CHAPTER II

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The poems of Cangkam Age appear totally unique and quaint to those critics who consider them in isolation and fixity. But to those critics who make a detailed comparative study of the poems of classical literature, they appear to partake of the universal and still remain a bright ornament of human civilisation. By their authenticity of portrayal of human life and by their universality of appeal to the reader of every clime, they demand inclusion in the cream of world literature. Though deeply rooted in their own cultural milieu, bardic in its nature and oralistic in its tradition, these poems, with their complex and profound treatment of the issues involved and with their intrinsic lyrical qualities, transcend their milieu and thus have deservedly drawn the critical attention of scholars from the West, leading to studies and translations. The earliest body of poetic literature in its language, these poems date back to nearly two thousand years. The word "Cangkam" means an academy of poets and its ancestry has led many to feel proud of its existence at such a period -- a period that existed a thousand and four hundred years before the
establishment of a French Academy which "prescribed and upheld literary standards" that the Western world and its admirers were proud of.\textsuperscript{1} While the existence of such a forum at an ancient time is really a matter of pride, the use of the word "Cangkam" meaning an academy is of a late origin. Kamil Zvelebil ascribes the first incidence of the term to Tiruppurtur Tantakam by Appar, a work of the 7th century;\textsuperscript{2} he agrees with the Jesudasans' comment on the use of this term as "misleading" and appropriately calls this corpus of poems "classical".\textsuperscript{3}

Because all these poems bear features of poetry that underwent oral transmission since their creation, it becomes difficult for the compilers and commentators to arrive at the exact date of their composition based on the support of different external and internal evidences. Since an analysis of the evidences will not form part of the present study, the generally accepted estimate is presented here:

\textsuperscript{1} T.P.Meenakshisundaran, "The theory of Cankam poetry" in Prof T.P.Meenakshisundaran Sixty-First Birthday Commemoration volume (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1961), 64-69

\textsuperscript{2} Kamil Zvelebil, The Smile of Mururgan on Tamil Literature of South India (Leiden: E.J Brill. 1973), 45.

\textsuperscript{3} Kamil Zvelebil, 49.
The most plausible date for the bulk of early Tamil literature is the 2nd cent. A.D. This date, suggested by G.K. Sesha Iyer on the astronomical computation of the great fire of Madurai in 171 A.D., was taken up by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and S. Vaiyapuri Pillai who, I think, were the first to prove more or less conclusively, especially in *A Comprehensive History of India* Vol II. 1957, that the bulk of the earliest Tamil lyrical poetry was composed between 100 - 250 A.D.  

The general term "Cangkam Poetry" falls broadly into two divisions viz. "ETTuttokai" (Eight Anthologies) and "PattuppaTTu" (Ten Lays). The following constitute the two divisions:

**ETTuttokai:**

1. **NarRinai** — Poems of good places
2. **KuRundtokai** — Poems of short length
3. **AingkuRunuRu** — Five hundred short poems
4. **PatiRRuppattu** — Ten poems of tens
5. **ParipaTaTal** — The song in "paripatatal" metre
6. **Kalittokai** — The poems compiled in "kali" metre
7. **AkandamuRuhNeTundtokai** — Four hundred poems of "akam" (the interior) or Collection of long poems
8. **PuRandamuRu** — Four hundred poems of "puRam" (the exterior)
PattuappaiTTu
1. tirumurukarRuppaTai - Songs that guide towards Lord Muruga
2. Porundara:RuppaTai - Songs guiding the war-bards
3. CiRupa:Na:RuppaTai - Songs guiding the bards who have small
   lutes
4. PerumpasNa:RuppaTai - Songs guiding the bards who have big
   lutes
5. MullaippaiTTu — Songs in praise of Life in the forest
6. Maturaikkargnci — Song glorifying the impermanence at Madurai
7. NdeTunaLva:Tai — The good long wind from the north
8. KuRigncippa:TTu — The song of the hills
9. PaTTinappalai — The song on City and Separation
10. MalaipaTukaTaim — The song of the "kaTam" sound of the hills

