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PICTURES OF ANCIENT KERALA LIFE *

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My aim today is the very modest one of rotating before you a series of pictures of what I consider to have been aspects of life in Kerala in the centuries immediately preceding and succeeding the birth of the Xian era, so far as they could be gleaned from the most ancient extant classics of Tamiḻakam, of which Kerala was decidedly a part. When about thirty years ago the comparative study of the speeches of the east and the west coasts opened out to me the idea of linguistic kinship, I was able to envisage a parallel cultural intimacy too. I do not deny for a moment the individuality of the culture of Kerala of a later day. Unquestionably, the east and the west coasts developed their own peculiarities or rasas at a particular stage. Nevertheless, just as there is a continuity of linguistic evolution from the beginning of the Xian era down till day on the east and the west coasts, there exists a parallel continuity on the cultural side too. The parting of the ways may have started somewhere about the post-Sangam period — at least a few centuries

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before the appearance of the first west coast inscriptions, and the divergence may have become complete by about the tenth century. Ever since, the east and the west coasts, like the Cauvery and the Coleroon, forked out into two and developed divergent linguistic and cultural peculiarities. During this transitional stage, the relationship of the languages and cultures of the east and the west coasts could be graphically represented by two circles overlapping each other over a considerable area, but extending on either side a little distance beyond, the overlapping areas representing the similarities and the extensions the incipient divergencies. Anterior to this period, the peoples of Tamiḻakam — the country ruled over by *muvēndar* "the three kings" — had practically the same language, the same culture, the same outlook on life, hopes and aspirations, beliefs and ideals.

There is nothing in such a view that need detract from our distinctive achievements of a later time. The culture embodied in the most ancient classics of this part of India is as much ours as of those of the east coast. By the pure accident of these works having been preserved and cultivated on the east coast, they are described as Tamil works, but the language and culture embodied in them form the common "ancestral property" of both the east and the west coasts. Modern Tamil is as far away from this parental stage (both linguistically and culturally) as modern Malayalam is. I lay some emphasis on this point, because a great deal of misunderstanding has been caused by the indiscriminate use of the word "Tamil." On the one hand, unscientific propositions have been laid down by people who know "little Tamil and less Malayalam", that the west coast speech is the "daughter of Tamil" and that

it never had a life of its own except after the sixteenth century. On the other side, there are west coast scholars swinging to the other extreme, and yielding to the temptation of ascribing comparatively late divergencies to an ancient past which knew them not. There are not wanting among us voices which proclaim that the relationship of Kerala and the east coast was essentially a political one and that the Kerala language and culture are "as divergent from Tamil as the anguage and culture of the Kannadigas or Telugus".

The best corrective for these misunderstandings would be an intensive study of the languages and cultures of the east and the west coasts on a comparative basis. Few Tamil scholars have probed into the beginnings and development of Malayalam; and conversely, very few Malayali scholars have taken up the study of ancient Tamil classics. Attempts have been made to establish "chronologies", but perhaps more important than these from the comparativist's point of view would be the reconstruction of the social and economic life of the past, of polity and administration, of religious beliefs, of love and warfare.

Material for such a reconstruction is already there, in the most ancient extant anthologies known as Eṭṭuttogai, Pattup-pāṭṭu and Padinenkīḻkkaṇakku. The poems themselves may have been composed on different occasions and the redactions made at different periods. The evidence of language enables us to mark off the posteriority of some among these also. For instance, my analysis of Kalittogai and of Kuṟaḷ has revealed a number of post-Sangam features in the language of these works. Similarly, the language of Cilappadigāram also shows it to be a comparatively late work. Indispensable as this work,

