

## *Dates of Cilappadikaram and Manimēkalai*

I HAVE read with interest the article under this caption contributed by Mr. V. Chelvanayakam in this journal for April 1948, pp. 96-105, and I have much pleasure in making my observations on the subject in response to a kind invitation from one of the editors of the Journal, Mr. G. C. Mendis.

First I must congratulate Mr. Chelvanayakam on the soundness of his general position on the subject. He does well to seek to break an uncritical tradition and to ask for a fresh consideration of the dates of two great epics in the light of known facts. For many years now I have been convinced that the two epics are much later than the Śāngam age, and though I indicated this clearly enough in my book on *The Colas* I have not had any occasion to discuss the whole question in all its bearings and I welcome this opportunity to do so. Another preliminary remark. The arguments I shall employ in this paper have all of them been set forth in a number of contributions in Tamil by Rao Saheb S. Vaiyapuri Pillai. He and I have worked so long and so closely together that it is not always easy for us to say whether a particular argument is his or mine, and we have never cared much which it is. I say this only to show that what I say below is nothing new, but in no way to shift the responsibility for it on other shoulders.

While I agree with the general trend of Mr. Chelvanayakam's argument, I must confess that I think he is not correct in some of his details, and what is more, he seems to me at times to assume or just to state as settled facts the very propositions he has set out to establish by argument. I shall discuss some of the details in his article before setting forth what appear to me to be decisive arguments in support of his general position regarding the chronological relation of the epics to Śāngam literature proper.

### **Poet Cāttan's Identity**

He is right on the confusion created possibly by scribes, perhaps also by others, mixing up different poets of the same name, and particularly in stating that Maduraikkūlavāṇikan Cittalai Cāttanār is a hybrid born out of a confusion between Cittalai Cāttanār and Maduraikkūlavāṇikan Cāttanār. This hybrid name occurs as that of the author of Puṟam 59 in MM. Svaminatha Aiyar's edition, but not in the corpus of Śānga-Ilakkiyam issued by the Śaiva-Siddhānta-Mahā-Samājam, Madras, in 1940 under the virtual editorship of S. Vaiyapuri Pillai (Preface xix)—which gives the poem correctly under Cittalai Cāttanār (No. 1260). But when C. states further that Taṇḍamiḷ Cāttan is a character in *Cilappadikāram* different from the Maduraikkūlavāṇikan with whom he has been confused, I think he makes a statement for

which there is no warrant. In canto xxv of the poem we are told that when Cenguṭṭuvan heard a report from some of his forest subjects of the apotheosis of Kaṇṇaki, the master of Tamil, Cāttan, who was nearby told him that he had himself witnessed the tragic occurrences in Madura which preceded Kaṇṇaki's apotheosis in the Cēra country. Cāttan is described once as *taṇḍamiḷ-āśān-Cāttan* (1.66) and again as *nannūr pulavan* (1.106) i.e. the master of pleasant Tamil, and the poet of the good book. In the *paḍigam* (1.10) he is simply called *taṇḍamiḷ-cāttan* i.e. Cāttan of the pleasant Tamil. *Prima facie*, the references are all to the same person who was a poet and a resident of Madura who had the opportunity to witness the murder of Kōvalan and the burning of the city following the death of the Pāṇḍyan king on his throne ; we may go further and see in the mention of the ' good book ' a reference to the *Maṇimēkalai* itself. True the poet is not called grain-merchant (*kūla-vāṇigan*); but here we are not dealing with colophons to poems where authors who were namesakes had to be carefully distinguished by characteristic epithets, and there is no intrinsic reason why the Master of Pleasant Tamil could not also have dealt in grains. Again, it is difficult to agree that *Taṇḍamiḷ Cāttan* could be the name of a person ; in fact the form of this name becomes intelligible only in the light of the other phrase *Taṇḍamiḷ-āśān Cāttan*. The character Cāttan in the *Cilappadikāram* is therefore not different from the poet of *Maṇimēkalai*. There is also no contradiction between the *Paḍigam* and Canto xxv as C. seems to think. He says ' While the epic (Canto xxv, lines 56-63) clearly states that the people of the hill country related to king Cenguṭṭuvan the incident of Kaṇṇaki's ascent to the heavens, the prologue definitely lays down that they related it to the author himself '. The reconciliation is easy ; and it is found in MM. Svaminatha Aiyar's summary of the story of the *Cilappadikāram* : the author and Cāttan were present together with the king Cenguṭṭuvan when the people of the hill country came and spoke to the king of the wonder they had seen, and the occasion was recalled in the *Paḍigam* for explaining how the poem came to be written, while the main narration of the incident is placed in canto xxv. The two accounts are clearly two versions of one incident viewed from different angles. I do not find it easy to accept C.'s view that ' Cāttan of the *Cilappadikāram* was merely a creation of the poet's imagination ', confounded with the author of the *Maṇimēkalai* by the author of the prologue. I may add that Pērāśiriyar is the first writer to connect Cīttalai-Cāttan with the *Maṇimēkalai*. (Tol. Śey. 240).

