Kalaignar in English Translation

# The Treasure Trove of Time and the Verse Key

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BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY

Kalaignar M Karunanidhi is essentially a poet, and even his prose writings have a heavy preponderance of poetic diction and poetic deviances. His intrinsic passion for poetic expression transcends his apparent limitations on technique, and the resultant poetic style has become a defining characteristic of all that he has written, both prose and poetry.

Kalaignar's is poetic prose or prose poetry, which is poetic insofar as it is infused with imagery of an original kind, and expresses things in adequate language, matching language to the thought and the mood. His poems, in particular, demonstrate his uncommon ability to strike at the right word and the right image by which to evoke his thoughts.

Most of his poems touch and disturb the mind of the learner or the reader, born as they are out of the disturbance the poet feels at the innermost depths of his heart over the external happenings, which range from the significant socio-political events of the day through concerns about the Tamil language and the Tamil culture to things romantic at one end and rational at the other.

Kalaignar's poetic expression is natural and spontaneous. It is not interesting thoughts dressed up in flowery language, nor is it a mental exercise of a laboured kind, metrically structured. He neatly fits into the Keatsian conception of poetry coming naturally as leaves to a tree, surprising by fine excess, and not by singularity.

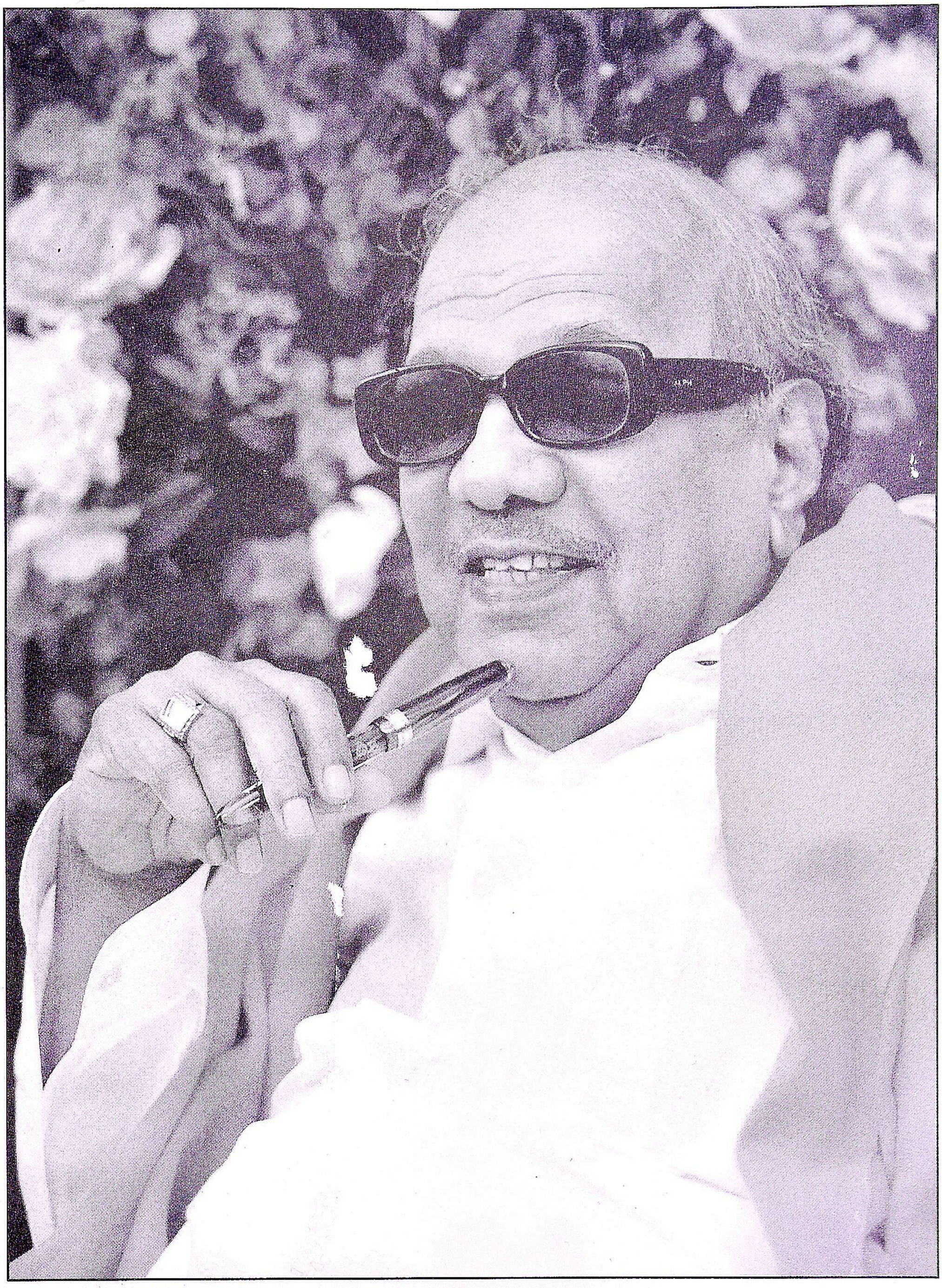
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# The Treasure Trove of Time and the Verse Key

*Translated by*

P. Marudanayagam

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P. Marudanayagam

V. Murugan

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Bharathiar University
Coimbatore, India

MACMILLAN

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M. Karunanidhi
Chief Minister

Secretariat
Chennai - 600 009
Date: 12.05.2009

# Foreword

I am extremely happy to know that Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, has taken the initiative to bring out a selection of my writings in English.

Bharatidasan, a formidable revolutionary poet, instilled in the Tamils an intense love for Tamil in such exhortations as

May you thunder, O Conch!
That the never diminishing Tamil
Is our life-breath and our prosperity.

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Perarignar Anna devoted their entire lives to promote among the Tamils an awareness of the dignity of their race. Following in their footsteps, from my childhood to this day I have immersed myself in the task of writing in order to keep the Tamil youth ever vigilant because of my desire that the Tamil land and the Tamil society should progress rising to the level of the rest of mankind. With this end in view, my writings have taken numerous forms such as poetry, drama, fiction, essay, epistle and travelogue.

Many have admiringly observed and continue to observe that my literary output has also contributed to the onward march of the Tamils in several spheres. In such a context, let me unreservedly and to my heart's content praise Bharathiar University, especially its Vice Chancellor, Dr G. Thiruvasagam, for his efforts to publish the most significant of those writings in English.

My thoughts have always centred round the idea that the Tamils should awaken and that the Tamil land should achieve worldwide progress. May these translations effectively serve that cause dear to my heart!

To
Dr G. Thiruvasagam
Vice Chancellor
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore

(M. Karunanidhi)

# Vice Chancellor's Note

There is a close parallel between the nationalist Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi (after whom this University is named) and Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi in that both of them have a deep-rooted conviction in art being an agent of social transformation and the writings of both seek to release people from the shackles of slavery and show them the way of dignity and self-respect.

Bharathiar firmly believed that at the root of all social problems lay the evil of the caste system. All his life, he stressed that there were only two castes - the righteous and the unrighteous, the former superior and the latter inferior. A standing example of the might of the pen over the sword, Bharathiar's writings played a very significant role not only in gaining freedom for India from foreign yoke but also in unfettering his countrymen from the utterly dehumanizing beliefs and practices of the Indian society.

Kalaignar, remaining in the forefront of the fight against social inequality in all its forms, is a writer with ingrained social consciousness and has fathered numerous social reforms as the head of the government and as the leader of a political party, thanks to which people from the sections of the society once looked down as being incapable of thought and knowledge are today intellectuals, professionals and leaders of men.

A grand fusion of Periyar, Anna and Bharathiar, Kalaignar stands as a towering personality. Kalaignar now at 86, age has not withered his intellect nor has time made his writings stale.

Determined to secure a presence for Tamil literature and culture on the global scene, this University has already translated Bharathi's poems into English and conferred the"Bharathi Tamil Chemmal"award on Kalaignar in 2007, the University's Silver Jubilee year. The present endeavour, translation of Kalaignar's works into English, is a major step towards realizing this goal.

**G. Thiruvasagam**

# Prologue

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi's literary works in English translation should constitute a gift of the Tamil language to world literature.

In so far as Kalaignar is both a visionary writer and an active practitioner of his vision, he is a phenomenon unto himself, standing a rung or two above his fellow artists of all genres.

Kalaignar's significance in the history of Tamil literature primarily lies in his restoration and renewal of the pristine glory of Tamil, the language that is the mother of the Dravidian family of languages and that is one of the primary classical languages of the world.

Kalaignar's creativity began to manifest in his concern for the ethnic identity of the Tamils and the aesthetic exuberance of the Tamil language, and today it has matured into a seminal contribution to world literature.

Looked at the need for winning international recognition for Tamil literature, especially in the context of the other pan-Indian language, Sanskrit, enjoying worldwide attention and study, the present translations of Kalaignar's selected works into English are an attempt in the right direction.

Such of these translations are also a need of the hour for the Tamil language to demonstrate its capacity for indestructibility and rejuvenation, at this hour of the prognosticatory threat of the social scientists that globalization would in its wake see the languages of ethnic communities either wear off or die out.

**Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu**

# Vice Chancellor's Note

G. Thiruvasagam

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# Introduction

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, born in 1924 in a hamlet of Thanjavur in the southern part of India, has eminently succeeded in making spectacular contributions both as a statesman and as a man of letters. His has been a full life providing ample space for diplomacy, social reformation and creative writing. Neither a philosopher nor a full-fledged academic living in an ivory tower, he has the courage and the wisdom to think and to act remarkably. A prolific writer endowed with unusual powers of observation and meditation, he has been ceaselessly adorning his beloved Mother Tamil with a steady stream of writings, leaving no genre untouched. It may be poetry or prose, song or verse, essay or story, play or fiction, social novel or historical novel, creative writing or criticism, memoir or autobiography, script for a film or a play, broadcast or speech – he can handle it with astonishing ease. What he has written till today may run to more than fifty volumes of 300 to 400 pages each.

What Karunanidhi states in the first volume of his autobiography about the year in which he was born is a telling comment on the ethos of the times as well as on the political, social and cultural forces that moulded his world-view. That was a year that witnessed momentous events. Lenin, the supreme architect of the communist revolution in Russia, died and Stalin came to power. Trotsky's advocacy of violent worldwide revolution was abandoned in favour of Stalin's plan for *"socialism in one country"* and the communist leaders decided to adapt the movement to the differing situations in various countries. Turkey became a republic under the presidentship of Kemal Ataturk during whose fifteen-year reign, the country's political and economic structure as well as its religious and social bases was totally transformed. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* written during his incarceration in Bavaria, preaching anti-semitism, power worship and disdain for morality and outlining his strategy for world domination later became the bible

of the Nazi party. Since all the empires had been weakened by the first world war, many colonies boldly rose in revolt against them.

When Nazism, Fascism and Communism were becoming prominent in the West, Gandhian ideology started taking shape in India. It was in 1924 that Gandhiji, released from prison, became the President of the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected its General Secretary. India had awakened from its deep slumber and Gandhiji's appearance on the political scene electrified the Indian masses. The Belgaum Congress meet had the party's future course of action mapped out. Though most of the Indian political leaders were unanimous in their view that the British should be driven away from the country, they were hopelessly divided with regard to the strategies to be developed for dealing with the foreign power. The labour unions in the country were gradually becoming stronger and stronger. The feudal lords and zamindars were waging a losing battle against the tillers of the soil. If in the south seeds were sown for organized fights for social justice, in the north there appeared signs of disruption of communal harmony.

It was in 1924 that Periyar E.V. Ramasami planned an epic battle against the evil of untouchability that later earned him the title of Vaikkam Hero. Besides laying a firm foundation for the labour movement in Tamilnadu, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar became a fierce fighter for the country's freedom. Finally, Karunanidhi significantly adds that it was the year in which "the revolutionary of revolutionaries, who dispelled the thousand-year-old darkness of the Tamil land," Arignar Anna, was a high school student equipping himself for the historic role he was going to play.

In this chronicle he is able to identify, of course with the benefit of hindsight, the intellectuals and men of action who later became his models as well as those against whom he had to define himself. Though all those personalities, movements, parties and ideologies might have attracted his attention at an impressionable age, he was going to choose Periyar and not Gandhiji, Arignar Anna and not Jawaharlal Nehru, the party wedded to Dravidian ideals and not the Congress, Periyar's Marxism and not Nehruvian socialism, and Tamilnadu and not India. To him, as to his guides and companions in the Dravidian Movement, the social and cultural emancipation of the Dravidians was of greater importance than even the political freedom of the country.

Even as a fourteen-year-old adolescent, Karunanidhi was captivated by the self-respect movement of Periyar E.V. Ramasami, whose fiery speeches and writings exerted an irresistible influence on several thousands of young men and women of Tamilnadu during the early decades of the twentieth century. To the politically,

socially, economically and culturally oppressed of the Tamil land, Periyar appeared as a new messiah who could save them from the atrocities perpetrated against them in the name of religion. His words and deeds, ideas and activities, principles and practices took the southern part of India by storm as he travelled the length and breadth of it tirelessly, asking the Dravidians to become aware of their racial identity and to boldly fight for their release from the shackles of slavery, superstition and inferiority complex which, in his view, had been the handiwork of an alien race. The young Karunanidhi was one of his prize catches.

If Periyar's thoughts made an indelible impression on him, Arignar Anna's powerful oratory became a perennial source of inspiration. He thoroughly soaked himself in Anna's speeches and writings, committed numerous admirable utterances of his to memory and revelled in quoting them as often as possible. When it came to his own speeches, he didn't slavishly imitate Anna but scrupulously developed a distinct style of his own. If Anna's ornate and colourful prose is almost verse and if every paragraph of his can be turned into a *viruttappā* by a few slight modifications, Karunanidhi's prose is punchy, heavily ironic and full of witticisms. If every sentence in the former's speech, having a lyrical charm of its own, is a case of "linked sweetness long drawn out," every sentence in the latter's speech moves fast and quickly reaches its carefully planned climax. If Anna's mastery of Tamil prose is almost unsurpassed, every speech of Karunanidhi is a sparkling performance. One would be reminded of the comparison Dryden draws between Demosthenes and Cicero:

> One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on
> fire all at once and never intermits his heat. ...
> One persuades, the other commands.

Of all the modern poets, it was Bharatidasan, the organ voice of the Dravidian movement, who won his heart by a poetry that galvanized the Tamils into action. He can use Bharatidasan's similes, phrases, lines and whole poems to dramatic effect in his own speeches and dialogues for films. Inspired by Bharatidasan's play *Iraṇiyan allatu Iṇaiyaṟṟa Vīraṉ*, he reconstructed the myths relating to Ravana, Vali, Hiranya and Indrajit. The Dravidian stance on many more legends, myths, literary representations and historical personages was later exquisitely articulated by Karunanidhi in different genres and modes.

Kalaignar's lack of college education or of classroom learning of ancient Tamil writings never stood in the way of his becoming an accomplished writer and competing with the university wits of his time. Energetic and strenuous self-schooling more than made up for it. Plunging into studies of classical and modern Tamil works, he got as much out of them as any contemporary Tamil scholar

could. He took to *Tolkāppiyam, Tirukkuṟaḷ, Eṭṭuttokai, Pattuppāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* and Sundaraṉār's *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam* just as fish take to water, and a sound knowledge of these stood him in good stead by shaping his vision of life and having quite an impact on the texture of his prose and poetry. Besides writing learned expositions of some of these texts, he could provide new renderings of many of these into lucid modern Tamil so that they could easily reach the masses. Because of his re-presentations of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in more than one form, Tiruvalluvar became a household name in Tamilnadu.

There is no simple yardstick with which the performance of any writer can be assessed. It has to vary from group to group if not from individual to individual for there are writers and writers. Their missions vary; their methods differ. Gandhiji was a prolific writer but would never claim the title of an artist. Among those that have produced many works of lasting value, there have been political revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky and Mao Tse-Tung, political theorists such as Hobbes, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and Malraux, philosophers such as Voltaire, Bertrand Russell and Sartre, activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Periyar E.V. Ramasami and Martin Luther King and scientists such as Charles Darwin, Julian Huxley and Einstein. The writings of these can't be measured against those of creative artists such as Flaubert, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who firmly believed that artistry was of primary importance and that their loyalty to language came before everything else.

Karunanidhi is almost equally split between his responsibilities to art and politics. He may be in or out of power; he may be the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu or the Leader of the Opposition but his creative vigour shows no signs of abating. The older he grows, the more voluminous the literary output happens to be. For the life, career and achievement of Karunanidhi, we can find three amazingly close parallels in contemporary world histoy: Arthur Koestler, Pablo Neruda and Wole Soyinka. Koestler, who, interestingly begins his autobiography with an account of what happened in different parts of the world on his birthday, was a communist when he was in his twenties, left the party during the Stalin purge trials, became an influential spokesman of the non-communist left and is now remembered for his writings characterized by an impressive journalistic style and a sense of commitment. Neruda earned a name as a poet, diplomat and communist leader, received the Nobel Prize for literature while serving as ambassador to France and is known for his highly personal poetry in the collection *Twenty Love Poems and One Song of Despair* and for his writings that glorify his home country's landscape and condemn the exploitation of the Red Indians. Soyinka, a Nigerian

revolutionary, playwright, poet and novelist, has won international acclaim for his writings which combine Western and Yoruba traditions.

Karunanidhi's writings, dashed off in the white heat of inspiration in the midst of a hectic schedule, are in Tamil, at once a classical and modern language that has, because of several centuries of constant use, become a supple medium of prose and verse. They have to be made available in English if the world at large, especially the West, has to recognize their power and glory.

Prof. P. Marudanayagam

# Preface

The New Historicism gaining prominence during the last three decades has considerably reduced the gap between literature and history. By juxtaposing a literary text and a historical document of more or less the same period, this approach helps us learn a lot about the life of a particular society. Showing a combined interest in the textuality of history and the historicity of texts, it breaks down the barriers between a literary text and other kinds of social production. Greenblatt, the founding father of New Historicism, claimed that it enabled him to have a delightful dialogue with the dead. The poems in Kalaignar Karunanidhi's *Kālappēḻaiyum Kavitaiccāviyum* bring together literature and history at two levels. They attempt to derive the political, social and cultural history of the ancient Tamiḻ land from the celebrated Caṅkam classics and the extant historical evidences; the history thus gleaned is turned into charming poetry. There is thus a simultaneous transformation of literature into history and history into literature. Going far beyond the New Historicists, the poet-historian almost totally obliterates the distance between history and literature. Besides presenting the formidable Tamil heroes and their epoch-making achievements, the volume highlights the grandeur of Caṅkam lyrics by rendering them into a Tamiḻ easy to comprehend and extremely pleasing.

As soon as Tamiḻ was declared a classical language, he sounded a clarion call for an upsurge of interest in promoting the cause of Classical Tamiḻ. Now that the dawn of Classical Tamiḻ (*"Chemmozhi Viṭiyal"*) has taken place, it behoves our young men and women to realize that the Caṅkam corpus is a repository of our unique culture and to convey their message and the vision of life embodied in them to the world.

But he was not going to leave the entire task to the academics and keep watching resignedly whatever they did. In fact, he himself had been at it for a

long time and nothing – not even the most dreadful of political challenges – could prevent him from girding up his loins and getting into the field with redoubled vigour. He had been harbouring a grievance against the historians that began the story of Indian civilization from the shores of the Ganges. The time had now come when he would set the record straight. It is not as if no evidence can be traced for a reliable account of the political and social history of the ancient Tamiḻs. Ancient Tamiḻ writings in the form of *Eṭṭuttokai, Pattuppāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai* were still available though a lot more had been unfortunately consumed by fire, water and white ants because of the indifference of the Tamiḻs themselves or of the conspiracies of the cunning enemies of Tamiḻ. But then deeply immersing himself in what was extant, he realized that there was much that was worth salvaging.

In this collection of poems, more than once he stresses the importance and the dire need to trace the history of Tamilnadu by opening the treasure trove of time with the help of the verse key available in the form of Caṅkam writings. To those that contend that it is utterly useless to keep speaking of the past glory of a community, his stern reply is that a race will be able to learn valuable lessons from its past achievements and misdeeds and to fare forward with greater courage and confidence.

> We can face the onrushing foes
> Only if we are armed
> With the sword-and-shield of our history. (p. 42)

Although historians like Ramachandra Dhikshitar have with enough evidence demonstrated that it was Tamiḻ culture that had spread to the Kumari Continent, Indus Valley, Egypt and Sumeria, we have not made an attempt to gain anything out of the stupendous revelation, whereas strangers to that culture have been capitalizing on that. To those that ask what harm will overtake us if we live without evincing any interest in our history, his answer is that if it is acceptable to a human being to live without the head or the neck or the tongue or the teeth, the Tamiḻs are welcome to be indifferent to their age-old tradition.

When in his poems he went into raptures over the ancientness and excellence of the Dravidian race, there were people who asked, "Why should you heat up the tea of Aryan-Dravidian distinction when it has become cold?" He directs their attention to the writings of P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sesha Iyengar and Surya Narayana Sastriar who, in their scholarly works, do not fight shy of comparing the two races. Mentioning that of the sixty-eight excavations which witnessed to the presence of Roman gold coins in ancient India, fifty-seven took place in the

southern part of the nation, he adds that this piece of information may appear to be insignificant to those that would like to black out Dravidian history. It is for the future benefit of our young men and women that the past has to be dug out with care and concern. Only if we keep harping on the antiquity of the Dravidian race will our "young coconut saplings grow into mighty teaks." (p.135)

He also dilates on the harmful consequences of starting the history of India from the Ganges and not from the Kāviri. Though an eminent historian like Vincent Smith has explicitly stated that the Indian history should begin from the deep south, our academic historians continue to completely ignore the ancient Tamiḻ land in their works. In Kalaignar's view, "It is like pouring water on the branches of a tree avoiding the roots and the stem" (p.158). As early as 1945, he voiced his concern that the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas of the Tamiḻ land were conspicuous by their absence in the contemporary textbooks of history.

There is no history !
There, alas, is no history
on the shores of the Kāviri
or of the speeding Peṇṇai !
Woe to the Tamil land !
It all began, they say,
from the Ganges !
Who witnessed the reign
of the Pandyas?
Who carved the history
Of the reputed Cheras?
Have they ever sung
the Cholas' prosperity?

In which celebrated place
did the Cheras reside?
Why did the heroic Pandyas
fall upon evil days ?
How did cowardly concepts
come crowding into the busy land
where the Cholas sauntered?

