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Similarities between South Korea and Tamil Nadu: The Unknown Link

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Abstract

Tamil is one of the ancient languages which has an oldest extant literature. It is one of the longest surviving Dravidian languages dated from 300 BC. Korean is the native language for about 80 million people all over the world. Modern Korean was developed by King Sejong the Great in the 15th century. While analyzing the Tamil and Korean scripts, there was a certain amount of similarity in both text and grammar of these two languages. Despite the geographical separation of these two peninsulas, they share a considerable extent of literature and cultural resemblance. Hence, this proposed work provides a proof for the similarity with the help of a theoretical research study. This work portrays a list of words taken from Korean and Tamil Literature as samples and classifies them as complete or partial based on their similarity. It also lists verbs which after conjugation have a lexical similarity.

Keywords: Lexical Similarity, Cultural Similarity, South Korea, Tamil Nadu

Introduction

As the world becomes more tech-savvy, we are moving towards different cultures. Korea's culture is now taking over the world. Korean aesthetics as a whole bring awareness and appreciation to Korea. Originally, Korean was only spoken and was written using Chinese characters (also known as Old Korean). Today's modern Korean consisting of 24 basic vowels and 27 complex letters was developed by king Sejong the Great in the 15th century. Notable heritage sites of Korean culture include Changdeok Palace in Seoul, Gyeongju Historic Areas, Bulguk (sa) temple in Gyeongju and many more. Their traditional houses (한옥) "Hanok" have been preserved till today without demolishing to showcase their culture to the world and also to the future generations.

Being 5000 years old, Tamil is spoken by around 78 million people all over the world. The very first Indian manuscripts acknowledged by UNESCO were written in Tamil. Tamil signifies the meaning 'sweet sound' which is justified by the language itself. Tamil literature is composed of 12 vowels, 18 consonants and 216 letters which are the combination of both. 'The Thirukural' (திருக்குறள்) a classic Tamil literature work is known worldwide for its teachings on the art of living. 'The Brihadishwara Temple', situated in Thanjavur district, is a UNESCO world heritage site which was built in the 11th century. This temple stands as pride of Tamil culture and is world famous for its architecture and sculptures. The Chettinad mansions are widely known for their beautiful architecture consisting of wide courtyards and pillars enriched with marble and teak.

Though Tamil and Korean seem to be different, they have immense lexical similarity. For example, father is pronounced as (அப்பா) ‘Appa’ in Tamil and is pronounced as (아빠) ‘Appa’ in Korean too. Similarly, there is also a considerable amount of cultural similarity between the two languages too. For example, the Tamil sweet snack ‘Poli’ (பொரி) is quite similar to the Korean sweet snack ‘Hotteok’ (호떡). Thus, this work mainly studies the lexical and cultural similarity between Tamil and Korean by collecting and analyzing samples of text and images.

Literature Survey

The lexical link between Korean and Dravidian languages like Tamil have been researched and explored as early as 1985 by Morgan E Clippinger, who had taken over four hundred sets of Korean - Dravidian words to reveal the link between them (Clippinger).

Intercultural understanding and mutual relations are crucial to economic and political development between nations. (Kannan) had taken an initiative to prove that Tamil Nadu and Korea are not coincidentally related but it has a strong base tracing back to the 1st Century (AD 48). He has thoroughly researched and has proposed the origin of the Korean - Tamilian Queen Heo Hwang Ok (Chempavalam) with accurate proofs (Kannan).

(Narayanan) has taken a close look at the relationship between South Korea and Tamil and has also supported the origin of Queen Heo Hwang Ok or Chembavalam through proofs. He encourages young scholars to research more on the historical, cultural and lexical relationship between the two countries (Narayanan).

(Arokiyaraj et al.) suggests that the ancient trade route might be a possible reason for the similarities between South Korea and Tamil Nadu. They suggest that the ancient port Korkai might have been the starting point where Mongoloids traveled to Tamil Nadu and Tamilians traveled to Korea for trade and missionary activities (Arokiyaraj et al.).

Historical References

Tamils and Koreans have a deep connection to each other, not just today or yesterday, but for

approximately 1900 years. The story starts with the Tamil princess, Suriratna, whose father had a prophecy in his dream from a God to send his daughter towards the north through the sea and get married to the King of the Gaya kingdom in Korea. After two long months of traveling through the sea, Suriratna reached Gaya, married King Suro and was given the title of the queen and the name ‘Heo Hwang Ok’ (허황옥). She lived for around 157 years, and almost 6 million present day Koreans are her descendants (Wikipedia: Heo Hwang Ok).

