



God Murugan riding a peacock South Indian bronze
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THE SMILE OF MURUGAN

ON TAMIL LITERATURE OF SOUTH INDIA

BY

KAMIL ZVELEBIL

With 3 plates and a folding map



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CAMARPPANAM

DEDICATION

The great drums beat
As Asua warriors marched
Then burning rage cut asunder
Corpses scattered
Scorched with a spark
From your radiant smile
O leader of men
With leaf-edged spear
Lover of Valli the gypsy
O lord who resides on Tiruttani hills!

(Arunakiri, *Tiruppukal* 5 71)

Transl S Kokilam

Somehow or other, Murugan, the youthful god of victorious war, is ubiquitous in Tamil writing and culture, he is present in the earliest classical poems of Tamil as well as in the splendid “Lay of the Anklet”, in the ruby-red and sea-blue and golden songs of Arunakiri as well as in the very recent prayers to Murugan by A K Ramanujan

His wars are, of course, not only victorious, but just He destroys evil, decay, death His smile is the light of life and eternal youth “His face shoots forth myriad rays of light, removing darkness from the world” (*Tirumukurārruppatai* 91-92)

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Leiden,
Spring 1971

K Z

PREFACE

The Dravidians, and in particular the Tamils, have contributed a great deal to the cultural *richesse* of the world. Pallava and Chola temple architecture, Chola bronze sculpture, the dance-form known as Bharatanatyam, the so-called Carnatic system of music. But probably the most significant contribution is that of Tamil literature, which still remains to be “discovered” and enjoyed by the non-Tamilians and adopted as an essential and remarkable part of universal heritage. If it is true that liberal education should “liberate” by demonstrating the cultural values and norms foreign to us, by revealing the relativity of our own values, then the “discovery” and enjoyment of Tamil literature, and even its teaching (as a critical part of the teaching of Indian literatures) should find its place in the systems of Western training and instruction in the humanities.

However, frankly speaking, I do not think that anybody is capable, at the present state of affairs, of bringing out a sufficiently formalized, detailed and exhaustive synthesis of Tamil literature comparable to such magnificent works as, say, Jan Rypka's *Persian Literature* or Maurice Winternitz's *History of Indian Literature*.

Much, much more detailed, analytic work must be performed and many monographs on various aspects, trends, literary works, writers and even entire periods have yet to be written and published before a synthetic and detailed treatment of Tamil literature can be attempted. There are still quite enormous blank spaces on the map of our knowledge of the subject, fundamental knowledge is lacking, e.g., with regard to the extremely interesting and even thrilling poetry of the *cittar*, who can say that he has mastered in a critical way the vast sphere of the Tamil *purānas*, or the much neglected Muslim contribution to Tamil writing? Not only that—we must, at the same time, learn to enter sympathetically and with professional precision another culture, remote in space and time, we must learn to understand the function of literature in India, to appreciate and enjoy it in terms of cultural norms and literary taste which is not only different from our approach but often in direct contrast to it. And, last but not least, we must try to formulate the results of our

analysis in a manner which will be increasingly more formalized and explicit and less intuitive and informal.

Since, then, as I believe, no accurate and systematic synthesis of the subject is as yet possible, it is obviously inevitable that a choice is made, a selection of topics and themes, which will necessarily be biased owing to one's own abilities and inabilities and one's own personal preferences and dislikes.

But apart from subjective motivations, there must be, and I believe there are, objective criteria of evaluation indicating which literary works are characteristic, typical, truly representative of a national writing. My selection of works, authors and topics was fundamentally based on such criteria. I made a choice (it must be frankly admitted that this selection was made under the shadow of despair caused by a true *embarras du choix*) which is reflected in the twenty chapters where I have dealt with what I consider to be the most characteristic, pivotal and topical works and trends of Tamil literature. I can hear the indignant, offended and even enraged critics: why the Sarvite and not the Vaishnavite poets? No discussion of the brilliant *Cīvakacintāmani*? Why has nothing been said about our greatest modern poet Bharati? Etc. etc. I do not apologize. I try to explain in the pertinent chapters. One of the reasons for this selective approach is that I believe in strict professionalism; I do not like to pretend and to speak about matters which I do know only as an enthusiastic dilettante, and, unfortunately, dilettantism, however much it might have been motivated by passionate enthusiasm, is one of the maladies which have affected studies in Tamil literature to a dangerous extent.

The annotated bibliography, appended to this volume, though far from complete and very selective, may to some extent fill the gaps. The present volume is therefore emphatically not even an approximation to a complete historical treatment of Tamil literature. It is a fragmentary collection of essays on Tamil literature, intended to arouse interest and to provoke discussion.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Aink</i>	<i>Ainku₂anūi_u</i>
<i>.Ak</i>	<i>Akanāyūi_u</i>
<i>Akalt</i>	<i>Akalinaiyval</i>
anonym	anonymous
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London
<i>Čuupān</i>	<i>Čuupānāyūi_uppatai</i>
<i>Col</i>	<i>Collatikāram</i> of Tol _k
comm	commentary
<i>DBIA</i>	<i>Dravidian Borrowings from Indo-Aryan</i> (1962) by T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau
<i>DED</i>	<i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> (1961) by F. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau
<i>DEDS</i>	<i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary — Supplement</i> (1968)
ed	edition, edited
<i>EI</i>	<i>Épigraphia Indica</i>
<i>Éṭṭ</i>	<i>Éṭṭatikāram</i> of Tol _k
fn	foot-note
<i>ISI</i>	<i>A History of South India</i> (1955) by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri
<i>IIL</i>	<i>A History of Tamil Literature</i> (1965) by T. P. Meenakshisundaran
<i>HTLL</i>	<i>History of Tamil Language and Literature</i> (1956) by S. Vayapurū Pillai
<i>IA</i>	<i>Iṭaiyaṇū Akapporūl</i>
<i>ibid</i>	<i>ibidem</i>
id	idem
<i>Ka</i>	Kannada, Kanarose
<i>Kalit</i>	<i>Kalittokai</i>
<i>Kuz</i>	<i>Kuzuntokai</i>
<i>KZ</i>	Kannal Zvelebil
<i>Lta</i>	Literary Tamil
lw	loan-word
<i>Ma</i>	Malayalam
<i>Malai_upatuk</i>	<i>Malai_upatukātāṁ</i>
<i>Mānar</i>	<i>Mānarādharmaśāstra</i>
<i>Matu_uatik</i>	<i>Matu_uatikkāñci</i>
<i>Mey_up</i>	<i>Mey_uppāthiyal</i>
<i>Mulla_up</i>	<i>Mulla_uppāthi</i>
<i>Naccu_uārik</i>	<i>Naccu_uārikkūṁṁiyai</i>
<i>Nātya_us</i>	<i>Nātyaśāstra</i>
<i>Nay</i>	<i>Naiyimai</i>
<i>Netu_unal</i>	<i>Netu_unalvātar</i>
<i>OTa</i>	Old Tamil
<i>Pat</i>	<i>Patikam</i>
<i>Pat_ur</i>	<i>Pat_uṭṭi_uppattu</i>
<i>Pei_umpān</i>	<i>Pei_umpānāyūi_uppatai</i>
<i>Pr_ukt</i>	<i>Prakrit</i>
<i>Poru_unai</i>	<i>Poru_unai_uṭṭi_uppatai</i>
<i>Porūl</i>	<i>Porūlatikāram</i> of Tol _k

prob	probably
<i>Pur</i>	<i>Puram, Puranāṅṅiri</i>
<i>PVM</i>	<i>Puṣṣporulvenpāmālar</i>
<i>Rām</i>	<i>Rāmāyana</i>
<i>s</i>	<i>sūtra</i>
Skt	Sanskrit
<i>ss</i>	<i>sūtras</i>
<i>st</i>	stanza
<i>Ta</i>	Tamil
<i>Tātakaṛṣ</i>	<i>Tātakaṛṣpatalam</i>
<i>Tiruk</i>	<i>Tirukkural</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tamil Lexicon, University of Madras, 1936</i>
<i>To</i>	Toda
<i>Tolk</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam</i>
<i>Tolk Col</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam, Collatāḱāram</i>
<i>Tolk Eḷutt</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam, Eḷuttatāḱāram</i>
<i>Tolk Porul</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam, Porulatāḱāram</i>
trans	translator, translated by, translation
<i>Uvam</i>	<i>Uvamayyal</i>
<i>v l</i>	alternative reading

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION

The transcription used for Tamil words in this book is a strict transliteration, a system adopted by the Madras University *Tamil Lexicon*. The only exceptions are names of modern and contemporary Tamil writers where I follow mostly their own anglicized spelling. The following Roman letters are used for the Tamil characters:

		<i>Vowels</i>					
		Short			Long		
		a			ā		
		i			ī		
		u			ū		
		e			ē		
		o			ō		
		ai	au				
		<i>Consonants</i>					
		Lips	Teeth	Ridge behind upper teeth	Hard palate	Soft palate	
Stops	p	t			t	c	k
Nasals	m	n	ɳ			ɳ̠	ɳ̡
Liquids			ɻ	l	l̠		
Semivowels	v			ɻ̠			y

The Tamil long vowels are simply long vowels, unlike their English diphthongized counterparts. Final -ai is pronounced approximately like -ey.

Tamil has two series of consonants unfamiliar to English speakers: the dentals t, n and the retroflexes t, n, l, ɻ. The dentals are pronounced with the tongue at the teeth, the retroflexes are produced by curling the tongue back towards the roof of the mouth (cf. American pronunciation of *girl*, *sir*).

In the middle of Tamil words, long consonants occur. In transliteration, they are indicated by double letters (cf. *Nakkīrar*, *pāttu*). English has long consonants between words, cf. Mac Kinley, *four roads*, *hot tea*.

The Tamil *r* is flapped or trilled as in some European languages like Spanish, Italian or Czech. The *l* is somewhat like the American variety of *r*, *r* and *ṛ* are not distinguished by most modern Tamil speakers, but long *ṛṛ* is pronounced like *tr* in English *trap* or *tt* in *hot tea*, *nr* is pronounced *ndr* as in *laundry*.

p, *t*, *c*, *k* are pronounced differently according to their positions. Initially, *p*, *t*, and *k* are pronounced as voiceless stops, *t* does not occur, and *c* is initially pronounced as *s* or *sh*. Between vowels, *p*, *t*, *c* are voiced into *b*, *d*, and *d* and pronounced as lax voiced stops, *k* and *c* are pronounced as *gh* or *h* and *s* or *sh*. After nasals, all stops are voiced into *b*, *d*, *ḍ*, *g*.

Instances: *akam* is pronounced usually *aḥam*, *cankam* is pronounced *saṅgaṇi*, *kapilar* is pronounced *kabilar*, *kuruntokai* as *kurundohev*, *narrinai* as *natriney* or *nattiney*, *tolkāḥḥiyam* as *tolhaapivam*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY

Let me right at the beginning posit a problem. are we at all entitled to speak about Dravidian literatures (or even about South Indian literatures) as an entity separate from other literatures of India? In other words is there a complex set of features which are characteristic for the literatures written in Dravidian languages and shared only by them and not by other Indian literatures?

The criteria, setting apart "Dravidian" literatures from the other literatures of India, are either linguistic or geopolitical

"Dravidian literatures" means nothing more and nothing less than just literatures written in the formal style of the Dravidian languages, "South Indian literatures" means, by definition, literatures which originated and flourished in South India (including Sanskrit literary works, produced in the South)

The answer to this question whether there are some specific, unique features shared exclusively and contrastively by the literatures written in Dravidian languages is negative. There are no such features—apart from the incidental (for our purposes and from our point of view) fact that they are written in Dravidian languages. It is impossible to point out specific literary features of works composed, e g , in classical Telugu, and designate them as Dravidian. It is equally impossible to select any particular feature which we could term Dravidian as such and would apply to all Dravidian literatures alike and only to them.

Conclusion there are no "Dravidian" literatures *per se*

It is, however, an entirely different matter if we consider carefully just one of the great literatures of the South—the Tamil literature. There, and only there, we are able to point out a whole complex set of features—so to say a bundle of diagnostic isoglosses—separating this Dravidian literature not only from other Indian literatures but from other Dravidian literatures as well. It is of course only the earliest period of the Tamil literature which shows these unique features. But the early Tamil poetry was rather unique not only by virtue of the fact that some of its features were so unlike everything else in India, but by virtue of its literary excellence, those 26,350

lines of poetry promote Tamil to the rank of one of the great classical languages of the world—though the world at large only just about begins to realise it

All other Dravidian literatures—with the exception of Tamil—begin by adopting a model—in subject-matter, themes, forms, in prosody, poetics, metaphors etc.—only the language is different, in spite of the attempts of some Indian scholars to prove that there were—that there must have been—indigenous, “Dravidian”, pre-Aryan traditions, literary traditions, in the great languages of the South, it is extremely hard to find traces of these traditions, and such attempts are more speculative than strictly scientific. It is of course quite natural that in all these great languages oral literature preceded written literature, and there is an immense wealth of folk literature in all Dravidian literary as well as non-literary languages

But in Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, the beginnings of written literatures are beyond any dispute so intimately connected with the Sanskrit models that the first literary output in these languages is, strictly speaking, *imitative* and *derived*, the first literary works in these languages being no doubt adaptations and/or straight translations of Sanskrit models. The process of Sanskritization, with all its implications, must have begun in these communities before any attempt was made among the Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam peoples to produce written literature, and probably even before great oral literature was composed.¹ About Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam literatures we may say with K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (*HSI*, 3rd ed. p. 340) “All these literatures owed a great deal to Sanskrit, the magic wand of whose touch alone raised each of the Dravidian languages (but here I would most definitely add with

¹ Incidentally, a community which has totally escaped the type of diffusion that had been identified by the term “Sanskritization” (cf. the writings of M. N. Srinivas and Milton Singer for the introduction and elaboration of this term), at least in South India, has yet to be found. As M. B. Emeneau pointed out, one can enumerate a number of important traits even in such isolated groups as the Todas and Kotas of the Nilgiris, which may be called Sanskritic (even the Toda word *tow* “god” is ultimately derived from Sanskrit, cf. *DBIA* 219 Skt. *dava-* “divine” - Pkt. *devva-* > Ka. *devva*, *devvu* “demon” whence probably *To tow*, cf. “Toda Verbal Art and Sanskritization”, *Journal of the Orient Institute, Baroda*, XVI, 3-4, March-June 1965). What is important for our problem is that, according to Emeneau’s opinion, these Sanskritic traits in the Nilgiris are very old, they can hardly be considered as a recent acquisition.

the exception of Tamil, K Z) from the level of a patois to that of a literary idiom" Whoever has written so far on the history of Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam literatures take refuge in a formulation which is characteristic for speculative conclusions, cf "the beginnings of Kannada literature are not clearly traceable, but a considerable volume of prose and poetry must have come into existence before the date of Nīpatunga's *Kavirājamārga* (850 A D), the earliest extant work on rhetoric in Kannada", or "beyond doubt there must have existed much unwritten literature (in Telugu) of popular character " etc The facts are different

The beginnings of Kannada literature were almost totally inspired by Jainism The first extant work of narrative literature is Śivakōṭi's *Vaddārādhanē* (cca 900 A D) on the lives of the Jain saints The fundamental work on rhetoric in Kannada, and the first theoretical treatise of Kannada culture, is based on Dandin's *Kāvyaśāstra*—that is Nīpatunga's *Kavirājamārga* Pampa, the first great poet of Kannada literature—and one who is traditionally considered the most eminent among Kannada classical poets—is, again, indebted entirely to Sanskrit and Prakrit sources in his two compositions, in his version of the *Mahābhārata* story, and in his *Ādīpurāna*, dealing with the life of the first Jain Tīthankara The beginnings of Kannada literature are, thus, anchored firmly in traditions which were originally alien to non-Aryan South India Quite the same is true of Telugu literature Telugu literature as we know it begins with Nannaya's translation of the *Mahābhārata* (11th Cent) The vocabulary of Nannaya is completely dominated by Sanskrit And again the first theoretical work in Telugu culture, fragments of which have recently been discovered, *Janāśrayachandras*, an early work on prosody, is itself written in a language which is more Sanskrit than Telugu, it contains traces of metres peculiar to Telugu and unknown to Sanskrit, and only this fact indicates that there had probably existed some compositions previous to the overwhelming impact of Sanskritization In Malayalam, too, the beginnings of literature are essentially and miraculously connected with high Sanskrit literature the *Unnunīli Sandēśam*, an anonymous poem of the 14th Century, is based on the models of *sandēśa* or *dūta* poems (the best known representative of which is Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*), its very language is a true *mampravālam* which is defined, in the earliest Malayalam grammar (the *Līlātilakam* of the 15th Cent), as *bhāśāsamskrītayogam*, i e the union of *bhāśā* (the indigenous language, Malayalam) and Sanskrit

An entirely different situation prevails in Tamil literature. The earliest literature in Tamil is a model unto itself—it is absolutely unique in the sense that, in subject-matter, thought-content, language and form, it is entirely and fully indigenous, that is, Tamil, or, if we want (though I dislike this term when talking about literature), Dravidian. And not only that—it is only the Tamil culture that has produced—uniquely so in India—an independent, indigenous literary theory of a very high standard, including metrics and prosody, poetics and rhetoric.

There is yet another important difference between Tamil and other Dravidian literary languages—the metalanguage of Tamil has always been Tamil, never Sanskrit. As A. K. Ramanujan says (in *Language and Modernization*, p. 31): “In most Indian languages, the technical gobbledegook is Sanskrit, in Tamil, the gobbledegook is ultra-Tamil”¹.

There is an obvious historical explanation of the fact—the earliest vigorous bloom of Tamil culture began before the Sanskritization of the South could have had any strong impact on Tamil society. It is now an admitted fact by scholars in historical Dravidian linguistics that the Proto-South Dravidian linguistic unity disintegrated sometime between the 8th-6th Cent. B.C., and it seems that Tamil began to be cultivated as a literary language sometime about the 4th or 3rd Cent. B.C. During this period, the development began of pre-literary Tamil (a stage of the development in the history of the language which may be rather precisely characterised by important and diagnostic phonological changes) into the next stage, Old Tamil, the first recorded stage of any Dravidian language. The final stages of the Tamil-Kannada split, and the beginnings of ancient Tamil literature, were accompanied by conscious efforts of grammarians and a body of bardic poets to set up a kind of norm,

¹ This may be illustrated by comparisons of grammatical or philosophical terms. In Telugu, e.g. the gender categories of “higher” and “lower” classes are termed *manat* and *amat* (Sanskrit), in Tamil, the corresponding terms are *uvai-turai* and *ahuvai* (*ahuvai*), which is pure Tamil. Most Indian languages use for “vowel” and “consonant” the Sanskrit terms *svara* and *vyāñjana*. In Tamil the terms *uvai* (Ta. “breath”) and *mev* (Ta. “body”) have always been used (with the exception of a rather “pro-Sanskrit” “Aryan-oriented” Buddhist grammar *Tiracūḻvan* which introduced Sanskritized grammatical terminology into Tamil, but the usage has not spread at all). Even such philosophical terms as “meaning”, “form”, “soul”, *kauma* etc., have always been precisely expressed in “pure” Tamil cf. resp. *porul* DED 3711, *uvai* DED 566, *uvai* DED 554, *uvai* or *ūl* DED 4473, 2258.

a literary standard, which was called *ceyyul*—or the refined, poetic language—or alternatively *centamil*—the elegant, polished, high Tamil. The final outcome of these events—the creation of a literature of very high standard and of a rich and refined linguistic medium—found expression in the excellent descriptive grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, one of the most brilliant achievements of human intellect in India.

Charts 1 and 2 give the data for the first extant literary works and epigraphic monuments of the four South Indian languages, and a kind of graph which shows a sharply rising curve indicating the tremendous time-gap between the beginnings of Tamil written literature on the one hand, and the other Dravidian literatures on the other hand. These data are self-explanatory and need no commentary.

The influence which the various South Indian literatures exercised on one another was, at certain periods, not inconsiderable. Thus, e.g., a certain very early school of Malayalam poetry was obviously strongly influenced by Tamil, or, to quote another example, Kampan's Tamil *Rāmāyana* seems to have had an influence on some other South Indian *Rāmāyanas*. On the other hand, this mutual interaction has never been decisive or even very important. Apart from the earliest period of the development of Malayalam literature, South Indian literatures seem to have developed more or less independently of each other. There was one very good and simple reason for this: the one language which was almost equally spread over the South Indian territory as the language of highest learning and culture was Sanskrit. The intellectual exchange very probably took place through the medium of Sanskrit and the Prakrits, Sanskrit literature composed in the South was of a very high quality and of a considerable volume.

A fact which tends to be overlooked: so many outstanding Sanskrit authors were Southerners—Tamil, Kanarese or Kerala Brahmans, who in many cases could not help but let themselves be enriched and influenced by indigenous traditions, conventions, etc. A typical case is that of the great Rāmānuja, the founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita system. Though an exact and final proof of a direct connection between the Tamil Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs and Śrī Rāmānuja is yet to be submitted, there is more than ample external evidence to show that the traditions and the emotional and intellectual background of Śrī Rāmānuja were identical with the environments which produced the great Tamil Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs. Rāmānuja was a Tamil

Brahmin born at Śrīperumpūtūr near Madras in 1018, and had his early philosophical training at Kāñcīpuram, but built up his philosophy of qualified monism in Śrīrankam, and travelled throughout India to propagate his ideas. The important fact is that Rāmānuja followed, in the evolution of his philosophy, Yamunācīrva (b. 917) who was the grandson of Ranganāthamuni (824-924), the first of the great Ācāryas of Vaiṣṇavism who followed directly the Tamil Ālvārs, Ranganāthamuni actually became the final redactor of the Vaiṣṇava Tamil canon, and the grandson and direct spiritual inheritor of this man, Yamunācārya, who also went under his Tamil name Ālavantār, became the guru of Rāmānuja. Thus, a direct and uninterrupted line leads back from Rāmānuja to the greatest of Ālvārs and one of the greatest Tamil poets, Namālvār, who was the *guru* of Ranganāthamuni.

Without going into details, it is proper at least to mention by name the most important Sanskrit poets, commentators, philosophers and Sanskrit literary works, intimately connected with the South. It is well-known that, under the patronage of early Vijayanagara kings, notably Bukka I, a large body of scholars headed by Sāyana undertook and completed the enormous task of producing a commentary upon the Saṁhitās of all the four Vedas, and many of the Brāhmanas and Āraṇyakas.

It is not always stressed, however, that the *Bhāgavatapurāna* was composed somewhere in South India about the beginning of the 10th Cent., and that it summed up the outlooks and beliefs of typical South Indian *bhakti*, it is a fact that the *Bhāgavatapurāna* combines a simple emotional *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa with the *advaita* of Śaṅkara in a manner that (to quote K. A. Nilakanta Sastri) "has been considered possible only in the Tamil country of that period." Among the most interesting dramatic compositions coming from the Tamil South are the two unique farces (*prahasanas*), *Mattavilāsa* and *Bhagavadāyuka*, written by that immensely attractive figure in South Indian history, the "curious-minded" Mahendravarma the First of Kāñcī.

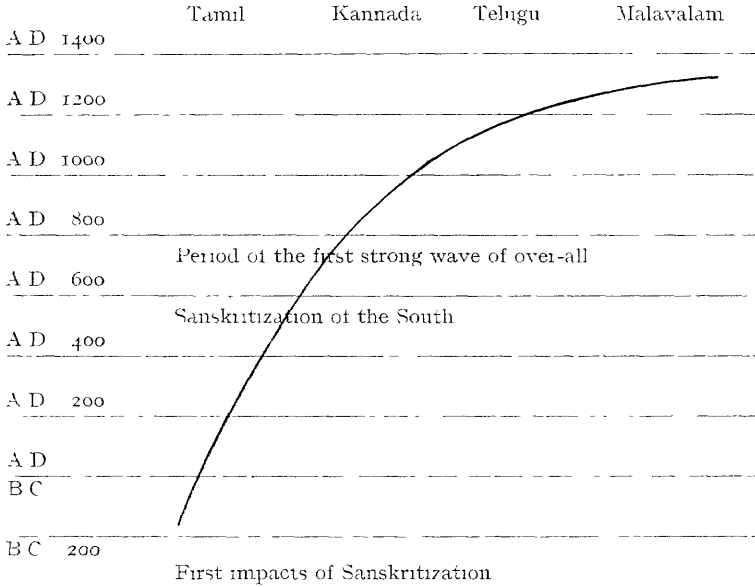
In the domain of Vedānta, all the three major schools had their origin in the South. Śaṅkara (born in 788 at Kalādī in North Travancore) was a Kerala Brahmin. One may go on enumerating hundreds of Sanskrit works in the field of belles-lettres, rhetoric, grammar, lexicography, commentatorial literature, philosophy etc., all of them written in the South. This we will not do, naturally,

CHART I

Tamil		Kannada		Telugu		Malayalam	
inscriptions	literature	inscriptions	literature	inscriptions	literature	inscriptions	literature
Early Tamil Brāhmi ("Damali") inscriptions, 3-1 Cent B C (Asokan / 272-232 B C / Brāhmi introduced ca. 250 B C into the Tamil country and adapted between 250-200 B C to Tamil)	1. the "Urtext" of the <i>Tolkāḇ-ṇṇam</i> , i.e. the two first sections <i>Eṇṇatāṅkām</i> and <i>Collatāṅkām</i> minus later interpolations, ca. 100 B C, 2. the earliest strata of bardic poetry in the so-called <i>Caṅkam</i> anthologies, ca. 1 Cent B C - 2 Cent A D	ca. 450 A D	beginnings in the 6-7 Cent A D (lost) Nripatunga's <i>Kāṇṇiṅga-mūḡga</i> (ca. 850 A D)	633 A D	beginnings in the 7-9 Cent (lost), Nannaya's translation of the <i>Mahābhārata</i> (11 Cent)	close of 9 Cent (Kottavam plates of Sthānu Ravi Chokur inscriptions ca. 925 A D)	<i>Rāmācaritam</i> of Cūrāman (13-14 Cent) <i>Ummūḇi Sandēsam</i> (anonym) (14 Cent)

it is important, however, to appreciate the fact that *Sanskrit* literary works are an integral and intrinsic part of the literary heritage of the *South* and that Sanskrit was the language of learning and higher culture throughout South India, though, of course, to a different degree in different parts of the South, and in different periods

CHART 2



CHAPTER TWO

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF TAMIL LITERATURE

One may observe, through the entire development of Tamil literature and, for that matter, Tamil culture in general, a kind of inner tension which may be traced to two sources—one is the truly dialectic relationship between the general and the specific, another the conflict between tradition and modernity. The problem of the relation of specific and general in Tamil literature and culture is a very central, very basic problem which has its important aspects in all spheres of life and which penetrates or at least touches a great number of other questions (such as the biculturalism of some strata of the Tamil community, the language-loyalty, language policy etc.). By “general” I mean the generally, the universally Indian, by “specific” I mean the specifically, distinctively Tamil.

There is much talk today about the Indian linguistic area, after Emeneau applied the theory of a *Sprachbund* to India and so-to-say discovered India, in 1956, as a “linguistic area”, as an area in which genetically different languages show similar or even identical features, we should probably develop, along analogical lines of thinking, an Indian areal *Literaturwissenschaft*, with the same precision, with the same attention to detail, with the same rigour that Emeneau develops in his hypothesis of Indian linguistic area. There is no doubt that there are some “emic” features, typical for the pan-Indian *Literaturbund*.¹ Hardly anybody can deny that there

¹ Features which are common to the entire Indian sub-continent but unique only for it, not confined to any particular region or bound by any particular linguistic unit or social community. Examples of such features (seen, naturally, in a somewhat “collapsed” form) are, e.g., high degree of conceptualization and categorizing science against low degree of fact-gathering and hypotheses-testing, the conception of time as circular rather than linear, etc. etc. In the field of literature, its function and appreciation such features are, to quote a few instances, higher regard for oral than for written transmission, emphasis on audience appreciation, the concept of “mood” (*rasa* in Sanskrit, *meyppātu* in Tamil) and its over-all importance—though the Tamil *meyppātu* is not identical, but an important “alloform” of the over-all category of “mood”, literature as rhetoric to move others, to intensify the feelings of the *rāsika*, composition is prescribed, there is therefore high degree of conventionalization, characters analyzed rather by types than by individual heroes, high degree of anonymity, a typical Indian

is a common Indianness in the literatures of India just as there are some common and distinctive features of Indian civilization and culture (though I have my doubts whether anybody has as yet successfully produced a classified list and a really deep and penetrating discussion of these features) These common features are of course results of a converging evolution, or, one should probably say, and this seems to me to be rather important, of a synthesis not yet fully achieved—, actually far from achieved. The common Indianness, the “unity in diversity”, should be regarded not as something static and finished, but as a dynamic process, as a truly dialectical process, not as a sum, but as a movement which alters in the historical evolution, a kind of striving after synthesis of oppositions and conflicts which are frequently rather antagonistic.

One of the basic—if not the basic—components of this dynamic process full of tensions and antagonisms is the striving after a Dravidian-Aryan synthesis. Tamil literature reflects this struggle, from its very beginnings in the text of the *Tolkāppiyam* until today’s writings of such men as Annadurai, Kannadasan or other apostles of the Dravidian movement on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the writings of the synthesis-oriented, “Sanskritized” Brahmin writers.

As mentioned above, it is very probable that the first bloom of Tamil culture and literature took place before that type of diffusion which had been termed “Sanskritization” could have had any massive effect and any structurally deep impact upon the indigenous, pre-Aryan culture of the South. This does not, however, mean that even the earliest strata of classical Tamil culture are without any traces of “Sanskritization”. In fact, diffusion of at least some of the “Sanskritic” traits must have taken place as early as in the Proto-Tamil or pre-Tamil stage, since, as Emeneau pointed out, these traits are very ancient in Toda culture, possessed by the Todas probably when they first appeared in the Nilgiris. As Emeneau says, Sanskritic culture has, indeed, been all-pervasive in India.

The very earliest monument of Tamil literary language and Tamil culture as such, the *Tolkāppiyam*, supposed to have been composed by Agastya’s pupil *Tolkāppiyar*, is to a great extent the product of an Aryan-Dravidian synthesis, and even in its *Urtext*, in its earliest layers, it shows beyond doubt the author’s well-digested conception of authorship, originality and imitation, a particular conception of plot(s) etc. etc.

knowledge of such Sanskrit authors as Pāṇini and Patañjali. The earliest traces of another style of Tamil—a style probably rather near to the colloquial speech of those days—preserved in the most ancient inscriptions in Tamil in the Brāhmi script—are influenced to a considerable extent by the Prakrit of the Jains and the Pali of the Buddhists.

Hence it is clear that Tamil literature did not develop in a cultural vacuum, and that the evolution of the Tamil culture was not achieved either in isolation, or by simple cultural mutation. The very beginnings of Tamil literature manifest clear traces of Aryan influence—just as the very beginnings of the Indo-Aryan literature, the Rgvedic hymns, show traces of Dravidian influence. This, too, is today an undisputed fact.

On the other hand, there are some sharply contrasting features which are typical for Tamil classical culture alone, for the Tamil cultural and literary tradition as opposed to the non-Tamil tradition—and in this respect, the Tamil cultural tradition is independent, not derived, not imitative, it is pre-Sanskritic, and from this point of view Tamil alone stands apart when compared with all other major languages and literatures of India.

It is possible to express this fact briefly but precisely by saying that there exist in India only two great specific and independent classical and historically attested cultures—the Sanskritic culture and the Tamil culture.

Historically speaking, from the point of development of Indian literature as a single complex, Tamil literature possesses at least two unique features.

First, as has just been pointed out, it is the only Indian literature which is, at least in its beginnings and in its first and most vigorous bloom, almost entirely independent of Aryan and specifically Sanskrit influences. This primary independence of Tamil literary tradition has been, incidentally, the source of many conflicts.

Second, though being sometimes qualified as a neo-Indian literature, Tamil literature is the only Indian literature which is both classical and modern, while it shares antiquity with much of Sanskrit literature and is as classical, in the best sense of the word, as e.g. the ancient Greek poetry, it continues to be vigorously living modern writing of our days. This fact was expressed in a very happy formulation by A. K. Ramanujan in his excellent book *The Interior Landscape* (1967): "Tamil, one of the two classical languages of

India, is the only language of contemporary India which is recognizably continuous with a classical past”

This fact—the relation between tradition and modernity—has, too, been the source of constant tension—contemporary Tamil literature has to carry the splendid but massive burden of an uninterrupted tradition and classical heritage, and sometimes the burden seems indeed too heavy to bear

The following are then the diagnostic, characteristic features of classical Tamil literature with regard to its subject-matter and thought-content. First of all, Tamil is probably the one ancient language of India that bears the reflection of the life of an entire people, that is, its heroes are idealized types derived from what we might even call “common folk”.) Classical (i.e. the so-called *Cankam*) Tamil literature is not the literature of the barons, neither is it the literature of a monastic order, nor the literature of an *élite*, of a *nāgarika*, it is thus not the literature of a particular social class. One major type of Tamil classical poems reflects the life of ordinary though idealized men and women, not the life of a sacerdotal or ruling nobility, of a priestly class, of nuns, monks, or of any *élite* group or groups of society. The whole gamut of basic human experience is contained in what has been best in Tamil writing. In this sense, it is very different from all strata of Sanskrit literature—from the Vedic literature which is the literature of a sacerdotal class, from the great epics which are the literature of the ruling barons, from the classical literature which is *par excellence* the literature of the “man about town”, of the *nāgarika*, it is also different from the Buddhist and Jāna texts, since these are mostly the literature of monastic orders, of monks and nuns. However, this does not mean that it is, in its finished form, as we have it, “popular” literature or “folk” literature. Classical Tamil literature is literature about and of people but not a *Volksliteratur*. It is typically a *Kunstichtung*.

The poets, of both sexes, had no priestly function to perform. There are more than twenty women minstrels, responsible for about 140 poems of the earliest strata of Tamil poetry. The true diagnostic feature of these poets is the fact that they were a professional, vocational group, held generally in high esteem. They belonged, by birth, to all classes of society, quite a number of them were born as princes and chieftains, a great number were of peasant or merchant origin, however, the list of ancient poets includes potters, black-

smiths and carpenters—by birth, that is. Some of the names are revealing e.g. Nampī Kuttuvan, *Kur* 243, belonged to the ruling dynasty of the Cēral kings, Maturai Eḷuttālan, *Kur* 223, was probably a scribe at the royal court of Maturai, Uṟaiyūr Mutukoṟṟan, *Kur* 221, is the “old headman of Uṟaiyūr”, but Kilmankalan-kilār, *Kur* 152, was a peasant by caste, while e.g. Māmūlanār, responsible for a number of poems, was a Brahmin scholar.

These early poets, recruited from many different communities, received bardic training—there were probably different schools and traditions of this training—and became professionals, the wandering minstrels and bards travelled about in groups, often rather poor, frequently, however, very influential, and sometimes rather affluent. When a poet in *Pur* 208 7-8 says “I am not singing for money” and “I am not a poet who barters his art”, it implies the existence of “mercenary” singers. Some of the poems speak even of the duty, of the obligation (*kaṭaṅ*, lit. “debt”) towards the minstrels which the ruling monarchs and chieftains have to perform (*Pur* 201 14, 203 11).

The learning of the minstrels was oral, acquired by imitation and practice, the basis of their knowledge was purely auditory. Cf. the term *kēḷi* “learning” (specifically of the poets) primary meaning “hearing, sound” (<*kēḷ*), or *kīḷavi* “word, speech, language utterance” <*kīḷa* “to speak”, i.e. “to be heard” (*DED* 1677 Burrow *BSOAS* 1943, 128), *kīḷavi* is used most frequently for “poetic utterance” all this points to the oral-auditory nature of early Tamil literature.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that the term for the most ancient Tamil metre, the metre in which almost the entire bardic poetry is sung, namely *akaval*, means “call, summon, song” (cf. *DED* 11 *akavi* “to utter a sound as a peacock, to sing, call, summon”, *akavar* “bards who arouse the king in the morning”). Later the same metre was called *ācāryam*, derived from *ācārya* “priest, teacher, author of any literary work, scholar”, a very early loan from Skt. *ācārya*—“a spiritual guide or teacher” (*DBIA* item 30). That is, there was a semantic shift from “call, summon, song” to “teaching, sermon, explanation”. The poetry acquires more and more the character of learned *Kunstichtung*, and this also leads, as Karlasapathy rightly observes, to the next stage of gnomic, didactic poetry (under the increasing impact of Jaina and Buddhist ideology).

But let us return to the bards there were probably six major types of these early poets the term which is used most frequently is *ṣānar*. This is connected with *ṣān* "song, melody", *ṣānu* "song, melody, music" and *ṣānu* "song", most probably the underlying mono-syllabic morpheme is *ṣan* "music". There are cognates in Malayalam and Tulu. It is interesting that the Pkt *ṣāna-* (most probably connected) means "a low caste" (DED 335r). The *ṣānar* were minstrels who sang their songs to the accompaniment of the *vāl* or lute. In medieval times, they were regarded as a lower caste, and in such medieval texts as the *Nantikkalampakam* (anonymous, of the time of Pallava Nandivarman III, 846-869, historically a reliable text), the *ṣānar* are compared with *ṣēv*, "the devils, the demons", and with *nāy*, "the dogs".

kūttar were dancing minstrels, performers of choral dramas (a synonymous term is *āṭṭṭar*). Cf. Greek *choroi* who sang as well as danced at the festivals. This class of minstrels was degraded, too *kūtt* "danseuse" in later time means "prostitute".

ṣorunar a term which probably means "war-bards", they were especially close to the chiefs and princes, the accompanying instrument in this case was the *tatāri* or *kinau* "small drum".

akavunar, *akavalār* or *akavar* < *akavu* "to utter a sound as a peacock, to sing, call, summon", i.e. "summoners, callers". Probably "heralds". We also come across the term *akavaṇṇ makalir* "women heralds".

vāṭṭiyar these were female dancers and singers, originally highly respected—cf. the case of Auvaiyār, who was a great and esteemed poetess and a danseuse. In later times, however, mainly due to the puritanical attitude of Jainism and Buddhism, they became to be regarded as symbols of immorality, and the word was used first for concubines, later for harlots and prostitutes.

The only term which survived in the meaning "poet" was *ṣulavar*. This is the modern Standard Literary Tamil term (in de-Sanskritized Tamil). Original meaning is "wise men, the learned". And this itself is important. The idea of wisdom, of knowledge, of learning connected with the person of the poet, it was a learned poetry. It also shows the reverence for the poets in ancient times. The *ṣulavar* are always highly respected—somewhat like in the Jewish tradition a scholar is the most respected man in the society. It seems from certain data that poets have not only been always

associated with profound learning, but also with mantic wisdom, which was connected, again, with the cult of *Murukan*. *Murukan* is actually the patron-god of poets and scholars in the South, only much later this function (of the patron-god of wisdom and learning) is taken over by Ganapati.)

In a way, ancient Tamil poetry, especially the erotic poetry, is very "democratic." However, this democratism, I am afraid, was greatly exaggerated.¹ The characters mentioned by name in the heroic poetry are almost exclusively aristocratic. (On the other hand, in love-poetry, the personnel is anonymous—they are types, typified common people or rather people in general, without any determination of their social status, their occupation, etc. just a man and a woman, the woman's mother or girl-friend, the man's friend or his charioteer.) However, there is evidence which shows that even these anonymous types belong, in most of the erotic poems, to the "leisure class". We may assume that, with a few exceptions, one and the same type of male is the hero of both—the war exploits and the erotic feats. The only difference is that when the poet describes his erotic achievements, he is discreetly anonymous, while anonymity in panegyric and heroic poetry would be quite unwanted, here, the hero is a concrete person. There is no personal love-poetry. The poet never speaks about his individual erotic experience, on the other hand, there is a lot of personal experience of the poet revealed in the poems from the other sphere—the sphere of public life.

The male hero, though an "aristocrat", cannot be compared with let us say a feudal baron of the Norman period. (The Old Tamil hero was very close to the land, the economic basis of his existence, though he himself did probably no manual work in the fields, he did not live in huge castles, but in villages in big houses called *manai*, *akam*, *il*, and only occasionally in small fortresses.) However, as *Puram* 311 says,

"he wears spotless white clothes washed by the *pulatti* (washer-

¹ I would now hesitate to use the term at all. It is true that, on the one hand, the *akam* genre of classical poetry has for its *dramatis personae* anonymous types representative of men and women *an sich* (unrespective, among other features, of caste or class) who undergo common and total human experience of love in all its phases and aspects, on the other hand, these idealized types represent cultured, well-matched and fit pairs, to the exclusion of uncultured, ignorant, unlit people, who, in later scholastic literature, are said explicitly to be servants and workers. The ideology of the *puram* (heroic) genre is definitely "clannish" and "aristocratic".

woman), who digs the salt land for water. He also wears a garland of flowers. He is always helpful to others. But he fights alone, unaided in battle. A fierce and mighty hero, he is, who wards off with his single shield the weapons aimed at him by his foes" (K. Kailasapathy's transl.)

The bards did not indulge in moralizations concerning either the ethics of war or the problems of extramarital relationship or non-monogamous sexuality of the heroes (Kailasapathy, 79, 80). Only later—probably due to the impact of Jainism, Buddhism and later Brahmanism—there is some gnomic content in the poems—the central idea being the impermanence of life in the world. *Tolkāppiyam* calls this theme *kāñci*, and *Purañporul venṭāmālai* calls it *vāku*. They stand apart, probably as later additions. Whether they are later or not, all of them are to an extent pervaded by some conception of universal humanism and unity of mankind. The reasons for this humanism are not drawn from a monistic identity with the Primeval Being, but from the very nature of man, from the fundamental identity of all men, from a rational unity found in nature and in the cosmos, above all, from a stoic-like, unpassioned, unperturbable kind of acceptance of the facts of life. In these few stanzas, we see the poet-philosopher, or rather simply the "wise poet", the *fulavar*, at his best, whether or not we regard these poems as a reflection of the progressive transformation of values, which were originally pertinent simply and purely to the heroic age, into more idealized values, interpreted from the moral standpoint. Whatever the process was, the outcome, represented e.g. by the well-known and often quoted poem beginning *yālum ūrē yāvarun kēlu*, *Puraṇam* 192, played a very great role in subsequent ideological development, and is probably even more important today in its very contemporary political interpretations, and even misinterpretations. The whole context of the poem shows that we have to do rather with a stoic-like, Montaignesque resignation and even a privileged recognition of the transiency of life, than with any kind of egalitarianism and "universal brotherhood" which had been lead into the opening line of this beautiful poem

Any town our home-town, every man a kinsman
 Evil and good are not things brought
 by others, neither pain, nor relief of pain
 Death is nothing new. We do not rejoice
 that living is sweet, nor resent it
 for not being so

Life's way is like the raft's
 when the restless descending waters lash on the rocks
 as lightening skies pour down the rains —
 we know this very well
 from the vision of the Open-eyed Ones
 So we do not marvel at those
 big with excellence, nor scorn
 the little ones

Puram 192

Translation A K Ramanujan

The ideal of human life was to be achieved in this life, and it was the ideal of a wise man of human proportions and with human qualities. There is even a specific term for this ideal man, appearing again and again in many stanzas—in fact one of the key-words of Tamil poetry, if not the key-word of the best in Tamil culture. I have in mind the term *cāṇṟōṟ*. This is a participial noun derived from the verb stem *cāl* “to be abundant, full, suitable, filling, great, noble”, the noun *cāl* means “fullness, abundance”, *cālpu* “excellence, nobility” (*DED* 2037 a). Hence *cāṇṟōṟ*, pl *cāṇṟōṟ* means “a complete, a whole man, a perfect, noble man”.

Actually the medieval glossators and scholiasts called consistently the most ancient poetry of the Tamils *cāṇṟōṟ ceṟṟuḷ* “poetry of the noble ones”. K. Kailasapathy adds the following very true statement about this term: “It is perhaps no great exaggeration to say that no other expression sums up the totality of the nature of the earliest Tamil poetry as does *cāṇṟōṟ ceṟṟuḷ* ‘poetry of the noble ones’”. The *TL* in 1397 gives the following meanings of *cāṇṟōṟ*: “the warrior, the great, the learned, the noble”, and “the poets of the *Cankam* period”. In a book of essays, *Añciraattumṟi*, on pp. 49-64, M. S. Venkataswamy discussed this word and its semantic field and tried to demonstrate that it originally connoted “warriors”. That may be true, but in the bulk of so-called Sangam poetry, it means “great, noble men” (in the moral sense). A stanza, *Puram* 182, maintains that the world exists as a livable place because such perfect men exist:

This world lives because
 some men do not eat alone, even the sweetest things,
 nor even the food of the gods
 earned by grace and penance,

they have no anger in them,

they do not fear evils that other men fear,
nor sleep over them,

they give their lives for glory
but will not touch the gifts of the whole worlds
if it should be tainted,

they have no faintness in their hearts,
and strive not for themselves
but for others,

this world is,
because such men are

Puṛaṃ 182

Translation A K Ramanujan

Agam, in another stanza of the anthology, *Puṛaṃ* 191, we may read the following lines

You ask me how it is
my hair is not gray
though I am full of years. Then listen
a wife's excellence, children fulfilled,
dear ones wishing me what I wish
for myself, a king who will do nothing
that isn't done, and in the town
where I live, several men
full of virtue, courtesy,
masters of their senses

Puṛaṃ 191

Translation A K Ramanujan

The same idea reappears later in the *Tirukkural* (e.g. in 571, 996), *paṇḍitaiyār paṭṭuṇ tuḷakam*, *atiṇṇṇēṇ* *maṇḍukku māyvatu maṇ* (996)

“The world exists because noble and cultured men exist, without them the world would vanish in dust”

The important fact is that this Tamil wise man, the *cāṇṇōṇ*, is not an anchorite or a recluse, not an ascetic of any kind and shade, but a man of flesh and blood who should live fully his days of courtship and of married life, of fighting and love-making, rejoicing in the laughter and happiness with his children and friends and fully dedicated to his social and civic duties. And this humanistic tradition is very much alive in Tamil literature from its beginnings to its present short-story writing, and is found strongly expressed in the best works of Tamil literature in the earliest poetry which is

its source, in the pragmatic and empiric ethics of the *Tirukkural*, in the best of the *bhaktas*, in the conception of Kampan's Ayodhyā, and even in the medieval poets like Pukalēnti and Arunakīri, in Rāma-linka Cuvāmi and, much later, in the two probably greatest figures of new Tamil writing, in Pāratī (Bharatī) and Putumaipittan.

Before discussing another general characteristic feature of Tamil writing as such, let me trace in some detail the other key-words, the other diagnostic concepts typical for the earliest and most independent era of Tamil literature and thought.

One of such terms is *nān* "sense of shame." According to the most accurate and sensible commentator on early old Tamil literature, Ilampūānar, "what is meant by this word is a state of mind that leads to the actions contrary to the conduct of the noble ones, it cannot be explained." *Akam* 273 15 speaks about *pulavar pukalnta nān* "sense of shame praised by the bards."

Another key-term, and probably even more important, is *pukal*, and its many synonyms, all meaning "glory", "fame." According to *Puṟam* 282, the ideal hero while alive lived in the battle ground to attain "gloire", and after death he passed into the verses of the singers. To acquire fame and glory was the chief goal of his life. In *Puṟam* 36 it is said that "for fame they would give their very lives, against blame even the entire world they would not have." And again, *Puṟam* 182 5 says *pukalēṇṇi uyirun kotukkuvar* "for fame they would give their very lives." The synonyms for *pukal* are *urai*, *icai*, *perumpeyar*, *cīrtti*, all meaning, "praise, fame." K. Kaia-sapathy examines in detail the contents and attributes of these items (231 ff.). The poems are saturated with constructions involving these terms. The warrior constantly endeavours to establish his reputation, he is full of courage, having utter disclaim for death. One's fame is more lasting than death itself, cf. *Puṟam* 165 2 etc. *tampukal nīṟūt tāmmāyntaṇar* "they died, having set up their fame on a firm basis." Honour and fame could be achieved only by bravery in war and deeds of slaughter against the enemy. The true hero longs for battle. Cf. *Akam* 154 3-4 "Having consumed plenty of strong palm-wine, the furious men long for battle." Hence the hero's pride in wounds received in battle, in *vuḷuppu* "excellent wounds" (*Puṟam* 180 4) which, according to the celebrated commentator of the *Tirukkural*, Parimēlaḷakar (*Kural* 70 6), are "glorious wounds which one receives on one's chest and face."

Women were as brave and as thirsty for fame as men. cf. this amazing poem, *Puram* 86

You stand against the pillar
of my hut and ask me
Where is your son?
I don't really know
My womb is only a lair
for that tiger
You can see him now
only in battl fields

Translation A K Ramanujan

With the longing for battle and thirst for fame is naturally connected the earliest Tamil conception of heaven. It is a hero's heaven, the world of great renown, the world of the noble ones, whereas the earth is peopled by heroes and non-heroes, the warrior's heaven is inhabited only by renowned (*perumpeyar*) persons. They will enjoy the bliss of marriage with the spotless maidens in heaven (*Puram* 287 10-12) "Lucky are those who are killed by someone rather than just die" (*Akam* 61 1-2). Those who died a natural death were laid on a grass mat and cut asunder with a sword, so that they might die a warrior's death. Even children did not escape this gruesome custom, cf. *Puram* 74 1-2 "Whether it be a still-born child or a mere foetus, it is not spared but cloven asunder"

Leaving these gruesome aspects of early Tamil civilization behind, let me mention another and very typical and characteristic feature of the pre-Aryan Tamil literature—its predominantly secular inspiration, the absence of any "religious" sentiment. The earliest extant poetry is emphatically not ritualistic at all, even reflection and didactic features appear later. It was suspected and hunted at more than once, and probably quite conclusively proved by Kailasapathy, that the early poetry of the Tamils is founded on *secular, oral bardic* tradition—in sharp contrast to the Vedic poetry, and comparable rather with the Greek or Welsh bardic literature and, in some respects, with the early amorous lyric poetry of the *trobadors* of Languedoc and Provence.

The Tamil classical poetry is pre-eminently of this world, it makes almost no allusions to supernatural meddling in worldly affairs. When, quite marginally and exceptionally, it reflects some kind of *religio*, it is mostly the rites and ceremonies connected with the daily life of the people (such as marriage ceremonies), or, in bardic

war-poetry, reflections of tribal cults and their survivals (sacrifice of blood and flesh to the devils, etc.) The presence of Vedic religion, of Brahmanism, in early Tamil poetry may be traced only with difficulty as a very feeble, unimportant superstratum.

(The poetry only rarely reflects and speculates, where reflexion and elements of speculation appear, they are often of very different quality from what we find in Aryan texts. In old Tamil literature, reflections and speculations are of a general, humanistic and "stoic" character, preoccupied mostly with the impermanence and transience of human affairs, with man's duties as a *zoon politikon* and as a social being, with the ability to live a full, happy life in this world.)

This original secularism and the absence of almost any religious inspiration is the one feature that later disappears from Tamil literature, and Tamil becomes what has been called "the language of devotion" and of religious philosophy. But Tamil religiosity is undoubtedly of a different colour than any other Indian religiosity, it has its specific and peculiar features, which will be discussed in detail when Tamil *bhakti* poetry, and the *cittar* texts, are analysed.

Apart from these more general typical features of Tamil literature—its so-called "democratism", humanism and secularism—we may of course characterize Tamil writing by its typical subject-matters, by its leading themes and motives. The traditional and in fact the only content of ancient Tamil poetry seems again to be something specific in India, and any attempt to bring it into direct relationship and one-to-one correspondence with the concepts of *dharma* or *artha* or *kāma* is bound to fail. To put it simply and somewhat crudely, the two topics of early Tamil poetry are mating and fighting. This fact finds its formal expression in the existence of two and only two genres. The genre of *akam* poetry, i.e. poetry of the "inner world", speaks of private life. This is the tender, intimate love-poetry, anonymous, stereotyped, including some of the greatest love poems ever composed in world literature—a poetry based on a concept definitely broader and deeper than the Sanskritic *kāma*. The second genre is that of *puṇam*, of the "outer world", poetry concerning individual heroes, about war, greatness, fame and duty, about public and political life, the result—magnificent bardic poetry, panegyrics and war lyrics. The genre comprises a great many aspects of the Sanskritic *dharma* and *artha*.

Finally, there is yet another feature which should be mentioned, a formal feature which is perhaps rather typical of the best achieve-

ments of Tamil literature as such, from the earliest exquisite lyrical stanzas to the quite contemporary prose-writings of such authors as L S Ramamirtham or the very contemporary *putu kavitai*, "new poetry" school. It seems somehow that the thing which matters most in Tamil creative writing is a conscious effort after brevity and conciseness, a striving after powerful abbreviation, clarity and transparency, which is the result of much effort to exploit to the utmost the technique of suggestion, of allusion, of inference and word-play, of a complex and telling use of imagery, of multiple overtones. This effort may be seen in the earliest lyrical stanzas as well as in the intensely concise couplets of the *Tirukkural*, in the songs of *Cilappatikāram*, in various stanzas of Kampan's epic, in modern essays and short stories.

Hence, the two most typical and best developed forms of Tamil writing throughout the ages are *lyrical poetry* and *short story*, that is basically brief forms. Epic poetry appears later, and is almost always an imitation, even the greatest Tamil epic poetry—with the possible exception of *Cilappatikāram* and its majestic grandeur—is rather a series of miniature dramatic situations arranged like a chain of individual stanzas similar to beads on a string, stanzas which are finished, homogenous and perfect in themselves. And, frankly speaking, a *great* novel and a *great* drama has yet to appear in Tamil literature, whereas Tamil poetry abounds in exquisite lyrical pieces and Tamil prose abounds in excellent short stories and essays.

Paripāṭal, edited and translated by F. Gros, at Pondichéry, 1968 (see Bibliography)

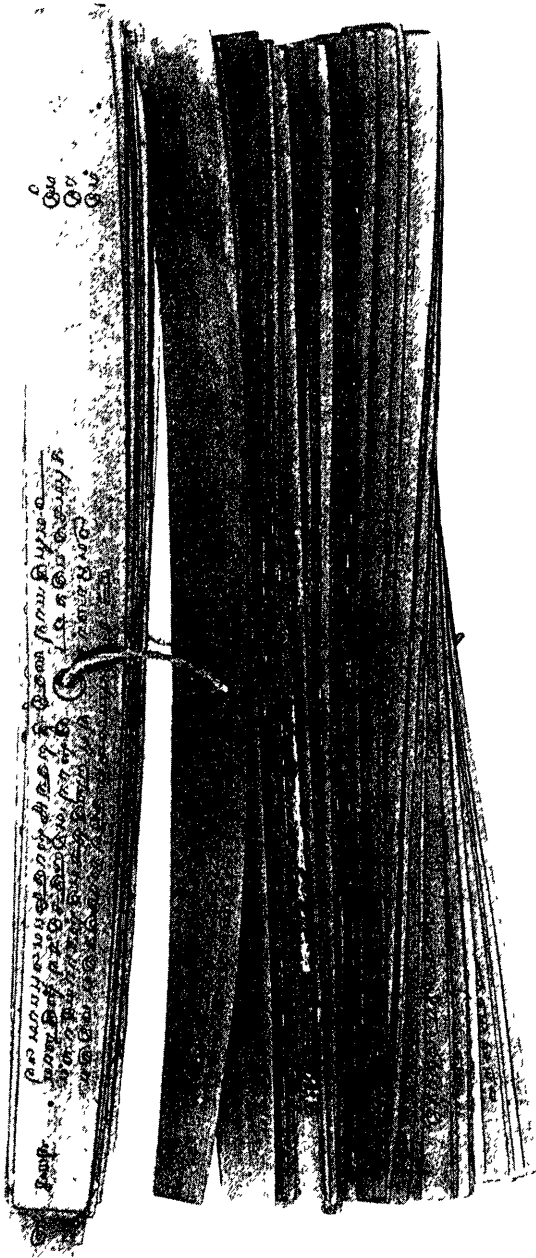
Also, there seems to have been a break in the traditional study of ancient literary works before they were rediscovered in the 19th Century. Many verses are missing even from those works which have come down to us. On the other hand, there was a tradition of interpolation—and this is very important for us when trying to reconstruct the original text of such works as the *Tolkāppiyam*. We know, e.g. that a nun by name of Kantiyār is said to have included her verses in the Jain epic *Cīvakacintāmani* (Naccinārkkinīyar's Commentary on *Cīvi* 31.45, Irākava Ariyankār's ed. of *Peruntokai* 1549). Interpolations, elaborations of some episodes etc. have been probably added to the original texts: there are, e.g. critics who maintain that the *Periyapurānam* and the *Kamparāmāyanam* contain quite a number of interpolations. And it seems to us that the *Tolkāppiyam*, too, contains some later additions.

Those who tried to solve the chronological questions pertaining to ancient Tamil texts did not pay much attention to what one may call the various stages in the life of the text. It is absolutely imperative to distinguish between these stages, otherwise one gets entangled in a hopeless mess resulting from the unfortunate fact of mixing these various stages and trying to date a work in question as one homogeneous whole.

Generally speaking, we have to distinguish the following stages in the life of a text:

1. The creative act, that is the process of the actual composition of a text
2. The period of oral transmission of the text
3. The compilation of anthologies of texts
4. The redaction (Germ. "Redaktion"), i.e. the editing and codification of the anthologies
5. The stage of commenting upon the texts, the composition of commentaries and super-commentaries
6. The critical edition or at least the preparation of a modern edition which is more or less in agreement with the principles of textual criticism.

1. The creative act. Several authors, lastly K. Kailasapathy (*Tamil Heroic Poetry*, 1968) have conclusively shown, that the earliest Tamil poetry was composed in agreement with the con-



A Tamil manuscript on palm-leaves Property of the author

ventions of an oral bardic tradition, and that, obviously, a great body of oral bardic literature preceded and was incorporated into the earliest corpus of Tamil literature (Though writing as such was known in the Tamil land during or immediately after the reign of Aśoka, and the Tamil-Brāhmī script was fully adapted to the language probably sometime in the 2nd Cent B C, it is highly probable that for a long time writing was used only for inscriptional purposes and, later, for grants, royal papers, letters written in royal chancelleries, only much later for literature as such. The creative act must have been purely oral, the early poems show unmistakable features of oral poetry, of oral composition, destined for audience appreciation and not visual "consumption" of literature.)

2 Thus the period of oral transmission was an unusually long one. As a random example we may give poems numbers 4 and 143, 144 and 145 of the *Puṟam* collection, ascribed to the well-known poet Paranaṟ, who composed these songs probably sometime in the middle of the 2nd Cent A D. Perhaps as many as six centuries went by until a certain Peruntēvaṅṟ of 8th Cent A D compiled a number of bardic poems into one single anthology of four hundred of them, and provided this anthology with an invocatory stanza, this anthology goes since then by the name of *Puranāṅṅūru* or *Puṟam*.

3 The same man was very probably responsible for the anthologization of a great number of other early bardic poems (*Akanāṅṅūru*, *Aimkuruṅṅūru*, *Kuṟuntokai* and *Narriṅṅai*) (We may say that the majority of the earliest texts were compiled into anthologies some time in the middle of the 8th Cent if not later (some authors date Peruntēvaṅṟ into the 9th Cent).)

4 The next stage—that of the final redaction and codification of the various anthologies into greater corpora—is even later. The earliest Tamil poetry was compiled into two great anthologies, the *Ettuttokai*, "Eight collections", and the *Pattuppāttu*, "Ten Lays", but the names themselves occur for the first time only in Pēṛāciṅṅai's commentary to *Tolk Poruḷ* 362 and 392 where he speaks about *pāttu* and *tokai*, that is in the 13th-14th Cent A D, and by Mayilānāṟ, a commentator of the grammar *Naṅṅūḷ* (also in the 13-14 Cent), he speaks about *eṅṅeruttokai* and *pattuppāttu* (s v 387 *aṅṅerunkāṅṅiyam*, *eṅṅeruttokai*, *pattuppāttu*, *paṅṅenkiḷḷkanakku*). Before that, though the individual anthologies are mentioned and cited by various commentators, the two great anthologies of *Ettuttokai* and *Pattuppāttu* never figure in these commentaries. e g

in the commentary on *Irāyaṇār Akapporul* by Nakkīrar (8th Cent A D) or in Ilampūranar the earliest commentator on *Tolk*, in the 12th Cent. Thus it seems that the final codification of the texts into the two great anthologies has not been made before 13-14 Cent A D.

5 The ancient literature, once it was anthologized, and especially after its final codification, was submitted to extensive comments, annotations and interpretations by medieval scholiasts, this period of great commentaries starts probably in the 8th Cent A D with Nakkīrar's commentary on *Irāyaṇār's Akapporul* and Ilampūranar's commentary on *Tolkāppivam*, and ends with Naccinārkkinīyar's commentaries of the 14th Century. Later, a great number of miscellaneous lesser commentaries were written, and those of them that are available form a literature in themselves. Taking as an instance, again, the stanzas in *Puram*, an ancient anonymous commentary is available up to stanza No. 266 of this collection, apart from that, there exists a modern super-commentary by Auvaṅ S. Doraiswami Pillai to the whole anthology.

6 Finally, beginning with late 19th Cent., the early poetry was being published in many editions of different kind and quality. Thus e.g. the anthology *Puranānūru* was published in 1894 by the great U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar in what is an approximation to a critical edition.

Another problem which is involved in the general question of dating and chronology of the early works is the fact that a number of literary personalities occur under one and the same name, and very many writers and editors have committed the mistake of regarding persons bearing identical name as identical people. Thus we have e.g. Auvaivāi who comes in the pre-Pallavan age of so-called *Cankam* literature, another Auvaivāi appears as a contemporary of Cuntarai in the Pallava age, and a third Auvaivār, the author of the popular didactic works, appears in the later Chola age as a contemporary of Ottakkūttaṅ. There was also the habit of later writers assuming the names of great poets of a previous age—this may be the case of Kapilar. There are at least three poets going by this name—one who is sometimes called Tol-Kapilar or the "Old Kapilar" (cf. colophon to *Akam* 282 etc.), then Kapilar the Great—"the prince" of the so-called *Cankam* poets, and finally the late Kapilar, the author of the late-medieval *Kapilarakaval*, an antibrahminic outcry.

We have at least two Nakkīrars—the older Nakkīrar might have lived round about 250 A D—and was the author of some very fine poems in the anthologies. A later Nakkīrai is the author of *Tirumukāṛruppatai*, and probably the same man composed the commentary to *Tiravāṇār Akapporul* in the 8th Cent. A D.¹ Certain works elaborated by a series of scholars in a particular school of thought were sometimes named after their original teacher and *guru*—such may be the case of *Tolkāppiyam*, or rather its third portion, which is probably much later than the basic parts of the first two portions but goes, too, under the name of Tolkāppiyar.

Finally, there is the problem of the language of the earliest literature—the uniformity of the language is part of the whole picture of the uniformity and homogeneity of the poetry itself, the linguistic matter of the early bardic poetry is a highly standardized, conventionalized language making use of stereotype formulae, it is a normalized, highly polished language of a high literary style. On the other hand, one should always bear in mind that this literature is a corpus of poems arranged, as pointed above, much later into collections and hyper-collections and that, consequently, these anthologies contain material of very different age and antiquity, ranging probably from the 2nd-1st Cent. B C. to the 3rd or 4th Cent. A D. The fact that not much linguistic development is detectable within the bulk of the earliest poems is due to the conventionalized, in some ways petrified, “frozen”, linguistic norms.

One extreme case was to date these texts between the 9th-10th and the 13th Cent. A D. These attempts are no more seriously considered nowadays, though in the earlier editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or in the writings of the French scholar Julien Vinson this was the accepted dating. However, neither Vinson nor

¹ The identity of these two Nakkīrars is still a disputed question. To be precise, there are actually more Nakkīrars than two in Tamil writing. Many bards bore the name of Kīrai (e.g. Kuttuvāṇ Kīraṇār, Maturai Nakkīrai, Vilankīraṇār). Of the better known Nakkīrars, there may be three or four: 1. Nakkīrai the bard—the author of the lyrical pieces in the *tolkai*s. 2. He is probably identical with Nakkīrai, the author of the beautiful lay “The Long Good Northern Wind” A D. 215 (?) 3. Another Nakkīrai, the author of *Tirumukāṛruppatai*. Cca 700-800 A D. 4. He may or may not be identical with Nakkīrai—the author of the commentary of Tiravāṇār’s *Kalavṇai* (that is with Maturai Kanakkāyaṇār Makai Nakkīrai). Cca 700-800 A D. 5. One or more Nakkīrars, author(s) of some of the poems which are included in the 11th *Tirumurai* (Śaiva Canon).

Rost, the author of the pertinent lines in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, had access to the earliest texts, they were not aware of their existence (Vinson knew only one of the anthologies, *Kalittokai*, which is anyhow a later collection, Caldwell and Rost considered the *Tirukkural* to be the earliest Tamil literary work) This dating of the beginnings of Tamil literature can be thus dismissed without any further ado

Swamikannū Pillai's is a much more serious attempt he dates the bulk of the earliest poetry into the 7th-8th Cent A D (his calculations are based on astronomical data and result in the date 756 A D for the epic poem *Cilappatikāram*, and 634 A D for *Paripāṭal*, one of the Eight Anthologies) He gives a few additional reasons, they need not be discussed in detail, since this dating in general goes against the evidence of the history of South India, against the internal linguistic evidence, and against some other considerations, e.g. of the prevalent religious situation (a period of absolute tolerance for Buddhism and Jainism during and immediately after the earliest literary period as opposed to the intolerance typical for the age of the Pallavas, characteristic for the beginnings of militant Hinduism in the South)

The most plausible date for the bulk of early Tamil literature is the 2nd Cent A D This date, suggested by G. K. Seshu Iyer on the astronomical computation of the great fire of Madurai in 171 A D, was taken up by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri and S. Varayapuri Pillai who, I think, were the first to prove more or less conclusively, especially in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol II, 1957, that the bulk of the earliest Tamil lyrical poetry was composed between 100-250 A D

Let us now examine in detail the external and internal evidence for this date, as presented by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, and as supported by the contemporary and rather conclusive testimony provided by the historical analysis of the early Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions and some other material

The earliest Tamil literature extant has been preserved in two great super-anthologies, the *Ettuttokai* and the *Pattuppāṭtu*. Chart 3 gives the titles of the various eight anthologies of the great collection, and the names of the ten lays contained in the second great anthology, in their traditional order

It has been noted, and nowadays only the most stubborn of the traditional pandits would not admit this fact, that out of the eight

and subject-matter of poetry That was probably the period when, for the first time, a need was felt for commentaries and theoretical treatises dealing with this classical heritage This heritage was ultimately preserved only and exclusively by the learned poets (not by the popular poets), and by the scholasts and commentators Even the scholiast and the commentator ceased to be interested during the late medieval times, until in fact this early poetry faded into oblivion and had to be rediscovered in almost modern times

The "rediscovery" of ancient Tamil literature occurred in the transition period of the later 19th Cent when—to employ the happy phrase of A K Ramanujan—"both paper and palm leaf were used" The two men most responsible for making possible this very transition were Damodaram Pillai (1832-1901) and U V Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942)

It has just been stressed that the anthologization is much later than the actual creation of the poetry, and that the final codification is very probably, again, much later than the anthologization The name Peruntēvaṅṅār was mentioned before Five of the six earlier collections of the *Ettuttokai* hyper-anthology are introduced by Peruntēvaṅṅār's invocatory verses *Akanānūru*, *Aṅkurunūru*, *Kuruntokai*, *Nāṟṟinaṅ*, and *Puranānūru* A certain Peruntēvaṅṅār is quoted as the author of a Tamil version of the *Mahābhārata* (this *campū* work has unfortunately reached us only as a fragment) A few verses of this *Pāratam* are quoted in the commentaries¹ It may probably be dated into the middle of the 8th Cent. These two persons are probably identical, since the Peruntēvaṅṅār who wrote these introductory verses to the ancient anthologies is referred to persistently as *pāratam pāṟṟiya peruntēvaṅṅār*, "The Peruntēvaṅṅār who sang the Bhārata" Whether this man was also the compiler of the anthologies is a problem It is only a hypothesis, though a plausible one One thing is clear the anthologization of the poems seems to be much later than their actual composition and corroborative evidence may be drawn from the fact that even within the collections themselves poems of rather different antiquity may be found thus, e g , the majority of the poems collected in the *Kuruntokai* anthology belongs probably to the 1st Cent B C.-2nd Cent

¹ This work seems to have been composed in the *venpā* metre interspersed with prose Cf Naccīṅṅarkkīṅṅiyar's comm on *Tolk Purāṅṅināyiyal* 17 21, and the commentaries to *Vīracōḷiyam*, *Poruṅpat* 15 and *Atankārappat* 12, 18, 29

- மு. “ களியானைத் தென்னன் கனவின்வந் தென்னை
அளியா னளிப்பானே போன்றான்—தெளியாதே
செங்காந்தண் மெல்விரலாற் சேக்கை தடவந்தேன்
என்காண்பே னென்னலால் யான் ” (முத். 63.) (30)

தலைவி கூற்று

[அயலார் தலைவியை மணம் செய்யும்பொருட்டு முயன்ற காலத்தில் அதுகாறும் தலைவனைப் பற்றிய செய்தியை வெளியிடாத தலைவி, “நான் ஆடுகளத்தில் துணங்கையாடும் இயல்புடையேன்; என்னோடு நட்புச் செய்து பிரிந்தமையால் என் கைவளைகளை நெகிழ்ச்செய்த தலைவன் அத்துணங்கைக்குத் தலைக்கை தந்தான். அவன் இப்பொழுது எங்கே உள்ளானோ? பல இடங்களில் தேடியும் கண்டேனில்லை” என்று உண்மையைத் தோழிக்கு வெளிப்படுத்தியது.]

31. மள்ளர் குழீஇய விழவி னானும்
மகளிர் தழீஇய துணங்கை யானும்
யாண்டுங் காணேன் மாண்டக் கோனை
யானுமோ ராடுகள மகளே யென்கைக்
5 கோட ரிலங்குவளை நெகிழ்த்த
பீடுகெழு குரிசிலுமோ ராடுகள மகளே.

எ - து. நொதுமலர் வரைவுழித் தோழிக்குத் தலைமகள் அறத் தொடு நின்றது.

[நொதுமலர் - தலைவனல்லாத அயலார். வரைவுழி - மணத்திற்கு உரிய பரிசுத்தோடு வந்தபொழுது.]

ஆதிமந்தியார். (கு - பு.) ஆதிமருதியாரென்று படித்தற்கு மிட முண்டு.

(பி - ம்.) 3 ‘ஆண்டுங்’ 5 ‘நெகிழ்த்த’ 6 ‘குரிசிலுமாடுகள்’

(ப - ரை.) மாண் தக்கோனை - மாட்சிமை பொருந்திய தகுதியை யுடையோனை, மள்ளர் குழீஇய விழவினானும் - வீரர் கூடியுள்ள சேரி விழாவின் கண்ணும், மகளிர் தழீஇய துணங்கை யானும் - மகளிர் தம் முள் தழுவி ஆடுகின்ற துணங்கைக் கூத்தின் கண்ணும், யாண்டும் - ஆகிய எவ்விடத்தும், காணேன் - கண்டேனில்லை; யானும் ஓர் ஆடு களம் மகளே - யானும் ஆடுகின்ற களத்திற்குரிய ஒரு மகளே; என் கை - என் கையிலுள்ள, கோடு ரர் இலங்கு வளை நெகிழ்த்த - சங்கை அறுத்துச் செய்த விளங்குகின்ற வளையல்களை நெகிழ்ச்செய்த, பீடு கெழு - பெருமை பொருந்திய, குரிசிலும் - தலைவனும், ஓர் ஆடுகளம் மகளே - ஆடுகின்ற களத்திலுள்ள ஒருவனே.

(முடிபு) மாண் தக்கோனைக் காணேன்; யானும் ஓர் ஆடுகள மகள்; குரிசிலும் ஓர் ஆடுகளம்கள்.

A D , but the same anthology contains a poem, *Kuṭ* 2, ascribed to Iṛaiyaṇār, the author of *Akapporul*, probably of the 5th-6th Cent A D

It has already been stressed, too, that the final codification of the earliest extant poetry must have been later than the compilation of various anthologies. Of crucial importance for this hypothesis is the silence maintained by the famous commentary by Nakkīrar on Iṛaiyaṇār's *Akapporul*; Nakkīrar speaks in detail about the early poetry, he gives a full account of the legend of the *Cankam* (Academy), but he never mentions the great anthologies. Though an *argumentum ex silentio*, it is rather persuasive.

The work itself is very interesting. Composed some time in the 5th-6th Cent A D , it is probably the most ancient of the theoretical works on the *akam* and *puram* genres (probably older than the *Porulatikāram* of the *Tolkāppiyam*). The work has been attributed (by a credulous generation) to the God Śiva himself because the name of its author, Iṛaiyaṇār, can be interpreted as God or Śiva. There is also a poem, *Kuṭ* 2, which is attributed to Iṛaiyaṇār. Another name of the treatise is *Iṛaiyaṇār Kalaviyal*. It deals exclusively with the *akam* genre—a lucid, continuous text, though much of it does not require a commentary, it obtained one, and this commentary is ascribed to one Nakkīrar who is definitely different from the poet Nakkīrar of the early anthologies, but also different from the author of *Netunalvātai*, one of the “Ten Lays”. However, he may be identical with the poet who composed *Tirumurukāṛṇṇup-patai*, a very late poem of the “gude” genre. The date of this commentary is a matter of dispute. If the two Nakkīrar's are identical then the date could be anything between the 6th-7th and 8th Cent A D. If they were not identical, the commentary could be as late as the 10th-12th Cent. But I would be inclined—for a number of reasons which I cannot go into here¹—to regard the poet and

¹ The commentary on *Iṛaiyaṇār Akapporul* uses the smiles taken from the description of pre-marital love as found in the *Perunkatai*, cf. *Iṛaiyaṇār Akapp sūtra* 2 (ed. 1939), p. 38. *Perunkatai* I xxxi, 17 and 18. *Perunkatai* is earlier than the 10th Cent, but certainly not earlier than cca. 700 A D. Duvimīta's *Bīhathkathā*, very likely the model of *Perunkatai*, was composed probably in the 1st half of the 7th Cent. For the upper limit cf. the fact that *Pāntikkōvai* (by an unknown author) written probably in the 8th Cent. (since it is crammed with references to the victories of the Pandya kings of the 7th and 8th centuries), is a collection (*kōvai*) of poems out of which about 250 have been preserved, and the major portion of these are taken from the commentary on *Iṛaiyaṇār Kalaviyal* (*Akapporul*).

the commentator as one and the same man, and set the date of the commentary at about 750 A.D. A tradition maintains that the commentary was composed by the poet Nakkīrar and was transmitted orally for eight generations until it was written down by a Nilakantaṅ of Muciṛi.

This tradition is not at all absurd. Lately we have come to regard such and similar traditions with more credulity than in the age of pure empirical positivism. It was after all found out that many persistent indigenous traditions (e.g. the one incorporating the famous Gaḷabāhu synchronism) may be on the whole trusted. While the commentary itself was very probably composed by a Nakkīrai of the 8th Cent., it again very probably was transmitted orally until it was fixed as a written text by Nilakantaṅ of Muciṛi.¹) This commentary of Nakkīrar is actually one of the first specimen of Tamil prose, not bits of unmeasured verse as in *Cilappatikāram*, but pages and pages of genuine prose (ornate, poetic, alliterative, metaphorical, and full of similes).

I am dealing with this work and its commentary at this length because it will again and again be mentioned (especially while

Nakkīrar's commentary, though regarded by many as inferior to the text itself, has descriptive passages of literary beauty, with alliterations and assonances, and they can even be metrically scanned (see chapter 16 of this book, cf. also T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *HTL* 173).

¹ This can be inferred e.g. *ab intra* from the manner in which the commentary itself proceeds, cf. utterances like *urai natantu varāṇṇamāi nōkki*, or *inai urai natantavāṇi collutum*, or *innanam varukiriyatu urai*. The commentary is said to "proceed", "to come down" to us, obviously through oral tradition. That the commentary very probably contains later interpolations was recognized already in 1938 by R. Narayanan of Jaffna who describes it as a "commentary which has come down to us with innumerable alterations". These interpolations are probably responsible for S. Vayayapuri Pillai's opinion expressed in *Kāvīyakālam* pp. 215-216 where he tries to show that the commentary *in its present form* is clearly indebted to *Civakacintāmani* (10th Cent.). On the other hand, there is a persistent and early tradition that Nakkīrar was the author of the commentary, cf. Naccinārkkūṇṇiyar's comment on *Tolk Porul* p. 808, and *Porul Marapu* 814. This commentary uses once the term *elutiṇṇāṅ* "he wrote (down)", cf. *uvurai ceytār yārovenṇavūḷi matuṇṇaṅ kanakkhāyāṇār maṅkaṇār nakkīrareṇa urai veḷutiṇṇāṅ* (instead of the prevalent *urai kantavāṇi*). V. S. C. Pillai is probably right when he says that Nakkīrar composed the main outlines of his commentary, which was then orally transmitted probably for about 200-300 years, until sometime in the 10th Cent. it was written down by Nilakantaṅ who also gave an introduction and supplied the commentary with additional and "modern" quotations. The date of the commentary was first set as 8th Cent. A.D. by V. Kanakasabhai Pillai in *The Tamils 1800 Years Ago* (1904). Cf. also Chapter 16 of this book.

(discussing the legend of the *Cankam*, and because it very probably is the first theoretical treatise on the poetic conventions of ancient Tamil) What one has especially to bear in mind is the distinction in date between the text itself and its commentary. Let me repeat: the text was composed probably sometime between the 4th and 6th Cent. A.D. The commentary—round about 750 A.D.

It has also been said that the earliest commentator on the *Tolkāppiyam*, Ilampūranar, who was given the distinguished title *uraiyācariyar*,¹ i.e. *The Commentator* (and he deserves this title), and who probably belonged to the 12th Cent., does not mention the anthologies. In the 13th-14th Cent., however, three commentators, Mavilamātar, Pēracariyar, and Naccinārkkimiyar, mention by name the two great anthologies, hence we may assume that the final codification of the poems occurred sometime between the 12th and 13th Centuries.

Now we finally come to the problem of the external and internal evidence for the dating of the earliest literature of the Tamils.

Let us first consider the purely historical correlations. According to G. Jouveau-Dubreuil (*The Pallavas*, 1917, p. 10), the beginnings of the Pallava dynasty of Kāñcī is to be dated sometime in the first half of the 3rd Cent. A.D. In the 6th and 7th Cent. A.D. the Pallavas were one of the most powerful and important South Indian dynasties. The first important Tamil Pallava inscription may be dated roughly in 550 A.D. In the earliest Tamil poetry, there is not a single allusion to the Pallavas, they are not mentioned at all, though much of this poetry, especially in the *Patirruppattu* and *Puram* collections, is of quasi-historical nature and mentions a number of Indian, particularly Tamil dynasties, dynastic names, events etc. True, this is an *argumentum ex silentio*, yet one can hardly assume that such a powerful dynasty and state as that of the Pallavas would not have been mentioned at all in a corpus of more than 2000 poems! We may therefore safely assume that this earliest strata of literature is pre-Pallava, that is pre-3rd Cent. A.D. Now this conclusion fits well with other lines of evidence derived from other data on South Indian history. What are these other lines of evidence?

1. First of all, there are the data of Graeco-Roman authors. The Greek and Roman trade is well attested by the early Tamil texts

themselves the poems speak of Yavanas¹ and their ships, of their gold coins and Yavana wine etc., and these poems speak about the Western merchants and their trade with the South as a well-known, widely popular and contemporary fact, allusions to this foreign Western-oriented trade are of such nature that we must assume this Roman and Western trade to have been a simple fact of daily life of those who listened to these early poems. It was shown conclusively that the Greek and Roman trade could not have continued in any considerable extent after the 2nd-3rd Century²

¹ There are about ten references to the Yavanas in the *Cankam* texts: *Mullaiṭṭ* 61, 66, *Perumpān* 316, *Patirrup* II, *Akam* 57, 149, *Netunal* 31-5, 101-2, *Puṭam* 56 and 353. The Yavanas served as body-guards to kings (*Mullaiṭṭ* 66) and as palace-guards during the night (*ib* 61). They were a drinking, freely-moving people, decorating themselves and walking along the city-streets during nights (*Netunal* 31-5). They were merchants, too, they brought lamps of fine workmanship, swan-shaped and woman-shaped (*Netunal* 101-2, *Perumpān* 316-19), they came with gold and wine in their ships and returned with pepper (*Akam* 149 *Puṭ* 56, 343), and one of the ports they most frequently visited was Mucūri (*Akam* 57, 149 *Puṭ* 343). Cf. P. Meile, "Les Yavanas dans l'Inde tamoule", *Journal Asiatique* 323 (1940) 85-123, and K. Zvelebil, "The Yavanas in Old Tamil Literature", *Charisteria Orientalia*, Praha 1956, 401-409.

² Cf. E. H. Warrington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*, Cambridge 1928, M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade-routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1926. Further *Tamil Culture* Vol. I, No. 1, 286-295, also A. Ayyappan, "A Dakshina Taxila", *The Hindu* Madras, 23.3.1941, L. Fauchaux, *Une vieille cité indienne près de Pondichery, l'Uvampatnam*, Pondichery 1945, P. Z. Pattabramm, *Les fouilles d'Arikamedu (Pôdôukè)*, Pondichery-Paris, 1946, but especially the exhaustive account by Sir R. E. M. Wheeler, A. Ghosh and Krishna Deva, "Arikamedu an Indo-Roman Trading Station on the East Coast of India" *Ancient India* 2, July 1946, 17-124, further J. M. Casal, *Fouilles de l'Uvampatnam-Arikamedu. Rapport de l'Inde et de l'Occident aux environs de l'ère chrétienne*, Paris, 1949. Also Albin Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, 2. Aufl., Bern (1963), p. 865. Tamil India as described in the so-called *Cankam* poetry was quite well-known to such Western authors as Pliny the Elder (75 A. D.), Ptolemy (130 A. D.), and above all to the anonymous, charming author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (cf. W. H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, New York, 1912, cf. its new dating in ca. 240 A. D. by J. P. Prieur in *J. A.* 1961), also K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India*, Madras, 1939). The excavations in Uvampatnam-Arikamedu near Pondichery point to an old Roman settlement proving that the Yavana settlements referred to in the very early anthology *Patirrupattu* (*Patikam* 2) are not figments of imagination. Roman imperial coins of gold and silver were imported in considerable quantities and circulated freely in the country, there were probably small copper coins bearing Roman devices and legends produced locally. In the Greek and Latin sources we have scores of Tamil and South Indian names both local and dynastic, which again and again occur in the earliest poetry of the Tamils (e.g. *Tyndis-Tonthi*, *Kolchoi-Koṭṭai*, *Mucūris-Mucūri*, *Modoura-*

2 This cumulative evidence of the early Tamil texts themselves, of the Greek and Roman authors, and of archeological data are fully supported by the internal evidence present in the texts themselves here I have in mind not the historical, but linguistic and philological evidence, derived from the state of development of the Tamil language, and from the considerations about the prosody of early poetry This linguistic evidence tells us quite convincingly, first, that there are problems of relative chronology involved with respect to the age of the various texts themselves, and, second, that as a whole, the earliest poetry must be quite obviously much older than the first beginnings of the devotional *bhakti* literature of the 7th Cent The language of the early poetry shows many decisively older forms, to give a few diagnostic examples the OTa *yāṇ* "I" occurs in Appar's songs (eg *Paṭṭakam* 305 1-10) as *nāṇ*, undoubtedly a later form, OTa *i* "this" gives way to Middle and Modern Ta *inta* in Campantar (*Pat* 4 11), OTa has no double plural marker, whereas *Tēvāram*, the anthology of *bhakti* hymns, abounds in it (eg Campantar, *Pat* 2, 9, 10), the Old and LTa *avntu* "five" appears in Campantar 237 4, as *añcu*, the present morph—*kinṇ*—which, in the OTa texts, is very sporadic (a few instances), is rather frequent in Campantar, *Pat* 2, 3-4, *Pat* 235, 1, etc

In short, the language of the *Tēvāram* devotional hymns presents an entirely new and later stage of development in its morphology and lexis, and the prosody, too, is very different and shows much more influence of the Sanskrit *mātrā*-type of metrics All this shows beyond doubt that the language of the early poetry must be at least a few centuries older than the language of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava hymns, the first of which were composed in the 6th-7th Cent

3 We shall discuss the relative chronology of the various texts later Now we have to ask a very basic question is there any positive, concrete *datum* which would serve as a point of departure for an *absolute* chronology of the earliest Tamil texts? I believe that there is such a date, though it is still hypothetical This hypothesis, however, which has been strongly supported by two other kinds of data, by evidence derived from the earliest Brāhmī inscriptions, and by a bilingual coin, seems to me to be, to date, a rather firm sheet-anchor for the chronology of early Tamil India In any

Maturai, Khabens Emporion-Kāvēṇṇipattinam, etc etc), cf F B J Kuiper, "Two Problems of Old Tamil Phonology", *IJ* (1958), pp 219-221

case, it is not quite true what H W Schomerus wrote a few decades ago in his account of Tamil literature, namely, that the beginnings of Tamil literature are enshrouded in complete darkness (“*die Anfänge der Tamil-Literatur liegen völlig im Dunkeln*”)

In the well-known Tamil epic poem, *The Lay of the Anklet*, we may read, in the 30th Canto, 160, the following line *katalcūl ilankaik kayavāku vēntan*. The whole passage reads “The monarch of the world circumambulated the shrine thrice and stood proffering his respects. In front of him the Arya kings released from prison, kings removed from the central jail, the Kongu ruler of the Kudagu, the king of Malva and *Kayavāku, the king of the sea-girt Ceylon*, prayed reverently to the deity thus ” (Dikshitar’s transl, p 343) ¹ According to *Cilappatikāram*, *Gajabāhu* (the First) of Ceylon was contemporary with the hero of the 3rd Canto of the epical poem, the Chera king Cenkuttuvan. Hence this great *Cēral* monarch who according to *Patirruppattu V* ruled for 55 years, may be roughly assigned to 170-225 A D (S Vayapurī Pillai, *HTLL*, p 22) ²

This computation has been known as the *Gajabāhu Synchronism* and it has become a sheet-anchor of early Tamil history, and our basic point of departure for dating the earliest Tamil literature. Though it rests on slender foundations, it is obvious from the plentiful corroborative evidence “derived from the general possibilities of history in Northern and Southern India” (K A Nil-

¹ For the first time, the “Gajabāhu synchronism” was made the centre of attention by V Kanakasabhai Pillai, *The Tamils 1800 Years Ago* (1904), p 7, he however dates Gajabāhu I in 113-125 A D, which was proved incorrect.

