A Brief Account of Jaina Tamil Literature

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India is well known for its most ancient literature in different languages. Tamil is one of the languages of India having the claim for its ancient literature of great humanistic value. Scholars have proposed three phases in the Tamil Literature:

1. Literature prior to Sangam Age;
2. Literature of Sangam Age; and
3. Later Literature

Scholars are of the opinion that most of the literature belonging to the phase of prior to Sangam Age is lost. But, fortunately, we should say one work by name Tolkāppiyam, belonging to this age is surviving and it throws a flood of light not only on the grammatical structure of Tamil language, but also on the culture and the way of life of our Indian People in more particular about the Tamil people.

In addition to this, the Siddha literature "Siddhar Pādalgal", it appears has its own claim to be included in this first phase of Tamil Literature.

I. (1) Tolkāppiyam: This authoritative work on Tamil Grammar is supposed to be written by a Jaina Scholar. This grammatical treatises consists of three great chapters - Eluthu, Sol and Porul i.e. letters, words and meaning respectively. Each chapter consists of nine Iyals or Sections. On the whole, it contains 1612 Sūtras. This forms the foundation of the later grammatical works in the Tamil Language. It is said that there are five commentaries on this treatise written by Ilampuranār, Perāsiriyār, Senavaraiyār, Naccinarkkiniyār and Kallādār.

(2) Kural: This ethical work is the most important work in Tamil Literature, composed in the form of couplets known as Kural Venbā. This work is considered so important by the Tamil people that they use various names to designate this great work, such as "Uttara Veda", "Tamil Veda", "Divine Scripture", "The great truth", "Non-denominational Veda" and so on. The work is claimed by almost all the religious sects of the Tamil land.

This book contains three great topics aram, porul, inbam i.e. Dharma, Artha
and Kāma. These three topics are interpreted and expounded as to be in thorough conformity with the basic doctrine of Ahimsa. This great ethical work, which contains the essence of Tamil Wisdom, consists of three parts and of 133 chapters. Each chapter contains 10 verses. Thus, we have 1330 verses in the form of couplets. There are commentaries which are written by Ilampooranār, Kālingar and many others. Of these, one is by the great commentator Naccinarkkiniyār, whose creation is unfortunately lost to the world. We can see the influence of this magnanimous work on such great literary pieces as :- Neelakesi, Jeevaka Cintāmanī, Cūdamani, Arungalacheppu and many others.

(3) Nāladiyār: Nāladiyār derives its name from the nature of the metre i.e. a Quatrain or 4 lines in Vembā metre. The work consists of 400 quatrains and is also called the "Velālar - Vedam", the Bible of the cultivators. It is not the work of a single author. Tradition supposes that each verse is composed by different Jaina monks and put together to form a single work.

The 400 isolated stanzas are arranged according to a certain plan after the model of the Kural. Each chapter consists of 10 stanzas. The first part on aram i.e. Dharma consists of 13 chapters and 130 quatrains. The second section on porul i.e. Artha, contains 26 chapters and 260 quatrains. The third chapter on inbam i.e. Kāma, contains 10 quatrains. Thus 400 quatrains are arranged into 3 sections. This arrangement is attributed by one tradition to the Pandya King Ugraperuvaludi and by another tradition to the Jaina Scholar named Padumanār. There are 18 didactic works in Tamil language among which Kural and Nāladiyār are considered to be the most ancient and the important work.

(4) Aranericcāram : "The essence of the way of virtue", is composed by a Jaina author by name Thirumanaippadiyār. He is said to have flourished in the last Sangam period. He describes in this great work, five moral principles, associated with Jainism. These principles go by the name of "Pañca Vratās", the five rules of conduct governing the house holder as well as ascetic. These are Ahimsā, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacarya and Parimita - Parigraha.

(5) Palamoli : The author of Palamoli (means proverbs) is a Jain by name Munruraiyaraiyanār. It consists of variable old sayings containing not merely principles of conduct, but also a good deal of worldly wisdom.

(6) Tinimalai - Nutraimbadu : The author's name is Kanimoliyār, who is also said to be one of the Sangam poets. This work treats of the principles of love and war and quoted freely by the great
commentator like Naccinarikkiniyār and others. Of the same author, the other book is called ‘Elādi’.

