

Configuration of Natural Elements in the Mountain songs

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Introduction

In classical Tamil poetry, also known as *Caṅkam* poetry, nature plays an important role. Nature is used to demarcate the limits of poems as well as for classifying them. These poems implicitly portray the parallelisms between the human and non-human activities. The subjects of these poems are generally classified into *akam* 'inner and anonymous' and *puṟam* 'outer and public', which subsequently refer to love and heroism, respectively.¹ The *akam* poems are again broadly classified on the basis of nature into the following five physiographical groups: *Kuṟiṅci*, *Mullai*, *Marutam*, *Neytal* and *Pālai* which correspond to mountain, forest, arid tract, coastal area and desert, respectively. Each area has its own specific flora and fauna and its own theme describing an activity of the hero and heroine. Each area is full of specific animals, birds and trees inhabiting this area. Nature and romanticism are the distinct qualities of the age of the *Caṅkam* literature. The description of flora and fauna is so accurate that a biologist like P.L. Sami can make a comparison of the description in the poems with the knowledge of a biologist.² This paper investigates the relationship of the configuration of animals and plants as a whole in a poem to its contents. I have selected *kuṟiṅci*, the area around the mountain, for a number of reasons. One of the important reasons is that this area can be studied on the basis of one author who has established himself as a specialist of the poems related to this area, and the theme exemplified in it. The second reason is the recurrence of specific animals, trees and plants in the poems of the author selected under the first criteria. My curiosity increased when I saw the same animals and trees recurring with different activities in different poems. This has led to the question whether there is a connection between the configuration of the animals and trees on the one hand and the theme of the poem on the other. Picturesque natural background occurs in the poems related to the *kuṟiṅcittinai* as in the poems depicting the poetic situations related to the remaining four *tiṇais*.

¹ K. Kailasapathy (1968: 6) Kailasapathy refers to an article by Emeneau about the Oral Poets of South India, and remarks that the convention of inner and outer survives in the Toda community of the Nilgiris. Some of the features are the enigmatic and allusive character, not mentioning the name of the person or giving any clue about his identity.

M.B. Emeneau (1958: 278): "A striking feature of all Toda singing is its enigmatic and allusive character. Traditionally, no person is identified in song by his or her name. When the song is addressed to a person, alive or dead, a buffalo name is used in a vocative form instead of a personal name." The *akam* poems instead of addressing with a personal name, use names such as *nāṭaṅ* etc (geographic names). Addressing a buffalo in the Toda songs and addressing a *nāṭaṅ* etc in the *akam* poems structurally point towards the tradition of avoiding a personal name in the love songs or poems. The animals are used in these songs or poems in connection with the *talaivan* of these songs or poems.

² P.L. Sami (1967, 1976).

Tamil poets exhibit their familiarity with the flora and fauna in relation to the themes handled by them. The Tamil grammar *Tolkāppiyam* and the later grammars lay down the poetic rules the poems should comply with. The compliance is measured against the theme and the natural background. The natural background in the *akam* poems not only functions as a stage for the concerned theme; but also communicates an implicit suggestiveness to the reader. This is one of the important characteristics of Tamil classical *akam* poetry. Therefore it is not enough to understand what the poets say literally; but also what they imply.³ The enigmatic character of poetry is an inherent feature of both written and oral poetry. The short poems often hide much culturally relevant information. What is said is very little, and what is hidden is more.⁴ The *akam* poems of classical Tamil literature are enigmatic besides context-oriented and imbedded.

Who is Kapilar?

Kapilar⁵ is an expert on the poems dealing with mountains and their surroundings. He is also considered as the greatest of the poets belonging to the Caṅkam period. Though the *akam* poems exhibit his talent as a poet, his *puram* poems are also full of passion and intimacy with his patron Pāri, the great. The hill and the surroundings of chieftain Pāri would have formed the background of most of his *akam* poems. The Parampu Mountain is a dominant feature of his *puram* poems. The following remark of V.Sp. Manickam reflects the sublime character of Kapilar as an individual and as a poet:

His greatness is due not only to his extraordinary gift of poetic resources and the largest individual contribution that he has made among the Sangam poets, but also to his lifelong and faithful association and friendship with Pāri, the greatest of the Tamil Patrons.⁶

We have as corpus the poems of Kapilar of the Caṅkam period. As there are a few more poets with the same name Kapilar, it is necessary to state that we are dealing here with the great poet of the Caṅkam period and the author of hundreds of poems that deal with hills and their surroundings. Not only the name brings problems with it, but also the disputed authorship of some of the poems that are attributed to Kapilar. Problems revolving around the authorship are not discussed in this article.