Such questions arose
disturbing the depressed mind. (pp. 256 - 57)

In *The Treasure Trove of Time and the Verse Key,* Kalaignar converts a series of episodes from the lives of ancient Tamiḻ kings into poetic scenes. These have been carefully gleaned from ancient Tamiḻ texts and authentic historical documents. There is evidence to show that during an incredibly early period, the Tamiḻs went by ship to distant lands to conduct their trade. The history of Toṇṭaimāṉ Iḷantiṟaiyaṉ born to a Chola prince and Pīlivaḷai reveals that more than four thousand years ago Pūmpukār flourished and had contacts with the land of the Nagas. In the third century B.C., the Mauryas were defeated at Mōkūr by Iḷañcēṭceṉṉi, a Chola king who was praised by the Tamiḻ poets as "Ceruppāḻi eṟinta Iḷañcēṭceṉṉi. Pāṇṭiyaṉ Peruvaḻuti sent an ambassador to the famed Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar in 20 B.C. The Tamiḻ kings had sturdy, sword-wielding Romans as their able guardsmen in their palaces and war-camps.

It has to be said here that vindicating Kalaignar's stand, new evidence has emerged during the last decade. Recent research in the field of archaeology corroborates the evidence provided by literature with regard to the antiquity of the Caṅkam Age. New excavations in places such as Āticcanallūr, Koṟkai, Māṅkuṭi, Karūr, Pērūr, Vallam, Uṟaiyūr and a host of other sites have enabled the archaeologists to revise their earlier views. Besides these, Koṭumaṇal, Mayilāṭumpāṟai and Taṇṭikkuṭi excavations have yielded a lot of valuable information about ancient Tamiḻ culture. The historians now believe that the transition from the late Iron Age to the Caṅkam period would have taken place around the sixth century B.C.

The charming recounting of Kalaignar's version of ancient Tamiḻ history includes rapid-fire questions about certain historical and literary issues leading to his original response to them. The brief but learned discussions of the following problems as addressed by him arrest our attention: Where was the first human being born? How did the Kumari continent come to be called Lemuria? Who was the Paṉdya king who sent a team of ambassadors to Augustus Caesar? By whom was Ātitta Karikālaṉ, the elder brother of Rājarājaṉ, assassinated? What was the role of Rājarājaṉ himself in the tragic historical occurrence? On which date was Rājarājaṉ born? Was the Pallava capital Kanchi situated in Tamilnadu or Andhra Pradesh? Did Kaṇṇaki have a happy married life before Kōvalaṉ left her to live with Mātavi? How did many of the ancient Tamiḻ texts disappear? When was the *Akam-Puṟam* discourse overshadowed by the *Ikam-Param* discussion?

Although the book consists of fifty-eight poems in free verse and appears to be episodic in nature, the underlying theme that unites these pieces is that Tamil culture is ancient and unique and has an unbroken tradition. Each poem being independent and self-contained may, of course, be read in isolation and enjoyed. But no reader interested in the grandeur of the age-old tradition can afford to miss any of the poems. The structure of every poem is in accordance with its subject matter. Some pieces consist of fairly long lines, a few of very short lines, and others mix long and short lines. The first poem entitled *'Potu Ulakam'* begins with very short lines; *'Paḻantamiḻar Paṉṉāṭṭuttoṭarpu'* opens with short lines and ends with long ones. *'Āṅkāṅku Aṭaiyāḷa Muttirai"* consists of long and very long lines. In many poems, prose is interspersed with verse. Historical documents, quotations and references to contemporary events are all given in prose. The thirteenth poem, which is on Kāravēlaṉ's defeat, includes Appaduraiyār's historical notes in prose. *"Kaṉaka Vicayar Kal Cumanta Varalāṟu"* has short lines in verse at the beginning but metamorphoses into a one-act play of three short scenes. In the course of some poems, one or more Caṅkam verses are quoted verbatim and their interpretations in simple modern Tamiḻ verse follow for the benefit of the common reader. Many Caṅkam poems are lucidly rendered into verse in Kalaignar's characteristic style. The poem that announces the dawn of *Chemmozhi* (Classical Tamiḻ) catalogues in rhythmic verse the names of thirty-odd formidable women poets of the Caṅkam period.

In most of the poems, there is a deft handling of similes of Kalaignar's own fused with traditional ones, bearing ample testimony to his thorough acquaintance with ancient Tamiḻ texts. The poem entitled *'Uvamai Aḻakukku Uriya Paricu Eṉṉavām?"* (What reward does the beauty of the simile deserve?") pays a glowing tribute to the simile used by Ayyūr Mūlaṅkiḻār to drive home the impossibility of getting back the fortress captured by Ukkirapperuvaḻuti:

> Is it possible to recover the drop of water
> absorbed by the red-hot iron in the smithy?

Inspired as it is by hundreds of such similes in ancient, medieval and modern Tamiḻ writings, Kalaignar's creative power doesn't lag behind. For this collection of poems itself, he has chosen a double metaphor as a suitable title : *The Treasure Trove of Time and the Verse Key*. In a situation where vandalism has played havoc with historical remnants and in the absence of adequate historical documents, he has to use Tamiḻ poems as a key to open the box of time containing the valuable history of the Tamiḻs.

The hypocrites who glorify women in public but do them incalculable harm behind the scenes are described by him as the ones that accomplish their ends

"hiding themselves like the teeth at the back of the mouth" (p.22). Having been instigated by jealousy, some wanted to ruin the joy of the couple, Aṭṭanatti and Atimanti. Their motiveless malignity is exquisitely brought out in a simile:

> How can the bitter-hearted bear the sight
> of the eating of a jackfruit
> by people in the neighbouring houses? (p.107)

The ships that were found in large numbers in the sea of Tamilnadu are likened to "the serial set of bulbs burning bright" (p.119). If there had been absolutely no evidence to trace the history of the Tamiḻs, we would have been rendered useless as "the matches drenched in water and no lamps of history would have been lit" (p.127). The Cholas were unable to rule the land following Tiruvaḷḷuvar's instructions because the aliens had entered the land "hiding themselves like black cats in the dark" (p.161). Even though Rājarāja Cholan's enemies were spreading scandals about his involvement in the assassination of his brother Ātitta Karikālaṉ, he was not disturbed but remained firm doing his good deeds for his Tamiḻ land. And the poet asks, "Will an iron pillar wear off when touched by the wings of flies?" (p.213). During the otherwise glorious rule of the Cholas, Tamiḻ had to decline yielding place to Sanskrit. This infamous development was like "the pouring of buttermilk into milk" (p. 231).

In order to describe the destruction of Kavāṭapuram by a *kaṭalkōḷ* (tsunami), Kalaignar brings in numerous mixed metaphors.

> Their delight did not last long; as though
> Challenging it, the wild dance of
> Nature started six months later
> In Kapāṭapuram; in the grip
> Of a demon, Nature unleashed
> A savage attack on the waves of
> The big sea with a gigantic
> Iron hand and the whole area
> Became a forest of dense darkness.
> Making a loud deep thunder-like noise,
> Lashing like flashes of lightning,
> Entering the sea as an earthquake,
> Nature played havoc with the two
> Rivers which became one, changed

Course, shifted from one place to
Another and finally disappeared;
Who can assess the impact of
Nature's fury? After the demon
Of the deluge destroying all
Ended its wild dance, peace showed
Its head; yes, it showed the damage
Done in that long wide open space!
There was no trace of human life. (p.267)

While reading the independent poems in the order in which they have been strung together, anyone will be assailed by a variety of emotions. It is with an overwhelming sense of pride that the history of the Tamiḻs is narrated by Kalaignar whose enthusiasm is exceedingly infectious. We rejoice at the breath-taking account of the series of victories by the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas but this delight is tinged with sadness whenever we remember – and that is bound to happen too frequently – that these three Tamiḻ clans, who, in Parimēlaḻakar's view, had existed from time immemorial, often fought among themselves though they belonged to the same race and were related to one another through marriage also. We are deeply shocked when Kalaignar ends the account on a tragic note expressing his profound regret over the historical fact that the three great monarchic families that flourished for several centuries ultimately destroyed themselves by internecine wars. It is a thousand pities that though they were known for their heroism, wisdom, courage, determination, physical strength, dignity and boundless generosity, they lacked racial unity and it was the tragic flaw that brought about their ruin.

There is an outburst of righteous indignation whenever he has to report the foolish or wicked deeds of any of the Tamiḻ kings. The later Cholas, especially Rājarājaṉ and Rājēndiraṉ, had numerous achievements to their credit but it was during their heyday that Tamiḻ was being replaced by Sanskrit. Kalaignar is unequivocal in his condemnation of this aspect of their reign. We can hear a melancholy piece of music when he mentions the strange coronation that takes place on a battlefield where Rājēndiraṉ crowns himself king immediately after his elder brother is killed by the Chalukyas.

'Should thirty thousand men lay down
Their lives for one man to get crowned?'
A Jain saint singing thus passed by

The battlefield and this sight was one
That would bring ponds and lakes of tears
Even into the eyes of the merciless! (p.250)

A Chola king's ill-treatment of two Chalukya ambassadors comes under severe censure and Kalaignar calls it a blot on the Chola history.

Although the work as a whole has a serious underlying theme, humour is not lacking. He is a master punster who is very adept at playing with words in his speeches and writings. He makes at least a couple of puns in every poem but, unfortunately, they can't be effectively conveyed in English. To be sure, there are other instances of humour which are translatable. In the poem on Rājarājaṉ, there is a passing mention of the *five, six wives* of the Chola king gathering together for one of the rare meetings with their husband. But much to our amusement, we realize that he has actually *eleven* wives when their long names are listed by the poet! In the poem on Picirāntaiyār, we come across a hilarious scene depicting the display of love of an old couple in the presence of their grandchildren.

Kalaignar has consulted numerous primary and secondary sources as the substance of the poems in this collection would demand strenuous research. *Tolkāppiyam, Tirukkuṟaḷ* and the *Caṅkam* corpus are, of course, works in which he has had a life-long interest. They have nourished him and his life-time ambition has been to get them world-wide recognition in all possible ways. Of Caṅkam anthologies, four—*Puṟanāṉūṟu, Akanāṉūṟu, Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Patiṟṟuppattu*—are understandably given supreme importance here and they must have been constantly consulted by him. Paraṇar, Nakkīrar, Kallāṭaṉār, Iṭaikkuṉṟūrkkiḻār, Picirāntaiyār, Kaḻāttalaiyār, Veṇṇikkuyattiyār, Nakkaṇṇaiyār, Māmūlaṉār, Ātimantiyār, Cāttantaiyār, Ālattūrkiḻār, Iṭaikkāṭaṉār, Erukkāṭṭūrttāyaṅkaṇṇaṉār, Ayyūr Muṭavaṉār, Mūlaṅkiḻār, Kuṭapulaviyaṉār, Māṅkuṭimarutaṉār, Kārikkiḻār, Neṭṭimaiyār, Neṭumpalliyattaṉār and Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ are the poets whose poems are here highlighted through commentaries and renderings into simple modern Tamiḻ. Some scenes from the epics, *Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai* and *Kuṇṭalakēci* have been re-presented as poetic dramas. Kalaignar doesn't shun away from Bhakti writings such as *Tēvāram, Tiruvācakam,* and even *Periyapurāṇam,* which are alluded to wherever there is a need. When the victories of Tamiḻ kings are recorded with documentary evidence, he brings in Oṭṭakkūttar and Ceyaṅkoṇṭār, the last one having been his favourite since boyhood. The poems of Bharati and Bharatidasan and the essays and speeches of his mentor Arignar Anna in which he had immersed himself even as an adolescent provide him not only with

words, phrases and images but with ideas also.

Besides great literary works, plenty of historical writings have served as his indispensable secondary sources. The notes of the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang, Rahula Sangrityayan's collection of historical short stories, Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*, Ramachandra Dhikshidar's *The Origin and Spread of the Tamils*, Appaduraiyār's *Teṉṉāṭṭuppōrkaḷ*, P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar's *History of the Tamils*, Mayilai Ciṉi Vēṅkaṭacāmi's *Makēntiraṉ's Varalāṟu*, Ayyam Perumāḷ Kōṉār's *Pāṇṭiyar Varalāṟu*, Maṅkaḷa Murukesan's *Pallavar Varalāṟu* and Zograf's *A Survey of Languages of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Nepal* have all been thoroughly explored. The writings of Paritimāṟkalaiñar, Pērāciriyar Cuntaraṉār, Sadasivappandarattar, Avvai Duraisami, Nilakanda Sastriyar, and Ma. Irācamāṇikkaṉār and historical documents such as the copper plates of Ciṉṉamaṉūr were not spared.

If, in addition to exquisite poetry, he has been able to impart a fund of knowledge relating to Tamiḻ history, it is because he has delved into all available writings on the subject.

Prof. P. MARUDANAYAGAM

# Transliteration Key

## Vowels

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

ஐ ai

ஔ au

## Consonants

| Hard | | Soft | | Medial | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| க் | k | ங் | ṅ | ய் | y |
| ச் | c | ஞ் | ñ | ர் | r |
| ட் | ṭ | ண் | ṇ | ல் | l |
| த் | t | ந் | n | வ் | v |
| ப் | p | ம் | m | ழ் | ḻ |
| ற் | ṟ | ன் | ṉ | ள் | ḷ |

## Āytam

ஃ ḵ

# 1 The World is Common

Void! void! void!
Seen by none.

None could see;
There was none to see.

Widespread void!
Light came first.

In which direction?
None knows; not at all.

We gave the direction a name!
We worship the direction!

The void was not seen;
The light was not seen.

When we were not there
How could we see?

Diverse sounds in the void!
On numerous occasions!

None hearing;
None could hear;
There was none to hear!
Several crores of thunder
To thunder in a corner.

Red planets
Fiery balls
Rashly rushing
Got scattered.

They say there were nine or ten planets;
There could have been one or two more.
The earth came into being as one of them;
Chaos started later!

All this was unknown then;
Only after several crores of years;
The thirsty earth wanted water!
Nature shed tears saying 'no'.

Changing the name into rain
The earth solaced itself!

Having quenched the heat of its body
It stored the rain water as seas.

In the midst of five great elements
Water, land, air, sky and fire.

Daily conflicts, eternal intimacy.
The coming of newer and newer lives
Without a kiss.

There was a change in it also,
There were changes in them
Lighting new beings and copulating.

Worms, insects, flocks of birds,
Packs of wild beasts,

The gathering of patient domestic animals,
The desire for exquisite evolutionary growth.

We are men that gradually grew from monkeys;
Let us, from the stage, raise the voice of principle.

Wealth is common; rights are common;
Wrong to claim the world's wealth as one's own.

# 2 Evolution

This living world, they say, is

Five hundred crores of years old.
On the basis of advancement of
Civilization and the evolution of
Earthly beings, dividing the age
From five lakh years to about
Ten thousand years as B.C.
Our ancestors, old tigers
Called that only the age of Lemuria . . .

The rest of the age belongs to the glorious
Civilization of the people of the big Indus Valley
Starting with the culture of the Kumari Continent.
In the absence of alternate views and if it is
Impressed in our minds that this is
The truth that shines like the purest gold,
We have to agree, line by line, with
The statement of reputed historians
That life began in this world eighty crores of years
Ago and that our ape-man walked on this earth
Forty lakhs of years earlier.

What took birth five lakh years before
Was the first Stone Age!

Kumari witnessed great culture
Fifty thousand years ago!

That alone is the culture of Kumari Continent!
Though it was born there
Till five thousand years ago
It flourished joyously in the Indus Valley!

How did our pleasing Kumari Continent
Get the other name of Lemuria?

The monkeys of Lemur would leave for food
At night and this was the dominant scene on the Continent.
Hence clatter playfully named it Lemuria
As lemur in Latin meant 'night-wandering ghost'.

I have a hunch that historians eminent
Might have named it Lemuria telling her,
This is the fittest name for you, wily lady,
Since by your wild dance of a ghost
You got the big Kumari Continent narrowed
And the land shifted;

In a prolonged *kavya* of poetic style
I give the essence scrutinizing historical treasures
Like the lucidly written account
Of the race conscious Pāvāṇar Tēvanēyar
With the help of the work *From Lemuria to Harappa*

Given to me at sweet seventy-five by my friend
And polyglot intellectual Mativāṇar
Against the background
Of Sāngrityāyan's writings.
I will be delighted to receive letters from those
That differ and I will hail them.

Changes didn't take place overnight
For the human monkeys to stand up.

Several crores of dozens of years had to pass by;
Is it enough to pass a resolution in a conference
For a monkey to grow into a man?

Isn't evolution the shaping of a chisel into
A sword in a smithy over many thousands of years?

The monkeys of Lemur had thirty-six teeth
Those that came later had thirty-four.

The number of teeth didn't change in hours
Many centuries passed between the changes!

The men of Stone Age, they say, had thirty-two teeth
And they may become twenty-eight later.

For the monkey that stood on its tail
To stand on its legs and to walk

To become the human animal
That runs in the Olympic tracks
It took many thousands of years
It is this that is called evolution.

# 3 One Should Have a Golden Heart; One Should Have the Love it Gives!

Today taking a paper

Filling the pen with ink,

We wonderfully paint

The entire life of the ancient man that lived

Six thousand years ago
His eating, sleeping and rejoicing;
We research with the help of
A thousand convenient tools.

We easily announce our findings;
But didn't Tolkāppiyar older than Ayyan Valluvar
Write his *Tolkāppiyam* with the stylus
Two thousand years ago?

That grammar of life written on palm leaves
Begins with the one-sense organism that knows by its body,
Ends with the six-sense organism that knows by its mind,
Recounts the number of senses that all lives have.

A grand epic and a picture of life's definition,
A poem that narrates man's history beginning with
Plants, trees and creepers.
A mountain on this earth, a peak of the mountain;
I would say that it is one's duty in the midst of
Writing man's history to kneel down and pray to
The one that gave a faultless grammar of tradition!

Six thousand years ago
Without clothes,
Without the ability to cook
The six-taste food,
Without the feeling of love or the sense of duty
Without any relationship between bodies
Clothed with bones and skins
Without the habit of caring for virtue or decorum
Acting according to his whims and fancies,

Man wandered about the forest
Made friends with the cattle.

He was habituated to picking
What he saw and eating what he picked
Whenever he felt hungry.

If he saw the 'magnetic stone' or if
'The stone' came to his side with love
They would search for their own food
Like owls and other birds of prey.

After that they would be strangers to each other;
Who would sing lullabies for the ones to be born?

That is what happens in a Sangrityayan story.
When Diva, a paragon of beauty and her passionate
Lover Sur were lying unconscious after an amorous play,
She said, "Though you are my mother's son, dear, I didn't approach you;
Please forgive me for that." "Enough if you don't feel shy
In my presence," he said; later they fused
Like a flood merging with a flood
Like a Veena and its melody.

They got separated, ran away from
Each other to play different veenas.
During this degenerate life devoid of discipline
The practice was to speak through gestures.

The language of dance was the language of the day
Conveying through facial signs
What one didn't want, what one shouldn't do;
A history there is how the spoken language came later.

When beaten, shouting 'ā' and 'ū',
Calling someone at a distance 'vā',
When terror-stricken, crying 'ayyō',
While in ecstasy, loudly laughing with an open mouth

If securing the second place, music became sounds,
Prose and poetry, music and dance became
The basic grammar of all languages.

It was the reign of the lower tongue that
In due course made the gesture-language
A minister without portfolio and as per
The dictum of Ayyan, "control your tongue
Even if you don't control anything else,"
Mounted a guard over the tongue-emperor.

If the tongue that paved the way for civilization
Began to speak, it was due to a development
That took place forty thousand years ago.

The man that ate raw meat to alleviate his hunger
Learnt to light a fire and to cook with love.

To find a way out to manage the misery
Of the stomach, animals had to be hunted and killed.

Even in hunting, there were fresh problems
Like rivalry, jealousy and fight.
The conflicts that began during the days of our
Grandmas and great-grandmas haven't stopped
Today during the time of their granddaughters and grandsons.
The lesson that *Atticūṭi* teaches
"Control your anger" has fallen on deaf ears;
Nobody knows why.

If the situation shouldn't worsen to a state
That forces us to think that men of those days
Leading an uncivilized life in caves
Are far superior to men of these days
Used to a life of conflicts,
Men and women very much need
The golden heart of the earth;
It is hard to secure.
It will cause love, it will create peace!

# 4 The Sword is the Foe's; The Blood is Ours!

Whether the man of the Stone Age wanted
To learn more and more of new things or not,
Nature came forward to teach him a lot
Like the mother that breastfeeds her child.

It was in truth due to the command of his mind
That he killed the animal for food, ate its flesh
And dressed himself in its peeled skin.

It was but Nature's mercy that urged him
To take its iron and stone to make instruments
That helped him live a life of strength.

Without straining a single nerve,
The land-owners keep increasing their wealth,
Their stomachs growing bigger and bigger;
To make them weep, the labour class has
Risen in revolt. If, unlike in the past,
This is the situation today, there is a reason for that.
Here is the sound of the voice of
An intellectual revolution
That will deal a death-blow to slavery.

The prince of poets Bharatidasan sounded
The war-drum to say that a gang of rogues
Told the poor and the oppressed who asked
"Why? For what? How?" that the command of God
Was responsible for all;
The labour force, freed from the fetters of God
Should be let loose on the gang.

We see grace and humility in the mansions of the rich!
Since mercy and culture couldn't be seen in the Stone Age
Men fought having their war camps in hills and forests.
Though the Age of Gold is superior, the patronage of
The roguish men of wealth and landlords can be
Dimly discerned only through a strong lens.
To the eyes of those that wear the Vedic glasses
The labouring man's sweat won't be visible at all.
Time was when unity in diversity could be savoured
As festivals, comic shows and diverse pastimes.

But this changed and differences developed fast;
Hostility took deep roots and grew into a tree of poison
With huge branches;
Attacking one another with swords and stones
Hundreds and hundreds of them perished as listed.
The possessions of both the groups went to waste.
In the darkness of stupidity, the soldiers that survived

On either side lit the lamp of death, knelt down,
Touched the ground and in praise of
The heroic martyrs offered their silent prayers.

When I was writing this, a part of the oft-read
*Glimpses of World History* by Nehru haunted
My mind and inspired many thoughts.
Nehru says, "If you have a hard look at history
You may learn the evolutionary growth of this world
From grass to worms to trees to animals
To birds to snakes to rocks to human beings;"
He brings as evidence Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam;*
Having praised man's reasoning power,
The Light of Asia says in the same book,
"If progress means the murdering of
Brothers by brothers as witnessed in
The world war, there is something seriously
Wrong with that progress." Is there any
Medicine that will cure such worries?

Taking a bowl of medicine, a lady came there;
It can be certainly said that she was not the paragon
Of beauty who was called a magnetic stone earlier.

Opening her eyes wide she walked slowly,
Slowly towards the wounded lying on the ground,
One foot paining and the other burning.

In order to identify, she turned
One or two bodies;
But for those that had run away
The rest were lying there
Having faced death heroically.

The lady carrying the bowl of medicine
Walked with dignity, with a sense of pride.
You may ask why she did it that way.

