



A Study of Ballad Literary Techniques, Aesthetic sense and Bravery of a Tamizhachi through the lens of Vanavil K. Ravi's *The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili*

Dr. K. Subapriya

Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of English, Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai-30, Tamilnadu, India

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Abstract— Tamilnadu, the ancient land with many accolades including the eminent language, culture, bravery, hospitality has more crown and feather to its caps. Its achievements and accomplishments knew no bounds. Endless song on the praise of Tamil and Tamil culture can be sung for ages and ages. Among the versatility of Tamil culture, the bravery of female warriors cannot be ignored. One such significant contribution is *The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili* by Vanavil. K. Ravi. Through this text, the magnificent achievement and the contribution of female warriors for the independence is well brought out and presented to the younger generation. This paper explores the techniques, aesthetic sense and bravery of blood in a woman. The ballad form employed by the poet adds more flavour and enthusiasm while approaching this text, henceforth this paper ventures to explore on the aspects of Ballad form in addition.



Keywords— *Ballad, Kuyili, Warrior, Velu Naachiyar, literary techniques of Ballad*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the word Ballad

Before plunging into the discussion about the text, *The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili*, it becomes mandatory for us to ponder upon the etymology of the word 'Ballad'. The term 'Ballad' has evolved from the Latin word 'Ballare', which means 'dancing song'. So, from the root word, one could clearly understand that it is another form of short narrative poem which could be used to perform in the form of dance. To quote from the Cambridge dictionary, Ballad is "a song or poem that tells a story, or (in popular music) a slow love song". Ballad is always placed in juxtapose to the form of epic as it has a short verse which is meant to be sung with the accompaniment of music instrument. In European countries, Ballad form was highly developed between fourteenth and fifteenth century. The minstrel, a travelling performer like a musician, or a singer or any other type of entertainers would have composed these Ballads. The subject of the Ballads is usually centred on

mythical people, history and folk customers to the commoners.

1.2 Characteristic features of Ballad in this chosen text:

The Ballad of the Warrior girl Kuyili written by Vanavil K. Ravi has the following characteristic features of ballads namely (1) Short story (Life of Kuyili) (2) Universal appeal (Revealing the strength of women) which indeed gives an inspiration to women all over the world (3) Colloquial language (of course diction used here is simple) (4) Abrupt opening (5) No extra details (6) Dialogue (7) Refrain (8) Stock Phrases (9) Ballad stanza (10) Tragic elements and (11) simplicity.

One could also find some difference in the Ballad which varies from the usual Ballad epic like (1) This Ballad is devoid of supernatural elements (2) There is additional invoking of Gods like Ganesha and salutations were also offered (3) There is an inclusion of prologue and epilogue. In the blurb of this text, writer Mrs. Sivasankari puts forth and comments on the ballad form. To quote, "written in Sindhu form of folk art, the style is simple, lucid and

gripping. The author needs to be congratulated for putting the focus light on Kuyili, an unknown heroine till date and making the society aware of her courageous act that speaks the glory of women”.

1.3 Characterisation of Kuyili

To begin with the discussion of Kuyili, one cannot forget the brave queen Velu Nachiyar and her invincible soldier Kuyili. This Kuyili, a diamond in the ‘Udayal Regiment’ is an unsung heroine who is rightly applauded through this Ballad by Vanvil K. Ravi. To know more about the prosperity and richness of Tamil culture, it is just more than enough to read the characters of great women like Kuyili and Velunachiyar. During nineteenth and twentieth century when women in western world fought for the vote to right seeking freedom and equality, it is proud to note the participation of certain women who were far ahead in all fields. They excelled to the extent of running a defence regiment named ‘Udayal Regiment’ on their own.

For instance, Virginia Woolf, an early twentieth century writer in her lecture that has been later retitled and published as *A Room of One's Own*, makes an ardent plea for a room where she could peacefully sit and right to be an efficient writer. On the other hand, African American writer Alice Walker “In Search of our Mother's Garden”, talks about the struggles which their mother and grandmother has to encounter for their livelihood. They strived immensely to bring up their children. Life was not a bed of roses for them. African American women were triply colonised and their struggle was against those multi-layered colonisations. Compared to the above scenario, even before ages, it is quite admirable to find an abled queen with capable defence regiment comprising woman soldiers from normal walks of life.

