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A Festschrift for Dr. L. Ramamoorthy

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IMAGINING TAMIL'S HISTORY FROM THE IMAGERIES OF SANGAM POEMS

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Rendering a parallel version of human life from nature and subsequently making an analogy between them has been a very notable trait of the Sangam poems. Characteristics of nature, on the one hand, and behaviors of human, on the other hand, are the two coexisting poetic entities that require careful attention. Tamil poets observed nature and human's life in close proximities and attempted to relate them in their poems with a number of indirect and subtle nuances involving sarcasm, inferences, mocking and other related intents. Would the fallen leaves have anything to relate to human life? (cf. *ñemaiilai utirtta erivāyk kōtai* 'harsh summer with fallen lives' Aham: 353) What does the blast of the midday grass imply in the context of the main point that the poet makes? (cf. *naḷḷeṅ kaṅkul puḷ oli kēṭṭorum* 'when noise of the midday grass is heard' *naṅṅai*: 287). One might wonder how the hero's laid back skill to destroy his enemies can be expressed in a plain language with suitable analogy! The poets would not find it any challenging as they can always establish a right imagery from nature and depict it in their poems unambiguously.

...taṅ tamiḷ potu eṅap poṅāṅ pōr etirntu

koṅṭi vēṅṭuvaṅ āyin koḷka eṅak

koṭutta maṅṅar naṭukkaṅ raṅarē

aḷiyarō aḷiyar avaṅ aḷiḷḷan tōrē

nuṅṅal citalai aritumuyaṅṅu eṭutta

cempuṅṅu īyal pōla

orupakal vāḷkkaikku ulamaru vōrē. (Puṅam 51)

...Intolerable of giving up the pleasant Tamil country,

If he were to go to battle to challenge the enemies,

the fearful enemies can never stand against him

he would never give up until they all get destroyed

like the red ants with freshly grown wings

die in group within a day soon they emerge from their anthill.

The analogy here between 'the unskilled enemies being destroyed in abundance' to 'the red ant flies (īyal) dying in abundance without tolerating the warmth of the sun' can by no means be considered arbitrary, and it needs to be read as appropriate in all sense. Red ants with freshly grown wings come out from anthills in abundance at the start of winter season, but sadly though, they can not tolerate the parching sun and all of them die instantly without having to live too long. The poet captures this moment of nature elegantly and counterparts to that of those inexperienced soldiers who can not stand the powerful army of the king. *cempuṅṅu īyal* 'the red winged ants of the red anthill', has thus become an object of

comparison for short-lived soldiers who can not bear the powerful army of the enemy, the same way as the red ant can not bear the scorching rays of the sun. Thus, a careful reading of Sangam poems would unquestionably make one to appreciate that they do indeed carry within them an array of inferences which can be correlated to human's lives in many nuanced ways. Imageries of the poems in no way can be dispensed with as simple analogies, nor can they be assumed as typical poetic devices.

Employment of similes, metaphors, metonymies and other finest literary devices deserve to be understood within a large paradigm of how the poets envision the world from their own imaginative ability. These literary devices as they are presented in literature can no way to be assumed as random in nature, and they should carry a wealth of underlying implications and intents, which can be comprehended only when a careful deconstruction of the texts of the Sangam poems is made with all of the circumstantial evidences, and perhaps with a native intuition. Attempting to relate to all of the genuine and indigenous thoughts of the Tamil poets to similar sounding paradigms from another language or another culture and attempt to describe as an instance of borrowing can in no way be a relevant appreciation of literary ingenuity.

Either to express the virtuous characters of the heroes and heroines or to condemn their uncharacteristic behaviors, poets always depended heavily on their exquisite imageries construed within many analogies from nature, either explicitly or implicitly defined. Particularly, the idiosyncracies of similes in comparison to other literary devices, such as metaphors, personification, idioms and a number of related others, is that in similes the objects that are compared can be part of a very large domain of the popularly known and universally employed entities, such as *nāyiru* 'sun' (*nāyiru anaiya nin pakaivarkku* 'for your enemies, you resemble the sun...'), *tiṅkaḷ* 'moon' (*tiṅkaḷ anaiya emmanōrkkē* 'for us all, you replicate the moon...') (Puṇam:59) and the like. Similes can also be part of a very selectively construed uncommon objects specific to their own time and space, as is evident from examples like *piṇṭa nellin allūr anna* 'like the abundant rice as grown in Allur' (Aham:46-14), *vēnil veḷiṟrup panai pōl* 'like the pale palmyra trees of the summer' (Aham:333-11), *paḷiṅkattanna palkāy nelli* 'goosberries, like a pile of beads' (Aham:5-9), and similar others in innumerable numbers (See Renganathan 2017: 36-37 for an account other similar similes). Specifically, these uses of uncommon objects such as *piṇṭa nel*, *vēnil veḷiṟrup panai*, *paḷiṅkattanna palkāy nelli* etc., as similes in poems deserve special mention in so far as they unambiguously represent some hidden facts of the past that the poets want to draw on. These objects of references may or may not be relevant to the present context, but require careful

