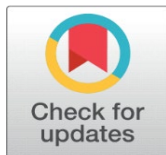# THE ROLE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY AS A FRAMEWORK IN HANDLING CULTURE SPECIFIC CONCEPTS WITH REFERENCE TO TAMIL EGAI

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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary framework is one of the viable methodologies and it is considered feasible for handling issues that are pertaining to human life. The magnitude of human crisis or the emergence of the complexity of social and cultural concepts has created the necessity or necessitates the approach in which there is a need for inputs from more than one discipline, and thus, the cognate fields of study have to be brought together to deal with the problem that cannot provide a solution due to the nature and complexity of the problem. And despite the speculation that the interdisciplinary framework has limitations in its applicability, and confining it to academic settings, this study makes an attempt to conflate various elements for building up an argument towards its relevance beyond and outside the academic purview. By critically evaluating the feasibility and deliverability of the proposed framework, with the help of an example from ancient Tamil society and its much-celebrated concept of egai, this paper highlights the inevitability of the existence of some of the elements of concepts, or sometimes concepts themselves, being rooted in other concepts. It forces us to claim that a holistic study could be made possible with the interdisciplinary framework which is evidenced here. To move towards the proposed concept, it builds the environment of ancient Tamil society, its contribution in terms of a corpus of literature and its universal significance that is used to contextualize the universal importance of the proposed concept and its contemporary relevance.

Keywords: Classicism, Charity, Interdependence, Interdisciplinary

Bigger than earth, certainly,

higher than the sky,

more unfathomable than the waters

is this love for this man

of the mountain slopes

where bees make rich honey

from the flowers of the kurinci

that has such black stalks

(Kuruntokai 3, A.K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, 1967, quoted in Kamil Zvelebil (1973), 73)

What is my mother to yours?

How is my father related to your father/

And I and you

How did we two meet?

Like the waters of rain pouring down on red soil

The two loving hearts themselves

Blended with each other

(Kuruntokai 40, A.K. Ramanujan, translation Kamil Zvelebil (1973), 75

1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Tamil society has tremendously contributed to the shaping of Indian society, and this contribution is evidenced from a vast corpus of literature left behind by the ancient Tamils apart from the available historical data, including the archaeological and epigraphical findings in addition to travelogues. Their significant contributions had not been confined to the development of Indian civilizations, because, for example, their rich contributions to the world culture have already been highly acknowledged by Indian and foreign scholars including Prof. Kamil Zvelebil who mentions that "... probably the most significant contribution is that of Tamil literature, which still remains to be "discovered" and enjoyed by the non-Tamilians and adopted as an essential and remarkable part of universal heritage" (1973: xi). The Tamil language, with its structural integrity and rigidity, and also with its uniqueness, has made itself different since the ancient period, and it has managed to retain its indigenous, Dravidian, and pre-Aryan cultural and literary traditions and values. Among the world's classical languages, it is the only language with an immense wealth of folklore or folk literature documented in the written literary traditions. The difference between Tamil and other Indian languages in terms of metalanguage is that "In most Indian languages, the technical gobbledygook is Sanskrit; in Tamil, the gobbledygook is ultra-Tamil." (A.K. Ramanujan in *Language and Modernization*, p.31, quoted in Zvelebil (1973), 4).

Historically, with its strong roots in cultural and literary traditions, it began to get into the next state as old Tamil from its pre-literary Tamil as early as the 5th century B.C. Later, it emerged as a proverbial banyan tree and contributed to the development of Indian literature as a simple complex with the help of two unique features: first, it was independent of Aryan and specifically Sanskrit influences, and second, it was known as both classical and modern, retaining its antiquity as well as

vigorously living modern writing in the present day. In the words of Ramanujan (1967), "Tamil, one of the two classical languages of India, is the only language of contemporary India that is recognizably continuous with a classical past" (quoted in Zvelebil (1973), 11-12). The Tamil language being classical and modern could be well understood in the words of the renowned Tamil scholar T.P. Meenakshisundaran, who says "The Tamil language, like Janus, looks backward to the ancient world and looks forward to the modern world, with the future still in its womb. It is both a classical language, shaping itself with logical precision and wondrous rhythm as a beautiful and befitting medium for poetry and philosophy, and a modern language, shaping itself as a powerful and proper vehicle for scientific and practical; for, unlike other classical languages, it has refused to die" Meenakshisundaran (1961).

