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GRT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF FOLKS IN
TAMILNADU AS GLEANED FROM BALLADAS

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Abstract:-Tradition is the fountain from which history of mankind is tapped. People's history often survives in its folk literature and traditions. Among the folk compositions folk ballads which are normally in poetical form which narrate popular themes of intellectual and emotional culture of the common people. Historical ballads serve as an unique, dependable as well as corroborative source for the reconstruction of history of every nation. They are both informative and instructive narrations which shed immense light on the political, economic, social and cultural life of the people. They are the expressions of the common people to record their sentiments towards heroism and rouse righteous indignation against oppression and tyranny.

Keywords:Social And Cultural History , Folks , People's history .

INTRODUCTION

Here an attempt is made to explore the importance of historical ballads a valid source for the reconstruction of social and cultural history of Tamilnadu. Besides the traditional types of primary and secondary data, the ballad constitute a solid hybrid or corroborative evidence which can also be regarded as an original source of information for writing the hidden history of unsung heroes and heroines of Tamilnadu.

Epigraphic and archival data contain passing references to the social conditions of the people at grass root level. Further those sources furnish one side information and hence ought to be corroborated with literary evidences. The desire of the common people to preserve and perpetuate the memory of important incidents in life necessitated the development of oral tradition. These can be regarded as the inscription of the common people. They provide a rich insight into the past and connect the missing link that brings together various types of sources of information.

From the historical Tamil ballads like Kannadian Pore, Ivar Rajakkal Kathai, Ulagudaiya Perumal Kathai, Maduraiveeran Kathai, Maduraiveeran Ammanai, Ramayyan Ammanai, Venkalarajan Kathai, Desing Rajan Kathai, Thampimar Kathai, Ottan Kathai, Khan Sahib Sandai, Kattabomman Koothu, Kattabomman Kummi Padal, Sivagangai Charithira Kummi, Sivagangai Charithira Ammanai, Muthupattan Kathai and Chinnadan Kathai, one can catch glimpses of the life of the Tamils. As a matter of fact these are a collective cherished memory of the people and as such they are of great use for the reconstruction of the social history.

Communities and castes ballads like Kannadian Pore and Ivar Rajakkal Kathai, composed during the period of the later Pandyas, give reference to the social life of the common people, particularly the Maravas, Agampadaiyas, Kannadiyas, Kongar, Rowthar, Kammalar, Vanniyar and Thuluvar. The Madurai Veeran Kathai and Ammanai formulated during the Nayak period mention

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about the Naickers, Brahmins, Vellalas, Muslims, Chettiyars and the Kammalans. The Desing Rajan Kathai, Thampimar Kathai, Khan Sahib Sandai, Kattabomman Koothu, Kattabomman Kummi Padal, Sivagangai Charithira Kumini and Ammanai narrate the life and activities of the Pattanimars, Reddiyars, Nadars, Mudaliyars, Muslims and Paraiyas during the period of the Nawabs and the English.

The Kannadian Pore indicates the distinctions that existed among the different communities. Inter-caste marriage was strictly prohibited even among the rulers. A Kannadiga ruler, who belonged to the Vaduga community wished to give his daughter to Kulasekara Pandya of Vallioor. However owing to caste restrictions Kulasekara Pandya refused to marry and it resulted in a big confrontation. Bommi, the daughter of Bommanan of Naiyyakkar community, fell in love with Madurai-veeran, who belonged to the Scheduled caste. They married themselves and left the palace of Bommanan without the knowledge of the parents to Tiruchirappally where the Nayak ruler Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha appointed him as military chief.

Chinna Nadan Kathai narrates the outcome of an inter-caste marriage. Chinna Nadan or Kumarasamy belonged to the Nadar community. At the age of eighteen, he married a four year old girl, the daughter of his uncle. After two years, he fell in love with Ayyankutti, a barber lady and so his four uncles opposed him and denied to give their properties to him. Chinna Nadan was very adamant and refused to send the barber lady to her parents house. Finally the four uncles murdered Chinna Nadan with the help of the Zamindar of Nattahi, a village near Srivaikuntam in Tirunelveli District.