Elādi: "Cardamom and others" refers to the mixture of the perfumes of Ela (cardamom), Karpuram (Camphor), Eriyarasu (the oederous wood), Candanam (Sandal), and Tēn (honey). The name is given to this work because each quatrain is supposed to contain 5 or 6 such fragrant topics.

(7) Nānmanikkadigai: "The Solver of the four gems" by the Jaina author by name "Vilambināthar". This is also in the Venbā metre, well known in the other works. Each stanza deals with 4 important moral principles like jewels.

So far we have spoken of Jaina Ethical Poetries and next the Kāvyas shall be dealt with.

II. Kāvyas are classified into 2 main heads :-

(a) Mahā kāvyas: - Śilappadikāram, Jeevaka Cintamani and Valaiyāpathi.

(b) Laghu Kāvyas: - Yaśodhara Kāvyam, Cūdamani, Perum kathai, Nāga Kumāra-Kāvyam and Nilakesi.

1. Silappadikāram: The author of this great work is a Chera prince, who became a Jaina ascetic by name "Elango Adigal". It is considered to be composed by about 2nd century A.D. and hence it is having its place among the ancient Tamil Literature. Its impact of Tamil Society is vast and wide. From top most scholars to a man of lowest, it is known to all. ‘Kannagi’ happens to be centre figure of this great work and happens to be "Sītā" of Dravidian culture. She is deified and worshipped.

The sentiment of pathas is well known throughout the work. In addition to this Sambhoga Shringāra, Vipralambha Shringāra and also the other Rasas are well brought up in the extraordinary prose Kāvya. Not only this much, it potentially depicts what exactly is the Grhaustha Dharma, but also presents a valuable material on all arts such as vastu, music, dance, folk dance music, global trade and economics. In fact, it is a store house of every thing that human life requires.

The work is having its own message and the same can be brought in three important valuable truths :-

(1) If a king deviates from the path of righteousness even to a slight extent, he will go down and his kingdom meets with catastrophe. In this context, the couplet in Tirukkural is worth noting.

"Seiyāmai Setrārkum innādha seidhapin Viyā Vijuman tharum. 313

"Even in the case of a person, who causes injury without any provocation, retaliation by doing evil for evil is sure.
to cause innumerable inescapable woes".

(2) A woman walking on the path of chastity deserves adoration and worship not only by human beings, but also by devas.

(3) The working of Karma is such that there is an inevitable fatality from which no one can escape, and the fruits of one's previous Karma must necessarily be experienced in later period.

This is an epic in other words "Ārśa Mahā Kāvyā", just as Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata in Sanskrit. It consists of three great divisions and 30 chapters on the whole. The great work has a very valuable commentary by Adiyarkkunallār,

2. Jeevaka Cintāmani: Scholars consider this work as the best of the Mahā Kāvyas. This great romantic epic, which is at once the Iliad and the Odyssey of the Tamil language is said to have been composed in the early youth of the poet named "Tiruttakkadeva". As the result of the challenge from his friendly poet of Madurai Sangam, the Cintamani was composed by Tiruttakkadeva to prove that a Jaina Monk can also produce a work containing 'Śringāra-rasa. It was admitted on all sides that he had succeeded wonderfully well.

The work is divided into Ilambakas or chapters. The first beginning with the birth and education of the hero, "Jeevaka", and the last ending with his Nirvāṇa.

The names of Ilambakas are :-

(1) Nāmagal Ilambagam;
(2) Govindaiyār Ilambagam;
(3) Gāndharvadattaivār Ilambagam;
(4) Guṇamālaiyār Ilambagam;
(5) Padumaiyār Ilambagam;
(6) Kemāsariyār Ilambagam;
(7) Kanakamālaiyār Ilambagam;
(8) Vimalaiyār Ilambagam;
(9) Suramanjarī Ilambagam;
(10) Manmagal Ilambagam;
(11) Pumagal Ilambagam;
(12) Ilakanaiyār Ilambagam; and
(13) Mukti Ilambagam.

This classic contains 3145 stanzas. An excellent edition containing a fine commentary by Naccinarkkinīyār is now available.

