

CLASSIFICATION OF RACE OR KUDI MENTIONED IN SANGAM LITERATURE

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Introduction

The society under the ancient Tamilnadu had derived significant factor to study about the life of ancient Tamils. The Sangam literature gives complete references to know about them. Even though new archaeological sources are available to understand about ancient Tamils; these sources are collaborated with literary records to ensure veracity of the records. In this paper, an attempt has been made to trace land and people of sangam Tamils, social divisions, and their family set up namely kudi with some other social aspects of their life. However, these aspects were discussed earlier by some other scholars this would be a new attempt to analyse the race or Kudiof Sangam people on historical, and literary concepts for the brief understanding.

The Land and People

The Sangam land was categorised as hilly, pastoral, agricultural, coastal and desert. The people of Sangam moved freely as social groups with all lands of people, the barter system of trade, and other ways of economic pursuits, pushed them to contact all types of lands. The people had selected suitable lands for settlement on the basis of occupation, in due course the new occupations had pushed them to choose new regions for habitation. The Tamils had created their shelters based on their economic and geographical advantage. The Sangam people had designed their lifestyle based on the soil (Tina) viz. Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai. Each land has its own individual nature. Hilly region called Kurinchi, Mullai region covered forest. Marutham contains pastoral lands, Neithal was seashore region and Palai was the desert region. The lands played dominant role in setting the character and occupations of Sangam Tamil society. In Kurinji and Neithal regions the people settled in small houses, Sangam work Ahananuru describes the people of Kurinji and Neithal lived in hut, it was made of bamboos and its floor was smeared with cow dung. But, the houses in Mullai and Marutham lands were bigger in size using mud and burnt bricks. Great care was given while constructing the houses. The rich people decorated their house wall with flowers and paintings. The lights were kept burning throughout the nights. The thatched roof was the feature of Kurinji and Neithal land. Neithal people used palm leaf for roofing the houses. But, the Marutham and Mullai land witnessed an urban habitation system. The recent archaeological discovery at Keeladi proves the existence of urban elite society during the sangam period. Upto 8th phase of excavations at keeladi there were many large size of bricks, ring wells, earthen ware have been excavated, which stands that the sangam society was an economically empowered society. As mentioned, earlier the land played vital role in the social status of Sangam people. As far as the occupation was, concern people of Kurinji led

the life through hunting and bee keeping. Cattle rearing were the prominent occupation for Mullai land people because it covers the forest region. The people who lived in pastoral marutham land concentrated on agriculture and irrigation. Being a seashore region the people belonged to Neithal land involved in fishing for their livelihood. Among the five categories of land, Palai was deemed unfertile, so the people belonged to this land under no other better professions they became decoiters. The Sangam literature mentions about the people of these lands as Vettuvār - Kurinji, Ayar - Mullai, Vellala - Marutham, Paradavar, Umanar - Neithal & Kalvar - Palai. Besides the tribes and regional groups there were many occupational divisions existed in southern Tamil Nadu.

Race (or) Kudi

The ancient Tamil society constructed based on Races or Kudi. According to Tamil lexicon the word race (meaning in Tamil - Inam) denotes Kulam (clan) Sutram and Nirai. The race defined as a group of people with certain common characteristics descended from a common ancestor. Many Tamil literature mentions the words Kudi, Kulam, Tinai to denote the word race. Accordingly, it is believed, that the word Kudi may refer family and settlement. Sangam literature mentions this word on this meaning as

Thinai thorum mariIya. Thinai nilaiperyar

“Thulanku kudi vizhuththinai

Aadu Kudi mootha vizhuththinai

Therefore, the word kudi was the basic social system of Sangam period. The Sangam period was the period when Tamil ethnic consciousness was not abundant. Though ancient literature shows the mind and legacy of the Tamil kings, which pointed out family system (Kudi-system). When we count the use of word Kudi in literature, we come to conclusion that the Sangam Tamils formed their family set up through Kudi. Hence, the word Kudi became noted as the sentiments of the people. When the term kudi popularised among the people they started to know about the Kudi of the kings, poets, and ministers. Based on the statements of ancient poets we can understand the historicity and tradition of the term Kudi. The poets mentioned some terms to denote Kudi and its posterity, Muthukudi, Tholkudi, Palankudi, Thulankukudi, Neelkudi, Nallisai kudi, Thillisaikudi. The Sangam classics Tolkappiyam, Kalitogai and Ainkurunuru mentions about various kudi (Tribes), its functions and characteristics features. The poets of Sangam have also mentioned the pride of every tribe (Kudi). The clannish prides of Kumanar, Pari, Velir, Nannan and Nalliakodan have been praised by poets with great extent. According to the verses of eight anthologies, the ancient tribes had distinguished from one another in their lifestyle, features, profession activities because of various geographical location. For example Vedars (Hunters) settled in Singhala forest had different features of Vedars of Tamil country. The Vedars of Singhala forest had domesticated cattle but this practice was not vogue in among Tamil Vedars.

During the Sangam period, there were many social groups which engaged in various occupations, each group gave birth to their own cultural traditions. In this context, it is not genuine to consider the ancient Tamils as monsters mentioned in Ramayana, because it is an epic, the research on this line about the race of Tamils is not knowledgeable. According to

Srinivasa Ayyangar, Tamils are divided into Aryan, Dravidian and Nagar, by this view, he wants to highlight Brahmins were Aryans, Vellalas were Dravidians, Valayar, Pallar, Sanar, Maravar, Idayar, Parayar, Ahambadiyar, Kammalar, Kallar, Ambalakarar were Nagar. Hence, it is not genuine to divide the Tamils as Aryan and Dravidian, because this division should be linguistic oriented not racial outlook. According to Vincent Smith the hunter (vedar) and fishermen (Meenavar) were the ancient tribes (Kudi), other Tamils were came later periods. But some contemporary Sangam classics ascribe that in addition to Vedar, Meenavar, the groups like Kallar, Panar too belonged to ancient Tamil Kudi (Race), accordingly the Parayar and Thudiyar also belonged to same Kudi. The practice of Kudi system later developed into great extent, which led to the formation of caste system in Tamil Society.

Conclusion

Thus, the Tamil society during the sangam age lived a compact life within a group consist of equal social and economic pursuits. Importantly the people of Kurinji led a life of hunting they were called as VedarKudi or Vettuvar Kudi. Though their occupation was same they were called as common Kudi. The people of Neithal were known as Meenavar and Umanar, they are being called as Meenavar Kudi even today. The cattle rearers of Mullai land were called as Idayar or shepherd, the villages bearing name Idayankulam, Idayapatti, Idayanenthal, Idaikattur etc stands as the testimony for the settlements of Mullai land people. The term Idayar Kudi even exists in many villages of Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram districts. As mentioned above the ancient poets mentioned Tholkudi, Muthukudi, Palankudi to denote the races, it is important to mention that these three terms are common in all lands, because there was no existence of caste system based on the birth during the sangam age. Thus the sangam literature classified the people as Kudi based on their occupation not by birth.

End Notes

1. Aham:12, 1.9
2. Perum: 298
3. Mani: 128
4. Tamil lexicon, University of Madras, Vol.I,1067, p. 870
5. Tol.ahath: 80
6. Pathitru: 31
7. Puram, 24:28
8. Kali, 105.13
9. Ibid., 107
10. Pattinam,479.
11. Pathitru, 31.3
12. Aham, 54:16
13. Kali, 104:5
14. Pathitru,81:83
15. Smith. V.A., Early History of India, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1976,p. 439