TRANSGERDER IN SILAPADIKKAARAM

Vijayalakshmi M G, Dr. Ambika Kameshwar

Research Scholar, Assistant Professor

School 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


INTRODUCTION

Transgenders are mentioned with so many adjectives and terms in the classical Tamil literature. The most commonly used terms are “Ali, Pedi, Peduaravani, Thirunangaiyai”. 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 kandam, Indira Vizhaavu Oor Edutha Kaathai and Kadaladu Vanchi Kaathai have inscriptions about transgender’s dance. In Vanchi Kandam, Neerpadai Kaathai and Nadugal Kaathai have inscriptions about various categories of transgenders. Some exciting information are also involving transgenders in Katturai Kaathai in Madurai Kandam. It is very interesting to know that all these dances are about Hindu mythology. Madhavi performed 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 Mannmathan, where he dressed as a Eunuch to secure the release of his son Anirudh. The detailed informations are discussed along with inscriptions in Kandam below.

Transgenders in Pugar Kandam

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).

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

(Silpadikaaram, Pugar Kaandam, 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 thirintha’ in Silapadikaaram.

"Aanmaiyl Thirinuthhan Arulthozhil Thiriyaathu
Naanudai Kolaththu Nagaimuga Kaatti
Pammozhi Narambin Thiviyaazh Mizhattri
Pensmaiyil Thiriyum Pettriyum Undena"

(Silpadikaaram, Pugar Kaandam, 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 Silapadikaraam. The lines that are depicted in Silapadikaraam 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

“Weayoon Paniyum Varuna Puthar
Nalvakai Paaniyum Nalamperu Kolgai
Vaan oor Mathiyamum Paadi Pinnar
Chiriyiyal Poliya Neer Alai Neenga
Bharathi Aadiya Bharathi Arangaththu
Thiripuram Yeriya Thevar Venda
Yerimuga Peranbhu Yeval Ketpa
Umaiyaal 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 Kandantha
Mallin Aadalum, Makkadal Naduvan
Neerthirai Arankathu Nigarthumun Nindra
Suthiram Kadanthon Aadiya Thudiyum
Padaivizhathu Avunar Paiyul Yeitha
Kudaivizhandhu Avar Muna Aadiya Kudaiyum,
Vaanan Peeru Marukidai Nadanthu
Neelnalam Alanthon Aadiya Kudumum,
Aanmai Thirintha Penmai Kolathu
Kamam Adiya Pedi Aadalum,
Kaaisina Avunar Kaduthzhil Pora aal
Maayaval Aadiyal Marakkaal Aadalum,
Seruvengalam Avunar Neenga
Thiruvin Seiyoon Aadiya Paavaiyum,
Transgenders in Madurai Kandam

I. In Madurai Kandam, 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.

“Vala Marunghu Ponniram Puraiyum Meniyal
Idakkai Polampoon Thamarai YCenthinum
Valakka 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 Kandam. 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 ‘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 Thuvarvaai
Suudaga Varivalai Aadamai Panaithol
Valarila Vanamulai Thalariryal Minnidai
Paadaga Siiradi Aariya Peediyoodu
Enchaa Mannar Erainzho Marukkum
Kanchasuga Muthalvar Eeraiich Niaaatruvar
Ariiyiar Ponthai Arunthamizh Aatril
Theriyaathu 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 Yenthinaaar Orusaar
Poovaiyum Pugaiyum Meviya Viraiyum
Thuviyum Sekkai Suznthana 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.

REFERENCES

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