

INTERRELATION OF TAMIL LITERATURE AND ITS CULTURE IN INDIA AND IN AND AROUND THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Tamil literature, one of the oldest in the world, has a rich and diverse heritage spanning over two millennia. Rooted in Tamil Nadu, India, and Sri Lanka, it reflects the region's cultural, spiritual, and linguistic evolution. The earliest Tamil texts belong to the Sangam period (circa 300 BCE–300 CE), renowned for its classical poetry on themes like love, war, and nature, as found in anthologies like "**Kurunthogai**" and "**Akananuru**".

Post-Sangam literature evolved with works like the "**Silappathikaram**" and "**Manimekalai**", which integrated ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions into narrative poetry. Bhakti literature flourished between the 6th and 9th centuries, led by Saivaite and Vaishnavite saints, whose devotional hymns inspired religious movements and temple culture. Notable works include "**Thevaram**" and "**Nalayira Divya Prabandham**".

Medieval Tamil literature saw the emergence of philosophical and didactic texts, exemplified by **Thirukkural**, a universal ethical guide. The modern era, influenced by colonialism and the Dravidian movement, saw writers like Subramania Bharathi and Bharathidasan explore social justice, freedom, and equality. Today, Tamil literature thrives globally, addressing contemporary issues while preserving its classical roots. Its unique blend of poetic elegance, philosophical depth, and cultural richness ensures its enduring relevance and universal appeal.

KEYWORDS: Tamil Literature, Nation, Cross-border, Century, Philosophy, Language, Colonial.

INTRODUCTION

The earliest Tamil literature, known as Sangam literature (circa 300 BCE to 300 CE), provides a vivid depiction of ancient Tamil society. Comprising anthologies like "**Akananuru**" and "**Purananuru**", this body of work explores themes of love, valor, and the human connection with nature. The division of Tamil poetry into "**akam**" (interior, dealing with personal emotions) and "**puram**" (exterior, addressing public life and heroism) mirrors the cultural emphasis on balance and harmony between individual and societal responsibilities.

Later periods saw the rise of epics like "**Silappathikaram**" and "**Manimekalai**", which combined narrative elegance with ethical and philosophical discourse. These works reflect Tamil culture's seamless blending of the spiritual and the secular, portraying characters that grapple with moral dilemmas while navigating human relationships. Such texts underscore the Tamil worldview that sees literature as a medium for ethical and cultural instruction.

RELIGION AND LITERATURE

Tamil literature has been a cornerstone in preserving and disseminating religious traditions. The Bhakti movement, which emerged between the 6th and 9th centuries, saw Tamil poets like the Saivite Nayanmars and Vaishnavite Alvars compose devotional hymns that continue to be sung in temples today. Works such as "**Thevaram**" and "**Nalayira Divya Prabandham**" not only popularized religious ideas but also made spirituality accessible to the common people. These hymns, deeply rooted in Tamil culture, emphasize themes like devotion, surrender, and divine love, which resonate in Tamil religious practices, rituals, and festivals.

SOCIAL VALUES AND ETHICS

The interrelation between Tamil literature and culture is also evident in the emphasis on ethical living and social values. The "**Thirukkural**", a masterpiece by Thiruvalluvar, stands as a timeless guide to morality and human conduct. Its concise couplets offer insights into virtues like honesty, compassion, and justice, reflecting the core values of Tamil society. Even today, the "**Thirukkural**" is widely quoted in personal, educational, and political contexts, underscoring its cultural relevance.

Tamil literature's portrayal of societal roles, such as the importance of family, the sanctity of marriage, and respect for elders, reflects the traditional values upheld in Tamil culture. These themes are not confined to ancient texts but continue to find expression in modern Tamil novels, plays, and cinema, thereby bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

CONNECTION WITH NATURE

Tamil literature's depiction of landscapes and natural elements showcases the Tamil people's profound connection with their environment. The Sangam poets categorized human emotions and societal situations through the lens of **"tinai"**, or landscapes, such as *kurinji* (mountains), *mullai* (forests), *marutham* (plains), *neithal* (coast), and *palai* (deserts). Each landscape was associated with specific emotions and themes, reflecting a cultural perspective that sees humanity as an integral part of nature. This eco-centric worldview, deeply embedded in Tamil literature, has shaped cultural practices like agricultural festivals, traditional medicine, and sustainable living.

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Tamil literature plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting the Tamil language, which is central to the cultural identity of Tamil Nadu. As one of the longest-surviving classical languages, Tamil owes much of its resilience to its rich literary tradition. From ancient Sangam poetry to contemporary writings, Tamil literature has been a vehicle for expressing the cultural pride and linguistic uniqueness of the Tamil people. Movements to preserve and celebrate the Tamil language, such as the Tamil Renaissance in the 19th and 20th centuries, were heavily influenced by literary works that highlighted Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage.

FESTIVALS AND FOLK TRADITIONS

Tamil literature has also influenced and been influenced by folk traditions and festivals. Works like **"Silappathikaram"** have inspired dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, while folk songs and stories, often rooted in Tamil literary themes, are an integral part of festivals like Pongal and Karthigai Deepam. The oral tradition, where folk literature is passed down through generations, further exemplifies the interrelation between written and cultural expressions in Tamil society.

EVOLUTION IN THE MODERN ERA

In the modern era, Tamil literature continues to reflect and shape the evolving cultural landscape. Writers like Subramania Bharathi and Bharathidasan used literature to advocate for social reform, equality, and freedom, blending traditional Tamil ethos with contemporary ideals. Their works reflect the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, ensuring that Tamil culture remains relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Contemporary Tamil literature addresses themes like globalization, urbanization, and social justice, yet remains deeply rooted in cultural values. The global Tamil diaspora has also contributed to this evolution, using literature to explore identity, migration, and the preservation of cultural heritage in foreign lands.

