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IMPACT OF *TOLKĀPPIYAM* AS PORTRAYED IN KALKI.R.KRISHNAMURTHY'S
PONNIYIN SELVAN

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ABSTRACT

A country's Literature is one of its greatest assets as it enables to relive the past, reflect the present and foretell the future. Tamil Literature is a granary of history, culture and society especially of the past dating even back to Pre-Christian era. Various nuances of culture, the people's emotions and experiences are captured in time by its Literature. *Tolkāppiyam* is one such antique work that has dictated terms for the Literature of its time. Though ancient, its powerful presence is still felt in many works of Tamil Literature. *Ponniyin Selvan*, by Kalki.R.Krishnamurthy, though a phenomenal historical novel in every aspect among the Tamil readers, is no exception. The possible reason, for the traces of influence of the ancient treatise in the work of a modern writer, could only be the culture's communion with its Literature, and in return, Literature infuses life into culture making it stay alive and healthy down the ages.

Key Words: Tolkāppiyam, Kalki, Ponniyin Selvan, akam

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Introduction

Rome was not built in a day nor is greatness. It involves years and years, perhaps even generations of untiring hard work and constant renewal of the already attained glory added on to the achievements of the present. For it to be remembered down the lane in the pages of history, then achieving targets should become a regular cycle. A work of art, even though a masterpiece, can never singly represent a country's greatness in the field of Literature. Rather, there has to be constant and continuous productions by many hands for the works of art to be called a country's Literature. Tamil Literature is one such amalgamation of masterworks recorded from ancient past to the present.

Tamil Literature has always served as a mine of information in unearthing the Dravidian history, more particularly the history of the Tamil land and its culture, for after all Literature is a reflection of life. T.G.Aravamuthan in his book *The Kaveri, The Maukharis and The Sangam Age* emphasizes on this notion:

No other literature of the Dravidian peoples is as old as that of the Tamils nor has any of them, whether ancient, medieval or modern, approached in excellence the Tamil literature of these early days. The ancient Tamil classics are unique among the literary works of the Dravidians for their

antiquity as well as for their quality. Further, they contain true and lively pictures of the life of the Tamil people in a period for which we have no other sources of information... (1)

Evidences place the official birth of Tamil Literature to the Sangam Age. The Sangam age had its inception from 600 B.C and the literature composed during this period is called Sangam literature which falls between 600 B.C and 300A.D. The term Sangam means 'academy' or 'fraternity' and it is said that there were three sangams altogether, wherein the material of the first Sangam is completely lost. One of the ancient works, probably belonging to the second Sangam, is *Tolkāppiyam* meaning 'ancient book' or the preserver of ancient institutions. The author of this work is Tolkāppiyānār also called Trinadhūmāgni, a disciple of the popular Agastiyer (107) says Simon Cassie Chitty. He also adds that "This work, which is the oldest of the kind in existence, consists of 1276 sūtras or rules in verse." (107). The voluminous work is not merely a book on Tamil grammar of inflection and syntax but also sets the norm for the theme of works of art. In ancient days, poetry was the only known genre in Tamil literature. This treatise enunciates the style and theme of Tamil poetry giving a picture of the political, social and religious life of that period. It clearly and systematically treats of only one of the time-honoured divisions of Tamil- Iyal or Natural Tamil. The book is divided into three major sections or chapters of nine subdivisions. The three major divisions are 'Eluthu' meaning script or orthography, 'Sol' which means words or etymology and 'Porul' referring to the subject-matter or theme of poetry. It is this third section that is acknowledged by all scholars to be a unique one, for it includes classification of habitats, time, season, people, occupation, pastime, settlements, food, beasts, trees and gods pertaining to the regions of the Tamil land. Kamil Zvelebil in his book *The Smile of Murugan* says of the third category "Porulatikāram, or the book dealing with "subject-matter" is, in short, the prosody and rhetoric of Classical Tamil. In addition, it contains a wealth of sociological and cultural material." (133).