³ See J.R. Marr (1985: 335) for an association between a poet and his favourite subject: "There is, in some cases, a definitive association between a particular poet and poems depicting a particular *tiṇai*. The most notable instance is the alliterative association between Kapilar and poems about *kuṟiṅci* subjects, and every one of his poems included in *Aka.* is on *kuṟiṅci*, save *Aka.* 203 on *pālai*."

⁴ M.B. Emeneau (1958: 279): "The Toda verbalisation then, like the ethnologist's generalized descriptions, need much comment to point out their relevance to particular manifestations of the cultural themes. The relevance, I must emphasize, is not overtly provided in the song words."

⁵ See V.V. Reddiar (1936: 1-22) for details regarding the folk-stories and biography of Kapilar.

⁶ V.Sp. Manickam (1962: 242).

The poems of Kapilar

Below is a list⁷ of Kapilar's works from the Caṅkam literature:

1. *Kuṛiṅcippāṭṭu* – a long poem of 261 lines
2. *Kuṛuntokai* – 28 verses
3. *Narṛiṅai* – 20 verses
4. *Akanāṅūru* – 18 verses
5. *Aiṅkuṛunūru* – 100 verses
6. *Kalittokai* – *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 29 verses
7. *Paṭiṛruppattu* – 7th ten
8. *Puṛānānūru* – 28 verses.

There are differences of opinion regarding the authorship of *Kalittokai*: *Kuṛiṅcikkali*. Some believe that Kapilar did not write it. For the differing numbers of poems attributed to Kapilar, see Reddiar 1936: 31. According to U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar, Pinnathur Narayanaswamy Aiyar and N.M. Venkataswamy Nattar the numbers are 278, 246 and 278, accordingly. *Kuṛiṅcippāṭṭu*, *Inṅānārpatu*, *Tiruvalluṅvamālai* and *Nettilai* are included in these lists apart from the ones listed above under Periyakaruppan. Ramanujan praises him as the biggest contributor to the Caṅkam literature with his 235 poems of the total of 2,381 Caṅkam poems.⁸ Zvelebil attributes only 206 poems to Kapilar.⁹

Karupporuḷs of Kapilar

The present study is about the *karupporuḷs* or the native elements such as flora and fauna of a landscape, and specially their arrangement in a particular configuration in the *kuṛiṅci* poems of Kapilar. The central question is whether there is a direct semantic relationship between a theme and a configuration. Emphasis is laid on the configuration of natural elements. An analysis of the poems by one author may help us to find out whether the configuration is a signature of the poet. Before I proceed further, it is necessary to give an account of the flora and fauna found in the *kuṛiṅci*¹⁰ poems of Kapilar.¹¹

Kapilar as the court poet of Pāri is familiar with the flora and fauna of the hill of Pāri — the *Parampu malai*. Two animals show their ubiquitous presence in his poems: tiger and elephant. The configuration of the animals is more important than the mere individual mentioning of these animals in the poems

⁷ Authors differ about the number of poems attributed to Kapilar. This list is from Rm. Periyakaruppan (1976: 262).

⁸ A.K. Ramanujan (1985).

⁹ K.V. Zvelebil (1973: 116) mentions only 206 songs as belonging to Kapilar.

¹⁰ Rm. Periyakaruppan (1976: 121-146) treats elaborately the *tiṅai kuṛiṅci*.