While considering the structure of poetry in the ancient period worldwide, the Tamil poems have excelled in every aspect; sometimes they are superior to the Greek poetry. To quote Warren R. Castle, an authority on Greek literature, "Characteristic of all early Greek poetry is a kind of simplicity, sometimes almost naiveté, resulting partly from a tendency to treat subjects of universal interest only and partly from a tendency to treat all subjects in general rather than in particular terms... Through its entire range of effects, from the most delicate loveliness to the most sublimely tragic, Greek poetry is almost wholly direct statement, not the poetry of suggestion. Further, it does not attempt to communicate private or unique experience." (Castle 93) It helps us understand the fine quality of ancient Tamil poetry in terms of its structure and content. P. Marudanayagam mentions that "In comparison to what the Greeks have achieved in the dramatic form, their output of lyric poetry is meagre. But what is extremely disappointing is their theory of poetry. Plato believed that the poet is probably possessed by madness and not in control of himself when he writes. Aristotle is universally praised as the first critic to attempt a systematic discussion of genres. But his Poetics, which makes a profound analysis of the nature and function of tragic drama, has very little on the lyric. Answering Plato's criticism of the poet as a mere imitator of appearances, his student claims that art is a kind of improvement on nature in that the poet is able to bring to completion what nature, operating with different principles of order, is still trying hard to complete. In the sixth section of Poetics, Aristotle promises to speak later of the poetry which imitates hexametre verse and of comedy, but the work comes to an abrupt end after a comparison of the relative merits and limitations of tragedy and epic poetry (2007: 18). He further continues to reveal the condition of the Sanskrit, which is eulogized for having had a poetic tradition and he adds that "In comparison to what the Greeks have achieved in the dramatic form, their output of lyric poetry is meager. But what is extremely disappointing is their theory of poetry. Plato believed that the poet is probably possessed by madness and not in control of himself when he writes. Aristotle is universally praised as the first critic to attempt a systematic discussion of genres. But his Poetics, which makes a profound analysis of the nature and function of tragic drama, has very little on the lyric. Answering Plato's criticism of the poet as a mere imitator of appearances, his student claims that art is a kind of improvement on nature in that the poet is able to bring to completion what nature, operating with different principles of order, is still trying hard to complete. In the sixth section of Poetics, Aristotle promises to speak later of the poetry which imitates in hexametre verse and of comedy, but the work comes to an abrupt end after a comparison of the relative merits and limitations of tragedy and epic poetry" (2007:18).

In continuing the argument, Professor Marudanayagam further adds that "A close study of Sanskrit poetics would reveal that there have been attempts at

defining poetry in terms of *rasa* or *dhvani* or *alankara*, *guna* or *riti* or *vakrokti* each of the theorists from Bharata to Appayya Diksita claiming pre-eminence or sole recognition for this favourite idea. It cannot be denied that their writings have provided a number of brilliant insights into poetry, which have deservingly won the admiration of some of the leading Western aestheticians. But, at the same time, it has to be conceded that their endless debates and hairsplittings down the centuries have not led to a holistic view of the poem as a work of art or of the poetic process, not to speak of the name and nature of a lyric. It is the chief glory of Tamil poetics that it alone has been able to fully identify the salient features of a poem, emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts" (2007:19). While no accurate dating has been done for most of the ancient literature as well as for the historical events, the evidence found by foreign travellers can help us give an answer to those who are showing vested interest in pushing the period much later. For example, Antonios Vasileiadis, a scholar from Greece, has made a few points of great importance of Tamil: The Kannagi legend has been referred to in Greek literature since the first century B.C.; The Chera dynasty was noted in the fifth century B.C.; Karikalan was mentioned in the first century B.C.; and a trade relationship was noticed between Greece and the West Coast, including Tamil Nadu, in the Early Christian Century. These findings will establish that the Sangam Classics and Cilappathikaram are more ancient than they are now reported to be. Subramonian (2007). Another great aspect of the ancient Tamils could be understood from their seafaring and overseas trade activities that have been well documented in the Tamil classics such as *Ettutthokai* (eight anthologies) and other texts like *Perumpanattruppatai*, *Cirupanattruppatai*, and *Cilappathikaram*.

The exquisite descriptions found in these texts are clear evidence of the Tamil community's advancement in handling overseas trade but also their expertise in shipbuilding and managing ports. For example, Vangam is a large ship, and its making has been well portrayed in Akananuru (255). The ancient port of Poompuhar is known for its trade activities, and Purananuru (30) has given a candid description of the port's trade activities with foreign countries like Malaya, Ceylon, Arabia, etc. Pattinappalai (135) could be the evidence for customs officials fixing the seal of the royal crest of the Chola Empire before unloading ships in Poompuhar. Mamallapuram, Vasavasamudram, Eyilpattinam (Sopatma), Arikamedu, Kaviripumpattinam, Nagappattinam, Tondi, Alagankulam, Korkai, Kumari, Naravu, and Muciri were the important ports of ancient Tamil Nadu that have extensive references in the ancient Tamil literature. Many of the ports are mentioned in the Periplus of the Erithrean Sea. With this piece of introduction that shows that the ancient Tamils had the dominant presence in terms of literary activities, socio-cultural life, and trade with overseas countries, this study moves further to explain the necessity of interdisciplinary studies and their contemporary relevance for exploring ancient Tamil society.

