COUNT-DOWN FROM SOLOMON

OR

THE TAMILS DOWN THE AGES THROUGH THEIR LITERATURE

Volume - I



HEPHZIBAH JESUDASAN

INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES
Chennai-600 119, INDIA

"God has made of one blood all nations of the earth"

Acts. 17:26 (A.V)

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CAṄKAM AND THE AFTERMATH

by

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COUNT - DOWN FROM SOLOMON (or) THE TAMILS DOWN THE AGES THROUGH THEIR LITERATURE VOL. I

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DEDICATED

to

the cherished memory of

Miss. OLIVE MORTON

(formerly Principal, Duthie English Girls' School, Nagercoil)

&

Mr. C. PANNIRUKAI PERUMAL

(formerly Head of the Department of Tamil,
University College, Trivandrum)

Without whose personal interest this book could not have been thought of.

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Transliteration Table

VOWELS

Short		Long	
அ	a	ஆ	ā
இ	i	ஈ	ī
உ	u	ஊ	ū
எ	e	ஏ	ē
ஒ	o	ஓ	ō

ஐ	ai
ஔ	au

CONSONANTS

Hard		Soft		Medial			
க்	k	ங்	ṅ	ய்	y	ஷ்	ṣ
ச்	c	ஞ்	ñ	ர்	r	ஸ்	s
ட்	ṭ	ண்	ṇ	ல்	l	ஜ்	j
த்	t	ந்	n	வ்	v	ஹ்	h
ப்	p	ம்	m	ழ்	ḻ	க்ஷ்	kṣ
ற்	ṟ	ன்	ṉ	ள்	ḷ		

ĀYTAM

ஃ ḵ

Editorial Note

This work is the first of a series of four volumes under the title **Count-Down From Solomon or The Tamils Down the Ages Through Their Literature** in which Dr. Hephzibah Jesudasan gives a fascinating account of the life and achievements of the Tamils based on their literature. This first volume covers the period of the *Caṅkam* and *post -Caṅkam* literature.

Dr. Hephzibah Jesudasan paints a panoramic picture of the ancient glory of the Tamils, their distinct cultural contributions and civilizational high watermark attained by them at a time when most of the people of the world were in a very early stage of social development. Ships from Tamilnadu sailed to distant lands during the reign of the great king Solomon and returned laden with gold, silver and other precious cargoes. In the absence of a reliable chronology, Dr. Hephzibah Jesudasn starts the History of Tamil Literature from the days of the great and wise king Solomon.

Dr. Hephzibah Jesudasan is a great scholar and a well-known novelist. She has to her credit four novels in Tamil, *Puttam vīṭu, Ṭākṭar cellappā, Anātai* and *Māṇi*. The *History of Tamil Literature* which she has co-authored with her husband Prof. C. Jesudasan is an internationally acclaimed standard work of reference in English.

I deem it a great privilege to have edited this work which presents to the non-Tamil reader the specific ethos of the Tamils and their culture in a language remarkable for lucidity inducing their interest in further reading.

The devoted efforts of the staff of the Computer Department of our Institute was very helpful to me for the preparation of this volume. Mr. K. Selladurai and Mr. R.Ruskin Lavy deserve special mention for their excellent computer work and active co-operation. I am thankful to Mr. K. Chidambaram for assistance in proof reading work. Dr. A. James deserves special thanks for preparing the Index to this volume and Mr. A.S. Natarajan for having designed the cover. Credit goes to Students' Offset Services, Chennai-600 017 for the neat-execution of printing in record time.

P. Thiagarajan

INTRODUCTION

Count-Down from Solomon or, The Tamils down the ages from their Literature, by Hephzibah Jesudasan, takes the reader, as the title explicitly states, through Tamil Literature and Tamil Life right from the beginnings to our own times. It attempts to reconstruct from literature an ancient Folk and ancient culture, whose beginnings are lost in the hoary past, whose vigour and vitality have taken them in the course of history beyond the bounds of Tamilaham to distant lands and continents, and who to-day remain a living force to be reckoned with in the comity of the peoples of India and of the world. All the pride of the Tamil people in their rich heritage, all their passion for the preservation of their culture as one of equals among equals can be felt in the pages of this book.

The present volume which is the first of a series of four volumes, deals with the pre-historic times when Solomon sent his ships to South India and the startling resemblances between words dating back to the times of Abraham or Christ are mentioned briefly before the *Caṅkam* Age itself is taken up. More than 2000 poems by 450 poets (included in the two volumes edited by Prof. S. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai) represent the *Caṅkam* Age (prior to 300 A.D.). But they are only remnants of an infinitely rich stock, a great part of which has been lost. One can deduce from them the dynastic line of more than four generations of Tamil princes (Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇṭiya). They tell a realistic story of a warlike people who divided their time between love and war, of the sufferings long sieges inflict, and of the anxious waiting of the lonely wife for the return of the warrior. They record the flora and fauna in the background, depict the simple pleasures of life, of the joy little children give, without whom "life has no meaning". They reflect Jain and Buddhist influences and the beginnings of the infiltration of Brahminism. The technical perfection, the uniformity of tone, systematic division into *Akam* and *Puṟam*, and the subdivision of *Akam* into five *Tiṇais* according to a specific background and a specific pattern of behaviour etc. bespeak a highly developed, sophisticated school of poetry with its own strict code of rules regarding form, diction and imagery.

The bards are drawn from all classes. Many of them are sycophants praising their princely patrons in most extravagant terms. But there are exceptions like Kōvūr Kiḻār who tells the Cōḷa king that he is "neither generous nor valorous" in closing the great gate of the fortress, whereby "infants cry for milk and cries for water are heard in the houses". Kings and queens also turn versifiers. In

this heroic age even women turn votaries of valour. We read of a mother who rushes to the battlefield sword in hand, and discovering her dead son "in pieces", rejoices "more than on the day he was born", We read of strange customs like (fasting unto death) "facing North", or killing of children of monstrous birth. Great lines that have become popular quotes are not rare. "Every city is my city, all people are my people!" This is a line by an obscure poet. It is this uniformly high standard that characterises even little poems by obscure poets that fill us with wonder over the greatness of *Caṅkam* poetry. Short pieces intensely lyrical in feeling and expression are a special glory of the *Caṅkam* period.

The longer pieces like *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Idylls) bring many interesting facts about *Caṅkam* times to light. The best of them, *Neṭunalvāṭai*, about a Pāṇṭiya king away with his army in the battlefield and his queen pining away in loneliness at home, illustrates qualities typical of such poems- classical restraint in feeling and expression, realism of details, generalisation of some experience into a universal aspect of life etc. *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, depiciting the course of the river Kāviri, describes fields of paddy and sugar-cane, a sugar-cane factory, boats laden with merchandise like pepper, gold, pearls, corals and sandalwood, places of worship of Brahmins, Buddhists, Jains and Dravidians. We hear of flags "of many shapes" that flutter from flag-staffs of ships. The refreshingly light-veined *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* has for its theme love before marriage, a favourite theme with the *Caṅkam* poets.

Of the *Āṟṟuppaṭais*, (a minstrel's description to another of the way to his patron) "Mountain Sounds" is of special interest because of the description of ancient musical instruments like the *yāḻ*. Music, we read, is played "according to the instructions of musical treatises. *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, the shortest of the *Āṟṟuppaṭais* gives a touching description of the poverty of the minstrel. We also hear about the hospitality these wandering minstrels will receive on the way. The fisher-folk will give them dried fish and sweet toddy. The farmer's daughter will give them "white rice and crabs and beans". At Āmūr they will get roast venison and rice. Only the Brahmins seem to be wanting in hospitality. In *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* we hear once again of popular dishes and details of Brahmin cooking. *Poruṇarāṟṟuppaṭai* is or the Guide book of the dramatic troupe" testifies in its title to the existence of Tamil Drama. There is also a clear reference to animal sacrifice. *Maturaikkāñci*, running to nearly 800 lines, is the lengthiest of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces, and reflects the influence of Brahminism. The description of Maturai conjures up a busy city with streets cluttered up with horses, elephants and chariots. Craftsmen of all kinds are there. Merchants sell cloth "as fine as smoke", silk shawls etc.

And the things brought down to the city are spread out, " like the great Ganges river spreading out before it meets the sea".

Patiṟṟuppattu or Ten Tens are written mostly by Brahmins. But the caste system has not yet taken root as is clear from the words of King Neṭuñceliyaṉ who says that "of the four groups, if one from the lowest is educated, he can be ranked with the highest". The high rank given to Kākkai, a mere *Pāṭiṇi* of pre-Dravidian stock, is even stronger evidence. She was court poet of the Cēra king. *Viṟalis* or women dancers and Pāṇars and *Pāṭiṇis* or wandering minstrels were highly valued and given rich gifts like elephants and horses.

The *Akam* poems consisting of *Akanāṉūṟu* and *Kuṟuntokai*, each a collection of four hundred poems are again striking in their variety and dramatic power. Some of them are very short with just five lines and are spoken by the hero or the heroine or their attendants. *Akam* means "private life" or "love" and the poems deal with love before marriage (*Kaḷavu*) and love after (*Kaṟpu*). The subdivision of *Akam* into five types associated with specific terrains is an original feature of *Caṅkam* poetry. Thus Paraṇar's poem, *Akanāṉūṟu* 122, dealing with *Kaḷavu,* has its setting in *Kuriñci* or mountain territory and gives a humorous depiction of the obstacles to a girls's clandestine love. In *Akanāṉūṟu* 129, *Pālai* or dry land is the setting for the theme of separation, and three vivid pictures of that arid region are given. In *Marutam* with fertile fields as background, we are in the world of prostitutes. *Akam* poems thus give a lot of general information. The descriptions give astoundingly realistic details. A *Neital* (coastal plains) poem is an extremely beautiful picture of the beach. " The stretch of sky and sea" merge, for there is a drizzle. And that is the time when the fish come up to the surface, looking shining white. The "crooked", aged *Puṉṉai* tree puts forth its soft buds, white as those fish. But on its dark branches nest the birds, chirping softly.

The *Kuṟuntokai* is an anthology of short poems mostly of six lines. They are all about Love. In one the hero tells the jessamine that has put forth its buds: "You are smiling with your small white buds. Does it become you to seem to smile at lonely people?" In another a love-lorn girl asks her maid: "No sorrow- filled nights? No loneliness? In the land where my lord has gone?" In still another the maid tells the lover that she could not arrange a tryst because of the girl's mother. "This mother, without a sense of right and wrong, was clasping her daughter like a peacock ensnared in a net. I could not do anything about it". The *Kuṟuntokai* poems have all the verve and vigour of folk poetry.

The unflinching realism of *Caṅkam* poetry is borne out by a short poem from *Naṟṟiṇai*, another collection of 400 *Akam* poems. A girl -child of a prostitute who is to be trained in her trade is all dressed up and sent to the swing where a man waits. She runs up in innocent joy to the swing, but returns crying, everything changed for her. Nothing is said openly, everything is suggested. In another poem from the same collection, a mother's sorrow over her eloped daughter vents itself in this pretty detail. "And the parrot that she tended, cries to me Mother! (As she did). Less pleasant are the poems that tell of the husband who, to rid himself of the prostitute and to return home, sends a Pāṇaṉ as go-between to the wronged wife, or takes home to his wife his "bejewelled women".

One can go on fetching pearls from the *Caṅkam* Ocean, whichever collection one turns to, even from *Aiṅkuṟuṉūṟu* (The Five Brief Hundreds) which show *Caṅkam* poetry at its weakest.

The very short poems (down to three lines) of this collection use conventional imagery and sound artificial. But the following image is the condensation of a whole world of meaning. "Where the Pāṇaṉ catches the swollen-bellied fish with his bait"- The heroine implies that just as the Pāṇaṉ caught the fish with his bait the hero has seduced her. "Swollen-bellied" suggests that she is with child. The variety and individuality of these poems need special mention. If in one poem the hero seems a philanderer, in another he is the devoted lover.

"Thinking of her of the bright forehead

It's become cool, the road across the desert".

In still another a father's love is appealed to. The maid asks the departing hero if the money he will earn will be sweeter than the smiles of his first-born. A wife's revulsion before her unfaithful husband is expressed by her maid in strong terms:

"Your harlot-ridden bosom, embraced by many, like the cold lake-water where the girls with flowers in their five braids have their dip." Or the cosy family feeling in this picture: "While the bright-browed lady feeds her son at her breast, her husband caresses her neck". Or the sheer joy of home-coming: "And thinking of you, my bright-browed lady, faster than the monsoon I come." Mountain girls playing a game of balls is the theme of another poem.

The sheer human interest, the variety within the sameness of topic, the directness of expression, the delight in elemental experiences etc. make *Caṅkam* poetry very pleasant, wholesome reading.

Special sections are devoted to the great names in *Caṅkam* poetry. The chief of them is Avvai, the fiercely proud woman with the sharp tongue, berating kings and chieftains when she feels herself slighted ("Whichever way I turn, there is my rice"), aware of the difficulties of "this kind of life, dependent on patronage", daring to dissent from poetic conventions as when she questions the division into *Tiṇais* ("Wherever good men dwell--There is the good kind of land") and fittingly honoured in her own day by being allotted the historic role of commemorating one of the proudest moments of Tamil kings (Cōḷa, Cēra, Pāṇṭiya), becoming united in a rare moment of harmony. The next is Kapilar, proud of his poetry and his Brahmin birth, and so loyal to his patron Pāri that after the patron's death he provided for the patron's daughters, and began to fast "facing the North" to rejoin his dead friend and patron. The third is Paraṇar, whose poems are full of information about the times and in praise of the Cōḷa and Cēra kings. He has written a strange poem about one Naṉṉaṉ, abhorred for "woman-slaughter", another in which he depicts a piece of surgery in which "the long white needle" goes in and out of warriors' bosoms , like the kingfisher's beak that takes out fish from the cold lake.

In fact the vignettes from everyday life enshrined in the *Caṅkam* poetry conjure up a full - blooded folk living a healthy pagan life, whose priorities are love and war, who also love music and dance, flowers and liquor, whose kings patronise art, a community that is still free from the stranglehold of the caste system, and cherishes valour and generosity as the highest virtues, a community that gave birth to these unforgettable lines:

> To plead "Give" is disgraceful.
> To face that and say, "I won't give", is still more disgraceful.
> To give, saying,"Take it" is noble.
> To face that and say, " I won't", is nobler.
>
> (*Puṟam*-204)

As for poetic greatness, the unfolding of which is avowedly not the main concern of the authoress, *Caṅkam* literature is, without doubt, one of the peaks of World Literature. Reading it, or even reading about it, one feels like Keats' watcher of the skies "When a new planet swims into his ken". And the wonder of it is that such perfection was achieved as early as the second century of the Christian era, giving grounds to believe that earlier *Caṅkams* existed before Christian era and that the *Caṅkam* under review was the third one, the climax of a slow development of the language and the poetic art through the centuries.

A comparison with the literary beginnings of to-day's great literatures would be interesting. English is said to begin with the epic "*Beowulf*" of the eighth century, but worthwhile literature begins only with Chaucer in the fourteenth century. German literature also begins in the eighth century with the fragment "Hildebrand's Song", but once again literature proper begins in the twelfth century with the epics and the "Nibelungen Song". For Russian, we have even meagre beginnings only in the twelfth century. It is only in the eighteenth century that Russian literature makes its mark. In point of antiquity Tamil can therefore be ranked to Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian and Hebrew literatures.

The most important work, Thirukkuṛaḷ written in the fourth century A.D by Tiruvaḷḷuvar belongs to the post-Caṅkam era. *Tirukkuṛaḷ* known as the Tamil "Veda" is one of the Tamils' two great classics, the other being *Kamparāmāyaṇam*. Its author is the only one of the ancient poets to be called "Tiru" or "holy". Probably he was a Jain by religion, although there is no predominance of any religion in the work, which is written for Universal Man. He was a scholar familiar with Manu and Sanskrit works like *Arthāsāstra*, *Kāmasūtra* etc. *Tirukkuṛaḷ* has inspired more translation and commentaries than any other Tamil work.

Tirukkuṛaḷ falls into three broad sections: *Aṛam* or Righteousness, divided into *Illaṛam* (home-life) and *Tuṛavaṛam* (ascetic life), *Poruḷ* dealing with kingship and matters connected with it, and *Iṉpam* or Love. *Aṛam*, *Poruḷ* and *Iṉpam* correspond more or less loosely to the Sanskrit *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*. There is, naturally, overlapping of themes in the three sections. In all the three, terse compact couplets which combine perfection of diction and loftiness of thought, lay down rules to guide human behaviour. It is exactly this combination of restrained dignified rhythmical expression and sublimity of thought that has ensured *Tirukkuṛaḷ* a permanent place among the ethical writings of the world. The couplets "lend themselves so easily to memorisation and quotation, that the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* has endeared itself to the Tamil heart".

It is significant that the world after death is left out by Tiruvaḷḷuvar. But the general introduction to the work begins with an invocation devoted to God, lines that stem from Jain theology as the author proves in her interpretation. However every religion can subscribe to the first two lines:

> Just as the letter Ā is the beginning of all letters,
>
> God is the beginning of the Universe.

The lines on God are followed by a glorification of the rain as the source of productivity. The third part extols the role of the ascetic and the fourth dwells on the need for *Aṟam* or Righteousness. The introduction naturally leads to the sections on *Illaṟam* and *Tuṟavaṟam* (Home- life and Ascetic life). There is high praise for domesticity.

"If it has Love and *Aṟam*, then Home-life
Has character and is its own reward."

"The glory of home is the character of the woman.
The ornament thereof is the bringing forth of children."

Tiruvaḷḷuvar's ideal woman worships her husband and does not put anybody, even God, above him. The joy of bringing up children finds beautiful expression.

"The touch of children is a joy to the body."

"The flute is sweet, the harp is sweet,
Say those who never heard the pretty prattle of their little ones."

Equally inspired are the lines on love in Home- life.

"The loveless ones keep all to themselves: as for the loving ones,
Their very bones belong to others."

There are exhortations on the importance of Hospitality, the necessity for speaking sweet words, Gratitude, Impartiality, Self-control and good conduct. There is a special chapter on "Not desiring another man's wife". The last part of this section deals with the need for "Sweet Reputation."

The next section is on ascetic life. The authoress comes down heavily on the commentators who, following the Sanskrit concept of four stages in a human life, equate ascetic life with the third stage "Vānaprastha," whereas for Tiruvaḷḷuvar the ascetic and the house-holder are two totally different persons.

Dealing with *Tapas* or asceticism, Tiruvaḷḷuvar speaks about the hypocrites among ascetics who "with minds stained, appear glorious and wash themselves". The charge is repeated in the lines on Truthfulness. "Outer cleanliness comes through

washing; inner, through truthfulness." The authoress is of the opinion that these passing shots are aimed at Brahmins who make a fetish of washing.

There are splendid couplets on Anger:

"Anger is evil when directed where it will not work.

And where it will work (among the weak), nothing is more evil."

Or on Not hurting others, where the lines echo Christian teaching: 'Don't return injury for injury."

"The way to hurt those who have hurt you is to shame them by doing good to them."

Or on Crime and Punishment: "If, in the forenoon you hurt someone, in the afternoon the hurt will seek you out on its own."

Or on Self-denial: "He who destroys the pride of Me and Mine will attain that world that even the Gods cannot reach."

The "*Porul*" begins with couplets on Kingship. Valluvar sums up the virtues of the ideal king so:

"Bounteousness, pity, the just sceptre and cherishing

Of the people-these four are the light to kings."

On Education, occur the lines:

"The learned have eyes: the unlearned

Have two blisters on their face."

The poet-counsellor can be stern when necessary:

"Putting to death the criminal is like pulling

out the weeds from the grain."

In the third section on Love or Kāma, there is a whole chapter on "Women without discipline or limits," bringing out all his sternness.

"The false embrace of the bought woman is like embracing a corpse in a dark room."

"The undisciplined bejewelled woman,

Her soft shoulders will push them into Hell."

But, when it comes to true love, whether *Kaḷavu* or *Kaṟpu*, he strikes a totally different note:

"She looked: her look, as against mine, is as though

A goddess brought an army to strike."

"Slumber on the soft shoulders one loves-

Can it be sweeter-

The world of him of the lotus-eyes?" (Heaven)

Humour too is within his reach as in the following lines:

"If farmers quiet sit and go not to their land,

It will sulk and take the huff like a sulking wife."

Add to all this the word- melody which is lost in translation and we will have some idea of the greatness of this "Bard of Universal Man."

Cilappatikāram , written in the fifth century by Iḷanko, a Cēra prince who had abdicated his claims to the throne and to the bliss of family life, is the first Tamil epic extant. The story, of the destruction of a great city (Maturai), is a theme of epic grandeur. The working in of a message, the building up of the whole story on an ethical basis, adds a moral dimension to *Cilappatikāram*. Perhaps this is also a weakness, for the cult of the chaste woman, which is the central theme of the epic, is carried on beyond the destruction of the city in ten more cantos to the deification of the chaste woman, creating a sort of anti-climax and giving a dragging effect.

The authoress has given a very detailed interpretation. As a story that comprises all the three Tamil countries, it has a special value. Kaṇṇaki, the heroine, is born in Cōḷanāṭu and lives there, finds her tragedy in the execution of her husband in Pāṇṭiya country and is deified in Cēraland, Being a prince of one of the ruling royal families, the cause of Tamil unity and Tamil greatness lies close to Iḷaṅkō's heart. Tamil degeneration therefore saddens him. And he strikes into the very heart of the problem when he makes Wealth, Art and Loose Morals, the root causes of the degeneration.

The young and handsome Kōvalaṉ, born in a rich merchant family, loves dance and music, can play the *Yāḻ* like an expert, is generous and sensitive. No wonder he falls a victim to the charms of Mātavi who knows eleven kinds of dances, can play *Yāḻ* very well, is beautiful, and , born into the prostitute profession, has been trained to captivate men. She begins like a regular prostitute by offering herself to the highest bidder. It is her tragedy that she falls in love with the first man she takes. She is faithful to him till the end, bears his child, pursues him into the Pāṇṭiya country with messages, after his death gives up her profession and turns to an ascetic life, and even brings up her daughter to be a Buddhist nun. Thus there is no black-and-white characterisation. Kaṇṇaki also is convincing even though she is idealised into a goddess. Iḷaṅkō sees in her likes the redemption of Tamil homes and Tamil society. Kaṇṇaki remains the timid, bashful wife till the end, incorruptible in thought, word and deed in her worship of her husband. Her fury is awakened when she sees her husband 's mangled body lying uncared for. But it is no fury that exclaims, "I cannot understand anything" as the king, shocked and remorseful at the miscarriage of justice, falls dead. And as the queen, in the true spirit of a *sathi*, worships her husband's twin feet and falls dead, Kaṇṇaki is shocked at herself. But this does not prevent her from punishing the city.

Round this perhaps commonplace story of playboy husband, faithful wife and artistic mistress, Iḷaṅkō has woven not only high morals, but also built up the life of a whole people. Courtesans and courtiers, craftsmen, cowherds and fishermen are all there. We have Jains, Brahmins, Buddhists and according to the authoress, even a whiff of Christian ethics. Iḷaṅkō, himself a Jain ascetic, glorifies the Jain nun accompanying Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki to Maturai, and presents Brahmins in slightly ridiculous roles. Undoubtedly Brahmanism was on the rise, but had strong rivals in Buddhism and Jainism.

Iḷaṅkō's own personality shines through in the reflection on the duties of the king, of the citizen etc. There is even an autobiographical passage in which he narrates how he became a Jain ascetic.

We come across deeply lyrical passages as in the songs of Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi or the laments of Kaṇṇaki's mother, mother-in-law and friend. Kaṇṇaki's entry into the Pāṇṭiya king's court and her encounter with the king are full of high drama. There are also prose passages, the earliest prose writing in Tamil.

In characterisation, story and background, in the working out of a central idea giving the epic an ethical backbone as it were, the epic is a great achievement. The minus points are the long sermonising passages, the

monotonous descriptions, and the free mixing of the fantastic and the supernatural with the natural as in the appearance of supernatural beings or in the episode of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki being carried to heaven in a heavenly chariot. It may be conceded that *Cilappatikāram* is an unequal work.

The Bakthi movement and the period of the minor epics are included in the next volume of the series which deals with the seventh to twelfth, centuries A.D. The Bhakti movement had a tremendous effect on the people, who, worked up to a frenzy of devotion, sped from temple to temple, singing, dancing and clapping hands. But what swept them off their feet was the music. A flood of Caivite and Vaishnavite hymns appeared. These two sects had established themselves in the Tamil countries winning over even kings as converts and fighting Jainism tooth and nail. Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi mentions that thousands of Jains were sent to the gallows by Caivites.

The devotees of Civa or the Caivites found their spokesmen in the Nāyanārs. The hymns they wrote were compiled by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi into the *Tēvāram* . Other devotional songs were added to it. Last came another addition- the *Periyapurāṇam.* Compiled into twelve volumes, they formed the sacred scripture of the Tamil Caivites. The devotees of Krishṇa or Vishṇu were called Vaishṇavites. Their hymnodists were the Āḻvārs and the hymns they composed were compiled into the *Tivviyaprapantam.*

The Jain element was not completely wiped out and speaks through a collection of four hundred verses called *Nālaṭiyār* (four- lined verses). Grouped under the headings *Āṟam, Poruḷ and Kāmam,* they give terse ethical aphorisms which have become as popular as proverbs.

Of the Caivites the most important were the three included in the *Tēvāram*— Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar. The combination of simple, deep feeling and music make the poems good singing material. Campantar, who converted the Pāṇṭiya king to Caivism and died young, engaged in stormy disputes with the Jains and played a role in their suppression. He is more of a musician than a poet. His deft handling of rhyme and rhythm, assonance and alliteration contributes to the musical value of his poems. Some of these pieces are tirades on the Jains and the Buddhists. But sensitive expression of deep personal experiences is also within his reach as we find in the following lines on Death:

"In the hour when our senses grow confused, the way grows dim,
Our wisdom fails, and mucus chokes our struggling breath . . ."

Suntarar, named Insolent Devotee or the Lord's Comrade, writes poems ordering the deity around. One of the poems tells the god: "I have managed to get some paddy; there is none to carry it home; therefore command that it be taken home." He had two wives and he drags Civa into his matrimonial problems. He lost his sight and scolded Civa for it. "I did no wrong. You made me blind! Why, Lord, did you take away my sight? The blame is yours alone!" He has however written poems of deep piety also.

Turning to the Vaishnavites, the foremost among them is Periyāḻvār. Krishna's childhood and boyhood form the theme of many of his poems.

"Come, see the flower-like feet the silly babe
Takes to his mouth and munches."

So run two lines of this tender worship of the child-God. The ardour of his devotion suffuses many poems.

"My Lord! I have found thee! Now,
Shall I let thee go?"

"I have filled my soul with thee as though I churned the sea to nectar and filled with it a bowl." Periyāḻvār's adopted daughter Āṇṭāḷ has written some of the most lyrical poems of the Krishna-cult.

Kulacēkara Āḻvār, the king who turned versifier in his devotion, strikes an intensely personal note of longing for the deity. Nammālvār, called the greatest of Āḻvārs by Vaishnavites, is said to give the essence of the four Vedas in his works. But his tone is more philosophical than poetic.

Bhakti poetry falls far short of *Caṅkam* literature. Moreover it had a decisively bad effect in the strengthening of the domination of Sanskrit and Brahminism. The influx of Sanskrit words resulted in the short- lived literary language called Maṇipravāḷa, a hybrid mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil. Temples multiplied and the Brahmins had the real say in every matter.

The vigour of literary life is reflected in the great number of epics that came out - Jain, Buddhist, Vaishnavite, Caivite and historical epics. Most of them are lost and the Tamils to-day speak of "Five great epics" starting with *Cilappatikāram*. The other four are "*Cīvakacintāmaṇi*" a Jain work, *Maṇimēkalai*, a Buddhist epic, *Vaḷaiyāpāti* and *Kuṇṭalakēci*. The last two are lost. *Cilappatikāram* is perhaps the only great work among these epics.

Periyapurāṇam written by Cēkkiḻār, is a major work of the times and tells the story of sixty- three Caivite Nāyaṇmārs. It is a simple plain narrative, unfolding their spiritual experiences.

The next great work is *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the greatest literary creation in the Tamil language. Kampaṉ who probably lived towards the close of the twelfth century is the " Kaviccakkaravarty" of Tamil. The authoress reels off superlatives in her glorification of Kampaṉ and makes a detailed analysis of the epic bringing out its anti-Brahminism in spite of the apparent Brahminism, the contradictions in it, the personality of Kampaṉ who with tactful diplomacy tries to please everyone, so on and so forth.

Kamparāmāyaṇam is based on Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and his comparison of himself with Vālmīki is full of self- abasement. But it is no copy, a fact made clear by the authoress. In the general plan and in details, in the depiction of the characters and in its very spirit, there is vast difference. A comparison of the plan of Kampaṉ's first book itself with that of Vālmīki brings out the difference.

The coronation of Rāma after his return from exile shows the liberties he has taken with the old story to fashion it according to his own liking. The organisation of the details also tells the same story. Kampaṉ drops the story of the origin of the four castes from Manu, the wife of Kāsyapa. He drops Cītā's long sermon to Rāma about "the lawless love of other's wife". In Vālmīki Cūrppaṇakai is shunted between Rāma and Lakshmaṇa but not in Kampaṉ. Kampaṉ would not disgrace his heroes with such unkind behaviour. On the whole, while Vālmīki lays emphasis on the Vedic outlook, Kampaṉ stresses the purely human. He handles the background also in his own way. Ayōdhya is changed into Cōḻanāṭu through the introduction of Vaḷḷuvas, Pāṇas and Kuṟavas in addition to a great number of elephants. Above all he turns Vālmīki's villains into grand tragic heroes. The splendour of Rāvaṇa's first appearance, with the Devas bowing to him and the celestial nymphs dancing before him, we do not have in Vālmīki. The strange tenderness that he feels for Lakshmaṇa as he admires Lakshmaṇa's archery, the father's grief that he suffers as he seeks his son's dead body in the battle- field etc. invest him with tragic greatness. In short it is not Vālmīki's story, but Kampaṉ's handling of it that makes the work great.

Ayōdhya is for Kampaṉ the perfect city and Rāma and Cīta the perfect man and woman. For Cīta he seems to have a special understanding and

tenderness. Bharata and Lakshmaṇa are also individualised and ennobled. In fact they are all great characters.

And Kampaṉ breathes poetry into the narrative. His flood of words is always poetic and when need arises, dramatic. One remembers that the work is called "Kampa Nāṭakam" also. The scene between Kaikēyi and Tacaratan as she demands the two boons, or of Rāma telling Kaucalyā his mother, of his going to the forest, Lakshmaṇa's outburst at the news, the Vibhīshaṇa-Kumpakarṇa scene etc. are small dramas in themselves. His descriptions of the forest into which Ramā, Cīta and Lakshmaṇa enter are from a pen very sensitive to the beauty of nature. Above all, he is the supreme word- artist. He does use Sanskrit words, but sparingly and always with the sure instinct of the word-artist. Kampaṉ's rhythm always changes to suit the situation. The lines race describing the battle scenes, flow smoothly, dreamily in the description of the river Gōdāvari, or go trekking with Rāma, Cītā and Lakshmaṇa as they begin their wanderings in the forest.

In short, in the deep human interest he has infused into every important situation, in the creation of great characters, in the splendour and pliancy in his use of metre and language, he is without parallel in Tamil. We have to seek his equals among the gaints of world literature.

After Kampaṉ no great poet makes his appearance, even though events of tremendous historical importance take place. The long stretch of time from 1200 to 1650 witnesses the break-up of the Tamil kingdoms-the Muslim conquest of South India, the emergence of the Vijayanagar Empire and, from the sixteenth century onwards the appearance of the European powers. We have only the Cittars and the Hunger- poets to carry on the literary tradition. The Cittar's , a remarkable group of free thinkers, who broke away from the Sanskrit tradition and lashed out at casteism, wrote robust poetry in plain language.

"The dead are not born, never, never, never!," one of them, Civa-Vākkiyar, asserts. Another, Paṭṭiṉāttār, a fierce misogynist and cynic, snarls:

> "Having lied your tongues out and earned wealth
> You unite with women who know no good,
> And bring forth children, rapidly, readily,
>
> Like the poor white ants that come out from the cleft earth."

The Cittar tradition is continued by Tāyumāṉavar in the eighteenth century.

Hunger-poetry is written by poets living in absolute poverty. "Did He teach me to cook the stone or the mud and eat it?" asks one poet. In the poem "Stork", another poet asks the bird to tell his wife that

"Without a garment and shivering from the cold,
Covering my body with my hands,
Embracing my bosom with my legs,
And sighing like a snake within a case,
Me, you have seen here."

Satire and humour we have in the works of Kāḷamēkam who lived in the middle of the fifteenth century.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Christian missionaries come, popularise the printing press, translate Tamil works, write prose tracts in Tamil and even original works like Fr. Beschi's *Paramārttakuru*, a prose narrative about a hermit and his disciples that sets everyone roaring with laughter, and *Tēmpāvaṇi*, an epic narrative about the life of St. Joseph. Later, by starting schools and switching over to the English language and the English system of education, the missionaries revolutionised the life and thought of the people.

But Tamil was relegated to the background. However with Subramania Bharathi began a new epoch of poetry. He took part in the Freedom Movement and wrote passionate lyrics vibrant with the thirst for freedom. He tried to awaken his people to a sense of nationalism that embraced the whole of India. Lasting human values, delight in childhood and young womanhood were other themes of his poems. It need not be said that he falls far short of Kampaṉ and Iḷaṅko.

The influence of English literature has created new forms like the novel, short story, literary criticism etc. But despite the leavening of art and thought through foreign influence, anti-Brahminism and language-fundamentalism still mar the thought and life of the people.

The authoress of this story of a great people and a great literature, Mrs. Hephzibah Jesudasan, formerly Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, is an established writer. She has to her credit poems and novels in English and Tamil, and has already published, in collaboration with her husband, Professor C. Jesdasan, a History of Tamil Literature (1961). In

taking up the same story after thirty- seven years she is giving expression to her life-long devotion to Tamil. Years of detailed study lie behind this work. These great masters are to her not just names in books, but close friends and mentors, whose attitudes and moods, tricks of articulation and mannerisms are so familiar that she can even laugh at them. To the reader she is an excited guide, eager to reveal all the glory and grandeur of her beloved authors. Such a combination of deep love and profound knowledge is rare and has resulted in a fascinating work that combines humour and scholarship. Her thorough knowledge of the Christian Bible is reflected in the similarities she works out between the Bible and Tamil writings. Equally striking is her love of English literatue. These two alien streams help to bring Tamil history and thought into a larger perspective.

The method used in presentation is a direct confrontation with the work accompanied by a running commentary. This work-based interpretation creates an immediacy of experience, an effect strengthened by the informal style that sometimes shades off into slang and colloquialisms, but which when necessary easily rises to lofty heights of eloquence. Herself a poet, Professor Hephzibah Jesudasan has opened up before us a world of great and genuine poetry comparatively unknown to the world, and thereby has done a great service. May this work. a labour of love, find an audience fit, but not few, an audience as large as the world.

Thiruvananthapuram,
29.07.1998

Celine Mathew.
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Author's Foreword

A little girl, from South India, in a school in Katha, in far- away Burma (now Myanmar)- where her father was a teacher-was staring with incredulousness at her geography book. It hurt. The book said, "the Dravidians of South India are an uncivilised race". My classmates-all little boys and girls, not yet teenagers-were looking at me. They were polite, but, it hurt.

Now a stigma was on me. And the higher education I went through did nothing to remove the stigma. I looked down on Tamil, with all my heart. My parents, took our Tamil connections very seriously, married me off-to a Tamil scholar! And on his part, one of my attractions was the reputation that had been building up for me, in my corner, as an English writer. Of course I was a stuck-up little writer, but that did not change matters. We were going to take our Tamil *muracu* (drum) and tom-tom it all over the world.

But, speaking seriously, there were two factors behind our common interest. One was the deep and unflagging faith that Miss. Morton, my teacher, then Principal of the Duthie School, had in my commission as English writer. Another was the passionate interest that Mr. C. Paṉṉirukai Perumāḷ, Head of the Department of Tamil, University College, Trivandrum, took in my husband's Tamil studies. Now a joint responsibility lay before us. The responsibility took on a clear outline after I had just completed my Grandma's Diary (poetry selections), to which Princess Gawri Lakshmi Bayi, of the Royal House of Travancore, had given the introduction. So, at the age of seventy-three, with a *guru* -in Centamiḻ or "pure" Tamil he would be a formidable Kaṇakkāyaṉār- aged seventy - eight, there rose before me a steep ascent, like a road "stood on a hill".[1] I did not know ancient Tamil! We had, in 1961, got published *A History of Tamil Literature* together, my husband's being the mind moving behind it, and I being the scribe. Now conditions are so changed that, with my *guru's* help, and real old-world Tamil discussions with him (though without the accessory of a flag)[2], the main responsibility devolves on me. Hence I have affixed

1. *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (line 16)
2. *Paṭṭṇappālai lines 170 & 171*

my name to the book, although I could not have written a page without my husband's participation. And, here's my heart-felt "Thank you", to my friend Dr. Miss. Celine Mathew, scholar in three European languages, for her kind Introduction. I have also to thank Dr. Enose, for the real interest he took in the shaping of the book.

I have taken it on myself to give here a careful translation of one of the longer poems, written by Nakkīrar, son of another Kaṇakkāyaṇār, for the simple reason that, without the whole poem before him, the reader would not be able to believe that such a thing existed. For the rest, I have only used bits of verse from here and there to illustrate some point or other. As I have mentioned already, apart from the poems on public life, only one out of twenty- five of the extant love-poems have been brought into the picture. The rest of' *Caṅkam*' literature is like a great sea, which calls for the work of a team of honest, and dedicated scholars. For, the literature records both the strength and the weaknesses of an empire that is no more.

The fourth to sixth centuries A.D. are the time when the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* and *Cilappatikāram* were produced in Tamilnad. We do not know much of the historical background of the times. But we do know that both these works were Jain creations. We do not have its recorded history. *Tirukkuṛaḷ* and *Cilappatikāram*, both of them being, individually, greater than the whole of *Caṅkam* literature put together, and greater than any other creative work in Tamiḻ except Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* together from the crest of the literary output of what might have been a great mass-movement in Tamilnad, showing as they do a strong ethical consciousness, though without religious fervour. Indeed, Jain and Buddhist literary creativity seems to have been pronounced in this age. A few runlets of emotionalised religion, the harbingers of the powerful Bhakti movement, are also traceable, somewhere near the horizon.

It is interesting to observe that the whole of the literature studied in Volume I of this series would have been totally unintelligible, dark, to the modern student of Tamil, if it had not been for the stupendous work of the scholars and commentators of the twelfth century and after. Hence the debt the Tamiḻ literary world owes to them is beyond measure. Whatever differences of opinion there might be on attitudes and beliefs, they would be submerged in the gratitude owing to them. The value of scholarship and hard work, although secondary to inspired creativity, has to be acknowledged with a curtsy to these men.

The Tamils do not really need at this date to be reminded of the greatness of *Caṅkam* literature, or the *Tirukkuṛaḷ*, or the *Cilappatikāram*. But so far as the rest of India, or the rest of the world, is concerned, they are buried away from sight, by a forgotten language, and behind one and a half millennia in terms of time. The author of this book has been rarely privileged therefore, in introducing ancient Tamil literature to the English-knowing public. For they would find totally unexpected treasures in what has been salvaged from obscurity, treasures belonging indeed by right to all mankind.

The Aftermath to this literature, includes the famous grammarian Tolkappiyar, and two of the greatest works ever written in Tamil, Kampaṉ's excepted. These two are the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* and *Cilappatikāram*. The backdrop against which they make their appearance is not very distinct, but it will not do to imagine things, although a warmer religious bent is perceptible. I have not given a full view of the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* since dependable translations and studies are already available in English. *Cilappatikāram* I have had to subject to closer scrutiny, only hoping that it will be followed up by further studies.

Now, may I here record my gratitude to Dr. G. John Samuel, Director of the Institute of Asian Studies, India for bringing out the book into the world of letters- a great privilege for me.

Hephzibah Jesudasan,
1998, Pulippunam.

Chapter I

COUNT -DOWN FROM SOLOMON

"For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram; once in three years came the navy of Tharshish bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes, and peacocks".

(I Kings 10: V: 22. A.V.)

"For the king's ships went to Tharshish with the servants of Hiram, every three years once came the ships of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory and apes, and peacocks.

(II Chronicles 9: V:21, A.V.)

This is just a glimpse of one aspect of Solomon in all his golory: his overseas trade. The items mentioned in the two verses quoted above are the same and in the same order. Navy or ships. Three years to return from overseas. Gold, silver, ivory, apes, peacocks. All this could have been dismissed as part of the life of an emperor of Israel. But there is one word, just one, which suddenly illuminates them all with an old- world splendour, shared by Solomon with India. That is "peacocks". The Hebrew word for 'peacock' is '*tuki*', The tamil *tōkai*. [1] Now for the apes, or the monkeys: you could look for them in Tamilnad. Next, ivory. Suddenly it rings a bell in Kerala. About gold, there are several references in ancient Tamil poetry itself.

And so, Solomon sent his ships, once in three years- a regular process, to collect these items from that part of the sub-continent which could deliver the goods. Obviously, the Western, and South-western, shore-line suggests itself. The far north, the deep inland, are not in the picture. The southern peninsula of India naturally comes to mind. And the age around 1,000 B.C. You do not expect an emperor of Solomon's status to trade with savages. Whoever it was must have been of political consequences.

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1. The root of the word is "*tuki*" (to hang)
   See *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* 1956 by R. Caldwell- Third Edition (University of Madras) P. 88.

The subject of the antiquity of Tamilnad usually touches upon Asoka[2] or Megasthanes[3] or Pliny[4] or Ptolemy[5] or Chinese traders. Solomon is hardly ever consulted. Between Solomon and those other personalities stretches a vast gap of time. That body of ancient Tamil literature, which we now call *Caṅkam* literature (remember, that word is never used in the literature itself) lies on this side of the gap. We must not forget that tradition has it strong that there were two earlier *Caṅkams*. (We may be sure that those *Caṅkams* or whatever they were, were not called by that name) We have no authenticated evidence about them, and later imagination has peopled them with gods and all sorts of fictitious events. Now if the known *Caṅkam* literature itself were of the type of Beowulf, we could dismiss those earlier Academies as products of a merely overheated patriotism. But the *Caṅkam* literature that we are going to consider is so much sophisticated, to a point, as a matter of fact, bordering on decadence, that we have to acknowledge that, there might have been, most likely there were, two Academies before the one we can speak of, but about which we know, simply, nothing. After all, as Chingakchook said, "The World is very big", and we do not know what we can find and where.

Well, we do know that Abraham (B.C. 2,000/-) came from Ūr, and how many Ūrs do we find in Tamilnad meaning "township"? And we now know that Magdal- of Christ's time-means fortress or high wall, which is exactly what Matil in Tamil, has come to mean. But these are stray instances of the Hebrew-Tamil relationship and after all it is high time that we started counting down from Solomon.

Half-way between Solomon and Christ comes the Buddha, as well as Vālmīki, the author of the *Ramāyaṇa*. Prince Cittārtta could not, naturally, remain king when he turned ascetic. And his appeal was strongest on the weaker sections of society to whom royalty did not hold out much from the world. However, society was leavened from top to bottom by his ethics, and Sangh after Sangh was formed. It is strange that nobody should have considered Prince Cittārtta's duty to his wife and child-although his was certainly not as painful a dereliction

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2. *A History of South India* by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (Oxford University Press),1955, p. 79
3. *Ibid.*, P. 81
4. *Ibid.*, P. 113
5. *Ibid.*, P. 25

of duty as that, in the *Rāmāyaṇā* story, of King Rāmā to his wife-when he sent her, pregnant, into the wild woods, with a blemished reputation on her head. Cīta was entitled to protection from her husband, as well as to justice from her king, and she did not get them. Now such a heartache did not befall Prince Cittārtta's wife, and she might have forgiven her husband's failure- for failure it was- to keep up her position as his wife. But the Sanghs kept multiplying and crossing the boundaries of the Acōkaṉ empire. Right into Tamilnād, *Caṅkam* poetry does have a slight leavening of Buddhist philosophy. Close to Buddhism in Tamilnad appears Jainism, where asceticism takes the extreme form of going aroun̄d unclothed, with begging bowls, and avoiding trampling on the lowest forms of life, such as ants and worms, with studious care. Well, there is no saying to what extent human nature can go when the emotions are unleashed.

But, it is obvious that both Buddhism and Jainism were felt in the Tamiḻ country. *Caṅkam* literature speaks of the "Tavappaḷḷis"[6] the "Ascetic Ashrams"- and the role of Destiny of Fate is marked in some of the poems.[7] The word *Caṅkam*- though it comes late, is obviously from Buddhism. The *Rāmāyaṇā* and *Makāpāratā* too, are not unknown in Tamiḻnad, several of the episodes, and characters too, turning up in the early literature, although, strange to say, Rāmā and Cītā are barely mentioned by name, while there is even a *Caṅkam* poet named Vālmīki!

Obviously the presence of Brahmins along with the other Tamil poets in the courts of kings, would explain this Sanskrit influence. Brahminism is making itself felt very strongly indeed, when we go through *Caṅkam* literature. Sanskrit words, in the Tamilised form of course, can be recognised occasionally. The Tamil Brahmins of that age, it must be borne in mind, were Tamiḻs by adoption, although they took good care to maintain their communal aloofness. They are described in the literature as being "cow-like". gentle, and their claims to the possession of the "*Tirumaṟai*" ("That which is Holy, and Hidden") settled their authority with the kings, especially as great results were expected from their Yōgās or fire-sacrifices; and their severe discipline, along with the cleanliness of their domestic lives, must have carried weight with the people. Of course the excesses of Brahminism, such as *Cati* and child-marriage, were unknown in

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6. *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, Line 53.
7. *Puṟam* 192

Tamiḻnad. If one queen, of the *Caṅkam* Age, does mount her husband's funeral pyre[8] the reason she gives to the elders, (who would dissuade her!) is not very Brahminical in nature.

Somewhere before the *Caṅkam* Age, there appeared on the Middle East scenario, the most extraordinary young man ever. He was from the unlettered, downtrodden classes, but he claimed to be the Son of God, who was sent to heal the sick, reclaim the lost and guide the wandering. His moral influence on his followers reminds us of Gandhi's, but their missions were widely different. While Gandhi's was to release a particular nation from political bondage, Christ's mission was to every man, every woman, offering release from the sinful nature of the world. As man, his fiercest battle was with the corruption within organised religion, and he courted, and obtained, the death of the basest Roman criminal. Time split before his face into B.C. and A.D. His disciples had been announcing, as even now they are announcing, that their master was risen from the dead, and is due to return as King of kings some day -the date of which is not within their ken.

There is absolutely no evidence, in *Caṅkam* literature, that Christ's influence had reached the Tamiḻ country in the early A.D.s. Tradition has it that St. Thomas, one of his disciples, had landed in Kerala and that the last of the eight churches, which he built but did not complete, is still in Tiruvitāṅkōṭu. The appearances of the Syrian Christians is another question for probing. And, the *Tirukkuṛaḷ, of the post Caṅkam* period, runs parallel to Christianity in so many verses, that one feels the author should have been familiar with Christian ethics at the least. But-and this is a very serious fact-there is No reference to Christ or His faith or His followers in ANY of the *Caṅkam* poems. No, Jesus is NOT to be seen here! Nor is there, for that matter, any use of the word "Hindu" or Hinduism", or even "Indian", either. India is mentioned twice in the Bible and that is to refer to the eastern boundary of the domains of the Persian King Ahasuerus (around B.C. 500)- obviously the valley of the Indus river, the north-west, touching the Persian Empire. But even that mention is not to be found in *Caṅkam* literature.

The great question is, how do we come to possess the vast and highly sophisticated body of poetry that we call Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* literature? Much of it seems to have been preserved, [9] with jealous care, in some of the non-Brahminical

8. *Puṟam* 246.

9. *Caṅka Ilakkiyam* Pub: Pāri Nilayam Part II P. 1535 to 1540.

Hindu mutts; some of it has also turned up from scholarly families including Brahmins. Had the literature been of less intrinsic value, or of inconsiderable bulk, one could very well have propounded a theory of a neatly "made-to-order" verse, by interested parties, to support the theory of the antiquity of the literacy of the Dravidians. No possibility of that, anyway. And hence this book will be devoting a great part of its contents to the Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* that the pundits still, without any extant proofs, though, declare to be the third of its kind in the Dravidian country. And here it is that the rocks are right in the middle of the way. Ancient Tamiḻ is as far from modern Tamiḻ as old English is from modern English, and it costs a real struggle to overcome the difficulty of the language. But then -it is worth it.

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Chapter II

THE CASE FOR THE ACADEMY

Puṟanāṉūṟu No; 367, by the poetess Avvai, shows the three kings of Tamiḻnād, enthroned together, where she is given the privilege of felicitating and blessing them. Of Avvai herself, there is more later. But this is the only occasion, in the entire coverage of *Caṅkam* literature, when we actually see the kings of the Tamiḻ Triarchy on a shared dais. Since Avvai refers to Kapilar's patron in the past, and she herself is referred to by later poets, we infer that she represents, in point of time, the middle of the *Caṅkam* Age.[1] The brief poetic address itself, serious, solemn, and dignified, as befits the occasion, carries three admonitions, the very first of which is that the Brahmins should be showered with flowers and gold. The second, that the kings should enjoy the clear liquor (symbolic of the joys of life) together. The third, that there should be no stinting in their generosity to the needy. This is followed by the reminder that nothing but good deeds will serve one in this life. Finally, there is a blessing that the three kings, like the "Three Fires" of the twice-born, should live long, in greater glory than the stars of heaven or the drops from the rainclouds.

Some astounding facts emerge here. At that very early date, the Brahmins were a very highly placed community-with the Dravidian kings. Their *hōmās* or sacred fires, were held in high esteem. Obviously, when Avvai was chosen to make this address, political conditions were already such that she was duty-bound to make this obeisance to the Brahmins, along with the kings. Why, we can only partly conjecture. She makes no such reference to the Brahmins elsewhere. Now, the Brahmins did not make this much headway with sword-power. If there had been an invasion from the North, we're sure to have heard of it from the *Caṅkam* poets, or at least through story. But the fact is that the war-involved kings came easily under the moral control of a community which promised them great things by their *hōmas*, and which impressed by their courtesy, their gentleness, their scrupulous cleanliness and their scholarship. But the Brahmins had learnt Tamiḻ. And if we except just one possibility- there is no

1. Ist three centuries AD.

reference to Sanskrit as a language-not even as the language of the Northerners, the later "*Vaṭamoḻi*". (*Vaṭamoḻi*" is used once,[2] in fun, by a poet, to describe the language used by the mahout to his elephant-he could not understand it!) And there is at least one Tamiḻ Brahmin poet, Kapilar, whom we think of with deference as man as well as poet. Perhaps, if Tamiḻ, as a language, could have held such sway over the Brahmins at that time, there were times in Tamiḻnad, when it was a sort of controlling force over the entire Tamiḻ population, and their kings too.

But we don't have the privilege of seeing the kings patronising the Tamiḻ poets as a body, nor of standing together to keep out the invading Aryans. The kings of the *Caṅkam* Age we know were really too busy fighting one another. And so the *Caṅkam* period actually smells of the decadence, not of the glory, of the Tamiḻ kingdoms. Perhaps it was the third *Caṅkam,* after all. The literature itself had leavened the lives of the people so much , that when the cadjan leaves went underground, they were protected, with passionate jealousy, mostly by the non-Brahmin Hindu *mutts,* or isolated scholars, or families of poets, where they belonged. You would expect them to have been strangulated completely by later political and religious developments in Tamiḻnāḍu. They were not. A sort of Tamiḻ education did get around the lower middle-class people.

It was in the eighteenth century that Western scholars began to evince interest in Tamiḻ. It simply began with the gospel message. Father de Nobili[3] had acted the Italian Brahmin to be able to do it better, but could not get away with it. Father Beschi (1680-1746)[4] next worked at Tamiḻ, under the tutelage of Cupraṭipa-kavirāyar. He wrote a Tamiḻ-English Dictionary, and he wrote the very popular Tamiḻ farce, *Paramārtta kuru,* but this is the wonder of it, somehow stumbled, literally stumbled, upon the *Tirukkuṛaḷ.* He went on to translate the first two sections of it into-Latin! That was Eureka indeed for the Tamiḻs, by then a demoralised, degraded people, suffering from inferiority complex. But Latin was not likely to get around the English- speaking world anyway. Now came the Rev. G.U. Pope (1820-1908)[5] who not only translated into English the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* (which belongs to the post- *Caṅkam* period), but also got introduced

2. *Mullaippāṭṭu,* line 35
3. *International Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*- Vol II-Ed. Ganga Ram Garg, 1987 p. 104.
4. *Ibid.,* P. 20.
5. *Ibid.,* P. 125

to the *Caṅkam* literature itself. He worked at a few *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poems, and also *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* (by a Tamiḻ Brahmin, *Caṅkam* Poet), which he calls the Highland Song. Ramāniyakkavirāyar, a Brahmin, who was the Rev. Pope's tutor, had access to some of the cadjan originals, This was in 1850.

By now interest in ancient Tamiḻ literature had been aroused and the Indologist [6] Ellis wrote his commentary on the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. Tāmotaraṉ Piḷḷai[7] a local scholar, was able to edit the *Kalittokai*. The Rev. Popley[8] translated again- the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, and Āṟumuka Nāvalar[9] from Jaffna, came out with his commentary on *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. The Rev. Caldwell's [10] great- ("Tremendous"! is the word for it) work on the comparative grammar of the Dravidian languages, was published, but he does not seem to have noticed much of the ancient literature.

The printing press was ready-brought into India by the missionaries, - money from the public was flowing in, the interest in the newly discovered ancient works of Tamiḻ was hotting up, and Dr. U.V. Cuvāmināṭiyar [11] (1855-1942) a Brahmin disciple of Makāvittuvāṉ MiṉāṭciCuntaram Pillai [12] (a bigwig of the non-Brahmin *mutt* of Tiruvāvaṭuturai) was able to bring out his very valuable editions of the *Caṅkam* classics. Prof S. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai[13] Reader in Tamil in the Madras University, compiled the entire *Caṅkam* literature into two volumes. Of course he was guided by Dr. Cuvāmināṭaiyar. The number of poets included in the volumes is about four hundred and sixty-three, and of poems, well over two thousand [14]. Only ten of the extant poems, the *Pattuppāṭṭu* the "Ten Idylls" are of any considerable length. Certain poems of the *Caṅkam* Age, including a translation of the *Makāpārata*, are said to be lost. Incidentally that is the only occasion for the word "Pāratam" in the *Caṅkam* Age. Quite a

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6. *Ibid.*, P. 33
7. *Ibid.*, P. 29
8. *Ibid.*, P. 125
9. *Ibid.*, P. 15
10. *Ibid.*, P. 23
11. *Ibid.*, P. 168
12. *Ibid.*, P. 185
13. *Ibid.*, P. 187
14. *Caṅk Ilakkiyam*, Pub; Pāri Nilayam: 1940, Part II P.1369 & 1502.

number more of the ancient poems could have gone the same way. When the poems came out, it must be remembered, the literary elite had been prepared for the event through the centuries. Fact and fiction had combined to create the atmosphere of eager, almost excited anticipation. Kampaṉ in the twelfth century, while touching heights that now seem unattainable to any of the *Caṅkam* poets (though he had his pitfalls) had expressed unbounded admiration for their poetry, in the famous stanza on the Gōdāvari river, which flows, (like *Caṅkam* poetry) along the five *Tiṇais* or different kinds of terrain. More, he had gone to the extent of dutifully describing the five *Tiṇais*- with which presently we shall have to deal in detail. Tiruvaḷḷuvar's partial observance of *Caṅkam* technique in his chapter on Love is another case in point. Later Tamiḻ works have a story to tell, of the *Caṅkam* and the "Caṅkappalakai" plank which admitted only the poets deserving of the honour, and summarily threw out any imposter. And, for another story, the god Civa had been on the Committee but did not escape the censure of one of the mortal poets. The Tamiḻs did indeed look for something divine from the *Caṅkam* poets when the anthologies came to their hands-though the event by itself was probably beyond their wildest dreams at the time.

Could it all have been simply a grand hoax? If it were humanly possible for one poet, or just a few, to have "cooked up" all the material now available as *Caṅkam* literature, the idea is one not to be lightly dismissed. In quality, the author of one of the finer pieces of *Pattuppāṭṭu* could very well make his claim to be remembered on that ground alone. And there are a great number of shorter pieces that are tender and true. In bulk, the available verses, which run to well over two thousand poems (not lines!) could certainly not be turned out in a lifetime. And the historical information to be gleaned from these poems works out so convincingly a whole history of over six generations of Tamiḻ princes, and tells such a vivid realistic story of the people of the time, with recognizable fauna and flora in the background (no Satyrs!) that the possibility of an imposture goes overboard once for all. And one remembers that the whole of the literature, though discovered by diverse people, has a strong family resemblance, as is natural, nay, inevitable, in a literature of an age telescoped over a distance of nearly two thousand years. It would be a relevant question how it came about that all the anthologies turned up from somewhere within a few decades. But it could be understood in the context of the then nascent linguistic enthusiasm of the Tamiḻs. The European missionaries, in their zeal for translating the *Bible* into the Indian languages, had been surprised by what they found in Tamiḻ, and had not been slow to express admiration for it. The Tamiḻs, on their part, were

only too eager to escape from the inferiority complex that was oppressing them. Father Beschi's find, naturally, sparked off the spirit of research, and the fruit of hard labour was this golden harvest.

It must be said that Caṅkam literature is still a rewarding field of research. Antiquarian, literary, historical-many of its aspects have been but partially explored. Dr. Kailasapathy has, in his stimulating book on Tamil Heroic poetry, formulated the theory that this *Caṅkam* literature is, in essential, bardic poetry, transmitted orally to posterity, which is responsible for committing it to letters. Bards, the *Caṅkam* poets were, in a sense. But just how primitive they were we can decide only after a much deeper, far more exhaustive study than has been envisaged so far. . The existence of letters in *Caṅkam* times is a certainty, for the poets themselves speak of the "hero-stones" [15] inscribed with the names, and achievements of the dead. And though it is obvious that the poets recited their verses at court-there are numerous references to the "tongue" [16] that utters poetry-it is not credible that the verses were improvised and sung to the accompaniment of a harp and altered at will in the act of recitation. Minstrels who sang were a category- an honoured category by themselves, and they did exist. But look at the poem- one single poem- from *Pattupāṭṭu*, the best, it is true, which has been given here in translation at the beginning of the chapter on "Some *Caṅkam* Poems". The reader can easily decide for himself whether the exquisite, conscious artistry of that piece is a thing possible in extempore verse. Most of the other pieces will not bear alteration either. And when Avvai, with modest pride, speaks of that "unpolished lisp" [17] of hers. it is obvious that a high degree of polish or sophistication was expected, of the poets of the day. And realistic as the *Caṅkam* poets were, they have never a word to speak of the "Voice" or the "Tune" or even the "Chant" of their poems. No, their poems depended on the spontaneous arrangement of words, to express their experiences, and although they are brought under a common understanding, the understanding is that of intellect highly academic.

We of the twentieth century are very likely prone to considering ours the peak of civilisation. Much depends on what we mean by civilisation. No two civilisations are likely to have an identical system of social rules and regulations,

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15. *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* No. 353
16. *Puṟam* 107.
17. *Ibid*, 92.

though each could be highly developed in its own way. Peace and prosperity are certainly factors that help the development of a civilised pattern of social life, and peace and prosperity were certainly behind the Egyptian, Persian and Roman civilisations at their height. Possibly the ancient Dravidians had once developed a civilisation that was free, like theirs, from the fear of war for some considerable length of time, between Solomon and the third *Caṅkam*. But the political picture of the famous Triarchy that evolves from the (Third) *Caṅkam* poems is rather like the political picture of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy, very much in the melting-pot. Naturally, war was then in the air, with its inevitable accessories- the blood, the sweat, the tears. Every young man was brought up to expect the call of the battle-drum.[18] And just as for the men who fell at Hastings, prowess on the battlefield was the ideal to which the brave looked forward.

But there are some other factors to be considered. By the standards of those days the armies of the kings seem to have been highly organised. Elephants, horses, and chariots were in the armies, not only the archers and infantry.[19] The king himself does not seem to be just a valiant tribal leader-read *Neṭunalvāṭai*- but high standards of behaviour and a sense of duty are expected of him. And if the Dravidian palaces have been destroyed, a beautiful image of one emerges from the same poem. These are a far cry from the givers of gifts and the gold-seal we meet with in the Old English poems. True, among the many patrons of the *Caṅkam* poets, there would be a number of chieftains of hill tribes, say, like Pāri, who "would give land and hill together!"[20] to the minstrels and the dancers. Here was a giver of gifts indeed! But there were kingships, organised enough to enforce taxation- witness 'the sage advice of the poet Veḷḷaikkuṭi Nākaṉār to the king Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ[21] on the subject. There was at least one king who boasted of extending his territory to the Himalayas[22] (Imaya Varampaṉ). There were certain dynasties which maintained the integrity of their domination for several generations. There was a clearly defined group-consciousness also, on the basis of language, for Avvai blesses the three kings with special reference to their unitedness, or rather, oneness. Pūmpukār, by the

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18. *Ibid.*, 312
19. *Ibid.*, 63
20. *Ibid.*, 109
21. *Ibid.*, 35
22. *Patiṟṟuppattu*

description in *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, seems to have been a prosperous port- town, where trade was carried on, according to the highest ethics. "They take not more, they give not less". This sounds an exaggeration-not common with the Caṅkam poets- but the ideal was there.

Connections with North India, as early as the 4th century B.C., have been suggested by Kātyāyanā's Vātikā. Asoka's edicts refer to the Triarchy, and the "Dramida" Confederacy is mentioned by the Kaliṅka king, Kāravēlaṉ. Obviously, while the three major kingships of Tamiḻnad were perpetually striving among themselves for supremacy, they could come to an understanding in the face of the common enemy. And language was at the basis of the understanding. There seems to have been trade-connections, too, with Rome, Greece and Burma, and Greek soldiers are mentioned in *Neṭunalvāṭai* and elsewhere. Such a society could hardly be classed as tribal. Its leaders would range from kings to mountain-chiefs, and their subjects would be heroes riding in chariots across the swamps to meet their sweethearts, as well as bull-fighters, or just men from the mountains. Its poets would be men-and women!-honoured and looked up to by king and courtier alike, or just wandering minstrels and impoverished bard seeking patronage. Shakespeare and Marlowe did not disdain patronage and we do not call them tribal bards. And side by side with them did subsist a numerous host of sundry poets.

There is, however, one remarkable feature of Caṅkam literature. The poems belong to a distinct category, and everyone of them subscribes to a certain degree of excellence. Not all- perhaps not any but one-reaches the perfection of *Neṭunalvāṭai*, but not one goes below par. This is astounding, for it bears testimony to a highly critical mind- or a recognised body of critical minds- moving behind the scenes, selecting, discarding, with discretion, if with an eye on the patrons. The story of the *Caṅkam* Board thus seems to have some basis in fact, though to what extent we are not aware. Quite a number of the "*Akam*" (or "Private life") pieces have a made-to- order look. A great number seems to have been accepted on the basis of their satisfying the requirements of some presiding body. This body, not unlikely, would be of the nature of an Academy, and we hear a great deal of a legendary *Caṅkam*, or rather, three *Caṅkams* or Academies in ancient Tamiḻnad. Taking the language consciousness of the people and kings alike- as the ancient literature itself records it -such an Academy to which the kings themselves deferred, is not an improbability. Caldwell has stated that Tamiḻ would be the only Indian language to withstand

the onslaught of English.[23] Well, English has come over the world with the force of something like Noah's flood, and Tamiḻ has not withstood it. But it certainly has withstood the supremacy of contemporary Hindi, the only Indian language to be able to do that. It might have been unwise, but it is inevitable. For, the Spirit of the *Caṅkam* never really died out in Tamiḻnad.

Several poems, incidentally referred to by the *Caṅkam* poets, have been lost. Whether these, too, were sponsored by the Academy, we do not know. They need not have been. Non-academic creative activity, it is obvious, has a lesser chance of survival during war-time. When, during the break-down of the Tamiḻ powers, the famous *Caṅkam* poems themselves went underground, to be preserved jealously as a treasure by the Jains or Buddhists or other independent scholars in their houses of refuge, the non-academic literature, of whatever quality we do not know, could have been wiped out in the general devastation.

In the fifth century A.D., we know, the Jains had founded the Dramida Sangha in Maturai. Were they seeking to build on the ruins of a once-flourishing institution, for Maturai is supposed to have been the site of the Tamiḻ *Caṅkam*? The *Caṅkam* poets themselves, while speaking of Maturai as Mūtūr (the ancient city) do not speak of the Academy and such a silence is expressive. But perhaps the Academy was only a body that selected and compiled from what already existed. If such were the case, could it be identified, or associated, with the Drāmida Sangha of the Jains? Did the scholars of the Drāmida Sangha sponsor the compilation-thus giving rise to the story of the Maturai Tamiḻ *Caṅkam*. The fact that the commentaries were attached to the originals when they turned up, shows that a great deal of scholarship had already been expended on them in nooks and corners of Tamiḻnād all down the centuries and it needed only the printing press and mass-enthusiasm to flash the literature all over the Tamiḻ country once it was discovered by a person with a sense of civic responsibility. All down the ages the idea of an academy behind the ancient literature has been present. As *Caṅkam* Tamiḻ, or MutTamiḻ or under some other name, the idea was growing to legendary dimensions till the seventeenth century, when the disintegration and downfall of the Tamiḻ kingdoms was complete, and court-poets, epic-writers, and other bards of literary status were gone forever. Perhaps this was the time when *Caṅkam* literature went completely underground.

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23. *A Comparative grammar of the Dravidian Languages*- Caldwell, Pub: Madras University, 1956

As for the *Caṅkam* poets themselves, their mode of writing is as far from the old Norse bards' Beowulf and the Pearl as is possible. There is a rugged grandeur about Beowulf, an elementary simplicity about the Pearl, entirely absent from *Caṅkam* literature. And we are not aware that ancient bardic literature, anywhere else, has presented the fauna and flora of their country with such conscientious truthfulness, or that we would be able to trace out the genealogy of their princes from their poems so clearly, or that the social customs and superstitions of the people would be presented so vividly if not completely without idealism (but then, where would poetry be without idealism?) or that, on the whole, they should have such an eye on realistic description, an eye, it must be remarked, that the Tamiḻs chose to wink shut in their later literary creations.

Nor do we hear of a system of anything like the *Tiṇais or Tuṟais* except in fairly advanced literature where we have the pastorals, the ode, the elegy and other forms. Only, ancient Tamiḻ literature, building on its own , did not recognize or observe those or similar differences of form. The differences it did recognize were, in the main, those of *Akam* or Private life, and *Puṟam* or Public Life. *Akam* is further subdivided into the five *Tiṇais;* each *Tiṇai* has a specified background- a specified code of behaviour, and an earmarked hero and heroine, mostly from aristocratic families (not normally from the Brahmins or from royalty). The role of the background in determining the behaviour of the dramatis personae is given, perhaps, more than its due importance, but if it tells us anything about the poets it is that these are not impulsive wandering bards seeking to impress on the imagination of very limited audiences prepared for thrills. There are no Grendels, there is no Valhalla or Thor or Balder. The defect we really note is that characters are sometimes a bit like puppets, lacking individuality, the result of decadent scholarship. But even then, there is rhyme and reason behind the *Tiṇais.* For example, marital infidelity is the theme of the *Marutam* area, the fertile fields, where men feed and get fat. And that is the red light area of the poems.

Anyway, Academy or no Academy, first or third, we can depend only on the volumes in our hands.

They are:-

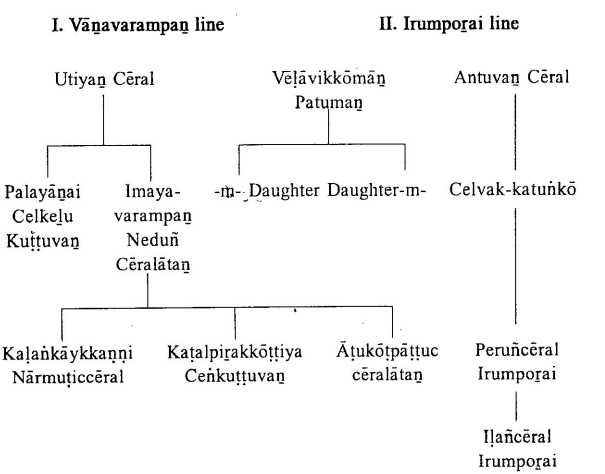
1.	*Pattuppāṭṭu*	-	'Ten' long pieces (Nine?)
2.	*Naṟṟiṇai*	-	400 love-poems, rather short.
3.	*Kuṟuntokai*	-	400 love-poems,very brief.

4.	*Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*	-	500 love-poems, very brief.
5.	*Akanāṉūṟu*	-	400 love-poems
6.	*Puṟanāṉūṟu*	-	400 poems on public life.
7.	*Patiṟṟuppattu*	-	100 poems on public life, the Ten Tens of which two Tens are missing.

Two anthologies, *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal*, are relegated by [24] scholars to a later period, for linguistic and other reasons, and we shall leave them out.

Now just one more item to prove the authenticity of the poems.

Here are two collateral lines of Cēra kings, covering four generations, deduced from *Paṭiṟṟuppattu*.



24. *History of Tamil Language and Literature*, S. Vaiyapuri Piḷḷai, Pub: New Century Book House, Madras, 1956 P. 58.

The matter of four generations [25] would be corroborated by the colophons in *Akaṉāṉūṟu* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poems as well as by several internal references.

Several of the *Caṅkam* poets hail from Maturai city itself, and the importance of Maturai to *Caṅkam* poets is borne out by several poems including the lengthy *Maturaikkāñci*. Also note that Nakkīrar calls Maturai already an "ancient" city! There also is one reference to a poet, Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, presiding over a body of poets in the court of one Pāṇṭiyan[26] Well, for the moment the Pāṇṭiya was the hero. Of the Academy. In Maturai.

But, as Shakespeare, half laughingly, I expect, tells Philomel, "King Pāṇṭiōṉ, he is dead", he is dead indeed.

But then, "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of it is as the flowers thereof".

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25. *History of Tamil Literatue* by C& H Jesudasan. Pub. YMCA, Page 12& 13

26. *Puṟam* 72

Chapter III

PURANĀNŪRU

Puṟanāṉūṟu, or the Four Hundred *Puṟam* Poems, is a gold mine of information for the historians. Out of this a history of the Cēra, Cōḷa, Pāṇṭiya kings could be built up! But what it would mean to the student of serious literature is another question. Here he is, confronted by a whole host of poetic sycophants, showering praises upon one patron after another. Of course, some of the praises are wittily, even prettily, worded. The sun, for instance, is unworthy of being compared with a certain king, for the former does turn back (in defeat) on the world, does go down beyond the hills, is subject to change, and is bound by the Time! (*Puṟam*-8). Well, if the king had sense, that would be matter for laughter! Another king has his valour sketched in a few vivid lines about his horse,foaming red at the mouth; his sword, stained with the blood of victory, and his shield, pierced through with many arrows. (*Puṟam- 4)* But the total effect of such poems is that of the poets vying one with another in the praises of the patrons, and there an end. Of course, the poets are conscious of a need for quality in their verses, otherwise they would not get their reward. But the quality is essentially that of form, diction, and arresting imagery, the superficial ones, with which one easily gets surfeited. And, the qualities of the patrons are generally the same: Valour in destroying and pillaging enemy country, and generosity in rewarding the bards. The bards are many and of all classes and communities. A Pāṭiṇi, a minstrel woman, sings, of a king who gave her a lustrous jewelled ornament, and to the man who sang with her, obstensibly her husband, a gold lotus tied with a silver thread (*Puram*-ll).

However, not all the poems in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* are of this calibre. Some of them are forged out of a deeper experience. To this category belong the poems reflecting Kapilar's love for Pāri, a love which outlived the need for patronage, and recognised that love begets responsibility. This love drove him to take charge of Pāri's two orphaned daughters, to go from chieftain to chieftain to find husbands for them, to reprimand and warn at least one who scornfully turned down his request, and, finally to entrust them to the care of some Brahmins, which shows how deeply he trusted Brahmindom. (*Puṟam* 113, 200, 201, 202,236).

Again, consider Avvai's friendship for Atiyamāṉ, beginning with his indifference to the impecunious but gifted minstrel woman, and her angry and proud retort "Wherever I go, there is my rice". (*Puṟam*-206.) *Puṟam* 91 takes on a different strain altogether, when the chieftain comes to recognisze her merits. Lighting on a berry, supposedly capable-whatever we may think of it- of conferring longevity, Atiyamāṉ unhesitatingly bestowed it as a gift on the venerable poetess, whose life he prized more than his own. Avvai replies by a suitable'panegyric[1]. But, simpler, and far more touching, is her heartfelt cry on Atiyamāṉ's death[2]. It is a pure jet of passion, and we need to be told that its metre is one within the realm of ancient Tamiḻ literary convention. It is a phenomenon in the history of Tamiḻ literature. It bleeds with sorrow. We hear a sob in the pauses and modulations. See what use Avvai has made of that word "maṉṉē"-now obsolete.

Ciṟiya kaḷ peṟiṉē emekkīyu maṉṉe!
Periya kaḷ peṟiṉē
Yām pāṭa tāṉ makiḻntuṇṇu maṉṉē!

A literal translation of the poem might be read thus;

Had he a little wine, he gave it us: O never more!

Had he more,

The while we sang, with joy he drank; O never more!

A little rice, in many plates he served; O never more

And more rice, in many plates he served; O never more.

All the meat, fat upon the bone, to us he gave; O never more,

All the ways shot through with arrow

and with spear he faced: O never more

With hand fragrant with fruit of lime

He caressed our heads that smelt of flesh: O never more.

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1. *Puṟam 91.*
2. *Ibid., 235*

Pierced through the almsbowl of the minstrels great,
Tore through the palm of beggars,
And, while his subjects' eye grew dim with giref
Shot straight upon the tongue of bards renowned and wise,
the spear that launched upon his warrior-breast.
Whither is he gone, my father and my stay?
Henceforth, poets are not, nor those who give to bards.
Many the lives that will not give;
Large scented flowers of rattlewort
Lie wasted on cool waters still.

It will be noticed that the lines are irregular, the length of the lines being guided purely by the emotion. Analysing the structure of the poem, we find that the first line has a normal metrical form. But the very next line is a gasp of grief. Then slowly the lines lengthen out, till in the sixth and seventh they attain a very swift and breathless expression. In the next line the voice softens. The syllables become long-drawn-out, and the lines are again shrunk as if to accentuate grief. Then follows the tremendously forceful image that has been feebly translated above in lines 10 to 14. The last three lines are normal, as though the fluctuations and the agony of emotion have finally been exhausted. Translation cannot do justice to the original which is a study by itself as an example of what a poet like Avvai could do, when a friend like Atiyamāṉ was gone.

Surely these are not the begging sycophants. With these pieces could be included quite a few more of the elegiac poems-except perhaps those designed to reach the hearts and therefore, the purses, of the descendants of the deceased. Some of the poems can be very beautiful. Look at this one (*Puṟam* 242):

"No children wear them; no women with bracelets pick them;
The minstrel will not bend you with the neck
Of his good harp, softly to take them,
Nor will his wife use them,

Since Cāttaṉ of the powerful spear is gone,

O Mullai! in Ollaiyūr,

How could you now break forth in bloom?'

Well, Mullai is jessamine, but in the poem, Jessamine is no substitute for *Mullai*.

It is impossible, in translation, to bring forth the tenderness, the nuances, of the entire poem, but most especially the last line. You could do even *Neṭunalvāṭai*, but this little piece fairly beats the translator. The whole piece is given here in transliteration:

ilaiyōr / sūṭār / vaḷaiyōr / koyyār/

naḷyāḻ/ maruppiṁ/ mella / vāṅki

pāṇaṉ/ cūṭāṉ/ pāṭiṇi/ aṇiyāḷ

āṇmai / toṉṟa /āṭavar / kaṭanta

Valvēl/ Cāttaṉ/ māynta /piṉṟai

mullaiyum/ pūttiyō / ollaiyūr / nāttē!

The last line goes thus into English;

"O Mullai! How you could flower now, in the land of Ollai!" O-Shaughnessey's- "Has summer come without the rose?" seems to echo this, though the occasion is slightly different.

The obscure poet, Kirattaṉār by name, has made one of the best hits, if not the best hit, in *Puṟaṇāṉūṟu*, with this little piece of six lines. The poem deserves to be scrutinised carefully. Obviously the result of a flash of inspiration, a careful analysis will show us its components.

The first three lines are a picture, where, by a negative reference, their use in happier days is suggested, when children played with them, young women picked them (suggestive of romance) and the minstrel-who flourished only under a patron, put up his harp to bend down the vine of a jasmine plant so that he, too, could joyously crown himself with flowers-and his wife, too, for that matter. A carefree life, now at an end. The cause of all that joyousness was Cāttaṉ of the powerful spear, under the shelter of whose manhood the tender flower-

symbol and what it stood for could be protected. But now he is gone, and with his protective spear is gone the meaning of the flower-symbol in the life of Ollaiyūr. But the flower itself is there! The Jessamine is in full bloom, right in the land of Cāttaṉ of the powerful spear, who is no more. The poet cries out to the plant in sorrow, what business it has to flower. Thus, brief as the poem is, it has three distinct parts, in wonderful juxtaposition: the days that are no more, whose joys are symbolised by the flower; the man who is no more and who was responsible for them; and the irresponsible flower, that will and must bloom in spite of everything. The fusion of these three elements is no result of calculated art, but an event, an experience that take shape under the white heat of sorrow. And a careful examination of the flower-symbol shows the three aspects of the life that was protected by Cāttaṉ's manhood in those warlike days; innocent Childhood, romantic Youth and Artistes, all capable of enjoying the flower though in three different ways: With the protector gone, all three, which need protection, have disappeared. The flower which by use becomes a symbol, loses the meaning of the symbol, but exists to no purpose.

So much for a little poem by an obscure poet on an obscure patron. Whether he was a rice-poet or not, this is not rice-poetry. This is the genuine stuff. And whichever way you look at it, is the cut face of the diamond-without the naivete of the ballad type. You cannot include this either in primitive literature or in imitation-literature. Economy is the word, and the effect, perfection of art.

Another little elegy without an axe to grind *Puṟam* 112 was composed by Pāri's daughters, after their father's death.

Under that moon, in that white light,
Our hill was ours then, and our father lived;
Under this moon, in this white light,
The kings of the victorious drum
Have taken our hill, and no father have we.

The tone becomes deeper and more authoritative, and the themes more arresting when a poet-though this is rather rare-addresses himself bravely to a king in the cause of war, or peace, or justice, or mercy. This changes the role of the poet from the begging sycophant to the fearless adviser. (See *Puṟam* 35,95,143,145, and 184).

Avvai goes as ambassadress to her patron Atiyamāṉ's enemy, looks on the shining weapons on display in his armoury, and suggests, significantly, that her patron's weapons are rusty and scarred from frequent use, not shined bright and kept for exhibition (*Puṟam* 95).

Four poets bring up the cause of a neglected wife to a chieftain. Two of them are reputed *Caṅkam* poets, Kapilaṟ and Paraṇar. The other two are rather obscure poets, called Arisil Kiḻār, and Peruṅkuṉṟūr Kiḻār though the last one is NOT just "minor". All the four poets exert considerable pressure on the straying husband. One of them tells him how the wife was "Wailing loudly like the flute"- (*Puṟam* 143.) Another declares that, as poet, he requires no gift from Pēkaṇ other than that he should return to his wife (*Puṟam* 145). So we do find that a poet's status could be of consequence enough to interfere in matters ranging from political to dometsic.

And there are *Caṅkam* poets who do maintain a certain dignity in the eye of their patrons, and can be sensitive to the slightest affront. When Atiyamāṉ, at first, was not able to recognise Avvai's genius, and possibly treated her as any begging minstrel, she turned her back on him. Another affronted poet retaliated by tying to the "guardian tree" of a rude chieftain, an elephant that he had obtained as a gift from a generous one. (*Puṟam* 162).

The poet Picirāntai's advice to Pāṇṭyan Aṟivuṭai Nampi comes up for notice in this context. The theme is taxation. The poet counsels the king to "know what is just and act accordingly". Should a weak-minded man be king, with his "merely noisy council who have no sense of values", he will desire to extract huge taxes from his grieving people, and things will so work out that he himself will not be able to eat, and his world also will be ruined. Happy the king who has such outspoken counsellors! But this counsellor happens to be a poet too. He sees the elephant, rampaging in a hundred fields, destroying with his feet far more than he eats. Had only the elephant been fed on "rice-balls" from the "harvested field", a small area would have sufficed to maintain him! (*Puṟam* 184).

Kōvūr Kiḻār has five beautiful pieces in this collection, each of which shows him to be of considerable authority as poet and man. One of these shows his familiarity with the story of king Sibi. But that is perhaps beside the point. We say "perhaps", for in all these poems he is bravely, actively, playing the Good Samaritan, at some risk to his own person- and may be Buddhist affiliations or Jain inclinations did have somethting to do with his concern for human life,

even the life of an enemy, in an age when valour was the password and death was of no account. None of these pieces can be passed by.

In *Puṟam* 46 he is addressing the Cōḷa king Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ, as the descendant of the emperor Sibi, who gave his own life to save the dove. Well, here is a sense of proportion indeed! But the "little scanty-haired boys" whom the king has brought out to be trampled on by elephants, are the sons of the famous Kāri, patron of poets, -though Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ's enemy, whom he has vanquished and killed. Now the poet calls the king's attention to the children. They had been crying, but seeing elephants, have forgotten to cry. (Jumbo is always interesting to children!) However, looking at the crowd, (collected there with what feelings the poet leaves us to imagine) they are a trifle scared. And having just pointed this out-enough to evoke pity in hearts of stone- the poet winds up with this challenge to Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ: "Now you have heard this, do your will".

On another occasion he intervenes on behalf of a fellow-poet-a minor one-by name Iḷantattaṉ, who, coming from enemy territory to Cōḷaṉ *Nalaṅkiḷḷi*, was for a time suspected of being a spy and was consequently in danger of his life. Kōvūr Kiḷār's address to Nalaṅkiḷḷi shows a sharp-edged sense of the dignity of his profession, as well as an awareness of the innocence and the pitiable plight of the minstrel who goes looking for reward.

"Like birds,"he says, "they fly to patrons; not counting the distance, they cross the wilderness; with untrained tongue they sing something; they rejoice over what they get; they distribute freely to their kin; they eat it without laying by for the morrow; they give it away cheerfully. In this life of the poet, "pining for alms". warns the bard, "there can be no evil contemplated against others!" Besides, he also proudly reminds the king" "Like you, who have the privilege of ruling the land, we, too, establishing our skill and shaming our rivals, can walk erect, in order, and claim our leadership" (*Puṟam* 47). It would be something today to find a poet who could say this to modern statesmen! The second part of the poem alludes to himself, and his own prowess as a poet, the first part to the innocence of Iḷantattaṉ, who meant no harm apart from seeking a gift. Whether Nalaṅkiḷḷi was convinced of Iḷantattaṉ's innocence or cowed by Kōvūr Kiḷār's displeasure we do not know.

Puṟam 41 is addressed to Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ who does not consider the fitness of the time, which even Death would do, but would fight and conquer at will. The enemy have troubled dreams. "Meteors fall, great leafless trees shrivel up,

the sun shows itself in several places, birds of ill-omen screech fearfully, one's teeth fall to the ground, one has an oil-bath, one rides an elephant, one discards one's clothing, one's weapons tumble down with the cot -(Now, does not this look like having come straight out of Macbeth or Julius Caesar, with one or two improvements to boot, which Shakespeare somehow didn't think of?) Well, such are the ill-omened dreams the enemy has. And then, says the poet, in a flash of imagination, the warrior, "Kissing the flower-like eyes of his son, conceals his pain from his wife". If the poem were a tribute to the valour of Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ, it also contains a thinly-veiled reminder of the human element in the opposing camp-and, of the pity of it!

Another poem (*Puṟam* 44), by the same poet, is addressed to the Cōḷa king *Neṭuṁkiḷḷi* that he is "neither generous nor valorous", in closing down the great gate of his fortress before the enemy, whereby "the infants cry for milk . . . and cries for water are heard in the houses, under the protracted siege". Yet another. (*Puṟam* 45) is a passionate plea for reconciliation between two warring princes who are brothers; "Whoever loses, it's your own house that loses". So much for Kōvūr Kiḷār.

"To raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled", says the disappointed poet *Āvūr Mūlaṁkiḷar*, to the Pāṇṭiya King Naṉmāraṉ," and to refuse what is within one's power to give: what I've never met with elsewhere, I've seen here". And so, he bestows on the source of his disappointment what sounds like a blessing, but is in reality a curse; "May your children never know disease!" (*Puṟam*-196).

The poet Mōci Kīraṉār drops asleep on the king's drum-stand, a crime deserving capital punishment. But the good- humoured king, not wishing to disturb the innocent sleep of his poet-friend, fans him with his chauri-fan! Waking, the poet, shocked at the situation, declares that the royal service was only a ministering for his having mastered good Tamiḻ, thus gracefully getting out of the predicament. (*Puṟam* 50).

The poet Tāmappal Kaṇṇaṉ plays a game of dice with a Cōḷa prince, a dangerous game to play with a monarch. What is worse, he wins. The natural result is that the angered prince flings the dice at his head. The downcast poet reminds the king that such behaviour could never have been expected of the son of his royal father. Whereupon the prince is touched and frankly ashamed of himself. But the poet soothes the prince in a poem (*Puṟam* 43), praises him for his humility, takes the blame on himself, and blesses the gracious prince to live as many days as the sands of the river Kāviri.

