

Unique Worship Of Hero Stone In Tamil Culture – A Study**P. Nithya^{1*}, Dr. S. Thangaraju²**

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Abstract

The present study is based on understanding Hero-stones worshipped by people in Tamil Nadu. This paper tries to show how the unique of Hero-stone worship is interconnected with that culture in Tamil land through the Tamil literature. The Tamil Literature as the mirror of time can fall through human life. It reflects civilization, culture, policy, doctrine and customs. These reflected aspects are flexible and they change according to time. Culture is the most important expression of these aspects. It was defined earlier as the symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are part of any society. Moreover, these cultural aspects are considered the important determinants of a human 's social status. In this way, literature can be considered the expression of culture and culture can be considered the determinant of social status of human beings. The Sangam literatures evidence the practice of honouring heroes, sacrificing themselves with mortal wounds of valorous fighting in the battle field, with stones commemorating them and paying obeisance to them. This practice of honouring the dead hero with memorial stone had an important place among worship-observances of the Tamils. It has to be assumed as an old tradition, which grew with the passage of time and received tribute of poet in the Sangam age. Hero stones are erected for those who sacrificed their life for society. Tamil literature contains many references to the hero stones. This study brings out the messages of the hero stones through the Tamil literature.

Key words: Hero Stones, Tamil Nadu, Worship, Memorial Stone, Sangam age

Introduction

Hero Stones, which are popularly found in many areas of Tamil Nadu are memorial stones erected in the ancient days in memory of a hero who had laid down his life for a noble cause. These slabs or stones are usually found on the outskirts of small towns and villages and the people of these areas, usually the family members of the deceased hero, worship these memorial stones with flowers and Kumkum. The men thus deified are those who sacrificed their lives protecting their town, village or families from attacks by enemy soldiers who tried to steal their cattle, from attacks by wild animals or some such unselfish and courageous act. The sculptures on these hero stones usually depict the brave man and the event in which he lost his life. A few even graphically portray the event such as a fierce fight which led to the death of the hero. The men are seen wielding various kinds of weapons like spears and swords and also as carrying shields, sometimes seated on horseback. Some of these stones bear inscriptions explaining the event and also the name of the hero. Based on the alphabet of the inscription, archaeologists are able to date the period of the hero stone and when it was installed. They are in fact very important records for understanding the social and cultural milieu of the ancient period in Tamil Nadu. Literary works of ancient Tamil Nadu like the *Tholkappiyam*, *Ahananuru*, *Purananuru*, *MalaiPadukadam*, *Pattinappalai*, etc specifically describe the hero stones which were planted in honour of men who performed some daring acts to protect their community or village. These hero stones were usually installed at the very spot where the hero laid down his life.

Tholkappiyam

Tholkappiyam (the ancient grammatical classic of the Sangam age) speaks of hero stone (*nadukal*) worship as poetic subject matter, and the stages of its presentations. Its aphoristic statement is explained by the expositors, *Ilampuranar*, as comprising five stages- *Katchi*: finding the suitable stone for the memorial of the famous hero; *Kalkol*: the bringing of the selected stone to the spot of fixation of the stone; *nirppadai*: bathing the stone in holy water; hero stone (*nadukal*): Planting or establishing the stone in the spot meant for it; *Perumpadai*: building a shrine for the stone; *Valttal*: divinizing the stone and worshipping it with praises.

Kaṭci kālkōḷ nīrpatai naṭukal
cīrtaku cīrappil perumpaṭai vaḷattāl

It is probable that the worship of the hero-stone is a survival of ancestors-worship; old societies believed that the excellences of ancestors are passed on to their worshippers. The Tamils seem to have acted on the belief that the hero-stone had in it the dead person's soul.

Ahananuru

In the ancient Tamil land, there was the habit of planting stones on the burial places of the dead heroes. Their names were inscribed and all their achievements were also added to the inscriptions.

Nal amark kaṭanta nāṇuṭai maṇavar
peyarum pīṭum eḷuti, atartorum
pīli cūṭṭiya pīraṅku nilai naṭukal - 67

These hero stones were planted in many places. Lances were also planted there. The Stones of heroes were planted in an arranged row. All this looked like an army in an array.

