

Dates of Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai

Introduction

Among the problems which confront the student of Tamil who attempts to trace the growth of the literature of the early Tamils, two or three stand out prominent. Were the epics, *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, traditionally known as the twin-epics of the days of the Sangam, i.e. second or third century A.D., written by two contemporary poets, and if they were not so written, what would be the dates of their composition? And was *Cilappatikāram* written by the brother of *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ*, the king of the *Cēras*, and was *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ* himself, who is eulogized in *Cilappatikāram* as the conqueror of the Northern territories of India as far as the Ganges, a historical figure? It has been assumed on insufficient data that *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ* was a *Cēra* king of the Sangam period and that *Ilankō*, his brother, and his friend *Cāttaṇār* were the authors of the two epics. But when all the available sources are analysed they indicate a different conclusion. The examination of these sources is, however, complicated by a number of difficulties such as their background, antiquity, the different social problems, linguistic variations and other matters which will be discussed in the course of this article.

The Difficulties of Sangam Literature

THE Tamil literature of the second and third Centuries of the Christian era is generally known as the literature of the Sangam.¹ The language itself being archaic, is not easily intelligible to a modern student; the life and thought of the people of that period are so far removed from the life and thought of today that a real effort is required to transport oneself back to that period. Further, no sources other than literary are available for writing a history of the civilization of this period; these were sometimes supplemented by the tradition handed down by commentators of later periods. Unfortunately these commentators, though they had no historical sense, were regarded by uncritical writers as 'authorities'; and some positively misleading statements, for which they are responsible, have added to the difficulties of the modern student. Among many such offenders, may be included Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, the author of "*Maṇimēkalai its Historical Setting*" (1928). By his indiscriminate use of the traditional accounts of poets and the views of the commentators in his attempt to fix the date of *Maṇimēkalai*, he has made the task of the student of literature m

1. It was believed that three academies were established in the early days and the last one, known as the Sangam was established in Madura in the second century

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more difficult. The modern student could easily be led away from realities and from the actual chronology if he accepts without careful investigation all that these commentators and critics have surmised.

One simple example will show how confusion arose in regard to the names of some of the poets of the Sangam period even in the early days when these poems were compiled and colophons written for them. If two or more contemporary poets had one name they were usually distinguished by a prefix indicating the name of the locality from which they came. Thus the Cāttaṇār who came from Ālampēri was distinguished from another Cāttaṇār from Cittalai; the former came to be known as Ālampēri Cāttaṇār and the latter as Cittalai Cāttaṇār. If two poets with the same name came from one village and if one was to be distinguished from the other and both from a third of the same name coming from a different village, then significant appellations were prefixed to the names of the first two in addition to the name of the village from which they came. For instance, two poets with the name Cāttaṇār coming from Uraiyūr were distinguished from each other by one being called Katuvāiccāttaṇār and the other Mutukaṇṇaṇ Cāttaṇār; and, in order to differentiate both of them from Cāttaṇār of Cittalai they were known as Uraiyūr Katuvāiccāttaṇār and Uraiyūr Mutukaṇṇaṇ Cāttaṇār respectively. Applying this principle to the name Maturaikkūlavānikaṇ Cāttaṇ, the author of Maṇimēkalai, we see that the two appellations Maturai and Kūlavānikaṇ were prefixed to his name in order to distinguish him from another poet of Maturai with the same name and from a third who lived elsewhere. Several examples could be cited of this system of nomenclature which prevailed during the early days.

Scribes of the later periods who were unaware of the prevalence of this system took Maturaikkūlavānikaṇ Cāttaṇār and Cāttaṇār of Cittalai to be the same person and called the poet thus created by their ignorance Maturaikkūlavānikaṇ Cittalai Cāttaṇār.² Others, little knowing that Cittalai was the name of a place, took the word to be made up of two words Cī (sore) and talai (head). From this ingenious derivation of the word arose the story that Cāttaṇār being one of the critics of the third academy was in the habit of scratching his head with the stylus in his hand whenever he was called upon to criticise the bad poems that were placed before the academy for approval. As a result of this, according to the story, a permanent sore had formed on his head and hence he came to be called Cāttaṇār with a sore head. In a similar way, if a poet of the sixth century A.D., happened to have the same name as another of the second century, both of them were at once and with a complete disregard of chronology taken to be the same person and a

² See poem 59 in Puṛaṇāṇūru.

life history which belonged to neither of them was thereafter easily fabricated. Thus, *Tanṭamiḷ Cāttan*, one of the personages figuring in *Cilappatikāram* becomes identified with *Maturaikkūlavāṇikaṅ Cāttan*, the author of *Maṇimēkalai* and thereby the two epics belonging to two completely different periods in the history of Tamil literature are classed together as two contemporary works. The next step is easy and the two poets, it is added, worked in collaboration in writing the two epics. Unless errors of this kind, arising from such obvious causes, are removed and unless the chronology of the early poets is established as accurately as possible, it will be almost impossible for a student to study or trace the development of the literature of the early periods.

