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Review Of Research



REPRESENTATIONS OF INTIMACY: THE KING AND HIS WOMEN – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

his article takes to discuss the relationship between king and women into focus with the special reference from Muvarula. In the Tamil literary tradition, heroism and virility were always treated as two important aspects of Kingship. For example, the entire collections of classical Tamil texts were divided into two categories viz., akam (love) and puram (heroism). This tradition was revived once again in the early medieval period, when kingship is projected in romantic terms as much as heroism. Here I will discuss the role played by the queen and the other women in the king's life in

representing his heroic and romantic qualities. It is interesting to note that even a cursory look at the sources indicates that the queens and the concubines speak in different voices in these texts.

KEYWORDS: Tamil literary tradition, heroism and virility , king's various women play.

INTRODUCTION

The text Muvarula primarily deals with the beauty of the seven stages of maidens (age group 5-40) and their intoxication towards the king as his procession wended through the crowd. This article takes up these references and analyzes them in the context of erotic kingship and their other implications.

Queen's Role in the Institution of Kingship

While trying to demonstrate about the definition on the kingship of South India, David Shulman points out that the king's various women play a central role. He points out that "The king needs at least one wife in order to perform his ritual tasks and he needs his courtesans to demarcate the space in which he functions as ruler, to map out the positions of court and throne." The role of women in the king's life starts from his childhood itself. It is the king's mothers' and grandmothers' responsibility to bring him up with a regal identity. Being a future king's mother, the queen was given an important place in the royal court.

Here, Vidhukulanayaki is shown as the wife of Vikrama and the mother of Kulottunga-II, who played a crucial role in both the kings' lives. It is also important to

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note that only after his marriage, was the king considered ready to be crowned.

Though in several instances, Muvarula portrays the attributes and social standing of both the king and his wives; this text did not pay much attention in depicting the personal relationship between the king and his wives. But still there is fragmentary evidence where the king's wives and concubines are shown as erotic symbols or in a romantic light.

In Vikramacholanula, in lines 38 to 40, the poet depicts the king and the queen as waking up together in the morning before preparing for the procession, under the pearl shelter (nittila pandhal) on a big white bed that was as white as the moon itself, the king was sleeping together with the queen, who is praised as wearing flower garlands, with huge eyes lined with kohl (mai), with huge breasts and also looking like a proud swan. She is said to be respected as the woman deity who possessed all seven worlds (Ulagangal ezhudaiya pen anangu) and whose hair was adorned with beautiful flowers. Such was the beauty and greatness of the queen with whom the King was sleeping, and they both awoke together.

On the surface, it does appear that the poet has converted the ordinary, everyday event of sleeping and waking as a kingly ritual by elaborately describing the setting of the sleeping quarters, in addition to elaborately describing the queen with whom the king coupled (Kudi thuyil ezhunda) and then woke up in the morning. Yet, the use of the term Kudi thuyil ezhunda is obviously a reference to their being together in a subtly sexual context. Such direct reference to the 'togetherness' of the king and queen are sparse in this text.

The Erotic and Heroic Attitude of the King in Muvarula

As we shall see, the south Indian king is surrounded by a plethora of women such as the king's wives (at least two), and often the many courtesans. All these women have their own place in the royal court. There are certain features which distinguish the courtesans from the king's wives. First of all, a courtesan should not conceive a child. If in case she happens to get pregnant, she had to produce a female child to continue her profession. On the other hand, in the case of the king's wife, she was expected to produce a male child. The king had a relationship with the courtesan based on traditional practices, where she was considered an essential element in the royal court. The medieval South Indian king's erotic expression is seen as frenzied activism by Shulman. There are many indications that in accordance with convention the king's erotic expression was limited with his subjects. If he crossed the limits, it was believed that his territorial hold would be broken and the country would be in chaos. There is an example from a late medieval tale Perurpuranam which depicts this situation:

Once there was a king Tirilokacholan who ruled the Chola land as a devout Saiva and all his subjects too were devoted to Siva. Once on Sivaratri he went to Tiruvidaimarudur to worship God and there he met a group of Brahmin Kapalikas who had come from Nepal. The king wondered at their appearance but failed to notice their hearts. An old man from the group addressed the king:

"Your highness! Our home is in Nepal. We have come here after hearing of your fame and the richness of your country. This is our knowledge: the true source of joy in the world is sexual union with beautiful women. Some say that the world is created by a God, but they are fools; has anyone ever seen such a God? There is no immortal deity; only the body is lasting and real. The world is created and increases by sexual union, which is the finest thing there is; and it is enhanced by drinking wine. So reject all this talk of salvation, O great king!"

