

Language And Culture in Medieval Kerala : A Study of Oral Tradition of Kadathanad

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Abstract

Vadakkanpattukal is one of the eminent part of the Pattusahitya of Malayalam literature. Generally they are called as Northern Ballads. In reconstructing the history of Kerala, it has played a very remarkable role. It aids to reconstruct the history and evolution of Malayalam language itself. The language which reflects in this pattusahitya is almost popular. And it was spread in oral forms. This study is also aims to find out, how did the culture and language were connected in those days. Whether the language is responsible for cultural differences or the language is created by cultural differences are the main problem of this study. Apart from this, it helps to understand the condition of language, which is spoken by the people. The social life, which is reflected in these songs also helps to understand the social history of Malayalam language as well. This study is based on a comparative study of meanings of terms and usages. Along with this, it aids to analyze the condition of Tamil and Sanskrit influences, used by the people during those ages. It also aims to understand the culture and integration of Kerala in terms of the oral tradition of the region of Kadathanad.

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INTRODUCTION

Human society has evolved through a wide process of social and cultural change. In the progress of human community, language played a very remarkable role. Language is used either in the form of sounds or in the form of actions. Before the formation of literate society, language was expressed in the form of spoken word only. At the same time, the condition of words in a text is quite different from their condition in spoken discourse. Memory played a significant role to reconstruct language as well as the history of people. But in the case of Kerala, we can only have the Secondary Orality. That means writings were also flourished along with oral tradition.¹ But these oral songs help us to construct, the social history of language and cultural formation of Kerala, than literature. According to Robert Wood, “Memory played a quite significant role in oral culture from that which it played in literate culture.”²

We do not have sufficient evidence to reconstruct the history of Kerala in earlier times. We have only the Megalithic remains. But to reconstruct the medieval society many inscriptions are available and literature in large scale. The language spoken by the people in those days were Malayalam mixed with Tamil. From literature, we can get much information regarding the transformation of language into proper Malayalam. But from literature we can not get the original spoken discourse which was used by the people. The oral tradition of Kerala, helps very much to decipher the spoken discourse used by them. The folk songs like Vadakkkan and Thottampattukal and other songs help us to resolve the above mentioned problem and these were composed in the medieval age. It gives valuable information regarding the medieval culture and society.

In this study of language and culture in medieval Kerala: A study of oral tradition of Kadathanad”, two kinds of songs are being discussed in the subtitle as ‘Puthoorampattu and Tacholipattu. These two songs are slightly different in their theme, nature and age of composition. Most of the songs in Vadakkanpattukal are arranged in very common manner. It was used by the Paniyalar, who were the low caste group.³

PUTHOORAM PATTU: VALIYA AROMAL CHEKAVAR

Puthoorampattu is concerned with ‘ValiyaAromalChekavar’. He is the brother of PuthooramUnniarcha and born in the famous PuthooramVeedu.

The pattu begins with the conflict of Unnikonar and Unnichandror. They were the sons of two sisters. Their uncle soon died. They had to attain the power and position of their uncle. Since there was confusion. As a result of this, some persons lost their life. Finally, the naduvazhi concluded that those who won the

Angam will be assuming seniority or MoopuVazhuka. Unnichandror get Aringodar as the thekon. Hearing this, Unnikonar put an end to search for a valiant Chekon by selecting AromalValiyachekavar of Puthooramveedu. Moreover it was about the matters regarding dignity, honour and property right.

The influence of Brahmanic culture and language could be seen in PuthooramPattukal. They also try to change the folk words to Sanskritised words. The words like 'Kolasree' (Kolathiri), 'Vellasri' (Valluvakonathirir), Nanibhakede (Shame), 'Manibhakede. 'Thamboolamvarjikkuka'⁴ (refusing to accept betel offered), Paradukkham (sorrowful), 'Odangalumdhahanam(Cremation) 'Sakhi (companion), Teertham (holly water), 'AnduDeeksha (yearly penance) , all these are common Sanskrit words used by them. Along with this we get the information that, they also followed Brahmanic culture too. 'AnduDeeksha' is an obvious example for this.⁵ After the death of the uncle of Unnikonar and Unnichandror, they together practice the custom of 'AnduDeeksha'.