Tamil literature transcends geographical boundaries, creating a bridge between diverse cultures and regions. The cross-border impact of Tamil literature is rooted in its antiquity, with the Tamil language and its literary tradition serving as vital links between communities in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the global Tamil diaspora. This cross-border influence highlights the universal appeal and adaptability of Tamil literary works, which have been instrumental in shaping cultural exchanges and preserving Tamil identity beyond its native homeland.

HISTORICAL CROSS-BORDER CONNECTIONS

Tamil literature's cross-border connections date back to ancient times, particularly during the Sangam period (circa 300 BCE–300 CE). Maritime trade routes facilitated the exchange of ideas and cultural practices between Tamil Nadu and regions like Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Sangam literature, such as **"Purananuru"**, provides glimpses of these interactions, referencing foreign traders and cross-cultural exchanges that enriched Tamil society. In Sri Lanka, Tamil literature found a significant foothold, especially among the Tamil-speaking communities of the north and east. Works like **"Manimekalai"** reflect the cultural and religious interactions between the Tamil and Sinhalese populations. The dissemination of Tamil Buddhist and Jain texts in Sri Lanka underscores the historical role of Tamil literature in fostering cross-border religious and philosophical dialogue.

INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Tamil traders and settlers carried their literary traditions to Southeast Asia, leaving a profound impact on the region's culture. Tamil inscriptions and manuscripts found in countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia testify to the spread of Tamil language and literature. The influence of Tamil epics like **"Silappathikaram"** and **"Thirukkural"** can be observed in Southeast Asian literary and ethical texts. Tamil literature also contributed to the development of local languages and scripts, such as the Pallava script, which later evolved into Southeast Asian writing systems.

MODERN DIASPORA AND GLOBAL INFLUENCE

In the modern era, the Tamil diaspora has played a crucial role in sustaining and expanding the cross-border impact of Tamil literature. Migrants to countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, and South Africa have preserved their linguistic and literary heritage, adapting traditional Tamil works to reflect contemporary themes and local experiences. Modern Tamil writers from the diaspora, such as K. S. Maniam and M. Balakrishnan, have explored themes of identity, migration, and multiculturalism, creating a unique blend of Tamil and global literary traditions.

The global dissemination of Tamil literature has also been facilitated by translations. Works like "**Thirukkural**" have been translated into numerous languages, bringing Tamil ethical and philosophical thought to a wider audience. Literary festivals and Tamil cultural organizations in countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia further promote cross-border engagement with Tamil literature.

The cross-border dimension of Tamil literature underscores its universality and resilience. By transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, Tamil literature has not only preserved the Tamil identity but also enriched global literary and cultural landscapes. Its enduring relevance highlights the ability of literature to connect communities, foster mutual understanding, and celebrate shared human values.

The Tamil language, one of the world's oldest and most enduring tongues, has witnessed significant transformations through centuries, particularly during and after colonial rule. Despite the disruptions caused by colonialism, Tamil has emerged resilient, maintaining its cultural and literary essence while evolving to address contemporary challenges in the 21st century. The legacy of colonialism and the renewed importance of Tamil today underscore its adaptability and relevance in an increasingly globalized world.

IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON TAMIL LANGUAGE

Colonialism profoundly impacted Tamil society and its language. During British rule in India, English was imposed as the administrative and educational medium, marginalizing Tamil and other regional languages. However, Tamil intellectuals and writers resisted this cultural erosion through literary and political movements aimed at preserving and revitalizing their language.

Organizations like the Tamil Sangams and individuals like Maraimalai Adigal championed the Pure Tamil Movement ("**Thanithamizh Iyakkam**"), which emphasized purging Tamil of foreign influences and restoring its classical purity. These efforts ensured that Tamil retained its literary vibrancy and cultural significance even under colonial hegemony.

IMPORTANCE OF TAMIL LANGUAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21st century, Tamil holds immense significance as a cultural, economic, and technological asset. Here are key areas highlighting its relevance:

- **CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PRIDE:** Tamil continues to be a symbol of cultural identity for millions worldwide. Its recognition as a classical language by the Indian government and its inclusion in UNESCO's list of ancient scripts celebrate its rich heritage.
- **TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS:** With the rise of digital media and globalization, Tamil has successfully transitioned to new platforms. Tamil-language content flourishes in areas like social media, mobile apps, and artificial intelligence. Unicode adoption has enabled the seamless use of Tamil across devices, fostering its use among younger generations.
- **GLOBAL DIASPORA:** The Tamil-speaking diaspora in countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and Canada plays a pivotal role in promoting the language. Tamil schools and cultural events abroad ensure that future generations remain connected to their linguistic roots.
- **EDUCATION AND RESEARCH:** Tamil is an essential subject in schools across Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, fostering a deeper appreciation for its literary and historical contributions. Academic research on Tamil literature, history, and linguistics continues to thrive globally.

Colonialism tested the resilience of Tamil, but the language emerged stronger, adapting to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. In the 21st century, Tamil not only serves as a bridge to a glorious past but also paves the way for a future where cultural identity and technological progress coexist. As it continues to grow and adapt, Tamil remains a testament to the enduring power of language as a medium of cultural preservation and global communication.

CONCLUSION

The interrelation between Tamil literature and its culture in India is a testament to the enduring legacy of Tamil civilization. Through its profound exploration of human emotions, ethical principles, and spiritual aspirations, Tamil literature has not only documented but also shaped the cultural identity of Tamil Nadu. It reflects a worldview that values harmony, resilience, and continuity, ensuring that the Tamil heritage remains vibrant and relevant across generations. As both a custodian and a creator of culture, Tamil literature continues to inspire, educate, and unite Tamil-speaking communities worldwide.

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