Hearing this speech, the king became confused; he mistook the lies for the truth. He therefore abandoned the Vedic way and gave himself completely to wanton excesses; thus, drunk and obsessed with women, he ruled the world. Since a king's subjects always imitate their ruler, the inhabitants of the Chola land also broke all bounds. And finally, with the help of the sage Narada, the king was freed from the evil karma by worshipping at the God's shrine in Perur.

In this larger section, my attempt is to unearth the representation of the sexuality and romantic attitude of three kings i.e Vikramachola, Kulottunga II and Rajaraja II expressed within the poetic parameters characterizing the women subjects. Traditionally, there are seven stages of women - pedai, Pedumbai, mangai, madandai, arivai, terivai and perilampen – representing different emotions, appearance and attitudes. Within the context of women on the street adulating the king, the specific physicalities and their mode of love itself is determined by their age group. If a girl of ages 5-7 years is shown loving the king's material possessions like

ornaments, garland, etc, the young women are shown as displaying erotic love. Here is an example of how the young pedai, playing in the street of courtesans with her various toys, reacted on seeing the king Vikrama's procession:

The poet here makes a suitable reference to the age group of the girl. She is only between 5 and 7 years of age, and naturally her interest was only on the toy-like garland of the king and not even his crown or other attractive facial features attracted her attention. Here, my intention is to unearth the sexual gaze of the young women in relation to the king. Therefore, I focus on the descriptions of women from the third stage (mangai), whose age group is between 12 and 19 years, to the seventh stage of the perilampen (age group between 33 and 40). However, it is of significant interest for a gender analysis how even children are used as if they are sexual objects in the waiting, although this is not central to my thesis.

VIKRAMACHOLANULA

If we read the seven stages of women and their relationship with Vikrama from the text, there it could be seen that it is only one-sided love or sexual desire that is expressed, where the women are shown as falling in love with the king. Inevitably, there is no reply from the king nor does he show any sign of recognizing the women's feelings. Through the various women's voices, the valiant features of Vikrama are depicted. The examples given below are expressions of how these women perceive the king's achievements, apparatus, ornaments, etc. In some cases, they also reveal how a woman imagines the manner in which she made love to the king.

In verses 493-510, the poet narrates how the arivai woman, with her abundant love impelling her, went to her well-tended garden. Yet she ignored the beauty of her own garden, its flower plants, and pets like the swans, cranes, cuckoos, peacocks and others. Thereafter, she talked to these animals and birds regretting her own inevitable attachment towards the king. She also appreciated her pets, for they must have done great penance in their previous births, to make them escape a fate like hers.

Here, there is no direct evidence whether the king had expressed his actual love or the woman had simply imagined that she had succeeded in making the king love her. As we shall see, if a king apparently loved/ or was infatuated by a lady, he would convey his desire at least by smiling back at her. In the following example, the terivai asks a bard to sing about the various things that belonged to the Cholas:

In lines 575-86, the terivai woman is seen praising the king's elephant for being the bravest of all animals, and also for its divinity, strength and loyalty towards the king.

O Airavatam! You are the one who bears the King who bears the entire world on his shoulders; You are the one who buried entire mountains under the earth during the battle of Kalinga; The Pandya kings on hearing your roaring sound are petrified to stand in front of the Chola king.

Sangupulavar interprets this overt praise of the elephant, as the woman trying to please the elephant, with the expectation that it would help her. In this woman's case, it indicates that she was hesitant to praise the king directly; so she began to sing about the heroic elephant on which the king was seated. At the same time, she wanted to express her admiration for the king; therefore, she said to the elephant, 'you are one who bears the king who bears the world on his shoulders'. Here again, there is nothing to do with love or eroticism; she was merely recounting the king's grandeur, and possibly providing justification for her infatuation. In the following lines, again terivai addresses the brave elephant and says that its appearance on the street helped her to recover from her frenzied state.

