

PATTERNS IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN CLASSICAL TAMIL TEXTS

PATTERNS IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN EARLY SOUTH INDIA:  
A STUDY OF CLASSICAL TAMIL TEXTS

By

GANAPATHY SUBBIAH, M.A., Ph.D.

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AUTHOR: Ganapathy Subbiah, B.A. (Madras University)  
M.A. (Banaras Hindu University)  
Ph.D. (Calcutta University)

SUPERVISORS: Professor K. Sivaraman  
Professor P. Younger  
Professor L. Greenspan  
Professor R. Radhakrishnan

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analytic study of specific patterns of religious thought in early south India as found in the earliest extant literary texts in Tamil, one of the classical languages of India and one of the oldest living languages of the world. Commonly known in the Tamil tradition as the *caṅkam* literature, this corpus of poetry is generally assigned to the early centuries of the Common Era, and is thought of as constituting the classical heritage of Tamil culture. There has not been a major attempt to investigate the importance of this remarkable body of literature to the development of religious thought in south India, a region which is widely acknowledged as the birth-place of a number of religious movements including the great devotional movement of the early medieval times, called the *bhakti* religion.

The reluctance on the part of historians of Indian religious thought to take up the study of classical Tamil texts was partly due to a perception that the classical Tamil texts were essentially 'secular', and, therefore, of not much interest to a historian of religious thought. I had, therefore, to begin the thesis with a historiographical



critique showing how limited and limiting that perception was and suggesting that, whatever unique features that classical Tamil texts may have, they are not unyielding to the queries of a student of religion.

In addition to other types of poems, there are a few explicitly religious poems which are regarded by tradition as part of the classical corpus. Taking my initial cues from those poems, I have isolated three central themes in the literature, namely space, hero, and gift around which the religious thought of the culture can be discerned. By a careful and selective analysis of the so-called 'secular' poems in the corpus, and through an analysis of sections of the major grammatical treatise of the classical period, I have shown that the thought underlying these three themes was integral to classical Tamil culture.

The thesis has in the end a dual purpose. Its stated purpose is to assess the importance of the period of the classical Tamil texts in religious history, but it also indirectly demonstrates the need for a fresh approach to the study of early Tamil literature.

## PREFACE

My principal objective in this dissertation is to demonstrate the significance of classical Tamil texts in the history of religious thought in India in general, and in the development of religious thought in the culture of the Tamils in particular. Such a task has long remained overdue. A major deterrent in attempting such a task was the notion that the classical Tamil texts were essentially 'secular' in content and spirit, and, therefore, there was little point in looking for religious ideas in them. I have tried not to allow this perception to cloud my understanding of the classical Tamil texts, and I have stated in the Introductory Chapter my reasons for taking a different approach to the study of these texts.

By way of justifying my approach and the kind of questions that I have posed and attempted to answer, I can perhaps do no better than quote from what one of my supervisors, Professor K. Sivaraman stated over two decades ago. In his evaluation of the Ph.D. dissertation of one of his students, who had worked on the medieval theological texts of the Śaiva Siddhānta school of thought, he said,

It would have been a more rewarding undertaking if the candidate had inquired into what fundamental faith is expressed in the forms which civilization has taken down the ages in the history of the Tamils, for

the possible roots of Śaiva Siddhānta, a task, incidentally, that still awaits the attention of the cultural historians of India . . . What is the kind of faith reflected in the 'secularism' of Tirukkural and the Saṅgam classics? How is it related to the emergence and proliferation of the more specific forms of the Saiva and the Vaishṇava faiths, admittedly of Tamil country origin? An investigation of this kind . . . would have yielded valuable results.

In the following pages, I have made an attempt to identify some of the constituent elements of the 'fundamental faith' as revealed in classical Tamil texts. It would be presumptuous on my part to claim that this dissertation meets the challenge fully and squarely. That task is a long and arduous one. However, the present work, I believe, meets the challenge at least partially, and it is for the reader to judge whether the work succeeds in what it claims to do. In the meanwhile, I remain gratified that I was able to address the issue, and suggest to the best of my ability some preliminary answers.

It is with pleasure that I acknowledge my gratitude to the Executive Council, Viśva-Bhāratī University, Santiniketan, India, for granting me study leave from my post in the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology for four years (1984-88) in order to pursue my research in Canada, and to the Government of Ontario for granting me an Ontario Graduate Scholarship for the year

1986-87.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many individuals for enabling me to complete the work. First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor K. Sivaraman without whose encouragement it would not have been possible for me to come to Canada and work at McMaster University. At McMaster university, I had the good fortune of working closely with Professor Paul Younger. His intellectual influence on me and my work has been immense. Whenever I faltered in my steps in the course of writing the thesis, he was there at every step of the way to offer his help and advice. My thanks are due to Miss. Sobana Harihar for patiently going through the thesis and for making valuable suggestions.

Finally, two individuals have played a silent but important role in the completion of the present work. They are Mrs. Parvathy Sivaraman and my friend Kartik. My life in Canada would have been poorer without their love and affection. To them both, I dedicate this work.

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## SCHEME OF TRANSLITERATION

Sanskrit words are transliterated throughout the thesis in accord with the standard system employed in the **Epigraphia Indica** series. The scheme of transliteration of Tamil words is given below. In transliterating current proper names, however, I have preferred to use more familiar forms (e.g. Madurai, not Maturai, Somasundaram, not Cōmacuntaram).

Vowels			Consonants					
அ	-	a	க்	-	k			
ஆ	-	ā	ங்	-	ñ			
இ	-	i	சு	-	c			
ஈ	-	ī	ஞ்	-	ñs	ஊ	-	l
உ	-	u	ட	-	t	உ	-	v
ஊ	-	ū	ண்	-	n	ஊ	-	l
ஏ	-	e	த்	-	t	ஊ	-	l
ஏ	-	ē	ந்	-	n	ஊ	-	r
ஐ	-	ai	ப	-	p	ஊ	-	n
ஓ	-	o	ம்	-	m			
ஔ	-	ō	ய்	-	y			
ஔ	-	au	ர	-	r			
			ஹ்	-	h			

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AI	-	Ancient India, Delhi, 1946-
Akat.	-	Akattiṇaiyiyal (Tol.)
AKN	-	Aiṅkuṟunūṟu
AN	-	Akanānūṟu
Cēnā.	-	Cēnāvaraiyar
Ceyyūḷ.	-	Ceyyūḷiyal (Tol.)
CII	-	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
Cil.	-	Cilappatikāram.
Col.	-	Collatikāram (Tol.)
comm.	-	commentary
DED	-	T.Burrow and M.B.Emeneau, A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary.
eṭṭu.	-	eṭṭuttokai
HOD	-	History of Dharmaśāstra, 5 vols., by P. V. Kane
IA	-	Iṟaiyaṅār Akapporuḷ (Kaḷaviyal)
IJJ	-	Indo-Iranian Journal
Iḷam.	-	Iḷampūraṅar
Kalit.	-	Kalittokai
KP	-	Kuṟiṅcippāṭṭu
Kuṟaḷ	-	Tirukkuṟaḷ
KT	-	Kuṟuntokai
MK	-	Maturaikkāñci



With other peoples, religion is only a part of life; there are things religious and things lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion . . . To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and his temporal life, are incapable of being so distinguished. They form one compact and harmonious whole, to separate which into component parts is to break the entire fabric. All life to him was religion and religion never received a name from him, because it never had for him an existence apart from all that had received a name.

Bankimchandra Chatterji, cited in  
T. N. Madan, **Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture**. (1987), pp. 142-143.

**CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I.1. Objective

The principal aim of the present work is to contribute toward an understanding of the religious history of south India through a study of patterns of thought and behaviour in the life of the early Tamils. The study is based on the earliest extant literary works in Tamil language, known collectively as the **caṅkam** literature.

The study of south Indian history and culture has come a long way during the past three decades. Subjecting the available source-material to a penetrating and rigorous analysis, scholars have elevated the discourse on different phases of south Indian history and culture to a level of sophistication unknown before. The contributions of J. R. Marr, N. Subramanian, F. Gros, K. Kailasapathy, A. K. Ramanujan, K. V. Zvelebil, K. Sivathamby and G. L. Hart on the ancient period, and those of Burton Stein, Noburu Karashima, Friedhelm Hardy, David Shulman, and Norman Cutler

on the medieval period are but some of the recent studies which, taken together, provide a new and deeper analysis of early south Indian society in general and of the ancient and medieval Tamil source material in particular.

One happy outcome of these efforts has been that it is now possible to identify in south Indian studies areas of consensus as well as lines of enquiry that need to be pursued further. Although the image of an eternal, unchanging and unchangeable India still lingers on, scholars are no longer averse to identifying periods of change or transition in Indian history. There now prevails, for instance, a consensus among scholars that the mid-part of the first millennium C.E., witnessed a 'many sided shift' in Indian history. The period of the reign of the Guptas (c. 4th-6th century C.E.) in north India is often viewed as a turning point which marked the end of the ancient phase and the beginning of the 'medieval' phase in Indian history, and the history of south India is thought of as reflecting this moment of transition as well. Several writers on south Indian history have sought to map out the contours of this 'shift' from the perspective of their theoretical or ideological assumptions.

Although a number of such scholars have attempted to analyze the elements of continuity and change between the periods, a comprehensive study of this shift or transition from one phase ('ancient') to the other ('medieval') in

south Indian history has not so far been undertaken. The reason for this is not difficult to discern. Despite the notable strides that have been made in recent years, certain crucial facets of early south Indian culture are still hazy and require further exploration and exposition. Scholars who work on the medieval phase of south Indian history in particular often stress the need for a reinvestigation of the pre-medieval Tamil source material, particularly the classical texts known as the *caṅkam* literature, in order to obtain a better understanding of the inner dynamics of south Indian society and its culture.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that one, perhaps the most important, facet of the metamorphosis in early medieval Tamil culture is seen in the realm of religion. Thanks to the efforts of scholars from different disciplines, our understanding of various aspects of religion in medieval Tamil society is now considerably wider and deeper than it was before. But the same cannot be said of the pre-medieval phase of Tamil history. The picture that has been drawn to date of the religious dimension of early Tamil society is far from adequate. Commenting on this inadequacy, Hardy says:

There exists a number of attempts to delineate the religion of the classical *caṅkam* age, but I have not found any of them particularly useful or reliable . . . A

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<sup>1</sup>Stein (1980), p. 99; Ramanujan (1981), pp. 111-112; Karashima (1984), p. xxx.

critical and comprehensive monograph on  
**caṅkam** religion is an urgent **desideratum**.<sup>2</sup>

## I.2. Religion in early Tamil society: The historical problem

The historical phase of the far south of India may be said to begin from about the third century B.C.E. The archaeological remains and the epigraphical records that are available for the next seven hundred years or so are still incomplete, and it is only a large body of literary works, collectively known as the **caṅkam** literature, that are the important source material for reconstructing the earliest phase of Tamil history and culture. The spade of the archaeologist has not so far unearthed any dramatic vestiges from the past in the far south, except perhaps at Arikamēḍu (near Pondicherry) where excavations conducted by Sir R. E. M. Wheeler brought to light an Indo-Roman trading post.<sup>3</sup> Nor do we find, south of the Venkaṭam (Tiruppati) hills, religious monuments or cult images that can be safely dated to a period before the ascendancy of the Pallavas and the Pāṇṭiyas in the mid-part of the sixth century C.E.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Hardy (1983), p. 131, f.n. 48. The passage contains a terse review of some of the recent writings on religion in the **caṅkam** age.

<sup>3</sup>Wheeler, (1946), pp. 17-124.

<sup>4</sup>Mention should be made here of the Pillaiyārpattī cave-temple inscription which, on palaeographic considerations, is dated to a period earlier than c. 500 C.E. If this date is admissible, it would then be the earliest extant rock-cut shrine in Tamilnadu. See Mahadevan (1971), p. 98.

The efforts of archaeologists in south India have, however, brought to light a number of megalithic monuments which are essentially burial complexes, as well as a series of natural caverns which contain a few beds chiselled out on the floor of the rock. These megalithic monuments, which are found in almost every part of south India, have been associated with the Iron Age. Distinctive to south India, these sepulchral monuments have yielded artifacts such as iron implements and weapons, and a particular type of black-and-red pottery which would seem to show the diffusion of a uniform culture over much of south India during the Iron age. On the importance of these monuments, Srinivasan has this to say:

The vast number of such monuments, which literally occur in thousands, their ubiquity, density and spacial distribution . . . all indicate a number of generations of a vast and settled agricultural people, growing irrigated crops such as rice. Their contents by themselves denote a highly advanced material culture, domestication of animals, including horse, and great reverence for the dead.<sup>5</sup>

The natural caverns into which beds were chiselled seem to have been used by Buddhist or Jaina monks on their retreats. Most of these caverns are found in the southern districts of Tamilnadu state, particularly in and around Madurai. Several of these caverns contain short, but exceptionally valuable inscriptions. These inscriptions are

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5K. R. Srinivasan (1960), p. 2.

written in the Tamil language employing the brāhmi script.<sup>6</sup> Assigned to the period from the second century B.C.E., to the second century C.E., these inscriptions are taken by scholars to be contemporaneous with the age that is reflected in the bulk of the poems in the classical caṅkam anthologies.<sup>7</sup> There are a few names of kings who appear as donors in these inscriptions, and these names are also found in some of the poems of the anthologies. Thus, apart from shedding light on the spread and influence of the Jaina and Buddhist religion in early Tamil society, these lithic records provide a welcome confirmation of the historicity of these rulers. Despite all this, when compared to the rich archaeological and numismatic wealth of some of the other regions in the sub-continent during the corresponding centuries, the material remains that have come to light to date in Tamilnadu fall far short of a historian's delight.

Owing to this relative paucity of material remains the historian of early Tamil culture is left with no other option than to find his or her way primarily with the help of the extant literary sources. This does not mean that we belittle the importance of literary texts in the task of reconstructing the past. Literary sources, as the Allchins put it, "open up possibilities of understanding a culture in

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<sup>6</sup>Mahadevan (1966), pp. 57-74.

<sup>7</sup>Mahadevan (1971), pp. 83-85.



a way which can never be achieved without their aid."<sup>8</sup> The problem faced by one who seeks to use the earliest extant Tamil literary texts as source material for the study of religion, however, is of a special kind. The *caṅkam* corpus, without doubt, contains a mine of information on various--not excluding religious--aspects of early Tamil culture. Yet, this corpus of poetry, unlike the earliest extant literary collections in Sanskrit, Prākṛit, or Pāli has no professedly sacred, ritual, or philosophical texts; in short, it has no 'religious' texts as that term is sometimes understood. There are a few poems in the corpus which are explicitly religious in content and character. One of them, the *Tirumurukāṅruppatai*, sung in glory of the god Murugaṅ, was even taken by the later tradition, as part of the 'sacred' hymns (*Tirumuṟai*) of the Tamil Śaiva tradition. These religious poems, however, being limited in number, have sometimes been viewed by scholars as somewhat odd and even out of place in the corpus.

The entire corpus of Tamil classical poetry has come down in two large collections, namely *pattuppāṭṭu* ('Ten Poems') and *eṭṭuttokai* ('Eight Anthologies'). The total number of poems in the corpus, according to one of the best editions, is 2381. Of these 102 are anonymous, and the

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<sup>8</sup>Allchin and Allchin (1982), p. 299.

remaining are attributed to 473 different poets.<sup>9</sup> The list of poets includes the names of a few kings and a few women as well. Ranging from three lines to over seven hundred lines, these poems are found classified under two broad categories, namely **akam** ('inner') and **puṛam** ('outer'). We will have occasion to discuss these terms in detail later, but, as Ramanujan says, "Akam and puṛam are ancient, complex words. To understand them is to enter Tamil poetics, and much that is crucial to Tamil culture."<sup>10</sup>

The significance of the terms **akam** and **puṛam** and other conceptual aspects that governed the classical Tamil poetics are elaborated on in the **Tolkāppiyam**, the earliest extant grammatical treatise in the Tamil language. In Tamil literary tradition, **akam** and **puṛam** are generally treated as love and heroic poetry respectively. The range of themes dealt with by the poets under each of these categories is wide, and the aesthetic quality of many of the poems is breathtakingly refined. According to the literary convention, the **dramatis personae** in the **akam** or love poems should be anonymous and never be either particularized or identified. It is significant that, whether a poem is on the theme of love or heroism, the characters depicted in the

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<sup>9</sup>The edition that is referred to is the **Caṅka Ilakkiyam (Pāṭṭum Tokaiyum)** published by the **Śaiva Siddhānta Samājam, Madras**.

<sup>10</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 235.

classical Tamil poetry are vividly pictured persons of flesh and blood, who are, for the most part, drawn from aristocratic, ruling families. It is their love, their anger, their anguish, in short, their actions and emotions that formed the subject matter on which the poets composed their poems. The principle that seems to underlie the two-fold division has been well summed up by Younger:

What the focus on these two themes indicates is that the cutting edge of all moral judgement is in the direct personal encounters of the individual. The inner person is revealed to oneself in the five different experiences of romance, and the external person is manifested in the seven different experiences of heroism. All cultural values were ultimately seen as manifestations of one or the other of these two kinds of personal encounters.<sup>11</sup>

In view of the vividly human content and character of the bulk of the poems in the corpus, many scholars have tended to characterize the corpus, as well as the social milieu that it reflects, as one that was 'courtly' and 'secular'.<sup>12</sup> Zvelebil writes:

. . . let me mention another and very typical and characteristic feature of the pre-Aryan Tamil literature--its predominantly secular inspiration, the

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Younger, 'Getting beyond Racist historiography in south India and Sri Lanka', (an unpublished paper), p. 11. For a discussion of further divisions within the love and heroic poetry, see Ch. III.4.

<sup>12</sup>Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956), p. 44; Kailasapathy (1968), p. 3 and p. 134 f.n.; Marr (1985), p. 453 and p. 457; Zvelebil (1973), p. 20 and (1974), p. 10.

absence of any religious sentiment.<sup>13</sup>

How can this corpus of poetry, which is perceived as the product of a 'predominantly secular inspiration', be a source for understanding the religious thought of its times? Right at the very start, it seems that the student of early Tamil religion encounters a major hurdle.

We shall have occasion throughout the present work to examine what have been described as the 'religious' as well as the 'secular' poems in the corpus, and to explore the validity of the premises on the basis of which that bifurcation is made. What we need to do first, however, is to examine the larger historical question because scholars who view the classical Tamil poetry as predominantly 'secular' also hold that this 'secular' poetic tradition came to an end by the third or fourth century C.E., and gave way completely at that point to the emergence of what is known as the *bhakti* or devotional poetry in the history of Tamil literature. As matter of fact, the legacy of writing court poetry and the tradition of composing poems following the classical conventions were both continued during the medieval times and even later, but so entrenched is the equation of classical and 'secular' and medieval and 'devotional' that the term 'secular' is seldom employed by

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<sup>13</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 20. Elsewhere he writes: "What is so important about these poems is that they are the only example of Indian secular literature dating from so ancient a period." Zvelebil (1975), pp. 81-82.

scholars in describing those literary works.<sup>14</sup>

The expression of an intense devotion to a personal god is seen by scholars as the dominant, characteristic mark of much of the medieval and post-medieval Tamil poetry, and it cannot be doubted that some of the earliest and finest devotional poems in Indian literature are to be found among the post-classical Tamil literary works. The impact of devotionalism is seen to be so deep in the literary scene that the medieval 'court' poetry such as the **Pāṇṭikkōvai** (c. 700 C.E.), the **Muttollāyiram** (900 C.E.?), the **Nantik-kalampakam** (c. 900 C.E.), and several other works of their kind which were composed at the court of the Imperial Cōlas (850-1250 C.E.), have been either dismissed as of minor significance or, seen as coloured by the influences of the devotional milieu of their times.

Based on the above understanding, some scholars have attempted to suggest that a shift from 'secularism' to 'devotionalism' was the major defining feature of the transition that brought in the medieval phase in Tamil

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<sup>14</sup>There exists in Tamil another corpus of poetry called the **patinēkilkkanaṅku** ('The eighteen minor works') which are taken to be post-classical in date. One of the distinctive marks of this corpus is that most of the poems are composed in **venpā** metre in contrast to the poems in the classical corpus which are chiefly in the **akaval** metre. Although most of the works in the **patinēkilkkanaṅku** collection are ethical and didactic in content, the corpus does contain as many as six works which deal with **akam** (love) and one work with **puṟam** (war) themes. Some of these works are assigned to a date in the second half of the first millennium. For a discussion of these works, see Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956), Ch. III; Zvelebil (1975), pp. 117-128.

culture.<sup>15</sup> Focussing on the 'shift' in south Indian culture in this way, however, leaves the central question unanswered: If early Tamil society had so solid a 'secular' base, why and how did it undergo such a radical change and turn so suddenly and so thoroughly 'religious'?

The explanation conventionally offered in response to this question is that the change was due to, or, the result of, influences from the 'north'--a process that is variously known as the 'sanskritization', 'aryanization', 'brahmanization' or 'hinduization' of the far south. This is, however, a curious position to take for a variety of reasons. First of all, it pushes an extraordinary body of literature, that is universally acknowledged by scholars as representing the classical heritage of the Tamils, to a position of marginal importance in their history and culture. Secondly, it alludes to a major historical change for which there is little or no evidence. Finally these terms ('sanskritization' etc.), although widely current in south Indian historiography, are so elusive that, as conceptual tools, they are now more a liability than an

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<sup>15</sup> Zvebil (1973), p. 21. It must be mentioned here that there are scholars who take a different view. According to Cutler, for instance, notwithstanding the several critical differences between the classical and devotional poetry, "it would be a distortion to postulate a complete break between the bhakti poetic tradition and the earlier classical tradition." Yet, curiously he, too, characterizes the relation between 'Tamil Classicism and **Bhakti**' as one of 'Conflict and Accommodation'. Cutler (1987), p. 81.

asset because there is no consensus among scholars as to what these terms precisely stand for.<sup>16</sup> To sociologists, for instance, the term 'sanskritization' means a continuing process of social change in Indian society in which groups which are placed low in the caste hierarchy try for upward mobility by emulating the patterns of behaviour of the higher groups.<sup>17</sup> To historians, on the other hand, all of the above terms are cognates and those terms are often employed by them to characterize the spread of Sanskritic culture--i.e. the language as well as the brahmanical ideas embodied in it--in areas of non-Sanskritic and non-brahmanical population. To the historians, it is not a timeless phenomenon, but is taken in the case of the history of south India as an occurrence which is usually placed in the mid-part of the first millennium C.E.

This whole historical hypothesis is somewhat puzzling. For, it seems to rest for support upon two doubtful assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that the process of change--by whatever name one chooses to call it--was so sweeping and massive that in a very short period of time it effected a total change of direction in Tamil culture. Secondly, it forces us to postulate a historical situation which would have cried out for such a dramatic change.

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<sup>16</sup>For a recent discussion on issues relating to the theory of sanskritization, Lee and Rajoo (1987), pp. 389-415.

<sup>17</sup>Srinivas (1968), pp. 6-7; Milton Singer (1972), p. 44.

Normally one would expect that a sudden and widespread adaptation of the religious ideas and values of one culture-area by the people of another area could materialize only if and when the society which is receiving such outside influences is on the threshold of a serious structural crisis. There is at present no evidence to suggest that there was such a crisis in south Indian society during the mid-part of the first millennium.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, whatever the changes that we might discern between the ancient and the medieval phases in south Indian history, there is also no indication that they were either abrupt or imported largely from outside. On the contrary recent attempts to trace the development of literary conventions, religious ideas etc., among early Tamils, however limited their scope might be, seem to suggest that there was significant continuity rather than radical change in Tamil cultural patterns and behaviour between the pre-medieval and medieval phases.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Recently Stein has made an attempt to suggest that Tamil society faced a sort of crisis during the intervening centuries between the classical phase and the medieval phase (c.400-600 C.E.), which is generally known as the 'Age of Kalabhra Interregnum' or the 'dark age' in south Indian history. The overthrow of the rulers of the traditional Tamil kingdoms by the Kalabhras, a group of people whose origin is still shrouded in mystery, represented, in Stein's view, a serious challenge and the momentary success of the 'non-peasant' people over the 'peasant' people. Interesting though it is, Stein's hypothesis is hard to accept for lack of supporting evidence. Stein (1980), pp. 63-67.

<sup>19</sup>Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), pp. 177-214; also Yocum (1973), pp. 1-17.



If the arguments in favour of historical continuity are reasonable, how and why did the notion of radical change gain currency in south Indian historical writing? In order to answer this question it is necessary to draw attention to certain conventions that came to be established in south Indian historiography during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the present century. Fired and fanned by contemporary social and political movements particularly in the Tamil-speaking region, these conventions played--and, are still playing--a major role in perpetuating a set of stereo-typed images of the past in Tamil historical scholarship. Their impact on the study of religion in early Tamil society has been equally complicated.

### **I.3. Religion in early Tamil society: The Historiographical Factor**

Unlettered are the good ones, indeed, they alone are good. Here I am - a learned fool! What shall I say of my thoughts and deeds? When the good ones speak high of the path of **kaivalya-jñāna**, I shall seek to establish that **karma** is important; when someone asserts the supremacy of **karma**, I shall turn around and say that **jñāna** is important. Upon encountering an expert in the northern tongue (Sanskrit), I shall argue that it has been said in **drāviḍa** (Tamil); If Tamil experts confront me, I shall resort to the northern language (Sanskrit) and mutter some words. How can this 'trick' (**vittai/vidyā**) that never wins but deludes everyone ever

deliver liberation?<sup>20</sup>

According to Zvelebil, there is 'a kind of inner tension' running through the entire course of Tamil history and culture. The chief source of this tension, in his opinion, was a 'truly dialectic relationship' between the general ('universally Indian') and the specific ('distinctively Tamil') components in the culture.<sup>21</sup> While one may be able to perceive this tension in Tamil culture from time to time, a more sharply defined version of the tension appears in the writings of modern scholars on Tamil culture. Among scholars of Tamil culture, it is not just a tussle between the 'universal' and the 'specific', the tussle that can be seen, although in varying density, in every regional cultural tradition in India. In the context of Tamil historiography, the 'universal' is not only equated, quite correctly, with Sanskrit language and culture, but also with a cultural rival called the 'north', whatever that may refer to. The far-south of India is then seen as unique within the sub-continent as a zone of serious cultural combat, and the culture of the Tamils is viewed as a composite one, consisting of 'two originally distinct cultures' called the Aryan/Sanskrit and the Dravidian/Tamil. How deep-rooted and influential this dichotomous view

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<sup>20</sup>Tāyumāṇavar (a seventeenth century mystic poet), *cittarkaṇam*, 7:1-14.

<sup>21</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 9.

of Tamil history can be is seen, for instance, in the writings of Nilakanta Sastri, the greatest among south Indian historians, who wrote in the twenties:

The evidence already available is sufficient, however, to furnish conclusive proof of the origin and development of an independent Tamil culture which flourished for centuries before it was touched by extraneous influences. However difficult it may now be to define, in a scientific manner, the content of that culture, to deny its existence altogether can only be the result of ignorance or prejudice. It is equally certain that, at a time before recorded history begins, this indigenous Tamil culture came under strong influence from Northern India, which for the sake of convenience and without any implication of race, may well continue to be called Aryan.<sup>22</sup>

A few years later, he wrote, in his *magnum opus*, *The Cōlas*: "There is no task more fascinating and none less easy . . . than that of disentangling the primitive elements of these cultures, the stages by which they mingled and the consequences of their mixture."<sup>23</sup> The same idea is echoed in the writings of his contemporaries, as we see, for instance, in the work of Sivaraja Pillai, a noted literary historian, who declared: "The problem of problems for the historian of Southern India is to take this composite culture, this amalgam of civilization, analyze it carefully and impartially, and trace its elements if possible to their

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<sup>22</sup>Nilakanta Sastri (1974), p. 5 and (1929), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Nilakanta Sastri (1955), p. 63.

respective sources--Dravidian or Aryan."<sup>24</sup>

Several recent writers share basically the same view except that they are more aware of the difficult nature of the disentangling task than their predecessors. Commenting on the composite nature of south Indian culture, Ramanujan, in his inimitable style, says: "Traditions are not divided by impermeable membranes; they interflow into one another, responsive to differences of density as in an osmosis. It is often difficult to isolate elements as belonging exclusively to the one or the other."<sup>25</sup> Hardy writes: ". . .in all matters other than linguistic ones it is practically impossible to decide what is Dravidian, what Tamil, and what southern, . . ."<sup>26</sup> Considered opinion such as this, however, has never prevented writers on Tamil culture from attempting to sort out, not without prejudice, different cultural elements--not excluding the gods--into neat slots: Tamil or Sanskrit, Dravidian or Aryan, southern or northern etc.

It is not possible here to discuss at length the genesis of this convention in south Indian historiography, or to give an account of the socio-economic and political factors that were conducive to its growth during the later part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth

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<sup>24</sup>Sivaraja Pillai (1932), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup>Ramanujan (1973), p. 23.

<sup>26</sup>Hardy (1983), p. 120. f.n. 5.

century.<sup>27</sup> We shall, however, touch upon a few major points. The publication of Bishop R. Caldwell's **A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages** (First edition, 1856) marked, in more ways than one, a turning point in south Indian studies. Decades before the publication of any of the **caṅkam** texts, Caldwell, 'the father of Dravidian philology and linguistics', was able to show with great insight that the Dravidian languages are a distinct group within the linguistic map of India and suggested a link between the Dravidian and Finno-Ugrian groups. We are not concerned here with the question of the soundness of Caldwell's hypothesis or of the counter-hypotheses that have been proposed in recent years linking the Dravidian group with the Asianic and Basque or Elamite language.<sup>28</sup> What is of interest to us is that Caldwell's findings, that Tamil as a language could function without the help of Sanskrit, contributed in a significant way to the rapid growth of an incipient cultural Resurgence movement in the Tamil region during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The rediscovery and publication of the **caṅkam** texts which began in the year 1885 through the indefatigable efforts of two scholars, namely Ci. Vai. Damodaram Pillai and U. Ve. Saminathaiyar, added further

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<sup>27</sup>Irschick (1969); Nambi Arooran (1980).

<sup>28</sup>Basham (1979), p. 2.

stimulus to the movement.<sup>29</sup> During the second and third decades of the present century, the Tamil Resurgence movement, which counted among its pioneers quite a few brāhmaṇ scholars, was slowly but steadily transformed into a socio-political movement by a group of 'non-brāhmans' who formed a federation in the year 1916 to promote "the political interests of non-brahmin caste Hindus."<sup>30</sup> Their social and political concerns had arisen because, by the turn of this century, the Tamil brāhmans had come to hold a unique and enviable position in south Indian politics. As Settar says:

Being part of the social group which stood at the forefront of the national movement (especially as members of the Indian National Congress), as part of the loyal bureaucracy under the British as well as the Princely States (especially in Mysore and Trivandrum), and as part of the elite, educated in Western ideas, they shared the advantages which were beyond the reach of the rest of the social groups . . . the majority of them were keen on reiterating traditional values and defending the gains which both tradition and modernity had secured for them.<sup>31</sup>

The non-brāhmaṇ movement was hinged onto the Tamil Resurgence movement because the latter provided the former not only an organizational base but also powerful

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<sup>29</sup>For the history of the publication of the caṅkam texts, see Sanjeevi (1973), pp. 322-328.

<sup>30</sup>Irschick (1969), p. 48.

<sup>31</sup>Settar (1982), p. 9.

ideological content in its struggle against the brāhmins. It was against this backdrop that a neat, but historically questionable, set of equations gained currency during the first quarter of this century among south Indian academics: Brāhmaṇ = Aryan = Sanskrit = North and Non-brāhmaṇ = Dravidian = Tamil = South.

One major consequence of these equations was that the 'non-brāhmaṇ' Tamils came to be considered the inheritors of one classical language, and had to deny themselves or be denied by others title to anything that was in Sanskrit. For Tamil-brāhmins, it was **vice versa**. Correspondingly, a passionate search for a period in the past in which a pure, uncontaminated Tamil culture flourished, or an equally passionate denial of all such claims became the propelling motives in much of the historical writing on early south India. So well entrenched is this convention that one finds its influence even among scholars who are neither 'brāhmaṇ' nor 'non-brāhmaṇ' Tamils.<sup>32</sup> Influenced by this logic and extending it to its extreme, some scholars have ventured to identify the so-called distinctive elements of Tamil or Sanskrit culture by applying a stunningly simple solution: eliminate those elements in Tamil language and culture which are encountered

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<sup>32</sup>Hart, for instance, has advanced the theory of 'tamilization' of the brāhmins as a counter thesis to the theory of 'brahmanization' of the Tamil region. Hart (1975a), p. 59.

in Sanskrit sources and treat the residue as distinctive of Tamil culture. This exercise, apart from inaccurately treating 'Sanskritic culture' to be exclusive, monolithic, and homogeneous, has led writers on early Tamil history and culture to arrive at startling conclusions. In the view of one scholar, for instance, the Tamils during the early centuries of the Common Era were "a secular minded people . . . refusing to yield to the blandishments of religious fanaticism which, however, in the succeeding age succeeded in disturbing even the generally balanced Tamils."<sup>33</sup> Writing on the same period, Hart says: "In Tamilnad, there was almost no mythology, at least insofar as can be determined from the early poems and the later traditions, where almost all stories about the gods were imported from the North."<sup>34</sup>

So deep has been the impact of these equations that the term 'non-brāhmaṇ' is now being employed by writers on early south Indian history not merely as a descriptive term but an analytic term as well. For instance, *ūr*, a generic term for a village or settlement, is analyzed in the context of medieval south Indian history under the rubric of 'non-brāhmaṇ' village by applying the logic that a settlement that has not been donated to the brāhmins is not just a

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<sup>33</sup>N.Subramanian (1966), p. 332.

<sup>34</sup>Hart (1975), p. 192.



village but a 'non-brāhman' village.<sup>35</sup>

The attempt to unearth in historical times a period in which a pure and pristine Dravidian or Tamil culture flourished has had yet another major consequence: it has added further confusion to the already puzzling problem of the chronology of the early Tamil literary texts. The **caṅkam** literature is often seen as largely free from Sanskritic or brahmanical influences owing mainly to the fact that only a negligible number of Sanskrit words occur in it. As this body of literature is generally assigned to the early centuries of the Common Era, important literary collections such as the **Kalittokai** and the **Paripāṭal**, which are counted by the tradition as part of the **caṅkam** corpus, the **Tolkāppiyam**, the earliest extant grammatical work in Tamil, the **Tirukkuraḷ**, one of the most outstanding ethical treatises in any language of India, the **Cilappatikāram**, the great Tamil 'epic', and a few other early works which betray a 'gradual pervasion of Sanskrit vocabulary' and ideas, tend to be lumped together and squeezed into a span of two centuries (c. 400-600 C.E.).<sup>36</sup> Ironically this is the same period in which 'a long historical night' is said to have

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<sup>35</sup>Stein (1980), p. 150; Karashima (1985), pp. 1-15.

<sup>36</sup>For the views concerning the date of the texts mentioned above and other issues relating to their chronology, see Zvelebil (1973), ch. III and (1975), chs. VI and VII.

descended on the Tamil country.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, one can see that an all consuming concern with making a cultural bifurcation has entangled the historians in their own web.

The foregoing historiographical critique should not be taken to mean that we deny either that there were changes that Tamil society underwent during the mid-part of the first millennium C.E., or that there was a role played by ideas and institutions which had their origin elsewhere in the sub-continent in effecting those changes. The point that is intended here is that the 'south' was not discovered by the people of the 'north' in the mid-part of the first millennium; nor was the 'north' completely unknown to the people of the 'south' before the Common Era. Archaeologists as well as historical linguists now readily admit that there must have been "co-existence of Vedic and Dravidian speaking peoples in a culture contact situation for a period, perhaps of centuries, before the compilation of the Rigveda."<sup>38</sup> Deshpande writes: "In the process of the early Aryan speakers coming into contact with pre-existing Dravidian and Munda populations of India, there was, to put it in simple terms, Aryanization of the indigenous and indigenization of the Aryan."<sup>39</sup> Coming to the historical period (i.e. from

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<sup>37</sup>Nilakanta Sastri (1957), p. 550.

<sup>38</sup>Allchin and Allchin (1982), p. 355.

<sup>39</sup>M. M. Deshpande, "In Defense of Vedic Religion: Strategies of Sanskrit Grammarians" (An unpublished paper), p. 2.

about 500 B.C.E.), we find that there is no dearth of references in early Indian literature and inscriptions which show that there was a live contact between the north and the south particularly all along the eastern sea-board during the pre-Common Era.<sup>40</sup> The Kalsi version of the thirteenth Rock-edict which was issued in the eighth regnal year of Maurya Aśoka (273-231 B.C.E.) refers to the Cōlas and the Pāṇṭiyas as the southern neighbors of the Maurya kingdom. The record further tells us:

There is no country where these (two) classes (viz.) the Brāhmaṇa(s) and the Śramaṇa(s) do not exist, except among the Yonas; and there is no (place) in any country where men are not attached to some sect.<sup>41</sup>

As noted already, the presence of Buddhist and Jaina monks in the Tamil region as early as the second or first century B.C.E., is well corroborated by the contents of a substantial number of Tamil-brāhmī inscriptions.<sup>42</sup> After carefully examining the references to the Nandas and the Mauryas in early Tamil poems, M. G. S. Narayanan has recently suggested that "commercial and cultural relations and probably political relations, too, existed between the growing empire of Magadha and Tamilakam in the pre-Mauryan

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<sup>40</sup>For relevant references on south-north intercourse in the pre-Christian sources, see Zvelebil (1975), p. 50; Nilakanta Sastri (1929) p. 1-3.

<sup>41</sup>Hultzsch, CII., vol. I, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup>Mahadevan (1971), p. 99.

period of the Nandas."<sup>43</sup> After all, until about the mid-part of the first millennium C.E., documents of ancient India are found only in four languages namely Sanskrit, Prākṛit, Pāli, and Tamil. It is highly improbable, if not impossible, that at the time when the historical phase began the content and character of any one of those four languages could have remained unaffected by the others. What applies to languages applies to cultures as well. An approach that lays greater stress on the contents, and not the container, might therefore throw open new possibilities for an enhanced understanding of the configuration or mosaic of what is called the Indian culture.<sup>44</sup>

In view of the fact that constant intercourse existed between different regions within the sub-continent for many centuries before the shift occurred in the mid-part of the first millennium, it is hard to accept the reasoning that shifts in the medieval phase in south Indian history were the result of 'northern influences'. Even if one were inclined to attribute so much to the 'northern influences', that does not in fact confront the issue of change and the development of devotional literature squarely for it merely switches it to the 'north'. Since the 'north' too is said to

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<sup>43</sup>Narayanan (1977), p. 97-98.

<sup>44</sup>Mahadevan has well demonstrated the exciting results that such an approach might yield in a thought-provoking paper on the study of Indus script through bilingual parallels. See Mahadevan (1979), pp. 261-267.

have been undergoing changes of a similar sort at this time, one is only pushed back a step and forced to ask: what, then, caused the changes in either region in the first place? As Marr rightly observed:

Hindu beliefs and customs were perfectly familiar to the anthology (i.e. *caṅkam*) poets. It seems most likely that Hindu believers were in the Tamil area as early as the Jains and Buddhists, and some other cause for the increased preoccupation with religion from the time of *Tēvāram* must be sought.<sup>45</sup>

Our task in the following pages is, however, not to probe into the fascinating question as to why after the seventh century there was an 'increased preoccupation with religion' in the Tamil region. The task that we have defined for ourselves here is to deal with the prior, and probably more difficult, question of analyzing the classical texts in order to identify those seminal ideas that constituted the foundation upon which the Tamils erected their religious edifices in the later centuries. Such an exercise, it is believed, is not only feasible but also essential for a proper assessment of the Tamil contribution to the history of Indian religious thought.

A final note of clarification is perhaps needed on this historiographical critique. The critique presented here should be taken as underscoring the need for a common perspective and approach for studying both continuity and

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<sup>45</sup>Marr (1985), pp. 457-458.

change in Indian history. That does not, however, mean that one has to swing to the opposite extreme from those who hold a dichotomous view of Tamil culture and maintain that there is nothing in the early Tamil sources that we do not also find in Sanskrit sources. The classical Tamil literature does unmistakably offer us a distinct view of certain dimensions of early Indian thought and culture which cannot be obtained from the Sanskrit sources for the corresponding centuries.

What we have suggested is that there is no academic justification for slicing the sub-continent arbitrarily into 'south' and 'north' and equating these labels with Tamil and Sanskrit. If we are to speak in terms of particular zones or regions and their mutual interaction within the cultural map of early India, it would in fact be more accurate to agree with the observation of the Allchins:

There are three major regions, a western centring upon the Indus system, a northern and eastern centring upon the Ganges system, and a southern or peninsular region . . . The three major regions have in every sense--archaeological, cultural and political--played leading roles in the history of Indian civilization."<sup>46</sup>

A cultural history of India in this sense is yet to be developed. For a long time, as one recent writer put it,

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<sup>46</sup>Allchin and Allchin (1982), p. 347. In early Indian texts, too,--i.e. the *dharmasāstras* and the *śilpasāstras* in particular--the sub-continent is broadly divided into three major geographical zones namely the *āryavarta*, the *dakṣiṇāpatha* and the *drāvidadeśa*.

". . . culture has been viewed and documented vertically, resulting in tomes on literature in isolation, e.g. Sanskrit or Tamil, not Sanskrit and Tamil."<sup>47</sup> Clearly, then, there is justification for according a decent burial to the much used and misused Aryan-Dravidian, Sanskrit-Tamil, Brāhmaṇ-Non-Brāhmaṇ and north-south dichotomies, and propose new methods and approaches to the study of early south Indian culture.

#### 1.4. Scope and Method

How does one bring the diverse facts of literature, of society, of religion as one finds them in different ages and areas, into a single understandable system? . . . It may be said, of course, that systematising is just what we should not yet do, for it has been the experience of sciences, social as well as natural, to begin with description and to come to systems only when they are fully grown. Let us, then, first gather the facts. But still, one must be aware of an ultimate goal, and one yearns for it. Personally, I tend to think of such a goal as a system of history, for such has been my training.<sup>48</sup>

The governing approach of the present work will be historical. By historical approach we mean the application of the mode of analysis that seeks to understand patterns of the mental and material culture of a given group of people within the framework of spacio-temporal dimensions. The

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<sup>47</sup>K.S.Srinivasan (1985), p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>Daniel H.H. Ingalls in his foreword to Milton Singer (ed.) *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago. 1971. 2nd imp. p. x.

Tamil classical texts are peculiarly hard to date, and the question of both absolute and relative dating of these texts which will be discussed below still remains the greatest puzzle in south Indian studies, notwithstanding the best efforts of three generations of scholars. That fact, however, does not render the task of analyzing them as products of a historically given reality a hopeless one, for much is now known about the cultural setting from which they come. It is also widely recognised that classical Tamil poetry is remarkably rich in its account of the social and cultural life of the people.

On the surface the most obvious question we have to face is: how does one go about studying the patterns of religious thought on the basis of a set of seemingly 'secular' literary works? Where do we begin our investigation, and how do we proceed? Fortunately the extant corpus itself suggests one possibility. It was mentioned earlier that there are a few poems in the corpus which are avowedly religious.<sup>49</sup> The longest and the most important of

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<sup>49</sup>We have not taken into account here the five invocatory verses which are composed by the poet Pāratam-pāṭiya-Peruntēvaṅār ('Peruntēvaṅ who composed Pāratam'/ Skt. Bhāratam), and are prefixed to five of the eṭṭu. collections namely, AN, AKN, KT, NT and PN. Of the five verses, two are in praise of Śiva, two in praise of Viṣṇu, and one in praise of Murukaṅ. Except the metre, these poems are said to have nothing else in common with the anthology poems and are therefore regarded as later additions. The author of these poems has also been assigned to a period much later than the period of the anthology poems. See Valyapuri Pillai (1957), p. 57. Zvelebil assigns the poet to c. 400 C.E. Zvelebil (1974), p. 143. The anonymous verse that has been quoted by the late medieval commentator Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar (c. 1600 C.E.)



them is the **Tirumurukāṛruppaṭai** which is the first poem in the **pattu.** collection.<sup>50</sup> Then, there are the fourteen poems in one of the **eṭṭu.** anthologies called the **Paripāṭai.** These poems are sung in praise of either **Cevvēl** (Murukaṅ) or **Māl** (Viṣṇu). Finally in the same spirit is another anthology in the **eṭṭu.** collections, called the **Kalittokai.** The **Kalit.** has no explicitly religious poems comparable to the **Parī.** except the invocatory verse, a beautiful poem in praise of the dancing Śiva, but the anthology has several features in common with the **Parī.** and some of its poems are revealing with regard to the religious and ritual life of the early Tamils.