Another interesting feature was the ritual crying or Muravili. Ritual crying of women during the death were inorder to inform others that, that was s house of dead persons. Those lines are;

PengammarrandumMuraviliche

ChathoruVedennuAriyikkunnu

NenjethadichumTozhichumkonde'

AthuthaneKelkunnuAyilarum

odittumMandittumVannodungi⁶

(Vadakkanpattukal, K.V. Achuthanandan, P.5. Two sisters who are crying to inform the neighbours that this was a death house. While hearing this ritual crying the neighbours come into the house very fast).

Apart from this they used to some interesting phrases during the offering of Balis.

SheshichanellumAriyumcholli

Vedanpulavintechakkacholli

Vadukapuliyantemangacholli

(VP, K.V. Achuthanandan, p.6. It alludes to the offering of Balis in the names of several plants namely mango, jackfruit and also rice).

The caste system was very rigid during this time. That we can analyze from the conversation of Vazhunnavar (a local ruler) and a low caste man.⁷ They used the words like pancherukkan, kollancheikkan instead of using their name.⁸ Now-a-days itself 'Chekkan' is used as derogatory in Kadathanad region. Vazhunnavar (Unnikonar) identified the Pancherukkan and inquires the way to find out an efficient Chekkan. Along with this he asked the Panan,⁹ where are you going? He answered that he was going to his "Ooru" (nadu) Then he again asked "What can you get from your Ooru?"

Panan, answered it in very interesting and simple manner.

UnnumbolChennaloChorukittum

Thekkumbolchennaloennakittum

Chethumbolchennalokallukittum

Athazhachorianariyumkittum

Sandhyavilakkinuennakittum

(V.P, K.V Achuthanandan, P.13. Here the Panan says that he got meals, toddy, rice and oil from his Ooru or nadu).

From these lines we can understand that the distributive system that prevailed there. It also gives information that 'kallu' or 'toddy' was used by them as a common item for their diet.

Another interesting reference is concerned with their knowledge about the identification of the places. Nature was the main indicator to locate different areas. They related the appearance of the mountains and hills to elephant's, cock's, pig's and deer's neck. Paddy fields and plantation were also used for their identification.

Kozhikazhuthanmalaarike

Anakazhuthan mala arike

Pannikazhuthan mala arike

Avidennum were Vadamkottekku

PattapazhuthullaKavunginthottam

KulayunangiyaTenguthottam

Karimpanathottamkadannnuchennal

PothereKettiyaTenguthottam

(V.P. K.V. Achuthanandan, p.13. It refers the mountains as the neck of cock, elephant, pig and alike. Along with this they also refers to the plantation of coconut tree, arecanut tree, palm tree etc.)

These phrases can be seen in various parts of the songs. That means they

had no concept about the boundaries. At the same time they were well known with the various nadus and their borders. The lines like ‘KaruthanarnadumKizhekkeattam, PuthoorampadamPadinjarattam, Elamanoornadorunadallane’¹⁰ indicate this.

Next important factor is their concept about beauty or grace. They were well bothered of each body parts such as hairs, eyes, teeth, colour, etc. The compared it with various things. Today’s beauty concepts have no more relation with this.

*‘Karirulkothamudiazhake
panchamichandranodothanetti
kunjimukhavumkuriyakannum
Thathamachundumpavizhapallum
Kannadikothakavilurandum
Aroamlthadiarayanmeesha
ShangukadanjaKazhutazhake
CheppukadanjhoruTremukhavum
MarathuMampullipoonchoangum
Amayodothapuravadive
karirulkothathudaazhake*

(V.P, K.V Achuthananadan, p.16. It says about the hair and thigh of AromalChekavar which can be compared to pitch darkness, forehead with moon, lips with the lips of parrots, teeth related to coral bead, cheek with mirror, neck with conch, and the external shape with the appearance of tortoise).

From this description we can identify the thing that AromalChekavar was a man of black complexion and he is the ideal person of male beauty. Through the character of Kuttimani, we can get knowledge regarding female beauty. Ornamentation plays a decisive role in their beauty concept.

