Block

4

**CILAPPATIKARAN**

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This block will take up for study Ilanko Atikal’s Tamil epic Cilappatikaran. This will be a new area for most of us in the North and Central part of the country but our learners from the five southern states might be aware of this great work. However, the way we see it, this work will open new areas of investigation and will broaden our mental horizons to include an ancient text from Tamil Nadu that shows a rich influence of Jain and Buddhist influences on our literary heritage. We hope you go through the text translated by R Parthasarthy as The Tale of an Anklet, published by Penguin in 1993. It is advisable that you read the text after reading the introduction by Parthasarthy, and before you begin going through the units. We hope you enjoy a glimpse into the rich cultural and literary heritage of Tamil Nadu and what you may have heard of, or know about, i.e, Sangam Literature.
UNIT 1 SANGAM LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Early Sangam Literature
1.3 Tamil Poetics & Sanskrit Poetics
1.4 Themes in Tamil Poetry as per Sangam Poetics
1.5 Jainism and the Self in Cilappatikaran
1.6 Locating the Cilappatikaran
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at what Sangam Literature is as most of us would not really be aware of it. We may know about the Ramayana and the Mahabharata but may not be aware of the Literature from the South of our country. We also need to have some understanding of this classical literary tradition from the south as the epic under consideration is an ancient Tamil epic belonging to the Sangam Period. We will trace the growth and development of Sangam Literature and then locate the epic under consideration Cilappatikaran.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian Literature is a vast area comprising numerous diverse traditions which resulted in a vast and a complex literature in the last 3500 years. Every part of India has produced classical literature in various Indian languages. The literature produced in ancient India includes the Vedic corpus along with the Puranas, the Jain agamas and traditions and the vast literature produced during the Buddhist period which incorporates writings across Asia. The south of India has 4 major languages namely Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu. All of them are classical languages with a robust literary tradition and Tamil literary history is of nearly two millennia.

Sangam Literature also spelled cankam/ chankam/shangam according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, refers to a body of ancient Tamil writings probably produced during the “chankams/ literary academies located in Maturai, Tamil Nadu from the 4th to the 1st Century”. Sangam Literature is also referred to as early classical Tamil literature with works dating between 400 BCE to 250 CE. The word Sangam refers to an academy where this poetry was composed and later anthologised. The Literature of this period comprised three main types of literary works. We shall look at them next.

1.2 EARLY SANGAM LITERATURE

The most interesting feature of Sangam Literature is the fact that while most of the early literary traditions were religious writings in some form or the other,
Sangam Literature is not religious in that sense. The poems belonging to what is called Sangam Literature are based on two main themes – love / akam, and heroism/ praise of Kings and their deeds/ puram. But we will deal with akam and puram in Unit IV in detail as these two themes/ emotions form a crucial part of the text Cilappattikaran.

The literature of this period was comprised of the following types of works:

1. Ettuttokai (Eight Anthologies)
2. Pattuppattu (The Ten Long Poems)
3. Tolkappiyam (A Grammar Treatise)

The Ettuttokai or the Eight Anthologies of collected poetry are:

1. Kuruntokai
2. Narrinai
3. Akananuru
4. Ainkurunuru
5. Kalittokai
6. Purananuru
7. Patirruppattu
8. Paripatal

The theme of the first five anthologies (Kuruntokai, Narrinai, Akananuru, Ainkurunuru and Kalittokai) of the Ettuttokai or the Eight Anthologies of collected poetry is love/ akam. The theme of the next two anthologies (Purananuru and Patirruppattu) is heroism and praises of the Kings and their deeds while the Eighth Anthology or Paripatal contains poems that deal with love/ akam, heroism/ puram, and the praise of Kings and their deeds. The poems on heroism/ akam are a refreshing change from most of the early and medieval poetry written in the subcontinent as there is a sense of freshness and the poems are not bogged down by the use of literary conceits and mythological references. However, that is not to say that the poems of the Sangam period did not have any connection with religious works. The Paripatal contains some poems that deal with chiefly four deities - Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, and Murugan.

Moving on to the next collected works, we have the Ten Long Poems/ the Pattippattu.

The Pattippattu or The Ten Long Poems include:

1. Kurincippattu
2. Porunarrarruppattai
3. Cirupanarruppattai
4. Perumpanarruppattai
5. Maturaikkanci
6. Malaipatukatam
7. Pattinappalai
8. Mulaiappattu
9. Netunalvatai
10. Tirumurukarruppattai

Along with these anthologies of classical Tamil poetry there was also produced during this period a grammar treatise called the Tolkappiyam which deals with the rules and the norms of Tamil poetics which is distinctly different from Sanskrit.
poetics, something we have examined at length through the three previous blocks of this course. *Sangam* Literature is a part of the literary and historical rediscoveries made in the 19th century by a generation of Western and Indian orientalists who systemised the older manuscripts and translated them into English and subsequently published them in the print form. The rediscovery of the *Sangam* corpus was a major effort taken by a few men in the 19th century namely Caminta Aiyar (1855-1942) and Tamotaram Pillai (1832-1901) who discovered these old poems in crumbling palm leaf manuscripts and through exemplary scholarship translated and copied them to be published. Tamotaram Pillai published the first edition of the *Ettuttokai* (The Eight Anthologies) in 1877 CE. Subsequent efforts in the recent past have been made by scholarship like A K Ramanujan and Kamil Zvelebil who have translated and commented on a large selection of these anthologies.

Apart from the poetry that was written during the *Sangam* period we also have two epics that were composed and produced in manuscript form. The two epics are the *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekalai*. Both these epics have been composed after the *Sangam* period during the Buddhist and the Jain periods of Tamil Nadu. The *Cilappatikaran* is a Jain text with larger overtones of Jain philosophy and the *Manimekalai* is a Buddhist text with a heavy influence of Buddhist theology. The *Cilappatikaran* will be discussed in greater detail in the course of this block.

The *Tolkappiyam* is the earliest compendium of Tamil grammar and consists of three sections. The first two sections deal with Ancient Tamil linguistics like orthography, phonology, morphology and syntax. The third section deals with prosody, rhetoric, poetics, genres, themes, behavioural codes, poetic diction etc. The entire *Tolkappiyam* consists of 1612 *Cuttirams* which in a sense can be said to correspond to the Sanskrit *sutra*.

### 1.3 TAMIL POETICS & SANSKRIT POETICS

The poetry of the *Sangam* period reflects a syntax and poetics that is not seen in the tradition of poetry from the north of India. This poetry does not have the influence of Sanskrit poetics and prosody on it. As mentioned earlier, the uniqueness of this poetry is the thematic division of writing poetry into the *Akam* (Poems of Love) and the *Puram* (Poems of War). These poems are further categorised on ideas of emotion which can be compared to the idea of the *Nav Rasas* by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. There is a huge difference in the portrayal of these emotions from the *Rasas*. The *Rasas* talk about emotions which are permanent (*Stahi*) and those which are transient (*Vhabhichari*).

The emotions portrayed in *Sangam* poetry are expressed through physical geography like the hills, the sea shore, the wasteland, the forest and the low land or the marshes. They are called *Tenai* and they form in the prosody analysis in the third section of the *Tolkappiyam*. The topographical related emotional *Tenai*’s in these poems include:

1. *Kurinci* (The Hills) signifying lovers meetings.
2. *Neytal* (The Sea Shore) signifying secret meetings at the sea shore and lovers anxiety.
Cilappatikaran

3. *Palai (The Waste land)* signifying a lovers frustrating journey through the deserted landscape.

4. *Mullai (The Forest)* signifying happiness through physical and emotional union.

5. *Marutam (The Low land)* signifying a lovers unfaithful attitude.

1.4 THEMES IN SANGAM POETRY AS PER TAMIL POETICS

To understand the themes let’s examine a few poems within these scenic landscape categories.

1. *Kurinci (The Hills)* signifying lovers meetings. This poem is ascribed to a *Sangam* poet called *Kapilar* and is a part of the anthology called *Ainkurunuru*.

**What she said**

To her girlfriend, her foster mother within earshot:

>Bless you, listen to me:  
>My man wore the flowers,  
>Their blossoms gold,  
Their buds, sapphire;  
>Tell me, what do you call  
>Those trees on his mountain slopes?

There is a reference to the emotion and its personification with mountain slopes that classifies this poem as belonging to the *tenai* category *Kurinci*.

2. *Neytal (The Sea Shore)* signifying secret meetings at the sea shore and lovers anxiety. This is a poem called *What her Girl Friend said* by the poet *Ammuvanar* in the anthology *Ainkurunuru*.

**What her Girl Friend said**

To him when he wanted to come by day:

> *O man of the seashore*  
>*Where old womaen*  
>*Dry their wet streaming hair*  
>*And look like a flock*  
>*Of herons in the bay,*  
>*When people said,*  
>*A chariot comes here often*  
>*Splattering*  
>*The dark neyal lilies*  
>*Near the bubbling backwaters,*  
>*Mother said at once,*  
>“Don’t go out.”

Here there is a reference to the *neytal* lilies personifying the secret meeting at the sea shore.

3. *Palai (The Waste land)* signifying a lovers frustrating journey through the deserted landscape. This poem is ascribed to a poet called *Otalantaiyar* and is a part of the anthology called *Ainkurunuru*. 
What he said

In the desert
In this long summer wilderness
Seized and devoured by wildfire,
If I should shut my eyes
Even a wink
I see
Dead of night, a tall house
In a cool yard, and the girl
With freckles
Like kino flowers
Hair flowing as with honey,
Her skin a young mango leaf.

4. *Mullai* (The Forest) signifying happiness through physical and emotional union. The following poem is ascribed to a poet called **Milaipperun Kantan** and is a part of the anthology called *Kuruntokai*.

What she said

Only the dim witted say its evening
When the sun goes down
And the red sky reddens,
When misery deepens,
And the mullai begins to bloom
In the dusk.
But even when the tufted cock
Calls in the long city
And the long night
Breaks into dawn,
It is evening:
Even noon
Is evening
To one who has no one

5. *Marutam* (The Low land) signifying a lovers unfaithful attitude. The following poem is ascribed to a poet called **Orampokiyar** and is from the anthology titled *Ainkurunuru*.

What she said

In his country,
Spotted crabs
Born in their mother’s death
Grow up with crocodiles
That devour their young.
Why is he here now?
And why does he take these women,
A jangle of gold bangles
As they make love,
Only to leave them?

The Tamil epics of South India *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekhalai* represent a society in a state of transformation dealing with a state of constant flux. The epical tradition in South India display ideas and characteristics of most of the
early religions in India. The Tamil epical tradition also includes the later retelling of the Ramayana by Kamban indicating the permeability of ideas and cross migration of those ideas through time to be adapted and reconstructed at a later date and maybe in a newer form/genre, but that is what all great literatures do, don’t they? Before we begin talking about the two Tamil Epics one of which is in our course, we would need to have a little understanding of Jainism as the Epic Cilappatikaran is basically a Jain text. Let’s do that in the next section.

1.5 JAINISM AND THE SELF IN CILAPPATIKARAN

Within a couple of centuries, we know that Buddhism had spread widely in the India of that time and this is evidenced by the large number of Ashokan edicts found in the areas that are a part of the two Tamil epics Cilappatikaran and the Manimekhalai. In the meantime, Jainism was not too far behind as the Jain Agama tradition talks about the Svetambara guru Kalakacharya being received in the court of the Satavahana king around the 1st century BCE and the documented presence of the Jaina Digambara monk Visakhacharya choosing to establish his area of operations in the Chola and Pandyas territories. What is amply testified is that the two religions received immense patronage within the Pallava courts of Kanchipuram and the Pandyan courts in Maturai. Kanchipuram is well known as one of the four Vidyastanas/ seats of learning mentioned in the Mahabhashya of Patanjali the others being at Kolhapur in Maharashtra and at Penukonda in Andhra Pradesh. The Cilappatikaran on closer analysis does not appear to be in a fixed religious structure of Jainism but espouses a greater tolerance to the various beliefs around. The surrounding country, the politics of construction along with the religious interpellations constructs literature in such a way that the epic Cilappatikaran bears testimony to the fact that Cilappatikaran is in a sense a modification of the basic Kovalan and the Kannaki story which was a part of the folklore of the region and had been around much before the entry of the Buddhist and Jaina religions and thereby traditions.

