

# Tinai Concept: Aesthetics Of Ancient Tamil Poetics Tolkappiyam

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tolkappiyar identified only fourteen tinais, for akam and puram combined, but one may add many more to his list if literature other than from South India is considered. The present paper attempts to suggest tinai as an essentially deep-ecological vision and poetics comparable to the systems currently discussed under this rubric. The paper deals elaborately with the concept of tinai and its various aspects such as the famous five tinais and their important components, and also the origin and development of Cankam Literature. To begin with, various interpretations of the etymology of the term tinai are given. It is followed by a detailed explication of the concept of tinai. The paper traces the early model of ecopoetics in the context of the concept of tinai. Consequently, the two major divisions of ancient Tamil poetry and their renowned five sub-divisions into distinct tinais are mentioned. Writers use the names kurinji, mullai, marutham, neythai, and palai for the distinct landscapes and the genres associated with them. Each tinai is explicated with examples and all their characteristics or salient features are tabulated. The arguments are projected with the extensive use of the ideas and contributions of A.K. Ramanujan. The aesthetic, for the ancient Tamils, was a significant system that was strictly conventional yet open-ended. They looked upon the entire environment as one unified whole, where meaning was not something that was realized at the end but a process interlinked to all and everything at all points. This comes quite close to what we now recognize as a biosphere in ecological terms.

**Keywords:** tinais, Cankam Literature, Kurinji, Mullai, Marutam, Neytai, Palai

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

India is a barn of different languages and distinct cultures. Despite the external differences, there exists from ancient times, an underlying unity in the customs and conventions, ideas, and ideals of the people that spread from Kashmir in the North to Cape Comorin in the South. In addition to this, India has a splendid literary tradition that belongs to the pre-Christian era. An enormous body of literature consists of the epics The Mahabharata and The Ramayana, and anthologies like Kathasarithsagara and Panchathantra form the warp and weft of this grand literary tradition. The references to the Tamil Monarchs Chera, Chola, and Pandyas found in the epics and also in the Rock Edicts of Emperor Asoka and the mentioning of the dynasties of Nandas and Mauryas in the ancient Tamil Cankam Classics

bear testimony to the cordial relationship that prevailed between the South and the North. In the field of Vedic Literature, Jagad Guru Sri Adi Sankaracharya and Ramanuja, the eminent exponents of Vedanta and Visistadvaita philosophy respectively, hailed from the South. Sankaracharya founded four matts or monasteries in four cities situated in four directions of the country. Not only in the sphere of intellectual speculations but even in the domain of literary activities, one witnesses the mutual understanding and influences of various linguistic groups. From this, it becomes clear that Sanskrit has been studied by Southerners who have contributed much to the enrichment of that language. Though the Indian languages possess their individuality and originality, the influence of Sanskrit on them cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, Tamil, an equally important

ancient language has also exerted its impact on Sanskrit as noticed by Burrow and Emeneau. A.B. Keith has explained how, Kumarila, the excellent commentator of Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra revealed his knowledge of Dravidian languages in his *Tantravurtika* and his opinion that the incorporation of Dravidian words is permissible, provided that they are given Sanskrit terminations (25, 474). Hence, it is sufficient to conclude that in the exchange of knowledge neither region nor language stood as a barrier.

Cankam (pronounced as Sangam) literature, which is believed to have existed a few centuries immediately preceding or succeeding the Christian era, is a part of the great literary tradition of India. The culture and ethos of the Tamils of the Cankam period get reflected in the classical literature of the Tamils, popularly known as Cankam Literature. The Tamil poetic tradition is based on the foundation of the writings of the Cankam period and they still influence and inform the literary production of Tamil poets and authors. The poems of Cankam literature depict an exclusive literary tradition of Dravidian origin that existed in South India and was as precious and prosperous as Sanskrit literature.

According to popular Tamil belief, there were three Cankams (like the French Academy of scholars) established by the Pandya Kings. The earliest Tamil poetry known as Cankam poetry was named after the 'assembly' or Cankam of poets. Cankam is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word "Cangha" which means a group of persons or an association. Of the three Cankams, the first one lasted for about 4440 years and was in the now-submerged south Madurai. Lord Siva and the other gods and sages were supposed to be its members. The second Cankam had its centre in Kapatapuram and it lasted for 3700 years. By then many gods had evacuated and mortals constituted a greater percentage of its membership. Kapatapuram was claimed by the sea and later Madurai became the centre of the third Cankam. This lasted for only 1850 years. Though there is a dispute over the age and duration of the period, there is a general agreement on the organic nature of the body of work that is usually termed Cankam literature. Though most of the works of the early Cankams dwindled into oblivion due to deluge and

carelessness, the available classical writings that stood the ravages of time are *Tolkappiyam* the earliest extant Tamil grammar, and the anthologies known as *Ettutokai* (Eight Compilations of poetry) and *Pattupattu* (Ten Idylls). These are regarded to be the comprehensive products of the Tamilian intellect. These works roughly belong to a period that extended from 500 B.C to 300 A.D. This is known as the Cankam Age which has been compared to the Periclean age in Greek history and the golden age of the Guptas. Among the poets and thinkers of the Cankam age, *Tolkappiyar*, *Valluvar*, *Ilango Adigal*, *Sattanor*, *Nakkiranar*, *Kapilar*, *Paranar*, and a few others are outstanding.