² In Ceylonese history, there were two kings by name of Gajabāhu since the second ruled as late as in the 12th Cent, it must be the first who is meant here. Gajabāhu I is mentioned in *Mahāvamsa* XXXV, pp 253-5 as follows: “After Vankanasikatissa’s death, his son Gajabāhukagāmani reigned twenty-two years” Dr Wilhelm Geiger, in his translation of the *Mahāvamsa* (Pali Text Society, 1912) gives a list of Ceylonese kings, in which Gajabāhu I appears as the island’s 46th ruler, ruling between 171-193 A D. *Mahāvamsa* is based on genuine tradition and may well be accepted as history except for its opening chapters. According to most scholars, Gajabāhu I ruled either between 171-193 or 174-195 A D. It was suggested (P F S Iyengar, *History of the Tamils*, pp 335-7) that there is an alternative reading for the word *Kayavāku*, viz *Kāval*. But according to V R Dikshitar, the illustrious editor of the epical poem, Dr U V Swaminatha Aiyar, after carefully comparing 11 manuscripts of the text and 14 commentaries, accepts the reading *Kayavāku*—i e Gajabāhu—as the only correct one, though he gives the *il kāval vēntan* on p 585, ed 1950. For Gajabāhu I, cf *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, III, No 1, p 9.

kanta Sastri) that the epic poem preserves elements of a correct historical tradition and that Cenkuttuvan the *Cēral* and Gajabāhu I of Ceylon were contemporaries, both living round 180 A D. The opinion that the Gajabāhu synchronism is an expression of a genuine historical tradition is accepted by most scholars today, apart from K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, by Seshagiri Sastri, Kanakasabhai Pillai, Krishnaswami Aiyengar, K. Kailasapathy etc (cf. Vayapurī Pillai, *HTLL*, p. 22. "We may be reasonably certain that the chronological conclusion reached above is historically sound")

4. The procedure as to how to arrive, from the Gajabāhu synchronism, at an absolute dating of the bulk of so-called *Caṅkam* poetry, is as follows. The traditions, recorded in the colophons and epilogues of the poems of *Paṭṭirup̄pattu* ("The Ten Tens"—a bardic collection singing about the *Cēral* kings), reflect no doubt quite reliably the history of the Cheras.¹ A careful study of the synchronism between the kings, chieftains and the poets suggested by the notes at the end of the poems (assigning to each generation about 25 years) indicates that the main body of early Tamil literature reflects events within a period of four or five continuous generations, a period of 120-150 years. Though the details remain to be worked out and there may be quite a number of points which need further discussion and clarification, the labours of R. Sewell and of S. K. Iyengar, R. Dikshitar, and above all, of K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, have brought as their results the rough outline of Chera and Chola kings between approximately 130 A D - 240 A D. The majority of the so-called *Caṅkam* poetry, or early Tamil bardic literature, belongs thus to 100-250 A D. This does not mean, though, that the corpora do not contain material which may be much older (actually, some poems are as old as the 1st Cent. B C) as well as much younger (some bardic poems may be as late as the 4th-6th Cent. A D.)

5. The epic poem *Cilappatikāram* provides yet another clue. In Canto XXVI, ll. 149 and 163 we read about *nūṟṟuvar kaṇṇar*. This name was identified with the dynastic name *Śātakarṇi*, *Śātakami*, the *Śātavāhanas* or *Āndhras*. This powerful dynasty which followed the Mauryan rule in the Deccan, lasted for four and a half centuries

¹ *Paṭṭirup̄pattu*, ed. by U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, p. 4-5, R. Paneiselvam, "An Important Brahmi Tamil Inscription, a reconstruction of the genealogy of the Chera kings", *Proc. 1. International Tamil Conference-Seminar 1966*, Kuala Lumpur (1968), M. E. M. Pillai, *Culture of the Ancient Cheras*, Kovalpatti, 1970.

from about 230 B C. By the beginning of the 3rd Cent., their empire had virtually ceased to exist. In the private collection of Dr. N. P. Dikanara Rao, Hyderabad, is found a silver coin with a short bilingual inscription in Prakrit and Tamil. The Prakrit text reads (?) *vasiti putasa siri satakanisa raano*. The script is Brāhmī. The meaning is "(The coin) of the king Sīri Satakani (Śrī Śātakarni) Vasiṭiṭputa (Vasisthiṭputrasya)". The Tamil text, also in Brāhmī, reads *vacittimakanṅku tiru catakaniṅku aracaṅku*.¹ This king established himself on the *Śātavāhana* throne perhaps in 168 or 170 A. D.² This short bilingual is only a slight corroboration of our dating, but it is a kind of evidence: first, it shows the use of Brāhmī for epigraphic Tamil in the 2nd Cent. A. D., second, it shows the use of Tamil as an important language side by side with Prakrit—probably a *lingua franca* of the South of that time (the *Śātakarnis* were an *Āndhra*, not a Tamil *kula*), third, it is a corroboration for the identification of the name *nūrruvarkaṅṅar* of the *Cilappatikāram* with the *kula*-name *Satakarni-Śātavāhanas*, and, finally, the palaeography and the grammar of this short inscription is identical with the other Brāhmī Tamil inscriptions and with a rule of the *Tolkāppiyam* (about the possessive dative), and so even this short bilingual on a *Śātavāhana* coin helps in the dating of the earliest Tamil texts.

6. The most important corroborative evidence which shows the reliability of the Gajabāhu synchronism on the one hand and of the colophons in the *Patirruppattu* collection on the other hand is found in the results of the splendid work performed by Iravatham Mahadevan and published in his "Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions", *Seminar on Inscriptions*, Madras, 1966, pp. 56-73, and in his papers "Chera Inscriptions of the Sangam Age", *The Hindu*, March 14, 1965, "The Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions of the Cankam Age", *I International Conference—Seminar of Tamil Studies, Kuala Lumpur*, 1966, "New Light on Dravidian Kinship Terms", *II International Conference—Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Madras, 1968 and "Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions of the Cankam Age", *ibid*. Thanks to the labours of K. V. S. Ayyar, H. K. Sastri, K. K. Pillai, my own,³

¹ Cf. R. Pameeriselvam, "Further Light on the Bilingual Coin of Satavāhanas", *IJ* XI (1969) 4, and R. Nagaswamy, "A Bilingual Coin of Satavāhanas", *The Sunday Standard*, 26.3.1967.

² R. Sewell, *Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, Madras, 1932, D. C. Sincar, *E I* 35, IV, 247 (1964).

³ Cf. H. K. Krishna Sastri, "The Caveins and Brahmi Inscriptions of Southern India", *Proceed and Trans of the I Oriental Conference*, Poona

and especially of I Mahadevan, we now know of the existence of 76 rock-inscriptions in the Tamil-Brāhmī script from 21 sites in the Tamil country. While these inscriptions are very short and the reading of some of them is still not quite clear, it is true that the importance of these texts for the study of early Tamil language, literature and history is out of proportion to their volume. Especially I Mahadevan's discovery of the rock inscriptions of the *Cēral Irumpōrai* dynasty at Pukalūr and of the Pāndyas at Mangulam enables us to identify some of the kings and chieftains with the heroes of *Cankam* poems. This is of enormous importance for the dating of literary texts.

a) Thus Kō Ātaṅ Cellrumpōrai of the Pukalūr Inscription (dated ca. 200 A D) can be identified with Celvakkatunkō Vāliyā-ṭaṅ, the hero of the VII decade of *Patirruppattu*.

b) There are further identifications of Chera feudatories whose names occur in these epigraphs, with the heroes of poems from *Patirruppattu*, *Akam* 77, 143, *Puram* 168-172 etc. Thus the Pukalūr Tamil-Brāhmī Inscription (dated with the help of the Ankamedu *graffiti*) became another sheet-anchor of the early Tamil chronology.

c) The two rock inscriptions of Netuñceḷiyaṅ found at Mangulam near Madurai are the earliest known historical records in Tamilnad. The archaic palaeography and the linguistic features of these inscriptions indicate an earlier date than the Ankamedu *graffiti*. They can be dated towards the close of the 2nd Cent. B C. Netuñceḷiyaṅ was probably the ruling king of the day (who should not be identified with his namesake of *Cilappatikāram* and other so-called *Cankam* works!). The end of the 2nd Cent. B C seems to be the period—as we shall see later—when the original text of the *Tolkāppiyam* which I propose to call the *Ur-Tolkāppiyam* was composed.

Thus, the analysis of these earliest Tamil epigraphic records establishes a correlation between earliest inscriptional texts and earliest literary texts: a number of poems of the earliest anthologies appear in a new light, and happen to be dateable, thus correlation

(1919), 327-348, K. V. Subrahmanya Ayyar, "The Earliest Monuments of the Pandya Country and Their Inscriptions", *Proceed and Trans. of the III Oriental Conference*, Madras (1924), 275-330, K. K. Pillai, "The Brahmi Inscriptions of South India", *Tamil Culture* (1956) 175-185, K. Zvelebil, "The Brahmi Hybrid Tamil Inscriptions", *Archiv Orientalni* (1965) 547-575

has been established with *Akam* 77, 143, *Puram* 158 and 168, 169, 387, *Akam* 115 and 253. Taking into consideration the cumulative evidence of the linguistic, epigraphic, archaeological, numismatic and historical data, both internal and external, it is undoubtedly possible to arrive at the following final conclusion: *the earliest corpus of Tamil literature may be dated between 100 B C and 250 A D.*

The question is which texts out of the corpus of the so-called *Cankam* literature belong to this earliest body of Tamil literary texts? Though a detailed relative chronology cannot be worked out yet with any appreciable degree of exactness and rigour, a tentative relative chronology of the earliest Tamil texts may be arrived at on the basis of labours performed by S. Vayyapuri Pillai, M. Raghava Iyengar, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, John R. Marr, K. Kailasapathy and others. The results of this relative chronology may be seen in Chart 4.

- 1 The *Ur-Tolkāppiyam* (that is, the two first books of this admirable grammar, the *Eluttatikāram* (Phonology) and *Collatikāram* (on Morphology, Semantics, Etymology, and Syntax) minus later interpolations, which may be dated roughly to 100 B C
- 2 The earliest poems of the following anthologies
 - a *Aṅkuraṇūru*
 - b *Kuṟuntokai*
 - c *Narṟinaṟ*
 - d *Paṭṟruppattu*
 - e *Akaṇāṇūru*
 - f *Puṟaṇāṇūru*

The earliest poems of these anthologies form thus the nuclear corpus of the great anthology later called *Ettuttokai*.

- 3 The lays of the second great anthology, *Pattuppattu*, in this possible chronological order
 - a *Porunaṟṟruppatai*
 - b *Peruṁpānāṟruppatai*
 - c *Pattinaṟpātai*
 - d *Kuṟṁciṟppattu*
 - e *Malaiṟpatukatām*
 - f *Netunaṟvātai*
 - g *Maturaṟkkāñci*
 - h *Mullaṟppattu*
 - i *Ciṟupānāṟruppatai*

CHART 4

Serial number	Text	Details	Approx. date
1	Early Tamil Brāhmī Inscriptions	The two rock-inscriptions of Netuñceḷiyaṅ at Mangulam Asoka's Brāhmī introduced round ca. 250 B C into the Tamil country. Adapted between 250-220 to Tamil.	3th-1st Cent. B C
2	<i>Ur-Tolkāppiyam</i> , <i>Eluttatikāvam</i> and <i>Collatikāvam</i> minus later interpolations	First standardization of the Tamil language, the first literary norm of Maturai between ca. 200-50 B C, based on oral bardic literature, pre-literary traditions and "pre-Sangam" literature of ca. 250-150 B C.	2nd-1st Cent. B C
3	The earliest strata of extant Tamil literature in the Anthologies: early poems of <i>Aṅkūruṇṇūru</i> , <i>Kuṟuntokai</i> and <i>Naṟṟinaṟ</i> , prob. also of <i>Puṟaṇṇūṟu</i> and <i>Akaṇṇūṟu</i>	Earliest "Sangam" poets: Ammūvaṅ (<i>Ak</i> 10, 35, 140 etc., <i>Aṅk</i> 101-102, <i>Kuṟ</i> 49, 125, 163 etc., <i>Naṟ</i> 4, 35 etc.), Ōtalāntai (<i>Aṅk</i> 301-400, <i>Kuṟ</i> 12, 21, 329), Ōram-pōḷi (<i>Ak</i> 286, 316, <i>Aṅk</i> 1-100, <i>Kuṟ</i> 10, 70, 122 etc., <i>Naṟ</i> 20, 360, <i>Puṟ</i> 284), Kāpilar the Elder (<i>Aṅk</i> 201-300 etc.), Pēyaṅ (<i>Aṅk</i> 401-500 etc.).	1st Cent. B C — 2nd A D
4	Aṅkamedu <i>graffiti</i> and the related group of Tamil Brāhmī Inscriptions at Āṅgamalai etc. The Sātaśāhana bilingual coin		1st-2nd Cent. A D Ca. 150-200 A D
5	The earliest strata in the <i>Pattuppāṭṭu</i> anthology: <i>Poruṇarāyarpṭatai</i> , <i>Peruṇpāṇāyarpṭatai</i> , <i>Pattuppāḷai</i> , <i>Kuṟuṇṇarpṭattu</i>	Kāpilar the Elder, Mutattāmaikkanni, Kaṭiyālūr Uṟuttiraṅ Kannaṅ	2nd-3rd Cent. A D
6	The middle strata of the Anthologies: <i>Aṅkūṟuṇṇūṟu</i> , <i>Kuṟuntokai</i> , <i>Naṟṟinaṟ</i> , <i>Pattuppāṭṭu</i> , <i>Akaṇṇūṟu</i> , <i>Puṟaṇṇūṟu</i> , <i>Malaṟpaṭukataṁ</i> , <i>Matuṟaikkāṅci</i> , <i>Netumalvātai</i>	E.g. Paranaṟ (150-230 A D), Nakkīraṟ the First, Māṅkutimarutaṅ	2nd-4th Cent. A D

Serial number	Text	Details	Approx. date
7	Late Tamil Brāhmī Inscriptions the <i>Cēral</i> inscriptions at Pukalūri etc	Later inscriptions from Aracalūr Māmantūri etc	3rd-4th Cent. A D
8	Late strata of the Anthologies <i>Patruppattu</i> , <i>Akanāṅṅūru</i> , <i>Pūvanāṅṅūru</i> , <i>Mullaiṅṅpāttu</i> , <i>Cirupānāruppatalai</i>	E.g. Nappūtaṅṅai, Nallūr Nattattaṅṅai	3rd-5th Cent. A D
9	Transitional Tamil Brāhmī (Proto- <i>vattaiuttu</i>) Inscriptions at Pillaiyārpattī and Pūnātaikkuṅṅam		5th-6th Cent. A D
10	Latest strata of the Anthologies e.g. <i>Cirupānāruppatalai</i> (?) Iṅṅaiyāṅṅai's <i>Akapporul</i>		4th-6th Cent. A D

These are the most ancient texts in the Tamil language. The earliest poems contained in these texts belong roughly to 100 B.C. - 250 A.D. The upper limit for these anthologies is the 5th-6th Cent. A.D. Linguistically, this period is usually described as *Early Old Tamil*. At the beginning of this period, we have the *Urtext* of the *Tolkāppiyam*. At the end of this period, we have the earliest poetics of Tamil, the *Akapporul* of Iṅṅaiyāṅṅai.

Cf. the following sources and bibliography for the quoted texts and problems: Iṅṅavatham Mahadevan, "Corpus of the Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions", *Seminar on Inscriptions*, Madras (1966), ed. by R. Nagaswamy, pp. 57-73.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE CANKAM LEGEND THE TEXTS

(In the following chapters we shall mostly deal with the anatomy of the earliest Tamil bardic poetry, selected specimen of the two main genres, *akam* and *puram*, will be analysed, the thought-content and the form of these poems will be described, as well as their language and structure, the themes and cycles, the formulae, the metre and prosody, in short, the thematic and psychological as well as the formal aspects of these compositions. We shall also deal with the theory of poetics evolved by Tamil scholiasts approximately in the middle of the 1st millennium A D)

First, however, we shall discuss some other questions pertinent to this early literature—above all, the term and the notion of *Cankam* and *Cankam literature*, the legend of the *Cankam*, and the *rationale* behind this legend. Second, we must give a detailed account of various anthologies out of which we shall select our examples for analysis.

41 *Cankam* (pronounce *Sangam*) We hear this term again and again. Not only that it is current as the attribute of the literature of the earliest period—in most books and papers dealing with Tamil literature one encounters the term *Cankam* poetry or *cankalakkriyam* on every page—but also it is used as an attribute of other phenomena, like language (*cankattamil*), or even the whole epoch which is called the “Sangam Age”. The term *Cankam* poetry or *Cankam* literature or even *Cankam* Age means that, according to a persistent indigenous tradition, a *literary cankam* or *Academy* in *Maturai* shaped and controlled the literary, academic, cultural and linguistic life of ancient Tamilnad.

The legend about a learned body responsible for and critically controlling the literary output of early Tamil poets is rather late—it seems to occur for the first time in a line by Appar who uses the term *cankam*¹ in *Tirupputtūr Tāntakam*, st 3, 1 e in the 7th Cent

¹ *nan pātup pulavaṇāyc cankam ēri | naṅkaṇakak kūtitarumkku aruliyōṅi kān* “Look at Him who was gracious enough to appear in the assembly (*cankam*) as a poet of fine poems and presented the purse of gold to Taruṇi” For further references to Sangam, and to Maturai as the seat of Tamil

names (such as Ulōccaṅār, Mātirttaṅ etc.), that Jaina cosmology and mythology is mentioned in the early corpus (e.g. *Pur* 175, *Akam* 59), as well as Jain austerities (*Akam* 193), that Tolkāppiyāṅār very probably was a Jain, too. The Ciṅṅamanūr plates (10th Cent. A.D.) mention a Sangam at Maturai. All this seems to indicate that the cultural prestige of Maturai, the uniformity and fixity of the style and language of the earliest poetry, and the lively interest the Jains and their organisations always took in the Tamil language and culture, provided some basic rational elements for the "Legend of the Sangam". For the Jain character of the Sangam—and, at the same time, for the purely fictitious number of years traditionally given—there is one more evidence: observe that the number of years given is always a multiple of 37: 37 by 120, 37 by 100, 37 by 50. The typical passion of the Jains for numbers is well-known.¹

In conclusion one may agree with what K. A. Nilakanta Sastri says in his *A History of South India*, 3rd ed., p. 116: "That a college (*cankam*) of Tamil poets flourished for a time under royal patronage in Madura may well be a fact. Some of the names of the kings and poets are found in inscriptions and other authentic records, showing that some facts have got mixed up with much fiction, so that no conclusions of value can be based on it."

4.2 *Cankam literature* The term, strictly speaking, should not be used. The Jesudasans are right when they say (*A History of Tamil literature*, 8), "The title 'the Sangam Period' is misleading". And they admit that it is a name given only for the sake of convenience. Even worse is the term "Augustan" or "Augustus" era of literature (which, if I am not mistaken, was introduced by S. Krishnaswami Iyengar in *Tamil Antiquary*, No. 5, 1909).

☞ If there is at all an appropriate term for this corpus of conventional literature, it is the term "Classical". First of all, the so-called *Cankam* poetry is regarded by the Tamils themselves, by the professional historiographers and critics, as well as by intellectual readers, as classical, in the same sense in which we regard some parts of our national literatures as classical. Second, it has been, since

founded the Dravida Samgha in Madura of the Deccan in the year 525 "after the death of Vikrama". I give the two passages: (1) sirupumjja pādasāso dāvidasamghassa kāragovuttho nāmena vajjanamdi pāhudavedi mahasattho // pamcasae chavise vikkamarāyassa mai anapattassa / dakkhima mahaijādo dāvidasamgho mahāmoho //"

¹ Cf. X. S. Thanai Nayagam, *Ancient Tamil Poetry* (xeroxed), 1964, p. 7

probably the 5th-7th Cent A D , a finite, "frozen" corpus, a body of texts which had not been expanded since it ceased to be part of a live oral tradition Since those times, it has become a part of the "classical" heritage as it were Third, it is the expression of a linguistic, prosodic and stylistic perfection, it is a finished, consummate and inimitable literary expression of an entire culture, and of the best in that culture, in this sense, it is truly a "classical" product, a classical literature,

4.3 At this point we shall give at least the most basic data concerning the fifteen texts which form the earliest literary corpus in Tamil Without the knowledge of this basic information which includes the name of the anthology or poem, the number of stanzas or lines included, the name of the compiler, of the commentator(s), of the editor and a brief characterization of the text, any further discussion is meaningless Sometimes these facts are by themselves rather revealing The various anthologies and poems will be described here in chronological order

I *Ainkurunūru*

Traditionally the third among the anthologies "(The collection of five hundred short (poems))" It owes its name to the fact that it is divided into five groups of 100 short stanzas each, each group being concerned with one of the five basic "physiographic regions" (*aintinai*) in the following order *marutam* "riverine", *neytal* "littoral", *kuruvīci* "montane", *pālai* "arid" and *mullai* "pastoral" Each hundred is subdivided into tens or *pattu* ¹ The poems have three to six lines each Stanzas 129 and 130 are not extant Five poets are credited with the authorship of the work the centum on *marutam* was composed by Ōiampōki, on *neytal* by Ammūvaṇār, on *kuruvīci* by Kapilar the Elder, on *pālai* by Ōtalāntai, on *mullai* by Pēyan Peruntēvaṇār composed an invocatory song The anthology is said to have been made by Pulatturai Muṟriya Kūtalūr Kiḷār on the direction of a *Cēral* king Yāṇakkat Cēy Māntaraṅ Cēral Irumporai The anonymous old commentary on this anthology is not a detailed

¹ The arrangement into tens is found also in *Patirupattu* "Ten Tens", and the traditions of tens continues all through the history of Tamil literature in the *Tirukkural*, in the *bhakti* poetry, etc , it may be of Sanskrit origin, cf the *śataka* arrangement The tens in *Ainkurunūru* are named after the word or line repeated in each of the ten verses, such poems with recurring lines and phrases show the underlying bardic tradition

one, but it is supplemented by a detailed commentary by U V Swaminatha Aiyar. A few lines of *Aink* appear in *Paripāṭal*, *Cilappatikāram*, *Nālatiyār* and other later works. There are not many Indo-Aryan loanwords in the text. In *Aink* 202 we hear (probably for the first time in Tamil texts) about the *kutumi* “pig-tail” of Brahmin boys (*pārṣṣṇak kurumaka kutumt talai*). There are 17 allusions to historical incidents in this anthology. The work was first published in 1903 by U V Swaminatha Aiyar. There is a good edition in 3 vol. prepared by Auvai S. Turacami Pillai, publ. by the Annamalai University (1938).

2 *Kuruntokai*,

“The collection of short (poems)” Under the original scheme, the collection must have had 400 stanzas, though U V Swaminatha Aiyar’s edition has 401 stanzas including the invocatory stanza by Peruntēvaṅār. It includes *akam* songs by 205 bards. 398 stanzas are indeed *kurū*, “short”, i.e. from 4 to 8 lines. Poems 307 and 391 have 9 lines (and may have been “smuggled into it by careless copyists”, N. Subrahmanian, *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index*, p. 6). The compiler was a certain Pūrikkō (a king?) of whom we know nothing else. The colophon is silent about the patron who directed the compilation. Tradition says that Pēraciriyar had written a commentary on all but 20 stanzas of this collection, and that another complete commentary was composed by Naccinārkkinīyar. Neither is extant now. U V Swaminatha Aiyar has published the text in 1937 with a fine and detailed commentary of his own. About 10 phrases occurring in *Kuruntokai* poems appear in later works, like the *Tirukkural* and *Cilappatikāram*. There are some interesting Skt. loanwords like *amittam* (83, 201), *yāmam* (5), *āttirai* < *yāttirai* (293). About 30 poets have Aryan names (Uruttiraṅ, Tēvakulattār etc.). T. S. Arangasami Ayyangar published *Kuruntokai* in 1915 for the first time. *Kuruntokai* contains 27 historical allusions.

3 *Narrinai*

is mentioned traditionally as the first among the eight collections. The name means “(The collection of poems) on excellent *tnais*” or “(The collection) of excellent (poems) on the *tnais*”. The anthology contains 400 songs ranging from 8 to 13 lines. In the extant form, song 234 is missing (a poem quoted as an illustration by the scholast

on *Iraviyanār Akapporul* has been included in the 2nd ed as the missing song 394), and poem 395 is fragmentary. The anthology was made under the patronage of the Pāndya king Paṇṇātu tanta Pāntiyaṅ Māraṅ Vaḷuti, but the compiler is anonymous. (The king was also the author of *Nar* 97 and 301, and of *Kur* 270.) There is a good commentary by P. A. Narayanaswami Aiyar. No ancient commentary is available. The anthology was published in 1914. It contains 59 historical allusions. Quite a number of lines or phrases reappear in *Tirukkural*. A few lines are found in *Puram* and *Akam* (e.g. 175), and are later quoted in *Cilappatikāram* and *Manumēkalai*. The allusion to the legend of a woman who tore off her breast (Kannakī?) occurs in *Nar* 312. There are not many Indo-Aryan loanwords in the poems of *Narriṉai*.

4 *Patirruppattu*

or "Ten Tens" is a collection of panegyric poems, consisting of ten sections, each ten has been sung by a poet or poetess in praise of a Chera king, each poem is supplemented by an unusually informative colophon, partly in verse and partly in prose. It is therefore a chronicle in verse, devoted exclusively to the *Cērals*, the ancient rulers of Kerala. Two decades, the first and the tenth, are lost. 39 lines of this work are found in the commentary to *Tolk* (4 stanzas) and in *Purattirattu*, a later anthology of war-poetry.

The epilogues or *patikams* furnish us with details about the author, the hero, his lineage, etc., they are most probably of later times (possibly added by the compiler), but they seem to have drawn on relatively dependable historical materials. Both the poems and the epilogues provide abundant sources of sociological interest (J. R. Marr, *op cit* 283, 328). Stylistically the poems are similar to the rest of the poetry in *akaval* (Kailasapathy, *op cit* 29), but a few peculiar regional expressions and usages do occur (M. A. Thiagarajah, *The Cēranātu during the Cankam and the Post-Cankam Period*, pp. 222 ff.) The II decade by Kumattūrk Kannaṅār, a Brahmin poet, is in praise of Imayavarampaṅ Netuñcēral Ātaṅ (the son of Utiyaṅ Cēral and the father of the great Cen-kuttuvaṅ). This king is said to have beaten the Aryas and the Yavanas, and carved a bow-emblem on the Himalayas.

The III decade, by a Brahmin poet Pālaik Kautamaṅār, is dedicated to the younger brother of Imayavarampaṅ, king Palyā-ṅaic Celkelu Kuttuvaṅ.

The IV decade by Kāppiyarṟuk Kāppiyaṇār is in praise of Kalankākkanni Nārmuṭic Cēral, one of the sons of Imayavarampaṇ

The V decade, ascribed to the great Paranaṟ, sings of the mighty Cenkuttuvaṇ, son of Imayavarampaṇ, and contemporary of Gaḷabāhu I of Ceylon (cca 180 A D)

The VI decade, composed by a poetess called Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyār Naccellaiyār, is dedicated to another son of Imayavarampaṇ, king Ātukōṭpāttuṭ Cēralātaṇ

The II -VI decades of the collection are dedicated, as we have just seen, to the Imayavarampaṇ-line of the *Cēral* kings, and deal with 3 generations of rulers

The VII decade composed by the well-known Kapilar is a panegyric on Celvakkatunkō Vāḷiyātaṇ who belonged to the second line of the *Cēral*, the one called *Irumpoṟai*. The greatest king of this line was probably Peruñcēral Irumpoṟai, the victor of Takatūr, praised in the VIII decade by Arcil Kīlār

The IX decade is dedicated to Iruñcēral Irumpoṟai, the son of Peruñcēral and the grandson of Celvakkatunkō. This decade was composed by a *vēlāla* poet called Perunkuṇṟūr Kīlār. This king, too, won victorious battles with the Cholas and Pāṇdyas. Hence we see, that decades VII-IX deal with the *Irumpoṟai* line of the *Cērals*, and again with 3 generations. Both *Cēral* lines were connected through marriages

The whole work has an old, brief commentary, which must be later than the 12th Cent *Paṭṟruppattu* was first printed in 1904, edited by U V Swaminatha Aiyar who also supplied a detailed commentary

According to J R Marr (*op cit* 311), a number of data indicates an indebtedness to some common but unknown sources. Some of the main themes are mentioned with variations in the decade poems, the epilogues, and the later epics, *Cilappatikāram* and *Manimēkalai*. Hence it is clear that these main themes were transmitted by (oral) tradition

5 Akanāṇṟu

or "The four hundred (poems) in the *akam* genre" also called *Netunto-kai* or "The Anthology of Long (Poems)" is a collection of 400 stanzas on love plus an invocatory stanza on Śiva by Peruntēvaṇār. The number of verses in a stanza ranges from 13 to 31. The anthology was directed by the Pāṇdyan king Ukkiraperuvaluti, and the name

of compiler is Uruttiracaṅṅaṅ, the son of Maturai Uppūri Kutī Kūḷāṅ. There is an old commentary for the first 90 stanzas, the next 70 stanzas have a commentary by the first editor, V. Rajagopala Iyengar, a modern commentary to the entire collection was prepared by N. M. Venkataswamy Nattar and R. Venkatacalam Pillai. The anthology was first published in 1920. The number of poets is 143 (+ Peruntēvanār), 114, 117 and 165 are by anonymous authors. The stanzas are arranged according to a peculiar scheme: the stanzas bearing odd numbers belong to *pālai* (1, 3, 5, 7, ...) which means that half of the entire anthology is dedicated to *pālai*, poems bearing number 2, 8, 12, 18, 22, 28, etc. belong to the *kuṟṟi-cittinai* (80 in all), poems bearing number 4, 14, 24, 34, 44, etc. are *mullai* (40 in all), poems with number 6, 16, 26, 36, etc. are *marutam* (total 40), and all stanzas having ten or its multiples (10, 20, 30, etc.) are *neytal* (total 40). In *Narṟimai* and *Kuṟuntokai* the "landscapes" (*tinai*s) of the poems are not indicated and no scheme is adopted with regard to their arrangement. S. Vayyapuri Pillai sees in this fact an indication that *Akanānūru* was collected later than *Nar* and *Kuṟ* (HTLL, p. 27).

The relatively long poems of this collection allowed scope to refer to heroic episodes, the total number of historical allusions is 288 (Kaulasapathy, *op. cit.*, 31). From the historical point of view, it is one of the most valuable collections. Some of the more interesting historical allusions are, e.g. in *Ak* 251 and 265 (by Māmūlanār), the allusion to the Nandas, and in *Ak* 69, 281 and 375 to the Mauryas (*Mōriyar*). In about five poems there are echoes of *purāṇic* legends (Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Paraśurāma etc.). There is quite a number of Indo-Aryan loans (e.g. *vatuvar*, *nīti*, *cikaram*, *irāmaṅ* etc.). In *Ak* 148 the Yavanas are mentioned whose ships loaded with gold came to Kerala, casting anchor in the river Culli, and returned heavy with pepper.

6 *Puranānūru*

or "The four hundred (poems) in the genre *puram*", traditionally the last of the anthologies, historically probably the most valuable, and perhaps the latest of the collections, a careful study would no doubt show that it contains stanzas of different chronological levels, covering probably more than 2-3 centuries. It was considered by the redactors of the anthologies as the collection of heroic poetry *par excellence*, it is also simply called *puram*, or *purappattu*, the

heroic songs. Of the 400 poems, two, 266 and 268, are lost, some poems are fragmentary. There is an invocatory stanza on Śiva by Peruntēvaṇār, so that the anthology as it stands contains 397 pieces. The poets represented number 157, 14 poems are anonymous. An old anonymous commentary is available up to stanza 266. There is a modern popular commentary by Auvai S. Turaicāmi Pillai. The anthology was first published by U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar (the excellent introduction is dated September, 1894). 138 poems of the anthology praise 43 kings belonging to the three great dynasties (27 deal with the achievements of 18 *Cēral* kings, 74 poems praise 13 *Cōla* rulers, and 37 poems laud 12 *Pāṇṭya* kings). 141 poems are in praise of 48 chieftains, nine of them regarded prominent enough to be treated in more than 4 poems each (e.g. Atiyamān, Netumāṇ, Añci, Vēl, Pāri, Pēkaṇ, Kāri etc.). Some kings emerge strikingly as heroes of *Puram* poems, e.g. Karikālāṇ the Chola or Kutakkō Netuñcēralātaṇ the Chera, clusters of poems in which certain heroes emerge prominently are centred around certain incidents in the heroes' lives (Kailasapathy, *op cit* 20). The redactors seem to have tried to group the poems on the basis of the kings or chieftains praised in them, but, at the same time, on the basis of many different themes. 121 poems have defective colophons, and owing to this fact their heroes are unknown. More than 100 poems beginning with 248 and ending with 357 have been classified into 30 themes by the colophon writer(s), the heroes are anonymous, this section of *Puram* may contain a very early strata of Tamil heroic poetry. Thus, e.g., there are poems about widowhood and its hardships (248-56), poems praising the prowess of the warhorse (273, 299, 302-4), elegies (260-1, 264-5, 270, apart from other elegies occurring earlier, all in all, there are 43 elegies in *Puram*, Kailasapathy, *op cit* p. 24), from 358 to the end of the anthology, the poems again refer to kings and chieftains. 141 poems in the anthology belong to straight panegyric poetry called *pātān*. As Kailasapathy rightly says, "modern attempts to read ethical and moral motivations into the words of the bards are particularly strained, if not irrelevant" (p. 81), at least as far as most of the poems are concerned. But there are a few poems with gnomic content, and there are a few lines in this anthology—probably under the influence of Jainism and Buddhism, and yet specifically Tamil in spirit—which may be regarded as showing elements of that pragmatic approach and practical and universal ethics which underlies the

Tirukkural There are also elements of reflexion, and some of the poems are fully reflexive, the central idea being mostly the impermanence of life in this world. These poems seem to be of later origin than the more ancient, straightforward war and panegyric songs.

7 *Porunarārruppatai*

or "The guide for war-bards" (traditionally the 2nd of the Lays—very incorrectly called "idylls"¹—) is probably the earliest among the poems collected later into *Pattuṣpāttu* anthology.

The genre *ārruppatai* or "guide" is very productive—it is a poem in which bards are directed by their fellow professionals to famous heroes who are patrons of art. The genre is found in the heroic Anthologies—altogether 18 pieces in *Puṣam* and *Patirruppattu*. Five of the "Ten Songs" belong to the genre.

The *Porunarārruppatai* sends a war-bard (*porunar*) to the famous Chola king Kārikāl. The poem consists of 248 lines in the *akaval* metre (and a few *vañci* lines) and was sung by Mutattāmakanniṃyār. The poet gives biographical facts about the king (especially his great victory at the battle of Venni), and describes his prowess, conquests, his benign rule, the general wealth and fertility of his Chola country is dealt with, and there is a charming description of the beauties of the river Kāviri. There is also a delightful description of the *vīrali*, the danseuse, whose charms are treated in minute detail—she has, e.g., *varuntunāy nāvīṇi peruntaku cīraṭi* "small feet of great beauty similar to the tongue of a panting hound", she has "young fair breasts set so close that a nib could not part them" (*irkku itai pōkā ēṛ la vaṇa mular*) and "her navel is like a water ripple", while "her venus' mound seems to be the seat of bees" (*nīṛṣ peyar culiyiṇi nīrainta koṣṣūl vantu iruṣṣu aṇṇa pal kāl alkul*). Finally, there is a very realistic description of a poor minstrel, whose clothes swarm with lice and mites, are soaked with sweat and much patched-up (79-80 *irum pēṇum iruntu irakūti | vērotu naṇamtu* . . .). The inhabitants of *Cōlanātu* are pictured as gay folk who likes to eat meat and drink liquor. First published in 1889.

8 *Perumṣānārruppatai*

or "The guide for bards with the large lute" is another of this "guidance" poems, attributed to Uruttrankannaṇār, who also sang the *Patṭiṇaṣpālai*, it has 500 lines in the *akaval* metre in praise

of the chieftain *Tontaimān Ilantirayan*, the ruler of Kāñci. The *perumpānar* are a class of minstrels (*pānar*) who obviously accompanied their singing or reciting of the songs by playing the *pēriyāl* or large lute. One special feature of this lay is the detailed description of the five physiographical regions (*tinai*) and a mythical account about the origin of the *Tontaimān* dynasty. The city of Kāñci is eulogized thus: "Among the great cities in this wide-placed earth, girt by the sea that smells of fish, and canopied by the sky, this is the greatest. It is an old city of ancient might and fame, abounding in festivals in which many worship" (Kailasapathy's translation, *op cit*, p. 44). In the lines 316-317, the *Yavaṇar* are mentioned. The poem describes also the life of the *ulavar*-peasants, and there is much material that is of sociological interest. Published in 1889.

9. *Pattinappālai*

The name is a compound of *pattinam* "maritime town" + *pālai* "a flower (*Mimusops kauki*), desert tract, one of the love divisions". It is a poem by *Uruttirankannaṇār* about the proposed separation of a lady from her lover who wants to go to *Kāvīrippattinam*, the capital of the Cholas. It has 301 lines, some of them in the *akaval*, some in *vañci* metre, in praise of the great Chola king *Karikāl*. First there is a lengthy account of the city, then 5 lines dedicated to the love element proper, and the rest of the lines deal with the exploits of *Karikāl* the Great. The poem gives a vivid portrait of the life in the great harbour, about the big ships and the merchandise they bring, about the *parataṇavar*, fishermen, and the *kurumṇar* and their feasts—e.g. the cock-fights and ram-fights, dancing and wine-drinking, but also about Buddhist and Jain monasteries as well as about the worship of *Murugaṇ*. It describes *Karikāl*'s struggles to regain his rightful throne, his invasion of enemy lands, the slaves he captured, his activities during peace-times, and his patronage to bards and other artists.

As a lay glorifying a celebrated ancient Chola king, this poem was very popular with the court panegyrists of the later Chola empire (850-1200 A.D.). It is mentioned in inscriptions and literary works of the 11th and 12th Cent. Some of these works say that *Karikāl* gave 1,600,000 gold pieces (*poṇ*) to the bard for his song—indeed a royal royalty! The name of the song was also *Vañci netum pāttu*, "The Long Song in the *vañci* metre". Indeed there are 153 lines in *vañci* and 138 lines in *akaval* metre. According to J. R.

Marr (*op cit* 435) the *vañci* lines were introduced to effect a change of rhythm that would please the listeners. The short staccato *vañci* lines with their swinging movement were apparently more suited for cataloguing things besides serving as a deliberate contrast to the *akaval* lines (Kailasapathy, *op cit* 39) Published in 1889

10 *Kurñciṣṣṭṭu*,

meaning literally "The song of the mountains", narrates the story of premarital love among the people living in the hilly regions. It is the love-poem *par excellence*, ascribed to the great Kapilar (also called *Perunkurñci*, "The large mountain song") The story preserved in the colophon accompanying the commentary says that it was composed for the instruction of an Aryan king, called Pirakattan, cf Skt *brhat* "great". This story and the fact that the poem contains a catalogue of 99 flowers typical for the *kurñci* region, appear to substantiate the suggestion that the poem was composed as a "model".¹ This is roughly the content of the lay. A chieftain of the hill-tribe falls in love at first sight with a fair maiden. The love is reciprocated. The girl's foster-sister helps the lovers to meet and enjoy their love. But the parents find the change in their daughter strange and suspicious. In the belief that she is ill they invite magicians and exorcists, but the cleverness of the foster-sister overcomes all obstacles, and, finally, when the parents are told that the young man saved their daughter twice—once from the danger of

¹ Cf S Vithiananthan, *The Pattuppṭṭu—a historical, social and linguistic study*, PhD thesis, Univ. of London, 1950, p. 20. The catalogues were a rather typical feature in ancient Tamil poetry. We do find catalogues of different items (e.g. the seven great donors), and perhaps the longest catalogue is this one in the *Kurñciṣṣṭṭu*. In the midst of the description of a girl and her foster-sister the song bursts into a methodical enumeration of the flowers characteristic for the hilly region (ll. 61-95). The presence of this catalogue has, as Kailasapathy says (*op cit* p. 131), discomfited many modern critics. Chelliah who translated the "Ten Songs" says "this list seems an intrusion, and somewhat detracts from the high poetic level of the poem" (p. 195). But this attitude was rightly criticised by X. S. Thani Nayagam (*Nature in Ancient Tamil Poetry*, 1953), and we may fully agree with Kailasapathy according to whom the presence of the catalogue need cause no surprise (p. 131). Bardic training included information pertinent to flora and fauna, among other types of information. And our poem was very probably meant to be an exercise in singing the *kurñci* theme, a model poem, illustrating a type, an informative poem on the *kurñci* situation (M. Varadarajan, *The Treatment of Nature* p. 62). It should also be noted that the catalogue itself has a high phonaesthetic quality, cf *on cen kantal āmpal ānccam | tankayak kuvalai kurñci vetci* (26).

drowning and another time from a rogue-elephant—they give their consent. The poem has 261 lines in the *akaval* metre. There has been some doubt about Kapilar's authorship (cf. Sivaraja Pillai, *Chronology of Early Tamils*, 202, who has called the poem a near-forgery committed upon a famous bard, cf. also J. R. Marr, *op. cit.* 357). Published in 1889.

11 *Malai-patukatām*

The title is somewhat obscure, according to some authors, it means "the secretion oozing from the mountain", according to others, it means "the sound of *katām* which appears in the mountains"¹. The title is taken from a line (348) of the poem itself (and must have been considered poetically very striking, this tendency to pick up "catch-words" or attractive phrases from the poems and give them as titles of poems, or names of authors, if the proper name of the author was lost, is well attested from a number of Anthology poems). The lay has yet another name, *Kūttarārruppatai*, i.e. "The guide of actors". The patron celebrated in the lay is Nannai (almost unknown from other sources), and the name of the poet Perunkuṅṅūr Perunkaucikaṅār. The poem has 583 lines. Various aspects of the life of different communities in the hero's land are described, and the poem contains exquisite pictures of nature. Published in 1889.

12 *Netunavātai*

means literally "The Good Long North Wind", implying by metonymy the Cold Season, which is the background of this narrative, ascribed to the famous Nakkīrar, and composed in the *akaval*, totalling 188 lines. The lay is a unique blend of love and heroic elements, and the pains of separation are its predominant features. It is artistically rather complex and subtle, so that it is often regarded, and probably rightly so, as the best or one of the best of the lays of the bardic corpus.

(In respect of language, diction, imagery and subject-matter it is of course—only naturally so—in no way different from the rest of the lays, but, in addition, it has some features that set it apart from the rest. It begins with the beautiful description of nature during the

¹ Cf. P. Kannappa Mudaliyar, *Tamil nūl varalāru*, 1962, p. 109. The line runs *malai-patukatām matirattu vyampa*. Probably it is a comparison of an elephant to a mountain, the oozing stands for the sounds emanating from the mountainous region.

rainy season "The earth is cold . From chilly boughs hang coloured drops of rain When sharp winds blow to chill the very hills " One then travels across the country to the city, to the king's capital, Maturai One sees details of the luxury life in the city, and enters the palace, the royal bedchamber, where, surrounded by her maids, the languishing queen lies plunged into grief "with the tip / Of her rosy finger now and then she spills / The shining tear-drops that in heavy lids / collected, roll down fast" Her thoughts are far away—and suddenly one is taken to the king's winter-camp (? at Talaiyālakānam), where her lord (? Netuñceliyaṅ), "at war with numberless foes", is fully absorbed in his stern duties In one of the most vivid scenes in the entire bardic poetry one sees the king inspecting at night the camp with wounded warriors The climax of the poem is a prayer to the Goddess of Victory, Korāvai (As Kailasapathy says (42), "the poem is indeed a *tour de force*, exhibiting the bard at his best ") Published in 1884

13 *Maturakkāñci*

is the longest of the lays, containing 782 lines in the *akaval* metre interspersed with a great number of *vañci* lines, ascribed to the bard Mānkuṭi Marutaṅār who was probably the chief court poet of Netuñceliyaṅ (whose fame the poem celebrates), and also the author of a number of stanzas in *Puranānūru* A *kāñci* is a later genre of "Sangam" poetry, it can be translated as a "hint" or "gentle hint", a kind of "moral epistle" (M S Purnalingam Pillai) based on the philosophy of the instability and perishability of world and life The poet was probably well versed in this particular genre (cf his poems in *Puraṅam* anthology) The title can be translated as "The good counsel (given to the king at the city) of Maturai" (according to an old commentator) The poem indeed contains some didactic matter, as do other stanzas composed by Mānkuṭi Marutaṅār or Mānkuṭi Kīlār There is a graphic description of city life the description begins with the morning market-place and makes a full circle of twenty-four hours (including some description of Buddhist monasteries and Jain shrines, of the various riches brought back by the king's warriors from raiding expeditions, a vivid portraiture of thieves etc) The author was an exceptionally keen observer of men and manners he has captured successfully the sights and sounds of Maturai in the morning, in the afternoon, during dusk, midnight and dawn There is absolutely no love element in the poem The first

portion is dedicated to the valour and victories of the greatest hero of the Pāndyas, Netuñceḷiyaṅ. The poem ends with a "good council" to the king to be happy throughout the allotted portion of his life.¹ There are relatively many Aryan loanwords. *Maturai* looks like a later "lay", Netuñceḷiyaṅ might have been ruling in Maturai around 215 A D. And, indeed, this lay might be dated well in the beginning of the 3rd Century. Published in 1889.

14 *Mullaṅṅpāttu*,

sung by Nappūtaṅṅār, is the shortest and one of the most beautiful of the lays. It contains 103 lines in the *akaval*, out of which only 33 deal specifically with the love theme of wifely patience and self-control shown by a heroine while her warrior-husband (anonymous) is away on some military campaign. The remaining lines describe the expedition of the hero, the temporary camp in the forest, the hero's chamber, specially constructed by the Yavanas who are fierce-eyed (61) and clad in toga-like garments, mention is made of *mūḷēccar*, (Skt *mleccha*-), employed as the king's body-guards, not knowing Tamil and speaking only with gestures (65-66). Interesting is also the mention made of unlearned youngsters (or servants)² who are the mahouts of king's elephants and who utter Northern words (or speak Northern speech).

Unlike the other poem on separation between lovers, *Netunālvaṅṅai*, this lay ends in a note of hope: the triumphant hero is returning swiftly home. Published in 1889.

15 *Cirupānārruppaṅṅai*,

"A guide of the minstrel playing the small lute", has been sometimes acclaimed as the best of the "guidance" poems, though it is the shortest of them. It has 296 lines in the *akaval* metre. The chief honoured in this poem is Nalliyakkōṅṅai of the Ūy tribe (cf. *Pur* 176). The poet's name is Nārattāṅṅār. It is a typical "guide" poem, possessing all essential features of this genre. All the conventional scenery is described, as well as the valour and especially the munificence of the hero. The fact that the Seven Great Donors "are mentioned in a catalogue lends colour to the argument that the

¹ *makiṅṅu iṅṅu uṅṅamāi peruma | vaṅṅamtu nī perṅṅai nāl ūṅṅaiyē*

² *vaṅṅamoli paṅṅaiṅṅai kallā ūṅṅai* (35-36), the phrase *kallā ūṅṅai* occurs also in *Poruṅṅai* 100 (for attendants or servants of the king), and *kallā ūṅṅai* occurs in *Cirupān* 33.

CHART 5

<i>The Three "Academies"</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>No of years</i>	<i>No of poets</i>	<i>Seat</i>
<i>Talaccankam</i>	440	449	Southern Maturai
<i>Itaccankam</i>	3700	3700	Kapātapuram
<i>Kataccankam</i>	1850	449	Upper Maturai
<i>Grammar</i>			
			<i>Akathiyam</i>
			<i>Akathiyami, Tolkāppiyam + 3</i>
			<i>Akathiyam, Tolkāppiyam</i>
<i>The Anthologies (tokai)</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>No of poems</i>	<i>Length of poems</i>	<i>Authors</i>
<i>Ankurunūru</i>	500	3-6 lines	Ōrampōki Ammūvaṇār Kapilar Ōtalāntai Pēyaṇ
<i>Kiṟuntokai</i>	400 + 1	4-8 lines	295 poets
<i>Narīnai</i>	400 + 1	8-13 lines	174 poets
<i>Paṭṭirūppaṭṭu</i>	Out of 10 decades, 8 decades available, + <i>paṭṭikams</i>		Kūmattūk Kannaṅai (2) Pālaik Kautamaṅār (3) Kāppiyarūk Kāppiyāṅār (4) Paranaṅ (5) Kākkarpāṭṭiyār Naccellaiyār (6) Kapilar (7) Aricil Kiḷār (8) Perunkunṅūr Kiḷār (9)
			<i>Commentaries</i>
			Old anonymous
			Modern by U V Swaminatha Aiyar
			U V Swaminatha Aiyar
			P A Narayanacami
			Old anonymous
			Modern by U V Swaminatha Aiyar

<i>The Lays (pāitū)</i> <i>Name</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Hero</i>	<i>No of lines</i>	<i>Metre</i>
<i>Akanānūru</i>	400 + 1	143 poets	13-31 lines	Old anonymous to 1-00 V. Rajagopala Iyengar next 70 M. N. Venkataswamy Nattar and R. Venkataschalam Pillai
<i>Purānānūru</i>	400 (266 and 268 lost)	157 poets	varies	Old anonymous up to 266 Auvai S. Turaicami Pillai
<i>Poitaravāruṅṅupṅṅatai</i>	Muttattāmakkaṅṅaiyār	Kārikāl	248	<i>akaval</i> (+ <i>vaṅci</i>)
<i>Perumpānāruṅṅupṅṅatai</i>	Ūruttraṅ Kāṅṅanār	Tontaimāṅ Ilantunayāṅ	500	<i>akaval</i>
<i>Pāṭṭinaṅṅupṅṅatai</i>	Ūruttraṅ Kāṅṅanār	Kārikāl	301	<i>vaṅci</i> (153) and <i>akaval</i> (138)
<i>Kuruṅṅupṅṅāṭṭu</i>	Kapilar	anonymous	261	<i>akaval</i>
<i>Malaiṅṅupṅṅakāṭṭam</i>	Peruṅṅuyūṭi Peruṅṅaṅcikaṅṅār	Nappay	583	<i>akaval</i>
<i>Netunakāṭṭai</i>	Nakkirai	Netuṅṅeliyāṅ	188	<i>akaval</i>
<i>Mattaiakkaṅṅai</i>	Māṅṅuti Marutaṅṅai	Netuṅṅeliyāṅ	782	<i>vaṅci</i> (+ <i>akaval</i>)
<i>Mullaiṅṅāṭṭu</i>	Nappūṅṅār	anonymous	103	<i>akaval</i>
<i>Curuṅṅānūruṅṅupṅṅatai</i>	Naiṅṅattāṅṅār	Nalhiyakkōṭṅay	206	<i>akaval</i>

poem contains later material" (Kailasapathy, 45) It indeed seems to be the last composed in the series of the *Pattupṭṭu* (*HTLL* by S Vayyapuri, 33 and *CET* by Pillai, p 202 imitation of the *Perumpān*) "The fact that not only the seven minor chieftains, but also the Three Kings and some of their cities are mentioned in a retrospective manner and with remarkable objectivity strongly suggests a later date for the lay" (Kailasapathy, 46) Tamil and Maturai are associated in a special way, and, as Kailasapathy points out, in this lay the connexions between Tamil and the *Pāntiya* capital which became later legendary, may be seen in its evolution (p 46, cf *tamil nilaiṭṭera matura* 66) Rather powerful is the poet's description of his poverty—the starved bitch laying in the ruined kitchen near a cold hearth with her blind and helpless pups, refusing to suckle them, the wife of the bard cooks without salt (as she cannot afford it) some herbs which she gathered from refuge heaps Lines 14 to 40 contain one of the most detailed and meticulous descriptions—but also rather charming—of a woman's body found in classical Tamil literature, this in a kind of *antāti* arrangement (the offset of a line repeated as the onset of the next line) including the simile known to us from *Porunar*—the small feet similar to the tongues of panting dogs (16-17) Published in 1889

Such phrases and formulae, recurring again and again (cf the construction *kallā ilaiyar* or *ilaiṅgar*, recurring e.g. in *Porunar* 100, *Mullaiṭṭ* 35-36 and *Cirupān* 33) show how intimate and close was the connection between the various poems of the corpus, and how stereotyped and conventional is the language of this bardic poetry We may indeed say that the 15 poems and collections of poems just described constitute one single corpus—in many ways unique in the literature of the world—stylized to such an extent that it is almost impossible to distinguish what belongs properly to each author

ANALYSING CLASSICAL POETRY

The Metre , ,

The entire corpus of earlier classical poetry is composed in two metres ¹ *akaval* and *vañci*

The basic metrical unit ² is the *acar*, ³ which is of two types — the *nēr* and the *nirai*. The *nēr* is a simple metrical unit, long or short, which may or may not be followed by a consonant, that is (C) $\overset{\vee}{V}$ (C). We designate it by —. The *nirai* is a compound metrical unit, made up of two short syllables, or a short followed by a long syllable.

with or without a consonant following, i.e. (C) $\overset{\vee}{V}C\overset{\vee}{V}$ (C). We symbolize the *nirai* by =. We see that the *nēr* may be quantitatively long or short, whereas the first, initial syllable of a *nirai* is always short, in terms of Western notation, then, a *nēr* is always — (a macron), while a *nirai* may be ∪ (pyrrhic) or ∪— (iambic) ⁴

If either of these two are followed by *-u* or by the “overshort” *-u*, they become *nērpu* and *niraiḥpu*, i.e. modified *nēr* and *nirai*. This does not apply to cases where the *-u* follows a single short syllable, whence it becomes not a *nērpu* but a *nirai*. ⁵ The possible combinations of these four units (*nēr*, *nērpu*, *nirai*, *niraiḥpu*) are sixteen. And all of them are permitted in the *akaval* metre. The most common combinations are — — or *tēmā*, = — or *pulmā*, — = *kūvilam* and = = *karuvilam*. These combinations form the next level in the metrical structure—the level of the *cīr* “feet”. The feet proper to the *akaval* are termed *iyarcīr* or “natural feet”, also *ācīriyaccīr* or “feet proper to the *ācīriyam* (= *akaval*) metre”

¹ For the most recent treatment of Tamil classical prosody, cf. K. Zvelebil, *An Introduction to Tamil Classical Prosody*, Hoe & Co., Madras, 1972.

² Some writers translated *acar* as “syllable” which is incorrect (cf. the criticism of this term by J. R. Marr, *op. cit.* 273). *acar* is not a syllable, neither is it a *moīa*. Vithianathan translates it as “quantitative unit of a movement” (*op. cit.* 273), Kailasapathy as “basic metrical unit” (*op. cit.* 140). I hesitated for some time between “prosodic” or “metrical syllable” and some kind of “unit”, and then, after discussing the matter with J. R. Marr, decided for “fundamental” or “basic metrical unit”.

³ Cf. *DED* 39. *acar* “to move, stir, etc.”

⁴ Cf. J. R. Marr, *op. cit.* 415.

⁵ E.g. in the words *karu* = and *muḷu* =

The combination of feet constitutes a line of poetry, termed *ati*. The standard line consists of four feet. Although there are lines of two, five etc feet, the ideal line is that of four feet and hence is called *alavati* or "measured line".

In the *akaval* or *āciriyam* metre, the standard line has four feet (= eight *acais*). Only the penultimate line consists of three feet. Elsewhere, a three-foot line is exceptional ¹.

The *vañci* metre (which occasionally occurs with the *akaval* in the songs of the *Pattuṅṅpāttu* anthology) has a somewhat different scheme. The *vañci* foot is made of three *acais*, e.g. — — — *nēnirai-nēr*. The possible combinations of the four *acais* are sixty for the *vañciṅṅpā*. The usual *vañci* line has two feet, so that it usually has six *acais*. The last line in a *vañci* stanza may be in *akaval*.

The next (and for our purposes the final) important concept to discuss is the *totai*, lit. "connexion, joining", "fastening, tying", "series, succession", i.e. the art of joining the lines of a poem in succession, making use of "rhyme", alliteration, assonance, contrast etc ². The line is considered by indigenous theoreticians as the basic and self-contained unit, in fact, as the largest single unit in a poem. According to Pēṛāciriyar, "the poet completes the intended meaning in each line, he does not need another line". *Totai* is precisely the art of stringing together lines so that they constitute a song. There are various kinds of *totai*. For our purposes, we shall mention just two: *etukai* and *mōṅai*. *Etukai* is the "consonance" in the coda of the first closed syllables in the feet, e.g. in *peru* (1st line) *aru* (2nd line), the *-r-* is the seat of *etukai*, in *pātu* (1st line) *kōti* (2nd line), the *-t-* is the seat of *etukai*. *Mōṅai* is alliteration, like in *māyōṅ mārpil* or *paranta pātu*.

Specimen Analysis

The basic prosodic and rhetoric features of classical Tamil poetry will now be demonstrated through the analysis of three selected poems.

¹ It was very probably rightly suggested by John R. Marr (*op cit* 464) that the three-foot penultimate line in *akaval* might have indicated the approaching end of a song. Kailasapathy (*op cit* 143-143) suggests an analogy of the penultimate line to the cadence in a musical composition.

² The next constituent is *nōḅku* "gaze, look, view", i.e. the cohesion of the various elements into one single whole, Kailasapathy says that it connects "the smooth flow of meaning" (*op cit* 146).

Kuṛuntokai 119 (by Catti Nātaānr)

cīruvel laravi navvarik kurulai
kāna yānai yananki yāan
kūlayaṅ mulavā leyyirral
valaiyutak kaiyalem mananki yōlē

In literal translation, this means

“little-white-snake of lovely-striped young-body
 jungle elephant troubling like
 the young-girl sprouts-brightness toothed-female
 bangle(s) possessing hand(s)-female”

In A K Ramanujan’s charming translation

As a little white snake
 with lovely stripes on its young body
 troubles the jungle elephant
 this slip of a girl
 her teeth like sprouts of new rice
 her wrists stacked with bangles
 troubles me *(The Interior Landscape, 1967)*

The prosodic pattern is as follows

== / == / + = / ==
 --- / --- / ≠ - / ---
 == / == / ==
 == / - = / = - / - -

We observe in this stanza four lines of four feet, the penultimate line has three feet, the metre contains only feet of two metrical units (*acai*) each, of the pattern = —, — =, — — and = =, these feet are called *īr acai cīr* “two-unit-feet” The metre is therefore *akaval* or *ācīriyam*

As for the *totai*, there is e.g. a *etukai* or “consonance” between the 3rd and 4th line (*i|l|ariya|—va|l|ai*), and there is, e.g., a *mōnai* or “alliteration” in the 2nd line *|y|ānai |y|ananki |y|āan(ku)*

Now for the phonaesthetic analysis almost all consonants belong to the nasal (so-called *mellinam*) or liquid (*itavīṇam*) series, the most favoured is the retroflex liquid *l* which occurs 8 times. The occlusives are rare *c* occurs only once, there is no *t*, *k* as a tense stop occurs only 3 times. This consonantal structure of the stanza results in a soft, mellifluous, liquid effect, like the murmur of a mountain stream. The distribution of the sounds is also interesting, each line has its own specific phonic structure, resulting in a specific phonaesthetic impression.

- 1 (c) ɾ v ll r v (n) vv r (kk) r l
- 2 k n y n y n nk y n(k)
- 3 l y(l) m l v l y r r l
- 4 v l y t (kk) y l mm n nk y l

Observe the various patterns in consonantal sequences in terms of feet. Given enough space one could discern similar patterns with regard to the vowels. Every stanza—every line, to be precise, since the line is a finished and self-contained unit—has its own phonic structure which is *functional*. The functional status of phonaesthetic properties, of “orchestration” (instrumentovka), is one of the very important and characteristic features of classical Tamil poetry. Much later, there comes a period in the development of Tamil literature when—like in most literatures—the purely formal qualities become the most important features of a poem (e.g. in medieval and late medieval devotional literature). Not so, however, in early old Tamil classical texts: there, the formal side is most often—though not always—in perfect unity with the thought-content, and hence the purely formal aspect of the poems is fully functional.

Next the rhetoric analysis in terms of traditional Tamil poetics, i.e. in terms of the first and most ancient descriptions of these matters as preserved in Iṟaiyaṅār’s *Akapporul* and in the 3rd part of *Tolkāppiyam* (*Porulatikāram*).

The two fundamental genres which were mentioned several times before are the *akam* “love” and *puṟam* “war”. It is obvious that our poem belongs to *akam* poetry. Within the *akam* genre, the first dichotomy runs between well-matched love (*akam* proper) and ill-matched love. Our poem belongs to the genre of well-matched love (see detailed discussion later). *Akam* proper is subdivided into five erotic situations, five phases of love, which are matched with the physiographic regions, these are the five *tinai*s. Our *tinai* is called *kurvñci* or “lovers union”, appropriate to the mountainous region.

How can we tell?

In every classical Tamil poem, diagnostic features are present which, to an informed listener and reader, reveal immediately the type of *tinai* and theme in which the poem is composed. Sometimes they are abundant. Sometimes, they are only a few. They are conventional and traditional. There is great fixity, great stylization. The poet is obliged to abide by traditions. The bardic practice

—both in the *akam* and in the *puṛam* genres—is conditioned by traditional material. The inner tension, the very dynamism of classical Tamil poetry arises out of this relation between the traditional materia represented by conventions and formulae, and the poet's art of improvisation. As Kailasapathy observes, simultaneous freedom and limitation constitute the dynamism of Tamil classical poetry. Now what is this traditional and conventionalized matter in our particular poem? What are the diagnostic features? First, there are some elements of the so-called *karuṅṅporul* present here, i.e. of "things born" or "native" the strata of *karuṅṅporul* is represented by the "snake" (*aravu*) and by the "jungle elephant" (*kāṇa yāṇai*), that is by the beasts typical for the mountainous region (*kurūñci*). The word *kāṇam* "jungle, forest" also belongs to this strata. As far as the *urūṅṅporul* is concerned, or the strata which deals with human situations and feelings, the key-word is *ananku* "trouble", "be troubled, afflicted, suffer pain", "afflict"—a feeling typical again for the *kurūñci* situation. The "troubles" or "sufferings of love" belong to the characteristic behavioural features of the "mountain-poetry" (union of lovers). There are no other elements of conventions present in the poem, but these four catch-words or key-items (snake, elephant, forest, and afflictions of love) are sufficient and diagnostic. This is the basic traditional and conventional material around which the poem has been built. The presence of representative features of all conventions is certainly not obligatory. But some *must* be present. This is the kind of limitation imposed on the poet: first, the broadest frame—he may decide between love (*akam*) or war (*puṛam*) as his two main themes, now, if he decides for love, he again has a binary choice: well-matched or ill-matched. Within *akam* proper, he has to make his choice among the five situations, and after he has chosen one, he is obliged to give clues in terms of *mutal* or "First things", and/or *karu* or "Native things" and/or *uri* or "Appropriate human feelings". He is also expected to use the technique of direct and indirect comparison and suggestion (inference). Within this framework, he is relatively free.

As far as the last point is concerned in the poem under analysis, the comparison is rather explicit, actually, the whole poem is a wonderful simile (made explicit by the use of comparative particle *ānku* "similarly, of that nature, like, as") the lover—a jungle elephant (*kāṇa yāṇai*), the sweetheart—a small young snake: no

real danger for the mighty elephant, and yet—she troubles and afflicts him, by her elusiveness, mockery, and who knows what. There is also the *technique of suggestion* used here, or rather comparison by suggestion, which is not apparent at first sight and which requires knowledge of some cultural traits: the *avvari* “lovely stripes” at the body of the snake hint at the fair lines, stripes and/or dots (*vari*) which were considered to be marks of beauty on the body of a woman (particularly on her breasts and venus’ mound).

Let us now analyse another poem, *Kuruntokai* 3, ascribed to Tēvakulattār. First the original Tamil text again:

mlattinnum peritē vāṇṇuṇṇu muyarntanru
nīṇṇu mārala vṇṇrē cāraṭ
karunkōṭṭu kurṇṇiṭṭi pūkkontu
peruntē ṇṇaikkum nāṭaṇṇotu natpē

‘earth-than big(ger), sky-than high(er)
 water-than hard(er)-to-fathom mountain-slope
 black-stalk-*kurṇṇiṭṭi*-flower(s) taking
 rich-honey-making-country’s-lord-with love’

Bigger than earth, certainly,
 higher than the sky,
 more unfathomable than the waters
 is this love for this man

of the mountain slopes
 where bees make rich honey
 from the flowers of the *kurṇṇiṭṭi*
 that has such black stalks

(A. K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

Metric analysis will tell us that this is a poem of the same structure as the one preceding: four lines, each of four feet, the penultimate line has three feet, feet of two and three metrical units are used. This kind of stanza (which is technically known as *nēricai ācīriyappā*) seems to have been the earliest type of stanza in the *akaval* metre, and hence the earliest type of stanzaic structure extant in the language. The metric patterns are

= = / = — / — = / = — —
 — = / — = / — — / — —
 = — / = — / — — —
 = — / = — / — = — / — —

Before we go into the rhetoric analysis, let us observe yet another property which many or most of these early Tamil poems composed as *nēricai ācīriyappās* have: they are divided, from the point of

thought-content *and* form, into two parts—the first part, usually longer (purely quantitatively, in a 4-line stanza, the first 2 lines, sometimes part of the 3rd line), deals with the *mutal* and/or *karuṭṭorul*, i.e. with the time-space continuum as basic background, and with the concrete representations of the five-fold physiographic regions—in *Kur* 119, we have in those lines the snake and the elephant, in this stanza, we have in the first 2 lines the earth, the sky, the waters, the mountain-slopes, and the 3rd line, too, is filled with the *karuṭṭorul* material—the black-stalked *kuṟiñci* flowers. The second part, usually shorter (in a 4-line stanza it usually begins in the penultimate 3-foot line, or sometimes only in the very last line) contains the substance of the poem, its essence (*uriṭṭorul*), the *pointe*—in *Kur* 119, the human element appears in the 3rd line, and the essential feeling (the trouble of love) as the last word of the 4th line, in *Kur* 3, the human element occurs only in the very last line (*nāṭaṅ*), and the *pointe*, the essential feeling, again as the very last word of the whole stanza (*naṭṭē* “love”)

This kind of structure gives to the classical Tamil stanzas a wonderful conciseness, terseness, pithiness and an inner tension which is resolved usually at the very end of the stanza. Sometimes, though, the procedure is exactly opposite, and the same effect is achieved by a reverse technique—the *pointe*, the essence of the poem is revealed in the very first line, it is a sort of direct attack on the listener, and what follows, is a kind of “decrescendo”, an unfolding of the *pointe*. But always, in the best stanzas of the collections (*tokai*), in both genres, *akam* and *puṟam*, there is a very conscious striving after a perfect and extremely potent and effective *form*.

The genre of *Kur* 3 is *akam* or love, clearly well-matched love or *akam* proper, the basic theme—*tinai*—is *kuṟiñci* or lover’s union. The time-space continuum is not explicitly given in this poem, neither is it implicit in some suggestion or other. However, according to some interpretations, the main components of the place or *nilam* subdivision of the *mutal* are earth, water, fire, wind and sky, and in this particular poem, three of them, earth, sky and water are actually mentioned, to stress the greatness and depth and intensity of the heroine’s love. As far as the *karuṭṭorul* or concrete representations of the physiographic regions are concerned, we have here no gods, but the term *nāṭaṅ* for the lover, this is a specific term used for the chief of the mountain-tribe, so that this in itself provides the clue for the *tinai*, second, among the birds and beasts and insects,

we have, implicitly, the bees, in the sphere of flora we have the *kurñici* flower, and honey which stands for the bees, being the typical conventional apparatus of the "mountain-poetry" The *uripporul* or the psychological essence is represented by the word *natpu* "love" According to some commentaries, the attributes *karunkōl* "black-stalked" and *peruntēn* "rich honey" belong to so-called *iraicci* or suggestion (or inference) in form of some additional material, as qualifier or adjunct to some basic concept: the *kurñici* flowers with black stalks stand for the woman in love, the bees gathering honey from these flowers are supposed to stand for the man's action of gathering sweetness from the pleasure of the lover's union As in the previous poem, the comparison is explicit, made overt by the use of the ablative plus *-um* "big(ger) than earth, high(er) than sky" etc What is compared is the intensity, the depth and greatness of the heroine's *natpu*, love

Finally, a third poem, from the same *tokai*, collection, *Kuruntokai* 68, ascribed to Allūr Naṅmullai I abstain this time from quoting the original Here is Ramanujan's lovely translation

The bare root of the bean is pink
 like the leg of a jungle hen,
 and herds of deer attack its overripe pods
 For the harshness of this early frost
 there is no cure
 but the breast of my man

(*The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

The genre is obviously *akam*, love, and *akam* proper, or well-matched love The *tinai* is a mixed one, and this is no chance, nor an error on the part of the poet How do we know it is a mixed "poetic situation"? As far as the time-space continuum is concerned, the poem mentions explicitly "early frost" (this comes under *kālam*, time) "early dew" is typical for *kurñici* or "lover's union" Now to the "things native" or "concrete representations" the bird mentioned is the jungle hen, typical for *mullai* or forest, appropriate to "patient waiting" in terms of the phases of love, the beast mentioned is the deer, again typical for *mullai* or the "patient waiting" situation The "bean" also belongs to *mullai* The *uripporul* or essential human feeling is defined as "memory and desire" that is, "memory of lovers' union" (*kurñici*) and "desire of patient waiting" (*mullai*) the *tinai* of this poem, the "situation" is thus *kurñici* + *mullai*, a *mixed tinai*, a mixed situation There is,

again, an explicit comparison present (the pink root of the bean compared to the leg of the jungle hen) But there is also suggestion and inference in this stanza the bare root of the bean, pink and attacked by herds of deer in the “season of early dew” is suggestive of the bare body and soul of the waiting, pining woman, attacked by memories of union and longing for embrace

RANDOM READER OF *akam* AND *puram* POEMS

Kuruntokai 119, by Catti Nāṭanār

As a little white snake
with lovely stripes on its young body
troubles the jungle elephant
this slip of a girl
her teeth like sprouts of new rice
her wrists stacked with bangles
troubles me

(A K Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

1 *akam*

2 *well-matched*

3 *tinai kurñci*

3 1 *mutal* ø

3 2 *karu* gods ø

nature human ø

non-human animate *snake, elephant*

manimate *jungle, sprouts*

3 3 *uri love—trouble*

4 *comparison* lover = jungle-elephant
girl = little white snake

inference stripes on the snake's body
(= stripes on the body of the girl)

Kuruntokai 3, by Tēvakulattār

Bigger than earth, certainly,
higher than the sky,
more unfathomable than the waters
is this love for this man
of the mountain slopes
where bees make rich honey
from the flowers of the *kurñci*
that has such black stalks

(A K Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

1 *akam*

2 *well-matched*

3 *tinar kurñci*

3 1 *mutal kalam* (time) \emptyset
nilam (place) *earth, sky, water*

3 2 *karu* gods \emptyset
 nature human *nātan*—mountain-chief
 non-human animate (bees, implicit)
 inanimate *kurñci* *flowers*
honey
mountain-slopes

3 3 *uri* *love*

4 *comparison* love great and deep like earth, sky, water
iraicci (suggestion) black-stalked flowers = woman
 honey-gathering = gathering of pleasure

Kuruntokai 68 by Allūr Naṅmullai

The bare root of the bean is pink
 like the leg of a jungle hen,
 and herds of deer attack its overripe pods.
 For the harshness of this early frost
 there is no cure
 but the breast of my man

(A K Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

1 *akam*

2 *well-matched*

3 *tinar* mixed *kurñci-mullai*

3 1 *mutal kalam* *early dew* (*kurñci*)
nilam \emptyset

3 2 *karu* gods \emptyset
 nature human \emptyset
 non-human animate *jungle-hen* (*mullai*)
deer (*mullai*)
 inanimate *bean* (*mullai*)

3 3 *uri* *memory and desire*

4 *comparison* explicit (root of the bean pink like leg of jungle hen), suggestion and inference bare root of the bean attacked by deer = bare body and soul of the woman attacked by memories and desire for union

Kuruntokai 40

What is my mother to yours ?
 How is my father related to your father ?
 And I and you
 How did we two meet ?
 Like the waters of rain pouring down on red soil
 The two loving hearts themselves
 Blended with each other

Author Anonymous ("Cempulapeyalnīrār")
Tinai *Kurñci*
 Transl K Zvelebil

Kuruntokai 2

O bee, fair of wing, ever in search of flower-garlands,
 Tell me not what I fain would hear, but what you really saw
 Among all the flowers you know is any more fragrant
 Than the tresses of my lady of the close-set teeth ?
 Graceful as the peacock she dwells, rich in love with me!

Author Irāyaṅār
Tinai *kurñci*
 Transl J R Marr

Kuruntokai 131

My girl
 has lovely shoulders
 that sway like wide bamboo,
 her eyes are large,
 liquid, burn to kill
 Her land is far
 to reach,
 the ways are hard
 My heart aches
 in frantic haste
 to reach her
 I am like the ploughman
 with his single plough
 in haste
 to plough his vast virgin land
 fresh with the rains

Author Anonymous ("Ōrēruḷavanār")
Tinai *kurñci* - *mullai*
 Transl S Kokilam

Aṅkurunūru 409

The father holds his son close,
 the son's mother holds them both
 in her arms
 Such a state is beautiful
 In its little space,

it is large enough
to hold the wide world
and all the lives in it

Author Pēyaṇār
Tīnai *mullai*
Transl A K Ramanujan

Narīnai 284

My heart says, "Go to her, unbind the thongs
of suffering from her soul"
She of the cool-lidded eyes,
whose outlines are dark *kuvalai* blossoms,
and long black tresses hanging low
My mind "A job undone will bring disgrace,
rush not"
My body bears the tension of these two —
a worn-out rope pulled from both ends
by elephants
with bright upswinging shiny tusks

Author Tēypuripaṅkayirraṇār
Tīnai *pālai*
Transl E Annamalai-H Schiffman

Kuruntokai 325

Let me go, let me go,
he used to cry
Go then, I replied,
anger aflame,
like a child's vicious play
But now, now
he is gone
Now my tears fill
a pool
in the hollow of my breast
Like the lake where cranes
with soft white wings
and black feet feed

Author Nannākaiyār
Tīnai *marutam*
Transl S Kokilam

Kuruntokai 8

You know he comes from
where the fresh-water shark in the pools
catch with their mouths
the mangoes as they fall, ripe
from the trees on the edge of the field
At our place,
he talked big
Now, back in his own,

when others raise their hands
and feet,
he will raise his too
like a doll
in the mirror
he will shadow
every last wish
of his son's dear mother

Author Ālankuṭi Vankaṇār

Tīnai maruṭam

Transl A K Ramanujan

(*The Interior Landscape*, 1967)

Kuṟuntokai 324

Man-eaters, male crocodiles with crooked legs,
cut off the traffic on these waterways
But you,
in your love, will come to her swimming
through the shoals of fish in the black salt marshes

And she,
she will suffer in her simpleness

And I,
what can I do but shudder in my heart
like a woman watching her poisoned twins?

Author Kavamakan

Tīnai neyṭal

Transl A K Ramanujan

(*The Interior Landscape*)

Kuṟuntokai 24

Will it stay for my lord's coming—
the blossom, new and glowing
of the dark *vēmpu* tree?
Now, that my lover's gone
these cruel women's tongues
are working on me,
grinding me to paste
like the one solitary fruit
of the white fig-tree rising on the shore,
trampled and mashed
by seven
crabs

Author Paranar

Tīnai neyṭal

Transl K Zvelebīl

Narṟimai 149

Eyes askance,
hands cupped to mouth

the women (in small groups and not so small)
 are tattling on us My friend,
 fresh flowers from the grove
 could not be sweeter
 than the honey-colored mane
 of that steed, drawing the chariot,
 which my lord rides
 Shall I leave with him at midnight?
 Then to hell with these townsfolk and their gossip!

Author Ulōccaṇār

Tīnai neytal

Transl E Anamalai - H Schiffman

Kuṟuntokai 17

When love is ripe beyond bearing
 and goes to seed,
 men will ride even palmyra stems
 like horses, will wear on their heads
 the reeking cones of the *erukkam* bud
 like flowers, will draw to themselves
 the gossip of the streets,
 and will do worse

Author Pēreyiṅ Muṟuvalār

Tīnai peruntīnai

Transl A K Ramanujan

(*The Interior Landscape* 1967)

Puṟaṇāṇūru 271

The dark-clustered *nocci* trees blend with the land
 that knows no dryness, the colors on the leaves
 mob the eyes

We have seen that leaf
 on jewelled women,
 on their lovely wide-angled mounds
 of venus

Now, mixed with fearful blood,
 their looks changed, slashed
nocci-wreaths lie on the ground
 where the vulture thinks them raw meat
 and takes them in its beak to its heights

We have seen that too
 just because a young man
 in love with killing
 wore them for glory

Author Veripāṭiya Kāmakkaniyār

Tīnai nocci / vetci

Transl A K Ramanujan

Puranānūru 279

May her grief come to an end!
 Her courage is cruel
 She is truly a woman
 born of fighters

In the war sometime ago, her father
 killed an elephant, fell and died
 Recently, her husband fell in battle
 trying to guard his great black herds
 of cattle

Yet today, as she hears the drums of war
 she is beside herself
 with the ancient love of glory

She gives her son a spear to hold,
 unfolds and wraps white cloth
 around him,
 combs his parched hair with oils—
 this woman who would have no one
 if she did not have this one son—
 she turns his face
 to the battlefield
 and urges him
 to go

Author Okkūr Mācāttiyār
Tīnai vākaī
 Transl A K Ramanujan

Puranānūru 82

The festival hour close at hand
 his woman in labor
 the sun setting behind pouring rains
 the needle in the cobbler's hand
 is in a frenzy of haste
 stitching thongs
 for the cot of a king

such was the swiftness
 of the king's tackles,
 an *atti* garland round his neck
 as he wrestled with the enemy
 come all the way
 to take the land

Author Cāttantaiyār
Tīnai vākaī
 Transl A K Ramanujan

Puṛaṇāṇṭūru 295

A heaving sea
 the battlefield with its tents
 In the battle,
 pointing the forged and whetted tongues
 of spears toward the enemy,
 urging his troops forward
 with himself at the head,
 killing men with arrow and spear
 in the skirmish, cleaving through
 the over-whelming wave of foes,
 forcing a clearing in that sea of men,
 he had fallen,
 his body hacked to pieces
 She saw him there in his death
 In love's excess,
 mother's milk flowed again
 in the withered dugs
 of this mother
 for her warrior-son
 who had forsworn all retreat

Author Auvaiyār

Tīnai tumṭai

Transl A K Ramanujan

Puṛaṇāṇṭūru 300

A shield, you say, a shield?
 Yes, a shield and a stone to stave off the enemy,
 and you may survive
 The brother of the one you slew yesterday
 is searching for you, his eyes jumping
 like the crab's eye seed, rolling around
 on a white plate
 His search is like that of a thirsty man
 for a glass of wine
 in an empty house

Author Aricil Kīlār

Tīnai tumṭai

Transl E Annamalai - H Schiffman

Puṛaṇāṇṭūru 88

Whoever you may be,
 beware
 before you even see
 our lord
 the chief of warriors
 terrible and strong
 with their long shining spears

Puranānūru 256

Potter, O potter, maker of pitchers,

I've come with him
like a tiny white lizard
merging with the axle-tree
of a cart-wheel
through narrow places

Be kind to me
and make wide
the casket of clay
Make it wide enough,
O you who make pitchers
for this city,
this wide, old, city

Author Anonymous

Tīnai potuvīyal

Transl A K Ramanujan

Puranānūru 389

Summers when the fruit of waterpalms dry and harden
when forest neems go to seed
waterplaces crack their beds
unadapting silverfish
swim south and leave behind
a fish famne,

dear young warrior,
put me among those you remember
on such days,

said my lord once

and gave me gifts, my lord of lasting glory

He is now where no one can reach him
vet if one could go, he is not the kind
who would be hard to see

He, old king Ātaṅkaṅ,
would tie up in his city
in public places
the young of jungle elephants
and make the soft-browed
mother beast grieve

Like him, O Nallērmuṭiya
of Vēṅkatam, rock and falling water, O you
who do not rise at once to run
wherever your heart goes,
you too must give
good things to hunger's households
and give till misery ends

May your women,
wide mounds of venus,
may they never hear
in the long yards of your house
the funeral drums of grief!

Author Kallil Āttirayanāi
Tinaī pātān
Transl A K Ramanujan

Finally, I give four different translations of one and the same poem, *Kuṟuntokai* 25, ascribed to the great Kapilar (the poem belongs to the finest classical Tamil poems ever composed) to show the various problems, difficulties and solutions involved in translating Old Tamil poetry.

Tamil text

*yārumillai tāṇē kalvaṅ
tānāi poypṇi yāṇevaṅceyko
tūnattā laṅṅa ciṟupacuṅ kāla
oḷukunī vāral pārkkuṅ
kuṟuku muntutāy mananta ṅāṅṅē*

Kuṟuntokai 25

Author Kapilar

Tinaī marutam

Theme What she said to her girl-friend
on the spot where he took her

1 Prosodic pattern

5 lines, each of them four feet, the penultimate three feet,

— — / — — / — — / — —
— = / — — / — = / — —
= — / — — / = = / — —
= = / — — / — —
= — / — = / = — / — —

The metre is *akaval* (*ācīriyam*)

2 Word-by-word translation

- Who-ever (was) not (there) only-he the thief
- he that if-denies I what shall-I-do
- millet-stalk-like small-green leg(s)-of
- running-water *āral* (fish) seeking
- heron was alone (he) took (me) day

Translation A

None else was there, but only he, the thief,
Should he be false, what should I do?