¹¹ M.B. Emeneau (1971). The Toda songs about the things, seasons and the flora and fauna of the Nilgiris remind us of the *kuṛiṅci* songs of the Classical Tamil literature. Emeneau recorded about 16 songs of this nature (cf. 185-200). The configuration of birds, animals and trees is a constant factor in these songs. For example, buffalo and elephant play prominent roles in song 149; in song 195 a peacock; in song 149 a snake and an elephant, and further in the same song lime flower, primrose, betel leaf, jasmine, golden and silver flowers.

of Kapilar. The configurations are closely connected to subjects such as romance, emotion, protection, allegiance, loyalty, sincerity, and stupidity. Kapilar has written a large number of poems about the mountainous area. In his poems he describes hilly regions, which are very fertile and full of fruitful trees like the plantain and the jackfruit, flowers like the *vēṅkai* and the *kāntal*, birds like peacocks and parrots, animals like elephants, tigers, monkeys and wild pigs and sounds like those of falling streams and humming bees.¹²

In the *kuṛiṅci* poems of Kapilar one comes across the following animals and birds: elephant, tiger, monkey, deer, pig, cow, ox, sheep, horse, fox, bear, dog, snake and, birds like peacock, parrot, crane and owl. Fish, crocodile, snake and bees are also found here and there. About eleven trees such as *vēṅkai*, jackfruit, plantain, palmyra, sandal, akil, Asoku, *kaṭappam*, mango and *curapunnai* also play important roles. Bamboo and sugarcane decorate the background of some of his poems. Among the plants millet, paddy and *cēmpu* form the natural background. The pepper creeper, as a plant revolving around sandalwood, is also popular in the hilly poems. Flowers like *kāntal*, jasmine, *narantam*, lotus, *nālal*, *avarai*, *kuvalai* and *piccakam* are also found.

This is the world of nature of Kapilar. The repertory is limited; but the combinations or configurations are unlimited. It is the chemistry of the combination of these elements, which makes the poems enigmatic rather than the individual properties of the elements. The frequency of occurrence of the native elements depends also on the theme of the poem. For example, trees such as *vēṅkai* and *palā* (jackfruit), animals such as tiger, which is also known as *vēṅkai*, and elephant, and birds such as peacock and crane are the frequent visitors of these poems. Their frequency of occurrence is directly related to the theme of the poems. Elephant, tiger and the tree *vēṅkai* are the most specific native elements of the hilly tract. The natural objects of the hilly region alone can be employed in a *kuṛiṅci* poem. There is, thus, a common stock of conventional images, in such groups as *kuṛiṅci* images, *mullai* images etc.¹³ From the poems it is evident that a *karupporuḷ* as ascribed to a specific *tiṅai* may also occur in another *tiṅai*. There seems to have been an apparent discrepancy between rules and poems. In most of the *akam* poems *karupporuḷ* alone is always evident because comparatively a larger part of a poem is devoted to this aspect, description of the flora and fauna of the landscape involved in the poem. While discussing the role and position of the maid in *marutam*, V.T. Manickam refers to a poem (Aka. 12: 4-5) by Kapilar.¹⁴ In this poem Kapilar describes her as a close companion of the heroine. They have a single soul dwelling in two bodies like the fabulous bird having two heads and one body. Kapilar, as a poet, is an excellent example for the use of even mythological animal imagery to illustrate the human behaviour. I shall discuss below, in general, some of the elements of nature which are associated with the *tiṅai kuṛiṅci*.

¹² M. Varadarajan (1957: 60).

¹³ Rm. Periakaruppan (1976: 261). See also Appendix I (pp. 260-276), which is about the "Imagery of Kapilar".

¹⁴ V.T. Manickam (1982: 99).