The Cilappatikaran abounds with Jain themes and the idea of expiation is a major theme within Jainism. There are spaces within the text that indicate Jain themes but it may not be advisable to bracket Cilappatikaran as being a completely Jain text. The larger Jain observance that occupies the Cilappatikaran is the idea of Sallekhana, and the presence of Kuvanti the Jain Sadhavi who is a spiritual preceptor/ religious adviser. Kannaki and Kovalan ritually practices this extreme Jain austerity/ Sallekhana wherein the body is slowly starved to death. This is a classic example and the practice of complete non action within the body and the mind. If you recall the Rajasthan High Court had banned the practice of Sallekhana in 2015 terming it a suicide, however, the Supreme Court stayed the ban of the Rajasthan High Court later that year.

And she moaned:
‘Was this the fate of those
Who were my companions?’ She vowed to starve herself to death.
So ended her life.

The Vipaka Srutam or The Oral Traditions of Karmic Life, one of the 60 Jain Agamas the canonical texts in Jainism divides the life of the individual into
the sentient and the non-sentient the *Jiva* and the *Ajiva* and it is the world of *Karma* that creates the non-sentient. The state of *Ajiva* brings out the notion of illusion and the notion of doer/ the primordial mover of the self and the ego. There is a conversation between a sage and the Jain nun *Kuvanti* at *Srirangam* where he explains to her the transience of life and the concept of *Karma*. This scene is also presented in the paly as it explains the basic Jain belief that an *arhat* or an evolved one has to intervene to guide a devotee/ a seeker of truth to the path of salvation. This idea is again very similar to the Buddhist notion of a *Bodhisattava*, a level below the *Buddha* / one who has attained *Nirvana* but who doesn’t do that in order to help sentient beings. This is an indication of how these two religions share common roots and similar world views.

No one can escape the prison house
Of the body's rebirth unless he is blessed
With the light of the revealed Agamas.

The Jain traditions mention that *Chandragupta Maurya* settled down at *Shravanabelagola* and began institutionalising Jainism in the South and was to opt for the *Sallekhana* as a final mode of liberation. Jain history in South India depicts wide spread practice of *Sallekhana* or the ritual of starving oneself to death. It must be noted that Buddhism moves away from the concept and practice of *Sallekhana* as Buddhism focuses on the middle path and not on extremes. Hence, what we really find on careful reading of the *Cilappatikaran* is a larger shift within the literary imagination. The movement is away from the *Sangam* corpus with its emphasis on the five *tinais* the bifurcation of experience with emotion; the emphasis on land as in the *Tolkappiyam* where the land decides the corresponding emotion. The *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekalai* though incorporating the basic *Akām* and *Purām* divisions is still able to make the epic accommodate newer traditions of the North. The different strands of influence that we see in the *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekalai* suggests a slow but steady homogenising influence of the Indian literary tradition with the various telling’s and re-telling’s of the various versions of the epical traditions.

The larger dialogic impulses present in the epic seek some common grounds for the human soul though the matters of doctrine and the modes of achieving it differ. Within the Jaina *Bastis* present in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and the rock cut caves of the early years of the 1st century the epic point to a period in South India where there is a transition in the making, of a period from the earlier imaginations that engendered the *Sangam* poetry to a new fresher imports from the heart of the Indian sub-continent. In the next section we shall try and locate the text *Cilappatikaran*.

### 1.6 LOCATING THE CILAPPATIKARAN

The authorship of the *Cilappatikaran* is attributed to *Ilanko Atikal*. Now, the word *Atikal* literally means a *Jaina* saint or an ascetic. So what do you think we could infer from this? One stream of thought proclaims *Atikal* to be the younger ascetic brother of *Cenkuttuvan* (2nd CE), the *Ceral* King who renounced his family and the throne after hearing about a prophecy that he would succeed to the throne instead of his elder brother. It is believed that he then took the Jain vow of renunciation and entered a Jain monastery near *Vanci*. There is also another interesting legend associated with *Sattanar* the author of the *Manimekalai* and legend has it, that *Sattanar* actually met *Ilanko*
Atikal to seek his permission to bring out the Buddhist version of the epic. This is interesting as it tells us that given the socio-cultural space of the times, there never was any large scale violence between the Buddhists and the Jains in history unlike the heterodox sects and the Hindu ones.

The setting of the epic is the cities of Puhar and Kāñci within the Tamil domain. This is of significance as two significant Greek texts - *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* of the 1st CE and *Ptolemy’s Geography* (2nd CE) mention the towns of Puhar as the town Khaberis and talk of the Kaveris Emporium and the flourishing Roman trade with the two Tamil kingdoms. Both the works describe at length the markets in the two towns providing a setting which is commonplace and populated with common folks much like the setting of our earlier play *Mrichhakatika*. Situated within the larger Jain and the Buddhist themes are the mercantile communities and the guilds and the role of trade and its contribution to urbanity with courtesans, palaces, the common man and the religious institutions and individuals who people the epics.

Situated in the town of Puhar the epic – *Cilappatikaran* develops the kernel story of Kovalan and Kannaki, and as mentioned earlier was present in the oral tradition of folk tales and then worked on it. Since we do not have too many details on the genesis of the *Cilappatikaran* we may conjecture that the kernel of the story might not have been taken from within the larger Jain and the Buddhist traditions but could have been a local story that was later adapted for presentation to a larger audience who were primarily followers of the two religions.

The Kovalan and Kannaki story is ahistorical in the sense that all good stories are, permitting the gaze from across time to shift and re-alter components within a discursive framework. The notional idea of the Manichean battle of the fight between the forces of light over darkness is interpolated within characters like Kovalan and Kannaki as they make sense of the world order around them across time. The Kovalan and Kannaki story precisely within its ahistorical positioning is able to gather its existence in history across time by being appropriated by other socio-cultural sects. So much so that Kannaki is worshipped as a deity, and as the epitome of chastity.

The story centres on Kovalan and his affair with Matavi a courtesan who dominates the relationship and with whom Kovalan has a daughter called Manimekhalai. He is not aware of the child he has fathered and she - Manimekhalai is the subject of the sequel epic of the *Cilappatikaran* the *Manimekhalai*. Kannaki who is distraught by her husband’s affair forgives him, when he realises his “mistake” and returns home. She (the wife Kannaki forgives him), reunites with her husband after the affair with Matavi is terminated due to a misunderstanding. In order to begin anew and recoup the losses they have incurred as a result of the affair, Kovalan and Kannaki migrate to Maturai the kingdom of the Pandian king Netunceliyan. Kovalan tries to sell Kannaki’s anklet but is cheated by a jeweller, is accused of stealing the Queen’s anklet and is executed without a trial. Kannaki is overwrought and goes to the King’s court where she breaks open her anklet to prove that her anklet has rubies and not pearls inside (whereas the Queen’s anklet had pearls inside), and in her extremely emotional state tears off her breast and flings it at the city of Maturai which burns to cinders. Thereafter, she ascends to heaven. Interestingly, there is the presence of a Jain nun Kavunti in the epic and the beheading
of Kovalan is attributed to the misdeeds of an earlier birth (bringing in the entire Jain ethos of transmigration of the soul).

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have attempted to provide a precise literary history of Sangam Literature. We have looked at the epic Cilappatikaran very briefly, discussed the sequel Manimekhalia, and tried to locate the two texts within their respective religious backgrounds/philosophies. We have also seen from historical monuments how other religions and literary traditions made their way to modern day Tamil Nadu and enriched Tamil Literature.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the term Sangam Literature?
2. Is there a difference between Sanskrit Poetics and Tamil Poetics?
UNIT 2 CILAPPATIKARAN: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Structure
2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The Plot
2.3 Female Presence in Cilappatikaran
2.4 The Idea of Justice in Cilappatikaran
2.5 Destruction, Resurrection and the Ascendency of the City
2.6 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at who the author of the epic Cilappatikaran is and then look at the way the plot is structured. We will also examine the female presence in the epic, the sense of justice, the destruction that is wreaked on the city, and the resurrection of Kannaki. In short, we will be also be doing a textual analysis of Cilappatikaran.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The authorship of the Cilappatikaran is attributed to Ilanko Atikal a supposed and Atikal literally means a Jain saint or an ascetic and an interesting legend is associated with Sattanar the author of the Manimekhalai that he actually met Ilanko Atikal to seek his permission to bring out the Buddhist version of the epic which within the politics of the period is quite acceptable as there has never been a large scale violence between the Buddhists and the Jain in history unlike the heterodox sects and the Hindu ones.

The setting of the epic is within the cities of Pukar and Kâñci within the Tamil domains are significant as two Greek works The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea dated at 1st CE and Ptolemy’s Geography dated at 2nd CE mentions Pukar as the town Khaberis and Kaveris Emporium and the flourishing Roman trade with the Tamil kingdoms and both the epics describe at length the markets in the two towns providing a setting which is common place and with common men within the larger urban setup unlike the larger North Indian epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Situated within the larger Jain and the Buddhist themes are the mercantile communities and the guilds and the role of trade and its contribution to urbanity with courtesans, palaces, the common man and the religious institutions and individuals who people the epics.

Situated in Pukar the epic Cilappatikaran develops a kernel of the Kovalan and Kannaki story that was a part of the oral extant tradition and presents it in epic form situated within the larger Jain tradition to be presented before a largely Jain audience. It could have been as a result of the inroads of Jainism into Tamil society or as a result of the epic being presented to a Jain audience.
2.2 THE PLOT

The story begins in the city of Pukar a flourishing seaport and the capital of the Chola kingdom. The town is festive as the people gather to celebrate the marriage of Kovalan and Kannaki who belong to two prominent families in the area. The couple live happily for a few years in Pukar as Kannaki settles down to a life of domesticity and Kovalan begins to earn a living. What is noted here is the deep love between them. In the town of Pukar lives a beautiful courtesan named Matavi who is a very talented dancer. The Chola king in recognition of her talent presents her with a garland and a thousand and eight pieces of gold. Matavi decides to auction the garland to anybody who will purchase it at the price decided by her and in the process she would also marry the man who buys the garland. Accordingly she asks her servant Vacantamalai to announce this to the people of Pukar. Kovalan hears the announcement, purchases the garland and abandons his wife Kannaki and begins to live with Matavi. Kannaki is extremely heartbroken as a result of her husband’s actions. Kovalan meanwhile is so enamoured of Matavi that he squanders a lot of his wealth away on her neglecting his wife Kannaki.

Soon it is spring and the city begins the celebration of the season with a special festival to god Indra who is the king of the gods. Everybody heads to the sea shore and Kovalan and Matavi set up a small pavilion there. Matavi hands Kovalan a lute and requests Kovalan to play the lute. Kovalan begins to sing a number of songs about a lovely woman who has hurt her lover. Hearing the songs, Matavi assumes that Kovalan is not interested in her any more. She takes the lute from his hands and begins to sing a song of a woman who has been betrayed. Kovalan too begins to feel that Matavi probably does not love him or care for him any longer and leaves her. Matavi is heartbroken and writes a letter to Kovalan imploring him to come back. Kovalan refuses to do so and tells Matavi’s servant Vacantamalai that at the end of the day Matavi is only a dancer and not someone fit to be in a lifelong relationship. Matavi is extremely unhappy about this and endures the loss silently. By the time Kovalan ends his relationship with Matavi, he is thoroughly impoverished and now at the mercy of his wife Kannaki.

