

JUSTICE, FOREKNOWLEDGE, AND FATE
IN THE CILAPPATIKĀRAM

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IN THE
CILAPPATIKĀRAM

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ABSTRACT

Cilappatikāram is a classical Tamil work in verse interspersed with prose, of uncertain date, composed between the 3rd and 6th centuries C.E. It is ascribed to Iḷaṅkō, a prince of the Cēra dynasty who became an ascetic, abandoning the prerogatives of wealth and power.

The thesis examines ideas of fate, justice and apotheosis. On the surface, fate appears to be pervasive. Guilt is identified as an instrument for the working out of fate and a certain kind of knowledge is sought to be the solution to worldly woes. The notion of *aṇṅku*, affliction, is seen to have, as it were, a life of its own as the dynamic net of relations which binds characters and their actions together, providing channels for the action of fate.

Asking whether Iḷaṅko provides a viable religious solution to the breach between the experience of raw suffering and ideas of salvation, in the apotheosis of his protagonist, Kaṇṇaki, he is found to fail in precisely the way he is most generally appreciated as having succeeded. However, Iḷaṅkō hints at a transcendental vision which provides a better prospectus for success in the battle with sorrow.

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TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration used here is the standard established by the Tamil Lexicon. In quotations which use some other system, the original is maintained intact.

Vowels:		Consonants:	
அ	- a -->	ஆ	- ā
இ	- i -->	ஈ	- ī
உ	- u -->	ஊ	- ū
எ	- e -->	ஏ	- ē
ஐ	- ai		
ஓ	- o -->	ஔ	- ō
ஔ	- au		
ஃ	- <u>k</u>		
		க	- k -->
		ச	- c -->
		ட	- ṭ -->
		த	- t -->
		ப	- p -->
		ய	- y
		ர	- r
		ல	- l
		வ	- v
		ங	- ṅ
		ஞ	- ṅ
		ள	- ṅ
		ழ	- ḷ
		ள்	- ḷ
		ற்	- ṛ
		ன்	- ṅ

FORMAT OF CITATIONS/NOTES

A format familiar in the social sciences has been used for citations and notes.

Citations, referring directly to the bibliography are located in the text in the form: (Author's surname, Date of publication: Page number) Eg. (MacPhail, 1988: 149) (V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, 1978: 116) is cited as (RD 116) due to frequency of citation.

References to the Tamil text of *Cilappatikāram* are in the form : (Kātai: Line number)

Substantive notes are found after the Appendix and are indicated by serial superscript in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most common, perhaps even universal, concerns of human societies is justice in one form or another. Collective life requires some sense of fixed ground rules, even though these rules will certainly vary from one society to another and the terminology for referring to them will often be quite different from the abstract concept of "justice" in English. Whatever the terms in which the issue may be framed, the need for order and regularity will somehow be expressed.

The semantic field of the English word "justice", the quality of being "just", ' ranges from mere compliance with convention, to judgement of aesthetic suitability, to merited consequences of action, to reasoned, well-founded validity, to impartiality, to correspondence with some ideal truth, to a comprehensive equity. That a category such as justice needs to be socially defined and sanctioned presents a problem. Injustice is defined, quite naturally, in accord with a community's developing notions of justice and is identified with the symbols and prerogatives associated with its office-bearers. The primary source of the concept of

injustice, however, is the experience of suffering. Whatever explanation may be given for justice, whatever legitimation for injustice, our primary intuitions about questions of justice lead us back to the more basic problem of suffering, especially as it occurs within a social environment. Though suffering is essentially subjective and hence individual, its generation through transactions between humans makes it a problem with which the social order must contend. How a society deals with the problem of suffering reflects its values, and its processes of redress, and provides a measure by which the social order may be judged.

Integrative ideational coherence is an implicit and often an explicit goal of communal life. Ignorance or ineptitude are valid grounds for exemption from sanctions in some ethical and judicial systems, but in others, they are not. The means to get knowledge and the power to act upon that knowledge are critical variables in determining the justice of one's actions. Whenever a breach occurs between the knowledge and power of the common institutions of abstract justice, and the knowledge and power of an individual, either as culpable villain or as injured victim, each is tested. If culpability is successfully proven and injury is redressed, the institutions of justice are reinforced and their symbols embellished. If villains go free or victims continue to suffer, these institutions are weakened and their symbols tarnished. How well a system reconciles the

perspectives of villain, victim, and community is the measure of its equity, its suitability, its pragmatic truth, and its right to be considered as a set of lawful institutions.

Proper action requires an accurate perspective with sound horizons. Guilt is rooted in the subjective condition of defective knowledge which leads to improper action. Guilt may be peripheral and nagging or it may be utterly disruptive, ending in self-destruction. It is always reflective of the state of one's knowledge, and is always self-hindering. Guilt may result from knowing yet failing to act upon knowledge, or from failing to have the knowledge required to act in the first place. Guilt is self-defined villainy. If guilt is somehow resolved, it is through a new perspective which serves as a justification for the guilt-generating action or condition.

It may so happen, for instance, that circumstance is constraining to such extent that one could have done no other. How, then, is it possible to assign guilt or blame? What is the source of these constraints which hinder just action? Forces referred to variously as "undercurrents", "fate", or "destiny" are often postulated to explain why things are now as they are. These forces may be cosmic in scale, as in the case of long ages of differing character, or they may operate with immediacy in response to human actions. In the Indic religions of Jainism, Buddhism and

Brahmanism, the origins of "fate" have been the object of much theorizing, systematization and ethical prescription. Such explanations cannot be sustained by logic and invariably result in an infinite regress. They are, however, found to be useful as they provide the ground, through long communal experience, of presuppositions for common principles of justice and pervade the world-view of society.

In this study, I shall examine the idea of justice, its breach, and rectification, in *Cilappatikaram*, a literary classic of the Tamil culture, which places credence in a concept of fate conditioning action while, at once, deriving from action. I shall

- 1) place this work in the context of its literature and history,
- 2) examine its presentation of suffering as the presupposition of injustice,
- 3) examine the symbols of protection and justice, and show how injustice is represented and acknowledged by their failure,
- 4) assess the idea of fate as underminer of the symbols of protection and justice,
- 5) examine attitudes toward dreams, oracles, and omens as sources of information which may or may not condition actions and as means for clarification of events, and, finally,
- 6) examine the apologetic process through which guilt

is relieved.

My objective in this thesis is to determine the relationship between immediate experiences of individual characters and the ideation about justice of the author. A crisis point comes when the imperative toward justice, taken into the victim's own hands, ends in a destructiveness which, in turn, produces a condition of guilt at both individual and collective levels urgently demanding relief. Throughout I will be monitoring the characters' perception of their situations as they vary, and at the same time trying to appraise the extent of the author's success as he presents the material. In short, I will be asking, does he provide an adequate answer to the mystery of raw pain? ²

Cilappatikāram is an early Tamil work whose author is known as "Iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ", a descriptive pseudonym. It is a narrative work set in the ancient *Cōla*, *Pāṇṭiya*, and *Cēra* kingdoms. Most scholars are satisfied with the placement of its events in the late 2nd century C.E. Debate continues on the date of the original text, ranging from contemporaneous with the events to as late as the 9th century. Issues surrounding the text are discussed in the first chapter. Issues of justice, guilt, prognosis and fate raised by the text occupy the subsequent chapters.

Method:

It is with a view to clarifying Ilaṅkō's contribution to Tamilian understanding of the experience of suffering in the presence of institutions of justice, and its relation to karma and fate, that the present study has been undertaken. In this study we will explore the patterns of human relationship which generate, consummate, and justify suffering as presented in a piece of ancient narrative literature which has provided unparalleled insight into the culture - arts, sciences, society and history - of the Tamil people in the morning of their historical consciousness. While history lives, forming part of the continuous present in the common mind, the historian must be radically separate from the past and from its evidence. Only rarely will such a self-conscious separation be found in historical sources. Documentary research of "facts" provides a body for history. What people believe to be true of themselves and of their past constitutes its soul. It is their self-understanding which moves people to perform the actions which become their history. (Srinivasan 1985:12) *

The method I have selected to analyse the materials in *Cilappatikāram* which relate to justice, suffering, fate, and the means to knowing them, is a method called "situational analysis" devised by Berkhofer (1969: 32-44) His

approach, like the text under study, is transaction-intensive. It addresses the following questions to the student:

- 1) What are the major actions?
- 2) Who are the major actors?
- 3) What does each actor contribute to the action?
- 4) What alternatives does each actor consider?
- 5) What result does each actor expect the action to have?
- 6) What are the relationships between the actors at the moment of decision?
- 7) What influences are brought to bear on each actor?
- 8) What experiences, information, energy, skill, etc. does each actor bring to each decision?

For application to this text, I have added the following:

- 1) What conditions does an actor generate for other actors?
- 2) Does an actor have a correct view of the role he or she has played?
- 3) Does an actor assign blame for the actions of others?
- 4) What responsibility is claimed for action or for the welfare of others?
- 5) What accommodations are made to the wishes of others?
- 6) Is there consistency between previous and subse-

quent actions?

- 7) Is an actor satisfied with the decision-making process?
- 8) What accommodation is made to the wishes of others?

The answers to these questions when applied to interpersonal transactions will do more than aid in comprehending the plot-development of a work of fiction. The characters of *Cilappatikāram* were always more than fictional and they have, with time, become paradigmatic role models in Tamil culture. Contemporary politicians identify themselves and their constituencies with its victims and emulate its heroes. Homely metaphors in the mouths of common people endow their neighbours and themselves with the vices and virtues of Iḷaṅkō's characters. And completely apart from such mundane considerations is the not inconsiderable fact that the story is about a woman who became a goddess, recognized and worshipped by kings and peoples of many lands. She does not start out as one, descended from above with divine purpose. She is no spook, demon, or mystic protectress like those which proliferate in the villages of India. She is a model girl, a model wife, and if we may hazard it, a model widow. It is clear from Iḷaṅkō's presentation that she becomes all these through the transactions he recounts. An account of the transactions is also an account of an apotheosis conditioned by and predicated upon suffering. This

image of suffering divinity is full of power.

Approach:

Cilappatikāram is, among many other things, a work of ethics and its didactic spirit is evident. There is internal evidence to suggest that it may have been the work of a Jaina monk, though it is not my intent in this thesis to make a definitive statement to that effect. A polished product of a humane and cosmopolitan sensibility, it is characterised by a variety of humane liberalism which may offer insights of value for our time. Iḷaṅkō's summary injunctions are clear enough in themselves and reminiscent of the great *Kural* of Tiruvalluvar.

V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar's English translation has been my primary source for citations which are indicated thus, eg. (RD 287). While entirely in prose, this translation follows the original closely and is quite moving in places, presumably where Iḷaṅkō's light shines through. I may not presume to assess the formal literary quality of *Cilappatikāram*. My concern is with religion and history. * I have considered some important literary issues in passing which relate to the stylistic integrity of the work and to the possibility of interpolation, but to do a literary analysis is not my intent.

Zvelebil sums up concisely what he sees *Cilappatikāram* to be, in its religious, literary and political

dimensions:

- 1) a saga of the cult of Goddess Pattini,
- 2) the first literary expression and the first ripe fruit of the Aryan-Dravidian synthesis in Tamilnad,
- 3) the first consciously rational work of Tamil literature, the literary evidence of the fact that the Tamils had by that time attained nationhood. (1973: 172)

It is from Zvelebil's estimate of the work that I began. I chose to study *Cilappatikāram* for a variety of reasons - initially, because I was struck by the secular attitude of the *Caṅkam* works which preceded it in time, and because of the dramatic shift in Tamil literature to devotional sectarianism concurrent with increasing Sanskritization from the 7th century. *Cilappatikāram* stands between these two literatures.

The Text:

As we have it, *Cilappatikāram* is comprised of an introduction, called the "Patikam", which has two short appendices, "Uraiperukatturai" and "Nūrcirappuppāyiram", of four and two verses. There follow thirty chapters or *kātai*-s organized into three cantos or *kantam*-s, "Pukārk Kāṇṭam", "Maturaik Kāṇṭam", and "Vañcīk Kāṇṭam", each named for a city in which major events take place. These three cities were the three capitals of the *Cōla*, *Pāṇṭiya*, and *Cēra* kings, who ruled the east, south, and west in the Tamil country of the period. *Pukārkkāṇṭam* contains the first ten *kātai*-s, *Maturaikkāṇṭam* thirteen, and *Vañcikkāṇṭam* the last seven. The *kātai*-s range in length from 53 to 275 lines of verse, with the median at about 200. The work concludes with "Nūrkatturai", a summary statement of 18 lines. The author of *Cilappatikāram* has packed a remarkable amount of diverse geographical, sociological and aesthetic information into a narrative of but 160, or so, pages of text.

Iḷaṅkō's work has come to be understood as a seminal one in Tamil literature both in style and content. In place of *puram*'s brief panegyric and *akam*'s anonymous vignette, he introduces a continuous narrative form of verse interspersed with prose while continuing to employ the metrical forms of earlier literature. In his use of subject matter,

he acknowledges the *Caṅkam* literary standards while appearing, at once, to subvert them. In common with the *Caṅkam* literature and in contrast to later works, the manner of *Cilappatikāram* is quite matter-of-fact and remarkably lacking in hyperbole.

Caṅkam Conventions:

Let us briefly take note of some Caṅkam conventions. There were two approved categories for poetry. Puram addresses heroism and public life and tends to identify its subjects. Puram literature is replete with names of patrons and events in their lives which the poets praise. Genealogies have been constructed from them, particularly from Patirruppattu which gives an account of two lines of Cēra kings, including the monarch of Vaṅcikkāṅṭam. (RD 12; C.Balasubramaniam 1980) Akam addresses the intimate life of feelings and is anonymous. A complex system of equivalences developed in which five inner emotional conditions came to be represented by five ecological regions, their weather, flora and fauna. These correspondences were highly idealized and reflected only the relations between a pair of lovers whose relationship was mutual and were thus "well-matched". These five were

- 1) kuriṅci, the hill-country, representing the first meeting of lovers and the surreptitious consummation of their love,
- 2) mullai, the forest, representing domesticity and patient waiting for the lover,
- 3) mārutam, the region of intensive agriculture, representing sulking at lover's unfaithfulness,

- 4) *nēy[̄]tal*, the seashore, representing separation anxiety, and
- 5) *pā[̄]lai*, marginal lands, representing elopement, hardship, and separation from lover or from parents. (Ramanujan 1967)

These were known as *aintinai*. Apart from these taken collectively, there were two other categories, *peruntinai*, the "great *tinai*", which represented the way of all those not blessed with the kind of mutual and balanced relationship described in *akam*, and *kaikkilai* which was worse, representing outright abuse in intimate relations. There were two dimensions to the *akam* of the Cankam poems, *kalavu*, premarital love expressed through the *aintinai*, and *karpu*, marital love, also mediated by *aintinai*. *Karpu*, equated with marital chastity, was an acquired virtue which, as a form of penance, conferred certain powers and was considered to be an especially feminine virtue.

Running parallel to these *tinai*-s of *kuriñci*, *mullai*, *mārutam*, *nēy[̄]tal*, *pā[̄]lai*, *peruntinai*, and *kaikkilai* were the *puram tinai*-s *vetci*, *vanci*, *ulinal*, *tumpai*, *vakal*, *kanci*, and *pātān*. These represented stages in the archaic cattle-raid in which skirmishes were prepared and executed to obtain livestock from other communities and to recover livestock taken by others. The phases these *tinai*-s represented were

- 1) *vetci*: initial raid, preparation for war and the

- worship of *natukal* or hero-stones of the community;
- 2) *vañci*: the clatter of warriors proceeding to the enemy's country and their progress;
 - 3) *uḷiñai*: attack on the enemy's stockade and its defense;
 - 4) *tumpai*: the heat of battle;
 - 5) *vākai*: encampment of the victors;
 - 6) *kāñci*: details of the aftermath of battle with contrasts between the elation of those who escaped injury and pathos of the suffering, culminating in a sense of the ephemeral nature of life and its contests; and
 - 7) *pāṭān*: post-victory celebration and bardic panegyric to the victors' leader.

In these *purattinai*-s are many subcategories or *turai*-s such as *vallaippāṭṭu*, laments for the ruin of a country, *taliñci*, nursing the wounded, both categories of *vañcittinai*, and *nocci*, heroic resistance to the invaders and eventual defeat, a *turai* of *ulinai*, which provide further thematic structure. (Periakaruppan 1981: 24-31)

The canon for Caṅkam literature is *Tolkāppiyam*, the earliest extant Tamil grammar, parts of which may be dated to as early as 200 B.C.E. The first two parts deal with orthography, semantics, and syntax. The third portion, which treats aesthetics, and therefore the standards and organiza-

tion of early Tamil poetry may postdate *Cilappatikāram* by a few centuries. It is claimed by some to be an active standard for the composition of Caṅkam works, rather than an after-the-fact appreciation of their traits.

Ilaṅkō tends to follow the convention of *Tolkāppiyam* for the process of *naṭukal* worship. (Vijayalakshmy, 1981: 98-99) In *Vaṅcikkāṇṭam* the decision of the Cēra king, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, to march an army to the Himalayas and its aftermath follows, stage by stage, the appropriate *tinai*-s. Once the search for an appropriate stone is successful, the timing, washing, setting up, celebration and praise all follow the pattern for *naṭukal* worship set out in *Tolkāppiyam*. (Kailasapathy 1968: 235)

It would be erroneous to claim that Ilaṅkō intends to present a work of *akam*. Ilaṅkō breaks with Caṅkam traditions in many ways. He identifies the couple. Their marriage is arranged by their parents. There is no development of the themes of separation, uncertainty and longing between Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalan found in the *akam* poems. Theirs is a *peruntinai* relationship. A closer approximation to the *akam* theme exists, however, in the relationship between Mātavi and Kovalan. *Kanalvari*, the 7th *katai*, follows closely the conventions for *akam* style. But when longing strikes Mātavi, there is no possibility of her lover's return, which is the very premise of *akam*. Thus, Ilaṅkō uses *akam* elements but separates them from the ethical and didactic thrust of his

work.

A "secular" trend may also be observed in the Invocation to the Moon, Sun, Rain (Clouds) and to the city of Pukār of the first *kātai*. Reference to the common Brahmanical, Jaina, and Buddhist deities is avoided while each verse also praises the *Cōla* king. Not even the Tamil gods *Māyōn*, *Cēyōn*, *Korravai* are mentioned here. This is remarkable, even revolutionary. Another characteristic of this work is revolutionary. Never before is a woman regarded as the hero. While the greater part of the *akam* literature is in the mouth of woman, it is her foil, in the form of man, which is the focus of concern. In *Cilappatikāram*, it is *Kannaki* who stands firmly at the center.

Publication History and Commentaries:

U.V. Cāminātaiyar tells, in his introduction to the first modern edition (1892) of *Cilappatikāram* ⁵ of his search for manuscripts after receiving the first copy from a friend ⁶ in Tañjāvūr District. This manuscript was in deplorable condition. It contained an urai or commentary called *Arumpatam* or *Arumpatavurai* ⁷ which provided glosses of the difficult words in the text. In referring to all the *kātai*-s, the urai was complete.

Cāminātaiyar tells how he was reluctant to publish the text before being able to compare it with other manuscripts, and he searched the holdings of Sarasvati Mahal Manuscript Library, Tañjāvūr, the Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras, the monasteries (*maṭam*-s) of Tiruvāvaturai, Tarumapuram, Tiruvannāmalai, and Ceñkōlmaṭam, and the collections of scholarly families in Tirunelvēli District. From these sources, he managed to procure 22 more manuscripts.

In 14 of these was found a second commentary, *Aṭiyārk kunallar urai*, ⁸ whose author referred to *Arumpatavurai-āciriya*r as his predecessor. This second urai was more structured than the first and provided commentary at three levels. The first was a gloss on questionable terms, following *Arumpatam*. The second was an elaboration of the

sense in which terms were used. The third level was a stylistic literary critique proper. He was thus comprehensive in terms of the five categories of the classical grammar, *Tolkāppiyam* - *eḷuttu* (orthography), *col* (word), *porul* (meaning), *yāppu* (prosody), and *aṇi* (rhetoric). This *urai*, though broader and deeper than its predecessor, was incomplete. It is extant for 18 of the 30 *kātai*-s, from first to 19th, except for the longest, the seventh. This would seem to indicate that it had never been completed. As the commentator makes reference in other *kātai*-s to his commentary on the seventh, *Kāṇalvari*, it has been held

that at least this chapter had been available at one time. However this is no proof, as will be clear to any writer who elects to write in a sequence other than that which the final object is to take. A better proof of an actual *urai* to *Kāṇalvari* would be mention of it by some other writer, but no such evidence is available.

Arumpatavuraiācīriyar cites lines only by first word, longer passages by first and last word, and quotes from previous works without citing them. That these citations are not repeated by Aṭiyārkkunallar suggests that previous commentaries had been available which were no longer in existence when Aṭiyārkkunallar wrote.

