

**Block**

**4**

***CILAPPATIKARAN***

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**Unit 1**

***Sangam Literature: An Introduction*** **5**

---

**Unit 2**

***Cilappatikaran: A Textual Analysis*** **14**

---

**Unit 3**

**The Divine, the Human and the Immortalised  
Characters in *Cilappatikaran*** **23**

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**Unit 4**

***Akam and Puram Poetry in Cilappatikaran*** **36**

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## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

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



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# UNIT 1 *SANGAM* LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION

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## Structure

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

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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## 1.2 EARLY *SANGAM* LITERATURE

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The most interesting feature of *Sangam* Literature is the fact that while most of the early literary traditions were religious writings in some form or the other,

*Sangam* Literature is not religious in that sense. The poems belonging to what is called *Sangam* Literature are based on two main themes – love / *akam*, and heroism/ praise of Kings and their deeds/ *puram*. But we will deal with *akam* and *puram* in Unit IV in detail as these two themes/ emotions form a crucial part of the text *Cilappatikaran*.

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

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

The *Ettuttokai* or the Eight Anthologies of collected poetry are:

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

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

The *Pattuppattu* or The Ten Long Poems include:

1. *Kurincippattu*
2. *Porunararruppatai*
3. *Cirupanarruppatai*
4. *Perumpanarruppatai*
5. *Maturaikkanci*
6. *Malaipatukatam*
7. *Pattinappalai*
8. *Mullaippattu*
9. *Netunalvatai*
10. *Tirumukurarruppatai*

Along with these anthologies of classical Tamil poetry there was also produced during this period a grammar treatise called the *Tolkappiyam* which deals with the rules and the norms of Tamil poetics which is distinctly different from *Sanskrit*

poetics, something we have examined at length through the three previous blocks of this course. *Sangam* Literature is a part of the literary and historical rediscoveries made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a generation of Western and Indian orientalist who systemised the older manuscripts and translated them into English and subsequently published them in the print form. The rediscovery of the *Sangam* corpus was a major effort taken by a few men in the 19<sup>th</sup> century namely **Caminta Aiyar** (1855-1942) and **Tamotaram Pillai** (1832-1901) who discovered these old poems in crumbling palm leaf manuscripts and through exemplary scholarship translated and copied them to be published. **Tamotaram Pillai** published the first edition of the *Ettuttokai* (The Eight Anthologies) in 1877 CE. Subsequent efforts in the recent past have been made by scholarship like **A K Ramanujan** and **Kamil Zvelebil** who have translated and commented on a large selection of these anthologies.

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

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

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### 1.3 TAMIL POETICS & SANSKRIT POETICS

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

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

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

3. *Palai (The Waste land)* signifying a lovers frustrating journey through the deserted landscape.
4. *Mullai (The Forest)* signifying happiness through physical and emotional union.
5. *Marutam (The Low land)* signifying a lovers unfaithful attitude.

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## 1.4 THEMES IN SANGAM POETRY AS PER TAMIL POETICS

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

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

### What she said

To her girlfriend, her foster mother within earshot:

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

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

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

### What her Girl Friend said

To him when he wanted to come by day:

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

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

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



### What he said

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

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

### What she said

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

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

### What she said

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

The Tamil epics of South India *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekhalai* represent a society in a state of transformation dealing with a state of constant flux. The epical tradition in South India display ideas and characteristics of most of the

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

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## 1.5 JAINISM AND THE SELF IN *CILAPPATIKARAN*

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

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

And she moaned:

'Was this the fate of those

Who were my companions?' She vowed to starve herself to death.

So ended her life.

The *Vipaka Srutam* or *The Oral Traditions of Karmic Life*, one of the 60 Jain *Agamas* the canonical texts in Jainism divides the life of the individual into

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

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

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

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

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## 1.6 LOCATING THE *CILAPPATIKARAN*

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The authorship of the *Cilappatikaran* is attributed to **Ilanko Atikal**. Now, the word **Atikal** literally means a *Jaina* saint or an ascetic. So what do you think we could infer from this? One stream of thought proclaims **Atikal** to be the younger ascetic brother of **Cenkuttuvan** (2<sup>nd</sup> CE), the *Ceral* King who renounced his family and the throne after hearing about a prophecy that he would succeed to the throne instead of his elder brother. It is believed that he then took the Jain vow of renunciation and entered a Jain monastery near *Vanci*. There is also another interesting legend associated with **Sattanar** the author of the *Manimekhalai* and legend has it, that **Sattanar** actually met **Ilanko**

**Atikal** to seek his permission to bring out the Buddhist version of the epic. This is interesting as it tells us that given the socio-cultural space of the times, there never was any large scale violence between the Buddhists and the Jains in history unlike the heterodox sects and the Hindu ones.

