

Cultural Imprints in Vallikannan's Literary Works

Dr. Meignani Prabhakarbabu

M.Sc., MBA (Bkg), MBA (HR), CAIIB, Dip- Intl Bkg, M.A., Ph.D.
No.3, Solai Street, Ayanavaram, Chennai-600023
meiprabhakar@gmail.com
9790414379

Abstract

This study examines the representation and preservation of cultural practices in the literary works of Vallikannan, with particular emphasis on the ways in which his narratives document the lived experiences of Tamil society. The study seeks to identify, classify, and interpret the cultural elements embedded in his writings and to examine their relationship with changing social structures. It focuses on customs, rituals, festivals, folk beliefs, oral traditions, proverbs, dialectal expressions, performing arts, food practices, marriage ceremonies, social relationships, and community life as represented in selected works. A qualitative textual-analysis methodology is adopted, drawing upon close reading and contextual interpretation of the primary texts, supported by relevant scholarship on Tamil literary and cultural studies. The analysis investigates how cultural practices function not merely as narrative details but as markers of identity, collective memory, social values, and regional consciousness. Particular attention is given to the representation of rural and regional life and to the tensions between traditional cultural practices and processes of social transformation. The study argues that Vallikannan's works constitute significant literary records of cultural memory, preserving aspects of everyday life that may otherwise remain undocumented. By situating his literary representations within their broader socio-cultural context, this study establishes the potential of Vallikannan's writings as sources for understanding the continuity, negotiation, and transformation of Tamil cultural practices in the modern period.

Keywords / திறவுச் சொற்கள்: Vallikannan, Meignani, Tamil literature, cultural representation, cultural memory, folk culture, social practices, regional identity, textual analysis

Introduction

South Tamil Nadu covering Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Kanyakumari, and Virudhunagar has a rich literary history. The region comprising these states has rich historical values and cultural imprints. Southern states have produced several stalwarts in Tamil literature who have depicted the lifestyle of their districts. The authors such as Vallikannan, Ki.Rajanarayanan, Poomani, Sundararamasamy, Pudhumaippithan have registered the socio-cultural situations of those days in their style of writings. Vallikannan is one of the writers who has left a unique mark in the history of Tamil literature. His real name is R.S. Krishnaswamy. He hails from Rajavallipuram in Tirunelveli district and has contributed in various fields such as short stories, novels, poetry, essays, dramas, translations, literary criticism and literary history. Records mention that he is the author of more than fifty books and works of various genres. When we look at the literary world of Vallikannan from a cultural point of view, we find that he was not just a creator of stories. He was a writer who documented the human life, social relationships, rural environment, family system, human attitudes, social contradictions and changing lifestyles of a period in writing in more than 70 works since 1944. The cultural records found in his works not only refer to the customs of a particular community. They also reveal the mindset of the Tamil society which has gone through a change.

This study examines the representation and preservation of cultural practices in the literary works of Vallikannan, with particular emphasis on the ways in which his narratives document the lived experiences of Tamil society. The study seeks to identify, classify, and interpret the

cultural elements embedded in his writings and to examine their relationship with changing social structures. It focuses on customs, rituals, festivals, folk beliefs, oral traditions, proverbs, dialectal expressions, performing arts, food practices, marriage ceremonies, social relationships, and community life as represented in selected works.

A qualitative textual-analysis methodology is adopted, drawing upon close reading and contextual interpretation of the primary texts, supported by relevant scholarship on Tamil literary and cultural studies. The analysis investigates how cultural practices function not merely as narrative details but as markers of identity, collective memory, social values, and regional consciousness. Particular attention is given to the representation of rural and regional life and to the tensions between traditional cultural practices and processes of social transformation. The study argues that Vallikannan's works constitute significant literary records of cultural memory, preserving aspects of everyday life that may otherwise remain undocumented. By citing his literary representations within their broader socio-cultural context, this study establishes the potential of Vallikannan's writings as sources for understanding the continuity, negotiation, and transformation of Tamil cultural practices in the modern period. Given the extensive volume of Vallikannan's work, this article focuses on a selected few of his creations.

Soil and Humans

The basis of Vallikannan's cultural record is his connection with the soil. The background of the village of Rajavallipuram was important in his life and in the world of creation. The area where he was born is associated with the Tamiraparani river culture. Thus, the village, the street, the house, the people, nature, the social relations etc. are not just the background in his writings but also a part of life. In his works, human beings are not separated from their social environment. His works show that there are many factors behind a person's actions, such as family, economic status, social relationship, habits, education, mentality, etc. Thus, his stories also serve as literary evidence to know the social life of a period.

Family Culture

The family, the basic unit of Tamil society, occupies an important place in Vallikannan's works. The love, responsibility, power, expectation, conflict and relationship issues in the family are revealed through his stories. To cite a few, his works such as 'Aththai Magal', 'Veendum Veliyum', 'Oru Veettin Kathai' and 'Mannikka Theriyaadhavar' take the reader to various dimensions of family and personal relationships. Vallikannan's catalogue of works includes many works that touch on family, human relationships and social life. In his work, the family is not only an individual residence but also a place where culture is transmitted from generation to generation. The language, relationships, respect, duty and expectations spoken in the family are recorded as micro elements of social culture.