along with its companion-volume Manimēgalai, is to the student of Kerala history, these two do not belong to the earliest stratum of Tamil classics. The different stages which help us to reconstruct the picture of the life of the west coast of Tamiḻakam (called Malaināḍu, Kerala and later Malayāḷam) would therefore be : the Tolkappiyam stage (with its linguistic archaisms and specialities reflected, if at all, only in the language of the text of this ancient grammar, and not in any work of literature yet known to us), the earlier Sangam stage (represented essentially by Eṭṭuttogai and Pattuppāṭṭu), the later Sangam works (like Kalittogai and Kuṟaḷ), the stage of Cilappadigāram and Maṇimēgalai, and then the beginnings of the west coast speech (as mirrored in the earliest inscriptions). Importance is commonly attached only to works like Padiṯṯup-pattu and Cilappadigāram for the reconstruction of the political history of Kerala. I would however stress the need for the use of all the above material for an adequate picture of the social and religious life of the ancient inhabitants of the Malaināḍu region of Tamiḻakam. The third chapter of Tolkāppiyam dealing with poruḷ; works like Puṟanāṉūṟu and Padiṯṯupattu dealing with wars, the military prowess of kings, their liberality to minstrels and their achievements in war and peace; Pattuppāṭṭu which sheds light on the life of the princes and peoples of those times; works like Agaṉāṉūṟu, Kuṟundogai, Ainguṟunūṟu and Kalittogai treating about love, marriage and its vicissitudes; the moral discourses of Kuṟaḷ on Dharma, Artha and Kāma; and Cilappadigāram: all these should be utilized for this purpose. Obviously, unhistorical exaggerations like the Cēra king Imayavaramban, having fed the contending hosts in the Mahābhārata war, or another ruler having plucked sunbeams from the sun and moonbeams from the moon, are

encomiastic superimpositions which it is possible for the careful historian to detach from the kernel of truth. The pictures emerging from such reconstructions may not always be complete, but then "all history is in part incomplete." "On the shore where Time casts up its stray wreckage, we gather corks and broken planks, whence much indeed may be argued and more guessed; but what the great ship was that had gone down into the deep, that we shall never see." The awareness that much material of the past is doomed to irrevocable oblivion should, far from dispiriting the student, only spur him on in his search for truth.

The essential dependability of the historical data furnished by all this early literature is proved by mutual corroboration. Let us take for instance the topic of export trade in Muciṟi. Different indigenous literary works (perhaps written on different occasions by different writers) deal with this, sometimes in circumstantial detail, and these accounts tally with those of ancient foreign travellers. The real task of the historian lies in weeding out fiction from truth through the elimination of mere exaggeration and the assessment of well-poised reality.

The view that except for mere political contacts Kerala was already culturally and linguistically separate from the east coast even in the days of Tolkāppiyam would not hold water, in view of the definition of Tamilakam given by the Introduction to Tolkāppiyam (supposed to have been written by Parambaranār, a contemporary of the writer of Tolkāppiyam): the country where Tamiḻ is spoken is bounded on the north by the Venkaṭa hills of North Arcot district, by Kumari on the south, and by the two oceans on either side. Nothing can be more

convincing than this definition of a homogeneous tract comprising all parts of the Madras Presidency except the Telugu and Kannaḍa areas. Tolkāppiyam indeed speaks of "the twelve tracts comprising the cendamiḻ country" ("cendamiḻ cērnda paṉṉirunilam"). Commentarians like Iḷambūraṇar, who lived centuries after the author of Tolkāppiyam attempted to make out a distinction between *cendamiḻ nāḍu* and *Koḍundamiḻ nāḍu*,—which is not envisaged by Tolkāppiyam at all. I have discussed the point elsewhere in detail, and shown how commentarians of a later day imported into the period of Tolkāppiyam a degree of cultural and linguistic separation which was never contemplated by Tolkāppiyam itself. While it might be true to say that about the tenth century (the period of the first among the commentarians) the cultural separation of Kerala was indeed well on its way, and that the distinction between cendamiḻ nādu and Koḍundamiḻ nādu had fairly well established itself, this was hardly true of the period of Tolkappiyaṉar who does not even advert to the term Koḍuntamiḻ. In the face of these facts, it is idle to build up the speculative theory that a tag ascribed by the fourteenth-century Mailainādar (a commentarian of Naṉṉūl) to Agastya (who is fabled to have been the preceptor of the author of Tolkāppiyam), contains a reference to the tracts comprising Koḍundamiḻnāḍu.

