

Manimekalai

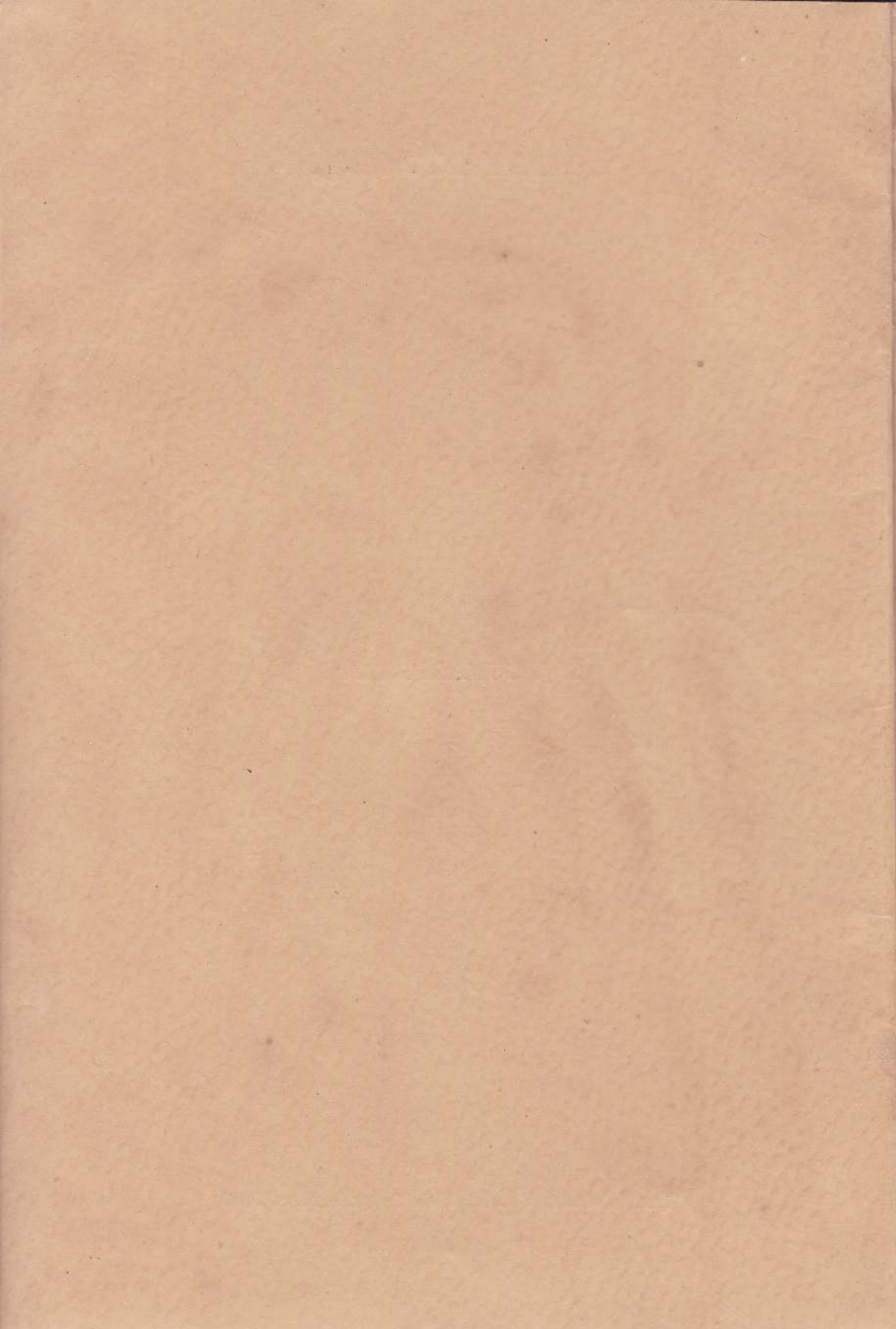
This book
has been gifted to
Evelyn Rutnam Institute, Jaffna
by
Mrs. S.J. Gunasegaram
from the collection
of
her beloved husband
the late S.J. Gunasegaram

S. J. GUNASEGARAM



Reprint of

Tamil Culture, Vol. X, No. 2, April—June, 1963



S.J. Sundararam

Koray

18.7.63

Manimekalai

S. J. GUNASEGARAM

Manimekalai is the heroine of the Buddhist Classic in Tamil entitled '*Manimekalai*' - the only epic of the type in the whole range of Buddhist literature. It is the composition of a Tamil Buddhist merchant known as Sattanar. The consensus of opinion among Tamil scholars is that the work belongs to the second century, the period following the Sangam classics.

