

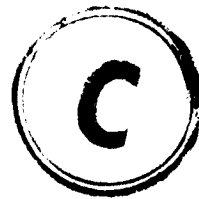
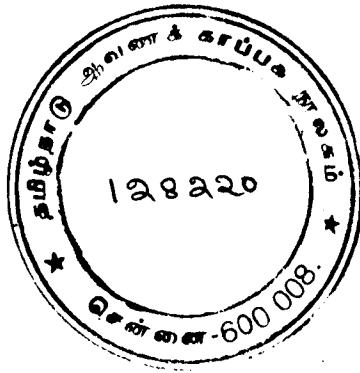
CILAPPATIKARAM

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FOREWORD

Cilappatikaram (the Story of Anklet) popularly known as *Cilampu* (Anklet) is not only one of the five great epics in Tamil literature but also the first epic in Tamil and it has been very popular among Tamil people for centuries with different versions enacted on the stage in the crude form of folk drama. Though there are a number of versions the central theme centers around the heroine *Kannaki*. *Kannaki* who is well known for her unblemished chastity spotless character and faithfulness, gracious silence and shyness is depicted as an embodiment of virtues of an ideal Tamil womanhood in *Cilappatikaram*. The influence of *Cilappatikaram* among the Tamils is such that mere pronouncement of the name *Kannaki* would bring into the minds of Tamils an exalted feeling of chastity, emotional appreciation of faithfulness, the divine qualities of womanhood, the harmonious blending of shyness and softness on the one hand and courage and conviction on the other hand and above all the exalted place of woman enjoyed by them in the early Tamil Society.

Cilappatikaram was written in the second century A.D. and it really reflects the socio-cultural and religious trends of the times. It deals with the story of *Kovalan* and *Kannaki* of merchant families, and it has to be mentioned that while both the western and oriental epics of those days dealt with the stories of kings and queens, gods and goddesses it was left to *Ilango* the author of this great epic to choose the story of a common man and to make a brilliant epic out of it and it is unique in this respect.

Prof. T.P.Meenakshisundaram has dealt with this aspect of the epic in detail and has given the appellation '*Makkal Kappiyam*', 'Epic of Common Man'.

It is true that it is the story of a common man. But it is also true that primarily it is the story of a housewife, the story

of *Kannaki*. It is very often said by various critics that there is no hero except for the heroine. *Kannaki* stands tall among various characters of the epic and the epic itself stands alone not only in the matter of its techniques but also in the theme and the story.

It is a story of a woman of great qualities, who is forsaken by her husband who chooses to live with *Matavi* whose enchanting beauty and artistic excellence make him almost her slave. Finally he returns to his wife, goes to *Maturai* with her to sell her anklet and by mistake he is executed by the *Pantiya* king. *Kannaki* realising the folly of the king agitates and in her anger and anguish becomes rebellious, the silent and the shy woman changes into thunderous, the smiling lady into cyclonic. She goes to the king and proves that her husband is innocent and this results in the instant death of the king and the queen and the city goes up in flames and finally *Kannaki* reaches the heavenly abode.

It is not accidental that *Ilango* a young Jain monk has chosen the story of a woman and it is in tune with the long tradition of this part of the country that women were highly respected. It was the order of the day. The Sangam days bear testimony to this and it is very gratifying to note that there were a number of poetesses who were held in high esteem by various kings and chieftains. They were treated well not only as poetesses but as 'friends, philosophers and guides' also. It is well known that *Avvai* of Sangam Age enjoyed great respect and was revered by kings and people. It is remarkable that a young Jain monk, has come forward to compose a brilliant epic out of a story of a woman and it is also equally astonishing that a prince-turned poet has chosen the story of a housewife as the theme of his immortal work while other poets of common origin sang songs eulogizing kings and chieftains among other things.

As has already been said this is one of the most fascinating epics which brilliantly depicts the life of a woman, a woman of pristine purity and faithfulness, a woman of great patience and gracious silence and shyness coupled with great conviction and courage. It is true that Indian women are generally shy and silent but when provoked and when there is a danger to their dignity and womanhood they change into the most vociferous and volcanic. A woman of great qualities, chastity and faithfulness is considered holy and she is respected, admired and above all adored even by Gods not to speak of kings and monarchs, intellectuals and illiterates alike. It is this fact that is brought out passionately by the prince poet, *Ilango* who turned to be a Jain monk in this 'Epic of Woman', by the name *Cilappatikaram*.

It is the embodiment of old and cherished tradition enshrined in what the great *Thiruvalluvar* has said:

No god adoring, low she bends before her lord;
Then rising, serves; the rain falls instant at her word!

The Tamil University has recently launched an ambitious project, **Translation Of Tamil Classics Into English** and I am very happy to say that within a short span of time several works have been taken up.

Classics like,

1. *Cilappatikaram*
2. *Manimekalai*
3. *Bharatiyar Songs*
4. *Tirukkovaigar*

have been completed and the following are in progress:

5. *Akananuru*
6. *Purananuru*
7. *Periyapuranam* and
8. *Kalittokai*

I am sure that these translations will be of great use to understand the poetic tradition of Indian Literature in general and Tamil Literature in particular.

12-10-'89,
Thanjavur.

