

## LANGUAGE

Hallo.

TAMILNET welcomes you.

We are very glad to share with you through electronics, the Tamil language, which is claimed by some over-enthusiastic Tamils to have a mythic origin at the stage in the evolution of the world, "after the appearance of the rocks, but before the appearance of the sand"!

## ROOT

Tamil language is a member of the Dravidian family of languages, which are predominant in South India and north-east Sri Lanka. Some Dravidian languages are spoken by tribal people in different parts of the South Asian subcontinent, such as northern and central India, Pakistan and Nepal. Scholars are not agreed on the original homeland of the Dravidians. Among the Dravidians, the Tamils alone have a continuous literary tradition, going up to the beginning of the Christian era. The Tamil texts from very ancient times preserve memories of having lost land to the sea. The legend about three Tamil academies under the patronage of the Pāṇṭiya kings, one academy succeeding the other in new capital cities, after losing land to the sea, and existing for more than nine thousand years, has been recorded in Kalaviyalurai, which could be dated to about the eighth century AD. Geologists refer to the past existence of a land mass in the Indian Ocean area, which gradually receded before the advancing ocean. There are Tamils who believe that their original homeland was Lemuria, which has been submerged by the Indian Ocean. Another theory is that the South Asian subcontinent was at one time the homeland of the Tamils and that they were pushed to the South by the later Indo-Aryan migrants, a branch of the Indo-European people. The Vedic literature of the Indo-Aryans originated in North-West of the subcontinent. The Indus Valley civilization, occupying almost the same area, preceded the Vedic age. Many scholars identify the Indus civilization as Dravidian, even though total unanimity among scholars could not be achieved as proper methodology for the decipherment of Indus valley script could not still be worked out.

The Euphrates-Tigris Valley, corresponding to modern Iraq in Western Asia, has been the home of many very ancient civilizations. In the southern part of that valley, north of the Persian Gulf, there flourished the Sumerian civilization for many centuries. This civilization had many distinctive features which distinguished it from other civilizations in that valley. It has many resemblances to Indus Valley civilization as well as to the Dravidian civilization of South India. There are scholars working on the affinity between the Sumerian and the Dravidian languages.

Further down on the Persian Gulf, in the western highlands of modern Iran, there was a kingdom of Elam in Biblical times. Some placenames in that region have been shown to have close resemblance to place names in Dravidian languages.

There are scholars tracing the original homeland of the Dravidian race, from the region of the Caucasus mountain.

Those who believe in the Lemurian origin of the ancestors of the Tamils argue that after settling down in South India, groups of these people might have migrated to the Indus Valley and the Euphrates-Tigris Valley.

## PALAEOGRAPHY



There is still controversy about the origin of the Tamil script. There are Tamils who argue for a hoary antiquity for the Tamil script in consonant with the legendary history of Tamil literature. The Indus script remains undeciphered. Even if the prehistoric writings in the seals of the Indus valley have been established as belonging to Dravidian language, the problem whether the present Tamil script could be traced to the Indus script cannot be solved automatically, as intermediate stages of evolution, covering more than 1500 years are not available.

Scholars differ in dating the earliest historical inscriptions from North India, South India and Sri Lanka. It is remarkable that the script that was in vogue in all the three regions was basically the same. The main controversy is whether North India adopted a Tamil script with modifications or South India adopted a North Indian script with modifications. The precise dating of the early inscriptions is very difficult and scholars now take Asōkan inscriptions of the third century BC as the starting point. Asōka used Brahmi script to write Prakrit language in his inscriptions throughout India, roughly to the north of Tamilakam. Early inscriptions in Sri Lanka also mainly follow the same pattern. In the Tamil country, all the earliest inscriptions are in Tamil language but the script appears to be the same, modified to suit the Tamil language. This script has been named Tamilī by R. Nagaswamy and Tamil-Brahmi by Iravatham Mahadevan. Most of these early inscriptions have been located around Maturai, where the legendary third Tamil academy was located. Cave inscriptions from other parts of the Tamil country are relatively late and they might indicate that writing spread from Maturai to other parts. Even though the cave inscriptions consist mainly of labels and are not many in number, a large quantity of potsherds with writings of the same type have been unearthed from various archaeological sites in different parts of the Tamil country. There is controversy on the dating of these records; the most ancient of the inscriptions could be as old as the second century BC.

From the sixth century AD, we have Tamil inscriptions in Vaṭṭeḷuttu script on inscriptions in natukal (planted stone). The script of the earlier cave inscriptions seems to have evolved into Vaṭṭeḷuttu, may be due to the influence of the common writing material of palmyrah leaf. The Pallava rulers who were claiming a North Indian origin for themselves introduced the Grantha -Tamil script in the seventh century AD. The Grantha script was used to write Sanskrit in South India. In the Pallava kingdom, another script closely resembling the Grantha was introduced to write the Tamil language. The latter two scripts together is sometimes referred to as the Grantha-Tamil script.