The poet imagined the woman getting cured of all these disease-like manifestations, the moment she saw the King and his elephant. Once again, the woman alone was emotionally affected by the love sickness. As usual, no love sign or erotic expression was shown by the king. It is supposed that the king would fulfill the needs of his subjects. But here the woman's desire is completely ignored by the king. The following lines spoken by the maidens reveal the desires of an infatuated woman to the king, after first recounting his heroic nature and the glories of his country:

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KULOTTUNGACHOLANULA

In the poetic compositions, the king himself is described as the lord of love 'Manmada to women' and thereby, that he conquers women as he conquers enemies in the battlefield. Courtesans are used as a vehicle to express the king's sexual virility, since they were considered auspicious on some occasions and were experts on love. Despite this, the sexual link between the king and courtesan is uncertain. It is often portrayed that the king cannot feel or understand the real love of courtesans, and as we shall see, he is seen as not upholding his duty towards his subjects because of this insensitivity. The following few examples focus on Kulottunga II:

Maidens of mangai stood before the King and appeal to him accusingly: Oh king! You whose chest is adorned with the tulasi garland, You who had snatched this woman's garment! Please give your golden garment to her! Oh lord with red lotus eyes! You captured this woman's bracelets; On the contrary, it would be justice if you gave her your bracelet.

Since the crowd of women disturbed the procession, the king had no choice but to acknowledge their words. Therefore, he stood still in front of them with his elephant. And finally, he decided to reveal his sympathy and grace just by throwing a smile at the woman. Then the mangai's desire was fulfilled, and she recovered from her love-sickness upon seeing the king's smiling face. Here again, the woman was mesmerized just by seeing the valorous beauty of the king, but no dialogue transpires between the king and the woman.

Madandhai is the woman in the fourth stage of life, characterized in the age bracket 20 to 25 years. In these lines, she is described as the resplendent moon. The king appeared in the form of the sun and was considered as the hero of the lotus flower, possibly Vishnu. The crowd in the procession saluted both the king and the woman. But this woman began to worship the king by looking at his physical features. Since the maidens could not tolerate this woman's struggle, they asked for justice from the king. Here, the king is considered as Krishna in his previous birth and as having dallied with cowherd women. So, the maidens wondered, why the king was hesitant to catch hold of this woman's hand in this birth. Then they consoled the woman by saying that the king will be returning back to her again. But it is not clear whether the king went back to her or it was just the maidens' statement to make the woman comfortable. The next example talks about the beauty of the arivai woman, and through her vision, the king's heroic attributes are depicted.

The king is described as accommodating various Goddesses throughout his body. Such examples are plentiful in the text. But here, the maidens concern is to cure the love affliction of the woman. Therefore, the maidens lamented that this woman did not find place among the Goddesses on his being. They sent animals as their emissaries to the king to explain the awful situation of the madandai. After a long description about the ball-game played by terivai and her maidens, and the physical beauty of women in that particular stage of life, the poet goes on to depict how the women were eager to watch the king's procession, how the king and the woman were afflicted by love-sickness, and the intoxication of the woman towards the king.

The poet here intends to convey that she was so overcome with the desire to see the king that she even forgot her womanly virtues. The lines indicate her eagerness to watch the king's procession. The king, we are further told, helped the terivai to get rid of her love sickness by opening his mind to her.

In this discussion, the poet simultaneously introduces both the king and the element of intimacy at the same time in the poem. It seems that in the context of women, these entities - king and intimacy - were intended to be intertwined in the description of the women in all contexts. When we study the conceptual basis of kingship within a literary text like Muvarula, we cannot ignore such obvious references to the inner domain of love, desire and affect that underscore the attraction of the ruler. However, nowhere are the king's physical features described in an erotic manner nor is the king's love or desire the pivot of the discussion. In an interesting use of politically-correct literary traditions, the poet makes women of all age groups express their own sexuality, desire and yearning for the king, implicating him only through their imagination and subtly drawing the king into

the vortex of intimacy.