- **Ancient Tamil Texts as Tamil Classics:** Falling under the Dravidian linguistic family by origin and being one of the 22 scheduled languages of India, Tamil is spoken almost in 143 countries outside India with its humongous diaspora. According to the recent findings by the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Germany, the Dravidian language family may be approximately 4000-5000 years old. The Tamil community is proud of their language for the simple reason that the language is ancient as well as modern with unbreakable continuity in terms of its form and content. Importantly, it is the first language in the world to be given a classical tag by the Union Government in 2004, and the other languages such as Sanskrit have been assigned the classical tag thereafter. Based on the minimum

criteria laid down by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India the classical tag was first given to Tamil and later to other selected Indian languages, the criteria include the following points: "(i) High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years; (ii) A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers; (iii) The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community; (iv) The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots." (http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=103014). Giving a classical tag to Tamil language was projected as the use of political power by the state government on the Union government. But people conveniently forget the matter that the demand for the recognition of classical status by the people of Tamil Nadu and the Tamil Diaspora has had a long history, and however, it materialized due to the political pressure from the state government. What is this classical status? What is the meaning of classical or classicality? Does the word classical have any single meaning? It is pertinent to refer to a few encyclopaedias to understand the word classical literature: According to the Encyclopaedia, Britannica "Classical Literature is the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. The term is also used for the literature of any language in a period notable for the excellence and enduring quality of its works. In ancient Greece, such a period extended from about 500 to 320 BCE. The Golden Age of Rome ran from about 70 BCE to 18 CE. French literature of the second half of the 17th century is considered classical, as is English literature of 1660–1714. The works produced and the critical standards that prevailed in both eras emulated those of the Classical periods in Greek and Latin, although this criterion is not an essential characteristic of classical literature" Britannica (2017). Similarly, *The Encyclopaedia Americana* presents the definition of classicism as an "adherence to qualities customarily associated with literature, art, architecture and thought of ancient Greece and Rome. It involves excellence, permanence, and values, based on the Greek concept of life. This concept emphasized order and clarity of thought, dignity and serenity of spirit, simplicity, balance and proportion of structure and union of the subject with the appropriate form. At the core of classicism are esteem for objectivity, rationality and moderation and distrust of subjectivity, emotion, and excess" McDannald (1945). The other definitions that are important are "The world classicism in literature refers to those elements of style or content such as reason, clarity, order, restraint and humanitarian outlook that characterized the writing of ancient Greeks, ranging from Homer, Plato and Aristotle" Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge (1956); "Classicism: The aesthetic qualities that were embodied in the visual arts and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome and served as ideals for various later European artistic movements. Qualities associated with the concept include harmony and balance of form, clarity of expression and emotional restraint" Isaacs (2003); and Classicism is art, music and literature, a style that emphasizes the qualities traditionally considered characteristic of ancient Greece and Roman art, that is, reason, balance, objectivity, restraint, and strict adherence to form. The term classicism is often used to characterize the 'Culture' of 18th century Europe and contrasted with 19th century 'Romanticism'" The Hutchinson Encyclopedia (2001).

In this context, the antiquity and richness of the literature of the Tamil language are very precisely delineated by the Encyclopaedia of India published by Agan Prakashan which states that: "Tamil, highly cultivated and developed of Dravidian languages, perhaps the oldest spoken language of the world going back to pre-historic times, has rich vocabulary and can express exactly nuances of thought, meaning and ideas, has a vast literature, early output being that of the three Sangams (or Academies); dating of Tamil literature is difficult. (1988: n.a.)" However, in the case of the Tamil language, it has a vast amount of literary resources supported by archaeological evidence. As per the Encylopaedia Britannica, "The Tamil language is perhaps the only example of an ancient classical language which has survived as a spoken language for more than 2500 years with its basic structure almost unchanged." (Quoted by M. Arunachalam in George (1984)). Those who are familiar with the history of the recognition of Tamil language's classical status (on September 17, 2004) may be aware that there was a set of criteria that was adopted for defining a classical language. After the declaration of Tamil as a classical language by the Union Government and the subsequent establishment of the Central Institute of Classical Tamil, a list of forty-one Tamil texts belonging to the period up to 600 A.D. has been identified for the purpose of exploring the nature of language, culture, and society in ancient Tamil society. The list consists of the following texts:

