Cenkuttuvan

Cheran Chenkuttuvan (c. 2nd century CE), literally 'the Alluring Kuttuvan Chera', identified with **Katal Pirakottiya Vel Kezhu Kuttuvan,**[2] was the most celebrated Chera dynasty ruler of the early land of Tamilnadu in early historic South India.[2][3]

The Kuttuvan is eulogized by Paranar in the fifth decade of *Patitrupattu* of the *Ettutokai* anthology (early Tamil texts).[4] The Kuttuvan successfully intervened in a succession dispute in the Chola country and established his relative on the Chola throne.[2] The Kadambas — helped by the Yavanas (perhaps Greek or Roman mariners) — attacked the kuttuvan by sea, but the Chera ruler destroyed their fleet.[2] He is said to have defeated the Kongu people and a warrior called Mokur Mannan.[2] Under his reign, the Chera territory included Kollimalai near Karur in the east and Vanchi, Tondi and Mantai on the western coast (Kerala).[5][6] Kuttanadu in Kerala is after his name, which was one of his major capitals. The base of major ancient temples in land of Kerala was established by Chenguttuvan.

Cenkuttuvan	
Katal Pirakottiyavan	
Chera ruler	
Reign	c. 188 – 243
Spouse	Illanko Venmal
House	Chera
Father	Nedum Cheralathan[1]
Mother	Uraiyur Chola Nalconai

Military achievements of Senguttavan are described in an exaggerated manner in the medieval Tamil epic poem *Cilappatikaram*.[1] A method, known as Gajabahu Synchronism/Triple Synchronism, based on text proper, canto 30:160 of the epic, is used by scholars to date Chenkuttavan Chera to *c.* 2nd century CE.[7]

Early Tamil texts

The kuttuvan is eulogized by Paranar in the fifth decade of *Patitrupattu* of the *Ettutokai* anthology.[4] *Purananuru* 343 refers to the hill products and sea products, mainly pearls, of Cenkuttuvan and to the Yavana gold that reached ashore by boats, in exchange.[3]

The kuttuvan's mastery over the sea might have led to the often used title *Katal Pirakottiya*, which translates as "One who Lagged the Sea Behind".[3] Paranar praised the kuttuvan for his naval powers -

> "Kuttuvan not finding an enemy worthy to fight with became angry, with martial might besieged the sea and with magnificent spear drove back the sea whose wave rose high".

Paranar also praised kuttuvan's military prowess -

> "Kuttuvan of the gold garland, whose army destroyed the beauty of many lands, till the noise rose loud of the drums used in numerous battles with the monarchs of the country between Kumari (Cape Comorin) on the south and Himalayas, the mountain that rises high as the northern boundary."[8]

- Kuttuvan was the son of the Cera ruler Nedum Cheralathan and Nalconai (of the Cholas of Uraiyur).[2] The wife of Cenkuttuvan was Illanko Venmal (the daughter of a Velir chief).[5][6]
- Cenkuttuvan ruled the Cera country for 55 years (*Patitrupattu*).[9]
- Warriors of the Kuttuvan used bull-hide shields to protect themselves from the enemy darts (*Patitrupattu*, 45).[2]
- Kuttuvan successfully intervened in a succession dispute in the Cola territory and established his relative (brother-in-law) Killi on the Cola throne. The rivals of Killi were defeated in the battle of Nerivayil, Uraiyur (leading to the death of nine other contenders to the throne).[2]
- The Kadambas are described as the arch enemies of the kuttuvan. The kuttuvan was able to defeat them in the battle of Idumbil, Valayur (Viyalur). The "fort" of Kotukur in which the Kadamba warriors took shelter was stormed. Later the Kadambas (helped by the Yavanas) attacked kuttuvan by sea, but the Cera ruler destroyed their fleet.[2]
- Kuttuvan defeated the Kongu people (*Cilappatikaram, XXV, 152-53)*.[2] Kuttuvan defeated a warrior called Pazhaiyan Mokur Mannan (one of the Cera's allies was Arukai, an enemy of the Mokurs) (*Patitrupattu,* 44 and 49).[2]
- The *patikam* to *Patitrupattu,* decad V mentions Ilanko Atikal and the expedition of Cenkuttuvan to north India to bring a stone from which to carve the Pattini idol (scholars are of the opinion that the *patikam* is a later interpolation to the text).[9]

Senguttavan Chera in *Silappatikaram*

Authorship of *Silappatikaram* is traditionally ascribed to prince Ilanko Atikal (literally the Junior Prince), who appears in the work as the younger brother of Cenkuttuvan Cera.[10] The third part of *Silappatikaram* (the Vanci Kantham) deals with Cenkuttuvan's expedition to bring the *virakkallu* from the Himalayas for an idol of Kannaki/Pattini.[1][7]

