

## Executive Summary

### WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HERO WORSHIP? INTROSPECTING THE CULTURAL MECHANISM OF HEGEMONIZING THE NATIVES

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Heroes and heroines are part of the culture and histories of every society. Their geneses are not fixed to certain ages. Every societies experience the emergence of heroes and heroines irrespective of ages. Some among these surpass the ages they lived to find their places in the belief systems of the respective regions- sometimes spreading their influence to much wider arena. Heroism is a quality which is much revered and valued by the societies. No society has ever escaped from the clutches and influences of heroes and heroines.

In this study the present scholar is attempting to trace out the Hero worship patterns and the hero cult existed in the Early Tamiḻakam and the transitions the cult and those worship patterns met in due course of social transitions. The study focuses on the theme of hero worship and the transformations it met through the ages and hence the traditional patterns of the divisions of the ages are not followed.

In Early Tamiḻakam, heroism was a very much revered personal quality. Heroes evolved in the communities of Early Tamiḻakam for their chivalrous deeds in the contexts of *vetṭi*, battles, *kaḻiṟṟudanilai*, combats with wild animals, etc. The dead heroes were raised by the respective societies to the status of divinity. Though we could generally state that there evolved and existed a cult of hero worship around the dead heroes who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of society, it should be analysed whether the heroes of a community were revered and worshipped in entire Tamiḻakam or that these were community divinities having their impacts and influences in the communities at local level alone. Various factors have contributed to the transformations of the Hero cult in Early Tamiḻakam. This study will focus on such aspects. It will be helpful for the better understanding of the social atmosphere in the Early Tamiḻakam and for the knowledge regarding the social transformations in the later centuries.

Hero worship in Tamilakam and the transformations it met through the ages are the topics which are not studied in detail. The present study focuses on these themes in detail. This is with a view to understand the umbilical relationship between the processes of transitions in belief systems and patterns in Tamilakam and the integration of various communities who were following their basic community belief patterns and the regions they were located into the emerging patterns of religio-political administrative units.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Tamilakam- the land beyond the Venkatam hills- presents a history of social formation, which is very unique in many aspects. The major terrain of this study is Tamilakam, though certain parts of Karnataka too were focused to trace out certain social processes in the time frames focused in this study.

The evidences for the hero worship and the cults associated with it can be traced out from the early Tamil songs and the works which have been identified as the Sangam works. The present study attempts to delineate the social processes of making the heroes in the society, the nature of hero worship, the ideology behind the glorification and institutionalization of the hero worship, it's purely local nature in the early Tamilakam and the transformations faced by the hero worship during the period of pantheoning under the Sramanic and Brahmanic religions. This study attempts to trace out the political, social and economic pressures and necessities which materialized the institutionalization of Sramanic and Brahmanic religions in Tamilakam. Thus this study views the pantheoning materialized by the Sramanic and Brahmanic religions were very much ideological and practical. Thus the ideology and practice of the pantheoning is also traced out in this study.

As the processes were very slow and presents several phases, according to the interests of the people acquiring political, social and economic hegemonies, the time frame of the study doesn't stick to the conventional historiographical time zones of ancient, early medieval, medieval, late medieval or modern. Focusing on certain vantage points the present study attempts to conceive a long term time frame work starting from the age of early Tamil songs- say c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE- to 12<sup>th</sup> century CE- the latest age of panting of herostones and the zenith stage of

attempts of intense popularization of universal herohood of the heroes of Sanskrit works Ramayana and Mahabharata during the second wave of Bhakti in Tamilakam and Kerala.

### **Sources and Methodology**

The period of this study covers from c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, and the terrain of the study includes the regions comprising the Tamilnadu, Keralam and Karnataka, majority of sources were from these regions. The major sources of the study comprises of archaeological, inscriptional, literary and archival. The archaeological sources consist of the hero stones, sculptures and temples. These provide various levels of information regarding the nature of hero worship and the transitions occurred within the domain of hero worship. The inscriptional sources include the labels and inscriptions found on the hero stones which describe the contexts and historicity of the hero stones. The major literary sources include the early Tamil songs found in the anthologies popularly known as Sangam works, the Alvar and Nayanar literature and the translations of Ramayana and Mahabharata which emerged during the second wave of Bhakti. These also include the field accounts written by the colonial explorers on the temples, customs, belief structure, mentalities etc. The archival records include the colonial records like administrative reports, census reports, etc. the extensive materials preserved in the various museums of Tamilnadu, Keralam and Karnataka were used as primary sources. Apart from these, field visits conducted for tapping the resources, have provided data and insights which have helped in formulating arguments.