Kannaki the ever dutiful wife has a nightmare about a misfortune that Kovalan will face. She is obviously extremely worried about her wayward husband and is overjoyed when Kovalan arrives home having deserted Matavi. Needless to say, Kannaki welcomes him back and the couple reconcile as Kovalan admits to his relationship with Matavi and apologises to Kannaki. The happy couple decide to leave Pukar together and go to the city of Maturai the capital of the Pandyan rulers to start afresh. They hope to begin a new life there by selling an anklet that belongs to Kannaki in order to start a new business. Kovalan has no money left to begin anew as he has spent all his money on Matavi and is not inclined to ask either his or Kannaki’s parents for a loan. Early one morning they leave for Maturai and on the way they meet a Jain monk named Kavunti as they proceed to the town of Uraiyur. They pass through the dense forests that form the boundary between the Chola and the Pandyan kingdoms. Eventually, they arrive at the banks of the river Vaiyai and they get a glimpse of the towers and the homes of Maturai on the opposite bank. Kovalan leaves Kannaki in the care of the Jain monk Kavunti and slips into the fort of Maturai unnoticed by everybody including the yavana
guards that are posted there. He begins a tour of the city to get a sense of the city that they intend making their home now. On his way back to the forest grove where Kannaki and Kavunti await him, he meets a Brahmin named Matalan who informs him of the birth of his daughter Manimekalai as Matavi has given birth. Kovalan shares the ominous dream with the Brahmin wherein he is riding a buffalo the mount of Yama the god of death, and we realise that, that was the dream that made Kannaki and Kovalan leave the city of Pukar. Kovalan explains to the Brahmin that the ominous dream was the reason for them to leave Pukar as they feared that some harm would befall him. Kavunti the Jain monk entrusts Kannaki in the care of a herdswoman named Matari and both Kannaki and Kovalan begin to live with the herdsman’s family and in their living quarters.

In a domestic scene in the epic, Kannaki collects some raw food from Matari the herdswoman and cooks a delicious meal for Kovalan. Kovalan is deeply disturbed by his act of infidelity and he begins to despise himself for all the grief that he has caused Kannaki. Kannaki is deeply hurt by the memory of Kovalan’s affair with the dancer Matavi and she expresses the pain and the anguish his actions have caused her. The reformed Kovalan is ashamed of his behaviour in the recent past and after listening to his wife, teary eyed he leaves for the town of Maturai taking her anklet with him to sell and generate some money to begin afresh. On the way he sees a humped bull which is considered to be a very bad omen but distraught as he is, does not notice the humped bull and continues on his journey to the market. He finds a goldsmith, shows him the anklet and asks for an estimate for it. The goldsmith takes the anklet asks Kovalan to wait and rushes to the palace of the Pandyan king to tell him that he has apprehended the man who has stolen the Queen’s anklet. Truth be told, the goldsmith is the one who has in fact stolen the Queen’s anklet and is excited at the thought of putting the blame on Kovalan while he goes free and undetected himself. The King and Queen are not on talking terms due to a misunderstanding regarding the loss of her anklet and the King in an effort to please her and gain her favours again, is delighted that the thief has been located. Without ascertaining facts he orders that the thief be caught and executed without a trial immediately. The fact that he had the Queen’s anklet is proof of guilt. Note that today we would decide that that is circumstantial evidence. The guards follow the goldsmith to his shop during which the goldsmith lectures the guards on morality and deceitfulness of thieves and their community. He asks the guards to execute Kovalan when they reach there. The guards apprehend Kovalan and one of them cuts him down with his sword. Strangely enough the guards are apprehensive about striking Kovalan initially as they believe him to be innocent. Kovalan falls down once he is struck and lies on the ground life ebbing away. The goldsmith is extremely relieved that the secret of his theft remains a secret and having got an innocent killed is safe forever. He is very happy to have the anklet back and returns it to the King. As the reader/viewer of the play, we know that an innocent has been killed and that the anklet that has been given back to the King actually belongs to Kannaki. While the real thief the goldsmith is a free man.

Meanwhile Matari the herdswoman sees inauspicious signs in the herdsman’s quarters and is worried that some tragedy is about to strike them. She and the others arrange for a sacred dance in the praise of Krsna in which they would enact his life story. After the dance is over Matari walks down to the
river Vaiyai to bathe where she learns of Kovalan’s murder. She is shocked and does not inform Kannaki about it as she feels that the news of Kovalan’s execution will break the latter. Kannaki learns about the execution of Kovalan through a stranger who informs her that Kovalan has been killed on the charges of the theft of the Pandyan Queen’s anklet. Kannaki is distraught and angry and denounces the Pandayan King Netunceliyan. The people of Maturai also come together protesting the death of Kovalan and demand justice from a King who they feel has moved away from the path of true justice. Kannaki proceeds to the site of the goldsmith’s shop and finds the dead body of her beloved Kovalan. In the process of embracing him he appears to stand before her and console her wiping her tears away, and he begins the divine ascent to heaven. He blesses her and asks her to live in peace.

Kannaki fighting for justice storms the court of the Pandayan King demanding justice from him along with an explanation for the hideous murder. The Pandayan Queen in the meantime has seen very inauspicious dreams and she is woken up with the piercing cries of Kannaki demanding an explanation at the palace. Kannaki holds the anklet in her hand and with her hair loose appears as a wild aspect of justice to the Pandayan King as he listens to her demand for justice and an explanation for the murder. The king protest as he claims that he is innocent while Kovalan was a thief who had been caught with the Queen’s anklet which was proof of guilt and that it was his duty to punish the thief. Kannaki in a fit of anger breaks open her anklet and gems stream and fall all over the floor. The gems that tumble out are rubies which prove Kovalan’s innocence as the Queen’s anklet had pearls in it. The King is dismayed after confronting the evidence in front of him. He admits his guilt and dies out of remorse and his Queen follows him in death.

Kannaki deeply angered and in a rage, storms out of the palace and curses the city that has brought her so much grief - Maturai. In a fit of superhuman power that will later transform her into a goddess and an important part of the Tamil consciousness, she tears her left breast away from her torso leaving a deep wound in her body and hurls it over the city cursing it and the moment her left breast falls on the ground the city of Maturai bursts into flames. In a beautiful passage in the epic the presiding deity of Kannaki appears before her explaining the Jain laws of Karma and the problem of causality. She informs Kannaki that in a former birth Kovalan was called Bharata and that he was in the service of King Vasu where he had mistaken one Cankaman who was a just merchant to be a spy. Cakaman had been beheaded on Kovalan’s orders. So an innocent life had been taken. Cankaman’s wife Nili is so deeply shocked by this injustice that she curses Bharata (Bharata was Kovalan in an earlier birth) and commits suicide by jumping off a cliff. Due to the effect of the Karmic cycle the presiding deity mentions that, Kovalan had to suffer the same fate as Cankaman as atonement for his actions in his previous life. The presiding deity informs Kannaki that she will rejoin her husband in fourteen days.

Kannaki then leaves the city of Maturai and proceeds to the Chera kingdom and arrives at the Netuvel hills eventually. She ascends to heaven on the chariot that Lord Indra sends for her. This begins the transition of Kannaki to a goddess as the dwellers of the hills witness her ascent to heaven. They inform the Chera King Cenkuttuvan about this miracle. The King is camping on the banks of the river Periyar and the poet Ilanko Atikal who is also present there tells...
the Chera King about all the unhappy events that occurred in Maturai. The Chera queen Ilanko Venmal asks the King to build a temple for Kannaki and to worship her as a goddess. The Chera king Cenkuttuvan decides to have a statue of Kannaki sculpted and has the sacred stone brought from the Himalayas. He begins the great march to the north of India where he seeks to bring the Arya Kings to heel and to prove that the Tamil people are as strong and brave as the Arya Kings. He defeats all the Arya Kings in a pitched battle and finds the sacred stone where the image of Kannaki is engraved and purified by the waters of the sacred Ganges.

Meanwhile back in Maturai, Matalan the Brahmin arrives with the information that both Kavunti the Jain monk and Matari the herds woman have ended their lives as they failed to protect Kannaki. The Chera King Cenkuttuvan then proceeds to head back to his kingdom where he installs the engraved image of the goddess Pattini / the deified name for Kannaki. The process of the daily worship of Kannaki begins at this temple. On the advice of Matalan the Chera King Cenkuttuvan performs the Rajsuya sacrifice and proclaims his lordship over the entire Tamil country. He begins the elaborate endowment of the Pattani/Kannaki temple and slowly other Kings begin worshipping her as the embodiment of virtuosity and chastity. The worship we are told begins and is consolidated even in faraway Sri Lanka in the kingdom of King Gajabahu. Eventually the goddess Pattani herself appears before them bestowing her blessings. This is the summary of the epic Cilappatikaran. In the next section we will look at the presence of female characters in the epic.

2.3 FEMALE PRESENCE IN CILAPPATIKARAN

India is a country that has traditionally been largely male dominated though, every now and then there has been a strong feminine voice as well. A singular case is the voice of Draupadi in the epic the Mahabharata who articulates both at the level of the voice as well as that of the body. She comes across as an articulate woman in the epic who voices her ideas on the injustice meted out to her and at the same time her open hair becomes a symbol of resistance (articulation through the body). This is not so apparent in the other epic the Ramayana where there is domesticity apparent with Sita becoming emblematic of a new ideal of womanhood which, has been and is being questioned in most discourses today. The two epics Cilappatikaran and Manimekalai (which is the story of Matavi and Kovalan’s daughter Manimekalai and is a sequel) are singular as they have women protagonists who bring out the voice of injustice during the ancient period when these epics were written. They are also domesticated voices as in the case with Kannaki who endures Kovalan’s abandonment of her or the case of Matavi the courtesan who accepts the fact that Kovalan has left her. Apart from this is the fact that the voice of Kannaki as an example of an injured womanhood of a universal kind is very apparent. She transforms from being the ideal daughter-in-law (taking care of her aged in-laws even after being abandoned by her husband), ideal wife as she welcomes the straying husband Kovalan back to, a symbolic figure fighting for justice again for the same husband who left her for a dancer/ courtesan transforming into an avenging goddess and is later canonised into a benevolent, protective deity.

The presence of women as central characters in the Cilappatikaran and the Manimekalai unlike in Sanskrit epics where the male protagonist is central
to the plot is the influence of Buddhism and Jainism on the epical tradition of Tamil Nadu. Egalitarianism was a big thing in Jainism and Buddhism and it is largely these influences that have allowed women to function with their distinct identities in the epic. The local context comes into play as well, when we see Kannaki being transformed to the goddess Pattani. This transformation in keeping with the local context, points to the creation of a newer imagination which results in the formation of new cults and belief systems. Tradition is an evolving process and this also points to the pluralism that was present in early India which provided a space for different voices to be articulated. This leads to the formation of a new goddess who is now imbued with a myth and a discourse which originates in a tragedy that involves normal human beings bringing out the synthesis between the human and the divine. Kannaki the woman becomes the symbol of a vengeful woman and when her presence as a transformed figure is accommodated in the Buddhist tradition, she becomes an emblematic voice. Her demand for justice assumes the universal nature of Dharma and finally there is the elaborate scene where she is absorbed into the larger mainstream tradition of beliefs and thoughts and becomes a distinctive goddess.

There are two kinds of women in the epic. One variety are the simple folk be it the herdswoman or the domestic help or the women who have a distinct public profile as in the figure of the courtesan Mathavi and the other variety is of the divine. This is reflected in the figure of Kannaki who transforms from a simple housewife to a canonised goddess.

2.4 THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN CILAPPATIKARAN

The Cilappatikaran apart from the status as a ritual epic in Tamil Nadu is also noteworthy for the representation of justice in the early eras of Indian history. Woven around the mythological aspects of the epic is the idea of justice which has been subverted. Justice in early India can be seen in some early texts like the Arthashastra which brings out the early aspects of Maurayan rule and the idea of a King administering it with elaborate penalties for crime. The idea of a king as a divine figure administering justice is woven around the nature of the judgement. The King had to be impartial so that the miscarriage of justice did not take place.