1) Tholkappiyam;
2) Ettutthokai (Eight Anthologies such as Natrinai, Kurunthokai, Ainkurunuru, Pathitruppatthu, Paripatal, Kalitthokai, Akananuru and Purananuru;
3) Patthuppattu (Ten Idylls such as Thirumurugatruppatai, Porunaratruppatai, Cirupanatruppatai, Perumpanatruppatai, Mullaippattu, Mathuraikkanji, Netunalvatai, Kurinjippattu, Pattinappalai, Malaipatukatam;
4) Pathinenkilkkanakku (Eighteen Didactic texts such as Nalatiyar, Nanmanikkatikai, Innanarpathu, Iniyavainarpathu, Karnarpathu, Kalavalinarpathu, Ainthinai Aimpathu, Ainthinai Elupathu, Thinaimoli Aimpathu, Thinaimalai Nutraimpathu, Palamoli Nanuru (Pazhamozhi Naanuuru), Cirupanjamulam, Thirukkural, Tirikatukam, Acarakkovai, Mutumolikkanji, Elathi and Kainnilai;
5) Cilappathikaram;
6) Manimekalai;
7) Mutthollayiram; and
8) Iraiyanar Kalaviyal.

Among these texts, *Tholkappiyam*, the earliest extant grammatical work available in any Dravidian languages, is considered to be written as early as the seventh century B.C., but *Ettutthokai* and *Patthuppattu*, which together form the corpus of Sangam literature, might have been written well before the first century Ramakrishnan (2019).

The significant aspect of Sangam literature lies in its neutralness in addressing the concept or any issue and it could be one of the reasons the Sangam literature is celebrated for its universality of portraying human emotions by crossing all the geographical and social boundaries. For example, the Kuruntokai poem (40) titled as Red Earth and Pouring Rain metaphorises the eternal bond between lovers beyond any barrier: "What could my mother be to yours? / What kin is my father to yours anyway? / And how / Did you and I meet ever? / But in love, our hearts have mingled /like red earth and pouring rain." (trans. A. K. Ramanujan. http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pehook/226.sangam.html) Considered as Golden era, the

Sangam period was peaceful by and large and its geographical potions also provided natural security to the ancient Tamil country. It could be another reason that the ancient Tamils were fully involved in literary activities.

The corpus of Sangam literature is classified into *akam* (subjective or personal life) and *puram* (objective or social life) and which are composed poems that reflect the moods, emotions, socially accepted conventions including deviations, music, occupation, supernatural beings, fauna and flora of the landscape and associated life. According to Sangam literature, the Tamil land was classified into five genres (*thinai*) and they are mountains and regions associated with the mountain (*kurinji*), forest and its adjacent landscape (*mullai*), agricultural plains and associated life (*marutham*), sea and seashore life (*neithal*) and wasteland and the life associated with (*paalai*).

The salient features of the akam poems include the vivid presentation and deep generalization of the deep emotions derived from the love-life or social life of the ancient Tamils. Those who read the akam poems will notice the portrayal of the followings: the first meeting of the lovers; the happiness of the lovers when they are in each other's company; the fear of them when they think of their separation; the twinge of separation; the love affairs came to be known by the confidante; confidante's assistance for the secret meetings of the lovers; the parents of the lady imposing restrictions; settlement of marriage; elopement of the lovers in some cases; the happy married life; the pain of the young wife when the newly married husband goes away in search of wealth; the feelings of joy when the husband returns home; etc., whereas, the *puram* poems depict the political life of kings including their achievements and contributions to the development of culture and civilizations, etc. According to Zvelebil (1973), in South India, there grew up an independent and characteristic literary tradition (quite independent in its root and beginnings of the Sanskrit tradition) which along with other branches of artistic expression, notably music, the visual arts and dancing, points to the clearly marked specific character of the oldest South Indian culture, within the framework of all Indian development and pan-Indian civilization, whose basic features have often characterized as a harmony of contracts and a synthesis creating unity out of diversity.