attention as to what they signify in their context of occurrences. The expression *vēnil veḷiṟṟup panai* obviously implies a period when there was a famine and excessive hot season due to lack of rain. Palmyra trees don't normally dry out and become pale even during the summer period, and they remain green in all occasions. What is, thus, significant to note from this particular expression is that there was indeed an occasion when the sun was disgracefully hot to the extent that even the palmyra trees became pale and dry. Historiography, thus, is to be understood as a careful reading of the Sangam poems to learn about the past.

Thus, these imageries of the past, as depicted by the poets of the Sangam period, become the important and unavoidable sources of references designating to the forgotten past. Attempting to investigate the past when this famine occurred and the other consequences that the ancient Tamils went through due to this event can be a far-fetched idea, but one can at least get the glimpse of the Tamil's past from these lines in the verse. In this sense, ancient Tamil poems can be considered to be the historiographical resources carrying within them a wealth of information of the past. Similarly, the other objects of similes of particular interest in the Indian society in general and Tamil society in particular can be of the kind *mūttār* 'elders', *neruppu* 'fire', *amiḷtam* 'nectar', *maṭamayil* 'female peacock', *īcal* 'winged white ant' and a host of others. These similes, in particular, tend to express a sense of philosophical symbolism of the objects compared.

Notably, these uncommon objects of references can not be considered, in any manner, as sporadic and occasional. But they are found to be attested contemporaneously in numerous circumstances in many poems of different authors, thus, entailing a study as to how they can be read as a viable source to learn the history and how one can imagine the lives of the Sangam Tamils through their depiction. As a note of reference, employment of these objects in poems can be seen in two principal circumstances, one with explicit markers denoting their status as explicit similes and the other without any overt marker, commonly called an implicit comparison. Ramanujan (1985, p 246) quoting *Tolkappiam*, the ancient grammar of Tamil, points out that explicit comparison belongs to worldly usage (*ulaka vaḷakku*), whereas implicit metaphor belongs to poetic usage (*ceyyuḷ vaḷakku*). The latter type of analogies are also treated as the implied, hidden or intended meaning (*uḷḷurai uvamam*) of the poets, who intentionally opt out themselves from making any direct and explicit mention about the similarities, thus leaving the relevant interpretations to the understanding of the readers.

Along these lines of inferences, what we explore in this section are the two types of imageries, which include in them a reference to explicit comparisons of two objects, one in relevance to the flower called *nāḷar pū* 'Cinnamon, *Cinnamomum*' and another with a

specific reference to a ferocious mythical animal called *Āḷi*, 'a legendary animal known for its hybrid forms and exceptional power'. Both of the instances have mentions in many Indian literatures including Tamil and Sanskrit. In Sanskrit the Tamil term *Āḷi* is referred to invariably as *yāḷi* or *vyāḷi*, where the initial 'y' and 'v' can be taken to represent a glide, rather than to be part of the word itself. What is particularly of interest here is that when studying how these objects are employed in Sangam and medieval poems, the imageries that are drawn in them seem to differ from each other quite contrastingly, implying two different forms imageries drawn from the same object. While their references in Sangam poems offer an in-depth and absolute form of representation, the religious poems of the medieval period, on the other hand, appear to demonstrate a clear case of adaptation, with a relatively less intensity in their depiction. What is striking though is that these objects of comparison survived through generations, from one genre of literature to the other, but by exhibiting a clear disconnect between them on the way how they are employed variously.

