

## CHAPTER – 11

# ECO-ZONES IN SANGAM LITERATURE

**Dr. A. MUTHUKUMAR**

Assistant Professor of English

Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College

Rasipuram 637 401.

Email: apmuthukumar@gmail.com

According to Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the Sangam literature which combines idealism with realism and classic grace with indigenous industry and strength is rightly regarded as constituting the Augustan age of Tamil literature. It deals with secular matter relating to public and social activity like government, war, charity, trade, worship, agriculture etc.

The ancient Tamil literature consists of the great grammatical work Tolkappiyam, the ten anthologies Patthupattu, the eight anthologies Ettuttogai, and the five epics Iynperenkapiyam such as Silappadikaram, Manimegalai and Sivaga-Cindamani.

The religion of the ancient Tamils closely follows roots of nature worship. In the ancient Sangam literature, Sivan was the supreme God, and Murugan was the one celebrated by the masses; both of them were sung as 'deified Tamil poets ascending the Koodal academy.

**The Sangam literature or heroic poetry refers to the concept of 'Ainthinai' or five ecozones and these five eco-zones are:**

- (a) Kurunji. This Kurinji zone consists of hilly backwoods
- (b) Mullai. This eco-zone consists of pastoral tracts
- (c) Maruttam. This eco-zone consists of wetland
- (d) Neital is the sea coast
- (e) Palai. This Palai zone consists of deserts or arid zone Neital is the sea coast

This classification of Tamil landscape into five categories, thinai, was a scientific classification based on the mood, the season and the land. Tolkappiyam, one of

the oldest grammatical works in Tamil mentions that each of these thinai had an associated deity such as Kottravai (Mother goddess) and Sevvael (Murugan) in Kurinji (the hills), Thitumaai in Mullai (the pastoral tracts), Vendhan (Wanji-ko) in Marutham (the plains), and Kadaloan in the Neithai (the coasts and the seas). The occupations and lifestyle of the people of these ecozones are varied. They were according to the landscape or eco-zone in which they lived. Lovers union is the main aspect of Kurinji thinai. This is pre-marital. Patient waiting is the theme of Mullai. This could be premarital or post-marital. Infidelity or fidelity is the theme of Marutham. This is post-marital. Anxious waiting is the theme of Neythal thinai. This could be pre-marital or postmarital. Separation is the theme of Palm. This could be pre-marital or post-marital. Hunting and gathering was the occupation of Kurunji inhabitants.

The people living in Palai depended on plundering and cattle-lifting. Shifting cultivation and animal husbandry were the occupation of the people of the Mullai zone. The people of Marutam pursued plough agriculture. Fishing and salt-making were the occupations of the people of Neital eco-zone. There was also bartering of goods produced by one eco-zone people with other ecozone inhabitants. Gradually, these small social groups living in different eco-zones became integrated through interaction and interdependence. Where there was better productivity, they developed social divisions of labour and in other areas of lesser productivity people led a simple life as clans. Though all the people of different eco-zones shared a common culture, the society comprised unevenly developed components.

Tamilham society of this period was essentially tribal, characterized by kinship organizations, totem worship and such tribal cults and practices. While tribal customs prevailed in all the eco-zones, in the Maruttam or the agricultural region, society appears to have become complex by the gradual break-up of old kinship ties and the introduction of the Vama concept.

Social stratification based on 'high' and 'low' groups took shape in course of time. Besides agriculture, there were other professions such as blacksmiths, carpenters and weavers. Most of the people followed old tribal rituals of religious worship and cult practices, and the society was not priest-dominated. Trade and commerce was possible because of surplus production of goods. There are traders Unianan or salt merchant, Kogla vanikan or com merchant, Amvai vanikan or textile merchant and Pon vanikan or gold merchant. Tolkappiyam, the earliest Tamil grammar text indicates that Vama

system entered into Tamilham as the above-mentioned traders were given the status of Vaisyas and the Chieftains of the Maruttam region started claiming descent from Suryavamsa or Chandravamsa. Thus, in the agrarian zones, we notice amalgamation of old tribal practice and Brahmanical ideas.

The economy of Tamilham depended on trade and commerce besides agricultural production.

The Sangam poems reveal many vivid images of the Tamil country from two thousand years ago. We see the fauna and flora in all the five landscapes, food people ate, clothing that people in different geographical regions wore mountain dwellers wore grass and flower garments and others wore woven cotton and silk clothes, jewelry made with gold and precious stones, the lives of bards, dancers and musicians who played instruments, cattle herders playing their flutes, the various musical instruments, battles and warriors, trading with the Greeks and Romans whose large ships arrived in ports, just reigns of small-region kings, great friendships between poets and kings, the three great kings who battled with each other constantly, the seven great donors and small region kings, trades people did in the different landscapes, war equipment, forts with moats, existence of metal smith workshops, knowledge of the sky the sun, moon, Venus, mars, saturn, comets and many constellations, casting of bronze bells using the lost wax method, building of a small curved dam, the heat and wafting aroma from sugar mills etc., All these occupations and social systems were all the result of the scientific understanding of the geography and the eco system of their lands.