- **Data/Material and Discipline:** The classical tag helped the Tamil community to identify and enlist the number of texts that had been composed well before the 6th Century A.D., and a new opportunity was created for scholars to work on these materials. The materials termed Classical Tamil texts supplemented with the archaeological evidence are considered as data for advanced studies. But the question that needs to be answered is what is the discipline that can fully utilize the materials for further studies within its disciplinary boundary? When a scholarly discipline is defined by the nature data it deals with, how do we understand the nature of the discipline that can deal with the classical Tamil texts? Because without such materials or data, there can be no subject for scholarship. For the sociologist these materials, these materials consist of social life, for the historian these materials appear as historical data, similarly, for the literary scholars they are literature, for the folklorists these materials have valuable folklore items and elements of folk knowledge, for the linguists they are the language data, for the philosophers they are the materials of having philosophical value, for the cognitive scientists, they are the materials for cognitive studies, for artists or performers these are the materials on arts, etc. Each discipline that focuses on these materials can promise to come out with the findings as per its theoretical and methodological frameworks. Though we have just listed a few

scholarly disciplines as examples, the list of disciplines that can make use the Classical Tamil data is large per se. However, there may be little agreement among the scholars of different disciplines as to which materials fall properly within the domain of their study. Because of the fact that each discipline has its own way of defining its data, a single material with multiple dimensions can be the reality. When a single material offers ways for multiple findings, it could lead to an acute problem with the reliability of the conclusion. In fact, each time the material is used by the concerned discipline, it claims that the material belongs to that discipline, that is, a disciplinary boundary is formed around the material. Again, when the material belongs to a particular discipline, the evaluation, interpretation and analysis of this material follow from the approaches that are determined by the conditions set by the discipline itself. Moreover, such evaluation, interpretation and analysis will have to depend upon the training, the predilection of the scholars involved as well as the scholarly apparatus utilized by those who handle the material. While we can broadly say that all these disciplines which deal with the Classical Tamil texts cannot escape from the humanistic and social-scientific or the combination of both of these, paradigms, we must start from the materials. And these materials can come only from the scholars who come with their definitions for these materials.

- **Classical Tamil Texts and Interdisciplinary Approach:** The availability of forty-one Classical Tamil texts supplemented by archaeological evidence makes the community unique on the one hand and on the other hand promises to offer new things about the ancient past, its continuity as well as its relevance for the future. While each discipline approaches its data with specific objectives, there could be a contradiction and conflict among the findings. However, the Tamil community that treats these texts as their identity and pride may not be in a position to accept the findings that go against their projected and stereotypical images that were constructed with the help of independent disciplines. But here is the proposal that accommodates all the cognate disciplines in the social science and humanities with an intention to bring out non-conflicting and non-contradictory findings that can play a vital role in the scientific term to promote the legitimacy of the materials as well as their epistemological foundation in constructing the identity. In other words, this study strives to highlight the point that the very best aspect of ancient Tamil society in terms of language, literature, culture, philosophy, ethics, worldview, etc. Also, this study critically assesses the nature of interdisciplinary studies, their applicability, and limitations so that the validity of the outcome and their epistemological foundation can be understood. The following description offers a brief account of the nature and structure of interdisciplinary studies and its salient features that can help us to understand its relevance for the study of Tamil Classics.

- **Interdisciplinary Study as a tool in exploring the uniqueness of Egai:**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines interdisciplinary as "Of or pertaining to two or more disciplines or branches of learning; contributing to or benefitting from two or more disciplines" (2023) Seen as a twentieth-century contribution and it was due to the historical condition that has resulted in the creation of both the adjective *interdisciplinary* and the noun *interdisciplinarity*. To treat interdisciplinarity as a concept, one must see it is historically linked to disciplinarily. Louis Menand writes that "interdisciplinarity is not only completely consistent with disciplinarily - but

providing us with the plurality of practices; For integrating humanities, sciences and arts in its programme; For providing an opportunity to synthesis and evaluate the perspectives of different disciplines; For enriching with theory and practices; For building structures, strategies and activities;. For overcoming or going beyond the disciplinary boundaries; For multiple modes of inquiry; For approaching multiple areas of knowledge; For recognising the interdependence of knowledge structures; For having a holistic approach to issues pertaining to society; For helping to look at the problem beyond the scope a single discipline or area of research practice; etc. While going through some of the studies on ancient Tamil texts as well as studies on them, it was strongly felt that without an interdisciplinary study, the findings could not be very substantive and they may belong to within the boundary lines. However, this approach with few underlying assumptions of hybridity and crossing the disciplinary boundaries could yield desired results for the time being or till the alternative is worked or its validity is questioned. Though it is strongly felt that the assumptions advocated by the interdisciplinary can promisingly solve the problem, it could not considered as the final and forever option for in dealing with the materials related to ancient Tamils.

