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## Royal Attributes as Reflected in *Caṅkam* Poetry

SUMMARY: A figure of the ancient Tamil king occupies the central place in the division of the old Tamil poetry called *puram*. Along with his qualities as a warrior and a generous patron, his material attributes are described by poets. Many of them represent formal signs of royal power. The role of such objects as the royal scepter, the parasol and the drum is analyzed, their symbolic meaning is discussed. A special stress is laid on the connection of Tamil kings with plants. The role of chaplets made of flowers and the importance of ‘guarding trees’ are revealed. The traces of development of the poetic usage from a simple cliché to more complicated images are pointed out.

KEYWORDS: *caṅkam* poetry, Tamil kings, royal signs, symbolic plants.

It is a well known fact that ancient and medieval Indian kings were understood as symbolical figures whose power and authority were expressed in various ways, including rituals, ceremonies, different attitudes and relations. The most conspicuous, external signs of kingship could be represented by some specific bodily marks revealing an outstanding status of a person (or a god), by symbolical signs (insignia) or some material objects. Tamil kings and chieftains as described in old Tamil poetry did not possess unusual or supernatural outward features (apart from such details as ‘long hands’, ‘strong chest’ etc., which constitute traditional epic-style characteristics of a hero). But there are other things that express a kingly status eloquently. They are mentioned in poetry quite often and will be considered in this paper within the poetic division called *puram*, that is the poetry depicting ‘the outer’

sphere of life, which in ancient times was inseparable from military activity (examples are taken mostly from the anthology *puṛaṇānūru* (herein after PN), which can be considered as a quite representative text for the matter).

Tamil kings and chieftains, the main persons of the *puṛam* poems, generally were shown in two interrelated aspects: as warriors and as generous donators (donations were much dependent on military successes—distributing riches was possible after capturing a booty or receiving a tribute). They were presented by poets as personifications of an ideal king, a typical epic figure emerged in the ancient Indian poems *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* or, as was noted by K. Kailasapathy,<sup>1</sup> in other world epics as well. Indeed, Tamil rulers resembled their North Indian counterparts in many respects, including the adherence to the way of *dharma*, performance of Vedic sacrifices and claims to be the owners of the whole world (*cakravartin*) or, at least, the Southern part of India. No wonder they possessed the same attributes of royal power (such as crowns, parasols, scepters, drums etc.) as those used by the Northern kings. But there were some original features of Tamil royal insignia, which will be considered below.

There are several Tamil terms signifying a ruler in praise-poems: *vēntu/vēntaṅ*, *maṅṅaṅ*, *kō/kōmāṅ*, *ai*, *kurucil/kuricil*, *iraī/iraivaṅ*, *aracu/aracaṅ*. The last term is usually considered as a borrowing from the Sanskrit *rājan*. In *caṅkam* poetry the variant *aracu* signifies not only a king but sometimes ‘royalty, royal status, kingly rule’. A characteristic example: *noytāl.../ vicumpuṛa vōṅkiya veṅkuṭai/muracukeḷu vēntar aracu keḷu tiruvē* (PN 75, 10–12) ‘by suffering... [comes] the wealth of royalty of the kings with drums and white parasols touching the skies’. One passage with this word (PN 31, 17) signifies the king of the Northern land’ (*vaṭa pulattu aracē*). Other terms render the idea of a high-standing person, a person in power and can be translated as ‘king’, ‘lord’, ‘ruler’. The distribution of these terms in texts is not clear, or, at least, needs a more careful investigation.

<sup>1</sup> Kailasapathy 1968.

Suffice it to say that they are typical of great Tamil kings and of chieftains as well. The most common terms for ‘a king’ are *vēntu/vēntaṅ* (pl. *vēntar*)—*maṅṅaṅ* (pl. *maṅṅar*). They are used in connection with ‘our king’ but in some cases signify enemy rulers (for example: for *vēntar* PN 111, 2 and 156, 5, for *maṅṅar* PN 128, 7; 172, 11). In PN 197, 13 the expression *cīrūr maṅṅar*, in the context of the poem, means chieftains (lit. ‘kings with small villages’), owners of dry poor lands.

Sometimes kings are addressed with words which stress their dignity, greatness (*tōṅṅal*, *aṅṅal*, *perumāṅ*), sometimes poets call the king *attai*, *entai* (‘father’) or by terms connecting him with his domains: *viḷunīr vēli nāṭu kiḷavōṅ* ‘the lord of the country with fenced plots of land where water falls’ (PN 13, 13); *kallaka verpa* ‘oh, lord of mountains of stones’ (PN 200, 5); *mutirattuk kiḷava* ‘oh, owner of the hill Mutiram’ (PN 158, 25); *urantaiyōṅ* ‘[the owner of] Uṅṅantai’ (PN 68, 18; 69, 12); *taṅcōḷa nāṭṭup porunaṅ* ‘lord of of the cool Cōḷa country’ (PN 382, 3).<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that almost all terms for ‘a king’ are applied in later religious poetry to gods.