CHAPTER SIX

THE THEORY OF "INTERIOR LANDSCAPE" ५

In this chapter I shall deal in detail and in a more formalized manner with the remarkable and to a very great extent independent and original theory of literature, worked out some time at the beginning of our era and systematized and codified some time in the early half of the first millennium A D. The pertinent material to be discussed is presented in form of charts and diagrams, and the text is a kind of commentary on these.

First, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the sources of this theory.

(There are three basic theoretical works in classical Tamil which deal with the earliest conventions of Tamil literature: Iṛaiyaṅār's *Akapporul* (IA) or *Kalaviyal*, the third part of *Tolkāppiyam* called *Porulatikāram* (TP), and Aiyāṅār Itanār's *Purapporul venpā mālai* (PVM). These texts will be now discussed one by one, in their probable chronological order.)

Today, *Iṛaiyaṅār Akapporul* and its commentary by Nakkīrar form an integral text, and for most Tamil scholiasts, the commentary is more important than the underlying book. However, there is probably a wide gap of time between the two. It seems that Iṛaiyaṅār's *Akapporul* is the first "grammar of love" in Tamil culture, older than *TP*, that it is the earliest attempt to systematize, classify and explain the bardic poetry and its conventions, themes and subject-matter as a "classical", that is a "closed", "frozen", "traditional" body of texts which ceased to be alive.¹ Reasons

¹ Some authors maintained that the rigid adherence to the conventions "crushed poetic freedom and originality" (M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *op cit* p. 18). Some other authors would see in the classification, codification and explanation of the traditional conventions, given in the grammars, notably in *TP*, almost a whim of the grammarians and scholiasts, and they took a very negative stand towards such procedures (S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *HTLL*). He speaks about "the utterly artificial, or at best conventional character of the treatment", of "artificialities" which "had never any influence on the development of Tamil literature", which "today have no meaning except for the antiquarian", *op cit* pp. 69-70). For some critics, applying neo-romantic literary criteria to ancient oral and post-oral literature of the classical age, imitation is unbecoming of poets, imitative verses are necessarily of inferior

First, the fact that, in *IA*, the literary theory, the poetics and rhetoric is much less elaborate and much more roughly and less delicately presented than in *Tolk Porul*. Second, the commentary says explicitly, that *IA* is the first book (*mutanūl*) on *akam*¹ The

quality (M Varadarajan, *The Treatment of Nature* , pp 412 and elsewhere, Raja Manickam, *op cit* 204 ff) These critics are indeed very incorrect in their conclusions. First of all, no so-called creative act is entirely free (even a titanic artist like Michelangelo was necessarily limited, e.g. by the demands of Pope Julius and the extent of the space in the Sistine Chapel). Old Tamil poets did emphatically *not* sing "like birds" (as e.g. P. T. S. Iyengar says). On the contrary, the classical Tamil poet is, first of all, *par excellence* an "objective" type (in R. Wellek's sense of the term), open to the world, obliterating his concrete personality, with a very weak or almost non-existent element of personal expression, like the poet of the Renaissance age, like the bard of chivalric romances. The poetry of the classical Tamil age is a sophisticated poetry full of conventional formulae, based on traditional subject-matter, fed on traditional smiles, metaphors, allusions and suggestions. The material which was codified, classified and interpreted in the grammars was not a late ex-post ratiocination, or an anthology of the grammarian's whims, but, originally, while the bardic tradition was still alive, these were the useful guidelines for instruction and aid how to compose poetry, later, after the live bardic tradition died and became part of a classical past, these *sūtras* came to be regarded as useful guidelines for the reader. They were based on actual usage of the poet for whom they had once formed a framework of references and limitations within which he was 'free to sing', or rather free to prove how good his power of improvisation was. The original framework, the ancient prototypes of the formulae and themata, the basic original conventions must have been based ultimately upon reality. This was true of both genres: the conventions built up around love-poetry were ultimately based on real life, on erotic experience of the people living in the hills and forests, in the fields and on the seashore, allusions to heroic deeds which later became symbolic, allegoric, and part of the technique of suggestion, were based on actual historical events preserved in the memory of generations. That and only that had been the period when the first poets (not yet bards or minstrels of any status, but a kind of folk-singers) sang "like birds". But of this period we have absolutely *no* direct testimony. Of this "primeval", simple, "folk" poetry of the ancient Tamils nothing whatsoever has survived. What has survived, is a highly developed bardic poetry, composed in accordance with the rules and limitations imposed by tradition and formalized by the first theoreticians.

¹ The episode is blended with myth and fiction, but may contain a grain of truth. Once upon a time a severe famine occurred in the Pandya land. Many people had to leave, and among them were bards and scholars patronized by the king. Many years later they returned, the king convened the bards and discovered that there was no book on poetics and rhetoric (*porulatikāram*), but only the two books on "letters" (*eḷuttatikāram*) and "words" (*collatikāram*). Since the king and the members of the "Academy" had no "grammar of the Matter" (*porulakkanam peyātu*, ed. 1939, p. 14), god Śiva (= Irāyaṅār) himself intervened and composed the *Akapporul*. Hence, *Irāyaṅār Akapporul* is sometimes translated as "The Lord's Grammar of Love".

name of the author is Iṛaiyaṅār, and this has been explained by the commentary and by the tradition as "God", i.e. Śiva himself. There is a poem in *Kūr* (No. 2) ascribed to one Iṛaiyaṅār. There is nothing to refute the hypothesis that the author of the late bardic poem and the author of the theoretical work were one and the same man. The commentary also says that the book was composed at the time of the third *Cankam*, during the reign of *Ukkirap Peruvālu*. The legend referred to in fn. 1, p. 86 may indicate (although it is rather vague speculation) that at the time when *IA* was composed, the *TP* was not yet in existence. On the other hand, there is much in the body of the aphorisms (*sūtras*) that shows a relatively late origin of the book. The very first *sūtra* which gives the definition of *kalavu* or premarital love shows that the Brahminic influence (which has by that time surpassed the Jaina and Buddhist impact) was fully established. It says that *kalavu* is called that type of marriage among the eight (described by) the Vedic tradition of the Brahmins (*antanar arumārai*) which has been called the *gandharva* type (*kantariva*) by the wise. Or, cf. s. 36, where it is maintained that for the "high-class people (*uyarntōrkkū*)" two kinds of occupation are suitable: *ōtal* ("reciting of the Vedas") and *kāval* ("protection"). The commentary quite rightly explains *uyarntōr* as Brahmins and kings or *ksatriyas*. This again shows a firmly established Sanskritization and Brahminization of Tamilnad. However, quite naturally, the text contains much very ancient material, classified and described in the *sūtras* which are based, after all, on the early classical poetic texts, and on the tradition of bardic "handbooks". It seems therefore that *IA* is the first treatise on the conventions of the earliest bardic poetry of the *akam* genre written down at a time when the live bardic oral tradition of that poetry was already moribund—approximately between the 4th-6th Century A.D.¹ The text of the *sūtras* is lucid, continuous and brief. There are two parts in the grammar, one on *kalavu* (premarital or clandestine love), the other on *karpu* (conjugal love). There are 33 *sūtras* in the first portion and 27 in the second. More prominence is given to *kalavu*, and hence the work has also been called *Kalaviyal*. The entire text has thus 60 *sūtras*. The

¹ The age was now very different from the "bardic" age—Tamilnad went through a strong impact of Jaina and Buddhist moralizing, pessimistic trends, reflected in the didactic literature, and subsequently through the first impact of neo-Brahminism reflected in early *bhakti* texts like the *Tirumurukāṛṇruppatar* and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's poems.

commentary is ascribed to Nakkīrar, the son of the accountant of Maturai (*Maturai kanakkāyanār makaṇār Nakkīrar*). It is the first and earliest of the great prose commentaries which occupy so prominent a place in the development of Tamil scholarship and prose. It begins with a lengthy and detailed account of the legend of the three *Cankams*, the story about Uruttira Caṇmaṇ, and how the only true commentary to Iṟaiyaṇār's book was that of Nakkīrar. It then relates how this *urai* was transmitted from Nakkīraṇār to his son Kīrankoṟṟaṇār etc etc, until the ninth recipient of this oral transmission, a certain Mucirī Ācīriyar Nilakantaṇār, put it into writing (*innanam varukuvratu urai*). It would be very difficult, but probably possible to prove, that this Nakkīrar and the Nakkīrar who composed the very late lay "Guide to Lord Muruku", were one and the same person. This hypothesis is supported by the analysis of the diction and style of this commentary, the prose is highly ornate and poetic, full of alliterations, similes and metaphors¹. The commentary contains many love poems (e.g. *urai* to ss 7, 9, 12) which it quotes as specimen, which have not survived in the anthologies. Both the text and the commentary contain an abundance of interesting sociological, psychological and physiological data (e.g. s 43, where the menstruation—*pūppu*—practices are discussed).

There are a number of Skt loans in the commentary (e.g. *vārttai*, *pīrāmanan*, *cuvarkkam*, *caṇam*, *kumāracuvāmi*, *vācakam*, *kāraṇikaṇ* etc). Important is that the commentary quotes extensively (325 out of 350 stanzas) from a *Pāntikkōvai* (author unknown), whose hero is Pāntiyaṇ Māraṇ (640-670 A.D.). These stanzas belong to the 7th-8th Cent., which shows that the lower limit for Nakkīrar's commentary is roughly 700 A.D. The upper limit would be perhaps 750-800. This does not refute the speculation that Nakkīrar of *TMK* and Nakkīrar the author of the commentary are identical.

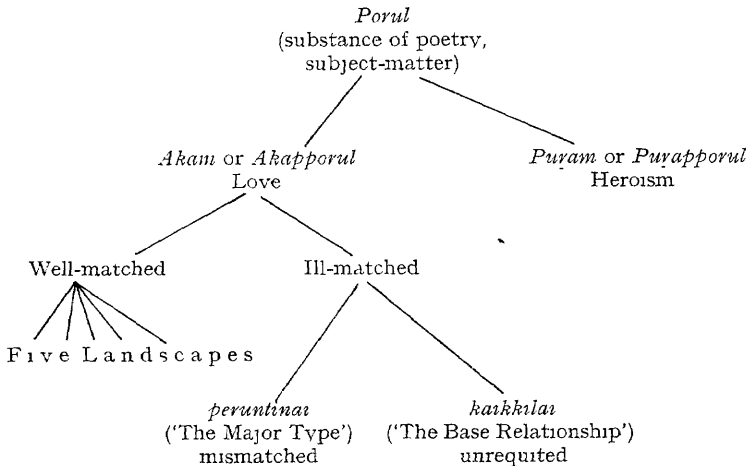
Probably only slightly later than Iṟaiyaṇār, the author of *Kalaviyal*, was the man responsible for the final version and redaction of the *Tolkāppiyam* (we very much doubt that it was "Tolkāppiyaṇār" himself). It seems that the final and definitive version of the

¹ Cf. such passages as e.g. on s 2 *valum utai pīraṇtu utai valarntu nīr utai āti cīr utai peruki il utaiāttup pāl utaiuntu pāl utaiēluntu col utai karri palamaiyum payaraiyum paṇpum nānpum* etc. This is very much the style of a late Tamil poet rather than of a medieval scholiast who tended to be more simple and less verbose (cf. Ilampūranar's style, who was, in "time-depth", the very next commentator). The number of similes is staggering.

Tolkāppiyam Porulatikāram occurred sometime during the second half of the 5th—first half of the 6th Century A D

The *Porulatikāram* deals with different literary compositions, their subject-matter and the conventions to be observed. The *sūtras* which form the basis of our present definitive text of the *TP* may have had once the function of a bardic grammar, "an aid to the instruction of young bards" (Kailasapathy), when bardic art was still alive (Later, when the bardic art was dead and became part of the classical heritage, *Tolkāppiyam* became the ultimate and essential authority since it "drew freely upon many predecessors whose works were probably widely in currency, and appears as a fully developed and definitive treatise" (Kailasapathy 49), different, in this respect, from the probably slightly earlier *IA*.)

CHART 6



There are indications that the core-*sūtras* of the grammar were indeed intended for bardic instruction. So, e.g., the author refers to ten kinds of forbidden faults in literary compositions (*TP* 653 ff). The very fact that *TP* contains material which at first sight might seem irrelevant to poetry (data on cosmology, nature, flora, fauna etc., cf. with data on physiology, hygiene etc. in *Irāyanār's* text), seems again to prove that the tradition contained in these *sūtras* was a teaching tradition: bardic training stresses general knowledge, and has encyclopaedic character (Kailasapathy 51, Chadwick,

Poetry and Prophecy, 31-48) The classification and arrangement of the many poetic themes of love and heroism manifest unity and harmony, and in spite of some schematism, the author does not lose sight of the realities outside literature. This holds good even more of the *Akapporul* ascribed to Irāyaṅār.

Purapporul venpā mālai, "The garland of *venpā* (stanzas) on the subject-matter of heroism", is a grammatical treatise of uncertain date but obviously later than *TP*. It seems to be a derived work, probably an abridgement of the lost grammar called *Pannirupatalam* "The Book of Twelve Chapters". It is of utmost importance for the study of heroic poetry. It also seems to have preserved a tradition to some extent different from *Tolkāppiyam*. According to Kailasapathy (*op cit* p. 53) it may reflect older traditions, going back to the time of the *TP* itself. It provides poems illustrating each theme, composed probably *ad hoc* for the treatise, but embodying early material. From this point of view, *PVM* is in some respects a literary work. Kailasapathy (*op cit* 53) quotes a few parallelisms between the illustrative stanzas in *PVM* and *Puranāṅūru* (*Pur* 290 = *PVM* v. 19, *Pur* 292 = *PVM* v. 32). The authorship is ascribed to Irāyaṅār Itāṅār of the royal *Cēral* family.

In conclusion it may be said that all the three works discussed are later than the erotic and heroic poems themselves, and evidently contain interpolations and later additions. However, "because they were committed to writing at relatively early date, and were perpetuated by a line of scholiasts who were also in possession of oral traditional material, they more often than not provide invaluable elucidations on the bardic poems, and have become in the course of time, part and parcel of the corpus itself" (Kailasapathy, *op cit* 54). It is especially the *Tolkāppiyam* which has become a kind of "universal grammar" for Tamil literature of all ages. The whole problem of *Tolkāppiyam*, its date, its structure etc. will be discussed in detail later (cf. Chapter 9).

Now to the theory of literature as such. Chart No. 6 shows the basic division of the substance (*porul*) or subject-matter, of the content of poetry.

The entire subject-matter of poetry may be divided into two main *genres* — *akam* or *akapporul*, and *puram* or *purapporul*.

akam — the meanings given in *DED* 8 are "inside, house, place, agricultural tract, breast, mind", it occurs in all SDR

languages + Tulu and Telugu This in itself should be rather relevant In the cultural and literary spheres, it also means "inner life", "private life" and, more specifically, "all aspects of love", i e *premarital, marital* and *extramarital love*

puṣam in *DED* 3554 we read "outside, exterior, that, which is foreign", again, the concert occurs in all SDr languages + Tulu and Telugu In reference to literature it means "outward life, public life, political life" and more specifically "heroism, war"

The fundamental features of the *akam* genre highly conventional poetry, the heroes should be and are fully *anonymous*¹ and *typified*, their number is limited to the hero, the heroine, the hero's friend, usually his charioteer, the heroine's friend, usually her foster-sister and/or maid, the heroine's mother Under *akam* in its two basic divisions of *kalavu* (pre-marital love) and *karpu* (wedded and extramarital love), the classical Tamil poet succeeded to describe the *total erotic experience* and the *total story of love of man as such*

In contrast, the heroes of the *puṣam* genre are frequently *individualized* as *concrete, historical persons* (kings, chieftans, the poet himself), the drama described is based often on a single, historical event However, there is strict conventional framework for the heroic poems, too

From the total corpus of classical Tamil poetry, about a quarter may be ascribed to *puṣam*, and about three quarters to the *akam* genre

Love may be well-matched or ill-matched Well-matched love is treated in poems describing a man's and woman's love-experience

¹ According to *TP*, ss 54-5, in the five phases of *akam*, "no names of persons should be mentioned Particular names are appropriate only in *puṣam* poetry" In this connection, cf W H Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, 2nd ed, London, 1946, p 97 "The majority of world's great lyrics owe their place in literature very largely to the fact that they embody what is typically human rather than what is merely individual and particular" In this sense (and in a number of other features, e g the strict adherence to form, the elaborate system of conventions, the respect paid to the authority of literary precedent, etc), "*Canham*" poetry is directly opposed to Western romanticism, and should be rather judged and compared with the European Renaissance and the neo-classic (classicist) ages Cf M Manuel, "The Use of Literary Conventions in Tamil Classical Poetry", *Proc of the 1 International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Vol II 1969, 63-69

against the background of the five basic physiographic regions, the story of human love takes part in one of the five landscapes, known technically as *aim* "five" + *tinai* "landscape" or *aintinai*. To each of these landscapes corresponds a particular phase of love.

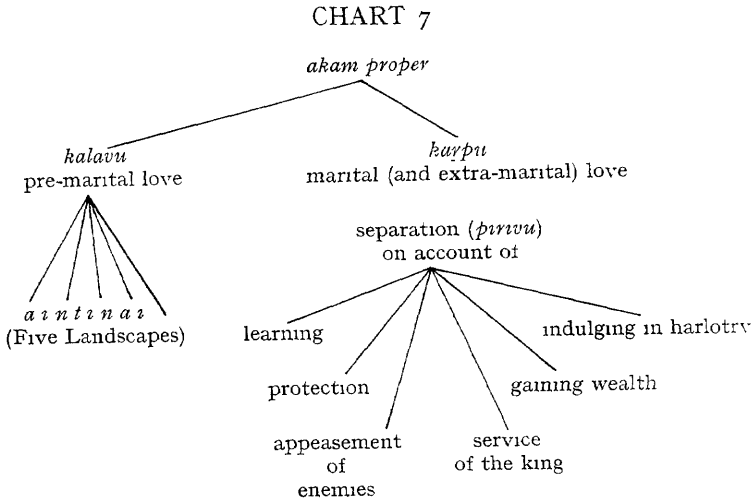
Ill-matched love is again of two basic kinds: unequal, inappropriate or mismatched love or passion, technically known as *peruntinai* or "The Major Type" (is it irony?) E.g. the poems under this head deal with a man's passion which has grown out of proportion, or with a young man's passion for a woman much older, or with forced union due to unrestricted passion. It is the forced, loveless relationship, partners come together for duty, convenience or lust.

The other major type of ill-matched love is one-sided, unreciprocated passion, known as *karkkilar*, i.e. "The Base Relationship". E.g. love between a man and a maid who, being too young and unripe, does not know how to react to his feelings, his love becomes unrequited.

These two types are common, vulgar, undignified or perverted (though J. R. Marr thinks that these two aspects of love are put on one side by the theorists "cavalierly", *op cit* 1969), they are fit only for servants. According to *TP* 25-26, and Ilampūranar's commentary, only free men can lead a happy life. Servants and workmen are outside the five *akam*-types, for they cannot attain wealth, virtue and happiness, they do not have the necessary strength of character, they are moved only by passion and impulses. Only the cultured and well-matched pair is capable of the full range of love: union before and after marriage, separation, anxiety and patience, betrayal and forgiveness. The lovers should be well-matched in lineage, conduct, will, age, beauty (or figure), passion, humility, benevolence, intelligence, and wealth (*TP* 273).

The attitude of the theoreticians towards different types and phases of love is neither purely descriptive nor fully normative (prescriptive). It may be perhaps called "evaluative".

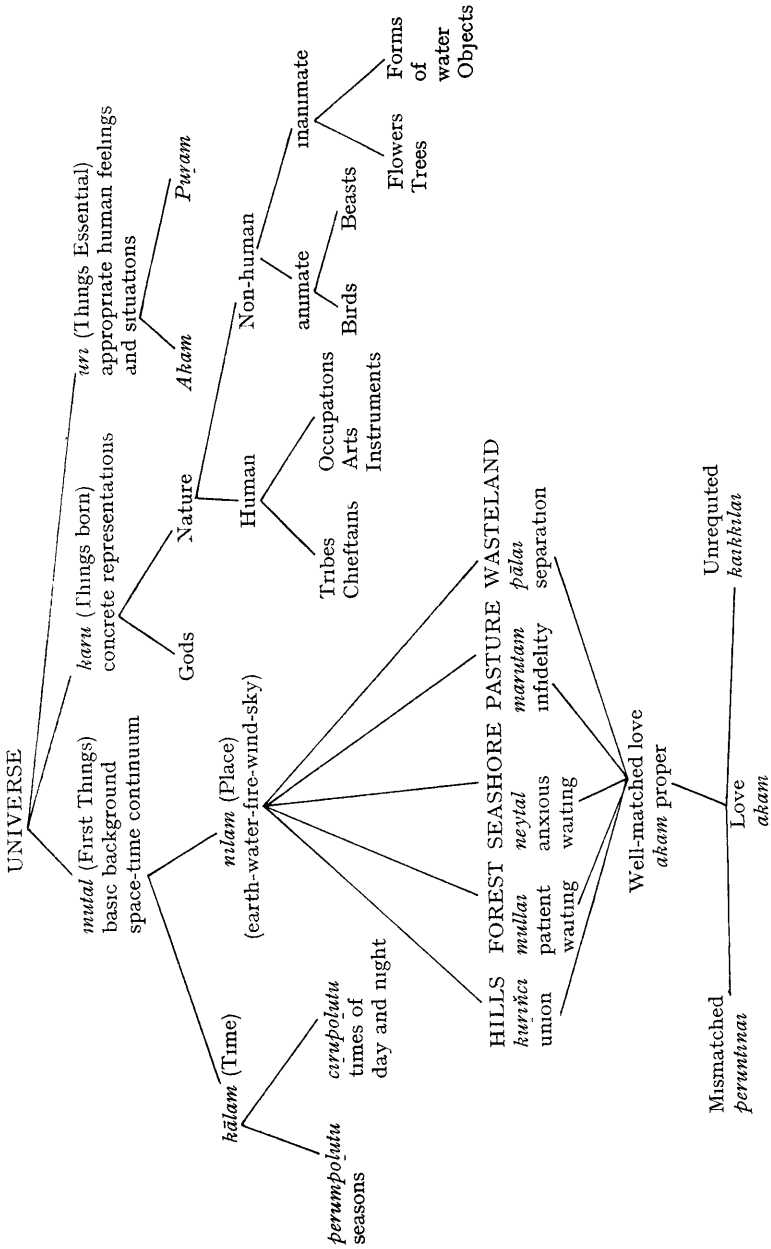
According to some theoreticians, *akam* proper is divided along a basic dichotomy between pre-marital union of lovers, termed *kalavu*, lit. "stealing, deceit", and wedded, marital love, called *karpu*, lit. "chastity" (Chart 7). This binary division has been elaborated especially in Irāyaṅār's *Akapporul Kalavu*, pre-wedded love, is treated in terms of the five landscapes, while the poems coming under *karpu* describe marital and extramarital love, including the separation (*pirivu*) of the husband and wife on



account of six different reasons pursuit of learning, pursuit of wealth, service of the king, being engaged in the protection of the country, being engaged in the diplomatic mission, especially in the appeasement of two inimical kings, and, finally, on account of indulging in harlotry. The author of *Akapporul* shows keen observation of human behaviour when describing what sort of men do leave their wedded wives thus e.g. it is proper for the high-class men (according to the commentator, for the Brahmins and *ksatryias*) to leave their wives because of the pursuit of learning (*ōtal*, learning and reciting the Vedas) and protecting the land (*kāval*), to serve the king and to gain wealth is proper for the merchants and peasants (*vēlālar*), but to leave (temporarily of course) one's wife in order to indulge in harlotry is appropriate to all classes of men (*IA s 40*). Observe the fact that visiting harlots (*parattar*) comes only under the edivision of *karpu* or wedded love.

As Chart No. 8 shows, the universe is perceived (*kāitci*) and conceived (*karuttu*) in terms of three basic categories: a space-time continuum which provides the basic background, the space and time coordinates of an event, this is termed *mutal*, lit "first, basic things", fundamental aspect, the basic stratum. The time continuum is divided into *perumpōlutu* or the *major seasons of the year*, and *cirupōlutu*, lit "small time" i.e. the *minor times of day and night*. The space continuum, comprising the "five elements" of Indian

CHART 3



philosophy (earth, water, fire, wind and sky), is divided into the five physiographic regions, the five major landscapes in which the drama of love takes place (Each one of these landscapes corresponds to a phase of love: the hills are a proper setting for the union of lovers, the forest corresponds to patient waiting, the seashore to long and anxious waiting, the pasture lands provide a setting for treatment of infidelity, and the wasteland for a long separation)

The second major category is termed *karu*, lit "things born" or "native", this provides a framework in terms of concrete representations of the five major themes (phases of love, physiographic regions). There is, first, the basic division into Gods and Nature. Nature is subdivided into Human and Non-human nature. Under human beings, the tribes and their chieftains are treated, and also the occupations, arts, ways of life, customs, musical instruments etc. Non-human nature is animate and inanimate: the two main representatives of animate nature are birds and beasts, while under inanimate nature are described the typical trees, flowers, objects, forms of water (whether a mountain-rivulet, a broad river, the sea, ponds, waterfalls) etc.

Finally, the third major category is termed *uri*, lit the "proper, specific" aspect, that is the essence of poetry, this deals with the innermost psychological events, with the drama of human souls and hearts, this is the inner and external life, the behaviour of the heroes, their feelings, deeds and situations.

We will deal in some detail with the three categories of *mutal*, *karu* and *uri*. The first division of the space-time continuum, as just indicated, concerns the appropriate *time of an event*.

There are *six seasons*, six major times of the year:

- 1 *kār* or the rainy season (approx. August-September),
- 2 *kūtir* or Winter (October-November),
- 3 *mūṣṣam* or "early dew", (December-January),
- 4 *phṣṣam* or "late dew", (February-March),
- 5 *ilavēṇil* or the season of "young warmth" (April-May),
- 6 *mutirvēṇil* or the season of "ripe heat" (June-July)

There are also six *minor times of day and night* (six by four hours): dawn, sunrise, midday, sunset, nightfall, dead of night. These categories provide for the space-time coordinates of an event of love.

Chart 9 gives the *phases of love* corresponding to the six types of landscape: union of lovers and immediate consummation corre-

CHART 9

Uṛi

Phases of love in correspondence to the landscapes

<i>Phase of love</i>	<i>Landscape</i>	<i>Dravidian</i>
1 Union of lovers	1 <i>Kuṛṇṇi</i> — Hills	கூர்ணியி
2 Domesticity Patient waiting	2 <i>Mullai</i> — Forests	முல்லை
3 Lover's infidelity Sulking scenes	3 <i>Marutam</i> — Cultivated Fields	மரத்தம்
4 Separation Anxious waiting	4 <i>Neytal</i> — Sea-coast	நெய்தல்
5 Elopement Hardships Separation from lover or parents	5 <i>Pālai</i> — Wasteland	பாலை

sponds to the hills, domestic life and patient waiting of the wife is described under *mullai* or forest (and pastures), anxiety and impatient waiting under *neytal* or seashore, infidelity of the man under *marutam* or agricultural tracts, and elopement and separation under *pālai* or wasteland

As we may see, considering both *kalavu* and *karṇu*, pre-marital and wedded (plus extramarital) love, and both well-matched and ill-matched union, the theory provides for a minute description of the entire gamut of human erotic experience, for the total love-experience of man and woman. This I think is very unique and extremely interesting. A pertinent question may be asked at this point: what about the corpus of the texts themselves? Did they really describe all these situations? The answer—probably surprisingly—is positive. Indeed they did. There was probably an evolution in this literature: it seems that the oldest poems could be classed under *kuṛṇṇi* and *pālai*, i.e. dealing with the immediate erotic union and with the elopement of the girl, while the two *tinai*s dealing with ill-matched union seem to be later additions: not additions of the theoreticians, though, in search of pedantic completion, but the texts themselves, dealing with these aspects of human love, seem to be later, as we shall see.

The earliest, most comprehensive and elegant description of these concrete representations of the five *tinai*s is given by Nakkīrar in his Commentary on just two words of the 1st *sūtram* of Irāyaṅār's *Akapporul* (*aṅṅin aintinai* "the five situations of love"). He bases

his *exposé* on tradition and on the *TP* which he quotes whenever necessary. After an engaging and charming discussion of what is *anpu* "love" (ed. 1939, pp. 18-20), Nakkīrar asks "What does *antṇai* mean?" And his answer to this question is a brilliant treatment of the theory of the five physiographic regions and the five basic love-situations.

First he gives the five terms in the order *kurñci*, *neytal*, *pālai*, *mullai*, *marutam* (quoting *TP* 3), he adds at once that these five are discussed in terms of *mutal*, *karu* and *uri*. *Mutarporul* is of two kinds: place and time (*TP* 4). According to Nakkīrar, however, *pālai* or the "separation" situation has no proper place (*nilam*) corresponding to it. Presenting the *mutal* once more schematically and in accordance with Nakkīrar, we get the following charts:

	<i>antṇai</i>	
<i>pālai</i>		the other four <i>ṭṇais</i>
— "place"	—	+ "place"
+ "time"	—	+ "time"
<i>ṭṇai</i> "situation"	place	time
<i>pālai</i>	—	noon, hot season, also "late dew"
<i>kurñci</i>	mountainous region	dead of night, cold season, also "early dew"
<i>neytal</i>	sea-shore	sunrise
<i>mullai</i>	forest	rainy season, evening
<i>marutam</i>	cultivated fields	dawn

For confirmation, Nakkīrar quotes *TP* 5-10 and adds that all the six seasons of the year must be appropriate to *marutam* and *neytal*, since no particular seasons are mentioned.

Nakkīrar gives then a detailed list of concrete natural representations (*karu*). *Karu*, he says (quoting *TP* 18 as authority), is "god, food, beast, tree, bird, drum, occupation, lyre and other items".

Ideally, the *kurñci* or mountainous region has Murukavēl as its god, its food is the five varieties of paddy and millet, the beasts are the tiger (panther), wild hog and elephant, the trees—eagle-wood, ebony, *Pterocarpus marsupium*, teak and the kino tree, typical birds are the parrot and the peacock, drums of three kinds—*veriyāt-tuṭṭarai* (drums used by Murukan's priests), large drums (*tontakam*) and *kuravai* (hunters' drums). Typical activity of the inhabitants: gathering honey, digging up edible roots, dancing and/or wandering about the hills, and driving away parrots from millet-fields. The

particular lyre (or harp), *yāl*, is called "mountain-lyre". Under "other items", Nakkīrar understands the name of the hero,¹ in our case *cilampāṇ*, *verpāṇ*, *poruṇpāṇ*,² the name of the heroine, *koṭiṇṇi* or *kuṟaṭṭi*,³ the typical waters—water-falls and mountain springs, human settlements small hamlets and *kuṟiṇṇi* ("village", *DED* 1534) Flowers conehead (*kuṟiṇṇi*, *Strobilanthes*), glory lily (*Gloriosa superba*), kino (*Terminalia tomentosa*) and water-lily (*Pontederia*), and, finally, the name of the people is *kuṟavar*, *vavular*, *kuṟavar*.⁴

In the sea-shore regions, *neytal*, Varuṇaṇ is the patron-deity, for livelihood, people sell fish and salt, typical beasts are the shark and the crocodile, trees mast-wood and *Cassia sophora*, as birds, Nakkīrar gives the swan, the *anṟil* (= *cakravāka*) and *makaṇṟil* (? a water-bird), as drum, "the drum of fish-caught", and "the boat-drum" The inhabitants are engaged in selling fish and salt, and in production of salt The lyre is called *vilar* (? "youth") The names of the hero are *tuṟavaṇ*, *konkaṇ*, *cēṟṟpāṇ*,⁵ of the heroine, *nulaṇṇi* and *paṟaṭṭi*,⁶ the characteristic waters are the sand-well and brackish marshes, the flowers white-petalled fragrant screw-pine (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) and white water-lily (*Nymphaea lotus alba*), as the typical settlements, the commentary gives *paṭṭiṇṇam*⁷ ("maritime town, harbour-town") where "ships enter", small hamlets and *pākkam*,⁸ the name of the people is *paṟatar*⁹ (fem *paṟaṭṭiyar*) and *nulaṇṇiyar* (fem *nulaṇṇiyar*)

¹ The literary hero is called *kūlavōṇ*, lit "old man" (*DED* 1315), also "headman, chief" or *talavaṇ* (*DED* 2529) "chief, headman, lord", the heroine *kūlavai*, *kūlavōl* or *talavai*

² *cilampāṇ* (? < Skt or Pkt) "hillman, chief of the hill tribe", *poruṇpāṇ* "chief of the hill-tribe", *verpāṇ* "id"

³ *koṭiṇṇi* (? *DED* 1704) "woman of the hill-tribe", *kuṟaṭṭi* (cf *DED* 1530 for Dr cognates) "woman of the hill-tribe, woman of the *Kuṟava* tribe"

⁴ *kuṟavar* (*DED* 1530), *kuṟavar* (*DED* 1548) "hillmen, mountaineers", *vavular* (*DED* 442) "hill tribes"

⁵ *tuṟavaṇ* "he of the harbour, lord of the harbour" (*DED* 2773), *konkaṇ* lit "husband, man", *cēṟṟpāṇ* (cf *cēṟṟpu* "sea-coast") "he of the sea-coast, chief of the sea-coast"

⁶ *nulaṇṇi* "fishermen-tribe, fishermen-caste", *nulaṇṇi* "she of the fishermen-tribe", *paṟaṭṭi* "id"

⁷ Eg *Kāvurpattinam*, lit "the harbour-town on the Kavir", the famous sea-port of early Cholas *DED* 3199

⁸ *DED* 3332 "seaside village, town, village" Preserved in the modern names of several quarters of Madras (*Kūlpākkam* = Kilpauk, Nungambakkam etc.)

⁹ Cf *DED* 3263 ? Skt *bharata* "barbarian" To this day, the fishermen of Madras sea-coast are called *Paratavar*

Pālai, "waste-land" according to *Tolk*, there is no deity to *pālai*, "since there is no *nilam* (*pālai* is a 'situation', not a 'place')", but others give Bhagavatī (Durgā) and Āditya (Sun-god) Food whatever was gained by high-way robbery and plundering Beasts emaciated elephant, panther, wild dog (*Canis dukhunensis*), trees *mahua* (*Bassia longifolia*) and *ōmai* "the tooth-brush tree", birds vulture, kite and pigeon Occupation highway robbery, murder, stealing Melody type *curam* The term used for the hero *mīli* "warrior" (lit "the strong one, the valiant man, the fighter", used also for the God of Death), *vitalai* "young hero" (lit "young bull"), *kālai* "warrior" (or "bull, steer"?) The heroine is called *eyyri* "woman of the *Eyynar* tribe" or *pētai* "the naive one" (lit "girl between 5 and 7 years of age", "simple woman") Flowers *kurā* (*Verberia corymbosa*), *marā* (*Barringtonia acutangula* or *Anthocephalus cadamba*), trumpet-flower (*Stereospermum chelonoides, suaveolens, xylocarpum*) Waters dry wells, dry ponds The name of the inhabitants is *eyynar* (fem *eyyriyar*) and *maravar* (fem *marattiyar*)¹ The villages are called *kolkurumpu*²

The god of *mullai* "forest" is Vāsudeva, the food—common millet (*varaku*) and *cāmai* (?), typical beasts—hare and small deer, trees *koṅṅai* (*Cassia fistula*) and *kuruntu* (wild lime, *Atalafia*), birds jungle-fowl, peacock, partridge Drums "bull-taking drum" and the *muracu* Activities of the people weeding of millet-fields, harvesting of millet, threshing of millet, grazing of cow-herds, "taking of bulls" The melody-type *mullai* The name of the hero is the "lord (or inhabitant) of the land of low hills" (*kurumporavāntan*) The name of the heroine—*kūlatu* (lit "mistress (of the house)") and *maṅavai* "house-wife" Flower jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*, *mullai*) and Malabar glory lily (*Gloriosa superba, tōṅṅai*) Waters forest-river Settlements *pāṭi* "town, city, hamlet, pastoral village" (*DED* 3347) and *cēri* "town, village, hamlet" (*DED* 1669) The name of the people *itaiyar* (fem *itacciyar*) and *āyar* (fem *āycciyar*)³

¹ Connected for sure with *DED* 691 *ey* "to discharge arrows, n arrow", *eyynar* "arrow-men, hunters" *Maravar* (cf *DED* 3900 *maram* "valour, anger, war, killing") "hunters, people of Marava caste", they were a rather prominent community in historical times in Tamilnad The caste exists until today, chiefly in South-East Tamilnad (Ramnad)

² Connected prob with *DED* 1542 "stronghold, fort" or *DED* 1541 "battle, war", and with *DED* 1772 "killing"

³ *itai* (*DED* 382) "the herdsmen caste" *āyar* *DED* 283, *āy* "the cowherd caste", *ā* "female of ox, sambur and buffalo"

JAPANESE (= name of region and poetic theme)	COVERED MOUNTAINS	FALLING WALLING	LOVERS UNFAITHFULNESS	AN XLEIS, SEPARATION	ELUPEMENT, SEPARATION
Landscape	<i>kurūci</i> mountains	<i>mulla</i> forest, pasture	<i>marutani</i> cultivated countryside	<i>neytal</i> seashore	<i>pālai</i> wasteland
Season	cold season, early frost	rainy season	all seasons	all seasons	summer, late dew
Time	night	evening	dawn	sunrise	midday
Hero	<i>poruppaṅ, verpaṅ</i> <i>citampān, nātaṅ</i>	<i>nātaṅ,</i> <i>tōṅal</i>	<i>īraṅ,</i> <i>maṭiṅṅaṅ</i>	<i>cēyppaṅ,</i> <i>pulampbaṅ</i>	<i>vālai,</i> <i>kālai, mīli</i>
Heroine	<i>kuratti, kotucci</i>	<i>maṅaveri, kūlath</i>	<i>kiṭatti, magaveri</i>	<i>nūlaucci, paratti</i>	<i>eyviri</i>
People	<i>kūlavai, kānavaṅ</i>	<i>ṅaiyar, āyar</i>	<i>ūlavār, kālavayan</i>	<i>nūlavayār, paravai,</i> <i>alavār</i>	<i>eyvinaṅ, māṅavar</i>
Occupation	guarding millet fields, honey- gathering	pastoral occupa- tion, fieldwork	agriculture	drying fish, selling salt	wayfarers, robbery, fighting
Pastimes	bathing in water- falls and streams	bull-fight, <i>kuravaṅ</i> dance	bathing in ponds, festivals, arts	bathing	dancing, fighting
Settlements	<i>cūṅṅār, cūṅṅuti</i>	<i>cūṅṅār, pāṅ</i>	<i>pēvār, mītār</i>	<i>pākkaṅ, paṅṅaṅ</i>	<i>kūṅṅuppa</i>
Waters	water-fall, hill-pond	pond, rivulet	river, pool, well	well, sea, salt- marshes	waterless well, stagnant water
Beasts	monkey, tiger, bear, elephant	deer, hare	buffalo, freshwater fish, otter	crocodile, shark	wild dog, tiger, lizard, elephant
Birds	peacock, parrot	jungle hen, sparrow	heron, stork, swan	sea-gull, marine crow	dove, eagle, kite, hawk
Trees	teak, sandal, bamboo, jack	<i>koṅṅa,</i> waterlily, red <i>kāṅkal, pūlavān</i>	mango, lotus	<i>puṅṅai, tāṅai</i> -shrub, <i>mūṅṅaṅ, atampū</i>	<i>ūṅṅai, ṅmai,</i> cactus
Food	millet, mountain-rice	<i>vaiaku, tūvān</i>	rice	fish	
Instrument	mountain-drum, mountain-lute	<i>ēyri</i> -drum, forest-lute	field-lute	<i>pampai</i> -drum, <i>vīlavai</i> lute	<i>ūṅṅai</i> -drum, desert-lute
Melody-type	<i>kurūci</i> ppan	<i>cāṅṅi</i>	<i>marutappaṅ</i>	<i>cēvāṅ</i>	<i>cūṅṅai</i>
God	Murukāṅ	Māyōṅ (Tirumāl)	Intnaṅ	Varunaṅ	Koṅṅavai (Kāṅ)
Note	<i>kurūci</i> conchard, <i>Strobilanthes</i> , various <i>S</i> and <i>Barleria</i> species, said to grow at an altitude of 6000 ft and flower only once in 12 years, flower is bluish	<i>mulla</i> <i>Jasminum sambac</i> , Arabian jasmine	<i>maritama</i> <i>Terminalia tomentosa</i>	<i>neytal</i> white Indian water-lily, <i>Nymphaea lotus alba</i> , blue nelumbo	<i>pālai</i> silvery-leaved ape-flower, <i>Mimusops kauki</i> , grows in barren tracts, is evergreen, blossoms small, white

The god of *marutam*, cultivated fields, is Indra, for food, the people have rice (cultivating paddy of the two varieties, *cennel* and *vennel*), typical beasts are the buffalo and the otter, trees rattan (*Calamus rotang*), strychnine tree (*Strychnos nux vomica*) and *marutu* (*Terminalia tomentosa*) Birds duck, heron Drums are called *manamulavu* and *nellari kinar*.¹ Occupation of the people cultivating paddy The lyre is called simply *maruta* lyre The names of the hero are *ūraṇ* (lit "villager, inhabitant of village, town") and *makinan* ("husband, chief of agricultural tract, lord", *DED* 3768) The heroine is called *kuḷatti* or *maṇarv* "house-wife" Flowers Lotus and red water-lily Waters wells in the houses, ponds and rivers Settlements are termed *pērūr*, lit "big village, big town" The name of the inhabitants *katarayar* (fem *kataracciyar*), *ulavar* (fem *uḷattiyar*)²

Chart 10 shows the various representations, the attributes of the five *tinai*s, the elements of the *karu*-strata, how they are usually found in the texts

Nakkīrar turns then his attention (pp 24-25 *ed cit*) to the *uripporul*, and, quoting *TP* 14, makes the following statement (cf Chart 9) sexual union (of lovers), *puṇartal*, is the *kurivici*-phase (situation), separation, *piṇtal*, is the *pālai*-phase, waiting, *iruttal*, is the *mullai*-phase, anxiety, *irankal*, is the *neytal*-phase, sulking, *ūtal*, is the *marutam*-phase

At the end of his discussion Nakkīrar refutes the one-sided conception of *tinai* as either "region" (*nilam*) or "situation" (*oḷukkam*, lit "conventional rules of conduct"), *tinai* is not "either or" but "both", Nakkīrar says it quite explicitly *tinai* is both region and situation, "like the spot on which the light (*cutar*) of a *vilakku* "lamp" falls, is also called *vilakku* "light" (cf *DED* 4524 *vilakku* "lamp, light")

It is obvious that not all clues of the *karu*-strata occur in a poem They never occur in totality, they never could occur But at least some of these characteristic representations, of these typical, diagnostic attributes do always occur These clues are sometimes a part of the technique of "suggestion" called *vaicci*, and of the

¹ *manamulavu*, lit "marriage-drum", *nellari kinar*, lit prob "paddy-harvesting small drum"

² *DED* 929 *katarayar* "men of the lowest caste or status", *ulavar* (*DED* 592 *ulu* "to plough") "ploughmen, agriculturalists"

"implied simile" or "implied metaphor", termed *ullurai uvamam* (cf *TP* 242 ff)

vaiacci (cf *TP* 229), occurring usually, but not always, in the utterances of the heroine and of the heroine's friend is "suggestion", "implication" through the description of a natural phenomenon or event. Closely related but not identical is *ullurai uvamam* or "implied metaphor" objects of nature and their actions stand for the hero, the heroine and other humans and their actions. Nature is described and the listener (reader) should understand the implications of such natural descriptions e.g. a buffalo treading on a lotus and feeding on tiny flowers implies the unfaithful lover who leaves the heroine and makes her suffer ("lotus") while he "feeds" on harlots ("tiny flowers"). A heron eyeing the *āral*-fish, its prey (*Kur* 25), stands for the lover who "takes" the heroine. The strongly erotic, even sexual imagery in *Kur* 131 (the impatient hero = ploughman with his single plough "in haste to plough his vast virgin land fresh with the rains", which symbolizes the woman) is quite obvious. In *Kur* 40 there is a sexual image which is a perfect *ullurai uvamam* "waters of rain pouring down on red soil" (the hot, parched red soil waiting for rains stands quite obviously for the woman, while pouring rain symbolizes the man).

For *vaiacci* or "suggestion" cf e.g. *Akam* 360 therein, the hero comes to visit the woman frequently at daytime, and she requests him to come during nights. She describes the front yard of the house, adorned by *punnai* trees with fragrant blossoms, and by palmyras with the nest of *anṛil* (= *cakravāka*) birds. The "suggestion" according to the commentary is that at night the *anṛil* birds, being close to the house, keep the woman awake by their heart-rending cries, and she longs for her lover's company, a "secondary" suggestion is involved: the urge on him to marry her as soon as possible.¹

{ In terms of sociological and psychological observations, one should probably stress the following facts. First of all, the heroes of these love-poems were by no means monogamous. This was almost taken for granted. Harlots, concubines and prostitutes play quite an important part in this literature: the *marutam* theme abounds in harlotry. Second, it is interesting, that out of the

¹ M. Varadarajan, "Literary Theories in Early Tamil—*Ettuttokai*", *Proc. of the 1 Intern. Conf. of Tamil Studies* Vol. 2, Kuala Lumpur (1969) 49

five major themes, actually four deal in this or that form with waiting—the two *tinais* appropriate for waiting *par excellence* are *mullai*—patient waiting—and *neytal*—long and anxious waiting for the hero to return. But *pālar*, wasteland, also deals with waiting and separation (apart from elopement), and so does *marutam*—here the wife is waiting till the debauchee returns from the harlot. Finally (the *kurincci* theme might be considered as an echo of the primitive, tribal, pre-nuptial promiscuity.)

The second genre—*puram*—has, of course, its conventions, too. It also has its basic division into poetic situation and into *themes*. In dealing with the *akam* genre, we discussed the concepts of the *porul* or poetic content, *subject matter*, and the *tinai* which may probably be translated best as the poetic *situation*. In a detailed discussion of the *puram* genre, yet another term must be introduced—*turai* or *theme*.

It was stressed right at the beginning that all subject-matter of literature dealt either with emotional situations of love or with other situations than those of love, primarily with heroic situations. From chart II one sees clearly that there is an intimate connection between both genres, *akam* and *puram*, that, behind both, there is a *unified perception and conception of the universe*. I cannot agree with J. R. Marr's (*op cit* p. 44) and Kalasapathy's criticism (*op cit* p. 189) that the pairing of love and heroic situations appears artificial. Rather I would tend to agree with the medieval commentators like Naccinārkkinīyar who seem to have intuitively felt that there had existed a basic homogeneous and uniform conceptual pattern behind the classification of human situations into the two basic genres. According to Naccinārkkinīyar (*TP* 56), *akam* and *puram* are like the inner palm of the hand and its back.

The heroic situations are, too, described under 5 *tinais*.

1 *vetci* (*ttinai*) is the prelude to war—this is the cattle-raid. The features which this situation has in common with its *akam*-counterpart, *kurincci*, are the time—night, the place—a mountain-forest, and the fact that it is a clandestine affair, just like *punartal* or sexual union of lovers before marriage.

2 *vañci* is the preparation for war and the beginning of the invasion. Common features with its *akam*-counterpart, *mullai*—both take place in the rainy season and in the forest, both describe the separation from loved ones, and wifely patience, *vuttal*.

CHART II

Akam-Puzam Correspondences

<i>Akam</i>	<i>Uri</i>	<i>Puzam</i>	<i>Uri</i>	<i>Features common to both</i>
1 <i>kupāci</i>	(first) union of lovers	<i>vetci</i>	cattle-lifting, prelude to war	nighttime, hillside, clandestine affair
2 <i>mūlai</i>	separation (patient waiting)	<i>vāñci</i>	preparation for war	forest in the rainy season, separation from beloved ones
3 <i>marutām</i>	infidelity, conflict	<i>uḷṅai</i>	siege	fertile area (village, town), at dawn, refusing entry
4 <i>neytal</i>	separation (anxious waiting)	<i>tumpai</i>	battle	seashore in <i>akam</i> = open battleground in <i>puzam</i> , no particular season, evening, grief
5 <i>pālai</i>	elopement, search for eloped girl, search for wealth and fame	<i>vāḱai</i>	victory, an achievement	praise
6 <i>peruntinai</i>	mismatched love	<i>kāñci</i>	struggle for excellence, endurance	no landscape, struggle, defeat, note of sadness
7 <i>kaḱkūlai</i>	unrequited love	<i>pāḱū</i>	elegy, asking for gifts, praise	no landscape, one-sided relationship, note of sadness

3 *ulñai* describes the siege of a settlement or fortress, like *marutam*, it takes place in an inhabited, fertile area (city etc) at dawn, the infidelity results in *akam* in *ūtal*, wifely sulking, and —both in love and war—in “refusing entry” (A K Ramanujan)

4 *tumpai* or pitched battle corresponds to *neytal* in *akam* in both, there is anxiety, separation of wives from the heroes, the *akam* situation is set on the open sea-shore, the heroic situation, in the open battleground, evening and grief (*irankal*) are common to both

5 *vākaī* describes victory, the ideals of achievement its counterpart in the *akam* genre is *pālai*, both have in common the achievement of the hero in one, the abduction and possession of the woman, or the search for wealth and fame, in the other, achieving wealth and fame in victory after long separation from the wife (*pīrtal*) in war

In both categories, there are two situations which are not specifically related to any type of landscape, both are not supposed to be ideal topics for poets, both are considered to be so to say “abnormalities” in love-situation as well as in war-situation

6 *kāñci* in the *puram* genre describes struggle for excellence, endurance, but also the feeling of transience of the world and defeat, death, in the *akam* genre, this corresponds to the *peruntinaī*, struggle and defeat in the mismatched love

7 *pātān* is praise, or elegy, as well as asking for gifts in the heroic genre, this corresponds to *kaikkīlai*, unreciprocated love, in *akam*, both have in common e.g. a one-sided relationship, a note of sadness etc

(Thus, for the old Tamil classical poet, there were fourteen basic human situations, suitable for poetic treatment, which were based on a unified conception of the universe, which comprised both the “numenon” and the “phenomenon”, and which, using the principle of economy and the technique of concentration, reflected the entire scale and spectre of human experience

As may be seen from chart 12, the later “grammar of heroic poetry”, *Purapporulvenpāmālai*, follows a different and more elaborate scheme when compared to *Tolk Porul*. It enumerates twelve non-love situations in contrast to seven listed in *TP*. In this

CHART 12

Heroic situations (*tinai*) according to

<i>Tolkāppiyam</i> <i>Porulatikāi am</i>	Number of themes (<i>turai</i>)		<i>Puṟapporul</i> <i>Vēnpā Mālai</i>	Number of themes (<i>turai</i>)
1 <i>vetci</i>	14	cattle-raid	<i>vetci</i>	20
2 <i>vetci</i>	21	cattle-recovery	<i>kavantai</i>	36
3 <i>vañci</i>	13	preparation for war, invasion	<i>vañci</i>	21
4 <i>uḷṅṅai</i>	8	siege of a fort	<i>uḷṅṅai</i>	29
5 <i>uḷṅṅai</i>	12	defence of a fort	<i>nocci</i>	9
6 <i>tumṇai</i>	12	pitched battle	<i>tumṇai</i>	24
7 <i>vāḱai</i>	18	victory	<i>vāḱai</i>	33
8 <i>kāñci</i>	20	transcendence of the world	<i>kāñci</i>	22
9 <i>pātān</i>	20	praise	<i>pātān</i>	48
10		general heroism	<i>potuviyal</i>	12
11		one-sided love	<i>kaiḱkūlai</i>	19
12		mis-matched love	<i>peruntinai</i>	36
13		residuary items	<i>olṇiyal</i>	18
	138			327

list are included the two abnormal love-situations, so that, essentially, there are 10 heroic situations according to *PVM*. The number of themes is also higher in *PVM* than in *TP*, as one would naturally expect.

The word for theme, *turai*, means lit. "place, location, way, section, seaport, roadstead, frequented place" etc. (*DED* 2773). According to Pērācīriyar's commentary, *porul* or "general subject-matter" includes all subject-matter created by poets while *turai* has a limited range and scope, being part and a section of *porul*, according to Ilampūranar, the best commentator on *Tolk* (*Porul* s. 510), the description in a poem of people, animals, birds, trees, land, water, fire, air etc., that is pertinent to the seven major situations of love (*akam tinai*) and the seven major situations of heroism (*puṟam tinai*) should be in harmony and never contrary to tradition and convention, a clear and excellent exposition of such matters in a poem is called *turai*. Naccīṅārkkīyār says, using metaphor and analogy, that all sorts of matter become unified in the theme just like men, beasts and other beings drink water together from a river ghat (*Tolk Porul* s. 56). According to Kailasapathy (*op cit* 192), *turai* is the thematic clarity and unity in a poem; it should be specific and traditional; the definite theme in traditional

poetry And to the bards of the period, "the composition of a poem was equivalent to the composition of a theme" (192)

How does the "theme" work in the corpus of texts?

Let us take, as an example, the very first poem of *Puranānūru* (designated as *Pur* 2 since *Pur* 1 is the invocatory stanza) The colophon says "tṇai (poetic situation) pātān "praise", turaṅ (theme) ceṅṅiyarvurūm "god counsel", vāḷṭṭiyalumām "or praise of qualities" sung by Mutinākaṅār of Muraṅciyūr about Cēral king Utiyaṅ of Grand Feast" Now in all the collections of bardic heroic poems that have reached us, each poem has a colophon which gives the situation (*tṇai*) and theme (*turaṅ*) The entire corpus of bardic poetry seems to have been composed on the basis of definite themes From the colophon quoted above we see that the *tṇai*, the "situation" gives the more general, the major category, in this case, of *pātān* or "praise", the *turaṅ* or "theme" gives the *minor*, the more specific category in this case a bard "counselling" a king on good conduct There are eight poems treating the *same turaṅ*, theme, by eight bards, in the collection of *Puram* Poems on love, *akam*, have, too, colophons with various degree of amount of information Thus e.g. in *Kuruntokai* the first poem, which belongs to the *kurṅcittṇai*, has the following colophon "tōḷi kaṅyuraṅ maruttatu, 'the maid's rejection of a present' Tipputtōlār (name of the poet) "The maid's rejection of a present" may be considered a theme, *turaṅ*

This is not the place to give an exhaustive catalogue of all *puram* and *akam* themes But some of them may be mentioned, to show how variegated and detailed the scale of experience, treated in those poems, indeed was Here are some *puram* themes

- nātu vāḷṭṭu* "blessing the country" in praise of the wealth and beauty of the land of the hero, e.g. *Patirruṅ* 30
- tumpariyaravam* "bustle of war" a king distributing rewards to his soldiers after a victorious battle, e.g. *Patirruṅ* 34, 85
- kāṅci vāḷṭṭu* "praise of a sight" describes the reaction of seeing a great hero and a hero-stone (*virakkal*), e.g. *Patirruṅ* 41, 54, 61, 82, 90
- olvālmālai* warriors brandishing swords the king, swinging shining blade, is joined in dance by warriors wearing anklets, cf. *Patirruṅ* 56

<i>kuravai nilai</i>	<i>kuravai</i> dance of women, women joining warriors, holding hands, celebrating hero's victory by dance
<i>paricivrtai</i>	"munificence" a king bestowing gifts on his bards, e.g. <i>Pur</i> 140, 152, 162, 397, 399
<i>netumoli</i>	"vow" describes the vow of a warrior, cf. <i>Pur</i> 298
<i>ānantap paryul</i>	theme describing the distress of a wife on her husband's bereavement, e.g. <i>Pur</i> 228-9, 246-7, 280

Our choice of *akam* themes must of necessity be equally brief e.g. "What the heroine said to her heart so that the companion heard it", e.g. *Kur* 11

"What the heroine said to her friend who was distressed thinking that she (the heroine) will be unable to bear it" e.g. *Kur* 12, and its sub-theme

"What the heroine said to the friend who was in distress thinking that she will not endure the separation" (e.g. *Kur* 4, 5)

"The promise of the friend to the heroine broken by the separation" (*Kur* 59)

"The speech of the hero to the friend" (e.g. *Kur* 136, 250)

"The fear of separation, expressed by the hero after sexual union" (e.g. *Kur* 137)

"The friend refuses entry to the hero" (*Kur* 258)

"The speech of the mother after the elopement of the daughter" (e.g. *Kur* 396)

One concluding remark on the technique of *description*: The two typical features of the descriptive technique employed by early Tamil classical poets are terseness and concentration. The descriptions are intensive, never extensive, acute, accurate and sharp, never elaborate and full, never "from head to foot"¹ This technique gives no room for exaggeration, so typical of Sanskrit *kāvya* poetry, and of later, medieval Tamil literature. The poets take their inspiration straight from nature and experience, in a way, they creatively copy nature and life. This means that they do not

¹ Cf. the medieval Tamil term *kēcāi pāta varunayai* "description from head to foot"

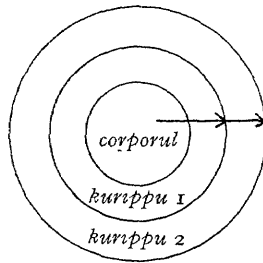
use foreign, borrowed imagery. The matter employed in descriptions is traditional and conventionalized (cf. next chapter for the detailed treatment of this feature). And, finally, there is usually a perfect harmony of content and its formal expression. M. Varadarajan quotes,¹ as an example of a typical early classical description, *Puram* 334.2: a hare is pictured as *tūmayirk kuruntā netuñcevik kurumuyal* "small (young) hare with pure fur, short legs and long ears". The poet (Maturai Tamīlakkūttarār) has succeeded, using three simple adjectives and three simple nouns, to convey the picture of a hare in terms of the animal's most typical features (so to say the essence and idea of „hareness"), it is simple and perfect, in one word, classical.

The technique of *allegory* (*ullurai uvamam*) and especially the use of *suggestion* (*vraicci*), comparable to the Skt. *vyañjanā*, *vyangya*- and termed *utañurai* by *Tolk* (s. 1188) has reached its perfection in a number of stanzas where in fact at least three *layers of meaning* may be distinguished by a true *connoisseur* of sophisticated poetry. Thus a charming and seemingly simple stanza (*tanipātal*) beginning in *Ta. ellā utukkān* says

Look
there
my lord
near that lovely pond
with its broad green lotus leaves
the heron
motionless and without fear
stands shming
like a white and golden
conch

This stanza, a simple picture of a quiet scene, has three layers of meaning. The first "obvious" meaning "on the surface" (*corporeal*) is the one given in the inadequate translation above. However, the meaning of the crucial phrase, "the heron, standing motionless and without fear", expands and transcends the obvious, because the pivotal expression in the poem, *tulakkamīl*, "without agitation, fear and motion", conveys a suggestion, an implication (*kurippu*) deriving from the "obvious" meaning "there are no people at that place, it is deserted". This *kurippu*, however, is the source of yet another expansion, into a further layer of meaning, an inference, a suggestion

¹ in "Literary Theories in Early Tamil—*Ettuttokan*", pp. 52-53



(*kurippu₂*), a hint to the lover since the place is quiet and deserted, it is an ideal spot for love-making (*punarcci*), so, let us go and make love. This, at least, is what the commentator and the scholiast has to say about the text, and we are fully entitled to agree that the implication and inference is not "read into" the stanza *ex post* but fully intended by the poet, since it follows certain patterns of convention, and since there is a unanimous and traditional agreement in its interpretation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEMES, MOTIVES, FORMULAE

K Kailasapathy has shown, in his excellent book *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (1968), that the most important structural element in the Tamil classical (heroic and erotic) poem was the *formula*¹ The oral bard, reciting his themes, had to work rather fast in the midst of an enthusiastic, thrilled and demanding audience, he could hardly hold his audience in permanent attention That is why the formulae had so great functional value for both the audience and the minstrels (Kailasapathy, *op cit* p 138)

Kailasapathy quotes a number of formulae occurring again and again in the classical corpus of the poems, e g *nanantalai yulakam* (metric pattern = = / = —) “wide-placed world”, cf *Pur* 221 11, *Patir* 63 18, *Kalit* 6 3, *Mullaiṭ* 1, or *cirukanyānai* “the small-eyed elephant” (metric pattern = — / — —), occurring in *Ak* 314 3, 327 2, 24 13, 179 4, *Nar* 232 1, *Pur* 6 13, 316 12, 395 18 etc

Some formulae show absolutely identical structure and exponents, save for one “synonym” used for another, like in *aravu vekuntanna tēral* (*Pur* 376 14) *pāmpu vekuntanna tēral* (*Cirupān* 237) “toddy that stupefies like (poison of) the snake”

^ Apart from such formulae, occurring in the midst of the text, there are many set beginnings and endings of poems, e g “I laugh whenever I think of it” (*Nar* 110 1, 107 1) or *amma vāḷi tōḷi* “Listen, o friend” (*Kur* 77 1, 134 1, 146 1 etc)

To Kailasapathy’s rich material, contained on pp 147-170 of his book, I should like to add the following *akam* examples based on one collection of poems, the *Kuruntokai* (to show that Kailasapathy’s conclusions concerning the occurrence and function of formulae in Tamil bardic poetry are generally valid for the whole corpus, for the erotic genre as well as for the heroic) The formulae can be just simple attribute-head constructions, like e g *val vil* “mighty bow”, in *Kur* 100 5, *Aink* 373 5, 390 3, *Kalit* 7 6, 104 58, *Ak* 120 12, 152 15, 281 5, *Pur* 150 7, 152 6 etc, or *karunkāl vēnkaḷ* “black-

¹ A recurrent element in narration or description, restricted by metrical considerations, as a rule an exact repetition “of a group of words expressing a given essential idea” (K Kailasapathy, M Parry)

stemmed *vēnkaṭ*”, in *Kur* 26 1, 47 1, 343 5, *Nar* 151 8-9, 168 1, 257 5, *Aṅk* 219 1, or *talayam yalkul* “the venus’ mound, adorned by leaf-garment” in *Kur* 172 2, 195 2, 391 6, cf *Tolk Kalavu* 23, Naccinārk comm, or *netu meṅ panait tōl* “large, soft, broad shoulders” in *Kur* 185 2, 268 6

Quite frequently such simple formulae reappear in slight variation either the order of the words is changed, or the exponents are substituted for each other, cf *aruvikaṅ mukaṭ* (*Kur* 95 1-2), lit “waterfall(s)—rock(s)—cave” *kaṅmukaṭ aruvi* (*Pur* 147 1), lit “rock(s)—cave(s)—waterfall(s)”

More or less elaborate similes enter very often into the stock of the formulae, like *pūppōlunkan* “darkened eyes similar to blossoms” in *Kur* 101 4, *Nar* 20 6, 325 7, *Aṅk* 16 4, 101 4, *Mullaiṭ* 23, cf *malarērunkan* “id” in *Kur* 377 1 This utterance actually forms the first half of a verse (*Kur* 101 4) which is composed of a double formula (the prosodic shape of the line is — — | — — | | — — | — —) *pūppōlunkan poṅpōṅmēṅi*, the second formula, which means “gold-like figure”, reappears in *Kur* 319 6 (*poṅṅēr mēṅi*) and in *Nar* 10 2, *Aṅk* 230 4, *Ak* 212 1-2

The fact that the formulae are often metrically equivalent means that they are structurally *interchangeable* Thus e.g. a formula like *ullu ṇallam vēmē* (*Kur* 102 1) “when (I) think (on it, my) heart burns”, can be readily substituted for *ullu ṇunnōy malkum* (*Kur* 150 4) “when (I) think (on it), the heart-ache grows” both have identical prosodic pattern (— — | — — | — —)

The substitution of larger or smaller portions, or of entire formulae, and the variation which thus arises, play an all-important role in the bard’s *skull of improvisation*

K Kailasapathy quotes a number of such cases, some formulae show absolutely identical structure and exponents save for one synonym used for another, like in Kailasapathy’s quoted example *Pur* 376 14 *Cirupān* 237, cf a similar case from my material *pacu ven tinkal* (*Kur* 129 4) *pacu ven nilavu* (*ib* 359 2, *Nar* 196 2) “young/green/white moon”

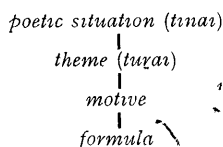
Sometimes, though, the underlying formula is changed to such an extent that we should rather talk of variation, as in Kailasapathy’s examples “the ships come with gold and return with pepper” (*Ak* 149 10) and “the waves come with shrimps and recede with garlands” (*Ak* 123 12)

A formula may sometimes be followed through whole centuries of

literary texts of this nature is, for instance, a beautiful metaphor which has its origin probably in *Kuruntokai* 91 5 *māri van kai* "the strong hand of the monsoon-rain" may be recognized in *Cirupān* 124 *peyan mālai tatak kai* "the strong hand of the great rain", in *Maturaik* 442 (*vāna van kai*), in citations in commentaries (*Tolk Uvam* 11 and 14, Pērācīriyar's comm, cf also *Pur* 54 6-7). and even in such medieval texts like *Civakacintāmani* 2779 (*mālai talāya kaiyāy*) Or, the formula *ulli nullam vēmē* (*Kur* 102 1, and elsewhere) reappears in *Tirukkural* 1207 *ullinu mullañ cutum* and much later in Kampan's *Rām Tātakaip* 5 (*karutiñ vēm ullamum*)

Some of the formulae seem to be echoes of colloquial utterances, like *yān evaṅ ceṅkō* "what should I do?" (*Kur* 25 2, 96 2, *Aṅk* 154 4) or *utukkān* "there, look" (*Kur* 191 1, 81 11 *Aṅk* 101, 453, *Kaḷi* 108 39, *Pur* 307 3) The utterance *ullin ullam vēmē* (*Kur* 102.1 etc) may probably also be regarded as a colloquialism

(Apart from purely formal structural properties (metrical pattern, other patterned prosodical features like alliteration, "rhyme" etc), every stanza is hierarchically organized in terms of form-meaning composites This hierarchy may be set up as follows



The basic and least inclusive element in this structure is the formula (in its shortest shape composed of two exponents, e.g. *valvul*, an Attribute-Head construction, "strong bow"), the most inclusive (since it encloses the whole stanza) is the *tinai* or poetic situation (there are hundreds and hundreds of formulae but only fourteen basic poetic situations accord to *Tolk Porul*) To quote an instance in *Kur* 190, the poetic situation (*tinai*) can be characterized as *mullai* "separation and patient waiting", mixed with *kurñci* "desire" Next in the hierarchy comes the theme (*turai*) (also enclosing the entire stanza, but, under each *tinai* there are several decades of themes)¹ which is, in our particular instance,

¹ Thus, e.g. under the *puram* poetic situation called *vetci* "cattle-raid", there come 14 themes, according to *TP* According to *PVM*, the 13 "heroic" situations comprise as many as 327 themes (see K. Kailasapathy, *op cit* 194)

‘what the heroine, unable to bear separation, said to her girl-friend’. On the next lower level, there are several *motives*, e.g. the motive of the snake and the thunder, occurring quite frequently (thunder-storm as destroyer of snakes), e.g. in *Kur.* 158 1-2, *Patir* 51 25-28, *Ak* 92 11, 323 10-11, *Pur* 17 38-9, 37.1-4, 58 6-7 126 19, 366 3. The motives are different from the formulae, motives are recurring reflexes of experience, not necessarily clad in identical or nearly identical linguistic material. Formulae, on the other hand, are structures which apart from a full or almost full semantic identity show a high degree of formal identity (including prosodic structure), such as, in our particular example, *neriyrunkatuppu* ‘tightened black tresses’ which reappears in *Ak* 35 17 and 269 2 in identical structure and exponents, and in *Kur* 199 4 in the variation *neripatakūntal* ‘tightly combed hair’. A motive is as a rule more expanded and more inclusive than the formula—thus, e.g., it is a recurrent theme in both heroic and love poetry to describe the flourishing sea-port of Tontı (known well to Graeco-Roman sources as Tyndis), this theme ‘occurs at least twenty-two times in the Anthology poems’; (Kailasapathy, *op cit* 212). It is a recurring motive in the love poems to compare Tontı with the heroine (*Ak* 171 4, 173 3-4 174 1-2, 175 4, 176 1-3, 177 4, 180 4, 60 7-8). The descriptions of Tontı are often recurrent formulae, e.g. ‘Tontı of seaside groves’ (*Pur* 48 4, *Nar* 18 4, 195 5).

These basic hierarchically structured components—the poetic situation, the theme, the motive and the formula—are parts of given traditional material, the bardic practice is dependent upon this traditional material. As already said, a tension arises between this traditional material and the bard’s ability to improvise. The language of the poetry, is, too, stereotyped, conventionalized, traditional. Because of the traditional situations, themes, motives and formulae, and because of the language stereotype, there is an underlying *unity* of thought-content, diction, style and form of the classical poetry.¹

This brings us to the problem of the individuality of the poet, and of his originality, also, to the problem of imitation within the corpus. According to *Tolkāppiyam* and its commentator Ilampūranar, in a good poem, unity should prevail among the details of a theme, and

¹ As Kailasapathy rightly observes, ‘the itinerant life of the bards spread the bardic language. The evolution of standard Tamil was an inevitable concomitant of bardic literature’.

the theme itself should be in harmony with tradition. In these traditional and greatly stylized poems it is almost impossible to point out individual authorship. The problem of an independent, original creative personality is alien to the bard, the bard is, consciously, "effectively traditional" (Kailasapathy), exploring all potentialities of the tradition. Therefore, the question of imitation does not at all arise, as there is no question of plagiarism or copy-right (Bowra, cited by Kailasapathy, *op cit* p 185) ¹.

However, there are a few distinct and strong personalities of poets who have been acclaimed as the best among the bards. Paranaṛ, Kapilar and Nakkīraṛ are probably the three classical Tamil poets who should be mentioned by name in this connection.

Paranaṛ is the one of the great trio who is probably the least "original". He is very disciplined and follows the conventions closely. However, some of his similes and metaphors are truly exquisite. Probably the most beautiful one is to be found in *Kuṛ* 399, where the pallor of the beloved is compared to the persistent moss on the surface of a pool, which "with every touch gives way / and spreads back with each estrangement" ². It is significant that this picture is not part of any formula, and reappears only later in clear imitation (*Kaḷit* 130 20-21).

The technique of suggestion was also exploited effectively by this great poet. When trying e.g. to describe the behaviour and character of a faithless lover he says

"To eat the silver fish, the stork, as though
Afraid its steps were audible,
Moves soft—
A burglar entering
A guarded house" (*Akaṁ* 276)

Nakkīraṛ is probably a stronger creative personality than Paranaṛ. He is, above all, the author of one of the "Ten Lays", the *Netunāl-vāṭai*, probably the best of them. In short lyrical poems, he seems to have preferred the *pālai* situation. He seems to have been "the

¹ Long before Kailasapathy made the theme and the formula subjects of an explicit analytic treatment, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (in 1904) wrote "The recurrence of certain ideas and images in some of these idyls by different authors bespeak the stock-in-trade and no literary theft. Broad streets are river-like, rice stalks finger-like, women's soft soles the gasping dog's tongue-like etc."

² *ūruṅ kēṅṅ yuntuvāṅ tokka | pāci yaṅṅē paṇalai kātalar | totuvuḷit totuvuḷi nīnki | vituvuḷi vituvuḷiḷ paṇatta lāyē*

most conscious craftsman"¹ among the great poets of the classical age of e.g. *Kur* 143 with the elaborate alliteration and assonance patterns, or the beautiful *Kur* 161 with a very intricate phonic structure (listen to the music in the opening lines of his *Kur* 368 *mellīya lōyē mellīya lōyē* "O you whose nature is so gentle")

The tradition is unanimous in regarding Kapilar as the greatest of all classical Tamil poets. He is represented in all anthologies, being the author of 206 songs. His *puram* pieces throw some interesting light on his life. His *Kurūnciṅṅpāttu* was written to instruct an Aryan prince in Tamil poetic conventions and may be regarded as a model creation. A whole one fifth of *Aṅkuruṅṅūru* is ascribed to him. In these poems we recognize in him a master of condensation and an original author of lovely images. Probably the most beautiful of his love-poems is *Kur* 25 (the one which begins with *yārum illai tānē kalvan*)

"None else was there but he, the thief,
If he denies it, what shall I do?
Only a heron stood by,
its thin gold legs like millet-stalks
eyeing the *āral*-fish
in the gliding water
on the day
he took me"

Kapilar's interest and genius was concentrated on nature of the hills. His descriptions of nature and his comparisons and metaphors, apt and daring, have probably no match in the whole bardic corpus. Cf. *Nar* 13 "the *vēṅkaṭ* scatters its blossoms like sparks of fire flying in the smithy" Or, from *Ak* 292

"A small stone
sped from the woodman's catapult
shot like an arrow
scattering *vēṅkaṭ* flowers,
and spilled the honey from the comb
before it reached
the sweet fruit of the jack"

Another question, connected with the problem of linguistic and stylistic stereotype, is the problem of relative internal chronology within the earliest corpus. Is it at all possible to discern among different chronological strata within the early anthologies? It is

¹ C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* 32

basically true what Kailasapathy says on p 47 of his book “ to arrange them (the poems, K Z) in strict chronological order is to force on them a pattern of linear development which does not appear in the poems The question of imitation is as incongruous as that of authorship in the context of an oral tradition”

No detailed and exact chronological stratification has as yet been performed with regard to this corpus However, the answer to the question posed above may be, very probably, in principle positive, though a great deal of the results would be based on rather speculative procedure

First of all, we may exclude from the earliest corpus *Kalittokai*, *Parripatal* and *Tirumurukārruppatai* as compositions which are positively later in origin Being left with the 15 remaining texts (6 Anthologies and 9 Lays) we may set up a few theoretical and methodological principles which can help us as guide-lines while investigating the corpus from the point of view of relative chronology

a) *Historical allusions* within the poems themselves The clustering of bardic songs round certain personages and certain events in their lives enables us to set up relative sequence of events, and, hence, relative sequence of texts about the events (though this inference is speculative and not too safe) The same is true about allusions concerning the lives of some of the poets Thus e.g. it is very probable that the historical sequence of the three great poets mentioned above was Paranar —Kapilar—Nakkirar (e.g. Nakkirar mentions Kapilar as living in the past in *Ak* 78) The historical or near-historical (or even quasi-historical) data receive, in some cases, corroboration from external sources (inscriptions and the like)

¹. b) A great deal of speculation as to the chronological order of the poems may be based on *formal* criteria

1) The simpler the metre and other prosodic properties, the older the poem (since there exists undoubtedly a tendency of formal complexity to increase steadily with the passage of time),

2) affinity with folk-songs and echoes of colloquial utterances may probably be also regarded as indications of relative antiquity,

3) it is probable that a relative chronology of motives and formulae could be set up within one and the same motive and formula, the movement is from a simpler to a more involved and complicated pattern

c) *Language*.

1) in the development of linguistic forms, we may discern (though with difficulty) certain innovations *vis-à-vis* certain retentions,

2) the more Aryan loanwords, the younger (later) the text,

3) loanwords from Prakrit and Pali are very probably older than Sanskrit loanwords

d) There is a development in *thought-content*

1) poems showing traces of Jainism and Buddhism are probably earlier than poems showing Brahmanic influence,

2) straightforward descriptions of fighting, mating, nature etc are probably older than poems which bear traces or elements of reflection and philosophy,

3) didactic and philosophical poems with an undertone of pessimism are probably rather late,

4) certain situations and themes (like *kāñci* and *vākaḥ* in the *puram* genre and *kaikkilai* and *peruntinai* in the *akam* genre) are probably later)

It might be worthwhile to apply these general considerations to the earliest bardic corpus and try to establish a relative chronology of poems within the fifteen texts, however much speculative and slender they may seem

Finally, a remark on the intelligibility of early classical Tamil poetry is probably not out of place here, the early classical poetry is not intelligible to a modern Tamil speaker without special training and study. Formal Tamil of today is more conservative than the informal style and hence closer to earlier Tamil. But even an educated modern Tamil reader does not understand early classical texts unless he has made a special study of them. As A. K. Ramanujan says (in *The Interior Landscape*, p. 98) "The development of verb- and noun-endings, losses and gains in vocabulary, and the influence of other languages like Sanskrit and English have widened the distance between ancient and modern Tamil". But, though the gap between ancient Tamil poetry and its modern Tamil reader is very wide indeed, it does not matter much, it is more important that—as any classical literature—Tamil classical poetry belongs to the great literary heritage of the whole world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LATE CLASSICAL POETRY

According to an ancient and persistent tradition, the *Kalittokai* and the *Paripātal* belong to the original corpus of the *tokai* (anthology) texts, and the *Tirumurukāṛṇṇippatai* is quoted as the first of the lays (*pāttu*). However great our respect for the tradition may be, we have to admit, after an unprejudiced and critical examination of these three texts, that they almost certainly do not belong to the earliest strata of the erotic and heroic poetry. The reasons for a later dating of these poems are both formal, and of a different and younger thought-content and ideology.

Kalittokai, lit. "the anthology in the *kali* metre" is a collection of lovely songs which try to capture all phases, types and details of love-experience, the anthology is an *akam* collection *par excellence*, and, in fact, it seems to have been composed after the first arrangement, systematization and classification of love-themes and love-situations had been worked out by some of the early scholasts. The *peruntinai* and *karkkilai* situations (mismatched and one-sided love-affairs) were added to complete the cycle of total love-experience of man. It also seems that some folkmotifs and "vulgar" (<*vul-gus*) trends forced their way into the classical erotic poetry, with rudimentary humorous and dramatic situations, with elements of farce and buffoonery. The poems, composed in this new tone, deal with affairs which are "common", "abnormal", "undignified", fit only for "servants and workmen", affairs which are fit for the ignorant, the uncultured. These poems were not accepted as *akam* proper by later theoreticians and compilers of the early anthologies, but were classed under the *karkkilai* and *peruntinai* situations, the one-sided affair and the mismatched relationship.

The anthology has 150 poems in the *kali* metre. The first poem is an invocation to Śiva, and the rest are love-poems divided into the five traditional divisions: 35 stanzas about *pālar*, 29 about *kurñci*, 33 songs on *neytal*.¹ The compiler of the anthology was a certain

¹ The *peruntinai* and *karkkilai* situations are handled as additional to the five *tinai*s.

Nallantuvanār, supposed to be the author of the *neytal* portion, and there exists a detailed and excellent commentary by Naccī-
pārkkīṇiyar (14th Cent)

The background of the poem is the same as in early classical poetry, but the tone is different. In a way, it is precisely the *Kalittokai* anthology which marks a definite break from the early classical tradition and conventions.

There are two fundamental problems to be dealt with in connection with this anthology: first, the problem of the dating, second, the question of authorship.

A very strong evidence points to the fact that the poems of *Kalittokai* should be dated considerably later than the other anthologies, roughly between the 5th-7th Cent. A.D.

First, the form, the metre, the structure of the poems, when compared with the *akaval* and *vañci* stanzas of early classical poetry, display further development, the *kali* metre itself appears to have been a later development, the *kali* stanza seems to be a combination and a development of the *āciriyam* and the *venṇā*. It can hardly be denied that the *kali*-metre and the *kali*-stanza is later, historically younger than the *akaval* (and *vañci*).

There are new structural elements in the *kali* stanzas: dialogues which sometimes look like "a one-act play in miniature" (C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* 67). Thus we have dialogues between the heroine and her girl-friend (60), the heroine and the hero (64), the girl-friend and the hero (61) etc. The narrative pieces which may be considered as miniature tales are also new. Thus there is, apart from the still predominantly lyrical character of the poetry, a new, rudimentary but vigorous, dramatic and epic component in the *Kalittokai*. New *dramatis personae* appear, too, folk-types like *kāmakkūlati* (67, 72, 73) "match-maker", *kūni* (94) "the hunchback woman" and *kuralaṅ (v)* "the dwarf".

As already stressed, the tone is new and different: realistic attitude, coarseness, spicy and racy dialogues, absence of delicacy, broad jokes, crude humour, echoes of folk-songs. As a typical instance one may quote the magnificent, rude, bawdy, and yet strangely moving and poetic dialogue between the hunchback woman and the dwarf (*Kalit* 94, in the flawless translation of A. K. Ramanujan).

O hunchback woman,
 gentle
 and crooked as a reflection
 in the water,
 what great good deeds
 did you do that I should want you so?
 (O mother! she swore to herself) Some
 auspicious moment made you dwarf,
 so tiny you're almost invisible,
 O whelp born to a man-faced bird,
 how dare you stop us to say
 you want us? Would such midgets
 ever get to touch such as us?

O lovely one,
 curvaceous,
 convex
 as the blade of a plough,
 you strike me with love
 I cannot bear
 I can live
 only by your grace
 (Look at the way this creature walks!)

O dwarf, standing piece of timber,
 you've yet to learn the right approach
 to girls. Humans do not copulate
 at noon but you come now to hold
 our hand and ask us to your place

Good woman,
 your waist is higher
 than your head, your face a skinned heron
 with a dagger for a beak,
 listen to me

If I take you in the front, your hunch
 juts in my chest, if from the back
 it'll tickle me in odd places

So, I'll not
 even try it. Yet come close and let's touch
 side by side

Chī, you're wicked. Get lost! You half-man!
 As creepers hang on only to the crook of the tree
 there are men who'd love to hold this hunch
 of a body close, though nothing fits. Yet, you lecher,
 you ask for us sideways. What's so wrong
 with us, you ball, you bush of a man,
 A gentle hunchback type is better far than a string
 of black beans

(Look at the walk of this creature!) You stand
like a creepy turtle stood up by somebody,
hands flailing in your armpits
We've told you we're not for you Yet you hang around
(Look, he walks now like the Love-God!)

The root of this love is Kāma,
the love-god with arrows, brother to Shāma
Look, this is how the love-god walks'

(Look,
look at this love-god!)

Come, let's find joy,
you in me, me in you, come, let's ask and talk
and agree which parts I touch

I swear
by the feet of my king, I'll mock you no more
Right, O gentle-breasted one I too will give up
mockery

But I don't want this crowd in the temple
laughing at us, screaming when we do it,
'Look, look! Look at that dwarf and hunchback,
leaping like demon on demon!'