The song **TMP** (317 lines) and the two anthologies, the **Parī.** (22 poems) and **Kalit.** (150 poems), taken together, may be said to constitute within the classical corpus a distinct group both in their form and content. All three works are closely associated in one way or other with **Madurai,** which was the nerve centre of **caṅkam** culture. Some modern scholars have tended to treat these three works as later than most of the classical poetry, and have sometimes

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as the invocatory stanza to the **PrP** collection also falls in the same category. **Tol.poruḷ.puṛat.nūṛ.** 26, Nacci. comm.

<sup>50</sup>According to Kailasapathy, the **TMP** "seems to have been considered by the redactor as the invocatory lay" for the **pattu.** collection. Kailasapathy (1968), p. 35.

described them as the 'late classical' works.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not one gives them a slightly later date, these texts do, in a sense, link the classical poetry on the one hand and the devotional poetry of the early medieval period on the other. In our judgement, notwithstanding the problem of their chronological position in the corpus, these texts provide a good vantage point for studying the history of religious thought in early Tamil society. We will, therefore, begin with them and look at the rest of classical corpus in relation to them.

Scholars tend to view these three texts as testimony to a process of linking together of various strands of religious thought and behaviour in early Tamil society. The **TMP** and the **Pari.** poems are sometimes said to have marked the commencement of a new 'religious' movement in south India, the birth of **bhakti** religion.<sup>52</sup> The importance of these poems for understanding the development of **bhakti** religion and literature in south India certainly cannot be overstated, but what we propose to do with these texts is exactly the reverse. We propose to explore not what was new in these texts but what was old; not what agenda they offered for the future, but what they carried from the past. We shall be using this 'religious poetry' as our 'take off'

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<sup>51</sup>velebil (1973), Ch. VIII; also Vaiyapuri Pillai (1957), p. 39.

<sup>52</sup>velebil (1975), p. 101.

point not to go forward but to plunge backward; in other words, we shall seek to use them as 'keys' to unlock the windows of the other, the so-called 'secular' poems, in the corpus.

The reader will also notice that in our effort to understand and elucidate the conceptual base of Tamil religious thought we draw heavily from the **Tolkāppiyam**, the outstanding prescriptive grammar book in Tamil language. As Zvelebil eloquently says:

The **Tolkāppiyam** represents much more than just the most ancient Tamil grammar extant. It is not only one of the finest monuments of human intelligence and intellect preserved in the Indian tradition; . . . it represents the essence and the summary of classical Tamil culture.<sup>53</sup>

The **Tol.** consists of three major divisions (**atikāram**) and each division has nine chapters (**iyal**). The entire book has over one thousand six hundred aphorisms (**nūṟpā**) of varying lengths.<sup>54</sup> In the three divisions, namely **eluttu** ('letter'/phonology), **col** ('word'/morphology), and **poruḷ** ('subject-matter'), **Tol.** deals with an astounding range of subjects. The dating of **Tol.** has been one of the

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<sup>53</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 131.

<sup>54</sup>According to a stray verse, the **Tol.** contains 1610 **nūṟ(s)**. Unfortunately there is no critical modern edition of the text, and this total number does not agree with that of the commentaries of the medieval writers. Although the text of the **nūṟ(s)** is the same in all the commentaries, the difference in the total is explained by the fact that commentators differ in dividing some of them. What is regarded by one commentator as a single **nūṟ**. is taken as two by another commentator.

most exasperating (and, even emotional) issues in Tamil chronological studies for well over half a century. The text has been variously dated by scholars, ranging from about the fourth century B.C.E., to the fifth century C.E., and there is no final solution to the problem of date in sight. Nevertheless, whatever date that one chooses to assign, there can be no two opinions about the importance of Tol., particularly its division on *poruḷ*, for understanding the conceptual realm of classical Tamil culture. Accordingly the text will be used extensively to illuminate the underlying structure of thought of the classical poems. Taking our cues from those distinctively religious poems, as well as from the grammar, we will then attempt to analyze the other poems in the corpus.

It may be worthwhile at this point to remind ourselves what, and what not, to expect from the classical corpus. Let us first take a closer look at the provenance of the poetry. It has been observed that the classical Tamil poems "are witnesses to a transition." From the point of view of poetic technique, the classical Tamil poems are said to represent the transitional stage between the oral and the written modes of composition.<sup>55</sup> From the perspective of social and political life, this transition is said to have involved "the dying of old communities and the emergence of

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<sup>55</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 273.

new princes and kingdoms."<sup>56</sup> In other words, what characterized the transition was that smaller, homogeneous, 'tribal' communities were getting incorporated into a larger, more heterogeneous and hierarchically ordered society. In some measure this process has been the hall-mark of Indian social history down the ages, and the incorporation of autonomous or semi-autonomous groups into a large social complex has taken many forms. It should not, however, be assumed that the process was always voluntary or smooth, and more often than not, it was probably through brute force that the solidarity of the old communities was broken. Nevertheless, once a group was brought within the larger society, it was often allowed to retain for itself many of its community norms and practices, and to continue more or less as a coherent group. Kailasapathy's contribution to south Indian studies lies partly in the fact that he has convincingly shown how classical Tamil poetry bears testimony to one of the most brilliant but violent examples of this transition, an historical moment which he labelled the 'heroic' age.

What did this transition entail in terms of the role and function of this poetry in the society? Applying the method devised by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord for studying oral compositions, Kailasapathy has argued that

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<sup>56</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 73.

early Tamil poetry was bardic, oral, and traditional. His conclusion that the classical Tamil poems were originally oral compositions has generated a lively debate among scholars.<sup>57</sup> Whether the early Tamil poems were orally composed or not, the more important question from the historical point of view is this: how should one envisage the role of the authors of this poetry in society? In Kailasapathy's view, "the main purpose of bardic recitations was the entertainment of the aristocratic audiences."<sup>58</sup> But the term 'entertainment' should not be allowed to mislead us because, as Kailasapathy himself has suggested, the bards of the Tamil Heroic Age were

elegant versifiers, amiable companions,  
consummate courtiers, and venerated wise men  
all in one. It was this many-sided  
personality of the bards which, while it  
drew them very close to the princes and  
kings, and often pushed them into the  
political crucible of the age, gave them, on  
the other hand, a distinct identity and  
scope of expression that has secured their  
position in history.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>For a critique of Kailasapathy's conclusion, see Hart (1975), pp. 152-153; Ramanujan (1985), pp. 269-273; Sivathamby (1981), p. xxvi; Nanasampantan (1987), pp. 359-367. One more point may be added to this on going debate. According to Lord, the oral tradition died out first in the cities, "because the schools were first founded there and writing has been firmly rooted in the life of the city-dwellers." Lord (1978), p. 20. If so, how does one explain the fact that a good number of patrons as well as poets hailed from urban centres such as Madurai, Uraiyūr, Kāvīripūmpaṭṭiṇam and Karuvūr? For a list of place names of the poets, see Saṅjēvi (1973), pp. 25-26.

<sup>58</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 7.

<sup>59</sup>*ibid.*, p. 92.

The classical Tamil poets were, no doubt, both participants as well as observers in the transition that their age witnessed. Yet in their poems they were obliged to reflect, and only rarely reflect upon, the world that they inhabited. We cannot therefore judge them for not saying what they never intended to say.

If the classical Tamil poems are found wanting in presenting us with coherent notions of the 'transcendent' other, or hair-splitting metaphysical discussions, it was certainly not because the poets were incapable of such thought but because their assignment was something else. It is a characteristic mark of the classical Tamil poets that even when they speak of myths, legends, and the divine 'other', they were expected to do so by relating them to events occurring in the life of the people. We shall cite two examples. The first one is from the *PN*, a poem by *Ūṅpoti Pacuṅkuṭaiyār* extolling the heroism of the *Cōḷa* king *Ceruppāli-eṟinta-Iḷaṅcēṭcēṇṇi* who had subdued the *Paratavas* in the south and the *Vaṭukas* in the north. Note how the poet handles a scene borrowed from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* to describe a real, humorous situation at his home.

(The king) disbursed to us large quantities of rare jewels and other wealth. So excited were the poverty-stricken members of my huge family that they put on their ears ornaments that should be on the fingers; on the fingers, what should be on the ears; on the waist, what should be on the neck; and, on the neck, what should be on the waist. It was hilarious. They all behaved like the crowd of red-faced monkeys that saw and

picked up the jewels of Sītā, the dear wife of the heroic Rāma, as those jewels were falling on the earth when she was being abducted by the demon (arakkān).60

The second example is a passage from the Pari.17 in which the poet Nallaliciyār explains how inseparably tied up are the 'sacred' and 'profane' pursuits in worldly life.

The ladies perform rituals to the god at Paraṅkuṇṇam, the hill bedecked with waterfalls, for the speedy return of their husbands who are away; when the husbands do return, they all engage merrily in water-sports and ritual bathing in the prosperous Vaiyai river of undying fame. And, then, the ladies, with the wealth brought by their husbands, entertain guests at their residences in Kūṭal (Madurai), the capital of the Pāṇṭiya king whose chariot that carries a fish-banner is always surrounded by many chariots drawn by horses with well trimmed manes. Worship, union, enjoyment and then separation--all these are tied up in a chain of cause and effect relation; there is nothing wrong about it because that is what the way of worldly life is.61

Worth quoting here is the excellent translation and analysis of the very first poem in the Kuṇṭokai by Ramanujan, who has shown how this presence of many genres marked the distinctive feature of the classical Tamil akam (love) poems:

**What her Girl Friend Said**

to him, refusing his gift of red flowers

Red is the battlefield  
as he crushes

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60PN 378: 10-22.

61Pari. 17: 42-46. For interesting comments on these lines, see Gros (1967), p. 274.



the demons,  
 red his arrow shafts,  
 red the tusks  
 of his elephants:

this is the hill  
 of the Red One  
 with the whirling anklets,

the hill of red glory lilies,  
 flowers of blood.

Tipputtōlār  
 Kuruntokāi 1

On the face of it, the description could be from a war poem, in praise of a chieftain. The reference to demons and the Red One (Cēyōn or Murukan) enlists the war imagery to praise a god of war, the god of the hills, which makes it a religious poem. The title of the poem, "What her girl friend said to him, refusing his gift of red flowers," adds a third frame... It is a *kuṛiñci* poem set in the hills; the girl friend is teasingly delaying love's consummation. Thus a war poem is set inside a religious one, which in turn is used to make a love poem. Three major genres are here, frame within frame.<sup>62</sup>

The attempts that have been carried out to date to study religion in classical Tamil society have been largely taken up with looking for evidence of the origins of individual gods or one or the other 'sects', or by gathering and putting together scattered references on various beliefs and rituals concerning life and death. These studies have, no doubt, made some useful contributions to our knowledge by establishing the correspondences between the early and the later stages in the 'history' of a particular deity or by

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<sup>62</sup>Ramanujan (1985), pp. 278-279.

distinguishing between the early and later modes of faith. But the very premises upon which these studies were based precluded the possibility of taking the corpus in its totality, and searching in it for patterns of thought that were basic to the religious and ritual orientation of the Tamils. Even the few examples cited above would seem to indicate that underlying patterns could be discerned if we identify and analyze "culturally defined sets of behaviour", or, what may be broadly called the ritual motifs in early Tamil poetry.<sup>63</sup>

What we hope to do in this thesis is to focus our attention on some of the central ideas and action patterns in early Tamil poetry, thereby obtaining a better cognizance of the religious foundations of early Tamil society. Admittedly the bulk of the corpus, if contrasted with the devotional poetry, may not qualify for the label 'religious' poetry, but this does not mean that these poems are areligious or antireligious. It may also be true that the poems are not on or about religion, but religion is very much in them.

As stated earlier, a strict chronological arrangement of the poems in the classical texts is not possible. Therefore, we have chosen to adopt a thematic

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<sup>63</sup>According to Edmund Leach, the term ritual may be applied to all "culturally defined sets of behaviour". See **International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences**, vol. 13, p. 524.

approach to our topic. The themes that we have chosen for study are the following: space and place, hero, and gift. It must be admitted at once that these are not the only themes that one can isolate and study in the classical Tamil texts. Our choice of the above three themes is, however, not arbitrary, but is guided by a conviction that these three themes are not only prominent in the classical Tamil texts, but also reflect the underlying patterns of the Tamil mode of thought. The three themes are not unrelated, but are part of a clearly discernible mode of thought, and, in our discussion of each theme, we will attempt to show the connections between them. Finally these three themes are also, in our view, of vital importance for understanding the pattern of religious culture of the Tamils in later centuries, but a study of the way these themes manifested themselves later is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Notwithstanding the choice of what we deem to be the three most elemental themes in this literature, the present work is not intended as a complete or comprehensive treatise on early Tamil religion. The extant corpus of this archaic poetry runs to over twenty five thousand lines, and the grammatical treatises and the traditional commentaries, which are indispensable for a proper understanding and appreciation of the classical poetry and culture, are even more voluminous. Much ground work on individual texts need to be done, and several nagging issues settled, before a

definitive picture of early Tamil religion could be drawn up. The present work, it is hoped, is only a step in that direction.

**CHAPTER II SOURCES**

## CHAPTER II

### SOURCES

#### II.1. The Classical Poetry

The following eighteen works constitute the classical corpus in Tamil literature:

##### A. Eṭṭuttokai ("Eight Anthologies"):

1. **Narṛiṇai**, "The Good Genre", 400 love poems and an invocatory verse; one (234) is missing; range of lines 9-12; 187 poets. Patron: Paṇṇāṭu tanta Pāṇṭiyaṅ Māraṅ Valuti.
2. **Kuṟuntokai**, "Short Anthology", 401 love poems and an invocatory verse; range of lines 4-8 with one exception; 203 poets. Patron: Pūrikkō.
3. **Aiṅkuṟunūṟu**, "Five Hundred Short", 500 love poems and an invocatory verse; two (129,130) are missing; range of lines 3-5; five poets, each poet composed one hundred verses on each one of the five situations on the theme of mutual-love (**aṅpin aintiṇai**). Editor: Pulatturai muṟṟiya Kūṭalūr Kilār.

Patron: Yānaikkaṭcēy Māntarañcēral Irumpoṟai.

4. **Paṭiṟruppattu**, "Ten Tens", 100 panegyric poems on ten kings of the Cēral family, each decade composed by one poet praising one king; the first and the last decades are missing; range of lines 8-57; 8 poets; an invocatory verse and five fragments are also found. The heroes of the seventh, eighth and ninth decades namely, Celvakaṭuṅkō Vāḷiyātaṅ, Takaṭūr-eṟinta-Peruñcēral-irumpoṟai and Kuṭakkō Iḷañcēralirumpoṟai are identified respectively with Kō Ātaṅ Cellirumpoṟai, (his son) Peruṅkaṭuṅkōṅ and (his son) Iḷaṅkaṭuṅkō, the three generations of Cēral kings of Irumpoṟai family whose names appear in the Pukalūr Tamil-brāhmi inscriptions.<sup>1</sup>
5. **Paṟipāṭal**, "The Song in Paṟi (metre)", 70 poems of which only 22 are extant; however, 2 poems in full and a few fragments have been retrieved from other works and commentaries; range of lines 32-140; 13 poets; names of those who set the music to the songs are also given in the colophons.
6. **Kalittokai**, "The Anthology in kali (metre)", 149 love poems and an invocatory verse in kali metre; range of lines 11-80; five poets. Editor: Nallantuvaṅār.

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<sup>1</sup>Mahadevan (1966), pp. 65-66 and (1971), p. 95.

7. **Akanānūṟu**, "The Love Four Hundred", 400 love poems and an invocatory verse; range of lines 13-31; 158 poets. Editor: Uruttiracanmaṇ, son of Uppūrikuṭi Kilān. Patron: Pāṇṭiyan Ukkirapperuvaluti.
8. **Puṟanānūṟu**, "The Heroic Four Hundred", 400 poems on puṟam including an invocatory verse; two (267,268) are missing; 43 poems are incomplete; range of lines 4-40; 157 poets.

**B. Pattuppāṭṭu ("Ten Poems"):**

1. **Tirumurukāṟruppaṭai**, "A Guide to holy Muruku", 317 lines; Poet: Nakkīraṇ, the son of a teacher of Madurai. Hero of the poem: God Murukaṇ.
2. **Porunarāṟruppaṭai**, "A Guide for the war-bard", 248 lines; Poet: Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār. Hero of the poem: Cōla king Karikāl Valavaṇ.
3. **Ciṟupāṇāṟruppaṭai**,<sup>2</sup> "A Guide for the bard with small-lute", 269 lines; Poet: Nattattanār of Nallūr in Iṭaikkalināṭu. Hero of the poem: Nalliyakkōṭaṇ, the chieftain of Öymānāṭu.
4. **Perumpāṇāṟruppaṭai**, "A Guide for the bard with large-lute", 500 lines; Poet: Uruttiraṅkaṇṇanār of Kaṭiyalūr. Hero of the poem: Toṇṭaimān Iḷantiraiyan,

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<sup>2</sup>According to one view, the **CPA** (269 lines) and **PPA** (500 lines) are named so on the basis of the range of lines and not on the basis of the size of the lute of the bards. Jayaraman (1975), p. 177.



- the ruler of Kāñcipuram.
5. **Mullaippāṭṭu**, "Mullai Song", 103 lines; Poet: Nappūtanār, the son of a gold merchant of Kavirippūmpaṭṭinam. A love (akam) poem.
  6. **Maturaikkāñci**, "Good Counsel (given to the king) at Maturai (Madurai)", 782 lines; Poet: Māñkuṭi Marutaṅ. Hero of the poem: Pāṇṭiyan Talaiyālaṅkāṅattu-ceru-venṛa Neṭuñceliyan.
  7. **Neṭunalvāṭai**, "The Long, Good North Wind", 187 lines; Nakkīraṅ, the son of a teacher of Madurai. A love (akam) poem. The name of the hero is not mentioned, but Nacci. identifies the hero as the Pāṇṭiya king Talaiyālaṅkāṅattu-ceru-venṛa Neṭuñceliyan because of the allusion to his emblematic flower in the poem.
  8. **Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu**, "Kuṛiñci Song", 261 lines; Poet: Kapilar. A love (akam) poem. According to the colophon, the poem was composed by the poet in order to enlighten the Āryan king Pirakattaṅ on the Tamil concept of love.
  9. **Paṭṭinappālai**, "Paṭṭinam and Separation" , 301 lines; Poet: Uruttiraṅkaṅṇaṅ of Kaṭiyalūr. Hero of the poem: Cōla king Tirumāvalavaṅ (Karikāl Valavaṅ).

10. **Malaipatukatām**,<sup>3</sup> "The Mountain-Echoes", also called **Kūttarārrippatai** ("A Guide for the Actors"), 583 lines; Poet: **Peruṅkaucikaṅ** of **Peruṅkunṛūr** in **Iranīyamuttam**. Hero of the poem: **Nannan**, son of **Vēḷ Nannan** and the ruler of **Cenkaṇmā** in **Palkunṛakkōṭṭam**.

Besides these eighteen works, there is one other important text that should be counted as part of the classical corpus. That is the **Tolkāppiyam**. The **Tol.** a grammatical treatise consisting of three divisions (**atikāram**) each of which contain nine chapters (**iyal**). The third division, **poruḷatikāram**, is of special importance for our purpose. This division consists of the following nine chapters: 1) **akattiṇaiyiyal** (chapter on love) 2) **puṛattiṇaiyiyal** (chapter on heroism) 3) **kaḷaviyal** (chapter on pre-marital love) 4) **karpiyal** (chapter on conjugal life) 5) **poruḷiyal** (chapter on aspects of life) 6) **neyppāṭṭiyal** (chapter on dramaturgy) 7) **uvanaiyiyal** (chapter on simile) 8) **ceyyuḷiyal** (chapter on prosody) 9) **marapiyal** (chapter on conventional usage).

An outline of the content of each one of these works is available in a number of recent studies.<sup>4</sup> We shall not

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<sup>3</sup>The phrase **malaipatukatām** occurs in line 348 of the poem. It is not uncommon in the classical corpus to name the poem or the anonymous author after a striking phrase that is found in the poem itself. See Dorairangaswami (1968).

<sup>4</sup>Jesudasan and Jesudasan (1960), Chs. II and III; Kailasapathy (1968), Ch. I, pp. 16-47; Zvelebil (1973), Ch. IV. pp. 49-61 and (1974), pp. 12-25.

therefore repeat them here. However the content and structure of the three texts that we have chosen as our 'guide', namely *TMP*, *Pari.*, and *Kalit.*, have given rise to major debates in Tamil studies. It is therefore necessary to respond to at least some of those issues. Before we do so, we must comment on two general issues.

The first issue is the nomenclature. It was noted that 'caṅkam literature' is the name by which this corpus is commonly known in Tamil literary tradition. According to a legend first recorded in an eighth century commentary of a grammatical work called the *Iṟaiyaṅār Akapporuḷ*, the rulers of the Pāṅṅiya family were the founder-patrons of three literary caṅkam(s) or 'academies' which flourished successively in three of their capitals.<sup>5</sup> These three academies, we are told, lasted altogether for over nine thousand years, and approved numerous literary works composed and contributed by thousands of poets. But all works that were presented to and approved by the first caṅkam at (old) Madurai, which counted among its list of poets a few gods too, and all but one of the works of the second caṅkam at Kapāṅapuram perished when these two Pāṅṅiyaṅ capitals--Madurai and Kapāṅapuram--were, one after the other, engulfed by the sea (*kaṅalkoḷḷa*). Most of the works of the third and last caṅkam, which was located at

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<sup>5</sup>*IA.*, pp. 5-7; For a full translation and discussion of this legend, see Zvelebil, *IJ.*, vol. XV, 2. pp. 109-135.

Uttaramadurai (modern Madurai) have fortunately survived. The commentary on the IA lists the names of all the eight anthologies mentioned above as works of the third caṅkam; it does not mention any of the ten poems, but they, too, are traditionally counted as works of the poets who belonged to the third caṅkam.<sup>6</sup>

According to the same legend, the only surviving work of the second caṅkam is the Tol. The dating of the text is, as mentioned already, a matter of serious dispute among modern scholars. According to the traditional view, it is the earliest extant work in Tamil, preceding in date all other classical poems.<sup>7</sup> According to another school, it is later than most of the classical anthologies, and is datable to a period not earlier than the fifth century C.E.<sup>8</sup> According to yet another point of view, the work was of multiple authorship spanning several centuries, and, "the nuclear portions . . . were probably born sometime in the 2nd or 1st Cent. B.C., but hardly before 150 B.C."<sup>9</sup> Whatever be its date of composition, its association with the classical poems is justified by the fact that the work,

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<sup>6</sup>cf. Marr (1985), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Among the recent writings in which fresh arguments have been made in support of this view, mention may be made of Aravanan (1978), pp. 15-30.

<sup>8</sup>Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 147. The chapter includes a review of all previous theories on this issue.

particularly its third section, is "indispensable for a full understanding of the early history of poetry" in Tamil.<sup>10</sup>

The appropriateness of calling this body of literature by the name 'caṅkam poetry', notwithstanding its sanction by the tradition, has been called into question by some modern scholars on the ground that the idea as well as the act of collection and codification of the poems into anthologies could have occurred only after the period in which the poems were composed and, therefore, ". . . the earliest corpus of literature, which in point of time definitely preceded the existence of any such academy, cannot properly be termed 'caṅkam poetry'."<sup>11</sup> In its place, other nomenclatures such as the 'court poetry', 'heroic' or 'bardic poetry' and 'classical' poetry have been suggested, and employed for these poems.<sup>12</sup>

In this dissertation all of the above texts will be referred to as 'classical', and our preference for this term may require an explanation. Our reasons for adopting this appellation are both literary and historical. By this we mean that the age reflected in the caṅkam poetry was characterized by the following features: 1) the function of a standard and authoritative form of literary idiom that was

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<sup>10</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 48.

<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Marr (1985), p. 453; Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 3-4; Zvelebil (1973), p. 49-50.

shared by all poets irrespective of their place of birth or social rank, 2) the prevalence of a set of formal literary conventions and modes that was, once again, shared by all poets, 3) the origin and spread of alphabetic writing (in Tamil) which coincided with a rapid growth in trade and inter-regional communication, and, 4) indisputable evidence of a dynamic development in Tamil culture that provoked its finest creative minds to attempt to draw and redraw a constantly expanding configuration of ideas and social groups into a common structure and an organic cultural unit.<sup>13</sup> The result was an age of well thought out cultural values which all later ages held in great respect.

The second issue is the problem of dating. A great deal has been written on the question of absolute and relative dating of classical Tamil texts. It is neither possible nor necessary to discuss at length the bewildering array of arguments that have been advanced in support or in refutation of one theory or the other. Moreover, these theories have been summed up and reviewed many times over by scholars.<sup>14</sup> It is sufficient to note that the issue remains

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<sup>13</sup>Specifically I have in mind Tol., Vaḷḷuvar, and Iḷaṅkō. Although their works--Tol., Kuraḷ, and Cil. respectively--are a little later than the early poetry, there is no denying the fact that these authors have erected their edifices upon the classical heritage and each work was a monumental effort to set forth an organic view of the language, the life and the culture of the Tamils respectively.

<sup>14</sup>See particularly, Zvelebil, 1973, chs. III, VIII and IX; 1975, chs. II-V; Iracamanikkanar (1973).

unsolved, and we are as yet far from arriving at any definite conclusions in this regard. This may be illustrated by a quick review of the position held by scholars with regard to the date of the three texts, namely **TMP**, **Pari.**, and **Kalit.**

The **TMP**, for instance, has been assigned to different dates ranging from the third century to the ninth century C.E. According to Vaiyapuri Pillai, Nakkīraṇ, the author of **TMP**, did not belong to the classical phase but probably belonged to eighth century C.E.<sup>15</sup> Zvelebil, on the other hand, is inclined to take all poems, including the **TMP**, which are ascribed to the poet named Kīraṇ or Nakkīraṇ in the classical corpus as works of one and the same author, and, he assigns c. 250 C.E., as the probable date of the composition of the **TMP**.<sup>16</sup>

The **Pari.** has poems composed by several poets, but it is hard to fix the date of any of them. In the eleventh poem in the **Pari.** collection are some astronomical details which have given rise to a serious debate with regard to its date. The debate which began in the twenties still

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<sup>15</sup>Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956), p. 58 and p. 113.

<sup>16</sup>Zvelebil (1975), pp. 106-107 and pp. 273-274. Zvelebil accepts the possibility that Nakkīraṇ was probably a contemporary of Nallantuvanār whose poems are found in the **Kalit.** and **Pari.** Elsewhere he also says that "there are also other indications that the poem (i.e. **TMP**) may hardly be older than about 550-600 A.D." Zvelebil (1973), p.130.

continues.<sup>17</sup> Without getting ourselves lost in the details, it may be noted that these astronomical details have yielded different dates at different hands, and, accordingly, the **Pari.** collection has been assigned to various dates ranging from the first century to the seventh century C.E. Zvelebil favours a date between "the latter half of the 4th and the first half of the 6th c. A.D."<sup>18</sup> He arrives at this date on the basis of rather general considerations such as the linguistic features, thought-content and orientation of the poems in the text.

The **Kalit.** poems offer few clues to help us fix their date, but scholars are nearly unanimous in regarding the collection as one of the latest, or, as P. T. Srinivasa Aiyangar put it, the 'Swan Song' of classical Tamil literature.<sup>19</sup> In Vaiyapuri Pillai's view, the date of the anthology was probably about the eighth century C.E., because there are late linguistic features as well as references to stories from Sanskrit sources in several of its poems.<sup>20</sup> In Zvelebil's opinion, the "metre, diction, themes, the over-all tone and spirit of the poems", and the

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<sup>17</sup>For a summary and review of the debate, see Gros (1968), pp. xx-xxiv.

<sup>18</sup>Zvelebil (1975), p. 102 and (1974), p. 50 and p. 89.

<sup>19</sup>Srinivasa Aiyangar (1983 reprint), p. 565.

<sup>20</sup>Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956) p. 57; also Sivaraja Pillai (1932), p. 225.



virtual absence of references to any king by name all indicate that the *Kalit.* was of "a later date--somewhere between the 4th-5th cent. A.D."<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding these efforts at establishing rough chronologies, the issue is still wide open. The only inference that can be drawn at present on the basis of a cumulative study of archaeological, epigraphical and literary evidences, is that the bulk of the classical poems were composed during the period between the second century B.C.E., and the second or third century C.E.. For the rest, we quote below two observations from one and the same work of Zvelebil who has written probably more on this issue than any other scholar in recent years. His observations mirror, in our view, fairly accurately the provisional character of all current theories relating to the chronology of the classical Tamil texts. Attempting to fix the position of the three texts, namely *TMP*, *Pari.*, and *Kalit.*, vis-a-vis the other poems in the corpus, Zvelebil initially observes:

According to tradition, the two collections of *Kal.* and *Par.* belong to the original corpus of the *tokai* (anthology) texts, and the *TMP* is quoted as the first of the lays (*pattu*). However great our respect for tradition may be, it seems that an unprejudiced and critical examination will remove these three texts from the oldest corpus and place them, on ideological, semantic, formal and linguistic grounds, at

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<sup>21</sup>Zvelebil (1974), p. 48 and (1973), p. 120.

the very end of the Classical period.<sup>22</sup>

However, he closes the section seven pages later saying:

. . . in spite of what had been said in favour of the historical approach to the relative sequence of texts within the bardic corpus, the problem is far from definitely settled, and it may ultimately appear that the indigenous tradition regarding the *Par.* and the *TMP* as genuinely belonging to the corpus of ancient bardic poetry will prove correct . . .<sup>23</sup>

These prudent observations of Zvelebil should alert one to the fact that, whatever distinctive features that the *TMP*, *Parl.*, and *Kalit.* may have, it has not been possible to establish their date, and in the present circumstance, it may not be imprudent to treat them as more or less contemporaneous with the other anthologies. In the light of the historical picture that we presented in the previous chapter, one cannot conclude that on account of the Sanskrit influences found in them, these texts are incompatible with the period to which the bulk of classical poems belonged. On the other hand, by accepting them as part of the traditional corpus, we may seek clues in them for understanding the other texts better. Let us, therefore, take a closer look at some of their distinctive features with a view to underscore what they have in common with each other and with other poems in the classical corpus.

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<sup>22</sup>Zvelebil (1975), p. 99.

<sup>23</sup>*ibid.*, p. 106.

## II.2. Tirumurukāṛṇṇuppaṭai

The TMP has the distinction of being the only text that is a part of two celebrated literary collections. It is the first of the ten songs in the **Pattu**. collection in the classical corpus; and it also forms a part of the eleventh among the twelve sacred collections (**tirumurai**) of the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Its importance in the history of Tamil literature is, however, not merely because of its being one of the earliest sacred texts of Tamil Śaivism. For it has also won the critical acclaim of many modern critics as a work of great artistic beauty and excellence.<sup>24</sup>

### Author

The author of the song was Nakkīraṇ, the son of a teacher (Kaṇakkāyaṇār) of Madurai. Nakkīraṇ is also credited with the authorship of yet another song in the **pattu**. collection, the **NNV**. Besides these two long poems, there are as many as thirty-five poems in different classical anthologies which are attributed to poets by the name of

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<sup>24</sup>Keller (1969), pp. 55-62; also Meenakshisundaran (1961), pp. 70-79.

Nakkīraṅ.<sup>25</sup> Finally the author of the commentary on the IA, to which reference was already made in connection with the caṅkam legend, was also named Nakkīraṅ and lived in Madurai. Vaiyapuri Pillai was of the view that, on linguistic and other considerations, the TMP, the NNV and the commentary on IA could not have been the works of one and the same person, and, therefore, argued that there were at least three different poets bearing the same name but belonging to three different periods.<sup>26</sup> Kīraṅ or Nakkīraṅ is a hallowed name in Tamil literary tradition and over the centuries the name has been embellished with a number of myths and legends which render the correct identification of the author of TMP a difficult one.<sup>27</sup> It is fairly certain that there was more than one poet bearing the name in Tamil history, but it is not easy to determine exactly how many.

### Āṟṟuppaṭai: Form, Theme and Function

The TMP is composed in akaval, the metre par excellence of classical Tamil poetry. Its root verb akavu

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<sup>25</sup>These anthologies are: AN (17 poems), KT (8 poems), NT (7 poems) and PN (3 poems). A certain Iḷaṅkīraṅ (lit. 'young Kīraṅ') appears as the author of nine poems in AN, one poem in KT and six poems in NT. It is not certain whether both names--Nakkīraṅ and Iḷaṅkīraṅ--refer to one and the same person. cf. Zvelebil (1974), pp. 105-106.

<sup>26</sup>see footnote no. 15 above.

<sup>27</sup>Legends on Nakkīraṅ are mainly found in the late medieval Saiva sthalapurāṇas centered on Madurai, the most important among them being Paraṅcōti's Tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam, chs. 54 and 56.

means, 'to call, summon'.<sup>28</sup> Its *ōcai* (rhythm) is also called *akaval*; the metre is regarded as best suited for narrative and recitative poetry.<sup>29</sup> Thematically the *TMP* is a *puṛam* poem. The grammarians classify it as a song of *pāṭāntīnai* ('Praise-situation') with the theme (*turai*) of *āṛruppaṭai*. *Āṛruppaṭai* is a 'guidance' poem in which a bard directs his fellow professional to the generous patron from whom he had earlier received gifts.<sup>30</sup> Shorter poems of this genre are found in the *PN* and *PrP* collections. There are altogether twenty-one such poems, fourteen in the *PN* and seven in the *PrP*.<sup>31</sup> In the *pattu*. itself, besides the *TMP*, there are four other *āṛruppaṭai* poems namely *PAP*, *PPA*, *CPA* and *MPK*. The setting of each one of these four poems, as indicated by their titles, is a meeting between a different kind of minstrel (*porunar*, *perumpāṇar*, *ciṛupāṇar* and *kūttar* respectively). In each of them a bard directs his fellow professionals to a munificent patron.

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<sup>28</sup>DED 10.

<sup>29</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 110 and p. 119; also see Marr (1985), p. 420.

<sup>30</sup>Tol.poruḷ.puṛat.nūṛ. 30: 3-6.

<sup>31</sup>In the *PN*, seven (68, 69, 70, 138, 141, 155, 180) of them are classified under *pānāṛruppaṭai*, three (48, 49, 141) under *pulavarāṛruppaṭai*, and four (64, 103, 105, 133) under *viṛaliyāṛruppaṭai* ('guiding the danseuse'). In the *PrP*, one (67) poem is classified under *pānāṛruppaṭai* and six (40, 49, 57, 60, 78, 87) under *viṛaliyāṛruppaṭai*. Kailasapathy, in his book, counts only 18, leaving out the three under *pulavarāṛruppaṭai*. Kailasapathy (1968), p. 36.

The **TMP** follows the same pattern, except that in this poem the poet is a devotee of Murukan, and he directs his listener to the god and gives him an account of the various abodes where the god can be found. The **TMP** is the only extant 'guide' poem in the classical corpus in which, instead of a human patron, a god is extolled. Moreover, unlike the other **āṛṛuppaṭai** songs in the **pattu.**, the poem is named after the benefactor (**puravalaṅ**) rather than the beneficiary (**iravalaṅ**). The **TMP** was also known by the name **Pulavarāṛṛuppaṭai** ('guiding the poet'), which would give it exactly the same form as the other four 'guide' poems. This alternate appellation finds no favour with the fastidious commentator Nacci., for in his view it had no sanction from the tradition.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that the **TMP** celebrates a god and not a mortal as its 'hero', has prompted some scholars to assign a late date for the poem.<sup>33</sup> First, it has been contended that the name **TMP**, according to the established literary convention, "should denote a composition by which the poet directs Tirumurugan to follow a certain path to compass some of his ends because the transitive verb **paṭutta** and the verbal noun derived from it **paṭai** appearing in the compounds **āṛṛuppaṭutta** and **āṛṛuppaṭai** were always used (then) with

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<sup>32</sup>Tol.poruḷ.puṛat.nūṛ. 36. Nacci. comm.

<sup>33</sup>Iracamanikkanar (1973), p. 77.

their grammatical objects."<sup>34</sup> According to this argument the title **TMP** shows a departure from this usage in as much as it is the devotee, rather than Murukan, who is directed in the poem to visit the various sites where the god resides. Secondly, it has been argued that the poetic 'setting' in which one devotee directs another to (the abodes of) god has not been mentioned in the **Tol.**, and, hence, the **TMP** should be taken to represent a later day convention.<sup>35</sup>

These contentions are not, however, very convincing. The first argument, for instance, does not take into account the occurrence of the expression **āṛṛuppaṭutta** in the poem itself. The poet, while on the one hand directing the devotee to the abodes of the lord, also explains in the poem how Murukan, too, is 'directed' by the devotee to make an appearance at the site of worship:

. . . the daughter of the hill played the favourite instruments of Murukan inviting him (**murukāṛṛu-p-paṭutta**) to appear at the temple site petrifying his enemies.<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that the expression **murukāṛṛuppaṭutta** occurs in yet another poem in the **AN** in the same sense of 'directing' or 'invoking' the god:

It was midnight. The floor was well decorated; the spear was garlanded; the

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<sup>34</sup>Sivaraja Pillai (1932), p. 257.

<sup>35</sup>Iracamanikkanar (1970), p. 47.

<sup>36</sup>**TMP.**, 242-244.

temple reverberated with the loud singing; then, the sacrifice was offered; full grown millet mixed with blood were showered and, thus, Murukaṅ was invoked to appear by the women of ancient wisdom.<sup>37</sup>

In the light of these references, one may dissolve the compound **murukāṅruppaṭai** either into an accusative ('guiding Murukaṅ') or locative ('guiding [the devotee] to Murukaṅ') case, and in either way the title of the poem remains meaningful.

The second argument is based on the assumption that the great grammarian Tol. does not refer to god at all when he defines an **āṅruppaṭai** poem in the section on 'praise'. This issue is a rather complex one and needs careful consideration. Admittedly the 'hero' glorified in the extant classical poems was rarely a god, but nearly always a king or a chieftain.<sup>38</sup> However, what we need to ask is not whether praise is intended for humans or gods, but what was the early Tamil conception of a 'poetic hero'? Did the early Tamil concept of 'hero' encompass mortal beings as well as divine beings? What, indeed, were the criteria of being a 'poetic hero'? The issue that needs to be addressed is: Was there a linking between god and man in the concept of hero?

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37AN 22: 7-11.

38There are a few poems in the PN in which the achievements of nameless warriors and community leaders who were not members of princely families are extolled. For instance, PN 166 and 305 are classified under the theme, **pāṅppaṅ vākaḷ** (theme of extolling the greatness achieved by a **brāhmaṅa**). see PPVM 163; also Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 23-26.



Reserving a detailed discussion of these questions for a later chapter, we shall draw attention to a few points relevant to our present discussion now.<sup>39</sup> We may begin with the *Tol.* which, as always, provides a good starting point for understanding the conceptual realm of the early Tamils. According to the literary conventions as laid out in the *Tol.*, the world is divided into four distinct, regional landscapes (*tiṇai*).<sup>40</sup> In an oft-quoted passage, *Tol.* gives the name of the presiding lord of each of these regional landscapes as follows:

māyōṅ mēya kātuṟai ulakamum  
 cēyōṅ mēya maivarai ulakamum  
 vēntaṅ mēya tīmpuṅal ulakamum  
 varuṅaṅ mēya perumaṅal ulakamum  
 mullai kuṟiṅci marutam neytal eṇac  
 colliya muṟaiyār collavum paṭumē.

the pastoral region, presided over by Māyōṅ;  
 the mountain region, presided over by Cēyōṅ;  
 the riverine region, presided over by  
 Vēntaṅ; the great sandy (coastal) region,  
 presided over by Varuṅaṅ; these, in the  
 order enumerated, are called mullai,  
 kuṟiṅci, marutam and neytal.<sup>41</sup>

Both medieval and modern commentators identify the four lords mentioned in the *nūṟ.* as follows: Māyōṅ, the god of mullai is identified with Māl or Viṣṇu; Cēyōṅ, the god of kuṟiṅci is identified with Murukaṅ; Vēntaṅ, the god of marutam is identified with Indra; and, Varuṅaṅ, the god of

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<sup>39</sup>The theme of 'hero' is discussed in Ch. IV.

<sup>40</sup>*Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ.* 2.

<sup>41</sup>*ibid.*, 5.

**neytal** is equated with Varuṇa. The first two identifications pose no problem. The allusion to Varuṇa as the god of the coastal region poses a problem primarily because there are no references to Varuṇa in any of the extant classical poems. The coastal people seem to have believed that an awesome power (**aṇaṅku**) resided in the expansive ocean.<sup>42</sup> The **PP** refers to a ritual performed by the Paratavas, a coastal community, to appease this sacred power. In this ritual the Paratavas planted the tooth of a pregnant shark on the beach and offered prayers with flowers because they believed that the fearsome power (**vallaṇaṅkināṇ**) of the sea resides in it.<sup>43</sup> But there is no evidence to show its association with Varuṇa.

Our concern here, however, is with the term **vēntan** which the commentators took as denoting Indra, the king of gods in the Vedic mythology. The **DED** lists the following meanings under the term **vēntan**: 'king, Indra, sun, moon, Bṛhaspati' and under **vēntu**: 'kingly position, kingdom, royalty, king, Indra'.<sup>44</sup> The etymology of the term is not clear, but there are grounds to believe that the term originally meant simply king or kingly position, and it was only by extension of its primary meaning that subsequently

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<sup>42</sup>**NT** 155: 5-6.

<sup>43</sup>**PP** 86-87.

<sup>44</sup>**DED** 5529 and also see entries 4540, 4550, 4549.

it came to refer to Indra or Bṛhaspati in Tamil tradition. It is of some significance in this context that the term is not known to have been employed in the classical texts to refer to either Indra or Bṛhaspati, even though the name Intira (Indra) itself is found at least five times--four times in the singular and once in the plural--in the anthology poems.<sup>45</sup> The term vēntaṅ occurs at least sixty-one times in the texts, and in no instance is it used to mean either Indra or Bṛhaspati. On the contrary in every case it is used to refer to kings, especially kings of the three major ruling families of the Tamil region namely the Cēra<sub>l</sub>s, the Cō<sub>l</sub>as and the Pāṅṅ<sub>ṅ</sub>iyas. In Tol. itself, the term occurs no less than eleven times, and is invariably used to refer to a mortal king. In view of the consistency in its use in the classical texts and in Tol., one wonders if the term vēntaṅ in the passage cited above refers to Indra at all, and does not mean simply 'king' or the one who was deemed the 'lord' of the agrarian (marutam) tract. If this argument is correct, it would imply that for Tol. or generally in classical understanding, the vēntaṅ (king) was to be respected on par with gods.

