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Introduction:

“Mahabharat” is the greatest epic of India and as well as that of the world. It has influenced not only India, but also the world in many aspects leaving traces that could be discerned even today. As the western world has been subjected to total westernization, modernization and religious culturation in recent centuries, such traces have been slowly disappearing or have already been made to disappear. However, their footprints could still be found in Asia, particularly, South East Asian Countries, where, they are culturally surviving.

In Indian context, Sanskrit and Tamil literatures are placed apart on lines of linguistic, racial and sectarian interpretation and argued that both are different and separate in the respective aspects. However, it is interesting and thought provoking to find out the traces of epics and puranas in the ancient Tamil literature popularly known as “Sangam literature”. It reflects the social, religious, economic and political aspects in historical perspective. Like Mahabharat, the influence of the Tamils on the South East Asian countries has been so remarkable. Till 12th century, with the victories and exploits of Cholas over seas, the political domination too was registered.

The Dates of Mahabharat and Sangam Literature:

The dating of Mahabharat has been controversial for a long time, however, the range has been narrowed down to 3102 BCE to 1700 BCE recently based on astronomical and archaeological evidences. Only, the stray cases come down to 4th century CE and so on, which delve on the development of script and association of a language with script. Thus, some western estimates starting with 950 BCE (F. E. Pargiter), place it between 400 BCE and 400 CE (Winternitz, Hopkins, Wilson, etc.). The methodology of dating involved can be grouped as follows:

1. **Archaeological evidences:** Usage of horse, cavalry, sophisticated weaponry used, chariots with horses with axle made of tensile Iron etc., As usage of Iron could not be placed before 1000 BCE, the date of Mahabharat cannot go beyond 1000 BCE.
2. **Script, Language Literature:** Before Asoka (c.250 BCE) / Mauryan period (c.300 BCE), there was no script in India, as Indians did not know to write. Thus, all literature could

have written down only after this period. Thus, the date of Vedas has to be around 1500-1000 BCE in language form, but put into written form later.

3. **Astronomical evidences:** Though, it is accepted that the Kali era started with 3102 BCE, the exact observation of conjunction of planets on 17th / 18th February 3102 is credited to an unknown Greek instead of an Indian. Therefore, if at all any Indian used it, it could have been borrowed one and the possibility was Aryabhata (c.496 CE), who used it first.

4. **Buddhism, Jainism and Hindu Religion:** As Ramayana and Mahabharata make reference to Buddha, Buddhists and Jains, they must have been conceived, composed and written only after 5th century BCE.

5. **The Greek Factor / Alexander Invasion:** After the invasion of Alexander (c.326 BCE) only, all arts and sciences were introduced into India and therefore, the poets could have seen the reality of wars, palaces, kings, their dresses etc., only after that and hence date could be only after 326 BCE. Thus, even the epics could have been copied from the Greek sources, as has been argued by Weber, D. C. Boyd, W. Taylor and others (K. T. Telang, *Was the Ramayana Copied from Homer? A Reply to Professor Weber*, (1873), Publishers Parlour (India), New Delhi, 1976).

Here, the important point is the dating of Mahabharat war is different from the dating of the composition of the work.

Another controversy is about its status of attaining 1,00,000 verses in three stages. Winternitze asserts that the supposition that the Mahabharata received its present form only in the 15th or 16th century is absolutely false. For it is proved by its literary and inscriptional evidence, that already about 500 CE, the Mahabharata was no longer an actual epic, but a sacred text-book and religious discourse, and was on the whole, not essentially different, in extent and contents from the work as we have it at present.

The dating of Sangam literature has been 500 BCE to 500 CE or 300 BCE to 300 CE or 500 BCE to 100 CE. Here, the methodology of datings could be grouped as follows:

1. Tolkappiyam is placed at two extremities – 1000 BCE and 7th to 9th centuries CE.
2. The existence of “Tamil Sangams” based on the internal evidences of the literature and “Iraiyanar Agapporul” is accepted by one group of scholars and denied by the other.