Among the ancient Tamil works of Cankam period, *Tolkappiyam* is generally admitted to be the earliest available treatise dealing descriptively with phonology, morpho-phonemics, morphology, and syntax which focuses on the structure of the Tamil language and also discusses in detail the literary concepts of subjective and objective themes known as *akam* and *puram* rhetoric and canons of versification which generate a beacon of light especially on the literary-cum- a social history of the ancient Tamils. It is just to regard the whole work as an encyclopaedic in character since it throws a flood of light on a varied set of epistemological areas like grammar, poetics, polity, warfare, socio-ethics, and erotics, biology, astronomy, religion, philosophy, and the like. The life and times of the author of such a great and immortal masterpiece are often unsettled, as the treatise poses many problems of interpolations, additions, deletions, and readings to the researchers who have never converged in their opinions but have stoutly claimed their findings to be conclusive and genuine.

Hence there is a necessity to revise their theories and to re-examine the possibility of finding out the historicity and plausible chronology of the author based on some fresh materials hitherto unnoticed or not fully analyzed by these researchers. The vast scope of that project makes it impossible for the present research to take it up within its limited scope; therefore, we would just note the broad conclusions.

At the outset, one has to record that there are two extreme views, one of which pushes forth Tolkappiyam to 5000 B.C or even before, mainly based on the strength of the fabulous account of the three Cankams found in the commentary of Iraiyanar Kalaviyal that ascribes Tolkappiyam to the second Cankam, while the other drags it down to 500 A.D. chiefly claiming the influence of some Sanskrit works of a later period on some of the portions of Tolkappiyam. Judging on the facts that Tolkappiyam shows a clear influence of Sanskrit on Tamil, and the fact that the first commentary on such a vital text appeared only during 1100-1200 A.D. The text was probably composed sometime in 900—1000A.D. Whatever the date of composition, Tolkappiyam is the first Tamil text to approach the grammar of the language systematically and comprehensively. It also gives us an insight into the prosody that emerged during the Cankam period.

## 2. TOLKAPPIYAR'S LITERARY THEORY

Tolkappiyar's discussion of literature takes off from three kinds of usages adopted by the authors in creating poems. They are:

### **Ulaka Valakku**

The term refers to the poetic convention of depicting the normal ways of life in society. It does not mean that literature should be a copy of actual life. There may be some omissions and commissions in the portrayal of society. This usage comes very close to what modern critics call realistic idealism. Though more prescriptions are found to delineate the brighter and purer sides of life, Tolkappiyar did not prohibit touching on the dark scenes, if such a depiction aimed at exterminating the evil and thus ennobling the society. The value of literature depends on the degree of its concern with society. As W.H. Hudson was to note later:

We care for literature on account of its deep and lasting human significance. A great book grows directly out of life; in reading it, we are brought into large, close and fresh relations

with life.... It is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language. (10)

Thus, the ancient Tamils do not appear to have approved of "literature for literature's sake" as it is untenable, and to have held the view that literature must have something to instruct and instruct artistically; this has been the general trend as far as ancient Tamil poetry is concerned.

### **Nataka Valakku**

This means the dramatic usage which intends to reveal the delightful and interesting scenes occurring in a sequence in the form of monologues or dialogues. This usage is devoted to the description of all that is good and virtuous and indicates the imaginative and illuminative elements constituting the idealistic aspect of literature. This usage provides enough opportunity for the poets to exercise their imaginative faculty in the production of wonderful but meaningful words of art.

### **Pulanneri Valakku**

The third one is known as Pulanneri Valakku which is the usage based on the scholarly conventions, being the blend of the first two usages. Usually, the poets follow this method by which they combine both realism and idealism so that they should create what is beneficial to society.

In these three major usages, Tolkappiyar seems to have closely followed the *Natyasastra*, the Sanskrit treatise by Bharata that distinguishes between the two forms of art called *lokadharmi* and *natyadharmi*. The first two valakkams appear to be literal translations of the Sanskrit terms, while the third appears to be a combination of the two aspects added by the Tamil writer. After having seen the threefold usages for literary production, the nature of subject matter or literary theme as conceived by Tolkappiyar may be dealt with.

Since literature is considered to be a social product, its theme essentially centres on the incidents of life and social activities. Love and warfare are the dominant themes in primitive society and the conventions and norms governing these two aspects had become standardized during the period of Tolkappiyam. In the language of Tolkappiyam love is known as *akam*,

literally to mean that which is internal and subjective, and in its extension of meaning denoted the pre-marital or clandestine love, post-marital love of the ideal hero and heroin (known as anpin aintinai), the unreciprocated love or one-sided love (kaikkilai), and mismatched love or inappropriate relationship (peruntinai). The last two varieties, though commonly seen in society, are not taken by many writers as subject-matter for poetic treatment. Most of them are prepared to sing the glory of ideal love so that society would follow the right course.