When the bard sang of the arrival of the procession of Kulottunga on top of his elephant, the women in the seventh stage - the perilampen - went to the street and waited for the king to arrive. Upon arriving on that street, the king Kulottunga, the one who emerged as Lord Vishnu to protect the entire world, noticed the perilampen worshipping him by folding both hands. Thereafter, the woman displayed her youthful beauty, her proud chest, twin eyebrows, and eyes like lotus-like eyes, big shoulders, navel, ears, and moonlight like smile, pearl-like lips and lotus-like legs. She stood in front of the king, with all these features, and spoke in various ways.

The perilampen was ready to do austerities to obtain the belongings of the king and to join with the king himself. Here, once again the king is as associated with Lord Krishna. The perilampen beseeched the king to destroy the disease of love sickness.

RAJARAJACHOLANULA

This text is on the whole different from the other two texts in the way it reveals the poet's experience, both in the literary form and the historical event. As we shall see, descriptions of the king Rajaraja which inspires frenzied reactions from the women is more vivid than those of the other two kings. But still, his own interventions do not exceed the giving of a gift to the love-lore woman.

The poet's description of the mangai focuses on her beauty as well as her nature as a docile and shy woman. He talks about the ornaments and jewels that adorned her beautiful body. He explains about each ornament and compares them to divine attributes. At this juncture one of the companions of mangai approaches her to inform her about the king's procession on the next day. On hearing this, our mangai feel disheartened that she has to wait for a whole night before she could watch the king's procession.

Here again, we have to bear in mind that the king just gazed at the woman as if he wanted to gift her something; actually he did not do so. He did recognize her beauty for he considered that the woman herself was his gift. Further, he did not even stop his elephant, and his gaze towards her by itself may be construed as his gift to her.

From Lines 466 to 530, the poet portrays the madandai as describing and praising the merits of the king's caparisoned elephant. I have already alluded to this particular portrayal in the previous chapter. For once, the woman is described as noticing and appreciating other elements of kingship apart from the king himself. This is one such occasion where even the description of the elephant by the woman has nothing to do with her desires or the physical qualities of the elephant. While she is waiting for the Chola King, till the time he arrives she talks about the king's elephant (mannanai padatodangiyaval avan yanaiyaiye mudalil padinal).

This time the woman tried to take refuge with the king by proclaiming her intention of seeking shelter with the king's elephant itself. The king was absorbed in the music played by the woman, and he appeared as if he wanted to bestow something for her talent. It has been noted earlier that whenever the woman meets the king ,she does so in a love-sick state, it is obvious that the god of love Manmada will also be brought into the scene. The following example tells how both the king and the woman faced each other, and the kind of gifts bestowed by him on her.

The woman herself is shown here to be offering the garland to the king. The king was not distracted by the physical features of the woman like her breasts and eyes, but he melted for the music played by her, and captured her garments, waist-band etc. He wanted to give the whole world to her. He gifted her palanquin and a female elephant, and is then stated to have left the place where the woman stood.

In the next few examples, the woman in the arivai stage's physical beauty, her intoxication with the king's valorous features, and her pleading with the king to cure her love-sickness are depicted. Her beauty is not comparable even to the beauty of the divine women. Even the Lord Indra, the one who holds the bow, got frightened on seeing the king's procession, while the Lord Manmada did not fear the King to wage war with him to conquer this woman. She splashed flowers which were given to her by her maidens on the king, and she fell at the king's feet in a salutary manner. Immediately, her maidens drew her up from the king's feet and she placed a couple of flower garlands on his shoulders. The king took them from her and he draped the golden garland on his caparisoned elephant and he wore the other flower garland on his shoulder.

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Within this scenario painted of the king gifting garland to the woman, two distinct things could be brought out. First, the king Rajaraja Chola is the only king among all three to be portrayed as gifting things such as, palanquin in the case of perilampen, female elephant in the case of madandai and here a garland for the arivai woman, to the women who seem besotted with him. Other kings are not explained as giving more than an occasional benign smile or a deep glance (kurntu nokkal). Second, here, can the King's acceptance of a garland from the woman and gifting her back with his own garland be interpreted as a wedding itself? Though the poet makes no explicit reference to this incident as a union of any kind, but talks about it only in the context of gift-giving, it still leaves an argument open for interpretation. If kingship as an institution was defined as much by harem women (Antappuram), as by the accompanying queens and royal households, then this could very well be a 'recruitment' for such a harem. Though there is no such evidence for such an analysis within this particular text, the possibility nevertheless needs to be documented here.