This woman Kuyili who hailed from a normal peasant family, served as the army commander of Velu Nachiyar. She participated ferociously against the East India Company in eighteenth century. She has the acclamation of being the first suicide bomber and the first woman Martyr in Indian history for the freedom struggle. She was first introduced in literature by K. Jeevabharathi in his account on ‘Velu Nachiyar’. She is attributed with the fame for saving the queen's life several times. Only after noting her valour and sincerity, she was appointed as commander-in-chief by the queen Velu Nachiyar.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

2.1 Canto one: The opening stanza of the book presents the skilful usage of paradox. The lines “songs of love and war” reminds the title of the book *Songs of Love and War* by

Santa Montefiore. There are much more beautiful paradoxical images given as below,

Full of music –listen quietly

Songs of love-Songs of war

From lands near-far

Happy themes- melancholy

The second stanza also has figures of speech. For instance the poet uses the simile shining like the sun. Setting of the action is clearly given in the fourth stanza i.e Sivaganga of Tamilnadu, and the poet praises the land as land of loyal warriors and great musings. After the homage to land, he also praises Tamil language and acclaims it to be the sweetest of all languages. He uses the superlative degree to talk about the sweetness of Tamil over all languages. Supposing the incident to have taken place in 1780 before the festival of Navarathri, we are taken back to those years to travel with the warrior girl Kuyili.

The author gives a cinematographic representation. To quote, “As we proceed my camera would adjust its lens” (24) states the poet. A visual treat is expected and yes of course in Canto one, we have the visual, sound and touch images of nature. It is a treat for the readers. Dramatic imageries have been well used in Canto one. The ending line of Canto one presents an ironic image of love and rifle shot. To quote,

A flower is dropped by a tree

And on her palm it lands.

Does it make a statement

Of love, loud and clear?

A rifle-shot, somewhere near

Brings her back to now and here! (24)

2.2 Canto two & Canto three: This canto reveals Kuyili's acquaintance to Udayal regiment. A picturesque representation of Velu Nachiyar's valour which is more sung than the beauty of queen is brought into focus. Queen with the spear in hand on the horse back is something a visual treat. Even in Canto 3, one could see the struggle of VeluNachiyar. Disguised as a man with her disguised women regiment, she leads a sleepless nights shifting abodes to restore her lost kingdom for the welfare of her loyal subjects. Her life could be well understood through the lines “Grief to pain, pain to anger, anger to reason”! (33) which shows the transition of emotions. Through the meeting between the great queen VeluNachiyar and brave girl Kuyili, the poet captures the early life of VeluNachiyar. The poet has elegantly played with rhythmic verses. To quote, “Down the memory lane, she saw her past again” (30).

She was multifaceted even at the age of eight or nine who was roaming like a deer learning martial arts like a lion. She mastered several languages and rode a horse. She handled all the weapons with ease. Being the only daughter of her parents, she was no less than a son who had all the capabilities to ascend the throne of Sivagangai and rule the people. After her wedlock with MuthuvaduganathaDevar, all was well with their new born daughter until the hindrance of Arcot Nawab Muhammad Ali who demanded tax from the states around. The issue started when Muthuvaduganathar refused to pay the tax for his own land. Through treachery, Arcot Nawab executed his plan to murder him in Kalaiyar Koil and he got succeed in his venture too. If not for the objection of Chinna Marudhu and Peria Marudhu, VeluNachiyar queen would have stormed on the same day to behead the treacherers. The wise counsel prevented her by stating that bows and arrows cannot fight against cannons.

2.3 Canto four "Udayal, the Martyr" marks the sacrifice of brave woman Udaiyal who sacrificed her life denying to tell the secret hiding place of queen. She did not yield to the torture of British. She faced death rather than revealing the secret place of the queen. To mark her sacrifice, queen named her regiment as 'Udaiyal regiment'. Brave woman Udayal gets beheaded by the soldiers and the nature stood as the evidence to that brutal scene. The poet skilfully uses pathetic fallacy technique to express the emotions. To quote,

The trees around lamented and
Shed their leaves in respect.
The sky was dark, a single star,
Like a little insect,
Peeped out from up above
To have a look at the
ghastly scene, a blot on earth, (37)

No wonder, to honour the sacrifice of great Udayal, later the queen's regiment was named as Udayal regiment and a temple was built for her which was called as 'Vettudayar Temple'.

2.4 Canto five presents the diplomatic skill of the queen. She could convince Hyder Ali to borrow army and troupes to fight against the Britishers. Her words show her determination. To quote,

Give me men, rifles, bullets
Give me cannons generously
The British are our common enemy
Let us crush them unitedly. (39)

Hyder Ali was able to well understand the queen's will and he yields. With all the regiments, she was able to attack the Britishers. The great queen could have easily attacked the Britishers, however the modern ammunitions and weapons storage was a great threat to many lives and moreover it seemed to be a great hindrance for the victory of the queen's regiment. Through the canto five, "A Doha and The Diplomat" Poet also sings the praise of Queen's invincible diplomat aspects. She is not only a woman of pride with great warrior skills but on the other hand as a woman of knowledge, poetry, music, logic and the diplomat, easily even the Hyder of Mysore has turned out to be a spectator of her mighty nature. Her impeccable urdu conversation and Dohas of Amir Khusro blew up Hyder. Her demand for men, rifles, bullets and cannons to fight against the British was accepted by Hyder in one stroke. He sensed a fact that Queen is not an ordinary woman but a woman with solid determination who is destined to rule to a Nation.