One feudal lord, a terrible sinner there
Had gobbled the entire land in that area,
Though many had the title-deeds
After distributing it for plenty of money.

To cover up the sinful deed,
He spoke like a madman
Claiming that he would do yogas
And yogas, was scared of none
And would ultimately win.

The whole town rose in anger
Cursing the foxy men that had
Appropriated what rightfully belonged
To others, leaving the virtuous in the street.
The rising sun appeared on the scene.
The lady, peacock-like, got on to
A pillar-like stone meant for washing
Clothes in a ghat and began to speak.

"Lend me your ears, comrades!
Listen to the ideas I utter!
We are only a few, living in a forest!
Those that are jealous of us and
Angry with us are also like us, a few!
If anger is reciprocated by anger
Only anger will prevail and
Our ashes alone will remain.

It doesn't require much of intelligence
To instigate one group against another.

The landlord is sleeping on his cot in his bedroom!
We, the labouring common, march to the graveyard!
Because of the passage of time
Men of the Stone Age have been
Gradually progressing and have

Now become rational beings.
To make this clear, let all of us
Get united and first let us throw off
All our differences into the dustbin!
Later let us raise the flag of revolt
And change everything upside down!
Arise and organize a revolution!"

Having listened to the lady's words
Uttered as were the floodgates opened,
Those that were wounded and others
Gathered round her with gaping mouths
And gave vent to their surprise,
"How is it you speak so well?"
She gave a reply that everyone could hear.
"I don't speak for myself alone,
I learnt to speak in order to
Teach everyone to speak."
A warrior wounded in the chest
Lying still till then in the dark
Woke up and asked, "You know me, lady?"

"Why not? You were mine! Why
Did you join the enemy's camp?
Treachery it is to see traitors"
Saying this, she went far off.

"Forgive me, lady! Having understood
The enemies, I returned to this side;
Don't you know that? See, my dear!
I am now dying of the wound in my chest
Caused by the foe's arrow."

Shouting *"Ayyo!"* she embraced his body.

At the point of death, he asked,
"My sandal-statue! When is

The revolt you spoke of? What form
Will it take?"

"What I meant was not a rebellion
That will create chaos; it will be
A cultural revolution! It won't be
A war but a fight for social justice!
Everything in a righteous way!"

The dying man asked with a smile on his face:
"Is it a war without the use of a sword,
Without shedding blood?"

"Yes," she said, "The sword the enemy brings;
The blood we give; That is the virtuous war!"

As he was embracing her
His life ebbed away.

# 5 Remnants Found Here and There!

The name Nākanāṭu evoked at once the memory

Of Pīlivaḷai and the Chola king Neṭumuṭikkiḷḷi
Who prominently figured in the procession
Along the royal road of history and I put
Cāttaṉār's epic *Maṇimēkalai* through a sieve
For evidence of their existence and evidence
I got without much strain.

In the story of Āputtiraṉ narrated in that epic
Astrologers state that in Nākanāṭu, Pīlivaḷai,
Lovely like a peacock, would be born to
The king Vaḷaivaṇaṉ and Tēvi and enter
The Elysium of love together with a Chola prince
And bear a child in her womb. Once they become

Man and wife is it necessary to cast the horoscope
To predict pregnancy? Today in our nation
What the family needs is birth control; otherwise
The seas have to be converted into land!

Neṭumuṭikkiḷḷi was the son of Kirtti,
The loving husband of Cirtti, a lady of the Pāṇar clan;
Urged by the long cherished desire to witness
The Pūmpukār festival, Pilivaḷai visited
The place with her father Nākaṉ and the very
Next day they met and their hearts got stolen.

Pilivaḷai who came to Pūmpukār, indifferent
To the scandal that might arise, fell into the lap
Of the Chola, in a frenzy of love! Caught
In the grip of his love, she sank into it!

* * *

Since the two lamps of the royal clans, their
Eyes, blinded by the madness of love,
Were joined together, the seed sown in
The womb of Nākaṉ's daughter grew into a creeper

Of the Chola clan called Iḷantiraiyaṉ.
Pregnancy adding to Pilivaḷai's beauty,
She returned, worried and shedding tears,
To her land when so commanded by Nākaṉ.

When the child was born and played in
The mother's lap, in a ship she sent him
Well-guarded to her husband's place
Kāviripūmpaṭṭiṉam; but fortunately,
Though, caught in a sea-storm, the ship
Sank with all inside, the child escaped; yes,
Found on a seashore bound by a *toṇṭai*
Creeper, he is said to have been named Toṇṭaimāṉ!

Becoming the ruler of Kāñci, the capital
Of Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam and winning
The continuing fame of ancient history
The same one became Iḷantiraiyaṉ.

What does this ancient account explain?
From the Kumari Continent that became
The food of a stormy sea to the large
Chola kingdom on the shore of the Kāviri
River, the entire area and the vast expanse
Owned by the descendents of Nākās
And wiped out by the fury of Nature,
Were places where great culture resided.
Even today Nākarkōyil witnesses to it.
Nākappaṭṭiṉam, Tirunākēcuvaram
And Nākalūr are seen here and there
As remnants of that civilization.

Since it is said to have begun from
Four thousand B.C., if you add two more
Thousands of years of the present era
The age of the ancient culture is six
Thousand years; foreign contacts, sea-trade,
The love that came crossing the sea from beyond
Several hundreds of miles - the first letter
Of all these that began in the remote
Past is the dearest southern land of ours.

Those that start writing history, therefore,
Without wandering here and there, may seek
Caṅkam writings to excavate evidences
Numerous and easy like the palm fruits;
The duty to contribute to it is ours.

# 6 Where to Start Writing World History?

Crores and crores and crores
Many crores of years ago
One particular year, one month,
One day, one hour, one second –
Darkness, darkness, darkness,
In which nothing could be seen –
What or who is in front of you.

The hue of that darkness is
Known now as black, but not then.
For no colour had been seen!
Black, red, green, yellow,
Blue, white – to name them like

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These separately, no colour
Had come to us individually;
Now we realize that on that day
What we saw was only black.
If it had been named white then
Now the hue of darkness would have been
White only!
There is a feeling that some
Went jostling us or stood nearby.
Who were they? Adam and Eve?
Or were they ourselves?

Before an answer was got,
What burst out?
What got scattered?
The heart was shaken!

Such a big sound, the sound of
The fall of the biggest of the big
Planets, a thousand of which
Have been huddled together-
We could have heard before
We became deafened; but we
Didn't; nor did we see.
There is only a trace of that
Sound having been made like
A line drawn - seen crores
And crores of years later!

The sound coming from the basket
In which chickens are kept confined;
Now it is heard -
The same sound was heard from
Very near also; we could hear it
Very well from above and below!

Those baskets have been floating
In the sky from that day till today!
Also the basket in which we are!

Behold a basket there;
Why does it revolve round us?
No, no, we only go round it,
Keep revolving round it!

O, what is this? We
Keep going round ourselves;
Are they that go round ceaselessly
At a far-off distance
Also baskets of chickens like ours?
Do all the baskets revolve?
How do we know
When we are in the dark
Not knowing the colour of darkness
Lying in a blind state?
It is a movement that we don't feel!
None got our permission for that!
Those that burst into existence
Like our basket–do they revolve
Like ours with the name of a universe?

Do they go round something or
Someone else? Do we alone
Constitute the universe?
Or does it include everything?
Let it be anything;
What is our duty now?
What are we ordered to do?

Even if we don't come forward
To discharge the duty or execute
The order, without leaving us
In the lurch, the universe functions

Keeps functioning interminably,
For the last crores and crores of years.
That functioning continues;
Meanwhile because of puzzling quakes
Diverse changes take place.
We come to know of them only later
Even if we know them beforehand
We aren't given the power to stop them.
When there is none to give the power
How can it be given? Who will give it?

You and I, all of us, were chickens,
Are still chickens in a basket
That came into being by an explosion
Crores and crores of years ago.
Here is a simile I can give:
On the seashore where the wind
Blows softy, children blow up
The balloons that look like
Wind-swellings and they also fly
In the air till they burst!
It is one of those balloons,
An air basket into which we
Have climbed or been forced
To climb! That basket is tossed
Off by the wind, by the sea-water;
Facing the challenge of Nature in
The form of floods, storms, hurricanes,
We are hanging on to the bits
And pieces that have remained;
While we thus hang, it is
What we know as Nature that
Holds us for the time being
And keeps shattering us.

Then and now, we have been
Created by Nature; our baskets,
Yes, they are baskets of chickens!
Cluck! Cluck! Cluck! The chorus
Of clucks from the baskets!
What was the first of these?
The Kumari Continent? Or
The African land? Or something
Else? When was it discovered?
Was it the Stone Age or the Golden?

When the man- you and I -was
Not born, how could there be
A Stone Age or a Golden one?
How did we come into being?
The chicken grew into a hen!
The hen laid an egg, a chicken
Came out of the egg! The egg
Or the hen, which came first?
Evolutionary process explains this!

The plant's seeds are also eggs
In a way! Something gets the shape
Of an egg first; not only the hen
But man also grows inside the egg
Only, the egg doesn't mean the hen's
Egg or any bird's egg only.
There are several lakhs of eggs
In every drop of semen; using
Only the required eggs, the foetus
In the womb takes shape; depending
On the place of birth, it develops
Into a bird, an animal, an insect
Or a human being on the basis
Of evolutionary process!

If man is said to have come from
The monkey, we should take it
To be an evolutionary growth
And shouldn't ask why these
Monkies that we see are not
Becoming men. To raise a wall,
We mix earth and water and
The wall is made out of the mixture.
What remains as mud will
Only be called mud and not wall.
If the egg grows into a hen,
How is the egg born? The reply
To this is that it takes shape
Just as the mud takes shape.

Just as mud is made by mixing
Earth and water, some mixtures
Are needed to form an egg.
From the egg itself, the things
Required are taken to form the egg.
Out of that egg the hen comes.
Likewise, man by evolution
Came out of the monkey!

Did he originate in the Kumari
Continent or in Africa? This
Is the question demanded not by
The human history alone but by
The history of the whole world!

# 7 A Traumatic Historical Event

*Cilappatikāram says*

Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ was a princely
Son of Cēralātaṉ and Naṟcōṇai,
Who was Karikāl Cōḻā's daughter.

*Patiṟṟuppattu* says that lady's
Name was Cōḻa makaḷ Maṇakkiḷḷi.
It is but natural that one may
Have two names; there is no point
Making a fuss about it and getting
Confused; in the history of the Tamil
Land there have been greater
Confusions. There have been three,
The first, the second and

The third Karikāl Cōlaṉ,
We are bewildered and confused
About the victories of the three
Not knowing who won where!

They speak of Vēlkeḻukuṭṭuvaṉ
As though he were another
Kuṭṭuvaṉ; but some say
The two are the same.

In England, even though there
Have been eight Henrys or any
Number, their chronology
And history would be perfect.
Since literature and epigraphy
Are the two sources of history here,
Researching as far as possible
I could finalise the dates!

An unrivalled hero that went
To the Himalayas and had a run
Of wins, the Cēraṉ added to
The fame of the Tamils whenever
He found favourable occasions.

A great king to whom self-respect
Was the hallmark of life, a heroic
Tamil, that protected his clan
Standing like a huge hill.

It was widely proclaimed
None could conquer him and
Anyone fighting him would fall.

Such speeches like the sound that fills
The space spread his fame far and wide.
Some kings inflamed by jealousy
Became furious! Isn't it true

That fire-like jealousy and
Unbearable bitterness would afflict
Only the Tamiḻs when a Tamilian
Wins glory? Mōkūr Paḻaiyaṉ became
One such king scheming to bury
Cēraṉ deep in a pit of death
In order to end his enmity.

He hatched horrible plots, got ready
For war, and even beat the war-drum.
On the border of his land a ruler
Called Arukaṉ, in support of Cēraṉ,
Pounced upon Paḻaiyaṉ considering
It the right time for an attack.
In a fit of rage against Arukaṉ,
A thousand times more than his
Indignation against Cēraṉ, Paḻaiyaṉ
Had risen against Arukaṉ first;
Arukaṉ had survived that attack.
To defeat Paḻaiyaṉ, to teach him
An unforgettable lesson and
Daring to challenge his sense of
Self-respect, Arukaṉ joining
Cērā's army destroyed Paḻaiyaṉ's fort!

Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ appeared like a lion
On the battle front, ruined Mōkūr,
Chased him saying "I won't leave
You wherever you go," imprisoned
Him, felled down the guarded
Neem tree of the ruler of Mōkūr.

Directing the tuskers of Mōkūr under
His control now to bring the felled
Tree, that incomparable Tamiḻ king
Returned to his capital city.

As soon as he left, Arukaṉ
In order to fulfil his ambition,
And to wreak revenge on Paḻaiyaṉ
Sent his soldiers to cut off the tresses
Of the women of Paḻaiyaṉ's palace
And made a sturdy rope twisting
Them together with which he got
The guarded tree pulled to Cēraṉ's
Place; on hearing this, Cēraṉ
Fretting and fuming, castigated
Arukaṉ for having caused a blot
On his victory and said to him,
"Arukaṉ, having used my support
You have taken revenge on your
Foe by sending an army and
Giving vent to your indignation.
But much against our culture, you
Have asked your men to cut
The hair of the women of Paḻaiyaṉ's
Family; you may say the deed
Was done in revenge; no, no,
It was a despicable deed,
A despicable deed, I would say."

He was greatly worried but got
Himself freed from his worry
By releasing not only the guarded
Tree but Paḻaiyaṉ also.

The Tamiḻs of the Dravidian
Race had heroism, wisdom and
The strength that would spread their
Fame in all the eight directions.
They had mighty shoulders that earned
Them the title of tigers in fight;

They had such a deep-rooted sense
Of self-respect that they would
Never turn their backs to their foes.

They had the courage to face death
On the battlefield bearing a spear
On their chest and not for a single
Moment would that leave them.
The fame that they had reached
The peak in their love for art
Had gone far beyond the waves.
They had strong convictions that could
Never be shaken, but and that
Is a big but for among the Tamils,
Alas, only racial unity is
Lacking and this historical
Defect distresses us deeply!

# 8 Though Fallen, He was a Victorious Hero!

When one thinks of Veṉṉi war which

Serves as an example of heroism
And self-respect, warriors' nerves
Will tense up like the Veena's strings;
Their hearts will be overwhelmed by
Sorrow, their eyes will become streams.

In the fight that took place between
The great hero Karikāl Cōḻaṉ
And the king called Cēraḻātaṉ
In the Tamil land of Kōyil

Veṇṇi adjoining Tañcai,
Innumerable corpses fell down
The sturdy Cērar and Cōḻar
Fought against each other wielding
Their swords and spears on the bloody
Battlefield where the lance hurled
By Karikāḷaṉ, in the twinkling
Of an eye, speeded up and pierced
The chest of Cēraṉ, bathed in
The mud of red blood, came out of
His back ending the great king's life!

I won't wholeheartedly say
The Cēra king died; I said like
That because Cēraṉ, fearing that
It was a shame unbearable and
Not demanding any exemption
From the common Tamiḻ practice,
Decided to take out his life
By sitting still facing the north!

He said he would hurry up taking
Away his spear and sword in order
To welcome death by facing the north.
It was not a wound received while
Running away from the field; only
A wound caused by the sharp point
Of the spear that came out of his back.
But imagining that it was shameful,
Not feeling consoled or happy
Cēraṉ sank into death; he attained
Fame by courting death – This is how
Poet Kaḻāttalaiyār sang his glory.

If Kaḻāttalaiyār composed this
Elegy, the poetess born in

Veṇṇi where the fight occurred,
Veṇṇikkuyattiyār, sang thus:

Karikālaṉ won fame by winning
The war while Cēralātaṉ won
Honour by dying; thus the poet
Decks both the kings with
The garlands of poetic pearls.

When this news spread like fire in
The entire place prosperous, great men
Gathered from all the eight directions.

They willingly hurried to join
Cēramāṉ, who fell fighting like
A lion, and sit with him facing
The north in order to give up life.

The delight caused by Karikālaṉ's
Victory on the one side, the grief
Caused by the sense of honour
Displayed by Cēramaṉ who decided
To die, on the other side –
What can be shown as comparable
To the large-heartedness of the poets
Who admiring both the victor
And the vanquished sang
Their praise in the same breath!

# 9 Where Damage is Done to Culture, They won't Desire even to See the Place

Even when he was a vigorous

Youth, he saved himself by breaking
The bonds; though caught in a fire

Lit by some evil-minded foes
He escaped with a burnt ankle;
He constructed bunds on the river
Kāviri and got fame for the dam
Called Kallaṇai; it was Cōḻaṉ
Karikālaṉ, the great king, who
Had two incomparable capital
Cities, Woriur and Pūmpukār.

Karikālaṉ's daughter, Ātimanti
Was a poetess and also a queen
Of dance known for her dances on
The stage; she had three brothers
Named Nalaṅkiḷḷi, Neṭuṅkiḷḷi
And Māvaḷattāṉ; she did all
That she could to stop them from
Fighting against each other,
But in vain, though they chose the path
Of the Tamiḻs as their way, very much
Like the Tamiḻs, they were divided
In their deeds; preferring the path of love
For herself, the Tamiḻ artist-queen
Atimanti fell in love with
The big-shouldered Cēra king
An expert in the art of dance, Aṭṭaṉatti.

Since that truth was confined to
The palace, the princes from far
And near gathered in large numbers.
She told her confidante that her
Eyes wouldn't desire to see any,
And when Karikālaṉ with his
Sky-transcending fame asked her
Who else she loved, she gave her reply

In a poem which she recited
As though she knew it by heart.

Hearing that, Karikālaṉ sent
The message of their marriage
To all the kings and performed it.

One or two rogues who had waited
For long shocked by the wedding
As though a cotton seed had burst
Joined together and hatched a plot

To terminate the love-life in
The middle; how could hearts bitter
As Eṭṭi living in houses nearby
Rear to see some eating jackfruits?

Those venomous as scorpion's stings,
Therefore, had fixed the date to tear
Asunder their love-filled life;
They had schemed like a fox.

After the training in the art of
Dancing was over, both the lovers,
Made merry till the festival of
New floods in the Kāviri was over,
And having exhausted the epic
Of bedroom at midnight, they
Were in deep slumber embracing
Each other, Aṭṭaṉatti kissing
The thornless rose by his side.

Seizing Aṭṭaṉatti bound by ropes
Kicking off Atimanti who woke
Up and ran after them, they threw
Him, alas, like a ball, into
The noisily flowing Kāviri.

They were mean unidentified
Chaff-like men; they escaped leaving
The king's daughter in misery.

Her face a cool faultless moon, she
Runs along the shore of the river;
Indignant like fire, she cries
"*Attāṉ, Attāṉ*" and continues
To weep, her heart bursting with agony.
He is caught in a whirlpool and
Having been bound by ropes, he struggles
Hard like a little thing caught in a storm.

The news reaching the ears of the king,
Kaikālaṉ is perturbed, not
Knowing how to console his dear
Dear daughter Atimanti.
She runs and runs along the shore
Calling aloud her dear husband.

She dances and dances a wild dance,
She feels burnt up like a tender
*Alli* stem that has fallen into fire.
At midnight, a very old
Woman sailing a ferry across
The river is agitated, rushes
Towards the lady Atimanti
Who has fallen on the shore,
Looks at her turning her face.

There are flashes of lightning;
The rumble of thunder is heard like
The whirling sound of whip lashes.
The old woman asks Atimanti
Who looks at her with half-opened eyes,
"Are you the lady, dear, who

Sang this song to my granddaughter,
Your confidante, Nilavaḷaki?"

Wondering at the way the old
Woman recited her poem,
A great Tamil song, she wept
Bitterly and the tears shed by
Her eyes conquered the Kāviri,
One may say; taking pity on
Her, the old ferry-woman with love
And a smile opening her
Toothless mouth said that her name
Was also Kāviri; her words thrilled
All those who were by her side
When she said she was keeping
Atti safely lying in her hut.

She gave King Karikālaṉ's son-in-law
Aṭṭaṉatti back to Atimanti,
The one that ruled the realm of poetry.

The epic of Aṭṭaṉatti-Atimanti
Declares that art and love were
To the Tamiḷs everlasting elements of
Culture even in those distant days.

# 10 My Question: "Why a Question then?"

Myself, myself, I myself,
Am going forward.

Myself, myself, I myself –
If the tongue curves and straightens
Like that, it is done not with pride
But with politeness, extreme politeness;
How did this "I" come? From
Where did I come? There is a question
Which is the basis of these questions.
That question is, "Why did I come?"

Just because I came, I could ask,
"Why did I come?" Just because
I ask, I can get an answer.
That is why, which came first –

The question or the answer?
If the question is 'why',
The answer is 'by this';
If the question is 'how',
The answer is 'thus'.

Which came first, the egg or the hen?
This has been already explained.
What is it that we face now :
The question or the answer?

If there is no question
Will an answer arise?

What is the name of this?
This is the question.
"Universe." This is the answer!
Just because there is already
This answer, or there was,
Looking at something we could ask,
"What is this?"

When there was nothing, no
Question arose; since no
Question arose, no answer came.

Hence a state in which no
Question or answer was needed.

I was in that state only;
Like a shadow I clung to that,
Not one or two or a thousand
Or a lakh but crores and crores,
Five hundred crores of years ago
This world came into being;
Life came into being eighty
Crores of years ago; this is what
Has been discovered and reported.

Imagining that I was the first
Of those lives that came into being,
During those eighty crores of years
I have been mixing as wind with
Wind, as water with water, as
Heat with heat, as coldness
With coldness, as darkness
With darkness and as light
With light; I am going forward
Playing with the sky and the earth
Crawling, curving, kneeling, walking.

Who can say that a full-stop
Has been put to my progress?

Māṇikkavācakar has sung,
His heart melting extremely,
Of the evolution of lives from
The grass to the plant to the worm.

If a full-stop had been put then
How can there be this dialogue
Between you and me?

In my journey of life –
Can this be called a journey
By walk, or by movement,
By crawling or by flying?
Since the word 'journey', in general,
Is suitable, I only say
That my journey that has been
Going on for crores of years, for
Five hundred crores of years –
How and to whom can I prove that
Eighty crores of years ago, I came
Into being as the first life of these?

Who among you were there then?
Who among those will be there now?

To speak of several crores of years
Is, therefore, by common consent.

Though there is no exact account
Isn't this rough reckoning of "several
Innumerable years" acceptable?

None should misunderstand that
This "I" implies, like the many
Examples listed by Parantāman̲
In *Bhagavad Gita*, "I am all".

In order to make the journey
Of evolution safe,
Māṇikkavācakar might have thought of
Starting it with the worm!

It has been possible to come across
Numerous lists of evolutionary
Growth during these several
Crores of years in my journey.

As a part of my journey I see
The sinking by a snow storm
Of a bridge-like structure linking
East Asia with North America,
Supposed to have survived till
Twelve thousand B.C. and
The symptoms of the spread
Of the Māyā civilization
Caused by the contact East Asia had
With North America till that day.