All these poems are divided into two great categories
-- "akam" (interior) and "puRam" (exterior), based on the subject
they deal with. "Akam" poems look at life from within presenting
the whole gamut of experiences that arise between a Man and a
Woman, in their manifold situations. They do not speak of any
other inner experience, as A.A.Manavalan observes, "like justice,
friendship, psychic release or any such spiritual things which are
also really inner ...[ akam is ] an idealised form of love
represented in a highly conventinalised poetic idiom".5 PuRam

poems look at life from outside, eulogizing the exploits of kings in battle-fields, their munificence in general, their relationships with the citizens and bards of the court and also the duties of citizens prescribing ethics, fame in war etc.

Out of the 2379 poems of the entire corpus, the "akam" division has 1864 while the "puRam" division has 515.6 (There may be some variance in these numbers because of certain incomplete poems and later additions). The entire anthology KuRundtokai consists of 401 poems and an invocatory song to God. U.V.Saminatha Iyer who was the first to make painstaking and fruitful efforts to collect and publish them in 1937 has pointed out that this anthology must have been the first one to get compiled among the eight anthologies. In support of this he cites an internal evidence. The poets who acquired their pseudonyms on the basis of the images and symbols they had used in KuRundtokai are referred to with the same pseudonyms in the poems that find their places in other anthologies. Some of them are Ka:kkaippa:Tiniya:r NacceLLaiyar (K 250), Kayamanaiy (K 9) and Orreiruzhavar (K 131). Hence he arrives at the conclusion that this anthology must have been compiled earlier.7


He also surmises that compilation work must have got started from the poems that have minimum lines and hence KuRundtokai poems which range between four and eight lines each must have been compiled in the very beginning. This surmise could be countered by the view that compilation could have begun with longer poems to aid memory. However, the first argument, supported by the internal evidence it provides, merits acceptance and S.Vaiyapuripillai another commentator has accepted the view of U.V.Saminatha Iyer.

A thorough-going analytical study of the components of all Cangkam poems will reveal the fact that they all conform to a well-knit system of poetic improvisation. It is a literary system with components whose function is set by the literary tradition and convention and the poet is conditioned by the traditional practice both in thematic content and form. Literature as a system or as a polysystem is a recent concept in modern literary theory both in the East and the West. Andrew Lefevere traces this back to the Russian Formalists and Marxian critics whose criticism is "based on communications theory and reader - response criticism".

8  U.V.Saminatha Iyer, 11.
The term refers to a set of inter-related elements that share and contribute certain characteristic traits which make them distinct and different from other such elements. When literature is called a system, then it must operate with a code which Andrew Lefevre calls "a poetics."\(^{11}\) A study of the Cangkam poems reveals the fact that in Tamil, this concept is as old as its literature. The entire Cankam corpus is a system and the poetics in which the functioning is enumerated in detail is \texttt{tolka:ppiyam}. It is a monumental work on grammar and literary convention and a reading of it has become "indispensable for a full understanding of the early history of poetry and bardic tradition... [and] the Tamil world of literature and scholarship took it as an ultimate authority."\(^{12}\) To \texttt{tolka:ppiyar} "literary conventions" are specific and should be followed by the poets in their poems. The term used by him is "\texttt{pulagneRi vazhakkam}\(^{13}\) which means the themes justified to be sung by the poets and the usage followed by them. These two put together are marked under two divisions, viz "\texttt{nda:Takavazhakku}" and "\texttt{ulakavazhakku}" (dramatic usage and worldly usage respectively). "\texttt{Ulakavazhakku}" comprises the situations in day to day life; when they receive a thematic presentation in literature, they come under "\texttt{nda:Takavazhakku}".

\(^{11}\) Andrew Lefevere, 229.