Vēṅkai

The word *vēṅkai* refers to a tree as well as to a tiger. The use of the same word is based on their similarity of appearance. The *vēṅkai* tree is a symbol of love and marriage. The poets are overwhelmed at the sight of the beautiful yellow flowers which hang in bunches “as finely wrought as the workmanship of the cleverest jeweller.”¹⁵ Often its flowers are compared to flames of fire. The lovers also exchange *vēṅkai* flowers, especially during the period of courtship (*Kuru.* 214). Its flowering season is considered to be auspicious and is set apart for the public celebration of weddings, and betrothed couples wait eagerly for it to burst into flower (*Pari.* 14: 11-12; *Aka.* 12.).¹⁶ In many a poem the maid urges the hero to celebrate the public wedding now that the *vēṅkai* has bloomed, or she consoles her mistress saying now that the *vēṅkai* has flowered, her lover will soon return and they will be united forever after ceremonial wed-lock (*Aka.* 2, 378; *Kali.* 38; *Narr.* 206). This association of the *vēṅkai* with weddings led to the custom of new brides adorning their hair with these golden flowers, and of parents carrying out celebrations regarding their children’s espousals, and of the festive dances taking place on the marriage day under a flowering *vēṅkai* (*Narr.* 313; *Kali.* 42; *Kuru.* 241). A touching poem in the *Narriṇai* collection speaks of a heroine weeping almost unconsciously as soon as she adverted the *vēṅkai* had flowered, for she realized that of her lover’s return there was as yet no sign (*Narr.* 241). *vēṅkai* flowers are given to the heroine at the time of courtship. Its petals strewn on a rock below the tree remind the poet, because of their colour, of a tiger asleep (*Puram.* 202: 18-21, *Kuru.* 47).

Like Kapilar many poets have used the imagery of *vēṅkai* in their *kuriñci* poems. In a poem (*Aka.* 228) of Aṅṅar Maṅṅaṅ Kuruvalutiyār the maid suggests that the hero can stay with them till night-fall because the path will be full of moon-light and on the way there will not be any real tiger, but only tiger-like flowers of the *vēṅkai* tree.¹⁷

Vēṅkai is a facilitator of love and marriage. One of the conventional situations, when lovers meet, is the time when the heroine gathers *vēṅkai* flowers. The heroine and her female companions play about shouting ‘tiger,

¹⁵ J.R. Marr (1985: 29). Many more features of the *vēṅkai* flowers described here are based on the description of J.R. Marr.

¹⁶ A.M. Dubianski (2000- 113-114) gives a mythological interpretation to the presence of the *vēṅkai* tree in the *kuriñci* poems. P. 113. “It must be the colouring of the *vēṅkai* tree that links it with Murukaṅ. Moreover, it can be suggested that the tree is in fact Murukaṅ’s arboreal counterpart: in the story of Valli and Murukaṅ related in the *kantapurāṇam* Murukaṅ turns into a *vēṅkai*.” According to Dubianski *vēṅkai* gets a mythological and ritual significance in the Caṅkam poems. Dubianski emphasises the relationship between *vēṅkai* and Murukan. Murukan wears a wreath made from *vēṅkai* flowers and the hero of *kuriñci* also wears a wreath of *vēṅkai* flowers. The time of blossoming of the *vēṅkai* is auspicious for marriage. In one of the myths is the mention of Valli climbing a *vēṅkai* tree whose shape Murukan has taken. She presses her breast against the tree and embraces it. This is a symbol of love union. Any mention of a creeper (valli) climbing a tree in the *akam* poems can be interpreted as a metaphor for lover’s union. The natural description in a poem of a climbing creeper on a tree, can be thus interpreted as lover’s union. This has an erotic connotation.

¹⁷ V.Sp. Manickam (1962: 207).

tiger'. A young chief who came to hunt in the forest hears the cry and rushes to the spot. Then the girls hide one after the other in shyness. But the eyes of the hero and the heroine meet in silence, and then he goes away (*Aka.* 48, 52). *vēñkai* tree is also a sign of danger and hatred in the animal world. Male elephants see a real tiger in the flowering *vēñkai*, and start to fight against it. In one of the poems we see an elephant whose tusks have gone deep into the stem of a *vēñkai* tree (*Kalittokai: Kuṟiñcikkali* 2).¹⁸