The dates, religion, and *kuṭi* of these commentators are unknown. We know that both preceded Naccīnārkkīniyar who refutes some ideas of Aṭiyārkkunallar. Arumpatavurai-

Ācīriyar is thought to have worked in the 9th century and Aṭiyārkkunallar in the 13th or 14th. (Bhagavati 1981: 410) The latter was also known as "Nirampaiyar Kāvālar" signifying that he was from Nirampai in the Koṅku country, that is, from around modern Coimbatore.

With this much information collected, Cāminātaiyar felt himself to be on more secure ground and published the first edition of *Cilappatikāram*, including both commentaries, in 1892. For the second edition of 1920, he examined three further manuscripts. The third edition followed in 1927 and the fourth in 1944. According to Kailasapathy ¹⁰ *Pukārkkāṇṭam*, alone, had been published ten or 12 years prior to Cāminātaiyar's first edition. This *kāṇṭam* is of special interest to the musical families of the Kāvēri delta region for its detailed treatment of music and dance. Many musical families have manuscript copies of this *kāṇṭam* alone, lacking the second and third.

Several modern commentaries have been written based on Cāminātaiyar's text, (Bhagavati 1981: 410) some involving prochronism, or reading of contemporary social issues back into the original text, and popularization, or simplification of character and plot, resulting in a modern "overlay" to the original. Shanmugam Cheṭṭiyar's *Urai* (1946) is a colloquial rendition of *Pukārkkāṇṭam*. *Puliyūrkkēcikaṇurai* (1958) is also colloquial. *Veṅkaṭasāmi Nāttar Urai* (1966) is literary, but designed for easy interpretation. *Cōmacuntara*

Nāvalar Urai (1968) is also literary. Many folk versions and other attempts at literary rendition of the story have followed.

Translations:

In 1900 Julien Vinson translated the *Patikam* and *kātai-s* 16 to 18 of *Cilappatikāram* for his *Légendes Bouddhistes et D'Jaīnas*, which introduced the work to western readers. In 1939 V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar published the first English translation. This is a full text with notes on the complete but anonymous medieval commentary, *Arumpata-vurai*. It also includes notes on the incomplete 14-15th (?) century commentary of *Aṭiyārkunallar*. Alain Daniélou's French translation, *Le roman de l'anneau*, published in 1961, and his English version, *The Shilappadikaram (The Ankle Bracelet)* of 1965, are also complete prose renditions, but their lack of notes limits their utility. In 1977, Ka. Naa. Subramanyam published an English translation, *The Anklet Story: Silappadhikaaram of Ilango Adigal*. Also lacking notes, this version better reflects the style of the Tamil text, being written partly in prose, partly in verse. In 1965, Kamil Zvelebil published a Czech verse translation, *Píseň o klenotu - Silappadigáram*, and in 1966, J.J. Glazov published a Russian version, *Povest' o braslete*. Neither has been available to me by reason of language. To my knowledge no other complete text is available in translation.

My primary source is V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar's 1939 English translation of U.V. Cāminātaiyar's original

Tamil text of the literary version of *Cilappatikāram*. Interestingly, the text itself claims to be an account of the first-hand experience of the author's informants. There have been and currently are a number of other accounts of the persons and events involved in the story. To what extent these other accounts may have inspired or been inspired by Iḷaṅkō's text of *Cilappatikāram*, is a matter for future research.

My Purpose:

My concern in this thesis is with the material presented in the literary text, and with mapping transactions among the characters of the story in order to see how injustice is felt and conceived, and how the problem of injustice is resolved and/or deflected. My interest here, in other words, is to specify and clarify values attributable to the society contemporary with the author.

Critical to a grasp of justice in this work are the pervasive themes of fate, foreknowledge and guilt which are interwoven with it. Much that dictates the central events of the story is hidden to both the major players and to the reader, even though characters appear from time to time with the necessary clues and explanations. Blessed only with hindsight - and often not enough, at that - the characters of *Cilappatikāram* seem very real and human to a modern western reader. In the end, everyone comes to know that events could hardly have been other than they were. We are left with a conceptual resolution which is politically expedient in its time and, for those devotionally inclined, an affective resolution as well.

Fate pervades the story. In its introduction we are told that it was written for three reasons, one of which is to show "that destiny will manifest itself and be ful-

fulled". (RD 87) The instruments by which fate is made sensible are suffering, which sensitizes subjects to deeper levels of experience, predictive (or retrospective) esoteric knowledge presented in an oracular manner, and the experience of guilt - at least "interim" guilt - which radically transforms the lives of most of our characters. This guilt is palliated by the conceptual resolution of the issues which brought it about. It does not, however, lead to a return to the status quo ante.

Cilappatikāram is the poignant tale of a chaste wife who, though faultless, suffers grievously through the judicial murder of her husband, whom the civic authorities think to be a thief. Though a sheltered woman throughout her life, *Kannaki* rises in fury to the occasion, challenging the authorities to do justice, if they can, to her innocent husband and to herself so newly widowed. This is a tale of the subjection of a just, innocent, and virtuous woman to husbandly neglect and kingly injustice, resulting in a traumatic release of retributive power and eventuating ultimately in the heroine's own demise. A kind of justice is won for her in the end, however, by the actions of both gods and humans.

The author of *Cilappatikāram* is presented in the preface (*Patikam*) as *Ilaṅkō Aṭikal*, "younger brother to Cenkuttuvan, king of the Cera country of *Tamilakam*. *Ilanko* is a monk, probably a *Jaina*, who renounced the world to

frustrate an astrological prediction that he, rather than his brother, would succeed to the Cēra throne. (RD 400-401) He is approached in his hermitage by hill-people, Kurava-s, who tell him:

A chaste lady who had lost a breast came to the shade of the vēṅkai tree, rich in its golden flowers; there the King of the Dēvas appeared, to show her her loving husband, and took her to Heaven before our very eyes. This was verily a wonder. Be gracious to know this! (RD 85)

At this time Cāttan, ¹² Iḷaṅkō's friend and a great Tamil poet, was also present. He recalls the life-story of Kannaiki and offers his own first-hand account of how he witnessed the guardian deity of Maturai consoling a distraught Kannaiki, whose breast had been torn away, in a temple in Maturai even as the city was being destroyed by fire. Cāttan identifies the woman whom the Kurava-s describe as that very Kannaiki and challenges Iḷaṅkō to present her story in literary form for the purpose of illustrating three truths:

... that *dharmā* will become the God of Death to kings who swerve from the path of righteousness,

... that it is natural for great men to adore a chaste lady of great fame,

... that destiny will manifest itself and be fulfilled. (RD 87)

Iḷaṅkō accepts Cāttan's invitation and begins to compose the work, presumably in the form it has come down to us. The product is a mixture of blank verse, called *akaval* metre, interspersed with prose and constituting a lengthy,

connected narrative. This combination, called *uraiyitaiyitta pāṭṭuṭaicceyyul*, (RD 88) was novel the ancient literature of *Tamilakam* and became a stylistic model which tended, in a later period, to be identified with the Sanskrit *kāvya* form and subjected to the criteria by which *kāvya* was judged.

Let us turn, now, to the story.

THE STORY

Pukār̄k Kāṅṭam:

We first learn of the goddess-to-be as a girl of the well-to-do merchant class in the capital and chief emporium of the Cōla kingdom, Pukār̄, sometime past the mid-point of the 2nd century C.E. She was married by parental arrangement at the age of 11 to Kōvalan̄, aged 15, the son of her father's business associate. Kaṅṅaki's virtues are praised. She is compared to auspicious Lakṣmi and to Aruntati, the northern star, symbolizing constancy. (RD 95) Kōvalan̄ is characterised as precocious and desired of all the young girls. (RD 96) The marriage appears to have been consummated immediately, (RD 97) the young couple enjoying together a variety of voluptuous pleasures. "The ecstatic lover with bright garlands, spent with his fair lady-love days and days in deep enjoyment." (RD 103) Kōvalan̄'s mother is sufficiently wealthy to establish a separate household for these married children, and Kaṅṅaki has always the means whereby the imperatives of the dharmic householder might be performed.

Some years passed, and Kaṅṅaki in the discharge of her household duties earned a name worthy to be

praised. (RD 103)

Diverted by fascination for a young and able courtesan, Mātavi - herself but 12 years old (RD 104), yet already recognized at her coming-out performance by the Cōla king as mistress of the arts of music and dance - Kōvalan purchases her garland offered for sale for 1008 pieces of gold, thereby taking her as his mistress. Abruptly, and without explanation, he neglects Kannaki, abandoning her to loneliness through no defect of her own for, being untutored as an entertainer, she could not compete with an adept of the courtesan class. Sad at heart, Kannaki ceases to wear all ornament - jewelry, scented paste, eye-makeup, hair-oil and forehead decoration. (RD 117) She is not alone. Many are the neglected wives of Pukār whose husbands consort with lovers. She ceases to smile lovingly at Kōvalan (though whether this is due to her reluctance or the rarity of his presence is not clear). She refuses to compete with this rival for Kōvalan's love and remains childless, while he impregnates Mātavi and has a daughter by her. (RD 240) With Kōvalan's infidelity begins a transformation in Kannaki.

This takes us to the end of the fourth kātai. The contents have all been rather intimate, homely and personal. The fifth kātai is a detailed account of the social, political, religious, artistic, and economic life of Pukār. As it closes with a description of the civic festival of Indra, we read:

Because she had not been separated from her lover, Mātavi, wearing beautifully serrated ear-rings, had not lost her charms. Mingled with the united fragrance of the māṭavi flower, the home-grown mullai, jasmine, the mayilai flower, the pot-grown blue-lotus, and the red kaḷunīr, and pleased with love's delight, seeking sport in the pleasure garden made fragrant by the lovable flower-buds, entering into the fresh aroma of flowers in the ever-mirthful market-place caressing the frankincense and the ever-wet sandal-paste, and continuously indulging in the joyous lovers' speech and laughter, the mountain breeze roamed about the city accompanied by the ili-sounding bee and by the mild rays of early summer, in the same way that Kōvalan went about accompanied by minstrels singing the kural tune and by his city-companions skilled in love affairs. With... frivolous talk the broad-shouldered lovers gained victory over their sweethearts, chaste as Arundati, who looked like a great army of the bodiless god (Cupid), and prevented them from running away from their presence by closely clasping them in voluptuous embrace and (thereby) smearing their chests all over with the sandal solution which adorned the breasts of these women. By thus giving them the pleasure of their union, they made their wives' lotus eyes lose the colour of the kuvalai and gain instead a reddish tinge....

It was then the middle day of the festival in honour of the King of Gods.... The dark left eye of Kannaki and the red right eye of Mātavi throbbed and were filled with tears of sorrow and of joy respectively like the kaḷunīr flower which shakes when the sweet pollen inside it emits honey and loses its external colour. (RD 131-3)

Here is the first hint of a supernatural event, the twitch of the left eye being an inauspicious and the twitch of the right eye being an auspicious omen. The mountain breeze is a direct metaphor for Mātavi, who seems a perfect match for the playboy Kōvalan.

The sixth kāṭai informs us that Kovalan is in utal (love-quarrel) with Mātavi. On the full-moon day of the festival, Mātavi is eager to join those seeking amusement at

the sea-beach. Kōvalaṅ, who "wore sparkling jewels on his garlanded chest, and like the prodigal cloud", accompanies her, it seems, reluctantly through the wealth-burdened streets of Pukār to the beach where princes and merchant-princes consorted with their retinues of servants, entertainers, and confidantes. Kāṅalvari, the seventh kātai, and the first for which we have no urai from Aṭiyarkkunallar, tells of how, when her musician tired, Mātavi took the "lute" from her hand, tuned and prepared it, and gave it to Kōvalaṅ for his instructions. He played for her a number of songs of love. She, suspecting that one of these indicated some fancied admiration for another woman, took the instrument and,

pretending that she was pleased though (really) sulking... began to play, purposefully, an ode to the sea so fine that the goddess Earth wondered at her skill (RD 152)

In song, the girl accuses the absent lover of abandoning her and cries her helplessness. Even the ocean waves conspire against her to wipe out the tracks of his chariot. (RD 155) Her songs are of sorrow and desolation appropriate to the nēyṭal tinai where the lovers now are. Kōvalaṅ, ever one to know others in comparison with himself, at his best and at his worst, and believing Mātavi to sing with her mind upon another, newer lover, abruptly leaves her.

Prompted by Fate which made the music of the lute its pretext, he slowly withdrew his hands from the embrace of his full-moon-faced lady-love, and said, "Since the day has come to a close, we shall make a move". But she did not get up at once. After Kōvalaṅ

had gone away with his retinue of servants, Mātavi rose up, and silencing the group of maids who were making a noise in the grove filled with the pollen of flowers, she betook herself home... with a sad heart. (RD 160)

Here is the first mention of fate which we are to meet again and again throughout the work. We will be recalled to this moment in the twenty-seventh kātai when a wise brāhmaṇa, Mātalan, recounts this part of the story to the Cēra king, Ceṅkuttuvan, in the aftermath of battle in the shadow of the Himalayas, far to the north, which consummated his questing expedition for a suitable stone to carve an image for the fitting worship of a goddess.

The eighth kātai is an account of Mātavi's pining. She writes an earnest conciliatory note to Kōvalan, conceals it in a garland, and has her maid take it to Kōvalan, who is staying in the grain-handlers' quarter of the city. Recounting to the maid Mātavi's precious and precocious ways in coquetry as an entertainer, Kōvalan refuses to accept the garland and concludes, smarting under evident envy and an imagined affront, "All these dances... are quite natural to her because she is only a dancing-girl", (RD 168) quite unconcerned that it was he, and not she, who had initiated their affair by purchasing her garland.

Much of Ilaṅkō's efforts in the first kāṅtam-s are put to describing the conventions of music and dance (3rd, 6th, and 8th kātai-s), the public life and ways of the thriving port city of Pukār (5th kātai), and sampling love-

lyrics in akam genre (7th k̄atai).

It is in the ninth k̄atai, the second to last of Pukārkkāṅṅam, that events occur which begin to give momentum to the story. Kaṅṅaki lives some years in neglect. This we know, for Maṅṅimēkalai is no infant when Kōvalaṅṅ abandons Mātavi. We have no means of knowing how long he may have remained apart from both these women, but when we meet Kōvalaṅṅ again upon his return to Kaṅṅaki, he is destitute of all the jewels and retainers he had when he left Mātavi. Kaṅṅaki is living in sorrow at her broken marriage. This is known to her neighbours, among whom one is Tēvanti, a devotee of the god Cāttan (RD 170 n.6; RD 396 n.1). Tēvanti, who will figure significantly in the last two k̄atai-s, invites Kaṅṅaki to pray to the god of love for Kōvalaṅṅ's return. She declines, saying, "That is not proper." ¹³ Kaṅṅaki tells Tēvanti of a disturbing dream:

Though I may get him back, my heart will still be pained; for I have had a dream. It was thus. We went, hand in hand, to a great city. There some people belonging to the city said something which was unbearably unjust. Some crime was thrown upon Kōvalaṅṅ. It stung me like a scorpion-bite. Hearing it, I pleaded before the protecting king. The king as well as the city would witness a great calamity. I shall not say more because it was a bad dream. O lady with close-fitting bangles, if you listen to the evil deed done to me and the happy results achieved by me and my husband, you will laugh (in derision). (RD 172)

Upon this dream, and Kaṅṅaki's failing to attend to it, turns the plot of this tale. Though the dream disturbs her, she prefers to disregard it now, and as events develop. She

will recall it and it will give her meaning and strength when she is most vulnerable.

One day, ashamed and impoverished, Kōvalan returns home. Shocked at Kannaki's condition, he apologizes for having neglected her and bringing poverty upon them. Cheerfully she offers him her rich anklets. These anklets, made of purest gold with loose jewels inside to make sound, are the instruments for the working out of Kannaki's dream, and the source of Ilaṅkō's title for the work. It is Kōvalan's idea to sell the anklets as capital to renew his business fortunes but wishes to begin again in Maturai, the Pāṇṭiya capital, and asks Kannaki to come with him. That very night, before dawn, they depart.

As they leave Pukār, without a "good-bye" to parents, friends, or servants, they pay their respects at the temple of Viṣṇu, at a *Bauddha vihāra*, and at a *Jaina* temple where

... gathered the men of penance who had abjured meat eating, and taken the vow, of speaking the truth alone, and purified themselves of all sins, understanding the true path by restraining their senses.
(RD 176) "

At their first stop beyond the city, they rest at the hermitage of Kavunti, a *Jaina* nun, who recognizes Kannaki's unsuitability for travel and offers to accompany them to Maturai. Kavunti becomes protectively attached to Kannaki.

On the way, they meet a revered *Jaina cāraṇa*, a *śramaṇa* who is all-knowing and levitates, and a sarcastic young couple whom Kavunti seems to turn into jackals.

Maturaik Kāntam:

Leaving Uralyūr, the three pass out of the Cōla country into the protection of the Pāṇṭiya king. There they encounter a Vaiṣṇava brāhmaṇa who gives well-meaning directions, and a forest nymph who tries, but fails, to seduce Kōvalan by taking the form of Mātavi's maid who had once brought him her massage in a garland.

In the 12th kātai the travellers enter a pālai region inhabited by fierce bow-hunters, the Eyinār, a Maravar clan. There, in a ritual process, a young girl, Cālīni, is possessed by the goddess Korravai and augers, pointing out Kaṇṇaki:

"This is the lady of the Koṅkunāṭu, the mistress of the Kuṭamalai..., the queen of the south Tamil country, and the sprout of her... prior penance; she is tirumāmaṇi... far-famed as the peerless gem of the world." (RD 206)

Now, as this corresponds to no self-reflection on her part, and thinking Cālīni spoke in ignorance, Kaṇṇaki smiles derisively and modestly takes refuge behind Kōvalan. There follow devotional songs and a blood-sacrifice.

As they near Maturai in the 13th kātai, Kōvalan draws aside, depressed at their situation and at Kaṇṇaki's condition. He is found by a brahmācārya of the Kauśikagōtra, a messenger from Mātavi, who delivers a letter begging him to expain what was her fault. Reading it, he denies her any

fault and takes all blame upon himself. Kōvalan sends the messenger to his parents with words of respect, but with no answer for Mātavi.

There follows an encomium to the river Vaikai. Then,

She (the Vaikai) covered herself with the holy robes of sweet flowers and restrained the flow of tears that filled her eyes as if she knew the trouble in store for youthful Kannaki. (RD 224)

The travellers cross by country boat and as they approach the walls of Maturai, the water-lilies and lotuses seem to quake with grief, their eyes filling with tears, the bees seem to buzz mournfully, the flags on the walls seem to say, "Do not come." (RD 225)

Before entering, they stop to rest among ascetics whom Kavunti has come so far to see. Settling Kannaki there in Kavunti's care, Kōvalan takes leave to ostensibly meet the city's merchants to find hospitality among them and more suitable protection for his wife. He spends the day exploring the city and we are treated to a description of Maturai, or Kūṭal, in this 14th kātai similar to that of Pukār in the fifth.

In the 15th kātai, Kōvalan returns, mightily pleased, to Kannaki and Kavunti, from

...the ancient and great city of Madura distinguished for the highly righteous sceptre, the coolness of the (royal) umbrella, and the prowess of the spear of the [king] who dutifully turned the wheel of law under the merciful guidance of a bountiful providence, and never deserted by its law-abiding citizens, (RD 239)

but without having done what he had set out to do. Mātalan,

a learned *brāhmaṇa*, appears on the scene. He knows *Kōvalan* from *Pukār* and gladly recounts the birth and naming of his daughter, *Manimēkalai*, and of his glowing reputation as a humanitarian, a brave and generous householder. As *Māṭalan* knows only good of him, he attributes *Kōvalan*'s current suffering, and that of his wife, to unknown deeds in a past life. (RD 240-4) *Kōvalan* tells *Māṭalan* what has been bothering him:

"Half awake in the middle of the dark night I dreamt thus: 'Through a low person in this city, well defended by the righteous monarch, this girl with the five plaits of fragrant hair suffered great agony; stripped of my robes by some stranger I mounted a horned buffalo. Later in the company of this handsome lady of the charmingly curled hair, I attained the great status of those who have renounced attachment. I also saw *Mātavi* yielding her daughter *Manimēkalai* to a Buddhist saint of great glory, thereby making the god of love fling his flower dart on the barren ground and sob helpless.' I anticipate some imminent trouble." (RD 245)

Here is an intuition which parallels *Kannaki*'s, but neither tells the other. Why?

