

THE ROLE OF KANNAKI VAZAKKURAI IN UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE OF SRI LANKAN TAMILS

E.Cumaran

Abstract

The epic Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai and its different versions, Kōvalanār Katai and Cilampu Kūral, are believed to be composed or compiled during the period of Kingdom of Jaffna. These are popular in Batticaloa, Jaffna and Mullaitivu respectively. Though these three versions may be considered as three different works, there are similarities in their narration, division of chapters and diction; so that it is difficult to distinguish them from one another. The similarities among these three works led the scholars to opine that there ought to be a common source as a pioneer to these versions. This pioneer work may have been adapted by the copyist to suit their respective claims and needs, along with their necessity and creative ability. Though the story of Cilappatikāram is the main theme of this epic, it preserves uniqueness profoundly in its structure, style and the narration of story. Certain portions of the story of this epic are the sole imagination of Sri Lankan author whose name is even now in dark. Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai is in abundance in recording the cultural patterns of Sri Lankan Tamils such as art, religion, educational and literary heritage, believes, customs and habits. These valuable facts could not be derived from other sources. As this epic has close association with folk literature, the life style of folks is also brought out obviously. In short Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai and its difference versions are the treasure trove who delves deep into the study of Sri Lankan Tamil culture. This paper tries to bring out such cultural aspects in descriptive manner as related in Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai.

Key words: *Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai, Tamil Culture, Tamil epic*

1. INTRODUCTION

Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai one of the epical work composed during the period of Kings of Jaffna has two more different versions, Kōvalanār Katai and Cilampu Kūral which are popular in Jaffna and Mullaitivu respectively. Though the story of Cilappatikāram is the main theme of this epic, it preserves uniqueness profoundly in its structure, style and the narration of story. By perusing Kaṇṇaki Vazhakkurai and its versions they are amply rich in folk literary

aspects in their narration, diction, and composition. The story of these three works ought to have been very familiar with the common folks in the form of folklore, before it was compiled as an original literary work. A. Vellupillai opines thus a narration popular among the common folks may have attracted the attention of the Kings of Jaffna who were keen in collecting, preserving and maintaining Tamil literary works (1989:60). Hence, there may be possibilities that this original work of these versions may have been composed or compiled by a King of

Senior Lecturer, Department of Tamil, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. cumaran2004@yahoo.com