O shape
of unbeaten gold, let's get away from the temple
to the wild jasmine bush Come, let's go
You're now a gob of wax on a parchment
made out in a court full of wise men,
and stamped
to a seal, you're now flat, incomplete Come,
let's touch close and hug hard
and finish the unfinished
Let's go

On the other hand, the traditional *amṛtinaī* (i.e. "love proper")
situations continue in *Kalittokai* and even receive new possibilities
and new additions

The language of *Kalittokai* manifests some features which are
undoubtedly to be considered as innovations, both lexical and
structural (e.g. the suffix *-kāl* in *allākkāl* 124, *-ēl* in *kāttāyēl* 144, the
form *āṇāl* in 139, further cf. stanzas 84, 87, 90, 93, 130). A relatively
high number of Sanskrit loanwords (like *kāmaṇ*, *kāranam*, *kunankal*
with the pl. suff. *-kal*, *ṣicācar*, *mēkalar*, *vacciram*) attests, too, a
later origin

Earlier poems are often quoted, e.g. *Kur* 185 *uyyrtavac ciritu*
kāmamō ṣeritē "the endurance of my soul is small, but passion of

love is indeed great" reappears in *Kalī* 137 2 *peritē kāmameṇ nuyyrtavac ciritē*

Throughout the entire collection, no name of any king is mentioned but of the *Pāṇṭya* in Maturai (55) No poets, chieftains, battles etc mentioned in the other *tokai* anthologies are alluded to in the *Kalittokai* On the other hand, *Kurivñcikkalī* 24 mentions "the merciful men of Benares", and in *Marutakkalī* 29 there is an allusion to Kāma (also elsewhere, these are the first allusions to this relatively late Aryan import into Tamil literature) Actually, the whole collection is permeated with allusions to Sanskritic Purāṇic legends the burning of the three cities by Śiva (1), the plans of Duryodhana to kill the Pāṇḍavas (25), the battle between Murugaṅ and Sūrapadma (27), Rāvana lifting Mount Kailāsa (38), Bhīma beating Duryodhana on the thigh (52), Kṛṣṇa killing Kamsa's wrestlers (52, 134), Śiva thwarting Yama (101), Urvaśī and Tīlottamā (109), the story of Yāyātī (139), Śiva bearing Gangā in his locks (150), Kṛṣṇa killing the horse-demon (103), Kṛṣṇa hiding the sun with his *cakra* (104), etc

All these facts point rather conclusively to the post-early classical origin of *Kalittokai*

In many ways, the collection seems to be work of one author, the subject-matter, the style, the metre, the language — all indicates an individual authorship of the whole collection (granted even the over-all uniformity and homogeneity of the bardic poetry) On the other hand, a rather late *venpā* quatrain¹ exists which ascribes the five divisions of the anthology to five "Sangam" poets *pālar* to Perunkatunkōṅ, *kurivñci* to the great Kapilar, *marutam* to Marutaṅ Iṅāṅkaṅṅāṅ, *mullai* to Cōḷaṅ Nalluruttiraṅ and *neytal* to Nallantuvāṅṅāṅ the Compiler The *venpā* itself is not found in any manuscript of the text, and is unknown to the commentator, its veracity may be doubted Almost all serious scholars (the first editor of the work, S V Damodaram Pillai, 1887, K N Sivaraja Pillai, Rajamanikkam, H W Schomerus) are inclined to regard *Kalittokai* as the work of one poet, who probably belonged to the *Pāṇṭyaland*

The problem is far from definitely solved But the work itself is great and deserves careful study, monographic treatment, and a congenial translation *in toto*

Paripāṭal is traditionally enumerated as the fifth of the collec-

¹ Cf Vaiyāpurī Pillai, *Ilakkīya tīpam* (1952) 81

tions (*tokai*), it is an odd, hybrid work, partly traditional love-poetry and partly a work of *bhakti*. It is a collection of poems in the *paripāṭal* metre,¹ which seems to be further development of the old classical metres. Of the seventy poems supposed to have been originally included in this work, only twenty four are extant in full (a few more are in fragments, and some (22, 24) may be found in a commentary on the *Tōlkaṭṭiyam*, and in the medieval anthology *Purattirattu*). Of the extant poems, seven are dedicated to Tirumāl, eight to Cevvēl (Murukan), and nine to the river Vaikai. In the Vaikai-portion, the love-theme is worked out along the traditional lines against the background of bathing festivities. The stanzas are ascribed to 13 poets, one of whom figures among the poets of other anthologies.

The most noticeable feature of this collection are the colophons to each stanza which, beside the name of the author, give also the names of the composer who set it to music and of the tune to which it was set. The basic tunes (*paṇ, icai*) are *pālai, yāl, tiram* and *kāntāram*, the names of the composers are Kannakaṇār, Kaṇṇanākaṇār, Kēcavaṇār, Nallaccutaṇār, Naṇṇākaṇār, Nākaṇār, Pittā-mattar, Pēṭṭaṇākaṇār, Maruttuvaṇ Nallaccutaṇār. There is a detailed commentary available composed by Parimēlaḷakar. The work was published first in 1918 by U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar.

It seems that the poems were indeed composed as songs, intended to be sung. The work is relatively late. It seems to be separated at least by three centuries from the earlier collections. First of all, there are many Aryan loanwords, and their number and nature betray a late origin of the text, e.g. *kavitar* (6), *mitunam* (11), *cintikka* (20), *pōkam* (5), *kamalam* (2) etc. There are also some characteristic grammatical innovations like the present-tense suffix *-kuv-*, and forms which are undoubtedly rather late in the history of the language, e.g. *nān* (20.82) "I", or *āmām* "emphatic affirmation".

¹ *Paripāṭal* is mentioned as a metre in *Tolk Ceyyul* 242. The number of lines is unlimited, it is on the whole a rather loose structure with verses ranging from one foot to four feet, exceptionally to five feet, and it provides for much variety. For the hybrid nature of the work, cf. e.g. the definition of its content in *Yāpparunkala virutti teyoamum kāmamum porulāka varum* "as the subject-matter, both devotion and love occur". Out of the 70 original stanzas, 8 should have been dedicated to Tirumāl, 31 to Murukan, 1 to Kātukūḷāl (Korvavar?), 26 to the river Vaikai, 4 to Maturai. All commentators, beginning with Ilampūranar, interpret the term *paripāṭal* as *parinta pātu* "running, speeding, rapid song".

Second, there are references in the text to temples and shrines which must have been built in the post-classical period (Tiruvēnkātam, Tiruvaṇantapuram etc.), and mural paintings on the walls of Tirupparankunṅam temple are mentioned depicting stars and planets. Many allusions to a number of *Purāṇic* stories betray, too, the relatively late origin of the poem—thus we hear of the churning of the ocean of milk (2 71-72, 3 33-4), of Prahlāda (4 12-21), of the birth of Murukaṅ (5 27-49), of the destruction of the three cities (5 25) etc.

There is no great devotional fervour in the poems, and the lyrical quality of the text is not exactly outstanding. One can regard these poems as a form of transition—not very successful—between the classical, traditional love poetry, and the emerging, devotional, *bhakti* literature.

More interesting, and better poetry, is the first intensely devotional poem in Tamil literature, the *Tirumurukāṛṇṇuppaṭai*. As the name suggests, it is a “guide” poem, not to any liberal patron of arts, however, but to different manifestations of god Murukaṅ. The devotee, the *bhakta*, is directed by the poet to various shrines of the god. The “Guide to Lord Muruku” seems to have been considered by the redactor of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* collection as the invocatory lay to the “Ten Songs” (in analogy with the invocatory stanzas prefixed to the Anthology collections)¹. The poem is held in very high esteem not only by Murukaṅ worshippers for whom it is the most ancient and fundamental text, but by all Śaivites. It is an excellent poem in 312 *akaval* verses, and it is ascribed to Nakkīrar (whom the tradition makes identical with the author of the early lyrical pieces, but who is very probably much younger than the “Sangam” Nakkīrar, he may be identical with the author of the commentary to *Iravayanār Akapporul*).

The poem is carefully planned out, according to a definite scheme which is based upon a very fundamental conception in South Indian Hinduism—the intimate connection between a particular place of worship and the god’s “local” manifestation. The poem has six parts of unequal length—the first describes the beauty of Murukaṅ, the killing of Sūrapadma, the excellence of Maturai and Tirupparankunṅam, in the second, the six faces of Murukaṅ are described and their functions, as well as his twelve arms and their work, and the temple in Tiruccīr, the third part deals with the shrine in Tiruvāvi-

¹ K. Kailasapathy, *op. cit.* 35

naṅkuti, the fourth with the temple in Tiruvērakam, in the fifth the poet narrates the sports of the god in the hills, the sixth describes the shrine in Paḷamutircōlai

The effects of contrast are exploited cleverly by the poet Murukan, surrounded by lovely goddesses, is very different from the Murukan in the battlefield. There the "she-devil (*pēymakal*) dances the *tunankai* dance .

dry-haired,
twisted and projecting teeth
in her gaping mouth,
rolling eye-balls,
greenish eyes
with a fearful gaze,
ears that pain her heavy breasts
as the owl with bulging eyes
and the cruel snake
hang down from her ears
bothering her breasts
In her hands with shimmering bangles
she holds a black skull,
smelling rotten
With her cruel, sharp-nailed fingers
stirring blood
she had dug-out human eyeballs
and eaten them up
As she dances, shoulders heaving,
her mouth drips with fat" ¹

¹ This is probably the occasion to say a few words about "the fantastic, gruesome and grotesque" (C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* 187) aspects in Tamil literature. In heroic poems of the early classical age, the gory aspect plays quite a prominent role, as in heroic poetry elsewhere, and in the feudal poetry of the Occident, the gory and gruesome face of killing is described with gusto and in detail. It is a part of the prowess and glory of the heroes—the "assertion of superior force" (K. Kalasapathy, *op cit* 239). There are many instances of gruesome scenes in Tamil bardic poetry, with "trunks dancing", "vultures feeding upon carrion", "elephants pierced with arrows" "spears soaked in blood" etc. As an instance, a few lines from *Patirruppattu* 49.10-44 may be quoted (Kalasapathy, *op cit* 240) "The blood gushing out of the chests of the warriors of red hands who opposed you, flows and spreads on the ground like the reddish muddy water that flows on to the low lying lands on a rainy day. Terrible is the destruction you bring on the battle field, where you pile up fallen corpses" *Tolk* has a poetic theme called *attaiyātal* (cf. *Ka. attai* "a headless trunk", *Te. attai* "id", *DED* 90) "hero's body continuing to manifest heroic deeds even after dismemberment, as the quivering of a leech (*attai*, *DED* 89) after being cut into two".

Slaughter of men and animals alike is described with great gusto. From

The whole poem seems to be aglow with red, the colour of Murukan, images of blood are frequent (e.g. "pure white rice mixed with the blood of a fat strong ram with stout legs" is brought as an offering to the god), Murukan's body glows like the sun rising from the emerald sea—the peacock which the "red god" rides, celestial damsels, blessing the cock-banner of the youthful god, have

" bright, rosy, tender feet
thin garments purple like the Indragopa " ,

and the hills glow the *kāntal* flowers red like fire, and across his handsome wide chest run red lines (*cempōri*)

Flames, blood, red garments, red lustre—we encounter these images again and again, and probably the most frequent epithet is "shining, lustrous" and "fire-like" (*vāl* in 8, 87, 90, *ol* in 28, 31, 54, *tikal* in 40, *cutar* in 43, 46, *muṇ* in 85, *nakai* in 86, *vilaku* in 87, etc etc)

There are also a few magnificent natural scenes, and the tech-

the *glōve* of a slayer of elephants, an entire genre developed in the middle ages—the *parani*, a war poem about a hero who has destroyed 700 elephants. The greatest of the *paranis* is *Kaṁkātupparani* by Cayankontār, the court-poet of Kulōttunka Cōḷa (1070-1122). In many ways, it is a great and marvellous poem, probably the most colourful poem in the entire Tamil literature, in which erotic experience and blood-thirstiness is painted in the same glowing colours. But the fantastic and the gruesome have perhaps "not been treated with more vividness elsewhere in Tamil literature" (C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* 187). The poem is inhabited by blood-lusting devils, lean and famished for want of human flesh. After the battle, the devils, with mouths watering, rush in a wild stampede to the battle-field. The Brahmā devil gapes for the tasty soup of stinking corpses, but the Jain devil (which does not take life and eats only once a day) is to be given the strained soup—indeed an admirable sense of humour on the part of the poet! And the Buddhist devil, going about wrapped in skins, is given the delicious brains of the dead (this, too, is humour).

An extremely relevant passage of the great medieval commentator Naccinārkkinīyār on *TP* gives much insight on the theme of sacrifice to the devils (*pēy*, *DED* 3635 "demon, goblin, fiend, devil", To *ōn* "god of the dead", in Gondi, Kui and Kuvi "god", which is very suggestive). A gruesome ritual was performed in honour of Korṅavai, the goddess of war and victory, and probably the old Dravidian mother-goddess (*DED* 1803 *korṅam* "victory, power, bravery"). It consisted of the following features: 1) it was performed at the end of a battle by the victors, 2) wholesale sacrifice of men, animals and weapons took place, 3) some sort of ritual cooking was done, using blood, 4) priestesses officiated at the ceremony.

It seems—though this needs further and careful investigation—that there are references to the ritual of human sacrifice (and probably an echo of cannibalism) in *Puṇam* 62, 356, 359, 369-71, *Paṭṭiṇṇi* 13, 15, etc

nique of contrast is cleverly employed Listen to the first 20 lines
in a very inadequate translation

Like the sun seen in the sea,
the delight of the world
praised by men,
he is the dazzling light
visible from afar
even through eyes
which are closed

His feet are strong
They destroy ignorance
and support
his friends
His mighty arm
rivals
the thunderbolt
It has crushed
his fiends

He is the bridegroom
of the maid
whose front is fair
and who is
gently chaste

The forests,
cool and fragrant
after first showers,
pouring down
from gigantic clouds,
pregnant with waters
sucked up from the sea,
scattering heavy drops
upon the firmament
whose darkness is dispelled
by the sun and the moon

The forests,
darkened and overspread
by the dense leaves
of the red *katampū* tree
He has a garland
of its flowers
rolling on his chest

High on the mountains
towering into skies
unearthly maidens dance

They have
bright,
rosy,
tender feet
with tinkling anklets

Rounded shanks
and gently swaying
waist
Broad luscious shoulders
and thin garments red
like Indragopa's wings

Their mounds of venus bear
brilliant girdles strung
with many shining gems
How lovely are they!
With a beauty made
not by the skill
of human hands

And they have jewels
set in Jambū gold
and glowing,
gleaming bright
with flawless lustre
shooting beams afar

(Transl K Z)

Murukan has two wives, the senior, Teyvayāṇai, is the daughter of Indra, the younger is "the beautiful daughter of the hunters, little Valli, with creeper-like slender waist" (101-102) ¹ The god's priest is called *vēlan* (190) "he who wears the spear", and the men in the jungle drink in the god's honour liquor prepared from honey matured in bamboo (*nītamai vīlanta tēkkat tēral*, 195) But, in his temples, there are also the *dvijas*, the twice-born (*ruṣṣiṣappālar*, 182), wearing the sacred thread of three bands Elsewhere, the Vedas are mentioned (*mantram*, 95), and the sages (*muṣṣavar*, 137), and the whole poem shows in fact the fusion of the Brahmanic god Skanda with the pre-Aryan, South Indian Murukan The poem contains much old, traditional material (like the relationship of Murukan to Koṟṟavai, the old mother-goddess of the Tamils) It is typically a poem of transition, marking the end of an epoch, the

¹ According to later speculations, *karpu* "chastity" is of two types the stern (*maṟam*) and the gentle (*aram*) Draupadī and Kannakī represent the former type, while Sitā and Teyvayāṇai represent "gentle chastity"

end of pre-Aryan Tamilnad, the end of the classical age, and the beginning of an entirely different age which is heralded by the rise of devotional literature. It is perhaps significant that the first truly religious, devotional poem in Tamil is dedicated to Murukan, the Tamil deity *par excellence*.

Apart from what was said about its subject matter, there are also other indications that the poem may hardly be older than about 550-600 A D, there are some very serious authors who place it around A D 800¹. There are some rather late forms and innovations in the language (*periyar* 168, *nalkumati* 295 etc), many of the Aryan loanwords (which are abundant) are rather late borrowings (*talakam*, *nakaram*, *canpakam*, *ankucam* etc), earlier texts are cited (e.g. *Nar* 62 *Tirumuruk* 24). There is also the fact that, according to U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, most of the *Pattuppattu* manuscripts used by him for his edition do not contain the text of this poem.

The poem is very important for the development of South Indian *bhakti* in that it contains, in lines 60-66, the summary of its fundamental principles: salvation as the goal of existence, salvation means to take one's station at the feet of the Lord, to love the Lord, to attain this means to give up egoism, sense of separation (63, 64), the poem says literally "to reach the feet of Cēy with elevated heart" (*cēey | cēvati pataruñ cemma lullamotu* (61-62)). This is pure *bhakti*.

No wonder that the poem found its way into the 11th *Tirumurai*, the corpus of Śaivite Canonical writings.

¹ S. Varivapuri Pillai, *HTLL* p. 58. On p. 113, he dates it "about A D 700".

CHAPTER NINE

TOLKĀPPIYAM

The *Tolkāppiyam*¹ represents much more than just the most ancient Tamil grammar extant. It is not only one of the finest monuments of human intelligence and intellect preserved in the Indian tradition, it is also the first literary expression of the indigenous, pre-Aryan Indian civilization, it represents the essence and the summary of classical Tamil culture.

For the evaluation of Indian linguistic thought, it is probably as important and crucial as the grammar which goes under the name of Pāṇini. To the field of general linguistics, it would add, if sufficiently known, some new important insights on a number of phonetic, etymological, morphological and syntactic problems.²

The *Tolkāppiyam*, as we have it today, consists of three books (*atikāram*). Each book has nine chapters (*iyal*), and

¹ The name *Tolkāppiyam* is an attribute-head construction which means "ancient (*tol*) book (*kāppiyam* < Skt *kāvya*-)". However, this Indo-Aryan etymology (which is not absolutely water-proof) was unacceptable for some Tamil purists, and so we may read such curious statements as the following: "tol means ancient and 'Kāppiyam' means Kāppu iyanṛatu that which deals with protection. The main function of grammar is to protect the language from deterioration and the word *kāppiyam* " etc (*vide* J. M. Somasundaram Pillai, *A History of Tamil Literature*, 1967, p. 50). Whether the book gave the name to the author or vice-versa is a disputed question. The first alternative is of course the more plausible one. The attribute *tol* "ancient, old" (cf. *DED* 2899, the word occurs in the oldest literature, cf. *Puṇam* 24 21, 32 7, 91 7, 203 2 etc) is used here with the connotation "aged, hoary, venerable".

² Unfortunately, there exists no full, critical and exact translation of this extraordinary work into English (or, for that matter, into any Western language). The present writer is engaged in translating the text in full including the seven commentaries now available. As far as the overall atmosphere and the general context of *Tolkāppiyam* is concerned, I can hardly add anything to what M. B. Emeneau says about "Hindu higher culture" in his paper "India and Linguistics", *Collected Papers*, Annamalainagar (1967) 187-188. "Intellectual thoroughness and an urge toward ratiocination, intellection, and learned classification for their own sakes should surely be recognized as characteristic of the Hindu higher culture".

the whole has 1612 *sūtras*¹ of unequal length in 27 chapters²

Roughly speaking, the grammar deals with orthography and phonology, etymology and morphology, semantics, sentence structure, prosody, and with the subject-matter of literature

In the nine chapters of the first section, *Tolkāppiyam* deals with the sounds of the language and their production, with combination of sounds (*ṣunarcci*, "joining, copulation"), with orthography, and with some questions which we would today designate as graphemic and phonological problems. One may say that the first book "on *eluttu*" (this term may mean, in various contexts, "sound", "phoneme" or "letter") is dedicated to phonetics, phonology and graphemics of Old Literary Tamil. The treatment of the arrangement of consonants, and the description of the production of sounds is interesting³

The second section is called *Collatikāram*, "The book about words", and deals with etymology, morphology, semantics and syntax. Among the exciting problems emerging from the study of this book are questions of word-classes, of compounds, semantic problems, and rich lexical data. The author (or authors) had also some idea about linguistic geography of the Tamil land. Standard Tamil was spoken in the *centamiḷ* land, and adjoining this area were the twelve dialectal regions⁴

¹ When we use the term *sūtras* here, it is not quite exact, the rules are actually composed in a metre which resembles the *akaval* and is called *nūrpā* (< *nūl* + *pā* "the stanza / appropriate for / eruditory literature"), it is functionally equivalent to the *sūtra* in Sanskrit culture. Tamil *nūl*, like Sanskr. *sūtra*-, means 1) "thread, string, cord", 2) "rule", 3) "book", especially "book of rules", "eruditory book".

² There are *nūrpās* of one line only, but quite a number of stanzas have as many as 9 lines and more. Most *nūrpās* in the grammar have 2-3 verses. There are "nūl stanzas" which have as many as 46 lines. Like the *akaval*, a *nūrpā* is composed of 4 feet, but unlike *akavalpā* it may have only one or two lines, and some other properties, which make it a different metre altogether.

³ Highly interesting is the metaphor describing vowels as *uyir* "life, life-breath", consonants as *mey* "body" and the group consonant + vowel, in other words, the "most primitive", open syllable, the basic unit of the syllabic script, as *uyrmeṣ* "life-endowed body". There is a number of other engaging problems, concerning, e.g., the *āytam*, or the *sandhi*, but a discussion of these questions is indeed beyond the scope and purpose of this book.

⁴ These *paṇṇuru nīlam* or "twelve regions" were the source of "dialectisms" (*tucaṅcol*, *tucaṅ* < prob. Skt. *diśā*, mstr. of *diś* "region, place"). The author or authors of *Tolkāppiyam* do not describe the dialectal regions in detail. The medieval commentators, though, tell us the names of the twelve regions, and denote the dialects by a common term, *koṭuntamiḷ*, lit. "crude,

'*Porulatikāram*, or the book dealing with "subject-matter" is, in short, the prosody and rhetoric of classical Tamil. In addition, it contains a wealth of sociological and cultural material.

The first two chapters of this *atikāram* (the *akattinai iyal* and the *purattinai iyal*) contain a detailed treatment of literary conventions of both basic genres of classical literature, *akam* and *puram*. The next two *iyals* deal with the two kinds of love, pre-marital (*kalavu*) and marital (*karpu*) and with extramarital relations, and in the subsequent parts, prosody (*yāppu*) and rhetoric (*ani*) are treated in detail.

The whole book on poetics is planned as follows

- (i) Treating of mutual love
- (ii) Treating of war and non-love themes
- (iii) Treating of secret or premarital love.
- (iv) Dealing with open wedded love
- (v) Treating of further aspects of love situations
- (vi) Dealing with dramaturgy
- (vii) Dealing with simile
- (viii) Dealing with prosody and the art of composition
- (ix) Treating of tradition and literary usage

It may be seen from this outline, that the work, and, in particular, its third book, grew around a core which was intended as a bardic grammar, as a guide to bards as to how to compose their songs in accord with tradition and conventions.¹

In traditional terms, *Tolkāppiyam* deals with the total subject-matter of grammar (*lakkanam*)², with *eluttu* (basic "signs" of

vulgar Tamil". Also, the author of the prefatory stanza to the grammar was well aware of the stylistic distinction he speaks, as of two distinct styles of one language, of *valakku* "spoken, colloquial (style)" and *ceyyul* "poetic, literary (style)".

¹ Cf K Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (1968) 48 ff

² "Grammar", *lakkanam* (< Skt *laksana*-) has a very broad sense here. The semantic field of the term *lakkanam* comprises the nucleus, which is "prescriptive rules about the use of (literary) language", further "description of the structure and function of the (literary) language", and still further "description of the structure and functioning of any cultural phenomenon". In this sense, one speaks of "the grammar of dance" as well as of "the grammar of war-poetry". Ultimately, *lakkanam* means treatment of the structure and function of any structured and conventionalized phenomenon. In this broadest sense, one speaks about "the grammar of love" (the patterned and conventionalized "reality" underlying love-poetry) or "the grammar of *bhakti*".

language, sounds and letters), *col* ("words"), *porul* (subject-matter of poetry), *yāppu* ("prosody"), and *aru* ("rhetoric")

No wonder that the grammar became enormously influential in the entire subsequent development of Tamil culture, its authority goes unquestioned to the present day

(*Tolkāppiyam* obviously contemplates a literature very much like that of the early classical (*Cankam*) age. However, it also gives a picture of an earlier literature. There are, according to the "ancient book", two basic kinds of compositions: one which is governed by restrictions concerning lines and metres, the other which has no restrictions.¹ The grammar seems to suggest also the existence of narrative poems.² In these literary forms, six kinds of metres were employed: *venpā*, *āciviyam*, *kali*, *vañci*, *marul* and *paripātal*.³)

Under the second type (compositions with no line restrictions), the grammar quotes grammatical treatises, commentaries on grammars, compositions intermixed with prose, fables, humourous hits, riddles, proverbs, magical incantations and "suggestive imaginative statements". It is obvious that much literature must have existed before the time of *Tolkāppiyam*, as we have it, and that the author(s) of the grammar made use of earlier grammatical works.

As a *single integrated* work, the *Tolkāppiyam* was first mentioned in Nakkīrar's commentary on Irāiyanār's *Akapporul* (prob. 7th-8th Cent. A.D.)

Some of the *nūrpās* are ambiguous. Also, as already stressed, the authority of *Tolkāppiyam* has always been supreme. These facts lead to the existence of a number of commentaries on the "grammar of grammars", of which at least seven have been (partly) preserved.

1. The first, and probably the best commentary is that of Ilampūranar. He fully deserves the title of *urayāciviyar*, i.e. "The Commentator". His commentary has fortunately reached us in full. He was probably a Jaina scholar, living in the 11th or 12th Cent.

Ilampūranar's commentary shows a great deal of common sense and critical acumen. He obviously distrusted the tales connecting the mythical Akattiyar (Agastya) and the author of *Tolkāppiyam*. There might have been other, earlier, pre-Ilampūranar commentaries in existence (probably in oral grammatical tradition, cf. Ilampūranar's hints to this in his comm. to *Collatikāram* 44, 57, 122, 421, 408,

¹ *Tolk. Porul* 476

² *Tolk. Porul* 549-553

³ *Tolk. Porul* 433, 450, 472

68, 447 and elsewhere) One of the most pleasing features of Ilampūranar's commentary is its clear, simple, lucid prose, written in comparatively pure Tamil

2 Cēṇāvaraiyar's¹ commentary pertains only to *Collatikāram* His name occurs in several epigraphs, and it seems that the one which is dateable in 1275 A D has in mind our author² The commentary is detailed and precise, and very learned It is interesting that its author contests the views of Pavananti, and also questions some conclusions of Ilampūranar

3 Pērācīriyar is heavily indebted to *Nannūl*³ in his grammatical thought (besides quoting frequently from *Tantiyalankāram* and *Yāpparunkalam*, the first being the standard medieval rhetoric, the second the most detailed treatise on prosody in Tamil) It seems that he wrote his commentary—of which only the portion pertaining to the greater part of *Porulatikāram* is available—sometime at the end of the 12th or rather in the 13th Cent, if not later

4 Naccinārkkīriyar's commentary is available to the whole text of the first and second book, and to five chapters of the third book of the grammar He quotes the three previous commentators, often refuting their views This great commentator, who was equally learned in Tamil and Sanskrit; quotes, too, in some of his commentaries, his famous colleague Parimēlaḷakar, and this shows that he lived probably in the 14th, if not in the 15th-16th Century

5 Teyvaccilaiyār composed his commentary to the second book on *col* "word" He is later than the four previously mentioned commentators It seems that he was a learned Brahmin, very well versed in Sanskrit and in Aryan traditions His date is probably the 16th Century A D

6 Kallātar seems to be the latest of the available commentators His work refers to the second book only, to *Collatikāram* He belongs very probably to the 16th-17th Cent A D

Apart from the six commentaries, there is yet another anonymous

¹ Which means "general of the army" *cēṇai* (Skt *senā*-) + *araiyar* (< Indo-Aryan *rāya*, *rāa*)

² A place-name, *Māyōkkam*, occurs both in the commentary and in the inscription For the dating of Cēṇāvaraiyar in the reign of Māravarmaṇ Kulacēkara Pāntiyaṇ (1268-1311) cf M Raghava Aiyangar, *Cāṇaṭ tamīl-kkavi caritam* (Ramnad, 1947) 108-144

³ According to tradition, Pavananti composed his *Nannūl*, the standard medieval grammar of literary Tamil, on the model of Ilampūranar's commentary Pavananti lived in the first half of the 13th Cent

commentary to the three chapters of *Collatikāram*,¹ which seems to be more recent than any of the six commentaries mentioned above.²

After this brief description of the text and the available commentaries, three rather tangled problems must be discussed: the person of the author, the date of the work, and its integrity.

In the commentary to the preface of the grammar, Naccinārkkīyār identifies the author of the grammar with Tīranatūmākkīṇi, son of Camatakkīṇi, a Brahmin *rsi*.³ The boy became one of the disciples of the sage Akattiyār (Agastya), and turned out to be a first-class grammarian. He wrote a grammar called *Tolkāppiyam* which, together with the work of his master, *Akattiyam* (now lost), is said to have been *the* grammar (*nūl*) of the "second *Cankam*".

According to Pērācīyār (ca. 1250-1300 A.D.), some scholars held that Tolkāppīyaṇār composed his work on principles other than those of *Akattiyam*, following some grammars no longer extant. The commentator refutes this theory and maintains that Akattiyār was the founder of Tamil grammatical tradition, that Tolkāppīyaṇ was the most celebrated of the twelve pupils⁴ of the great sage and that he followed Agastya's teachings in his own grammar. According to K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, the opposite party which denied Tolkāppīyaṇ's indebtedness to Agastya "postulated hostility between teacher and pupil arising out of Agastya's jealousy and hot temper". The whole story is recorded by Naccinārkkīyār. After Agastya left the Himalayas for the South, he sent his pupil Trinadhūmāgni (Tolkāppīyaṇ) to fetch his wife Lopāmudrā from the North. He, however, prescribed a certain distance to be maintained between the pupil and the lady during the journey ("four rods"). While crossing the river Vaikai, a rapid current threatened to drown Lopāmudrā, and Tolkāppīyaṇ approached too close, holding out

¹ To *kalaviyākkam*, *vēṟṟumariyāḷ* and *vēṟṟumaimariyāḷ*.

² The editors of an excellent and careful edition of *Collatikāram*, A. Arulappan and V. I. Subramoniam (Trunelveli-Palayamkottai, 1963), designate this text as *aracu* (since they published it according to a manuscript obtained from the *Aracāṅka nūl nilaiyam*, "The Government Library").

³ These names are of course Aryan. Trinadhūmāgni, son of Jamadagni, a *rsi* mentioned in the *Rgveda*, in the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

⁴ According to tradition (found fixed, e.g., in the prefatory stanza to *Puṟapporulvenpāmālai*), Tolkāppīyaṇ and these fellow students of his were responsible for the production of another grammatical work, the *Panṇirupatalam*. This work on *puṟapporul* is now lost but a few *sūtras* are preserved in Ilampūranar's comm. to *Tolkāppiyam*.

to her a bamboo stick with the aid of which she was able to reach the shore safely. This displeased the master and Agastya cursed them saying that they would never enter heaven, to which Tolkāppiyān replied with a similar curse on his master.

As K. A. Nilakanta Sastrī says, "this silly legend represents the last phase of a controversy, longstanding, significant, and by no means near its end even in our time"¹. However, the truth is that there is no mention of Agastya or *Akattiyam* in the *Tolkāppiyam* or in the preface to it by Paṇampāraṇār. The earliest reference to the *Akattiyam* occurs only in the 8th or 9th Cent. A. D.

As we shall see later, *Tolkāppiyam*, the core of which may be assigned to the pre-Christian era, consists perhaps of many layers, some of which may be much earlier than others. We do not know of any definite data concerning the original author or authors. It seems that Tolkāppiyān was a Jaina scholar, well versed in a pre-Pāṇinian grammatical system called *ainṭram*, and that he lived in Southern Kerala sometime in the 3rd-1st Cent. B. C.

A few data support the tradition which maintains that Tolkāppiyān was a Jain. First, the *pāyiram* (preface) uses the term *paṭimariyōṇ* which is derived from a Jaina Prakrit word and signifies a Jaina ascetic². There are further indications within the text corroborating this hypothesis: the classification of lives (*jīva*) and non-lives (*ajīva*) in *Tolk. Marappiyal* 27-33 appears to agree fully with the Jaina classification. The description of a *mātrā* (prosodic unit) as being equivalent in duration to *kannmarittal* "closing and opening of the eyelid" and to *kainnoti* "snapping of the finger" is supposedly of Jaina origin, the allusion to *muṇṇṭṭin unarntōr* (*Elutt* 7) in connection with that description is obviously to Jaina *ācāryas*. According to the opinion of S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, Tolkāppiyān belonged to a heterodox Jaina grammatical tradition called *ainṭram*³.

As for his South Travancorian origin. It was again S. Vaiyapuri Pillai—probably the most critical of modern Tamil scholars—who has shown that *Tolk. Elutt* 241, 287 and 378 quote grammatical forms which do not occur in literary Tamil texts, but which exist in

¹ *A History of South India* (3rd ed., 1966) 77

² Cf. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamilc utar manikal* (3rd ed., 1959, p. 26), quoting Sinclair Stevenson's *The Heart of Jainism*

³ *ib.*, pp. 22-41

Malayalam ¹ This fact supports the tradition which makes Tolkāp-
piyaṅ a native of Tiruvatānkōtu in today's Kerala ²

The problem of the dating of *Tolkāppiyam* is an extremely
difficult one. It has to be attacked, though, since we would like to
have at least an approximate chronology of the work which mani-
fests the first conceptual framework and the earliest noetic system
of a culture which is part of the world's great classical civilizations.

The basic issues of this problem may be formulated as the
following points

1 The relation of the language described in *Tolkāppiyam*
(specifically in the *Eluttatikāram*), and of *Tolkāppiyam*'s meta-
language, to the graphemic and phonological system of the earliest
Tamil inscriptions in Brāhmī

2 Is *Tolkāppiyam* earlier or later than the bulk of the "Cankam"
poems? Is it a "pre-Cankam" or a "post-Cankam" work?

3 The identity of the political and social background of the
Tolkāppiyam and early Tamil classical poetry

4 The references (if any), in the *Tolkāppiyam*, to a Patañjali,
b Pāṇini, c *Mānavadharmasāstra*, d Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*,
e Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, f *Kāmasūtra*

5 Inconsistencies among the *sūtras* of the text

Also, we have to start our investigation of this problem with a
few presumptions, the most important of which are 1) the existence
of a body of literature ³ before *Tolkāppiyam*, 2) relative (and an

¹ The forms in question manifest a morph, -*attu*, e.g. *paṇiyattu*, *maḷayyat-
tu*, *veylattu*, which does not occur with this distribution in literary Tamil of
any period. S. Vaiyapuri quotes Malayalam utterances like *paṇiyattu*
pōkarute maḷayattu pōkarute. In Tamil, especially in Early Middle Tamil and
subsequent stages, -*attu* occurs as a locative suffix with stems ending in -*am*
in the nominative (this is an "impressionistic" statement). However, the
extension of -*attu* to other types of bases, like Malayalam *teruwattu* (cf.
L. V. Ramaswami Aiyar, *Evolution of Malayalam Morphology*, 1936, 12) is
definitely a Malayalam development, and a "Malayalamism" in Tamil.

² There still exists a village by name of Atankōtu in South Travancore.
The prefatory stanza says that the merits of the grammar were approved by
Atankōttācāṅ (< *atankōttu ācāṅ*) i.e., "the teacher of Atankōtu", a member
of the learned assembly of king Nilantaru Thuvir Pāntiyaṅ, who this
Pāntiyaṅ was we have no idea. The author of the prefatory stanza, Paṇam-
pāraṅār, is probably identical with the grammarian whose work (*Paṇam-
pāraṅam*) was preserved very fragmentarily in a few *sūtras* in the commen-
taries to *Yāpparunkalam* and *Nāṇṇūl*.

³ Needless to say that by "literature" we do not necessarily mean "written

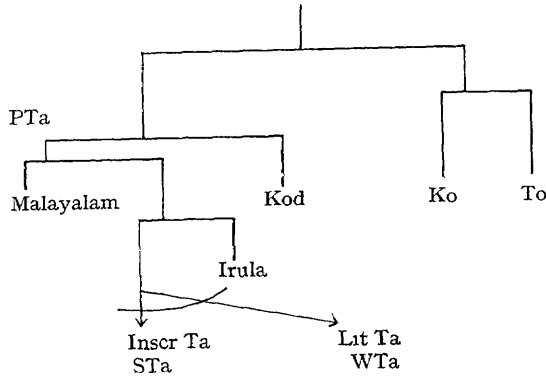
attempted absolute) chronology of the linguistic evolution of the earliest stages of Tamil

That some literature had existed before even the *Urtext* of the *Tolkāppiyam* was written is not only a reasonable assumption, but is supported by hints given in the text itself. As already mentioned, the grammar refers to earlier compositions of two basic types (e.g. *Poruḷ* 476 *et seq.*) and from a great number of lines it is clear that earlier grammatical works have been made use of by Tolkāppiyar (he constantly refers to his predecessors in grammar and learning with utterances like *enmanar* "they-honorific say", *enpa, colluḷa, moluḷa*, "they say" all this of course in the sense "it has been said, it is said" i.e. "it is the established scholarly tradition to say that ...") Before even the basic text of the grammar could at all have been composed, a period of development of a literary language (probably used in a body of bardic poetry) must have preceded the final stages of the standardization and normalization of early old Tamil. Never, in none but a very artificial situation, is literature preceded by grammar, it is always the other way round. First there is a body of texts, of literature (which, let me stress again, does not always mean written literature, recorded texts!), then a grammar¹

literature" Just as the term "text" does not necessarily mean anything written or recorded, so "literature" refers merely to a body of adopted, accepted compositions, which fulfil certain aesthetic and social functions. The same when we speak about "literary" language of this early period what we have in mind is a language different from the day-to-day colloquial, a language used in that body of compositions, a "higher" language which gained prestige and esteem (probably connected with its magic usage), a language which would have had the function of literary language proper in a society with predominantly written (as against oral) cultural transmission.

¹ With regard to the *Tolkāppiyam*, this fact was stressed long ago by Robert Caldwell. "Whatever antiquity may be attributed to the *Tolkāppiyam*, it must have been preceded by many centuries of literary culture. It lays down rules for different kinds of poetical compositions which must have been deduced from the examples furnished by the best authors whose works were then in existence" (quoted by B. Kannappa Mudaliyar, *Tamil nūl varalāri*, 1962, p. 54). Tamil pandits have a saying which states the fact briefly and succinctly: *ilakkanattukku mun ilakkियam* "Before grammar—literature" (personal communication, S. Kokilam). In a more elegant form, the opinion that literature always precedes grammar, is expressed in the text of *Akkaiyam ilakki yattiyin retuppatu malakkanam* "literature yields grammar", cf. further *Nannūl* s. 140 *ilakkियam kantatai ilakkhana miyampal*, "the utterance(s) of grammar are based on literature". Tamil grammarians had also a clear conception of the principle of change in language, according to *Tolk*, usage sanctifies new words (*katuḷo lillark kālattuppatinē, Tolk* s. 935), and according to *Nannūl*, it is in the order of things for the old to give place to the new: *paḷaiyana kaḷtalum putriyana pukutalum / vahūwala kāla*

The linguistic situation in the extreme South of India, as it might have prevailed (simplified, of course, very considerably) sometime between the 4th-2nd Cent B C , can be represented by the following diagram



PTa = Proto-Tamil, Inscr Ta = Inscriptional Ta , Kod = Kodagu, Ko = Kota, To = Toda, STa = Spoken Ta , WTa = Written Tamil.

This was probably the period when the first bardic poetry was composed in the Tamil language. About 250 B C or slightly later, Aśoka's (272-232 B C) Southern Brāhmī script was adapted to the Tamil phonological system. And between 200-100 B C , the earliest Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions (about 50 in number) were produced by Jain and/or Buddhist monks living in natural caves of the Southern country ¹

In a somewhat different language, and in a very different style, the earliest bardic poetry, now developed, refined and transformed into bardic court-poetry, enjoyed and acclaimed, began to crystalize around certain nuclei which later became the core of the "Cankam" Anthologies (cca 100 B C -200 A D)

vaḥaiyir uṅṅi (s 461) We cannot but admire these insightful utterances of the ancient savants

¹ I Mahadevan, *Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions of the Saṅgam Age*, preprint, *II International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Madras, 1968. For the discussion of the two types of Old Tamil, cf also K Zvelebil "The Brahmi Hybrid Inscriptions", *Archiv Orientální* (1964) 545-575, and id, *From Proto-South Dravidian to Old Tamil and Malayalam*, preprint, *II International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Madras, 1968

The problem is how to fit, chronologically, the *Tolkāppiyam* or its basic layer into this picture

As far as the mutual relation of the language described in the *Tolkāppiyam*, and the language of the early Tamil-Brāhmi inscriptions, is concerned, one point is quite clear—the two represent two different types, two different “styles” of language (This is indicated on the diagram by the curved line cutting across the arrow-head lines representing the evolution of the two basic styles of Tamil, Written and Spoken) According to I Mahadevan, “the orthography of written Tamil was experimental during the first two centuries of its existence—the inscriptions emerge in simple, intelligible Tamil, not very different in its *matrix* (that is, the phonological, morphological and lexical structure) from the Tamil of the Southern period” In other words, the differences between the Tamil of the inscriptions (Prakritization of their vocabulary, some of which looks “archaic” and different from forms found in literary texts, etc) and the Tamil of the ancient literature, almost contemporaneous with the inscriptions, may be accounted for by the fact that those inscriptions represent probably a spoken variety of Tamil used by the (most probably bilingual) Jaina and/or Buddhist monks, while the bardic corpus represents a literary language, which was at that period in the stage of “crystallization” and standardization Basically, then, the language of these epigraphs, and the language described by *Tolkāppiyam*, are two styles, two varieties of one language—Old Tamil Therefore, nothing prevents us from regarding them as contemporaneous or almost contemporaneous, just like, in our own days, the Tamil used by—let us say—an Iyengar Brahmin from Triplicane, Madras, discussing the arrangements for the day’s dinner with his wife, represents a different style from that employed by the authors of the *Tamil Encyclopaedia* preparing an article on the use of contraceptives

(A number of scholars (like R Raghava Ayyangar, M Raghava Ayyangar,¹ V Ventakarajulu Reddiar,² S Vaiyapuri Pillai, T P Meenakshisundaran³ and others) have clearly pointed out that there are differences between the rules in *Tolkāppiyam*, and

¹ Eg R Raghava Ayyangar, *Tamil varalāru* (Annamalai, 1941), 268-273, M Raghava Ayyangar, *Arāyccut tokuti*, 306-9

² Cf Vēnkatarājulu Reṭṭiyār, *Kapilar*, 104-105

³ Cf T P Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Language* (1965), 51, C and H Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature* (1961), 3-4

the actual linguistic usage in the so-called *Cankam* texts. Since the type and style of the language are identical (standardized literary Tamil of bardic court-poetry), the *Tolkāppiyam* and the bardic poetry are, obviously, not quite of the same age. Was the grammar composed earlier than the bulk of “*Cankam*” poetry, or later? Let us point out first some of the more striking differences.

Phonemic shapes, which may be considered earlier, occur in the grammar, the same words appear in what may be considered later phonemic shapes in the bardic poetry, e.g. *Tolk vīyar Porunar* 80 *vēr* “sweat”, *Tolk yātu Pur* 229 *ātu* “goat, sheep”, *Tolk yāru Netunal* 30 *āru* “river”.

There is a restriction on the occurrence of the palatals in the *Tolk*, according to *sūtras* 62, 64, 65, the palatal *c*, *ñ* and *y* cannot be followed by *a*, but this restriction is no more valid for the bardic poems, in which a number of words occur with the palatals followed by *a* (cf. *Pur* 14 9, 56 18, 74 3 and elsewhere) ¹ Honorific plurals, allowed by *Tolk Col* 27 only in the spoken language, occur in the literary texts of the “*Cankam*” age (*Aṅk* 431-440). The restrictions on the use of the verb *vā* “to come” and *tā* “to give” (used only with the first two persons), *cel* “to go” and *koṭu* “to give” (used only with the third person, cf. *Tolk* 512, 513) are no longer valid in the “*Cankam*” period. The usage of the particles of comparison, prescribed in *Tolk*, is relaxed in “*Cankam*” works. The restriction of the *vīyankōl* “implied command”, to the third person, is not valid for bardic texts (*Tolk* 711). There had also been some semantic shift, e.g. *tuñcal* in *Tolk Porul* 260 means “to sleep”, while in *Patir* 72 it means “to die”, *kavarvu* “to desire” (*Tolk Col* 362) means “to eat” in *Pattinap* 22. According to *Tolk Col* 269, *el* means “light”, in *Malarpatuk* 416 it means “night”.

These and other differences between the language, described in the *Tolkāppiyam*, and the language used by the bards in their heroic and erotic poems argue rather for an earlier date of the grammar, since a literature following a grammar may “add” its own “rules” (and it usually does so), while the reverse procedure is highly improbable. Since, however, the general political, social and

¹ Cf. items like *caṭai* (*Pur* 1), *camam* (*Pur* 14), *caṭatam* (*Pur* 102), *cavatti* (*Perumpān* 217), *caṭam* (*Maturak* 112), *caṭu* (*Malarpatuk* 392), *cavattum* (*Patirrup* 84), *camam* (*Tirukkural* 99), *caṭam* (*ib* 112), which show that the rule of *Tolk Eṭutt* 62 must have preceded these forms and, hence, these texts.

cultural conditions as reflected by the *Tolkāppiyam* and the classical bardic poetry are more or less the same, and—more important—the deep structure and the stage of evolution of the language of the bardic poetry and the metalanguage of *Tolkāppiyam* are, too, almost identical, there could hardly have been a wide gap of time between the two

Our first conclusion—the earliest, original version of the *Tolkāppiyam* belongs to the “pre-*Cankam*” period, the oldest layer of the grammar is somewhat earlier in time than the majority of extant classical Tamil poems¹

The relations between Patañjali, an early Sanskrit grammarian, and the *Tolkāppiyam*, seems to be well established. It looks as if *Tolk Col 419* is indeed indebted to Patañjali’s classification of compounds into *pūrvapadārtha-*, *uttarapadārtha-*, *anyapadārtha-* and *ubhayapadārtha-*. In fact, *Tolk Col 419* seems to be almost a translation of Patañjali’s Sanskrit text²

S. Vayyapuri Pillai also points to *Tolkāppiyam* using the term *lakkanam* < Pkt *lakhana-*, Skt *lakṣana-* in the sense of “grammar”, this, he says, was first introduced by Patañjali (cf *HTLL*, p. 49)²

The date of Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* is given as approximately 150 B C³

It also seems that *Tolkāppiyam* knew Pāṇini. S. Vayyapuri Pillai quotes a few instances of this. Thus, the “four-parts-of-speech” system of *Tolkāppiyam* (*Col 158, 159* noun, verb, particle, qualifier) seems to correspond to the fourfold system of Pāṇini (*nāma-* “noun”, *ākhyāta-* “finite verb”, *uṣasarga-* “dependent determina-

¹ This is the Tamil version *avar tām | mūṇmōḷi mlaiyalum pūṇmōḷi mlaiyalum | vūṇmōḷi mēlum orunku taṇ mlaiyalum | amṇmōḷi mlaiyātu aṇmōḷi mlaiyalum | aṇṇāṅku eṇṇa porulṇai maraṇṇē* (*Col 419*)

Cf this with the Sanskrit text *iha kaścit samāsāḥ | pūrvapadārtha pradhānah | kaścit uttarapadārtha pradhānah | kaścit anyapadārtha pradhānah | kaścit ubhayapadārtha pradhānah*. I think S. Vayyapuri rightly stressed the fact that neither Pāṇini nor Kātyāyana divide compounds according to this fourfold scheme, it seems that this division is characteristic for Patañjali, and hence there is a special connection between Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* and the Tamil *Tolkāppiyam* (*Mahābhāṣya* is the “great commentary” of Patañjali on the *sūtras* of Pāṇini and the *vārttikas* of Kātyāyana)

² Cf *Tolk Col 27*. Before Patañjali, only the term *vyākaraṇa-* was used to denote “grammar”. Cf also *Tolkāppiyam*’s use of the loan-translation *kuṇṇi* “sign” (cf Skt *lakṣana-* in the same meaning) to denote “grammar” in *Tolk Porul 50*. These points are discussed at length in Tamil by S. Vayyapuri in his *Tamiḷ cular manikāḷ* (ed. 1959) p. 50

³ A. B. Keith *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 5

tive word”, *nṛpāta*- “particle”), though Tolkāppiyam’s division is first and foremost based on the actual state of affairs in Tamil and agrees admirably with modern linguistics (the Tamil system is noun, adjective, verb, particle) We may probably also connect *Tolk Elutt* 83 with Pāṇini ¹

Granting the indebtedness to Pāṇini, this would give us the 4th-5th Cent B C as the lower limit for *Tolkāppiyam* Since, however, we consider the *Tolkāppiyam*, even in its original form anyhow much later than that date, this lower limit is not so very important ²

Much more important is the fact that some of the *nūrpās* of the Tamil grammar seem to have been directly influenced by much later Sanskrit texts

The possible agreement between *Mānavadharmasāstra* III 46, 47 and *Tolk Porul* 185 would immediately raise our lower limit to about 200 A D

‡A very possible agreement between the enumeration of the 32 *uktis* in Kautilya’s *Arthasāstra* and Tolkāppiyam’s 32 *uttikal* would raise the lower limit further, to about 300 A D ³ †

In *Tolk Porul* 251, the eight feelings (moods) and/or their physical manifestations are enumerated, and these, according to S Vayapurī Pillai, clearly agree with the eight *rasas* or “moods” of Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* VI 15 I am very much convinced that in this point, *Tolk Porul* is indebted to the Sanskrit source (or sources) beyond any doubt whatsoever Bharata’s date is usually given as 4th Cent A D , so that *Tolk Porulatīkāram* would be later than the 4th Cent A D , if the Tamil grammar indeed imitated the Sanskrit treatise ⁴

¹ *Tamiḻ cutar manikal*, 3rd ed , 46-48 and HTLL p 13

² For the date of Pāṇini, cf M B Emeneau, *Collected Papers*, p 188, fn 3 “Probably not earlier than the sixth century B C nor later than the fourth (so Franklin Edgerton, *Word Study*, vol xxvii / 1952 /, b 3, p 3), perhaps even to be pinned down to the fifth century B C (M Winternitz, op cit , p 42), even to the middle of that century (V S Agiavala, *India as known to Pāṇini* / Univ of Lucknow, 1953 /, p 475)”

³ M Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, III, 523

⁴ P R Bhandarkar, *Indian Antiquary* 41 (1912) 158 The two texts in question run as follows

*śṛṅgāra hāsya karuṇā raudra vīra bhayānakāh
bībhatsādbhuta samjñau cētya nāṭyerasāh smrtāh*
(*Nāṭyaś* VI 15)

nakariyē yaḷukar yiluvavaṅ māruthai

The ten *avattar*, “states”, described by Tolkāppiyar in *Porul* 100 correspond clearly to the *daśāvasthāh* of *Kāmasūtra* 5 1 This would, again, give us a later date than the 4th Cent. A D for *Tolk Porulatīkāram* ¹

One can of course always object that, before all these cultural matters became fixed in dateable texts, they might have been and probably were current in the cultural traditions of the “Sanskritic” people, hence, allusions to them are no real help in dating Also, lines containing these allusions might be considered as later interpolations

According to S Vaiyapuri, there is yet another additional proof for a rather late date of the grammar in the use of the word *ōrai*,² which seems to be most probably a Greek word (*hōrā*) borrowed into Sanskrit astrological texts about the 3rd-4th Cent A D (A B Keith) ³

Last but not least, *Tolk Porul* 53 shows familiarity with the dramatic idiom and the common usage portrayed in the rather late, “post-*Cankam*” texts of *Kalittokai* and *Paripātal*

Before reaching a conclusion—or even before expressing our agreement (or disagreement) with S Vaiyapuri Pillai’s conclusion—we must, however, observe one fact all the correspondences between later (post-Christian era) Sanskrit texts and the Tamil grammar occur in the *Porulatīkāram*, in the third book of *Tolkāppiyam* In other words, there are a few lines in the *Porulatīkāram* which are almost certainly of very late origin, not earlier than the 5th Cent A D Ruling out a transfer of cultural materia through channels other than direct influence of Sanskrit texts, and ruling out later interpolations and additions of precisely these lines, this fact would give us approximately the 5th Cent A D as the earliest possible date of *Porulatīkāram*, and as the date of the final redaction

yaccam perumitam vekuli yuvakariyēn
raṅpā lettē meyppā tenpa

(*Tolk Porul Meyp* 3)

The equivalents are, obviously, Ta *nakar* = Skt *hāsyā* “fun, laughter”, Ta *alukar* = Skt *karuṇā* “compassion, weeping”, Ta *ilvaral* = Skt *bibhatsa* “ridicule, disgust”, Ta *marutkar* = Skt *adbhuta* “wonder, confusion”, Ta *accam* = Skt *bhaya* “fear”, Ta *perumitam* = Skt *vīra* “conceit, arrogance, heroism”, Ta *vekuli* = Skt *raudra* “wrath, anger”, Ta *uvakar* = Skt *śrngāra* “pleasure”

¹ M Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, III, 540

² *maraynta olukkattu ōrayum nālum*, *Kalaviyal* 45

³ *Tamiḷ cutar manikal*, p 54

of the *Tolkāppiyam* This is our second, but not our final conclusion

The question is now Should we accept S Vaiyapuri Pillai's conclusion that Tolkāppiyar "must have lived in the 5th Cent A D" ? Or, in other words, that the whole of *Tolkāppiyam* was written as late as the 5th Cent A D ?

There is a certain amount of inconsistency between some of the *sūtras* of the grammar It also seems that some of the *sūtras* have been "tampered with" and rearranged This would suggest that certain *sūtras* are later interpolations. On the other hand, there are some gaps in the treatment of a few topics, which would suggest that the grammar has not reached us in absolute integrity ¹

It is suggested here, therefore, that the present text of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which underwent final editing and redaction sometime in the 5th Cent A D or later, is rather the work of a grammatical school than of an individual author The school in question was probably called *avnīram*, a pre-Pāṇinian grammatical system ascribed to Indra ² The term *avnīram* (<*avnīra*-) itself is post-Pāṇinian, and Pāṇini does not mention it This *avnīra* system of grammar continued to exist, however, long after Pāṇini and was followed mainly by Jains (its representant being, e g, Kātantra of the 3rd-4th Cent A D) ³ It is probable that the author(s) of the bulk of the grammatical *sūtras* which became known as *Tolkāppiyam* belonged to the group of Jaina scholars, following this *avnīra* grammatical tradition However, the organization of the grammar, and some other features of the text indicate that, apart from a possible number of authors involved there probably was a single master-mind who grasped with exceptional insight and intuition the deep grammatical structure of Tamil, who observed

¹ Cf T P Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Language* (1965), pp 51-52 E g in *Tolk* 1503, 1510, 1573, the word *pillai* "young one" is said never to occur with reference to "human child", but in *Tolk* 1106 the same word means "human child" Or the last few *sūtras* in the last chapter of the 3rd book seem to be unnecessary repetitions of statements about *nūl* "book" made already in the previous chapters on prosody Such *sūtras* may be considered later additions

² In the prefatory stanza, Paṇampāraṇār qualifies Tolkāppiyar as *avnīram nīraṇṇa*, i e "full of", "well-versed in" *avnīram*

³ Cf Belvalkar, *Systems of Sanskrit Grammar*, p 11 "As for the diversity and extent of Indian grammatical work about twelve different schools of grammatical theory have been recognized in the Indian tradition (most, if not all, to some degree dependent on Pāṇini), and there are about a thousand separate grammatical works preserved" (J Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, 1968, p 19)

the emergence of Tamil as a full-fledged literary language, distinct from other closely related speeches like Kannada, who helped to institutionalize and standardize this vehicle of literature, and made explicit, in a highly formalized way, the rules of that language and its particular style. Thus, the nuclear portions of *Tolkāppiyam* were probably born sometime in the 2nd or 1st Cent. B.C., but hardly before 150 B.C.

Later generations of grammarians and prosodists added to this core and developed its ideas from time to time, and it is not ruled out that the third part of the grammar, the one which deals with the subject-matter of poetry, is *in toto* (or in greater part) later than the first two parts. The final redaction of the *Tolkāppiyam* as we know it today did not very probably take place before the 5th Cent. A.D., so that the ultimate shape of the *sūtras* as we have them before us is probably not earlier than the middle of the first millennium of our era.

The intellectual achievement of the author(s) of *Tolkāppiyam*—in spite of the lack of utmost brevity and economy—is indeed enormous. (As already said, it is a vision of an entire civilization, highly formalized and made very explicit. All the three books show a mind of extraordinary depth, a rare inwardness, a brilliant expository power, and an ability of crystal-clear formulation.¹)

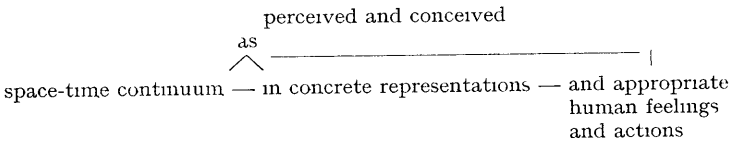
In general approach, *Tolkāppiyam*, like the work of Pāṇini, is a descriptive, strictly synchronic grammar, dealing with one style of the language, the Early Old Literary Tamil. Like Pāṇini, *Tolkāppiyam* gives much attention to phonetics, and to the internal structure of words. His statements seem to be based on observation and experiment. Though well organised, very consistent, and very exhaustive, the *Tolkāppiyam* has not surpassed or even reached the level of Pāṇini in economy, explicitness, consistency and terseness. On the other hand, the field of experience the *Tolkāppiyam*—as a total text in its final shape—describes, is much wider and even deeper than that of Pāṇini. To illustrate this point, let us analyse a few of the *nūrpās* occurring at the beginning of *Akattinaiyiyal* (the first chapter of the 3rd book of the grammar), since the reader is already familiar with the basic concepts occurring in this text from Chapter 6 (*The Theory of "Interior Landscape"*). However, while in the previous chapter the literary implications were considered,

¹ S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *HTLL*, p. 71.

here we shall deal with the basic conceptual framework of *Tolkāp-piyam*, with the gnoseological attitude of the first and most ancient of great Tamil intellects

True to the characteristic intellectual thoroughness, and obeying a basic urge toward learned classification, the author of these lines observes the entire universe, all objects in the world which appears to him as perceived—*kāṭci*¹—and conceived—*karuttu*²—in terms of three categories of entities (*ṣorul*) *mutal*, *karu* and *uri*³ *Mutal*,⁴ or *mutarṣorul*, or the basic, first entities, in terms of which the phenomenal world may be described, are TIME (*ṣoluttu*) and SPACE (*nilam*) That is, the time-space continuum, the dimensions of space and time, space and time are indispensable, everything must be perceived and conceived within its time-space coordinates *Karu*⁵ (lit “foetus, embryo, egg, germ”, cf *DED* 1074) are things (*ṣorul*) “born, native”, i e entities which appear as concrete, natural, “inborn”, “native” representations of the time-space coordinates *Uri* (lit “own, related, suitable, proper, essential”, *DED* 563) are “essential, appropriate” entities, i e human feelings and situations “proper, appropriate” to the various time-space divisions Schematically

Universe



For the subdivision of time (*ṣoluttu*, *kālam*), the reader may consult chapter 6 The space, the stage set for humans to “fight and mate”, was “perceived and conceived” by Tolkāp-piyan in terms

¹ *kāṭci*, *DED* 1209 “sight, vision of a deity, view, appearance”, in this connection, “perception, vision”

² *karuttu*, *DED* 1078 “design, purpose, opinion, attention, desire, judgement, mind, will”, in this connection, “conception”

³ *Tolk Porul Akat* 3 *mutalkaru vuvipporu lenṇa mūṇṇē* etc “the three (types of) entities the basic (or first), the germinal (or womb-like) [and] the proper (or own)”

⁴ ib 2 *mutaleṇa patuvatu nilampōḷu tivantin | vyalṣ(u)*

⁵ Accord to *Porul Akat* 18, “gods, food, beasts, trees, birds, drums, occupations, melody-types etc” and the commentator adds, under the “etc”, (tribal or generic) name of the hero and the heroine, the waters, the habitat, the flowers, and the (tribal) designation of the people

of the cultural regions, of the landscapes, of the physiographic divisions. These regions had their concrete manifestations in the *karu* paradigm, and, under the *uri* or “appropriate entities”, each of the landscapes had a corresponding human physical and psychological situation¹. Nature and man were conceived as different (nature under *mutal-nlam*, and man typically under *uri*), but, at the same time, as being in one-to-one correspondence, in striking parallelism, and, above all, in “harmony” and unity. Natural phenomena, behaviour of beasts and birds, and descriptions of natural scenery, were frequently used as symbolic, indicative and inferential for human feelings and actions. There was no strict division between “nature” and “art”, between “natural” as non-human, and “artificial”, “civilized”, “cultural” as human.²

The very first *nūrpā* of *Tolk Porul Akatt* speaks about seven behaviour-patterns or *tinai*, it says that, beginning with “one-sided love” and ending with “excessive love”, there are seven *tinai*s. The details have been discussed in Chapter 6. Here we would like to add one point. In *TP Akatt* 5, Tolkāppiyāṅ calls these regions *ulakam* (<Skt *loka*- “world”), i.e. “worlds”, since, indeed, these regions constituted miniature worlds with their own characteristic cultures. It is also significant that the same *nūrpā* enumerates only the four regions (pasture lands, mountains, agricultural tracts, littoral regions) which are constantly inhabited and “cultivated”, i.e. cultured, leaving *pālai* “wasteland, desert” unmentioned. The world is called characteristically *nānlam* in classical Tamil, i.e. “four-fold region”. *Nūrpā* 14 of *TP Akatt* gives the five behaviour-patterns, the five psychosomatic situations *punartai* “sexual union”, *pūrtai* “separation”, *iruttai* “patient waiting”, *irankal* “pining” and *ūttai* “sulking”.

It can hardly be claimed that this “intellection” and classification of the world and of human beings was the “invention” of Tolkāppiyāṅ. However, since *Tolkāppiyam* has given it its final shape, this categorization and these conventions went under its author’s name and, as pointed out above, exerted a lasting influence upon the Tamil mind.

¹ This being what A. K. Ramanujan so happily termed “interior landscape”.

² Which does not mean that there was no distinction between “beast” and “man”. On the contrary, the language, and its grammatical description, make a sharp distinction between rational (= human and divine, *uyarttinai*), and the ir-rational (= animal, vegetative and inanimate, *ahyrtinai*).

APPENDIX

The translation of the beginning of the *Tolkāppiyam* (*Eluttatikāram*) is given here so that the reader may have an idea of the highly technical nature of the work

- 1 The *eluttu* are said to be
thirty in number
beginning with *a*
[and] ending with *ṅ*
except the three the occurrence of which
depends upon others
- 2 They [the three] are
the over-short *ṛ*, the over-short *u*,
and the three dots
called *āyṭam*, similar to a *eluttu*
- 3 Among them,
the five sounds
a, ṛ, u, e, o
have each one measure
[and] are called short sounds
- 4 The seven sounds
ā, ī, ū, ē, ai, ḍ, au
have two measures each
[and] are called long sounds
- 5 One [single] sound has never three measures.
- 6 Learned men say that if lengthening is needed, the [sound]
of that measure should be produced and added
- 7 According to the view of those who have
understood accurately,
one *māttirai* is the time taken by a wink of the eyes
[or] a snap of the fingers
8. The twelve phonemes ending with *au*
are called vowels.
- 9 The eighteen phonemes ending with *ṅ*
are called consonants

- 10 The nature of vowels is not altered
even when pronounced with consonants
11. The measure of a consonant is said
to be half [of a *mātturai*]
12. The other three also remain of that nature
- 13 The sound *m* has [its] half measure shortened
when pronounced with [another consonant]
Considered carefully, this is rare
- 14 [Its] shape will be a dot obtained within
- 15 The nature of the consonant
is to be provided with a dot

CHART 13

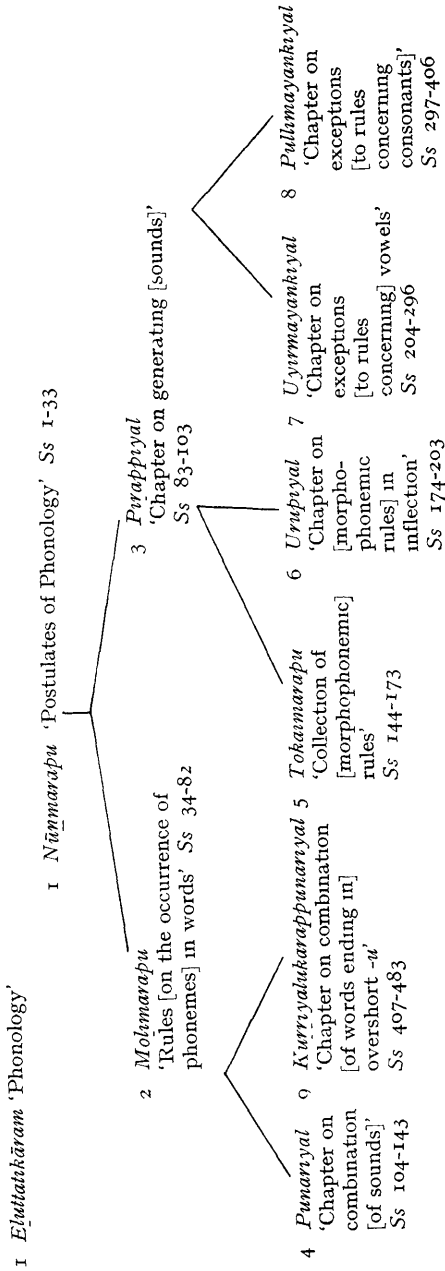
Structural build-up of *Tolkāppiyam*

CHART 13/2

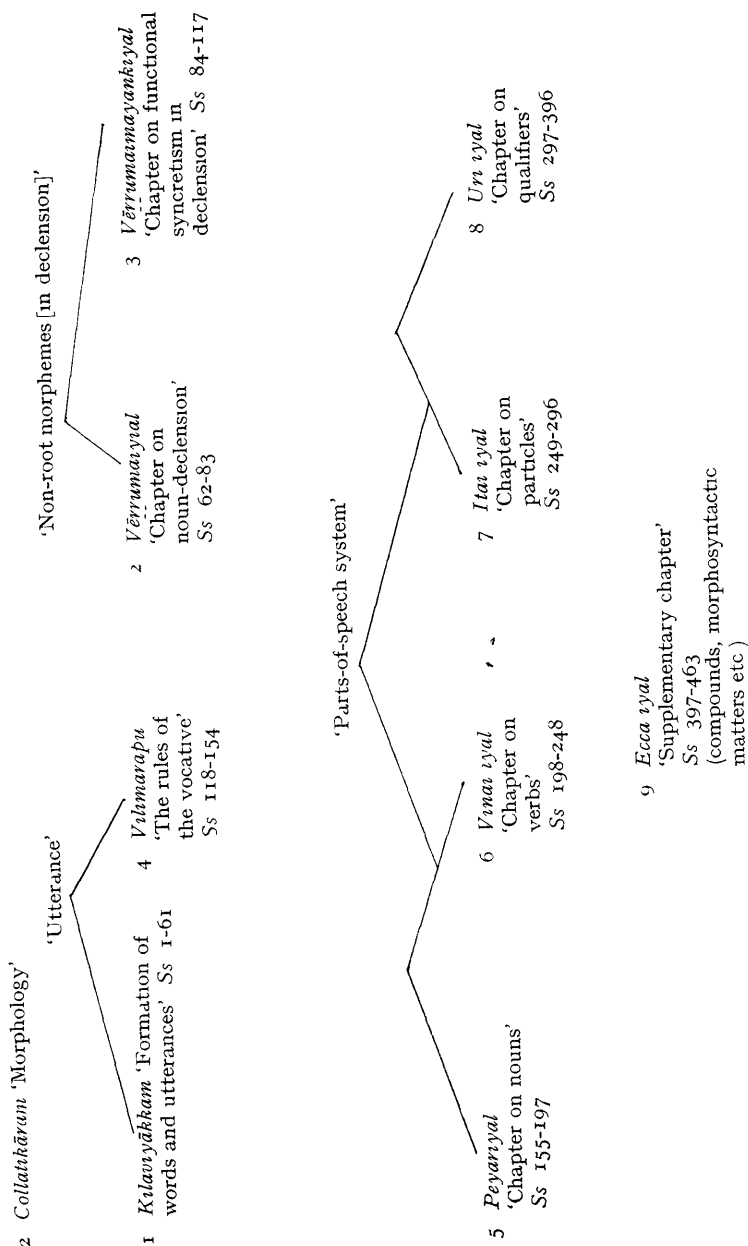
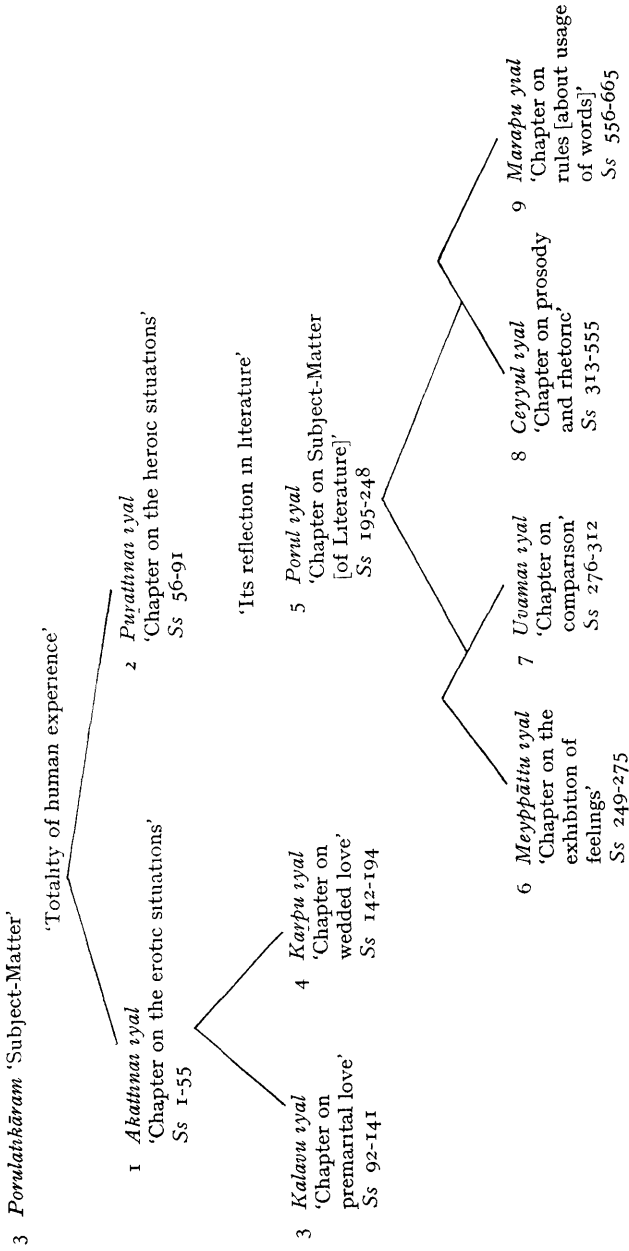


CHART 13/3



CHAPTER TEN

THE BOOK OF LOFTY WISDOM

“ there hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom” (A Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, 1960, p 199)

The facts about the *Tirukkural*, formulated as briefly as possible, are as follows. It is a comprehensive manual on ethics, polity and love, consisting of 1330 distichs divided into 133 sections of 10 distichs each, the first 38 on ethics (*aram*), the next 70 on political and economic matters (*porul*), and the rest on love (*kāmam*). The author was probably a learned Jain with eclectic leanings and intimate acquaintance with the early works of Tamil classical period, as well as with some knowledge of the Sanskrit legal and didactic texts. We have almost no authentic information on his life. As the best date of the *Kural* one may suggest 450-550 A D.

This chapter will deal with the *Tirukkural* exclusively from the point of view of its structure—structure of content, structure of metre, structure of language. By structure we understand a set of interrelated items which have no validity independently of the relations which hold among them.

Thus, this chapter will not entirely ignore, but deal only with utmost brevity, with such problems as the author's person, the date of the work, and its “ideology”.

The *Tirukkural* has always been in the highest esteem among the Tamil people. This great reverence for the author and his work is reflected by the nine different names under which the book goes.¹

¹ In addition to these traditional names, three more titles occur (*Tiruvalluappayan* in *Yāpparunkalakāṅkai 40 urai*, *Tamilmunṇūl* in *Parimēla-akai's Commentary*, and *Tiruvalluvamālai*, cf. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamiḷ cutar maṅkal* 101). According to S. Vaiyapuri, Nos 1, 4, 5 and 8 are taken from *Tiruvalluvamālai*, a later eulogy, a collection of stanzas in praise of the poet and his work, ascribed to gods and poets of the Maturai academy. The name *Tamiḷmaṅgai* is also based on ideas occurring in the eulogy, stanzas 24, 28, 37, 42. No. 7 occurs in Kallātar's and Vellivīṭiyai's stanzas. According to the same scholar (*Tamiḷ cutar maṅkal* 101-102), the original name of the book, given by the author himself, had most probably been *Muppāl*, or (in

1 *Tirukkural*, lit "The sacred *kural*", 2 *Uttaravētam* "The ultimate Veda", 3 *Tiruvalluvar* (= the author's name, "Saint Valluvar"), 4 *Poyyāmoli* "The falseless word", 5 *Vāyurai vālttu* "Truthful praise", 6 *Teyvanūl* "The divine book", 7 *Potumarai* "The common Veda", 8 *Muppāl* "The three-fold path", 9 *Tamil-marai* "The Tamil Veda"

The historical problem of the date of the *Tirukkural* is rather complicated, and it has been thrashed out in a number of papers and books, published in Tamil as well as in Western languages. The internal evidence (the language of the work, allusions to earlier works, indebtedness of the *Kural* to some Sanskrit treatises, etc.) all points to a date which is considerably later than the early classical poetry (and in this respect the *Kural* does certainly *not* belong to the "Cankam" age), but earlier than the beginnings of *bhakti* in Tamilnad. The 5th Cent. A.D., probably sometime between 450-550 A.D., is the best date that can be suggested.¹

There are, as usual, a number of conflicting traditions about the author. One tradition says that he was an outcaste by birth, the issue of an union between a Brahmin and a Pariah woman. Some think that he was a weaver by caste,² others say that he "must have been" a *vēlāla* since he praised agriculture, the traditional occupation of the caste, so highly. A scholar equates *valluva* with *vallabha* and takes the term to mean a superintendent, an officer of the king.³ Another, and a more probable opinion was expressed by S. Vāyāpurī Pillai (*HTLL*, p. 80) that Valluvar was "the chief of the proclaiming boys analogous to a trumpet-major of an army"⁴

Almost every religious group in India has claimed the *Tirukkural* for itself, including the Christians. G. U. Pope sees the poet as an eclectic, who came, in Mayilāpur, into contact with Christian teachers (like Pantaenus of Alexandria), "imbibing Christian ideas, tinged with the peculiarities of the Alexandrian school, and day by

analogy with *Nālatiyār*) simply *Kural*. Though purely a speculative conclusion, it is not improbable.

¹ Cf. Es. Vāyāpurī Pillai, *Tamiḷ cutai mankal*, 3rd ed., 1959, Pāri Nilaiyam, Madras, pp. 77-96; S. Vāyāpurī Pillai, *History of Tamil Language and Literature*, 1st ed., 1956, Madras, pp. 79 ff.; C. and H. Jesudasan, *op. cit.*, pp. 41 ff.

² Cf. Pope's translation, 1886, 1. "The weaver of Mayilāpur"

³ M. Raghava Iyengar, *Ārāyccittokuti*², 1964, 206-209

⁴ cf. *DED* 4353. Ta. *valluvan* a Pariah caste, the members of which are royal drummers, and priests for Paraiyas. Ma. *valluvan* a priest of the Paraiyas, a low-caste sage, a caste of slaves.

day working them into his own wonderful *Kurral*” It is Pope who speaks of the book as an “echo of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ ” Pope, himself a Christian missionary,¹ was rather overenthusiastic in discovering strong traces of Christianity in Tiruvalluvar’s work “I cannot feel any hesitation in saying that the Christian Scriptures were among the sources from which the poet derived his inspiration” (Introduction, iv) However, whatever may remind us of the Sermon on the Mount belongs rather to the sphere of “natural law”, and the ethics of the *Kurral* is rather a reflection of the Jaina moral code than of Christian ethics (cf e.g. *Tiruk* 251-260 on vegetarianism, *Tiruk* 321-333 on “not killing”, *kollāmai*)

While the hypothesis of Christian influence is based on vague impressions, it is a fact that we find in the text several purely Jaina technical terms, and it seems that Tiruvalluvar had been “cognizant of the latest developments” of the Jaina system.

The *Kurral*’s epithets for God are very much Jaina-like cf *mālarṁmūcāryēkināṇ* (*Tiruk* 3) “he who walked upon the (lotus) flower”, *aravālyantanaṇ* (*ib* 8) “the Brahmin (who had) the wheel of *dharma*”, *enkuṇattāṇ* (*ib* 9) “the one of eight-fold qualities” (*kuṇam* <Skt *guṇa*-) These epithets of God (besides *āṭṭipakavaṇ* “the Primeval Lord”, cf *Manu* I 6, and *ṛavaṇ* “the King, the Monarch”) are very well applicable to the Jaina Arhat (e.g. “standing on a lotus flower”) and to none else, thus even the orthodox Hindu commentator Parimēlaḷakar had to admit Two of the other attributes, given by Valluvar to his God, have a strong ascetic flavour, and suggest, too, Jaina atmosphere In *Tiruk* 4 we find *vēntutal vēntāmai ulāṇ* “he who has neither desire nor aversion”, in 6 *porvāyil arntavittāṇ* “he who has destroyed the gates of the five senses” So, if there is at all any reflection of a particular doctrine in the work, it is rather the Jaina terminology and the Jaina atmosphere (cf *Tiruk* 251-260, 321-330) which we find in the text

Aram (*dharma* “virtue”), *porul* (*artha* “wealth”) and *kāmaṁ*

¹ Pope began his missionary life in 1840 in Mayilāpuri The 19th Century Christian-oriented morality was responsible for the standpoint of early translators of the *Kurral* towards its third book on *kāmaṁ* “pleasure” Of this book Drew said that “it could not be translated into any European language without exposing the translator to infamy” And Pope adds “But this is only true in regard to certain of the commentaries upon it, which are simply detestable *Kāmaṁ* is the Hindū Cupid This prejudice kept me from reading the third part of the *Kurral* for some years” (Introd. xii-xiii)

(*kāma* "pleasure") are dealt with in the work. There is no specific portion allotted to the fourth and "highest" objective of life, to *vītu* (*moksa* "deliverance"). It is not because Valluvar had left his work incomplete. Not because "he thought his people were not prepared for the higher teaching"¹ But simply because Valluvar's moral code was eminently empirical, practical, pragmatic. This life, this world, man in his relation to this material world, to society and state, to his beloved, his children and family, and to his own inner life—that was what thrilled Valluvar, not "heaven" (*vītu*). That this interpretation is valid may also be seen from the schematic representation of the content-structure which shows that the progression, the movement is from the "imperfect", "incomplete" married man, husband and lover, through subsequent steps of perfection, to the "perfect", "complete" family-man, husband and lover, and not towards an ascetic, a recluse. God and virtue as such, and "disinterestedness" of those "who, way of both worlds weighed / In this world take their stand, in virtue's robe arrayed" (23), is common to all spheres and stages of life, just like rain (*vāṇ*, *maḷai*) falls upon all.

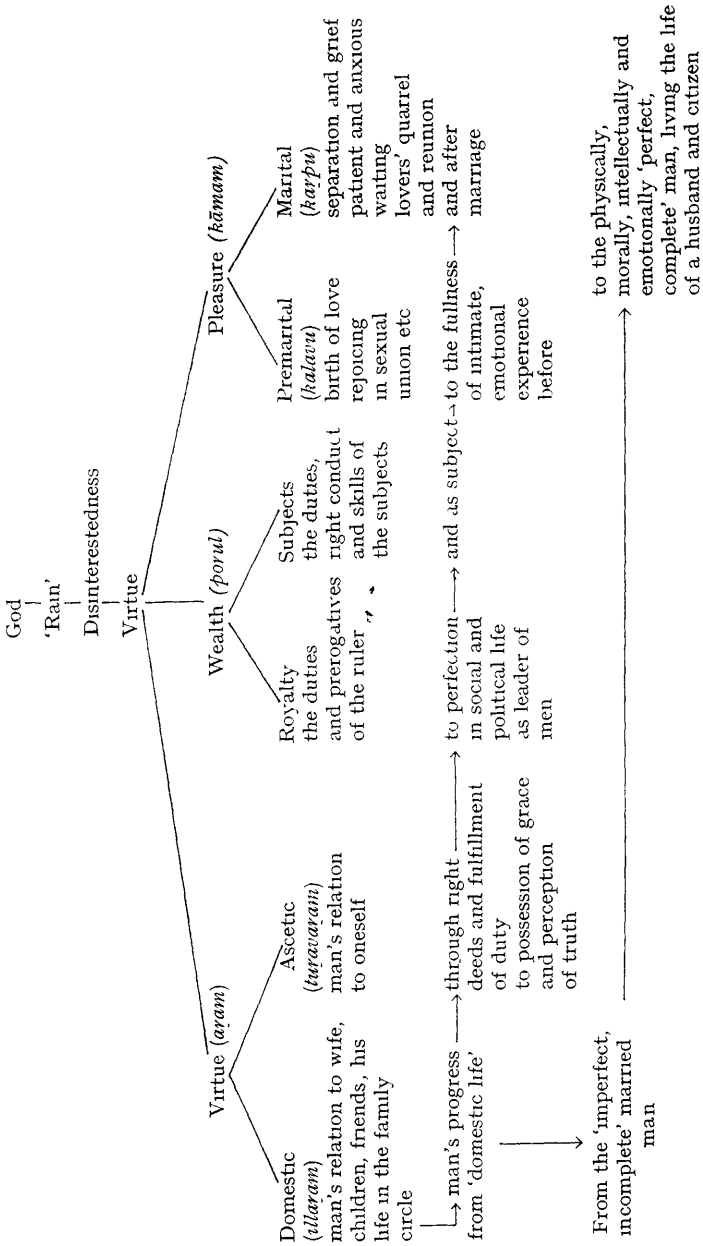
It seems that, as far as its language, formal structure and content-structure is concerned, the *Kural* is the work of a single author.

The very division into the three major parts—the *aṟattuppāl* (the part on virtue), *porutpāl* (the part on wealth) and *kāmattuppāl* (the part on pleasure)—may be and probably is the author's. The name *Muṟpāl*, "(A work) of three parts", and the fact that all commentators agree with this basic three-fold division, support this conclusion. However, any further division of the text beyond that seems to be later, since the commentators and scholiasts differ. Thus, the first book is divided, by Parmēlaḷakar, into two parts, *ullaṟam* ("domestic virtue") and *turavaṟam* ("ascetic virtue") plus four chapters as *pāyiram* or "introduction". But there are others who divide the first book into four portions. As far as the second book is concerned, there is even more variation. Parmēlaḷakar divides it into three portions, other scholiasts into five or even six parts. It seems, though, that the poet himself was responsible for the basic structure of the book and for the sequence of individual couplets, the content seems to be organized dichotomously. Also,

¹ That a wise and knowledgeable man like Pope could make such a judgement is hardly credible.

CHART 14

Structure of Content in the Tirukkural



there do not seem to be any later additions to the text¹ The *Tirukkural* is certainly not an anthology It is the work of one poet, revealing a single structural plan² The structure of the content is given schematically on the pertinent Chart The contents of the work in detail is as follows

Book I Virtue (*aram*) *Aṟattupṗāl*

Introduction *Pāyiram*

- 1 In praise of God (*ṗakavaṇ, vaṇavaṇ*)
- 2 The excellence of ram (*vāṇ, mālai*)
- 3 The greatness of those who have renounced
- 4 Assertion of the strength of virtue

I Domestic virtue (*illaṟam*)

- 5 Domestic life (*ivāḷkkaṟ*)
- 6 The goodness of wife (= *vāḷkkaṭṭunai* 'the life's help')
- 7 The obtaining of sons (*ṗutalvar*)
- 8 The possession of affection (*aṇṗu*)
- 9 Hospitality
- 10 Kindly speech
- 11 Gratitude
- 12 Impartiality
- 13 Self-control
- 14 Decorous conduct
- 15 Not coveting another's wife
- 16 Forbearance
- 17 Absence of envy
- 18 Absence of covetousness
- 19 Not speaking evil of the absent
- 20 Not speaking senseless words
- 21 Dread of evil deeds
- 22 Recognition of duty
- 23 Giving
- 24 Fame (*ṗukaḷ*)

II Ascetic virtue (*turaṇaram*)

- 25 Possession of grace (*aruḷ*)
- 26 Abstinence from flesh (vegetarianism)
- 27 Penance (*tavam*)

¹ Mrs S Kokilam makes me aware of the interesting fact that the number seven played obviously some role in the structural build-up of the book Every *venṗā* (couplet) has seven feet (4 + 3), the total number of couplets in the book is 1330, which, as 1 + 3 + 3 + 0, equals 7 The number of graphic units in the author's name is also seven *ti-ru-va-l-lu-va-r*

² " the perfect and most elaborate work of one master" (Pope, Preface, iv)

- 28 Inconsistent conduct
- 29 Absence of fraud
- 30 Truthfulness
- 31 Absence of anger
- 32 Inflicting no pain
- 33 Not killing (*kollāmar*)
- 34 Instability of earthly things
- 35 Renunciation (*turavu*)
- 36 Perception of truth (*mey*)
- 37 Extirpation of desire (*avā*)
- 38 Past deeds (*ūl* = *karma*)

Book II Wealth (*porul*) *Porutpāl*

(Royalty The qualities of the leader of men.)

