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**Tamil literature based on**

**Mahabharata.**

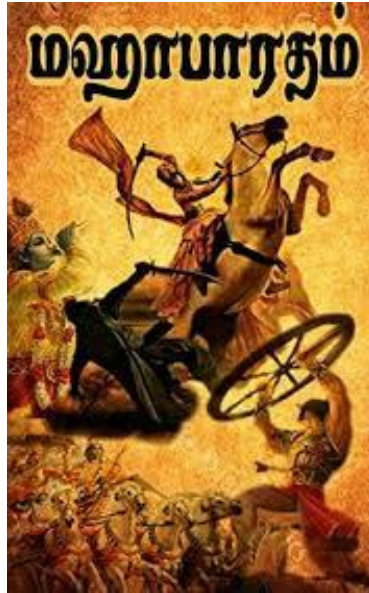
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## **Tamil literature based on Mahabharata.**



## **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 culturization 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.

## **References about Mahabharat in Sangam Literature:**

Tolkappiyam is placed at two extremities – 1000 BCE and 7th to 9th centuries CE. 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. 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-Haimendörfer

Such Megalithic culture distributed all over South India including Tamilnadu and which persisted well into the first centuries of the Christian era.

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). 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.

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.

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

Connecting the Tamil Kings of Tamizhagam with Mahabharata.

Direct references to Mahabharata.

Indirect references to Mahabharata.

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.

## **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). Whether the reference is historical or mere poetic exaggeration to eulogize the King to get Gifts.

The Pandavas were refused their land, which was due to them.

They got angry because of this and decided to fight.

They fought with Kauravas.

The Kauravas fell dying in the battlefield.

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.

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:

Irungovel was born from a Yagna Pit (Tadavu) of a Rishi living in the North.

He ruled a city named “Tuvarai”, which had walls made of Copper like material.

He used to give alms without any discrimination.

He descended from the “Velir dynasty”, which had in existence for 49 generations before him.



### **A Note on Kharavela Inscription:**

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 the important point to be noted is that the territorial confederacy of the

Tamil States ..... was existing since thirteen hundred years. If the date of Kharavela is taken according to different authorities, the existence of the territorial confederacy of the Tamil States goes back to 400 BCE. Therefore, the antiquity of the Tamil Kings can be historically goes back to 1700 to 1400 BCE. Hence, the scholars should consider his important aspect and research further about the antiquity of the Sangam period and the Kings of the period.



### **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 Tinalis” 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.

<b>Mahabharat incidences</b>	<b>Sangam literature</b>
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 and 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 up to the skies had an axe with which he cut off (the heads of) many Kings. Parasurama is implied.	Puram.220:5

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

### **Paripadal, Dasavatara:**

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. Macca and Kalki avataras are not mentioned in the Sangam literature. Paripadal does not mention Parasurama and Rama avataras, though mention about Mohini, Swan and other avataras. Narasimha and Varaha avataras are mentioned only in Paripadal. The concept of Dasavatara has not been well developed in the Sangam literature. As similar feature is found in Paripadal, all works of Sangam literature has to be placed before the development of Dasavatara. As Mahabharat contains such development, the date of Sangam period before 3rd cent.CE is well established

## **Mahabharata and Tamil Sangam Kings:**

The Southern recensions mention Arjuna marrying a Pandyan princess. Specifically, he marries Chitrangathai daughter of Chitravahanan, King of Manalur and begets Papruvahanan through her. She is considered as a daughter of Pandyan King. During Aswametha Digvijaya, Sahadeva comes to South and meets Papruvahanan in Manalur (Sabaparvan). Here, the name of the Pandyan King is mentioned as Malaytdwajan). A Pandya king was present in the Swayamvaram of Draupati at Viratapuram ). Yudhisthira describes how Krishna broke the gates of Pandyan King and defeated him. Krishna defeated Cholas ,In Digvijaya, Sahadeva defeated Dravidas, Cholas, Keralas and Pandyas. The Cholas, Dravidas and Andhras were present at the Rajasuya ,Sarangadvaja, the Pandyaraja joined Pandavas in the Great War and was slain by Aswattama, Some manuscripts mention his name as Sagaradhvaja. Keralas and Cholas also fought on the side of Pandyas .



## **Archaeology, Mahabharat and Sangam Literature:**

Archaeological evidences for Tamil culture and civilization do not go beyond 1000 BCE. The Iron in South India is also placed around that date. Moreover, the script used in India, the Asokan Brahmi and Tamil Brahmi, is dated to 3rd cent.BCE. Archaeologists assert that before that there was no script. Therefore, the historical period of Tamils cannot go beyond 300 BCE. Therefore, they do not

recognize the existence of Sangams, participation of Tamil Kings in the Great War etc. As far as Mahabharata is concerned, the traditional sites excavated at Indraprastha, Kurukshetra, Dwaraka and other places yielded evidences dated to 1700-1400 BCE only. No evidences to the effect of a Great War fought – weapons, missiles, chariot wheels, axles, axle pins, turrets, horse-shoes, etc., or the Palaces built and Kings lived have been found. Therefore, they do not recognize the astronomical dating of the Great War around 3100 BCE. The presence of large body of Indian troops in the Persian army in Greece in 480 BCE shows how far west the Indian connections were carried and the discovery of modelled heads of Indians at Memphis, of about the 5th cent. BCE shows that Indians were living there for trade [Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) Egypt and Israel (1911)]. Lotus appearing in many Egyptian paintings – the earliest wall paintings of the VI Dynasty at the pyramids of Saqqara and in all funerary stelae; among the funerary treasures from the tomb of Takhamen; the god of Nile holds a pair of blue lotus stalks in his hands at the temple of Rameses II; The Mittani who worshipped Vedic gods, belonged to an Indic kingdom that was connected by marriage across several generations to the Egyptian 18th dynasty to which Akhenaten (1352-1336 BCE) belonged. The first Mittani King was Sutarna I (good sun).

## Conclusion:



The Mahabharat war, whether it is myth or reality, its impact on Indian history, historical dynasties and rulers has been well felt and recorded. Something must have happened after the War, that is why perhaps, it has earned the name of “Mahabharat”, so that the Kingdoms must have been disturbed, disintegrated and even disappeared.

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