

Ancient Tamil Poetry and Poetics: New Perspectives

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P. MARUDANAYAGAM



CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL TAMIL

CHENNAI

2020

ANCIENT TAMIL POETRY AND POETICS: NEW PERSPECTIVES
© Central Institute of Classical Tamil, Chennai

CICT Publication No. 6

First published 2010
Amazon KDP Edition; 2020 Reprint

Published by
CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL TAMIL
CHENNAI 600 113

ISBN 979-86-987101-7-2
Typeset By
GAAMA DTP Division, Puducherry

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FOREWORD

The Tamils may be justly proud of the fact that Tamil has won the status of a Classical language, the status it richly deserves and should have got long, long ago. The *Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT)*, established in Chennai, has mapped out various plans including preparation of definitive editions of forty one Classical Tamil texts and translation of these works into English and other major European languages as well as into major Indian languages and writing of a historical grammar of Tamil. Language being the autobiography of a people, our objective is to preserve and safeguard the invaluable treasure of the literary compositions in our language. If only we could delve into our past and recover the riches and wealth of the mighty treasure trove of Classical Tamil poetry, we will be amply rewarded by its lofty poetry, the poetry that strengthens and purifies the holiness of heart's affection and enlarges our imagination. Apart from these, reading the ancient Tamil texts such as *Tolkāppiyam*, *Eṭṭuttokai*, *Pattuppāṭṭu Tirukkural* provides a foundation for scholarship for the present and in this sense provides enlightened education.

It is heartening to write this foreword to the series of publications to be brought out by CICT, which I am sure, will do full justice to the masterpieces in Tamil without compromising on the quality of production. The *Caṅkam* corpus being a repository of our glorious culture, it behoves our present and future generations to study them and to convey their message and the vision of life embodied in them to the public at large. Let me, therefore, commend the series to the enlightened beings the world over.

S d/-

(M. KARUNANIDHI)

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PREFACE

No apology may be required for bringing out a collection of essays examining ancient Tamil poetry and poetics from diverse contemporary perspectives. Now that Tamil has been declared a classical language by the Government of India, it behoves the native scholars of Tamil to convince the world that Tamil deserves the appellation that has elevated it to the level of Greek and Latin which the West has been unanimously cherishing as classical languages for a long time.

By 'classic' we mean a literary piece which has achieved a recognized position in literary history for its superior merits. Classical literature may refer to Greek and Roman literature or any literature that exhibits the qualities of classicism. When the word 'Classical' is used to describe the characteristic features of a literary work it implies objectivity in the choice and handling of the theme, simplicity of style, clarity, restraint, order and formal structure. Praiseworthy books, according to Milton, "are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them". Great literature deals not merely with some aspects of the human mind but with the total human psyche. In Coleridge's view, its great achievement is to bring about a "whole souled activity in man" by appealing to the senses, the heart, the intellect and the spirit of the reader. Besides possessing these attributes, Caṅkam writings have been exerting their profound impact on several succeeding generations of Tamil poets.

How did the ancient Tamils conceive art? To them, art, especially poetry, is not a simple source of aesthetic delight, but as Tolstoy contends, "one of the conditions of human life", and, more importantly, "a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards the well being of individuals and of humanity."

The claim of Tamil classics to international recognition and to eternal fame is, therefore, based on solid grounds. In consequence of A.K. Ramanujan's English translations of selections from a few Caṅkam

anthologies, the response by Western critics in the form of articles and books is much more widespread than ever before. But not all of them can be said to be insightful or even well informed and some of them are not free from howlers. It is again the duty of the insiders to adequately project the Tamil texts, to properly explicate them and to periodically provide the corrective, wherever necessary.

We now have a vast variety of ways to interpret a work of literature ranging from traditional approaches like the moralistic and the historical through the formalist, the New Critical, the psychological and the mythic and into such post-structuralist approaches as deconstruction, feminist criticism, New Historicism, Bakhtinian dialogism and cultural studies. Caṅkam writings, being great literature, deserve correspondingly rich responses that are felt and reasoned. Such responses will be extremely fruitful when the critic appreciates these works from as many perspectives as they open themselves to.

Matthew Arnold rightly stresses the need to reassess even a writer who has attained the status of a classic.

If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word, classic, classical), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry.

This monograph has been made possible by the constant encouragement and advice given by Dr. K. Ramasamy, Officer-in-charge, CICT, to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude. The work done by GAAMA DTP Division in respect of typesetting and pagemaking of this publication is commendable. I would be failing in my duty if I do not thank Thiru P. Sudhakaran, the man behind this venture.

INTRODUCTION

Defining a classical language as one that possesses the potential to function without the help of other languages that are found in the nation where it is spoken, that can be understood by the listener without being hindered by any verbal or semantic obscurities, that has the capacity to shed what is antiquated and to absorb what is new and an ever-growing vocabulary, its own words far outnumbering the words borrowed from other languages, Paritimārkalaignar contended as early as 1887 that Tamil fulfills these requirements.

Another native scholar, Devaneyappāvānar, could adduce some convincing evidences of the primary classicality of Tamil such as its primitiveness, originality and natural development, and extraordinary copiousness.

That Tamil is one of the most ancient languages of the world has been testified by more than one Western linguist. Caldwell, for instance, observes: Does there not seem to be reason for regarding the Dravidian family of languages, not only as a link of connection between the Indo-European and Scythian groups but – in some particulars, especially in relation to the pronouns – as the best surviving representative of a period in the history of human speech older than the Indo-European stage, older than the Scythian and older than the separation of the one from the other? (2001: 30)

About the ancientness of Tamil and its contribution to world civilization, no testimony other than the following by Swami Vivekananda is required:

The Madras Presidency is the habitat of the Tamil race, whose civilization was the most ancient and a branch of whom called the Sumerians spread a vast civilization on the banks of the Euphrates in very ancient times, whose astrology, religious lore, morals and rites etc., furnished the foundation for the Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations and whose mythology was the source of the Christian Bible. Another branch of these Tamilians spread from the Malabar Coast and gave rise to the wonderful Egyptian civilization and

the Aryans also are indebted to this race in many respects. (1998: 120)

A.K.Ramanujan could easily comprehend the real strength of *Caṅkam* poetry which entitles it to a secure place in world literature and his assessment of it is just and insightful:

In their antiquity and in their contemporaneity, there is not much else in any Indian literature equal to these quiet and dramatic Tamil poems. In their values and stances, they represent a mature classical poetry: passion is balanced by courtesy, transparency by ironies and nuances of design, impersonality by vivid detail and leanness of line by richness of implication. (2000: 64)

Professor George Hart, who is well-acquainted with many classical and modern languages, states that to qualify as a classical tradition, a language should be ancient, should possess an independent tradition and a large and extremely rich body of ancient literature and that these criteria are met by Tamil. Indicating that the word “Classical,” ultimately derived from the Latin *classicus*, which means “of the highest class,” Hart has listed his arguments in support of his firm belief that Tamil is a true classical language:

It is almost as old as Latin; it possesses a vital and rich literature that is peculiar to itself and is not borrowed; it was standardized at a very early time; it was used in subsequent periods as a language of literature and discourse, and it exerted considerable influence on the traditions of other languages. There are very few world languages that have these characteristics. Other Indian languages are like the non-classical languages of Europe; they did not become productive literary languages until after 1000 AD, they did not produce their own peculiar grammar, and they did not produce any great body of literature that was entirely their own, without any significant influence from the outside. ...

It has its own poetic theory, its own grammatical tradition, its own aesthetic and above all, a large body of literature that is quite unique. It shows a sort of Indian sensibility that is quite different from anything in Sanskrit or other Indian languages, and it contains its own extremely rich and intellectual tradition.

Caṅkam literature is one of the great literary treasures of the world.

Its works provide a Tamil perspective on life and on human experience that is quite different from anything found in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, or any other language. Its meters, its language, its conventions, and its spirit are all purely Tamil. Its scope is so large that it can easily be compared to any of the other classical languages.

The fact is, many Indian literatures have been influenced directly or indirectly by the Tamil tradition.

Everyone knows the *Tirukkural*, one of the world's greatest works on ethics; but this is merely one of a myriad of major and extremely varied works that comprise the Tamil classical tradition. There is not a facet of human existence that is not explored and illuminated by this great literature. (http://tamil.berkeley.edu/Tamil_Chair/Tamil_classicalLanguage/TamilClassicalLgeLtr.html)

Strongly recommending that Tamil be accorded global recognition as a classical language on the basis of its possession of Caṅkam poetry, Kamil V. Zvelebil writes:

Sangam Poetry is the expression of a linguistic, prosodic and stylistic perfection; it is a finished, consummate and inimitable literary expression of an entire culture and of the best in that culture; in this sense, it is truly a "classical" product, a classical literature. ... Those 26,350 lines of poetry promote Tamil to the rank of one of the great classical languages of the world. (1973: 1-2)

Tamil aesthetics, ancient as well as profound, has now been gaining the global recognition that it richly deserves. The theory of poetry as described in Tolkāppiyar's "Poruḷatikāram" and as exemplified in Caṅkam poetry makes it clear that even more than two thousand years ago, the Tamils had a rich and highly sophisticated set of notions of poetry which the West could arrive at only after several centuries of experiments and prolonged discussions and debates. The classical concept of poetry, showing great intellectual depth and understanding, was born of and shaped by remarkable powers of observation and meditation. The Tamils' exhaustive description of the name and nature of poetry appears to be almost the final statement on it. Martin Seymour Smith, in his *A Guide to Twentieth Century World Literature*, a close study of contemporary trends in about four hundred leading literatures of the world, has the highest praise for Tamil aesthetics. The Western aestheticians who stumble upon it, he says, will find it a shockingly pleasing treasure with its divisions of Akāṁ and Puṛaṁ and its

strategic use of landscapes and a symbolic key. He avers that the classical Tamil theory is of greater practical value today than any of the bogus experiments conducted by a majority of bogus poets of the West and that it can serve as an effective antidote to the dry philosophy of life advocated by them. The Akām poems, in his view, function within a psychologically based framework that is flawless and appropriate.

The uniqueness of *Tolkāppiyam* as an ancient grammatical treatise and as the achievement of a linguist par excellence has been acknowledged by some leading Western authorities on the subject concerned. Daniel Jones, the British specialist in phonetics, having scrutinized the Tamil language as presented in *Tolkāppiyam*, praises it as a language

that illustrates particularly well the grouping of several distinct sounds into single phonemes... those who originally invented this orthography must have had a clear conception of the phoneme idea, though the theory had never been formulated. (Quoted in Sankaran's article on *Tolkāppiyam*)

He marvels at Tolkāppiyar's accurate description of the Tamil phonemes at a time when there was no recourse to any of the scientific instruments which phoneticians could acquire only more than twenty centuries later.

More recently, in an interview in which A.L. Becker, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Michigan, Keith Taylor of the same university and A.K. Ramanujan participated, the suggestion came from Becker that

Tolkāppiyar was someone whose bust they should be putting in American university libraries "because he opened up that Tamil world with a kind of care and thoughtfulness and imagination that is certainly comparable to Plato or Aristotle in the Western world. The way that he took the least part of things we do with language and subjected to careful analysis ... not so much to make the rules as to describe it. ... Tolkāppiyar is important because here we have someone describing the equipment to grasp art, describing the conventions, describing in such detail everything that is taken for granted by the people". (2000: 68–69)

Paying his share of the tribute, the Indian linguist added,

“Yes, the man who wrote the poetics. He was also a grammarian. He does it all for Tamil! Rhetoric, prosody and poetics. He’s very close to what you would call a linguistics’ ultimate guru. He does everything. He takes all of language, from the most ordinary banal language to the most poetic, as the subject of his linguistics” (ibid.).

Over an incredibly long period of its existence Tamil has naturally gathered a cornucopia of words, phrases, idioms, proverbs and sayings enriching and enabling it to become a marvellous medium of expression. The wealth of Tamil vocabulary and the subtleties and nuances of meanings of Tamil words have been admired by the right group of competent authorities such as the Western translators of Tamil classics. G.U.Pope, for example, in the very learned introduction to his translation of *Tirukkural*, telling his contemporaries that Tamil is an independent language with a copious and original vocabulary, concedes that in English it may not be easy to achieve the economy of diction that is possible in Tamil, which exploits the provision of ellipsis in all its variety. Having in mind the Tamils’ advantage of the use of *viṇaittokai*, *paṇputtokai*, *uvamaittokai*, *ummaittokai*, *vērumaittokai*, and *anmolittokai*, Pope admits that ellipsis, though difficult to master, is one of the great beauties of Tamil.