The Tamil language had two scripts for some centuries, depending on political boundaries. The Pāṇṭiyas and the Cēras were using the Vaṭṭeḷuttu while the Pallavas were using the Tamil. The Cōḷas, who were under the Pallava domination, were used to the Tamil script. When they conquered the Pāṇṭiya kingdom in the tenth century, they replaced the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script there with their Tamil script. The Cēra/ Kerala rulers continued with the Vaṭṭeḷuttu for some more centuries before writing the Malayāḷam language in the Malayāḷam script. The Vaṭṭeḷuttu disappeared and the Tamil script became the only script for the Tamil language.

## LANGUAGE FORMATION

According to modern linguists, the Dravidian was the ancestral form of the Tamil language. First the North Dravidian and then the Central Dravidian separated themselves and later some languages from the South Dravidian also emerged as independent languages. There was a stage when proto Tamil- proto Malayalam- proto Kannada prevailed and later then Kannada and Malayalam also developed as separate languages. The word Dravidian language is a reconstruction of modern linguists to refer to a stage in the undifferentiated prehistoric development of Tamil and its sister languages.

There are linguists working on extra-Dravidian affinities. Robert Caldwell, the father of Dravidian linguistics, was speculating on these lines and emphasised the Dravidian affinities with the Scythian languages. The title of the Scythian languages has been replaced



by linguists with the names of a number of language families but many linguists are seriously trying to work out the relationship between the Dravidian and the other language families, mainly of Central Asian origin. Even in the last International Tamil Research Conference in Ta'ncāvūr in 1995, papers were read on the relationship of Tamil with Mongolian, Korean and Japanese languages.

There are some Tamil scholars who stretch philological approach to claim that Tamil language was perhaps the mother of all other languages in the world. Two Roman Catholic scholars- Nallūr Cuvāmi Gnānappirakācar (Svāmi Gnānappiragasar) from Ilaṅkai and Tēvanēyappāvāṇar (Devaneyan) from Tamilnāṭu are the well-known names associated with this approach.

There are myths, connecting Tamil language to Śaivism. According to Tamil legends of the Three Academies, the history of Tamil was intimately linked to Lord Śiva and god Murukan. They participated in the deliberations of the first academy from its inception. Some medieval Tamil poets claim that Śiva was the origin of both Sanskrit and Tamil. It is also a part of medieval tradition that Akattiyar (Skt. Agastya, a Vedic sage) learnt Tamil grammar from Śiva and wrote down Akattiyam, its first grammatical work. Puttamittiraṇār, a Tamil Buddhist grammarian of the 11th century, challenges the Śaiva claim when he says that Akattiyar learnt Tamil grammar from Avalōkita, a bodhisattva.

There is difference of opinion among modern scholars on the earliest existing documents in Tamil. Three types of documents- the cave inscriptions, the Caṅkam literature and the Tolkāppiyam - each of these has many adherents. Historians, Archacologists and Epigraphists generally date the cave inscriptions as the earliest documents and then from that stage trace the development of the Tamil language. The legend of the Three Academies refer to Tolkāppiyam as a product of the second academy and the existing Caṅkam texts as products of the third academy. Heated arguments still go on about the relative antiquity of the grammar and the literature. Some grammatical features in the Tolkāppiyam appear to predate the Caṅkam texts while some other features appear to be clearly later developments. The most plausible compromise seems to be that there were two books by the name of Tolkāppiyam, one earlier and the other later than the Caṅkam texts, and the later Tamil tradition has made a synthesis of the two books into one.

## Grammar

Tolkāppiyam is the most ancient extant grammatical work in Tamil. There is no mention of Akattiyam anywhere in that book, even though it refers to its indebtedness to other grammarians anonymously. The format of the grammar is descriptive even though it served as a prescriptive grammar subsequently. The grammar is surprisingly very extensive for its early period. The description of minute details of the Tamil language create admiration for the work among modern linguists. The work is in three parts :- 1. Eluttu (phonology, morpho-phonemics), 2. Col (morphology, syntax), 3. Poruḷ (Subject matter).

The phonology of Tamil has helped the Tamil language to preserve its individuality and distinctiveness. The other Dravidian languages have borrowed thousands of words from Sanskrit and related languages and then to write them, they borrowed all the sounds, found in the Northern alphabet. Even though the Tamil language has borrowed from Indo-Aryan from very early times, it was careful to use them within the Tamil phonemic pattern. The phonemic pattern of Tamil has been so carefully described in the Tolkāppiyam that it has remained as a guideline for later writings in Tamil. Literary Tamil, especially Tamil poetry, always adhered to the phonemic pattern, even though Tamil prose and inscriptions of the later periods transgressed occasionally.