It is also prescribed that an ideal hero and heroine should be equals in ten respects, namely, birth, heredity, quality, age, beauty, love, grace, knowledge, humbleness, and opulence. Further, even the superiority of the groom over the bride is also admitted. It is also a literary convention that the lovers entering into the secret relationship should one day come forward to openly wed and in any circumstance, none of them should forsake the other. The characters of love poetry include the lady companion, male friend, foster mother, harlot, bard, dancing damsel, the ascetic, and others. Another tradition as recorded in Tolkappiyam proclaims that the characters of love poems should not be mentioned by their names, but must be known by their generic names following their local habitation. Depersonalization in love poems has been a peculiar feature of the literary conventions of ancient Tamil. The objective of the writers was to communicate the emotions, feelings, and sentiments of the characters in a general way so that they may be taken to a wider circle of readers without offending or wounding the individual. Even in modern times, the editors used to publish that the names and incidents are fictitious. This trend is labelled as a generalization.

The landscape and the season, the divisions of the day and night, the flora and fauna, and the five aspects of lovers' behaviour, namely, union, separation patient waiting, sulking, and pining are elaborately explained in Tolkappiyam which served not only as a work of poetics but also as a manual to the study of sex education. Since a major portion of the poetics in Tolkappiyam is devoted to the norms of love poetry, it is evident that a hedonistic way of life was very popular during the period of Tolkappiyam.

The next dominant theme that includes warfare, polity, education, and arts and crafts is known as Puram, which means 'that which is external and objective.' Cattle-lifting, fighting with the purpose of territorial expansion or establishing one's valour, and besieging the castle were considered some of the aspects of ancient warfare. Further, the success that one gain in every walk of life, the realization of the evanescent and transient nature of mundane life, the objects of praise, etc were also some of the themes to be dealt with in puram poetry.

Apart from the dichotomy of Akam and Puram themes which are purely local and native, the author has also presented a Pan-Indian literary view known as 'Trivarga' i.e. Mu-p-pal or the three aims of life, which in the Sanskrit tradition were Dharma (aram-virtue), Artha (Porul-wealth) and Kama (inpam-pleasure). The total absence of the fourth objective, viz. Mokṣa is significant in Tolkappiyam and it is essential to note that this aspect gained importance only in the post-Cankam period when religious movements swept the minds of the people.

The prosodical portions in Tolkappiyam provide the canons of versification, the literary genres including the oral bardic poetry and prose works, the emotional aspects, and rhetoric, and throw a flood of light both on the structure and substance of different types of literary creation that existed in the remote past.

The Cankam landscape (Tamil "inner classification") is the name given to a poetic device that was characteristic of love poetry in classical Tamil Cankam Literature. The core of the device was the categorization of poems into different tinai or models, depending on the nature, location, mood, and type of relationship represented by the poem. Each tinai was closely associated with a particular landscape, and imagery derived from that landscape with its flowers, trees, wildlife, people, climate and geography was woven into the poem in such a way as to convey a mood associated with one aspect of a romantic relationship.

Classical Tamil love poetry, recognizing that human activities cannot take place in a vacuum and are constantly influenced by environmental factors, assigns the human experiences it describes, and in particular the subjective topics that those experiences relate to,

to specific habitats. Every situation in the poems is described using themes in which the time, the place and the floral symbols of each episode are codified. These codifications are used as symbols to imply a socio-economic order, occupations and behaviour patterns that, in turn, are symbolized by specific flora and fauna. Details of secondary aspects are just as rigidly codified – the seasons, the hour, a god, musical instruments and above all, the sentimental connotations of each landscape; lovers' meetings, patient waiting, lovers' quarrels, separation, and the anxiously awaited return.

### 3. GEOGRAPHICAL AND NON-GEOGRAPHICAL TINAIS

The fisherman sings the song of the people of hills  
 The garland of Neytal is worn by the people of hills  
 Shepherds sing the farmer's song.  
 Flowers of plains are traced by the farmers  
 Paddy grains are eaten by wild hens  
 Monkeys of hills bathe in the salt water of salt lands  
 Cranes climb up the hills and take rest

says the Tamil work *Porunrattuppadai* about the mutual relationship among tinai. Under the codification, the inner universe associated with love is divided into seven modes, or tinai, five of which are geographical and associated with specific landscapes, and two are non-geographical and not associated with any specific landscape. Four of the geographical landscapes are described as landscapes that occur naturally

in the Tamil lands. These are: Kurinji which represents mountainous regions associated with union, mullai which stands for forests associated with waiting, marutam which is allied to cropland associated with quarrelling, and neytal which epitomizes the seashore associated with pining. The fifth, palai or desert which is associated with separation is described in the *Tolkappiyam* as not a naturally existing landscape.