What he says about the originality of *Tirukkural* and other didactic writings in Tamil should be borne in mind by literary historians and critics:

It would be possible, indeed, to find a close Sanskrit parallel to nearly every gnomic verse in Tamil poetry, but in many cases the beauty, spontaneity and terseness of the Tamil stanza seem to prove its originality (Pope 1984: 6).

Francis Whyte Ellis, who first proposed the idea of a Dravidian language family in 1816, forty years prior to Caldwell, convincingly argued that the four south Indian languages were not derivations from Sanskrit, that it was not necessary for their existence and that they form a distinct family with which Sanskrit has, in later times especially, intermixed, but with which it has no radical connection. Extremely impressed with Tamil literature’s concern for life here and now, he pointed out that among the various and excellent works in which the Tamil language abounds to a degree excelled by no Asiatic and by few European languages none are more remarkable than what may be described as treating on human existence.

It is in the course of his celebrated commentary of *Tirukkural* that he pays glowing tributes to the language and culture of the Tamils. Explaining that “the genius of Tamil is to hint rather than to define the signification of its words” he wonders

why so opulent a language as Greek has no term for “*iṅiyavai kūral*”, which, in Vaḷḷuvar’s usage, would include the several modifications of the primary notion conveyed by affability, courtesy or similar terms. In the absence of an equivalent to this, Aristotle was forced to describe the nameless virtue as the intermediate habit between flattery and moroseness, between that disposition which inclines the feeble minded in all cases to sacrifice their own opinions in deference to others and that by which men are excited to contend for the mere sake of contention (ibid.).

Ellis rightly chides certain European writers who have said that the Indian languages have no word corresponding to ‘gratitude’, the inference being that the very concept of gratitude is unknown to the Indians:

To this calumny let this chapter of Tiruvaḷḷuvar (the one on Ceynanṛiyaṛital) and the accomplishments to it be the answer, as in it the idea will be found to be expressed in many varying modes (ibid: 230).

After translating and elaborately commenting on a particular *Kuraḷ* of this chapter, Ellis observes:

Both the translation and explanation very inadequately convey the strength and vivid expression of the original (ibid: 234).

This is an able polyglot’s sincere, unalloyed expression of admiration for *Tirukkuraḷ*, the language in which it is written and for the culture it embodies.

The Tamil lovers of the present era are not the first ones to speak about the great antiquity of Tamil. There is plenty of literary evidence to show that the Tamils have been cherishing the notion from time immemorial. The thirty-fourth stanza of Puṛapporuḷ Venṇāmālai claims that “the old clan, armed with words, came into being, before soil evolved out of rocks.” One of the soberest of Tamil poets, Iḷaṅkō Aṭṭikaḷ, singing the glory of a Pandya king, speaks of the distant past of the Tamil land:

Hail to the southern king!
He ruled the south having conquered

the northern Ganges and the Himalayas
after the cruel sea had swallowed
the Pahruli river with the multi-ranged
Kumari mountain.

Kamban's Rāmāyaṇam says that the saint Agasthya won enormous fame by learning "the ever-living Tamil." Ni.Kandasamippillai proudly declares that Tamil was the tongue that moved the first man's tongue:

Let us prostrate ourselves
placing our heads
at the feet of
the foremost lady
ever-fresh Tamil
who gently moved man's tongue
as the time when
the primordial people
the world had yielded
were revealing their hearts
through hand-gestures
came to an end.

The Tamil mother, as presented by Bhārati in one of his poems, bemoaning her present misfortune, says that she owes her birth to no less a person than the ancient Siva. Bhāratidāsan always goes into raptures over the antiquity of Tamil:

We were born with Tamil
which was born with
the moon, the great sun,
the sky, the stars and the sea.

But, as the numerous statements by a galaxy of linguists, literary theorists, scholars, critics and translators would attest, the plea for the national and international recognition of Tamil as a classical language is not to be dismissed as a simple case of megalomania involving fantasies of past glory or as an intellectual exercise in futility. It should be evident to the just and the discerning that the claim for the classical status is well-grounded.

A phoenix is a mythological bird reported to consume itself by fire after 500 years and to rise renewed from its ashes and has, therefore, come

to mean a person or thing that has been restored to a new existence from destruction, for which reason it is praised by poets as a symbol of immortality. Tamil has had a chequered history with periods of eminence and glory as well as times when it faced humiliation and even the threat of extinction. And it has managed to survive “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” on at least three or four occasions.

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1. POETICS OF THE LYRIC IN GREEK, SANSKRIT AND TAMIL

In his essay “Sailing to Byzantium: Prolegomena to a Poetics of the Lyric”, Elder Olson categorically states that neither the ancients nor the moderns have said much that is valuable about the nature of a lyric, though there have been numerous abortive attempts at that. To be sure, what has been written about the lyric has finally proved to be a series of “bons mots on the character of the lyric poet, of startling analogies to the psychological or physiological effects of lyric poetry – of mere loci within a general discussion of literature which is concerned with the lyric only because the lyric possesses some characteristic in common with other forms” (p. 215). All the modern disputations about the lyric have been, in Olson’s view, declarations of individual predilections, or, as in the case of Ezra Pound’s famous precepts for Imagists, definitions of a doctrine or a convention rather than of a lyric poem. He, therefore, takes it upon himself to discover some index as to how, eventually, a poetics of the lyric might be arrived at.

Olson is fairly clear about what needs to be done and under what conditions it should be done. Any attempts towards a poetics of the lyric will be significant only in a philosophy in which the arts and sciences are held distinct from each other. And poetics in such a system cannot deal with every question which may possibly be raised about a work of art but only with those questions raised concerning it qua work of art. Questions about works of art may fall under many sciences, according to the manner of consideration. A question about a poem as an existent thing falls under metaphysics; a question about it as productive of social consciousness falls under politics. But neither of these questions would be poetic questions in the sense in which the term “poetic” is employed. Whatever answers could be found to questions about its *being* and *political instrumentality* would be mainly concerned not with the nature of poetry but with the relationship between poetry and something else. Two more statements that Olson

makes who surprise those that are aware of what Tolkāppiyar has done to the lyric.

. . . poetics as conceived here would not afford a series of recipes for making poems, nor a set of rules according to which they must be made, for the very character of poetics is such that it must be *subsequent to the inventive utilizations of the medium by the artist*.