Rural Life

His narratives focus on ordinary village people, capturing their day-to-day habits, speech, and traditional lifestyles without romanticizing them. Many of his writings and famous stories (such as *Madam Rides the Bus*) view the expanding world and rural surroundings through the innocent, curious eyes of children discovering independence. His stories reflect the economic hardships, quiet routines, and subtle emotional transformations of rural communities in South India. The influence of rural life on Vallikannan's works is significant. For him, the village is not just a collection of scenery. It is an integrated form of the people living there, the relationships between them, the social constraints, the problems of livelihood and the beliefs. He describes the landscapes in his own style in a lucid manner. The important oral traditions, relationships, social morals, and local values in the rural culture are reflected in the events of the short stories and the dialogues of the characters. Thus, while reading Vallikannan's stories, one can see the daily life of the Tamil society from close quarters.

Registration of Social Conflicts

Vallikannan's cultural outlook is not just about glorifying antiquity. He also expresses the contradictions that exist in society. In his 'Vidivelli', the plot moves forward focusing on how people cross through dark or trying times in their lives, searching for a new dawn and transformation. The lifestyle of ordinary people: The story narrates, against a social backdrop, the daily lifestyle of simple people living without luxuries, along with their desires and disappointments. In several stories, human nature, social control, civilization and law collide with each other. Stories like 'Compassion' and 'Intelligent' express the approach to human beings from the point of view of social justice. From this, it can be understood that Vallikannan's valuable writing is a critical record that presents the values in the society, their contradictions and the actions of human beings to the reader's thought.

Woman's life

The lives of women also appear to be an important cultural element in Vallikannan's works. Creative titles such as 'Natyakari', 'Kalyani', 'Aththai Magal', 'Shakuntala', 'Aval Oru Extra' refer to various platforms related to women's life, relationships, art, family and society's perspective. His works provide an opportunity to look at the status of women not only as an individual issue but also as a link to family and social systems. Thus, literature serves as a cultural document to understand the gender expectations, family values and social perceptions around women of the society of that time.

Urbanization and Changing Culture

The change between the old social system and the new way of life can also be seen in Vallikannan's works. A title like 'Veedom Veliyum' reminds us of the relationship between the individual's family world and the outside world. Similarly, in some of his stories, the pace of modern life, the loneliness of human beings, the change in social relationships, etc. emerge. A few of his stories describe the urbanization and change in human relationships in Tamil society from a cultural perspective.

Language and Dialectical Culture

In Vallikannan's works, language is not only a tool for storytelling; It is also a medium to carry culture. The way people speak, the choice of words, the way of dialogue, the way of humour and satire convey the social background of the characters. The culture of a society cannot be known only through its food, dress and ceremonies. Culture is also manifested in how those people speak, how they call relationships and how they express their opinions. Vallikannan's dialogue-based writing style accommodates these subtle cultural records.

Historical Record of Literary Culture

Vallikannan's cultural contribution did not end with his fiction. He recorded the literary development of Tamil as a part of cultural history. His series of essays such as 'Saraswathi Kaalam', 'The Origin and Growth of Puthukavithai', 'Bharathikku Pin Tamil Prose' and 'Tamil Small Patrikagal' document the development of the Tamil literary world, the journalistic environment, writers and literary movements. In particular, the book 'The Origin and growth of Puthukavithai' was an attempt to compile the history of the Puthukavithi movement. This book was first serialised in 'Deepam' and later published as a book. Thus Vallikannan is not only a writer but also a literary historian who recorded the literary historical facts of his time.

Humanistic Culture

Man appears to be the central theme in Vallikannan's work. Man's shortcomings, desires, weaknesses, love, compassion, selfishness, social responsibility, etc., are explored in his stories. Hence his cultural outlook focuses more on recording the intrinsic characteristics of human relationships than on recording external rituals. An account of his literary theory mentions that

Vallikannan used to write down the emotions and thoughts that life and time aroused in him. This concept helps us to understand how the experience of life becomes literature in his works.

Conclusion

The cultural records found in Vallikannan's works are multi-layered. They span different dimensions such as soil, village, family, relationships, women's life, social conflicts, humanism, urbanization, language, dialect and literary movements. The specialty of his writings lies not in recording the culture as a frozen old form, but in connecting it with the movement of life that is changing. On the one hand, he records the traditions, relationships and way of life of the Tamil society; On the other, he points out the shortcomings and contradictions of the society. Similarly, he documents the development trajectory of Tamil literature. Thus, Vallikannan's works are not only a fantasy world of a single writer but also an important cultural document that helps us understand the life, mood, changes and literary culture of the twentieth century Tamil society.