*Peelithirumudikettivechu
chandranvalanjathirunettimelum
Chandamodezhuthiyathodukuriyum
MarvinazhakiyaThalimala
MarvidamthingiyaAngabhangi
Poonulparichothapoonchongum
AliakothoravaniVayarum’
Neelakavunnipudajhorium
RamayanamKothiyaValakalrandum
Kaiviralkarinumponmothiram*

(V.P., K.V. Achuthananadan, p.45. The following lines described the woman’s beauty. It praises her hair, forehead and like things).

They had good awareness about jyothisham, that got represented in various parts. 'Kannirashi', 'Midhunarashi', 'Ashtamivyazham, ShaniPizha'¹¹... are indicating this.

Ashtamivyazhamshanipizhayum
Shanipizhathanteapaharathil
petennuveenumarikkumjhane
Baalikkupandupizhachavyazham
AnnallowBaalivadhamkazhinju

(V.P., K.V. Achuthananda, p.45. While taking the story of Ithihasapurana tradition, AromalUnni says that who also have the same fate which occurred in the life of Baali. Baali died because of the shanipizha).

Another one is their concept of a man becoming a Chekon, Nair, Namboothiri and how they represented women. They represented it with Angam, Pulasyam,¹²poonul and mangalyam.

Angampidichalechekonavoo
PulasyamanijaleNayaravoo
PoonulumittaleNambooryavoo
Mangalyamaninjalenaryavoo

(VP, K.V. Achuthanandan, p.25. From these lines they says that one who will conduct Angam or fight will become a Chekon, one who wear poonul will become a Brahmin or Namboodhiri and women with marriage and lion-cloth or kacha with Nair)

References regarding the features of house can be understood from the Vadakkanpattukal.

NereKizhakkethuillamane
NereThekkethuVariyamane
NerePadinjarumAntharveedum
NereVadakketuVeluhedante
Puthaaytheerthapadippurayum
Kummayamthechathilchitraezhuthu
Padippurakayarikadannuchennal
Nadakashalayilchennirangum
Ettukettumnallaezhutharayum
nalkettakathundemullathara

(V.P, K.V, Achuthanandan, P.14. Following lines mentioned the features of various kinds of settlements in Kerala like illam and varyiam and the features of houses in Kerala. Ettukette and nalukette were one of the traditional types of houses

maintained by the Namboothiri and the ruling families in Kerala).

From the above mentioned lines, we can analyze that they followed mixed settlements. The usage of natakashala can be seen at the home of Veluthedan.¹³ They belong to the community of Vannan or Mannan (washerman community). Perhaps they were the groups of professional Theyyam players.¹⁴ The reference of Natakashala,¹⁵ is seen at the house of Chekon as well.

Next attractive thing is the conversation in between Unniarcha and her mother-in-law. Unniarcha wanted to see her brother AromalUnni very soon. She wanted the permission from the side of her mother-in-law and father-in-law. Mother-in-law said that Panancherukkan would accompany with. Unniarcha would give a good reply to the mother-in-law while taking the tradition of Puthooramveedu.

*AppolparayunnuAmmayamma
Panacherukkanethunakondoyko
AthuthanekelkunnuUnniarcha
OmanamukhamvadiArchakallow
Puthooramveetilpenungalum
Panantekoodenadanittilla*

(V.P, K.V. Achuthanandan, p.32. Mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law that Panan will accompany you. But Unniarcha became angry while hearing this. Unniarcha replied that the women of Puthooram house will never go with the Panan.)

Another interesting feature is that they had well knowledge regarding Parasurama tradition, Keralolpathi, CheramanPerumal and alike matters. Those lines are put down below.

