

An Attempt to Trace the Early Translations of Sangam Literature

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Tamil, one of the classical Indian languages and Tamil in Tamil script is "jkpo;" and the word by itself has a special feature, each letter is from each group of Tamil letters- (j) *Vallinam* means "Hard", (kp) *Mellinam* means "Soft", and (o;) *Idaiyinam* means "Medium". Also the letter o is available only in a very few languages like, Tamil, Malayalam, Chinese, and Japanese. Tamil is a longest surviving classical language and the Sangam Age or Sangam period marks the beginning of Tamil literature and this paper attempts to trace the translations of Sangam literature into English.

The advent of East India Company marked the arrival of Christian missionaries from Europe to the coastal areas of Tamilnadu and Kerala. They arrived for the purpose of developing their religions but they also worked and contributed immensely to Tamil language.

Translation studies as a genre developed or gained its due worth or importance in the academic sphere only during the early 20th century. One of the earlier translations made during that time was by M.S. Puranalingam Pillai who translated the early myths of Tamil legends and literature. It gives a complete survey of the early history of Tamil literature and discusses the books and its authors in detail. Sangam Literature forms a major part of this work.

The Treatment of Nature in Tamil Language by M. Varadarajan and *Tamil Concept of Love* by S.P. Manickam talk about the intricacies and nuances of Tamil literature and it gives a vivid and detailed description about Sangam literature and documents all the important features and characteristics of verses of the Sangam Age. The Sangam Age is a golden age of Tamil literature and the word sangam is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word Sangha which means a group of persons or an association. The Tamil Sangam was a school of poets and bards who contributed to the literature of Tamil language. Sangam period is divided into three different periods and it is believed to be in different places under the patronage of the Pandyan kings. The Pandyan kings were great kings who ruled Madurai and its neighboring small villages. There is a popular notion that the first Sangam was attended by Gods and legendary sages. Not a single work of the first Sangam is currently available.

The second Sangam was believed to be existed at Kapatpuram, another capital of the Pandyas. It comprised several poets, but only *Tolkappiyam* (the early Tamil grammar) has survived the test of time. *Tolkappiyam* is one of the oldest Tamil grammar written by *Tolkappiyar*. *Tolkappiyar* is one of the twelve disciples of the great Saint Agastya. The third Sangam is the present Madurai. It has also contributed immensely to the language but unfortunately only a few managed to survive the test of time. The books that are significant are *Ettutogai* (Eight anthologies), *Pathupaatu* (10 verses) and *Pathinenkzhkanaku* (18 minor works).

AK Ramanujan has also translated a few poems of Sangam literature. There are many poets from Tamil Nadu who attempted translating the poems of Sangam literature. But almost every critic who knows Tamil and English has expressed that these translations give the possibility of rendering the works to non- Tamil readers, but they are prosaic in Nature as they attempt to remain faithful to the spirit and content of the original.

It is very interesting to observe that G.U. Pope, an Anglican Christian missionary visited Tamil Nadu and stayed there for a span of forty years and translated many works of Tamil language. He widely translated the works of Sangam Age. His greatest contribution was the translation of *Thirukural* in 1858. The *Tirukkural* or *Thirukkural*, or shortly the *Kural*, is a classic Tamil text consisting of 1330 couplets or kurals, dealing with the everyday virtues of an individual. *Thirukural* is more of a guide to how to live our lives. The first line of every 1330 couplet has four words and the second line has three words.

Pope was one of the major scholars of Tamil literature. His first work was *A Catechism of Tamil Grammar* (1842). In 1893, he translated *Naaladiyaar*, a didactic work of moral sayings in quatrains. It has 400 verses in 40 chapters, each is believed to be written by a Jain ascetic. The translation of *Tiruvachakam* appeared in 1900. Of this he said: "I date this on my eightieth birthday. I find, by reference, that my first Tamil lesson was in 1837. This ends, as I suppose a long life of devotion to Tamil studies. It is not without deep emotion that I thus bring to a close my life's literary work".

Sangam literature is considered as a literature of wisdom in Tamil language. The Sangam period was followed by the five great epics of Tamil language. Sangam literature, unlike the Vedic texts, is secular in its themes. It talks about the economic, political life of people who belong to all the spheres of the economy. Even Mahatma Gandhi once mentioned that he wanted to learn *Thirukural* and gain all its wisdom. Such is the greatness of Sangam literature. These translations have given the literature a global scope and an acknowledgement. Even in the 21st century, there are many translators who still continue to work on the verses of Sangam period and these translators work with a fair idea on theories on translations and translation studies. But earlier translations did not have a theoretical understanding of translation studies yet they continue to be predominant and important till date.

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