

**Analyzing the Food Habits of Current Era with Reference to Ainthinai in
Tamil Literature**

Dr. V. Sangeetha, Professor and R. Pathmapriya, M.Phil.

Food is one of the basic necessities that are needed for human beings. All the living things give more importance to food because food is an important source for survival. Hence food brings goodness to one's health. It emphasises a beneficial eating habit that helps to prevent humans from illness. It offers dynamic fitness and vitality.

The traditional food method plays a vital role in maintaining better health. Ancient people followed a typical farming method. Those methods helped them to lead a long life and preserve food for a long time as well. Drying food is one of the ancient methods practiced preserving food for an extended period. Healthy foods help to maintain effective mental health and energetic spirit. In ancient times, people stayed energised both mentally and physically which emphasizes the importance of nutrition.

The present landscape and the recent developments in food varieties are affecting the psychological structure and cultural identity of a person. In the current era, most people consume fast food. It lacks good amount of carbohydrate and proteins. In the ancient time, food growing environment seemed to produce high quality food products.

In Sangam literature, poems deal with subjects of Akam and Puram. Each poem is the representation of moral ethics which is based on the relationships with nature. In Akam, Thinaï appears as a collection of poems of Sangam literature. Thinaï is classified into seven and Ainthinaï is one among the seven types of thinaï.

Thinaï is derived from the root word tin or tit which means a surface of land. The word Thinaï refers to earth's surface land, which is divided into five natural regions named as Kurinji, mountain tract; Paalai, deserted land; Mullai, pastoral tract; Marudam, fertile land; Neithal, seashore land. The other two types of Thinaï include Kaikilai, one-side love and Perunthinaï, mismatched love. All these lands are established by the people of Tamil Nadu. The indigenous Tamil people in South India follow it for years together. Traditionally they developed the practices of growing crops and raising cultivation in the five landscapes. The evolution of human culture was first understood by the culture of the five regions around the five geographical lands.

Tamil people noted that the habitual parts of the earth's surface were divided into five natural regions. Each region is named as a terrain or mode. These landscapes associated with specific

aspects of a relationship or specific stages in their development of a relationship. The literary studies on Thinaï gave birth to Thinaï poetics written by indigenous Tamil people.

In Sangam period, Tamil people followed the three kinds of human culture such as Mediterranean, Alpine and Nordic inherent food habits. Food habits based on the five landscapes and their culture evolved the occupation of the people of the five regions such as hunting, robbery, honey collection, farming and trade.

Kurinji region is the earliest surface in Ainthinaï, the tract of mountain which stands in thick woods and dense forest. Kurinji land people were living in the foot hills of mountain tract and lived their lives firstly with fruits, nuts, tubers, jackfruit, honey, rice, bamboo rice and foxtail millet. These varieties of foods supply got changed with animal flesh. They are expert in hunting, in mountain regions. Namachivaym in his work *தமிழர் உணவு* stated “தடியும்கிழங்கும் தண்டினர் தரீஇ ஓம்புநர் அல்லது உடற்றுனர் இல்லை”, (9) as the food used by Kurinji people as referred in *மலைபடுகடாம்*.

Man’s first profession was hunting which was also the occupation of Kurinji region. On the hills the wild boar was hunted for food by the Kurinji people. Despite of hunting the ancient women started planting seeds in soil. The people were killing them using bamboo fire and throwing poisoned thorn on them. The earlier kuravar invented fire, the greatest invention ever to cook animal flesh. Cooked food made people healthy and strong.

The barren area was one of the habitual regions of the earth surface which is called ‘Paalai’. These people were chased by the wild animals; therefore they hunted the animals for continuing their lives in the desert. People of Paalai lead an adventurous life and took risks to overcome their starvation. People of Paalai feasted on Porcupine which was referred as *முளவுமா வல்சி யெய்னர்* (Namachivayam 18).

Mullai is the forest terrain and the extended region of Kurinji. People provoked the development of human civilisation through the usage of their habitual food. In Mullai land they consumed millets, rice, boiled vegetables, cereals, panicum sumatrense and red grams. Different types of millets gave nutrition to ancient people to become physically strong. Millets are grains which contain the power of fibre, calcium, minerals and iron. It has high value of nutrition when compared to rice and wheat. It is a suitable food for people in the preserve who are aiming for weight loss and who are diabetic and cardiac patients.

In this land people cultivated and consumed various types of millets like finger millet, kodo millet, foxtail millet, little millet, barnyard millet, pearl millet and sorghum. The Mullai people followed pastoral life style of living. Their lifestyle developed by the civilization of culture and cultivation of food from the forest land. The consumption of rice and millets of Mullai region people is referred as “அரி செத்து உணங்கிய பெருஞ்செந்நெல்” (Namachivayam 13).

The next among the five geographical landscapes is Marudam. It closely denotes the early phase of the Stone Age Paleolithic and beginning of Neolithic age of modern civilization. During that time people of Marudam were working as ploughman and peasants. They grew their habitual food such as plantain, sugar-cane and mango which were their habitual foods. “தீங் கரும்போடு அவல் வகுத்தோர் மான் குறையொடு மது மறுகவும்” (Namachivayam 15). They also grew fresh vegetables, tasty rice and cereals. Despite usual crops, people also started to grow bananas, nuts, tapioca and cassava. These food habits were healthy.

People there learnt the tactics of farming life and what crop to grow and when.

The last among the five regions is Neithal, the seaside landscape. Neithal land people practiced the art of fishing. They consumed fish, dry fish, shells, sea food and salt. “மீன் தடிந்து, விடக்கு அறுத்து ஊன் பொரிக்கும் ஒலி முன்றில்” (Namachivayam 17). Their main occupation was fishing and salt preparation. Food of this land had high level nutrition, protein and minerals. These resources provide information about food practices of Tamil people. It also presents information about traditional food.

The basic human needs which remain unchanged for ever are food, water and oxygen. To acquire food farm lands are cultivated but the food produced feeds only to half of the current population. Food scarcity will not lead to healthy active life. The food pattern followed in the present era is also bad since it has no nutritional values. Huge factories sell fast food for affordable cost but with no nutritional value.

People of all age group love junk food. In the present era people are attracted towards affordable food. But it brings harmful effects to people. It results in lack of learning and many other health problems especially to the teenagers. It also increases the chemical changes in our body that can result in depression, which is the root cause for many diseases. Eating packaged food is the cause for low level nutrition in the body; it's connected to mental stress and induces health hazards such as blood pressure, diabetics, overweight because of the excessive cholesterol, fat and sugar content. They only provide pleasure. Most of these foods affect women rather than men. They bring infertility in women.

Candies, bakery products, pizza, fried fast food, ice cream, salty snacks, drinks, burger and spicy food are considered as junk food. Nowadays human activities destroy the environment and natural resources. Farmers are using insecticide to eradicate the insect which induced chemical changes on plants. A pesticide acts as poison and affects both plants and people who consume it.

Ancient people were very strong both physically and mentally because of their healthy food habits. But the present people ignore good eating habits. Junk foods are enclosed with the unessential layers that make people suffer from various kinds of illness. Eating grains and pulses are solution to equalize the absence of the nutrition in human body. Human body needs raw food

which was followed by the ancient people in Tamil Nadu. The traditional way of agricultural pattern which is followed in some parts of the country has to be widened to acquire healthy lifestyle.

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Dr. V. Sangeetha
Professor and Head
Department of English
Periyar University
Salem-11
sk19@periyaruniversity.ac.in

R. Pathmapriya
M.Phil.
Department of English
Periyar University
Salem-11
pathmapriyarv@gmail.com