The characters in all Cangkam love poems are fixed and the situations arising out of love between a man and a woman are also conventional and traditional. In each poem the situation is presented against the backdrop of different manifestations of Nature including the flora and the fauna. A unique feature is the involvement of Nature in the affairs of human beings and the presentation of its aspects matches the emotions involved. The characters whether men or God, Nature in all its features which provides the backdrop, the time and place of the occurrence of events and the thematic content of the situation that arises out of love are all classified and inter-related. The chart in the next page based on tolka:ppiyam provides a graphic representation of the classification. From tolka:ppiyar's classification of the subject matter of poetry one can observe how the society and its culture are placed as the environment of the literary system, both getting interpreted and becoming interdependent on each other. The appropriate human feelings and situations are the nucleus of any poem and they find a concrete manifestation in the space-time continuum. Time is divided into "perumpozhutu" and "ciRupozhutu" referring to the seasonal divisions in a year and binary divisions of day and night respectively (tol.957). Space is divided further

13 tolka:ppaiyam, 999.
into five physiographic divisions called "mullai" (forest), "kurignci" (hills), "marutam" (pasture), "neytal" (sea shore) and "pa:lai" (waste land) (tol.951). For poetic situations tolkappiyam relates each season with particular hours of the day or night. "ka:r" the rainy season and "ma:lai" the evening get associated with "mullai"; "kutir" the winter and "ya:mam" the midnight go with "kurignci"; the season just before winter is also ascribed to "kurignci" (tol.952); for "marutam" and "neytal" only the binary time division is adopted. "marutam" is associated with dawn and "neytal" with sunrise (tol.Ver.954). "pa:lai" is associated with summer and the late-dew season and with mid-day (tol.956).

The Human and Non-human entities which are native to the soil are brought under "karu" (the things that are born). This includes the deity of a particular place, the people, their occupation, the grains they eat, the birds and beasts of the field, the trees and plants, the peculiar musical instruments of the class etc. All these enable one to infer the daily life and the culture of the people who inhabit the particular area. (tol. 964 and 965).

"uri" is the nucleus of any poem, the "proper or the specific" aspect of it; the innermost experience resulting in the rapport of the souls concerned is given this name. This is the life that consists of feelings, deeds, situations and events.
resulting in varied and various moods. The whole gamut of experience is related basically to these five regions. Each region corresponds to a phase of love. The hills provide the place for the lovers' union; the Forest is the place where the heroine patiently waits and the seashore symbolises a long and intense waiting. Infidelity of the Man is treated in the pasture land setting and the Wasteland provides the setting for both elopement and long separation.\(^1\)

Thus all aspects of the subject matter are specific to their respective backgrounds and their details and their combinations are discrete. One can observe that the milieu and the meaning of a poem have a complementary function towards each other. These two aspects could be observed in all these poems not as separate concepts but as elements of a kaleidoscope which could give different pictures at different positions using the same elements. This can be represented as in the following diagram:

\[\text{POEMS} \rightarrow \text{MILIEU} \rightarrow \text{TEXT & MEANING} \rightarrow \text{INTRINSIC TALENTS}\]

The two circles on the left side which are adjacent and opposite to each other represent the complementary function of the milieu and meaning of these poems. The larger circle which includes in itself a smaller one represents the traditionally structured components of the poetic tradition within which the poets exhibit their intrinsic talents in improvisation. The two lines connecting these two segments to the poems show that though they appear to be different aspects, they are only perspectives of the same object, viz., the poems. While the details of the milieu become pregnant with meaning in the poetic context the personal situation gets established in its varied aspects through the details of the milieu. Let us analyse the following poem:

What Her Girl-Friend Said

O long white moonlight,
you do him no good at all
as he comes stealing
through the night in the forest

where the black-stemmed venkai
drops its flowers
on the round stones
and makes them look
like tiger cubs
in the half-light!