Elephant

The poet Pālai Pāṭiya Peruñkaṭuñkō in one of his characteristic poems paints a realistic picture of a male elephant. The male elephant has fought against a tiger, and thus has red tusks, and they smell of flesh. The tusks sound like a large number of pearls. The powerful elephant breaks the stem of a strong *vēñkai* tree. It embraces with its long and big trunk its female and the calf. The male elephant protects its female and the calf, and feeds them with bunches of golden *vēñkai* flowers hanging from the big branches of the *vēñkai* tree while the honey-bees are still active on these flowers. This is the nature of the forest of the heroine (*Narr.* 202). The duty of a head of the family is the theme of this configuration. The female elephants also care for their males. A male elephant has fallen into a deep spring. In order to alleviate the sadness of this elephant, its female breaks big trees and lays them as steps for the male elephant to climb out of the spring. While the female elephant breaks the trees, the sound from these falling trees echoes on the tall mountains. This is the nature of the mountain of the hero. The configuration tells the hero that even the heroine can help him (*Aka.* 8). Elephants are also roped to the *marutam* tree (*Kuṟu.* 258). Apparently they do not fight against these trees.¹⁹

We have shown two examples of the elements, which play crucial roles in a *kuṟiñci* poem. I shall discuss in detail the role of a *karupporu!* within a configuration.

*Karupporu!*s and their network

Grammars like Tolkāppiyam describe in detail the constituents of an ancient Tamil poem. The broad division in *mutal*, *karu* and *uri* and the items, which belong to these three categories, are salient features of these ancient poems.

¹⁸ A.M. Dubianski (2000- 117): "The harmony of this landscape (*kuṟiñci*) with the love situation follows from their essential unity and their basic mythological affinity." Unity of the elements of *karupporu!* is essential for understanding the inner meaning of an action, which takes place in a landscape. But the mythological background of the simile is far fetched. Dubiansky emphasises this mythological aspect on the basis of the association of certain trees and animals with gods. However, one should not forget that the *akam* poems are also depicting many more trees and animals which are not related in the mythological manner described by Dubianski. It is highly doubtful whether the mythological function of flora and fauna was consciously employed by the poets in their poems. What about jackfruit and banana in the *akam* poems as against the mythological mango?

¹⁹ V.T. Manickam (1982: 37)

However, the practical use of these instruments for the composition of poems is not provided by the grammars. Especially a subject such as configuration belongs to the private domain of a poet. The poets created the networks of animals, birds and plants in a poem. The grammars provided the raw materials. In this context it is important to analyse the frequent configuration of almost same animals, birds, plants and trees in the poems of one author, for example Kapilar.

Explicit function of *Karupporu!* in configuration

Kapilar himself, through the maid, points out the function of animal behaviour in the poem *Aka. 2*. The maid points out that it may not be difficult for the *talaivan*, the hero, to achieve the pleasure which he desires, while the animals of his mountain quite unexpectedly achieve the pleasure about which they have not even thought of. The animals are used here as a point of comparison. Kapilar himself in this poem describes the role of nature in the construction of a poem, and above all the implicit meaning or message it carries with it. The message is not brought out by a single member of nature; on the contrary it is brought out through the interplay of members or in other words through the configuration of natural elements.

***Karupporu!* and their use**

The elements of nature or *karupporu!* are used in the Caṅkam poems as sources of decoration and in configurations where they are also sources of imbedded meaning. The landscape is described with the help of the flora and fauna, which are characteristic of specific regions such as mountain, forest, agricultural area, coast and desert. The beauty of the poems lies in intertwining the description of nature with a message. The aim of the poet is the description of human behaviour in the context of love in its varied phases of development. The subtleties of human behaviour are described through a similarity with animal behaviour.

Three examples for the use of *Karupporu!* in a poem

Narriṇai 65: The heroine is waiting for the hero. A neighbour told her that her lord would soon come back. Then the heroine wished "Let our neighbour get *amirta*." Though this is the message of the poem, 80% of the text is devoted to the description of the land of the hero. The land has a river that passes through a forest. When it flows small water plants oscillate. An elephant that fought with a tiger ran into the water. But the hunters who wanted the tusk of this elephant aimed their arrows at it. The elephant started roaring like a thunder.

This picturesque description of the land of the hero is not just for decorating this poem. It has, as in many other poems, a deeper meaning. The tiger reflects the diseases of separation. The hunters are the gossiping ladies from the neighbourhood, who spread scandals. The roaring elephant represents

the haunted heroine who is afflicted by the penetrating scandals of the neighbours.