Empirical study was carried over in the light of the insights provided by social theories. In order to materialize the empirical depths, ample evidences pertaining to the locations identified as the formative or structuring terrains of hero worship and its transmutations were collected and subjected to analysis. By correlating every data with multiple lived realities, these evidences were subjected to thorough scrutiny. Every opportunity to formulate counter arguments on the dominant narratives in the light and strength of evidences, were utilized. Hence, to materialize these outcomes, the methodology adopted was both descriptive and analytical.

## **Organization of the Study**

The present study is arranged thematically, fixing to chronology as far as possible. At times, the chronological sequencing is interrupted permeating the criss-crosses and overlaps. Apart from the Introduction and Conclusion, the study contains three chapters.

The first chapter, titled *On Heroes and Hero Stones in Early Tamilakam- An Overview* is an analysis on the historiography on the topics referred.

The Second chapter, *Martial Heroism: Heroes and Hero Cults in Early Tamilakam*, primarily analyses the contexts of the becoming of warrior males as heroes. The socio- political and economic situations which necessitated and valorized the death in the combats are focused. In this chapter attention is also paid on the benefits gained by the warriors after combats, if they are alive and by their families, if they faced death. Taking such factors into account, attempts are made to understand the logic of hero cults in Early Tamilakam. This also focuses on the patterns of hero worship and the terrain of influence of the heroes as worshipped deities. The contexts of the making of heroes, the terrain of influence of those heroes as worshipped deities, the lineage patterns developed out of them and included them, profess the ideology, meaning and utility of hero worship.

In the Third chapter, *Transitions: Hero Gods in Pantheons- the Political Ideology of Bhakti*, analyses the nature of pantheoning in Tamilakam by appropriating the hero deities. The positions accorded to these hero deities in such pantheons did define the status of the societies which worshipped and followed them. Focus is also paid on the development of Nayanar and Alwar sects in Tamilakam which produced new meanings to heroism through the cult figures included in both these sects. Attempts are made to understand the new meanings and qualities as imbued within the frameworks of heroism in the contexts of Bhakti Movement.

The study was an attempt to understand the socio- cultural and political processes in which the hero cult and the belief systems and the associated worship patterns emerged in ancient Tamilakam and how it got transformed in due course with the emergence of new developments in the political structure and associated socio-cultural patterns. The following are the understandings generated through this study:

1. The evidences from the early Tamil songs provide information regarding a society which was deeply associated with the belief and worship patterns associated with the *Viras* who lost the lives fighting for the society during the plunder of cattle or lifting the cattle.
2. *Nadukals* were consecrated to commemorate these dead warriors and they were considered as divine forces which protected the people.
3. Though the hero worship was a common feature in the early *Tamilakam*, and there were several heroes elevated to the divine statuses, the worship of heroes was very much a local phenomenon. The hero worshipped in a locality was never treated as divine protector by the people of other regions and the insistence of the local people over the people of other regions passing the locality to bow before the local *Nadukal* is an indicator for the thoroughly local character of the hero gods.
4. Once the old orders started crumbling and there happened a new wave of sprouting of kingdoms, the expansion of kingdoms to new areas also gained momentum. These expansions were not political or economic alone. It was cultural as well as ideological. The cultural and ideological apparatuses were designed and operated through the waves of *Bhakti* which emerged in *Tamilakam* along with the establishment of kingdoms. The temples, the *bhakti* literature, the cults of *Siva* and *Vishnu* popularised by these and the art and architecture emerged as part of these were important and functioned as tools and venues of popularisation of the ideology. The dimensions of the affiliations of the emerging kingdoms to *Bhakti* and vice- versa are to be explored as the literature juxtaposing both has serious limitations in canvassing the fate of the localities to which the kingdoms expanded.
5. The crumbling of the old orders was not a single faced crumbling of the local political systems. It was the decline of the Ancient in *Tamilakam*.
6. The expansion of kingdoms and the institutional frameworks associated with these expansions along with *Bhakti* nullified not only the importance of the local cults associated with the *Nadukals* and *Vira* worship, but also of the social groups who were invoking the *Vira* traditions and actively involved in the

warfare at the local levels. These social groups who wielded social prowess and respectability lost all these in due course and transformed to the position of *izhipirappalan*, the marginalised.

7. The pantheoning- which, as we saw, was a political and cultural process- under the central deities Siva and Vishnu, which happened along with the expansion of kingdoms, reduced the statuses of the Nadukal Viras and subjugated them depriving off the divine powers and categorised them as Bhaktas or followers of these central deities. The reflections of these transitions could also be seen in the social structures of Tamilakam.

Thus a close analysis of the transformations of the Vira Cult would give us a vivid picture of how the power structure associated with the emerging kingdoms was established dominating the belief patterns and worship structures by plundering the Gods and reducing them to the status of Bhakta, which is in turn reflected in the social structures.