The subject-matter is classified into two divisions. Invariably all the poems of ancient Tamil fall under these two divisions in its theme which is explained in *Tolkāppiyam*. The two main groups are 'akam' or 'agam' and 'puram'. Akam means internal while the latter external. Akam refers to love in its different phases and puram to war and praise of kings. Tamil scholars have realized the fact that emotions or experiences can never happen in vacuum. Another reason is that human emotions are constantly influenced by environmental factors. Hence *Tolkāppiyam* speaks of different landscapes with its particular features to accentuate the emotion or experience that is narrated.

A landscape in Tamil classical poetry defines the quality of human experience. Every situation is described using themes in which, three native elements- 'mutal' (place and time), 'karu' (man's relationship with nature, occupation and the territory's characteristic features) and 'uri' (different phases of love) are always present. Place under mutal is ascertained seven 'thinai' which means regions or geographical landscapes. This classification is separate for both akam and puram. The classification of akam alone is explained in order to keep relevance to the title of the paper. The thinai are Kuṛinci, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Pālai. The last two Kaikkilai and Perunthinai are not assigned any landscapes as these were thought to be unnatural emotions that a society should not approve of. Kuṛinci are the mountainous regions signifying lover's union, in other words, pre-nuptial love. Mullai refers to forest area and pasture lands. This signifies the brief parting of lovers. The next thinai Marutham refers to lover's unfaithfulness. Anxiety and separation falls under Neithal and Pālai is long separation or elopement. Every region is accorded its own appropriate flowers, animals, birds, gods, weather, seasons, music and people. A poem adopted any one of the thinai at a time; overlapping of two thinai is also not absent. Another interesting feature is: in the native language, the name of the five thinai are the names of flowers associated with that particular landscape and the flower has the attributes of the exclusive emotions of the mentioned thinai.

Ponniyin Selvan is a historical masterpiece in Tamil by Kalki. R. Krishnamurthy. It takes the readers back in time to the tenth and eleventh century in Tamil Nadu, a period where the Cholas were at their peak of power. The central theme of the novel is love and war, a criterion mentioned in the ancient grammar book *Tolkāppiyam*. The novel is divided into six parts in English translation by C.V.Karthik Narayanan. Sundara Chozhar is the Emperor and his two sons, the Crown Prince Aditha Karikalan is in Kanchi and the younger one,

Prince Arulmozhivarman who is the favourite of the Tamil people is in Lanka at the beginning of the novel. The story is vast but to put it in a few lines, it narrates the events concerning the accession of the next ruler after Sundara Chozhar who is sick to the point of death. The Crown Prince is considered to be the successor while the Pazhuvettarayars, important ministers at court, hatch a plot against it. Meanwhile the Chozha people, who hate the Pazhuvettarayars, get an inkling of the impending plot and they intend to crown their darling Prince Arulmozhi. The novel ends with unexpected turns, keeping in tune with history. The characters who fall in love with each other are Vandiyathevan (a warrior of a royal clan) and Princess Kundavai (beloved daughter of Sundara Chozhar), Prince Arulmozhi and Princess Vanathi (a chieftain's daughter), Sendhan Amudhan (a Saivite) and Poonkuzhali, a boat girl. The five thinais are present in the novel amidst these pairs of lovers. This can be traced in the novel from the characteristic features of the thinais mentioned in *Tolkāppiyam*.

In the first volume *First Floods*, Princess Kundavai who is to meet Vandiyathevan regarding state matters, has already been attracted to him, though she was not sure of his identity. So is the case with the hero. They meet in the garden without anyone's knowledge as it concerned state affairs. This secrecy is a trait of *Kuṟinci*, signifying lovers' meeting. Moreover, the thoughts of Vandiyathevan are depicted as "Can a bee not like the flower? If it doesn't, why does it buzz around the flower ceaselessly until it loses its mind and swoon?" (262). Bees and gathering honey are associated with *kuṟinci tinai*. Added to that, Kalki narrates a detailed story of how these lovers have already met - that they have already met at the beginning of time on a mountain. Further, the novelist compares the singing of the girls who are with Kundavai, on the banks of the river Arisilar to that of nectar and he compares Kundavai to a peacock. On the other side, when Vandiyathevan heads towards the beautiful river, the scene described is that of peacocks calling to the peahens from rooftops. Peacocks, bees, gathering honey, mountains, mood of stealth portray lovers's union, characteristics of the *kuṟinci tinai*.