There is a general term in Sanskrit for objects that served as tokens of kingship or royal insignia—*rājalingāni* which, perhaps, signified, apart from typical royal belongings, personal weapons, elements of dress and decorations. In the story of Śākuntala from *Mahābhārata*, Duṣyanta, when coming to Kaṇva’s *āśrama*, removes his *rājalingāni* (which are not specified, however). Duṣyanta in Kālidāsa’s *Abhijñāna-śākuntalam*, before entering the *āśrama*, hands over his bow and decorations to the charioteer. The symbolic meaning of such a behavior (which is a generality of ancient Indian literature) is obvious: entering the sacred territory of sages and ascetics, the king withholds his status and power.

No such scenes and no term signifying royal attributes in general are found in Tamil poems, but the existence of the king’s special objects, their meaning and functions are revealed in them quite clearly. Interestingly enough, such an important symbol of the kingly power

<sup>2</sup> The term *porunaṅ* is discussed in: Dubianski 2000: 51.

as the crown (*muṭi* or *kuṭumi*) is rarely met with and in a specific context: in PN 26, 8, for instance, ‘crowned heads’ (*muṭittalai*) of enemy kings are parts of a hearth in the war sacrifice; in PN 40, 2–4 it is said that the Cōḷa king makes his feet-anklets of the gold taken from the crowns of the enemies; in the poem *perumpāṇār̥ruppaṭai* (451) it is stated that Ḥantiraiyaṅ, the hero of the poem, possessed ‘the quality of victoriously capturing crowns’ (*kuṭumi koḷḷum veṅriyal*). In all these cases, as we see, crowns belong to the enemy and are treated in a humiliating way.

Flags of kings (*koṭi*) are mentioned in a number of poems of PN but they are described in a very general way. They are hoisted on chariots (*koṭittēr* PN 24, 23; 45, 7; 197, 2; 351, 2), on elephants (PN 9, 7; 228, 9), in war camps (PN 69, 9). Once the flag is defined as ‘victorious and white’ *vicaya veṅkoṭi* (PN 362, 5) and ‘shadowing the skies’ *vicumpu niḷar̥rum* (PN 9, 7). In PN 175, 6 the Maurya kings are mentioned as *viṅporu neṭuṅkuṭaik koṭittēr mōriyar* ‘the Mauryas who are possessors of chariots with flags and the high parasol touching the skies’.

Three most important objects belonging to Tamil kings are mentioned in Tamil *puṛam* poems regularly: the parasol (*kuṭai*), the royal staff (*kōl*) and the drum (*muracu/muracam*). The parasol obviously symbolizes the king’s role of the guardian of the world (*kāval veṅkuṭai* ‘white parasol of protection’ PN 229, 20) and specifically of the king’s subjects. It is white and possesses a cooling property, giving shade to the earth and people: *uvavumati uruviṅ ṅṅkal veṅkuṭai /niḷavukkaṭal varaippin maṅṅaka niḷar̥ra* (PN 3, 1–2) ‘high white parasol resembling full moon gives shade to the earth up to the borders of the ocean’; *vāṅuraiyum matipōlum/ mālaiveṅkuṭai niḷalāṅ/ vāṅmaruṅkilōr kāp-puraṅka* (PN 22, 11–12) ‘in the shade of the white parasol [decorated with] garlands, resembling the moon residing in the skies, those who do not possess swords sleep under [its] protection’; *ṅāyiru cumanta kōṭutiraḷkoṅmū/ māka vicumpin naṭuvu niṅrāṅkuk/ kaṅpora viḷaṅkum niṅporu viyaṅkuṭai/ veyilmaṅrai koṅṅaṅrō aṅrē varuntiya/ kuṭimaṅaip patuvē kūrvēl vaḷava* (PN 35, 17–21) ‘does your brightly glowing,

spacious, touching skies parasol conceal the heat like the cloud which stands in the middle of the sky bearing the sun on itself? No, it covers suffering people [from misfortunes], oh Vaḷavaṅ with the sharp spear!.’

