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TRANSGENDER IN SILAPADIKAARAM

¹Vijayalakshmi M G, ²Dr. Ambika Kameshwar

¹Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor

¹School of Music and Fine Arts, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS)

ABSTRACT

History always helps us in finding the most vital and fascinating part of our ancestry and their period. During that period, apart from men and women there existed the third gender which has different activities despite his/her sex. Transgender has been mentioned in most of the ancient and classical Tamil Grammar texts and other important literature books. Some instances can be seen in old Tamil Poems. They have been mentioned not just in a positive way but also in a negative way as they are described to be disgraceful. There also exists the different forms of Transgender in different circumstances in Kaappiyam, widely known as an Epic in English.

Kaappiyam has found its place significantly in the history of Tamil Literature. In the form of a long, continuous poem, the ancient Tamil Literary form provides a lot of information and other Tamil works of ancient times. Among the five major epics namely, Iymperumkaappiyam, Silapadikaaram is considered as the best. This paper deals with the description of various forms and activities of Transgender in different circumstances that are explained in Silapadikaaram.

KEYWORDS

Kappiyam – Pugar Kaandam – Madurai Kaandam – Vanchi Kaandam – Silapadikaaram – Transgender – Pedi – Ali – Iymperumkaappiyam

INTRODUCTION

Transgenders are mentioned with so many adjectives and terms in the classical Tamil literature. The most commonly used terms are “Ali, Pedi, Peduaravani, Thirunangaiyar”. Each of these terms was used according to the era and the dialect of the people. Although they had different terms to be addressed with, they were always considered as disgrace to lives in the ancient times. This paper aims to study about the lives and conditions of transgender with reference to Silapadikaaram

Silapadikaaram

As a literary work, Silapadikaaram is held in high regard by the Tamil people and also considered as the earliest epic poem in Tamil. It was written by Ilango Adigal probably in the 5th and 6th Century. Kovalan and Kannaki are the protagonists of Silapadikaaram and Madhavi was Kovalan's mistress. She was the daughter of Chitrapathy and a famous dancer. She learnt the art form from the age of five and mastered it at the age of twelve. She received many acclaims like the royal medal and 1008 gold coins from the King for her performance at the Indra festival of the ancient Chola port city Kaveri Pumpattinam. Kovalan, who was a great lover of fine arts, fell for her.

Ilango Adigal wrote many writings and the songs which also includes about the transgenders. In Pugar kadam, Indira Vizhaavu Oor Edutha Kaathai and Kadaladu Vanchi Kaathai have inscriptions about transgender's dance. In Vanchi Kadam, Neerpadai Kaathai and Nadugal Kaathai have inscriptions about various categories of transgenders. Some exciting information are also involving transgenders in Katturai Kaathai in Madurai Kadam. It is very interesting to know that all these dances are about Hindu mythology. Madhavi performed eleven different types of dances according to the epic namely, Alliam, Kodukotti, Kudai, Kudam, Pandarangam, Mal, Thudi, Kadayam, Pedu, Marakkal, Pavai.

In this, Pedu, so called Pedi Koothu is one of the dances performed by Madhavi who dressed like a Transgender to narrate the story of Manmathan, where he dressed as a Eunuch to secure the release of his son Anirudh. The detailed informations are discussed along with inscriptions in Kadam below.

Transgenders in Pugar Kadam

- I. The below lines depict that whoever have any disability in their body will have to go to temples that are directly meant only for them. So, transgender who have different characteristics from normal people should also go to Ilanchi Manram (River, Pond, Lake, etc).⁷

**“Kunum Kuralum Unamum Sevidum
Azhaghu Meiyaalarum Muzhuginaar Aadi
Pazhuthu Elkkatchi Nalnira Petru
Valam Seiyaa Kazhiyum Elanchi Mandramum”**

(Silapadikaaram, Pugar Kaadam, Enthira Vizhavu Oor Edutha Kaathai (5), Paadal Adigal 118 – 121)