The subject matter of ancient Tamil poetry treating akam, "interior" and puram, "exterior" has been very distinctive to Tamil tradition. The Caṅkam poetry is based on this tradition. Much of that poetry could not have made any sense, if not for its elaborate description in the third part of the Tolkāppiyam. Understanding poruḷ tradition is a sine-quo nun for the



understanding much of later Tamil literature also, like the narrative poems and the bhakti literature also, not to mention later pirapantams (Skt. Prabandha).

The subject matter dealt with in the third part of the Tolkāppiyam led to the branching away of three units in later times known as poruḷ, yāppu (prosody), and aṇi (rhetoric). So later grammatical tradition in Tamil speaks of aint-ilakkaṇam, "five-fold Tamil grammar". Viracōliyam of the eleventh century AD is the first grammar in Tamil to have five sections dealing with five-fold grammar. There is controversy on the religious affinity of the author of the Tolkāppiyam, whether he was a Vedicist or a Jain, based on internal evidence. The Jain and Buddhist monks dominated the field of Tamil grammar as authors and commentators during the medieval times before the Śaivites took over. Nannūḷ by Pavaṇanti, a Jain monk of the thirteenth century, is the Tamil grammar of medieval Tamil par excellence. It deals with eḷuttu and col only. Many modern Tamil grammatical works are based on this work.

## ROOTS IN EELAM

The word Eelam is the name used by the Tamils from very remote times to indicate Ilaṅkai, the modern Sri Lanka. It is not clear whether the term referred to the Tamil habitation only in the island or to the entire island. In medieval times, it was used in both the senses. In the Cōḷa inscriptions of the eleventh century, Īlam was used to denote the north / north-east of the island and Īlam muḷuvatum to denote the whole island.

The Tamil Lexicon, published more than 60 years ago, derives this word from Pāli, Sihala and Skt, Simhala. The compilers of the Lexicon took over Wilhelm Geiger's theory, formulated at a time, when archaeological and classical studies about the Tamils were not sufficiently advanced. The Tamil Lexicon also gives four meanings. Besides the name for the island, it could mean gold or toddy, besides a shrub. The meaning of toddy is derived from Īlavar, a South Indian caste name for toddy tappers. The meaning of gold seems to be the one, connecting the Tamils to the island. Probably, Tamil traders of ancient times gave this name to the fertile and prosperous island, rich in pearls and gems. It is remarkable that the Tamil Lexicon quotes Nakarappaṭalam of Aracakēcani's Irakuvammicam (Skt. Raguvamsa), a narrative poem translated and adopted in Eelam, for the usage of the word in the sense of gold.

The word Eelam as a place name occurs in the Caṅkam literature as well as in the Cave Inscriptions. Even the Pāli chronicles of Sri Lanka refer to contacts with South India from ancient times. The Brahmi script used in ancient Prakrit inscriptions in Sri Lanka resembles closely the Tamil Brahmi. Even though the ancient inscriptions of Sri Lanka are in Prakrit language, many terms in those inscriptions could be satisfactorily explained only by reference to Tamil usages. Most probably the Tamils formed a substantial portion of the Lankan population even at the beginning of the historical period.

The eastern coast of the island probably formed an integral part of the historical habitation of the Tamils. The Tamil Lexicon quotes a phrase Īla'n curriyōṭal, with the meaning, "Sailing round the eastern side of Ceylon", from Winslow's dictionary.

Yālpāṇam peninsula is the core region of Tamil Eelam. Though it has only about two percent of the land area of the island, it has about half of the Tamil population referred to as Ilaṅkai Tamils and about one-third of the entire population of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Human habitation in Yālpāṇam extends to only about 500 BC with the beginning of megalithic settlements. The Tamil Hindu claims on Yālpāṇam begin with king Vicayaṇ building five Īcuvaraṅkal, "temples for Śiva", in five different localities, one of them being Kīrimalai, on the northern coast of the peninsula. In the Eastern coast of Ilaṅkai, from Tirukkōṇamalai to Tirukkōvil, the Tamil Hindu claims generally start with the legendary king Īrāvaṇa (Skt. Rāvaṇa) of Rāmāyaṇa fame.

There is almost appalling paucity of evidence for reconstruction of the past history of Yālpāṇam. Dr. Ragupathy's Archaeological Survey of Early Settlements of Jaffna is the



primary source for its early history. The first phase of rudimentary settlements were noticed at five sites, two in the small islands and three in the western portion of the peninsula. The type of pottery called Early Carinated Black and Red Ware (ECBRW) was noticed only at the above sites. At two of these sites, this occurred in association with the megalithic burials which contained burial offerings. This type of pottery and burial indicate the Dravidian culture of the inhabitants.