Properly taken, poetic questions would be concerning the poetic structure of a particular work, in the sense of inquiring what form has been imposed upon the medium of words. Such an enquiry, properly prosecuted, would terminate *in a discovery of the parts of a work and of the interrelations through which the parts are parts of a whole* (p. 217).

Though himself a Neo-Aristotelian to be bracketed with R.S. Crane and the other proud members of the Chicago School, Olson concedes that even if the *Poetics* of Aristotle is relevant in a discussion of the lyrical mode, the great Greek theorist's description of the nature of a tragedy cannot be blindly applied to the lyric:

To attempt to find a plot in the lyric, however, would be a profitless if not impossible task; to attempt on the other hand to find in the lyric some analogue of plot in the drama and in epic, for the mere sake of imitating Aristotle, would be to run counter to the broader indications of his very method – a method involving the distinction of diverse departments of inquiry diversely prosecuted (ibid.).

Taking a valuable clue from Aristotle, Olson sets himself to discover some principle in the lyric which is the principle of its unity and order and which will not be something extrinsic to it such as the differentiation either of authors, audiences, subject matters, or orders of diction would afford. With a view to achieving this, he subjects “Sailing to Byzantium” to as thorough an analysis as possible and concludes that the argument of a lyric is its principle, “in a sense analogous to that in which, for Aristotle, plot is the principle of tragedy” (p. 227). The argument of a lyric which is its principle is not a dialectic referable to externals, but a certain formal collocation of terms which is referable to nothing outside itself and which may be called the soul of the poem in the sense in which Aristotle calls plot the soul of tragedy.

But Olson realizes that he has managed to describe only one type of lyric and the essay ends with a give-away remark:

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all lyrics are of the order considered here. The term lyric itself has been given an extraordinary variety of applications, and the scrupulous analyst and critic will attempt to keep the variety of critical approaches almost commensurate with these, on the assumption that great art – however familiar the pattern in which it is apparently laid – is always in the last analysis *sui generis* (229–30).

One's claim that one has taken us close to a poetics of the lyric may not be justified if one has been able to identify the nature of only a particular type of lyrics when every literature worth the name has lyrics and lyrics.

By the word "Lyric" the Greeks meant only that poetry that was sung to the accompaniment of the lyre. They had no general term to describe all personal utterances expressing the emotional response of the individual to his own world which, in fact, constitute a vast body of poetry which is neither epic nor dramatic. There were two types of such poetry – monodic and choral. In the monodic, the poet spoke for the group with which he identified himself. Even during Homer's time, there were wedding songs, funeral dirges, paeans of thanksgiving and rustic chants of various kinds. It was only when epic poetry declined that poets started choosing the contemporary world as a subject and lyric poetry began to flourish. For a few centuries the great names in poetry were those of lyricists such as Archilochus, Mimnermus, Sappho, Alcaeus, Solon and Pindar. Finally, it had to yield place to the drama which, absorbing the lyric and the epic became the dominant form. The famous Greek Anthology is a collection of poems covering more than a thousand years, most of which are short pieces called epigrams written in elegiac couplets. They include love poems, epitaphs, prayers, dedications, satires and numerous other kinds. The importance of the musical accompaniment varied with the different types of lyrics. In the case of iambic poetry, originally satirical, it consisted of a few notes providing a background for the voice of the reciter. The elegy, chanted with the accompaniment of the flute for some time, lost the musical element. The light odes of Sappho and Pindar, sung to the accompaniment of an instrumental melody, were real songs. The instruments were few and harmony was largely unknown.

What Warren R. Castle, an authority on Greek literature, writes about it is worth knowing especially when we would like to compare it with ancient Tamil poetry:

Characteristic of nearly all Greek poetry is a kind of simplicity, sometimes almost naiveté, resulting partly from a tendency to treat subjects of universal

interest only, and partly from a tendency to treat all subjects in general rather than in particular terms.... Through its entire range of effects, from the most delicate loveliness to the most sublimely tragic, Greek poetry is *almost wholly direct statement, not the poetry of suggestion*. Further, it does not attempt to communicate private or unique experience.... Probably the two most celebrated lyric poets of antiquity were Sappho in monody and Pindar in choral lyric.... The Greeks called her (Sappho) the tenth muse and ranked her equal to Homer. Love was the subject of all her poems. ... Her method is direct and piercing; her art is an exquisite combination of simplicity, grace and passion...

The poems (of Pindar) are mostly about horse races and wrestling matches...He was the supreme voice of aristocracy, a thoroughgoing blue blood. He believed that the quality of *arête*, which we loosely translate as virtue, or more exactly as excellence, was the exclusive property of the nobility. ... And by the best he meant the landed nobility, who alone possessed "virtue". He had nothing of what we call "social consciousness" (pp. 93–94).

In comparison with what the Greeks have achieved in the dramatic form, their output of lyric poetry is meager. But what is extremely disappointing is their theory of poetry. Plato believed that the poet is probably possessed by a madness and not in control of himself when he writes.

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Korybantian revelers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains; but when falling under the power of music and meter they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind (Plato 14).

Since men may be misled by the poet's lies, Plato banishes him from the ideal republic.

And so if the tragic poet is an imitator, he too is thrice removed from the thing and from the truth; and so are all other imitators. ... Then the imitator is a long way off the truth, and can reproduce all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image...

Then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators, who copy images of virtue and the other themes of their poetry, but have no contact with the truth? (p. 35–36).

Aristotle is universally praised as the first critic to attempt a systematic

discussion of genres. But his *Poetics*, which makes a profound analysis of the nature and function of tragic drama, has very little on the lyric. Answering Plato's criticism of the poet as a mere imitator of appearances, his student claims that art is a kind of improvement on nature in that the poet is able to bring to completion what nature, operating with different principles of order, is still trying hard to complete.

Epic poetry and tragedy, comedy also and dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ, however, from one another in three respects – the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct (Aristotle 48).

In the sixth section of *Poetics*, Aristotle promises to speak later of the poetry which imitates in hexameter verse and of comedy, but the work comes to an abrupt end after a comparison of the relative merits and limitations of tragedy and epic poetry.

