi* by Naraiyur Nambiyandar. These songs were made popular by Rajaraja Cholan and the devotees of the Lord Shiva. Kulothungan wanted Sekkilar to interpret the *Thiruthonda Thiruvanthathi* in the correct way. He prized Sekkilar after hearing the history of the Thiruthondars and insisted him to spread their history throughout the Kongu Nadu.

Sekkilar went to Thillai and took bath in the daybreak of the Shivagangai River and he was meditating at the daybreak to get the grace of the Thillai God. There he sung the songs about Thillai God. The devotees who were around the temple garland him after hearing the songs of him. He was sitting at the thousand pillar mandapa after praying Thirunana Sambanthar, Thirunavukarasar and Sundarar and he began to sing *Thiruthondar Puranam*. He began to sing *Thiruthonda Puranam* with the word of "world". He successfully sung all the songs in *Thiruthondar Puranam*.

The Chola King reached Thillai to adorn Sekkilar for singing *Thiruthondar Puranam*. Sekkilar and Thillai people were heartily welcomed the King. Kulothungan stoops and got the blessings of Sekkilar. The people who were well versed in Thiumurai, Vedhas and Tamil language were reached Thillai. These people wanted Sekkilar to sing *Thiruthondar Puranam* on Thiruvathirai day. The *Thiruthondar Puranam* had been presented by Sekkilar with the help of Kulothungan King. It took nearly one year to complete. The King was delighted by hearing this news. The people who were living in Thillai thought *Thiruthondar Puranam* as the Lord Shiva and started to worship the God with the lines of *Thiruthondar Puranam*.

The King Chola made Sekkilar and *Thiruthondar Puranam* to sit on his elephant and splash the flowers. The elephant stood before Ponnambalam after rounding the Thillai. The devotees of the Lord Shiva surrounded Sekkilar and prized him for his job. Sekkilar got down from an elephant with *Thiruthondar Puranam* and put *Thiruthondar Puranam* near by the King's foot. *Abanaya Cholan* wrote *Thiruthondar Puranam* in the golden sheet and joined eleven *Thirumurai* because of that *Thiruthondar Puranam* was become as eleventh *Thirumuari*.

The King Anabaya found the brother of Sekkilar and made him as minister at his court. Sekkilar remained in Thillai and spend his remaining life by worshipping the

Lord Shiva. The archeologists were telling that *Periyapuranam* is the first book which was written in Tamil language. It presents the history of the Lord Shiva's devotees and priests. It was translated into various languages. The morality, worshiping the God and worldly peace were presented in this book. The communists' people who were living in Russia were prized this book.

This book presented about the devotees' sacrifice, worldly love of the people, politics, morality, agriculture, brevity games, sacrifice of the people, nature, creativity, history, epic, traditional, revaluation and caste system.

The Poets of Kongu Nadu

Anjiyathimagal Nagaiyar

She is a female poetess. Nagai is her real name. The people were living with the name of Anji in Thagadur Athiyaman's reign. She was an aunty's daughter of Anji King, so the people called her as Anjiyathaimagal. The couplet of her is compiled in Agananuru. It sang about the Kurinchi Thina. This couplet narrates about a monkey which is having the Jack fruit at the back side of a Peacock and dance on a rock. This incident is compared with Bharatha Natya and it talks about the bride who is talking her happiness regarding her marriage with her friend.

Athiyaman Vinnathanar

Athiyaman is a family name. Athiyaman was the people who ruled Thagadur country. This poet is belonged to Athiyaman family and belonged to Kongu Nadu poet. One of his couplets was placed in Agananuru as 301th couplet.

Arisilkilar

He was a leader in Arisil village. There is a saying that Arisil was belonged to Kongu Nadu. One of his couplets placed in Kurunthogai as 193th couplet. He sang about Vaiyavi Kopperun Bogan. Kabilan and Bharanar also sang about Vaiyavi Kopperun Bogan's love with Kannaki. This proves that Arisilkilar is belonged to Kongu Nadu. The couplets of Arisilkilar is compiled in Purananuru as 281, 285, 300, 304, 342 couplets. When Peruncheral Erumporai and Athiyaman Nedumananji fought against Thagadur, Arisilkilar had been watching the war incidents and Ponmudiyar also witnessed the war incidents. The war of Thagadur is portrayed in the book called *Thagadur Yathirai*. The couplets of Arisilkilar were presented in *Thagadur Yathirai* book. Arisilkilar sang about the death of Athiyaman Nedumananji's son Ezhini.

Arisilkilar's couplets were presented in *Thagadur Yathirai*. Nachinaikinar quoted the couplets of Arisilkilar in *Silapathigaram Porulathigaram*. Arisilkilar sang nearly ten couplets about the victory of Peruncheralirumporai. These couplets presented the good characters and victories of Peruncheralirumporai. He prized Arisilkilar after hearing the couplets, which were narrated about his valour by presenting nine lakhs gold coins, palace and his Kingship, instead of accepting the presentation; he rejected and became the minister in court. It is presented in Ettam Paththu Pathipagam.