Cōḷaṉ Nal Uruttiraṉ in *Puṟam* 190, declares tht he is not like a rat, that pulls stray sheaves into its hole. He is rather like a hungry leopard, that will not touch its prey, were it a bear, should it fall to the left when the leopard strikes.

Puṟam No. 188 shows a yearning for children, by a king, Pāṇṭiyaṉ Aṟivuṭai Nampi. He knows the joy of dining in company, the result of vast wealth. But, he says, without little ones to come toddling up, (*Kuṟukuṟu naṭantu*) and stretching their little hands touching the fragrant rice, and scattering it all over one's body, "life has no meaning".

Nakkīrar, author of *Neṭunalvāṭai* gives a bit of sage advice; "*uṇpatu nāḷi uṭuppatu iraṇṭe*" (What you eat is but a measure of rice; what you wear is but two bits of cloth). Hence the only profit one gets from riches is the joy of giving (*Puṟam* -189). And, "if one wants to enjoy all the riches by himself, many are the errors that will result".

The poet Picirāntaiyār was asked why, in spite of his years he was not going grey. His reason is that he has a good wife and good children; his servants are obedient; he lives in the city of the wise! (*Puṟam* 191).

"*Yātum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir*" is a piece, by an obscure Kaṇiyaṉ Pūṅkuṉṟaṉ. "Every city is my city, all people are my people!" That, from an ancient Dravidian poet, is an interesting observation, (*Puṟam* 192.)

One very interesting poem (*Puṟam* 246) is that by the queen of Pūtappāṇṭiyaṉ. When her husband is dead, she prepares to mount the funeral pyre. We have to remind ourselves *sati* was a purely Āryaṉ custom, and that *sati* is not the kind of custom that can easily infiltrate into a society, which is not already permeated with much of Āryaṉ practice. Of course the higher the social strata, the quicker it comes under codes of respectability and religion. And such drastic measures as *sati* would not easily permeate the lower classes of society, unless society was thoroughly leavened with Āryaṉ principle from top to bottom. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that this is the solitary incidence of *sati* we know of in *Caṅkam* literature. And even here, the queen's reasons for "bathing in the flame" are interesting if frank. She is a princess. She is used to fragrant ghee, "White as the seeds of cucumber". Now she cannot reconcile herself to green vegetables without flavouring, nor to sleeping on the hard floor, apparently the attributes of high-class widowhood. Hence she is going to welcome the flames like a bed of lotuses! The poem resounds with self-confidence, if not defiance. It is a criticism, unintentional of course, of the institution of *sati*, and

cruelty inflicted on widowhood-on upper-class society, where Brahmin influence was strongest.

One Pūtappāṇṭiyaṉ, the husband of this queen, has an oath that is interesting for an ancient monarch: If he cannot make his enemy take to their heels, "Then let me turn false to her of the great eyes, painted with collyrium". (*Puṟam* 71). To be true to one's wife is an understandable wish in the normal man, but in days when kings could command all their human desires, surely Pūtappāṇṭiyan's masculine virtue turns up here for specail commendation. Rather a touch of the Age of Chivalry!

One beautiful little lyrical piece reflects a wife's anxiety when her husband has not returned from the war, " though everybody else's horse has come"/ *mā/ vā/rā/tē/ mā/vā / rā/ tē/* (His horse isn't coming!) Like a log twirled about in the confluence of two rivers, she goes on, that's how that horse must be trapped, (between two armies). But she has not a word to say about the man who rode the horse. She dares not let her words dwell on him. *Puṟam* 273.

And Avvai has a poem (*Puṟam* 100), which speaks of a warrior, whose eyes, bloodshot with the fury of fighting, would not soften, when, coming home, they looked on his new-born son. Here's a warrior- poetess for you! But Avvai comes in for detailed study among the *Caṅkam* personalities.

Kākkai Pāṭiṇiyār Naccellaiyār another poetess, describes the feelings of an elderly woman, with veins starting under her dry skin. When she hears that her son escaped from battle, she vows to cut off her breast that fed him if the news were true. But when, sword in hand, she rushes to the battlefield, turns over the bodies, and discovers her dead son "in pieces" she rejoices "more than on the day when he was born". (*Puṟam*-278). (This sounds to us an exaggerated sentiment,but probably, in those days of war, a generous dose of this was fed to mothers of warrior-sons, who reacted accordingly.

In *Puṟam* 86 we see another mother, though motherhood as such is not a favourite theme with the *Caṅkam* bards. This poem also is written by a poetess, designated simply as "Protectress", addressing herself to her friend, who comes enquiring for her son:

> "..... My son,
>
> Wherever he is, I do not know; this, the belly that begot him,
>
> Like the cave

Indwelt by the roaming leopard; he

Somewhere on the battlefield should be"

Another bit shows a rather warlike girl falling in love with the Cōḷa prince Perunaṟkiḷḷi, who has just overthrown and killed a famous wrestler. The event occasioned a great deal of noise:

āṯā / ṯeṉ parō / oru cā / rārē /
ātaṉ / ṟeṉpaṟ / oru cā / rārē / (Puṟam 85)

("He won! He won!" one group declared.
"He didn't" declared the other).

There was reason for this. The conquering champion did not belong to her locality, and naturally, had few friends. But the maiden, hearing the din, ran up, her "anklets jingling" and from her place of concealment behind a huge palmyrah tree, saw the victor, and "saw that he conquered" her heart! A Rosalind! (*Puṟam* 85).

Now, from the poems of human relationships, we pass on to topics of more general interest. Pakkuṭukkai Naṉkaṇiyār has a rather arresting poem, wherein the poet remarks that the creator has so ordained the world that, while in one home the death-drum is sounded, (*ōril neital kaṟaña*) in another home the wedding drum resounds (*Oril īrantaṉ muḻaviṉ pāṇi tatumpa*). While lovers wear their garlands, those who are separated shed tears of sorrow. Hence, advises the poet, "the world being such, knowing its nature, take the way to happiness" (*Puṟam* 194).

A very beautiful poem, (*Puṟam* 243) contrasts old age sharply with childhood. the poet is not known by name, but is simply designated by one of the most conspicuous lines from the poem *Toṭittalai viḻuttaṇṭnār* (he of the stout metal-capped walking-stick). Obviously now the walking-stick is all that is stout and strong about him. His "few words" are "punctuated by coughs" since he is of "great age" and he shakes even while leaning on his stick. But he cannot help thinking, nostalgically, of his boyhood. Dancing with the very young girls who decked out their clay dolls with flowers, and resting while they rested, " with innocent chums who know no secrecy of guilt", he had made his way along the overhanging branch of the *marutam* tree.

"*Karaiyavar maruḻa, tiraiyakam pitira*" (While those on the bank stood awed, and the flood shot out its spray), he leaped into the water, and brought up

sand from the bottom-an achievement in his *kallā iḷamai* (Uneducated childhood). In those far-off days he had been a hero, to himself, to his chums, and to the little girls. Now he has come to this extremity. The contrast is powerful, poignant.

Puṟam 74 is written by no less than a prince Cēramāṉ Kaṇaikkāl Irumporai. He is in captivity. He had asked for water. It was NOT brought to him. The royal prisoner has left a powerful poem before he killed himself. The victor, a Cōḷa king, seems to have had the royal courtesy to pass on the poem to the right hands-else how do we get it?

Incidentally, from that poem, we come to know of a practice among the warlike Tamiḻ kings; "If an infant dies", it says, "or there is a monstrous birth." (in the royal families) it is put to the sword, for one of royal blood must not die otherwise. And the kings in prison feels himself "like a dog in chains" Surrounded by those who are not his friends, he had been reduced to the position of one who would have to wait for the little which would be grudgingly given "to put out the fire in his stomach". The king asks himself "Could such sons as I have been born in this world?' (not to die a warrior's death). Well, we have the case of Shakespear's Richard II-only, the Cēra prince does not spend too much time crying over himself. Just seven lines- and a full stop.

"Facing the North" is another interesting custom among the ancient Tamiḻs. It really means fasting to death-but why "facing the North?" We remember the Bible verse, "He hangeth the North upon nothing". But what was special about the North for the ancient Tamiḻs? Kōpperuñcōḷaṉ "faced the North" most probably because of the feud in his family. And two poets, Picirāntaiyār and Pottiyār, have left on record their sorrow on his account.

Pottiyār "wept and sang", says the colophon to *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 220, in which he describes the feelings of an elephant-keeper gazing on the empty stake. Once filling his eyes, his heart and the place, now the elephant is no more. How will the keeper, who had loved, tended and fed the great, intelligent and affectionate being for so long, respond to the terrible gap that he now sees before him? That, says the poet, is how he grieves, looking at the Assembly in Mūtūr where the Cōḷa king once presided[3].

This same Pottiyār's next piece, *Puṟam* 221, has an unusual challenge about it, "Come", he says, "you poets of the truthful words. Let us, with all our grieving kin, together scold Death for taking him away so unexpectedly... Wearing

the crown of undying Fame, he has now become a memorial stone".

Yet another (*Puṟam* 222) by the same poet, shows how far he was involved in this Cōḷa king. It seems he had decided to join the king in "facing the North". But the king himself had commanded the poet to go home and wait till his wife, "who had been with him, like his shadow" gave birth to the awaited son. And now the poet, who is back, to the monument, invokes the dead king, "the loveless one", to indicate to him the place that he had reserved for him to "face the North" by his side. And the next piece shows Pottiyār actually doing the thing.

Puṟam 245 shows a Cēra king grieving for the loss of his wife. She has been laid to sleep on the bed of fire. He wonders that the pain he is going through is not powerful enough to take away his life too.

Needless to say, many of these poems are intensely lyrical in experience as in expression. And it is well worth the dive into the vast rice-poetry of *Puṟanaṉūru* if we are looking for such pearls of great price. They are created by not just "dreamers of dreams". They are, by the poets "of the truthful words".

* * * * *

3. *Puram* 220

Chapter IV

PATTUPPĀṬṬU

Pattuppāṭṭu is a collection of ten fairly long poems. Avvai is not represented here, although there is a reference to her. All the ten pieces are, with one possible exception, by men. *Neṭunalvāṭai*, here translated in full, is by far the best of the ten, although all of them do subscribe to some degree of excellence, and they have a great deal to tell us about the background of *Caṅkam* poetry. Three of them are called *Āṟṟuppaṭai* or guide-books, to some patron or other. The last poem, *Malaipaṭukaṭām* is also a similar guide-book, though not explicitly so named. *Maturaikkāñci* and *Paṭṭiṇappālai* are in honour of two famous ancient cities, one of which still continues under the same name, but the other, Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam, then a centre of overseas trade, has been all but wiped out. This is the Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam of the post-*Caṅkam* period. *Neṭunalvāṭai* has been dealt with in detail in this chapter, and hence need not be described here. *Mullaippaṭṭu* looks as though it were inspired by *Neṭunalvāṭai*. A lighter, shorter sketch, it carries many of the graces of the longer poem, without losing its strong individuality. *Kuṟiñcipāṭṭu* is the only purely romantic poem of the ten. *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* has been examined last.

The great difference between these poems along with *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and *Paṭiṟṟuppattu*, and the *Akam* pieces, is that there is far greater occasion here to learn about the trends of the times, and the background in general. For the *Akam* pieces, even though rigidly conforming to set patterns, were dealing with themes of an elementary and universal nature, and such references as were made to contemporary life were inevitably casual and few. True, even the *Puṟam* poems are seriously limited by the poor poets' economic obligations to their patrons for all their stout upholding of the poet's status. Flattery is a weak supporter of Truth-for all that the poets are described as being "of the truthful words", and we have to glean what facts we can from a collection of highly exaggerated encomiums. Still, many interesting facts about *Caṅkam* times do come to light in the *Puṟam* poems. The general characteristics of the *Caṅkam* period, however, are relegated to a separate chapter.

Before proceeding further, we will have a look at *Neṭunalvāṭai* (by Nakkīrar), the most exquisitely beautiful of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* idylls, in translation.

Neṭunalvāṭai

or

(The lengthy-and good-mansoon)

The earth is cold; the unfailing clouds that rise
In curve towards the right, have shed new showers.
Cowherds with crooks, who shun the floods, remove
To higher grounds their herds with bulls, dismayed
At shifting from their old familiar fields.
The rains disturb and toss their garlands, woven
Of glorıosa flowers with petals long;
With cold severe their bodies are oppressed;
In groups, and shivering, they rub their cheeks
With warmth of hands shown over a glowing fire.
Cattle forget to graze, and monkeys cower,
Birds settled on their perches drop to earth.
The cow refuses to the calf its milk.
And then, at midnight in the latter rains,
Of sparse-leaved creepers, white and rounded flowers
With golden peera blooms, from bushes blow.
The fish evade the river's flow and swim
Upstream, as prey to red-veined herons, and flocks
Soft-feathered of the sleek-legged stork, all o'er
The moist white and with black slime spread. Spent clouds
Upsurging white, learn how to scatter drops
From skies dark- blue and broad. In wide lush fields

The coming sheaves of thick-sheathed paddy bow.
From sapphire-throated, stout-stemmed areca palms
The green and watery fruit, with tiny drops
Of water swollen large, with bulging sides,
In cluster from the lusty open sheath,
Ripen with luscious kernel. In groves with tops
Luxuriant, rich with variegated flowers,
From chilly boughs hang coloured drops of rain.

But in the ancient, thriving city, tower
Huge mansions, and like a flowing river sweeps
The broad and lengthening road, where sinewy men
With handsome, strong-built shoulders, garlanded,
Intoxicate with wine, swarmed over by bees,
Of the drizzle heedless, wander in the dusk,
Wherever they please, with scarves that flow behind
And over their chest. In streets with crowded shops,
Young women, with dark and lovely eyes that match
Beautiful pendents from their ears, with forms
Beautiful and soft, with smiles that pearls reveal,
With shoulders sleek, and bracelets white of shell
Tight-fitting on their wrists, do know the hour,
When pretty green-stalked buds of jessamine
Showered upon the tray, with fragrance strong
Unfold their petals beautiful; and then
They kindle moistened wicks in lamps of iron,
And strew the flowers and paddy, joining hands

In worship; and early night thus celebrate.
The domestic pigeon-cock, red-legged, goes not
For food abroad, with him his pleasant mate,
But stunned and helpless, not knowing day from night,
Shifts constantly his feet, perched on the eaves;
In guarded mansions, servants grind to paste
On scented stone like horse-gram shining black,
Ingredients of perfume; the white stone round,
Gift of the Northerners, in the South
With sandal idle lies; while tressed dames,
To strew upon their dark abundant hair
A few stray flowers, but not heavy wreaths,
Kindles sweet-smelling faggots, and warm their locks
In fumes of black and hardened eaglewood,
And fragrant resin white. The crimson fan,
Lovely, wrought by the skilful workman's art
Encased hangs from the hook upon the wall,
Entangled in the spider's cobweb white.
In summer sleeping chambers, in the heights
Of the sky-reaching buildings, windows meant
To admit the southern breeze, are unused.
The strong-framed double doors are bolted fast.
The drizzle hums, by cold winds sprayed. None
Drinks water from the jug with narrow mouth,
But takes the warmth of fires, glowing red
In censers open-mouthed. The dancing girls

Press to their bosom's warmth the dulect strings
Disturbed by cold, and thus they set in tune
The small and black-stemmed harp that it might sing.
They pine whose lovers parted. With drizzle close
Thus reigns supreme the lingering Monsoon.
When that great globe which sheds its spreading rays
In all directions, rising, to the west
So guides its course that from the gnomones twain
Shadows fall not astray, at time of noon,
Skilled master-builders accurately marked
With lines the eight directions, the gods whereof
Were favourably placed, and thus they planned
Thr proper residence of the king renowned.
This they surrounded with a towering wall,
Wherein with strong iron fixed, with ochre red
Painted, twin doors of perfect symmetry
Were hinged, and on the mighty beam above
Joined fine, carved new-blown hyacinths, beside
She-elephants, in symmetry arranged,
Bolts fitted in the closely joined doors,
And all the joints by skilful workmen pressed
Without an interspace, as though a hill
Were in the middle hollowed, that elephants
Might enter bearing flags of victory.
In courtyards of the palace beautiful
Where dwells the goddess of prosperity,

O' erspread with sand, without a fault, unique,
The pure white male of the long-haired yak
Sports at the entrance with the short-legged swan.
The thick-maned horses that refuse the grass
O'ercloyed, and of their stables wearied, neigh
To tell of solitude. From the roofs
The water falling, gushing through the spouts
Shaped like a shark's mouth open, in the yards
Wherein the monarch drank the moonlight's bliss
Is loud. The peacock, proud and soft of form
Trumpets, folding its long luxuriant plumes.
Throughout the palace all these echoes send
Like sounds we hear in closely wooded hills.
Fine images of women by Ionians
Wrought, in outstretched hands bear earthen lamps,
Filled to the brim with oil, where coloured heads
Of flame from stout wicks burn erect. When'er
They fail, they are revived, from all the place
To quell the darkness spread,
. Where, except
The king of proud renown, men venture not,
In the close-guarded mansion, shows mountain-like
The residence of the queen; o'er which stream
The pennons rainbow-like. Its rising walls,
With pillars round and strong like sapphire blue,
Are plastered white as silver everywhere,

And ornamented as with copper red,
And with a creeper bearing lovely flowers
Numerous, painted round. An artisan,
Skilful, to even thickness and straight line,
Chipped off from round the sides of tusks that dropped
From an elephant some forty years of age,*
With strong legs rivalling enormous drums,
With spotted brow supremely grand, high praised
In war, that died upon the battlefield,
Then on the legs, shaped with the chisel sharp,
Large leaves upon the rounded top, -like breast
Of woman nearing motherhood; carved round
And strong the middle; he fitted then the foot
Like garlic shaped; thus raised the royal couch
Spacious, oval-shaped; and round it hung
A lattice-work of pearls, strung beautiful.
Through delicate holes the fine thread passed; then nailed
It firm; bright-coloured bands with tiger-stripes,
Are drawn across, to cover interspace
Within the metal frame; o'er this spread
A mattress soft of dyed and faultless wool,
Painted with scenes of hunting mighty game,
Beside them many buds of jessamine,
In forest vast, vying with other flowers;
Here swells a pillow wide of cushions twain

* Forty years is the age-limit of the elephant

United, stuffed with pure white down of swans
Gathered in mating-time; o'er all is flung
A starched and clean-washed bedspread, from its folds
But newly-shaken, with flower-petals strewn.
And here the queen upon her breast, once decked
With pearls, wears but the pointed marriage-seal.
With pain of separation the few stray curls
Upon her lovely brow, are lustreless,
The ears, deprived of gleaming pendants long
Close-fitting ear-rings wear, but little stretched.
Covered with down, with wristlets scarred, her arms
Shell-bracelets wear, and talismanic thread;
A crimson ring carved like a salmon's mouth
Open, girdles her rosy finger; her waist
Once clad in rich and flowered robes, is wrapped
In threadbare raiment, ennobled by its dust.
Unfinished picture as she is, around
Stand dainty maids whose compexions fine
Without the aid of art, are like the leaves
New-budded on the mango tree, o'erspread
With beauty-spots, with shoulders rounded smooth
And soft, with budding breasts strapped tight, and waists
Supple and slim; they rub her beauteous feet.
While older dames, with ruddy looks, and hair
Perfumed and grey-streaked, on her woe's increase
Crowd close with short and long assurances.

"Today will come your dear-beloved", they say.
Such sweet words she heeds not. Fraught with care
She gazes on the canopy, whose stand
Firm, and with vermilion coated, is fixed
To the royal bedstead's legs with swollen globes;
There, newly painted on the wax-smeared cloth,
Rohini, eternally beside
The prince of light famed for his rivalry
To that swift sun that holds through heaven his course
That from the strong-horned Ram begins. She sees,
And contemplating, sighs; and with the tip
Of her rosy finger now and then she spills
The shining teardrops that in heavy lids
Collected, roll down fast. For her, in whom
Love gathers radiance, who dwells with solitude,
End soon the thoughts of care and woe!
Wherefore,
End soon with victory the king's campaign!
From tent to tent, to see the wounds sustained
By heroes on their breasts, who on the field
Felled veteran elephants with brows adorned
With frontlets, so their long, round, mighty trunks
Rolled upon the earth, the monarch goes
Where large and many heads of flame, when gusts
Blow chilly from the north, southwards bend;
And saddled, beads in their noble bridle-reins

Proud horses swift of foot, in the lanes
Of black and miry slush, are shuddering
To shake the scattering raindrops form their sides;
The general in command, in his hand
The strong and mighty spear with neem-flowers crowned,
Points to the wounded soldiers one by one.
Gathering to the left the scarf that slipped,
One hand upon the shoulder of a youth,
Warlike, on whom the royal sword is slung,
With face benign, by few attended, at dead
Of night, sleepless, under the umbrella white
With strings of pearls hung round, that him protects
From drops of humming, spraying rain,
End soon his battle with the many foes!

Caṅkam standards of literary beauty are Roman standards, Vrgil's standards. Severe, classical restraint; quiet, dignified, realistic observance of detail; avoidance of effusiveness, loudness, erotic excesses and conceits; and subdued reflection on some aspect of life or other, often of permanent interest to mankind: these are the characteristics of *Neṭunalvāṭai*, which is easily the highest peak of *Caṅkam* literature. Hence the need for translation and the study.

The motif is worked out generally with some regard to conventional background. *Neṭunalvāṭai*, however, like a few other of the longer *Caṅkam* poems, brings in both the "*Akam*" and *Puṟam*" motifs and their combination. The worst fault of the *Caṅkam* poets, which is dulness in the detailed and lengthy descriptions, is not noticeable in *Neṭunalvāṭai*. Like most of *Caṅkam* poetry, one first suspects that the beauty of *Neṭunalvāṭai* inclines a trifle towards frigidity, but at the end of the poem one is compelled to realize that its heart is warm, though firmly controlled.

The poem is about a Pāṇṭiya king and his queen, during the time of war. On the one hand there is the queen, subjected to the severe strain of anxiety and loneliness; on the other there is the king, going on his rounds at midnight in the camp, inspecting his loyal soldiers who are wounded, and giving them encouragement by his presence, and his calm face. Over both hero and heroine the north wind, the bane of separated lovers, casts its icy spell. The north wind is the presiding deity of the poem and it is given a very relentless personality.

The first words strike the keynote of the poem, "The earth is cold". The background is Nature-in all her details. Shepherds sit and shiver round out-door fires. Fish swim upstream, while flocks of soft-feathered birds wait and watch for them on the moist sand. Spent clouds "learn how to scatter drops", after heavy showers. High on sapphire-throated areca palms, the green and watery fruit are ripening. And the poet fairly sends a delicious shiver up our spine when he recalls that "from chilly boughs hang coloured drops of rain".

The poet then takes us to the capital, along the road that sweeps, "Like a flowing river". Strong-built young men are out regardless of the drizzle. Scarves are thrown over their shoulders. Within the houses, "the domestic pigeon-cock, red-legged, shifts constantly his feet".

The capital smells of luxury. Servants grind ingredients of perfume. The "White round stone, gift of the Northerners", lies idle with the sandalwood on it. Windows and doors are closed. The details are chosen for their pertinence in relation to weather.

The next step is the description of the palace. But here, one feels, he would begin from the foundation stone! I could imagine an impatient reader protesting against the details, but every line is priceless for the historian. The interior of the palace is lit up by earthen lamps, in the hands of "fine images of women wrought by the yavanās (Greeks). The queen's residence, where, "except the king of proud renown, men venture not", is naturally the heart of the palace. Nakkīrar himself seems to be quite at home there, however, and surveys it with the eye of an architect and sculptor. The royal couch, oval-shaped is itself a marvel. the legs are of ivory, from a magnificent tusker that lived to be forty years old. The lower tips are shaped like garlic. Strings of pearl are hung all round the cot. Over a mattress of wool, swells a pillow of two cushions, united, and stuffed with swan's down. Over all is flung

"A starched and clean-washed bed-spread, from its folds

But newly shaken, with flower-petals strewn".

Maybe for a moment we eye the artist dubiously, not being quite sure what all this luxury is about. The triumph, however, is all the poet's. For we suddenly recognize the poet's plan when he shows us the queen on the royal couch. On her bosom she wears only the *tāli*-or marriage-seal. The few stray curls on her brow are lustreless. Her arms wear only the talismanic thread, and the scars that wristlets had left. Her very apparel is threadbare, "ennobled by its dust". An "unfinished picture", Nakkīrar calls her. Round her are her maids, trying to bring her comfort by chafing her feet. Older attendants tell her that the king will come soon; she should not worry. She does not reply. Her eyes are fixed on the canopy, where an artist had painted Rōhini, eternally by her husband's side. What irony, that this should be over her couch at that moment!

"..... She sees, and contemplating, sighs: and with the tip of her rosy finger now and then she spills the shining tear-drops, that in heavy lids collected, roll down fast".

This is one of the two crests of the poem. This is what we come to. after the ivory, the pearls, the painting on the canopy. And so, in the capital, the ladies perfume their hair, the dancing girls warm the harp at their bosoms, and the yak and the swan sport at the palace gate. The queen, however, keeps silently spilling her tears with the tip of her finger.

But Nakkīrar has not done. *Akam* or love is but one side of life according to the ancient Tamiḻs. There yet remains *Puṟam*, the reverse of the coin. And the poet deftly changes the scene by wishing for the speedy return of the king, who is the object of the queen's thoughts, and who is in camp. The picture of the camp is comparatively brief, but worked out with the same sensitive attention to detail. At dead of night, you see the king, under the royal umbrella, also hung round with strings of pearls-those ridiculous pearls!- going from tent to tent of his valiant and loyal warriors wounded in the day's action. The wind makes itself aggressively felt here also, for the

"Large and many heads of flame, when gusts

Blow chilly from the north, southwards bend".

In the slushy lanes the proud horses with beads in their bridle-reins, shudder to shake off the pattering raindrops. The general shows round the king, who rests one hand on his youthful bodyguard, and gathers up his scarf from the slush with the other. His face is calm, "benign", as he inspects the wounded soldiers. This is Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceliyaṉ, for whom the queen is pining. And this is the second crest of the poem, highlighted by the artist -poet.

The poem is a brilliant study of contrasts: The contrast between the wet and shivering woods and the luxurious capital; the palace and the exposed camp. The smallest details are sometimes suggestive of other and opposite details. But, above all, the anxious face of the queen and the duty-conscious face of the king, heroic in his calmness and his attentiveness to his wounded and loyal followers, are strongly, powerfully contrasted. "For men must work (fight), and women must weep"! But the poet seems to think comments on the situation below his dignity. He simply wishes, "For her sake . . .. .. end soon his battle with the many foes"! That rounds it up.

Dr. Basham observes that "the most remarkable description of an ancient Indian city is contained in the early Tamil poem, " *Maturaikkañci*", and that it has a realism "rare in the literature of the North", Pity, that *Neṭunalvāṭāi*, or *Paṭṭinappālai,* either did not come, apparently, to his notice. Yes, realistic description is of the essence of *Caṅkam* art, but the realism of *Neṭunalvāṭai* is far superior to that of *Maturaikkañci* because, in the former, there is a wonderful selection of details. Never was military camp more vividly, and briefly, presented. It is a quaint mixture of luxurious ornaments and hardships. The poet does not forget the details of the slush at dead of night. The general points with his spear at the wounded soldiers one by one, but the spear is decorated with Neem flowers. The whole is a tasteful, magnificent painting, in full colour, with the light being focussed on the king and queen, both on their personalities and on the hard realities of life they were going through. Or perhaps, *Neṭunalvāṭai* is better compared to a movie that takes us briskly through the rain-soaked woods to the capital, and thence to the pinig queen, and finally to the king to show the impossibility of his even thinking about his anxious wife. And now and then in the reel are close-ups to show either the sway of the North Wind, or the heroism of the king, or the mute anguish of the queen. The cobwebs on the fans, the calm on the king's face, or the moving finger-tip in an otherwise motionless picture of prostrate grief, why, the queen's eye, fastened to the picture of Rōhini with her husband- these are very delicately but unmistakably drawn, all pointing

out to the audience the tyranny of the demands of war on a man's private life, for the poet has NOT given the king an easy victory or cheap flattery.

The details of the palace in the capital may sound excessive, but they are intentionally given to provide a background which is the last word in luxury for the queen. The obvious prupose is to highlight the severity of camp-life. Here is *Akam* balanced with *Puṟam* in the harmony of life studied by the poet.

It must be observed that the physical aspect of love is subdued to the minimum, the emphasis being on the emotional aspect, though controlled under high tension. *Caṅkam* love is essentially Woman's love, the love of the wife, or the girl who is to be the wife. With manhood, when it is not victimised by prostitutes, love acquires a protective dignity rather than an all-absorbing passion. And this is found in the Pāṇṭiya's posture in the camp. Self-possessed and duty-conscious, noble and handosme, attentive to those who were suffering for his sake-this is the man for whom the queen was wearing herself out, a husband for any woman to be proud of. *Neṭunalvāṭai*, calm and self- contained as it is, is a stronger testimony to the Pāṇṭiya's greatness than the most high- pitched lyric could have been. King and queen, man and woman, bound to each other by sacred not erotic-bonds of affection, are shown as separated by stern duty and time when the North mansoon was master of the scene, and when the humblest man would have been glad to be in his cosy home with his beloved wife. *Neṭunalvātai* is not merely a love-poem, it carries with it a deep and penetrating vision of heroism, both characteristic of *Caṅkam* art. Yes, *Akam* with *Puṟam*. And the emphasis is on the painful waiting -but we are going on to a poem which is called by the name "*Mullai*", or "Patient Waiting".

One observation is in place here. Lines 152 and 153 speak of elderly, greying women, "with ruddy looks", as the queen's attendant - mothers'. Their colour arrests us, as being out of place in a Dravidian palace. Could it be that elderly, trustworthy Āryaṉ women were employed by Tamiḻ royalty in such a position of responsibility as "attendant-mothers" to the queen? Again, the queen herself has a rosy finger. Under the circumstances, not painted, certainly. Kings could please themselves in the choice of their mates, and there is no reason why a Dravidian king should not have brought an Āryan princess to adorn his palace. After all, this is a way to the integration of the races!

Mullaippāṭṭu

This is by far the shortest of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems, running to just over a hundred lines. The theme is somewhat like that of *Neṭunalvāṭai*- the separation of royal lovers on account of war. Of course the treatment is, sharply, different.

The poem is by one Nappūtaṉār son of a gold merchant form *Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam* which city is the main feature of another major poem- *Paṭṭiṉappālai.* Nappūtaṉār has taken another city, "Mūtūr, (the "ancient city" , Uṟaiyūr to house the heroine of *Mullaippāṭṭu.* But Mūtūr itself is very much in the shade, despite the "carefully-guarded", "seven-storeyed" palace. The emphasis is more on the military camp -even more than the queen and her surroundings.

The first three lines are clearly a reference to Vishnu, bearing conch, trident, and Lakshmi as well, assuming Viswarūpa. The poem opens on that note. However, there is not sufficient emotive charge in it to justify our calling Nappūtaṉār a Vaishnavite. The lines only prove that puranic stories had by then freely infiltrated into Tamilnad. When Avvai blesses one of the kings to live as long as the "black-throated one", (Civa, who swallowed poison which stuck in his throat) we can clearly see the emotional involvement, and, puranic story or not, Avvai was a committed Caivite. But this puranic story of Vishnu is used just as a comparison, to show how a cloud rising from the sea suddenly covered the whole sky before the downpour. The reference has as much detachment as the reference to the Muses in Milton.

A few interesting facts emerge from this poem. One is just a superstition. The elderly attendants of the queen, worried about her condition, go out in the evening to "strew flowers and paddy", and worship-which gods exactly we do not know, since here we find no mention of temple or idol. But a young cowherdess, tending a baby calf that has been bleating for its mother's milk, comforts it, saying, "Soon, your mother will come". The words fall on the women's ears like a divine answer to their prayers on the queen's behalf. They hurry home, bearing news of the good omen. However, the queen does not take it as they intended. Her tears keep falling "like pearls", drop by drop.

The scene changes to the camp, where the "small-eyed" elephants are surfeited with sugarcane and paddy plants, so much so that they find bitter the rice-balls fed to them by "uneducated young men", for all the *Vaṭamoḻi*[1] that

1. *Mullaippāṭṭu* , Line 35

they had been talking. *Vaṭamoḻi* later comes to mean Sanskrit or the "Northerners' language". Now, now "uneducated young men", and talking *Vaṭamoḻi* ! What the poet means is obvious. The language that the mahouts were talking to the elephants to coax them to eat, sounded to the listeners as unintelligible as Sanskrit, (or say Greek of Latin if you please.) But this is the only reference to *Vaṭamoḻi* literature. One supposes that, as yet, Tamiḻ was language enough for the Tamiḻs.

All round the camp, the bows of the archers are stood like the *Tri-taṇḍās* (the arm-support of men in *tapas*). A formidable fence, one should say. And a word, incidentally, about the men in *tapas*- the "Pārppār" the Brahmins. They wear clothes "beaten clean on stone"![2] Like a *Cańkam* poet, to observe that. And as we proceed, we are in for more surprises.

Yong women, with shining swords attached to their belts, are in charge of the oil-lamps- for it is night. What? A women's Regiment? With special duties in a military camp? Apart from lighting, cooking? And their shining swords, for self-defence? Most likely. And next we hear a gong announcing midnight to the camp. Elderly men, looking rather sleepy, are walking around. Significant, that.

Meanwhile,"dependable men", with folded hands, announce the time- from a water-clock! The "small drops of water" are used to measure time. and there are "fearful-looking Ionians" (*yavanas*) as guardians around the king's resting-place, partitioned off into two chambers by a curtain. And there is one expression which could be interpreted as "wearing armour". Maybe the Greeks had armour (Or breast plates) in those days? Anyway their bodies (chests) had some sort of a cover. Only, the *Cańkam* poets were not expected to tell lies.

Now there are two lines in the poem describing the "servants" in the king's chamber, which raise all sorts of questions, and suspicions, in the reader. Those poor fellows had "tongues that could not speak, "they were dumb. Their language was "the language of the body". And clearly they were looked down upon. They are called *milēcās*,[3] the Sanskrit word *mlēcchas*, denoting "despicables". How did the dumb fellows come there? Note, they did have "tongues".

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2. *Ibid.*, Line 37
3. *Ibid.*, Line 66

The king himself, for all the garlands he is wearing, is thinking of his elephants, whose severed trunks-horrible thought! -are wriggling "like snakes" on the battlefield. And of his horses, which, pierced through with arrows, refuse to eat. One hand supporting his head and the other placing his braceleted wrist over his head- there is no question of sleep for him that night. And of course his queen cannot imagine him sleeping either. She, too is restless. She sighs and shivers like a peacock, and then, suddenly, there falls on her ears the tramping of hoofs. A few sprightly lines, wherein the words seem to jump and dance before us, are devoted to the beautiful flora on the way (symbolic of the anticipated joys of the victorious monarch) and then, the horses of the "long chariot with the rare workmanship" are home.

Neither *Mullaippāṭṭu* nor *Neṭunalvāṭai* have much to say about the actual fighting. That would be too much. But *Mullaippāṭṭu* has its marked difference from its greater counterpart. There is more action here, if less of controlled emotion and careful craftsmanship. And one can understand if *Mullaippāṭṭu* is assigned a very respectable place in *Pattuppāṭṭu*.

Paṭṭiṇappālai

This poem is of value mainly on account of the city of Pūmpukār (Kāviṛippūmpaṭṭiṇam), now no longer a city, but once a prosperous port-town. Probably this was a harbour to which Solomon's navy found its way. But *Paṭṭiṇappālai* is the only detailed record that we have of it. It was written by Kaṭiyalūr Uruttiraṇ Kaṇṇanār (He of the angry eye- "Rudra" -from Kaṭiyalūr). The name, of course, does not sound Dravidian, but, with Aryan influences coming in through the Brahmins, and besides, Civa(Rudra) being already worshipped as a favourite god as stone (no carvings noted as yet) under the trees, we can understand it if even a non- Brahmin was given the name of Rudraṇ- Kaṇṇaṇ, But this Uruttiraṇ Kaṇṇaṇār has written another long poem in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, and from a perusal of both his poems in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, we should be able to find out if he is a Brahmin or not. After all, that is a pointer to the entry of Āryan influence into Tamiḻnad.

We take up *Paṭṭiṇappālai* first. As in the two poems we have already seen, the poet seems determined to incorporate *Akam* with *Puṟam*, but here, with scant success. Somewhere in the latter half of the poem, (Lines 218-220), in a poem of 301 lines, there is a vow made by the lover to his beloved. And that is, were he to be endowed with all the riches of Pūmpukār, he could not leave her

behind. Then the last two lines; they just state that, if separation from her were as painful as the Cōḷa king's spear, her sleek, soft shoulders are sweet as his sceptre. And this is all the *Akam* element, for which we can detect no specific purpose either. *Akam* in *Paṭṭiṉappālai* is a failure.

The first part of the poem shows the activities of the city, and the second, the prowess of the warrior-king, Cōḷaṉ Karikāl Vaḷavaṉ. As such we have to study it. And with a swing and a lilt, rare in the other *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems, the poet strikes into the opening lines -the river Kāviri. Kāviri is a familiar name in the later *Cilappatikāram* but here the poet speaks of "Kāviri", from mountain to sea,

"That will not fail, though the clouds might fail",

"*Vāṉpoippiṉum tāṉ poiyā-*

Malaittalaiya kaṭal - Kāviri

A dependable river. And here's a reference to a bird that live on the raindrops. Without rain-water, it cannot live. Well, there seems to have been such a bird, not common, in ancient Tamiḻ legend. Though legend is not a common feature of the *Caṅkam*.

But as we proceed, the poem comes down to earth. Fields of paddy, and sugarcane. Nearby, a sugarcane factory! Believe it or not, the heat of it withers up the flowers in the pond. The young one of the buffalo dozes in the shade. Coconut trees. Banana. Arecanut Mango-varieties of it. Palmyrah. Ginger. Here's the countryside. Little boys wheel around their three-wheeled toy- chariots, stopped only by the leaf-heavy twigs, thrown by the womenfolk at the pheasants.

Boats that came form inland with paddy in exchange for the "white salt", are tied to the bank in line like"ranks of horses meant for war". Twin lakes, and ahead is the "strong guarded gate", with the tiger-seal of the Cōḷas. Within, there is the great Dharmaśala- "*Aram nilaiyia akaṉ attil*" where rice is cooked for the needy, and from which roof the thick rice-water flows into the streets. The bullocks trample it into slush, but when the chariots over-run it, dust rises and covers the "white temple" in the vicinity, till it looks like an elephant that has had its bath. Well, this temple could not have been very big. And quite close by there are also Tavappaḷḷi- the monasteries of the Jains and Buddhists.

And then we come to an exciting observation. There are ascetics (Brahmins) performing *veḷvis* or *hōmas*, the fragrant smoke of which isn't

pleasant to the *kuyil*, which with its black-coloured mate (the cock is speckled) seeks out the refuge of the dove "which swallows small pebbles". The *kuyil* is the sweetest songbird that we know of, and the dove is symbolic of innocence even in Tamiḻnad. well, neither the *kuyil* nor the dove seems to like the *vēḷvi* smoke! Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉār says this!Probably what he intends to point out is the abundance of the *vēḷvi* smoke.

But the refuge of these birds is "the unspeakable building, protected by *pūtams* or spirits'. Probably a house of Dravidian worship. So we find all these, - a place for Brahmins' *hōmas*, Tavappaḷḷis of Buddhists and jains, and the Dravidian "*Pūtam* -guarded" roof, existing together. No sign of clashes.

Now we come to the "striped" sand- dunes where the "noisy folk who work hard", eat "roast" lobster, and "boiled crab". So. they live well. They don't stop there. wearing water-hyacinths, they assemble in the groves where they practise war-games. Wrestling. Fencing. Shooting stones from catapults, till the birds are frightened away.

Around, are pigs and pheasants. This is a *cēri*, "outside" the city, where those poor folks described in the previous paragraph, live. Their homes are low-roofed huts with fishing tackle stuck into them, rather like the low "Naṭukal" (hero-stones) surrounded by shield and spear. On the sand, spread out to dry, are the fishing nets, "like darkness settled on the moonlight". Meanwhile, the womenfolk have their own occupation too- worship. Their object of worship is the back-bone of the she-shark about to cast her young. Yet another kind of worship, the fifth! Worship of sea-life.

Now the poet presents their festival. "Irumparatavar" the "dark-skinned fisher folk", he calls them, Where the river Kāviri meets the sea, like" the cloud, embracing the great hill", and "the infant, embracing the mother's breast", there is bathing in the water, running after the crabs, making sand-dolls and there are men and women. Exchanging garlands, drinking, and making love. There. is singing, acting and enjoying the moonlight.

But meanwhile the merchandise goes on. Everyday, unfailing, like the "horse drawing the chariot of the angry, multi-rayed one" (by the way, doesn't that sound a bit Greek?) the "workmen of repute, who guard the treasures of the king", bring up from water to land, and down from land to water, what "cannot be measured". Whatever is exported has the "tiger-seal" on it. Upon the heaped objects, dogs and goats roll over one another. Now we come to a

great building that "touches the clouds". Access is only by stair-ways. Beautiful women, like peacocks, doe-eyed, stand gazing at the lattices with folded hands, while another kind of worship is going on outside. There is frenzied dancing, to the sound of music.

"*Kuḻal akava, yāḻ murala*",

"While the flute wails,and the harp hums", they are accompanied by two percussion instruments. The worship of the "many" is directed to a "flag". Another flag, of cloth. is also an object of worship, people "scattering rice" before it. But among these many flags is one particular flag of special interest. This is a "formidable" flag, under whose shade,

"*Tollāṇai nallāciriyar*"

"Great scholars of ancient command"

who had "mastered many fields of scholarship", argued with one another for the sheer sake of debate. Again, does this not sound Greek?

Other flags: those which flutter from the ships' flag-staff, when the ships are at rest in harbour. And flags "of many shapes". But so many are the flags, they do not permit the sunlight to enter the city! An unusual *Caṅkam* exaggeration indeed.

But we don't seem to have left the beach yet! The "erect horses" that came by water, the bags of pepper that came from inland, gems and gold that "were born" in the northern hills, and sandalwood from the Potiya hills, pearls from the southern sea, coral from south-west, precious things from the Ganges and the Kāviri, eats from Iḻam or Ceylon, valuables from Burma, "rare things and great", are all mixed up together.

Here folks "support their kin, and ignore their foes". Before the fisher-folks' huts, the fish are "rolling" over one another, freshly caught and still alive. The buyers crowd together. They do not allow murder or theft. They please the gods. They feed them on ghee. They care for cows and the bulls. They spread the fame of those of the four *Vēdas* (Brahmins). They distribute eats and soft rice. This is the "cool, refreshing life of the ploughmen with the bent plough". Among them are the "truthful" supervisors, afraid of bad reputation, and seeing with "equal eyes" that which belong to them and to others. They "mingle" with many neighbours from the townships.

"They take not more, they give not less". They move freely around, in the "blameless country" where "many languages abound"! Pity, we are not told what languages "abound"! Here ends the picture of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam - of course an idealised picture. And this is where the *Akam* portion is inserted.

Now we pass on to the military prowess of the king. He grew up in prison from childhood, "like the striped cub of the tiger in a cage". Obviously his father had been conquered and killed, but the child's life had been spared. But like "the tusker of the mighty trunk" that "tore its way out of the pit to join its mate", he had managed to "climb over the strong fortress", and to "use his sword" to "take back his inheritance". He didn't stop there. He had "rolled down the crowned head" of his foe, destroyed the elephants "that break doors with their tusks", along with the war-horses, while the vultures "roamed the sky", fought simply "for the love of fighting" and changed into dry land the great pools of water with hyacinths and plenty of crocodiles, so that "the doe played there with the six-antlered stag".

Next comes an observation that makes us stop. Two places of gathering are mentioned-in enemy territory. In one, where women (now in captivity) had once lit the evening lamps and many had worshipped, the mighty wild elephant brings down the tall pillar by rubbing his itching shoulder on it. Scant respect for a house of worship in enemy territory! In another, a "formidable meeting-place, where during festive occasions the sweet harp had sounded, with percussion instruments", now the owl hoots, and she-devils join with the he-devils in devouring the corpses. It's a devils' feast on the battlefield!

In the great hall where rice was once cooked for the hungry, now the green parrot lisps. Inside the dark and now-empty granaries, the night- birds cry by day. Still unsatisfied with laying waste enemy country, the warrior- monarch, Cōḷaṉ Karikāḷaṉ, breathes this challenge

"I'll bring down the hills; dry up the ocean;
Shake down the heavens; change the winds' direction"!

A boast, which certainly he could not have fulfilled, and which again does not smack too much of the *Caṅkam*!

And the neighbouring states are scared!

"*Vaṭavar vāṭa, Kuṭavar kūmpa*"-

"The Northeners wither; the Westerners faint".

As he looks with his red eyes on them, the weak princes are destroyed; the "five great chieftains with all their kin, break down"

Destruction over, construction begins. Forests are cleared to make room for villages. The lakes are once more filled with water. The king expands his own capital "with the many mansions". There he finds the "little ones playing around". And the red paste on his bosom is disturbed, says the poet, "by pressing to it the breasts of the bejewelled women". Mind, women, in the plural. And the poet, thinking of his beloved, winds up saying that her love is as sweet as Cōlaṉ Karikāl Vaḷavaṉ's sceptre!

Paṭṭiṉappālai has one great redeeming feature. It sings. Again and again and again, we catch ourselves chanting. The brevity of the lines is certainly conducive to the emphasis on the measure. But it has its faults. The thought-arrangement is certainly not as lucid as in *Neṭunalvātai*. The author must have had tremendous influence on the *Caṅkam*- he was paid 60,000 gold coins by the Cōḷa king and no wonder. And besides, he has got another poem, a longer poem, in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, an *Āṟṟuppaṭai* which will be taken up for study with the three other *Āṟṟuppaṭais* (meaning "guides to patrons".

Cōḷaṉ Karikāl Vaḷavaṉ is celebrated for his victory over the two other Tamiḻ kings and sundry chieftains. Well, if that was not the beginning of the fall of the Tamiḻs! Tamiḻ king against Tamiḻ king or kings- and what would become of the Academy? The famous *Caṅkam*?

Kuruñcippāṭṭu

This is the one of the ten poems that could really be called an idyll- though the poems go by the name the Ten Idylls. The setting is the mountains- *Kuṟiñci*. The whole poem is in the form of monologue- the heroine's attendant is speaking. The heroine is a mountain chief's daughter. The family is anxious about her. The maid is talking to the mistress of the house about the heroine's illness.

Now, the family have enquired of "those who know", and have been told that she is "possessed". Hence the mother worships and serves flowers, to "the godhead in different forms". But the maid knows better. Her young lady is worried because she does not know how to face her father "who has the great chariot" with the truth. The maid herself is diffident, torn between two anxieties. The context of that love- story was provided by the elder lady herself, who thus

has to share in the blame. It was she who sent her young daughter with the maid to watch over the cornfield- haunts of dangerous wild elephants, to drive away the birds.

The two girls had first climbed to the bamboo-rest on a high tree and kept to instructions using the customary instruments to make noises and frighten away the birds. But then the raincloud would come, bringing thunder and lightning with water from the sea. What fun now for the girls, to splash in the lovely brooks, enjoy a wash, and wring out the water from their long hair!

The fun didn't stop there. What a weatlth of flowers spread out before their eyes! The list in fact is far longer than the list in Lycidas- not that, of course, it means any special credit, and it goes with a rhythm not common in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems except *Paṭṭiṇappālai*. To quote three of the thirty or more lines of description:

"Tillai/ pālai/ kallivar/ mullai/
Kullai / piṭavam / ciṟumā / roṭam/
Vāḻai / vaḻḻi / niṇaṟu / neital/"

The girls forget themselves in the wilderness of flowers. Still shouting at the birds, they pick the leaves and flowers to make themselves kirtles with, bind garlands round their foreheads, and put a flaming flower each behind an ear. - when, who should come on the picturesque scene but a pack of angry hunting dogs, to surround them? Seeking a way of escape, they chance on the young hunter who apologises for their plight, stinting no words about their beauty, thus carefully highlighted.

But now comes an elephant. The woodsman, drinking the sweet fermented honey, offered him by his doe-eyed wife, had ignored the tusker, which, wandering into his fields, was working havoc there. Brought to realise the situation, he took up his bow, let the arrow fly, and besides raised such a din and clatter that the tusker turned tail and fled. His way, however, happened to be right where the three young people were standing, and he came trumpeting like thunder . The girls flew to the young man for succour. He with a single arrow, aimed so well and true, that the elephant, his spotted forehead bleeding, swung round again, and disappeared in a trice. The heroine was, however, still quaking- in the hero's arms. He, declaring that her beauty was his, brushed the curls from her brow, "thought a long while" and, looking at the attendant maiden,

"laughed", obviously in triumph. Now the heroine, whose natural modesty had returned, sought to escape from her lover's embrace, only to be drawn closer to him. It all began there!

The attendant maiden reminds the mother now that this young man is not a nobody. He is master of the fertile hills, where the peacock, drinking of the stream where the abundant jack-fruit and mango-fruit lie fermenting, dances itself crazy! Nor is he a weak lover. What dangers he faces on his nightly visits to his beloved! And that explains her young mistress's worry on his account. No wonder she pines away. For this, then, there is only one remedy- the obvious one. So ends the Mountain-Song, *Kuriñcippāṭṭu.*

This poem does have a freshness, romantic fragrance, as its distinguishing feature among the *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces, where sternness of outlook and severity of expression are often marked. Love before marriage was a favourite theme with the *Caṅkam* poets, however much the *Caṅkam* parents might have protected their girls from philanderers. Under normal circumstances a father "with the great chariot", would have the responsibility of looking for a suitable husband for his daughter. But the abnormal is not the impossible, and clandestine affairs and runaway matches would have occurred. Strange to say, the poets themselves were preoccupied with the abnormal. So much so, that love before marriage is treated in *Akam* poetry as the normal, most desirable course of romance. Even Kampaṉ succumbed to the fascination of this theme, a dozen centuries later, when he made Cīta fall in love with Rama before their marriage. *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*, the Highland Song, is a lovely narrative with many graces, not the least of which is the tactful way in which the speaker of the monologue unfolds the seriousness of the situation.

It is no flighty or casual affair, but made to look like a decision of Fate- and even the poor mother is reminded of the finger she unwittingly put in the pie, so that we may infer what stand she will have to take when the case for the heroine's marriage with her lover is brought up before the father, "with the great chariot". And. what a predicament for "those who know", who have declared that the signs of ill-health in the heroine are the signs of demon-possession!

If we do not call *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* a great poem, we can call it an enjoyable one in any case, with a just sense of proportion- the climax being that moment when the tusker drives the lovers into each other's arms. We sense the attendant's hesitation in the narrative, but she soon warms up to it, and by the end she is in dead earnest, pleading-between the lines- for her mistress's immediate marriage.

This poem, running to two hundred and sixty-one lines, was written by Kapilar, a Brahmin poet- of whom, more later- to teach an Āryan king, Prakatattaṉ "about the graces of Tamiḻ poetry. The colophon to the poem gives this information. Now one "Āryaṉ" prince, Prakatattaṉ, has actually written a short poem on the *Akam* theme in the Tamiḻ anthology. Was he the same prince whom Kapilar tutored? But anyway, Kapilar's syllabus is incomplete, for *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* is only *Akam*, and *Puram* is almost left out. Was Kapilar playing safe? It wouldn't have done to teach an Aryan king about the military prowess of the Dravidian princes! Just here, a question: What was the Āryan prince doing in Tamiḻ Nad? Only learning Tamiḻ?

Another question: It was the Rev. Pope who brought out *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* in English. The Rev. Pope's Tamiḻ tutor was a Brahmin. Was there nothing greater than *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* to show the missionary, out of the entire range of Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* literature?

THE FOUR ĀRRUPPAṬAIS

or

Guide books to patrons

Malaipaṭukaṭām (Mountain-Sounds)

All the four *Āṟṟuppaṭais* have just one business in hand- poet, or minstrel, or dancer, or actor, who has been honoured with priceless gifts by a king or chieftain, is showing the way to another of his kind. Rather like one beggar telling another where to find food". Only, the dimensions are different. But it is interesting how much of information we can pick up incidentally while listening to the narrative. No, not about the cities, but just the jungles, and the mountains.

Malaipaṭukaṭām is of special interest because of the description of the musical instruments of ancient Tamiḻnaḍ. yes, the *yāḻ* or stringed instrument, does feature in the three other *Āṟṟuppaṭais*, in very great detail - but here is enough for an orchestra! And the Mountain- climber, the one who, with all his clan, is looking for encouragement and support-say patronage- is not an ordinary beggar.

The poet begins with a percussion instrument, the *muḻavu*, which resounds "like thunder". Next come the cymbals. Then the horn. Then the pipe, with holes, on which melody can be played. Then, another pipe, which keeps sounding the fifth note of the octave, say, corresponding to *sōl*. Next, the "sweet flute", Then, two other percussion instruments. All of them are packed into a bag, which, naturally, "resembles a jack - fruit"! Now the musical party is climbing a narrow path, which looks as if it has been "stood" on the mountain -it's steep. On the way, the jungle-folks, " who live with their wives, " do not cause the travellers any harm. Fifteen lines! -are devoted to the *pēr-yāḻ*, or Great Harp, which obviously would not get into the "jack-fruit" bag. But the fifteen lines defy the translating capacity of the present writer-although it has to be noted that the playing of the instrumetns is strictly according to "instruction from experts".

The guide himself is coming from the famous chieftain, "Naṉṉaṉ, son of Naṉṉaṉ". One observation about this chieftain is that he is husband of "beautiful women". The beauty of the wives is beside the point, the plurality isn't. But the guide has amply benefited by the generosity of Naṉṉaṉ, son of Naṉṉaṉ, and he expects the same unstinting generosity to be bestowed on the leader of the musical party going uphill. This is a party of Kūttars (dancers)-and they have their womenfolk (*viṟalis* or women-dancers) with them all, except those who are newly confined- to use an English idiom. Of course the music would be imperative for the dancers. This poem has another name - *Kūttar Āṟṟuppaṭai*- "a guide to the Dancers". And a word about Naṉṉaṉ. Line 77 speaks of him presiding over a "happy" court, where "good people gather" and "tongues (of poets?) speak" (obviously in praise) of him. These major chieftains were very much like kings in their own right. When once the Triarchy was befuddled, they would naturally make room for new rulers, if not exactly the Cēra-Cōḻa Pāṇṭiyās, And *Malaipaṭukaṭām*, the lengthiest of the *Āṟṟupṭais* gives all the praise to just a chieftain.

Kaṭām literally means the "must" of the elephant. And the mountain-path is full of the sounds of the wild, including the elephant of course! For that matter, the elephant is everywhere, in Caṅkam literature. Wild. Tamed-with tinkling bells. In the fore of the army. And, actually given as gifts by the princes or chieftains, to the poets and artists. A costly gift, one should say, for both giver and receiver! Here is a wild she, trumpeting for help, when the tiger strikes, while hubby elephant is away foraging for food for his mate - for she is carrying his young. And elephant-cubs- in puppy-fight! And even the rocks of

the mountain area are frequently compared to elephants. No wonder the mountain is compared to an elephant in "must". But this elephant can be pulled down by the crocodile or "swallowed" by the huge mountain boa! Believe that? Do you know that "Ana-Conda" simply means "Ēlephant-killer" or "Elephant-taker" in Tamiḻ? Any relationship between South Americans and South Indians? It would seem that their Ana-Condas are related, any way?

There are other sounds up in the mountain. The goddesses splashing in the water are "keeping time" (now there's a bit of Greek again!) Up in trees are rests where the mountain folk are perched, clapping their hands to drive away the birds from the corn. Monkeys chatter. And the "many birds" gathered in the spreading banyan *(Āl)* tree, with its ripening fruit, are making "many noises" - their noisy orchestra! The waterfall "sounds sweet" on the mountain-side. The porcupine shoots its quills, and the forest-folks scream with the pain. Women, whose husbands' chests have been torn by the leopard, sing songs that are supposed to heal their wounds. There are noises of bulls fighting. Now, a cacophony! For, a monkey cub has fallen to its death from the heights. There are cries of joy, too, and of dancing and singing. There is drum - beating, to drive away the pigs from the plantations. The mountain "echoes" with these sounds, when the musical party comes up. The path is dangerous enough, but the people are hospitable. Wherever wayfarers rest, there is food, and plenty of it. No vegetarianism here, thank you! Down to pigs, baked in fires started among the bamboo clumps. And dried fish. And hospitality is at its height when they reach the court of Nannaṉ.

The poem does have an over-all plan: mountain-sounds, as opposed to man-made music. The former are confused, but the latter conforms strictly to certain standards. We are also caught unawares by the *naṭukal* (hero-stones) on the mountain-side, inscribed with the names, and achievements, of the buried warriors. There are superstitions: women singing to heal the mauled bosoms of their husbands. And, there is religion! The performers, the "sweet-voiced *viṟalis*" first worship "the mighty One who is beyond all things" (*Arumtiṟalkaṭavuḷ*) "according to the age-old custom" - and then proceed with their singing. Worship is of many kinds, and the *naṭukal* or hero-stone also is an object of worship. There is mention of Civa (The deity who swallowed poison to save the gods) who has his residence in Naviram, a mountain. But we don't find a temple to speak of. The author of this rather impressive poem is Peruṅkaucikanār from Peruṅkuṉṟūr - which names convey NOTHING to us.

Ciṟupāṇaṟṟuppaṭai (The Minstrel's guide - Minor)

This is the shortest of the *Āṟṟuppaṭais* comprising only two hundred and seventy lines, and the author is one Nappūtanār, from Nallūr. This has its marked points of interest. One is that it seems to have been written at the close of the *Caṅkam* period. For it refers to the Cēra-Cōḷa-Pāṇṭiyās as having run out of their greatness. And in particular, to the Pāṇṭiyās. To Maturai, "where Tamiḻ was once a weighty, ancient tradition". And this is the only poem in which the seven great Benefactors (The seven famous chieftains) are mentioned by name and by the gifts which have immortalised them. Here again, the famous Seven are no more. One of these Seven, it must be mentioned, was Āi-connected, later, with the Royal House of Travancore. Another was Atiyamāṉ who bestowed the life-giving fruit on Avvai. Well now, there happens to be just one chieftain, Nalliyakkōṭaṉ from whom the poet, impersonating the successful Pāṇaṉ, is just returning, with rare gifts, and to whom he is directing the impecunious Pāṇaṉ and his tribe.

Here comes a description of the poverty to which the "poet" himself was once subject before he met Nalliyakkōṭaṉ. Later Tamiḻ poetry abounds with painful pictures of poverty. But this one is equal to any of them. A bitch has just whelped, in the kitchen, and as the young pups, "with eyes closed" and "ears back" keep pulling at her dugs, she keeps yelping in pain - for there is no milk. The old wall is eaten up by white ants, and the hearth is fungus - ridden. But the woman of the home, "with the lean waist", goes out to pluck edible green leaves, cooks them "without salt", and, ashamed of "foolish onlookers", "closes the door", and gathers her "dark-skinned" family round this poor fare. Now the "poet" is returning home "with the great chariot", and the "small-eyed" elephant with the "tinkling bells". So he directs the fellow-sufferer to Nalliyakkōṭaṉ.

On the way, they have to cross the beach, where the *puṉṉai* "flowers pearls". The fisherfolk will give them dried fish and sweet toddy, "everywhere". No want of hospitality anywhere. When the party reach Vēlūr, (Vellore) they will get roast venison and rice. Next comes Āmūr, the "carefully guarded city with the cool moat", where "there is no dearth of Brahmins" - but-but- the party is directed to go where the paddy-fields lie, and where the plowman's daughter will give them plenty of "white rice" and crab-curry. The Brahmins' dwelling-place seems to be the only area where Nallūr Nattattaṉār does not envisage hospitality. But the poet directs the Pāṇaṉ to go through the fields to the capital,

Mūtūr, where the gates "are not closed" either to "the actors, or the poets", or "the Brahmins -of the tongue that speaks of the rare hidden things"!

The chieftain will look kindly on them all. And he has his troupe of beautiful women who keep praising him (with song and dance) And many are those who surround him as the stars surround the full moon. Now is the time for the Pāṇaṉ to take out the harp, tune it, "sound against sound", and make its "honeyed" accents heard in the Assembly- mind, "according to the instructions of the *musical treatise*". They will be rewarded with fine garments. And drinks, heady drinks, "like an angry snake-bite". "He will see that you have feast, give you a vehicle (probably an elephant) with a driver, and other gifts", says the poet, for hasn't he had enough experience? So ends *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* by Nallūr Nattattaṉār.

Perumpāṇaṟṟuppaṭai (The Minstrel's guide - Major)

This is the second longest of the *Āṟṟuppaṭais* running to a clean five hundred lines. But the author of this poem, Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉār, is also the author of another lengthy, more famous, *Pattupāṭṭu* piece-the *Paṭṭiṉappālai* and the name does suggest that he could be a Brahmin, and he was certainly an influential man in his day, for did not the Cōḷa king Karikālaṉ bestow 60,000 gold coins on him for that poem on his capital? For us, it is priceless because of the information it carries along with its word-music.

Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai is, somehow, another story. This is in praise of a famous chieftain, Toṇṭaimāṉ Iḷantiraiyaṉ, but the special graces of *Paṭṭiṉappālai* are not here. But of course, no Caṅkam poem goes below par, and that is the wonder of it. The poem opens with a lengthy description of the harp, that the Pāṇaṉ clasps to his left, and the poet, as successful Pāṇaṉ, addresses the poor one who is wandering with his "hungry, noisy clan", "like birds in search of trees with ripening fruit". The "poet" speaks of himself, now rich with horses and elephants. We can understand if the poet speaks so highly of that chieftain, in whose realm "the lightning will not strike; the snake will not kill; nor the leopard pounce". Here comes a story about Toṇṭaimāṉ Iḷantiraiyaṉ which smacks very much of puranic lore. And now the poet starts with his directions.

As usual, all the way there is hospitality to the minstrels. According to the type of terrain. Dried fish and rice, served on teak leaves - in the beach. In the desert area, rabbits caught by "open-mouthed dogs". And so brave are the

womenfolk that they cannot be scared by the elephant, or the snake, or the thunder- life has inured them to hardships. There are menfolks who do cattle-raiding, sell the cattle for liquor, slaughter and eat the strong bull, and drink themselves drunk - where the travellers can beat their drums, and spend the day joyously with them. There are areas rich in butter and buttermilk, where the cowherdess will exchange the butter only for milch kine, not for gold. Of course the travellers will feed here on rich buttermilk and rice. And the delicious juice of sugarcane. And the brown sugar from the sugarcane factory. Note that the vegetarianism here does not indicate Brahminism, for there is another area indwelt by the Brahmins, whose cuisine is dealt with in detail.

Two observations take our note here. The children of carpenters are fed on the milk, not of their mothers, but of their nurses. That implies a luxurious way of life. And certainly, roast chicken does. Well, the list of resting places and different dietary customs goes on, till we come to the Brahmin quarters. Very minute are the details. No dogs here please. No chicken. But in front of the home is a low shed where the calf is tied up. And there are parrots that repeat the "Vēdās". And, the details of Brahmin cookery are all there, such as we know it even today. Pure vegetarian. All this we can understand, but we are told that the chaste lady of the home will serve, to the hungry travellers, prepared food. Well that is NOT what we would have expected, from what we learn in *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*. And, this phenomenon is found elsewhere in *Caṅkam* literature.

Just an interlude. Tradition has it, and has it strong, that in heated argument between Nakkīrar and the god Civa, Nakkīrar had the best of it, and coolly told the god, "Even if you open your third eye (of destruction), an error is an error". *"Neṟṟikaṇṇait Tiṟappiṇum Kuṟṟam Kuṟṟame"* has passed into Tamiḻ lore. The poet's name "Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉ" which means, "He of Rudra's eye", suggests the deity Civa. Did Nakkīrar spot a blemish in Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉ's poetry? After all, the poets of the *Caṅkam* were supposed to be strictly "truthful".

And there is yet another question. What is the *yāḷi*, the terrible beast, about which this poet speaks? Why are there no descriptions of this animal alone, in a literature which is so particular about its correct, detailed observations? Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉ, among other very detailed notes, could describe a boar, fed fat for its pork, as being "short-legged" and "confined to a pit". Why not a word about this *yāḷi*, except that it lives in caves? It seems to be a shapeless Fear, from which even the elephant-herds flee in terror. And this *yāḷi* does occur in

one or two other places in the literature, and by other poets. Did this Fear come out of the Lord of the Flies, or was it a real animal? If so why is everybody silent about its appearance? Much later, some sculptor have carved the *yāḻi* in temples.

And there is a reference to the lotus, as being the lotus seat of a deity - of course that must be Brahma. Again, the poet speaks of the ancient city, which has a "pride of place above other cities" because of the festivals in which "many people worship". Again, there is a reference to Turiyōtaṉaṉ and Taruman, (of the *Mahābharata* of course). Rather too many puranic references for a *Caṅkam* poet. They point to Brahmindom.

The rest of the poem is as usual with the *Āṟṟuppaṭais.* Nobody, past or present, can exceed in valour or in generosity, the patron of the poet. As for this particular chieftain, he is able to take a personal interest in the minstrel's children "child by child" at the great feast. Reason? In this unstable world, Fame is the only thing that will last. But will it, really? If fame wasn't the biggest bug that bit the poor *Caṅkam* kings. And the chieftains. And the poets. Or, did it all start from the poets?

Poruṇāṟṟuppaṭai (Or, the guide-book of the Dramatic Troupe)

One really gets fed up with the Tamiḻ patrons and their beneficiaries. Surely you would expect something about ancient Tamiḻ drama from this poem at least? Except for three words "staging a scene", "the rest is silence" on that point. You get as much as that from *Paṭṭiṇappālai.* And, the patron in both poems is the same Cōḻaṉ Karikāl Vaḷavaṉ. And both poems refer to his vanquishing the other two Tamiḻ kings, the Cēraṉ and the Pāṇṭiyaṉ. Only, the author of this poem has a line which could be indirectly interpreted as a wish. She (for it looks like a she) dared not have expressly stated it as such. The range of sounds, covering three octaves, makes a special beauty of sound like the Tamiḻ country when the three kings were ruling together! And, definitely the references to the *yāḻ* or ancient Tamiḻ harp are very interesting. Actually Cuvami Vipulāṉantar, a Tamiḻ enthusiast, had tried to build up the *yāḻ* from the descriptions in the four *Āṟṟuppaṭais* taken together, and succeeded to a certain extent, though it has since been completely superseded by the Veena. Nearly twenty lines of this poem are devoted to the *yāḻ.*

A word about the poetess. The name indicates the feminine gender. The suffix "Muṭa" suggests that she was lame, though to what extent we do not know. She is the only *Āṟṟuppaṭai* author to refer to the modesty of the *viṟalis* or women-dancers, but her description of the *viṟalis* in detail would have done justice to a sculpture of Venus. Say, she had no inhibitions! And if Cōḷaṉ Karikālaṉ did pay Uruttiraṉ Kaṇṇaṉār in hard gold, he is said to have paid the leader of the dramatic troupe, (whom the poetess addresses as "Lord of the seven sounds" it's music all the time!) in another kind. Kings did give away elephants, but this king is reported to have given this particular artiste a whole family. Father elephant, Mother elephant and Baby elephant, who is obviously a toddler (The poem has that detail!)

There is a clear-cut reference to animal sacrifice here, though by whom, or to whom or where, we do not know. Not inside a temple, for it's the crows that glut themselves on the rice mixed with blood, and put away the baby crab they have found for a hungry day. And there's not a shadow of vegetarianism in the fertile area ruled by the Cōḷaṉ. The poem runs to three hundred lines, the last hundred being marked by their brevity and quickness of movement. The river Kāviri is very much here, but there's little about Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam, except for a passing mention of precious things in the harbour, and the backwaters where the women love a bath.

Maturaik Kāñci

Definitely this is one of the important poems of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* for three reasons: One, that it is supposed to be about Maturai, which is supposed to have been the seat of the Academy. Second, that it is said to be keyed to the note of "Vanity of Vanities"- a Jain outlook. Third, that it is the lengthiest of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces- running to nearly eight hundred lines, and as a *Caṅkam* poem, cannot be overlooked.

The poet is one Marutaṉār, from Māṅkuḍi, and both names are non-committal, But the name of the poem, "Kāñci", does suggest Jainism. And the "hero" of the poem is the Pāṇṭiya King, Neṭuñceliaṉ, who put down all the other Tamiḻ kings and chieftains in the "famous" battle of Talaiyālaṅkāṉam.

The opening of the poem is, well, grand enough, an address to the king, who is descended from "the noble ones who ruled the world, surrounded by the famous men who never knew a lie". Never knew a lie. You stop at that. It's

one thing for a poet to call his tribe together and say, "come, all you poets of the truthful words", and quite another to say that the counsellors of the king-though some of them were poets, never knew a lie. Well, in this land of the elephant if this were not an elephant-lie!- only, the animal would be too innocent for the comparison. Later, this same poet says of this same king that he would NEVER tell a lie, not if the gods came down and offered him nectar from heaven. The awareness of the need for truthfulness is here, but what do we have to say of the poet's huge lie, and also of the gods- only imagined, true, but- offering the king nectar if he would tell a lie? Yes, it's only an "if" but one winces at the "if". Ideals are dipping. And this is NOT what one expects of *Caṅkam* poetry.

Horrible is the description of the battlefield. The elephant tosses the cropses on his tusks. The she- devils are dancing around. The headless trunks of the dead do a death- dance with them. In the fire of battle-fury, human flesh is cooked in blood, etc., You can have too much of that sort of thing. And there ARE quite a number of puranic references too.

After such a battle, in which "the two great kings and the chieftains fell" what do you expect of the Tamiḻ country? Destruction, pillage, and no mercy. "In the homes where the gods sojourned" the sorrowing women wail. "Some of the people flee for refuge to friends in neighbouring countries". In the burnt-out granaries, the night- owl and its mate are "shrieking". Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ's elephants, and his armies, "like a wide sea", along with his cavalry, are over-running the entire Tamiḻ territory.

But there are some who would come to treaty with him. Here, the king extends his rule over them,"without breaking the rules in the book of the laws of government". We are not aware of such a treatise in Tamiḻ. There might have been. Anyway, nobody knew Sanskrit then except the Brahmins.

Victory means rejoicing for the victors. And eating- and drinking. And giving. The singers and dancers are here. Chariots and horses are among the gifts. But "for the kings who ruled and died, they died". Here is a suggestion of the instability of life, a favourite Jain theme.

This is followed by the sounds of a prosperous country. Among the natural sounds, and the noises of an active population, are noises of "the sugar-cane factory". "*Yantiram*" or "machine" is the word, but it is obviously a huge one. The mountains echo with these sounds. There are thatched huts, where the "rough-spoken" young men, wearing garlands- they sleep on deerskin- bear

their bows in their hands and stand on guard. The suggestion is that, after destruction, it is construction. But the details are often repetitive and hence tend to monotony.

Now we come to the city of Maturai. Some of the details remind us of a baronial castle in Scott. There is a moat around, wherein the water is blue suggestive of depth. The city-walls "touch the heavens". The great gate shines "black with grease". Through the gate runs the stream of people, like the river Vaikai. In the city runs the broad, long street, again "like a river". There are flags flying. Elephants, chariots. Horses, being trained in four different paces. Well, only a horseman could comment on that.

What's next is something rather new in Dravidian history! Elderly, dignified ladies, with silver hair combed neatly back and plaited, in the shadow of the many storeyed buildings. But it's their complexion! They look like " dolls made of gold turned to the bright sunlight" And they are looking, with angry disgust, at something that the poet mentions with the next breath.

The courtesans of Maturai. Dressed up. Young. Attractive. Black-haired, like ink. As peacocks-moving softly, gracefully. Clapping their hands to draw the notice of "uneducated young men", with whom they go laughing, for the obvious purpose. And we observe that these women have a darker complexion that of the tender mango leaf *Māmai* which could range form dark violet to light mauve.

So, that's that. The red light area of Maturai. It was prostitution-along with injustice, that angered the author of *Cilappatikāram*- way ahead- and led him to burn Maturai in the fire of a wife's sorrow. Here we see the fair women, obviously Āryan, probably Brahmin, looking angrily at the behaviour of the prostitutes. Prostitutes are nothing new in Tamil history. The *marutam* love-poetry is full of them and the anxiety they cause to the innocent wives. Well, this is not a reflection on Dravidian or pre-Dravidian women. Nallūr Nattattaṉār takes special care to describe the poor "dark-skinned" minstrel women singers and dancers climbing the hard mountain-path, as "chaste". And chastity is implied in most of the *Caṅkam* love-poems, as far as the womenfolk are concerned. But here's another element. Āryan women, probably Brahmins, obviously idealists, passing judgement on the Dravidian prostitutes- with their eyes.

Yet another group of women comes into the picture. These are happy women, happy in the embrace of their husbands whom they "protect", and, bearing in their arms young children "like lotuses". You see them going for

worship to the Buddhist temple "which guards", or to the Brahmins' temple which looks like "a hill cut into", obviously a temple in the form of a cave. These children, "like lotuses" -were they fair?

The next item in the poem that arrests us is the mention of "Oṇam Naṉṉāḷ" ("The good day of Onam). Ōṇam is a very popular festival in Kerala today, in memory of a former king, who had been tricked away by a god, but returns every year nostalgically to see the country that had been taken from him. A mythical figure. Something like Santa Claus in the west. But you don't see that king in *Maturaikkāñci,* probably because the *Caṅkam* poets were not normally expected to tell stories, although puranic stories are getting in. Ōṇam here is just a festival for Vishṇu, the Māyôn if not the dark one, at least the one with the *Māmai* or Dravidian colouring. The specific attributes of this festival are the elephant-tournaments of the Maṟavs, the ceremonial bath of mothers with infants, and equally ceremonial bath of the young women who are pregnant for the first time. All this is accompanied by music and drums, and the poet compares this with the festivals in Naṉṉaṉ's country in glorification of his name. Obviously Naṉṉaṉ was famous for his festivals! One would have expected Ōṇam to have brought in a mention of the Cēra country. Only, there's no talk of that.

Another interesting reference in this poem is to the use of betel and arecanut (pan). Of course there are several references to the arecanut tree- and fruit elsewhere in *Caṅkam* poetry. But not betel. May be betel was just taken for granted.

The market place is noisy as boisterous, says the poet, as *paṭṭiṉam* (see *Paṭṭiṉappālai*) or as the sounds of homing birds flying together. And here is a reference to the "Kōcars" of the "four languages" We don't fully understand the implications, but it looks as if they Kōcars were employed by royalty in the ancient city of Mōkūr as interpreters of foreign languages, as well as free lance (as in Ivanhoe). And there is another reference here to the court, where "great men gather and argue". These are all just similes to show up the noisy market-place in Maturai, where there are four different streets. All sorts of goods are here, and all sorts of carftsmen. Goldsmiths. Coppersmiths. Those who cut the conch for bracelets, etc... and those who sell cloth. While we come repeatedly across cloth in *Caṅkam* poetry, even cloth "as fine as smoke", we come across a detailed description of silk shawls here, some narrow, some wide, like" sheets of clear sea-water".

An evening in Maturai city. The sixteenth day after the new moon. Night is changed to day. The air is full of perfumes-expensive ones, on should say. The doe-eyed young wives "blush" when the noises of evening subside, and the sounds of the *yāḻ* fill their husbands with desire. But there is another, and distasteful, element- the prostitutes, who "tell lies" and snatch away the money of "many rich young men". Then comes night, showing everybody asleep, except robbers! But, eyes open, "like leopards looking for the elephant, slippers on their feet, belts fastened, swords slung from their waist, the bold guards are ready for them.

Now comes morning. Nearer to the palace. The petals of the flowers in the fragrant lake "are unbound", and the Brahmins chanting their morning prayers sound like the "humming" of beetles eating the pollen. You can hear the "*marutam*" tune of the *yāḻ*. The elephants and horses are fed to satiation. The food-stalls are cleaned up and got ready, loving couples wake from a blissful night and look for the morning work, there are sounds of "good doors on strong walls" opening, and the die-hard old drunks-who had been "lisping"! - The previous night in their drunkenness, are now booming with deep voices, the time of day is being announced by professionals, and other professionals start off their day by praises of the king, the cock" announces the dawn", the tusker trumpets to its mate, " in the strong cages the animals such as the bear roar with the leopard"! Zoo here? And the things brought down to the city are spread out, like the "great Ganges river spreading out before it meets the sea". "They cannot be measured" - in the famous city with "the great name, Maturai". The Tamiḻs knew the Ganges river very well as they knew the Himalayas. And they knew about dams, the "inflowing river's stone prison"

What about the central figure in Maturai, Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ? It's impossible to identify him with the hero of *Neṭunalvāṭai*. There the king is a dignified, duty-conscious, self-controlled man. the name is not mentioned within the poem, but the colophon to *Neṭunalvāṭai* calls him Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ, because the Neem-flowers are symbolic of the Pāṇṭiyas and also because Maṭurai is the city concerned. But Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, not Nakkīrar, has been mentioned by the Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ of *Maturaikkāñci* in a *Puṟam* poem a great honour to be sung by a king, as "the head of the tribe of poets in his court", but that does not tell us if Nakkīrar's hero was the same king. No, just another Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyan. The hero of *Maturaikkāñci* has a special attribute - "the conqueror in the battle of Talaiyālaṅkāṉam". Anyway the poem is moving towards the

king at the end, and we had better take a look at him. We seem to have come a long way from *Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Paṭṭiṇappālai* too, even though the Tamiḻ of Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār happens to be the Tamiḻ of *Caṅkam* poetry. And one observes that the "Palkēḷvituṟai Pōkiya Tollāṇai Nallāciriyar"- "the teachers of ancient command in many fields", in *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, is here changed to

"*NalVēḷvit tuṟai pōkyia.*

Tolāṇai Nal āciriyar", meaning "the teachers of ancient command, who had performed the good *Vēḷvis* or *Hōmas*"- in other words, the Brahmins. This suggests the atmosphere of the court, that is waiting for the arrival of the king.

Well, this king also has had his night. In his harem. Not often do we come across anything like that in *Caṅkam* verse. The women are all like peacocks, and they all have the colour of the tender mango leaf-*Māmai*- Dravidian beauties, bejewelled, as would become the wives of a famous king. The king rises from his bed, "hung round with garlands", himself bedecked with flowers and pearls, wearing a neatly "starched" cloth, and looking like a"statue" on which "divinity" has descended, moves into the court. Doesn't this suggest an idol?

No queen is by his side. The rest is "Welcome, everybody". Pāṇaṉ, Pāṭiṉi, poet, -the whole lot. Heady drinks and meaty foods available. And, gifts. And the poet breathes a wish for the king, that, like a royal ancestor of his, who was surrounded by elders and counsellors "who had performed their *Vēḷvis*," (obviously Brahmins), this Pāṇṭiya also should "live out the days allotted to him". O yes, he would be like the sea, or the moon surrounded by stars, and obeyed by the Kōcars who wear the sword,- (weren't they "free lances" employed by the king?)- and praised to his face by the chieftains and others, and would share in the liquor served round by the bejewelled women. But all that is an old story and we get sick of it all. May be that is implied in the title "Kāñci", - Instability. The title harks back to lines 206-208, where the poet wishes the king to get over his heartaches, for, after all, how are those things really related to him?

Maturaikkāñci takes us to a very arresting poem by this same Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ. Not the hero of *Neṭunalvāṭai. Puṟam* 72 is a powerful oath by the young king, who felt humiliated by the other Tamiḻ kings. He was going one day to laugh at them, for they had hurt him by calling him "young chap". "*Iḷaiyan ivaṉ eṉa uḷaiyakkūṟi*". And they had boasted of thei r elephants and chariots and horses - "small words" (*ciṟu col*) he calls their boasting. Obviously

they meant to put him down from his throne. But he is ready for them. If he cannot overpower them, he says:

"Then let those who dwell in my shadow not find a refuge, and shed tears saying that their king is a hard -hearted man -let me bear the rule that is cursed by the people.

"Then let the poets, headed by the great Maṅkuṭi Marutan of high fame, applauded by the many people all over the world, leave my boundaries without singing of me.

(And)"Then let me be poverty-stricken myself, so that I cannot give to the beggars, and those whom I rule be in pain".

The first clause of the oath is a great thing for a monarch to say: His concern for the people, for the ordianry man, who looks up to the crown for protection, is the burden of it. Was it carried out after Talaiyālaṅkāṇam? We don't know. As for the second clause, *Maturaikkāñci* itself is evidence of its fulfilment. So also of the third one. But for the first, we can only hope that Pāṇṭiyaṇ Neṭuñceliyaṇ's subjects did not have reason to curse their king, when his enemies inside the Tamiḻ country had been brought under control at last. However it's a great oath, in which Valour and Duty are both sounded deep, along with the love of Fame, -the "last weakness" of the Tamiḻ kings.

Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai

Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai heads the list of the *Pattuppaṭṭu* in the anthology. The strange thing is, it does not belong there. Prof. Vaiyāpurip piḷḷai[1] has made it very clear that it is of later origin.

How come that it is included in the Ten Poems? Well, for one thing, Ten is a round number and Nine is not. For another, Murukaṇ, the god of Beauty and Youth, was the ancientest Tamiḻ deity that we know of; and you cannot think of ancient Tamiḻ religion without him.

The poem has been attributed to Nakkīrar, or rather, to one Nakkīratēva Nāyaṇār, who has been given the senior poet's name. The very first line of

1. Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *History of Tamil language and literature,* Pub: New century Book House, Madras, 1956, p. 113.

Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai has a strong echo of the very first line of *Neṭunalvāṭai*. And inside the later poem there are similar echoes from Nakkīrar. Now if literary study teaches us one thing, it is that no poet worth his salt ever repeats himself. Nakkīrar would know better then to repeat his own words. It is obvious that some later poet - shall we call him a plagiarist? has assumed, or been given, Nakkīrar's name, and used a line or two or more from him to justify the assumption. Of course both poems are descriptive- even the later poem, though religious, is not devtional. But there are two other tests to which *Tirumuurukaṟṟuppaṭai* can be subjected before we discard it summarily from *Pattuppāṭṭu*.

One test is to see if it fits into the requirements of an *Āṟṟuppaṭai* [2] according to the early Tamiḻ Grammarian, Tolkappiyar. The poem is a guide -book to Murukaṉ who is installed in several places, and, as such, should resemble the other four guide-books that we have seen. - the *Āṟṟuppaṭai*. No, NOT *Tirumurukaṟṟuppaṭai*. The second test is to hand over Nakkīrar as well as Nakkīratēva Nāyaṉār to a student of ancient Tamiḻ literature, without ripe experience, for perusal. You will find him stumbling several times a page in Nakkīrar and racing through Nakkīratēva Nāyaṉār. Such has been the present writer's experience. No, the latter belongs to any period but the *Caṅkam*. The other nine pieces do belong there, but even they are spread apart in time, see *Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Maturaikkāñci*.

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Chapter V

PATIRRUPPATTU

Of the Ten-Tens, or *Patirruppattu,* only Eight are with us. The first Ten as well as the last have mostly gone down the drain. But it's a great thing that we know the authorship as well as the names of the recipients of the remaining eight. All the extant poems are addressed to the Cēra kings, wherefore we infer that the twenty lost poems also would have been addressed to the Cēras.

A word about the addressers and the addressees. The second Ten was written by Kaṇṇaṉār, a Brahmin, from Kumaṭṭūr, to Imaya Varampaṉ Cēralātaṉ. The third by another Brahmin, Pālaikkautamaṉār to Palyāṉai Celkeḻu Kuṭṭuvaṉ. The fourth, by Kāppiyāṟṟukkāppiyaṉār - Brahmin again, to Kaḷaṅkāy kaṇṇi Nārmuṭic Cēral. The fifth, by the famous Paraṇar, was addressed to Kaṭal piṟakkōṭṭiya Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ. The sixth, by Kākkai Pāṭiṇiyār (a woman), to Āṭukōṭpāṭṭuc Cēralātāṉ. The seventh, by the even more famous Kapilar - Brahmin? Yes - to Peruñcēral Irumpōṟai. And the ninth, by Peruṅkuṉūrt Kiḻār to Iḷañcēral Irumpoṟai. The Kilārs were, simply, farmers.

So we will take up the second Ten first. Kaṇṇaṉ is the Prakrit form of Krishna and passes naturally into the Tamiḻ language. The first poem shows Murukaṉ fighting with the Avuṇas, till the sea is red with blood. This is a convenient simile for the valour of the king. One rather pretty picture is here of the yak sleeping sweetly on the mountain-side, dreaming of the streamlet and the fragrant lime-tree. This is a symbol of the comfort of the king's people. And the extent of the king's domain is from the "very famous Himalayas of the Āryās, down to Kumari in the South". This king certainly has something to do with the Himalayas, since he is known by the name "Imayavarampaṉ". But it does look an over-statement-by a sycophant, that he had been ruling from the Himalayas to the Cape.

In the next the poet has definitely photographed the lion, an animal not known in the south. He is "king of beasts" (*Ari mā*) with "the ornament of the garland round his neck"-a reference to the mane! The rest is the usual flattery of the *Caṅkam* poet. One observation is the "cloth, not woven of spun thread"-

obviously silk garments, presented to the deserving. And, Brahmin or not, the poet does not shrink from "the fragrant rice, mixed with pieces of fatty flesh", given to the hungry.

Poem three of the first Ten has a line showing the forests cut down to make room for the gods, (temples?) and has a picture of the king as protector of the merchants, and a bearer of the burden of the families of the farmers. In such a king's reign, the rains cannot fail. But-all this, after the usual horrible picture of war.

In poem four we see the king addressed as the "Shield" of the warriors. And here he is also praised as husband of the beautiful, divine, admired queen - in the singular, not plural. Importance to the queen is coming in-in Cēranād.

Poem five shows the king, in his council, as "saying one word and not more" - as though to point out that the king's words are very weighty and he cannot afford to rattle away like other men.

