

Spread Of Saivism In The Kongu Country

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ABSTRACT

The Kongu country was known to the ancient people of Tamil Nadu as a separate territorial entity. It played an essential role in the context of its relationship with the neighbouring regions. The Saiva Saints like Thirunavukkarasar, Tiruganasambandar and Sundaramurti Nayanar highlighted the seven Saiva temples in the Kongu region. Their hymns are based on a poetic composition called *Devaram*. The study of inscriptions from these seven Saiva temples can be corroborated with literary evidence, which gives a graphic description of the region, the social condition, numerous customs, and traditions. Tamil land was divided into five central territorial divisions: Chera Nadu, Chola Nadu, Pandya Nadu, Thondai Nadu, and Kongu Nadu. *Tolkappiyam* mentions the three divisions of Kongunadu, Cheetham, panic, and malanadu, while *purananuru* refers to Kongunadu as a separate division. These sources confirm that the kongunadu had flourished separately for several centuries. This paper aims to trace the spread of Saivism and Lord Shiva Worship in the Kongu country from a historical perspective. The Kongu country enjoyed a premier position in the history of Saivism due to the fact that the people of the country and the ruler had extended their patronage to the Saiva religion.

Keywords: *Kongu Country-Saivism-Temple-Devaram-Nayanmars-Cultures*

Introduction

The historical significance of Kongu region could be stated concerning the Tamil poetic work. *Thirumandirum*, whose author *Thirumoolar* had spoken of five areas: Chola mandala, Chera mandala, Pandiyamandala, Thondaimandala, and Kongumandala. The second-century C.E. literature *Silapadikaram* and *Purananuru* (A Sangam Tamil work) also mentioned the existence of the Kongu region. Thus, the Kongu region had become one of the five regions in Tamil Nadu. Etymologically speaking, there was no definite origin for the word 'Kongu'; Kongunadu was believed to have come from Kongudesam. Konga is a derivative of the term Ganga, meaning the land of the Ganges. However, the origin of the term Kongunadu was also believed to have derived from the meaning of Kongu in Tamil nectar or honey of the flowers since this area was known for honey and hills.

Hindu Culture

Hinduism is believed to have originated during the pre-Indus Valley Civilization period. Hinduism remained a significant faith in this part of the country. The main branches of Hinduism are Saivism and Vaishnavism. These two paths guide the worldly life and spirituality of the majority of Indians. With their regional versions, the Vedas, the epics, and the Puranas have remained the primary sources. Idolatry, ritualism, and animism are the essential aspects of this belief system. Indians' history and culture are inseparable from religion. Hinduism is a popular religion through the existence of various cult worship systems by the people of society. Many scholars have often identified the revival of the Vedantic faith with the Bhakti Movement. Kongu's version of the Bhakti Movement could be traced to the 7th century. An attempt to trace the origin of Shiva worship and

the growth of Temples in the Kongu region.

Bhakti Movement

The word Bhakti refers to religiosity, and the movement was meant to revive Hinduism. Saints, namely Nayanmars (Saivites) and Azhvars (Vaishnavites), spearheaded the Movement in Tamil country in general. The Movement of Bhakti promoted personal devotion and affection, attributed to miracles and mystical experiences, and promoted complete surrender for salvation or rebirth. Rituals are performed with religious fervour while observing regular poojas and celebrating festivals enhance their social life. It took into consideration the regional elements that comprise the mainstream of Hinduism. Temples, which became centres of many social activists and treasury of the people, were built. The temples built during or after the Bhakti Movement were tall stories, big, prominent, permanent and wealthy. The society or the community revolved around these temples patronized by the newly converted king. The Hindu Brahmins were well taken care of through the generous grants provided for them.

Saivism

In ancient India, Saivism took shape as a distinct and major religious movement, mainly in the south, due to the untiring work of many great saints who were dedicated to Siva in every conceivable way and showed exemplary devotion to their beloved Lord throughout their lives and works of great merit. The illustrious propagators of Saivism have been classified into two groups: "Samaya" (religious) leaders and "Santhana Acharyas." The former's outpourings have been collected as devaram. The latter's lineage commences with Nandi Devar, followed by three illustrious saintly guides.