Two diverse traditions of Tamil and their continuum in making imageries with identical objects:

Tamils' customs and traditions are differentiated primarily by two distinct phases of the past namely the ancient which is deeply secular and the medieval/modern which is flatteringly religious. Both of these traditions are particularly known for their resilient and refined literary productions with abundantly exquisite and appealing qualities of realistic and indigenous talents of many poets. While the objects of representations in the former type of poems relied heavily on kings (*araisan*), heroes (*talaivan*), heroines (*talaivi*), concubines (*parattai*), love life (*kātal vāḷkkai*), bardic personals (*viraliyarkaḷ*), the five landscapes (*aiṅṭṭinai*), and a host of others, whereas the latter consumes within it the depiction and praise of gods, ways of worship, conducting rituals and ritual life and related many others, most of them with an ultimate intention of obtaining god's grace. Invariably in both of these genres, one can appreciate the eminence of the poems as enfolded on how they extend their world views, especially of the animals, plants and other natural objects such as mountains, fountains, rivers and so on to the life of the humans. In the context of a discussion on the geniuses of the Sangam poets, Hart assumes that the Tamil poets of the Sangam period had an in-depth knowledge and experience over writing their literary pieces. "Tamil poetry was composed by sophisticated poets who had written poems for much of their lives and who used a group of conventions that had been refined and made more sophisticated for many years." (Hart 1975, p. 180).

The imagery of *ñālar pū* in Sangam poems

Engaging the nature to designate the love life can be perceived in many instances of the Sangam poems. One of them may be cited from how the use of *ñālar* flower is found in both Sangam as well as medieval poems. A set of ten songs under the title *ñālar pāṭṭu* 'Ten songs of *ñālar* flower' in *Aiṅkuṟuṇū*, composed by Ammūvanār, in particular, employs *ñālar pū* and *ñālar* tree as an object of comparison to the hero and heroine's love life in an exquisite metaphorical denotation in that the stages of this flower from budding, blossoming with fragrance and subsequently reaching to the stage of withering are symbolically linked to the multiple moods of the lovers from their union, experiencing happiness, separation, and subsequently attaining the mood of desperation. These ten songs put forth a scenario where the sequence form an imagery with a careful integration of this plant's qualities to that of the love life of the hero and heroine. What is of particular significance in this imagery is that the poet not only observes the stages of the *ñālar* flowers in terms of their emitting fragrance, the breeze that permeates the fragrance, but also interprets them as the primary cause for which each of the moods of the hero and heroine happen to occur in subsequence. Thus, this type of intertwined depiction between nature and the human life, thus, deserves special mention as to how the imagery can be very engaging and appealing.

Thus, to begin with, the fragrance of the *ñālar* flower and the breeze from it causes the love-sickness of the heroine.

ekkar *ñālar* ceruntiyōṭu kamaḷa

tuvalait taṅṭuḷi vīcip

payalai ceytana pani paṭu tuṟaiyē (Aing. 141)

'There exists

the fragrance of *ñālar* flower with its blossoms

a cold breeze with misty sprays

instigates within me a feeling of love-sickness'

ñālar tree that is grown in *neytal nilam* is associated here with heroine's desperate state of mind due to hero's separation. The terms *payalai cey* 'instigating love sickness', *pacalai nōy* 'the syndrome of love sickness' etc., are very common throughout the Sangam poems referring to the mood of longing of the heroines for the heroes. What is uncommon though, here, is attributing to the circumstances *ñālar* flower as the principal cause of love sickness of the heroine.

Subsequently, while the *ñālar* tree continues to emit its cold and fragrant breeze, the bees are swarming around especially attracted by the fragrance. Their explicit intention is to

draw honey from the flower, but implicitly to acquire the pollen (*paṭucinaī*) for cross pollination. A dense symbolic connection is made deliberately to the hero's return for the primary purposes of engaging in a physical union with the heroine. However, with a sense of pleasant repulsion (commonly called *ūṭal* in Tamil), the heroine pretends that she is unaware of his presence, and hence orders her eyes to be closed in order to deliberately ignore him.

ekkar nāḷal iṛaṅkiṇarṇ paṭucinaip
 puḷḷiṛai kūrum tuṛaivanai
 uḷḷēn toḷi paṭī iyar en kaṇṇē (Aing. 142).

'The nāḷal tree emits the fine breeze,
 the bees enjoy the breeze,
 there happens the arrival of the hero.

However, my eyes are shut unaware of his presence!'

Bees reaching out to the *nāḷar* flowers enticed by the fragrant breeze on the one hand and the hero returning to unite with the heroine on the other hand are, thus, the parallels that the poet intentionally make.