3. Megalithic culture related to Tamil culture - According to Asko Parpola *the Dravidian languages came to India from the west through Iran about 700 BCE with the carriers of the Megalithic culture*. He repeats that “*one of the most widely supported hypotheses*” was the one that was proposed in 1953 by Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf. Such Megalithic culture distributed all over South India including Tamilnadu and which persisted well into the first centuries of the Christian era.
4. The *last phase of the Megalithic culture* (c.300-100 BCE) does overlap *the period of Old Tamil Culture* (c.100 BCE - 600 CE), which in its militaristic idealization of warfare (including such elements as the horse and iron weapons) closely resembles the martial character of the Megalithic culture (in which weapons were regular grave goods).
5. Megalithic invasion of Tamizhagam - Asko Parpola also talks about a “*Megalithic invasion*” of Tamizhagam. To bring the “invading Dravidians” from Iran like “Aryans”, he proposes another hypothesis that the Dravidians could not have arrived in India as late as the Megalithic culture is clear from the fact that there is evidence in the Vedic texts for the presence of Dravidian languages in the Punjab already in the second millennium BCE.
6. Thus, the Tamil language could have developed only after 500-300 BCE, and could have been written down after 300 BCE, so that the literature evolved had been upto 1st century to 7th cent.CE.

Therefore, the dating of Sangam literature should be decisive one in connecting it with Mahabharat incidences. The extensive usage of Mahabharat incidences as simile, metaphor and comparison in the literature clearly proves that it has reached South India definitely before or during 500-300 BCE. Otherwise, the Sangam Poets could not have adopted to use in such a manner.

References about Mahabharat in Sangam Literature

The references about and of Mahabharat in the Sangam literature have been of the following nature:

- 1. Connecting the Tamil Kings of Tamizhagam with Mahabharata.**
- 2. Direct references to Mahabharata.**
- 3. Indirect references to Mahabharata.**
- 4. Other references of simile types.**

The usage of Mahabharata, characters, episodes etc., prove that the Sangam Poets had been well aware of the work during the material period. Though, the Great War was fought in the North separated by thousands of kilometres, its percolation to South down and its recording in the Tamil literature has been unique. Unless, there had been some relation between the Tamils and Mahabharata, the Poets could not have registered its presence positively in their poems.



FIG.1: *TRACES OF THE MAHABHARATHA IN SANGAM LITERATURE*

The Contemproneity of Cheraman Peruncheraladhan

Muranjiyur Naganar, while singing the praise of Cheraman Peruncheraladhan, records that he offered food without any limit to the fighting armies of *The Five and The Hundred* (this is the usual expression used) implying Pandavas and the Kauravas, till the latter fell down dying (Puram.2.13-16). The following questions arise in the context.

1. Whether the reference is historical or mere poetic exaggeration to eulogize the King to get Gifts.
2. Whether, the food was offered at the Site or he made any arrangements, if so in what way?
3. Why no cross-reference is found in the Mahabharata itself, had a Chera King did such a service?

In any case, the Poet knew the following facts:

1. The Pandavas were refused their land, which was due to them.
2. They got angry because of this and decided to fight.
3. They fought with Kauravas.
4. The Kauravas fell dying in the battlefield.
5. As the Chera, Cholas and Pandyas have been mentioned in the text of Mahabharata giving their details of participation in Rajasuya, the Great war etc.
6. Thus, in historical perspective, a Chera King might have participated in the War and he might have been given the charge of feeding the army, which the poet describes in his own way.

The Relation of Velir with “Tuvarai” and Krishna

Kapilar records certain details about Irngovel (Puram.201:8-12), which are to be scrutinized critically:

1. Irungovel was born from a Yagna Pit (Tadavu) of a Rishi living in the North.
2. He ruled a city named “Tuvarai”, which had walls made of Copper like material.
3. He used to give alms without any discrimination.
4. He descended from the “Velir dynasty”, which had in existence for 49 generations before him.

The following points are noted after critical observation:

1. If we take 15/20/25 years as the reign of each generation, then the Velir must have been ruling since 500 +735 / 500+980 / 500+1225 or since 1235 / 1480 / 1725 BCE. Incidentally, which tallies with the “Tramiradesa Sanngatham” that threatened the territories of Kharavela as recorded in the Kharavela / Hathigumpā inscription.
2. Surprisingly, the Kharavela’s inscription records that he defeated a confederacy of Dravidian Kings, which was threatening his territorial integrity. And that confederacy was 1300 years old during his reign.
3. Interestingly, scholars have hitherto been mentioning that it was 103, 113, 130 or 300 years old, but, actually, the inscription reads that it was 1300 old.
4. If we consider that “Tuvarai” was a famous town in Mysore as revealed through inscriptions existing in 12th century CE, then, the reign of first generation comes to 1st cent.BCE / 3rd cent.CE /4th cent.CE, which contradicts the Sangam chronology.

