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## BOW-SONG TRADITION OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT-A CASE STUDY

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### Abstract:

*Among the folks of Kanyakumari district it is a tradition to sing bow-songs on the days of temple festivals in villages. Bow-songs have been performed in the premises of temples as a sacrifice to propitiate the small deities and they seem to be the most flourishing folk performing art in this district. By this art, stories of small deities are narrated before the effigies of the deities till some one devotee belonging to that village gets into frenzy to perform a frenzied dance called Samiyattam in front of the people crowded during the festival. Bow-songs related to the life of heroes, love stories, historical events and stories of epics and puranas, which were once very common in the society, are of rare occurrence today because of the effects of modernization. This paper portrays the historical changes in the tradition of bow-songs in Kanyakumari district.*

### KEYWORDS:

Folks, Bow-Songs, Tradition, Singer.

### INTRODUCTION

Bow-song, also known as Villuppattu or Villadichampattu in Tamil (Villu means Bow and Pattu means Song), is an ancient form of musical story telling where narration is interspaced with songs and music at some intervals. Although bow-song is performed in almost all districts of Tamil nadu, it has attained the pristine height in the culture of people of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts. This art is popular among the Nadars and, to some extent, Vellalas of Kanyakumari district. In Bow-song, the main singer narrates a story from religion or social issue while striking the bow that rests on a mud pot, the co-singer beats the mouth of the pot by making a chorus and another co-singer utters appropriate oral responses to the words of main singer. Bow-songs are conducted to entertain people during the cultural festivals, to pass social messages to people of an area, to preserve the native culture of the area and as way to propitiate small folk deities in villages.

The bow that gives background music for bow-song consists of a seven feet long wooden rod with bent metal caps at both ends which are tied by a strong high tension string.<sup>1</sup> The centre of the convex side of the bow is made to rest on the neck of a large earthen pot resting on a soft cushion made of paddy straw or coconut fibres. Five or seven bells made of bronze are hung down in a row from the bow on either side of the pot. The bow is balanced by the performers using a small thread that is tied with the bow and large finger of the leg. The main singer seated in the centre of the bow beats the string with two slender wooden rods called Veelukols rhythmically to the song. As the Veelukol has a metallic hollow ring, containing small beads or stones, in its one third of the length, it produces a giggling sound while the artist moves the hands up and down and beating the string. While singing bow-song, the main singer makes some rhythmic hand and head movements so as to reveal mood and bhava of the scene and strikes the string for producing definite thala that is expressed by the bells hanging down from the bow. In the meantime, the artist in charge of pot raises

synchronizing notes by beating the mouth of the pot using a slender hard-board like plate made out of plantain sheath and often by striking the pot with a coin in his left hand. One supporting artist holds a percussion instrument called Udukku in horizontal position in the left hand and beats it with the fingers of right hand. Another supporting artist keeps tala with the aid of two wooden pieces while yet other one plays cymbals. When bow-song is in full swing, there is a perfect coordination of music raised from the Veekols, bells, pot-beating, Udukku, tala kattai and cymbals to the mood of ballad. The artist in charge of pot most often says the chorus “aama” “aama” or “sari...sari” at the end of each and every verse to add an encouragement to the main singer and to grab the audience. Songs sung in bow-songs are in a very simple style that can be understandable for every folk, even illiterate folk people. Harmonium and thabela, which are the essential components of Modern bow-song programs, were no longer used in the ancient version of bow-songs called Nattar Villuppattu.

### ORIGIN OF BOW-SONGS

It should be noted that, though there has hardly been any documented evidence for the exact time of origin of villuppattu, it was believed to be introduced as a new performing art by one of the poets in the Royal court of Pandiya King who ruled Valliyoor or Kalakad in the 15th century A.D.<sup>2</sup> It is believed that Villuppattu was first organized by assembling archer that was used in wars, mud-pot being used to fetch water, stalk of palmyra palm as a beating rod, and bells that were hung down from the neck of cows and bulls. A keen look into ancient Tamil literatures makes known that the ancient poem Viralividu thoothu, which was written by Deivasilaiyar in the middle of 16th century AD, makes use of the phrase “Paadukinra Villaam” for denoting the bow-song that was carried out to sacrifice the deity Sudalaimaadan.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore concluded that bow-song had originated at least in the later half of the 15th century AD and became popular among the people in the 16th century A.D.<sup>4</sup> Even if bow-song tradition begun in the 15th century A.D, ballads (stories interspaced with songs) sung in bow-songs had started to appear in the writing since the 12th century A.D.<sup>5</sup> It is probable therefore that bow-song tradition had begun even before the 15th century and became the part of the culture of people in the 16th century. It is quiet possible, and even probable, that the folk ballads were passed on in the form of oral narration from one generation to the next generation and the singers, owing to lack of transcription facilities, preserved their own songs with slight modifications in course of time according to their wishes. Because of this reason it is quite impossible to predict the exact author who first narrated the ballad and time during which the ballad was first enlisted in folk literature. Since year marks, as in B.C and A.D, have not been used in Tamil calendar and since most Tamil folk writers did not write their names in the script, the prediction of the age of the script would be a painstaking duty of researcher.