Māṭalan, as with *Kavunti*, urges *Kōvalan* to seek the hospitality of the city's merchants. Just then, an elderly cowherdess comes by and offers obeisance to *Kavunti* who decides this woman, *Mātari*, would be an excellent interim warder for *Kannaki*. I cannot help suspecting that this is because *Kannaki* may have disturbed the meditation of the ascetics with whom they were then staying. *Kavunti* recommends *Kannaki* to *Mātari* as her ward, encouraged by stories of *punya* gained through hospitality. So, that evening,

Kaṇṇaki accompanies Mātari to her humble home within the walls of Maturai. Iḷaṅkō takes this opportunity to describe in terrifying detail the grotesque defensive weaponry upon the walls beneath which they have entered.

The 16th kātai begins with a delightful domestic scene in which Kaṇṇaki, on Mātari's instructions and with the assistance of her daughter Aiyai, prepares a meal for Kōvalan in the rustic environment of her hostess' home. Surely Kaṇṇaki has never cooked a meal in such a way before. Perhaps she has never before cooked for Kōvalan nor, perhaps, any meal at all. (RD 253) Mātari dotes on the whole process. Finishing the meal, Kōvalan holds Kaṇṇaki, saying:

"Doubting whether these tender feet of thine would have strength enough to walk over the tracts covered with gravel and stone, and taking pity on us for having crossed these painful deserts, how miserable will our aged parents feel? Is this (our present condition) illusion? Is it due to cruel fate? My mind is so confused that I know nothing. O is there hope for one who has wasted his days in the company of useless men and debauchees, among groups of scandal-mongers indulging in boisterous laughter, ever hankering after sinful deeds, neglecting the good words spoken by wise men? I have not been dutiful to my aged parents. I have also disgraced thee who art young in years, but old in wisdom. I never thought that I was doing wrong. Even though I asked thee not to leave our great city for this place, thou camest with me. What a thing thou didst?"

Kaṇṇaki's answer:

"Though I could not give charity to observers of *dharma*, or honour Brahmanas, receive saints and ascetics, or entertain guests as befits our great family, I hid from your revered mother and your highly reputed and honourable father, much esteemed by the king, my sorrow at not having you before me; but they knew it and were full of affection for me and spoke loving words. In spite of my pretended

smile, my emaciated body made them know my inner anxiety at which they were highly grieved. Though you deviated from the right path, because I kept to the path of rectitude, I volunteered to come along with you." 15

Then, says Kōvalan to her:

"O thou who hast given up thy parents and relations, menial servants, nurse-maids and female-attendants, and taken as thy great aids modesty, credulity, good conduct, and chastity, hast rid me of my troubles by accompanying me. O purest gold, creeper, girl with fragrant curls of hair! O embodiment of modesty, light of the vast world! O tender offshoot of chastity, storehouse of virtues! I shall go with one of the anklets that adorn thy beautiful feet and return after exchanging it for money. Till then do not lose heart." (RD 255-7)

From this point, when Kōvalan takes the anklet, the pace of the story rushes headlong. Kōvalan is obstructed in the street by a humped bull, an evil omen with which he is unfamiliar. (RD 257) He attempts to sell the anklet through a goldsmith who, as fate would have it, has recently stolen the Pāṇṭiya queen's anklet and, recognizing the potential in its resemblance to Kaṇṇaki's, rushes to the king to claim credit for finding the thief. He catches the king, who is in the midst of a love-quarrel with the queen, about to enter her chambers. In order, we may presume, to bring about an end to the quarrel by producing the lost anklet, Neṭuñceliyan, the Pāṇṭiya king, sends city watchmen with the goldsmith, ordering

"If you find the foot-ornament of my consort resembling the flower-garland in the possession of an expert thief, kill him, and bring the anklet here." (RD 259)

Ilaṅkō credits this injudicious decision to the ripening of

past karma. When introduced to Kōvalan, the watchmen, who are reasonable enough people, disbelieve that he is a thief, even though in possession of what seems to be the anklet described to them. The goldsmith plies them with tales of thieves' deceits and warns of punishment if they do not follow implicitly the king's command. One among them, less discerning than the rest, cuts Kōvalan down, "vanquished by his predestined fate". (RD 262)

The 17th kātai is an account of ill omens among the cowherdesses and a kuravai dance, with songs, which they perform to allay the fears of their cattle.

In the 18th, someone hearing the news from the city rushes to Kaṇṇaki who, struck with sudden trepidation, asks of Kōvalan. She is told that Kōvalan has been accused of theft and executed. She rages and collapses. She raves at the prospect of perishing as a widow in misery, anguish and grief on account of the wrong of the Pāṇṭiyan "whose sceptre swerved from the righteous path". (RD 279) Kaṇṇaki calls on the cowherdesses to hear as she calls upon the sun, as witness to all the world's deeds, to speak, asking, "Is my husband a thief?" The answer comes:

"He is not a thief, O lady of carp-like eyes! This city will be consumed by blazing flames." (RD 280)

Ignorant of the goldsmith's part in events and assuming the Pāṇṭiyan to have killed Kōvalan out of reluctance to pay the fair price of her anklet, Kaṇṇaki, its match in hand, rages through the town accusing the king of

injustice before all the people. The citizens of Matural are raised to sympathy. Bewildered, they exclaim:

"Since irremediable wrong has been done to this woman, the unbending and righteous sceptre of the king has been bent.... Lost is the glory of Tennavan, the king of kings..., possessor of the moonlike umbrella and the spear.... The sheltering umbrella of the victorious king that had cooled the earth now generates heat.... A new, great goddess has now come before us bearing in her hand an anklet of pure gold.... This afflicted woman,... looks as one possessed of divinity. What is (the meaning of) it?" (RD 282-3)

Led to Kōvalan's bloody corpse which has, mysteriously, been left in the street, she mourns him as night descends.

* * *

She fears that though his subjects accuse the Pāṅṭiyan, good people will think it was her fate, founded in some former action of her own, which led the king to act so. Such would preserve the king's justice, even had he acted without sufficient knowledge. (RD 283-4) Is it just, is it right, asks Kānnaki, that Kōvalan should lie bleeding in the dust, to leave her helpless, lonely, weeping, in a strange and hostile place? Directly challenging the grounds of such a notion of justice, Kānnaki asks:

"Are there women here, are there women? Are there women who can endure such injustice done to their wedded husbands? Are there such women?

Are there good people? Are there good people here? Are there good people who nurture and fend for children born of them? Are there good people here?

Is there a god? is there a god? Is there a god in this Kūṭal whose king's sharp sword killed an innocent? Is there a god?" (RD 284)

Lamenting so, she sees a vision in which Kōvalaṅ rises up, wipes away her tears, and departs among the gods, asking her to "Stay here." As he departs, she vows to seek for him, after first demanding an explanation from the king. As she rises from the dusty street, she recalls her ominous dream. Now she is certain of her coming actions and the part which has been assigned for her to play.

As the 20th k̄atai opens, the Pāṅṅiya queen has an ominous dream. She rushes to the king and tells how his sceptre and umbrella had fallen, how the bell at the palace gate which those seeking the king's judgement would ring to get attention had shivered, tinkling, of itself, how even the eight directions were disturbed, darkness swallowed the sun, a rainbow appeared in the night, and a meteor by day.

Then, boldly, Kaṅṅaki is heard to shout an accusation to the king at his gatekeeper (RD 287) who, amazed at the goddess-like fury of this woman, rushes to the king, who admits her. The Pāṅṅiyaṅ asks in a kindly manner who she is and her purpose. Kaṅṅaki identifies herself and Kōvalaṅ's purpose in trying to sell her anklet, and accuses the king of his murder. He responds that it is kingly justice to execute a thief. Kaṅṅaki asks that her anklet be brought and tested. The king's justice will be measured by its match with that of the queen which is known to contain pearls. As Kaṅṅaki bursts open her anklet, a gem flies in the king's face, and immediately he is overwhelmed, sceptre and

umbrella in ruin. "Am I a ruler," he cries,

"I who have listened to the words of a goldsmith? It is I who am the thief. The protection of the subjects of the southern kingdom has failed in my hands for the first time. Let me depart from this life,"

and so he does. (RD 290) The queen collapses, holding her husband's feet as did Kannaki shortly before.

Kannaki relates to the queen, in the 21st *kātai*, stories of wifely chastity from her native *Cōla* country and declares that if these were true, and if she also is a chaste lady, she will destroy Maturai. (RD 295) Once again in the streets, Kannaki cries to the people, the gods, the saints, a curse on *Kūṭal* and declares her blamelessness for what is to follow.

Then she twisted off her left breast with her hand, and going round the city of Madura thrice making this vow, in deep anguish, she threw that beautiful breast whirling into the fragrant street. Before [her] appeared the god of fire, with flames,... blue in hue, his tuft like the red sky,... saying: "O, chaste lady! As I long ago received the order that I should destroy this city by fire on the day on which you would be cruelly wronged, who can escape death here?" (RD 296)

She asks Agni to consume unrighteous people, sparing *brāhmaṇa*-s, the righteous, cows, chaste women, the aged and children, and the city is wrapped in smoke and flame.

Four protector *pūtam*-s of the city depart, declaring that when the king's justice should fail, the city would be destroyed in fire. (RD 303) The goddess *Maturāpati*, who is the tutelary deity of *Neṭuñceliyan*'s family and of *Kūṭal*, approaches Kannaki, stumbling dazed and aimless through the

city's streets. She begs Kaṇṇaki to listen to the past virtues of the Pāṇṭiya kings. She tells how a king of such a righteous line could have committed an injustice. There was a prediction that under certain astrological conditions a fire would ruin Maturai and its king. Kaṇṇaki has become the instrument of that event. Maturāpati tells how, long ago, there was a woman, Nīli, whose husband Caṅkamaṇ was a merchant; how Kōvalaṇ in a former life had, as Pārata, a servant of a king at war, mistaken Caṅkamaṇ for a spy and had him unjustly executed. Nīli cried to all the people for justice, but finding none, raved for fourteen days, finally throwing herself from a cliff with a curse upon Pārata that he would suffer the same fate. The goddess explains that now this curse has fallen upon Kōvalaṇ and Kaṇṇaki. She predicts that after fourteen days, Kaṇṇaki will again see Kōvalaṇ, but only in divine form. And so it is that Kōvalaṇ's dream also is to be fulfilled.

Kaṇṇaki vows: "I will not sit nor shall I stand till I see the husband of my heart." Indifferent to her surroundings or her direction, distracted, moaning, "Alas, I am a great sinner", she went westward toward the mountains, climbing a hill sacred to the god Murukaṇ where, after fourteen days she ascended at Kōvalaṇ's side in a celestial chariot praised by the king of heaven. This is the substance of the 23rd kātai which ends Maturaikkāṇṭam.

Vaṅcīk Kāṅṭam:

Vaṅcīkkāṅṭam begins with an account of this apotheosis by Kurava girls to whom Kaṅṅaki answers, in response to their curiosity,

"I am she whose cruel destiny it was to lose her husband on that evil day when ever-joyous Madura and its king were fated to be ruined."

Seeing her who had lost a breast taken to heaven, they acclaim her their goddess and set up a rude shrine. There follow several songs.

The scene shifts in Vaṅcīkkāṅṭam, 25th kāṅṭai, to the Cēra court. Ceṅkuṅṭṭuvan, the king, has left his capital Vaṅci and gone on excursion with his court. While consorting for pleasure on the sandy banks of the Periyar River which flows west to the Arabian Sea, he is approached by the local hill-people, Kuṅavar. They bring him as tribute the bountiful wild products of the hills which they have collected or captured.

From them Ceṅkuṅṭṭuvan first receives eulogies, which are his due as sovereign, and then a concern from the heart of these people - An unknown woman, not native to their place, had appeared beneath a vēṅkaī tree. Her breast had been torn away and she suffered unequalled distress. They had witnessed as celestial beings, praising her, carried her off heavenward. (RD 332) Evidently, this event was very important, though confusing, to the Kuṅavar. They imply that

she had come to the Cēraṅ's land, and therefore had been entitled to his protection.

Cāttan, a visiting scholar-poet hailing from Maturai, offers the Cēraṅ what he knows of the antecedents to this curious account. He glosses, though not as an eye-witness to the events in Maturai, Kaṅṅaki's departing words to the Pāṅṅiya queen. (RD 333) Cāttan says,

"As if it were her intention to point out to you, and to tell you, O mighty king, the nature of the injustice perpetrated by the powerful Pāṅṅyan, [she] came to your kingdom, not wishing to return alone to her own native place." (RD 333-4)

Here is a further urging for Cēṅkuṅṅuvan to take some action of recognition of this woman who had sought his protection by entering his country.

Cēṅkuṅṅuvan observes that, fortunately for the Pāṅṅiyan, he had died when otherwise unable to resolve his injustice to Kaṅṅaki, for in dying he had "straightened the righteous sceptre" his own rash act had bent, albeit by an irresistible destiny. In this quick judgement is the question of a possible retribution against a fellow Tamil monarchy concluded. He then turns to his queen and asks which lady were better, the chaste queen or the wrathful one who came to their land. She answers, the former has her reward, but "let this Goddess of Chastity [Pattinik kaṅṅavull] who has come to our extensive country be duly honoured." (RD 335) As a reward ought certainly to accrue to virtue, it would seem only proper that a living model of chastity

should not go unrecognized. I detect here no ulterior motive, but a sense of the vicarious value of suffering acting as a magnet, as it were, drawing the sacred to us. Here is a vicarious intimacy with divine being.

In approval, his councillors suggest that a stone be brought from the ancient sage Akattiya's holy Potiyil Hill and washed in the Vaikai or, alternatively, from the Himalayas and washed in the Ganges, to be carved as an image of Kaṇṇaki. Ceṅkuṭṭuvan takes the more venturesome course. Perhaps to the reader's surprise, he declares that if the king of the Himalayas will not give a stone to carve an image of "the great Lady of Chastity" the Cēra army would deprive him of his crown. The king then instructs his military retainers to put on garlands of vañci and unbroken palmyra leaves as symbol of preparation for war.

Villavan Kōtai, a minister, recalls to the king his previous victories over the Cōlan and Pāṇṭiyan, as well as other kings. (Koṅkaṇar, Kalingar, Karunāṭar, Bangalar, Gangar and Kaṭṭiyar are mentioned.) His advice is modest, once he has assured his king of his prowess: Explain his purpose - to get a stone for carving the image of a deity - in messages under his royal seal to all the northern kings. A chieftain, Alumpilvēl counters: As all kings have spies in our capital, we need only announce our purpose there publicly. Ceṅkuṭṭuvan agrees with the latter and orders the announcement that he will march north to the Himalayas with

his army, demands tribute of all kings in his path, commanding them to yield or abandon their wives and become ascetics. (RD 339-40)

In the 26th *kātai* is found the reason for this precipitate decision to go on a "pilgrimage" of conquest. Some time before, *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan* received word through his spies that he had been insulted by certain kings, *Kaṇaka* and *Vijaya*, rulers to the north of the Ganges. Humiliated, he had fretted at making no satisfactory response. Now was his opportunity to declare that the stone for the Goddess of Chastity be brought on the crowned heads of those indiscrete kings. (RD 341)

Marching beyond his northern borders to southern Karnataka, *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan* receives petition and tribute from several minor rulers. (RD 346-8) The *Cēraṇ* will not be dissuaded from his aggression even when *Cañcayan*, an emissary of the *Nūrruvar Kannar*, "approaches with an offer to procure such a stone, bathe and deliver it to him. *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan*, declaring to *Cañcayan* his wrath and his intention to see *Kaṇaka* and *Vijaya* humbled, refuses to end his march and demands that the *Nūrruvar Kannar*, if they be his allies, prepare a fleet of boats for his army's crossing of the Ganges. Abruptly, the narrative continues with the *Cēra* army having crossed the Ganges and in battle with a confederacy of Himalayan kings led by his prime targets. In the finest and most gruesome *puram* style, *Iḷaṅkō* describes

the valour of the Aryan soldiers. Those who did not fall to the Tamil warriors discarded their weapons, changed their clothes, and appeared to be ascetics, minstrels or dancers. Goblins hacked, cooked, and ate the bodies of the dead of both sides while praising Ceṅkuṭṭuvan for their feast won in dharmic battle. (RD 354)

In the 27th kātai, a suitable slab of stone is found, washed in the Ganges and carved in accordance with the śāstra-s. Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's battle is compared to that of Rāma and Rāvaṇa and to that of the Pāṇḍava-s at Kurukṣetra, though it lasted but eighteen nālikai-s (seven hours and twelve minutes). The Cēraṇ crosses to the south of the Ganges and, staying as a guest of his Aryan allies, rewards his injured soldiers and the sons of those who have died.

(RD 356-7) While Ceṅkuṭṭuvan is in his war camp, he is approached by Māṭalan, Kōvalan's admirer, whom we met before the walls of Maturai and who heard Kōvalan's dream there.

(RD 240-6) Māṭalan fills in for the king those parts of the story of this new goddess which took place in Pukār, as well as events there which followed the razing by fire of Maturai and identifies Kaṇṇaki as this Pattini. Māṭalan becomes a trusted political adviser to the Cēraṇ. (RD 375-9)

After thirty-two months on campaign, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan turns homeward, sending captives, including the captive Ārya kings, to be exhibited to the Cōlan and Pāṇṭiyaṇ. Kaṇṇaki's stone is carried on the crowns of the vanquished kings back

to Vañci where her temple is consecrated. Iḷaṅkō's description of the founding of this new royal cult is of interest, and I quote it in full.

To that venerable lady was dedicated, by the united aid of the dharmic Brahmanas, purōhitas, astrologers, and expert sculptors, a shrine (Pattinikkōṭṭam), constructed in all its parts according to the prescribed rules so that it might win the approval of the wise. Therein was planted the image of Pattini, carved with expert handiwork upon the stone brought from the Himalayan slope, the residences of gods, after prayers to the god (Śiva) on the top of those hills. (The deity) was decorated with choice ornaments of exquisite workmanship, and worshipped with flower offerings. At the temple entrance were stationed (images of) the guardian deities. The lion of kings who brought all north India under his control thus performed the ceremony of consecration (kaṭavuṇ-maṅkalam) and commanded the conduct of worship from day to day by sacrificial offerings and other festivities. (RD 381)

In the 29th kātai, word of Kaṇṇaki's doings in Maturai where "she condemned the God of Righteousness for the injustice done to Kōvalaṅ" (RD 383) spreads and four women - Tēvanti, the devotee of Cāttan, Kaṇṇaki's former nurse, her aṭittōḷi or maid, and Aiyai, daughter of the cowherdess Mātari - learning nothing further of her fate there, eventually make their way to Pattinikkōṭṭam at Vañci where they find their dear girl to have become a goddess. They lament and take darśana, speaking to her in the stone. Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ also is present. Kaṇṇaki appears to them, in full divine panoply and declares:

"The Pāṅṭyan is blameless. He is now a good guest in the palace of the king of gods. I am his daughter. I am going to sport on the hill of Veṅvēlāṅ...; friends, please come with me there, all of you."
(RD 387)

In the 30th and final *kātai*, *Tēvanti* tells the *Cēraṅ* of *Maṇimēkalai*, child of *Mātavi* and *Kōvalaṅ*, whose story forms the sequel to *Cilappatikāram*. She then becomes god-possessed and calls upon *Māṭalaṅ* to sprinkle some water she (as the god *Pāśaṅṭaṅ*, or *Cāttan*) had once given him for safekeeping on three small girls who are present. (RD 392-8) The result is dealt with in the third chapter. (p.112) The astonished *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ* endows *Pattinikōṭṭam* with grants and commissions *Tēvanti* as officiant. Present also are the *Ārya* kings released from prison, the *Kutaku* ruler, the king of *Mālava* and *Kayavāku*, king of Ceylon. All pray that their countries be graced by the presence of the goddess *Pattini*, just as she is present there. The goddess answers in the affirmative by a voice from the sky.

Iḷaṅkō enters the story in person as he follows his brother *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ* into the hall of sacrifice. Again possessed, *Tēvanti* tells *Iḷaṅkō* of his renunciation so that he could pose no threat to *Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ*, thwarting thereby an astrologer's prediction that he would rule in his brother's place. The final movement of our story is a supplication by *Iḷaṅkō* to the court and the reader to practise morality.

JUSTICE, ANAṆKU, AND CURSE

"O, Lord of the hot rays! You who are a witness for all the deeds of this seagirt world, speak! Is my husband a thief?" (RD 280)

"Is there a god?... Is there a god in this Kūṭal whose king's sharp sword killed an innocent? Is there a god?" (RD 284)

In these passages, Kannaki first learns of the murder of Kovalan and calls upon the Sun to witness his innocence. Then, rushing to the place where Kovalan's dismembered body lies, she is struck by the utter brutality of the event and the futility of surviving him.

How is this contrast between the cultural imperative to, and faith in, divine and royal justice reconciled with the razor of experience? I shall examine how Iḷaṅkō treats the theme of justice. Here, and in the next chapter, I shall see how he describes the human-divine interface. In the fourth chapter, we shall endeavour to assess Kaṇṇaki's apotheosis. 17

Symbols of Justice:

Whatever may be the rationale offered in support of a scheme of order, justice or political legitimation, it is by the direct and unmediated experience of suffering that the intuitive dimension where ideas of injustice take form is nourished. As with other dualisms, there would be no justice nor need of a rationale for a judicial system were injustice unknown. Suffering is first of all affective, not cognitive, though cognitive elaboration may certainly aggravate suffering. It is unnecessary to reflect whether or not one is suffering. Precisely from what one may be suffering is a cognitive concern.