- **Interdisciplinary Exploration Tamil Egai - Finding the Conceptual/Cultural Uniqueness:** Charity, different from gift and prestation, is the state of giving something to people who are in need (of love, kindness, care, welfare, etc.), without expecting anything in return, i.e., philanthropy/ well-being as pure objective. The 'charity' in Old English meaning "benevolence for the poor" and "Christian love in its highest manifestations" is derived from the Old French charité (Christian "charity, mercy, compassion, alms, charitable foundation") and Latin caritatem or nominative caritas ("costliness, esteem, affection" or from carus ("dear, valued"). Being one of the seven virtues in Christian theology, charity focused on 'the friendship of man for God' and later it was extended from 'the love of God' to 'the love of our neighbour' to enjoy joy, peace, and mercy as the fruits of the charity' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charity_(practice)).

Unlike Western society, the ancient Indian civilization consisting Tamil and Sanskrit traditions has treated the concept with utmost care. For convenience, the examples are given from the classical Tamil texts. Before getting into discussion, we could see a brief account (abstracted from the verses) of ēgai as reflected in the Tamil classics:

1) *Naladiyar:* Some of the points reflected in *Naladiyar* on *ēgai* are given here: Even if there is an insufficiency in terms of quantity, one must have the mindset to give with rejoicing heart as there is sufficiency (91); death, old age, disease stand around, instead of longing for accumulating more wealth and holding tightly the wealth already available - thus, one must give (92); donate because wealth grows in time while enjoying and giving and it flies away when clinging to it without giving (93); give according to your ability not of other's condition – even it is a small quantity one must give (94); when you can't give due to poverty, then better don't receive (95); charity not to be omitted even in troublesome time (97); give it to those who cannot recompense you if they can then it is the lending (98).

2) *Pazhamozhi:* Some of the points reflected in *Pazhamozhi* on e *ēgai* are given here: Since life is viewed as the present world and the world after death, that is, even a small charity will give more benefit in the later world – its significance is known by which is known by learned (persons); relieve the miserable; relieve the wants of the poor before being asked – hard-

earned wealth if not shared with poor it will benefit to the king (government); give in accordance with the nobility of the donors, not in accordance with the state of the recipient; give without desiring praise; giving for fame is like working for wage; as well does not get dried by drawing water, wealth will not get reduced by doing charity; one has to understand the condition of others before giving are some of the ideas mentioned in the verses between 372 and 379.

3) *Nattrinai*: Some of the points reflected in Nattrinai on ēgai are given here: Nobles are those who give in such a way that the poor don't knock at another's door further. And, the point is that Unless society provides the best examples (from literary or imaginary constructions), then the concept of charity, cannot be explained to future generations (verse 84).

4) *Tirukkural*: Some of the points reflected in Tirukkural on ēgai are given here: Charity (ēgai) is something giving to the destitute and rest are having expectation (221); even in any low condition, saying or hearing "I have nothing," is not characteristic of the noble birth (222); give until you see the pleasant countenance (223); sage's power of enduring hunger is inferior to the power of those who remove the other's hunger (225); removing hunger of poor is the place where one to lay up his wealth (228); those who habitually share his food with others will have no hunger (229); the death becomes pleasant when charity cannot be exercised (230). In the next chapter, it continues to say that the purpose of getting fame in a lifetime is by getting it by doing charity (231); the ultimate is fame for one is achieved through charity (232); further, it presents the qualities and characteristics of both charity and the conditions of the people who receive it. Moreover, it warns of dos and don'ts in charity.

Here are the literary examples from the same corpus on the seven chieftains who lived during the Sangam age and whose stories are live in the social, cultural, literary, and political life of the Tamils. *Kodaimadam* (*kodai*+*madam*, i.e., donation/charity + ignorance) is unique to Tamil society and used to mean the inability to differentiate the needy people. Began is known for his noble deed of expanding the concept of charity to accommodate non-human beings by his act of giving a blanket/shawl to a peacock that was shivering in cold a rainy day. Paari is compared to rain for giving without expectation. Giving his chariot to a jasmine plant that was longing in the air for a prop is the best-known example. Kari is known for giving to the bards, artists and needy people the gifts (such as villages, countries, elephants, horses, ornaments, etc.) received from the Chera, Chozha and Pandiya Kings for helping them in their war. His act is metaphorically compared to rain as does not bother dry land or wetland. Ai Andiran is known for donating gems, pearls and elephants to the bards and needy people. The sacred-precious dress was received from a saint, instead of keeping it with him, he presented it to the ancestral deity. Once, when a few women bards demanded a few rice grains, he gave them a mountain-like elephant. Adhiyaman is celebrated as a symbol of charity for his act of giving a precious life-saving gooseberry to woman poet, Avvaiyar. Nalli is known for charity because those who approach him do not approach other chieftains for further help. Valvil Ori is known for avoiding any embarrassment of listening to others praising him, that is, even if the bards praise him, he gives them everything. All these stories of the chieftains are narrated in the everyday social, cultural, and political life of the Tamil community world as instances of charity. This is how a concept of conceptualized, legitimized and put into use in the language activities. The Indian oral traditions also have a vast amount of examples for charity, and for

instance, *The King who was Fried* (in Flora Anna Steel, 1894) has everything to glorify the importance of the concept. It is about King Karan who never had his breakfast without offering a hundred-weight of gold pieces to the poor folk. To get his gold every day, the King secretly allows himself to be fried and eaten by a holy *faqîr* who with his magical power gives him life with gold.