I have been journeying in order
To understand and to inform you

Of the philosophy of evolution
From monkey to man since
The days I had been a worm,
With the support of not one
But several staff!

The universe that includes
Innumerable planets including
The Earth – we don't know how many
Planet – children it is going
To break into, without any
Concern for family planning!
It may be known in due course
As the journey goes on ceaselessly.

Till this day during the journey
I have made for the last crores
And crores of years, I have seen,
Enjoyed, been concerned with, been
Proud of, shed tears over
The worms that crawl over the earth,
The birds that spread their wings
In the sky, the beasts that wander
In the forest, the lives that creep,
That swim and the *homo sapiens*
Whom we consider the youngest
And the most complete of these,
The divisions of that species
And the culture that each admires

Bearing the burden of diverse
Feelings I keep continuing
The journey – together with you!

During the journey forward
I look back for a moment;

This is what the wise call the lion's
Look; the look by the poor me
May be an ignorant look!
It is not a selfish look;
Since it is a historical look
Of the Tamils, don't think of it
As a narrow look; accept it
As my principled look!
The reason for the look has
Expanded into an answer.
My question therefore is
'Why a question then?'

# 11 Kuṇṭalakēci Speaks of Female Fortitude

The great prince of business men,

Kōvalaṉ; his lady love, the truthful
Dancer, Mātavi; the queen of women
Who came as a lovely lamp of life,
Kaṇṇaki; a virtuous maid of
Eternal fame who was born as
A descendant of these three,
A self-denying ascetic beyond
The world's blame, Maṇimēkalai
*Cilampu* and *Mēkalai* linking the three;

*Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi* that shines as these,
A rare Tamil literary text,
*Vaḷaiyāpati* and the one
About a lady rare that defeated
Male dominance, *Kuṇṭalakēci*.
Of these five great epics, alas, two
Were strangely lost by the Tamiḻ
Land before there was time enough
For the Caṅkam savants, and those
That were experts in all the arts
To achieve equality among
Camaṇam, Buddham, Caivam and
Vaiṇavam which waged terrible wars.

How did Vaḷaiyāpati get bent?
How was Kuṇṭalakēci's shape
Spoiled? Were they eaten by the termite
Called time? Was it caused by
The negligence of the Tamiḻs?

It might have been more than six
Decades ago that a humble being
Like me undertook a tireless
Search all over the places and
Finally got a torn text.

When a man who spent his time
Regarding murder, larceny, rape and
Kidnap as artistic acts in life
Was caught and taken to prison
Along the street, his hands and legs
Bound by chains, Kuṇṭalakēci
Eyed him; bearing a pair of
Hill-like breasts, that virtuous
Lady was known as '*Pattarai*'.

Her father, a royal minister
Used to affectionately call her
Nectar! That nectar falling in
Love with poison, as the story
Goes, fell prey to the beast bound
In chains being charmed by its
Beauty; falling at the feet of
Her minister-father, winning
His grace, *Pattarai,* who was
Captivated by the shining skin
Of the snake, got the king's sentence
Cancelled, became the doll of his
Bedroom, and both tasted the drink
Of ecstasy in plenty! When once
They were in a tight embrace on
The cot, she, going into a sulk,
Told him, not harshly, but in love,
"You are only a thief!" He got wild
But not showing his anger, he
Embraced her pressing her breasts hard.

When he asked her, "Come, dear, we
Will go, see the top of the hill
And come back, she clung to him
Willingly; when both the birds
Winged their way to the hill-top,
He told her, "You called me a thief,
Damn you, I will push you from
The peak, you will be dashed to pieces."
In a few seconds, she understood
The truth-the lady with a heart
Like a cold-flowered garland.

Deciding to defeat evil
And conspiracy by evil

And not by sword, she asked him,
"My life! My dearest, before you
End my life, give me some time to
Pray to my husband." That thief,
That villain gave her time!
Staging skillfully a false drama,
Pretending to be devoted to
Her master, she began to go round;
When half the circle was over, when
He was waiting for the other half,
Planning to kill that sinner, she
Pushed him from the top of the hill;
That sinner dreadful met with death.

Though the work of art *Kuṇṭalakēci*,
Which taught the proud patriarchs,
Male chauvinists, a lesson in
Female fortitude, isn't extant
Today, she remains as its grammar!

This *Kuṇṭalakēci*, this lady,
In order to spread Buddhist
Principles, won several debates.
Her life, later, came to a stop!

# 12 This Tamiḻ Land Two Thousand Years Ago!

If we look back at the history

Of this land, about two thousand
Years ago, ships from several
Nations anchored in the sea, in

A row, like lights in series,
Come to sight; both the eyes get

Brightened; I'll give you facts
About the Tamil land that will
Delight the ears also; sea-trade,
Foreign relations beyond the sea,
Art, literature, victories in
Wars and the glorious reign –all
These flourish like clusters of fruits;
With you I also enjoy the sight!

From the prince of poets Kārikkaṇṇar
We fully learn and rejoice at
The love and affection, friendship
And contacts between the Pāndyas
And the Cholas and at Kaṇṇaki's
Chastity and Mātavi's majesty.

In Kāviripp ūmpaṭṭiṇam
There was no problem of security,
Discipline or of anything else.
The wealth of art manifested
Itself in Mātavi whose fame
Reached unimaginable heights.
We will swoon if we read the names
Of the jewels that she wore; let us
See at least some from the staggering
List given in *Cilappatikāram*.

Imagine hiding yourself and
Watching the moon that stands in front
Of a mirror decorating itself!
Jewels like *pariyakam, cilampu,*
*pāṭakam, ariyakam* and *cataṅkai*
That fit the legs and the tight
*Kuṟaṅkuceṟi* around the thighs!

A string of pearls with thirty-two
*Viricikai* around the waist!

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*Mēkalai* that shines on the waist
Projecting the beauty of the front;
On the shoulders, *kaṇṭikai*
With faultless stones inset!

Ear-rings made of rubies and *cūṭakam*
Inset with diamonds! Bangles various
Around the well-haired forearms,
Which are of diamond, conch, gold, opal
And coral! But the smile on her face
Outshines all the jewels of gold!
*Mutakku* ring which resembles the open
Mouth of a shark! The ruby ring
Which shines in the best of colours!
The *"marakattāḷ cēri"* shining
Like the sun, studded with diamonds
To beautify the *kāntaḷ* fingers!
Sturdy and subtly sculpted
Chains for the arms, fully
Filigreed *cavaṇi* and *carappaṇi*!
*Kōvai* that hangs beautifully
Behind the pearl-decked neck!
*Cantirapāṇi* and diamond *kutampai*
Shining in thick clusters!

Lovely conch in beauteous blue seen
In between! *toyyakam* and *pullakam*
And many more such ornaments
Adding beauty to Mātavi's beauty,
Making one wonder if it was
A sight created by magic or illusion!

Aren't these jewels evidences
Genuine of the grandeur of
The great Tamiḻ civilization!

Don't we feel in our hearts the blowing
Of a soft breeze? Is that all?

What was the structure of the stage
Where the beauty-queen Mātavi danced?
The place chosen did in no way
Differ from the one described
By the writers on dancing.

Bringing the bamboo that grew on
Potiya hill, cutting it down to
The right size by leaving the right
Space between one knot and another,
With a length of twenty-four thumbs,

And using it as one unit
The stage for the dance was set
Eight units in length, seven
In breadth and one in height.

Leaving four units in between,
Pedestal lamps and curtains
Were artfully placed on the stage.
This is what the charming epic
*Cilappatikāram* states.

For the inaugural function
The dance master, music director,
Poet composer, percussion artist,
Reed musician, *yāḻ* artist, all
Faultless craftsmen, experts in
Their arts, were there in plenty.

The Tamiḻ land at that time was one
Where arts grew; Mātavi was not only
An example of unshaken devotion
To justice, and to the principle
That good conduct is held dearer

Than life; her life is also an example
Of the victory of her stand
That art is not an enemy
To chastity; she lives alone
As an ascetic even after
Her man has abandoned her, brings
Up her daughter Maṇimēkalai
Like herself guiding her to grow
Into a pure-hearted queen of women.

This piece of literary history
Is not simply an example but
It reveals that two thousand
Years ago, when many nations
Were engulfed in darkness, bringing
Light to the seashores of all those
Nations, Tamiḻnadu remained
As a beacon light that spread
Art, literature, culture
And civilization; it should
Also wake up the sleeping
Tamiḻ pouring tears on his face!

# 13 Awake! Here is the Dawn of Chemmozhi!

None has written the history of
The Tamil land completely and
Left it for posterity. Our old
History can be studied only
Through palm-leaf manuscripts,
Inscriptions on stones cut by some
King, stories told by some passer-by,
Research done on bones picked up,
Skulls kept in big pots long ago,
And palm-lines discovered somewhere;
From these alone details about
Art, culture and life could be guessed;
The strange look of time could be known;

Otherwise, from the Stone Age to
The present one that has mellowed,
Only utter darkness has reigned!

* * *

We would have been puzzled not knowing
When and how our ancestors lived;
Unable to paint the glory of
This great land on the global book,
We would have been lying like wet
Matches that can't be used to light
Lamps. Flies have no teeth, but don't
They keep swarming over dishes?
Crocodiles have no tongues, but don't
They satisfy their hunger? Crabs
Have no heads; frogs have no necks;
When frogs in the well that know not
The nation's state and crab-like
Headless trunks live, if we live without
A history what harm will overtake
Us and our land? If it is argued
That living without heads, necks, teeth
Or tongues is all right, it is only
Fitting that the Tamiḻs live without
A history! We only fix for
Ourselves skills and standards!

Though some Tamiḻs are prepared to
Live a life devoid of self-respect
The Tamiḻ women never played
A second fiddle to them in
Destroying Tamiḻ! I will give
A list of those that were fitting examples!

Was it not a woman called
Mācāttiyār who sang that

A mother who had lost her father,
Husband and brother in a war,
Called her child that had gone to school,
Placed a soaring spear in his hand,
And asked him to go to the frontline
And return defeating the foe?
Wasn't the person sung about
Also a woman who came in
The line of women with self-respect!

It was also a woman who sang
That when someone asked "Mother,
Where is your son?", a mother,
Instead of saying, "He has gone
To war," said, showing her stomach,
"I don't know where the tiger is
Gone; but here is the tiger's cave."
Avvai sings of a mother who is
Worried why the hero has delayed
Going to war, dying there and
Getting carried to the graveyard
On a cot of shortened legs
When the son whom he prefers
To the rest that are young like
Him is in the thick of a fight;
Wasn't she a woman? Isn't this
The earth that gave birth to both of them?
"We haven't buried our children;
We have sown those warriors as seeds" –
Weren't these challenging words, words that
Thundered like swords, uttered by women?

A Tamiḻ lady that drove away
A tiger with a winnowing fan;
On hearing a false report that

Her son had fallen receiving
A wound on his back, a woman
Wept bitterly, went straight to
The battlefield vowing that she would
Cut off the breasts the child suckled,
And returned knowing the truth;
Who made a poem of it? Wasn't it
Kākkaippāṭini? In the past,
There lived more than thirty such
Women poets on this land who shone,
It is said, like perfect gold,
To the surprise of the three kings.

The poems these great women wrote
Form pages of the Tamil history.
I will give the catalogue not
To make grandpas and grandmas proud
But to make grandsons and daughters
Steel-hearted heroes and heroines!

Avvaiyār, Aḷḷūr Naṉmullaiyār,
Kākkaippāṭiṉiyār, Kāvaṟpeṇṭu,
Nakkaṇṇaiyār, Veṇṇikkuyattiyār,
Kuṟamakaḷ Iḷaveyiṉi, Kuṟieyiṉi,
Tāyaṅkaṇṇi, Pūṅkaṇuttiraiyār,
Poṉmuṭiyār, Pōntaippacalaiyār,
Pūtappāṇṭiyaṉ tēvi, Peruṅkōppeṇṭu,
Peruṅkōḻi Nāykaṉ Makaḷ Nakkaṇṇaiyār,
Pārimakaḷir, Pēymakaḷ Iḷaveyiṉi,
Okkūr Mācāttiyār, Nalveḷḷiyār
Atimantiyār, Nēṭṭimaiyār,
Nappacalaiyār, Veḷḷivītiyār,
Kāmakkaṉippacalaiyār,
Kaḻārkkīraṉ Eyiṟṟiyār,
Kaccippēṭṭu Naṉṉākaiyār,

Uṇpittaiyār, Māṟpittiyār,
Pūṅkaṇ Uttiraiyār,
Veṟipāṭiya Kāmakkaṇṇiyār,
Añci Attaimakaḷ Nākaiyār.

The poems written in a Tamiḻ
That flows like a stream by men and
Women that became poets rare
Are witnesses to ancient history;
Letters carved in stone in those days
Are imperishable evidences
Of our knowledge, strength, love,
Heroism, culture and the rest.
Come! Let's do our duty, more and more of it!
Awake! Here's the dawn of Chemmozhi!

# 14 Give Birth to Self-respecting Heroes; Give them to us, Mother!

When we hear the name of the place
Talaiyālaṅkāṉam, we recall not only
Talaiyālaṅkāṭu of the land of Tañcai
But also the historical fact that it
Was the place where the fight of
Fights of Caṅkam times took place.

The very same Tiruviṭattār,
The warriors of the Tamiḻ race
Who fought from both the fronts.

Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ the second, a youth
That hadn't come of age, unscared
Of war, rushed to the battlefield!

In the army opposite, there were
Two mighty kings, a Cērā, a Cōḻā and
Five Vēḷirs with their armies huge.

Irumporai, a peerless hero
Of the Cērā clan, Cōḻaṉ Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ,
Capable of confronting
Onrushing foes, and leaders
Indignant of the Vēḷir clan–
Veṇmāṉ, Porunaṉ, Eḻiṉi,
Erumaiyūraṉ, Titiyaṉ –
These robust men came thinking
Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ would be scared of
The armies of the five and they
Could win the war as if it were
A child's play but what happened
To them? Accepting defeat in
A dignified manner, and saying
They could go alive getting
A new birth because of the good
Deeds of the past and they reached their
Homes and towns! Pāndyas on the field
Through their eyes said to each other
That even the lord of death doing
Penance for long could not conquer
Our Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ the great!

Greeted he was by the Tamiḻ bards
Who touched tenderly his leaf-like
Fingers and kissed his broad shoulders
And said, "Those that are determined
To row the boat of heroism with
The oar of courage across the field
Or the sea of life will live till
Tamiḻ lives like Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ of
Talaiyālaṅkānam even without
Getting any boons by doing tapas.
The whole land of Tamiḻ hailed him!

Heartily hailing him this Tamiḻ
Land hoped a day would come when
The holy day of the inditing
Of *Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Maturaikkāñci*
That would live forever like epic
Poems that exude fine artistry
By the lions of bards Nakkīrar
And Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār
Would be grandly celebrated!
Now also the victory we hail!

While praising this battle glorious,
This is what the bard that sang of *Puṟam*
Kuṭapulaviyaṉār says in a poem.

Not that alone! The Pāṇṭiyaṉ
That looked like a growing moon
Made a vow and the song that he
Himself sang is found in *Puṟam*.

Let us pray to the Tamiḻ mother
"Help us see throughout this Tamiḻ
Land the likes of such a youth, a prince
Of heroes of the Tamiḻ Pāndya clan!

Give birth to such self-respecting
Heroes! Give them to us, Mother.

# 15 An Honourable Mother and an Upright Daughter

The absolute beauty of Nature

As darkness and light, as the sky
And the cloud, as the sun and the moon,
As the land and the sea – thus together,
Appearing in pairs, fused into one,
Not taking a huge shape, assuming

As it were an exquisite form
That smiles, with a beauty that dances
Like a wave and a hair long as
A stream, two buds at the front,
A silk-like body, a coral-red mouth,
A set of teeth like a wreath of pearls,
And all the other beauteous things
That beautify her beauty-a lady
Created by getting these in a row;

Born of that parrot and paragon
Of beauty, Mātavi and Kōvalaṉ
Who excelled in several arts
And had her as half of his life,
Maṇimēkalai was so lovely
That even if we call lines and lines
Of poets, they as well as their Tamiḻ
Would be baffled by her beauty,
Find it absolutely ineffable.

In that house delightful where joy rained like
A cascade, Mātavi and Kōvalaṉ
Sulked during the festival of Indra
And because of the bitter fight
They could not rejoin as man and
Wife; Mātavi, broken-hearted, a world
Without the sun, became a nun!
Though she decided against living
A householder's life, she felt as though
A thorn had pricked her heart when
Some bull-like youth drunk with love
Entered her daughter's life; Mātavi
Felt sad not knowing what to do!

Expressing his heart-felt love for
Maṇimēkalai, Utayakumāraṉ,

The Chola prince sent a letter to her
Stating, "You are an icon that I
Worship! My heavenly nectar!
This evening I will meet you to make
My request in person, my jackfruit
Ripe at the root!" Mēkalai was shaken!
Hurriedly changing her appearance,
Assuming the false form of her
Kāli-like confidante Kāyacaṇṭikai, She stood before Utayaṉ
In the courtyard inside a dark
Inn where food would be served!

Though well-accomplished in arts,
The king's son, in a hurry, couldn't
Distinguish between Mēkalai
And Kāyacaṇṭikai; nearing
Mēkalai who was serving food,
Asked her, "Why have you turned ugly
My dear, my nectar!", when there came.
The real husband of Kāyacaṇṭikai;
Unexpectedly, her husband,
A Vidhyataraṉ, thinking that
His wife had an affair with the prince,
Drove Mēkalai away and with
The sword kept ready on his waist
Cut off the prince's head and ran
Away before anyone could catch him;
He roared that he had ended the story
Of the rogue Utayakumāraṉ;
Maṇimēkalai, alas, fainted!

Hearing the news Cempiyaṉ
Neṭumuṭikkiḷḷi wasn't perturbed
Feeling that his only son's life

Had departed like this but felt
Consoled that someone had meted
Out the punishment he himself would
Have done as if it were the nation's deed.

Without stopping there, wrongly
Concluding Maṇimēkalai was
The cause of all this, he put her
In jail; it was to an extent
At the instance of his wife!

Then, acting on the advice of
Aṟavaṇa Aṭikaḷ, an ascetic
Admired by all the wise and the great,
He released Maṇimēkalai
And also allowed her to do again
Her humanitarian deed of
Removing the hunger of the public.

Iḷaṅkiḷḷi, the king of Kāñci,
Invited Maṇimēkalai who
Had become a merciful mother
And fulfilled her dream of building
A Buddhist monastery.

Isn't the history of Mātavi
And Mēkalai, honourable mother
And daughter, a famed, faultless
History telling the glory of
The Tamiḻ land that stands on its dignity?

# 16 Kōvūrār's Question and the Head That Hung

Poets and bards are skilled in making
Poems and composing songs and are,
In general, good to everyone.

Is it *puṟam* or *akam* or
A *Paraṇi* that glorifies
A war? Like a cuckoo they will

Sing in a charming Tamiḻ that
Has mingled with their blood or at times
They may pounce on others like a tiger!

With determination, they will
Cross the river of their blood and
Firmly declare their desire for
The final victory of the Tamiḻs.

Today such poets are to be found
In a small number only; but
During those days both in quality
And quantity they could excel.
The songs composed in colourful
Tamiḻ by those bards in the twinkling
Of an eye will ignite our thoughts
And drive away the enemies.
Since the young Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ
Who led the Talaiyālaṅkāṉam
War was a born poet, he made
A mighty vow lest the world
Should forget his undying fame.

In order to thunder this *puṟam*
Poem that will turn a worm into
A tiger, Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ the king
Turned himself into a poet as well.

* * *

Poet Kōvūr Kiḻār would be there
Not only when a war starts but
Whenever brothers of royal
Family clash on the battlefield!

It was that master of threefold
Tamiḻ that first prevented

The clash between the brothers
Nalaṅkiḷḷi and Neṭuṅkiḷḷi!

The credit again goes to the learned
Kōvūr Kiḻār, well-versed in
The art of politics, for preventing,
For the time being, the fall of
Justice during Neṭuṅkiḷḷi's
Reign and of Neṭuṇkiḷḷi
Himself when he issued an urgent
Order to kill the poet Iḷantattaṉ
Mistaking him for a spy.

When King Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ conquering
Malaiyamāṉ Tirumuṭikkāri
Ordered the killing of his dear
Children by being kicked by
A rutting elephant, Kōvūrār
It was who, rushing like lightning,
Intervened, for which he is praised
As a poet that is as dear to
The Tamiḻs as sugar cane and
As one that still lives in history;
People like us praise him and wish
That he might live forever!

In a series of fights that continued,
Neṭuṅkiḷḷi, scared of fighting back,
Ran away from the capital
City Avūr to Uṟaiyūr
Like a beaten snake, his experience
Telling him it is dangerous
To cease to be cunning and vengeful;
Accepting that Nalaṅkiḷḷi followed him.

One Cōḻaṉ sourrounded the fort;
Another Cōḻaṉ sealed the fort!

The celebrated Tamiḻ poet
Kōvūr Kiḻār, between the two
Armies, spoke outside the fort;
Opened his heart inside the fort,
We have the poem that says what he
Said, what argument he put forth;
The song that sounds sweet tries to wipe
Out the enmity between the two!

Confronted by Kōvūrār's question
The heads of the two kings hung but
Did their mad desire for war abate?

The Tamiḻ land was again drenched
With the stream of their blood; brief
Was the time of peace; till we listen
To the voice of Kōvūr Kiḻār,
Till we respect humanistic
Feelings, all talks of peace, we would
Say, will have no meaning at all!

# 17 An Elevated Intimacy Dearer than Life

Picirāntai, the bright star of Tamil

Subtle, substantial and classical
Who served as the lamp of wisdom to
Pāṇṭiyaṉ Aṟivuṭainampi,
Had love ineffable for the great
Chola King Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ.

In his birth place Picir, in a shady
Grove, the well-disciplined bard,
Wanting to fulfil his long-cherished

Desire of inditing a poem on
His Chola friend, dear as life,
Wrote an exquisite piece highly
Imaginative with a male
Swan as the centre in a Tamil
Sweet as the sugar cane!
Addressing the bird twice as
Male swan, opening his miserable
Heart, keeping under check the storm
Of grief that the occasion to meet
King Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ hadn't yet
Arisen, he spoke on his widespread fame!

We don't know if the swan listening
To the owl went to the place of
The Chola! But the bard delighted
With having sung his dear friend's glory
Rejoiced reading it to his dear wife.
His wife served *aṉṉam* to him and (rice)
Their grand children praised that
The poem addressed to the *aṉṉam* (swan)
Was a fine piece of artistry.

