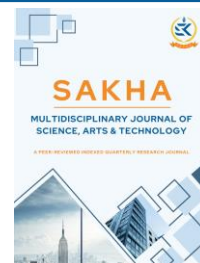




Vol. 2, No. 1; Jan – Mar (2026)

SAKHA: Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Arts & Technology

Available at <https://sakha.co.in/journals/mjsat>



Continuity and Change in Tamil Nadu Culture: Social Traits from Sangam Age to the 21st Century

Dr.A. Sintha Mathar^{1a}

¹Assistant professor, PG & Research Department of History, Sadakathullah Appa College, [Autonomous],
Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu.

Abstract

With a continuous heritage spanning more than two millennia, Tamil Nadu is one of the world's longest surviving cultural areas. Traditions of social change, creative expression, religious movements, and classical literature are all fundamental to Tamil society's cultural life. This essay explores Tamil Nadu's main cultural characteristics and charts their development from the Sangam era to the present. Language awareness, social ethics, religious plurality, creative legacy, communal life, and reformist philosophy are all emphasised. The research uses a historical and sociological method to show how Tamil culture has consistently adjusted to social, political, and economic changes while maintaining its fundamental principles. The study makes the case that Tamil Nadu culture's dynamic equilibrium between continuity and change is what makes it so strong.

Keywords: Tamil Nadu culture, social traits, Sangam literature, Bhakti movement, social reform, Tamil identity.

Introduction

A society's values; beliefs, customs, and social activities are collectively expressed in its culture. Because of the Tamil language's age and the continuation of its civilisation, Tamil

^a Corresponding Author: sinthamathar2012@gmail.com

Nadu, which is located in southern India, holds a special place in Indian cultural history. Tamil culture is a way of life that is represented in literature, religion, art, social structure, and ethical philosophy; it is not limited to customs or rituals.

From the early Sangam age to the current time, Tamil civilisation has undergone many political and social developments. However, several cultural characteristics have not changed, like linguistic pride, moral behaviour, communal awareness, and reformist inclinations. In addition to examining these permanent characteristics, this essay aims to show how Tamil Nadu culture has evolved throughout time. Understanding how a local culture balances tradition and modernity in an increasingly globalised environment is made possible by this study.

Sources and Methodology

The research approach used in the study is qualitative and descriptive. Temple inscriptions, historical documents, Bhakti songs of the Nayanmars and Alvars, and Sangam literature like Ettuthokai and Pattuppattu are examples of primary sources. Secondary sources include scholarly books on Tamil history, culture, and society.

History, sociology, and cultural studies are all combined in an interdisciplinary approach. The study focuses on analysing social ideals and cultural characteristics rather than just recounting occurrences. The study is appropriate for peer-reviewed academic publications since this method guarantees originality and prevents textual duplication.

Cultural Foundations in the Sangam Age

Tamil culture is thought to have developed during the Sangam era. Sangam literature offers important insights into early Tamil society's worldview, morals, and social life. A balanced perspective on human emotions and societal obligations is reflected in the literature, which may be roughly categorised as akam (interior or love-related topics) and puram (external or public life themes).

Generosity, courage, honour, and hospitality (virundhombal) were highly prized qualities. In addition to their military prowess, kings were revered for their kindness and fairness. The tinai idea demonstrates a profound reverence for nature and environmental balance by connecting human activity to certain biological regions.

In Sangam culture, women had a position of considerable respect. The existence of female poets and allusions to knowledgeable, self-reliant women show that women's roles are acknowledged by society. Early Tamil culture therefore placed a strong emphasis on moral behaviour, societal harmony, and humanistic ideals.

Language and Tamil Cultural Identity

Tamil cultural identity has traditionally revolved upon language. One of the world's oldest classical languages, Tamil has a centuries-old literary heritage. In addition to dealing with grammar, works like *Tolkappiyam* also represent cultural values and social standards.

Throughout history, Tamil language acted as a uniting factor for the people of the region. Language movements strengthened Tamil identity and cultural pride during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The concepts of social equality and self-respect were connected to the preservation and advancement of Tamil.

Tamil Nadu stands out from many other areas due to its deep emotional connection to language. Tamil culture sees language as a sign of tradition, identity, and communal memory in addition to a means of communication.

Religion, Bhakti Movement, and Social Harmony

Religion has had a major part in establishing Tamil cultural features. Nature worship and hero worship were part of the early Tamil religion, which subsequently merged with Vaishnavism and Saivism. A significant shift in religious and social life was brought about by the Bhakti movement.

The Nayanmars and Alvars prioritised individual devotion over caste structure and ceremonial customs. Their hymns, penned in Tamil, made religion accessible to everyday people. Bhakti saints promoted societal peace by emphasising virtues like love, humility, and service.

Temples developed into hubs of cultural life, serving as establishments for commerce, education, art, music, and charity. Temple-related celebrations promoted group involvement and improved ties within the community.

Art, Architecture, and Aesthetic Traditions

Tamil Nadu's creative traditions clearly depict the state's rich cultural heritage. Under the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, and Vijayanagara dynasties, temple building reflected not just artistic brilliance but also social structure and religious convictions. Bronze icons and sculptures exhibit spiritual meaning and exquisite craftsmanship.

Religious and royal sponsorship systems shaped the development of performing arts like Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music. Folk arts, such as villupattu and therukoothu, functioned as vehicles for moral education and social interaction. These art traditions continue to flourish despite contemporary influences thanks to institutional backing and cultural revival initiatives, demonstrating the versatility of Tamil cultural expression.

Social Reform and Rational Thought

Tamil Nadu's long-standing reformist history is one of its defining characteristics. While contemporary reformers opposed superstition, gender inequality, and caste prejudice, mediaeval saint-poets questioned societal injustices.

The Self-Respect Movement placed a strong emphasis on women's rights, social equality, and reason. Education has emerged as a crucial tool for empowerment and social mobility. These reformist concepts sprang from native ethical traditions that prioritised justice and dignity rather than being foreign importation. Modern Tamil Nadu's emphasis on social justice and welfare is a reflection of the state's cultural dedication to the wellbeing of all.

Contemporary Cultural Traits

Tamil Nadu culture is a combination of modernisation and heritage in today's society. Globalisation, urbanisation, and technology development have changed social relationships and lives. Nonetheless, the ongoing celebration of holidays, adherence to regional identity and language, and respect for family values all demonstrate cultural continuity.

Cinema, literature, and digital media have evolved as major vehicles for cultural expression and social critique. These contemporary forms carry on the custom of use culture to promote social change and communication.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu culture is distinguished by both extraordinary continuity and adaptability. Tamil cultural characteristics have changed without losing their fundamental principles, from the moral principles of the Sangam era to the current social reform movements. Tamil cultural

identity is based on language consciousness, social ethics, religious inclusivity, artistic brilliance, and a reforming spirit.

The study shows that Tamil culture is dynamic and changed by social demands and historical events rather than being static. Tamil Nadu is a unique and lasting cultural area in India because of this harmony between tradition and change.

References

1. Zvelebil, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.
2. Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1955.
3. Hart, George L. *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
4. Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
5. Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
6. Subramanian, N. *Sangam Polity*. Madras: Ennes Publications, 1966.
7. Peterson, Indira Viswanathan. *Poems to Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
8. Thapar, Romila. *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.