Here, Suriratna or Chembavalam (Oviya) is referred to as a Tamil princess, as it is believed that she had come from a kingdom called Ayuta, the present-day Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu state. Though there are a lot of controversies regarding the origin of Ayuta, it is believed to be Kanyakumari because of the following reasons:

- The mind-blowing lexical similarity between Tamil and Korean.
- Kanyakumari is a district that contains a port for sea traveling which might serve as a proof for Queen Heo Hwang Ok’s travel from Ancient India to Korea (Wikipedia: Kannyakumari District).
- There are several cultural practices that are exactly the same in both the cultures. They have been explained further in this paper.

The Pandya Kingdom reigned over the south Tamil Nadu from 4th century BCE till 14th century CE (Wikipedia: Pandyan Dynasty). The first and foremost capital and port of the early Pandya kingdom (Wikipedia: Early Pandya Kingdom), Korkai (Wikipedia: Korkai) has been existing for over 3000 years from the 4th century BCE till today. Korkai lies near Kanyakumari, which as mentioned above was also believed to be the birthplace of Queen Heo Hwang Ok. The Queen’s journey to Korea has been under research for several years and the possible land routes from Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh, India) have been ruled out as shown in Figure 1 (Wikipedia: Heo Hwang Ok). So, the only possibility for the queen to travel to Korea by sea would be through the Korkai port as it is situated near the Kanyakumari (The old Ayuta Kingdom). The time period of Korkai and the queen’s time period coincide with each other.

As for the classical Prose, the two major Historical Korean records include: Samguk Yusa (삼국유사) and Samguk Sagi (삼국사기). These two documents are considered as the national treasures of South Korea and consist of several myths, legends and the records of all the dynasties and kings who reigned and ruled over Korea for thousands of years. As for classical fictional work, original fictional prose was mostly written in classical Chinese during the 14th to 17th centuries. It includes one of the most prominent and the first fictional prose of classical Korean Literature: Geumo Sinhwa (금오신화) - The tales of Mount Geumo. It is a collection of five fantasy novels revolving around Geumo-san, the famous present day Namsan, South Korea.

Modern Korean literature emerged in Korea during the fight against Japanese colonial rule. Modern Korean literature works were often influenced by western cultures. It also helped in raising literacy rates and the spread of hangul throughout Korea. Modern Korean literature can be divided into two major divisions: the Pre - war Korean Literature and Post war Literature based on the Korean war which took place from 1950 to 1953.

Sinsoseol is a pre-war literature work. Sinsoseol (신소설) - 'New novel' or enlightenment novels, gave hope to people in despair and enlightened people during the Japanese colonial rule. These novels mostly talked about enlightenment, freedom and modernization of Korean society. Other famous works include the widely known literary magazines published in the 1920s and 1930s such as Changjo (창조), Changmichon (장미촌), GaeByeok (개벽).

After the war, Korea was divided into north and south. South Korean Post - War Literature mainly focused on the struggles faced by Korean people. There were also few works that focused on the daily lives of South Korean people. But soon, all the post war literature works were rejected and overthrown by people as it was considered to be "sentimental escapism". Other works produced during the 1970s and 1980s mostly focus on the division of Korea or national division. It was during this time, the influence of Western modernism on Korean Literature started to grow rapidly.

Cultural Likeness

There have been several articles, journal papers, blogs and even books published worldwide in order to showcase the cultural resemblance between Tamil and Korean. Still, when the research was started to study the cultural resemblance between two cultures, there was at least a single resemblance in each and every aspect of life not yet discovered. On a similar basis this work portrays the undiscovered cultural similarities of both the cultures.

The three amenities of life are food, shelter and clothing. It is astonishing to say that both Tamil Nadu and Korea share likeness in all these three. Firstly, in food, both Tamilians and Koreans are rice eaters. For example, Korea's steamed rice cakes - Jeung Pyeon (증편) ([Wikipedia: Jeungpyeong](#)) - which is similar to Tamil Nadu's most popular dish Idli (இட்லி) ([Wikipedia: Idli](#)). Both these dishes are prepared with the same ingredient - rice and the basic preparation method is fermentation and steaming. Figure 2 shows Jeungpyeon and Idli.



Figure 2 Jeung Pyeon and Idli

Next, Poli (பொளி) is a very delicious snack which is loved by people of all ages in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, The Korean Hotteok (호떡) is very similar to Poli as shown in Figure 3. Both these sweet snacks

are loved by people and are made using all-purpose flour or wheat flour. Poli is stuffed with grated coconut or boiled dal with jaggery. Hotteok is stuffed with peanuts and jaggery or honey.