Umbarkattu Elankannanar

Umbarkadu is one of the villages in Kongu Nadu. Elankannanar is his name. He got this name because he lived in Elephant hill station area. The couplet which was sung by him was placed in Agananuru as 264th couplet.

Avvaiyar

The name Avvai was given only to the high class women in those days. It is not her real name; it is used to indicate the status of the women. Some poetesses were lived with name of Avvaiyar in those days. She was living in Kongu Nadu. She was the Poetess in the court of Athiyaman Nedumananchji. Now Thagadur is separated from Salem district and named as Tharmapuri district.

Avvaiyar went to Athiyaman Nedumananchji's court for getting prize through presenting the couplets. There the King delayed to prize her; at that time she sang one couplet by hearing the couplet he presented her the prizes. When Athiyaman Nedumananchji was fighting in war his wife gave birth to his son, after his great victory he came to palace to see his son. This incident was sung by Aivaiyar. Athiyaman Nedumananchji named his son as Poguttozhini.

Athiyaman Nedumananchji sent Aivaiyar to Thontaimaan Elanthirai as ambassador. There Thontaimaan Elanthirai wanted to show his strength to her by displaying the weapons which were used at the battle field. The weapons were placed with garlands. Aivaiyar sang about Athiyaman Nedumananchji's weapons were sent to repairing at the time. It means Athiyaman Nedumananchji has been using the weapons instead of placing it in an ideal place. It shows her brevity.

Athiyaman Nedumananchji got an eternal gooseberry fruit. One who eats that fruit can live long life. He did not want to eat that fruit but he gave it to Avvaiyar and made her to eat. Avvaiyar knew the secret of that fruit after eating gooseberry. There she sang about Athiyaman Nedumananchji's attitude in couplets. The couplets which were sung about Athiyaman Nedumananchji were placed in Purananuru as 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 94, 97, 98, 101, 103, 104, 315, and 320 couplets.

Avvaiyar sung about Athiyaman Nedumananchji's son Poguttozhi in her couplet too. He has taken the cows from his enemy's country. It was presented in Kurunthogai 80: 4-6. She sung about his bravery and good characters in Purananuru as 102th couplet. When he won the enemy's palace he prized her by adorning with shawl. It was sung in Purananuru 293.

Parivallal was living in the period of Avvaiyar. The war of Thagadur held in the period of Avvaiyar. Erumporai Kings were expanding their reigns in Kongunadu. Peruncheral Erumporai was fighting against Thadadur at the time. The shoulders were killed during the war in both sides. Athiyaman Nedumananchji's chest was tasted by enemy's arrow. This was sung by Avvaiyar in Purananuru as 93th couplet. Athiyaman Nedumananchji died because of great wound in his chest. This incident was sung by her in Purananuru 231 and 235th couplets.

Avvaiyar was supported by Athiyaman Nedumananchji and his son Poguttozhiyan. Arisilkilar and Bharanar sung about Cheran Senguttuvan and Peruncheral. Kabilar sung about Pari. Kabilar and Bharanar were lived in the same period. Cheran Senguttuvan's brother Elangovadigal and his friend Seethalai Sathanar were lived in the same period.

The couplets of Avvaiyar were presented in Thogai book. The couplets of Avvaiyar were presented in various books. The four couplets of Avvaiyar presented in Agananuru, fifteen couplets in Kurunthogai, seven couplets in Natrinai and thirty three couplets in Purananuru. Avvaiyar sung that one of Athiyaman Nedumananchji's relatives were first planted sugarcane.

Karuvur Kannambalar

He lived in Kongu Nattu Karur. The couplets of Kannambalar were presented in Agananuru as 180 and 263 couplets and Natrinai 148th couplet. Kothai is referred Thagadurperuncheral Erumporai. Vangi is one of Karur's old names.

Karuvur Kathambillai Sathanar

He lived in Karur. He sung the couplets in Agananuru and Purananuru. Kathambillaiyar was a poet and he sung Kurunthogai (64, 265, and 380), Natrinai (135) and Puram (380). Narayanasamy Ayyar mentioned that those two were one but they were appeared separately. Karur Kathampillai Sathanar sung about Pittangkottrai in Puram 168th couplet. Pittangkottrai was living in Kuthirai Malai Nadu.

Karuvur Kalingathar

Kalingathar went to Kalinga Nadu and came back to Karur with a great poetic sense. Tamil traders went to Kalinga country and doing trading. It was mentioned in the caves of Hathi Kumba by Karavelan. One of his couplets was placed in Kurunthogai as 183th couplet.

Karuvur Kilar

The name of his village was given to him. The biography of Kilar is not clear. The couplet of his is placed in Kurunthogai as 170th couplet.

Karuvur Kosanaar

Kosar is his family name. The numbers of Kosar family were worked as shoulders and government employees in the court. They conducted the festivals for Virgin God like Kokilanj Koshar and Cheran Sengutuvan. It presented in *Silappathigaram*. Koyamputhur name was formed from the name of Kosar. He got Karuvur Kosanaar because he lived in Karur. One of his couplets was placed in Natrinai as 214th couplet.

Karurur Cheraman Sathan

He was belonged to Cheraman family. The biography of Cheraman Sathan is not clear. One of his couplets was placed in Agananuru as 277th couplet.