In PN 60, 11 the poet praises the moon, because it is like the parasol of the patron, concealing heat (*veyil maṛai*). The white brightness of the parasol has also an illuminating (*viḷakkum*) property (PN 213, 2). One special feature connected with the parasol is its height: (*ōṅkal veṅkuṭai* PN 3, 1; *nīḷkuṭai* PN 24, 13). No doubt it is its long shaft which counted. That is why the parasol is described as ‘rising’ (*ōṅkal* PN 3, 1), ‘touching heavens’ *vicumpura ṅkiya veṅkuṭai* (PN75, 11); *viṅporu neṭuṅkuṭai* (PN175, 6). This detail can be interpreted as a hint at a cosmic dimension of the parasol and it is not a mere chance that in PN 266, 7 the Maurya kings who claimed to be *cakravartins*, the rulers of the world, are mentioned as possessing ‘a long parasol touching the sky’ (*vāṅtōy nīḷkuṭai*). It is also possible to see in such descriptions the image of Indra’s *dhvaja*, the staff of his banner, which, sometimes along with his weapon, *vajra*, is understood as the *axis mundi*. Exactly in this connection G. Hart speaks of a symbolism of the cosmic tree.<sup>3</sup> This idea can be accepted, to my mind, with some caution: in the early Tamil poems the cosmic symbolism of the parasol is not developed, though, perhaps, implied. In the poem *cilappatikāram* (herein after CP) however, it comes out rather clearly. In the third chapter, devoted to the first appearance of the danseuse Mātavi on the stage during Indra’s festival, there is an episode (CP III. 114–130) with a bamboo staff which was a property of the Cōḷa kings. Previously it served as the shaft of the white royal parasol which was captured by the Cōḷas on defeating glorious enemy kings. It was encrusted with nine precious stones and covered with the best gold. It was kept in the palace of the ‘king with white protective parasol’ (that is Indra’s temple) and represented Indra’s son Jayanta. Before the performance started, the staff was worshipped, then Mātavi washed it with holy waters brought in a golden pot and decorated it with garlands.

<sup>3</sup> Hart 1975: 18.

Then it was given to the king's elephant, which took it in its trunk, then the king with his advisers made a circumambulation trip around a chariot and the staff was handed over to a poet. After that a ceremonial march in the town (*ūrvalam*, that is *pradakṣiṇa*) was undertaken. The king came to the theatre and the staff was placed, it seems, in front [of the stage] (the text is not quite explicit on that). Many details of this episode resemble the description of the worship of the *jarjara*, a ceremony which took place on the stage of the ancient Indian theatre before the performance started.<sup>4</sup> During this ceremony, which imitated the cosmogonic deed of Indra, the staff, *jarjara*, represented his *dhvaja* and symbolically the *axis mundi*. No doubt, the bamboo rod described in the episode from CP, previously the shaft of the royal parasol, plays here the same role.

The parasol is an expressive symbol of the king's glory and power and as such it was strictly guarded. A damage to it meant a threat to the king's life and symbolized his defeat or even death. Kūṭalūr kiḷār lamenting the death of his patron enumerates along with 'a star falling from the skies' some other events that play here the role of death-marks: *maintuṭai yānai kaivaittu urāṅkavum/ tiṅṅiṇi muracaṅ kaṅkiḷin turuḷavum/ kāval veṅkuṭai kālparin tulaṟavum/ kāliyaṟ kalimāk katiyiṅṟi vaikavum/ mēlōr ulakam eytiṅaṅ* 'mighty elephants are sleeping (dead), curving their trunks, strongly bound drums are rolling [on the ground] with torn eyes, the protective white parasol with its shaft broken is worn out, horses with the nature of wind are motionless—he has reached the world of the high ones' (PN 229, 18–22). The parasol always should stand erect and can bend, as one poet put it, only during the ceremonial procession of Śiva around the temple (*mukkaṅ celvar nakarvalam ceyarkē* PN 6, 17–18).

There is one more object in the king's possession connected with the notion of uprightness. It is the royal stick, or staff (*kōl*), a kind of a scepter. It was termed *ceṅkōl*, literally 'straight', 'upright' stick (DED 2265). I doubt that it was understood, as G. Hart puts

<sup>4</sup> About the worship of the *jarjara* on the stage, read Kuiper 1976.

