

# The Women in the Concept of *Ottamulachy*: A Study of Kodungallur Sree Kurumba Bagavati Cult in Chilappathikaram Perspective

<sup>1</sup> Anju M, <sup>2</sup> Dr. C. Jeya Veera Devan,  
<sup>1</sup> Ph.D Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor,  
<sup>1</sup> Department of History, <sup>2</sup> Department of History,  
Periyar University, Periyar Palkalai Nagar, Salem-636 011, Tamil Nadu, India.  
Email – anjumeethal@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Among the lore of Kerala people there is a usage existed regarding the word of *ottamulachy*. Besides, this word was used to show some appalling thing related with religion and rituals. But the majority among them not knew about the actual concept of *ottamulachy*. In their opinion it was something dangerous figure. Why it become so? Who is *ottamulachy* in character? What was the historical and folk aspect of the concept *ottamulachy*? How it become the part of Kodungallur Sree Kurumba Bagavati Temple? How the women turn out to be *ottamulachy*? While getting angry why she plucks her breast and throws it? What it symbolise? How the breasts are important for womanhood? Was it really every woman do the same when they got angry? Then why she throws her breast? And such a protest response by a woman has not been recorded in history or any myth. For the reason that, here she protest for justice and womanhood. Because, after the death of Kovalan Kannaki lost every expectation so she enters in to the Madurai City vigorously. But afterwards this spread out in the village folk of Kerala in another aspect as a danger figure of a woman and the concept of *ottamulachy* known in horrendously. So this study is going to analyse the actual concept of *ottamulachy* in Chilappathikaram perspective along reconstructing the myth behind this and to show the power of womanhood through the vigorous character of Kannaki.

**Key Words:** Chilappathikaram Story – Kannaki- Women- Chaste wife - Figure of Courage- in Aggressive Nature- Goddess – Concept of *ottamulachy* - Sree Kurumba Kavuvu- Sree Kurumba Bagavati Temple.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The place Kodungallur is located in Thrissur district in the centre part of Kerala and which is very famous since ancient time. Beside, can see that *Kodungallur Sree Kurumba Bagavati Temple* is very much referenced when try to studying the cultural history of Kodungallur. Because, which is a very popular temple in Kerala and majority of the south Indian devotees participate the temple rituals and believe the divine power of the temple. Such believe make the goddess look as Kali and Kannaki. But in Chilappathikaram perspective it is Kannaki. Besides, she is worshiped as *ottamulachy* and considered as the power of women hood. How the woman become like this is going to study with the help of the story Chilappathikaram.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF OTTAMULACHY AND KODUNGALLUR SREE KURUMBA BAGAVATI:

Kodungallur Sree Kurumba Bagavati temple is famous temple in Kerala. It is situated in Thrissur district. The great speciality of this temple is from all over the southern part of India, people have been a part of the temple's ritual practices. It is noteworthy that this ritual practice of this temple is dedicated to both men and women without any gender division. Moreover, here the goddess is considered as Kali and Kannaki. But inside in the sanctuary the image of main deity is in Kali's figure.<sup>i</sup> Besides inside temple there is no deity in the name of Kannaki. But in northern side there is a portrait of Kannaki with anklet. And in two hundred meter distance there is a deity which is known as *Sree Kurumbamma* in the concept of Kannaki and this place is known as *Sreekuruba kavuvu* otherwise *melkkavuvu*.<sup>ii</sup> In the myth which is established by Chera Senguttuvan for the commemoration of the Kannaki.<sup>iii</sup> Here this proposed study tries to analyse the concept of *ottamulachy*, what myth saying about the concept? How the so called women become *ottamulachy*? And how it is connected with *Kodungallur sree kurumba bagavati temple*?