According to the patikam of *Silappatikaram*, the royal astrologer at the court of Cera king predicted that (the younger prince) Ilanko would succeed the king, which angered the elder prince Senguttavan. Ilanko at once chose to renounce his claims to the throne and live a life of a Jain ascetic. He shifted to a monastery on the outskirts of Vanci, where he composed epic *Silappatikaram.*[7]

> Chera king Senguttuvan's wife Illango Venmal was moved by Kannagi's tragic story and wanted her to be worshipped as a goddess of chastity. Senguttuvan agreed and asked his court at Vanji for advice, which suggested to carve out a stone block from the Himalayas for the *virakkallu*. The king then ordered the march to the Himalayas by the royal sword and umbrella pointing northwards.[10]

> Senguttuvan first moved to the Nilgiris mountains of Odisha by sea, where he was welcomed by Sanjcharya, a general of Magadha.[10] Sanjcharya informed Senguttuvan, that he was sent by Nuruvar Kannar to inquire about the needs of the Chera king for the campaign to the Himalayas. Senguttuvan responded, that he needed ships to travel through the River Ganges. With Sanjcharya's ships the army sailed to Magadha, where they were received by the Magadha king.[10] The expedition ended at Uttarai, where the Arya princes led by Kanaka, Vijaya and allied princes Uttara, Vichitra, Rudra, Bhairava, Chitra Singha, Dhanuttara and Sveta encountered the forces of Senguttuvan with a huge army. After a long battle, the Arya alliance was defeated. Kanaka and Vijaya were caught and brought back to Magadha, where

Senguttuvan honoured the warriors of the battle. Two-and-half months after his departure Senguttuvan victoriously returned to Vanchi, where the temple for Kannagi (Pattini) was consecrated with the *virakkallu* from the Himalayas.[10][11]

The Bhagavati Temple, in Kodungallur, Kerala, is claimed to be the Kannaki temple thus consecrated.[7]

Dating Senguttavan Chera

A method known as Gajabahu synchronism/Triple Synchronism is used by some scholars to date Cenkuttuvan Cera to 2nd century CE.[9]

- According to *Silappatikaram* (text proper, canto 30:160), severals neighbouring kings were invited by Cenkuttuvan to the installation of Kannaki-Pattini at Vanchi.[9]
  - the Arya kings Kanaka and Vijaya[9]
  - Kongu king of Kutaku[9]
  - Kayavaku, the king of Lanka[9]
- Kayavaku,the king of Lanka is identified with Gajabahu I, king of Sri Lanka (r. *c.* 171/73 - 193 CE). In this context, Cenkuttuvan can be dated to either the first or last quarter of the 2nd century CE.[7]
- Despite its dependency on numerous conjectures, the method is considered as the sheet anchor for the purpose of dating the events in the early historic Tamil texts.[7][12][13]

In popular culture

The film *Raja Rani* (1956) features Sivaji Ganesan playing the role of Senguttuvan in a play within the film.

Senguttuvan is briefly portrayed by an uncredited actor at the beginning of the film *Poompuhar* (1964).

References

1. Subbarayalu, Y. 2014. 'Early Tamil Polity', in *A Concise History of South India: Issues and Interpretations.* ed. Noburu Karashima, pp. 50–51. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. K.G. Sesha Aiyar, *Chera Kings of the Sangam Period*, London, 1937. 21-23.
3. "Classical Indo-Roman Trade" (https://www.epw.in/journal/2013/26-27/special-articles/classical-indo-roman-trade.html). *Economic and Political Weekly*. **48** (26–27). 5 June 2015.
4. Zvelebil, Kamil. "The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India". Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973. 52–53.
5. Menon 1967.
6. Menon 2007, pp. 67–68.
7. Shulman, David (2016). *Tamil: A Biography*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. pp. 99–101.
8. Menon, A. Sreedhara (1987). *Kerala History and its Makers*. Kottayam: DC books. pp. 24–25.

9. Zvelebil, Kamil V., *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature*, Leiden, 1992. 110-111.
10. "Silappathikaram | Tamil epic poem by Adikal" (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silappathika ram). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 4 February 2020.
11. "Silappathikaram | Tamil epic poem by Adikal" (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silappathika ram#ref845622). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 16 November 2018.
12. Zvelebil 1973, pp. 37–39: The opinion that the Gajabahu Synchronism is an expression of genuine historical tradition is accepted by most scholars today
13. Zvelebil 1973, p. 38.

Bibliography

- Menon, A. Sreedhara (1967). *A Survey of Kerala History* (https://books.google.com/books?i d=N7WaZe2PBy8C). Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society. OCLC 555508146 (https://s earch.worldcat.org/oclc/555508146).

  - Menon, A. Sreedhara (2007). *A Survey of Kerala History* (https://books.google.com/book s?id=FVsw35oEBv4C) (2007 ed.). Kerala, India: D C Books. ISBN 978-8126415786.

- Zvelebil, Kamil (1973). *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* (https://boo ks.google.com/books?id=VF2VMUoY_okC&pg=PA38). Brill Academic Publishers. ISBN 978-90-04-03591-1.