

NATURE IN ANCIENT TAMIL POETRY - RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCHERS

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Abstract

Ancient Tamil literature of South India is a rich source of history and cultural heritage of ancient Tamil society. The corpus of this Sangam literature comprises of 8 anthologies and 10 idles. This literary corpus is divided into two categories depending on the content. One is *Aham*-which deals with matters pertaining to love between a man and a woman. The second is *Puram*- which deals with matters other than that are dealt in *Aham*. The conventions and codes followed by Sangam poets are documented in *Tholkappium*. Nature forms a vital part of Sangam literature. Research on the place of nature in Sangam poetry has helped us to understand the development of culture, economy, ethics and religious believes in the ancient Tamil society. However, the aesthetic approach used in the Sangam poetry needs further research.

Keywords: Sangam literature, Ancient literature, nature, poetic device, *Tholkapium*

Nature in Ancient Tamil Poetry - Research Methodologies and Researchers

Sangam literature is the oldest available Tamil writings from ancient South India. These writings are from a period between 400 BC and 200 AD (Zvelebil, K V. 1992. 12 S3). Sangam was an assembly comprising of Tamil scholars and poets which could be regarded as a literary academy. The main literary works of this period is contained in 8 anthologies and 10 Idylls. The Sangam corpus contains 2279 poems in Tamil composed by 473 poets, some 102 of whom remain anonymous. (Sastri, N.K.A. 1958. 110) The literary conventions of this period are contained in *Tholkappium* (*Thol.*) which is a work on the grammar and aesthetics of Sangam period. The third section of *Thol* prescribes the aesthetic conventions of Sangam poetry. Though the date of Sangam literature precedes that of *Thol*, it is generally used a guide book to understand Sangam poetry. (Pillai. V. 1956. 12-14).The poems in the sangam corpus is thematically classified into love poetry ('*Aham*') and other ('*Puram*') poetry. The word *Aham* means inner and *Puram* means outer. The *Aham* poetry deals with love between a man and a woman and the related incidences. The *Puram* poetry deals with heroism, war, personal virtues, glory of kings ect. The field of these *Aham* and *Puram* poetry is five landscapes these are: mountainous regions, forests, cropland, seashore and desert. The desert which is parched to a wasteland from mountainous and cropland during summer is not part of the natural landscape of South India. These landscapes are known as *thinai* in Sangam poetry. Each *thinai* is named after a flower belonging to that region. For *Puram* and *Aham* different sets of flowers assume importance. Each *thinai* is associated with different human emotions or activities.

Region	Flower for Aham	Flower for Puram
Mountain and adjacent area	Kurinci (Strobilanthus)	Vetci (Leccova coccinea)
Forest and adjacent area	Mullai (Fasminium trichotomum)	Vanci (Calamus rotang)
Paddy fields and adjacent area	Marutam (Terminalia tomentosa)	Ulinai (Cardiospermum halicacabum)
Seashore and adjacent area	Neytal (Nymphae lotus)	Tumpai (Leucas asphera)
Uncultivated dry land	Palai (Mimusops Kauki)	Vahai (Albizia lebbeck)

In the *Aham* poetry the *thinai* comprises of 3 aspects, which constitutes the poetic composition of Sangam poetry as defined by *Thol*. These three aspects form the fundamental aesthetic structure of *Aham* poetry. These aspects are the primary aspect (*Muthal purul*), nuclear aspect (*Karu porul*) and the human aspect (*Uri porul*). The primary aspect consists of place, time and the season. The nuclear aspect consists of things that belong to that land

including gods, furan and flora, animals, musical instruments ect. The human aspect includes five aspects of love life namely lovers union, separation, waiting, agony of separation and sulkiness of

heroin due to hero's unfaithfulness. (Murugadas.2006. 43-66) In the *Aham* poetry the place and season along with the native things of the land forms the background for the human feelings to be displayed. In the words of Varatharathan, primary aspect and the nuclear aspect form the stage for the display of human aspect. (Varatharajan.1969. 18)