*KeralamennoruBhoomiyallow
ParasuramantePradishtayale
Gurukshetramthannilumninnukonde
Gokaranamnokkiyorubanameythu
Adalaybhoomipakarunnuninnu
varunaneneekiyittuBhoomiyaki*

*ezhukudayumethannittunde
Thoranamnalumethannittunde
Chennalavideyiruppathinai
ThandaymastanavumTazhvazhchayum
Veetaymastanavumundunokke
Chekontepadaviyumundonnokke
PuthooramveedumKalarithannu*

Attiperaiezhuthithannu
Puthoorampadathekandamnalum

EzhavatheRajavumnammalhanne
Malayalam thannilekalariyile
Payattumurakalpathivilanju
NalloruKurukalumTulunatteenne
MelaymaSthanavumvechuporum

(VP, K.V. Achuthanandan, p.26-28. These lines indicate the Keralolpathi tradition. According to this the land of Kerala was created by Parasurama stretching from Gokaranam to Kanyakumari. It is said that Parasurama, who threw his arrow to the sea and due to his supernatural powers the land of Kerala came out of the sea. He also makes nootiyettupradishta to stabilise the bhoomi or earth. He brought forty two kalaris here and also brought Brahman from paradesham. It also says that the four jathis coming in to Kerala from paradesham, with the absence of people in Kerala. It also pointed out that their ancestors are coming from Ezhupathunadu. Perumal, who wrote a letter to Ezhupathu king and send a ezhavar. Perumal, who give them all facilities at here. They rendered the position of Tandaymasthanam, Tazhvazcha, and Puthooramveedu and padam the position of Chekonetc like Attiperu or grants).

From this line we get plenty of information on “NootiyettuPradhishta’ forty two Kalaris, migration of Brahmins etc. In those days Kerala was referred as Malayalam. That means Malayalam named as a name of language, may be a later origin. When the song was composed Kerala may have renounced as Malayalam, in the sense of region. But Ezhupathu king referred our land as Keralam. That means Malayalam used in the sense of region only by the people, who reside at Kerala. But the term Paradesham indicates Kerala which was completely independent from Tamilnadu and got a separate border those days.

The origin of Jathi is clearly defined here. Sub castes were also formed along with this. The family of Puthooramveedu might become from ezhupathunad and perhaps belong to the commentary of ezhavas. They have taken the story of CheramanPerumal to highlight their tradition. According to them, they were brought here by CheramanPerumal. That indicates their original home land perhaps in Srilanka. Perumal send a letter to Ezhupathu King. As a result of this, the King sent as ‘Ezhava’ to Kerala. The Perumal welcomed them in all hospitality and rendered

them Permanent residence here. He provided them koothuvilakku, ezhukuta, thoranam, pallake and such like things. Along with this he also gave thandaymasthanams, veetaymasthanams, Tazhvazha, puthooramveedu, kalari and other properties as Attipperu¹⁶(grants). This indicates they were not a silly people at here. Because ‘Attipperu’ was only given to Brahmins or foreigners perhaps the songs get Brahamanical influence. There is confusion regarding the origin of Kalari. Was there any connection with the origin of Kalari with Ezhavar? Was there any kind of knowledge regarding about this Kalaris in Srilanka? Why did CheramaPerumal brought this Ezhavar from Srilanka?, all these are suspicious questions. All these are indicates, they were not a common group and had some special peculiarities. Along with this he also brought a KalariKurukkal from Tulunad.

All above things hint at, social expansion’s influence on the expansion of language. Social formation played crucial role in the formation of language itself. With the social change, transition also occurred in the format of language.

TacholiPattu- TacholiChandu

Tacholipattu is concerned with TacholiChandu, one of the legendary hero. These folk songs also belong to the oral tradition of Kadathanad region. This folk tradition concerns with war for a woman named KunjiKongi. Chandu, who stole Konki, who had a husband and brother named Kannan and KunjiKonkan. At last Kongi joined with Chandu to fight against her brother and husband.

In the first part of the song we shall see the reference of *Vadakaranadu*. Chandu with Chappan were going to collect the delayed taxes from Bappan, the *Naduvazhi* of Vadakara. Chandu whose preparations for the collection of taxes are mentioned very fabulously here.

Angapattaleedukunnunde
Pattutheruthangedukunnunde
KuzhaleenuKachavalichedukunnunde
PanthukanakkinuChurutiiKacha
AkshamChoonieringukacha
VadakkanajherivechumKoonthalvechum
Anamukhamvechukettunnunde

(VP, K.V. Achuthanandan, p. 64. The following lines mentions the dressing style of TacholiChandu. How did he wore loin-cloth over his body are explained here.)