It is important to recognise this aspect of early Tamil thought because it has been suggested by at least one scholar that the Tamils originally had no coherent notion of

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<sup>45</sup>AKN 62: 1; PN 182: 1; Pari. 8: 33; 19: 50; Pari. Tirattu, 2: 96.

godship and that their concept of kingship was devoid of divine dimensions. Therefore,

. . . when the North Indian gods were imported [sic] and had to find a place in South India, (for) in order to be accessible to South Indians, the new gods had to fit into the indigenous human perspective . . . the new god was modeled on and assimilated to the king.<sup>46</sup>

In support of his idea of the assimilation of the 'northern' god with the Tamil king, Hart draws our attention to the similarity in the procedure followed by the roving bards of the classical phase and the itinerant devotees of medieval bhakti religion in that each bard travelled from place to place to receive patronage. Specifically mentioning the TMP in this context, he further argues: "In that work, those in spiritual need are counseled to go to the god Murukan, just as in the earlier examples of this genre, bards suffering from physical want were advised to go to a certain king: the god had already begun to assume the characteristics of the king."<sup>47</sup>

I do not subscribe to the view that it was the 'imported' northern gods who assumed the characteristics of the Tamil king. I would rather argue that in the early poems themselves there is indication of a conceptual linking of 'king' and 'god' who were, to borrow Ramanujan's expression

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<sup>46</sup>Hart (1979), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup>Hart (1979), pp. 14-15.

from another context, tied together in "a hyphenated continuum".<sup>48</sup> This linking was sufficiently strong in Tamil culture that in introducing the theme of 'praise' (pātāṇ) the grammarians always explain that the term refers to the praise of both mortal heroes and immortal gods.<sup>49</sup>

We shall have occasion in a subsequent chapter to examine more closely some of the literary conventions related to this perception, and also the actual handling of particular situations by the classical poets. What needs to be stressed at this point, in order to understand the rationale of an āṟṟuppaṭai poem, is that the early Tamil images of king and god, as revealed in the extant corpus, instead of being conceptually distinct and separate, appear to overlap and intersect with one another. It is hard to pinpoint the date of its origin, but it is a pattern of thought which seems to go far back into prehistoric times. Important support for this understanding is found in Mahadevan's linguistic study of the term vēntaṇ. Analyzing in detail the Sun-God-King concept in ancient India, he concludes: "It will also be seen that the old Tamil vē-nt-aṇ, "paramount sovereign" . . . is distinctly related to "sun" and "god" concepts."<sup>50</sup> So deep rooted and enduring was

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<sup>48</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 286. For further discussion on this, see Ch. IV.

<sup>49</sup>Tol.poruḷ.puṟat.nūṟ. 81-85. cf. Stein (1980), p. 335.

<sup>50</sup>Mahadevan (1979), p. 265.

this conception of 'king-god' that in the early medieval and medieval periods, it "blossomed into a fullfledged political theory."<sup>51</sup>

The main function of an **āṛṛuppaṭai** song was to praise the hero. The occasion of its composition, and in which it was to be recited appears to be a ritual setting. This interpretation is borne out by the context in which Tol. defines what **āṛṛuppaṭai** is. In the **purat.** division, Tol. gives a list of possible themes for poetic composition under **pāṭāṇ** in two lengthy **nūṛpā(s)**. The themes that he enumerates in the second **nūṛ.**, include the **āṛṛuppaṭai** situation:

Songs sung by **sūta(s)** to awaken sleeping kings, wishing them unblemished fame; situations when actors, bards, war-bards, or female dancers, while returning from a patron, meet fellow-professionals who suffer from poverty, and suggest to them how they may also obtain the riches as **they** themselves have; the occasion of the birthday of the king, festive days when he avoids anger; the occasion of annual coronation ceremony; praising the protective powers of king's umbrella; praising the sword that is aimed at the enemies; the occasion of ritual bath that kings take after destroying enemy's fort. . .<sup>52</sup>

It is apparent that most of the situations are related to ceremonial events in the life of a king. The

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<sup>51</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 77.

<sup>52</sup>Tol.porul.purat.nūṛ. 30: 1-12. For a translation of the whole passage and further discussion on this **nūṛ.**, see *infra*, Ch. IV.

reference to the recitation by the **sūta(s)** is particularly significant. Pargiter long ago suggested that the **purāna(s)** were originally composed and sung by traditional genealogists (**sūta**) in Prākṛit and were later rendered into Sanskrit by **brāhmaṇ** editors.<sup>53</sup> **sūta(s)** along with **māgadha(s)** and **vaitālika(s)** were described in Sanskrit texts as ritual singers in the royal household.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, it remains to be pointed out that the **āṅṅuppaṭai** genre was, in one sense, a forerunner to the poetic eulogies called **praśasti(s)** or **meykīrtti(s)** which appeared in medieval royal grants and inscriptions. As elsewhere in the subcontinent, in the Tamil region too, the function of bards in the royal court was gradually taken over by the 'learned' ones (the **pulavaṅ** and the **brāhmaṅ**) who were the authors of the 'court' poetry and the **praśasti** or praise sections in the royal inscriptions of the medieval Tamil kingdoms.<sup>55</sup> The medieval compositions were quite often longer and more elaborate than the **āṅṅuppaṭai** poems, and,

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<sup>53</sup>Cited in Thapar (1984), p. 131.

<sup>54</sup>Kailasapathy accuses Nacci. of confusion when the latter equates the Tamil **akavar** bards with **sūtas** and **māgadhas**: "Being only too familiar with the Sanskrit scholarship of medieval times, Nacci brings **sūtas**, **Māgadhas**, **Vandins**, and **Vaitāligas** into his discussion--names and concepts alien to early Tamil poetry." Kailasapathy (1968), p. 110. In fairness to Nacci. it must be noted that these names do occur in early Tamil poetry. See MK 670-671 (**cūtar vāltta mākatā nuvala vētālikaroṭu nālikai icaippa...**).

<sup>55</sup>cf. Kailasapathy (1968), p. 223.

therefore, tended to be richer in 'historical' as well as mythical details. Nonetheless the spirit, purpose and function of the two genres were one and the same; in oral or written form, they glorified and legitimized the hero and his power.

### II.3. Paripāṭal

The **Pari.** was the last of the classical texts to appear in print in the year 1918. The name **paripāṭal** (**pari** + **pāṭal**) means 'song in **pari**' metre. It is the only extant anthology in Tamil in which poems composed in the **pari** metre are found, and there has, therefore, been a tendency among scholars to keep the anthology somewhat separate from the other classical texts. The **Pari.** anthology is said to have originally consisted of a total of seventy poems. According to a stray quatrain, these seventy verses had been thematically distributed as follows:

Eight on Tirumāl, thirty-one on Cevvēl, one on the Lady of the forest (**kāṭukāl**), twenty-six on the beautiful (river) Vaiyai and four on the great (city) Madurai; these constitute the beautiful **paripāṭal**. Thus it is said.<sup>56</sup>

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56 **tirumār kirunāṅku cevvēṭku muppat**  
**torupāṭṭuk-kāṭukāt konṟu maruviṇiya**  
**vaiyai (y)irupattāru māatural nāṅkenpa**  
**ceyyapari pāṭar-riṟam.**

A variant reading for **kāṭukāl** is **kārkōl** which may then either mean 'the **kār** or rainy season' or the 'ocean'. This solitary poem is among the missing ones.



Of these seventy, only 22 have come down to us. However two poems composed in the *pari* metre have been retrieved in full from the late medieval commentaries, and these two have been taken to be among the lost poems of the *Pari.* collection. F. Gros, in his edition of the *Pari.*, has added one more to this list, a *pari* verse in praise of Cevvēḷ which was found in Pērācīriyar's commentary on the *Tol. poruḷ. ceyyuḷ.* 156. Besides these twenty-five, a few fragments of *pari* poems have been collected from the old commentaries and from the *Puṟattiraṭṭu*, a compilation of poems on the *puṟam* theme. Of the twenty-five full length poems, nine are in praise of Cevvēḷ (Murukaṅ/Skanda), the lord of Paraṅkuṅṟam hill which is located near Madurai; seven are in praise of Tirumāl (Viṣṇu), the lord of Iruṅkuṅṟam (15) and Iruntaiyūr (23); the two sites are also located near Madurai. The remaining nine are in praise of the river Vaiyai that runs through the city of Madurai.

A noteworthy feature of the poems in the *Pari.* collection is that the colophon that accompanies each poem gives not only the name of the author but also the name of the person who set the music. In the poems on Cevvēḷ and Tirumāl, there are allusions to a number of epic and purānic stories of these two gods. The *Pari.* poems are important for yet another reason. They, particularly the ones in praise of Cevvēḷ and Tirumāl, together with the *TMP*, represent "the earliest literary testimony of *bhakti* movement in south

India, if not in India as a whole."57

### Authors

The subject and the name of the author of each one of the extant pari verses are as follows:

No.	Subject	Author	Composer
1.	Tirumāl	-- not known -	
2.	Tirumāl	Kīrantaiyār	Nannākanār
3.	Tirumāl	Kaṭuvaṅ Iḷaveyiṅaṅār	Peṭṭanākanār
4.	Tirumāl	Kaṭuvaṅ Iḷaveyiṅaṅār	Peṭṭanākanār
5.	Cevvēḷ	Kaṭuvaṅ Iḷaveyiṅaṅār	Kaṅṅanākanār
6.	Vaiyai	Nallantuvaṅār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
7.	Vaiyai	Maiyōṭakkōvaṅār	Pittāmattar
8.	Cevvēḷ	Nallantuvaṅār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
9.	Cevvēḷ	Kuṅṅam Pūtaṅār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
10.	Vaiyai	Karumpiḷḷai Pūtaṅār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
11.	Vaiyai	Nallantuvaṅār	Nākanār
12.	Vaiyai	Nalvalutiyār	Nannākanār
13.	Tirumāl	Nalleluniyār	not known
14.	Cevvēḷ	Kēcavaṅār	Kēcavaṅār

15.	Tirumāl	Iḷamperuvalutiyār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
16.	Vaiyai	Nallaliciyār	Nallaccutaṅār
17.	Cevvēḷ	Nallaliciyār	Nallaccutaṅār
18.	Cevvēḷ	Kuṅṅam Pūtaṅār	Nallaccutaṅār
19.	Cevvēḷ	Nappaṅṅaṅār	Maruttuvaṅ Nallaccutaṅār
20.	Vaiyai	Nallantuvaṅār	Nallaccutaṅār
21.	Cevvēḷ	Nallaccutaṅār	Kaṅṅakaṅār
22.	Vaiyai	-- not known --	

Retrieved either in full or in fragments from the medieval commentaries and the *Puṟattiraṭṭu* collection:

Full:

1. Tirumāl -- not known --  
(cited in Pērā. comm. on Tol. poruḷ. ceyyuḷ. nūr. 121)
2. Vaiyai -- not known --  
(cited in Iḷam. comm. on Tol. poruḷ. ceyyuḷ. nūr. 118)

Fragments:

Besides these two full length poems, there are, according to the early editions of the text, eleven fragments which originally belonged to different pari

poems.<sup>58</sup> Of these eleven, five have been retrieved from the medieval commentaries and six from the **Purattirattu** collection. All the fragments from the **Purattirattu** are in praise of Madurai.

Of the names of the poets listed above, none except two--Nallantuvaṅār and Iḷamperuvalutiyār--are connected with any other collection of classical poetry. A certain Antuvaṅ is hailed as the composer of beautiful songs about Paraṅkuṅṅam hill by the poet Marutaṅ Iḷa Nākaṅār of Madurai in one of his poems in the AN. This Antuvaṅ could well be Nallantuvaṅār.<sup>59</sup> The poet who composed the neyṭal poems in Kalit. and codified that collection into an anthology was also named Nallantuvaṅār.

The poems in the anthology are composed in pari metre, which has been defined as a 'mixed metre'. That means that a pari poem may contain all possible metres.<sup>60</sup> According to Tol. a pari poem may range from twenty-five

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<sup>58</sup>In the editions of U. Ve. Saminathaiyar, Samajam, and SISS, the number of fragments given is nine. In the edition of Murray S. Rajam, two more fragments are added bringing the total to eleven. See also Gros's edition in which the poems on Tirumāl and Vaiyai which have been retrieved in full from the commentaries are also listed under 'fragments'. Gros (1968), p. 305 and p. 309.

<sup>59</sup>AN 59: 11-12. For a review of the opinion of various scholars on the identity of Nallantuvaṅār, see Gros (1968), pp. xix-xx; also, Zvelebil (1975), p. 273.

<sup>60</sup>Tol.poruḷ.cēyyuḷ.nūṟ. 116.

lines to four hundred lines.<sup>61</sup> The poem normally consists of four parts namely **koccakam**, **arākam**, **curitakam** and **eruttu** and, thematically, love (**kāmam**) elements will be predominant in it.<sup>62</sup> Tol. refers to a few more characteristic features of the **pari** poems, but as these features are applicable to poems composed in **kali** metre as well, we shall discuss their significance in the section that follows on the anthology of **Kalit.**

#### II.4. Kalittokai

The **Kalit.** was edited and published by Ci. Vai. Damodaram Pillai in the year 1887 and was thus the first classical Tamil anthology to appear in print. It consists of 150 poems composed in **kali** metre. Ranging from eleven to eighty lines, these poems have been grouped unevenly under five **akam** themes as follows: **pālai** (2-36), **kuṟiñci** (37-65), **marutam** (66-100), **mullai** (101-117), **neytai** (118-150). The first poem is an invocatory verse in praise of the dancing Śiva. There is a fine commentary on the entire work by Nacci.

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<sup>61</sup>*ibid.*, 155.

<sup>62</sup>*ibid.*, 117.

**Author(s)**

The authorship of *Kalit.* has been a matter of dispute.<sup>63</sup> According to a stray verse of uncertain date, the five sections in the poem were composed by five different poets, namely *Perunkaṭuṅkō* (*pālai*), *Kapilaṅ* (*kuṟiñci*), *Marutaṅilaṅākaṅ* (*marutam*), *Nalluruttiraṅ* (*mullai*), and *Nallantuvaṅār* (*neytal*).<sup>64</sup> Of them, *Nallantuvaṅār*, according to the tradition, was also the compiler of the anthology. But, as this stray verse was not found in the manuscripts, *Vaiyapuri Pillai* treated it as late and spurious and, in his view, the "style and diction and certain other peculiarities" indicate that the collection was, in all probability, the work of a single author, who was none other than *Nallantuvaṅār* himself.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the *Kalit.* was not an anthology at all! The tradition of the commentators, however, maintains that the *Kalit.* was the work of more than one poet and, that *Nallantuvaṅār*, the author of the *neytal* section, was the one who compiled it.<sup>66</sup> There are no

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<sup>63</sup>*Iracamanikkanar* (1973), pp. 108-119.

<sup>64</sup>*Perunkaṭuṅkōṅ pālai Kapilaṅ kuṟiñci*  
*Marutaṅilaṅākaṅ marutam aruñcōlaṅ*  
*Nalluruttiraṅ mullai Nallantuvaṅ neytal*  
*kalvi vaḷar kaṅṅa kali.*

<sup>65</sup>*Vaiyapuri Pillai* (1957), p. 27. It may be noted that the editor of the text, *Cl. Vai. Damodaram Pillai*, also called it '*Nallantuvaṅār Kalittokai.*'

<sup>66</sup>In the concluding lines of his commentary on the *Kalit.* *Nacci.* states that the work was compiled by *Nallantuvaṅār*; see also his commentary on the verse 12 in the text. *Pērā.* refers to the work as an anthology in his commentary on *Tol.poruḷ.ceyyuḷ.*

compelling reasons to believe that their understanding was wrong. Moreover, it is hardly a safe course to rely upon the evidence of style and diction for determining the question of authorship of classical Tamil poems in view of their highly conventional character.<sup>67</sup>

In the judgement of many modern critics, the *Kalit.* is noticeably different from other classical anthologies in as much as it consists of a fair number of poems which, in marked contrast to the sophisticated and aristocratic character of the poems in other collections, are permeated with 'folk' or 'vulgar' elements.<sup>68</sup> The collection includes poems that deal with the themes of one sided love (*kaikkilāi*) and mismatched love (*peruntinai*). Although counted as part of the seven *tinai*(s) of the *akam* or love division, poems on these two themes are not found in any other anthology of love poetry. Moreover quite a few *Kalit.* poems are sprinkled with "spicy dialogues and broad jokes." *Kalit.* 94, for instance, gives a graphic account of an erotic 'verbal' encounter between a dwarf and a hunch-back woman.<sup>69</sup> The number of allusions to the puranic legends is also fairly high in the *Kalit.* poems. All these features

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*nūr.* 461. Also see Jesudasan and Jesudasan (1961), p. 69.

<sup>67</sup>cf. Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 30-31.

<sup>68</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 119.

<sup>69</sup>For Ramanujan's rendering of the poem in English, see Zvelebil (1973), pp. 121-122.

have prompted scholars to regard the collection as a work of distinctive character and the product of a different ethos and time from that of other classical texts.

Interestingly the **Kalit.** seem to have consistently enjoyed a remarkably high and privileged position in traditional estimation. A solitary quatrain in which the names of eight anthologies are listed refers to it as the "kali that is lauded by the learned" (**kaṟṟaṟintār ēttum kali**).<sup>70</sup> This was not an atypical estimation. Both **Iḷam.** and **Nacci.**, in their commentaries on **Tol.poruḷ.akat.** section, quote a vast number of illustrative examples from among the **Kalit.** poems. The elaborate grammatical note that accompanies each of the **Kalit.** poems explaining the 'poetic situation' according to the rules laid down in **Tol.** also lends support to the idea that the collection was deemed a model work on the **akam** theme by the medieval commentators.

As stated already the **Kalit.** derives its name from its metre and, like the **Pari**, it is the only extant work in that metre. Besides its metre, the collection has other distinctive features as well. Many of its poems are in the form of a dialogue in contradistinction to the love poems in

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<sup>70</sup>**Narriṇai nalla kuṟuntokai otta  
patirṟuppattu ōṅku pariṇāḷal -  
kaṟṟaṟintār ēttum kaliyoṭu akam puṟameṇa  
ittiratta eṭṭuttokai.**

The anonymous author of another quatrain says that the **Kalit.** is a greater work than the **Cintāmaṇi** and the **Peruṅkatai**, the two great early medieval **kāppiyam** (Skt. **kāvya**) in Tamil.



other classical anthologies which are invariably in the form of a monologue or 'utterances' (kūr̥ṟu) by one or the other of the characters. Also, unlike many other poems on the love theme, no name of any king or chieftain is alluded to in the kali poems except in a few instances where the Pāṇṭiyaṅ kings are mentioned but only by their family titles such as Tennavan, Valuti etc.

According to Tol. the kali metre evolved out of venpā and there are four kinds of kali verses, namely ottālicai, kalivenpā, kockakam and uṟalkali.<sup>71</sup> Of these, an uṟalkali verse is one that is interspersed with dialogues or questions and answers. The ōcai (rhythm) of the metre is tullal ('jumping') and, therefore, kali verse is regarded as best suited for dance and drama.<sup>72</sup>

#### II.5. Some Conventions concerning the Metres

As mentioned already, the Pari. and Kalit. anthologies occupy a unique position in Tamil literature as these are the only extant anthologies in which poems composed respectively in pari and kali metres are found. Tol.'s treatment of these two metrical compositions is elaborate, and also is indicative of the fact that these two types of compositions, despite their apparent differences,

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<sup>71</sup>Tol.porul.ceyyuḷ.nūṟ. 104 and 126.

<sup>72</sup>Marr (1985), 419-20.

shared many features in common. A brief discussion of some of Tol.'s observations concerning these two types of compositions may be useful to clarify the function of different metres in Tamil tradition.

The *Kalit.* is traditionally classified as *akam* poetry although, as pointed out already, the poems in the collection differ in significant ways from other *akam* poems. With regard to the *Pari.* collection the situation is more complex. According to Tol., a *pari* verse may have, as in the case of a *kali* verse, four parts, namely *koccakam*, *arākam*, *curitakam* and *eruttu*, and its predominant theme or subject matter will be love.<sup>73</sup> Thematically the *Vaiyai* poems in the *Pari.* anthology by and large conform with this prescription. On the other hand the other poems in the collection, particularly those in praise of *Māl* (*Viṣṇu*), do not, and in them *puṛam* elements are predominant. As Gros rightly comments:

..la grande division des thèmes du Sangam entre *akam* (l'amour) et *puṛam* (l'extérieur, tout le reste) n'est pas respectée par lui, et alors que le *Tolk.* lui assigne l'*akam* pour sujet, il se permet de passer outre et de mêler les genres!<sup>74</sup>

In fact, the *akam* elements are conspicuous by their absence in several of its poems and it is difficult to classify the

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73Tol.porul.cēyyul.nūṟ. 117.

74Gros (1968), p. xiv; also see Kailasapathy (1968), pp.11-14.

anthology neatly either as an **akam** or **puṟam** collection. That the tradition itself did not treat the **Pari.** as an **akam** collection is indicated by the fact that fragments from the anthology are found in a collection of **puṟam** poems called the **Puṟattiraṭṭu**.

The problem here, however, is not why are some **puṟam** type poems are found in a collection the theme of which was supposed to be predominantly love, because the two categories, **akam** and **puṟam**, though separable, were never viewed as mutually exclusive by either the poets or the grammarians.<sup>75</sup> The question here rather is: does Tol. ever make, as is generally assumed, an 'unambiguous' statement to the effect that **paripāṭṭu** and **kalippā** are the only suitable metres for the composition of love poems or does he say that the theme of love alone should be the subject of these compositions? These assumptions are usually drawn from several statements of Tol., of which the following is the most important:

nāṭakavalakkinum ulakiyal valakkinum  
pāṭal cāṅṟa pulaneṟivalakkam  
kaliyē paripāṭṭu āyiru pāviṇum  
uriyatākum enmanār pulavar.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>cf. Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 5-7.

<sup>76</sup>Tol.porul.akat.nūṟ. 53/56. The **nūṟ.** has been translated and commented upon by several scholars. see Marr (1985), p. 35; Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956), p. 70; Gros (1968), p. xiii; Sivathamby (1981), p. 96.

Given below is the translation of the *nūṟ*. by Zvelebil which is very close to the interpretation of the medieval glossators, particularly Iḷam.:

The scholars say that the literary tradition of the bardic poetry (*pāṭal cāṇṟa pulaneṟivalakkam*) based on the usages of dancing (or dramatic usage, *nāṭakavalakkam*) and on the customs of the world (*ulakiyal valakkam*) has as its proper (metres) the two--*kali* and *paripāṭṭu*.<sup>77</sup>

Modern scholars take this *nūṟ*. as a general rule that is applicable to all *akam* (love) poems. Since the bulk of the bardic poetry is in *akaval* metre and, also since "*kali* and *paripāṭal* are almost certainly structural developments of *akaval*," and "occur only in the two undoubtedly later collections," Zvelebil draws an important conclusion: "This would, incidentally, indicate . . . that *Poruḷatikāram* of *Tolkāppiyam* may also be regarded as relatively late, coinciding in time with those two later bardic collections which prefer the *kali* and *paripāṭṭu* metres."<sup>78</sup>

There are at least two major difficulties in accepting Zvelebil's interpretation of Tol.'s statement and the conclusion that he draws from it: a) it is in direct conflict with evidence from the classical poems because four out of the six *akam* anthologies are composed in the *akaval*

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<sup>77</sup>Zvelebil (1974), p. 33, f.n. 64.

<sup>78</sup>*ibid.*

metre. Why, then, should Tol. say that **kali** and **pari** metres are the suitable metres for composing love poems? The discrepancy becomes all the more serious if, as Zvelebil suggests, we place **poruḷatikāram** after the period of the anthology poems, because it would then mean that the author of the above **nūṟ**. consciously ignored the whole literary tradition before him. There is no satisfactory explanation as to why he might do that; b) the extant poems in the **Pari.** and **Kalit.** anthologies also do not altogether fit with the stipulations laid down by Tol. As already observed, love elements are completely absent in several of the **Pari.** poems, and the treatment of the love theme in the **Kalit.** is in many ways different from that of the other collections.

One must therefore look for an alternate explanation of the statements of Tol. Noteworthy in this connection is Aravanan's analysis of the **nūṟ**. under discussion. Pointing out that there is nothing in the **nūṟ**. that makes it a general rule applicable for the entire **akam** poetry, Aravanan has convincingly argued that the term **nāṭakavalakku** should be taken to refer only to compositions (on the love theme) which are in the form of a dialogue or trilogy, and that the expression **pāṭal cānṟa pulaneṟi valakkam** should be understood in the light of Pērā.'s definition of the term **pulaṅ** in his commentary on **ceyyuḷiyal**, 241, so that it means musical compositions in which colloquial expressions of the

common folks are used.<sup>79</sup> These two features of being in dialogue form and being musical compositions with colloquial expressions are shared by the poems in the *Pari.* and *Kalit.* anthologies. It should be noted here that, long before Aravanan, Gros had also stressed the importance of Pera.'s commentary, for understanding the nature of *pari* poems:

Nous ajouterons deux remarques enfin sur lesquelles on n'insiste pas toujours assez. La première est que sous *Tolk. Ceyyul* 242, *Pêrāciriyar* laisse entendre que le *paripāṭal* relève du langage musical c'est-à-dire doit rechercher l'expression simple qui convient au chant et au théâtre, chargée de syllabes douces et agréables. La seconde est que sa récitation peut s'accompagner d'une véritable mimique (*avinayam*) pour en développer le sens. Cela explique que certains poèmes soient de véritables scènes à plusieurs personnages . . . Cela justifie aussi l'apparition de quelques termes du langage parlé.<sup>80</sup>

Even these clarifications cannot be taken to prove that the date of *Tol.* was later or that its date coincided with those of the *Pari.* and *Kalit.* because it has been shown that, from the point of view of the metre, there are verses in *Kalit.* which transgress the rules of prosody as laid down by *Tol.*<sup>81</sup> How does one explain this discrepancy? In this context, it is noteworthy that the commentary of *IA* refers to the fact that there were among the works that perished

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<sup>79</sup>Aravanan (1978), pp. 193-200.

<sup>80</sup>Gros (1968), p. xvi.

<sup>81</sup>Chidambaranatha Chettiar (1977), pp. 33-34.

during the destruction of the first and the second **caṅkam** a number of **kali** and **pari** poems.<sup>82</sup> One may therefore surmise that Tol. formulated his rules when these were available, and not on the basis of the extant **Pari.** and **Kalit.** anthologies.<sup>83</sup>

We may conclude our survey of the formal aspects of these three poems by referring to one more general rule in the **Tol.** concerning **pari** and **kali** metres. In the section on prosody, Tol. speaks of themes that are permitted or forbidden when composing in different metres. According to him, the themes of **aṟam** (**dharma**), **poruḷ** (**artha**), and **inṇam** (**kāma**) may be treated in all four basic metres namely: **akaval** (**ācīriyam**), **vañci**, **veṇṇā**, and **kali**; so also the general theme of praise may be composed in all of them.<sup>84</sup> He then mentions four specific themes which are forbidden in compositions in the **kali** metre, and its related types or in the **vañci** metre.<sup>85</sup> The themes are: **puṟanilaivāḷttu**, **vāyuraivāḷttu**, **avaiyaṭakkiyal** and **ceviṟivuruḷū**. **Pērā.** explains these themes as follows:<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>I.A., p. 6.

<sup>83</sup>Aravanan (1978), pp. 199-200.

<sup>84</sup>Tol.poruḷ.ceyyuḷ.nūṟ. 102, 105.

<sup>85</sup>Tol.poruḷ.ceyyuḷ.nūṟ. 106-107. Since Tol.speaks of **kali nilai vakai** in **nūṟ. 106** **Pērā.** in his commentary suggests that the same rule is applicable to the **pari** poems also. See **Pērā's** comm. on **ibid.**, 422.

<sup>86</sup>Tol.poruḷ.ceyyuḷ.nūṟ. 422-426, **Pera.'s** comm.

- puṛanilaivālttu** - invoking a particular god for praising a hero in second person.
- vāyuraivālttu** - rendering advice, however bitter it may be, to the king for the benefit that may accrue in the future.
- avaiyaṭakkiyal** - expressing one's humility before the learned assembly.
- ceviyaṛivuṛū** - counseling (to the king) on the duty of being polite with elders.

It is hard to explain why these injunctions were set down, but it at least seems to make sense of the fact why poems addressed to individual kings or chieftains are absent in the **Pari.** and **Kalit.** anthologies. One would not praise or counsel a king or express oneself in a learned assembly in a style and diction which included dialogues and colloquial expressions.

To sum up, then, early Tamil poets handled different metres for different purposes and some themes were forbidden from being composed in specific metres. The **akaval** is regarded as one of the oldest metres in the Tamil language. Judging by the number of poems found in that metre in the classical corpus, it was the favourite metre of the classical poets. The **pari** and **kali** metres were used for compositions which contained dialogue and colloquial modes of expression. With regard to the function of these metres, it has been suggested that the **akaval** was used for



recitative poetry and the **kali** and **pari** were used for choral songs.<sup>87</sup> According to Tol., 'praise' poems--either in honour of a god or a human hero--may be composed in all metres. However a closer look at the anthologies reveals that while praising a human hero in the second person the poets preferred the **akaval** metre. Whereas in the **kali** and **pari** metres, which were meant for choral songs, 'praise' poems honouring a god in the second or the third person, and 'praise' poems honouring a 'historical' hero in the third person are found.

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<sup>87</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 119.

CHAPTER III SPACE

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### SPACE

#### III.1. Preliminary

For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. I am talking of space, of moments and discontinuities . . .

Instead of linear narrative, what emerges are isolated images--in essence, a series of snap-shots in prose--which when juxtaposed to one another produce a montage-like effect.

Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin* (1982), p. 2.

The significance of the notion of 'space', 'place', or 'locale' in the religious culture of India in general, and that of the Tamil region in particular has drawn the

attention of a number of scholars in recent years.<sup>1</sup> In a seminal paper, Kees W. Bolle put forward the suggestion that the notion of a god residing in a given place or locale-- 'topographic religiosity', as he called it--is a basic trait of Hinduism, and stressed that an understanding of the notion of 'primacy of **place**' is essential in order to comprehend the nature of the sacred in the religious culture of the Hindus.<sup>2</sup> Hart, while making a comparative study of the concept of god among the early Aryans and the ancient Tamils, suggested that the idea of a god being present in a place or object is a distinctive mark of Tamil religious thinking:

The gods of the ancient Tamils were not transcendent beings, but rather immanent powers, present in objects encountered every day and involved in every aspect of ordinary life. They are to be distinguished from the gods of the early Aryans. . .<sup>3</sup>

Developing these ideas further, Shulman has argued in his book **Tamil Temple Myths**, which is based primarily on

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<sup>1</sup>It must be mentioned at the out set that, although the terms 'space' and 'place' can sometimes be used synonymously, the humanistic geographers make a distinction between the two terms. Space, according to them, is more abstract and unfamiliar than place. 'Space' becomes 'place' when it is concrete and familiar. See J. Z. Smith (1987), pp. 28-29. One implication of this distinction is that 'space' and 'place' are relative, and not absolute categories, and this understanding is of some relevance to the arguments and interpretations that will follow in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Kees W. Bolle (1969), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup>Hart (1975), p. 26. Also see, Yocum (1973), p. 8.

the late medieval Saiva **sthalapurāṇa(s)** ('accounts of a sacred site'), that **place** was of prime importance in the religious culture of the Tamils, and, that **its** primacy was constantly upheld in the **sthalapurāṇa(s)** by a process of localizing the mythic action within the confines of a given temple site.<sup>4</sup> This process or, according to him, the 'phenomenon of localization' embodied motifs of great cosmological significance.<sup>5</sup> He informs his readers that "these motifs are not, in fact, unique to Tamil Hinduism', but are 'simply the south Indian variants of very widespread types"; yet he, too, maintains that the 'phenomenon of localization' of the divine power is a typical feature of the religious culture of the Tamils: "In any case, there is a decisive distinction between the Vedic concept of a movable ritual applying a set of standard symbols to any newly chosen site, and the Tamil belief in a rooted, totally localized godhead."<sup>6</sup> Hardy is yet another recent writer who has made some brief but perceptive remarks on this issue. Commenting on the conception of the 'divine' as revealed in early Tamil sources, he observes: "...the 'divine' was seen as manifest, present, and available within the confines of

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<sup>4</sup>Shulman (1980), Ch. II.

<sup>5</sup>According to Shulman, the most basic of these motifs is: "Each shrine sees itself as the only center of the universe, the one spot that is directly linked to heaven and the nether world". *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>Shulman (1980), p. 48.

empirical reality, localized in various particular areas and symbols."7 As illustrations of this 'localized conception of the supernatural', he draws attention to a few relevant passages from the classical corpus which indicate that (memorial) stones, certain trees, mountains, threshing-floors, and places of meeting were thought to be the sites where the 'divine' or 'supernatural' was present.8

It is evident from this brief survey of the recent literature that there is a general consensus among scholars on the following points: a) the notion of godhead being seen or felt to be present in a given site or locale is a fundamental feature of the Tamil devotional religion, b) that this notion bears no generic relationship with the Vedic sacrificial cult, and c) that early references to its prevalence in south India are found in the oldest stratum of Tamil literature. In other words, if one follows the logic of the argument, the generative roots of one of the core ideas of the medieval **bhakti** religion are traceable to the period and sources which are adjudged by modern scholarship to be predominantly 'secular'. There is a paradox here, and it has not so far been adequately explored or explained--a paradox which, if explained, might, at least partly, help us understand why in Indian religious tradition the Tamil or

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7Hardy (1983), p. 135.

8**ibid.**, pp. 136-37. Also see Indira Peterson (1982) pp. 69-82.

drāviḍa region was acknowledged as the birth place of the bhakti movement.

aham bhaktir iti khyāta .....  
 utpannā drāviḍe cāham vṛddhim karnāṭake gatā  
 kvacit kvacin mahārāstre gūṛjare jīrṇatām  
 gatā...

I am called bhakti .... I was born in Drāviḍa, grew up in Karnāṭaka, and, after spending some time in Mahārāstra, became old in Gūṛjara...<sup>9</sup>

### III.2. Treatment of Space in Tirumurukāṛṇṇupāṭai and Paripāṭai

It has been suggested by Zvelebil that, "in terms of structure and content, both Paripāṭai and Tirumurukāṛṇṇupāṭai show some innovations which reappear and evolve as typical features of all bhakti hymns."<sup>10</sup> Two of these innovations, according to him, are: a) "the synchronic projection of the diachronic event--of the story of the god; in other words, the personal story of the god is telescoped into characteristic epithets", and b) "the objects of praise--Skanda and Viṣṇu--have a series of very concrete places of residence; they live at a given place and at a given moment of time."<sup>11</sup> Stated differently, Zvelebil's observations seem to mean that the vision of the bhakta

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<sup>9</sup>Bhāgavatamahātmya, I. 45-50. There is a similar passage in the Padmapurāṇa, Uttarakhaṇḍa 189. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Zvelebil (1974), p. 90.

<sup>11</sup>ibid.

poets of Tamil devotionalism, including the authors of the **TMP** and **Pari.** poems, was governed by a distinctive conception of space and time.

Zvelebil has chosen to describe this conception of space and time as an 'innovation' of the **bhakta** poets, and credits the authors of **TMP** and **Pari.** poems for it in the history of Tamil tradition. Was this conception of space a new development of the mid-first millennium? How were space and time perceived and treated in the classical poems? Is there a radical difference insofar as the perception of space and time is concerned between the poems thought to be secular and the **TMP** and the **Pari.** poems? Do the classical poets' perception and treatment of space and time shed any light on the links between their pattern of thought and that of the later devotional religion? What do the early poets' perceptions of space and time tell us about the religious orientation of the early Tamils? Our attempt in this chapter will be to address these questions.

Among the scholars cited above, it was Hart and Shulman who contended that the notion of perceiving a given locale as the place of residence of the divine is a distinctive feature of the religious culture of the Tamils. It is also suggested that the "Tamil sense of the sacred, immanent in particular things and places, led soon to the



building of temples."<sup>12</sup> We will illustrate that there are vigorous and elaborate expressions of this notion of primacy of place in all types of classical Tamil poems, religious or the so-called 'secular'. However, we will neither deduce from this Tamil evidence that the notion was unique to Tamil culture nor that it was either unknown or absent in other parts of the sub-continent. In fact, if we look at evidences of the temple building movement, the origin of which was presumably embedded in this very notion, we find that it developed almost simultaneously in different parts of the subcontinent during the mid-part of the first millennium C.E. And, if we go by the archaeological evidence, it is not in the Tamil region that we find the earliest surviving temple buildings of India.

It is not necessary to exercise ourselves over the question of whether the notion of god being seen to be present in a given place originated among the Tamils or not. Our concern here is to comprehend how space or place in general was understood in the classical phase, because it is that understanding which appears to have influenced in a significant manner the sum and substance of Tamil religious culture in the subsequent periods. The thrust of our investigation will be to find out what clues the classical Tamil sources offer us concerning the idea of sacralizing

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<sup>12</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 295.

space (not just a site or spot which is made sacred through ritual) which is so evident in the later Tamil tradition. With these introductory remarks, we now turn to the corpus itself. We begin by examining the manner in which space/place is treated in the **TMP** and the **Parī**.

### **Tirumurukāṛṛuppaṭai**

It was mentioned earlier that the **TMP** is in the form of an address by a bard to a fellow professional. The poem celebrates certain locales that are well known as the 'abodes' of the god Murukaṇ. The poem, in all modern editions, is divided into six sections or 'scenes'. Each section is taken to be a description of one of the six important cult sites associated with the god and, hence, captioned accordingly.<sup>13</sup> The break-up is as follows:

(Tirup) Paraṅkuṇṇam (1-77); (Tiruccīr)Alaivāy (78-125); (Tiruv) Āvinakuṭi (126-176); (Tiruv)Ērakam (177-189); Kuṇṇutoṟu-Āṭai ('dancing on every hill') (190-217); and, Paḷamutircōlai ('garden of the ripe fruits') (218-317).<sup>14</sup>

The first three of these sites are identified with

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<sup>13</sup>'Six' is a mystically significant number in the cult of Murukaṇ. By the late medieval times, out of the numerous sites of Murukaṇ in the Tamil region, the tradition counts six as the holiest, and these sites are known collectively as **aru-paṭaiviṭu** 'the six abodes'. They are: Tirupparaṅkuṇṇam, Tiruccentūr, Paḷani, Tiruttaṇi, Svāmimalai and Paḷamutircōlai.

<sup>14</sup>The term 'Tiru', a honorific prefix, means 'beautiful', 'holy' etc. The numbers in brackets refer to the lines in the poem.

Tirupparāṅkuṅṅam (Madurai district), Tiruccentūr (Tirunelveli district) and Palāni (Madurai district) respectively which are three of the most famous temple centres of the god even today. Of them, the temples at Tirupparāṅkuṅṅam and Palāni are located on hills, and the temple at Tiruccentūr is right on the coast of the Bay of Bengal at a distance of about sixty kilometers from Tirunelveli. The location of Ērakam is uncertain, although some scholars identify the site with Svāmimalai (Tanjavur district).<sup>15</sup> The expression **Kunṛutoru-Ātal** literally means 'dancing on every hill'. It does not refer to any single site, but to hills in general which are the favored abodes of Murukaṅ. And, hill-temples dedicated to Murukaṅ are found in several parts of the Tamil region.<sup>16</sup> Palamutircōlai is sometimes identified with the hill-site called Alakarmalai ('mountain of the handsome one'), located near Madurai. But this identification is doubted by scholars on many counts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Nacci., in his commentary, locates Ērakam in Malainātu ('hill-country'). Iḷāṅkō, in Cil. 24: 8 refers to four cult-sites of Murukaṅ, namely Centil (Alaivāy), Ceṅkōṭu, Veṅkuṅṅu and Ērakam. Arumpatavuraiyācīriyar, in his gloss, identifies Veṅkuṅṅu with Svāmimalai, and leaves Ērakam without identifying it. Aruṅakiri, a late medieval mystic devotee of Murukaṅ, refers to Svāmimalai as Ērakam in his poems. For a discussion of the issue, see Iracamanikkanar (1970), pp. 225-231 wherein the author has attempted to locate Ērakam in south Karnataka.

<sup>16</sup>Tiruttāṅi (Cengalpattu district), Marutamalai (Coimbatore district), Kuṅṅakkuṅi (Ramanathapuram district), Kalukumalai and Tirumalai (Tirunelveli district) are among other popular hill temples of Murukaṅ.

<sup>17</sup>Iracamanikkanar (1970), pp. 231-238.

One is that there are no independent evidence in support of this identification until late medieval times, and another is that the site Alakarmalai is better known in the **Parī**. poems as the abode of Māl or Viṣṇu (**Māḷirūṅkuṅṟam**).<sup>18</sup> The final section of the poem contains twenty-one lines of description of a thickly-forested mountain region and its torrential water-falls. It has been plausibly suggested that this passage might well be the description of the **kuṟiñci** or mountain region in general, which is the favorite abode of Murukaṅ.<sup>19</sup>

Although the lines 1-77 in the **TMP** are taken to be the description of the cult site at Paraṅkuṅṟam, one may fully agree with Filliozat's observation that "vers 1 à 66 peuvent être consideres comme une introduction générale."<sup>20</sup> The poem opens up with a description of Murukaṅ and his consort (Teyvayānai **Skt.** Devasenā) in which the god's imposing appearance is compared to that of the rising sun (1-11). It is followed by a detailed description of the dangerous nymphs (**cūraramakalir**) worshipping the god with

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<sup>18</sup>**Parī**. 15: 17, 22-23. Apart from Alakarmalai, another famous hill-site associated with Tirumāl is Tirupati. In some Śalva quarters, it is contended that these two hills had originally Murukaṅ temples which were later appropriated by the followers of Viṣṇu. See N.Subramanian (1966), p. 355; Raghavaiyangar (1938), pp. 264-277.

<sup>19</sup>See Po. Ve. Somasundaranar's commentary on the **pattu**. (SISS edition), vol. I, pp. 109-110. This would mean that the sites mentioned in the poem are only four.

<sup>20</sup>Filliozat (1973), p. XL.

songs and dance on the slopes of mountains (12-41).<sup>21</sup> The focus is then shifted to a battle-scene in which Murukan's victory over the demon (cūr), the subsequent frenzied victory dance (tuṇāṅkaḷ) by the demoness (pōymakaḷ) on the battle-field, and the god's act of cutting-down of the mythical mango tree are recounted (42-61). The passage ends with a message (62-66) in which the poet tells his listener:

If you are inclined to undertake the journey, with a heart elevated by the desire to reach the red feet (of Murukan), and with a mind that is uncluttered by sensory knowledge, and set on good deeds, then, you will at once and on the spot obtain all that you longed for and all that your heart can contain.<sup>22</sup>

Where does one find this god? The poet as if responding to the question provides a site-by-site account of the abodes where the devotee might have his rendezvous with the lord: First, Paraṅkunṇam, the grand seat of Murukan at the hill-site near Madurai (67-77); then, Alaivāy, the 'habitual' abode where the god, mounted on his elephant,

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<sup>21</sup>For a translation of part of this passage as well as of a similar passage in the MK (606-617), see Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 63-64.

<sup>22</sup>TMP., 62-66.

cēvaṭi paṭarum cemmaḷ uḷḷamoṭu  
 nalampuri kolkaippulam pirintuṛaiyum  
 celavu niḥ nayantaṅaiyāyiṅ palavuṭaṅ  
 naṅṅar neṅcattu innacai vāyppa  
 innē peṛuti ni munṅiya viṅaiyē.

The line 63 has a variant reading: nalampuri kolkaippulam purintuṛaiyum (SISS edition) in which case the meaning would be 'with a mind that is set on good deeds and acquiring (true) knowledge'.

appears with six faces and twelve hands each one of which has distinct functions (78-125);<sup>23</sup> then, Āvinan̄kuṭi, the 'occasional' (cīlnāḷ) resort where not only sages, celestial musicians, and damsels but also Śiva, Viṣṇu (Māl), and Indra along with other gods come to have an audience with him (126-176); then, Ērakam where Murukan̄ is worshipped by the twice-born, chanting the six-lettered mantra (177-189). It must be noted that in enumerating these sites, the poet does not seem to follow any geographical order or imply a spiritual ranking among them. The spotlight is then turned on to hills in general for it is the hills which are Murukan̄'s favorite places of residence, and it is there that the god descends on the person of his priests vēlan̄(s), and joins the girls of the hill tribes in drinking and dancing (190-217).