From these basic associations of landscape and subject, a wide range of specific themes suitable for each landscape was derived. Thus, for example, the commentary on the *Iraiyanar Akapporul* states that as a result of the association of the Kurinji landscape with the union, it was also associated with the fear of separation, reassurance, the hero's or heroine's discussions with their friends, they're being teased or taunted by their friends, their replies to their friends, the friends' role as intermediary, the meeting of the lovers' grief and doubt, and other similar themes. According to the *Tamilneri vilakkam*, a 9<sup>th</sup>-century text on poetry, the love themes described by the five tinai constitute "the Tamil way of life" or "the Tamil way of love" (*Tamilneri xvi-xvii*).

The two non-geographical modes, kaikkilai and peruntinai, were seen as dealing with unnatural emotions, and therefore were not associated with any specific landscape. Kaikkilai dealt with unreciprocated or one-sided love, while peruntinai dealt with improper love or love against the rules of custom.

The following table describes the salient features of tinai as they are derived from the conventional associations in poetry between certain landscapes and specific emotional and subjective experiences.

#### 3.1 Poetic Attributes of The Landscapes

	Kurinji	Mullai	Marutam	Neytal	Palai
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Mood	Union of lovers	Heroine expresses patient waiting over separation	Lovers quarrels, wife's irritability (husband accessed of visiting a courtesan)	Heroine expresses grief over separation	Elopement longest separation dangerous journey by the hero
Flower	Kurinji	Mullai (Jasmine)	Marutam	Water lily	Palai
Landscape	Mountain	Forest pasture	Agricultural areas plains or valley	Seashore	Parched wasteland desert
Time	Midnight	Evening	Shortly before sunrise	Sunset	Noon
Season/ climate	Winter is cool and moist	Late summer cloudy	No specific season	No specific season	Summer
Animal	Monkey elephant horse, bull	Deer	Water buffalo freshwater fish	Crocodile shark	Fatigued elephant tiger or wolf
Crop/ plant	Jackfruit bamboo venkai	Konrai	Mango	Punnai	Cactus
Water	Waterfall	Rivers	Pond	Well, sea	Dry wells stagnant water
Soil	Red and black soils with stones and pebbles	Red soil	Alluvial	Sandy saline soil	Salt affected soil
Occupation	Hill tribes gathering honey	Farmer	Pastoral and agricultural occupations	Selling fish salt fisherfolk	Travelers bandits
God	Ceyyon Murugan	Mayon or mai	Ventan	Katalon	Ur-amm or kottravai

### 3.2 Relationship Between Tinai and Landscape

Despite the strong associations of each tinai with a geographical landscape, in classical prosody, it

was the conduct described by the poem that constituted its tinai, and thus determined the geographical region that was appropriate to it. Nakkiranar, in his commentary on the Iraiyanar Akapporul provides an analogy. The word, "a light", he says, is in Tamil used not only to describe the flame that gives light, but also the torch or other object being burned by the flame. This, however, does not change the fact that the light is the flame and not the object that emits it. Similarly, though the tinai associated with the union of the lovers is called the "mountain country" tinai, the mountain country is like the object emitting light. The tinai itself is the conduct that is the subject of the poem namely the union of the lovers.

### 3.3 The Geographical Tinai

In Tamil each of the five geographical tinai is named after a flower that is characteristic of that landscape. In English translation, however, it is customary to use the name of the landscape rather than that of the flower, largely because the flowers lack the cultural association with a specific landscape in English as they have in Tamil.

#### 3.3.1 Kurinji – Mountainous Region.

The mountain is the scene of the lover's union at midnight. It is the cold dewy season. Love in this setting is exemplified by Murugan and one of his wives, Valli, the daughter of a mountain dweller. He wears the sparkling red kantal flower and rides a peacock, the bird of the mountains.

The name of the region, kurinji is also the name of the famous Kurinji flower (*Strobilanthes Kunthiana*) from the lofty hills of Tamil country. The *Strobilanthes* is a shrub whose brilliant white flowers blossom for only a few days once every ten or twelve years, blanketing the slopes in radiant whiteness under the sun. This event of jubilation and purity symbolizes the frenzy of a sudden love shared, in connection with the unleashed forces of nature: the amorous dance of peacocks and their echoing cries, the splash of waterfalls, and the cries of savage beasts. The lovers hold each other tighter still and forget the dangers of the mountain path.

