

# **Optimization Techniques for Computational Mathematics, Network Analysis, Fluid Mechanics and Machine Learning**

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## Chapter 21

### Workshop Practices of the Ancient Tamizhar in Sangam Literature

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#### **Abstract**

Sangam Literature represents one of the earliest and most significant literary traditions of the Tamil language. These works provide valuable insights into the lifestyle, social organization, religious beliefs, and ritual practices of the ancient Tamil people. The early Tamizhar lived in close harmony with nature and considered natural elements such as mountains, trees, seas, and rivers as sacred manifestations worthy of worship. In addition, they followed the custom of commemorating fallen heroes by erecting hero stones (Nadukal) and performing ritual worship in their honour. Through the study of Sangam texts, it is possible to understand the diverse forms of worship practiced by the ancient Tamizhar, including devotion to natural forces, village deities, and major gods. This study examines the various worship traditions reflected in Sangam literature with relevant literary evidence and attempts to highlight the spiritual outlook and religious consciousness of the early Tamil society.

*Keywords: Sangam Literature, Religion, Workshop, Ancient Tamizhar.*

#### **1. Introduction**

Sangam Literature represents the earliest and most ancient literary tradition of the Tamil language. These texts are generally dated



between 300 BCE and 300 CE and provide significant insights into the cultural patterns, social organization, and everyday life of the ancient Tamil people. Sangam literature is broadly classified into two major categories: Akam (interior) and Puram (exterior). Akam literature primarily deals with themes of love, emotions, and personal relationships within the private sphere of human life. In contrast, Puram literature focuses on public life, highlighting heroic deeds, warfare, political activities, generosity of kings, and various aspects of social life. The Concepts can be found in [1-6].

## **2. Life and Culture of the Ancient Tamizhar**

The assembly of Tamil scholars who gathered to study, discuss, and promote the Tamil language was traditionally known as the Sangam. This scholarly academy played an important role in nurturing literary creativity and intellectual exchange among poets. The significance of such gatherings is reflected in the verse:

**“Tamil kezhuk koodal than kōl vēndhē”** (Purananuru,58)

This verse highlights the importance of assemblies where learned scholars convened to deliberate on Tamil language and literature. The people who lived before and during the Sangam period are generally referred to as the ancient Tamizhar (Tholkudiyinar / Tholkudiyar). Their lifestyle was deeply rooted in nature. Natural environments such as mountains, forests, agricultural lands, and seas shaped their livelihood, culture, and social practices. A well-known verse that expresses the universal humanistic outlook of the ancient Tamizhar

is: **“Yaadhūm Oore, Yaavarum Kelir”** (Purananuru,192)

This line conveys the idea that all places are one’s own and all people are kin. It reflects the inclusive worldview and humanitarian values

of the ancient Tamil society, demonstrating their belief in universal harmony and unity among humankind.

### **3. Religious Thought**

The term religion (Samayam) refers to an organized system or set of principles formulated for the worship of a divine power. In classical usage, the word samayam denotes an established doctrine or disciplined path associated with spiritual practice. According to K. S. Pillai, the concept of samayam corresponds to the idea of a structured system similar to the English term “system,” implying an organized framework through which religious practices and beliefs are carried out (Pillai, Tamilar Samayam, All-India Tamil Conference Welcome Address, p. 25). The word samayam is also related to the root samai, which signifies the act of preparing or refining. In this sense, religion functions as a process that cultivates and refines human character. It shapes individuals in a manner that promotes both personal well-being and harmonious social living. Thus, religion plays a vital role in guiding human beings toward spiritual maturity and divine grace (S. Thirunavukkarasu, Nalvar Nanmanimalai: Or Aayvu). Scholars have further explained that religion emerges as a complete system when emotional elements, ritual practices, and intellectual understanding function together in harmony (Kalaikkalanjiyam, Vol. 4, p. 452). During the Sangam period, religion functioned as an important social institution that regulated human life and moral conduct. It guided individuals toward virtues such as righteousness, discipline, and compassion. The existence of religious institutions during this period is indicated in the following verse: **“Pagatteruththin pala saalaith thavappalli”** (Pattinappaalai, 52–53)



This verse suggests the presence of ascetic centers and religious establishments, indicating that spiritual practices and religious learning were integral components of early Tamil society.

#### **4. Belief in God**

The people of the Sangam age possessed a deep belief in divine powers. Observing the forces of nature often evoked awe and reverence, which gradually developed into forms of worship. The ancient Tamizhar believed that divine energy was present within natural elements and phenomena. Early grammatical and cultural references indicate that certain ritual practices were associated with divine worship. In this context, references such as Kodi Nilai, Kanthazhi, and Valli, mentioned in Tolkaḷḷiyam, are interpreted as symbolic forms of early worship traditions connected with divine belief. Sun worship has also existed among people from ancient times. Natural forces were regarded as manifestations of divine power and were revered accordingly. A verse from Natrinai illustrates the worship of the sun:

**“Munnīr mīmisai pala thozhath thōndri**

**Ēmuṛa viḷangiya sudarinum”** (Natrinai,283)

This verse indicates that the sun, shining above the vast seas and receiving the reverence of many, was considered a divine entity worthy of worship. The belief that the universe was created by a divine power is also reflected in Sangam poetry. A verse in Natrinai expresses the idea that the world itself was created by God:

**“Aithē kamma! ivvulagu padaithōnē!”** ( Natrinai,240)

Similarly, another poetic line suggests that devotion to the divine would bring prosperity and blessings such as rainfall:

**“Theyvam thozhāl kozhunan**

**thozhudhezhvāl**

**peyyenap eyyum mazhai.”** (Natrinal,240)

These lines reveal the strong faith that people placed in divine intervention and grace. Natural forces that caused fear or wonder were often personified as deities. In Sangam literature, certain supernatural powers are referred to as “Sūr.”