2. DISCUSSION

The ancient Tamil society is not the first and foremost in thinking about the necessity of the concept of ēgai, but could be considered the most significant one in terms of adding value to the concept with cultural specific examples that can be accepted globally. However, the purpose of giving stress on the interdisciplinary necessity is to drive home the point that ancient Tamil literature can be decipherable at its full capacity if the interdisciplinary approach is employed. Thus, this concept of ēgai is seen as an apt example, among others, that can uphold the cultural uniqueness and specificity in a significant way by exploring its multidimensional aspects. Here are the salient features that highlight the fact that the ancient Tamil society is far better than other civilization in terms of conceptual clarity and accuracy on specific concepts that are essential for shaping social morality: 1. Tolkappiyam (Tol. 9:48-56) offers the social dimension of the words used in Tamil to express the "asking" ("ī", "thā" and "kodu") and each term in this category represent different relationships between the giver and receiver. The relationships mentioned here do not reflect the social relationship of the present society, rather they are either based on the possession of knowledge or wealth or deeds and behaviours – which are not specific to any communities or social groups. 2. *Naladiyar* conceptualizes the concept of *ēgai* in a sophisticated way. It brings together many concepts to stress on the importance of charity, like, life after death, the temporary nature of material life, the uncertainty of health, the certainty of death, killing diseases around, short life, the impossibility of holding back wealth without removing the hunger of the poor. It gives charity as a viable option or the way for the sustainability of social life during the drought or famine. Irrespective of considering small or big, one must give it to the needy people who are in a position to give it back. So ancient society defines the quality and characteristics of not only the giver but also the receiver, and most interestingly, sharing during the crisis is the reflection of well-matured society and this practice has been well realized during the pandemic period. 3. *Tirukkural* assigns deeper meanings to the practice of charity. The binary nature of the concept of ēgai is very well delineated in this text by signifying both the pros and cons of the giving and taking. While charity is kept at an elevated level, the condition in which one has to ask from others is treated as the most discardable one by mentioning the receivers' extreme conditions. All the didactic texts expose the problematic categories of giver, receiver, non-giver, poor, and miser in connection with the ēgai. And each of these categories requires a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to decipher their denotative and connotative meanings in social life. However, despite serious discussion on the problem of the condition of receiving, Tirukkural offers its philosophical importance by giving emphasis on the presence of the receiver without whom the concept of giving and non-giving will be discussed and charity will not be a concept of celebration – that is charity is the backbone of social life. 4. Pazhamozhi conceptualizes charity with the help of its practicability and applicability and it essentializes the practice of charity in the social life. Interestingly, it has identified a good number of proverbs that were vogue in ancient Tamil society to emphasise the importance of the concept. Folkloristic knowledge is inevitable in order to see the

viability of the proverbial form in accepting the ideas associated with the notion of charity. Many of the proverbs have a meaning that inherently highlights the metaphorical and metonymical nature of charity. It makes use of literary figures such as the daughter of Paari to portray that no home will be having nothing to give to needy people even during the period of crisis – what an optimistic reflection on the Tamil society! On par with all these texts, the individual verses of Avvaiyar speak about the importance of *Aram* (in the broader sense of charity), *porul* (wealth – what is earned through hard work), *inpam* (happiness by mutual understanding between partners) and *veedu* (afterlife). *Ēgai* is not merely giving or receiving, it is associated with the outlook of a community and also their worldview. Further, it is not a simple concept, but a complex one by way of integrating many other concepts. While going through all the verses of ancient Tamil texts, one could notice the fact of the emergence of this complexity.

