Tamil Classical Literature in the age of blogging and social network

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Tamil classical literature popularly known as the Sangam literature is hailed by scholars around the world as one best literary output of human civilizations. Scholars from various western countries have patronized Sangam literature and produced various studies and translation on this literature. Many Universities around the world have understood the literary significance of Sangam literature and have opened departments to study Sangam literature. With such literary greatness, Sangam literature is not much known to common people of Tamil Nadu. The common people of Tamil Nadu are more exposed to literature such as Thirukkural and Bakthi than Sangam literature.

Except for very few Puram poems much of Sangam literature is unknown to common people of Tamil Nadu. The only exposure most people have towards Sangam literature is the few poems which they had read in their school Tamil syllabus. There has been no popular appeal or drive to encourage people to read Sangam literature in the likes of Thirukkural.

Themes of Love and war essentially make most of the poems, and not well appreciated by children of young ages. Hence the only time people are exposed to this literature they had not developed any special interest for it. In such circumstances, the age of blogging and social network which are the mostly used by the youngsters in the prime of their life can be effectively used to popularize the Sangam literature. Sangam literature has strong emotional connection with present day lives. Hence if Sangam poems are presented in proper way, it is sure strike a chord with present generation.

Obstacles to a common man:

The biggest obstacle for a common man is the archaic language of Sangam Literature. To understand and appreciate the Sangam poems, a person has to know lot of background details like themes, landscape etc. Dr.Kamil Zvelebil has once remarked that only trained readers can completely understand and appreciate Sangam literature. A common man requires considerable education before he can appreciate Sangam poems. More often than not, translating the poem or explaining the poem line by line doesn’t give full experience of the poem. As an example I would like to take a poem and explain how much back ground detail he requires to appreciate the poem.

மாாி ஆΆப᾿ அᾹன ெகாᾰகிᾹ
பா᾽வ᾿ அ吭įசிய பᾞவர᾿ ஈ᾿ ஆஞᾶᾌ
கᾶட᾿ வ᾿ அைளᾲ ஆசbairro
EXTERNALLY

வாராᾐ அைமயிByExample I would like to take a poem and explain how much back ground detail he requires to appreciate the poem.

மாாிிமன்ம வாரா் வாைற்
மாாிமன்ம வாரா் வாைற்
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வாராᾐ அைமயிByExample I would like to take a poem and explain how much back ground detail he requires to appreciate the poem.

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வாராᾐ அைமயிByExample I would like to take a poem and explain how much back ground detail he requires to appreciate the poem.

மாாி ஆΆப᾿ அᾹன ெகாᾰகிᾹ
பா?option set text rendering method to default
If the chief of maritime land

Where,
the wet crab
seeing the stork,
Which looked
Like a water lily in rain,
Gets afraid and
moves inside the hollow roots of
the mangrove trees,
Like a bull which cut loose
from the rope tied by the herdsman,

Doesn’t return
let it be so.

The merchant sells smaller bangles
in this town.

In the following poem we expect the reader of this translation to know the following points to enjoy the poem completely
1. How the water lily looks when it rains - and how it is so similar to the crane
2. Wet crab being compared to Thalaivan
3. Crane compared to gossip of women
4. Running for safety into hollow roots, as imagery for Thalaivan hurrying to Thalaivi’s home to save his love.
5. Bull cutting loses from the rope tied by the herdsman as imagery for Thalaivan breaking the shackles of the pressure from the society.
6. Small bangles to indicate the Tamil akam tradition of love sickness and thinning of hands and loosening of bangles. Small bangles will fit the smaller hand and hence they can throw away the memory of Thalaivan and be safe from the society.

It can be shown with further examples that traditional methods of translation and brief explanation cannot give a reader the full experience of a sangam poem. Hence experimental approaches should be considered to take this classical literature to the common reader.

**Blogging as a medium:**

Blogging as medium of communication has developed over the last few years. This medium gives enough flexibility and freedom and in most cases free of cost. Blogging has become a popular medium for readers who like to gather knowledge on various topics. Most internet users are used to blog medium hence blogging overcomes one of the major pitfalls of Book. Books involve printing cost
hence there are severe restrictions on page counts and illustrations. Blogs therefore can afford to be as long as they want and can use illustrations as required. The blogging medium is also flexible enough to allow audio and video. The flexibility of this medium can be really helpful in presenting Sangam literature to the new age reader.

With no restrictions in page count, more explanation can be given on the theme, landscape and other required back stories can be given in addition to translation to understand a particular poem.

Sangam literature has very visual nature to it. The poets of the Sangam infused elements of nature-flora and fauna effectively in the poems to describe emotions. They play an integral part in understanding the poem. Most readers’ knowledge of flora and fauna especially with names in archaic Tamil is pretty low. Hence pictures or illustration of flora and fauna mentioned in the poems helps the reader understand the poems better.

**Experimental approaches:**

The visual nature of the Sangam nature can be utilized and the poems can be presented in new formats such as explaining poems with series of pictures or more experimental approach of comic book format (with illustrations and subtext). Audio files with rendering of the poem along with explanations can be uploaded. Lectures on the poem can be recorded and uploaded as video blogs. Small animations can be made to explain similes and imagery of the poem.

Few examples of illustrating visual elements of Sangam poems are given below
A more experimental approach of Sangam poem in comic book style

With blogging medium we have no restrictions to creativity. Experimental and creative approaches can help in popularizing the Sangam poems.

**Visual catalogs:**

Visual catalogs of various flora fauna and smiles can be made into searchable online databases. In one such effort visual catalog of 99 flowers of Kurinchipattu was created 2 years ago in my blog kankanirka.org. This effort can be extended to include all flora and fauna of Sangam and also efforts can be put convert into a searchable online database. Such visual catalogs would help the common reader as well as researchers in understanding the Sangam literature in much better way.
Relating to popular Culture:

Most themes of Sangam poems are still prevalent in popular culture though Tamil Cinema, either as scenes or as lyrics for film songs. Relating the Sangam poems to prevalent popular culture helps common reader understand the classical poems better since they are able to relate to the emotion of the poem.

Themes such as love at first sight, opposition for love from parents, eloping of lovers, temporary separation of lovers, wife cooking for first time and waiting for approval of husband, girls parents mistaking girls love sickness and inviting priest to perform rituals are still prevalent as movie themes. Relating the Sangam themes to popular culture makes them understand that Sangam literature isn’t as alien as they had imagined and creates an interest in them to explore more in the classical literature.

Use of Social Network:

Social networks like Orkut, Twitter and Facebook have become the most popular medium for knowledge transfer and sharing. Each of these social networks has hundreds of groups on Tamil Language and literature. Sharing the links of the blogs at such groups helps spread the reach of Sangam literature. This method popularly known as viral marketing is very useful tool. Many new readers are exposed to Sangam literature this way. When a reader likes a poem he shares it to his friends and any one is his friends list who likes the post passes on to his friends. This way with minimum effort the reach of the poems can be maximized. The social networks have played an important role in growth of Karka Nirka blog. In April 2010 Karka Nirka Facebook page was started and presently there are 622 followers and growing. On average one blog posted in Face book is passed on/shared by 50 other people.
Conclusion:

New approaches are required to popularize the Sangam literature. There are many takers for such efforts. Fresh enthusiasm and creativity can help to revitalize the Sangam Literature and take it to the present generation.