Saiva Saints: Nayanmars

The Nayanmars hailed from all walks of life, and the Periya Puranam was an account of the Saiva saints' lives in Tamil. It is also known as Thiruthondar Puranam as it chronicles the lives of devotees and was composed by Sekkizhar. Sundaramurthy undertook the pioneering task of documenting their lives in the Thiruthondar Thokai on which Sekkizhar based his work. Sekkizhar was a minister of the Chola King, and his documentation is more elaborate. One may wonder why only 63 saints have been singled out as Nayanmars. Certainly, there are many more Saiva saints. It is by no means a limitation but a representation of the different ways devotion expressed itself in human lives and how God graced them in a unique manner. The biographies of the 63 Nayanmars, totally committed to the worship of lord Siva, convey their poignant feelings. They spread the message of Saiva Siddhanta, which deals with the three entities, God, soul and bondage, the former being eternal. Born as humans, with norms of behaviour and codes of conduct, pious persons in noble company are rewarded with divine life, and evildoers are punished with suffering in their subsequent birth. The characteristics of the followers of Saivism, as seen from the biographies of these 63 saints, are their devotion to the Lord, their chanting of the holy five-lettered Mantra and their reverence for holy ash (vibhuthi). They are Works of Nayanmar.

Devaram

Collection of the hymns of the foremost of the Saivite Nayanmars, Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar; these ancient hymns have had a profound influence on the growth of Carnatic music and are even now being sung in temples as part of worship. The devaram, as we now have it, is a corpus of approximately 800 hymns (pathogens) to the god Siva that was composed by 3 saints (Sambanthar, Appar and Sundarar) at a time of powerful religious fervor, or bhakti, between the 6th and 9th centuries, in the Tamil world. Most of these hymns refer to and are traditionally attached to specific Siva temples located at particular sites (sthalams).

Tradition also attaches some musical information to a significant number of hymns in so far as it specifies what musical scale (pa 6) is to be used when singing them. As a consequence, two traditional classificational canons (or muzai) are met with in the collections of hymns, one being called tala muzai (with primary classification according to the 276 sites). The other one is called pao muzai (with primary classification according to the three authors and secondary classification to 24 different musical scales). In the latter case, the devaram is seen as consisting of 7 sacred canonical books (7 tirumuzai): the first, second and third books contain the pathigams composed by Sambanthar; the fourth, fifth and sixth of those formed by Appar; the seventh book containing 100 pathigams, the work of Sundarar. The devaram hymns were rescued from obscurity, and set of

music was created by Nambiandar Nambi during the rule of Rajaraja Chola I.

Thiruvem Paavai

“Thiruvempaavai” is the composition of 20 hymns in praise of Lord Siva written by Manikkavachakar at the grand Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleshwara temple. This is precisely on the same lines as the “Tiruppavai” of Sri Andal. This deals with the Paavai nonbu aspect of salivate bhakti, sung ceremoniously during the winter month of Margazhi Tiruvachagam. The Tiruvachakam is one of the most well-known and best-loved works of Tamil devotional literature of Manikkavachagar. Parts of it are regularly chanted every day in many South Indian temples. Manikkavachakar emphasized that Tiruvachagam leads to the awakening of the flame from within and shows how man, step by step, can obtain salvation by reaching Lord Siva.

Saivism in the Kongu Region

The main objective of Saivite philosophy is getting salvation. These are the basic principles and philosophy of Saivism. In the prehistoric period, some references were found to the Saivite tradition. Indus Valley Civilization worshipped Siva as a bull and considered Saivism to exist during that period. Siva in Sanskrit means *Sisna-phallus*. In the Rigvedic period, the term *Sisnadevah* referred to a tribe that worshipped the symbol of Phallus. They probably adopted the cult of a phallus with Rudra Siva's form of worship. Rudra is a ferocious and benevolent aspect of Siva worshipped for the welfare of all living beings.

Shiva Lingam

The term *Linga* in Sanskrit means Male productive organ and symbolically pertains to Lord Siva. According to the Linga Purana, the prominent Lingam does not have smell, colour, or taste in the sense of nature or Prakriti. Skanda Purana mentions that the sky is its shaft, and the earth denotes its pedestal. So, all gods and other things have their origin and everything there. The worship of Sivalingam is prominent in the Siva temples of Kanchipuram, even at present times.