### Unity and Contemporaneity of the Epics

On the basis of the supposed contradiction between the prologue and canto xxv, C. infers that the prologue could not have been written by a contemporary. He discredits the prologues to both the epics as untrustworthy particularly in their statements that the poems were read out by their authors to

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each other, and fastens on Aḍiyārkkunallār the fancy that the prologues were written by the poets themselves and the conclusion that 'the two epics were not only contemporary works but were designed by the poets to be two parts of a complete poem'. He affirms that the 'Cilappadikāram was at least a hundred years older than Maṇimēkali' and hence their authors could not have been contemporaries; he adduces some arguments in support of this position. Let us examine these propositions. The *paḍigam* to a work, if not written by the author himself, is usually written by the teacher of the author, a fellow disciple of the author, his pupil or his commentator. There is no evidence that any commentator of the epics claims the authorship of the *paḍigam* of either poem, and there is no apparent reason why the *paḍigams* should be separated from the poems themselves by any length of time. We have indicated above that the poems and their *paḍigams* are mutually consistent, and proceed on the basis of the contemporaneity of the Cēra monarch Cenuṭṭuvan, his brother Iḷaṅḍō and Cāttan of Madura. Again, we have not got to wait till the time of Aḍiyārkkunallār for the idea that the two epics were meant to constitute a single whole; this is implicit in the indirect reference to the work of Cāttan in l. 106 of canto xxv of Cil., and in the conversations between the poets reported in the *paḍigams* and is expressly stated at the end of *Cilappadikāram* where we read that *Maṇimēkalai* completes the story of the poem:

*Maṇi-mēkali mēl-uraiṭ-poruḷ murriya*

*Cilappadikāra—murrum.*

To consider now the arguments for the interval between *Cilappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, C. bases his view on what he considers to be contradictions between the two poems and on the fact that a major disaster, the submergence of Pukār in the sea intervened between the dates of their composition. The first contradiction he mentions is this: *Maṇimēkalai* says that Maṇimēkalai set out to the Cēra country to see the temple of Kaṇṇaki in Vañci, and then does a number of other things before she renounces the world and takes to asceticism. 'On the contrary *Cilappadikāram* states definitely that the renunciation of Maṇimēkalai took place long before the consecration of the temple to Kaṇṇaki (Cantos xxix and xxx l. 27)'. I do not know if C., has noticed that Cenuṭṭuvan's consecration of the Kaṇṇaki temple is mentioned as an accomplished fact at the end of canto xxviii. Again, the prose passage at the beginning of canto xxix says definitely that the events recorded in that chapter took place *after* the consecration—*kaḍavulmaṅgalañjeyda pinnāl Kaṇṇaki tan kōṭṭattu* etc. And here *pinnāl* should be taken to mean, I think, not the very next day, but simply in the general sense of 'on a later day'. In any case there is no authority for saying that Maṇimēkalai's renunciation took place long before the consecration of the temple. Next C. argues that while Pukār is a flourishing city in the *Cilappadikāram*, the *Maṇimēkalai* refers to the destruction of Pukār by the sea and must have been written after that

occurrence ; ' it can be safely assumed ', he says, ' that the former was written long before and the latter long after the submergence of the capital '. But the story is that the destruction of the city by sea was a sudden occurrence which took place in the life time of Mādhavi and her daughter Maṇimēkalai, after the renunciation of the mother and before that of the daughter. The event finds no mention in *Cilappadikāram* for it occurred after the events of its story and had no relevance to it, whereas it has to come into Maṇimēkalai's life to explain its course.

C. adds further : ' Many more instances can be taken from the two epics to show that one contradicts the other in several details of the story. (Cil. Canto xxx l. 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) '. One wishes that instead of resting content with giving these references, he had argued out the matter fully and pointed out the contradictions clearly. For on examining the references I am unable to see that there are any irreconcilable contradictions. Thus *Cilappadikāram* XXX l. 27 mentions the cutting off of the flower-bearing tresses of Maṇimēkalai as preparation for her being made a nun. *Maṇimēkalai*, III. 16 speaks of Maṇimēkalai as ' the girl with fragrant flowers on her tresses '—but this is a reference to her before renunciation, when she was in the full bloom of her youth. *Cilappadikāram* XXX 23 refers to a question addressed to Mādhavi by her mother as to what her intentions were regarding Maṇimēkalai ; Canto II of *Maṇimēkalai* refers to the surprise felt in Pukār at the absence of Mādhavi at the festival to Indra where she used to be regular, ll. 6-9 mentioning the surprise of the city and 36-37 completing a report of it to Mādhavi by Vasantamālai. These in no way seem to contradict Cil. XXX but amplify details germane to the life-story of Mādhavi and her daughter after the death of Kōvalan for which there was little room in *Cilappadikāram*. In fact the passages selected by C. to prove contradictions between the two epics seem to be just those which may well be cited for the view that they are complementary, and together constitute one continuous story.