In *Cilappatikāram* we learn about the ancient Tamil system of justice as a royal function and prerogative. Three symbols support the king's judicial functions. Each represents a dimension of these functions which the king, himself, seems to embody.

The royal parasol represents the king's protection (*paripalanam*) of the people and the country. In this sun-baked land, it is described as white as the moon, which symbolizes cooling; it is stable, unshaking, and adorned with garlands. (RD 146)

The king's staff, or sceptre, is straight and unbending (*ceṅkōl*) so long as his rule is righteous. It

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becomes crooked (*koṭuñkōl*) when the justice of his rule fails. (Ramanujan 1985: 269) In the 19th *kātai* the sympathetic townsfolk of Maturai are confused by the claims of *Kaṇṇaki* against their king. She is raving through their streets, accusing their trusted protector of murder. They reflect:

"Since irremediable wrong has been done to this woman, the unbending and righteous sceptre of the king has been bent.... The sheltering umbrella of the victorious king that had cooled the earth now generates heat. What is (the meaning of) this?"
(RD 282)

The *Caṅkam akavunar*, reciters, had no instrument but carried a *kōl* (Ramanujan 1985: 272) for the purpose, we may suppose, of calling attention, as with a gavel, and marking time in metrical recitation. At an important function such as *Māṭavi's* initial performance, the king's figurative presence appears to have been marked by the *talaikkōl* - the shaft of a defeated monarch's parasol. Deprived of its protective symbolism and decorated with finest gold and gems, it was ritually bathed, decorated, and turned over by the chief dancer to the custody of a leading musician-poet as a preliminary to the performance. It is said that the *talaikōl* was to be used by the dancing-girl; also that it was placed in its appointed position in the theatre. (RD 111) This treatment is of interest for it shows how the sceptre symbol could assume subordinate meanings or an alternate referent.

The parasol seems to have been a general symbol of

protection while the sceptre was, more specifically, a symbol of civil justice. When Ceṅkuṭṭuvan departs from Vañci on his northern campaign, he departs with parasol, sword, spear, and drum - but not with his sceptre. (RD 343) This is a strong indicator that the civil standards of justice were abrogated in battlefield conditions, weaponry replacing the civil rod.

A third symbol was *araiccimani*, the "bell of justice", which figures in a story of Manuṅṅiṅkaṅṅa Cōlan to which Kaṅṅaki alludes in her confrontation with Pāṅṅiyan Neṅṅuceḷiyan. (RD 290, n.1; RD 310) The Cōlan's only son had killed a calf by running over it with his chariot. A bell hung outside the palace for subjects to ring to call the king's attention to their plight. When the calf's mother rang this bell with her horns, the king investigated and sacrificed his son under a chariot's wheels to satisfy her demand for justice.

(As is evident from the stories about justice here and in the Caṅkam literature, the ancient Tamils had developed a sophisticated set of ideas about justice and its breach. It is also worthy of note that presence within a king's domain was sufficient to qualify for his protection.) Witness *audience* Neṅṅuceḷiyan's frank willingness to give audience to Kaṅṅaki at an inconvenient hour (RD 289) and the way Cāttan prevails upon Ceṅkuṭṭuvan to acknowledge her by mentioning how she came into his country:

"As if it were her intention to point out to you, and to tell you, O mighty king, the nature of the injustice perpetrated by the powerful Pāṇṭyan, (Kannaki) came to your kingdom, not (wishing) to return along to her own native place." (RD 333-4)

Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, himself, makes clear the king's duty to protect the people from injustice:

"If rains fail, great havoc is caused (to the country). If living beings suffer unrighteousness, widespread fear is caused. Paying due regard to the welfare of his subjects, and wary of tyrannical rule, a protecting king born of a noble line occupies a position which is but suffering and is not to be sought after." (RD 334)

(The toppling of the parasol and the bending of the sceptre are symbols of justice gone awry) So also is the absence of rain which is believed to follow from unrighteous rule as a direct consequence. This idea is reinforced in the appendix to the Patikam called Uraiperukatturai where it is said:

From that day forth the Pāṇṭyan kingdom was deprived of rains, and famine-stricken. This was followed by fever and plague. Verrivērceliyan reigning at Korkai propitiated the Lady of Chastity by sacrificing a thousand goldsmiths, and celebrated a festival when there was a downpour causing fertility to the land. (RD 89)

While an unrighteous king was powerless against drought, its hardships for the people, and its political consequences, it was said that a chaste lady could cause the skies to pour.

(Tirukkural 55)

(These symbols are the barometer of a king's righteousness, his earnest pursuit of aram, or dharma. Ilaṅkō intends to show that aram will be the god of death to kings who fail it. By rashly failing to give Kōvalan due

set of rules
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process, Neṭuñceliyan condemned himself. This may also to be a part of Ceñkuṭṭuvan's motive for giving special recognition to Kaṇṇaki, as put before him by the Kuravas.¹⁸ It

would seem, however, that in failing aram the Pāntiyan was in the grip of fate. The workings of fate are treated in detail in the following chapter, (but it is necessary to notice here a conflict between aram, which the king means to serve, and fate, which deflects his judgement.) This tension between the imperatives to aram and the constrains of fate (*Karma*) results in a conundrum which devolves upon Kaṇṇaki as she tries to act in accord with her best sense of propriety and of justice, and to act freely, only to learn later that she had been the instrument of fate all along.

Anāṅku:

It seems that Kaṅṅaki's modesty and forthright devotion to her marriage are the measures of her eventual manifestation of devastating power and the symbols of her ultimate sanctity. The Tamil term anāṅku denotes a divine, furious, and potentially retributive force, while also connoting feminine purity. (It is in contrast with Kaṅṅaki's virtues that one may appreciate the magnitude of the injustice done to her.)

How could a mere anklet bring about the death of a husband and of a king? How could the breast of a young, chaste, and dutiful wife be cause of a city's destruction, a major military campaign, the mortification of conquered monarchs, and the founding of temples in many lands?

Throughout the story, certain pairs of motifs are evident on the auspicious/inauspicious pattern. These are marriage and separation, innocence and danger, love and death, anklet and breast. The first of each pair is symbolic of a positive value. The second of each pair is symbolic of its loss. Kaṅṅaki's transition from the young, innocent and loving wife to the alienated, fearsome and death-dealing widow-becoming-goddess is summed up in the dynamic between her anklet, an outward ornament of special richness and fit for a royal ankle, and her breast, an inward sign of fitness

for motherhood. The hopes of Kōvalaṅ and Kaṅṅaki are placed in her anklet which becomes the instrument of their undoing. With Kōvalaṅ's death, the anklet becomes meaningless in a material sense and Kaṅṅaki's attention turns to her now useless fertility. She has lost her husband, and therefore all possibility of mothering. What need, therefore, has she of a breast? Kaṅṅaki walks round Kūṭal, her torn, bleeding breast in hand, proffered to the city as the fruit of its injustice to her. It is a scene of utter destitution, but at the same time, of transcendence. It is Kaṅṅaki's will that the city be destroyed and her own innocence be vindicated. As yet she is unaware that all that was to happen in Maturai was foretold and that she was just the instrument of events.

Another dyadic relation - that of ideation and action or thought and behaviour - runs through the story. The best of intentions go astray, resulting in misfortune. Reactions, when they come, to situations thought to be understood are usually over-reactions. Kōvalaṅ, though not ill-willed, is generally inconsiderate. Kaṅṅaki, though she should know better, leaps at the opportunity to accompany him on a venture to gain wealth, leaving comfort and security of home and friends to do so. Kavunti, who professes ascetic detachment, accepting the reverence of passersby, becomes so wholly involved with Kaṅṅaki and her fate that she eventually starves herself to death. Neṭuñceliyaṅ believes he is dispensing justice in the unsullied tradition of his

dynasty when he orders the innocent Kōvalan's execution. Seeing the guilt is his own, he dies. While destroying Maturai, Kāṇṇaki believes she is acting free from the constraints of fate (ūlvinaṅ) and heaps guilt upon herself when she learns otherwise. She is distraught to learn that she has been duped, through her own deeply rooted sense of justice, into becoming the willing instrument of a larger and unknown purpose.

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(How, then, does Kāṇṇaki constitute a problem?) There are dimensions both explicit within the text and implicit in its setting as well. In textual terms, here is a young, innocent, protected girl acclaimed by the citizens of Maturai (though not by the king) as goddess-like. She becomes the object of a cult of wonder and respect, by the hill-Kuṛava-s and then brought back to actually become a worshipped goddess in Vañcikkāṇṭam. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes, in his foreword to Ramachandra Dikshitar's

Cilappatikāram:

The name [Kāṇṇaki] carries a magic glow, a talismanic charm, for the Tamils - but how exactly shall we understand her? Her role is divinely passive in Pukar, fiercely active in Madurai, and transcendently fulfilling in Vañci. Was she but the merchant-prince Manaikan's darling daughter - the insulted and injured, the enraged and the transfigured? (RD xiv)

A miniscule portion of the text of *Cilappatikāram* is devoted to Kāṇṇaki - perhaps 3% - before her crisis in Maturai. Here is what we are told of Kāṇṇaki, including all her words, culled from this portion of the text:

In Pukārkkāṅṭam:

He [Mānaikan] had a daughter, Kannaki, who was like a golden creeper and was nearing 12 years old. She had high qualities on account of which women adored and praised her, exclaiming, "She is Lakṣmī of praiseworthy form, seated on the lotus, and her excellence is that of the faultless northern star (Aruntati)." (RD 94)

Some years passed, and Kannaki in the discharge of her household duties earned a name worthy to be praised." "They ... who ... resembled Kāma ... and Rati..., enjoyed close embraces like smoke-coloured serpents; they enjoyed all sorts of pleasures as if realizing the instability of life on the earth. (RD 103)

But Kannaki was sad at heart. Her anklet was no more on her charming feet; the girdle no longer graced her soft waist-cloth; her breasts were no more painted with vermilion paste: no jewel other than her sacred tāli did she wear; no ear-rings were visible on her ears; no perspiration adorned her shining moon-like face; nor was there collyrium on her long fish-like eyes; no more was there the tilaka on her beaming forehead; her milk-white teeth were not revealed to Kōvalan in a loving smile; nor was her dark hair softened by oil. (RD 117)

... Tēvanti worshipped the god for her [Kannaki's] sake with offerings ... and went ... with the blessing, "May you get back your husband." But Kannaki replied, "Though I may get him back, my heart will still be pained; for I have had a dream. It was thus. We went, hand in hand, to a great city. There some people belonging to the city said something which was unbearably unjust. Some crime was thrown upon Kōvalan. It stung me like a scorpion-bite. Hearing it, I pleaded before the protecting king. The king as well as the city would witness a great calamity. I shall not say more because it was a bad dream. O lady with close-fitting bangles, if you listen to the evil deed done to me and the happy results achieved by me and my husband, you will laugh (in derision)." (RD 172)

Kannaki replies to Tēvanti's suggestion to worship the God of love in order to get back her husband:

"That is not proper." (RD 173)

Kaṇṇaki responds to Kōvalan's return home, his remorse and poverty:

"O, do not grieve! You have yet my anklets. Accept them." (RD 173)

Kaṇṇaki, when she and Kōvalan had reached the outskirts of Pukār, yet more than 60 leagues from destination, asks naively:

"Which is the ancient city of Madurai?" (RD 177)

Derided by "a trifler" with his lover who suggests she and Kōvalan are incestuous lovers,

Kaṇṇaki closed her ears when she heard these sarcastic words and shuddered in the presence of her husband. (RD 188)

In *Maturaikkāṇṭam*:

Cālini, inspired before the goddess, of "Kaṇṇaki, of the fragrant locks of hair, standing with weary little feet by the side of her husband", says:

"This is the lady of the Koṅkunātu, the mistress of the Kuṭa malai (the western hills), the queen of the south Tamil country and the sprout of her (Kaṇṇaki's) prior penance; she is tirumāmaṇi (literally, the bright jewel) far-famed as the peerless gem of the world." At this Kaṇṇaki smiled a derisive smile and stood modestly behind the broad back of her dear husband thinking that this soothsayer spoke in ignorance. (RD 205-6)

To this, Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

... Chālini in a vision sees the past, present and future at once. Beyond the present is the glorious future, itself a flowing from the past. Kaṇṇaki will be honoured in all three Tamil kingdoms, and will eventually be worshipped as a jewel among women, a Goddess. (RD xv)

Kavunti recommends Kaṇṇaki to Mātari:

"Oblivious of her own suffering this celebrated lady, although fainting from thirst in the scorching sun, felt more keenly the suffering of her husband. We... have not seen any shining deity other than this goddess who has taken the vow of chastity necessary to devoted housewives. Do you not know the truth of the good saying that in a land where chaste women live, rains will not fail, prosperity will not decrease, and the great monarch's victory will not diminish?" (RD 247)

At the hut of Mātari:

When Kāṇṇaki had cut the different green vegetables with a curved knife, her tender fingers became reddened, her face perspired, her superb eyes became bloodshot; and she turned aside from the smoking oven. Then with the aid of the fire of straw lit by Aiyai, Kāṇṇaki cooked to the best of her ability for her husband. When that lord had seated himself on a small mat, ... with her flower-like hands she sprinkled water from an earthen-pot over the feet of her lord.. (RD 253-4)

After his meal, Kōvalan takes Kāṇṇaki aside and expresses his regret for all the hardships he has caused her. Her response is direct, unemotional, accusing, and forgiving at once. Kōvalan praises her for graciously ending his troubles. (RD 244-7; above, pp.33-4) There is surely a message here that the inner discipline of wifely chastity has more than just intrinsic rewards. The chastity of wives seems to be the measure of virtue in social and political life as well and, if we may press the matter, is of meteorological import as well. (Tiruk kural 55)

Kāṇṇaki is quite an ordinary woman with a rather ordinary biography. She has internalized the value of chastity in marriage and, though her husband breaches it, she will not. She is generous within the means available to

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is
Sanskrit.*

her. She is not, despite Kōvalan's eulogy, particularly wise. If the measure of her by her mortal peers is uncertain, we have the oracle Cālini's intriguing statement. Kaṇṇaki herself turns away from the suggestion that she is the "lady of Koṅkunāṭu" or "mistress of the Kuṭa malai" or "queen of the south Tamil country" and of course denies she could be "tirumāmaṇi...far-famed as the peerless gem of the world". The key, of course, is that this girl is "the sprout of her... prior penance". In this life, Kaṇṇaki's penance could not have been her isolation itself for it was not her choice. It could only have been her silent forbearance. We are directed by Cālini to the conditions of Kaṇṇaki's life before, or after, the current one. Srinivasa Iyengar perceptively collapses time in his comment on this oracular message by Cālini. It is quite impossible to determine if Cālini recounts the past or predicts the future in this passage.

(Kaṇṇaki is thoroughly human.) There is no suggestion in this text that she is an avatāra descended to earth for some divine purpose. " (She becomes a goddess.) She does so without any consciousness of such a transformation and while living, makes no claim to divinity. To the end she grieves, denying the very principles that Iḷaṅkō intends to prove by publishing her story. Witness her final words uttered to the hill-maidens at the opening of Vaṅcikkāṇṭam, 24th kātai:

"I am she whose cruel destiny it was to lose her husband on that evil day when ever-joyous Madura and

its king were fated to be ruined." (RD 320)

Contextually, Kaṇṇaki presents problems as well. Her apotheosis follows the pattern of the naṭukal cult in which a hero who had fallen in battle had erected to his honour a stone carved with representations of events of his life. The hero's spirit was believed to dwell in the very stone itself. This had been a long tradition from neolithic times in Tamil Nāṭu. (Kailasapathy 1968: 234-7) But never before had such a stone been erected for a woman, and never before for such an abstract virtue as chastity. ²⁰

Certainly Kaṇṇaki is painted as a moral and heroic exemplar. May there be a micro/macrocosm motif at work here? Is Kaṇṇaki, in some manner, to be equated with society? Through time, a "symbiotic" relationship has emerged between Kaṇṇaki and the Tamil people. This issue is touched upon in the fourth chapter, below.

Dramatic and violent death is a popular theme in Tamil folk religion. (When death comes to one prematurely and undeserved we have the essential ingredients for deification) which results, in a remarkably short time, in habitual and established rituals of worship. Blackburn has noted the implications for goddess-hood in the pathos of Kaṇṇaki's mental and physical condition. (1985: 260) Kaṇṇaki's story was very likely seminal to such notions of deification, so they will not be of much help much in explaining her apotheosis which antedates the modern accounts by at least

1500 years, but whatever the impetus to this transformation may be, it is still alive and well in contemporary Tamil folk tradition. ²¹ How the *Kannaki* who is lost to us in the 24th *katai* compares with *Pattinik kaṭavuḷ* who speaks in the 29th (RD 387-8) is examined in the third chapter in the section on guilt.

The sense of the dramatic convergence of circumstances in an especially significant event, expressive of *ṇaṇku*, characterised as sacred uniqueness, runs from the earliest *Caṅkam* literature, through the narrative works such as *Cilappatikāram* to the *Tēvāram* hymns. Underlying the variations of style and ostensive purpose the play of this sacred power pervades Tamil literature.

ṇaṇku has been characterized as the malevolent and potentially destructive force immanent in sacred persons or objects. This dangerous power has been identified as residing in women in general, and in certain body parts, such as the breasts, in particular. (Hart 1973) It is therefore imperative for social order that such power remain strictly controlled through marriage. A faithful wife was believed to be able to control her *ṇaṇku* for good, and could ensure adequate rainfall, as well as political stability, with her blessings, through this power.

Widowed, a woman became dangerous, her *ṇaṇku* having no living focus. This made austerities by the widow necessary for its control. A clean, uncomplicated solution

to this problem for the community was *anumaraṇam* or *sati*.
(Hart 1973: 250)

Recent efforts have been made (Rajam 1986) to establish from the *Caṅkam* works the original semantic range of the term, *aṇaṅku*. *Aṇaṅku* is used adjectivally as an attribute of a person or object. As it may be acquired as an attribute, it may not be regarded as innate. (Rajam 1986: 258) It is used as a verb in the sense that one can "be *aṇaṅku*-ed" or made vulnerable. (259) It may also be used substantively as one may become *aṇaṅku* to another. (260) This use is rather like the Greek "*nemesis*" with the sense of inevitable consequence or retribution. The Greek root *nemein* from which it derives means "to allot", "distribute" or "deal out" - a meaning acquired by the Sanskrit *karma* which is not original and may derive from the Dravidian semantic complex in which *aṇaṅku* is a key term.

Rather than a sacred and dangerous "power", *aṇaṅku* emerges affectively as "anxiety" in two dimensions - fear and eagerness (261) The flash of stunning beauty apprehended in a moment is as much an expression of *aṇaṅku* as is affliction. One love-sick is as much "*aṇaṅku*-ed" as one intimidated by a mighty adversary. *Aṇaṅku* can thus be regarded as informing both styles of early classical *Caṅkam* literature, *akam* and *puṛam*, as well as the affective expression of the *Tēvāram* singers of the late classical period, in their concern for the import of the sacred locale

and the anguish of their separation from God.

Between these limits, at the height of the classical age where we find the beginnings of narrative in the *Cilappatikāram*, we should expect also to find expression of this *anañku*. We do find, in this work, a model for the deification process of folk religion observed today by Blackburn through the violent, premature and undeserved death of *Kōvalan*. The deification is shifted away from him, however, to his chaste wife, *Kaṇṇaki*. It is their marital relationship which serves as the nexus for this shift. *Kaṇṇaki* is the "hero" of the tale, if there be any. It is she who sets out to seek justice upon her husband's murder, knowing certainly that no justice can be done - only that *Kōvalan*'s reputation might be restored and vindicated. She sees a dismal future for herself as a widow and refuses categorically to live submissively, doing penance, like other widows. (RD 279)

The destructive events which follow - the death of the *Pāṇṭiya* king on learning of his injudicious error, of the queen upon his death, of the burning of the city, *Maturai*, and *Kaṇṇaki*'s eventual demise, dirty, torn and exhausted, in the nearby hill country two weeks later - have been attributed to her *anañku*, as a wild and malevolent force, unleashed by widowhood. (Hart, 1975: 102-107)

A less dramatic but perhaps more fruitful account is possible. We may see in the early stages of their marriage

the establishment of a unique bond between Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki. Altered by Kōvalan's desertion and attachment to Mātavi, this relation acquired aṇaṇku as Kaṇṇaki's wifely chastity (*kaṇṇu*) focused this bond to such an extent that virtually the entire responsibility for and burden of the relationship lay with her. Kōvalan was aṇaṇku to her.