In poem six we have a glimpse of the queen worrying about her husband who is away fighting. Even when she is asleep, her dreams are of him-and no wonder. The rest is all us usual, fighting, conquering, and giving.

Poem seven shows the king accepting the tribute of the enemy kings when they bow before him.

Poem eight declares that, even if the rains fail, Cēralātan's bounty will not fail.

In poem nine there is mention of sacrificial blood, offered to the *murasu* or war-drum. And in the tenth, the king does not" know falsehood", even in the land of the enemy!

Having glanced through the second Ten (the first available) we note a few things about the style. It is more difficult-more artificial, than the *Caṅkam* poems studied thus far. The fact that the author is a Brahmin would account for the purāṇic element. But - the style? Most of the authors of these Tens are Brahmins-except the two Kiḷārs, and the one woman. And, except for these three, and also Kapilar and Paraṇar, who seem to be naturalised Tamiḷs, (Paraṇar's community is a matter of pure conjecture, only because he is generally mentioned along with Kapilar) all the others have a stilted pedantic style, tougher to tackle than the rest of *Caṅkam* poetry. And the colophons, as well as the concluding verse, being of later origin, are hardly cent per cent trustworthy. Only the name

Imayavarampaṉ implies that the king did go up to the Himalayas and the reports of the lion (the "garlanded" beast) as well as the puranic element, show that the king had indeed familiarised himself with some of the elements of the north.

Now to the third Ten-the second available. This section also is by a Brahmin, and is addressed to Imayavarampaṉ's younger brother-Palyāṉaic Celkeḻukuṭṭuvaṉ - "Him of the many elephants like a cloud". He seems to have been a powerful monarch in his own right. But-stories are getting in. The colophon-a later addition-tells us that a "pārppāṉ" and "pārppaṇi" (Brahmin and wife) went to Heaven in the tenth of the *Yāgas* that were performed under the king's auspices. Did they-poor simple folks - have a fire-bath in that *Yāga*? But the ten poems themselves have nothing to say of the matter.

In this Ten, great importance is given to the queen, (singular). A clean five lines of the very first poem are devoted to her. But the pity of it is that the queen is just a figurehead, and except for her beauty and her chastity, there is no individuality about her, any more than there is about the poet. In another piece, "Covet not" seems to be among the virtues of kingship! Also, here's a king who helps his people to "live out their old age without disease"-a terrific achievement, if true. And there is no oppression, according to the poet.

Well, the fourth in the series shows the king, "going the way shown by the Brahmins who do *Aṟam* or *Dharma*", so that "the world goes his way". And this king's greatness cannot be measured even if the five elements, "water, earth, fire, wind and the sky" be measured. The rest is all fighting, blood, and victory. Here also we find pieces of sacrificial meat, offered by the "high one" (Brahmin? or king?) to the battle-drum, from which the she-devil with the "black eyes" is scared away, but on which the crows, with the "black eyes" again, feed, so that the ants do not get them.

Now we proceed to the fourth Ten. This is by Kāppiyāṟṟuk Kāppiyaṉār on Kaḷaṅkāikkaṇṇi Nārmuṭicēral. Here again, the queen, "whose bright forehead lends light to her ear-rings" is in the singular. And we find here an indication of Vishṇu-worship. Definitely here is a temple, where people gather, to the sound of a "moulded" bell, to worship the "beautiful feet" of the "garlanded one" who bears Lakshmi on his bosom". Some of the people seem to be fasting. We cannot really say that this worship was before an idol of Vishṇu, but it could have been. Kāppiyāṟṟuk Kappiyaṉār, the poet, was a Brahmin.

Another piece by him, expresses wonder at the "absence of anger" in the king, even within "enemy territory". Well, if this isn't astounding! Warriors-and kings, too - have been noticed as "red-eyed" elsewhere in *Caṅkam* poetry, especially in battle, as we would expect them to be. But here is a king who can NOT be angered even in enemy territory. One wouldn't expect a tame dove to conduct a battle! Is he a *Caṅkam* king? Before this gentlè king, however, we see the bold enemy kings, "their woven robes flowing to the ground, riding on horses with reddish manes, or seated on chariots with flags flying, or mounted on the elephants with the spotted foreheads", fleeding in defeat, while the Cēra army shouts the victory. Believe that? And the battle-field is red as sunset with blood, wherefore the devils are dancing! And shall we see the blessing that this poet bestows on the king? (Poem 6) "May you live long, and fight many battles, where the red streams of blood flow!" How is that red blood to flow without anger behind it? What do we have to say to that? Confusion coming in. But here's another blessing, which is more to our taste: "May you live for others". The last piece bears a reference to Naṉṉaṉ, whom the Cēra king defeated.

Just one observation. This poet has embarked on a slightly novel technique- the last line of one poem being taken up as the first line of the next. However, poetry is NOT just novelty, and although this technique has been taken up by later Tamiḻ poets, it has to keep to its place-as technique.

The fifth Ten is by Paraṇar-considered a major *Caṅkam* poet-addressed to a Cēra king who "drove back the sea" - Kaṭal piṟakkōṭṭiya Kuṭṭuvaṉ Cēral. The implications of that "driving back the sea" are not very clear. Paraṇar himself is a very familiar name in *Caṅkam* poetry, being often mentioned in the same breath as Kapilar, though for what reason we do not know. The poet's standing among his compeers may be judged by the fact that he is mentioned with warm appreciation by Avvai herself-"And, Paraṇaṉ sang of him, didn't he?", she says in a reference to Atiyamāṉ. It is claimed by some that Paraṇar was a Brahmin, since his name implies that he was born under the star Baraṇi. But there is no reason why a non-Brahmin should not be named after a star. We only note his great respect for the Paratavās. He even addresses the king as "Paratavā"[1] Paraṇar, like Avvai, is not represented in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* but he has a far greater number of short poems in the *Akam* group. However, there is practically no autobiographical element in his verses, and he keeps a very low profile indeed.

1. *Puṟam* 99

There's not much that is arresting about his writing either, except his very valuable references to contemporary life, authors, and kings, which we find in the *Akam* group,-not here. But there's a sudden, refreshing, change from the three previous Tens, so far as the diction and style are concerned. The difficulty has disappeared. We are on familiar *Caṅkam* ground. Possibly the Brahmins, being so exclusive a race, with so little contact with ordinary folks, would inevitably develop a dialect of their own. Even today, if you listen to a Brahmin speaking Tamiḻ, you recognize it as NOT quite the language of the ordinary Tamiḻ household. That's understandable, taking into account the charmed circle in which the Brahmin lives. No breaking that, anyway. You could even become a Jew, but you cannot become a Brahmin, unless you are born one. This state of things seems to date at least as far back as the *Caṅkam* age. True, Kapilar, for all the innocent pride that he takes in his Brahminism-"I, Brahmin and Poet"-has shown himself as living freely, simply, as a member of a chieftain's family, and that probably accounts for his language having the natural Tamiḻ ring about it. But at the moment we are studying Paraṇar, obviously NOT a Brahmin, in the Ten Tens.

You certainly cannot help observing that Paraṇar does not smell too much of blood. For that matter, not Kapilar either. Though Brahminism has really nothing to do with that-for Kaṇṇaṇār, Kauṭamaṇār and Kāppiyārruk Kāppiyaṇār are all three quite at home in the battlefield. In imagination, that is. But Paraṇar's first poem in his Ten begins with an old familiar theme-the minstrels and the *yāḻ* and the drum etc., and ends with the waves leaping on the shore in the wind and spray, like horses with their white manes flying.

The second poem speaks of Kuṭṭuvaṉ as "husband of her of the clear brow"-it's monogamy here, but the last of the same Ten shows him embracing women-in the plural-on the pillow. Possibly the former allusion is to the queen and the latter to the king's mistresses. The third one refers to the king as being of "unbounded learning". Also to the she-elephants that are giving to the *viralis* (the dancers)- but here we see them singing as well, with "sweet voices". (It's not often that we hear of, or hear, "voices" described in *Caṅkam* literature.) The warriors get the "tuskers that kill", and the Pāṇaṇs get the horses". As for the "liquor" that is served here, it is not liquor that "has been kept long", the favourite drink of the people. It looks like the sweet toddy from the palmyrah, the "Irumpaṇai" (dark palm) to which there are several references. But there is No reference to the jaggery prepared from this toddy. The Karumpukkaṭṭi (sugarcane block) is prepared from the sugarcane. Toddy seems to be just a drink either fresh or

fermented. Then comes a poem in which we see the "urns" that hide the bodies of kings. The poem is just a wish that the "singing women may long see "only your living body, not the dead one in the urn". Kuṭṭuvaṉ had been to the "long mountains of the high rocks, where the god lives", according to poem No.3, and the colophon[2] seems to have made use of this, to say that he was the one to have brought down the stone for the Kaṇṇaki-idol from the Himalayas.

Well, the fifth poem just says explicitly that there was "none like him before and who is like him now and who shall be like him hereafter"? For this king had "seven crowns". It winds up with the description of the sea, "which does not ebb when the clouds arise, nor fill back when the rains fall"-but which has been forced back by the king - how, we don't exactly know. And here's incidentally, an interesting image-the arrow in the quiver is "like the snake in the pit"-it will be quiet, but will hiss and bite only when it is out. The next two pieces are the prettiest of the ten, both in movement and imagery. In one, the women are singing the *Uḻiñai*,[3] wondering at the monarch who "drove back the sea". In the other, the dancing women are praising him, in the city by night, when the flames of the tapers are flickering in the strong breeze.

Poem Eight shows the "water-festival"-an item that has continued to this day. And it has a tinge of chivalry in it, for the king is capable of bowing, but is "of upright manhood" towards men. Note here that the king is called "Paratavaṉ", (fisherman). Was Paraṇar a Paratavaṉ? We would not be surprised if he was.

An observation in the ninth piece is rather unusual, but correct. The fallen warriors bleed profusely only when the weapons are pulled out from their bodies so that the field runs blood. But it's the *viṟalis* or dancers who say it- "We shall go and you, too, come with us-to see the Kuṭṭuvaṉ who cut the Neem-tree of the dark branches"-(the "guardian tree" of the chieftain of Mōkūr). The last of the ten poems shows three "rivers" beside the Kāviri-one, of "the elephants that kill", another, of the "archers", and yet another, "of the shining swords"-the infantry. Of course the king owes his victory to these. No Horses? Chariots?

Paraṇar's Ten pieces make pleasant smooth reading on the whole, but it is in the *Akam* poems that he has his best hits, not here. The next Ten are by a

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2. To Paraṇar's Ten.
3. a war-song

woman, Kakkai Paṭiṇiyār Naccelaiyar on Āṭukōṭpaṭṭuc Ceralātaṉ. It is interesting but the feminine element predominates in her poetry.

The first piece shows a sea-bird, flying up from the sea "that sounds like thunder", to settle on the dark branches of the *Ñāḻal* tree. On the beach, the strong wind blows the sand to cover the trail of the crab. And in the background is the "pure, dark grove of the palmyrah tree". But what is interesting is the mention of the dancing-girl, obviously "possessed", in the palmyrah grove. A kind of Dravidian worship, certainly, is going on there. But this dancer is only used here as a sort of comparison to the *viṟalis*; among whom the king has stayed long enough for folks to criticize him as "weak". But, continues the poetess, he is anything but weak. He is like the "thunder, the lion of the angry storm", that scares back into the pit the "guitly snake"-a suggestion that this poetess, at any rate, did not worship the snake. And an angry look from him on his foes is like "a net that the great, black Death has spread for them".

The second poem gives an anecdote the like of which no other *Caṅkam* poet has given! The king has been in the midst of the dancers, thoroughly exhilarated, enjoying himself, joining in the hullabaloo - and then he goes back to his queen. But the queen has her own sense of self-respect, and, shaking with anger "like a leaf in the wind", takes up a small red flower to fling it at him. The king entreats her "Do gift that to me". She will not. Instead, she asks him, "What relationship are you to me?" The poet remarks that the king does not have the strength to take that flower from her-for all the warlord that he is, capable of breaking the strong fortresses of his enemies. The title of the poem? "The tiny red flower". The flower, by the way, is a sort of water-hyacinth-the *kuvaḷai*.

That's nice. For a Change. And just here we might as well remember that the poetess is a Pāṭiṇi. Her name is Kakkai Pāṭṉiyār. So, she is poet as well, and accepted by the Tamiḻ Board or *Caṅkam*, or whatever. The Pāṭiṇis, wherever they are described, are "dark-shinned", or "black". Most probably they were pre-Dravidians, for the Dravidian woman's complexion is invariably described as *Māmai*. Probably the Dravidians had not been in this country long enough for the sun to turn them really black. But the point here is the respect given to a pre-Dravidian woman, Pāṭiṇi, not just as dancer and singer, but as poet of invariably high status. Avvai herself was probably a Pāṭiṇi. The evil theory of mankind being divided into four, or five, different strata of respectability, relegating the two lower ones to the position of serfdom, had not yet taken root

in Tamiḻ soil, although we can sense the seed being planted. For Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ; after "conquering the Aryan army"; says that, "of the four groups, if one from the lowest is educated, he can be ranked with the highest". No talk of the fifth anyway, to which the pre-Dravidians were relegated later by our famous Indian culture. But we don't see the four groups even, elsewhere in the *Caṅkam* literature. Who taught Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ about their existence? Well, he had been moving with the Āryans. As inferior, or superior, he had learnt a rather ugly lesson. His own people could have taught him better. Wasn't it a Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* poet who wrote.

> "Every city is my city, all people are my people"?
> *"yāṭum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir"*

So now we will get back to the poetess Kakkai Pāṭiṉiyār Naccellaiyār (the ending 'ār' is just a term of respect).

The third poem is still more of a surprise. She addresses the king politely enough, but there is a suggestion of disapproval in the adjective: "O angry monarch". And here are two admonitions. One is that when he has made a conquest, he should be gracious to those whom he has subdued. Another, that while he is justified in going for the fortresses of his enemies-those fortresses surrounded by the "deep moats infested by crocodiles!"-he should not attack those walls dear to his forefathers. Instead, he should go "round" them. Happy the king who has such counsellors! The poem ends on a description of the king's elephant, (mentioned in the singular but obviously commanding the whole elephant troop) "that had conquered the tiger", "curling his trunk' to hold up the "victorious, fluttering flag"-of course after the breaking down of the strong bolted gates of the enemy. Well, Avvai's advice to the three kings sounds tame, accommodative, and, shall we say-politic? - by the side of this adviser. This advice is honest, sane, strong and sound. But we have to take the context also into consideration. Kākkai Paṭiṉiyār poems No.2 and No.3 would have been just impossible in the presence of such an august audience as Avvai had, and on such an occasion.

The next poem leads us to the familiar picture of the dancing women singing of the king's military "unlimited" gifts. Alongside is the wish for the long life of the kingdom here, not in heaven!

Poem five begins with one word about the queen, "the chaste one". As her husband, he is "protector of the wise ones". The poem goes with the graceful

swing, that one would expect from Kākkai Pāṭiṇiyār, but the one special item to pick out from it is the observation that, even if there are no beggars coming to his court, the king would send his chariots for them. Sounds exaggerated. Well, one is reminded of the pretty exaggeration in Kampaṉ of the ideal state where "there is no giving, because there is no begging.". Poem six is a contrast, - the king"dances", not in the festival, but on the battle-field! The next piece is mostly about the dancers and the Pāṇars, whose fingers elicit the *pālai* tune from the *pēryāḻ* or the Big Harp, and who combine their voices with it to make sweet music, in the presence of him who has the companionship of "young sons", and also "deep wisdom". One point she makes out here is that the monarch is afraid of the "pain in the eyes of the beggars". Really, something to be afraid of-if he is a real king. Poem eight has her usual style-full of life-but the two items to be noted here are the description of the king as the "shield" of his warriors,and a very minute beautiful description of the "wide" paddy-fields where the plowmen with the "tinkling" oxen sow their seeds, in preparation for the "swaying sheaves" of "beautiful grain".

Her last two poems have nothing very special about them; of course the usual tributes to the duty-conscious and warlike king are there, along with the fertile country, with its different kinds of terrain-and, its jack-fruit. And, the movement we expect of her poems.

It's strange- but this poet, with such a strong , individual voice, with so much authority as to advise a king, or to speak of his private life- has only two other pieces extant in her name in *Caṅkam* poetry, one of which is not very distinguished, though the other is often quoted as evidence of the fiery temperament of the *Caṅkam* mother of a warlike son. She would take the sword into the battlefield to look for his body. If the wound was in his back, she would cut off the breasts that fed him. But when she saw what he really was- a hero hacked to death, she was prouder of him than on the day she brought him forth. Now Kākkai Pāṭiṇi was certainly not a minor poet. The very fact that a Cēra king made her his court-poet, to write one of the Ten Tens about him, proves that she was not. And she was richly rewarded, if we may depend on the colophon. Would a Cēra king choose a literary Nobody for that privilege? Certainly not. Where are the other poems that entitled her to that status? Gone down the drain, of course. And let us remember, that she was Pāṭiṇi. A singer by profession. A beggar. Highclass? Yes- rewarded by kings and chieftains with chariots and elephants- but, dark-skinned. The "colour of the elephant's trunk" is Pre-Dravidian, but entitled to honour. However, we do see a troop of Pāṇars in *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*,

whom the poet Nallūr Nattattaṉār describes as "*kallāiḻayar*" "uneducated young men"-poor fellows, they do know their job(music) but they are not, normally, educated. It's from such a group that our Kakkai Pāṭiniyār has risen. The exact circumstances we do not know, but it is clear that there was nothing to prevent her from getting educated. No social taboo. Did not Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceliyaṉ say that if one from the lowest strata of society were educated, he would be above the highest? And we have to reiterate here that even that mention of "lowest" or "lower" strata of society was possible for the Panṭiyan king only because he mingled with the Aryan army that he conquered. In the *Caṅkam* Age there are different groups of people, different professions, richer, poorer, not "higher" or "lower"[4]. Only the Brahmins, who mostly keep their counsel- are marked out for special distinction and respect. And usually they are seen in the king's court.

The seventh Ten of the Ten Tens is by Kapilar, a Brahmin who speaks out, and the author of *Kuṟiñcipāṭṭu*. The very first of the Ten carries a reference to Pāri, whose death has driven him to seek out the Cēra king. It's obvious from his *Puṟam* poems that Kapilar considered it his duty to see Pari's daughters safely settled before he joined his friend. This poem shows Kapilar approaching Celvakkaṭuṅkō Vāliyātan but he is no beggar- We do not see Brahmins as beggars! - and he says as much. "I have not come to beg", he says, " but on that account I will not decry your greatness". And that greatness is the subject of all the Ten pieces. The Cēra king rewarded him, says the colophon, richly with gold and land. One infers that Kapilar, before "facing the North" to join Pāri, would have settled all that wealth on Pāri's daughters before he handed them over to the custody of the Brahmins. So, the Brahmins were not taking charge of the girls for nothing, but it is obvious that Kapilar considered them trustworthy enough, payment or no payment. The first poem also begins with a familiar picture in Kapilar, the jack fruit- but it does not occur again in his Tens. Kapilar had done with life, and what he was doing for the Cēra king was actually for the sake of Pāri's daughters. On his side, the Cēra king would have heard of Kapilar and would have considered it an honour to be sung by him. The fourth of the Ten begins with praising the king thus: "You do not know to bow before anybody except the Brahmins." So far as Kapilar was concerned, respect was the Brahmin's birthright. The third line is more acceptable to all: "Your eyes will not be afraid of anybody, except your friends." The fifth line is a questionable virtue, whether

4. Exceptions: the drummers (only in four contexts).

stated by Kapilar or anybody: Your bosom will not be open except to women (Plural). All the same the third poem is the most interesting-if we except the first- of the ten. There is nothing else special about the other poems in this Ten- except that they all have the characteristic grace of movement of Kapilar's poetry, and that they have two other references to what is owing to the Brahmins, as would be natural.

But what is rather unexpected is the reference to the Brahmins in the Eighth Ten, by one Aricilk Kiḻār. Kiḻār mean Farmer, or may be landlord, but in any case NOT a Brahmin. One of the items to the king's credit, (in poem four) he has "desired", or, rather, seen performed, the *Vēḷvis* (*Homas*)- "to the joy of the High ones.' The High ones could mean the gods, but they could also mean the Brahmins who were pleased with the *Hōmas*, and in any case it would be the Brahmins who would perform them. That's how the Brahmins were accepted- here, not by the kings only, but by the landlords. Of course they were very much present in the king's court, where the poem would be read out. Poem one has one or two interesting pictures. One is that of the hornet's nest, shaped like a heap of paddy. A group of young boys rashly break it. Sure, we can imagine what will happen, how the boys will run for their lives, scattering helter-skelter. That, says the poet, is what will happen to Peruñcēral Irumporai's enemies. The second one is the sacrifice offered to the devil that has come to take the life of some one. The devil takes the sacrifice- and, runs away with it instead of precious human life! Well if that isn't an easy way of cheating Death! An ancient superstition, one would say.

Another observation, in poem Three, is that Pukār (*Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam*) now belongs to the Cēra king. That's how the Cēra-Cōḻa-Pāṇṭiya country changes boundaries. It's largely a question of sword-power, along with elephant-power, horse-power, and what not. Poem Five compares the king to the "rarely-striped, great Tiger" that "kills the strong leopard as well as the great elephant.' Of course the plowman also features conspicuously in the Farmer's poems. But poem Four has another statement, which indicates the way things are going- at court. "Great one, as you have said, to the grey-haired elder, who knows everything and abides by it, belong all the strength, and the glory, and the riches, and everything else - as God and everything belong to the ascetics.' So, already the "grey-haired elder" who knows *everything* (that which 'is Hidden, and Holy") is in command of the strength and the glory, and the riches, that belong to the king! This glorification of the Brahmins, in *Caṅkam* poetry! The only reason

we can see is that the poems would have to be read, and passed, in the presence of the Brahmins in court, for they were already in command of the king. Hence this Brahmin-worship in the court by several of the poets. Thank goodness, we do have quite a number of *Caṅkam* poets who, without opposing the Brahmins- in which case they might not have been heard of-merely go about their worship of Fame as poets.

The Ninth Ten, the last, is by Peruṅkuṉṟūr Kiḻār on Iḷañcēral Irumporai. The clouds are thundering. It's dawn. The elephants are moving together; the horses have to be restrained. The flags are flying. In the strong wind the chariots veer round. The bold warriors are true to their sworn oath. Night comes and they enjoy the jack-fruit, huge as the battle-drum, along with the honey fermented in bamboo-cups. The poet wishes joy of the king's home- coming from the battle-field, to the queen with "hair combed back on both sides and with jewels that "spit lightnings.' Nothing special anyway, in the first of this Ten. Nor is there anything very special about the second either, except that, in the very first line, you see that the enemy-armies have each their own god to protect them. So, it is a battle of the gods! Only, the names of the gods are not given. The third, and the fourth, go in the same strain-battle, and gifts. But the fifth has a reference to Kapilar, and the many villages that he was rewarded with. In the next the king is called "protector of the singers," which he has been, throughout, anyway. And the next is a direction to the singer-woman, the Pāṭiṉi, who is also here called *viṟali* or Dancing-woman. Possibly the singers and dancers were the same. Only, the poet was different. Poem Eight here is distinguished by its reference to the killing of that Naṉṉaṉ who was infamous for his butchery of a girl who had taken a fruit from his territory. Poem Nine describes the king enthroned grandly, by the side of his chaste wife-but, the very brides-to-be in the country have lost their hearts to him! The poet admits that they are now no longer unspotted, although, poor things, they do not know it. Just here one is reminded of Kampaṉ's Rama (whose heart is all for Sita) with whom all the women of the country fall in love - and Kampaṉ doesn't seem to mind. Only, one must remember that Kampaṉ equates his Rama with God; and here the Kiḻār suggests the need for moral alertness to his king, when his own queen is as chaste as Aruntati, and women tend to look on him the way they should not- not intentionally, though, poor things!

The very last of this Kiḻār's Ten gives us two very special items. One, that the *king* has learnt "plenty": from Brahmins. That is something really new.

Another, that among other things, the king worships the goddess of the "dreadful" mountain Ayirai. Very likely, Kāḷi or Durga. You can expect a temple there. The rest of the poem is mainly - routine. Except for the closing lines, in which the poet wishes the king's month a year--and so on and so forth, the point to be observed is the importance which Peruṅkuṉṟūr Kiḻār gives to the queen, by the side of the king. It seems that the king's importance is partly owing to the fact that he is husband of that lady. But, to sum up Peruṅkuṉṟūr Kiḻār's Tens, there is a strength, as well as smooth-flowing grace, about his style, which can challenge comparison with that of Kapilar or even Nakkīrar. He is no minor poet. Of course we have only a few of his poems apart from the *Patiṟṟuppattu* extant.

Four of these poets, the two Kiḻār's, Kapilar and Paraṇar, have addressed themselves, in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, to the chieftain Pēkaṉ, on the very delicate topic of his separation from his grieving wife. All their sympathies seem to be on her side. Whether the chieftain, besieged right and left by poetic moralists, took their advice or not, we do not know. But we do know that the poet in Tamiḻnad was looked upon as something of a seer.

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Chapter VI

AKANĀṆŪṚU

(The Four Hundred Akam Poems)

The Title is a misnomer. *Kuṟuntokai,* another four hundred, is on the *Akam* theme. *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu,* another five hundred is on the *Akam* theme. *Narrinai* -another four hundred, ditto. Some of them are very brief, very brief indeed. But none of them is of considerable length. However, by the time we cover the *Akam* poems, the poems on private life, we'll have some idea of the great sea of life underlying them all. These poems are but the sparkles on the surface, as we turn the searchlights on to it.

Hero and heroine are common to them all. So are youth, beauty, and heroism. Life, human life, is not made up of just these components! However, Shakespeare thought fit to make most of his heroines young. Juliet, Miranda, Perdita-- why not-- Juliet's mother? Excuse me, Mr. Shakespeare. You are just sharing an idea with some old-world poets, around one and a half millennia before you were spoken about. Youth and innocence have their charms. And youth is the time for ideals, before they get tried and tested. Hence we can understand if the *Caṅkam* love-poetry is full of Juliets who conquer their Romeos.

And Juliet has her protectors! Shakespeare's Juliet has a nurse who is old enough to be her mother- and a harsh- spoken mother, whose concern for her child, with her developing attractions, shows itself in cut-and-dry language. Look at the poem No. 122 from *Akanāṉūṟu.* The first obstacle to the lovers- meeting by night is the "harsh-spoken mother". The father, the dreaded father-figure, is of course there, in both instances, but he has no inkling of the developments. Only, the Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* chieftain's daughter has an attendant who is her own age and therefore more suitable as companion, although she herself has her mother who is a sort of foster- mother to the heroine. So, you see, the Tamiḻ household in which the *Caṅkam* poets are interested is something like a nobleman's family in ancient Verona- only, the Tamiḻ chieftain is often lord of some fortress in mountain- territory. Often, it has to be said, because the terrain is not always the same.

For reason of some brain-wave or other, the Tamiḻs have divided their terrain into four or five types. And, if, in the post- *Caṅkam* age, the author of *Cilappatikāram* respected this division, and in the twelfth century, Kampaṉ respected it, we do not know what else to do with it. So we will have to take a look at the five divisions. One is *Kuṟiñci,* mountain territory. The next, *mullai,* the afforested area. The third *Pālai,* or dryland. The fourth, *Neytal* or the coastal plains. And, finally, *marutam* the fertile fields. Of course, when you say *marutam,* a gong goes somewhere, and it is Kampaṉ speaking. However, we have to wait for a clean millennium before we come to Kampaṉ.

Now whether we approve of it or not, whether we can see the why and wherefore of it or not, we have to see the accepted behavioural patterns of the young lovers according to the type of terrain. Kuriñci shows pre-marital love, not exclusive of sex, and its cause. We see this in detail in Kapilar's *Kuriñcippāṭṭu. mullai* shows separated lover patiently waiting for reunion. *Palai* is the background for long-term separation, in which the man leaves his wife behind for reasons of earning wealth, education, military campaigning; etc. *Neytal* shows the impatience of separated lovers, separated for various reasons. All these four show love without adulteration. But another element comes into *marutam.* This is the existence of prostitutes, who cause the wives great pain. The difficulty with them is to take back their straying husbands.

The word *Akam* means "private life", or in other words, "Love". The strange thing is that the *Akam* poems have only a small percentage of that supposedly all- absorbing element. Brief as the poems are, they have room for many sorts of other things. Now we would call Elizabeth Barrett Browning a poet of love. Sappho is supposed to be another. Mr. Browning, except in that one lyric addressed to his wife, is anything but that. His method is to allow his protagonist to probe, slowly, meticulously, into the nerves and veins and arteries of his associates, and sometimes, of his own also. Now the *Caṅkam Akam* poems have far more kinship with Mr. Browning than his wife. However, there is one sharp difference even here. Some of the *Akam* poems are just five lines long- or short. How much can be packed into them after all? And, just look at the number. And the variety. And the family resemblance, in spite of everything. Well, they are, all,teeny, tiny dramatic monologues. Either the heroine, or the hero, or the heroine's attendant or the hero's friend, or -- well, anyone within that charmed circle, is speaking. Now we cannot really exhaust the entire *Caṅkam* love poetry so-called. But we can take samples, as we took from *Puṟanāṉūṟu.*

Let us first check the number. *Akanāṉūṟu*- four hundred poems. *Kuruntokai*, another four hundred. *Naṟṟiṇai*, ditto- then *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*. Naturally. To study them all, one by one, is beyond the scope of the present writer. But, we might take ten poems at least at a stretch from each of these anthologies. Just for a taste after a short general introduction.

In the first place, love is divided into two phases. One is *Kaḷavu*, the other, *Kaṟpu*. *Kalavu* is love before marriage. *Kaṟpu* is love, after. We cannot forget that it was a predominantly masculine society, where muscle-power went even before elephant- power or horse-power. Hence if the young man strayed, he could be expected to be taken back. There was absolutely no possibility of the young woman straying. Well and what if she did? The *Caṅkam* poets don't tell us that. The beauty of single-minded girlish love is extolled, but- taking the general realism of the *Caṅkam* poets into account, we cannot help asking, what if the woman strayed? That is one direction they don't look, maybe they don't like to look. However, the element of prostitution is unconcealed. These poets were too honest to ignore that. Then, did marital failures land the women in the red light area?

Another thing. It has been slyly suggested that the *Caṅkam* poets were just wool gathering in their *Akam* poems. Well, if they were, they were. But if they weren't, they should be, could be, cleared of this fault attributed to their Academy.

Yet another. Prof. M. Rakavaiyaṅkār had even suggested that the *Caṅkam* age had no formalised marriage. Boy and girl ran away together and that was that. True, the *Caṅkam* age did NOT have the Brahmin formalities of marriage- the witness of *Agni* or Fire, or the Brahmin *mantras*. But Prof. M. Rakavaiyaṅkār's statement kicked up a row, and understandably, among the ordinary people. For marriage was a highly honoured state into which the young people entered in the presence of relatives, who celebrated the occasion in the way they knew.[1] No *tāli* mentioned except in *Neṭunalvāṭai*. But then, the queen there looks like an Aryan princess!

Akanāṉūṟu carries the longest four hundred of the *Akam* poems- if you except *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* which is included in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*. We will first take poem No. 121, written by Marutaṉ Iḷa Nākaṉār. The terrain is *Pālai*- dry land-

1. *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*, 379

and the topic, separation of the lovers. Fourteen lines in all. And three pictures of wild-life, two being very detailed, and packed with suggestions of what a man owes his mate and family. The first is the elephant-when do we hear the last of elephant? The desert is really dry-except for a small pool of water. The tusker needs a bath- his back is itching. But he patiently encourages his mate, with her young calf, to bathe in whatever water is available. What is left is just mud. The tusker then bathes in the mud, and rubs his itching back against a big tree till its "striped shadow" shakes. The second is the wild deer. The stag sees the white tender palm leaves, in which wayfarers had brought their lunch, now flying like arrows in the strong wind. The stag mistakes them for real arrows and sounds the alert to his mate. And finally, there is the "black-faced monkey", looking out at you. Dangers enough in the wilderness, which the hero has to cross-he's got his business to do! But the heroine is determined to follow him, says the maid. Now the hero is, frankly, ashamed of himself, as well as laughing within himself at her ignorance. What does she know? How do I protect her? These are the questions sounded in the piece. But, do you call this a love poem?.

Here's the very next poem. *Akanāṉūru* 122, *Kuriñci*, the hills. The theme-love before wedlock. The author is Paraṇar. The heroine, whose love is a matter of *Kaḷavu*, is complaining to her maid about the difficulties of her love-affair. She's obviously a city dweller- in Mūtūr. Of course there would be festivities. But even without the festivities the city doesn't really go to sleep. In case the city sleeps there's her mother, "the strong-voiced, harsh-worded mother", wide-awake. Should she doze, the "sleepless-eyed guards" would be around. Should they, too, drowse, the dog "with tail curled to the right" will "enjoy" himself-barking. Should he be quiet the moon shines bright. Should the moon go down behind the hills and it is dark, the owl that eats the rats will make its uncanny cry. But this, it is time for the cock to announce day-light-And if, one night, all is quiet, he who fills her heart will not come to her!

And -since it is Paraṇar, he must have a reference, with which here he closes the poem. Uṟantai or Uṟayūr, which belongs to Tittaṉ of the "springing, leaping horses", is very difficult of access, what with its fences and its surrounding rocks. Such, says the heroine, is my love-affair. There goes another love-poem. But perhaps this one is a love-poem after all, showing the obstacles to a girl's clandestine love.

Now to *Akanaṉūru* 123. One Kārikkaṇṇaṉ (the Black-eyed one) from Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam is the author. The terrain, again, *Pālai* or dryland. The theme, again, separation. But this is, obviously, within wedlock. And it's the hero speaking, to himself, not the heroine.

There seems to be a suppressed titter here at the Jain ascetics. They don't eat. They don't bathe. All the same the poet has a good word for them- "the great ones" -which shows the respect commanded by the hermits from the people. And, says the hero, he, too, is like one of them, despoiled of comeliness, like the elephant (elephant again) that "goes with his herd up the narrow track on the hills", in search of food. "Lean-waisted and dirt-covered", that's what the hero is. He, too, would like to go out in search of the means to live, but he cannot bear it. He would love to live at home with "her of the beautiful locks braided into five", but then, he's afraid of poverty!

Now comes a reference: In the great harbour, where the river Kāviri flows into the sea, belonging to the powerful Cōḷas "of the many shields and long, well - greased lances" - the water comes in, bringing the prawns, and returns with flower garlands (obviously a reference to the "foam-flowers of the sea" -some minor English poet has said that!) But the point here is that the sea is never at peace. It brings in the fish and takes back the foam. Then back again. Like the never-settled waters, the hero's heart is torn, between the need to work for his livelihood and the desire to be with his wife.

Akanāṉūṟu 124. Terrain: *mullai*- or the forest. Theme: Patient waiting for the separated lovers.

Again, this love is *within* wedlock. Mr. Rakavaiyaṅkār, you had better look sharp. A warrior is ready to return from the wars. And he is speaking to his charioteer. He seems to be some officer in the army. Battle is just over. The defeated regiments have given up their ornamented elephants and bowed themselves before the king. With his army, "that the earth can hardly bear", he is ready to return.

Two things are on the hero's mind. The first is, that his beloved wife should be comfortable on her bed; the second, That he should get over the fatigues of the battlefield.

So, now, the charioteer, has something to do. He has to drive fast the steeds, with saddles of "workmanship of gold thread flashing like lightning",

and with manes well-groomed, through the pathway where the *mullai* (jasmine) creeper showers its flowers "drooping in heavy rains", to the city where the evening guards are sounding their drums. So ends this little poem of fifteen lines. The author is a clothes-merchant from Maturai. His name-Iḷavēṭṭaṉār.

Akanāṉūṟu 125. Again the terrain-*Pālai*. Theme, patient waiting. The author Paraṇar. So we can expect a reference to one of the kings. Here it is the heroine's maid speaking. She is addressing the cold North Wind. She's telling it to flee-flee- it has caused enough pain to her mistress. And she is visualising the nine kings who threw down their umbrellas (the umbrella is a symbol of the protection the kings afford to their subjects)- and fled before Cōḷaṉ Karikālaṉ. Well, the flight of the kings makes her think of the North Wind, or it could be vice-versa. Her mistress has gone thin till her armlets-(cut from the conch) have slipped down. All because, in this weather, which grieves separated lovers (*Neṭunalvāṭai*) when the great clouds have spent their rains, her husband has left her for the sake of his education-education which "partakes of the divine"

So, the separation here is for he sake of education. Education? Where? University, or college, or Academy? The very Academy we are thinking about? The *Caṅkam*? Well, that is NOT explicit. But we find that the young husband can leave his wife to pine, not only on account of war, or on account of amassing wealth, but also on account of education.

Next is *Akanāṉūṟu* 126. Well, if that isn't by the author of *Neṭṭunalvātai*, Nakkīrar himself? The topic is *marutam*, where we meet the prostitutes and all that they mean to society. Nakkīrar does not show the prostitutes at work. He does not break his delicacy of touch. But he does show a young man who has been blamed by his beloved for associating with them, and all whose words cannot bring about a reconciliation with her "who lisps like a parrot", with large eyes like great fish, cloudy black hair plaited into five, and waist like lightning". His heart will go out to her, and he fears that it will break. He thinks of the foolish Aṉṉi, who died fighting with Titiyaṉ despite "polite" warning from Evvi of the many spears. The hero calls himself a fool. Well, he says, he is likely to die like Aṉṉi!

And just here is a description of the fertile country of Evvi. We don't quite see what business it has to be here. It would do for an epic simile, as many of these descriptions would. Kāviri! - comes down from the mountains, and in its dark back-waters, there is active fishing going on. The sweet -spoken

Pāṭiṉi's brothers have done a good night's fishing. In the morning it is her duty to dispose of the fish. She barters the fish- not for paddy! but for pearls and ornaments. In the prosperous country of Evvi.

Now such a lengthy simile is expected to carry with it some suggestion related to the main theme. What is the poet driving at? His theme is *marutam*, but the fisher girl has nothing to do with prostitution. Just doing a good days' work. And the poet is looking on-in imagination, as if he would look away from the problem that is breaking his protagonist's heart.

But we are up against a very common misconception. By all the laws of caste and communalism a Pāṭiṉi is a Pāṭiṉi and a fisher-girl is a fisher-girl. Here's the daughter of a Pāṇaṉ acting as fish-vendor, and her brothers go fishing. Actually Nakkīrar never meant to reveal what would shock many people today. But, there are several instances of country folks crisscrossing the borders of traditional professions. Mountain-chiefs' daughters elope with warriors or hunters or-well, the eligible young men who come their way. Nakkīrar was just stating a fact. A Cēra king is called a Paratavaṉ. (fisherman!) Just a title of course, but it shows that "paratavaṉ' does not carry any tinge of despicability about it, as it would later.

Akanāṉūṟu 127 is, again, *Pālai*. Author: Mamūlaṉār. One feature-artificial -of this compilation is that every alternating poem is on the *Pālai* theme- or the separation of lovers. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" says an old English song. And may be that's the reason. But the same song goes on to say that "Birds in the tree sing love-songs." - for mating time is singing -time. The singing is low-keyed here. There's far more of lyricism in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* than in *Akanāṉūṟu*. There is far more of general information, and scholarship, in *Akanāṉūṟu* than in *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. Māmūlaṉār speaks of "a country of another language across the border" where the "uneducated archers" lie in wait for the travellers. Other languages are envisaged.

The next poem 128, is by Kapilar, the author of *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*, one of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces. The theme here is his favourite *Kuṟiñci* or love by stealth, on the hills. The lover is outside the "prison"- or guarded home. His beloved is talking to her maid, so that he can hear what she is saying, for he is meant to hear it and act accordingly.

And the lyrical element is NOT felt by its absence in this little piece, part of which is translated here.

The meeting-place are silenced; the homes are quiet;
With what killing cruelty, this night,
My love comes on me, like Death,
Vaster than ocean that overflows its shores
My friend, but how is this?. Half-conscious
My pure heart, not minding me, or you,
Is gone on its own tonight, to bear up his failing feet,
Up the dark difficult rocks, the narrow path
Like the rope down the back of the elephant,
-With the pitfalls on the way.

Well, Kapilar has also a word to say about the hero's garland of blue lotuses with the bees humming round them. But-No references! Just the opposite of Paraṇar, who, in the narrow space of fifteen lines, would not have been satisfied with one or two observations on the outside world. And, Kapilar's poem does have a lyrical bent-at least in the first four lines the lyricism is strong.

Now to the 129th *Akanāṉūru* poem. *Pālai* again. Author- Kīrattaṉār from Kuṭavāyil. The maid is comforting her mistress, telling her that her husband is sure to come. Why, he had even boldly suggested taking her with him-through the dangerous, deserted area. Here are three pictures of life in this arid region. The first, the stag calling to its mate to feed on the dry grain that dropped form the bamboo-clumps. Second, the "poverty-stricken" women collecting the white seeds that dropped from the cotton pods that the cock-birds pecked open for their mates. Third, in the small townships the people put their hands in desperation on their heads while their fat cows are carried away and eaten by the fighters with sharp weapons. After a good feed, these men, "with slippers on their feet" go down the hot country to drink of the cold water from the springs. The hero had dared to face all this with the heroine if only she would accompany him. Such a man is not likely to forget her!

Akanāṉūru 130. Terrain- *Neytal*, or the beach area. Theme-lamentation on separation. Poet-one Veṇkaṇṇaṉār. Translated, it would mean "Him of the white eye". Whether that has any significance we do not know.

But, "Listen, my friend", starts the hero. He is speaking to his friend who had obviously found fault with him for being so love-lorn. "If you had only seen her, you would not have said that".

And then follows a description of the cactus and other flora of the seaside. One kind of flower has red stems and fat buds covered with pollen dust. The cactus has "long leaves with thorns like teeth on either side" to protect its insides. For it has white flowers that open out-although its head looks like a "very devil." The fragrance of this kind of cactus-the *Tāḻai*-covers up the fishy smells of the beach.

And this beach is Koṟkai, belonging to the Pāṇṭiya king of the chariot of excellent workmanship, drawn by the horses attractive in their trot-but their feet are hurt by the shining pebbles thrown up by the waves.

(Obviously the hero had been in this king's regiment). And the women were watching, his beloved among them. "You should have seen her eyes then, brimming with love, more beautiful than the *Neytal* flower with the beetle inside!" That's what the hero is thinking of. He tells his companion that he would not have despised him then.

Well, we've skimmed over just ten poems, out of the four hundred! Just for a taste. They are all akin, though they have their differences. Since it's impossible, for writer as well as reader, to examine all the four hundred, we will also take, at random, sheer random, one single poem from the first, another from the third, and yet another from the fourth hundred. The ten we've just seen happen to belong to the second hundred-so we will leave that out.

From the first hundred, it is poem NO. 10. The author, Ammūvaṉār, must be a poet of some consequence since he has also written one hundred (though very brief) poems of the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*, the five hundred short pieces. His *Akanāṉūṟu* No. 10 is a very tough little piece, packed with suggestions.

The first four lines are a beautiful picture of the beach. Every word is strong and packed with meaning. "The stretch of sky and sea", goes together, for there is a drizzle. And that is the time when the fish come up to the surface, looking shiny white. The "crooked", aged, *puṉṉai* tree puts forth its soft buds, white as these fish. But, on its dark branches nest the birds, chirping softly. Rain, but there is beauty and security for the bird in its nest.

The last five lines show another kind of beach, in the coastal town of Toṇṭi. The Paratavās or fishermen, who have weighted heavily their old boats with their huge catch in their new nets, have brought their "horned" fish ashore and are sorting them out for sale. These Paratavās are responsible for the prosperity of Toṇṭi. Meanwhile,a strom is breaking, over cloud and sea. (Paratavās -fishermen-are a highly respected community! And they are "dark-skinned". They are called "Irumparatavar".

The heroine's maid is addressing the hero who is slipping away after meeting the heroine. She confronts him with his failure of duty. "If you think you can get away from her, with her eyes like *Neytal* flowers, brimming with tears, O you great one, you have done a very serious thing. You have to take away with you her beauty, that is like the beauty of Toṇṭi, in the proper way". Suggesting-marriage.

Caṅkam poetry is noted for is suggestiveness. Similes, however lengthy, do not stop with functioning as epic similes. The first picture suggests the quiet safe home of the heroine, in rain and spray. The latter one suggests the net in which the poor girl has been ensnared. The attendant angrily demands that the hero use the heroine in the proper way, and take her away with him. To elucidate the similes further, one supposes, one would have to be a member of the Tamil *Caṅkam*-the Academy!

From the third hundred-poem 286. Terrain-*marutam*, the fertile plains. Theme, faithlessness (of the man) Author - Ōrampōkiyār. Little girls use lengths of sugarcane as pestles, with which they pound the white sand-like fish-eggs, and accompany the pounding, under the shade of the *Kāñci* tree, with song. That's pure, innocent, make- believe. The kingfisher, meanwhile, after a good feed on prawns, is dozing quietly on the low bough of the *marutam* tree. As though it knows nothing. This is the background of the hero-a dual character. The heroine's assistant has a serious charge against him. He has taken his oath that he will marry her mistress. She would question the veracity of that- (she must have heard enough of him). Now she has a sermon for him.

Suppose the unattached mind does turn after desire, he should use the wisdom he has heard as the hook that controls the elephant, take care that he does not stray from the path of righteousness and prosperity, consider what is suitable for him, and only after that take the decision of marriage, according to the custom of good men. Considering the way of life of good men, how come,

says the maid, that he alone can speak what is mixed with falsehood? "If such be the words that come from you, where", asks the maid, "can we find truth in this wide world?" Her words are as full of sorrow as anger, on behalf of her beloved mistress, whom she considers betrayed.

Poem 336 by one Pāvaik koṭṭilār, is *marutam* in full, with all its implications. The fertile fields? Yes, but also the red light area. Here are no waiting brides, no chaste wives. Every woman in this one poem-with the exception of one group, is a woman who literally sells her beauty. Thank goodness, there do not seem to be too many of this type in *Akanāṉūṟu*. But, as has already been stated, the *Caṅkam* poets were too honest to completely overlook one of the sad realities of their world.

The man is not very much in the picture. But his "love-lady" or mistress is the speaker. She is speaking within hearing of the friends of another mistress of the same man, the one who is in the "home"- obviously a bought woman, like Mātavi in *Cilappatikāram* of the post- *Caṅkam* period.

The first five lines are a picture of confusion. The otter, in search of prey for his hungry mate with her young, leaves them under the broad, "hollow-stalked" leaves of the *cĕmpu* plant in the moss- covered water, and lights on the rather big *vāḷai* fish in the area of drinking water. Now issues a fight, otter and fish both battling together till the water is muddied. The womenfolk who came to take water have to put down their "rarely ornamented" pots. But they have already had their drink of clear toddy. And they are in the mood to "sing" of the hero's loose life with prostitutes, hooting at him under the *Kāñci*-tree. What a song!

Meanwhile, much the fellow seems to mind. His chariot is bringing "bejewelled women" who speak angrily of the beauty of his "love-lady", the speaker. Now this woman has a challenge. If the fellow goes after other women, it is because she has spared exercising her beauty on him. If the mahout of the murderous tusker survives, it is because the tusker spares him. Like the tusker, she also uses her strength in moderation. The reason why those women (brought in the chariot) and others like them, are able to draw the man, is that she herself does not go where they do, to the festival where they dance to the drum for him to see.

Had she only been present, all eyes would have turned to her wherever she was, as the *Neruñci* flower (like the sunflower) turns always in the direction of the sun. If they didn't, she continues, " May my bangles break" as the Ārya, troops broke and fled before the Cōḷa's rain of arrows and clouds of shields.

What a poem! It's all-prostitutes. One of them is boasting of her beauty, which, she says, she exhibits only in moderation. Had she been dancing with the group of prostitutes in the festival, all eyes would have turned to her. Well, that is a boast for a prostitute to make. Bought women, common prostitutes-they are all there.

But how does Society look at them? Whatever the menfolk may have to say is not here. But, the domestic women, symbolised by the pots they brought for drawing water, are actually, hooting at the fellow who is involved with these loose women. "Singing", too? We can imagine what kind of song.

And, one more item to notice. There had been conflicts between the "Āryans" and the Tamiḻs. And the "Āryaṉs" had fled before the Cōḷas.

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Chapter VII

KURUNTOKAI

(Or the Anthology of short poems)

These too, are four hundred in all. The length of each is around six lines, more or less. We shall dip into the second hundred, get through a dozen or so, and then pick out at random, two poems from each of the other hundreds. All the four hundreds come under the *Akam* group.

Poem 156. The author, one Neṭuṅkaṇṇaṉ, is obviously an officer in the Pāṇṭiya's army. It is NOT necessary to read an autobiographical element into his poem. Just an exercise of fancy, like most poetry, but subject to the rigid rules and conventions of the *Caṅkam*.

The hero is speaking. And to his companion, who, unusually, is a Brahmin. Well, that by itself argues the hero to be of some consequence. He addresses the companion with a freedom that we can hardly expect of the man in the street.

"Son of a Brahmin, son of a Brahmin!". And then follows a description of an ascetic, holding his three- pronged arm-support and his bowl, and "feeding on ascetic diet". This "son of a Brahmin", who has learnt by rote the wisdom of the *Vēdas*, is appealed to by the hero: "Among those unwritten words, is there any medicine that can bring together the separated ones? Or is it just a dream of yours"? Now, wasn't he teasing his companion with unusual liberty?

Evidently the Brahmin friend has been encouraging the hero-that he will be able to meet his beloved.

Poem 157. Author: Naṉmullaiyār from Aḷḷūr. Just four lines. They could have come straight out of Romeo and Juliet, after their first night together.

"Coo-Coo!" says the cockerel. In response

My pure heart is shaken.

Like a sword that separates the lovers

Shoulder from shoulder, the dawn is come.

Poem 158. Threatened separation-

Author-Avvaiyār! Well. The heroine is addressing the clouds. The thunder on the long mountain range strikes to kill the snake. The heavy rains come with the swift wind. Thunder and wind sound together. The poor love-lorn girl is asking the cloud, "Have you no mercy? You have the power to shake the Himalayas. And, here am I, a poor girl, without my companion. Wherefore do you do this to me"?

Poem 159. Author- Vaṭama Vaṇṇakkaṉ Pēricāttaṉār

The maid is speaking. Her mistress is wearing a kirtle of leaves- the full significance of which we do not understand. But above her slim waist, hurt by the kirtle, her breasts are swollen globes. Only, thoughtless folks round her do not understand! They do not even care to enquire what will become of her.

Poem 160. Author- Marutaṉ Iḷanākaṉār from Maturai. The red- headed "*antil*" bird and its curve- beaked mate are cooing to each other, inside their nest, on the high branch of the *Tāṭa* tree, to the great vexation of separated lovers. And, at midnight blows the strong, cold North Wind. Still, the heroine's lover, who has left her to find money for the wedding, has not returned. And she pathetically asks her attendant. "And is this, O maid, the marriage my lover promised?"

Poem 161. Author-Well, that's Nakkīrar! The daylight is gone. The shower will not abate, so much so that the devils wink their eyes. Worse, the heroine's mother, holding in her embrace her son with the garland of leopard's teeth, will keep calling to her daughter. "And that is when her lover, his bosom scented with sandalwood, must come and stand outside like an elephant wet through with the rain". "Alas!"wails the heroine, "Whatever does he intend?"

Poem 162. Author-One Karuvūrp pautiraṉ. The name suggests a Brahmin. The hero is returning to his beloved. It is a wet evening. People are going to their homes. The *mullai* (jessamine) creeper has put forth its buds. "Hail, *mullai*"- says the hero. "You are smiling with your small white buds. Does it become you to seem to smile at lonely people?"

Poem 163. Author- Ammūvaṉār. Here's the heroine, listening to the call of the sea at midnight, in the harbour where the white sea-birds flock together

like sheep. The waves are washing on the *Tāḻai* plant with white flowers. She is asking the sea "Who has so troubled you?" The implication is that her heart also is calling out in pain to her beloved, who is not with her.

Poem 164. Author- Marutaṉār from Māṅkuṭi. Here's again the distasteful element of *marutam* in *Caṅkam* literature- the infidelity of the man. The mistress, or prostitute, has heard rumours that the heroine found fault with her for taking away her husband. But, says the prostitute, nobody went after him. He just came her way, as the clusters of sweet mangoes drop into the mouth of the *vāḻai* she-fish big with young. If he hadn't been such easy prey, says the prostitute, "May the cold, great sea worry me!".

Poem 165. Author- Paraṇar. No reference here, a rare thing for him. The hero is upset. He is refused admission to the home by the heroine's maid. He is talking to himself. "Once drunk" says he, "you want to drink again". So once, subjected to his beloved's beauty, he wants to be subject again. He says that he has been completely emptied of himself-like the cart, bearing salt, exposed to a heavy shower!

Poem 166-Author- Kūṭalūr Kiḻār. The maid is spokeswoman. It would be wonderful (for her mistress) if she were with her husband in the township of Māntai, where the white sea-birds, in a line, fly from the beach whence the waves have whipped away the fish. But, to be there by herself, would be sorrow indeed.

Poem 167. Author, Kūṭalūr Kiḻār again.

This is a beautiful picture of a young bride preparing a very simple meal for her husband. Just curds, which she has with tender fingers mixed with the rice. Now she wipes her fingers on her clean dress. But, still wearing the same dress, "unwashed", she bends over the fire, while the smoke gets into her dark eyes like the *kuvaḷai* flower, and unmindful of that, she seasons the curd-rice. This sweet-sour meal she serves to her husband, who pronounces it "Sweet", and upon his appreciation, a controlled pleasure shows itself on her face with the shining forehead.

Dr. U.V. Cāmināta Aiyar supposes the couple to be a Brahmin husband and wife. The poem does not. Dr. Caminăta Aiyar's one reason is that the diet is vegetarian.

He goes on further to compare this diet with the Brahmin cuisine in *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, Lines 305 to 310. Well, it is worth the comparison. How

many items are there in the *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* Brahmin cooking? Buttermilk, butter, pomegranate curry, curry leaves, mango-pickle etc. A highly flavoured, delicious dish. A modern Brahmin household would love a serving of that.

But-*Kuruntokai* 167 converges on one point. Simple as the cookery is, the husband relishes it because of his love for his wife. And if there's only curds and no meat, in all probability it's because there's no meat to be had. And just because the husband is satisfied, the wife is pleased. Dr. Cāmināta Aiyar had missed the main issue. The news carried by the maid's mother to the bride's mother is that the couple are happy. A good start for a family life, over a very humble meal. And by the way, would Dr. Cāmināta Aiyar relish the idea of a Brahmin bride wiping her dirtied hands on her clean dress? That incident here is only to suggest the nervousness of the bride. A Brahmin girl would know better, than to wipe her dirty hands on her clean dress.

Remember that beautiful line of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's on his deceased wife? "Aṭicir kiṇiyāle. "You who made my rice sweet". *Kuṟuntokai* 167 is just that. Only, these are a young couple, of course, and both are living and loving. Neither Brahmin nor non-Brahmin. That is NOT to the point here. Not unless the Brahmins insist on separate treatment by the poets!

Now we move to the pieces at random. From the first hundred poems 32 & 51.

Poem 32. Author, one Naṉmullaiyār. Sounds feminine. There is nothing like this in any of the literatures that the writer has known. It looks like a tribal custom, but tribal customs would be inevitable in a literary cross- section of even a vast empire. The stalk of the palmyrah-tree has a broad base, broad enough for a man to be seated on. However, it would make a very uncomfortable seat, for both sides of the long and strong stalk have sharp, serrated, sword-like edges. Now the hero hits upon what looks like a novel way of inviting publicity, but which seems to have been known in those days in extreme cases.

Apparently, the hero so loves the girl of his choice that he would consider his love a "total lie" if there were any interval by dawn, day, evening or night when that love was not present. He passionately wants to marry her. But the girl does not seem to be accessible. There is only one way out. It is to bring sufficient pressure on the parents to agree to the marriage. And that way-I hope it doesn't evoke a laugh- is to get on to the palmyrah- stalk as on to a steed, (legs apart on either side of it) and allow himself to be drawn, one supposes, by friends or confederates, through the streets, exposed to the public eye. Now a

palmyrah stalk is not a cushioned chariot, and the fellow would be bleeding. If undeterred, he could bleed to death. People with a civic sense would certainly bring this to the notice of the parents, who are expected to take pity on the man who loves their daughter so well. Since there is no question of dowry on either side-no dowry, please, in *Caṅkam* times! although there is a consideration of status- the marriage would be a foregone conclusion. This "mounting the palmyrah stalk" occurs, if not often, rather sufficiently in *Akam* literature not to be ignored, although to us it sounds ridiculous.

Poem 51. Author, one Kuṉṟiyaṉār. The speaker is the heroine's maid. Now the maid has a place of great consequence in *Akam* poetry. Not only does she echo the heroine's sentiments, and sympathize with her at every step, but she seems to be almost living in the heroine's life, and often arranges her affairs. Here she is saying that she, too desires the wedding, the mother of the maid desires it, and the father must give away the bride because the gossip that is getting around the village or township invariably connects the heroine's name with the hero's.

A word here. If it had not been for the colophon and the introductory paragraph, the poem would sound very much like the heroine herself speaking. The poem is in the first person and without the introduction nobody would have imagined the attendant speaking. After all, is the identification of maid with mistress so complete? Now, this happens in several poems. Just taking a look at this particular poem without the introduction, we would read the relevant part like this:

"I too, love him; my mother desires our marriage very much;

My father would love to give me away to him;

And all the gossip in the village connects me with him"!

Now, is this not fairly clear by itself? Why on earth should a compiler imagine such an identification of maid with mistress, beyond all rhyme and reason?

Poem 209, Author- Peruṅkaṭuṅkō. Now it is for the lover to speak. He has come back across the fearful wilderness, where the *Nelli* fruit, which saves the lives of the wayfarers, drops and rolls across to the leopard cubs-not an easy place to pick them up from. All the time the man says, he has not been thinking of anything else. Only the love of his beloved has been with him.

The suggestion is that he has come back after a hunt for resources, and now he is ready to wed the girl he loves. However, it must be said that this interpretation belongs to the colophon and not explicitly to the poem. The love, of course, is there, facing all difficulties.

Poem 244. Author- Kaṇṇaṉ. The mother knows her duty. She will not let her daughter out of her sight at night. When everyone is fast asleep, the lover comes "like an elephant", to try to break open the door. And the maid tells him, "Don't think, great one, that I did not hear. I heard you alright. This mother, without a sense of right and wrong, was clasping her daughter like a peacock ensnared in a net. I could not do anything about it"!

So, the mother is the villain of the piece! And the daughter is under close guard.

Poem 330. Author- Kaḷārkkīraṉ Eyiṟṟiyaṉār. This poem shows a love-lorn girl asking her maid, "No sorrow- filled nights? No loneliness? in the land where my lord has gone"?

» But, we suddenly find ourselves up against something totally unexpected. The first three words. "Nalattakaippulaitthi", Today, and for decades behind us, the use of the word "pulaya", and "pulaitthi", have stood for something highly objectionable. The adjectives to "pulaitthi" here mean "the beautiful, and good". Such is the woman, "who washes the clothes". Not a sign of despicability is here. But there are exceptions, which we will examine later. If the *Caṅkam* poets are honest, so have we to be.

Poem 400. The last but two in the series. Author: Pēyaṉār. The hero is back, having completed his work, whatever that was. His charioteer has driven fast, and of course this could not be a private affair. The hero has been anxious about his beloved in his absence. She would be pining of course. Now, in good time he is back. She is saved. And gratefully, the hero says to the charioteer, "It's not the chariot that you have given me. It's my bride"!

Kuṟuntokai is full of love-lorn women, wedded and unwedded, of heroes who have to leave their hearts behind for sundry reasons, of prostitutes too, but, most of all, the attendant maids. Their love and loyalty to their mistresses raises them to an inconceivable pitch of importance. They are almost the heroines, though they are supposed to be only the heroine's servants. The women in love are reported to be "of few words", although, they, too, do speak occasionally. When prostitutes are around, the heroine speaks out. Naturally.

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Chapter VIII

NAR RIṆAI

(The Good Tiṇai)

These, too, are all on the *Akam* theme. They come up to four hundred in number. They are slightly shorter than the *Akanāṉūṟu* poems. But here we will change the method of study. We will just examine a few poems at random from all the four hundreds.

First, it is Poem 40. By Kōṇmā Neṭuṅkōṭṭaṉār. Here is the family of a rich man, disturbed by the prostitute- element. The home is a grand one, with guards. It has even a "long-tongued" bell to sound the time. Women, evidently servants, are waiting to get the omen, for something has happened. The "son", the new-born infant, is sleeping with the maid's mother-all "smelly" with contact with the heroine, who has just been delivered. Like the *Caṅkam* poets, to observe that! The young mother's "twin eyelids" are closed. And here, laughs the prostitute, the man of the "broad, well-watered fields," enters at midnight, "like a thief", because "the one who bears his father's name" is born. Surely, this "thief" is NOT a nobody! Though a prostitute can have her laugh at him.

Well, in poem 42, we, too, can have a laugh, -an innocent one - at a *Caṅkam* poet. He happens to be one Kīrattaṉār. The poem is beautiful. The hero is riding home in hot haste. He has done his business, whatever that was. He is talking to his charioteer; reminiscing about the past. On a previous occasion he had sent word about his arrival to his beloved. Hurriedly washing and dressing herself, she had flung herself on her husband so that her long wet tresses came loose. But while remembering that, the hero is also happy to note that, after a long dry spell, the rains had come at last, and the frogs, with all their "kin" were speaking, "with their tongues".Well, we know that only fairy frogs can do that! Like the *Caṅkam* poets. These *Caṅkam* poets were no scientists!

Next we go on to Poem 90. The author is one Añcil Añciyār. Sounds feminine. Terrain- *marutam.* Theme-what we hardly expect, even from *marutam.* There is a good bit of washing of clothes by the "pulaitthi". She has plenty of

work, and plenty of income. The clothes are flowered-or embroidered-and she starches them and gets them ready for use. A little girl, dressed thus attractively and wearing a gold chain, runs up to the swing. But, when the "flower-eyed" neighbours (obviously a prostitute-colony) try to make her swing, she just won't do it, but runs away crying. Poor child, she does not know what they expect of a woman. Her "crying" is very suggestive.

Evidently the heroine's man was in the swing, though it is not explicitly stated. And the fellow was, if not a king, at least a prince. And the heroine's maid is furiously angry with him. "Out with you", she as good as tells the Pāṇaṉ whom his master had sent as a feeler. "What use" asks the maid, "is the court of such a king?" A question that we, too, might ask.

Now, bad enough as the prostitutes were as a class, it is horrible to think of the education they are trying to give a girl-child in their power. Think of her tears! She had innocently run up to the swing with joy. But what she found there had changed every thing!.

Shakespeare also deals with this ugly topic. He was no escapist. Marina had spoken "holy words" to a fellow, there also a prince, who frequented a bawdy house. But Marina was capable of doing that. And Shakespeare had deliberately pitted her against the evil forces at work. At least the victory was Marina's. But what do you say of the poor child who was crying under the threat of sex-abuse? Yes, the king, or prince, had got away in time from the distasteful scene, but what was going to happen to the child? Too obvious.

Well, the *Caṅkam* poets were honest, as a class. They were generally, "the poets of the truthful words". Else, why did they put *marutam* and its problems along with the other four terrains - *mullai, Pālai, Kuṟiñci,* and *Neytal*? One- fifth of Tamiḻ society was *marutam*! How was society expected to survive under the impact of that, whatever be the chastity of the women in all the other four areas of the country? Yes, men too, loved their women sincerely. Even if they met them clandestinely, they did not mean to desert them. But *marutam* is a time- bomb in the Tamiḻ country. Only, for the time we dare not think of Kampaṉ's *marutam*. That would be a desecration.

Poem No. 9l. By Picir Āntaiyār. The "Owl from Picir!" It is NOT *marutam*. Here is the hero, riding in his chariot-in broad daylight- to meet his beloved. The maid, who had been anxious on account of her mistress, conveys the joyful news to her. Surely the man means marriage. He's coming-in the public eye-the

horse-bells ringing, "in the long chariot with the horses at furious speed"- NOT clandestinely! And this is preceded by a picture of life among the birds. The hero is coming to "our small home" through a beach area where the stork, hunting for food with its mate, returns with the small fish to the nest on a high branch, where the nestling sits open- mouthed. There is a bird- family for you! It is a pointer to a human family life.

But one idea comes up here. Most of these fellows, whether they go to an innocent girl or to a prostitute, go in chariots. And yes, in poem 40, we find that the girl's father also has a chariot. Most of the philanderers must have been big guys in their day. Some of them would be princes, or king's sons! No wonder Tiruvaḷḷuvar includes them, later, in the verses on Kingship!

Poem 110 is, like every other poem, different. Author, one Pōtaṉār. A mother marvels at her daughter's sense of independence. The paternal home was, and still is, an abode of luxury. There was a time, when,as a little girl, she would give her elderly nurses a time of it, feeding her. They would hold out to her a gold bowl of milk mixed with honey, and tempt her to try it. But, her gold anklets jingling with pearls, she was making it a game- for her or for them?- as she ran from their hands.

Now, where on earth, wonders the mother, did that daughter of hers get the wisdom needed to live with her poverty-stricken husband, under whose roof she would have to cut many a meal? That's strength of mind, says the mother.

Poem 135, by one Katappaḷḷār, shows the maid's concern for her mistress. They had been living a quiet, happy life, near the tall palmyrah tree, whose black base was covered by the sand. They honoured their guests. That was the way of life in their village. Now all that is changed. Their nocturnal visitor has been delaying the expected marriage.

He comes in his chariot against the sounding ocean (one supposes the chariot's noise was drowned by the sea). but what is left of the past? "Life was sweet," says the maid, "before he smiled on us". Poor simple innocents.

Poem 136, by Naṟṟaṅkoṟṟaṉār has a startling reference to medicine. Yes, in poem 140 the hero does say that there's NO medicine for his illness except his beloved. And there's a glance by Paraṇar at a bit of crude surgery- which is quite horrible! But *Naṟṟiṇai* 136 shows, in just a side-reference, that the art of medicine was practised seriously by men who had learnt it, or by "good men" who, when a patient was suffering from a serious disease, would not give him

what he wanted, but did quite some thinking before they gave him the medicine he needed. And, by the way, there is at least one *Caṅkam* poet who was *"maruttuvaṉ"* - a doctor.

And, want a graphic picture of gossip? We could turn to poem 149. The womenfolk, looking from "slanted" eyes, and putting their first finger to the tip of their nose-"some", and "many"- *silarum, palarum* - O dear, no wonder, the maid encourages her mistress to elope. This poem is by one Ulōccaṉār. Sounds a Sanskrit derivative.

We go on to poem 166. By an unnamed poet. Just a sketch of family life. It seems the wife had some suspicion- wholly unwarranted- that her husband was about to go somewhere. Her countenance changes. And the man wishes to soothe her doubts and see her happy. This is what he tells her!

"Like gold, like sapphire, my dear,
Your lovely self, your fragrant hair.
Like flowers, like bamboo, my dear,
Your eyes, your shoulders.
Your dark eyes and beautiful shoulders,
Whenever I look at them, my heart fills.
And I am like a man who has fully attained the bliss of home.
And over and above that,
Our ankleted son is learning the game of make-believe.
And no work have I elsewhere.
Just think, lady, wherefore do we part?
For love is greater than the sea".

Now, the original is poetry. The translation can only be imitation-poetry. Well, this is, definitely, love inside the family- domesticated. But so much is made of the beauty of the lady that one wonders if that much is needed to keep that love warm to the end.

The very next poem 167, also anonymous, is on the ugly topic. Here it's the maid speaking. On a very angry note. To a Pāṇaṉ. Well, we have met Pāṇars hanoured by kings and chieftains and their courts. Here is a Pāṇaṉ used

by some chap, who probably was a big guy, as we have seen-as a go-between. The Pāṇaṉ's master-what a humiliating servitude!-was entangled with a prostitute. Now he wants to get back to his wife. He sends the Pāṇaṉ to find out if she is accessible. As usual, the maid speaks for her mistress.

The point of interest in Poem 167, strangely enough, is neither maid nor mistress, nor master, nor even the Pāṇaṉ. It is just a side-reference to the "court of uproarious joy" of Āi the chieftain. And, before we come to this court, there's another side-reference. That is to the flock of white cranes that come as guests from the west, to that great branch of the black-stemmed *puṉṉai* tree that looks westward. The birds make a great deal of noise and that's all their relevance to the story. But like that noise is what you find in the "court of uproarious joy" of Āi the chieftain.

Now this reference is of special interest to us. Āi the chieftain was always noted for his generosity and his court would be teeming with folks. Here the gifts that he bestows are chariots, and as their bells go jingle- jangle from the court, they remind one of the noisy birds on the *-puṉṉai* tree.

Since the poet has taken so much liberty with his main theme, we will also here take another-with the poet. The poet took this opportunity, within the scope of eleven lines, of side-stepping the main issue, to introduce us to the court of uproarious joy" of Āi the chieftain. Well, Āi was one of the "seven famous benefactors" of *Caṅkam* times, and there are reasons to connect him with the Royal House of Travancore. Perhaps one of the best-known poems on Āi was that written by "Ēṉiccēri Muṭamōciyār- the lame. Mr. Mōci from Ēṉiccēri". The poet asks the patron, "How many calves do your she-elephants bring-forth at a time, that you give them away so freely"? One loves to think of the value of that gift to the lame poet. The elephant would not only have made a comfortable mount for him over hill and over dale, but it would also have picked him up and set him on its back, and gently put him down when so required. No modern vehicle, not even a jet plane, would be capable of that! Well, we have strayed very far from the main point, but then the *Caṅkam* poets taught us that, and we are discussing them.

Poem 250. By one Nalveḷḷaiyār. Now here's another story. A husband is speaking to his Pāṇaṉ, who seems to be reduced by now to the ranks of servitude. However, this master is not unkind and treats him as an affable companion, "Come now"he says to the Pāṇaṉ, "let's have a hearty laugh

together". The husband, on the way home, had met his little "honey-tongued" son, wheeling his toy chariot in the street. Lifting him up in a close embrace, he carried him into the home. There seems to have been a serious difference with his wife, who considered him as "a stranger", obviously because she held him unfaithful. There's not a word in the poem to show that she was right. On the contrary, the husband speaks of her as "My beloved, of the dark fragrant tresses". When she saw him, she "acted the frightened doe", and ran away saying, "Who are you?" The husband laughs as he grasps the situation. Of course he would be able to clear himself, else that laughter would be villainous. Besides he speaks of her forehead "like the crescent moon", as being "spotless," showing his respect for her character. O yes, here, difference between fact and fiction-which somebody had put into his wife's ear. And just a word about that unspotted forehead. There's barely a trace or two in *Caṅkam* literature, of the Indian *poṭṭu* or *tilakam*.

Poem 251 by Maturai Perumarutu Iḷaṇākaṇār shows the maid in a predicament. She knows very well what is wrong with her young mistress. But the mother believes that her daughter is demon- possessed, and resorts to *Vēlaṉ Veṟi*- the driving away of evil spirits by sacrifices to Muruka, and also of women's frenzied spirit-dance. The heroine herself is virtually in prison. *Vēlaṉ- Veṟi* was a popular religious activity of the times. How far the poet himself believes in it can be seen by the attitude of the attendant-maid, who knows better. This scepticism is repeated in sundry other *Akam* poems. All that hullabaloo attached to the *Veṟi*- dance was really for nothing. In one poem, the recipient of the sacrifice is even called a fool because he knows nothing of the reality. What was needed by the heroine was just the love of the man to whom she was attached. One supposes that a modern psychiatrist would agree.

Poem 330. Poet, Vaṅkaṉār from Ālaṅkuṭi -Theme: *marutam*.

The background is one of natural comfort. The buffalo - of course he is thick- skinned- having been at the plough all the morning, throws his tired weight into the broad, cold lake with a thud*, which frightens away the many different flocks of cranes. He comes up thence refreshed, and rests in the sweet shade of the dark *marutam* tree. Such is the countryside, which brings "ever-renewed revenue" to the farmer. But the attendant maid is talking sharply to the thick-skinned man, who has come from that background to her door, and practically

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* The Tamil word for "thud" is "*tuṭum*", the "u" being pronounced as in "put".

refusing him entrance. Inside the home is the much-injured heroine, her mistress. The man has been with his "bejewelled women". The maid tells him that even if he should bring them home and embrace them there as a lawful husband, it is not possible for their evil hearts to be faithful. And it is still more impossible for them to bring forth daughters and sons and live a happy wedded life with the heroine.

Now that is the limit, or, beyond the limit. One could understand the bestial man living in the midst of his mistresses and forsaking his wife. But one needs to be told- by the commentary- that the custom of bringing prostitutes home to one's wife and there treating them as lawful wives, existed- anywhere- in Tamilnad. Even then, if the text itself does not support the commentary, one would not feel like accepting that statement. And it does NOT support it.

So, we've brushed through *Naṟṟiṇai*. Out of four hundred poems, just fourteen. Enough to sense the variety of the poems, along with their individuality. Avvai and Kapilar are very much here, Avvai with her strong, authoritative voice, at times tender, and Kapilar with his romantic *Kuṟiñci* and sweet jack-fruit-but we've had to leave them out since this is not really a study of poetry- just a look at the social history borne out by the poets. Paraṇar gives a lot of reference, to kings but the poems themselves are not really catchy, although- well-never below par. How Paraṇar comes to be named along with Kapilar is a question. We owe him a bit of special study. But anyway we cannot go deep-sea fishing without sufficient equipment, and just one old couple at work have to keep within reasonable life-expectation. For an in-depth study of *Caṅkam* poetry, and *Caṅkam* poets, more is needed, a great team-another Academy? of committed and honest scholars and writers. Our scope in this book is only to trace from the literature of the ancient Tamils the possible reasons for their rise and fall. But, incidentally we cannot resist the temptation to take a look at-the poetry of it.

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Chapter IX

AIṄKURUṆŪṚU

(The Five Brief Hundreds)

The *Aiṅkuṟunūṟus* are really too brief to make a real mark. Just imagine a poem of three lines- of which the first line is only a chorus. That's how brief these poems can sometimes be. How much could be packed into the poems after all? It looks like an experiment and cannot claim too much success. And each hundred is written by one poet, which is something new. Each poet divides his hundred into tens. Nothing special about that, either, except a general look of artificiality. Well, a sonnet is a highly organized , tense composition, but here we sometimes have only the scope of a quatrain. Now we know that Tiruvaḷḷuvar's couplets have each only two lines-or rather, one-and-three- fourths. And we also know that a great deal is packed into one of these couplets. But Tiruvaḷḷuvar is a phenomenon-and he must be left out. The *Aiṅkuṟunūṟus* are just *Caṅkam* poetry at their weakest, shortest and most artificial-though sometimes even they can flash out at us.

The poets keep to their conventional handling of imagery. Imagery is expected to be highly suggestive of the situation. And we will first take some pieces representative of the poet who comes first in alphabetical order - "Ammūvaṉār".

a. Ammūvaṉār

The first of his second Tens:

> Hail, my friend, may you live long! [1]
>
> The friendship of the one who belongs to the shores,
>
> Where the Pāṇaṉ catches the swollen-bellied fish with his bait,
>
> Is such, that separated from him we cannot live,
>
> And all such trials we cannot bear.

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1. *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*, III

At least, here are four lines, apart from the chorus. The heroine is supposed to be speaking to her maid. The image at the heart of it indicates that, just as the Pāṇaṉ caught the fish with his bait, the hero has caught her. And the word "swollen-bellied" suggests that she is, actually, with child! Of course she cannot bear separation from him. And the family is trying to immure her away from him, a little too late, one feels.

Well, here's the Pāṇaṉ going afishing! *Caṅkam* poetry in general shows the Pāṇaṉ singing.

Some of these pieces do declaim the joyous expectation of the hero-always in his chariot, with the bells jingling-to announce the wedding. But the general impression is depressing. The heroine cannot sleep because of the sounding of the cold waves on the shore-suggestive of the hero's country, and her forehead grows pale and her shoulders grow thin[2]. Or she hears the sea birds calling from the tall palmyrah trees in his land[3]. Or "the loveless one", she scolds him whom she calls her husband. And there is a whole section of ten poems devoted to the prostitute-theme, where there is one picture of a mere child of a girl who is trying to feed a doll at her dry breast[4], and who is also suspected of having a liaison with the hero.

And, there is another whole section of ten pieces devoted to the Pāṇaṉ! We have, apart from the *Puṟam* poems, four lengthy *Pāṇāṟṟuppaṭais*, and plenty of references to the Pāṇaṉ elsewhere, but almost everywhere the Pāṇaṉ is treated with respect as a master- artiste, as one who plays music "according to the musical treatise" and as one who feasts with kings and courtiers and is rewarded with fine clothing, chariots, elephants, and what not. In *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* the Pāṇaṉ is degraded to the station of a go- between, involving the hero, his wife, and his mistresses. This will, naturally, mean a lot of serious differences. The first poem begins with a wife's refusal to admit her husband. She is speaking to the Pāṇaṉ.

> "Well, Pānaṉ, I know too well about that-my
> husband's love, (of which you speak)"[5].

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2. *Ibid.*, 107
3. *Ibid.*, 114
4. *Ibid.*, 128
5. *Ibid.*, 131

The whole township is talking about him and his affairs".

In the next,

"Hail, Pāṇaṉ, and greetings!

But this whole township, full of Puṉṉai buds,

Is teeming with talk of the way my lord shows me his grace".[6]

In the next,

"Whatever can I do, Pāṇaṉ?

My armlets have slipped down because

I have gone thin, with this separation".

In another

"Pāṇaṉ. you are shameless".[7]

In yet another,

"Pāṇaṉ, you have no manners,

You who cannot give me back my husband,

Showing him his lovelessness [8]

In another, addressed to the husband-not the Pāṇaṉ, "Hail, my lord, and greetings! So far as I am concerned; The Pāṇaṉ has caused my beauty to wane, more than you have".[9]

All the ten poems are something in this strain. No credit to the Pāṇan. And it is suggestive of the Pāṇaṉ's sudden dip in the social scale.

In the other poems too, occasionally, the prostitute-problem crops up. The eighth ten shows an artifice- consciousness, the last line of the preceding poem making the first line of the following one. But artifice is neither art, nor poetry, although it does happen that in this ten are occasional flashes, as in the

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6. *Ibid.*, 132
7. *Ibid* 136
8. *Ibid.*, 138
9. *Ibid.*, 144

second one, where the hero tells his companion that even at night he cannot sleep, like the sounding waves of the sea.[10] And in this whole batch of ten the beauty of the lady is compared to Toṇḍi, a coastal town in the Cēra country.

But on the whole the short Hundred poems by Ammūvaṉār cannot really claim distinction, even though they have the distinctive *Caṅkam* flavour about them. But, how much we have heard from them of the general moral deterioration of Tamiḻ Society!

b. Ōtalāntaiyār

The next poet in the series is a bird. And a night-bird. The "Learned Owl"- Otalāntaiyār. He begins with a story of the separation of a loving couple for financial reasons. The husband has to find the money for running the home. Here's another observation of "Uneducated" men-in this case, cowherds.[11] The maid warns the hero that, if he should take the road up the rock and across the area where the uneducated cowherds have dug pits for the rain-water, his wife is going to be worried. In another piece, she asks him if the money he is going to bring will be sweeter to him than the infant smiles of his first-born son![12]

The "Learned Owl" is different from the other poets. His emphasis is on goodness, conduct, character. We do not see much of the heroine's soft, sleek shoulders. But we do see what her husband thinks of her character. *Paṇpu* -(character) is an oft-repeated word with this poet. [13] The hero also does have a "character" in his wife's eyes. So even when the couple elope, the nurse, the attendant maid's mother, is able to console the heroine's mother, saying. "Why so upset? This is your daughter's wish". (313).The colophon actually puts it the other way round. The real mother is consoling the maid's mother. Now, we cannot depend too heavily on the colophons. The text itself is fairly clear. In another poem the hero is going across the hot desert. He has to find money. But, he says:

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10. *Ibid.*, 172
11. *Ibid., 304*
12. *Ibid., 309*
13. *Ibid.*, 321, 323, 325, 326, 327 etc.,

"The dry season lengthening till the bamboos break,

The hot sun beating down all the day,

Hard it was, once. But now,

Thinking of her of the bright forehead,

It's become cool, the road across the desert. " [14]

If, in this desert, at midnight, he should "doze awhile", he sees her of the *māmai* complexion. [15] It's tough going across such a place, but he has obtained "the company of his beloved's "character", even though her actual presence is not with him.[16] It's as though she is with him all the time! Yes, in another poem, the way from her is long and tedious, the way to her is short!

Hard is the desert, where the stag with his deer is suffering for want of the cool shade of trees and where there is no water in the pools. But sweet is the character of "her I left behind"[17]. Character. Character, character, character. But he has had to leave her. And now there is a drizzle. The going should be easier. But-should it rain flowers, it's hot, hot, for him who has left the sweet companionship of the innocent one, and gone into the forest.[18]. He cannot forget the weeping eyes, and the suffering heart, of her who is thinking of him in the desert. [19]

When we leave the hero and turn to his wife, we find her complaining. "Why", she asks, "should we live separate when the birds live in the company of their mates?[20] And, "he who left me with my many- petalled eyes weeping, is stronger than the granite, while my silly heart has to go after him"[21]. Again, to her maid, a complaint:

"Sweeter than my fond embrace is wealth

To him who climbed the dark mountain".[22]

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14. *Ibid., 322*
15. *Ibid., 324*
16. *Ibid., 325*
17. *Ibid., 326*
18. *Ibid., 328*
21. *Ibid., 334*
22. *Ibid., 337*

The fifth Ten is on spring-time, and it makes a lovely lyric of three-lined stanzas.

"As for him, he will not come; but what is come,
The time of the mirage when the female cuckoo
makes her sweet call"
"As for him, he will not come; but what is come
The time when the doll-flowers of the kuravam plant are plucked".
"As for him, he will not come; but what is come,
The time when the black, red-eyed cuckoo calls
out that the pādiri is in bloom."

He comes at last. The maid, overjoyed, carries the news to her mistress. She calls out, "My friend, he's come, our lover! Across the desert where the angered elephant roams with his huge trunk, crinkled like the rough- hewn hero-stones with inscriptions about the names and deeds of those who were killed by the Maṟavās' arrows". [23]

Three points to be noted here. The " hero-stones" are the monuments of dead warriors and there were "inscriptions" on them. So much for those who say that the *Caṅkam* poets did not know writing. Another, that elephant-trunks were like these rough-hewn stones, crinkled. Yet another, the way the maid calls her mistress's lover, "our lover". Now, Rosalind has her Celia. Hero has her Beatrice. Celia is feebler than her heroine, and Beatrice is stronger than hers. Shakespeare has seen a future for both Celia and Beatrice. But, as has been remarked formerly, the role of the maid in *Caṅkam* times is often identified with that of the mistress. It is as if she has no separate identity, no future for herself. Her whole being is wrapped in her mistress's happiness, What will happen to her, a mere servant, when her mistress marries and goes to her domestic felicity? There's not a suggestion about that. It's almost as if she doesn't count. And what counts is the romance of her mistress. Rather undemocratic, that, one has to say.

The seventh Ten shows the daughter's elopement. But the mother is not angry with her. "May the high mountain-range with thunder-clouds, where the

23. *Ibid., 352.*

peacock dances, provide a very sweet path for her!" is the mother's fervent wish. "After all, my young daughter with the crescent- moon forehead has chosen what she knew to be the right path". [24]

But, she cannot help sorrowing, looking at the relics her daughter has left behind.

"This is the doll that was pretty to my doll.

This is the parrot that was carried by my parrot.

This is the love-bird that spoke sweetly to my love-bird.[25]

So she has left, my flower-eyed one, with the shining forehead.

That, whenever I see this, whenever I see this,

I grieve".

In another poem, she says,

"She's gone then, my daughter,[26]

Leaving to us her ball, her doll, and her marbles".

One cannot help remarking that the heroine seems to be a very young girl, barely past childhood. The hero, however, is invariably a capable and strong adult, who knows what is what. One feels that the protection provided for her was insufficient. And that the "hero" in general seems to have been taking too much advantage of her.

After the daughter has left, the mother wishes that her daughter had been given in regular marriage. "Wouldn't that have been sweeter, the marriage, with all her kin and friends around her?"[27] So, there was such a thing as a regularised marriage in *Caṅkam* times. How the marriage was solemnised we do not know. We do not hear of the "*tāli*" (the marriage-seal) or of *mantras*, or of prayers, or of exchanging of garlands, or of wedding rings. But the bride is certainly given away to the bridegroom, with friends and relatives round her.

24. *Ibid., 371*
25. *Ibid., 375*
26. *Ibid., 377*
27. *Ibid., 379*

And it would have been the father who officiated at the giving-away ceremony. And the feast-a natural sequel, though not spoken about.

Now, there's no room for all that, anyway, after the elopement. And the mother wails:

"Great is the sorrow of the women in the home, who bring forth

Girl-children, with the bright ornaments"![28]

Well, the daughter, too, does have a thought for the mother. She sees some Brahmins on the way. She says to them.

Here she has no maid for a mouthpiece.

"I beg you to do one thing for me:

Do tell my mother, who brought me up with love,

With whom I am gone.

And tell my kinswomen too"[29]. The maid is probably included in the vague term "kinswomen"- now, just a nobody. [30]

This same message is sent through others (not Brahmins) in another piece, but- the Brahmins are now in the field! Not just behind the kings. They carry the message to the nurse, too. "We saw her", they say, "her sweet companion tending her affectionately".[31]

It only remains for us to see her, with her husband, returning to the paternal home. There are a few poems about that. But there seems to be a ritual to be gone through in the husband's home to celebrate the marriage. In her new home- the bridegroom's home, the mother-in-law removes the bride's anklet.[32]

Ōtalāntaiyār has thus his own individuality. At one glance, all the *Akam* poems seem to be similar. So do the poets. But when we study them carefully, the differences come out. If we, as visitors, look at a dozen leopards in the zoo (the Tamils had a zoo!) the whole lot seems to be alike, each one a sheer replica of the next. But the keeper knows better. He knows all the animals as individuals

28. *Ibid., 382*
29. *Ibid., 384*
30 *Ibid., 387*
31. *Ibid., 399*
32. *Ibid.,* l.

by face, and by name. They are individuals to him. So it is with the *Caṅkam* poets. Each one has his strongly marked personality although they all have the *Caṅkam* seal upon them.