Tottukari Amman Kathai a social ballad reveals that Tottukari was the daughter of Konandi Rajan, the chieftain of Muttapathi near Kanyakumari and her love affairs with Kumarappa Rajan, the son of Konthalappa Rajan, another chieftain of Nanchil Nadu led to the battle between their fathers due to their communal differences and it ended with the death of the lovers. Both of them jumped into fire and committed suicide. This ballad reveals the caste-barrier in the society.

Muthu Pattan, a Brahmin youth from Papanasam in Tirunelveli district quarreled with his parents, went to Kottarakkara in Kerala and served under a native. Through his efficient service he occupied a key position and became prosperous. Later on, his brothers went to meet him and persuaded him to return home along with them. On their way Muthupattan saw two young low caste ladies. Carried away by their charm, he wanted to marry them. But his brothers refused and when he continued to persist, they attempted to murder him, but he escaped. When Muthupattan met the Chakkili chieftain, father of the girls he gave an evasive reply due to Muthupattan's dissociation with the non-vegetarian food and other practices. Thereupon Muthupattan agreed to renounce the marks of his caste, to tend herds of cows, to make shoes and to eat with the Chakkilies. Before marriage he was put into a probation for two years. Having successfully completed the probation he married the two ladies.

Communal sentiments assumed importance during the Nawab's administration. Desing a Rajput Governor of Jinji refused to pay tribute to Sadat-ul-Iah-Khan, the Nawab of Arcot, for he was a Muslim. The Rajput remarked that the Nawab was only a Lebbai whose business was to sell dry fish and not to demand tribute. Ramavarma, the King of Travancore (1721-29), attracted by the beauty of Abirami, a Yadava lady, came down to marry her but he changed her name into Kittinathal Ammai and then admitted her into the royal fold. Masha, the wife of Khansahib who originally belonged to an untouchable community stood before Goddess Meenashi and offered prayers in disguised way. Venkalarajan, the Nadar Chief of Nanchilnad refused to give his daughter in marriage to a Nayar chief of Travancore. The Nayar chief tried to capture the girl and surrounded Fort of Venkalarajan, namely Kottayady near Manakkudy. To maintain the chastity of his daughter Venkalarajan severed the head of the girl and threw it outside the fort. Cinnadan, the Chieftain of Eral in Tirunelveli district, after his first marriage, loved a barber lady Ayyankutti. It was strongly condemned by the relatives of Cinnadan and finally he was murdered.

Religion had a profound influence on society. The principal Gods were Siva, Vishnu, Vinayagar, Muruga and Renganathar. The Goddesses like Meenakshi, Parvathi, Lakshmi and Saraswathi were also worshipped. Heroes were elevated to the status of deities. People visited the temples frequently for achieving prosperity. Maduraiveeran, the Thampis and Muthuvaduganathan

visited the Siva temples. Desing went to the Renganathar temple and Kattabomman worshipped at the Chakkamma temple. Kulasekara Pandyan, Venkalarajan, Mathupattan and Cinnadan still command reverence in the districts of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli. Ottan is even today a powerful deity at Pothaiyudi near Kanyakumari. Kochumadammai, the sister of the Thampis popularly known as Kailiyankattu Neeli commands an awful memory in Nagercoil. Desing, Khan Sahib, Kattabomman and Marudu Pandyan has statues on different places and are considered to have possessed extraordinary qualities.

Superstitions sway the imagination of the society to a great extent. Chirping of lizards and hooting of owls were considered as bad omens. While the Thampis proceeded to meet Mathandavarma they crossed a shaved Brahmin and considered it as a bad omen. Taking oaths and giving promises in front of Temples were very common. The conspirators against Khan Sahib took a pledge in front of Goddess Meenakshi. Marthandavarma and the Thampis promised not to attack each other in front of Tiruneelakandar Temple at the Padmanabapuram palace. Before marching to the battlefield Kattabomman went to the Temple of Chakkamma and prayed for achieving victory over the English.