If in the period of Tolkāppiyam Tamiḻakam was one and indivisible, why and how did the cultural and linguistic separation between the east and the west coasts arise? My suggestion is that socio-political factors combined with the extraordinary influence of the Aryan colonists on the social life of the west coast should have brought about the cleavage at a

certain stage in the post-Tolkāppiyam period. The old traditions were more or less preserved on the east coast, while the new social set-up created by the peculiar Aryan influence on the west coast (cf. the anācāras of the Aryan Nambūdiris) led to an abrupt break with the old traditions in this part of Tamiḷakam. In the meantime, the evolution of language was going on, the colloquials were asserting themselves on either side of the Ghats; but while the restraining hand of tradition prevented a landslide on the east coast, the absence of this tradition on the west led to unchecked colloquial disintegration. The influence of Aryan languages (particularly OIA) was also making itself felt on the west coast through the popularisation of maṇipravāḷa. This form of writing was there on the east coast too; here again, while the east coast kept maṇipravāḷa outside the region of ceyyuḷ (literature), the west coast gave recognition to it as an essential part of literature. And so, new forms of literature cropped up on the west coast, and the native elements of the language used here were fundamentally those of the colloquials of the west coast. The old tradition also continued here and there in what was known as pāṭṭu which employed both traditionary forms and colloquial developments, besides a few adaptations from Aryan (āriyaccidaivu). There was indeed a great deal of agreement between the colloquials of the west coast and the colloquials of the east coast, as reflected in the inscriptions of the fifth to the tenth centuries, and then came the parting of the ways: the west coast colloquials disintegrated further before they received recognition in literature, while the arresting hand of tradition prevented the colloquials from swamping literature on the east coast. Those who maintain that Kerala did not form the homeland of the Cēra dynasty put

forward the view that the west coast was but an insignificant adjunct of the Cēra empire and that the people of this part were little better than mountaineers and savages during the period of the Cēra hegemony. I leave aside the question of the homeland of the Cēras, on which I do not feel competent to pronounce an opinion; but evidence like the following is conclusive on the point that the people of the west coast were not "savages": Asoka's reference to Keralaputra in his Girnar inscription; Pliny's mention of Muziris as "pirate-infested", of Cælobothras and of centres of trade in "Cottonara" (Kuṭṭanāḍu); the references in the Periplus to Damirica (Tamiḻagam), to Naura and Tyndis (Toṇḍi of the classics) as towns in the land of Cerobothra, to Muziris itself as a port at the mouth of a river, and to the port Bacara (suspected to be Vaikkara) from where the products of Cottonara were exported; and Ptolemy's mention of Limirica (Tamiḻagam), Tindis of the pepper country, Muziris with the false-mouthed river near it, Koreowra (the seat of Kerabothras) between Muziris and Bakare. The testimony of the travellers agrees with the descriptions in the classics themselves: "the land ruled by the Cēra extends from the sea on the east to the sea on the west"; "Muciṟi, the port where the yavanas exchange their gold for pepper (brought to them) on the foam-filled waters of the Periyāṟu"; "where bashful damsels with rotund arms, shining hair and glittering jewels bathe in the cool waters of the Periyāṟu, and worship images made of earth"; "Periyaṟu which flows perennially even when the land around suffers from drought"; "the Cēra king who with his mighty army cleared the western ocean of pirates' boats, and established full domain over the seas"; "bags of paddy exchanged here for basketfuls of fish...,.heaps of pepper

lie scattered about the shore; the gold brought by ships is carried on small boats to the land....the produce of the hills and of the sea is distributed among his subjects by Kuṭṭuvaṉ wearing the gold garland and living near the roaring sea"; "the cool wine brought by Yavaṉas and quaffed by damsels from gold cups"; "Toṇḍi, bounded on the east by mountains, with its moon-lit streets and stately palms bending with bunches of coconut fruits."

Here indeed are no uncultured barbarians ruled over, or held in check, by representatives of foreign rulers!