The word *ottamulachy* in the Malayalam sense is one breasted women. Who is identified as *ottamulachy* in the usage of village folk of Kerala? Actually this version is extract from the story of Chilappathikaram, Kannaki is the heroin of the story is stated as *ottamulachy*. It is because according to Chilppathikaram story of Ilanko Adikal Kannaki took vengeance to Madurai King, so that she pluck out her one breast and throwed away to Madura to burn the city. Kovalan and Kannaki, both are the progeny of wealthy merchant Manaykan and Masattuvan are narrated as the hero and heroine of Chilappathikaram. Kannaki the daughter of Manaykan, Kovalan the son of Masattuvan.<sup>iv</sup>

Kannaki the queen of beauty and she have a good sense of knowledge about milieu and the social life. Moreover their parents wish their coherence as husband and wife finally they get married. But unfortunately the young

beautiful and clever dancer named as Madhavi came and performed a beautiful dance in the court of Chola king. At that time there was huge audience including Kovalan watch and covet her beautiful dance.<sup>v</sup>

The King and the audience gifted many things to her performances. Unexpectedly she announced that if anyone can give thousand and eight gold coin for the garland then she will become his lover. Suddenly Kovalan, who is more attracted with her beautiful dance, is ready to pay the same as she expected. Ultimately Madhavi and Kovalan start their love and lives as husband and wife. The result is Kovalan forgotten Kannaki in a short period of time.

And Kovalan spends luxurious life with his lover Madhavi. But Kannaki, the courageous lady waiting for his return and expects him more in her life. Finally he come as poor and losing everything. So he apologise for everything what had happened before. The matured behaviour sense of Kannaki is great and Kovalan is ashamed a lot by the attitude of Kannaki as she welcomed him with a simple smile. Then again they start their genuine love as before but unfortunately their love reach in a great disaster. It is because; Kovalan is back in to Kannaki's life. kovalan lost everything. If they want to live togetherness without poverty they need money. But due to the lack of money Kannaki gives her one anklet made by precious stone.<sup>vi</sup>

Then Kovalan went to Maduraito collect the cash by selling the anklet. There he met a goldsmith, and he said he wish to sell this anklet. The crooked goldsmith misuses this situation because he has already stolen the anklet of queen of Pandyan Kingdom. So he wants to save himself by using this great opportunity. So he informed to the Pandyan king that the person who stole the anklet of queen was under his custody. Without any enquiry the king ordered to kill Kovilan and bring the anklet back. It is the court order so the king's soldiers took immediate action.<sup>vii</sup>

The queen got the anklet back but it was not her. It was under the custody of the goldsmith who has really stolen. But the goldsmith's crooked mind badly affected Kannaki's life, for this reason Kovalan is killed by the king's soldiers and lay dead in Madura. During this time Kannaki was waiting for him worriedly but he didn't return back. She heard the news that Kovalan murdered. Before that she felt some bad omens that were something going to happen.

After that the cowgirl came and informed to Kannaki that her husband was murdered and she narrates everything as happened. Suddenly Kannaki trance in to down and there after she wake up in an aggressive nature and went straight to Pandyan court and there weeping in anger she said to all,

“ Is there no women here? Is there no real woman, or only the sort of women who should allow an injustice to be done to her lawful husband? Are there such women there? Is there no man in this land? Is there no honest man or only the sort of man who nourishes and protect none, but the son of his own blood? Is there no god? Is there is no god in the country? Can there be a god in a land where the sword of the King is used for the murder of innocent strangers? is there no God, no God”<sup>viii</sup>

The murder of Kovalan spread throughout Madurai and the people all are very disappointed and puzzled. But Kannaki the courageous lady without any fear demanded the explanations of the murder. But King replayed that he deserved this murder because he has stolen the queen's anklet. But she didn't accept this and again questions against king's order. She argues that he is very innocent moreover without any enquiry how he can kill him and is there any justice? But king strongly opposed her argument. This made her very angry and she shows some evidences, she opened her anklet and shows it was filled with precious stone and she asked the king to show the queen's anklet whether they are same. King is shocked and replies it is filled by pearls. Suddenly king fell down and died by repent. Then she went to Madurai Street and plucks out her one breast and throws into Madurai Street.<sup>ix</sup>

After that the street burnt and it becomes ash and also perished. It was her curse. However she couldn't control her anger. She went to the sacred hill where the *Nedvel* the god domicile. From there she died by percolate blood from her brest. According to the story of Chilappathikaram it is remarked that Kovalan took her to heaven and this event is witnessed by the people who lived there. So the hilly people buried her body under the tree in their manner. Besides, by fixing the stone above this funeral place and lighting the lamp on that is their custom. This symbolise their worship. Moreover they consider this woman as *ottamulachy* as in vampire concept.<sup>x</sup> Finally they informed all these to their King Cheran Senkuttuvan<sup>xi</sup>. He considered she is not only women but also the power of the divine and power of the chaste. So he established a stone statue of Kannaki as deity and starts to worship her at Chera Capital Vanji.<sup>xii</sup>