The second phase of the settlement pattern in the peninsula emerged around the dawn of the Christian era and continued up to the fifth century AD. This phase is distinguished by the presence of the Rouletted Ware, introduced here with the Roman trade. The Rouletted Ware has been collected from nearly ten sites. All the sites except Kantarōtai are coastal sites. Important new settlements emerged along the eastern coast of the peninsula and in the small islands. Kantarōtai emerged as a central place or urbanised capital. The Roman trade brought in economic boom and resulted in urbanization of Kantarōtai.

Around the dawn of the Christian era, the advent of Buddhism coincided with the Roman trade which led to the development of many coastal entrepôts and trade route settlements. Extensive Buddhist remains are found at Kantarōtai. The overlapping of megalithism with Buddhism is evident in the concept and lay-out of the early Buddhist monuments there where a number of stupas are found in a cluster. Such a lay-out was found in Andhra Buddhism and not in Sinhala Buddhism. An indigenous feature of the Buddhist remains in Yālpānam is the coral and limestone architecture and sculpture. The building material is one aspect that differentiates the Buddhist monuments of Yālpānam from those of the Sinhala South. The settlement pattern indicates that Buddhism in Yālpānam is mercantile in character and was patronised by the trading elite, unlike the Sinhala Buddhism which was peasant oriented and patronised by kings.

The third phase marks the deterioration of the previous pattern and concerns the period from around fifth century to tenth century AD. The prosperous Roman trade ended and the settlements in the peninsula had been affected by this. The subsequent Arab-Chinese trans-oceanic trade did not have its focus in the peninsula. The next phase started around the tenth century AD and continued upto the advent of the Portuguese. The overlapping of the classical Hinduism of the Cōlas with the Yālpānam Buddhism was almost complete in two or three centuries. Many of the old settlement sites of phase three were abandoned. Kantarōtai, the central place itself, was abandoned. New settlements arose and they were found widely distributed throughout the peninsula. There was a spurt in the Arab-Chinese trade as evident from the Arab-Chinese artefacts of eleventh to thirteenth centuries. With the emergence of the kingdom of Yālpānam with its capital Nallūr, the present religious trend of Yālpānam almost took its shape.

## INSCRIPTIONS, COINS AND MANUSCRIPTS

Sri Lankā has thousands of stone inscriptions, mainly in caves, connected to Buddhism. Tamil influence can be traced in these inscriptions. In the present Northern Province, except in Vavuniya district, this type of inscription could not be found probably because rocks and hills are not available in the landscape.

Upto the tenth century AD in Yālpānam peninsula, only six epigraphs - three from Kantarōtai, two from Ānaikkōttai and one from Vallipuram - have been discovered so far. One of them was a Sinhala inscription of the ninth century AD. A large number of coins, beginning from Punch mark types, have been found at Kantarōtai. Regarding coins, the particularity of the site is the heavy presence of the Lakṣmī Plaque coins. The coin is a rectangular sheet of copper having a standing figure with prominent feminine features resembling a mother goddess. The Lakṣmī Plaque is essentially an indigenous product as a very large number have been reported from Kantarōtai. This type is dated around the dawn



6

of the Christian era. Nothing was written on these coins. Coins of some Sinhala kings reigning between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries have also been discovered. The reading and interpretation of two of the early epigraphs - one from Āṇaikkōṭṭai and the other from Vallipuram - have generated lot of controversy.

A bronze seal of two lines was discovered inside an ECBRW dish, placed near the skull of a skeleton in a megalithic burial complex in 1980. In the first line there are three graffiti marks usually found in megalithic pottery and in the second line there are three Brahmi letters. Prof. K. Indrapala feels that the first line consists of three characters or symbols written in the same way as the ideograms on an Indus seal. He wonders whether we have come across the first bilingual inscription in the Indus and Brahmi scripts. He dates this inscription in the third or second century BC. Dr. P. Ragupathy attempts to deduce the prevalence of the god-king concept among the Tamils by his reading of the inscription as *kō vēntu*. The inscription seems to be so small that different readings are possible. It seems to be unwise to rush into interpretations entailing deep significance.

The Vallipuram Gold Plate was discovered in 1936 and the one sentence inscription was first edited by Paranavitana in 1940. This refers to the erection of a Buddhist temple. The inscription was in Prakrit language, written in Brahmi script. Paranavitana interprets this record in the light of the Pāli chronicles. He finds some resemblance in names between the ruler mentioned in the record and a ruler mentioned in the Pāli chronicles. So he rushes to the conclusion that the Anurādhapura king of the second century AD was ruling over Yālpāṇam in the second century. Claiming to recognise similarities in language and script between the Vallipuram Plate and inscriptions in Southern Ilaṅkai, he comes to the conclusion that the people of Yālpāṇam in the second century were Sinhala Buddhists. Dr. A. H. Dāni pointed out that that on palaeographical grounds, this inscription could be dated only in the fourth century and the script betrays South Indian influence. Prof. A. Veluppillai has argued convincingly that this inscription reveals Dravidian influence and that this could not be cited as evidence for Sinhala settlement in Yālpāṇam.