According to popular theory the two epics, *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, have been assigned to the Sangam period ; this was due to the assumption that the authors of the two poems were contemporaries and that both of them lived during the reign of *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan*, a mythical king of the Sangam period. For this confusion the prologues of the two epics which were definitely written by a later poet were mainly responsible. Evidently the author of the prologues had taken the character *Tanṭamiḷ Cāttan* appearing in *Cilappatikāram* and *Maturaikkūlavāṇikaṅ Cāttan*, the author of *Maṇimēkalai*, to be one person, overlooking the fact that *Cātan* of *Cilappatikāram* was merely a creation of the poet's imagination. And again, although *Cilappatikāram* was at least a hundred years older than *Maṇimēkalai*, yet the prologues mendaciously state that the epic *Cilappatikāram* was read by its author to the author of *Maṇimēkalai* ; and by way of returning the compliment the latter is made to read his work before the former. *Adiyārkkunallār*, one of the commentators on *Cilappatikāram*, probably fancying that the prologues too were written by the poets themselves, went a step further and confirmed the idea given in the prologues by stating that the two epics were not only contemporary works but were designed by the poets to be two parts of a complete poem. Since then, scholars who attempted to write the history of the early Tamil literature have followed this commentator and laid down as a fact this theory of the two parts forming a complete poem till Professor Jacobi, twenty years ago, expressed his doubts as to the possibility of assigning *Maṇimēkalai* to the Sangam period.³

Prologues Written in a Later Period

Writing prologues or invocatory poems at the beginning of a work or a compilation was not in vogue either in the Sangam period or in the period of *Cilappatikāram* or *Maṇimēkalai*. It was established as a convention at a much

3. 'Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik'; Band B Hgt 3 of the Deutsch Morgenländische Gesellschaft (Leipzig).

later period (*circa* sixth century A.D.) when Tamil poets obviously began to imitate Sanskrit models, and every literary work was supplied with a preface or a prologue from the hands of the author's pupil or teacher or from one of his colleagues. It was, probably, during this period that all the earlier works came to be supplied with these prologues. It would, thus, not be wrong to surmise that the two prologues to the two epics were written by a poet who lived in this later period. The fact that the prologue to Cilappatikāram contradicts some of the statements in the epic suggests that it was not written by a contemporary. For instance, while the epic (Canto XXV, lines 56-63) clearly states that the people of the hill country related to the king Cenkuṭṭuvan the incident of Kaṇṇaki's ascent to the heavens, the prologue definitely lays down that they related it to the author himself. If the prologue was written by a contemporary even such minor contradictions would hardly have found a place.

The Epics not Contemporary Works

The fact that the story of Maṇimēkalai is almost a continuation of the story of Cilappatikāram may have suggested the identification of the author of Maṇimēkalai with the character Cāttaṅ in Cilappatikāram. It is, thus, only the prologues which suggest that the two epics were written by two contemporary poets and, as we have seen, these prologues are very unsafe guides. On the contrary the evidence available in the works themselves shows that they were written by two poets living in two different periods. For instance, the heroine, Maṇimēkalai, according to the epic Maṇimēkalai sets out to the Cēra country to see the temple of Kaṇṇaki in Vañci. There she comes to know of the submergence by the sea of her native city of Pukār and the departure of Aṟavaṇa Aṭikaḷ from Pukār to Kāñci. She then goes to Kāñci to meet him and when she learns from him the Buddhist logic and philosophy, she renounces the world and thereafter devotes her life to the practice of asceticism. On the contrary Cilappatikāram states definitely that the renunciation of Maṇimēkalai took place long before the consecration of the temple to Kaṇṇaki (Cantos XXIX and XXX, line 27). Further, according to Cilappatikāram the city of Pukār was always in a flourishing state and wherever any reference was made to Pukār in Cilappatikāram, it was done with praise and veneration as it was the capital of the Coḷa country. It is therefore evident that Cilappatikāram was written before and Maṇimēkalai after the destruction of Pukār. Many more instances can be taken from the two epics to show that one contradicts the other in several other details of the story. (Cil. Canto XXX, line 27, and Maṇ. Canto III, l. 16; Cil. Canto XXX, l. 23; and Maṇ. Canto III, l. 16; Cil. Canto XXX, l. 23; and Maṇ. II, l. 6-9 and l. 36 and 37). If the two poets had been contemporaries and had written their works in consultation with each other, contradictions in certain important events such as