Till the end of the 18th century, old people of the village sat in front of the temple and sung songs as they had known about their deities by beating the string of a bow and pot. Whereupon the village people invited selective persons who had enough skill in udukku, bow-play, pot-beating and tala kattai from different regions and requested them to perform villuppattu for meals and cloths during their temple festivals. The artists did not get money as remuneration from the villagers in that time and they thought of that it was a good reputation and appreciation to the performers from the villagers.

In particular there had been no organized bow-song team in Kanyakumari district till 1850 A.D when Aruvikkutti pulavar (1824-1882 A.D) at Azhathankarai village of Kanyakumari district had established a team for performing villuppattu in temples.<sup>6</sup> Aruvikkutti pulavar taught villuppattu to his pupils Somasundaram Nadar and Madakkannu Nadar in nearly around 1862-1875 A.D. Madakkannu Nadar taught villuppattu to Ariharaperumal while Somasundaram Nadar taught it to Chitrakkutti pulavar in 1895-1910AD. Chitrakkutti pulavar (1880-1951A.D) taught villuppattu to Thanga Nadar (1914-1966AD) who in turn taught it to Saraswathi, Suyamburajan, Rajakizhi, Rajakumar and Subbiah Nadar who are now popular villuppattu artists in Kanyakumari district. Dhuraiswamy Nadar (1926-2002 A.D), who learnt villuppattu from Madakkannu Nadar, taught it to his sons Janarthnan and Dharmalingam.<sup>7</sup> Saraswathi<sup>8</sup> who is the recipient of Kalai Maamani award from Tamilnadu Government taught villuppattu to her daughter-in-law Malathi, a recipient of Kalaimanni award.

In modern bow-songs, which are popularly called Naveenavillisai or Villuppattu in Tamil, harmonium and tabela are used in addition to the instruments used in Nattar villuppattu, some songs from cinema are included at suitable places and jocks are built-in to amuse the audience, but the basic theme of story telling is the same. The bow-song performed by Nadar community is called Nadar Villu, that performed by Vellalas is known as Pillaimar Villu and that executed by Devar community is called Devar Villu.<sup>9</sup> Devar Villu is very likely in Tirunelveli district while Nadar Villu is preferred by Nadar community and Pillaimarvillu is preferred by Vellalas of Kanyakumari district, of which Nadar Villu seems to be most

popular in this district.