The final section of the poem is exactly one hundred lines long (218-317). The entire section is generally taken as the description of a single site namely Palamutircōlai, but, as suggested already, it is doubtful that it refers to any site in particular. The lines 218-295 constitute, perhaps, the most significant part of the whole poem--a sort of climactic scene in which the poet tells his listener how he should conduct himself once he is in the presence of the god. In its conception and dramatic effect, the passage has

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<sup>23</sup>References to Alaivāy as the site of Murukan̄ are also found in AN 266: 20-21 and PN 55: 18-19.

few parallels in the entire range of Tamil religious poetry. The poet begins the passage with a list of locales other than those just mentioned, where the god stations himself (218-226).

(Murukan̄ is present) at the festival site in every village where he is instated with (his) cock-flag, and where little millets mixed with flowers are offered, and rams are sacrificed to him; (He is present) at the points where his followers stand praising him; at the site prepared by the *vēlan̄* for his frenzied dance; in forests and in groves; in beautiful rivulets, rivers, lakes, and in many other sites too; at the meeting points, and at the cross roads; in *kaṭampu* trees with fresh blossoms; in the public halls and places, and in upright posts . . .

Then follows a striking portrayal of the ritual performed by the maid of the hill-tribe (*kuṛamakal̄*) inviting or 'guiding' (*ar̄ruppaṭutta*) Murukan̄ on to the site of worship (227-244).

The maid of the hill tribe hoisted the flag drawing on it the figure of the lord's splendid bird, the cock; patted white mustard seed into ghee; uttered her special chants in whispering tone; sprinkled fresh flowers and worshipped. She had worn two layers of garments of different colour and fastened red threads on her wrists. Scattering white parched rice, she offered in several small dishes the clean, white rice mixed with the blood of fat and strong-footed rams. She sprinkled sandal fragrances with turmeric on long red oleander and other garlands, cut them into equal lengths and let them hang. She hailed the temple (*nakar*) located on the rich mountain slopes; burnt sweet incenses; sang the melodies of *kuṛiñci*. While the roar of the water-falls mingled with the music of the instruments, she spread several kinds of red-flowers and millets mixed with blood and played the favorite instruments of Murukan̄ inviting him to appear at the dance-floor of the settlement petrifying his enemies.

The image here is remarkable. Having enumerated a number of places where the god can be found, the poet tells his listener how the god also can be 'brought' to the site of the devotee's choice by performing appropriate rituals. It is interesting to note that earlier in the poem the 'thinking man' who was inclined to reach the god was given guidance, and asked before undertaking the 'spiritual' journey to free himself from sensory knowledge. Here later in the poem it seems that the same god is fairly easily persuaded to appear at a site chosen by the illiterate mountain girl because of her very sensory ritual, music, and chant. In any case, the person who 'shows the way' to another person performs merely the role of a sign post. He indicates the right destination to be reached, but he does not accompany the person who is guided. Whether the devotee chooses to go where the god resides, or the god is 'guided' to appear at the place prepared by the devotee, the pivotal element common to both modes is that the encounter that eventually takes place between the devotee and the divinity is unmediated, direct, and intensely personal.<sup>24</sup> This is clearly attested by the description in the succeeding lines of the poem.

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<sup>24</sup>These factors might not only account for the highly emotional character of the **bhakti** religion but also explain why there was no place for an organized community of 'mediators' in it. It is also noteworthy that in one way or the other it is the devotee who chooses the place of meeting.



The poet instructs his listener that, on approaching the god Murukan in any of those sites mentioned above, he should worship and sing the glories of the lord with folded hands, and with his head touching the feet of the lord. In the lines 257-276 are listed as many as twenty-three attributive or descriptive titles of Murukan and "these names, running in steady flow, suggest that they were meant for chanting."<sup>25</sup> The poet continues:

Praise the lord as I said and tell him, 'You are wise and incomparable. It is hard for human beings (**mannuyir**) to measure and comprehend you. Therefore I have come here thinking of your feet alone.' As you utter these words, minions of varied shape and size will emerge on the festival site and report to the lord, 'Drawn by your fame, this suppliant (**iravalan**) of ancient wisdom has come uttering good and delightful words. He deserves your gift.' And, then, He (Murukan) whose mighty, divine form touches the sky will appear. He will conceal that awe-inspiring form (**aṇaṅku cāl uyarnilai taḷii**), and present himself before you as a youth, (another of) his ancient and divine form. With love he will say these sweet words: 'Do not worry. I know why you are here.' He will then grant you the rare gift (**peḷalarum paricil**) and make you unique in this world, which is surrounded by the dark-coloured sea.<sup>26</sup>

Modern critics have noted with admiration the brilliant artistry of Nakkīraṅ, and the effective manner in which he employs the contrast method--bright sun and dark forests, awful battle scenes and peaceful countryside, and

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<sup>25</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 132.

<sup>26</sup>TMP 278-295.

so on--throughout the poem.<sup>27</sup> From our perspective, what is noteworthy is that the manner of exposition, though vivid and fascinating, is neither linear nor diachronic. On the contrary, the poem is composed of a series of disconnected but dynamic images which are beautifully interwoven into an artistic whole-- 'a series of snap-shots' captured in lovely poetry. Be it a description of the sacred sites, or rituals, or natural scenes, each section in the poem, in its treatment and presentation, resembles a miniature painting. The images have been pictured, processed, and put together in a synchronic fashion, and, as Keller aptly says, "There is indeed all through the poem one perpetual movement. It is the movement of dance, of singing, of whirling around, of āṭal. All the developed pictures we come across are moving pictures."<sup>28</sup>

### **Paripāṭal**

The picture that we obtain from the **Parī.** poems, though different in some important ways, corresponds substantially to that of the **TMP**. We shall first note some of the differences. The **TMP** glorifies various cult sites of one deity Murukan, which are located far away from each other. The **Parī.** collection, on the contrary, has poems celebrating

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<sup>27</sup>Keller (1969), pp. 61-62.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, p. 60.

sacred sites which are located in and around Madurai, but which are dedicated to different gods. The sites are: Parañkunṛam, the same hill site that figures first among the abodes of Murukaṅ in the **TMP**; and, Iruṅkunṛam and Irunṭaiyūr, the two abodes of Māl or Viṣṇu. Of the two sites, the former is identified with the Kaḷḷalakar temple at Alakar-malai ('the mountain of the handsome one') which is located at a distance of about fifteen kilometers north of Madurai, and the latter with the Kūṭalakar temple which is situated within the city.<sup>29</sup>

The **TMP** is in the form of counselling by one who has experienced the divinity to another who lacks that experience but is willing to undergo it. The **Pari.** poems, whether they are in praise of Murukaṅ or Māl, are mostly panegyric or eulogistic hymns "where descriptions of gods are addressed to the gods themselves."<sup>30</sup> Although composed by individual poets, the **Pari.** verses were probably meant for choral singing or chanting, and this factor might, at least partly, account for the lack of a 'personal' touch in the poems which "tell us a great deal about the god, but not much about the poet who eulogises him."<sup>31</sup> The group character of

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<sup>29</sup>For a discussion of the issues relating to the identification of Irunṭaiyūr, see Gros (1968), p. xviii and p. 297.

<sup>30</sup>Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), p. 190. It may be mentioned here that at least one poem, **Pari.** 4, shows some features in common with the **TMP**.

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*, p. 192.

these poems is explicit in the closing, invocatory lines of several of them where the noun is in the first person plural.

We praise you thus together with our kith and kin. We extol your protective feet where we wish to take shelter for ever.<sup>32</sup>

With our dear ones around us, we worship you with pure heart again and again. Let our mind never know the faulty path.<sup>33</sup>

Wealth, gold and enjoyment are not what we plead for; grant us grace, love and proper conduct.<sup>34</sup>

Together with our loved ones, we worship and pray so that we shall for ever reside at your feet as we do today.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding these differences, the primacy accorded to the notion in the **Pari.** poems of devotees meeting with the god at a given space or physical site is analogous to that of the **TMP.**

#### **The Hills and the Towns:**

The poet **Iḷamperuvaluti**, for instance, hails the **Iruṅkuṅṅam** hill, the seat of **Māl**, as follows:

There are indeed numerous mountains such as **Nemi** (Skt. **Cakravāla**) whose fame is too great for the mind to fathom. The learneds have hailed many of them. Yet, of them only

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<sup>32</sup>**Pari.** 1: 62-65.

<sup>33</sup>**Pari.** 2: 73-76.

<sup>34</sup>**Pari.** 5: 78-81.

<sup>35</sup>**Pari.** 21: 68-70; also see **Pari.** 18: 54-56 and **Tiraṭṭu**, 1: 81-82.

a few provide the means of sustenance to the (people of the) world; fewer still among them are favoured by the gods. Of those very few, Iruṅkuṅṅam is unique because it is the abode of the two (i.e. Viṣṇu and Balarama) whose appearances are different like the ocean (dark blue) and the coast (white), but whose actions are identical like the word and the meaning. It is impossible to obtain the final release (viṣu peru turakkam) without the grace of Māl, the basil-garlanded one (tulāyōṅ); but, what is otherwise hard to obtain has been made easier by this mountain Iruṅkuṅṅam, because he resides here. So let us praise it aloud.<sup>36</sup>

The poet continues further:

Iruṅkuṅṅu is identical with Māyōṅ. If you cannot climb up the mountain to worship the lord there, you bow to the mountain even from a distance. Great is its fame in this world. It is god (kaṭavuḷ). The mere sight of the mountain can cure persons of their illusion ... (Therefore) treat the mountain as god. Worship it along with your wife, parents, children, and friends.<sup>37</sup>

The mountain no doubt gained its sacred character because god has chosen to be there. While acknowledging this, the poet goes further and underscores the virtual identity of the mountain with the god: the mountain is god.

A similar adoration is shown to the Paraṅkuṅṅam hill in a number of Pari. poems which are dedicated to Murukaṅ. In fact some of these poems are almost entirely filled with the description of the hill, and direct references to the god in them are few and far between. Nallaḷiciyār, for

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<sup>36</sup>Pari. 15: 1-18.

<sup>37</sup>Pari. 15: 33-37 and 46-48.

instance, has devoted forty-six out of a total of fifty-three lines in one of his poems to describing the enchanting scenes in and around the hill.<sup>38</sup> We are told that every evening well dressed devotees carrying with them perfumes, fresh flowers, and various musical instruments came to the hill and worshipped the god with songs. On the one hand, the hill was reverberating with the sounds of harps, flutes, and drums played by the well trained bards as well as by the singing and dancing of the female members of their group. On the other hand, the hill was constantly echoing with other sounds too: the continuous buzzing of the bees, the thundering noise of the water-falls, the mild swinging of the creepers, set in motion by the cool, gentle breeze, the happy calls of the dancing peacocks, and so on. All these sounds mingled and merged together so harmoniously that they presented a unique musical soiree on the hill.<sup>39</sup> Such was the splendour of the Parāṅkuṅṅam hill and its surroundings. We are further told that although the distance between the city of Madurai and the hill was not long, it was hard to negotiate because it was always crowded with young men and women engaged in various love games.

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<sup>38</sup>Pari. 17. Compare also Pari. 18: 22-50; 19: 8-94 and 21: 18-53.

<sup>39</sup>Pari. 17: 9-21. On the musical significance of the passage, see Gros (1968), p. 273.

The description of the hill takes a good part of yet another poem (8) on Cevvēl composed by Nallantuvaṅṅār. A significant feature in this poem is that it contains an elaborate depiction of an **akam** (love) theme--a quarrelling scene between the unfaithful hero, the sulking heroine, and the concerned girl-friend of the heroine.<sup>40</sup> It is clear from the treatment that the introduction of the **marutam** theme of sulking (**ūtāl**) into the poem was, in fact, a device to accentuate the glory of the Paraṅkuṅṅam hill. While seeking to pacify the heroine who was angry over his act of infidelity, the hero points at the hill and reminds her of its power to evoke the desire for (sexual) union among couples whether they are in clandestine (**kaḷavu**) love or in conjugal (**karpu**) life.<sup>41</sup> **Kurīṅci** or the mountain region, in the conventions of **akam** poetry, signified the pre-marital, secret union of lovers. So unique was the potency of the Paraṅkuṅṅam hill, he argues, that the mere sight of it was enough to evoke those sweet memories even in the minds of now married but feuding couples, and thus make them forget their squabbles. Not inappropriately, therefore, the poet, who begins the verse by addressing the god in the second person, closes it with an invocation to the hill:

Oh! cool Paraṅkuṅṅam! Not only lovers who  
knew no separation but also all others  
gather and worship at the temple of the god

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<sup>40</sup>Pari. 8: 36-89.

<sup>41</sup>Note particularly the lines 36-46 in the poem.

who is seated under the **katampa** tree, and whom the blemishless lady (Pārvatī) offered as a gift to the blue-throated one (Śiva). Let this glory be yours forever, and let your water-falls flow always full, even if the sky dries up causing great distress to the earth.<sup>42</sup>

To Nallantuvaṅṅār, as well as to other poets whose poems we just discussed, hailing the hill is tantamount to hailing the god who resides there. The late medieval glossator makes this point clear in his closing comments on Nallantuvaṅṅār's poem: "By celebrating the Paraṅkuṅṅam hill, the abode of Murukaṅ, the god is hailed in the second as well as in the third person in the poem. Therefore it is an invocatory verse."<sup>43</sup>

An interesting variation of this pattern is offered in one of the two poems retrieved from the medieval commentaries. The poem which is in praise of Tirumāl is eighty-two lines long. The anonymous author of the poem begins and ends the poem by directly addressing the god, and appealing for eternal union at the feet of the 'seated god at Iruntaiyūr' (iruntaiyūr amarnta celvā ...). But these appeals, as well as references to Māl, do not exceed more than one tenth of the total length of the poem. However, there is a fairly lengthy description of the landscape of Iruntaiyūr town. We quote below a few lines:

On one side of the town was a lush, green

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<sup>42</sup>Pari. 8: 125-130.

<sup>43</sup>Pari. 8, Parimēlalakar comm.



mountain crowded with *vēṅkai*, *marā*, *makilam*, and *aśoka* trees. On another side was a large pond filled with shiny fishes which resembled the numerous stars on the vast sky; and bunches of colorful bees were incessantly buzzing and encircling the lotus buds waiting to suck the honey as they bloom. On yet another side of the town were the rich rice fields where one could hear constantly the noise arising from the sites where sugar-cane was crushed, and the loud singing of ploughmen. Men, drunken and care-free, and, women, singing and implanting the sprouts on the wet fields, were seen everywhere.

On one side of the temple was the settlement of the learned and righteous brāhmans (*an-tanar*) who never deviated from the path of the Veda(s); on another side was the well-decorated settlement of the virtuous traders who were engaged in importing and selling all kinds of goods and other precious objects obtained from mountains and ocean; on yet another side was the settlement of peasants and labourers who worked in wet and dry lands.<sup>44</sup>

Richer still are the descriptions of the crowds of devotees who thronged the temple of the mythical snake, the thousand-headed Ādiśeṣa on whom Viṣṇu reclines (30-63), a temple located at Kuḷavāy in the vicinity of the Iruntaiyūr temple. The devotees paid their homage first to the god of Kuḷavāy before stepping into the shrine of Viṣṇu:

Having worshipped the great one who possesses the dreadful one-thousand heads and a huge army of companions, we hail your feet so that we shall never be separated from you.<sup>45</sup>

Not all Tirumāl poems in the *Pari*. collection glor-

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<sup>44</sup>*Pari*. *Tiraṭṭu*, 1: 7-27.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*, 79-82.

ify temple sites. Out of the seven extant poems, five (1, 2, 3, 4 and 13) do not refer to any temple site or earthly abode of the god. How the authors of these poems have visualized Tirumāl has been summed up well by Hardy:

He is the universe, the essence of the universe, the creator, maintainer, and destroyer of the All. All opposites depend upon Him, while he is beyond them. In a word, Tirumāl for these poets is the transcendental, unapproachable absolute.<sup>46</sup>

While Tirumāl is visualized as the transcendental god of all, the notion that divinity makes itself available at specific and approachable sites in this world is nonetheless present in these poems as well. There occurs, for instance, an important passage in one of these poems in which Māl is hailed as the one supreme god who is nevertheless known by different names in different places. There is in this passage a clear articulation of the idea that, although known by different names in different places, there is only one God. To the poet Kaṭuvan Iḷaveyiṇaṅār, that God is Tirumāl:

You appear wrathful and merciless to those who themselves are so. You appear cool and graceful to those who themselves are so. You are not the cause of their dispositions because you have neither friends nor foes. You are formless. Yet, you assume every form that people conceive of you in their minds . . . You are in the banyan tree whose many branches with their tender leaves resembling sparks of flames provide a thick shade; you are in the kaṭampu tree; you are on the islands formed by the course of the great

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<sup>46</sup>Hardy (1983), pp. 205-206.

rivers; you are on the high mountains which stand obstructing the passage of the wind; and, in many other places too. You are everywhere but with different names in different places. You allow yourself to be secured by your devotees in their folded hands, and you attend upon them as their servant.<sup>47</sup>

Here we see how the poets are able to combine the idea of a deity which is in specific places with that of a deity which is the absolute god or *vice versa*.

#### The Vaiyai: a 'moving' site

The Vaiyai poems in the *Pari*. fall under a slightly different category. Traditionally these poems are classified under the *akam* theme of *marutam* which has as its locale the river valleys and as its theme quarrel in love (*ūṭal*). Accordingly the principal characters appearing in them are conventional and typical of the *marutam* poetry: a sulking heroine, her female companion, an amorous but unfaithful hero, concubine, foster-mother etc. Other conventional elements of the *marutam* poetry are also found in them. Although the theme of *marutam* or marital infidelity is dealt with in these poems, it is clear that the primary objective of the authors was to sing the glories of the river rather than to focus on the theme of love. In poem after poem, the poets extol the Vaiyai for scintillating the erotic chords

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<sup>47</sup>*Pari*. 4: 50-56 and 66-72. The gods who reside in the banyan and *katampu* trees are Siva and Murukan respectively.

in the minds of young men and women who come to bathe and play in the river. This effect is especially strong when the river is gushing with fresh flood waters from the monsoon rains. The poets linger lovingly on describing the innocent and 'not-so-innocent' games played in the fast running water by the men and women of Madurai.<sup>48</sup>

The elaborate, and at times tedious, descriptions of erotic water-sports in the Vaiyai poems do recall in one's mind similar descriptions in the Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, and this has led Gros to suggest that, like the Sanskrit *kāvya(s)*, the Vaiyai poems, too, were meant for sheer poetic pleasure. In his view, the Vaiyai poems are primarily secular, although, "tout aspect religieux n'est pas banni de ces festivités aquatics."<sup>49</sup> The issue here, we would contend, is not whether the Vaiyai poems are essentially secular or religious, because, in the perspective of the authors of these poems, these two were not mutually exclusive categories.<sup>50</sup>

Any forced attempt to define these and the other poems in the collection either as secular or as religious would not only injure the unity and vision of the text, but

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<sup>48</sup>Pari. 10:25-5 and 69-70; 11: 136-137.

<sup>49</sup>Gros (1968), p. xxxv.

<sup>50</sup>We quoted already a passage from the Pari. 17 wherein the poet speaks of the ambivalent nature of life in this world in which 'secular' and religious pursuits always remain entwined and interlocked with each other. *supra*, Ch. I, p. 39.

also hinder a correct understanding of the intentionally multivalent message that the authors of these poems seek to convey. Lee Siegel's comment on a similar debate about the character of the *Gītāgovinda* seems appropriate here: "The 'problem' of interpreting the work arises with the limiting assumption that it must be either sacred or profane, an assumption which obscures the essential achievement of the poem--its ambiguity."<sup>51</sup> This ambiguity is the hall mark of the *Pari.* poems in general, and of the *Vaiyai* poems in particular.<sup>52</sup>

The ritual dimension in the *Vaiyai* poems is fairly clear. We are told that women who went for bathing in the river carried not only their cosmetics but also objects for making offerings to the river.<sup>53</sup> People gave snails, prawns, and fish made of gold as offerings so that the river would always flow full and keep the lands fertile.<sup>54</sup> On the *ātirai*

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<sup>51</sup>Siegel (1978), p. 29.

<sup>52</sup>Even this 'ambiguity' appears to be a problem not of the early Indian texts but of the modern minds. Instructive in this context is Diana Eck's comment on Nehru's attachment to the river Gaṅgā: "As one who considered himself as thoroughly secular, Nehru denied that the Gaṅgā had any "religious" significance for him, meaning "supernatural" significance. His attachment to the river and his desire to have his ashes thrown into it was, on the contrary, as natural as his love for the land of India. In this one might say, he was thoroughly a Hindu and his affirmation of the land, its waters, its mountains, was a thoroughly Hindu religious affirmation." Eck (1982), pp. 168-169.

<sup>53</sup>*Pari.* 6:11-13; 10: 85-86.

<sup>54</sup>*Pari.* 10: 80-85 and 125-126.

(*śkt. ārdra*) day in the month of *Mārkali* (December-January), young virgins took a bath in the river under the supervision of their mothers (*ampā-āṭal*). The act of bathing in the river was regarded as an auspicious encounter with the divine and possible only as the fruit of penances done in previous births.<sup>55</sup>

Oh! Vaiyai, the subject of well turned out and melodious *pari* songs! You have the ability to arouse erotic feelings in the minds of ripening virgins who come to bathe in the river. We (the girls) obtained this opportunity on account of our propitiation in the previous births; let this opportunity be available to us in the future too.<sup>56</sup>

References such as these which indicate a special, ritual affiliation of the river with women, particularly virgins, have led some scholars to argue that the Vaiyai poems are associated with a common fertility cult. Others have suggested that there must have existed in early times a special cult centering around the Vaiyai river.<sup>57</sup> The latter view gains support from the fact that all except two of the Vaiyai poems end with an invocatory passage in which the river is praised as the giver of wealth, prosperity, and sexual enjoyment.

Oh! Vaiyai, erotic feelings blossom and fill the hearts of those who play in your waters;

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<sup>55</sup>*Pari*. 11: 90-92.

<sup>56</sup>*Pari*. 11: 136-139.

<sup>57</sup>Sivathamby (1981), p. 113. Also see Gros (1968), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

let this nature of yours be ever-green.<sup>58</sup>

Many, many indeed are the benefits and pleasures that you bestow on the people of this grand old city. So great is your fame that even this vast world cannot contain it.<sup>59</sup>

### Fragments of Poems on Madurai

It was mentioned that the *Pari.* collection had originally four poems in praise of Madurai city none of which have survived in full. There are, however, six fragments, all of which have been retrieved from the *Purattirattu* collection, and which are generally taken to be parts of the original *pari* poems on Madurai.<sup>60</sup> In one of those fragments, Madurai is hailed as a city which does not wither away even if misfortune strikes the whole world.<sup>61</sup> In another fragment, the city is compared to the full-blossomed lotus flower that emanates from the naval of Viṣṇu: the well-laid out streets of the city resembled its petals; the temple of Viṣṇu, located in the center of the city, its bud;<sup>62</sup> the people living in the city, its pollen, and the

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<sup>58</sup>*Pari.* 6: 105-7.

<sup>59</sup>*Pari.* 12: 101-102. Also see 7: 84-86; 10: 126-129; 11: 137-140; 16: 50-55.

<sup>60</sup>*Purattirattu*, 866, 874-878.

<sup>61</sup>*Pari.* *Tirattu*, 6.

<sup>62</sup>The phrase *aṅṅal kōyil* is taken by one modern commentator to refer to the palace of the Pāṅṅiya king. See Po. Ve. Somasundaranar comm.

suppliants (paricil vālnar), who came in flocks to receive gifts, the bees. The city was awakened every morning not by the sounds of a cock-crowing but by the melodies of the Vedic chants.<sup>63</sup> In the remaining fragments, the city is hailed as one of eternal fame because it is blessed with Paraṅkunṇam, the abode of Murukan, the prosperous Vaiyai river, and the assembly of persons who were well versed in Tamil. Cited below is one of those fragments:

Madurai, the city of the Pāṅṭiyan kings, has tall buildings and the hill Paraṅkunṇam, the abode of god Cevvēl. The people of the city always honour the donors (ivār) and are pleased to receive the donees (ērpār). Therefore only those who live in this city are worthy to be regarded as living. Who else other than these people would reach the world of the high ones?<sup>64</sup>

Admittedly these fragments are inadequate and we do not know how far the poet went in glorifying the city as such. Yet, in view of the fact that descriptions of several important sites such as Paraṅkunṇam, Iruṅkunṇam, Irunṭaiyūr, Kuḷavāy, and, of course, the Vaiyai river, all of which are located in and around the city constitute the central themes in the Pari. collection, it suggests that the missing Madur-

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<sup>63</sup>Pari. Tirattu, 7: 1-11. cf. PPA 402-405 in which the city of Kāncīpuram (Kācci) is compared to the lotus flower stemming out of Viṣṇu's naval.

<sup>64</sup>Pari. Tirattu, 11.



ai poems, too, contained similar descriptions of the city, its landmarks and its sacred associations.

### III.3. World: the locus of experience and the habitat of the human and the divine

The central theme that runs through, and thereby unifies, the **TMP** and the **Pari.** poems may now be summed up. There are specific places or locales in this world where divinity is present awaiting the arrival of devotees. The devotee in order to meet with the divinity has to undertake the journey to the site, a journey which is at once both physical as well as spiritual. One may phrase it in another way too. Both 'humanity' and 'divinity' are present simultaneously in the same world, yet are separated from each other by distance--an abyss of unknown dimensions.<sup>65</sup> The distance has to be traversed, and the right path has to be taken for a communion between the two. In this message not only can one see the rationale for the **āṟṟuppaṭai** ('to set on the path') genre of poems, but one can also see something of the early Tamil understanding of what constitutes the 'meaning' of life. The thought and the act of being **on the way** toward a meeting with the 'other' is what constitutes both the shell and the substance of life's meaning. Being 'on the way' is both the means and the end of it. Not surpr-

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<sup>65</sup>cf. Cutler (1987), p. 87.

Isingly, therefore, separation (**pirivu**), the cause of separation, and a longing for (re)union (**kūṭal**) are the predominant motifs in classical and medieval Tamil poetry.

Instructive in this context is the common Tamil expression for worshipping, **valipaṭal**, from which is derived the compound noun **valipāṭu** meaning worship. The noun **vali** means 'way, path, road, lineage' etc., and **pāṭu**, which is derived from the auxiliary verb **paṭu**, means 'coming into being, happening, experience' etc.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the expression **valipaṭal** would mean 'entering a way, or experiencing the path'.<sup>67</sup> An early occurrence of the expression **valipāṭu teyvam** in the sense of 'god who is worshipped' is found in a love poem, in which the hero homologises the union experienced by him with the heroine to the union of devotees with the god.

For long I was wandering in circles to  
obtain your love. And, my sufferings were  
nullified when your soft, beautiful, bamboo-  
like shoulders became mine. It was just like  
people, who strive passionately and unceas-  
ingly, happen to see right in front of their  
eyes the very god they were worshipping  
(**vali paṭu teyvam**).<sup>68</sup>

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66DED 5297 and 3853.

67It is worth noting here that Tol., while listing the 'occasions' for heroine's utterances, refers to a specific theme (**turai**) called **valipāṭu maṟuttal**. Iḷam. explains it as "the refusal of the heroine to follow the hero when he desires for (sexual) union." Tol. **poruḷ.kalaviyal.nūṟ**. 21:3. Iḷam's comm.

68NT 9: 1-4.

**aḷivila muyalum ārva mākkal**  
**valipāṭu teyvaṅ kaṭkaṅtāṅku**  
**alamaraḷ varuttan tīra yālanin**

The devotees' 'journey' to a site, and the encounter with the divine, can be undertaken either on a one-to-one basis or in a collective venture with fellow devotees. The girls of the hill tribe, for instance, perform a ritual dance together, and the god Murukan descends and participates in it. In several of the *Pari*. poems, as we have seen, the utterances are collective. In either case, however, both the journey and the final encounter between the devotee and the divinity are understood to be a tangible, physical experience. One does not meet with the divinity in any metaphysical or ontological sense, but meets with it existentially at a **place**, **here** and **now**. The **place** where the god is 'grounded', and where the meeting takes place, is, therefore, of great significance. That place is as divine as the god. The **place** is the locus of that experience, and the **place**, being a part of the physical world, is real and tangible; so, too, is the meeting.

The purpose of journeying to the divine site is certainly not the same with every devotee. While referring to the assembly of women devotees in the Parāṅkuṅṅam hill, the poet Nallantuvaṅṅār says that they included:

Those who wish for fresh waters in the  
Vaiyai river so that their dream of sporting  
in the river with their lovers will materi-  
alize; those who pledge many offerings so

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**nalamen paṅaittōl eytinam ...**  
Māṅikkavācakar's *Tirukkōvaiyār* offers a full grown rendering of the homology suggested in this poem. See Cutler (1987), pp. 104-105.

that they may conceive (a child); those who appeal for success and prosperity in all ventures of their husbands; and, those who pray that their husbands should obtain victory in war.<sup>69</sup>

Evidences such as these which refer to devotees making a trip to the sacred sites and asking the god for specific requests with regard to their every day life are commonly met with in the early texts. This, however, does not mean that everyone who goes to the place of the god goes there only with petitions for mundane benefits.<sup>70</sup> The place grants the devotee *mukti* or eternal bliss too, as the author of the *Pari.* poem (15) quoted above says. There is yet another angle. Some people go to the abode of the god with an 'aimless' aim--just to be there. What is the driving force that brings these devotees to the site? That force is love--"a unitive, fusing force, an energy through which two seek to become one."<sup>71</sup> Cēkkiḷār, the twelfth century author of the Śaiva hagiographical work the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam*

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<sup>69</sup>*Pari.* 8: 103-108. The idea of a child being born through the grace of Murugaṅ is found in *AKN* 257: 1-2. In *Pari.* 8: 83-89 the heroine is praised as one who always pleads with the god for forgiveness on behalf of her hero even when he offends the god by his false oaths to her.

<sup>70</sup>Compare the observations of Bhardwaj (1973), p. 153. After studying pilgrim groups in several religious centers of north India, Bhardwaj classifies them into two broad categories: a) those who are concerned with mundane things and existence, and b) those who are desirous of earning religious merit. According to him, for pilgrims in the first category, 'deity is the focus of pilgrimage' and for those in the second category, the act or the 'event of pilgrimage' is more significant. *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup>Siegel (1978), p. 1.

('account of the holy servants'), popularly called the **Periya Purāṇam** ('great account'), defines the nature of **toṅṭaṅ** ('servant') or **bhakta** in the following terms: "Apart from worshipping with unifying love, these heroes do not seek anything else, not even the salvation (**vīṭu**)."<sup>72</sup> So blissful is the divine site that the poet **Nallaḷiciyār** says in praise of the **Parāṅkuṅṅam** hill:

Every evening people flock and spend their time at the foot of the hill. Who amongst them would prefer life in heaven, the abode of gods? None, indeed.<sup>73</sup>

### **Meaning and End of Pilgrimage**

It is necessary at this point to digress a little and respond to the views of recent writers on the significance of the act of pilgrimage in Tamil religious tradition. While commenting on the purpose of devotees' visit to the temple sites, Shulman writes:

Again and again we are told that a shrine provides the devotee with both material reward (**bhukti**) and release (**mukti**). The former is a clear enough goal, while the latter, on the surface, appears to coincide with the ideal of renunciation as proclaimed in the Upaniṣads and later texts. This is not, however, the case; it is important to realize that no one in Tamilnaṭu goes on pilgrimage to attain release. What has happened in the Tamil tradition is that the world renouncing goal of the ascetic has

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<sup>72</sup>Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam, 5. 8: 3-4.

<sup>73</sup>Parī. 17: 7-8.

been redefined as equivalent to **bhakti**.  
Pilgrimage comes to substitute for  
**sannyāsa**.<sup>74</sup>

He illustrates this point by narrating the myth of the Mutukunṅam (Vriddācalam) temple in which gods are directed by none other than Śiva himself to descend from heaven to earth and visit the temple site at Mutukunṅam in order to obtain the vision of his dance. As this vision which is obtained at the temple-site is equated in the myth with salvation, Shulman argues that earth is thus seen as the 'locus of **mukti**':

**Mukti** is present for the devotee within the conditions of his life on earth. This is a development of particular importance. Tamil devotional religion can dispense with heaven altogether, for the shrine is superior to any world of the gods.<sup>75</sup>

What, one might ask, was the basis of this 'development of particular importance'? In Shulman's view, this development in Tamil tradition was in essence a reaction, a response to the ideal of world renunciation. To quote him again: "Having inherited the goal of world-renunciation from an earlier stage of Indian religion, **bhakti** stands it on its head and directs man back to life on earth."<sup>76</sup>

Chronologically the spread and influence of the Ājīvika, Jain, Buddhist, and Upanisadic schools which stress

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<sup>74</sup>Shulman (1980), p. 20.

<sup>75</sup>*ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>76</sup>*ibid.*

the ideal of renunciation preceded the climactic development of the **bhakti** religion in south India. One cannot, therefore, deny the possibility of the above argument altogether. At the same time, it must be pointed out that such an interpretation sets its focus on only one link in a causal chain. What one should not ignore is that it was not out of a vacuum that the ideal of world-renunciation itself sprang up; for that ideal too was a reaction, a response, a counter-point to the ideal of world-affirmation. Notwithstanding the claims of the ascetic traditions to the contrary, there is no inherent reason to suppose that the ideal involving the exaltation of life in this world was perceived of by its practitioners as a hindrance to realization of the ultimate goal of life, or a lesser religious pursuit than the ideal of world renunciation. On the contrary, the Āgamic religion, has a positive attitude towards life-in-the-world and "consistently favours the path of the householder" over the path of renunciation.<sup>77</sup> It would be incorrect, therefore, to presume that one path is the ideal and the other is a deviation from it at any stage in India's religious history. It would be more appropriate to regard these two as alternate or parallel modes available to all prospective religious persons in all ages. The 'dialectical' tension generated by these modes has been a constant source of debate and vital-

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<sup>77</sup>Mishra (1981), p. 46.

ity within the various Indian religious traditions down the ages.

The ethical works in Tamil refer to these two modes as **tuṛavaṛaṃ** ('path of renunciation') and **illaṛaṃ** ('path of house-hold').<sup>78</sup> The act of pilgrimage, which may be paraphrased as the act of 'being on the way', is not a substitute for renunciation, but a preparatory condition applicable to both--**illaṛaṃ** and **tuṛavaṛaṃ**--modes of religiosity. In the perspective of the history of Indian religious thought, the importance of the classical Tamil poems lies in the fact that they offer us an unusual glimpse into the operation of the ideal of affirming life in this world as a valid means of experience in a specific historical setting that preceded the debates between renunciation and devotion.

Paradoxical though it may sound, it is in this classical ideal of the exaltation of life, which has been understood by scholars as 'secular', that one may see the seeds out of which the **bhakti** tree grew. There are definitely major as well as minor differences between the classical poetry and the medieval **bhakti** poetry.<sup>79</sup> These differences,

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<sup>78</sup>The commentators divide the first division in the **Tirukuraḷ** called, the **arattuppāl** into three sub-sections namely **pāyiraṃ** 'Introduction' (Chs. 1-4), **illaṛaṃ** 'Domestic way' (Chs. 5-24), and **tuṛavaṛaṃ** 'Ascetic way' (Chs. 25-38). See Zvelebil (1973), pp. 158-160.

<sup>79</sup>For a discussion of the differences between the poetics of the Classical Tamil and the poetics of **bhakti**, see Cutler (1987), pp. 61-70.



however, should not be allowed to eclipse from our view the basic, underlying principle that bound them together: both involve an exaltation of life-in-the-world. The philosophical supposition of both is that 'space' or the physical world constitutes the arena of experience, and life-in-the-world is a legitimate setting for achieving its goal. Accordingly the world of space, the locus of life, is held to be as important as life itself. It is only against this background that one can truly measure and appreciate not only why the early Tamil theoreticians attached so much importance to the physical world (*vaiyam*) and to the classification of natural landscape, but also why the early poets were so fastidiously cherishing a world-view in which,

Nature and culture are not opposed but consubstantial; together they make meanings possible, each containing the other in paradoxes of metonymy. And the metonymy generates metaphors--the natural scene with its many orders is like the human scene because the two belong together. A landscape (*tinai*) in the Tamil definition, is both a place and a mood; to speak of one is to evoke the other.<sup>80</sup>

So crucial and fundamental was landscape in their mode of thinking that the grammarians, who codified the rules for poetic composition, classified all--animate as well as inanimate--things primarily in terms of their spacial associa-

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<sup>80</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 286.

tion.<sup>81</sup>

We shall attempt in the ensuing chapter to clarify how this ideal of exaltation of life in this world manifests itself in the context of the culture of the warrior-heroes who were the subject of most of the classical poems, and also how it provided the base for the religious orientation of the Tamils in general. What needs to be stressed here is that one cannot view the **bhakti** religion simply as a reaction to the religion of renunciation, which seems to be the implication of Shulman's argument. To do so is to ignore its roots in the past. After all, the Tamil **bhakta** saints--  
 Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas--were the lineal descendants of the classical vision in which the physical world as the arena of experience--divine or otherwise--was solidly affirmed and upheld. Admittedly quite a few of the conceptual signs and symbols of the classical phase underwent transformation in the hands of the medieval devotional poets, but the spontaneous manner in which they accomplished the changes stands more as an indication of the large degree of continuity they maintained with the past.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>It may be pointed out here that in Tamil literary tradition, the **poruḷatikāram** ('subject-matter'), which included discussions on spacial concepts and categories never lost its appeal or importance, and treatises on **poruḷ** continued to be written until recent times.

<sup>82</sup>On the threads of continuity between the classical and **bhakti** poetics, see Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), pp. 204-206.

### III.4. Space in the Classical conventions: The Tinal Classification

Having pointed out the primacy of space or physical world as the locus of experience in the explicitly religious poems, it now remains to be seen how this notion manifested itself in the other poems in the classical corpus and in the conceptual schema of the Tamil grammarians-cum-theoreticians. Although there is uncertainty with regard to the relative dating of the Tol. and the classical poems, there is little doubt that one is a fairly accurate reflection of the other. We will discuss the grammatical conventions first.

It may be appropriate to begin our discussion by recapitulating the salient features of the conventions that governed classical Tamil poetry. As noted already, the subject matter of poetry in Tamil was classified into two broad categories: a) The poems which dealt with various themes relating to pre-marital, and marital union between a man and a woman were called **akattinai** ('inner' or 'interior landscape') or love poetry. The **akam** poetry was governed by one inviolable rule. That is: While treating the theme of reciprocal love (**anpin aintinai**), involving humans (**makkal**), the poets were forbidden from mentioning the names of the persons concerned.<sup>83</sup> In other words, in poems on reciprocal

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<sup>83</sup>Note the expression **makkal nutaliya** .... in Tol.porul. **akat.nūr**. 57 implying thereby that names may be mentioned if the principal characters involved in a love poem include the divine beings.

love between a man and a woman the characters must always be anonymous or 'types', and never be particularized; b) The poems which dealt with all themes other than love, but mainly heroic, and in which the characters involved are identified were called **purattinai** ('outer' or 'exterior landscape') or heroic poetry. If in a love poem the names of the **dramatis personae** were mentioned, it was then treated as a **puṛaṁ** poem.<sup>84</sup>

Of the total number of poems that are extant now in both the **eṭṭu**. and **pattu**. collections, more than two-thirds fall under the division of **akam** or love poetry. Although the principal characters are not named in these poems, several 'historical' personalities, mostly kings and chieftains, are mentioned by name in several of them, and, "both the categories of poems, i.e. love and martial alike, are ... dealing with an aristocratic society--a society dominated by warlike chiefs."<sup>85</sup> Each of these two divisions--**akam** and **puṛaṁ**--was further classified into seven specific situations called **tinai(s)**. These fourteen constituted the basic frameworks that were considered appropriate for poetic compositions. Ten of these fourteen 'poetic landscapes' were correlated to five distinct, physiographic regions, each of which was named after the flora typical to the region. In **akam** poetry,

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<sup>84</sup>*ibid.*, 58.

<sup>85</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 11.

each of these *tiṇai*(s) was correlated to an appropriate mood in love; and, in *puṇam* poetry, to a specific heroic deed. This complex structure of conventions and correspondences has been elaborated in a number of grammatical treatises of which the *Tol.* is perhaps the earliest and the most authentic.<sup>86</sup> The essential features of these conventions may be tabulated as follows:<sup>87</sup>

**Akattiṇai:**

<b>Tiṇai</b>	<b>mutarporul</b>	<b>karupporul</b>	<b>uripporul</b>
(Landscape)	(First things)	(Native things)	(Human mood)
<b>kuṛiñci</b> <sup>88</sup>	hilly region	flora and fauna of the hills god: Cēyōṇ	secret, pre-marital sexual union ( <b>puṇartal</b> )
<b>mullai</b>	forest/	flora and fauna	wife's patient

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<sup>86</sup>It may be noted here that Zvelebil assigns the *IA*, a treatise of sixty aphorisms on pre-marital, secret love to a date earlier than that of the third book of *Tol.* Zvelebil (1973), pp. 85-86.

<sup>87</sup>The chart is mainly based on the *Tol.* Although the respect for *Tol.* was great, it appears that since very early times, there were grammarians who differed from *Tol.* in matters relating to definition and elaboration of various themes. The author of the *PPVM*, for instance, classifies the *puṇam* or 'heroic' poetry into twelve divisions and assigns over three hundred themes under them. Cf. Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 52-53.

<sup>88</sup>The botanical names of the flowers mentioned in the chart are as follows: **kuṛiñci** - *Strobilanthes Kunthianus*; **mullai** - *Jasminum auriculatum*; **marutam** - *Lagerstroemia flos-reginae*; **neytal** - *Nymphaea Stellata*; **pālai** - *Wrightia tinctoria*; **veṭci** - *Ixora coccinea*; **vañci** - *Salix tetrasperma*; **uḷiṇai** - *Caediospermum hallicacabum*; **tumpai** - *Leucas aspera*; **vākai** - *Albizzia lebbeck*; **kāñci** - *Trewia nudiflora*.

	pasture	of the forest	waiting
	land	god: Māyōṇ	(iruttal)
marutam	agrarian	flora and fauna	unfaithful
	region	of riverine tract	husband &
		god: Vēntaṇ	sulking wife
			(ūṭal)
neytal	littoral	flora and fauna	wife's pining
	region	of the coast	(iraṅkal)
		god: Varuṇaṇ	
pālai <sup>89</sup>	-----	flora and fauna	impending
		of the dry land	separation
		goddess: Korṟavai	(pirital)
peruntinaḷ	-----		mismatched union
			('great tinaḷ')
kaikkilāi	-----		unrequitted love
			('base or one-sided love')

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<sup>89</sup>Tol. does not assign any particular landscape to pālai because the world, according to him, is comprised only of the first four landscapes, Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ. 2. When seasonal rains fail, the mullai (forest) and kuṟiṅci (mountain) regions become so parched that they take the appearance of pālai or arid land. Cil. 11: 62-66.

**Puṛattinai:**

<b>Tiṇai</b>	Appropriate deed and number of poetic themes (tuṛai) according to Tol.
<b>veṭci</b>	Cattle-raid (fourteen themes) and cattle-recovery (twenty-one themes)
<b>vañci</b>	defending against an invading king's army (thirteen themes)
<b>uliṇai</b>	siege (eight themes) and defending the fort (twelve themes)
<b>tumpai</b>	battle scenes (twelve themes)
<b>vakai</b>	victory (eighteen themes)
<b>kāñci</b>	impermanence (twenty themes)
<b>pāṭāṇ</b>	praise (twenty (?) themes)

Tol. speaks of a clear one-to-one correspondence between the seven **akam** and the seven **puṛam** divisions: **veṭci** is the exterior of **kuṛiñci**, **vañci** is the exterior of **mullai** and so on.<sup>90</sup> The explanations offered by the medieval commentators on these correspondences are rich and diverse, but they need not be allowed to detain us here.<sup>91</sup> What is apparent, and, from our point of view significant, is the spacial orientation that lies at the core of this poetic schema. In his opening statements on **akattinaiyiyal**, Tol. makes this point clear:

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<sup>90</sup>Tol.poruḷ.puṛat.nūṟ. 1, 6, 8, 12, 15, 18, and 20.