Eventually, though, in the same *ekkar* region with *nāḷar* tree abundant with tiny leaves and big branches that spread out like waves of ocean, the hero consummates his union with the heroine, thus getting rid of the love sickness from her permanently. They are together now happily ever after - *pacalai nīkkinan iniyē*. 'he removed the spots of love sickness from her body in a very satisfying manner'

ekkar nāḷar ciṛiyilaip peruṅcinai
 ōtam vāṅkum tuṛaivan
 māyōḷ pacalai nīkkinan iniyē! (Aing. 145).

'In the midst of the nāḷal with tiny leaves
 spread out like the vast ocean,
 the hero removes the spots of love sickness!'

Thus, the beauty of *nāḷal* flower, *nāḷal* tree, their exquisite and appealing qualities are thoroughly integrated symbolically to the appeal of the heroine, her love sickness and subsequently to her union with hero. Thus, the *nāḷar* flower becomes the point of reference for the poet to both describing and comparing the two concurrent events between nature and human, a general characteristic feature that one can observe throughout the poems on love in Sangam Tamil.

The spots of love sickness (*pacalai* 'love sickness') that the heroines develop on their body and subsequently their cure due to hero's union have been a common trait that one can

attest in many Tamil poems of love. Fascinatingly, here though, the tree with abundant tiny leaves spread like an ocean (*ciṛiyilaip peruñcinai* ‘dense tree with plentiful tiny leaves’) is used to symbolize the gorgeous and appealing body of the heroine without any spots of love sickness. While the hero rejoicing the association of the heroine is to be mapped to the bees that swarm around the *ñāḷal* flower (*paṭucinaip pulḷiṛai kūrum* ‘bees enjoying the fragrance of the flowers’) to drink honey. The flowers without the bees and subsequently without a possibility of pollination, on the other hand, is a symbolic reference to the heroine without her hero around, being fallen sick with the spots of love sickness (*tuvalait taṇṭuḷi vīcip payalai ceytana* ‘emitting the pollen on the air caused the love sickness’). Symbolization of flowers emitting fragrant pollen on the air to women flirting their heroes is not an uncommon technique as employed in Sangam poems. (cf. Aham 234, 250, 360, Kali 33, 35, 40, Nar. 299, 311).

ñāḷal flower in the context of divinity and the continuum from secular to religious life:

A major twist in the way how the *ñāḷal* flower is referenced in medieval religious poems can be observed in a number of different distinct contexts. While the secular poems exploited the charm of this flower symbolizing the charm of love life among the lovers, the religious poems, on the other hand, make use of the same charm in the context of obtaining the grace of god. The aesthetic quality of the *ñāḷal* flowers and the popularity that it instituted among the readers through Sangam poems is now reverted to the divinity of god, an object of utmost importance in medieval poems.

ñāḷal kamaḷkāḷi yuḷñāṇa campantaṅ
 vēlam poruteṇṇīr atikaivīraṭ ṭāṇattuc
 cūluṅ kaḷalāṇaic coṇṇa tamiḷmālai
 vāḷun tuṇaiyāka niṇaivār viṇaiyilārē. (Tēvārām 1.46.11)
 ‘In the grove with *ñāḷal* flowers and fragrance
 the poet Sampantan adored Lord Śiva
 with his beautiful Tamil verses,
 adoring these poems of Śiva, one attains eternity’

Bees consuming honey from *ñāḷal* flowers signifies the heroes enjoying the presence of their heroines, and in the same fervor, poet Sampantan rejoicing the *ñāḷal* grove was able to adore the Lord with his delightful verses in Tamil. Thus, the circumstances of the imagery and the objects of comparison are quite unchanged in these two genres, but the objects referred to are vastly different. In other words, the metaphors are the same but the metaphorized objects are different in a totally contrastive manner.

In a similar circumstance, a verse from Periyapurāṇam attempts further to illustrate it to the extent that when the devotees worship the Lord Śiva from a grove of *ñāḷal* flowers, their minds would be preoccupied as a temple, where God himself would be dwelling in.

maṇaip paṭappil kaṭal
koḷuntu vaḷai coriyum kaḷip pālai maḷuṅku nīṅki
naṅaiccinaḷ meṅ kuḷiñāḷal
poḷil ūṭu vaḷi koṅṭu naṅṅum pōtil
niṅaiṅṅavar tam maṅam kōyil
koṅṭu aruḷum ampalattu niruttaṅṅārait
tiṅaittaṅṅaiyām poḷutu maṅantu
uyvēṅō eṅap pāṭi tillai cārntār (Periyapurāṇam 5.1.174)
'In contrast to the bushes of the ocean,
from the grove of the cool and radiant *ñāḷal* flowers
surrendering the Lord,
heart transforms to a temple with God in it,
the poet reached the Lord's place Thillai'

Identical references of *ñāḷal* flowers and their unique potentials of obtaining god's grace can be understood from a number of other medieval poems as well (Cf. Tēvārām 7.71.2, 6.71.5 etc.).