Figure 3 Hotteok and Poli

Next, Likeness in the clothing, Korean traditional dresses are called Hanbok (한복) ([Wikipedia: Hanbok](#)) which consists of a Jacket (Jeogori: 저고리) and a Skirt (Chima: 치마). Similarly, Tamil Nadu's traditional Pattu Pavadai (பட்டுபாவாடை) ([Wikipedia: Langa Voni: Significance in Coming of Age Ceremony](#)) consists of a Jacket and a Skirt. Both these traditional attires are made from silk or cotton and are worn on special occasions as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Hanbok and Pattu Pavadai

The next similarity between the two cultures is their homes or shelters. The Korean traditional Houses or Hanok (한옥) ([Wikipedia: Hanok](#)) are very alike to the Thotti Kattu Veedu (தொட்டிகட்டுவீடு) in Tamil Nadu. Both portray an open verandah or courtyard and the house surrounded by it as depicted in figure 5.



Figure 5 Hanok and Thotti Kattu Veedu

The other astonishing similarities include the traditional Korean Sebae (세배) ([Chung](#)) and Jesa

(제사). Sebae is the practice of paying respect to elders on new year, Seollal (설날). The people get blessings from their elders by deeply bowing to them and in return they receive a (Sebaet Ton - 세뱃돈) gift in the form of money. Very similar to this, In Tamil Nadu too, people get blessings (ஆசீர்வாதங்கள்) (Wikipedia: [Blessing - Hinduism](#)) from their elders on new year (தமிழ்ப்புத்தாண்டு) and all other special occasions and in turn get money as a return gift as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6 Ashirvadam and Sebae

Jesa (제사) (Wikipedia: [Jesa](#)) is a ritual, where Koreans pay homage to their ancestors on their death anniversary by offering them food and fruits and praying. Likewise, the exact same ritual is done in Tamil Nadu. It has several names including Padaippu (படைப்பு) and Thithi. Figure 7 depicts Jesa and Padaippu.



Figure 7 Jesa and Padaippu

Kummi (கும்மி) (Wikipedia: [Kummi](#)) is a dance performed during several festivals and Pongal - the harvest festival celebrated in Tamil Nadu. Women form circles and dance together with either drums beating in the background or rhythmic hand claps. Ganggangsullae (강강술래) (Wikipedia: [Ganggangsullae](#)) is an ancient Korean dance performed during the Korean harvest festival. It is also performed by women in traditional clothing who dance in a circular fashion accompanied by singing and playing as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8 Ganggangsullae and Kummi

Tamil Nadu's most famous religious temples are located on mountain slopes or on mountain ranges. A vast amount of people visit these mountains every

day in order to worship God. These destinations include: The Palani Hills, The Maruthamalai Hills, The Velliangiri Hills and The Mailam Hill. Similarly, Korea's most known shrines are situated on mountain slopes and ranges. People from all over the world visit these shrines to pray to God and for internal peace which include: Beopju Temple, Tongdo Temple, Buseok Temple. Figure 9 depicts the 2 most visited temples of South Korea and Tamil Nadu.

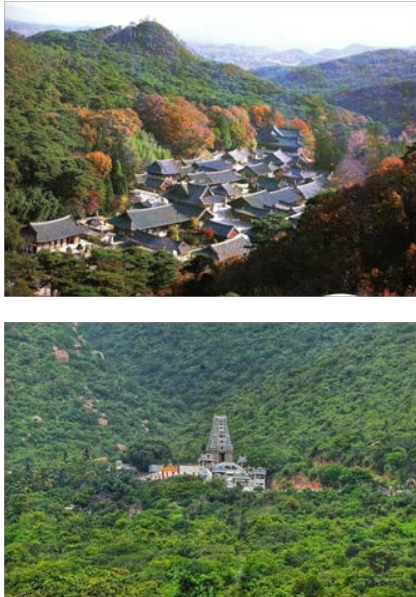


Figure 9 Tongdo Temple and Marudamalai Temple

Chuseok (추석) ([Wikipedia: Chuseok](#)) is the biggest traditional festival celebrated in South Korea. It is celebrated for 3 days as a celebration for a good harvest in the early autumn or end of the summer. Pongal (பொங்கல்) ([Wikipedia: Pongal](#)) is a festival celebrated in Tamil Nadu for 3 to 4 days to celebrate the beginning of the harvest in the early summer. Figure 10 depicts Pongal and Chuseok.