<sup>91</sup>For a critical discussion on this issue, see Marr (1985), pp. 32-46.

When we examine the subject matter of a poem, it will be seen that only three things are important and proper: the 'first things' (*mutal*), the 'native things' (*karu*) and the 'appropriate feelings' (*uri*).<sup>92</sup>

Of these, the 'first things' (*mutal*) mean the order of land (*nilam*) and time (*polutu*). Thus say the learned.<sup>93</sup>

In the poetic discourse, space (land) and time are perceived to be the 'first things'. Zvelebil's comment on the significance of this perception is worth quoting here:

The universe is perceived (*kāṭci*) and conceived (*karuttu*) in terms of three basic categories: a space-time continuum ... provides the basic background, the space and time coordinates of an event; this is termed *mutal* lit. "first, basic things", fundamental aspect, the basic stratum.<sup>94</sup>

'Where' and 'when' were thus the basic structural frames within which the classical Tamil poets captured and concretized their creative impulses. The 'where' is never an imaginary wonderland, but is and has to be a part of the natural landscape obtained on this earth.

It might be suggested that of the two basic categories--i.e. space and time--the former was more basic than the latter in the conceptual scheme of the early Tamils. This is clearly borne out when we turn to the classical

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<sup>92</sup>Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ. 3. Iḷam. states clearly that landscape is the most important one in determining the *tinai* of a poem. Also see Aravanan (1978), p. 99.

<sup>93</sup>Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ., 4.

<sup>94</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 93.



corpus and look for terms which mean space or place. The corpus has a rich and wide range of terms that carry these meanings, and it would go beyond our purpose to provide an exhaustive list of those terms. What is remarkable and very striking, however, is that almost all stipulatory terms that are essential for an understanding of classical Tamil conventions are based on 'place', 'space', or 'locale'. Significant among these terms with their meanings as listed in the DED are:

- akam**<sup>95</sup> - 'inside, house, place, breast, mind, a locative ending' etc.
- puram**<sup>96</sup> - 'exterior, outside' etc.
- tiṇai** - There is no entry under the term **tiṇai** in the DED., but according to the TL it means, 'land, place, region, site, house, tribe, caste race, family, conduct' etc.<sup>97</sup>
- nilam**<sup>98</sup> - 'ground, earth, land, field, place, region' etc.
- turai**<sup>99</sup> - 'place, location, situation, way, path', etc.
- iṭam/iṭan**<sup>100</sup> - 'place, room, spot, wide space, auspicious

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95DED 7.

96DED 4333.

97TL, vol. III, p. 1874. Compare the term **kuṭi** in the DED 1665.

98DED 3676.

99DED 3370.

100DED 434.

time'etc.

Some of the other common terms which mean 'place' are:

il101 - 'house, place', etc.

kaṇ102 - 'place, site', etc.

maṇraṇ103 - 'plain, open space, central place in a battle-field', etc.

kaḷam/

kaḷaṇ104 - 'place, open space, threshing floor', etc.

pulaṇ105 - 'arable land, place, region, quarter' etc.

With so many of the basic terms carrying the meaning 'place' or 'space', one would not be far off the mark in suggesting that the classical Tamil thought was predominantly a space-oriented one. A further discussion of the meaning and significance of some of these terms will be necessary in order to understand the depth of spacial thinking in early Tamil taxonomy.

### Tinaḷ

Of the several terms employed by Tol., tinaḷ is of

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101DED 494.

102DED 1161.

103DED 4777.

104DED 1376. p̄al and k̄al are among other important terms that mean 'place' or 'locale'.

105DED 4303.

basic importance in early Tamil taxonomy. As noted above, the term means 'land, place, region, family, conduct' etc. It occurs frequently in the classical poems, and the medieval commentators, depending upon the context, interpret it to mean 'land', 'family', 'settlement', or 'code of conduct'.-  
 106 In the view of one modern scholar, "in the heroic poems at least, it oftener than not means 'tribe, clan, family' etc."107 That the term *tinai* had acquired different meanings at an early period is beyond doubt. We read, for instance, in the commentary on the IA:

There are two schools of scholars: those who maintain that *tinai* means *olukkam* ('code of conduct') and those who maintain that *tinai* means *nilam* ('land'). This is not correct. *Tinai* means *olukkam* only . . . There is yet another school of scholars who say that *tinai* means both *olukkam* and *nilam* . . . This is not correct either.108

In the Tol., the term is employed in different contexts, but the author does not offer us a definition of it. However it is fairly clear that he uses the term in more than one sense. For instance, in his opening statement in the chapter on 'Formation of words' in the col. (morphology) division, he uses it in the sense of 'category' or 'family':

Human beings belong to the higher category (*uyartinai*); all the rest, to the division of non-category (*ahrinai*). The formation and usage of words are also classifiable under

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106For relevant references, see Sivathamby (1974), p. 31.

107Kailasapathy (1968), p. 250.

108IA.nūr. 1, comm. p. 25. cf. Aravanan (1978), pp. 94-95.

these two categories.109

Here again Tol. does not explain why human beings were perceived to belong to the higher class. Modern writers, perhaps influenced by his statements elsewhere in the book, take **uyartinaḷ** to refer to 'rational' beings who are endowed with the power of discriminatory knowledge, and **ahrinaḷ** to all 'non-rational' entities, animate and inanimate.110

According to Tol., appropriate pronominal and verbal gender-suffixes of the higher class (**uyartinaḷ**) are to be employed for super-human beings including gods and goddesses.111

Subsequently, in the **poruḷ** division, Tol. employs the term **tiṇai** in the sense of 'division' or 'group' as well as in the sense of 'landscape' or 'physiographic region'. In his opening statement in the chapter on **akattiṇai** he says:

The learned say that there are seven (love) divisions (**tiṇai**). These divisions commence with **kaikkilāi** and end with **peruntinaḷ**.112

In the very next **nūṛpā**, he says:

Of them, the middle five divisions except the medial one constitute the world which is surrounded by sea.113

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109Tol.col.kilavi.nūṛ. 1.

110cf. Tol.poruḷ.marapiyal.nūṛ. 39-40.

111Tol.col.kilavi.nūṛ. 4.

112Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṛ. 1.

113ibid., 2.

What he means by the latter statement is that four out of the five middle *tiṇai*(s), namely *kuṟiñci*, *mullai*, *marutam*, and *neytal*, represent respectively the following four 'landscapes' or 'physiographical regions' namely mountains, forests, riverine and coastal regions. These four regions together constitute the world. The fifth *tiṇai* to which no particular landscape is ascribed is *pālai*. Although it has no landscape of its own, mountains and forests take on the appearance of *pālai* when they become parched due to lack of rains. It is clear that the term *tiṇai*, in this context, means 'landscape' or 'region'. Curiously, a few *nūrpā*(s) later, Tol. makes the following observation:

Those who are well versed in the art of poetics say that fusion of *tiṇai*(s) is not forbidden in compositions but fusion of *nilaṅ* ('land') is.<sup>114</sup>

Apparently Tol. here makes a distinction between *tiṇai* and *nilaṅ*. The commentators differ in their interpretation of the term *tiṇai* in this *nūṟ*. Ilam. takes it to mean 'Time' while Nacci. interprets it as 'code of conduct'. As pointed out by Sivathamby:

This is mainly a problem of poetics. Tolkaṭṭiyar wants to maintain the primacy of the region. Whether *Tiṇai* here means 'Time' or 'Conduct' is of no major significance because the primacy of region as a unit is maintained.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>*ibid.*, 12.

<sup>115</sup>Sivathamby (1974), p. 33.

In yet another context, Tol. employs the term **tinai** in the sense of 'physiographical region'. In ancient times the people of the world were classified and named on the basis of the territory in which they lived and worked. Habitat determined the patterns of behaviour of peoples, and common habits gave them their collective identity. Tol. calls these names **tinainilaippeyar**.<sup>116</sup> Why did Tol. feel the need to explain this? In **akam** poetry, as mentioned already, the principal characters are never identified by their personal names (**iyarppayar**). But the **akam** poems are invariably in the form of 'utterances' (**kūrṟu**) by one or the other of the idealized characters such as the hero (**talai-vaṅ**), the heroine (**talaivi**), the female companion (**tōḷi**), or the foster-mother (**cevili**). Consequently the listener or the second person is often addressed in them.<sup>117</sup> When doing so, the second persons are addressed by their common names (**potuppeyar**) so that their anonymity will be maintained. These common names are derived from nouns or verbs which, in turn, are derived from the regions where those persons live and work: for example, **kunruvar** ('people of the hills'), **kānavar** ('people of the forest') **vēttuvar** ('huntsmen'), **ulavar** ('ploughman') and so on.<sup>118</sup> According to Tol, the

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<sup>116</sup>Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūr. 20.

<sup>117</sup>It should be noted that in some classical poems the person so addressed is one's own self.

<sup>118</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 12.

principal characters in the **akam** poems--the hero, the heroine etc--should also be addressed by their common names which are derived in the same manner. The hero, for instance, of **kur̥iñci** is called **ver̥pan** ('hillsman'), and the hero of **marutam** is called **ūran** ('villageman'), and so on. Literally they mean 'he of the mountain' and 'he of the village', but can also be taken to mean 'he who belongs to the mountain' or 'he to whom the mountain belongs'.<sup>119</sup> In either case, the point is that the **place** gives the identity to individuals as well as groups.<sup>120</sup>

This pattern of classifying the world into distinct physiographical regions, and the convention of identifying peoples and their chieftains on the basis of the territory or 'regional landscape' to which they belonged is then extended to include gods too. We already quoted in another context Tol.'s statement according to which each one of the four landscapes--**kur̥iñci**, **mullai**, **marutam** and **neytal**--was perceived to be the favourite place of residence for different gods.<sup>121</sup>

The association of a particular deity with a par-

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<sup>119</sup>See Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 12-13 for a discussion on the sociological significance of these usages.

<sup>120</sup>It is worth noting in this context that place of birth being a segment of the proper name of a person is a common feature in Tamil society.

<sup>121</sup>**Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ**. 5. There is no reference to the **pālai** in the **nūṟpā**, but the latter grammarians assign **Kor̥ṟavai**, the 'lady of victory' as the presiding deity of the **pālai** region.

ticular landscape is not to be taken to mean that gods were totally and helplessly confined to their respective regions. Gods may, and, indeed, they did, transcend the *tiṇai* region with which they were conventionally associated. *Murukan*, for instance, is the god par excellence of the mountain region, but *Alaivāy*, a site in the coastal region, is counted as one of the abodes of the god in the *TMP*. Besides the *TMP*, references to this famous coastal abode of *Murukan* are found in two other classical poems.<sup>122</sup> Similarly *Māyōṅ* is the god of the forest region, but *Iruṅkuṅṅam*, a hill-site near *Maḍurai*, is among the celebrated abodes of the god. How does, then, one explain the convention of associating a particular god with a particular region? We mentioned earlier that in Tamil understanding gods inhabit the same universe as the humans. In order to be known and experienced, gods, too, have to be defined or identified, as in the case of humans, in relation to a given territory or place.

### **Akam and Puṅam**

Besides *tiṇai*, the terms *akam* and *puṅam* are also of great importance for understanding the conceptual realm of the early Tamils. In Tamil literary tradition, as stated repeatedly, *akam* is commonly understood as the poetry of love, and *puṅam* as the poetry of valour. But, as pointed out

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<sup>122</sup>AK 266: 20-21; PN 55: 18. In the latter poem, the site is referred to by the name *Centil*.



by Kailasapathy, ". . . in course of time these two subjects gathered many subsidiary ideas within their fold, for the sole reason that they remained the only two major categories of human behaviour."<sup>123</sup> In other words, the whole spectrum of human behaviour was divided and classified by the Tamil theoreticians under these two categories.

In the third division of his work, Tol. has devoted two full chapters to discuss the various aspects of **akattinai** and **purattinai**. Yet, as in the case of **tinai**, the grammarian does not offer a definition of **akam** or **puram**. For definition, we have to turn to the medieval commentaries of whom **Iḷam.**, the earliest commentator, defines the terms as follows: "The content of **akam** is sexual enjoyment, and only the concerned participants realize its effects. Therefore the author called it **akam**. The content of **puram** is performance of acts of valour and acts of virtue, the effects of which are perceived by others. Therefore he called it **puram**."<sup>124</sup> In his view, these two terms are descriptive or causal nouns. **Nacci.** treats them both as metonymical nouns, and in his view, the enjoyment arising out of sexual union has its locus in the heart of the concerned persons only; therefore, it is called **akam**, and all the rest, **puram**.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 4.

<sup>124</sup>Tol.porul. Iḷam. comm. Introduction, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup>Tol.porul.akat.nūr. 1, Nacci. comm.

Evidently, in formulating their definitions, both commentators have taken into consideration the primary sense of these terms which is spacial (i.e. 'inner' and 'outer'). They then explain the terms on the basis of the assumption that with regard to the effects of emotional experiences there are 'within' and 'without' categories: those arising out of mutual love are 'within' i.e. intimate and enclosed within the hearts of the persons directly involved, and those arising out of situations other than mutual love are 'without' i.e. open and public.

It is noteworthy in this context that the terms **akam** and **puram** are enumerated by Tol. among the suffixes for the seventh (locative) case which indicates the location of the performance of action.<sup>126</sup> This provides further confirmation of the view that these terms denoted basically the locale or the locus of action and experience. In meaning and usage, these two terms are remarkably rich in Tamil language. Yet, it is interesting to note that in every context it is the spacial dimension that governs their usage. Listing in pairs the various meanings of these two terms as given in the TL, Ramanujan has made the following comment on the significance of their application in the context of early Tamil poetry:

The meanings complement each other systematically. As we move from context to context, for each meaning of **akam**, there is a cor-

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<sup>126</sup>Tol.col.vērrumai.nūr. 20-21. For references in the classical corpus where these two terms appear as locative endings, see Sivathamby (1981), p. 107.

responding sense of **puṛam**. It is characteristic of this poetry and its poetics that the meanings seem to expand and contract in concentric circles, with the concrete physical particular at the centre, getting more and more inclusive and abstract as we move outward. The context picks and foregrounds one or another of these circles of meanings.<sup>127</sup>

### III.5. Treatment of Space in the Classical Poems

Descriptions of specific cult sites analogous to those found in the **TMP** and the **Pari.** poems are rarely found in the poems of the other anthologies. In the **ettu.** works, apart from the **Pari.** and **Kalit.**, there are four **akam** and two **puṛam** anthologies. Of the four **akam** anthologies, two--**AKN** and **KT**--consist of very short poems ranging from three to eight lines. Their short range, coupled with the fact that they deal with the highly structured **akam** themes, allows little scope for elaborate descriptions in them. The poems in the remaining two **akam** collections namely **NT** and **AN** are comparatively longer, but even the longest among them has only thirty-one lines. Of the two **puṛam** collections, the **PrP** is devoted exclusively to glorifying the kings of the **Cēral** family whereas the **PN** has poems in praise of several kings of the **Cēral**, **Cōla** and **Pāṇṭiya** families, a number of chieftains, and many nameless warriors and heroic women. The poems in these two collections are also not very long. The

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<sup>127</sup>Ramanujan (1985), p. 263.

longest poem in the **PN**, for instance, has only forty lines, and of the eighty extant poems in the **PrP**, only four are over forty lines with the longest one (90) having fifty-seven lines.

In the **pattu**. collection, there are, including the **TMP**, six **puṛam** poems, three **akam** poems, and the character of one poem **NNV** is disputed. According to the tradition, the following three are the **akam** poems: **PP**, **MP**, and **KP**. Except for **KP**, they are, however, freely interspersed with **puṛam** or heroic elements, and are in praise of 'historical' kings whose names are explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the poems. The **PP**, for instance, is sung in glory of Tirumāvaḷavan who is generally identified with the celebrated Cōla king Karikāl. The hero of the **MP** is 'anonymous', but Nacci. identifies him as the Pāṇṭiyan king Neṭuñceliyan, the victor of Talaiyālaṅkānam. Thematically the **NNV** is an **akam** poem, and shares several features in common with the **MP**. Its hero, obviously a king, although not mentioned by name in the poem, is taken to be the Pāṇṭiyan Neṭuñceliyan, the victor of Talaiyālaṅkānam on account of the fact that the king's emblematic flower is mentioned in the poem. Because the hero is identifiable, Nacci. does not regard **NNV** as an **akam** poem.<sup>128</sup> The six **puṛam** poems are: **TMP**, **PAP**, **PPA**, **CPA**, **MPK** and **MK**. Except for the **TMP**, each of them is sung in praise

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<sup>128</sup>**Pattu**. Nacci. comm. p. 445.

of a king or a chieftain. Even if we discount the conjectural identification of the heroes of **NNV** and **MP** from the reckoning, it is apparent that six out of the ten poems are 'praise' poems composed in honour of heroic men of ruling groups.

What is the 'make-up' of these poems? How are space and places handled in them? Does the approach to space and places in these poems reveal any significant patterns? If so, are there any correspondences between them and the 'religious' poems? Obviously the longer poems in the **pattu.** collection are more useful for our purpose than the shorter ones in the **eṭṭu.** Two poems in the **pattu.** at once demand our attention for their titles themselves express the importance of 'place'. They are the **MK** and **PP.**

### **Maturaikkāñci and Paṭṭinappālai**

The **MK**, the longest of the classical poems, is a near perfect example of a **puṛaṃ** poetry. According to the medieval commentator, the title of the poem means 'the counsel (on impermanence) given (to the king) at Madurai'. The king in question was the Pāṇṭiya ruler Neṭuñceliyan, the victor of Talayālankāṇam, and the counselling poet was Māṅkuṭi Marutaṇ, who was probably his court poet.<sup>129</sup> In **puṛaṃ** poetry, according to the convention, the theme of

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<sup>129</sup>cf. **PN** 72: 13-16.

impermanence was dealt with under *kāñcittīnai*.<sup>130</sup> The poem, no doubt, contains some didactic material in accord with its title. It is noteworthy, however, that, besides *kāñci*, other *puram* themes also find a detailed treatment in it.

The MK revolves around three subjects: the (*Pāñṭiya*) king, the (*Pāñṭiya*) country, and the (*Pāñṭiya*) capital. The first and the last sections of the poem are devoted by *Marutaṅ* to praise the exploits of his patron-king. In lines 1-209 the poet briefly hails the illustrious family of the *Pāñṭiyas* by referring to a few semi-mythical and historical ancestors of the king, and, then, delineates in detail the king's own heroic deeds which included: the capture of the prosperous coastal town *Cāliyūr*, the subjugation of *Mutuvelililai*, another coastal (?) settlement, the magnificent victory at *Talāyālaṅkānam*, where he crushed the combined forces of the *Cēral* and the *Cōla* kings and their allies, and finally his conquest of the *Paratavas*, a menacing martial community who lived on the southern coast of the kingdom. There is also a trenchant portrayal of the terrible devastation that his triumphant army wrought on the conquered territories.<sup>131</sup>

The middle section, which constitutes more than two-thirds of the total length of the poem, is entirely devoted

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<sup>130</sup>*Tol.poruḷ.purat.nūṟ*. 23.

<sup>131</sup>MK 152-177. For a translation of the passage, see Kailasapathy (1968), p. 43.

to the description of the Pāṇṭiya country and the Pāṇṭiya capital, the city of Madurai (238-699). As part of the description of Madurai, the poet presents an itemized report on various aspects in the life of the inhabitants of the city. The passage where Marutaṅ shifts his focus from praising the king to praising the land and the city is an enigmatic one (206-237). It is enigmatic because this is the only passage in the poem where the theme of *kāñci* or counselling (the king) on the transitory nature of life is treated. After eulogising Neṭuñceliyaṅ's heroic and virtuous qualities, the poet tells him:

Oh! the hero of several battles! In valour and generosity, none can equal you. Nevertheless I venture to tell you something that would make your life even greater by eliminating your predicaments. (Therefore) Listen!....

(because), countless are the kings who have passed away after ruling this wide world in a praise-worthy manner (like you).<sup>132</sup>

What precisely the poet ventured to tell the king appears only at the very end of the poem. Says the poet:

(Therefore) Perform the (Vedic) sacrifices (*vēlvi*) as your ancestor Mutukuṭumi did, follow the path of Neṭiyōṅ who attained fame by patronizing great teachers of wisdom .... and, venerated by the minor kings (*kuṛunilamannar*) and by other chieftains, and relishing the redolent wine served in gold vessels by well-adorned girls, oh! lord, live happily till the end of the allotted

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132MK 206-210 and 235-237.

span of your life on this earth.<sup>133</sup>

If, as argued by the medieval commentator, counselling the king on the theme of impermanence was the central purpose of the poem, we are confronted by a few problems. First, the poet's exhortation does not sound like a typical discourse on impermanence. What does then *kāñci* mean? Secondly, the obvious intent of the poet is to give a lengthy description of the the land and the city of his patron. How does one explain it if the theme of the poem is impermanence? With regard to the first question, it might be suggested that the notion of impermanence that the poet talks about is not of the Jain or Buddhist or Upanisadic brand. Since death is inevitable and the body is perishable, Marutaṅ is only urging his patron to establish his fame in this world to the fullest extant and in every possible manner by doing what is expected of him as a hero before his time runs out. From this perspective, *kāñci* or the theme of impermanence was an integral part of the culture of the 'heroic' age, and not 'out of tune with' or 'alien' to it.<sup>134</sup>

As to the second question, an apparent answer would be that, for the poet, descriptions of the fertility of the country and of the affluence of the city were "useful prima-

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<sup>133</sup>MK 759-763 and 776-782.

<sup>134</sup>Death in battle and the conditions of a dead warrior's relatives, particularly his wife are the themes under *kāñcitiṅai*. cf. *Tol.poruḷ.puṛat.nūṛ*. 18-19.



rily as a reflection of a hero's glory."<sup>135</sup> While this may be true, it does not adequately explain why extraordinarily lengthy sections are devoted to such descriptions which almost eclipse other aspects in the poem. The description of space and place in the MK contains such details that cannot be regarded simply as a reflection the glory of the hero. Its significance must be much deeper and wider.

Let us revert to the MK. The description of the country in the poem is traditional and stylized. In accordance with the classical conventions, the poet classifies the Pāṇṭiya country into five distinct physiological regions namely, *marutam*/ cultivated lands (238-270), *mulalai*/forests (271-285), *kuṛiñci*/ mountains (286-301), *pālai*/ arid zones (302-314), and *neytal*/ the coast (315-326), and presents a colourful picture of the life of the people living in each of those regions.<sup>136</sup> At the center of this 'ideally' constituted world was located the fortified capital city Madurai, surrounded by a moat.

In the succeeding three hundred and seventy-three lines of the poem, the poet paints a wide variety of images of daily life in the city. The city had tall buildings and wide streets. Flags of varying hue were seen flying atop several buildings. The king's huge army was constantly

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<sup>135</sup>Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), p. 189.

<sup>136</sup>Even though Tol. assigns no particular landscape to *pālai*, the poets treat it to be a separate landscape.

moving in and out of the city. During the day, women, young and old, were seen selling house to house fresh flowers, assorted snacks, and other eatables. The market site was so crowded and noisy that it resembled the all-important seventh day of the festival season. Rich men were moving about on the city roads in chariots drawn by fast-running horses. There were several religious centers in the city. Every evening sacrifice was offered in the temple of Śiva (malvāḥ neṭiyōṇ) and of the other gods. Women, holding their children safely and tightly, were seen singing and offering flowers and incense in worship at the Buddhist shrines (kaṭavuṭpaḷli).<sup>137</sup> Righteous brāhmans were reciting the Vedas in their cave-like settlements (antaṇarpaḷli). Learned Jaina monks lived in temples (nakaram) which were decorated with painted walls and surrounded by well-tended gardens.

On the inner streets of the city were located the halls of justice (aṛankūṛavaiyam), and learned men honoured by the king with the title kāviti had their residences in them. Merchants who were engaged in internal and external trade, and other craftsmen and artists lived in their separate quarters. Every evening the market was crowded with buyers who came from distant lands. As the night set in, the quarters of the harlots became active. The day of ōṇam, the

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<sup>137</sup>The commentator takes the expression kaṭavuṭpaḷli which occurs in line 466 to mean a Buddhist shrine although there is no clear indication in the passage that what is being referred to is a Buddhist shrine.

natal star of Māyōṅ (Viṣṇu), was celebrated with great rejoicing by the martial community (maṛavar). New and young mothers took ceremonious bath in the tanks with their relatives; women who were pregnant for the first time made offerings to the deity through a priestess; and unmarried girls performed the kuravai dance in honour of Murukaṅ. These were among the routine evening sights in the city. At midnight, the city was patrolled by well trained watchmen. The city woke up every morning at daybreak listening to the sounds of the Vedic recitals, and the ritual singing of the bards.

The widely known and famed Madurai thus resembled the world of gods. The amount of wealth accumulated in the city was immeasurable. Like the Gaṅgā which enters the sea in several branches, wealth poured into the city through several means.<sup>138</sup>

Marutaṅ returns to the theme of praising the king in the final segment of the poem (700-782). The description begins right at the inner most chamber of the palace, the king's bed room. The king woke up every morning to the music of the bards and adorned himself with sandal and precious jewels. Honouring great warriors and giving gifts to different groups of bards were part of daily engagements of the king. The poet brings the poem to a close by greeting the king to live a happy and contented life.

Although not explicitly a religious poem, the ac-

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<sup>138</sup>MK., 696-699.

count from the MK of ritual activity in the city of Madurai is one of the clearest indications of the religious life of the society to be found in the classical corpus. While it includes references to 'renouncing' religions such as the Buddhism and Jainism, its over all tone is one of exuberance and a ritual celebration of life in a particular place here on earth. Note particularly the way in which the snap-shot style of description set against a number of spacial settings maintains this vivid sense of the here and now. By contrast there is little sense of the 'history' which would link the present to a more perfect, eternal realm.

Interestingly the same pattern is obtained in the PP, an *akam* poem which was composed by Uruttirankannaṅ of Kaṭiyalūr. Although it purports to be a poem celebrating the exploits of the Cōla king Tirumāvalavan, its title, if expanded, would mean 'the composition in which Paṭṭiṇam is celebrated through the theme of separation'. Three themes are thus interwoven in the poem: the Cōla king, Paṭṭiṇam (Kāviriṭṭiṇam), the port-town of the early Cōla kings, and the *akam* theme of separation (*pālai*).<sup>139</sup> The treatment of the theme of separation in the poem is short and simple. Disturbed by the impending separation from his lady-love, the hero (*talaivan*) speaks to himself: "Even if I were to get in compensation Paṭṭiṇam, the city of abundant fame, I

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<sup>139</sup>Paṭṭiṇam is generic name for port-towns.

shall not leave her, whose hair is long and dark and whose ornaments are bright" (218-220). In terms of lines, the love element in the poem is so negligible--it occurs only in five out of three hundred and one lines--that, as one scholar put it, "even this short love 'interlude' was but a poetic device introduced as a foil to the martial elements."<sup>140</sup> What is equally interesting is that until line 218, neither the martial elements nor the love elements appear in the poem. In all of these two hundred and odd lines, it is a place, Paṭṭinaṃ, that is graphically described.

The initial part of the poem contains the following themes: glorification of the river Kāviri which "never disappoints even if the planets fail"(1-7); description of the prosperous Cōla country (8-28), and of the town Paṭṭinaṃ which was dotted with gardens, lakes, palatial buildings, and hermitages (29-59). As noted by a modern commentator, this sequence of describing the river, the country, and the town, in that order was later to be accepted as the standard pattern in the genre of Tamil **kāvya**s and **sthalapurāṇa**s.<sup>141</sup> This was in the logic of the early poets--to place the central geographical features first and set the society within that setting. In describing the town, we have, as in the MK, the poet presenting a series of snap-shot pictures

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<sup>140</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 10.

<sup>141</sup>Pattu. (SISS edition), Po. Ve. Somasundaranar comm. on PP, p. 8.

of various scenes: people spending their day-time by engaging in various games and sports on the sea-shore (60-103), and their night hours in amorous play and in the enjoyment of music and drama (104-117); the busy ware-houses near the port where goods were being transported back and forth from the ships (118-141); young and beautiful maids standing on the terrace of their storeyed houses and joining the frenzied women to worship the god Cevvēḷ (142-158); the numerous flags that were flying atop the temples, the festival sites, the debating halls, the ships, and the taverns (159-183); the opulent streets of the town where consumer goods imported from every direction had been piled up (184-193); the settlements of peasants whose charitable disposition had rendered the city virtually crime-free, and those of local traders who were neither greedy nor deceitful, and of foreign traders who were adept in several tongues (194-217). The life of the people in the city was so happy and harmonious that

the prosperous town of undying fame matched  
heaven which is hard to gain.<sup>142</sup>

In the final part of the poem (220-299), the poet gives a stirring account of the relentless heroism of the king Tirumāvalavaṅ. Through his valour and meticulous plann-

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<sup>142</sup>PP 104-105. An identical passage occurs in the PPA which is attributed to the same poet Kaṭiyalūr Uruttirāṅkaṅṅār. In that poem, the site so hailed is Tiruvehkā. See the section PPA below.

ing, the king regained his rightful inheritance from his foes who had imprisoned him while he was young. Later he conquered a number of his adversaries including the Oḷiyar, the Aruvāḷar of the ancient lineage, the Northerners, the Westerners, the ruler of the south (Pāṅṭiya), the forest-tribes, and the family of the Iruṅkōvel. Among his peace time activities special mention is made of his efforts in rebuilding the city of Uṛaiyur, the inland capital of the Cōlas.

It is possible to discern a distinctive pattern in the descriptive portions of these two poems. In the first part, there is the description of general or 'universal' space (the regional landscapes) and, in the second part, there is the description of 'particular', historical places (the town and its landmarks). Beginning with the exterior or the all-encompassing space (country), the movement of the description finally pauses at the interior or inner point (the town and the abode of the king). Looking through the vision of the poets, we see that there is little uniformity either in the landscapes or among the people who inhabit them. Yet, there existed a meaningful bond and harmony between varied landscapes, between peoples, and between people and the landscape. The settlement where the chief had his abode was the 'center', not so much in the Eliadean cosmological sense of the term as it is in the sense of a micro level reflection of the macro world which is made up

of heterogeneous landscapes and communities.<sup>143</sup>

It is noteworthy here that the terms *kōyil* (*kō* + *il*, literally 'the abode of the chieftain') and *nakar* (Skt. *nagara*) fall under a common genre in Tamil, and both denote either a 'palace', or a 'temple', or, by extension, a 'town'. The town, the palace, or, the temple is the point where particular blends with universal; where unfamiliar 'space' becomes familiar 'place'; where past and future merge with the present.

#### The *āṟṟuppaṭai* poems

The four *āṟṟuppaṭai* poems in the *pattu* collection also reveal much the same pattern that we see in the *MK* and *PP* insofar as the treatment of 'general' space and of 'particular' places is concerned. As they all belong to one and the same genre, these four poems share several structural components in common; yet, each poem has distinctive features of its own as well. A condensed content analysis of each is necessary to grasp their different emphases.

#### *Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai*

The poem is in the form of an address by a bard returning from the palace of the *Cōla* king, *Karikāl Valavan*, to a poverty stricken war-bard (*porunan*) whom he meets on the

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<sup>143</sup>Compare the *Pari.* poem on *Madurai* and the reference to *Kāñcipuram* in the *PPA*.



way (1-3). It is sung by Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār.<sup>144</sup> The poem begins with a vivid description of the bard's pālai harp (4-24) and the female singer (pāṭiṇi) in his retinue (25-47). Instructing the bard to worship first the 'god who resides in the forest' (kāṭurai kaṭavul) (48-52), the poet then tells him to set his foot on the right path and reach the right destination.

There are three great rulers (Cēral, Cōla, and Pān-ṭiya) who possess a vast army that beats the victory drum always, and who are far-famed for their wealth, fame, and great ventures. Nothing can be sweeter than the get-together of the three of them in one and the same court. Oh! the leader of the kōṭiyar ('blowers of horn'), your songs have the power of producing a similar effect. You know the pulses of your audience. It is the fruit of your penances that I met you on the way. Or else, your might have gone by mistake on the false path."<sup>145</sup>

Directing his listener to go to the court of Karikāl, the poet narrates how cordially the king received and honoured him when he entered the palace one early morning without even obtaining permission from the guards, and began to sing the king's glories (61-89). After a night's stay at the palace, the poet was honoured by the king in his assembly the next morning (90-102). So hospitable was the king that he entertained him every day with grand feasts (103-119). Having thus spent several days in the palace, the poet

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144The name is taken to be that of a female by some scholars.

145PAP 53-60.

one day decided to return home and expressed his desire to the king. The king was reluctant to let the poet go but finally bade him farewell showering him with gifts (120-129).

The poet then gives a glowing account of the king's great lineage and his military prowess (130-138), his resounding victory at the battle of Venṇi (139-150), and of his acts of compassion and generosity (151-177).<sup>146</sup> To the visiting bards, the king not only granted fertile lands but also gave gifts of fine elephants. The final sixty lines of the poem contain picturesque descriptions of the beauty and the prosperity of the Cōla country (178-212) and of the king's benign rule, and the social harmony that prevailed in the kingdom under his righteous rule (213-231). So close were the ties between the inhabitants of different regions that:

the coastal community (**paratava**) sang **kurin̄ci** tunes; the hill-tribes (**kuṛavas**) adorned themselves with **neytal** flowers; the forest-folks sang **marutam** tunes and the inhabitants of the agrarian regions praised the **mullai** lands. The wild fowls were feeding on rice-corn and the domestic fowls ate millets. Monkeys from the hills came to play in the coastal backwaters and the coastal cranes rested on the hills. Such was the peaceful co-existence of the four diverse regions (**nāṭu**) which were ruled by the king whose writ ran the whole world.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>For a translation of this passage, see Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 200-201.

<sup>147</sup>PAP 219-228.

The poem ends with a description of the river Kāviri and of the fertile lands watered by it (232-248).<sup>148</sup>

### Cirupāṇāruppaṭai

Set in the background of the spring (vēṇil) season (1-11), this poem, too, begins with an address by the to a poverty-stricken, fellow professional who is resting on the way with his retinue of dancing maids (12-40). It is followed by a description of Vañci, Madurai, and Uṛantai, the capitals of the three major ruling families of early Tamilakam namely Kuṭṭuvan (Cēral), Celiyan (Pāṇṭiya) and Cempiyan (Cōlas) respectively (41-83). The poet tells his listener that these well known towns are poor in fame and name when compared to Kiṭāṅkil, the capital of Nalliyakkōṭan, the ruler of the Ōymānāṭu (modern Tintivanam taluk) who is the hero of the poem. In a similar vein, he lists the names and feats of generosity of the proverbial seven Great Donors (vallala), namely Pēkan, Pāri, Kāri, Āy, Atikan, Naḷli, and Ōri, all of whom had predeceased Nalliyakkōṭan, and claims that the munificence of the latter surpassed them all (84-113).<sup>149</sup> The heroic qualities of the king, and the generous

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<sup>148</sup>A special feature of the PAP may be noted here. Shortest of all, this is the only 'guidance' poem that, although containing a general description of the country, does not refer to the capital or any other town of the king.

<sup>149</sup>For more discussion on these seven vallala(s), see *infra*, Ch. V.

disposition displayed by him when the poet visited the palace are then recounted (114-143).

The poet then instructs his listener that he should first visit the three towns which are located in three different regions of Nalliyakkōṭaṅ's kingdom namely Eyiṟpaṭṭinaṃ, a paratava settlement on the coast (neytal), Vēlūr, an eyiṟṟiyar settlement near the forest (mullai), and Āmūr, a peasant village (marutam) (144-195), and then reach the capital Kiṭaṅkil, which was located in the mountain (kuṟiṅci), not far from Āmūr.

The doors at the entrance of his palace are hard to get through for others but they are open at all times to the war-bards (porunar), the learned (pulavar), and the brahmins (antaṅar). The doors remain open as if the great mountain where god resides had unfolded its eyelids.<sup>150</sup>

On the assumption that the poet Nattattaṅār was directing the bard from his native place, Venkatacamī has attempted to identify the exact location of the sites mentioned in the poem and the route from Nallūr in Iṭaikkalināṭu to Kiṭaṅkil, the seat of Nalliyakkōṭaṅ.<sup>151</sup> If Venkatacamī's identification of the sites are correct, it is then clear that the intention of the poet was not to suggest a quick or direct route to the capital, but to make his listeners visit the country (space) and settlements (places)

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<sup>150</sup>CPA 203-206.

<sup>151</sup>Venkatacamī (1961), pp. 57-64.

which 'belonged' to the king.

Lauding the virtuous qualities of the king in conventional terms, the poet in the final section tells his listener that he should praise the king by playing on his harp, and can in turn expect from the king care and affection, feasts and lavish gifts (207-269). The deft workmanship of the poet is evident in the arrangement in which spacial descriptions and panegyric elements alternate throughout the poem.

### **Perumpāṇārṟuppaṭai**

Uruttiraṅkaṇṇan of Kaṭiyalūr, the author of PP, is credited with the authorship of this poem too. Like the other āṟruppaṭai poems, it also takes the form of an address by the poet who was on his way home after receiving gifts from Toṇṭalmān Iḷantiraiyan, the ruler of Kāñcipuram, to a fellow bard and his retinue (1-28). The initial part of the poem contains a minute description of the harp carried by the latter. Although comparing princes and kings with gods is not uncommon in the classical poems, it is noteworthy in this case that Uruttiraṅkaṇṇan, while glorifying Tiraiyan, ascribes a divine origin to his lineage and a divine character to his rule (29-45). The king is explicitly hailed as a descendant of (Viṣṇu),

the god who spanned the earth, whose breast  
bears the sacred mark and whose colour is

sea-blue....152

In his vast, well-protected land, there are no robbers whose habit it is to mount a screaming attack on the travellers and snatch their savings. Thunders do not strike in his country; nor snakes bite; nor the wild animals do any harm. Therefore you can rest on your way wherever you want.153

The lines 46-82 contain descriptions of the itinerant salt traders traversing the main roads carrying their commodity in bullock-carts which were driven by women, and of travellers who were transporting goods through the forest routes on caravans of donkeys. In the next two hundred lines, the poet describes the richness of the country and of the conditions of the people living in the different regions. The depiction follows the familiar pattern: first, life in the settlements of *eyiṛriyar* in the *pālai* region (82-133); then, the conditions and occupations of the people of the *kuṛiñci* region (134-147); then, scenes from the settlements of herdsmen (*kōvalar*) of the *mullai* region (148-195), and of the graze lands that spanned across the *mullai* and *marutam* lands (196-205); then, life in the fertile and prosperous peasant villages of the *marutam* region (206-262), and, finally, a view of the *valaiñar* settlements in the *neytal* region (263-282). The poet cautions the retinue to be

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152PAP 29-31.

153*ibid.*, 39-43. Compare the parallel description of the *Pāṇṭiya* country in the *Cil.* 13: 5-9. In his gloss, *Atiyārkkunallār* explains: "By this, his (*Pāṇṭiya*'s) power and right over the five regions are described."

careful before adorning themselves with flowers on the way, and not to pluck those which are special to gods (283-295). He tells about the delicious meal that will be served to them if they choose to halt at the clean settlements of the brāhmins where even parrots chant the Veda (296-310).

In the line 311, the poet switches from 'space' to 'place', from sketching the countryside in general to painting vivid pictures of particular places in the kingdom. The description begins with Nīrppeyaṟṟu, a port-town which is identified by some scholars with Mahābalipuram (Māmallapuram).<sup>154</sup> Shorn of its hyperboles, the passage reveals that there lived in the town very affluent families of traders, brahmins who performed sacrifices, and a large community of fishermen (paratar). The visiting bards were entertained by the people of the town with tasty pork and liquor (311-345). Crossing the harbour front, where stood a tall light house, the bard's entourage, on their way to the capital, could rest, if they so desired, at the houses of the garden growers and enjoy their hospitality (346-362). Passing through several localities (nāṭu), the group would finally reach Tiruvehkā, the site of a Viṣṇu temple on the outskirts of Kāñcīpuram. The poet then gives a fairly lengthy description of the temple site (363-390). Incidentally, barring the TMP, this is the only poem in the pattu. collection that gives

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<sup>154</sup>Pattu (SISS edition), Po. Ve. Somasundaranar comm.

description of a temple site. Says the poet:

The place--Tiruvehkā--is of undying fame. It abounds with fresh blossoms all the time and matches heaven which is hard to gain. Take rest there and, then, play for a while your sweet, dark-stemmed harp praising the mighty god before you leave.<sup>155</sup>

Then follows the description of Kāñcīpuram, the capital of Tiraiyaṅ, which is compared to the lotus bud that issues out of Viṣṇu's naval (402-404).<sup>156</sup> The lines 411-447 contain the following themes: the victory of Tiraiyaṅ over his enemies which is compared to the success of the Pāṇḍavas over the Kauravas; the imposing entrance to his palace where the kings defeated by Tiraiyaṅ stood awaiting for permission to enter with their tributes ("Just as people who wish to cross the Gaṅgā wait on its banks for their turn to get into the only boat that was available to them, the kings waited at the gate"). In the final segment, the poet informs his listeners how they should praise the glories of Tiraiyaṅ in his royal assembly, and how the king, in turn, would honour them with feasts, and give them gifts on the very day of their arrival (448-500).

### **Malalpaṭukaṭāṁ**

Composed by the poet Peruṅkaucikaṅār of Peruṅkunrūr village in Iraṅiyamuṭṭam locality, this poem is in the form

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<sup>155</sup>PPA 388-392.

<sup>156</sup>cf. Pari. Tirattu, 2.



of an address by the poet to the leader of a troupe of dancers-cum-actors (**kūttar**). The hero of the poem is **Nannan**, the son of **Nannan** and the chieftain of **Cenkanmā** in **Palkun-rakkōṭṭam**. Rated as one of the finest poems in the **pattu** collection, it has 583 lines and is thus second only to the **MK** in length. The poem begins with a description of the various musical instruments carried by the troupe in bags hanging on poles across their shoulders, the rugged mountain route through which they had just come, and the **Pēriyāl** ('big harp') played by the **pānar** in the group (1-37). Addressing the leader who was resting with his retinue of beautiful **viraliyar** and **pānar**, who were adept in singing faultlessly in the assemblies of kings, the poet says:

Like the river that moves towards the sea  
after accumulating huge quantities of water  
in the high mountains . . . I come collect-  
ing enormous wealth from him (**Nannan**). If  
you are inclined to go to **Nannan**, the son of  
**Nannan**, our meeting now will be the first  
signal of your good fortune.157

Two special features in the **MPK** deserve notice: a) in lines 67-94 the poet gives a synopsis of what he is going to say in the rest of the poem, and b) almost two-thirds of the total length of the poem is devoted to describing the mountains, their wealth, the dangers that one encountered in negotiating through their paths, and the life in the settlements of the forest-folks. In a sense, the poem reads almost

like a guide book for mountain trekking. This is not surprising because Nannan was the lord of the 'region dotted with many mountains' (**palkunrakkōttam**). Aptly therefore the poem carries the title which means 'echoes of the mountain' or 'the secretion oozing from the mountain'.