Even though the similarities are striking as to how both genres employ the same simile in their poems, what is of relevance here is that the purpose of these imageries are quite different. Later seems, in many respects, to be an adaptation of what was very common and popular among the poets of Sangam period. The symbolism as one can observe between the bees swarming the *ñāḷal* flowers and the heroes rejoicing the company of the heroines seems quite natural and spontaneous, whereas the latter analogy between the comfort of the *ñāḷal* flowers and obtaining the divine grace of gods seems very unnatural and artificial. Especially, the implicit comparison of *ñāḷal* flowers surrounded by bees to heroes rejoicing the comfort of the heroines seems to make an authentic poetic imagery of pollination and sexual union, whereas enjoying the divine grace amidst the fragrant and beautiful *ñāḷal* grove seems to be an idea that is far-fetched without any inherent relevance between the two. In the former, the youth and the beauty of the heroines are very much appealed to the heroes, as much as how the bees are appealed to the sweet honey and fragrant pollen emitted from the flowers. In this respect, the reason why the medieval poems employ the identical similes as originally prevalent in Sangam poems, but in a relatively unrelated tone of expression

deserves further explanation. What is pertinent to mention in this context though is that there had been a continuity from Sangam toward medieval period in terms of how the poets of medieval period were fully aware of the similes and metaphors as used in Sangam poems, so they indeed adapted them in their poems subsequently.

The Imagery of *Āḷi* and its relevance in the two genres of Tamil literature:

In a similar note, we present here yet another explicit comparison of simile both in Sangam and in medieval poems, with the same inquiry as to how they are found to be very relevant in one context but not so quite appealing in the other. A close examination of the uses of the term *Āḷi* in many Sangam poems indicates that it is represented as a symbol of braveness, something with utmost power, and something with a sense of aggravated and restless state of mind. *Āḷi* is considered, imaginatively, to be a very powerful animal, more powerful than any other animal of the ancient period, and it is, thus, believed to have possessed with a hybrid form of many other animals, such as with the faces of lion, elephant and tigers with harsh teeth and horn. Artifact images of this animal are prevalent in the South Indian temples on the niches.

References to *Āḷi* can be found invariably both in *Aham* as well as in *Puram* poems despite its unique understanding as an object of braveness and valor. In the context of *Aham* poems, as in the following example, the heroine compares *Āḷi* to her hero, who possesses an exceptional strength.

valampaṭu vēṭṭattu
vāḷvari naṭuṅkap pukalvantu āḷi
uyarnutal yāṇaip pukarmukattu orṭi
veṅkōṭu puykkum taṅkamaḷ cōlaip
peruvarai aṭukkattu oruvēl ēntit
taṇṇiyaṅ varutal avaṇum aṅcāṅ (Akam. 252)

‘In the battle field
emanating a sense of fear among all the animals,
Āḷi enters and attacks on the face of the long tusked elephant.
In such dreadful field abundant with fragrant neem flowers
my hero will never fear to enter alone with just one sword.’

In this rather exaggerated context, what seems to be implied is that the animal *Āḷi* is portrayed as the powerful animal which possesses the capacity even to attack on the face of the supposedly very powerful male elephant that has a long and sharp white tusk. Besides portraying *Āḷi* for its extraordinary power and strength, it is also understood as an aggravated,

restless and disturbed animal that always attempts to appease its desire by destroying everything that it encounters. This is quite obvious from the following *Puṛam* poem, which implies the behavior of those who always tend to align themselves with unscrupulous people.

mīḷi muṇṇiṇ āḷi pōla
 uḷḷam uḷavintu aṭaṅkātu veḷḷeṇa
 nōvā tōṇvayiyiṇ tiraṅki
 vāyā vaṅkaṇikku ulamaru vōrē. (*Puṛam*. 207)
 ‘Like *Āḷi* that moves back and forth restlessly,
 without having satisfied within,
 affiliating oneself with those without any virtue,
 is like being terribly fond of unripe fruit.’