#### HISTORICAL BALLADS IN BOW-SONG

From the early 16th century onwards people of Kanyakumari district have been singing bow-songs that reveal the stories of historical events as a way to remember their previous culture with the intension of preserving it in the society via folk ballads. The Nayaks of Madurai frequently invaded the southern regions of Travancore (present Kanyakumari district) since 1609 and attempted to destroy the Pandiyas who ruled Agasteeswaram, Thovalai and western part of Tirunelveli district.<sup>10</sup> Bow-songs such as Kanadiyan Por (war with king of Kanada), Vettum Perumal Kathai (story of man who cut off the heads of great many number of enemies), Malaiyammal kathai (story of women who killed Nayaks soldiers), Idachi Shelli Kathai (story of Yathava woman who misdirect the Nayak's army) and Manan Mathippan Kathai (story of Pandiyan chieftain) deal with various events associated with the war between Nayaks and Pandiyas.<sup>11</sup> More like historical novels, these bow-songs narrate the war events and the cultural traditions of people in the area. From Kanadiyan Por, it came to be clear that Valliyoora Pandiyan<sup>12</sup>, who ruled Aramozhi and adjacent areas with Valliyoora as the capital, defeated the Nayakas army in that war, and on hearing his war lordship the princess of Nayakas fell in love and liked to marry him. The Nayakas King requested the Pandiya King to marry his daughter, but the Pandiyan denied his marriage proposal because of the reason that in Tamil culture a man marries a woman his own race and that it would be inferior to his prestige if he used to marry a vadukachi (a Nayaka's woman). Since he had denied his proposal, the Nayakas King commenced war with Valliyoora Pandiyan, captured him and put him in the royal court of Nayaks where he was enforced to marry the princess. But, that Pandiyan King, who had full hatefulness in his heart, did not want to obey the Kings order so that he committed suicide with his scimitar before the Nayaks King and princess. Having seen the dead body of her beloved man, the princess cremated herself to die off, as the women of India in yester years died along with their husbands who died first, to reveal her fondness to him. Kulasekara Tampuraan Kathai depicts the story of Kulasekara Pandiyan who defeated Venad Kings in the early half of 16th century. The military of Nayaks, headed by Srinivasa Rao in 1719 and by Subbiah Rao in 1722, attacked the Pandiya Kings who were ruling Aramozhi, Kalakadu, Thenkasi, Kayathaaru and Valliyoora, and defeated them in the war. After they won the premises of Venad, they robbed the cattle and grains stored in granary, burgled women and their jewels including thali and killed men illegally without mercy. The clay pot that was carried by women on their waist for fetching water from wells or river was broken by throwing small pieces of stones on it.<sup>13</sup> Since the village people suffered a lot from the invasion of Telugu Nayaks, the native people hated the Nayaks and expressed their hatefulness in the form of a bow-song called Pancha Pandiyar Kathai or Ivar Rajaakal Kathai. Besides these, bow songs such as Udaiyaar Kathai, Kumaraswami Kathai, Sonamuthu Pandiyan kathai and Siva Ramapadiyan Kathai are also sung in some parts of Kanyakumari district, but they are popular in Tirunelveli district.<sup>14</sup> These stories are related to the Kings included in the Pancha Pandiyar Kathai. Immediately after the hung down of the King Veerapandiya Kattabomman<sup>15</sup> on 16th October 1799, bow-songs were written in memory of the King and the ballads were sung in village festivals in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts. Existence of ten different bow-songs about Veerapandiya Kattabomman today reveals the fact that at least ten narrators had told the story in the beginning.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, there was a bow-song about Puli Devan who was a patriot fought against the East India Company during the period of Kattabomman.

There are thirteen bow-songs concerned with the events associated with the South Travancore region that makes up the present Kanyakumari district. The folk ballad named "Ravikutti Pillai Por"<sup>17</sup> states about a war between Ravikutti Pillai who was a chieftain of Venad and Thalavai Ramappyan of Madurai Nayaks in 1630 A.D. It narrates about how did Ramappyan cut off Ravikuttipillai's head with his sword and how did the post war events caused hatefulness of Venad people towards Telugu people. The bow-song "Dharmarajaavin Rameswara Yaathirai" is a bow-song that narrates the event of theft from the Maharaja of Travancore Karthikai Thirunal Rama Varma (1758-1798 A.D), alias Dharmaraja, while he along with his Vellala bodyguards used to go to Rameswaram temple.<sup>18</sup> It clearly states that some thieves belonging to Nayaks stole the King's prestigious ornaments and provided them to a Telugu woman. So also the bow-song "Thiruppanni Kazhvu Maalai" narrates a story of the jewels theft from Bhagavathiamman temple, Kanyakumari, by a group of Telugu people who came from Trichy.<sup>19</sup> When Padmanabhan Thampi and Raman Thampi, the sons of Rama Varma rose in rebellion with the support of Ettuvittil Pillaimars against the sovereignty of Marthanda Varma in 1729 A.D.<sup>20</sup> Vellalas gave money and supports to the King to restore the law and order of the Government. The bow-song "Thampimaar Kathai" tells the story of Padmanabhan Thampi and Raman Thampi, "Kunju Thampi" bow-song depicts the story of Raman Thampi, "Valiya Thampi or Valiya Ejamaan Kathai" bow-song reveals the story of Padmanabhan Thampi, "Ettukoota Thampuran Kathai" narrates the story of eight Nair families who offered their supports to