"What She Said," the three hundred and eighteenth poem in the anthology *Akananuru*, by Kapilar is a kurinji poem that depicts the anxiety

of the lady love about her lover's safety while he is traveling back to his village after their meeting during the night:

Forest animals walk there  
And elephants roam  
In the sky's high places  
Thunder rumbles  
But you come alone  
In the night  
Along the narrow paths  
Of snakes and tigers,

O man of the mountain country,  
That country of fruitful hills  
Ancient conquests,  
And wide spaces,  
Where the music of waterfalls  
Mingles with bee sounds  
As drums with lute-strings

If you wish to marry me, you can  
But one thing: do not come  
Along those narrow paths;

Though, if you must, please,  
When you leave here  
And reach your village in the hills,  
Think of us  
Living in anxiety here  
And get that longhorn you use  
To signal your hounds  
And hunters  
Straying in the bamboo jungle.  
And blow on it  
A little. (Ramanujan Poems of Love 14)

#### 3.3.2 Mullai-Forests

Mullai is the land of the forest. The forest is rich with lakes, waterfalls, teak, bamboo, and sandalwood. In this region, millet grows and wild bees are a source of honey. Mullai or Jasmine (*Jasmin Auriculatum*) is the flower of the forests.

The theme of the forest with shepherds at play and the image of confidence waiting for the loved one produced an original off-shoot; for this is the region of Vishnu, and the love theme it represents symbolizes the devotee waiting in the hope that Vishnu, as Krishna, will eventually come and fill his soul, thus experiencing the joys of expectation.

The sixty-sixth poem in the anthology Kuruntokai, "What Her Girl Friend Said" by Kovatattan depicts the agony of a lady who is patiently waiting for her lover, who has promised to return from his journey by the rainy season. Her girlfriend denies the season has come at all, for if the season had come, he would have already returned.

To her  
 These fat cassia trees  
 Are gullible:  
 The season of rains  
 That he went through the stones  
 Of the desert  
 Is not yet here

Though these trees  
 Mistaking the untimely rains  
 have put out  
 Long arrangement of flowers  
 On their twigs  
 As if for a proper monsoon.  
 (Ramanujan Poems of Love 70)

### 3.3.3 Marutham-Cropland

The plains were the scene of triangular love plots in which the hero's visits to the courtesan oblige the heroine to counter with a mixed show of coquetry and moodiness, tactics whose limits are described in the Thirukkural ("Sulking is like flavoring with salt; a little suffices, but it is easy to go too far")

The Marutam (*Lagerstroemia Speciosa*) tree was the characteristic tree of this region. "What the Concubine Said" by Alankuti Vankanar, the eighth poem in the anthology Kuruntokai is a marutam poem that illustrates the unfaithfulness of a husband. It depicts the harlot's words which were spoken when she heard that the man had spoken awful things about her.

You know he comes from  
 Where the fresh-water sharks in the pools  
 A catch with their mouths  
 The mangoes as they fall, ripe  
 From the trees on the edge of the field  
 At our place,  
 He talked big.  
 Now, back in his own  
 When others raise their hands  
 And feet,  
 He will shadow

Every last wish  
 Of his son's dear mother. (Ramanujan Interior 22).

### 3.3.4 Neithal-seashore

The seashore affords many examples of the compelling charm of Cankam poetry and the extraordinary freshness of its realism. From behind the conventional symbolization of waiting, there emerges a picture of the life of the fisherfolk: the nets and boats were drawn up on the beach, scuttling crabs and cartwheels bogged down in the sand, the odour of drying fish cut into thick slices which attracts the birds, beautiful village girls peering through the pandanus hedges, and the wind blowing through the cracks in the roughly constructed straw huts at night. Water lily is the characteristic flower of the region.

A poem by Ammuvar called "What She Said" which appears fourth in the anthology Narrinai portrays the anxious waiting of lady love, who is looking forward to her lover's proposal of marriage and their union:

The fishermen who go  
 From the little town in the seaside  
 groves  
 Into the sea  
 Wait in the thick shade of the blue  
 laurel tree,  
 Looking for the right time  
 To enter the cold wide waters,  
 Spreading and drying meanwhile their  
 nets  
 With many eyes and knots.  
 In the seaside of my man.

If only someone would go to him  
 And tell him,  
 "If Mother should ever hear  
 The scandal about us, it would be hard  
 for me  
 To live here".  
 Maybe he'll take me then,  
 Through those places where  
 The salt merchants trading in white  
 rocksalt  
 Wake up the cows sleeping on the long  
 road  
 As they crunch their carts through the  
 sand



Their loud wheels  
 Scaring the black-legged heron in the  
 fields,  
 To his hometown  
 Surrounded by salt pans? (Ramanujan  
 Poems of Love 85)

### 3.3.5 Palai-Wastelands.

In classical Tamil prosody, the palai or wasteland is not seen as being a naturally occurring ecology. Ilampuranar, in his commentary on the Tolkappiyam explains that instead, the landscape of the wasteland with which palai is associated emerges when other landscapes wither under the heat of the burning sun. Thus, this landscape is associated with the theme of separation, which occurs when love is subject to external pressures that drive the lovers apart. Palai could thus be seen as a mixture of Mullai and Kurinji tracts, rather than as a mere sandy area.