Vanathi, the Kodambalur Princess, like many other girls, has fallen for Prince Arulmozhivarman. But unlike others, she had the succour of Princess Kundavai, whose words stood law to her brother Arulmozhi, who constantly encouraged her love for the Prince. The Prince, on the other hand, wanted to prove his mettle in warfare. Vanathi, waiting patiently for her lover, often sinks into anxiety. She is also compared to the jasmine flowers (156) in the third volume titled *The Killer Sword*. Another person is Poonkuzhali, who is also sad and thinks over the past events where she had met Prince Arulmozhi and is fascinated towards him. Her heart yearns to see him though she confides it to no one. The opening chapter of the second book *The Cyclone* brings out the anxious mood in Poonkuzhali's mind. Moreover, the time is evening and a group of deer rush through the dense jungle. Patient waiting on the part of Vanathi, anxiety within Poonkuzhali, deer, jasmine flowers and evening symbolize the *Mullai tinai*.

Periya Pazhuvettarayar, who married a beautiful young woman Nandini, in his sixties, was the topic of debate in the entire Chozha Nadu throughout the novel. An enchantress with ulterior motives, Nandini, now the Pazhuvor Ilaya Rani, uses Pazhuvettarayar to achieve her evil designs. She uses her old husband who has fallen in a web of passion, through small quarrels whenever he begins to suspect her motives. These small quarrels break the old man's heart for his young wife pretends to be angry, and he immediately reconciles by cajoling her, completely losing his purpose of visit. Kundavai is jealous of Nandini for various reasons. One reason is also that Nandini uses her beauty to make all men fall for her, only to achieve her vengeance. Kundavai, deep within, is worried over Vandiyathevan's fidelity when the latter thinks twice to go on a mission to Kanchi. Her suspicious question "Maybe it is the Pazhuvor Ilaya Rani's voice?" (198) confirms her jealousy, the chief mood of Marutham. The emotions of *neithal* are seen in Sendhan Amudhan's love for Poonkuzhali. He is much patient for a positive reply from Poonkuzhali to his proposal of love. But towards the end, he is much grieved that he might lose her forever. He is in so much sorrow that he falls seriously sick and recovers only when his beloved accepts his long-time courtship. The longest separation and a dangerous journey of *Pālai* landscape can again be traced in the love between Vandiyathevan and Kundavai when the hero goes on his second mission sent by his beloved. The fifth and the sixth part, *The Pinnacle of Sacrifice* describes the danger Vandiyathevan undergoes, to bring out the dead body of the Crown Prince from being charred as a fire

spreads over the entire palace, and in return is sent to the dungeon for the accusation of murdering him. Later, it is with much difficulty that he is acquitted after some time.

Unrequited love called Kaikkilai is also present in the novel. Manimekalai, the Kadambur Princess falling in love with Vandiyathevan and finally ending her life is a fine example. She reveals her love for him to Nandini in *The Crown*, the fourth part of the novel in the fourteenth chapter (82) when the latter comes as a guest to her palace on official matters of state. Aditha Karikalan's love for Nandini, another man's wife falls under Perunthinai. In the closing chapters of the first part *The First Floods*, Aditha Karikalan discloses the secrets of his heart to his friend Pallava Parthibendran. He says that he is not able to forget her though she is another man's wife. His words "Either Nandini should die or I should. Or both of us. Otherwise I'll never know peace in this birth." (307) prove prophetic towards the end of the novel. His death is also symbolic of the disapproval of the unnatural relationship, even though the person involved may be in the highest position as the Prince. This brings out the approved values of the Tamil society.

Conclusion

The attributes explained in *Tolkāppiyam* are clearly seen in the novel *Ponniyin Selvan*. The novel still holds dear to thousands of Tamil readers, both young and old that it has been translated into other languages. Kalki wanted to project the greatness of the Tamil land to his fellow citizens. Statistics prove that he has surpassed his goal to greater effect in infusing the Tamil spirit through his novel and he has achieved it, by not only taking historical events of ancient Tamil land but also being faithful in his choice of theme (Porul) by adhering to the tenets described in the ancient treatise.

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