In fact one may well admit that on a surface view there is little that strikes one as incongruous or suggests that the two poems may be anything but what they purport to be—works by authors who were contemporaries of each other and of the Cēra king, Cenuṭṭuvan, and who saw some of the events they speak of and heard of the rest from those who had taken part in them. The illusion is fairly well kept up, and to get behind it we should resort to a closer scrutiny as well as to extraneous evidence. The rest of C.'s article is devoted to some considerations of this character, and this part of his argument will command general assent. I shall try to mention briefly the most important reasons which lead us to dissociate the two epics from the corpus of Śāngam literature constituted by *Ṭṭuttogai* and *Pattupāṭṭu*.

**The True Position**

Iḷaṅḡō sounds very much like a pen name and his connection with the story set forth in the *paḍiḡam* and in Canto XXX appears to be only a literary device. Perhaps we may detect a hint of this in the earliest extant commentary—*Arumpada-vurai*, which towards the end of the notes on Canto xxx describes the statements Dēvandikai made in a trance regarding Iḷaṅḡō's renunciation as a *kadai*, though there is nothing in the text answering to this word. If this view is correct, the *paḍiḡam* of *Maṇimēkalai* is also part of a complex literary scheme, not to be understood as recording literally true facts. There is no mention of a brother of Kuṭṭuvan in the *Paḍirrupattu*. But this does not quite warrant the view put forward by P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar and adopted by C. that Cenkuṭṭuvan is a mythical figure altogether of Iḷaṅḡō's creation. It is not possible to be definite about the relation between the *Cilappadikāram* and the epilogue of the fifth ten on Kuṭṭuvan in the *Paḍirrupattu*; either a legend was growing round Kuṭṭuvan to which the epilogue gave the first expression and the author of *Cilappadikāram* developed it further in his epic, or the author of the epilogue drew upon the epic in composing the epilogue. The former alternative has always struck me as the more likely as slight hints thrown out in the epilogue like an expedition against one Aryan king in the north are developed into an elaborate saga in the epic.

That the *Cilappadikāram* was not treating of contemporary events of a historical character but rehandling an old theme of popular legend becomes clear from statements of ancient writers and from traces of the currency of the legend in other forms than the *Cilappadikāram* found in literary references. Naccinārkinīyar gives three examples of works based on old stories in his comment on *tonmai* in *Tolkāppiyam*, Śeyyul 237—viz., *Perundēvanār Bāratam*, *Takaḍūr Yāttirai* and *Cilappadikāram*. It is surprising that this clear statement of the great annotator should not have been stressed properly and that room should have been found in the face of it for treating the leading incidents of the epic as history. Again *Narriṇai* contains a short poem (216) which mentions a woman Tirumāvuṇṇi who after pining for husband's coldness to her, tore off and cast away one of her breasts, and stood beneath a *vēṅgai* tree—incidents with a strong resemblance to the main traits of the Kaṇṇaki saga. Further, the *Yāpparuṅgalavirutti* (p. 351) reproduces an old *venbā* in which a woman laments over the dead body of her husband lying in a pool of blood—and the verse is marked ' *pattinic-ceyyul* '—song of the chaste wife. There can be no doubt that we are here right in the heart of the Kaṇṇaki story. and as this verse is called ' *ārīda* ' (Skt. *ārṣa*) it must be taken to have preceded the *Cilappadikāram*. Another *venbā* of a narrative character referring to the trouble Kōvalan got into at Madura is cited by Deyvaccilaiyār in his commentary on *Tolkāppiyam* Śol. 100. Hence the superb work of Iḷaṅḡō, like the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, must be taken to clothe in the best literary form a