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

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

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

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

of *Kovalan* is attributed to the misdeeds of an earlier birth (bringing in the entire Jain ethos of transmigration of the soul).

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 1.8 QUESTIONS

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1. What do you understand by the term Sangam Literature?
2. Is there a difference between Sanskrit Poetics and Tamil Poetics?
3. Examine some of the themes of Classical Tamil Poetry/ Sangam Poetry.



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## UNIT 2 *CILAPPATIKARAN*: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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### Structure

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

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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## 2.2 THE PLOT

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

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

*Kannaki* the ever dutiful wife has a nightmare about a misfortune that *Kovalan* will face. She is obviously extremely worried about her wayward husband and is overjoyed when *Kovalan* arrives home having deserted *Matavi*. Needless to say, *Kannaki* welcomes him back and the couple reconcile as *Kovalan* admits to his relationship with *Matavi* and apologises to *Kannaki*. The happy couple decide to leave *Pukar* together and go to the city of *Maturai* the capital of the *Pandyan* rulers to start afresh. They hope to begin a new life there by selling an anklet that belongs to *Kannaki* in order to start a new business. *Kovalan* has no money left to begin anew as he has spent all his money on *Matavi* and is not inclined to ask either his or *Kannaki*'s parents for a loan. Early one morning they leave for *Maturai* and on the way they meet a Jain monk named *Kavunti* as they proceed to the town of *Uraiyyur*. They pass through the dense forests that form the boundary between the *Chola* and the *Pandyan* kingdoms. Eventually, they arrive at the banks of the river *Vaiyai* and they get a glimpse of the towers and the homes of *Maturai* on the opposite bank. *Kovalan* leaves *Kannaki* in the care of the Jain monk *Kavunti* and slips into the fort of *Maturai* unnoticed by everybody including the *yavana*

guards that are posted there. He begins a tour of the city to get a sense of the city that they intend making their home now. On his way back to the forest grove where *Kannaki* and *Kavunti* await him, he meets a *Brahmin* named *Matalan* who informs him of the birth of his daughter *Manimekalai* as *Matavi* has given birth. *Kovalan* shares the ominous dream with the *Brahmin* wherein he is riding a buffalo the mount of *Yama* the god of death, and we realise that, that was the dream that made *Kannaki* and *Kovalan* leave the city of *Pukar*. *Kovalan* explains to the *Brahmin* that the ominous dream was the reason for them to leave *Pukar* as they feared that some harm would befall him. *Kavunti* the Jain monk entrusts *Kannaki* in the care of a herdsman named *Matari* and both *Kannaki* and *Kovalan* begin to live with the herdsman's family and in their living quarters.

In a domestic scene in the epic, *Kannaki* collects some raw food from *Matari* the herdsman and cooks a delicious meal for *Kovalan*. *Kovalan* is deeply disturbed by his act of infidelity and he begins to despise himself for all the grief that he has caused *Kannaki*. *Kannaki* is deeply hurt by the memory of *Kovalan's* affair with the dancer *Matavi* and she expresses the pain and the anguish his actions have caused her. The reformed *Kovalan* is ashamed of his behaviour in the recent past and after listening to his wife, teary eyed he leaves for the town of *Maturai* taking her anklet with him to sell and generate some money to begin afresh. On the way he sees a humped bull which is considered to be a very bad omen but distraught as he is, does not notice the humped bull and continues on his journey to the market. He finds a goldsmith, shows him the anklet and asks for an estimate for it. The goldsmith takes the anklet asks *Kovalan* to wait and rushes to the palace of the *Pandyan* king to tell him that he has apprehended the man who has stolen the Queen's anklet.