the consecration of the temple to Kaṇṇaki, the renunciation of Maṇimēkalai and the destruction of Pukār, could not have arisen. Since Cilappatikāram does not refer to the destruction of Pukār which is a historical fact, and Maṇimēkalai mentions it clearly, it can safely be assumed that the former was written long before and the latter long after the submergence of the capital.

**Maṇimēkalai a Work of the Sixth Century, A.D.
according to Professor Jacobi**

Professor Jacobi was interested in fixing the date of Maṇimēkalai, one of the most important works on Buddhism in Tamil literature. After going through the Nyāyappavēsa of Dignāga and carefully examining the system of logic explained in it and comparing it with the Buddhist logic given in Maṇimēkalai he has come to the conclusion that the author of the epic had followed the Nyāyappavēsa in writing that portion of his work which dealt with Buddhist logic. He referred to it thus :

“ There are found the same nine pakshabhasas, fourteen hetvabhasas and ten drshtantabhasas in the same arrangement and almost through the same series in the Maṇimēkalai as in the Nyāyappavēsa. Even the example instanced for the purposes of explanation agree in most cases in both. It is thus established without any doubt that the author of Maṇimēkalai has made use of the Nyāyappavēsa in a most evident manner.”

Following this line of argument Prof. Jacobi has fixed the lower limit of Maṇimēkalai as sixth century A.D. But Dr. Krishnaswamy Iyengar being convinced that the two epics were a product of the Sangam period, and basing his arguments on the doubtful authority of the prologues and tradition, has devoted his entire work arguing that Prof. Jacobi, who based his arguments on a much more dependable authority of the system of logic expounded in Maṇimēkalai itself, was wrong in assigning the epic to a period later than fifth century A.D. Evidently Dr. Krishnaswamy Iyengar himself was not fully satisfied with his own arguments and referred to the logical inference of Prof. Jacobi thus :

“ If I could go by this investigation alone I should not have any great difficulty in accepting the position arrived at by the eminent scholar.”

But the difficulty with him was that he was not prepared to admit the fictitious character of the prologues. Moreover he took Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, to be a historical figure and the consecration of the temple to Kaṇṇaki as a historical fact.

Ceṅkuṭṭuvan not a King of the Sangam Period

In the “ History of the Tamils ” (page 596) P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar expresses doubt as to the historicity of Cēraṅ Ceṅkuṭṭuvan. His surmise that

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he was a mythical figure deliberately introduced into the third part of the epic Cilappatikāram appears on analysis to be justified. He is also of opinion that the epic Cilappatikāram should actually consist of the first two parts only and that the third part was added on to it, probably, for the purpose of deifying Kaṇṇaki and perpetuating the glories of the Cēra rule in the Tamil land by eulogizing the mythical figure Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ. Even if we reject this as a conjecture, there seems to be no evidence either in the epic or in the literature of the Sangam period to prove that Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ was a king of that period.

Patirruppattu (the Tenfold Ten) one of the eight anthologies of the Sangam period consists of poems composed with the set purpose of eulogizing ten kings of the Cēra dynasty. Each Ten has an epilogue, evidently written by a later poet, which gives certain information in regard to the author of the poems, the name of the king about whom they were written and also a short list of his victories over others. The Fifth Ten was written by Paraṇar, the celebrated poet of the Sangam period, in praise of Kaṭal Piṛakkōṭṭiya Vēlkeḷu Kuṭṭuvaṇ who probably became famous by his victories over the pirates. But the author of the third part of the epic identifies him with Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ of his work and attributes the exploits and victories of the former to him and in addition assigns to him the expedition to the Ganges. But the author of the epilogue to the Fifth Ten obviously taking everything stated in the third part of the epic to be historical and identifying Kaṭal Piṛakkōṭṭiya Vēlkeḷu Kuṭṭuvaṇ with Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ assigns all the victories and achievements of the latter to the former and calls him Kaṭal Piṛakkōṭṭiya Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ by coalescing the two names. But the expedition to the Ganges is neither mentioned in the Fifth Ten of the Patirruppattu nor in any of the subsequent Tens of the same work. Historians will admit that the exploits of Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ and his march to the banks of the Ganges as described in the third part of the epic are incredible. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar in his "History of the Tamils" says thus :

"Canto III then makes Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ defeat a number of Trans-Gangetic monarchs, for whose existence there is no other evidence, literary or epigraphical, and makes two of the kings carry on their heads the stone which was to represent the deceased lady Kannagi. All these must be fables, because the transport of an army of the size necessary for the purpose of fighting with the Trans-Gangetic monarchs is a feat that can be imagined only by a Tamil poet ignorant of the geography of India."