There are different views regarding the origin of the Linga cult. It presumes that Hero stones or *Nadukal* have been worshipped as linga. It suggests that the showing of fire rays at the end of the Siva linga worship is in support of this view. There is another suggestion that linga worship would be derived from tree worship. This platform was converted into an altar and the trunk into Siva-Linga, and it is presumed that Linga worship derived from the tree worship of ancient times. In the early days of Tamil country, the Siva Lingas worshipped under the Tree. Later, the advent of Aryans changed the pattern of worship by adding a *balipitha* and Nandi for their ritualistic practices. Notably, some of the earliest temples now exist in the Kongu region and have been associated with the sacred tree of that place. These inferences state that the sacred worship of Tree (SthalaVirksha) lived in the earliest period, associated with linga worship.

Origin of Linga Worship

At the time of Buddha's birth, his parents took him to a Siva temple, which had a linga for worship. During the Kushana of Kadphises, the worship of Siva in the form of linga was prevalent. The Gupta rulers were considered to be the worshippers of *ekamukhalinga* and *chaturmukhalinga*. In the Malayalam-speaking region, the lingas were found in the central shrines for the first time during the period of Pallavas. The Gudimallam *mukhalinga*, datable to the Second-century B.C.E is the earliest Siva linga among the available specimens of India. Presently, it is estimated that Lingas exists in India at about thirty million.

The besmearing of sacred ashes and the wearing of *Rudraksha* beads are the characteristic marks of a Saivite. The Saivites mostly wear three horizontal lines of ashes drawn across the forehead. This practice was familiar among the Kapalikas and spread to all other sects of Saivism. *Vama Purana* is praised for the practice of smearing the ashes. *Rudraksha* means the eye of Siva; Rudra denotes Siva and Aksha to the eye. Among the floral varieties, the Banya, the Konrai (Indian Laburnum) and Bilva (Aegle Marmelos) are sacred to Siva. The Bilva leaf is used for Siva worship in the Siva temples of the Kongu region, and it consists of three leaflets that symbolize the three characteristics of Siva. In the hymns of Tirunavukkarasar on *Tirukkachchiekambam*, the lord Siva is described as the possessor of Agni and a musical instrument called Damaru. The Puranas referred to Gana as innumerable forms of Siva and created at the time, disturbing the sacrifice of Daksha. The Mayamata refers to the eight holdings of Siva: Kapala, Sula, Khatvanga, Parasu, Vrishaba, Naga, Deer and Pasa as his signs.

Forms of Siva

Siva is represented by their *dimorphic* and anthropomorphic form on the coins issued by the early rulers of India. Siva has taken the form of three, *Rupa* (form), *Arupa* (formless) and *Rupa Arupa* (form cum formlessness). Siva is the god of nature and a birthless and deathless character. Siva is known as *Visvesvara*, which means the lord of the universe. He is remembered as *Ashtamurti*. It means that the personifies in eight forms. They are earth, water, fire, air, sky, and the sun, the moon and soul or *Pasu*. These eight things symbolize the entire universe; the concept of *Atta Murtham* has been referred to in the work of Tiruvasakam. Siva is associated with the Vegetation world, which he personifies as *Vrkshapathi*, *Vanapatinampati* and *Padapesvara*. The early Indian coins, which had the symbols of the trident, lingam, and the tree (*SthalaVrksha*), were associated with cult symbols of Saivism. It seems to be considered that probably denotes the cult of Siva as *Vrkshapathi* (Lord of Vegetation World). Siva is symbolised as the god of destruction and the recreation of the mundane world by besmearing the sacred ashes on his body.