"See the scene of two rows of *mullai*
Smiling here", he said; raising her
Bowlike brow, his wife asked, "Where?"
"The lovely smile of a lady
Like you and the smile of this cooked
Rice were called *mullai* by me," he said;
"Be cautious about the words you use,
Children are nearby," she said.

"These diamond icons sculpted by our
Son aren't old enough to understand
This language! Our grown-up son has
Gone to the field with his wife; there

Is still time for their return;
Don't be scared!" he said; "They will
Soon be here, don't fondle me now,"
She cautioned him! At once he closed
His mouth with the rice she had served!
Suffocated by the food he swallowed
He struggled hard to regain his breath!
She rushed to her husband's help, gave
A pat on the head and tenderly
Touched his chest when he embraced her
But she dodged him! Like the sounding
Anklets the old couple laughed in ecstasy!
The grandchildren began to laugh
Clapping their tender hands and
Their prattling was sweet as the lower
Part of the sugar cane! But their joy
That opened the floodgates came to
A stop as if banned all on a sudden
When the news dreadful as fire reached
Their ears! Opposing the king of
Uṟaiyūr Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ, his sons
Dear to him as his life had declared
A war against him; the Chola king
Who could compose poems in a Tamiḻ
Sweet as the parrot's language had
Been driven to despair by the deed
Of his sons; finding no other
Way, the king with a heart pure as
The white flower, taking a sword
In his hand had risen to fight.

On hearing the shocking news about
The ongoing war between father
And sons, poet Picirāntaiyār

Saying that his joy had gone like
A thing lost in the market left for
The Chola land, his heart shaken by grief.

* * *

Hearing that the great men of that
Town had assembled at the town's
Common hall built by Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ,
He went there with a heart that was
Broken and a grief beyond words.
Pottiyār, Pūtanākaṉār, Nattattaṉār
And Pullāṟṟūr Eyiṟṟiyaṉār – all poets
Jumped out of their seats in the hall,
Embraced Picirāntaiyār and
Welcomed him with great delight!

"Utterly shaken in body and
Mind, I have come, dear sirs, to know
What happened to the fight between
The lion and its cubs," he said standing
As though he had become a query!

"Listen, nothing has gone wrong; there
Appeared a difficulty; this great
Man rushing like lightning could
Remove it; "when stepped on by its
Young ones should the hen be shaken?"
By a charming Tamil poem asking
Thus, this Pullāṟṟūr Eyiṟṟiyaṉār
Could cool Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ's
Anger and put an end to the war"
Pottiyār introduced him thus!
Picirāntai went into raptures
And returned home with relief; but there
Awaited some news that stormed his heart!

* * *

The poet saw a sword-like palm-leaf
Letter stating that the Chola king
Who ruled the land like the sun that
Rises in the east, unable to bear
The agony of the revolt of his sons
Had gone to die facing the north.
"I will rush home immediately
And return taking leave of my
People; when we have lived a life
That defined friendship, we won't part
In the world of death; tell the Chola
That has gone to die that Picirāntai
Will soon sit with him to face death."
Having said this the lion of poets
Started travelling, tears falling from
His eyes just as snow falls from leaves.

* * *

Poets of the Tamiḻ land heard that
The great Tamiḻ king who had ruled
Long, his heart filled with grief cold
As fog, because of his sons' war,
Desired to die facing the north
Thinking that was the only way
To overcome his sorrow; some of
Those that sat with him feeling that
Their life was not nectar, and some
Who had not considered their life
Dear as candy but dared to die,
And whose life was ebbing away
Their bodies weakening, asked the king,
"King of kings! You used to tell us
Picirāntai a Tamiḻ bard and
A great teacher had become your

Bosom friend without having met you;
Why is it he hasn't come though
Your life is coming to an end?"

"He vowed to die sitting by your
Side; what happened to his words
That promised his return?" Hearing
The mocking tone the king felt terribly
Indignant towards those that suspected
His friend's honesty even in
The place where they had come to die.

"Know this, gentlemen, Antai is
Gold genuine mined out of the Tamil
Town Picir of the Pandya Kingdom;
His is friendship pure that doesn't show
Off during prosperity but rushes
To help at times of adversity."
Giving this answer the king died,
Became a hero-stone the next day!

Picirāntai came late but died
Sitting by the side of his friend;
Poet Kaṇṇākaṉār weaving
A garland of verse out of his
Flower-tears decked those hero-stones!
"The great will always be beside
The great; the low having dried up
Will wither away in due course!"
Isn't this friendship of the great
A glorious one dearer than life?

# 18 A Young Lady, She is a Tamil Lady!

That was the time when young ones

At a tender age before going to school
Would rise in anger vowing to
Exterminate the enemies with
An onrushing lance, with an
Indignant sword; that was the golden
Age of the Tamils; that was the time
When the Sangam prospered because
Of numerous bards! Warriors went

To fight like tigers ferocious;
Graceful women greeted them standing;
Even when the wind blew, it brought
With it Tamiḻ heroism! When the waves
Of the sea rose, the status of the Tamiḻs
Rose! The fame of Tamiḻ joined
The fragrance *akil* exuded!
The wealth of epics of the threefold
Tamiḻ would appear with the beauteous
Moon rising among the clouds!

Of the broad-shouldered southern
Clans whom Asoka the great praised
As the able invincible
Southerners, there was a heroic
Group called Kōcar; they were mighty men,
Known for their truthfulness and purity;
Leaving the Tuḷu country, they
Wandered upto the Eastern Sea
Before finally settling down
At Niyamam and Cellūr!

* * *

This is the fact found in *Akanāṉūṟu;*
The *akam* poem introduces two
Great Tamiḻ heroes known as
"Aṉṉi" and "Miñili"; there was
A young Tamiḻ lady whose name
Was a combination of these two;
Though she was at that age when
Using her eyes and brows as weapons
She could conquer young men, she had
A spotless character! Many desired
To embrace her; some Kōcar sought
Her hand in marriage but her father

Refused; Aṉṉi Miñili's chastity
Was as fiery as the heroism of
The hero Aṉṉi who died on the field;
She was as firm as the warrior
Miñili who defeated Āy Eyiṉaṉ
And also captured Naṉṉaṉ's town!
"She is as lovely as the figure
Of the moon, as charming as
The long-eyed fish that swims
In the river, extremely fit
For copulation," thinking thus
Some Kōcar approached her father
With a stupid smile on their faces;
"What do you think of my daughter?
I won't leave my sugar cane in
The hands of a wild monkey! Don't
You know all her thoughts are of
Aḻuntūrāṉ? The guardian of that
City, Titiyaṉ, is her guardian!
Don't come again! Understanding
What I said, leave the place at once!"
This was his response to their request.

Even among the truthful Kōcar,
There lived some hard-hearted and that
Is what their history reveals!

They hatched a plot to capture
The lady! Many fertile places
Of *payaṟṟam* plants were owned by
The Kōcar of Niyamam; a cow
Was the only wealth of Aṟṟi
Miñili's family! A few
Kōcar, scheming widely, drove the cow
Into their own field so that it

Might graze there; will a hungry cow,
When let loose in a grazing land,
Run away in fear instead of
Eating its fill? Its stomach swelled
Leaving little space, like the stomachs
Of the rude ruling group that keep
Growing by eating into all
The labour of the working class!

"If the old man who denied us
The maid is deprived of his eyes,
There's no refuge to the lady!
All of us shall share that paragon
Of beauty." Wishing thus those
Evil men planned and decided
To cheat by performing their tricks.

Aṉṉi's father was brought to book
And told the story of the cow's
Grazing in their field on a day!
The Kōcar judges asked him to
Tell the truth! The old man's face grew
Dark like the cloudy sky and he said,
"I won't ask who saw my cow
Grazing; I am of that lineage
That won't lie even when opposed
By the whole world; it is true that
My cow fed on the *payaṟṟum* plants."
The Kōcar judges said that since
He had accepted the crime his
Eyes could be pierced and cast;
The next moment he was dragged
Away; both of his eyes, alas,
At a ripe old age, were removed.
"You have lost your eyes, my father!

I will take revenge on those sinners!"
Beating a war drum his daughter wept.

"They plan to abduct you removing
My eyes; but who can near my daughter
Who wields the sword of chastity?"
Before he ended his speech, the lady
That stood on fire began to reply.

"Till they that blinded my father
Dear as my life die, I won't eat
My food from any vessel, nor will
I change my dress, nor will I care
For food or sleep till I take revenge.
I will finish off my foes! I will
Offer them as a sacrifice
To my blinded father! Her vow
Reached Titiyaṉ the very next day!
He was worried hearing the maid's
Misery and wanted to rush
To her; he saw Aṉṉi standing
Before him as a burning piece
Of wood when the news had reached her ears!
O my dear! Delightful to my eyes!
Pleasing to my thoughts! I don't know
How to heal your wound; I know no
Way out," he said, grief-stricken.
"You have the cavalry in your
Fort, king, you have hill-like shoulders,
My dear, if you really love Aṉṉi,
Get ready for a fight against Kōcar;
They have made my father a blind
Man; we should destroy the unjust;
I came in search of Titiyaṉ,
A mongoose that can cut eye-piercing
Snakes into pieces," she said.

"See the sword out of the scabbard!
Know a vow of mine, my dear!
My hands will touch you only after
I return killing those that harmed
Your father and my father-in-law,"
Aḻuntūrāṉ uttered the war-cry!
An army marched! The backs of
The evil-minded Kōcar were broken;
They perished falling like a huge
Wall dilapidated; she fulfilled
Her wish as she vowed and leaned
On the shoulders of Titiyaṉ;
The bud of love blossomed that very day!

# 19 Can He be Bought by Love?

Naṟkaṇṇai was a woman poet who

Could compose Tamiḻ poems sweet as
Sugar candy; without writing on
*Ikam* and *param*, she chose the essence
Of *akam* as her subject for the six
Pieces in the Sangam corpus–
Stones with which *Akam, Puṟam*
And *Naṟṟiṇai* are studded!
Besides those six songs, two more
When read deeply, kindled my mind
And something came up like the big
Branch of a banyan tree; a mother
Of the warrior clan, Kāvaṟpeṇṭu,

When asked by a maid where her
Son had gone sang a war song to say
Proudly her stomach was once
The tiger's cave; the same mother
Brought up Perunaṟkiḷḷi, the Chola
Prince as her own son whose beauty
And heroism captivated the heart
Of Naṟkaṇṇai, who revelled in his
Company in a dream world; Poet
Cāttantaiyār sings the praise of
Perunaṟkiḷḷi in a *puṟam*
Poem, a majestic march in words!

In the fertile fields of the Chola
Kingdom, in the ancient capital
Uṟaiyūr, where plants sway like
The maids who resemble peacocks and
Dance the Bharata dance, dressed in
Green silk, sitting under the royal
White umbrella, a king called
Viraivēṇmāṇ Veḷiyaṉ Tittaṉ,
Was giving away all the wealth
To the ascetics who offered sacrifices!

Saying this is not the true Tamiḻ
Tradition, his son kept opposing him.
Rejecting all the advice sane of
His son, like an innocent child that
Refuses to drink the medicine bitter
Not realizing its potent, Tittaṉ
Squandered the nation's wealth unchecked.

"To fill the royal treasury
Is the duty of the people; is it
Right to pierce their hearts making
Their life a fallow land? A king's

Greatness lies in a benevolent
Reign; to set fire to noble aims is
The deed of those devoid of ideals!
Pouring pots and pots of milk and
Honey into the fire, killing goats
Cows and horses to offer as
A sacrifice and conducting
*Yagnas* to have a share in
The offerings- Isn't this a deed
That will shake the basis of the dictum,
Love is God; Kiḷḷi asked objecting!

"King I am of this land; how can
You my son oppose me and preach
Atheism leaving a scar on your
Tongue? Leave this country before
I cut your tongue and feed dogs and
Foxes," thus ordered Tittan! "Today
I will leave Uṟaiyūr, which gave
Me birth; but, my king, you call me
An atheist because I said, "There is
Only one God; don't offer lives
As a sacrifice; in order
To see the heaven supposed to hang
In the sky you kill making a hell
Of this earth! One can cure madness;
But I leave this land feeling
My father can't be reformed," said
Perunarkiḷḷi, the prince with
A golden heart, left Uṟaiyūr
And reached Amūr, a city well-guarded.

Poet Cāttanār, the prince of words,
Accompanied Kiḷḷi avoiding
The presence of the Chola king.

Since the prince himself renounced
The throne the poet felt that to be
A court poet was of little value;
Vowing to safeguard the Tamil's
Dignity, heroism, culture and
Tradition, he stood by Kiḷḷi's side.
To the thrice guarded city of
Āmūr a wrestler rude came
And issued a challenge loud,
"Who in this town can defeat me?"
If their men were vanquished, he claimed,
He would possess the whole city!
Hearing this the ruler of the land
Marched forward but got defeated by
The man that was a forest-buffalo;
The wrestler started shouting, "Ah,
Āmūr belongs to me, the victor!"

Before him there stood on the ground
A warrior of the *Maṟavar* clan
Who had jumped there with the speed
Of a star that falls from heaven;
"Wrestler, stand there," he said
Pounding his chest and pounced upon
The human animal! "Who is he?
Who is he?" Āmūr was shaken
With the question! "See! It is Tittaṉ's
Son Perunaṟkiḷḷi," applauded one group!
Another group was agitated about
The outcome! Men and women of
Āmūr were struck dumb wondering
If the victory denied to
The Āmūr wrestler would be won
By the younger man! The wrestler

Rude dashed against Kiḷḷi shouting,
"Are you so haughty? I will blow
You off!" We will witness from
A distance the fight that went on
Like the whirling of a storm through
The window of Cāttantaiyār's poem.
Rushing towards the wrestler and
Pushing him to the ground, Naṟkiḷḷi,
Sitting with one knee on his chest
Avoiding his attack with the other,
Pinned his back to the earth, broke his
Head and legs and killed him just as
A hungry tusker attempting to
Eat a bamboo would bend and break it.

The poet greeting the Chola prince
Called him "Pōravaik Kōpperu
Naṟkiḷḷi and felt sad that King
Tittaṉ hadn't been there to see
The sight of his son's heroism.
Cāttantai, a famed Tamiḻ poet,
Giving a simile, describes
The speed with which Naṟkiḷḷi
Fought in words sweet as honey.
When Naṟkiḷḷi thus expressed his
Gratitude to the poet and the people
A lovely lady there her heart
Brimming with love asked her friend
By her eyes if he could be bought
By love! Her breasts heaving up and down,
That lady Naṟkaṇṇai was troubled
By unbearable pangs of love.

# 20 He Who Lives in the Hearts of the Grateful!

The Chola moon spread its pearly
Light of fame but because of many
Groups of enemies and lack of unity
Lost its glory and faced darkness;
Before this could happen, becoming
Kings, two could attain fame eternal!

After their reign, there came no one
Else as reputed as they were;

Holding the sceptre in hand,
King Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ protected
The public, and wielding the lance
King Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ fought many
Battles; I am delighted to
Write about the latter, my heart
Being weighed down by great sorrow.

Kuḷamuṟṟattut tuñciya
Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ was the one
That fought against both
A Cēraṉ and a Pāṇṭiyaṉ and
Received wounds deep on the field;
Kuḷamuṟṟam was the place where
He fell; After these two the Chola
History was dark for five hundred
Years; the later Cholas came later.
Here we will meet now Kiḷḷi who
Died in Kuḷamuṟṟam but survives
As a living legend in literature.
In the treasure trove of *Puṟanāṉūṟu*
These are several songs well-known
On him! Several poets have sung him!

"Though those that cut off a cow's
Udders, that destroyed the life that
Grows in a woman's womb, and that
Killed their loving parents may be
Forgiven, the life of the sinners
That prove ungrateful will be damned
Even if the world is turned upside down."

Ālattūr Kiḻār uttered this,
Greeting him and receiving from him
An award; the same Ālattūr
Kiḻār appeared before Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ

And advised him in a wise song,
When there was a siege of Karuvūr:
"What is there to be proud about
Conquering an impotent coward
Who, hearing the fall of guarded trees,
Has hidden himself in fear
In the palace?" Listening to this,
Returned he with his rushing army.
The king of Karuvūr escaped just as
A worm that fell on a brand survived!"
Expressing wonder at the king's
Heroic deeds, Kōvūrkkiḻār says,
"Even the Lord of Death waits to seize
The life of someone but you, a king
Of the Chola clan, end your foe's
Life the moment you think of it!"
He also adds that those who go to
King Kiḷḷi get awards unimaginable,
Just as one going to chop wood
In a forest receives gold.

Poet Iṭaikkāṭaṉār sings
The praise of Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ:
"You are the only king that guards
The Tamiḻ race as a tiger
Mother guards its young cubs!
You rule the Chola land fertile
Where honey in the sugar cane,
*Vāḷai* fish from river waters,
*Ceṅkaḻunīr* flowers picked by
Maids, tortoises found by farmers
From their fields, paddy grains grown all
Over fed by the Kāviri floods."

Hailing the king, poet Veḷḷaikkuṭi
Nākaṉār gave a piece of advice:
"Your royal parasol white is
Not an umbrella that keeps the sun
Away; it is one that provides
Benevolent reign driving away
People's misery; since all the victories
Won by your warriors on the front
Depend on the plough's work in the field,
The farmer clan labours hard
Without giving in to fatigue
Undeterred by floods or little rain.
If sword-men should survive, King,
Live long protecting ploughmen!"

Poet Tāyaṅkaṇṇaṉār of
Erukkāṭṭūr wove many wreaths
Of pearl-like poems praising the king;
Scholars tell us that he was a lion
Of bards who lived near Kuḷikkarai
Of Tañcai; "Even if this world
Is ruined by Nature's fury, when
King Kiḷḷi lives, what should we fear?"

Kiḷḷi had a friend in Ciṟukuṭi,
A small town of the Chola country;
He was tender as the shadow
Of a tree; in the field of that
Paṇṇaṉ of a glorious clan,
All the paddy grains reaped would reach
The poor free of charge; knowing this
Kiḷḷi went to this place and conferred
On him the title "Physician that
Heals the disease of hunger!"
"Paṇṇaṉ, you are generous as

The rain, live long including
The years of my life!", he wrote thus
In a *puṟam* poem, gave it to him
And left for his capital Uṟaiyūr!

Whatever army was brought by
The enemy, he would vanquish;
This was the heroic history
Vaḷavaṉ kept writing in life.
He had a face lovely and graceful
As the cow's milk; on the field he
Fell into the hands of death one day;
This news tore the eardrums of a team
Of Tamiḻ poets who shed streams of tears!

"Let me ask those that are skilled in
Making pots in which the dead are
Placed and buried; if the body of
King Kiḷḷi is to be contained
By a pot, it should be made by
Bending the sky of East and West,
Using the entire earth as a wheel,
And carving the Mēru mountain
That stands straight; your pot may be
Enough for burial of a body
Real but for Kiḷḷi's body of fame
This world is the vessel that fits."

While writing this elegy with grief
Aiyūr Muṭavaṉār also felt
There was no limit to the Chola's fame.

# 21 He didn't Come by Himself; He was Brought by the Chief!

If you start writing the history

Of the South since the ancient times,
The lists, long and short, of the old
Tamil kings, Cheras, Cholas and
Pandyas would stand before you;

The kings with three flags, the three
Kings who fostered the three Tamiḻs,
Who founded the three Caṅkams,
Of the Cheras, Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ the great,
Of the Cholas, Karikāl Peruvaḷattāṉ,
Of the Pandyas, Muṭattirumāṟaṉ;
Who, promoting Tamiḻ, had as
His capital Kapāṭapuram
Swallowed by the sea; these empires
Under crowned kings flourished
During the days the three Caṅkams
Reached the peak and they didn't lose
Their grip for long; they fiercely
Fought to expand their territories
And to take revenge, but embracing
Each other forgot their vengeance,
Sustained their friendship each ruling
His region; the history of any
Of these from beginning to end
None has written, none can write with
Authenticity absolute!
Later during the five hundred years
In between before the later Cholas
Were born, grew up and became
Powerful, several groups of rulers
Called Kaḷavar and Kaḷappirar
And Cātavākaṉar who ruled
Upto the Ganges, lived gloriously
Having their small kingdoms and
Building forts for them; of these
Mahendra Varman of lasting fame,
His son Naracimma Varman
The great warrior were the two Pallava
Kings powerful and generous;

Male lions claiming lineal descent
From Simma Vishnu; with Kāñci
As capital they ruled for three
Hundred years! It is recorded
History that in some wars Pallavas
Like Nantivarman had vanquished
Even Cholas and Pandyas; when
Mahendran, who had been a Jain,
Became a Saivite king and wrote
The play *Matta Vilācam* making
Fun of Jainism and used it for
Religious propaganda, the Jains
Were worried thinking of the past,
Wondering if the opposite camp
Could change the mind to that extent.

Several scholars have raised doubts
About Kāñci having been Pallava's
Capital; they even declare,
In order to prove it, Petta Kāñci
Of Andhra was the Kāñci of Pallavas.
They guess even the Chinese pilgrim
Yuan Chwang would have mentioned
Only that Kāñci; we don't know
The truth! There is some news sweet as
Honey drops in the special note
Of the Chinese pilgrim! "Asoka,
In the land of Dravidas, erected
Many pillars of which some
Stand ruined"; our hearts brim over
With joy when we think of where
And by what great men the word
'Dravida' has been pronounced.
Pulikēci the Chāḷukya
Came to fight with Mahendra

Varman to bring him to his knees.
Like erupting volcanos, the two
Big armies clashed against each other.

Pulikēci then got a lie
Carved on stones claiming in the war
At Puḷḷalūr, Mahendran ran
Away from the field; objecting
To this, King Naracimmaṉ also
Known as Māmallaṉ in which name
Māmallapuram came into being,
True to his name, challenged him to
A fight; but Pulikēci ran
In search of a safe hiding place
And disappeared; Naracimmaṉ
Was not to leave the coward there!
He sent his chief Parañcōti
To go after him to Vātāpi
His capital and to declare to the world
Pulikēci had to turn back
In defeat and they won the war.

As a token of their victory
Parañcōti brought a beauteous
Tusker in stone from Vātāpi
To the Tamiḻ land; if every
Concert even today begins with
An invocation to Vātāpi
Ganapati, it began only
After Parañcōti got the icon
Introduced to the Tamiḻs.

Piḷḷaiyār did not come by himself
To bestow his blessings; history
Reveals he was conquered by our

Chief Parañcōti and brought from
Vātāpi to Tamiḻakam!

# 22 Love and Mercy Displayed by the Land of Kāñci

The Higira is the occasion
When the prophet Mohammed
Left Mecca to go to Medina
In A.D. 622; that was the time,
"The History of Mahendran" tells us,
When the saint Appar also known

As Tirunāvukkaracar, and
Mahendra Varman lived here;
This reckoning by Vēṅkaṭacāmi
About Kāñci king's days of reign
Is good news that delights us all!