moving story of wide popular appeal which found expression in several other works besides, though not of equal merit. Lastly, if we take note of some statements in the epics we shall see that the story moves and has its being in a timeless world to which it would be foolish to apply our common notions of chronology. Kaṇṇaki is not merely the daughter of a merchant prince of Pukār, but goddess Durgā herself born into the world—see *Cilappadikāram* XII ll. 47-50 and *Arumpada-vurai* thereon as also the suggestions of xx ll. 34-40. *Maṇimēkalai* (xxviii ll. 103 ff.) states that Cenkuṭṭuvan's father Imayavaramban Neḍum Śēral-Ādan had a Kōvalan for his contemporary, and that the hero of *Cilappadikāram* was ninth in descent from him ; so that eight generations separate the husband of Kaṇṇaki from Cenkuṭṭuvan according to this statement, though *Cilappadikāram* makes him the contemporary of the Cēra monarch last named. *Maṇimēkalai* (ibid. 11.141-6) makes the father of Kōvalan say that Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki will be present at the Buddha's preaching in Kapilavastu and attain release and that he too would be there at the time. Is it possible after this to dream of treating the authors of the epics, the hero and heroine of the poems, and the Cēra monarch Cenkuṭṭuvan as historical contemporaries ? Is it not clear that an old legend is just given a historical setting by talented authors, one of whom aimed at a vivid pen-picture of life in the three Tamil kingdoms as the background of his story, and the other gave more attention to religion and philosophy ? After this, the numberless miracles in the story call for no comment.

Once we realise that the epics constitute really a literary phantasy, we shall cease to treat them as history and their deep-going contradictions will cease to worry us. It is just possible, though of even this one may not be sure, that the synchronism of Gajabāhu of Ceylon, the Pāṇḍya Neḍuñjeliyan and the Cēra Cenkuṭṭuvan is historically true, and the author of the *Cilappadikāram* pitched upon that epoch as the most promising historical age for the background of his tale. But by its very nature such a sophisticated treatment of an ancient story in an artificial setting is far removed from the realistic and simple character of Śāngam poetry, and we must necessarily postulate an interval of some centuries between the age of the Śāngam and that of the composition of the epics.

There are many features in the epics that go far to support this view, and it may be enough to mention them briefly as they lie on the surface and are most readily grasped once attention is drawn to them. The species of literary composition which handles a continuous theme through many cantos in the style of a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* was obviously unknown to the Śāngam age ; and so too the many picturesque metres clearly of Sanskrit inspiration employed in the *Cilappadikāram* in its numerous *varis*—kānal, kandukam, ammānai, ūśal etc. The state of religion and philosophy reflected in the Śāngam poems is much simpler and offers little in common with the Śakti ideas pervading the

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*Cilappadikāram* or the complex philosophies expounded in detail in the *Maṇimēkalai*. The proportion of Sanskritic words is much larger in the epics than in the earlier poems. Both the epics cite verses from *Kural*, *Nōnmaṇikkadikai*, *Paḷamoli*, *Āśārakkōvai* and other relatively late works; and *Cilappadikāram* cites a story and refers to the verse which draws its moral from the Sanskrit *Pañcatantra* (XV 58). There are found late grammatical forms unknown to the early Śāngam works, and to some of these C. has drawn attention also. Examples are *nīr* for second person plural, *nān* for first person singular, the demonstrative *inda*, the *an* ending for first person singular in future tense like *arikuwan*. The form *Bangaḷar* for the people of Bengal (Cil. xxv, 157), the citation of *paḷṣa*, week-day, and *tilhi* (Cil. xxiii 133-5), are also evidences of late composition.

C. argues that anklets were not worn by married women in Śāngam age whereas the *Cilappadikāram* builds a story upon the anklets of a married woman, and therefore must belong to another age. There may be some point in this, but I feel that we should know more about the nature of the Cilambu-kaḷi-nōnbu, the ceremony of removing the anklet, which preceded marriage before we can accept the argument as decisive. I am not also convinced that *Maṇimēkalai* shows grammatical forms, borrowings from Sanskrit and a state of religious faith very different and decidedly later than those of *Cilappadikāram*.

The *Maṇimēkalai* has a chapter (xxix) devoted to the exposition of logic and it is clear beyond a shadow of doubt that part of this chapter is a straight translation of the *Nyāyapravēśa*, a fifth century work on Buddhist logic. *The Maṇimēkalai* cannot be of an earlier date and I think *Cilappadikāram* is in the same boat.

L. D. Swamikannu Pillai arrived at A.D. 756 as the date of the departure of Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalan from Pukār to Madura and of the burning of Madura; but he based his calculations on the meagre data of *Cilappadikāram* text (X, 1-3 and xxiii, 33-7) eked out by those furnished by Aḍiyārkkunallār from the *Maṇimēkalai*. This date is accepted by some, but I am inclined to feel that it is too late for the epics. It must be admitted, however, that there seem to be as yet no reliable objective data for fixing the date of the composition of the epics in a manner that would compel universal assent.

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