- II. The below lines depict how a person was born as a male but grow up to have a feeling of a female and still retains the masculine voice and face. This was compared as such transgenders are made to look gorgeous with the voice of yazh instrument. This categorization of a change to express the female characteristics are described as 'Aanmai thirinta' in Silapadikaaram.⁴

**“Aanmaiyl Thirinthuthan Arulthozhil Thiriyaathu
Nanudai Kolaththu Nagaimuga Kaatti
Panmozhi Narambin Thiviyaazh Mizhattri
Pensmaiyl Thiriyum Petriyum Undena”**

(Silapadikaaram, Pugar Kaadam, Enthira Vizhavu Oor Edutha Kaathai (5), Paadal Adigal 220 - 223)

III. One of the folk arts that was famous during the ancient days was Koothu and it was performed on the stages. Those days, transgenders are also performed in Koothu which in a way shows that they were treated as equals during those times. As discussed above, there were around eleven Koothus which was performed by each god in Silapadikaaram. The lines that are depicted in Silapadikaaram contains a specified Koothu for transgenders which is called as 'Pedi Koothu' where the rescue of his son Aniruthan has been described. Even Madhavi, one of the main characters of this epic literature has also performed this Pedi Koothu, which is very popular on those days. In this story, Manmathan changed his appearance like a transgender in the rescue process where he performed 'Kaaman Dance' widely known as 'Pedi Koothu'.²

“Maayoon Paniyum Varuna Puthar

Nalvakai Paaniyum Nalamperu Kolgai

Vaan oor Mathiyamum Paadi Pinnar

Chiriyial Poliya Neer Alai Neenga

Bharathi Aadiya Bharathi Arangaththu

Thiripuram Yeriya Thevar Venda

Yerimuga Peranbhu Yeval Ketpa

Umaiyaaval Oruthiran Aaga Ongiya

Imaiyavar Aadiya KoduKotti Aadalum,

Ther Mun Nindra Thisaimugam Kaana

Bharathi Aadiya Viyanpaanda Rangamum,

Kanchan Vanchagam Kadatharkaaka

Anchana Vannan Aadiya Aadalul

Alliya Thoguthiyum, Avunan Kadantha

Mallin Aadalum, Makkadal Naduvan

Neerthirai Arankathu Nigarthumun Nindra

Suthiram Kadanthon Aadiya Thudiyum

Padaivizhathu Avunar Paiyul Yeitha

Kudaivizhanthu Avar Muna Aadiya Kudaiyum,

Vaanan Peeruur Marukidai Nandanthu

Neelniam Alanthon Aadiya Kudamum,

Aanmai Thirinta Penmai Kolathu

Kamam Aadiya Pedi Aadalum,

Kaaisina Avunar Kaduthzhil Pora aal

Maayaval Aadiyal Marakkaal Aadalum,

Seruvengolam Avunar Neenga

Thiruin Seiyoona Aadiya Paavaiyum,

**Vayal Uzhai Nindru Vadakku Vaayilul
Ayiraani Madanthai Aadiya Kadaiyamum,
Avar Avar Aniyudan Avar Avar Kolkaiyin
Nilaiyum Padithamum Neega Marabin
Pathinor Aadalum Paattin Paghuthiyum”**

(Silapadikaaram, Pugar Kaandam, Kadalaadu Kaathai (6), Paadal Adigal 35 - 66)

Transgenders in Madurai Kadam

- I. In Madurai Kadam, after Kannagi destroyed Madurai, Goddess Mathurapathi who appeared behind her back having the characteristics of a transgender. She appeared with a lotus flower on her left hand and a sword on her right whereas on the left leg she had Veera Kazhal (heroic anklet king) and Silambu on her right leg. Goddess Mathurapathi namely, Madurai Maa Theivam is worshipped by the King Pandiya and his descendants. Thus, she is assumed to have the characteristics of both a male and a female and are inscribed in below lines.⁶

“Vala Marunghu Ponniram Puraiyum Meniyal

Idakkai Polampoon Thamarai Yeenthinum

Valakkai Amsudar Koduvaal Pidithol

Valakkaal Punaikazhal Kattinum Idaikaal

Thanichilambu Arartrum Thagaimaiyal Panithurai

Korkkai Konkan Kumarithuraivan

Porkoottu Varamban Pothiyil Poruppan

Kulamuthal Kizhathi”