This formulation is very different from the ideas of justices as seen in a modern nation state where there are norms and rules not only in every country but there is also a forum where justice can be administered for nation states through agencies like the United Nations. The epic deals with early Indian social conditions where the idea of monarchy prevailed and hence, the conception of justice is based on the body of the king who is divinely appointed and imbued with the wheels of administering justice. The King needs to be a “just and fair King” who follows the Dharma as Dharma is important for administering justice. The entire universe in the Jain and Buddhist tradition is governed by Dharma and any subversion of this would obviously result in a physical catastrophe. This physical disturbance of space is noted in many cultures and is reflected in many national literatures. An example can be taken from Shakespeare’s King Lear where Lear abdicates his responsibilities as the custodian of the kingdom as he begins the process of dividing the Kingdom between his three daughters. This is a violation of the idea of a moral code imbued in the body of the king. Hence, any disturbance within this can lead to a physical catastrophe reflected
in the civil war in *King Lear* and the subsequent death of *King Lear*. Something similar happens here in the *Cilappatikaran* when there is the miscarriage of justice. As a result of the miscarriage of justice by the *Pandyan* King, the city of *Maturai* burns.

The error made by the *Pandyan* king was in not examining facts in the case of *Kovalan*. By ordering his death on the grounds that he was a thief he set up the problem of the violation of *Dharma* and he pays a price for this action. The violation of *Dharma* in ancient literature is not just an individual act but the consequences affect a large number of people. This is apparent in early *Sanskrit* epics like the *Mahabharata* where a single error by *Dhrtarashtra* in not dividing the kingdom between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* results in the *Mahabharata* war leading to mass scale destruction of lives. In the next section we shall deal with how the city of Maturai comes to be destroyed, is resurrected and rises again.

### 2.5 DESTRUCTION, RESURRECTION AND THE ASCENDENCY OF THE CITY

*Puhar* the *Khaberis* (in the Egyptian records) of *Tolemy* and *Maturai*, are the two cities that form the setting of the epics *Cilappatikaran* and *Manimekalai*. *Pukar* known as *Kaveri Poompattinam*/*Poompuhar* in old Tamil memory and *Maturai* are the two cities that appear to have been destined for destruction following the law of *adharma* that was committed by the King when he orders the execution of *Kovalan*. Much of what remains of *Puhar* is now beneath the sea; a part of the shifting coast lines and the geo tectonics of continental plates. Modern day *Madurai*, is most likely where *Maturai* was situated. The areas we are talking about (*Puhar* and *Maturai*) have a historical reference to the sea eroding and reconstructing the coast line. *Poompuhar* was one of the most prosperous port of the early *Cholas* and both the epics *Cilappathikaram* and the *Manimekalai* mention the prosperity of the port. *Cilappatikaran* mentions the general lay out of the plan of *Poompuhar* in Section five of the epic when the festival of *Indra* is celebrated. It provides a fascinating glimpse of the early *Chola*, *Chera* and *Pandyan* economy where the markets streets are filled with traders from distant lands, where silks, grains, fur, cotton, coral, sandalwood, pearls, gems and gold are traded and sold.

```
On the edge of the burnished waters lived
And mingled as one traders from the distant
Lands, come for goods carried
By ships. With paints, scented powders,
Incense and fragrant perfumes, hawkers
Went around the city streets.
```

Further the epic mentions an interesting lay out of the port city with the suburbs being the residences of the princes and the landed gentry. There were separate streets for the astrologers, charioteers, bards, panegyrist, farmers, physicians, astronomers, dancers, harlots, flower sellers, betel leaf vendors, musicians and drummers.

```
One saw the fine work of making
Cloth from silk, fur and cotton
In the weavers quarters. Silk, coral,
```
The various trades practised by the people, the types of food and wines sold are all described very vividly. It’s almost like the cataloguing that happens in Greek Epics.

Apart from the description of trades plied, commodities bought and sold, types of food, the dwelling spaces of different occupational holders are also mentioned.

In the city itself stood the Kingsway,
The flagged car street, the market square,
The boulevard where merchant princes dwelt
In tall mansions, the brahman homes,
The houses of landed families and their tenants
Farmers, of physicians, astrologers and those employed
In other tasks, the broad street
Of the homes of those who with skill bored
Holes into bright gems, and those who polished
Ornate conches. In separate houses
Lived charioteers, bards, panegyrist.
Astronomers, handsome dancers, harlots,
Actresses, flower and betel girls,
Maidservants, professional musicians.
Drummers of various sorts, and jesters.
Surrounding the fort were the spacious houses
Of cavalrymen with swift horses, riders
Of male elephants, drivers of lofty chariots,  
Fierce looking soldiers. Celebrated in song  
Was this part of the town and well known  
For the great and renowned men who lived there.

It was a part of the larger / popular imagination, of a big port city. Moreover being the capital city it occupied a special place in the imagination of the poets who received the impressions of the past through the glory sung within literature and through collective memory/ folk songs. It had a resonance like the Sthala Puranas/ the narrative of places. Both the epics being urban epics in the classical sense celebrate the city and the various hues of the city. The impressions of the city have been drawn long after the original sites have disappeared with the passage of time, much like Krishna’s Dwarka that is celebrated in the Mahabharata as a part of the collective unconscious that is handed down from one generation to the next. It is important to note that simply because the physical city itself is long gone, faced by the ravages of time and natural calamities like tsunamis and earthquakes, the memories of the lost city are consequently rebuilt - layer by layer of memory that cut across time as seen in Poompuhar of Cilappatikaran.

Somewhere though in the stratigraphic layers of the soil on the land and at the silt on the bottom of the ocean lie the physical remnants of the old imagination; artefacts of daily use that have not biodegraded like bronze coins, terracotta, sculptures in stone and beads. The land below holds within the layers of soil entire cities with fort battlements, residences and streets now reduced to rubble and mere foundations. This is also seen beneath the sea near the coasts as the eroding coast lines tsunamis swallow entire cities leaving remnants for marine archaeologists to discover and in the case of Poompuhar the old submerged city has been found and the many Maturais of the creative and folk imagination are connected with the lost lands swallowed up by the sea. Take for instance the case of Kumari Kandam or the Tamil lost lands. Kumari stands for Cape Camorin and it is now connected deeply within Tamil nationalism to the lost submerged mythical continent of Lemuria.

### 2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have summarised the epic Cilappatikaran, we have examined the presence of female characters in the epic, looked at the sense of justice, the Jain influence on the epic and also at the collective consciousness/ memory that contributes to the nation building/ myth making process.

### 2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Who is the author of Cilappatikaran? Why do you think authorship is speculated?
2. Outline the plot of Cilappatikaran.
3. Comment on the female presence in Cilappatikaran.
4. Discuss the idea of justice in Cilappatikaran.
3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at the characterisation in the epic. The Cilappatikaran is a Tamil epic belonging to the Sangam period and is considered by scholars to be one of the five finest epics of Tamil Literature. As discussed earlier, all literary works usually have characters and in some cases there are divine characters, and in other cases there are both human and divine characters, Cilappatikaran has three distinct types of characters – the human, the divine and the immortal. We will be examining the intermingling and intersection of these three types of characters in the Cilappatikaran.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An important feature of all epics is that it has both human and divine characters. The North Indian epics in Sanskrit, namely, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have divine characters that are incarnated as mortals. Cilappatikaran, the Tamil epic, is different from the Sanskrit ones in the sense that it has not only human and divine characters but also a third type – human turned into the divine instead of being merely the incarnation of various gods. The ideal of karpu (chastity) and the dynamics of power play are crucial in the relationship of these three types of characters.

3.2 TYPES OF CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

B Mangalam explains the novelty of Cilappatikaran through the characterisation of the divine and mortal characters:
Unlike the Sanskritic epics like Mahabharata, the Ramayana or the Greek epics like the Iliad or the Odyssey, the protagonists in all the five Tamil epics belong to the merchant class... The poem opens with the marriage of Kannagi - Kovalan and their happy settling down to domesticity. They are not semi-divine heroic characters fighting for a cause ... Kannagi gains a divine stature at the end of the epic while divine/royal/semi-divine epic heroes in the epics of other traditions stand humanized towards the end of their lives/ careers.

Having said earlier on that there are three types of characters in the Cilappatikaran, let’s look at each category next. Human Characters, Divine Characters and the Immortalised Characters are the three categories of characters in the epic and we begin by looking at the Divine characters next.

### 3.3 CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

As mentioned earlier there are three categories or types of characters in the Cilappatikaran: the Divine Characters, the Human Characters and the Immortalised Characters. Let’s begin by listing the main characters of each category and then looking at them and the purpose they serve in some detail.

#### 3.3.1 Divine Characters in Cilappatikaran
- Lord Indra
- Lord Shiva
- Lord Murugan
- Lord of Death

#### 3.3.2 Human Characters in Cilappatikaran
- Kovalan: Son of a wealthy merchant in Puhar
- Kannaki: Wife of Kovalan
- Masattuvan: A wealthy grain merchant and the father of Kovalan
- Matavi: A beautiful courtesan dancer
- Chitravathi: Madhavi’s Mother
- Vasavadaththai: Madhavi’s female friend
- Kosigan: Madhavi’s messenger to Kovalan
- Matalan: A Brahmin visitor to Madurai from Puhar
- Kavunthi Adigal: A Jain nun
- Netunceliyan: Pantiya king
- Kopperundevi: Pantiya Queen
- Cenkuttuvan: Ceral king

#### 3.3.3 Immortalised Characters in Cilappatikaran
- Kovalan
- Kannaki
- Valli

### 3.4 DIVINE CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

The ancient Tamil epic Cilappatikaran has a few divine characters. They have minor roles in the plot. Nevertheless, they are not insignificant. They do not appear directly in the plot. Rather, their actions are narrated by others. In The Book of Vanci, the reference to a god, (i.e., Lord Indra) first occurs in the “Prologue”.
A chaste woman with only one breast
Stood in the thick shade of the kino
tree, incandescent in its golden flowers.
Indra, Lord of the immortals with kindred gods
 Came down, revealed her loving husband to her...
And before our very eyes led her to heaven. (Prologue, p 20)

The Kuravais from the Red Mountains report to the Chera King Cenkuttuvan
about the appearance of Lord Indra in front of Kannaki, who is standing under
the shade of Kino trees. Lord Indra reveals to her, her dead husband, Kovalan,
and leads her to heaven.

The reference to Lord Siva appears in the “Prologue” as well. The poet Cattan
narrates Kannaki’s past to the king and also mentions her transformation into
an immortal. Cattan says that right after the destruction of Maturai by
Kannaki’s curse, he was resting in the temple of Maturai when he saw Lord
Siva appear before Kannaki, overcome by sorrow. Lord Siva blesses Kannaki
and tells her that after fourteen days, Kannaki will re-unite with her husband,
not in the mortal form but as immortals.

Cattan then replied:
Listen, holy one!
One night, in the ancient city
Of Maturai of immaculate fame, I was resting
In the silver hall of the meeting place
In the temple of Lord Siva, his matted hair
Adorned with the laburnum. It was then I saw
The guardian deity of Maturai appear
Before the awesome Pattini, overcome with sorrow,
And speak to her.... (Prologue, p. 20)

The appearances of these gods happen at very crucial times in the plot. The
appearance of Lord Siva announces the transformation of Kannaki, from a
mortal woman, into an immortal goddess. Lord Indra’s appearance completes
this transformation.

The other gods and goddesses are referred to in the epic as a means of
comparison. For instance, Kannaki is compared to Kali, King Cenkuttuvan
is compared to Indra, Murugan and the god of death.