P. Pushparatnam has been doing archaeological field-work in Pēnakari in the mainland, opposite Yālpāṇam peninsula and has come out with many findings of evidence for Tamil settlement there, contemporary with the Caṅkam period. The discovery of potsherd inscriptions in Brahmi - the certain reading of some of them as Tamil-Brahmi, confirmed by Iravatham Mahadevan - is worthy of mention here.

## BEGINNINGS OF LITERATURE IN EELAM - EARLY HISTORY.

Though writing has been continuously practised in Ilaṅkai for about two thousand years, early literary works in the national languages have not been preserved and the earliest extant literary texts in either of the two national languages could not be dated beyond the last thousand years.

Attempts have been made to trace the beginnings of Eelam poetry and grammar from the Caṅkam period. Different arguments have been put forward to claim poets like Mura'nciyūr Muṭinākarāyar and Amūvāṇār and grammarian Tolkāppiyar for Eelam but scholars have found them unconvincing. Vittuvāṇ Ci. Kaṇēcaiyyar was the first to include Ilattu Pūtaṇṭēvaṇār in his *Eelattu Tamil Pulavar Caritam* (History of Tamil Poets in Eelam), 1939. There are two separate entries in Caṅkam anthologies, two poems by Eelattu Pētaṇṭēvaṇār and five poems by Maturai Eelattu Pētaṇṭēvaṇār. Kaṇēcaiyyar has taken both names as belonging to the same author.

Some scholars have expressed scepticism about taking this poet as an Eelam poet, just depending on the place name and about taking two entries of names as belonging to one person. The poet has only akam themes for his poetry and so it is difficult to locate him in a regional and historical milieu.

Modern research is establishing the fact that the early history of Ilaṅkai was very much influenced by the Tamils. There must have been a substantial Tamil population in the island



7

from the beginning of the historical period. It is from 247 BC, the date of introduction of Buddhism in Ilaṅkai, that the real historical period can be said to have begun. Even according to the Mahāvamsa, the Pāli chronicle of the Sinhala, the Tamils made three different attempts to rule from Anurādhapura. During a period roughly corresponding to two centuries before the Christian era, there was Tamil rule for about eighty years. This could not have been possible without a settled Tamil population in Ilaṅkai, who could make a challenge for sovereignty over the whole island. A poet from this region could not be dismissed as an improbability.

Maturai Eelattu Pētāntēvaṇār seems to be the name assumed by Īlattu Pētāntēvaṇār, after having been settled in Maturai. A comparative study of the poems, given under the two different entries, helps in identifying them as belonging to one author.

The seven poems have been included in three different anthologies, known as Kuruntokai, Naṟṇai and Akanāṇūru. If not for the anthologies, this early flowering of Eelam Tamil poetry might have been lost to the posterity.

From early fourteenth century AD, Eelam Tamil literature has a continuous history. Between the ninth and the thirteenth century AD, many Tamil inscriptions have been discovered from different parts of the island. The language of the inscription is an indication that it was understood by at least a section of the people in that locality. Tamil inscriptions have been found both in Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa, the capital cities. Many Tamil inscriptions have been found in and around Tirukkōṇamalai, in a triangle among Tirukkōṇamalai, Padaviyā and Polonnaruwa, making one speculate whether that region could be the core of Eelam.

There is reason to believe that literary activities in Tamil were going on in Ilaṅkai, even though they have not been preserved. Poems inscribed on stones only have been preserved for posterity. Four Tamil poems, in three different metrical forms, have been discovered from three different locations. The first one of the ninth century AD, in venpā metre, was from Anurādhapura, praising a Tarumapālan for raising the Makōtaippaḷli there. The second one in venpā metre belongs to Kotagama, near Kegalle, praising the victory of a Yālpāṇam king against the Sināhala king in the fourteenth century AD. There is an inai kkuṟaḷ ācīriyappā in a Padaviya inscription, referring to a Hindu temple in the twelfth century. A thirteenth century viruttappā from Panduvasnuvara, near Dambadeniya, mentions the establishment of a number of Buddhist edifices during Nissankamalla's reign. Many technical terms of astrology occur in this inscription.

## EELAM POETS/ SCHOLARS PATRONISED BY KINGS

The word "pulavar" in Tamil could mean both poets and scholars. They were mainly using verse "ceyyul" for their productions. This kind of explanation is essential to understand the patronage extended by Yālpāṇam kings to pulavar. The Kingdom of Yālpāṇam was in existence from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries AD and there are traditional accounts that they were patronising Tamil poets.