Truth be told, the goldsmith is the one who has in fact stolen the Queen's anklet and is excited at the thought of putting the blame on *Kovalan* while he goes free and undetected himself. The King and Queen are not on talking terms due to a misunderstanding regarding the loss of her anklet and the King in an effort to please her and gain her favours again, is delighted that the thief has been located. Without ascertaining facts he orders that the thief be caught and executed without a trial immediately. The fact that he had the Queen's anklet is proof of guilt. Note that today we would decide that that is circumstantial evidence. The guards follow the goldsmith to his shop during which the goldsmith lectures the guards on morality and deceitfulness of thieves and their community. He asks the guards to execute *Kovalan* when they reach there. The guards apprehend *Kovalan* and one of them cuts him down with his sword. Strangely enough the guards are apprehensive about striking *Kovalan* initially as they believe him to be innocent. *Kovalan* falls down once he is struck and lies on the ground life ebbing away. The goldsmith is extremely relieved that the secret of his theft remains a secret and having got an innocent killed is safe forever. He is very happy to have the anklet back and returns it to the King. As the reader/viewer of the play, we know that an innocent has been killed and that the anklet that has been given back to the King actually belongs to *Kannaki*. While the real thief the goldsmith is a free man.

Meanwhile *Matari* the herdsman sees inauspicious signs in the herdsman's quarters and is worried that some tragedy is about to strike them. She and the others arrange for a sacred dance in the praise of *Krsna* in which they would enact his life story. After the dance is over *Matari* walks down to the



river *Vaiyai* to bathe where she learns of *Kovalan*'s murder. She is shocked and does not inform *Kannaki* about it as she feels that the news of *Kovalan*'s execution will break the latter. *Kannaki* learns about the execution of *Kovalan* through a stranger who informs her that *Kovalan* has been killed on the charges of the theft of the *Pandayan* Queen's anklet. *Kannaki* is distraught and angry and denounces the *Pandayan King Netunceliyan*. The people of *Maturai* also come together protesting the death of *Kovalan* and demand justice from a King who they feel has moved away from the path of true justice. *Kannaki* proceeds to the site of the goldsmith's shop and finds the dead body of her beloved *Kovalan*. In the process of embracing him he appears to stand before her and console her wiping her tears away, and he begins the divine ascent to heaven. He blesses her and asks her to live in peace.

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

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

*Kannaki* then leaves the city of *Maturai* and proceeds to the *Chera* kingdom and arrives at the *Netuvel* hills eventually. She ascends to heaven on the chariot that Lord *Indra* sends for her. This begins the transition of *Kannaki* to a goddess as the dwellers of the hills witness her ascent to heaven. They inform the *Chera* King *Cenkuttuvan* about this miracle. The King is camping on the banks of the river *Periyar* and the poet **Ilanko Atikal** who is also present there tells

the *Chera* King about all the unhappy events that occurred in *Maturai*. The *Chera* queen *Ilanko Venmal* asks the King to build a temple for *Kannaki* and to worship her as a goddess. The *Chera* king *Cenkuttuvan* decides to have a statue of *Kannaki* sculpted and has the sacred stone brought from the Himalayas. He begins the great march to the north of India where he seeks to bring the *Arya* Kings to heel and to prove that the Tamil people are as strong and brave as the *Arya* Kings. He defeats all the *Arya* Kings in a pitched battle and finds the sacred stone where the image of *Kannaki* is engraved and purified by the waters of the sacred *Ganges*.

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

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### 2.3 FEMALE PRESENCE IN *CILAPPATIKARAN*

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

The presence of women as central characters in the *Cilappatikaran* and the *Manimekalai* unlike in *Sanskrit* epics where the male protagonist is central

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

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

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## **2.4 THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN *CILAPPATIKARAN***

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

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

in the civil war in *King Lear* and the subsequent death of *King Lear*. Something similar happens here in the *Cilappatikaran* when there is the miscarriage of justice. As a result of the miscarriage of justice by the *Pandyan* King, the city of *Maturai* burns.