- Dr. S. Agesthalingam,
Vice-Chancellor.

INTRODUCTION

Cilappatikaram composed by Ilanko is a world classic, considered purely as literature. For centuries it was in palmleaf manuscript. In 1892 it was printed in full for the first time by Dr. U.V. Caminata Aiyar. Perhaps its late recognition as a great work worthy to be placed alongside Homer's is due to this fact that the full text was not available before.

The text, as known today, is not fully authentic. The preface, the verses at the end of ten cantos, and even the whole of the third part, that is Vanci, are regarded by some modern critics as interpolations. Hence there is need for a great deal of textual criticism for fixing the text and making it standard.

It has three parts and thirty cantos; the first part having ten cantos, the second thirteen, and the last seven.

The rules of Aristotle and other Western critics do not apply to *Cilappatikaram* since Tamil literature developed, untouched by Western literary influence in those far-off days. In fact, the name 'epic' sits uneasily on this work. It is *Kappiyam* and not drama, though it contains many dramatic elements. Music predominates in this work, and for that reason, it cannot be an opera. It is throughout in verse form, though some portions are not poetic; these unpoetic parts are designated prose.

The geographical features of the land are poetically presented; the flora and fauna of those ancient times are fully delineated. Besides, the way of life of the people of those distant days is vividly portrayed; both the beauties and blemishes. The arts of music and dance are given a detailed treatment. The professions of agriculture, business and administration are realistically described. In all epics, the main themes are love and war, while in this *Kappiyam* the first part describes human values;

to be a complete and faithful translation of the original. It no doubt contains verses and songs also. Danielou condenses certain portions and misinterprets some passages. The most glaring of these misinterpretations occurs in the translation of line 20⁴ of canto 5. This translation has not become popular with the discriminating reader.

The third translation published in 1977 was by *K.N.Subramanyan* who is essentially a creative writer in Tamil. As a translator from Tamil to English, he used devices that are considered good in Tamil style. This does not sound well in English. In readability it falls short of Danielou's translation.

I have ventured into this work of translation, avoiding the pitfalls of the earlier translations. English equivalents, wherever possible, of Tamil technical words are used in the text itself. A few other names are transliterated, and their meanings are given in the notes at the end of the book.

The texts used are by *U.V.Caminata Aiyar*, *Venkatacam Nattar*, and *Kecikan*. A short bibliography of the books consulted, besides other books used as reference works are given at the end of this book.

R. S. Pillai.

Preface

The *kuravas* of the hills, awed by a miraculous event,
Rushed to a holy man in their predicament;
His reverence was a monk *Ilanko* of *Kunavayil* monastery,
And had been a prince of *Kutanatu* family.

"We saw under the cool shade of a *venkai* kino tree 5
With golden flowers, a noble lady of quality
Who had lost one breast; and there did descend
Celestial beings, among whom was her husband;
And with them she soared heavenwards.
This miracle we have seen is beyond words." 10

At this, *Cattan* a Tamil savant, interjecting
'I know how it befell,' narrated the following:
"*Kovalan*, a rich merchant of *Pukar*, the capital city
Of the *Colas* whose king had the floral symbol of *atti*, 15
Took a lovely and talented courtesan as mistress,
And was, after a time, reduced to woeful distress;
Returning to his wife *Kannaki* in a mood dismal,
He decided to use her anklets as wherewithal
To rebuild his fortune at *Maturai*, the *Pantiyan* capital.

Together they trudged their way to the far-off city, 20
Where *Kovalan* met a goldsmith of obvious prosperity;
The anklet that *Kovalan* showed looked like one
Of the queen's that the goldsmith had stolen;
Asking *Kovalan* to wait, he rushed to the king,
Who, in a perturbed state and without thinking, 25
Ordered the execution of the thief, and recovery
Of the anklet; *Kovalan* was killed and the king was guilty.
Kannaki on hearing this, wept and felt orphaned;

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Canto 1 - The Wedding Song

Prayer	Glory be to the Moon, glory be to the Moon! Benign her rays like the sway of our Sovereign, Whose flowery garland spills with pollen.	
	Glory be to the Sun, glory be to the Sun! Who beams as far as the silver-topp'd mountain; So does the mandate of the Lord of <i>Kaviri</i> run.	5
	Glory be to the Rain, glory be to the Rain! Its bounty like our King's reign Makes rich the royal domain.	
Of Pukar City	Glory be to <i>Pukar</i> , glory be to <i>Pukar</i> ! As its fame grows apace on a par With the rise of <i>Cola</i> power.	10
	Be it <i>Potiyil</i> or <i>Imayam</i> or <i>Pukar</i> city, With its ancient families and unique tradition, Each will last for ages with undimmed vitality, Owing to the wise ones who have attained perfection; <i>Pukar</i> is comparable in fame and splendours With the broad and fair land of the <i>Devas</i> and the <i>Nagas</i> .	15
Introducing the heroine, <i>Kannaki</i>	<i>Manaykan</i> of that city was reputed For liberality, spontaneous and unstinted As the rain; and like a golden creeper Divine was his daughter in her twelfth year, Beautiful as the goddess of the red lotus, Perfect as the northern star for virtues, She held dear, and by her own sex adored; The name of <i>Kannaki</i> she adorned.	20 25

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