Five Laghu Kāvyas were composed by Jaina authors: -

1. Yasodhara Kāvyam: Jainism advocates the observance of any vow by Trikarana - i.e. mind, speech and body. If any one of these is lacking, then it will not fulfil the observance of vrata. For Jains, Ahimsā is the fundamental vrata. This
means one should obtain from killing animals or in other words to avoid injury to any living beings. So, in this regard the Ahimsā is looked upon mainly in two forms:

(a) Dravya Hiṃsā

(b) Bhāva Hiṃsā

Even though a person does not kill actually an animal, in other words, does not commit dravya hiṃsā and in his mind, out of Rāga or Dvesa thinks of killing, then there is Bhāva Hiṃsā. For the fulfilment of Ahimsā Vrata, both Dravya Hiṃsā and Bhāva Hiṃsā should be avoided. Even with Bhāva Hiṃsā, one commits as much of sin as with Dravya Hiṃsā.

In earlier days in yāga and yagnās there were offering of animals as bāli. But, later on because of the influence of Jainism, a modification in offering animal sacrifice came up. As a result, animals made of flour were offered in the yāga and yagnās. But Jainism did not accept this as Ahimsā, as there was Bhāva Hiṃsā in it.

This Yasodhara Kāvyam is centres around this thought and presents in a picturesque way, the sin how shall fractifies even with the Bhāva Hiṃsā.

2. Cūlāmanī : It is composed by the Jaina author and poet Tholamolithevar. Cūlāmanī resembles Cintāmanī in poetic excellence. It contains 12 sargas and 2131 stanzas on the whole. According to Sri Damodaran Pillai, it must be earlier than some of the major Kāvyas.

3. Perunkathai : This work was named after the Brhat Kathā of Guṇādhya written in what is known as paisācabhāṣā, a prākrit dialect. The author is known as Konguvelira prince of the Konguvaṇa. The portions relating to the life of Prince Udayana, has taken by the author.

The story consists of 6 main chapters:

(1) Unjaik Kāṇḍaṃ;
(2) Lavanak Kāṇḍaṃ;
(3) Magadak Kāṇḍaṃ;
(4) Vattavak Kāṇḍaṃ;
(5) Naravahana Kāṇḍaṃ; and
(6) Tūrvuk Kāṇḍaṃ, all relating to the rich life of Udayana.

4. Nilakesi : It is a controversial work dealing with the systems of Indian philosophy and it has an excellent commentary called, "Samayadivākara" by Vāmana Muni. Nilakesi which is one of the five laghu kāvyas in Tamil, is evidently an answer to Kundalakesi, the Buddistic work.

It contains 10 chapters namely:

(1) Dharma-Urai Carukkam;
(2) Kuṇḍalakeshi Vāda Carukkam;
Glory of Jain Culture

(3) Arhacandra Vāda Carukkam;
(4) Mokkala Vāda Carukkam;
(5) Buddha Vāda Carukkam;
(6) Ājīvaka Vāda Carukkam;
(7) Sānkhya Vāda Carukkam;
(8) Vaṇesika Vāda Carukkam;
(9) Veda Vada Carukkam;
(10) Bhūta Vāda Carukkam.

It must be latter than the age of Kural and Kunḍalakesi.

III. Purāṇa Kāvyāś : There are many purāṇa kāvyas among which two are very popular.

1. Meru Mandira Purāṇam : It resembles in excellence of literary diction, the best of kāvya literature in Tamil. It is based upon a purāṇic story relating to Meru and Mandira. The author is Vāmana Muni, who lived in 14th century. It contains of 30 chapters of 1405 stanzas on the whole.

2. Śrī Purāṇa : It is written in an enchanting prose style in Maṇipravāla-mixed Tamil and Sanskrit. It is based on Jinesena's and Guṇabhadra’s Mahāpurāṇa and is also further called Trisasthisalākkāpurusa carita dealing with 63 prominent personalities - 24 Tirthankaras; 12 Cakravartins; 9 Bala Bhadras; 9 Vāsudevas; 9 Pratīvāsudevas of the present Avasarpīṇī era. In Tamil, there is another work by name Periyapurāṇam by Sekkizar which presents the stories of 63 Nayaṇmārs. The frame of which appears to be worked out on the model of Mahāpurāṇa or Triṣasthi Śalāka puruṣa carita of Jains.