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

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

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

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

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

*One saw the fine work of making  
Cloth from silk, fur and cotton  
In the weavers quarters. Silk, coral,*

*Sandalwood, agar, flawless pearls,  
Gems, gold, and an endless profusion  
Of rare ornaments were piled high  
In the commodious streets.*

The image painted of the city in the epic is almost like the land of plenty where:

*Heaped separately  
Were grains in the streets of the grain merchants,  
As also a variety of provisions distinct from one  
Another.*

The various trades practised by the people, the types of food and wines sold are all described very vividly. It's almost like the cataloguing that happens in Greek Epics.

*Peddlers of pastry, appam;  
Women hawking wine; fishermen  
Offering fish for sale; vendors  
Of white salt; sellers of betel  
Leaves; perfumers; butchers flogging  
Different kinds of meat; oil mongers;  
Overcrowded shops packed with food;  
Braziers; coppersmiths; painters; sculptors;  
Goldsmiths; jewellers; tailors; cobblers;  
A host of artisans making various  
Flawless objects with cloth and pith;  
The homes of great musicians, expert  
In the traditions of music, who could display  
Impeccable skill on the flute and the lute by sounding  
The first seven notes; and other workers  
Who excelled in small crafts-  
All had their homes in the suburbs of the city.*

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

*In the city itself stood the Kingsway,  
The flagged car street, the market square,  
The boulevard where merchant princes dwelt  
In tall mansions, the brahman homes,  
The houses of landed families and their tenants  
Farmers, of physicians, astrologers and those employed  
In other tasks, the broad street  
Of the homes of those who with skill bored  
Holes into bright gems, and those who polished  
Ornate conches. In separate houses  
Lived charioteers, bards, panegyrists.  
Astronomers, handsome dancers, harlots,  
Actresses, flower and betel girls,  
Maid servants, professional musicians.  
Drummers of various sorts, and jesters.  
Surrounding the fort were the spacious houses  
Of cavalymen with swift horses, riders*

*Of male elephants, drivers of lofty chariots,  
Fierce looking soldiers. Celebrated in song  
Was this part of the town and well known  
For the great and renowned men who lived there.*

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

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

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 2.7 QUESTIONS

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

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## UNIT 3 THE DIVINE, THE HUMAN AND THE IMMORTALISED CHARACTERS IN *CILAPPATIKARAM*

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Types of Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
- 3.3 Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
  - 3.3.1 Divine Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
  - 3.3.2 Human Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
  - 3.3.3 Immortalised Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
- 3.4 Divine Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
- 3.5 Human Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
- 3.6 Immortalised Characters in *Cilappatikaran*
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Questions

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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### 3.2 TYPES OF CHARACTERS IN *CILAPPATIKARAN*

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**B Mangalam** explains the novelty of *Cilappatikaram* through the characterisation of the divine and mortal characters:

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

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

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### **3.3 CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN**

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

#### **3.3.1 Divine Characters in *Cilappatikaran***

*Lord Indra*  
*Lord Shiva*  
*Lord Murugan*  
*Lord of Death*

#### **3.3.2 Human Characters in *Cilappatikaran***

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

#### **3.3.3 Immortalised Characters in *Cilappatikaran***

*Kovalan*  
*Kannaki*  
*Valli*

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### **3.4 DIVINE CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN**

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The ancient Tamil epic *Cilappatikaran* has a few divine characters. They have minor roles in the plot. Nevertheless, they are not insignificant. They do not appear directly in the plot. Rather, their actions are narrated by others. In *The Book of Vanci*, the reference to a god, (i.e., *Lord Indra*) first occurs in the "Prologue".



*A chaste woman with only one breast  
 Stood in the thick shade of the kino  
 Tree, incandescent in its golden flowers.  
 Indra, Lord of the immortals with kindred gods  
 Came down, revealed her loving husband to her...  
 And before our very eyes led her to heaven. (Prologue, p 20)*

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

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

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

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

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

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### **3.5 HUMAN CHARACTERS IN *CILAPPATIKARAN***

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

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

*... And from that exalted line  
 Of heavenly nymphs was Matavi descended.  
 A woman of flawless birth, of broad shoulders,*

*And curly hair, spilling pollen, she was  
Noted for her style of great distinction.*