3.5 HUMAN CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

In section 3.3.2 we listed all the human characters in Cilappatikaran. However,
Kovalan and Kannaki will not be discussed here under human characters as
they will be discussed later in Section 3.6 under Immortalised Characters. Apart
from the male and female protagonists, the other main human characters in the
epic include Matavi (Book of Pukar), the Pantiya King, (Book of Maturai)
and King Cenkuttuvan (Book of Vanci). Let us begin our discussion with
Matavi.

Matavi: The character of Matavi appears in the “Book of Pukar”. She is
described as an accomplished dancer at the Chozha court.

... And from that exalted line
Of heavenly nymphs was Matavi descended.
A woman of flawless birth, of broad shoulders,
And curly hair, spilling pollen, she was
Noted for her style of great distinction.
(Book of Pukar, Canto 3, p.34)

As discussed earlier on in the Block, the King presents Matavi with a garland made of one thousand and eight pieces of gold. Matavi auctions the garland saying:

A thousand and eight
Of the most excellent gold is this garland worth.
Who buys the garland becomes the husband
Of our vinelike girl. (Book of Pukar, Canto 3, p 40)

Needless to say, Kovalan buys the garland of a thousand and eight pieces of gold and, as per custom, becomes her husband.

Kovalan bought the garland -

Matavi with wide, lotus eyes. With the hunchback,
He entered Matavi’s residence: came
Under her spell the instance he took her in his arms.
He forgot himself, and wished never to part from her
Forgot his own blameless and noble wife, and home.
(Book of Pukar; Canto 3, p.40)

Kovalan, leaves his wife, Kannaki, and starts living with Matavi. After a few years of blissful romance, there is a misunderstanding between the two of them – Kovalan and Matavi. Kovalan leaves Matavi and goes back to Kannaki and reconciles with her.

The girl Matavi
Had a lovers’s quarrel with Kovalan as they amused
Themselves on the cool seashore. Inspired by fate,
She sang the songs of the seaside grove
To accompany her dance. Instead of reuniting them,
The songs made them drift apart. He returned
To his virtuous wife.... (Canto 27, 63-68)

Matavi, in the meanwhile, gives birth to Kovalan’s daughter, Manimekalai. Ilanko Atikal portrays the character of Matavi in a positive light. She is taught the path of virtue by her mother, owing which Manimekalai her daughter from Kovalan becomes a Buddhist nun instead of becoming a courtesan like her mother Matavi.

Matavi turned
To Manimekalai and said: ‘Come here, dear innocent girl,’
And removed her locks of hair braided with flowers.
Enraged, the god of love threw down
His sugarcane bow and his flower arrows.
She entered a Buddhist nunnery and obeyed its rules.
(Book III, Canto 30, 24-29)

She may be a courtesan but she is not responsible for seducing and therefore luring Kovalan away from his wife Kannaki. She is an artist who has knowledge about the fields of music and dance. When Kovalan leaves her, she remains...
loyal to him and leads a path of virtue. She is compared to the star Arundhati for her conjugal chastity and loyalty. B Mangalam states that, “it is in the representation of Madhavi that Ilango wins our heart. She is not depicted as the home-breaker or as the other woman... The inventory of Madhavi’s jewellery is a splendid catalogue that indicates her aesthetic taste.” It is through the character of Matavi that one gets to know about Tamil Nadu’s rich cultural heritage - its music, dance, costumes, jewellery and the practices prevalent in the King’s court. The mortal Matavi stands in contrast to the immortal Kannaki. According to Kamil Veith Zvelebil, “Kannaki is set into a significant contrast with Matavi: a naive, reticent, unsophisticated upper middle-class girl, in contrast to a literate, cultured, witty, brilliant artiste.”

**Pantiya King:** The King of Maturai or the Pantiya King is an important character in Book II of the epic. In Book III, his character is described in order to juxtapose him against King Cenkuttuvan, the Chera King. The Pantiya King fails in his Dharma as a king while the Chera king is described as the upholder of justice.

The former persecutes Kovalan without seeking evidence to corroborate the accusation made by the cunning goldsmith. He merely tries to appease his wife and the courtesans. Kannaki, then enters the court, demanding justice. She proves the innocence of her husband in the court. The king dies of guilt, and his death is followed shortly by the queen’s demise. After the Pantiyan King and Queen die, Kannaki destroys the city of Maturai.

*The Pantiya king who sat  
On the lion-throne, with Lakshmi glowing on his breast,  
Fainted and died, not knowing what to do  
With the ordeal of the woman with fair wreaths.*

*(Book III, Canto 25, 82-85)*

The fate of the King of Maturai projects the concept of Anangu – an aspect of Dharma which ensures a just society. According to Tamil belief, the duty of a just king is to protect a woman’s honour and protecting a woman’s chastity would keep the sceptre of the king upright. The Pantiya King’s sceptre had turned crooked as soon as he had wrongly punished Kovalan. It becomes upright again only after the Pantiya King dies.

*Now the king’s death has made  
The sceptre upright, bent by the inexorable hand  
Of fate.*

*(Book III, Canto 25, 99-100)*

**King Cenkuttuvan:** The Chera king is the focus of the “Book of Vanci”. The mortal king is responsible for the deification of the mortal-turned-immortal, Kannaki. B Mangalam states that;

*It is the alliance between the sacred power of Kannaki and the Chera king Senguttuvan that forms the focus in the third book.*

One can also state that the Book of Vanci is more about Cenkuttuvan than Kannaki.

*The Book of Vanci is set in the Chera kingdom. After burning down the city of Maturai, Kannaki is asked by Lord Siva to go to the Chera Kingdom where she will be able to re-unite with her dead husband. The one-breasted*
lady is then seen standing under the Kino tree by the Kuravas, the tribesmen of the red mountain. They report her sighting to the Chera king. Cattan, the great Tamil poet apprises the king about Kannaki’s past. After hearing about her tragic story, King Cenkuttuvan decides to deify Kannaki by establishing a temple in her honour. He, “recognises Kannaki’s sacred power as a chaste wife – as a Pattini – and decides to honor her by building a shrine in his kingdom”, as stated by B Mangalam. Cenkuttuvan declares that the stone for her idol will be brought from the Himalayas and not the nearby Potiyil hills:

It does not redound to the good name
Of kings born in our family of fierce swords
And great valor to get a stone
From the Potiyil hills and leave it in the waters
Of the Kaveri. In the Himalayas live the Brahmans
With matted hair, wet robes,
Three-stringed cords across their chests,
And the power of their three sacrificial fired.
If the king of mountains refuses us the stone
To carve the image of the goddess of chastity,
With garlands of willow around our necks,
We will show the evil men that survived
Our earlier onslaughts the uncertainty of lives

(Canto 25, 124-136)

The king’s declaration is not only the show of his loyalty and devotion to Kannaki but it is also a show of his might. He challenges the Himalaya, a divine figure:

We will rob the Himalaya
Of his crown, radiant like a moon, and glowing
With the wreath of mantaram flowers strung together
With kino blossoms. We will attend to this.

(Canto 25, 141-144)

His valour is comparable to that of the gods, like the warrior god, Murugan’s:

King Cenkuttuvan of the fearless sword,
Born in the illustrious line of the Cerals,
Tore apart the cadamba oak, fenced in
By the immense sea, to the amazement of the gods,

(Canto 25, 1-4)

He is also compared to the king of the gods, Indra:

Followed by a train of women
Pressing along the route, he left the environs of Vanci,
 Appeared like Indra of the fierce spear
Who wished to amuse himself with the heavenly women

(Canto 25, 10-13)

His army is like the god of death:

Like the god of death, this army
Marches forth with untamed fury.

(Canto 25, 169-170)
Cenkuttuvan orders all the kings to help him in his mission which includes the great Satavahana king Satakarni:

Inform
King Satakarni and ask him to get ready
For us a great fleet of boats to cross the holy Ganga.

(Canto 25, 170-172)

The Aryan kings of the North of the Ganga oppose the Tamil king’s invasion:

Opposed by such a warrior
Uttara, Vicitra, Rudra, Bhairava,
Citra, Simha, Dhanurdhara, Siveta,
And other northern kings, followed by Kanaka and Vijaya
Marched at the head of an army boundless as the sea.

(Canto 25, 188-191)

Cenkuttuvan charges at them like a “famished lion” (Canto 25, 193). A bloody battle follows and the Ceral king is victorious. He legitimises his position as the “Great King” (canto 25, 149) or Chakravarti. The establishment of temple of Kannaki is followed by a “Benediction”, where subjects of the Chera kingdom, kings and people from others kingdoms come to pay their respects to the Pattini/Kannaki, as well as express their allegiance to Cenkuttuvan. The final words of the “Benediction” are by Kannaki herself.

Those who do not worship the holy feet
Of Poraiyan of the great bow will find it
Difficult to bless our lord of the good earth.
The renowned daughter of our king, Kannaki,
Spoke the benediction: ‘May our Cenkuttuvan live forever’.

(Canto 29, Song 29)

She is described as the daughter of the king. Pattini Kannaki is, therefore, a creation of Cenkuttuvan. The final lines of the Book of Vanci declare the synthesis of the mortal and the immortal, of the sacred power of Kannaki and the imperial power of Cenkuttuvan. The mortal Cenkuttuvan seems to be more powerful than the immortal Kannaki. His power is such that he legitimises the position of Kannaki as a goddess, a Pattini, although she was turned into an immortal by the gods already.

Rather, Cenkuttuvan’s mission of establishing Kannaki as Pattini is a garb under which he implements and achieves his imperialist dreams. He unites the three Tamil-speaking areas – Chera, Chola and Pantiya – under him. It is for this reason that “Cilapattikaram may be justifiably viewed as a national Tamil epic” according to Kamil Veith Zvelebil.

The fact that King Cenkuttuvan, a mortal, is bestowed with such mighty powers displays the politics of the author. The author, Illanko Atikal, is believed to be a Chera prince and King Cenkuttuvan is his brother for whom he abdicates the throne. Atikal writes the epic in order to legitimise Cenkuttuvan’s position as the Chera king and in order to generate a sense of respect from the Tamil masses. Puram poetry, an important aspect of Sangam literature, is used to depict King Cenkuttuvan.
3.6 THE IMMORTALISED CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

The transformation of the mortal beings into immortal ones is unique to Cilapattikaram. Kovalan, Valli and Kannaki are three such characters in the epic.

**Kovalan:** Kovalan is transformed into an immortal being after his execution by the Pantiyan king. Kannaki burns down the city of Maturai. Kannaki is promised a reunion with her husband in the Chera kingdom. The promise is fulfilled. The transformation of Kovalan and Kannaki is completed in the red mountains of the Chera kingdom. He and Kannaki are taken to heaven. However, unlike Kannaki, Kovalan is not deified. His actions as a mortal are recorded.

The mortal Kovalan displays the notion of Karma. After the destruction of the city of Maturai, the goddess of Maturai tells Kannaki that Kovalan’s beheading by a drunken soldier is due to his karma in his previous birth. Kovalan had beheaded an innocent merchant Cankaman in his previous birth. Kovalan’s death in this birth is due to the curse of Cankaman’s widow.

However, Kovalan’s karma in his previous and present birth helps Kannaki display her karpu. She accepts Kovalan even though she had been rejected by her husband Kovalan in favour of Matavi. She helps him by giving him her anklets, cilampu. His character, however, remains unexplained. B Mangalam states that “Kovalan remains largely colourless and we never get to read his mind and motives”.

**Valli:** The wife of Lord Murugan is a mortal by birth. She is the daughter of the king of the Kuravai tribe who live in the red mountains of the Chera kingdom. She is the second consort of Murugan. He aggressively woos and courts her.

You came to our village wearing a cadamba garland
And holding a spear for the sake of our girl
But you do not have a fine peacock, the mountain girl
Valli, and broad shoulders. The people
Of the small huts, being foolish, will not accept you
As the god weathed in a cadamba garland.