No! the Cera kings, whether they had their capital in the east or in the west, were no strangers to the west coast, they regarded the west coast as their own, and lived and moved and had their being among them. Warriors from among them they led to battle; bards from among them they loaded with presents. One of the earliest known among these rulers ruled over a territory extending from sea to sea, and he was so powerful as to get the appellation Vāṉavarambaṉ. Another is said to have distinguished himself by defeating the Yavanas, tying their hands behind their backs and pouring boiling ghee over their heads. A third one was noted alike for his martial prowess and religious fervour. A distinguished career of a ruler and warrior was crowned with asceticsm. Yet another displayed his infinite capacity for clemency to his enemies. Then there was the great Ceṅguṭṭuvaṉ himself, the Ceṅguṭṭuvaṉ of Cilappadigāram, the lord of oceans and of lands, the patron of arts, the consecrator of the Kaṇṇaki temple, the hero of many an ancient legend and song. The rulers of those days "embodied" the "soul" of the subjects:

Nellum uyiraṇḍē, nīrum uyiraṇḍē, Maṉṉaṉ uyirttē ulagam.

"Neither paddy nor water is the mainstay of man; but the life-principle of man is the king himself".

Both the arts of war and of peace were assiduously cultivated. Wars were so common that a poet speaks of them as "nothing unusual" "the routine of the life of rulers". The motives actuating many of them do not appear to be commendable, at least from the point of view of international amity. Lust for conquest and a hankering after fame very often formed the motive. One ruler seems to have attacked his neighbour for securing his daughter in marriage. Cruelties were often perpetrated by the victor. Towns were razed or put to flames, the jewels of the enemy's diadem were used for the anklets of the victor, teeth were plucked out and arranged in rows as trophies on the gates of the victor's palace. One ruler cut off the hair of women and twisted them into ropes with which he tied up his elephants. Another is said to have boiled the limbs of his enemies in their own blood. Yet another caused children to be trampled to death by elephants.

Yet there were the *laws* of war too. The invader gave timely warning to certain classes of men and animals whom they wished to spare: "cows, Brahmins sharing the qualities of cows, those that are sick, women, and those who have not begotten dear sons who would make offerings to the *manes*. All ye! seek protection! we are now about to shoot our deadly arrows!"

"Āvụm ā̲ṉiyaṛpārppaṉamākkaḷum
Peṇḍirum piṇiyuḍaiyīrum pēṇi
Tteṉpulavāḷnarkkarungaḍaniṛukkum
Poṉpōl pudalvarppeṛāadīrum
Emmambu kaḍiviḍudum nummaraṇ cērmmiṉ."

Heroism on the battlefield was a stepping-stone to Vīrasvarga, and the dead heroes were commemorated by hero-stones or Vīrakkal at the place of death. Nothing was more disgraceful than cowardice on the battlefield. There is the story of the Cēra king who, having accidentally received a wound on his back, considered it to be so deep an ignominy as to starve himself to death ("vaḍakkirundaṉaṉ"), the process being the courting of death through starvation after walking northwards. "Cāvēṟu" (the practice of fighting the king's enemies till death, mentioned in the eleventh-century Tamil inscriptions and so well-known in the history of Kerala of a later time), was perhaps common. Even women were noted for their courage, though regular Amazons who fought in the battlefield are not heard of. Here's a hero's mother: "While she carried him in her womb, she never quailed before the mad elephant, moved never an inch when a serpent hissed past her shoulder, and never budged at the terrific thunderpeal".

"The woman brings forth the hero; the father trains him up; the smith makes for him the javelin; the ruler directs him along the right path; and the hero himself wins immortal glory."

"Hearing the war-drum beat, her blood was on fire, she pulled the child from her breast, armed him with a javelin, showed him the hero-stone of her dead husband, and asked him to march to the field of onslaught."

"The joy that the old dame, with hair whiter than the bill of the fish-pecking dove, felt on hearing of her son's heroism on the battlefield, was greater than the joy felt by her in giving birth to him."

"Mīṉ uṉ kokkiṉ tūviyaṉṉa
Vālnaraikkūndal muḍiyōḷ ciṟuvaṉ

Kaḻirerindu paṭṭaṉaṉ eṉṉum uvagai
Iṉḏa ñāṉḏiṉum peridē."