Pasupathies

Srikantha was probably the founder of the Pasupata sect. He served as an acharya and discussed the primary cause of Sakti and Sattiman. Bhandarkar is of the view that Srikantha was a preceptor of this school, and later, he was accepted as an incarnation of Siva. Pasupata School was patronized by the rulers of ancient times, primarily in the coins of Gondopharnes, having the portrayal of Pasupati Siva presenting the skin garment slung over his arm. It seems to be denoting that Gondopharnes should be a devotee of Pasupati Siva and gave respect to this sect in the first century C.E. Varahamihira testifies the fact that Pasupatas had the practice of besmearing their body with ashes thrice a day and sleeping on ashes. In Tamilnadu, the Pasupata centres were identified as Kanchipuram, Tiruvorriyur, Mayilappur, Kodumbalur, and Tiruvanaikka. The teaching of the Pasupata system insisted on the annihilation of all kinds of sorrow, and this teaching is confined to the ardent disciples. The ashes that besmear the body indicate the person being a Pasupata ascetic. The ashes are, therefore, called *linga*, or a sign of a pasupata ascetic. The Pasupata ascetic should employ himself in muttering, laughing, singing, dancing and making different sounds through his mouth. *Pasupatavrata* denotes cutting off all desires for worldly things, including honours and fame; Kaundinya states that the insistence of this school is called *Pancartha*, viz., *Karya* “effect,” *karana* “cause,” *yoga* “union,” observance and *dukhanta* “end of sorrow.” The Pasupatas first assumed the concept of Siva as the supreme deity compared with other gods.

Lakulisa Pasupata

The Tamil epic of Manimekalai has been mentioned as the ascetics of the Kapalika sect as Sudalai Nonbigal. It means that the observer mediates on the burial ground. Jagaddhara, the commentator on Malati Madhava, describes the *Kapalikavrata* by *Mahavrata*. The Kapalika penance was observed for twelve years for removing the sin of Brahmahatti. The works of Apastamba Sutra and Varaha Purana refer to the Kapalika penance.

Kalamukhas

Kala means “black” and mukha “face.” This may be because members of the order had their faces hued black. The Kalamukhas prescribed that the following are the means for the attainment of their desires concerning this world and the next, which leads to salvation: eating food in a skull, besmearing the body with ashes, eating the ashes, holding a club, keeping a pot of wine, and worshipping the god as seated there.

Saiva Siddhanta

The doctrine of Saiva Siddhanta was the contribution of Lord Siva as guhavasi in the epigraphs. The basic principles of this school are Pati (the lord), Pasu (the individual), and Pasa (fettters). The major concept is that Siva is the progenitor of the five cosmic powers viz., creation, sustenance, involution, concealment, and bestowal of grace.

Kashmir Saivism

It is said that the Himalayas are the abode of Siva. The hill region of Kashmir is the venue of a school of Saivism that came to be called Kashmir Saivism. Bhandarkar separates the school into two divisions: the Spanda Sastra, Advaita School, and Pratyabhiji Sastra, a Kaula Marga. Vasugupta and Kallata are credited with authorship

of the Spanda School. Somananda was the founder of the Pratyabhijna School.

Lingayat Sect

Vira Saivism is an ancient sect of the Agamic School. It is mainly based on Agamas, even though associated with Vedic practices. Srikara Bhasya of Sripati Pandita belongs to the 11th century and expounds the Vira Saiva Philosophy of Viseshad Vaitam. It is technically termed Sivadvaitam, Saktivistadvaitam or Satsthala Siddhanta. The Vira Saivas revered the sixty-three Saiva saints called puratanas by them. Basava, a minister of Vijjala and ruler of Kalyani, was its founder. So, he spent a large amount of money on supporting and entertaining members of the Lingayat sect called Jangamas. Both the Basava Purana and Inscriptions have revealed that he was the advocator of the Virasaiva Sect. Due to the misuse of state money, the ruler of Kalyani tried to control the efforts of Basava and his supporters but a plot caused by Basava killed him.

Conclusion

Moreover, it has some folk elements like Shiva worship, which might have been an ancient tradition later assimilated with the Vedic tradition. The belief of pledge making (Sathiya padi) at the step of this hill still has some impact on the minds of the people of this region, and hence, the temples are flourishing well even today. The temples at Tirumuruganpundi and Venjamankudalur are unique, with the inscriptions on the temple's walls even today. The bronze images of the Kodumudi temple, like those of Thiripurantaka and Vishnu, are unique and included among the masterpieces of South Indian architecture. Avinasi temple has a background of miracles made by Sundarar. Getting back the swallowed child from the crocodile and the early inhabitants of hunters, their role in the development of the temples is very interesting.

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