The above-mentioned similarities were very explicit and are related closely to the culture and habits. Here are some acknowledged yet unknown similarities of the history and lexical similarities between Korea and Tamil Nadu.

- Korean is the native language for around 80 million people from all around the world. Surprisingly, Tamil is also natively spoken by

78 million to 80 million people throughout the world.

- India and Korea commemorate their Independence Day on August 15. The two nations became independent exactly a year apart.
- The ancient period of both Korea ([Wikipedia: Three Kingdoms of Korea](#)) and Tamil Nadu ([Wikipedia: Three Crowned Kings](#)) were dominated by the 3 great kingdoms which excelled in art, literature and military. The Three great kingdoms of Tamil Nadu were Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. The Three great kingdoms of ancient Korea were Silla, Baekje and Goryeo. Figure 11 represents the maps of both the places during the ancient era.



Figure 10 Pongal and Chuseok



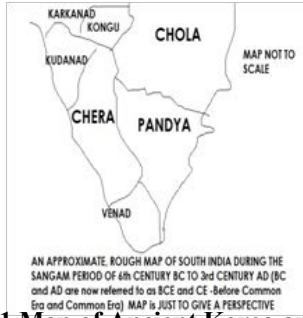


Figure 11 Map of Ancient Korea and Map of Ancient Tamil Nadu

Lexical Similarity

Lexical similarity is when a set of words sound similar in 2 or more languages. Tamil and Korean have an astonishing degree of lexical similarity. Based on the lexical similarity of words, the words have been categorized into three major categories:

Partial Word Similarity

The words that have partial lexical similarity are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1 Partial Word Similarity

Tamil	Pronunciation	Korean	Pronunciation	English
சோறு	Soru	쌀	Ssal	Rice
தங்கச்சி	Thangachi	아가씨	Agasshi	Sister
வெட்டுக்கிளி	VettuKili	메뚜기	Mettugi	Grasshopper
ஐயோ	Aiyoo	아이구	Aigoo	Exclamation
பாம்பு	Pambu	뱀	Baem	Snake
நாடு	Nadu	나라	Nara	Country
மொத்தம்	Motham	모든	Modeun	Everything
நாளை	Naalai	내일	Naeil	Tomorrow
முதலில்	Mudalil	먼저	Meonjeo	First
முடி	Mudi	머리카락	Meori Karak	Hair
கனவு	Kanavu	꿈	Kkum	Dream
கல்யாணம்	Kalyanam	결혼	Kyeolhon	Marriage
சத்தம்	Satham	소리	Sori	Sound
மனம்	Manam	마음	Maeum	Mind
காற்று	Kaatru	공기	Kongi	Air
ஜன்னல்	jannal	창문	Changmun	Window

Complete Word Similarity

The words that have complete lexical similarity are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2 Complete Word Similarity

Tamil	Pronunciation	Korean	Pronunciation	English
நான்	Naan/ Na*	나	Na	Me
நீ	Ni	너	Neo/Ni	You
அப்பா	Appa	아빠	Appa	Father
அம்மா	Amma	엄마	Eomma	Mother
அன்னி	Anni	언니	Eonni	Sister/Sister-in-law
புல்	Pul	풀	Pul	Grass
பல்	Pal	이빨	Ippal	Teeth
இது	Ithu	이	I	This
நாள்	Nal	날	Nal	Day

Similarity Between Verbs

These verbs when conjugated or when in root form, are lexically similar as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Similarity between Verbs

Tamil	Pronunciation	Korean	Pronunciation	English
பாடு	Padu/ Paduvadu*	부르다	Burueda	Sing
படி	Padi/ Padipadu*	배우다	Baeuda	Learn
பாரு	Pa/Paru*	보다	Boda	See
கட	Kada	가다	Kada	Go/ Pass through
வா	Va/Wa	와	Wa	Come

Conclusion

This paper addresses the lexical and cultural similarities between South Korea and Tamil Nadu. This research points out the unknown and unbelievable similarities that have been existing for a long period of time and has a significant influence on the cultures. The possible reason for this unknown link between South Korean and Tamil has also been speculated from the existing resources and has been explored with references. This paper highlights the astonishingly similar cultural customs, architecture and heritage of Tamil Nadu and South Korea. This paper also shows the degree to which Tamil and Korean words are similar by classifying them into partial and complete. In future, this work can be extended to study the lexical similarity coefficient between Tamil and Korean. Therefore, it is believed that this work will stand as a proof to spread awareness and strengthen the link between South Korea and Tamil Nadu.

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