Nal icai nīrutta nāṇuṭai maṇavar
nirai nilai naṭukal porunti, imaiyātu, - 387

These hero stones were well worshipped on memorial days respectively.

Neṭu nilai naṭukal nāṭ palik kūṭṭum
curaṇiṭai vilaṅkiya maraṅ ḍṅku iyaviṅ,
vantu, viṇai valitta namvayiṅ, eṇrum, - 289

They were natural stones marked as memorial stones. A rock lofty like a woman elephant lying was adopted as memorial stone on which many names of heroes were inscribed. Perhaps it might refer to the heroes killed in some war. Women folk used to wash those memorial stones with turmeric water yellow in colour. They decorated them with 'karantai' flower. Thus, they paid homage to the heroes perished. There were in the distant day's hero stones found on the surface or the earth. Around them each was a wall stone of two lines. They were called 'Kal vattam' (stone circles).

The bravery of heroes was celebrated not only with memorial stones recording their glories and honoured with worship, but also with the pictorial representation of the heroes and the inscription of their exploits on hero stone (*natukal*) rock-faces receiving such worship; and this is evidenced by a Sangam poetic reference to the "big stone" (or rock) naturally formed on earth, looking like the one fixed firmly on the ground". Obviously, the bits of rocks growing tall in mountainous areas were taken as hero stone (*nadukal*) and worshipped by the Tamils. Also, the places of burial of the warriors who met brave deaths in cattle-raiding attacks received worship; over earth-mound on burial places, covering-stones were laid, and a verse of the *Ahananuru* tells us that these stones were regarded as hero stone (*nadukals*) and received worship.

Vil ēr vāḷkkai viḷut toṭai maṇavar
val āṇ patukkaik kaṭavuṭ pēṇmār,
naṭukal pīli cūṭṭi, tuṭippaṭuttu,
tōppik kalloṭu turū'up pali koṭukkum

pōkku aruñ kavalaiya pulavu nāru aruñ curam -35: 5-10

Purananuru

We also learn from the *Purananuru* that hero stone (*nadukals*) were established in honour of people who fasted unto death as a self-sacrifice for one reason or other. King *Kopperun Cholan* gave up his life, fasting in a sitting position facing north till he died, as his sense of disgrace at the revolt of his sons against him led him to this extreme step. A memorial hero-stone was put up at the place of his self-immolation, and the *Purananuru* verses tell us of the happenings centring on his hero stone (*nadukal*).

People planted memorial stones for the heroes killed in wars and the Hero-stones were worshipped as gods. Those stones were decorated with garlands and peacock feathers. Above the Hero-Stones a pandal (shamiana) of cloth was put up. The worship of these stones was called 'NAL VAZHIPADU'. Toddy was offered for the propitiation of the dead soul.

Puṭai naṭu kalliṅ nāṭ pali ūṭṭi,
nal nīrāṭṭi, neyn naraik koḷī'ya,
maṅkul māp pukai maṟukuṭaṅ kamaḷum,
aru muṇai irukkaṭṭu'āyiṅum, vari miṭaṟru - 329
Naṭukal pīli cūṭṭi, nār ari
ciṟu kalattu ukuppavum koḷvaṅkollō - 232

Avvaiyar wept during the death of *Adiyaman Neduman Anji*. She had lost morning and evening and days to survive would be day without any avail. A wife worshipped a memorial stone playing for the arrival of good guest worthy enemies for her heroic husband.

Conclusion

The unique worship of Hero-Stones beliefs and practices of the early Tamils may be known from the Tamil literature. Ancestor worship is known to have flourished from the early times. This emerged partly perhaps from phenomenon of death and partly from a desire to perpetuate the memory of the dead. Among the early Tamils the practice of erecting memorial stone and Hero-Stones had appeared and it continue for quite a long time after the Sangam age. Remembering and respecting elders was a custom in the ancient civilized society. In the sense, the people of southern regions speaking Tamil language had the traditions of erecting stone from time immemorial. It has been symboling of thanks to sacrifice. The literature also laid down the rules and regulation to Hero stone establishment is amazing tradition of the Tamil people. The study revealed that aim of this paper is to give a picture of unique worship of Hero-stones in the Tamil culture through the Tamil literature.

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