The mid-section of the poem contain the following themes: the various crops and edible fruits that were grown in plenty in the land of Nannan (95-144); the settlements of the forest folks (**kānavar**), who treated the bards as their kins once they learnt that the bards were the buglars of Nannan (145-185). Then follows a lengthy section on the dangers that await while passing through the mountains and the measures that one should take:

Elated by the (**kānavar's**) reception and enchanted by the scenic beauty, you may overstay in the mountain regions. Get back to the plains soon because your life will be at risk if by mistake you pluck the flowers which are favoured by the gods or step into the sites where mountain nymphs reside . . . (186-192).158

Pass through the narrow paths in the forest in day light so that you may avoid the pig traps laid on them . . . (193-196).

If you have to traverse on less used tracks, check first from a high spot that the path is safe. They are infested with snakes and other animals. Keep away from these creatures. While your danseuses (**viraliyar**) whose arms are adorned with bangles worship them with folded hands, let your troupe pass those creatures on their right side . . .

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158 Compare the lines 262-267 in which the poet, likewise, cautions the troupe to avoid plucking certain kinds of flowers and fruits on the way.

(197-202).

Take shelter behind the trees when **kuṛavaṅ** shoot deadly pebbles with catapults to drive elephants away (205, 209-210).

While crossing the wet and slippery spots, pass through them one by one holding strong creepers tightly . . . (216-218).

If you happen to see on the way the fortified abode of the god who is beyond praise, worship him before you proceed. But do not unpack your instruments to play because it never ceases to rain in (**Nannan**'s) fertile hill . . . (229-233).<sup>159</sup>

Fascinating though it is, it is not necessary to dwell upon these details anymore. It is noteworthy, however, that the poet does not confine the description only to the **kuṛiñci** (mountains) landscape in **Nannan**'s kingdom. There are passages in the poem containing the description of the **mullai** (404-420) and **marutam** (449-470) regions too. The king's capital of ancient fame was located in **marutam** land, not far from the **Cēyāṟu** river. Even a cursory reading of the poem makes it clear that, as in the other **āṟruppaṭai** poems, the intention of the poet was not to indicate an easy route to the patron's city. There was in fact no need for the members of the troupe, whom the poet met while they were on the plains, to pass through the mountains in order to reach **Nannan**'s capital, which was located on the plains. Yet, the poet exuberantly tells his listeners to visit and acquaint

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<sup>159</sup>The god and the hill are identified by the commentator as **Kāri Uṅṭi Kaṭavul** ('god who consumed poison') and Naviramalai respectively.

themselves with the 'world' that belonged to Nannan or, better still, to which he belonged.

To sum up, then, two themes occur recurrently in the **pattu**. poems discussed above: the hero, and his land and his place. The themes are not unrelated. For the poets, hero and his place are inseparable; to praise the land means to praise the hero. Although some of these poems are called 'guide' poems, the authors of these poems are not engaged in suggesting an easy or short route to the place of the donor; Rather, they present before the listener a panoramic picture of the space and places of the hero. It is therefore no surprise that a modern scholar who attempted to trace the route described in the poems, on the assumption that they refer to actual routes traversed by the poets from their place of residence to that of the patron, was not only unable to do so but had perforce to conclude that "these may be imaginary routes of the poets."<sup>16</sup> The presence of a hero is felt not merely in his palace or capital, but in every part of the landscape in his chiefdom. The land is identical with the hero. Making oneself familiar with the landscape tantamounts to associating oneself with the hero of the place.

In this respect, there is an unmistakable unity in the perception between these poems and the avowedly religi-

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<sup>16</sup>Iracamanikkanar (1970), p. 46.

ous poems in the classical anthologies. One might suggest that the overall conceptual underpinning of classical Tamil culture as revealed in them was, therefore, one and the same. It was an understanding in which the tangible space and place were of fundamental importance not *per se* but as an inalienable factor that offered the scope and ground for meeting and participating with the 'other' or the hero.

An important aspect of the encounter with the hero is that it is as personal as it is real. The meeting between the hero and the bard often takes place under a formal setting. Yet, the hero is not only easily accessible to the latter, but the meeting itself is conducted in a very personalized manner. There are no intermediaries involved, and the hero, however awesome his power may be, is attentive to the needs of the bard as individual. Awesome yet accessible and powerful yet loving are the characteristic features of a hero. This brings us to the next theme of our study. What was the early Tamil concept of a hero? Did that concept encompass both the divine and the human? How do the poets explain the concept? We will address these questions in the ensuing chapter. But before that a brief comment must be made with regard to the understanding of time in early Tamil culture.

### III.6. Excursus: Is Classical poetry discrete or continuous?

In the light of what had been discussed so far, one might suggest that in the conceptual schema of the early Tamils the dimension of space was clearly more central than the dimension of time. This raises a related question: what was the view of time in early Tamil culture? There are no texts in the classical corpus in which discussions on the concept of time are found. Nevertheless we will attempt to formulate the notion of time which we find to be implicit in the structure and content of the poems which constitute the corpus.

At the outset, it might be suggested that reflections on time were clearly ancillary to those on space. By this we mean that time conceived as a continuous flow was of less significance than time conceived as discrete moments. Perhaps the most striking feature of the classical Tamil poems is that each has been conceived and delivered within a discrete spacial context and moment. The relatively longer poems in the **pattu**. collection also are 'occasional' or solitary poems which do not develop or expand any story in a linear or continuous manner over an extended period of time. While the use of time references is limited in the poetry, this does not mean that the narrative element is totally absent. As noted by Cutler, narrative enters into the composition as a backdrop and as a prerequisite for the interpretation of the poems.

Every classical poem addresses a particular situation and consequently it is implicitly situated within a narrative framework; in the case of **puṣam** poems, this framework is historical; in the case of **akam** poems, it is an abstraction from human experience.<sup>161</sup>

Because the narrative background is so much a 'taken-for-granted' dimension of the poems, one is tempted to ask if the classical poems were ever parts of longer 'epics'? Some modern scholars, finding it difficult to subscribe to the view that the anthology poems are solitary or 'situational' compositions, have suggested, with particular reference to the **PN**, "that most of the pieces of the collection are extracts from one long poem or another."<sup>162</sup> Supporting this view, Kailasapathy has argued that the names of longer, presumably more narrative poems, such as the **Takaṭūr Yāttirai** and the **Pāratam** (Skt. **Bhāratam**), which are now available only in fragments but to which constant reference is made by the medieval commentators, furnish evidence that there must have been poems of more 'epic' character in the early period: "It is more than probable that from these earlier bardic corpora the **Caṅkam** scholars selected a certain number of poems illustrating a variety of themes, and arranged them in the form of anthologies."<sup>163</sup> This argument implies that the form in which we find the poems now was due

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<sup>161</sup>Cutler (1987), p. 102.

<sup>162</sup>V.Narayanan, cited in Kailasapathy (1968), p. 26.

<sup>163</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 28.

not to the specific mode of composition but to the method of selection adopted by the redactor(s). We find this argument hard to accept.<sup>164</sup>

For one thing the possibility of **akam** poems being part of a continuous, 'epic' poetry is effectively ruled out by the elaborate conventions that governed them, particularly the anonymity of its characters. More important is the consideration of how time was conceived and classified in the **akam** poetry. In his discussions on the **akam** conventions, Tol. speaks of time as divided into two cyclical units or sets: **perumpolutu** ('major time units') and **ciṟupolutu** ('minor time units').<sup>165</sup> Tol. refers to the names of only five, but the commentators explain that the 'major time units' consist of the six seasons of the year: **kār** (rainy season), **kūtir** (cool season), **munpani** (early dew), **pinpani** (late dew) **ilavēnil** (warm season) and **mutuvēnil** (hot season). The 'minor time units' are the six parts of the day and night: **vaikaṟai** (dawn), **viṭiyal** (forenoon), **naṇpakal** (midday), **eṟpāṭu** (afternoon), **mālai** (evening), and **yāmam** (midnight). These major and minor time units are associated with particular love situations and regional landscapes in the **akam**

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<sup>164</sup>Sivaraja Pillai, in another context, indicted the redactors of the classical corpus of being worse than "an evil genius [who] had conceived the plan of playing pranks with the chronology of a nation's early literature." Sivaraja Pillai (1984), p.17.

<sup>165</sup>Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ. 6-12; also Ramanujan (1985), p. 238.



poetry.<sup>166</sup> This convention of classifying time into cyclical units and associating these units with particular moods in love is more suitable to poems that are composed as solitary stanzas than to long, 'epic' narratives.

In the case of the **puṛaṃ** poetry, one might expect more scope for narrative, but there too, it is hard to accept the hypothesis that the extant poems were extracts from longer narratives. Structurally as well as aesthetically a **puṛaṃ** poem, like the **akam** poems, is "self-sufficient and self-contained, and can be comprehended and enjoyed by itself."<sup>167</sup> It is true that there are clusters of poems, particularly in the **PN**, which have been composed by various poets commemorating several related events in the life of a few great heroes. And, it is possible to recapitulate some of the chief events in the lives of those heroes by collating the information obtained from the poems as well as from the accompanying colophons. Kailasapathy takes this possibility as a positive proof that these poems were originally parts of a longer poem. That is not likely. This possibility of partial reconstruction of the life-stories probably only means that chief events in the life of a few great heroes were widely known and that different poets used these well known events as the base for their compositions.

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<sup>166</sup>For the chart showing these associations, Zvelebil (1973), p. 100.

<sup>167</sup>Zvelebil (1974), p. 7; Ramanujan (1985), p. 294.

In fact there is at present no firm evidence to suggest that there were 'epic' narratives in Tamil either before or during the period of the composition of the anthology poems. If there were any, it has not, at any rate, come down to us. The partly salvaged **Takaṭūr Yāttirai** consists of heroic poems dealing with the invasion of Takaṭūr, the capital of Atiyamāṇ, by the Cēral king, Cēralātaṇ (?). It is unlikely that it was composed by a single poet in the form of an 'epic' narrative, and it has been suggested that the work was "in reality a collection of the occasional verses sung by the two great Caṅkam poets, Aricilkiḷār and Poṇmuṭiyār, on the various poetic situations of that war, arranged by some later day scholar on the pattern of successive events of a war. The poems of (the) Caṅkam age are, thus, capable of being arranged so as to suggest a narration of successive events of a connected story of love or war."-  
 168 Furthermore, as Sivathamby pointed out, "the highest limit Tolkāppiyar prescribes for **akaval**, the most employed bardic metre, is only (a) thousand lines, which is hardly enough for a full bardic epic."<sup>169</sup>

In support of this argument, we may refer to one more point which underscores the 'occasional' character of

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<sup>168</sup>Meenakshisundaran (1961), p. 62. The work was also known by the name **Takaṭūr Mālai** ('garland of Takaṭūr') implying thereby that it was an anthology.

<sup>169</sup>Sivathamby (1981), p. xxvi.

the classical poems. Both **akam** and **puṟam** poems are composed on the basis of specific themes called **tuṟai**. The various meanings of the term **tuṟai** were given already.<sup>170</sup> The importance of **tuṟai** in classical Tamil poetry can hardly be overstated. As Kailasapathy rightly says:

To Tol. and other early writers **tuṟai** meant a definite theme in traditional poetry. To put it in another way, as far as the subject-matter was concerned, the theme was perhaps one of the smallest but certainly one of the most important 'elements of production'. So important was the theme that to the bards of this period the composition of a poem was equivalent to the composition of a theme.<sup>171</sup>

Solitary or 'occasional' compositions has a long and continuous history in Tamil literary tradition. Worth noting in this context is the Tamil convention of classifying the literary compositions into two major types namely a) **tokainilai** ('anthology', Skt. **koṣa**) or collection of solitary, or 'occasional', stanzas (**tanippāṭal**) composed by more than one poet on specific themes, and b) **toṭarnilai** ('continuous narratives') or poems which are narratives and composed by a single author.<sup>172</sup> The solitary stanzas in **tokainilai** works, as Lienhard suggested, are comparable to the **muktaka** poetry

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<sup>170</sup>supra, p. 132.

<sup>171</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 192.

<sup>172</sup>Zvelebil (1974), pp. 5-6 and 130. The **Cil.** is the earliest extant **toṭarnilai** composition in Tamil.

in Sanskrit.<sup>173</sup> The following remarks of Lienhard on the importance of **muktaka** poetry in the history of classical Sanskrit literature are equally valid with regard to the **tokainilai** poetry in Tamil: "As far as we are able to say at present, the history of classical poetry begins with **kāvya** of the minor form, above all with **muktaka**, the one stanza poem. It seems very probable that for a long time lyrical poetry and the epic recited by the rhapsodists ran a parallel course".<sup>174</sup>

It may not be inappropriate here to draw attention to the fact that the history of solitary compositions has an important bearing on the origin and development of religious poetry in Tamil tradition. As Zvelebil says:

The Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava hymn in Tamil literature--from the formal point of view and in terms of its literary development--emerges directly from the **tanippāṭal** or individual bardic stanza of the **puṣam** and **akam** genres. In fact, one of the heroic settings, the **pāṭaṅ**, which represents praise, and asking for gifts, is a direct predecessor of bhakti hymns. With the early Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, it is usually still the one-stanza poem which is the hymn addressed...-  
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Zvelebil's remark that the **pāṭaṅ** poetry is a direct predecessor of **bhakti** poems is, in our view, a pregnant observation, to which we shall devote closer attention in

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173Lienhard (1971, 1973).

174Lienhard (1984), p. 63.

175Zvelebil (1974), pp. 93-94.

the following chapter. For the present we shall conclude this section by referring to a final point that suggests that the sense of time in early Tamil culture was more oriented toward moments rather than continuous flow.

Range of lines and thematic unity appear to be the main criteria followed by the redactors for organization and classification of the classical poems into anthologies. The poems in the *akam* anthologies have been grouped under the five-fold classification, namely *kuṟiñci*, *mullai*, and so on, and in the *puṟam* anthologies either on the basis of the subject (hero) or theme.<sup>176</sup> A chronological sequence of the poets or of the patrons was of little or no concern to the redactors. More than anything else, it is this 'apparent indifference to chronology' that has rendered the task of the historian of early Tamil chronology a truly exasperating one. Having failed to work out a satisfactory genealogical sequence for any of the ruling families mentioned in the poems, Nilakanta Sastri could only lament that, "Men, scenes, and incidents stand out sometimes in powerful pen pictures, but there is no means of assigning their proper places in a continuous story."<sup>177</sup>

Viewed negatively, one might argue that this 'indifference to chronology' reflects a lack of historical sense

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<sup>176</sup>cf. Kailasapathy (1968), p. 19.

<sup>177</sup>Nilakanta Sastri (1972), p. 7.

on the part of the classical Tamil authors. Viewed more positively, it reveals a perception of time in which discontinuous pictures set against a well marked geographical or spacial background was perceived as more important than continuity. In a somewhat similar vein, it has been suggested that in **bhakti** poetry there is also a marked proclivity for collapsing the past and the present together, a feature which Zvelebil called 'the synchronic projection of the diachronic event' in which the personal story of a hero was telescoped into epithets.

The conception of time as seen in early Tamil culture is not, however, only a matter of collapsing the past and the present but involves the future as well. This, for instance, is reflected in the Tamil grammatical convention relating to a unique compound construction called **vinaittokai**.<sup>178</sup> **Vinaittokai** may be defined as a nominal compounding in which verbal stems stand directly attached to nouns without any tense indicating morphemes in between them. The omission of tense morphemes, while implying the timeless or eternal relevance of the meaning of the compound construction, also means that the compound is dissolvable into any one of the three tenses by adding the appropriate tense marker. In other words, **vinaittokai** involves the collapsing of three tenses--past, present and future--into one, single

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<sup>178</sup>Tol.col.eccaviyal.nūṟ. 16 and 19.

compound. As illustration we may cite an example. In the **PAP** (line 52), while directing the bard, the poet instructs him to worship first the 'god who resides in the forest' before setting out on his journey. The passage reads:

**kāṭuṛai kaṭavuṭ kaṭaṇ kalippiya piṇṛai**

The expression **kāṭuṛai kaṭavuṭ** is a **vinaittokai** compound. One can dissolve it in three tenses to yield the following meanings: god who resided, who resides, and who will be residing in the forest. By collapsing the tense markers, what is being implied is that the meaning has timeless relevance.

**CHAPTER IV HERO**



## CHAPTER IV

### HERO

#### IV.1. Preliminary

Oh! land! in some places you are called settlements (nāṭu); in some places, forests; in some places, meadows, and in other places, highland. Whatever you are, you are pleasant only where there are good men (āṭavar). I hail you.<sup>1</sup>

Our discussion of the treatment of 'universal' space and 'particular' places in the classical poems revealed that landscape and locale gained their importance as focal points for poetic description not because of their intrinsic importance or beauty, but because they were seen in association with or, may be even were identified with, a 'hero' of hallowed qualities. In Tamil understanding, the hero and his place were inseparable. Land and locality were

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<sup>1</sup>PN 187. The commentator interprets the word āṭavar ('men') to mean the 'inhabitants'.

familiar and pleasant when a hero's presence was felt in them. They generated anxiety and anguish when his presence was not felt.

When the classical poets composed eulogies, they seldom bothered to tell us, even when praising a 'historical' figure, **when** the hero lived. By contrast rarely did they fail to tell us, even in the shorter poems, **where** he belonged. In the poems, the 'hero' could be either a divine being (gods), or a historical figure (kings, chieftains, etc.) or, as in the **akam** poetry, anonymous but universal persons or types. In all kinds of situations, the pattern of linking the place with the hero remained the same. No doubt, there were a few striking exceptions to this general pattern, but they do not minimize the significance of the pattern.<sup>2</sup> The pattern is sufficiently common to indicate the special nature of the concept and function of hero in Tamil culture. In this chapter, we will seek to examine some aspects of that conception and its ramification in early Tamil religious thought.

It has been the trend of modern scholarship to classify the anthology poems into 'secular' or 'religious' poems on the basis of the identity of the figure that was being glorified in a poem. For instance, when the 'person'

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<sup>2</sup>As already stated, some of the poems in the **Pari.** collection which are in praise of Tirumāl do not refer to any site or abode of the god.

glorified is a divine figure, the poem is taken to be a religious poem, and when the 'person' is either a historical figure, or an ideal, universal type, it is taken to be a 'secular' poem. Going a step further, it is sometimes conjectured that the anthology poems in which humans are eulogised should be dated earlier than those in which the divine figures are praised on the assumption that the former type of poem was the paradigm for the latter.

Attention was already drawn to the view of some scholars who hold that the notion of godship in the medieval devotional religion was modeled on that of kingship in the classical Tamil poetry.<sup>3</sup> The following quote may be taken as representative of the position of these scholars on this issue:

In Tamil Hinduism gods are conceived of as sovereigns, and the services worshipers perform for gods in many ways parallel the services traditionally rendered to kings. In other words, the parallelism in the cultural construction of kingship and godship in Tamil south India has a counterpart in the structural parallels between Tamil heroic poetry and Tamil bhakti poetry.<sup>4</sup>

*Prima facie*, the hypothesis is, no doubt, appealing because it suggests an evolutionary process in Tamil religious thought and seeks to explain the conception of godship in the bhakti religion by understanding it to have

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<sup>3</sup>*supra.*, Ch. II, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup>Cutler (1987), p. 66.

evolved from that of kingship in the classical period. In response to this hypothesis, we argued earlier that it was not strictly correct to assume that the parallelism was absent in the classical phase itself, or that the notion of kingship in the classical phase was totally devoid of divine dimensions and came to be used as a 'model' for godship only at a later date. We also pointed out that there are, in the classical phase itself, indications of a conceptual link between godship and kingship.

What our argument entails is that very early in their history the Tamils had developed a mode of conception within which they could envision and allow for the blending or inter-penetration of what other cultures refer to as divinity and humanity. Hardy comes very close to identifying one such example in early Tamil culture, while commenting on the significance of the nouns by which the god Murukan̄ was known vis-a-vis the ideal of cān̄rōṇ in the classical phase. He observes:

(The) semantic field of Murukan̄'s names corresponds very closely to the ideal of the cān̄rōṇ: as the 'perfect man' to enjoy the fullness of life, proving his heroism in battle and his attractiveness in love affairs . . . it is no exaggeration to speak of him as the Tamil 'god' **par excellence**, in whom the Tamils of the classical **caṅkam** age envisaged the divine in a personalized form, and who at the same time represented their human ideal on a divine plane. Thus it would not seem to be correct to label **caṅkam**

society 'secular'.<sup>5</sup>

The word cāṅṟōṅ, which is formed from the root cāl meaning 'capability, endurance, and sufficiency', is, as Zvelebil says, "one of the key-words in Tamil poetry, if not the key-word of the best in Tamil culture".<sup>6</sup> It means "the warrior, the great, the learned, the noble, the poets of the caṅkam period."<sup>7</sup> Scholars have discussed the semantic range and the historical significance of the term in detail.<sup>8</sup> Without going into those details, it may be pointed out that the ideal of cāṅṟōṅ has been interpreted as representing the best in the 'original secularism' and the 'humanistic tradition' of the early Tamil culture.<sup>9</sup> Against this backdrop, Hardy's suggestion that the god Murukaṅ was the divine representation of cāṅṟōṅ 'the perfect man' in classical Tamil culture seems significant and original. While agreeing with Hardy's insight in substance, we would, nevertheless, argue that from the perspective of the development of religious thought, there is another, and

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<sup>5</sup>Hardy (1983), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup>Zvelebil (1973), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>TL, Vol. III, p. 1397.

<sup>8</sup>It has been suggested that the term cāṅṟōṅ originally denoted warriors, but later came to be applied to morally superior persons. For lexical references and a discussion of the significance of the term in early Tamil culture, see Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 229-230; Zvelebil (1973), pp. 17-18.

<sup>9</sup>Zvelebil (1973), pp. 18-21.

conceptually more significant, term in early Tamil culture which incorporates within itself the ideal of cāṅṟōṇ as well. That term is talaivaṇ. Talaivaṇ means 'chief, headman, lord' etc., and in literary compositions, it denotes the 'hero' in whose honour the work is composed.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV.2. The Concept of Talaivaṇ

The relevance of the concept of talaivaṇ for understanding the religious orientation of the Tamils can hardly be overstated. The primary clue to its importance in Tamil thought and culture comes from a rather unusual kind of source, the treatises on poetics in the Tamil language. In the language of Tamil poetics, irrespective of the fact of whether it referred to a divine or human being, the 'person' who was regarded worthy of praise in poetic compositions was denoted specifically and formally by the term talaivaṇ.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that in no other notion of early Tamil culture can one perceive the

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<sup>10</sup>DED., 3103. The terms entai, kuricil which occur in some of the poems also carry the same meaning. It may be noted here that poeticsians make a distinction between 'hero of the composition' (pāṭṭuṭai-t-talaivaṇ) and 'hero of the narrative' (kiḷavi-t-talaivaṇ). The former is whom the poet honours in the poem, and the latter is the anonymous figure in the narrative. This distinction is particularly relevant in love poetry. see Cutler (1987), p. 83. In classical poetry, the former is not given a speaking role, and the latter is not particularized. It may noted here that Iḷam. cites Kalit. 67 as an example in which the hero of the composition and the hero of the narrative are one and the same, namely the Pantiya king. Tol. poruḷ.puraṭ.nūṟ. 22, Iḷam. comm.

interpenetration of divinity and humanity more clearly than in the concept of talaivan. In a sense, the notion of talaivan was a point of convergence that enabled the Tamils to identify and define the intersecting dimensions of the divine and the human. One might go a step further, and argue that the notion of talaivan, 'a super being' is a creatively ambiguous one. For, it is one of those seminal notions in which the Tamils sought and achieved a synthesis of the particular (puṟam hero), the universal (akam hero), and that which is neither or both (the divine). To state the matter briefly, our hypothesis is that the classical Tamil notion of talaivan was not simply a stage in the evolution of the notion of kingship or godship, but that it was (and is) a notion that remained the bed-rock for expressing the experiential relationship with the 'other' in Tamil culture. What we propose to do in the remainder of this chapter is to elucidate this hypothesis with regard to the evidences provided by the early Tamil poets and poeticsians.

It was suggested that the notion of talaivan was a point of convergence of the concrete and the abstract. It was a mode in and through which the particular was universalized and the universal was particularized; the concrete was recast into the abstract and the abstract into the concrete. The images of the authentic subjects in poetic compositions, namely the typified, anonymous akam hero, the particularized puṟam king, and god, appeared side by side or

they were seen overlapping with one another in one and the same poem. There are several poems particularly in the **Kalit.** and **Pari.** anthology which illustrate this aspect. These poems are unified by a structural pattern. For instance, Hardy comments on the pattern as he found it in some of the **mullai** songs in the **Kalit.**: "These stanzas after (usually) referring to the 'praise of the couple' and to the **kuravai**, mention the 'praise of **Māyōn**' and the welfare of the **Pāṇṭiya** king."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most instructive example of this pattern is seen in the **Kalit.** poem 43. The poem offers an excellent illustration of how unified and multi-layered was the classical vision of a hero. It is a poem on the theme of **kuṟiñci** or pre-marital love. The background to the poem is narrated in the colophon. The heroine was suffering from love sickness on account of a long separation from her lover. Wanting to soothe her feelings, her girl friend invited her to sing a **vallaippāṭṭu**, a duet song, praising the hero. In order to avoid suspicion and maintain the secrecy of the love affair, they pretended to sing the praise of god **Murukan**, but actually praised the hero. The heroine felt relieved after the song. The poem is the utterance of the girl friend, who was speaking aloud in the 'hidden' presence of the hero.

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<sup>11</sup>Hardy (1983), p. 188. The poems under reference are **Kalit.** 103-106.



Before we turn to the poem, a word must be said about the song type **vallaippāṭṭu**. It is also known by the name **ulakkaippāṭṭu** ('pestle song'), and it is sung by women in praise of a divine or human hero when husking or hulling grain. The **vallaippāṭṭu**, as pointed out by Kailasapathy, "shows the prevalence of 'praise poems' on a popular level."<sup>12</sup> A similar type of popular art in which heroes (both men and gods) were praised was the **kuravai** which included dancing as well as singing. There were different types of **kuravai**, in some of which men also took part.<sup>13</sup> Now, the poem:

The companion:

Oh, friend! Let us pour the white, **aiyaṇam** rice in the stone grinder, and pound it with pestles made out of the tusk of the elephant that killed a tiger in anger, and out of sandal wood trees laden with bees. While pounding, let us pretend that we praise **Murukaṇ** (**aiyaṇ**), but praise the hero (**nāṭaṇ**) of the tall, hill country from where emerges beautiful clouds.

He is indestructible even when the god of death opposes him in war. He is never reticent in revealing himself to those who love him. On his hill, bees (**tumpi**), resembling the jewels around the fingers of beautiful women, sit on the **kāntai** buds, awaiting their blossoming. And, the young rams, scared needlessly on seeing a black monkey seated on the huge rock, race up and down on the shadowy slopes. Let us sing and

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<sup>12</sup>But his suggestion that it was 'apparently a secular song' in the early period, and was made into a religious poem in the later period by the Śaiva saint Māṇikkavācakar is hard to accept. Kailasapathy (1968), p. 234.

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion on **kuravai** song-dance, see Sivathamby (1981), pp. 334-341; Hardy (1983), pp. 617-633.

praise him!

The heroine:

..... Even if others, out of jealousy, are inconsiderate to him, he forgives all their blemishes.

The companion:

Oh, the fragrant-haired one! On his hill, the male elephants with pairs of beautiful tusks walk with their mates, and consume the *vaḷaku* creepers to their full satisfaction. (Now) say something about his shortcomings!

The heroine (refusing to oblige):

On his hill, bunches of curved plantain fruits hang on the trees resembling the paw of tigers. Our hero is one who gives himself away when he is not in a position to remove the sufferings of those who are in pain.<sup>14</sup>

The companion:

Thus,

when we both sang his glory, her weak, bamboo-like shoulders swelled up as they always do when she is with her lord, on whose hill abound bamboo-bushes.

Since it is a love poem, the commentator is eloquent in demonstrating the inlaid meaning (*uḷḷurāi*) of each of the imageries in the poem. It is not necessary to go into those details here. It is noteworthy, however, that it is the colophon that suggests the narrative frame and turns it into

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<sup>14</sup>Nacci.'s gloss on these lines is noteworthy: "When applying it to Murukan, it may be explained that when Murukan is not in a position to grant salvation to those who are still ineligible and go through the cycle of births, he renounces his body and settles down in their minds." Also compare his gloss on the **TMP** 111-113.

a love poem. Concurrently, it is a religious poem too, and, as the girl friend says, it is meant to be a poem in praise of Murukan to the unsuspecting listeners. The poem could well have been rendered a **puṣam** one if the hero had been identified in the colophon, if not in the poem itself.<sup>15</sup> What is more significant from our point of view is that the poem not only affords a good example of the multivalent character of the poem itself as it puts 'frame within frame', but also shows how the concept of **talaivan** was a multi-layered one that encompassed both the human and the divine.

The same pattern of 'transferring' the god into the human world and casting him in the role of human hero is seen in a slightly different way in some of the **Pari.** poems. For instance, in the **Pari.** 9 which is in praise of Cevvēl, the ostensible aim of the poet Kunṟampūtaṅār is to underscore and convey, particularly to the Vedic specialists, who are directly addressed in the poem, the superiority of pre-marital, secret love between a consenting man and woman over conjugal love. These two modes of union-- **kaḷavu** and **kaṟpu**--were both integral parts of the 'ideal' life, according to Tamil conventions on **akam** or love poetry.

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<sup>15</sup>Such examples are not unknown in the classical anthologies. There are three poems (83, 84, 85) in the **PN** by Nakkaṅṅaiyār. Content-wise they are love poems. Yet, they are regarded as **puṣam** poems because the name of the hero is identified in the colophon.

Ideally there must be first the *kaḷavu* union between the lovers and then the *kaṟṟu* or conjugal union.<sup>16</sup> But the message that the poet seeks to convey is that while the former is prompted solely by spontaneous love between consenting adults, the latter can materialize merely on the basis of physical maturity, when there is no spontaneous love between the couple. Therefore, the *kaḷavu* union, according to the poet, is superior to *kaṟṟu*. Moreover the heroine in *kaḷavu*, unlike her counterpart in conjugal life, does not ever sulk with her lover. She never sulks because the situation of her being separated from him on account of the 'other' woman, which is a major cause of friction in conjugal life, does not arise in clandestine love.<sup>17</sup>

To clinch his point the poet cites the case of *Murukaṇ* and his two consorts, *Vaḷḷi* and *Devasenā*, whose union with the god exemplify the modes of *kaḷavu* and *kaṟṟu* respectively. One day *Devasenā*, smitten by loneliness, sulked because she thought *Murukaṇ* was indifferent to her and showed a preference for *Vaḷḷi*, the 'other' woman in his life. *Murukaṇ* somehow managed to appease *Devasenā*, but then *Vaḷḷi* entered the scene, pulled him to her side, and

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<sup>16</sup>The *kaḷavu* union involves first the union of hearts or *uḷḷappuṇarcci* followed by the union of bodies or *uṭarpuṇarcci*.

<sup>17</sup>A note of clarification: In Tamil convention, the secret, pre-marital, clandestine union between a consenting man and a woman is called *kaḷavu*. It should not be confused with the secret, extra-marital 'affairs'.

embraced him tightly. Her action provoked a quarrel between the two spouses in which not only their female-companions but even their pets were soon involved. The poet does not tell us what was the outcome of this battle of the brides, but the message implicit in the poem is that the god's union with Valli is superior than that with Devasenā because his union with Valli was prompted by spontaneous feelings. And, according to the poet, only those who were conversant with the Tamil conventions on kalavu would be aware of its supremacy. Murukan understood its supremacy because he was well versed in Tamil conventions.<sup>18</sup>

The multilayered concept of hero as seen in these and other verses in the Kalit. and Pari. was neither an aberration, nor a later day accretion, but a typical illustration of the early Tamil notion of talaivan or hero. In comprehending the conceptual aspects of talaivan in early Tamil culture, the poetic category called the pātāntīnai, which is counted as one of the seven divisions under the puram poetry, is of extreme importance. It is even possible to contend that the quintessential aspects of the concept of talaivan are to be found in the discussion on the pātāntīnai in Tamil grammatical treatises. Accordingly we must attempt now to show the importance of the pātān poetry in the history of Tamil literature in general and how Tol., in the

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<sup>18</sup>Pari. 9: 16-26 Parimēlalakar comm.

section on the **pāṭāntiṇai** in his monumental work, set out the conceptual and conventional prescription for praising a hero. We will, then, compare that with the poetic practice.

#### IV.3. Significance of the Pāṭāntiṇai

It was mentioned that the subject-matter of poetry in early Tamil was broadly divided into **akam** and **puṇam**, each of which was further classified into seven **tiṇai(s)** or poetic situations. Of those fourteen, three namely, **kaikkilāi**, **peruntiṇai**, and **pāṭāṇ**, are somewhat special. While the other eleven situations bear the names of flowers or plants, these three do not. Unlike the other situations, these three are also not associated with particular landscapes. Thematically, however, the **pāṭāṇ** situation is the most unusual of all. According to the convention, each **tiṇai** or poetic situation was associated with a well-defined theme: in the **akam** poetry with an appropriate love mood and in the **puṇam** poetry with a specific heroic deed, associated with battle. The **pāṭāṇ** situation is an exception to this general rule. Although it is counted as one of the seven **puṇam** situations, yet, unlike the others, thematically it is not associated with any specific act of physical prowess. Nevertheless, the **pāṭāṇ** poetry was very popular among the classical poets. As a matter of fact, the largest number of poems in the two extant **puṇam** anthologies are classified as **pāṭāṇ** poems. Not only among the classical poets, but among

the medieval devotional poets as well, the **pāṭāṇ** type was equally popular.

This raises several questions. Why was the **pāṭāṇ** type of poetry so popular and durable? Is the **pāṭāṇ** situation just one of the seven divisions of **puṣam** poetry in which, "all seven are of equal standing" or, is it unique in some way?<sup>19</sup> How did the poetics explain a **pāṭāṇ** poem? What, indeed, is the thematic content of a **pāṭāṇ** poem? In the quote above, Zvelebil refers to two important aspects of a **pāṭāṇ** poem, namely praising the hero and asking for gifts. There is no doubt that the **pāṭāṇ** poem is a panegyric verse, and the **pāṭāṇṭiṇai** can well be explained as the 'Poetic situation of praise'.<sup>20</sup> But is not 'praise' the intent of other **puṣam** poems too? What, then, is the purpose of providing a special poetic category on 'praise'? Or, to put it differently, in what way is 'praise' under the **pāṭāṇ** situation different from 'praise' under other poetic situations?

An examination of the meaning of the term **pāṭāṇ** may be a useful starting point here. Nacci. takes the term **pāṭāṇ** as a compound (**paṭu** + **āṇ**), meaning 'praising a hero'. However, he adds an important gloss: "The expression **pāṭāṇ** refers neither to the act of praising or to the hero who is

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<sup>19</sup>Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), p. 179.

<sup>20</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 21.

praised, but to the conduct of the hero."21 Nacci.'s definition is generally accepted by scholars, but another school of scholars hold that the compound **pāṭāṇ** should be dissolved into **pāṭu**, a noun meaning 'greatness, nobility' etc., and **āṇ**, a derivative from the verb **āḷ** meaning 'to possess, or to govern'. As a compound, the expression would then mean 'the one possessing noble qualities'.22

Whichever definition one chooses to follow, the significant point is that they both imply that there is a subtle difference between the **pāṭāṇ** and the other types of **puṛaṃ** poetry. Whereas in the other types of **puṛaṃ** poetry the thematic focus is on a specific act of the hero, in the **pāṭāṇ**, it is on the total personality of the hero who commands the traits that effect such actions. As the focus is on the total personality, it is not only a hero's physical prowess, but every quality that makes him special and marks him off from others can form the theme of a **pāṭāṇ** poem. In short, it is a mode of praise that is based on a

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21Tol. **poruḷ. puṛat. nūṛ.** 25. Nacci. comm. He takes **pāṭu** ('to sing') as a verbal participle and **āṇ** as a noun meaning a 'male'.

22Jayaraman (1975), pp. 33-34.



wide variety of themes.<sup>23</sup>

So sweeping and comprehensive was the range of the **pāṭāṇ** type of composition that it incorporated within its fold various themes, including, and even reaching beyond, **akam** and **puṛam**. More importantly the 'poetic hero' in the **pāṭāṇ** poems may be either a human or a divine being. This is significant because conceptually it offered a special vantage point to the poet, and a range of subject matter that was endless. For centuries, the inspired poets explored that freedom and gave expression to inter-personal encounters and experiences both between two humans and between humans and the divine.

Is there a sound basis for this interpretation in the **Tol.**? The answer is yes. In the discussion on the **pāṭāṇ** situation **Tol.** provides, as he does in the case of the other situations, a list of themes (**tuṛai**) that are appropriate for a **pāṭāṇ** poem. On close examination, the statements of **Tol.**, suggest that the **pāṭāṇ** was regarded by him as not just another of the seven divisions of heroic poetry, but as an all inclusive and open-ended category.

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<sup>23</sup>The same idea is echoed in the definition of **pāṭāṇ** in the **PPVM** by **Aiyaṇāritāṇār**. According to him a **pāṭāṇ** verse is one in which,

the qualities of brilliance, strength, liberality that does not care for oneself, and compassion (of the hero) are contemplated and articulated. **PPVM** 9. 1.

#### IV.4. Tolkāppiyar on Pāṭāntīnai

Before we embark on an analysis of the **pāṭāṇ** section in the Tol., it is necessary to enter a caveat. The statements of Tol. are quite often too cryptic to decode to the satisfaction of all. More often than not his formulations throw up more riddles than solutions. The late medieval commentators, whose exegesis is otherwise indispensable for understanding the text, do not always make the task any easier for the reader. There are a few modern commentaries on the **poruḷ** division, but they are also not of much help in solving the problems.<sup>24</sup> The commentators are at times so totally at variance with each other in their interpretations that at present there is sometimes no way of arriving at a resolution of the disagreements.<sup>25</sup> The **pāṭāṇ** section in the Tol. has some of the most enigmatic passages and some of those to be discussed below are among them. In interpreting them, our effort will not be to seek for 'final' solution to the problem, but to extract enough useful information to assist in understanding the concept of **talaivan**, 'poetic hero'.

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<sup>24</sup>I have in mind chiefly the commentaries of S. S. Bharatiyar, Pulavar Kulantai, and Mu. Arunacalam.

<sup>25</sup>For an useful study of the differences in the Tol. commentaries with reference to the first two chapters in the **poruḷ** division, see Aravanan (1978).

Tol. begins his discussion on the **pāṭāntīnai** (20) with the following statement:<sup>26</sup>

**Pāṭānpakuti kaikkīlai-p-puṣaṇē  
nāṭuṅkālai nāliraṇṭu uṭaitte.**

The **pāṭān** division is the exterior of **kaikkīlai** and, on contemplation, it is seen to be of eight kinds.

The grammarian makes two observations in the **nūṟ.**, and there are difficulties in comprehending the full significance of both of them. With regard to the first one, the commentators have attempted to show, in a somewhat strained and circuitous way, that there are a number of correspondences between the **pāṭān** and the **kaikkīlai**, and, therefore, the former is regarded as the exterior of the latter. According to Iḷam., for instance, there are the following correspondences between the two: a) both are not associated with any particular landscape; b) in both the speaker pleads for a favour;<sup>27</sup> and, c) in both the proper name of the hero may be mentioned. With regard to the second observation, there is greater difficulty than with the first one because Tol. does not spell out what are those eight kinds of **pāṭān**. The commentators have suggested lists of the

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<sup>26</sup>The **nūṟ.** numbers that are given in this section refer to the serial number according to the Murray Rajam edition of the Tol. These numbers do not always correspond with those given by the commentators. This discrepancy is due to the fact that what one commentator takes as one, single **nūṟ.** is split into two by another commentator. See f.n. 38 below.

<sup>27</sup>In **kaikkīlai**, the favour asked is love, and in **pāṭān**, material rewards.

eight kinds of **pātāṇ**, but there is no agreement between the lists of any two commentators. The lists provided by the two best known medieval commentators are as follows:

Iḷam.	Nacci.
1) <b>kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu</b> - (Praising the god)	<b>pātāṇ poruṭpakuti</b> ( <b>pātāṇ</b> themes)
2) <b>vāḷttiyal</b> (praise)	<b>veṭci</b> (cattle raid)
3) <b>maṅkalam</b> (auspicious)	<b>potuviyal</b> (common division)
4) <b>ceviyaṟivuruṭtal</b> (counselling)	<b>vañci</b> (defensive war)
5) <b>āṟruppaṭai</b> (guidance)	<b>uliñai</b> (siege)
6) <b>pariciṟuṟai</b> (gift themes)	<b>tumpai</b> (battle scenes)
7) <b>kaikkilai</b> (one sided)	<b>vākai</b> (victory)
8) <b>vacai</b> (reproach)	<b>kāñci</b> (impermanence)

Iḷam.'s list has eight randomly chosen themes from the extant **pātāṇ** poems, and he seems to imply that **pātāṇ** is a wide but more or less a closed **tiṇai**. The problem in Iḷam.'s list is that it does not adequately explain or cover the range of themes that we find in the **pātāṇ** poetry. On the contrary, Nacci.'s list includes one division that is

exclusive to the **pātāṇ**, the six **puram** situations other than the **pātāṇ**, and a common division covering all other, unspecified themes. In Nacci's view, the **pātāṇ** is clearly both an inclusive as well as an exclusive **tiṇai**.

Subjecting the above two lists, as well as two more lists suggested by the modern commentators, to a careful study, Aravanan has shown that there are difficulties in accepting any of them in their entirety. For his part, Aravanan has suggested that the following constitute the eight divisions of **pātāṇ**: **veṭcippātāṇ**, **vaṅcippātāṇ**, **uḷṅṅaippātāṇ**, **tumpaippātāṇ**, **vākaippātāṇ**, **kāṅcippātāṇ**, **kaikkīḷaippātāṇ** and **peruntīṇaippātāṇ**.<sup>28</sup> It is obvious that Nacci's list is repeated by Aravanan with two exceptions: **pātāṇ poruṭpakuti** and **potuviyal** are replaced by **kaikkīḷaippātāṇ** and **peruntīṇaippātāṇ**. The list of Aravanan implies that the eight **tiṇai(s)**--six from the **puram** and two from the **akam**--function as **turai(s)** or themes for a **pātāṇ** poem. It must be noted that, long before Aravanan, S. S. Bharatiyar had made the same suggestion. In his list, however, Bharatiyar had excluded **peruntīṇai** and counted **kaikkīḷai** and **aintīṇai** ('five-situations' on mutual love) as the two **akam** divisions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Aravanan (1978), pp. 330-331. Compare **PPVM** 9.1.26.

<sup>29</sup>**Tol.poruḷ.puṇat.nūṇ**. <sup>a</sup>25, Bharatiyar comm. The reasons why Bharatiyar treated **aintīṇai** as a single category and prefer it over **peruntīṇai** will become clear from the contents of the next **nūṇ**.

The understanding that is common in the two modern interpretations of Nacci. by Bharatiyar and Aravanan is that **pātāṇ** is seen not as a separate poetic situation, but as an affiliative one. The **pātāṇ** poetry emerges from other situations and functions by having every other situation as its base. Consequently one writer has suggested that it is appropriate to call the **pātāṇ** a **cārputtinaī** ('associative situation').<sup>30</sup>

A **pātāṇ** poem, however, not only functions in association with the eight situations mentioned above but also incorporates within itself many more dimensions adding a greater significance to the praise involved. How does the different dimensions of the **pātāṇ** function? In the next **nūr**. (21), Tol. says:

**Amarar kaṇ nuṭiyum aṟuvakaiyāṇum  
puraitīr kāman pulliya vakaiyiṇum  
onṟan pakuti onṟum enpa.**

In the six kinds (of verses) in which gods are praised, and in those (verses) which are on the theme of faultless love, the section of one (i.e. **pātāṇ**) may coalesce with another. Thus it is said.

Iḷam.'s comment on the **nūr**. is at once clear and lucid: "A hero is praised in two ways. First, in the six kinds of verses in which gods are exalted, and secondly, as part of the verses which deal with the theme of mutual love. In either case, the verse is called a **pātāṇ** verse".