The themes of wasteland and separation appear in several poems of Cankam literature. The theme of the mountain being only secondary, palai tree is identified as the ivory wood tree (*wrightia tinctoria*). The theme of an elopement, one of the resolutions to the problems of pre-marital romance, is dealt with extensively in the 323<sup>rd</sup> poem in the anthology *Ainkurunuru* by the poet Otalantaiyar. The poet portrays the strength of the woman who daringly comes through the dangerous plain with her man:

“What He Said”

In the wilderness  
 They've come  
 Crossing even the hot forking desert  
 paths  
 Where the sharp-toothed red dog of the  
 jungle  
 Waits by the cactus clump  
 To kill a wild pig  
 For his mate  
 Now suffering pangs of labour.

All the way  
 They've come with you, O heart  
 The gentle ways  
 Of the woman you love. (Ramanujan  
 Poems of Love 60)

The main aim of these poems is to highlight such qualities as love, while the description of nature

forms the background for the human drama. Thus, each phase of love gets its characteristic type of imagery from a particular tinai or landscape. Each of these landscapes is now a collection of images, anything in it, bird or drum, tribal name or dance, may be used to symbolize and evoke a specific feeling.

### 3.4 Non-Geographical Tinais

Whilst the palai landscape is not associated with a permanently existing landscape, it is nonetheless assigned a definite landscape. The two tinais of kaikkilai and peruntinai, however, are assigned no landscape nor are they named after flowers. Instead, they are named directly after the emotions they describe. In Tamil prosody, the reason for this is stated to be that they deal with unnatural emotions, and consequently cannot be associated with a landscape that is part of nature, although kaikkilai and peruntinai, too deal with emotions that are similar to those that are dealt with in the poems which belong to the five geographical tinais. The difference, however, is that in this non-geographical tinais, the situation of the lovers makes the emotions unnatural.

In kaikkilai the situation that is described is made unnatural by the fact that the love is for animals and the feeling is one-sided.

In peruntinai, the situation is made unnatural by the fact that it has occurred as the result of acts contrary to tradition, such as a union of a man with a woman who is much older, a union where one of the parties does not consent or separation that occurs as the result of the breach by one party of his or her duties.

The term tinai has different interconnected meanings. They originated from the basic meaning namely 'to join' (Paavaanar 100). The planet Earth is tinai because it is an unbroken continuum made out of the conjoining of various minerals, rocks, soils, and other substances. By extension, tinai can also refer to any specific region on earth; especially, a house with its surrounding, a homestead. By further semantic extension, tinai has come to mean 'family', particularly a family that occupies a specific place, and also a family with its members. Earth and the household are tinai because the constituents that go to make these entities,

namely, earth and household are so compacted as to produce a hard, firm unit. The first and second meanings combine to yield a third, namely, 'human community indigenous to a specific eco-region. By extension, when tinai refers to non-material firmness, it means 'conduct.' Not only is character a kind of non-material firmness (or tinai), but also persons marked by such character are tinai, in fact, uyar tinai are distinguishable from other beings not endowed with such character (Sastri 27; Cu.Kumaaracuvami 270). Those beings that have character belong to uyar tinai (e.g. human beings), and those beings that are not endowed with character belong to altinai (al=not; al+tinai='without'tinai) beings without tinai or character (e.g. stone). A.K. Ramanujan translates tinai as "landscape". But tinai has several meanings: "class, genre, type", as in akattinai," the akam genre. In a more specific sense, tinai is a complex concept defined in the poetics of Tamil poetry: a genre is represented by a region or landscape, its nature and culture, and the human feelings associated with them—in short, an entire ecosystem used for poetic expression. "Landscape" is a convenient metonymy for the whole cluster of notions. Porulathikaram, the third part of the ancient Tamil text Tolkappiyam is the earliest basic text of Dravidian poetics. It contains an early model of ecopoetics, in so far as it tries to relate poetry to the time and place of its origin. The first principles or muthalporul are the landscape of the region as well as the time of the day and the year under reference. The assumption here is that environmental factors influence human emotions. This physical landscape affects and reacts with the mindscape of the characters. It can be traced even in the epics. In ancient Tamil poetics, this landscape is referred to as tinai. Men of letters use nomenclatures like kurinji, mullai, marutham, neythai and palai for the landscapes and the genres associated with them.

Porulathikaram divides poetry into akam and puram categories. Akam and puram are complex, ancient words. To understand them one has to study scientifically Tamil poetics which is rooted in Tamil culture. According to A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary, they are also current in all the South Dravidian languages. In classical poetry, akam poems are love poems and puram are all the other kinds of poetry, which are

usually about war, values and community. Puram poems are the 'public' poetry of the ancient Tamils, celebrating the valour and glory of kings, lamenting the death of heroes and the poverty of poets. Elegies, panegyrics, invectives, poems on wars and tragic events belong to this group.

All poetry is divided into akam and puram types. Akam poems may be said to deal with subjective experiences; they are personal, individual-centered and self-directed. Puram poems are generally concerned with outdoor life, heroic exploits, adventure, etc; and concentrate on impersonal or social experiences and events. Together they may be called poems of love and war, although these are not only the concerns or themes. The classification is not as neat as it might look, for sentiments other than the heroic and the romantic are also expressed in Cankam poetry.