*(Book of Pukar, Canto 3, p.34)*

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

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

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

*Kovalan bought the garland -*

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

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

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

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

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

She may be a courtesan but she is not responsible for seducing and therefore luring *Kovalan* away from his wife *Kannaki*. She is an artist who has knowledge about the fields of music and dance. When *Kovalan* leaves her, she remains

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

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

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

*The Pantiya king who sat  
On the lion-throne, with Lakshmi glowing on his breast,  
Fainted and died, not knowing what to do  
With the ordeal of the woman with fair wreaths.*  
(Book III, Canto 25, 82-85)

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

*Now the king’s death has made  
The sceptre upright, bent by the inexorable hand  
Of fate.”*  
(Book III, Canto 25, 99-100)

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

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

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

*The Book of Vanci* is set in the *Chera* kingdom. After burning down the city of *Maturai*, *Kannaki* is asked by Lord *Siva* to go to the *Chera* Kingdom where she will be able to re-unite with her dead husband. The one-breasted

lady is then seen standing under the *Kino* tree by the *Kuravas*, the tribesmen of the red mountain. They report her sighting to the *Chera* king. *Cattan*, the great Tamil poet apprises the king about *Kannaki*'s past. After hearing about her tragic story, King *Cenkuttuvan* decides to deify *Kannaki* by establishing a temple in her honour. He, "*recognises Kannaki's sacred power as a chaste wife – as a Pattini – and decides to honor her by building a shrine in his kingdom*", as stated by **B Mangalam**. *Cenkuttuvan* declares that the stone for her idol will be brought from the Himalayas and not the nearby *Potiyil* hills:

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

(Canto 25, 124-136)

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

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

(Canto 25, 141-144)

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

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

(Canto 25, 1-4)

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

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

(Canto 25, 10-13)

His army is like the god of *death*:

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

(Canto 25, 169-170)

*Cenkuttuvan* orders all the kings to help him in his mission which includes the great *Satavahana* king *Satakarni*:

*Inform  
King Satakarni and ask him to get ready  
For us a great fleet of boats to cross the holy Ganga.  
(Canto 25, 170-172)*

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

*Opposed by such a warrior  
Uttara, Vicitra, Rudra, Bhairava,  
Citra, Simha, Dhanurdhara, Siveta,  
And other northern kings, followed by Kanaka and Vijaya  
Marched at the head of an army boundless as the sea.  
(Canto 25, 188-191)*

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

*Those who do not worship the holy feet  
Of Poraiyan of the great bow will find it  
Difficult to bless our lord of the good earth.  
The renowned daughter of our king, Kannaki,  
Spoke the benediction: ‘May our Cenkuttuvan live forever’.  
(Canto 29, Song 29)*

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

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

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

### 3.6 THE IMMORTALISED CHARACTERS IN CILAPPATIKARAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Canto 24, Song 19)

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

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

(Song 16)

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

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

*It seems the man from the mountain will marry you.  
We will sing a song in honor of the chaste woman  
Who burned down the glorious city of Maturai  
With her breast, who was shown her husband  
By a host of gods, and is worshipped by many.”*

(Song 22)

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

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

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

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

It is in Book II that she traverses the private sphere and moves into the public domain. **B Mangalam** states that *Kannaki* “*comes alive in the Book of Maturai as a woman who breaks free of societal barriers*”. When *Kovalan* is killed, she goes to the court of the *Pantiyan* king, a public domain, and challenges him. An angry *Kannaki* resembles the divine *Chandi* or *Kali*. The image of *Chandi* or *Kali* is that of a masculine female, of destructive female sexual energy. She dwells in the public space, outside the ambit of the domestic. *Kannaki* too is defiant. **Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan** compares her to *Antigone*

from the Greek epic. **Sunder Rajan** further assesses her position in the court as a public figure: “*When Kannagi confronts the king, it is as the representative of a city, a class, and her sex and as a subject.*” Her traversing the public domain from the private associates her “*Karpu*” as a social order rather than a personal virtue. Her actions exude the edicts of kingly duties. The king of *Maturai* fails to provide justice and thus bring doom to himself and his kingdom:

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

*(Book III, Canto 25, 97-105)*

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

*Praised by the gods, she ascended  
To heaven.*

*(Canto 25, 61-62)*

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

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

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

*(Canto 25, 108-116)*

She is honoured by having a temple in her name in the *Chera* kingdom. *Kannaki* and *Cenkuttuvan* collaborate to establish the edicts of kingship and chastity:



*Pattini whom the whole world now worships  
Had proved the truth of the Tamil saying:  
“The virtue of women is useless if the king  
Rules unjustly.” She made the Cola realize it.  
She made the Pantiyan, lord of the south,  
Realize, “The king cannot survive if this sceptre  
Is crooked.” She made the Ceral,  
Lord of the west, realize, “The wrath  
Of kings will not be appeased till their vows  
Are fulfilled, and made known to the kings  
Of the north. (Canto 28, 210-220)*

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

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

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

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

Further, it is reported in Canto 30 that;

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

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

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

*The water  
Will not lose its power till the sun and moon  
Vanish. (Canto 30, 63-65)*

She legitimises the *Chera* king as a great king and obviously there are no voices of dissent.

*A voice rose*

*From the heavens:*

*'Your wish is granted.'*

*(Canto 30, 161-163)*

**B Mangalam** views the apotheosis of *Kannaki* in terms of her subjugation into the patriarchal domain which renders her silenced. “*Kannaki is deified, made into a deity at the cost of total erasure of her human identity. She is no longer referred to by her name. She has become the Pattini goddess.*” The reason for her deification is explained by **B Mangalam** through a feminist perspective. She breaks societal norms by entering the public domain in the *Book of Maturai* and “*Society did not, as it still does not, easily allow women to transgress. It draws them in, either to domesticate them or to deify them.*”

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

*O my daughter, my partner! When your husband*

*Abandoned you, I sympathised with you*

*... My dearest!*

*Won't you come back and rid me of my great sorrow?*

*(Canto 30, 94-98)*

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

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

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### 3.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have seen how the relationship between the divine, human and immortalised characters leads to conclude that the *Book of Vanci* or rather *Cilappatikaram* is more about human accomplishments than about religion. A middle class woman, *Kannaki*'s exhibition of the virtue of *Karpu* in her human

form makes her ascend to the position of goddess. She is superior to her husband *Kovalan* owing to her actions. Similarly, King *Cenkuttuvan*'s efforts towards deifying *Kannaki* makes him legitimise his position as a *Chakravarti* and a just ruler. The epic is a celebration of feminine power, through *Kannaki*'s apotheosis and deification. Her deification is also a means by which patriarchy, through King *Cenkuttuvan*, brings the defiant *Kannaki* into its fold.

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### **3.8 QUESTIONS**

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1. *Cilappatikaran* has three types/ categories of characterisation. Comment on each category briefly.
2. How does the poet bring about the transformation of human characters to immortalised characters?
3. Comment on the main female characters in *Cilappatikaran*.



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## UNIT 4 *AKAM AND PURAM POETRY* IN *CILAPPATIKARAM*

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### Structure

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

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

Let us define *akam* and *puram* next.

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## 4.2 DEFINING AKAM AND PURAM POETRY

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

There are five *akam thinais*, also known as *Aintinai*, and are named after the local flora and fauna. In *akam* poetry, the *Aintianis* are: *Kurinchi*, *Mullai*, *Marutam*, *Neytal* and *Palai*. The other two *Akam thinais*, *Kaikkilai* (unrequited love) and *Perunthinai* (mismatched love or lust), are considered to be inappropriate subjects for poetry. Similarly, in *puram* poetry, six out of the seven *thinais* are named after flowers/trees and indicate military situations. **S Murali** points out that the categorisation of the environment into the *thinais* should be seen as “*the earliest attempt by the Sangam poets towards the formulation of an environmental aesthetics, where the human bhava seeks its correspondence in the natural vibhava.*”

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

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

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

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## 4.3 AKAM & PURAM THINAI & THEIR CORRESPONDING LANDSCAPES

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

The *thinai* concept has social and historical significance. According to **P T Srinivasa Iyengar**, the concept of the *thinai* illustrates the evolution of civilisation: “*All these five kinds of natural regions are found in the Tamil country, though on a small scale and as the South Indian spread from region to region he developed the stages of culture which each region was calculated to produce.*” According to him, *the thinai concept reveals the spread of Tamils from the hills and mountains to the low-lying plains.*”

