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Revisiting the Roots of Tamizh and Kannada towards a Confluence

*¹Dr. Anupama Sabhapathy

¹Associate Professor, Department of English, Govt. Arts, Commerce and PG College, Autonomous, Hassan, Karnataka, India.

Abstract

This paper commits to the study of the fascinating roots of the Tamizh-Kannada languages that have their lineage in the Dravidian language system. It traces the historical influences of Prakrit and Sanskrit on both these languages. It attempts to clarify why Tamizh sustains itself so strongly while Kannada has transformed over the centuries. It traces the history of the two major works in both the languages, viz., *Tholkappiyam* and *Kavirajamarga*. It also goes back to the time of the *Sangam* literature in the South. Several linguists whose researches have shed enormous light on some of the missing links about the continuity of these languages also forms a significant part of the paper. It emphasizes the contribution of the two great writers who gave the above historic works thus making our appreciation of the roots of Tamizh and Kannada stronger.

Keywords: Dravidian languages, *Tholkappiyam*, *Kavirajamarga*, *Sangam* literature, Prakrit, Sanskrit, *Tholkappiyanar*, *Margakkara*.

Introduction

The evolution of languages is an organic phenomenon that embeds a whole gamut of a people's psyche which represents a geographical location and a way of life. Language is the living symbol of the historicity of a people. Human evolution and its distribution throughout the globe have witnessed the birth of innumerable cultures and languages. Some have survived assimilating the changes and getting metamorphosed while some others have vanished silently without a trace of existence. A study of languages necessitates a holistic understanding of various fields of knowledge. Much of the evidences of the past are irretrievable and lost in time which puts an enormous load on the researches striving to achieve some breakthrough.

Research has contributed to our knowledge that there are common roots to the languages of the world. This paper confines itself to one chequered part of the history of languages which focuses on the southern part of the Indian sub-continent., specifically to the mutual influences between Tamizh and Kannada. Having a common origin in the Proto-Dravidian linguistic tradition, they have evolved into their individual language entities with a script, region and culture of their own. Nevertheless, the area of exploration and research lies in the methods and paths adopted by Tamizh and Kannada to establish their independent languages systems over the centuries.

Tracing the history of the languages in the Indian su-continent is in itself a fascinating journey visited by several historians to seek the umbilical cord that binds the various language systems. It was found by them that the languages in the southern part of the continent did not identify with any of the

European languages of the Indo-Aryan systems of language. It was a non-European, indigenous system with a history that might have had its roots even in the Harappan Civilisation. The term, *Dravida*, was coined by Rober Caldwell to specifically mean those languages of the territory in the southern part of India.

Alaxander D. Campbell in 1816, suggested the co-existence of a Dravidian language family in the *Grammar of the Theloogoo Language*. It was then that he discovered and argued that Tamizh and Telugu "descended from a common, non-Indo-European ancestor." [1]. In 1865, Robert Caldwell published the *Comparative Grammar of Dravidian – a South Indian Family of Languages* which "expanded the Dravidian umbrella and established *Dravidian* as one of the major language groups of the world." [2]. Caldwell coined the term *Dravidian* and said, "The word I have chosen is '*Dravidian*'" The term, it is true, has sometimes been used and is still sometimes used in almost as restricted a sense as that of Tamizh itself so that though on the whole it is the best term I can find....." [3]. Zvelabil, another linguist states that, "It is obvious that the Sanskrit *dr{a/aa}vida*, Pali, '*damila*', '*damilo*', and Prakrit '*d(a/aa)vida* are all etymologically connected with Tamizh.

This paper takes up the first recorded work in Tamizh, *Tholkappiyan*, by *Tholkappiyanar*, supposedly in the 1st century and the first recorded work in Kannada, *Kavirajamarga* (*Margakkara*) in the 5th century. The first millennium witnessed the evolution of classical languages across the world and the second millennium saw the rise of global languages. The classical languages were a major influence that affected the regional languages. The regional

languages had to face and counter the structured languages which were dealt differently by the native of the region.