- 39 The greatness of a king
- 40 Learning
- 41 Ignorance
- 42 Learning through hearing
- 43 Possession of knowledge
- 44 Correction of faults
- 45 Seeking the help of the great
- 46 Avoiding mean association
- 47 Acting after right consideration
- 48 Recognition of power
- 49 Recognition of opportunity
- 50 Recognition of place
- 51 Selection and confidence
- 52 Selection and employment
- 53 Cherishing one's kin
- 54 Unforgetfulness
- 55 The right sceptre
- 56 The cruel sceptre (tyranny)
- 57 Absence of tyranny
- 58 Benignity
- 59 Spies
- 60 Energy
- 61 Unsluggishness
- 62 Manly effort
- 63 Not despairing in trouble

(The subject *vis-à-vis* the ruler)

- 64 Ministry
- 65 Power in speech
- 67 Firmness in deeds
- 68 Method of action
- 69 The envoy
- 70 Conduct in the presence of king

- 71 Knowledge of signs
 72 Knowledge in the council chamber
 73 Not to fear the council

(Essential parts of state Shrewdness in public life)

- 74 The land
 75 The fort
 76 Way of accumulating wealth
 77 Greatness of the army
 78 Military spirit
 79 Friendship
 80 Scrutiny of friendship
 81 Familiarity
 82 Evil friendship
 83 Faithless friendship
 84 Folly
 85 Ignorance
 86 Hostility
 87 The excellence of hate
 88 Skill in the conduct of quarrels
 89 Secret enmity
 90 Not offending the great
 91 Being led by women
 92 Wanton women
 93 Abstinence from liquor
 94 Gaming
 95 Medicine

(Reaching perfection in social life)

- 96 Nobility
 97 Honour
 98 Greatness
 99 Perfect excellence
 100 Courtesy
 101 Useless wealth
 102 Shame
 103 How to sustain the family
 104 Agriculture
 105 Poverty
 106 Mendicancy
 107 The dread of mendicancy
 108 Vileness

Book III Pleasure (*kāma*) *Kāmatuppāl*

1 Concealed love (*kalavū*)

- 109 Mental disturbance caused by the lady's beauty
 110 Recognition of the signs
 111 Rejoicing in the sexual union

- 112 In praise of her beauty
- 113 Declaration of love's excellence.
- 114 Abandonment of reserve
- 115 Rumour

2 Wedded love (*kaṟpu*)

- 116 Separation is unendurable
- 117 Complaining of absence
- 118 Eyes concerned with grief
- 119 Grief's pallor
- 120 Solitary anguish
- 121 Sad memories
- 122 Visions of night
- 123 Laments at evening
- 124 Wasting away
- 125 Soliloquies
- 126 Reserve destroyed
- 127 Longing for return
- 128 Reading of the signs
- 129 Desire for reunion
- 130 Arguing with one's heart
- 131 Lovers' quarrel
- 132 Petty jealousies
- 133 Pleasures of temporary variance

The content of the *Tirukkural* is undoubtedly patterned. In fact, it is structured very carefully, so that no "structural gaps" occur in the text. Every single couplet is indispensable for the structured whole. Every distich has, so to say, two kinds of meaning: if isolated and thus removed from the content-structure, the couplets lose a very important meaning-component—their "structural meaning". An isolated couplet may be charming and interesting in itself, but it is just a "wise saying", a moral maxim, a "literary proverb" in perfect form, possessing, in varying degree, the prosodic and rhetoric qualities of gnomic poetry. It acquires a "structural meaning" only in relation to other couplets, forming higher patterns, and, finally, in relation to the entire text, which forms a perfect total structure. This fact is in sharp contrast with the early classical poetry, where each stanza was a perfectly self-contained unit, various stanzas were gathered in anthologies, while, as already stressed, the *Tirukkural* is not an anthology.

(Man in the totality of his relationships is the *suṣet* of the *Kural*. After a "cosmic" introduction, which praises God, man, supermen and virtue, the author of the book turns towards man, whose

personality is gradually unfolded in “ever expanding concentric cycles” within the family with his wife and children, within the community with his friends, and within his country, in his relationship towards the ruler and the state. Man is shown not in a static state but in development, and the force that is behind this dynamism is sympathy, even love, manifesting itself through kind thought, sweet words, and right actions.) At the end of the first part, in Chapter 24, this stage of one’s development ends by attaining true fame (*ṣukal*). However, the gradual unfolding of man’s personality goes on on a higher level through benevolence, through the grace of universal love (*arul*, Chapter 25). Abstaining from all injury, fraud, anger, falsehood and, above all, from killing,¹ the mind becomes pure, and the man becomes wise. He attains real knowledge² and universal love, there is, for him, no distinction between “you” and “I”,³ he is free.⁴

But man’s relationship to himself, to his own soul, and his private, intimate life, is only one aspect of human life on this earth. There is also man’s relationship towards society, towards the state, his place in the hierarchies and orders, his relationship towards the king, the material and social basis of his existence, his public life, in short—man, the *zoon politikon*.

It is in this second book on “Wealth” (*ṣorul*) that the *Tirukkural* is not only a book of noble, “lofty” wisdom, but also a book of shrewd cunning. Here, the moral is very empirical, very pragmatic. It is true that Tiruvalluvar approaches even these wordly matters from the aspects of friendship, kindness, justice.

“Search out, to no one favour show, with heart that justice loves
Consult, then act, this is the rule that right approves”

(Pope, 541)

It is true that the *Tirukkural* despises tyranny and that his

¹ E g 322 “Let those that need partake your meal, guard everything that lives / this is the chief and sum of lore that hoarded wisdom gives”

323 “Alone, first of good things, is “not to slay”, / The second is, “no untrue word to say”

² E g 352 “Darkness departs, and rapture springs to men who see / The mystic vision pure, from all delusion free”

³ E g 346 “Who kills conceit that utters “I” and “mine”, / Shall enter realms above the powers divine”

⁴ E g 365 “Men freed from bonds of strong desire are free, / None other share such perfect liberty”

monarchy has many features of "modern democracy" ¹ (if that is to be considered a compliment) But we also read such couplets as e g

"Make money! Foeman's insolence o'ergrown
To lop away no keener steel is known"

(Pope, 759)

Or,

"Destroy the thorn, while tender point can work thee no offence
Matured by time, 'twill pierce the hand that plucks it thence"

(Pope, 879)

¹ However, one should never contemplate the couplets in isolation We must again and again stress that they have true validity and meaning only in their patterned relations to other couplets, and to the whole And when read and contemplated in this way, Tiruvalluvar's ethics is never that of a Cānakya or a Macchiavelli Even in single couplets, kindness and friendship will show as an unavoidable accompaniment of other qualities'

"Fierceness in hour of strife heroic greatness shows
Its edge is kindness to our suffering foes"

(Pope, 773)

What is, however, even more important is the fact that the public life of man, man as a political being, is discussed only after his inner, moral growth had been described, only a cultured, a civilized man, a man who is morally and spiritually ripe, is ready to enter public, political life This is the basic "structural" meaning of the whole second part of the book

(It is the third part of the work, the *Kāmatuppāl*, which contains some of the most "poetic" couplets The reason is clear, it is in this part dealing with "pleasure" that the traditions of early classical literature, of the "*Cankam*" poetry, are still strong Every couplet in the third part may be considered a "dramatic monologue of the *akam* variety" ² The man who has unfolded his personality in the moral and spiritual order and who is taking part in the social and political life, is also entitled to pleasure, and to strictly private life.) In fact, only a meaningful relationship with woman, physical and emotional, makes him "whole" After spiritual treasures and moral

¹ Cf T P Meenakshisundaran, *HLL*, p 58 Cf e g 566 "The tyrant, harsh in speech and hard of eye, / His ample joy, swift fading, soon shall die"

² Cf T P Meenakshisundaran, *HLL*, p 53

wealth, there is emotional *richesse*, after exercising his intelligence and knowledge, there is the heart which must not be neglected. The hypertrophy of virtue, as well as the hypertrophy of skills and prowess, would be catastrophic, beauty, leisure, feelings and emotions are indispensable parts of human life. And in the *Kāmattuppāl*, we have the lover and his sweetheart in physical and emotional rapture, described in about 250 charming couplets

“Shall I draw back, or yield myself, or shall both mingled be,
When he returns, my spouse, dear as these eyes to me”
(Pope, 1267)

“Withdraw, it burns, approach, it soothes the pain,
Whence did the maid this wondrous fire obtain?”
(Pope, 1104)

“A double witchery have glances of her liquid eyes,
One glance is glance that brings me pain, the other heals again”
(Pope, 1091)

If there is true poetry anywhere in the *Tirukkural*, it is here, in the erotic couplets of the third book. Because here, the teacher, the preacher in Valluvar has stepped aside, and Valluvar speaks here almost the language of the superb love-poetry of the classical age.¹

As far as the prosodic form of the work is concerned, a perfect unity prevails throughout the entire text in that it employs one kind of metre which is eminently suitable to gnomic poetry. The *venpā* is the most difficult, and the most highly esteemed of stanzaic structures of classical Tamil literature. There are five different kinds of this stanza. The *Tirukkural* uses just one of them, the *kuralvenpā*. Here are its structural properties

- a) Only feet of three or two metrical units may be employed
- b) The stanza must always end in a foot of the following type
—, =, — ∪, = ∪
- c) Strict rules of consonance of lines must be observed (so-called *ventotai*)
- d) The number of feet is seven, the number of lines two. The first line contains four feet, the second three feet.

As an instance, a typical *kuralvenpā* (393) is quoted here

¹ Tiruvalluvar's *Kāmattuppāl* is utterly different from any of the Sanskrit *Kāmasāstras*. While Vātsyāyana's work (and all later Sanskrit erotology) is *śāstra*, that is, objective and scientific analysis of sex, the third part of the *Kural* is a poetic picture of *eros*, of ideal love, of its dramatic situations.

kannutariya reṅṅavar kaṅṅōr mukattirantu
ṅunmutariyar kallā tavar

“The learned men alone are said to have eyes
 the unlearned have but a pair of sores in their face”

Its metric structure is

— = — / — = / — — / = = —
 — = — / — — / =

Observe, how the above-said rules are strictly adhered to: the couplet has four feet in the first, three feet in the second line. The feet are of two (— =, — —) or three (— = —, = = —) metric units only. The couplet ends with a foot of the so-called *malar* (=) shape. The “rhyme” occurs in the coda of the first syllable *kann-/ṅunn-*. Observe, too, how closely and intimately the formal properties and the content are connected. *kan* “eye(s)” and *ṅun* “sore(s)” are placed in the most prominent, most “functional” slots in the lines, they bear the “rhyme” (*etukar*), because, semantically, these two words express the contrast between learning (“having eyes”) and ignorance (“having sores instead of eyes”).

No wonder that this perfect form which is so closely connected with the structural properties of the Tamil language, and which is a marvel of brevity and condensation, has proved an insurmountable obstacle for all translators of the work. What H. A. Popley said about this problem is unfortunately very true: “It is impossible in any translation to do justice to the beauty and force of the original”¹

It is precisely this perfect form which—apart from the structural properties and the “structural” meaning discussed above—adds to the sometime rather banal sounding “sayings” the “beauty and force” these couplets undoubtedly possess in the original. This brings us to the discussion of another, rather delicate, matter.

The question posited by some (notably the old iconoclast K. N. Subrahmanyam) whether the *Tirukkural* is at all poetry, is not so senseless and unwise as some scholars have indicated.² I would not at all hesitate to raise the question, but I would certainly hesitate to answer it positively without much thought. Is Tiruvalluvar to be regarded as a (great) poet or not?

¹ H. A. Popley, *The Sacred Kural*, Calcutta and London, 1931, p. x.

² Cf. T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *HTL*, p. 59. “his work cannot be denied the title of poetry”

Tirukkural is a great work, and its author must have been a great man, and a great genius, "the venerated sage and lawgiver of the Tamil people", as Pope says. But only occasionally, only rarely is he a great poet. True and great poetry appears in brief flashes here and there in the text (notably in the third book) in a few forceful metaphors and happy similes. The author's supreme skill in handling the metre is of course undeniable.

However, quite obviously, the aesthetic function, the evoking of *rasa*, i.e. poetry, art as such and in itself, had not been the main aim of Tiruvalluvar.

He was not a poet but a teacher, not art, but wisdom, justice, ethics is the basis of his work, his aims are gnomic, didactic, instructive. And he is great precisely because in spite of these basic goals, he also attains perfection of form and he, too, occasionally appears as a great poet.¹ "That which above all is wonderful in the *Kurral* is the fact that its author addresses himself, without regard to castes, peoples or beliefs, to the whole community of mankind, the fact that he formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason, that he proclaims in their very essence, in their eternal abstractedness, virtue and truth, that he presents, as it were, in one group the highest laws of domestic and social life"² Tiruvalluvar is "the great 'Master of the Sentences'" (Pope). But this "bard of universal man" is emphatically not "the greatest poet of South India" as Pope calls him.³ It is also not true that "Tiruvalluvar has made

¹ Cf. such sweet and charming similes as in 1121 "The dew on her white teeth, whose voice is soft and low, / Is as when milk and honey mingled flow" Or 1289 "Love is more tender than an opening flower" Or such striking comparisons as in 552 "As 'Give' the robber cries with lance uplift, / So kings with sceptred hand implore a gift" Or 1078 "The base, like sugar-cane, will profit those who bruise", or 80 "Bodies of loveless men are bony framework clad with skin" Cf. metaphors like in 853 "the grievous plague of enmity", 1221 "thou art not evening, but a spear that does devour the soul of brides", 1166 "a happy love is a sea of joy", 1227 "This grief is a bud in the morning, all day an opening flower, a full-blown blossom in the evening", 1232 "eye wet with dew of tears" Or such pregnant and forceful lines as 1075 *accamē kīlkala tēcāram* "Fear is the base man's virtue"

² M. Ariel, in a letter to E. Burnouf, published in *Journal Asiatique* (Nov.-Dec. 1848), quoted by Pope (Introd. 1)

³ What of Kampan, and Ilankōvatikal, and the early classical poets like Kapilar and Parānar, and the great epic poets in Telugu and Kannada? According to Pope, "in value it (= the *Kural*) far outweighs the whole of the remaining Tamil literature" (Introd. 11)! We can naturally never agree with Pope on this point.

every maxim a beautiful verse of wonderful poetry”¹ There are couplets in the text which are just skillful *venpās* containing some platitude or even banality, and not the slightest attempt has been made by their author to even strive after poetic greatness²

But, on the whole, taken as an integrated vision of man and his development, one can understand why such reader of the *Kuṛal* as G U Pope composed a sonnet on the poet, and, *cum grano salis*, one may agree with Pope when he says that Tiruvalluvar touched “all things with poetic grace”)

(Let it be said in conclusion that it is almost impossible to truly appreciate the maxims of the *Kuṛal* through a translation *Tirukkural* must be read and re-read in Tamil This fact, too, reveals something about the nature and degree of its “poetic excellence”)

APPENDIX

The language of *Tirukkural*

A number of important grammatical innovations occur in the language of this text when compared with the early old Tamil of the classical period the plural suffix *-kal* is used with both nouns of the “higher” and “lower” class (cf 263 *marraiyavarkal*, 919 *pūriyarkal*), the conditional suffix *-ēl* occurs frequently (368 *untēl*, 655 *ceyāvēl*, 556 *irēl* etc), negative forms in *-āmal* belong to the innovations, too (101, 103 *ceyāmal*, 1024 *cūlāmal*), there are more of such features which show that, linguistically, the *Tirukkural* cannot be contemporaneous with (or older than) the “*Cankam*” poems, but later³

There is definitely a higher percentage of Sanskrit loanwords in the *Tirukkural* than in the *Tolkāppiyam* and in the “*Cankam*” works A complete list is given in S Vaiyapuri Pillai’s *Tamilccutarmanikal*, pp 72-3 Since I have a comment to offer on these loans, the list is reproduced here *in toto*

¹ T P Meenakshisundaran, *The Pageant of Tamil Literature* (1966) 19

² E g 582 “Each day, of every subject every deed, / ’Tis duty of the king to learn with speed” Or 584 “His officers, his friends, his enemies, / All these who watch are trusty spies” Or 616 “Effort brings fortune’s sure increase, / Its absence brings to nothingness” (The original is equally banal and poor as the translation, but for a pun upon the word *irumar mūyarcu tiruvinar yākku / mūyarcumar irumar pukutti vitum*)

³ For a complete linguistic analysis of the text, cf J J Glazov, *Morphemic Analysis of the Language of Tirukkural*, in *Introduction to the Historical Grammar of the Tamil Language*, Moscow, 1967, 113-176

1 *akaram* (1) 2 *ankanam* (720) 3 *accu* (475) 4 *ati* (636) 5 *antam*
 (563) 6 *amar* (814) 7 *amarar* (121) 8 *amiltam* (11) 9 *amaiccu* (387)
 10 *aranku* (401) 11 *aracar* (381) 12 *aran* (381) 13 *avam* (266) 14
avalam (1072) 15 *avi* (259) 16 *avar* (323) 17 *ākulam* (34) 18 *ācāram*
 (1075) 19 *ācai* (266) 20 *āni* (667) 21 *āti* (1) 22 *āyram* (259) 23 *icai*
 (231) 24 *intiraṅ* (25) 25 *imai* (775) 26 *vā* (1168) 27 *ulakkam*
 (627) 28 *uru* (261) 29 *uruvu* (667) 30 *ulku* (756) 31 *ulakam* (11)
 32 *ulaku* (1) 33 *uvamai* (7) 34 *uru* (498) 35 *ēmam* (306) 36 *ēr* (14)
 37 *kaḥcu* (1037) 38 *kanam* (29) 39 *kanicci* (1259) 40 *katam* (130)
 41 *kantu* (507) 42 *kalulum* (1173) 43 *kavar* (969) 44 *kavul* (678)
 45 *kaḷakam* (935) 46 *kalam* (1224) 47 *kalaṅ* (730) 48 *kaṇam* (1081)
 49 *kāmam* (360) 50 *kāmaṅ* (1197) 51 *kāranam* (270) 52 *kārikar*
 (571) 53 *kālam* (102) 54 *kāṇam* (772) 55 *kutankar* (890) 56 *kuti*
 (171) 57 *kutampam* (1029) 58 *kunam* (29) 59 *kulam* (956) 60
kuvalai (1114) 61 *kūr* (599) 62 *kokku* (490) 63 *koti* (337) 64 *kōttam*
 (119) 65 *kōtti* (401) 66 *camaṅ* (118) 67 *calam* (660) 68 *civikar* (37)
 69 *cutai* (114) 70 *cūtar* (932) 71 *cūtu* (931) 72 *takar* (486) 73 *tavam*
 (19) 74 *tāmarai* (1103) 75 *tinmai* (54) 76 *tiru* (168) 77 *tukil* (1087)
 78 *tular* (986) 79 *tūtu* (681) 80 *teyvam* (43) 81 *tēyam* (753) 82 *tēvar*
 (1073) 83 *toti* (911) 84 *tōtti* (24) 85 *tōni* (1068) 86 *tōl* (149) 87
nattam (235) 88 *nayam* (860) 89 *nākam* (763) 90 *nākarikam* (580)
 91 *nāmam* (360) 92 *nāvāy* (496) 93 *niccam* (532) 94 *nir* (13) 95
nutuḥḥpēm (1148) 96 *paḥkam* (620) 97 *paḥkuti* (111) 98 *patām* (1087)
 99 *pativattar* (586) 100 *pantam* (475) 101 *paḥkavaṅ* (1) 102 *patam*
 (548) 103 *payan* (2) 104 *parattaṅ* (1311) 105 *paḥlinku* (706) 106
paḥli (840) 107 *paḥkam* 108 *paḥkkiyam* (1142) 109 *pāvam* (146) 110
paḥlukkum (843) 111 *paḥlai* (658) 112 *puruvam* (1086) 113 *pūcaṅai*
 (18) 114 *pūtankal* (271) 115 *pēti* (614) 116 *pēy* (565) 117 *mankalam*
 (60) 118 *matamai* (89) 119 *matalai* (449) 120 *mati* (636) 121
mantiri (639) 122 *mayir* (964) 123 *mayil* (1081) 124 *maṅam* (7)
 125 *man* (1273) 126 *mā* (68) 127 *mātu* (400) 128 *māṅam* (384)
 129 *miṅ* (931) 130 *mukam* (90) 131 *yāmam* (1136) 132 *vaṅcam* (271)
 133 *vannam* (561) 134 *valai* (1157) 135 *valli* (1304) 136 *vittakar*
 (235) 137 *vēlai* (1221)

Now from this list we have to exclude a number of items which were considered to be Aryan loanwords by S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, but which have since been proved, mainly by the labours of Burrow and Emeneau, to be of Dravidian origin. The lexis of *Tirukkural* is thus not so heavily Sanskritized after all. The following items have to be regarded as Dravidian in origin: *amar* (DED 137), *uru* (DED 608),

ēmam (DED 760), *ēr* (DED 2313), *kavarī* (DED 1115), *kavul* (DED 1124), *kalakam* (DED 1132), *kalam*, *kalan* (DED 116), *kuti* (DED 171), *kūr* (1578), *kōttam* (1709), *takar* (2430), *tinmar* (2634), *tukul* (2687), *tōtti* (2925), *tōl* (2940), *nayam* (2977), *nīr* (3057), *pakuti* (3154), *phantam* (3220), *paḷli* (3309), *pēti* (3631), *pēy* (3635), *matamar* (3798), *mayr* (3854), *mayil* (3793), *mā* (3923), *mīy* (3999), *mukam* (4003), *valar* (4348), *valli* (4351), *vēlar* (4555) Some items are of uncertain etymology, thus e g *uru*, *uruvu* (DED 566) may or may not be a lw <Skt *rūpa*-

The Sanskritic vocabulary of *Tirukkural* shrinks considerably, from 137 items to about 102 items. And if a more intensive etymological work were done, it may still shrink (cf. the uncertain etymology of such items as *kutankar*, *kalul*, etc., which may ultimately prove to be Dravidian)

A few of the metaphors in the text seem to be loan-translations from Sanskrit, e g *ṭṭavṭṭ perun katal* "the ocean of rebirths". Sanskrit *samsārasāgara*- Just as there is a not negligible influence of Sanskrit vocabulary on Tiruvalluvar's lexis, the author of the *Kural* is undoubtedly to some extent indebted to Sanskritic sources like *Mānavadharmasāstra*, Kāutilya's work etc. Thus *Tirukkural* 43 is almost a translation of *Mānav* III 72, *Tirukkural* 54 is a vague echo of *Mānav* IX 12, *Tiruk* 58 of *Mānav* v 155, *Tiruk* 396 about learning has a parallel in *Mānav* II 212, *Tiruk* 501 (the method of testing candidates for ministerial office) is based undoubtedly on Kāutilya I 10 (*upadhā*- "the moral test"), *Tiruk* 385 mentions the same four kinds of acts of a kind as those stated in *Mānav* VII 99, 100 and *Kāmāndaka* I 20, etc. However, this is, in itself, of no great importance, it would be foolish to deny that *Tiruvalluvar*, a mind so universal, cultured, learned and eclectic, knew these basic Sanskrit sources on *dharma* and *nīti*. He was without doubt a part of one great Indian ethical, didactic tradition. It is more important that he was also a very integral part of the non-Sanskritic and pre-Sanskritic Tamil tradition, this fact is seen not only from his conception of "pleasure" which is so typically a reflexion of the *akam* genre, but also from the all-pervading pragmatic, this-wordly, empirical and, to a great extent, humanistic and universalistic character of his particular conception of *dharma* and *nīti*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LAY OF THE ANKLET

According to Jules Bloch, *Cilappatikāram* or the "Lay of the Anklet" is one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult of all Tamil ancient poetical works¹ In spite of this, the poem was translated into English,² French,³ Russian⁴ and Czech⁵ It is only the Czech version which renders prose by prose and verse by verse in exact agreement with the original text All the other translations are more or less exact⁶ prosaic renderings of the poem and, though this is very sad, they lack almost totally the great poetic splendour and grace of the original

What is the *Cilappatikāram*? According to Āṭiyārkkunallār, the medieval commentator on the work, it is an *iyalicanātakapporultotarmalaicceyyul*,⁷ this somewhat lengthy compound means "a poetic work dealing with a story which has the elements of songs and dance (or, music and drama)" This is not a bad definition of the main formal properties of the work, but it is hardly a satisfactory answer to the question about the essential character of the epos

According to my opinion, *Cilappatikāram* is

1) a saga of the cult of Goddess Pattinī, 2) the first literary expression and the first ripe fruit of the Aryan-Dravidian synthesis in Tamilnad, 3) the first consciously national work of Tamil literature, the literary evidence of the fact that the Tamils had by that time attained nationhood ;

¹ In his Foreword to V R Ramachandra Dikshitar's translation (Madras, 1939)

² Cf V R Ramachandra Dikshitar, *The Silappadikaram or the Lay of the Anklet*, Oxford Univ Press, Madras, 1939

³ Alam Danielou—R N Desikan, Prince Ilangô Adigal, *Le roman de l'anneau*, Gallimard, Paris, 1961, A Danielou, *Shilappadikaram (The Ankle Bracelet)*, New Directions, New York, 1965

⁴ by J J Glazov, *Povesi' o braslete*, Moskva, 1966

⁵ *Piseň o klenotu—Silappadigāram*, transl by Kamil Zvelebil, Praha, SNKL, 1965 It took me ten years to translate the text and reshape it in Czech verse

⁶ The most precise of them being probably the Russian version

⁷ Cf *iviyalicanātakaḥ poruttotarmalaic ceyyula atikal ceykūra kālattu* (p 6 of the 1950 U V Swaminatha Aiyar's ed)

The legend obviously existed in the indigenous tradition long before the great poem was born, and independent of it. An old poem, *Narrinai* 216, and a probably even older poem, *Puram* 278,¹ mention the motive, it occurs later in the *Vaṣyaṣurāna*, in the commentary to *Yāpparunkalavirutti* we find a line which is part of the heroine's lament, but is not found in our versions of the great epic. According to Amitacākarar's *Yāpparunkalam* I 351, there is a poem referred to as having been composed by Pattinī or Kannakī.² The story of the "great chaste lady" is known even today in ballad-form as *Kōvalaṅkatarai*, in "purāṇic" form as *Kannakī Purāṇam*. The heroes, however, became duly transformed. Kōvalaṅ is a licensed profligate, Mātavi an avaricious prostitute, and Kannakī a terrible shrew. I heard myself illiterate workers in the textile mills of Maturai speak of "Kōvalom" and "Karni", in their version, too, the classical Mātavi was transformed into Mākati, the corrupt daughter of a *devadāsī* by name of Vasantamālā.³

The cult of Pattinī is alive in a few places in Kerala⁴ and Ceylon, as a minor cult connected with fertility rites and marriages. However, twelve or fifteen hundred years ago, the cult of Pattinī, the goddess of chastity, must have been rather important and widely-spread throughout today's Tamilnad, Kerala and Ceylon.⁵

The story must have been well and widely known, and this is the reason why the poet of *Cilappatikāram* "could afford to be irritatingly allusive and terse in important narrative passages and lingers lovingly over interesting descriptions" (Basham).

But Ilankōvatikal's great poem, although a version of the widely-spread and obviously very old legend, is primarily a story of human proportions, of human love and passion, jealousies, infidelity,

¹ *Narr* 216 *ēti lālaṅ kavalar kavayra / orumular arutta tirumāsunni*
Puram 278 *en / mulaiyayū tittuven yāṅ* (v1 *mulaiyayuttitukuvan*)

² T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *HTL*, p. 43

³ In the original poem, Vacantāmalai is a servant-girl and companion of Mātavi.

⁴ In Cranganore on the West Coast, Durgā-Bhagavatī is still worshipped as *Oṟṟamularcci* "The woman with one breast". Cf. also N. Vanamamalai, "The Folk motif in Silappadikāram", *Proc. I International Tamil Conference Seminar* II (1966) 138-63.

⁵ There exists a number of beautiful bronzes of Pattinī of Ceylonese provenience (probably the best known among them being the great statue of the standing goddess in the British Museum, 10th Cent., and a small but charming sitting Pattinī from Trincomalee, 10th Cent.) Cf. also H. Neville (1887) (transl.) "The Story of Kovalan. Ceylon Tamil Version", *Tamil Culture* X 2 (1963) 72-84.

charity and forgiveness, so human in fact, that the *deus ex machina* appears more or less casually and as a non-essential factor, or is rather forced to appear by the logic of human passions and actions. It is Kannakī, the woman, the human heroine, who alone matters to the poet, it is Kannakī, who—backed by the sympathy of the entire people of Maturai—performs her duty and avenges the death of her husband, it is she who at one moment doubts the very existence of God, and who finally conquers and overthrows the law of *karma*, she who enforces gods and fate to capitulate.

And the fact that, in the third book of the poem, this extremely human and humane heroine, this woman who is transformed before our eyes from simple, quiet, patient maid into a passionate, admirable woman of the magnitude of a Greek heroine, becomes a goddess, is the logical and very Indian outcome of her inner growth and development.

Canto 30, lines 155-164, contain the "Gajabāhu synchronism", discussed above.¹ We came to the conclusion that the hero of the 3rd book, *Cēral* king Cenkuttuvan, was a contemporary of Gajabāhu I (171-193 A D), king of Ceylon.

The Gajabāhu Synchronism became at once an object of sharp criticism. The objections were well-founded: first, if Cenkuttuvan the *Cēral* and Gajabāhu of Ceylon indeed met at the end of the 2nd Cent. A D, and if, as the text and a persistent tradition maintain, Cenkuttuvan's younger brother, prince Ilankō, was the author of the poem, how to explain the striking differences between the language of the epic poem and that of the classical Tamil lyrics, which should be contemporaneous with the *Cilappatikāram*?²

How to account for the fact that the ideologies, beliefs, customs, manners, rites and cults, the entire social, religious and philosophical background of *Cilappatikāram* is strikingly different from the social, political and cultural world of the so-called *Cankam* poetry? The civilization portrayed in the epos reflects beyond any doubt a well-progressed synthesis of the pre-Aryan and the Aryan elements in all spheres of life and culture, thinking and social habits. *Cilappatikāram* quotes some didactic poems (e.g. *Tirukkural* 55 or *Paḷamolinānūru* 46). By no stretch of imagination is it possible to

¹ Cf. Chapter 3, pp. 37-8.

² The epic poem contains such pronominal forms as *nūṅ* and *tām*, it contains twice the present-tense suffix, a later conditional form *untēl*, forms like *inta*, and a number of lexical innovations, e.g. *tampi*, *katai* etc.

consider the bulk of the classical Tamil bardic poetry and the epos—as we have it today—as contemporary literature

But the defenders of the faith in the Gajabāhu Synchronism supported their hypothesis by no less valid arguments, and they proved that Cenkkuttuvan's age must be assigned roughly to 100-250 A D, not later. In other words Cenkkuttuvan and Gajabāhu were contemporaries. Atiyārkkunallār, the medieval commentator on *Cilappatikāram*, calculated the date of the departure of Kōvalaṅ and Kannaki from Kāvīrppattinam (computing on the basis of astronomical data) as 174 A D.

The Gajabāhu Synchronism was accepted by most of the serious scholars, since, to quote K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, "it fits very well with all other lines of evidence derived from the general probabilities of history in North and South India—from archeology, from Greek and Roman authors, and from early Tamil literary sources"¹. (On the other hand, *Cilappatikāram*, as we have it today, cannot have been composed before the 5th—6th Cent. A D.

Somehow or other, the most simple solution, as it frequently happens, did not occur to scholars for a long time. And so the antagonists of the Gajabāhu Synchronism, and those who rightly maintained that the work must be of later date, joined forces and proclaimed that the 3rd book of *Cilappatikāram*, which contains the Gajabāhu Synchronism and the tradition of Ilankō's authorship, is not an integral part of the work, that it is, *in toto*, a later appendix. This was naturally a very serious statement to make. But the antagonists of the poem's integrity had some very impressive arguments. First of all, the structural argument: the first two books, they maintained, were self-sufficient, they formed a semantically and functionally closed structure, a single complete story. The story of the two lovers is finished and needs no continuation whatsoever. The third book is a non-functional appendix, an independent panegyric in the old bardic tradition, which has nothing to do with the story of Kōvalaṅ and Kannaki.²

It is true that, from the point of the story itself, the first two books form a perfectly closed cycle (at least if we apply the Western

¹ *A Comprehensive History of India* Vol. 2 (1957)

² This argument, which sounds so strikingly non-Indian, originated interestingly enough with a Tamil scholar, P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar (1929), and was later elaborated by another—Marxist-oriented—Tamil scholar, Cāmi Citamaraṅgāi, in books written in Tamil.

aesthetic criteria), but, from the point of the subject-matter and thought-content of the poem, and in full agreement with the Indian tradition and the Indian aesthetic theories, it is only just that the heroine should ultimately become an object of defecation, and that the epos should contain a panegyric on the ruling dynasty whose member very probably the poet had himself been

But, even from the point of its form, of its structure, the epos must be viewed as patterned into its three books. First of all, in the traditions of classical Tamil poetry, *Cilappatikāram* celebrates both love and war, dealing with both *akam* and *puram*, and without the third book it would be incomplete. The first book, dedicated to the land of the Cholas, is like a stage set for the opening and development of the tragical story of human passions. The second book, describing the Pandya country, contains the climax of the human story, the culmination of the tragedy. And the third book, portraying the land of the Cheras—since times immemorial an integral part of the Tamil land—contains the typically Indian conclusion of the story—the defecation of Kannaki-Pattini. Thus, the poem has three dominant phases, it is like a three-fold classical music composition, each of the phases set in one of the capitals of the three Tamil kingdoms. The “Lay of the Anklet” is the first consciously national work of Tamil literature. It transcends the barriers of different “landscapes” since it deals with all of them, it ignores tribal and clannish divisions and loyalties, Ilankōvatikal has purposely set the stage for the tale in all three Tamil kingdoms, enshrining in his poem the whole of Tamil India.

There are two other valid reasons why the third book has to be regarded as an organic, indispensable and integral part of the poem—the unanimous consensus of the indigenous tradition, and the fact that the language of the entire work, its diction and style, are perfectly homogeneous.

Those who distrust the colophons to *Patirruppattu*, as well as those who tried to prove that the 3rd book of *Cilappatikāram* was almost a late forgery, have committed one very basic fallacy—they thought that late material was necessarily unauthentic, their utterly false contention was that the content of a work could not be older than its form. But, as K. A. Nilakanta Sastri says, the colophons to *Patirruppattu* as well as the *Cilappatikāram* “embody genuine history” and are exceptionally accurate and trustworthy, as is usually the case with traditional oral material. The synchronism

of Cenkuttuvan and Gajabāhu—a reliable date in itself—is not valid for the time of the origin of the poem as we have it today, it is not valid as the date of the literary work, but it is valid for the time when the historical Gajabāhu met with the historical Cenkuttuvan, that is, it is valid for the story which forms the content of the 3rd book of the poem

Cilappatikāram is primarily the story of Kannakī Wedded when she was “not yet twelve”, beautiful “as the goddess of Fortune” but “more shy than Arundhati”, a sheltered and beloved maid, tender and silent

The young couple, Kōvalaṅ and Kannakī, keep, for some time, a quiet and happy home, spending “sweet, pleasure-filled days in close embrace” Kōvalaṅ loves Kannakī tenderly and passionately

“Flawless gold,
translucent pearl,
unblemished seed,
sweet sugar cane,
honey,
rare maid!”¹

That is how he calls her But the fore-taste of the tragedy is there, at the very beginning of the poem

“Kovalan and Kannakī lay entwined
like two black serpents on their couch,
drank to its depth their cup of love,
already having felt, perhaps,
how transient is human joy”²

Then Kōvalaṅ abandons Kannakī for Mātavi, the dancing girl, who lives in grand style, lures her lover to the fashionable resorts of the time, and who is set marvellously into contrast with the patient, chaste wife On account of a silly quarrel, Kōvalaṅ and Mātavi part So it seems at least—but the fact is that Kōvalaṅ has lost faith in Mātavi, and he was probably overspent and exhausted by the kind of life he was leading as her lover “Long-eyed Madhavi had patiently listened to all these sailor songs But she felt they showed a change in Kovalan’s feelings Angry but pretending to be pleased, she took the harp”³

¹ Transl S Kokilam

² Transl A Daniélou (1965)

³ Transl A Daniélou (1965)

Kōvalaṅ is back at home, which is sad and quiet, with Kannakī, chaste and faithful, waiting. She is prepared to follow him wherever he will go. Mātavi's plea for reconciliation is rejected. Ruined in his career, Kōvalaṅ accepts his wife's anklets—*cuḷamṇu*—to raise the money on which to build a new life. For this purpose they travel to Maturai, the Pāndya's capital. On their long and strenuous journey, Kavuntī Atikal, a Jaina nun, gives them much comfort and friendship. In Maturai, Kōvalaṅ entrusts first his beloved to the care of poor and honest folk of the shepherd community, and then walks forth alone to seek out a jeweller who would help him sell Kannakī's anklet.

Thus he meets his fate—a goldsmith, who "had the face of Death's dread messenger", who has stolen the queen's anklet, sees a golden opportunity in Kōvalaṅ's coming. He accuses Kōvalaṅ before the king, and the king says "Put the man to death and bring me the bracelet!" Since Kannakī's anklet resembles the jewel of the queen, Kōvalaṅ's doom is sealed. He is murdered by a drunken soldier of the king. "Blood gushing from the wound fell upon the Earth, mother of men, and she shuddered with grief."

When Kannakī arrives on the scene—now an entirely different being, no more the meek and silent girl we met in the first book—she proves her husband's innocence by bursting open the other anklet—incidentally, a deeply symbolic act—revealing to the king the ruby inside instead of the pearls which were contained in the queen's jewel. The shocked king is killed by remorse, and his queen dies a true *sati*. Kannakī's wrath turns now on the capital city of Maturai, the seat of crime and profligacy, twisting off "her lovely breast" and hurling it on to the city, she sets fire to Maturai and the whole town goes up in flames. Only "Brahmins, good men, cows, truthful women, cripples, old men and children" are spared. Kannakī then turns west to the land of the Cheras where Kōvalaṅ, in a divine chariot, meets her on a mountain and they are received into heaven.

A temple to Kannakī is built in Vañci, the Chera capital. Cen-kuttuvaṅ, the powerful *Cēral* king, has the stone for carving her image brought down all the way from the Himalayas on the shoulders and heads of conquered arya kings. Kannakī comes back to grace the temple with her presence, now a full-blown deity.

The poet, Ilankōvatikal, who composed his masterpiece sometime between the 4th-6th Cent. A.D. (this is how a historical linguist

would date the text) was, according to tradition, the younger brother of Cenkuttuvan, and the son of King Cēralātan Imaiyavarman. He renounced the throne which, according to the prophecy of a soothsayer, he should have had occupied. The vow of asceticism kept faithfully all his life earned for Ilankō which means simply "prince" or "younger brother of the king" the title Atikal or "saint"

It is not improbable that the author of the epos actually belonged to the Cēral royal family—though of course to a period much later than his famous forebear Cenkuttuvan. And it is not ruled out—as maintained in the introduction to the poem—that it was another poet, Cāttaṅār (the author of the "twin-epic" *Mammēkalai*), a friend of Ilankō, who discussed one version of the Kannaki-Pattinī legend with Ilankō, and this discussion inspired Ilankō to compose the poem. Or the poem, as we have it now, was composed by some unknown poet and ascribed to an Ilankō, a prince of the Cēral clan. Though an argument *ex silentio*, we should not forget the fact that ancient Tamil poetry which knows well king Cenkuttuvan (witness the panegyric bardic collection *Patirruppattu*) does not at all, not once, mention any brother of his, a prince by name of Ilankō. Anyhow, the cult of Kannaki-Pattinī must have been wide-spread and well-established in Cheranad, but, at the same time, Jainism and Buddhism were still flourishing in the South, which also shows that Ilankō composed his poem sometime between the end of the 4th and the end of the 6th Cent. A.D. He embodied a reliable historical tradition in his poem: his royal ancestor Cenkuttuvan, victorious in battles with the aryaes, is conceived as a national Tamil hero, and Ilankō describes his march to the North and finally the erection of a shrine to Pattinī, which was witnessed by a number of contemporary rulers, among them Gaḷabāhu I of Ceylon.

The only false statement Ilankō has made is that, at the very end of the poem, he brought himself into the story, as if he had personally witnessed the meeting of the kings in honour of Pattinī. This kind of fraud is well-known from other literatures, and not only from India, and may be easily forgiven.

The driving forces of the story spring out of the hearts of the heroes, mainly of course of Kannaki, Kōvalan and Mātavi. One of the greatest merits of the work is the treatment of the problem of evil, the poet's conception of guilt.¹ Who is to be blamed for the

¹ I remember having read years ago (1958) a discussion of this problem in a Tamil journal the name of which I unfortunately forgot. Its author was T. A. Chokkalingam.

tragedy? The hot-headed king? The weak Kōvalan? The attractive Mātavi? Or Fate itself?

Cilappatikāram is not a story of schematic shadowy figures, of faultless heroes and demonic villains. If we ask who actually is the villain of the piece, we are unable to answer. Nobody is entirely to be blamed—and all of them are guilty. Not a single character in *Cilappatikāram* is thoroughly bad or thoroughly good—not even the pious Jain woman-ascetic, and probably not even Kannaki.)

Certainly not the king, “the virtuous Pandya monarch, the noble Nedunĵelīyan”, who is not intrinsically unjust or evil—he is only hot-tempered and unbalanced. Wherein lies his guilt? Instead of calling for an inquiry, instead of saying “Bring him along with the anklet for being executed if found guilty”, the king says “Put the man to death and bring me the bracelet!”

(Is Mātavi the immoral and vicious harlot as she appears in some folk versions of the same matter? Not at all. She is a charming character—sweet, clever, cultured, loving, passionate, trained to attract. Was it her fault that she was born in her caste and trained to become a courtesan?)

Is Kōvalan a bad character? He certainly is not. He is of that tribe of Indian literary heroes who are “courteous, kindly, generous, competent, gentle-spoken, popular, pure, eloquent, well-descended, stable, young, intelligent, energetic, with a fine memory, insightful, artistic, self-respecting, courageous, consistent, vigorous, learned in the sciences, and observant of the Dharma” (Dhanamjaya’s *Daśarūpa*, quoted by J. A. B. van Buitenen, 1968). However, this hero “is more often than not involved in amorous intrigue” (van Buitenen), and he is no proof against the vices of society and the charms of an attractive courtesan.

The only figure that is clearly good from the beginning to the end, painted with one bright colour, is Kannaki. But she, too, is very human, she, too, is not fully perfect. In perfection there is, metaphysically, so to say, no change, once perfect, always perfect. Many of the heroines of classical Sanskrit erotic poetry and drama are predictable, they are stereotypes, they are of importance only in relation to the hero. Kannaki is very different. There is tremendous change in her. At the beginning of the story, she is an innocent, obedient and silent girl, almost a mere child. When Kōvalan returns to her, we would expect a passionate scene of reconciliation. There is no such thing. There are no recriminations, no explanations.

“I feel great shame”, says Kōvalaṅ, “at the dire poverty that I bring into this house today” Kannakī welcomes him “with a clear smile” and answers “Do not be anxious you still possess the gold circlets that weigh on my ankles”

But all this quiet beauty, this extreme patience merely shows the depth of emotion dedicated entirely to her husband With his unjust death, “that depth is lashed to a storm”¹ of pathos and passion

And yet all these people who are in fact not guilty, confess their guilt Mātavi, Kōvalaṅ, the king, and even Kannakī And this is what makes *Cīlapatikāram* the supreme masterpiece of Tamil poetry *taṅ tītu ilal eṅ tītu eṅṅē*. . . “She did no wrong I alone am to blame”, says Kōvalaṅ when he reads a letter from Mātavi (Canto 13) But Mātavi confesses her guilt by the act of renunciation, she, who was so fond of the *éclat* of the king’s court, who loved gold and jewels and extravagant life above all—she atones for her guilt by becoming a nun and persuading the daughter she bore Kōvalaṅ (Manimēkalai) to be a nun as well

The king is shocked by his own deed and exclaims *yāṅē kalvaṅ ketuka eṅ āyul* “I am the robber Let me die!” And he is killed by remorse (Canto 20)

But Kannakī says in Canto 20 “I too am guilty of great sins”, and, again (Canto 29) *teṅṅavaṅ tītilaṅ* “The king of the South has not committed crime” And in Canto 23 “Alas, I am guilty of a great crime”

Fate is of course everywhere in the poem It occurs in all crucial moments, in Canto 7, when Kōvalaṅ and Mātavi part “Inspired by fate, for whom the harp appeared a suitable pretext, he gradually withdrew his hand from her body”

Before departure for Maturai, Kōvalaṅ is “inspired by fate” to start at once, and again “they left, / impelled by fate that had devised / for ages past their final destiny”

But there seems to be an inner tension between the conception of Fate, of the *karmic* and *dharmic* interpretation of events, and between Kannakī’s actions Out of the shock and pain which she has experienced when told about Kōvalaṅ’s murder, an unforeseen, painful skepsis is born in her mind (“Is there no god? Is there no god in this country? Is there no god, no god?” in Canto 19) But, almost

¹ C and H Jesudasan, *op cit*, 55

at once, there is a tremendous resolution first, to know the truth, then, to perform an act of justice. And when this is accomplished, Kannaki goes on to fight that very Fate, to fight against the very basis of the philosophical and religious ideology which lies at the bottom of the work "I wish neither to sit nor sleep nor stop, until I see the husband dear to my heart" And she finally succeeds she compels the forces of *karma* to give up, and so Kōvalan and Kannaki are reunited.

"Then heaven's king, with all his angels, thought the time had come to proclaim the saintliness of this woman, whose name men shall ever recall. He showered down a rain of never-fading flowers, then appeared and bowed at her feet" ¹

Let us once more return to the tragedy itself, to its roots and causes 'is it true that *Cilappatikāram* is a social tragedy rather than a personal one? The fall of a society which cut in twain art and chastity, and family women, made custodians of charity and love, were set into contrast to public women—the custodians of art, leaving thereby no room for such men as Kōvalan, aspiring for both art and love? It is one possible explanation, suggested by T. P. Meenakshisundaran in his lectures on Tamil literature ²) It finds support in the fact that Kannaki and Mātavi are set into a significant contrast by the poet. Kannaki is unripe, naive, unsophisticated, reticent, whenever she speaks, she is an illustration of *matamai*, simplicity and naiveté, she is lovely, but not charming, after her unfolding and transformation, she becomes the illustration of *marakkarpū*, "stern, heroic chastity". In contrast, Mātavi speaks a lot, knows how to read and write, is literate and cultured, she sings, dances, plays on musical instruments, she is charming, sophisticated, witty, gay, even brilliant.

The burning of Maturai is, according to this view of the epic, the symbol of the downfall of the society which splits womanhood.

Another important matter to discuss is the anklet, the *cilampū*, which is so very important, so pivotal in the story and its symbolism that it gave the epic its name. *cilampū* + *atikāram* > *Cilappatikāram* "The Lay about the Anklet".

In the beginning, when she was happy after her marriage, Kannaki was wearing her anklets, a pair of them. But once her husband

¹ Transl. A. Daniélou (1965)

² T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *HTL*, p. 40

deserted her and went to live with Mātavi, she no longer adorned herself "No anklets adorned her shapely feet" (Canto 4)

It is the anklets which are offered by Kannakī to Kōvalaṅ and he accepts them (Canto 9) to sell them in Maturai and start a new life there. Thus it is the anklets that "drive" them, so to say, to Maturai.

It is one of the two anklets which, in Canto 16, becomes the instrumental cause of Kōvalaṅ's death. It is the anklet which is broken open and thus proves Kōvalaṅ's innocence (Canto 20).

However, there seems to be still deeper meaning in the symbol of the anklets.

First of all, the breaking of the anklet in Canto 20 ("The ankle bracelet was brought and placed before the king. Kannakī seized it and broke it open. A ruby sprang up into the king's face. When he saw the stone, he faltered. He felt his parasol fallen, his sceptre bent") is symbolic of *the* specific truth and of *truth* in general, truth which breaks through, which is, ultimately, always revealed. Does not, however, the round anklet and the breaking of it symbolize more than that? The circle of the story, of the plot, and of Fate, must be, and is completed, the *cilampū*, the anklet, comes to the Pāndya's court, the circle is completed (Kōvalaṅ murdered, the king and queen die, the Pāndya capital burnt) and the round anklet is broken—the human story tragically ends here. What follows is another story—a divine tale, the story of Kannakī's apotheosis.

And there is yet another symbolism connected with the anklets: in a way, the pair of them is symbolic of the married couple's happiness. While she was happy with Kōvalaṅ, Kannakī wore her bracelets, when he left her, she wore none, when he returned, she wore only *one*, because the marriage was no longer a perfectly happy and "whole" marriage. And it is very significant for this symbolism of the *cilampū* that, at the beginning of Canto 19, the remaining anklet which Kannakī holds in hand, is called "*mate* to the one she had given to Kōvalaṅ." (At the very end of the poem, in Canto 29, Kannakī, united with Kōvalaṅ in heaven, again wears *both* anklets. King Cenkuttuvaṅ says "In the sky, a marvellous vision! A woman, slender as a lightning-flash! Gold circlets gleam at her ankles!"¹)

¹ For anklets in contemporary ritual, cf. T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *HTL* 42. "In the Tamil temples big anklets made of bronze are held in the hand and moved so that the sound of the jolling stones inside may keep time to

Apart from the fact that *Cilappatikāram* is a great masterpiece of narrative and lyrical poetry, it contains the essence of old Tamil culture, and, like other epics, it portrays whole civilization. It stands at the very end of its first bloom, gilded by the rays of the setting sun of that early era which was doomed to end soon after the poem was composed, with the tremendous changes that occurred in the Tamil land under the Pallavas.

the songs sung in praise of the deity. It is thus clear that there is an intimate connection between the symbol of the anklet and the story of Kannaki, the chaste woman."

CHAPTER TWELVE

ŚAIVA BHAKTI—TWO APPROACHES

The literature of Tamil *bhakti* is an enormous complex of Śaivite and Vaisnavite texts which must be regarded not only as an amazing literary and musical achievement and the embodiment of the religious experience of the entire Tamil nation, but also as a tremendous moving force in the lives of the peoples of Tamilnad. Unlike the pre-*bhakti* poetry which had to be resuscitated and revitalized and which became only recently the topic of attention and interest, Śaivite and Vaisnavite hymns have played, since the very days they were composed until the present time, an immense, indispensable and often decisive role in the religious, cultural and social life of the entire Tamil people. To a great extent, the contemporary Tamil culture is still based on the *bhakti* movement, and it is only quite recently and among some strata of the present generation that the Tamils look at once farther back into the past of pre-*bhakti* days, and into the future, for inspiration and guidance.

It is probably impossible, at the present state of our knowledge, even to touch all aspects, forces, components and features of this vast literature, of this religious, philosophical and social movement. More than one large monograph would be needed to do so. In a series of essays the purpose of which is to introduce the reader to some of the most characteristic and crucial features of Tamil literature and culture, one has strictly to select an approach and to restrict the material rather drastically. If, therefore, the texts to be dealt with are restricted to the Śaiva texts there is absolutely no other reason for this than the present author's relative ignorance of the works of Vaisnava *ālvārs* and the fact that some choice had to be made. Much of what can be said about Śaiva *bhakti* does apply to the Vaisnava component of the movement, on the other hand, there are some very specific features pertaining to the literature of the *ālvārs*, and hopefully it will be dealt with one day by a more competent expert.

The immense dimensions of the Śaiva *bhakti* texts may be seen from Chart 15 which gives the names of the authors and their works as found in the twelve books of the Śaivite canon called *Tirumurai*.

This body of literature includes a great variety of texts, beginning with the mystic hymns of the great trio, Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar, followed by Mānikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukōvāyār*, and ending with the "national epos of the Tamils", the hagiographic *Periyapurānam* of Cēkkiḷār (Thus, the three characteristic features of this body of literature are its enormity, its heterogeneity, and the fact that it covers a period of at least 600 years of religious, philosophical and literary development (the earliest texts being probably the songs of Kāraikkāl Ammayār, round about 550 A D, whereas the date of Cēkkiḷār is the 12th Century))

Nampī Āntār Nampī (see 11 on Chart 14) is said to be responsible for collecting the *Tēvāram* hymns (the first 7 books of *Tirumūṟai*) and classifying them, some time at the beginning of the 10th Cent A D, into the seven books (on the basis of musical tunes)¹ As the eighth book, Mānikkavācakar's two great poems were added (they are not musical compositions) The 9th book of the canon consists of *Tiruvicaiṅṅā* or musical compositions sung in the Chola temples in the 10th and 11th Centuries,² the term *paṭikam* (<Sanskrit) means "ten", it is a form (consisting of 10 or 11 stanzas) which became popular in the *bhakti* period The 10th book of the canon is of a very different nature this is the *Tirumantirāvam* of Tirumūlar, his date is a matter of speculation, but since he is mentioned by Cuntarar (7621), he must be earlier than this poet His work is tantric and yogic in nature, a superb philosophical poem, which becomes the point of departure for the highly interesting, eclectic school of the Siddhais The 11th book contains works of very different age and character, the period covered by this book may stretch from the 6th to the 10th Centuries Among the most interesting texts are those composed by Kāraikkāl Ammayār, probably the earliest of Tamil Śaiva saints and by Cēramān Perumāl a contemporary of Cuntarar, the *Tirumūrukārruṅṅpatai* (from *Paṭṭuṅṅpāṭṭu*) by Nakkīratēvar, *Paṭṭuṅṅāṭṭār's* stanzas, and the two poems on Saint Kannappar by Nakkīrar and by Kallātar (narrating the well-known story of Kannappar the hunter who became mad

¹ The date of Nampī Āntār Nampī is fortunately rather well established He speaks of the Chola king Ātittāṅ (Āditya) as having brought gold from Konkunātu and covered the temple hall at Chidambaram with that gold He also mentions the death of this king Ātittāṅ indeed conquered the Konku country, and he ruled between 870-907 A D (cf K A Nilakanta Sastrī, *A History of South India*, III ed., 175)

² T P Meenakshisundaran, *HTL* p 131

after God at the sight of a *lingam*, and who, when he saw the eyes of the *lingam* bleeding, plucked out his own eyes to replace them) Finally, the 12th book is the "Great *purānam*" by Cēkkaḷār the crown of Śaivite literature, "the story of a perfect spiritual democracy" (T P Meenakshisundaran) The ultimate kernel of this tremendous epic, "national and democratic", which had a universal appeal and an enormous influence in the Tamil country and outside, is Cuntarar's vision of the sixty-two saints in his *Tiruttantattokai*, sung at Tiruvārūr in the presence of the *atīyār*, "devotees" He has mentioned their names, sometimes with suggestive epithets, including those of his father and mother By adding Cuntaramūrtti himself, we get the classic list of 63 *nāyaṅmār* Nampī Āntār Nampī's work is the next stage in elaborating the hagiographic tradition Cēkkaḷār, as a minister of state, had probably access to inscriptions, documents, court-records, and in his epic he narrates the individual lives of the saints in separate *purānas* Their stories are built around Cuntarar's vision Cuntarar's story is in fact the unifying factor and the most general frame for the poem (or rather chain of poems, since the structure of the epic is very loose) However, the basic unity of the whole epic is not that of form, but that of a message however poor, insignificant and helpless a human being may be, nothing can prevent him from having an ideal, the meanest of the mean can rise to the highest spiritual level—in the life of service and love What is important is the fact that, unlike the other epics of the same period, the sources of *Periyapurānam* are purely indigenous, purely Tamil, and that the poem is "national and democratic not only in its theme and its message but also in its language and its rhythm"¹

{ The following fourfold approach toward the Tamil *bhakti* poetry seems to me to be the most fruitful

a) the historical and sociological approach to *bhakti* as a literature of social and spiritual protest,

b) a synchronic segmental analysis of *bhakti* texts as religious literature,

c) a comparative approach to *bhakti* as mystical poetry, in comparison with other movements of Indian *bhakti* and mysticism,

¹ T P Meenakshisundaran, *HTL* p 125

CHART 15

The Śaivite Canon-Tirumurai

No of book	Author	Name of the work	No of patikams	No of hymns or stanzas
1	Campantai	<i>Tēvātam</i>	I (136)	4181 hymns
2	Campantai	<i>Tēvātram</i>	II (122)	
3	Campantai	<i>Tēvātram</i>	III (125)	
4	Tirunāvukkaicacar	<i>Tēvātam</i>	IV	
5	Tirunāvukkaracar	<i>Tēvātam</i>	V	3066 hymns
6	Tirunāvukkaracar	<i>Tēvātram</i>	VI	
7	Cuntarar	<i>Tēvātram</i>	VII	1026 hymns
8a	Mānikkavācakar	<i>Tiruvācakam</i>	100 <i>patikams</i>	
b	Mānikkavācakar	<i>Tirukkovaiyār</i>	51 chapters	656 hymns
9a	Tirumālkañtēvar	4 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		
b	Cēntaṅṅār	3 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		400 stanzas
c	Karuvūrttēvar	10 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		
d	Pūnturutti Nāmpi	2 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		12 stanzas
e	Kāṭava Nāmpi	1 <i>patikam</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		
f	Vēnāttatikāl	1 <i>patikam</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		10 stanzas
g	Tiruvālyanutaṅṅār	4 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		
h	Puṭuṭṭama Nāmpi	2 <i>patikams</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i>		42 stanzas
1	Cēṅṅiyāi	1 <i>patikam</i> in <i>Tiruvacaiṅṅā</i> and <i>Tirupallāntu patikam</i>		
10	Tirumūlar	<i>Tirumantiram</i>	9 <i>tantuams</i>	301 stanzas in 9
11a	Tiruvallāyutaiyār	<i>Tirumukapṅācūcam</i>		24 stanzas
b	Kāraṅkālanmaiṅṅār	<i>Tiruvāṅkāntu miṭṭa tiruṅ patikam</i> , <i>Tiruvavattai maṅṅamālai</i> , <i>Aṅṅuṭṭuttu vaṅṅantāi</i>		
c	Aiyatikāl Kāṭavar Kōṅ	<i>Kṣēttiratraveṅṅā</i>		100 stanzas
d	Cēramāṅ Perumāl	<i>Poṅṅannantāntāi</i>		
		<i>Tiruvāṅṅār muṅṅamaṅṅkōvacai</i>		30 stanzas
		<i>Tirukkaṅṅūṭaya nāṅṅarūṭā</i>		394 lines

e	Nakīratēvar	Kaylaipāt, kālatipāt antāt Tīru iṅkōyamalai eḷēpatu Tīru alaṅcuḷi mummamāṅ kūvai Tīru eḷukūṟṟūkkhai Peruntēva pāni Kōpappiracātam Kāetiṅ Pōṟṟittirukkaḷēvṅpā Tīrumurukāṟṟuppatin Tīrukkaṅṅaṅpa tēvar tīrumaram Mūḷānāyayār tīru vattai manimālai Civaṟerumāṅ manimālai, Civaṟerumāṅ tīruvanātān Civaṟerumāṅ tīruvanātān Civaṟerumāṅ tīrumummamāṅ kūvai Māḷaṅpillaiyār tīrumummamāṅ kūvai Kōyēḷ nāmanimālai, Tīrukkaḷamālai mummamāṅkōvai, Tīruvattai mōṟuṟṟīṟ Tīruvoṟṟiyār oraṅṅ oruṅpaṅṅ Tīrunarayār vīṅṅayakar vattai manimālai Kōyēḷ tīruppanṅyār vūrutam Tīruḷḷontar tīruvanātān, Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīruvanātān Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīruccanṅpai vūrutam Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīrumummamāṅkōvai Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīruḷḷāmālai Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīrukkaḷampaham Āḷutaiya pillaiyār tīruḷḷokai Tīruṅṅūkkaracuḷēvar tīruccāḷaiacā mālai Pēṟṟappurānam	100 stanzas 70 stanzas 15 stanzas 55 lines 67 lines 99 lines 8 stanzas 90 lines 248 lines 38 lines 20 lines 37 lines 101 lines 30 lines 23 lines 100 stanzas 10 stanzas 20 stanzas 70 stanzas 86 stanzas 11 stanzas 4286 stanzas
f	Kāḷātēvar		
g	Kāpīlātēvar		
h	Paranātēvar		
i	Ilamperumāṅ	Atikal	
j	Aṟṟivāṅikal		
k	Pattinattāṅikal		
ii	Nampī Āntār Nampī		
iz	Cēkkiṅār		

Note *paṅkam* = a complex of ten or eleven stanzas

today, I think, most scholars would agree that *bhakti* was indeed "born on the banks of the Tamil land" wherefrom it spread to other India,¹ in a broader perspective, (Tamil *bhakti* may be profitably compared with other religions of grace (*arul*), and/or with the mystical poetry of the East and the West (sūfism, Catholic baroque poets such as Juan de la Cruz, or Protestant mystics such as J. Bohme, etc),

d) a structural and structuralistic approach to *bhakti* texts conceived purely as poetry

In this essay I shall try to give a brief and simplified outline of the first two approaches—the sociological and historical analysis of the movement, and the synchronic segmental analysis of the texts

Between 600 A D and 900 A D, Tamilnad was ruled by the Pallavas in the North, and the Pandyas in the South. There was a perpetual strife between the two. To the North of the Pallavas, the mighty Chalukyas of Badami were constant enemies of the Pallava kingdom. These three kingdoms were the first political units possessive of really large territories to have been formed in South India, and, as our data show, highly developed feudal relations prevailed in the social structure of these states.

Constant war or at least unceasing skirmishes among these three big powers, their efforts to enlarge their territories, the struggle against disloyal and disruptive tendencies, and the enormous growth of administration and bureaucracy—all this needed constant influx of money, and the burden of the expenditure had to be borne by the masses of the people.

This ever-growing feudal oppression of the masses aroused a protest, a mass-movement of popular dissatisfaction and opposition, which took the apparel of a religious drive. (S. Vaiyapuri Pillai (*HTLL*, p. 100) speaks of a "bloodless revolution" which took place in Tamil India between the 7th-10th Centuries A. D. -

Thus, according to one conception of social history of Tamilnad, the *bhakti* movement is to be regarded as the ideological reaction against early forms of feudalism and the first establishment and

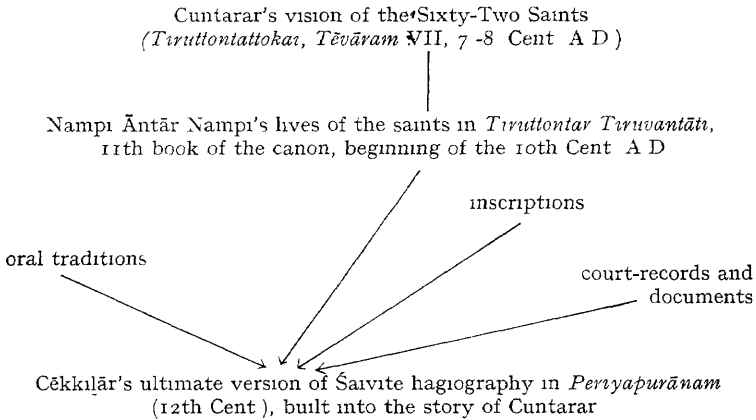
¹ Cf. S. K. Iyengar, *A History of Early Vaishnavism in South India*, Madras University Series No. 4, Oxford Univ. Press, Madras, 1920, p. 10, who quotes a poem which says that *bhakti* was born on the banks of the Tamil land, grew into womanhood in the Maharashtra and in North India, and became old in Gujarat.

stabilization of class-society in South India, in the North of India, *bhakti* is regarded, by the same school of thought, as the expression of the struggle against a fully developed and centralized type of feudalism of the 14th-17th Centuries

Among Tamil scholars, it was probably S Vaiyapurī Pillai who first formulated a socio-political conception of the Tamil *bhakti* (*HTLL*, p 100 ff, he speaks about "social equality of all" proclaimed by the religious revivalists, about *bhakti* becoming the "popular movement in the real sense of the word", about "the language of the masses and their racy idiom" etc) Needless to say the socio-economic interpretation was worked out and refined chiefly by Soviet scholars (e g by Smirnova, Pyatigorsky) on the one hand, and by Marxist-oriented Tamil scholars and writers on the other hand (e g by Cāmi Citamparaṇār, C Rakunāṭaṇ and others) In contrast, there are scholars, both Indian and Western, who regard

CHART 16

The build-up of *Periyapurānam*



the movement as a purely religious and ideological conflict, mostly as the reaction of a renescent Hinduism against Jainism and Buddhism

Though I have a number of strong reservations about any vulgar socio-political interpretation of *bhakti*, it seems to me that its conception as a purely religious conflict is necessarily an oversimplification of the whole matter

In what follows, the points made in favour of the socio-political interpretation of *bhakti*, and of the class-struggle-background-conception of the movement will be examined critically one by one

(First, there is the "class-origin" of the poet-saints. It was argued that most of the *bhaktas* or at least the most important of the earlier *bhaktas* belonged to the lower or depressed classes and castes of Tamilnad. The greatest number of the *bhaktas* were said to belong to the Śūdra *vellālar*, and there were practically no Ksatriyas among them, and, in the hagiographic legends, the Ksatriyas are said to be usually portrayed in an unflattering light.)

(Most of these statements, made by some Indian and Soviet scholars, are, however, quite obviously incorrect. A rough investigation of the caste-origin of a number of *bhakti* poets shows these approximate numbers

about 35% of Brahmin origin (e.g. Campantar, Cuntarar, Mānikkavācakar, Periyālvār),

about 35% of Ksatriya origin (e.g. Cēramāṇ Perumāl, Kulacēkara Ālvār, Tirumankai Ālvār),

about 20% of *vellāla* (Śūdra) origin, e.g. Appar, Nammālvār,

about 5% of low-caste origin, e.g. Tiruppānālvār,

about 5% of unknown origin. Āntāl was found as a baby in her step-father's garden;

The argument is rather weak for yet another reason. High or low caste, it did not matter at all, the meaninglessness of caste in the eyes of the Lord is precisely one part of the message of the Nāyanmārs and Ālvārs. In fact, if there is a class-conscious or caste-conscious standpoint discernible in these poems at all, it is (in contrast to the heroic, warrior, aristocratic-oriented early bardic poetry) the Brahmins whose importance and excellence becomes progressively clearly underscored, whereas kings and princes appear in an unsympathetic light. And what more, there are some episodes which, quite *au contraire* to the "egalitarian" and "democratic" spirit discovered by some Marxist-oriented critics in the *bhakti* movement, show that even some of the most important authors of the movement were very much caste-conscious. According to Nampī Āntār Nampī, an outcaste devotee (Tirunālaippōvār) destroys the disgrace of his low birth by entering the fire, according to Cēkkilār,

God Śiva demands that the poor outcaste enters the fire and is purified before he is admitted to the sacred presence' (The poems ignore the masses of peasants and common folk as such. Naturally so, something else was in the centre of their interest—the individual relation of a *bhakta* to God, and the inner tensions and outer conflicts resulting from this relation.)

(The second point, one with which we may agree to a great extent, is that Tamil *bhakti* literature is full of the spirit of social negativism.

A *bhakta*,¹ as we saw, was usually a Brahmin, a Ksatriya, or at least a *vellāla* (landlord-community), he thus belonged either to the very top, or at least to the upper middle strata of the social hierarchy of medieval Tamilnad. The life of the devotee or *tontar* was usually portrayed (in the canonical hagiographic literature) in the following way. After a rather stereotyped description of his birth and education, the great moment comes—the dramatic picture of the central episode—the conversion. This is inevitably preceded by a period of inner tension and by a sharp outer conflict. The important thing to note is that the nature of the conflict is usually social, and, invariably, in each episode the saint refuses to yield and becomes victorious (even if in death).² E.g., when Vātavūrār alias Māikkavācakar gets into conflict with the Pandya king whose minister he was, and also with the entire Brahmin community, or when Cuntarar publicly opposes the decision of the caste panchayat. Śiva takes the side of the devotee who protests against society or tradition—frequently, though, in the very last moment, when his future devotee is in danger of annihilation, physical or moral.

The victory against society and/or tradition, and the subsequent boon of poetic inspiration granted to the devotee by God as a gift of grace (*arul*) frequently do not lead to full denial of society, to asceticism and renunciation, there are, of course, *van tontar* who sacrifice their families, children, their life, without care and con-

¹ The equivalent Tamil term is *tontan*, pl *tontar*, "servant" or *atiyān* "slave". There are two kinds of saints—the "hard" servants (*van tontar*), the ones whom ordinary men cannot follow (they are the truly a-social or probably even anti-social ones), and the "soft" servants (*mentontar*) who became a model for all to follow. A typical *van tontar* is, e.g., the hunter Kannappan.

² There is, in each episode, a dramatic plot, and an inner, psychological development of the hero—in this respect, the hagiographic stories are better than many modern Tamil short stories.

sideration whether their behaviour is just or unjust according to accepted social rules. But they can never be a model to be followed by others. Normally, the devotee goes on living within the society, but on a different, higher level, he is now independent of society, he is free of the society which is represented by two levels, the more general and higher level of the king and his court, and the more specific and lower level of the caste and the devotee's family. The *bhakta* does not pay any attention to social matters, only two ties are now important for him—one between God and himself, another between himself and the other *bhaktas*.

Hence it is doubtful whether we are entitled to speak about the *bhakti* movement in terms of a positive social protest. Social negativism—yes, but an antisocial movement, or a revolutionary social protest—no.¹ The utmost case of social negativism and perhaps the only one carried so far may be seen in the life story of Kāiakkāl Ammaiyār (about 550 A.D.). She breaks step by step all ties with her family, with her caste, with the society as a whole, and ultimately with humanity itself, and identifies herself with the uncanny demons, ghosts, “devils” (*ṣṛy*) who witness Śiva's wild dancing in Tiruvālkātu.

The third point made for the socio-political interpretation of *bhakti* is that the texts disregard, transcend and deny all social privileges and all caste prejudices. This feature was called “democratism” or “egalitarianism”. T. P. Meenakshisundaran speaks about “perfect spiritual democracy” and “a spiritual democracy of love and service”. We may agree with the term as long as it is accompanied by the qualifier “spiritual”. Of social or political democracy, however, there are perhaps no traces in the texts. The equality and freedom refer to the *bhaktas*, to the devotees, and to them only. Just as there is no real social protest on behalf of the exploited masses of the common people but only individual social conflict of the devotees, there is no fight for freedom and equality on behalf of the oppressed. Only the devotees of Śiva are equal. Only they are filled with the feeling of wonderful freedom. They have one master alone—Śiva, they are “slaves” (*atīyār*), “ser-

¹ Even this is doubtful in case of some poet-saints, thus e.g. Cuntarar, as T. P. Meenakshisundaran says in *op. cit.* 74, “was a great political force in his times and sang the praise of the Pallavas”, cf. *Tēvāram* 8240. His life seems to have been “a divine family life, a divine social and perhaps political life”.

vants" (*tontar*) but also comrades and companions (*tōlar*) of Śiva. In an admirable hymn typical of this feeling of freedom, Appar sings *nāmārkkum kuti yalōm namaṇai yañcōm* "We are subjects to no one, we do not fear death. It's joy for us through life, not pain!" Towards each other, they, too, are "slaves" and "servants" *atīyārkkum atīyēn*, "I am the servants' servant", says Cuntarar. And a similar situation prevails among the Vaiṣṇavites.¹

Before a man or woman becomes a devotee of Śiva, he or she has to give up all privileges, based on high social status or wealth. Thus Mānikkavācakar renounces completely all his worldly ambitions and his wealth, and again and again stresses the necessity of doing so, Cuntarar becomes, immediately before his marriage, the servant (*tontar*) of God, and after he gives up the privilege of belonging to the highest caste, he becomes the Lord's comrade (*tōlan*).² However, as already stressed, the spirit of freedom, equality and service pervades only the "brotherhood", the "clan" of the devotees.

Bhakti is a personal and emotional approach to God, the individual character of such contact with the Divine means that it occurs outside of any corporation which has a specialized and privileged knowledge of sacred texts and ritual.

In Buddhism and Jainism, the liberation of the individual from the fetters of "human bondage" was achieved by total denial and renunciation. In *bhakti*, it is achieved by total devotion and worship. The liberation of the individual from the grip of social oppression was achieved, in Buddhism and Jainism, by his getting rid of society itself, society as such became an enemy of the individual. And these two religions—at least in their later "degenerate" forms in the South—were indeed strongly antisocial. In spite of the rivalry between each other, they were strong enough to be very probably a powerful antisocial factor in the Tamil society in the middle of the first millennium A.D. That is one of the reasons why, in the second half of the 1st millennium, the society and in particular its rulers turned away from Jainism and Buddhism.

The excesses committed in the name of these religions provoked many individuals and whole social strata to resistance. The early poet-devotees speak about Buddhism and Jainism with genuine hatred, stressing the antisocial behaviour of the Buddhists and Jains.

¹ Periyālvār speaks about the devotees as *tontakkulam*, "the clan of servants". For the "servant's servant", cf. one of the titles of the Roman pontiff *servus servorum Dei*.

The opposition towards Jainism is well seen in Appar's own life story. He had been a Jain himself, he led a life of vain mortification of the body, denying it even the simplest pleasure of a bath, moving around as a naked ascetic. This kind of religion built on a series of negations brought him only an unbearable inner tension (which manifested itself, incidentally, by a chronic stomach-ache). He became a convert to Śaivism, and found the omnipresent, omnipotent Lord, whom he could love and who would never fail him. Or consider Cuntarar's contempt of the Jains: he sneers at their names, their unclean and antihygienic habits, their ways of eating and living, and even at their shaven heads. According to persistent tradition, Cuntarar was responsible for the annihilation of 8000 Jains in Maturai.¹ He went as far as to deny, very unjustly, the Jains their great merit of cultivating Tamil learning. Cuntarar, too, speaks of the Jains and Buddhists with contempt and ridicule: thus, in his hymn 33.9, he mentions the "shameless Jains, jeering at everyone, who recite the (meaningless) sounds *ñamana ñānana ñāna ñōnam*" Tontaratiyālvār, a Vaiṣṇava saint, condemns, too, the Buddhists and Jains and speaks of them as of "untouchables".² Even the great Periyālvār of whom it was said that "his poems show no hatred of other religions" (M. S. Purnalingam Pillai), cries out: "Snatch the rice from the mouths of these who burden the earth! Stuff them with grass instead!"

We must of course allow for some amount of exaggeration but it is obvious that, by the middle of the first millennium A. D., Buddhism and Jainism must have lost practically all of their attraction, and the poet-saints became allies of the kings and the princes who, as already said, turned away from Jainism and Buddhism (many of the *bhaktas*, both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava, belonged themselves to the ruling classes, e.g. Kulacēkarālvār, the king of Kōlḥ, Konku, Kūtal and Kōḷi, or Cēramāṇ Perumāl, or Tirumankai Ālvār, the prince of Mankai in Tiruvaḷinātu, etc.)

Politically, Jainism and Buddhism were, in the middle of the first millennium, connected with foreign, non-Tamil powers, chiefly the Cālūkyas, and this probably induced the Pallava and Pandya kings to reject Jainism and to adopt Śaivism.

Another very powerful factor was language. Though the Jains cultivated arduously literary Tamil since the earliest times, the

¹ Nampī Āntār Nampī, *Ālutariya Pillariyār Tiruvulāmālai*, 59 and 74

² *Tirumālai*, 7

style of Tamil they fostered became, to a great extent, artificial and very much removed from the idiom of the masses. On the other hand, Buddhism and Jainism were to some extent even linguistically alien. In contrast, the language of the masses reached the innermost texture of the literary idiom of the poet-saints; the masses understood well the new language of *bhakti* poetry, it sounded to them "at once direct, clear and forceful" (S. Vayyapuri Pillai). The Sanskrit diction of the ever more influential Brahmins added to the richness of the diction of *bhakti* poetry, and the melodies of the religious songs were obviously based on popular songs, on folk-tunes.

The anti-Buddhist and anti-Jain *bhakti* movement coincides in Tamilnad in time and content with the establishment and spread of a strong Tamil national feeling and with the political expression of this fact—the origin and spread of the powerful Tamil kingdom of the Pallavas under Mahendravarman I (580-630 A D.) and his son Narasimhavarman I (630-668 A D.). In the second half of the first millennium, Buddhism and Jainism are regarded as something alien, something which is inimical to this national self-identification of the Tamils.

However, the reaction against Buddhism and Jainism had yet deeper roots. The purely intellectual ethical conceptions of the Jains were not and could not be popular among the masses, the Jaina cult was also somewhat too abstract and unattractive, and the excesses of Jaina asceticism were ridiculed by the folk as well as by some intellectuals. Art, literature and music were basically regarded as dangerous by Jains and Buddhists, and their attitude became later openly negative. The whole world was full of temptation and misery, even womanhood, motherhood and childhood lost their charms.

In contrast to this, early Śaivite saints glorified womanhood and motherhood (cf. Campantar, *Tēvāram* 1425). Nature became a form of *śakti*, indeed, God has no other form (Appar, *Tēvāram* 4552, 4560). The whole material world seems to dance and sing and play (*valaiyātu*), this is a dance of worship of the Lord (*Tēvāram* 2703). Art and music became divine in temple worship.

The endless personal loyalty of a *bhakta* to a personal and very real God,¹ and love, not suffering and renunciation, are the

¹ This may incidentally be one of the reasons why the Pallava and Pāntiya monarchs were converted to Śaivism. The endless loyalty to a personal God was used as a kind of model and projection for an unconditional loyalty of the subject to the king.

central motives and features of *bhakti* including sexual love and eroticism, which is not a hindrance, but, on the contrary, frequently a precondition to divine love or, at least, its standard symbol. There is in fact a direct connection between the idealized and typified love of the *akam* genre in the early classical poetry, and the ecstasies of the eternal love between the soul and the Lord. The trend may be followed from the *akam* pieces through Tiruvalluvar's *Kāmattuṅṅāḷ* and Tirumūlar's basic utterances like *aṅṅē cīvam* "God is love" to the relation between the human and the Divine as expressed in the great Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite poet-saints¹

The relation to the object of the cult develops individually, but within the community, asceticism is not obligatory, frequently it is missing altogether (cf. the life-story of Cuntarar who married first a temple-girl at Tiruvārūr, Paravaḷ, then a *vēlāla* girl, Cankū, at Tiruvorriyūr, and these two women occupied a large portion of the life of this "licensed friend" of God). The *bhakta* brings, to his God, his economic and social position as sacrifice—but this sacrifice does not mean a denial of the society as a whole, only the acquisition of freedom from social ties. The devotee of the Lord remained living within the community and the society, in full enjoyment of all advantages provided by social life, but, at the same time, living on a higher level, ignoring any ties and restrictions which society imposed.

Finally, the cult of sacred places, a feature so typical for both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in the South, which was probably the most "popular" element of the movement, added much to its spread and attraction. The theology of *bhakti* was realistic to the extent that it did not accept the conception of the phenomenal world as an illusion, it was theistic. God was individualized and made completely real, so to say "solidified" in a very concrete form of the idol worshipped in the temple, at a given moment in time, God was dwelling in a concrete and near place, in a familiar local shrine. And what kind of God! Śiva took on a colourful, vital

¹ It is usually the *bhakta* who turns into woman craving for the embrace of the Lord, i.e. the human soul is female, God male. Exceptionally, as in Mānikavāsakar's *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the soul is the male and the Lord the lady-love. Frequently, the *bhakta* is a slave, a servant of the God-king, sometimes, he is a child, and God his mother, he is the lotus-flower and God the sun, he is Yacōtai and God her child. Kṛṣṇa, a woman devotee is the woman longing passionately for Kṛṣṇa's embrace, or, as in the case of Kāraikāl Ammai, she is a mad demon (*pēy*), and the Lord is the dancing Śiva.

personality, absorbing much of the local *couleur*, and the attention of the people, and perhaps even more absorbing became the personality of Viṣṇu—in the role of child, lover, and intimate companion of the devotees. So, in comparison with the decayed, deteriorated Southern Buddhism and Jainism we see in the Tamil Hindu revival the triumph of emotion over intellect, of the concrete over the abstract, of the acceptance of life over its ascetic denial, of something near and homely against something alien and distant, and, above all, the acceptance of positive love against cold morality or intellectually coloured compassion.

It was said at the beginning of this chapter, that there was another productive approach to Tamil *bhakti* literature—the structural analysis of the texts into segments.¹ A few preliminary remarks are necessary.

The religiosity of a text includes basically two elements. The first element is that of the *function of the cult*—the composition, the uttering or chanting of the text, or the acceptance of a given text or its portion is directed to call forth or to sustain the connection with the object of the cult. The second element is that of the *information* pertinent to the relation of the subject of the cult to its object.

This information is classified into the following segments:

- S₁ — the interior state of the subject of the cult,
- S₂ — the external actions of the subject of the cult,
- O₁ — the respective reaction of the object of the cult in relation to the subject,
- O₂ — the state, qualities or actions of the object of the cult irrespective of the given relation to the subject, O₂ has usually the form of a synchronic projection of an event in diachrony.

As an example of a stanza which illustrates the complete pattern S₁ S₂ O₁ O₂ we may quote one of the earliest Śaiva *bhakti* poems, ascribed to Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār.)

O heart! Praise always in the fullness of love
 Him the Bestower of good, the Pure one with falling locks,
 Him who likes to give shelter to hissing snakes in his hair,
 Him who will redeem us when the day comes

¹ Elaborated in detail by A. M. Pyatigorsky in his book *Materialy po istorii indyjskoj filosofii* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 76-146.

- S_1 = "O heart in the fullness of love",
 S_2 = "praise always",
 O_1 = "who will redeem us when the day comes",
 O_2 = the rest

Indian religious literature may be divided into three kinds of texts (specific religious texts (hymns), narrative religious texts, and religious-philosophical texts). One and the same text may acquire or lose its specific religious function depending on its setting in the space and time coordinates. Reflective-religious, or religious-philosophical literature is that kind of literature in which O_2 plays the central part but is removed from its cult-relations and appears in an abstract and categorized shape. In ancient Indo-Aryan literature the first kind of texts is represented by Vedic hymns, the second by the *purānas*, and the third by the *upanisads*, the *śāstras* and the *āgamas*.

The function of the text and its content, i.e. the information it gives, are independent of each other. We find e.g. a number of texts in India which give no information related to cult and religion, and yet they have become indispensable for the cult as *the* texts of the cult, depending upon their diachronic situation.

The segmentation of the information into S_1 , S_2 , O_1 and O_2 enables us to perform a series of internal and external comparisons. When, for instance, we compare the hymns of the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saint-poets of the 7th-10th Cent. A.D. with the Vedic hymns, we may observe a set of common features but also features which are sharply contrastive. One of the most important distinctions is the hypertrophy of S_1 in many Tamil hymns, and its almost complete absence in Vedic hymns.

The intimate side of worship is highly developed in the Tamil hymns (contrary to Vedic texts). The most important feature of the Tamil hymns is the relation $S_2 O_1$ — what does the devotee ask for when addressing God, and what does God grant him?

The analysis of $S_2 O_1$ shows that in the Vedic hymns man demands from God material goods for himself, and denial of these goods to his enemies. Such demand is usually accompanied by a ritual in which one brings to the gods in small quantities the same which one wants from them in large amounts.