Karuvur Bhootha Sathanar

As earlier mentioned the name of ghosts and bad spirits were given to the human. The names of bad spirit and ghost were considered to be good names like Peyalvar and Boothalvar in those days. The temples were built for Bhootham in Kongu Nadu. The name of the bad spirit was given to him. One of the couplets of Bhootha Sathanar was placed in 5th couplet of Agananuru.

Karuvur Powthar

Powthar is his real name. One of his couplets is placed in Kurunthogai as 162th couplet. This couplet sung about the natural scenery of evening time when the cows returning to their shed.

Karuvur Perunjchathukanar Bhoothathanar

He was born at Perunjchathukanar in Karur. The real name of Karuvur Perunjchathukanar Bhoothathanar is Bhoothan Athan. The biography of Bhoothathanaar is not clear. He sung about Kopperucholan's death. The couplet is placed in Purananuru as 219th couplet.

Karuvur Nanmanpanar

He had been living in Karur. The biography of Karuvur Nanmanpanar is not clear. One of his couplets is placed as 277th couplet in *Agananuru*.

Kolli Kannanar

Kannan is his real name. Kolli is the name of his village. The kolli hills were in the Kolli country. Ori was ruling Kolli country. Pereuncheral Erumporai won Ori and joined Kolli countries with his reign. One of his couplets is placed in *Kurunthogai* as 34th couplet. He sung about Koottuvan King. There were many Koottuvan Kings but the historians were not clear that which Koottuvan is wrote this couplet.

Peimagal Elaveyeni

The names of Pei (ghost) and Bhootham (bad spirit) were given to the people of Kongu Nadu in those days. These names were considered to be the names of Gods. Peyalvar and Bhoothathalvar were the famous names in those days. Peimagal Elaveyeni was one of the famous poets in Kongu Nadu. The poet Perungadugo got prize from him by presenting couplets to him. The couplet of Peimagal Elaveyeni was placed as 11th couplet in *Purananuru*. Perungadugo and Peimagal Elaveyeni were lived in the same period

Ponmudiyar

He was living at Salem in Thagadur country. The name of his village was given to him and his real name is unknown. He witnessed when Thagadur fort was attacked by Peruncheral Irumpora. Arisikilar poet also witnessed the war of Thagadur. Avvaiyar was the court poetess during this time. So these poets are belonged to same period. The couplets of Ponmudiyar were placed in *Purananuru*.

The couplets like 209, 310 and 312 were in *Purananuru* and the couplets of ponmudiyar were placed in *Thagadur Yathirai*. The book called *Thagadur Yathirai* is destroyed but some of the couplets were placed in *Purathiratu*. Nachinayakanar quoted Ponmudiyar's couplets in *Tholcopiya Purathinai*.

Perunthalai Sathanar

He was named as Perunthalai Sathanar because of his father's name Avuyur Moolangilar. Some people say that he was named as Perunthalai Sathanar because he was having big head. It was sung in *Natrinai* by A. Narayasamy. Some people say that he was named as Perunthalai Sathanar because he was born in Perunthalai village. Perunthalaiyur is in Coimbatore district.

He sung 13 and 224th couplets in *Agananuru*. The six couplets of Perunthalai Sathanar were placed in *Purananuru*. Kandirago and Vichigo were the landlords of Kongu Nadu. Kumanan was expelled by brother from Kingship and ruled the Kongu Nadu. Perunthalai Sathanar was lived in poverty and he sung about Kumanan. He presented his poverty through his couplets. Kumaran told him that he was not having anything to present the poet. So he told him that cut off his head from body and produces that to his brother and get prize. This incident was sung in *Purananuru* as 165th couplet. He sung about Neduvettuvan as 13th couplet in *Agananuru*.

Marutham Padiya Elankadungo

He was named as Elankadungo because Perunkadungo was living during same period. He gained this name because he sung the couplets of Marutham. The couplets of Elankadungo were placed in *Agananuru* as 96 and 176 couplets. He was the

youngest poet in Kongu Nadu. Perungadugo and Peimagal Elaveyeni were the poets lived in the same period.

Conclusion

The couplets of the Kongu Nadu poets were mostly presented the brevity and good characters of the various Kings of Kongu Nadu. The family names were given to the poets in those days. The Avvaiyar was the title of more than one poet who was active during different periods of Tamil literature. There is a very famous legend that is associated with Avvaiyar as prominent. The poets travelled from one part of the country to another and from one village to another, sharing the gruel of the poor farmers and composing songs for their enjoyment. The Kongu poets mostly sung a small time chieftain Vallal Athiyamaan Nedumaan Anji and his family. The rest of the poets sung about the various aspects of state governance. Nowadays, the festivals were conducted to adorn the Tamil poets. Annual Avvai Vizha is organized and conducted by Government of Tamil Nadu to commemorate Avvaiyar's contribution to Tamil literature. This festival is celebrated every year in the month of Panguni on Sadhayam. Avvai Vizha has been started by local community long time back and still continuing willingly. Local community, Tamil scholars and scholars from various fields participating with passion on this occasion and deliver their speech.

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