Horace's *Ars Poetica* (*Art of Poetry*) is a celebrated Latin treatise whose ideas and catch phrases are supposed to have had considerable influence on the neoclassical movements in the West. His work is primarily concerned with the question of how the poet may delight and instruct his readers but he shows no interest in defining what a poem is or what literature is. By the phrase "ut pictura poesis", Horace means that poetry is like painting insofar as some works will be more effective when viewed up close whereas others have to be looked at from a distance. This analogy is used to emphasize the variety of poetry and not to restrict poetry to the effects of painting in words. Though Horace lays stress on decorum, by which he means the rightness of each part to the whole, he cannot be credited with an awareness of the organic unity of a work of art. But he is rightly remembered for his view of the artist as a craftsman and his concept of decorum.

It is an old question whether a praiseworthy poem be the creation of nature or of art. For my part I do not see what study can do without a rich vein of native gift, nor what the native gift can do without culture; so much does each ask of the other and swear eternal alliance with it. He whose ambition is to reach the wished for goal of the race course has borne much and done much in his boyhood, has sweated and shivered, has denied himself love and wine. The pipe-player who is chosen to play the Pythian piece has learnt his lesson sometime ago under the fear of a master (Horace, p. 74).

In his concept of the sublime, Longinus attempts to balance inspiration and rhetorical mastery. He describes various rhetorical devices but is not

merely interested in persuasion. A poet would do well to learn all rhetorical devices as well as to imitate and emulate great writers who had great souls. It is good to master the art of ordering of the parts of a whole but it is praiseworthy to aim at achieving sublimity, which “flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt” (Longinus 76). The artist, on the other hand, should be wary of a pompous, false sublimity.

All who aim at elevation are so anxious to escape the reproach of being weak and dry that they are carried, as by some strange law of nature, into the opposite extreme. They put their trust in the maxim that “failure in a great attempt is at least a noble error.” But evil are the swellings, both in the body and in diction which are inflated and unreal, and threaten us with the reverse of our aim; for nothing, say they, is drier than a man who has the dropsy. While timidity desires to transcend the limits of the sublime, the defect which is termed puerility is the direct antithesis of elevation, for it is utterly low and mean and in real truth the most ignoble vice of style. ... a third, and closely allied, kind of defect in matters of passion is that which Theodorus used to call “parenthysus”. By this is meant unseasonable and empty passion, where no passion is required, or immoderate, where moderation is needed (Longinus 78).

Though Longinus does not define sublimity, he identifies five principal sources of elevated language: power of forming great conceptions, vehement and inspired passion, the due formation of figures of speech, noble diction and dignified and elevated composition. It may be noted that the first of these five is a quality of the author rather than of the poem. The second may be a characteristic of the author or of the poem or of both. The final three are features of the poem. Longinus privileges truth and reality over the fabulous and believes that grandeur with some faults is preferable to moderate success.

The idea of the sublime attracted the attention of many eighteenth century critics including Addison, Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer who defined it in different ways. Whereas Longinus’ treatment of the subject refers sublimity to the work and the author, his admirers locate it in the audience.

Unlike Greek and Latin, Sanskrit has numerous polemical treatises written over a long period of time on many issues relating to drama and poetry. In Sanskrit also, as in Greek and Latin, there is no single dispassionate work that deals with the lyric comprehensively.

Bharata's *Natyasastra* states the theory of *Rasa* in all its ramifications. The following are listed as the eight sentiments recognized in drama: "Erotic (srīngāra), Comic (hāsya), Pathetic (Karūṇa), Furious (raudra), Heroic (vīra), Terrible (bhayanāka), Odious (bibhatsa) and Marvellous (adbhuta). *Rasa* is defined in an aphorism:

Vibhāvas are causes or mainsprings of emotion:

- a) the characters in a drama that excite our feelings
- b) setting: spring, garden, fragrance, moonlight

Anubhāvas are the effects of emotions that develop the main sentiment such as anxiety, anger, depression through which love (which is the principal emotion) is expressed.

A blending of these bhāvas rousing in the reader/spectator a certain emotion, accompanied by a thrill and a sense of joy is *Rasa* (Seturaman 1992, p. 2).

The dominant states (Sthāyībhāva) are known to be love, mirth, sorrow, anger, energy, terror, disgust and astonishment while the thirty-three transitory states (vyabhicāribhāva) are designated as discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, intoxication, weariness, indolence, depression, anxiety, distraction, recollection, contentment, shame, inconstancy, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, despair, impatience, sleep, epilepsy, dreaming, awakening, indignation, dissimulation, cruelty, assurance, sickness, insanity, death, fright and deliberation, which are said to be defined by the names. An additional list of eight temperamental states (Sāttvika bhāva) includes paralysis, perspiration, horripilation, change of voice, trembling, change of colour, weeping and fainting.

The practice of representation (dharmi) in a dramatic performance is twofold: realistic (lokadharmi, lit. popular) and conventional (nātyadharmi, lit. theatrical). No meaning proceeds from speech without any kind of sentiment. The sentiment is produced from a combination of determinants (vibhāva), consequents (anubhāva) and transitory states (vyabhicāri bhāva). *Rasa* is so called because it is capable of being tasted. Just as well-disposed persons while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices enjoy its tastes and are gratified, so do cultured people taste the dominant states when they see them represented by words, gestures, and temperament, and derive pleasure and satisfaction. A discussion of the relation between the sentiments and the states leads to the conclusion that just as a tree grows from a seed and flowers and fruits (including the seed) from a tree, so the sentiments

are the source (lit. root) of all the states and likewise the states exist as the source of all the sentiments.

The four original sentiments, Erotic, Furious, Heroic and Odious are stated to be the sources of the eight sentiments. Of these, the comic sentiment arises from the erotic, the pathetic from the furious, the marvellous from the heroic and the terrible from the odious. The erotic sentiment is light green (*syāma*), the comic white, the pathetic ash-cloured (*kapota*), the furious red, the heroic light orange (*gaura*), the terrible black, the odious blue, and the marvellous yellow. Viṣṇu is the presiding deity of the erotic, Pramathas of the comic, Rudra of the furious, Yama of the pathetic, Siva (*mahā kāla*) of the odious, Yama (*kāla*) of the terrible, Indra of the heroic, and Brahman of the marvellous.