Padmanabhan Thampi for the fight against Marthanda Varma. The bow-song “Kaanni Savu” tells about the war of Marthanda Varma with Kaanni tribe dwelling in the forests of south Travancore. Madhava Rao (1858-1872A.D) changed the Marumakkathayam law of inheritance to Makkathayam law of inheritance of properties<sup>21</sup>, which was immediately included in the bow-song “Dewaanin Vetti”, meaning victory of Dewan. Such historical ballads appeared somewhere in the district immediately after those incidents had happened and they were passed on to next generation via oral transcription. After Vividh Bharathi program was launched on 3rd October 1957 by All India Radio (New Delhi)<sup>22</sup>, people were more absorbed by radio programs due to their perfectness and artistic expressions than the local folk performing arts and hence the lust for folk performing arts had declined gradually from the minds of people.<sup>23</sup> Those people who sung the verses of bow-songs then started to murmur the songs broadcasted from radio stations. Tradition of historic bow-songs therefore came to end in social festivals in villages within two or three years. Now-a-days such songs are sung only in radio programs and cultural festivals being celebrated at the district level.

#### **STORIES OF PURANAS AND EPICS IN BOW-SONGS**

As the people of Kanyakumari district had to face serious threats of slavery and inequality under Travancore Government, stories of puranas and epics could not attract the people very much, except some old people who had known some stories from their ancestors. The Kings of Travancore strictly ordered the low caste people, including Nadars, Elzhuvas, Kammalar, Azhuvars, Sambars and Kaannis, not to worship the main gods such as Bhrama, Siva and Vishnu and their consorts in whatever way in temples<sup>24</sup>, but the puranas and epics were mainly written on these principal Gods. Because of this reason, people of Kanyakumari district were socially prohibited to know about the stories depicted in puranas and epics. Nevertheless, some people who could read and write alone were interested to hear the stories from puranas and epics. However, such stories were very popular in Tirunelveli district ruled by Pandiya Kings so that people who moved to and returned back to the Kanaykumari district had the opportunity to know some stories from the local people via daily conversations. Stories of Mahabharatha (400 BC)<sup>25</sup> such as Panchaali Sapatham, Keesaka Sapatham, Nalan-Dhamayanthi Kathai, Archunan Thavas, Abimaniu Por, Karnan Pirappu, Karnan Por, Dhrona Motcham, Alli-arasaanni Maalai, Pancha Paandavar Vanavaasam, PandavarAnjaatha Vasam, Krishnan Thoothu, DharmarUttam, Rukmanni Kalyannam and Dharmarin Raajasuya Yaagam had been sung for several centuries, but they became popular among the people after Pugazhenthai pulavar who wrote these stories in simple style in Tamil. Further, stories of Kambar Ramayana<sup>26</sup>, written in 12th century AD, such as Seetha Kalyannam, Vaali mocham, Padukaa pattabishekam, Asuvametha Yaagam and Raman Por (war of Raman) were also sung in this district. Kovalan-Kannaki kathai based on the Tamil script Silappathikaram (6th century AD)<sup>27</sup> is sung in many parts of the district during pongal and Tamil New year festivals. Most of the stories from Puranas and epics are nowhere to be found in village festivals after the launching of Vividh Bharathi programs by All India radio in 1957.

#### **SOCIAL EVENTS IN BOW-SONGS**

In order to create awareness about social evils among the people, some bow-song scripts are written and performed before the crowd of people who aggregated in a common place for some reasons during community festivals. Such bow-songs have been displayed directly before the audiences or broadcasted through radio or television programs after suitable recording since the inception of Vividh Bharathi by the Government of India. There was no evidence for the existence of such bow-songs in palm leaf scripts. Stories about the social evils<sup>28</sup> concerned with the abortion of female babies, prohibition of alcoholics, prevention of dowry system, quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, father-son conflicts, agricultural problems, management of rural and urban problems, blood donation and its impacts on people, diabetes management, Leprosy awareness, AIDS awareness, creative thoughts of higher officials and great men, water harvesting, safe environmental management, tree planting, etc. are narrated to the people in a simple and easy to follow manner to create awareness among them. Now-a-days, much importance is given for radio and TV broadcasting of bow-song programs that are concerned with social awareness to public.

#### **BOW-SONGS ON SOCIAL HEROES**

There has been a growing tendency to sing about heroes, who had suffered a lot for the benefit of others, via bow-songs to remember and respect them among the local people. Marshall A. Nesamony (1895-

1959 AD) who seriously worked for the liberation of oppressed people of South Travancore<sup>29</sup> and Chidambaranathan Nadar<sup>30</sup>, who was a minister worked for separation of Tamil speaking regions from Travancore, have been respected via bow-songs during cultural festivals in Poovankudiyiruppu and Poochivilaayam villages of Kanyakumari district.