(Canto 24, Song 19)

It is after her marriage to Murugan that she is immortalised and given the title of Pattini. Valli is not a character in Cilapattikaram. The tribeswomen, who follow the cult of Murugan, refer to her in their love song. In Canto 24, the friend of the girl in love with a “man from the mountain” seeks the blessings of Valli and Murugan for the successful culmination of the affair:

Son of the lord of Mount Kailasa! We adore
Your feet red as asoka flowers and your wife,
Valli, daughter of the mountainfolk, with a crescent
On her forehead, the color of peacock.
We ask you to bless our love, marriage with this man.

(Song 16)
The mortal Kuravais seem to identify with the immortal Valli, because of her past association with the tribe. The mortal lovers are inspired by the love affair between Murugan and Valli as it is also ridden with obstacles as is theirs.

The tribeswomen also begin to identify with Kannaki, whose transformation they have been recently a witness to. They pray to Kannaki:

\[
\text{It seems the man from the mountain will marry you.} \\
\text{We will sing a song in honor of the chaste woman} \\
\text{Who burned down the glorious city of Maturai} \\
\text{With her breast, who was shown her husband} \\
\text{By a host of gods, and is worshipped by many.”} \\
\text{(Song 22)}
\]

Kannaki, like Valli, is transformed into a Pattini from a mortal being. She is the epitome of conjugal love. Nevertheless, the difference between the two of them Kannaki and Valli is that while Kannaki becomes a Pattini because of her love, and the support she gives her truant husband and the fact that her anger and bereavement at the murder of her husband, she was able to evoke such powerful emotions that she managed to burn down the city of Maturai after flinging her left breast towards the city; Valli gets her position as a Pattini on the basis of her relationship with Lord Murugan. She epitomises the virtue of Karpu – because she is the chaste wife of Murugan. She does not exhibit her position dramatically as does Kannaki. Cilappattikaram valorises Kannaki’s virtues by comparing her to Valli.

It also marks the beginning of the cult of Kannaki, as the tribeswomen who were followers of the Murugan cult, now begin to pay reverence to Kannaki along with Murugan-Valli.

Kannaki: She is the protagonist of the epic. The title “Cilappattikaram”, i.e., The Tale of the Anklet is associated with her. Kannaki adds to the uniqueness of the epic. Firstly, she is a mortal who is immortalised and deified. Secondly, she is the protagonist of the epic. It is a rarity to find a woman as a protagonist in an epic. Manimekalai, the sequel to this epic, is the other epic which has a woman protagonist. Thirdly, she belongs to the merchant class. None of the Sanskrit epics of India or the Greek epics; depict middle class protagonists.

Kannaki is a human figure in the first two books of the epic. The epic opens with her bound in the domestic sphere. She is the ideal of conjugal love, loyalty and chastity. She is wronged by her husband but she takes him back and supports him by giving up her anklets. B Mangalam notes; “Kannagi is idealized as the silent, chaste wife in the Book of Pukar.”

It is in Book II that she traverses the private sphere and moves into the public domain. B Mangalam states that Kannaki “comes alive in the Book of Maturai as a woman who breaks free of societal barriers”. When Kovalan is killed, she goes to the court of the Pantiyan king, a public domain, and challenges him. An angry Kannaki resembles the divine Chandi or Kali. The image of Chandi or Kali is that of a masculine female, of destructive female sexual energy. She dwells in the public space, outside the ambit of the domestic. Kannaki too is defiant. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan compares her to Antigone
from the Greek epic. Sunder Rajan further assesses her position in the court as a public figure: “When Kannagi confronts the king, it is as the representative of a city, a class, and her sex and as a subject.” Her traversing the public domain from the private associates her “Karpu” as a social order rather than a personal virtue. Her actions exude the edicts of kingly duties. The king of Maturai fails to provide justice and thus bring doom to himself and his kingdom:

By crowned kings the Pantiyan lies condemned.  
And before the news reached our ears, it is well  
He gave up his life.  
To forswear tyranny and ensure the welfare  
Of his subject is the king’s duty. Born  
Of a noble line, suffering is his lot. His throne  
Is not to be envied.”

(Book III, Canto 25, 97-105)

The Book of Vanci begins with Kannaki’s apotheosis. The Kuravais are a witness to it.

Praised by the gods, she ascended  
To heaven.  

(Canto 25, 61-62)

They call her a Pattini. Kannaki’s transformation is unlike that of Kovalan. While Kovalan is immortalised by the gods and taken to heaven after his death; Kannaki’s gets immortalised directly from her human form. She is closer to the goddess Valli, in this regard, thereby, giving her a superior position than her husband. This, further, helps in the projecting the qualities displayed by Kannaki as ideal. Therefore, Kannaki, through her apotheosis into a divine form also manages to subvert patriarchy.

Her apotheosis is, however, completed by King Cenkuttuvan, who in order to establish himself as the ideal king, establishes Kannaki, who embodies the virtues of “Karpu (chastity), Vidamayurchi (perseverance) and needhi (justice)” (The Hindu Magazine: April 6, 2014: 2) as Pattini in his kingdom. After hearing about Kannaki from the tribesmen and the poet Cattan, King Cenkuttuvan asks his wife:

One chaste woman  
Gave up her life the moment her husband died.  
Another in a rage came to our kingdom.  
Good woman, tell us who is the better of the two?  
When the king asked her, the great queen replied:  
May the joy heaven wait upon the queen  
Who gave up her life before she felt the pain  
Of surviving her husband. And may the goddess  
Of chastity who has come to our good land be honoured.  

(Canto 25, 108-116)

She is honoured by having a temple in her name in the Chera kingdom. Kannaki and Cenkuttuvan collaborate to establish the edicts of kingship and chastity:
Pattini whom the whole world now worships
Had proved the truth of the Tamil saying:
“The virtue of women is useless if the king
Rules unjustly.” She made the Cola realize it.
She made the Pantiyan, lord of the south,
Realize, “The king cannot survive if this sceptre
Is crooked.” She made the Ceral,
Lord of the west, realize, “The wrath
Of kings will not be appeased till their vows
Are fulfilled, and made known to the kings
Of the north.” (Canto 28, 210-220)

The king in order to fulfil his promise of building a temple for Kannaki begins
an expedition to the north to procure the stone for the idol. He wages a gory battle with the Aryan kings in the north. His expedition institutionalises Kannaki as a Pattini. It is he who declares;

Worship
The goddess every day with offerings and festivities.
(Canto 28, 238-239)

As has been already stated, the Book of Vanci is more about King Cenkuttuvan and his expedition to the north. The immortal Kannaki turns into a symbol and is referred to whenever Cenkuttuvan’s kingship is mentioned. He completes Kannaki’s apotheosis by building her a temple. Kannaki and Kovalan’s kins, subjects from various parts of the Chera kingdom and other Tamil kingdoms collect before the temple of the goddess to pay respect to her. This assembly is also the show of strength for the Chera king after his triumphant campaign. He accomplishes his imperial dreams through the apotheosis of Kannaki:

He said, the king offered grants
To the temple of the immortal Pattini who had wrenched off
Her breast and set fire to the noisy city. (Canto 30, 145-147)

Further, it is reported in Canto 30 that;

Then Cenkuttuvan, the other kings and their strong armies
Praised the goddess in impeccable words,
As though they themselves had achieved salvation.
(Canto 30, 162-164)

Therefore, it can be said that Kannaki who subverts patriarchy in Maturai is brought back into its fold through King Cenkuttuvan. Her deification is at the cost of her human identity. She is no longer referred to by her human name, ‘Kannaki’; she is now a Pattini – the goddess of chastity. The power that she had displayed in the court of Maturai is silenced in the Book of Vanci. She is made the epitome of wifely duties and justice.

Her deification and institutionalisation include the process of myth-making surrounding her. In Canto 30, Matalan, the Brahmin announces:

The water
Will not lose its power till the sun and moon
Vanish. (Canto 30, 63-65)
She legitimises the Chera king as a great king and obviously there are no voices of dissent.

A voice rose
From the heavens:
‘Your wish is granted.’ (Canto 30, 161-163)

B Mangalam views the apotheosis of Kannaki in terms of her subjugation into the patriarchal domain which renders her silenced. “Kannaki is deified, made into a deity at the cost of total erasure of her human identity. She is no longer referred to by her name. She has become the Pattini goddess.”

The reason for her deification is explained by B Mangalam through a feminist perspective. She breaks societal norms by entering the public domain in the Book of Maturai and “Society did not, as it still does not, easily allow women to transgress. It draws them in, either to domesticate them or to deify them.”

The deified Kannaki is humanised through the lamentations of her mother as well as her mother-in-law/Kovalan’s mother who refers to her as daughter and daughter-in-law. Kannaki’s mother cries:

O my daughter, my partner! When your husband Abandoned you, I sympathised with you ... My dearest! Won’t you come back and rid me of my great sorrow? (Canto 30, 94-98)

Another interpretation of the apotheosis of Kannaki is that the Pattini and the Chera king collaborate to exude the principles of needhi (justice) and karpu (chastity). The final cantos of the Book of Vanci display this synthesis. Kannaki’s benediction to the king shows the confluence of the sacred power and the imperial power.

The transformation of Kannaki from a human to a divine being is wonderfully displayed through the use of Akam and Puram poetry. While Book I has mostly Akam poetry allocated to her, Book II sees the use of Puram for her. This happens when she enters the Maturai court and challenges the king. Since Book III is also an attempt to bring her into the purview of patriarchy, most of the Akam poems are attributed to her and to Valli (only Canto 24). The synthesis of Kannaki and Cenkuttuvan is completed in the last canto of the Book. It is here in Canto 30 that Kannaki is described through Puram poetry. The Book of Vanci therefore, displays the synthesis of the patriarchal and the feminine, the sacred power and the imperial, the human and the divine and finally, the Akam and the Puram.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen how the relationship between the divine, human and immortalised characters leads to conclude that the Book of Vanci or rather Cilappatikaram is more about human accomplishments than about religion. A middle class woman, Kannaki’s exhibition of the virtue of Karpu in her human
form makes her ascend to the position of goddess. She is superior to her husband Kovalan owing to her actions. Similarly, King Cenkuttuvan’s efforts towards deifying Kannaki makes him legitimise his position as a Chakravarti and a just ruler. The epic is a celebration of feminine power, through Kannaki’s apotheosis and deification. Her deification is also a means by which patriarchy, through King Cenkuttuvan, brings the defiant Kannaki into its fold.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Cilappatikaran has three types/ categories of characterisation. Comment on each category briefly.
2. How does the poet bring about the transformation of human characters to immortalised characters?
3. Comment on the main female characters in Cilappatikaran.
UNIT 4 AKAM AND PURAM POETRY IN CILAPATTIKARAM

Structure
4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Defining Akam and Puram Poetry
4.3 Akam and Puram Thinais & their Corresponding Landscapes
4.4 Akam and Puram in Cilappatikaran
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 Questions
4.7 Suggested Readings & References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Since Tamil and in particular Sangam Literature is a relatively new area for most of us we will be detailing what the powerful and poignant akam and puram poetic forms are in general and in Cilappatikaran in particular. In this unit we will look at what akam and puram mean, study akam and puram forms along with their corresponding landscapes, and then look at instances of akam and puram in the Cilappatikaran in detail. Let us begin by tracing the history of akam and puram in Sangam poetics.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

An important feature of Sangam literature is the use of the poetic form. According to the ancient Tamil treatise, Tholkappiyam, poetry’s subject matter is categorised under two heads: Akam and Puram. These two are mutually related in terms of being the opposite of the other and simultaneously complementing each other.

Akam stands for the interior, the individual, the feminine, and the varied phases of love. Women dominate the Akam. Puram stands for the exterior, the world, the masculine, violence and heroism. It is male-dominated.