The author was a friend of Ilanko (the young Prince), a younger brother of Senguttuvan, the king associated with the dedication of the temple to Pattini, or Kannakai (Kannaki)—the chaste. Ilanko was the illustrious author of *Silappathikaram* (The Epic of the Anklet), and these two Tamil classics have often been referred to as 'Twin Epics'.

C. R. Reddy in his foreword to '*Dravidian India*,' by T. R. Sesha Iyengar, calls Manimekalai a 'supreme pearl of Dravidian poesy'.¹ 'The investigation and enquiry into Tamil literary tradition' says Krishnaswami Iyengar, 'leads to the conclusion that it is a work of classic excellence in Tamil literature and may be regarded as a Sangam work in that sense.'²

The same scholar refers to it as a 'Tamil Treatise on Buddhist Logic'. Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai refers to it as 'this great classic'.³ M. D. Raghavan ('*Times of Ceylon*', 1-5-58), writing on the contribution of

1. '*Dravidian India*,' by Sesha Iyengar, Luzac & Co., London.
2. '*Manimekalai in its Historical Setting*,' by Krishnaswami Iyengar, Preface, p. VII.
3. '*History of Tamil Language and Literature*,' by S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, p. 155.

Tamils to the religious system of the Island (Ceylon) says, "It will always remain a sense of pride to us that the greatest if not the only classical epic of Theravada Buddhism exists in the Tamil language. The poetry of Manimekalai (2nd century A. D) remains one of the finest jewels of Tamil poetry."

In contrast Sinhalese writers of recent times, either because their knowledge of Tamil literature is scanty or because they have failed to note the opinions of scholars who rank it high among the Tamil classics, refer to it merely as a 'poem'. Dr. Malalasekera alludes to the conflict between the Naga kings found in the 'Tamil poem Manimekalai', mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* (6th century).¹

While the *Mahavamsa* places the scene of the battle at Nagadipa,² the earlier chronicle, '*The Dipavamsa*' (4th C.), says, that the battle was fought in Tambapanni,³ ie., the North of Ceylon. The Manimekalai gives the name of the scene as Manipallavam, identified by Rajanayagam Mudaliar as North Ceylon.⁴

Dr. Paranavitane refers to Manimekalai as 'a Tamil poem, a work attributed to the second century of the Christian era', and adds that the goddess Manimekalai after whom the heroine of the work is named seems to have been a patron saint of the sea faring people of the Tamil land who professed the Buddhist faith. The same writer refers to a non-canonical Pali work which "contains a very old legend of South Indian origin. The work states that one of the six stupas had been built by Tamil merchants."⁵

1. '*Vamsattha Pakkasini*', Commentary on the *Mahavamsa*, by Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, Vol. 1. Int. p. LXXVI.

2. *Mahavamsa*, Ch. 1, V, 47.

3. *Dipavamsa*, Ch. ii, V. 3.

4. '*Ancient Jaffna*', p. 26.

5. *C. L. R.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan; 1931.

Dr. Paranavitane quotes *Rajavalia* (which he calls 'a Sinhalese historical work of the (17th C.), where we are told that she would be ^{the} mother of Duttugemunu ('Vihara-Devi' now 'Vihara Maha-Devi'), who had been offered by her father as a sacrifice to appease the sea-gods, ^{she is said to have been} was brought by the goddess Manimekalai across the sea to Magama, where she found her future husband. What Dr. Paranavitane describes as 'a Sinhalese historical work', Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai says, 'is not of any historical value and cannot be relied upon'.¹ Dr. Mendis in his early history of Ceylon has expressed a similar opinion.²

Two facts however, emerge from these references. The tradition accepted in Ceylon that the goddess Manimekalai was the patron saint of early Tamil merchants, points to a very early period in the history of Ceylon during which Tamil Buddhist influence had reached the Island.