Landscape	Akam		Puram			
	Thinai	Flowers/ trees	Phases in Love	Thinai	Flower/ tree	Military Situation
Hills	<i>Kurinci</i>	Cone Head	Clandestine meeting of lovers	<i>Vetki</i>	Scarlet Ixora	Cattle raiding
Pastureland and open terraces	<i>Mullai</i>	Jasmine	Waiting in hope	<i>Vanci</i>	Indian Willow	Invasion
Riverine- agrarian	<i>Marutam</i>	Arjuna tree	Wife's sulking/ infidelity of man	<i>Ulinai</i>	Balloon Vine	Siege
Littoral	<i>Neytal</i>	Dark Lily	Lamenting/anxiety for husband's return	<i>Tumpai Tumpai</i>	White Dead Nettle	Pitched battle
Uncultivated Dry Region	<i>Palai</i>	Ivory	Parting/ lover's departure in search of wealth or knowledge	<i>Vakai Kanci</i>	Sirissa Tree	Victory
	<i>Kaikkilai</i>		Unrequited love	<i>Kanci</i>	Portia Tree	Impermanence of life
	<i>Perunthinai</i>		Mismatched love/ lust	<i>Patan</i>	Not Specified	Praise of kings

**Ramachandra Dikshithar** saw the *thinai* concept as a clue to the pre-history of South India. **A K Ramanujam** says, (the) “*actual objective of landscapes of Tamil country became the interior landscapes of Tamil poetry.*” He also states that the “*real world was always kept in sight and included in the symbolic.*”

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

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

#### 4.4 AKAM AND PURAM IN CILAPPATIKARAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She transgresses into the public domain. This transgression is depicted through the use of *Puram* poetry. She was the forgiving wife in the *Book of Pukar*. She takes her disloyal husband back and helps him by giving up her anklets for him to sell. However, in the *Book of Maturai*, she is vengeful and punishing. Therefore, *Kannaki*, who in the *Book of Pukar* is depicted through *Akam* is now in the *Puram* domain. **B Mangalam** says that; "*Kannagi, the silent, chaste wife, cloistered within the Akam domain, now invades the public/Puram domain and challenges the king and proves in the open court that her husband was not a thief.*"

It is in the *Book of Maturai* that *Kannaki*'s apotheosis into a deity begins. She is a middle class woman in the first book. In the second, she is promised to be made into an immortal. This transition is depicted through her movement into the *Puram* domain from the *Akam*. The apotheosis is complete in the *Book of Vanci*. This book shows the synthesis of the private/ *Akam* and the public/ *Puram* domains. **B Mangalam** states that "*Kannagi's traversing from Akam to Puram is a fascinating journey.*" It is here that the silent chaste wife of the *Book of Pukar* is silenced again through her deification in the *Book of Vanci*.

The *Book of Vanci* begins in the *Akam* tradition. Canto 24, "*The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers*", has short lyrics in the *Kurinchi thinai*. Spoken by 'she' and her woman friend –

"her friend speaks to her"  
"she speaks to her friend"

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

*We will bathe in the mountain waterfall  
That sparkles and flows, bright as Indra's bow,  
A blend of powders: the kohl, musk and sindura.* (2)

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

*The village gossip thinks I am possessed by Katampan.  
She has called the shaman to perform dance  
To rid me of this illness caused by the man  
From the cool mountain on which peppercorns grow.* (11)

As the two women speak, the man is within earshot:  
*Our man from the mountain with a fragrant garland  
Hid himself and was all ears as we sang.* (19)

The woman expresses her fear of separation to her lover:  
*The people  
Of the small huts, being foolish, will not accept you  
As the god wreathed in a cadamba garland.* (20)

The friend assures the woman that there will be a successful culmination of her love:

*It seems the man from the mountain will marry you.* (21)

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

*We will sing a song in honor of the chaste woman  
Who burned down the glorious city of Maturai  
With her breast.* (21)

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

*In the same way, our lover will come to this place  
While we sing our songs and perform*



*The round dance. May the king of the west country  
Who ruled over the Kolli hills  
And inscribed his bow-emblem on the Himalaya  
Live in endless joy in the days to come.* (26)