In the five phases of akam, the names of persons should not be mentioned. Particular names are appropriate only in puram poetry. The dramatis personae for akam are types, such as men and women in love, foster-mothers and girlfriends, rather than historical persons. Similarly, landscapes are more important than particular places. The reason for such absence of individuals is implicit in the word akam: the 'interior' world is archetypal; it has no history, and no names of persons and places, except now and then in its metaphors. Love in all its variety, with some important exceptions—love in separation and betrayal—is the theme of akam. There are seven types of love, of which the first is kaikkilai, or unrequited love, and the last is peruntinai; or mismatched love (Tol. 1).

Peruntinai or the 'the major type' of man-woman relationship, as the Tolkappiyam somewhat cynically calls it, is the forced loveless relationship: a man and a woman, mismatched in age, coming together for duty, convenience, or lust. At the extreme is kaikkilai (literally, the 'base relationship'), the one-sided affair, unrequited love, or desire inflicted on an immature girl who does not understand it. Neither of these extremes is the proper subject of akam poetry. They are common, abnormal, undignified, and fit only for servants. Servants and workmen are outside the five akam types (of true love), for they do not have the strength of character (Tol. 25-26).

The akam anthologies do not contain poems of unrequited or mismatched love; only Kalittokai, an "Anthology of Kali poems", 150 love poems by 5 poets in a meter called kali, has examples of both types. They follow none of the formal constraints on theme and structure that are characteristic of the akam poems.

Of the seven types, only the middle five are the subject of true love. The hero and the heroine should be "well-matched in ten points" such as beauty, wealth, age, virtue and rank. Only such a pair is capable of the range of love; union and separation, anxiety, patience, betrayal, and forgiveness. The couple must be cultured; for the uncultured will be rash, ignorant, self-centered, and therefore unfit for akam poetry. There are seven tinai or regions identified in Porulathikaram for each of these two major divisions. Each tinai for the two groups is named after a plant or a flower. The major akattinai are mullai, kurinji, marutam, neytal and palai besides unproductive tinai like kaikkilai and perumtinai. The tinai marked out for puram poetry are paadaan, vanchi, vetchi, vakai, uzhinai, tumpa and kanchi.

What is important here is, again, not the number or nomenclature of the tinai, but the approach to poetry through the time-place complex revealed in the tinai. These tinai are said to correspond to various human emotions, which in turn are evoked by the flora and fauna of the respective regions. The triadic system of mutal-karu-uriporul, i.e., the time/place, the flora/fauna, and the emotions, seem to represent the basic essence of tinai poetics. Let us look at these in greater detail.

#### 4. THE FIVE LANDSCAPES

Tolkappiyam opens its outline of akam poetics with a statement about the world of poems.

When we examine the materials of a poem, only three things appear to be important: mutal (the "first things", i.e., time and place), karu (the "native elements"), and uri (the "human feelings" appropriately set in mutal and karu). (Tol. 3)

"Place" is first divided into four kinds of regions, which are constituted by combinations of the five

elements earth, water, air, fire, and sky(or space). Each region is presided over by a deity and named after a characteristic flower or tree: mullai, a variety of jasmine, represents the forests presided over by "the Dark One", the dark-bodied god of herdsmen (Visnu); kurinji, a mountain flower, stands for the mountains overseen by Ceyon, "the Red One", Murukan, the red-speared god of war, youth and beauty; marutam, a tree with red flowers growing near the water, for the pastoral region overseen by Ventan, "King", identified with the rain god (Indra); neytal, a waterflower, for the sandy seashore overseen by Varunan, the sea god (Tol. 5). A rather special fifth region, palai or desert waste, is overseen by Korravai, the demonic goddess of war, according to later writers. Palai is supposedly a green desert tree that is unaffected by drought.

Time is divided into day, month and year. The year is divided into six "large time units", six seasons: the rains (August-September), the cool season (October-November), the season of evening dew (December-January), the season of morning dew (February-March), early summer (April-May), and late summer (June-July). The day is divided into five "small-time units": morning, midday, evening, nightfall, and the dead of night. Some would add a sixth, dawn. Particular "large-time units" and "small-time units" are associated by convention with particular regions. Mullai country is associated with the rainy season and evening; kurinji, with the season of evening dew and midnight; marutam, with the later part of night and the dawn; neytal, with the twilight or evening; palai with summer, the season of morning dew and midday (Tol 6-12).

Each of the five regions or landscapes is associated further with an appropriate 'uri' or phase of love. Lovers' union is associated with kurinji, the mountain; separation with palai, the desert; patient waiting, with mullai, the forest; anxious waiting, with neytal, the seashore; the lover's infidelity and the beloveds' resentment, with marutam, the cultivated agricultural region or lowland (Tol.16). Of these five, the first is clandestine (kalavu) and occurs before marriage; the fifth occurs after marriage. The other three could be either before or after marriage. Palai, separation, includes not only the hardships of the lover away from his love; his search for wealth,

fame, and learning, but also the elopement of the couple, their hardships on the way, and their separation from their parents.