Kamil Veith Zvelebil describes the two forms in the following words:

... in the early classical poems, which have been termed hedonistic and egalitarian in spirit, whose length varies from three to over eight hundred lines, and which often go under the now ‘popular’ term Sangam poetry, the religious inspiration and the philosophical reflection are almost totally absent. These were poems of ‘sentiments’ and of ‘exploits’ of the ‘noumenon’ and the ‘phenomenon’, in Tamil terminology, of Akam and Puram; in a somewhat simplified manner we may also say, poems of a total human erotic experience, and of heroism and public activity.

Let us define akam and puram next.
4.2 DEFINING AKAM AND PURAM POETRY

The contents of Akam and Puram poetry is located in terms of mutal – the first themes which are that of time and place, of karu – the seed theme that indicates the relationship between human beings and the world, and between society at large and uri – the essential theme that reflects the various phases of love and war. The mutal is further divided into Thinais. They are seven in number in both the Akam and the Puram.

There are five akam thinais, also known as Aintinai, and are named after the local flora and fauna. In akam poetry, the Aintianis are: Kurinchi, Mullai, Marutam, Neytal and Palai. The other two Akam thinais, Kaikkilai (unrequited love) and Perunthinai (mismatched love or lust), are considered to be inappropriate subjects for poetry. Similarly, in puram poetry, six out of the seven thinais are named after flowers/trees and indicate military situations.

S Murali points out that the categorisation of the environment into the thinais should be seen as “the earliest attempt by the Sangam poets towards the formulation of an environmental aesthetics, where the human bhava seeks its correspondence in the natural vibhava.”

Commenting upon the use of natural landscape in akam poetry, Xavier S Thani Nayagam states that:

"Akam poetry had to consider as its essential theme one of the five aspects of love poetry, choose an appropriate situation and write with the prescribed landscape, the annual season and the period of the day pertinent to the division. The poet had to be particular about choosing similes and metaphors from objects exclusive to the region. The objects were: the gods, food, fauna, flora, music and other objects indigenous to the region. By way of exception, the flora or birds or any of the other objects of one region might not be mentioned in a poem of another region for even nature is not rigorous in her natural divisions to be so exclusive. This mixing of regional objects was permitted and was known as “regional interchange”.

Puram poems though are easier as their themes are foregrounded in the objective. Let’s look at akam and puram thinais and their corresponding landscapes next.

4.3 AKAM & PURAM THINAINS & THEIR CORRESPONDING LANDSCAPES

The Akam and Puram thinais along with their corresponding landscapes are listed below:

The thinai concept has social and historical significance. According to P T Srinivasa Iyengar, the concept of the thinai illustrates the evolution of civilisation: “All these five kinds of natural regions are found in the Tamil country, though on a small scale and as the South Indian spread from region to region he developed the stages of culture which each region was calculated to produce.” According to him, the thinai concept reveals the spread of Tamils from the hills and mountains to the low-lying plains.”
Ramachandra Dikshithar saw the thinai concept as a clue to the pre-history of South India. A K Ramanujam says, (the) “actual objective of landscapes of Tamil country became the interior landscapes of Tamil poetry.” He also states that the “real world was always kept in sight and included in the symbolic.”

The Akam and Puram domains encapsulate varied human experiences in historical time and place. Akam poems depict various phases of and situations in love. Women’s voices are predominantly heard though they remain anonymous. In fact, in Akam poetry, the speakers are identified by their relationship. No proper names are mentioned. One witnesses the girl, her friend, mother, foster mother, the lover, the husband, the concubine, the wife addressing each other or speaking within earshot of the other. The poems are short, pithy, moving dramatic monologues that manage to pierce through the listener’s and reader’s heart.

In the Puram domain, it is the men – the king, the soldiers – who dominate and the women are only thankful that they are their mothers or wives. The heroes are referred to by their names, identities are revealed and celebrated. Apart from their battle wounds, kings are hailed for their charity, munificence and generous patronage of court poets in Puram poetry. There are Puram poems that stress upon the transience of life, impermanence of earthly glory and the levelling of the king and the commoner.

4.4 AKAM AND PURAM IN CILAPPATIKARAN

Cilappattikaram uses the unique non-Sanskritic poetic sequence that incorporates Iyal (poetry), Isai (music) and Natakam (dance) and is interspersed with prose sections. The epic in Tamil consists of 5730 lines in
**Akam and Puram Poetry in Cilappatikaran**

*akaval* meter and is said to have been composed around the 5th Century CE. The text also uses *kali* and *venpa* meters. The prose pieces are considered to be one of the earliest in Tamil poetry.

The *Book of Pukar* has 10 cantos and is situated in *Pukar* in the Chola kingdom. Since the Book is about the conjugal life of *Kannaki - Kovalan* and the love affair between *Matavi - Kovalan*, the *Akam* form of poetry is used. The *Neytal thinai* is invoked in cantos 6 and 7. It is here that the misunderstanding between *Matavi* and *Kovalan* occur. *Palai thinai* is used in canto 10, where the bankrupt and repentant *Kovalan* and his wife *Kannaki* leave *Pukar* without informing their parents.

The two women, *Kannaki* and *Matavi*, in this book depict their moral ethics through *Akam* poetry. *Kannaki* owing to her fidelity, patience and chastity depicts the supreme value of *karpu*. Meanwhile, *Matavi* is also presented in a positive light as a chaste woman, though not equal to *Kannaki*.

The *Book of Maturai* focuses on *Kannaki* and *Kovalan*’s journey to *Maturai* and their quest for their *karma*. *Puram* is invoked when *Kannaki* enters the court of the *Pantiya* king after the execution of her husband on the false accusation of theft. She proves her husband’s innocence in the open court. *Kannaki* with simmering eyes and dishevelled hair, holding her anklet is compared to Kali:

*Pent up with hatred and anger*
*At the loss of her husband, she stands at the gate, a golden anklet in her hand.*

The king dies of guilt. The queen dies of shock at the loss of her husband. *Kannaki* curses the entire city of *Maturai*. She wrenches off her left breast and flings it on the city of *Maturai*. She addresses *Agni*, the god of fire:

*Brahmans, good men, cows, chaste women, the old and children – spare these. Go after the wicked.*

*Kannaki’s* chastity becomes her power. According to B Mangalam, “Silenced and controlled by patriarchal institutions, Kannagi unleashes her sexual energy into a powerful tool of interrogation and subsequent annihilation of the unjust, the adharma, the untruth.”

She transgresses into the public domain. This transgression is depicted through the use of *Puram* poetry. She was the forgiving wife in the *Book of Pukar*. She takes her disloyal husband back and helps him by giving up her anklets for him to sell. However, in the *Book of Maturai*, she is vengeful and punishing. Therefore, *Kannaki*, who in the *Book of Pukar* is depicted through *Akam* is now in the *Puram* domain. B Mangalam says that; “Kannagi, the silent, chaste wife, cloistered within the Akam domain, now invades the public/Puram domain and challenges the king and proves in the open court that her husband was not a thief.”
It is in the Book of Maturai that Kannaki’s apotheosis into a deity begins. She is a middle class woman in the first book. In the second, she is promised to be made into an immortal. This transition is depicted through her movement into the Puram domain from the Akam. The apotheosis is complete in the Book of Vanci. This book shows the synthesis of the private/ Akam and the public/ Puram domains. B Mangalam states that “Kannagi’s traversing from Akam to Puram is a fascinating journey.” It is here that the silent chaste wife of the Book of Pukar is silenced again through her deification in the Book of Vanci.


“her friend speaks to her”
“she speaks to her friend”

– with ‘He’ sometimes within earshot. The lyrics are about the woman’s relationship with her beloved, “the man from the high mountain”. This canto reflects the various phases of love. The friend of the woman in love encourages her to bathe in the waterfall:

We will bathe in the mountain waterfall
That sparkles and flows, bright as Indra’s bow,
A blend of powders: the kohl, musk and sindura.

The woman in love tells her friend that because of her strange behaviour, the villagers doubt that she is possessed by spirit:

The village gossip thinks I am possessed by Katampan.
She has called the shaman to perform dance
To rid me of this illness caused by the man
From the cool mountain on which peppercorns grow.

As the two women speak, the man is within earshot:
Our man from the mountain with a fragrant garland
Hid himself and was all ears as we sang.

The woman expresses her fear of separation to her lover:
The people
Of the small huts, being foolish, will not accept you
As the god wreathed in a cadamba garland.

The friend assures the woman that there will be a successful culmination of her love:
It seems the man from the mountain will marry you.

Canto 24 and these poems in the Kurinchi thinai end with prayers to the newly transformed Pattini Kannaki for the fruition of their love:

We will sing a song in honor of the chaste woman
Who burned down the glorious city of Maturai
With her breast.

The women do the Kuravai dance, usually dedicated to Lord Murugan and Valli, while singing in praise of Kannaki. They also pay respect to their king, Cenkuttuvan:

In the same way, our lover will come to this place
While we sing our songs and perform
The round dance. May the king of the west country
Who ruled over the Kolli hills
And inscribed his bow-emblem on the Himalaya
Live in endless joy in the days to come. (26)

Kannaki as the symbol of chastity and fidelity is the right one to seek blessings
from for, the success of a relationship. These Akam poems indicate the merging
of the Murugan cult with the newly anointed cult of Kannaki. Reference to
Kannaki and Cenkuttuvan by the lovers foreshadow the synthesis of the virtues
of chastity and kingship which occurs in the last canto of the Book of Vanci.

Canto 25, “The Choice of the Stone” delves into the heroic/ masculine domain
as the narrative shifts from Kannaki and the hill dwellers to King Cenkuttuvan.
The Puram genre is now invoked. The king learns about Kannaki from the
hill dwellers and the poet Cattan. He decides to build a temple for her and
thereby, officially declare her as the Pattini. It is from canto 25 onwards, that
the narrative becomes more about Cenkuttuvan than Kannaki. Kannaki
becomes the silent deity while Cenkuttuvan, the symbol of patriarchal authority,
institutionalises her and also legitimises his authority as a king.

Canto 25 begins with the Puram thinai, i.e, Vanci. Vanci thinai describes
the preparation for war.

Here, King Cenkuttuvan’s chivalry during war is described. He is compared
to Lord Indra:

Followed by a train of women
Pressing along the route, he left the environs of Vanci,
Appeared like Indra of the fierce spear... (10-12)
Further,
He mounted his great elephant,
And his train wound to a distance
Of twelve hundred and sixty miles (15-17)
Also,
After setting fire to the enemy's camp,
The imperishable fame achieved by feeding
His soldiers, and the prowess of a king on the eve of battle.
He ordered his troops to put on their battledress
And wreaths of unbroken palm leaves .... (150-154)

The Vanci thinai is accompanied with the Korravanci thurai (theme), here.
The function of the Korravanci thurai is to praise the king who destroys his
enemy valiantly in the battlefield. Lines 157 to 173 of Canto 25 are in the
Korravanci thurai. For example,

Villavan Kotai,
His minister, the said:
May your upright rule
Last for many years! On the bloodstained field
Of Konkan you routed your equals
Who forfied their banners with the emblems of
the tiger and the fish (159-162)

Another example,

We cannot forget
Your courage when you escorted your mother
To bathe in the swollen Ganga, and fought alone
Against a thousand Aryas that the cruel god
Of death was stunned. (167-171)

This canto also refers to the Vallai song: “the vallai song of those who pounded grain”. These are songs in praise of a heroic figure and are sung by women while working in the fields, winnowing or gathering grains.