In the Tamil hymns, the devotee asks God to grant him knowledge of himself and knowledge of God, so that he can see him, love him and become one with him.

(Both in Vedic and Tamil hymns we frequently encounter the phenomenon of substitution, the object of the cult is no more God himself but some of his attributes) Sometimes the substitution phenomenon is very simple (e.g. the simple *pars pro toto* relation), but it may also become more complicated—the devotee addresses a third object, a kind of “duplicate” of the original subject of the cult, which has some unique, specific relation to the sphere of $S_2 O_1$ and serves as the ideal mediator between the subject and the object of the cult. In Vedic hymns, such substitute is usually an element of the material rite, e.g. *ghī*, in the Tamil hymns, it may be the heart, the mind, the soul of the *bhakta*.

The relation of the subject of the cult to its object has predominantly material character in Vedic hymns, and it lies outside the cult, *au contraire*, in the Tamil medieval hymns, the relation of the subject to the object of the cult remains fully within the sphere of the cult, and has predominantly spiritual and/or emotional character. Vedic hymns are, as to their function, a part of the cult, the part which reflects and assists the material ritual, the Tamil hymns are the centre and the basis of the cult, in relation to which the material ritual is only a facultative component of S_2 .

There is yet another important difference—the object of the Vedic cult was conceived as existing in nature in general, and, at the same time, at any given place, in other words, the object of the cult was delimited only on the cosmic plane. In the Tamil hymns, however, God—Śiva or Viṣṇu—is considered to dwell, at a given moment in time, exclusively at a given place, in one of the great shrines of the South. This “here and now” attribute of God is part of the phenomenon which has been called *henolocotheism*.

The segment O_2 fills the greater part of Sanskrit *purānas*—the personal story of the object of the cult. The object of the cult received, much later, his “second life” in the South of India. The important changes concerning this “second life” were connected with the cult as such and with its practical part, not with the conception of the object itself beyond the sphere of cult-relations.

In the Tamil hymns, the material of O_2 is usually telescoped into the epithets. There are two kinds of epithets in these hymns. One group entered Tamil literature from (or through) Sanskrit literature and has no relation to Tamil ritual practice—e.g. when Kṛṣṇa, as Viṣṇu’s *avatār*, is described as “the one who had devoured the entire universe”, this is an allusion based on the *Bhāgavata-purāna*,

it had lost so to say the temporal coordinates of the *purāṇic* episode and was telescoped into the Tamil hymns as a “flattened” synchronic epithet

Another kind of epithets has the henolocotheistic character, that is, it is connected with the particular place of abode of the deity, or with the intimate sphere of the devotee’s religious experience. This group of epithets has nothing in common with the Sanskrit tradition, it is completely indigenous

The fact that S_1 , S_2 , O_1 , O_2 were posited as segments of the information given in the hymns enables us to compare, from one convenient point of view, the saint-poets with one another. Here I shall give a very brief comparison of the hymns of the four great Śaiva *nāyaṅmār*, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar and Mānikkavācar

Campantar’s poems contain all the elements of information which are typical for the whole complex of Śaiva *bhakti* texts. However, there is in his songs a definite predominance of the segment O_2 . The content of S_2 is mostly Campantar’s struggle with the Jainas. On the other hand, the intimate, lyrical part of religious experience is relatively weakly developed in his work. He is less emotional than the other *bhaktas*, the greater part of his work is filled with material related to O_2 , mostly in epithetic form. A favourite substitute for God is, in his poems, *ṭṭṭunīru*, “the sacred ash”, and also *patam*, “the foot”, *atr*, “the footstep” of the Lord. One of the diagnostic features of his poetry is also his preoccupation with Śiva’s abodes

In his ears, he has the palm-leaf roll,
riding a steer, crowned with the pure white crescent-moon,
besmeared with ashes of the jungle burning ground,
he is the thief who stole away my soul
He wears a flower-garland, he, who in former days
when praised and worshipped, showered grace
and came to famous Brahmāpuram
He is our mighty Lord!

In contrast to Campantar, the poems by Appar are almost exclusively emotional. There is rich material connected with the individual acts of worship and with the autobiography of the poet. Therefore, apart from O_2 which is also strongly developed in Appar’s poetry, there is a strong element of S_1 and S_2 . One of the important

features of Appar's poetry is his antiritualism, this fact of the worship being fully transferred into the spheres of emotion and vision seems to anticipate the most typical features of the poetry of the *Cittar* and of Tāyumāṇavar

One of his best-known poems begins with the line *nāmārkum kutiyallōm namaṇaṇ yañcōm* ¹

To none are we subject!
 Death we do not fear!
 We do not grieve in hell
 We never tremble
 and we know no illness
 We do not crouch and crawl
 It's joy for us through life,
 not pain!

In Cuntarar's poetry, there is again a strong preference for S_1 , but of a different kind than by Appar. Cuntarar's poetry is very near to erotic lyrics, the material of his hymns is most intimately connected with his innermost emotions, with the events of his life, and even the epithets, forming the segment O_2 , are connected with the intimate aspect of worship, with the body of the Beloved ²

I was sold
 and bought by you
 I am no loan
 I am your slave
 of my own free will!
 You made me blind
 Why, Lord,
 did you take away
 my sight?
 You are to blame!
 If you will not restore
 the sight of my other eye—
 well, may you then live long!³

Finally, there is Mānikkavācakar, whose work is usually considered to be the most typical and the ripest expression of Śaiva *bhakti* in Tamil literature

The structure of his *Tiruvācakam* is rather complex. It has 51

¹ Appar, *Tēvāram*, *Kalākam* ed., 357

² There is a popular saying in Tamil, attributed to Śiva himself "My Appaṇ sung of myself, Campantaṇ sung of himself, Cuntaraṇ sung of women"

³ Cuntarar, *Tēvāram*, *Pat* 95, 2

chapters, containing 656 hymns After the *akaval* portion, which contains an entire inventory of Śiva's epithets, and the whole canon of accepted forms of Śaiva worship, follow the *patikams*, divided usually into quatrains with refrains or catch-words There is a clear hypertrophy of the segment S_1 Religious emotion achieves, in these poems, a strength and fullness hardly achieved anywhere else The love of the devotee, which is the central and basic feature of his *religio*, is responded to by the object of worship with *arul*, divine grace The segment S_2 is almost entirely suppressed, since everything what happens on the side of the subject of worship happens within his heart and soul Most of his hymns have the pattern $S_1 O_1 (O_2)$ The central and most important portion of his hymns concerns the relation $S_1 O_1$

O *kuyil* who calls from flower-filled groves
listen
He came as a Brahman and revealed
his lovely rosy feet
He is mine
he said with infinite grace
and made me all his own
All glowing flames his form
The Lord Supreme
Go
Call him once again

Tiruvācakam, Kuyirpattu 10
(Transl by S Kokilam)

Below an analysis is given of two quatrains from his *Tiruvācakam*
(in A K Ramanujan's translation)

I am the very last, but in your mercy you made me your own,
O Lord of the Bull But, look, now you give me up,
O Lord, dressed in the fierce tiger's skin, O King everlasting of
Uttarakōcamankai,
O Lord of the matted locks I faint Support me, Lord, Our Own
I refused your grace in my ignorance, O jewel!
You loath me Look, you give me up Cut down
this chain of acts and make me yours, O King of Uttarakōcamankai!
Don't the great ones always bear with the lies of tiny puppies?

Observe the fact that, in both poems, the segment S_2 —in contrast to Campantar's and Cuntarar's hymns—equals zero, the segment O_2 is developed, but not too strongly (in contrast, e.g., to Appar's or Campantar's poems) It is the segments S_1 and O_1 which are filled with material The second hymn in particular has a neat pattern of $S_1 O_1 (O_2)$

	S ₁	S ₂	O ₁	O ₂
1	Is the very last of Śiva's devotees		Made him his own through his mercy	Rides the bull Is clad in tiger-skin
	Fears to be forsaken by Śiva		Gives him up	King of Uttarak
	Is tired and faints		(Supports him)	Has matted locks
	Prays to be supported by Śiva			The Lord
2	Lives in ignorance		Loathes the devotee	Jewel
	Refuses the grace		Gives him up	
			Destroys the devotee's chain of actions	
	Fears to be forsaken by Śiva		Makes him his own	King of Uttarak
	Considers himself to be a miserable dog		Bears with the devotee's lies	He who is great

Another typical feature of *Tiruvācakam* is the development of the system of the object—an elaboration and “universalization” of the object which results in the fact that the object engulfs as it were the whole phenomenal world including the subject of the cult. Thus, the hymn is, in part at least, transformed into a religious-philosophical treatise, and worship is accompanied by reflection

He is the Ancient One, who creates the Creator of all,
He is the God, who preserves the Preserver of things created,
He is the God who destroys the Destroyer,
But, thinking without thought, regards the things destroyed

(Transl G U Pope, *Tiruvācakam* III, 13-16)

The culmination of this development is reached in the *Civapurānam*. According to this poem, the only aim of the poet's life, of his trials and efforts, is the complete liquidation of *karma*. To achieve this, one must be born as a human being, after passing through different births not only in the organic but also in the anorganic nature.

This cur
in ugly existence
to praise you
knows no words
As grass as weed
as worm as tree
as carnal beings
as bird and as snake
as rock as man
as devil and as demon

as ascetic
 as god
 as being and non-being
 all creations
 I've lived and tired
 My Lord
 My cosmic eye has seen
 your golden feet Today
 I've reached my home

Tiruvācakam, Civaṣurānam 24-32
 (Transl by S Kokilam)

Śiva gives the soul the privilege to be born in human form Śiva grants the devotee the gift of love and true knowledge, and, finally, Śiva helps to annihilate completely the devotee's *karma*. Thus *karma* has lost its absolute character, it is no more *the* transcendental and eternal law. It is Śiva, the God, at once transcendental and personal, who is absolute in every sense of the term.

Civaṣurānam has been called "The Tamil Upaniṣad". Not only the *Civaṣurānam*, but the whole of *Tiruvācakam* is the culmination of Śaiva *bhakti* hymnic literature, and, at the same time, the beginning of the specific system of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy. It has always played an enormously influential role in the entire spiritual culture of Tamilnad.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE IMPERIAL POET

In the standard German history of Indian literatures,¹ revised in 1961, we do indeed come across the name of Kampan. The author has devoted to "the greatest epic poet of Tamil land" (T. P. Meenakshisundaran), to "the king of Tamil literature" who "represents the Tamil mind at its ripest and noblest" (C. and H. Jesudasan)—11 lines of small print, and these 11 lines abound in general statements.² And yet, Kampan's *Irāmāvātāram* is not just an epic poem, it is an entire literature and, as the Jesudasans say, "to the Tamilian mind, one of the world's wonders is its ignorance of him" (*op cit* 168) "The field of research in Kamban is vast as the sea", and, as we have specialized "Dantists" or Shakespearean scholars, we are equally entitled to have specialized "Kambanologists"³

Hence, again, just like in the case of the *bhakti* literature, we have to make a choice, and select a few, particularly relevant, critical and interesting features of Kampan's great work, and deal with these rather than try to give an over-all picture of the poem and its creator.

There are no reliable enough sources about the poet and his life. Even his name presents a problem—it is of course the name of Śiva in Kāñcī (*Tēvāram* 3240). There was also a Pallava king, Kampavarman (870-912? See K. A. N. Sastri, *A History of South India*¹¹, 175), in fact the very last of the Pallava kings. According

¹ H. von Glasenapp, *Literaturen Indiens*, 1st ed. 1929, rev. ed. 1961.

² such as "Behebt ist Kambans Rāmāyana vor allem wegen der Eleganz und des Wohlklangs seiner Sprache" or "Gross ist er in der Verwendungs von Bildern und Gleichnissen und anderem schmuckenden Beiwerk".

³ Incidentally, Kampan is sometimes called "the Homer of Tamil literature" or "the Shakespeare of Tamil literature". Nothing is more misleading than these entirely empty metaphors. Homer is Homer, Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and Kampan is Kampan. They have nothing substantial in common. In the Tamil tradition, Kampan is called very often *kaviccak-kiravarthi*, "the emperor of poets", since he is so "supreme". He is, though, not the only Tamil poet to bear this title. Thus, e.g. Cayankontār (the author of *Kalvinkattuṅṅavani*) is also "emperor of poets" (cf. *Kulōttuṅṅai Pillaittami*, 14, and *Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library Catalogue* Vol. I, p. 288). Another "emperor of poets" is Ottakkūtār (cf. *Takkayākapparam* 813).

to one legend, the poet was born in the vicinity of a temple-pillar (*kampam*, *stambha*-), according to another story, he was the son of the king of *Kampanātu*, other stories associate his name with *kampu*, "millet", or *kampam* "pillar" or "stick", a well-known proverb says that in Kampan's home even a post for tying cattle will compose verses ¹

What we do know is that he was a native of Tiruvaluntūr (Tanjore district), of the *wacca* community (temple drummers, or according to others, *pūjāris* in Māriyamman's temples), and that he was patronized by a chieftain called Cataiyappaṅ or Cataiyaṅ, to whom he thankfully refers in every thousandth verse of his poem

Another problem is Kampan's date. According to one stanza, the year of the composition of his work is 885 A D ² An alternative interpretation of the same stanza puts Kampan in the 12th Cent ³ On the basis of another verse, and the frequent occurrence of the word *uttamaṅ*, the work is assigned to the 10th Cent A D, to the reign of Uttama Chola. According to T. P. Meenakshisundaran "this seems the most reasonable view" (*op cit* 102). Others, however, will interpret this verse as referring to 1185 in the reign of Kulōttunkaṅ III (1178-1216), and there is inscriptional evidence which shows that this Chola king was called *Tiyākavirṇōtaṅ* to whom Kampan refers (in *Yuttakāntam*, *Maruttumalaṅp* 58) ⁴ There is a stanza attributed to Kampan in *Tamilnāvalar caritai* in praise of a king of Varangal who belongs to the same period. Once, in *Kutkintākāntam*, *Pilamninkuṅp* 35, Kampan refers to Amalaṅ who is identified with Chola Kulōttunka II (1132-1150) praised by the Chola court-poet Ottakkūttan ⁵ Hence it seems to be true that Kampan was not prior to Kulōttunka Chola II, and the upper limit is set by Periya Āccāṅ Pillai (first half of the 13th Cent) who quotes from Kampan in his commentary to *Tiviyappirapantam*. A probable, though by no means certain date for Kampan is, therefore, the 12th Cent A D. As T. P. Meenakshisundaran says, "in any case all these dates fall within the period of the Imperial Cholas" (*op cit* 102) ⁶

¹ *kampan vittuk kattuttarivṅm kaviccollum*

² Cf. V. V. S. Aiyar's introduction to *Pālakāntam* (1917)

³ *Centamiḷ* III, 171-81

⁴ Cf. Es. Vaiyāpuri Pillai, *Tamilccutarmanikal*, III ed., 1959. Also *Centamiḷ* I, p. 122

⁵ *Kulōttunkacōḷaṅṅulā* 157

⁶ For a detailed discussion in Tamil of this problem cf. Es. Vaiyāpuri Pillai, *Tamilccutarmanikal*, III ed., 1959, pp. 127-149

This is, then, the sum of our knowledge of the poet and his date

As far as the work itself is concerned, one can point out, as already said, only to a handful of those features which one considers to be most relevant and important, at our age and for the contemporary understanding and appreciation of Tamil literature among non-Tamil and non-Indian readers

First, it was definitely not Kampan who discovered Rāma's story for the Tamils. The *Rāmāyana* story was actually known in the Tamil South in the early classical age itself, at least one thousand years before Kampan. In the very early texts, *Akam* 70 13-16 and *Puram* 378 18-21, there are clear allusions to the story of Rāma. In the *Cilappatikāram*, 14 46-48, Rāma is referred to as suffering because of separation from his beloved, and *ib.* 13 64-66, the city of Pukār, after Kōvalan had left it, is compared to Ayodhyā after Rāma's departure. Naccinārkkinīyar's commentary on *Tolk* 1021 quotes stray *venṇās* which may be from an earlier Tamil *Rāmāyana* version.

The Vaisnava *bhakti* hymns are of course full of Rāma as the *avatār* of Viṣnu, T. P. Meenakshisundaran (*op cit* 104-105) quotes several instances to prove that Kampan obviously knew and used these poems. It is however, interesting to notice the fact that, "while the Tamils have gone on attempting *Mahābhāratas*, no man has dared to attempt the *Rāmāyana* after Kampan",¹ though there were *Rāmāyanas* before him.

Second. The *Irāmāvatāram* of Kampan is one of the few Tamil literary works which were well-known outside Tamīlnad. It was rather popular in the Kannada country (a 14th Cent. Kannada inscription from Mysore refers to *Kamṇadarāmāyana*). According to a Malayalam anecdote, Śiva was born as Kampan and composed the *Kamṇarāmāyanam* "consisting of the thirty-two dramas enacted even today as a part of the ritual during the annual festivals in the temples of Śiva in the northern part of Kerala" (T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *op cit* 106). Rāmānuja (who died in 1137) is praised by one of his disciples as famous for his interest in *Rāmāyana* (*Rāmānucar Nūrrantāri* 37). If Kampan belonged to an age earlier than the 12th Cent., Rāmānuja might have known his great poem. The influence of the great Tamil philosopher travelled to North India and spread through to Rāmānanda, whence a connection may

¹ The Jesudasans, *op cit* 183

be established with Kabīr and Tulsīdās. There is much speculation about the influence of the Tamil poem on the Northern versions of the Rāma story.

Third. One of the crucial points is, naturally, the relation between Vālmīki and Kampan. That the Tamil epic is not a translation of Vālmīki is quite clear, and one might point to a great number of major and minor differences between the great Sanskrit epic and the Tamil poem. On the other hand, in the main story Kampan follows the tradition rather closely without making any great changes. The plot and many of its details are taken from Vālmīki. The division into books (*kāntam*) and the subdivision into cantos (*patalam*) is taken from Vālmīki, too. The epic is basically modelled on the rhetoric of Sanskrit *kāvya*s, not on the more indigenous Tamil epic tradition. And, above all, Kampan is a learned poet,¹ and his great erudition in both Sanskrit and Tamil tradition, written and oral, is evident everywhere. On the other hand, the Tamil poet introduced significant changes into minor episodes, and some of these changes have been sufficiently commented upon (as, e.g., the premarital love of Rāma and Sītā which is not found in Vālmīki). Here, too, one has to make a choice and try to show what seem to be the most characteristic and the most easily illustrative points of difference between the *āṭīkavī* (Vālmīki) and Kampan's Tamil work, and to focus on the "Tamilness" of the Tamil *Irāmāvātāram*.

Kampan's ideal, the *Rāmarājya*, Rāma's rule, the heavenly kingdom to be established, is set into an ideal environment of country and city which, though it retains its original name, has a number of new, concrete and purely South Indian features. He has utilised the ideal descriptions of the *aiṅṭamar* found in the early classical literature, the five ideal landscapes appear quite significantly in stanzas 23 ff. The fact is very obvious e.g. in stanza 28

Turning forest into slope,
field into wilderness,
seashore into fertile land,
changing boundaries, exchanging
landscapes,
the reckless waters
roared on like the pasts
that hurry close on the heels
of lives

(Transl. A. K. Ramanujan)

¹ There is even a popular saying which reflects this: *kalviyir periyavan kampan* "Kampan is greatest in learning".

Not only that the entire opening passage on waters, taking many shapes and forms, is unique, characteristically Tamil, and none of this is in Vālmīki

Caressing the lover's hair,
the lovers' body, the lovers' limbs
concubines take away whole hills
of wealth yet keep little
in their spendthrift hands
as they move on

so the waters
flow from the peaks to the valleys
beginning high and reaching low
(17)

Born of Himalayan stone
and mingling with the seas,
it spreads, ceaselessly various,
one and many at once,
like that Original Thing
even the measureless Vedas
cannot measure with words
(30)

Through pollen-dripping groves
clumps of champak
lotus pools
waterplaces with new sands
flowering fields cross-fenced
with creepers

like a life filling and emptying
a variety of bodies

the river flowed on.
(29)

(Transl. A. K. Ramanujan)

Like god, the rains and the floods take the form of many things,
like god appearing so different in the beliefs of various sects, water
takes many different forms according to the shapes men give it

Stealing milk and buttermilk,
guzzling on warm ghee and butter
straight from the pots on the ropes,
leaning the *marutam* tree on the *kuruntam*,
carrying away the clothes and bracelets
of goatherd girls at watergames

Like Kṛṣṇa dancing
on the striped and spotted snake
the waters are naughty

(26)

(Transl. A. K. Ramanujan)

The ideal city, Ayodhyā, the seat of civilization, is governed by the ideal of *aṛam* (*dharma*), "rightness, righteousness, justice", when Rāma is exiled, *dharma* goes weeping after him. In Rāma's city, there are no poor, because there are no rich, there are no learned ones, because there are no uneducated. In contrast, there is Lankā, also a seat of civilization, equally rich, perhaps even more so. However, while Ayodhyā is a seat of love and divine light, Lankā is governed by *maṛam*, by militant heroism, the seat of a Titan, whom even the gods fear, and who has an utter disregard for *dharma*, however cultured and refined he may be.¹

In the characterization of some figures, there are considerable differences between Kampan's work and its Sanskrit inspiration. I shall give at least two instances of such changes introduced by Kampan.

1ST THEME. THE EPISODE OF SUGRĪVA, VĀLI AND TĀRĀ

Vālmīki

Tārā is the wife of the monkey king Vāli. After Vāli's death, the victorious Sugrīva takes her as his wife and his love is reciprocated by Tārā. Laksmana, enraged at the ungratefulness of Sugrīva (whom Rāma helped to kill Vāli and regain his throne), is pacified by Tārā.

Kampan

The moral justification for Vāli's death is the fact that he has taken forcibly Sugrīva's wife from him. Tārā becomes a saintly widow after the death of her husband, and comes to pacify Laksmana, who is reminded by her widow's dress and ascetic behaviour of his own mother, left as a widow in Ayodhyā.

¹ Here one should probably at least mention the fact that the *Kampan-māyanam* has become the target of attacks in rather recent days, mostly by the protagonists of the "Dravidian movement". Some speakers of the D. K. and D. M. K. parties tried to discredit the poem by pointing to the various moral fallacies of the hero (never on aesthetic grounds¹), e.g. Rāma's behaviour towards Sītā after she was rescued from Lankā, Rāma's role in the killing of Vāli etc., by interpreting Rāma's war against Lankā as the Aryans' brutal conquest of the culturally much superior Dravidians, by accepting Rāvana as the true hero of the story. The last point was made very explicit by a contemporary Tamil scholar-poet (Kuṭantaḷ Pulavar) who composed an "anti-epic", *Iṅṅaṅaṅ Kāppiyam*, a "chanson de Rāvana". There were other scholars who tried to point out an immense number of "interpolations" and thus "reconstruct" the "original" Kampan in agreement with the aims of the Dravidian movement.

2ND THEME THE STORY OF AHALYĀ

Vālmīki

Ahalyā, the wife of the sage Gautama, willingly accepts Indra's embrace ("O Rāghava, though Ahalyā recognized Indra disguised as her lord, yet she acceded to his request") Whatmore, she enjoys it "Then Ahalyā addressed Indra saying 'O Indra, I am highly gratified, now depart quickly, unobserved'" She is purified into a chaste woman by the touch of the divine dust from Rāma's feet, after she has been turned into a stone by her husband Indra was deprived of his manhood by the curse of Gautama, but later the testicles of a ram were grafted on to him

Kampan

Ahalyā is chaste, she is duped by Indra's impersonation, she knows she is sinning only in the act, but her mind does not take part in the sin She repents ("Ahalyā stood stunned, bearing the shame of a deed that will not end in this endless world") Indra steals away in the shape of a cat, and Gautama curses him ("May you be covered / by the vaginas of a thousand women") Ahalyā is turned into a black rock Rāma's eyes fall on the rock, and as the dust of his feet blows on it, Ahalyā is revived

The Ahalyā episode is handled more effectively and more dramatically by Kampan The two innovations (Indra stealing away in the shape of a cat, and the thousand vaginas as a sign of shame on Indra's body) seem to be folklore motives (A K Ramanujan). But most important of all is the difference in the conception of Ahalyā's character, while, in Vālmīki, she enjoys her extramarital adventure with the prince of gods, in Kampan she is in fact chaste The episode is related organically to other episodes and to the basic motive of Kampan's epic—Rāma's incarnation in order to release all souls from the misery of this world, and the response of the souls through *bhakti*

There are episodes in Vālmīki which, for Kampan, are obviously very important and he dwells on them in great length (Rāma's marriage is described by Kampan in five chapters) Sometimes Vālmīki has no more than one or two lines where Kampan elaborates an entire episode There is also a tremendous difference between Vālmīki and Kampan in form, Kampan's poem is rather like a string of self-contained and individual stanzas, in contrast to Vālmīki's majestic epic flow of thousands of *ślokas* In about 40 000 lines Kampan has used, with extreme skill, 90 different variations of *kavi*, *viruttam* and *turai* metres

The changes which Kampan introduced are not necessarily improvements In fact, it might be argued that the more crude, the more straightforward, more heroic and dignified version of Vālmīki,

which has many a feature of a "morality tale", of a *Marchen* and a *chanson de geste*, has not really much improved by Kampan's delicate and sophisticated touches ¹

After a macroscopic or telescopic, and probably rather over-simplified and impressionistic view of the epic we should now try and take a more proximate, a closer look at two or three small portions of the great work

Cūrppanakai, the sister of Irāvanan, comes into Rāma's presence "like a young peacock, with sweet words, like a swan, a flashing creeper, like poison, like the daughter of wickedness" Listen to the measure of her footfall

*pañciyolir viñcukulir pallavama nunka
ceñceviya kañcanimur cīratīya lāki
añcolila maññariyeṇa vaṇṇameṇa miṇṇum
vañciyeṇa nañcameṇa vañcamakal vantāl*

(*Ārānyakkāntam, Cūrppanakarṇ 24*)

The fascinating, regular metrical pattern is definitely suggestive of the triumphant, dance-like, wicked rhythm of her gait

— = — / — = — / — = — / — —

What is, however, so impressive, is the sound-symbolism of this stanza, by an extremely skillful use of high and front vowels and palatal consonants, plus the rhythm and the alliterations and consonance placed in the crucial slots, Kampan has achieved to convey the picture of that malevolent, demoniac and weird beauty

i	14	u	4
e	7	o	2
	a	28	

The front high *i* and the front *e* are very frequent (14 + 7, 1 e 21 in comparison with 28 *a*'s, *a* being the most frequent vowel in the overall system of Tamil sounds), among the consonants, the palatals give the predominant colour to the whole stanza For the Tamil reader there is—apart from the direct acoustic effect of the sounds—a subconscious association between the palatal cluster -ñc- and things which are bizarre, uncouth, dangerous, deadly, e.g. *añcal*

¹ There have always been voices strongly critical of Kampan, some of them taking the shape of crude folk-sayings like *kampan-vampan* "K - the bombastic talker", or stanzas like the one ascribed to Kālamēkam *nārāyananar nārāyan enṇē kampan nērāka vāreṇṇāl varreṇṇēṇ vāleṇṇāṇ valleṇṇēṇ naraṇṇēṇāl narreṇṇēṇ* "if K could say Nārāyan for (the correct) Nārāyanan, then I shall say *var* for *vār* . " etc

was not easy for him to show the mysterious state of God, he has succeeded, I think, better than Vālmīki, to show Rāma as a man (and hence the title, *Irāmāvatāram*, "The Descent of Rāma", lit "the Rāma's becoming an *avatār*"). There is a phrase which sums up his conception of Rāma. *mānītam vēnratanyē* "truly, human nature has won!"¹

¹ 4 3 19 Cf T P Meenakshisundaran, *op cit* p 119

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE *CITTAR* AN ENIGMA

“They are most popular works in Tamil and there is no pure Tamilian, educated or uneducated, who has not committed to memory at least a few stanzas from one or other of them ”(M S Purnalingam Pillai)

Here and there one comes across stray poems in Tamil which have a number of features in common a protest, sometimes expressed in very strong terms, against the formalities of life and religion, rough handling of priests and Brahmins in general, denial of the religious practices and beliefs of Brahmanism, and not only that an opposition against the generally accepted pan-Indian social doctrine and religious practice, protest against the abuses of temple-rule, emphasis on the purity of character, claims made by the authors of these poems that they have achieved certain psychokinetic powers and other capabilities which belong to the sphere of parapsychological phenomena, use of imaginative and ambiguous language, rather puzzling, though strongly colloquial, no systematic doctrinal exposition Finally, all these poems are ascribed to a body of sages known as the *cittar*, the Siddhas

The writings of the *cittar* belong to the most perplexing and intricate pages in the history of Tamil literature and culture It is a very provocative puzzle, the flashes of exceptional knowledge and deep wisdom, and the social and philosophical context of the writings of the *cittar* are so stimulating and exciting that one feels compelled to investigate the matter and to try to unravel its mysteries Besides, some *cittar* poems are truly great poetry

Who were the *cittar*? What have they written and when did they write? At present, we are almost unable to answer even these fundamental questions with any appreciable degree of certainty

Why should it be so? There are at least three major causes for this highly unsatisfactory state of affairs First, nobody has ever published the writings of the Tamil Siddhas *in toto*, and in a critical or even a near-to-critical manner The first modern comprehensive—but by no means complete—edition of these poems appeared in

1947 and was reprinted in 1956¹ It is not even an approximation to a critical edition (though the editor is capable of preparing near-to-critical editions, as we know e.g. from his excellent edition of *Iravayanār Akapporul*), it lacks the *apparatus criticus*, there is no commentary on the poems, no notes, reading variations are not given—in short, the book is rather a kind of “popular print” serving as an aid to memory for those who profess devotion to the *cittar*. We must, nevertheless, be grateful to the editor for having collected the texts and for having them printed in one handy volume²

But why this neglect of the writings of the *cittar*? It seems that the texts have been regarded, by the adherents of the *cittar* move-

¹ *Cittar nānak kōvai*, edited by Mē VI Vēnukōpālap Pillai, Madras, 1947, 2nd ed. 1956. Another recent edition is Aru Rāmanātaṅ's *Cittar Pātalkal*, Madras, 1959, 2nd 1963, 3rd 1968.

² The editor admits in the foreword that this is not a critical, but a “popular” edition. He has, however, appended a Tamil-Tamil glossary of difficult and unusual terms found in the texts. The edition has 816 pp. It includes the works of most of the traditionally quoted siddhar, the *cittarkal patinenmār*, “the 18 siddhar”, plus the works of Pattinattāi who is usually not included among “The Eighteen”, it further contains a number of anonymous works of similar kind, on the other hand, it does not contain the texts ascribed to some of the traditionally quoted *cittar* like Pōkanātai, Pōtakuu, Kōrakkar, Taṅvantiri etc.—There had been other editions earlier, e.g. a fairly comprehensive and good edition by Ramalinga Mudaliyai, *Periya nānak kōvai*, 1899, in 2 vols. The works of individual siddha poets were also published, cf. e.g. Rajagopala Pillai who in 1915 published a book entitled *Iravēnkālavēṅṅum patinattup pillaiyār carittra puvānamum, tirup-pāttarvattum* (British Museum Libr. 14170 dd 69). A few years ago I performed a preliminary and informative digging in the library of the BM in London, the library contains a large number of manuscripts of *cittar* works. The Mackenzie Collection (BM 620 g 34) contains a long list of items connected directly or indirectly with the Siddhar (e.g. Agastya's “autobiography” plus a list of 38 works ascribed to him, p. 228, LIII, or, on p. 251, *Agastya Vyākaraṇa* described as “a short grammar of the Tamil language attributed to the sage Agastya, but the genuine work is supposed not to be in existence”). It also seems that Det Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen contains under *Cod. Tamoul* 10, 39, and 48 some *cittar* texts (*Rāmatēvar pātal*, *Ahattiya cūttiram*, and *Cittarpātalvattu*). The more interesting and promising items in the BM may be found under the following numbers: Oriental 1008, Magic, Orient 1048, Medical, Orient 5004, Orient 11726, and especially Orient 11727 (Civavākkīyar), Orient 11729 (Rāmatēvar), Orient 11736 (Civavākkīyar) further Or 11736 15 A C and Or 11727 15 A C. But I am sure there is much more. The obvious first prerequisite for any further serious work on the Tamil Siddhars seems to be, therefore, to unearth all published and especially unpublished (manuscript) texts collected in such libraries as the BM, Copenhagen's Royal Library, Lisbon, the Vatican, Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, etc., and, second, to prepare an annotated catalogue of these works. After the texts are gathered and classified, a critical edition at least of the basic *cittar* works may be contemplated.

ment themselves, as esoteric teaching, hence almost no commentaries, no expository literature, and no handy editions. On the other hand, orthodox Hindus in Tamilnad have always had a deep-rooted prejudice against the Siddhas. They tended to ignore them, even to suppress them, the works of the Siddhas were uncared for, neglected, and even destroyed.¹

Another reason why the study of this fascinating body of literature has so far been unsuccessful derives probably from the fact that it has not been approached and discussed from the right angle: if mentioned and commented upon at all, this was done in isolation, and not in the context of very similar or almost identical philosophical, social and literary movements in other parts of India. The Siddhas in Tamilnad are certainly not an isolated and unique body of freethinkers, but part of a very general tradition, well-spread in space and time in medieval India—the tradition of the *siddhāchāryas*, who are, again, part of a larger *āgamic*, tantric and yogic tradition of India. Any further study of the Tamil *cittar* should be performed against the background of and in relation to this pan-Indian *siddhāchārya* movement.)

Probably the most important reason why Siddha texts remain enigmatic to us has already been hinted at. Unlike e.g. the "*Cankam*" poetry or the *Cilappatikāram*, these texts are fully alive in the sense that they are until this day used and followed in daily yoga practice, but unlike the *bhakti* hymns, which are "open" texts, the *cittar* texts are "closed" — their only "true", authentic "esoteric" interpretation may be revealed by oral instruction, through a *guru* — in other words, it may be gathered from the *cittar* themselves—and there are a number of Siddha teachers at large in Tamilnad even today. I am happy to say that some of my data in this chapter were graciously supplied by two Siddha yogis in Madras early in 1968.

We do not know when the *cittar* tradition and the *cittar* line begins in Tamilnad. As an undercurrent, it might have been there

¹ Cf. Mā Campāciva Pillai, *Tirunānmaṣavaliaka āraṅgī* 210 "*carva camayattar tāpittu upakaritta carva camaya kuravarkal karppitta valiyark karppittitu olukum carva makkalum cittar nūlar nōkkavum icavārā? orukālum icaiyār*" Cf. what Taylor has to say in his catalogue (under *Śivavākkriyam*) "I was told some years ago, that the ascetics (Pandārams) of the Saiva class seek after copies of this poem with avidity and uniformly destroy every copy they find. It is by consequence rather scarce and chiefly preserved by native Christians." Heinrich Nau, in his very interesting *Prolegomena* (Zwickau, 1920), says "die Werke der Sidhars (sind) von śivaistischen Zeloten, besonders den Pandārams, systematisch verfälscht und beseitigt worden."

since very early times Yoga and tantrism are truly archaic and pan-Indian. Whenever the 18 *cittar* are enumerated traditionally in Tamilnad, one begins with Tirumūlar. Tirumūlar is undoubtedly one of the direct and most influential forerunners of the movement. At the other end of the line in time stands Tāyumāṇavar (1706-1744), a real giant of Tamil religious and philosophical poetry, who may be considered as a direct descendant of the Tamil *cittar*.

Considering Cīvavākkīyar as the earliest of the great genuine Tamil Siddhas, we shall probably not be far from truth if we say that the most important exponents of the movement—or, shall we say, the greatest and most interesting *poets* among the Siddhas?—that is, Cīvavākkīyar, Pattirakīyar, Pāmpāttī Cittar, Itakkāttucittar and Pattinattār, flourished between the 10th-15th Cent. A. D.¹

However, a much broader and wider conception of the Siddha movement in Tamilnad is certainly possible, the only one really unifying and common element of the *cittar* thus conceived would be their eclecticism, and their popularity with the masses. If we stretch our conception of the *cittar* like this, then even the great Rāmānka Cuvāmi of the 19th Century belongs here (as he actually claims to),² and even Subrahmanya Bharati († 1921) who said

¹ Among the *cittar*, we have a few Muslim poets, e.g. Kunankutimastān, the obscure mystic, who was under strong influence of sūfism. In Pattinattār's poems, we find the Telugu pl. suff. *-lu* and some other indications which seem to point out that the poet belonged to the Vijayanagar period. Some *cittar* texts mention *intustāni pāsai*, "the Hindustani language", and seem to be actually translations from some North Indian texts (e.g. the prose-passages—a commentary?—of *Cvayōhacāvam* mention *pañcāpu*, a guru Carantās, Nānak's disciples, etc.). It is clear that even under a more specific and narrow conception of the Siddha movement, we still have to do with works of very different nature and very different dates. The language of most of the *cittar* texts is too modern to be older than the 15th cent. A. D. Also, it is an established usage among the Siddhas to assume the names of the seers of ancient times. "There is no end to the growth of such apocryphal works but this does not minimise their greatness and usefulness" (Simon Cassie Chitty, *The Tamil Plutarch*, ed. 1946). Cf. also *L'Inde classique*, II, 163. "Le classement dans ce groupe des Çittar d'auteurs légendaires pêle-mêle avec des personnalités qui ont des chances d'être historiques brouille toute chronologie et oblige pour le moment à rapporter en block au moyen âge l'élaboration des traités des Çittar, dans lesquels d'ailleurs des additions très tardives sont parfois manifestes". An interesting assessment of the Siddhas may be read in M. Srinivasa Aiyangar's *Tamil Studies* (1914) p. 226. "Most of them were plagiarists and impostors. Being eaters of opium and dwellers in the land of dreams, their conceit knew no bounds". Needless to say that we do not agree in the least.

² And, in fact, M. V. Venugopala Pillai has included his *Tiruvārūpā tvattu* into his anthology of *cittar* poetry.

“I am one of the Siddhas of this land!” But this very wide and very nebulous conception of the *cittar* would not be of much use for our purposes—or for any purposes, in fact

Traditionally, the Tamil Siddhas trace their origin to Agastya (Akattiyar), and to various works on mysticism, worship, medicine and alchemy ascribed to him.¹ In the *Rgveda* a brief reference occurs to Agastya’s miraculous birth from a pitcher (*kumbha*), but otherwise he seems to have been a historical person who composed hymns, a real Vedic *ṛṣi*. In the *Mahābhārata* we already have a developed story of Agastya, including his marriage with Lopāmudrā, a princess of Vidarbha, the motive of the two *dāitya* kings and Agastya’s search for wealth, Agastya’s drinking up the waters of the ocean, and his journey to the South when he prevailed upon the Vindhya to stop growing until he returned—which, however, he never did. In the *Rāmāyana*, Agastya figures, too (he fights the *asuras* and *rākṣasas*). But in the early Tamil works, there is no reference to Agastya the sage. It is only the *Manimēkalai*, a Buddhist epic, which knows of the miraculous birth of the sage and his relation to Vasistha. The first reference to Agastya as the “Father of Tamil” and the first Tamil grammarian is in Nakkīrar’s commentary to Iṟaiyaṅār’s *Akapporul* (8th Cent.). Later, medieval commentators, Naccinārkkinīyar (14th Cent.) and Pēracīriyar (ca. 1300 A.D.), narrate a number of Agastya-stories and make him the “Sage of Potiyil.”² This Agastya, however, whether he existed or not,³ is a very different person (and legendary hero) from the Siddha Akattiyar. It is obvious that one or more Siddhas assumed the name of the ancient, legendary *ṛṣi*, and there exists a number of works on medicine and alchemy, but also poetic works, ascribed to an Akattiyar.⁴

Some of the medical works contain fascinating details. Thus e.g. in

— — — — —

¹ *Editio* M. V. Venugopala Pillai contains *Akattiyar ṅāṅam* I-IV (pp. 277 ff) and *Akattiyar ṅāṅam* V (p. 559).

² Potiyil is the southernmost mountain of the Western Ghats, the Bettigo of Ptolemy.

³ Cf. T. P. Meenakshisundaran (ed. *The Tamil Plutarch*) “Agastya as a historical figure is no more than a will o’ the wisp but as a tradition he wields an influence which is felt in all walks of Tamilian life.”

⁴ That *this* Agastya is a very late author may be seen from two works ascribed to him, *Irūṅṅāṅcu* (a medical treatise) and *Pūranacūttiram* (alchemy) in which he speaks about syphilis as *paṟankuvīyāṭi* “Frankish disease”, and about quick-silver as *paṟanki paṟaṅgam* “Frankish remedy”.

Akattiyar's *Kurunāticcūttiram*,¹ the author discusses seminal animalcules, discovered in Western medicine by Ludwig Hamm in 1677.² Akattiyar is also said to have performed the trephination of the skull

This brings us to a brief discussion of the *cittavaṭṭiyam* or the system of Siddha medicine in Tamilnad. It belongs here only marginally, since it is hardly a part of literature in the sense we are discussing it here. On the other hand, some of the Siddhas were both poets and physicians, and most if not all of the *cittar* were vitally interested—as we shall see—in human body and its health. All of them were undoubtedly yogis.

The medical system claims to be original, not derived from the Ayurvedic system, contrary to the Ayurveda medicinal practice which seems to have been concerned primarily with herbs and other organic drugs, the *cittavaṭṭiyam*—though not adverse to herbs—makes much use of salts, metals, mineral poisons etc., in short of elements of anorganic nature. Sometimes it is said that the three basic methods of Siddha medicine are *manī*, *manṭiram*, and *maruntu*, i.e. astrology, reciting mantras and using drugs. However, according to some more modern exponents of *cittavaṭṭiyam*, the Siddha therapy consists of 1) yoga *āsanas*, *mudras* and *bandhas* ("locks"), 2) of *cūrya cikiccai* or "sun-baths", and 3) of taking drugs (*maruntu*).

The great Tirumūlar himself spoke about a number of yogic *āsanas* (*Tirumantiram* 541, 543, 545) he recommends *paṭṭiram* ("leaf-pose"), *kōmukam* ("cow-pose"), *ṭankayam* ("lotus-pose"), *kēcari* ("lion-pose"), *cottiram* (= *svastikāsana*), *vīram* ("heroic pose"), *cukāṭanam* ("easy pose"), and *māmutu* for taking food, further the *kokku* ("cock-pose") and one or two other poses. According to later exponents of Siddha yoga, there are eighteen poses, used in the therapy (combined with the *bandhas* and *mudras*)³

¹ Cf. Robert's *Oriental Illustrations of the Sacred Scriptures*, p. 281.

² Cf. *English Cyclopaedia, Biography*, vol. III, p. 871. Cf. also W. Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts, in the Tamil Language*, Vol. I, Madras, 1835, pp. 135, 172, 175, and *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, vol. IX, p. 161.

³ The eighteen indispensable *āsanas* (Tam. *ācaṇam*, *āṭaṇam*) are 1) salutation (*vanakkam*), 2) sun-worship (*sūryanamaskāram*), 3) shoulder integral pose (*carvāṅkācaṇam*), 4) fish (*mīṇ*), 5) crane (*kokku*), 6) bow (*vil*), 7) topsyturvy pose (*vṛparitācaṇam*), 8) half-fish (*ṭāṭi mīṇ*), 9) plough (*kalappai*), 10) serpent (*ṭāmpu*), 11) yogic symbol pose (*yōkamutṛācaṇam*), 12) half wheel (*ṭāṭi cakkarām*), 13) sitting crane (*amarṇa kokku*), 14) locust (*vittil*),

Breathing is of course a most important part of *citta* yoga. Breath, *prāṇam*, is the vital energy, and death, *maranam*, is defined by Rōma Rsi, one of the classical Siddha therapeutists, as complete loss of *prāṇa* *prāṇan pōyvitā nīlai maranam*. On various practices of breathing, the Siddhas based their theory and practice of physical longevity and even immortality. According to *Rōma rsi śānam* 13, a man who is one hundred years old breathes 21,600 times per day¹. That is, during one hour this healthy centenarian breathes 900 times, which will give 15 respirations per minute². The span of life is inversely proportional to the rate of breathing. If the respiration is 15/min and the length of life 100 years, then 18/min gives us approximately 83 1/3 years. But, the respiration 2/min gives us $100 \times 15 \div 2 = 750$ years, the respiration 1/min = 1500 years, and if the respiration is 0/min, the span of life is $100 \times 15 \div 0 = \infty$, i.e. infinity. If there is no respiration, leading to stoppage of breath, as in the so-called *corūpa camāti*, the yogi attains immortality, since the span of his life is infinity. Practical consequences, appearing in *citta* yoga therapy: control your breathing, unnecessary talk, slipshod panting and gasping, unnecessary respiratory muscle work is harmful.

Siddha medicine cannot be discussed at length here, since it is entirely outside the scope of this book, just as the preoccupation of the Siddhas with *racavātam* or alchemy. As M. Eliade (*Yoga*, 2nd ed., 1969, 281) rightly stresses, in this kind of alchemy we have no prechemistry, no pre-science, but a spiritual technique, operating on matter but seeking first to bring about deliverance and autonomy of spirit. "Gold is immortality" (*amrtam āyur hīranyam*, *Maṅṅṅāyanī Samhitā* II,2,2 and elsewhere)—it is the one perfect, solar metal, the symbol of spiritual freedom and autonomy. Alchemy in the Siddha practice has soteriological function. Just as the *cittar* work on their body, so they also work on matter—to finish it, to make it mature, perfect, to change it into gold. There is an occult correspondence between matter and man's psychophysical body. The vital interest of the *cittar* in medicine and alchemy

15 supine pose (*vajroli mūtrācaṇam*), 16 kneeling pose (*supta vajrācaṇam*), 17 triangular pose (*mukhōnācaṇam*), 18 corpse (*cavācaṇam*)

¹ *ulakattal māṅṅṅākkām āntu nūrē / ām enrē irupattō vāyvatōtu / aru nūru cūvācam allō oru nālarakkup pōm*

² According to Western medicine, it is 18/min

is no accident, it is closely connected with their religion and philosophy, as will be shown later

Who is a Siddha? A Siddha is one who has attained *siddhi* (Tamil *citti*), i. e. "power, prowess, strength, ability", then a special kind of psychic and supernatural, miraculous, occult power. There are eight kinds of this specific power

- 1 *anmā* (Skt *anīman*) "shrinking", the faculty of reducing oneself to the size of an atom,
- 2 *makimā* (Skt *mahīman*) "illimitability", the power of increasing one's size without limit,
- 3 *lakimā* (Skt *laghīman*) "lightness",
- 4 *ṣivatti* (Skt *kāmāvasāyitva*) "fulfillment of desires", the power of attaining everything desired,
- 5 *ṣivakamīyam* (Skt *ṣivākāmīya*) "irresistible will", the power to overcome natural objects and go anywhere,
- 6 *icattuvam* (Skt *īśitva*) "supremacy", dominion over animate and inanimate nature,
- 7 *vacittuvam* (Skt *vaśitva*) "dominion over the elements", the power of changing the course of nature and assuming any form,
- 8 *karamā* (Skt *garīman*) "weight", the power of rendering the body immaterial and able to penetrate matter

According to *Vālmīki cūttira śānam* 3, "by purifying the mind and attaining perfection one becomes a *cittar*, he is indeed fit to be called Śiva"¹ A classical definition of the Siddhas is given by the great Tirumūlar "Those who live in yoga and see the divine light (*oli*) and power (*caṭṭi*) through yoga are the *cittar*" (*Tirumantram* 1490)

Tirumūlar's *Tirumantram* is very probably the spring and source of all *āgamic* texts in Tamil. This is the other stream of religious and philosophical thought which ran parallel with the *bhakti* movement, only it was much less conspicuous and much more "esoteric". The poet, philosopher and yogi Tirumūlar might have lived sometime in the 7th Cent. A. D., since he prays to Viṇāyaka in his invocatory stanza, and since he is mentioned by Cuntarar in *Tirutontattokai*, st 5 (7621). The work became part of the Śaiva canon (of its 10th *Tirumūrai*). In his yogic passages, Tirumūlar is clearly indebted to Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* and to the *Māndūkyaopaniṣad*. The

¹ *cirantu maṇat telvāric cērntōṅ cittaṅ | civaiva avaṇavaṇeṅ ṣivarkkālāmē*

Tirumantiram is the greatest treatment of yoga in Tamil literature, and more than that the Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy as such takes its origin from this marvellous text. In spite of the simple style, the text is often obscure, since it uses a wide variety of symbolism, especially numerical symbolism ¹

Tirumantiram contains very many features which are typical for Siddha writings. Thus it attacks caste-system and the Brahmmins, whom it calls foolish and gluttonous ². Though the text contains stanzas which have devotional character (e.g. 712, 1651, 1816, 2104, 2958), much more accent is on yoga and knowledge. The body is valued as the temple of God, ³ and as a fit instrument for the soul in its career of self-discipline and search of God (307, 724). Tirumūlar is sharply opposed to the ultraemotional type of *bhakti*. God, for him, is "light" and "lustre" (*cōti*, *cutar*), he is omnipresent, omnipotent, creator of all, one, the divine potter (*kucavan*), the divine bull (*nanti*), above all sects, creeds and religious groups. Like in later Siddhas, and in contrast to *bhakti*, in *Tirumantiram* there is total absence of the local cult, of "henolocotheism", there are almost no references to the worship of God through *arccanās* in temples. The Siddhas have not built up a unified system of philosophy. The same is true of *Tirumantiram*. However, this collection of more than 3000 quatrains in the *kalviruttam* metre is the earliest work in Tamil to contain Śaiva *āgamic* matter, and though Tirumūlar's thought ⁴ is not identical with later Śaiva Siddhānta, it is its source, as stressed above.

Tirumūlar was a great poet-philosopher, one of the greatest poets of symbolism in Tamil literature. For those who follow the Siddha teachings, he is "the most ancient of the Tamil yoga Siddhas". To us, some parts of his *Tirumantiram* are "a masterpiece of mystic wisdom, robust philosophy and moving poetry".

In what follows I shall discuss some of the features which are typical for all or almost all *cittar* as a body of thinkers.

¹ Thus e.g. *añcu* "five" may mean, according to context, the five senses, or the five elements, or the five "sacred" letters, etc.

² Cf. *Tirumantiram* 231 "The Brahmmins are truly without truth and knowledge, without devotion, they are gluttonous and foolish". Cf. also *oṇṇē kulamum oruvanē iṅvaṇṇum* "There is one humanity and one god".

³ 1823 *ullam perunkōyil ūn utampu ālayam*

⁴ Accord to A. V. Subramania Aiyar, Tirumūlar was probably an advaitic vedantin (cf. 116, 1789, 2820), cf. the *pratyabhijñā* school of Kashmir Śaivism. It is believed that he came to Tamilnad from Kashmir.

First, in sharp opposition to the *bhakti* tradition, they refuse to allow themselves be carried away by idol-worship in particular temples Cf Cīvavākkīyar st 126 *tēvar kallum āvarō* "Should gods become stones?" Pattinattār in XI,16, sings "I cannot exalt the polished stone or the moulded lime or the burnished brass, it is true that within my heart I have set his two feet similar to gold Now I do not need anything more"

The mind, the heart, is the temple of God, and God enters the heart in a mysterious way, like "coconut water into coconut shell" "The Lord came and made a temple of my heart here, entering it in the same way in which fresh water gets into the reddish young coconut" ¹

Second, in contrast to *bhakti* which emphasizes passionate devotion to God, to the *istadevatā*, the *cittar* emphasize knowledge (*ñānam*), yoga practice, and character, moral behaviour, right conduct Anger (*kōpam*), lust (*ācai*), egoism (*akankāram*) are the worst sins According to Akattiyar 7,1, if the mind is in the right disposition, it is unnecessary to say prayers ²

Third, almost all Siddhas raise a protest against caste and casteism *cāti yāvat(u) ēi(u)atā* "What is caste?" asks Cīvavākkīyar in st 47 And Pattirakiri in his *Lamentations* 126 cries "O when will come the day when we shall live without caste-distinctions?"

We are primarily interested in the Siddhas' conception of God, body and soul, *karma* and reincarnation, since these are the key-problems of Indian philosophy The whole atmosphere of the Siddha thinking is empirical and experimental Their writings are not in the nature of clear-cut formalized statements of any well-defined doctrine, hence it is difficult to extricate a philosophical system out of their writings, at least at the present state of our knowledge of their works, but it is possible to point out a few essential features, and one day, when their writings are better known, it should be possible to state their philosophy more explicitly

There is god, or rather godhead, deity, *civam*, without limitation, who, by force of sheer custom, carries the name *civan*, Śiva (almost all of them are Śarvites but Cīvavākkīyar—to quote just one

¹ Cīvavākkīyar 31 *Ceyya tenki lēyilanir cērnta kāra nankalpōl | ariyaṅ vantiṅ kenṇūlam pukuntu kōyil kontavaṅ* And again in 33 *kōyil um maṇattulē, kulankal um maṇattulē* "temples are within your minds, temple-tanks are within your minds"

² *maṇamatu cemmariyāṇāl mantiram cepikka vēntā maṇamatu cemmariyāṇāl mantiraiṅ cemmariyāmē*

example—glorifies also Viṣṇu) The *paramātmā* is identical with *jīvātmā*, with *uyir* “soul, life-force”; and *uyir* does not exist apart from *utal* “body”, just as body has no life without *uyir*. If body is destroyed, soul, life is destroyed. Hence it is necessary to protect and cherish the body. There is an important stanza in Tirumūlar which has become one of the corner-stones of *cittar* thinking

If body is destroyed, soul is destroyed,
and one will not attain true powerful knowledge
Having acquired the skill to foster the body,
I cherished the body, and I fostered the soul

Hence the obsession of the Siddhas with the dream of eternal youth and splendid health, or at least with the possibility to prolong individual life, and hence the preoccupation with medicine. The Siddhas professed that there was no incurable disease, and that it was possible to maintain eternal youth. It was possible, so they maintained, to get over the five limitations of *narai*, “grey hair”, *turai*, “dim vision”, *mūppu*, “old age”, *nōy*, “disease”, and *maramam*, “death”. Rōma R1S1 says explicitly in *Ṇāṇam* 12 “If you ask what is the sign (*atariyālam*) of *corūpa mutti* (= true liberation of body and spirit), it is the physical body (*tūla tēkam*) aglow with the fire (of immortality)”

Karma and reincarnation are simply and forcefully refuted. God, “the ancient one”, “the omnipotent”, “the divine potter”, is not directly engaged in the three actions of creation, preservation and destruction. Those who actually re-create and procreate, foster, preserve and destroy the world, including themselves, are men and women in their actions, one of which, and a very important one, is the sexual union.

The world is real, not illusory. It exists and endures because of the ignorance of the soul, of the spirit. *Māyā*, cosmic illusion, endured by man as long as he is blinded by ignorance, makes possible the maintenance of the material world. Liberation (*mutti*)—in contrast to *bhakti*—is achieved through knowledge, it is a liberation from the idea of evil and pain. Suffering ceases as soon as one understands that it is exterior to Self. It is destroyed by ignoring it as suffering. This true knowledge is obtained in enstasis (*samādhi*) which is achieved by practice, by physiological yogic techniques.

Poetry was not the primary concern of the Siddhas. They were ignorant of, or indifferent to, the complicated poetics of the post-

classical age The rhythm of their stanzas is simple, robust, unrefined, reminiscent of folk songs One of them, Pāmpātti Cittar, sings verses in the metre used by snake-charmers Itaikkāttu Cittar sings as if he were a shepherd They use many colloquial forms like *añcu* for *anttu* "five", *vaicca* for *vaitta* "placed", *enkuṭu* for *enkuṛatu* "it says", etc

They are not free from ambiguous and obscure passages, and some portions of their works are so obscure that Gover in his well-known book *Folk-Songs of Southern India* (1871) suggested that the obscure chiaroscuro passages are mischievous interpolations intended to ridicule the *cittar* and weaken their impact on the people Indeed a naive and ridiculous statement! Whenever the Siddhas use ambiguous language, it is on purpose, they are obscure because they want to be obscure Their obscure language is an important device by the means of which they can at the same time address both a casual listener as well as an adept of greater spiritual awareness who reads a deep mystic interpretation into their verses Thus the dancing *pāmpu* "snake" may be interpreted as one's own heart or soul, the *akappēy* is the *daimonion* in one's own soul, or the devil of human mind, etc In fact, according to the living *cittar* tradition, the texts are a closed mystic treasure-box bound by the Lock of ignorance, and only a practising Siddha yogi is able to unlock the poems and reveal their true meaning

I will now discuss in some detail two of the Tamil Siddha poets, Cīvavākkīyar and Paṭṭiṇattār The first because he is typical, the second, because he is not

All in all, 527 stanzas are ascribed to Cīvavākkīyar, probably one of the earliest, if not the earliest of the great Tamil Siddha poets¹ In some respects, he is the greatest rebel against religious orthodoxy, sacerdotalism, and the Hindu "establishment"

"What does it mean - a Paraiya woman ?

What is it - a Brahmin woman ?

¹ The earlier Paṭṭiṇattār of the 10th-11th Century refers to Cīvavākkīyar in his poem *Tiruvitāmarutūr mummamikkōvar* 11 33 A strange story (in *Kuruṣamparā pīrapāvam*, ed K Kīrusnamācāriyār, 1909) maintains that Cīvavākkīyar the Siddha converted to Vaiṣṇavism and became one of the greatest Vaiṣṇava poets under the name Tirumaḷicai Ālvār It is a fact that his poems are in *tiruccanta viruttam* metre just like the poems of the Vaiṣṇava poet, even more curious is the fact that there is a number of stanzas ascribed to both poets which are nearly identical Were these two indeed one and the same person, or did the iconoclastic Śaivite *cittar* copy the Vaiṣṇava mystic ?

Is there any difference in them
 in flesh, skin or bones ?
 What is the difference if you sleep
 with a Parāya or a Brahmin woman ?”
 (38)

He also rejects the division between Śāivites and Vaisnavites. Again and again he speaks of Rāma but, at the same time, he extolls Śiva and śaivism.¹ He denounces the Brahminical way of life, he repudiates the authority of the Vedas and condemns idol worship in temples

“What are temples ? What are bathing tanks ?
 Fools who worship in temples and tanks !
 Temples are in the mind Tanks are in the mind ”
 (33)

“You say that Śiva is in bricks and granite,
 in the red-rubbed lingam, in copper and brass !
 If you could learn to know yourself first,
 the God in temple will dance and sing within you !”
 (34)

Recalling the scheme $S_1 S_2 O_1 O_2$ which we used when structurally analysing *bhakti* hymns, we observe in the poetry of the Siddhas complete negation of O_2 . One cannot say at all what is God, how he is. God is described almost exclusively in negative terms, in what he is not. This is in sharp contrast with the *bhakti* conception of a personal, individualized God having so many attributes and residing in a particular form in a particular shrine

“The lazy ones say Far away, far away, far away (is God)
 The *parāparam* (Supreme Being) is spread everywhere on earth and
 in the skies
 O you poor dumb ones, running through towns and country and
 jungles, suffering in search,
 Know well that Godhead is right there within you, and stand still !”
 (14)

Observe how he describes God *ap parāparam* “that supreme thing”, spread everywhere (*enkuṁāy paranta*), and being within men (*ummul*). In another stanza, Cīvavākkīyar identifies *cīvam*, the Absolute, with *arivu*, knowledge. This is, of course, nothing new, again we may point back to Tirumūlar who says “Those who say that knowledge and *cīvam* are two (different) things, are ignorant”

¹ *entar rāma rāma rāma rāmavenṟum nāmamē*, st 10, *cīvayam enṟa ātcāram cīvan vrukkuṁ ātcāram*

This *aṟivu* or *ñānam* ¹ is naturally not the discursive kind of knowledge found in the texts

“O you who proclaim yourselves the yogis of knowledge,
 who search after knowledge in books!
 You do not know your own hearts -
 there you should search after the light of knowledge!
 Knowing the unique Lord who is knowledge,
 there is nothing else than the truth we proclaimed!”
 (453)

Elsewhere Cīvavākkīyar speaks of those who drag the burden of books and blabber lies. True knowledge is empirical and experimental

One of the most powerful stanzas of all his poems is the one in which he plainly refutes the theory of transmigration, it deserves to be quoted fully

*karanta pāl mularppukā katainta venney mōṟṟukā
 utaintu pōṇa cankiṇṇōcaṟ yuyirkaḷum utarṟukā
 vrintapū vutrinta kāyum mīntu pōy maramṟukā
 vrantavar pīrappa tillai yillaiyillai yillaiyē*
 (46)

“Milk does not return to the udder, nor butter to butter-milk
 Nor the life within the sea-shell, when it breaks, to its body
 The blown flower, the fallen fruit do not return to the tree
 The dead are not born, never, never, never!”

Cīvavākkīyar also ridicules many ritual and social customs and practices thus e.g. saliva, which is considered by the Hindus as something utterly unclean, he refuses to regard as unclean in itself. In st. 479 he says “Why should you be so fussy about *eccil*, about saliva? Why—honey is the bee’s saliva, the beetle’s spittle is on the flower, the cow’s milk itself is mixed with the saliva of the calf” ² And he laughs at those who bathe for cleanliness’ sake and yet are impure in their hearts (cf. stanzas 207, 209 etc.)

Cīvavākkīyar’s poetry shows that there had been a school of thought in Tamīlnad that repudiated caste and stood for absolute equality of all in the religious and social practices. His great contribution to Tamīl literature lies in the fact that he has used,

¹ A rather late highly philosophical Siddha text (*Cīvāṇanta pōḷam*) is a dispute in dialogue form between *maṇam* “mind” and *aṟivu* “knowledge, wisdom”. The interesting thing is that the ignorant mind speaks in prose, whereas the supreme knowledge speaks in verse

² *varcca veccil tēṇ alō vanti neccil pūvalō | karccu tāvīl varttutaṇ karanta pālum eccilē*

probably for the first time in Tamil writing, the common idiom of the people, both in syntax and lexis. On the whole, he is a powerful, independent, crude and often striking poet, who is definitely worth reading.

In the concluding remark on Cīvavākkīyar I cannot abstain from quoting one of his stanzas which illustrates the “purposeful obscurity” of the *cittar* diction (st. 221)

*akāra kāra nattilē yanēka nēka rūpamāy
ukāra kāra nattilē yurutta vittu nṛṇṇaṇṇ
makāra kāra nattilē mayankukūṛa varyakam
cīkāra kāra nattilē telinta tēci vāyamē*

“Like so many forms he stands - through the sound *a*,
having dressed himself in shapes - through the sound *u*,
the world confused - through the sound *ma*,
it became clear as *civāyam* - through the sound *ci*”

This may indeed seem “closed by the lock of ignorance.” However, the sound *a* (*akāram*) is the symbol of beginning, and of the Primeval Lord (cf. Pāmpāṭṭi *Cittar* 5 *āti tēvaṇ*, also *Tirukkūṛal* 1) who is eternal and omnipresent, in many forms, the sound *u* stands for *uru*, *uruvu* which means “shape, form”, i.e. material shapes, the sound *ma* symbolizes *mayakkam* “bewilderment, confusion”, also *māyā* “illusion of creation” (so important in yoga philosophy), and *ci* is of course the first syllable of *civāyam*, i.e. *namacivāyam*, the sacred “five letters”, the mystic formula of Śaivism and Siddhism. In other words, the quatrain contains a whole theology. God is the eternal and omnipresent Lord, clad in material forms, dispelling the confusion and ignorance of the world by the mystic doctrine of *namacivāyam*. Schematically.

a = Supreme God
u = in many material forms
m(a) = in real world existing because of ignorance
ci = removed by the doctrine and practice of
civāyam

Reading the first “letters” of the quatrain vertically, we get the greatest and the most potent *mantra* *a + u + m + ci = aum*, i.e. *ōm cī(vāyanamā)*

The greatest *poet* among the Tamil Siddhas is undoubtedly Pattinattār. It is very probable that at least two poets hide under

this name, an earlier one (10th-11th Cent A D), whose five poems ¹ were included into the 11th book of the Śaivite canon (*Tirumūṟai*), and a later one, the true *cittar*, probably of the Vijayanagara period, of the 14th Cent A D The earlier Pattinattār is a Śaiva *nāyanmār*, a *bhakti* poet writing in grand style of literary Tamil a poetry of charming descriptions and captivating similes, but, at the same time, picturing the ephemeral nature of physical pleasures and human sufferings in very dark colours (and thus he has in common with the later Pattinattār)

However, here we are not concerned with the poems of this earlier Pattinattār We shall discuss Pattinattār the Great, Pattinattār the Siddha, the author of the 632 stanzas and 207 lines going under the name *Pattinattār Pātal*, a poet who probably belonged to the 14th-15th Cent A D Together with Tāyumāṇavar and Rāmalinka Cuvāmi, he is the most popular religious poet of South Indian Śaivism In this great poet, we have a yogic ascetic, a man of revolt against Brahmanic and ritualistic social order, as well as a saint with mellowed and sublimated outlook, a bard singing of sadness in this world, but also accepting this world with almost cheerful resignation

The very first lines of his songs sound like blows of a hammer

*pirantana irakkum irantana irakkum
iṅṟṟiṅṟa maraiyum marantana iṅṟṟum
pumarntana piriyum pirntana punarum
uvappana verupam veruppana uvappam etc*

“ Those who are born, die, the dead are born,
those that appear, disappear, those who vanish, appear,
who join, separate, those that separate, join
Joys become hateful, hatreds become joys ”

Pattinattār, in most of his poems, is the great relativist and the great pessimist of Tamil literature Life is a tragedy, an eternal interplay of contradictions and antinomies, a lie, “a tale told by an idiot”

“Uttering lies so much that your tongue cracks
Hoarding riches and wealth
You lie with women who know no good
And bring forth children
So rapidly, so readily

¹ *Kōyil nāṇmanimālai, Tirukkalumala mummamkkōvai, Tiruvitar marutūr mummamkkōvai, Tiru ēkampamutaiyār iruvantāi, Tiruvōṟṟiyūr orupā orupakṟu*

Like the poor white ants that come out when earth cracks!¹
 You do not know how to foster them
 You will not forsake them
 You have put your foot into a hole
 in the bole of a tree
 Like the monkey that removed the wedge
 You are caught to stay and suffer,
 You are caught,
 You!"

(XI 65)

His language is cruel, fierce and direct in his treatment of woman as the seat of filth and temptation, and of man as the seat of vileness and egoism

"I loved this mortal vessel stuffed with blabbering air,
 this leather bag for rice, this torn sack wrapped in flesh,
 this stinking body, cow-stable of lust,
 and roamed about and begged,
 o Ēkampan of Kāñci, Lord!"

(II 27)

"The fire says It is mine But the worm, too, says It's mine
 And this earth says Well, it's mine But the kite says
 It is mine And the jackal says It's mine
 And wants to devour it And the mean dog says It's for me!
 This stinking body I cherished with love
 And what was the use?"

(XI 26)

"The treasury of insolence, the granary of anger,
 the palace from which ignorance does not depart,
 the home of falsehood, this rag of a body,
 full of lust and flirting, its towering weapon
 swelling into skies!

How to attain wisdom
 in worshipping you?"

(XI 55)

Woman's beauty is to him the most detestable thing on earth In seventy lines he strips woman totally of her glamour "I shall now teach something all those men / who have been enjoying and loving and taking women in lust!" And he describes the female body as a bag of filth The belly, compared by poets to a banian leaf, is a shaking screen of dirt and dregs, the breasts, compared to lotus-buds, are in fact two hanging dried-up pouches, parched and full of inner heat, scratched by the finger-nails of lusty men The neck is full of sweat and dust and filth, and out of the hellish

mouth spurts poison And so on and so forth As we see, there is a very notable difference between Pattiṅattār and the early *cittar* they liked their own body, they wanted to cherish and foster and preserve it, in order to use it for yogic techniques Pattiṅattār, in this respect, is actually more of a 'classical' yogi than a Siddha according to Patañjali (*Yogasūtras* II 40), physical purification produces disgust with one's own body, and cessation of contact with other bodies—a point in which "classical" yoga and the "magical", Siddha yoga differ significantly

While the early *cittar* are full of confidence and self-respect, Pattiṅattār and his disciple, the poet Pattiṅakiriyar (Bhadragiri, who composed the heart-rending *Moaning cry of true wisdom, Meyññāṅappulampal*) show a kind of spiritual frustration, a passionate longing for peace, even in death, for deliverance, for liberation Their songs are pathetic outcries ending with passionate wails, personal God returns, not to the extent we know in classical *bhakti*, but indicating that we are on the road to Tāyumāṅavar and Rāmalmkar In Pattiṅattār's and Pattiṅakiriyar's writings there is almost no trace of that self-confidence, of the proud and sure knowledge of a Tirumūlar or Civaṅvākkiyar Listen to Pattiṅattār XV 1 *mūlam ariyēṅ mutiyu mutivarīyēṅ* "I do not know the beginning, I do not know the ultimate end" Or XV 5 "The earth devoured me who desired earth, and the desire of gold and women (*ponṇācai pe inācai*) do not want to leave me" XV 13 "Fear and egoism refuse to go" The notion of *sīn*, the feeling of shame, of self-humiliation—these are new and unheard of notes in *cittar* creations

In Pattiṅattār, there is almost always a mixture of cynicism and pathetic helplessness, of vile abuse—abuse of self, of women, of the sinners—and moving appeal He has composed a number of beggary stanzas, too, with a particular charm of their own

"For the cool mist
there are tight rags
There's rice in every house,
just beg and eat
And when you are aroused,
there are fine harlots roaming in the street
Why then grow weary of this world?
O heart! To be so sore each day!" (XI 15)

There are hardly more moving "beggary stanzas" in Tamil literature than the following

"When cold wind blows
 and the sun is gone,
 there is an old abandoned dress—
 just take it
 and cover your body
 All the world over
 there's everywhere an outside porch
 to lie down and to sleep
 When hunger comes,
 there's Śiva to give
 O heart!
 There's indeed nothing which we lack!"

The *cittar* tradition—especially the Siddha *vaidya*, the Siddha medicine—is fully alive. So are most of the *cittar* songs. One can hear them sung often by wandering religious mendicants. "To denounce today caste, worship in temples and religious and agamic rituals does not require much courage, but to have done so in the centuries in which the Tamil Siddhars lived required extraordinary heroism and strength of conviction"¹ A knowledge of the works of the *cittar* is absolutely necessary to have a correct perspective of the civilization of the Tamils, of their religious, social and literary history.

¹ A. V. Subramania Aiyar, *The Poetry and the Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhars*, Tirunelveli, 1957, p. 82

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ARUNAKIRI, THE GREAT MAGICIAN

Arunakiri¹ is the essence and condensation of a type probably the greatest language-tamer among Tamil poets, certainly one of the greatest formalists in Tamil literature. And that is also why some scholars would say of him and his work "As religion and as poetry his verses are not much . . . (they show) a revelling in the erotic element first and then a religious reaction against it. His other works are mere word-jugglery for the lover of literature"²

Why this judgement? Because this wizard of language and rhythm has indeed reached the dangerous brink between true poetry and mere formalistic skill. Some of his lines are indeed clever, sophisticated, expert bijoutry. But most of his poems are brilliant jewels, glittering and glowing with emeralds, rubies, amethysts and carbuncles, with gold and pearls.

At the same time, Arunakiri is the sum and substance of that type of Tamil poets who have achieved a complete and harmonious integration of two cultures: Sanskritic and Tamil. In this type, there is a total penetration of the Tamil structure by the Sanskrit structure, and the result is a happy and immensely rich blend. In Arunakiri, it is an ambrosial amalgam above all in the expression-side of his poetry, in language and prosody. Even in stanzas which are very heavily Sanskritized,³ the final effect is marvellous, e.g.

*ēttalampukal kāvēryāl vīlai
cōḷa mantala mitē maṇḍōkara
rāca kempāra nātālum nāyaka
vayalūrā*

"O lord of the fields,
o prince who rules

¹ The name Arunakiri or Arunakirinātai means "(The lord of) the Arunahill (of the fiery hill, or, mountain of light)", i.e. of Arunācalam. The poet was born in Tiruvannāmalai, under the Arunācalam mountain, much later, in our century, the place became the site of the *āśram* founded by Śrī Ramana Mahārṣi.

² C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* pp 212-213

³ Considered to be a grave sin by some critics. "His poetry is heavily packed with Sanskrit words" C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* p 212

above the vast and charming kingdom,
the Cholamandalam, fertile by Kāvēri
famous for its seven shrines ”

Here, the ratio is about 60% of Tamil words to 40% of Sanskrit
But in the next stanza

iṭṭa maṅkala cōṭi namōnāma
tūya aṃṭala līlā namōnāma
tēva kuñcara pākā namōnāma
arultārāy

there is less than 30% of Tamil items and more than 70% of
Sanskrit loanwords Observe the *cantam*, the rhythmic pattern

tāna tānana tānā tanānana,

this is maintained throughout the stanza, ending with *tānanānā*
arultārāy

Two of the four main properties of Arunakiri's songs are revealed
in this stanza immensely rich vocabulary ¹ having as its source the
treasures of Tamil as well as of Sanskrit, ² and *cantam* or regular
rhythmic pattern

The term and notion of *cantam* needs somewhat detailed discus-
sion Historically, it means an assault of Sanskritic, *mātrā*-type
and *syllabic*-based (“syllabic” in our Western sense) metrics on the
indigenous metrical system of Tamil which was not syllabic, but
acai-based (cf the beginning of Chapter 5) *cantam* is a rigidly set
pattern of rhythm, based on syllabic quantity The beginnings of
its influence in Tamil prosody are naturally connected with the
adoption of fixed melody-types (*paṇ*) for poetry which is identified
with (devotional) singing. Poetry as (devotional) song set to a
fixed melody evolved in Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* texts, and hence
also the first poets who employed, on the Sanskritic models,
quantitative prosody of the *cantam* (*chandas*) type, were Campantar
and Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār, two early Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas* ³ The

¹ “Words, marshalled with rhymes and alliterations interspersed, break
from him in a deluge” C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* p 212

² In a sense, Arunakiri's god is also a happy blend of the two cultures, and
his two wives symbolize this fact Teyvayāṅai, the daughter of Indra,
stands for Sanskrit, Valli for Tamil Murugaṅ himself has been always
considered the prince of poets, cf Kumarakuruparar's invocation “O
Prince Bard of *Cankam* literature!”

³ The poets noted for skillful use of *cantam* were, after Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār
(8th Cent) who has probably been the one most responsible for its introduc-
tion into Tamil prosody (in his *Tiruccantaviruttam*) Tirumankai Āḷvār,
Pattinattār the Elder, Nampiyāntār Nampī, Cayankontār, Ottakkūttāṅ,
Villi, and, of course, Arunakiri

influence of *cantam* grew steadily until it reached its peak in the poems of Arunakīri¹ This is part of the process whereby the connection between poetry and music becomes closer and closer, more and more intimate, until the *kīrttanai* is born—a form in which music is as indispensable as the text itself And Arunakīri's *Tiruppukal*, singing the 'praise of the Lord', is one of the basic foundations of *kīrttanai*, only it has no refrain yet, no *ṣallavi* (like *kīrttanai*)

In thought-content and themes, Arunakīri is one of the peaks in a particular line of *bhakti* poets, another poet of the same line—yet different because deeper, because more of a thinker and mystic than Arunakīri, and less of a poet, yet basically belonging to the same type—Tāyumānavar̥ (1706-1744), admired and loved Arunakīri, and praised him more than once, e g

aiyā arunakīri appā unaiṣṣōla
meyyāka ṛ col vilampinar yār

"O sir, Arunakīri, friend, who ever uttered such true words as you?" And elsewhere he speaks about him as *matuṛam pōliyum arunakīri*, "Arunakīri, who pours forth sweetness"

Typical is also the legend of the poet's life, it is a characteristically late *bhakti* legend The hero leads a wretched life Without his personal merit, and so to say in the last moment, God in his mercy intervenes, turning the scoundrel into a saint, into a *bhakta* and into a poet And once more the deity is localized in a particular South Indian shrine, under the Arunācalam mountain

Arunakīri was born in Tiruvannāmalai and spent his young years as a rioter, good-for-nothing brawler, drunkard and unbridled seducer of women Everyone despaired of him The most unhappy of all was his sister, who was the only one that kept a place for him in her heart, when all others turned their back on him because with progressing years his lack of self-control and his daring increased

The poet describes in vivid colours this stage of his life, speaking about his *kāmukan akappattai ācai*, "the passions of a lewd man",

¹ A poem in *cantam* has, in addition to other formal properties (prosodic pattern, *totai*, i e "rhymes", alliteration, assonance etc), a rigidly set rhythmic pattern in terms of syllabic quantity E g in *Tiruppukal* 418 *tirumakalulōum | irupuyamurāri | tirumurukanāma | perumāl kān*, the *cantam* is *tāna tāna tānā'na | tāna tāna tānā'na | tāna tāna tānā'na | tāna tānā, 1 e*
○○○○○○-○/○○○○○○○○-○/○○○○○○○○-○/○○○○○○○○-○

about his *vilaimātar kaṇṇvāyil kannalivu varitta putri* "blind mind guided only by the senses inflamed by harlots"

After having ruined his health¹ and reputation and having become a real menace to society, he one day tried to commit suicide, disgusted with life and with himself, and unable to bear the pains of his ruined body He threw himself into the abyss from the northern tower of the famous Tiruvannāmalai temple to end his wretched life

However—he did not shatter his limbs by the terrible fall, but landed softly in the arms of a holy man who just at that moment appeared unexpectedly at the bottom of the gopura and who was none else but the god Murukaṇ himself After having thus saved Arunakiri's life he expelled from his heart the threefold craving—*mannācai poṇṇācai pennācai*—the desire for earth, gold and women, he touched with the point of his spear Arunakiri's tongue and exclaimed *nī pātuka!* Sing! Naturally, Arunakiri was in no mood to sing, not to mention the fact that he did not know how or what to sing And so Lord Murukaṇ himself sang the first verse beginning with the words *muttataru pattittirunakai kurupara* "O my guru with the lovely smile of your pearl-like teeth!"

The next moment Arunakiri was a new person Even the physical signs of his deterioration vanished from his depraved face and body, and Arunakiri, young, handsome and pure, burst into streams of beautiful songs, which amazed the crowds, led by his sister

From that day Arunakiri became the most ardent devotee of Murukaṇ, wandering from temple to temple throughout Tamilnad, praising life and God in verses which have no like in Tamil literature

Thus far the legend

About the real Arunakiri we know very little He himself mentions a ruler by name of Praudhadevaraya, who probably is no else than the noted Deva Raya II, the Vijayanagara king known as *Gajabētekāra* "Hunter of elephants" He was a great patron of poets and a great builder, reigning from 1426 till 1446 On the other hand, a Sanskrit poet, Rajendra Kavi, who lived in the 15th Cent, speaks of a Sarvabhauma Dīndima Kavi as of his father, and there is some reason to identify this *kavi* with Arunakiri

Arunakiri left behind a huge poetic work 1367 stanzas of *Tirup-pukal*, praises of Murukaṇ, the eternally young, the handsome lover

¹ According to one version, he suffered from a stomach (or duodenal) ulcer, according to another version, from a venereal disease



A South Indian wood-carving from Tamilnad. Property of the author.

and warrior, symbol of youth and strength, victory, of movement and change in life and nature, the patron of poets and god of travellers Apart from *Tiruppukal*, Arunakiri is the author of many hundreds of other poems, forming several large collections (the chief among them being *Kantaralankāram* of 102 stanzas and *Kantaranupūti* of 51 stanzas), imbued with tremendous knowledge of mythology and legends, and characterized by perfection of form and sovereign command of diction and prosody

“The work of Arunakiri may be described as religious, lyrical hymnody, interwoven with Śaiva Siddhānta philosophic doctrines, and fed profusely by Aryan and indigenous mythology At the same time, however, his poetry has a vitality gushing from the poet’s own inner experience, the poet’s all-embracing and glowing love for all aspects of life, from the beauty of a pearl or an emerald through flowers, birds, beasts to men—especially women—and ultimately for God)

Several streams converge and merge in his work the hymnic tradition of Śaiva and Vaisnava *bhakti*, the reflective stream of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, the ancient inheritance of bardic poetry, both *puram* and *akam*, the vast resources of Aryan mythology, the deep wells of indigenous Tamil myths and legends connected with the cult of Murukan, and, last but not least, his own shattering life-experience.

There are basically poems of three types in Arunakiri’s work lyrical poetry of personal experience with rich autobiographical material, reflective lyrical poetry with elements of philosophy, and straightforward hymns praising Lord Murukan)

If we apply the scheme of the segments $S_1S_2O_1O_2$ we see that all these segments are usually present, but the segments S_2O_2 are predominant As an illustration, here is *Tiruppukal* 200 The first portion comprises segments $(S_1)S_2$

“I was ensnared and smitten with love
of maids whose tresses are fragrant night,
I was attached to mountain-like breasts
of women arousing lust,
fed by desirous lips
of females skilled in Madana’s tricks!”

Next comes the segment O_1

“But you have never forgotten
your friendship,

you have not left me alone
 enmeshed in desire,
 you have endured my sins
 and you gave your grace
 to live in the shade of your sacred feet
 and grasp your eternal bliss!"

And, finally, O₂ which is quite developed

"O Guha, master of Śiva,
 lover of Valli, your bride!
 You dwell in Tiruvēṛakam
 on Kāvīri's northern shores
 with fully-grown shady groves,
 sweet child of Umai, Ganesa's brother,
 great hero, destroyer of demoniac pride!"

O₂ is of course based on both Sanskritic and Tamil mythology
 Guha is Aryan—but the lover of Valli is Tamil, child of Umai, brother
 of Ganesa, destroyer of the demons is probably Sanskritic, but he
 who lives in Tiruvēṛakam on the shores of Kāvīri is indigenous

"Those women
 with swaying breasts
 lovely red hands
 filled with bangles
 as they jangle
 with dark cloud-like tresses
 where bees sing
 and soft beseeching words like the *kuṇṇi*
 lovely as the five-coloured parrots
 their voices honey
 fish-like eyes
 vieng
 warm with fear
 then forehead a crescent moon
 By them I was lured
 in their magical ways
 into this sea of birth
 Your slave am I
 Help me reach the shore
 of your brave noble feet
 Conquer and bless me"

(*Tiruppukal* 11, 26)
 (Transl S Kōkīlam)

This motive appears again and again Arunakīri, the sinner and
 Arunakīri, the saint, temptation and redemption Though the
 material and the form are very much alike, yet no two stanzas
 repeat themselves in a dull and uninteresting manner

"Two tusks of black elephants
 are those mountainous breasts
 sparkling with gold chains
 Lovely forehead
 lovelier than the crescent moon
 Are they sharp spears
 those beautiful eyes?
 Like the dark nightfall
 their tresses flow
 They come these women
 who trade for wealth
 with sweet words
 with soft caresses
 These lewd women lured me
 into their homes
 into a life filled with *karma*
 This wasted sinner
 Give me the strength
 to reach your noble feet
 Give me the joy of enlightenment"

(Transl S Kokilam)

In the second type of Arunakiri's poetry—the philosophical stanzas with no autobiographical material—the segments (O₁) O₂ are usually the only segments present. As an illustration, a perfectly beautiful quatram form *Kantaranupūti* (51) may be quoted. First the music of the original

uruvāy aruvāy ulatāy ulatāy
maruvāy malarāy maniyāy ollyāyk
karuvāy uyirāy katiyāy vitriyāyk
kuruvāy varuvāy arulvāy kukanē

"You who have form and who are formless,
 you who are both being and non-being,
 who are the fragrance and the blossom,
 who are the jewel and its lustre,
 who are the seed of life and life itself,
 who are the mode and act of existence,
 who are supreme *guru*, come
 and bestow your grace, o Guha"

I suggest that this stanza is no "word-jugglery" but perfection itself—as far as philosophic poetry goes—both in thought-content and in form. A whole philosophy is expressed in three lines of poetry which sounds like music. This is Arunakiri's real greatness. He has reached extreme limits in his masterly use of the phonaesthetic qualities of Tamil, and such stanzas are therefore untranslatable.