Ōrampōkiyār

Third in alphabetical order in the *Aiṅkuṟuṅūṟu* series comes Ōṟampōkiyār.

Ōrampōkiyārs Hundred in the Aiṅkuṟunūru are a hundred with a difference. The first Ten, which are slightly longer, have as chorus, the name of a Cēra king, Ātaṉ Aviṉi, who is addressed in every one of the Ten thus:

Hail, Ātaṉ! Hail, Aviṉi!

We see two personalities- perhaps three, -in this ten. The speaker is the heroine's maid, but she is completely identified- with her mistress. The colophon says that, after returning home from his mistresses, the "hero" enquires of the maid, "What did you speak of when I was away"? "The maid's reply has two parts. The first is what the mother said; the second is what the daughter said. You note that the mother always speaks of big things, generalities. And the daughter with her maid-of things that are associated with the straying husband. We'll try to reach for one of the pieces, - the first. [33]

"Hail, Ātaṉ! Hail Aviṉi!
May the paddy abound; may the gold multiply:
This is what our mother desired. As for us,
Long live him of the prosperous city,
Of the small kāñci buds and small fishes,
And may the Pāṇaṉ live long too-that is what we desired".

In another piece, No. 4, the mother's wish is this:

Hail, Ātaṉ! Hail Aviṉi!
May the foes flee, may the Brahmins chant".

Neither mother nor daughter has had reason to be happy over the turn of things. The last line of the first stanza is clearly a satirical reference to the

33. *Ibid.*, 9.

Pāṇaṉ who has so misled the husband. And the serious- minded mother includes the Brahmins among her wishes. Was Ōrambōkiyār a Brahmin? Not necessarily.

[34] Another, No. Says the maid:

Hail Ātaṉ! Hail Avini!

May good flourish; may evil be destroyed.

This is what our mother desired. As for us,

May our friendship with him of the cool waters,

Where the stork, having eaten the fish,

Rests in the haystack, never come to light!

That's what we desired.

The stork here is clearly symbolic of the man who has victimised her young mistress.

The second Ten poems are each just four lines each. We'll see the first of these. The heroine says:

"Ashamed of the cruelty of him of the township of the cool waters,

Where the Vēlam plant surrounds the paddy with the hamlets in between,

We say that he is good; but

"No, he's not good", say my soft sleek shoulders,

(they have gone thin)[34]

In another, we see him enjoying his bath- there's plenty of water in the *marutam* area- with many women. The news reaches the heroine, and her flower-like eyes turn jaundiced. In yet another, the heroine is wailing that her "foolish heart" has gone "vacant" because the hero has turned aside to another mistress.[35] But, in the colophon, the maid has, apparently, asked her mistress, "Why this despondency? After all, it is not unnatural for menfolk to behave

34. *Ibid.*, 11

35. *Ibid.*, 17

thus". Maybe the twentieth century folks would understand this philosophy from the *Caṅkam* maid. Or perhaps the colophon does not belong to the poem- it was a later interpolation.

In the Crab Ten-where the crab image secures in each of the ten pieces- the fourth piece arrests by two startling images of cruelty. [36] It seems the "speckled" crab dies when the young ones come out, tearing the mother open. And the crocodile eats its own young ones. The scientific accuracy of both statements needs to be checked, but if they are true, they are startling truths. Anyway Ōrampōkiyār seems to believe both, and makes his heroine say that, since her man comes from such a terrain, where cruelty is the order of the day, there's no wonder that he has despoiled her of her beauty and then deserted her. There's a mournful lyricism about the Crab- Ten, as also about the next Ten, the fourth, where the heroine is speaking to the maid.

And we hear sad complaints from the other side too! Here's the prostitute speaking to her maid. In some of the *marutam* poems, the prostitute assumes the role of heroine!

"Hail to you, my maid! My Lord

Is deft at making the eyes of those who love him

Turn yellow and tearful; and deft he is

At telling lies and breaking his word". [37]

Can a prostitute have a heart? These pieces seem to suggest that they can. We are drawing dangerously near to Mātavi of *Cilappatikāram* of the post- *Caṅkam* period.

A tortoise seems to be sleeping. On its back are mounted many of its little ones, small tortoises, "like copper", also asleep.[38] Well, that phenomenon in nature is unknown to the present writer. Now, accepting that as scientific truth, we can also accept what follows. The heroine's man has told her a very big lie- about his faithfulness. On top of that there are many, many lies by the Pāṇaṉ. One big lie breeds small lies, and they are many in number.

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36. Ibid., 24
37. *Ibid.*, 37
38 Ibid., 43

And the Pāṇaṉ tells so many lies! O no, the master does not have so many[39]. One poem says that the bejewelled folks (women) around know the truth of that quite well. And, the Pāṇaṉ's wife, with her beautiful teeth, (smiling) comes with her broad basket full of fish, which she barters for corn in the house-hold[40]. O yes, her family can live quite well. The suggestion-a Pāṇaṉ does not need bawdry for a livelihood. The next poem shows a Pāṇaṉ adept at casting his net over the fish. [41] Or. does that include poor simple womenfolk, too?

In the sixth ten, the maid is discussing her lady's illness with the husband. She tells him that her illness is not the desire for the tamarind- or rather, that she is NOT pregnant, [42] Another poem- again by the maid, - addresses the husband thus: "Is your other woman so beautiful, that you should forsake your wife "[43] Yet another poem, by the maid. She tells the man that she had once brought the medicine for him, in bringing him to his mistress. Now she has no medicine for her, whom he has betrayed.[44] And she asks him. "Have you no fear of the sword, in her father's hand"?[45] This fear, of the father- figure, is rare.

The seventh ten shows a rather outspoken heroine, who tells the man that even if she lost her beauty, she would not care to enjoy the bosom that had been embraced by others. In another, she challenges him:

> I am not going to be angry. But, speak the truth.
>
> Who was that woman, husband, who carried,
>
> Into your wealthy home, our toddling son,
>
> Along with his toy chariot"?[46]

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39. *Ibid., 47*
40. *Ibid., 47*
41. *Ibid., 48*
42. *Ibid., 51*
43. *Ibid., 51*
44 *Ibid., 57*
45. *Ibid, 59*
46. *Ibid., 60*

And next, a rather well- known outburst of anger:

"You of the township of renewed revenue,
Where the stork sits on the branch of the marutam tree,
In the field, in wait for the many fishes,
Pure and fragrant are your women,
But we, who bore your child, are like the very devil"![47]

The eighth ten begins with the wife's accusation:

"They say, that, embracing your mistress,
You bathed in the flood. The scandal,-
Can it be hidden, the light of the sun?" [48]

In the same group another poem brings out the maid's anger.

"Even on hearing it, she is too furious for words:
Should she see, what will happen to her?
Your harlot-ridden bosom, embraced by many,
Like the cold lake-water, where the girls
With flowers in their five braids have their dip?" [49]

This hundred closes on the note of the heroine's sweet voice- as sweet as the strings played by the Pāṇaṉ! [50] So, the Pāṇaṉ has not quite forgotten his time- honoured vocation. The same poet has, in a *Kuṟuṇtokai* piece, (*Kuṟuntokai* 127) shown the maid as telling the hero,

"Just because your one Pāṇaṉ is a liar,
All the Pāṇars are treated as thieves."
So, not every Pāṇaṉ is a bawd.

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47. Ibid., 66
48. Ibid., 71
49. Ibid., 84
50. Ibid., 100

Kapilar

The fourth poet in the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* series, in alphabetical order, happens to he Kapilar. At last here should be something arresting, or at least interesting, although the form is a serious draw-back to poetic expression here as elsewhere.

Well in the second poem there is something: "Look at the horse our hero is riding!" says the maid to her mistress "It's head has a tuft just like a Brahmin sibling in our country!" [51] In the next, the heroine, who has come to the paternal roof after a stay at her husband's is telling her maid that the water left under the shrub by the deer in her husband's country is sweeter than the honey mixed with milk in her father's. No materialism, that!

Another poem. The heroine is love-lorn. The maid's mother attributes it to demon-possession. But the maid tells her mother that one way to overcome her mistress's disease is to climb over the shrubs in their country and look in the direction of the flower -covered hill. We know whose it was. [52] Repetition of the demon- possession story, only partly accepted by the people.

And, of course, it's Kapilar! He will not forget the jack-fruit! Kapilar describes the hero's country. The huge honeycomb that falls from the rocks and is shattered into bits, is like the fragrant, luscious, fruit of the jack.[53]

In another poem, the black leopard carries away the "toddling" young one of the elephant, and hides, with his catch, in the full shade of the jack-tree, where the huge fruit hangs from the branches. [54]

Well, if it's Kapilar, there must be something to show for it. Even in this unpromising batch of poems he does have something out of the ordinary. He calls the he-monkey "uneducated" *Kallāk kaṭuvaṉ* [55] We are suddenly carried back to the great *Pattuppāṭṭu* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poems where, very rarely, though unquestionably, we meet the "uneducated" young men! Why on earth does

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51. Ibid., 202
52. Ibid., 210
53. Ibid., 214
54. *Ibid., 216*
55. *Ibid., 274*

Kapilar call the he-monkeys "Uneducated"? Yes, and in one place, the she-monkey too? [56] Does he see something in the monkey behaviour? Men, behaving like he- monkeys, in the midst of wives, mistresses, and prostitutes! And the baby monkey, also "uneducated", is beating the moon as he rides the bamboo up in the clumps. [57]

Kapilar's Teyyō-Ten does read like a lyric, taken together, with its sounding endings. And in one of these, Kapilar points out that the heroine, though she does not see her husband's bosom in reality, does see it in her dreams.[58]

That confusion of love-sickness with demon possession is in one whole section, devoted to *Veṟi.* In one of these ten little pieces the maid asks her mistress- loudly enough for the house-hold to hear- "And they say it's Vēlaṉ who has possessed you - but Is that, then, the name of the Lord of the hills?"[59]

Another section of ten pieces is devoted to the "beloved, innocent daughter of the Kuṟava of the hills". Kapilar's speciality is always *Kuriñci,* - love on the mountains- Romeo meeting Juliet on the mountains, and it suits him.

The Parrot- Ten is another. The mountain- damsel is now not allowed to drive away the birds from the cornfields. Maybe her people have scented it out, that it is there that she has her affair. Hence it is really for protection that she is immured in the home. But the maid interprets it another way. Her sweet voice is likely to attract the parrots, not drive them away- because it is like theirs, and therefore, she is not allowed to go to the fields. [60]

The Peacock- Ten. In one pretty piece, the heroine comes from behind and covers the hero's eyes with her hands. A child-like game. He is to identify the person. He says he knows very well whose these hands are. Like the fragrant buds of the *Kāntaḷ.* The lady who is like the *Tōkai,* the peacock. Who else, but she, who is in his heart? [61]

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56. *Ibid., 277*
57. *Ibid., 280*
58., *Ibid., 234*
59. *Ibid., 241*
60. *Ibid., 289*
61. *Ibid., 293*

A game of balls by the mountain damsel turns up in another.[62] almost in every piece there is something interesting. But this is not really a study of poetry as such, though we cannot completely ignore it. However, before we leave Kapilar we have to say that Kapilar's hundred little pieces make really pleasurable reading for all their brevity. And we do learn a lot about mountain-life, for the heroine of the hills.

Pēyaṉār

The next, or last, poet on the list is one Pēyaṉār. The name *Pēy* should mean- the Devil?- but it does not mean the devil as we understand it- only, a spirit. The ancient Tamiḻs believed in the spirit-world- as most ancient peoples did. They were animists. NOT "Hindus". They saw a spirit working everywhere. Something not tangible, yet powerful. What if they did not understand some things? They knew-what the moderns do not know-that one cannot know everything. And this was one of the factors behind their reception of the Brahmins- so gentle, so obviously learned, so remarkable for cleanliness, and on the whole, so other-worldly. Other-worldliness might not have continued with them for long as a trait, but it was there, for sure, before they got a grip on the Tamiḻs.

Now, this Pēyaṉ, superficially, looks very much like the authors of the other *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* poets. *mullai* or *Kaṟpu* (faithful love) is his subject. Whether he was allotted the topic by the Academy, or he chose it on his own on a common understanding with the other four poets of the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu,* we do not know. But- it is a beautiful topic, and he has handled it beautifully. Mother and baby- and father- what we see very rarely elsewhere , is one entire section. Father- rushing home in his chariot- another. And now the Pāṇaṉ! NOT as bawd. But as musician and faithful servant, of the hero, who obviously serves the king as one of the commandos in his army. In one stanza we actually see Pāṇaṉ used in the plural- Pāṇar, - as though this lord and baron had a number of minstrels at his beck and call.

The first section of ten poems is supposed to be by the Nurse, mother of the heroine's attendant maid. She had just visited the young couple in their new home, and brings back an exciting report.

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62. *Ibid., 295*

"Like a deer-couple, their young one between,
With the son in their midst,
Sweet is their bed."[63]

In another, while the "bright- browed" lady feeds her son at her breast, her husband caresses the nape of her neck.[64]

This picture is repeated in different forms:

"Like the red flame of the bright lamp,
She is the light of the home, mother of the son
Of him who commands the land of the woods and the flowers"[65]

And the couple can go out together, like modern tourists, to see the charm of the woodscape. The hero as good as promises his wife an outing:

"Forest!"he says, "You're beautiful:
What with your koṉṟai that flowers like gold,
And the honeyed Kāyā blooms, of blue;
We're coming to take a look at you,
I, with my bright-browed dame". [66]
Bright brows. And no *poṭṭu* or *tilakam.*

The first piece of the next section shows the young husband unwilling to part from his wife. Her "beautiful shoulders" prevent his going. There is, of course, variety in the poems. In one poem, the hero reminds his charioteer that if he drives really fast, the wife will not get worried. [67]

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63. *Ibid., 401*
64. *Ibid., 404*
65. *Ibid., 405*
66. *Ibid., 420*
67. *Ibid., 422*

Or, the maid gives him the warning that his beloved infant son, "like the opening lotus", will be crying for his milk if he should leave his wife (implying that she cannot stand the separation and will die).[68]

Or, the hero tells his wife,

"You are the woman with the flower-like, battling eyes;
You will not let me go because the monsoon is come,
And the King, because he knows that I will not go,
Has stopped his move to the battle-front".[69]

What a reason for stopping a battle!

The third section is a lyric of three-lined stanzas, the first line being the chorus:

"It's good now, the path my love is treading"- as the wife thinks of the attractions on the way, the peacock, the stag with the deer, the golden *Konrai*, the white *mullai* or jasmine that blooms in the drizzle, etc: etc., But the whole taken together is a real lyric.

The next section shows the warrior in his tent in the battlefield, thinking of her"of the sweet words" - and thinking also that it would be good if she does know the pain he is going through. [70]

Another piece shows him hoping that the hard work of the furious monarch (in battle) will cool down. That would be a feast to the chaste mother of his son.

"If only the king's work were over", wishes the hero, "I could ride in my chariot even though home were near so that I could quickly meet the one of the crescent brow that shed moon- light". [71]

Again and again the hero wishes that the king's job would come to an end. Here is a poem of six lines showing the problem:

68. *Ibid., 424*
69. *Ibid., 427*
70 *Ibid., 441*
71. *Ibid., 443*

"When the "muracu" announces the morning,
The fierce monarch goes to his work.
When on both sides the "mullai" blooms,
The rising monsoon clouds come up with showers.
Thinking of her of the five braids,
What I get is just sleepless care".[72]

In another piece, the warrior wishes that the battle were over, and the king of the victorious sword were able to go back to his country on the elephant, " whose tusks were blunted by charging at the long fortresses and breaking them." Then, and only then, he would be able to see his "lady with the great shoulders".[73]

These are the warriors! Hankering after the love of Woman.

The following section shows the woman. On her part she is no better. The frogs are croaking. The birds are chattering. The monsoon is come. It is raining! Surely, her "tall" husband has started his chariot for home![74]

In another, the heroine states that her beloved can never learn to lightly leave her, any more than her silly heart can learn to forget him.[75]

Yet another: "The fierce king will not leave the battlefield. As for him of the dark mountain, his message has not come. And such is the monsoon wind that it sways the huge-leaved banana tree right from the stem. Poor I, then! What will become of me?"[76]

Her attendant maid is ever-ready to console her, "Come, let's look at the sky, flower-eyed one", she says. "It's started to rain and thunder". [77] For, that's the time the hero is expected. And she reminds her that surely he cannot forget her *māmai* beauty.

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72. *Ibid., 448*
73. *Ibid., 444*
74. *Ibid.,453*
75. *Ibid., 457*
76. *Ibid., 460*
77. *Ibid., 469*

The next Ten is on the Pāṇaṉ! Well, the *Yāḻ* is still in his skilled hand. The heroine's attendant complains to him that her mistress's husband has not come yet[78]! So, what? The Pāṇaṉ's duty is to bring him. The heroine herself speaks to the Pāṇaṉ in another poem: "Pāṇaṉ of the skilled hand! Do not forget me, like those others who brought me sorrow and suffering!"[79] She was hoping he would carry a message.

And in the last poem of this series, the Pāṇaṉ himself suddenly springs to life. He meets his master, and addresses him sharply:

"To you I am no more Pāṇaṉ. To me

You are no more master.

You, who having heard of how

Your loving wife at home is weeping out her
two - petalled eyes,

Have not shown grace to her!"[80]

Another Ten for the chariot- returning home. The king has ended his wars. The officer is urging the chariot to speed, for it is going to be "a great feast" for the Lady. [81] This is the burden of most of the verses of this section.

The last Ten is the sheer joy of the Home- coming. "I come" he begins, "Lady, with speed this monsoon morning, with aching, aching heart".[82] And he proceeds to describe what he saw on the way.

"Like you, the peacock was dancing.

And like your fragrant brow the mullai was flowering.

Like you the doe was looking, timidly.

And thinking of you, my bright-browed Lady,

Faster than the monsoon, I come".[83]

78. *Ibid.,472*
79. *Ibid., 473*
80. *Ibid.,480*
81. *Ibid., 482*
82. *Ibid., 491*
83. *Ibid., 493*

How many bright foreheads! And not one with a *Poṭṭu,* or dot.

And will the maid be left out of the rejoicing? She addresses herself, excitedly, to her mistress.

"Lady of the great virtues, thinking of you,
The great man of war has come."[84]

"Because the king, on the tusker, had given up the war,
The lord of the hill came speeding on the long chariot."[85]

"You of the sweet words, for your beauty he's come[86]".

And then she turns to the warrior.

"Look at her", She tells him. "Her once- jaundiced eyes are now like the blue *Kuvaḷai* flowers in the mountain-springs. They have got back their beauty, now that you, away so long on the battlefield, have come".[87]

How the home in those warlike days must have been disturbed by the absence of the master!

We've just brushed through a cursory selection from the *Caṅkam* poems, to see if we can get a rough- very rough-idea of the life of an ancient people. Just here we have to reiterate the often- repeated suggestion, that the *Caṅkam* poets, in their love- poems just went wool- gathering. Now, does it really click? Youthful love, warlike times, warrior- heroes, a maid to aid and abet the heroine, mistresses, prostitutes, elopements, bawds and babies-well, what sort of wool is all that? The setting is Tamiḻnad with its five *Tiṇais*, the life is universal. And how many more of the poems lie waiting to be gleaned from? We have not seen one out of twenty-five of the extant love-poems. The *Puṟam* poems we have seen in greater detail, but more will turn up as we consider the general characteristics of the *Caṅkam* Age.

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84. *Ibid., 497*
85. *Ibid., 498*
86. *Ibid., 499*
87. *Ibid., 500*

Chapter X

TOWARDS UNTOUCHABILITY

It's amusing- we can afford to be amused today- but it was one of the Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* poets themselves who seems to have introduced Untouhcability as a creed! And the reason behind it is one with which all would sympathize, if not acknowledge as right. One Naṉṉaṉ- whether father or son, or maybe just another chieftain with the same name, we do not know- had committed, what is repeatedly mentioned in the poems as "Woman-slaughter", "*Peṇ-kolai*". And so a poet, who embraced a certain chieftain, refused- openly- to embrace that chieftain's friend. Poor fellow, he happened to be the descendant of the Naṉṉaṉ who had committed "*Peṇ-kolai*". There is untouchability for you! The Chieftain Naṉṉaṉ himself might have been an untouchable, but how was his descendant answerable for the sins of his forefathers? In principle, then, untouchability had been accepted by a Tamiḻ poet as an objectionable, but inescapable heirloom.

But the untouchability of classes, or clans, which became a very serious reality later in Tamiḻnad, stems from another source. Not Sin. Just-Poverty. And poverty easily attacks classes that could not claim protection from the rulers of society. One *Caṅkam* poem mentions four classes of people- Pāṇaṉ, Tuṭiyaṉ, Paṟaiyaṉ and Kaṭampaṉ, as "*Kuṭis*" or (original) inhabitants.[1] Of these, we do not meet the Kaṭampas anywhere else, even in the literature, though there is mention of a Cēra king who cut down the "Kaṭampa" tree, which should have been the "guardian tree" of Kaṭampas[2], though we are not able to relate them to the *Kuṭis*. These *Kuṭis* seem to be Pre- Dravidian- the original inhabitants of the country. They were all black, not brown like the Dravidians. And within the literature we do not find any trace of despicability even about the *Kuṭis* except about two groups who happened to be drummers, one of which is mentioned in four *Puṟam* poems, which have therefore to be studied in detail.

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1. *Puram* 335
2. *Patiṟṟuppattu*, 12

Apart from the *Kuṭis*, however, there are several groups, like the Kuṟavās, and the Paratavās, who later dipped in the social scale, but were held in high esteem during the *Caṅkam* period. Why, they themselves had a "Paratavar-Kōmāṉ".[3] (Prince of the Paratavās ,or fishermen), and a Cēra King, Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ who "drove back the sea" is actually addressed in one poem as "Paratava"![4] Reason? These Paratavās were "responsible" for the "beauty", or prosperity, of the coastal town of Toṇṭi- and, probably, of other coastal towns too. The picture we have of them is as living in low- roofed hutments, but eating crab and lobster. Fish is not mentioned in their diet, but would be taken for granted. And we see them practising war-games, like wrestling and fencing. They would be warriors at a pinch! That would set them high up in the king's favour. The Paratavās were thus contributing greatly to society and we do not see them treated as low-class in *Caṅkam* literature. Definitely they had the protection of the kings, who, in turn, was protected by them.

And, taking the *Kuṭis* themselves! The first of them, the Pāṇan, an integral part of *Caṅkam* society. No Pāṇaṉ, no *Caṅkam* poetry. Four of the major *Patttuppāṭṭu* poems are about them- *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai Poruṇarāṟṟuppaṭai*, and *Kūttarāṟṟūppaṭai*. Poor enough the Pāṇars can be at times, but they have a profession which entitles them to entertainment, and respect, not just protection, in courts of kings and chieftains. Their knowledge of music is not merely casual, but "according to the musical treaties". As they climb the mountains, we see them tired and dirty, but kings and chieftains will see them richly clothed and rewarded with rare gifts. Only in *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* we find that there is one area- only one-where they cannot expect to be received hospitably. That is within the city of Āmūr, guarded by the moat, "where there is no dearth of Brahmins".[5] Certainly, extreme cleanliness was one of the traits of the Brahmins, and maybe we should understand if they did not relish the proximity of dirty, ill-clad people. But here is the beginning of untouchability on account of poverty! And what of the Pāṭiṇi? Avvai should have been one, for there is barely one stepping -stone from song to poetry. And, Kākkai Pāṭiṇiyār Naccellaiyār? It is actually disputed, that she could not have been a Pāṭiṇi, but was called one because she wrote a (brief, undistinguished) poem about a Crow

3. *Akanānūru*, 266
4. *Patiṟṟuppattu*, 48
5. *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, line 187

or *Kākkai*. More likely, Crow or *Kākkai* should have been her name because she was black. Ātimanti was a Pāṭiṇi, and her name suggests that she was a Monkey! Not that Drawin's theory had anything to do with it. Nor the *Rāmāyaṇam*. No, the dark-skinned Pāṇars and Pāṭiṇis were obviously pre-Dravidians, but managed, with their music, to keep up their position in society.

And the Pāṭiṇi's smile flashes out at us from the poetry-her teeth would have been conspicuous against her dark skin-almost as symbol of her joy in life. Music was at the back of it. Music, however, would not be much in demand among people torn too badly with strife, and the Pāṇars would have had later to fend for themselves. We see them fishing. And, disposing of the fish they caught. But if they didn't do either, they sometimes stooped to currying favour with the big guys of the day by dealings with their mistresses. That was a real social dip, for the Pāṇars.

Coming to the Pulaiyās! They were drummers. But we will see their womenfolk, the Pulaittis, first. "Nalattaku" (*Kuṟum* 330) is an adjective in the *Caṅkam* poetry of the Pulaitti- the "beautiful, and good", Pulaitti. She does a good bit of dancing- (Muruka's spirit-dance-*Puṟam* 259). A Pulaitti, dancing what was obviously associated with early Dravidian, or Pre-Dravidian, religion! But spirit-dances could not go on all the time for a livelihood. So we see her engaged in washing clothes. Now washing clothes could be dirty work, especially in olden days, and if it's not your own clothes that she is washing, you might be tempted to turn up your nose at them. The over-scrupulous cleanliness of the Brahmins wouldn't have helped them in their dealings with the Pulaiyas. The Brahmins washed their clothes themelves, "beating them clean on stone", and their womenfolk would have followed suit. No, one cannot imagine a washerwoman being looked on with acceptance by a Brahmin woman. Untouchability! That's what we're sniffing at here. And this untouchability would have a sharper edge when you find the washerwoman dealing with the women of the red light area.

Four poems in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* take us to the Pulaiyan. Actually, if it had not been for *Puṟam* 287 we would not have known that Pulaiyaṉ and Tuṭiyaṉ are the same person. In that list of the four "original inhabitants" (not a trace of serfdom), you have the word Tuṭiyaṉ, but not Pulaiyaṉ. They were not "aborigines" as some would make out. If they were, what do you do with the Pāṇars? In some way, they seem to have been accepted by the Dravidian set-up. They must have had a strong culture of their own-"chaste" is the word used for

the poor *Pāṭiṇis* in *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai.*[6] And right in the battle-front, the Paṟaiyās must have been used as drummers. The *Tuṭi* is a slighter, smaller drum, and seems to have been used for announcing the omen to the warriors- about the flower they were to wear. Flowers seem to have been a substitute for military uniform. Incidentally, omens are related to superstition, and - popular religion. In *Puṟam* 289, by the poet Kaḷāttalaiyār (Him of the unwashed head: Was he a Jain?), addressed to the Pāṇaṉ, ("Hail, Pāṇaṉ, listen:", there is a reference to the *Pūkkōl* (flower-omen) shouted out by the ("Iḷiciṉaṉ"[7] ("him of the low class"). That the "Iḷiciṉaṉ was a Pulaiya is clear from the description of the drum he is handling. This poem, by the way, while it relates to the battlefield, has an indication about the Pulaiya's standing with the warriors. Certainly the Pulaiya, if his voice (or the sound of his *Tuṭi*) was to be heard among the warriors for announcing an omen, was not to be despised. Then why is he "low-class"? One supposes, because he does not take part in the actual fighting, There's no heroism about him and that is why. The glamour that raises Richard of the Lion-heart to the status of hero, by its very absence degrades Isaac the Jew in Ivanhoe. But Isaac the Jew had his wealth to back him. Otherwise, what place would a spineless man like him command in a country of fighters? With all that wealth behind him, we see that he was as good as "low-class". See Wamba the slave, looking down on Athelstane the Anglo-Saxon prince because he was a"cock that would not fight"! Whether all cocks are allowed to fight, is an open question.

Now we pass on to *Puṟam* 170, by Tāmōtaraṉ- evidently a Sanskrit name, but while we could imagine him a Brahmin, imagination is not certainty. Here again the implications are not very clear. The poet is writing about a chieftain, Piṭṭaṉ Koṟṟaṉ . He dares the enemy to approach the one who is "soft to friends, and hard (as iron) to foes". Standing guard on his hill are the bowmen (who "have archery for a livelihood") and, right in their midst, stands the Tuṭiyaṉ. And how does he manage the *Tuṭi*? "Till his black hands turn red". That is smart of him, one should say. And the Pulaiyaṉ does not lose face in the description. He is not surrounded by enemies, that is clear. Then, why is he designated "base-born"? Because he does not share in the fighting?

But it is when we come to the two poems (*Puṟam* 82 and 287) by the poet Cāttantaiyār, that we really face some painful facts about the Pulaiyaṉ. *Puṟam* 82 shows a desperate Pulaiyaṉ, weaving strands of some material, torn

6. Line 30

7. "*Cinam*"- the word is of Sanskrit origin:"*Jaṉam*" meaning "people".

from the bark of a tree, to and fro across a cot, with a style. "Needle" (*ūsi*) is the word. Cot-making. Anything to make some money, except- fighting. It's nearing sunset. Darkness is gathering. Raining, too. But the worst of it is, his wife is in travail, and he cannot run up to her! Meanwhile, the frantic haste of the style in his hand is compared to the frenzy of the Cōḷaṉ's army in battle. Poor fellow, in himself he is fighting a frenzied battle. The poem shows up the Pulaiyaṉ in anything but a despicable light. One would call him heroic! Iḷiciṉaṉ? It's not only the bow and arrow, or the sword and dagger, that are-employed in the battle of life.

Puṟam 287 is by the same poet. Not a Brahmin, obviously. Cattantaiyār does not smack of Sanskrit. One should think this a lovely poem for a school boy's recitation. Or- mono-act. You could shout it out to your heart's content. It's an angry poet that confronts the Pulaiyaṉ. Perhaps "angry" is not the word. "Ferocious, frustrated, desperate". He is all that.

"You, Pulaiya, who beats the *Tuṭi*!
You, base-born, who uses that stick!"

And the poet points to the army in battle- trim. Here are the "noble ones" who will "not flee". And what are they anticipating? Arrows thick as" "Seasonal rains". Swords and spears, glancing like the "*Keṇṭai*" fish. Elephants, ready to "pierce with their tusks". The men might die, but what if? They will go to the land of the valiant, and live with the "stainless ladies of heaven" (Incidentally, that does not sound Dravidian). But the poet proceeds:

"Now, look, there's the enemy army coming!
Right here you can see them advancing!"

The poet's quarrel, at this juncture, with the Pulaiyaṉ, is that he has come to the battlefield, anticipating gifts! This, the time? The poet's fury can be understood.

However, not all the force of public opinion can as yet degrade the Pulaiyaṉ to the status of untouchable. There's only one Untouchable in *Caṅkam* poetry, and that is whoever has committed Woman- slaughter, be he chieftain or no.

From later developments we infer that the other drummer-clan, the Paṟaiyās were also teamed up with the Pulaiyās, though for what reason we cannot specify. The poverty of the pre-Dravidian people is portrayed vividly in the *Cirupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, where the woman of the home hands out edible leaves, cooked "without salt" to her "dark-skinned" family. Quite likely none of the drummers wanted to be fighters. Th Pulaiyas, at any rate, shared this qualification with the Brahmins. They were not a martial race. And all they could do for a livelihood was not able to keep them up on an equal footing with the Brahmins. But then, the Brahmins had the status of religious advisors to the king, and they had the privilege of taking shelter from war behind a halo-with their cows.

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Chapter XI

SOME CAṄKAM PERSONALITIES

1. Avvaiyār.

Perhaps, of all the *Caṅkam* poets, Avvai is the most fascinating study. Ther are at least two Avvais in Tamiḻ literature, the second one belonging to the beggar-class, - though perhaps an even more powerful poet, whose gem of wisdom are in the air even today in the average Tamiḻ household. But then, the first Avvai was conneted with royalty! We have seen that she was the poet chosen to felicitate the three Tamiḻ kings seated together on the dais. No common honour, although even she defers to the Brahmins. Who was this remarkable woman? What did she look like? How was she dressed? No answer. Of course she was NOT a Brahmin. Not only are all the *Caṅkam* poets silent on the point, but we know that NO Brahmin woman would have been allowed to go around like that. Yes, she would have been elderly- Avvai simply means *Amma* or Mother, but if she had been a Brahmin we would have scented it out. Did she ever have a family? Was she a widow? How did she manage to get into the limelight of Tamiḻ literature? Where, and how, did she get her education? Pity, that the compiler of the *Puṟanāṉūru* poems did not respect, or did not know, their chronological, order. As it is, we do not know, we cannot even guess, anything about Avvai. I, except that she was probably a Pāṭiṉi (a minstrel-woman) whose poems shot her into fame. But, to be chosen for the signal honour of addressing the three crowns of Tamiḻnad on the dais, she must already have been known for a considerable number of valuable poems. Of the quality of her extant poems we can have no doubt. But- the existing quantum? That is meagre, to say the least. What happened to the rest of her verses? She is NOT one of the major poets represented in *Pattuppāṭṭu* NOT among the Ten Tens, in honour of the Cēra kings. And NOT among the five who wrote the *Aiṅkuṟuṉūṟu* the Five Short Hundreds. Her verses are mainly, scattered among the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and *Akam* pieces. If she was chosen for the great honour of representing the poetic community at a great national event, she must have had more to show for it. She is one referred to by other poets with special respect, and she certainly

has no small opinion of herself. Kept waiting at the chieftain Atiyamāṉ's gates, she strikes out furiously at the gate-keeper:

"Vā/ yi/ lō /ye, Vā/ yi /lō /yē"

Keeper of the gate, Keeper of the gate,

Does Atiyamāṉ, lord of the swift horses,

Not know himself, or else not know me?"

And she follows it up with boastful anger:

"Whichever way I turn, there is my rice."

Subsequent events bear out the fact that Atiyamāṉ did receive her, graciously, into his court, and Avvai's dirge on his death, studied here in the chapter on *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, is one of the most beautiful of the shorter *Caṅkam* poems. We see her, later, in the court of Atiyamāṉ's son. Hence her move seems to have been from kings to chieftains. Apparently this was a world where she could be master, or mistress of herself, and speak strongly and fearlessly. In the poem addressed to the three kings there is a suspicion of a policy of adjustability, and even the reference to Paraṇaṉ could have something to do with a poet a high in favour with the kings. But perhaps there is really no justification for this suspicion, and in any case we do not like to associate it with Avvai.

There are no limits to the legends around this woman, and they are, naturally, confused with the legends around the other Avvai, - who comes more than a millennium later. Prof. *R. Rākava Aiyaṅkār's* Pāri Kātai incorporates one of them. That is, that Avvai, after Kapilar's death, took Pāri's destitute daughters around to one of the Tamiḻ chieftains, who accepted them as brides for his sons. *Caṅkam* poetry itself tells us nothing of the matter. Avvai does refer to Pāri, as well as to other poets, but we find no reference of hers to Kapilar himself. However, the story does tell us something of the image that Avvai built up for herself. Another story, very commonly known, is that Avvai, along with most other great names in Tamiḻ literature for that matter - Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Kapilar not excepted-was born of a Brahmin father and Pulaiyās mother, who had come to a most unusual understanding in their love-escapade, namely, that the children should be deserted at birth, to be left to Providence, which Providence knew better than to desert them. Behind this myth, of course,

find the (charitable?) suggestion that all the writers of renown in Tamil were fathered by Āryan culture and mothered by the Dravidian one which is sheer nonsense.

Well, Avvai was just one of the daughters of the soil. And she was no vegetarian- she speaks of the "meat rich upon the bone"[1] which she enjoyed. And she had a wide range of poetic experience, from the tragic to the comic. We have seen, in the chapter on *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. some of her tragical utterances. Now for a specimen of the comic, we might just glance at the piece, beginning " *Akaval makaḷē akaval makaḷē*".[2] Just five lines, which go with an easy lilt, deceptively simple. At first reading the first two lines would just mean "Dancing damsel, go on (sing) Dancing damsel, go on (sing)". But, in its *Akam* setting, it turns out to be a peak of high drama. The heroine is in love, she is languishing, her folks consider her the victim of a devil-attack, they invite a singer whose mission is to drive out devils, and the heroine's attendant, who is in the know of things, bids her sing, but, bids her sing "of the mountain belonging to the chief" with whom her mistress is in love. And there is the giggle of girlish laughter behind the curtain. We know too well, from Shakespeare as well as from Kampaṉ, the power of poetry that rides up in a few words, on the wave of a dramatic moment. Like Lear's "never, never, never". Well, that is tragedy, and "*Akaval makaḷē*" is pure comedy. Avvai has left but sixty short pieces in all- some of them are marvellous! We do not know how many of her poems have been lost.

Avvai's *Puṟam* poems. like those written by many of the poets of the time, have the nauseating smell of the blood of war. She would not run away from that- not she! As for her *Akam* poems, they strictly conform to the conventional pattern- the five *Tiṇais* and the accepted codes of behavior in them. Her observation of the "red- tongued" poets' gives a clue to the fact that the poets recited, and did not sing, their poems. We hardly ever find the poets singing-else we would have heard more of their voices. And, talking of the *Tiṇais* or kinds of terrain, Avvai comes down with emphasis on the fact that, whatever be the type of land,

> "Wherever good men dwell
> There is the good kind of land".[3]

1. *Puṟam* 235
2. *Kuṟuntokai* 23
3. *Puṟam* 187

And there is one line of hers expressing regret for "This kind of life, that depends on patronage", which reminds us of Shakespeare's regretting that he had to make himself a "motley to the view!" Thank goodness, though, that Shakespeare had been an actor, and that Avvai did get the patronage she needed in her lifetime.

2. Kapilar

The next *Caṅkam* poet of special interest is Kapilar. He is one who has been referred to by several of his contemporaries. His debut in the *Caṅkam* is as the close friend of Pāri, one of the seven chieftains known for their generosity. The poetess *Nappacalaiyār* has bestowed on him the title, "The Brahmin of the stainless wisdom"[4] He himself is proud of two items in his birthright- his Brahminism, and his poetry . His friendship for Pāri involved him in tragedy. The three kings of Tamiḻnad, who did not appreciate the popularity of this over-generous baron, joined up and surrounded his territory with their war-power. Kapilar shouted down his challenge at them: "Come as minstrels, and Pāri will give you land and hill together!"[5] The outcome of the battle? Pāri was killed. He left behind two daughters, whom Kapilar must have tutored- they have composed a tender little poem on their father's death- and now, Kapilar had to leave the beloved homestead with Pāri's daughters in his charge. We see Kapilar taking the girls from chieftain to chieftain, seeking to get them married. But their status, as the orphaned and destitute daughters of Pāri, however famous, was no marital recommendation, and we see Kapilar a frustrated and disappointed man. He decided to join Pāri by "facing the North"-ie. fasting to death. But not before providing for his charges. We read that he "handed them over to the Brahmins, - which shows again, what a highly respected community the Brahmins must have been, if Kapilar thought them as trustworthy as that.

There are a few sidelights on Kapilar's life. *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*- here studied in detail in the chapter on "Some *Caṅkam* Poems"- was written to teach an Āryan king, Prakattaṉ, about the graces of Tamiḻ poetry. But, what was the Āryan king doing in Tamiḻnad? How did he come to be so much interested in Tamiḻ literature? These questions remain unanswered.

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4. *Puṟam* 126
5. *Ibid.*, 109

During his wanderings with Pāri's daughters, Kapilar had access to a Cēra king- could not be the one who killed Pāri- and singing his praises, was rewarded with a generous amount in gold. Obviously, Kapilar had no need of that sum where he was going. He must have bestowed it on Pāri's daughters, and gone to "face the North" himself. Later stories attribute another kind of death to Kapilar- that he leaped into the flames to join his friend. This is even said to be inscribed in the monument-stone in his honour. Anyway, since he could not have died both kinds of death, we would prefer to keep to the *Caṅkam* account -namely, that he "faced the North".

Kapilar has left a considerable bulk of verse, a good number on the *Akam* theme. It seems to suit him fine, and everywhere we see the jack-fruit, the elephant, the leopard, the monkey, and the peacock. The heroine's love is great, though her life is slender, like the huge jack-fruit hanging from a thin stem. The black rock, after rain, looks like an elephant, clean after a good bath. In one of his *Puṟam* poems, dedicated to Cēra prince, he felicitates him for not bowing before anybody except the Brahmins (pāpār). And you certainly do not perceive the warrior-poet in Kapilar's *Puṟam* poems. But perhaps the most beautiful of all his minor pieces is that *Kuṟuntokai* poem beginning

"*Yārum illai, tāṉē kaḷvaṉ*".

None else was there, but he, the thief.

Should he deny it, whatever could I do?

For on that day we met, only the stork,

With feet like straw,

There into the water peered for prey"[6]

The suggestion is obvious.

Well, after Kapilar had disposed of his charges, as best as he could, he turns back to his memories of Pāri:

"Pāri! of the country where the Kuṟava archers

Feed on the jack-fruit torn by the monkeys!

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6. *Kuṟuntokai* No. 25

Your have not been true to friendship. You
Spurned me even while living
You would not allow me to come with you
And that was not friendship.
You sent me away- but may Fate
Bring me to be with you, so that I am
Taking the next life as this one".

This was before he "faced the North"[7]

Ātimanti

Ātimanti has left one poem- only one, in *Caṅkam* literature, but that one needs to be studied carefully, along with the available references to her by two other poets Paraṇar, a major poet, and Veḷḷivīṭiyār, a woman.

Here is the poem:

"Whether at festivals where warriors gather (for dancing)
Or at spirit-dances where women join hands,
Nowhere could I find him of the great virtues.
Me- I too am a dancing damsel, and he
Who caused my countless shining bangles to slip down,
The lord of the noble qualities- he too, is a dancing youth".[8]

Āṭṭaṇatti and Ātimaṇti". - the famous dancing duo of *Caṅkam* literature. But they were not to go on dancing forever. Āṭṭaṇatti disappears from the scene. He seems to have been carried away by the flash floods at a water-festival. The poor girl goes distracted. She goes from river to sea, from sea to river, seeking him.

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7. *Puṟam* 236
8. *Kuṟuntokai* 31

"Have the rivers swept him away?

Has the sea taken him?" But the curtain is not rung down on a passionate, distraught woman, looking for her lover. *Akam* 222 shows him restored to her.

The above poem is fitted into the "*Kuṟuntokai*" scenario, but highly autobiographical as it is, it could have been composed only at an early stage in this drama.

Paraṇar refers to her in *Akanāṉūṟu*. Take *Akam* 76. A prostitute is issuing a challenge to the scandal-mongers. What if the scandal is louder than the "*Paṟai*" or war-drum in the court of him who gives grants of elephants and jewels? She is ready to drag away the man with her hand, very much as Kāviri of the cool waters broke its "prison" (dam) and carried away to the reddening east its victim, till Ātimanti, distraught, went around crying, "Have you seen my curly-haired dancer (actor), handsome in diverse ways, with belt, anklet, and with honeyed garland on his bosom?"

Akam 135 is a *Pālai* poem. The heroine is telling her maid, that, because of separation from her lover, (like Ātimanti) her "sense has left her", and she has become an idiot.

Now *Akam* 222. The story of Āṭṭaṇatti and Ātimaṇti is magnified. More than three-fourth of the poem of fifteen lines is devoted to it. That the dancer - youth was carried away by the flood- is repeated. Well, that happened because the river was in love with him. That the poor dancing-girl was distracted with grief and went around everywhere looking for him, is also repeated. But the story does not end here. He seems to have been rescued and is under the care of one Maruti who also has fallen in love with him. Ātimanti comes there and Maruti recognises her predicament. Now there is only one thing for Maruti to do. She restores the lost husband to the sorrowing wife and herself leaps into the ocean. Her profit Fame, enough for a poet to write about!

We are not really concerned about the rest of the poem here, except to mention that it is neatly fitted into the *Caṅkam* conventional frame-work.

Akam 236. Paraṇar repeats the first part of the story. Maruti is not in the picture here. But we see the distress of Ātimanti, making her enquiries here, there, and everywhere: "Did the sea take him?" Or "Did the river hide him?" Here again the rest of the story is not to our purpose.

Yet another poet refers to Ātimaṇti, and this is a woman, Veḷḷivīṭiyār, not quite a minor poet, though not a major one. In *Akanāṇūṟu* 45, she makes the heroine say to her maid, "Do you think I'am going to wander around with unsettled mind, like Ātimaṇti?" Veḷḷivīṭiyār's heroine has greater strength of mind.

Now, if Ātimanti had not herself been a poet, contributing one- if but one- poem to *Caṅkam* literature, we could have dismissed the story, with a passing mention, But as it is, we have to consider her seriously.

Who was this Ātimanti? The name means "Ancient Monkey". It does. It could be a nickname, but it need not be. And since this Ātimanti was a dancing belle, she should have been a Pāṭiṇi, a pre-Dravidian. Kākkai Pāṭiṇiyār Naccellaiyār, a much more important poetess, who wrote one of the Ten Tens in honour of a Cēra king, should have been a Pāṭiṇi, also - her name Kākkai-Pāṭiṇi includes the word. But it is argued that since she has left a poem about a sacrifice to a crow (*Kākkai*) her name explains that she was just a "Singer about a crow:. She was not just that, but then that is a point of dispute. But we notice with a feeliing of satisfaction that Ātimaṇti was important enough for a poet like Paraṇar to take notice of her. She was a *Caṅkam* poet, and a *Caṅkam* pre-Dravidian. The dancers or Pāṭiṇis were pre-Dravidians if you judge from their recorded complexion.

4. Paraṇar

Paraṇar is an important poet, if we consider the quantum of his poetry in *Caṅkam* literature. He is, like Avvai, not represented in *Paṭṭuppāṭṭu*, but then, unlike Avvai, he is a poet without a personality! He speaks about everybody except himself. He is a bureau of information, and so cannot be dismissed lightly in a study of the social history of his people. However, in his method of handing out the information, he can verge on the ridiculous.

Now look at this poem. *Akanāṇūṟu* 396. *Tiṇai- marutam*. Theme: Faithlessness of the lover. The speaker is the prostitute. You can almost imagine Mātavi of *Cilappatikāram* (of the post-*Caṅkam* age) speaking. She is charging her lover with having broken his word to her. Not content with his promise, he had taken her to the presence of the "unvanquished" god and ratified his vow there. Now he has denied his bosom to her and become a stranger to her. Now she will not let him go! She is afraid that his wife ("she of his home") will

snatch him away! She has caught him, and forbids him to go, until he gives her back her former beauty.

How much we have learnt from these five lines! The powerful, aggressive prostitute-bane of Tamil society. The vow made by a lover to her in the presence of a god-most likely an idol. These are understandable. But let's see the need for the rest of the poem.

Naṉṉaṉ- (We do not know if he is the father or the son) had a problem in his country. His town of Pāḷi, full of the music of the *yāḻ* or harp, was attacked by Miñili "schooled in the art of war". Āi Eyiṉaṉ promised him help-and died at Miñili's hands. This story, like the Ātimanti story, is frequently used by Paraṇar. Five lines.

And here's the Ātimanti story too. Five lines. Kāviri had carried away Atti out of love for his beautiful dancing. While Manti, with weeping eyes, sought him from terrain to terrain.

Finally, there's the reference to Cēraṉ of the beautiful Vañci. He had attacked the Āryans till they shrieked, and inscribed his bent bow on the famous, ancient Himalayas, and conquered the angry enemy kings. Another five lines. Now let's see how he pins his references to the main theme.

"You who broke your vow, unlike warlike Āi Eyiṉaṉ who gave his life for keeping his word! I am afraid that your wife will snatch you away as Kāviri ran away with Aṭṭaṉatti. So I will not let you go unless you give me back my beauty which was like Vañci of the Cēra kings".

This is the rough plan of the poem. Each referene is by itself well-worded, even sensitively worded but where is the dramatic sense of it? And is it probable that the prostitute woman was so well versed in the politics of the times, even if she might have heard, in her circle, of the famous dancing couple? Empire or not, the Tamiḻs had no newspapers or radio or television in those days.

Of course Paraṇar has a great deal to tell us here. Vañci of the Cēra country is introduced to us, apart from Miñili and Aṭṭaṉ, and the aggressiveness of the prostitute. And he gives us a great deal of information in his other poems also, but mostly like this, without a just sense of proportion,at least according to the present writer's way of thinking.

Maybe another poem from Paraṇar's *marutam* can be given a glance. Here again it's at a water-festival that the heroine's man has been enjoying his bath-with a loose woman. The vicinity? Uṟantai, the Cōḻā's capital. The king? Tittaṉ. But there's another bit of information. Tittaṉ is father of the beautiful princess[9] Now, why that name? Why Ayyai? Maybe we could have found a clue in some lost poem. But, the wife has another grievance.

"Yesterday" she says", you mixed up your garlands with those of the women you love. Today you come here and call me mother of your spotless son. Enough, your laughing at my age-(I am no longer young). My youth is gone and is an old story, like the town of Kaḻār belonging to the swordsman Matti".

Youth and beauty are favourite themes with the *Caṅkam* poets, and therefore of Paraṇar as well. In several places Paraṇar refers to the *Māmai* or complexion of the Dravidian beauty, but in one place he speaks of the "gold doll turned to the morning sunlight" which shows that both Āryan and Dravidian beauties came within his ken.

Kuṟuntokai 292 gives us a shock. It's about Naṉṉaṉ. Whether he is Naṉṉaṉ son of Naṉṉaṉ, or Naṉṉaṉ father of Naṉṉaṉ we cannot tell, but he should be one of the two. He is held guilty of "Woman-slaughter", and abhorred on that account by the poets- there are other references to him. (One *Caṅkam* poet refuses to embrace a chieftain for the reason that he traces his descent from this Naṉṉaṉ[10]) However, the poem needs to be closely studied. At a first glance it looks as though a girl had taken a green mango from a river and eaten it, and was killed impulsively for that act by the owner of the river. But no- the father had offered eighty- one elephants (nine into nine) and his daughter's weight in gold, as ransom for the offender. The ranson was rejected, the offender put to death. Obviously this was at the height of a quarrel between two chieftains- a border- dispute over a river flowing between their territories. Paraṇar is in the know of what was going on inside the Tamiḻ territory, at a time when every chieftain was aspiring to be king over his domains and resented every attempt to overlook that aspiration. And king too! Paraṇar is all praise for the Cōḻa king who destroyed nine umbrellas in one day [11].

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9. *Akam* 6
10. *Puram* 151
11. *Akam* 125

And Paraṇar shows us an idol!

There's no mistaking this observation. Look up *Akam* 181:

"The three-eyed god of the four Vedas

Seated handsomely under the banyan-tree

Similarly, in his *Patiṟṟuppattu*,[12] he described a piece of surgery. The Cēra king has won his victory through those warriors, in whose bosom "that long white needle" goes in and out like the kingfisher's beak that takes out the fish from the cold lake. If you want to know more about *Caṅkam* times go to Paraṇar! Avvai's tribute to him is a pointer to his importance. But then, you will know just as much about him at the end of the study as you knew at the beginning. Was he a Brahmin? He does not tell us even that. We need not be surprised if we find him a Paratavaṉ. He addresses a Cēra king as Paratava!

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12. *Patiṟṟuppattu* 42

Chapter XII

SOME CAṄKAM CHARACTERISTICS

Woman is at the heart of *Caṅkam* literature. Yes, a man might conquer and kill and destroy, and ride an elephant or a prancing horse grandly, but he is always, finally, directing it-home. And "she of the home" provides the momentum for the home-coming. Everywhere it's she "with the pure forehead," or the "chaste forehead", or "with the forehead like the crescent moon". "or the "shining forehead" etc. That forehead is the beacon to the hero. Even in *Neṭunalvāṭai* the queen's good forehead" is set in the centre of the picture. By the way there is nothing, no dot, in the middle of that forehead that is so noteworthy[1]. By itself, the forehead is an important part of the woman's physiognomyl. Separation from the husband makes it turn pale, or yellow. It's very rarely that the prostitute shows her forehead. Talking of the beauty of Woman, the poet speaks of her forehead, or her flower-like eyes, or her colour like the tender mango leaves, but hardly ever of her face. That's rather unusual. The "impudent face" of the prostitute, described in a dramatic incident by no less a poet than Solomon[2], is never described by the Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* poets, although the impudence is here in no less a measure, when the poet deals with guilty love, if you call it love. (And, Solomon's anecdote could be included in *marutam*!)

The problem here is rather funny- you don't have a word for "face" in "CenTamiḻ or pure Tamiḻ! The word *muṉṉi* " which is used even today as "*miṉṉi*" by illiterate Tamiḻs, literally meaning "front" , does not seem to have been used by them during the *Caṅkam* age, and the Sanskrit *Mukha* had not yet been freely absorbed into *Caṅkam* literature. Result? The ancient Tamiḻ woman has got to go most of the time without a "face" to lift it towards her husband. "*Natal*" could not be "face": it is crescent-shaped.

Talking of Woman, we have to accept that womanising was one of the worst habits of the ancient Tamiḻs. Well, womanising was the worst weakness of the wisest king who ever lived, and how should the Tamiḻ kings rise above

1. *Akam* 125
2. *Patiṟṟuppattu* 42

what felled the greatness of Solomon himself? Like Solomon, the Tamil kings were aware of the dangers behind it. But, to tackle it, or avoid it, was an entirely different matter. How many verses in Solomon's proverbs point to this awareness! And so, "May I be faithless to her of the great eyes painted wtih collyrium" declares a king, Pūtappāṇṭiyaṉ, in his "*vañciṉam*", or vow, to conquer his enemies, as though he were thinking of the unthinkable. But- in actual practice, though the ideal was there, and normally king had only queen and not queens, this was very slippery ground for king and warrior alike.

If you study the closing hundred lines of *Maturaikkāñci,* you will find the king, "having embraced the fragrant shoulders of the damsels wearing bangles" (the plural is there for the woman, there is no question of compromise on that score) arising sweetly from his bed, decked with garlands, removing the faded garlands from his bosom, wearing new ones of pearl, dressed in starched clothes, and, looking "like divinity descended on a shapely figure", entering the court. There is a great deal of fanfare on his entry, and it's a "O welcome, everybody. Pāṇars, come in -Pāṭiṉis, come in. Poets, come in "-for here is one who will freely "toss" to them chariots and elephants, and share with them a grand feast, seated among them like the sun over the three waters, or the moon in the midst of the many stars- but we notice an important omission. There is no queen in the court! What happened to her? And, if the queen were dead, or there were no queen, did the king need so many fragrant shoulders, of women in the plural, to adorn and comfort his bed surrounded with garlands?

And this is where we find the relevance of *marutam,* among the five *Tiṇais* or kinds of terrain, with their typical behavioural patterns. The prostitute was looked upon with fear and distaste by the wife, but the water-festivals went on with their orgies. Girls hooted at the fellow who went to these festivals, but he brought in more bejewelled women. Scandal could be as loud as the noise of battle or the noise of busy cities, but it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. The mother protected her daughter, and the nurse protected her charge, but when romance found out the girl after all, life had more in store for her. marutam is not just one- fifth of Tamil terrain. as the red light area; it spills over. How could a nation stand the strain of such a life, in which Crime would breed like vermin? No wonder the author of *Cilappatikāram* took as his theme the betrayal of an innocent wife by both her husband and a Tamil king.

You see children only very occasionally, but when you do, it's touching. A warrior kisses the flower-like eyes of his son before going to war, to hide his

sorrow from his wife. A nurse reports the joy of seeing the daughter of the home with her husband, with their baby son sleeping between them. an old man remembers the thrill of his boyhood days, when he brought out the sand from the bottom of the brook, to show the admiring little girls. There is even a king, who declares that life without the toddlers, who scatter the fragrant rice all over his body, life is not worth living. And yes, there are the two little fellows, looking with interest at the elephants brought to trample them down. •But on the whole, the role of the child in *Caṅkam* poetry is very slight, as it is in Shakespeare.

Then, how about old age? Perhaps that was not an age when people lived to be very old. Yes, we do know him "of the stout metal-capped walking stick," who reminisces about his boyhood. And there's an old man sleeping in his home on deerskin, with a dog chained outside. And when the queen of Pūtappaṇṭiyaṉ addresses the elders who were trying to dissuade her from leaping into the funeral pyre of her husband, she refers to the grey stubble "like fish-bone", o their cheeks. They must have been elderly. "*Pēraṉ*" means "grandson". Avvai herself was not young. But, one should think, the elderly and infirm would not have had much chance of extending their lives. Why, if we turn to English literature, we find most of the great writers-before the Victorian age-dying young. Medical science has now done a great deal, to help pensioner live to get more pension than pay, but that was neither here nor there. Of course one of the *Caṅkam* poets was a "*maruttuvaṉ*", meaning a doctor, and there are references to medicine elsewhere. But they would have limitations.

Education was certainly given and literary education must have been of a very high order. A young man parts from his wife for his education-and we don't know where he got it. "Uneducated" young men are always an object of pity. Of course the education would have been in Tamiḻ- and "SenTamiḻ" -at that. No sanskrit! And if the Brahmins did teach or learn Sanskrit, they kept their counsel about it. And they went about their Tamiḻ education very seriously, so that one of them Kapilar, is numbered with the great poets of early Tamiḻ literature. And education for the warrior also meant learning the skills of war, such as teaching a horse its four different paces, and archery and swordsmanship. But, courage should have been in the curriculam! For we don't really find the warriors enjoying the battle, although there is a king who "dances" on the battlefield. the poor fellows would much rather have stayed at home. The women- folk on the mountains, however, do get a sort of education from-Nature. They learn not to be afraid of "the thunder, or the elephant, or the snake"- (which three objects do not come in for their worship).

Religion for the early Tamils is a sort of animism. They are ready to worship anything that comes their way with a promise of good things. They strew rice and flowers before flags, and before the spine of the she-shark. They worship the stones erected as monuments over the dead, and this is supposed to be the first form of idol-worship. They believe in auguries. There are Jain and Buddhist temples side by side with other houses of worship without inviting clashes. Actually, the god of Beauty and Youth is the Tamils' favourite god, and he is called Muruka, but without any definite shape about him. And Civa, as just stone, is everywhere under the banyan-trees, although we don't see too much of temples or idols. These Tamils have a fear of the Tirumaṟai, (That which is "holy, and hidden") and which, as they have been taught, they consider the Brahmin monoply. They also have a respect for the *Yāgas* or *Vēḷvis* performed by the Brahmins.

One *Caṅkam* element that we miss from later Tamiḻ life is the Pāṇars and the Pāṭiṇis. The joy of living is expressed by Pāṇaṉ and Pāṭiṇi with singing -and dancing. No, no tribal affair. They have no keyboard music but, otherwise elaborate musical instruments, and they play them "according to the musical treatise". We must not forget that Avvai was most probably a Pāṭiṇi. Women who kept to their homes would not have been able to get that level of education. And, there is Kākkai Pāṭiṇi Naccelḷai, a major poetess, as we have seen. Were the Pāṇars a vestige of a pre-Dravidian civilization in Tamiḻnad, along with the drummers? Did society relegate them later to a "lower" strata- the "high" and "low", being very normal to the Brahministic way of thinking? Right in the heart of *Mullaippāṭṭu* we find the poor dumb fellows being called *Milēccās* (despicables). And *Milēccā* is Sanskrit and could have come in only through the Brahmins. And, four times in *Caṅkam* literature, though it be but four, we find the drummers being designated as. "Ḷiciṉar" - the first part of which is an ugly word in chaste Tamiḻ for "low"-and the second, a derivation of Sanskrit. Thus do the races combine.

And invariably we find the poets on the highest rung of the social ladder at court, excepting only the kings and the Brahmins -and close behind the poets are the Pāṇars and Pāṭiṇis. Viṟalis and Porunars (dancing women and men, and actors) follow next. Āṭṭaṉatti and Ātimaṉti would take their place here. But at times Pāṭiṇi and Viṟali, Pāṇaṉ and Porunar, get mixed-up. Āṭṭaṉatti and Ātimanti have even entered their names in literature, and Ātimanti was something of a poetess! But on the whole, the singing, dancing folks lived, even then a hard life. We see the Pāṇars, with their wives, trudging up a narrow way to make

their livelihood. They are black-skinned, their limbs being "like the elephant's trunk" and as the Pāṭiṇis sit down on the rocks, the poet of *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* sympathetically shows us their husbands, chafing their poor, tired feet. But four of the major *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces are devoted to the Pāṇars, and it is as though life could not have got on in *Caṅkam* times without Pāṇaṉ and Pāṭiṇi. They were honoured by kings and chieftains alike. Later, however we find them slipping down the social scale to become a laughing- stock for others, and others have taken their place. Turn on your television for a Tamiḻ dance and song today, and who do you see? No Pāṇaṉ and Pāṭiṇi. They must be lost somewhere on the hills. Or, they would be counted among the fisher-folks- they knew fishing and bartering the fish even in *Caṅkam* times.

Paṭṭiṉappālai gives us a view of some of the professional workers in *Caṅkam* Tamiḻnāṭu. It begins with the farmer! The sugarcane-with the factory. The haystack, with the baby buffalo resting in its shade. The banana, with its bunch of fruit, The arecanut. Quality mangoes. The palmyrah. Tubers. Ginger. This is the country through which the Kāviri flows. Several of its noteworthy poets were Kiḻārs or farmers, although they have not come much within our ken during this study. And the farmer is held in very high esteem by the poets. In the beautiful *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 184, the poet Picir Āntai points out how a single elephant, turned loose on the fields, can destroy with its feet far more than he eats. A wise monarch will not be like that elephant. he will know the way of justice in assessing taxes for his farmers. *Puṟam* 18 shows the value of building dams, in preserving water for the fields. In *puram* 35, a poet reminds the king that if he wanted to reign wisely, he should bear the burden of the ploughman, and then only his enemies would fall at his feet. The farmer does have a very respectable place in ancient Tamiḻ society.

Next, the boats we see in *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, filled with salt, (which is bartered for paddy)- are tied to the bank in order, "like a row of horses". Then there is fishing for prawns. And there are flowers and flowers! You can't have so many without horticulture. And there are articles, ever so many, taken from the water onto the shore and taken from the shore down to the ocean. All this means-overseas trade.

Now, we come to musical instruments, which require skilled professionals. The flute "wails", the harp "hums". The "*muḻavu*" "quakes" and the "*murucu*" "speaks"-both of them being percussion instruments, And here's a forum for discussion being opened by the "famous teachers in the many

fields" by planting a flag, as challenge to argument. Sounds a bit like ancient Greece, but there it is.

And shall we see some of the places connected by trade with Tamiḻnād? The Himalayas for gems and gold. The Coorg mountains, for sandalwood. The Pāṇṭiya country, for pearls. They went pearl-fishing in the south! Coral from the western sea. The Ganges, for its wealth- it is not specified. Food materials from Ēḻam (Ceylon). That's strange. Today, food materials have to go to Ēḻam. Should have been something special, for Cōḻanād was self-sufficient in the matter of food. And Burma,-ōr, to be modern Myāṉmār. For what? Again, not specified, but "for its wealth". Well, Burma would have had her strong points. And there are those who keep the order, or justice, in trade, who are "afraid of blame", and speak out to see that those who buy, do not take more, and those who give, do not offer less.

There is a reference in *Caṅkam* literature, to the "pure silk dress with embroidered border. "We don't know whether it was native work, or may be imported from China. There are references to the Kalinga cloth, but that was of course imported. There are many references to the starching of cotton dresses, as well as to embroidered dresses. There is cloth as "fine as smoke", and cloth "like the cream on the milk", but again we do not know if they were local or imported. But there are references to cloth "which was woven of thread". Well, in *Maturaikkāñci* we do find weaving explicitly mentioned. We find a pair of scissors, but no tailoring, however. They just wore *strips* of cloth, it seems. Washing and starching is seen as a profession for women. Fishing and hunting are men's professions.

Goldsmiths are mentioned as a class in *Maturaikkāñci* and elsewhere. So,too, are those who set diamond stone in jewels. There are also the craftsmen who cut the conches for shell-bracelets, a common ornament for women. Along with these skilled workers, painters also come as a class, as those who "capture the eye" with what they do. Blacksmiths, carpenters, all feature in *Caṅkam* literature. Sculpture as such is absent. A Kuṟava woman from the hill tribes has written poetry. So has a woman from the potter-class. The "dark-skinned" Paratavās from Toṇṭi who are responsible for its greatness, as a rule are a fishing community, but they are also traders, and on occasion fighters too[3] No restriction of community, to profession, except for the Brahmins. As occasion

3. *Pattinappālai,* lines 62-73

demanded and abilities prescribed, a man or woman look up a profession, though most women were just home-keepers, except the Pāṭiṉis.

Maybe the most lucrative profession, - lucrative because it was nearest the king-was the military profession, with its many branches. Even the drummer is of importance. The war-drum, or *Paṟai* has led to the coining of the now objectionable word "Paṟaiyaṉ". But, out of work means out of money, and men cannot be fighting all the time. Soldiers probably resorted in peace-time to highway robbery-and the Paṟaiyās retreated to the background to become a section of the unwanted classes. The word "low-born" or "of-base-community", is used of a man four times in *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. Now who is this man? We have to face facts. The Pulaiyā too had once his part to play in battle-that of striking the *Tuti*, a kind of minor war-dum. So, the Pulaiya or Tuṭiya went down in the social scale along with the Paṟaiya. The four old groups were the Tutiyan, Pāṇaṉ, Paṟaiyaṉ and Kaṭampaṉ.[4] We know how highly the Pāṇaṉ was esteemed. But the Pulaiyās and Paṟaiyās are fast running out! Society does not need their profession! And those Kaṭambās seem have been completely wiped out by this time. Only the Pāṇars hold on socially, for a longer time.

The Brahmins as a class had the charge of making *Vēlvis* or *Hōmas* for the kings, and saying *mantras* for their benefit. We also find them as advisors or counsellors in the court, though it is really difficult to understand how the kings of those days did not completely knuckle under their four-class formula. One Pāṇṭiya king, who had mingled with the Āryans- shows himself dubiously acknowledging it, dubiously, because it has this condition, that, even if one from the fourth strata were educated, he could be raised above the first![5] So, education is above caste.

It would be in place here to consider some of the broad principles, the ethics, of the *Caṅkam* age. We'll begin with a mother's ideas about the respective duties of people-though the mother's role is not usually very pronounced:

"My first duty is to bring forth and bring up"

The father's to make him learned in arts and war. The blacksmith's, to make him a good weapon.

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4. *Puṟam* 335
5. *Puram* 183

The king's, to give him a good leading.

The young man's with the flashing sword-

To destroy the enemy, and kill their elephants".[6]

No doubt, the Tamiḷs were a warlike people. And there is also a lot of giving and taking of gifts in *Caṅkam* literature, although we never actually see people in the act of direct begging. We might therefore see what a *Caṅkam* poet thinks about that.

Puṟam 204: (the first four lines).

"To plead, "Give", is disgraceful.

To face that and say, "I won't give",

Is still more disgraceful.

To give, saying "Take it", is noble.

To face that and say "I won't", is nobler".

Now *Puṟam* 34: There might be expiation for the sin of killing a cow, or aborting a woman's foetus, or dealing cruelly with Brahmins. But, says, Ālattūr Kiḻār, if the world should turn upside down, there is absolutely none for the sin of ingratitude. The word, "ingratitude", naturally takes us to the famous *Kuṟaḷ* couplet, which comes down heavily on that sin like a hammer. We have only to compare the *Caṅkam* poem with Tiruvaḷḷuvar's to know the force of the latter, but the idea is there even in *Caṅkam* times.

Puṟam 9 shows another of the ideals of the Tamiḻ people. Before an army overruns enemy territory, it sounds the warning to the people:

"Cows! Cow-like Brahmins! Women! Sick folks! (etc: etc:) We are shortly sending our arrows. Get to your place of safety." A look at that list shows that they have one common quality: They cannot fight back. So, this is a species of real chivalry. the Brahmins in those days were not fighters. But why this special respect for the cows? The cows were part of the Brahmins' life, cherished by them. And milk was the most important item in their diet. An aura of sanctity thus settled on the cows, even before Āryan culture fully drowned the Tamiḻs.

6. *Puram*, 312

We can easily understand the extreme importance given, even in the *Caṅkam* period, to the sacerdotal community controlling the kings. But it is not easy to see the reason for the importance given to the Tamiḻ language by this same community. Their roots, religious, ethical, and even secular, were in Sanskrit. Through their influence, Sanskrit words have been coming into the Tamiḻ but with the necessary phonological changes, so that they do not conflict with the genius of theTamiḻ language. It is impossible, for instance, to write the word "Sanskrit" in Tamiḻ. R cannot come after K, nor can three consonants come together. The Tamiḻs later take the easy way out by calling it Āryam (the language of the Aryans), and it is also called *Vaṭamoḻi* (the Northern language) once, in *Caṅkam* poetry, and later, more freely. But hardly a word is mentioned in *Caṅkam* poetry, about the importance of Sanskrit even by the Brahmins, although there was a vague idea among the people about the *Vēdās*. The Brahmins kept their own counsel about it, though why, we can only conjecture.

But the Brahmins had taken their Tamiḻ studies very seriously. It is as though they had tacitly acknowledged that they could not build up their status in the Tamiḻ country without a real command of the language. The kings had given that much importance to the language, there being quite a sprinkling of verses written by the kings in the literature, especially in *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. Hardly any other language has been extolled, idolised we would say, to the point of absurdity, like Tamiḻ. Why, we might ask. The heritage of the Ages: That, which had so firmly bound the Tamiḻ population once upon a time that Ashōka and Khāravēla had respected them as neighbours, and which had, quite possibly, prevented a complete armed invasion from the North from the days of Solomon or even before it, -for, after all, good fences do make good neighbours, as Frost put it. Nobody, not even the Sanskrit- based Brahmins, would have dared to slight Tamiḻ without incurring the strong displeasure of the kings. And so we find that at least four out of the ten *Paṭiṟṟuppattu* poets were Brahmins - one of whom was Kapilar, who has endeared himself to the Tamiḻs by his life as well as by his sweet verses. Actually, Kapilar is the poet, Brahmin or non-Brahmin, who is everywhere-in all the anthologies - in *Caṅkam* poetry. And there are quite a number of other Brahmins too, though they cannot compare with him. Like the Pāṇars, then, the Brahmins too, have made themselves felt in *Caṅkam* literature, though in a different way.

And what was the standing of the Brahmins with the ordinary folks? That poem beginning "*Pārppaṇa mahaṉē*" ("Son of a Brahmin") seems inclined to tease a Brahmin. And *Puṟam* 305 seems to show the irritation with which the

ordinary man looked on the Brahmin community. a *payalaippārppāṉ* (a very young Brahmin) of no distinguished presence, enters the court at night, goes straight in, and says-just a few words: At that, bolt and ladder fly away, and the bells are removed from the elephant. Such is the power of the Brahmin! He needs no introduction, and at his word big big things happen.

But last we come to the profession of poet. There we find they are indeed "the movers and the shakers of the world". Kings have written in *Caṅkam* poetry, but kings had their affairs to look after, and poetry could at best only be a part-time job for them. But there are poets and poets, from all classes and communities, moving from court to court, making themselves heard, and at least some of them bagging huge awards. They can be quite fearless. It's as though the kings were afraid of them. They represent the media today- the newspapers. And, as trains carry newspapers today, the elephant seems to have carried the poet. Public opinion is shaped by them. Poet-and, elephant? And there is one rule, that all the poets are tacitly bound to obey- they have to be of "the truthful words". Hence through them, the "unacknowledged legislators", comes the unwritten law for the Tamiḻ court -the Head of which is king -or chieftain. As yet NOT all through the Brahmins.

Kaṇiyaṉpūṅkuṉṟaṉār - he seems, from his reliance on Fate, to be a Jain, - has written this little poem in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (192). *Yātum ūre, yāvarum kēḷir.* Quite a famous piece; we'll have a look at the translation:

Every city is my city; all people are my people.
Good and evil do not come from others.
Hurting and healing are also like them.
And dying is nothing new: We
Will not rejoice that life is sweet: In pain
We will not blame it as being hard.
Like the boat tossed on the water,
Of the great silted river roaring down the rocks
When with lightning the clouds pour forth the cold drops,
This dear life goes as ordered by Fate:

We know, from what the wise ones have seen.
Hence, for greatness' sake,
We will not wonder at the great ones,
Nor look down upon the small people".

Hats off, everybody, to a very ancient Dravidian poet with a very strange name- Kaṇiyaṉpūṅkuṉṟaṉār. You can forget the name, and keep the message:

"Every city is my city; all people are my people".

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Chapter XIII

TOLKĀPPIYAM

1. Introduction

Roughly, from A.D. 300 to A.D. 600 in the history of Tamilnad, is dismissed as the *Dark Age* of the Tamils, by several scholars and historians, including no less a scholar than Nilakanta Sastri.[1] But we would rein up at that. The Age that produced the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* and *Cilappatikāram,* to be designated a *Dark Age*? The literature of an age reflects its life, or rather, it *is* its life intellectual, and will show the quality of the life of the people. This Age is anything but Dark, if we consider the totality of its literature. Therefore it is appropriate to designate this period as the post-*Caṅkam* Age

As we noted in *Caṅkam* literature never really died out in Tamilnad. Not in the twelfth century, when Kampaṉ came storming into the heart of a temple-culture. Not even in the twentieth century, when English and Hindi vie with each other for a grip on the people, and a Chief Minister rides to power on the wave of a *Caṅkam-Tamil* worship. But what we are examining at the moment is the literary left-overs from the *Caṅkam Age* and the immediate aftermath. The tide has gone out. The Triarchy is no more, or exists obscurely in nooks and corners of Tamilnad. But still the *Caṅkam* exists as a nostalgic memory. A considerable number of poets are given the names of *Caṅkam* poets! However, the language is different. Prof. S. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai has made that very clear.[2] In *Kalittokai,* a group of one hundred and fifty pieces are available from this scenario, but the honesty and realism of most of the *Caṅkam* poems are not here, or at least, to that extent. And we cannot proceed without considering Tolkāppiyar, the reputed grammarian of *Caṅkam* literature, before we take up the Post-*Caṅkam* works, however early.

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1. *A History of South India* by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, Pub. Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 139.
2. *History of Tamil Language and Literature.* Pub. New Century Book House, Madras -2, 1959, p. 29.

It has been suggested that Tolkāppiyar comes before the *Caṅkam*, and that his was the magic wand that controlled the literature. It's absurd to say that a grammarian would precede a literature, and hence we are compelled to give him the modest place of one who was supposed to tabulate the rules and regulations of the vast literature that preceded him. But his should be a considerable scholastic work, for it includes the phonology and the morphology of the Tamil language, as well as the aesthetics of its literature. Every student of Tamil has heard about it. The popular thirteenth century *Naṉṉūl* is based on it. We need not bother to consider his discipleship of the sage Agastya, with its obvious connotations of Brahministic fable. But his *Poruḷatikāram* needs to be studied, since it is associated with the "content" of *Caṅkam* literature. Here, however, we do need to look out for differences, if any, with the *Caṅkam*, and also for suggestions of *Kalittokai.*

Poruḷ does mean "content" and *atikāram* means "section", the former being a Dravidian word and the latter a Sanskrit one. This would be a feature of the language of a Dravidian community permeated by an Āryaṉ one. We find many Sanskrit words being substituted for Tamil ones without a real need. Now, whether Tolkāppiyar was a Brahmin or a Jain, it would be natural for him to freely take a Sanskrit word in the place of a Tamil one, especially if his work was in the field of scholarship. At the same time, he could not afford to ignore the ocean of *Caṅkam* literature that would still be commanding the attention of the literary elite among the "natives" of the Tamil country. *Tolkāppiyam* would thus take a place among the honoured literary products of the time, high in favour with both the rulers, whoever they were, and the people, who still counted as people.

He opens the chapter with three Tamil words, *Akattiṇai Iyal* —meaning, "the chapter on the conduct of Love". However, the commentator's elaboration goes on to speak of behaviour in sex-joy". *Iṉpam*, or "sex-pleasure", is not quite the same as *akam* in the *Caṅkam*, which means Love, (human? - yes, inclusive of sex) but it is a more sublime expression of the relationship between a man and a woman. Another word for this relationship in the *Caṅkam* is *kātal*, which also is not un-sublime, and can be used only for the man-woman relationship. Look at this well-known piece from *Caṅkam* poetry.

Kuṟuntokai 40 which begins:

"yāyum yāyum yārākiyarō"

"My mother, and your mother, what kin are they?
My father, and your father, how are they related?
You, and me, how did we get to know each other?
Like rain-water falling on the red clay,
Our loving hearts are mingled into one."

The word for "Love" here is *Aṉpu*. It does include sex-pleasure, but it includes much more than that. The word *Iṉpam* is used by the *Caṅkam*. The word is Tamil, but the idea of *Iṉpam* being used for sex-pleasure is identical with the use of the word *Kāmam* in Sanskrit. But *Puṟam* 32 clearly shows *Iṉpam* as "going the way of *aṟam*" or *Dharma*. The commentator does not seem to be aware of all that! The *Tiṇai* of *Akam* or "behaviour in sex-enjoyment" would simply hark back to the *Kāmasūtra*, so far as the commentator was concerned. And, in Tolkāppiyar too, sex-enjoyment and just that, is denoted by the word *Akam* which originally meant a great lot more than sex. He seems to be asking - "How many ways can people have sex?" Then answering that question, "Seven ways, they say," beginning with *Kaikkiḷai* and ending with *Peruntiṇai*. Now, both are not visible in *Caṅkam* poetry. *Caṅkam* poetry has, in the love-poems, only five *Tiṇais*. Tolkāppiyar's *Kaikkiḷai* means one-sided or unrequited love. His *peruntiṇai* means unaccepted "love", maybe like Rape. Of the second, there is one *Caṅkam* instance, (*Naṟṟiṇai* 90) in a prostitute colony, of a girl-child who was sought after by a big guy. But she cried and ran away and the fellow also seems to have done the vanishing trick. We must remember that even this is included in the five *Tiṇais* and does not have a separate *Tiṇai*. These two *Tiṇais*, then, look like monsters that do not belong to the *Caṅkam Akam* poems. But they are in *Tolkāppiyam*!

We'll now take a look at Rule No.5, in *Tolkāppiyam*, pertaining to the kinds of *Terrain*. The five *Caṅkam Terrain*, that Kampaṉ, too, spoke grandly about, are here. But, they are not introduced by Tolkāppiyar with simple description. Instead, gods seem to rule them, for by the names of their gods Tolkāppiyar introduces them, "as said", by whom we do not know.[3]

3. A reference to already existing grammar which he seems to accept.

Māyōṉ (Viṣṇu) rules the forest. The Beautiful One (Muruka) rules the dark mountains. The king of the gods (Indra) rules the waters. Varuṇa (the god of the coastal area—by the way, he does not even show himself in the *Caṅkam* Age)—rules the beach. Now, any doubts about the identity of Tolkāppiyar? Even though you can find some of these gods in some of the *Caṅkam* localities, they definitely do not rule them! You hardly feel their presence! The poets have much else to talk about!

Two of Tolkāppiyar's Rules, No. 25, and No. 26, of *Akattiṇai Iyal* point again to something that the *Caṅkam* Board, (or plank) would summarily reject. Slaves, labourers, and servants, are eligible for—the great privilege?—of *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai*. You don't really see slaves in *Caṅkam* poetry except, may be, the poor dumb fellows in *Mullaippāṭṭu*. And, for the rest, you just don't see the labourers raping or harassing the women-folk. The hill-tribes "live with their wives". Pāṇaṉ and Pāṭiṉi get along fine together, without *Kaikkiḷai* or *Peruntiṇai*. Where does this grammarian get these ideas?

Now we have had enough, for the time, of Tolkāppiyar. There would be many things that he does have to say from the *Caṅkam* poets, and quite some things that he says that do not belong to the *Caṅkam*. But, enough is enough, and since, in any case this grammarian does not strictly conform to the *Caṅkam*, we expect him to conform to the early literature of the post-*Caṅkam* period, that does bear some likeness to its ancestor. This would bring Tolkāppiyar down to the period after *Kalittokai*.

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Chapter XIV

KALITTOKAI

So, we will take up the *Kalittokai* poems. Say, fifteen of them. Out of the hundred and fifty-five from *Marutam*, two from each of the other *Terrain*, and the other two, at random. *Marutam* takes the predominance because we are searching for *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai*, which are not specified even here.

Kalittokai simply means the "compilation of poems in the *kali* metre". The first time we are hearing a Tamil metre mentioned by name. The *Caṅkam* poems are mostly in the *āciriyam* or *akaval* metre. But it just doesn't make sense, to say "*kali* metre or *āciriyam* metre", except when we follow it up with the observation that neither *āciriyam* nor *kali* has anything to do with Sanskrit prosody. They are indigenous, which implies that Tamil prosody must have been of a distinct order from before *Caṅkam* times. However, we have no ancient work extant before *Tolkāppiyam* on Tamil prosody. Metre, though, while it is a study by itself, does not come up for special notice before Kampaṉ, when we will have to make a few relevant observations.

Kalittokai has only the five *Caṅkam Tiṇais*, *Marutam*, *Mullai*, *Neytal*, *Pālai* and *Kuṟiñci*. Since *Marutam* is the likeliest place where we can find those disreputable women, and look for *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai* also, we'll take that first.

Poem 69. The first seven lines, while addressing the "hero", calls him a "dweller near the abundant waters, where the white-feathered swan with its graceful-moving mate moves around the lotus, as the chanting Brahmin moves to the right around the fire, (leading) the doe-eyed, veiled damsel with her companion". Definitely a picture of a marriage with Brahministic rituals. We have not seen this before!

Now, Tolkāppiyar gives an explanation: *Poruḷatikāram* 143. Because "lies" multiplied, "Aiyar" (the respected ones i.e., the Brahmins), brought in the "formalised marriage". We'll just see how far this "formalised marriage" was able to overcome the "lies". The speaker herself seems to be the man's mistress, if we can depend on Naccinārkkiniyar's comments. A "bought" woman? She can see so vividly the beauty of a formalised marriage with the Brahmin leading

the bride and bride-groom. And she is complaining to the "hero" about his having come from the prostitute-colony. There is no question about the beauty of the picture of the swans or the sweetness of the piece, but, what is the real purpose achieved by formalised marriage, or the Brahministic ritual? Has Tamil social life been actually purged of its falsehoods? We'll find that out from *Cilappatikāram*.

Poem 70. The poem opens with a lengthy simile, somewhat in the way of the *Caṅkam* poems. It is meant to suggest the human life that follows. There are two items in the simile, the first of which, at least, is definitely wanting in the realistic touch. The "foolish" swan, looking for her mate, sees the reflection of the moon in the water and mistakes it for him. Now the *Caṅkam plank* would throw that overboard. Even a foolish swan will not mistake the reflection of the moon for her mate. The second item, that, when the cock-bird comes confronting her, she suddenly goes "very shy", poses a question to those who have watched bird-behaviour in mating-time. Superficially, it reminds one of *Caṅkam* imagery.

This picture is followed by three stanzas which are musical enough, and which convey the sleeplessness of the sorrowing heroine. When she does doze awhile, there are three factors that shake her from sleep. One is the noise of the drums that sound of rejoicing, when her husband joins the prostitutes. The second is the frenzied spirit-dance, when he brings into the city the women "who please him". The third is the loud clanging, for the same reason, of his chariot-bells.

But then there is a fourth. The attendant-maid declares that even if she could tolerate the first three, she could not bear this! And this fourth and last item is the *Pāṇaṉ*. He has come from the home of the prostitutes. He still "embraces the *yāḻ*", but here he does not sing properly. He has an "uneducated" or "untrained," mouth. A real fall, for the *Pāṇaṉ*. Is Tamilnad no more a home for him? For here comes a time when his music is not wanted!

An interlude here. It's not many people who know the origin of the word Jaffna, in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. The syllable Jaff is just an anglicising of the word *yāḻ*, "y" and "j" being practically the same, and "f" being a poor substitute for "ḻ", which consonant is not in any of the European languages. Actually Jaffna is in Tamil as Yāḻppāṇam—"the home of the Pāṇars with the *yāḻ*". Well, and when did the Pāṇars get into Jaffna, and how? That question is worth the probing, but we do not have the answers here.

Now, Poem 71. The background is the fertile *Marutam* and the speaker, according to the commentator, is a "bought woman", who is complaining to her

man about his involvement with prostitutes. There are only two points of interest here. One is, again, the Pāṇaṉ. He is involved in his master's escapades. He is described as having "taken the *yāḻ* and sworn many oaths". Now the *yāḻ* is part and parcel of the Pāṇaṉ, and if the commentator, the famous Naccinārkkiniyar, explains this passage as meaning that the Pāṇaṉ had sworn many oaths by his god, the *yāḻ*, we can understand it. The *yāḻ* could be idolised by the Pāṇaṉ, for he had lived with it, and lived by it, down the centuries. But the commentator goes on to say that the Pāṇaṉ brought in "many gods" along with the *yāḻ* to swear by. There is nothing in the passage to justify the coming of "many gods" into the picture. So much for the dependability of the commentators. True, we cannot forget our debt to them—for without them how could we have read the poems at all?

The other point is the ear-ornaments worn by the women. "Many ornaments" are worn from the ears, which suggest the gold ear-ornaments worn by some Dravidian women not so far back, when they pierced the lobes of their ears and enlarged the holes to hold—yes—"many" gold ornaments, which weighted down the lobes to touch their shoulders. Now there is an obvious reference to this practice in ancient Andhra[4] also, around the first century B.C. While the Telugu country is just suggested in our *Caṅkam* picture, there seems to have been some likelihood of the Dravidian kings having been in control there as well, since the poems translated by Prof. Mativāṇaṉ do have a faint, if very faint, family resemblance to our *Caṅkam* poems. Prof. Mativāṇaṉ has even tried to bring out the resemblance by fitting those Prakrit poems into the Tamil *tuṟais* and *tiṇais* even *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai*.[5] At a gesture from Tōlkāppiyar.