What are the boundaries of the land
Of Naracimman, son of Mahendran?
It was a land surrounded by
The Chalukyas in the north,
The Vaikai of the Pandyas in the south,
And the Cheras in the west - this is
The map drawn by history.

The power crazy Pulikēci,
Eaten up with jealousy, went
To war too often fearing that
The Pallavas would become powerful
And their reign might take deep roots.
To put an end to this arrogance
Of Pulikēci, Naracimman
Rose beating the war-drum aloud.

The soldiers of Kāñci with their
Shoulders strong and their skill
In war forced Pulikēci to
Turn back and chased him up to Vātāpi.
Pallavan made Pulikēci
Realize his chief Parañcōti's might;
The emblem of the Pallavas
Was exquisitely inscribed
In Vātāpi's temple and even
Today it is seen as a remnant
Historical! Stone inscriptions
There are on his famed victories!
History hails him as a Pallava

King who fought hundreds of battles
And sealed his sign of victory
On the back of the vanquished
Pulikēci in Pariyalam,
Maṇimaṅkalam and Cūramāram!
The learned that live in Kāñci
Are even today proud of the fact
That Kāñci's great teacher Dharma Pālar
Taught in Nāḷanta;
The Chinese Yuan Chwang doesn't forget
To mention how Tikampara Jains
Lived as blessed beings in
The Dravidian Kāñci and the Buddha
Himself came down to Kāñci and
Converted hundreds to Buddhism.

Naracimma Varman never
Abandoned his bosom friends; a little
King called Māṉavarman ruling
Ilaṅkai was defeated by his foes
Driven away with his family
In a boat on the Indian Ocean;
The heart-broken Māṉavarman
Rowed the boat towards the port
Of Māmallapuram hoping to
Seek Ṇaracimman's help of which
He was certain though his friend
Was not of his clan; when he reached
The shore he was worried about
The reception but was stunned and
Delightfully surprised when he
And his wife were treated as his kith
And kin by Naracimman who
Took them to his palace, gave them

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Clothes and jewels behaving like their
Brother and told him, "My brother,
Dear as my life, I extend a warm
Hand of support to give you all
That you need; ask whatever you
Want in order to be crowned as
King by defeating your enemies;
Ask without hesitation; I will
Give without delay;" his friend said,
"You are a hero great gathering
Victories by your sword-point; I lost
My land, I lost my palace, as
I was deceived by the plot of
A scorpion pretending to be my
Friend; I have come begging your help
So that Māṉavarmaṉ may live
A life decent without losing
His dignity." Pallavaṉ said,
"Take as many soldiers as you need;
Here is the steel-hearted chief
Parañcōti who will do whatever
You want," and turned to have a look
At Parañcōti, who promptly
Responded, "I am ready to
Send the army your friend requires,"
And took his leave nodding his head.

* * *

With the army of Kāñci, left
Māṉavarmaṉ for the battlefield;
Hugging him with love, Naracimmaṉ
Sent him on his errand but his
Friend returned to Kāñci with
A heavy heart having lost the war

In Ilaṅkai; finding out the reason
For the defeat in detail and teaching
Him the art of organizing
His army for the next fight,
Naracimmaṉ went to the port
Of Māmallai to take leave of him.

To their surprise there, the soldiers
Refused to board the ship without
Naracimmaṉ and joining together
Demanded that the king should go
With them to Ilaṅkai; consoling
The miserable Māṉavarmaṉ,
Asking him not to be scared,
Naracimmaṉ got into the ship;
Shouting "Long live the king," the army
Of Kāñci started its journey;
The ship having covered some distance
In the sea, the king covering himself
With a shawl, got down by another
Entrance and left for Kāñci by boat!

When his army reached Ilaṅkai,
Thinking that the king was with them,
They surrounded the enemies;
The result was the garland of
Victory to Māṉavarmaṉ!

The foes perished on the field;
The king of kings of Māmallai,
Naracimmaṉ, having saved his
Friend and his land, was delighted
To note because of this deed,
Friendship pure had blossomed between
The two, this act of his making
Māṉavarmaṉ the king was a firm

Rejoinder to those that think kings won't
Have a heart and even if they
Have one, human love won't bloom there!

Māṉavarmaṉ wrote a letter,
Greeting Naracimmaṉ, hailing
Him as a gentleman eminently
Fit for friendship and accepting
All was due to Kāñci's love and mercy!
Also he added, "Your father piercing
Rocks could make sculptures splendid;
You piercing the enemy camp could
Erect victory pillars and that
Pleases the hearts of our people as if
They had been touched by a cool breeze."

The sweet letter delighted the king
But that never made him haughty!

# 23 An Iron Pillar and the Wings of a Fly

During the days of Atitta Cōḻaṉ,

His son Parāntakaṉ the First,
Ascended the throne; twelve wives he had
And five sons Irācātittaṉ, Kaṇṭarātittaṉ,
Arikulakēcari, Uttamacīlaṉ,
Ariñcayaṉ; Of these, since in
Takkōlam war Irācātittaṉ died,
The one next to him, Kaṇṭarātittaṉ
Became the king, married Cempiyaṉ

Mātēvi, Maḻavaraiyaṉ's daughter,
And got the son Uttama Cōḻaṉ, who
Had the other name Maturāntakaṉ.

When Kaṇṭarātittaṉ died, since
Maturāntakaṉ was but a child,
Ariñcayaṉ, a younger brother, was
Crowned king; he also died a premature
Death, after him it was Ariñcayaṉ's
Son, Parāntakaṉ the Second who came
To power; they conferred on him the title
Irācakēcari, the copper plates of
Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, singing his praise,
State that; though young, he fought against
Vīra Pāṇṭiyaṉ at Cēvūr, won the war,
And dispatched him to the land of death.

Of the wives of Parāntakaṉ the Second,
Two deserve to be mentioned; one is
Vāṉavaṉ Mātēvi, Malaiyamāṉ's daughter;
She was the one that died climbing on to
The fire that burned her dead husband;
She deceived none merely saying she would
Burn herself to death when her husband died.

Since the practice is irrational, we didn't
Support it in the past, don't support it now,
Will not support it in future; before
The two lost their lives, the Chola prince
Irācarācaṉ, dear as pure gold, who
Later established the Chola empire,
Was playing with a sword on the lap of
His mother! Cēraṉ Mātēvi was another
Wife of Parāntakaṉ; the present place
Cēramātēvi was named after her!

The womb of Vāṉamātēvi that gave
Birth to Irācarācaṉ, Atitta
Karikālaṉ, and Kuntavai Nācci
Was gratified to find the tiger-flag
Flying all over the earth! She was proud
Of having become the best example of
The *kuṟaḷ* that states "The mother that hears
Her son's virtues being praised would be more
Delighted than when she gave birth to him."

Though Atitta Karikālaṉ was the first
Son of Vāṉamātēvi, even when his
Father was alive, he became the victim
Of a plot hatched by the evil-minded
That raised the question of their right to rule!

After Karikālaṉ was killed, since the next
In line was Irācarācaṉ, there spread
The scandal that he it was who got
Karikālaṉ murdered, urged by his love
For power; but that blame disappeared
Just as snow disappears at the sight of
The sun and the country came to know what
Had really happened; Maturāntakaṉ
Who had the undeserving title 'Uttama
Cōḻaṉ' taking killing to be a game,
In contrary to the import of his name,
It is said, executed his violent plan.

He became an example of the dictum
That the name and the deed don't match
In the case of some; somehow he had
Managed to join the group of great men.

There are men that tell a different tale
Claiming that Uttama Cōḻaṉ was
Wrongly blamed for the deed done by

His own kith and kin who were behind
The assassination of Atitta Cōḷaṉ.
Whatever might have caused the Chola's end
Whoever might have hatched the plot, none denies
The belief that a plot brought his life to a close.

Those that indulged in the sweet dream that
Irācarācaṉ would be the future
Ruler were frustrated but consoling
Them he made his uncle Maturāntakaṉ
King though he also felt Maturāntakaṉ
Might have been the cause of the murder.
See therefore how fitting to him the name
Aruḷmoḻittēvaṉ; it was thus that
Atittaṉ's tomb became the throne on which
Maturāntakaṉ wearing the crown was seated!

Yes, the plot succeeded, and the innocent
Public shed tears murmuring, "Fate, alas,
Has won;" but in the heart of Irācarācaṉ,
There wasn't one iota of agitation;
Will an iron pillar be weakened by the wings
Of a fly? He vowed to watch the king's reign
Remaining a prince and watched every
Move of his uncle without sleeping a wink!

As he knew his uncle full well, he did his
Duty as a prince always as vigilant
As the proverbial Murukaṉ on the peacock's
Back; when there is a fight in big families
For the householder's place, won't there be a fight
For the headship of an empire? Even while young,
Irācarācaṉ understood this and behaved
Accordingly because of his intelligence,
Faith in the golden saying that those that
Wait will rule the land, and the fear that if

There is a problem in the palace, that
Will provide room for strangers to gain entry.
This will-power and wisdom made him king later!

# 24 Father Irācarācaṉ and his Captivating Son

After the crime dastardly

Of the assassination of Atitta
Karikālaṉ, Cuntarac Cōḷaṉ was
Heartbroken and died in Kāñci's golden
Palace unable to bear the shock of his

Son's death; in this background melancholic
When there were questions alarming about
The tragic events, Maturāntakaṉ
Ascended the throne in 910 A.D.

When there was a controversy fierce about
His role, Pañcavaṉ, Piramātirācaṉ,
Paramēcuvaraṉ, Tēvatācaṉ, Cōmaṉ,
And Ravitācaṉ were reported to
Have done the dreadful deed; the stone inscriptions
In Kāṭṭumaṉṉārkuṭi shedding tears
Over this sad event lists these six names
And identifies four of them as Brahmins.

If Uttama Cōḻaṉ was really responsible
For the killing of Karikālaṉ, why didn't
He make his son heir apparent to the throne?
Why was Aruḷmoḻi Varmaṉ made the prince?
These are questions raised by the Tamil historians.
It might have been a drama staged to cover up
His conspiracy; but his dream came true;
Uttama Cōḻaṉ got the position he cherished
As his life and also the relatives of
Irācarācaṉ to serve as a saving shield.

Nīlakaṇṭa Cāttiriyār, a professor
Of history, started the debate stating
The cunning killers of Karikālaṉ
Were Brahmins but evidence was
Provided by Catāciva Paṇṭārattār
To prove Maturāntakaṉ wasn't guilty;
Both could quote from stone inscriptions and
Copper plates to justify their stand; let us
Give the benefit of the doubt to the guilty
Ignoring the witnesses in the field,
And deliver our judgement in their favour.

If we are after Irācarācaṉ,
The lion-like Cōḷaṉ that established
The Tamiḻ empire in the whole country
And far beyond the south, we will go into
Ecstasies over how he maintained his
Empire; when Irācarācaṉ served as
A prince, he received his training in
Diplomatic arts from Maturāntakan.

He learnt how to help those that seek refuge
And how to attract those that oppose;
Maturāntakaṉ might have made amends
For the crime he had committed but
Unmindful of all this, forgetting and
Forgiving his foes, Irācarācaṉ,
Bent upon winning his future victories
Moved forward relentlessly and on
The twenty fifth of June 985 A.D.
Was crowned king of the country after sixteen
Years of training as prince and by our
Reckoning, he became the ruler at about
Forty and reigned for thirty years after that.

His son Irācēntiraṉ became king
At the age of fifty in the year one
Thousand and twelve even when his father
Was alive and captivated the hearts
Of the Tamiḻs; the glory of the sceptre
The father's hand wielded spread up to
The Krishna river in the north;
The waves of the Arabian Sea in the west
And the Ilaṅkai island in the south
Humbly accepted the rule of father and son;
Praising highly, history pays its respects to both!

# 25 Mummuṭiccōḻaṉ Shone as a Model King!

It was the time of Irācarācaṉ's reign;

It was the rule that opened the door to
The development of Tamiḻ sweet, the training
In racial welfare, the resurgence of
Racial awareness, the perfection of culture,
The praise of the past glory, the blooming
Of communal harmony, and the delight of
The farmers; but then we hesitate to
Historically call it the golden age.

We have the courage and the honesty
To state the reasons that are clear as glass;
It is true they conquered northern regions,
Displayed their might as a maritime power,
Established an empire covering a large

Area from Kumari to the Himalayas
And struggled hard to keep it flourishing
For three hundred years; but without causing
Damage to the glory of our pioneering
Kings, without finding fault with their
Victories and their proud titles in the slightest
Manner, we only regret the fact that
Like the farmer that didn't use the wind for
Winnowing, the Tamiḻ race failed to exploit
The chance it had, lack of will and lameness
Forcing it to end its march forward, though
Mummuṭicōḻaṉ had built an empire;
My hand trembles while writing this as we
Cannot fully admire the Chola's feat.

The days of the Chola empire were Caṅkam
Age but in politics, they were days when
They won several victories, in life,
In maintaining racial dignity, they
Didn't attain the glory of the great age.

Not only professors of history but
Also cultured men that cherish self-respect
Regret it; the flawless Tamiḻ culture
Artistic and literary, as it went
To the north and absorbed its practices,
Degenerated and got ruined
Like the fruit into which a wasp had entered
In the distant past before the bud blossomed
In a green garden full of fruit-trees fresh.
A single instance of evil is enough;
Being burnt to death with the husband's corpse-
Was the practice ever there in the Tamiḻ
Land? From Pūtappāṇṭiyaṉ Tēvi to
The Chola queens that ruled the world - they were

All afflicted by this contagious disease
To which the cure could be given only by
Raja Rammohan Roy; not only that evil,
But the creation of the distinction between
The high and the low and the scaring claim
That it was the Vedic injunction, and
To benefit "those born of the forehead"
Inventing caste hierarchies and reserving
Chaturvēdi charities, building dams
To prevent the mixing of the clear streams
Of Jainism and Buddhism – all these,
History reveals to our horror,
Came causing to us agony intense.

In Southern history, it is the Chola
Age that is comparable to the Sangam
Age but that is true of politics only;
Though they won many wars, in social life
The degeneration began because of
The advent of the Aryan wind from the north!

Irācarācaṉ leading those that came
To power attained eminence before
The alien practices could be examined
Rationally and found fit for our culture.

Several flashes of lightning turned into
The growing moon which finally became
The rising sun that reached the zenith at noon;
He shone like a disc of light in the Chola
Chronicle; a charmer he was, neither
Too old nor too young; if he stood up holding
A sword in hand, he would look like a lion;
A handsome hero with a moustache
With curls at the ends appearing as if
A crescent moon tinged with black had been fixed

On the face, a broad back that wouldn't bend
A little even when kissed, a sturdy chest
That seemed to be made of a tusker's forehead,
Presenting on the whole the sight of
A mountain moulded into a mighty man!

When he was free for an hour or two
Away from the battlefield, he would rush
To the place of his wives, five plus six in
Number, and when stopped on the way by
A woman's voice calling him "Aruḷ" or
"Aruḷmoḻi", would move in that direction
Unconsciously and his grandma
Cempiyaṉ Mātēvi would embrace him.

With his grandma and his dear sister
Kuntavai who doted on him, he would
Discuss matters relating to the country
And their welfare. "Hasn't Tēvar come?"
He would ask Kuntavai and Tēvan would
Be there saying he had come and laughing aloud.
His sister's husband, holding a high post,
Would wink at her asking what had happened.

Moving away from there, Kuntavai and
Tēvaṉ would have a confidential talk;
During the dialogue a group of ladies,
Brimming with delight would reach the place.

It would be the group of Irācarācaṉ's
Wives – Ulaka Makātēvi, Cōḻa
Mātēvi, Nakkaṉ Tillai Aḻaki,
Pañcavaṉ Mātēvi, Tirailōkkiya
Mātēvi, Apimāna Valli, Ilāma
Mātēvi, Piritivi Mātēvi,
Mīṉavaṉ Mātēvi, Vīra Nārāyaṇi,
Vāṉamātēvi; of these, the last one

Was blessed with the honour of having
Been the mother of Irācēntiraṉ.

Irācarācaṉ would speak with all
The eleven starting with Cōḷa Mātēvi,
Fall at the feet of Cempiyaṉ Mātēvi,
Receive the spear she would hand over
And go to the royal court for counselling.
This was the daily routine he followed.

During the time kept apart for his family
He would manage all those meetings, those
Cordial conversations in a manner
As speedy as the swords drawn and spears
Hurled on the battlefield! It was a life
Busy and exciting with a rare day
Of rest as Nature's gift in between!

Thus spinning like a top, Irācarācaṉ
Did his duty as devotedly as the sun;
His younger daughter Kuntavai, wife of
Vimalātittaṉ, would come but there would
Be no talk about their family life;
Both would discuss but the burden of reign.

When one holds a lance, one should labour on
The battlefield, when one holds a sceptre
One should take care of one's countrymen;
Can one be concerned with one's family
All the while? The answer is 'no';
Embodying this dictum excellent,
Mummuṭiccōḷaṉ shone as a model.

# 26 That Future Will Be the Future Dear!

Have you seen it anywhere?

Has anyone spoken about it?

Having served as prince for sixteen
Years and as king for thirty years,
That hero of heroes, victor
Of victors, during the reign of
Forty-six years, won names regional
And national such as Mummuṭi
And Ceyaṅkoṇṭa Cōḻaṉ and

Numerous titles and honours,
Was also known as Cōḻēntra
Cimmaṉ, Civapāta Cēkaraṉ,
Cikāmaṇi, Jaṉanātaṉ,
Irācācirayaṉ, Irāca
Mārttāṇṭaṉ, Nittiya Vinōtaṉ,
Pāṇṭiya Kulācaṉi, Kēraḷāntakaṉ,
Ciṅkaḷāntakaṉ, Iravikula
Māṇikkam, Teluṅku kula
Pālaṉ, victorious wherever
He went, laid the foundation
For a Tamiḻ empire that would
Last three hundred years, but neither
He nor his relatives knew
The year in which he was born!

It was not known to the nation;
Incredible it is but this is
An instance of incredible events!
There are stone inscriptions several
To show he won wars numerous,
Documents innumerable that
Declare he built temples also,
Copper plates that reveal the glory
Of his reign righteous, and his
Administration admirable.

But the date of birth of a king
That carved out a name for himself
As one mightier and more determined
Than even Alexander that
Shook the world went unrecorded!

There is the brief note that he was
Born on a *Cataya* day in
The month of *Aippaci* but the year

Is not known and on this basis
Irācarācaṉ's *Cataya*
Celebrations take place every year.

For the king that inscribed the events
That happened during the days of
The Chola empire, there was none
Among those with him or his sons
Who could rationally think and
Remember to record the date
On which he was born! We are
Disappointed and have to hang
Our heads in shame as such details
Have not been cherished as a treasure!

Just because there is no note about
The date of birth, can we conclude
That someone was not born at all!
Can we reckon from which single cloud
Heavy rains pour during winter?
Don't we decide there had been
Plenty of rains by seeing that
Lakes and ponds are full to the brim!
That is how we sing the glory of
Irācarācaṉ based on the empire
He built up! We wonder at the wars
He won! We are overwhelmed when
We think of the victories he had!

We may forget the clouds, not the rains;
We may forget his date of birth,
But not his great deeds! Wasn't his
World-renowned reign a reign that
Pleased the Tamiḻs in a special way?

Even in the fourth year of his
Reign, the Chola lion laid siege to

The Chera land! The one that led
The army was his own dear son
Irācēntrac Cōḻaṉ, also
Known as Pañcavaṉ Māṟavarmaṉ,
A bold warrior, who defeated both
A Chera and a Pandya, helping
The Chola clan stand firmly
Like a rock of eminence.

Irācarācaṉ's messenger
Was ill-treated in Kuṭamalai
Enraging the huge Chola army.
"Start, my son", the king commanded;
"I will force them to their knees,"
Vowed Irācēntraṉ and none can
Stop him from raising the sword!
Kuṭamalai prostrated itself;
Tañcai laughed aloud and its
Anger cooled down considerably!

The little kings of Koṅku Nāṭu,
Koṭuṇkālūr and those that ruled
The western seashore were ready
To humble themselves and kneel down;
The Chola army was everywhere,
That prince supreme returned to
Tañcai winning the war with the title
Kīrtti Parākkirama Cōḻaṉ.

Kaṅkapāṭi was a part of
Mysore during those days and its
Capital then was Talaikkāṭu.

Irācarācaṉ, king of kings,
Crossed the Kāviri first, then entered
Kaṅkapāṭi with his army!

It was captured; in addition to it
Tamikaipāti was brought under
His rule and his flag raised; there
Too flourished the Chola rule!
Unable to solve the problem faced
By the land of Eastern Chalukyas
Caktivarmaṉ got scared and
Surrendered himself at the feet
Of Irācarācaṉ, who hoisted
His flag at Vēṅki by sending
An army to defeat it, extended
His hand of support showing mercy;
Caktivarmaṉ seized hold of it.
Besides this, Irācarācaṉ
Increased his strength in Vēṅki
By giving his daughter Kuntavai
To Vimalātittaṉ, younger brother
Of Caktivarmaṉ, which wedding
Proved that he was not only a king
Of kings but a cunning king also!

The songs of victory sung by
His inscriptions on stones have reached
The sky saying he had conquered
Kaliṅka and a part of Laṅka!

In the history of his victories
The Himalayan peak was reached
When he captured the Laccadives!

In 1013 A.D. he founded
A navy but without using
It, he could win those islands;
The attempt the father first made
Brought a string of conquests in the sea!
The Tamiḻ army that included

Rows and rows of warriors victorious,
Army camps that drove away
Enemies hitting them hard, chiefs
That trained the soldiers time and again,
Had a suicidal squad called
Vēḷakkārar army that would
Cease to exist if the king was harmed
Because they had been slack in their work;
Theirs was whole-hearted love for the king!

We praise that the tower of the Big
Temple at Tañcai is a gift,
A lasting gift to the Tamiḻ land
By Irācarācaṉ; but it
Is a grief to us that while
The temple is there, the fort from which
He built the temple is gone; where is it?
It is a grievous question raised
Not by Tañcai alone but by
The whole of the Tamiḻ land!

We, however, rejoice recalling
Our kings and their descendants
Have prevented our history from
Perishing by preserving at least
The inscriptions, documents and
Literary writings of those times.

Though the plans, welfare schemes and
Governance of Irācarācaṉ,
Were all glorious, Sanskrit flourished,
Tamiḻ, our mother tongue, declined;
Though the Tamiḻs could bear this grief
It was like mixing buttermilk
With milk! They could have done more good
For the labourers and farmers;

Maybe because the kings served the god
More, their service to the poor suffered
A little! That was the defect of
The time, they say; but it was really
The fault of the king; for the great
Are of the view that the king should
Supplement when the time lacks something;

It is the strength of a ruler
Rather than his weakness that is
Highlighted in histories from
Ancient times to these days though
The contrary should be the case!