"The old matron, shrivelled double with age, hearing many say that her son had played the coward by fleeing from the battlefield, took up a sword with the vow that if the report were true, she would cut off the breasts that suckled him; she then ran to the field of battle, and found her son's corpse cut to pieces like the body of a true hero, and she was overwhelmed by a joy deeper far than that felt by her when she brought him forth".

"She indeed is worthy of the heroic clan to which she belongs. The other day she lost her only brother on the battlefield. It was but the previous day that her husband attained the Valhalla of heroes. Today, hearing the beat of the war-drum, she dressed up her only son in spotless white, gave him the javelin, bathed his fluttering hair in oil, and hurried him to the battlefield. So long as we have such women among us, we shall be unafraid!"

"Unable to bear the grief of separation caused by her husband's death on the battlefield, she reached her lord through courting death herself ("taṉṉuyir koṇḍu avaṉuyir tēḍiṉaḷē").

"She placed on her breast the husband's head severed on the battlefield, and wept herself to death."

There is a touching poem (in Puṟ.) describing a king's wife jumping into her husband's funeral pyre, after warding off those who tried to dissuade her, with the words that her lord's pyre was as cool as a lotus-pond to her.

Women had their tender or feminine side too. An entire class of works deals with love, marriage and their vicissitudes.

A somewhat complicated grammar of love has been worked out by Tolkāppiyam and later treatises. Behind the conventionality and standardization of the stores of love and marriage of these ancient peoples, with kiḷavaṉ, kiḷavi, pāṇaṉ, tōḻi, naṯṯāy and cevilittāy, there is a core of unmistakeable naturalness. The most ancient type of marriage seems to have been the kaḷavu or "secret union" type, where the bride chose her own husband without consulting her parents. The other type known as kaṟpu was of later origin, and a rule of Tolkāppiyam (in the Kaṟpiyal chapter) explains that "rules and rituals were made for marriage by aiyars ("Aryans") when falsehood and deceit appeared" ("poyyum vaḷuvum tōṉḏiyapiṉṉar aiyar yāttaṉar karaṇam eṉba"). The original kaḷavu type was special to the mountainous regions (Kuṟiñji) and the god vēlaṉ of these tracts was the patron of this type of union. As the above citation from Tolkāppiyam implies, there was at first nothing wrong or immoral in a girl choosing her own husband and consummating it. That this type of "secret union" fell within the four corners of aṟam (or Dharma) is illustrated by a fine pen-picture in Kalittogai, that storehouse of stories of social life in ancient Tamiḻagam. A set of parivrājaka Brahmins, asked by a grief-stricken matron whether they had seen on their wanderings a young man and a maiden (her own daughter who had run away with the man of her choice) billing and cooing like lover and sweetheart, consoled the woman thus: 'Of what use is the sandalwood to the hill where it grows? or sea-pearls to the ocean bed? or harp's music to its strings? Even so, your daughter who has come of age can no longer be yours. Comfort yourself! Your daughter has chosen her lord and followed him. This is Dharma, and your efforts to thwart its course are in vain!'

Love and marriage were regarded as Heaven-made: "My mother and yours are mutual strangers, nor does my father know yours. How then did this attachment arise, unless God has ordained it?"

"Sporting on a floating plantain-stem, the attractive youth drifted down the river, his eyes rivetted on the maiden standing on the shore. Unable to withstand the love-gleam in his eyes, she walked down the stream away from her mother and companions, and thus the love-pact was sealed."

"When her lover left her, her eyes were red with weeping, and the mother asked her for the reason why, she slyly explained that the sea-waves had dashed her doll-house on the sand."

"A youth suddenly came up to the house and asked for a cup of water to slake his thirst. When at the mother's bidding the daughter handed to him the water-cup, he cast a love-glance at her and gripped her by the hand. She thereupon set up a cry of fear, but when the mother rushed up to her in alarm, she explained that she merely called out for help when she found the stranger about to swoon."