Poem 72. There are three items of interest here, the context being the same as in the previous poem. One, again the Pāṇaṉ is playing his *paṇs* (tunes) to gladden the heart of his womanising master. How long is such a servitude going to be sweet to him? The second is the "Pulaitti". She is "rustling" in the dresses of "other" folks. This does take us back to the reference, in *Caṅkam* poetry, to a "Pulaitti" washing clothes in a prostitute-colony. The third is the Brahmin! It seems he extols the praises of that womaniser, in the hearing of those who do not want to hear it. The poem says "the wise Brahmin", the commentator, "the foolish Brahmin". Of course the poem does imply "foolish".

4. Refer: *Āntira Nāṭṭu Akaṇāṇūṟu* a translation of *Gathā Sapta Sati*" (Pub. Thāy Nāṭṭu Patippakam, Madras), by Prof. Mativāṇaṉ, 1978, poems 89&90.

5. *Ibid.*, lst page of the author's preface.

Poem 74. Still the same theme, the first five lines giving as usual the background of the well-watered fields with the lotus-flowers, where the addressee belongs.

This is followed by three two-lined stanzas, showing up three people who have been cheated, and "driven mad", by him. One is the Pāṇaṉ, who sings his praises, saying that he will not be called loveless or unrighteous. Next come the womenfolk who accept his words even though they know that the intake of poison will mean death. Finally comes the heart of the womaniser himself.

Poem 80. Herein comes another element, the child—the young son. The mother speaks to him, fondly listening to his infant prattle, which cannot, however, do away with her problem with her husband.

Well, the whole of *Marutam* here also, is this: What the prostitute means to Tamil society. And, how many are there of the *Marutakkali* poems?

From poem No. 66 to 100. Thirty-five pieces. *Mullai* is from 101 to 117, *Neital*, from 118 to 150. *Pālai*, from 2 (No. 1 is Worship) to 36. *Kuṟiñci*, from 37 to 65. There is only one group—the *Pālai*, having as many pieces as *Marutam*. Since we are searching for *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai*, we will take the two pieces at random also from *Marutam*.

Poem 83. There is a reference here, to a festival for the "beautiful son of the dear one who sits under the banyan tree". This is Muruka, who has by now come to be accepted as the son of Śiva. The theme, while it is again about the infidelity of the "hero", brings in the son, who has caused the wife great worry by coming home late from play. And just then arrives the father, bearing on his person the marks that the prostitutes had left. This is blow on blow. The wife compares it to "the sword that pierces the wound caused by the flame." By the way this has passed into Tamil folklore as a proverb: *Venta Puṇṇil Vēl*.[6]

Poem 94. So we seem to have come to a *Peruntiṇai* poem after all! Tolkāppiyar is quoted here, to show that there is no marriage within slaves or labourers. But here are a hunchback and a dwarf included by the commentator among "slaves or labourers." We can see that they are unfortunates, freaks of Nature, but how do they normally come within his "slaves or labourers"?

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6. We come across this image in stanzas 19 and 24, *Kaikeci Cūḻviṉaippaṭalam*, Kampaṉ, Pub. Murray and Co., 1958.

This poem is included in *Marutam* but it has a lot of crude exchange of heated words between a hunchback woman and a dwarf of a man who are, after all, seeking sex in each other.

All the same, the whole of the *Marutam* that we have seen in *Kalittokai* is a sickening affair. We will look for a breath of fresh air in *Kuṟiñcikkali*. Love on the mountains.

Poem 51. This is perhaps the best-known of the *Kalittokai* pieces. You see the boys playing ball in the street. One of them comes running to the heroine's door, calling out, "Water, please!" The mother sends the daughter with a cupful. As she innocently hands it out, the young man grips her by the fore-arm. Frightened, she screams out, "Mother! See what this chap is doing!" Well, the mother comes running. Now the daughter does not want to involve the youth in a bad scrape. "Nothing much, mother", she explains; "just that some of that water went the wrong way." And the mother rubs the boy down the nape of his neck, while that "son of a thief" looks sideways at the girl "as though he would kill" with his "many smiles", or (suppressed) laughter. There's drama, and fun!

This same author shows a heroine playing another trick, in the very first of the *Kuṟiñcikkali* poems. She is on the swing, in the cornfields, where she is sent to mind the birds. As the young man comes along, she begs him "Aiyē! (a term of respect) please push the swing faster for me"! "Good, girlie, so I shall", he answers, and accedes to her request. She swings, and falls—upon his bosom. He lifts her and she lies as though unconscious, in his embrace. And, the beginnings of a romance are here. (Poem 37)

And there is a rather impressive picture of the father's reaction when his daughter's love-story reaches him through his wife. Poem 39. He "looks at his choice arrow, looks at his bow, and one whole day he fumes- then cools down, and sees that there is no fault in either of them (the couple) and bows his head (in assent)."

Here are two observations, in the same poem, which are found, in a more powerful form, in the *Kuṟaḷ* (No. 55 & 56). One is, that the heroine is so chaste that if she commands, it will rain. The other is that the Kuṟava wives will themselves not go astray, and because they worship their husbands first thing in the morning, their Aiyers (respected men, here indicative of husbands) will not go astray either. And, there is no question about the sweetness of the pieces. Quite some, like Poems 40 & 42, are real lyrics, lovely in their sound pattern. And the metrical forms are conducive to lyricism. Occasionally even the deep tones of Kampaṉ are suggested.

Now, who is this poet? He is called Kapilar. Tradition identifies him with the Kapilar of the *Caṅkam*. For that matter, all the five poets of *Kalittokai* are identified with their namesakes in the *Caṅkam*. It has been stated earlier in this book that the language of *Kalittokai* is not the language of the *Caṅkam*, as Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai has clearly and expressly, stated.[7] But there is more to it. Look at this conceit in poem 39 - an otherwise beautiful poem enough.

"If the moon touches the hills, the Lord of the forests will build a ladder to it, thinking it a honeycomb". Lovely, for a fairytale, but—would the Kapilar of the *Caṅkam* have been capable of that?

Again, Poems 37 and 51. Pretty enough in the working out. But, what of the real tricks being played by the girls on the unthinking young fellows? They are, simply, trapped by the girls. No, no, that would never have done with Kapilar. Kapilar's heroines are innocent girls. They cannot have any relationship with these tricksters.

In Poem 41, there is a lengthy description, of the woodsman's shot, from his catapult, going through the honeycomb, then through the banana stem, and finally coming to rest within the jack-fruit. Anyone who has read through the *Caṅkam* Kapilar would recognise that. It is plagiarism, to the core. Only, this Kapilar seems to have forgotten at times the favourite fruit of his ancestor. It does occur - but not so often, or quite in the same way, as with the *Caṅkam* poet. And that is, what does occur here, simply - the jack-fruit. So, Kapilar could just have been something like a pen-name for the *Kuṟiñci Kalittokai* poet, when he chose the Terrain and the theme of the famous *Caṅkam* Kapilar. Or, given to this poet by tradition. See the use of the name Avvai for so many poetesses down the centuries! By the way, there is no poetess in *Kalittokai*.

Since we have mentioned the accepted name of one of the poets in *Kalittokai* we might as well bring in here the names of the others. Peruṅkaṭuṅkō, for *Pālai*. Marutaṉ Iḷanākaṉ for *Marutam*. Cōḻaṉ Nalluruttiraṉ for *Mullai*. And Nallantuvaṉ for *Neital*. All these bear the names of poets who have contributed to the original *Caṅkam* literature. We can understand the hold of the *Caṅkam* on the popular imagination if such a development can take place. An imitation-*Caṅkam*. Some of the pieces are enjoyable in their way, but they are not what

7. *History of Tamil language and literature*, p. 57.

they presume to be. Such an observation carries a chill with it. However, we have to peruse six more of the *Kalittokai* poems before we can take leave of the collection.

Well, dipping into the *Mullai,* we've stumbled across what the commentator calls, *Kaikkiḷai.* That is, "Love among the labour-classes". Such a find calls for study. There are two of this breed, included in *Mullai.* Nos. 112 and 113. Both poems stand out among the rest, the form being that of dialogue, not just one person speaking. We will examine one of them, Poem No. 113. Here is a shepherd confronting a girl and introducing himself as "A son of the shepherd community". The adjective for shepherd here includes "grass-related". Of course cow as well as sheep graze, but the adjective here for shepherd has also the suggestion of being "low". Does that carry a challenge? For the shepherd also says that his people are "not afraid of foes". May be it's a veiled threat to the girl in case she complained to her folks. But the girl is not weak or timid. She strikes back at him, saying "O.K. If you belong to the grass-root shepherd class, I belong to the "good" cowherd class!" There is a suggestion of superiority, of boldness, even defiance, in her words. But he apparently stops her, thus: There's no harm in my saying a few words to you". Her reply is, "No need to talk of harm, but let me go for the present".

"I won't", he rejoins. "Look, you consented. Fooled by your sweet words, - though I know you gentle—could I let you go after listening to your words, gentle one - if my heart commands me?"

"You mean that you will not command your heart", she answers. "But how do you recognize falsehood, if your love is confused with desire?"

"Bejewelled one, I understand. I've been so long, in the cool groves on the sands of the river in the wood, wearing the *Mullai* on my head, playing with my friends. And now it's getting dark now, the bull that bellows like the thunder that frightens the snake is standing ready with the cow, so that we might go with our many cattle.'

The poem stops at that. The suggestion, of the bull with the cow, leads the commentator—not the poet—to say, "So thus was born the desire of sex between the two." This sentiment is repeated by the famous Naccinārkiniyar in his commentaries on several of the poems even without such a suggestion as the bull-and-cow image to prod him on.

Note that in the same line the poet uses both the words *kātal* and *kāmam*, the former for love, and the latter for "sex-desire".

Another point here is that the cowherds presumes on the superiority of her community to the shepherd-group. Economically, the cowherds might have a prominence over the shepherds, and that is enough for communal feeling anywhere. But the importance accruing to the cowherds from the Krishna-cult is not here. We don't see Krishna in the *Caṅkam* poetry either. Yes, there are many Kaṇṇaṉs, but they have many kinds of *kaṇ* in the *Caṅkam* (*kaṇ* meaning "Eye",) as in "the black-eyed one," "the white-eyed one", the "angry-eyed one" etc. There is only one Kaṇṇaṉ whose name is non-committal. Kaṇṇaṉ would be the Dravidian (as well as Prakrit) form of Krishnan, since we cannot have those Aryan consonantal combinations "kr" "sh" or "shn" anyway in Tamil. But the myth of Krishna dancing with the cowherdesses is not in the poems that we have seen so far.

And we must remember that the poem is designated *Kaikkiḷai* (one-sided love, among "the labour classes") which is not supposed to be refined love, such as you would find in the *Caṅkam Akam* poems. We have to reiterate here that in the *Caṅkam* poems you are not expected to find "low-class" people having one kind of love, and "high-class" people having another kind. True, most of the "heroes" of the *Caṅkam* are aristocrats, (and quite some of them are in *Marutam*! but they don't seem to really look down on the life of any people. The author of *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* has a kind word for the forest-dwellers "who live with their wives" and would not harm the poor minstrel folk. Tolkāppiyar is quick to recognize the fact that the heroes in *Caṅkam* poetry are aristocrats, but he proceeds to scale down the labourers as a sort of inferior folk the quality of whose love would also be inferior. No, they "live with their wives" and would (therefore) be kind to the wanderers. A certain quality of human grace, and love too, would, therefore be in their lives. *Kaikkiḷai* and *Peruntiṇai* as separate *tiṇais*, are therefore unheard-of in the literature we have left behind us in Book I, and even in *Kalittokai*, which we are just examining, there seems to be no justification for the word "labourer-level" which, for Tolkāppiyar also and certainly for Nacciṇārkkiṇiyar, carries the implication, "low-born". Nacciṇārkkiṇiyar was a Brahmin. Perhaps, after all, we should not take them as seriously as the creative literature, although so much has been made of them later. Taking another look at this same poem, No. 113, we can say that there is nothing sub-human about the two characters involved in the dialogue. The language itself, except in the address, "ella!" (Hello!) has nothing that is dialectical

in character. And what do we have to say about the word "Okkuman!" which, in its context, would simply mean "O.K. Then?", or "Good. Proceed", but is taken by the commentator as an "assent to sex-intercourse"? So hereafter, we shall dispense with grammarian and commentator altogether except when squarely confronted. Was there such a thing as *Kaikkiḷai* or *Peruntiṇai*, in this period, the post-*Caṅkam* period? The poems are divided, we must note, into five *Tiṇais*, just like the *Caṅkam* works, and not seven. And there's no time-machine available to take us backwards, except the literature itself. And, the commentaries, while indispensable, can also mislead.

Poem 106. Here is a picture of bull-baiting. The actual word for it is "embracing" the bull. The bulls are compared to warriors getting ready for war. They are covered with blood, and so are the young men who "embrace" them. The young women here sing that they will press to their breasts the wounds obtained by their lovers in embracing the "murderous bulls." At the end of the poem there is a reference to "the king who conquers the enemies".

Poem 107. This poem also refers to bull-baiting, in a passing reference, but what we pause to note is a comment by the maid: "If he is a son of the cowherds, and you are a daughter of the cowherds (lines 20 - 21) and if he wants you and you want him, then there is nothing your mother need worry about" (concerning your marriage). Well, never before, certainly not in the *Caṅkam*, was sameness of community expressly noted as being a specified reason for marriage. Marrying within the same community, whether regional or professional, was very likely a common occurrence, but the communal factor had not then degenerated into an important reason for marriage.

Poem 12 is *Pālai*. Separation. Here, for financial reasons. The maid points out to the hero the dangers of the wilderness, where the murderous archers kill, and the elephants go roaming in search of water. Her mistress is terrified at the thought of his crossing such a place. If he should leave her of the "fragrant brow", for the sake of treasure, he should remember that Youth and Love will not stay at his bidding. And nobody knows when his end will come. He should not forget that Death and Old Age are waiting for him.

Rather too solemn a lecture, one feels, for a very young girl. But all the same, smacking of the *Caṅkam*. Looking like a spill-over.

Poem 13, also from *Pālai*, shows a maid comforting her mistress. Her lover had hinted at a possible separation. Whereupon she had decided to go with him wherever he went. But the difficulties on the way were such! The land looked

as though an angry monarch had burnt it all up after battle. The deer with the antlered stag mistook the devil's chariot for water. A mirage! The hills burnt till the trees wilted. The monkeys hungered. The elephant, not finding water in the springs, chewed the marsh. This was the desert. If her mistress followed the hero, her feet would blacken. She was used to sleeping on the swing-bed with its mattress of soft swan's down. But wouldn't she be scared—if, leaving her safe home, she heard the tiger's roar? And she of the sweet words like the parrot, wouldn't she lose her beauty, if hurt by the strong wind, from the "roaring fire" in the desert? Hence, says the maid, though her lover had spoken of separation on account of business, it was only for the fun of seeing her tremble with the dread of separation.

Now this poem, too, except for the "devil's chariot' would fit neatly into the *Caṅkam Pālai*. And the poem sings like a lyric, which the *Caṅkam* poems don't usually do.

Only two more poems from this collection: *Neital*. Poem No. 123.

This is a real lyric, a lovely one, showing the heroine talking to her foolish heart about its going after her lover. The poem opens with a grand, though impossible, picture, of the sea being lulled to sleep by the bees and the beetles humming on the flowering branches of the black-stemmed, fragrant *punnai* tree, and the comparison is to Vishnu, (though the word used here for Vishnu is Māl, - for phonological reasons) lying prostrate, listening to the *yāl*. An Āryan god, enjoying the symbol of Dravidian music. She continues.

"My foolish heart,
Did you, or didn't you, see him you went after,
Who made you love-sick
That night when everything was hid
Under the darkness?

"My foolish heart,
Did you, or didn't you, embrace him you went after,
Who made you love-sick
That twilight time when the he-sharks
Prevented folks from moving
On the beach?

"My foolish heart,
Did you, or didn't you, know him you went after,
Who made your bracelets slip down,
That evening the frenzied birds
Went home to their nests?

And so,

"My foolish heart,
By day, by night, not getting sleep,
You have been troubled
Like the dark, great sea that has no rest".

The last two lines are in sharp contrast to the opening stanza, where the sea is lulled to sleep by the bees and beetles, "like Māl, lying prostrate", listening to the *yāḻ*-music. The first part of it is a sheer impossibility, and the second part an imaginary picture, equated with it, but familiar to any mind having the least contact with the stories from the Hindu pantheon. The *yāḻ*, however, comes straight out of the *Caṅkam*.

Poem 126. The attendant maid is speaking. To the hero. "The sun has reached the golden hill. Up climbs the moon, for the world to wonder at and praise. In the reddening time, when noises are silenced, the flocks of herons gather on the sand like Brahmins with their three - pronged rests, (doing *Tapas*) "meditating on the ancient words".

"Listening to the sounds of the pretty birds, she (the heroine) takes them for tinkling bells of his strong chariot. But when the sounds die down, she knows them for the birds of the woods and weeps for loneliness.

"When the fragrance of the flowers on the waters reaches her, she takes it for the fragrance of the garland round your neck. But when the wind blows from the water, she recognizes it and faints with the disappointment.

"When, in the great city she does not care for, she keeps thinking of you, she embraces you as being real, but then she finds it a dream and gets helpless and sad.

"And so, thinking many things and worrying, my friend is grieving for you. That her bright moon-face might shine out again, may your chariot get ready (for the wedding)!"

Very much like a *Caṅkam Akam* poem indeed. The mistaking of the fragrance of the flowers for the hero's garland is slightly out of the way. And the image of the herons on the sand, in flocks, "like Brahmins doing *Tapas*", is a bit startling too. We don't find them in such numbers in the *Caṅkam* though we might feel the power of their presence in the courts of the kings.

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Chapter XV

TIRUMURUKĀṟṟUPPAṬAI

Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai or "showing the way to Tirumurukaṉ", is a poem calling for careful study. For one thing, it is really compiled with the Ten Songs (*Pattuppāṭṭu*) as the first and Introductory poem. For another, Murukaṉ was already known to the Tamils and is mentioned several times in the ancient poetry. We know that the Pāṭiṉis first worshipped "the God who is beyond all things," and then only proceeded to their songs which delighted the kings. There is no reason why the Ten Songs should not be introduced with a poem dedicated to worship.

But Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai has relegated this poem to a later date. So, it was the compiler who included it in the Ten Songs. And compilers as well as commentators have to be subjected to scrutiny. If commentators can be so very disappointing, deliberately showing the wrong direction, there is no reason why the compilers should not toe their line too. Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai's reasons are mainly linguistic. But there are other, and stronger, reasons.

The authorship is attributed to Nakkīrar.* That is, to say the least, a terrific claim for the poem. We have to look twice. Both poems seem to begin, roughly, on the same note. In the genuine Nakkīrar, it is the cloud that "moves to the right." In the imitation one, it is the sun that moves to the right. But the former follows up the details of the monsoon, every one of which can be recognized in its truthful relation to life. And the poem has a large plan, consistently and delicately worked out. The plan of the later poem is just to show off Muruka in five different places. This piece also is descriptive in tone, but then, it is—just descriptive, which *Neṭunalvāṭai* is not. One would expect Nakkīrar to be a bit more of an artist. No more Nakkīrar, you have no place in *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. You are out. If your name is used by another, whoever he is, he owes you an apology.

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* See *Neṭunalvāṭai* by Nakkīrar.

Look at the images in Neṭunalvāṭai, or, for that matter, in the general run of *Caṅkam* poetry. They are, mostly, three-dimensional. Nearly all the images in *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* are two-dimensional. No sign of life or reality. The idol of Muruka, for instance, in *Tiruccīralaivāi*. The functions of the six faces and the twelve hands. They are shown in just flattened pictures. "One face", says the poet, "smiles at Vaḷḷi, the Kuṟava girl", or the girl from the mountains. Tamil myth of course but it could have been given a bit more of life.

We'll take, by contrast, just a still-life picture from *Neṭunalvāṭai*. "The cobwebs that encase the fan." The suggestion is that the fan has not been used for quite some time. The cold of the monsoon season, which cruelly separates the king from, the queen, is felt here. By its side we can place the smile of Murukaṉ, a smile directed at one of his wives by one of his faces—and, how far does the smile carry?

The poem shows Murukaṉ as having an Āryaṉ goddess as wife. She is *Tēvayāṉai*, daughter of the king of the gods, Indra. Murukaṉ has taken both Dravidian and Āryaṉ wives. Incidentally, he is also shown as extending the marriage-garland to countless "nymphs of heaven". Of course this is just symbolical, but it shows the presence of both Dravidian and Āryaṉ religions. Murukaṉ has by now been exalted to be the son-in-law of the king of the gods, whereas formerly he was husband only of a mountaineer's daughter. But now behind this lies the concept of polygamy, never a common feature of Dravidian life. Even in *Marutam*, the wife's right to react normally, had been accepted as a matter-of-course by the *Caṅkam* poets. In that masculine- society.

And, in *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* you do see the *Tilakam* or *poṭṭu* or dot, on the "fragrant foreheads" of the "nymphs from heaven". Which shows where the *Ṭilakam* comes from.

And also, here's plenty of the purāṇic element. Plenty. This is another point of vital importance. The poem ends with the words "Lord of the hills". That is the dignity accorded to Murukaṉ by the grammarian Tolkāppiyar too. But *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, of *Caṅkam fame*, also concludes with the words "Lord of the hills"—but there the place belongs, simply, to a mountain-chief. Thus are we exalted!

Finally, what is the function of an *Āṟṟuppaṭai*? By *Caṅkam* rule—unspoken—and expressly stated by Tolkāppiyar—it is a poem directing the impecunious poet or Pāṇaṉ to the Giver of gifts. And, we learn a great deal

about the way to the Giver of gifts. Now, where is the Way to Murukaṉ? You see a great deal of the idol of Murukaṉ, but hardly anything about the Way, even to that. Hence, Tolkāppiyar himself would have to deny the status of *Āṟṟuppaṭai* to *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. No, *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* does not belong to the Ten Songs. It is probably among the left-overs. Like *Tolkāppiyam* itself.

The last line of the poem arrests: *Paḻamutircōlai malai kiḻavōnē*. "The Lord of the hills, where the groves drop fruit". And there is a smart transition from one section of the poem, (there are five sections) to the next. *Ataṉṟu* - "Not only that". But the rest of the poem is of interest mainly to the Muruka-bhakta. And, of course, to the antiquarian.

We have to observe the recording, in *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, of the spreading of temples, with the idols formally installed. It's natural that the poem has been given a place in the Tamil Saivite "scriptures", the *Tirumuṟais*. After all, Murukaṉ is accepted as the son of Śiva. But - *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* is a prelude to the Bhakti movement. However, there are still many hurdles for the Bhakti movement to get over, to gain momentum.

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Chapter XVI

PARIPĀṬAL

With *Paripāṭal*, we come to a new element in the life of the Tamils. The emotional hold of religion, through song. The seeds of the Bhakti movement are sprouting. The Pāṇar's and Pāṭiṇi's also had made it a point to worship the "One who is beyond all things" before they followed it up with song, which obviously was enjoyed by their august audience. But we have no idea of the nature of their songs although we do know something of the accompaniments. Since enjoyment was the main concern, the songs should have been secular. And, there is not a single name among the *Caṅkam* Pāṇars, as singers, left for posterity to remember them by. While the contribution of a single poem to *Caṅkam* literature carries a name, or names, with it, as in the case of Ātimanti, all those streams of melody that the kings delighted in have been lost, and their springs forgotten. Chariots and jewels were among the gifts given, and there is no real record of who received what. No, the Pāṇars were not looked down upon, not till much later, but nobody remembered then to take down their names. Not in an academy of musicians, - which did not exist anyway.

But something like that is turning up here. After each *Paripāṭal* poem, or rather, song, there is substantial information given. For instance, we will take the third song.

Worship - of *Kaṭavul* (God-beyond-all-things)

Verse - written by Kaṭuvaṉ Iḷaveyiṉaṉār

Musical composition - Peṭṭanākaṉār

Tune - *Pālai yāḻ*

It's obvious that someone has taken seriously the name of the versifier as well as the musical composer. And the name of the melody or tune, as well as the theme. The poems, as poems, all have a distinctly Hindu flavour, though the word "Hindu" has not yet come in. Of the Hindu Pantheon, Viṣṇu takes the predominance- though still being called Māl, or Tirumāl. Next comes Murukaṉ.

Several poems are addressed to the river Vaikai—the Water-festival, with its bevy of prostitutes and "bought" women, causing distress to the wife. In the manner of *Marutam.* Only, it is sung to music. But—there is one outstanding omission! It is Śiva, whom we met frequently under the shade of trees in the *Caṅkam* age. So, the brand of Hinduism that is coming into Tamilnad seems to be Vaishnavism. And, for the nonce, not Śaivism, unless it be among the lost poems.

In Poem 4, in five lines there are six references to snakes-(that's plenty of snakes!) - now a familiar association with Viṣṇu. Krishna appears in one poem as playing the flute in the midst of cowherdesses - again, today another familiar picture. The word *Kōkulam* appears in Poem 9. "Ā" is invariably the Tamil word for "cow" in the ancient literature. Now it appears as "Kō". "Kō" and "cow" are related words, belonging to the Indo-European group of words, one being Sanskrit, and the other, English. "Ā" is Dravidian.

Now, before we proceed further, we have to go through one at least from each of the three groups of poems-though they are mixed up, and not grouped separately in the anthology. We'll first take one of the poems addressed to "Tirumāl" - "Holy Viṣṇu" (Poem Three).

It begins thus:

> You Dark one; you Dark one;
> You like sapphire, who prevent Rebirth;
> You of the spotless holy feet, you Dark one;
> Fire, Wind, Sky, Earth, and Water —these Five;
> The Sun, the Moon, *Aṟam,* and the Five with them.
> The children of Titti (the Asuras); the twelve children of Kāsipaṉ;
> The eighty spotless ones; the eleven Kapilars; etc., etc.

Except for the first three lines, wherein a general description of Viṣṇu as the Dark One (we know that Krishna and Rāmā, as incarnations of Viṣṇu, are conceived as being "dark", which by now would be familiar to the Tamil mind,) every step carries a purāṇic image with it, which would not mean anything to the ordinary run of people, or mean much indeed even to the aristocratic classes except the Brahmins, whose sway over them would be slowly but surely strengthening under the influxes from the North. As the Tamil kingdoms

weakened, the Brahmin would not have gone down with them. Even when there was infighting, the Brahmins were secure. All Brahmins could not be Kapilars! We remember that address to the enemy camp by the militant Tamil troops: "Cows! Cow-like Brahmins! Women! Sick folks!" etc.: etc.: They were advised to "get to their places of safety," before the army started "raining" arrows. We can be sure that the advice was heeded, and, cows included, the Brahmins were safe. What would happen to the women after the conquest is pure conjecture. And, sick folks couldn't be expected to survive. But, the Brahmins? They would be protected, whether in the conquering kingdom or in the conquered kingdom. And while the battles weakened the kings, they would only strengthen the Brahmins. So, even when the Pallavas came in, their priesthood would only be a substantial reinforcement to the priesthood that already existed. And we can be sure that the Pallavas were not wanting in priests. This book, the *Paripāṭal*, shows Brahmin priestcraft touching new heights, hardly intelligible to the common man, but in general command of the situation.

We must remember that the Brahmins had families, not like the Catholic priesthood. Even among the Catholics, power does seep from authority to blood-relatives. As for the Brahmins, they had strong rules and regulations that cemented their families, and the families themselves were bound together by a common understanding. No wonder, over the ages they developed into a powerful sacerdotal community, and easily brought under their law, (the law of Maṉu!) the people their kings had conquered, who were really now "as sheep without a shepherd". These people would be simply at the mercy of the Brahmins, and swallow whatever was fed them by Brahministic tradition. Even Maṉu. What would have happened much earlier, in the northern part of the sub-continent. Hence, you can see, what was long ensconced in North India, by now in Tamilnad too,—the Brahmins wielding absolute power. No Bishop, no king, said King James I. Well, the "Hindus" of Tamilnad move into a phase where it is, no Brahmin, no Maharaja. Absolute power, we know, absolutely corrupts. And human nature being what it is, Avarice and Ambition would have had their way. In a scenario where the four-caste, or five-caste, system was taken, with a curtsy, by the brain-washed people. Except in the Jain and Buddhist-controlled areas.

Poem 19 is addressed to *Cevvēḷ* or the Beautiful king, or Murukaṉ. Here is mention of Tirupparaṅkuṉram, where Murukaṉ married Vaḷḷi, after marrying Teivayāṉai in the celestial abode. Two wives. And here is a Pāṇṭiyaṉ also, with

those women (plural too) "like peacocks", coming in procession upon the mountain. There are eats offered to the monkeys. Musical instruments sound. And the people there mistake one another for Rati and Kāmaṉ (Manmataṉ, the Hindu Cupid—only, he is not a child but a handsome young fellow). No want of purāṇic allusions here either. Only, towards the end, there is a slightly *Caṅkam*-tinted picture of flowers on the mountains. But, for the first time we see the elephant being used in what looks like a temple-festival, a golden umbrella, with a coral handle, being held over it. The musical composer for this poem was a *maruttuvar* (physician).

Now we'll just turn over Poem No. 6 on the river Vaikai. That rather repulsive aspect of the Tamil folks even today—excessive worship of the language—turns up here in line 60 - "The cool beautiful waters of the Tamil Vaikai". What has Tamil to do with the innocent river? "Like those floods", says the poet, "is Desire in Love". And Vaikai has broken its "prison"! The crowds have collected to rejoice in the Water-festival. The weak ones cannot get into it but watch from sheltered spots. Meanwhile, flowers and sandal-paste come floating down the water, from the bosoms of those who bathe in it. Now, (Line 45) the Brahmins, naturally, consider the water as changed—not the original Vaikai. The orgies in the festival are not to their taste. "Pollution" is implied in the poem. Which means, Untouchability, with *Marutam* behind it: Prostitutes, and "bought women", enjoy the Water-festival along with the men they had seduced away from their wives, and it is in the general mix-up of the garlands—and bosoms!—in the merry-making that the flowers and sandal-wood paste get afloat, to the not illogical dismay of the Brahmins. Well there is not much more to say about the Vaikai poems except that it is the *Caṅkam* dramatis personae from the *Marutam* terrain who appear in them. Just because the poets have not been able to shake off the icy tentacles of their old-world glory! (Which icy tentacles are very much here, even in the twentieth century).

Now, unlike the *Caṅkam* poems, these poems were definitely set to tune and sung. What was the venue? The courts of the new rulers, or temples? The Hindu invaders from the North would be aware of the importance of the Tamil language to the people they were ruling, and hence there would be place for Tamil song in the temples. And the poems certainly don't impress as poems. The names of the poets and the names of the melody-composers might smack of the *Caṅkam*, but the diction doesn't. But if, as poetry, *Paripāṭal* does not startle us like the *Caṅkam* poems, one major factor would be its dependence on music for

effect. A song, stripped of its music, cannot be expected, normally, to carry much poetry. Where would the Hallelujah chorus be without its music? And some of the soul-stirring songs in the Sankey collection? Hence, if the *Paripāṭal* poems do not make a mark as poetry, there is no saying what impact they would have made as songs. There is so much contributed,by the voice, the rendering, and the accompaniments. Perhaps *Paripāṭal* should not be looked upon as poetry. But then, those other aspects of it are out of syllabus here.

Another point to remember is, that though the Triarchy had indeed collapsed, smatterings of the old Royal Families would be existing here and there. Even in *Paripāṭal* there is a reference to a Pāṇṭiya king. Time and again one or the other of the kingdoms would emerge into the limelight. They would only bide their time. But Jainism and Buddhism seem to have permeated Tamilnad wherever Hinduism couldn't, and in any case you cannot conceive the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* taking shape in a predominantly Hindu Society. And so, we will proceed towards the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* (the Holy Collection of Short Verses).

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Chapter XVII

TIRUKKURAḶ

1. Introduction

The work that we are going to study is widely accepted as the Tamil "Vēda" - the Scripture of the Tamils. Stories have collected around the personality of its author, bringing out the image that he has created for himself in the minds of the people. One is that he took his work to the *Caṅkam* Board for acceptance, which he did not get. Finally, after a great deal of dispute, the *Caṅkam* poets placed the work on the legendary plank and floated it on the water. The plank did not sink. The work was passed. Now the *Caṅkam* poets collected around Tiruvaḷḷuvar, and contributed, each of them, one poem in praise of him. And the poems have been put together - you can read them! - in what is called *Tiruvaḷḷuva Mālai* - "Tiruvaḷḷuvar's garland". One must call that a real hoax. These poems have to be examined after we are through with the work. They look like the truth, but there can be lies that look like the truth.

Tiruvaḷḷuvar is the only one of the ancient poets who is given the adjunct "Tiru"-Holy. Not Nakkīrar. Not Kapilar. Not the author of the *Cilappatikāram*. Why, not even Kampaṉ! Of course, in the Bhakti period, the title is conferred on several poets, but that is not for quite the same reason. And there are folks who would dissent, if asked for their votes on this issue. One is not aware that anybody in Tamilnad would object to the appellation "Tiru" for Vaḷḷuvar. It is verses from Vaḷḷuvar, and not from the *Rāmāyaṇā* or the devotional poems, that appear today on boards in the buses that run in Tamilnad. Glancing at them, one would think that the Tamils were a holy people! But no, Vaḷḷuvar was only laying down the rules for a perfect society. Making the law is not quite the same thing as keeping them. Who was capable of keeping the Mosaic law? But then, superhuman wisdom was required for making it. God's Spirit had to dictate that. And we must not forget that God's Spirit is everywhere.

Another point, related to Vaḷḷuvar's standing with the Tamils. Try tampering with any of his verses and see the explosion. There is a story of a European scholar who tried to "better" one of the couplets by introducing the normal initial rhyme in a couplet where Vaḷḷuvar had, intentionally, chosen another word. Those were days when India was within the British Empire. But that didn't prevent the explosion. And, talking of word-values, there are others who do write succinctly, and with a sure sense of the associations of a word. Francis Bacon, for instance. But nobody would think of comparing Bacon with Vaḷḷuvar. Their lines of thinking were on entirely different levels. And their impact on society was different too. And, Vaḷḷuvar cannot be edited. There are changes made by later writers in the original *Kamparāmāyaṇam.* Get into Kampaṉ's stride and you will be able to turn out something after your heart—which could be nonsense—and put it in the *Rāmāyaṇam,* and it could pass muster. There are several fake verses in the great epic. Vaḷḷuvar remains untouched. And, at any gathering of Tamil scholars you could play ball on the wide grounds which Kampaṉ provides. You could discuss even the character of Kampaṉ's "Rāmā" - the Vāli story, for instance. (By the way, he got that from Vālmīki. Couldn't escape). But nobody would think of arguing on Vaḷḷuvar's statements. They are decisive. We would at least leave them untouched, as inevitable for him, out of respect for this inspired man.

Who was this Vaḷḷuvar? What was his life like? Did he live up to his ideals? There is a lovely poem attributed to him, supposed to have been written by him on his wife's death. But then, that has to be confirmed.

That he was a scholar, cannot be doubted. That he was widely read in Sanskrit, that he knew the *Arthasāstrā*, the *Kāmasūtrā*, Maṉu, etc. is evident. But that is not to say that Vaḷḷuvar translated from those Sanskrit works! The Spirit behind Vaḷḷuvar is not from any of them.

Vaḷḷuvar should have been from the Vaḷḷuvar community, a lowly clan enough, but accessible, as all lowly clans are, to Jainism and Buddhism. There are rumours - a bird's whisper-that Vaḷḷuvar was a name given to a King's "Announcer"-in which case Tiruvaḷḷuvar's Sanskrit scholarship could be easily understood. But there is also the possibility of such an idea being promoted by folks who find it difficult to accept the intellectual endowment of an ordinary, "lower class" man, behind the *Kuṟaḷ*. And in any case we do not find any substantiation for the "King's Announcer" theory in the ancient literature. It is easier, and more pleasant too, for the present writer, to seek for the roots of

Tiruvaḷḷuvar among the Jains, who greatly valued scholarship, and who knew Prakrit and Sanskrit, and some of whom we have already met in the ancient poems. Witness Kaṇiyaṉ Pūṅkuṉṟaṉār, author of "*Yātum Ūrē, Yāvarum Kēḷir*". And in any case we have a community of Vaḷḷuvars even today. But it is just as well that Tiruvaḷḷuvar's community is a matter for dispute, else his book would have been given communal bearings, which it does not have at present. The book, as it is, sweet, dignified, and restrained, smacks more of the ripe experience of a scholarly recluse than of a courtier. And the Tamil Jains claim it as "Our Scripture"-"Em Ōttu". That makes it safe for us to put it above the communal level. The Jains did not recognize Maṉu-dharma at any rate.

And we must remember that, if *Caṅkam* poetry was, in essentials, descriptive poetry, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is, mainly, prescription. Normally we do not expect much poetry from description. And, no, certainly not, from prescription! The tendency is to shy away from that. However, just as *Caṅkam* verse startles us by its many true and poetic observations, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* fairly takes by surprise the most sceptical of critics. It was the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* that Father Beschi seriously set out to translate into Latin, directly he made the discovery. And men as different as Rev. Pope and Rev. Popley on the one hand, and V.V.S. Aiyar on the other, have translated it into English. And one must remember that Father Beschi was not just a long-faced priest, but the author of one of the most hilarious farcical writings that Tamil has known, and has set his readers roaring with laughter. Laughter in general is not a common feature of Tamil literature, but the truth is that the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is, despite the weight of its observations on life, truly enjoyable. Here's the Rev. Popley, speaking about the *Kuṟaḷ*. "The terse, vivid couplets lend themselves so aptly to memorisation and quotation, and there is a charm about them that makes us want to repeat them again and again".[1] No tedious didactic edifice, this!.

The plan of the book could raise many questions. And, eyebrows. Three broad sections. *Aṟam* or righteousness, divided into *Illaṟam* (Home-life) and *Tuṟavaṟam* (Ascetic life). Then *Poruḷ* or possession and, miscellaneous items connected with it. Finally, would you believe it, Love, more or less as it is handled by the *Caṅkam* poets, before marriage (*kaḷavu*), and, after marriage (*kaṟpu*)! Well, without the *tiṇais* and the *tuṟais*, but still—? And Love is here called *Kāmam* (what the *Iṉpam* of Tamil would be in Prakrit as well as Sanskrit). Now these

1. *The Sacred Kuṟaḷ*, Popley, p. 32.

three sections actually overlap. Family-life is studied in the section on *Aṟam*. It would certainly go down into the *Kaṟpu* section of *Kāmam*. And the "miscellaneous" items in the section on Kingship would not strictly be only in the picture of royalty. And, *Aṟam* could be applied anywhere. But then, Tiruvaḷḷuvar must be permitted to make his own blue-print. He has not ignored the broad ideological outline which existed even then on the theme. *Poruḷ* and *Iṉpam* were already in the *Caṅkam* picture as "based on *Aṟam*" (*Puṟam* 31) and in the same order, *Aṟam, Poruḷ, Iṉpam* (*Puṟam* 28) as in the Sanskrit picture of life-*Dharma, Arthā* and *Kāmā*. The fourth in Sanskrit, *mōkshā*, is the ancient Tamil *vīṭu* (Home), but is not to be seen in the *Caṅkam* poetry itself. Is that why Tiruvaḷḷuvar has omitted *vīṭu*? Or is it because he was a Jain, and *vīṭu* does not come much into the Jain picture of after-life?

We see that Tiruvaḷḷuvar's *Aṟam, Poruḷ* and *Iṉpam* do have connection with *Dharma, Arthā* and *Kāmā*. But then, *Dharma* in the Sanskrit is clearly related to the division of the people into four castes and the duties allotted to them. No *Dharma* without *varṇa*! So, we will have to get into the depths of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, to see what direction the section on *Aṟam* is taking. The whole book consists of 1,330 verses or couplets. This is broadly divided into *Aṟam, Poruḷ* and *Iṉpam*, as we have seen. *Aṟam* has three hundred and eighty verses; *Poruḷ*, seven hundred; and *Iṉpam*, which Tiruvaḷḷuvar calls *Kāmam*, two hundred and fifty.

2. *Aṟam* or Righteousness

Tiruvaḷḷuvar's Pāyiram or Introduction included in Section I on *Aṟam* consists of forty verses; ten, for the invocation; ten, in praise of rain; ten, on the glory of ascetics; and another ten, on "emphasizing the need for *Aṟam*." Does not look very promising, and there is even a suggestion of confusion of topics. But we shall forget that when we get to the poems.

So, the first ten are an invocation.

The very first verse:

> "Just as the letter Ā is the beginning of all letters, God is the beginning of the Universe."

Here he calls God, *Ātipakavaṉ* meaning "God Who is the Beginning". Both words are adopted from the Sanskrit. It could be rendered: "In-the-beginning-God." Incidentally, these are the first four words in *the Bible*. (A.V).

The second verse:

> "What is the use of learning if they do not worship the good feet of Him of the pure knowledge?"

The third verse:

> "Those who cling to the glorious feet of Him who walked upon the flowers, shall live long in this world."

The idea of God walking on the flowers is taken from Jainism.

Next: "To those who attain the feet of Him who has neither Desire nor the want of Desire, there is no suffering at any time". Again, a Jain conception of God, who is neither minus nor plus, though we must ask how do we relate that to a God who walked on the flowers, and who has a personality if He is to be held by the feet, by His worshippers.

Verse five:

> "Neither good deeds nor bad, that touch the darkness, can reach those who grasp the meaningful fame of God."

"Neither good deeds nor bad!" So, both "touch" the "darkness". Jain outright.

Verse six:

> "Those, who abide by the truthful direction of life of Him who burnt down the five senses, will live long." Jain again. But what will life mean for one whose five senses are "burnt down"? O the Jains! They are impossible!

Verse eight:

> "Except for those who have attained the feet of Him of the refreshing qualities, who is the sea of Righteousness, it is not possible to swim across the other seas." It must be mentioned that the word for the personality in the first half of the verse is identical with the word for "Brahmin" in *Caṅkam* literature: (*Antaṇaṉ*), "Him of the refreshing qualities." Tiruvaḷḷuvar has taken the word out of its common association and used it for "Him who is the sea of Righteousness."

Verse nine:

> "No use in the senses with no direction, for the head that will not bow at the feet of Him with the eight qualities." What the eight qualities are, we must ask the Jains. They seem to be the attributes of Aṟhat, a Jain Teertankara, later deified.

Verse ten:

> "These will swim across the great sea of birth, but those, who do not attain to the feet of God, will not."

The ideas are explicit. They stem from Jain theology. And Tiruvaḷḷuvar cannot be blamed if he was a Jain. Only, we are happy that his God seems to be open to everybody and there are absolutely no restrictions of caste or community.

Now, so much of patient study need not have been spent on Tiruvaḷḷuvar's religion if it had not been for his standing with the Tamils. He is a giant and we do not question that. But then, every religious clan in Tamilnad would like to lay claim on him as their private property. Hence it is just as well if at the outset we fix where he belongs. No Christian, that is clear. Nor Hindu, that also must be acknowledged. His calling God "Antaṇaṉ" does not incline him to Brahminism. It only shows the ancient Tamil associations of the word. Vaḷḷuvar is a Jain, but, at the same time, he has many things to say, of value to everybody.

Strange, that the chapter on God should be followed by the chapter on Rainfall. So, from God, Tiruvaḷḷuvar moves on to the material source of life—water. Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ, another Jain (the "Recluse - Prince") who wrote the *Cilappatikāram*, opens his work straightaway with praise of rain: "We praise the great cloud, we praise the great cloud!" he shouts, almost as though identifying the cloud with God. So, there's a Jain tendency again, to exalt the place of rain in human life, almost to the place of God. Tiruvaḷḷuvar does not exactly worship Rain, but clearly he considers it as being next only to God in the productivity of life.

So, "because of the cloud the world goes on." Hence, it is right to recognize it as "nectar" (divine). But the second verse in this section fairly catches one laughing! We are tickled.

tupparkku- tuppāya tuppākkit- tuppārkkut-
tuppāya tū-um maḻai.

Just a jugglery of sound, wherein the poet is driving at a bit of fun with the reader. He means here that the rain not only creates good food for the feeder, but is in itself food. And he continues with what will happen if there is no rainfall. Hunger. No plough. Cannot see the "heads" of green grass. Even the sea will shrink. No grand offerings to the gods. Is Tiruvaḷḷuvar suggesting a plus-point for the *pūja*, a purely Hindu mode of worship? One should think that he is hinting at all the activities of life that would be stilled if it did not rain. "No giving, no doing penance even." Without rain, says Tiruvaḷḷuvar, nothing could survive in this world. Which point nobody is going to question anyway.

The third chapter is meant to extol the role of the ascetic. Just a warning here; It's not safe to be guided by the commentators. They were later off-shoots of the literature, but they were themselves subject to other social factors, entirely foreign to Jainism. Jainism itself would have been a sort of natural revolt to Brahminism as it appeared first on the northern horizon, but what do we have to say of the comments by one Parimēlaḻakar, ("the beautiful one on the horse") on the very first verse of this chapter?

Tiruvaḷḷuvar's verse simply means "The greatness of those who have abandoned normal life, is what the great writings of those who desire real greatness, finally come to." Even the *Kuṟaḷ* ! But this is what Parimēlaḻakar has to say, among other and really confusing things: "*Aṟam* (Righteousness) will grow if people live without swerving, each one, from the duties prescribed by his own *varṇa* (caste, from Maṉu's four-caste theory!). When *Aṟam* grows, sin will wane; when sin wanes, ignorance will depart" etc., etc. Whatever is all this, except a deliberate brain-washing, quite uncalled-for in a commentary on the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*? Here it's not just a question of looking askance at a commentator's dependability. It is confronting a commentator of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, with the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* itself. And Parimēlaḻakar (13th century) is a very famous commentator, as famous as Naccinārkiniyar.

Well, Tiruvaḷḷuvar knew Hindu mythology for his purpose (verse 25).

"Indra, king of the wide heavens, is "ample witness" of the powers of those who have controlled the five senses." A reference to the mythical story of a disgraceful Indra, king of the gods—who lusted after Ahalya, wife of a Rishi,

who thereupon cursed him to bear the symbol of his lust all over his body. No recommendation of Indra, or Hinduism, that! Indra is "ample witness" of the powers of asceticism! Tiruvaḷḷuvar is lashing out at a story from Hindu mythology with fierce irony.

The outstanding commentators on the ancient literature are, nearly all, Brahmins. They see life, and literature, with eyes jaundiced by Maṉudharma. They cannot help interpreting straight, simple things in the light of a life that they have been accustomed to. The ancient literature came to their hands through palmyrah leaf-cuttings on which the words were engraven with a metal style.[2] The ancient libraries would have stocked, not books of paper, but sets of palmyrah-leaf cuttings. Most of them would have been preserved under the vigilance and protection of the seats of power, whatever they were. As the power passed to the Brahmins, who were recognised as scholars too, these precious ancient books would have been freely accessible to them, and, yes, to the other privileged classes, but not to the ordinary man. Thank goodness, they don't seem to have tampered with the originals, but they have certainly developed a knack for interpreting things in ways favourable for the uplift of their very own charmed circle. The great change would come much later, with paper, the printing press, education, and other factors that brought these books within easy reach of the commoner. But in the interim we will have to face a great deal of now incredible observations made down the years in the light of Maṉudharma. We have to thank the commentators, though, for making the texts intelligible. Perhaps the best thing to do, under the circumstances, is to ignore their Maṉu-based observations, except in the event of direct confrontation.

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2. The palmyrah trees have been a feature of the Tamil landscape from *Caṅkam* times. We do not indeed see there the palmyrah jaggery of later times, but *kaḷ* (liquor) was used very freely by the ancient warriors, and the delicious palmyrah juice (toddy) would have been one source of the *kaḷ*. Jaggery, which is now called *karuppaṭṭy*, is just a derivative of *karumpukkaṭṭi* or sugarcane blocks. But the point here is, one real service and yes, a great service,—that the palmyrah tree seems to have rendered to the ancient Tamils, was the production of its strong durable leaves,-possibly they were seasoned too,— on which the scholars and poets could inscribe their words.

Some of Valḷuvar's verses in this section, that could be used as quotable quotes:

"Those who do great things are great; the small ones
cannot do great deeds." (v. 26)

Again, "Taste, light, touch, sound and smell-these five—
In the differentiations therein exists this world." (v. 27)

Again, "The greatness of those persons with expressive words—
in this world,
It will reveal the hidden word." (v. 28)

Again, "The anger of those who stand on the heights of goodness
Cannot be borne a moment." (v. 29)

And then, there is another reference to Antaṇās-the word for Brahmins. Valḷuvar seems to be asking, "Who are the Antaṇās?", since the definition of Brahminhood seems to be very much in requisition in his time. No, not the uppermost class of society. Not the priests of Hinduism (the word "Hindu" is as yet unknown). Maṉu has nothing to do with it. The word "Antaṇās" does not specify the Brahmins, although it had been freely used for them in the ancient literature, because the Brahmins were expected to have the "refreshing qualities." Then, who are the Antaṇās? Tiruvaḷḷuvar says, (verse 30)

"The Antaṇās are the righteous ones - because towards every life,
They walk in courteous grace."

Obviously, Tiruvaḷḷuvar is thinking of the Jain ascetics, who do not injure any life. The Jains were professed vegetarians, and they did not recognise communal differences. It was a Jain poet who wrote "All people are my people." Valḷuvar's couplet is a very inconvenient challenge to those Tamil Brahmins who insist on their hierarchical superiority and who would yet claim that Tiruvaḷḷuvar was a Hindu. Tiruvaḷḷuvar's was a definition, not of Brahmins, but of the Antaṇās. The pity of it is that the kings did not recognise the difference, or rather, were not allowed to, by the Brahmins.

The fourth chapter is "Emphasizing the need for *Aṟam* or righteousness.'

Verse 31: "For him who is strong through *Aṟam*, it will give glory
and riches."

Verse 32: "No greater power than *Aṟam*: nothing worse than forgetting it;"

Verse 34: "To be spotless in mind is all that is *Aṟam*: All the rest is of the nature of meaningless noise."

Just a look at the first line and then at the first part of one of the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Verse 35: "*Aṟam* condemns and does away with these four: Envy, lust, anger, and hurting words." Definitely! But then, one has to yield to the pressure of *Aṟam*.

Verse 36: "Do *Aṟam* without thinking, "I shall see later." When you die, it will be a deathless companion."

Verse 39: "*Iṉpam* is what comes through *Aṟam*. All the rest is not of it, nor does it have fame."

What a use of the word *Iṉpam*! Maybe for the first time in Tamil, the word *Iṉpam* is used to mean simply, "Joy" - not *Kāmam*. Later, Tiruvaḷḷuvar will do a right-about-turn with *Kāmam* too.

And so, here is the end of the general introduction to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. God, rain, asceticism and *Aṟam* - in that order. One would have expected the order to be slightly different, but then, one must not presume to dictate to Tiruvaḷḷuvar. There is also the question if the order of the couplets has been tampered with by the commentators. It does not look like it, though.

The general introduction to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* leads us on to the section on *Illaṟam* and *Tuṟavaṟam*—Home life and Ascetic life, (followed by a chapter on fate). For the benefit of those who would base this division on the Sanskrit divisions of life, one must remember that the Sanskrit divides life, (for the people who matter, for all people don't, apparently) into four—*Brahmacchariya, Grihastha, Vānaprasthā* and *Sanyāsā*. All four are just supposed divisions of the life of the same man, though we do not know of a single instance that would go neatly and regularly through this process. So, the Sanskrit prescription doesn't seem to work out, for all that it is made so much of. And Tiruvaḷḷuvar does not prescribe *Illaṟam* and *Tuṟavaṟam* for the same man. The householder is a householder, and the ascetic is an ascetic. They are just two types of people that

Tiruvaḷḷuvar came across in his society—a Jain society, which, from its over-emphasis on asceticism and forbearance, would tend to look down on Woman and all that is normally associated with her. Deliberately Tiruvaḷḷuvar gives the precedence to the householder, making so much of it that he just couldn't make more. But then that is a persisting trait with this poet - to take his stand to the verge of excess, not just Keats' "fine excess."

Now who is this householder? He who is a "help" "in the good way", of those three who are "naturally" associated with him. And who those three are, he proceeds to explain in the very next couplet - "Those who have given up the world (ascetics), those who have nothing to enjoy (the poor), and those who die (apparently, there are duties to be done for the dying, differing with different religions). To them, says the poet, the householder is a helper. The word "helper" is in verses 1 and 2. Those three naturally associated with the householder, find a "helper" in him (verse 1) And the implications of the "three" are clearly brought out in verse 2. What doubt is there about the meaning of the word "three"? What call was there for the commentator to view the "three" as the *Brahmacchārya*, the *Vānaprasthā* and *Sanyāsā*? And much merit there would be in leaving the world, if the householders were enjoined to seek out the ascetics and "help" them! The ascetics would be eating of the fat and drinking of the sweet! No, no, the householder is simply expected to "help" the needy folk who come to his door, whether ascetic or beggar, and also to see that the dying are not left uncared-for.

Now, his other "prime" duties? To care for the "five"—"those in the south (the abode of the dead forefathers), God, guests, kindred and, finally, self." The first three were "naturally" associated with him. The latter five would not come into his purview unless he was duty-conscious.

Verse 44 tells the householder that he need not be afraid of any day in the walk of life if he should feed with an eye on "blame". The poet's word "blame" is rendered by the commentator as "sin", a word naturally and freely used by him, here as well as elsewhere.

The next is a beautiful couplet, often quoted. It has that quality which the Rev. Popley commends in the *Kuṟaḷ*. It just shows the value of Home-life.

"If it has Love, and *Aṟam*, then home-life
Has character, and is its own reward."

Of course there is the "If"

Verse 46: "If *Aṟam* is done in the home-life, what need to go
To the way without?" A reference to the ascetic life.

O no, the householder, if he sticks to *Aṟam* has nothing to gain by going to *Vānaprasthā* and *Sanyāsā*. Not *after* home-life. And so you can connect this verse, verse 46, with verse 42 - where the poet speaks of the three who are "naturally" associated with the householder. Now, how do you interpret the "three" as *Brahmacchārya, Vānaprasthā*, and *Sanyāsā*? The "three" are, obviously, "the ascetics, the poor, and the dying." From Jain philosophy, not the Hindu. You don't need here to go to *Vānaprasthā* after *Grhasthā*. Ask Tiruvaḷḷuvar. Why, "those who lead the home-life are supreme among those who strive." And home-life, according to the Righteous Way, needs greater patience than the life of the ascetics. And then, "What you call the Right Way of life is nothing but home-life." Again, he who lives this life in this world will be placed "among the gods who dwell in the heavens!" So, this chapter is on home-life, for its own sake: *Vānaprasthā* and *Sanyāsā* belong to Brahmindom.

But the next chapter is on the "Beauty of Life's Companion." One remembers the word "helpmate" used for "wife" in the *Authorised Version of the Bible*. The *Vāḻkkaittuṇai* is exactly that. "Life's Companion" includes the sense of "helpmate". The poet next proceeds to declare that if one's wife is not "glorious" in herself, whatever other glories his home might have, they are nullified. Five of the ten verses from this chapter are often-quoted couplets, belonging to that group which the Rev. Popley has commended.

They are

Verse 54: "What is there greater than Woman? - if she has the
strength of chastity."

Well, there is the "If."

Verse 55: "She does not worship God; she worships her husband
on rising from bed. If she commands, the rain will fall."

Verse 56: "She protects herself; she cares for the man who took her;
she guards
The noble words; she will not give up."

That is, Woman. The word for Woman here, is *peṇ*— "she who is desired."

Verse 57: "Where's the use in guarding them? Above all
The best protection for women is their own fullness
(chastity)."

Verse 60: "The glory of Home is the glory of the Woman; the ornament thereof is the bringing forth of good children."

Again and again, these verses are repeated in Tamilnad. They are catchy in their very simplicity. But we need to take a closer look at them, though we will have to flounder through his smart and sparkling words, because of the language-problem.

Tiruvaḷḷuvar uses the word *Maṉai*, "Home", as well as "Il" - Home again - to mean the Wife - "She of the Home". The word *maṉaivi* is of later coinage, although *maṉaiyāḷ* is already there in *Caṅkam* poetry. *Maṉaimāṭci* is used in verse 60, which lays down the rule for the glory of Home-life. It rests on the character of the Woman. But then, if the woman has the strength of chastity (he does not mean celibacy but means spotless love for the husband), the poet asks, what is greater than Woman? And so, if the woman idolises her husband and does not worship God, if she commands, the rains will fall. The rains, being the very source of life itself, are at the command of the woman who loves her husband and puts nobody-not even God, above him. We might add a question-mark, but then we have already pointed out that it is a general characteristic of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's to drive a point almost to excess when he really wants to drive it home. No, there is not the least suggestion here of the inferiority of the woman though there might be of emotional subordination. But then, it is in this subordination that the woman exalts herself. An apparent paradox!

And, Woman has her very special duties. She guards herself. She is not to look for protection elsewhere. Her own attitude to herself, to her husband, and to others, gives her the best protection from lecherous eyes. Next, she cares for her husband. There is a suggestion of protection, included in this care, from his leaving her sheltering wings to other women. A husband will not easily go astray from a wife who really loves and adores him. (We find something like this in *Kalittokai* 39). Another observation: "She has to guard her words". She is not to be a tattler. Her words will be of great worth; hence she has to guard them (watch them) carefully. And she is "not to give up!" There will be battles. What a womanhood! In two lines, (v. 56) which one would love to repeat again and again.

In the next verse he gives special attention to one aspect of womanhood, which is later to deify, and idolise, Woman. Her chastity, in other words, her not being touched, defiled, by the lecherous world. Here, the prime responsibility rests with her. What protection can be afforded her, asks the poet, by imprisoning her? The greatest protection that can be afforded her is by her own self-control.

Chapter Seven is devoted to "Bringing up children". Here again there are five couplets that are in common use. Verses 64, 66, 67, 69 and 70 - for the same reason. The simpler, the sweeter. But there are other verses that demand attention. In verse 62, the poet says, "Evil will not hurt you during the seven births (A Jain concept), if you have brought forth children of character untouched by blame." So, you are safe for seven births if you have children without blame. But if you cannot be touched by evil, why the births at all?

Again, one's wealth is one's children-one eyes that a bit dubiously, since one's wealth also comes through hard work, which the poet seems to have ignored here. But then he is speaking of the importance of children. So he must, true to type, speak as though nothing else mattered for the nonce.

Verse 68: "To all those who live in this world, it is sweet when one's children are wiser still."

May be that could be questioned by a man of the world! Now for the five precious hits:

Verse 64: "Sweeter than nectar is the gruel stirred by the little hands of one's children."

"Gruel", by the way, is indicative of poverty. So even a poor man can have the joy of his little ones sharing his poor fare.

Verse 65: "The touch of children is joy to the body; and for the rest, Their words are joy to the ear."

Iṉpam is the word used here for joy.

Verse 66: "The flute is sweet, the harp is sweet, say those, who've never heard the pretty prattle of their little ones".[3]

The word used for "harp" here is *yāḻ* - a word with which no student of ancient Tamil literature can be unfamiliar.

3. Rev. Popley's translation of the *Kuṟaḷ*. See *The Sacred Kuṟaḷ*, p. 34.

Verse 67: "The greatest good that a father can bestow on his son is to help him to be seated prominently in an assembly."

Verse 69: "More than at the time when she brought him forth, the mother will rejoice when she hears that her son is a great man."

Verse 70: "The greatest thing that a son can do for his father is to make people ask "What penance has the father done?" (to beget such a son?) Incidentally that brings out the faith of the Tamils (Jain and non-Jain) that penance can work wonders in this life, and this faith is shared with the non-Dravidians also.

The eighth chapter is on Love - in the sense of *aṉbu*, and not *iṉbam*. And this is in the section on Home-life. The first verse:

"Any barricade to Love? The tears of those who
love, will speak aloud."

The second:

"The loveless ones keep all to themselves: as for the loving ones, Their very bones belong to others."

The third:

"This is what connects with Love: The connection
That life has with bones."

Verse 74: "Love attracts: its offspring
Is unmeasured friendship."

Verse 75: "The way that Love provides, is splendour
Of rejoicing, even in this world.

Verse 76: "The ignorant ones state that Love is the support of righteousness; why, it is the very Strength of fighting." But, how is that?

Verse 77: "*Aṟam* will burn out whatever is without Love, as the Sun will burn out that without bones. This couplet could be examined in detail:

eṉpil	*ataṉai*	*veyil pōla-k-*	*kāyumē*
the bone-less	thing,	the sun likewise	burns out
aṉpil	*ataṉai*	*aṟam!*	
the love-less	thing,	dharma!	

The poem fits into Popley's description. We can repeat it again and again with pleasure. Now this is about what *Aṟam*, or, a better known word, *Dharma* or righteousness will do to a loveless person. We notice that the neuter gender is used for the loveless one. And, *Aṟam* is a very abstract thing. But we see how the poet brings it into the concrete world. "The sun burns out the boneless thing," i.e., the worm, and that's what *Aṟam* will do to a loveless person.

Such a poem, frankly, openly, about righteousness, will naturally draw us towards the Ten Commandments. But we observe that the right way of living is there like plain, formidable granite. *The New Testament* presents them all together in two positive Commandments. Again, just straight and simple. No furnishings. Not that *the Bible* rules out figurative language. What of the Parables? And, the prophets, and Solomon, (see the Song of Songs) do use figurative language for spiritual musings. And, there is no reason why Tiruvaḷḷuvar should not use it too. The depths of his philosophical utterances are generally highlighted by brief pictorial representations, somewhat of *Caṅkam* origin, but made the more enjoyable by his very simple, but not easily attainable, word music. So,

Verse 77: *Eṉpil ataṉai veyil pōlak - kāyumē*
aṉpil ataṉai aṟam!

It turns out to be a very lovely piece - and a very precious one.

Verse 78: "To live in a home without Love, is to be like a tree on the hard ground, trying to put forth buds."

Verse 79: "To those who do not have the organ of Love within, what is the use of all their external organs?"

Verse 80: "Love is the life of the body; to those who do not have it, the body is just bones covered with skin."

You could hardly think of all this as an ordinary sermon. There is force, or rather, there is power, in Tiruvaḷḷuvar's preaching.

Now we pass on to chapter nine, his section on "Receiving guests".

The first verse: "The meaning of running a home lies in receiving guests and cultivating their society."

Verse 82: "Feasting, with the guest waiting outside— that's not to be wished for, even if it were medicine that confers immortality."

Verse 83: "The life of one who daily cares for his incoming guests, will never be ruined by poverty," Doesn't sound like commonsense, that!

Verse 84: Here's a reference to Lakshmi! By a Jain poet! To be sure there will be folks who connect Tiruvaḷḷuvar here with Brahminism, or "Hinduism" as it comes to be called later. Lakshmi is known as the goddess of prosperity. Of course she cannot be called Lakshmi in *Centamiḻ*, in which the poet was obviously well schooled. She would have to be called Ilakkumi. But the poet does not use the name. He simply calls her "The Beautiful Lady." No, Tiruvaḷḷuvar was not worshipping any deity here. He was simply referring to her as a symbol of prosperity. And here is the poem:

"With joy of heart the Beautiful Lady indwells
The home where guests are hospitably entertained with pleasant face."

The word for "pleasant face" here is the same that is used for the king, in *Neṭunalvāṭai*, who goes round the camp inspecting his wounded soldiers - "Mukaṉ Amarntu", - one of the rare contexts where the word Mukam appears for "face" in *Caṅkam* poetry. Well, at least Tiruvaḷḷuvar knew that the symbol of prosperity in Tamilnad was a Beautiful Lady.

Verse 85: "Any need to put by the corn for seed," asks the poet, "in the land where the host first feasts the guest and then feeds on what is left"?[4]

4. *Puṟam* 227 by one Mācāttaṉār. (refers to the use of the seed for food during famine-time).

So, want will be unknown in a home where the guests are hospitably entertained. Just a pious wish? Or a superstition? Something like it, linking generosity with resulting abundance. Well, famine is not to touch a large-hearted man, according to Tiruvaḷḷuvar. We can take it or challenge it!

Verse 86: "He is a great joy to those who dwell in heaven, who cared for the guest who has left, and looks for the guest who arrives."

And in the next two pieces there is a reference to *vēḷvis*, which certainly does not argue Tiruvaḷḷuvar to be a Brahmin. He calls hospitality a *vēḷvi* or sacrifice. That is the religious sacrifice that Tiruvaḷḷuvar recognizes! The idea of *vēḷvi* was well-known even in the *Caṅkam Age*, but there it was invariably connected with Brahmins.

The last poem in this series is also one of the loveliest and most commonly known, from the whole of the *Tirukkuṛaḷ*.

> "*mōppak kuḻaiyum aṇiccam mukamtirintu*
> *nōkkak kuḻaiyum viruntu*".

The *aṇiccam* is a flower so delicate that if you just smell it, it will fade and droop. And *viruntu*, the guest has such delicate sensibilities that if there is a slight change of expression in the host's face he will droop likewise. A warning, that the host must be careful and watch out for the slightest weakening of hospitality.

Chapter ten is "the Speaking of Sweet Words"

The first verse: "The sweet words of the lips of those who have seen the valuable riches, are mixed with affection and are without deceit."

Want to know the Commentator's interpretation? For *cemporuḷ kaṇṭār* - "To those who have seen the valuable riches," - he explains, "To the hearts of those who have grasped the truth, everything is good or beautiful.' No. Tiruvaḷḷuvar would never say, or imply, that. Everything is not good or beautiful—to anybody, and certainly not to those who have grasped the truth! Commentators had best be left alone. In such cases, that is. But we have to listen to Tiruvaḷḷuvar! For, if one has seen God, who is goodness as well as "Riches", then his utterances are mixed with sweet words and are without deceit. That is what Tiruvaḷḷuvar

says. And the Tamil sage is correct. We must remember that he is here speaking of the householder.

"Better", continues the sage, "is it to be a man with a pleasant face with sweet words, than one who gives generously from a full heart." Comparisons are odious, but Tiruvaḷḷuvar here is just keeping true to his style and taking his point to what appears to us to be excess.

Next, "Looking from a pleasant face, and yielding sweet words from the heart, is *Aṟam*." Is that definition of *Aṟam* really complete, we ask. Of course it emphasizes the need for sweet words, along with a pleasant face. And we can recognize *Aṟam* behind them and in them, not quite as them.

The next couplet declares that, for those who speak sweetly to everyone, so as to give pleasure, the pain of hunger through poverty will be nullified. A man needs no other ornament, says another verse. Sweet words, courtesy—these are the main points in this chapter. Finally, to speak harshly, when there are sweet words available, is like "plucking the unripe, while there are ripe fruits to be had."

The next Chapter is on Gratitude. Two of these verses are old familiar faces to the Tamil. Verses 108 and 110. Easy to dismiss their content as platitudes, but not easy to forget the poems themselves.

naṉṟi maṟappatu naṉṟaṉṟu naṉṟallatu
aṉṟē maṟappatu naṉṟu

"Not good to forget a benefit, but, what is not good, it's good to forget on that very day."

ennaṉṟi koṉṟārkkum uyvuṇṭām uyvillai
ceynaṉṟi koṉṟa makaṟkku

"There's deliverance for any who killed any good, but no deliverance ever
For those who have killed Gratitude."

In Chapter 12, on Impartiality, occurs that stanza over which Tyākarāja Ceṭṭiyār quarrelled with an enthusiast for rhyme.

Verse 114: *takkār takavilar eṉpatu avaravar*
eccattāṟ kāṇap paṭum

"Eccam" means that which is left behind." The word substituted for *eccattāl* was *makkaḷāl*) (children), obviously an improvement in rhyme but inflicting a loss in meaning. "That which is left behind" involves a lot more than the rhyming word "makkaḷ." It's not just children, or good children, that a good man leaves behind!

Verse 115: The ornament of the noble one is "not inclining" or being partial.

Verse 116: "Let him whose heart does what is partial, know that he will be ruined."

Verse 120: A word for the merchant! He should care for his profession, and "do to others as he would do to himself." That's the Golden Rule, and in the Book of the Tamil Jains.

The chapter on Self-control starts with a warning. "While self-control will take one to live with the gods, want of it will throw him into utter darkness." Is Hell implied here, we ask.

The control of the "five" senses in one, like the body of the tortoise, provides a refuge in the Seven Births! And this precept, we find, is not for the ascetic, but the householder in the *Illam* or home.

Versel27: He proceeds to the control of the tongue:

"Whatever you guard or not, guard the tongue; if not,
You'll rue it, touched by blame from words."

Quite a well-known piece:

yākāvārā yiṉum nākākka kāvākkāl
cōkāppar collilukkup paṭṭu

Even more well-known is verse 129:

"The wound caused by the flame will heal: not so
The scar burnt by the tongue."

tīyiṉāl cuṭṭapuṇ uḷḷārum āṟātē
nāviṉāl cuṭṭa vaṭu

Next is the chapter on Good Conduct, *Oḻukkam.*

All that Tiruvaḷḷuvar has said so far, would apply to Good Conduct! *Aṟam* and *Oḻukkam* overlap. *Aṟam* is righteousness, an abstract quality. *Oḻukkam* or good conduct is just that quality in action. And many of the *Kuṟaḷ* chapters do overlap.

"Good conduct gives greatness; hence,
Good conduct is (to be) cherished more dearly than life."

Verse 133: says, "Good conduct gives nobility, base birth
is baseness of conduct."

The commntator, who can never get away from his *Varṇas*, declares that, "Even if one is born in a low caste, if he conducts himself nobly, his caste becomes noble. If one born in a high caste behaves badly, he sinks into a low caste." Now that is not quite the *Varṇāsrama*, though a Brahmin says that. In the *Varṇāsrama*, a Brahmin remains a Brahmin, and a Sudra remains a Sudra. Different rules of conduct are prescribed for different castes. But Tiruvaḷḷuvar's code of righteousness and rules of conduct apply to all people. Your conduct, not your birth, decides your social status. And one can sniff out Jain-Hindu differences when Tiruvaḷḷuvar reminds us "Even if a Brahmin forgets his books, (the *Vēdas*) he can learn them again; but if his conduct is ignoble, his birth is demeaned." Doesn't Tiruvaḷḷuvar suggest to the Brahmin that his conduct is more important than his *Vēdas*? He goes on to say that (verse 135) "Greatness will not come to the man of base conduct, any more than power comes to the envious man." So with him, character is the concern, not caste.

Verse 137: "Through good conduct one attains greatness; through bad
one gets untold blame."

Greatness, not change of caste. Blame, not change of caste.

Verse 138: "Good conduct is the seed of thankfulness; bad,
Forever gives sorrow."

Verse 139: "For men of good conduct, it's not possible
Even by mistake to speak evil."

Now wouldn't that go into the chapter on "Sweet words"? Chapters do overlap at times

Verse 140: "They move along with the world, who, having learnt much,
Have learnt nothing, know nothing."

This poet doesn't believe in doing as Romans do if you are in Rome!

And so on, grows the list of the householder's good qualities: patience, freedom from tale-bearing, not speaking useless words, fear of evil deeds, generosity, etc., etc. Two chapters are of special interest-on not desiring another man's wife, and that on Fame, "the last weakness," of the Tamils. That is not to say that we are not arrested by certain outstanding verses elsewhere for some reason or other. The image of Patience, for instance, in verse 151 - "like the Earth that bears with those who break her."

Verse 168: That powerful verse on Jealousy:

"*aḻukkā ṟeṉa orupāvi tiruceṟṟut*
tīyuḻi uyttu viṭum"

"That sinner called Jealousy, will destroy one's wealth and fling one into the fire (of hell)".

Jealousy has got here a personality, and is not just a vague personification.

Verse 179: Carries a reference to Tirumakaḷ. Tirumakaḷ is the Tamil word for Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity, with which image Tiruvaḷḷuvar was familiar. His image however, stops with Tiru- (wealth). There's no hint of idol-worship. Then, "Worse than begging is feeding alone"—V. 229.

And now, to the special chapter. Chapter XV, beginning with verse 141, on "not desiring another man's wife." The word for "Wife" is "il" meaning "home", but actually implying "she of the home"—the wife. "Home" for the man is contained in the "wife", and so the man who looks with desire at another man's Home is an "idiot".

"The idiocy of walking in desire of another man's wife," says Tiruvaḷḷuvar, "cannot be found, in this world, in those who have seen the riches of *Aṟam.*" And here, the word for *Illāḷ* is explained as "possession" - "another man's possession." The word "possession" is declined here in the feminine gender, leaving no doubt about Woman's being considered the husband's "possession". The commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife," along with

"thy neighbour's house," "his man-servant," "his maidservant," "his ox" etc., etc., obviously includes the wife in the list of a man's possessions, and whoever is protesting against Tiruvaḷḷuvar's observation is also protesting against that particular commandment.

The second verse, verse 142 of the *Kuṟaḷ*, goes thus: "Of all those who stand outside *Aṟam*, there is no one who is such a fool as he who stands outside his neighbour's door"—(for the obvious purpose of defiling the neighbour's wife.) Now, men have liaisons with other womenfolk (*Marutam*), and they are standing outside *Aṟam*. But the man who goes to his neighbour's wife is the most foolish of all such fools. Well, Solomon says as much.

Verse 143: "Those who wrong the trusting friends
Are as good as dead."

Verse 144: "He who enters another's home,
However great he might be, what is going to happen to him?"

Verse 145: "He who breaks a home thinking it easy,
Will get the blame that will stand forever."

Verse 147: "He who does not desire the womanhood of his neighbour's wife, is the one who observes *Aṟam* (*Dharma*) and keeps the home-life."

Verse 148: "The great manhood that does not look at another's home (wife) - isn't that *Aṟam*, with the good conduct?"

Verse 149: "Who are those worthy of the good? In this world surrounded by the fearful sea, those who do not lean on the shoulder of her who belongs to the neighbour!"

Here's adultery, such as the "Old Testament" conceives it. David had several wives. But it was when he wronged his faithful servant Uriah, in the affair with Bathsheba, that judgment struck him. The ideal home, the normal home, in Tamilnad, of course, as in the "Old Testament", has only the "she of the home." What of the man who turns aside to prostitutes? Tiruvaḷḷuvar has come down hard on that aspect of infidelity to the home, in his chapter on "Undisciplined Women." But there, it seems, the responsibility rests with the woman. Significant, that Tiruvaḷḷuvar should have included that chapter in the

section on Kingship. But the chapter arrangement is perhaps not what Tiruvaḷḷuvar originally conceived.

One great danger to the home, then, one great wrong to the man, is the lecherous eye cast by another man on the "she of the home". No compromise there. No *Aṟam*, no *Dharma*, can excuse that. Of course, it is looked at from the point of view of a masculine society. For, Tiruvaḷḷuvar does not seem to be reacting here to the lecherous woman, without whose participation, mentally at least, there can be no adultery in action. He does recognize the responsibility of the married woman, (in the chapter on *Vāḷkkaittuṇai*) to protect herself from adulterous eyes. But here he is simply warning the man to take care not to look at another man's wife. That is the greatest wrong one man can do to another. But we have to hurry along, only remembering that Tiruvaḷḷuvar is himself all the way. Consistent. We come to Chapter 24. *Pukaḻ* (fame) is the last chapter on home-life. It begins with verse 231, which begins with "giving." The householder is enjoined to live "with the sweet reputation," "Icai" (the word for music also) for giving. "Without that, there is no profit in living." Well, Nakkīrar of the *Caṅkam Age* has said something like that!

And poem 236 is one of the most often-quoted of the *Kuṟaḷ*!

"*Tōṉṟiṉ pukaḻoṭu tōṉṟuka ahtilār*
tōṉṟaliṉ tōṉṟāmai naṉṟu"

"If you must appear, appear with fame; or else
Better not to appear than to appear."

"Appear," by the way, is a synonym for "being born. "If you must be born, be born with fame!" But then, how can you help being born? We'd better ask the sage that!

Now, we have to see what the poet means by Fame. He just means a good name, a name without blemish, a fragrant name, a name not stained by blame. O no, he does not mean the inflation of the ego, such as we meet with so often in the *Caṅkam*. But then, that was inevitable because of the host of sycophants surrounding the Tamil kings.

Well, at the end of the chapter on home-life we are confronted with what the commentator has to say about the poet's remark on home-life: "Herein we find included all that Maṉu and other books on *Aṟam* have to say on the subject

of *Illaṟam*." Now, wherein does Maṉu come in here? What an obsession with a Brahmin commentator! Can't he allow a Tamil poet's statements to pass without the seal of a caste-biassed moralist, entirely foreign to Tamil? After all, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, so far as language is concerned, has shown himself to be sternly, severely, Tamil. Quite like the Tamil purists of today! See the words he uses for Vishnu and Lakshmi. He uses other Sanskrit words also, but takes care to Tamilise them.

We do not make any claim for Tiruvaḷḷuvar just because he avoids Sanskrit. For one thing, he does not avoid Sanskrit. There are more Sanskrit words in the *Kuṟaḷ* than in the *Caṅkam*, as would be natural. But, he has taken great care to keep to the genius of the Tamil language and to be faithful to the standard phonology of Tamil. Would such a writer care for the questionable sentiments with which he came across in Sanskrit, when he had to say something strong on his own? Maṉu, inside the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*? Who dares say that today?[5]

As for the sentiments themselves, Vaḷḷuvar's are definitely not tainted with the four-caste system. Isn't this remark of the commentator's, a symptom of the systematic brainwashing that the Tamils were going to be subjected to, all down the ages? Parimēlaḻakar comes, in point of time, around eight centuries after Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

Now just a word here, about the part played by the English language, in exposing things that were supposed to be blacked out forever from the mainstream of the people. It was English that took the lead in revealing Tiruvaḷḷuvar's status as philosopher. Father Beschi came into Tamilnad to teach the gospel of Christ, and he found it worth his while to translate the *Kuṟaḷ* into Latin. But it did not stop there. Pope and Popley went on to try, we say, to try—to put the *Kuṟaḷ* into a language that could carry it over the world. And, yes, even today newspaper headlines[6] scream this sentiment from the Sanskrit Vēdas: "Do your allotted duty"! There was a time when the reader would have simply bowed his head. But now, he can ask the question: "Allotted? To whom? By whom?" Behind the answer stands the personality—not just that of Krishna, who is supposed to be saying that, but—of Maṉu, who divided people into four recognisable strata, with four clearly marked duties, not interchangeable. Maṉu

5. Surprisingly, such a statement is made in *Masterpieces of Indian Literature*, N.B.T., 1997, p. 1368.

6. *The Indian Express*, Madurai edition dated 02.09.1997.

has absolutely no place in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. And all this came out into the open, we must say, because of the English language. Thank you, Mr. Macaulay, for making English education compulsory! Without English, where would we have been?

We have left Home-life behind us, and are going on to the Ascetic life. Only, the commentator makes us pause a while here also. For, he is remarking that "the *Aṟam* of Asceticism means that one has completed one's home-life without a jolt, and for the purpose of attaining Heaven, and being afraid of rebirth, has to observe duly certain rules of *Aṟam*." So, he means that the ascetic life comes after home-life. In other words he is trying to rope the reader into the *Vānaprasthā* after *Grhasthā*. But, we ask, what has happened to the wife after Grhāsthā? Is she dead, or is she abandoned, leaving her husband no scope except *Vānaprasthā*, and after that *Sanyāsā*? In the genuine *Vāṉaprasthā* the man takes his wife with him into the woods! No trace of the wife, past or present, is to be found in Tiruvaḷḷuvar's ascetic life. It's a different kind of life altogether. The householder begins and ends as a householder. The ascetic begins and ends as an ascetic. The qualities and graces of the ascetic are just generalities with Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

As usual, it's not the sentiments alone, but the sentiments with the language in which they are couched, that arrest our attention.

Verse 243: "*Aruḷ cērnta neñciṉārk killai*
iruḷcērnta iṉṉā ulakam pukaḻ."

"No going to the world of darkness," says the poet, "for those whose hearts are filled with grace."

Verse. 244: "There's no fear for one's life, for those who care for all life and show grace to it."

Verse 247: "To those who have no grace, there's no world hereafter, just as to them without wealth there's no world here and now."

"*Aruḷillārk kavvulakam illai poruḷillārk*
kivvulakam illāki yaṅku."

Verse 250: "Let him who goes where the weak ones are, think of himself As confronting those who are stronger than he."

The next chapter is on "Refusing meat". Tiruvaḷḷuvar makes no compromise here with non-vegetarians. Christians might find it hard to accept a difference with Tiruvaḷḷuvar, but they have to. But why, Brahmins themselves seem to have been eating meat in the *Caṅkam* age! When Pāri remarked that Kapilar's hand was soft and flabby, the latter answered that it was no wonder, for Pāri had fed him fat on meat, while Pāri himself was occùpied with fighting. And, the Brahmins seem to have eaten the flesh of the fire-sacrifices, the *yāgās* or *hōmās*. They seem to have adopted vegetarianism later from the Jains, whose immense popularity was partly due to their asceticism. As for *the Bible*, one notes that, before Sin entered, mankind was purely vegetarian—there were no flesh-eaters, not even among the big cats! And only after the entry of Sin, meat was given, not just permitted to mankind. According to *the Bible*, refusing meat would not take away the sin inherent in man, and meat-eating by itself now is not a sin. But, according to Tiruvaḷḷuvar, killing to eat would be a capital offence. You can take that or challenge that. Nothing else to do with Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

Verse 251: "He, who, to fatten his own flesh, eats other flesh,
How can he command grace?"

Verse 252: "Those who do not care, cannot guard their wealth; so,
Those who eat flesh, cannot guard their grace."

Verse 253: "Like those who carry their weapons, the minds of those
who eat the flesh of a body will be settled on that alone."

And so on he goes, confirming, in verse 260, that "All life will worship, with folded hands, him who does not kill, and refuses meat!" So sure of that! But the people did have a special respect for the vegetarian, or rather, the ascetic, in those days. It accounted for the spread of Jainism and Buddhism. And later, Brahminism also absorbed the vegetarian cult to counter the hold of those two religions. Probably it was to the Brahmins' fire-sacrifices that Tiruvaḷḷuvar pointed critically in verse 259; "Better, than making a thousand *vēḷvis* with ghee, is refusing the meat of one animal whose life has been taken." But, more than the sentiment itself, it's the charm of the expression of the sentiment that laid hold on the Tamil mind.

Verse 259: "*Avicorin tāyiram vēṭṭalin naṉṟām*
uyircekuttu uṇāmai naṉṟu."

Verse 260: "*Kollāṉ pulālai maṟuttāṉaik kaikūppi*
ellā uyirum toḻum."

The next chapter, one should think, is the most important part of the ascetic life, for it speaks of *tavam* or penance. Now, how is this penance done? Yōgic practitioners would have a great deal to say on the subject. But here again the poet seems to be concerned only with generalities! Does he take it that his readers are familiar with the technicalities of *tavam* anyway, and he has only to remind them of the large generalities they are likely to forget? We are not any the wiser for these verses about the postures etc.; that the Yōgi would have to observe. Surely, the chapter on *tavam* should enlighten us on how *tavam* is to be practised! Any hocus-pocus involved? But, we have to have patience. The paintings of Tiruvaḷḷuvar show him in a typical Yōgic posture, which he himself doesn't seem to have prescribed! Shouldn't we see his definition of *tavam* first?

Verse 261: "Bearing with one's suffering, and not hurting anyone—this is the shape of *tavam*!" This definition is just a generalisation, bearing on the mind—and, not the posture of the body.

Poem 262: "And *tavam* is only for those who have it; if those who don't have it practise it, it would be disgraceful for them." So, all people cannot start off practising penance. You have to be naturally qualified for it.

What the qualification is, however, is not specified. Definitely, not one's community. Poem 263: "It looks like-doesn't it?-that others have forgotten to take to *tavam* because they are needed to help those who have given up the world." (Even the question is Tiruvaḷḷuvar's). And the "others," are obviously, the householders. The householder is required to look after the ascetic but what the ascetic is doing we are not told.

Poem 264 : "To destroy the enemy, and build up the friend—if required, the power will come through *tavam*." Must be a mighty power, that, but how does one get it working? Why doesn't the poet tell us something of the technicalities? Technicalities, please.

Poem 266: "It's the ascetics who really do their work; as for the others They injure themselves getting trapped in desire."

So, Desire is the villain of the piece.

Poem 267: "Those who perform penance in the hot hot suffering, will shine like the gold in the hot hot fire."

"*Cuṭaccuṭarum poṉpōl oḷiviṭum tuṉpam*
cuṭaccuṭa noṟkiṟ pavaṟku."

Poem 268: "He who has got his life without ego, him will all other mankind worship."

Poem 269: "Those who seek the power of *tavam* can leap over Death."

Poem 270: "The reason why there are many who have nothing, is that the ascetics are few, and many are those who do not practise asceticism."

All the ten poems of this chapter have been searched carefully to find out how *tavam* (in Sanskrit it would be *tapas*) is practised. What do we do with such a Tiruvaḷḷuvar, who so stubbornly refuses to enter into technicalities? Sire, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, you can really be impossible sometimes!

You raise expectations. You do not fulfil them. At what court should Your Worship be arragned? Of the externals of *tapas* all you tell us is that bald heads or shaggy heads do not matter. But, for all we know, there should be far more to the technicalities of *tapas*. Where shall we learn about the truth of the matter if not from you? All that you have told us is that the mind matters more than the posture!

And so, good-bye to *tapas!* Not, however, to the *tapaswin*. The hermit, or ascetic, continues to dominate the scene till verse 390. Misconduct is the theme. Misconduct, on the part of the hermits! So, they were all men.

Poem 271: "All the five elements will laugh within him who practises asceticism with a deceitful heart."

Poem 272: "How will a lofty stature help, when one's heart finds fault with one's self?"

Poem 273: "He who has no strength to control himself, if he takes on the shape of a strong one, (a hermit) would be like a cow wearing a leopard's skin and eating grass."

Poem 274: "To assume *tavam* and do wrong is to be like a hunter hiding behind the bushes and catching the birds."