### BOW-SONGS TO MINOR DEITIES

In Kanyakumari district, it is a tradition to sing bow-songs on the days of temple festivals in villages. Bow-songs have been performed in the premises of temples as a sacrifice to propitiate the small deities and they seem to be the most flourishing folk performing art in this district. By this art, stories of small deities are narrated before the effigies of the deities till someone devotee belonging to that village gets into frenzy to perform a frenzied dance called Samiyattam in front of the people crowded during the festival. Bow-songs have been performed mostly in the villages of Nadars and to a small extent in the villages of Vellalas, Elzhuvass, Aluvaha and scheduled castes during the temple festivals called Kodai or Thiruvizhaa. Thiruvizhaa is usually conducted during April- June whence most farmers and villagers are at rest and schools remain closed after annual examinations.<sup>31</sup> In addition to Thiruvizhaa, yet other offseason festival called Sirappu is conducted for the deities at the end of Karthigai month (17th Nov-16th Dec) or in the first week of Markazhi month (17th-25th December). It is said that there would be no Thiruvizhaa without bow-song. In some temples, bow-songs are conducted even for Sirappu.

To reverence the small village deities, which are believed to be subordinates of major Gods such as Siva, Brhama and Vishnu, bow-songs are sung in Mutharamman temples, Isakkiamman temples, Pathrakazhi amman temples, Parasakthiamman temples, Brhammasakthiamman temples, Vaathiyan temples, some Sudalaimadan temples, Sangili Boothathan temples, Aaladi Bothi temple, Manar Raja temples, Muthu Pattan temples and Sastha temples during Thiruvizhaa. Although it is not a tradition to play bow-songs in temples of Lord Siva and Vinayaga, it is often included in the Sivarathri festival and Vinayagar sathurthi festival respectively to bring out happiness in the mind of devotees. In Sastha temples, bow-songs are performed during Pankuni Uthiram, ie. moon in Uthiram star zone during March 14-April 12.

The Travancore Government that appreciated the cast system strictly ordered the low caste people such as Nadars, Ezhavas, Paraiyars, Vannars and others that they should not enter the premises of temple for worship and it restricted the low caste people to construct large temples for their Gods and to install the images of Siva, Brhama and Vishnu therein for worship.<sup>32</sup> The low caste people were forced to worship small deities such as Veerabadrhan, Sudalai Madan, Irulan, Mutharaman, Isakkiamman and Padrakazhi as they were believed to be low caste Gods and they were also restricted to conduct grand festivals in their temples.<sup>33</sup> The story of the main deity alone was sung in bow-song in the evening and the festival ended with a pooja in the midnight.<sup>34</sup> It was Vaikundaswami (1809-1851) who first promoted the low castes to worship the lords Siva and Vishnu by simple chanting, without rich rituals to propitiate them and as a consequence the stories about high caste Gods (Bhagavathi, Parasakthi, Vishnu and Siva) were included in bow-songs.<sup>35</sup> Large temples have been built for the village deities and three-days festivals have been conducted to propitiate the deities since 1936 when the Chithirai Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore ordered to open temples for all Hindus irrespective of castes and relaxed the religious restriction imposed on low caste people. As a consequence, bow-songs of deities have attained a high place in the worship of village deities. Bow-songs of deities reveal that the deities had got supreme blessings from lord Siva to destroy the enemies of villagers and it depicts the revenge mood of people towards the higher caste people who were cruel to them.

It is thought to be righteous that story of Sastha (Sastha kathai) is sung on the first day of festival because of a belief that all deities will be sacrificed and seated in their places in the temple when the God Sastha, who rules all deities and Boothas (elemental factors), is revered through bow-song.<sup>36</sup> So it is a rule to sing Sastha kathai at first in all festivals of small deities in villages. Following this, on the next day, the main deity of the temple is worshipped through bow-song and in the night bow-songs about the subordinates of the deity are sung to propitiate them. The subordinates may be either brothers or sisters of main deity or bodyguards for the deity. Bairavar, Pechiamman, Uchimakazhi, Irulan, Shetrabalan, Pannimadan, Palavesakaran, Sangili Bootham, Pulamadan, Karupan, Kathavarayan, Vandimalayan, Nagakani, Jadamuni and Mundan are believed to be subordinates of main deity. On the third day morning, stories of Kalasamy (Yama), Sudalaimadan and Masanamurthi are sung in bow-song till some one gets excited to perform Samiyattam. The festival ends with a song that blesses the Gods and villagers who conducted the festival.<sup>37</sup> The conception of Aruvikutti pulavar, to which many villagers provided support, seemed to be the correct way in the small deities' worships or at least a vital part of it and that bow-song

tradition has been inherited through his pupils and fellow artists so far.<sup>38</sup>