Tripartite aspects of *Aham* poetry

It is important to understand the *thinai* concept and the landscapes in relation to the human aspect which is the central theme of Sangam poetry. According to the convention of Sangam literature the human aspect that is assigned to the mountain area - *Kurinci*- is sexual union and the incidences that lead to it. *Kurinci* and *kānthai* flowers belong to this area. *Murugan* is the god of mountain land. Tigers, bears, elephants, monkeys, wild pigs, parrots and peacocks live here. Millet, paddy, and tubers are cultivated. Sandal wood trees are in plenty. Millet cultivation and honey collection is done. Springs and waterfalls add beauty to this landscape. The assigned time for this *thinai* is mid night of the cold season. This sets a very conducive backdrop for the romantic drama. During such times lovers long to meet each other even at the risk of losing many things. This is the time when birds and animals return home to be with their loved ones. The subject of these *Kurinci* poems is usually the pre-marital secret meeting of lovers, at the millet field, or at night where the heroine escapes her mother's watchful eyes. However with time gradually the suspicion arise that the heroin is up to some mischief.

The human aspect assigned to the forest and adjoining area - *Mullai*, - is separation. This landscape is named after the jasmine, a plant that grows wild in forest areas, especially in the rainy seasons. When *mullai* is in bloom the scent spread all over the forest area. The god of this landscape is *Māyon* (the dark one). Wild fowl, cattle, deer, and rabbit live here. Millet and wild grain are cultivated in this land. Jasmine and *thonral* flowers are plentiful here. *Kondrai* and *kāyā* are the native trees of this region. In the rainy season streams flow across the forest area. The time assigned is late evening. This is the time where the environment is neither hot nor too cold. The heroin is waiting for the hero's return. The hero who went on business returns home. On his way home he see various scenes that arouses sexual desire in his heart. This background intensifies the feeling of separation.

The human aspect that is assigned to paddy fields and adjoining lands which forms the *Marutham* is heroin's resentment due to hero's infidelity. This region is named after the *marutham* flower which grows in agricultural areas. Indiran is the god of this landscape. Rice both white and the red variety are cultivated here. Lotus and lilies are found in this region where water buffalo is the animal usually found. This region has *vanji*, *kanchi* and *marutham* trees. There are plenty of wells, ponds, and streams in this region. Due to the presence of rich water source pelican, waterfowl and swan are seen here. People in this region work in paddy fields. Hero and the heroin marry and have a child, the hero starts visiting a harlot. Heroin is hurt due to hero's infidelity. Heroin's sulkiness has no specific time. Hence no specific time is allocated to this region. However early morning hours is generally assigned to this region, it is when the hero return home after spending the night with harlot. Early morning is a suitable time for the heroin to overcome the bitterness and accept her hero back into the house.

Neydal, the seashore and adjoining lands is named after the blue water lily. *Varunan* is the god of the region. People here work in saltrans and do fishing. Dark-coloured web-footed water bird, cormorant is the bird and sharks, crocodiles, and buffalo live here. This region has many wells and salt water ponds. Screw pine trees grow here. *Parathavar*- the fishing community lives in this region. The human aspect assigned to this region is agony of separation. The time assigned is night fall of all seasons. During night fall birds fly back to their nest to be with their partner. This along with scenes in the seashore increases the agony of the heroin of being separated from the hero. The parched waste land of *Kurinci* and *Mullai* becomes the desert land in the summer. This happens during the summer months from February to July. This region is named after the *pālai* tree which grows in very dry areas. *Kotravai* is the goddess here. *Irruppai*, *omai*, *ulignai* trees are in this land. Tigers, vultures, pigeons, red foxes, eagles and lizards live in this dry land. *Pāthiri*, *revam* and *kuravam* flowers are seen here. The time assigned to this land is mid-day.