it, as a symbol of “the connection between this profane world and the sacred world above”.<sup>5</sup> Its characteristics lie more in the sphere of moral attributes. Certainly it was connected with the idea of justice or *dharma* in general (Tam. *aṛam*): *aṛam purintaṇṇa ceṅkōl* ‘*ceṅkōl* is like *dharma*’s execution’ (PN 35, 14–15), *māṇṭa/ aṛaneṛi mutarṛe araciṇ korṛam / ataṇāl namareṇa kōl kōṭātu* (PN 55, 11–13) ‘the glorious way of *dharma* is the first victory of the king. [Your] *kōl* does not decline towards ‘ours’, that is, the king is just in judgment; *aṛavōṛ pukaḷṇta āykōl* ‘the exquisite *kōl* praised by those who stay with *dharma*’ (PN 221, 3). In PN 230, 4 it is called ‘unshakable’ (*kalāṅkā*) and the king protects it ‘like the tiger protects his tiger-cub’ (PN 42, 10–11). The protective property of the stuff itself is stressed by the epithet *taṇ* ‘cool’ (PN 58, 13), which in a way likens it to the parasol. In some cases, however, when the king swerves from the way of *dharma*, his *ceṅkōl* becomes *koṭuṅkōl*, that is ‘crooked’. The most conspicuous example of such a development is the fate of the Pāṇṭiyaṅ king in CP: when he learnt that Kōvalaṅ was killed in consequence of his fast and unjust order ‘the *ceṅkōl* of the [king]-guardian bent, and he fell down’ (*kāvalaṅ ceṅkōl vaḷaiya vīḷntaṇaṅ* CP XVI, 216).

Another important symbol of the king’s power and authority was represented by a drum called *muracu* (*muracam*). It was a war-drum roaring on the battle-field (PN 288, 4) like thunder (PN 17, 39). It is described as frightening (*urukeḷu* PN 50, 6; *uṭkuvaru* PN 197, 5) for enemies, that is why in PN 3, 3 it is termed *ēma muracu* (‘protective drum’). But it is pleasant when beaten within the king’s court (*iṇitu muracu iyampa* PN 29, 8) or during auspicious events such as the ceremony of the worship of Indra’s staff in CP (described earlier), which was accompanied by the sound of *muracu* along with musical instruments (SP III, 125). The drum was made of wood and covered with the bull-skin, strongly fastened (bounded [with ropes] (*tiṇṇiṇi muracam* PN 93, 1; 229, 19; 288, 4); gloriously (that is skillfully) fastened (*vicittu viṇai māṇṭa... muracam* PN 63, 7). To stress

<sup>5</sup> Hart 1975: 15.

martial characteristics of the drum, poets sometimes include an expressive detail: the drum is covered with the skin of the bull which defeated in the fight the other one (PN 288, 2–4), or with the skin of a bull which killed a tiger (*maturaikkāñci* 242). Obviously, it was considered important that these fights took place not long ago, because the skin is covered with hair (*mayirkaṇ muracam*), which means it is fresh (PN 63, 7; also CP V, 91). The drum had an eye (*kaṇ*)—a spot in the center of the surface made of clay (*maṇ*) or special paste (*mārccaṇai*) to make it sound louder.<sup>6</sup> When war-drums were broken on the battlefield, it was said that their eyes were torn (PN 238, 8): *muracam kiḷintaṇa kaṇṇe*.

Old Tamil poetry knows many words (*kiṇai*, *taṇṇumai*, *muḷavu*, *paṇai*, *taṭāri*, *tuṭi*, *tonṭakam*, *neytal* and others) signifying drums of different size, forms and functions. They were used by different people (by praise-singers and performers, for instance), for different occasions and social events, during rituals, festivals, ceremonies. But the problem of their usage lies beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the drum *muracu* occupies a special place in the row. It belonged to the king, it was his, so to say, personal drum, the sacred symbol of his sovereignty, which is reflected in such passages as: PN 73, 7 *muracukeḷu tāyam* ‘the right of heirdom connected with *muracu*’, or PN 75, 12 *muracukeḷu vēndar* ‘kings connected with *muracu*’. In PN 58, 12–13 a Pāṇṭiyaṇ king is addressed as *imiḷkural muracam mūṇruṭaṇ āḷum/...vēntē* ‘oh, king... who rules with tree noisy-voiced drums.’ It means that the king is a ruler of the three great Tamil kingdoms. It goes without saying that if the king’s drum was captured (PN 26, 7) or broken in a battle, it was a catastrophic event signifying the king’s defeat in the battle (*maṇappōr vēntar/ tā māyṇ taṇarē*, *kuṭai tuḷaṇ kiṇavē*, *uraicāl ciṇappiṇ muracolīn taṇavē* PN 62, 7–9) ‘the kings of heroic war died, the parasols are broken, the drums of famous glory perished’.

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<sup>6</sup> It seems that other drums, or, at least, some of them also had ‘eyes’. PN 15, 24 mentions a small drum *muḷavu* belonging to a woman-singer, ‘richly [covered with] clay’ (*maṇ kaṇai muḷavu*); or: PN 397,10: ‘big *kiṇai* with the clear eye’ (*teṅkaṇ mākkiṇai*).