It is very significant to consider the milieu (*Yuga Dharma*) during which the first works in both these languages were taken up. The milieu of *Tholkappiyam* was pro-Tamizh and anti-Sanskrit. Royal patronage was favourable to the steady growth of Tamizh besides continuous revivals by poets and writers reconnecting the past linguistic/literary tradition to the prevailing times. On the contrary, Kannada lost its tract and did not preserve nor revive its ancestral literature tradition. Sanskrit held its rule over the indigenous language which was practised only by the elite. The Prakri-Kannada and the Brahmi-Kannada script that was widespread during the reign of Ashoka in the region were superimposed by Sanskrit and then there was a lull for several centuries until the Kadambas came to power.

It was no different in the other parts of the world. Dominant languages and cultures ruled over other cultures that found it difficult to face the challenges of the ruling cultures. In spite of the strong sway of the influential languages the regional languages reacted either by synthesizing their language with the dominant one or by independently establishing their native language by strengthening the native language. In this regard, *Kavirajamaarga* has taken a balanced stance. It does not treat Sanskrit as a rival or an opponent, nor does it get enslaved by it. Instead, it accepts and treats both languages as unique and different but neither as inferior nor superior. It is founded on inter-regional similarities and negotiated between languages and cultures. It negotiated not by surrendering its individuality or accepting the other's supremacy, but by successfully synthesizing both.

S. Shettar, the leading voice in Indian History and Archaeology elucidates the nuances and intricacies involved in the evolution of languages with particular emphasis on Dravidian languages. He terraces the missing links in time during which there are no historical evidences for the existence of literary works. Western Indologist, Sheldon Polak studies the traditional roots of Dravidian languages in India but he does not emphasize the influence of religion on language and culture. For instance, *Kavirajamaarga*'s impact on the Bhakti movement in Karnataka in the 12th century is not dealt by him. Shettar counters that Sanskrit was not the supreme-most language in the first millennium. The first millennium was not the age of Sanskrit. Shettar shows this through the Tamizh tradition.

The growth of native languages was because of the lords and heads of smaller kingdoms and not by emperors or kings. Their contribution to the growth of language and culture was more than the kings. There is a disparity between imperialism and language. If imperialism would decide the growth of languages, American literature would be the only literature thriving today. Tamizh continued drawing essence from *Sangam* literature but Kannada diverged from *Kavirajamaarga*. Shettar fills the gap between Maurya Ashoka's relics and Kadamba Banavasis. He recognises the contributions of Erumma, Punnata, Konga, Konkana, Tuluva, Kadamba and Ganga and others who have contributed both to Tamizh and Kannada.

Kavirajamarga was translated to Malayalam as *Lalita Tilakam*. While *Kavirajamarga* was influenced by Tamizh, *Lalita Tilakam* was influenced by Sanskrit. This juncture becomes extremely significant in the study of the common Dravidian roots of Tamizh and Kannada. There is an absence of continuity of any historical evidence regarding the evolution of Kannada until it was found again after several

centuries. This time gap becomes essential to observe that somewhere during this period, the ancestral connection that bound Tamizh and Kannada got snapped. Tamizh did not sever itself from its original roots and not only sustained itself but evolved as an independent language in spite of various cultural impacts.

Sangam literature never entered Karnataka. It entered a century after its rebirth. Kannada has derived much from Prakrit during pre-modern times and from English in the modern time. What has it derived from Tamizh? Prakrit was the common man's language encouraged by the Mauryan king while Sanskrit was the language of only a section of the society. Prakrit flourished for sometime during which the northern kings carried out the process of raising artefacts and inscriptions all over the sub-continent. Prakrit and Sanskrit gradually died when royal patronage in the North changed.

