



Worship of Hero stone in Sangam Literature

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Abstract

Hero stones are erected for those who sacrificed their life for society. It is interesting that stone has been selected for the medium of such expression, implying the toughness, durability and naturalness of the bravery displayed by the person commemorated. It is a miniature replica of a funerary monument and a structural in concept, miniature in size and a product of classic traditions both conceptually and artistically. Thus, their stylistic idiom and their decorative, thematic detail would be of immense interest. The art history of several minor dynasties and feudatories can be known better from their contemporary memorial stones. In this regard, this paper express briefly about the Hero stones worships in the Sangam Literature.

Keywords: *Hero Stone, Megalithic, Tolkapiyam, Manimekalai*

1. Introduction

The erection of memorials to the dead is an ancient and worldwide phenomenon. The memorials took different forms in different countries and times. In Tamilnadu the act of erecting memorials get its firm foot in the megalithic culture. The gradual transformation of the megalithic cult into the hero cult is reflected in the Sangam literature. The rituals for erecting hero-stones (Nadukkal) are also mentioned in Tamil grammatical works. Memorial stones were erected to the heroes who died for the common cause of their village, country and king. So this article is a study of some aspects of hero-stones evolution how it became folk deities. It will be of help to those readers interest in the culture of Tamil Society.

1.1 Mentioned in Tamil Literature:

It is generally believed by scholars that the so-called Sangam Literature arose as an offshoot of the oral literature of the Megalithic society. Tamil

Literature especially the Sangam anthologies supply as first-hand information on Hero-Stones. Sangam period is considered to be the heroic age of the Tamils. Moreover, the study of megalithic burials have given us a great insight into an important chapter in South Indian History which witnessed a remarkable change not only in the cult of the dead and the construction of sepulchral monument but also in the socio-religious and economic patterns of the people. The archaeological and the Sangam Literary evidence have been correlated as far as possible here. In this respect, we are more fortunate, probably due to the fact that while megalithic burial customs were widely practised by the people when the Sangam Literary works were composed. Some of the references may be examined here by way of correlating the archaeological and Tamil Literary evidences.

1.2 Mentioned in Tolkapiyam:

K.K.Srinivasan in his study, has amply quoted the

Sangam Literature to show that many of the megalithic burial customs have been referred to. First of all he interprets the *Tolkapiyam verse* in the light of what we have at present come to know of the material objects and culture revealed by the megalithic monuments of South India. According to him that *Katel* means *to know*, probably meant the lying in state for some time, as even now in practice so that all the relatives and friends can assemble and do the ceremonial wailing. *Kalkol* likewise probably, meant the exposure of the body to the five elements of nature. *Nirpadal* would refer to the ceremonial washing or purification of the few picked bones left after exposure. *Nadukalis* the erection of the stone (megalith) over the remains. This was followed by *Perumpadai*, the great offerings, perhaps with cooked rice and other food and by *Valttal*, praise or adoration perhaps, with song and dance.

The bards of the Sangam Literature made many heroes immortal among men. Such heroes desired to be remembered in more tangible ways. The setting up of a *Nadukal* was one such mode of recording the glorious deeds of the fallen heroes. *Tolkapiyam*, the earliest extant grammatical treatise in Tamil has been of great importance not only for the study of the structure and development of Tamil grammar but also for the cultural history of the ancient Tamils. It graphically enumerates six different stages involved in the ritual ceremonies connected with the erection of *Nadukal* to commemorate the death of heroes.

- The First *Katci* means searching for a suitable stone to be erected as a hero stone.
- The second *Kalkol* means invitation and fixing up of auspicious time to erect the stone.
- The third *Nirppadai* is bathing of the stone ceremoniously.
- Fourth one *Nadukal* is the setting up the stone.
- The fifth stage *Perumpadai* means celebration and feasting to the erected stone.

- And the final stage *Valttal* means the praising and worshipping of the stone by singing invocatory songs.

1.3. Mentioned in Manimekalai:

Manimekalai a Sangam work enumerates five modes of the disposal of the dead prevalent in the society, viz ,

- Cremation (Suduvor)
- Cist away or exposure (Iduvor)
- Pit Burials (todu-kulipaduppor)
- Underground cist burial (talvavinadalppor)
- Urn burial covered with a lid (talivirkavlpport).

1.4 Mentioned in Purananuru and other literature:

A Purananuru verse was written in praise of the Pandya King Nedunchelivan. It, also refers the different modes of the disposal of the dead followed by the people in those days viz, the exposure (iduku) cremation, complete inhumation (padukulipoduka). Exposure, which was widely practised by the megalithic builders, has been vividly described in Purananuru. It mentions the grave-yards (Kadu) as places where the vultures descend on it many foot paths which cross each other and the strong billed cow flies as it likes, where the carrion eating jackals abound, and the hordes of demons with their teeth defiled by carrion, grasp the skeletons of the dead and eat the white flesh till their mouth reek odor and where lie strewn fragments of white bones and numerous stones concealed by overgrowth of jungle. Apart from these literatures belonging to the Sangam period, there are numerous references to hero-stones in later literature also. Tirukkural mentions about hero-stones. It reveals that "The typical warrior warns his enemies from approaching his leader, saying that many had stood before him and then stood as stones". Though, Silappadikaram did not mention anything about *Nadukal* rose in honour of the deceased heroes, it mentions about *Nadukal* rose in honour of Kannagi, the heroine of Silappadikaram. It also refers to a temple with an erect stone as an object of worship.

2. Major types of hero-stones:

2.1 Hero-stones with Inscriptions only:

These types of hero-stones are scarcely found in South India, particularly in Tamilnadu. Only a few such specimens have been reported. In this case only inscriptions are relating to the deceased heroes exploits and achievements have been found. They are completely devoid of any sculptural representations of the dead heroes. Such types of hero-stones are reported from Hanumanthapuram in Salem district and another at Chinnakuppam in Merur taluk of Dharmapuri district.

2.2. Hero-stones with Sculpture only:

On the contrast to the above mentioned type of hero-stones, we have quite a good number of hero-stones bearing only with sculptural representations. For instance many hero-stones depict heroes holding bow and arrow or with sword and dagger in their hands. Sometimes they depict heroes fighting with wild animal like Tiger, Pigs etc.

2.3 Hero-stones with both Sculpture and Inscriptions:

This type of hero-stones found scattered throughout South India. They give much information regarding the name of the hero and also under what circumstances the hero met with his death etc. Besides, the inscriptions sculptural representations of the deceased heroes are also found. However, a further attempt is also made in the succeeding pages on the typology of hero-stones on the basis of the purpose or causes for the erection of hero-stones in South India. It has been said earlier that during the Sangam period, most of the hero-stones were raised for those who died in the cattle-raid campaigns. But the Epigraphical record shows that hero-stones were raised for various reasons and causes.

Conclusions

As we have already learnt from Sangam literature that most of the hero-stones were raised for those who died in the attempt of cattle raiding. Many hero-stone inscriptions also record the death of heroes while capturing or recapturing the cattle from the enemies. Terms like *Toru kondupothu* and *Toru Meta pothu* in hero-stone inscriptions clearly show that how and when the particular hero met his death. The former refers to the occasion when the hero captured the cattle from the enemies and the later refers to the occasion when to the occasion when the hero recaptured the cattle that was lost to enemies. Such act of cattle-raiding was not confined to Tamil Nadu also. In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh we get numerous hero-stones regarding the death of heroes in cattle-raid.

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