I mentioned two properties of his poetry: his exceptionally copious vocabulary, and the use of *cantam*, the other two properties are his supreme skill in *vannam* or 'colour of sounds', and in the *ōcar* or 'basic tone and rhythmic flow' of his stanzas

vannam (Skt *varna*) is the prevalent phonaesthetic quality of a stanza, determined by the quantitative relations and structural positions of vocoid and contoid phonemes. Arunakīri is famous for this feature of his poems. The stanza from *Kantarānupūtī* which was just quoted is an instance of a prevalent *ītarīyīṇa vannam* or "sonant, liquid colour" (prevalence of *y, r, l, v, l, l*). The stanza is, however, carefully patterned from the point of its thought-content, too—the basic principle being that of positive-negative pairs and pairs of actor-action or result

uru(vu) "form" *aru(vu)* "formlessness"
ulatu "existence" *īlatu* "non-existence"
malar "blossom" *maru* "fragrance"
man "jewel" *ol* "lustre"
karu "seed" *uyir* "life"
katu "mode" *vitu* "act"

Some of his poems are a blend of reflection and prayer, like the following one (*Tiruppukal* VI 186)

"We need clothes
to dress
Rich drink to quench our thirst
To be resplendent lovely attire
water and perfumes
To cure ills medicine
A young wife for a home
A cottage to rest
as protector of kith and kin
Life passes by
as it withers aimless
So
be merciful to me
Give me the knowledge
of realization
Redeem me from this *karma*
the swirling mountain of life
Will there come a day
when you will reach this slave?"

(Transl. S. Kokilam)

Finally, as an instance of the pure prayers, praises, hymns

addressed to Murugaṅ, we have chosen one in which Arunakīri the *bhakta* points to himself as a maid of the Lord (*Tiruppukal* V 6g):

“Lord with the spear
 worshipped by
 the spouse of the mountain kings’ daughter
 the spouse of the daughter of learning
 the spouse of the daughter of wealth
 You
 with the deer of the millet fields
 with the deer of the heavenly groves
 in love embraced
 in your merciful arms
 Rescue
 this daughter of the earth
 where great poets stray
 with your golden-rayed spear
 residing on the hills of Tiruttaṅ
 You redeem those lonely followers
 all day mounted
 on your beautiful peacock
 O pride of prides!
 Those bedecked women
 with luring words
 mingled with the sounds of horns
 and the call of black *kuyils* from the shore
 echo of the sea
 merged with waves of thoughts
 From the murderous arrows of Maṅmataṅ
 rescue this woman with creeper-like waist
 from being destroyed in sorrows
 You adorned with the *kura* flower
 grant me your garland of *katappa* blossoms
 strung round your wide arms!”

(Transl S Kokilam)

When two great poets meet, we may expect a happy outcome. This is in fact the case of a stanza of Arunakīri, translated into English by Subrahmanya Bharatī (1882-1921), and published in his *Agni and Other Poems*

“Like a child unto the barren womb,
 Like a mine of new-found treasures,
 Like a floor of diamonds,
 so be my songs

Like the wilful embrace of Love’s soft bosom,
 Like a string of the purest gems,
 Like a garden of fragrant blossoms,

Like the river that descends from heaven,
 even so be my songs
 Like the daughter of the ocean,
 Like eyes unto poets,
 Like a stream full to the brim easy to drink of,
 Like the vase of the nectar of Thy beauty,
 So be my wondrous songs of love,
 by Thy grace, o Lord''

Lastly, there is one more feature of Arunakiri's poetry that should be mentioned his conception of Murukan True to the ancient, almost pre-historic tradition, Murukan and Tamil are one for Arunakiri Murukan, the "lion who presides over the famous bards of powerful speech" (*Tirumurukārruppatar*), is the supreme patron of poetry, and the god of the Tamil language

"The bridegroom of Valli
 with tresses adorned with garlands
 is ready to foster
 even those who curse and abuse—
 in threefold Tamil!"

And, elsewhere, Arunakiri cries out, full of rapture, in verses in which Tamil and Sanskrit blend in resonant music

muttamī vitva
vinōlā' kītā'
marravar oppilā
rūpā' tīpā'

"O beauty, o wisdom of three-fold Tamil!
 O song!
 Incomparable, unique Form !
 O light!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE PROSE OF THE COMMENTATORS

“Like the oil pressed out of sesamum-seed,
so grammar derives from literature”

The primacy of literature before grammar was mentioned in our discussion of the *Tolkāppiyam*. Analogically, before there was a commentary, *urai*, there must have been the original text, *mūlam*. Although, according to Pēracīriyar (13th Cent A D), there had been a time when there were no commentaries, and literary works were easily understood by everyone,¹ it seems nowadays almost unbelievable that there could have been such a golden age. We can hardly imagine a classical text without a commentary. And there are texts to which the commentaries are considered decidedly more important and relevant than the text itself.²

Although there exists a limited number of commentaries in verse in Tamil, this is not typical.³ And yet, for the development of Tamil literature, it is important that some modern poets, notably Bharatidasan and Kannadasan, composed a few works as “commentaries” in verse upon ancient classical texts.⁴ But, generally speaking, it is the prose-commentaries one usually has in mind when discussing the important cultural phenomenon which is called *urai*.⁵

I speak about a ‘cultural phenomenon’ on purpose. The existence of a live commentatorial tradition, and the origin and development of a rich commentatorial literature, presuppose a specific cultural atmosphere and a certain outlook which may be characterized in terms of a number of more or less well-defined, constituent elements like “return to classicism”, “unquestioned authority of the original

¹ *Tolk Mavaṟṟiyal* ss 98, 101, Pēracīriyar’s comm

² E.g. Nakkīrar’s celebrated commentary to *Iṟaiyanār Akapporai* alias *Kalavṟiyal*

³ Cf. U. Vē. Cāmnātaiyar, *Tiruvalluvarum tirukkuralum*, 8

⁴ Cf. Pāratitācaṇ (Bharatidasan) *Kavitaṅkal*, 2nd vol, containing a “verse-commentary” on some *Kuṟuntokai* poems, and Kannadasan’s poetic comments upon *Muttollāyiram*

⁵ For the etymology of the two basic terms *mūlam* < Sanskr *mūla*—“root, base, fundament, basic, original text”, *urai* (Dr. ?) “word, speech, word of praise, comment, commentary, to say, speak, utter, comment”

text", "initatory structure of learning", "urge toward ratiocination, intellection and learned classification for their own sake", "positive, appreciative criticism", and, basically, the concept of the division of the totality of recorded literature into underlying texts (*mūlam*) and comments upon them (*urai*)¹ These conditions were prevalent in a high degree in Tamilnad between the 12th-16th centuries, but especially in the 13th-15th centuries, the "golden age" of the commentators There was a definite "return to classicism" (to the great classical literature of the "Cankam" and post-"Cankam" epoch) in the works of such men as Parimēlalakar (14th Cent),² the authority of the original text went unquestioned, and hence the criticism of the commentator was always positive and appreciative the commentator paraphrased, analysed, explained the meaning of the original text (quite often misunderstanding the original author), questioning or even refuting the views of other commentators, but never the views of the original author, for the entire recorded literature was divided into the *mūlam*, the original texts, "revealed" by sage-poets or by poets revered and respected because they were ancient and aged, and *urai*, the prosaic commentaries where disagreement and polemics were quite welcome, finally, there was the tendency to systematize, to be as exhaustive and as explicit as possible, reading became study

The earliest commentaries, however, were obviously brief answers to students' questions concerning isolated items obscure, unintelligible words and difficult grammatical forms, technical terms, allusions to historical events, etc Some of such old commentaries (or fragments of such commentaries) have actually been preserved, and later commentaries, modelled upon these, are in existence They are characteristic for their brevity, terseness, economy of language and style Sometimes such commentaries are hardly more than collections of annotations and remarks, as e.g. an old anonymous commentary to 90 poems of *Akanānūru* Such collections of annotations were appended to (and in modern times printed along with) the original text under the term *kurippurai* or "annotations" (lit "note-commentaries")

¹ It is significant that, in this respect, the *bhakti* hymns, especially Śaiva *bhakti* literature, were not considered "literature" they were not supposed to be commented upon, there was a sort of tabu on any commenting upon these hymns

² Cf S Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamiḷ cutar manikāḷ*, p 198

Somewhat more explicit and detailed commentaries (like the old anonymous commentary to *Puranānūru* or Parimēlaḷakar's commentary on *Paripāṭal*) are called *polēppurai* or "abstracts", "summaries"

In course of time, commentaries became more involved and intricate, their form developed with the growth of ideas and the emergence of critical and polemic approach toward the opinions of former generations of scholars, and finally, after the texts were recorded in writing, much more complicated patterns evolved, including quotations of a number of examples, polemic passages, etc. These detailed, complicated commentaries are termed *virivurai* or *viritturai*, "detailed commentaries, dissertations", and *vilakkurai*, *vilakkavurai*, "exemplifying commentary"

There can be hardly any doubt that, originally, commentaries were transmitted orally in the same way as the underlying literary texts. This fact is explicitly mentioned e.g. in the famous commentary of Nakkīrar (8th Cent. A.D.) to *Iṟaiyanār Akapporul*. It says *inī urai natantu vantavāru collatum* "Now we shall reveal the way (*āru*) how the commentary came down [to us] (*natantu vanta*)", and it goes on to report how the commentary passed from Nakkīrar to his son, etc., and how, finally, after having passed through eight generations of scholasts, it was finally fixed by a Nilakantaṅ of Muciri.

The origin of the commentaries may be sought in discourses between the teachers and the students, in other words, in the initiatory and personal structure of learning. There are many commentaries which still retain the character of *vināvṛtai*—"questions (and) answers". In most commentaries, statements are interrupted with brief questions like *ennaī* "what?" or *atu ennaṅam* "How is that?" Many statements are introduced with phrases like *aḥtu ennaṅam eniṇ*, lit. "if you say how is that" or *iccūttiram enṇutalirō vēṇṇ* "if you ask whether this is what this *sūtra* says", which show that such statements are in fact answers to questions. Such phrases became established and recurrent formulae in course of time.

As time went by, the great classical commentaries became in part unintelligible. Thus a need arose to comment upon them, and the super-commentaries or commentaries on commentaries (*urakkurai*) were born. A typical case is, e.g., that of the great commentary of Parimēlaḷakar on the "Sacred *Kural*". In the 17th Century, T. Irattina Kavirāyar composed a commentary to Parimēlaḷakar's

commentary (called *Nunporul mālai*) Another super-commentary was written in 1869, and another in 1885 (by Murugesu Mudahar) We have, in addition, five other modern commentaries which comment upon Parimēlālakar's classical work

(The function of a commentary should, ideally—according to the traditional view—be,

a) to split and dissect, analyze and examine the text word by word and to give, in paraphrase, the meaning of each item in the text,

b) to quote examples and illustrations, and parallel *loci* from other texts,

c) to discuss, in form of questions and answers, the merits and demerits of other opinions,

In actual practice, there are not many commentaries which attain such perfection¹ But, according to an old stanza, a commentary should be a tool as useful to the student as “a style is to the goldsmith”, “a rod to the carpenter”, and as sharp as “a diamond needle”

There are many kinds of commentaries, the classification based usually on the exhaustiveness and explicitness of the commentary, or on the various aspects on which this or that commentary concentrates It seems that from the earliest times (i e from the age of the earliest extant recorded commentary, Nakkirar on *Ṛaiyanār Kalaviyal*, 8th Cent A D), four types of commentaries were distinguished

1 *karutturai* should reflect and explain the sense of the text (*karuttu* = “thought sense”),

2 *kannalitturai* should split the utterances into constituent words and give the gloss for each word (*kannalivu* is the *terminus technicus* for the process of “dissolving” the *sandhi*—the syntactophonemic and morphophonemic rules—and splitting up a stretch of text into isolated words), also termed *patavurai*, lit “word-commentary”,

3 *polappurai*, the abstract, the summary of the text (*polappu*, “compendium, digest, synopsis”), also termed *mutippu*, “summary”),

¹ As illustration of a medieval commentary, the Appendix to this chapter gives a very brief segment of Atiyārkkunallār's classical commentary to the *Cilappatikāvam*

4 *akalavurai* or *akalam* the detailed and elaborate exposition with examples and discussions (*akalam*, lit "breadth, width")

The best commentaries usually combine all these aspects and procedures Thus e.g. U. V. Cuvāmināt'āiyar's Commentary on *Kuruntokai* (1937) proceeds along the following scheme: 1) *varia lectiones* (textual variations, *piratipētam*, abbreviation *p-m*), 2) "word-commentary" (*patavurai*), 3) summary (*mutiṭṭu*), 4) basic sense, basic idea (*karuttu*), 5) detailed exposition (*vicētavurai*) including parallelisms and concordances

Later, many sub-types of commentaries were added, so that e.g. the medieval grammar *Vīracōliyam* (11th Cent. A.D.) enumerates 14 kinds of commentaries

A special kind of commentary is the *arumpatavurai* or "glossary (of unusual, rare terms)"

There is another and very basic classification of the commentaries¹ or rather of the entire expository and exegetic literature into

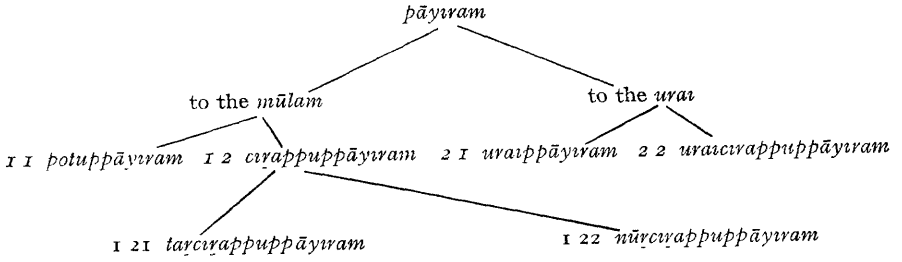
a) *kāntikai*, which paraphrases the text, explains the meaning of the original (usually in form of questions and answers), and gives illustrations, and

b) *virutti*, which, in addition to the functions mentioned above, critically evaluates other commentaries, engages in discussion, and supplements the text with its own *dāta*

The prefatory verses—*pāyiram* (or *puravurai*)—to a work can also be considered as a sort of commentary since they provide information (usually embodying current oral tradition) about the author's name, origin, education and learning, about his patron, etc.² There are two basic types of prefatory verses: the *potu pāyiram*, "general preface", and the *ciraṭṭu pāyiram*, "specific preface". Later, however, there was some development in this genre, too, and the late medieval state of affairs may be symbolized by the following diagram

¹ Cf. *Nannūl*, *Potupāyiram* 21-22

² It should also give the title of the book and explain it. Traditionally, a book should be entitled in either of the following five manners: 1) according to its author, e.g. *Akattiyam* (written by Agastya), 2) according to its patron (e.g. *Pantirayam*), 3) according to its size and/or the number of its parts (e.g. *Pannuvupatalam*, lit "12 chapters"), 4) according to its content and importance (e.g. *Kalaviyal* "The Treatise on Secret Love"), 5) by an "arbitrary" or "primitive" descriptive term (e.g. *Nikantu* "Dictionary")



1 1 —general preface (invocatory verses, in praise of a deity, in praise of Tamil, etc), not dealing specifically with the work

1 2 —specific preface concerning the work

1 2 1 —subjective assessment of the work, expresses the attitude of the author toward the work and provides information about the author

1 2 2 —objective assessment of the work, dealing with the excellence of the work, usually in verse

2 1 —composed as a preface to the book by the commentator

2 2 —dealing with the excellence of the commentary and the praise of the commentator, usually in verse

By the time of the standard medieval Tamil grammar *Nannūl* (lit “The Good Book”, beginning of 12th Cent), a more or less fixed and rather elaborate conception how an expository book (*nūl*) should look like had developed, and is formulated by the author of the grammar, Pavananti

1) It must have two prefaces, the “general preface” and the “specific preface” (aphorisms 1-3)

2) It must have a place in one of the three orders of a literary work, the primary, original (*mutal*), the deductive, derived (*vali*), the supporting or supplemental (*putai, cārpu*) (5-8)

3) It must be advantageous for the reader in his quest after one or the other of the four grand objects—virtue, wealth, pleasure or deliverance (9)

4) It must agree with one or more of the 7 principles of authorship (10)

5) It must avoid the ten basic faults to say too little, to say too much, tautology, contradiction, employment of inappropriate terms, mystification, to begin with another subject, to introduce another subject, gradual loss of vigour and tone, useless verbosity (11)

6) It must possess the ten beauties—brevity, elucidative power, sweetness, juncture of well-chosen words, rhythm, comprehensiveness of language, orderly arrangement, congruity, usefulness, clarity (12)

7) It must possess the 32 niceties (*utti*) (13)

8) It must be composed in terms of *ōttu* (section), *patalam* (chapter) and *cūttiram* (*sūtra*, aphorism) An aphorism of expository literature must follow another aphorism in regular and natural order like the flow of a river, it must have ‘lion’s look’ (i.e. ‘look’ forward and backward), it must ‘leap with ease like a frog’, and it must grasp its subject as a hawk grasps its prey (15-18)

9) Finally, it is proper that it has commentaries (20-22)

From the point of view of this particular book, the main importance of the commentaries lies in the fact that they represent long stretches of prose-writing, reflecting the evolution of standard literary Tamil prose¹ in the course of an entire millennium. However, apart from the tremendous role they played in the origin and development of Tamil prose, the commentaries are of paramount importance in many other ways.

We know of the existence of a number of Tamil literary works only from the data provided by commentaries. They have preserved names of writers and titles of works which have otherwise got lost. More important than that, the commentators, in giving illustrations and examples, have preserved a number of verses and lines of lost works, or stray individual poems (*tanipātal*) which would have otherwise never reached us. Of particular interest and import is the fact that they have conserved folklore material (tales, proverbs, even folksongs). A wealth of cultural and sociological material has also been amassed by the commentators.

The commentaries have also great value for the historical linguist, reflecting the development of the language of a particular type—the expository style of Standard Tamil—through almost ten centuries. And there is of course their primary function—to comment upon the original texts.

The prose of the commentators has always been a powerful accumulator which could be utilized and resorted to by the ‘makers of modern Tamil’. There is, in fact, a direct connection between the great medieval commentators and the makers of modern Tamil.

¹ Here we should add of one particular style, the exegetic, expository style.

Many of the prose writers of the 18th and 19th Centuries were, at the same time, scholars, editors, and commentators themselves and as direct heirs of the medieval commentatorial and scholastic tradition, they themselves wrote important commentaries foremost among those who were, on the one hand, responsible for the creation of modern Tamil prose—fiction and non-fiction—and, on the other hand, composed, themselves, valuable commentaries, based—in structure, language and style—on the classical medieval works, were Āṟumuka Nāvalar of Jaffna (1822-1876), the great editor Dr U V Cuvāmināt'aiyar (1855-1942), the great purist Maṟai Malai Atikal (1876-1950), and the many-sided Tīru Vī Kalyānacuntara Mutaliyār (1883-1953)

The first full-fledged commentary which has come down to us is Nakkīrar's commentary on Iṟaiyaṅār's *Akapporul* (alias *Kalaviyal*) It probably belongs to the 8th Cent A D, but its final shape may be later¹ It is so very important because it consists of pages and pages of prose, which seems to grow, quite organically, out of the most popular classical Tamil metre, the *akaval* (*āciviyam*) "One little verse of the grammarian is dragged out through a wilderness of ornate, at times, poetic prose Simile and metaphor illuminate his style, but clarity and simplicity, essential features of good prose, are absent"²

I am afraid I can hardly agree with this judgement It is true that Nakkīrar's prose is ornate, "poetic", full of similes and metaphors But it is also very plastic, colourful, lively, and not too involved, really It is of course full of alliterations and assonances, and T P Meenakshisundaran calls it *pāttunatai* "singing, melodic prose" But this "melodiousness" and "ornateness" constitutes the excellence of the commentary, not its drawback T P Meenakshisundaran obviously considers Nakkīrar's commentary an admirable piece of

¹ According to S Vāiyapuṇi Pillai, *Kāvīyakālam* (1957), 215-16, in its present form the work is indebted to *Civakacintāmani*, and hence could not have been prior to the 10th-11th Cent A D The lower limit, in any case, is provided by the fact that the commentary quotes 325 poems from the *Pāntikkōvai*, a work of probably late 7th Cent which praises the Pāntiya king Netumāraṅ (640-670 A D) Hence, Nakkīrar's commentary cannot be earlier than the 7th Cent On the other hand, it is older than Ilampūranar Late 7th-8th Cent A D seems to be a reasonable estimate for the original text of the commentary, at least as far as our knowledge goes Later careful investigation of the text can fix a more precise date The final shape of the commentary may be later 10th-11th Cent A D

² C and J Jesudasan, *History of Tamil Literature*, 196-7

prose, and I quite agree with his evaluation ¹ It seems that Nakkīrar, while composing his melodious, singing, ornate, alliterative utterances, actually heard the rhythm of *akaval* (a metre which he must have known extremely well) and listened attentively to the *akaval* *ōcai*, the “narrative musical tone” of that metre For this is precisely the rhythm of his prose M V Aravintan, the author of an excellent book in Tamil called *Uravyācīriyarkal*, “Commentators” (Madras, 1968), gives an illustration which shows how very much is, in its structure, Nakkīrar’s prose “*akaval*-like” ²

One of the great qualities of this commentary is its liveliness, the fact that it is not at all pedantic, not at all dry, we do not find in it those endlessly involved complex sentences where we lose our breath in the search for a finite verb, stumbling across innumerable boulders of absolutes—constructions which are so cherished by some of the medieval commentators On the contrary Nakkīrar’s utterances are comparatively short, well-built, balanced, and in a particularly effective way he knows how to use the combination of a finite verb form (at the end of an utterance) and an absolute or a participle (at the beginning of the next utterance) For all commentators, analogy is the most frequently used weapon Nakkīrar is no exception, and his prose abounds in similes, some of them striking, some of them extremely pleasing He is a shrewd observer, he is open-minded, his eyes, too, are open and see clearly and sharply the real world around him He quotes a number of classical poems, known to us from the anthologies Sometimes, he quotes poems which we do not know from any other source

If there is a difference between this commentary and all other later commentaries, it is in the fact that Nakkīrar’s work is not so much a piece of expository and eruditory literature as rather a “poem in prose” It lacks the deep scholarship, the searching intellectualism, the argumentative, even polemic tone—and also the insolence, pedantism, and errors of later commentaries

There are a few truly great pages and paragraphs in this commentary One of them is e g in praise of *aṅṅu*, “affection, love”, the loving person’s characteristic features are “to die with the

¹ He calls it *oru ciraṅṅa uravataimūl*, “an outstanding prosaic work” In *Ninkalum civarayunkal* (1954), 195-6

² Nakkīrar’s commentary *innūl ceytār yārō enṇu*, *māl varar purarayum mālakūtal ālavāyir pal purar paṇṇakavṛk kuḷavittinṅkalarṅk kuṇṅkanṅmīyāka utarva aḷalavṛ cōṭh arumaṅṅarṅk kataṅṅul enṅṅatu* (ed 1939, p 3)

dyng, to suffer with the suffering, to give generously, to speak sweet and gentle words, to love ardently in union and to pine anxiously in separation" The lover should be "wise, faithful, understanding and resolute", the woman should be "modest, shy, timid and virtuous" Or consider the following similes "like the sandal-tree, standing scorched and fading in the summer-heat, when it sprouts again after it received rain" (*cūttirai* 3), or this striking one "she became pale and her heart melted and thawed like a wax-figure placed before glowing flame, like a dimmed, blurred reflection when one blows on the surface of a mirror "

While the underlying text may be superior to the commentary¹ (though I doubt it), I think that Tamil was rather fortunate to have this magnificent piece of prose at the very source of its prosaic literary tradition sometime in the 8th Cent A D

Ilampūranar wrote a commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam* some time in the 11th-12th Century His style was compared to a "quietly flowing deep river"² It is clear and simple The sentences are not too involved, comprising usually one, two, three clauses at most, the choice of words very well-balanced, and though he is not a purist, there are comparatively very few Sanskrit loanwords If I should point to a model for polished interpretative, expository style in Tamil, Iampūranar would be undoubtedly the best choice Cēṇāvaraiyār (13th Cent), another commentator on the ancient grammar, is more elegant, more descriptive, his syntax is more involved and complicated, and he displays his Sanskrit knowledge

Pērācīriyār (13th Cent) is one of the great masters of Tamil prose According to V V S Aiyar,³ "his style is grammatical, graphic and simple This is the best specimen of elegant and simple prose" T P Meenakshisundaran finds his style "dignified" I have to admire, above all, Pērācīriyār's ability to attune the style of his writing to the diction and style of the *mūlam*, of the underlying text he was commenting upon In the commentary to *Tolkāppiyam*, his style is terse, elegant, sharp, well-chiselled, however, in the commentary to Mānikkavācakar's *Tirukkōvaiyār*, it is mellow, sweet, melodious, and at the same time, admirably simple

Atiyārkkunallār's commentary on the "Lay of the Anklet" is above all a mine of information and data, including some about

¹ C and H Jesudasan, *op cit* p 196

² M V Aravintan, *Uraiyācīriyārkal* (1968), p 50

³ *Tamil—the Language and Literature*, ed 1950, 4

a number of literary works now lost. However, his sentences are complex, long and broad, epic in character. His style is very high and learned. Occasionally, his commentary reads itself like a learned epic poem.

Parimēlaḷakar (2nd half of the 13th—1st half of the 14th Cent.), a Brahmin of Kāñcīpuram, is considered by many the “prince” of Tamil commentators. According to V. V. S. Aiyar (*op cit* 42), “his prose . . . is very terse and in some places too brief to be easily intelligible. Like the style of the great poet whose work he had taken to annotate, his style also is so much compressed in form that no word in a sentence can be removed or substituted without at the same time damaging compactness of the style. Not a single word he uses unnecessarily.” Parimēlaḷakar is, according to my opinion, very much indebted to Sanskrit sources, and sometimes he is entirely under the spell of ‘Sanskritization’ and ‘Brahminization’. I would not go as far as to say that he “twisted the text” “to fit his Brahmin prejudices”, but Brahmanic, Sanskrit sources certainly enriched and influenced his thinking, as well as his vocabulary and style. The one quality which is traditionally attributed to Parimēlaḷakar’s thinking and writing is *tellu, telvū, tenmar*, i.e. ‘clarity’. This quality gives him a great power of argumentation, one of the characteristic features of his commentaries.

There are, however, students of Tamil who prefer Naccinārkkinīyar (14th Cent.), who may probably be considered as the last of the great commentators, and I belong to them. He was accused of being “prone to looking for his own ideas in the verses”¹ This may be true, but it only shows his originality and boldness of thought. The same authors admit that “he does have a keen poetic sense and awareness of word values.” Naccinārkkinīyar is, above all, a very vivid and vehement author. He is also very learned, sometimes tending to display his great learning, and very sophisticated. I think, though, that he honestly tries to be impartial, that his commentaries show minute and critical observation, a clear mind and a vast erudition. His commentaries may always be classified as *viruttis*. According to V. V. S. Aiyar (*op cit* p. 41), “it may be said that good prose writing commences with” Naccinārkkinīyar.

The so-called *manpravāla*² style was accepted as legitimate by

¹ C and H. Jesudasan, *op cit* p. 216

² The term means “(white) pearls + (red) coral”, the pearls usually symbolize Sanskrit, the coral Tamil. According to a Malayalam grammar,

the Sanskrit-oriented *Vīracōhīyam* (11th or 12th Cent A D), a very interesting grammar written by Puttiramittiran, a Buddhist Though *manīpravālam* must be evaluated, in an overall estimation and assessment of the history of Tamil language and literature, rather negatively, it was a very picturesque, colourful and plastic style which had its own charm Characteristic for this hybrid jargon is of course the exceedingly high percentage of Sanskrit loans, between 30-50% of the total vocabulary in a text (according to a count by J J Glazov, 1964, the percentage of Sanskrit loans in Tamil varies from 18 to 25%) Commentaries were written in this language mainly on Vaisnava *bhakti* poems To give an instance of this diction in a piece of *manīpravāla* prose containing approximately 125 words, I counted more than 35 Sanskrit loans including such *tatsama* ("appropriation" phase) loan-words like *prahāsikka*, *atīprīti*, *kaṣṭūrī*, etc Linguistically, there are three basic features of *manīpravāla* style 1) high number of Sanskrit loan-words, but this feature alone does not sufficiently characterize *manīpravāla*, the loans must be, mostly, 2) unadapted to Tamil phonemic system, i e must be of the *tatsama* type, and 3) a great number of structural features of Sanskrit are translocated into Tamil (e g Sanskrit compounds are borrowed as such, there are many loan-translations, syntactic features of Sanskrit are found in Tamil constructions, etc)

The commentatorial tradition has never been quite broken When we speak about Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar as "the last great commentator" we should add "the last great medieval commentator" The particular cultural and spiritual atmosphere in which the commentaries thrived and flourished, has never really ceased to exist, not even today, inspite of so many clashes between "tradition" and "modernity" Above all, the initiatory structure of learning still persists, though in a much lesser degree than previously ¹

In the "period of transition", when the Tamil country passed

Līlātlakam, *manīpravāla* means *bhāsāsamskṛtīyogam*, i e "the union of the indigenous speech and Sanskrit"

¹ I have had the honour and luck "to sit at the feet of a *guru*", Mahavidvan M V Venugopala Pillai (born 1896), one of the great teachers of the indigenous Tamil scholastic tradition He is an outstanding editor and glossator, and an excellent and kind teacher In this connection, I recall the words of M Elade (*Yoga Immortality and Freedom*, 2nd ed 1959, 5) "Strictly speaking, all traditional disciplines or crafts are, in India, taught by masters and are thus initiations, for millenniums they have been transmitted orally, 'from mouth to ear'" This fact is one of the most important components in the atmosphere which produced commentatorial literature

gradually into Muslim and then English hands, and when Tamil as a literary language was sadly neglected, the tradition of the commentaries was still kept alive, and the greatest literary personality from the *mutts*, the monasteries, Civañāna Muṇivar († 1785), was a great commentator—probably a greater commentator and prose-writer than a poet. It is especially his monumental commentary on *Civañānapōtam* which contains his best prose-passages.

And so we come to those “makers of modern Tamil”, already mentioned, who were directly indebted, in their prose-writings, to the commentators of past ages. There were many of them, but probably the most important of those who “bridged” medieval and modern prose, was the controversial Ārumuka Nāvalar (1822-1876). He was a very prolific writer, editor, translator, and commentator. Besides a great number of original prose-works (narrations of *purāṇic* stories in prose, polemic writings against Christian missionaries) and in addition to some translations (the Bible), he has written a number of commentaries, the chief of them a *kāntikai urai* to the standard grammar *Naṇṇūl*, and a commentary to *Kōyilpurānam*. Although today we would probably describe his prose as dry, pedantic and monotonous, colourless and full of restraint, he deserves praise and gratitude for some of the great changes he introduced, and thus paved way for the writers of the “Tamil renaissance”. First of all, he “broke up” and “dissolved” some of the most rigid rules of *sandhi*, second, he “broke up” long complex sentences into brief, clear and simple sentences with finite verb forms (instead of using in abundance participles and absolutes). However, he was decisively against the use of colloquial, day-to-day forms and lexical items in written prose, and thus he was to a certain extent responsible for the affected, stilted, formal, stiff trends which are characteristic for a kind of Tamil prose even today.

But, in an over-all assessment of his work, one has to agree with the opinion of T. P. Meenakshisundaran who says “Ārumukanāvalar of the nineteenth century is the father of modern literary prose—the simple, elegant but grammatically correct prose”¹

In the commentaries was thus incorporated a tremendous force of potentialities, a generator of syntactic and stylistic possibilities for a prose-fiction to arise and develop from within. And there is no doubt that modern Tamil prose is the result of a long devel-

¹ C. and H. Jesudasan, *op cit* p. 176

opment which has some of its deep roots in the commentaries

The basic change leading to the origin of modern prose-fiction occurred in the conceptual sphere so far, prose was primarily and almost exclusively reserved for eruditory and interpretative purposes (in short, for commentaries) In the 19th Century, under the impact of different forces (probably the most decisive among them Western influences), something else became the subject-matter of prose-writing The purpose and the function of prose changed drastically :

APPENDIX 1

Cilappatikāram XVIII, 11 51

“ ‘O, Sun of burning rays! Is my husband a thief?’
 ‘He is not a thief, o woman with black fish-shaped eyes!
 Glowing fire will devour this town!’ so said a voice”

Atiyārkunallār’s commentary on these lines

“Therefore, o Sun with rays, you must know whether my husband is a thief So she said, and he declared standing (there) in a bodiless state Your husband is not a thief, o woman, look (how) this town which proclaimed him a thief, will be devoured by fire

olleri = ‘the fire which will listen to your command’,
vvūr ‘this town’ = ‘this town which said this’
unnumvvūr ‘will-eat this town’ = *vvūraiyunnum* ‘will-eat this town-accusative suffix’, a finite verb”

APPENDIX 2

As an example of those medieval invocatory stanzas in praise of god (*kalavulvālttu*) which usually introduce Tamil poetic works I give a very close translation of Peruntēvaṇār’s introductory poem to *Puraṇāṇūru* Peruntēvaṇār’s date was probably the 9th Cent

In praise of God Sung by Peruntēvaṇār who composed the Pāratam

The perfect ascetic ¹
 with abundant locks of falling hair
 and with a jar which knows not want of water ²
 He — the protector of all creatures alive
 The *koṇrai*-flower ³ which smells sweet after the rains
 his chaplet
 The *koṇrai*-flower—a wreath of many flowers

on his chest
 And the pure white bull ⁴
 he rides
 The pure white bull
 a banner of excellence
 Poison ⁵ beautifies his neck
 Poison praised by the Veda-chanting Brahmans ⁶
 One side of him shaped into a woman ⁷
 He will hide and keep within himself
 His forehead adorned with crescent moon ⁸
 That crescent moon
 praised by all
 by everyone ⁹

1 = Śiva, 2 = Gangā, Śiva is *Gangā-dhara*, Bearer-of-the-Gangā,
 3 = Indian laburnum, *Cassia fistula*, red I 1, *C marginata* (DED
 1808); 4 = Nandi, the vehicle of Śiva (cf *Mahābhārata* 13 6401)
 The bull also appears on Śiva's banner as his emblem, Śiva is thus
Vrsabha-dhvaṅga, "He whose banner is the bull", 5 = Śiva is *Nīla-*
kantha, "Blue-throated", 6 = in Tamil, *maṟṟavai antanar* (cf DED,
 DEDES 126, 3897), 7 = cf *Manusmṛti* 1 32 "He divided his body
 into halves, one was male, the other female. The male in that female
 procreates the universe" Hence he is called *Ardhanariśvara*, "The
 Hermaphrodite", 8 = Śiva bears on his head as a diadem the
 crescent of the fifth-day moon, 9 = i.e. the gods (*sura*), the anti-
 gods (*asura*), the seers (*muni*), the heavenly musicians of Kubera
 (*kinnara*), the musicians of gods (*kimpurusa*), the half-vulture
 half-men (*garuda*) the guardians of earthly treasures (*yakṣa*), the
 demons (*rākṣasa*), the celestial musicians (*gandharva*), the perfect
 ones (*siddha*), heavenly panegyrists (*cārana*), benevolent aerial
 spirits (*vidyādharā*), serpents (*nāga*), ghosts (*bhūta*), vampires
 (*vetāla*), hosts of stars (*tārāṅga*), aerial beings (*ākāśavāsi*), in-
 habitants of paradise (*bhogabhūmi*)

APPENDIX 3

As an instance of *cirappuppāyiram*, "The specific preface", I give
 here an English rendering of the famous and very important preface
 to *Tolkāppiyam* by Paṇampāraṅār

In the beautiful world
 which speaks Tamil
 between
 Northern Vēṅkatam ¹ and Southern Kumari ²
 he explored

the sounds, the words, and the things,³
 and he has fathomed
 both the common speech and poetry,⁴
 and inquired into the ancient books⁵
 in the land stirred with Straight Tamil,⁶
 and he designed a perfect plan
 and gathered knowledge as in faultless words⁷ —
 he, the ascetic⁸
 established in ample fame,
 who revealed his name as Tolkāppīyaṅ⁹ versed
 in *aiṅṅiram*¹⁰
 surrounded by the surging waves,
 and he has shown the system and the order
 which starts with sounds
 in a clear and unbewildering course,
 and he dispelled the doubts
 of the Teacher of Atankōṭu,¹¹
 ripe in the wisdom of the four Vedas,¹²
 whose tongue resounded with *dharmā*,¹³
 in the assembly of Pāntīyaṅ,¹⁴
 glorious and land-bestowing

1) Ta *vatavēṅkatam*, i e probably the modern Tirupati north of Madras, a place which has been always considered the northern boundary of Tamilnāṭu, 2) Ta *teṅkumari*, prob Kumariṁṅai, Cape Comorin, but may also refer to the river Kumari, 3) Ta *eluttu, col, porul*, i e the three main subjects of the three books (*atikāram*) of the grammar, 4) Ta *valakku*, the colloquial, spoken language, *ceyyul*, the poetry, the language of poetry, the literary language, 5) having inquired into (or having observed, having seen to) the ancient book or books, obviously an allusion to the predecessors of Tolkāppīyaṅ in grammatical tradition, 6) lit “in the land stirred (incited, animated) naturally by Straight Tamil”, i e *centamil* “the correct, standard(?), literary(?) Tamil”, 7) This is not quite clear, lit “faultless word(s), speech, utterance”, according to some commentaries, “as in faultless speech, like in faultless utterances” (adverbially), according to Naccinārkkīṅiyar, it means “in the utterances (of the grammar, of the book itself) which are faultless” 8) *patimariyōṅ* = (Jan) ascetic, 9) Naccinārkkīṅiyar uses this occasion to give his account of the legend about Tolkāppīyaṅ = Tīranatūmākkīṅi, 10) *aiṅṅiram* = the *aiṅṅira* grammatical system, for some “Dravidian”-minded nationalists this sounds too “Aryan”, and so they read it as *aiṅṅiṅiram*, and interpret it as “five-fold skill” (i e *eluttu, col, porul, yāppu, aiṅṅi*), amusing but false 11) Who this

was, we do not know, the word *ācāṇ* is identical in meaning with *ācīriyaṇ* “teacher, preceptor, *guru*” (epigraphic *ācīrikar*, *ācīriyka*), but also with *arukaṇ* < *Argha*-! It occurs frequently in Malayalam names (cf e.g. the well-known poet from Kerala, Kumāran Ācān). The commentator says *Atankōttācīriyar*, “The teacher of A”, this is one of the data which point (vaguely) to a connection between the *Tolkāppiyam* and South Kerala, 12) *nāṇmarar*, 13) *aram*, 14) We do not know who this Pāntiyaṇ king was. But it again seems to point to Southern Tamilnad or (today’s) South Kerala.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ORIGINS OF MODERN TAMIL PROSE THE HISTORICAL AND THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM

The problem of the origin of modern Tamil prose—as seen from a necessarily simplified perspective—is a twofold one—first, purely historical, and second, theoretical

The first part of the problem means to trace down and find out, to list, analyze, classify and explain the external causes and conditions accelerating or mitigating the origins and development of modern prose. The second part of the problem means to answer a basic theoretical question—Is prose, as belletristic writing, as a form of creative literature, basically alien to Tamil (and Indian) culture, and could and did it arise and develop only under predominant foreign impact—or not?

I shall not at all attempt to answer these questions, to solve these problems. There are unfortunately almost no valid *Vorarbeiten* in this field, and only very recently Tamil scholars themselves have begun to search for answers to these questions.¹

In this chapter I shall try to arrange some facts reflecting the external and internal factors pertaining to the origins of modern Tamil prose, especially as far as printing and journalism in 19th Century Tamilnad is concerned.

Among the external historical factors we have to distinguish purely historical and political factors, external cultural factors, and external ideological factors.

The expansion of French and British rule from the coastal cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras etc., ultimately brought a kind of peace and order after decades of disorder, fighting and strife. It also brought new system of law, it codified indigenous law, it brought opportunity for new jobs etc., and there is no wonder that Indian intellectuals in general welcomed the new *Pax Britannica*. The introduction of the then modern science, of the Western concep-

¹ The two books in Tamil that probably deserve to be mentioned in this connection are K. Kailasapathy's *Tamiḷ nāval* ("Tamil Novel"), Pāri Nilaiyam, Madras, 1968, and Mu. Vai Aravimban's *Uvayācuviyarkal* ("The Commentators"), Madras, 1968.

tion of humanistic studies, of ideas of "enlightenment" etc played an enormous role in the development of indigenous cultures. On the other hand, we must not forget the immense influence which the work of early Western Indologists had on the intellectual élite of India—their editions and translations of ancient Indian texts were often a kind of revelation to the Indians themselves. They brought them better knowledge of their own cultural traditions, and the praise and admiration shown by Westerners aroused in Indians legitimate pride in their own heritage.

The most important of the external ideological factors was—in the 18th and early 19th Centuries—the confrontation with Christianity. Especially in the South of India there was massive missionary activity, both Catholic and Protestant. This confrontation meant, on the one hand, practical acceptance of parts of Christian doctrine and ethics,¹ but, at the same time, strong defence and resistance against it. The Hindus saw a model which they could adopt for methods and techniques of their own propaganda and education.

More specifically, in Tamil India (as elsewhere, e.g. in Bengal), there was great need felt by the British administrators to learn the "vernacular". The old Portuguese and Latin grammars were inaccessible, dated or incomprehensible, and indigenous grammars—anyhow not available yet in print—would be of no use for the beginners. So the first "modern" grammars of Tamil began to appear, written partly in Tamil prose, partly in English. Probably the first of these printed grammars for wider use was *A Tamil Expositor* by Teroovorcaudoo Subroya Mudaliar, printed at Madras A.D. 1811.² In 1812, the College of Fort St. George was founded in Madras. In this institution (closed on July 21, 1854), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Urdu were taught by indigenous teachers, the

¹ We have in Tamil such early Christian poets as Henry Albert Krishna Pillai (1827-1900), whose Christian hymns are formally based on the *Tēvāram*.

² The early British administrators, missionaries etc. were much impressed by Tamil culture. W. Taylor "(Tamil) is one of the most copious, refined and polished languages spoken by man" (quoted by G. E. Gover, *The Folk-Songs of Southern India*, Madras, 1871, viii-ix). P. Percival "Perhaps no language combines greater force with equal brevity, and it may be asserted that no human speech is more close and philosophic in its expression as an exponent of the mind" (quoted *ib.*) E. Hoole "God 'left not Himself without witness' among the Tamil people. The acquisition of the language in which the remains of Tamil wisdom are preserved is no easy task. Aptitude, genius, industry, perseverance, are necessary to the Tamil scholar" (E. J. Robinson, *Tamil Wisdom*, With an Introduction by the late Rev. Elijah Hoole, London, 1873, ix-x).

munshis First principals of this College were Englishmen, Ellis and Mackenzie, but later they also included Indians, like Muttusami Pillai, and this College was in fact the first centre of Western-oriented Tamil scholarship The first influential Tamil scholars of the first half of the 19th Cent all taught or were in some way connected with the College Tandavaraya Mudaliyar, Muttusami Pillai and others

Another important institution where the contacts of Western and Tamil culture took place daily was the office of the dubashis, the interpreters

Among early French and British administrators, the need soon arose for various lists, inventories, catalogues, registers, accounts, chronicles etc , in Tamil, besides having them in French or English

All these and similar factors had a definite trigger-effect accelerating the development of Tamil prose, adequate for such purposes

As far as the classical and medieval Tamil texts were concerned, there was relative ignorance of them among the people Only the traditional scholar, sometimes in private, sometimes in *mutts*, kept the knowledge alive One of the reasons for this relative ignorance was the fact that all literary works were either in the manuscript form, or existing only in scholarly oral transmission, neither of these traditional channels accessible to the majority of common people There were no really live centres of literary and cultural activities For a few centuries, owing to political and religious reasons, Sanskrit, Urdu, Marathi and Telugu seem to have been more prestigious and important than Tamil even in Tamilnad This is no speculation We actually have records and accounts of the fact that Tamil as a literary language was neglected, while the other languages were decidedly preferred cf the complaints of Patikkācu Pulavar, a bard of the 17th Cent , who made himself acquainted with this deplorable state of affairs during his wanderings all over the country

In the monasteries or *mutts*, it was a scholastic, highflown type of compositions which were produced, under a very strong impact of Sanskrit, in the 18th Cent , one may observe slight beginnings of a reaction against the over-all Sanskritization upheld by such overbearing Sanskrit enthusiasts as Swaminatha Desikar

One important factor in the origin of modern prose seems to be the fact that traditional forms of literary expression became inadequate to express new ideas and new emotions, but, above all,

to meet new demands and new needs, in fact, to express the entire process of the confrontation of the two cultures

However, the most important external factors, playing an almost all-decisive part in the origin of modern and popular prose in Tamilnad and in India, were printing and journalism

The very beginnings of printing, sporadic both in time, space and output, were all connected with missionary activities. Here was the origin of Gonzalves' *Kristuvavanakkam* (1577),¹ one of the first if not the first book printed in India, Philip de Melho's Tamil *New Testament* printed in 1749 etc. The two most important early printing establishments in the South were founded at Ambalakkadu (since 1679) and in Tranquebar (1712-13). However, it was only the massive spread of printing, beginning in Tamil India roughly after 1835, which played such a decisive role in the origin and development of modern prose.

On August 3rd, 1835, a law was passed which abolished the previous acts of 1823, 1825 and 1827 concerning printing and publishing of books. Printing was brought under direct surveillance of magistrates and thus a kind of censorship was established (disobeying the law resulted in a fine of Rs 5000 and/or 2 years' imprisonment), on the other hand, this law institutionalized and legalized printing, and it gave an exactly defined obligatory form to everything which was to be published. The full text of the new law which formed article 11 of the 1835 Act was published in Fort St George Gazette in English, Tamil, and the other languages of Madras.

What was, however, most important was the fact that the law enabled Indians to own pressworks. Previously, almost all printing works were owned by Catholic and Protestant missions, and, apart from dictionaries, grammars and textbooks, they naturally printed their own kind of Christian propaganda material to the exclusion of everything else.

The fact that since 1835 Indian ownership of printing establishments was legalized had naturally a tremendous impact, and the results were to be seen very soon. First, old Tamil texts began to

¹ According to Albertine Gaur of the British Museum, the first Tamil printed book was a translation of Francis Xavier's *Doutrina Christe* by Henrique Henriques, published in 1578 in Goa, cf. "European Missionaries and the Study of Dravidian Languages", *Proceed of the I Intern Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Vol II, Kuala Lumpur, 1969, pp 322-328

be published and this rediscovery of ancient Tamil culture ultimately led to the "Tamil Renaissance", second, the development of modern prose took a new and vigorously different turn

It was of course a great novelty to have old venerated texts which had so far been known only to the elite either through oral transmission from *guru* to *chela*, or written on palm-leaves which were almost unavailable, printed and published in a great number of copies which were cheap and easy to obtain. It was such a novelty that many of the pandits who called this manner of treating old literary texts *elutā eluttu*, i.e. "unwritten script", actually opposed it. One of the points which made tremendous difference between a palm-leaf manuscript copy of a text and its printed edition was the price. (Thus e.g. according to John Murdoch, the Rev P Percival paid (sometime before 1835) for a palm-leaf manuscript-copy of Beschi's *Caturakarāṭi* 10 English pounds, when the same work was printed after 1835, its price fell down to 2½ shillings.)

The "rediscovery" of ancient Tamil literature occurred in the transition period of the later 19th Century when—to use the happy phrase of A. K. Ramanujan—"both paper and palm leaf were used". The man most responsible for making possible the transition was U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942), by editing and printing the most important and inaccessible of ancient manuscripts. The late medieval Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite scholars "apparently tabooed as irreligious all secular texts which included the earliest and the greatest of Tamil literary texts, they disallowed from study all Jain and Buddhist texts. . . Under this intellectual taboo, a great scholar like Cāmpātaiyar had to give his nights and days to second-rate religious and grammatical texts of the medieval period. He was entirely unaware even of the existence of the twin epics and the breath-taking poetic anthologies of Tamil literature, till he met a liberal-minded *munsif* named Rāmacuvāmi Mutalār. He records the date as 1880, October 21, a Thursday—and all students of Tamil literature should think of that date as 'etched in red letters'." ¹

It was *munsif* Ramaswamy who made Swaminatha Aiyar aware of the existence of such texts as the *Cīvakacintāmani* and the *Cīlappatikāram*, and even gave him a handwritten manuscript to

¹ A. K. Ramanujan, *Language and "Modernization" The Tamil Example*, University of Chicago, 1968. Xeroxed, Private Distribution Only. By courtesy of the author.

take home and read¹, Swaminatha Aiyar devoted then the rest of his life to unearthing, editing and printing ancient Tamil literary texts

However, it seems that we should go at least twenty years back for the true 'rediscoverer' of ancient Tamil literature 'In 1868, Rev H Bower, an Englishman, published the first book of *Civakacintāmani (Nāmakal Ilampakam) The Chintamani First Book Called Namagal Ilambagam, with the Commentary of Nachnarkunyar, and with analysis and notes in English, Tamil and English Indexes, and an English Introduction explaining the Jaina system on which the book is based, by Rev H Bower, with the assistance of E Muttaiya Pillai* Printed by H W Laurie, at the Christian Knowledge Society Press, No 18, Church Street, Vepery, 1868 Bower's edition was of a surprisingly high standard².

Without trying in any way to detract from the great merits due to U V Swaminatha Aiyar, we have to justly admit that S V Damodaram Pillai (1823-1901) deserves equal admiration and gratitude for his editions of literary (e.g. *Kalittokai*, 1887) and especially grammatical texts (e.g. *Vīracōliyam*, 1881, Iṟaiyanār's *Akapporul*, 1883, *Tolkāppiyam Porul*, 1885). It was probably Damodaram Pillai more than *anyone* else who started the search after old manuscripts. Without doubt he was the one who was first engaged in the rediscovery of the earliest classical literature. Before him, probably nobody knew for sure about the existence of an anthology called *Ettuttokai*, pandits were not sure even of the famous epic, whether it was *Cilappatikāram* or *Ciraṅṅatikāram*. And worse than that there were even doubts and suspicions as to the genuine nature and authenticity of the ancient texts, so much so that Damodaram Pillai had to write in a kind of self-defence "Śrīmat Cāminātaiyar is my witness, as I am a witness to him". Perseverance and modesty were the two most characteristic features of this man, who was as great as Swaminatha Aiyar, but whose greatness and merits have never been truly acknowledged.

It is impossible to give a chronological or a complete list of printing works which published Tamil literature in the first half of the 19th Cent. But after 1835, there was an enormous growth of Indian-owned printing establishments in Madras and in Ceylon,

¹ U V Swaminatha Aiyar's *Autobiography* (in Tamil), ed 1958, 326-43

² Cf S Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamilc cular manikal*, 3rd ed 1959, 296

and foreign printers and the missions, too, began publishing Tamil literature. According to preliminary and incomplete data, in the first half of the 19th Century, roughly until 1860, there were seventy printers in Madras and in Ceylon, publishing in Tamil.

The appearance of printing and paper, the availability of printing to Tamil editors, scholars and original authors after 1835, revolutionized the whole conception, the ways, methods and techniques of writing, and was no doubt one of the two most decisive external factors in the development of modern prose.

The second factor of utmost importance was the birth and growth of Tamil journalism. The 19th Century is the century of Tamil journalism.

At the beginning of the century, it were mission-owned and government establishments that began publishing Tamil weeklies and monthlies. The first, and at the same time typical of these Christian-oriented Tamil journals was *Tamilppattinikai* (alias *Tamilatal*), established in 1831, a monthly, published by the Madras Religious Tract Society.

In 1840, a Christian-oriented journal for children was started in Nagarcoil, a quarterly under the name *Pālātīpikai* (stopped publishing in 1852). In the same year, three other Tamil journals were founded in Madras: *Missionary Glance* in Nagarcoil, *Friendly Instructor* in Palamcottah, and *Tarpōtakam* in the same place.

About six or more weeklies to monthlies to quarterlies were started between 1840-1855, in 1855, a very important weekly, the *Tinnavarttamani*, appeared for the first time. It was published every Friday, and its founder and editor was Rev. P. Percival. Though Christian in orientation, this was the first full-blooded Tamil journal in its language, and in general atmosphere. It published news, pieces of ancient literature⁽¹⁾, science, essays. It was supported with 200 Rs of government money per month. After Percival left, the editorship was taken over by Damodaram Pillai and later by Viswanatha Pillai.

The first period of Tamil journalism, typical for its Christian, missionary orientation,¹ and for the absence of dailies, came to an end after 1880 with the foundation of *Cūṭēcamittiraṅ* (Swadeshamitraṅ), the excellent and well-known daily paper of Madras,

¹ An exception was the *Tattvapōthini*, founded in St. Thome, Mylapore, in 1864 by the Madras Brahma Samaj, followed by *Vivekavilakkam*, another journal of the Samaj, in 1865.

which, by its political outlook, language and cultural orientation set up an entirely different and much higher standard for Tamil journalism

Between 1831-1880, that is in about fifty years, roughly 46 weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies were founded in Madras Presidency. Between 1880—1900, that is within twenty years alone, approximately 60 Tamil dailies to quarterlies were born. This number is rather impressive in itself. And starting with *Culēcamittiran*, there was place, in Tamil journalism, for regular news-editing, for political and social satire, for regular essays, and, most important of all, for the short story. Typical for the new type of periodical, devoted more to literature and culture than anything else was the monthly *Ñānapōtṭṭu*, published since 1897 in Madras by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, the author of the first history of Tamil literature. The joint editor of this—for its time quite outstanding—achievement was Suryanarayana Sastrī (1871-1903), a noted poet, dramatist, journalist and scholar.

For any successful attack on the theoretical problem posed above—the origin and evolution of modern Tamil prose as such—we have to make a distinction between belletristic writing (prose-fiction) and all other types of prose, second, between direct influence and an accelerating impulse, a trigger-like effect.

Well-spread in time, for about seven to eight centuries, there had been a tremendous potential of Tamil prose in the writings of the commentators: from the alliterative, highly ornamental prose of a Nakkīrar to a comparatively simple descriptive style of Atiyārkkunallār, there were short pieces of narrative prose as well as heavy, ornate and very learned passages of some commentaries. These sources were of course accessible only to a few individuals: traditional pandits, antiquarians, foreign scholars. But it is exactly these men who stand at the cradle of modern prose. Foreigners like Roberto de Nobili and C. J. Beschi, traditional scholars like Minakshisundaram Pillai (1815-1876)

Minātcūntaram Pillai was an extremely prolific poet and translator from Sanskrit, but his poetry¹ is now almost forgotten. His enormous importance lies in the fact that he gathered round himself a charmed circle of disciples—in the manner of a Samuel

¹ 22 *purānas*, 10 *pullaittamils*, 11 *antāths*, 2 *kalampakams*, 7 *mālaris*, 3 *kōvars*, 9 *ulās* and 1 *līlai*.

Johnson—and some of the most distinguished scholars and prose-writers of Tamilnad owned their skill, enthusiasm and knowledge to this fascinating man—the most noted among them perhaps Thyagaraja Chettiar and U V Swaminatha Aiyar

For prose writing as such, however, a more important personality was Ārumuka Nāvalar (1822—1876) of Jaffna. The incentive for his literary activities seems to have been the religious zeal of Christian missionaries which provoked him to an attitude of fierce defence. Soon a stream of powerful Tamil prose gushed out of him, prose which was expressive, vigorous, and tolerably free of Sanskrit influence—though somewhat pedantic and dry. He established his own press in Jaffna and the books which he published—though containing perhaps childish controversial matters—actually meant the origin of modern Tamil prose-style. His prose is very severe, spotlessly correct and very polished.¹ He composed a Śaiva catechism, *Caravaviṇāvitai*, formally based on current Roman Catholic catechisms. He was also the teacher of Percival, whom he actively helped with his translation of the Bible into Tamil. For the development of Tamil belletristic writing most important of his contribution is probably his very readable rendering of the *Periyapurānam* into prose.

Apart from these men, and a host of others who were their contemporaries and their successors, and who were nourished basically by two sources, by the medieval commentators and by early Christian missionary writings, there is yet another line of development of modern Tamil prose, entirely independent of the learned scholarly tradition.

This third line consists of prose which is a direct, simple and charmingly naive reflection of the spoken language of the 18th Century.

Anadarangam Pillai was born at Pirambūr near Madras in April 1709. His father's brother-in-law, Naniyappa Pillai, was a distinguished citizen of Pondichéry, a wealthy merchant and a government official in the French colony. He invited Tiruvengada Pillai, the father of Anadarangam, to become his partner in business. The

¹ A current saying about him was *vantālum vaḷuvuṇṇi vavvārē*, "Even in abuse he would speak faultlessly". Once, so the story goes, he went to the bazaar to buy some coconuts and asked about the price in the following manner: "*Ammayē, nīvur tenkankāykalai māraḷ ennaṇamō?*" Unfortunately this can be appreciated only by those who know at least some Tamil.

newcomer did very well, indeed so well that he became divan of Pondichéry. When he died, the divanship was for a short time in the hands of a Kanagaraya Mudaliar, and when this man died, the French East India Company transferred the office on Anandarangam Pillai.

Under governor Joseph François Duplex, Anandarangam acted as the Prime Minister of the French colony. He invested his money well—in textile industries, printing, and merchandise of different sort, he even owned a big ship by name of *Anandappuravi* which carried his merchandise from European to Chinese ports. He was also a patron of literature, and we have at least three panegyric poems composed about him, one of these poems says that poets were awaiting him as peacocks await the coming of rain-clouds, as the *cakravāka* birds await the appearance of the moon, as the lotus awaits the rising of the sun. He was liberal not only to poets but also to temples, and founded a number of caravanserais and choultries. In 1760 the British invaded Pondichéry. Four days before this French-British war was over, on January 11, 1761, Anandarangam died.

He left behind a diary which he began writing on September 6, 1736, under the governorship of Duplex, as the divan of Pondichéry and the governor's dubashi, interpreter. It is one of the most important documents ever written in the Tamil language—from state secrets to small everyday trivia of family life, Anandarangam Pillai has captured, sometimes in details, sometimes in an almost shorthand style, the events of 25 years. Whatever he saw and heard, without adding much of his own imagination, but very lively, and obviously very truthfully—the joys and sorrows of his own household, echoes of battles and policies in India and Europe, appointments and withdrawals of French officials, goings and comings of ships, festivals and ceremonies in temples and churches—it is as if one would watch a documentary movie showing the life of French Tamilnad in the middle of the 18th Century day by day.

As a historical source it is a fascinating mine of both trivial and important data. As a piece of prose it makes sometimes charming, sometimes boring reading. Some entries have dry, factological character.

“29th of April, 1745

A ship from China by name of *Notre Dame de Sour*. The captain's name is M. Felicien de Sylva Medeiro. The ship brought sugar, ground-

nuts, candy, and other Chinese products On the same day, a ship by name of *Lakshmana Prasad* arrived from Tennasserim, bringing 13 elephants, the ship-master is Subha Singh"

"5th of June, 1743

Today at four o'clock, they hanged, opposite the choultry, a thief who was caught thieving in the house of a muslim in Miravelh"

"3rd of Febr, 1743

In the morning at 10 o'clock a ship named *Duc d'Orleans* departed for Europe It carries bundles of washing sarees, one bunch of indigo silk sarees, many sacks of ground nut, of kindan, of cotton cloth etc M Coulard also went to Europe aboard this ship"

But some of the entries read very well

"16th of Oct, 1745

Today in the evening, the Christians with their wives—the Pariahs, Indians dressed in European garments, Whites and Tamils—all gathered at the place where they usually come to hear their *pūjā* K R Mudaliyar's son Asarappa Mudaliar with his wife Selvam also came to the place where their religious ceremonies are held The woman was all dressed in the garments of their caste, she was heavily perfumed with many odours and aromas, she had on a transparent muslim saree When she approached the honourable padre who was very near to the Swami, and as she was kneeling deep in thought on the place where one hears the Christian *pūjā*, as soon as that cloud of perfumes hit the nose of the padre, he discarded the holy words and catching his nose he pricked her hair-knot with a rattan cane and shouted 'Are you a married woman? Or are you a whore? Isn't your husband ashamed of you? To come to church with this muslim saree on—one can see your whole body, your breasts, and even your hairy orifice! Get up and home with you, you virtuous one, your mass is ended!'"

All this is written in the most deliciously colloquial language with a number of spelling errors which would offend any purist and perfectionist, spontaneous, with a keen sense of minute observation, here and there with a pinch of humour A complete and good translation of this book is badly needed

Anandarangam Pillai's *Diary* is entirely independent of the traditional line of high Tamil prose, and it has most probably nothing to do either with any direct impetus from French or English literature It seems that the only classical work of Tamil literature the divan knew was the *Tirukkural* Naturally, he knew many languages besides Tamil, he knew Telugu, Urdu and French, perhaps even English But it seems that this knowledge was not at all academic, but practical, day-to-day knowledge, and it is almost certain that he did not know any of the literatures. His

Diary is a direct and spontaneous piece of prose-writing which had only one model life itself. And so is its language the written form of the day-to-day spoken Tamil of the 18th Century.

The reader was warned that an answer to the question pertaining to the origin of modern Tamil belletristic prose would not be attempted. A few suggestions will nevertheless be made in conclusion of this chapter. As already stressed, potentially, Tamil prose has always been present in Tamil literature. Since Tamil literature starts with bardic creations, its first fruits were in form of poetry. All the world over bards sang songs, i.e. composed poetry. But, at the same time, the syntax and the lexis of ordinary prose was developed in inscriptions. Even the *Tolkāppiyam* speaks of prose literature consisting of riddles and proverbs (s. 1429). Short narrative prose passages occurred in the *Cilappatikāram*.¹ Narrative introductions to bardic songs were also in prose.² Later, there is some Sanskritized prose in Peruntēvaṅār's *Pāratam* (9th Cent.). And, finally, we come to a large, lengthy literary work in Tamil prose, the *Śrīpurānam* of Mantalapurutar (prob. 16th Cent.), a *purāna* of the sixty-three Jaina saints. All these facts show that there had always been in Tamil literature a perfectly adequate capacity to develop prose-writing, that there had always been a kind of accumulator of different prose-styles, narrative, descriptive, factographic and eruditory, which could generate prose if need arose.

The decisive impetus came with the tremendous impact of Europe upon India which should not be underestimated (or even rejected!) However, European influences were "more immediately effective in the social sphere" and "much less formative in the actual birth" of modern prose-fiction.³ If need arose, prose could be written easily—witness the eloquence of Anandarangam Pillar's *Diary* which is, truly enough, predominantly documentary, facto-

¹ E.g. the *vaṅperu katturai* is a piece of narrative prose. Another genuine piece of prose-fiction contained in the epic is the *vaṅpāttumatai* at the beginning of Canto 29, in Daniélou's Engl. translation this part is found on pp. 187-189 (the syntax of this particular piece of prose is indeed awkward and cumbersome, the whole paragraph contains only one finite verb-form and an endless number of adverbial participles and infinitives).

² E.g. the colophon to *Puṟam* 5.

³ D. Zbavitel, "The European impact and the chief changes in the function of literature in Asia", in *The East Under Western Impact* (Academia, Prague, 1967), 94-100.

graphic writing but which also contains elements of narrative prose and description in its anecdotic passages (and, what is also important, we do not know for sure that his is the only written document of that type, rather, we may hope that one day more of such “diaries” and similar documentary writings will be unearthed) When one reads, therefore, that modern Tamil prose-fiction¹ arose and developed under decisive Western, European influence (and sometimes this implies that without such influence it would have never developed at all), one should bear in mind that this “influence” should be rather understood more generally and broadly as an “impact”, for it was a diverse, far-reaching and long-term effect² rather than individual, direct and absolutely decisive influence On the other hand, it is significant, that—at least as far as we know at this stage of our knowledge—the strong “mainstream” out of which almost all if indeed not all modern Tamil prose developed was the one strong current of scholarly, commentary-like, severe, somewhat dry and pedantic prose of the *savant*, of the scholiast, of the pundit and sage This fact has very decisively left an imprint on almost everything written afterwards

¹ Usually, C J Beschi's *Paramārtta kuruvēṇ katar* is quoted as the first work of modern Tamil prose-fiction Constanzo Gioseffo Eusebio Beschi was born in Castiglione nelle Striviere (Venezia) on Nov 8, 1680 In 1707 he landed in Portuguese India as a member of the Society of Jesus, armed with the knowledge of Italian, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, French and Persian Soon he acquired a working knowledge of Urdu, Telugu and Sanskrit Tamil, however, became his great love Until his death at Ambalakkadu on Febr 4, 1747, he wrote a number of grammars, dictionaries, a great and very excellent epic poem, and a small satire in prose mentioned above The English translation appeared in London, 1822 *The Adventures of Gooroo Paramartan* A tale in the Tamil language accompanied by a translation and vocabulary, together with an analysis of the first story By Benjamin Babington

² D Zbavitel, *op cit*

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TAMIL RENAISSANCE

In the second half of the 19th Century, one may discern two mainstreams in the development of Tamil belletristic writing one is the stream of pedantic, traditional, polished, severe scholastic writing, fed by commentatorial prose—the two greatest representatives of this style in prose are probably Ārumuka Nāvalar and somewhat later Dr U V Swaminatha Aiyar The other—very thin, almost non-existent—is the line tending to identify written and spoken language, in the modern period, this stream begins perhaps with Arunācala Kavirāyar (1712-1779) and his *Irāmanā-takam*, and it develops in two directions on the one hand, in the “opera” *Nantaṅār Carittirak Kīrttaṅai*, about a poor Paṇaiya serf becoming a Śaiva saint, composed by Gōpālakraṅga Pārati, and, on the other hand, in ballads like *Kōṣalaṅkatai*, *Rāja Tēcinku*, *Purāṇic* ballads—in short, in a rich undergrowth of literature representing in a charmingly naive, crude, often sentimental and silly way all spheres of life, political, social, religious—but always with sure strokes of convincing realism and in a language which is not far removed from the day-to-day spoken idiom of the Tamil masses However, all these pieces are in verse, there is a mass of *popular poetry* at the beginnings of modern Tamil literature—often popular poetry which is derived from “classical” sources, but there is almost no popular prose

Modern Tamil literature, specifically the prose, has rather tended to be nourished by scholastic food, and this high-style, academic stream became the mainstream of Tamil writing later, when it came under direct impact of English literature

The scholastic, high-flown type of writing, is practised in the *mutts*, but “a slight relaxation of style, an accommodation of common speech and life, can also be traced in the *pallus* and the *kuravaṅcis*”,¹ like Rājappa Kavirāyar’s (1718) *Kurṟālakkuravaṅci*, or in the *Mukkūtalpallu* The sentiments expressed are coarse, and here and there we get a glimpse of the daily experience of genuine

¹ C and H Jesudasau, *op cit* p 248

folk—but the language is highly literary and even these pieces have to be considered “highbrow” literature

It is one of the most characteristic features of modern Tamil prose that the informal, spoken, colloquial language has never become, not even in part, the language of literature. And vice versa, the formal literary language is not spoken as day-to-day informal speech by any Tamil speaker, not even by the intellectuals and highly educated who use it in writing. The *diglossia*—“two-language”—situation is perfectly clear-cut in Tamil. There is no analogy to the Bengali *calitbhāsā*, a language which is spoken *and* written simultaneously. There are only different types and styles and kinds of *the* Tamil equivalent—in the Bengali situation—to the *sādhubhāsā*—that is the formal, written, literary language. And then there are local and social dialects¹

These two characteristic features of modern Tamil prose-writing—i.e. the fact that it was based on the model of scholastic, commentatorial literature, and the fact that it was composed in a highly formal, un-spoken language—prevailed in Tamil literature until the day of Bharati. The tremendous importance of Subrahmanya Bharati for the development of Tamil literature—both prose and poetry—lies, apart from other things, in the fact that he made an attempt to synthesize both main streams, the classical, the scholastic with the popular, the “realistic”, and that he has succeeded, in the best of his writings, in having released Tamil literature from the fetters of the *purānas* and *prabandhas* and all those medieval genres which became inadequate to express modern consciousness and reality. But in language it is not so, Bharati’s language remains—apart from a few isolated exceptions of several verb-forms—the formal, literary language, though his syntax and idioms, his choice of lexical items is almost always based on the live speech of the masses.

¹ Literature on this feature of Tamil is now steadily growing. Cf. Charles A. Fergusson, “Diglossia”, *Word* 15 (1959, 325-340), id. and John J. Gumperz, “Linguistic Diversity in South Asia”, *IJAL* 26, 3, 1960, K. Zvelebil, “Spoken Language of Tamilnad”, *ArO* 32,3 (1964) 237-64, Bright, W. and Ramanujan, A. K. “Sociolinguistic Variation and Language Change”, *Intl Cong Lang, Proc* 9 1107-13 (1964), Pillai, M. Shanmugam, “Tamil—Literary and Colloquial”, *IJAL* (1960) 26,3, 27-42, Ramanujan, A. K., “The Structure of Variation: A Study in Caste Dialects”, *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Chicago (1968), 467-74. Attempts are now increasing to introduce spoken (informal) Tamil into prose-fiction (and even poetry). So far, these attempts are singularly few, and there is opposition to this trend.

(In the second half of the 19th Cent, the aesthetic function of literature—that is, basically, the creation of *rasa* or ‘mood’—lost its predominance, and was no longer first in the scale of values. The first function in the new hierarchy of literary values is now (once again) the didactic function—literature should teach, inform, criticize, increase awareness, and, above all, foster the social reform.) Before Tamil writers started even to use their senses and discover and describe reality as it was around them, learning how to achieve that particular “artistic” reflection of reality in creative writing, they aspired at reforming and remaking that reality. Like in Bengal, they began their struggle against child-marriage, against the extremities of the caste-system, against decline in morality, against social oppression, for the widows’ right to remarry and, finally, against national oppression.

In 1879, the first attempt at a novel was made in Tamil writing, when Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai (1826-1889), a retired district *munsif* of Mayavaram, published his *Piratāpa Mutalīyār Carittiram*. Direct stimulus for his writing the book was provided by his acquaintance with English and French literature. But—and this is very important—the experience, underlying his writing, was his own. The data, the raw material for his loosely-knit, naive and silly romance, was provided from his own rich knowledge of the facts of life. As a judge at a district court he had ample opportunity to come into touch with very real life. As far as the language and style of the book are concerned, the most important source of it is, again, the prose of the commentaries. (Thus we have, in this single literary work, the three main sources of modern Tamil prose, reflected and typified, and what is true about *The Life and Adventures of Prathapa Mudaliyar* is generally true of all early modern Tamil fiction—the *subject* is provided by Indian, Tamil reality itself, and fed by the author’s own experience, the language and diction is basically that of the indigenous Tamil prose of the scholarly, academic tradition, and the direct stimulus to write, together with some minor plots and episodes, comes from the author’s Western education, provided by French and English models.)

In the English preface to the 1885 edition of his novel Vedanayagam Pillai writes “My object in writing this work of fiction is to supply the want of prose works in Tamil, a want which is admitted and lamented by all.” In this preface, he also mentions the prose of the commentators. In chapter 42 of his novel we read “We have

to admit that it is a great want that Tamil does not have the *vacana kāvriyankal*, the epics in prose, like English, French, and other languages". He even makes the European novel responsible for the high achievements in culture and civilization of the Western nations, and he adds "Thus, as long as there will not appear prose-epics in our own languages, this country will definitely make no real progress" This is indeed not so naive as it may sound. The great novel of the 19th Century—English, French, Russian—was, in many ways, what the great epic was for feudal societies—the mirror of the achievements of an entire national civilization. And one of the reasons why some 'small' nations were 'small' was the fact that they lacked this great cultural force, the national novel (this is, e.g., the view expressed several times by the sociologist, philosopher and politician, T. G. Masaryk, about the Czech community of the 19th Century). Vedanayagam Pillai was aware of this intrinsic connection between epos and novel on the one hand—cf. his term *vacana kāvriyam* "epic in prose"—and between the birth and development of the great novel and national destiny on the other hand.

His own work is rather loose in structure—a string of narrations, loosely connected, or appended to the central character, who is hopelessly innocent and disarmingly naive, "a well-educated native gentleman of brilliant parts, wit and humour". The story is told in the *Ich*-form. It is badly constructed and tedious. It is also crammed with anecdotes, and often tends to improbabilities. The didactic, preaching note is very predominant, the author makes a plea for a number of social and cultural reforms.

It is thus an approximation to a novel, a prose-epic which was written with a definite purpose in mind—"to supply the want of prose" in Tamil. In other words, Vedanayagam Pillai is not a creative writer driven by an irresistible urge to write, he writes because he wants to fill a gap in Tamil culture and society. Fortunately for Tamil writing, the stuff out of which this loose romance was made, was to a great extent real, and the eye which observed life as it was parading in the courtroom was a keen and critical eye. The prose of Vedanayagam Pillai is not without the ornateness and stiffness characteristic for all writing of this period—it is academic, pedantic, but the *suget* itself forced the writer's hand to such extent that it is even today quite readable, "last but not least for its quaintness" (R. E. Asher). Vedanayagam Pillai was, how-

ever, more of a scholar, reformer and enthusiast than a creative writer

An entirely different book in many respects is Rajam Iyer's *Kamalāmpāl Carittiram* or "The Fatal Rumour" The story was appearing in a journal by the name of *Vivēkacintāmani* between 1893-1895, and in 1896 it was first published as a book Its author, Rajam Iyer, who was perhaps the greatest Tamil prose-writer of the 19th Century, was born in 1872 in Vattalakundu near Madurai He began writing soon, and his interest in philosophy and journalism, as well as his broad, truly pan-Indian outlook, brought him into contact with Svami Vivekananda, who appointed him as editor of his *Prabuddha Bhārata* Because of two articles written and published by him in the journal he was to be arrested, but when the police arrived to take him he was dead He died two days earlier, in the 26th year of his life, in 1898

The life was like a short brilliant flash But his novel remains It has all the features of a young literary genius on the threshold of true creative writing It was not by chance that Vivekananda appointed this very young Tamil Brahmin as the first editor of his important journal Subrahmanya Bharati said that Rajam Iyer has achieved true greatness in the new field of Tamil prose, and N Pichamurti, a well-known contemporary prose-writer and poet, says that *Kamalāmpāl Carittiram* is one of the peaks of Tamil prose, the first real novel in the language

The weak point of the novel is its plot and its solution, though there is plenty of exciting action (including robbery, arson and manslaughter) But the plot is not the most important feature of the work What is important are the characters and the style Rajam Iyer has—for the first time in Tamil prose-writing—created a number of characters which belong irrevocably to Tamil literature and will never disappear into oblivion Kamalāmpāl, the heroine of the novel, and Ponnammāl, the lovely scandal-monger, Pēyānti Tēvaṅ, the robber, Amaiyappa Piḷḷai, the teacher in the village school, Cuppu, the scandalous shrew who is unable to pronounce her r's correctly A rare sense of humour pervades the book From time to time, there are brief flashes of successful parody, biting irony and social satire Rajam Iyer observes life as a realist, and often very critically, though, of course, he is not a "critical realist" in the strict technical sense of the term His novel is primarily a romance, but, at the same time, there is hardly any work in Tamil

fiction which would reveal so much about life in rural India of the 19th Century. The village Brahmin community is portrayed with much precious detail and in vivid colours. Rajam Iyer's eyes—and not only his eyes, but all his senses—are open, he sees, he listens, he even smells and touches things. And that is more than can be said about a number of modern Tamil writers!

His prose is basically rooted in the academic, commentatorial tradition, and it is profusely Sanskritized. The Sanskritization was inevitable in his case, and its absence would be unnatural, since he was writing primarily about Brahmins. On the other hand, he has introduced into his dialogues quite a number of colloquialisms and dialectisms. This mixture of highly Sanskritized language and colloquial-like, informal dialogues is quite functional in Rajam Iyer's work, and has become the model for many modern Tamil Brahmin writers.

Let us now look somewhat closer at the work. This is Rajam Iyer's portraiture of a village coquette. "Poṅṅammāl was a very ornamental woman. She knew well that when she walked, the whole world stood still and admired, without a twinkle of the eye, her beauty. Sometimes, as she went along, one could see how, suddenly, the following thought occurred to her: 'Indeed, I am walking like a swan'. At once a mixed feeling of insolence and shame was born in her, and she would walk as if treading upon fire-brands with her shapely feet, all transformed, all pretence and affectation, and people would observe her, how she stops, here and there, and then walks swiftly home." There is a great promise in such characterisation and description. Rajam Iyer, as pointed out above, was capable of surprising irony and sarcasm. E.g. "Muttucāmi Aiyar loved his wife passionately. He adored her. That's why he beat her. He was unable to cope with the slightest fault in his beloved." His dialogues are extremely lively, they are frequently a true echo of rows between husband and wife, of village talk and gossiping at the well, and they include a great wealth of sayings, proverbs, bywords, adages, and abusive terms. "You donkey! You widow! You mirror of Yama! You buffalo! You Mūtēvi!" etc.

I think Rajam Iyer's book, being a classic, is still the best novel ever written in the Tamil language. And it is indeed good tidings that this great book is going to be published soon in English.¹

¹ According to personal communication by R. E. Asher (Summer, 1969), he and K. N. Subrahmanyam are currently working on a translation into English which will be published by the UNESCO.

The end of the 19th Century is characterized by a rich growth of different stylistic variants of one stylistic level—the formal, literary Tamil based ultimately upon the academic tradition which by now set definitely aside the other, non-academic line. The main stylistic variants of the formal literary language and diction have all been labelled, and they have definite characteristics. They have their origin in the last decades of the 19th Century, and in the first 15-20 years of the 20th Century, and they are all more or less alive, though deep and probably rather decisive changes have taken place in Tamil writing—both in prose and poetry—after approximately 1960, so that the general picture, painted some 80-60 years ago, now waxes and wanes and is transformed into something new (cf Chapters 19 and 20 of this book). It seems that much that has occurred in Bengali or Marathi literature decades ago, is occurring in Tamil prose and poetry now, and that the end of this century will witness the emergence of truly creative forces in Tamil literature.

The various language-styles and styles of writing will now be discussed one by one.

The *centamūnatai* is the polished, strongly academic Tamil of essays and belletristic prose, which represents the most direct development of the medieval prose-commentaries of the *premanīpravāla* period. This style of writing is closely connected with the establishment of the Fourth *Maturai Tamil Cankam*, Tamil Academy, which was founded in Madurai on Sept 14, 1901. The greatest representant of this type of prose is undoubtedly Dr U V Swaminatha Aiyar, the scholar who, with Damodaram Pillai, was in the first place responsible for the rediscovery of old classical heritage, who bridged as it were the very ancient and the very new. Apart from his enormous work in the field of ancient classics he wrote what can be probably called the foremost of Tamil biographies (about his teacher, Mīnātcicuntaram Pillai) and his own excellent autobiography¹ as well as some sketches and reminiscences,² all very engaging reading.

It was indeed a marvellous work which was done by U V S. Aiyar, D Pillai, and their contemporaries and students. And yet one

¹ *En caritiram*, "My life-story" Publ. 1940-42 in a magazine, 1950 as a book. A mine of information about the literary world he moved in, sometimes rather naive, but always useful.

² *Nāy kantatum kēttatum*, "What I saw and heard", *Paḷantatym pūriyatam*, "The old and the new"

wonders if this rediscovery of the past (known as the "Tamil Renaissance"), coming as it did at a juncture when Tamil literary activities might have broken vitally with some of the aspects of this past, was—only from the point of view of the evolution of modern prose and poetry—quite fortunate. The past, however great it may be, must always be absorbed, digested, transformed and overcome, it is good to have tradition and modernity, it is bad to have only modernity and no tradition, but it is equally bad to have only tradition. For sixty years, the Tamils—with exceptions, of course—could only bow to that great, rediscovered and resuscitated, truly fascinating past, and in spite of the literary radicalism of the Thirties, signs of real change, of deep transformation and of emergence of things new are visible only now, in the decade 1960-1970.

Apart from Swaminatha Aiyar, a great number of prose-writers follow this stylistic line, the most notable among them probably Tuvār Viruttācala Kalyānacuntara Mutaliyār ("Thiru V1 Ka"), 1883-1953, Dr Somasundara Bharati, T K Chidambaranatha Mudaliar ("T1 Kē C1"), S Vayyapuri Pillai and K V Jagannathan. All these outstanding and important men of letters, though quite different in many aspects of their writings, have some fundamental features in common: they wrote in a more or less formal style (more formal in the case of Swaminatha Aiyar or "Thiru V1 Ka", less formal in the case of "T1 Kē C1" or K V Jagannathan), they wrote rich, polished prose, using unhesitatingly Sanskrit and English loanwords whenever they felt it was necessary and appropriate. They were all "academic" people—most of them professionally so, all of them in outlook. Most of them were connected with the political and social life of Tamilnad. However, the most important feature common to all of them: none of these men was truly a creative writer of *belles-lettres*, none of them has ever produced a truly great, path-breaking piece of original, creative prose or poetry.

Love of Tamil took a strange and militant shape. Having neglected their language for four or five centuries (and preferring Sanskrit, Urdu, Telugu, Marathi and finally English to their own mother-tongue), the guilt-conscious Tamilians overdid their love of the language in a kind of jingoistic enthusiasm that has hardly any parallel in any other country. They became overconscious of the past. They found everything old good, and this tendency to exalt the old and "pure" has worked havoc in many fields—notably in the

field of the novel and the drama, but also in poetry. This brings us to the second mainstream of modern Tamil prose-style, and language-style, the *tūyatamil* or *taṇṭṭamil natar*, i.e. the “pure”, read “purist” (“Tamil only”, “Pure Tamil”), prose (and poetry). The typical features of this style are, first, its linguistic purism—merciless and total elimination, a real purge of Indo-Aryan, Sanskritic loan-words, second, the removal of written Tamil from the spoken language as far as possible, and the pretence that one day spoken Tamil will “automatically” follow the frozen written style, third, sterility as regards creative art, creative writing. This trend has never produced any truly great master in the field of belletristic prose.

As far as poetry is concerned, the situation is somewhat different, the model which this *taṇṭṭamil* trend takes for its own to imitate—that is the “purest” and hence most ancient poetic works of the Tamil language—is, for certain kinds and genres of even modern poetry, a “productive” model. That is why a man like Bharatidasan, the most prominent exponent of “Tamil only” in poetry, was, no doubt, a prominent poet. But even Bharatidasan—only a few years after his death—sounds slogan-like, proclamative, flat, and full of hollow rhetoric nowadays.

As far as this type of prose is concerned, the most influential among the protagonists of this movement was *Maṛaimalai Atikal* (Svāmi Vēṭācalam Pillai, 1876-1950). “Purity should not be sacrificed for the sake of effect. The free use of foreign words in a language will ultimately lead to its degeneracy.” After 1916, Vedachalam “Tamilized” his name into *Maṛaimalai* and proclaimed himself a *svāmi (atikal)*, the title of the journal he published—*Īṇānacākaram* “Ocean of Knowledge”—was also changed, into *Aṟivukkatal*. A number of Tamil scholars, writers and intellectuals followed his example, and the “Pure Tamil Movement” gathered strength day after day.¹

The reaction to this linguistic purism was the so-called *putuman-*

¹ I would hate to be misunderstood. *Maṛaimalai Atikal* no doubt deserves much gratitude for many good things he did. In 1920 he founded one of the most prolific publishing houses for Tamil classical and medieval literature, the *Ttunelveli Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society*, in 1931 he started a very important public library, he wanted inter-caste marriage to be legalized, Tamil to be made one of the subjects for the B. A. Hons. examination, etc. However, in the questions pertaining to language and literature, his approach was, in many ways, narrow-minded, negative and sterile.

pravāla natar, the “new *manipravāla*”, a style so heavily Sanskritized that the result may be justly called a hybrid. In itself it is quite unimportant, naturally highly unpopular, and only a few Sanskrit-oriented pandits, mainly Vaisnava *ācāryas*, still write in this style.