Tamizh continued to grow creatively and continuously. The success of Tamizh evolving as an independent language continuing in the tradition of its origin was due to the timely revivals of the *Tholkappiyam* which reinforced the spirit and essence of the language, handing them over to the next generations. This revival of the past original literature and transferring of the tradition did not happen in the case of Kannada. Margakkara's successors failed to continue the legacy. Therefore, there is a huge gap in the literary history of Karnataka during this period while the *Sangam* literature flourished continuously in this period (500 B.C. to 500 C. E). The historical significance of *Kavirajamarga* lies in the fact where it describes the geographical extent of Karnataka for the first time as extending from the Kaveri to the Godavari. Shettar shows that this way of mapping a territory geographically through river boundaries existed even before that which is in the *Tholkappiyam*. Here was the big difference that altered the common course of Tamizh and Kannada. Kannada had taken to Sanskrit but Tamizh was connected to the Dravidian roots and not to Sanskrit.

Even while determining the depths of Dravidian roots with Kannada during its nascent stage. It got divided into South-Dravidian, North-South distinctions. The lineage was lost at the fundamental stages. Margakkara was influenced by Sanskrit through Bhamah who was from Kashmir and by Dandi who was from Dravida Desha. He was more strongly influenced by his neighbour Dandi than the remote Bhamah. Historians opine that *Kavirajamarga*, the first Kannada poetic treatise, and its time were strongly under the spell of Sanskrit. Translation was not taken by Kannada poets. But Tamizh poets translated their works as whole or units into various languages thus reliving the Tamizh literary tradition and perpetuating its original structure. The three stages of Tamizh literature were:

- a) The Age of *Tholkappiyam*
- b) Sangam Conference
- c) Great Epic Age-*Silappadikaram* and *Manimegalai*

Sangam was a confluence of Buddhist and Jain philosophies. The major question regarding *Kavirajamarga* was the description of Karnataka done for the first time by Margakara or was it identified much before by Tholkappiyanar(?) *Tholkappiyam* is the only available work of the Sangam literature which contains 1609 verses and is commonly known to be an encyclopaedia on linguistics and grammar. It is classified into 3 cantos called *Adhigaram* agreed by historians to be of 1 CE.

Sanskrit influenced all the Dravidian languages with variations in its impact. The authors of *Tholkappiyam* and

Kavirajamarga reciprocated differently to Sanskrit. The approach is detailed in *Tholkkappiyam* how the native language should react to a non-native language. It explains how it should assimilate or synthesize. Sanskrit had gained supremacy but *Tholkkappiyam* insisted that no language should be adopted blindly. The sound systems of every language are unique and different. When words from Sanskrit had to be used, they had to undergo a transformation from their root language and get Tamizhised so that it becomes a Tamizh word and not a borrowed one.

On the other hand, the author of *Kavirajamarga* lived in a milieu which adored Sanskrit such that he was prompted to Sanskritize the Kannada language. The methodology was a significant one. It checked the native language from becoming extinct from the heavy influence of Sanskrit. However, both the authors were equally troubled sometimes of the damage of the influence of an external language could do on its own.

Tamizh and Kannada, therefore, show distinctiveness because of the various forces that shaped and structured them and their mode of reciprocation to it. The purpose and intent of this paper is to ensure the deep-rooted links that these two languages have in their origin. The fact that Dravidian languages in the Indian sub-continent are bound intrinsically through a common lineage of language, culture, history and tradition should enable us to strike a chord of oneness and deep appreciation and understanding for one another. This revisit to the common past becomes a significant journey in dissolving boundaries that rise from the absence of knowledge of the past. Historical literatures like the *Tholkkappiyam* and the *Kavirajamarga* reveal the mutual contribution that Tamizh and Kannada had on each other through their common participation during the Sangam period.

Thol and Margallara become more and more relevant to dig the missing valuable clues that been submerged by numerous interventions obscuring the realities of the past. The stability of the future depends much on the efforts and interest given to bring out the unifying forces between the cultures rather than proceeding cluelessly ignoring the meaningful past. Understanding the *Tholkkappiyam* and *Kavirajamarga* from new dimensions becomes the need of the hour towards achieving a confluence of the two historic cultures of Tamizh and Kannada.

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