AKR:IL, 41:

This is a monologue of the heroine's friend and an apostrophe to the Moon. The friend of the heroine accuses the Moon of not
helping the lovers to meet at night either by shining too brightly or by making her man frightened of the shadow it makes with the vengkai flowers. The moon is addressed in the place of the hero whose presence is implied. The implied message is that since the meeting at night is not possible the hero should arrange for marriage. The forest and the moon denote that the theme is "waiting". In the poem the animate and the inanimate become actors and the real actor, the hero, becomes dumb and inactive. Since the vengkai flowers will also be features during the wedding ceremony, here the technique of "suggestion" is employed, giving the particular genus of flora a dual role. Thus the meaning of the poem becomes explicit through the specific environment.

Though the same elements are found in other poems with the same theme, every time a new message is provided. The poet has his spirit of improvisation too. Since the moon is not helpful to the lovers, it is "long" and the technique of suggestion shows the poet's creative imagination. It is to be noted that the poet's pseudonym, cempulap peyanirar, itself is based on this image. Thus the environment becomes pregnant with meaning and the meaning of the poem is conditioned by the environment. But at the same time the environment places all these poems within an organic whole. Each poem falls in line with others in the event it narrates, in the stereotyped language it uses and in the expository techniques it employs, thereby paving a way for a unity of diction and style through the corpus. Kailasapathy
considers this feature an exceptionally important one. He points out that these elements constituting the entire poetry viz. the "static epithets, descriptive circumlocutions, formulae, and recurrent themes are the features of oral literary language and vivify the fundamental unity underlying these poems." Thus though the poets are enjoined to operate with themes that are cyclic, settings that are fixed, features that are formalized and language that is laconic, yet each one is individualistic, as Kailasapathy has observed, in what he does with the elements and in the ways one orchestrates them to reveal a source of inspiration and pleasure.

A feature that strikes any reader of an akam poem is the predominant presence of Nature. Broadly speaking it is exploited in two ways -- the description of it as a setting and background to the human drama and the same as symbolically representing the human relationship that constitutes the theme of the poem. In the absence of any human character with individualistic characteristic traits Nature becomes predominant and life is viewed as a process of nature while the human beings figure just as elements that partake in the cycle as in the case


16 K Kailasapathy 183
of plants, birds, and other natural manifestations. Comparing these poems with the Japanese "haiku" poems K.Chellappan observes that in Cangkam lyrics

Thematical, nature and human drama are inextricably interwoven ... the principal actor or protagonist seems to be nature, though silent. Human love is seen as part of the cosmic process of regeneration through decay and nature seems to provide the symbolic language for the human emotions through the varieties of land and the cycle of seasons. 17

The development of love is constantly made an analogous development in Nature. The ripening of the millet coincides with the first meeting of the lovers. During the harvest the girl is not allowed to come out of the house. The flowering of vengkai and the full moon indicate the movement of love towards marriage. Enumerating such occurrences Dubiansky observes that "such interlacing of erotic and matrimonial events with those calendar and agricultural ... presupposes their magical mutual influence." 18

When Nature becomes unilaterally predominant human beings are subdued or they become submissive to it. They feel themselves upright when they are linked bilaterally with the cycle


of nature. The following is a situation where a hero justifies the condition of his mind because it responds to a woman who behaves like Nature and resembles its features. His friend had ridiculed him of his love and the changes he has observed in his behaviour. To this the hero replies:

Her words are sweet
as ambrosia
and her personality
is just as sweet.
If a girl like that can cause
such bitter suffering,
then living with love
is torture.
So, my wise friend,
keep love at a distance
from you.

Pillai & Ludden, 54.

His love is a flower and so must fall in line with its nature. If his friend notices his love for her and the resulting separation as suffering then it is contrary to Nature. The implied suggestion is that it is not intolerably painful as the friend thinks but sweet as the flower she is likened to.

Nature is treated as a place of retreat where one of the loving pair can get solace when the other is away. It alone can soothe a grieving heart. Observing the heroine's sadness over the undue delay in getting married to her man, her friend consoles her:


Even though our wicked man
has not been benevolent and come
to marry, so you might regain
the beauty of your shoulders,
with bangles shining on the joints:
just look at his towering mountain,
... ... ... ...

Pillai & Ludden, 135, i-vi.