When Kaṇṇaki, naive in the ways of the world but full of the sense of wifely propriety in which she had invested all her life, departs with the returned and remorseful Kōvalan for Maturai, she places all her eggs in a single basket, as it were. Aṇaṇku-ed again by Kōvalan's murder, she sets out to seek redress - to restore the balance of aṇaṇku between herself and Kōvalan and between herself and the king, the author of her new vulnerability. She has nothing to lose. Effective justice cannot be sought as Kōvalan cannot be restored by the king. Kaṇṇaki asks nothing of the Pāṇṇiyaṇ but the opportunity to show him his error, then somehow wreaks a horrible retribution on the unsuspecting and innocent city and wanders, raving, into the countryside. Where in this can we find heroism but in Kaṇṇaki's articulation of the aṇaṇku which forms the net of relations among the actors?

We find in *Cilappatikāram* no paradigmatic love or heroism motifs between primary characters which were the literary standard prior to it. Nor do we find the devotionalism of the literature which was to shortly follow

it. The paradigm which does connect these three literatures, as other conventions are overturned, is the play of *anañku* which emerges as an aesthetic principle homologous to the *dhvani* or *vyañgyārtha*, the figurative and suggestive meaning of words, of Sanskrit aesthetics. It is significant action which sets the parameters for religious life. *Anañku* defines significant action.

Curse:

While *aṇāṅku* is the adhesive between characters and the instrument of the working out of their relations, curses are important instruments for the channeling of this retributive force. Ilanko utilizes three curses - those of Kavunti, Nīli, and Kaṇṇaki - to develop the plot of *Cilappatikāram*.

In the 10th *kātai*, the three resting travellers are accosted by a young couple bent on making a nuisance of themselves. They approach Kavunti and, as their minds are prurient, ask her who might be this delightful pair resembling the god and goddess of love. Kavunti falls into the trap of their testy irony by telling that they are her children. She means this metaphorically, of course, but these rascals take her literally in order to annoy her, saying caustically:

"O wise one, who has known all the *śāstras*, have you ever heard the children of the same parents becoming husband and wife?" (RD 188)

As Kannaki covers her ears and shudders, Kavunti - she of great penance - hurls an imprecation at these triflers:

"Since these two seem to insult my dear one, fair as a flower garland, they shall become old jackals in the thorny forest." (RD 188)

We do not witness this transformation, but are told that

Kōvalaṅ and Kaṅṅaki "soon heard the long howl of jackals... and trembled." They ask themselves,

"Though those who deviate from the path of virtue speak unjust words, still should it not be attributed to their ignorance?" (RD 188)

and beg Kavunti to return the victims to their former state. She relents and limits their transformation to twelve months, whereupon they will return to their former selves.

This incident tells us that a wilful curse is far more than mere words of annoyance and frustration. When spoken by one who does penance, a curse will have immediate effect and may, just as well, be retracted. It also bespeaks a liberal, forgiving attitude toward human defects from the very mouths of those who are themselves about to become victims of the potent curse of one who is unable to retract it, for she is long dead. Shortly after this incident, Kaṅṅaki is seen to be less than willing to grant the *Pāṅṅiyan*, *Neṅṅceliyan*, the same forgiveness. Instead, she will wreak devastating retribution upon this king whose injustice might be dismissed, with greater generosity, on grounds of ignorance. This incident of the jackals points directly to Iḷāṅkō's burden which is to show how ignorance is at the root of defects in action. But fate lies in wait for *Neṅṅceliyan* also, grasping its opportunity while he is in quarrel with his spouse. In the end, as the goddess *Pattini*, Kaṅṅaki absolves him, proclaiming him as her father. (RD 387)

Spoken by one who lacks the power of penance to execute a curse, it lurks, awaiting suitable conditions to strike its appointed victim. This is the case in the story of Nīli found in the 23rd *kātai* and told in Chapter 1, above. ²² Nīli is widowed unjustly.

Finding that she had no resting-place, [she] wandered about the streets and court-yards, and created a commotion proclaiming: "O king, is this your justice? O residents of this place, is this right?" She raved thus for fourteen days, and exhilarated by the thought that that was a sacred day she ascended a cliff in order to rejoin her murdered husband in heaven, and fell down cursing thus: "He who has inflicted this injury upon us shall be overtaken by the same fate [injury]." (RD 315-6)

Clearly this is the model for Kaṇṇaki's own reaction and we are intended by Iḷaṅkō to believe that the fruit of this curse ripened precisely in Kōvalan's death and Kaṇṇaki's destitution. It is essential that Kaṇṇaki not know of Nīli's curse until after the destruction of Maturai as indirection is necessary to its accomplishment. Afterward, it is important that she know of it in order to give right direction to the working out of her own end. Kaṇṇaki's response upon hear of Nīli's grievous end:

"I will not sit nor shall I stand till I see the husband of my heart." (RD 316)

Nīli's curse suggests another issue upon which I mean only to touch here. Does Iḷaṅkō recognize a *karma*-transfer theory? Is Kōvalan's negative *karma* (*ūlvinaḷ*) transferred to Kaṇṇaki? It would appear to be so. Just as Cālini's prognostications about Kaṇṇaki are unclear whether, as they

fate
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her
* as
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certainly do not describe her present, her past or future is being described, so is it unclear whether the penance Kaṇṇaki performs is in this or in previous lives. (RD 206) We may not have to answer this question in order to understand Iḷaṅkō for the purposes of the present work, but it is a fact that Kaṇṇaki suffers and suffering, ostensibly, is always deserved. It seems odd if Iḷaṅkō is a *Jaina*, as has been suggested, that such a transfer theory, which can be found in *Itihāsa*-s and in *Mahāyāna*,²³ should appear in his work. If once we believe that merits may be transferred from one person to another, it is a small step to concede that demerits also may be similarly transferred. The premise of *karma*-transfer strips away the sense of a strict individualism in *samsāra*.

Yet, there is a fitting parallel between the lives of the couples Caṅkamaṅ and Nīli, Kōvalaṅ and Kaṇṇaki. Both men are merchants trading in unfamiliar cities. Both are innocent of the crime cast upon them. Both women are passive victims and marginal to the events which fix their painful circumstances. Apart from the *ananku* which Pārata (Kōvalaṅ) inflicts on Caṅkamaṅ, with its concomitant injustice to Nīli, conditioned by her sense of her own innocence and futility, her curse would not have taken the form it did. She asks that the worst she can imagine will likewise befall her husband's murderer, and this worst is just what she is suffering. The parallel demands completion in the equivalent

suffering of the villain's wife.

Kavunti's curse is trivial but is executed with power. Nīli's is dreadfully significant but she is powerless to effect it. Kaṇṇaki's imprecation upon Maturai and its king (RD 295-6) combines wretched Nīli's cry for justice with the potency of Kavunti's asceticism. The resulting concatenation of worth and power transcends them both.

(There is a direct link, made abundantly clear through several stories placed in Kaṇṇaki's mouth by *īlaṅkō*, between her chastity (*karpu*), a combination of innocence with penance, and her emerging power.) *Karpu* is regarded as a faculty which is not inherent but developed, a product of self-restraint and dedication to the married state. It has been claimed that Kaṇṇaki's quietude and patience evidence the depth of emotion she has dedicated to her husband. (Zvelebil 1973: 181; cf. 23: *vēṅpā* and *Tirukural* 55) My impression from a reading of this text is different. (It seems, rather, that Kaṇṇaki's devotion is to the value and principles of marriage itself.) She is dedicated not so much to her husband in and for himself as to the *karpu* which is growing in her for which he provides the necessary context. The existence of a living husband is essential to her goal, but his immediate presence is unnecessary to the maturation and fulfilment of her *karpu*. (It is from this *karpu* she speaks to the *Pāṇṭiya* queen:)

If I am also a chaste lady, I shall not allow this city to flourish but will destroy it along with its

sovereign.... I curse this capital of him who did wrong to my beloved husband. I am not to blame. (RD 295-6)

Significantly, her power and her state of knowledge are not commensurate. The defect in her knowledge permits the effusion of power needed for the working out of fate. Its correction is essential for the affective resolution Iḷānkō seeks. It is important that he closes Cilappatikāram with an affirmation of benevolence and forgiveness while at once maintaining that fate will, nonetheless, have its way. (RD 401-2)

Summary:

In this chapter, I have examined suffering as the affective and intuitive presupposition of ideas of justice, and symbols of justice as royal functions in ancient Tamil society, showing how their failure symbolizes dysfunction of the judicial system, with a resulting erosion of the legitimacy of the sovereign's rule. A conundrum was pointed out wherein the imperatives of ūlvinaī (fate) and aram (duty) come into essential and cognitively irreducible conflict. Fate itself propels the powerful into the very dereliction of duty of protection it punishes.

Kaṇṇaki seems an unlikely candidate for apotheosis. Her naive passivity and unmaternal aspect do not seem to fit her for the role of goddess. Kaṇṇaki's rectitude was examined through her own words and intimate descriptions of her. Pairs of motifs on an auspicious/inauspicious axis each representing a positive value and its loss are noted as structural constituents of the story. The anklet of Kaṇṇaki is seen to symbolize the worth of her marriage as well as the couple's material fortunes. All else lost, she casts it away.

The untranslatable term aṇaṇku was examined and found to denote the net of power relations, of offensive and retributive interactions among persons, which supplies a map

for the assignation of fate's consequences. Representing both anxiety and eagerness - *tremendem et fascinans* - *anañku* mediates between the delight and longing of *akam*, the vigour of *puṅgam*, and the sense of the divine which informs the *bhakti* poetry of the *Nāyaṅmār* and *Ālvār*. An account of a modern deification process in *Tamiḷnāṭu* is observed wherein apotheosis is attributed to a premature, undeserved and violent death in which the victim's personal virtue is not of great significance.

The curse of *Kaṅṅaki* which brought about the destruction of *Maturai* was examined in light of two other curses of lesser import. The curse appears to be instrumental in the return of *anañku* to the one who inflicts it, thereby yielding justice to its victims. The curse gives form to retribution, making it suit the crime. Comparison with these other curses gave us an appreciation for how special *Kaṅṅaki* is. (Her *kaṅṅu*, a faculty developed in the state of marriage and through devotion to it, is the seat of her power.) It is not necessarily paralleled by a state of knowledge fitting for its use, however. This issue of knowledge is further addressed in the next chapter.

FATE, GUILT, AND KNOWLEDGE

The first part of this chapter deals with fate and the third of Iḷaṅkō's propositions - that fate is inexorable and will eventually have its way. I will characterize what has been translated in English as "fate" by examining the Tamil terms which are used. I have attempted to locate all instances where fate is mentioned in the work in order to see in what sorts of circumstances fate seems to be active. The actors' state of awareness when actions are taken - in particular their sense of self-directed freedom - is noted. The characters seem to have a general disregard for the action of fate conditioning their actions and their lives. Iḷaṅkō appears to have assigned himself the task of illustrating the actuality of fate, and its working in everyday life, to a social order which does not habitually acknowledge it. The burden of Iḷaṅkō's work, which he states clearly in the *Patikam*, is to illustrate the working out of fate's imperatives. This purpose becomes the structural determinant in his handling of *Cilappatikāram*.

The second part of this chapter deals with guilt as it affects each of the major actors. How the actors compromise themselves by their actions is examined. Guilt is

seen to be a necessary instrument for the working out of fate. In the third part I examine the extraordinary means of knowledge available to the actors - omen, dream, and oracle - and examine in what manner and by what means the hints of each are confirmed.

Fate

The term used for fate is ū, and for its action, the compound ūvinai. vinai signifies action, or karma, and is modified in several instances by adjectival prefixes - tvinai, paṅṭai ūvinai, vantaviṅai, katuvinai, valvinai - with meanings like "wicked deeds", "past deeds", "bitter deeds", "potent deeds". The latter bear closer and closer upon the sense of ū itself. A gradual synonymity emerges between ū and vinai and this seems to be Iḷaṅkō's intent.

I shall now examine the instances of use of these terms to see when they crop up and through the actors' responses to these circumstances, how we are meant to understand them.

Apart from its initial mention in the *Patikam* when Cāttan first relates Kōvalaṅ's murder to Iḷaṅkō, then recommends that Iḷaṅkō write a poetic work to illustrate its workings, the first plot-related mention of fate does not appear, surprisingly, as we shall see, until well into the

work. We read in the 7th kātai:

Prompted by Fate [ūlvīnai - 7:52.4] which made the music of the lute its pretext, he slowly withdrew his hands from the embrace of his full-moon-faced lady-love.... (RD 160)

In this instance Kōvalaṇ, jealous of Mātavi's false but artful hint in song of another lover on her horizon, leaves her on the beach at Pukār, never to return. The translator adds a note here that this reference to the music of the "lute" as a pretext is Iḷaṅkō's introduction of prārabdhakarma - the consequences of actions in former lives of which the fruits allotted to this life must run their course, indifferent to our will or any attempt to divert them. (RD 160, n.3) This is directly reinforced in the 27th kātai when Māṭalaṇ, saluting victorious Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ, cries:

"Long live our king! The seashore song of the lady Mātavi made the crowns of Kaṇaka and Vijaya bear a weight."

The king asks for clarification of this obscure reference.

Māṭalaṇ continues:

"The maid Mātavi, whilst sporting on the cool beach, had a lover's quarrel.... Then governed by fate, [ūlvīnai - 27:59] she sang the seashore song appropriate to her dance. This resulted not in their reunion but in their separation, and necessitated his entry with his virtuous wife into the ancient towered city of Madura, whose reigning king with his wreath of leaves attained blissful heaven as a result of the murder of Kōvalaṇ, whose wife, O lord of the Kutavar, entered your country. And now she is being borne upon the crowned heads of the northern kings." (RD 358)

In sequence, this properly antedates the first reference to fate as Kōvalaṇ departs. The action of fate is represented, after the fact, as having contributed to

Kōvalaṅ's deed even before it is first acknowledged in the text.

Kōvalaṅ has just returned full of remorse to Kaṇṇaki and suggests he might use her anklet as collateral to rebuild their fortunes and in the last stanza of the 9th kātai, we read:

Impelled by fate [vinaikaṭaik kūṭṭa - 9:78] he decided to start before the heavy darkness of the night was dispelled by the sun.

The succeeding vēṅpā repeats:

...impelled by fate which had decreed their doom long ago. (RD 174).

The 10th kātai reinforces this impression of a momentous drift into helplessness by repeating ominously:

On the last day on which the last watch of the night was dark, when the eye of the sky... had not opened, and when the white moon that shone in the company of the stars had vanished, Kōvalaṅ and (Kaṇṇaki) started forth driven by their fate [ūlvinaikaṭai - 10:4]. (RD 175)

(As Cāttan is made to declare so forcefully that the purpose of Cilappatikāram is to illustrate the working of fate,) we are surprised to find no further mention of it until past the middle of the work.

Here, in the 16th kātai, Kōvalaṅ bids goodbye to Kaṇṇaki as he prepares to enter Maturai to sell her anklet, telling her of his state of mind and of the grief he feels for the hardships she has undergone coming all the way to Maturai with him.

"Is this... illusion? Is it due to cruel fate [valvinai, strong action carrying a pejorative sense - 16: 42]? My mind is so confused that I know nothing." (RD 255)

This sums up Kōvalan's consciousness of fate as it works in his life. At best he is confused by events as they come to him and has no sense that any part of his experience is foreordained, nor, for that matter, that he might somehow be responsible for events. He has the misfortune to meet the avaricious royal goldsmith who rushes to the king in the hope of framing him for the theft of the queen's anklet.

Because that was the moment of the ripening of past karma, [vinaiivilaikālam - 16: 148] the wearer of the garland of margosa flowers... without any inquiry, sent for the city watchmen and ordered: "Now, if you find the foot-ornament of my consort resembling the flower-garland in the possession of an expert thief, kill him, and bring the anklet here." (RD 259)

Thus it is that Neṭuñceliyan becomes, by his neglect, the instrumental cause of Kōvalan's demise. Victimized by the goldsmith's deceit, Kōvalan, "whose cruel fate [tīvinai -16:156] had enmeshed him in its close net" (RD 260) is indiscriminately murdered in the street by a ruffian servant of the Pāṇṭiya king.

Vanquished by his pre-destined fate [paṇṭai ūlvinai - fate which had caught up with him - 16:217], Kōvalan fell, causing the Pāṇṭyan sceptre to become crooked.

The concluding vēṇṇpā recapitulates:

Because of the injustice done to Kannaki's husband, the never-crooked sceptre of the Pāṇṭyan, became crooked, - a result of pre-ordained fate. [The sense of the original is the coming of consequences out an ancient source - 16, vēṇṇpā: 3-4] Good and bad actions [iruvinaiyum, two kinds of action - 16, vēṇṇpā: 1] yield their results unflinchingly. Therefore

always perform righteous deeds. (RD 262)

When, in the 19th *kātai*, Kaṇṇaki rushes to Kōvalan's body lying neglected in the street, she asks if people will not say it is her inevitable, preordained fate - even if the king had acted in ignorance - that she has been widowed. (RD 283-4) Her response is very important. Kaṇṇaki refuses to take responsibility for any hypothetical karmic defect which might have influenced the Pāṇṭiya to act improperly; refuses to accept any possibility which might make him less than fully accountable for his actions. She frets that even good people, not knowing her virtue and innocence [*lennuruvināikāṇa* - 19: 42, 46, 50], will admit that her fate is her own doing. (RD 284) Lost in her grief, she asks, how could there be women who could endure such injustice, and how, if there were good people who love and care for their children, or if there were a god, such injustice could occur. (RD 284)

Ushered into Neṭuñceliya's presence, Kaṇṇaki identifies herself to him as the wife of Kōvalan, of faultless reputation who,

"... driven by fate, [*ūlvinaṅai* - 20: 59] entered your city, O king with tinkling anklets, to earn his livelihood, when he was murdered by you while out to sell my anklet." (RD 290)

Kaṇṇaki tells the Pāṇṭiya queen, as she stands over his fallen body, that she as well as Kovalan is the plaything of fate [*koṭuvinaṅai* - 21.1] She pronounces:

"Though by nature I am ignorant yet you will see that

he who did harm to another in the forenoon will find himself harmed in the afternoon," (RD 293)

a statement which, oddly enough, she seems not to apply to herself, or does she?

We next find mention of fate when Maturāpati accosts distraught Kaṇṇaki as Maturai burns:

"I am much concerned at the fate of thy husband... Hear, my dear, the fruits of our kings' deeds [ūlvinaṅai 23: 28] in their previous births. Listen also to the account of your husband's past deeds [tītura vanta vinaṅai - 23: 30] resulting in this present misery." (RD 308)

Later in this same kātai the gathering storm of fate gains further sanction in the curse of Nīli (RD 316), considered in the section on curses in the previous chapter.

Kaṇṇaki's appreciation of the workings of fate seems to be fully established two weeks after the holocaust of Maturai when the curious hill-maidens ask in the opening lines of Vañcikkāṇṭam, 24th kātai whom she might be:

"I am she whose cruel destiny [kaṭuvinaṅai, strong, bitter fate - 24:6] it was to lose her husband on that evil day when ever-joyous Madura and its king were fated [valvinaṅai, potent fate - 24:5] to be ruined." (RD 320)

Cāttan, clarifying the Kuṛava-s' story, tells Ceṅkuṭṭuvan of Kaṇṇaki at Maturai and of her "ill-fated anklet" [tīvinaṅai cilampu kāraṅa - 25: 69]. He involves the Cēra king directly by pointing out that her coming to cēranāṭu was equivalent to an appeal for redress of the Pāṇṭiyan's injustice. (RD 333) Until reintroduced by the brāhmaṇa Māṭalan's pointed reference to Māṭavi before

Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, , the question of fate plays no part in the events of Vañcikkāṇṭam. Māṭalaṅ tells the Cēraṅ how, returning from Kaniya Kumari, "as if impelled by fate" [ūlvinaip payaṅkōl - 27:70] he had heard of Mātari's suicide. (RD 359) He also recounts the ascetic Kavunti's reaction to news of her wards. She declared:

"Was this the fate [vinaḷ - 27: 83] of those who joined my company?", and proceeded to die by starvation. (RD 359)

The prose preface to the 29th kātai tells how Kaṅṅaki condemned aṅam, personified as "the God of Righteousness" by the translator, for the injustice done to Kōvalaṅ. (RD 383) This is a rather oblique reference and likely means only the Pāṅṅiya king, rather than some more abstract entity.

In his final and first-person injunctions to the reader, Iḷaṅkō sums up his position on fate:

"You cannot escape from the days allotted to you: nor can you avoid what will happen. So seek the best help to the land of your final destination." (RD 402)

Guilt

Who is to blame for these tragic events? Zvelebil observes:

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 Jaina woman-ascetic, and probably not even *Kaṇṇaki*. (1973: 180)

To my mind, the single greatest charm of *Cilappatikāram* lies in just this - its scale is human. It has a power to touch us in our own intimate lives in a most credible way. Even the heroine and hero, if such they be, are as defective, as self-centered, as hopeful and depressed by turns, as enmeshed in life's complexities and paradoxes, as prone to confusion and error as ourselves. Yet, they are touched by divinity.