Because of excess heat the vegetations are dried up, the birds and animals are fatigued. The human aspect assigned to this land is separation from the family. (Murugathas. 2006. 43-66)

The land and the imagery of the land and season provide the backdrop for the human emotions. This backdrop functions like a word picture intensifying the human condition. This prescriptive poetic composition is a unique feature of the Sangam poetry. The following examples illustrate how this composition functions in a poem. This poem is from *Kurintohai* - one of the collections of *Aham* poems of the 8 anthologies. This poem belongs to *Kurunci thinai*:

“Greater than the earth,
Higher than the sky,
Deeper than the ocean
Is my love for this man
from the country where
mountain slopes have
black-stalked *kurinci*
flowers, that yield rich honey” Kur 3

This poem talks about the love the heroin has for the hero, who is from mountainous land with *kurinci* flowers which yield rich honey and blooms only once in twelve years. This poem by comparing with nature shows the greatness of heroin’s love and the uniqueness of the hero.

“A poem from the forest land in *Aikurunuru*:
The bees buzz, frogs croak,
The fragrance of *mullai* flower fill the cool pasture
The pleasant season has arrived
I have returned as promised
Don’t be sad anymore” Ain 494

The hero promised to return by evening. The pleasant evening has dawned in *Mullai* region, and the hero returns as promised and tell the heroin not to be worried as he has returned.

Research Approaches Adopted in Research on Sangam Literature

Various approaches adopted by researchers in research on Sangam literature can be broadly classified in to 3 groups.

1. research which used *Tholkappium* as a basic frame work to research Sangam poetry
2. researchers who concentrate on geography, life style of the people, socio-economic conditions to determine the role of such factors in Sangam poetry
3. researchers who use *Thol.* as an aesthetic guide to analyse Sangam poetry

Researching through the Frame Work of *Tholkappium*

Many researcher use *Thol.* as an entry point to Sangam literature as it codifies the literary conventions of the Sangam period. The third book of *Thol* - the *Porualthikaram*, contains the prescriptive conventions of literature of Sangam period.

M.Varatharajan, one of the early researchers on the place of nature in Sangam poetry took *Thol.* as a guide in his approach. Following *Thol* he has analysed the secondary role of nature which is used to enhance the effect of human experience in Sangam poetry. He states “External nature is only illustration or background for the human emotions they depict”. (Varatharajan.1969. 18) Except for few allusions he makes to western literature Varatharajan’s approach is exploring the Sangam literature through the *Thol.* Framework and conventions

In his book “The treatment of nature in Sangam Literature” Varatharajan identifies the important Nature-Poets of Sangam period. He explores the treatment of earth, sky and the flora and fauna in the Sangam literature. Varatharajan’s work mostly appears as a descriptive exposition of Sangam poetry than an analytical work on Sangam literature or the Sangam period. Using *Thol* to explore the Sangam literature is fraught with limitations. The eight anthologies of the Sangam corpus are organised according to the conventions prescribed in *Thol.* Though the individual poems in these anthologies had been written by different poets possibly during different times they are all classified according to conventions laid down by *Thol.*

Thol. envisages to create a model of a typical ancient Tamil society to inform the posterity and non Tamil speaking people about the ancient Tamil society. To achieve this there is a need to establish boundaries on the conduct and structure of that typical society. This is an effort to create a frame work to understand a community. In this process certain flexibilities and excess in the society may have been excluded to create this typical model.

The poems in these anthologies are grouped together on the basis of *thinai*. For example *Akananuru*- an anthology which was compiled by Rudrasarman at the behest of the Pandya king Ukkiraperuvazhuthi, has 400 poems belonging to *Aham*. Of these 400 poems 200 are of *Palai*, 80 are of *Kurinchi* and 40 each of *Mulai*, *Marutha* and *Neythal thinais*. These 400 poems are by 145 poets. (Vaidehi 2017) Herein lies a problem of analysing the sangam poems through the framework of *Thol.* These 400 poems have been written within a period of at least 400 year, by poets from diverse areas of Tamil land. But all these differences have been overlooked to satisfy the *Thol.* code. Many poets' poems appear in different anthologies and under different *thinais*. It is possible that all these poems of a single poet may have been part of a single work of the poet and it may have been broken up and compiled according to the convention prescribed by *Thol.* There is no evidence to suggest this. But what is available is what a compiler has classified and presented to us as anthologies.