Though her man has not come, she must look at his mountain to
regain strength by recollecting the rapturous moments that she had
with him in its presence. It is evident from poems like this that
their life is tied up with the rhythm of Nature and that they
believe that Nature will admonish them should they err. A heroine
when unable to bear the separation from her hero tells her friend:

In that land where he has gone,
my friend,
are there no sad evenings,
when sparrows, with wings that fold
like petals of a fading lily,
eat grain in the courtyard
and play
as they scoop out bits of dust
from dung in public places,
and live with their young
in the eaves of the house?
Is there no loneliness
where he is?

Pillai & Ludden, 197.

When the hero is away on an errand to make money, she expects him
to learn a lesson from the life process of nature and its
constituents. She expects him to observe the behaviour of the
happy sparrows in the evenings and be spurred to return to her.
Nature is also treated like a character on par with the other characters in this intense drama of love-life. The characters are presented as one of the several aspects of Nature in which they provide "an objective image for a mental state which is nonspecific and universal. ....The mind is seen through Nature." In the following poem the heroine in her anguish wonders why nature has not considered them as part of their cosmic revolution.

O great rain clouds, pregnant
with child ....
..... ....
you have a character strong enough
to shake the glorious Himalayas.
What is this?
Have you no pity for poor women
separated from their men?

Pillai & Ludden, 79.

The rain-clouds by pouring down heavily prevent the pre-marital romance of the lovers and hence this fervent prayer to them to avoid such interference. But the same rain-fall, when addressed by the hero on his return home after a period of separation from the heroine, receives warm welcome. The rain cools down everything even as he cools down with his woman (K. 270). The mind identifies itself with Nature. The heroine (K. 163) looks at the ocean as another pining maiden and asks who has made her sad as she was by her man.

19
K.Chellappan, 78.
But when Nature oppresses them, they have no recourse but their love which is their second Nature. While the one has given Life, the other alone could revive it. The pangs of agony of a heroine separated from her man gets aggravated by Nature. The heroine who agonizes over the separation finds the cycle of seasons inflicting further agony on her instead of consoling her.

This misty season
is so hard to bear,
when flocks of deer steal
the dried, ripe grain from the black gram
with its red legs, like the forest hen.
His chest,
close to me,
is the only medicine
that will end the misery.

Pillai & Ludden, 154.

The embrace of love alone could protect her, and with this she escapes the harshness of nature. On yet another occasion Nature is treated as unreal when the mind longs to give specificity to its thoughts which are neither completely nor entirely elusive. The friend of the heroine, noticing the arrival of the season but not the arrival of the hero in accordance with his promise says:

The wide-spreading konrai tree
is certainly foolish
thinking these unseasonal rains
to be the rainy season,
it flowers in crowded, but orderly,
but the season when our man,
who travels the desert path,
full of rocks,
said he would return,
has not yet come.

Pillai & Ludden, 211.
She is not able to accommodate the happenings of Nature because she is convinced of her thoughts which are the offshoot of her nature. Seeking the folds of Love and getting back again to the folds of Nature show that the entire process of Love is treated as part of the cycle of Nature.

Thus from the predominant function of Nature in these poems one can easily conclude that the purpose is not just to provide a connection between the lovers and a particular geographic region. It is something more subtle and the implication of Nature's relationship with the human beings differs from poem to poem. In general it is to fix them in the sacred universe because what binds them, viz. Love, is a sacred energy.

Finally must also be considered the architectonics and the resultant structure of the poems which are very often mentioned as unique to this corpus of poems. By exploiting to the utmost "the technique of suggestion, of allusion, of inference and word-play, of a complex and telling use of imagery and of multiple overtones, [these poems] achieve brevity and conciseness [and] clarity and transparence." 20

An immediate awareness that one gets at the first reading of the poem is of its structure -- the beginning and then

20 Kamil Zvelebil, 22.
the gradual introduction of the elements which unfold the theme in a rich and suggestive way. One can notice two different presentations. In some poems the message or the theme of the event is struck in its initial lines and then come the added elements that give manifold dimensions of meaning. To quote the original (since in translations the pattern is reversed at times):

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va:relend ceri tarrinin Ra:re:
alara: kinRa:R peruma
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K. 258.