We are all, at some time, guilty of doing the kinds of things *Iḷaṅkō*'s characters do, for similar reasons, though the stakes and consequences might be less dramatic. In this way they play out a macrocosmic paradigm while we play out but a microcosm.

Kaṇṇaki is depicted casually as the blameless victim of others' schemes and defects. Else, how could she have become the goddess? It is preferable, I believe, to accept her own estimate of herself. In this section, I examine how, and for what defects, guilt is expressed by the major

characters, culminating in the major guilt of Kaṇṇaki, herself.

If fate lays out the pattern of events, guilt is the magnet which draws fate upon the actors. Neṭuñceliyaṇ would not have thrown himself, dead, from the Pāṇṭiya throne were it not for guilt stemming from his sense of nāṇam, his criterion for self-blame. Mātavi, by her act of renunciation, may be seen as expressing remorse for the events, (Zvelebil 1973: 181) especially in light of Māṭalan's oblique statement to Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ that "the seashore song of the lady Mātavi made the crowns of Kaṇaka and Vijaya bear a weight." (RD 358) The radiant illusion which was her life with Kōvalaṇ was lost forever and, as a loving mother, she intends that Maṇimēkalai not be trapped in a like illusion. Mātari, the cowherdess, immolates herself for failing to protect her charge declaring:

"I enter the fire. I was not able to protect the refugee entrusted to me by her (Kavunti) of doubt-free vision." (RD 386)

This ascription is, as it turns out, an overestimation of Kavunti who also puts herself to death on learning the fate of her companions - in direct contradiction of her own teaching, which becomes hollow and self-condemning:

"When an evil deed brings its own reaction, [evil people] become maddened excessively by misery born of ignorance. On the other hand wise and learned people [among whom she would have counted herself] will not grieve when the unavoidable reaction of past karma shows itself." (RD 227; cf. Chapter 4)

Tēvanti, before Pattini's stone in Vāṇci, declares:

"I have done no penance. I did not realize the implication of your bad dream on the day I heard it. O, what have I done?" (RD 386)

She lives out her life in service to *Pattinik kaṭavuḷ* as officiant in her temple at the command of *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan*. Taking to *sannyāsa* by the two fathers, and death from grief of the two mothers, could be considered the outcome of a similar self-blame, perhaps for failure to advise and direct their children better, though this is not made clear by *Iḷaṅkō*.

While many are the expressions of guilt, the motif is most elaborated through *Kōvalan* and *Kaṅṅaki*. *Kōvalan* deserves to be guilty, without doubt. One wonders with what sense of justice a man can forsake a virtuous wife for an ambiguous artfulness. What justice has a man, used to unstinting self-gratification and ease of life, who will take a woman's last jewels to start a business after wasting away his own wealth? Again, he is not malicious, but is certainly irresponsible, and consistently so. Advising *Kavunti* that he is going to seek out members of his own community in *Maturai* with the words,

"Until I return after informing the princely merchants of this ancient city about my situation, this lady of mine will be under your protection,"
(RD 227)

he instead spends the day exploring the sights and sounds of the whole city rather than getting about his intended business. Neither does he fail to notice the city's

courtesans.

Kōvalaṅ amply deserves to be remorseful and its first expression comes in the 9th kātai when he returns, impoverished, to Kaṅṅaki.

Kōvalaṅ went into the house and entering the bedchamber was stricken with grief at the sight of the pale Kaṅṅaki, his fair wife, and said, "By consorting with a false woman who makes every false thing appear like truth, I have lost the rich store of my ancestral wealth. O, the poverty I have caused (to our house) makes me ashamed of myself." (RD 173)

As we know that when Kōvalaṅ, in a huff, left Mātavi on the beach at the festival of Indra, he was adorned with jewels and accompanied by servants, he seems far too ready, in this initial expression of remorse, to shift blame to another.

Kōvalaṅ's reflection on his actions appears to have matured somewhat by the 13th kātai, when he is found by Kaucikaṅ who bears Mātavi's artless message of her remorse and her appeal for his explanation of any offence she might have committed against him. Kōvalaṅ just says, with neither dissemblance nor elaboration: "She is not in the wrong; I alone am to blame." (RD 220)

His full confession comes on his departure from Kaṅṅaki to sell the anklet, following the meal she has taken pains, in trying conditions, to prepare for him. He regrets (RD 255-6; above, p.39) his inattention to good advice, his wasted days spent among debauchees, his dereliction in duty to his parents, and above all the disgrace he has laid upon Kaṅṅaki. "I never thought that I was doing wrong", says he.

His wife's response is not unloving, but is scathing in its acknowledgement of his faults. Closing, unawares, this chapter of their lives, Kōvalaṅ worships Kaṅṅaki, almost as he might a goddess:

"Thou... hast rid me of my troubles. O purest gold, creeper, girl with fragrant curls of hair! O embodiment of modesty, light of the vast world! O tender offshoot of chastity, storehouse of virtues!"
(RD 256-7)

A very different process of remorse takes place in Kaṅṅaki. She may have more reason, a higher reason, for guilt and a better appreciation of it than any of the others. She is free of all guilt from the beginning, until well into her crisis of widowhood. While the other characters' sense of guilt arises from some neglect of principle or detail to which they might have attended and which they might have corrected, Kaṅṅaki's guilt arises precisely from earnest application of her best judgement and profoundest intuitions about the nature of the world in which she has been all her life, as her husband attests, modest, credulous, good in conduct, and chaste. (RD 256)

In Kaṅṅaki, there seems to be a universalization, an embodiment, of guilt as she is caught up in a storm of cosmic retribution and becomes its instrument. Righteously, she demands of the cosmic powers (RD 280) to confirm Kōvalaṅ's innocence and declares the injustice done to her, denying that at any time she could have been responsible for these wretched developments. Maturai is to her a godless

place bereft of good people capable of nurture, and of women worthy of being wives. (RD 284) Remembering her dream, Kaṇṇaki is filled with the conviction that she must take action against the Pāṇṭiya king who has authored her grief. She now realizes that she is to become an instrument of righteous destruction and accepts the responsibility without reservation, just as she has accepted every other responsibility which has devolved upon her. But Kaṇṇaki's grief turns to uncontrollable rage. The death of the Pāṇṭiya is simply not enough to cool her. He yields to aṛam's demand too easily to provide her much satisfaction. She turns mercilessly upon the grieving queen with equal venom. Kaṇṇaki's faith in her role overwhelms her. She cries:

"Though by nature I am ignorant, yet you will see that he who did harm to another in the forenoon will find himself harmed in the afternoon. (RD 293)

If I am... a chaste lady, I shall not allow this city to flourish but will destroy it along with its sovereign. You will see the truth of this." (RD 295)

Leaving the palace for a public place, she cries out:

"O, men and women of Madura of the four temples...! O, gods in the heavens! and O, ye saints! Listen to me. I curse this capital of him who did wrong to my beloved husband. I am not to blame." (RD 296)

There is dissonance between this passage which appears in the 21st k̄atai and the v̄ēnpā of the 20th k̄atai in which Kaṇṇaki is made to say :

"O queen of the conquering king who did an unjust and cruel deed! I have indeed committed a great sin. See what I shall do." (RD 291)

Apart from this reference, which contradicts her claim to blamelessness in the following *kātai*, *Kaṇṇaki* shows no evidence of guilt until much later. Ramachandra Dikshitar notes that the caption "*vēṇpā*" for the stanza seems misplaced as it appears to present *Kaṇṇaki*'s own words. A *vēṇpā*'s function is generally to comment on a chapter's import. (RD 291, n.3) Here is evidence that the *vēṇpā*-s are not at all integral parts of *Iḷaṅkō*'s work - that is, an auto-commentary - but rather interpolations, pure and simple. They interrupt the aesthetic and narrative flow, as the transition from the 20th to the 21st *kātai*-s illustrates. In this *vēṇpā*, *Kaṇṇaki* is made to flaunt the power she has displayed to make the wretched queen's husband become a corpse. As well, she threatens the queen with worse: "See what I shall do."

Kaṇṇaki is surely impelled by her indignant cry for justice into a wrathful state which is merely aggravated, rather than satisfied, by *Neṭuṅceliyan*'s yielding. Tearing off her left breast invokes the god of fire who - after first determining from *Kaṇṇaki* who, by her favour, might be spared destruction - initiates the conflagration of *Maturai*. Relief only comes to *Kaṇṇaki* when she learns from the protector-goddess of *Maturai* why all this has come to pass. The clarification she receives provides her with an intellectual resolution for the course of events and assigns a modicum of responsibility for them to *Kōvalaṅ* (albeit in a

former birth) but provides no true catharsis. All her unexpended rage turns inward into guilt for all the needless destruction she has caused by acting without a full appreciation of the factors involved. Kaṇṇaki's ignorance, her innocence, and her rage were the instruments of a great city's destruction - a city misjudged, as defective in its way only as she is in her own.

All her life Kaṇṇaki had valued propriety, and her virtues had stemmed from knowledge of what, by social convention, is right. She is thrust into a situation where none of the parameters are known nor, for that matter, knowable by any ordinary means. By responding to circumstance in terms of her conventional virtues, she becomes the instrument of powers and purposes she fails to comprehend. This transmutes the self-discipline she esteems, even in her most desperate extremity, into a perverse caricature of itself and turns the force of her wrath inward. As she expires at the close of *Maturaikkāṇṭam*, 23rd *kātai*, she is haunted by her self-betrayal: "Alas, I am a great sinner." (RD 317) For one who had never breached her responsibility before, Kaṇṇaki's dawning knowledge of her role and function in events is traumatic indeed, and can find no resolution in life.

Knowledge:

In this section, I shall examine the sources of knowledge provided to the actors and to the reader of *Cilappatikāram*. There are three kinds of sources for extraordinary or supernatural knowledge which provide clues to conditions and events as they develop. These are

- 1) impersonal omens (some evident only to the reader, but not to the actors),
- 2) dreams, and
- 3) personal oracles.

The suggestion present in omens is largely ignored by the urbane major characters. This shows them to be radically different in mind-set from the common country people, such as the cowherds, who take special care to counteract them. *Kaṇṇaki*, *Kōvalaṇ*, and the *Pāṇṭiya* queen all have ominous dreams. Each dream is profoundly disturbing, yet the potential for providing useable knowledge is dismissed by those who might benefit - *Kaṇṇaki*, *Koivalan*, and the *Pantiyan*. This points to an uncredulous attitude which avoids the claims of superstition. One oracle, *Cālīṇi*, appears early in the story while *Kavunti*, *Kōvalaṇ* and *Kaṇṇaki* are yet travelling toward *Maturai*. Others appear long afterward, through possession, in the process of *Kaṇṇaki*'s recognition as a goddess.

Revelation through oracle has two objectives in

Cilappatikāram -

- 1) to reconcile Kaṇṇaki to her role, and
- 2) to reveal her identity in no uncertain terms to the public at large.

Revelation through omen and dream is intended by Iḷaṅkō to show that the events of life which befall the actors need not come entirely without warning if they but be sensitive to a force of intelligence in their lives which they habitually ignore. From a purely aesthetic and literary perspective, on the other hand, omen and dream may be regarded simply as suggestive motifs which supplement and support the credibility of oracle.

One strikingly curious aspect of Kaṇṇaki's response to crisis is her concern with what others might think of her. She appears to have devoted her life to karpu and the fate which seems to have struck down her husband strikes also at her karpu. As the Pāṇṭiyan who is the instrument of their fate remains free of injury while Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki suffer for no obvious fault of their own, Kaṇṇaki is forced to try to make sense of what is happening. She knows her own innocence and that is enough. While she may not be so certain of her husband's innocence, surely a woman whose virtue can bring rain at will should be able to save even a once-errant husband from evil.

Kaṇṇaki wants to believe that there are good people and a god of justice in Maturai but appearances are to the

contrary. Her arrival at religion, which had formerly taken the form of adherence to social virtues, comes through existential loss and she never, in life, accepts the role she has been assigned by fate. At the hill sacred to *Neṭuvēl* she mourns, "Alas, I am a great sinner." (RD 317) I take this to mean that she recognizes how, lacking the knowledge to act rightly, she has been duped by fate into performing horrific acts and thereby incurred the sin she bewails.

Another hypothesis might be that, after a life of presumed innocence, *Kaṇṇaki* has come to accept the reality of multiple lives and now identifies with the selves which have accumulated the morass of sin for which she has had to compensate by suffering here and now. I favour the former view as it is consistent with her continued distress and proportionate to her righteous fury in *Maturai*. Concerns for unknown defects of former lives would not seem potent enough to generate quite such distress. She has, of course, just been duped by the powers of fate, acting through her own ignorance. Doubtless, from the perspective of her initial concern with her own virtue, to be used so would add insult to injury.

Here *Kaṇṇaki* is confronted by the same conundrum faced by *Neṭuñceliyan*. The action of fate itself instigated the breach of *aṛam* which caused guilt. In the *Pāṇṭiyan*'s case, acting on the royal prerogative to punish villains, he orders a man's execution. He then learns his error, the

result of which, through guilt, leads to his own death. In Kannaki's case, she is also acting in presumed justice and innocence and a fine city is destroyed. She then learns of the agenda, unknown to her, which was behind her actions. The guilt of bearing a harmful ignorance is the same and fate is the identical instigator in each case. A kind of meta-justice has been at work which denies the ultimacy of human values while at the same time using human virtues and vices for the working out of its own equilibrating purpose. (cf. Chapter 4) In such terms, even the goldsmith's actions may be seen in a positive light. Thus it seems that Kannaki's guilt makes more sense as a product of the immediate events rather than of some actions in a distant, impersonal past. If this is so, it constitutes evidence for her non-reconciliation with her state while yet alive. At the very least, Kannaki came to an intimate appreciation of the worth of knowledge.

A dramatic change has taken place when, in the 29th *kātai* she appears before Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, Tēvanti, and others and declares her reconciliation with the Pāṇṭiyan whom she says is "now a good guest in the palace of the king of gods" and summons all others to a like reconciliation in her company as she sports on the hill of Veṅvēlāṇ. (RD 387) Strange as it may seem, the modest, unassuming, long-suffering and childless Kannaki is now the Goddess of Chastity, *Pattinikaṭavuḷ*, purveyor of rains and fertility, but also of

drought and barrenness (and allegedly the enemy of goldsmiths!) (RD 39) A discussion of the soteriology of Cilappatikāram is reserved for the fourth chapter.

The first instance of a supernatural order of meaning which is prognosticative comes at the end of the fifth kātai when

The dark left eye of Kaṇṇaki and the red right eye of Mātavi throbbed and were filled with tears of sorrow and of joy respectively. (RD 133; 5:237-9)

Such left and right throbbing is known from Caṅkam literature as inauspicious and auspicious, respectively. As early as the end of the second kātai an ominous reference occurs which could be construed as prognosticative but, located in a concluding vēṅpā, it is suspect as a later accretion. As it is addressed solely to the reader and hence could not have been appreciated by the actors:

They..., who resembled Kāma... and Rati..., enjoyed close embraces like smoke-coloured serpents; they enjoyed all sorts of pleasures as if realizing the instability of life on the earth. (RD 103)

The suggestive material to be examined here appears to have been meant to provide action-informing knowledge to the actors, should they be sensitive to it, and a sense of deep irony for the reader when the actors fail to cognize it. The theme of hidden knowledge is essential to Iḷaṅkō's three purposes but it is anything but constant throughout the work. The very absence of the supernatural for so much of the work reflects, I believe, a problem Iḷaṅkō faced. His readership was primarily urban, sophisticated and secular in

outlook. He could not afford to annoy his readers with too much fantasy too early.

Apart from these two instances, it is fully one third of the way through the work that we encounter the next prognosticative event, which is Kaṇṇaki's disturbing dream which she relates to Tēvanti, though not in full. (Above, p. 34; RD 172; 9: 45-54) Kaṇṇaki becomes conscious of 1) a move, with Kōvalaṇ, to a strange city, 2) impending injustice, 3) pleading before a king, 4) calamity for the city, 5) an evil deed done by her, and 6) happy results for herself and Kōvalaṇ who, at the time of the dream, still neglected her for Mātavi. It is evident that all the essential components of the story are present even before Kōvalaṇ initiates their move to Matural. Can we fairly say that Kaṇṇaki is in control of her senses when she departs with him? Why does she not apprise him of the dream? Will he think her but a silly girl? It is easiest to see her as conscious only of her imperative to kaṇṇu - to fulfill her role as wife to the best of her ability, wherever it might lead. However, once she experienced the dream, edited it for Tēvanti, and kept silent on its details, it is difficult to imagine why she did not recall it when they set out from Pukār. When she does recall the dream at the point where injustice is inflicted upon herself and Kōvalaṇ, it becomes a map for her to carry out its prescribed pattern. As the larger picture emerges, the dream becomes the instrument of

her motivation and of her deception by the power of fate seeking its own ends.

Another suggestion comes in the 13th *kātai* when the Vaikai River figuratively weeps, covering herself with floral robes, "as if she knew the trouble in store" for *Kaṇṇaki*. (Above, p.37; RD 224) This hint seems to be more for the reader, as surely the weeping of a river - being water, after all - would be obscure to any but the most sensitive observer. All nature seems intent upon warning *Kaṇṇaki* of impending disaster:

The dark water-lily, *āmpal*, and the lotus, as if they understood for certain the unparalleled trouble in store for *Kaṇṇaki* and her husband, seemed to quake with grief (represented) by the waving of their stems and their eyes filled with tears, while the bees that rested (in them) seemed to produce a mourning note in a spirit of sympathy. Lofty flags that were set upon the outer wall of the fortress in commemoration of victory over enemies, seemed to say by a deprecating wave of hands "Do not come (into the city)." (RD 224-5)

Next is the prognosticative dream of *Kōvalaṇ* in the 15th *kātai* which occurs between his first and second visits to Maturai. He relates it to *Māṭalaṇ* who has just told him that all his present sorrows result from deeds in a past birth. *Kōvalaṇ*'s dream is curiously more obscure and passive than *Kaṇṇaki*'s. *Kōvalaṇ* sees no king, but only a low person causing distress to *Kaṇṇaki*. He sees himself and *Kaṇṇaki* attaining the exalted status of renunciants, and *Māṭavi* sending their daughter to a life of renunciation. Most pregnant is his being stripped of his clothes and mounting a

horned buffalo. (Above, p.38; RD 245 ; 15: 95-106) Here is omen within dream. Surely the buffalo must have been known to Kōvalan as the mount of the god of death. He mentions his apprehensions to Māṭalan who urges him to seek protection from his peers within the city without delay, yet he proceeds perversely with his plans. Certainly Kōvalan does not wish to present himself before his fellow-merchants as penniless and so the anklet must first be sold. This pride is his undoing.

As Kōvalan sets out for the gold market in Matural, his path is crossed by a humped bull, an evil omen of which his community was unaware. (RD 257; 16: 98-101) Here is direct evidence of the variability of knowledge between communities about omens and an assertion that, whether known or not, omens exert their effect on all for immediately after this Kōvalan encounters the goldsmith who brings about his death.

Upon Kōvalan's death, though its details remain unknown to them, numerous omens seen in their livestock afflict the cowherd people:

"Alas! The milk in the pot has not curdled. The beautiful eyes of the big humped bulls are full of tears; some calamity is happening.
The fragrant butter in the uṛi does not melt. The lambs do not frisk about; some calamity is happening. Herds of cows with their four-nippled udders are shuddering and bellowing in fear; the big bells (tied to their necks) fall down. O! Some calamity is happening." (RD 263-4; 17: 5 ff.)

These signs are recognized immediately by the people, who

perform a *kuravai* dance to alleviate the suffering of their animals and to set themselves at ease. To these people it is not only necessary to take note of omens but to take a prescribed action to counteract the effects which they represent.

The third dream, that of the *Pāṇṭiya* queen, occurs just after *Kaṇṇaki* recalls her own and sets out to confront *Neṭuñceliyaṇ* and, significantly, before he receives *Kaṇṇaki*. In her dream, the queen envisions the sceptre and parasol fall and the bell at the palace gate shake itself. Its tinkling makes her mind shiver with fear. She sees the eight directions agitated, darkness swallow the sun, an iridescent rainbow shining in the night, and a meteor fall by day. (RD 286; 20:1-12)

The great queen (*Kōpperuntēvi*) approached king *Tennaṇaṇ*... and communicated her evil dream to him who was sitting on the lion-throne. (RD 287)

Clearly, the *Pāṇṭiyaṇ* has been apprised of the queen's dream when *Kaṇṇaki* arrives before him bearing her accusation. Clearly, he recognizes his role in events in the context of this dream when *Kaṇṇaki* proves her anklet. Yet, he is not prepared to give credence to the queen's dream on its own merits. This indicates a disregard for the worth of omen and dream among the upper classes in society which marks them off sharply from the lower classes.