Moreover it seems strange that no reference was made to Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ or to his expedition to the Ganges in any of the Sangam poetry in which are mentioned some of the less significant events in the history of that period. Since such an important event as this had not been of any interest to any of the poets of

that period it is evident that Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ was a creation of the author of the third part of the epic.

Impact of Aryan Culture

A comparative study of the language and thought of the epic and those of the literature of the Sangam period will yield further proof that the epic was not a work of that period. If Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ was no other than the king Vēlkeḷu Kuṭṭuvaṇ of the Fifth Ten of the Patirruppattu, it should be taken as certain that Paraṇar and the author of the epic were contemporaries and that the life and thought as depicted in the epic should, in many respects be similar to those in the poems of Paraṇar and a galaxy of other celebrated poets who were his contemporaries. Anyone who is familiar with the Sangam works will not fail to notice the marked difference between the life depicted in the Sangam poetry and in the epic. It could be easily discerned from the epic that the Aryan culture of the north had taken a firm hold on the masses of the south during the days of the epic. Even the land from which that civilization entered South India began to be known as 'the holy region' (Puṇṇiya tīcai) in the epic. As a result of this impact the religious cults of the early Tamils too began to be relegated to the lowest sections of society. The hills on the north of the Tamil land known as the Vēṅkaṭa hills in the poetry of the Sangam days began to be known as Neṭiyōṇ Kuṇṇam (the hill of Viṣṇu) in the epic, for it had by this time become famous for the temple of Viṣṇu built on it after the days of the Sangam. Sanskrit words and phrases have come into use among the masses; even the names of towns and villages were replaced by Sanskrit names. For instance, Kōḷiyūr began to be known as Vāraṇam⁴ in the epic and a mythological story imported from Sanskrit was made current to establish the use of the new name in place of the old one.⁵ Words such as Kuḷavi (குழவி), Čol (சொல்) and Kaṭṭu (கட்டு) which were commonly used in everyday life began to be replaced by words of Sanskrit origin such as Pālakaṇ (பாலகன்), Vārttai (வார்த்தை) and Pantam (பந்தம்) respectively. Numerous examples could be taken from the epic to prove that the Aryan culture had begun to attract the people in the days of the epic.

Linguistic Variations

The language itself appears to have undergone radical changes during the days of the epic Cilappatikāram. A fairly long period of time should have elapsed before such change could become well established in a language. One example would suffice to show what remarkable changes had taken place in the language of Cilappatikāram. Nouns in Tamil are classified into nouns

4. Kōḷi in Tamil is Vāraṇam in Sanskrit.

5. Canto X, line 247 and 248.

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denoting human beings (உயர்நிலை) and all other nouns (அஃறிணை). The former in the early Tamil had a singular form as well as a plural form ; the plural was formed either by changing the last letter of the singular or by adding a suffix āṛ (ஆர்) or mār (மார்) to the singular. All other nouns (அஃறிணை) had only one form for the singular as well as for the plural. But at a later period the plural of this group (அஃறிணை) was distinguished from the singular by the addition of the suffix kaḷ (கள்) and thereby the plural had two forms, one with the suffix kaḷ (கள்) and the other without it. In the Sangam period the plural with the suffix kaḷ (கள்) was rarely used. A few examples of this could be found only in the later anthologies such as Kalittokai and Paripāṭal, but none in the poems of Paraṇar. At a later period this suffix which was used to indicate neuter plural began to be used as an additional suffix to the plural nouns which denoted human beings (உயர்நிலை). In this way some of the nouns of the latter class began to acquire two suffixes to indicate plurality. For instance, the word yāṇ (I) had yām (we) as its plural in the Sangam period and the plural form yāṅkaḷ (we) formed by adding the neuter plural suffix kaḷ (கள்) to the already plural form yām (we) was never used in the Sangam period or in the period of Kalittokai and Paripāṭal. But it makes its appearance first only in Cilappatikāram (Canto XI, line 161). This indicates clearly that the epic could not have been written either in the time of Paraṇar or in the period of Kalittokai and Paripāṭal which followed it.