5. If we place the first dynasty at par with Mahabharata period, then, each dynasty must have ruled for nearly 40 years ($3102-1000=2102/49=42$ years), which may not be accepted by the modern scholars.

KHARAVELA INSCRIPTION:

Mahabharat incidences	Sangam literature
As Mal (Tirumal) carried away their dress and climbed on a Kurutta tree, the cowherd women could not take bath.	Agam.59:5-6
An expression “Kavuriyar” is used to denote Pandyas and they were with shining lances and with possession of lands ending (with ocean). Pandyas are considered as descendents of Pandavas.	Agam.70:13 Agam.343:3-4 Puram.3:5
“Kunjaram” – the word is used for an elephant just as in Mahabharat.	Agam.92:3
Pandavas were denied their land. Therefore getting angry, they decided to fight with Kauravas	Puram.2:13-16
Balarama had his body the colour of white ad Krishna blue. They had flags with symbols of Palm and Kite respectively.	Puram.56:3-6; 58:14-16: Nat.32:1-2; Pari.2:20-22; Tirumurugu.
“Kannan Ezhini” shows that “Kannan / Krishna” had been popular during the Sangam period.	Puram.197:7
The Highest One, who raised upto the skies had an axe with which he cut off (the heads of) many Kings. Parasurama is implied.	Puram.220:5
Akruran, with great muscle strength, particularly that of shoulders, fought in the battle, when the Five and the Hundred decided to do so.	Padit.14:5-6

Like Mayavan, Selvak Kadungo Vazhiyadhan excelled his Guru, implying Krishna's study under Chandini.	Padit.7th Ten.8-10.
"Bakan" means a person without eyes / eyesight. Thritharastra was a blind man like him. His son built a Lac Palace and invited Pandavas to stay there. Then, he set on fire to kill them, but the Son of Winds (Bhima) came out tearing off of the walls of the Palace escaping with his brothers and mother.	Kali.24:1-8
Balaraman wearing peerless ear ornaments is compared with the Mara tree with bunches of white flowers.	Kali.25.1
Balaraman with Plough and "Pasunthuzhai" garland.	Kali.35.1
Eight elephants are compared to that of ones protecting eight cardinal points, implying "Astatik Gajas".	Kali.47:2-3
There had been "Two Andanars". Though, they taught knowledge from the scriptures to "Two Different Groups", they did meticulously according to the respective scriptures, just like mother and rains, which shower without any discrimination. Here, Jupiter and Mercury are implied to Bhrihaspati and Sukracharya, who taught Devas and Asuras.	Kali.98:1-3.
She had her hair with elegance and wavy nature. One person touched her (to dishonour). Her husband took a vow that he would kill him by tearing off of his chest. Accordingly, he fulfilled his vow on the battlefield. In comparing a scene, where a youth was pierced through his chest by a bull with his horn, it is mentioned.	Kali.100:18-20.
The enemies sent a horse. Mayan killed it by tearing off its mouth. Here the killing of Kesi by Krishna is implied.	Kali.102:53-55.

The sound of roaring bulls and bisons, musical instruments etc., is compared with the starting of the “War between the Hundred and the Five”, implying Mahabharat War.	Kali.103:57-59.
He lies on a bed of Snake floating in the ocean and has a disc that is always victorious.	Kali.104:71-72.
He measured the entire world with his feet. His elder brother has body colour pure white and he has blue. The combination appears as if the former is dressed with a beautiful white cloth. Krishna and Balarama are implied.	Kali.123:1-2
At the time of Floods, all living creatures tumble down each other to reach God. All involute into Him with their respective nature and merge with Him.	Kali.128:1-2
The Wrestlers brought huge elephants before, and they were defeated. The disc emanated cut off of the parts of the elephants and killed them. The killing of Canura and Mustiga by Krishna and Balarama are implied.	Kali.132:1-3
The Five were capable of defeating all the enemies. With great chariots, they fought with the Hundred and killed them falling in the battlefield.	Perum.415-16
He was with the body colour that of three oceans, implying Krishna.	Perum.29

The inscription has been hitherto read differently and the date of the “Dravidian confederacy” arrived at as follows:

K. A. Nilakanta Sastri: “The famous Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela (first half of the second century B.C) mentions a league of Tamil states that was *113 years old* at the date of the inscription and had been for some time a source of danger to the Kalinga kingdom”.