The earliest extant books from Ilaṅkai are works on astrology and medicine. The astrological work Caracōṭimālai presents an interesting problem. There is another astrological work also called Cekarācēcēkaramālai. This presents no problem. The kings of Yālpāṇam had two alternate throne names: Cekarācēcēkaraṇ and Pararācēcēkaraṇ. Cōma Sarma, the author of the second astrological work, was patronised by a Cekarācēcēkaraṇ, most probably in the fourteenth century. The author has seen the earlier work and revised it with lot of additional information. He cites the names of some astrological sources, may be to lend authority for his revisions. The first work praises the king Parākkiraman, who was mentioned as tampaiyar kāvalaṇ, "king of people of Tampai". As no Tamil king in Ilaṅkai with this name has been mentioned anywhere and as Tampai looks like a shortened Tamilised form for Dambadeniya, this work is now identified as belonging to Parākramabāhu IV of Dambadeniya. The author of this astrological work is mentioned as



Tēnuvaraip Perumāḷ. Tēnuvarai seems to be the Tamilised form for Devīnuvara, the southern tip of the island of Ilaṅkai, which got its name from a Viṣṇu temple, prominent during the medieval times. The word perumāḷ is a Tamil translation for Viṣṇu which could serve as a personal name. Befitting this interpretation, the author praises only Viṣṇu and Vināyaka, who is expressly referred to as nephew of the former, at the beginning of his work. Parākramabāhu IV is referred to as a Sinhala Buddhist ruler in the Pāli chronicles. The Sinhala kings of that period married frequently into South Indian royal families and so rulers could claim kinship with Tamil dynasties. Tēnuvaraip Perumāḷ praises his patron as a scion of the Cōlas, who planted the tiger emblem on the Mēru mountain, who was wearing ātti flowers and who belonged to the solar dynasty. This king was probably a Sinhala to the Sinhalas and a Tamil to the Tamils.

The production of Cekarācēcēkaram as an āyurvedic medical text was most probably contemporaneous with the production of Cekarācēcēkaramālai during the reign of Varōtaya Cīṅkaiyāriyan. The names of authors of the two extant medical texts - Cekarācēcēkaram and Pararācēcēkaram - have unfortunately not been preserved. The latter work was a very ambitious project. Pararācēcēkaram is a massive work of encyclopaedic proportions, running to twelve thousand verses. This is probably a compilation in Tamil of the then available medical knowledge from Āyurvedic medicine, Siddha medicine and folk medicine.

For poetry as such, Aracakēcari, a member of the royal family, is credited with the narrative poem Irakuvammicam, an adaptation from Kālidāsa's Raguvamsa.

There is a folk epic in Eelam on Kāṇṇaki worship. Three different versions - Kōvalaṇār Katai in Yāḷppānam, Cilampu Kūral in Mullaittivu and Valakkurai in Maṭṭakkaḷappu - have been recited now during Kāṇṇaki worship. All three of them have an easily identifiable common core and some of the references seem to point to an Āriyaccakkaravartti as the author of the work. So the core of these three versions might have been written or compiled during the rule of the Yāḷppānam kings.

## NARRATIVE POEMS

Two forms- kāvīyam and kāppiyam- are used interchangeably in Tamil to refer to a literary genre. Some early writers in English have translated these terms as epics. As Tamil literary works of this genre do not share many features of the literary form epic in other classical languages, it is fashionable now to use the term narrative poem to denote the particular literary genre in Tamil. The proper Tamil term for the literary genre should have been poruṭ totar nilai cceyyuḷ. The Sanskrit word kāvya, "poetic creation" appears to have been Tamilised into kāvīyam and kāppiyam. These Tamilised forms make their appearance in Tamil late, may be only from the twelfth century.

The Cilappatikāram and the Maṇimēkalai are two of the earliest narrative poems in Tamil and they seem to reflect Tamil tradition in many ways. The authors take their stories from the Tamil country and have heroines as their main characters - a novel feature in such poems. They also make use of akaval metre, peculiar to Tamil. Ilaṅkō, the author of the Cilappatikāram, is evaluated as one of the greatest Tamil poets. He narrates the story of a modest and chaste Tamil woman, who takes revenge for her husband, after arguing her case convincingly in a king's court. The unity of the then truncated Tamilakam is forcefully brought out in the story where Kāṇṇaki, born in the Cōla country and argued her case in the Pāṇṭiya country had been made the Pattiṇi goddess in the Cēra country. There are frequent references to heroic Tamil kings extending their domination even up to the Himalayas. As plenty of allusions are found for iyal, icai and nāṭakam in this work it is also acclaimed today as mut tamiḷk kāppiyam. The Cilappatikāram is a primary source of treasure for researches on ancient Tamil music and dance. The author has made good use of folk-song motifs like varippāṭal and kuravaippāṭal.