IV. Prosody and Grammatical Literature :

1. Vāpparungalakkārikai : This work on Tamil prosody is by Amṛtasāgara. There is a commentary on this work by Guna Sāgara. It is considered as an authority on metres and poetic composition, and that it is used as such by latter writers are evident from the references to it found in Tamil Literature.

2. Vāpparungala-Vruṭti : This is a commentary on Vāpparungalakkārikai written by the same author, Amṛta Sāgara. There is an excellent edition of this Vāpparungala Vruṭti by the late S. Bhavanandan Pillai.

3. Neminatham : A work on Tamil Grammar by Guṇavīra Pandita. He was a disciple of Vaccumāna Muni of Karandai. The object of this work is to give a short and concise account of Tamil Grammar, because the earlier Tamil works were huge and elaborate. It must be placed in the early centuries of the Christian era.

It consists of 2 main chapters :-

(1) Eluttadikāram
(2) Solladikāram.

It is composed in the well known venbā metre.
4. **Nanual**: Nanul means "The good book" and is the most popular grammar in Tamil Language. It is held only next to the Tolkāppiyam in esteem. It is by Bavanandimuni, who wrote this grammar at the request of a subordinate king called Siya Ganga. It consists of two parts, Eluttdikāram and Solladikāram which are sub divided into five minor chapters. Mailainathar has written a fine commentary on this work.

5. **Agapporulvilakkam**: It is written by Nārkavirāja Nambi. His proper name is Nambi Nainār, he was expert in 4 different kinds of poetic composition, he was given the title of Nārkavirāya. It is based upon the chapter on Porul Ilakkanam in Tolkāppiyam. It is an exposition of the psycholological emotion of love and allied experiences.

**V. Three important works on Tamil Lexicography: The three nighantu are**

   1. **Divākara Nighantu**;  
   2. **Pingala Nighantu**;  
   3. **Cūdāmanī Nighantu**

1. **Divākara Nighantu**: This is written by Divākara Muni. At present it is not available.

2. **Pingala Nighantu**: This is written by Pingala Muni.

3. **Cūdāmanī Nighantu**: This is written by Mandalapurusa.

The author refers to Gunabhadračārya, a disciple of Jinasenācārya, author of Uttara Purāṇa which is the continuation volume to Jinasena’s Adipurāṇa. It is written in Viruttam metre and contains 12 chapters. The first section deals with the names of Devas, the second with the names of human beings, the third with lower animals, the fourth with the names of trees and plants, the fifth with place names, the sixth dealing with the names of several objects, the seventh deals with the several artificial objects made by man out of natural objects such as metals and timber, the eighth chapter deals with names relating to attributes of things in general, the ninth deals with names relating the sounds articulate and inarticulate, the eleventh section deals with words which are rhyming with one another and hence relating to a certain aspect of prosody; the twelfth section is a miscellaneous section dealing with the groups of related words.

An old commentary by the late Ārumukha Nāvalar of Jaffna is a useful edition.

**VI. Two miscellaneous works :**

1. **Tirunarrantu**: by Avirodhi Ālvār.

2. **Tirukkalambagam**: by Udicidera.

1. **Tirunarrantu**: Antādi is a peculiar form of composition where the last word in the previous stanza becomes the first and the leading word in the next stanza. Antādi literally means "the end and the beginning". This constitutes a
string of verses connected with one another by a catch word which is the last in the previous stanza and the first in the succeeding stanza. It is such a composition containing 100 verses. It is a devotional work addressed to god Neminātha of Mylapore. The author Avirodhi Ālvār was a convert to the Jaina faith.

2. **Tirukkalambagam:** Kalambagam implies a sort of poetic mixture where the verses are composed in diverse metres. This besides, being devotional is also philosophical in which the author tries to discuss the doctrines of the rival faiths such as Buddhism.

**Conclusion**

Jainas contribution to Tamil Literature does not limit itself to Kāvyas, Grammar or prodody. It extends to Sāstra works such as Mathematics, Jyotisa, Vaidhya, Metallurgic and such other branches. This contribution has gained appreciation by one and all.

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