Social Practices

Cilappatikāram gives a clear indication that many of the customs and manners of the early Tamils had undergone marked changes during the days of the epic. It was the custom among the early Tamils to conduct a ceremony known as Cilampukaḷi Nōṅṅu (சிலம்புகழி நேநாண்டி) to remove the anklets worn by a bride before she was given in marriage. Examples could be cited from the anthologies of the Sangam period (Ainkurunūru 399 and Kuruntokai 7) to prove the existence of this practice in the early days and hardly any reference could be found in the anthologies to the wearing of anklets by women after their marriage. The author of the epic, while giving a detailed description of the marriage ceremony of Kaṅṅaki, makes no reference to the removal of her anklets before her marriage. On the contrary in Canto IV (line 47) he clearly states that Kaṅṅaki wore her anklets even after her marriage. It may be incidentally mentioned that the author attaches great importance to her anklets by naming the work 'The Epic of the Anklets.' This is a clear indication that the practice of the removal of the anklets before marriage did not prevail during the time of the epic. Prof. S. S. Bharati, however, in his article to the Sen Tamil strives, though not very convincingly, to give a different interpretation to this practice because of his belief that the epic was a work of the Sangam period.

**Maṇimēkalai a later work than Cilappatikāram :
Linguistic and Cultural Variations**

It has been already pointed out from the details of the story as related in the two epics that they could not have been written by two contemporary poets and that Maṇimēkalai should have been written long after Cilappatikāram. It may also be established by comparing the language of the two epics as well as the civilization they depict that these two epics represent two distinct periods of culture and civilization in the history of the Tamil race. The use of Sanskrit words and phrases is far greater in Maṇimēkalai than in Cilappatikāram. Even kings and princes had begun to discard their Tamil names in favour of Sanskrit names in the days of Maṇimēkalai. There was hardly any trace of religious animosity in Cilappatikāram; but on the contrary the author of Cilappatikāram, wherever he refers to contemporary religions other than his own, does it with respect and devotion. On the other hand, there is enough evidence in Maṇimēkalai to prove that in the days of this work there was definite rivalry and antagonism among the various religions in the Tamil land. This is a clear indication that these two cannot be contemporary works. Moreover the analysis of the language of Maṇimēkalai indicates clearly that it must be much more modern than Cilappatikāram. For instance, the use of the medial particle *kiṅa* (கிண்ட) to denote present tense in finite verbs can only be found in the works that were written after the sixth century A.D. but not in Cilappatikāram or the anthologies of the Sangam period. The use of this particle in Maṇimēkalai (Canto XVII, line 68; Canto XXVII, line 104 and 111) clearly shows that it must have been written during or after the sixth century A.D. Moreover the use of the demonstratives *a* (அ) and *i* (இ) in the forms *anta* (அந்த) and *inta* (இந்த) and *aṅku* (அங்கு) and *iṅku* (இங்கு) respectively can hardly be found in the Sangam works or Cilappatikāram; but these are very commonly used in Maṇimēkalai (Cantos XXVI, line 63; XXIX, line 30; VI, line 26; and XX, line 89). It is therefore clear from this that Maṇimēkalai must have been a later work than Cilappatikāram.

Conclusion

The Sangam literature, unlike the two epics is to a great extent free from the influence of the Aryan Civilization; and among the epics its influence appears to be greater in Maṇimēkalai than in Cilappatikāram. Even in language and in the use of words the two epics differ from each other and both from the literature of the Sangam period.

In depicting the life of the people too the epics and the early literature show considerable differences. The use of certain particles and forms of demonstratives in Maṇimēkalai give additional support to the conclusions reached by Prof. Jacobi. Prof. S. Kuppuswamy Sastri and Mr. Iyaswamy

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Sastri⁶ by analysing the system of logic in Maṇimēkalai come to the same conclusion as Prof. Jacobi. Taking all these into consideration it will not be far wrong to assign Maṇimēkalai to the sixth century A.D. If the earlier and the later anthologies of the Sangam period could be assigned to the second and the third centuries of the Christian era respectively, then Cilappatikāram should be assigned to the fourth century A.D.

V. CHELVANAYAKAM.

6. Journal of Oriental Research, Madras, Vol. XI, Part II, pages 118-128.