If you see the stone inscription
In the Tañcai temple built by
Irācarācaṉ, it is said there
He won these twelve kingdoms
And brought them under his rule;
Their kings – Ceḷiyaṉ, Cēraṉ,
Makintaṉ, king of Utakai,
King of Kuṭamalai, king of
Nuḷampappāṭi, king of
Kaṅkapāṭi, Taṭikaippāṭi's king,
Cattiyaciṟiyaṉ, Teluṅka
Vimaṉ, Caktivarmaṉ, king of
Kaliṅka, king of ancient Isles
Of Munnīr, Paḻuvēṭṭaraiyar,
Kolli Maḻavaṉ, Oṟṟiyūraṉ,
Pirutikaṇṭa Varmaṉ,
Tiruvaiyaṉ, Caṅkara Tēvaṉ,
Koṭumpāḷūr Vēḷān, Cuntara
Cōḻaṉ, Naṉṉamaraiyaṉ, Vīra
Cōlaṉ Ilātappēraraiyaṉ,
Irācarāca Vāṇakōvaraiyaṉ,

Malaiyamāṉ, Vallavarāyaṉ
Vantiyattēvaṉ, Vimalātittaṉ
Are catalogued thus; however,
In our Tamiḻ land, he was one
That lived long, admired by many,
Well-versed in all arts which he helped
Spread; heroic he was and heaped
Victories upon victories;
Being fond of farming, he took care
To deepen rivers, canals and broad
Lakes so that farming might flourish;
He got them periodically
Cleaned, kept them in good repair
For crops to grow well, protected
People from famines, floods and storms,
Leading an army, wiped out
The enemies; he was strong and
Benevolent but what pleases us
More is that he is one of us;
May all those that belong to us
Be good and mighty and may that
History be the history of
The future dear of the Tamiḻs!
Let that be the time to come!

# 27 They Waged Many Wars; They Won Naval Fights too!

If the mother jumps eight feet
The young one would be able to do
Sixteen feet; this is the proverb
Of which Irācarācaṉ and
Irācēntiraṉ, father and son,
Have become unequalled examples!

It was towards the end of his
Rule Irācarācaṉ crowned as
King his son Irācēntiraṉ ;
But during the seventh year of
His rule, Irācēntiraṉ created
History making his younger son
Irācātirācaṉ ruler;
Father and son together ruled
The Chola country for twenty
Five years, an event unknown
To Indian history till then!

The battles Irācātirācaṉ fought
As a prince are divided into
Two groups by historians, both of
Which brought fame to the son who
Even excelled his father in some!
Irācēntiraṉ won his first
Victory in Iṭaitturai
A plain between the two rivers
Krishna and Tuṅkapattirai
Known to us as Raichur today!

The army of Western Chalukyas
Rose to fight on the field north of
Kaṅkavāṭi and west of
Nuḷampāṭi but he humbled it
Just as by sprinkling water one
Would cool the boiling pot of rice!

The Chola army crushed Koḷḷipāk,
Today's Gulburga, on the northeast
Of Andhra's Hyderabad, which was
As easy as breaking dry twigs;
It strung together a run of wins!

Capturing Maṇṇaikkaṭakkam,
Capital of Rashtrakuṭas, he won
The name Maṇṇaikoṇṭa Cōḻaṉ!

In 1017 A.D. Irācēntiraṉ's
Army chasing the king of Lanka
Makintaṉ the Fifth who had earlier
Fled in fear marched forward,
Defeated him and won the credit
Of securing the stolen crown of
The Pandya king and of keeping
Him as a prisoner in the land
Of the Cholas! This honour belongs
To both! *Mahavamsam* mentions
This witnessing to the fame of
The great Tamiḻ warriors!

The Chola empire kept the tiger
Flag flying in Iḻam and its
Army pounced upon the Pandyas!

On hearing that Vallapa
Pāṇṭiyaṉ, once enslaved by
Irācarācaṉ had risen in
Revolt, the Chola army thrashed
Him; a stone inscription states this
Trouncing as one that took place in
The place called Kāntaḷūrccālai.

Irācēntiraṉ's invasion of
The Ganges Valley, the greatest
Of his great invasions, was
Chiefly responsible for his winning
The title Kaṅkai Koṇṭa Cōḻaṉ
And erecting the memorial
Kaṅkai Koṇṭa Cōḻapuram!

The Chola's tiger flag that started
Flying at Vēṅki was held
Aloft at the end of the war
On the field of Cakkarakkōṭṭam!

Tiruvālaṅkāṭu copper plates
Proudly speak of the ransom of
Boxes and boxes of precious
Stones paid to the Chola army
When they won the regions known as
Nāmaṇaikkōṇam, Pañcappaḷḷi
Mācuṇi on the Cintu shore
Oṭṭara Tēcam of south Kōcalam
Known as the great Kōcalam and
The lands on the shore of Mahanati!

The same copper plates state that
Our Chola king crossed the Ganges
Over the bridge of hundreds and
Hundreds of tuskers standing in line
On the waters of the river
And overcame the enemies!

Historian Paṇṭārattār says,
Kōcalam known as the ancient
Land went to the Cholas as a reward.

The sword whirling victoriously
The world over went after Tarma
Pālaṉ of Taṇṭa Putti Nāṭu
And Pālaṉ's crown tumbled down!

The next spot the Chola army
Stepped into was the land of the king
Of Tekkaṇaḷāṭam, Iraṭacūraṉ;
One more Bengali king Kōvinta
Cantaṉ, won over, fell at

The Chola's feet! Another hero
Unequalled, Makipālaṉ, had
A kingdom spreading up to Kāci,
But it was blown away by
The armies of father and
Son like dust swept off by the wind!
Vātāpi Ganapati was
The statue brought by the Pallava
Chief, Parañcōti, as a souvenir
Of his victory over Vātāpi!

Kaṅkai Vināyakar of
Kuṭantai Nākesvarar temple
Was the statue brought by the Chola
Chief as a souvenir of his
Victory over northern kings!

Of Irācēntiraṉ's overseas
Conquests, Kaṭāram conquest
Is the one over which we have
Been in raptures; even today
It is celebrated in the stone
Inscriptions and the copperplates
Of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu.

The two emperors ordered that
Pots of the Ganges water be brought
On the heads of the vanquished
Warriors of the North and as they
Came in a procession they were
Received with open arms by both;
Would there arise a foe in future?

# 28 A Blood-drenched Battlefield Became a Coronation Hall!

Irācarāca Cōḻaṉ, his

Heroic son, Irācēntiraṉ,
Grandson, Irācātirācaṉ
Independently and together
Fought many wars and brought home

Not only more and more victories
But also heaps and heaps of
Eye-ravishing jewels and things
Expensive not to elevate
Their family or to enrich
Their royal status but to raise
The tower of the Tañcai temple
And of Kaṅkai Koṇṭa Cōḻapuram
To the level of the sky.

Aruḷmoḻivarmaṉ and his
Descendants amassed wealth only to
Be spent on schemes constructive;
The queens never failed to shower
Gifts on skilled dancers and musicians.

Irācātirācaṉ, meanwhile,
Conquered the troubling Chalukyas
Captured their capital city
Kāmpiḷi and completely
Destroyed their army in the war
At Pūṇṭūr by the Krishna river.
During Irācēntiraṉ's last days,
Akavamallaṉ, the Chalukya,
Having been thwarted in his armed
Attempts, hatched a plot to harm
The Tamiḻ king by feigning to be
His friend and sent a few messengers
Claiming they were capable magicians
Who could mesmerize people, and asking
Him in a letter to seek their blessings!

Irācātirācaṉ was not the one
Who depended on *yagnas* for his
Victories lacking faith in
Heroism and wisdom and hence

Understood the enemy's scheme;
Planning to respond properly,
He took hold of two messengers,
Reduced one's hair to five little tufts,
Got the other dressed as a eunuch
Named them 'Ākavamallaṉ' and
'Ākavamalli' and sent them back.

Burning with shame and indignation
Ākavamallaṉ shouting 'War! War!'
Confronted Irācātirācaṉ's
Army in a place called Pūṇṭi.

That led to Ākavamallaṉ's fall;
Capturing Kalyāṇapuram,
Irācātirācaṉ conferred
On himself on the same field
The title Vicaya Irācēntiraṉ.

The hero-bath holy was held
There and as a souvenir of
Victory he was given a charming
Statue of a pair of guards at
Whose base they had inscribed the words:
"The statue of Tuvārapālakar
Brought from the conquered Kalyāṇapuram";
They say the statue is still there
In the Big Temple of Tañcai; earlier
It was, researchers contend, in
The temple of Tārācuram
Airāvatēcuvarar!

I would say it is a blot on
The Chola history that the king
Becoming proud of the title he won
Treated his foes in a manner
Thoroughly uncivilised and

Unbecoming of his status!
Terribly shamed by what the Chola
King did, Akavamallaṉ took
A vow to kill him in a war
And indulged in strange schemes wild.

Deciding to do the deed in
A cautious way, he waited till
The year 1054 A.D. and then
Began to carry out the plot.

In Koppam on the right shore of
The Krishna river, a place now
Known as Citrāpūr, Vijaya
Irācēntiraṉ was besieged
By a huge army led by him.

There was a thunderous shout from
Both sides and all the soldiers of
Akavamallaṉ's army attacked
Irācēntiraṉ aiming all
Their arrows and swords at him.

The king of kings as reputed
As Arjuna in archery
Seated on the royal tusker's
Back, because of the ceaseless shower
Of arrows fell down dead winning
Everlasting fame as a hero.

A byword for heroism and
An image of victory, he was
A raging hurricane who had
The courage to comb his hair with
A bone from his enemy's breast
As valiant as Indrajit and
Abimanyu, Irācāti
Rācaṉ was a nightmare to his foes.

Irācēntira Cōḻa Tēvaṉ,
His younger brother, seeing him
Fall, had no time to wipe his tears,
Pounced upon his opponents as if
He were lightning, thunder and
Hurricane all rolled into one.

Penetrating deep into enemy
Lines, he cut off the hands or heads
Of many moving with great speed.
Shouting 'Victory! Victory!'
He chopped off the Chalukyas, fought
Like a fierce storm and won the war.

A hundred arrows had pierced
The body of the victorious
Irācēntiraṉ who vanquished
Those that had vanquished his
Elder brother dear as his eyesight.

Those arrows on his body were
Eyed by him with delight immense;
The Chola camp shouted, "Bring the Crown;"
The battlefield brimmed with joy!
The blood-drenched field suddenly became
The royal court where the function
Royal of holding the sceptre was held;
In the history of Indian
Wars this is something unheard of.

Irācēntiraṉ who thus made
History went to Kōlkāpūr
From there and returned to his city
After building a victory pillar!

"Should thirty thousand men lay down
Their lives for one man to get crowned?"

A Jain saint singing thus passed by
The battlefield and this sight was one
That would bring ponds and lakes of tears
Even into the eyes of the merciless!

# 29 A Turning Point may Come in the Wake of Weddings!

Irācēntira Cōḻa Tēvaṉ

Converting the Koppam battlefield
Into a coronation hall
Got himself crowned as king of kings

Cut off the heads of Chalukya
Chiefs, Jeyasingan, Pulikeci,
Tacapaṉpavaṉ, Araiyaṉ,
Asokamaiyaṉ and captured
The two ladies, Catyavai and
Caṅkavai of the royal clan.
His vengeful act did not stop there;
His thirst for blood was not quenched
By those deeds; the foe's royal
Tuskers, Catrubayaṅkaraṉ,
Karabadraṉ, Mūlabadraṉ
And all the wealth of the Chalukya
King including his camels and
Horses he secured for himself.
In the year 1054 A.D. he
Conferred on himself the title of
An emperor in the midst of
Heaps of dead bodies, and lived on
This earth only for nine years with
The name Irācēntiraṉ the Second;
He died in 1063 and was
Succeeded by his younger brothers
Irācamakēntiraṉ and
Vīra Irācēntiraṉ who
Didn't live long either and
There the history comes to an end.
After Vīra Irācēntiraṉ's
Demise in 1070, Ati
Irācēntiraṉ came to power;
Because of civil wars, he died young.
Thus the Chola reign that raised its
Lustrous hand in 850 A.D.
Lasted for two hundred years

Serving the people and the God,
Waging wars against enemies
And came to an end with its last
King, Atirācēntira Cōḻaṉ.

Later in the name of Chalukya
Chola, Kulōttuṅka Cōḻaṉ
Ruled for fifty years and his reign
Is also painted as a bright
Picture though the shadow of Chalukya
Tradition caused a dark spot of
"The old Avvai" in the Chola moon;
Unmindful of this minor blemish
Kulottuṅkaṉ ruled gloriously.
In this two hundred year old Chola
History. Who is this Chalukya?
Once this question has been raised, is
It possible to leave it unanswered?

Wasn't Irācarācaṉ exemplary
In guarding the land of the Chola
Kingdom intelligently through
Victories in wars, peaceful settlements,
And giving and taking of brides?

He was the one who arranged
The 'mixed marriage' between his
Dear daughter young Kuntavai and
The leading hero of the Chalukya
Dynasty Vimalātittaṉ.

Irācarāca Narēntiraṉ
Was their son and Irācarācaṉ's
Grandson; Ammaṅkai Tēvi
Was Irācēntiraṉ's second daughter;
Since Kulōttuṅkaṉ was born to
This couple, will history hesitate

To call him a Chalukya prince
During the days when social doctrines
Have degenerated and heaps
Of Sastric rubbish keep increasing?

Even as a crawling child he would
Choose the right surface before
Making a move and as wily
As his grandpa, he would never
Take the road of defeat even
By mistake; hence in his young age
He was called Irācēntiraṉ.

When he became the prince of Vēṅki
His name became Vishnuvarthaṉaṉ.

He had several special names:
Virutarāca Bayaṅkāraṉ,
Karikālaṉ, Maṉukula
Deepaṉ, Ulakuyya Vantāṉ
Parāntakaṉ, Cuṅkam Tavirtta
Cōḻaṉ and besides these, more
And more of titles were also added!

In the month of June of 1070
On the ninth day, he was crowned
As the Chola Emperor and
Hence became the first king to have
The title "Tiripuvaṉa Cakkaravartti"!

In Kaṅkai Koṇṭa Cōḻapuram
He crowned himself and had as
A capital Kāñcipuram;
Changing Paḻaiyārai and
Tirumaḻapāṭi into suitable
Cities for his governance
Declaring his dearest son Vikrama

Cōḷaṉ as the heir apparent
To the throne, Kulōttuṅkaṉ
Had his help and ruled for fifty years.

His last victory was perhaps the one
He won at Kalinga which caused
The birth of *Kaliṅkattupparaṇi*!

Vikrama Cōḷaṉ's reign also stood
For justice and did not lose what
Was left by his father though it
Lost its grip over Ilaṅkai
Which might have been the beginning
Of a big loss and a setback.

The Perumāl temple of Maṉṉārkuṭi
Was raised by Kulōttuṅkaṉ;
It was, therefore, called by common people,
Kulōttuṅka Cōḷa Viṇṇakaram.

Even today we can see at
The Museum of the Lieden city
Of Holland the copper plate
Recording the gift of land to
The Buddhist shrine at Nākai
By Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ.

After Kaṅkai Koṇṭa Cōḷapuram
Got the status of a chief city
The Tillai city now known as
Chidambaram attained eminence!

From the time of Vijayālayaṉ
To that of Irācarācaṉ, they
Held Tiruvārūr in high esteem,
Because it lies between the two towns!

# 30 Announcing the Advent of an Army prior to the Siege

Pandyas' history - from where to

Begin? About whom to write first?

The ancient Pandyas were the ones
That served as the source and the brains
Behind the birth of the Caṅkam
And its blossoming into the first,

The second and the third and of them
Muṭattirumāṟaṉ was the first.

Though there is a catalogue of
The Pandyas starting with Kāy
Ciṉa Vaḻuti and ending with
Kaṭuṅkōṉ, there is no evidence,
Alas, of any kind in history!

In the account of the second
Caṅkam in Iṟaiyaṉār's
Commentary on *Kaḷaviyal*
Though a search is undertaken
In bright light, there is but little
On the ancients excepting for
Muṭattirumāṟaṉ! What at once
Attracts our attention is the fact
He finally founded the third Caṅkam!

That was the time when the second
Devastation by the sea took
Place when Kumari and the Pahruḷi
River were totally submerged,
Historians reveal; Iragava
Ayyangar says Muṭattirumāṟaṉ
Is Nilantaru Pāṇṭiyaṉ!

U.Vē.Cā. Ayyar in a note
Indicates the one next to that was
Mutukuṭumipperuvaḻuti.

Poems in praise of this king have been
Written by the reputed bards
Kārikkiḻār, Neṭṭimaiyār
And Neṭumpalliyattaṉār.

When a king comes with his army
To besiege a country he will announce

His arrival by beating the drums
In order to warn the ignorant people.
What kind of culture even while
Waging a war? Where is it gone?

Poṟkaippāṇṭiyaṉ has a history
Which reads like a legend which I
Will briefly narrate for you to know!

When a Pandya king in the habit
Of going round the town every day
In disguise at midnight hears
A brahmin taking leave of his wife
Telling her, "The king is there guarding
Us all"; a month later he hears
Again the wife talking to someone
At midnight and mistaking the man
For a thief, the king knocks on the door.
But realizing it is the husband
He tries to rush away from there.

In the brahmin's house the Ayyar
Becomes suspicious of his wife!
Feeling that he hasn't been faithful
To him, he asks her, "Who is the man
Who knocked on the door?" Worried that
He has caused domestic disharmony,
The king, before leaving, knocks on
The doors of all the houses there.

Next day the townsmen go to
The palace, complain to the king
A thief knocked on their doors the previous
Night; the king asks what punishment
Should be given to the culprit;
The ministers say his hand should
Be removed; raising his sword, the king

Immediately cuts off his hand
And tells them the entire story!

The broken hand was replaced by
A golden one made by the public;
From that day onwards he was
Praised as Poṟkaippāṇṭiyaṉ.
Those that wrote the puranas somewhat
Promptly buried fathoms deep
The treasure-troves of history!

# 31 The Tamiḻ that Escaped the Tsunami Erected the Last Caṅkam

The prosperous India in the past

Extended upto an area of seven
Hundred miles beyond today's
Cape Comerin in the south, they say!

The Kumari mountains served
As the rampart guarding the nation
On one side while the two rivers

Kumari and Pahruḷi firmly
Protected it like the twin bolts
On the door in response to
The poem by Oṭṭakkūttaṉ!

The large land mass spreading
From the Cantāt islands in the south
East to the Madagascar island
Adjoining the Eastern shore near
Africa towards the west,
Was swallowed by the deep sea
With its hideous hunger; assuming
The attractive name of *Kaṭal kōḷ,*
It turned the Tamiḻ land,
Welfare, wealth and strength upside
Down and the knot was untied
By the research of able historians.

It is heartening to hear that
Pāṇṭiyaṉ Nilantaru Tiruviṉāṉ
Dug the Pahruḷi river on
The widespread land of the ancient
Tamils to make it green with new growth.

We are born and bred on the lakhs
And lakhs of corpses buried,
Search for a new life and serve
As manure to help young men grow
While seeking our history.

We knew the signs of the zodiac –
Sun, moon, *cukkiraṉ, rāhu, kētu,*
The cruel *caṉi, kumpam, makaram;*
We knew the years to be sixty
Starting with *Prabava, Vibava,*
Born as children to both
Nārada and Krishna, we said;

All that is right but having been
Cheated we have forgotten our
History; we have left it unsaid,
Unwritten; we have now to dig out
The history of the good and the capable
Piercing through the terra firma!
Seated in a horse-drawn chariot
Speeding like a storm Pāṇṭiyaṉ
Nilantaru Tiruviṉāṉ
Rushes along a long street on
The shore of the Pahruḷi river;
Getting down from a horse, a security
Guard bows low before the king.

The king asks, "Have all of them
Assembled at the court?"
"Yes, King,
All the poets are waiting at the court"
"Is the queen ready to leave"
"She is waiting for the king at
The palace"
"Is that so?"

The chariot then didn't run but flew,
The queen's face hadn't grown red with
Anger but she didn't beam with pleasure.
The king understood the real reason.
"It is getting late; shall we start?"
"It is all right; at least so late!"
The queen spoke softly but there was
Much of bitterness; she got
Into the chariot, her beauteous
Body swaying sweetly.

"The task of the Pakruḷi river
Took a little more time than expected."

"O, Is the task of *Tolkāppiyam*
Launching next only to that?"
"Both constitute a single task."
"Do you mean to say releasing
A palm-leaf manuscript and
Regulating a running
River are one and the same?"
"No, not one, but as you say
They are not two either!"
"Aren't they two different tasks?"
"Understand one thing, Tamiḻaraci,
What we are going to release
Is not a simple palm-leaf but
A world classic! The tasks seem
To be the same, but the fruits
Of our labours are different."
The Pahruḷi river paves the way
For people's welfare; *Tolkāppiyam*
Tells them how to live their life;
What came earlier was called the first
*Kaṭal kōḷ* but the Kumari
And the Pahruḷi are safe;
My heart is worried about one
More *kaṭal kōḷ* from which we can't
Stop the ruin of the two rivers.

The queen with pride responded :
Even if many more furious floods
Will be there, they can't touch
The *Tolkāppiyam* that is to be
Released today; rivers, seas, nations
May change course but the Tamiḻ works
Like *Tolkāppiyam* will never perish;

Endowed with eternal life, they
Can't be ruined by anyone anywhere.

With boundless joy, Nilantaru
Tiruviṉ Pāṇṭiyaṉ desired
To embrace her and show his
Gratitude but could only hold
Her with his eyes since they were
In the middle of a city street!

As if they had understood that
The royal family was in a hurry,
The chariot-horses had by then
Reached the doors of the royal court!

"There may be one more upsurge of
The sea;" that this was the fear that
Troubled the minds of the court poets
Could be discerned from their dialogues.
Aṭaṅkōṭṭācāṉ introduced
The court poets to the royal couple;
He was affectionately
Called 'teacher' by everyone!
Tolkāppiyar, Akattiyar,
Iruntaiyūrk Karuṅkōḻi
Mōci, Veḷḷūrkkāppiyaṉ,
Ciṟupāṇṭiraṅkaṉ, Tiraiyaṉ
Māṟan, Tuvaraikkōmāṉ,
Kīrantai - all these as poets
Of the second Caṅkam attended
The inauguration in the presence
Of the Pandya king and left
Happily after the Ācāṉ
Offered his felicitations,
Without realising that there
Would be another attack by the sea.

Though that day shone as a golden
Day, if only the bards of the middle
Caṅkam had known there would be
Another bad day that would bring
Death and destruction, would they have
Spent their time happily singing
Songs like *kali, kuruku, veṇṭāḷi*
And *Viyāḻamālai Akaval*?

They were steal-hearted men who could
Fight nature with courage; they could
Confront not this only but anything;
Those Tamiḻ savants were also heroic!