In the following examples, the infatuation of the terivai woman, i.e. the woman in the sixth stage, for the king is described:

The woman (terivai) was considered as Goddess Lakshmi by the entire world. They had never separated in their ten births. The king promised in his mind, To never leave her alone; The one who has eyes like swords, The one who has long eyebrows like the bow, The one who has bamboo-like shoulder, The one whose eyes were painted with kohl.

Since the woman terivai is described as the Goddess Lakshmi, the king, it may be presumed, was none other than Vishnu. Therefore, their union is described as 'piravitorum piriyamal serntiruntha todarchi'. It is also pointed out that the king just confirmed in his mind that he would never separate from the woman forever. But still there is no evidence whether later he accepted her as his wife, or the idea merely came to his mind. It is also noticed that the king did not immediately leave the place where the woman was waiting. Further, he gifted various things to her.

Kingship within the context of the private domain: the love of women in seven stages

When King Kulottunga, who won over Pandyans, began his procession, the blaring sound of conches echoed throughout the country. Hearing this echoing sound, crowds of women thronged to the place, falling over each other in a hurry (Pen kuttam vizhundum ezhundum odi vara). The king too seemed to appreciate the throngs of women falling over each other in their hurry to see him. Women falling in love with the king seemed to the poet to be a natural occurrence that need not be contextually explained. He smoothly fits in narratives of women who worship the king as if it was a most natural event of the day. If it was so, then modern day heroworshipping culture might have somehow derived from the earlier king-worshipping culture! If this was not a true/natural event and if the poet was merely exaggerating, then too it shows the length to which the poet goes in order to maintain a heroic image of the king. That the poet even thought that throngs of love-crazed women could be used in the context of building a heroic image of the king, says a lot about the status of the women of that era, if not the king himself. In this way, a study of kingship with its rituals and representations could throw light on the socio-cultural and moral ethos of the society.

Mention has to be made about the gift giving pattern of the king towards the women described in seven stages. Except Rajaraja II, no other king is portrayed as giving gifts to these women. While other kings are described as giving not more than a cursory glance or smile, Rajaraja is the only king who is portrayed as giving gifts like palanquins and elephants to these women. If gifting was an open kingly gesture, the construction of heroic king could also been seen differently as the other kings glide past the women with not so much as a cursory glance. For the king to stay unperturbed by such romantic distractions is a manifestation of manly/heroic

image. In addition, the way the poet has naturalized women's love sickness- thronging to see the king or swooning over their maidens- seem like a literary tool to build a heroic king out of "offered" love in the same manner that devotees offer unconditional love to Gods.

The descriptions of woman's physical features in all the three Ula literature are so vivid and pictorial that one could say women were objectified by the poet without any attempt to map their subjectivities within the text. Yet, the same argument then holds true for the king too. If we empathize with the woman who was so objectified than the same applies to the king as well, whose every feature, gesture and mannerism was not only totally objectified but also idealized to the extent of being invested with divinity.

What would it feel like to be the poet's women? - Constantly swooning and yearning, their love for the king seems so fruitless, considering that the king barely gave them more than a cursory royal glance or smile. All that the women seem to do is to faint or pray, while being constantly in love with the king, longing for him and incessantly talking about him, even to pet animals, birds and bees. Yet, what would it feel like to be the poet's king?- with impressive genealogies, divine attributes, arduous holy baths, heavy ornamental trappings, lengthy processions, ceremonial hunts, royal households, posse of ministers, haunting war memories, looming peril of enemies and mesmerized women who faint repeatedly in a state-of-love that seemed to have disease-like manifestations? The representations of intimacy that we have highlighted in this chapter do not merely recover a sensual image of the ruler, but depict one who often transcended his sexuality and desires, projecting the ideal typical kingship, which is not tied to ephemeral concerns.

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