But there's something pointedly interesting about poem 278: "Many are the men who move surreptitiously, with minds stained, but appear glorious, and wash themselves." This "washing" cannot refer to a Jain hermit. The Jains, especially the hermits, were known for not bathing. And it was Brahmins who were well-known for scrupulously washing themselves. And they were "many". So, they were not unknown in the immediate locality. Well, they kept their bodies clean, but their minds could be "stained." This poem does look like a direct hit at the Brahmins, although the commentator cautiously steers clear of the idea. He would! And the poet must have had considerable temerity to make such a statement as that in *Kuṟaḷ* 278. Jainism must have had a terrific moral, and intellectual, and, maybe, political, standing in his day, for such a verse to see the light. The wonder of it is that the tiny poem did not get tampered with later. Or, get lost.

We have to remember that Tiruvaḷḷuvar was not making a sweeping statement about all the Brahmins. He is just warning his readers of the presence of hypocrisy. "Many", not "all", is the word. They appear "glorious", but their minds are "stained." Only the word about "washing"—*nīrāṭal*! The image conjured up here is the person enjoying himself in the water—it makes us turn to look at the Brahmins. Tiruvaḷḷuvar's indictment. Like Christ's on the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It is said by M. Rāgavaiyaṅkār[7] that Vaḷḷuvar is the name of a drummer-community that was used to announce the king's orders. Another idea, from the same source: Vaḷḷuvaṉ seems to be the name for a king's officer. That would explain Tiruvaḷḷuvar's statements on Kingship. But, Rāgavaiyaṅkār suggests that the Vaḷḷuvars were a "low-class" community. Rāgavaiyaṅkār belongs to the twentieth century. Tiruvaḷḷuvar's social set-up, around the fourth century, was essentially a Jain one, in which there could have been no "low-class" or "high-class" as such. Hence both associations, the Vaḷḷuvar-clan, or the king's-office, are possible. And, they are immaterial.

An interlude. In the twentieth century, Sundaram Piḷḷai (author of the *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam*) has written, of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* : "Those who have learnt to perfection the scriptures that Vaḷḷuvar laid down—would they think of Maṉu's "one law for one caste?"

uḷḷuvarō maṉuvāti
oru kulattirk koru nīti ![8]

7. *Ārāiccittokuti*, p. 208, Pub: 1938.
8. Invocation, in *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam*.

So, the idea that Tiruvaḷḷuvar could not support Maṉu, has been growing down the centuries. But hardly anyone seems to have noted the sage's sharp criticism of that Brahministic cult that is a main feature of the Vēdic religion.

Hence, in poem 279, "By their actions you shall know them." Change the word "actions" to "fruits" and you have part of Matthew 7: 16 of the A.V. Now "actions" mean practically the same thing as "fruits." The poet is taking the arrow and the *yāḻ* to prove his point. The arrow looks straight and true, but—it kills! The *yāḻ*—yes, the *Caṅkam yāḻ* is still here—is bent, but it produces sweet music. Death is the fruit of the arrow, and the joy of the music is the fruit of the *yāḻ*. Hence,—through their actions you will recognize them. This is applied to the human being here, to the ascetic.

The poet does look, once, at the external appearance of the hermit. But that is in disapproval of the externals. Some of the hermits are clean-shaven, and some have long unkempt hair. "But no", says the sage, "you don't need to be shaven bald, or to grow long hair if you avoid what the world blames." By "the world", apparently, the poet signifies the good and great men of the world, whose opinions matter.

Well, we go on to the Eighth Commandment—"Thou shalt not steal". Christ identified the wrong action with the wrong desire, and the Tamil poet follows suit. Tiruvaḷḷuvar comes around four centuries after Christ, and Christian ideas seem to have leavened quite a few of his sayings. How they got in we cannot discern, but the trend is obvious. Then, the word, *kātal*, used for love in the *Caṅkam*, is here used for "wrong desire" of what belongs to others. And, granting that Tiruvaḷḷuvar is very much himself as always, we observe nothing else specially calling for notice here.

Chapter 30 is on "Truthfulness." The sage's definition of truthfulness is this:

"If you ask what is truthfulness, it is saying what has nothing to hurt in it." Now, that sounds more like "pleasant speech" than "truthfulness.' But the same sentiment is continued in the next verse no. 292.

"Even falsehood is in the place of truth if it will yield good without blemish." It's a paradox, but stated with his usual charm of words. Still, three pieces do stand out in this chapter from the usual run of his poetry. One is, poem 298.

> "Outer cleanliness comes through washing; inner- through truthfulness."

So again, that theme: one can wash and wash, and still be a villain. But then, this verse applies to humanity at large, as anyone may see.

But the two loveliest of these ten gems—they are all gems and no mistake—are nos. 293 and 299.

Take no. 293 first:

> "What your bosom knows, don't lie about. If you lie, your bosom itself will burn you out."

Now No. 299:

> "All lights are not lights, to the great ones. The light without falsehood, that alone is light!"

Now we come to Chapter 31—on Not getting Angry. He who controls his anger, what matter if he protects or does not protect its target?

Verse302: "Anger is evil when directed where it will not work. And where it will work (among the weak), nothing is more evil."

Verse 304: "Anger destroys the smile and the joy; what worse enemy than anger?"

Verse 305: "If you want to guard yourself, guard your anger; if you do not, anger will kill you."

Verse 307: "He who regards anger as a treasure, is like the man who hits his hand hard on the earth."

Verse 309: "He who, in his heart of hearts, will not cherish anger, will attain whatever he wants the moment he wants it."

Verse 310: Well, an angry man is "like a dead man!"

All these poems have the distinctive ring about them, of the silver-tongued philosopher-poet. But we know what to expect. Nobody else has written anything like that in Tamil. Definitely, Tiruvaḷḷuvar was a man with a mission.

Chapter 32 is on Not Hurting. Verse 312 is "Don't return injury. That's what the guileless ones will do."

> "Don't return injury for injury"! Doesn't *the Bible* say that?

Verse 314: "The way to hurt those who have hurt you, is to shame them by doing good to them": *The Bible* would substitute "Heap coals of fire on his head" for "shame".

Verse 319: "If in the forenoon you hurt someone, in the afternoon the hurt will seek you out on its own."

The Idea of Nemesis.

Not that the poems omitted here are not worth the study. Only, that they have not anything inviting special notice in this context—nothing specially Jain, pro-Hindu or anti-Hindu, pro-Christian or anti-Christian. Such pieces would have direct bearing on the life of the Tamils at that time. At least the poet would have meant them to.

The next chapter could be from one of the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt not kill." Herein comes the observation, "Sharing your food, and caring for others-this is the gist of all that is written in books." (verse 322)

Verse 327: "Even if you have to die for it, do not do what will take away another sweet life."

Verse 329: The word *pulai viṉai* occurs in the sense of "base deeds," identifying the word *pulai* with "base". No, no person, no community. But the word *pulai* seems to have acquired the meaning of "base"-obviously from its *Caṅkam* connotation, (see those four poems in *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, mentioned in Book I of this series). There the Pulaiyaṉ is called *Iḷiciṉaṉ*- "base-born", because of his poor social standing as an unwanted drummer (*tuṭiyaṉ*), who does not therefore quite know where to look for a livelihood. By Tiruvaḷḷuvar's time and in his society, the word *pulai* seems to have become an adjective that had lost touch with its human bearings. One can imagine Tiruvaḷḷuvar looking horrified at the

idea of affixing *pulai* to a man or a community! Here it is just affixed to "action" or "deeds", that would be common to any Homosapiens who is capable of base deeds.

Chapter 34 is on Instability. Verse 332 shows what will happen to a rich man when his wealth is all spent. His life would be like the floor of a dancing-hall. Once crowded, during the performance, after the performance it is just vacant.

Verse 339: "Like sleep, is death; after sleep
The wakening, is birth."

That is a typical Jain observation. Death follows life and birth follows death. The birth-cycle.

Chapter 35 is on "Giving up", the word used for it here being the same as for asceticism, *turavu*. So it needs extra careful study.

Verse 341: "Whatever we give up, we shall find ourselves above injury from that quarter. The verse reads,

"*Yātaṉiṉ yataṉiṉ niṅkiyāṉ nōtal*
ataṉiṉ ataṉiṉ ilaṉ."

Verse 342: "If you want to attain anything, give it up! After you have given it up, you are going to get it".

Verse 343: "You have to control your five senses, and you have to give up completely all that you desire." Are we getting anywhere near the point? "Control the five senses?" But how, is the question again.

Verse 344: "Natural, for the ascetic, to possess nothing. Possession of anything will bring back confusion."

So, that's for one clause. No possession. Not even clothes! The typical Jain hermit.

Verse 345: "What need for any other relationships? He who wants to cut his birth-cycle, for him even his body is superfluous."

Verse 346: "He who destroys the pride of Me and Mine will attain that world that even the gods cannot reach."

That philosophy contradicts "tatvamasi!"

Verse 347: "He who will not give up his hold on anything to hold, sorrows will not give up their hold on him."

Verse 348: "Those who have given up everything, they are at the entry (of Heaven). The others are confused and ensnared."

Verse 349: "The moment one cuts his desires, he has cut his birth-cycle; otherwise, whatever you see is unstable."

Verse 350: A famous, often-quoted couplet.

"paṟṟuka paṟṟaṟṟāṉ paṟṟiṉai appaṟṟai-p-
paṟṟuka paṟṟu vitaṟku."

"Hold on to him who has no hold; hold on
to that hold if you want to break free from all hold."

The clause to be examined here is the description of God as the sage sees Him. God, according to Tiruvaḷḷuvar, has no hold. No desire. No love. Now this is in direct contrast to the Christian vision. God loves. Enough to die for man. God seeks man. "Adam, where are you?" is His anguished cry. No, Tiruvaḷḷuvar does not see God the Christian way. And we cannot help that. Facts remain facts.

Now, at the end of this chapter we are not any the wiser about the ascetic's much-sought-after technicalities, except that one has to have absolutely no earthly possessions. Not even clothes. We remember the titter of the *Caṅkam* poet at the Jain ascetic!

Incidentally the poem exhibits some of the characteristic tricks of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's style. Strange, that nobody seems to have imitated Tiruvaḷḷuvar's style. And strange, too, that the other poems by the same poet—inevitably, there must have been quite a number—have all been lost. Just lost, or destroyed? In the holocaust that was to involve the Jains half-a-dozen centuries later, in Tamilnad?

Two more chapters, in the section of *Turavu* or Asceticism. One is on knowing the truth. The other, on the conquest of desire.

Now, on knowing the truth. Pilate, a big governor in one of the most powerful empires ever, asked a man of the people, who had been brought to him on a charge of high treason,—"What is truth?" The answer was simply, silence.

Verse 351: stipulates that man should not mistake the seeming for the fact. Verse 352, that he should have a clear vision. Verse 353, that he should not be confused by doubts. All three, meaning practically the same.

Verse 355: is a frequently quoted couplet.

"*Epporuḷ ettaṉmait tāyiṉum, apporuḷ*
meypporuḷ kāṉpa taṟivu."

"Whatever be the nature of a thing, in that thing, to find the reality behind it, is knowledge (of truth)." In other words, nothing is quite as it seems. You have to find out the truth behind the seeming. And that is knowledge of the truth. Apparently, what looks like something, is not quite the thing it seems: Again, a paradox.

Verse 356: "Those who have learnt and known the truth are going the way that will not bring them back." (In another birth). Well, but what is truth?

Verse 357: "If, on reflection, the mind grasps the truth, definitely he need not think over again about rebirth." Again, what is truth?

Verse 358: "To evade the ignorance of birth, the vision of the glory of the perfect reality is the knowledge required." Here the "glory of the perfect reality" comes very near the Christian conception of God.

Verse 359: is full of puns, on the word *cārpu* (dependency) "If a man knows his dependency (on God) and lives without dependency on other things, the pain brought by such dependency will be destroyed and will not recur."

Verse 360: Now he seems to be really clinching his point. "*Kāmam, vekuḷi, mayakkam* - (lust, anger, confusion) - When the names of those three are gone, pain also will go."

We need to take a second look at what the great sage means by knowing, or "realising", the truth. There is absolutely no hocus-pocus here. Just as there wasn't any in the chapter on asceticism. Verse 358 speaks of "the glory of the perfect reality" in no uncertain terms, and in words that are sure to appeal to the Christian. And verse 360 brings up "lust, anger and confusion": the three major sins in Tiruvaḷḷuvar's sight. Lust would include all wrong desire. Even the names of those three sins should not be mentioned.

Now this is what Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians: (Chap. 5: 3) "But fornication, and all uncleanness; or covetousness, let it not be once named among you . . . . . ". Covetousness. Related to lust. The name of it!

Echoes. Down the corridors of time. What about the other eight verses in the chapter on realising the truth? You see the poet desperately trying to arrive at a clear picture of the truth, but all he succeeds in there is making us also ask Pilate's question, "What is truth?" The answer, or something like it, can be found in Verse 358. And the negative picture is in Verse 360, "lust, anger, and confusion" which by its very negation of truth, suggests the positive.

We'll see one more chapter in *Aṟam ūḻ*, or fate, a very big factor in the religious faith of the Jains. It would be difficult for Tiruvaḷḷuvar to think on his own here. But, let us see.

Verse 371: "Through fate that creates, comes the endeavour for treasure. Through fate that destroys, appears lethargy."

Verse 372: "Through fate that destroys, foolishness is caused; knowledge is expanded when creative fate is present."

Verse 373: "Though one may learn many subtle books, it's one's natural wisdom that will be outstanding." Well, if that isn't true of Tiruvaḷḷuvar himself! However, though he has left out the word for fate here, and substituted "natural wisdom," he really implies the "wisdom granted by fate." We prefer to take the words "natural wisdom," at least so far as Tiruvaḷḷuvar is concerned. The "subtle books" could include Kautilya's *Arthasāstra*.

Verse 374: "These are two separate words, wealth and wisdom." (Suggestion: they are granted by fate).

Verse 375: "Being guided by fate, what appears to be good can cause evil, and evil can turn out to be for good."

Verse 376: "They will not stay on, if not decreed by fate; nor will they go, if not so commanded (by fate)."

But in the next verse we come upon an absolute startler!

Verse 377: "If one's possession was not so decreed by Him who decrees, he who gathered it, be it millions, will not be able to enjoy it."

So, after all, Tiruvaḷḷuvar believes in God, one who decrees—and not just an impersonal fate. Who calls Tiruvaḷḷuvar an atheistic Jain, believing in something like a spiritual evolution of the soul through several rebirths? The presence of God, in Tiruvaḷḷuvar's mind, is very clear. And how does he get it?

By his "natural wisdom", (although the idea behind that expression is said to be the wisdom granted by fate, in verse 373).

Verse378: "From those who do not have the wherewithal to eat, (or become ascetics), fate prevents the approach of suffering."

A rather obscure piece. If fate decrees, even the poor folks (who experience hunger and would therefore welcome food) would turn away from the world.

Verse 379: "Those who rejoice when they get the good things of life, why do they protest when they do not get them?" So, one has to cultivate the sense of detachment.

Verse 380: One of the most popular of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's sayings.

"What is there more powerful than fate? If something strives to occur, fate will interpose."

Was Tiruvaḷḷuvar just a fatalist? Verse 377 proves that he has sensed the presence of a God who ordains things. Still, fate, for him, is the function of one's own actions. So, Tiruvaḷḷuvar could be Jain or whatever.

We have come to the end of the first section of the *Tirukkuṛaḷ*, the section on *Aṛam*, or righteousness. Nowhere does it prescribe idol-worship as amelioration for the sins and sufferings of the world. There is no mention of any of the Hindu gods, except Indra, and that too, only in a disgraceful context.

But, the question is, how do the modern Tamil Hindus take so to Tiruvaḷḷuvar? That is because he appeals to something universal in man. The Rev. Pope calls him "Bard of Universal Man." And that, he is.

3. *Poruḷ* or Possession

Section 2 of *Tirukkuṛaḷ*, on Possession begins with Kingship.

Chapter 39 is on the glory of the king.

Verse 381: "The great one among kings possesses these six: The army, the people, wealth, ministers, friends, fortresses."

Well, without these there is no king.

Verse 382: "Fearlessness, generosity, wisdom, striving—these four come in full to a king."

Verse 383: "No slothfulness, and education, and daring—these three will not leave the rulers of a land."

Verse 384: "Without slipping from righteousness, avoiding what is not that, and with the honour of unwavering valour-that is to be a king."

Tiruvaḷḷuvar recognizes the need for Valour in a king—those were days when kings led military campaigns in person!

Verse 385: "Making, collecting, protecting, and distributing what was thus protected-the king is capable of this."

Verse 386: "Easy of access, and not sharp of tongue: if he is that, the king's country will be praised above another's."

Verse 387: "To him capable of giving, with sweet words, this world will be what he wants it to be."

Verse 388: "The king who protects, with justice, will be held as the God of the people."

Verse 389: "The king who has the quality of bearing with words bitter to hear, the world will take rest under his umbrella."

Verse 390: "Bounteousness, pity, the just sceptre, and cherishing of the people - to be with these four, is the light to kings." (To show him the way)

Now the poet proceeds to the education of kings, which can be applied to all.

Verse 391: An old familiar precept to Tamil students.

"What you learn, learn well. After you have learnt, stand as befits it."

"*Kaṟkak kacaṭaṟak kaṟpavai kaṟṟapiṉ*
niṟka ataṟkut taka

Verse 392: "Numbers, they say; else, letters, they say; these two
They say, are the eyes of those who live."

Everybody knows that numbers and letters are vital to learning.

Verse 393: "The learned have eyes; the unlearned
Have two blisters on their face."

Verse 394: Now we come to the role of scholars—or poets! Reminds us very much of the *Caṅkam.*

"Meeting, to rejoice—and parting, to reflect—
such is the poet's job." A happy association!

Verse 395: "Those who do not learn, stand humbly before those who have learning, as the have-nots stand before the haves."

Verse 396: "The well in the sand, the more you dig it, the more it springs (water); so does knowledge spring forth the more you learn."

Verse 397: "To the learned every country is his; every city is his;
then how does one go without learning all his life?"

Echoes of Kaṇiyaṉ Pūṅkuṉṟaṉār. "*Yātum Ūrē, Yāvarum kēḷir.*" Every city is my city; all people are my people." Kaṇiyaṉ Puṅkuṉṟaṉār also, we remember, was a Jain.

Verse 398: "The education that one gets in one birth, will serve him
through the seven (births)."

Verse 399: "The learned ones will desire learning, on seeing the
joy of the world in their own joy."

Verse 400: "Learning is the real wealth:
Indestructible wealth is learning; to one,
Other things are not wealth."

Now, all this is about learning, or education. And this is in the section on kingship. Does the sage imply that high quality education is a must for princes? And *Caṅkam* literature does show the kings as highly educated indeed.

The next chapter is on "Not getting education." And the next, "the possession of knowledge." Now, what has to be observed is that these are all generalities which would apply to everyone including the kings. And while the distinctive Tiruvaḷḷuvar-touch is here, there is nothing calling for special attention, nothing leaning specially to Jainism, or Brahminism, or democratic or anti-democratic ideas, that we need speak of. It was in the search for such things that we had to scrutinize the book, verse by verse, so far. But, maybe chapter 44, on "crime-and-punishment" will point to something of consequence. So, we call for the search-lights. But they do not expose anything startling.

Verse 431: "Haughtiness, fury, and littleness of mind—freedom from
these Leads to wealth and greatness."

Verse 432: "Stinginess, ego with glory, and without glory
Pleasure-these are crimes in kings."

One look down the ten, shows again, generalities, with the usual idealism.

Chapter 45 —"Seeking the help of the great ones."—ditto.

Chapter 46 "Avoiding little or mean people."— Again, ditto.

Chapter 47 . "Making the right choice."—ditto.

But we will stop at verse 543, (Chapter 54). The word "antaṇās" occurs here. The word "antaṇās" is used for Brahmins in the *Caṅkam*. Its original sense is "men of the cool, refreshing qualities," which the Brahmins were supposed to be. We will have to take the original sense, meaning the "great men of good character," and the *Aṟam* is the righteousness which they have outlined. Well the king's sceptre is the foundation, the strength, of that *Aṟam*. The commentator, jumping at an opportunity, takes the Antaṇās for Brahmins and their *Aṟam* for the Vēdas. He can be coolly dismissed with a "Thank you." He needs to be thanked for helping us to read! But four verses in this chapter—many of the verses throughout are quotable quotes—have to be looked at.

Verse 544: "The king of the great country, who wields his sceptre
embracing his people—the world will stand embracing his
feet."

Verse 546 "It's not the sword that gives the victory; but the rule
Not crooked, of the king."

Verse 549 "Guarding the people, cherishing them, and punishing
wrong-doing,
Is not a scar—it's the king's duty."

Verse 550: "Putting to death the criminal is like pulling out the weeds
from the grain."

At last, Sire, Tiruvaḷḷuvar! You've come to the point You're not just day-dreaming. Stern action has to be taken sometimes. Life is not all ideals. You will not, can not be a Cāṇakya, but nor are you completely in Utopia.

One fact does emerge from the sage's picture of kingship. Some king was at the back of the poet himself! Pity, that Vaḷḷuvar does not tell us anything about that king. Vaḷḷuvar was, most probably, a king's counsellor, but—the might have told us the name of his patron. Kampaṉ does. We must remember that kings were Jains, and Buddhists, in Tamilnad at sometime. Much later, in the 7th century, a Pāṇṭiya king was converted from Jainism to Saivism by his queen, who was an ardent supporter of Tiruñāṉa Campantar, one of the Bhakti-poets. But who the Jain king was, behind our great sage-poet, we have no idea.

And another fact, that might make the twentieth century eye the fourth century poet with scepticism. Tiruvaḷḷuvar was NOT a democrat. He believed seriously in self-discipline, but he believed also in the only discipline of a country that he knew to bring law and order. Which means that he believed implicitly in monarchy. He believed in goodness as an imperative for the kings—no, no Machiavelli here, thank you! - but he also believed in the need for stringent punishment at times. And so, he was not as completely impractical as we might think.

In chapter 56 he is dealing with the wrong kind of kingship-the crooked, or bent, sceptre.

Verse 551: "Worse than murderer, the king that oppresses."

Verse 552: "Like him who stands with the spear and commands "Give",
Is him who, with the sceptre, demands." (From the people).
In other words, an avaricious king is a robber.

Verse 553: "If the king does not observe regular rules all through his
country,
He, with his country, will be ruined."

Verse 554: "He will lose his wealth and his subjects—the king,
Who, without reflection, acts crookedly."

Verse 555: "The tears of the subjects who suffer
Are the weapon that destroys (the king's) wealth."

Verse 557: "Without the raindrops, the world will suffer. So (suffers)
All life that lives without the king's grace."

Verse 558: "Suffering worse than poverty will come from riches
Under the sceptre of a king who does not observe the law."

Verse559: "Should the king swerve from the law, the cloud will refuse to give its rain."

And now, verse 560 causes us to come to a jolt. It means:

> "The cow's yield will decrease; those of the Six Duties
> will forget their book,-if the guardian will not guard."

The "guardian" here is the king. But the commentator translates the word *nūl* (book) into the "Vēda". "Those of the Six Duties?" According to the commentator, the Antaṇās or the Brahmins. The couplet does not say Antaṇās, but the commentator does. But it's not the word "Antaṇās," that would carry weight in this context. It's the phrase "those of the Six Duties." And the word "cow". The cow has always been associated with the Brahmin. And the "Six Duties", according to the commentator, are, "reciting (the Vēdas), causing to recite, making *vēḷvis*, causing *vēḷvis* to be offered, giving, and receiving." It all sounds so plausible. But this has to be faced squarely.

The poet does not really use the word Brahmin here. Anybody else having Six Duties assigned to them? And why should the non-Brahmins not drink cow's milk? And, is the word *vēḷvi* (or *hōma*) used anywhere in all the couplets we have seen, down through the five hundred and sixty?

Right in the heart of the more or less secular literature of the *Caṅkam* age, there are so many references to *vēḷvis*. If Tiruvaḷḷuvar had belonged to Brahmindom, surely we would have heard plenty of the *vēḷvis*, in the progress of his mind down the five hundred and sixty couplets. The *vēḷvis* are not mentioned. The commentator includes them in the "Six Tasks". And we have no other means of ascertaining what the "Six Tasks" are. Any "Six Tasks" for the king's counsellors? We don't know. It's the word "Ā" (cow) starting off the poem, that makes us steal a look at the Brahmins. The "cow" clicks with the "Six Tasks," and the *nūl* (or book)./ So there you are, the commentator says, the Brahmins, the *vēḷvis*, the Vēdas! The reader must decide for himself whether there really is any genuine indication of the Brahministic religion here. If so, it raises a big question-mark against the Jain background of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. For, so far, (559 couplets!) there has been no mention of Maṉu's four-class system. And - not one idol. Not even one. Incidentally *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 397 does speak of the six duties of the Brahmins.

Could verse 560 be any interpolation, made at some opportune moment, which we do not know about? But sure, the Jains were powerful. They were scholars. They would be alert against any change, any substitution, in what they called *em ōttu*. They looked upon the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, as we do, with reverence. How

do we explain verse 560 of their scriptures as it stands? Any interpolation is unlikely.

Just one saving factor. Do the "Six Tasks" stand for anything within Jainism? They do![9] And so we can forget about the Brahministic element. There isn't any in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.

Chapter 57 is "Not acting to invite alarm." These ten couplets are a warning to the sovereign to act cautiously. His subjects should not live in constant dread of him. Verse 562 has a very arresting start. "Aim hard, throw softly." And the king is NOT to speak harshly! During war-time, the king has to see that those who would come to him are welcome. And the king "of the bent sceptre" is surrounded by "unlearned men" (or those who do not know what they should) and together they are the heaviest burden for the land. The customary idealism, and the usual wisdom, with the usual way of expressing ideas. But nothing to make us stop and enquire.

Chapter 58 is on "Resting one's eye"-which means "looking with consideration or sympathy." The content? Nothing unusual with the sage.

Chapter 59 promises something different, being on "Spying." Well, the king needs a Spy-system. Tiruvaḷḷuvar knows that! And he does know that spies also have to be spied upon. Also, that, to verify a statement (maybe a complaint) the king needs proof from three quarters. The Old Testament speaks of the need for two (or three) witnesses to verify an asseveration against a person. Well, Tiruvaḷḷuvar will have three. After all, spying is not for the ordinary man. Again, a spy is not to be publicly rewarded. Again, the spy is not to differentiate between one's immediate kinsfolk or one's open enemies. He is to study them impartially before bringing his report. Any Machiavellism here? Where we might most expect it? At any rate, no Maṉu. Never.

Chapter 60 is on Incentive—the energising factor in kingship, the ability to confront challenges.

Chapter 61, on the want of that factor—Laziness and Frustration.

Chapter 62, on Endeavour. Herein occur the household words:
Muyaṟcci tiruviṉai ākkum.

"Tireless endeavour brings up riches."

9. *Camaṇamum Tamiḻum* (Jainism and Tamil) by Ciṉi Veṅkaṭacāmi, Pub. Saiva Siddhanta Society, 1954. There are "Six Tasks" ascribed to the Jain ascetics (p. 216, line 16).

And herein is the Jain sage, who believes in fate, telling us that if we work tirelessly, we shall see "the other side of fate"—or, we shall defeat fate! (verse 620).

Chapter 63 is "On not breaking down before Trouble."

Verse 621: "When trouble comes, laugh (nahuha). There's nothing near it, or like it." Tiruvaḷḷuvar, to say that!

Verse 629: A very Jain-like, or Stoic, statement: "He who does not rejoice in joy, in suffering will not suffer."

Now all this is supposed to be meant for kings. But they are equally applicable—except the chapter on the spy-system—to every individual. The large generalities of life.

We pass on to the second division of *Poruḷ*—the members, or organs, of the king's governing body. First and foremost in this division is the Minister-*Amaiccu*. But there are other aspects of kingship on which Tiruvaḷḷuvar sheds light. Citizenship, for instance. A good citizen—has, among other things, a "sense of shame" at wrong-doing. And he should not be materialistic! If you give him a million, he will not do what will belittle him. Another field is the role of the ploughman. Very important indeed. And if the ploughman will not go to his field, the land will "grieve" and quarrel with him like a wife, says the sage!

Now we are not really studying the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. Nor, as a piece of literature. Why we glance occasionally at its literary merits is only to justify its hold on the people. But how many verses we have to leave out, that still echo down Time? After all, the Pen is mightier than the Sword. We have glanced at, roughly, two out of the three sections of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. We have not found a single incriminating verse that would land the grand old Tamil seer in the cesspool of Maṉudharma, in spite of all the desperate efforts of the commentator to push him in. Hence as we proceed, we are not going to find any either. Such a close study as we were compelled to give part of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, we could not give to any other. Not even Kampaṉ's great epic. But, suffice it to say, that this work required so much pains because we had to be definite about his stand in the field of our wonderful "Indian culture." We can expect the same pull in the third part of the work—between the non-Brahminical and Brahminical—elements, or between writer and commentator. The writer belongs to the 4th century A.D. and the commentator, to the 13th. The nine intervening

centuries account for the building up of the Hindu outlook in the south of the sub-continent, way after it had stabilised itself in the North. Its beginnings there, however, are under a cloud.

One must remember that the "upper castes" were almost as much the victims of "Indian culture" as the downtrodden. For, their kings had lost the loyalty of the depressed classes by the time the European traders had found their market, in what was going to be known as India. And the "upper castes" were to find themselves in the position of second-rate citizens in what, they forgot, was NOT their country alone. It was the country of a people, represented, from its depths of human experience, by a seer called Tiruvaḷḷuvar. Who reached out to the "poorest, and lowliest, and lost." By the bond of common humanity.

After that meandering, we had better get back to business. Included in the rest of this terrific work, is a section on Love. Now, this makes us gasp. Tiruvaḷḷuvar, writing on Love? After all that about asceticism, Sire, did you really go through the experience of the ordinary man? Or did those *Caṅkam* birds convey it to you?

If anybody has any doubts about the validity of *Caṅkam* literature, he had better go carefully through *Kāmattuppāl* in the *Tirukkuṛaḷ*—the section on love, or *Kāmam*. Inbuilt in the human body is the love-instinct, and the sage has not sought to escape it. And he has honoured the way the *Caṅkam* poets have dealt with it. In poetic technique, that is.

But in some aspects related to life, he is as fiercely up against it as he is against the king of the Hindu gods, Indra, making him "ample witness" against his own culture. Now, we had better see what the poet has done with the concept of Woman. Love of woman, he says, can be so strong that it can pull man away from his manhood. Adam and Eve, say. Hence, *man is not to be subject to* woman. Well, that's in *the Bible*. That's implied in the *Caṅkam*. And in the poetry of any heroic people, one supposes. Yes, the concept of a masculine society. And there's nothing to be done about it.

But there's another whole chapter, devoted to the *Varaivil Makaḷiṛ* - the "women without discipline or limits" - the loose women. *Caṅkam* poetry has taken them all for granted, and included them in *Marutam*. You see the men running after them, and the wives crying for their husbands. That seems to be a division of society, accepted(?) as inevitable by the *Caṅkam* poets, as they have even given them a separate terrain. When Tolkāppiyar handed out Indra as their

specific god,—you don't see much of Indra in the *Caṅkam*—he was more or less near the point. But Tiruvaḷḷuvar is very stern about this question. Indisciplined women? He will have none of them. But it is interesting that, along with liquor, indisciplined women are in the section on kingship.

> "The bejewelled women who long for wealth and not for love - their sweet words will bring shame." (verse 911)
>
> "The false embrace of the bought woman is like embracing a corpse, in a dark room." (verse 913)
>
> "The undisciplined, bejewelled woman,
> Her soft shoulders will push them into Hell." (verse 919)

No, no, you cannot expect Tiruvaḷḷuvar to make any compromise with the false woman.

But, when we came to the love that the poets sing about, the love of the birds in the trees, the love of Romeo and Juliet, Tiruvaḷḷuvar accepts even the technique of *Caṅkam* literature, minus the regional divisions. Love is broadly divided into two-*Kaḷavu* and *Kaṟpu*. *Kaḷavu* is love before marriage—the love of Romeo and Juliet, say. *Kaṟpu* is love after marriage. Seventy couplets for *Kaḷavu*, and one hundred and eighty for *Kaṟpu*. The proportion is just and fair. A novelist, even Jane Austen, might stop with marriage as the climax of a romance. But Tiruvaḷḷuvar gives more than double the importance to love-play after the marriage than before it. So far, he is a *Caṅkam* (or post-*Caṅkam*) poet. But his instinct is right and sure when he refuses to be drawn into the regional divisions of *Pālai, Kuṟiñci, Neital* and *Mullai*, (and, then, of course he would have no *Marutam!*).

A slight interlude. Nine centuries later, when Kampaṉ wrote about the human love of his god and goddess, he shows them as falling in love with each other before marriage. Well, that's *Caṅkam*, we say. But those two lines from Kampaṉ showing his hero and heroine looking at each other's eyes, or, eying each other, are remarkably like that couplet from Tiruvaḷḷuvar's verse 1091. Sure, Kampaṉ knew his *Tirukkuṟaḷ* through and through! For all that Tiruvaḷḷuvar was a Jain, and Kampaṉ, a Vaishnavite Bhakta. And Kampaṉ's portrayal of *Marutam* as a clean and beautiful wetland— without the prostitute element-shows him, again, as more akin to Tiruvaḷḷuvar than to the *Caṅkam*, although neither of these two great poets nor that other great poet, Iḷaṅko, had shaken himself quite free of the smaller, ancient ones.

Now, back to the *Kuṟaḷ*. Here's the start of the love-affair. Verse 1081: "Is she a goddess? A beautiful peacock? Or just a heavily-jewelled woman? My soul is doubting."

Romeo's first glimpse of Juliet. Verse 1082: "She looked: her look, as against mine, is as though a goddess brought an army to strike."

Verse 1083: "I did not know death before; now I know—A woman with large and battling eyes".[10]

Verse 1100: "If eye exchange look with eye, words are absolutely meaningless."

The first chapter is all on the eyes of lovers. The next is—after their meeting. All the five senses are involved.

Verse 1101: "Seeing, listening, tasting, smelling, touching"-are all together, in Her."

Verse 1102: "For illness, there's other medicine; for the jewelled lady, She herself is cure for the pain she causes."

Verse 1103: "Slumber on the soft shoulders one loves—can it be sweeter, The world of him of the lotus-eyes?" (Heaven)

And lovers' tiffs are included in the series of enjoyments.

Verse 1109: "Coyness, emotional abandon, coming together—these Are the reward of folks in love."

Chapter 112, i.e., verse 1111 onwards, is full of pretty similes in the *Caṅkam* strain. And chapter 114, from verse 1131, carries references to "mounting the *maṭal*" or palmyrah-stalk *in six pieces out of the ten*! Which shows that "maṭal-mounting," which has been studied in some detail in Book I of this series, was not such a rare occurrence as we might have expected. Maybe it was more common among the Jains—but then, that is mere speculation. More likely, "mounting the maṭal" was noticed by the Jains since they had an eye for poor folks and this would include the tribals.

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10. V. V. S. Iyer's translation.

There are a few more points to be noted from Tiruvaḷḷuvar's verses on love.

One is, that he has followed *Caṅkam* technique to some extent. The hero, the heroine, the attendant maid, the hero's friend—they are all here.

But one of the *Caṅkam* dramatis personae is conspicuous by sheer absence. And that is the prostitute. He will have nothing to do with her. No, she has no place in the society which Tiruvaḷḷuvar envisages. There is room for Jealousy in the experience of love, so much so that if the husband sneezes the wife immediately gets suspicious saying that it implies another attachment, for sneezing is supposed to be brought on if a person thinks of you. And while the sage comes down hard on the prostitute and the "bought" woman, he has included them, for notice and condemnation, in one chapter on kings. Which leads to the question why. The higher your social status, the greater the danger. Possibly that's the reason.

And, Tiruvaḷḷuvar is not a bit squeamish about the love-experience. In his great chapter on education—the Jains, as educationists, would have had a considerable role to play in the uplift of the common man—he says that if an uneducated man wants to address an audience (verse 402), he is like a woman who is in love but does not have "both the breasts." The simile can also be transferred to a man who is in love with a woman "without both the breasts." Incidentally, Father Beschi, who was the pioneer in the wonderful rediscovery of Tiruvaḷḷuvar, had quietly sidestepped Tiruvaḷḷuvar's observations on love when he translated the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* into Latin. But they are certainly not beside the point.

A full study of the sage's love-poems would be needed to bring out their validity in the life of the modern man and woman. But then, there are limits to space in a book. And so, Sire, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, good-bye for the time. We shall no doubt be meeting you quite often, giving us a casual look from over the hedges on the wayside. After all, aren't you immortal?

But we have to glance at the fake Tiruvaḷḷuva-mālai!

The first poem is by *Acarīri* (the voice without body)

The second, by *Nāmakaḷ* (the muse or goddess of poetry)

The third, by *Iṟaiyaṉār* (God)

And so on, for fifty-two more verses, by poets whose names can be easily recognized as belonging to the *Caṅkam*, even poets as well-known as Kapilar and Avvai! Avvai's name comes last, the last but one bearing the name of Iṭaikkāṭar. Avvai's is a *Kuṟaḷ* itself, but so is the one before it. But, this Avvai's verse is built exactly on the model of that before it. Iṭaikkāṭar speaks of the seven seas being poured into a mustard seed, whereas Avvai just puts the seven seas into an atom (the smallest particle). Now, Avvai, of all poets, to tamely imitate another scribe, only substituting one word, (just one word) for another! One cannot digest that. Except for these two *Kuṟaḷs*, the other poems in the *Tiruvaḷḷuva-mālai* are in the *veṇpā* form, which is not found in the *Caṅkam*. And the language is markedly of later origin. Some of these poems, though, do make interesting reading. One imitation-Gōdamaṇār says that the Antaṇās, or Brahmins, wrote down their Vēdas thinking that if they were left to be learnt by rote they would lose their power, whereas Vaḷḷuvar's verses would not lose anything by recitation. This is a reference to the specially memorable quality of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's verses. You don't need the written word, to remember this seer by! Another poet, an imitation Vaṇṇakkaṇ Cāttaṇār, says that, if Āryam, (Sanskrit) has the Vēdas, Tamil has the *Kuṟaḷ* of Tiruvaḷḷuvar. However, we need not get ourselves lost in these fake verses. Which were possible, of course, because of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's immense popularity.

Chapter XVIII

CILAPPATIKĀRAM

There is a small poem, of three stanzas, introducing the commentary to *Cilappatikāram*.[1] The first line arrests: "Like the kite and its shadow, is the poem and its commentary." Illuminating. The poem, a living thing, soaring in the sky. The commentary, that could not exist without the poem, and, after all, is only its shadow. And there is the need of the sunlight if you are to see the shadow at all. And finally, the shadow is affected by the terrain over which it moves. Whoever wrote this little bit has probably said far more than he meant to say. We'll now see the kite, as being the living thing, enabled to live by its circumstances.

Cilappatikāram stands by itself among the Tamil epics. It has a just sense of proportion. There's no mere "padding" anywhere, to swell out the theme. In conception it is a whole living thing, and in execution its details do not run out of control as one might occasionally feel with Kampaṉ. It is the story of a loyal wife—to be exalted later to the status of goddess—whose precious existence as human being was broken by an unfaithful husband, a woman he bought for pleasure, and a king who acted upon impulse. And just the broken life of one woman is powerful enough to send up the great ancient city of Maturai in flames—the destruction of one entire civilization, that had lost its moral bearings. At least that is how the Tamil world knows about it.

It is not exactly known who wrote the *patikam* or introduction to the *Cilappatikāram*. But the tone, and the temper, are remarkably like those of the epic itself. And the epic is introduced for what it is, including the arrangement of the chapters. The language is a bit more modern than that of *Caṅkam* literature.

Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ (the young Hermit-prince) of Cēranāṭu, is the chief personality here. He has obviously "given up the kingship." The first three words show us a temple where he had, apparently, laid down his claims to the crown. It could be a Jain Temple. No Brahmins in the picture. (Then, a group of Kuṟavas from the mountains met him. "Under the flowering *vēṅkai* tree." They had news for him! For, they had seen a "holy, wonderful wife"- (Tirumāpattiṉi). The

1. *Cilappatikāram*, VIth edn. (1955) by V. Swaminatha Aiyar, p. ll.

kindred of the king of the gods had come to her and brought her the husband of her love alive and then taken them both away "from earth to heaven." The tribals, full of joy, reported the story to the prince. But with the prince was the poet, Cāttaṉ, of "Taṇṭamiḻ" (pleasant Tamil). And he supported the tribals saying that he, too, knew the story. And Iḷaṅkō is full of it.

The story is given briefly here. In Pukār, of the Cōḻā country, a man named Kōvalaṉ, of the merchant-class, spent all his wealth on a "bought" dancing-girl, whereupon he took his wife's anklet for sale to Maturai in the Pāṇṭiya country, and showed it to a goldsmith. The latter had misappropriated the Pāṇṭiya queen's anklet, and quietly took the news to the king that here was the thief. Kōvalaṉ was killed, and his wife, Kaṇṇaki, plucked out one of her breasts (how, we don't know), and burnt Maturai (with the fire of her sorrow). Cāttaṉ himself had spent that night in the chief precincts of the Saivite temple in Maturai. The "goddess" of Maturai appeared before the "warlike" wife whose breast had burnt the city, and explained to her that what happened to her was the result of a woman's curse in a previous birth.

So much for the story. Then Iḷaṅkō proceeds to declare that he finds therefrom, that

1. "*Aṟam* brings death to the king who fails in his kingly duties;
2. The great ones will extol with praise the chaste wife; and
3. Fate will pursue one from the past birth."

Since all these three rules had been proved by an anklet, ("Cilampu"), Iḷaṅkō wants the theme to be written out as *Cilappatikāram*. But since all three of the Tamil countries were involved in it (Cāttaṉ is addressing the Cēra prince!) it appears best for Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ himself to take up the work. So Cāttaṉ the poet requests the Hermit-prince of Cēranāṭu, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ, to fulfil the responsibility. Iḷaṅkō thereupon proceeds to divide the epic into thirty episodes. Ninety lines for the introduction. Which is well-planned anyway. And well carried out too.

Canto I. Pukār Kāṇṭam

Episode 1

The first Canto begins with -

"Let's praise the moon! Let's praise the moon!"
- Because it is like the Cōḻā's cool white umbrella.

"Let's praise the sun! Let's praise the sun!"
- Because, like the Cōḷā's royal disk, it goes round the Himalayas.

"Let's praise the great cloud! Let's praise the great cloud!"
- Because it is like the drops of his grace.

"Let's praise Pūmpukār! Let's praise Pūmpukār!"
- Because, like his race, it's spread all over the world.

A lovely, lyrical opening, such as we have met with nowhere else in ancient Tamil. But we can't help thinking that here's a Cēra prince extolling the Cōḷa crown. And this was a time when the Triarchy was exhausted, and certainly the introduction harks back nostalgically to its past glories, and as certainly the epic touches on all three of the Tamil kingdoms. *Cilappatikāram* is not just a Tamil epic. It's a Cēra-Cōḷa-Pāṇṭiya epic. Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki meet in Cōḷanāṭu, are done for in Pāṇṭiyanāṭu, and have their story completed in Cēranāṭu. We are here concerned only with the text, not the many stories associated with it.

Before we proceed, a word about the lyrical opening. Not a word of worship, unless it were Nature-worship. It's praise, actually, of Cōḷanāṭu, where the hero and heroine were to meet.

The description of Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ is, again, beautiful. Kaṇṇaki goes before Kōvalaṉ, because, in essentials, it's the story of a woman's life. She is only twelve, and Kōvalaṉ only sixteen—poor innocents! - when they get married. It's an arranged marriage, and both are from a highly-placed community—the merchant-community. They are wealthy folks. And at the function, the great, elderly Brahmin officiates, "showing"(the couple) the "hidden way". You expect a great deal of rejoicing. But Iḷaṅkō is not the poet to overdo such things, and within sixty-five lines the function is over, including a tribute to "the war-like, fierce Cōḷaṉ Cembiaṉ, whose sword extends not only to this side of the Himalayas." All this, in the poet's imagination, and no wonder.

Episode 2

This is about the love-life of the young couple. As you might expect, Kōvalaṉ does all the talking, and he spares no pains in praising Kaṇṇaki to her face. And his parents see fit to establish them in a separate home, so that "they might observe *Aṟam*, and invite guests"-in the way that Tiruvaḷḷuvar has prescribed. (Iḷaṅkō says nothing here about the sage). And some years passed."

The *veṇpā* or four-lined stanza at the close of this episode says that the couple enjoyed themselves "as if they had seen the instability upon earth." Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki are not Jains, but folks whose marriage is conducted by Brahmins—and they see life as if it cannot go on forever. They were making the most out of it!

Episode 3

This brings in something totally unexpected. Iḷaṅkō speaks of a dancing-girl, Mātavi. The first line of this episode goes thus: "Because of the grace of the holy hermit on the divine mountain," Story. Myth. The Sage Agastya, it seems, had cleared the curse on the dancing stage, that came down on the heavenly nymphs along with the son of Indra. Every bit of this story is non-Taṃil, and comes from the Sanskrit. Scribes have desperately tried to put Agastya into a *Taṃiḻ Caṅkam*, if not the third, at least the first! But Iḷaṅkō seems to have accepted Agastya. That wouldn't really mean anything to us, if it had not been for that new article that appears on the stage. And that is Mātavi. We have not met the likes of her before! She's not a *pāṭiṉi* or *viṟali* from *Caṅkam* life, trudging wearily uphill, to get gifts from a king or chieftain, though the gifts were royal. She's of a particular tribe of dancers, educated from childhood till they attain, say, the age of twelve. Now she's ready to be sold off to the highest bidder. But she has first to prove her mettle before the Crown, which has always been a patron of the fine arts, poetry or music or dancing or whatever. Still, Mātavi's tribe is new to us, though it is going to be easily absorbed, in later times, into the *tēvatāsi* system, with both Temple and Crown encouraging dancers, and the onlookers being of that status that can purchase women of pleasure. Behind this way of life, we also see the *Caṅkam Marutam*, where a big guy enters a prostitute-colony to have his way with a girl-child, who cries out in terror, incidentally putting him to flight. But there can be no *Marutam* here, for Pukār, (Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam) is a city, and houses the king in his palace, as well as artistes of all kinds in their city-dwellings. This is the fertile ground for the "bought woman" to multiply.

Only, we stare when the poet says that the caste of Mātavi's birth is "high-class". But then, she is described as descended from the heavenly nymph Ūrvasi, so that she is like the "heavenly nymphs." (Urvasi was born on the earth as the result of a curse). That could be a pointer here to her appearance as well as her skill as artiste. But could such a young woman be of "high-class" birth, when

she could be sold, body and soul, to one who could afford the price? And, she would not fit into any of the high-class *varṇas*, unless you take her caste to belong to a merchant class that sold women: But, that, and "high-class"? No, the high-class here only indicates wealth. Of course Mātavi's people would have to be enormously wealthy–if they could afford her the kind of education she seems to have had.

One cannot really go through all the details of song and dance that we see on the stage. It is clear, though, that Iḷaṅkō himself, though now an ascetic, knows quite a bit about those forms of art, and he endows Mātavi with proficiency in her line. There is also an element of superstition involved, since she gets on to the stage "right foot first, near the pillar to the right." The *Caṅkam yāḻ* is here, but no Pāṇaṉ with it. Later we find that Mātavi herself is familiar with the instrument. The king bestows— on the dancer a heavy gold chain-"according to custom". But then he has nothing to do with the sale of the artiste! O no, there is no mention of him afterwards.

But, it seems to be Mātavi who acts! She hands over the gold chain to a hunch-back servant-maid, to be displayed in the street, "where the young men of the city loiter," and to announce that whoever buys it is the "one who will suit our maiden.' Well, if a girl of twelve could do such a thing, she must have been educated for it along with the dance. Without encouragement from her folks it would have been impossible. Very likely it was her mother who took the initiative here—simply designated as the "doe-eyed" one.

It is rather strange, though not improbable, that Kōvalaṉ should have been among the "loitering young men of the city." He doesn't seem to have had anything better to do. No children, to keep him at home by day. And to make things worse, he has plenty of money! So he just buys the gold chain and goes to bed with Mātavi. And then loses himself in her attractions, so that there is "no hope of deliverance." And, yes, that's what he now "desires." He has clean forgotten his "home of the stainless glory."

The concluding *veṇpā* to this episode is a compliment to Mātavi's accomplishments as an artiste. Which shows the way things are tending in upper-class social life in Tamilnad. Money, art, and lax morals.

Episode 4

This is about "the Splendour of the Evening." There is strong irony, not only in the title, but also in the working out of it. It closes on the note that the city is well-guarded at night, but Maṉmataṉ (the god of love) goes around with his sugar-cane bow to shoot his arrows of flowers at his victims. The suggestion is that the guards can do nothing about that. And, on the one hand, there is Mātavi who displays herself (and her talents) before Kōvalaṉ with "ardour of heart." But on the other, there is Kaṇṇaki (with the likes of her) who is pining for her husband. Three items of Kaṇṇaki's personal appearance should be noted. One is, that the lobes of her ears, without their heavy gold ornaments, still hang down. That is a reference to a custom among some Tamil folks to make big holes in the lobes of their ears so that they could cram in as much gold as possible. Well, Kaṇṇaki doesn't need the gold ornaments now, but the holes are there, and the ear-lobes still hang low. Another is a mention of the *tāli* or *māṅkalyam*, which is the only jewel she is wearing, and which was not noted in *Caṅkam* literature.[2] To remove that would mean widowhood and ostensibly Kaṇṇaki wanted at least that in token of her married state. Yet another is the *Tilakam*, which is now conspicuous by its absence, In *Caṅkam* verse we meet the vast majority of radiant or bright or shining foreheads without a spot on them.[3]

But here, Kaṇṇaki has lost the *Tilakam* on her bright forehead. Later custom would attribute that loss also to widowhood. But obviously, during Iḷaṅkō's time, the want of the *Tilakam* only meant the want of joy, the joy in the personal adornment of the happy wife. It was not anything as yet compulsory for the married woman.

The poet does spend sometime with Mātavi's rejoicing and Kaṇṇaki's pining, but that would be natural and therefore not of much consequence here.

Episode 5

This also ends with a note of contrast between these two women. And it carries a superstition which we do not find in the *Caṅkam*, but which has persisted among the Tamils till date. A woman's left eyelid twitches when joy (or pleasure)

2. Except in *Neṭunalvāṭai*, and even there, not by name.
3. Except in four places

is coming to her, but her right eyelid takes on that exercise when that important item in her life is moving away from her. And so, Kaṇṇaki's left eye, and Mātavi's right eye are twitching at the same time! For something is going to happen to them both. Kaṇṇaki's eye is described as "black" and Mātavi's as "red". Red eyes in the woman are indicative of sex-pleasure in Tamil literature, and hence the red colouring in Mātavi's eye.

But the episode itself is about "the Festival of Indra" in Pūmpukār or Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam, the background of the *Caṅkam Paṭṭiṇappālai* poem. And, *Paṭṭiṇappālai* is very much here, with what almost sounds like a parody of its lovely swing and lilt. And those folks who people that beach are all here too, with the white salt, the butcher's shops, the labourers and craftsmen, along with expensive items like silk and sandal, gold and gems etc., etc. But, there is one notable addition: Prostitutes. Along with dancing women. And, prostitutes who are paid daily, if you would believe it! So, here's a new element in Tamil culture, if it's anything to be proud of. Uṟṟiraṅkaṇṇaṉār, author of *Paṭṭiṇappālai* and *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, does not seem to have come across that. The word *Āyurvētam*, now a popular medical system in Kerala, is also here. But it is comparatively insignificant.

Everybody is involved in the rejoicing! It's the festival of Indra, king of the gods. Does this have anything to do with the poet's remark that, among the folks crowded in the festival, there are those who "desire another man's wife," for Indra is one who paid for that sin? In the crowd are also those who "hide behind asceticism, but don't have that quality," and "women whose conduct, though concealed, is bad" (not prostitutes!) Then "liars." Then "tale-bearers". All sorts of mischief-makers. We don't need here to go into all the details of the festival, except to observe that here are a great many temples! And of course, Indra gets special treatment. "Holy, good water from the Cauvery" is brought in golden pots, in which the "king of the gods" (his idol) is bathed. There is a temple to "the great one who was never born," (Civa). Another, to the "beautiful one" with six faces (Murukaṉ). Another, to the "fair one" (Balarāmaṉ, Krishna's brother). Another, to the "tall, dark one", (Vishnu, who assumed Vishvarūpa). And, there are *Hōmas* done, without failing any of the rules of the four Vēdas given by the "great, old, first one" (Brahma). The four kinds of gods and "their eighteen troops," are on one side. On the other are the *paḷḷis*, or temples of the Jains and Buddhists. On the outskirts of the city is a holy place. And lower down, we notice the Pāṇaṉ. He is no longer in the royal presence. He is in the

company of the "city loafers," laughing and "enjoying good words," obviously talking shop. And with him (or rather, with "them," for Pāṇar is used in the plural) we find—Kōvalaṉ.

Lines 220 to 230 are of special significance. Between that comment on Kōvalaṉ and the twitching of those two particular eyelids, is a general observation on the state of the city. "Death", says the poet, "that drinks up many lives, has changed its manliness for womanhood, with its blushes and smiles, its sweet lisps like the *yāḻ*; the formless one (has changed) into a great army." Which means that the greatest danger to the security of life in the city is its loose women! Death kills, like a warrior. But here is Death, in women's shapes—and a great array of them. So, it is not a matter of one Mātavi breaking up one Kaṇṇaki's life. A great many Mātavis are here. At this juncture the poet dismisses the art, over which so much of his own patience was spent. It's the lure of the loose woman, pointed out earlier in the study of *Caṅkam* poetry, that poses the real danger to society. The only answer to that is the "women who live in the home, like the chaste Aruntati"-inclusive, of course, of Kaṇṇaki—who fight them hard. They live with their husbands "of the great shoulders," and "oppose and drive away" the temptresses. It's the cult of the chaste woman, which becomes a religion. In Iḷaṅkō's eyes, the saviour of society.

There is one observation here-which carries an echo from the New Testament. Among the five *maṉṟams* is one—round a low-level tank—where hunchbacks, dwarfs, the dumb, the deaf, and the lepers can have a dip and get rid of their handicaps. There is another, where folks dying of poison, others with snake-bite, and still others with demon-attacks, can just circle round the tall pillar and get healed. Miracle-healing. We hear of it down the ages and in other climes. As for the wrong-doers, (lines 128 - 131) there is a platform where a spirit shouts aloud "They are caught in my noose!" He whips them hard, and finally eats them up! But, for the kings who go awry, there is a special *maṉṟam* where a doll (*pāvai*) is stood, which will not open her mouth, but will weep whenever there is evil sensed in the royal quarters. What else to do with a tyrant? Whether all these are from Brahminism or Jainism we do not know, but there is nothing like them in *Caṅkam* literature, and we also know that the Jains, revolting against Brahminism, imbibed a great deal, quite unawares, from the latter, while developing superstitions of their own. One thing we feel-the milieu is not that of the *Caṅkam* times. Entirely different.

Episode 6

This is "Sea-bathing". Also in Pūmpukār. But the centre-piece seems to be Mātavi. And the first part of it is pure myth. Hindu myth. That would begin from the Himalayas. It does. But how does a poet from Tamilnad visualise the glorious, snow-capped mountains, of which he would only have heard descriptions? "Silver" is the nearest word. And with "silver" the episode begins. A Viccātaraṉ (Vidyātaraṉ) who, with his wife, is celebrating Maṉmataṉ's festival, is taking her down south from the silver mountains, to Pūmpukār, and showing her some important landmarks.

The episode we have just done shows the festival of Indra, the king of the gods. The festival that the Viccātaraṉ is celebrating is that of Maṉmataṉ or the god of love. There seems to be an overlapping of festivals. Or, the festival of love might just have symbolic significance to the celestial couple. Anyway the first few lines—quite a few, without touching on Mātavi, are crammed with stories from Hindu mythology. For instance, the great spirit, that Indra sent into the heart of a Cōḷa kingdom to help the king, is shown as devouring the sacrifices made to him at a spot in which the Viccātaraṉ is interested. The idea—arrangement of the five kinds of *maṉṟams* or assemblies—was also brought down from the Āryaṉs. And why, Nāratā, the notorious tale-bearer, is here! With his Veeṇa, today a very popular musical instrument of South India, which has by now effectively displaced the *Caṅkam yāḻ*. Well, the thousand "eyes" of Indra are also mentioned here. One interesting point that Iḷaṅkō makes is that even the *pūtams*, or spirits, are divided into four *varṇās*. He seems to be laughing.

Another is that, in the midst of all these temples and all these gods, Iḷaṅkō seems to hold his head high. There is not a trace of Bhakti or reverence. Of course he was a Jain by choice and you couldn't expect him to worship the Hindu gods, but if he had the least leaning that way we would have known. When you read Kampaṉ you can easily find out his god. Reverence exhumes fragrance, like a flower, and cannot be mistaken.

But we are coming to Ūrvasi, the heavenly dancer. When she was born on earth, her Veeṇa also came down along with her. In her line of descent comes our Mātavi, from the celestials. Lovely stories, smacking of Greece, if you take them as stories. Well, it is this Mātavi who the traveller from the Himalayas-also a celestial creature-would point out to his wife. For Mātavi knows eleven kinds of dances, which in totality are a distant pointer to the *katakaḷi* of modern Kerala-without, of course, its distinctive mask.

And what jewels Mātavi is wearing! Head to toe and toe to head. Three kinds of rings. Bracelets covering her forearms. And among the gems she wears, we recognise diamonds, sapphire and moonstone.

In the twilight of early dawn, announced by the cockerel and other birds, Mātavi leaves for the beach with Kōvalaṉ. But she goes by chariot, while Kōvalaṉ travels on horseback. Only later we find out why. Mātavi's attendant-maid, Vasanta-Mālai, is with her, ostensibly holding her *yāḻ*. But on the way, Pūmpukār is a city of lights! A feature that Uṟṟiraṅkaṇṇaṉār seems to have left out. What the *Caṅkam* poet spent his powers of description over, namely, the flags, through which the sunshine could not enter(!) the post-*Caṅkam* poet dismisses with a word. But then the post-*Caṅkam* poet was seeing the city by night, and his predecessor, by day.

Here again is a mention of the four *varṇas*, on the festive occasion, on the banks of the river Cauvery, "of Karikāl Vaḷavaṉ of the great fame" (by the way, a *Caṅkam* monarch). "In different different garbs, with different different noises," the crowds of the four kinds of *varṇas* are jostling together.

Iḷaṅkō does not seem to be aware of a fifth. Or, it has not come up yet. "Together"-"Iyaintu"-is the word. They cannot be separated anyway; they are too many! But—the *varṇas* are there, and Iḷaṅkō is looking at them with a Jain hermit's eyes, and—the eyes of a *Caṅkam*-Tamil king.

On the beach, under the *puṉṉai* tree, concealed by a painted curtain, on the white sand, Mātavi, seated with Kōvalaṉ, takes the *yāḻ* proffered by her attendant-maid.

Episode 7

This is a duet, and a lovely duet it is. The title is brief and sweet. *Kāṉal vari*. It will have to be broken up into quite a few words in English. "Lines (or song) in the beach-grove." But another meaning is forcibly suggested. *Kāṉal* could also mean "mirage". In which case the lines would mean that what those song-birds saw before them in life was not really there. Which also would be correct.

But there is an introduction! The heroine here is, again, Mātavi. She "takes the *yāḻ* with a gesture of worship," and her fingers, decked with emeralds, move up and down the strings quickly, "like the legs of a field-bug" (looks like a *Caṅkam* image, that!) And feels her way up and down in the eight kinds of movement prescribed for the *yāḻ* player (they are mentioned by name, and

described too, but are beyond the present writer's scope and ability). Now Kōvalaṉ "holds out his hand" for the instrument, "looks at the Cauvery," and "to the rejoicing of Mātavi's heart, begins to play." He sings also.

The first song, the *Āṟṟu vari*, "lines on the river," bears out the importance of the river Cauvery to the Tamils.

"Cauvery, that will not dry up, though the Ganges might."

What does Iḷaṅkō know of the mighty Ganges, except by hearsay? But, Cauvery would be for the Tamils what the Thames is to the English—the one and only river worth the name, and we can sense that in the song. Along with the river, the Cōḷa crown is also glorified. But, the very first stanza? "Cauvery would not mind if the Cōḷa king weds the Ganges!" Does that indicate another woman in Kōvalaṉ's life? For, "Like the fullness of the river Cauvery, is the *kaṟpu* (chastity) of the women!" Here, Kōvalaṉ seems to suggest that a chaste woman should be able to accept her lover's "other" woman! Whether he meant it seriously we do not know.

He does not forget to mention the "noises of the plough" on either side of the river, as the river "walks" along. Its slow, gentle movement, in the delta.

The next song, also by Kōvalaṉ, is a tribute to the city (Ūr), of Pūmpukār (Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam).

Songs galore. And of different kinds. The *yāḻ* is in Kōvalaṉ's hand, and he would be using it to accompany his voice. Jets of song. But each song has some reference to Woman. To that city, he says, the "Cruel Death" is none other than the "daughter" with the "soft form".

And he does seem to describe a woman of relevance to the fisherfolk. One of the pieces addresses her thus. "Your Aiyers (respected ones; could be father or brothers) go into the sea to kill for their livelihood."

These two pieces are taken from Kōvalaṉ's songs:

1. "Come not near her, lovely swan! You cannot show her gait.
   Come not near her, lovely swan! You cannot show her gait.
   Near her who splashes through the creeping waves.
   Come not you, O lovely swan! You cannot show her gait."

2. "Holding the coral pestle in her hand,
   She pound the pearly grain, with beautiful eyes.

She pounds the pearly grain, with beautiful eyes,
Not hyacinths, but cruel, cruel! (kodiya, kodiya!)"

"Beside the waves under the *puṉṉai*'s shade,
As the swan walks she walks, with beautiful eyes.
As the swan walks she walks, with beautiful eyes,
So deadly sharp, a death, a death!"

"The wine-filled blue flower in her hand
She drives the birds from grain, with beautiful eyes.
She drives the birds from grain, with beautiful eyes,
Not shining swords, but piercing, piercing!" [4]

Not one of these songs seems to bear a direct relationship to Mātavi. Not a word about her dancing or her music! All that she has been trained to honour and value. So, her hero falls for just a woman with beautiful eyes. A woman who pounds the grain. A woman whose "Aiyers" are fisherfolk. A woman of *kaṟpu* (chastity). No wonder Mātavi finds herself slighted, or maybe, forestalled. Is Kōvalaṉ thinking about some other woman in his life? That's her question now. Deep in her mind.

And she strikes back. The "earth-god", says Iḷaṅkō, "marvels, the earth-folks rejoice," when, with a voice "attuned" to her instrument, she begins to sing.

Her first stanza, like Kōvalaṉ's, is a tribute to the Cōḻā king. He is "husband" of the river Cauvery, and his sceptre can never be bent or crooked.

And, her lyrics are equal to Kōvalaṉ's. The night that "spat out the moon, and swallowed the sun," is on her; the earth "covers her eyes," (for it cannot see anything), and Mātavi, in song, takes the place of a *Caṅkam* heroine, longing for her lover, who has deserted her, leaving her to pine. Which lover deserted her? This is the question that shoots up in Kōvalaṉ's mind. For he is as large as life before her. His own song had been autobiographical!

The mirage (*kāṉal*) disappears. Confronting him, he thinks, is a bought woman, pining for some absent lover. After all, how much of truth, how much of faithfulness, can you expect of a woman of that class? Who can convince Kōvalaṉ now that poor Mātavi is actually an innocent woman, victim of

4. *History of Tamil Literature*, C and H. Jesudasan, Pub. Y.M.C.A, 1961.

circumstances, who loves him passionately with all the ardour of her young heart? He has got the price of his filthy money, and he turns his back on her. She gets home without him.

Episode 8

Iḷaṅkō has not lost sight of a united Tamilnad! A dream, from the *Caṅkam*, to a Cēra prince, even though he has turned ascetic. For the first line draws the map of Tamilnad, from Veṅkaṭam to the Cape. The next line speaks of "what the Tamil language has clearly defined." The next two lines are on "Maturai" (the Pāṇṭiya capital), "Uṟaiyūr (the Cōḷa capital) and "Vañci" (the Cēra capital). When did such a combination really exist? Just once you see that poor, dear old lady, Avvai, making her obeisance to the three kings on a common dais. For the rest, the Tamil kings were only fighting one another in *Caṅkam* times, changing their boundaries according to circumstances. But, the dream has always been there. A mirage, *kāṉal*, you could call it. And Iḷaṅkō, too, is subject to it.

But anyway, the "army" of the God of love is here, it being summer, or rather "early summer", (spring). Here's a sharp deviation from *Caṅkam* custom. There it's in rainy weather that lovers are expected to be in each other's arms. There, separated lovers pine when the rains come and the jessamine is in bloom. But, well, Iḷaṅkō does not seem to take that. When Mātavi gets home, she "mounts" up to her "summer resort" (Vēṇil Paḷḷi) - takes the *yāḻ*, and sings a sweet song (*Matura kītam*, both being Sanskrit words). Quite some pains are taken over the music, but then, Mātavi is not satisfied. She takes a broad leaf of the *tāḻai* (a sea-side plant), mixes a kind of thick ink (the commentator explains that kum-kum is one of the ingredients), and, using a "fat bud" of a flower as pen, inscribes on the leaf "Love's unskilled lisp" in a letter to Kōvalaṉ. No "art" here! Mātavi's maid, Vasanta Mālai, is the bearer.

What scenes run across Kōvalaṉ's mental screen when he is faced with the letter! All, beautiful pictures, with Mātavi in the centre. A video-reel. But, at the end of it, she is *āṭal makaḷē* - only the daughter of a dancing tribe. The *āṭal* includes acting too. So, Mātavi is a splendid, beautiful actress, but still an actress, so far as he is concerned. He rejects the precious letter, and the bearer goes back disappointed. It must be remembered that this rejection takes place "in the street corner." Which shows that Kōvalaṉ has not yet made up his mind to get back to his wife. He is, still, hanging around, frustrated, and dejected. His sense of guilt would be with him. But Mātavi still believes that he will return—to her.

Episode 9

This is The Dream. A silly dream, it would seem. And we are not on terra firma anymore, it would seem also. A woman called Mālati gives suck to her husband's baby son (by another wife), and the child chokes and dies. Here's a predicament for a poor creature! And, it is specified here that her husband is a Pārppāṉ (Brahmin). Even Kōvalaṉ, with all his wealth, had only one wife. But a Brahmin, we are specifically told, (why?) has two, and one of them is caught in a terrible trap. Co-wives are not normally pleasant to get on with, and how is Mālati going to answer for the death of the child to her co-wife? And to her husband, too, for that matter?

The affrighted woman takes the child—or the child's dead body—from temple to temple, hoping for a miracle. There's a breathless enumeration of temples, including a Jain one, in a few lines, as though to suggest that they exist in abundance. And while she is desperately trying her hand at pleasing the deity Cāttaṉ, a devil, Miṭākiṉi, forcibly takes the corpse out of her hands and gobbles it up. Not even the dead body now, to hand over to the parents. She is like "a peacock struck by thunder." But Cāttaṉ appears, to console her and say, "Amma, don't cry; see the living infant before you!" For Cāttaṉ himself has become an infant. Mālati is able to present that babe to the mother! Well, the child grows up under the care of the "venerable"! Brahmin, the parents die, the son marries a woman called Tēvanti, all in the space of a few lines, and one day, the deity appears in his own form to the wonder-struck wife, and disappears. Bereft of her husband, the grieving wife goes looking for him, from temple to temple, praying for his restoration, and comes across Kaṇṇaki, in a slightly different predicament, but, like her, without her husband.

But now, what is all this about? Or rather, what is its relevance to the story? For, Iḷaṅkō is no hare-brained story-teller or declaimer. His eye is on Kaṇṇaki and her fortunes. Kaṇṇaki's husband had left her, and another woman, also deserted by her husband, comes to console her and invite her to go with her in visiting temples and bathing ghats. Kaṇṇaki's answer, in two words, is significant. *Pīṭaṉṟu.* "Not the right thing to do." She disapproves. If Kaṇṇaki disapproves, it means Iḷaṅkō disapproves. For Kaṇṇaki is not the feminine of the Greek tragic hero, who is great but has one fatal weakness. Iḷaṅkō sees in her his goddess, or rather, the divine, without a flaw. Gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology have flaws, and are subjects to curses, but Kaṇṇaki, though human, would have to be above their level! She would have to be divinity itself if she is to be able to lift her society above the quagmire in which she found it.

But, the temples seem to be the arena where miracles happen! A deity changes into an infant and back into a deity. And what need was there to bring in a Brahmin with two wives? Couldn't anybody have sufficed for the purpose? What need for the two wives at all? Wouldn't the loss of her own child be sufficient to drive any woman from temple to temple if she believed in miracles? And, Brahmin and two wives are together swept clean from the picture, once the god-babe has grown up and married and also deserted the wife, when she comes to Kaṇṇaki as to a companion in suffering. Wasn't Iḷaṅkō simply creating that milieu as a contrasting background for the stern, sober wife with the single-minded love, who waves aside her suggestion as *pīṭaṉṟu* (Not right!) Well, what was wrong about the bathing-ghats? That was where we met the loose women in *Paripāṭal*, and that is what. You can't dismiss what Iḷaṅkō has to say about a thing as just fancy. That was not the way with the *Caṅkam* poets and he was coming in their line. He was documenting something, and, with a purpose. Like that *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poem which shows a Brahmin with his two wives conducting a *vēḷvi*. Nobody else. In all seriousness, as an article of faith and religion-with two wives. When, in the mainstream of the people, every man was glad to be with his wife, or was supposed to be. And so, when Iḷaṅkō brings in here the Brahmin with two wives, in a context quite uncalled-for, he means business. Iḷaṅkō is a Jain, and he shows the Brahmin who has two wives in his narrative. Polygamy! And it is the daughter-in-law, who has lost her husband, who comes, with all good intention, to Kaṇṇaki.

Kaṇṇaki now tells her well-meaning friend, Tēvanti, "My heart is sore over a dream. " He (my husband) clasped my hand, and we went to a great city. In that city, one word dropped on me like a scorpion-sting: "An evil has befallen Kōvalaṉ". Hearing that, I spoke up in the king's presence. Now, I can't tell you much. But, I remember, there was a fire. And what happened after that, if I speak about it, you'll only laugh." Obviously something incredible, even in her dream. Though we don't know what could be incredible to a woman with Tēvanti's antecedents.

Now Tēvanti presses her friend. "You had missed one *nōṉpu* (religious ceremony) for your husband in a past birth. (That's why you suffer separation from him). We will go to the bathing-ghats, and worship in Maṉmataṉ's temple. Those who do so, will be reborn in the "world of enjoyments," to live with their husbands. Come, we will go there to bathe one day."

Kaṇṇaki's response? "Not the right thing to do." Why, is our question. Probably she has not taken in all the hopes that Tēvanti gives her in a typical Brahministic fable, or seeing it in the light of right and wrong, she finds that a chaste wife is not expected to go to the bathing-ghats and worship in the temple of the god of love. *Kalittokai* shows us why. And, see the way that Tēvanti tries to convince Kaṇṇaki. Playing on her superstitions, for there were many. Brainwashing, from-Brahmindom. But, Kaṇṇaki's answer, to a Brahmin woman's suggestion, is, "It's not the right thing to do.'

Just then comes news that Kōvalaṉ is back. Behind the news comes Kōvalaṉ himself. He straight away goes to her apartment "with the bed," "sees the sorrow in the withered form of his lady," and says to her, briefly, that he is ashamed because of the poverty brought on him by the ruin of the great wealth of the family, on account of his "playing with the deceitful woman with the doctrine of deceitful sex." This is how he sees Mātavi. Mātavi does belong to a tribe imbued with "the doctrine of deceitful sex." But, in herself, she is not a deceitful woman as Kōvalaṉ sees her.

Kōvalaṉ does tell his wife that he has "played away" the wealth given by his "fathers" (*kulantaru celvam*). From this, later scholars have adduced the idea that he had really been going home now and then, stripping Kaṇṇaki of her jewels and robbing his parents of their wealth. Now, to the present writer all this sounds like stuff and monsense. Iḷaṅkō does NOT have a word to say about Kōvalaṉ's confronting his parents or facing Kaṇṇaki, with that guilt on him. What an opportunity that would be for a dramatist, or an epic-writer! No, Kōvalaṉ had plenty of currency available with him. How else did he pay down ready cash as Mātavi's price? And she too, was no beggar. She had a "summer-resort" to which she "climbed up," and belonged to the wealthier ("higher"!) class of society. House-keeping was no problem with them, and in any case, they were living on dreams, both of them. Kōvalaṉ did not leave Mātavi because he had run out of cash. He left her because in his eyes a goddess had changed into a false woman. And, Kaṇṇaki did not give the anklet for him to go back to his mistress! Such was the state to which Tamil manhood had been reduced, that some Tamil "scholars" had decided that Kōvalaṉ robbed his parents to keep his mistress, and, worse, that Kaṇṇaki gave her anklet for the same good cause! Kaṇṇaki was "ideal" woman, and she would be happy with anything that made her husband happy! So, was she mad, or—what? What a philosophy of life for Tamil society! Anyway, Iḷaṅkō had nothing to do with that sort of thing, else he would have made it plain. All that he says is that (the repentant) Kōvalaṉ tells

his wife, "I have played away the wealth of my forefathers on a harlot." He was speaking truth. Whose wealth was that but that of his forefathers that bought Mātavi for him? He did not say "All the wealth." He may have run out of cash but he was living in luxury with Mātavi. He went on horseback, to that sea-side resort, the background of the *kāṉalvari*. And horses could not be had for nothing. He may have been a pauper, but he had no intention of discussing his poverty with his parents, though he shared it with his wife. Her "Take the anklets" was an encouragement to the man in him—the son of a merchant-class.

Now, if there had been one word from the poet, but one, to show that Kōvalaṉ had confronted his parents, and Kaṇṇaki too, off and on, the present writer would not have demurred against the popular Tamil view of the situation. But, Your Royal Highness, Iḷaṅkō, if the entire Tamil world had been ranged against you to say that Kōvalaṉ had visited his parents for filthy lucre's sake, I for one am on your side. No, he did not see his wife, till the day that he realised that his love for Mātavi was a *kāṉal*. A mirage. And his parents? Never again.

Now, the question is, if Kōvalaṉ had known that Mātavi was not deceitful in herself, what would he have done? Or, rather, what should he have done? A question for a legal practitioner. But as it is, Kōvalaṉ has no doubts.

We don't see any recrimination on the part of Kaṇṇaki. But she does have medicine for her afflicted husband. Her "sweet smile" lights up her face. And she says, "I have anklets. Take them." Now the man in Kōvalaṉ comes out. He decides to retrieve, by merchandise, the lost fortune. To provide the capital, the anklet should fetch a good price, in the city of Maturai. So, "before dawn" he sets out with his wife. Not a word to his parents, whose wealth he has squandered, and whose affectionate trust he has betrayed. He seems unable to face them. Anyway, if they had seen him, the story would have had to take a different turn.

Episode 10

Cilappatikāram is the Tamil epic par excellence, as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the Hindu epic par excellence. Hence *Cilappatikāram* has to take the reader from the Cōḻā capital, through the Cōḻa country, before he comes to the Pāṇṭiya capital, where the great drama is played out. The Cēra country, where the poet belongs, comes last.

As the couple leave Pūmpukār, they go round (in symbol of worship) the temple of the "dark one" (Vishnu). Then there are celestials who expound the words of him who sat under the Bōdhi tree (the Buddha) in the seven Indra Vihārās. There are meeting places of those "great ones" who have given up meat-eating (ascetics). No dearth of places of worship! And, no signs of strife. Thus they cross the "mouth" (delta) of the Cauvery. But Kaṇṇaki, her "small teeth shining," "lisps" a question across to her husband: "Where is the ancient city of Maturai?" Kōvalaṉ mentions the distance. It would come roughly, to about three hundred miles! He laughs (sorrowfully, says the commentator) at the ignorance of the poor girl whose feet are already tired. Chariots and elephants were comfortable vehicles, even in *Caṅkam* times, and horses did carry troops, but—they were not available like the buses and trains of today, to the mainstream of people. And Kōvalaṉ's one earthly possession was the precious anklet which he was going to sell in Maturai to mend his earthly fortunes. Three hundred miles. A weary distance on foot. To the great , "guarded city" of Maturai, the city of the great king. No fears for him now, except the distance. The irony of it.

All the time, Kōvalaṉ had the anklet with him, we think, but it was not really the anklet. It was only one of two anklets, for Kaṇṇaki had two feet. Where was the other anklet? Safe with her, But why did she not hand over both the anklets to her husband? Well, one anklet was enough, anyway, for capital for some business. And, she, with wifely caution, was reserving the other for a rainy day. What happened to her other jewels, expensive as they must have been? They were, where she was staying in his absence, and where she left her in-laws without a word, She had discarded the jewels when he deserted her. Somehow the anklets seem to have been within easy reach on that fateful day. Both anklets, we must remember, have their role, in different ways, in the drama. We only note that Kōvalaṉ quietly took the one anklet that his wife gave him for a new start in life. He did not reach out his hand for the other (though the plural form suggests that Kaṇṇaki implied both). It was his wife's possession, and what his wife gave him from her belongings he accepted, in tacit promise of the new life that he was going to give her. In itself, just a material thing, his wife's anklet-(Which one? Each equally important, in its own way) is going to decide Kōvalaṉ's fate, somewhat, yes, though only somewhat—as a handkerchief decided Desdemona's.

The anklet, it must be noted, seems to be an essential part of an ancient Tamil woman's jewellery. In a *puṟam* poem, we find a girl running to see a

wrestling match with her anklets jingling. In an *akam* poem, we find a mother-in-law removing the childhood anklet from the bride's feet, in token of the new life before the latter. But, the Pāṇṭiya's queen, in *Cilappatikāram*, seems to have worn anklets! Her anklet, too, the one that was stolen by her goldsmith, is in the picture as a third one. The inference has been, that, as a marriage ritual, the old anklets, in which the bride had run around in her father's house, are removed, and new anklets, in which she would have to do a different step altogether, are given in her groom's house. Conjecture, based on the logic of the situation. But, the anklet is related deeply to woman's life in ancient Tamilnad—not like the handkerchief, which can be shifted from man to woman! Hence, the wisdom of the title that Iḷaṅkō gave to his epic.

But by the time the distance of three hundred miles is covered, many things have happened. It might have taken years. And Iḷaṅkō maintains only the few events of consequence. One is the meeting with Kaunti Aṭikaḷ, the Jain nun. You don't meet with Brahmin nuns, in story, or in history. But Jain nuns, and Buddhist nuns, do exist, (though not in Tiruvaḷḷuvar). Kaunti Aṭikaḷ is on her way to Maturai, (possibly to a nunnery), and accompanies the couple on her own. The landscape on the way has already been described in the *Caṅkam* poems and does not call for repetition. But one line calls for a pause. "The kindred of beggars, and the friends of rulers,' who are equally the "sons of the Lady Cauvery." Classes! And all of them, the sons of the soil watered by the river. Poor folks and rich folks would be everywhere and all through the ages. But, well, here they seem to be mixed up together, and not separated by class-walls, or caste-walls, either. At least, not in the poet's mind. And, of the temples, far greater importance is given to the Jain, than the Brahministic, or the Buddhist.

We must remember that Iḷaṅkō is, after all, a prince or at least, a scion of a royal family that had been powerful in its day. And although he is committed to the life of a recluse, he does cherish the idea, not just of a Cēra Empire, but of a United Tamil Empire, the fragments of which are reflected in the *Caṅkam* poems. He would acknowledge those values of life which alone would have made royalty possible in the political scenario. Iḷaṅkō is a writer with right royal blood in him. He may not be the king of writers, but it must be remembered that (exceptis excipiendis), if we except Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Kampaṉ, the two names that contend in our minds for pre-eminence in Tamil, like Milton and Shakespeare in English, there is no name greater than Iḷaṅkō in the whole of Tamil literature. Kings have written in the *Caṅkam*, and some of their poems do make a mark,

but we certainly cannot include them in a list of the outstanding writers of the world. However we cannot leave out Iḷaṅkō. And, alone among them he stands a prince. But that by itself would not have justified our spending so much time over him if it had not been for the fact that he is so deeply involved in the people, and their life—an involvement which is the first requisite of royalty, and which helps us too in our study of an ancient people.

The Jain nun, Kaunti Aṭikaḷ, takes more than a subordinate place in the epic. Kōvalaṉ is impressed by her, and requests her company, for he and his wife are going - O the irony of it! - to Madurai, "without evil, of the good southern Tamil country." When they are together, walking through the difficult terrain, Kaunti talks to the young people, whom she somehow seems to have adopted, about the problems on the way. A group of Cāraṇās (celestials, from Jain myth) appear to the three, whereupon they fall at the feet of the celestials. One of them picks out Kaunti for a special sermon about the imperative nature of ūḻ or fate, tracking down a man from his previous birth. One line makes us catch our breath. "As you sow, so shall you reap." Why, that's from *the Bible*! But Iḷaṅkō didn't know that. Now follows a list of names for God, "He who knows, the Righteous One, the First One, the Learned One, He of the Heavens, He who is the light of heaven, the Great One, the Lord, the One of unlimited fame," etc., etc., which also carry echoes from *the Bible*. Two names, "He of the eight qualities," and "He of the four faces" stand out. The former applies to Jainism, and is in the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* also. "He of the four faces" applies to Brahminism as well as Jainism, but we infer that Iḷaṅkō has taken it from the latter. It's indicative of the four directions that God commands.

But the gist of the celestial sermon to Kaunti is that, unless you stand in the light of the scriptures propounded by this great God, you cannot escape the effects of the previous births. Whereupon Kaunti bursts out with an ardent declaration, that except for this God, she will not see, or hear, anything. She also speaks, like Tiruvaḷḷuvar, of the God who walked on the flowers. Her mind will not go after any words (scriptures) that are antagonistic to the "Lord's word". A self-declared Jain ascetic. Whereupon the celestials tell her, "Kaunti, may all hold of the previous births be annulled in you!"

But now comes the first spiritual trial in Kōvalaṉ's new life. A prostitute, with her accomplice, approaches them where the party is seated in a grove. The newcomers begin the conversation. They look at the young couple, and ask Kaunti, "Who are these two who look like the God of Love and his wife? And

where are you going?" Kaunti replies curtly: "They are my children. Human beings. Move aside, and go your way." But the disreputable couple, brazen as they are, have their laugh: "O you learned one, (Kaunti) did ever a couple born of the same womb, live together as man and wife?" For Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki are obviously that!

Kaṇṇaki, hearing those "words of fire," closes her ears, and trembles, "before her husband." But Kaunti has that in her which will not take those words lying down. "So, they are mocking at my flower-like girlie?" She turns to the scoffers and curses them.

"Ġo, change into old foxes in the thorny underwood!" "What Kaunti said," declares Iḷaṅkō, "was the curse of *tavam*!" (Just here, we remember Tiruvaḷḷuvar's pointing to Indra, as *cālum kari* (ample witness) of the powers of *tavam* or the ascetic life). What was going to happen therefore to the prostitute and her man? They did become foxes, says Iḷaṅkō, and listening to their "long howls," both Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki trembled, ostensibly, at the powers of asceticism. Now both of them plead with Kaunti.

Those who "spoke what was not right," did it out of "ignorance." Hence, "Won't you give them a time of deliverance?" The intercession worked. Kaunti allows them liberation from the curse, "after a dozen moons," that is, a year, during which time, we should think, they would have ample occasion to learn about their follies.

And by now the trio, Kaunti, the "Devi", and her husband, have reached Uṟaiyūr, also called Kōḻiyūr where a cockerel is said to have declared victory over the elephant—so goes the story! Well, a cockerel could crow from its perch on elephant-top, but that doesn't seem to be quite it. Again, "Devi" is not used for just "wife" in ancient Tamil. "Devi" is Sanskrit for "goddess", and is used for "queen" in *Caṅkam* poetry. Iḷaṅkō has already exalted Kaṇṇaki to the position of goddess in his mind—Divinity, because of an unsullied character. That is the cult on which he has set his sights.

The first of the three cantos of *Cilappatikāram* ends here.

Canto II. "Maturaik Kāṇṭam"

Episode II

The second canto begins with the three walking through the forest on the outskirts of the Pāṇṭiya country.

It's interesting, but the theme of the first chapter of this canto, (the eleventh episode of *Cilappatikāram*), is the Jain-Brahmin difference. The poet is very cautious, but the differences are strong. In line 15-Enter a Brahmin. In line 31 he is called "the great, elderly, *Maṟaiyōṉ* (*Maṟai* means hidden and the Brahmins laid claim to a knowledge of the hidden world). He makes his debut with praises of the Pāṇṭiya king: "Long live our king." Between lines 15 and 30 we are given some information about the Pāṇṭiya king. Where he threw his spear (*vēl*), the sea had swallowed up the Kumari mountain. (We must remember here that there is talk of land at the southern tip of India having been swallowed by the sea!) Second, the heavy garland thrown by the "thousand-eyed one" (Indra), rested on this monarch's shoulders without bringing him down. The implication is not very clear, but it seems to suggest that the Āryaṉ god could not defeat the Dravidian king. Third, the monarch had been able to rope the cloud into his country, thereby ushering in the rains. All three do smack of myth, but then, that Brahmin does not seem to rest his feet on the earth! For when Kōvalaṉ greets him and enquires who he is and why he has come, he just embarks on a picturesque description of Vishnu—from line 35 to 52. Lying on the coils of the thousand-hooded cobra; standing on the top of the mountain; wearing the lightning as garment, etc., etc. The Brahmin himself has come from worshipping Vishnu; he belongs to Māṅkāḍ. He has seen the splendour of the southern king and that is why he is there. Really, nothing to the purpose for our foot-sore travellers. Kōvalaṉ pointedly asks him the way to Maturai. Again the Brahmin embarks on a lengthy description, which seems to show his knowledge of the *Caṅkam* terrain, but actually does not help Kōvalaṉ anyway. However there seem to be three lakes, one of which will help Kōvalaṉ attain his desires. He also suggests that he will meet a celestial dame who will open the door of a tunnel, that, again, will lead to another tortuous labyrinth. Plenty of myth, that is what we observe. And it winds up with a declaration that he is a worshipper of the "great one with the great crown." It is Kaunti, the Jain nun, who gives the reply, and a curt reply it is.