The erotic sentiment proceeds from the dominant state of love (*rati*) and has as its basis a bright attire. The comic sentiment has as its basis the dominant emotion of laughter and is created by determinants such as showing unseemly dress or ornament, impudence, greediness, quarrel, defective limb, use of irrelevant words, mentioning of different faults, and similar other things. The pathetic sentiment arises from the dominant state of sorrow and grows from determinants such as affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death, captivity, flight from one's own place, dangerous accidents or any other misfortune. The furious sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of anger, owes its origin to *rāksasas*, *dānavas* and haughty men and is caused by fights. It is created by determinants such as anger, rape, abuse, insult, untrue allegation, exorcizing, threatening, revenge, jealousy and the like. The heroic sentiment, relating to the superior type of person, has energy as its basis and is created by determinants such as presence of mind, perseverance, diplomacy, discipline, military strength, aggressiveness, reputation of might, influence and the like. The terrible sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of fear and is created by determinants such as noise, sight of ghosts, panic and anxiety due to the untimely cry of jackals and owls, staying in an empty house or forest, sight of death or captivity of dear ones, or news of it, or discussion about it. The odious sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of disgust and is created by determinants such as hearing of unpleasant, offensive, impure and harmful things or seeing them or discussing them. The marvellous sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of astonishment and is created by determinants such as sight of heavenly beings or events, attainment of desired objects, entrance into a superior mansion,

temple, audience hall (sabhā), a seven-storied palace and (seeing) illusory and magical arts.

As the main concern of *Nāṭyasāstra* is dramaturgy in its varied aspects, it shows little interest in the basic concepts of poetics.

Bhamaha is one of the early Sanskrit aestheticians who set out to formulate certain rules relating to Alamkāra or beauty in Kāvya. In his view anyone attempting a Kāvya should master grammar, the science of metre, the nature of words (as conveying primary and secondary sense), meanings of words, the stories in itihāsas, the ways of the world, logic and the arts. No faulty word should be spoken by a poet, for being a bad author is nothing less than death. While some maintain that figures of speech like Rūpaka alone constitute a Kāvya's ornaments, others contend that they are external, since the proper disposition of nouns and verbs constitutes the real ornaments of speech. Making a clear distinction between beauty of language or phonetic sounds (śabdālamkāra) and beauty of thought (arthālamkāra), Bhamaha is prepared to accept both. Word and meaning taken together constitute Kāvya, which is of two kinds, prose and verse, further distinguishable into Sanskrit, Prakrit and Dialect. Including dramas and grammar under the category of Kāvya, he advocates a four-fold classification: real narratives of gods, stories put together (fiction), facts relating to arts and those relating to the sciences. Kāvya may be further divided into five groups: those that are built by divisions called *sargas*, those that should be acted or exhibited on the stage, *ākhyāyikās*, *kathās*, and unconnected compositions. *Ākhyāyikā* is a prose composition treating of an elevated subject-matter and characterized by agreeable words, meaning and style in harmony with the context. And it is divided into parts called *ucchvāsas*. *Kathā* is acceptable if composed in Sanskrit or in a dialect. The history of the hero is narrated in it not by others but by himself. *Anibaddha* (unconnected compositions) consist only in *gāthās* and verses. All compositions – from the shortest *muktaka* to the longest *mahākāvya* – become commendable if characterized by indirect or disguised statement (*vakrōkti*). Rejecting the distinction between *vaidarbha* and *gauḍiyā* dictions, Bhamaha states that there is no separate thing as *vaidarbhi*. This nomenclature is due to unintelligent people following blindly the lead of others. If a composition is devoid of suggestion or cleverness of statement but is merely clear, smooth and elegant, it differs merely as music does, by being pleasant to the ear. It is with utter contempt that he rejects the so-called *guṇas* or qualities like lucidity (*prasāda*), naturalism and tenderness (*komalatva*) associated with *vaidarba mārga* because he doesn't accept as

poetry anything devoid of profound meaning (puṣṭartha) and artistic turn of expression (vakrōkti). Even Gauḍiyā is acceptable as superior poetry if it possesses artistic beauty and elevated thought and is free from obscurity.

Giving suitable illustrative examples, Bhamaha describes the ten conventional doṣas or flaws in poetry. This list includes what is called *ayuktimat* by which he means the employment of clouds, winds, the moon, the bee, hārita (a bird of that name), Cakravāka (bird) and the parrot as messengers. Bhamaha asks, “How can those that cannot speak and those that are of indistinct utterance, going to distant places perform their function as messengers? Such descriptions do not fit in with reason” (Seturaman 1992, p. 66). After enumerating the last four defects of speech – *Srutiduṣṭa* (offensive to the ear), *Arthaduṣṭa* (of improper or objectionable meaning), *Kalpanāduṣṭa* (objectionable construction), and *Srutikaṣṭa* (painful to the ear – cacophony), Bhamaha concedes that sometimes even objectionable words may shine by the positions given to them just as mere green leaves look pretty when interposed amidst the flowers of garlands.

Just as man who strings up a garland uses one kind of flower because it is sweet-smelling and rejects another because it is ordinary; again knows that one particular flower will look pretty when interwoven in a particular manner or that only a (particular) place is suited for a particular flower just as such a man strings up discriminating correctly – so should one (composing kāvya) dispose of words with close attention (Ibid. p. 70).

Anandavardhan (1974) in his *Dhvanyāloka* claims that suggestion is the soul of poetry and uses the term *dhvani* to denote the suggested sense or the function of suggestion. That kind of poetry, in which the conventional meaning renders itself secondary or the conventional word renders its meaning secondary and suggests the intended or implied meaning is designated by the learned as *dhvani* or suggestive poetry. *Dhvani* is the most intrinsic principle of poetry delighting all refined critics and all else is only a ‘puzzling picture.’ Suggestion is conditioned only by the relation between the suggested and the suggester and hence it cannot be subsumed under such figures of speech as condensed metaphor, *paraleipsis*, *metonymy*, *periphrasis*, *faced denial*, *ellipsis* implying a simile and merging of figures since we have a clear perception of the implicit meaning in these. Wherever the implied meaning is unimportant and merely ancillary to the expressed, it may be concluded that such instances contain only figures like the condensed metaphor. “In places where we have just a glimmer of the implied, or where the implied is just a handmaid to the expressed, or where its primary

importance is not clearly discernible, there is no suggestive poetry” (Seturaman 82). Poems in which the word and the meaning are solely directed towards the implied meaning are alone genuine instances of suggestive poetry.

Suggestion, according to Anandavardhan (1974), is two-fold: (1) with unintended literal import and (2) with intended but further-extending literal import. Suggestion is not to be mistaken for indication because there is difference in nature between the two. A word that conveys a charm incapable of communication by any other expression and is pregnant with suggestive force deserves the title “suggestive”.