One may note a few features of the native categories of the Tamil system. First things (time and place) and native elements are distinguished from *uri* (appropriate human feelings and experience); the systemic symbology depends on the association between these two sets. They are distinct, yet co-present. They require each other; together they make the world. *Mutal* and *karu*, first things and native elements, are seen as the “objective correlative objects” of human experience. It is also significant that in this Tamil system, though gods are mentioned, they are only part of the scene; they preside, but as natives of the landscape. There seems to be no creator-creature relation in the early anthologies.

In the *karu*, “things born into, or native to, a region” no clear distinction is made between nature and culture; among the native elements, especially all animate beings, as part of a continuous series graded by degrees of sentience: Things without any sentience: stones, water, etc.

Beings with one sense (touch): Grass, trees, creepers

Beings with two senses (touch and taste): Snails, shellfish

Beings with three senses (touch, taste, and smell): Termites, ants

Beings with four senses (touch, taste, smell, and vision): crabs, lobsters, beetles, bees

Beings with five senses (touch, taste, smell, vision, and hearing): birds, beasts, and uncultured people

Beings with six senses (touch, taste, smell, vision, hearing, and mind): Human beings and gods.

In poetry, says Tolkappiyam, the above categories are used in a crossed manner, say, in figures like metaphor and personification. Time may become a winged bird, a bird may be seen as a messenger of love, and love may be felt as a river in flood. As some philosophers would say, a metaphor is a “category mistake”. A notable figure called *bhrantimadalankara* in Sanskrit depends on one thing being mistaken for another. George Hart (275-77) discusses this figure and

points out that, historically speaking, it occurs first in Tamil and later in Sanskrit poetry.

According to Indian and Western traditions, every sign is a union of signifier and signified (e.g. Saussure). In the Tamil system of correspondences, a whole language of signs is created by relating the landscapes as signifiers to the *uri* or appropriate human feelings. In this world of correspondences between times, places, things born in them and human experiences, a word like *kurinji* has several concentric circles of meaning: a flower, the mountain landscape, lovers’ union, a type of poem about all these, and musical modes for these poems. But its ‘concrete meaning, “a mountain flower” is never quite forgotten.

A conventional design thus provides a live vocabulary of symbols; the actual objective landscapes of Tamil country become the interior landscapes of Tamil poetry. It would be useful, initially at least, to refer to the list of symbols when reading the poems. Tolkappiyam takes care to add that birds and beasts of one landscape may sometimes appear in others; artful poets may work with an “overlap of genres” (*tinamayakkam*); they may even bring in war imagery to heighten the effects of an *akam* poem. Tolkappiyam further states that the above genres are not rigidly separated; the time and place appropriate to one genre may be fused with the time and place appropriate to another. Anything other than *uri* or the appropriate mood may be fused or transformed (Tol. 15). The following poem by Allur Nanmullai in *Kuruntokai* (68) is a good example of this mixture of landscapes.

“What She Said”

The bare root of the bean is pink  
like the leg of a jungle hen,  
and herds of deer attack its overripe  
pods.  
For the harshness  
of this season of morning dew  
there is no cure  
but the breast of my man.

The season is morning dew (*kurinji*), but the bird mentioned is a jungle hen (*mullai*), the beast is a deer (*mullai*). The mixture of *kurinji* (lover’s union) and *mullai* (patient waiting) brings out effectively the exact nuance of the girl’s mood, “mixing memory and desire” in a kind of montage. Thus for poetry, the hierarchy of

composition is inverted; the human elements(uri) the native elements (karu ); and the first elements (mutal)are in descending order of importance for a poet. Mere nature description or imagism in poetry would be uninteresting to classical Tamil poets and critics, for it could not 'signify', it would be a signifier without a signified, landscape(mutal)and (karu) without an "uri", an appropriate human mood.

## 5. METAPHOR AND METONYMY

An inset or ullurai uvamam is an implicit comparison. All explicit markers of comparison are suppressed. Tolkappiyam says that explicit comparison belongs to worldly usage (ulakavalakku) whereas implicit metaphor belongs to poetic usage (ceyyulvalakku). There are other distinctions to be made; (a) An inset is a correlation of the landscape and the contents (karu) to the human scene (uri). (b) Unlike metaphor in ordinary language, an inset is a structural feature within the poem; it integrates the different elements of the poem and shapes its message, (c) Unlike metaphor and simile, it often leaves out all the points of comparison and all explicit markers of comparison (e.g. 'like', as); such an omission increases manifold the power of the figure. In the poems, image intensifies image, associations flow into each other like a series of "montage" and "dissolve" shots.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The aesthetic for the ancient Tamils was a significant system that was strictly conventional yet open-ended. They looked upon the entire environment as one unified whole, where meaning was not something that was realized at the end but a process interlinked to all and everything at all points. This comes quite close to what one now recognizes as a biosphere in ecological terms and makes Tinai a concept quite useful in making an ecological reading of literature.

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