From the stone sculpture of Ayyanar (Sastha) on elephant dated back to 900 A.D.<sup>39</sup>, it is clear that Sastha worship was started among Hindus even before the 9th century, and that, since Sastha worship was prohibited for low castes, it was included in bow-song as a small deity that had no statue in village temples roughly around 1850s after the teaching of Sri Vaikundaswami.<sup>40</sup> Bow-song of Sastha<sup>41</sup> tells about the birth of Sastha to the Lord Siva and Vishnu when the latter got changed himself into a beautiful dancer called Mohini to kill Vallarakan, a demon king who got the blessing of Siva that all his enemies' heads would break off if he stretched his fingers towards them. Being attracted by the femininity of Mohini, Siva conjugated with her and gave birth to Sastha; the Goddess Parvathi then grew him up till he became an adult and sent him to the earth for governing the people.

Mutharaman kathai bow-song<sup>42</sup> states that the Goddess Parvathi fought with a demon king Mahisasura, who got the Siva's blessing that he can only be killed by women but not by any man or weapon, but she could not kill him, so that the lord Siva created seven Goddesses (Muthumari, Manjalmarri, Agnimari, Karumari, Sandhanamari, Meenakshi and Gowmari) from the sweats of Parvathi in a sacrificial fire for the purpose of killing the demon king. These seven sisters together with Parvathi fought with Mahisasura for nine days and killed him finally. With the intension of marrying the lord Siva, the seven sisters went to the sacred place of Siva but he, after providing some powerful blessings, sent them as Goddesses to the earth. Muthumari became the Goddess Mutharaman as she had the power to spread "Muthu" pox lesions and to cure that disease in man who worshipped her. Nagam Aiyya concluded that Mutharaman was propitiated by villagers periodically and special offerings and ceremonies were performed in South Travancore when there was cholera or smallpox outbreak in the area.<sup>43</sup> The first cholera epidemics<sup>44</sup> occurred in 1818s and hence it can be concluded that Mutharaman gradually became a deity in villages of low caste people and folk ballad on Mutharaman had been sung from the early 1825 A.D onwards.

Among the manifestations of Isakiaman, Muppandal Isakiaman is declared to be the most ancient one<sup>45</sup> Folk ballad of Isakiaman<sup>46</sup> reveals that a woman called Isaki killed Anandhan Chetti, who was her own lover and killed her to steal jewels in the previous birth, and his relatives in Pazhavor for revenge and came to a stone building at Muppandal when the famous Tamil Poetess Avvai was residing therein. After getting the superior blessings from lord Siva, Isaki settled in Muppandal and disturbed the people in several ways until people accepted her as their Goddess. Because of the existence of a temple for Avvai to the east of the Isakiaman temple in Muppandal and the ballad states about the friendliness of Isaki with Avvai, the events had happened in the Sangam age (6th century A.D). Therefore, ballads on Isakiaman had appeared at least in the 7th century and passed on to subsequent generations orally from elders. Nevertheless, the present version of Isakiaman bow-song might have originated from the ballads during the time of Aruvikutti pulavar.<sup>47</sup> This bow-song has been sung in all Isakiaman temples during festivals.

Padrakazhi aman kathai<sup>48</sup>, which is based on the epic Sri Devi Bhagavatham, states that Padrakazhi born from the holly fire came from the third eye of the lord Siva to kill the seven demon kings- Thakan, Thokan, Idumpan, Karupan, Sampeeran, Samparan and Tharukan- who had ruled a fort in deep sea and behaved rudely to Gods and good spirited men on the earth. Padrakazhi destroyed the fort and seven demons, for which she was accredited as the Goddess in the earth. A stone sculpture of Kazhi (1600 A.D)<sup>49</sup> from Puliyoorkurichi reveals that Padrakazhi worship in Kanyakumari district was dated back to 16th century and hence it is concluded that folk ballads on Padrakazhi might have originated in the 16th century A.D.