The *Dipavamsa* (4th C.) and the *Mahavamsa* (6th C.), the Pali Buddhist Chronicles of Ceylon, refer to the conflict between two Naga Princes of North Ceylon for the ownership of the Island. The quarrel is said to have been settled by Buddha himself. The two references, though there are differences in detail, are found in the *Manimekalai*. It is unlikely that the Tamil author of *Manimekalai* could have had access to the Pali Chronicles of Ceylon composed and preserved in some remote Vihara in the Island. Unless and until an earlier common source for the story could be cited, the *Manimekalai* should be assigned to a date earlier than that of the *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*.

1. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *ibid*, n. p. 144.

2. 'The Early History of Ceylon', Dr. G. C. Mendis, 1954 Edition, p. 25.

The consensus of opinion among students of Tamil literature has been that ^{the} classic *Manimekalai* belongs to the 2nd century A. D., though not a Sangam work. Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai, a fellow worker with K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, (a distinguished historian and South Indian Sankritist who has striven to establish the priority and supremacy of Sanskrit literary influences in the South), has challenged the date attributed to *Manimekalai* and post dates it. He adduces a number of arguments to show that the *Manimekalai* and the connected classic *Silappathikaram* are assignable to the 8th century, but accepts that the former was an earlier composition."¹

As already indicated below, Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai rejects the tradition recorded in the Sinhalese Chronicle *Rajavali*. Although unreliable and comparatively recent, the *Rajavali* records a persistent tradition in Ceylon regarding the introduction of Pattini (Kannaki) worship to Ceylon by Gajabahu I, in the 2nd century A. D. There is clear mention in the *Silappathikaram* that Gajabahu was present at the dedication of the temple to Pattini by Chera Senguttuvan.² That Chera Senguttuvan was an eminent king of the Sangam age is well known.

Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai holds that the most important statement from a historical standpoint that Gajabahu of Ceylon was present at Senguttuvan's court stands singularly uncorroborated. He admits however that *Manimekalai* corroborates the statement in the *Silappathikaram* that it was at Senguttuvan's capital, ^{that} the consecration of Kannaki's temple took place; but doubts that Gajabahu was present at the ceremony because the *Manimekalai* does not mention Gajabahu.

1. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *ibid.* pp. 139 - 155
2. *Culwamsa I*, Int. p. V.

Neither *Manimekalai* nor *Silappathikaram* is a historical work. The poet chooses incidents that are relevant to his thesis. That the author of the *Manimekalai* has failed to corroborate its 'twin epic' about the presence of Gajabahu I of Ceylon at Senguttuvan's Court does not prove Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai's case, although such corroboration would have been helpful. But it has been pointed out that both the works agree that the consecration was at the capital of Chera Senguttuvan who is known to have ruled in the 2nd century A. D.

Again, that Paranar, one of the illustrious poets of the Tamil Sangam age, has failed to mention in his poem on Senguttuvan anything about the installation of Kannaki as deity or about Ilanko being Senguttuvan's brother or about Gajabahu—should not be taken as a serious argument to support the Professor's case. Not all the works of Paranar and of the Sangam age have come down to us. It depends, moreover, what religious views Paranar held for him to consider the dedication of the temple of Kannagi as an important event. Ilanko (which merely means the young Prince) himself might have been too young to have merited notice by Paranar. It is admitted that both *Manimekalai* and Ilanko's works are post Sangam classics.

The Professor's most unconvincing of all arguments from silence is his emphasis on the fact that the *Mahavamsa* has failed to state anything about Gajabahu's attendance at the consecration ceremony, at the Chola capital or of the introduction of Pattini (Kannagi) worship to Ceylon.