The two main streams, the folk, popular tradition, and the academic, formal tradition, were, fortunately for Tamil, synthesized in the writings of Subrahmanya Bharati (1882-1921) who wrote in the first two decades of this century. In his prose and poems, we encounter the modern, the topical, the temporary and contemporary, as well as the “eternal”. And it was chiefly Bharati who made Tamil adequate for all literary expression—modern journalism as well as *bhakti*-type lyrical poetry, short-story as well as patriotic songs, politically or philosophically oriented essay as well as epic poetry. This is his real greatness and his most important contribution. (Probably he should not be regarded as the great light, the *mahākavi* of modern Tamil literature, but as the great predecessor, the great path-breaker who makes ready the way for him (or them) who has (or have) yet to come. So far, there was none greater than Bharati in modern Tamil poetry, but some of the very contemporary young poets are more interesting.) And Bharati—let us have the courage to admit it—does not belong to the greatest. He is not a Vyāsa, nor a Vālmiki, nor a Kampaṇ, not even a Tagore. But he has saved Tamil from the clutches of the *purāṇic* and pedantic tradition, and to counterbalance the purist, the pedantic, the false harking back to the past, there has always been his ever-increasing influence which was felt much more strongly ten years after his death, in the Thirties, than when he was still alive.

Under his name, the true literary *rinascimento* in Tamil grew to important dimensions, and the *maṇumalarcci natar* developed—the style of the renaissance. This is the only linguistic and literary trend which has produced truly creative literary personalities. The language they use is indeed formal, literary Tamil, but most of them try to come near to the phraseology, syntax and lexis of the spoken, informal Tamil, as far as it is possible under the given political, social and cultural conditions.

The short story as such appeared first from the pen of V. V. S. Aiyar (1881-1925).¹ Among the stylists who demanded that “one

¹ *Mankariyarkkaraciyyin katal*, a collection of eight stories, written between 1910-1920.

should write as one speaks" the best was probably V Ramaswamy († 1951). The great short-story writer Putumaippittan († 1948) should probably be not mentioned in one breath with the prolific writer of voluminous novels, R Krishnamurti-Kalki (1899-1954) who was much more popular but no doubt much less of a true artist than Putumaippittan. The two had however something in common—they both belonged to the *marumalarcci natari* line. There were tremendous differences among the writers of this group—in their *sujets*, ideology, political views, skills, importance and popularity, and even in their language and style. But all of them had one in common—vitality, promise, and the fact that they were writing modern fiction. And, basically, their language and diction, in spite of the differences among them and though formal and "literary", was an echo of the spoken, live language of the people. By the Thirties, pedantic, scholarly writing was practically dead, and the purist trend was sterile.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE PROSE OF TODAY

The lack of literary criteria of any sort was—and to a great extent still is—one of the most striking characteristics of the modern Tamil literary scene. A true, strict, and severe literary criticism is still wanting, in spite of some very promising beginnings in this direction, as, e.g., T. M. C. Raghunathan's evaluation of Putumaipittan, his essays on literature, K. Kailasapathy's work, a few articles by K. N. Subrahmanyam and, especially, the activities of C. S. Chellappa (b. 1912) and two groups of writers, one gathered round Chellappa's review *Eluttu*, another the *Kuruksētram* group.¹

¹ *Eluttu* (Writing) was founded by C. S. Chellappa in 1959 as a critical review. It is to be regretted that it has ceased publishing. Chellappa also publishes books in his *Eluttu* Press in Madras. His is undoubtedly the most important singular attempt to introduce solid literary criticism into the Tamil scene, and, more important than that, *Eluttu* opened its columns to everything new, creative, experimental and fresh in Tamil writing. Its influence was decisive, but its impact was unfortunately very limited. It was read and discussed among writers and intellectuals, but it did not reach the general reader who is influenced rather by such mass-magazines as *Ānantavikatan*, *Kalki* or *Kalamakal*, though their literary face and taste are of immeasurably lower quality than that of *Eluttu*.

Also, a few publishers have made attempts at more ambitious undertakings. Apart from Chellappa's *Eluttu* Press which was responsible for such extremely important publications as N. Piccamūtti's *Kāttuvāttu* (Wild Duck), the excellent anthology of "New Poetry", *Putukkuvalkal* (New Voices), and the highly interesting collection of interviews *Etarkāka elutukuvēy* (Why do I write), there is e.g. the experimental publishing house based on the principle of a reader's club called *Vācakar vattam* or *Book venture*, which has published such very interesting and outstanding books as Jānakirāman's novel *Ammā vantāl* (Mother came), Ramanurtham's novel *Putra* (Son), an anthology of contemporary Tamil prose and poetry, etc.

In 1968, a group of Tamil authors belonging to Trivandrum published a collection of essays, stories and poetry (including a "short novel" and a play) entitled *Kuruksētram*. Most of these literary pieces are original Tamil writing, a few are translated from Malayalam. The editor of the anthology is Nakulan, himself a noted Tamil author. Some of the prose is of high quality (e.g. N. Padmanabhan's story, and of course Mauni's stories), so are some of the essays, e.g. D. Satyanesan's evaluation of Naccinārkkunyar. Probably the most important contribution to this volume are the 43 poems by Shanmuga Subbiah (Sanmuka Cuppayā) and the three poems by Hari Sreenivasan. S. Subbiah's poems are straightforward, powerful, witty comments on everyday life, some of them probably too simple, but a few at least have no

Apart from Chellappa's established and influential review, there are a few other magazines which have more serious ambitions than just to entertain and make a profit. To these more serious journals belong some of the left and Marxist-oriented magazines (*Tāmarai*, *Ārāycci*, *Saraswathi*) and such periodicals as *Ilakkuyavattam*, *Tiṭam* and *Katir*. A recent and very promising but short-lived addition to the number of modern-oriented, critical journals was the quarterly *Natai* (G. Krishnaswamy, Salem), the eight or nine issues of which were of a high critical level, and the monthly of the "angry young men", *Kacatatapaṛa* (Madras).

However, the best known and the most widely read is still accepted as the best, the immediately successful as the truly good. Hence, e.g., the novels of Akilan are recommended as outstanding literature, which they certainly are not—they just make entertaining, sometimes interesting though sentimental reading. On the other hand, any treatise on an old text like the *Tirukkural* or the *Rāmāyana*, any thin, dilute, and very familiar rhapsody on the *Cilappatikāram* or the *bhaktas* are considered, too, great literature.

In a vague sense, almost all Tamil writing of the pre-Independence period was in a way realistic, in that its subject-matter was just real life around, and humanistic, idealistic, and mildly progressive in its message. Also, it was most often rather sentimental, very domestic, and very middle-class type of writing. Compared to the neighbouring Kerala, there was practically no battle of ideologies, almost no group activity, no live ferment, no clash of ideas, methods and techniques of writing. Mutual reconciliation, full conformity and meek adaptability—these were the main features of Tamil writing, and they were considered virtues. Tamil writing itself was like a pool of stagnant, malodorous water. And the awesome exultation over the past glories of Tamil was common almost to all, and it progressively increased.)

We may take as a typical instance of an immensely popular writer of mid-century R. Krishnamurti, better known as Kalki

equal in modern Tamil poetry in the forceful and yet graceful straightforwardness.

N. Padmanabhan (Nila Patmanāpaṇ) who has a fine short story (*Nāy*, "I") in the collection, published in June 1968 an ambitious novel, *Talamu-rakkal* (Generations, 408 pp.), a rather involved but truly realistic piece of prose with a lot of local *couleur*, no doubt one of the most important contributions to Tamil prose in recent years.

(1899-1954). Even such fairly critical scholars as T. P. Meenakshisundaran compare Kalki's rather poor novel *Alai Ōcai* ("The Tumult of Waves") to Tolstoy's supreme masterpiece "War and Peace", "though on a lower level" ¹ And C and H Jesudasan (1961) speak about Kalki very warmly, almost in superlatives, with almost no really critical remarks on his very fundamental inadequacies.)

Kalki was the most influential and prolific journalist of the day, and he dominated the literary scene from the middle thirties to the early fifties. His fame and reputation rest on his voluminous novels. The best—or rather the most successful—of them are historical romances like the Chola *Ponniyin celvan* or the Pallava *Civakāmyin capatam*. Both these, and more so his writings based on contemporary life like *Alai Ōcai* are just crammed with sentimentalism, melodrama, false romanticism, and tediously long descriptions of love-birds in their love-nests. It is all very sweet, or, rather, sugared. His characterisations are weak and shallow, his dialogues lively but often naive, the descriptions of sculptures or dancing very detailed but very trivial. His style is "fluent but colourless, clear but has no individuality" ² He was a great adaptor. In his humorous writings of his earlier period, Kalki based his stuff on the works of Mark Twain, Jerome Klapka Jerome, and other authors, almost unknown to the unsophisticated Tamil reader, the situations and characters of his historical novels come mainly from Alexander Dumas, Lord Lytton and Sir Walter Scott.)

In spite of all this—or probably because of all this—his appeal to the masses of readers was extremely powerful. Why? Because the average Tamil reader, who was rather "weak-minded" (to quote K. N. Subrahmanyam), was not prepared for anything else. The way in which Kalki plays upon the responsiveness to the sensational and to seemingly well-built and complicated plots is truly admirable. No matter that some of his plots are quite unreal or plainly impossible, he is always able to excite. He also responds masterfully to the sentimentality of his readers, chiefly frustrated

¹ *A History of Tamil Literature* (1965) 182

² Ka. Naa Subramaniam, "What is wrong with the Tamil novel", *The Sunday Standard*, Nov. 20, 1966. Compare this severe but absolutely just evaluation with the Jesudasans' false statement (*op. cit.* p. 266) "It is a style with a distinct individuality. It sparkles in the dialogues of his characters. It is quite probably the best part of his work." Contrary to this, Subramaniam says very correctly "His style was certainly not the man in a literary sense."

women His social and historical fiction was written week after week (in *Anantavrikatan*, and later in his own journal *Kalki*) "with just that element of mystery and suspense that are necessary for the serial reader in Tamil" (K N Subrahmanyam)

To be just, in Kalki's writings there also are some praiseworthy features, he almost always succeeds to work up an atmosphere in his historical romances, so that the dead past comes back to life in truly vivid colour He never wrote a line without a careful study of the history of the particular period with which he was dealing, and often he went painstakingly directly to the sources, to inscriptions and ancient texts His impersonal and colourless style is, on the other hand, smooth and polished and reads well It is easy to read Kalki, even for a beginning student of Tamil And, naturally, the Tamil reader needs minimum effort to understand his writings This was in fact considered Kalki's greatest virtue that he did not burden and fatigue his readers He also has a kind humour, which is never loud or vulgar, his prose may be probably in one short phrase evaluated as innocent entertainment, though, of course, its innocence is questionable if one agrees (as I do) with Subrahmanyam's strict pronouncement, that "Kalki's *Alai Ocar*, the Sahitya Akademi winning novel, is still unrivalled in the number of words used to square inch of sentimentality on the human scene"¹

As far as the short story in Tamil is concerned, I must again quote K N Subrahmanyam who is one of the few courageous and uncompromising critics of modern Tamil writings The short story "continues in its sedate pattern, with the defined plot, the leisurely narrative and the stock situations Perhaps because traditional thought in Tamilnad leans more towards a personal philosophy than to psychology, we have in the Tamil short story little of character probing or analysis of a situation"

The first to have written short stories in Tamil literature was V V S Aiyar Some of them were his inventions, some others just adaptations, the result was the first notable collection of modern short stories in Tamil called *Mankaiyarkkaraciyin katal*, called thus after its title story which is based on some events in Tamilnad of Kulottunka Chola III It is a lovely romance Another story of

¹ Though probably some of Akilan's writings ooze a greater amount of sentiment and engender a heavier stream of words

his is even based on modern life (*Kamalavijayam*). V V S Aiyar died in 1925—and with his and S Bharati's attempts, the Tamil short story writing made quite a good start

With Putumaippittan (1906-1948), between the thirties and the forties, the Tamil short story achieved a decided status. For a long time after him there was almost nothing which could be compared in standard to his writings

Around the thirties, a group of writers gathered round a short-lived journal called *Manikkoti*, under the leadership of a brilliant stylist, V Kamaswamy (Va Rāmacāmi Ayyankār, † 1951, "Va Rā ") Putumaippittan was one of them. Their achievement, in prose-writing as well as in poetry, must be considered as the peak of Tamil literary development between the two great wars. It is quite obvious, today more than ever, that almost everything which is truly creative and promising in modern Tamil *belles-lettres* has its roots in the short-lived (ca. 1930-1940) but powerful *Manikkoti* movement

Putumaippittan has been recognized as a real force in Tamil writing. He was a strange and unbalanced man and writer. He probed with fearless and ruthless frankness into the failings of the society around him. The method of his writing is truly realistic and truly critical at the same time. "Innocent" and naive romance of the Kalki type never did come his way, simply because there was no pure and naive romance in the life which he so sharply saw, so powerfully described and so bitterly criticized. He also reinterprets mythological stories in modern light. There is humour and pathos, but more often biting satire and much distress and harshness in his prose. Of about two hundred short stories he wrote, about a dozen are indeed first class, they are the first fruits of modern Tamil fiction which one may compare with highly developed story-writing of world literature. On the other hand, there is a lot, especially among his early 1925-28 productions which is second and third rate, imitated, even plagiarized (Maupassant, Chekhov etc.) In his late years he wrote things which leave behind nothing but bitterness, frustration, and even disgust.

Several anthologies of Tamil short stories were published more or less recently, in the original as well as in English translation, and one would expect them to be fairly representative. Let me critically evaluate the one collection which is probably the most

ambitious.¹ It was published in 1963 under the name *The Plough and the Stars* (Asia, London), edited by K Swaminathan, Periaswami Thooran and M R Perumal Mudalar. It contains 26 short stories. However, the anthology is not a careful and truly representative one since it does not include some of the best short story writers like Mauni, L S Ramamirtham or S Ramaswamy at all, it does not include any of the left-oriented realistic writers (with one exception) who were a real force between 1945-1960, like Raghunathan or Selva Raj, it does not include some of the other rather important writers like Vallikkannan, but it does include some very poor writers like Kumudini or V S Subbiah, and it does not always include writers on the merit of their literary excellence or importance, or the fact that this or that writer would be typical for one or the other aspect of modern Tamil writing, but just because they are politically or otherwise influential (Rajagopalachari, K Santhanam).

However, even though not representative enough, this anthology may be used as a *point de départ* to discuss at least some features of contemporary Tamil prose-writing. In terms of themes, the majority of the stories deals in some way with children (one whole third of the total of the stories) the child appears in all those stories as emotionally and ethically superior to the adult, we have here a lame child, a blind child, a number of poor children, and motherless children. Also patriotic children versus their not-so-patriotic father. Child-and-father relationship occurs more frequently than child-and-mother relationship. I think that this preoccupation with children is an important and rather typical feature of modern Tamil prose-writing.

Four stories have a distinct social theme in terms "the rich" *contra* "the poor" (beggar, rikshavallah, and a poor writer). No story, however, preaches revolt or revolution, though there are such stories in Tamil. The so typical and almost inevitable prostitute does, surprisingly so, not appear.

Another major group deals with problems of marriage and family-life, three stories deal with widowhood. There are no love

¹ There is a relatively very good collection of Tamil short stories, published by the Sahitya Akademi in 1959 under the editorship of the late A Chidambaramatha Chettiar, entitled simply *Civukataru kalaiviyam*. Why has not this short-story collection been translated *in toto* into English and published rather than *The Plough and the Stars*, is beyond my comprehension.

stories in the Western sense the relationship between man and woman develops either within marriage (if it at all develops¹), or, if there is some attachment and affection outside marriage, the two will inevitably part. Another very typical and significant feature

Apart from these major themes, there are some more or less interesting minor themes. Two or three stories teach some *morale* in one, it is "bad day-dreaming" *versus* "good reality", in another, patriotism is praised, in yet another, renunciation is extolled. There is a story with an anti-atheistic message. All of these "didactic" stories are very poor as *belles-lettres*, in terms of aesthetic evaluation, and they are rather conservative in outlook.

Finally, there is a story about animals, quite a charming one. The focus of attention of the authors is thus mostly on children, on married couples, on a few socially degraded and economically poor individuals. As an exception, two swamis (portrayed with humour and irony) figure in one of the stories.

In terms of characterization, I would classify as many as fifteen stories as poor. In two or three cases, I would say that the characterization is not bad, and in five cases it is good. In one case it is very good. The children are often better characterized than the adults.

As a rule, there is not much of a plot. A poor or a weak plot is found in about twelve stories. Four stories have no or almost no plot. In two stories, the plot is solved tragically, the central figure dies. Sometimes, the plot is rather forced and "romantic". In one or two cases, it is plainly silly. In most cases, it does not at all develop well. None of the plots is highly dramatic or striking, nothing really surprises us. Some of the plots are rather banal.

Style: first of all, the translation into English is mostly poor, and as I know from some instances (of the stories which I know in the Tamil original), it has often damaged whatever good there might have been in the original. However, even a bad translation cannot entirely kill a very good original. Four or five stories can be said to have good style, though with one or two exceptions nothing to be compared to a Ramamirtham or a Bhave. Thus we see that *style* seems to be the weakest point of these short stories. Some of the themes are interesting enough, some of the plots are at least promising, some of the characterizations is not bad, but in terms of style and diction, not even one fifth of the stories is really good.

Thus there are only three or at most four stories in this collection of twenty-six pieces which I would characterize as good in terms of all four features—theme, plot, characterization and style. Jeyakanthan's "Staff of life", Pichamurti's "Blind girl", probably Shankar Ram's "Wound Can Heal Wound", and maybe Janakiraman's "Exultation"

The three writers which were selected to be treated in detail in this chapter were chosen as *typical*, as *characteristic* for certain kinds of modern Tamil prose-writing. The fact that these three names were chosen as *representative* does not mean that these three authors represent the best in Tamil contemporary prose, or the whole gamut of modern Tamil prose-writing. Each typification presumes selection, and each representative selection means that, while a number of features or items is chosen as typical, as characteristic, a much greater number of features or items must necessarily be ignored. This is the reason why this chapter is not full of greater or lesser names and titles of books. It is a pity that it cannot be (naturally) quite anonymous.

Three authors were selected as typical of almost the whole range of modern Tamil prose—or rather, of that in contemporary Tamil prose which is valuable and full of promise for future development.¹

(The first one to be discussed is T. Janakiraman. Most Tamil critics, and probably most readers, too, would agree that Janakiraman's writings are good—that he is a good and interesting story teller. According to my opinion he is typically one of the best representatives of the prevalent, realistic, humanistic and mildly progressive trends of modern-day Tamil.)

T. Janakiraman was born on June 8, 1921 in Thevangudi near

¹ Since this is a delicate issue, let me repeat once more the fact that I have selected three authors for detailed discussion does not mean that there are no other good or even very good prose-writers in Tamil. Being well aware of the fact, I am inviting the wrath of many readers upon me (not to speak about the writers), yet I shall still boldly declare that I do not consider writers like Kalki, Akilan or Vallikkannan as first-rate or even great writers. On the other hand, I have a great respect and admiration for such truly honest writers as N. Pichamurti, probably the most awe-inspiring and impressive single figure in Tamil writing today, both in the field of prose and poetry (see Chapter 20). I also admire writers and critics like C. S. Chellappa and K. N. Subrahmanyam, if for different reasons. I am also aware of the extremely promising younger writers and poets like Sundara Ramaswami (b. 1931), probably one of the most talented authors of the younger generation (cf. his excellent short novel *Oru puliyamarattin katar*, *The Story of a Tamarind Tree*, 1966).

Tanjavur He is a Brahmin by caste and knows Sanskrit and English well For years now he has been working in the All India Radio (Madras, Delhi), and has published a number of short stories, novelettes, novels, dramas and travelogues

The best known short story collection is probably *Civappunkṣā* "The Red Riksha" (1956) The two novels one should read are *Mōkamul* "The Thorn of Passions" (1961) and *Ammā vantāl* "Mother Came" (1965) A charming travelogue about Japan was published by Janakīraman in 1967 (*Utaya cūryaṅ* "The Rising Sun") One of his more engaging dramas is *Tāktarukku maruntu* (1965) "The Medicine for the Doctor"

Janakīraman is a calm and composed writer His themes are taken from everyday life of the middle-class families in the towns of Tamilnad His most progressive piece is probably a short drama called *Nāluvelimilam* "Four *velis* of land" But his short stories are usually not concerned with social reforms or social revolution He speaks about social evil with mild disapproval, with a kind of dolorous smile and a sort of gentle reprimand "This should not be done", that is what he seems to say, "because it is sad, painful, and ugly" But more often he is concerned with the family, with the relation between husbands and wives, between fathers and their children (a very strong motive) Beyond the family, the unit within which his characters live—and they usually do live—is the very near neighbourhood, a house with a common courtyard, a block of houses, a compound, one single narrow street of a small South Indian town, a railway compartment

When asked why he writes he says "It is as if somebody asked me Why do you eat? For a number of reasons because I am hungry, because I enjoy it, because this or that tastes good, etc etc I write for a number of reasons for fame, for fun, for money, a little for myself and a little for you, or just because I want to manifest the fact that I am here, and sometimes just for my own amusement—well, for a number of reasons, really, and, in fact, it is quite simple Writing gives me much pleasure, it is composite pleasure—like the pleasure of love. there is the thrill of expectation, the pain of disappointment, the joy of union—but altogether it is a pleasure And I write about matters I know I never write about things I do not know" This is the one great thing about Janakīraman and his writing his honesty and the absence of any

kind of pretense. There is no affectation and no ostentation in him, no untruth.

His style is vivid, plastic, his language rich and colourful, though always temperate and subdued, he is not afraid to use, in the dialogues, a written reflection of the colloquial which usually happens to be the Brahmin colloquial with him¹.

(*Mōkamul* (1961) "The Thorn of Passion" is a distinguished novel—one of the best ever published in Tamil. The plot, the theme, the story, even the style—almost everything in the book is really good. And yet it is not an excellent novel altogether. It suffers from the one fault that some of his writings display: verbosity and loquacity. "An otherwise good piece of fiction—so thinly spun out that it runs to about 800 pages, it could have been more effective if it had been done in about a couple of hundred pages" (K. N. Subrahmanyam).

In this respect, *Ammā vantaḷ* (1965) "The Mother Came", is definitely better. This is, in short, the plot: Appu, a Brahmin boy, is sent at the age of eight to a Sanskrit seminary (*pāṭacālai*) to learn the Vedas. He stays sixteen years, to master them, living on the banks of the Kāvīri, in a beautiful, serene atmosphere. Appu alone does not know that his handsome, overbearing mother who appears to his mind's eye as a luminous vision, is unfaithful to his father, in fact, she seeks vicarious atonement by turning her son to a Vedic scholar. After sixteen years Appu returns home to learn the devastating truth. Appu's affectionate younger brothers and sisters turn out to be bastard half-brothers and half-sisters, his mother an adulteress. The short, explosive novel describes the reaction of the ardent, puritanical young Brahmin idealist to this emotional catastrophe. Seeing that his resigned, withdrawn and compassionate father ignores the aberration of his wife, Appu rejects his home and goes back to the *pāṭhaśālā* whose founder and benefactress on her death-bed makes him the joint heir to her property. Appu ends by living "in sin" with her widowed niece, a lovely and sensual woman by name of Indu.

The book's theme is highly interesting, even great, the plot well conceived, the characterization of some figures excellent. Alankāram, the sinful mother, is indeed overwhelming. Some descriptions

¹ *The Plough and the Stars* (1963) includes Janaknāman's story "Exultation", pp. 76-87, and *Mahful* (IV 3-4, 1968) has an English version of his story "The Temple Light".

are lovely—e g at the very beginning of the novel the description of the Kāviri On the other hand, the novel has a few basic drawbacks it has not quite escaped the curse of sentimentalism, its author, though brave enough to choose a delicate and explosive theme, is not courageous enough to be entirely frank—e g in dealing with Indu's sensuality, with sex in general There is almost no verbosity in this book, and there are some truly exciting passages, but there are also some flat and colourless parts, and some descriptions are not concrete enough I give below the English translation of a passage which describes the first confrontation between Appu and Indu, before Appu goes back to Madras and learns the truth about his mother

"She gripped his shoulders with both hands, the fingers digging into his flesh

Her palms were hot, but the rounded, soft forearms cool on his shoulders and chest, like a tight-woven garland of chrysanthemums

He was overwhelmed by a staggering feeling of astonishment

Indu's hair rubbed against his cheek, then her brows, her forehead, her lips

A lizard clucked from the wall Appu stood abruptly up, pushing her aside She got up, too, but held his shoulders tightly

"No, Indu!"

"No to what?"

"No! No to this sin When I think of your aunt, I feel ashamed"

"Even now it is only aunt you can think of! Not me! Why do you keep bleating 'sin, sin'?"

"Because this is sinful"

"It doesn't seem sinful to me What is a sin? To do and say things against one's conscience It is you, you that I have been thinking of all these years, you that I've been living for! Now you know Is it so wrong? Shouldn't I have told you what I feel?"

"It doesn't seem right to me, Indu I think of you as I do of your aunt When you touch me, I feel as if I was touching her " Appu closed his eyes

"You always think of her, how great she is And you turn away from me in disgust as if you had trodden on a dead worm If you could only realize that I am a human being, too but that you can't!"

"I do not even think of my own sister at home as so near to me as you, Indu! I think of you as one born with me "

"But don't you realize now that this is not true?"

"No, I still think it is true Nothing has changed"

"Appu!"

" "

"Appu!"

" "

"You talk and you don't understand, even now after I have told you all this I swear on the Vedas you study—without you, my life has no meaning at all"

He stood aghast, hurt, he could not bear this goading, this oath on the Vedas

"Never talk like this again, Indu"

"Why?"

"Don't drag in the Vedas They are like my mother to me They are my god, my mother, they are like my mother who is god to me Pure gold I knew Parasu Don't think he is dead He is there, listening to all that you say Doesn't it occur to you how his soul will squirm in agony hearing you? You don't think of him at all—and not only that, you dishonour him and degrade yourself, and I cannot bear to hear you babbling like this, ignoring him! And when you, in addition, swear on the Vedas, it is as if my mother had been dealt a blow, as if dust had been thrown in her face! Look here, Indu, I'd have left by now, but for your aunt I am just waiting for her to say good-bye You know, when I look at you, think of you, I feel happy but I feel like caving, too Don't be angry with me, Indu When I go back to my mother, I should go clean in body, clean in mind She must never think that I went to study the Vedas, but really smeared mud on my head When you return after a bath in the Kaveri, you should not drop into a roadside tavern and drink *kallu* I couldn't stagger in my mother's presence with a mud-stained face! When you look at me, it is as if she was looking at me! Send me home safe, Indu!"

He moved away from her and there he stood, afraid that she would follow and hold his shoulders

Indu stood facing the wall, with the light of the lantern falling fully on her She was not looking at the wall She was not looking at anything Her nose was shiny, the skin sagged beneath her eyes She was standing there as if she was some dead body that had been stood up Even on the face there was a deadly pallor, as if life and blood had been drained She was like ashes

For minutes the corpse-like apparition stood there, unmoving

Then she knotted up her hair, and raised a finger to scratch her cheek and lip With the look of utter blankness she crawled from one place to another, picked up the lantern, set it down by a pillar, and sitting beside another pillar, she buried her face between her knees

Appu glanced at the door, and then went quickly up to her, she heard his footsteps and raised her head, but he did not look at her He laid himself flat on the ground in front of her, in a full-stretch *namaskāram* Then he rose and walked into the *pātacālar* He spread his towel on the floor and laid down

He was listening to suppressed sobs and moans and snivellings

A gecko clucked from the darkness kík-kík-kík

He closed his eyes and could see, in the shadows, the face of his mother "

Janakiraman is a well-established author, who has always something to say, who does not want merely to entertain or to please. The message he has to convey is always a message of goodwill, an exhortation to more humane humanity. There is a lot of misery in the world and in man's life. Do not multiply this misery. The world needs decency, charity, common sense and a lot of goodwill. This is the message of Janakiraman, a good, solid and enjoyable writer.

Jeyakanthan is quite different. A robust, energetic, and passionate man. So are his writings—robust and passionate. An angry writer, when he began to write in the fifties. Only lately his style has mellowed and reached some stability. He was and still, to some extent, is the *enfant terrible* of Tamil literature, a writer whose purpose is to shock the readers—the shock being intended as a therapeutic device. He is definitely a man with a message. Things are bad and they should be changed, violently if necessary, without violence if possible.

He belongs to the young if not to the youngest generation of writers. He was born in Kadalur on May 2, 1934, and is a prolific writer who has published a large number of short stories and quite a number of novels—of very unequal quality.

Jeyakanthan seems to care much more about what he has to say than about how he says it, which does not mean that his style and language is disappointing. But he is, out of the three writers dealt with here, the least careful stylist, though some of his pages show that he is capable of formal excellence. He is always direct, quite simple and quite powerful. It is the topic, the theme, the plot, and the ideas, opinions, beliefs, the judgements which are important to him. In the best of his short stories, one feels a sure stroke of a stylist who has succeeded in getting rid of everything superfluous and redundant (quite opposite from Janakiraman). But sometimes his way of describing things is crude and raw.

(He belongs to the line of critical realism symbolized by the names of Puthumappittan and T. M. C. Raghunathan.) He does not hesitate to handle themes that were recognized as taboo, startling, even embarrassing his readers. In his early years as writer, there was much talk about his "immorality", which was, with him, nothing but absolute frankness, deadly serious, and crudely realistic, even naturalistic narration.

For the urge to write there is always some reason with Jeyakan-

than He is a rationalist who sees the chain of causes and results in the whole sphere of life. The ultimate measure and reason of everything is Man, even for nature, and more so for art. Art, for him, is always full of purposes, it has always some meaning, some sense, some message. In the story *Illātatu etu* ("What is lacking?"), he describes man, symbolized by a proud and successful scientist, approached by God, who had given him too much and wants to take back one of his senses. The man is free to choose which one he would agree to lose. He thinks for a while and then proposes a bargain: "You can take back any sense you want, but you will give in return something which I don't have." God—who intended to take away the man's mind—is embarrassed: "If I take his mind, what can I give him in return? Can I give anything? What if the thing I give him turns out to be even more powerful? What is it that he doesn't have? I should not have tried to talk with man in his language." And he disappears. The man wins.

As the scientist says to God, God has no business with man, man has work to do which may, in the end, touch God.

Life is a struggle. Especially the life of the working classes. Jeyakanthan wants to take part in the struggle. He always enjoys taking part in any fight.

Some of the truly Marxist ideas and methods of approach remained in him from the period (about 1956-1962) when he was a passionate and orthodox Marxist. He has lately left the camp of Marxists and ultra-left rebels who as he says "show only the *cēris*" in their writings. He is now refusing that kind of literature which wallows in the morbid description of filth, misery, poverty and vice to the exclusion of everything else under the pretence of being realistic and revolutionary. According to Jeyakanthan of today (though a decade ago he would have talked very differently, and one can hardly predict how he will talk a decade later), these writers who deny that there was a past in India, who see the past as something false and absolutely rotten, are blinded fools and perverts (*kurutarkal, acatarkal, vakkarittuppōnavarkal*). He recognizes the ideals of the past, "the pride of Indian wisdom and the power of Indian soul. But the soul of India broke into pieces. The life in India became an image of falsehood. In cursing the life and pleasure while at the same time enjoying them, the Indian became a hypocrite." (*Maunam oru pāsai*, "Silence is a language.") Thus he refuses to join the lines of those who see

only the past glories of India, for whom life is a thing of the past, and the present time means death and decay. For him, India lives, as he puts it, both in temples and in the *cēris* (low caste villages), the sanctity of the temple lives in the *cēri*, and the filth of the *cēri* lives in the temple (a truly dialectical approach). True literature should reflect the facts of all aspects of life in its fulness, here and now, what is important, is the present moment, the here and now of India in all its complexity. And, above all, doing away with all kinds of hypocrisy and pretence, revering the old high ideals just because they are old, and at the same time following, in practice, loose, derived, second-hand and diluted modern values. The future culture of India must reformulate ancient, traditional Indian values in the new context of social change.

Jeyakanthan prefers to think about himself as a truly critical realist, which he probably is, a fighter, not afraid of blows. Probably always sure of himself, always convinced that he is right, he most often is. He is always on the move. Figuratively he speaks about himself as a lover of Sarasvati, the Goddess of Art, and a son of the Goddess of Society. He has a very keen sense of future, including his own future as writer. He says about himself "I am a small drop in the great ocean which creates the world of tomorrow. My writing is just one wave in that ocean." It certainly is a powerful wave¹.

Contemporary Tamil prose—and I certainly do not enjoy writing this—is, on the whole, emasculated, flat, colourless, as if most of the writers were afraid of conveying their own experience of life, as if they were strangled by inhibitions when talking about matters like body and sex. Unfortunately one finds this flat, unidimensional and castrated writing even when reading a description of nature, of a street, of a room, of a human being, of an event. As if these writers, as A. K. Ramanujan very happily put it during a private conversation, were devoid of the five senses of seeing, hearing, touch, smell and taste. One is indeed almost bound to ask if there is something wrong with the sensoric perceptions of these writers—or is it just utter lack of the pertinent vocabulary and stylistic skill?

Fortunately, there are exceptions. Some of the writings of

¹ However, the development is very uneven and full of potential dangers and pitfalls.

N. Pichamurti, K Alagiriswamy, R Shanmugasundaram, T. Janakiraman and a few others are plastic, vivid, multidimensional, sensitive to shapes, colours, sounds and smells. And a writer like Jeyakanthan is capable, in the best of his prose, to produce descriptions like the following "He coughed again, having sat up, and then expectorated. You could really not say how old he was: he seemed ageless as eternity. His head was bare, his face silvery with unshaven hair, his forehead wrinkled. His grey eyebrows were so luxurious and drooping that they half-closed his eyes and only the pale whites were visible. His beard and the drooping flesh on his cheeks covered his face, so that one could not see where the deep wrinkles on either side of his nose began and where they ended. But his nose, broad and pointed, stood out prominently"¹

It is hardly possible to imagine two so different authors as Jeyakanthan, the robust fighter, and L. S. Ramamirtham, the shy, reticent Brahmin with the face of Sir Laurence Olivier. And yet both of them, like T. Janakiraman, and a number of others—C. S. Chellappa, K. N. Subrahmanyam, N. Pichamurti, K. Alagiriswamy, Chidambaram Subrahmanyam, S. Ramaswamy, K. Ganeshalingam—have something fundamental in common: apart from the fact that these writers, all of them, to a greater or lesser degree, possess, no doubt, a talent for creative writing, they *mean* it when they write. That is, writing for them is work, and, unlike so many contemporary Tamil "writers", they approach writing with a sense of responsibility, and with some definite intent and purport. (But whereas, e.g., Jeyakanthan is more attentive to what he says than to how he says it, and while Janakiraman probably tries to be equally careful about what he says and how, Ramamirtham, so it seems to me, is always or almost always much more on the look out for how he says it than what he says. Hence, he is probably the best Tamil stylist of our days, also, some of his short stories—at least seemingly so—turn round banalities or trivialities. And reading Ramamirtham may become an intellectual exercise.)

Both Jeyakanthan and Ramamirtham are each possessed by a particular kind of basic lunacy (I do not think Janakiraman is,

¹ "The Staff of Life", *The Plough and the Stars* (1963) 88-89. The original is much superior to this translation. *Mahfil* (IV 3-4, 1968) 81-99, contains English renderings of two of his short stories, "The Dispute" and "Ages Meet".

he is too sensible and too well-balanced for that). Jeyakanthan is obsessed with the future of the world he believes he is helping to mould, more specifically, with the here and now of the India he sees and wants to change. Ramamirtham's obsession is very different, it is the mystique of the *word*, in other words, he is always preoccupied with the problems of language, diction, style and writing techniques " words, once spoken, have become cinder. But the Word that defies capture is the flame that purges. Oh, I can feel it, don't I realise the ridiculousness of this attempt to pick out *the* Word from words—as ridiculous as trying to operate on the brain with a butcher's knife or a rusty doornail? He who has been touched by the flame of the Word, he carries the fire in his heart. If you will have the Word as water, he has drunk from the Pool of Eternal Thirst. And he walks alone on his endless way—to *the* Word" ¹

In a personal interview, granted in January 1968 in Madras, he told me "I am obsessed with words. I listen to every word, contemplating its meaning and form, and the place it has in the web of life and the patterns of speech. Every word is like a precious stone. There are moments, just before the ideas, the thoughts take the final shape of words, which are like a shimmering on the brink of some explosion. I try to choose words which will bear repetition. Repeating them makes me happy. The reader should also read my sentences like that—repeating them, listening to them."

(L. S. Ramamirtham was born on October 30, 1916. He has a wide and deep English education. He began in fact writing in English, his English writings were recognized and published by Manjeri S. Iswaran. "I love English like a woman. I think I was happy to have read the right authors at the right moments. As far as Western writing is concerned, I might have been influenced by Tolstoy . . . and Knut Hamsun . . . and Hemingway . . ." ² \

It was T. J. Ranganathan (b. 1901), one of the influential prose-writers of the older generation, who induced Ramamirtham to write in Tamil. "I have been writing for thirty-three years now. For the last ten to twelve years I have not been reading almost anything. All those three decades I was repeating myself. There is nothing new to tell . . ."

Ramamirtham has so far written more than one hundred short

¹ *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Nov. 20, 1966, p. 27

² Personal communication

stories and two novels (*Putra*, 1st part 1965, *Apitā*, 1970). The collections of short stories comprise *Janam* (1957), *Italkal* (1959, 'Petals'), *Paccakkānavu* (1961, 'Green Dream'), *Kankā* (1962) *Añcali* (1963 'Gesture of Worship') *Alalkal* (1964 'Waves') and *Tayā* (1966). He works in the Punjab National Bank in Madras. He is very shy, very difficult to talk to.

The world of Ramamirtham's stories—most of them describing the life of middle and lower classes—is often limited to just two persons: it may be husband and wife, parent and child, two friends, sometimes two people who just meet casually and a relationship develops between them—that is always of fundamental interest to Ramamirtham. The relationship between two, rarely between more human beings. Sometimes, he draws a whole family into the magic circle of his writing. But the family seems to be the limit for him. Only rarely does he deal with the relations of an individual or a group of individuals toward society, or with some total social problem: Where the problems of Jeyakanthan's heroes are primarily social and political, arising from such phenomena as poverty, caste, social status, class struggle, occupational features, nationality, religion etc., the problems of Ramamirtham's individual heroes are psychological, they arise from the depths of their hearts, from inner conflicts, suppressions, obsessions, passions and falsehoods. The subconscious workings of the mind, the conflict within an individual—that is a frequent theme in Ramamirtham's stories, which sometimes have only one single hero.

"What is my method? Introspection. I seek for the truth in things, for the true nature of things, for the truth in myself."

In this respect, Ramamirtham's method is very Indian indeed. But then he says

"I do not believe in anything really—perhaps I am an atheist. Yet, I believe—in the continuity of the race, the parents who begot me, my mother—she lives very much in me. I do not identify myself with my characters. They have a life of their own. But at the same time, I write chiefly about myself. I am very much occupied with myself. Almost all my writing is in some sense autobiographical. Yes, indeed, *Putra* is strongly autobiographic. And I am writing very often about my mother. She was a very unusual person. Something of a queen and yet a subject. Unapproachable."

The texture of his plots is really not very intricate but sometimes it is difficult to understand at once the full implications of

the interactions between the characters "Green Dream" (1961)¹ describes, for instance, the complicated net of emotions evolving between a blind man and his wife. Parts of the story, thanks to the diction and style, have a dream-like quality of fantasy and illusion. But even single dialogues in this story have a unique force and charm.

"Other memories arose at the word "moon" Memories of midnights when he had lain waiting on a camp cot on the veranda, in the moon light—the awaited hand clasping his—the many times it had led him to that stagnant pond amidst the four hillocks, at the turning of the road—the dusty earth of the street sticking to the soles of his feet—the green dress fluttering against him in the wind—it was like this moment

"Is moonlight green?"

"Green? Anyone would say it's white, wouldn't they?"

"Completely white?"

"Can you say whitewash is completely white? It's a sort of whitish green"

"Ah, I would say so"

If it must be so, let it be whitish green. To give him the slightest occasion to imagine it completely green is enough. It was satisfying for him to imagine moonlight flowing down, green upon green, over the hillocks, the grassy fields, the lotus tank—like sap wrung from a leaf. Immersed for a moment in the thought, he then asked—

"What is sunshine like?"

"Oh dear, why are you such a type today? Sunshine is *white*. Come inside"

"Completely white?"

"*Completely* white"

Yes, even as far as he could remember, sunshine was only white, and besides that, it burnt. If sunshine were only green!"

(Transl. by Donald A. Nelson)

In "Ganga" (1962), the husband, out of disgust with everyday grey life, chases after a love-dream of childhood and adolescence. After a drastic disappointment, he returns to his wife who is the symbol and guarantee of security and sound reality. "Tarangini" (1963) describes a barren woman's attempt to keep the affection of her husband, she loses his love at the very moment when she becomes pregnant. In "Talking Fingers" (1961) two people, a man and a woman, meet casually on a deserted road in the fields, he, a Telugu-speaking peddler selling bangles, she, a young and buxom Tamil peasant-woman, whose husband is a drinking ruffian. There and then an inner relationship arises between these two strangers—

¹ *Mahfil* IV, 3-4 (1968) 55-62

nothing develops between them in the physical sense; only his fingers speak and a few bangles remain crushed in the dust of the road—but the story, five pages in all, is a masterpiece of Tamil prose. Who has ever seen a dusty road in India, with a hot sun in the zenith, and a strong and shapely peasant woman walking on the road in the hot dust, under that sun, will feel the immense tension pervading the story.

“Clay” (1961)¹ describes the relationship between a family of low caste potters and the community they work for. The central idea behind the theme of “Stained Leaf”² is the madness of poetry, the higher, super-realistic, trans-realistic vision of the poet against the earthy, fully realistic plane of the profane, of the vulgar. And of course the higher, ideal plane is destroyed by the vulgar. This is part of Ramamirtham’s “aristocratic” convictions and “idealistic”, Plotinus-like philosophy. The setting of the story is extra-traditionally Indian on purpose, the reality is transformed—to some extent even grotesquely (the bizarre is not strange to Ramamirtham)—into very traditional visions of the poet: sun-scorched fields into moonlit pleasure-garden, stinking canal into lotus-pond, a Pariah woman into an *apsarā* etc. The plot is of course melodramatic, traditional, and, with a lesser writer, it could be disastrous. But here the climax and anticlimax technique is used very skilfully: after a double murder, an old woman with a broom gathering rubbish for fuel, and the burning of the leaf, stained by blood. The irony of the whole event—the poet and the woman (both quite innocent) are killed with the poet’s own stylus (used for writing his verses) held in the hand of a vulgar ignoramus! Diction and style is, as always with Ramamirtham, the best feature of the story. The whole is based on contrast: the basic contrast is that of the dreamer-poet and the Pariah man of action (the poet dreams, writes down his visions, forgetting reality completely; the Pariah shouts and acts. “He came, he saw, he decided, and he killed”). In the eyes of the Pariah, the poet is not a sensitive, innocent being, but a mad good-for-nothing idler, just squatting on the bank and grinning like a fool. The whole story is a series of flashes: how the world appears to different characters. For the Pariah woman, e.g., the world is made of sweat and sunshine and cooling, soothing water. The same reality, symbolized by the banyan leaf, appears

¹ *ib.*, 63-67.

² *ib.*, 52-54.

differently to the four actors what is a piece of poetry to the dreamer and intellectual, is some four scribbles for the illiterate Pariah *belle*, and dry rubbish, a piece of fuel, for the old hag And the style! The whole "physical history" of a leaf is contained in just one short sentence "It withered in the heat, it was soaked by rain, it shivered in the wind, and became stiff with cold" This is the description of the young woman, who "untied her sari, put down the bundle with rice, and slipped into the water . . . Her mind and body were entirely immersed in her bathing In the frenzy and intoxication caused by fresh cool water crawling across her body, she beat the water with her hands and raised a curtain of rain-drops, hiding behind it, and laughing like mad, she thrust herself down upon her back into the water Her hair untied, the flag spread and immersed in water, she flung open her arms, pressed her legs together and was floating like a cross Her eyes twinkled, dazzled by the glare of the sun, her lips smiled, her body shone and darted beams of light like a black crystal".

Ramamirtham's language is extremely rich He has at his disposal a great number of (so-called) synonyms e g, in just four lines of "Stained Leaf", the story just discussed, he uses four "synonyms" for "water" *vellam, punal, tannir, jalam*, each with slightly different connotation and function This in itself need not be a sign of art, just of skill Whenever necessary, he is able to use highly classical (and "pure") Tamil words, e g *tivalai* for *malar*, "raindrop, rain" (in the same story)

What is more important is the type of new and striking metaphors he employs Two instances (as random illustrations) taken from the short story "Ganga" (1962) hearing the name of the girl Ganga in a unexpected and surprising context, this is what the boy in the story feels *kathiyutan katti cantuttup poru pirantatu pol ennul eto nerntu vittatu* (p 14) "Something happened in my heart, like the birth of a spark when a knife strikes another knife" And a few lines further we may read *avalitamiruntu enakkuk kanavai oru varittar varin ari kanavin alaku mirntu ennavayum kanavakkuyatu* "(and) when a tender word came to me from her, it was all aglow with the beauty of a dream and I, too, was made like a dream" (p 15) He is equally able to deal with the beauty of nature as well as with details of human portraiture, cf the two following instances "From the hair, arranged like two curved armlets on both sides of the middle parting, two loose locks parted and played

on the hillock of the forehead in the swift wind of the electric fan
 A floating round mark, above the spot where the curves of her
 irregular black brows began, melted in sweat, shedding its red
kunkum and casting a glow on the face" (*Tayā*, p. 6) "Green
 pastures On the grass-tips stood drops of dew A golden bow
 sprouted and spread upon the indigo above Silver laces of water
 rose and descended up and down the grass-stalks, rolling about
 and smoothing the bends" (*Curuti*, p. 34) Alliteration seems to
 come naturally to him as well as a particular cadence and a powerful
 rhythm—cf. such utterances (taken at random from the novel
Putra I) as *ūr ōram āra amara anilntu kulikka ōtum jalam ullaivā*
 (p. 33) "Isn't there running water (for me) to bathe in, to be cooled
 and refreshed and appeased, at the side of the village?", or *inta*
ennattai ennum nērattukku pālavil pūtta pūppol, ennattin paṇṇai
neñcu kacintatu (p. 45) "Like a flower, blossoming in the barren
 soil, within the span of time necessary to produce this thought,
 the heart melted, by the tender freshness of the thought"

When asked what are the sources of his rich, sometimes rather
 profusely Sanskritized Tamil, he says "It was all in my family
 It is my family heritage My grandfather was a Tamil pandit
 And then, of course, experience richness of experience produces
 wealth of language The nature and extent and depth of my in-
 volvement, that is decisive for my diction My emotions
 Sanskrit? But I do not really know Sanskrit I do not know it, but
 I love the sound of it It is like heavy jewellery It has also been in
 my family for ages "

His writing is not very popular Sometimes he is rather difficult
 to understand "Often, one gets lulled into a trance while going
 through the verbal permutations he indulges in with magic effect .
 This seemingly undue dominance of verbal designs stands in the
 way of communication when the reader is not familiar with the
 technique Ramamirtham employs in expressing himself" ¹

His *Putra* ("Son"), a novel full of Macbethian twilight, reminding
 one of Spanish baroque, Italian "marinism", and the English 'meta-
 physical' poets of European seventeenth century, was called
 "tongue-in-cheek experiment" and to some extent this is true The
 search after new forms, the strife after technical innovations, the

¹ P. P. Sundarajan, "The Short Story in Tamil", *Indian Writing Today*, 4, p. 61

obsession with the "word" drive Ramamirtham, from time to time, to the dangerous brink of pure formalism, and he is almost ready to sacrifice the subject, the theme, the meaning, on the altar of the form, *uru*. This has indeed happened to some extent in *Putra*, especially in the first half of Part I. In the prose-poetry passages he seems to have carried his experiments too far. The novel is the story of a curse, hulled by the mother upon her son

"I am an utterance
Am I male? Or am I female?
Am I she? Or he? Or it?
 'Listen! To you, a son will never be born!
 And even if he were, he would rot!'"
This is, then, my lot, that is my destiny,
I am a curse

I shall not be locked within one place I shall be everywhere
I shall not be squeezed into one form, all shapes are my shape, my
being

I am a WORD
the meaning of the word,
the action of the meaning,
the three merged and blended into
one trident"¹

Reading a story by Ramamirtham is always an experience, sometimes a harrowing experience, often the reader is left with painful and very disturbed feelings, sometimes he is lost, sometimes, he feels that there is a certain amount of affectation, of ostentation present in Ramamirtham's writings, he may wish that the author be more simple, more straightforward, and—more sincere

However, Ramamirtham is a many-sided genius. He is capable, even within a single comparatively short novel as the first part of *Putra*, to evoke an entirely different picture

"Blue, saffron, violet, deep yellow, green, black—she had a figure which agreed with any colour

Aunt would open the long trunk which she used during the day as a board and take out one by one the different saris. This was indeed their chance

"Wear them—every day I shall only be pleased, looking at you I can't I am beyond the age of wearing them. They cut into my flesh at the waist. You wear them—one by one. You may wear them as you

¹ At the time when this is being written and re-read (December 1969, Sept. 1972), we still wait impatiently for the second volume of this experimental and breath-taking novel

wish—for some time to come, that is One day you will be like me'

While she was pointing out to her the beauty of a fullbodied saree, Aunt would say 'The Goddess of Anaikkal' And as she was showing the texture of another piece, she would say 'Kamakshī of Kanchi'

Uncle was sitting on the veranda, stroking his beard She felt that he was watching her with his eyes like live embers hid in the forest of his sloping brows Nowadays he would not talk to her His forehead was all in wrinkles What was the trouble now? What new worries were vexing him? Was he putting her under a test? Or rather himself? What did he search for? What was his true intention among those thousands of thoughts hidden in his beard?"

I have yet to read another passage in modern Tamil writing like the one which follows the sense of the passing of time is so urgent and perfect here.

"In November, a curtain of rain descending heavily upon the mango groves

Rain is streaming down everywhere, and clouds in crowds hurry across the sky

At dawns in December growing clusters of dew drops

In the soil of the earth, long tracks left by crawling snakes

Under the sacred fig-tree in the monastery, ant-hills grow daily out of its hollows

In the wells, in the spreading darkness of night, the waterlevel stands motionless and still, hiding its depths under a milky surface

Pungent unripe fruits hanging hidden in the midst of mango leaves

A flock of hawks, wings widely spread, floats in the dark blue skies.

Grating and scrapping of coconuts, huge heaps of fibres under the scrapers growing day after day

The earth overgrown with green grass like a colour engraving

A white feather flashing on the green earth, fallen from the wings of a flying flock of cranes

The hissing descent of a falling star

The gentle sweet sound of the Evening Star, as she slips and falls down and springs up

Big bellies of calving cows

A solitary drop of life, oozing out of the udder and trickling down along the teat, as the eyes grow tender looking at the calves

A column of fire hot and fierce, filling to the brim the hollow of the center of a wild jumping and romping dance

The quivering and shivering heat of Summer"

My feeble attempts at alliteration cannot revoke Ramamirthan's perfect sound magic (cf *kaṇṇu kaṇṇu kaṇ kaṇṇu* "the eye, growing tender at the sight of the calf", or *kaṇṇu pūralum paṇṇiṇ peruvayiru*, lit "big belly of a cow in which the embryo rolls"), observe also the technique of association, used in the passage with such skill

But reading Ramamirtham's prose is also always a revelation. Among other things, a revelation of the possibilities of the Tamil language. It is Ramamirtham who has shown us what Tamil is capable of. According to the author himself, the writer and the reader, they both make the book, they both create the literary work. Ramamirtham—according to his own admission—does not write in the easy way. Sometime—so he told me—he searches for the right mood, the right *rasa*, for a long time, it takes him often three, four months to finish a story.

But once you read one of his stories, you will never forget it, you want to re-read it, again and again. And that is something which can be said only about very few Tamil authors of our days.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE "NEW POETRY"

The term New Poetry is used here in a limited and technical sense of the Tamil expression *putuk kavitar* or *putiyak kavitar*, i.e. for the works of a particular group of "new poets" who made their appearance approximately after 1958-59, and whose poems were collectively published for the first time in October 1962 in a slender yet path-breaking volume entitled *Putukkuralkal* "New Voices" It is therefore not used for post-Bharati Tamil poetry, not even for post-Bharatidasan Tamil poetry I do not deal in this chapter with such influential modern poets as S D S Yogi, not even with some "young" contemporary poets like the "people's bard" Pattukkōttai Kalyānacuntaram, or like the very popular Kannatācaṅ All these are modern poets, but not "new" poets in the sense of the term mentioned above These modern poets may indulge in *vers libre*, or be fiercely politically orientéd and proclaim themselves as ultra-red revolutionaries, but, in fact, there is nothing basically new, creative, and "revolutionary" about their writing Their poetry is a sort of anaemic imitation of either Bharati or Bharatidasan or S D S Yogi.

What is meant by the term "new poetry" here is different both from the moribund orthodox pandit-like versification as well as from the sentimentally romantic outpourings of the hosts of "modern" but not "new" poets

The "new poets" have, in fact, general features in common which distinguish their work from the rest

1 Historically speaking, the "new poets" have a very definite line of descent which is indicated in the chart appended to this chapter and which includes, in succession, the four great names of S Bharati, Puthumaipitthan, K P Rajagopalan and N Pichamurti The other features of "new poetry" are

2 Radical break with the past and its traditions, though not a negation of the cultural heritage

3 Disregard for traditional forms and prosodic structures, and a new utilization of basic prosodic properties of Tamil

4 A great amount of experimentation with language and form of poetry, based on intellection, and at least some acquaintance with French, English, American etc modern poetry

5 Preoccupation with very contemporary matters and inclusion of new, hitherto ignored *sujets* If traditional subjects are handled, they are treated from a new, non-traditional angle and point of view)

The beginnings of "new poetry"—if we disregard a somewhat similar intellectual and emotional *milieu* of some of the Siddhar poems—may be found in Subrahmanya Bharati's (1882-1921) works, in his "prose-poetry" as well as in a few stray poems which are very striking from the point of view of form and content. Incidentally, Bharati considered himself to be a spiritual descendent of the *cittar*

"Siddhars many have been ere my time!
I am another come to this land"

Bharati's prose-poems and free-verse experiments opened new vistas and tried new techniques in Tamil poetry as early as during the decade of 1910-1920. Consider e.g. lines like these

Mind is the enemy within
And cuts our roots
Parasite Mind alone is the enemy
Let us peck at it
Let us tear it
Come, let us hunt it down ¹

One of the most amazing poems of Bharati is *Ūlakkūttu* or "The Dance of Doom" which I quote here in a good though not quite equivalent (partial) translation by Prema Nandakumar (*op cit* 86)

As the worlds mightily clash
And crash in resounding thunder,
As blood-dripping demon-spirits
Sing in glee amid the general rum,
To the beat and the tune
Leapest thou, Mother, in dance ecstatic
Dread Mahakali!
Chamundi! Gangali!
Mother, Mother,
Thou hast drawn me
To see thee dance!

When the demon-hosts clash

¹ Transl. Prema Nandakumar, *Subramanya Bharati* (1968) 116

CHART 17

S Bharati's
prose-poetry and poems like
Ūlkkūttu and *Akkimkkuñcu*

Puthumappitthan

K P Rajagopalan

N. Pichamurti

(T M C Raghunathan)

(S Vallikkannan)

C S Chellappa

(S Ramaswamy)

surrealistic
natural
description

irony, social
satire, caricature

Dharmu
Sivaramu
etc

intellectual
and
metaphysical
poetry

T. K Turaiswamy
S Vairtheswaran
T S Venugopalan
etc.

C Manu
and other
experimental
poets

emotive, imaginst,
symbolist trends

S Vairtheswaran,
T S Venugopalan,
S Ramaswamy *et al*

V Mah etc

The names are only representative of larger groups of authors

Hitting head against head,
 When the knocking and breaking
 Beat rhythmic time,
 When the sparks from your eyes
 Reach the ends of the earth,
 Then is the doomed hour
 Of universal death!

When Time and the three worlds
 Have been cast in a ruinous heap,
 When the frenzy has ceased
 And a lone splendour has awakened,
 Then auspicious Śiva appears
 To quench thy terrible thirst
 Now thou smilest and treadst with him
 The blissful Dance of Life!

After Bharati, it was the versatile Putumaippitan (1906-1948) who deviated from traditional poetry, he did not live long enough to mature into a great poet, and Putumaippitan the short-story writer is no doubt more successful than Putumaippitan the poet. A direct line leads from him to T M C Raghunathan who wrote a few very promising poems, but has been lately rather unproductive. K P Rajagopalan (1902-1944) died too young to exert any lasting influence on the present developments. There is, however, one great man who has carried on the fire of the Thirties to the post-war period. This man is N Pichamurti (Piccamūrṭti, b 1900). He admits that he was drawn to modern poetic forms only after reading Walt Whitman. His best-known poem *Kāttuvāṭṭu* ("Wild duck") was probably one of the decisive turning-points in the development of modern Tamil poetry.

The year 1959 may be considered as the real critical moment in these developments. In this year, C S Chellappa (b 1912), himself a good prose-writer and poet, and probably the most unorthodox and modern-oriented literary critic, founded his review *Eluttu*, "Writing", which opened its pages for anything new and truly creative. The results of the new ferment were visible in a path-breaking and all-important slender collection entitled *Putukkuralkal*, "New Voices" (Ezhutthu Prachuram, Madras, 1962) which, besides five poems by Pichamurti and Rajagopalan, contains poems composed only between 1959-1962. This volume—apart from 63 poems by 24 poets (a selection made out of about 200 pieces published on the pages of *Eluttu*)—contained also a very important introduction written by C S. Chellappa.

In addition to Pichamurti's "Wild duck", it is probably his *Pettikkatai Nāranan* ("Petty shopkeeper Nāranan") which is Pichamurti's best-known poem. It is a poem about the fall of modern man—about a *mock-hero*, even an *anti-hero*—and the disintegration of traditional values.

The stork
inside me
 pecks,
I go
rashly open
a
ration shop¹

What is a ration shop
Set up to
Sell
Rice pure like stars
Like faultless pearls?
A sieve?
A winnowing field?
A rice-mill?
Or the woman
Who levels the floor?
There are
Three hundred people
Waiting
Before I even
Unpack
The sack
Where is the place to sift?
Where is the place to winnow?
Where is the time
To be generous and
Polite?

(Transl. K. Zvelebil)

C. S. Chellappa's anthology contains Pichamurti's poem *Pūkkāri* ("The flower-girl") which shows a mature poet who has got rid of foreign influences. Below are given a few verses from parts 2 and 4 of this beautiful poem.

In the darkness of rain
In the streets
No bird

¹ Transl. S. Gopalie

"I may scratch, say I may,
I may scratch—my enemy?"

You may scratch, you may tear apart
In a soothing embrace
The left arm
Of the lovely-eyed
Will drip
Blood

Cut and throw off the nails of your right hand
Or else
Forget the joys of married life

Blood
oozes out
from the tender thighs
of that darling child
whom you lift and carry
on your hip

Cut and throw off the nails of your left hand
Or else
Don't ever more carry that child

Cut and throw off your nails—they gather dirt
Cut and throw off your nails—they gather dirt

"I may dig out, say I may,
I may dig out the wax from my ears?"

You may dig out the dirt
You may dig out the dirt

There is a place for each and every filth
The place may change
And the filth move to the guts
And go and mix with blood
With your blood

Cut and throw off your nails—they gather dirt
Cut and throw off your nails—they gather dirt

(Transl. K. Zvelebil)

According to Chellappa (*New Voices*, Introd. p. 10), the poem caused a furore among the readers. Most of them were shocked and disgusted.

Another important poem is C. Mani's (*Mani*) *Narakam* ("Hell"), published first in *Eluttu* 43. It is a true milestone in modern Tamil poetry. The minor theme—of the unfulfilled relationship between man and woman—is set within the major theme of corruption in the city (*nakaram*). Mani's imagery is extremely effective, his

technique is influenced by T S Eliot Hyperbolic abbreviation and powerful phantasy can do without much rhetoric, raw naturalism and surrealism blend in Mani's poetry As Chellappa says, when reading the poem one gets the feeling of witnessing a movie, "a panavision movie with stereophonic sound track",¹ The poem has 334 lines

"Like a dog poisoned by hunger / one roams about through endless streets" of the hellish city The city of Madras Mani describes the Marina, there are the women, whose "handfuls of tresses become stars in the southern wind, and the light of the eyes are all rainbows in the skies, and all their open lips become split hearts" There, "in the sand wounded by feet / and in the minds wounded by eyes / there are many scars "

Then follows (87-100) the well-known passage of Tamilnad of today

Tamilakam is neither in the East
 Nor quite in the West
 She placed the pan on the stove
 But she refused to cook
 Famine and loss
 Are the result
 She does not move foreward,
 She does not go back
 The present is hanging in the middle
 Hardened tradition and
 Settled belief
 Locked from inside
 Refuse to give a hand
 To cut the knot
 What should one do?"

(Transl K Zvelebil)

The poem's basic note is pessimistic, full of frustration, even cynical (152-161)

"One day
 Unable to bear
 Many-coloured sounds
 Intonations of old tales
 Sweet invitations of darkness
 Age?
 Twenty seven

¹ S Gopale, "New bearings in Tamil poetry", *The Overseas Hindustan Times*, July 26, 1969

Married ?
 Not yet
 Whatever
 I would add
 Would it be
 Any use ?"

(Transl K Zvelebil)

The frustration and the unfulfilled man-woman relationship finds powerful expression in lines 285-300

"Anger raised at deaf eyes
 With the hard pressure
 Of a forefinger
 He dragged
 The weighted cart
 Try harder bullock
 He said
 Stumbling Stuttering
 Falling on the bed
 When she
 Sleep's beauty
 Sulked away
 In the blazing sun
 Wriggling boneless
 This way and that
 Struggling dazed
 As all women of the world
 Turned witches
 Feeding fury
 Awakened to life
 In the bewildered moment
 Spent Arose Alive
 Hell
 Vast Hell"

(Transl S Kokilam)

Dharmu Sivaramu from Ceylon with his surrealist sensitivity and expression has a strong sense of form and an intimate feeling for nature. His poems are not as direct as Mani's, but his imagery is rather striking

Daybreak
 On the skin of the Earth
 Spreading freckles of beauty
 Sun copulated
 Spreading sperm
 Breaking into beams
 Blossoms unfold

Gangrenous worms
 Gorge on wings of darkness
 Birds bustle
 In the wings of light

(Transl K Zvelebil)

Lightning
 The stretching beak
 of the bird of skies
 A look thrown
 on the Earth by the Sun
 Streams of nectar
 pouring into oceans
 Red sceptre
 in god's grip

(Transl K Zvelebil)

Throwing stones
 Why do waves
 called yesterday and tomorrow
 wallow and swell
 in the pond of time?
 Because drops of stones called today
 are flung at it

(Transl K Zvelebil)

Speech
 Listen, beauty speaks
 Tender fleshed lips
 Sparkling of blood
 Slyly inviting
 Looks
 Youth's freshness like a
 Drum
 Beats at your ear-
 drums
 Against the walls
 of flower-petals
 Echoes of humming
 bees die
 Against the curtain of
 Kisses
 Speech dies
 But blood speaks
 Silence reverberates

(Transl S. Kokilam)

T. K. Duraiswami (Turaivāmi) is what Chellappa calls an intellectual poet. Here is one of his prose-poems, entitled 'There is nobody who would not know'.

"There is no one who would not know the house lizard which, clinging to the wall, like a dead crocodile, clad in dull brownish colour, will suddenly jump from its lurking-place without a sound at its prey

There is no one who would not know the spider which has made its web from its spittle and, spreading its eight legs, watches motionless in the middle of the cobweb for the unfortunate butterflies and beetles which get entangled in the trap

There is nobody who would not know that there are flies which swarm and buzz like those prophets of equality, not discriminating between cleanness and filth, like those demons betraying knowledge, with small wings, warm-like bodies, puululent red heads, all covered with eyes

We also know this heap of big black ants, who organize themselves in multitudes, bearing that preposterous dark red colour, and, like some hideous spreading pools, brush aside and choke those who stand in their way, hastening next minute to death"

(Transl. K. Zvelebil)

Probably the most talented and, at the same time, the most conscious craftsman of all the "new poets" is T. S. Venugopalan. However, according to some, S. Vartheeswaran is *the* best of all the lot.

S. Vartheeswaran's experimental trifle (published in *Natar*, 1969,4) is reproduced on the following page. The text says

DESIRE

What a throbbing
 rising and growing
 along the
 long
 lo
 ose
 hair
 reaching
 the rounded back!

What follows is a short random reader of their poetry which hopefully needs no comment.

S. Vartheeswaran

Fireflies

In every nightly street
 sprout trees of lights,
 fruits of flames above
 shedding milk on the ground



ஆசை

முதுகு வளர

நீ

ள்

டு

வீட்ட

கூந்தலுக்கு

மேலும் வளரத்

டி டிப்

கு கு பென்ன'

எஸ். வைத்தீஸ்வரன்

S. Vaideesan

Furiously flapping
 fireflies in futile strain
 rise in the air and fall and fall

In demi-shadows
 jasmin-mouths smell and wed,
 lightnings of teeth
 and women's hair shine,
 and with love's caprice
 many pairs of eyes
 baiter and clash
 and become
 fireflies

(Transl. K. Zvelebil)

The same poet's "Nature" is, in the original, a very powerful poem, I feel that the translation of this poem in particular is very difficult, and that it does not do justice to the Tamil version

The Sun reached the sea
 but
 Time dragged it ashore
 Fragment of a cloud
 floated
 as it wiped the body,
 cold conquered
 with spreading body
 one eye winking and shut
 Fire rained on Earth
 as earth's skin caught
 Fire

"Why a swing
 for him who scorches the body?
 Why a festival?
 Why a golden gown
 for him who tortures life?"
 cursed the Earth

Suffering fell the Sun
 "What can I do for nature?"
 It trembled
 With its hands
 tore its heart
 Knocked its head
 against mountains
 Shrieked out

"If body burns body
 must soul hate soul?
 If water abates fire

am I the sea's enemy?
 See!" It said
 as it dived into the sea
 The sea enwrapped the fire

(Transl S Kokilam)

The next poem, one of the best ever written in modern Tamil poetry, was translated very well by S Gopale

Thorn

"Shoe polish . . . repair",
 shouted the boy
 I flexed my leg
 showed him
 (the heel),
 Scoundrel—He
 Cut open my so(u)le
 took out the thorn,
 took to his heels,
 not taking money
 now,
 my grief keeps raging
 the thorn removed from the heel,
 has moved into my soul
 for good

Vaitheswaran is also capable of very short epigrammatic poetic jokes like the following two pieces.

Flesh-cart

In the flesh-cart
 dragged by man
 the tugging horse
 said "Hi, hi, hi!"

Fear

In fear of darkness
 I closed the door of my eye-lids
 "Nruiff!" said the
 New darkness inside

T S Venugopalan is considered by some the most original and the most gifted of all 'new poets', the one who "has everything in him to become not only a great modern poet but a people's poet as well" When reading his poems, one can feel how very carefully he writes—the detachment and impersonality of some of his poems remind the reader of the great achievements of classical Tamil

poetry of the 'Cankam' age Here is how he sees the Moon, a constant companion of poets in India

They call her Princess
 I haven't seen her
 For many many days!
 Now I met her
 It was
 When she fell
 Pitifully
 Into the well of your house
 And you called out
 To save her
 And stretched out your hand
 Then
 Today in the night
 In the good water well of *my* garden
 Oh me!
 Slipping out of her garments
 She bent her body
 And lured me
 With her winking eyes
 Shshsh ocking!

Back with your outstretched hand!
 Come back!
 No Wait
 Take a stone
 And before Jesus comes
 Throw and strike!
 Let the hands of waves
 Sweep away
 That vile vicious glee
 Off the Moon's face

Cut off and throw away
 The hands outstretched
 To touch her and to lift
 Her up
 The leprosy of lust
 Sticky and gluttonous
 Will corrupt
 Your form!

Shameless harlot
 Look at her
 The Moon

(Transl K Zvelebil)

In another poem, he addresses Śiva, the dancer of doom and destruction.

What sense

You burst
 With struggling curves
 Your belly turns
 Folding in
 Waves
 Why such burning fury?
 What silent weight was
 Born
 In your soul and then
 Grew and crushed?
 Burning sighs
 Leapt across the larynx
 And gurgled Why?
 Through the corners of your mouth
 Drips
 The juice of the betel-leaf
 And burns tender shoots
 And blackens the earth Why?
 Toothless hag's abuse
 A little child's hiccups
 Why did they become your speech?
 A gopuram
 And a few palaces
 Shd scattered and died
 And you
 Though feeling the flow of time
 What reason you give
 For burning poor huts
 Turning them
 Into dust?
 What sense has
 Your
 Demonic dance?

(Transl S Kokilam)

As an instance of his symbolic, "metaphysical" poetry, here is a piece called *Nāṇam* ("Enlightenment, Knowledge, Wisdom")

The doors of the porch, frame,
 Wind breaks.

The dust of the streets
 Adheres
 To these
 White ants
 Build
 Sand houses
 That day
 I cleaned,
 Painted,
 A new lock
 I fixed
 Ass of time
 Turned ant
 Even today
 In my hand
 A bucket of water,
 Pail of paint,
 Rags, broomstick,

Work of *dharma*
 Service of charity
 Never ends
 If it ends
 There is no world!

(Transl S Kokilam)

Literary experience

Two ways
 To be told
 With thought
 Without thinking!
 A swirl or
 A blind-fold
 For both
 The meaning
 Is expressed by the poet!
 Pictured by the artist!
 The one who gazed
 You and I only
 (For shame)
 Are the readers' crowd!

(Transl S Kokilam)

Finally, a poem on sterility, in a very able translation into English
 by S Gopale

I heard a cry
 from the next door.

Sweets followed suit
 The bride
 in her maiden
 nuptial night
 grabbed her
 lower abdomen.
 Can you conquer time
 tearing the calender?
 Why wish for ergot
 without the wart
 and pain attending upon it?
 No use moping and mooning,
 If you don't care to see
 the genuine from the fake
 Not all that sprouts
 is great

And an epigrammatic poem by T S Venugopalan, entitled

Old greatness

Curried mango-seed
 Spoke of noble ancestry,
 I planted and waited,
 The vast tree
 and its fruits
 turned out a shadow!
 Wriggled out
 only
 a worm!

(Transl S Kokilam)

While Vaitheeswaran is more emotional, more lyrical, more personal, more traditional, T S Venugopalan is more intellectual, more reflexive, impersonal, cooler, while Vaitheeswaran is more colourful, economical and yet rich in words, and more individual and self-centred, Venugopalan is more disciplined, sharper, less individual and more open towards society and contemporary problems. However, it is very difficult really to say—and probably it is quite unnecessary and even naive to try to—who is the better of the two. What is important is the fact that, unlike fifteen or even ten years ago, contemporary Tamil writing has at least two poets who are first-rate and full of growth and promise.

Doing away with traditional poetic forms, and trying their hand at *vers libre*, "prose-poetry" (*vacanāk kavītai*) and other formal experiments was and still is part of the credo of the 'new poets', cf *Eḷuttu 61* where a "new poet" says

"A poem tied by prosody
is like the Kāviri tied by dams"

However, it seems¹ that even the most "rebellious" formal experiments of the "new poets" may somehow and to some extent be reconciled with the literary *marapu* or tradition. Thus, e.g., the so-called *centotai*, i.e. verses without *etukai* "rhyme (initial)" and *mōṇai* "alliteration", may be considered a kind of *vers libre*, or, rather, the free-verse experiments are nothing but a kind of traditional *centotai*. On the other hand, the basic properties of classical and traditional poetry and prosody are used frequently even by the most "rebellious" "new poets" simply because the features are inherently connected with the very structure and nature of Tamil phonology and syllabification, just like the notion of *acai* "fundamental metric unit" is inherently connected with the very rhythm of Tamil speech. Thus, e.g., if we consider a poem like D. Sivaramu's *Minnal* (Lightning) we see a rather firm rhythmic structure in terms of the basic, "traditional" prosodic units, *acai* and *cīr* "feet" (the poem being limited to the use of the so-called *iyarcīr* "natural foot" of two *acai* each). We also unmistakably hear the initial alliteration (*mōṇai*) of (*ka-*), placed most regularly at the beginning of each first feet of the four distichs

<i>kakanap̄ paravaṭ</i>	= — = —
<i>nīttum alaku</i>	— — = —
<i>katvōṇ nilattil</i>	= — = —
<i>eriyum p̄arvai</i>	= — — —
<i>katalul vaṭiyum</i>	= — = —
<i>amrtat t̄arai</i>	= — — —
<i>katavul ūṇṇum</i>	— — — —
<i>cenkōl</i>	— —

Even very daring instances like

<i>ki</i>	in
<i>yū</i>	the
<i>vi</i>	que
<i>lē</i>	ue
<i>orē kūt̄tam</i>	one crowd
(<i>Eluttu</i> 91)	

¹ Cf. a very interesting essay on classical and modern prosody by Selvam (Celvam) in *Natar*, 3, April 1969.

may be reconciled with tradition according to Mr Selvam, the author of the cited essay on prosody (see fn 1, 331), such formal device was well-known as a kind of *cittirakkavi* "picture-poem" (cf *Tantriyalankāram* 68)

We are prepared to agree with this opinion to the extent that the "new poetry" is, indeed, reconcilable with Tamil tradition¹ as far as the basic, "low-level" structural elements—the *acai* and the *cir* (foot), partly also the line (*ati*)—are concerned. The traditional stanzaic structures of higher levels (*pā*, *mam*) are, however, not adhered to by the "new poets". Indeed, there is one very fundamental 'high-level' feature which means a definitive break with tradition as far as the "new poetry" is concerned. Since the early bardic poetry of the classical age up to the poems by Bharati, Tamil poetry has been *sung* or at least scanned in a sing-song manner. In some epochs and with some kinds of poetic composition, music and literature, singing and poetry became so intimately connected that the one does have hardly any existing without the other (as is the case, e.g., with the *patukams* of the classical *bhakti* poets, or with Arunakiri's songs). The "new poetry", however, is meant to be *read* and/or recited, but not sung.

Another novelty of this modern and avantgarde poetry lies in the new, surprisingly effective and forcible *use* of the traditional material, in the new, and hence different, and most powerful, utilization and application of the basic prosodic and formal properties of Tamil poetry, not in denying and destroying them. Finally, the "new poets" strive seriously after an organic and intimate relation between form and meaning, after the unity of meaning (*porul*) and form (*uru*, *uruvu*, *uruvam*). The "new poets" are in their absolute majority no empty formalists². *L'art pour l'artism* is not their credo, though some of the very contemporary poets, like V. Mahi, go rather far in their formal experiments.

To close this chapter, I shall quote a few poems by four very recent young poets, Hari Sreenivasan, Turai Seemisami, V. Mahi and Shanmugam Subbiah. The choice is quite casual. The transla-

¹ We should not forget, though, that the striving after reconciliation with tradition (*marapu*) is a very typical pan-Indian tendency, and has been so for ages.

² Tamil literature has known empty, unproductive and repetitive formalism for centuries. But perhaps none of the "new poets" is one of the sterile formalists.

tions are mine Let us say that these four stand for a number of other equally or probably even more important names, most of which indicate that modern Tamil literature has been finally lashed out of its lethargy, apathy and sterility

Hari Sreenivasan

Weep

Weep Weep Weep
 Only if you weep you'll get milk
 But
 Don't forget
 There's salt in tears
 Beware
 The milk
 Will curdle

Turai Seenisami

Unquenchable hunger

Like bodiless souls
 Moving about
 The overwhelming peace
 Of pitch darkness
 Makes me dazed
 There is no moon
 Upon the blue cake
 Dots of stars are
 Sugar-coated drops
 I became hungry
 Opening the mouth of sight
 I gorged the whole night
 But I am still hungry

V Mah

Question Answer?

For many days one could watch
 hips and shins dancing
 Everyone admired it with respect
 One day one could see
 thighs and nipples dance
 Everyone rose in boiling wrath
 She asked
 How is it
 that this
 is

CONCLUSION

Many unorthodox views were expressed on the preceding pages, and I am almost certain that they will meet with disapproval in some quarters. However, I strongly believe in the interpenetration of literary history and literary criticism. As Wellek and Warren rightly say, "There are simply no data in literary history which are completely neutral 'facts'. Value judgements are implied in the very choice of materials in the simple preliminary distinction between books and literature, in the mere allocation of space to this or that author"¹. Let me in conclusion sum up some of the views expressed in this book, in order to facilitate the orientation of those who wish to contest them.

I have expressed the opinion that the *Tolkāppiyam*, as we have it today, is not an integral and untampered with text, a work of one single author, but rather the work of an entire scholastic group, with a number of additions and interpolations, the final redaction of which is comparatively late (middle of the 1st Millennium A.D.), and that, possibly, the whole third book (*Porulatikāram*) is later than the first two portions.

I disagree with the conception that early classical (*Cankam*) poetry was "democratic in spirit". I believe that this poetry—the best which has ever been composed in the Tamil language—is basically aristocratic and early feudal in outlook and bardic and clannish in origin. Judging it purely aesthetically I believe that it is fully commensurable in quality with the very peaks of world lyrical poetry, specifically of the "objective" and "professional" type.

I do not consider any of the didactic texts to be truly great literature—not even the *Tirukkural*. I believe that the "didactic heresy" was detrimental to both old Tamil poetry and the Tamil fiction of the 19th-20th Centuries.

Contrary to the opinion of traditional Tamil panditdom, I think that Ilankōvatikal's "Lay of the Anklet" and not the Rāmāyana of the *kavīcakravartī* Kampan is the greatest single poem in Tamil literature.

I cannot fully agree with the analysis of *bhakti* poetry as the

¹ René Wellek—Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed., 1963, p. 40

literary expression of social protest. I also consider some of the *cittar* poets, particularly Tirumūlar and Pattinattār, as great creative poets.

I do not regard S. Bharathi as a great "world-poet" on a *par* with some other Indian authors such as Vālmīki, Kālidāsa, Ilankō, Kampan, or even Tagore and Vallathol.

I think that modern Tamil prose is still rather stagnate and sterile, though there are a few exceptional authors and a great promise of future inventive and creative developments. For the benefit of those who want to read good modern *prosateurs* in Tamil I shall risk to give a list of names who I believe are truly representative of good, solid, serious, even exceptional modern Tamil writing. Maam (the "Tirumūlar of short story writing" as Putumaippittan called him), N. Pichamurti, K. Alagiriswamy, R. Shanmugasundaram, T. Janakiraman, S. Ramaswamy, L. S. Ramamirtham, N. Padmanabhan.

I consider the *putukkavilar* movement the greatest achievement of modern Tamil poetry so far. The names which I would like to specifically mention in this connection are those of N. Pichamurti, C. Mani, S. Ramaswamy, D. Sivaramu, Vallikkannan, Hanu Sreenivasan, Shanmugam Subbiah, and, as truly outstanding, S. Vaitheeswaran and T. S. Venugopalan.

I think that the critical approaches developed in *Eḷuttu* and *Ilakkuya vattam* by C. S. Chellappa and K. N. Subrahmanyam are basically sound and correct, though they tend to be, sometimes, too iconoclastic, too sophisticated, and too exclusive and clannish.

Finally, I think that the specific glory of Tamil literature, past and present, is in the "short form"—in lyrical poetry, short story, essay, while the novel, the drama, and great epos do not belong—owing to a complicated network of causes—to the great achievements of Tamil.

Above all I believe that the outstanding works of Tamil literature of the past, and the very interesting writings of the present times, should be translated, published and spread wide, they intrinsically belong to the literary heritage of the world and man's culture will be enriched by their general knowledge.

EPILOGUE

palarpuḷai naṁmolai pulavarēē
yarumṭeran maraṭṭi perumṭeyar muruka

ninnati yulli vantaneṅ

(*Tirumurukārruppatai* 268 279)

“O lion
 among poets with mellifluous speech
 praised by many,
 O Muruka, great glory,
 goal of salvation so hard to reach
 I came to you
 seeking your feet!”

SELECT AND CRITICALLY ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON TAMIL LITERATURE IN ENGLISH, GERMAN AND FRENCH

a General Works

1 Jesudasai, C and H, *A History of Tamil Literature*, The Heritage of India Series, Y M C A Publishing House, Calcutta, 1st ed 1961, pp 305 Index A fair, mildly critical and rather objective general introduction, usually quite reliable, good for quick orientation and reference, no doubt the best which is available for a non-specialist

2 Meenakshisundaran, T P, *A History of Tamil Literature*, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, 1965 Pp 211 Index Based on a series of lectures at the University of Chicago Not as thorough and reliable as No 1 Very uneven in quality Contains some brilliant observations and interesting formulations, but also a few superficial portions Rather essayistic in parts Should be read with caution

3 Meenakshisundaran, T P, *The Pageant of Tamil Literature*, Sekari Pathuppagam, Madras, 1966 Pp 126 A collection of 21 essays on Tamil literature, of very uneven quality

4 Vairapuram Pillai, S, *History of Tamil Language and Literature*, New Century Book House, Madras, 1956 Pp 206 Index The most scholarly and the most critical, as well as very richly documented history of Tamil literature up to the epic age Based on strict historical methodology, biased rather in the "overcritical" direction Contains many misprints and inaccuracies In parts, dated Should be studied by all who want to penetrate deeper into the problems of Tamil literary history

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6 Sastri, K A Nilakanta, *A History of South India*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 3rd ed 1966, pp 365-393 A short but detailed account of Tamil literature from its beginnings to cca 1650 A D Good for first quick reference Dating reliable Slight pro-Sanskritic bias

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8 Glasenapp, Helmuth von, *Literaturen Indriens*, 1st ed 1929, 2nd ed 1961 Contains chapters on Tamil literature written by H W Schomerus (1879-1945) Dated, but interesting, the author had intimate knowledge of Tamil religious hymns and *purānas* Gives contents of a number of literary works

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real wealth of traditional material, legends, anecdotes, citations. A revised version appeared under the title *Tamil Literature* in 1928. Highly interesting, but must be read with critical knowledge and extreme caution.

11. Casie Chetty, Simon, *The Tamil Plutarch*, Containing a Summary Account of the Lives of the Poets and Poetesses of Southern India and Ceylon with Select Specimens of their Compositions, Ripley and Strong, Colina, 1859. 2nd ed., with notes by T. P. Meenakshisundaran, Colombo, 1946. Makes a charming reading. The dates and factual information should not be trusted, unless supplemented by T. P. M.'s notes in the 2nd ed. Contains a wealth of traditions, anecdotes and textual quotations with translations.

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13. Sivivasa Aiyangar, M., *Tamil Studies*, Guardian Press, Madras, 1914. Dated but interesting.

14. Chengalvayaya Pillai, V. S., *History of Tamil Prose Literature*, Tirunelveli S. I. S. S. Works Publishing Society, 1966 (1st ed., 1904). Deals mostly with the beginnings and early developments of Tamil prose (commentaries, etc.). Very brief, fragmentary and dated.

15. Zvelebil, Kamal, *Introducing Tamil Literature*, Madras, IATR, 1968. Pp. 28. Very brief outline, useful only for the very first and basic orientation. On pp. 22-28 contains a few controversial remarks on modern and contemporary writing.

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c. Anthologies of Translations from Tamil Poetry with Annotations

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INDEX

"A good index can hardly be too prolix" I want this Index to be more than simply an inventory of items found in the book. Therefore, whenever necessary and possible, the entries are glossed. The order of items is strictly according to the order of the English alphabet. The unfortunately rather frequent variation in the transcription of some names and titles is painful since it reflects the actual state of affairs, and the reader should make himself acquainted with the bewildering variety of transcriptions (and transliterations). The principles outlined in the Note on Transliteration could not have been adhered to strictly at this moment.

The Index comprises five parts: I Authors, II Persons other than authors, III Titles of books (modern expository books are not included), IV Geographical names, V Other items.

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