Those with unsatisfied and uncontained intent (*uḷḷam uḷ avintu aṭaṅkātu*) attempting to align themselves with the unscrupulous (*nōvātōṇ vayiyiṇ tiraṅki*) is nothing other than someone being very fond of unripe sour fruits (*vāyā vaṅkaṇi*), instead of the sweet ones. Sangam poems of both *Aham* and *Puṛam* are known for their powerful imageries of this kind, especially for bringing life of the past to the reader. Either in the case of developing a sense of fear, love, desperation, or expressing the hatred of the heroines over the abandoned heroes, the ancient poets always have a clear strategy to follow on with an appropriate simile from the nature. From these two poems and in a number of other similar poems with the simile *Āḷi* (see *Aham*. 252, 381 and *Narrinai* 207), what becomes obvious is that the purpose of this mythical figure, as conceptualized by the Sangam poets, is nothing other than to frequently develop a sense of fear by presenting an animal with extraordinary and unimaginable strength.

References of *Āḷi* in medieval Tamil poems and its purpose:

While Sangam poems depict a hybrid mythical animal with an extraordinary power, the medieval poems, on the other hand, attributes this character to the God Śiva himself. This is apparent from the following *Tirumantiram* poem, where *Tirumular* metaphorizes the Lord Śiva as *Āḷi*, who possesses a magnificent army, enters into his heart.

uruvili ūṇili ūṇamoṇṇu ili
 tiruvili tīṭili tēvarkkum tēvaṇ
 poruvili pūtap paṭaiyuṭai yāḷi
 maruvili vantueṇ maṇampukun tāṇē. (*Tiru*. 2941).
 ‘Formless, one without human body, without being handicapped
 without any sacrality and impairment, being the Lord of the Lords

without any enmity, Yāḷi with magnificent army,
the faultless came and entered into my heart.’

One finds a similar analogy of attributing *Āḷi* to Śiva in Periyapurāṇam (cf. 229, 717 and 952), which makes a simile to the Lord (*āḷi ēru pōla ēkum aṇṇalār*), instead of metaphor, in its depiction.

āḷi ēru pōla ēkum aṇṇalār muṇ eṇṇilār
mīḷi vēṭar nīṭu kūṭṭam mikku mēḷ eḷuntatē 3.3.68 (Peri. 717).
‘In front of Lord Śiva (*aṇṇalār*), who is appalling, like *āḷi*,
gathered uncountable number of hunters in a long row.’

Manikkavasakar’s *Tēvāram* also illustrates a similar environment of simile as *Āḷi* attacking an elephant as *kuḷikaṇ kaḷiru verīari yāḷi* ‘*Āḷi* that quenched its anger attacking the elephant that has a submerged eye’. The fact that the notion of ‘unconquerable with overwhelming strength and power’ is attributed to a mythical animal in Sangam poems, but to the supreme and Primordial Lord in medieval poems is to be taken as a case of transition from secular to religious mode of perception, where only the Lord can be the ultimate and extraordinary and *Āḷi* is, thus, to be taken as the symbolization of God himself.

Historiographical information in Tamil Sangam Poems:

It is far from evident that objects compared in Tamil Sangam poems are as relevant as the referenced objects themselves, especially in the context of their similar sounding qualities and attributes. The poets’ vision of the world, thus, encompasses within it an abundant knowledge of not only their experience with nature, and also their sophistication in the way they depicted their experience to the readers of the successive generations. In this respect, what the poems of the ancient Tamil offer us is nothing other than an historiographical account of the lives of the ancient Tamils themselves. What is important though is to identify the right tool to decipher the pattern that contains within them. It is obvious from the evidences that are drawn here in the context of the same set of similes that were employed in both the Sangam poems as well as the medieval religious poems is that there existed an universal appeal and appreciation of imageries among the poets of the different genres. In essence, the objects of imageries such as *cempuṟṟu īyal* ‘red ants of the red anthill’, *kaṅkul puḷ oli* ‘blast of the midday grass’, *nāḷar pū* ‘Cinnamon, *Cinnamomum*’, *tuvalait taṇṭuḷi* ‘fragrant pollen’, *Āḷi* ‘ferocious animal’ and an innumerable others that the Tamil poets of the ancient past drew on in their poems can not be taken as simple analogies, but they contain within them a wealth of historiographical information as relevant to the modern period.

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