Why there are only 400 poems? Why there aren't 500 for 5 *thinais*? How did someone find only 400 not more or less? It is possible that there would have been a collection of poems of which 400 were selected. Understandably *Thol* Would have been used as a guide to select these 400 poems So the rest would have been poems that did not conform to the convention laid down by *Thol*.

Hence when we read *Akananuru* we read what has been compiled by Rudrasarman, than a complete work of a single poet. In addition there are commentaries written by various people at various times who have included their interpretation as foot notes. What we have at hand is not a direct reflection of the ancient society; rather it is refraction through these processes of categorisation and interpretations of the original text. (Pillai S. 1932. 35-36)

The source books of Sangam literature themselves are limited in scope due to the adherence to the conventions prescribed by *Thol*. Hence when one tries to analyse Sangam literature through the framework prescribed by *Thol*. Those analyses will invariably result in analysing how far the literature source has complied with the conventions prescribed by *Thol*. Than analysis of Sangam poetry per se

Using Social History, Geography and Economics of the Society to Understand the Sangam period

Using multi disciplinary approach may be regarded as the best method to analyse a society. This will give a broad perspective on the socio-economic and cultural development of the ancient society. Exploring the means of production of a society, cultural history, and life style will be an objective approach to analyse the relationship between growth of a society and its literary expression. Thaninayagam's research and Sivathmby's research paved the way for multi disciplinary approach in Sangam literature research. Thaninayagam's research on ancient Tamil poetry has given the much needed recognition to ancient Tamil poetry by placing it alongside Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Chinese ancient poetry. His realist explanation of the ancient geography and landscape by comparing it with the contemporary land scape and geography help us to easily grasp how the lives of people of Sangam period was interwoven with the nature. By comparing the ancient landscape with the present day landscape of the region Thaninayagam makes us realise the transformation that has taken place and helps us to relate closely with the text. In his book Landscape and poetry Thanninayagam assumed a role of cultural geographer. In his research he has extensively employed comparative analysis of English, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and Chinese literature with Sangam literature. This approach highlights the unique character of Sangam poetry in the context of international poetry. In the initial section of his book Tanninayagam analyses the treatment of nature in Sangam poetry in line with *Thol*. He observes "in *Puram* poetry, the study of Nature is mainly objective and consists in similes and metaphors, whereas in *Aham* poetry Nature is the background and sympathetic stage for the emotional and aesthetic aspects of love" (Thaninayagam.2016. 5). Thaninayagam considers the use of nature in

Sangam poetry as an aesthetic device to enhance the expressivity of human emotions. Though the human emotions are the main subject of Sangam poetry in some places he observes that the description of nature has superseded the importance of human emotions. However he notes that nature serves as a storehouse of similes and metaphors in Sangam poetry. (Thaninayagam 2016. 43)

Thaninayagam does not confine himself to *Thol.*, he ventures beyond to explore the origin of “*Thinai* concept”. To accomplish this he has analysed how nature was part of the lives of the Sangam people, tracing historical evidence of evolution of cultural practices in Sangam literature and ethics and religious beliefs reflected in Sangam literature (Thaninayagam. 2016. 48 - 74)

Through his comparative analysis of use of language in the poetry of various cultures Thaninayagam notes “Sangam Tamil has the characteristic of being extremely concise and curt and of delineating magnificent word picture with great economy of language” (Thaninayagam. 2016.14). He considers that the Sangam poetry had reached the last and final stages of its evolution in the poetic appreciation of nature as there is no shade of child-like delight in nature in Sangam poetry as found in many poetry from other cultures. (Thaninayagam.2016. 26)

Thaninayagam states that the Sangam poetry fills the gap created by the lack of historical records of ancient Tamil society by providing ample historical references. He has also traced the origins of thinking of ethics and religion in Sangam poetry. In his analysis he has traced the reflection of sensory pleasure gradually leading to the appearance of ethical thinking and progressing into religious beliefs in Sangam poetry which is considered as the evolutionary phases of culture of a society. (Pillai S. 1932. 7-10) Thus Thaninayagam has attempted to trace the evolution of cultural practices of ancient Tamil society through Tamil poetry.