Even Brahmins got involved in this "secret union" business. "An ugly, misshapen Brahmin made overtures to a damsel who had given away her heart to another. One night, the Brahmin appeared before her like a ghost, his deformed body covered all over with a white cloth. She then set up the shout 'ghost' 'ghost', and the villagers came and beat the Brahmin black and blue."

When the lover was baulked of his desire, he would declare his resolve to die after going through what was called maḍalēṟudal or riding on a horse made of palmyra stalks and

leaves, through the village streets wearing a garland of calatropis flowers and cat-bones, gazing at a picture of his beloved held in his hand and calling upon the elders to witness the tragedy of which he would soon be a victim. Very often, the damsel or the elders would relent and accede to his wish, but in rare instances the hard-hearted damsel drove the frenzied lover to his inevitable doom.

Just as there were hopes and fears in the life of the lover and the sweetheart, there were crests and troughs in the happiness of the married pair too. One of the common causes of matrimonial quarrels was the separation of the husband for the collection of the wherewithal to live. When husbands went out into the wide world in search of porul, wives sulked and pined away at home in anguish. The agony of pirivu ("separation") and the joy of reunion form the themes of quite a number of poems.

"The beauty of the dancing peacock", says a husband to his wife "reminded me of you; the full-blown jasmine recalled your forehead to me, and through the eyes of the gentle deer I could visualize your peeping innocent eyes; and so I have come back to your side swifter than the wind."

The "other woman" is often a cause of trouble. The "other man", it may be observed here, never came into the matrimonial triangle. The "other woman" was often a "vampire" of the parattaiyar or prostitute class. Here is a woman of this type threatening the wife with the seduction of her husband: "I shall attract him with jasmine-buds on my tuft; I shall sport with him on the waters of the stream. Try as you might, you cannot prevent him coming to me."

"Let us guard your husband", says a toḷi ("woman-companion") to the wife, "from the attentions of this woman with the scented hair, long arms, rounded limbs and pearl-like teeth."

"Your breast", observes the wife to the faithless husband, "is daubed with sandal paste, your garland is one of faded flowers. Keep off from me, your touch is pollution."

Tamiḷagam was (according to the classification of Tolkāppiyam) divided into five tiṇais, each having its own distinctive characteristics. Kuriñji was the tract of hills, the people were kuṛavar, the god here was vēlaṉ or murugaṉ, and love was of the "secret union" type. Mullai was the forest tract and the pasture land, its people were iḍaiyar or herdsmen, and lovers were models of patience. Marudam, the cultivated tract, had Indira as its god, and love among the cultivators was marked by ūḍal or sulks and quarrels. Neydal was the sea-board, its god was varuṇaṉ, its people paradavar or sailors, and lovers there fretted and fumed. Pālai was the barren country, its people were the wild maṛavars, its goddess koṭṭavai, and love there was marked by pirivu or separation.

This division does not mark off successive stages of civilisation but only different types of life and professions in Tamiḷagam. Although kuriñji may have predominated on the west coast of Malainādu (with its preponderance of malaiyāḷar), the other types may also have existed side by side in certain areas.

I do not think it right that all people of Tamiḷagam (during the period of Tolkāppiyam) were simple and unsophisticated, looking out on the world with the children's sense of wonder. Different degrees of culture existed, from the refined to

the primitive. Already Tolkāppiyam speaks of the four castes: andaṇar, aracar, vaicigar and vēḷāṇmakkaḷ "the Brahmins, the rulers, the vaiśyas and the tillers." Aryan influence should certainly have made itself felt by this time, and this is attested alike by the outlook and word-borrowings of Tolkāppiyam. One cannot gainsay nevertheless the existence of social strata for which no counter-parts could be found in the Aryan country. The pictures drawn by Tolkāppiyam do justice to the actual condition of the country at the time. To disentangle the indigenous Dravidic strands is certainly not easy, but there are sufficient materials to justify the existence of these native elements. This is indeed a big problem, and I do not feel competent or able to tackle it, but even a cursory glance at the old texts reveals a multiplicity of professions like the following, many of which are met with today on both sides of the Ghats in an indigenous state: iḍaiyaṉ, kuṛavaṉ, kūttaṉ, pāṇaṉ, kollaṉ, taccaṉ, vēlaṉ, kuṛuppu, paradavaṉ, veḷḷāḷaṉ, vēḍaṉ, vēṭṭuvaṉ. Their customs and practices may indeed have undergone Aryan influence in parts, but the core was perhaps Dravidian. It is surprising how some of these ancient professions continue to exist even today. There is a theme in Kuṛundogai, which may well form the subject-matter of any modern poem of the east or of the west coast. A kuṛatti sings songs for warding off an evil spirit that had taken possession of a maiden. Not knowing that the "evil spirit" in the particular case was only a neighbouring mountain chief who had captured the maiden's heart, the kuṛatti was exorcising through her songs the supernatural spirits of the neighbouring mountains, and in the course of her songs dwelt upon the regions belonging to the mountain-chief. The woman-companion of the maiden, who knew of the secret of the love-lorn condition of