Anandavardhan (1974) came under fire from his contemporaries as well as from later generations of scholars. He himself had to counter the charges that something called *dhvani* does not exist, that it is included in *laksanā*, that it is nothing but inference, that it is beyond the province of words and that it is patently absurd. Twelve anti-*dhvani* theories were mentioned by Jayaratha. The main reason for the opposition was that various schools of Indian philosophy like the Nyāya and the Mimāṃsā do not recognize the suggestive power of words at all.

Abhinavagupta maintained that *rasa* is realized through suggestion. In his view, the *sthāyibhāvas* as well as the fleeting *vyabhicāribhavas* are dormant in the minds of the spectators and are roused by the stimulus of *vibhāvās* and reach the state of *rasa*.

Claiming that the doctrine of *dhvani* is only an extension of the *rasa* theory propounded by Bharata, Kunjunni Raja contends that there is no conflict at all between the theory of *dhvani* and the theory of *rasa* as the former stresses the method of treatment while the latter deals with the ultimate effect. “Suggestion, by itself, is not enough in drama or poetry; what is suggested must be charming, and this charm can come only through *rasa* or emotion. The emotion is not something which can be expressed directly by words, it can only be suggested” (Seturaman 1992, p. 288).

K. Krishnamoorthy (1979), a modern champion of *dhvani*, gives an interesting exposition of the theory:

Dhvani is the name given to the essence of poetry primarily in its synthetic aspect. It is first and foremost a complex whole, which also admits of intellectual analysis to cover every essential aspect of poetic experience.

... we believe that style is the bridge that somehow fuses form and

content. The Indian theorists before Ānandavardhana – Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana and Udbhaṭa – could not go beyond this analysis. While they relegated the importance of *rasa* only to drama, their *alaṅkāras*, *guṇas*, *Ritis* were more or less independent categories loosely hung on form and content...

What, then, is the soul of poetry? Well, the soul is that which sensitive sahr̥dayas alone feel and which is behind the meaning grasped by dry scholars... The realized inner meaning itself, which is over and above the logical meaning or meanings of the poems, though invariably springing from this is its *dhvani*. The soul of poetry admired by *Sahr̥dayas* is thus logical meaning plus something which is sui generis (pp. 88–89).

Vāmana is reported to be the first writer on poetics who has given a carefully outlined theory, “no longer naïve or tentative” (De 197). To him, “Ritirātmā Kāvyaśya”, Riti is the soul of poetry. The word (Sabda) and its sense (artha) constitute the body of which the soul is the riti. It is defined as Viśiṣṭapadaracanā or particular arrangements of words. This arrangement depends upon certain definite combinations of *guṇas* or excellences of composition. Proposing three kinds of riti, Vamana contends that Vaidarbhi unites all the ten *guṇas*, the Gauḍi abounds in *ojas* and *Kānti* and the Pāñcālī is endowed with *mādhurya* and *saukumārya*. Riti is not to be simply identified with the Western concept of style. It consists of the objective beauty of representation of the intended idea arising from a proper fusion of certain well defined excellences and from an adjustment of sound and sense. The outward expression should be in accordance with the inward sense.

Vāmana categorically states that the *guṇas* are essential for they constitute the riti. Each of the ten traditional *guṇas* is shown by him to play its role as a sabda-guṇa and as an artha-guṇa:

Sabda-guṇas:

1. Ojas or compactness of word structure
2. Prasāda or laxity of structure
3. Sléśa or coalescence of words resulting in smoothness
4. Samatā or homogeneity of manner
5. Samādhi or symmetry due to orderly ascent and descent, i.e., when the heightening effect is toned down by softening effect and vice versa
6. Mādhurya or distinctness of words due to absence of long compounds

7. Saukumārya or freedom from harshness
8. Udāratā or liveliness in which the words seem as if they are dancing
9. Artha-vyakti, or explicitness of words whereby the meaning is easily apprehended
10. Kānti or brilliance, i.e., richness of words.

Artha-guṇas:

1. Ojas, or maturity of conception
2. Prasāda, clearness of meaning by avoidance of superfluity
3. Sléṣa or coalescence or commingling of many ideas
4. Samata, or non-relinquishment of proper sequence of ideas
5. Samādhi, or grasping of the original meaning arising from concentration of the mind
6. Mādhurya or strikingness of utterance, i.e., in an impressive periphrastic manner for special charm
7. Saukumārya or freedom from disagreeable or inauspicious ideas
8. Udāratā or delicacy, i.e., absence of vulgarity
9. Artha-vyakti, or explicitness of ideas which makes the nature of things clear
10. Kānti or prominence of the *rasas*.

To Vāmana, alaṅkāras (poetic figures) are only elements of secondary importance. What is of great importance is the presence of charm or beauty (alaṅkāra in its broad sense of saundarya) which is not specifically defined by him. The *Guṇas*, being characteristics which create the charm of poetry, are essential to it whereas alaṅkāras are only ornaments that may enhance the charm already produced. The *Guṇas* are nitya (permanent) while the alaṅkāras are anitya for there can be beauty even in the absence of figures of speech.

Since drama was considered by Vāmana the best form of composition from which other forms of poetry proceed, he included *Rasa* as one of the essential characteristics (when he defined Kānti as an artha-guṇa).

The Riti system was ultimately discarded by leading Sanskrit aestheticians on the grounds that it comprehended poetry only from the formal point of view not providing any deep insight into its inner nature, that it made invidious and useless distinctions between the *vaidarbhi*, *Gauḍi*

and other kinds of diction and that its minute differentiation and endless multiplication of the *guṇas* served no purpose.

Kuntaka in his *Vakrōktijīvita* sets out to establish the idea of *Vaicitrya*, which, in his view, causes extraordinary disinterested charm in poetry. He maintains that *Vakrōkti*, which is essential in poetry, is to be taken as a kind of *Vicitrā abhidhā* (striking denotation) so that the *vakratva* or *vakra – bhāva* (obliquity) underlying it becomes synonymous with *Vaicitrya* or *vicitra-bhāva*. The *Vakra-kavi-Vyāpāra* or *Kavi-vyāpāra-vakratva* is the ultimate source of poetry. The ultimate test of the *vaicitrya* in poetry is the appreciation of the *Sahr̥ḍya* or the ablest connoisseur. Any composition involving mere *svabhāvokti* (natural description) is unacceptable to Kuntaka for a plain description of the *svabhāva* doesn't have the necessary strikingness. He firmly believes that since *vakrōkti* constitutes the only possible embellishment or *alamkāra* of poetry, all poetic figures are but different aspects of *Vakrōkti*. Though he admits that *vakratva* may be of infinite kinds, he lists a few important varieties. All *sabdālaṅkāras* are included under *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā*, all the beautiful grammatical affixes and terminations are included under *pada-pūrvārdha* and *padaparārdha vakrata*; all *arhālaṅkāras*, *mārgas*, *guṇas* and *rasādi* under *vākya-vakratā*; all beautiful constructions of plots, descriptions, innovations, characterizations and propriety of *rasa*, *sandhis* and *sandhyaṅg* as under *prakaraṇa-vakrata*; and the beauty of the entire work and dominant *rasa* under *prabhandha-vakratā*.