Their delight did not last long; as though
Challenging it, the wild dance of
Nature started six months later
In Kapāṭapuram; in the grip
Of a demon, Nature unleashed
A savage attack on the waves of
The big sea with a gigantic
Iron hand and the whole area
Became a forest of dense darkness.
Making a loud deep thunder-like noise,
Lashing like flashes of lightning,
Entering the sea as an earthquake
Nature played havoc with the two
Rivers which became one, changed
Course, shifted from one place to
Another and finally disappeared;
Who can assess the impact of
Nature's fury? After the demon
Of the deluge destroying all
Ended its wild dance, peace showed
Its head; yes, it showed the damage

Done in that long wide open space!
There was no trace of human life;
How did all the people vanish?
It is a surprise of surprises!
Wherever you turn, there is death's laughter!

Six or seven months ago
On a particular day
Excepting for the royal court
Where *Tolkāppiyam* was launched
All the other buildings and towers
Were deeply buried into the mud!

According to Aṭiyārkku
Nallār's commentary on
*Cilappatikāram,* between
Pahruḷi and Kumari
Over a distance of seven
Thousand miles covering the seven
Fertile towns of Teṅka nāṭu,
Seven towns of Maturai, seven
*Muṉpālai* towns, seven *piṉpālai*
Towns and seven *Kuṟumpaṉai*
Ones totaling forty-nine small
Towns, everything was submerged
And the epilogue was written by that
Disaster caused by the rude sea!

The queen's whereabouts being unknown,
Muṭattirumāṟaṉ felt
Frustrated searching for her;
He shed tears noting that she was
One of the citizens lost to the sea;
But he felt elated at the fact
That Tamiḻ had survived though not
Tamiḻaraci and took a vow

To save Tamiḻ that had emerged
Unscathed; joining the surviving
Poets of the second Caṅkam he tried
Hard to establish the third one!

Muṭattirumāṟaṉ had the honour
And the privilege of being
Alive during the end of
The second Caṅkam which fell a prey
To Nature's fury, and the founding
Of the third Caṅkam; we may
Infer this and can also feel happy.

# 32 Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ and Neṭunalvāṭai

The masterpieces left long ago by

The masterminds have come down to us
As a bumper crop and witness
To the fact that our dear Tamiḻ race
Is the only race that has lived from
Time immemorial dividing life
Profoundly into *akam* and *puṟam*.

Though there are any number of
Examples of that, Nakkīraṉār
Has strung *akam* and *puṟam*
Together in a poetic garland.

Of the ten songs, *Neṭunalvāṭai*
Shines as a pearl couched in
Nectar-sweet Tamiḻ and telling

Us about Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ's
Heroism and the happening
That burnt Kōpperuntēvi's heart
When, separated from her husband,
She suffered long from pangs of love;
It tells us how in the Tamil land
During those days people were opposed
To the very talk on *ikam, param.*

The seven kings that wrongly felt
A youth was caught in the field of
Talayālaṅkāṉam all alone
Faced disgraceful defeat their broad
Shoulders getting covered in mud!

After the war Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ
Desiring to live like the *aṉṉil*
Bird, accepted a lovely dove-like
Lady as his wife and queen.

Though the wounds on his chest caused by
The swords and spears of the soldiers
Of seven armies had healed leaving
Scars, the queen of beauty took them
To be shining medals in gold, and
Gave everyday countless kisses!

Having wed her, his desire was
To keep in bed the ravishing
Beauty in tight embrace all through
The night without a moment's parting.
But time didn't permit it and
The call of war was a big worry.

Even after the war of
Talayālaṅkāṉam, he led

An army to conquer Vēḷ Evvi's
Miḻalaikkōṭṭam also.

Capturing the crown that belonged
To the heroic clan of Muttu
Vēḷir, he annexed their own
Kingdom of Muttukkūṟṟam!

He ruined the army of the heroic
King Cērāmāṉ Yāṉaikkaṭcēy
Irumpoṟai and put him in prison.

Thus with waves and waves of warriors
He heaped hills and hills of garlands
Of victory but Pāṇṭimātēvi
Was depressed like a bird that feels
Frustrated because it can't eat
Though bunches and bunches of fruits
Are there in front! Unable to spend
Her days and nights the agonised
Queen kept shedding tears all the time.

If it is winter, won't the cold wind
Attack? And won't lovers conquer
That cold wind by using each other's
Body as the blanket though undressed?

What was the condition of the king
That had in fury gone to the field?

The cold wind's threat to the king was
In vain beside the fury of the war,
But the queen, alas, was all misery!

Nakkīraṉār the bard of bards
Sings the sorrow of birds in houses.
The days when the cock and the hen
Together went out, had their fill

And rejoiced having gone, today
They are kept in wooden cages where
Not knowing the night from the day
They kept shifting their pained legs!

In that killing cold, the lady with
A peacock look, her heart smitten
By love, keeps rolling in her bed!
In a Tamiḻ that can't be bettered
By any, Nakkīraṉ paints his
Picturesque poem *Neṭunalvāṭai*!

Flags display rainbow-like hues
On a tower tall as a peak!
Did they use silver as white paint
To decorate the pillars that
Were as blue as thick blue stones?

Nakkīrar paints in flawless
Tamiḻ Ceḻiyaṉ's palace looking
Strong as ramparts built in copper.

See how he sings the bed where she
Lies, the Pandya queen with lips
Lovely as *cemparutti* blossoms
Staggering burdened by thoughts
About him that filled her mind!

The cot was decked with a pair of
Sharp tusks secured from a wild tusker
With drum-like legs that had died
In a fight having lived for full
Forty years; the four pretty jars
On top of the four stands were round
Globes beauteous as the milk-filled
Breasts of a pregnant woman,

Pearl garlands served as hangings;
Lilies and jasmines figured in
Paintings; besides a blanket,
A work of superb craftsmanship,
Picturing a lion hunt, there were
Plenty of pillows to lie against
And to rest her head and hands on
All made of soft feathers of swans.
But her man was not there to ask her
To lie against! Hence the floodgates
Of her misery were bursting!

Pressing her feet softly her maids
Begged her to sleep but she became
Furious and chided them in agony,
"Get lost, you seem to have no work"

Seeing in the picture of the sky
The figures of the moon and Rohini
Together, she said, "I haven't been
Blessed with that boon but suffer
Like this in vain;" with her fingers
She wiped the tears that had gathered
At the corner of her long eyebrows
But couldn't wipe away her sorrow!
What was the Pandya's condition
When the queen in the Maturai
Mansion was lying like a creeper
Full of honey-burdened flowers
Waiting in agony for the bees?
Come! Let us find it out from
Nakkīrar's *Neṭunalvāṭai*.

Love was not a hindrance to
Pandya's sense of duty; he didn't

Miss his ideal because his thoughts
Turned to Kōpperuntēvi often.

The cold wind did come to his camp
But because of that he didn't run
Away from the sword-drawn battlefield
In search of the bangled lady!

Here the Pandya king went out at midnight
But why? Not to see his chaste wife
Lying in bed grief-stricken; not at all!

During the wintry days when hills
Shook assailed by the cold wind from
The north, the king in the northern
Camp never turned to the south
Longing for his loving wife though
The torch-flame leaned towards the south!

To discharge his duty as the chief,
Surrounded by torch-bearing soldiers
Holding with the left hand the shawl
Slipping from the left shoulder,
Placing his right hand with affection
On a sturdy soldier's shoulder,
During a rainy midnight, the king
Went round the camp seeing the wounded
Soldiers, enquiring them about
Their welfare, thanking them profusely!

When the king's kind consoling look
Fell on them, all their grief at
The loss of limbs in the fierce fight
During the day when foes were
Destroyed and driven away vanished.

The queen of queens looking for her
Lover is lost in grief; the king
Is going round the camp with
Painful legs to do his duty.

Isn't one *Neṭunalvāṭai* enough
To show that our dearest Tamiḻ
Race is the one race that has been
Living for long a life wisely
Divided into *akam* and *puṟam*?

# 33 When Love Exceeds its Limits, There will be a Roaring Fire of Frenzy!

The Pandyas founded the first Caṅkam

In Maturai conquered by the sea later.

Researchers reckon there were eighty
Nine from Kāy Ciṉa Vaḻuti
To Kaṭuṅkōṉ ruling the land.

Since the first Caṅkam and its place
Southern Maturai were submerged
In the sea, the second Caṅkam
Was patronized by fifty-nine
Kings from Veṇṭērcceḻiyaṉ
Muṭattirumāṟaṉ in Kavāṭapuram
Which was also swallowed
By the sea as a second shock
Though Muṭattirumāṟaṉ survived
As if he had a second birth!

Since he lost his leg in the severe
Attack by the sea he was called
Lame Tirumāṟaṉ with love and
Respect by the Caṅkam greats and
The historians as well; wasn't that
Title conferred by the land and the sea?

Of the Pandyas of the Caṅkam
Age, next to Muṭattirumāṟaṉ,
Mutukuṭumipperuvaḻuti
Became the ruler and was called
"Palyākacālai" because he conducted
Many *yagnas* and symbolized
The invasion of Aryan culture
Several centuries ago!

Mutukuṭumi tying his tuft
Conducted Asvamēta, Raja
Sūya *yagnas* and was sung by
The poets, Kārikkiḻār, Netum-
Palliyattaṉār and Neṭṭimaiyār.
Kārikkiḻār was from Kāri
Of Toṇṭaināṭu, now known as
Irāmagiri; the other two also
Got their names for known reasons.

Neṭṭimaiyār had long eye-brows;
The other was well-versed in music.

They tell the king in their poems,
"May your fame spread beyond
The snow-covered Himalayas
In the north, the Kumari river
In the south, the sea dug by
The Cakarar in the east and
The old sea in the west; may your
Rule flourish beyond these regions."
The king is said to have a navy
Also; as they add that his crown
Belonged to the four Vedas,
Ayyam Perumāḷ Kōnār asserts
Vedic practices had spread to
Tamilnadu even in his days!

Let us listen to what in his poem
Neṭṭimaiyār says about how
The king in frenzy would destroy
The foe's land once the war is won.
"Kuṭumi riding a tusker
Under the shade of an umbrella!
Is it fair to gift gold lotuses
To your bards and to drive tusker-drawn
Chariots across the land of your foes
After defeating them in a fight
And capturing their country?"

He continues the song to say,
"You have ruined the majestic
Mansions of your enemies
By ploughing with donkey-drawn ploughs
The streets where speeding chariots
Had left several deep pits!

The sound of your horses' hooves is
Heard in their fields where birds were singing!
You have forced their broad-footed
Tuskers with terrifying tusks
To fall from the field into ponds!"
Having written a historical
Note that the poets that sang and
The kings that were sung had all been
Fond of Saivism, they also state
The numerous atrocities
Perpetrated against their foes.
This only reveals like the lamp
Lit on top of a mountain that
Those going beyond the love of
Land and religion, become
Fanatical about both and are
Only men that hate religious
Unity and know no human love.

There was another Pandya king,
Mativāṇaṉ by name, who had
Great love for Tamiḻ theatre, which
We learn from Aṭiyārkku
Nallār's commentary on the epic
*Cilappatikāram;* we also learn
He was in the line of those that
Founded the last Caṅkam for Tamiḻ;
To the adoration of the Tamiḻ
World, he became a poet and wrote
*Mativāṇar Nāṭakat Tamiḻ Nūl*
In nectar-sweet *veṇpās.*
Mahendran the Pallava king
Wrote a drama in Sanskrit but
Pandya's work had appeared earlier!

It was a ring he decked Mother
Tamiḻ with, which she wore, which
Was not removed from her finger
Till Aṭiyārkku Nallār's time!

Yes! Our literary history
Says it was in use till those days!

# 34 What Reward does the Simile Deserve?

When a king leading an army

Lays siege to a foe's capital
It is called *uḻiñai;* fighting
To protect the city under siege
Is *nocci;* if one army clashes
With another, it is *tumpai.*
The winning of a war is *vākai.*
These are the names given by our

Bards to the stages of a war waged
During the days of the three kings.

The Pandya history recounts how
Ukkirapperuvaḻuti,
A Pandya king, went with his
Army, their swords drawn, to capture
The castle of Kāḷaiyār Kōyil
And how it was brought to an end.
When we have read it, we will know
If it was the wonder of
The enemies or of the bards.

Kāḷaiyār Kōyil, where the statues
Of the lion-hearted warriors
Ciṉṉa Marutu and Periya
Marutu who ruled Civakaṅkai and
Created history by shedding blood
Reddening the soil have been erected,
Was known as Kāṉappēr in the past.
Even today it is a land of
Heroes ever ready to fight
To defend their dignity;
A small king there called Vēṅkai
Mārpaṉ possessing a famed fort
Issued a challenge to the kings
To conquer the castle if they can.

All lion-like warriors stood stunned in
Silence as they knew that though one
Could make a hole, enter an atom,
One could penetrate the fort.

Ukkirapperuvaḻuti,
Ruling the Pandya kingdom then,
Was no doubt a lion on the battlefield,
Bold and strong enough to treat

Tuskers as playthings and none of
His foes could survive his sword.

Besides being mighty, he had
The mind of an artist and won
Great glory for getting the *Akam*
Poems compiled into a volume.
The launching of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*
The ever shining lamp took place
In his presence only, they say.

Avvai one day finding the Pandya
Seated together with Cōḻaṉ
Perunaṟkiḷḷi and Cēramāṉ
Māri Veṇkō greeted them with
A garland rare in Tamil verse,
Blessing them with lasting unity.

The Pandya king with a fish-flag
Was in love with a fish-eyed lady.
When the two were once engrossed in
The bed-room epic, her eyebrows
Sporting a question mark, she asked,
"You must clear a doubt of mine, dear!"

"What is your doubt, dear? Do you ask
Me how you got the softness of
That swimming swan's feather or do
You want to know how the honey
I drink from your lips came there
Without being brought by the bees?
Was your face modelled on the red
Lotus, or, my wealth, do you think
The red lotus was modeled on
Your face? Will the waist that wriggles like
The worm in a fish-hook, unable
To bear the burden of a pair

Of bouquet-like breasts last long?
Or, should it be lifted up by
Your gleaming ivory-like thighs?
Are these the doubts your mind raised?"

When the king asked this, hanging her
Head coyly like the bending branch
Of a plant, she said, "I didn't raise
A question so that you may write
A poem on me and win a prize;
Tell me what the word *Eyil* means
In sweet Tamil̲"; the king replied,
"Don't you know this, my innocent
Peacock! The ramparts that we build
Round the capital to prevent
The enemies are called *Eyil*".

"I also know that! But it seems
There is one *Eyil* that can't be
Broken by anyone; don't you know
A king proudly declaring that even
This one can't go near that?"
Pointing to him, she embraced him
When she uttered, "even this one"!

"That message reached my ears also;
That fort was built in the city
Called Kāṉappēr; our court poet
Āvūr Mūlaṅkiḻār has a rare
Picture of that fort; listen to me!

It deserves to rank first among
The forts! A long moat deeper than
The earth, a rampart high touching
The blue sky, a retreat from where
Soldiers can shoot arrows unobserved
And move fast as the stars crowding

That sky, a shielding forest dense
With trees impenetrable by the sun's
Rays, and countless battlements constitute
Kāṉappēr eyil which can't be
Shaken even by a thousand tuskers!
I have been delighted many times
By the songs sung about it by
Our bard in Tamiḻ," said the king.

If you are successful in
The siege and get into the moat
There will be a ceaseless shower
Of stones and arrows from the fort;
If you overcome the obstacle
Boiled oil and molten lead will
Come down on you in torrents;
If you try to reach the top braving
All these they will crush the ladders.
Even if you manage to climb,
The top of your head will be pierced
By mechanical feathers of
Metal birds; only when you escape
These, can you descend down inside.

"The Pandya king knows the foes far
Away; you bring them caught in cages
Like tigers, but very near our
Place in Kāṉappēr erecting
A rampart and raising his sword
High Vēṅkai Mārpaṉ thunders
Terrifying the town that none
Leading an army can near him!
Isn't it shameful if we keep quiet
When he makes fun of our valour?
I have expressed the doubt that has

Been lying at the bottom of
My heart for a long time; to the king,
Who can break a tusker's head
Is Vēṅkai Mārpaṉ's fort Vindhya
Hills? Even if the moat he has
Dug is deep as a sea, to my
Pandya, isn't it small enough
To be crossed? Why then should we be
Silent witnessing Vēṅkai's pride?
Let the king clarify this doubt;
Let us then have a happy time!
Saying this, the queen was in a sulk!

When she tried to move away
The king caught her and holding her
In tight embrace, their legs woven
Together, he asked her not to
Be bothered: "Let the day dawn, I
Will order the infantry and
The other armies of elephants,
Horses and chariots to leave for
Kāṉappēr eyil; leave your worry;
Let not your hand stop me now!"
She took her hand away and he
Had his way! Her sulk disappeared
In the twinkling of an eye and
They made love till the sun appeared!

The next day the army left to
Fulfil the queen's desire and
The king's promise to his consort!

Dashing against the well-guarded
Castle called Kāṉappēr eyil,
Making a fierce fight, the army
Ended the siege successfully.

Because of Peruvaḻuti's
Firm attack, Vēṅkai Mārpaṉ's
Defence of the fort got shattered!

The Pandya king returned to convey
The news of victory to the queen
Who had sent him to the field after
Imprinting a *tilak* on his forehead!

The king's chest full of wounds was
Massaged many times by the queen
With her breasts without any rest!

All the deep wounds dripping with blood
Fully healed receiving her kisses!

A few days later Ayyūr
Mūlaṅkiḻār came to the king's
Court and addressed him thus:
"Your enemies that didn't respect
You now praise you to the skies!
King, when you go to war you know
Nothing but victory! From today
Let epics and poetic meets sing your
Praise calling you Kāṉappēr eyil
Kaṭanta Ukkirapperuvaḻuti
And let that last till the sun lasts!"

The king bowed and said, "Many thanks,
My dear bard!" and asked him if
The crushed Vēṅkai Mārpaṉ, fretting
And fuming, would get ready for
A fight to recover his Eyil.
The reply Mūlaṅkiḻār gave the king
Has given Mother Tamiḻ
A rare metaphor – what is it?

"Is it possible to get back a drop
Of water that fell on the piece
Of iron boiling in the blacksmith's
Cauldron of fire? Kāṉappēr conquered
By Peruvaḻuti is like
The water sucked in the smithy's iron;
This is how Vēṅkai sings your praise
And lives with a heart full of grief."

I feel the king would have been baffled
Not knowing how best to reward the golden
Bard who gave a splendid simile.
Is my view wrong in any way? Tell me,
You who have tasted Tamiḻ's sweetness!

# About the Project Makers

**Bharathiar University,** Coimbatore – named after the nationalist Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi, who exhorted the Tamils to identify things worthy in their language, and give them unto the world for enjoyment and edification – conceived this Project viz., *Kalaignar in English Translation* by which to make available in English the extraordinarily rich and varied literary works of Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, who, by the sheer volume and weight of his output, makes a compulsive demand on us that he be studied and given his due.

**Prof. G. Thiruvasagam,** Chairman of the Project Committee and Vice Chancellor of the University. The genesis of this Project owes to his academic vision. His initiative and leadership as much as his passionate and studied interest in the excellence of Kalaignar's creativity has seen this Project through within a short span of ten months.

**Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu,** Vice-Chairman of the Project Committee. An intellectual poet in Tamil endowed with an astonishingly fecund poetic energy and representing a rare blend of ratiocinative powers and aesthetic sensibility, Vairamuthu has brought a sense of direction and significance to bear on the dynamics of the Project.

**Dr P. Marudanayagam and Dr V. Murugan** comprising the editorial team – the former a ripe Professor of English and a comparatist of towering erudition, and the latter a bilingual lexicographer and a distinguished translator with the translations of *Tolkappiyam, Kalittokai, Tirukkural* and *Narrinai,* and *Oxford English-English-Tamil Dictionary* to his credit.

**Dr C. Sivashanmugam,** Professor of Linguistics, **Dr R. Palanivel,** Professor of English and **Dr S. M. Ravichandran,** Professor of Tamil, Bharathiar University, the coordinators of the Project, who kept the Project on track.

The late **Dr S. Agasthialingom,** a renowned linguist and former Vice Chancellor, Tamil University, **Sirpi Balasubramanian,** a highly decorated poet in Tamil, **Prof. Tamizhachi Thangapandian, Poet Kayalvizhi Venkatesh** and **Dr N. Ramani,** members of the Expert Committee, whose learned counsel, suggestions and views have added to the strength and credibility of the translations as a whole.

**Macmillan Publishers India Limited,** who have done an excellent job through their passionate commitment to the project, their legendary technical expertise and their unfailing feel for accuracy and perfection.

And Kalaignar does not surprise us by resorting to things unworldly or irrational. There are no religio-philosophical abstractions, no escape into mythology, and no aesthetic exclusivism in Kalaignar. Thanks to his unwavering belief in the correctness of rational thinking and his scientific temperament, he, in most cases, treads the path of reason and logic.

Kalaignar is endowed with a natural gift for wit and humour, irony and sarcasm, pun and repartee, which remain the inseparable, intrinsic components of his poems, just as they are infused into his speeches and fictional and non-fictional prose. At one level, these qualities secure his poems against monotony and insipidness. At another level, they serve to mask his treatment of contemporary political issues and personalities, and thereby invest his poems with an abiding aesthetic character.

A significant mention must be made of his numerous political satires and allegories, which Kalaignar, along with his political mentor C N Annadurai, has developed into a distinct literary genre. This genre, among others, constitutes a lasting contribution of Kalaignar to Tamil literature in general and contemporary Tamil literature in particular.

**Kalaignar M Karunanidhi**, one among the select 'who is who' of contemporary India, is a ripe political personality of more than seven decade standing, a statesman and a proven administrator, with the rare distinction of being the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for five terms, besides being a relentless crusader for rationalist revival and an undaunted, missionary-like fighter for social and political causes.



Notwithstanding, it is the title 'Kalaignar' meaning 'an artist par excellence' by which he is identified and characterized, so much so that it is no longer a title but a proform designation of Dr M Karunanidhi, in the same way as 'the Bard' is used to refer to Shakespeare.

For Karunanidhi, whose formal education did not extend beyond the secondary school, is a multifaceted, prolific writer with an amazingly large volume of literary output to his credit. He is a poet, a playwright, a novelist and short story writer, a letter writer, an elegist, a journalist and a columnist, a script-writer, a political satirist, an essayist, a translator, an autobiographer and a social and literary critic, besides being an extraordinarily eloquent and powerful speaker. His creative and critical works have been published in 59 volumes, memoirs and autobiography in another 8 volumes, and other writings in 115 more volumes, large and small.

What astounds one is the fact that he has been writing on all these genres contemporaneously, putting the same amount of interest and energy in each kind, that too in the midst of his most exacting administrative and political activities.

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