This is the utterance of the heroine's friend to the hero who returns home after a sojourn with his harlot. Because of the separation and the gossip that has arisen the heroine has lost her beauty for which he alone is responsible. Hence her friend chides him:

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.... .... ...
Don't come down our street!
Don't give us garlands!
Now everything is gossip
.... ....
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Pillai & Ludden, 266, xiv-xvi.

This is the message, the essence of the poem embodied in the first two lines and this is unfolded in the lines that follow. Her beauty that was once attractive is compared to a city which was beautiful, and its king who was successful. The heroine was also once beautiful and successful in keeping him. This comparison and description are provided to the reader only after conveying the central message. Some times it is the reverse technique which is
employed. What we get in the beginning is a description of the details of the setting and the message conveyed is provided at the end. The two techniques create effects similar to the crescendo and decrescendo movements in classical Western music and the "atroiskaNam" and "avaroskaNam" aspects of Classical Indian music.

The following translation maintaining the formal order of the source illustrates the crescendo effect:

Even in this wintry season,
with its cold, north wind
in the humming dead of night,
when a nightingale,
whose head is red like fire,
together with her mate, with her
bent beak like a shrimp
calls out
from their nest in the high branches
of the spreading tatavu tree,
of love separated from one another,
he has not come
Is this the way he will marry me,
my friend?

Pillai & Ludden, 153.

This is the speech to the heroine to her friend while the latter consoles her with the idea that the hero would turn up soon to marry her. The scene of the mating birds in their cage is described in detail suggesting symbolically the domestic life that she longs for. The pining of the heroine for her hero and her restlessness over the delay in his return is the central theme and it comes at the end, relating her experience to the description
That has gone afore.

Terseness, concentration and imagery with multiple overtones are often the techniques that are employed in the description of the event and in the portrayal of the characters involved in the situation. To get to know the richness of imagery, the power of suggestive phrases and the symbolism, a literal word-for-word rendering is necessary:

unleashed-horse swiftness-like
sky-touching-fresh-bamboo hills-man
we-think-him not-knowing he-also
summer-ignorant-of a-bull

Following is the translation:

That man of the hills
where fresh bamboo
whips up, as if
to touch the sky
with the swiftness of horses
set free:
He just does not know
how much we think of him:
and
like a bull
in the heat of summer,
he grows thin,
longing for our beauty.

Pillai & Ludden, 56.

This address is to the heroine's friend, very simple in its thought but intense in its expression. The context is that the hero had requested her friend to arrange for a meeting between them -- a clandestine meeting, to appease his longing for her.
The surface meaning that one gets is this: The man, who lives in the hills full of fresh bamboo, grows very thin like a bull in summer because of his longing for her. This poem belongs to "kurignci tiNai" (mountain region, traditionally set for the union of the lovers). Based on these if one re-reads the poem, one can get the following. The tender green bamboo is pulled down by an elephant in order that it may eat the leaves at the top. When the elephant releases it, the bamboo whips up again as if to touch the sky. This by a comparison may refer to the first meeting of the lovers when they were alive to each other in the fullness of their vigour and spirit. On some intrusion, they must have got separated, even as the leaves got separated from the bamboo because of the elephant. The meeting is green in the memory and he has become lean because of his love-sickness like a bull in the heat of summer. Here the friend grieves over the fact that without knowing that his love is also pining for him, he grows thin. Besides this interpretation the images provide one more extension of meaning. The hero has bent down to ordinary human level when in the company of the heroine and has whipped up as the chief when left alone. Both his yearning for a meeting with her, and her longing for his better health are spontaneous. Hidden in this image there seems to be a suggestion that the heroine must succumb to his desires.
This kind of interplay of images or symbols resulting in implications and inferences could be found frequently in these poems. This technique is the traditional recourse of poets when they confront conventions that are fixed. Hart is of this opinion that