As the Cilappatikāram and the Maṇimēkalai appear to narrate the two parts of the same story and for some similar reasons, both are sometimes referred to as irattaik kāppiyaṅkaḷ, "twin epics". The Maṇimēkalai narrates the story of a young girl, born to Kōvalaṅ and Mātavi. Even though she was living in a Buddhist nunnery, she was tormented by conflict in her mind as she was loved by a prince. Finally she becomes a nun. The author is using the story to popularise and propagate Buddhism. As Buddhism is an international religion, the Maṇimēkalai assumes international importance. The Maṇimēkalai is probably the only Tamil text, for the study of which an international workshop was held. This was held in Uppsala University in Sweden in 1995. These two works attract international scholars and so they are getting many translations.

The first reference to aim peruṅ kāppiyaṅkaḷ, "five major narrative poems" occur in the 14th century. Their enumeration as Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Vaḷaiyāpati and Kuṇṭalakēci is found in a 19th century poem. The last two are no longer extant. The first one, whose author was a Jain monk, narrates a story of North Indian origin and utilises viruttam metre, which is common to both Tamil and Sanskrit. This work follows faithfully the rules laid down in Dandin's Kāvya-dharṣa, a Sanskrit work on rhetoric. This work was a path-finder to the later narrative poems in Tamil, even to the Christian Vīramāmuṇivar's Tēmpāvaṇi and the Muslim Umapūpūlavār's Cīrāppurāṇam.

It is not known who made the compilation of aim peruṅ kāppiyaṅkaḷ. All the five works are connected to the Jains and the Buddhists. But Uṭayaṇaṅ Katai, by a Jain author in akaval metre, had not been included even though it must have preceded Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi. Probably because the Periyapurāṇam and the Kampa Rāmāyaṇam were Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava works, they were not included among the five major narrative poems. It is even claimed that the Periyapurāṇam was written to counter the popularity of the Cintāmaṇi. The plot of the story becomes complicated as this work narrates the story of 63 individual nāyanmār and 9 collective categories. Even though Cuntaramūrttināyaṇār appears as the hero, Appar and Campantar outshine him in some respects. As this work looks like the history of the Śaiva bhakti movement of the Pallava period, some scholars call this a national epic.

Kampar's Irāmavatāram, generally known as Kampa Rāmāyaṇam, has all the features of a narrative poem in abundance. Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa in Sanskrit, the original, is an itikācam, "epic" as well as an ātikāviyam. Kampar is the greatest Tamil poet, may be of international status. International scholars have not shown much interest in Kampar probably because the original is in Sanskrit and the author of the original is also having international status. A socio-political interpretation of the Rāmāyaṇa, that it indicates the Aryanization of South India and that it ridicules the Dravidians as monkeys and demons, has dimmed its importance for some time but now it is realised that it has to be treated as literature and Tamil language cannot afford to dump a poet of this stature. Kacciyappār's Kantapurāṇam is apparently modelled on the Irāmavatāram. The story is about Murukaṅ, the Tamil god, and the work is intended for the Śaiva Siddhānta traditionalists, even though it utilises myths of North Indian origin.

There is also another category in Tamil, called ai'n ciṟu kāppiyaṅkaḷ, "five minor narrative poems". This compilation- Yacōtara Kāviyam, Cūḷāmaṇi, Nākakumāra Kāviyam, Uṭayaṇa Kāviyam and Nilakēci- is very late. Except for Nākakumāra Kāviyam, which is probably extinct, all the others have been printed. All of them are of Jain origin. Cūḷāmaṇi is acclaimed by many modern scholars as having more literary merit than Cintāmaṇi. Nilakēci is a fine example for religious polemics and apologetics - polemics against Buddhism and apologetics for Jainism. Some writers use the word ciṟu kāppiyam to refer also to literary genre like paraṇi, ulā and pillaittamil.

## CLASSICS : CAṆKAM AND AFTER.

There is some controversy on what Tamil classics are and on what caṅkam poetry consists of. The Tamil literature of the period preceding the seventh century AD could be considered



Tamil classics. Three anthologies - eṭṭuttokai, "the eight anthologies", pattuppāṭṭu, "the ten songs", and the patinēṇ kaṇakku, "the eighteen minor works" can be treated as classics. The first category of the eṭṭuttokai itself consists of eight anthologies. Basing on internal evidence like the theme, metre and language of the poetry, modern scholars postulate two different periods of time for this poetry. As the word caṅkam is very closely associated with the early poetry, the periods are classified as Caṅkam and After, the latter one referring to the post-caṅkam period. The fourth century AD can be taken as the beginning of the latter period. Two works of eṭṭuttokai- Kalittokai and Paripāṭal- and one work of the pattuppāṭṭu - Tirumurukāṇṇuppaṭai- and the patinēṇ kiḷkkaṇakku belong to the post-caṅkam period.