From this point on, omen and dream give way to outright oracular declarations.

Deus ex Machina:

Iḷaṅkō attempts to resolve two problems, and to resolve each of them in two dimensions, the cognitive and the affective. One problem is the conundrum, faced by the Pāṅṅiyan and later by Kaṅṅaki, that fate assigns responsibility to and demands retribution from those whom it, itself, induces to stray from aṅam. It brings suffering and wrong to innocents through the actions, insufficiently supported by knowledge, of others who are equally innocent and ignorant. The other problem is the abyss which lies between knowledge of the very human Kaṅṅaki, gained from our reading of her story, and the subsequent assertion of her identity as the redoubtable Pattinik kaṅavul.

Iḷaṅkō uses miraculous, information-yielding characters, both human and divine, as oracles in his attempt to provide such cognitive and affective resolutions to both of these problems. Unlike the wretched, guilt-ridden mortal Kaṅṅaki of the 23rd kātai, whose dawning intellectual understanding has only aggravated her emotional condition, those who remain alive are offered a resolution to the confusing play of fate, injustice, guilt, apparent freedom, mistaken identity, and necessity - a resolution in which a transformed Kaṅṅaki herself will play an active role. All that has gone before in this section on knowledge has been

suggestive. Even the human oracle, Cālinī of the 12th kātai, who makes outrageous claims on Kaṇṇaki's behalf, remains so and even in the ultimate resolution we are unclear as to just what she might have meant by her prognostications.

The characters of *Cilappatikāram* seem lost in a swirl of uncertainty and ill judgement at critical moments. If any of the characters - Kavunti, Kōvalan, the goldsmith, Neṭuñceliyan, Mātari, Kaṇṇaki herself - had known that they were willing but ignorant tools in the play of fate rather than instruments of their own will and interest, they certainly would not have acted as they did. Even the avaricious goldsmith would have restrained himself from being an unwilling accomplice of fate out of self-interest, for most surely he died in the holocaust of Maturai. In such a round of misplaced effort, due to ignorance of the larger frame of reference - the product of horizons which are too narrow - in what sense can defects in character and action find an apt compensation, an equilibrium? What possible meaning can there be for "good people"? Is it Iḷaṅkō's purpose to show that all life is like this - that apart from some supernatural intervention we must all be blind instruments of fate? Or, are we to seek in his work some other model of humanity which frees us from such bondage? ²⁴

Illusive and uncertain knowledge is removed by the appearance of supernatural characters who declare explicitly, for the benefit of the human survivors, the broader

horizons which are necessary to understand tragic events. (A resolution of the dissonance between actual experience and an ideal of right (aram) is attempted.) The supernatural seems to be introduced at first just to leaven the story with a touch of the marvellous, for example, the story of Tēvanti's marriage to the god Cāttan and the magical transformation of the triflers into jackals. But these are oblique and not germane to the story. The supernatural becomes endemic only in crisis - the sun answering Kannaki as witness to Kōvalan's innocence, the appearance of the god of fire to do Kannaki's bidding, and as we shall see next, a host of supernatural manifestations which provide all the resolution for which we could hope in order to establish a workable perspective on events.

While the sun declares, at the end of the 18th kātai, "This city will be consumed by blazing flames," (RD 280) the first certification that the events of Maturai had to come about of necessity manifests in the mouth of the god of fire who declares, as though summoned by Kannaki as she twists off her breast in the 21st kātai:

"O, chaste lady! As I long ago received the order that I should destroy this city by fire on the day on which you would be cruelly wronged, who can escape death here?" (RD 296)

He acts at her command, as if he were her servant, and ignites the city of Kūṭal. Agni's appearance, declaration, and obedience reinforce the propriety - and what is more, the apparent freedom - of her action as she unleashes his

devouring force.

In the 22nd *kātai* we learn of four guardian spirits, or *pūtam*-s, of Maturai whose function is to support the king in his dispensation of justice so long as his integrity remains. They refuse their duty of protecting the city even before *Kaṇṇaki* tears off her breast, and declare:

"Since we know beforehand that this city is to be consumed by fire on the day on which the king's justice fails, and since we know that this is just, it is proper that we should go away from here."
(RD 303)

All that has gone before is clarified for *Kaṇṇaki* by the family deity of the *Pāṇṭiya* line, called *Maturāpati*, who is described as *Ārdhanarīśvara* (RD 307) but is treated as feminine. She is reluctant to face the sorrow-stricken *Kaṇṇaki* who

... roamed aimlessly through the streets and lanes in a state of agitation, partly struggling hard to walk and partly bewildered and unconscious, (RD 305)

amid the smoking ruins she has caused. *Maturāpati* approaches *Kaṇṇaki* from behind and pleads for her attention. There is good reason for this reticence on the part of the goddess, for it is her task to explain to *Kaṇṇaki* how thoroughly - one might ungenerously say, maliciously - she has been duped. This conversation ensues:

"Blessed lady! Canst thou listen to my complaint?"
Whereupon, the woman with the grief-stricken face, turned to her right and asked: "Who art thou following me from behind? Art thou aware of my deep pain?"
Maturāpati replied: "Yes, I am aware of thy great suffering, O faultless lady! I am the tutelary deity of the vast city of *Kūṭal*. I wish to speak a word. I am much concerned at the fate of thy husband. Lady of

golden bracelets, listen. O listen to a word of mine, noble lady! Wilt thou not pay heed, O friend, to the lamentable disease causing anguish to my mind? Hear, my dear, the fruits of our kings' deeds in their previous births. Listen also to the account of your husband's past deeds resulting in this present misery." (RD 308)

The goddess recounts several stories of the virtues of the Pāṇṭiya dynasty similar to those Kāṇṇaki herself told of the Cōla line. Then Maturāpati says:

"Listen how even such a king [as Neṭuñceliyan's forebears] committed this act of injustice. There was a prediction that, in the month of Āṭi, on the tithi of Aṣṭamī, in the dark fortnight, on a Friday, with Kārttikai and Paraṇi (in the ascendent), a great fire would envelop renowned Madura to the ruin of its king." (RD 314-5)

Such an explicit astrological prediction is, by its very nature, unavoidable when the proper conditions exist, but its premise, that Kāṇṇaki's arrival in Maturai in such vulnerable condition as she did, points to a series of events governing all of Kāṇṇaki's life to the grievous present moment. If so, all Kāṇṇaki's efforts were blind. Was Kāṇṇaki born in just her situation of simplicity and rectitude in order to avoid further karmic embroilment? Is this why Kōvalan was destined to be her match, neglect and all? A comment is in order here which had a place in the section on references to fate, above. It is curious that the first reference to the maturation of fate comes with Kōvalan's departure from Māṭavi, rather than at her adoption by him as concubine when he spontaneously purchases her garland. Of all the incidents of Cilappatikāram, this is surely the most

apt to be attributed to the action of fate, yet Iḷaṅkō is silent. It is incongruous, considering the happiness Kōvalan experienced with Kaṅṅaki and receives no explanation whatsoever. This can only be regarded as the author's studied neglect.

Had Kaṅṅaki not been driven to curse the city, it would not have been destroyed. Was she fated to curse Maturai? Not to have done so would have been to contravene a prediction which is very explicit as to time and circumstance. Maturāpati then tells Kaṅṅaki the story of Nīli and we must likewise ask if her curse could have been avoided, for her grief, too, seems to be the instrument of an inexorable fate, spanning events between lives. Maturāpati concludes:

"That unerring curse has now descended upon thee. This is my explanation. Please listen. When actions in a past birth by those devoid of goodness yield their results, no... penance can stop them.... After fourteen days thou shalt see thy wedded lover in the form of a celestial being, but never more in his earthly form." (RD 316)

Breaking her bangles as a sign of her widowhood, declaring, "I will not sit nor shall I stand till I see the husband of my heart" (RD 316), Kaṅṅaki continues to grieve over her abandoned condition and:

Unconscious of day or night, she went helpless along one side of the flooded Vaikai. Dejected and sad, little thinking whether she was descending into a pit or ascending a cliff, she climbed step by step up the hill sacred to Netuvēl... and there, under the shade of a flowery vēṅkāi grove, she pined saying: "Alas, I am a great sinner". When fourteen days had thus passed, the king of gods, ... praised the great name

of this famous woman, showered unfading flowers upon her and revered her. In a divine chariot at the side of Kōvalan, murdered in the king's city, Kaṇṇaki with the forest-like hair went up to heaven. (RD 317-8)

For those who remain, Kaṇṇaki becomes a legend, almost in her own time. All who inform Ceṅkuṭṭuvan about her are human. He first learns of the one-breasted woman from the Kuravar without yet knowing her name. He learns of her connections in Maturai from Cāttan, who claims to have witnessed the exchange between Kaṇṇaki and Maturāpati. From Māṭalan he learns of the earliest parts of Kaṇṇaki's story in Pukār, and of her journey. Even when her Pattinik kōṭṭam is consecrated in the 28th kātai, there are no supernatural manifestations to disturb the mundane tenor of events.

However, when Tēvanti, Kaṇṇaki's chief nurse, and aṭittōli, along with Aiyai, daughter of Mātari, arrive in Vañci seeking news of her, events rush forward which revolutionize the cult Ceṅkuṭṭuvan has, perhaps cynically, instituted.²⁵ All these women, obviously at pains to reconcile their personal knowledge of the reclusive and modest girl they knew with a king's image of her in stone, lament their failures. Tēvanti calls upon the stone to see them. It is, significantly, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan who responds to the beatific vision of his goddess. He cries:

"What, what is this? O, what is this? What is this? O! I see in the sky the marvellous sight of a lightning-like figure with golden anklets, waist-band, bangles on her arms, golden ear-rings set with excellent diamonds and other ornaments of superior gold," (RD 386)

and Kaṇṇaki, the goddess, releases the Pāṇṭiyan from blame and invites all to sport with her on a hilltop. (RD 387) Could it be that there was no other witness among those gathered there to the vision he takes pains to describe?

Following this incident, Tēvanti, who had been the spouse and, later, devotee of the god Cāttan, became possessed by this god much as Cāliṇi had been by the goddess Korravai in the 12th kātai.

The flower wreaths on her locks fell loose behind her; her brows began to quiver; her coral lips shut to; her white teeth were set in a strange smile; her words were not normal; her lovely face perspired; her fair eyes reddened and her hands were lifted up in a threatening manner. Then she moved her legs and rose from her seat. Unrecognized by many was her understanding. She was in a state of bewilderment. With parched tongue she spoke inspired words before the king of the blossoming kuriñci region. (RD 394-5)

The god, through Tēvanti, points out three infant girls among the devotees who have come to worship Pattinī. He then tells of certain pools of water upon a hill wherein, if one bathes, one's past lives become known. He reminds Māṭalan of a pot of water this Cāttan had once given him for safekeeping and instructs him to sprinkle it now upon these three little girls. Māṭalan does so with Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's approbation. (RD 394-6) ²⁶

When he had thus sprinkled it, the knowledge of their previous births rose up in their minds and (the mother of Kaṇṇaki) began to sob thus: "O my daughter, O my helpmate! Without even caring for me who sympathized with you because your celebrated husband misbehaved towards you, you went to an alien city alone but for the company of your husband, and suffered exceeding trouble. O my dearest! Will you not come and relieve me of my great sorrow?"

Another (the mother of Kōvalaṅ) said. "O, you betook yourself away in the dead of night alone and in misery, with my good daughter-in-law staying with me. Grieving over your departure, I began to rave. I can no more endure this. Will you not come to me, my son?"

The third (Mātari) said: "I left for the bathing ghat of the Vaikai of fresh floods. When I came back I heard (the news) from the youngsters of the famous ancient city. I did not see you in my house. O my dear, my dear, where have you hidden yourself?" (RD 397-98)

Māṭalaṅ explains for the Cēraṅ:

"These three were, in previous births, much attached to the devoted wife of Kōvalaṅ.... They could not follow her to the other world as they had performed no other act of virtue. Because of their excessive attachment born of heartfelt love towards the lovely lady... these two were born as twins... and this elderly cowherdess... who in her previous birth was devoted to the charming lady... has now been born as the little daughter of [one] in the service of Lord Viṣṇu." (RD 398)

Tēvanti, who is commissioned by Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ to offer regular worship at Pattinik kōṭṭam, again becomes possessed and, addressing her remarks to Iḷaṅkō, himself present in the assembly, declares:

"In the artistic Audience Hall of the ancient city of Vañci, when you were seated by your father's side, you frowned upon the astrologer who predicted indications of your succeeding to the throne, so as to relieve the affliction of Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṅ.... You then went away to the Kuṇavāyirkōṭṭam and standing before eminent saints (paṭiyōr) you renounced all thought of the burdens of this earth in order to secure the kingship of the vast realm afar-off and of eternal bliss, incapable of approach by even the faculty of reason." (RD 400-1)

This brings us full circle to the state of affairs in the Patikam where Cilappatikāram begins.

FUNCTIONS OF THE WORK

In the first part of this chapter, I suggest a pattern in Cēraṅ Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's actions which clarifies the initial political use to which Kaṅṅaki's story seems to have been put and illustrate, with a curious episode in our contemporary politics, how implicitly Cilappatikāram continues to inform the Tamiḷ political consciousness. In the second part, I take note of Iḷaṅkō's didactic purpose in Cilappatikāram, and consider a rather elusive ideal with which he flirts. His soteriology is examined in light of this ideal.

Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's use of Kaṅṅaki:

Vaṅcikkāṅṅam is an account of a pragmatic and none-too-pious monarch who is ready to utilize a potent symbol when he finds one. Once past the hurdle of his Pāṅṅiya neighbour's culpability, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan passes the problem of Kaṅṅaki to his consort. She recommends that Kaṅṅaki be duly honoured as a Pattinik kaṅṅavul by the court. It may be that the Kuṅavar raise the issue of Kaṅṅaki in order to stir the Cēraṅ against the Pāṅṅiyaṅ, upon whose mutual hill-country

borders the Kuravar sit. Certainly, she is of great concern to them, whether for intrinsic or expedient reasons. Once it has been established that Kannaki is to be honoured, councillors suggest the customary means - in accordance with the Śāstra-s, a stone is to be procured from a mountain, bathed, carved, consecrated to her, and regular worship commissioned. Thus are Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's tribal subjects, the Kuravar, placated.

A difference of opinion exists among his councillors with regard to the source of the stone for kaṭavuḷ. Fuming under the slights of Kanaka and Vijaya, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan leaps at the opportunity to make a punitive expedition to the Himalayas under pretext of serving this new goddess about whom he as yet knows so little.

Like a wheel that has been set revolving by a stick, the decision to take a stone from the Himalayan slopes for the image..., received confirmation as it enabled Ceṅkuṭṭuvan to vanquish the kings of Aryavarta. (RD 382-3)

Denying the appeals of his more peaceable councillors, the Cēraṅ refuses to send sealed personal explanations of his intentions to his fellow kings, thus assuring that his actions will be rightly taken as hostile.

More significant than the battle with the northern kings is the relationship with the ally, Nūrruvar Kannar. Through him, or them, he is able to attain the southern banks of the Ganges, coming all the way from southern Karnataka, without incident. In the 2nd century C.E. the

Andhra-s may well have controlled this entire area and, not wishing to resist an army with ostensive interests beyond their borders, offered safe passage and very likely supplies in order to avoid conflict, as such an army on campaign would normally supply itself by pillage. So long as they could convince Ceṅkuṭṭuvan to go home again, he could be a valuable ally for a time on their northern border. Presupposing such a peaceful transit, the presence of a Tamil army north of the Ganges is credible.

Ceṅkuṭṭuvan is not reluctant to display the glory of his arms by sending royal prisoners before the other two crowned kings of the Tamil land. At home in Vañci (RD 374), he receives word that both the Cōlan and the Pāṇṭiyan have deprecated his victory claiming that it is a small matter to capture enemies in flight. The enraged Ceṅkuṭṭuvan is calmed by the brāhmaṇa, Māṭalan, who recalls for him his honourable rule of fifty years, reminding him that the brashness of youth and the strength to answer it are transitory. He should ignore young kings and, rising above such petty concerns, perform great yajña-s for his own welfare. Whereupon, Ceṅkuṭṭuvan declares a general amnesty for prisoners, including the Aryan kings, (RD 380) and has the stone for Kaṇṇaki installed with full brahmanical rites in a shrine (Pattinik Kōṭṭam) constructed and decorated in accordance with the śāstra-s. He establishes ongoing orders of worship and periodic festivals. (RD 381) Pattinik kaṭavul becomes

the seal of approval for his ambitions, but is his gratitude sincere?

And what, if any, of this is "history"? The tale of Kannaki and Kovalan in *Pukar* and *Maturai kantam-s* remains, until its very end with the holocaust of Maturai, a series of private, face to face events. *Vaṅcīk kāṅṭam* asserts an historical claim and logic which is at once grandiose, public, and plausible. Srinivasan writes,

History is as much based on what people believe to be true of themselves as on what research can prove to be true.... It is belief which conditions action which makes history. There is therefore no reason why Puranic and hagiological literature can't be taken to represent what Indians have understood of India and the past. To look upon it as fiction that is meant to hoodwink the gullible is a form of prochronism. (1985: 12)

Tamil "popular" history, which fuels the contemporary political imagination, has drawn heavily for its substance on *Cilappatikaram*, especially on *Vaṅcīk kāṅṭam* which proclaims the greatness of a Tamil king vis-a-vis the North. Even *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan*'s northern allies are depicted as his tributaries and claims are made for his sovereignty from, as it were, Kumari to Kailāsa. *Cilappatikāram* seems to have been known continuously, without interruption, since its origin and exists in multiple versions, portraying the characters with quite divergent motives, in order to speak to a variety of audiences, some of which are political. It has been popular with the Non-Brahman Movement, and its derivatives, of the 20th century for its assertion of an independent and

solidary Tamil identity. This claim is a vulnerable one for it is contraindicated by Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's own political expediency in founding the pattini cult as a brahmanical institution enjoying royal patronage. Iḷaṅkō makes no attempt to conceal this.

To illustrate the power of Cilappatikāram and the image of Kaṇṇaki to give form to the Tamils' perceptions of themselves and their society, we need look no further than the political crisis which occurred in the Tamil Nadu state assembly at Madras in January, 1988. The ministry of Janaki Ramachandran - widow of the immensely popular late chief minister, M.G. Ramachandran, who had passed away the previous month - fell on a vote of non-confidence. Mrs. Janaki, first female chief minister of Tamil Nadu, on the supposition that she had been horribly and unjustly wronged, first by widowhood and then publicly shamed, took train -- to where else but Maturai -- to cry for justice. She made public appeals to her supporters along the way, but it was to the ghost of Neṭuñceliyan the Pāṇṭiyan, still enthroned at Maturai that she went to address her grievance.

Didactic Purpose:

Ilaṅkō's work is very clearly a platform for his didactic intent, from the statement in the *Patikam* of his ostensive reason for writing *Cilappatikāram* to illustrate three truths through to his final public supplication:

"O distinguished and good people, ... rise above pleasure and pain in accordance with the approved course of conduct. Know God, and serve those who have known Him. Fear speaking falsehood. Avoid tale-bearing. Refrain from meat-eating and abjure injury to any living being. Give gifts and perform the prescribed penance. Do not forget the good done to you. Despise bad friendship. Do not give false evidence, and never depart from words of truth. Do not fail to join assemblies of people learned in *dharma*. Strive ever to escape the meeting-places of the unrighteous. Avoid other people's wives, and give succour to those who are dying. Protect the household virtues, but reject what is bad. Abstain immediately from drinking, theft, lust, falsehood and useless company. Youth, wealth and the body are impermanent. You cannot escape from the days allotted to you: nor can you avoid what will happen. So seek the best help to the land of your final destination.... Do all this, O dwellers on this wide prosperous earth."
(RD 401-2)

In *Cilappatikāram*, people certainly serve as the instruments of fate. How they do so is in part a function of their state of knowledge which is, in part, a function of their ethical stature. The upright *Pāṇṭiyaṅ* fails, as does *Kaṇṇaki*. The solutions Ilaṅkō offers do not seem to come from taking, and sticking to, an ethical position alone. We mere humans appear to be the imbalanced agents for the working out of the consequences of others. This imbalance is the

product of both capability and ignorance, potency and ineptitude. It is the mover of events. Over-reaction is evidence of this imbalance. Kōvalan overreacts to Mātavi's ūṭal. Kavunti over-reacts to the "triflers". Mātari over-reacts in her dotting on Kaṇṇaki. The Pāṇṭiyan most certainly acts with gravity in dispatching his guards without serious reflection on the facts - another instance of imbalance.