**“Sūr uru manjnaiyin nadunga”** (Akananuru,98)

Furthermore, the deity believed to determine or measure the span of human life was referred to as “Kootruvan,” the god associated with death.

**“Kootruvan pōla kodiyaḍhu pirivu”** (Purananuru,42)

Thus, Sangam literature clearly reflects that the ancient Tamizhar maintained a profound belief in divine powers, perceiving them both in natural phenomena and in the cosmic order governing human life.

## **5.The Five Landscapes (Ainthinai) and Deity Worship**

The concept of the five ecological landscapes (Ainthinai) described in Tolkappiyam reflects the close relationship between nature and the lifestyle of the ancient Tamizhar. Early Tamil society revered nature and perceived divine presence within natural environments. Accordingly, the land was classified into five distinct ecological regions, each associated with a particular deity and mode of life. The inhabitants of these landscapes worshipped different deities based on their natural surroundings. The mountainous Kurinji region was associated with the worship of Murugan; the pastoral Mullai region with Tirumal (Vishnu); the fertile agricultural Marutham region with



Indra; the coastal Neithal region with Varuna; and the arid Palai region with Korravai, the goddess of victory and war. This classification clearly illustrates how religious beliefs in ancient Tamil society were closely intertwined with ecological conditions and geographical landscapes.

### **5.1 Nature Worship**

The Tamizhar of the Sangam period regarded nature itself as sacred and worthy of reverence. Natural elements such as mountains, trees, rivers, and seas were considered manifestations of divine power and were worshipped accordingly. This form of nature worship reveals the deep ecological awareness and environmental sensitivity of the ancient Tamil people. Their reverence for natural forces demonstrates a cultural outlook in which human life was viewed as inseparable from the natural world.

### **5.2 Tree Worship**

The ancient Tamizhar considered certain trees to be sacred and worshipped them as divine manifestations. References to such practices can be found in Natrinai (303) and Purananuru (260). These literary sources indicate that particular trees were revered and regarded as the abodes of divine power. Tree worship therefore formed an integral component of the broader tradition of nature worship among the early Tamil people.

### **5.3 Nadukal (Hero Stone) Worship**

Another important religious practice of the Sangam period was the worship of hero stones (Nadukal). Stones were erected in memory of warriors who died heroically in battle. These memorial stones were not merely symbolic markers but objects of ritual reverence. The

practice reflects the cultural values of the ancient Tamizhar, who held bravery and sacrifice in high regard. Through the worship of hero stones, the community honored the valor of fallen warriors and preserved their memory for future generations.

#### **5.4 Worship of Minor Deities**

In addition to the worship of major gods, the Sangam people also believed in the existence of minor or local deities who functioned as protective guardians of villages and communities. These deities were often associated with specific natural locations such as trees, hills, and forests. People believed that these sacred spaces were inhabited by divine forces that protected the community from harm and ensured prosperity.

#### **5.5 Worship of Major Deities**

Sangam literature also contains references to the worship of major deities such as Murugan, Siva, Tirumal (Vishnu), and Brahma. These references demonstrate the presence of established religious traditions and the reverence accorded to prominent divine figures.

##### ***Murugan***

**“Porulum ponnum pōgamum alla ninpāl**

**arulum anbhūm aṛanum”** (Paripadal,5)

This verse highlights Murugan as a deity associated with grace, love, and righteousness rather than material wealth.

##### ***Tirumal (Vishnu)***

**“Māyōn mēya kādurai ulagamum”** (Kalithogai,140)



This line refers to Tirumal, who is associated with pastoral landscapes and divine protection.

### ***Siva***

**“Mukkaṅ selvan nagar valam seyarkē”** (Akananuru,181)

Here Siva is referred to as the three-eyed lord, indicating the presence of Saivite beliefs during the Sangam age.

### ***Brahma***

**“Nānmuga oruvar payantha”** (Perumpanarruppadai,42–43)

This reference mentions Brahma, the four-faced creator, showing that cosmological concepts were also present in early Tamil religious thought.

## **5.6 Methods of Worship**

During the Sangam period, people practiced various forms of worship as part of their religious life. These practices included ritual offerings (puja), presenting flowers to the deity, lighting lamps, offering fermented beverages such as kal as part of ritual observances, and the worship of hero stones (nadukal). Such practices were closely connected with both social customs and spiritual beliefs. Through these ritual acts, people expressed devotion to divine powers and sought protection, prosperity, and well-being for their communities.

## **6.Spiritual Thought of the Ancient Tamizhar**

The spiritual outlook of the ancient Tamizhar was deeply connected with nature. They perceived human life as an integral part of the natural world. Their beliefs and religious practices reveal a worldview in which nature, humanity, and the divine were interrelated. This perspective demonstrates that the early Tamil people maintained a

harmonious relationship with nature while also recognizing the presence of sacred power within it.

## **7. Conclusion**

The worship traditions of the ancient Tamizhar were fundamentally rooted in nature-centered cultural practices. Forms of worship such as nature worship, hero-stone worship, the veneration of minor local deities, and the devotion to major gods together reveal the spiritual consciousness of early Tamil society. Sangam literature serves as an important historical and cultural source that clearly illustrates the religious beliefs, cultural heritage, and spiritual worldview of the ancient Tamil people.

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