The king's drum was certainly a sacred object and even sacrifices were made to it: *paliperu muracam* PN 362, 3; 362, 5; *patirruppattu* (Pati) 17, 56. Its high status is well expressed in the poem PN 50. A poet describes an event that happened to him when he involuntarily polluted the king's drum by sleeping on its cot (the drum was taken for ceremonial washing). Actually the poem's main aim is to stress the generosity of the king and the sacred status of the poet himself but the symbolical value of the drum also stands out quite clearly: the poet committed a fault that deserved the capital punishment.

PN 50

*mācaṛa vicitta vārpuru valpiṅ*  
*maipaṭu maruṅkul poliya mañṅai*  
*olineṭum pīli oṅpori maṅittār*  
*polāṅkuḷai uḷiṅaiyoṭu poliyac cūṭṭik*  
*kuruti vēṭkai yurukeḷu muracam*  
*maṅṅi vārā aḷavai eṅṅey*  
*nuraimukan taṅṅa meṅpūñ cēkkai*  
*aṛiyā tēriya eṅṅait teṅvara*  
*irupār paṭukkuniṅ vāḷvā yoḷittatai*  
*atūuñ cālum narṛatimiḷ muḷu taṛital*  
*ataṅoṭu mamaiyā taṅuka vantuniṅ*  
*mataṅuṭai muḷavuttōḷ ḍccit taṅṅeṅa*  
*vīci yōyē viyaḷiṭaṅ kamaḷa*  
*ivaṅicai yuṭaiyōrk kalla tavaṅa*  
*tuyarnilai yulakat tuṛaiyu ḷiṅmai*  
*viḷaṅkak kēṭṭa mārukol*  
*valampaṭu kurucinī yīṅkitu ceyalē*

Before it was brought back from bathing,  
The frightening, thirsting for blood  
Drum which was decorated with golden shoots of uḷiṅai,  
The garland of sapphire and luxurious  
Peacock feathers with bright spots,  
So that would flourish its dark sides  
With belts flawlessly fastened,  
I climbed up on its cot, covered with flowers  
And as soft as the oil with the scum removed,  
You halted your sword cutting in two

Which was going to crush me, ignorant.  
 This alone was enough for the whole [land] of fine Tamil to know!  
 But you did not stop at that!  
 You approached me and raised your strong arm  
 Resembling the muḷavu-drum  
 And rocked it to make me cool.  
 Was it done because you have clearly heard  
 That there is no place in the high yonder world  
 But for those who gained fame spreading far and wide  
 In this world, oh victorious ruler?

One more interesting detail in this poem can be pointed out in connection with the military function of the drum. In addition to the passage *kuruti vēṭkai urukeḷu muracam* ('the frightening drum thirsting for blood' PN 50, 5), it is said that the drum is decorated with golden shoots of *uḷiñai* (PN 50, 4), the plant which, as I suggested elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> is associated with *Korṟavai*, the goddess of war and victory in the ancient Tamil society. This detail in the context of this poem looks very expressive and meaningful and reflects, among other things, a more general habit of using plants as symbolic signs. Tamil kings themselves also had symbolical ties with plants which served as their individual emblems. They were represented by chaplets (*kaṇṇi*), a kind of natural crowns, made of flowers and shoots of these plants. Thus, the Cōḷa king wore the chaplet made of *ār*, or *ātti* (ebony tree, *Bauhinia tomentosa*), Pāṇṭiyaṅ—of margosa (*vēmpu*, *Azadirachta indica*), Cēra—of palmyra (*paṇai*, *pōntai*). The same plants also were used for emblematic garlands. When poet Kōvūr kiḷār tried to reconcile two members of the Cōḷa family, he used exactly this symbolism when addressing one of them (PN 45):

*irumpaṇai veṇṭōṭu malaintōṅ allāṅ*  
*karuñciṇai vēmpin teriyalōṅ allāṅ*  
*niṅṅa kaṇṇiyu mārmīṭain taṅṟē niṅṅoṭu*  
*poruvōṅ kaṇṇiyu mārmīṭain taṅṟē*  
*oruvīr tōṟpiṇun tōṟpatuṅ kuṭiyē*

<sup>7</sup> Dubianski 2002: 30.