"You of the four Vēdas and the good ideals! There is no need for us to go through your tunnel. All that we obtained in the past birth, can't you see it in us in this birth? After all, what wealth is there unattainable to him who will not swerve from the truth and who will cherish life on the earth? (An echo from Tiruvaḷḷuvar) So, you may go to worship the God you love. We have to get along.'

Well, she as good as tells him to mind his business. What a blow Iḷaṅkō gives to a Vaishnavite Brahmin! Five lines from the Jain nun. For the rest, nearly half the canto is the Brahmin's speech. His lengthy, florid, myth-ridden speech.

Now the second trial, for the reformed Kōvalaṉ. A "nymph" falls in love with him. Of course she knows his antecedents. She takes the shape of Mātavi's attendant-maid, Vasanta Mālai. She falls at his feet and weeps. Now, in that lengthy speech of the Brahmin's, there is a reference to the presence of this sylvan temptress on the way to Maturai, which is, after all, relevant to Kōvalaṉ. For, he remembers the warning, is prepared, and throws a charm on her which defeats her and makes her flee, after first begging Kōvalaṉ NOT to report the matter to his wife or to the nun. (She is afraid of their curse!) Iḷaṅkō puts Kaṇṇaki first, says the commentator, because Chastity takes the precedence over Asceticism.

This temptation, that Kōvalaṉ manages to overcome, is, we must remember, the temptation of wrongly-directed sex. All the long way, after they left home for Maturai, he had been with his wife, he had loved and cherished her, but there was no question of private room or bed. There were two factors that helped Kōvalaṉ in his battle with sex. One was the sweet innocence, the pure love, of Kaṇṇaki, But, one feels, even more than that, (though Iḷaṅkō might not agree) was the presence of Kaunti, the Jain nun, whose influence over him was very strong. He learnt to respect his wife, one feels, through Kaunti, who here stands for the influence of God Himself. And his meeting with the sylvan nymph who wanted to have sex with him, was at a most inopportune moment for him. For he was alone, Kaunti and Kaṇṇaki being together in some shelter, and he had come to drink water at a pool and take some back for Kaṇṇaki. It was at the pool that the "nymph" met him. He was alone, and could easily have succumbed, After all, here was Vasanta Mālai, who brought memories of Mātavi and the life that he had lived with her. But—he had the vision now to see, and to resist, the temptation. When he goes back, he takes drinking water for Kaṇṇaki in a lotus-petal. By the way, was she a doll, to need only that much water?

Now, if the epic had just been a minor one, we could have stopped here. After all, we have learnt enough about Iḷaṅkō's political, religious and social affiliations. Even Tiruvaḷḷuvar we dropped at the point where there wasn't much purpose, socially, to pursue him further. Of the *Caṅkam akam* poems, we took only one out of twenty- five for our study. And when we come to Kampaṉ,

there will be lots, lots, that we will have to pass over-his dimensions are such that, with our limited time, we dare not undertake a word-for-word, or even a stanza-by-stanza, study of him. But, with Iḷaṅkō it is different. Unlike Tiruvaḷḷuvar, it is high drama that he is handling. And he is, after all, not all that expansive though he is intense in his perception of things. According to the world of Tamil scholars, there are five great epics in ancient Tamil *Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Cīvakacintāmaṇi, Vaḷaiyāpati* and *Kuṇṭalakēci*. The last two, except for isolated fragments—are not available. (And not one of these five can be included in the Brahministic or Hindu (?) literature of Tamil.) They are, all, either Jain or Buddhist. *Maṇimēkalai* and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*—we do have them - are crowded with theology and myth, but we really cannot afford to study them either to the letter, though we will have to take a cursory look at the people with whom they are dealing.

Cilappatikāram is a different story altogether. The magnitude of the epic is matched by the influence it has had on the mainstream of the Tamil people. The Kaṇṇaki-Kōvalaṉ-Mātavi story has become part of the literary education of the common people. Sung in ballad, acted out in street-drama—almost every generation in Tamilnad has passed it on to the next. Not in Iḷaṅkō's language, which has by now become obsolete. Nor with Iḷaṅkō's moral force, for it didn't come to play much part with a people struggling for survival. But, it has to be repeated, the force of a great writer's personality, expressed in his writings, has to be brought out in toto as far as possible, because its impact on society would be measured in terms of this force. A great writer has that in him which turns the world upside down. True, the Tamil world was already upside down when Iḷaṅkō found it, but his precious life-blood was spent in trying to right it. And, the epic has held its own, down the ages, among the Tamil literary elite, as one of the three great Tamil works. And when we say "great," we mean it. Hence we will have to go through *Cilappatikāram*, with extreme care.

Episode 12

This is the "Songs of the Hunters." These songs are introduced by a stretch of verse narrative. Kaṇṇaki is resting, with her companions—they are not even mentioned, she is as important as that—in one wing of an Aiya temple. Now, Aiya, Avvai, and Ammai or Amma, mean the same thing. So, mother-worship. It turns out to be a spirit-dance. In *Caṅkam* literature, we find a Pulaitti dancing spirit-dances, a feature of pre-Dravidian worship. Here the dancer belongs to the Maṟava clan,

whose "strong arm wields the bow." She shouts as the spirit—Iḷaṅkō calls it *teivam* (from Sanskrit "dēva") descends on her, flings wide her arms, and, "to the wonder of the woodsfolk," "takes a step and dances." The spirit in her exclaims that, unless the rites to the Celvi (goddess) are paid, she will not give victory to the bowmen.

So now, she is dressed up for the festive occasion. Her costume seems to be that of Pārvati, Śiva's wife. Pārvati is identified with her husband, as well as with Kāḷi, the fearful goddess of the woods. She even has Śiva's black throat! She wears a "baby-snake"—(The commentator hastens to add, "of gold") round her tresses, and over that, the curved tusk of the wild-boar for a crescent moon. Her garland is of tiger's teeth. The striped tiger's skin is round her loins. They put a strong bow in her hand and seat her on a stag. They make an elaborate ritual of worshipping her. Musical instruments—the *paṟai*, flute, and cymbals among them—sound as they lead her to the platform where the offering is to be made.

Now, the goddess speaks aloud, pointing to Kaṇṇaki, who is, simply, among the spectators. Very great things speaks the dancer. She calls Kaṇṇaki a priceless jewel. Well, spirit-filled people are supposed to descry matters invisible to others. But Kaṇṇaki squirms and "hides behind the broad back of her husband," with a "rare" smile, "budding" from her face. If she just hid and blushed we could have understood. But she does say something that tells. "This wise woman is speaking foolishness!" "Wise woman," and "foolishness!" Normally, we would take it that Iḷaṅkō is on Kaṇṇaki's side. But he runs on for over twenty lines in which he also seems to chime in with that worshipper of Kāḷi. Though he does not really sound emotionally involved. Nor, serious. He rattles away, "Amari, Kumari, Kauri, Camari, Cūli, Nīli", etc., Must have been the reaction of the spectators.

What makes things more difficult for us is the follow-up. The hunters, songs. They are real lyrics and no mistake. But—the language in which they are couched? And the sophisticated sentiments? From the forest-dwellers? Those who make a living by their archery? Those who raid cattle? We don't see Iḷaṅkō anywhere handling colloquialisms, for that might mean destroying the beauty of the language of the elite—which would be unthinkable for him—but, where is the dramatic sense behind these lyrics? Almost with a *Caṅkam* finish, plus—a real song-element? Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi sing, but their songs are in keeping with their education and character. But the hunters' songs are not, and that's

what we have to say about them. Well, they could be imaginary hunters, or an imaginary class of highly educated hunters, and even the milieu in which they are placed could also be imagined. That's the uttermost excuse that we can find for this part of the epic. Iḷaṅkō, a Tamil prince, must have been trapped by his love of *Caṅkam*-Tamil into what actually went against the essential spirit of *Caṅkam*-Tamil, namely, realism. If the *Caṅkam* poets wrote a refined language, it was because they were educated into that by the unknown academy. If Iḷaṅkō wrote a refined language, it was because he was a Tamil prince coming in that line. But if Iḷaṅkō made his group of hunters sing songs like that? Did he imagine that the hunters he created also came out of the *Caṅkam*? There were poets of all clans included there, but no, not groups of hunter-poets. Only isolated, educated poets from different tribes.

Again, Iḷaṅkō calls those songs Vēṭṭuvar Vari-the "Songs of the Hunters". In the same chapter, he calls them Maṟavars, "wielding the bow." By later professional discrimination, the Maṟavars would be warriors. In the Vēṭṭuvar Vari you see them as cattle-raiders. So, Vēṭṭuvars, or Vēṭars (hunters), and Maṟavars, are not clearly distinguished from one another. The professional seal was then not there on a community, even in Iḷaṅkō's time. "Maṟam" simply means "warlike", and the epithet would be later bestowed on all the warriors, whether from the hunter-class or fisher-class (Paṟatavar) or whatever.

Episode 13

This brings us back to Iḷaṅkō the artist—for artist he is, with an eye on realism. After the spirit-dance, what?

The trio are moving into the country "protected by the southerner" (the Pāṇṭiya king). Well, reports about it seem to be "great"-that "the tiger will not kill the deer, nor will the bear or crocodile or thunder harm" the inhabitants—Utopia. (Though Kōvalaṉ doesn't seem to believe it!) This is reminiscent of a verse from *the Bible*, but of course Iḷaṅkō was a Jain. And Iḷaṅkō is very particular to lay special emphasis on the fame of the Pāṇṭiya, for it is this same Pāṇṭiya who is going to be picked out as the Villain of the piece-if we except Fate. Who is supposed to be working out the events in every life, including Kaṇṇaki, Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi.

Moonlight is preferable to daylight, for the sun scorches. Travellers who find unendurable the sun, are looking for the "milky rays" of the moon. Line 15. The comparison is to "the subjects of a tyrant" waiting for "the rule of a good

king." Another point. The Pāṇṭiya is descended, apparently, from the moon—like the King-Emperor of China, say?

Kōvalaṉ bids his wife follow him. We infer that the nun is with her. He does not promise her an easy path. "The tiger will roar, the owl will call, the bear will grunt" etc. But he tells her, the difficulties will be lightened by the "good words" of "her of the spotless name" (Kaunti). They reach a place where those who "wear the thread across their bosoms" but who "do not observe the scriptures" are dwelling. Iḷaṅkō seems to disapprove of the style of living of these Brahmins (note the sacred thread). On the outskirts of their dwellings, (so says the commentator) Kōvalaṉ finds a resting place for the two women while he himself goes behind a thorn fence, ostensibly for a call of nature. All the while he is heaving with sorrow—about the plight of his wife.

Now here comes a Brahmin. It's early dawn, and the new-comer does not recognize Kōvalaṉ. Obviously, since he is bringing a letter from Mātavi, he would have known him earlier. But Kōvalaṉ is not the same man. He is changed. The Brahmin, of the Kōsika gōtra, calls out to the Mātavi creeper, exclaiming at its withered appearance. He uses the name deliberately, to sound the man who seems to be Kōvalaṉ, but he would make sure. As expected, Kōvalaṉ turns on him to ask "What are you talking about?" Instinctive.

Just a minute. Here's an emissary from Mātavi. Why should Iḷaṅkō make him a Brahmin? What business does a Brahmin have in those disreputable quarters? Right in *Caṅkam* literature we see one—if but one—Brahmin as a go-between. A pimp. Iḷaṅkō doesn't mince matters. This Brahmin, Kōsika Māṇi, is bringing a letter from Mātavi to Kōvalaṉ. And Kōcika Māṇi, if he knew those folks so well, would certainly know that Kōvalaṉ had a wife and was going elsewhere with her.

Well, Kōcika Māṇi's message: Kōvalaṉ's father and mother were grieving for his loss like a "cobra that had lost its jewel." His kindred were in the sea of sorrow, like a "body that had lost its life." Mūtūr, where he belonged, was like Ayodhya that had lost Rāmā (that story is referred to once or twice even in *Caṅkam* literature). All this had reached Mātavi through Vasantha Mālai. Whereupon, she fell on her bed in "the middle apartment of her towering (seven-storeyed, says the commentator) residence." Hearing of her plight, the Brahmin had visited her. And, we find him in an area indwelt by those who wear "the thread across their bosoms" but who "do not observe the scriptures!" We don't need further explanation.

But Kōvalaṉ, reaching for the proffered letter, is aware of a "scent," with which he had been too familiar. For a moment, he hesitates. Then he opens it.

It reads "I fall at your feet. Do receive my poor words—without the command of parents, to spend the night with her of the good tradition (the chaste one)! Do forgive me in my sorrow. Truthful one, I worship you!"

A great weight is lifted off Kōvalaṉ. "She (Mātavi) is not sinful. It was all my own sin." He was not only correct in his estimate of himself and Mātavi, but he had no intention of repeating his folly. No going back. The temptation does not touch him. And, he meets it in a most unexpected way.

"I worship the feet of my spotless parents: Kōcika Māṇi, show this letter to them!"

If you read the letter, in the place of Kōvalaṉ's parents, it would sound as though it came from Kōvalaṉ. And he was glad to send a message to his parents. Whether Kōcika Māṇi was prepared to take instructions or not, this request should have shocked him almost out of his mind. He, who came from Mātavi to Kōvalaṉ, to be asked to go from Kōvalaṉ to his parents! What implications are there!

Having thus disposed of Kōsika Māṇi, Kōvalaṉ rejoins the two women. His mind seems to be lightened. There are Pāṇars playing the *yāḻ* for the dancer dressed up as Kāḷi, and he joins them blithely, for that is where he excels. And he enquires about the distance to the city. They tell him that the breeze from the city is blowing right there, for it isn't far distant. So, the Pāṇars. In the temple. And one observation by the poet on the "poet's red tongue" leads the commentator (of the twelfth century) to speak of the *Caṅkam* poets—for Avvai does mention "the red tongue" of the poets! It just shows how far the *Caṅkam* influence extends. There wouldn't be anything startling about Iḷaṅkō's mentioning the *Caṅkam*. But there is, when a twelfth-century commentator, with the temple background, speaks about it.

The river Vaikai, that features in *Paripāṭal*,[5] lies between the trio and the great city. The poet compares the river to a beautiful woman, covered with flowers, and controlling her tears." Why, tears? There's going to be plenty of that over the river and that's why. There are boats to take the three people across, with

5. A slightly earlier, though post-*Caṅkam* work.

heads of horses, heads of elephants, and heads of lions, painted at the helm. The party gets across, but the beetles seem to sound a warning to them-"Don't come here!"

Episode 14

Seeing round the City. Morning. Inside the city. Maturai. The first temple to be mentioned is that of "him with the eye in his forehead." (Civa). Next, that of "him with the cockerel on his flag" (Muruka). Alongside of these is the *paḷḷi* of the Jain ascetics. Close by, the king's "kōil". The word literally means "The King's House," but has been used later for the temples which housed the gods. The Christian churches in Tamilnad—except in Cēranāṭu—are also calle kōils. Kōvalaṉ greets Kaunti and requests that his wife be in her protection while he goes in pursuit of his commission. His regrets about his own misdeeds are very deep. "I have been of those who slipped from the right path." And so? His poor wife is suffering. And he himself is "humiliated, among the unknown folks of a strange country." Kaunti accepts the charge, after delivering a rather lengthy sermon on Jainism, the burden of which is the role played by the past birth on this. Men suffer in their hunt for their women. Then they suffer, when separated from them. The Rāmā - Sīta story, and the Naḷā - Tamayanti story, are both brought up for illustration. But—what evil had Rāmā done in the past birth in Hindu mythology? We don't see any in Kampaṉ, but there seems to have been a Jain *Rāmāyaṇā* in Tamil-now extinct, though there are references available to it. (Kampaṉ has, of course, made capital of the boyish prank played by his Irāmaṉ on Mantarai's poor hump. He suffers for that!).

Within the city are those "basest of women," who enjoy the incoming floods of the river Vaikai—the Water-Festival—with the wealthy men of their "love". The details of this enjoyment, with the flowers and the scented paste, are here as in *Paripāṭal*.[6] A great deal of time is spent on describing these "bought" women, reminding us of Mātavi. There is even a flowering creeper of the name—we have seen it before when the emissary came from that semi-heroine. Just her name, echoing down the story. (And one has to be reminded that her class exists even today, as a class, in that city).

What importance is given to womenfolk by the poet! One wonders if the menfolk of the city have nothing better to do than play around—or fool

6. A slightly earlier work.

around!—with the women and the wine. There are a few touches on trade, but the emphasis is definitely not there. Seasons may change, but not the duo in the centre of the picture. The descriptions remind us, in a way, of *Caṅkam* literature, but, new factors come up for notice. And there is the *tilakam* or sacred dot on the forehead. We already came across that in the same poem, when Kaṇṇaki removed it to mourn the absence of her husband. But lines 144 and 145 seen to imply something! Wealthy men, with "those who guard the world"—rejoice in the "gladdening streets" where the beauties appear. The commentator struggles to climb out of a difficult situation by saying that these women are the "king's retinue", but that does not really alter what Iḷaṅkō has bluntly said about the morals of wealthy men, and rulers, in Maturai!

And, dancing and music are here too. For this is another capital! Kōvalaṉ has to go through quite a few streets before he comes to the "wall with the flags.' And here (line 184) are the words "The four *varṇas*." We did not meet that expression in the *Caṅkam*. Out of the vast number of contributors to the *Caṅkam*, there was one poet, a king, who "mingled with the Āryan troops," and spoke of the four divisions as though they did exist somewhere, but even then was positive that the uppermost division would have to yield the palm to one from the lowermost if he were educated. Looks like a challenge to Āryan culture, later dubbed by its beneficiaries as "Indian Culture". And even then the word *varṇa* is not there, In its place is a Tamil word, "pāl". "Pāl" just means division.

Iḷaṅkō very quietly, as though it were the normal thing to do, uses the Sanskrit word, *varṇa*. For it is Brahministic culture that he is showing up to the Tamil world. And we must remember that he was a Jain ascetic. And, which are the four *varṇas*? By today India knows. The first, Brahmins. Second, Kshatriyas or the warriors, inclusive of kings. Third, the Vaisyas or merchants, being a wealthy class. And fourth, the Sudras or the Farmers, whose land yielded the upkeep of the others. A very convenient arrangement for the Brahmins. Well, even in the *Caṅkam*, we found, towards the end, the kings under the control of the Brahmins. Granting that the Brahmins were not gods or super-men, what would be the result?

And these four classes live in the streets in the city of Maturai. But what other activities? You couldn't have ploughmen or tillers of the soil within the city. The Sudras in Maturai would have been land-lords, who would have to kow-tow to the Brahmins, but they would have labourers who were sweating in their fields for them and would kow-tow to them in turn. Sweated labour would lead to the fifth *varṇa*!

The last but one line in this episode must be noted. Kōvalaṉ rejoiced, on seeing the "king's great city." The word used for "king" is "Guardian"—the "one who guards the people." That was the concept of monarchy with the ancient Tamils, developed in great detail in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. That, according to them, would be the only way of securing a kind of stability to society. So, Kōvalaṉ had come to the great city of the protector of the people. You sense his sigh of relief. But—skip one episode, and see the last but one line in Episode XVI. "The king's sceptre bent, and he fell." Here also the word used for "king" is "Guardian." This is—after Kōvalaṉ's unjust execution. Poor fellow, how he counted on the protection of the king! And what happened to his faith? Just for a taste of Iḷaṅkō as artist.

Episode 15

"The Story of the Shelter." There's nothing unusual about a man from Kōvalaṉ's home-town meeting him in Maturai, and making kind enquiries. But why should this man, too, be a Brahmin? He is called *Māṭalaṉ*. And why should *Māṭalaṉ* make such a lengthy address? Before he begins, Iḷaṅkō tells us that Kōvalaṉ "saluted his holy feet," and immediately afterwards the "Brahmin with clever tongue" starts off with a flash-back. Kaunti is present, and it looks as if Kaṇṇaki also is present, for, at the end of his harangue, he mentions "this jewel", obviously the poor wife. Why has Kōvalaṉ come "alone" with "this jewel"? "Alone"? With his wife? That is his question. The whole of the Brahmin's address to Kōvalaṉ, the latter seems to gulp down without a word of response. Poor fellow, he is already deeply troubled by a dream, and his only real answer is that it looks like some evil is on the way. Twelve lines for Kōvalaṉ. The Brahmin's speech takes quite seventy lines.

Now if the rest of the epic had been of a piece with this Brahmin's speech, we could have crumpled up the whole work and dumped it in the waste-paper basket. But it isn't. Iḷaṅkō has not brought in *Māṭalaṉ* for nothing.

Kaṇṇaki is present. And the "Brahmin with clever tongue" starts talking, first of Mātavi, for that is where he has come from. And how does he describe Mātavi? "She who obtained the great award from the king, Mātavi of the complexion like the tender mango-leaf" (Dravidian, that is). Her prowess. Her beauty. And, she was able to do one great thing that poor Kaṇṇaki wasn't! She had brought forth the "milk-mouthed infant."

Here's a stunner! So, Kōvalaṉ has had a baby, a girl. The "elderly prostitutes" had gathered round Kōvalaṉ, to request him to give the baby a name

of his choice. There were "a thousand" of them—a whole prostitute-population! And, with Mātavi, Kōvalaṉ also had showered gold on their red (painted) palms. Possibly all this is no news for Kaṇṇaki. It's not unlikely that he told her everything when they were reconciled. But, for a stranger to narrate all this in her hearing! Sheer brazen-facedness, Was *Māṭalaṉ* marking the reaction of the husband, and the wife, at every step in the narrative? One notices that nowhere does he show disapproval of the prostitutes or what they had done to Kōvalaṉ's family life. Cool of him, one should say. From a polygamous society?

Perhaps it was from Māṭalaṉ's speech that scholars have adduced the idea that Kōvalaṉ had been seeing his parents from time to time, robbing them, and stripping his wife of her jewels, to keep Mātavi living in grand style. Iḷaṅkō himself does not tell us that. And Iḷaṅkō can suggest great things by very minute, delicate touches if he wants.

Another of Kōvalaṉ's past achievements, by Māṭalaṉ's account: He had saved a Brahmin from an elephant's trunk—say from within its very nose!—at risk to his own life. Well, that was heroism and no question. But, the description of that particular Brahmin by Māṭalaṉ! He comes as a beggar. He "walks feebly," leaning on a stick. His body is bent. "Poor fellow", one would say. Of anybody, in that condition. But Māṭalaṉ seems to suggest—as he would—that there was special merit in being a poor Brahmin, as also in saving a Brahmin from the elephant! And, if one may be pardoned for quoting Kampaṉ in this context, that poet also does show Brahmins as being terrified of elephants! Why Brahmins in particular? And, would Māṭalaṉ have taken as much interest in any other poor fellow? And, what were Brahmins doing in a prostitute-colony? All these are questions which can only be suggested. We must not forget that the prince was looking at Māṭalaṉ with Jain eyes.

Two more stories from Māṭalaṉ, involving Kōvalaṉ. One is a famous story from the Sanskrit *Pañcatantrā*—Kōvalaṉ is roped into it. That Brahmin woman who had killed the mongoose that she thought had bitten her child! (Again, a Brahmin) Her husband, it seems, deserted her for that crime. And she was in abject straits. Māṭalaṉ's story goes that it was Kōvalaṉ who relieved her want, brought her husband back to her, and granted them both sufficient means to live on.

The last of the four. A chaste wife has been belied to her husband. Upon his reaction to that, a spirit, (*pūtam*) cast its black noose on him, his mother begging the spirit all the time to kill her instead. But the *pūtam*'s logic is that it

cannot take her sinless life in the place of the son who sinned. So he gobbles up the criminal, leaving the whole family helpless. So—Kōvalaṉ to the rescue! With his boundless wealth. This is the one story out of the four which does not specially bring in the Brahmins.

Māṭalaṉ's comments on what he himself has observed in Kōvalaṉ are horrible. He says,

> "In this birth, I know you have done only good;
> Was it some sin from a past birth that made you suffer alone,
> And come here with this holy, good jewel (of women)?"

Look at the first line: According to Māṭalaṉ, Kōvalaṉ had done only good in this birth. "Only good!" Not a word about deserting his parents and his poor wife. Not a word about his squandering away the wealth of his ancestors on a prostitute-colony. O yes, according to Māṭalaṉ, Kōvalaṉ has done "only good" in this birth. It was good in his eyes that Kōvalaṉ spent royally on Brahmins—and prostitutes. It was good in his eyes that Kōvalaṉ helped the needy, Brahmins foremost among them. What does Iḷaṅkō mean by all this? Surely, nothing to commend the Brahmins.

Look down the lines. Here is a chastened Kōvalaṉ. A different Kōvalaṉ. He has left the prostitutes and chosen to find out his way in life, with his wife. According to Iḷaṅkō, that would be victory! But, Māṭalaṉ is full of pity for this new Kōvalaṉ. He does call Kaṇṇaki a "holy, good jewel", but does he mean that in irony, or does he call her that because he had to find some words for her?

Poor Kōvalaṉ indeed. Whatever touched him or not about Māṭalaṉ's description of his former life, that observation of his about Kōvalaṉ's "milk-mouthed babe"—how it sounds in Tamil! (*Pālvāykkuḻavi*)—would have cut him deeply. Wasn't that a tacit command to him, to return to Mātavi? And hasn't Kōvalaṉ already had two emissaries from Mātavi? And, weren't both of them, Brahmins? But then, how come that Iḷaṅkō, who knew his *Caṅkam* classics so well, did not remember that there could be Brahmins like Kapilar, who, although proud of his Brahminism, was human to the last degree? The effect of Jainism. Religion is like opium.

Strange, that Kaunti, and Kaṇṇaki—and Kōvalaṉ too, should have heard this fellow Māṭalaṉ out. Not a word. They had their problems. The women were waiting for the man's response. He is the most deeply hurt of the three. And, he has had a dream. He replies:

"I have had a dream, in the dark midnight.
It was so real!
In this city, guarded by the king,
A base fellow stripped me of my silk shawl,
And cast it over a buffalo,
So that she of the five scented braids (Kaṇṇaki)
Shivered in fear.
And with her, of the ornament of the tresses,
I also had obtained the victory of those who cut the bonds of birth.
Again, I saw, Mātavi—throwing to the bare earth
The flowery arrows (of Maṉmataṉ, god of Love)
So that the god of Love wept helplessly,
—And handing over to the great ascetic under the Bōdhi tree (the Buddha),
Maṇimēkalai (the infant).
Soon, something terrible is going to happen."

Kōvalaṉ's dream is carried out later in detail. The buffalo is a symbol of death. And maybe it was Kōvalaṉ's wish, too, that Mātavi should forget her lustful past and get down to a better life. He uses her name and his child's without an adjective. This is one of the tragic peaks of the epic. It is not a reply to Māṭalaṉ, who does not deserve one. It is almost a soliloquy, though three hearers are present.

Now it is for Kaunti to act. She speaks up. To Kōvalaṉ. Not to Māṭalaṉ.

"This seat, in the suburbs, is good only for ascetics. For those who come after the kings, (the merchant-class or Vaisyas of *varṇāsrama*!) they should get to the interior of the city. Leave this place before the sun is down."

Kaunti is a Jain. What does she mean by referring to the *varṇas* in Māṭalaṉ's hearing? The line which ascribes this speech to Kaunti, includes Māṭalaṉ also. It goes thus:

So spoke, "She of the great asceticism, and the master of the Vēdas." The first half of the line shows up Kaunti, the second, Māṭalaṉ. Iḷaṅkō is never impolite to the Brahmins when he speaks in his own person. He leaves, like the

artist that he is, a great deal to inference. That Kaunti speaks first, we see. That Māṭalaṉ nods assent, we infer. That would be his way of recognizing the failure of his mission.

Now there comes in a woman, of the cowherd class, saluting Kaunti. The newcomer is called Mātari. Kaunti suddenly, gets an idea. Rather than sending the couple together into the heart of the unknown city, it would be best to seek shelter for Kaṇṇaki with this elderly cowherdess. She is so sure that there can be nothing wrong in the life of the cowherds who "care for the cows and give their yield." She speaks to Mātari about Kaṇṇaki's plight. Till Kōvalaṉ's folks come to take her to her home, "I hand her over to you for refuge," she says. And she would not impose her asceticism on Kaṇṇaki! Hence Kaṇṇaki must be maintained according to her status. "Wash her, paint her eye-brows, put flowers on her hair" etc., etc. In short, 'be a mother to her," "the print of whose feet Mother Earth had not known," till now, when she grieves only for "the hot sun beating on her beloved husband." Kaunti continues, "I have not seen a goddess like this goddess of *kaṟpu* (single-minded love). Where such chaste women live, the rains will not fail, etc., etc." And here comes an echo from Tiruvaḷḷuvar which Kaunti quotes to the cowherds, asking her,—"Don't you know those good words?" But then, if Tiruvaḷḷuvar could be so well-known to the Tamils in the twentieth century, of course he would be well-known in the fifth century.

After introducing Kaṇṇaki to Mātavi—but, where's Māṭalaṉ? Slipped away?—Kaunti proceeds to talk to her about the meaning of taking anyone over for refuge. Unexpected things can turn out, as in the appearance of the divine being, with one arm like a monkey's, "with black fingers" to the Cāraṇās. This being, according to Kaunti, is "Him whom many people worship, unknown by the world.

Now, here is a very interesting story. We never see monkeys being fed in *Caṅkam* literature. They always find their own food. But, in a post-*Caṅkam* poem[7] we do find eats being thrown by people to them. And in *Cilappatikāram* we find the recognition of these cute creatures in an almost human sense. For, a monkey comes to a Jain at meal-time, eats the left-over morsels, and drinks the water with which he washes his hands. The poor thing is scared. But, pity for life is one of the qualities cherished by the Jains, and the master of the house, seeing the expression on the monkey's face, hands over the thing to his wife "to be cherished like one of your own children." The animal died in course of time,

7. *Paripāṭal*, 19.

but was reborn as a human being who, however, retained "one arm with the black fingers" in memory of the past birth, or rather, the loving woman who had tended him as a monkey.

A lovely story. But there are three words in the narration which jolt us into looking closely, with some positive results. One is that the reborn one reigned for "thirty-two years," and another that, after that, he took on "a divine body". Yet another, that he was the "Son of God." If, as tradition tells us, St. Thomas did indeed come to India, that would be well before the *Caṅkam* period. And three centuries are ample time for Christianity to leaven the country. *Tirukkuṛaḷ* sounds, again and again and again, some of the depths of the Christian faith. And, Iḷaṅkō belongs to the Cēra country - related to "Kerala" - where the Syrian Christians had been building up as a community. It is noteworthy, that, of the three Tamil kingdoms, there is more emphasis on Christianity in Kerala than elsewhere. Though actually, Jainism, which predominated then in Tamilnad, would be a stronger fence against Christianity than Brahminism. For, the Jains believed in helping the poorest of the poor towards educational and social upliftment, and the downtrodden classes did not stand to gain materially by switching over to Christianity. This was not the case with Brahminism, in which the plums of the pudding would not reach the lower strata of society, and from which the Jains themselves had revolted.

Now, the discovery of these three items within a Jain story cannot be proof that Christianity was alive and alert in Cēranāṭu during Iḷaṅkō's time. However, the words themselves are worth examining:

1. "After eight-four years were over."
   After thirty-two years. (line 182)

2. "A heavenly form."
   The glorified Body (line 183)

3. "The son of God" - (*Teivakumaraṉ*)
   The son of God (line 191)

Bits afloat, from the Christian gospel, that had found their way into a Jain story? Looks like it. For another thing, if the churches had been built, as tradition would have it, they would hardly stand out. They would be called "paḷḷis" - today they are called "paḷḷis" in Kerala. They would not be conspicuous. They would be absorbed into the "paḷḷis" of the Jains and Buddhists. In the rest of Tamilnad, the churches are called "kōils" today, but that again would only mean

"the king's house." In any case, if there had been any opposition to Christianity, we would have heard more about it. Iḷaṅkō himself would have taken up the cudgels in his epic! It looks like Christianity had been quietly leavening the minds of the people, with its ideals, that are so akin to Jainism—if you except that one about Rebirth, and that other one about Vegetarianism.

This is the place to recall *the Bible* echoes already noted in the *Cilappatikāram*—as well as in the earlier *Tirukkuṛaḷ*. We cannot whistle away the idea of the entry of Christianity by just remembering that great wits jump and that universal ideas would be everywhere. If St. Thomas did come to Kerala, that was in the first century. And Tamilnad was not unfamiliar even then with faces of different colours, though brown and black would predominate. The Ionians, (*Yavaṇas*) turn up again and again in the ancient literature, as king's officers. That was after the break-up of the Greek empire. And the Āryaṇs were fair, too. Tamils always had a special respect for the *Tirumaṛai*, (that which is Holy, and hidden), as *the Bible* is called even today among the Tamils. St. Thomas would not have been unwelcome. His message would have filtered surely through the Jain network in the country, even though slowly. For, *the Bible*, as a book, had not been translated into the language of the people. And, isn't it interesting that the one Jewish synagogue in India happens to be in Cochin? For, sea-worthy vessels were plying to and from the Cēra ports, quite certainly from *Caṅkam* times, and—it does look very much like it!—from Solomon's day.[8]

Two more words of special interest. *Kōḷum kuntamum*. They occur just before the close of this chapter. What they mean today is probably not quite what Iḷaṅkō meant. But they stand today for "all sorts of nonsense." An idiom. How did the words get airborne together down the centuries, to mean, "something that we do not understand?" That's the way with words, words, words. They grow—wings.

Episode 16

This is "The Scene of the Execution." Let's see how Iḷaṅkō stage-manages that.

The execution by itself is not the climax. After all, what would Death by itself mean to a scribe who has come of a race of warrior-kings? It's life, and the responses to situations in life, that carry meaning. But we are moving towards another of the peaks of the epic, another climax. Maybe, the climax of the epic.

8. Chapter I.

And that is the last meal that Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki have together. They do not know that it is their last meal together.

But, we'll have to revert to a "first meal together." That a timid, flustered bride was preparing for her beloved husband. Wiping her dirtied hands—on her dress! A simple, humble meal, but the man says *iṉitu, iṉitu* (sweet, sweet) because of the loving hands that prepared it. *Kuṟunttokai* (167).

Here's something that has moved out of modern high class society, whether western or eastern, English or Tamil. Possibly it still exists at humbler levels. Part of the joy of love-life for a young couple is the meal prepared by the wife and relished by the husband. Not the meal shared, on equal terms, in a posh hotel.

We remember that Kaunti entrusted Kaṇṇaki to Mātari, as to "a mother". And as a mother Mātari treats Kaṇṇaki. Lines 9 -ll are of special significance. They show a simply dressed, but simply beautiful, Kaṇṇaki. She is not "like the daughters of the city, covered with gold ornaments." One can understand if Iḷaṅkō, with his ascetic inclinations, would exalt the unadorned beauty of his Kaṇṇaki about the beauty of the ornamented, much-bedecked daughters of the city. Matari's kinswomen have bathed and refreshed her, and she is radiant, for is not Kōvalaṉ with her? And as long as her husband is with her, she must have her privacy. Her protectress gives her a "small, guarded" home. Not to be left on her own, no, no! For she hands over her daughter, Aiya, as "servant-maid"! So we understand how Kaṇṇaki is able to manage her cooking for her husband. A precious experience, that, for her. Bitter-gourd, cucumber. pomegranate, mango-fruit. The "sweet fruit" of banana. Good quality rice. All, purely vegetarian, for, coming from Kaunti, they are treated as "Jain householders." And, Kaṇṇaki gets the vessels necessary for her culinary skill. Her "tender fingers redden," and her "holy face perspires," as she "turns from the fire." But she has Aiyai's help, and the meal is ready.

A mat, woven of grass, by "skilled hands of women," is laid for Kōvalaṉ. As he squats on that, there are certain rituals, it seems, for "those who come after the kings" (the third *varṇa*) before eating. The wife washes her husband's feet, and spreads the tender banana leaf, on which the rice is served for him. The cowherdesses are in waiting outside for any exigency, but they do take a look—but, is that warranted?—at the couple, and compare them with Krishna and his wife—which names, unknown in the *Caṅkam*, would be by now household names, especially to cowherdesses.

Kōvalaṉ has doṉe. That after-meal delicacy, the "pan" - (it's not the name given here) is handed over by the wife. (We see the arecanut palms in the *Caṅkam*, but, not this ritual!) And, Kōvalaṉ "beckons" to his wife. Parting words. He has not been to this city before, although he has heard about its governance. He is leaving his wife with—complete strangers. His first observation is on her poor, tender feet. And, maybe, that item in his keeping, the anklet, has guided his look in that direction. "Lady", he says, " how did these feet manage that hard gravel path?" (She seems to be without slippers! Slippers were known from *Caṅkam* times, but maybe for a fine lady who never stepped outside home, the anklet was more of a must than slippers.)

And now Kōvalaṉ's mind turns to his parents. How they must be grieving for her plight! "Is all this real? Or is this fate?" His soul is troubled, and he can hardly think. And then he indicts himself, in terms so strong that they cannot be translated.

"With those fellows who spoke nonsense.
Those chaps who frequented bawdy-houses;
Taking cheap words; laughing loud and long;
- Is there a way out for one who indulged himself thus?
I broke from the service of both my parents;
You, poor young thing, have I wronged.
I did not see the sin of it all.
But, what have you done?
When I just said, "Come, up and away,
To the great city," you just got up and came!"

Kaṇṇaki answers: - (also untranslatable).

"I had lost the privilege of giving to the righteous ones.
Of tending the Brahmins.
Of receiving the ascetics.
The great Lady, your mother,
And the great Lord, your father,
Did indeed praise me with gracious words;
So, with all my sorrow and pain,
I did try to smile at them: at which, they grieved at heart;
True, it was your misbehaviour that brought that sorrow.
But since I was of changeless life,
I took your words and rose in obedience."

You almost hear her sobs; and her words ring true. And Kōvalaṉ bursts out, in a few lines of spontaneous lyricism, in wonder and pride, at that wife of his. He presses her—"all of her" to himself, in a close embrace, and, for the first and only time you see "tears" in Kōvalaṉ's eyes. Although he does control them, before walking out.

Here occurs a bad omen, which Kōvalaṉ does NOT notice, though the poet does. A bull charges. Now, how Kōvalaṉ tackles it is not mentioned. But it is obvious that he has overcome the problem, although he does not know the superstition associated with it. For, remarks Iḷaṅkō, it would not be natural for his community to know that! Implying, that superstitions connected with bulls belonged to the fōlks that kept cattle. Reasonable, one thinks, even for superstitions.

Kōvalaṉ has to get through the "street for women." What, no getting rid of that pest of society? But no, these are not prostitutes. The commentator tells us that these are "women employed in the service of the temple." They would be *Tēvatāsis*, by later reckoning. And they would also be later absorbed, one thinks, into the prostitute-breed, But, just now, as Kōvalaṉ is walking along the street, they are perfectly harmless. The poor fellow's mind is engaged elsewhere.

He meets someone walking grandly, "followed by a hundred goldsmiths." He has "got into" the "bag for the body"(!) (Mei-p-pai)[9] i.e., he wears a shirt, which is not a must in the hot clime. And in some way, not specified, Kōvalaṉ sees him as a craftsman recognized by royalty. He accosts him. "Can you tell the price of an anklet fit for the queen?" And the king's goldsmith replies, with mock-humility, "Your servant is ignorant, but I do make ornaments, from the king's crown downwards." As this "messenger of death" folds his hands "in salute," Kōvalaṉ shows him his treasure. The goldsmith bids him wait awhile, while he speaks to the king about it. The goldsmith's mind is "resolved."

But where's the king? His queen is displeased with him. She pleads headache and keeps to her apartments. For, "the appearance of the daughters of the city, and the songs, and the melodies" seem to have captivated him. The disease of the times! But the monarch, seeking reconciliation, walks towards her residence, "followed by a few servant-maids." At the gate, the goldsmith prostrates himself, and tells his story.

9. The usual apparel for men seems to be "two pieces of cloth" - the dhoti, and the scarf. At least, Nakkīrar, of the *Caṅkam*, says so *Puṟam*, 189.

"Someone had stolen the anklet belonging to the "kōil" (the king's house) putting my watchmen to sleep by magic spells. And the thief is in ward at the moment." And, "because it is time for the (past) evil to act," the king calls to the palace guards and commands them, "If my lady's anklet is in his hands, kill him and bring it here."

For the king is proccupied with his own personal troubles. He is not in a position to order scrutiny, the first and most obvious thing to do. Woman is in the pie here, too, and she spoils the game.

So, back goes the goldsmith. Kōvalaṉ is "in the finished net of his own evil." He is brusquely told, "These men have come to see the anklet. Orders of the king of the mighty army." Sensing the situation, the men round him protest. "He has been orderly. No, he cannot be the type of man who deserves to be executed." Now the goldsmith reverts to his story. "People have spells and charms. And they can look like gods. They can give medicine and prevent us from escaping. See, one fellow came as a messenger to our king's brother. He entered his chamber in woman's guise, and removed the garland that "throws sunlight." Awakening, the prince missed the jewel and drew his sword, but could not find the thief. And that is the way," concludes the goldsmith, "with these people"—inclusive of Kōvalaṉ.

The goldsmith's harangue is intended to stupefy the listeners. And he succeeds. An "uneducated" fellow swiftly flashes his sword. Kōvalaṉ falls in two pieces, his blood making the Earth "grieve" for him. But someone else has also fallen. That is, the king, the "Guardian" of the people. And, his sceptre also has gone awry, "bent." The sceptre is the symbol of the just rule of a reigning monarch.

The narrative is swift, brief, and telling. Every word. The hero's dead body is on the stage. One would think that here the curtain would fall for the last time. But no, the action is to continue. For this is only the end of Episode XVI. And the epic winds up only after thirty episodes. We are in the middle of the epic.

Episode 17

Eliot shows those poor old women involved in the sorrow of a great Archbishop's murder in the cathedral. Iḷaṅkō shows the Āyccis, the cowherdesses. Poor simple folks also. But what happened is just the death of a stranger, a poor

fellow who came to their capital to seek a livelihood. Still, the shock-waves reach them.

The caption given to this episode is "The *Kuravai* of the Āiccis." *Kuravai*, or Kulavai, is a word that has survived both in Tamil and in Malayalam. It denotes the wailing noise made by women on festive occasions, with two fingers rapidly churning their open mouths. Whether that was the exact nature of the sounds made by the Āyccis or not we do not know. But the episode is introduced by highly polished, *Caṅkam*-like verse, carrying—O, the irony of it!—a high-sounding encomium on the military prowess of the Pāṇṭiyaṉ, the function of whose justice we have seen at the close of the previous episode.

The morning drums are sounding, "coughing," from the "kōil" (Palace) of the mighty Pāṇṭiyaṉ. The elderly cowherdess calls out to her daughter "Aiyai", whom we recognize, for help, for "today" is their turn to supply ghee or butter.

But, they notice that

The milk in the pot will not curdle;
The tears come from the great humped bull.
Hence, Something is coming.

The butter in the pot will not melt;
The lambs do not frisk but lie down
Hence, Something is coming.

The cows with the four teats are shivering;
The bells round their necks are falling:
Hence, something is coming.
Something indeed, but these things bode no good!

The Āyccis have an idea. If they dance the dance of Krishna with his wife Piṉṉai (Nappiṉṉai), the evil could be averted. And Kaṇṇaki, in her loneliness, can look on. A diversion?

But before the actual Krishna-cowherdesses dance (we don't see that in the *Caṅkam*) starts, the womenfolk sing a song of seven verses (Anything sanctimonious about the number seven?) to extol the heroism of the bull-baiters who alone can claim the love of the women-folk. These seven verses are lovely in their simplicity, but they are followed up by something highly complicated, and, as so often with Iḷaṅkō, totally unexpected.

The musical notes of the octave are the same in Tamil, even ancient Tamil as in Western music. (But how's that?) So, to simplify matters, we will take them as "dō, rē, mī, fā, sōl, lā, tī." Seven young women, each one carrying the name of one note, stand in a circle; the one standing to the North carries the first note; the others are counted to the left, the notes being placed in order; "according to custom" (!) Apparently, the "dō" here stands for Krishna. Now what a distance their songs would be from our very modern Kulavai! Certainly Iḷaṅkō does not mean what we would, by the term Kulavai. There is some difference between wailing and singing.

But, how do we connect these songs with the cowherdesses? We should remember that they are among the suppliers of milk to the palace! They would be high-class. Forget their *varṇa*.

No praise could be too high for the smoothness, the mellifluousness, of the songs that follow. Now these are just hymns, Vaishnavite hymns, and if, from them, you turn to the Vaishnavite hymns of the Bhakti period, you would have no doubt in pronouncing Iḷaṅkō's hymns as more beautiful. But, the purpose of the hymns, however beautiful, however marvellously beautiful, has already been defeated. For great grief is on the way to the Āyccis, and, to their pet protege—Kaṇṇaki.

Episode 18

Mātari had been to the Water-Festival, it seems, At any rate she has been to the river Vaikai to worship Viṣṇu, with flowers and incense and sandal-wood paste. And there are "noises from the city." She understands, (by the way, we have to infer that) and comes back swiftly to Kaṇṇaki. "She says no word, she stands and says no word," says Iḷaṅkō. But Kaṇṇaki "will speak." She is not the Kaṇṇaki we know.

Ellāvōḷ (An ejaculation like "Alas!"). She cannot control herself. "My husband, I do not see him," she sobs. "My bosom heaves like the bellows. What did those folks tell you, my friend?" It's a long-drawn-out wail. A lament. A dirge with repetitions, pauses, and cries of sorrow. And she is told what happened.

After that, three times in the space of ten lines Iḷaṅkō throws the blame on the Teṉṉavaṉ, the monarch of the South, the Pāṇṭiya. Because the Teṉṉavaṉ did wrong, poor Kaṇṇaki cries out in sorrow, like a widow whose husband is on the funeral pyre.

The Pāṇṭiya's share in the crime is not extenuated. It had been explained, but is not excused. Another point to note here is that the widow does not mount the funeral pyre. One lady, a queen, did indeed commit voluntary (wilful?) *Sati* in *Caṅkam* times, but *sati* has not come to the forefront in Tamilnad, for "womanslaughter"[10] was one of the worst crimes that could be committed. Life was there before Kaṇṇaki, but—her husband was no more.

Kaṇṇaki, who hardly opened her mouth during his lifetime-except once-has her lips unsealed. "Listen! Simple daughters of the cowherds! Sea of the bounding waves, know the facts! You dear one of the burning rays (the sun), is he a robber, my husband? My husband is no robber. You women of the black eyes, this city is going to be burnt by fire."

Just a few lines, for a powerful lament.

And, at the end of it, a voice says, "Lady, this city is going to be burnt by fire." A voice. You don't hear that in Hindu mythology, so far as the present writer can vouch for. But the voice, from Heaven, is a well-known feature of life with the Christian community. It would have been spoken about in Iḷaṅkō's environment.

Episode 19

The lips, once unsealed, do not stop. "I shall see my loved one," Kaṇṇaki wails. "I shall hear his pure words. If I don't," she continues, "you may sneer at me as the one who caused this suffering." She holds her anklet out now for everybody to see. People are interested and they listen to her. Again and again and again, they refer to the monarch's sceptre. "How did that bend?" they ask, one of another. Looking at Kaṇṇaki, they think that she is spirit-possessed. It draws towards night and the red-rayed one withdraws his rays, and "goes into hiding," when Kaṇṇaki sees the bloody remains, uncared-for, of her husband. The lament is continued as she embraces him. Whereupon he gets up, wipes her tears, and remarks, "The full-moon face is eclipsed," and falls dead, again. Her cry: *Poṉṉuru naṟumēṉi poṭiyāṭik kiṭappatō*? (That body, precious as gold, to lie covered with dust!)

The lengthened vowel-ending, ō, in several of these lines, lends itself strongly to the loud wail. And one recalls the use Kampaṉ makes of it too, centuries later.

10. "Pennkolai".

And now Kaṇṇaki really speaks out, for she is at the people of Maturai. angry, ferocious.

Peṇṭirum uṇṭukol? This phrase is repeated four times. Twice, a break, then twice again. It is a challenge to the city.

"Women, here? - her first question. But neither English, nor modern Tamil, can carry the thunderous notes of this challenge. In between is the implication that Woman is supposed to carry the burden of her husband. If such women were in Maturai, would they not understand her?

Close on this question comes the next.

Cāṉṟōrum uṇṭu kol? *Cāṉṟōr* means "respected elders." But the qualification that Kaṇṇaki sees in the *cāṉṟōr* is that they have cared for the young children they have brought into life. She herself bore no children!

So, no elders in this city, who know what it is to love and cherish the tender young ones.

And the third question: A clap of thunder. *Teivamum uṇṭu kol*?

"No God here?" - Well, in this city of the countless temples? "In this city where the Maṉṉavaṉ's (king's) sword struck wrongly?"

"No God here?" Reiterated four times, like the two previous questions - with just one idea between the second and third lines.

"I shall see the king and demand," she resolves at last. And suddenly she remembers the dream she had had and narrated to that Brahmin friend of hers. (By the way, dreams do have meaning with Iḷaṅkō). So, Kaṇṇaki makes her way to the gate of the king's palace.

Ūrcūḻ vari - (Round the city) makes terrific reading. It is the prelude to the burning of the city. No one who reads it aloud can fail to be aware of the stormy notes of passion that carries one along, from Kōvalaṉ's dead body to the palace gates of the king who thoughtlessly butchered him. Although the metre is not Kampaṉ's metre, the voice is Kampaṉ's in those great moments when he mounts to the sublime.

Episode 20

The shock-waves from the great crime, endorsed by the king, reached not only the simple cowherdesses, but also the queen in her guarded palace.

She, too, has had her premonitions. Looks like a vision, or a hallucination. Not just a dream.

The king's umbrella, symbol of the protection he affords to his people, and his sceptre, symbol of his just rule, have fallen to the ground. The palace bell's sounds are shaky. The night "throws rainbows," the day "showers stars," the "eight directions quake" etc., etc. "I have to speak to the king," the queen tells her maids.

About ten lines are spent on the pomp and panoply with which they surround her as she speeds to the king, seated on his throne, supported by carven lions. On the other side, "Keeper of the gate! Keeper of the gate!" calls out someone.

Vāyilōyē ! Vāyilōyē !

Anyone who has the least familiarity with *Caṅkam* literature will recognize it. That was Avvai, speaking angrily before the gates of Atiyamāṉ.

Iḷaṅkō is no plagiarist! But he probably means to echo Avvai, when he makes Kaṇṇaki say this. In both places you hear the voice of Authority. The old woman, a recognized poet. And the poor young widow, just a nobody. But they both speak with one voice.

The gatekeeper promptly leaves his station and goes to the king with his news: The furious woman, anklet in hand, demanding to be admitted to the king's presence.

The gatekeeper observes protocol, with more than compound interest.

"Hail, our king of Koṟkai, hail!
Lord of the south, hail!
Ceḻiyeṉ, hail! Teṉṉavaṉ, hail!
You whom blame never touched, hail!"

The fourth line! It's like Iḷaṅkō to bring that in. The king grants access to Kaṇṇaki. As she enters, he queries who she is.

"I'll tell you, king, for you don't know. I come from a land where a monarch handed over his son to be killed for a crime of his. That is to say, the Lord of Pukār. From that city, a son of the merchant-class came here, O valiant monarch, with my anklet, to seek a living. I am Kaṇṇaki, wife of that Kōvalaṉ, whom you killed." Kaṇṇaki, speaking?

But the Pāṇṭiyaṉ has his defence. "Woman, killing a robber is not a crime!" Kaṇṇaki has not lost her thinking. "My anklets have diamonds inside (to jingle in the hollow)." He rejoins,

"My wife's have pearls."

Iḷaṅkō never wastes words, though he can make some of his characters do. She "broke the jewelled anklet" in question, with such angry force that a diamond struck the king's mouth. Seeing it, the king's "umbrella' lowered, his sceptre leant down. "To listen to the words of that goldsmith! Am I a king? It's I who am the robber!"

yāṉō aracaṉ? yāṉē kaḷvaṉ!

"- Me, the king? It's I (who am) the robber!"

Interesting, but quite some of the memorable passages in ancient Tamil begin with yā.

yātum ūrē (Every city is my city)
yāyum ñāyum (My mother and your mother)

and others. Today's Tamil vocabulary carries practically no yā. It usually substitutes ā, or a consonant, for yā.

Well, with the realisation that he himself is the real robber, another terrible fact dawns on the king: "With me has swerved the guardianship of the southern country. Break, then, life!" The poet shows the king falling in a dead swoon. And the Queen by his side—who is no doll, who had her quarrel with him, who has had her premonitions, who was involved in the shock of the whole affair—falls dead also, because "there's nothing in life for a woman who has lost her husband."

Rather too sudden, one feels, the two deaths. Though Iḷaṅkō does suggest, even earlier, the impact of Kōvalaṉ's death on both king and queen-as guardians of monarchy. The shock-waves reach them. All the same, it's Kaṇṇaki who rides the crest of the tragic emotion.

Episode 21

The action could have stopped there. But we cannot take our twentieth century concept of tragedy into a fifth century Tamil epic. For, this epic is not like any other epic. Not the *Rāmāyaṇā*, not the *Mahābāratā*, not *Paradise Lost or*

Regained. Iḷaṅkō simply takes the central character from an incident afloat in *Caṅkam* literature and works it out his own way. To fit into a message that he had for the Tamils. He might have included the twentieth century world in his ken had he only known it!

This episode begins with Kaṇṇaki taking a look at the fallen queen and recognizing with horror that she has done something awful. "I cannot understand anything of this," she confesses, as well she might. But she does know her Tiruvaḷḷuvar! "He who, in the forenoon, does evil to another, shall meet his own evil in the afternoon." And she includes herself in a list of seven Tamil women (again seven—the number!) Renowned for their *kaṟpu* (chastity or single-minded love for the husband). She goes through the list. What stories of *kaṟpu*, inside a population teeming with prostitutes! Some of these stories are pretty, if silly. For instance, some little girls make a doll of sand—a sand-man, on the beach. And they catch hold of one of them and tell her "Look, here's your husband!" So the girl-child, in all seriousness, seeks to prevent the tide from washing away the sand-man! Yet another. A woman changes into stone (not just metaphorical!) And remains stone till her husband's return. Yet another. A woman's baby fell into a well. Her co-wife thereupon threw her own baby into the well (but where's the sense in that?) And both babies were retrieved. For another. One little lady heard tell that she was promised to her mother's friend's son before they were born. Whereupon she decks herself with flowers, puts on a new dress, and "bows her head" as bride!

Yet another story. A woman finds that a stranger is eying her moon-face in the way he shouldn't. So, she puts on a monkey face, and changes it only after her husband comes to her. Well, the poet doesn't mean a mask anyway. Another story. A Cōḷa king's daughter, who married a king of Vañci (Cēraṉāṭu) finding that the flood had washed him away, came down and "spoke" to it. Whereupon the waters brought him back and "stood" him before her. Now, the minor scribe who is feeding us the meanings of hard words—not Aṭiyārkkunallār - actually confuses this story with the Ātimanti and Āṭṭaṉatti of the *Caṅkam*. But, fancy a king's daughter going around dancing publicly, and then going to all the water-sheds looking for her husband! No, this story is about a Vañci queen who had the miraculous powers of *kaṟpu* to bring her husband back to life. Poor Ātimanti of the *Caṅkam* is so much more real. And—we must not forget! Ātimanti is documented history, while the Cōḷa king's daughter and her miraculous *kaṟpu* along with Kaṇṇaki and all that belongs to her, are—fiction, pure and simple. If Iḷaṅkō makes us confuse fact with fiction, it's because he

makes fiction look so much like fact. That's just his imaginative power, of which he has quite a fund. Of course, while we are reading Iḷaṅkō, we are only listening to an antique tale and forgetting that it is an antique tale. Like Kampaṉ, who can make us gulp down indigestible things with relish, but then, unlike him—who can laugh behind his sleeve at us at the same time—Iḷaṅkō is taking his story very seriously because of its moral content which he brings to bear on actual life.

Just here, it must be observed that we miss our commentator, Aṭiyārkkunallār. So far he has been following the trend of the story as faithfully as the kite's shadow follows the kite. Now, suddenly, the shadow disappears. And we find ourselves in the shambles of an ancient language without our guide. But we will have to pick our way without his help for the rest of the epic. Which means nine episodes more.

The commentator is one of the Saivite scribes of the twelfth century. We do not know his name—but whose name do we really know? Not Iḷaṅkō's, not Tiruvaḷḷuvar's, not Avvai's , not Kampaṉ's. Aṭiyārkkunallār just means "he who has been good to those who worship the Holy Feet." Many Tamil scribes are known by names which are not really their names. No Christian names and no surnames here. Yes, in the *Caṅkam* we do have some real names, and funny names they can be at times, but—the major poets of Tamil literature are what the people choose to call them.

Iḷaṅkō makes his Kaṇṇaki go through the stories very seriously, as if the purpose of her life depended on it. Probably he is trying to show us her mental make-up. The sort of stories that Kaṇṇaki was fed on, her childhood education. At the other pole, one should say, from Mātavi's education!

Having brought her moral stand out into the open, Kaṇṇaki has one thing more to say. And she calls on the daughters and the sons of the city (daughters first), and the gods of heaven, and the ascetics, to listen to that. "I curse the city of the king that wronged my beloved. And I am guiltless." Having pronounced the curse, she plucks out her left breast with her right hand, (but—is it as easy as that?) circles the city three times, and flings the article concerned into it. Now the woman's breast, in Tiruvaḷḷuvar, is a symbol of the sacred love between man and wife. We could also add that it is a symbol of the nourishment given by the old life to the new. However, Iḷaṅkō seems to take only the former idea, and enough is enough for his purpose.

The impossibility of what Kaṇṇaki did. That doesn't deter her creator. Well, if you can take your reader into Heaven and into Hell, there's just nothing you cannot do. That's Dante. A woman, who had been sexually assaulted, had "cut off" one of her breasts." But that's in *Caṅkam* literature. You can relate that, like everything in the *Caṅkam*, to normal life and call it realistic. The woman would have died but that's left to inference. Iḷaṅkō's heroine simply twists off her left breast. But then, she is a goddess! We have no evidence of Greek literature influencing Tamil, but we do know that Greece had connections with Tamilnad. And we also feel that the milieu in Tamil literature has changed, sharply, from the *Caṅkam*. It does look a wee bit like Greek. Though, far more predominantly, Āryaṉ. It was not just the Brahmins who brought in that. The Jains also were responsible. After all, Jainism was an offshoot of Brahminism, and *yātum ūrē*, by a Jain poet, was written centuries before Iḷaṅkō.

The last line of Episode 20 shows the Pāṇṭiya's queen, worshipping her husband's "twin feet" and falling dead. The last word there is *maṭa moḻi* - suggesting that her words were young, childlike, and had no wisdom in them. This word *maṭa moḻi* is frequently used, appreciatively, of a young wife in the ancient literature. Probably, in a pre-eminently masculine society, the lisp of a young woman did not need wisdom to grace it. It was pretty enough by itself. Of course, nobody would have thought of using that word for Avvai!

The first three words in Episode XXI are "Kōvēntaṉ Tēvi". They are a cry from Kaṇṇaki. "Dēvi of the king"! For Kaṇṇaki is responsible for what happened. The death of the queen. And she acknowledges her responsibility. "Horrible, what I have done!" Well, she does not "understand it all." But there's always Tiruvaḷḷuvar to the rescue! "What you did in the forenoon against another, you get back yourself in the afternoon." She seems to be afraid of what she has done. But—she confidently ranges herself along with those other women of *kaṟpu* in her list. *Kaṟpu* in Iḷaṅkō's eyes is a deadly weapon. That nymph who tried to tempt Kōvalaṉ sexually and failed, begged him not tell his wife—for obviously she dreaded the curse of a wife who had *kaṟpu* (single-minded love) in her. Now, when Kaṇṇaki's curse descends on the city, along with her breast, it shakes up some one else. This is no less than a celestial, a spirit who apparently rules the fire. He assumes the "form of a Brahmin," with "milky teeth." Again, why in the form of a Brahmin? A celestial who seems to be in charge of a special duty? And why, "milky teeth?" Smiling? Or, grinning?

The spirit addresses Kaṇṇaki. "*Mā pattiṇi*! (Great, holy wife!) I have commands to know from you, who could be exempt from the great fire." This spirit is in charge of the Fire.

Kaṇṇaki's reply, again, chimes in with the list of those whom the fighting Tamils exempted from their arrows.

"Brahmins, cows, *pattiṇis* (good wives), old folks, and children".[11]

No escape from *Caṅkam* literature. Iḷaṅkō knew it too. And Kaṇṇaki commands that the fire is to destroy only "those who have done evil." Well, there's great, good, commonsense in that.

The *veṇpā* that closes the episode has to be looked into in detail.

The fire of *kaṟpu* eats up the king and his "women" (plural), his palace, his archers, his army, and his elephants. And the divine gods of the city also disappear. Before Kaṇṇaki's curse! "The divine gods"! And Episode XXI is over.

By all the laws of aesthetics that the English language has brought before us, the tragedy should be over here at least. Only, we forget that Iḷaṅkō was not writing a tragedy. He was not concerned with Art for Arts' sake. He, who had given up a kingdom. He believed that he had something to tell a people. All great writers have this conviction, else they would NOT write. Much would Iḷaṅkō care for people extolling him sky-high as poet! No Nobel Prizes on the horizon, thank you! No, he wants to say something and he is bursting with it. And we will have to allow him to say it in his own way. Of course Iḷaṅkō had the greatest regard for the vocation of poet, and Tamil poet at that. That, too, he got from the *Caṅkam*.

The kings who left their marks there were too busy fighting. And ruling. And giving. And also, sometimes doing some things that had better be left unsaid. Now, Iḷaṅkō is freed from all that. He, as prince, has shaken free from his princely privileges as well as handicaps, that he might be fully involved in his vocation as poet. That vocation carries him into the heart of the people for whom and to whom he would speak. He did not know that he could go international. With his great news. His great message. Allotted, to him, and to him alone, of all the Tamil poets who spoke out. He's not free to escape from that!

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11. *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 9.

Episode 22

"The face of the God of Fire opens out." That is how this episode begins. And, the next line, "the guardian spirits close down their watch."

Now, the city would be at the mercy of the fire. We saw the death of the king, and then the queen. But what of the officers who would, naturally, be around? The Purohits, the Brahmins, the secretaries? They "are seated, like pictures." Stunned. Brahmins too. With them, we see also the "little girls" untouched by the fire. Why? Because they are as yet too young for mischief? Looks like it! But there are others who run for their lives, "seeing the face of Fire"! The fighters, charioteers, etc. Good to see them run. For a change. And, there are plenty of spirits too, - the spirits who guard the streets.

Those spirits carry out orders from High command (who exactly, we do not know). Anything like it in Āryan literature, or in Greek? The present writer is not aware of it, at any rate. But here are two sentences from "the Book of Revelations."

To the Angel of the church of Ephesus, write."

To the Angel of the church of Sardius, write."

A spirit, in charge of a group of people, who takes orders. Now, this is not to say that Iḷaṅkō knew anything about *the Bible*. It's just to suggest that bits of that from adjoining *paḷḷis*, had been floating into the milieu with which Iḷaṅkō is familiar.

These spirits assume the forms of the three major gods of the Hindu pantheon—Śiva, Brahma and Viṣṇu—though they are not the gods themselves, avers the writer, though why, we do not know. And these spirits along with that particular *pūtam* (spirit) who "takes the sacrifices" from the "noisy city" of Kūṭal (Maturai), appear before the woman who "flung down" her breast, and tell her that they knew "on the day when the king's justice went awry" that the city was doomed to be "burnt by fire," and hence it was "natural for them to leave." All of them flee. As for the streets where the flags had been flying and where the grocers had sold grain, and the four streets of the four different *varṇas*, they are confounded like the forest that the Pāṇṭavās (from the *Mahābhārata*) had torched. The *cēri* or "dwelling-place" of the Maṟavās (fighters) is all in flames.

But, the "flags of flame" are not allowed to turn towards the "ascetics' abode." And what of the cows and their calves? They too flee there for shelter.

What of the other animals? The "warlike, fierce" tuskers? The she-elephants? The "swift" horses? They race towards the "outer walls" of the city, where we left Kaunti.

Another picture. Of extreme luxury. The beds, of young women and young men. The flower-garlands are broken and scattered all over. The inmates? "In lust and liquor"? Well, these two elements of life are "suppressed." Young mothers, waking their young children from their soft mattresses, carry them and flee, along with the "grey-haired women." But , there are women looking on, with approval, with feelings of satisfaction! Would you believe that? These are the "great wives" of the householders who receive guests and observe the *aṟam* (*dharma*) of the home" - the Jain householders. These women feel, "Can you really call this cruel, the quarrel of the breast of her who lost her husband? No, surely!" But then, they are safe! This conflagration is very discriminatory!

One more aspect of city-life. The dancers. O yes, related to Mātavi's class. With the drums. The flutes. The *yāḻ*. But, well, they have lost—the stage. Iḷaṅkō minimises words here. He has shown all that in glamorous detail when he brought Mātavi as artiste into the royal presence of the Cōḷa king. No repetitions! But he shows these unfortunate women as wondering about Kaṇṇaki: "Which country? Whose daughter is she?"

The ultimate result of the fire: No more of these activities: "The evening festivities. The Vēdas' sounds. The drumming of the Murasu" etc., etc. Iḷaṅkō imputes this state to the breaking of the king's justice.

As if Kaṇṇaki is happy over all this! She is, as she herself said earlier, sighing "like the bellows," when, who should come to see her, but the goddess of the city, Maturāpati herself. She "could not bear," says Iḷaṅkō, "the heat of the flame!"

Episode 23

The goddess of the city. Anything great about this? But the description of this personality is remarkably suited to Pārvati, who is here identified with Kāḷi. The crescent moon is on her forehead. At either end of her mouth, two bright teeth protrude. To the left, her body is dark. To the right, she is golden. Her left hand bears a lotus flower. In her right hand is a sword—or scythe? - For it is "bent", or crooked. Her right foot wears a warrior's anklet. The left, a woman's "single" anklet. Details, for an idol! But, the fourth "single" anklet! Three "single" anklets, *cilampu*, have their roles already in the story. That which Kōvalaṉ took

to the goldsmith. That which Kaṇṇaki took to the king. That which belonged to the Pāṇṭiya queen - for the other was stolen. *Cilappatikāram* indeed.

Kāḷi is here called the "Woman who rules the race of the Pāṇṭiya." She comes, hesitatingly, to Kaṇṇaki. Not confronting her. From behind. Kaṇṇaki "turns her wan face to the right" and takes a sidelong glance at her. "Who are you, coming to me from behind? Is it because you know my great sorrow?"

Now the goddess speaks. "Your great sorrow I know. My name is Maturāpati. I have a word for you. I bear your husband's sorrow. Listen. Fate brought this to my prince (the Pāṇṭiyaṉ). This same fate that brought this to your husband.

"The king's ears would listen only to the sounds of the Vēdas." Not to the sounds of the "tongue" of the bell. He was a *maṉṉaṉ* (king) at whose feet folks worshipped. Not one whose misdeeds were spoken about by the people. Listen further. That elephant, his manly youth, might strain to burst control on seeing the eyes of women, but his sex-life was always in order. No disgrace to those of high birth.

"Listen further. The wife of that poor fellow Kīrantai was repeating to him what he had said, that there is no fence like the king's fence. But one former king was actually knocking at the "weak" door of the fellow's poor home to make sure that all was well at night when he was away. But, he heard a man's voice inside that home! The result? When the king was discovered to be the culprit, he cut off his own hand that had knocked at the door. To those who "are born of the high class Virtue comes naturally," says the spirit of Maturai!

"Listen further. The Cēra king had provided "the great rice" (to the armies of both the Pāṇṭavās and Turiyōtaṉā) and the Cōḷa king—had weighed his own flesh against the pigeon, and granted justice to the cow."

"Now listen to what the Cēra king did. Hearing of the bounty of the Cēra king, who gave heaven to the Brahmins of the "strong Ṭamil,[12] a poor Brahmin, called Parasurām went to see him, over the forest, through the city, etc., and found the king giving abundantly to the one-minded folks of the second birth who fed the three fires and taught the four Vēdas, and did the five *vēḷvis* and had the six duties. (The numbers gradually rise, one, two, three, four, five-to

12. By providing for a great *homa* into which a Brahmin leaped, with his wife, for an entry into eternal bliss!

six!) Taking the precious things he obtained, he went homeward, resting, for a break, at the *bōdhi maṉṟam* (the outer house of the Buddhist temple), putting down his walking-stick, his water-jug, his white umbrella, his packet of sweetmeats, and his slippers.[13] He says,

> All hail, great warrior!
> All hail, king who broke the Kaṭamba tree!
> All hail, king who carved the bow! (On the Himalayas) etc.,

etc., to his own satisfaction, for he is in Cēra territory where he obviously feels secure.

But he is quickly surrounded by little Brahmin boys and girls who have scented him out. So he tells them, "Little roly-poly Brahmins, say the Vēdas with me!" and hands over to them his packet of sweetmeats. Now, among them is one Vārttikā's son, named Śiva, who repeats the Vēdās so well that the wayfarer is highly pleased, and hands over to him some of the expensive gifts he received from the king. But, these gifts are a cause of real trouble. The boy's father is put in prison on the charge of theft. The wife is in such distress that the door of the Aiyai temple refuses to open to the devotees. The news reaches the king, who decides that something has gone wrong somewhere in his rule, to hurt the goddess, and finds out at last the reason. He immediately apologises, "prostrates himself(!) before Vārttika, and—the temple door opens at once! (So-ho. The King prostrates before the Brahmin).

"Listen. Now for what happened to your husband. There has been a prophecy extant that Maturai will go up in flames. In a previous birth, your husband was born as one Paratan, an officer of the king. He had accused a merchant, one Caṅkaman, of spying. Poor Caṅkaman was committed to "non-slaughter" (Jainism) and that was why Paratan hated him. Caṅkaman's wife—she doesn't appear to be Kaṇṇaki! - went around crying out "Is this justice?" But after twice-seven (fourteen) days, she was united with him. Similarly you will also be united with your husband after twice-seven days. In a heavenly body, not in the earthly one."

A very lengthy narrative indeed. We have here tried to bring out only the gist of it. But there are lots of things for observation. When Iḷaṅkō gives a

13. This passage is of special interest when one comes across Kampaṉ's description of the Brahmins in the procession from Ayodhya to meet the young heir-apparent.

character a lengthy speech, he means many things that he could not say in the first person. The whole episode reads like a fantasy. What stories and what people! Only poor Kaṇṇaki is natural. She finds someone approaching her from behind and turns round, (to the right) to see who it is. Anyone to make a kind enquiry, when she is heaving in her sorrow? No sign of any response to that narrative by the goddess Maturāpati, but for this: "I cannot live, and I cannot die, *until I see the husband of my soul!*" she says—for Maturāpati has promised her that she will meet her Kōvalaṉ after twice-seven days.

Before the gate of the Kāḷi temple, just before she leaves for the mountain, *where she is to meet her husband*, Kaṇṇaki makes this statement: "I entered this city by the east gate with my husband. I am going out by the west gate alone (Without him)". A statement that reminds one of *Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law.* And the last words that she speaks in this episode are: "I am a door of evil." For has she not burnt up Maturai?

So, for twice-seven days she waits under the flowering Vēṅkai tree, and then she recalls, "This is the day." The kinsfolk of the king of the gods are all there, to shower unfading flowers on her. The *Vēṅkai* flowers will fade. After all, they are of the earth.

A "heavenly chariot" descends from above and Kōvalaṉ is in it. Kaṇṇaki gets into it—and that is the end of the episode. But, what a reunion? They both seem quite dead, Kaṇṇaki as well as Kōvalaṉ. So far as the reader is concerned, there's no life in them! When Kōvalaṉ parted from Kaṇṇaki, what tragic impulses were throbbing through the movements, the words, the tears! Well, one supposes that Iḷaṅkō, not knowing anything about the world after death—he may or may not have heard of it from his Christian acquaintance—is not prepared to give it any imaginary colouring. Kōvalaṉ comes to receive Kaṇṇaki—no look, no word, *no feeling. Kaṇṇaki goes to heaven!—with him. But-no look, no word, no* feeling! Vacancy. Silence. Death. For both of them.

True, in Maturāpati's promise this had been implied. "You will meet, in the form of the heavenly ones, not in the form of the base ones of earth." Heavenly ones indeed. We don't see any of it. And so, that chariot from heaven, too, means—nothing. To the reader, but also, to Iḷaṅkō!

But we have to turn back to the goddess of the city. Maturāpati. Iḷaṅkō expressly tells us that she dares not confront Kaṇṇaki. She seems to steal up her *from behind. She, a goddess? And, in the last but one line of the previous episode,*

we are told that she "could not bear the heat of the flame," that was consuming the city. She seems bent on explaining to Kaṇṇaki why all this happened to her. And she seems bent on excusing the Pāṇṭiya king too! Among the many great things she sees in the Pāṇṭiya is one item concerning his sex-drive. A young, energetic man, a warrior. Well, if he is not castrated, he will have the sex-impulse in him. The goddess says expressly that he indulges his sex-instinct only in an orderly manner. Can we help remembering the queen's tiff with him? She didn't seem to think him as orderly as all that!

There are four lines in Episode XXIII which show the king struggling with the sex-impulse and not being able to hold up the V for victory after all. People who are familiar with elephant-behaviour have heard about an elephant in "must," a tusker gone dangerous on account of an impulse that the poor thing does not understand for all his stature. Well, this elephant[14] is within the king, who is trying to fight it down, but it will not obey this helpless mahout, for all that he is "educated!" (In *Caṅkam* poetry you see an "uneducated" mahout speaking the "northern language," i.e., Sanskrit-to the elephant!) These four lines are terribly suggestive, and would not have been possible to anyone who does not come from elephant-country!

Rather interesting, that Tiruvaḷḷuvar does not seem to recognise this elephant. Even though he does deal with the man-woman relationship in some detail, he seems to be keeping to the *Caṅkam* side of the affair i.e., the woman's love-instinct. Possibly, as man, he found that more compelling! Iḷaṅkō cannot spare the man, for it was the elephant in Kōvalaṉ that destroyed him. The core of his story. The credit for this description of man's sex-instinct, (not love) goes to Iḷaṅkō, but the object of it is excused by Maturāpati as being, well—not out of order. Which, Iḷaṅkō, being an ascetic into the bargain, could not have condoned. Not a bit.

And it must be borne in mind that it is the spirit (or Angel?) of the city that is speaking. This spirit represents the civilization of the city, and is not likely to see any blemishes in its monarch. And it is very much inclined to extol and exalt the Brahmins. Did not a sovereign prostrate himself before an injured Brahmin (and not even injured by him, but injured in his country), before the temple-doors opened? What did Iḷaṅkō imply when he made the goddess tell that story? It would have been distasteful for Iḷaṅkō to fight down Brahmindom

14. Line 36 of this episode.

in the first person. Hence he could make others speak so as to expose the ridiculousness of it. And probably Iḷaṅkō meant more than the Brahmins when he identified this spirit with Kāḷi.

When we turn to that episode, wherein a monarch cut off his right hand for having knocked at woman's door, thinking that the man of the home was away, his only intention was to ascertain that everything was right within. The husband happened to be at home. So, what? Why should the king make himself a criminal? Why should he cut off his right hand that knocked at the door? If he had knocked in the spirit of integrity, only as protector of the helpless, his cutting off his right hand would only have made him look a double-dyed criminal in the eyes of the people! How long could a king, who was such a fool, remain a king? But that seems to have been the spirit of the city, Maturāpati! Look at the name that Iḷaṅkō has given it! Iḷaṅkō would have liked that king to take a lesson or two on kingship, we feel, from—Tiruvaḷḷuvar. What a tale! And the story of the king who weighed his flesh against that of the Dove is not very different. Wasn't that king cheated, really? And, one feels that Iḷaṅkō is laughing at the superstitious use of numbers from line 67 to 70. One principle, two births, three fires, four Vēdas, five *vēḷvis* and six duties. This, in later times, becomes quite a mannerism, - the use of numbers, that is. But it must have been sufficiently pronounced, - even in Iḷaṅkō's day, for him to take notice of it.

Iḷaṅkō winds up the episode with a *veṇpā* beginning with half-a-couplet from Tiruvaḷḷuvar. "She who does not worship God, but worships her husband." That, of course, is Kaṇṇaki. Then, for a touching up, some twenty lines on the Pāṇṭiyas, who were the most famed of the "Three crowned kings," and who had conquered the "Northern Āryaṇs.' Now we proceed to the third canto of the book.

Canto III VAÑCIKKĀṆṬAM

Episode 24

Canto III begins with the singing and the dancing, of the Kuṟava girls from the mountains. Wonder if the word Kuravai has anything to do with the Kuṟavas. For it is a Kuravai (now used also as Kulavai) that they are singing. We already came across the word in the songs that the Āyccis (cowherdesses) were singing, in episode XVII. The Kuṟava girls also sing beautifully. Both Kuṟavai groups are different from the Vēṭars' (hunters) songs. Why does Iḷaṅkō give so much importance, in his tale, to the Vēṭṭuvars (Vēṭars), the Āyccis, the Kuṟavas?

Three full episodes. And you only see them singing and probably dancing—for you do feel like dancing to those songs. One of the lines from the Vēṭṭuvar's, or Vēṭar's songs goes thus. "The clan of the Vēṭars of the bow and arrow is the clan." This is repeated in two more stanzas. The suggestion is, that the hunters' clan is very important, very—noble, shall we say? Why does Iḷaṅkō thus bring them in, with the Āyccis, and the Kuṟavas? Well, simply because he wants to involve the mainstream of the Tamil people in a story, at the peak of which stands the crown, which is shaken up by some folks from the "higher" classes of society. Brahminism is by now very much in the air - or, on the air, shall we say? - for Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ are "upper" caste people, and Mātavi, too, being descended from heavenly dancers, although her people are in a prostitute-colony. Deliberately Iḷaṅkō ropes in the ordinary folks of Tamilnad, making them sing and dance - though of course to the tune of Brahminism. What else would they do, the cities being so full of temples, and the Brahmins commanding so much respect from all sections of the people?

The Kuṟava women are singing about the woman who "lost her breast." And they are singing of her as a goddess," the likes of whom "we do not have in our community." So,

> "Humble folks, humble folks,
> Take the goddess!
> Touch the drum,
> Touch the bell,
> Strew the flowers,
> Show the incense!" etc

A very spirited beginning.

The girls are bathing in the floods from the mountains, "the new floods that come caressing the rocks." But, they have their axe to grind! They want their husbands. And, since Kaṇṇaki has rejoined her husband, (they think so!) they believe that this ritual will fulfil their desires. Throughout the songs, the gods of both Dravidians and Āryaṇs make themselves felt. Muruka, Śiva, Brahma, and Vishnu, are all here, in full strength. Herein has the poet sought to bring in the gods, with the myths associated with them. Iḷaṅkō seems to be aware that the Brahminical influences are all round him. Not wishful thinking, for he was Jain. But faithful portrayal. We must bear in mind that we are just a step behind the Bhakti literature in Tamil. The song-element, too, which is absent from *Caṅkam* literature, but is so sharply pronounced in Iḷaṅkō, would lead the

way to the Bhakti songs. The episode winds up with the pious wish of the Kuṟavas, for the welfare of the Cēra king. The Cēra king comes last, for it is a Cēra prince speaking.

Episode 25

Vañci. The episode begins with a flash-back. The exploits of the Cēras. They had "cut the Kaṭampu tree that was fenced by the great waters." This has been mentioned in *Caṅkam* literature. The Kaṭampās are in the list of the four pre-Dravidian tribes, who would have been subjugated by the Dravidians in their heyday. The list includes the Paṟiahs, Tuṭiyas (Pulaiyas) and the Pāṇars. You don't see these other classes fighting anywhere. The fight seems to have been taken out of them. Simply knuckled under. The Pāṇars were, well, encouraged by the Dravidian kings, for dance and song were always welcome at court. But the Kaṭampās seem to have held out, and retreated probably to some fortress in some promontory, where they did flaunt their power. But—the Cēra crown had cut down the tree, symbol of the last stronghold of the pre-Dravidians—the Kaṭampas.

Down south, it was the Kaṭampās. But the Cēra king (Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ) had been to the Himalayas! (A *Caṅkam* reference) He had carved the emblem of his state, the Bow, on the mountain. For, wasn't he one of the gods! (The Cēra dynasty is called the dynasty of the gods).

Just see with what nostalgia Iḷaṅkō looks at the past, for all that he has given up the world as ascetic!

Well, Iḷaṅkō projects himself into the picture here. The Cēra king is grandly seated in his "silver" (white) terrace, and by him are his younger brother, and the queen, a chieftain's daughter. The king wishes to see the mountains "surrounded by the mist," with the "sleepless, sounding cataract." A king, on a holiday! Surrounded by the womenfolk. Of course he would be on the "great, black elephant," like the "heavenly warrior" (Indra), who loves to "play with the daughters of heaven in the flower-gardens." Next follows a joyous list of wild flowers that meet the king's eye, and then comes the great river down the great mountain like the "garland on the tall one's (Vishnu's) bosom." Now there are sounds that come to his ear. The songs of the Kuṟava women. The "fearful" sound of the cataract, the thunderous noise of the elephant fighting the leopard, etc. Also, the noises the mahouts make to help out the elephant they have trapped in a pit. In much the *Caṅkam* strain.

But, the king is not going to have his holiday out! For like the "enemies" who come to greet him with presents (to conciliate him), who should come, but the mountain-folks? Lengthy is the list of the articles they carry on their heads. Apart from what one would normally expect from a fruitful mountain terrain, like bananas and mangoes, there are interesting young creatures. Baby elephants, baby leopards, baby monkeys, and even the babies of the *yāḷi* - an animal whose shape and identity we do not yet recognise. And there are specimens of bird-life, too. Peacocks, wildfowl, parrots, etc. for, they have come to meet the king, and they would not come empty-handed. And they bring great news, of Kaṇṇaki's ascension to heaven.

This is really a recall of the *Patikam* or introductory lines of the epic. One more person was there. One *Taṇṭamiḻ* Ācāṉ, a poet. This poet is identified with the Cāttaṉār of *Caṅkam* poetry! Clever of Iḷaṅkō, one should say. Neither Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ, nor Cāttaṉ, belong to Iḷaṅkō's age. But such is the hold of the *Caṅkam* on Tamil royalty, that Iḷaṅkō just cannot shake free of that. Those icy tentacles[15] are around him even when he sets out preaching a sermon in verse. Three centuries gone by, and Iḷaṅkō sees himself living in the *Caṅkam* age. Not only that, but he sees the three Tamil kings as being on the most cordial of terms—which we never really see in the available literature. This shows that Iḷaṅkō, in his heart of hearts, was hankering after the Dramida confederacy about which Khāravēla of Kaliṅka spoke. Which had once protected the identity of the Tamil people.

Nehruji, while he does not seem to be aware of the "power" of ancient Tamil literature, did once refer to the "fissiparous tendencies" in the developing nation of India. Quite probably a carrier-pigeon from the distant south of India brought him news of the danger of a language knitting together certain fragments of a long-divided Empire. He might have scented it out from C.N. Annadurai, or from E.V.R. But, how far is it true? Time and tide have changed things. Today, a Tamil can coolly quote Tiruvaḷḷuvar without any reference to his own conduct. No, neither Tiruvaḷḷuvar, nor Iḷaṅkō, have been able to save the Tamil people from themselves. For bare existence, they would need the control of something stronger than their language. That is how India comes to be relevant today in the daily life of the Tamil population. It's a life-and-death affair, and literature, however imaginative it might be, cannot carry the goods by itself. The pen is mightier than the sword, but Life makes demands on the pen.

15. This is not to belittle *Cilappatikāram*! There can be dull, tiresome sermons and powerful sermons. *Cilappatikāram* belongs to the latter category.

The woodsfolk have come to greet the king-with great news. Under the "*Vēṅkai*- tree of the forest, one lady," "without one breast, and in the sorrow of loneliness," "while the gods praised her," with her husband she went to heaven. Ascension. Was even a story like this, in Āryaṉ myth? Or, Dravidian? But, the Ascension is a familiar idea in Christianity. Originally it was associated with Christ. But later, it came to feature the Virgin Mary also. And the idea would have leavened Iḷaṅkō's environment. From the paḷḷis. But—"From which country is she? And whose daughter? We do not know," say the Kuṟavas.

Now Cāttaṉ, who is present, Cāttaṉ, from the *Caṅkam* itself! - is ready to corroborate the story. Every detail. From the "cilampu of the evil" (of the previous birth) to the death of the Pāṇṭiyā queen. His speech ends with the "All hail! Hail for ever and ever!" to his king - the Cēra king - (also supposed to be from the *Caṅkam*!).

The Cēra king is "grieved", at what happened "to a king like myself." And he continues, "May my life break before such a name for injustice comes to me!" A great wish.

And here follow a few lines on the responsibilities of a king. The idea behind monarchy, in the Tamil kingdoms. The Cēra king sees the "bent" sceptre of the Pāṇṭiyā as having been "straightened" out by his death, by his giving up his life itself. But—what is there so great, so much to be "worshipped," in kingship? Nothing, says the Cēra king, except sorrow. For, should the skies rain heavily, should any life be wronged, the blame, the great blame, is always on the king. Hence, to be born in the "good community" of those who "guard the world," even if you are afraid of the "bent sceptre" when you rule the world, the result is, only, sorrow. This is the Cēra king's estimate of the ultimate worth of kingship to the kings. "Vanity of Vanities?"