the maiden, let out the reason for the maiden's pallor by asking the kuṟatti to sing again the song describing the regions of the mountain-chief :

> "Agavaṉ magaḷē agavaṉ magaḷē
> Maṉavukkōppaṉṉa taṉṉeḏungūndal
> Agavaṉ magaḷē pāḏuga pāṭṭē
> Iṉṉum pāḏuga pāṭṭē avar
> Naṉṉeḏuṅguṉḏam pāḏiya pāṭṭē."

There are descriptions of veṟiyāṭṭam in which the priest of the mountain-country is inspired by the patron-god Muṟuga and enabled to make predictions. Similarly, dances, sacrifices and orgies are described in the old texts, which remind us of practices still met with in nooks and corners of the west coast. I do not know how far cākkyārkūttu and the national festival of Keraḷa viz. ōṇam, may have suffered Aryan influence, but ōṇam is described in Maduraikāñji of Pattuppāṭṭu as a festival held in honour of Māyōṉ ("māyōṉ mēya ōṇanaṉṉāḷ), and cākkyārkūttu is adverted to in Cilappadigāram.

The value attached to learning and to royal patronage of poets testifies to the high degree of culture of those days. Rulers displayed a great deal of rivalry in the performance of what was regarded as one of the primary responsibilities of a king, viz. patronage of learning. Some of the rulers themselves appear to have been poets or redactors of poems. They had bards permanently residing in their courts, and loaded learned men with rewards. One ruler laments that if he proved a coward on the battlefield, he would have the unforgettable disgrace of not being celebrated in song by his court-poet Māngudimarudaṉār. When a poet by mistake fell asleep on a

couch intended for the royal drum, the ruler came near and fanned him. Another ruler felt such reverence for a poet that he offered his throne to him as a reward.

The wandering bards, the pāṇar and viṟaliyar, were welcomed and fed by the kings. One minstrel complains that his life in the king's palace was one continuous round of feasts, that the sumptuous food had blunted the edges of his teeth and that he was retiring from the palace for a time to rest his jaw-bones.

Some of the poems indeed are eulogistic, and may have been literary exercises, but there are many bearing the impress of sincerity and truth. All poems are marked by terseness of diction and concreteness of imagery. The setting, the characters, the situations, the illustrations and the comparisons are mostly indigenous. No dead weight of foreign tradition here strangles or stifles the native music, although in later stages the earlier naturalness may have been replaced by a certain element of the artificial. The highest flights of philosophic thought exist side by side with the simplest naivete.

It is the sphere of religion that perhaps offers the maximum difficulties to the student's attempts to envisage the difference between Aryan and Dravidian. Already the interpenetration of ideas is apparent, and these are not merely superimposed one upon another like the leaves of an onion. The peoples of Tamiḷagam may have had a distinctive outlook of their own, but it is so difficult to isolate it today, as Āryan gods and beliefs had already become inextricably intertwined with indigenous deities and religious ideas.