*iruvīr vēra li yaṛkaiyu maṇṛē ataṇār*  
*kuṭipporu laṅrunum ceyti koṭittēr*  
*nummō raṅṅa vēntarkku*  
*meymmali uvakai ceyyumiv vikalē.*

He is not the one who wears white leaves of the dark palmyra,  
 He is not the one who wears a garland made of margosa with dark  
 branches,  
 Your chaplet is of *ār*, the chaplet of the one  
 Who will fight with you is also of *ār*.  
 If any of you is defeated your clan will suffer defeat;  
 The victory of both of you is against nature. So,  
 What you are doing is not a family matter.  
 [But] to the kings who owns chariots with banners like you  
 Gives a hair-raising joy your fight!

Sometimes chaplets were made of a mixture of flowers. PN 76, 4–6 mentions ‘tight honey-leaking chaplet of bright shoots of dark branches of margosa interwoven with long liana-shoots of *uḷiṇai*’ (*vēmpin māccinai yonṭalir/neṭuṅkoṭi yuḷiṇaip pavarotu miṭaintu/ceṇiyat toṭutta tēmpāy kaṅṅi*). The unity of the emblematic plant of the Pāṇṭiyaṅ dynasty with the plant connected with Korraṅvai stresses the military glory of the king. The chaplet of Atiyamāṅ Neṭumāṅ Añci made of *pōntai* (another name for palmyra), *veṭci* and *vēṅkai*, also had a symbolical meaning. Palmyra, the plant of Cēra kings, indicates that this chieftain belonged to Cēra’s royal lineage. Golden-red flowers of *vēṅkai* and red flowers of *veṭci* (*Scarlet ixora*) belong to the god Murukaṅ, who was a paragon of martial valor. Besides, in the Tamil system of military symbolism chaplets and garlands made of *veṭci* signified a cattle-lifting raid which was a prelude to war. Other small chieftains also wore chaplets of their own. For instance, Kumaṅṅai’s chaplet was made of *kūviḷam* (*Aegle marmelos*, PN 158, 9), Aṅṭiraṅai’s—of *valai* (*Calophyllum longifolium*, PN 131, 2),

Elīṇi's—of *vēṅkai* (*Pterocarpus bilobus*, PN 168, 15).<sup>8</sup> Chaplets made of plants certainly expressed the idea of a life-energy and it is no surprise that poets intending to wish the king a long life sometimes addressed their wishes to his chaplets: *vālkanīṇ kaṇṇi* 'long live your chaplet!' (PN 198, 11), *vālka avan kaṇṇi* 'long live his chaplet!' (PN 77, 6). Some poets resorted to more refined forms of praising (PN 6, 21–22): 'let your chaplet, oh, Lord, wither only in the aromatic smoke from the fire which burns the country of your enemies!' (*vāṭuka viṛaivaniṇ kaṇṇi yonṇār/nāṭucuṭu kamalṭpukai eritta lāṇē*).

Another important symbol of royalty connected with the world of plants is the so-called king's 'guarded tree' (*kaṭimaram*, *kāvalmaram*), or 'tutelary tree' as G. Hart puts it (Hart 1975: 16). Again he sees a cosmic symbolism in it: "The function of the king's tree was to represent the cosmic tree, joining heaven and earth" (Hart 1975: 17). Unfortunately, there is no textual proof for this interpretation. Certainly it had a connection with the king's life to an even greater degree than his emblematic flower. Presumably the tree itself was believed to contain and to protect the king's life energy (the term may be interpreted both ways: the guarded tree and the tree which guards). Anyway, it was carefully protected, especially in times of war because enemy kings tried to cut down or destroy tutelary trees of their counterparts: 'in every village the grove [appears] with uprooted guarded trees' (*ūrtoṛum kaṭimaran tuḷaṅkiya kāvu* PN 23, 9). Moreover, there was a habit of manufacturing kings' drums out of the wood of such trees (Pati 11, 12–14; 17, 5). No doubt its meaning was to suppress the enemy king's energy and, perhaps, in a magical way to appropriate

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<sup>8</sup> The symbolical importance of plants is stressed by the fact that they were used by members of some communities who wanted to express their ties with a certain god. Thus, the mountain hunters (*kuṛavar* or *vēṭṭuvar*) who worshipped Murukaṇ wore chaplets made of *kāntaḷ* (*Gloriosa superba*), the red color of its flower is mythologically connected with the god. The shepherds of the land of pastures (*mullai* region) made chaplets of the jasmine *mullai*, the most characteristic flower of the region reigned over by Māl/Māyōṇ.