(Silapadikaaram, Madurai Kaandam, Katturai Kaathai (23), Paadal Adigal 6 - 13)

- II. After the 16th day of Kalabali in Koovagam festival transgenders celebrate every year by worshipping Lord Aravan named ‘Koothandavar’. All the people and transgender wear Thaali around their neck as a wedding ritual and assumes Koothandavar as their husband. The next day, they cut to remove their Thaali and place it on to the divine foot of Koothandavar. This is described in the below lines.

“Kotravai Vaayirporkodi Nagarthu”

(Silapadikaaram, Madurai Kaandam, Katturai Kaathai (23), Paadal Adigal 181)

Thus, all the transgenders break their bangles, and remove all the auspicious ornaments that are related to their husbands.

Transgenders in Vanchi Kandam

- I. Silapadikaaram also articulates the portrayal beauty of Aariya Pedigal in Vanchi Kaandam. During ancient times, whoever wins the war, they deserve to have the valuables like gold, properties and other possessions for their own. During the war between Chera and Aarya kings, the Chera king has defeated the Aarya King and as a symbol of the victory, the transgenders were taken as captives.¹ These transgenders have some characteristics such as black coloured beard with germ cell of a male but act as a female, and also long dark cloud like hair, reddish green glowing eyes, flowered flower chain, white teeth, reddish cherry-coloured lips, with small anklets around their legs. Such transgenders with these characterizations are named as ‘Aariya Pedi’ and there are also some inscriptions described below about the same.³

“Aariya Mannar Ai Eru Pathinmarai

Seerkezhu Nalnaattu Selgha Endru Yeevi

Thaabatha Veedaththu Uyir Uyinthu Pizhaiththa

Maaperunth Thaanai Manna Kumarar

Surulidu Thaadi Marulpadu poonguzhal

Ariparanthu Ozhugiya Sezhungayal Nedungkan

Viriven Thoottu Vennagai Thuvavaai

Sudaga Varivalai Aadamai Panaithol

Valarila Vanamulai Thalariyal Minnidai

Paadaga Siiradi Aariya Peediyoodu

Encha Mannar Eraimozhi Marukkum

Kanchasuga Muthalvar Eraich Niyatruvar

Ariyiar Ponthai Arunthamizh Aatril

Theriyathu Malaintha Kanaga Visayarai

Iruperu Ventharkku Kaattida Yaevi”

(Silapadikaaram, Vanchi Kaandam, Neerpadai Kaathai (27), Paadal Adigal 177 - 191)

- II. The description about Aarya Pedi is given in Silapadikaaram although the description about Tamil Pedi is not there. Transgenders are treated without any discrimination as a result of which they participate in King’s functions and also work as servants in the palace.

On the arrival of Venmaal who is going to be a wife of King Chera Sengutuvan, was welcomed with the flower plates by transgenders which portrays them as the person who have Female characteristics. In Tamilnadu, Chera kings have transgender as their servants in palace and servants for Kings’ wives. Thus, we can indirectly understand that they were treated equally as normal people and also allowed to attend normal function with people with respect and honor.⁷

“Maanmatha Saanthum Vari Venchaanthum

Kunum Kuralum Kondana Orusaar

Vannamum Sunnamum Malarbhumi Pinaiyalum

Venani Peediyar Yenthinaar Orusaar

Poovaiyum Pugaiyum Meviya Viraiyum

Thuvium Sekkai Suzhthana Orusaar”

(Silapadikaaram, Vanchi Kaandam, Nadukar Kaathai (28), Paadal Adigal 57 - 62)

CONCLUSION

Transgender has always been a part of human civilization. They are many evidences of their presences in the form of inscriptions and literature. The Tamil Creative Genius has contributed immensely to the world’s cultural treasure through numerous works of Art and Language. Thus, it explains about the various forms of Transgender in different circumstances where they represented in the form of God and illustrated about their activities in Silapadikaaram.

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