Direct and Indirect References

As pointed out, the Tamil Poets used the incidences directly and indirectly as simile, metaphor or allegory in their poetic description. The Sangam literature mostly describes nature in “Five Tinais” with extravagant narratives and superlative comparisons. In such allegories, they use the Epic and Purana references freely to drive out the point. Thus, it is amply evident that common people know very well about the background about such narrative recorded by the poets purposely.

The references found in the Sangam literature are tabulated as follows for easy comparative study:

The indirect references include many social, ethical, moral, political concepts and issues.

Paripadal and Mahabharata

Paripadal gives many details of Mahabharata directly with specific terminology. The complete deification of Krishna is noted in the work. Though, it is dated to 9th century with its higher limit, definitely, the content matter had been incorporated during the Sangam period consistent with the other references vouchsafed by the culture, tradition and heritage reflected by the ancient Tamils.

Mahabharat incidence	Reference
The thousand-hooded Adhishesha cover his head.	
He is the same as Balaraman, who has his body colour that of white like conch and with a flag of Palm.	
Varaha avatara – He plunged into the Flood waters to rescue the earth out of waters. It is interpreted as marrying “Manmagal” - Tirumagal/Lakshmi. The saving of the world from the flood waters is compared to Meru.	2:16-17 2:32-33 4:22-24

Took the shape of a Swan and drunk the Flood waters to rescue the world.	3:25-26
Took Mohini avatatra to distribute nectar between Asuras and Devas.	
He killed Kesi, a demon who came in the form of a horse	3:31-32
Taking a form of a Dwarf, but attaining an all-pervasive gigantic figure, he measured the whole Universe.	3:20
Asuras dive into Oceanic waters fearing his gigantic figure taken to measure the world	3:54-55
Taking Narasingha avatara to kill Hiranyakasipu and bless Prahaladha	4:10-21
He held the churn-staff, taking a form of a Tortoise, when Devas churned the milky ocean	Tirattu.1:64-66 Tirattu.1.69
He checked the arrogance of Garuda, his vehicle	6:23:95

Dasavatara – Mahabharata and Sangam Literature

Sl.No	Avatara	Representing	Reference
1	Macca	Fish	
2	Kurma	Tortoise	Pari.Tirattu.1:64-66
3	Varaha	Boar	Pari.2:16-17; 2:32-33 4:22-24
4	Narasimha	Lion-man	Pari.4:10-21
5	Vamana	Dwarf	Pari.3.20; 3.54-56; Madurai.591
6	Parasurama	Man with Axe	Agam.220:5
7	Rama	Man with Bow and Arrows	Puram.378:18-21
8	Balarama	Man with Plough	Puram.58.14
9	Krishna	Man with Disc	Agam.59:5-6 Puram.58.15 Perum.29-31

10	Kalki	Man riding Horse	
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The references about different avatars / reincarnations as found in the Sangam literature are tabulated as follows:

It is evident that such metaphor is used only to imply the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent nature of Godhead scientifically in accordance with the evolution long ago. Later theologically, such representation might have been converted to “Dasavatara concept” for easy remembrance and broad classification.

From the table, it may be noted that –

1. Macca and Kalki avatars are not mentioned in the Sangam literature.
2. Paripadal does not mention Parasurama and Rama avatars, though mention about Mohini, Swan and other avatars.
3. Narasimha and Varaha avatars are mentioned only in Paripadal.

Thus, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The concept of Dasavatara has not been well developed in the Sangam literature.
2. As similar feature is found in Paripadal, all works of Sangam literature has to be placed before the development of Dasavatara.
3. As Mahabharat contains such development, the date of Sangam period before 3rd cent.CE is well established.

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