Of the *Mahavamsa* it has been pointed out that "not what is said but what is unsaid is its besetting difficulty." One does not expect a monkish chronicler bent on 'the edification of the pious' Buddhists to refer

SAIVITE

to an illustrious king of Anuradhapura introducing a Hindu Cult. It is well known that Gajabahu I, if not a Hindu, was without doubt a king with Hindu leanings. This probably accounts for the scant attention paid to the reign of this king in the pious Buddhist romance.

The fact appears to be that Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai finds support in the statement made by the Prof. Jacobi, is to the effect the logic of *Manimekalai* is more or less a copy of *Nyayapravesa* of Dignaga attributed to the 4th century A. D.

Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai in a note to his appendix in the *History of Tamil language and literature*, p. 189, says :

“ It is well known that the author of the *Manimekalai* is indebted for this section to Dignaga's *Nyayapravesa*..... Professor Jacobi renders it very probable that Dignaga perhaps even Dharmakirti, was known to this classic in Tamil.”

Prof. Vayapuri Pillai seems to have ignored the fact that long ago Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, a recognised authority on the *Manimekalai*, had convincingly rebutted Prof. Jacobi's assumption that the Buddhist logic of *Manimekalai* is derived from that of Dignaga's *Nyayapravesa*. He has stated in clear terms that, ‘We have good reason for regarding *Manimekalai* as a work anterior to Dignaga’.¹

Discussing the “clear cut, succinct statement, found in the *Manimekalai* of the main Buddhist theory of the ‘The four truths’, ‘The twelve Nidanas’, and the means of getting to the correct knowledge, which ultimately would put an end to ‘Being’, Dr. S. Krishnasamy

1. Krishnasamy Iyengar, *ibid*, Int. p. XXVIII.

Iyengar says, "There is nothing that may be regarded as referring to any form of Mahayana Buddhism, particularly the Sunyavada as formulated by Nagarjuna. One way of interpreting this silence would be that Nagarjuna's teaching as such of the Sunyavada had not yet travelled to the Tamil country to be mentioned in connection with the orthodox teaching of Buddhism or to be condemned as orthodox." ¹

Again Iyengar points out that in Chapter XXX of *Manimekalai* ^{He} 'the soul referred seems clearly to be to the individual soul and not to the universal soul'. He adds, 'These points support the view to that which we were led in our study of the previous book, and thus make the work clearly one of a date anterior to Dignaga and not posterior.'²

Dr. S. Krishnasamy Iyengar clinches his argument by reference to the Chola rule at Kanchi. "Kanchi is referred to as under the rule of the Cholas yet, and the person actually mentioned as holding rule at the time was the younger brother of the Chola ruler for the time being. Against this Viceroyalty an invasion was undertaken by the united armies of the Cheras and the Pandyas which left the Chera capital Vanji impelled by earth hunger and nothing else, and attacked the Viceroyalty. The united armies were defeated by the princely viceroy of the Cholas who presented to the elder brother, the monarch, as spoils of war, the umbrellas that he captured on the field of battle. This specific historical incident which is described with all the precision of a historical statement in the work must decide the question along with the other historical matter, to which we have already adverted. No princely viceroy of the Chola was possible in Kanchi after A. D. 300, from which period we have a

1, 2. Ibid. Int. pp. XXVIII - XXIX.

continuous succession of Pallava rulers holding sway in the region. Once the Pallavas had established their position in Kanchi, their neighbours in the west and the north had become others than the Cheras. From comparatively early times, certainly during the 5th century, the immediate neighbours to the west were the Gangas, and little farther to the west by north were the Kadambas, over both of whom the Pallavas claimed suzerainty readily recognized by the other parties. This position is not reflected in the *Manimekalai* or *Silappathikaram*. Whereas that which we find actually and definitely stated is very much more a reflection of what is derivable from purely Sangam literature so called. This general position together with the specific datum of the contemporaneity of the authors to Senguttuvan Chera must have the decisive force. Other grounds leading to a similar conclusion will be found in our other works, 'The Augustan Age of Tamil Literature' (*Ancient India*, chapter xiv), 'The Beginnings of South Indian History', and, 'The Contributions of South India to Indian Culture'. The age of the Sangam must be anterior to that of the Pallavas and the age of the *Manimekalai* and *Silappathikaram*, if not actually referable as the works of the Sangam as such, certainly is referable to the period in the course of the activity of the Sangam".¹

The *Manimekalai* is an exposition of Hinayāna Buddhism. Hinayana as distinct from Mahāyāna, is a Southern school—an earlier school—of Buddhism than Mahāyāna.