Through his analysis of Sangam poetry Thaninayagam asserts that the Tamil population is not a migrant lot which came from some other continent or is not a population which grew up in a different culture and was planned in south India but an original group of people who evolved from the cultural milieu of south India.

Some researchers have moved beyond the confines of nature and human emotions to analyse the significance of the nature in the socio-historic origin and socio economic existence of the Sangam society. A notable researcher in this regard is the Marxist critic Sivathamby. In his paper on the economic activities and conduct-code of *Mullai thinai* he explores the nature's role in determining the economic activities of *Mullai* people. This illustrates the possibility of analysing the socio-economic development of ancient Tamil society through Sangam literature. He proposes a strong argument to consider the *Mullai* life as a stage in the social developmental process of the Tamil community. He has eloquently described how the private property evolved and how '*Iruttal*' (patient waiting) that was prescribed behaviour for female in *Mullai* region was an economic necessity. He further explains the origin of the concept of *katpu* (chastity) in the *Mullai* region to ensure succession rights with the development of private property. (Sivathamby 1998. 115 -127)

Sivathamby in his paper titled “Early South Indian society and economy” tries to explain the origin of “*Thinai* concept” based on economic activities of the region. Early researchers regarded *thinai* as representing various stages of development of Tamil society. Sivathamby rejects this type of unilinear development process proposed by early researchers to explain the *thinai* concept in favour of an uneven multi level development process of the Sangam society. He cites *Cirupanarrupatai* to clarify his point. In *Cirupanarrupatai* speaks of the various terrains involving littoral region, hilly tract, and agrarian village a bard have to pass through before reaching the hill capital of Nappan to see the patron. He argues that “it is important to note that in each of these areas we find people living in different stages of civilisation, those living in the hills being more primitive and those of the agrarian being the most developed. In fact the description illustrate the law of uneven development”. (Sivathamby.1998. 1 -21)

Sivathamby stresses the importance of uneven economic development resulting in different social value systems in different regions. (Sivathamby.1998. 18) He links socio-economic factors to explain the *uri porul*- human factor in the *thinai* concept. Though the uneven socio-economic development of the Sangam society is plausible, explaining the human behaviour through socio-economic factors is not tenable

Tholkapium as an Aesthetic Guide

Tholkapium can be regarded as the aesthetic guide for Sangam poetry. The third book of *Thol.* the *Porul adiharam* contains the prescriptive rules of Sangam poetry. As the date of this work falls in the later part of 5th century AD (Pillai.V.1956. 12-14) it could be regarded as a work resulting from complete analysis of literary trends in Sangam period. The *Porul athikaram* has 9 chapters. Each chapter deals with different aspects of aesthetics of Sangam literature.

Chapter	subject
1. Akaththinaiyiyal	deals with matters related to love between a man and a woman
2. Puraththinaiyiyal	deals with heroism, war, personal virtues, glory of kings ect
3. Kalaviyal	Aspects of pre-marital secret love
4. Katpiyal	Aspects related to post-marital life together
5. Poruliyal	How the couple express themselves and relationship with kith and kin
6. Maippattiyal	How the feelings are expressed for others to feel
7. Uvamaiyiyal	Types of metaphors and their role in poetry
8. Seyyuliyal	Grammar of ancient Tamil poetry
9. Marabiyal	Traditional usage of Tamil language

From the above table it is obvious how detailed the prescriptive rules of *Thol.* are. With the availability of such extensive description of the prescriptive rules of Sangam poetry, *thol* has been used as an aesthetic guide by many researchers to study Sangam poetry. (Ramasubramaniam. 2008. 21-508) the contents of the chapters of the *Porul adikaram* deals with content, form and other poetic devices in Sangam poetry.