One must remember, that, although this speech is attributed to the Cēra king, the real speaker here is Iḷaṅkō the poet. This is how he sees kingship. And no wonder.

But there is real life in the portrayal of the king. He turns to the queen, the Kōpperuntēvi (the king's great Dēvi) by his side, with a question: "Of the two great women, that one who went with her life (her husband), and this one who come here with anger (for the injustice to her husband) - who is greater in your sight?" A philosophical consultation. With a queen, yes, but a woman. And the queen is ready with her reply: 'That lady who died because she could not

bear the sorrow of her beloved, may she have great joy in heaven. But as for the *pattiṉi* goddess who came to our wide country, we should worship her." So the king "looks" at the "scholars," the counsellors, in attendance.

Iḷaṅkō is one for surprises. For the unexpected. In this respect he is strongly, markedly, different, from both Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Kampaṉ. Once you are familiar with the direction of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's mind, you more or less anticipate what he is going to say. And yes, with Kampaṉ, too, except in those not uncommon phases where he turns aside deliberately to a sadistic spree, or a spell of mischievous humour. The pleasure we have with him, whether he takes us for a joy—ride over hill and over dale, or for a plunge into the depths of passion, is the pleasure of fulfilled anticipation. But with Iḷaṅkō you never know what he is up to next. Sometimes, when you are digging for coal, you turn up—diamond. Whoever expected a king to say what his Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ has said? About the worth of a Crown? Probably that is, after all, in the emotional make-up of many a monarch, old or new. Where is the great thing about being a king? You may strive all you can to do right, but if anything goes wrong with your people or your country, even the weather, you are held responsible for it. Only, kings do not talk that way normally. But here is a king confronted by the news that the sovereign of a neighbouring country had paid with his life for the blame of injustice. And Iḷaṅkō does not see these two as princes warring among themselves. After all, good fences do make good neighbours, and in Iḷaṅkō's eyes (pure imagination!) the Cēra - Cōḷa - Pāṇṭiyās were on terms of very cordial relationship. So, here's the Cēra king, jolted into the awareness, that what happened to the Pāṇṭiya king could happen to him anyday. Hence the observation.

And the queen's reply also has its startling points "What if the Pāṇṭiyā queen had that much divinity to join her husband in heaven? Peace be with her! After all, she belongs elsewhere. (The queen sounds more practical). Let's turn our attention to her who came to our own country."

The sky is the same, whether it flashes lightnings at you, or carries moonlit banks of cloud. Normally you do not give it a second thought. But, when you catch yourself stepping, quite unawares, as sometimes happens, under the arch of a rainbow, you do stop to look. That phenomenon also is quite in the scheme of things, but then, you had not anticipated it! That is the way with Iḷaṅkō. See that elephant-metaphor! All those reputed *Caṅkam* Tamil poets, living in the midst of elephant-territory, had not observed that! For all their sense of realism.

Now here are two cases, of people, women, going to heaven. Heaven, whether as *mōkṣā* or *viṭu*, was known by name to the Tamils even in the early literature. But nobody knew what it was like, and the *Caṅkam* poets preferred not to discuss it. Tiruvaḷḷuvar, ditto—he had not been there anyway! In Āryaṉ literature, though heaven is peopled with gods and goddesses, you do not find dead people going to heaven. Even Sītā, pure as she was, went down into the womb of Mother-earth, where she came from, and not - up. But Iḷaṅkō shows two people going to heaven because - they are holy. What happened to the Jain theory of Rebirth? Waived? Here again you see the Christian concept of life after death, floating from the *paḷḷis* into Iḷaṅkō's environment.

If you are holy, you go to heaven, which is beyond your comprehension. And both Kaṇṇaki and the Pāṇṭiyā queen were holy according to Iḷaṅkō - and, according to Tiruvaḷḷuvar (For, it is Tiruvaḷḷuvar who is really ruling the roost, even in *Cilappatikāraṃ*). Neither Tiruvaḷḷuvar nor Iḷaṅkō would chime in with the Christian concept of holiness here. The harmony is not complete. There are even discords. But then, there's nothing to be done about it. Both poets are on the outskirts of Christianity. The Christian message of Salvation has not touched them. A woman is holy, if she does not worship God but worships her husband! Both poets say that. One says it in theory, and the other puts it into practice—in imagination. Obviously it was the presence of the prostitute-element, flooding society, that compelled them to see the need of woman's single-minded love to knit the home, and then society itself, together. But whatever be the reason, no Christian would accept that a woman's passionate love for her husband would by itself take her to heaven. She does need to worship God for that. Which, both poets are, not just side-stepping, but apparently refuting!

Well, the king "looks" at the scholars, his counsellors, for further advice. The advice takes the king a step beyond what would have been his natural inclination. He had come for a holiday, to see the scenery! Much opportunity a king can have for that. He himself knows better. He is involved in the thankless business of ruling a nation, and this business of honouring a woman for her *kaṟpu* does have something to do with it. For it preaches to the people the necessity of stability in the home. The king depends heavily on the counsellors for directions in a critical moment. Now, who are these counsellors? For, they have a crucial role to play in the policies of the king. Away in *Maturaikkāñci*, three centuries earlier, we find the Brahmins in the privileged position of counsellors, almost rulers, of the king. Of course just here Iḷaṅkō does not mention that the

king's ministers were Brahmins, and if he leaves out that particular, so will we also have to. However, we will have to study the advice that the counsellors give him.

A word about the "worship" that the queen suggests for Kaṇṇaki. It is taken for granted that a stone should be set up in her honour, and made an object of worship. Now in the heart of *Caṅkam* literature, there were "hero-stones," stones set up in memory of the valiant dead, inscribed with their names and achievements. They would be honoured by their progeny in their own way. "Worshipped." And the stones representing Śiva under the trees would be "worshipped" too. However, while all this is idol-worship, there's no sign of sculpture as an art, in the literature which shows every other kind of craftsmanship. Nor do we see any definite shape in the stones concerned till we come to *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, where we see Muruka with six faces and twelve hands. But while there is great fuss made over the stone to be brought and installed in Kaṇṇaki's memory, we do not see anything of the image carved in stone, as yet. There would be plenty, later.

But what of the stone? Where is it to come from? The counsellors say that "If the stone is not brought from the Potiya hills, but from the Himalayas, it could also become "God." And the Himalayas, wherein the "Bow" of the Cēras is carved, would be the right source. It could be bathed in the great Ganges, and then in the Cauvery, also considered holy. The first sentence is rather interesting. "Even if" the stone is brought from the Himalayas. It is carefully worded. Not to extol the Himalayas above the Potiya hills of the Tamils. Statecraft. And, besides, the Cēras have a right there. They have carved their "Bow" on it!

But the king feels that it would be demeaning the valour of those of "our" great nation "with the long sword," if they were just to take a stone from the adjoining hills and dip it in the nearby Cauvery! It's the king who openly says that. The blood of the warrior-princes of Tamilnad is in him.

Now, this means—War. Crossing the difficult terrain up to the Himalayas was no holidaying. It meant crossing enemy territory. Vanquishing the enemy. "Like the good old days"—did Iḷaṅkō think that? - of the Tamil kings. And the king - and of course Iḷaṅkō - seem to know well their *Tolkāppiyam*, the grammar which is supposed to be comprehensive on the arts of peace and war as well. We found it woefully beside the mark so far as the content of *Caṅkam* literature was concerned, but the king seems to take it as being as authoritative as scripture.

The counsellors just suggested that a stone from the Himalayas would do "as well" as one from the Potiyil mountains. Iḷaṅkō shows the warrior-blood in the Cēra king boiling up at that. Much he thinks of his social responsibilities, his responsibilities to the people! There's pride, hereditary pride, in the Tamil king. It seems, when a king's daughter is given in marriage, as the prize of war, to a Tamil king, she will also be bringing, along with her dower, a number of Brahmin ascetics. (They would ensure her strength in the new surroundings!) Should the king of the Himalayas refuse to give the stone (in the place of his daughter), then the Cēra king is ready for war, (in the manner prescribed by Tolkāppiyar), whom the king as well as Iḷaṅkō seems to have learnt by rote.

Now the chief minister speaks up. He would not belittle the pride of the warrior-king, but reminds him of the day when his own mother (again, as memorial-stone), was brought from the Himalayas and bathed in the Ganges. So, the Cēra king has precedence for it in his own family. He had fought with a "thousand Ārya kings," and "Death of the cruel eyes opened them," says the minister. A great deal of rant is there, in both the king's words and the minister's. But the minister does not prescribe war at the outset. "Since you, our king, are going to the Himalayas only for a stone to write (carve?) God on it, we will send letters to the northern princes in the name of the three southern Tamil princes, with the emblems of the Bow, the Fish, and the Tiger." Now we don't wonder at Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ or his minister. They are only characters from fiction though we need to be reminded of that. But we do wonder at the hereditary pride of Iḷaṅkō, which he was satisfying in a day-dream.

So, "Beat the drums!" The king, with his retinue, comes to the city of Vañci, his capital. He has to make preparations. Meanwhile, two lines, lines 187 and 188, have lingering echoes. "He who cut the Kaṭampu tree near the sea, and he who carved the Bow (on the Himalayas)." The Kaṭampu tree refers to the guardian tree of the Kaṭampas, who seem to be the last tribe of the pre-Dravidians to keep up organized fighting. This was in the south. The carving of the Bow in the Himalayas was a symbol of victory over the north. No, history does not bear out all that. There may have been an expedition to the Himalayas, but we think of Napoleon Bonaparte in Russia. A complete Cēra victory over the north as well as the south of the sub-continent, seems to have been only in the dreams of Iḷaṅkō. And he features in the scene only as a silent observer.

Episode 26

With fanfare, and drum-beating, the king mounts his throne. The queen is felt by her absence. But there are the Ācāṉ, (*purōhit*), the secretaries, the astrologers, the army commandos, round him. It is decided. The reply to the king's letter, from "those who dwell in the Himalayas," is unsatisfactory. The sword has to be out. Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ makes an oath: "If this sword comes back empty, without bringing the stone. . . . on the heads of the crowned Kings of the north, may my warrior-guise not strike fear into the hearts of my enemies, and may my sceptre make my own people tremble."

The Ācāṉ seeks to soothe the king, now well in the fighting mood, and reminds him that the other two kings of Tamilnad were also involved. But the Astrologer declares that this is the auspicious time (Astrologers decide events in the *Rāmāyaṇā* too!).

Among the immediate preparations are the religious rituals, such as are not mentioned by the *Caṅkam* poets. For one, the king "bows" his "otherwise erect head" before Śiva's feet, and mounts his elephant, while the Brahmins bring the fragrant smoke from their *vēḷvis* (homas) to him. But, what of Vishnu, him of the "sleeping posture"? Iḷaṅkō says specially, (lines 64, 65 and 66) "Because Śiva had placed his feet on his crowned head," the king had to take the sacred offerings brought from Vishnu and "bear" them on his shoulders. So, Śiva's blessings, on his head. Vishnu's, on his shoulders. The precedence goes to Śiva. The king seems to be a Śaivite. And, the question of precedence between Śaivism and Vaishnavism in Tamilnad, later a somewhat heated issue, is already showing up.

As the royal procession starts, the "dancing women," presumably of Mātavi's breed, are arrayed on the way, to give the king their good wishes! Twenty lines, to take Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ "like a god," from Vañci to the Blue Mountains-the Nilgiris. With his elephants, his horses, his fighters, to camp for the night. But there are Muṉis, (Rishis or ascetics) "who fly in the heavens" (like Angels!) who come to the camp to give Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ a warning: "Where you go, great king, it is your duty to safeguard the "Antaṇās of the rare scriptures." Who are these Antaṇās? That is a term used by the *Caṅkam* poets to denote the Brahmins - "they of the cool, refreshing qualities." But Tiruvaḷḷuvar takes the word simply to mean "Those who perform *aṟam* or righteousness." And Tiruvaḷḷuvar is Iḷaṅkō's mentor. Probably Iḷaṅkō groups all the religious heads together - since there is a time-gap between Tiruvaḷḷuvar and Iḷaṅkō, and the Brahmins are by now much

more pronounced in society. He could indicate Brahmins along with the Jain ascetics as well. They are not to be touched by the military.

But, there are visitors! In the Nilgiris, seeking interview of the king. Who is on a military expedition. It is clear that Iḷaṅkō is familiar with the folks of the suburbs of Tamilnad. The Koṅkaṇ dancers, the Karnāṭakās, the Kuṭakas (Coorgs?). A great list is given of those who are seeking to enter the king's presence. And they are given gifts. But we have still not done. There are others. The one who guards the gates announces, that there is a formidable array waiting in queue! Of the dancing women, there are one hundred and two. The orchestra-or choir? - Two hundred and eighty. For the recorder has to be exact even if he is recording fiction, really! You can go through the pretence of recording, only, you must put up a show of credibility! And that is what we call imagination. These visitors have not come empty-handed. And they have not come for gifts. They have come to support the king. They have one hundred chariots, five hundred tuskers, ten thousand horses, twenty thousand footmen, and carts, manifestly for provisions. An ambassador goes before them. With him are one thousand officers-distinguished by wearing "shirts," or, as has been earlier described, "bags for the body"(!) - for shirts were not normally part of the Tamil's apparel.

Of course there would be no room in the king's tent for all this army. The king permits the entry of the ambassador, along with the singers and the dancers. No place where these artistes cannot get in. But the ambassador (he is called Sanjayaṇ. A character in the *Mahābāratam* story) after making his salutations to the royal presence, promises to provide for the army's crossing the Ganges (in boats, for that is imperative if they are to reach the Himalayas). And the king has something on his mind, which Iḷaṅkō, with his customary taste for surprises, now brings out. It is one Bālakumāraṇ's sons, Kaṇakaṇ and Vijayaṇ, who, when they were hosting kings at dinner, had talked as though they did not know "the rare power of Tamil." An insult to the language! But then, how do you hold anybody responsible for what they do not "know"? This naturally, brings home to us again the unpleasant fact of the worship of the language, sometimes amounting to idol-worship, of the Tamils. Iḷaṅkō was only three centuries away from the *Caṅkam*, and probably one from Tiruvaḷḷuvar, so we can understand. And here we revert to Nehruji's suspicions of "fissiparous tendencies" in the building up of the Indian nation. Really, we cannot blame the Tamils for having such a culture as was represented by that fantastic academy or *Caṅkam*, nor can we blame them for having produced a Tiruvaḷḷuvar. But all the same, passion

for the language can run out of order and commonsense, and in the ultimate analysis, the Tamils cannot forget that their literature has not saved them in the past nor can it save them in the future.

But, after the Nilgiris, is it the Ganges? What of the terrain in between? Iḷaṅkō knew Tamilnad, but not all of what we would today call India! No geography classes! And so Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ crosses the Gangetic plain before we are aware of it, and confronts the northern princes. Their names? "Uttaraṉ, Vicittiraṉ, Uruttiraṉ, Pairavaṉ, Cittiraṉ, Ciṅkaṉ, Taṉuttaraṉ, Civētaṉ" - Iḷaṅkō seems to be giggling at them. Does he forget that quite a number of *Caṅkam* Tamil names can be made a matter for laughter?

This is the episode of war. We are told that every epic needs to have a war, or at least a battle, and that *Paradise Lost* is an exception. Well, both the Hindu epics, *Mahābāratā* and *Rāmāyaṇā* culminate in war. And, there is the Trojan War. Iḷaṅkō also has a battle, not quite a war, for it lasts only one day. The poet's language warms up, or rather, hots up, as we find ourselves in the midst of the battle field, with the dead and the dying, and the dancing devils, around us. No, no cannon, no bombs. But as death thunders over the battle-field, Iḷaṅkō follows suit. But what happened to Kaṇakaṉ and Vijayaṉ, the prime culprits in that insult to the Tamil language? They flee. They disguise themselves as Jain hermits. The honours of the day go to Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ. Instructions have been strictly followed. The Brahmins have not been touched—there is a reference to their *vēḷvis* here. And the Jain hermits also have been spared, for Kaṇakaṉ and Vijayaṉ found the Jain disguise convenient, to escape with their lives. And the stone in question, from the "golden mountain," the Himalayas, in honour of Kaṇṇaki, has been taken by the Tamil king.

Episode 27

This is on "Bathing the Stone." It's idol-worship. No question. "Those who were versed in the books," most probably Brahmins, "bathed" the *pattiṇi* goddess in the Ganges. And it's the two Āryaṉ princes, Kaṇakaṉ and Vijayaṉ, who have the onerous duty of carrying the stone to Tamilnad. We have to bear in mind that this is not history. This is pure fantasy—a Dravidian-Āryaṉ fantasy. And if the *Rāmāyaṇā* was also an Āryaṉ-Dravidian fantasy, one can hardly quarrel with a Dravidian prince for reacting in this manner. It has taken centuries of subjugation by a distant country to bring these two races together! Time, now, to forget and forgive. Time to see sense, for survival.

But, to return to the story. How did the Cēra king catch hold of Kaṇakaṇ and Vijayaṇ? That he did get them, we find. For, Kaṇṇaki's stone was carried by them, "on their shining crowns." Well, the Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ of this story is seated in his pavilion on the southern banks of the Ganges, when—who should come there but Māṭala Maṟaiyōṇ himself? That same Māṭalaṇ who came as Mātavi's emissary to Kōvalaṇ? It's easy for him to get admission into the king's presence, for he is a Brahmin. He briefly salutes the king and goes on to address him thus: "So, the Lady Mātavi's *kāṇalvari* (the songs of the mirage) have bent the crowned heads of Kaṇakaṇ and Vijayaṇ!" The king does not quite grasp it, and counters, "Is it a matter for joking, you of the four Vēdas?" Māṭalaṇ goes on to explain.

Mātavi's songs acted on Kōvalaṇ because of ŪḶ or fate. He left thereupon for Maturai, where he was killed. And Kaṇṇaki entered the Cēra country, "mounted on the jewelled crowns of the northern kings" (who carried her stone). So, the acting out of ŪḶ is here: The Jain theory, the Jain explanation of the sufferings of this life.

Māṭalaṇ, "of the clever tongue" finds himself constrained to explain his presence to the Cēra king. He had circled the "Potiya hills" where the *Muṇi* (sage) Agastya resided - a highly resented Brahministic fable, which would ascribe the origin of the Tamil language to him!

What stories can get in through the Brahmins! And Māṭalaṇ was a Brahmin, and had bathed in the holy Cape. For he had sins on his head! But, what specific sins?

He had been talking, as he would, that Kaṇṇaki had fought, and defeated, the king, with her anklet. And Mātari, Kaṇṇaki's old friend the cowherdess, had declared that the king had done wrong and Kōvalaṇ was really guiltless. And, demanding "Have the Umbrella, and the Sceptre, both gone awry? - simply burnt herself to death. (The king, it is the king, who is blamed when injustice is done in the country. And it is the king's Umbrella that people look upto for protection, and the king's Sceptre that they look up to for justice, in the ancient system of monarchy).

More deaths follow. Why, Māṭalaṇ is a veritable newspaper! Kaunti, hearing of what happened to Mātavi, fasts to death. And Kōvalaṇ's mother dies of heart break. So does Kaṇṇaki's mother. Kōvalaṇ's father shifts to a Buddhist temple-Goodbye, to all the riches of this world! There's more sense in asceticism for him. Kaṇṇaki's father also becomes an ascetic—but, a Jain, not Brahmin.

Why not? For the obvious reason, one supposes, that they could not become Brahmin ascetics. As has been remarked earlier, you could even become a Jew if you want, but not a Brahmin!

Just a news bulletin. There's further news from Pāṇṭiyanāṭu. One thousand goldsmiths had been killed by the Pāṇṭiyaṉ—must be the next king. Given in "sacrifice of life" to Kaṇṇaki! Human sacrifice? You never heard of it before in Tamil literature. Horrible![16] The "sacrifice of life" took "one full day." For the crime of one goldsmith, one thousand goldsmiths to be killed? Sounds like madness, a Nazi butchering spree. But, one remembers, when Kōvalaṉ accosted that particular goldsmith, there were a hundred goldsmiths with him. If they did not deter him from his crime, then they had a hand in it. So, there is a reflection after all, on a great number of the goldsmith community. But, weren't the goldsmiths involved in the conflagration after all, if they were guilty? That's for Iḷaṅkō to answer.

The sacrifice was made, it is said, in Pāṇṭiyanāṭu - to Kaṇṇaki. Should have been to placate her, for she had burnt the city down. But, who would have carried out the ritual of "sacrifice of life" (*uyirppali*), if it was that? Definitely not the Jains or Buddhists. Was it a sacrifice after all, or just a horrible manslaughter?

There's another bit of news for the reader, not for Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ. This news is carried in the address made by Māṭala Maṟaiyōṉ to the king. It seems the Cēra's own brother-in-law was ruling the Cōḷa country, and when nine "umbrellas" rose up against Cōḷanāṭu, the Cēra had helped him out of the situation. Now, why does Māṭalaṉ, or rather, Iḷaṅkō, bring in that story? It has really no relevance to the main issue. Only, it looks like a bit of wishful thinking on the Cēra prince's part, that the Tamil kings could be related by blood, and would help each other in time of trouble. Which they didn't for all we know.

More news! This time, about Mātavi herself, Hearing of what happened to Kōvalaṉ's parents, and Kaṇṇaki's too, Mātavi changes colour. She will not go the way of her mother. Nor will she bring up her daughter, Maṇimēkalai, to be a prostitute. So, off with the flowers-and the hair too! - on the poor child's head. To learn the *dharma* of Buddhism. Here—remember Kōvalaṉ's dream?

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16. There could be strong difference of opinion here. The "Sacrifice of life" could be metaphorical.

Now, what are Māṭalaṉ's specific sins? Which he has come to wash away in the Ganges? Many are the lives lost for listening to him. At least, so he says.

Māṭalaṉ of the clever tongue is more tiresome than he has ever been. We get a great deal of facts from him, but this time we do not find anything to incriminate him. He seems sorry for what has happened. And for his part in it, he is come to wash it away in the Ganges. And there is a difference between his previous speech, his lengthy speech made to Kōvalaṉ, and this speech made in the presence of the Cēra king. In the previous one, there was some drama and colour. In this, terrible things are stated in a few words and left at that. Iḷaṅkō doesn't seem to want to capitalise on those many deaths! There's a bit of drama in Mātari's death. None whatever in the others. What is the cost of a heart-break? Just now it's none of the poet's business. He only seems to be settling accounts on paper.

But Māṭalaṉ has not really changed! Nor has Iḷaṅkō's attitude to Brahminism. For after narrating sundry horrific incidents as though they were just routine, Māṭalaṉ describes the heroism of the king who "cut his body" to weigh the flesh against that of the 'short-legged" Dove, while "those of the heavens" were looking on in wonder. The king is done for, finished, by the sermon. Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ thereupon weighs out twenty five weights in gold for the Brahmin. Then there are other matters to be settled. Ten Āryaṉ kings taken captive are generously set free, with a bidding to get home. However, Kaṉakaṉ and Vijayaṉ, "who had not known the power of the rare Tamil language," are retained to be exhibited before the other two Tamil kings.

We seem to have gone a very long way indeed from the Kaṇṇaki-Kōvalaṉ-Mātavi story with which the epic began. It was marriage, art, adultery, repentance, and reconciliation, in the lives of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki. Poor Mātavi, with all her glamour, is left out in the dark, though there are longings in her beyond those that we would normally associate with the "bought woman," or prostitute.

The institution of the "bought woman," that makes itself felt so strongly in the *Marutam* poems of the *Caṅkam*, has so cast its net over society that its very foundations were crumbling. And Iḷaṅkō had to make one of the three Tamil kings fall before the curse of a simple woman who had come to his kingdom to build her life, and failed because of his lax governance. That is how Iḷaṅkō shapes the Kaṇṇaki story.

But the poet-prince-ascetic is as deeply involved in the Dravidian-Āryaṇ difference, with special reference to the "power of the rare Tamil," that had made itself felt in that ocean of *Caṅkam* literature, which by some freak of history, was still somewhere within hearing distance in Iḷaṅkō's time. Iḷaṅkō's nostalgia for that is definitely connected with the Triarchy, the Cēra-Cōḷa-Pāṇṭiyās, the "Dramida Confederacy," during whose heyday that impossible academy had turned out well over four hundred real, if minor, poets, the Golden Treasury of whose verses is still with us in the twentieth century, available for study, criticism, and admiration. Hence Iḷaṅkō had to take a Tamil king to the Himalayas to bring a memorial-stone for Kaṇṇaki, and to make two Āryaṇ kings perform that impossible feat of carrying that stone to Tamilnad for the sin of insulting "the power of the rare Tamil" literature - which, after all, poor things, they could not be expected to know. Hence the second part of the epic - after Kaṇṇaki's death.

There's yet another major issue in the epic, that opens out on reflection. And that is the religious and social background (leaving out the womanising factor with which Iḷaṅkō had already dealt with in sufficient detail). We are moving into the crux of that at the close of the epic. Iḷaṅkō's environment was preparing for the Bhakti movement. That is as much as to say, moving away from Tiruvaḷḷuvar and into what we would call Hinduism today. The social background is distinctly that of the *varṇāśrama*. Kōvalaṇ himself is a *Maṇṇavaṇ Piṇṇavaṇ*—he who belongs to the class that comes after the king viz; the third *varṇa*. Iḷaṅkō suggests that the streets of Maturai were streamlined according to the *varṇas*, and, rather amusing, even the spirits have their *varṇa*-arrangement! Such a culture - it is not yet called by the name "Indian" or even Hindu culture—would have to be represented at its highest, by the Brahmins. No, Iḷaṅkō does not say a word against the Brahmins when he is speaking in the first person. Probably he could not. He had to say what he had to say here, under cover. Camouflage, like Kampaṇ. So he makes his Brahmin characters represent Brahmindom, or what we would today call Hinduism. Iḷaṅkō, like Kampaṇ, was not only a genius. He could also be, just, clever.

There are lots of Brahmins in the story. Far more than Jains. But only in one place is there real life in them. That is where a Brahmin, returning with a load of gifts, puts away his walking-stick, his slippers etc., for a break, and a group of Brahmin children run to him for the packet of sweetmeats that he holds out to them. And he tells them, "You roly-poly things, let me hear you repeat the Vēdas!" He is mightily pleased with their performance and gives away

some of his expensive gifts, which incidentally, create a lot of trouble but that's not to be of purpose here.

A very pretty picture. The only picture involving Brahmins in *Cilappatikāram* that we could really call beautiful. And that is because of the children. And this is the only place where we really see children in the epic. Now, now, does Iḷaṅkō suggest that Brahmin children are also children, and we should remember that all children have something in common? We have to be aware that it is Iḷaṅkō handling a matter of consequence. But,—would that Brahmin have given away those expensive gifts to children of non-Brahmins? Would he know that, that wonderful thing we call a child is the same whether Brahmin or not? You are not dealing with an ordinary poet.

There is only one conspicuous Jain character within the epic. Kaunti Aṭikaḷ. A look at her will show how honest, how compassionate, how discerning she is. So strong, yet so tender. Like Kaṇṇaki, and like poor Kōvalaṉ too, she comes alive. She is supposed to be an ascetic, and as such, detached from this life. But she is sufficiently attached, to fast to the end upon her beloved ones' death. And Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki are mistaken for Jain householders by the cowherdesses, because it was Kaunti who handed them over. The cowherdesses themselves are not Jains. But they obviously respect this couple as Jains. An in-depth study, out of syllabus here, of Jainism and Brahminism in *Cilappatikāram*, is really called for. Little, telling touches by the poet will bring the differences to the surface. Kaunti Aṭikaḷ is finished off in the middle of the epic, whereas Māṭalaṉ dominates almost—yes, though only almost—to the end of the story! But obviously, Kaunti was Iḷaṅkō's trump-card, his only one, for Jainism, for though she dies early and her death is mentioned by Māṭalaṉ, it is, after all, Kaunti's faith that asserts itself in the closing twenty lines of the epic proper.

A word about the names of the Brahmins mentioned in the poem. You don't as yet see any Aiyers or Aiyengārs, a very common suffix to the names of Tamil Brahmins today. In the *kāṉal vari*, Kovālaṉ sings of the fisher-girl whose Aiyers had gone to "kill for their livelihood." The Aiyers there are just the respected menfolk of her family. This word later came to be used only for Brahmins. Aiyengār, is, of course a word related to Aiyer.

Again, the Tamil Brahmins of today usually bear the names of the gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Śivarāmakrishṇa Aiyer would have the names of three of them, plus the Aiyer! You don't find that custom in early Tamil society. The name Uruttiraṉ (Rudṛa or Civa) is perhaps an exception. Besides, that was only

one god. Māṭalaṉ sounds a very Tamilian name. The suffix, Aiyer, we should note, came later to be used by the Tamil Christians for the missionaries too. The Reverend Mead, for instance, would be called by the name "Mīṭ Aiyer." For social respect was gravitating towards the missionaries, at least in Christian circles, in the twentieth century. But as yet, in the fifth century, the term Aiyer[17] had not come to be used specifically for the Brahmins. Despite their powerful hold on the imagination of the people. And, it must be added, when you capture one's imagination, you capture the person behind it.

Episode 28

This is "The planting of the stone," in other words, "The installation of the Idol."

A picture of the Cēra king, in Vañci. Women, bearing lamps, and strewing flowers before him—a ritual done to the gods. But then, the king was a god to the ancient Tamils. The wounded soldiers come. Notice that all the wounds are in their chests, not from behind. And their wives press these wounds to their own breasts for healing and also for the arrows of Maṉmataṉ, the God of love. Evening also brings the "sweet smiles" of the womenfolk to their husbands. And, it's the time for singing! The women compose their looks before a mirror which they "stand opposite," and as they take up the *yāḻ* for a highly complicated strain, they accompany it with "naturally sweet" voices. Their husbands are feasted by Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ.

But the queen is to join him in court! Pomp and panoply accompany her. No menfolk. But with the singers and the music, there are two types of people. One is a set of hunchbacks and dwarfs, carrying items necessary at court. The other set, that carries flowers and "colours," are "eunuchs" (neither man nor woman), dressed up, however, as women. As the king and queen mount the dais, there are two kinds of dance performed. One is the *koṭṭiccēṭam*, supposed to have been done by Śiva (Him of the Himalayas) Another is *kūttaccākkai*, from Paṟaiyūr, even today known as *cākkaikkūttu* in Kerala.

Now appears—Māṭalaṉ! ("After the gatekeeper had informed the king"). Along with sundry officers, who seem to be spies. They have news for the king. They are returning from the two other Tamil countries, where they had

17. Tolkāppiyar's use of it only means "respected ones," although he does indicate Brahmins.

been asked to exhibit those two northern princes, Kaṉakaṉ and Vijayaṉ, as trophies of war. We were told earlier that these two kings had fled from battle in the guise of Jain hermits. The words that the other two Tamil princes sent to the Cēra prince seem to have been offensive. The Cōḷa king had stated that it was no victory, over those who were "in the form of non-killers" (Jains). As for the Pāṇṭiyaṉ, he said that "it was a new thing" for a Tamil king to be angry with those who had put on the guise of ascetics. No applause obviously. Nor approval. Two items that the Cēra king seems to have expected. Now the Cēra king's "lotus eyes change to fire." And he laughs an angry laugh, as he grasps the meaning behind the reaction of the two other Tamil kings. For once, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ seems to have accepted. and acknowledged, the discords within the Triarchy.

Up starts Māṭalaṉ. He is one to whom the king will listen. "He of the fame that will not wane." Well, as Iḷaṅkō said, in his introduction of Māṭalaṉ when the latter came as emissary from Mātavi, Māṭalaṉ does seem to be of the "clever tongue!" His speech to Kōvalaṉ, then, had not been foolishness. Deliberate. His earlier salutation to the king had been brief but to the point. Now he belabours the king with praise after praise after praise. Obviously the king needs that much "buttering" to be—at his disposal. After the praise, comes what looks like an appeal to a superstitious belief in the blessing of the Brahmins. A warning (line 125 - 129).

> "King of the world! May the days of your life
> Be more than the sands of the cool Porunai river!
> You who rule the world surrounded by the vast ocean,
> Do not despise me, but listen to my words."
> Then,
>
> "If you will not perform the *vēḷvi* in the field of *aṟam*,
> But will perform it in the battle field,
> Whatever be your feats (of which there is an enumeration
> here),
> Remember that this body is not permanent.
> And, that wealth is not lasting,
> As you have seen in what happened to the Ārya kings,
> Who despised the refreshing Tamil."

He is careful to praise the Tamil language. Or literature? In the presence of a Tamil king who is supposed to belong to *Caṅkam* times! That will compose the king, even when Māṭalaṉ dares suggest that the king has grey hair. He goes on to remind the king that life, even if it goes to Heaven, has to come back (in the Rebirth). Hence he implies that the king has to take orders from him as a Brahmin, if he wants to ensure safety in the next birth.

So, what? "I am not one for asking for gifts of rare wealth." (He forgets that he has already obtained a considerable gift of gold). "But, you have to have a great *vēḷvi* performed by the Brahmins of the four Vēdas. If you say that you will do it tomorrow, your life might part from you today itself. (What audacity!) Hence, with this companion in *vēḷvi* (the queen) by your side, may you live long, guarding the world."

Anyway, Māṭalaṉ's intercession does two great things, One is, he prevents a war among the Tamil kings. Secondly, the two captive princes are released. In some way, Asoka's change of heart is suggested. Iḷaṅkō would have known that.

A "clever tongue" indeed. The wonder is that he was permitted to use it. But then, right in the heart of *Caṅkam* literature there is a recorded grunt and grumble by a local Tamiliaṉ that a Brahmin, of no great presence, enters the palace freely by night, and at a word from him, away fly bolt and bar, and the very bells from the elephant! Well, Māṭalaṉ gets easy audience in the Cēra king's court. While neither Kaunti nor Kaṇṇaki have a word in answer to him, and Kōvalaṉ's words have really no reference to Māṭalaṉ's speech, the Cēra king is shown as being very obedient. He cools down, and he knows what the Brahmin wants. *Vēḷvi*s seem to have been routine. So he makes arrangements.

A reference by the king to "the good Tamil words spoken by the old folks" (lines 206, 207 and 208) seems to be a pointer to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* verse no. 543. But the *Kuṟaḷ* only says that righteousness can survive only if the king's sceptre is straight. For monarchy is the word. The Cēraṉ says, or, Iḷaṅkō makes him say, that the *kaṟpu* of the famous woman will not be glorified unless "the kings of the rare ability maintain order." Which doesn't work out to quite the same thing!

There is also a reference, (line 141) by Māṭalaṉ to the "*Yavaṉas* of the strong words" (great literature?) Twice has this epithet been bestowed upon the Ionians. *Vaṉ sol yavaṉar* is the expression. Did the ancient Tamils, who were

connected with Greece by trade, have any inkling of Greek literature? If so, thank you, Māṭalaṉ, for the information—though you are only an imaginary character! But really, Aṭikaḷ, (Iḷaṅkō) you are the one to be thanked. And Māṭalaṉ seems to know that Sanskrit is not to be mentioned, or praised, in the Tamil king's presence!

The next step? "Because she (Kaṇṇaki) is the *pattiṉi* whom the world worships," he commands his officers to take the Brahmins, the teachers, those who know the stars, etc., etc., to worship her, and in the "divine form" (idol) carved by "skilled craftsmen," cover her with jewels, strew flowers before her, and ordain *vēḷvis* and festivals for her. A detailed process.

The first description, in Tamil literature, of the making of an idol of finished craftsmanship.

Episode 29

This episode begins with a stretch of prose narrative. The first prose writing extant, in Tamil literature. Rhythmic prose, yes, and having some of the qualities of verse, but still, prose.

This passage calls for careful study. It begins with praise of the Cēra king, "who ruled the world with one language, from the Cape to the northern Himalayas." Well, we can understand if Iḷaṅkō chose to visualise things that way, but even within the epic you find the other two Tamil kings as well as the northern princes. It seems the Āryaṉ princes, when feasting together, were joking and laughing about the legend of the kings who ruled "the southern Tamil country" and were reported to have set the seal of their emblems, the bow, the tiger, and the fish, on the Himalayas' brow "where the lightnings play." Hence the "stone goddess" came down "upon their crowned heads," was bathed in the Ganges, and entered Vañci, where she was formally installed as goddess.

From that day the Cēra king was mostly in the precincts of the Kaṇṇaki temple. Meanwhile, Kaṇṇaki's friend Tēvanti - yes, Tēvanti who invited her to the bathing-ghats, with Kaṇṇaki's foster-mother and attendant-maid, of whom we have not heard a word so far, have been to the cowherdess's colony enquiring for details and have entered Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ's presence. Along with them is Aiyai, poor Aiyai, whom we do know much more closely. Aiyi does not have a word to say here, but Iḷaṅkō bursts out into a spree of lyrics, ending with song and dance as at festival time.

First, Tēvanti introduces herself as the friend of the "Lady from Cōḷanāṭu" i.e., Kaṇṇaki. But, she is identifying that lady with the stone idol, "that was born in the northern, great Himalayas, and has come here after bathing in the rushing floods of the Ganges."

Next, Kaṇṇaki's foster-mother introduces herself as "mother of the lady from Pukār" (Kaṇṇaki) who, "without being furious with Mātavi," took her beloved husband by the hand and came to the "dry wilderness" with him.

Third, it's the attendant maid. Both foster-mother and attendant maid are characters from *Caṅkam* literature, and we have not met them so far in Iḷaṅkō's epic, but they suddenly turn up from nowhere—with song.

Where does Iḷaṅkō get his lyrical sensibilities from? Certainly not from the *Caṅkam*. The three stanzas attributed to these three characters are just of song. We'll try to get the attendant maid's self-introduction:

"Not to her who bore her. Nor to her who bore me
Who cared for her. Nor even to me: Not one word.
Bearing the duty of *kaṟpu* behind her beloved,
That beautiful woman, to her am I maid.
To that woman of Pukār am I maid.

But, from these lyrics, these women pass on to lyrics of another strain. They directly address the stone-idol with a lament . Now if Kaṇṇaki's dead body had been brought into their midst, their outcries could not have been more poignant. It's a cry for the impossible. As lyrics they are—lyrics. But their content?

"Did you hear of your mother's death, my friend?
Did you hear of your mother-in-law's death, my friend?"

"*Avvai uyiṟ vīvum kēṭṭāyō tōḻi?*
Ammāmi taṉ vīvum kēṭṭāyō tōḻi?

Those sobs cannot be brought out in another language.

And the attendant maid refers to -Mātavi! Mātavi had heard of her beloved's death, and the sufferings of his beloved (Kaṇṇaki), and the fault-finding of her neighbours. And she had gone to do penance with the ascetics under the Bōdhi-tree. And she had made her daughter Maṇimēkalai also take to the ascetic life.

Now Tēvanti continues the lament. She points to Aiai, who is all the time speechless, and tells the idol: "This is the daughter of that Avvai (who cherished you);

> But can you see the small-toothed Aiyai, my friend?
> And can you see the young daughter of your aunt, my friend?"

That aunt is the cowherdess Mātari, who had burnt herself for sorrow. But what we observe here is the sense of utter helplessness in the three women's cries. Iḷaṅkō himself calls the cry *araṟṟu* - lament. And laments of despair they are. What answer would we give, in Kaṇṇaki's place, if we could, to those grief-filled questions:

> "*kēṭṭāyō tōḷi?* and *kaṇṭāyō tōḷi?*"
>
> Did you hear, my friend? and Did you see, my friend?

It would be simply "No! No!" The "No!" would echo from the heart of the questioner, not from the stone:

It's Iḷaṅkō, showing the helplessness of the idol to wipe away the tears from human eyes. Whether he intended it or not, that's what it works up to.

Now comes an excited shout from Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ. In English, it would be something like:

"What is this? And what is this? and what is this? And whatever?"

The Tamil, of course, is more natural:

> "*Ennē ih / tennē ih / tennē ih / tennē kol?*"

Apparently, he had seen a "lightning-creeper" - a beautiful woman, in the sky.

Well, if he saw that, we don't wonder that he called out, "*Ennē iht?* Wonder. Disbelief. For he was looking, not on the idol, but on a vision. From the sky. And that was - Kaṇṇaki.

Just a moment's thought would show us how familiar the Christian world is with visions, and apparitions from heaven, of people who are dead and gone, but who are taken to heaven, and who are interested in the mundane world. No, Iḷaṅkō was not a Christian, but experiences of Christian folks would get into his

environment. People might call them hallucinations, but Iḷaṅkō didṉṭ mean Ceṅkuṭṭuvan's vision to be one.

The next item is by far the most difficult in the episode.

That is, "the revelation of the beauty of God, by Kaṇṇaki, to Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ."

There's a sea-change here! We don't recognize the Kaṇṇaki that we know. We cannot think of Kaṇṇaki as separated from Kōvalaṉ, for in a way she had been living in him till she was taken to heaven. And it is Kōvalaṉ who takes her to heaven, for the heavenly chariot that comes down for her bears Kōvalaṉ, and it is at this sight that Iḷaṅkō makes his mountain-folk wonder. As the shepherds wondered when the angels appeared in the sky to announce the Nativity. In both cases it is the common folks, the simple unlettered folks, who get the revelation. But, we observed that the Kaṇṇaki whom Kōvalaṉ took with him to heaven, is, like him, dead. Without any living human attributes, so far as we are concerned.

And here is Kaṇṇaki, from heaven, speaking to the king of Cēranāṭu. What happened to Kōvalaṉ? She seems to be speaking on Kōvalaṉ's behalf too, for she announces:

"The southern king is not evil." In other words, what the Pāṇṭiyaṉ king did, to Kōvalaṉ, is not remembered against him. It had been suggested earlier that the Pāṇṭiya's "bent" sceptre was straightened out by his death. That is to say, he had atoned for his crime by his death. And he is, therefore, forgiven. And, says this new Kaṇṇaki, "A good guest in the temple of the king of the Gods." Accepted, in heaven. Forgiven. What happens to the Jain theory of rebirth? Kaṇṇaki is now the Pāṇṭiyā's "daughter." She says so. However, the main difficulty is in the next two lines:

"I will not abandon my play on the mountains.
Come, all of you my friends, and we shall play together."

"Friends." Only in the feminine gender. And that line, wherein she calls to the "friends," is very pretty:

"*Eṉṉōṭum tōḻimīr, ellīrum vammellām.*" *Vammellām* means "come, all of you." And this is repeated like a chorus by the "daughters of Vañci."

But, who are these "friends?" Not the four poor womenfolk who had come seeking for her throughout the Tamil country. We left them wailing. We don't see them consoled. They belong to life on the earth.

These "friends" are the "daughters of Vañci"—who have never known Kaṇṇaki!

And they are singing joyously together. They are singing of the "Pāṇṭiyā's daughter," Kaṇṇaki. And the songs are real songs. You could dance to them. On the mountains.

Kaṇṇaki has, apparently, changed into a mountain-nymph for the daughters of Vañci. Didn't Iḷaṅkō know his Greek? Three centuries earlier, Greek officers had served in the army of a Tamil king. The *vaṉ-col yavaṇas.* "The Ionians of the strong words (great literature)." And the songs of the Vañci girls do remind us, in a way, of the Greek chorus!

However, we can't help asking, "Where is Kōvalaṉ?" Poor Kōvalaṉ indeed. But then, this is a woman's story. Kōvalaṉ would be safe in heaven. And he is to be forgotten!

Three fairly lengthy songs follow. They, too, are real songs. Iḷaṅkō is showing three kinds of folk-songs, of the women of Vañci. One is an Ammāṇai, in which the participants appear to clap and dance. The second one is "playing with the ball." The third one is "on the swing." The third one is still popular in Kerala, especially in the Ōṇam season.

But all three are on the three kings of Tamilnad. Which shows how seriously Iḷaṅkō takes monarchy, and Tamil monarchy at that. All the three kings are in the picture, but there is a slight tilting of the balance towards the Cēra king—as would be natural. The last line of this episode carries the name of the Cēra king—"All hail, Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ!"

Episode 30

The last episode of *Cilappatikāram.* And we expect it to take up all the different strands in the epic and bind them together.

"After the king had seen the 'divine form' of Kaṇṇaki." Does the poet mean Kaṇṇaki, or the mountain-nymph - or all three together? Anyway, she is not of the earth now.

The king is enquiring of Tēvanti, "Tell me, how did Maṇimēkalai turn ascetic?" And Tēvanti begins with a description of the growing beauty of Maṇimēkalai, daughter of Mātavi. She is no longer a child! Her hair is "plaited into five braids." Her eyes are dark, with red lines. She herself does not know

that their expression declares that she has come of age.(!) Her breasts are formed. etc., etc. The Ācāṉ, or teacher, is after her! For he would feel that she needs the education that Mātavi had, the education of the "bought woman," the prostitute. (It seems dance and prostitution go together). And Mātavi's mother reproves her daughter: "You are not bringing her up in line with our community! What do you mean? What are you going to do with her?"

Mātavi makes no reply. She simply calls her "innocent daughter" to her, and throws to the bare ground the "flower-arrows, with the bow," of the God of Love. None of that for her darling, for she herself has had enough of it! And she gets her child's head clean-shaven and goes Buddhist—mother with daughter.

This is surprising enough. But what is more surprising is the reaction of the "king, and the city." They are "plunged into the sea" of sorrow. What does Iḷaṅkō imply, of the moral state of Cōḷanāṭu? A king goes into the sea of sorrow. With his capital. Because a girl, who should have been a prostitute, becomes an ascetic! No wonderful dances from her—along with other favours. Or, is it because she goes Buddhist? Well, it is the "truth-speaking ascetics" who come to her rescue. They extend affectionate protection to her. And Tēvanti remarks that she grieves that Maṇimēkalai should have removed all her ornaments before the age of discretion. (It was not her own choice).

Now Tēvanti, suddenly, during the narrative, is, spirit-possessed. In *Caṅkam* literature you don't ever see Brahmin women dancing spirit-dances. There is a reference to a *Pulaitti* (Pulaya woman) doing it. The dance of spirit-possession looks like a pre-Dravidian custom. Anyway it is here performed by a Brahmin woman, and a spirited dance it is. Seven lines. The only detailed description in the ancient literature, of a case of spirit-possession. The present writer is unable to make it live again in English.

She points to three of the "daughters of Vañci," who had been joyously singing the songs in praise of the three Tamil kings. Of them are two the "twin daughters" of one Araṭṭaṉ Ceṭṭṭy, (the word *ceṭṭy* goes down into modern Tamil as the name of a merchant-community) and the third is the daughter of a priest of Vishnu. Not bad. Iḷaṅkō knows to make things look very real. "Twin daughters!" Not to be easily forgotten. Now, whoever bathed-in the "beautiful lakes" atop the "long chain of mountains" - obviously the Himalayas - remembered his past birth. It was that water- "which I give you, and for which you bear the jug." This speech is addressed by the dancer to Māṭala Maṟaiyōṉ, who, by the way, seems now to be everywhere.

But the one who is speaking is not Tēvanti. Obviously, it's her husband, Pāsaṇṭaṉ, whose spirit has now descended on his wife. He is addressing Māṭalaṉ. And the king also looks at him for guidance. (The king does that, twice, in the space of fifty lines!) And Māṭalaṉ, who now seems to be ruling the roost, answers the king's mute query: "Listen to this, king!" (no need for protocol by now). And then follows the old story of Mālati who breastfed her husband's child by another wife—etc., etc. - the story of which had been narrated in detail in Episode IX. An old story, no doubt, but it is turning up here again with new force. It seems the water-jug in Māṭalaṉ's hand had been handed over to him by that Pāsaṇṭaṉ himself, and Māṭalaṉ is sure that if he sprinkles the water on those three girls they are going to realise their former birth. So he acts accordingly-and the girls burst out crying! It's Kaṇṇaki's mother and Kōvalaṉ's mother and Mātari, all three of whom are dead, but whose spirits are crying out to Kaṇṇaki, and to Kōvalaṉ too. The crying is very realistic, and you would think that the three dramatis personae are back in the scene, and looking, and lamenting, for the departed Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ, just as they would have done when they heard what happened to the couple. The fun of it is that Kaṇṇaki's idol is right in the centre of the picture and they don't seem to care.

Now, now what is all this? Is Iḷaṅkō just being fancy-free or making us sense the milieu of his times? For, when the three girls go on crying impersonating the departed souls, and the king turns, again, to Māṭalaṉ, as if for an explanation, the latter proceeds with another lengthy narrative. According to him, Kōvalaṉ had earned his right to the "form of a heavenly one" because he delivered a Brahmin from the trunk of the elephant. But the three women, who had set their hearts on Kaṇṇaki, had not done that much *aṟam* to earn that privilege! So they were reborn in this world, in diverse forms. (The Brahmins also believed in rebirth). That elderly cowherdess became the daughter of a priest of Vishnu, and the other two (Kaṇṇaki's mother and Kōvalaṉ's mother), became the twin daughters of one Araṭṭaṉ Ceṭṭy. These were the three girls who burst out wailing for Kaṇṇaki as soon as the memory of their past birth came to them, upon the sprinkling of the water.

We recall that incident, of Kōvalaṉ's rescuing a Brahmin from within the very trunk of an elephant. But, when was that? When Kōvalaṉ was living with Mātavi. Now, as then, Māṭala Maṟaiyōṉ does not count it a venial sin in Kōvalaṉ, to forsake his parents, and his faithful wife whose heart was all on him, and to live with a "bought woman" under the lure of dancing and music. And the three afore-mentioned women did not go to heaven, because their love for Kaṇṇaki

could not help them to. So, Kōvalaṉ became a "heavenly one" just because he delivered a Brahmin from death, even though he had deserted his wife for a prostitute. And the three women could not go to heaven because of their love for Kaṇṇaki. Confusion worst confounded. That is actually the distinguishing mark of Māṭalaṉ "of the clever tongue" whenever he speaks. Whereas you will not find a single self-contradiction in Kaunti Aṭikaḷ, in either her words or her behaviour.

If we want to know Iḷaṅkō's responses to Jainism and Brahminism, we have only to study Kaunti side by side with Māṭalaṉ. They are representatives of two distinct religions. Kaunti has no temporal power. She has the respect of the people, and of the celestials too, but she is very human, and very consistent. When she hears of the great tragedy, she fasts to death—say, like Kapilar on Pāri's death. But we never see her at court. It is Māṭalaṉ who is everywhere. And whatever Māṭalaṉ says-for he is of the "clever tongue" (isn't Iḷaṅkō satirical there?)—carries weight with the king. For, after Māṭalaṉ's explanation of the rebirth of the three girls in that group of Vañci women, Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ is entirely satisfied. He is "delighted with Māṭalaṉ," and commands a festival for Kaṇṇaki as well as flowers and incense for Tēvanti, the spirit-dancer, for the worship of the Kaṇṇaki-idol.

How did *Cilappatikāram* survive the ravages of time, with the Brahmins commanding so much, and the Jains suppressed, as we shall see, by the eighth century? It would not have been easy to wipe out Iḷaṅkō. He belonged to a Tamil royal family. The Tamil kings had so jealously protected their literature during the *Caṅkam* that the Brahmins had hardly dared then to bring out their language, Sanskrit, into the limelight. Hence, the Tamil kings would have also jealously safeguarded their greatest and most precious literary heirloom.

So now-a festival to Kaṇṇaki. Those Āryan princes released from prison are there. With other kings. The Koṅkars from the west, Gajabāhu, king of Ceylon, (Iḷaṅkai) or Lanka "surrounded by the sea"), have all come for the great Kaṇṇaki *vēḷvi* by Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ (whose limit is the Himalayas). And they worship Kaṇṇaki (the idol) praying "Pray, come to us too." And "a Voice" answers, "I have given the gift you asked for." Iḷaṅkō does not say that the idol is speaking. But the assembly is thrilled, exhilarated, by the voice, "as though they have seen heaven." And they leave, with Māṭala Maṟaiyōṉ, "who desired the right path," to the place of the *vēḷvi.* Is Iḷaṅkō being satirical, one wonders? Or is he suggesting a slight difference between "desiring" and "attaining?" For, Iḷaṅkō is one who

weighs his words with extreme care. It is a saying that his epic should be "counted letter by letter." And so it should though not here. Well, "after the king left, I went." The king was leaving for the Vēdic *vēḷvi*, with Māṭalaṉ. Iḷaṅkō was coming to the Kaṇṇaki-temple. The king was under the directions of Māṭalaṉ, absolutely. The king's brother, Iḷaṅkō, believed more in the spirit of Kaṇṇaki, still guiding him.

But, what was going to happen to the Cēra country? Iḷaṅkō leaves it to inference. What would the directions of Māṭalaṉ mean to Tamilnad? Don't we know Māṭalaṉ intimately? But, our question is, how did *Cilappatikāram* escape censure and destruction? By the Brahmins? Just because, we answer, it was in the custody of a royal family which respected the tradition of the *Caṅkam*.

So far, the spirit that possessed Tēvanti has been that of her husband, the god Cāttaṉ. But as Iḷaṅkō enters something happens. Another spirit possesses her. And this is no other than Kaṇṇaki. Well, Kaṇṇaki is a goddess by now, and as goddess she can occupy the place that a god had vacated. (Only, it is remarkable that Kaṇṇaki's idol never once opens its mouth). So, it is Kaṇṇaki's spirit, speaking through Tēvanti.

The spirit "appears, shining forth," from Tēvanti.[18] There can be no mistaking her. She reminds Iḷaṅkō of an incident in his life in the past. He had been seated, in the palace-hall in Vañci, at his father's feet. A soothsayer there had announced that Iḷaṅkō had all the marks of future sovereighty. Well, and how do we assess the significance of such a suggestion to the younger son of a king, when the elder was present? His elder brother, the heir-apparent, was, naturally, hurt by the observation. But Iḷaṅkō, though young, had sufficient wisdom and sufficient detachment. He had "looked sternly"(!) at the soothsayer, and to soothe and heal his elder brother, had straightaway walked up to the temple at the eastern gate, and laid down, before the ascetics there present, "the burden of the wide kingdom," to assume another kind of kingship, ""where the mind cannot follow, and where is endless bliss." This takes us to the beginning of the epic, where we observed that the temple spoken of, should have been Jain since there were no Brahmins around., Now Kaṇṇaki's spirit reminds Iḷaṅkō

18. Tēvanti is the one extenuating factor in Iḷaṅkō's picture of Brahmindom. And it was no carelessness that made Iḷaṅkō ascribe to this simple, poor woman the responsibility of service to Kaṇṇaki's idol. Tēvanti belonged to the Brahmins - "Maṇṇavar Muṇṇavar," and Kaṇṇaki to a caste of "Maṇṇavar Piṇṇavar," "the caste after the Kings."

of that vow of asceticism. By which she acknowledges his greatness, and tacitly brings to his mind his sacred duties. And Iḷaṅkō now recalls the reader to the story of "*The great one of the good words*," that he has been narrating so far. The story of Kaṇṇaki.

He is winding up with an address. "To those good ones who listened carefully to the story of the daughter of the gods, who spoke about me." So, to the Kaṇṇaki-worshippers he is giving his commandments:

Carefully avoid (giving) sorrow and pain .
Know God.
Care for those who do (know God).
Fear falsehood. Protect yourselves from back-biting.
Give up meat-eating. Avoid killing life.
Give (to the needy). Support *tavam* or the ascetics.
Don't kill gratitude. Cry shame on evil friends.
Don't bear false witness. Speak only the truth.
Always be in the gathering of the righteous ones.
Flee from association with others.
Be afraid of your neighbour's house (wife). Cherish life.
Protect the *aṟam* of the home.
Chide whatever will not go with it.
Wisely avoid liquor, theft, lust, lies, and meaningless words.
Because -

Youth and wealth and the body are not lasting. You cannot count the days of your life; so do all you can. Seek what will come with you to the land to which you are going. And thus may you live long in this world." (The end is a blessing).

Now, on studying Iḷaṅkō's commandments, we notice a few things. It has repetitions. It has a Jain look. It has no tinge of Brahminism. It differs from the Ten Commandments in *the Bible*, in that it avoids speaking about idol-worship. And another difference is the strong emphasis on vegetarianism. All the same, it has a strong family resemblance to the Ten Commandments.

Now the basis of these commandments is Jain, and so would compel us to turn to look at Tiruvaḷḷuvar. But, Tiruvaḷḷuvar? The gentle, suave Tiruvaḷḷuvar, the flash of whose white teeth against his sun-tanned skin you seem to see even when he is preaching to you, and the charm and sweetness of whose versifying - call it that?—turn up soothingly in your memory? No, he could not have written that. His authority—for authority it is—is of a different kind. Iḷaṅkō's is stern, direct - that is, after he had finished with his fantasy! And seems to be carved in granite. No embellishments.

Authoritative, yes, and just plain. Herein Iḷaṅkō does not speak about fate, with which really he is so much obsessed during his narrative, and which he shares with Tiruvaḷḷuvar too. But both poets seem to think that even fate can be conquered if you fight sufficiently hard.

We have to make a few observations before leaving *Cilappatikāram*. It's interesting to see that, for all the great regard that Iḷaṅkō had for *Caṅkam* literature, he himself could never have found a place in it. Legend has it that Tiruvaḷḷuvar was passed by the *Caṅkam* with great difficulty, and in this instance, legend has been a very good critic. But Iḷaṅkō-and, dear God! Kampaṉ too, would have been quietly disposed of by that *Caṅkam* in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea, whichever was more convenient. That is because of the avidity with which both poets drink in the stories they have come across, and the freedom with which they use them. But, all the same, no Art for Arts' sake here, thank you! Not in the three poets of Tamilnad. There are only Three, not excepting the — Caṅkam. Iḷaṅkō wrote *Cilappatikāram* because he was compelled to do it. *Cilappatikāram* is a living thing, glowering at the disintegrating forces that were showing up in Tamil society. First and foremost comes-the laxity of morals. The poet prescribes the loyal wife as the only medicine. Does this have any relevance to society today, western or eastern? Next, the indifference of the powers that be, to justice. There's no medicine here. Only, Catastrophe. Again, does this ring a warning bell anywhere in the twentieth century?

Incidentally, there are minor traits, which could be used against the poet, for he was also a man. His hankering after a United Tamil Empire. Disappointing then, and not only not in place, but dangerous, today. His Jainism, his fairy-tales, his strong involvement in fate etc. His attitude, not to Brahmindom, which could be understood, but to the Brahmins as people. Had Iḷaṅkō been living today, the Brahmins could have made out a good case against him-for defamation! They would have only Tēvanti to argue for them. And there is his

excessive love of the Tamil language—too bad!—as a language. There is only one other language that he speaks of with admiration. And that is, Greek. Twice he mentions the "*yavaṇas* of the strong words" (Ionians, with the great literature). But then, he is expressively silent on the much acclaimed greatness of Sanskrit literature. He would have his reasons. The *Caṅkam* also is silent on the topic, though for other reasons. Iḷaṅkō is intellectually affiliated to the *Caṅkam*, but Iḷaṅkō actually belongs to a much later generation, when Tamil scholars would have been learning Sanskrit as a subject of study. Not only Brahmins. Why, even Tiruvaḷḷuvar knew his Maṉu and his Kautilya, and Tiruvaḷḷuvar precedes Iḷaṅkō by about a century! The language of the ruling class will, normally, be looked up to, and learnt, by those in fairly privileged positions in society. Iḷaṅkō must have known Sanskrit first-hand. Why does he not appreciate it? Or rather, why does he not speak appreciatively about it? Is he afraid of it? or, of its influence?

And, there is Iḷaṅkō's attitude to Art as such. He writes about ancient Tamil music as though he knew it through and through, and dancing as though he knew how it could be enjoyed. Other branches of art are also mentioned, like sculpture, for instance. But, he doesn't seem to appreciate or approve greatly of it all. We might say that he takes a real ascetic's attitude to them.

Iḷaṅkō is just looking at fifth century Tamilnad with heart-ache. He is grieving for his beloved country, going down into the shambles of unguarded sex and uncared- for injustice. But he somehow seems to put the blame of it all on Woman, or rather, on man's relationship with woman. And so he has created, out of his longings, the ideal woman. A sweet, simple, innocent girl. At heart, a child. Put through so much suffering by a sophisticated world. And finally, endued with so much power that she burns up a city. Not on her own account. But on account of a man, a poor fellow who was misled by the glamour of the world, but who came back, ready to face life with her—as an Adam, with the primeval Eve (sinless) by his side. Well, Iḷaṅkō has packed them off, somehow, to heaven, but he has actually rung the curtain down finally on them both as human beings—with Death. For, he was a terrific artist!

Perhaps the commandments are an anticlimax in *Cilappatikāram*. But, in the poet's eyes, the *Cilappatikāram* story was only the justification for this preaching. *Cilappatikāram* was just to draw your attention.

The third book of *Cilappatikāram* has a "concluding passage." It is in praise of Cēraṉ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ, the greatest of "of the three Crowned Kings." So far as Iḷaṅkō was concerned, the Tamil kings would be the only three Crowned

Kings, and of them, there was nobody like Cēraṉ. He had "driven back the sea." He had gone to the "banks of the Ganges." Well, and Iḷaṅkō has left out the Cēraṉ setting his seal on the Himalayas! The "driving back the sea" is from *Caṅkam* literature, though what exactly is implied nobody knows. The rest of the passage is largely, protocol.

And the whole of *Cilappatikāram* has a separate conclusion too! "From the Kumari to the Veṅkaṭam - that's where we find the *Taṇṭamiḻ* - the "cool, refreshing" Tamil. For the 'nth time. And the poet speaks of two kinds of Tamil here—*CenTamil* and *KoṭunTamil* (the "chaste" Tamil, and the "crooked" Tamil.) *KoṭunTamil* [19] might be a reference to the colloquial Tamil, which Iḷaṅkō has studiously avoided, but it could also be a suggestion of the appearance of a new language, in Cēraṉāṭu, that was straying from *Caṅkam* - Tamil, and would later develop independently.

And Iḷaṅkō declares that, in *CenTamil* he has brought out *Cilappatikāram*, which shows up the culture of the times, "as the mirror reflects the high, dark mountains." Perfectly true. He has tried to "mirror" his day in his poem. But there is one line here, the last but one—which takes us by surprise. But, then, surprises are the normal feature with Iḷaṅkō!

"The *Cilappatikāram* ends, which continues in *Maṇimēkalai*." Maṇimēkalai, we remember, is Mātavi's daughter. And the story of Maṇimēkalai is not written by Iḷaṅkō but by the poet Cāttaṉ, who had requested the Aṭikaḷ (Jain sage) to take up *Cilappatikāram* because it had something to do with the Tamil kingdoms. And Cāttaṉ was, not Jain, but Buddhist. The Jains had closer affinity with the Buddhists than with the Brahminists.

So, the *Cilappatikāram* is to "continue"!

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19. Previously metnioned in *Tolkāppiyam.*

Chapter XIX

MAṆIMĒKALAI

It must be remembered that both Iḷaṅkō and Cāttanār had taken up their epics as a matter of duty. That both were acknowledged as poets, at least by each other, we also know. So, they were contemporaries. For, in Cāttaṉār's presence *Cilappatikāram* was passed. And, in Iḷaṅkō's presence Maṇimēkalai was passed. Cāttaṉār was Buddhist and Iḷaṅkō was Jain, but this did not deter them from taking each other as the literary authority that was to introduce them to the Tamil literary world. A substitute, the best available, for that ancient *Caṅkam*, the Academy whose shadow was still on them. So far as Cāttaṉār was concerned, his was a terrific privilege. Not just that Iḷaṅkō was a prince. But that he was a poet greater than all the poets of that academy put together. And - to be passed by him! But Iḷaṅkō must have been generous indeed to listen to all that Cāttaṉār had to say. True, they were both writing on related subjects. And each was determined to bring out a sustained epic of consequence which would exalt the glories of the ascetic life, Jain or Buddhist or whatever. We can understand if it was this spirit of dedication that helped them to stand by each other in an age of what was practically anarchy, for the kings existed only in name and it looks like might was right everywhere. But, for Iḷaṅkō to make out that this Cāttaṉār, his Cāttaṉār, was that very same *Taṉṭamiḻ Cāttaṉ*, "(Cattaṉ of the pleasant Tamil)" who came right out of the *Caṅkam*! was definitely an unhistorical statement. Still, Iḷaṅkō seems to have been as much of a seasoned critic as he was an inspired creative writer. And quite possibly he could not find a better hand to support him on the issue of the ascetic life versus the worldly life, say, somewhat like Stoicism versus Epicureanism. And with both writers it was Woman who was the symbol of man's interest in life, the meaning of enjoyment. (Epicureanism would include other things).

It will not do to heckle at Cāttaṉār for posing to be the poet that he was not. After all, it is posterity that usually decides a poet's status. And everyday we come across writers who imagine themselves to be geniuses and are not aware that when they are dust, their readership is going to fizzle out. But the post-*Caṅkam* Cāttaṉār is relevant to us for reasons other than quality. His work is included in that list of *Aimperuṅkāppiyam* - the "Five Great Epics(!)" of Tamil.

The strange thing is that even Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* (the Incarnation of Rāmā) is left in the lurch by later scholars who have not changed the number five. Of course that doesn't alter the fact that Kampaṉ is more read, more enjoyed, more discussed, today than all these "Five Great Epics" put together. Of these "Five", only three are with us. The two that are lost are Buddhist epics. We have no idea of how they were shaped. Of the three extant, only *Cilappatikāram* is a really powerful work, and the one reason for its not being popular reading today is the antiquity of its language. *Maṇimēkalai* is *Cilappatikāram*'s contemporary; and the third one available, *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*, another Jain work, comes much later.

So, to *Maṇimēkalai*. Iḷaṅkō was right so far as the *Taṇṭamiḻ* (pleasant Tamil) of Cāttaṉ is concerned. His verse does make pleasant reading. Perhaps the flow is smoother, lighter, easier, than that of Iḷaṅkō himself. But Iḷaṅkō's appreciation, of the style alone, is significant.

Well, the heroine of this epic is none other than Maṇimēkalai, the daughter of Mātavi herself. She does not need an introduction, if we have read *Cilappatikāram*. As a child she had had her head clean-shaven, and was brought, from a prostitute-colony, to an ascetic, Buddhist life. But we don't see her head bald here. She is a beautiful young woman.

This epic also begins in Pūmpukār, (Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam) of the Cōḻa country. And, with the festival of Indra, which also we see in its companion-epic. But, if Iḷaṅkō freely draws upon Āryaṉ myth and legend, Cāttaṉ improves on it. Indra is himself personally present during the twenty-eight days of the festival. Along with scholars and astrologers. And gods who "take on the form of human beings." We hear the noises of the *Muracu*, or drum "of the desire for blood," The Vaḷḷuvaṉ, (the announcer of government orders) sounds three blessings: "May Mūtūr live long! May the heavens give the rains! And, may the king be one whose sceptre will never swerve from the right!" (The third one has special significance in the aftermath of *Cilappatikāram*).

What rejoicings! Lights. Banana trees. Sugarcane. Flowers. Removing the old sand. Spreading new sand. And, adornment, of all the temples, starting with that of "the god with the eye in his forehead" (Śiva), and ending with the *pūtams* or spirits who live in the junctions of the streets. Also of the halls, where representatives of different religions gather to discuss facts and figures and theology. The "warriors of the flashing sword," chariots, horses, and elephants, go with them. Also, the *Muracu* announces "Freedom from hunger, disease, and war - along with prosperity" to the city.

But the second episode declares that a great "scandal" is rocking the city. Mātavi is not present at the festival with her daughter! And Mātavi's mother, Citirāpati, who is more active here and known freely by name, sends Vasantamālai - yes, the Vasantamālai of *Cilappatikāram* - to her daughter, to ask, "What wrong has this city done to you?" So, the emissary reminds Mātavi of her early education. Its many facets. And she winds up with "It's shame on you, that the elders of Mūtūr are crying out."

And Mātavi replies (in anger, we infer) "Yes, I have given up shame, On that day when I heard of my beloved one's suffering and did not run up but safeguarded my own life, I had given up all claims to the praises of Mūtūr."

So far, the dramatic sensibility runs smooth. Mātavi really loved Kōvalaṉ and could not go back to the life of a "bought" woman in Mūtūr. But, Cāttaṉ makes her preach a lengthy sermon on the role of a chaste woman. If her husband dies, she will die too (like the Pāṇṭiya queen). Or she will mount the funeral pyre. (*Sati* is here coming to the fore). And she proudly speaks of Kaṇṇaki as "our dame" who excelled all of them by "setting fire to the great city." As for "her" (Kaṇṇaki's) daughter Maṇimēkalai, she will not turn to the "evil" life of a prostitute. Mātavi's "self" seems really broken by Kōvalaṉ's death.

Back goes Vasantamālai. Helpless. But Maṇimēkalai, who had been listening to the sad story of her father and "mother" (Kaṇṇaki), is shedding tears which fall on the flowers that she is weaving into a garland, apparently, for worship—should be for the Buddhist temple. Mātavi tells her daughter that the flowers have lost their purity now and she'll have to get others for the purpose. With Maṇimēkalai goes her companion, one Cutamati. For, Cutamati objects to Maṇimēkalai's going alone to pluck the flowers. She herself, though the daughter of a Brahmin, had been airlifted by a Vittiyādharan, raped, and deserted where her father had found her. Hence, Maṇimēkalai, says Cutamati, needs company. No safety for women, in the street.

The poet titters at a Jain hermit on the way! He has shed "shame, with his clothes," and grieves "for the lives that he cannot see." The Jains were of two classes-Tikamparaṉs and Suvētamparaṉs. Obviously this Jain was of the Tikampara class and Iḷaṅkō should have been of the other, the "white-clad" ones. People can go to extremes—in Jainism as in Christianity. You can hardly expect Cāttaṉ to get those lines on the Jains passed in Iḷaṅkō's presence had the latter been a Tikampara. (This clan was careful not to tread even on ants or worms, so as not to destroy "life"). Tikamparas are compared to "famished elephants"-an image from the *Caṅkam*.

But now comes the "hero," the Kōvalaṉ of this story! That is, Utayakumaraṉ, son of the Cōḻa king. A formidable person to start with, and he has come, after controlling the royal elephant in that seasonal upset that is called "must." Now this elephant is outside, not within the man. But, the idea of the elephant in "must" has, obviously, been taken from Iḷaṅkō himself. It would not have done to just copy that poet. So Cāttaṉ photographs the real elephant in the confused state. The comparison is to a huge ship tossed by the waves in a storm. Well, a new image for the elephant. And Utayakumaraṉ should have been a hero, to be able to control such an animal. Like Kōvalaṉ, who pulled out that Brahmin from the trunk of an elephant, only, Iḷaṅkō's elephant was sane and Cāttaṉ's was not.

Utayakumaraṉ rides down the street of dancers, sees an acquaintance revelling with a prostitute, and asks him what went wrong with his *yāḻ*. That chap indirectly suggests Maṇimēkalai, with whom it seems the prince had already been infatuated. Poor Maṇimēkalai should be easy prey, for she belongs to that unfortunate, unprotected class. She too knows of the danger. She knows the sound of his chariot, and hides for safety in a house—of glass! Her friend, Cutamati, is questioned by the prince. Cutamati thereupon embarks on a sermon, on the instability of youth and beauty. But, "when lust has entered, where is reason?"

We are not really all that interested in the hot pursuit of a beautiful, helpless young woman by the son of a king. Nor in all the fairy-tales in which they are involved. But we have to stop before an observation of Cutamati's. Her father was gored, in the stomach, by a cow. So the poor old fellow, with his daughter, had gone to the Jains for help. They had shooed them out! And it was—Buddhists to the rescue! Hence Cutamati advises the lust-mad prince to seek out the Buddhists for guidance. Only, we do not know which way our Iḷaṅkō was looking during this part of the narrative. And we are also surprised by poor Maṇimēkalai's confession, that, in her heart of hearts, she finds herself drawn to the prince. But a goddess of her name accosts her now, and tells her the story of Pukār.

There are gods galore in Pukār city. And the poet is specially interested in the cremation grounds, where the devils are dancing. A poor young man, a Brahmin, is so scared by them that he falls dead at his mother's feet. Whereupon she hastens to the god Campāpati for succour. None forthcoming. Not from all the gods. Only a sermon, on the inevitability, the finality, of death. Whereupon

she also finds release from her sorrow, in joining her son. A lurid picture of life and its end.

But the goddess who narrates the story airlifts Maṇimēkalai away from the danger zone to an island, leaving poor Cutamati sleeping, all alone! It's Cutamati who later carries the tale to Mātavi, who is "like a body that had lost its sweet life." And Maṇimēkalai, on her island, awakes, all alone too, and starts weeping, though she has enough sense to pray to the Buddha, who is given great importance.

There are many dull episodes in the epic. The poet is bent on making his heroine recognize her past birth, and the past birth of her mother and her friend, along with the past birth of this woman-hunting prince Utayakumaraṇ too. Gods appear and disappear and there is one god that hands over to Maṇimēkalai a vessel of food that can never be emptied. Hunger appears as a very common factor in the country-a contrast to the revelry and luxury that we see in *Cilappatikāram*. To such an extent can hunger go, that Visvāmitra, the Kshatriya-turned-Brahmin, was compelled to eat dog's flesh! However, he took care to offer first what he was going to eat-(dog's flesh?) to the gods. Whereupon, Indra appeared, the rains came, and famine was driven out. Whatever is all this, but heckling at the dēvās! Sure, they had a fund of patience.

That never-empty vessel, the *amutacurapi*, now in the hands of Maṇimēkalai, has a story behind it too. Wherein the Buddhist poet expends his anger on the *vēḷvis* and the Brahmins who perform them. The poet shows up a *vēḷvi* as a sacrifice of life, in this case, of a cow. While the cow is awaiting slaughter, she is rescued, stolen for her safety, by a young Brahmin, Āpputtiraṇ. Whereupon the latter is excommunicated by the furious Brahmins. And the cow reacts suitably by goring out the bowels of the teacher of the Brahmins. We have not really seen, in *Caṅkam* poetry, the pictures of Brahmins killing animals and eating their flesh at the *vēḷvis*. But Cāttaṇ, the post-*Caṅkam* Cāttaṇ, would leave us in no doubt about that.

There is quite a quarrel between Āpputtiraṇ and Indra, king of the gods, over the issue of giving food to the hungry too. Indra pours the rain over the country so generously that there are no hungry folks to come to Āpputtiraṇ to benefit by his *amutacurapi*. Poor Āpputtiraṇ.

Human interest is reduced to the minimum in this story. It's all about rebirth and prayers, and giving, and sermonising, all the way. We hardly have

time to enquire about the prince who is woman-hunting Maṇimēkalai. Well, Maṇimēkalai takes the form of the wife of one Kāñcaṇaṉ. The prince sees through the disguise but Kāñcaṇaṉ does not. Result? Kāñcaṇaṉ just makes short work of Utayakumaraṉ! The responsibility for this goes to Cittirāpati.

Cittirāpati, Mātavi's mother, whom Iḷaṅkō has so delicately sketched, is here like a tigress! "We are not *pattiṉis*," (chaste women) she says, about herself and her clan of prostitutes. She is furious to learn that her granddaughter is going around feeding the hungry. And she actually preaches a sermon to Utayakumaraṉ, that, among his princely duties is included that of teaching the prostitutes their code of behaviour. It is this sermon that leads the prince to his death.

Cāttaṉ's lectures are tiresome. His powers of characterisation are nil. And, his theology is confusing. But the verses do have a mellifluous flow as Iḷaṅkō pointed out. It's not really worthwhile, though, pursuing the trend of the story. But we learn some horrifying facts about the social make-up of the Tamilnad of the time. It was ready for a complete break-down. And we have to say that *Maṇimēkalai* is not an epic worth the name. Its kinship with the *Cilappatikāram* story probably protected it from going the way of the other two Buddhist epics that got lost. Whose quality, quite probably, did not ensure them protection.

There are, though, a few points of interest here, such as the washing away of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam by the sea, an incident that passes for history among the Tamils. There are also the arguments and counter-arguments of the religious heads to whom Maṇimēkalai goes for enlightenment. And there is importance given to Vañci—following the footsteps of its illustrious predecessor. Comparisons between *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* are, however, odious.

We have just glanced through a Tamil Buddhist epic connected with the Tamil country. Now we are proceeding to *Peruṅkatai*, the "great story," a Jain epic.

* * * * *

Chapter XX

PERUṄKATAI

Peruṅkatai is Tamil only in so far as language is concerned. The setting is non-Tamil, the sentiments are non-Tamil. A prince, Utayaṇaṉ (the "hero" of *Maṇimēkalai* was Utayakumaraṉ) falls in love with a princess whom he had tutored in music. Then he falls in love with another woman. Then another. Then another again. And finally he tires of it all—he would!—and turns to Jainism, for refuge. Meanwhile the poet makes capital of all the circumstances. And, it should also be mentioned, this poem is NOT included in the *Aimperuṅkāppiyam* the "Five Great Epics" of Tamil.

An indepth study of *Peruṅkatai* is, certainly not indicated here. This book is a study of Tamils through their literature, and by their literature we mean the literature of power. That section of their written words which is likely to have had an impact on the Tamil people. That section which is likely to catch fire in the minds of any people. *Peruṅkatai* has been taken seriously later by Tamil scholars, but scholarship is not quite the same thing as a grasp of what really matters in literature. We have lost the key-portions of the epic—the opening, and the conclusion, where we might have looked for a bit of Jainism-but what we have is just the story of "love". And, polygamy. In action. Vācavatattai, the heroine, is jolted to find her husband, who has won her and worn her with so much difficulty, making love to her successor in his favour. Whereupon, Utayaṇaṉ, who does not want to lose her either, turns to her with pleadings. He wouldn't have succeeded, but a stag breaks out from a nearby bush and charges at her, driving the terrified woman—into Utayaṇaṉ's embrace! Well, woman needs her protector, man. And so, polygamy is the natural result of a masculine society. If the vast majority of the *Caṅkam* poets, and Tiruvaḷḷuvar, and Iḷaṅkō, don't favour it, it is because they represent a very highly civilised class of people. We could lightly dispense with *Peruṅkatai*, the "great story." A lengthy affair too—though not so lengthy as Kampaṉ!

But then, *Peruṅkatai* is highly spoken of in some quarters. The reasons have to be scrutinised. It so happens that it has some attractive passages. Such is the

description of a princess playing a game of ball. And the verse, too, runs smoothly on its rails. It is *Taṇtamiḻ* we could say, but, *Taṇtamiḻ* isn't everything!

We are surprised to learn that *Peruṅkatai* is a Jain story. The Jains have a reputation for being associated with suffering humanity, with the man in the street. We see a great deal of the common man in the *Cilappatikāram* as well as in the *Caṅkam*, although even there hero and heroine are usually from the privileged classes. But When, Shakespeare himself has been accused of snobbery, for bringing the aristocracy to the fore, though Shakespeare also has an eye on the common man, for he can walk with them and talk with them and laugh with them too. The ancient Tamil poets cannot be accused of laughing readily with anybody, but they were downright earnest at least, like Shakespeare in his tragedies. And they did have a role for the common man. Both elements, of earnestness, and involvement in the ordinary run of human life, are absent from *Peruṅkatai*. Surprising, for a Jain creative work.

* * * * *

Chapter XXI

MUTTOḶḶĀYIRAM

The name, on the face of it, means the three nine-hundreds. But it is said to mean the nine hundred verses divided into three. And the author is, simply, not known. Here is somebody, singing of the Triarchy—a nostalgic memory, it would seem. And, by good luck or bad, all that is left of it is one hundred and thirty verses. The form is the *veṇpā*. We know to what good use the *veṇpā* was put later, in the *Naḷaveṇpā*, by Pukaḻēnti (the Bearer of Fame). But the only thing we can say of the *veṇpā* form here, is that it is indigenous and not borrowed from Sanskrit. And, at the same time, we have no quarrel with the mere versification. However, it is a different matter when we come to the content.

One considerable section of the verses, devoted to the kings, is *kaikkiḷai* or one-sided love. At last, *kaikkiḷai* is in full swing. And it is no credit to the chastity of the Tamil woman. For, here we come across a bevy of young girls, watching the king in procession, and longing for him. It is no vague or undefined longing, nor just an expression of admiration for the splendour of the monarch who is riding past. This longing shows itself in dreams, in sharing grievances with one's attendant maid, and sometimes in shockingly revolting erotic images.[1] Just for one instance. Turn to poem 29. A girl is languishing for the Pāṇṭiya king's embrace. Her breasts are like the "incoming tender fruit of the tall palmyrah tree," but, "What use is it?" she cries, "if it does not press and take to itself the cool sandal paste on the bosom of the king of the south who rides the elephant?" Could eroticism be clearer than that? The "hero" is the king, whether Pāṇṭiyaṉ or Cōḷaṉ or Cēraṉ, and the "heroine" the young girl who is eying his masculine comeliness from her retreat. The monarch knows nothing of the desires he is creating, but the girls of his country are simply burning for him! Hence the *kaikkiḷai*. There is nothing like it in the *Caṅkam*. The dramatis personae seem to have been borrowed thence, but their character, their individuality, is not here. And, highly as the kings are praised, the praises are not individualised. They

1. *Muttoḷḷāyiram*. Pub. by South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tirunelvelly Ltd., Aprial 1946.

could be for anybody. They are interchangeable. Only, the first *veṇpā*, "the worship of God the Infinite" is deserving of some attention. The first part of the *veṇpā* speaks of "Him who first created the stars, the moon, and the sun." In the second part, the poet wonders, "Why does the world call on Him again and again as the one who was born under the star Ātirai?" A very logical question, one should say. But it transpires that the God Śiva was supposed to be born under the star Ātirai—an idea that could not have been indigenous, and seems to have been later pursued in the christening of the kings, especially of the royal house of Travancore, the last Maharaja of which state is still remembered as Cittiraittirunāḷ ("He who was born under the holy star of Cittirai"). Was the poet of *Muttoḷḷāyiram* associated with Cēranāṭu, one wonders. But that is immaterial. What is interesting here is, that *kaṭavuḷ* is accepted, even in the mere sense of the word, as being infinite, and is also described as the one who first created the stars etc. Now how do you see Him as someone "born" under a star? Inconceivable, one would think. The creator here becomes a creature! However, it must be added that the poet sees nothing incongruous here. He only marvels that the "world" should be repeatedly calling on "Ātiraiyāṉ, Ātiraiyāṉ," and "fainting." Why "fainting"? Because of the inadequacy, of a word that describes God as being born under a star, to reveal the wonder of the infiniteness of the creator? To be sure the poet does not think of it that way, but that is how it strikes the present writer. As for the poet, he just sees the incredible wonder of such a thing happening. No, Śiva is not conceived here as an incarnation, but the idea of the incarnation could be somewhere on the horizon. After all, Rāmā and Krishna were already known to the elite of Tamilnad. Only, here, Śiva makes his appearance in the poem as a god, not man, but born under the star Ātirai. Now, our question is, how can God be born under a star? Unless he is an incarnation. Which he is not, here at any rate.

By the end of the 6th century, the Pallava kings seem to have strengthened themselves in Tamilnad. They seem to have been Buddhist, Jain, and Saivite. Their names give them away.

But what brands of Buddhism and Jainism were there we do not know. *Maṇimēkalai* and *Peruṅkatai* don't give us a picture of earnest religious activity. But the Brahministic temples were in the background, and the Brahmins were never slack in their religious zeal. Some sort of stability was ensured by their *varṇāsrama*, the system of prostitution being frowned sternly upon by the Brahmins, especially the women. Back in *Caṅkam* literature we find a fair-faced woman eying with angry disgust a prostitute and her victim. As the Brahmins increased in power

and numbers, the prostitute would have gone down the social scale. That is not to rule out the possibility of Brahmin men of wealth and influence, taking advantage of the women who were ready to sell themselves. But the Brahmin home had its own code of ethics which was especially stringent on its women, and hence this would not have caused great social disturbances. If *Maṇimēkalai* and *Peruṅkatai* represented Buddhism and Jainism, it would have been an easy walk-over for Brahminism.

A demoralised, prostitute-ridden Tamil generation would not have had the guts to fight social inequalities fostered by the *vaṛṇāsrama*. Upper-class women would naturally switch over to a way of life wherein they would find comparative security. And this walk-over was made the easier by the emotional storms of the Bhakti movement which was by now under way.

We cannot overestimate the power of music in a religious movement. Already in the aftermath of the *Caṅkam* we noticed that the *Paripāṭal* writers took their music as seriously as their verses. That the value of these songs was recognized by Authority we know, because the names of the tunes and their composers are on record as much as the verses.

And so it is that the first Bhakti poet so-called, Kārāikkāl Ammaiyār, comes into the picture. There are many stories attached to her, one of them being that her extreme piety scared away her husband. And that she was changed into one of the spirits dancing in a Saivite temple at Tiruvālaṅkāṭu. It is not possible to assess the full impact of her poems on her social circle, since they were set to music. Strip the Hallelujah chorus of its music and study the words. How far do they carry? Much of the Bhakti literature, which swept a whole population before it, owes its drive to the music. People sang, and strummed, and danced, and forgot themselves. And that is how the Bhakti period came into being.

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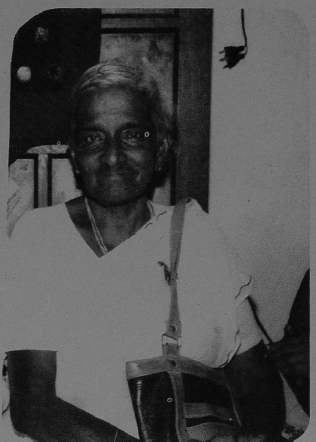

Hephzibah Jesudasan, retired Professor of English, is the author of four novels in Tamil, three books of English verse and two Children's Books in English besides a number of translations, articles and short stories, in both English and Tamil. In 1962, the Heritage of India Series featured *A History of Tamil Literature* written by her in collaboration with her husband, C. Jesudasan, then Professor of Tamil. Now, still with his indepth involvement, in her mid-seventies, she has brought out the first volume of her *Count-down from Solomon*, or *The Tamils down the Ages from their literature*. Three more volumes are in the offing. Vol II, including the Bhakti period and Jain ethical literature, is expected this December. Hephzibah Jesudasan has served for a term on the Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi.

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