Śiva is "mukkaṇ celvaṉ", the god with three eyes, "kaṟaimiḍaṯṯaṇṇal", he with the dark spot on the throat,

"nīṇimircaḍaiyaṉ", he with long locks of matted hair. The burning of Tripura, and the dance of Siva are very often associated with him. Viṣṇu appears as "tirumāl" resting on the thousand-hooded Ādiśēṣa, enjoying yōganidra along with Lakṣmi on his breast, the pancāyudha in his hands and tuḷasī-mālā on his neck. Other Aryan gods mentioned (though not so frequently as the above) are Indra, Varuṇa, Candra, Āditya. Kṛṣṇa-legends and Purāṇic stories also find frequent mention.

Vēlaṉ perhaps represents an indigenous deity which developed into the Subrahmaṇya of a later day as part of the Hindu pantheon. Māyōṉ became merged in the Aryan Viṣṇu, Cēyōṉ in Siva, and Koṭṭavai in Bhagavati or Durgā. The worship of ancestors, the offering of oblations to the manes, was perhaps a superimposition on the indigenous pratice of erecting hero-stones (naḍukkal). Tolkāppiyam mentions andaṇar or Brahmins as the first caste, and reverence for Brahmins and cows is already reflected in the texts. The Brahmin is ubiquitous in some of the classics. The anthology of Puṟanaṉūṟu contains about fifteen references to Brahmins. "Andiyandaṇar arungaḍaṉiṟukkum muttīviḷakku", the sacrificial fire in which the Brahmin performs his sacred hōma at dusk, "nāṉmaṟaiyandaṇar", the Brahmins learned in four Vedas, "aṟamburiyandaṇar", the Brahmins who know Dharma, are samples of these references. Brahmins performed sacrifices, made offerings to departed souls, acted as ministers and advisers to Kings, mediated between disputants, and even got involved in clandestine love. They should thus already have formed an integral part of Tamiḻagam including Keraḷa.

This raises the problen of the anācāras of the west coast Nambūdiris. When did they arise? Brahmins moved

about in Tamiḻagam as an integral part of society on either side of the Ghats and there is no reference to any distinction between Brahmins on this side and those on the other side. Inferences *ex silentio* may be unwarranted ; just as the mother-right, so deep-rooted on the west coast, is itself not mentioned in the classics, the anācāras may have been left unmentioned, but the problem is not finalised this way.

Let me, before concluding, stress some of those old features for which there are counterparts in the life of Kerala. These are preservations, whose history dates back to the period of the classics. These emphasize the original unity of Tamiḻagam.

1) The extraordinary freedom enjoyed by women, particularly the freedom for every damsel to choose her own husband through Kaḷavoḻukkam or "secret union", to which the stigma associated with the Aryan gāndharvavivāha was not attached.

2) The martial spirit of rulers and their subjects, mirrored in the heroism of later Kerala kings and in the Cāvēṟu practice of fighting for one's cause "even unto death."

3) Deities like māyōṉ, cēyōṉ, vēlaṉ and Koṟṟavai, many of which have counterparts in the nooks and corners of present-day Keraḷa.

4) Religious practices like worship of trees, blood-sacrifices and vaḷipāḍu.

5) Customs like ōṇakkaḷi and ōnattallu, āṇḍippāṭṭu in praise of Vēlaṉ, Kuṟattippāṭṭu for the driving away of evil spirits, vēlakkaḷi, veṟiyāṭṭam (cf. Veḷiccappāḍus of today), Koṟṟavaippāṭṭu (cf. pāṇa or Bhagavatippāṭṭu of today), worship

of hero-stones still prevalent in the mountainous regions of the west coast, cākyārkūttu (probably Aryan-influenced) and the old tuṇaṅgaikkūttu corresponding to the Kaikoṭṭikkaḷi of today.

I have just touched on a few of these old practices and preservations, to indicate how the classics of old are as much the heritage of the west coast as that of what is now known as the Tamil country, and how a superfluity of material awaits comparative study and interpretation at the hands of the Kerala antiquarian. Such a reconstruction of the early history of Kērala is essential to a proper knowledge of the roots of our culture. And may I say that there is also a special appropriateness and an added value in this task being undertaken by Kerala scholars in as much as the cēra dynasty (alone among the three ancient South Indian dynasties) lives on today represented by its illustrious scion, the benign ruler of our State.