Aesthetic of Sangam poetry has been studied by various researchers. A.K.Ramanujan has studied the symbolic significance of the landscape in his work. He considers the landscape as “a repertoire of images”.(Ramanujan

1967a. 106) Ramanujan regards *ulurai* - a poetic device of Sangam poetry - where a nature scene is used to represent human action or feeling without points of comparison or use of explicit words as markers of comparison like in metaphor and similes- as a “language within language”. (Ramanujan 1967b. 207) He states that the Sangam poets used a set of five landscape imageries and formalised the world into a symbolic representation of human feeling. According to Ramanujan this symbolism had been generally agreed upon by the Sangam poets and had been uniformly used in Sangam poetry.

Ramanujan discusses how the convention restricts the imagery for different speakers within the poems. He wrote “The range of imagery, not only its quality or content but also its very narrowness of width of choice, indirectly characterises the speaker and his class”. Hence it is clear that in Sangam poetry the imagery is used to form the background for the human aspect and the choice of imagery is determined by the importance of the speaker.

In Sangam poetry *thinai* is the key poetic device which anchors the whole poetic discourse. *Thinai* is formed by the triad *Muthal* (place and time), *Karu* (things thereof) and *Uri* (human aspect). Thus far the “place” (*Muthal porul*) in *thinai* has been regarded as a geographical social space. Essentially, a living space It is true that the five landscapes of *thinai* existed as real space as it exists now. However whether these spaces are strictly living spaces or whether these landscapes are only a poetic space used for the poetic device in the context of *thinai* is arguable..

The second aspect of *Muthal porul* -time and season are fixed for a *thinai*. For example for *Kurunchi thinai* the allocated time is night in cold season. Is the time and season of a *thinai* frozen? Absolutely not Nachchnarkkiniyar, an acclaimed commentator of Sangam literature says, in the night the atmosphere is pleasant and cool, the fragrance of *mullai* flower spreads far and wide in the region, birds and animals return to their mate with joy and that is the most favourable time for the hero to return to meet the heroin. Hence we see that the time and season are selected to augment the emotional state of the human aspect. So what prevents us from thinking that the “place” in *Muthal porul* is also selected to augment the human aspect as part of the poetic device. The *Karu porul* - are things that are associated with the place. Hence the *Muthal porul* and *karu porul* go hand in hand. There are essentially connected. *Muthal porul* and *karu porul* combine to form the background for human aspect. *Tholkapium* states that “*Karu porul* is more important than *Muthal porul* and *Uri porul* is more important than the other two in

thinai. The background has a poetic association with the *Uri porul*-human aspect. This association is similar to the association we see between romanticism and rose in the world literature.

The human aspect- *Uri porul* is the main ingredient of the *thinai* concept. Certain type of human behaviour is allocated to each *thinai*. For example the pre-marital lovers' union and those that lead to it are allocated to *Kurinci thinai*. One obvious question that arises from this allocation is that whether this type of pre-marital lovers' union takes place in the other *thinais*. In other words why is the pre-marital union of lovers specific for hill country? Aren't there pre - marital lovers' union in other type of land? The behaviour patterns that are allocated to each landscape is as follows; Hill country- lovers' union, pasturelands- wife patiently waiting for husband, countryside - males' infidelity and the sulking wife, seashore - agony of separation and uncultivated dry land - separation. Some of these behaviour patterns are attributable to pre-marital situation and some to post-marital situation. These entire five behaviour pattern could exist in one single love relationship. These five behaviour patterns could be regarded as different stages of love relationship.

According to psychological theories of love various aspects that forms the basis of love relationship varies in strength from time to time depending on various factors. The triangular theory of love suggests 3 main components if love relationship; "(a) intimacy encompassing the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness experienced in loving relationships; (b) passion encompassing the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation; and (c) decision/ commitment encompassing, in the short term, the decision that one loves another, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love" (Sternberg, R.J. 1986.119-135.)