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

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

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

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

*Followed by a train of women  
Pressing along the route, he left the environs of Vanci,  
Appeared like Indra of the fierce spear...* (10-12)

*Further,  
He mounted his great elephant,  
And his train wound to a distance  
Of twelve hundred and sixty miles* (15-17)

*Also,  
After setting fire to the enemy’s camp,  
The imperishable fame achieved by feeding  
His soldiers, and the prowess of a king on the eve of battle.  
He ordered his troops to put on their battledress  
And wreaths of unbroken palm leaves ....* (150-154)

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

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

Another example,  
*We cannot forget  
Your courage when you escorted your mother  
To bathe in the swollen Ganga, and fought alone*

*Against a thousand Aryas that the cruel god  
Of death was stunned. (167-171)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*renunciation of evil gets reiterated in each of the three books of the epic through the Jaina precepts that lie at the core of the poem.”*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*And she (Kavunti) moaned: 'Was this the fate of those  
Who were my companions?' She vowed to starve  
Herself to death. So ended her life. (95-97)  
Kovalan's mother gives up her life:  
His wife too, reeling from the shock  
Of her son's terrible death, gave up her life. (110-111)*

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

*Matavi* and her daughter *Manimekalai* renounce their material life and enter the *Jaina* monastery:

*I must now lead a virtuous life.  
Manimekalai should be spared the life of a courtesan  
Which is full of troubles.  
Her hair, wreathed in flowers,  
She removed, and entered a Buddhist nunnery* (117-120)

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

*O Poraiyan! A wreath of palm leaves  
You wore to celebrate the success of your sword,  
Brandished in your right hand, in tearing apart  
The margosa tree guarded by the Palaiyan.  
Be gracious enough to listen to me.  
The victorious Ver-Celiyan, ruler of Korkai,  
Offered a sacrifice of one thousand goldsmiths  
In a single day to the goddess Pattini  
Who had wrenched off one of her breasts.* (137-145)

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

*O King  
Of the vast world, may you live forever!  
In a day you broke the nine parasols  
Of nine kings who had formed a league  
Against your cousin, Killivalavan.* (129-133)

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

*O just king! It is unnecessary to remind men  
Of wisdom that youth will not last forever. O guardian king!  
Lakshmi resides in your chest through you see  
Your body covered with grey hair. Souls  
In divine bodies are often reborn in human bodies,  
And souls in human bodies may be reborn  
In animals.* (159-165)

And,

*The king of the loud anklets, invited  
Sacrificial priests, instructed by teachers  
Expert in the four Vedas. They were asked  
To begin the festival of rites as advised  
By Matalan.  
He ordered the Arya kings  
Removed from prison and taken outside the city  
Of Vanci of great renown to Velavikko Palace,  
Enclosed by ponds and cool groves.* (192-196)

It is in canto 28 that the synthesis of *Kannaki* as a *Pattini* and King *Cenkuttuvan* begins. The virtues of Chastity (*Karpu*) and Kingship merge.

*The virtue of women is useless if the king  
Rules unjustly. She made the Cola realize it.  
She made the Pantiyan, lord of the south  
Realize, "The king cannot survive if his sceptre  
Is crooked." She made the Ceral,  
Lord of the west, realize, "The wrath  
Of kings will not be appeased till their vows  
Are fulfilled and made known to the kings  
Of the north."*

(212-213)

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

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

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

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

(2)

The Foster Mother says:

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

(3)

The close friend says;

*But followed her husband as a dutiful wife*

*Know me as the friend of the woman of PumPukar*

(4)

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

*The day your mother  
heard of the troubles your torn-off breast had caused,  
O woman with beautiful locks of hair,  
She died of grief...*

*Your mother-in-law too died?*

(5)

The Foster Mother says:

*Macattuvan heard of the evil done to Kovalan*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Illango Atikal's** renunciation is also narrated here by *Tevantikai*:  
*In the elegant audience hall*

*Of the ancient city of Vanci, you were seated  
Beside your father. When the astrologer predicted  
You would inherit the throne, you disapproved of him  
To relive the pain of Cenkuttuvan* (169-174)

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

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

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

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

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

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## 4.5 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 4.6 QUESTIONS

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

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## 4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

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