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<sup>30</sup>See Vellaivarānar's Note of Appreciation to Auvai Cu. Duraiçami Pillai's commentary on the PrP (SISS edition), p. 18.

According to Iḷam. the six ways of exalting a god are: **koṭinilai**, **kantali**, **valli**, **pulavarāṟruppaṭai** ('guiding the poet'), **pukaltai** ('praising'), and **paravai** ('extolling'). The meaning of the first three will be discussed below.<sup>31</sup> In the light of Iḷam.'s commentary, the **nūṟ.** assumes far-reaching significance: a) it further confirms the associative character of the **pāṭāṇ** type of poems; b) it clearly underscores the fact that every one of the poetic divisions in **akam** and **puṟam**, including the five divisions on mutual love, can be an appropriate base for exalting a hero and thus creating a **pāṭāṇ** or 'praise' poem;<sup>32</sup> and, c) it confirms our hypothesis that according to the convention, it is legitimate to sing the praise of a human hero in poetry in the same manner in which a god is praised. The last point is particularly interesting because it calls into question the understanding that the classical poems in which human heroes are praised were the forerunners for poems in which gods are praised. Tol. seems to suggest just the opposite in that he first defines **pāṭāṇ** in terms of praise of god.

It is not only with regard to content, but in form too, that a **pāṭāṇ** poem is unrestricted. This means that a

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<sup>31</sup>Nacci. differs from Iḷam. in his interpretation of the **nūṟ.** He construes its meaning as follows: praising the six subjects namely sages, brāhmans, cattle, rain, crowned kings, and world, all of which are equivalent to the divine, and appealing to them for material rewards constitute the **pāṭāṇ** poems.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Tol.poruḷ.akat.nūṟ. 58.

**pāṭāṇ** poem may be composed in **akaval** or **ācīriyappā** metre which is meant for recitation as well as in other metres which are set to music and sung. This is certainly what Tol. seems to imply when he states in the next **nūṟ.**(22) that the **centuṟai vaṇṇam** is not forbidden in a **pāṭāṇ** poem. **Centuṟai vaṇṇam** is generally explained by the commentators as a kind of rhythm employed in the musical songs. In this context, it is noteworthy that **Pērā.** in his commentary on **ceyyuḷ.** 242 states that verses composed in **kali** or **pari** metre are **centuṟai** poems.

What is clear and more significant in all this is that verses composed in praise of a god are also treated as proper **pāṭāṇ** poems. This is well substantiated by the fact that in the **nūṟ.** 22-26, Tol. discusses a number of conventions relating to praising a divine 'hero' in a **pāṭāṇ** poem. The relevant statements may be quoted in full before we analyze their significance.

Learned men say that god also can be a **persona** in compositions which deal with love, and in which human beings are involved.

The treatment of love theme is admissible even when describing childhood (of a hero).

It is said that description of the place (**ūr**) and birth (of a poetic hero) are appropriate if that description is in consonance with the usage.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Nacci. takes this **nūṟ.** as two independent ones. See Nacci. comm. **nūṟ.** 85-86. In explaining the meaning of the conventional usage, he makes many observations of which one is particularly interesting. While composing love poems, poets should take care



In accordance with the custom, proper names are attributed (in such poems).

When viewed in isolation, the full import of the above statements may not emerge clearly. On the other hand, if we examine them collectively, we may find that Tol. is addressing in them certain key issues with regard to the range and depth of a *pātāṇ* poem. First of all, although it is not explicitly stated by the author, the context suggests that the conventions that Tol. is discussing in the above *nūr*.(s) pertain more to a divine hero than a human hero.<sup>34</sup> The full import of the statements may be summed up as follows: Divine beings may appear along with human beings as *persona* in a *pātāṇ* poem even if, in that poem, the theme of love is predominant. In a *pātāṇ* poem, not only is the childhood of a divine hero an appropriate poetic theme but ascribing a love life to that child is also permissible. By this last observation, Tol. is clarifying an important point. The *akam* convention required that the characters involved in a love-relationship must be physically as well as emotionally matured and well matched.<sup>35</sup> In the case of a *patan* poem, this need not always be the case. Furthermore

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to treat as heroes only those gods whose nature (*iyalpu*) is not against associating with female divinities. The (gods of) Buddhists and Jains, he says, are not to be treated in that way.

<sup>34</sup>Aravanan (1978), p. 339.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Tol. *poruḷ.kalaviyal, nūr. 2.*

when a hero is exalted in a **pāṭāṇ** poem, it is appropriate to give an account of his place (**ūr**) and of his birth.

It will be noticed that the focus of Tol. thus far in the section revolves mainly around one question: How are the two subjects--god and love--treated in a **pāṭāṇ** poem? This is interesting as well as instructive. Because by bringing the conventions relating to the praise of god into his discussion, Tol. is clearly indicating that the **pāṭāṇ** is not to be regarded as just another of the **puṣam** divisions in which only the deeds of human heroes are praised. This would mean that in the **pāṭāṇ** section, as we argued earlier, Tol. defines and demarcates the full range of the concept of hero or **talaivan**. We suggested that the notion of **talaivan** represented a conceptual zone which was, in a sense, the meeting point of the ascending human being and the descending god. It was a point at which both met and merged. The manner in which the **pāṭāṇ** situation is elucidated by Tol. offers a convincing proof for this interpretation. The second point that Tol. discusses particularly in the **nūr**.(s) 23-25 is how the theme of love is treated in a **pāṭāṇ** poem. Now, the question is: If the subject of love is included in a **pāṭāṇ** poem, and god, too, figures as a character in it, should names be mentioned in it or not? **Nūr**. 26 provides the answer. That is, when god is the hero, a proper name may be mentioned in a **pāṭāṇ** poem even if the theme of the poem is love.

Although poems in which both divine and human beings appear as **dramatis persona** are not found in the extant classical poems, it will not be wrong to presume that such poems must have been in existence before the time of Tol. Alternately one might argue that these **nūṟ(s)** are among the interpolated passages in the Tol. or that the Tol. itself (or, at least the **poruḷ** division) is much later in date than it is usually supposed. In our view, both views are unlikely. It was already stated that in the popular song types such as the **vallaippāṭṭu** and **kuravaipāṭṭu**,<sup>-P-</sup> either a god or a human being could be a hero. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Tol. is only quoting the previous authorities in some of the **nūṟ(s)** that we discussed above. At any rate, such poems were common among the post-classical devotional poets. With regard to those devotional poems, it is sometimes suggested that the poets who mention the name of the god when that god figures in the poems as an **akam** (love) hero are violating the classical convention which forbids mentioning of names in a love poem.<sup>36</sup> In the light of our discussion, it should be clear that the convention did not prevent the poets from mentioning the name of god in an **akam** poem. The convention of maintaining the anonymity of the characters was applicable only to those love poems in which the **dramatis persona** were all human beings.

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<sup>36</sup>Cutler (1987), p. 103.

It is in the *nūr*. 27 that Tol. seems to return to the task of codifying the conventions with regard to a 'kingly' hero in a *pātān* poem. Even there he indicates clearly how praising a divine hero and praising a human hero had overlapping areas. This particular *nūr*. reads:

The prime and faultless three, namely *koṭinilai*, *kantaḷi*, and *vaḷḷi* may also appear along with invocation to god.

The variety of interpretations offered by the medieval and modern commentators on this *nūr*., particularly with regard to the meaning of *koṭinilai*, *kantaḷi*, and *vaḷḷi*, is bewildering. Space does not permit us to examine them in detail here.<sup>37</sup> On careful sifting, however, it may be seen that the source of the controversy is centered around one issue--whether these terms should be understood as referring to the acts or possessions of a royal hero or as representing three divinities. Iḷam., for instance, takes the former view, and interprets *koṭinilai* as praising the *koṭi* 'flag' of a king and *kantaḷi* as describing the destruction of enemy's 'fort' by a king. He does not, however, explain the term *vaḷḷi*.<sup>38</sup> However, according to him, the *nūr*. means that poets may praise the flag of a king

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<sup>37</sup>Interested readers may find a summary of some of those interpretations in Jayaraman (1975), pp. 51-53; Aravanan (1978), pp. 339-341.

<sup>38</sup>It is certain that Iḷam. follows the PPVM in his interpretation of the terms, and, according to the PPVM, the term *vaḷḷi* refers to the frenzied song-dance by women in praise of Murukaṅ.

or eulogise his victory in war even while praising a god. On the contrary, Nacci. takes the latter view, and interprets the terms as denoting the Sun, the transcendant, formless 'thing' that stands unsupported, and the Moon respectively. The issue here is not which one of the interpretations is correct. For, in a sense, both may be right, and this remarkably divergent understanding of the terms by the two great commentators is in itself a proof and reflection of the ambiguous content and nature of the *pāṭāṇ* setting. It lends itself to be interpreted in two different ways.

It is interesting that a similar divergence of opinion is expressed by the two commentators in their interpretation of the very next *nūr*. (28). It reads:

**koṟṟavallai ōriṭattāna**

It is not easy to translate this cryptic statement. The term *koṟṟavallai* means a 'pestle song of victory'. *Koṟṟavallai* is mentioned by Tol. as one of the themes under the *vañcittiṇai*.<sup>39</sup> The *nūr*., according to Iḷam., means that, in certain contexts, *koṟṟavallai* is called a *pāṭāṇ* poem, when the intention of the poet is to praise the hero. Nacci.'s interpretation is radically different. According to him, it means that poems which deal with the themes classified under the *veṭci* and the themes up to *koṟṟavallai* under the *vañci*, are proper only with reference to the human

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<sup>39</sup>Tol.poruḷ.puṟat.nūr. 7: 11.

heroes. On the other hand, the themes that are listed under the remaining four *tiṇai(s)*, namely *uḷiṇai*, *tumpai*, *vākai*, and *kāñci*, may have a divine or a human being as hero. Nacci.'s argument is that gods do not engage in deeds such as the cattle-raid and cattle-recovery which are the themes under *veṭci*, but they do perform such deeds as destroying the enemies, celebrating victory in war etc., which are the themes under the other *tiṇai(s)*. If we accept Nacci's interpretation, it means, once again, that Tol. is defining and demarcating the range of themes which unite and differentiate a divine hero and a human hero under the *puṇam* mode of praise.

In the *nūr.(s)* 29-30, Tol. gives a long list of themes pertaining mostly to the praise of a royal hero in the *pāṭaṇ* poetry.<sup>40</sup>

It is said that the following are (the themes) of *pāṭaṇ*: praising the givers and reproving the non-givers; praising the qualities and victory of a hero; addressing the palace-guard and telling him of one's hardship suffered during the long journey from home; requesting the hero-king to retire for the day and asking him to go to bed; praising the sacrifice where cows (*kapilai*) are given in donation; lighting and worshipping a lamp to celebrate the victory of the spear; lending proper advice to the king even if the advice is bitter; counseling the king; invoking a god to bless the king; and, unilateral expression of adoration (*kaikkilai*).

Songs sung by *sūta(s)* to awaken sleeping

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<sup>40</sup>Reference was made to one of the *nūr.* in an earlier context. *supra*, Ch. II, p.

kings, wishing them unblemished fame; situations when actors, bards, war-bards, or female dancers, while returning from a patron, meet with fellow-professionals who suffer from poverty, and suggest to them how they may also obtain the riches like they themselves have; the occasion of the birth day of the king, festive days when he avoids anger; the occasion of the annual coronation ceremony; praising the protective powers of the king's umbrella; praising the sword that is aimed at the enemies; the occasion of ritual bath that kings take after destroying the enemy's fort; bards appealing for gifts standing at the door-steps of the kings; bards praising the king after receiving gifts and taking leave either on their own or with the king's permission; bards predicting by observing the stars, birds, and other omens the dangers that may fall upon a king, and singing protective verses for the safety of the king.

It must be pointed out that for many of the themes mentioned by Tol., there are no illustrative examples in the extant classical corpus. Nevertheless a number of themes mentioned in the above *nūṟ*.(s) continued to remain popular among Tamil poets until long after the classical phase. We may cite an example. Tol. refers to the theme of *tuyileṭai-nilai*, 'waking (a hero) from sleep.' There are no poems illustrating this theme in the classical anthologies, but a similar theme, called *paḷḷiyelucci* 'waking (the god) from sleep' was a favourite one among the devotional poets.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Zvelebil (1974), p. 101. Some of the themes are counted as part of a group of ninety-six genres collectively known as *pirapantam* (Skt. *prabandha*) or "minor literature" in Tamil. For an account of these works, see *ibid.*, pp. 193-219.

#### IV.5. Pātāntīnai Poems in the Classical corpus

Now we turn to the corpus. As mentioned already, of the total number of heroic poems that are available now, an overwhelming percentage are classified under the pātāntīnai. More than one-third of the three hundred ninety-eight poems in the PN, and almost two-thirds of the eighty extant poems in the PrP are classified by the redactors as pātān poems.<sup>42</sup> A perusal of the turai or theme distribution of the extant PrP poems is sufficient to demonstrate the comprehensive nature of the pātān poetry. Given below are the themes and the number of poems under each theme in the PrP:<sup>43</sup>

iyannoli vālttu	5	nātu vālttu	1
(theme of extolling a hero)		(blessing the land)	
uḷiñaiyaravam	1	pariciṟṟuraippātān pātṭu	2
(bustle of siege)		(request for largess)	
oḷvālamalai	1	pānāṟruppaṭai	1
(sword-dance)		(directing a bard)	
kaḷavali	1	peruñcōṟṟunilai	1

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<sup>42</sup>Sanjeevi (1973), pp 309-315 and 319-20. It must be mentioned that the poems in the PN have been classified according to the PPVM, which divides the puṟam poetry into twelve situations as against seven in the Tol. At least some of the sixty-seven poems, which are classified under potuviyal tīnai (common or general situation) in the PN, will fall under pātān from the point of view of Tol.

<sup>43</sup>Sanjeevi (1973), p. 321; For further signification of each theme, see Kailasapathy (1968), p. 196; also Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), pp. 181-182.



(battleground)		(the grand battle-feast)	
<b>kāṭci vālttu</b>	6	<b>mullai</b>	1
(praise of a sight)		(praising a hero and his wife)	
<b>kāvaṅ mullai</b>	1	<b>vañcittuṟaippāṭāṅ pāṭtu</b>	10
(praise of rule)		(praising a wrathful king)	
<b>kuravai nilai</b>	1	<b>vākai</b>	2
(victory dance by women)		(praise of victory)	
<b>centuṟaippāṭāṅ pāṭtu</b>	37	<b>vākaittuṟaippāṭāṅ pāṭtu</b>	1
(general praise of a hero)		(praise of victory in war)	
<b>tumpaiyaravam</b>	2	<b>viṟaliyāṟruppaṭai</b>	6
(bustle of war)		(directing the danseuse)	

Apart from the themes that are specific to the **pāṭāṅ**, one may see that independant **tiṅai(s)** such as **vañci**, **vākai**, **mullai** etc. function as themes of the **pāṭāṅ** poems; so much so that Nacci. states unequivocally that the entire collection **PrP** should be taken as consisting of **pāṭāṅ** poems.<sup>44</sup> In the **pattu.** collection, the five **āṟruppaṭai** poems are clearly **pāṭāṅ** poems. It may be recalled that in the two love poems in the collection, namely the **PP** and the **NNV**, the general theme of praise is predominant. These two poems which are in praise of the Cōla king Karikāl and the Pāṅṭiya king Neṭuñceliyan respectively may be considered as examples of **pāṭāṅ** poems that are associated with the **pālai** and the

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<sup>44</sup>Tol. poruḷ. puṟaṭ. nūṟ. 26, Nacci. comm.

**mullai** themes.<sup>45</sup>

By the same logic, it is possible to explain the structure of many **akam** poems in which allusions to several historical figures occur. According to one estimate, almost two thirds of the poems in the **AN** anthology contain allusions and references to historical heroes.<sup>46</sup> Such allusions were neither of "secondary importance" to the authors of the love poem, as tentatively suggested by Kailasapathy, nor is the **akam** framework used an instrument by the authors of those poems to achieve the objective of praising a patron, as some others have suggested.<sup>47</sup> The **akam** and the **puṟam** elements occurring in one and the same poem are of equal importance. They both serve the same purpose. They show the various ways in which both particular and universal figures mingle in poetic vision.

A detailed examination of the **pāṭāṇ** poems in the classical corpus is outside the scope of the present study. It was observed that the bulk of the extant classical poems deal with the deeds and demeanour of heroic men and women. Not only in the **puṟam** poems, but also in a number of **akam** poems, handsome eulogies were heaped on these heroic persons by inspired poets, who were drawn from all strata of

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<sup>45</sup>Jayaraman (1975), p. 285-286.

<sup>46</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 31-33.

<sup>47</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 7. Jayaraman (1975), p. 283.

society. Carried away by the predominant mood of their times, the poets more often glorified more of men than gods. Even then, the ultimate praise that they could bestow upon a human hero was to equate him with god.

Our interest in these poems is restricted to the purpose of understanding the concept of **talaivan**, and the manner in which the images of divine and human heroes converged in them. In the ensuing section we will attempt to show how this convergence was accomplished by the classical poets with particular reference to the poems in the PN.

#### **King and God: 'A Hyphenated Continuum'**

The highest form of praise that classical Tamil poets showered on a hero was to suggest a link between him and god. They accomplished this task of linking in two ways: a) by instituting a comparison between the mortal hero and an immortal god, and b) by tracing the lineage of a historical hero directly to a god or a mythical figure.

The references in which such comparisons are made are recurrent in the anthologies. So common and conventional was this mode of comparison that when a mortal hero was compared particularly with Mayon, the god of the **mullai** region, the grammarians classified the poem under the theme of **pūvainilai**.<sup>48</sup> **Pūvainilai** is sometimes explained as

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<sup>48</sup>Tol.porul.purat.nur. 5: 9-10. Also see Hardy (1983), p. 155.

'comparing one subject with another'. Quoted below is part of a poem in the **PN**, which is classified under the **pūvainilai**, and in which the Pāṇṭiyan king Ilavanti-kaippalli~~t~~tuñciya-Naṇmāraṇ is compared to the four gods by the Nakkīraṇ.

Four gods of undiminishing fame are in charge of the world. They are: the sapphire-throated god who rides on a bull carrying the axe (**kaṇicci**) that is hard to be countered; the god whose body resembled the color of conch shell that abound in the sea, and who has a palmyra flag and carries a plough (as his weapon) that has seen many a battle; the god who is fond of victory and whose colour resembles a refined sapphire and who has a tall eagle-flag that touches the sky; the shining red god whose flag carries a blue peacock, and whose vehicle is also a peacock. Of them, in your wrath, you are like the God of Death; in strength like Vāliyōn (Balarāma); in fame like the one (Māyōn) who liquidates his enemies; and, in determination like Murukaṇ. Since you resemble all of them, is there anything that is impossible for you?<sup>49</sup>

Kailasapathy has collected from the anthology poems copious references in which the comparison of a king with a god is found, and he has also drawn attention to the fact that "the language used for the description of the kings is almost identical to that used for the gods."<sup>50</sup> His comments on this striking similarity of language, and the conclusion that he draws from it are worth quoting here:

Such common usages can be explained away as the result of the bards using a common

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<sup>49</sup>PN 56: 1-16.

<sup>50</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 74-75.

literary language and traditional epithets. While that may be conceded from the point of view of the technique of verse making, the possibility of a deliberate choice by the bards cannot be entirely overlooked ... Granting, since it is true, that these are formulae, yet, we cannot ignore the fact that such identical usage deftly suggests an equality of gods and kings. This is heightened by the technique of the bards of comparing the gods to kings. It may be suggested that it is a part and parcel of the mode of exaltation.<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting to note that Kailasapathy's assessment based on a study of the language of classical poets corresponds closely with the conclusion that we arrived at on the basis of the statements of Tol. that, in a *pāṭāṇ* setting, it is not only legitimate but also customary to sing the praise of a human hero in the same manner and by using the same language in which a god is exalted.

As an illustration of this usage, one might draw attention to the manner in which the expression *neṭiyōṇ* is used in the corpus. The term literally means 'the tall one' or 'the exalted one'. It occurs several times in the poems, and the poets used it with various attributes to denote either a king or a god. There has been a lively discussion among scholars with regard to the primary identification of the term.<sup>52</sup> In the poems, the term is used in different

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<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>52</sup>Long ago Raghavaiyengar argued that although the term *neṭiyōṇ* is used with adjectives to denote a king or a god in classical poems, the term primarily means Viṣṇu. See Raghavaiyengar (1938), pp. 267-268.

contexts to refer to Śiva, Paraśurāma, Indra, or, a semi-mythical hero of the Pāṇṭiyan family.<sup>53</sup> After closely examining the relevant passages, Hardy has suggested that there is a special association of the person named neṭiyōn and the Pāṇṭiyan family. But, with regard to the historicity of the person, he has only this to say:

The observation made here cannot suggest a definite solution to the problem of Neṭiyōn's identity. But the different ways of possible interpretation would point to the possibility that features of Neṭiyōn allude to Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, or Paraśurāma, if he is not directly the god. If historical at all, this Neṭiyōn must have become a mythical figure for later generations who in various ways envisaged him in Vaiṣṇava terms.<sup>54</sup>

The root of the problem, if it is a problem at all, may be traced to the consciously nurtured ambiguity that surrounded the early Tamil notion of a hero and the manner in which the images of god and king blended in it. We cite a praise poem by the poet Uṟaiyūr Ēniccēri Muṭamōciyār sung in honour of the chieftain Āy Aṅṭiraṅ. Note how the first part of the poem sounds almost like the segment of a devotional poem:

I should have thought of him first, but I did so only late. (Therefore) let my heart be drowned, let my tongue be pierced, and let my ears be plugged like an unused well . . . . The Himālayas which brush the sky sustain the earth on the north. The family of Āy maintain the balance in the south, and

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<sup>53</sup> MK 455; AN 220: 5; PN 241: 3; MK 61 and 763. In the MK 61 the Pāṇṭiyan king Neṭuñceliyan is hailed as a worthy descendant of Neṭiyōn.

<sup>54</sup> Hardy (1983), pp. 610-612.

without Āy the world will be upturned.<sup>55</sup>

A logical outcome of the above convention was that the poets began tracing the lineage of the heroes directly to a divine or semi-divine figure. One of the clear illustrations of this found in the PPA. In this poem, the poet Kaṭiyalūr Uruttirāṅkaṅṅaṅār hails the hero of the poem, Toṅṭaimāṅ Iḷantiraiyaṅ who was the ruler of Kāñcīpuram as a descendant (**marapil uravoṅ**) of (Viṣṇu)

the god who spanned the earth, whose breast  
bears the sacred mark and who has a sea-dark  
skin.<sup>56</sup>

The significance of the above passage has not been sufficiently stressed in south Indian historical writing. The passage is among the earliest references in Indian sources in which the lineage of a ruler is directly traced to god. The PPA passage is not, however, an isolated example of its kind in early Tamil literature. In the MK, Nakkīrar traces the lineage of the Pāṅṭiyaṅ family to the **tolmutukaṭavuḷ** ('the ancient god'), although the identity of the god is a matter of dispute among the commentators.<sup>57</sup> According to Naccl. the expression refers to the sage Akattiyaṅ (Skt. Agastya), but a modern commentator arguing against this suggestion concludes that it should refer to

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55PN 132.

56PPA 29-31.

57MK 41.

Siva.<sup>58</sup> Kapilar, the most celebrated classical poet in one of his poems, speaks of Irūṅkōveḷ, a vāḷir chieftain who was also known as Pulikaṭimāḷ ('one who drove off the tiger'), as a hero of the lineage that had originated from the 'jar' (taṭavu) of a northern sage and had ruled in Tuvurai (Dvāraka?) for forty-nine generations.<sup>59</sup> Drawing attention to similar 'jar-born' legends in early Indian literary and epigraphical sources, Mahadevan has ventured to suggest that the 'jar' legends have a 'dravidian origin' and that "it now appears likely that the Brāhmaṇa-Kshatriya or priest-ruler tradition is pre-Aryan and possibly a survival of the Proto-Indian priest rule."<sup>60</sup>

There are further instances in the classical corpus in which the origin of a ruling family is traced to a mythical or divine figure. In many of the PN poems, a mythical king, Sibi (Cempiyaṅ) is counted as one of the ancestors of the Cōḷas.<sup>61</sup> Likewise the rulers of the Pāṇṭiyan family are called as the 'descendants of Kuru' ('kavuriyar').<sup>62</sup>

Apart from suggesting the way in which classical

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<sup>58</sup>See MK (SISS) edition.

<sup>59</sup>PN 201. It may be noted that, in Tamil, 7 x 7 (ēlēlu) is a conventional way of saying 'countless' period.

<sup>60</sup>Mahadevan, (1971a), p. 86.

<sup>61</sup>PN 37, 39, 43, and 46.

<sup>62</sup>PN 3; AN 70 and 342.



Tamils had conceived of a poetic hero, these references throw some light on the development of the theory of the divine origin of kingship in early India. This association between god and king progressively increased with a 'shift in the notion of sovereignty' in the early medieval period.<sup>63</sup> But that fascinating story falls outside the scope of the present work.

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<sup>63</sup>See Dirks (1976).

**CHAPTER V GIFT**

## CHAPTER V

### GIFT

#### V.1. Preliminary

All that is not given is lost - an Indian proverb.

In the preceding chapter we attempted to explain the concept of 'hero' in early Tamil culture. If one were to ask what in that culture was the single most important attribute that distinguished a 'hero' from others, the answer would be that it was the hero's boundless capacity for gifting or munificence. As a matter of fact, of the different leitmotifs that we come across in the classical Tamil poetry, the one that emerges in boldest relief is the theme of the liberality of the hero.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly glorification of persons who excelled in liberality is a feature in many cultures, and, in this respect, the early Tamil society is no exception. Yet, one might suggest that the notion of

<sup>1</sup>As Kailasapathy noted: "While the poems on kings and minor chieftains sing their praise, warfare itself seems to have been kept to the minimum. They rather extol the munificence and grandeur of the heroes." Kailasapathy (1968), p. 23.

liberality in early Tamil culture is remarkable both in its degree and in its emphasis on the unilateral or non-reciprocal character of the act of gifting. Giving out of compassion, and out of nothing else was considered the noblest act. It was an end in itself. In fact, the readiness to give unilaterally, or without any sense of obligation or reciprocity, is what distinguished a hero/god from others. This spirit of liberality was an absolute dictum in the culture of the Tamils down the ages.

There is no dearth of published material on various aspects of gift and gifting in early Indian society.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the account that is obtained in them cannot be regarded as complete. The studies that have been carried out so far are primarily based on the religious-cum-legal texts in the Sanskrit language. There is also rich material on the subject in classical Tamil texts. The common term for gift in classical Tamil is **paricil**. The available data on **paricil** reveals a somewhat different understanding of gift and gifting than is found in the early Sanskrit texts. In a study that seeks to trace the formative phase of religious thought in south India, these Tamil texts on gift and gifting are central. The data from the early Tamil texts is examined in this chapter with an aim of assessing their

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<sup>2</sup>HOD., vol. II, pt. II, Ch. XXV; Mauss (1967), pp. 53-59; Gonda (1965), pp. 198-228; Thapar (1978), pp. 105-121. Heesterman (1959), pp. 241-258.

relevance for understanding the religious orientation of the Tamils.

Gifts normally involve exchange of items that are imbued with 'value' in society. It has been suggested that the exchange of gifts served a magical-cum-religious function in early societies.<sup>3</sup> The gift-exchange also operated as a major mode of circulation of wealth, and as a process for legitimizing or reinforcing social and moral ties between individuals and/or groups of peoples. The mode and magnitude of gift-exchange, however, never remained static in any society; nor did its function remain the same always. The mode, magnitude, and function of the gift underwent changes corresponding to the changes in the social and economic patterns of the society. While acknowledging the importance of this correspondence, it must be emphasized at once that, in dealing with the classical Tamil material on gift, our major concern is not with tracing its socio-economic underpinnings, but with understanding certain conceptual aspects of the act of gifting. It will be our endeavour to show that an understanding of the conceptual framework underlying gift giving is vital for a proper assessment of early Tamil religious thought.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Mauss (1967), p. 10; Thapar (1978), p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>For some relevant observations on socio-economic aspects of gift in early south India, see Kailasapathy (1968), *passim*, particularly pp. 217-222.

In order to set out the theme of liberality or giving within early Tamil culture, we begin with a brief overview of the notion of gift in early Indian society as known mainly through the Sanskrit sources. This section includes a comparative analysis of the concept of Skt. **dāna** ('gift') with that of Ta. **paricil** ('gift'). This comparison is helpful not only in identifying the distinctive elements, if any, of the concept of **paricil**, but also in appraising the bearing of the gift concept in Indian religious thought in general. Secondly, the notion of **paricil** as revealed in the classical Tamil texts is expounded through a study of the poems which deal mainly with the theme of **paricil** in the classical anthologies. Finally, the motif of gift as seen in the avowedly religious poems in the classical Tamil corpus is discussed.

Before we begin, it may be useful to take a quick perusal of some of the terms that appear recurrently in connection with gift and gifting in classical Tamil poetry. In both medieval and modern Tamil, two terms--**paricil** (Ta.) and **dāna** (Skt.)--are used for 'donation, gift'. Yet, the terms are by no means synonymous, and there are important conceptual differences between the notions underlying the two terms. The term **dāna** does not occur in classical Tamil

poetry, where the common term for gift was **paricil**.<sup>5</sup> Although the occurrence of the term **paricil** is relatively less frequent in the post-classical Tamil literature, its variant **paricu** which also means 'gift, donation, present, boon' etc., has survived even in modern Tamil.<sup>6</sup> The term **paricu** had, however, in the context of classical Tamil poetry, other meanings as well. There it also meant 'quality, nature, manner, way, method' etc.<sup>7</sup> The act of 'giving away as a gift' was denoted by the term **īkai** or **koṭai**, derived from the verbs **ī** and **koṭu** ('to give') respectively.<sup>8</sup> The recipients of gifts were generally called **paricilar**, although the expression **iravalan** meaning 'suppliant' was also common. There are several terms referring to the donor. One is **vallal** which means 'a person of unbounded liberality, benevolence, ability', etc.<sup>9</sup> The other is **puravalan** which means 'protector, preserver, defender,

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<sup>5</sup>The term **dāna** occurs perhaps for the first time in early Tamil literature in the **Kural** 19 and 295. This does not mean that the **dāna** mode of gift was unknown in the period of the anthologies. There are poems in the **PN** in which the kings were praised for "pouring flowers and gold sprinkled with water into the cool hands" of the learned brāhmans. **PN** 367: 4-5; 361: 4-5. Also see **HOD.**, vol. II, pt. ii, p. 854.

<sup>6</sup>**DED** 3970.

<sup>7</sup>**DED** 3968. The term **paricu** occurs in this sense in the **Kalit**. 91:14; 138:21.

<sup>8</sup>**DED** 2598, 2053.

<sup>9</sup>**DED** 5304. The etymon **val** means 'fertility, abundance, greatness, largeness, strength' etc.

king' etc.<sup>10</sup>

Mention must be made here of an interesting convention in early Tamil culture with regard to the use of verbs meaning 'to give'. In his discussion on syntax, Tol. refers to a list of verbs which mean 'to give', and explains the appropriate context in which each of them is to be used. The relevant statements are:<sup>11</sup>

In the context of supplication (*iravu*), the following three verbs are employed: *ī*, *tā*, and *koṭu*.

Of them, the verb *ī* is to be used when the suppliant is inferior to the giver.

The verb *tā* is to be used when the suppliant is equal to the giver.

The verb *koṭu* is to be used when the suppliant is superior to the giver.

The verb *koṭu* is used in the third person only. However the learned say that it can be used in the first person when one refers to oneself in the third person.

*Cēnā*'s medieval gloss on the first *nūr*. is noteworthy:

Although there are other verbs such as *valāṅkal*, *utaval*, *vīcal* etc., which mean 'to give', the author chose only these three because only they are used in the context of supplication. The other verbs are used in the context of liberality, and they do not convey the sense of plea or supplication. Therefore there was no need to define their usage.

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<sup>10</sup>The etymon of the term is *pura* which means 'to keep, preserve, protect, govern'; the term *puravu* which occurs sporadically in the classical poems means 'care, protection, gift, boon'. In the early medieval period, the term *puravu* meant land tax or land given free of rent by a king. DED., 4283.

<sup>11</sup>Tol.col.eccaviyal.nūr. 48-52.



It is hard to say how far the convention defined by Tol. was followed during the period of the anthology poems. It has been pointed out that in the Tamil-brāhmi inscriptions, which are generally taken to be contemporaneous with the bulk of the anthology poems, the verb *koṭu* ('to give') is used consistently in the third person, and in relation to gifts to elders (monks).<sup>12</sup> But the same verb is used at least once in the second person imperative in the anthology poems.<sup>13</sup>

The implication of the convention deserves to be noted. One does not become superior just because one gives, nor does one become inferior simply because one receives. One cannot use the act of giving to elevate oneself in status. The convention clearly acknowledges a hierarchy among suppliants as well as the need to maintain the distinction between various groups of donees. Hypothetical though it is, one might suggest that the 'superior suppliants' were the groups of people whose privilege and way of life it was to accept gifts from others. In the context of early Indian society, these groups were mainly the brāhmaṇs and the Jaina and Buddhist mendicants. Their presence in early Tamilakam is, as noted already, well attested by literary and epigraphical sources. The presence

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<sup>12</sup>Mahadevan (1971), p. 91.

<sup>13</sup>PN 163: 7.

of those special classes of donees may have prompted Tol. to formulate such conventions. But what is particularly significant is that this formulation also means that, just as there were different kinds of donees, there were different modes of gifting too. What were those modes of gifting? Was the **paricil** mode of giving different from other modes of giving? If so, in what way? It is in this context that a comparative study of the **dāna** mode of giving and the **paricil** mode of giving becomes vital.

## V.2. Gift and Gifting in early Indian culture

The earliest references to gift and gifting in India are found in the **dānastuti** ('eulogy of gifts') hymns in the R̥gveda. Most of these hymns are fragmentary, and the historical data found in them is limited.<sup>14</sup> Being eulogies composed in praise of the patrons who presented gifts to the poets, these hymns are taken as expressions of heroic poetry, and sometimes called 'secular' poems.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, they are close in spirit to the gift poems in the classical Tamil anthologies. There is an emphasis in these hymns on the generosity and openhandedness of the royal donors. Gonda, while acknowledging this stress on openhandedness, has argued that the purpose of **dāna** was "to

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<sup>14</sup>Patel (1961), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup>Macdonell, (1961 reprint) p. 127.

establish a bond between the giver and the receiver by which the former gets a hold on the latter, and not in the last place because they were obviously an indispensable part of the rites and ceremonies."<sup>16</sup> According to Gonda, the ritual character of these poems is evident because the donors are compared to, or even identified with, gods. Further, in some of the poems, it is clearly implied that, "the god, whose liberality is beyond any doubt, is, directly or indirectly, also the source of the 'gifts' which fall to the poet's share."<sup>17</sup> Gonda seems to overstate the theme of reciprocity and to link these hymns too closely with the later traditions.

Analyzing the *dānastuti* hymns from a more historical perspective, Thapar has contended that the purpose of *dāna* in the Rgvedic age was different from what it was to become in later times. In her view, *dāna* signified the 'arbitrary liberality of a generous patron' and 'a channel of redistribution of wealth' in the early Vedic period, but it became 'a channel of deliberate exchange' in the later period'.<sup>18</sup> In this view, the early Tamil poems on gift can

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<sup>16</sup>Gonda (1964), p. 64. Elsewhere he observes: "It is however not true, as has often been contended, that the acceptance of a gift invariably binds the recipient to return something of equal or greater value." Gonda (1965), p. 209, f.n. 38.

<sup>17</sup>Gonda (1964), p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Thapar (1978), p. 111. According to her, "the changing concept is expressed in the more frequent use of the word *dakṣiṇā*." *ibid.*

be seen to have had many features in common with the **dānastuti** hymns. For the sake of clarity, the parallels between them may be tabulated as follows:<sup>19</sup>

The <b>dānastuti</b> hymns of the <b>Rgveda</b>	The <b>paricil</b> poems of Tamil classical corpus
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The donor can be a deity, but is often a king or a chieftain.	The donor is more often a king or a chieftain although god as a giver is not unknown.
The donees are priests- cum-bards.	The donees are bards and poets.
The gift comes from human hands but sometimes through the mediation of a god.	The gift comes from human hands or from god. No mediator is involved.

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<sup>19</sup>The points on the first column are compiled from Thapar (1978), pp. 108-109.

The gift is made not so much in the spirit of charity, but as a celebration of success and an investment toward further success.

The appropriateness of the gift is exalted but the time and place are only rarely mentioned.

The composer's **gotra** is mentioned, and the hymns are priestly compositions. The deity is invoked and appealed for aid.

The gift is given because gifting is an attribute of heroship/godship.

There are no appropriate gifts. The place of gift is often mentioned in the longer poems. Usually it is the abode of the donor.

There are no 'priestly' composers, although the poets and bards are associated with some divine power. Direct appeal to the deity for aid is not unknown (e.g. **TMP** and the **Pari.** poems).

Parallel situations from the past are recounted.

The gift-items are objects of wealth, and are often given in exaggerated figures. The most prized gift is cattle, but chariots, camels, garments, and gold also figure among the items. Female slaves are a recognized item of gift, but land is absent among the gift-items.

The **yajamānas** (the donor-heroes) are described as immortals and inhabit the heaven.

Especially in the longer **āṅgupaṭai** compositions, bards narrate their past experiences with the patron.

The same pattern is followed except that cattle do not appear as a gift-item, nor are slaves mentioned as a gift-item. The colophons sometimes refer to the gift of land, but clear evidence is lacking in the poems (cf. **PAP 170**). The colophons perhaps reflect the later practice.

The gift is made not with an eye on the heaven but for eternal fame in this world. The donors, being warriors, are said to attain heaven as well.

**Dāna** served a magico-religious function in that the gift is symbolic of communion with the supernatural.

The magico-religious function of **paricil** is not obvious. It does, however, symbolize a bond between the donor and the donee.

The donor (king) and the recipient (brāhmaṇs) both confer status upon each other.

Status was conferred by the gift-giving, but the recipients, the bards and the poets, did not belong to one social group.

Despite the many correspondences, there are, as one might see, some striking differences between the two sets of poems. In the context of **dānastuti**, for instance, the gift is not as arbitrary as it appears to be at first glance. The **dāna** was always a part of the sacrificial ritual. Singers received gifts because they were present at the sacrifice performed by their patrons.<sup>20</sup> Giving **paricil**, in contrast, is not tied to any particular ritual or ceremony, although rituals and ceremonies were no doubt major occasions for gift-giving. Further, one might suggest that the nature of the relationship between the donor and the donee is less

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<sup>20</sup>Patel (1961), pp. 80-81.

structured, or, more open, in **paricil** than in **dāna**. In the context of **paricil**, as we shall see below, the recipient of a gift need not even be a fellow human. An ideal **paricil**-giver, in classical Tamil view, is one who does not discriminate among the donees. An animal or even a plant could well be the recipient of gift. In summary what this means is that of the three components of gifting namely the donor, the donee, and the act of giving, the accent in **dāna** is on the actors, whereas in **paricil** it is on the action: giving.

The Vedic texts refer to yet another form of exchange called the **dakṣiṇā**. Contrary to the suggestion of some scholars that the **dakṣiṇā** was a 'fee' or a remuneration given to the officiating priests in rituals, Heesterman holds the view that it was a gift.<sup>21</sup> Following Mauss, the author of the well known book **The Gift**, Heesterman has suggested that the **dakṣiṇā** system of exchange belonged to the intermediate stage between that of "total pre-station" and that of a market and money economy.<sup>22</sup> According to Heesterman **dakṣiṇā** is "the material manifestation of the cyclical course of the universe as it is represented in the

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<sup>21</sup>Heesterman (1959), p. 242. Conceding that the **dakṣiṇā** was part of the Vedic gift-system, Thapar has argued that it came to mean a 'sacrificial fee' at a later time when there was "the gradual impinging of changing attitudes to land and ownership of land", and when land emerged as the major economic unit. Thapar (1978), pp. 106-107.

<sup>22</sup>Heesterman (1957), pp. 164-165.



ritual".<sup>23</sup> Only those who were present at the place of sacrifice were fit to receive the **dakṣiṇā**. When given to a fit person, it "establishes, or is expressive of, a generative alliance between the giving and receiving parties."<sup>24</sup>

In the post-Vedic Sanskrit literature, lengthy discussions on **dāna** are found in the epics, the **purāṇa(s)** and in the **dharmasāstra(s)**. According to the **dharmasāstra** writers, **dāna** means "the transfer of property according to sastric rites so as to reach a receiver who is a fit recipient with the idea that the donor will derive from this act some 'metaphysical' or unseen spiritual merit."<sup>25</sup> Although the recipients may belong to any social group, the 'fit recipients' came to be thought of as the brāhmins who were learned in the Veda(s). Acceptance of gifts (**pratigraha**) was a special privilege of the brāhman's way of life.<sup>26</sup> This means that the early Vedic notions of exchange continue to remain valid. It also means that in the **dāna** exchange the donees were considered to be of higher social and ritual rank than the donors. The donors may belong to any section of the society, although for obvious reasons

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<sup>23</sup>Heesterman (1959), p. 257.

<sup>24</sup>Heesterman (1959), p. 245.

<sup>25</sup>Gonda (1965), p. 208 (emphasis added); cf. **HOD**, vol. II, pt. II, p. 842.

<sup>26</sup>**HOD** vol. II, pt. I, pp. 114-116.

they were mostly members of rich and aristocratic groups. In special circumstances, the brāhmins were allowed to accept gifts even from the śūdra(s), but they were barred from accepting gifts from unjust kings, butchers, oilmen, and owners of liquor shops and brothels. The brāhmaṇ-recipients may or may not render religious services in return for the gift received. Yet, the act of giving to a 'fit' person was in itself a guarantee that the donor would receive spiritual merit.

There are at least two features that stand out in bold relief in the notion of **dāna** as expounded in the **dharmasāstra(s)**: a) the **dāna** is an act of giving performed by a person with the intention of accumulating religious merit, and b) the donee must be a person learned in the Veda(s) in order for the gift to be fruitful. To put it differently, when a person made gifts solely out of compassion (**dayā**), that is without any intention of gaining 'spiritual' merit, and without following the injunctions of the **sāstra(s)**, it was not considered **dāna**.<sup>27</sup> **Dāna** was an efficacious ritual act of exchange, and it yielded fruit in the form of accrual of spiritual merit or the cancellation of sin (**pāpa**) in proportion to the value of the gift; but,

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<sup>27</sup>HOD., vol. II, p. 116. The authority cited is Medhātithi on Manu, IV, 5. Note also that when a person gives gifts even to a fit person without expecting anything in return, but with the sole idea of doing one's duty, it is called **dharmadāna**. HOD., vol. II, p. 842.

only if it met the above conditions. There were meticulous rituals to be performed before making the **dāna**, and appropriate places and time for making gifts were also specified in the texts.<sup>28</sup>

The Jains and the Buddhists also held that **dāna** resulted in spiritual merit, and held that the most meritorious act that a householder could perform was the offering of **dāna** or the giving of alms to renouncers. This is no surprise since the renouncers were totally dependant on the charity of the householder for subsistence. In Jainism, for instance, the **atithi-samvibhāga**, 'sharing with (ascetic) guests' was the most important of all the forms of **dāna** for the householders, and all acts of charity involved the "proper items, proper time, proper recipient(s), and proper cause."<sup>29</sup> In other words, as in the **dāna** and the **dakṣiṇā** forms of exchange in the brahmanical tradition, in Jainism too the donee must be a fit person, the gift must be given according to the prescribed rituals, and the act must be done with the explicit desire to obtain spiritual merit.

**Dāna** and the **dakṣiṇā** were, therefore, highly ritualized acts of exchange. In this respect, they fall within the theoretical formulations of Mauss, who maintained that gifts always involved exchange, and "the thing given

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<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 851-855.