... to keep the poetry from becoming a rehearsal of trite figures, ingenuity had to be used to ensure complex and interesting relations between them, and to bring new figures into subtle relations with the old. Probably the conventions, based as were on symbols, assured that the poems would continue to make them effective chiefly through the interplay of symbols.20

Without such clusters and layers of meaning, there are also poems that take up one small event one simile or metaphor but expresses the same intense experience with a few words providing an impressive portrait that haunts the mind of the reader with a sense of involvement. The following is a typical example:

Transliteration:

u:ruN ke:Ni yuNTurait tokka
pa:ci yaRRe: pacalai kartalar
toTuvuzhit toTuvuzhi ni:ngki
viTuvuzhi viTuvuzhi paratta lane:

K 399.

The monologue is of the heroine to her friend on the pangs of separation when the hero extends the period of his absence due to his journey to seek wealth. Just with four lines, a simple and trivial image, and two words occurring twice, the poem achieves a magical effect in bringing out a single experience in all its profound intensity. There is no vivid description but just a simple presentation of facts. The imagery too is not explained in all its aspects but only one aspect is presented. With such sparse elements, the effect is created through a harmonious blending of statement and suggestion. The heroine waits for a long time for her man and hence suffers from pallor. The central message which is implied is her longing for union with him. Her pallor is compared to the persistent moss on the surface of the pond where the village gets its drinking water. Everytime he caresses me, it goes away; and when he leaves me alone, it spreads back over again.
pond. As the moss parts when someone strikes at the surface to drink clear water and spreads back when left alone, the pallor also spreads over her when her man goes away and goes away from her when he is with her. The two words repeated twice "toTuvuzhi" (touching) "viTuvuzhi" (leaving) suggest that in pre-marital love separation and union occur in a cycle. The poem in its total structure makes maximum use of a minimum number of words and imagery to present a complete expression of a single experience.

Mention must also be made of certain features that make this corpus of poems very different from its descendants and also from the ancient classics of other literatures. Anyone who is introduced to this corpus of poetry of Tamil along with other literatures of India can find one unique feature of these poems, as Zvelebil points out in his study. Tamil literary tradition in its beginning was primarily independent and "had its first and most vigorous bloom" unscathed by the Aryan, especially Sanskrit influence. This does not presuppose a "cultural vacuum" because there exists an Aryan-Dravidian synthesis in the very earliest monumental work Tolkappiam and in the Rigvedic hymns."21 The uniqueness lies in the fact that this poetry kept and followed its traditional and conventional features unaffected by any extraneous poetic or cultural tradition.

21 Kamil Zvelebil, II.
Another distinctive feature that needs to be mentioned is that there occur no "moral injunctions"\textsuperscript{22} in any of these poems. Further, though there are some references to the faith of the society in day to day affairs, there is not a single reference to the supernatural elements nor to any religious sentiments. The entire corpus is of the people and about their experiences alone.

To summarise the salient features discussed -- the Cangkam poems, the earliest in Tamil literature, are bardic in its nature and oralistic in its tradition; the poems are products of sets of well-knit traditional literary conventions which are propounded in \textit{tolkaippiyam}; the "akam" poems look at life from inside a family and deal with life between a man and a woman in its two phases -- pre-marital love and wedded love; Nature and its elements are divided into five physiographic regions that correspond to the five stages of these two phases of Love; Nature is predominant and is treated as the principal protagonist; the language of this poetry is simple but suggestive; the descriptions preserve brevity but provide possibility for extension employing implied similes and metaphors.

All these features contribute to the image re-employed by Hart:

In many ways, they fit what the poet Kapilar is supposed to have written about the ethical work called the Tirukkural. Even more than the verses of that book, perhaps, each of these poems might be likened to a drop, smaller than a millet grain hanging on a tiny blade of grass and mirroring the greatness of a towering palmyra tree.23

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