Presently this deity located in Kodungallur (Thrissur district of Kerala) and this is known as *sree kurumbamma* otherwise *sree kurumba bagavati*. So this temple is also known as *Kodungallur Sree Kurumba Bagavati Temple*. As part of this, every year this temple is conducting ritual to appease the deity. Besides, here women have right to participate as oracle. This is a great opportunity in the case of women to participate in temple sector. The main reason behind that is the worship of Kannaki cult. Kannaki is the remarkable phenomenon of womanhood. Her anger reflected in every male and female oracle at the time of temple rituals and this ritual practice is known as *Meena Bharani* festival, conducted in every year in the month of March<sup>xiii</sup>.

Including some scholars and devotes believed that *kodungallur sree kurumba bagavati* is the counterpart of Kali.<sup>xiv</sup> And the violent outlook of the goddess Kali mortifies the demon *Dharika*. Both Kannaki and Kali concept are following even now in *kodungallur sree kurumba bagavati temple*. But the concept of *ottamulachi* (One breasted women) is Kannaki. Breast is the symbol of motherhood. Here she plucks her one breast by anger. Why she wring her breast to burn the Madurai city? Suppose if a breast can burnt a city what does it mean? This shows the power of

motherhood. The emotion of a mother is not to substitute for anything. By the returning of Kovalan she may wish to become a mother but unfortunately all these are destructed by the Pandyan king's order to kill Kovalan. So the despair also made her very angry. So she thought there is no use in living and she couldn't give out her duty as she planned. Her motherhood terminated forever.

This shows the importance and value of motherhood and how much a women expect and wish to became a mother. Besides, until her death her image depicted as virgin. So in the *kodungallur sree kurumba bagavati temple*, the virgin Kannaki is called as mother of all or in the Malayalam sense it is *kodungallur amma*. So in the process of celebrating *meena bharani* ritual in the *kodungallur sree kurumba bagavati temple*, the devotees start to sing obscene songs even now to appease the *kodungallur amma*.<sup>xv</sup> The worshipers believed that this obscene song can help to decrease her anger. Because which contains sexuality.

Here there are two types of processes that use to appease Kannaki. One is considered her as mother and the second one sing obscene song for her. In the case of women, sexuality after marriage and the expectation of pregnancy is of great importance. Both were only hopes for Kannaki. So by performing this ritual, and treating her as mother, are for the fulfilment of her dreams.

In these we can analyse the fact that how much the village folk of Kerala included the brave women in the culture of a society. Usually in the case of women's lineage there is no other temples in Kerala give this type of priority and respect to women, and worships her a lot as part of their culture. But here the folk treated her as the mother of *Kodungallur*. It is because she was thaw with these culture and stand in the society as a martyred woman for justice.

Even though in the societies and myth of a society, a men who died or fight for the justice of the women has not become a part of hero worship in the village folk of Kerala. But in the same society where the patriarchal norm is already existed over the right of women there Kannaki is represented as the figure of courage and succeeded in fighting for the men who has killed without justice.

In fact the role of women is reflected in society in many ways. But till now, women rarely receive the opportunity even to express their actual power. But, Chilappathikaram shows the value of womanhood through the heroin Kannaki. After that, as part of her worships the women who lived in the society have given the right to perform directly as oracle in the temple ritual practices continuously, moreover here women not only the oracle but also from many regions they become part of this worships. They perform as singers of Bharani songs (obscene songs), and some were the usual visitors as devotees of this ritual. The reason is that this temple included everyone without caste and gender in their rituals. Besides, they believe that all represent their worshiping goddess and the performers are the represent of the goddess simultaneously. So here women become an inevitable part of this ritual and it is practised even today.

### 3. CONCLUSION:

The present study proves a woman is not a symbol of guilty and weaker sex. She is the power of women hood, mother hood and the courage. But the society and unnecessary social norms make her as cowardice and second sex. This means, by the patriarchal rules they confined in to family life as wife, mother, daughter, sister, like that. But by the ages the break the needless social norms and come in front of the society and prove their power. Here the power of women hood is seen in Kannaki's figure. In point of fact Chilappathikaram marks not only the women hood but also the mother worshipping patterns by the concept of *ottamulachy*.

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