When the thought of destroying the ammunition storage popped up, it was Kuyili who came up with the plan to destroy the ammunition by setting to fire. Rather than using any other source as torch to set the light which may at times fail, Kuyili plans to set herself on fire and destroy the entire ammunition storage. Who could render such a sacrifice at a very young age? She was not a common woman who was just meant to do household chores, fall in love, get married and die at an old age. She is an icon, a legend, and a woman who brimmed with patriotism and chivalry.

2.5 Canto six to Canto fourteen highlights the series of plans and motivations carried out by Queen. Attack on the Britishers is not a simple event. At the end, Kuyili comes up with a suicidal bomb attack plan which could not be deciphered by many even in her own regiment. The action sequences are picturesquely depicted by the poet. These action sequences too were not devoid of images, dialogues and literary dictions. The poet has used rhymes, blank and free verse and the rhyme adds more beauty to the story line. To quote,

After some confusion-he
Arrived at a conclusion
Not the best, he conceded,
Though workable instead: (58)

Another interesting rhymed line are as given below,

Can secrets remain secrets? Never!
From ear to ear,
They flow like a river! (59)

The poet also has brilliantly echoed the words of Shakespeare through the voice of Major Bonjour, who

underestimates the strength of queen. He loudly exclaims "Woman, thy name is frailty!" (68). As he fails to note the vicinity of Queen's soldiers, he mistakes that the dormant state of queen and utters the above words. The rhetoric questions also add to the freedom spirit in this Ballad. The following lines stands as a testimony,

"Aren't we warriors? Don't we fight?
Fight to protect the Nation?
Shouldn't we do our duty? Why
All this trepidation?
Life itself a battlefield,
A constant struggle for peace. (64)

War aspects keep shadowing throughout these Cantos however, one of the most attractive portion is the climax scene that happens in Canto fifteen where the brave girl Kuyili makes a supreme sacrifice. Kuyili, the dark skin girl runs like a fire ball into the warehouse and sets the warehouse in a blaze. The warehouse collapses like a pack of cards. The imagery like fire ball, and pack of cards used by the poet to describe that extraordinary scene makes the text unique and unparallel. As the poet states, it is a moment in history that has no parallel. Her following words echoes the sky,

"Victory to Kali, victory to Durga,
Victory to Sivaganga!
Freedom to all, freedom to all,
Freedom to one and all!". (78)

In the wink of an eye, she ascends and the angels descends to welcome her to their abode. She was revered as the patron saint of Sivaganga. Only because of her, the British flag was pulled from the mast without a roar and a hanuman flag was hoisted. The palace was redeemed at the end. The Ballad concludes with the following victory chant, "This Motherland is our pride!".

III. CONCLUSION

Epilogue pays a tribute and reverence to her supreme sacrifice. The poet adores her as a beacon light, an inspiration for every woman to rise. He makes a special reference to previous women warriors like Joan of Arc, Abbakka, Lakshmi Bai and Lakshmi Seghal and further celebrates Udayal, Velu Nachiyar and Kuyili in those lineages. They will forever remain as the shining stars. The poet in epilogue strikes a keynote stating, "This ballad never will end, but let us put an end to wars" (80). Epilogue is followed by the prayer calling for the necessity of peace on this earth. He beseeches the readers to carry forward the

praise and carry the glory of woman Kuyili to distant lands. The story of Kuyili can be told in any form of literary genre but the Ballad form when sung and heard with various rhythmic and literary techniques outworths the visual image of Kuyili's bravery. The success of the rendition lies in this chosen form of Ballad. Prayer, salutation, prologue and epilogue adds more beauty to the Ballad. No wonder this Ballad is a sensory treat to the readers and could give goosebump feel to the audience while performed on stage.

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- [6] Sivaganga-The town is the headquarters of the Sivagangai district in Tamilnadu, India.
- [7] Navarathiri- Festival of nine nights celebrated by Hindus to celebrate Goddess Parvathi, Lakshmi and Saraswathi
- [8] Vettudayar Temple- it is situated in a village called Kollangudi in Sivagangai district
- [9] Hyder Ali- Sultan who ruled Mysore in Southern India.
- [10] Urdu- Indo-Aryan language spoken in South Asia
- [11] Mirza Ghalib- an Indian poet who wrote both in Persia and Urdu
- [12] Major Bonjour- Principal British officer in charge of East India company in Sivagangai
- [13] Hanuman- Character in Epic Ramayana who is worshipped and celebrated for mighty courage and devotion to Lord Rama