

The message 'Ponnniyin Selvan' conveys



V. Jeevakumar

The advent of a new Tamil film in the contemporary society has opened a new chapter. 'Ponniyin Selvan' made in five languages was released simultaneously at 5,500 theatres the world over. The film and its title demand a re-examination.

'Ponni' is another name for the river Cauvery. Chandeswara Nayanar in 'Periya Puranam' calls the Cauvery 'Ponni.' Kulothunga Chozha-III also termed the river as 'Ponni' in his inscriptions and copper plates.

The carbon-14 dating method and archaeological researches including satellite images have estimated the age of the river Cauvery at five lakh years. Researchers have also pointed out that the present shape of the river had come about less than a thousand years ago.

The phrase 'Ponniyin Selvan' refers to Arulmozhi Varman aka Raja Raja Chozha-I. The Cauvery or Ponni took birth very well before his advent on the scene in the Chozha kingdom. The later Chozha reign represented by Raja Rajan started taking a full-fledge form in 9 C.E. and was at its peak in 1115 C.E. Yet it was the earlier Chozhas who had an umbilical kinship with the Cauvery. There was a long lineage of Ilamchetchennai, Chetchenni, Nalangkilli, Killivalavan, Karikalan-I and Karikalan-II. Their period has been defined as 60 BCE to 10 BCE. There are researchers who say that it was Kalikalan-II who built the Grand Anaicut ('Kallanai' in Tamil) across the surging Cauvery river.

Of course, the DMK government has expedited archaeological excavations. But it is true that such researches are not being done on the models pointed out by our Chief Minister M.K.Stalin's father and former Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi who had written the historical novel 'Romapuri Pandian.' The late DMK patriarch recalled the following lines from the story 'Selva Chandira' written in 1939: "Kaveripoompattinam is the eye of the Dravidian landscape flush and plush with land and water resources." He had described the Puhar civilization as a predecessor to the Babylonia, Phoenician, Greek and Egypt civilizations.

Ancient literature speaks about urban structures such as Maruvoorpakkam, Pattinampakkam and Naalangkadi (day market), gardens such as Ilavanthicholai, Unnaavanam, Sampaapathivanam, Uvavanam and associations such as Vellidaimandram, Paavaimandram, Nedungkal Mandram, Ilanjimandram and Kottraimandram – all in Poompuhar.

Yet another message that the film 'Ponniyin Selvan' conveys is that the ancient civilization that flourished on the banks of the Cauvery must be subjected to an elaborate, extensive and intensive research.

Evidences were ferreted out of sea, which have pushed back the Indian history to the hoary past thousands of years ago. German geophysicist Alfred Lothar Wegener, who proposed the theory of

continental drift, said in 1912 that the world remained a single continent about 25 crore years ago. Similarly, the Himalayan mountain ranges' earliest form was just an ocean and then there were no Arabic Sea and the Bay of Bengal, according to researches. The land man lived on in the hoary past had over the years changed into sea which was the cradle of the human civilization, say the scholars.

In order to project India's long tradition of glory in the global arena, it is the ocean-oriented researches which are more needed than the land excavations. However, there is a general tendency that we pride ourselves on the land excavations. The National Institute of Oceanography, India, the Tamil Nadu department of Oceanography and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the UNESCO must conduct joint oceanographic researches so several new chapters of the human history can be written. The Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology says the remains of the Poompuhar civilization are buried six km under the ocean.

India's first underwater archaeological excavation was done in Dwaraka in Gujarat in 1981. A decade thereafter, that is, in 1991 an oceanic excavation was conducted at Poompuhar. The archaeological surveys done at the confluence of the Cauvery with the sea made startling discoveries. Lots of potsherds, burnt clay dolls, reddish potsherds with Brahmi script, precious stones, square copper coins, broken ships, building debris, oval-shaped buildings, Semburan stones, grey potsherds, brick and black stone buildings, wharves, brick platforms and a European era ship containing 18 leaden blocks, an explosives box and a canon were thrown up by the underwater archaeological surveys. But unfortunately, these survey works were given up half-way through. The field of oceanographic excavation is one that demands fabulous funds.

It is 200 crore years since the earth took form. The modern man called homo sapiens appeared just a few lakh years ago. The

whole mankind's antiquity and oldest civilizations were buried deep in the dark recesses under the seas.

The Ponni river and the oceanic regions such as Poompuhar have lots of possibilities of throwing up startling and glorious discoveries if proper excavations and archaeological researches are conducted painstakingly. Will the government go all out to shed light on those dark regions?

V. Jeevakumar, advocate and farmers rights activist. For contact: vjeeva63@gmail.com

Translated by V.Mariappan.