it. The intention to degrade the enemy also could be added to that, and victorious kings sometimes tied their elephants or other animals to the enemy's guarded trees (Pati 33, 3). In PN 7, 10–11, the poet develops this idea into a kind of joke or, rather, mockery at the defeated king and gives his patron, a Pāṇṭiyaṅ king a piece of advice: 'do not fell the guarded tree, otherwise it won't do for your big good elephant as a pole' (*kaṭimaran taṭita lōmpuniṅ/ neṭunal yānaik kantār rāvē*). Interestingly, there are cases when tying the elephant to a tree had the same meaning in a different context, outside military actions. A story of a poet Peruṅcittiraṅār who came to a chieftain Veḷimāṅ to praise him in his song and to receive gifts shows this well. When the poet came to him, the chieftain was inattentive and not generous. The poet insulted by such a neglect went to some other chieftain Kumaṅaṅ where he was given an elephant as a gift. He came back to Veḷimāṅ, tied the elephant to his guarded tree and sang a small poem (PN 162):

*iravalar puravalai nīyu mallai  
puravala riravalark killaiyu mallar  
iravala ruṅmaiṅkāṅni yiravalark  
kīvōr uṅmaiṅkāṅni niṅṅūrṅ  
kaṭimaram varuntat tantiyām piṅitta  
neṭunal yāṅai emparicil  
kaṭumāṅ rōṅṅral celval yāṅē*

You are not a benefactor for those in need,  
But it is not so that benefactors are lacking for those in need.  
There are those in need—look now! And for those in need  
There are those who give—look now! In your town  
I made your guarded tree suffer. The big good elephant,  
Tied to it by us is our gift, oh, the chief with strong horses! I am leaving.

It may be assumed that 'guarded trees' gave branches and flowers for kings' emblematic chaplets and garlands. PN 76, 4 and PN 79, 2 devoted to a Pāṇṭiyaṅ king inform us that they were made of *maṅṅra vēmpu*, that is, of branches of margosa-tree which grew in *maṅṅram*. This word usually signifies 'a place for assembly' in a village. In this case it could be a place somehow connected with the king's court. Anyway the tree

is specially marked here and could well be the particular ‘guarded tree’ of the king. So, the ‘guarded trees’ of three great Tamil kings were trees mentioned earlier in connection with their chaplets. Chieftains also had their trees. For instance, Titiyaṅ’s tree was *puṅṅai* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) what is mentioned in *akanāṅṅūru* 45, 9–11, Naṅṅaṅ’s—mango tree (*kuruntokai* 73, 2–3), Pāri was associated with the jasmine *mullai* (*Jasminum trichotomum*) etc.

It is known that chaplets and garlands made of branches and flowers of certain plants were used in war as signs of this or that military action or a stage of war<sup>9</sup> and as such, they, strictly speaking, were not royal signs, the king shared these symbolic decorations with the soldiers of his army. The same can be said about the king’s weapons. Tamil kings and chieftains were described as possessors of a sword, a lance or a bow, but they were not formal tokens of a royal status and had no individual characteristics (and no names as it was in the case of the weapons of gods or epic heroes). It was also a natural prerogative of kings to have war-elephants, chariots and a big army in general.<sup>10</sup> However, in poetry these weapons, their power and kings’ skill in handling them were objects of praise and in a way became connected with their owners more tightly. Appearing in poems as details characterizing the hero and his attributes, they usually constituted formulaic expressions, which were a common stock for poets and were applied to different persons. But in some cases poets demonstrated a desire to single out this or that object and to treat it as a pretext for a poetic play. Of course, the aim of praising a person was well preserved but another aim—to show the poet’s artistic skill, his wit in creating an unusual and interesting image—definitely stood out. For instance, the poet Āvūr mūlaṅ kiḷār, praising a Cōḷa ruler, addresses him ‘Oh, king with

<sup>9</sup> Zvelebil 1973: 104–105.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that great Tamil kings had an army consisting of traditional Indian four divisions. In PN 4, for instance, they are clearly represented as *vāḷ* (a sword, a weapon of foot-soldiers), *mā* (horses), *kaḷiṟu* (elephants), *tēr* (chariots).

a vast army' *viyaṅ rāṅnai viṅal vēntē* (PN 38, 3). But Ālattūr kiḷār, speaking of the Cōḷa king's army, is not satisfied with such a cliché and comes up with a rather curious artistic device in order to show the size of the army. When soldiers are on a march 'Those who are in the first rows eat sweet pulp of the unripe palmyra-palm's fruits; those who are in the middle taste fresh fruits; those who are in the last rows consume fried roots [of the palms].' (*talaiyōr nuṅkin tīñcōru micaiya/ iṭaiyōr paḷattin painkaṅai māntak/ kaṭaiyōr... cuṭukiḷaṅku nukara* PN 225, 1–3). One more example touches upon another object—the king's lance (*vēl*)—that poets mention quite often in cliché expressions describing kings and chieftains as having 'many lances' (*palvēl*), 'strong lances' (*val vēl*), 'excellent lances' (*vāy vēl*), 'sharp-pointed' (*vainuti*) etc.<sup>11</sup> But there are poems where there is a tendency to use more complicated images, more refined poetic constructions<sup>12</sup>. A woman-poet, Auvaiyār, was devoted to a chieftain Atiyamāṅ Neṭumāṅ Añci, who once requested her to visit one neighboring chieftain Toṅṭaimāṅ. The latter decided to boast of his well cared-for armory. Auvaiyār invented a way to be polite to the host and at the same time to mock him and to glorify her patron. Her speech is reproduced in her poem PN 95:

*ivvē p̄li yaṅintu mālai cūṭtik  
kaṅṭira ṅōṅkāḷ tiruttiney yaṅintu  
kaṭiyuṭaiya viyaṅaka ravvē yavvē  
pakaivark kuttik kōṭunuti citaintu  
korruṅaik kurṅila mātō veṅrum  
uṅṅāyir pataṅkoṭut  
tillāyi ṅuṭaṅuṅṅum  
illō rokkar ralaivaṅ  
aṅṅaleṅ kōmāṅ vainnuti vēlē*

These, bedecked with peacock-feathers, decorated with garlands,  
With their strong and thick shafts smeared with oil,  
Are in spacious, well-protected room; those—  
With their curved points blunted

<sup>11</sup> For other examples see Kailasapathy 1968: 158–159.

<sup>12</sup> See: Dubyanskiy 2007: 98–106.

Because they pierced enemies,  
 They are always at the blacksmith's shed.  
 When there is [food], he gives much,  
 If there is not, he eats with all,  
 He, the chief of the relatives who are in need.  
 Those belong to him, to our great king,  
 Sharp-pointed spears.

The royal attributes described in the paper constitute important and, we may state, canonic features of the image of an ideal ruler. A poet can introduce into his praise-poem, depending on its volume, a number or just one of them, with the idea that the possession of such attributes is a privilege and a merit of a king. The description of them is usually short and consists of epithets expressing positive qualities (strong, high, beautiful etc.). But within the corpus of texts, we can detect a process of a certain development from just naming the attributes to more complex poetical images, where a taken object becomes the field of an artistic play in which poets try to demonstrate their skill, imagination and wit. The poem of Auvaīyār quoted above is a good example of this. The spears are taken here by the author not as just an attribute of the king but as the main theme of the poem. Moreover, there is a certain touch of individuality in connection with them (“the spears of Atiyamāṇ”). The artistic skill of the poetess is seen not only in the device of a contrastive parallelism (the used, broken and, consequently, heroic spears of Atiyamāṇ versus the neat, protected but idle spears of Toṇṭaimāṇ). She constructs her poem syntactically in such a way that the clue-word ‘spears’ (*vēl*) finds its place at the very end of the poem. Such a technique of ‘a clue word’ reminds us of a kind of an intellectual riddle characteristic of Sanskrit verses of the *muktaka* type and can be considered as one of the points where Tamil and Sanskrit poetic traditions meet, which needs further investigation.



**References:****Tamil Texts and Abbreviations**

- AN = *akanānūru*, with commentaries by nāvalar tiru na.mu. veṅkaṭacāmi nāṭṭār, karantai kaviyaracu ra. veṅkaṭācālam piḷḷai, tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: ceṅṅai 1962.
- CP = *cilappatikāram*, with commentaries by tiru po. ve. cōmacuntaranār, tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: ceṅṅai, 1977.
- KT = *kuṛuntokai*, with an introduction and commentaries by u. ve. cāminātaiyāravarkaḷ uraiyuṭan. tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: ceṅṅai, 1955.
- MK = *maturaikkāñci*. pattuppāṭṭu mūlamum uraiyum. irantām pakuti tiru po. ve. cōmacuntaranār urai. tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: tirunelvēli–ceṅṅai, 1968.
- Pati = *patiruppattu* mūlamum uraiyum, with commentaries by tiru auvai turaicāmi piḷḷai, tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: ceṅṅai, 1973.
- PN = *puṛanānūru mūlamum paḷaiya uraiyum*, ed. with an introduction and commentaries by u.v. cāminātaiyāravarkaḷ, ṭāktar u.ve. cāminātaiyar nūṛ nilaiyam: ceṅṅai 1971.
- Ppan = *perumpānarāruppaṭai*. pattuppāṭṭu mūlamum uraiyum. mutarpakuti, with commentaries by tiru po. ve. cōmacuntaranār urai, tirunelvēli teṅṅintiya caivacittānta nūṛpatippuk kaḷakam: ceṅṅai 1962.

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