Classical Tamil poetics is original, and not indebted to Sanskrit. The most comprehensive statement of Tamil poetics is the third book of the Tolkāppiyam. Poetry is classified into akam and puṇam categories. The akam poems have as their focus the individual within the matrix of familial relationships, foremost among them being love between man and woman. The bias is impersonal: the experience itself is rarefied and frozen in the shape of a poem. The puṇam poems are centred outside the matrix of familial relationships, and are occasional in character. They explore the relationship between man and the world around him, with reference to a specific place and time.

Women preside over the akam poems, which are redolent of their ambience and sacred power (anāṅku). Premarital love (kaḷavu) and marital and extramarital love (karpu) in all their phases are the subject of akam proper, which include phases like meeting, waiting, sulking, lamenting, and parting. The characters of the akam poems include the heroine, her friend, mother, foster mother, the hero, his friend or bard, the concubine, her friend, and passersby. Each poem is in the form of an utterance in the form of a monologue of one of the characters and the poet never directly addresses his audience. Men preside over the puṇam poems, which reverberate with the exploits and prowess in battle of heroes.

The first elements (mutal) are place and time. Place refers to the seven landscapes (tinais), into which the world of akam is divided, the tinais being a complex of "land, class and behavior pattern". The tinais are named after their characteristic flowers or trees and are presided over by deities. Time includes both the seasons of the year and the hours of the day and the night. The native elements (karu) comprise interrelationships between humans and nature. They include human beings, their occupations and past times, musical instruments, musical mode, animals birds, trees and flowers. The human elements (uri) are the phases of love that correspond to the five tinais. Two phases of love- unrequited love (kaikkilāi) and mismatched love (peruntinais) - are not considered suitable for poetry.

The world of puṇam also comprises seven tinais. They correspond to those of akam. Six of them are named after flowers or trees. Flowers, appropriate to each phase of combat, are worn as garlands by warriors.

The akam/ puṇam classification may be regarded as a unique contribution of Tamil poetics. The genres complement each other. Often they overlap, even fuse together to speak passionately and with sophistication of an ancient way of life. Prof A. Velupillai characterises this period as iyarkai neṇi kkālam, "Naturalistic Age".

Of the six works of the eṭṭuttokai of the early period, puṇanānūru and paṇṇiruppaṭṭu belong to puṇam and the rest to akam. Of the nine works of the pattuppāṭṭu of the early period, three - kuṇṇi'ncippāṭṭu, paṇṇinappālai and mullaippāṭṭu - belong to akam and the rest to puṇam. The puṇam poetry reflects the heroic age of the Tamils and it has many comparable features with such poetry in many ancient literatures, especially the heroic poetry of Greek literature. Prof. S.Vaiyapurippillai drew attention to this fact and Prof.K. Kailāsapathy developed his ideas in his work on Tamil Heroic Poetry.

The next period has been characterised by Prof. A. Velupillai as aṇa neṇi kkālam, "Didactic Age". Eleven works from eighteen minor works are didactic in theme. All eighteen works are in venpā metre, unlike earlier works which are in akaval metre. There are clear indications that the Tamil society had changed very much from the earlier stage. The dark age of the Kalabhra Interregnum follows the early period. There was political



upheaval and foreign rule. The Jains have become influential. The Buddhists were receiving patronage. Even though the Vedic religion was on the defensive, they were trying to adopt to the changed circumstances. The beginning of the bhakti religion can be traced to the end of this period.

Of the eleven didactic works, two -Tirukkuraḷ and Nāḷaṭṭiyār- have been exercising great influence on the Tamiḷ society. Even though both of them treat aram, poruḷ and inṇam, the three aims of life, their entire focus was on guiding the people on ethical lines. Nāḷaṭṭiyār was a Jain work. It also attracted Christian missionaries who made translations.

The Tirukkuraḷ has gained international renown and it has been translated into many Indian languages as well as into many foreign languages. It is non-sectarian in that its author has been claimed by the Śaivites, the Vaiṣṇavites, the Jains and the Buddhists as one of their own. Now, the Christians are looking for Christian influence on the author. It is treating poruḷ and inṇam also in a very detailed manner. In the section on inṇam, he synthesise the world-affirmation spirit of the Cāṅkara period with what he gets in the Kāmasūtra and other Sanskrit Classics. He seems to have made a synthesis of his deep knowledge of politics with what is found in Sanskrit Arthasāstra and other texts. The modern revival of Tamiḷ nationalism places heavy emphasis on the value of the Tirukkuraḷ.