The Ceylon tradition that Buddhaghosa, in the 5th century, had to come over to the Island from the Tamil country in South India to write the commentaries on the earlier Pali texts on Hinayāna into pure Magadhī is

1. *Ibid.* Int. pp. XXVIII - XXIX.

an indication that in the 5th century itself Mahāyāna had become dominant in South India. This tendency finds further support in the Introduction of a form of Mahāyānist teaching into Ceylon (the doctrine referred as the Vaituliyān heresy) in the previous century, by the Chola monk Sanghamitta, the friend of Mahāsena king of Anuradhapura.¹

Moreover the reference in *Manimekalai* to the popularity of Buddhism in Javakam indicates that *Manimekalai* had been written long before Mahāyānism became the dominant form of Buddhism under the Sailendra Empire, in islands such as Java and Sumatra.

Sir R. Winstedt attests to the fact that the Buddhist story of *Manimekalai* left by the Tamil merchants, Sumatran folklore had been retold in the Malay Peninsula and written down in modern times.²

Again it has been shown that the earlier Sangam works as well as *Manimekalai* and *Silappathikaram* make no references to the Pallavas who ruled at Kanchi from 325 A.D.³ But all the references in the *Manimekalai* are to the earlier Chola kings such as Nalankilli and Ilankilli. Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai apparently ignores these evidences.

Note

For a full discussion of the question of the date of *Manimekalai*, reference to Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai's 'History of Tamil literature', p. 142, may be made. His arguments to give it a comparatively late date had been met by Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar in his introduction to his '*Manimekalai in its Historical*

1. MHV. CH. XXXVII, V. V. 2-5.

2. 'Malaya - A Cultural History', by Sir Richard Winstedt, p. 139.

3. 'Buddhism and Tamil', *ibid*, p. 200.

Setting, published by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Society, Madras.

The Influence of *Manimekalai* and *Silappathikaram* on Sinhalese Literature :

Reference may be made to Dr. Godakumbura's '*Sinhalese Literature*', pages 279-288, to form some idea of the Tamil literary and religious sources which had inspired Sinhalese literature after the dethronement of Pali as the vehicle of expression of foreign Buddhist monks.

Dr. Godakumbura remarks that 'after the 16th century, when few could read the *Dharma* in its original Pali or even comprehend the compendiums written in Sinhalese', Vanijasuriya wrote the *Devadath Kathaya* in Sinhalese verse.

Commenting on the very great popularity of the story of Pattini in Sinhalese villages, Dr. Godakumbura writes :

"Literature, dealing with Pattini and the origin of the worship, is very large, and most of it has come from Tamil sources. The *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* are the two main classics dealing with the story of Kannaki and Kovalan.....

"It is quite possible that some popular poems existed in Tamil and these and not the classics were the sources of the numerous ballads about the Goddess".

Dr. Godakumbura also tells us that *Vyanthamala* by Tisimahla, 'gives a brief description of the Chola king in the classical style and that the author's description of the dancing of Madavi (the mother of Manimekalai), 'is one of the finest in the whole field of Sinhalese poetry.'

(Pattini—Kannaki—the heroine of *Silappathikaram* was the wife of Kovalan and Madavi was Kovalan's lover. Manimekalai, the heroine of '*Manimekalai*', was the daughter of Madavi by Kovalan)

Dr. Godakumbura then gives a fairly comprehensive list of Sinhalese writings based on the story of *Silappathikaram* and of deities popular among the Tamils—deities such as the God of Kataragama (Murugan), Ganessa, the brother of Murugan, and Vishnu—all attributed to stories from Tamil sources.