Sudalai Madan kathai<sup>50</sup> states about the birth of Sudalai Madan and how did he killed the black magician Kazhi Perumpulayan, who had stolen the secret treasury protected by him, and his only daughter Maaisaki. The Tamil poem Viralividu Thoothu written by Deivasilaiyar in the middle of the 16th century states about the worship of Sudalai Madan through bow-song and Kanniyar Koothu<sup>51</sup>, which suggests that bow-song on Sudalai Madan had appeared at least in the early part of 16th century. It is supposed that Aruvikutti pulavar had given a new shape to the bow-song during his life time.

Vaathai kathai bow-song<sup>52</sup> states that about 21 Vaathais, who were created by the lord Siva to fade away Kali (evils on earth), had got the superior blessings of Siva through seven rebirths and attained the status of Gods. Manar Raja is supposed to be the head of the 21 Vaathais. Until 1972 Vaathai was worshipped through a one-night pooja with butcher of fowls, sheep and goats but later on butchering in the mid-night has been neglected and bow-song has been sung for Vaathai.<sup>53</sup>

Muthupattan kathai bow-song<sup>54</sup>, which has been sung in Muthupattan temples located in Parvathipuram and Aramozhi, states the story of Muthupattan- a Brahmin boy who did the jobs of a low caste pulaya to marry his daughters Thomakaa and Bomakaa and died in a war with Vanniyar tribes who had stolen his cows, grains and jewels. Since Muthupattan temple was first built in 1923 AD, the tradition of propitiating him via bow-song may have originated in the first part of 20th century.<sup>55</sup>



Temples for Sangili Boothathan are located in Boothpandi, Vaithyanathapuram, Perunkulam and Suchindrum, of which Boothpandi temple is the most ancient one that was built in around 1870 A.D. For Vaithyanathapuram temple, Sangili Boothathan kathai<sup>56</sup> bow-song was copied from the palm leaf manuscripts maintained in Boothpandi temple in 1876 A.D.<sup>57</sup> It is therefore supposed that Sangili Boothathan bow-song has been sung from the later quarter of 19th century.

Aaladi Bothi kathai, which has been sung only at Keezha Maavilai village, states the story of a Brahmin family – Bothi and his sister Aananthiyamai- who had performed pooja for the lords Siva, Brahma and Vishnu under a banyan tree.<sup>58</sup> This bow-song was written by Annavi Nadar roughly around 1860 A.D and it had been sung by the members of the family until 1972.<sup>59</sup> Now, bow-song performers have been singing the bow-song in this temple. Likewise, Pichaikalan kathai bow-song, being sung in Pichaikalan temple at North Soorankudy and in Mutharaman temple at Sundapattivilai, was written in 1912 immediately after the Pichaikalan temple was established.<sup>60</sup>

Vivekanandan states that, since the ancient Brahmasakthiaman temple at Uvari was built in 1650 A.D, the ballad of bow-song might have originated at least in the second half of 17th century.<sup>61</sup> This ballad<sup>62</sup> states that the Goddess Brahmasakthi was created for receiving a pearl ornament from demons who robbed it once from Gods while they were in the way to the sacred place of the lord Siva. Ballads of other deities might have come into bow-songs following the main deities of village temples.

### CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows that in Kanyakumari district the bow-song tradition had arisen in the first half of 16th century and about 150 ballads have been sung through bow-songs. Folk tales of historical events had appeared soon after the incidents had happened somewhere in the district while those about heroes came into bow-song after the death of the men of high virtues. Folk ballads about social problems have been sung in bow-song from the days on which people wanted to tell them to other people crowded in cultural festivals. Aruvikutti pulavar had given a new shape to bow-song being sung in this district by organizing a bow-song team and teaching it to his pupils and his bow-song team was possibly the first one to reveal the present version of bow-song. Folk ballads of historical events and heroes, which were once the only way to entertain folk people, started to fade away since 1957 when the All India Radio launched Vividh Bharathi program that first broadcasted well styled film songs and dramas to which people were more absorbed than the folk ballads. Bow-songs of social problems broadcasted through radio and television programs however reach great many numbers of people in villages. Since the small deities were the sole Gods of Nadar, Ezhava and Alzhavar communities under Travancore Government and since bow-songs have been respected as holly verses in the worship of the village deities, bow-song has been the most flourishing folk performing art against modernization in Kanyakumari district.

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