The ballads indicate that the people sacrificed animals and even human beings to please the deities, in anticipation of a brilliant success. The Kannada ruler cut a man to please a ghost for getting a clue to the secret path of Kulasekara Pandyan of Vallioor. Thirumalai Nayak offered a pregnant pig to the statue of Maduraiveeran for pleasing him. Khan Sahib was said to have sacrificed a Brahmin girl as a means to unlock the treasury and wealth of Madurai. Further people used to take continuous fast in order to propitiate their gods and goddesses. Taking Kavadi to gods was another practice. Maduraiveeran took Kavadi to goddess Meenakshi. Belief in oracles existed among the religious people. Maduraiveeran and Khansahib were alerted by goddess Meenashi through oracles.

Fatalism had a telling affect on the life of the people. Vadivammal, the daughter of Kannada chief believed in Karma and transmigration. Maduraiveeran was convinced that his fate was already decided by Brahma and nobody could alter it. Further the life of the people was largely regulated by astrology and astronomy. Astrology based on astronomy decided the course of events. People consulted astrologers for the selection of auspicious time to begin their work and also for constructing house, temples and palaces. The infant Maduraiveeran was left in the forest following the prediction of the astrologer that his birth would cause troubles to the country. Desing marched to the battlefield despite the warning of his uncle about the bad time predicted by the astrologer and finally he was defeated. The astrologer informed Ramavarma the father of the Thampis that immediately after the birth of the first son he would get two more children that one would be a male and the last one would be a female. Further he prognosticated the future events.

Polygamy and Polyandry were practiced. Maduraiveeran, Muthuvadugan and Cinnadan married two wives each. Dowry system was in vogue. The Kannada chief promised a decent dowry to Kulasekara Pandyan if the latter married his daughter. Agilandeswari brought several acres of land as a dowry to the Sivagangai ruler.

Tamil society gave much importance to chastity and marital fidelity. Umaidurai ordered Muthia of Tuticorin to throw all the ladies of the harem in the wells to save the chastity of women from the enemies. Valliammal the dancing maid of Thirumalai Nayak treated Maduraiveeran as her husband for he was the only person who had just touched her body. The practice of Sati was also followed. The wives of Maduraiveeran, Desing and Cinnadan committed Sati. Immediately after the death of Kulasekara Pandyan, Vadivammal who had only seen the portrait of Kulasekara Pandyan committed Sati, but she neither saw him personally nor he married her.

Cultivation was the main occupation of the Tamils. Paddy, plantations, coconut, sugarcane, cotton etc., were cultivated. Weaving, carpentry and metal work were some of the other occupations. Wages were paid both in cash and in kind. The main source of income to the government came from fines, booties, tributes, and taxes on trade. Ramavarma collected one sixth of the produce as tax. Sadat-ul-lah-Khan collected enormous booty after defeating Desing. Marthandavarma collected toll duties and custom tax from the traders at Kottar. Failure of paying tribute led to conflict between Desing and Sadat-ul-lah-Khan, Kattaboman and English. Hunting, dancing and music were popular entertainments. Pilgrimage and taking holy bath in holy water were also practiced. In fact the Tamil

ballads shed much light on the social customs and life of the Tamils.

Kattabomman's minister Siva Subramania Pillai arranged child marriage or Chella Kalyanam to his son. Cock fighting was a popular entertainment. Muhammad Ali, Thandavarayan Pillai and Damodran Pillai enjoyed cock fighting. Kattabomman spent his leisure time by watching cock fighting. Horses were used for postal and communication system. Desing Rajan's father Terani Sing ordered the ministers to keep thousand horses in between Senji and Delhi for conveying news without much delay.

Ballads are impartial verdicts for the common people. They serve as the mirror of the age and reflect the society in detail. The heroes and heroines referred to in the ballads became local deities in the respective regions. Kulasekara Pandyan has temples at Valliyoor and at Nanchil Nadu regions, Madurai Veeran at Madurai region, Desing Rajan has become a powerful deity in the Arcot region, Thampimar, Ottan and Kochumadammlain Kanyakumari, Khan Sahib in Madurai. Veera Pandya Kattabomman in Panchalam Kuruchi and Marudhu brothers at Kalayarkoil. They were elevated and exalted to the position of gods and goddesses. In fact hero worship is part of human life, and the Tamil historical ballads reflect people's social and cultural life.

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