In Kuntaka's concept of *vakrōkti*, each variety of *vakratā* is inclusive of *vastu*, *alaṅkāra* and *rasa*, *guṇa* and *rīti*. Kuntaka's idea of *rasa* as *alaṅkārya* is praised by Krishnamoorthy as the former's epoch-making contribution to literary theory. With regard to the role of *rasa*, even Anandavardhana is not able to take a definite stand in his *Dhvanyāloka*. Does *rasa* mean something objectified or embodied in words and meanings of poems or is it some aesthetic experience felt by the reader? Anandavardhana takes it to mean the reader's aesthetic experience more than once. But he admits the possibility of *rasa* being regarded as *kāvyaṛtha*. And there are occasions when he credits the poet also with *rasāveśa*. It is in Kuntaka's analysis that Anandavardhana's idea of "rasavad-alaṅkāra ceases to be self-contradictory. It becomes the name of any figure of speech like the simile or metaphor which heightens the *rasa* intended by the poet. The material embodied by a poet is *alaṅkārya*. The whole of it can be brought under the heads of *vastu* and *rasādi*, the former denoting the objective theme and the latter the subjective elements. Both the *vastu* and the *rasādi* are

made striking by the use of alaṅkāra, *guna*, etc., In Kuntaka's perception, if what is to be expressed is *vastu* and *rasa*, how it is expressed is *vakrokti* or alaṅkāra.

But as S.K. De observes, though Kuntaka's work is of historical importance, his theory of *vakrokti* "never appears to have received liberal recognition in the hands of later theorists. ...Kuntaka was apparently fighting on behalf of a cause already doomed" (p. 218).

A close study of Sanskrit poetics would reveal that there have been attempts at defining poetry in terms of *rasa* or *dhvani* or alaṅkāra, *guṇa* or *rīti* or *vakrokti*, each of the theorists from Bharata to Appayya Dīkṣita claiming pre-eminence or sole recognition for his favourite idea. It cannot be denied that their writings have provided a number of brilliant insights into poetry, which have deservingly won the admiration of some of the leading Western aestheticians. But, at the same time, it has to be conceded that their endless debates and hairsplittings down the centuries have not led to a holistic view of the poem as a work of art or of the poetic process, not to speak of the name and nature of a lyric. It is the chief glory of Tamil poetics that it alone has been able to fully identify the salient features of a poem, emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. The theory of poetry as expounded in *Tolkāppiyam* witnesses to their success in unravelling the so-called mystery of poetic process and in pinpointing the essential elements of a poem besides cultivating their language as an extremely suitable medium of poetry.

According to Tolkāppiyar, the 'limbs' of a poem are: (1) the alphabetical sounds (Eḷuttu) (2) their duration (Māttirai) (3) their knitting together into syllable (Acāi) (4) the various permutations and combinations of these syllables as feet (Cīr) (5) the varied integrations of these feet into lines (Aṭi) (6) the caesura – the coincidence with the metrical and grammatical pause (Yāppu) (7) the lexical tradition (Marapu) (8) the basic poetic intonations or fundamental poetic tunes (Tūkku) (9) the innumerable garland like patterns of the metrical weldings such as assonance and rhyme (Toṭai) (10) the import or purport of the verse, controlling and vivifying all these parts, so as to make them expressive of the self-same purport (Nōkku) (11) the basic verse patterns as so many permanent and natural sound configurations of the idiom of the language (Pā) (12) the length or dimensions (Aḷavu) (13) the harking back to the ideal behaviour patterns of an ennobling humanity (Tiṇai) (14) their varying main currents of activity (Kaikōl) (15) the speaker whose expression the poem is (Kūru) (16) the

person to whom the poem is addressed (Kēṭpōr) (17) the place (Kaḷaṅ) (18) the time of the poem (Kālam) (19) the resulting effect of the purpose of the verse (Payan) (20) the sentiment or emotion bubbling forth there (Meypṭāṭu) (21) the elliptical construction or the yearning after completion of the sense, at every stage of its progress (Eccam) (22) the context making the meaning (Munṇam) (23) the underlying universality (Poruḷ) (24) the ford in the poetic current where the particularity enters into the flow of poetry or the particularity of the poetic aspect of the verse (Turai) (25) the great linkings or the retrospective and prospective constructions (Māttu) (26) the colour of the rhythm of the verse (vaṇṇam) (27) the eightfold poetical facades (Vaṇṇappu).

It is to be noted here that the Tamils, long before Coleridge, could conceive of a poem as an organic whole. Since these twenty seven are called uṟuppus by Tolkāppiyar, T.P. Meenakshisundaran rightly observes,

Looking deeper into this enumeration, one finds therein, the organic theory of poetry taking shape and form. There is the age-long Tamil simile that verse is like the living body of a man. The sound and meaning together form one united whole. The bone, the marrow, the hair, the tooth, the mucus and their varieties of cells make up the body of man; one has to add to these the various mental conditions and other vital constituents of life, known and unknown – in short all the physical, the chemical, the biological, the psychical and the spiritual hierarchies, rising as tiers, one over the other, but all woven into a beautiful unity by Nature – all these go to make up the personality of man. Everything there subserves the higher purpose of this personality and finds a significance and meaning therein. Even a change in a tiny invisible cell, for instance, of a gland affects the pattern, though the organism may continue to live. So do the various parts of the verse go to make up its individual specific pattern and life (“The Theory of Poetry in Tolkāppiyar” 56-57).

The concept of poetry as expounded in Tolkāppiyar’s “Poruḷatikāram” would, on close analysis, justify the claim that the ancient Tamils had a poetics of the lyric which Elder Olson was looking for but could not find in the well-known languages of the world.

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