Can Iḷāṅkō offer an escape from this bondage? I noted above (p. 106) that some other model for humanity may be sought in Iḷāṅkō which offers just such an escape. He introduces this ideal through a character who makes a very brief, early appearance. To him is attributed knowledge of all past and future lives, which would seem to answer the problem of the proliferation of suffering through ignorance. In the 10th kātai, several days out of Pukār at Śrīraṅgam, Kavunti, Kaṇṇaki, and Kōvalan meet a Cāraṇa. Recognizing him, the very revered Kavunti

... fell prostrate with her companions at his feet, saying: "May all our past sins perish." (RD 184)

Though the Cāraṇa who had a knowledge of the past, present and future knew the reason for their coming there, he did not feel afflicted being a hero who had completely put aside attachment and anger. (RD 184-5)

He then spoke as follows: "O Kavunti of great and abundant distinction! You know how inexorable are the laws of destiny. They do not cease (from action) even if ordered to cease. Nor can its wholesome effect be wiped away. They are like the sprouts shooting forth from sown seeds. Like the lighted lamp that is extinguished in an open plain when the high winds blow, is life in a body.

"The All-Knowing, the incarnation of dharma, He who has transcended all limits of understanding, the

great Friend, the great Victor (Jinēndra), the Accomplisher, the Great Person (Bhagavaṇ), the foundation of all *dharma*, the Lord, the All-Righteous, the Inner Essence (of the Āgama), the Pure, the Ancient-One, the All-Wise, the vanquisher of Wrath, the Dēva, the Blissful Lord, the Supreme Being, the Possessor of all virtues, the Light that illumines the world above, the great Truth, the All-Humble, the great Cāraṇa, the Root Cause of all, the yōgin, the great One, the great Illumination, the Dweller in everything, the great Guru, the Embodiment of Nature, Our great God, the One of undiminishing fame, the great King of virtues, the All-Prosperous, the great God, the Self-born, the four-faced, the Bestower of the *angas*, the Arhat, the peace-bestowing Saint, the One God, the Possessor of eight qualities, the indivisible old Substance, the Dweller in the Heaven, the foremost of the Vēdas, and the shining Light that dispels ignorance. None can escape the prison of this body unless he obtains the illumination of the revealed Vēda proclaimed by Him who has the various (above-mentioned) names." (RD 185-6)

This Cāraṇa's sources certainly appear eclectic! He seems willing to credit any plausible name or form of the ultimate principle (though, curiously, all those he mentions seem to be male) and to venture a guess as to his sect would be foolishness on my part. At some points in this speech he sounds like a Śaiva, at others like a Vaiṣṇava or a Jaina.

Kavunti then declares she will never open her ears, nor eyes, nor any sense to another teaching than that of this Cāraṇa. Despite this assertion, she is not free of grief when she loses Kaṇṇaki and even this worshipful nun fails in her composure, taking her own life. The Cāraṇa,

... rising to a height of two spans... went away along a path in the sky," (RD 187)

satisfied for the present with her devotion, though he must know she will fail to sustain it.

It is the briefness of this Cāraṇa's appearance and his being credited with an unafflicted knowledge of past, present and future which makes him so noteworthy. *Cilappatikāram* describes a pattern of human bondage to fate through ignorance. It uses the revelation of knowledge by tearing away the shades of ignorance, as with the three young girls, to broaden the horizon of understanding. This understanding, however, is limited by information concerning an immediately preceding life and also requires revelation by an external agent. Almost at the outset, Iḷaṅkō presents this character who knows all that has gone before and all that is to come, yet assigns him no further active role in events. The Cāraṇa clearly represents the author's privileged perspective. As a literary device, this is convenient. In the didactic context, his appearance becomes more. It is a statement of faith which points to a way beyond the confines of this world's sordid conditions, just as it points beyond the world of Iḷaṅkō's story, transcending even the apotheosis of Kaṇṇaki into *Pattini kaṭavuḷ*.

Soteriology:

It is necessary, therefore, to look at the soteriology of *Cilappatikāram*. To what sort of status do those who die attain? *Mātari* and the mothers of *Kōvalan* and *Kaṇṇaki* are reborn, their aching consciousness of their former lives trapped within and suppressed by the selfhood of three young girls. They are unable to be with the *Kaṇṇaki* they love or even to be aware of her divinity. The *Pāṇṭiya* queen dies at the feet of her husband and we can only guess at her fate. The only evidence we have is the *Cēra* queen's word:

"Let the... queen whose soul departed before she experienced the agony of surviving her husband, enjoy the great bliss of Heaven!" (RD 335)

Kōvalan and the *Pāṇṭiya* are comfortable guests in the house of the king of gods and *Kaṇṇaki*, after passing through the phase of suffering, struggling goddess, is able to communicate with those on earth who may choose to be her devotees - or her antagonists. She can extend her grace, through rains, or withhold it, bringing drought and misery. Though certainly powerful, this goddess is defective as an ideal.

Nowhere does *Iḷāṅkō* point the way to disinterested purity and wholeness (*vīṭu*, *mukti*) but through the *Cārana* in the 10th *kātai*. Human effects and embroilment in *samsāra*

continue, and as Kaṇṇaki's state is a heavenly one, involved in action still, that condition also may well come to an end some day. The Cāraṇa, on the other hand, is all-knowing and free of grief. The ideal of mokṣa is seen here as it is not found within the development of the story itself.

At whom is this story directed? Are we to embrace it as our own story, accepting ourselves as blind instruments of a fate which, at any given moment may be working for our good or against it; or working toward some unknown greater good, to be appreciated by others who come after us, but which may well result in our destruction?

The outer shell of Iḷaṅkō's message is collective and ethical, as seen from his concluding statement. Iḷaṅkō's penultimate concern is with human values and social order, but his inner message is an imperative to the kind of knowledge this Cāraṇa has, which ends sorrow. Iḷaṅkō writes for at least these two audiences, each with a different horizon:

- 1) those who have a need and a use, through ritual, for the goddess *Pattini*, residing in heaven as dispenser of grace, and
- 2) those who can discriminate between the defect of knowledge which led to her apotheosis and the pure, total knowledge, unbounded by illusive time, which sustains the Cāraṇa.

For the former, Iḷaṅkō provides an affective and cognitive

literary reconciliation. For the latter, the necessary answer is embodied in the appearance of the Cāraṇa, the story itself illustrating the futility of any other than his course. It will be noted that recalling her dream spurred Kannaḳi to action. Forgetfulness is intrinsically bound up with the process of becoming and return. The Cāraṇa never forgets. ²⁷

CONCLUSION

In the end, Iḷaṅkō offers a conceptual and affective solution to the problems of suffering and fate by confirming through oracles how matters could hardly have been other than they, in fact, turned out. The appearance of Kaṇṇaki as the goddess is in large part reason for this success. We are to take her appearance, forgiving as she does the Pāṇṭiya king and inviting her devotees to sport with her, as final and sufficient evidence of her new, transcendent condition. Her former friend, Tēvanti, is recruited and commissioned to serve in Pattini's temple, lending credence through her personal witness, augmented by her faculty for god-possession, to the new cult which is patronized by Tamil as well as by foreign kings.

This may be an adequate resolution for those with an arms-length involvement, but there is no such resolution for Kaṇṇaki's nor for Kōvalan's parents, nor for Mātari, nor Kavunti, nor for Neṭuñceliyan, all of whom died in grief. When asked if Iḷaṅkō provides an answer to the mystery of raw pain, we must answer in the negative, for his affective resolution is a third-party one and means nothing for the lives of those ground down by the working of fate. Certainly

Neṭuñceliyan's guilt is unrelieved within his living experience, though we learn from goddess-Kaṇṇaki that, as the Pāṇṭiyan has paid with his life for his misjudgement, his sorrow is at an end. Whatever rapture the living Kaṇṇaki may have known as Kōvalan appeared in a celestial chariot to carry her off to heaven, all we know with certainty is her sustained misery, exhaustion and remorse. Forsaken, in her last hours, she is anything but a model of faith. Were we to leave Kaṇṇaki and the story here, *Cilappatikāram* would be an eloquent tragedy. As the Indian tradition does not countenance the truly tragic, we have *Vañcik kāṇṭam* and an attempt at public resolution in place of what is impossible privately, given the evidence of Kaṇṇaki's worldly experience. And this is, of course, why her cameo appearance to absolve the world of its cruelty and guilt becomes so necessary.

One writer contends that by her "free and passionate actions" Kaṇṇaki "finally succeeds in compelling the forces of fate (and *karma*) to give up" (Zvelebil 1973: 182; Zvelebil 1974: 133). I believe I have shown how this is not the case. Whatever victory may be attributed to Kaṇṇaki is exoteric. She is unequivocally subject to fate throughout, as well as in the end. Her actions were instrumental to her apotheosis but were themselves predetermined and executed through the agency of ignorance founded on her own deep sense of propriety. That human actions which bear the sense

and appearance of freedom may well not be so at all, is essential to the message of Iḷaṅkō.

But not all actions need be so foredestined. Merit can still be obtained, but when its positive influence is exhausted, fate lies ready in wait for a moment of weakness - an opportunity to pounce upon the unprotected when nothing can forestall it - bringing upon its victims the fruits of their own former malice or neglect.

APPENDIX

Terms and Definitions:

In the course of this paper, a number of Tamil terms will be used. These and others which are conceptually related to them are glossed below for the convenience of the reader.

The following are ethical or religious terms:

aṇāṅku: An ominous force, related to karpu.

aṛam: Moral or religious duty, virtue, righteousness, the performance of good works prescribed by the śāstra-s, including justice, hospitality, liberality. It may be regarded (Kailasapathy 1968: 91) as a pathway along which to virtuously proceed, correct acts fitting custom, and justice itself. (Sanskrit dharmam).

ū: Fate, destiny, good or bad fortune. This term occurs alone and in a compound several times throughout Cilappatikāram. Usually it appears as ūvinai or "the action of fate", but also as tivinai or "wicked deeds", vantavinai or "coming deeds", kaṭuvinai or "bitter fate", valvinai or "potent, strong fate". ū may also mean pakai - hatred, enmity, malice. ū and vinai become synonymous in this work,

this synonymy being central to the author's thesis. *Palaviṇai*, or actions in former lives considered as latent cause of events (Sanskrit *sāñcita karma*) awaiting fruition in the present. When realized in the present, this is known as *prārabdha karma*. It may be seen that there is overlap in the semantic fields of *aṛam* and *ūl*. It is Iḷaṅkō's burden to bring these ideas into a coherent pattern.

ūlmurai: The order resulting from previous births. *ūl* and *murai* tend to be used synonymously.

kaṭavuḷ: God.

karpu: Virtue acquired in marriage; chastity.

kēṭu: Loss, destruction, degeneracy. *Nērmaik kēṭu*, *anīti*: Injustice, destruction of *nēрмаi*.

koṭuṅkōl: Crooked sceptre; the symbol of unrighteous, and therefore illegitimate, rule. The *kōl* was a standard of measure, both of length and of time, in dance. (RD 109-10) Along with the umbrella, it was an important royal symbol. In reference to the *Cōḷan*'s *kōl*, Iḷaṅkō says: "The *talaikkōl*, or the staff, was the central shaft of a splendid white umbrella captured in the battle-field from monarchs of great repute. It was covered over by purest *jāmbūnada* gold, its joints bedecked with nine gems. This staff represented Jayanta, Indra's son, and as such was worshipped in the palace of the protecting king of the white umbrella." (RD 111)

kōṭṭam: Established locus for religious practices.

ceṅkōl: Upright sceptre; the symbol of a king's righteous, and therefore legitimate, rule.

tīṅku: Injury, the result of tīmai.

tīmai: Vice, wickedness, vileness, turpitude, baseness, depravity, evil.

nānam: Sense of shame, honour; what one feels about one's own acts; part of the heroic code of honour and integrity. (Kailasapathy 1968: 87-88)

niyati: Also of Sanskrit origin niyatih connotes ūl with the accompanying sense of restraint, duty, obligation.

niyamam: Also Sanskrit niyamaḥ, this word connotes certainty, ascertainment, and its verbal form, niyamittal, connotes "producing, originating, engendering, bringing into being".

nēрмаi, nīti, also muṛaimai: Justice. Sanskrit, nītiḥ.

pattini: A chaste wife who embodies karpu.

paḷi: Blame; righteous indignation; what one feels for another's acts or what one imagines others will feel about one's acts; it was important to kings to have "blameless strength", or strength without paḷi.

(Kailasapathy 1968: 90)

pāl: The term equivalent to ūl used in Tolkāppiyam which devotes a chapter to it, in which it is said:

"Fate is inexorable and ... it overtakes us by surprise, even if we ... devise a way to counter it."

(C. Balasubramanian 1980: 177)

muraimai: Regularity, order, plan, manner, system, routine, course.

vinai: Action, deed. Sanskrit, *karman*.

viti: A Sanskrit term *vidhiḥ* has also become a synonym for ūl.

Literary terms not relating to ethics:

akaval: Blank verse; the oldest known metre in *Tamil* which was favoured by *Caṅkam* authors.

Iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ = Iḷaṅkō + aṭikaḷ: Junior royal ascetic. It is told in *Cilappatikāram* how the author, whose name we do not know, renounced any residual claim to the Cera throne in order to assure it to his brother, *Cenkuttuvan*, whose name may be glossed as "fine one from the *Kuṭṭunāṭu*".

uraiyiṭaiyiṭṭa pāṭṭuṭaicceyyuḷ: A narrative poem. The description given in the *Patikam*, which is the introduction to *Cilappatikāram*, for the style of the work.

kaṭṭurai: An avowal, solemn declaration, undoubted truth, infallible description.

poruṭṭoṭarnilaicceyyuḷ: Continuous long verses dealing with a single theme. (Vijayalakshmy 1981: 85)

venpa: A metre used in *Cilappatikāram* for purposes of a commentary verse at the end of a *kātai*.

Caṅkam Motifs and Modern Survivals:

A woman who cast off one breast is known in *Puraṇā-nūru* 278 and in *Narrinai* 216. (Zvelebil, 1973: 52, 173) In the latter, she is called *Tirumāmaṇi*, just as *Cāliṇi* calls *Kaṇṇaki*. *Narrinai* is thought to be of the 1st c. B.C.E. to 2nd c. C.E., which makes it anterior to *Cilappatikāram*. (Zvelebil, 1973: 42)

Obeyesekere tells how in Śrī Laṅkā *Kaṇṇaki*'s statement that she is the daughter of the *Pāṇṭiyaṇ* is taken quite literally. An astrologer predicts that a daughter born to the *Pāṇṭiyaṇ* will eventually bring about his death. He sends the newborn off in a container on the river. (How a container set adrift of the Vaigai turns up at the mouth of the *Kāvēri* is not made clear.) Raised by foster parents, *Kaṇṇaki* returns to Maturai and brings about the death of her natural father. (1973: 219) Obeyesekere, in *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, (1984) portrays in detail the surviving cult of *Pattini* which seems to be thriving among the Buddhist Sinhalese as also among the Lankan Tamils. The Buddhist version of *Kaṇṇaki*'s story varies in many significant respects from *Ilaṅkō*'s.

In Śrī Laṅkā *Pattini* is credited with having power over epidemics and is the guardian of female chastity. (Vasudeva Rao, 1979: 187) She is also the guardian of the

northern quarter of the island and one of the four Perahera festival deities celebrated at Kandy. In her temples an anklet is worshipped as an icon. She sponsors social games such as "horn-pulling", coconut breaking, and a flower game. Among the Tamils of the north, her story is closer to that of the mainland tradition. (Vasudeva Rao, 1979: 189)

Several folk stories are in active circulation among oral poets in Tamil Nāṭu. These are usually called Kōvalaṇ Kātai, Kaṇṇaki Purāṇam, or a similar variant. (Zvelebil, 1973: 173; Beck, 1972)

Kaṇṇaki in her divine form has come to be identified with goddess Kālī, as in Pukalenti Puḷavar's Kōvalaṇ Kātai of the 16th or 17th century. In this story, the goddess settled down at Tiruvōrriyūr, now a northern suburb of Madras, to be called Vaṭṭapuriammaṇ. M. Raghava Iyengar is cited (in Araicchi Tokudi, p. 239) as noting that Dūrgā is worshipped as Kaṇṇaki here annually, a special pandal representing Maturai, being burnt. (Vasudeva Rao, 1979: 190)

According to Sreedhara Menon,

The Kurumba Bhagavathi temple at Cranganore is believed to be the Kannaki temple consecrated by the Chera king Senguttuvan, the hero of Silappadhikaram. (1978: 41)

Vasudeva Rao (1979: 185) cites Cunningham (Archeological Survey of India Report, Vol. 9:31) as referring to a temple in Eastern Malwa of the Gupta period to a Goddess, Pataina Devi, whom the local people identified with Dūrgā. This lends at least circumstantial support to the contention

in the text that a king of Mālava attended the *Pattinik kōṭṭam* in Vañci. (RD 400)

Hameed (1968: 197) recounts the myth of the victimized wife, "Pazhayanuur Niili" (*Paḷayanūr NṬli*), shows its structural relationship with the story of Kaṇṇaki in *Cilappatikāram*, and provides evidence for the influence of the classic on the pattern of apotheosis in popular culture. This pattern is further developed by Blackburn. (1985)

The popularity of the story prior to the rediscovery of the foundational classic poetry of the *Caṅkam* is evidenced in Vinson's observation that a *Kōvalaṇ* story corresponding to the first two *Kāṇṭam*-s of *Cilappatikāram* was published by one M. Andrew Robertson in Madras, in 1859, under the English title: *A Compilation of Papers in the Tamil Language*. (Vinson, 1969: 117)

NOTES

Introduction:

1 From L. *justus*, lawful, right, proper.

2 Behind this appraisal may be the answer to the more remote question of whether his solution is merely culture-specific, with a limited usefulness, or universally valid, offering wider insight and application.

3 O'Flaherty 1984: 206 - "Epistemology is the shadow double of ontology. The Indian texts treat it as a single problem from the very start; they ask how our minds affect the world and how the world exists in our minds."

4 In Chapter 2, p.59, I take note of several diads which are amenable to structural analysis. At least one attempt using such a method has been made on the text of *Cilappatikāram*, though with a notable lack of success. (Handoo 1976) However useful it may be to the researcher for forming preliminary hypotheses or for prognosticative comparative studies, this method does not take us very far in understanding the particular issues within a human culture which form the matrix for experience upon which its world of ideas is built.

5 For the information in this section, I am indebted to Dr. G. Subbiah of Viśva-Bhāratī University, Śāntiniketan, who read for me the Tamil original from the fourth edition.

6 Chakravarti Rajagopalacari of Teraḷantūr, about eight kilometers north of Tañjāvūr, and considered the birthplace of the epic poet Kampan.

7 *Arumpatam* refers to a "rare/great/unusual word".

8 "Aṭiyārkkunallar" is a pseudonym which signifies "One who is good to the wretched (or, to the Śaiva devotees)".

9 [Null]

10 *Aṭiyum Muṭiyum*. Dr. G. Subbiah also provided this information from his reading.

11 Aṭikal is an honorific, meaning "ascetic".

12 Kuḷavanikaṅ Cīttalai Cāttanār was the author of Maṇimēkalai, the sequel to Cilappatikāram.

Chapter 1:

13 Cf. Tirukkural 55.

14 This judgement indicates Iḷāṅkō's favour for Jainism.

15 This indicates that Kaṅṅaki acts upon the norms of marriage and out of her own principles, rather than out of purely emotional attachment to Kōvalaṅ. This is why she endures.

16 Ramachandra Dikshitar observes that this term, taken as the "royal we", translates directly as "Sātakarṇi". Several Āndhra kings are known by this name. Numismatic evidence bearing it in Prakrit and Tamil bilingual inscriptions, dating from the latter part of the 2nd century C.E. exists. See Sankaranarayanan 1979.

Chapter 2:

17 Kaṅṅaki's apotheosis is compared in Chapter 4 with a higher-order ideal presented by Iḷāṅkō through the brief appearance of a rather unique character.

18 See discussion, Chapter 4.

19 Some popular versions of the story do make just such a claim.

20 I have been unable to find in the material available to me any prior instance of a carved image being set up in this manner and adorned by royal patronage.

21 For an unsystematic survey of contemporary Kaṅṅaki-worship, see Appendix, p. 133.

22 Kaṅṅaki learns of Nīli's curse from Maturāpati, the guardian goddess of Kūṭal. See Chapter 3, p.86.

23 For example, the generosity of Karna in the Mahābhārata which led directly to his death, and the premise for the hope of the Bhodisattva who exchanges entry into nirvāṇa for the work of transferring one's own punya to other sentient beings for their spiritual betterment.

Chapter 3:

24 I return to this question in the next chapter, under the heading, "soteriology", p.123.

25 See Chapter 4, p.114, for an assessment of Ceñkuṭ-tuvan's treatment of the cult.

26 These are the events alluded to in Chapter 1, p.52.

Chapter 4:

27 Plato says in the *Phaedrus*: 250, "For those who have forgotten, remembering is a virtue; but the perfect never lose the vision of truth and they have no need to remember."

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