Another interesting aspect of the ancient Tamil society is that the literary definitions have been visualized through literary and historical evidences for the purpose of putting them on everyday discourses on charity. From three kings (popularly known as "Moovendhars") to the last seven chieftains ("Katai Ezhu Vallalkal") of the ancient Tamilnadu (Thamizhagam) had been closely related to the concept of charity and it is evident from the literary poems of poets who lived during those time during the ruling of their respective chieftains. The poems and their mentioning of the contributions to the needy people could also be found cross-referred in other literary texts such as *Pazhamozhi*. The beauty of these literary presentations of the victories, defeats, governance, and charity activities of these kings and chieftains is that they are the finest product of literary imaginations interwoven with histories and historical evidences apart from the continuity of traditions. However, the literary descriptions of all these personalities in connection with their charity activities are very much helpful in constructing mental images or visual impressions about the noble cause of doing charity. As mentioned elsewhere each example becomes a framework or a model that is used to help people to use it in their daily discourse not only on the importance of the concept but about the historical necessity in addressing the greatness of the past. Let us recall the activities of these chieftains who have merged as the symbol or synonymous of the concept of charity: 1. Began: He was a chieftain ruling a small village called Vaiyavi in the Podhini Hills. He is known for giving his shawl to the peacock which was shivering in cold due to rain. The reference to him and his charity is found in Cirupanattruppadai (84-87), Purananuru (142), and Pazhamozhi (74); 2. Paari: The chieftain of the Parambu Hills and adjoining areas is known for leaving his chariot for Jasmine molle ("mullai" - Jasminum auriculatum) which was hanging without a prop. The reference to this activity could be found mentioned in Cirupanattruppadai (87-91) and Purananuru (107, 108); 3. Kaari: The chieftain of Malaimaan country is known for giving the needy people (particularly, poets/bards horses, beads, pearls, elephants, and other expensive items. All his deeds are noticeable from the references found in Cirupanattruppadai (91-95, 107-110), Purananuru (121, 123, 124); 4. Aai Arandiran: Ruled the villages in the Podhigai Hillsm he is known for giving elephants along with gold and beads to the needy people. His references are found in Cirupanattruppadai (95-99), and Purananuru (126, 127); 5. Adhiyaman: The chieftain of Thagadoor is known for giving a medicinal, rare, and precious gooseberry to the Tamil poet Avvaiyar, and instead of eating himself, he has given it to the poet with the intention that her contributions can enrich the language. His references can also be found in Cirupanattruppadai (101-103) and Purananuru (101); 6. Nalli: The chieftain of Kandeera country of ancient Tamilnadu is known for giving charity to needy people in the way that they don't need to go to any other

chieftains. He was praised figuratively as a culprit for the Panars (bards) to lose their poetry composition because of the wealth they got from him. His references can be seen in Cirupanattruppadai (101-107) and Purananuru (149); and 7. Valvil Ori: The chieftain of Kolli Hills is known for giving away many of his villages (countries) as a charity to needy people, and the references to his deeds could be traced Cirupanattruppadai (107-109) and Purananuru (152, 153, 204). The charity or ēgai is neatly delineated in all the examples given here and the persons and their extraordinary contributions make them emerge as synonymous and metaphorical that are being used in everyday life. However, to understand the nuances of descriptions and delineations given by these texts can be best understood with the help of theoretical frameworks provided by more than one discipline such as philosophy, ethics, anthropology, folklore, literature, etc.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

While talking about the literary examples of charity or ēgai, one can remember that the whole essence of the discussion is on the nature or quality of this concept by introducing the term "kodaimadam" (lit. charity + ignorance). While going through some of the didactic texts and other literary references such as Purananuru, Tolkappiyam, Cirupanattruppadai, etc., the concept of kodaimadam emerges as a unique feature of Tamil society which provided stereotypical examples to highlight the point of charity in everyday life. The ancient Tamil society systematically differentiated the attributes between various activities in connection with charity. If "iratthal" (asking) is considered a bad quality that has to be removed, then "iyeen" (don't give) is the lowest character. However, to conclude, it is necessary to initiate interdisciplinary research as an available option to decipher the core meaning of the contributions of the ancient Tamil society with which the uniqueness of the ancient Tamil civilization can be established. A thorough research must have been initiated in a way to explore the connections between the disciplines belonging to sciences, humanities and social sciences. We must explore the longer-term historical perspectives on the promises of interdisciplinary studies. The consequences of the interdisciplinary studies must be addressed with reference to the literary texts associated with the ancient Tamil society. Do we encourage interdisciplinary studies on the basis of selective issues? Or can we ignore the conventional disciplines and their advantages over the new interdisciplinary perspectives? A thorough review must be done of the projects and initiatives carried out in the name of interdisciplinary studies. The barriers created by the disciplines and institutional policies must be handled in favour of interdisciplinary studies. As this interdisciplinary study requires extra effort and additional risks, government institutions must come forward to extend support to the researchers who pursue interdisciplinary studies on literary texts of ancient Tamil society. Importantly, with the support of government agencies, the interdisciplinary programme must be established in select institutions with financial and employment opportunities for those who are interested in pursuing it. Studying the language, culture and life of ancient Tamil society would be facilitated and realized.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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