The nature of love one experiences depends on the strength of the 3 components, and the interplay between each other. The components interact with each other and this interaction will determine the type of love experienced. The triangular theory of love overarches other theories of love and number of empirical findings in the research literature is there to support this theory. (Clark, M. S., & Reis, H. T. 1988. 609-672) The intensity of these three components varies throughout the love relationship. (Belsky, J., et al.1985. 855-865.) Depending on the strength of these components we could explain the behaviour patterns of *thinais*. For example in *Kurinci thinai*, where early love is depicted, passion is the most important component. This drives the intense need to meet the lover and have physical encounters. Other behavioural patterns of other *thinais* also could be explained by using this frame work. Hence it is plausible that these behaviour patterns of *thinais* are essentially psychological necessities, than economic or social necessities. Sangam literature germinated in the prehistoric Tamil community. What mattered most in that society are the human beings and the nature? Human beings' dependence on nature made nature the only source of inspiration and reference for him. Humans saw the reflection of their feelings in nature and vice-versa. This is what is reflected in Sangam poetry. This tradition which was practiced by poets became conventions through the Sangam which was the forum for poets and intellectuals of that period. There are two important dimensions in the use of nature in Sangam poetry. One is the use of nature as imagery. Imagery can be defined as a representation in words of a sensory experience that can be known by one or more of the senses. In Sangam poetry imagery reflects the poet's impulse to perceive unity between man and nature, the apparently unrelated distinct components of nature, to create meaning that is beyond the resources of direct language. The complexity of the meanings implied by imagery differs in depth and profundity. The force and vitality of the imagery also varies depending on the contextual relation to other images in the poem. (Poetic - imagery 2017) This aspect of aesthetics is well explained in the chapter titled *Uvamyeyal* in *Porulathikaram* of *Tholkapium*. The Sangam poets had achieved expressivity that could not be achieved by verbal communication, by employing imagery association. As W.K. Wimsatt, Jr states "verbal image which most fully realizes its verbal capacities is that which is not merely a bright picture (in the usual modern meaning of the term *image*) but also an interpretation of reality in its metaphoric and symbolic dimensions." (Wimsatt 1954 P x) The second dimension in the use of nature in Sangam poetry is the poet's need to express the visual experience in the poetic composition. The visual art was not well developed in the ancient Tamil society. Literature, music and drama were the main ingredients of ancient

Tamil Culture (*Iyal, Isai and Nadagam*). The visual experience derived from the nature had no outlet than verbalising in the literature.

In today's world there are so many visual art forms- painting, photography, film, video etc. are there to express visual experiences of a creative mind. When these visual media are not available one could only describe the visual experience of nature in the literature. As noted by many scholars the Sangam poetry hardly has any reference to the real beauty of nature as seen in Wordsworth's poetry. (Manickam, V. Sp. 1962. 118) For Sangam poet the poetic composition was the medium to express his visual experience. Here the human aspect functions as the vehicle of delivery of such experience.

Sangam poetry could be regarded as a composition like what we see in abstract painting. Composition is commonly used in the context of visual arts. It is the arrangement of visual elements in a work of art to provide a collective emotional experience. Composition is distinct from the subject of art. The subject of art may be a portrait, but the composition includes the subject and the background. The colours and the technique used for the subject should harmonise with the background to produce a good composition. In the composition of Sangam poetry the *Uri porul* - the human aspect is the main subject. The background should resonate the same feeling that is created by the human aspect. There cannot be a discordant relationship between the human aspect and the background. This is precisely why certain landscapes are associated with certain human behaviours. Extension of this usage can be seen in present day South Indian films, where a hero from a very poor financial background suddenly goes into a dream state to sing a love duet in a paradise garden. Or a hero from the littoral area sings a sad song in a desert backdrop. Thus far no acceptable explanation has been provided in the text of Sangam literature, *Thol* or in the commentaries for assigning human behaviour patterns to the respective landscapes (Iyengar M.R. 1929. 23) However nature has been used as a store house of objects to supply similes and metaphors for Sangam poets (Thaninayagam 2016. 14). In addition nature provides a visual backdrop to enhance the effect of human emotions in the poetic composition by the emotional congruence it has with human behaviour.

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