Along with Chappan he went to Vadakaranadu. The ways are referred in this songs which are put down here. Paddy fields, soils, forests, rivers, hills were used as indicators of various borders. Here is the reference regarding Talasserinadu.

Taitaladichachirakadannu
Kuttatampadathuvannirangi
Chulliyannavanamkadannu
Kalvettukuzhiyumcharalparambum
Tayyoramalayudevalathubage
Kozhikazhuthan mala kayari
Ana mariyan mala karayari
TalasserinadumKadannavarum
VadakaranattinAttamchennu
KannanpuzhayumKadakkunnunde.

P, K.V. Achuthanandan, p. 65. Bunds, paddy fields, Chulliyann Forests, gravel land, Tayyora Mountains are referred as a part of their traveling. They

went to Vadakaranadu using those as main indicators. Apart from this the shape of mountains, they related with the neck of elephant and cock. At last they reached the vadakara and Talasserinadu and crossed the river named Kannan.)

Bappan was an Arab or Muslim, which is clear from the term 'Jonar'. He himself called him as king¹⁷. At first Bappan did not care for Chandu. But then he heard Chandu himself that Chandu belonged to the Tacholivedu. So he welcomed Chandu with all hospitality.

Kilivalanvettilaedukkunnunde
Erankavungintepakkeduthu
Chappadannallapokaleduthu
Changanguneettianooreduthu
Chunnambukaranameduthavanum

Conclusion

The language represented in PuthooramPattu shows early phase of medieval age. The Brahmanic influence and the use of Sanskrit show its encroachment into the life of ordinary people. The language represented in these songs shows the influence of Manipravalam style. Whereas in *Tacholipattu*, the consolidation of Malayalam language can be seen. The usages of normal Malayalam idioms give clear example

for this. No brahmanical influence could be found in *Tacholipattu*. The language represented in these two songs correspondence with the two phases of society in medieval Kerala.

The features of agrarian economy are clearly felt in *PuthooramPattu*, which indicates the commencement of a developed society. Martial arts just emerged in *Puthoorampattu* and *Kalari* became an important institution during those days. While in *Tacholipattu*, we can observe the money economy. Growth of trade contributed for the progress of economy. Martial arts were consolidated during this period. Which means, it is composed during the beginning stage of modern era. The reference of MadirasiPattalam, Jonakar, Talasseri which shows *Tacholipattu* probably composed in 18th century.

Above all the linguistic terms in *Tacholipattu* shows the mature phase of the Malayalam language, both in their meaning and its expression. Which means *Tacholipattu* was composed in very later period and *PuthooramPattu* is probably composed in 16th or 17th Centuries.

References

- ¹ Walter.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, London and New York , p.6.
- ² Robert Wood quoted in Walter.J. Ong 's orality and literary, London and New York , p.19.
- ³ M.C. RaghavaVarier, *VadakkanPattukaludePaniyala' VallatholVidhyaPeedam*, Sukapuram, 1982, p.16.
- ⁴ *ThamboolamVarjikkuka*, which indicates the breaking of relationships.
- ⁵ *AnduDeeksha* ' is a penance observed by the buried person that continued for a year.
- ⁶ K.V. Achuthanandan, *VadakkanPattukal*, p.5.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, P.13.
- ⁸ *Cherukkan* or *chekkan* they referred for to indicate they were belong to very lower community. Which means they were very were very small man. It is a caste derogatory usage.
- ⁹ *Panan* were professional singer belong to low caste group.
- ¹⁰ K.V. Achuthanandan, *Op.cit.*, p.13.
- ¹¹ *Shani* or *saturn* is considered to be an auspicious planet

- ¹² Pulasyam or Poolasyan is an red rope tied by the Nairs on their body. It was a traditional custom followed by them. It also associated with Kalari and Angam.
- ¹³ Veluthedans are belongs to the low caste hierarchy. They were professionally washer man community. They are also known as Vannan or Mannan.
- ¹⁴ Theyyams are one of the art forms in Northern Kerala .
- ¹⁵ Natakashala are connected with theatre culture or the place to conduct the art forms.
- ¹⁶ Attipperu as a form of gift, given to Brahmins or foreigners.
- ¹⁷ K.V. Achuthanandan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.