<sup>29</sup>Jaini (1979), p. 220.

brings return in this life and in the other".<sup>30</sup> With characteristic caution, Mauss himself pointed out that the **dānadharma** as expounded in the **dharmasāstra(s)** was applicable only to the brāhmans, who were the chief beneficiaries of the act of **dāna**, and noted, "It is probable that entirely different relationship obtained among noblemen, princely families and the numerous castes and races of the common people. It would be a difficult matter to assess them on account of the nature of our Hindu data."<sup>31</sup> To an extent, this difficulty is alleviated by an investigation of the classical Tamil poetry. While the extant corpus of poetry is not of much help in appraising gift relationships among the common people, they do indeed enlighten us on the importance of gift and gifting among noblemen and princely families in early south Indian culture. However, our interest in Tamil material is centered around not so much on the sociological side but on the conceptual side of the issue.

### V.3. Paricil poems

It was noted already that the most striking feature in the **paricil** mode of giving is that there were no set conditions or rules with regard to the 'fitness' of the donees. This does not mean, however, that there are no

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<sup>30</sup>Mauss (1967), p. 54.

<sup>31</sup>Mauss (1967), p. 53. The **pratigraha** (receiving gifts) was the privilege of brāhmans.

discernible patterns among the donors and the donees in early Tamil society. The persons involved in the act of giving or receiving gifts in classical Tamil poems belonged to certain categories in society. The donors were, for the most part, members of the aristocratic, ruling families, people such as kings or chieftains.<sup>32</sup> The main beneficiaries of their munificence were the roving bards and poets. By virtue of their natural 'gift' as versifiers, these bards and poets shared the same life-style. All of them constantly travelled around the country visiting, composing, and singing songs in praise of the heroic patrons to whose fame they were drawn. They were not, however, members of the same caste or occupational group. Some of them were teachers, some were traders, and some were toilers. There were quite a few women among them.<sup>33</sup> Even a cursory glance at the list of names of the poets reveals that they came from every strata of society.<sup>34</sup>

Not all bards and poets were itinerants either.

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<sup>32</sup>In exceptional cases, brāhmans or the bards themselves appeared as donors. A brāhmaṇ by name Vinṇantāyan of Kavuniya (kaṇḍinya) family from Puṅcārūr, and the poet Peruñcittiraṇār appear as donors in the PN 166 and 163 respectively.

<sup>33</sup>Although there were quite a few women among the donees, references to women donors are rare in the classical poems, see PN 151: 4-5. It may be mentioned here that royal women figured very prominently as donors in temple inscriptions in the medieval period in south India.

<sup>34</sup>For an interesting analysis of the names of the classical Tamil poets, see **Caṅka Ilakkiyam** (Samajam edition), pp. 1422-1435; Sanjeevi (1973), pp. 21-45.

There are clear indications in the poems that at least some of them were long time, if not permanent, residents at the court of particular kings. The two striking cases are those of Kapilar, a renowned brāhmaṇ (antaṇaṇ) poet, and Auvaiyār, a well known poetess. Both were long time residents in the courts of Pāri and Atiyamāṇ respectively.<sup>35</sup> Their friendship with their patrons was warm, deep, and long-lived.<sup>36</sup> Their special attachment to particular patrons did not, however, prevent them from visiting other patrons and singing their praise. The number of such 'court-poets' was decidedly small, and most of the bards and poets were unattached. Seeking honour as well as gifts, they regularly visited the abodes of the patrons, who obliged them in the customary way.<sup>37</sup> They were held in high esteem for their wit and wisdom, and were treated with great respect by the patrons. It has been cogently argued by Kailasapathy that the aura that surrounded them was at least partly because, "there were strong vestigial remnants of mantic elements associated

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<sup>35</sup>Māṅkuṭi Marutaṇ (PN 72:14) was probably the 'court-poet' of the Pāṇṭiya king Talaiyālāṅkāṇattu-ceru-venṇa Neṭuñceliyaṇ.

<sup>36</sup>Similarly the story of the poet Picirāntaiyār who took his own life at the death of his patron and friend, the Cōla king Kōpperuñcōḷaṇ (PN 216-218, 222, 223) is often cited in Tamil tradition for illustrating an 'ideal' friendship. See Kuraḷ, 785, Parimēlalakar comm.

<sup>37</sup>For a description of the traditional reception accorded to the bards, see PAP 151-177; CPA 235-261; PPA 467-493; MPK 561-581.

with the bards."<sup>38</sup> For all the 'sacred' power and character that they might have had, the bards and poets, however, did not enjoy nor claim a 'ritual' status equal or superior to that of their benefactors. In this respect, they differed from sacrificing brāhmaṇ priests and wandering mendicants.

The items given as gifts by the early Tamil heroes were indeed varied, and they included elephants, horses, chariots, and, of course, precious jewels which was the most common item of all. As noted already, cattle are conspicuous by their absence among the gift-items. There are a few references to donation of land in the colophons of the **PrP** and **PN** poems, but references in the text itself are rare.<sup>39</sup> While suppliants enriched themselves with wealth, the patrons, for their part, accrued fame (**pukal**) for their generosity. In fact the more a hero gave, the greater was his fame. The **īkai** or **koṭai** invariably brought fame (**pukal**) to the donor, and limitless giving was the primary means of achieving fame. Although physical prowess was an essential requisite for being a hero, fame attended upon a hero only when he excelled in the act of liberality.

The theme of gift forms the central subject matter of a number of poems in the classical anthologies. While references to the liberality of heroes are found in the **akam**

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<sup>38</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 69.

<sup>39</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 222.

poems often in the form of allusions, it is in the **puṛaṃ** anthologies that we come across poems exclusively devoted to the theme of gift. According to the reckoning of the tradition, the following are the themes (**tuṛai**) and the poems on gift in the two **puṛaṃ** anthologies:

**Paricilkaṭānilai** - Appeal for gifts. **PN** 11, 101, 136, 139, 158-160, 164, 169, 196-199, 209-211, 266.

**Paricilviṭai** - Utterances of the poets before taking leave of a donor-king. **PN** 140, 152, 162, 165, 397, 399.

**Pariciṛṇṇuṛai** - Bards presenting their needs before a patron. **PN** 126, 135, 137, 148, 154, 161, 163, 168, 200-208, 379.

**Pariciṛṇṇuraippāṭāṇpāṭṭu** - Praising the virtues of a hero and appealing for gifts. **PrP** 19, 65.

**Pāṇāṛṇruppaṭai** - Directing a fellow-bard to a munificent patron. **PN** 68-70, 138, 141, 155, 180. **PrP** 67.

**Pulavarāṛṇruppaṭai** - Directing a fellow-poet to a patron. **PN** 48, 49, 141.

**Viṛalīyāṛṇruppaṭai** - Directing a female dancer to a patron. **PN** 64, 103, 105, 133.

These thematic divisions, although extensive, do not, however, exhaust the full range of information on gift and gifting from the anthology poems. As noted already, the **pāṭāṇṭinai** or the 'poetic situation of praise' meant mainly glorification of the liberality of the hero, and an overwhelming number of poems in the **PN** and the **PrP** collections



fall under this poetic situation. References to gift and gifting are, therefore, copious in them. This is particularly true of the fifty-eight poems in the **PN** which are classified under the theme of **īyanmoli vālttu**, 'hailing the (virtuous) qualities of a hero'. Most of them deal directly with the theme of liberality. In fact, the author of the **PPVM** defines the theme as 'appealing for gifts by citing the example of other donors'.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in the **pattu** poems, apart from the five 'guidance' songs, which specifically deal with the theme of gift, references to gift are found in the remaining poems as well.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to touch upon the wealth of detail that these poems contain on various aspects of gifting, and on the life and personality of individual donors and donees. It was suggested earlier that the distinguishing mark of the **paricil** mode of giving was its arbitrary or unilateral character. Focussing on this aspect of the notion of gifting, we shall now seek to address the following questions. What are the evidences that we have in the poems to substantiate the argument that unilateral giving was regarded as the greatest and the noblest of all? Who, indeed, was the 'ideal' donor--the model for giving--in the eyes of the classical Tamils, and what was his distinctive mark?

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<sup>40</sup>PPVM 194.

### The Seven Vallal(s)

The Tamil tradition fondly remembers seven heroes of the classical phase as legendary donors. They are Pāri, Ōri, Nallī, Elīni, Āy, Pēkaṇ, and Malaiyaṇ. All of them rank among the 'minor kings' (kurunilamannar) or chieftains in early Tamil society. It is interesting to note that there are references in the classical poems to no less than one hundred kings who belonged to the three major dynasties namely, Cēral, Cōla, and Pāṇṭiya, and many of them are glorified for their liberality. Yet, none of them appear in the list of great donors hallowed in the classical tradition. On the contrary, all seven of these legendary donors were minor rulers or chieftains. This apparently means that although in classical Tamil society every king was expected to be a model giver, every model giver was not necessarily a king; nor did being a king automatically qualify one to be an 'ideal' hero as understood by the classical Tamils. For understanding the conceptual aspects of the notion of *paric-  
il*, there is no better way than a study of the poems which deal with the lives and deeds of the seven great donors.

Collectively known by the expression 'the Seven Great Donors' (ēlu vallal), the illustrious seven heroes were the standard of liberality. They were the supreme models for generosity. Worth quoting here is a verse cited by the author of *PPVM* in order to illustrate how a hero is to be hailed by the poet under the theme of *iyannolivālttu*.

There were once two kings (*iraiṅgar*). Of them, one gifted a chariot to the jasmine creeper, and the other, a robe to the peacock even when they did not ask for it. Just as the two kings established their fame in this world, it is your duty to do so and give without withholding.

The king who gifted the chariot to the creeper was Pāri, the chieftain of Paṅṅampū hill, and the one who gifted a robe to the peacock was Pēkaṅ, also known as Valiyāvikkō Perumpēkaṅ, the chieftain of the *Āviyar* clan. Perhaps the act of generosity of no other hero(s) had caught the imagination of the early Tamil poets as much as that of Pāri and Pēkaṅ. They were the donors **par excellence** in early Tamil history. Nevertheless, listing the names of the seven, and treating their extraordinary deeds as the touchstone to test the liberality of a patron was a typical motif found in the poems. We begin with a passage from the old, anonymous poem quoted by Pērā. in his commentary. Note how the poet chides a patron whose demeanour he found far below the 'ideal':

There is no point in blaming you. For you are not one of the great seven--Pāri, Ōri, Naḷli, Eḷiṅi, Āy, Pēkaṅ, and Malaiyaṅ.... I wasted my sweet, milk-like words on you.<sup>41</sup>

The poet Peruñcittiraṅṅar lists the names of the seven donors in one of his poems, providing some details on each one of them. The poem itself is in praise of the liberality of another celebrated *vallal* Kumaṅṅaṅ, the chieftain of the Mutiram hills:

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<sup>41</sup>Tol.poruḷ.ceyyuḷ.nūṅ. 437, Pērā. comm. (lines 4-7).

Beating the drums and blowing the conch-shell, Pāri, the lord of the Paṅampu hills on which the roaring cascade falls in full speed rolling the pebbles down, fought with great kings; Ōri, the great archer, was the ruler of the lofty Kolli mountains; Malaiyaṅ was a great warrior and rivalled the rains in munificence, and he rode on the horse named Kāri and won great victories; Elini, who was adorned with well-made anklets and a garland of kūvīlam, was the chieftain of the Kutirai mountain whose peak is unscaled; Pēkaṅ was the lord of the great mountain which had dark caves, and whose cool, high peak was protected by the mighty god; Āy, was praised by the fine-tongued Mōci; Nalli who drove away enemies was so liberal minded that his unfailing generosity eliminated the misery of those who came to him for help. All those seven great men have passed away. (Now) you alone are here to alleviate the sufferings of the pining bards and others. I thought of you and I came rushing here.42

The same list of seven names appears again in a passage in the CPA, composed by Nattattanaṅ in praise of Nalliyakkōṭaṅ. The significance of the passage is that it provides specific details of the extraordinary deeds of liberality of each one of the seven great donors.

Pēkaṅ, the great son of the āviyaṅ clan and the ruler of the great mountain gave away his robe to the peacock that was (calling aloud and) wandering on the slopes of the hills, where the seasonal rains never fail; Pāri, the lord of the Paṅampu hills on whose slopes fall thick, white cascades, gifted his huge chariot to the tiny-leaved jasmine (mullai) creeper (that was lying) on the long path in the forest which was full of naka trees where bees gathered honey from their fresh, fragrant flowers; With pleasing words, Kāri, who wears shiny bracelets and holds a fiery spear, gave suppliants swift white horses, and even his kingdom to the

astonishment of all; the sweet-tongued Āy, who carried a bow on his sandal-smearred shoulder, presented to the god seated under the banyan tree the blue garment that was given to him by a serpent (*nākam*);<sup>43</sup> Atikaṅ, the lord of the ocean-like army and the holder of a blazing spear that emits fire, gave to (poetess) Auvai the sweet, rare, nectar-like myrobalan (*nelli*) fruit that he obtained from a nearby mountain;<sup>44</sup> Efficient in the use of arms, Naḷli, the lord of high-peaked mountains where drizzles never stop, was candid with his friends and gave all that they needed; Ōri, who owned a horse named Ōri and fought with Kāri, who owned a horse named Kāri, gifted away to the *kōṭiyar* the beautiful hill country where abounds the full blossomed *nāka* trees. You are now carrying all by yourself the weight of liberality (*ikaiccennukam*) of the seven.<sup>45</sup>

Besides these poems, these seven rulers are referred to individually in a number of poems in the anthologies.<sup>46</sup> In the PN alone, there are as many as seventy three poems devoted to the praise of these seven donors. Taken together, these poems not only add further details on the lives of these heroes, but also confirm their immense popularity among the poets.

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<sup>43</sup>The line 96 (*nīla nākam nalkiya kaliṅkam*) is interpreted by the commentators in two different ways. Our translation follows Nacci.'s interpretation. According to another interpretation, the passage means, "a sapphire and the garment presented by a certain person called Nāka." See SSIS edition.

<sup>44</sup>The episode is narrated by Auvaiyār in the PN 91.

<sup>45</sup>CPA 84-113. Note that in the list the poet refers to Eḷṇi by the name Atikaṅ. For the story of the fatal encounter that Ōri had with Kāri, see AN 206 and NT 320.

<sup>46</sup>For a list of poets who have sung in praise of them, and the number of poems in the other collection, see Sanjeevi (1973), pp.371-392.

The examples set by these seven 'legendary' donors underscore several key aspects of giving in early Tamil society. First and foremost, the act of giving is thought of as an unrehearsed act of compassion. It is so spontaneous an act that there is no thought on the part of the donor of any reward or benefit. The donor does not even care whether his gift made 'sense' to others or not. No doubt, their acts brought them fame, but the act itself is not guided by any notion of recompense or exchange. It is performed because it is simply one's nature to do so. Valluvar makes this point clear:

What does the world give in return to the clouds? Befitting acts are performed without seeking any compensation.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, there are no formal or conditional rituals to be performed when the gift is made. Thirdly, the supreme epitome of liberality is one who gives without any discrimination whatsoever. In this perception, the donee does not even have to be a human being to be eligible for a gift. The recipient of Pāri's gift, for instance, is a plant, of Pēkaṅ's, a bird. Others understand the 'fitness' of the donee by **post-facto** analysis in an effort to explain the 'rationale' behind the gift. This aspect is important because, as we shall shortly see, when displayed by the heroes this virtue

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<sup>47</sup>Kuraḷ. 211. It is noteworthy that the chapter on 'the Knowledge of what is befitting' of which this is the first couplet, is followed by the chapter on 'gifting'.

of non-discrimination also came under censure by the poets who complained of not being accorded the proper recognition. Finally, the gift concerns and is concerned mainly with life in this world. The wealth expended or the fame earned in and through *īkai* are not investments for unforeseen future lives. The fame of the donor is established, and the donee reaps the immediate benefits of the gift--both these happen now and in this world.<sup>48</sup>

These features of gifting in the Tamil context are time and again underlined in the poems by a set of rhetorical devices and phrases. Most important and frequent among them was the analogy in which the hero was compared to the sky, and his liberality to the rains. On the surface, the comparison, "equates the liberality of a king or chief with the bounteousness of nature".<sup>49</sup> But its import goes deeper than that. The gift paralleled the rains because the donor-hero, like the sky, expected nothing in return for what he gave. Therefore the poets were fond of qualifying the liberality of hero with such adjectives as, *ōmpā īkai*, 'generosity that does not care for oneself', or *poyyā īkai*, 'unfai-

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<sup>48</sup>Compare the notion in the devotional religion that liberation comes as a gift from the god while one still lives in this world.

<sup>49</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 219. Also see Ramanujan and Cutler (1983), p. 187.

ling generosity', or *varaiyā īkai* 'unlimited generosity'.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to note that by giving one accumulated fame here and now in this world. Its result was immediate, and, unlike the *dāna*, one does not have to wait until one gets to the other world or other births.<sup>51</sup> The classical poets even stress the point that giving gifts with a design to further one's interest in future births was thought of as unbecoming of a hero. While lauding the chieftain Āy, the poet Uṛaiyūr Ēṇiccēri Muṭamōciyar, for instance, says:

Āy is not one who trades on righteous acts with the idea that what is done in this life (*immai*) will yield fruit in a future life (*maṇumai*). He gives liberally because that is the way of noble men.<sup>52</sup>

Directing a fellow bard to the court of Valiyāvikkō Perumpēkaṇ, Paraṇar says:

Oh! poor bard, . . . Pēkaṇ, our lord, the possessor of must flowing elephant and haughty horse, knows no limits in giving. He gifted his robe to the peacock even though he knew that it cannot use it. He gives not because he is concerned with his next birth, but because he is concerned with the poverty

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<sup>50</sup>For references to the poems in which these expressions occur, see *ibid.*, f.n. 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>51</sup>Valḷuvar goes a step further and says, 'It is good to give, even if it is said that giving does not ensure access to the higher world'. *Kuṛaḷ* 222.

<sup>52</sup>PN 134.



of others.<sup>53</sup>

The hero expressed himself, and let others identify him by the act of spontaneous liberality. It was the mode by which the hero secured himself with others in a relationship that was based on empathy and recognition. What is to be stressed here is that, the act of giving gifts was not the cause of the relationship, but the effect of it; it is not a condition of the relationship, but the expression of it. Giving is both a means as well as an end itself.

What, one might ask, was the sustaining force of the relationship between the puravalan (benefactor/hero/god) and the iravalan (beneficiary/bard/devotee)? It was a yearning for belonging, for participation, for being together--an association that grew upon mutual love and recognition. An arrogant autocrat is, therefore, the most unlikely candidate for puravalan, and a mindless sycophant, for iravalan. Both the giver and the receiver are to be willing participants in a meaningful meeting with an identity and personality of their own.

This aspect of the relationship is best illustrated in a moving episode in the PN poems.<sup>54</sup> Pēkan, the Āviyar chieftain had left his wife Kaṇṇaki for a harlot. The celeb-

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<sup>53</sup>PN 141: 11-15. see below for further details on Pēkan's story. cf. Kuṛaḷ, 221. Of course these vehement assertions only prove that the thought that giving would benefit one in future births was very much prevalent.

<sup>54</sup>PN 143-147.

rated poets such as Kapilar, Paraṇar, Aricil Kilār, and Perunkunṛūr Kilār all visited him, not for monetary gain, but in an effort to continue a meaningful relationship. Distressed by the separation between him and his wife, each of them made an appeal to Pēkaṇ. Of the five poems that deal with the episode, we quote below two. The first is by Paraṇar and the second is by Aricil Kilār.

Oh, Pēkaṇ, who owns a furious elephant and a haughty horse! you displayed your grace by giving the robe to the tender, dark peacock when you thought it was suffering from cold. I am not suffering from hunger; nor have I kith and kin to look after. I play my little lute that is curved like a kaḷam fruit, and cause vibration among connoisseurs of music. The gift that I seek from you is this: 'Do the right thing, and bestow grace'. Get into the tall chariot that has dark colored bells, and remove the sufferings of the lady who lives in pain.<sup>55</sup>

I do not want your rare ornaments and wealth. Playing the small lute, I sing the praise of your hill country. If you are pleased and decide to give me gifts, then please do this for me. Your lady is in great distress because you are not compassionate to her... Fasten your horses to the tall chariot, and go to her.<sup>56</sup>

The poets in this case not only refuse to accept anything for themselves, but claim that the king's reunion with his wife is the best gift that he can offer to them. In some poems of the PN, we find an outright refusal to accept a gift by the poets from a less-than-noble patron. Quoted

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55PN 145.

56PN 146.

below are a few lines from some of them.

If it is given without love (**pet̥pu**), we do not accept a gift even from the three great, wealthy kings.<sup>57</sup>

Will those who never tire in their efforts accept the gift that is given with a long face and an unsmiling heart.<sup>58</sup>

These passages indicate that, although the convention accorded the donors a superior status, the poets did not lower themselves to the position of mere flatterers in the presence of the former. When the treatment meted out to them lacked decorum, they did not hesitate to assert themselves, and even refused to receive gifts from imprudent would be donors.

#### **koṭaikkataṇ and koṭaimataṇ**

The special sense of the classical Tamil concept of gift is well brought out in two succinct expressions in the poems. One points to the fact that boundless giving was regarded as integral to the personality of the hero. It was his duty. The classical poets called it **koṭaikkataṇ**, 'the duty or responsibility of giving'.<sup>59</sup> Giving was the very purpose and meaning of a hero's life. The instincts of a

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57PN 205: 1-2.

58PN 207: 4-5.

59MPK 89, 543; PPA 446; PrP 20: 24. A related expression is **pāṅkatan**, 'the duty towards the bards'. Kailasapathy (1968), pp. 56-58.

hero were such that he rushed spontaneously to help others 'like a cow to its infant calf'.<sup>60</sup> In the longer *pattu* poems, the bards often tell us how heroes showered them with gifts even before they uttered a few eulogistic words.<sup>61</sup> The poet *Kumaṭṭūr Kaṇṇanār*'s characterization of *Imaiyavarampan Neṭuñcēralātan* aptly sums up the nature of heroes in general.

A man of unerring heart, he lovingly discharges the responsibility of giving to us, to others, and to all suppliants even if they lack in talents.<sup>62</sup>

The same notion is articulated more forcefully in a poem by *Kapilar* in which he compares the compassionate nature of *Pāri*, his celebrated patron, with god:

Flowers are of two kinds: auspicious and inauspicious. The *Corinda* (*erukkam*) flowers which bloom in bunches with tiny leaves around are neither auspicious nor inauspicious. Yet, the god does not reject them. Likewise, *Pāri* generously gives gifts even when ignorant and mean persons approach him, because he regards giving as his duty.<sup>63</sup>

This poem is significant because the poet makes it clear that god is the ultimate model for altruistic giving. In the same vein, *Uṟaiyūr Mutukaṇṇan Cāttanār* cites the example of moon while praising the generous nature of the *Cōla* king

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60PAP 151.

61CPA 235.

62PrP 20: 22-24.

63PN 106.

Nalaṅkiḷli:

Oh, my lord, Nalaṅkiḷli! the moon that moves in the sky teaches even the ignorant ones in the world the truth that what expands will contract and what contracts will expand, and what is born will die and what is dead will be born. Likewise you too are concerned with the sufferings of those who come to you, and grant them gifts whether they are proficient or not.<sup>64</sup>

These poems underscore the unilateral and arbitrary character of the act of giving on the part of the heroes. We shall cite one more example for the selfless giving of a hero, a moving poem by Vaṅparaṅar in praise of Naḷli, whom he met by chance in the forest. The poem highlights the point that an ideal giver is one who preferred to remain anonymous.

Seeing my pain and fatigue ... a hunter came to me. With folded hands, I tried to stand up to greet him. He placed his hands on my shoulders and made me sit.... Without delay, he made a fire-place, and roasted the meat, and said, "Please, you and your troupe eat this". We ate the meat which tasted like nectar, and were relieved of our hunger. We quenched our thirst by drinking the cool water from the water-falls on the slopes of mountain covered with dense forest. When we took leave of him, he said, "I am man of the jungle. I have no other precious jewels to give you." Saying this, he gave me his beautiful necklace studded with pearls and the thick armet. I asked him what was his country. He would not say. I asked him what was his name. He would not tell me that either. On my way back I enquired everyone. They told me, "He is Naḷli, the chieftain of Naḷimalai, the far famed mountain where cool

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<sup>64</sup>PN 27: 10-17. also 57:1; 124: 1-2. It may be noted here that Ilaṅkō begins his work Cil. with an invocation to the moon.

cascades fall like crystal lines.<sup>65</sup>

A second characteristic of giving was that a gift should transcend all logic. In the act of liberality there existed no distinction between humans, animals, or plants. Unrestricted giving was perceived as the mark of true compassion. The classical poets indicated this sweeping and supra-rational character of giving by the apt expression *koṭaimaṭam*, which literally means 'ignorant generosity'. A medieval commentator attempted to explain it as a poetic technique in which the hero is truly praised although the mode used is that of apparent mocking.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the mode was the opposite of satire in which one is mocked in the mode of apparent praising.

The expression *koṭaimaṭam* was not, however, a mere poetic technique. It concisely defines the innate quality of the Tamil notion of giving. It is instantaneous and different from 'intellectually coloured compassion'. It is compassion that belies all rational comprehension. Full of empathy, the hero gives without discrimination to anyone and everyone who came to him. Note how, in a short eulogy on Pēkaṇ, the poet Paraṇar uses the rain analogy to capture this core element of generosity:

The rains know no boundary. When they fall,  
they fill up not only dried-up tanks and  
wide paddy fields, but even useless, barren

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<sup>65</sup>PN 150.

<sup>66</sup>Tol. poruḷ. ceyyuḷ. nūṟ. 125. Pērā. comm.

lands. Likewise, Pēkan, who has must-flowing elephant and wears anklets, too, is 'ignorant' in generosity. He is not so when he faces the army of his foes.<sup>67</sup>

The names of the seven great donors became proverbial precisely because they excelled in acts of 'ignorant' generosity. However, it is interesting to note that the 'learned' poets were not always pleased when heroes showed a lack of discrimination in their treatment of the suppliants. Apparently it hurt the pride of the poets when heroes made no distinction between them and the other 'unlearned' suppliants. Recognition was more dear to the poets than the material rewards that they received from their patrons. There are several poems in the PN illustrating this point.<sup>68</sup> When Atiyamāṅ Neṭumāṅ Añci failed to honour him in person, the reaction of the poet Peruñcittiraṅār was swift and sharp:

I informed him, "Crossing several hills and mountains, I have come for gifts". And, the king who is hard to stop by the enemies, sent the message, "Take this and go". He did not even see me. How could he have judged me? I am not one who barter away his art to accept gifts from such a person. Even if it is little, I shall be happy to receive it when it is given with due recognition.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>PN 142. The well known poem PN 107 also falls in the same category.

<sup>68</sup>PN 162, 205-210.

<sup>69</sup>PN 208. Interestingly similar attitude is evident in the behaviour of the some of the devotional poets in the Tamil tradition. Note particularly, Cuntarar's rebuke of Śiva when he fails to restore his eyesight.

The poet Kapilar makes the same point directly to Malāyamān̄ Tirumuṭikkāri in the form of counselling:

Thinking of the same giver, suppliants will come from all four directions. It is easy to give them gifts, but it is difficult to maintain a ranking (*varical*) among them. If you are conscious of it, then refrain from treating the poets like everyone else.<sup>70</sup>

Auvaīyār has succinctly expressed this idea in one of her poems saying that the bards who subsist on gifts have only one longing: ranking.<sup>71</sup> One thus sees here an interesting paradox in the attitude of the poets toward patrons in general. The poets exalted the patron-heroes for their indiscriminate, 'foolish', rain-like munificence;<sup>72</sup> yet, they also complained precisely against this quality because it ignored distinctions among the suppliants. Worse still, it hurt a poet's pride.

In a milieu that attached so much importance to the act of giving it is only to be expected that the greatest calamity that could befall upon a hero was being unable to give. Under such circumstance, a hero did not hesitate to uphold his duty even at the cost of his life. Driven by extreme poverty, the poet Peruñcittiraṇār called on Kumaṇaṇ, the chieftain of the Mutiram hills. When the poet visited him, Kumaṇaṇ had lost his country to his scheming younger

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<sup>70</sup>PN 121.

<sup>71</sup>PN 206: 4-5; also 47:6.

<sup>72</sup>PN 27:15, 57:1.



brother Iḷāṅkumaṇaṅ, and was living in exile in the forest. The wicked brother had announced a price on his head. The poet was so touched by Kumaṇaṅ's response to his misery that he rushed to Iḷāṅkumaṇaṅ and reported to him how great a man his elder brother was. In the opening lines, the poet offers what may be regarded as the *locus classicus* of the goal of a hero's life.

There were those who, aiming at permanence in this impermanent world, first established their fame before they passed away. Many, many more, indeed, were wealthy and powerful persons, but they are not counted among the famed ones and were forgotten because they did not quell the poverty of their suppliants. When I stood in front of him (Kumaṇaṅ) singing his praise, he, the possessor of swift and famous horses, who gives to singers elephants on whose forehead hang tiny bells down to the legs ringing alternately, said to himself: "If I let the worthy bard return disappointed, it is worse than the loss my kingdom". He had no worthy thing to give. So he handed over the sword and offered his head to me. I have come here after seeing that senior of yours who is unflinching in his conviction.<sup>73</sup>

In much the same vein, Kapilar praises Pāri:

Pāri has given away his Paṛampū hills to the bards. If bards ask him for the gift, he will readily yield. For that is his way.<sup>74</sup>

So enduring were the legends and the images of the seven donors that their names never lost their appeal in the imagination of the Tamils. As noted already, the names of

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73PN 165.

74PN 108.

Pāri and Pēkaṅ remained popular throughout the history of Tamil literature. Commenting on the popularity of the story of Pāri in the post-classical, particularly in the devotional Tamil poetry, Kailasapathy remarks: "Strange and romantic as it sounds, the episode has since become a byword in Tamil literature, not excluding the essentially religious devotional poems of the Pallava period." 75 In the light of our discussion, it is neither strange nor romantic that Pāri, whose action epitomized all that was fundamental in the Tamil conception of gifting, became a proverbial symbol for latter day poets, religious or otherwise.

#### V.4. The notion of paricil in the TMP

We have already seen that the relationship between god and the devotee as envisaged in the **TMP** (and the **Pari**. poems) was an intensely personal one. In this relationship, the god and the devotee interacted with each other in the roles of benefactor and beneficiary respectively. Drawn by the fame of the god, the devotee undertakes a trip to the site of god. He sings, dances, or simply invokes the sacred names in the presence of god. What does god in turn do? Pleased by the arrival of the devotee, he bestows gifts on the devotee. The relevant passage to which reference was made already is worth repeating here:

As you utter these words, minions of varied

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75Kailasapathy (1968), p. 220.

shape and size will emerge on the festival site and report to the lord, 'Drawn by your fame, this suppliant (*iravalan*) of ancient wisdom has come uttering good and delightful words. He deserves your gift.' And, then, He (*Murukan*) whose mighty, divine form touches the sky will appear. He will conceal that awe-inspiring form (*anañku cāl uyarnilai taḷi*), and present himself before you as a youth, (another of) his ancient and divine form. With love he will say these sweet words: 'Do not worry. I know why you are here.' He will then grant you the rare gift (*peṇalarum paricil*) and make you unique in this world, which is surrounded by the dark-coloured sea.<sup>76</sup>

There are no clues in the poem as to what the gift is. The medieval and modern commentators invariably interpret the expression 'rare gift' as meaning the attainment of liberation (*viṭupēru*), even while living in this world.<sup>77</sup> This is understandable because liberation, in the devotional religion, is never gained through self-effort alone; it comes as a gift from god. How, when, why and to whom does god give? Praising *Murukan* in a series of 'telescopic' epithets, *Nakkīraṇ* says:

Among men of wisdom, you stand like a bull, and are much praised. Oh, *Murukan* of great fame and lineage! Oh, you, the exalted one, you grant whatever one yearns for. Oh, the Red one with golden ornaments, you give grace to those who are distressed. Oh, the great *Vēḷ*, you embrace and protect the suppliants (*paricilar*) upon your wide chest that has seen several fierce battles and gained victories. You are a famous hero

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76TMP 281-295. see *supra*, Ch. III, p. 14. ??

77TMP Nacci. comm.

(iyavul), praised by the great ones.<sup>78</sup>

The passage clearly indicates the nature of the relationship between the god and his devotee. The god, the boundless giver, waits for the devotees as much as they long to meet him. The choice of the term **paricilar**, 'suppliants' for the devotees, and **paricil** 'gift' for what god grants is significant. It must be noted, however, that god gives only to those who bother to approach him or somehow succeed, so to say, in crossing his path.

When compared to the concept of **dāna**, one may see here a reversal in the status as well as in the relationship between the donor and the donee. In **paricil**, the donor is always superior. When a great one gives, he (or, she) gives because giving is greatness. This is what the classical Tamil poets take for granted whether the context is religious or 'secular'.

In summing up, then, it might be suggested that the **paricil** mode of gifting as seen in early Tamil culture stands as a strikingly different notion from the **dāna** and **dakṣiṇā** modes of giving. Unilaterality, not exchange, is the characteristic, defining feature of **paricil**. An ideal hero is one who, prompted by compassion, gives unilaterally and spontaneously. The exemplar for this compassionate giving was god himself.

It is well known that one of the cardinal elements in Tamil devotional religion in general, and in its understanding of godship in particular is the notion that god is ever awaiting the call of the devotee, and whatever the devotee eventually gets, he gets it as a gift from god. God is, indeed, the greatest exemplar of compassion (aruḷ) and giving (koṭai). In the context of devotional poetry, the term aruḷ is usually translated as 'grace'. In his gloss on the term aruḷ, the anonymous commentator of the PN defines the term as 'compassion that springs without any reason on seeing someone in misery'; in contrast, anpu ('love') is 'attachment over a desired object'.<sup>79</sup> Compassion and giving are inseparable; one did not exist without the other.<sup>80</sup> The particular understanding of godhead as being an embodiment of grace or compassion in the later devotional religion may thus be seen rooted in the classical vision and understanding of the notion of paricil. It is from this perspective that one should appreciate the striking parallels between the concept of godship and that of kingship in early and medieval Tamil culture. In Tamil culture, the concept of god was not simply modeled on kingship, but both god and king were understood and explained through the concept of talaivan. And, talaivan revealed himself to the world through his act of unilateral giving.

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<sup>79</sup>PN 5. Also see IA., nūṟ. 1, comm.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. PN 27: 17-18.

## **CONCLUSION**

## CONCLUSION

A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.<sup>1</sup>

Both tradition as well as modern scholarship acknowledge that the far south of India--the *drāviḍadeśa*--was the most important nerve centre of *bhakti* religion. The eruption of *bhakti* religion around the mid-part of the first millennium in south India was not only momentous, but, as one recent writer put it, "nowhere in India has *bhakti* been a major force in religious life longer than in Tamilnadu."<sup>2</sup> However, in attempting to trace the generative roots of the *bhakti* religion, historians of religion have long looked toward the 'north' and the Sanskrit sources for ideas. There are, no doubt, both historical and historiographical factors

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<sup>1</sup>Geertz (1973), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Cutler (1987), p. 111.

which explain why they should have done so. But in the process, religious historians have by and large tended to overlook the source material in the Tamil language. Their preliminary lack of interest in early Tamil sources was further deepened by a perception that the earliest extant Tamil material was 'secular' in content and spirit, and that therefore most important religious notions found later in south India must have been introduced from outside after the classical phase.

In recent years there have been some noteworthy attempts, mostly by students of literature rather than religion, to offer a corrective to this understanding. They too, however, generally argue that the 'secular' symbols of the classical phase were set into a religious mold during the early medieval period by the poet-saints of the *bhakti* tradition.

It is mainly in response to the above understanding that we began this dissertation with a critique of the historiography on early south India. We have no dispute with the initial observation that, in content and spirit, the surviving corpus of classical Tamil poetry is strikingly different from the Sanskrit, Prākṛit, or Pāli texts of the corresponding centuries. There can also be no doubt that, in comparison to the early texts in those three languages, classical Tamil texts are intended primarily as a literary creation to be appreciated and enjoyed. What we would



contend is that the 'uniquely realistic' world view that is presented in the classical Tamil poems, and in the grammatical treatise Tol. is, nevertheless, a reflection of the religious culture of the Tamils.

It is on account of this marked proclivity for taking a more realistic view of the world that classical Tamil thought has come to be pronounced as 'secular'. This particular pronouncement on the classical Tamil world view is itself, we would argue, the result of a biased understanding of what constitutes the 'essence' or 'norm' of religious life in India.<sup>3</sup> The 'norm' of religious life in India is often viewed by modern scholars as ultimate withdrawal from power, relationship, or attachment. In short, it centres on renunciation. According to this understanding, a positive attitude toward life-in-the-world and a constant revelling in participation and commitment are the opposite of the 'norm', or even the opposite of, the essence of religion proper. If viewed from this perspective, classical Tamil culture could only be termed as 'non-religious', because in classical Tamil culture, the world is seen as a viable setting for religious life and life-in-the-world is celebrated as a valid means of realizing life's goals.

The tendency to reduce the meaning and substance of

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<sup>3</sup> I must acknowledge the influence of Inden (1986) in the formulation of some of my ideas in this section.

'Hindu' religious life to a single, unitary mode (the mode of the renouncer) and treat other modes (the mode of the 'man-in-the-world') either as opposite to or as deviation from that norm has far-reaching consequences. If the world view as revealed in classical Tamil texts is considered as not reflecting the 'norm', then, the bhakti religion which also has a positive attitude toward life-in-the-world, and is rooted in involvement and communion cannot be regarded as falling within the 'normative' path either. As a matter of fact, such a view of bhakti religion is sometimes expressed by scholars. To them, the bhakti religion may be explained, at best, as an apology, or a compromise in which the ideal of renunciation is modified by internalising it; at worst, as a deviation from the 'norm', or an 'easy road to salvation' meant for the unlettered and helpless masses.<sup>4</sup>

If we could rid ourselves of this long-established tradition of starting the study of Indian religion by looking for the 'norm' or 'essence' of Indian religious thought, we should have no difficulty in recognising how truly variegated are the ways of religious life in India, and how often a positive attitude toward life-in-the-world was as important, viable and valid a religious mode as any other. The importance of classical Tamil material lies in

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<sup>4</sup>According to Louis Dumont, "bhakti takes up in more or less sublimated form an aspect of common religion [i.e. ecstasy or possession] ignored by Brahmanic orthodoxy." (1957), p. 59.

the fact that it not only provides the fundamental suppositions of this world view but also clarifies, in some important ways, the idiom, structure, and the conceptual base for religious life set in this mode, and, indirectly, in the **bhakti** religion which was to follow.

What did a positive attitude toward of life-in-the-world mean in religious terms? I have sought to answer this question in this thesis by describing and analyzing some of the ways in which the ideal of life-in-the-world found expression in classical Tamil poetry. Taking the avowedly religious poems in the corpus as cues, I identified and isolated three specific but interrelated themes which, in my view, were (and largely still are) integral to Tamil thought and culture. Although the discussion on the three themes, namely space and place, hero, and the gift, are spread out in three different chapters, they reflect an unified vision, a coherent structure of what the early Tamils perceived to be the meaning of human life in this world.

In recapitulating the major points of our conclusion, we might reverse the order of our discussion in the body of the thesis and begin with the notion of gift. We argued that the most remarkable feature of the Tamil notion of **īkai** or **paricil** was its emphasis on unilateral or non-reciprocal giving. Spontaneous giving is not only the noblest of acts, but it is also the defining feature of a super being. In short, it is an act touched with divinity.

In the Tamil view, only a giver is a superior being, or, to be more accurate, (s)he who is superior is a spontaneous giver, like a natural spring. In fact, spontaneous liberality was the only mode by which one could identify a superior being or person. Although the giving was spontaneous, the notion of *īkai* or *paricil* implied that there were two beings involved in the act, the giver and the receiver. By reaching out to one another, both fully participated in the act, thus making it a truly religious event.

This participation required a specific conceptual mode by which the one could articulate the encounter and the experience with a superior being in the receiving of a gift. This the early Tamils accomplished by developing the concept of *talaivan* or hero. The *talaivan* was a concept within which the Tamils could envision the linking up or inter-penetration of the superior and the inferior, the strong and the weak, the giver and receiver, and the divine and the human. In the existing corpus most of the heroes eulogised are human. As Kailasapathy observed, being participants and observers of an age that witnessed the emergence of brilliant and fascinating heroic personalities, the bards and poets "who sang of gods now began to sing of all that was so present and moving in the affairs of men".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Kailasapathy (1968), p. 74.

Nevertheless, the mode of praising the hero and the grammatical conventions relating to the praise of a hero unmistakably suggest that god was the model for a supreme hero. As the poets were very liberal in showering encomiums on human heroes, they elevated them to the level of god.<sup>6</sup>

What is significant in all this is that whether the giver is divine or human, the act of giving as well as the enjoyment of the fruit of the gift both take place here and now in this world. This brings us to the notion of space and place in early Tamil culture. Space, or place was crucial in Tamil understanding because there is no experience or encounter without a site, a place, or a landscape. Landscape and place enable man to have the experience with the 'other'; they are witnesses to that experience and thereby participate in it.

The early Tamils, therefore, not only accorded a prime place to physical world in all their scheme of classification and celebrated life-in-the-world but also scorned at 'heavenly' life as static, dull and devoid of meaning. To them, life in heaven was meaningless because

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<sup>6</sup>Elated by such exalted modes of praise, the ruler-heroes in the post-classical phase sought to institutionalize this mode of praise and tried to identify themselves with the divinity enshrined in the temple. It is then we see devotional poets registering a voice of protest against praising a king instead of praising a god. It is noteworthy that although *ālvār* and *nāyanmār* saints visited numerous shrines in different parts of the Tamil region and beyond, they rarely glorified in their poems those temples which were erected or excavated by a ruling monarch and named after him.

there are neither givers nor receivers there, and therefore there is no scope for participation either. This thought finds a clear expression in a short poem by the poet Āvūr Mūlañkilār. When the Cōla king Kuḷamurṟattu-t-tuñciya Killivalavan asked the poet, "Did you come thinking of me? What is your country?", the poet replied:

Oh, victorious king! you ride on a young elephant that resembles a mountain. Your great army marches by waving flags of many colours that seem to sweep the sky. Fire spreads where you glance angrily and gold blossoms where you look with favour (*nayam*). Your power is so great that you achieve all that you wish for. You can make the sun shed moonlight and the moon emit sunrays. I was born and raised under your shadow. What is there to say about me? Nothing. They who live in heaven filled with groves of golden flowers live there reaping the benefits of the good deeds they have done in the past. Even their life is devoid of content because in heaven there are no rich to give nor poor to ask. But all the pleasures of heaven are found in your land. Therefore, even in the land of your of enemies, suppliants think only of your land because you live in it.<sup>7</sup>

The poet stresses two points. The worldly life is superior because there is in it scope for giving and receiving or participation. But more important is the fact that the giver, the *talaivan*, is accessible in a place in this world.

Translated into the universal religious language, the Tamils notions of gift, hero, and space could be seen to

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<sup>7</sup>PN 38. For references in which the monotonous life in heaven is denounced, see *Kuraḷ*, 213, 1058. *Parimēlalakar* comm.

deal respectively with the problem of epistemology, ontology, and cosmology. Expressed more in terms of the drama of life, the three might be rendered as 'action', 'character', and 'stage'. Perhaps, borrowing from the language of early Tamil poeticians themselves, we may say that in classical Tamil perception, spontaneous giving was the **uripporuḷ** ('conduct'), the hero was the **karupporuḷ** ('substance', 'inborn'), and space was the **mutarporuḷ** ('foundation', 'stratum'). The three together constituted the meaning of life, establishing "powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations' among Tamils.

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