Canto 26, “Removing the Stone” uses the Tumpai thinai. This thinai is used for the description of the battle. The king engages in a violent battle with the Aryan kings of the North. The descriptions are that of gore and are blood curdling:

With gleaming tusks, and by swift horsemen,
Smothered the battlefield, blinded people,
Made hoarse the throats of bells suspended
From the necks of war elephants, and choked
The far-sounding conches of the standard bearers,
And stopped them from adding to the terror: (210-215)

As the king destroys his enemies, he is described as a famished lion. Such descriptions are typical of the Tumpai thinai:

As a famished lion
Stalking for prey rejoices at the sight
Of a herd of elephants, so did Cenkuttuvan rejoice
Seeing his foes march towards him. Weathers
In a garland of Portia, he hurled his troops
Against the enemy. (193-198)

His wrath and thirst for blood makes him equivalent to the god of death:

On his head he now wore a wreathed of white
Dead nettle, braided with palm leaves,
And appeared on the battlefield to the Arya king
Like the god of death himself, riding a buffalo
And devouring all the lives in a span of a day. (230-234)

The descriptions get gorier as the goblins begin to celebrate the violence and feast on the dead bodies of both the camps:

With crowned heads for an oven,
Broken heads for pans, shoulder blades for ladles,
The goblin chef fed all the goblins. Smacking
Their lips, they gave thanks:
“May the king
Of the upright sceptre who fought and won
This just battle live forever.” (259-263)

The description of the victory of the Chera king is also described in terms of gore. Such a portrayal becomes significant because it subtly goes on to question the effectiveness of war. The Chera king may be victorious but the celebration by the goblins makes this victory a damp affair. Illango Atikal, as a Jaina ascetic, therefore, questions the need for such violence in order to defend Dharma. Or rather, he forces us to question whether it is legitimate to camouflage the violent imperialist tendencies with the cause of Dharma. This is done through the Puram form. B Mangalam states that; “Even as Illango follows the Puram literary conventions, his message of non-violence and
renunciation of evil gets reiterated in each of the three books of the epic through the Jaina precepts that lie at the core of the poem.”

Canto 27 titled as “The Lustration”, sums up the preceding narrative and simultaneously pushes the plot forward. It, therefore, moves both in the Akam and the Puram domains.

The Queen of Vancti learns that the King is on his way back from the war. She begins to make preparations for his welcome. These descriptions are made through the Kurinchi thinai in the Akam domain:

A flowery canopy topped the golden harem.
Made by expert hands, it was decorated
With strings of pearls and flowers, and blazed
With the glitter of diamonds and gems fastened
By gold thread. (217-221)

The king and the queen will be re-united again. The queen dresses up to welcome him with the help of her maids:

Renounce your sorrow at the parting
Of your dear lord.
The dwarfs and hunchbacks
Came up to her and said:
Let beauty reappear.
The noble lord is come. Brighten up
Your fragrant hair with everyday ornaments. (227-232)

This canto also re-narrates the story of Kannaki. Matalan informs the king about Kannaki, Kovalan and Matavi. These descriptions of their domestic lives, describing various phases of love, delve into the Akam:

The girl Matavi
Had a lover’s quarrel with Kovalan as they amused
Themselves in the cool seashore. Inspired by fate,
She sang the songs of the seaside grove
To accompany her dance. Instead of reuniting them,
The songs made them drift apart. (64-69)

The news of Kovalan and Kannaki’s death, leads to the death of Kavunti, Kannaki’s mother and of Kovalan’s mother:

And she (Kavunti) moaned: ‘Was this the fate of those
Who were my companions?’ She vowed to starve
Herself to death. So ended her life. (95-97)

Kovalan’s mother gives up her life:
His wife too, reeling from the shock
Of her son’s terrible death, gave up her life. (110-111)

The others, Kovalan’s father and Kannaki’s father; give up their wealth:
When Kovalan’s father heard of what had become
Of his son and daughter-in-law and also of the just king
Of Maturai, he was distraught. He gave away
All his wealth and entered the sevenfold monastery of Indra. (103-107)

Matavi and her daughter Manimekalai renounce their material life and enter the Jaina monastery:
I must now lead a virtuous life.
Manimekalai should be spared the life of a courtesan
Which is full of troubles.
Her hair, wreathed in flowers,
She removed, and entered a Buddhist nunnery

The reference to death continues in Puram poems also. The Pantiya King offers the sacrifice of one thousand goldsmiths to Pattini to absolve the kingdom of the sin committed by the goldsmith who had implicated Kovalan falsely:

O Poraiyan! A wreath of palm leaves
You wore to celebrate the success of your sword,
Brandished in your right hand, in tearing apart
The margosa tree guarded by the Palaiyan.
Be gracious enough to listen to me.
The victorious Ver-Celiyan, ruler of Korkai,
Offered a sacrifice of one thousand goldsmiths
In a single day to the goddess Pattini
Who had wrenched off one of her breasts.

Through the references to death in both the Akam and the Puram domains, the author seems to underscore the Jaina precepts of renunciation and transience of life. Canto 27 also describes the valour and the righteousness of the Chera king through the Puram domain:

O King
Of the vast world, may you live forever!
In a day you broke the nine parasols
Of nine kings who had formed a league
Against your cousin, Killivalavan.

Canto 28, “The Dedication of the Memorial Stone” adheres to the Kanchi thinai of the Puram genre. Matalan counsels the king about the uncertainty of life and asks him to conduct sacrifices and other rituals for spiritual power:

O just king! It is unnecessary to remind men
Of wisdom that youth will not last forever. O guardian king!
Lakshmi resides in your chest through you see
Your body covered with grey hair. Souls
In divine bodies are often reborn in human bodies,
And souls in human bodies may be reborn
In animals.

And, The king of the loud anklets, invited
Sacrificial priests, instructed by teachers
Expert in the four Vedas. They were asked
To begin the festival of rites as advised
By Matalan.
He ordered the Arya kings
Removed from prison and taken outside the city
Of Vanci of great renown to Velavikko Palace,
Enclosed by ponds and cool groves.

It is in canto 28 that the synthesis of Kannaki as a Pattini and King Cenkuttuvan begins. The virtues of Chastity (Karpu) and Kingship merge.
The virtue of women is useless if the king
Rules unjustly. She made the Cola realize it.
She made the Pantiyan, lord of the south
Realize, “The king cannot survive if his sceptre
Is crooked.” She made the Ceral,
Lord of the west, realize, “The wrath
Of kings will not be appeased till their vows
Are fulfilled and made known to the kings
Of the north.”

This synthesis is well depicted through the alternation between Akam and Puram. The synthesis, however, leads to the absorption of Kannaki into the patriarchal domain of King Cenkuttuvan. She is deified by Cenkuttuvan and she in turn goes on to legitimise the rule of king Cenkuttuvan as ideal. B Mangalam states that “The cult of Pattini is thus institutionalised. Her worship is ritualised and authorised by the king’s decree. While the king is eager to partake of Pattini’s sacred power, her deification is legitimised by the King’s authority. The symbiotic power assumes awe and power in the eyes of the subjects and other kings alike.”

Canto 29 titled as “Benediction” contains both prose and poetry section. The Preface is a prose piece which summarises the past happenings of the text. The poetry section is in the Akam form. They are in the form of lamentations by the relatives of Kannaki – Tevanti, the foster mother and close friend. Cenkuttuvan, Kannaki and the girls of Vanci also speak. The close friend and the foster mother remain anonymous. Their words are a reminder to the readers about the virtues of chastity, perseverance and justice – the ideals the Pattini goes on to symbolise and, the Jaina value of renunciation.

The poetic section begins with an introduction of the speakers – Tevanti, Foster Mother and the Close Friend. They introduce themselves as a relative of Kannaki. Tevanti says:

Know me as the friend of the woman of the Cola country

The Foster Mother says:

Know me as the foster mother of the woman of cool
Pukar

But followed her husband as a dutiful wife
Know me as the friend of the woman of PumPukar

They also go on to inform the listeners/audience/readers about the fate of some of the close relatives of Kannaki and Kovalan. Tevanti while lamenting before the image of Kannaki says:

The day your mother
heard of the troubles your torn-off breast had caused,
O woman with beautiful locks of hair;
She died of grief...
Your mother-in-law too died?

The Foster Mother says:

Macattuvan heard of the evil done to Kovalan
By the wretched man, and of the death
Of the guardian king. He lost heart
And wished he were dead. He gave away
His wealth and renounced the world. (6)

The Close Friend introduces Manimekalai:
Matavi...went to the sages
That live under the bo tree, gave away her wealth,
And entered a nunnery...
And did you also hear, friend,
Of the renunciation of Manimekalai? (7)

Cenkuttuvan’s words are a description of the vision that he has of the Goddess:
Of a lightning figure with gold anklets,
A girdle, bangles round her arms, earrings
And other ornaments of pure gold. (9)

Kannaki appears next and her words are a reiteration of her assimilation into
the patriarchal fold. The Pantiya king, whose authority she had challenged and
subverted in the Book of Maturai, is now forgiven by the Pattini. Their
relationship is that of a father and a daughter.

Blameless is the Pantiyan, now an honoured guest
In the palace of the king of the gods.
I am his daughter. I am going to play
On Venvelan’s hill. (10)

The girls of Vanci sing in praise of Pattini. They sing in praise of the “Tennavan’s
daughter” (11) and also praise the Chera dynasty:

We shall praise Vanavan.
Let the gods praise the king of the Vaiyai (12)

The Pantiya king is also blessed and thereby absolved of his sin of being unjust:
Let us praise the king who gave up his life
Burned by the tears of the woman
Who suffered the outcome of past fate. (13)

These stanzas are followed by the Song of the Wooden Ball (16-19), the Song
of the Ball (20-22), the Song of the Swing (23-25), the Song of the Pestle
(26-28). These songs are a celebration of the political power of the Tamil empire.
The Chola, Chera and Pantiya dynasties are praised in these songs.

The final stanza of the Canto is a synthesis of the sacred power of Kannaki
and the imperial power of Cenkuttuvan.

Canto 30 titled “The Granting of a Favor” completes the deification Kanniki.
Cenkuttuvan institutionalises Kannaki as Pattini. The canto describes the value
of renunciation, through the example set by Manimekalai. The Puram thinai
Kanchi is used here.

She then told him of Manimekalai’s great Renunciation. (8-9)

Illango Atikal’s renunciation is also narrated here by Tevantikai:
In the elegant audience hall
Of the ancient city of Vanci, you were seated
Beside your father. When the astrologer predicted
You would inherit the throne, you disapproved of him
To relive the pain of Cenkuttuvan (169-174)

The Kanchi thinai is also used to talk about the prevailing beliefs in the cycle of birth and death as well as in the organic, casual principle of Karma:

Good and bad
Actions have their own reward. Those who are born
Die, and those who die are reborn. Old truths, these. (134-136)

The canto seems to bind the Akam and Puram together. It ends with instructions for men and women which hold good in both the public and the private worlds:

Do not hurt any living thing
be charitable and do penance ...
Do not give false evidence ...
Uphold domestic virtues ...
Youth, wealth and the body
Are unstable... Few are the days of your fate.... (185-198)

It thereby, goes on to complete the synthesis of the sacred power and the imperial power, the Kannaki and Cenkuttuvan, the feminine and the masculine.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

The use of the Akam and Puram forms is strategic in Cilappatikaram. It helps in exemplifying the main theme of the epic – the signification of Karpu and the ideals of kingship. In this block we looked at the beginnings of Sangam Literature and Cilappatikaran’s place in it. We developed an understanding of Tamil Literature, looked at the powerful female characters in the epic, the Jain elements in Cilappatikaran, and the two poetic elements of akam and puram as used in the epic.

4.6 QUESTIONS
1. Attempt a literary history of Classical Literature in Sanskrit and Tamil.
2. Examine the conventions of akam and puram poetry.
3. Attempt a comparison between the use of metaphors and suggestions in Sanskrit aesthetics and in Tamil poetics.
4. Examine the politics of gender, relations and the patriarchal authority of the King in the epic.
5. Analyse the character of Kannagi as the woman protagonist of the epic.
6. Write a brief essay on the cult of Pattini.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES
2. Minatchisuntharan, T. P. History of Tamil Literature. Annamalai University