

## REVIEWS:--

### ERANĀKUḶAM KṢĒTRAMĀHĀTMYAM.\*

(By Dr. K. GODA VARMA, M. A., Ph. D.)

The book *Ēraṇākuḷam Kṣētramahātmyam*, as its title itself suggests, deals with the divine glories clinging about the Temple at *Ēraṇākuḷam*. It consists of four parts of which the first two give us the genesis of the temple—the arrival of *Nāgarṣi* with a *Śivaliṅga*, the sticking of the *Liṅga* into the soil in an immovable manner, the spontaneous springing up of an *Ardhanārīsvara* almost in the same place and the subsequent vision of three more *Śivaliṅgas* vouchsafed to *Vilwamaṅgalattu Svāmiyār*, the great saint whose name has been inseparably associated with the *Śrī Padmanābha* Temple. The third part deals with the miracles wrought by the great Lord *Śrī Paramēśvara* (*Ēraṇākuḷattappan*) by way of salvation to devout worshippers. The work is, appropriately enough, closed with a few hymns in praise of the Deity.

The belief has gained ground that the word *Ēraṇākuḷam* is derived from *Ṛṣināgakuḷam*, the pond of *Ṛṣināga*. This derivation may defy the rules of phonology. But it may be argued that place-names, in some cases, are subject to such vagaries and admit of peculiar developments.

The book is of significance in a variety of ways. The stories related therein read like episodes found in the great epic *Mahābhārata* or like the splendid visions recorded in the Christian scripture. The sudden conversion of the young *Dēvala* into a hooded serpent of fearful mien by a single curse from his preceptor, the vision of angelic figures fluttering over *Nāgarṣi* in the midst of divine effulgence, the disappearance of *Nāgarṣi* into the pond with floating glories above the waters and the simultaneous blaze of the houses of the unbelievers in

(\*Copies can be had of Mr. T. Kunju Menon, Variam Road, Ernakulam—  
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the still moon-light rousing to feverish activity, bird, man and beast from their slumber—these are some of the bright passages in the book.

To the geologist or historian, pure and simple, the geographical features of Cērttara (the slimy sand-banks left by the sea) and the social organisation prevalent at that period, afford ample field for thought and inquiry, and may occasionally help to corroborate a well-nigh established theory. The authenticity of these legends—the mixture of truth and romantic exaggeration which is often found in such accounts need not be discussed here. Suffice it to say that the three pilgrims returning from Benares and the beneficent Kaimaḷ of the place who were instrumental in erecting the stately Temple must have been actual historical figures. The Karta family of Cērānallūr seem to be descendants (adopted or otherwise) of the Kaimaḷ, and even to this day the inauguration of the Temple is commemorated by the Cērānallūr Karta on Makāram first of every year. The houses of the two Mūttatus at Eraṇākuḷam and the Nayar house Tat-tampalḷi are strictly vestiges of the Benares pilgrims.

The date of the work cannot be fixed for certain. Brah-māṇḍapurāṇa which relates the origin of Tiṟuvanantapuram (Anantaśayana), Varkkala, (Janārdanapura) Padmanābhapuram (Śīvardhanapura) Tṟṣṣivapēṟar (Śivapura), etc., does not mention the story of Nāgaṟṣi. The sentence “Annu Makāram onnām tiyatiyum sankramattil taṟṟiya veḷutta vāvum makaracco-vvayum ākaṟṟāl pūja tuṟaṇṇikkukayum.....” probably may give us some remote clues. “Atukontu kiḷakkē naṟayaṟaccu patiṇṇārē naṟa tuṟannatiṇṇu śēaṣmē ṇān dēvarē pūjikkayuḷḷu ennu” and similar usages show that the work might be a translation into Malayāḷam from a Sanskrit original. It must be said that the prose style of this Malayāḷam work does not help us much in determining its date. “nōkkiyāre”, “pōyāre,” etc., are comparatively old usages in literature; but a word like “bākki” (of Arabic origin cf. Arabic bāqī) has not found a place in Eḷuttaccan or even in Kuṇcan Nampyār who so enriches his vocabulary by free borrowings. Such loan words seem to have gained currency in literature only about M. E. 1000.

Mr. T. K. Krishna Menon has, with his characteristic love of literary exploration, done a valuable service to Cochinites in particular and to the people of Kerala in general by rescuing from oblivion a work of singular value. In his excellent introduction he also refers to the authenticity of the stories and to the historical value which they can possibly afford through the pictures of society in that slimy sea-given land of Cērttara. Mr. Menon deserves special praise in having placed within easy reach this book which acts as a sure inspirer to the pious, as it so beautifully records the actual experiences of devotees who have recovered from life's cruel hardships through divine grace.

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