

Korean envoy proud of his Tamil 'links'

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A Prathap

“Appa,” called out a voice as the consul general of Korea Kyugsoo Kim was taking a stroll on the Mahabalipuram beach. His first impulse was to look back, thinking it was his son calling him. Seconds later he realised that Tamils like Koreans also address their fathers as Appa. The incident inspired him to start researching on words that are common to both Tamil and Korean languages.

Although a possibility of the two cultures sharing a common origin has been disputed due to a lack of genetic and anthropological links Kim, who will soon give a presentation on the topic during the Madras Week celebration, asserts that Asians in general share a lot of values and are indeed genetically related. He adds that India's mission to capitalise on the growth potential of Asia has to be studied and developed so that South Korea and India can be considered as sister countries.

During his research, Kim came across about 500 words in Tamil and Korean which share the same meaning and pronunciation. For instance the Korean word ‘Apahada’ which is ‘Avadhipadu’ in Tamil means the same — ‘in pain’ or ‘suffer’ — in both languages. Similarly ‘Vanakam’ (hello in Tamil) in Korean is ‘Vangapta’, ‘Manaive’ (wife) is ‘Manura’ and ‘Nal’ (day) is also ‘Nal’.

Not just words, the two cultures share a lot of cultural and traditional practices too. Just like Tamils, Koreans have the habit of leaving the slippers outside the house and bowing before the elders as a sign of respect. And when it comes to syntax and grammar, Korean and Tamils share the same sentence structure. For example, ‘I am cutting the grass’ in Korean is ‘Naan pul-ul-beda’.

Kim says another thread of similarity could be a stone that Huh, the first queen of Kaya kingdom, took from India to Korea. This could be the ‘Ilavattakkal’, the practice of a man lifting weight to prove his strength. The old Tamil ritual involved a young girl asking her lover to lift a heavy stone to prove his strength. These stones are still found in interior villages of Tamil Nadu, says Kim.

“When a baby is born in Korea, we have green chillies hung outside the house to ward off evil spirits and I find the same practice here too. It is remarkably surprising to see girls playing five stones here just like Korea. These are some things that goad me to look deeper into the cultural similarities and I must say I feel com-



ASIAN CONNECT: Korean consul general Kyugsoo Kim says the cultural similarities between Koreans and Tamils make him feel at home

DURING HIS RESEARCH, KIM CAME ACROSS ABOUT 500 WORDS IN TAMIL AND KOREAN WHICH SHARE THE SAME MEANING

pletely at home here,” he says.

He substantiates his argument by citing examples of Korean food which are similar to the Tamil cuisine. Rice cakes, rice puff and lentil cakes are a few to name. “There must have been an exchange of cultural habits and cuisines when people from both the cultures migrated to each other's country,” he adds.

The connection between the two cultures is believed to date back to the reign of King Suro and Ayi of Pandian Kingdom in CE 45. Experts don't rule out the possibility of queen Huh taking Tamil culture to Korea with her when she left India.

Kannan Narayanan, a professor in AIMST University Malaysia and an expert in Tamil-Korean heritage, says the Koreans are as emotional as Indians and have the same affinity for bonding and intimacy like Tamils. “Even the smallest similarity is something we have to be really proud of. We just can't have a meal without pickle and they too can't have food without it. The Koreans believe they have Indian ancestors and the queen who migrated from India may have been highly influenced by the Tamils.” He adds that more research should be done in the area to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.