Narriṇai 359 uses another configuration of animal and plant to say more about the mental state of the heroine. The love before marriage, though accepted, never gets the approval of the parents. A certain degree of organised covering up takes place. Under such circumstances any visible evidence of relationship is fatal for the relationship. Wearing a strange dress, presented by the lover, will certainly attract the attention of the parents. The question is whether to wear it to please the lover or whether to wear it to invite the suspicion and rage of the parents. Kapilar does not describe her mental agony; instead he paints a beautiful verbal picture of a natural phenomenon. In *Narriṇai* 359 by Kapilar the heroine hesitates to wear a dress presented to her by the hero. If she returns it, it would offend him, and if she wears it, then her mother would scold her. Meanwhile the dress remains idle. Kapilar describes the country of the hero. A cow that went for grazing comes back with its colour changed because the pollen from the *kāntaḷ* flowers has covered its body. Its confused calf doubts whether the cow is its own mother. The hero belongs to the country of this calf. The confused calf portrays the agony of the heroine when she received the dress from the hero.

Our third example comes from *Kalittokai* (*Kuriṇcikkali* 4, line 15). The picture is a mingling of animal behaviour and societal ethics. If the animals can follow the ethical rules of our society, will it be difficult for us to follow them? This rhetorical question is imbedded in this poem. The unnaturalness in nature solves the dilemma of the hero. On the mountains of the hero a male monkey maintaining clandestine love, after learning the importance of marriage abandoned its old practice and went to the family of the female monkey for negotiating the marriage. The description of the animal behaviour in the land of the hero may encourage the hero to negotiate his own marriage. The girl friend of the heroine who mentions this resemblance facilitates the marriage.

In the examples mentioned above we have seen different animals employed in different situations. However, we have to realize that the number of animals, trees and plants, which are characteristics of a particular area, is limited. This may be a self-imposed limitation of the poet in the sense that he is fond of using only particular animals in his poems. From this point of view it may be interesting to investigate whether Kapilar repeats the same combination of animals with varying activities, circumstances and emotions in different poems.

One such combination which occurs frequently is that of elephant + tiger / (option) the tree *vēṅkai*. In *Narriṇai* 217 we see the picture of a disgruntled elephant which wanted to attack a tiger but was unable to do so because the frightened tiger was running away from it. However, the elephant consoles itself by breaking a *vēṅkai* tree that looks like a tiger. The inner meaning of this symbolic nature is the anger and frustration of the heroine. She wants to despise her competitor who was recently visited by her lover. However, she is unable to do this because the other lady is physically far away from her. Instead she scolds her own lover.

The same configuration of *karupporuḷ* is also found in *Kuṟiṅcikkali* 2. Again we witness an elephant fighting against a *vēṅkai* tree thinking that it is a tiger. Its tusk penetrated deep into the *vēṅkai* tree. Unable to pull it out the elephant starts roaring. The inner meaning of this poem and the psychological condition of the heroine are different from the one that I have discussed above: an elephant unable to break a *vēṅkai* tree and also unable to pull its tusk out of the same tree. An indecisive hero on the one hand wants to fight against the clandestine lover's meeting, and on the other hand he is unable to arrange his own marriage.

In *Kuṟiṅcikkali* 13 once again the poet uses the same configuration of *karupporuḷ* while portraying the picturesque description of the land of the hero. Here an elephant sleeps after a successful fight against a tiger. The elephant dreams this recent success and sees the same tiger in its dream. Half awake it starts fighting against a *vēṅkai* tree imagining that it is the real tiger and destroys its beauty. When it realises its mistake, its big head goes down in shame. The inner meaning is different from the two cases mentioned above. The heroine fought with her lover because of the increasing scandal about their secret meetings. When the hero returned to his place, she has none other than her own girl-friend to fight with. Later she realised that her girl-friend was innocent.

What is configuration?

We have seen a list of natural elements or *karupporuḷs* (flora and fauna) specific to the region: mountain. Each element has its own qualities like the elements depicted on a chemical periodic table. However, putting these elements together with one or more other elements produces compounds with other qualities, where the other quality may be entirely different from the qualities of the constituting elements, or it may be dominated by the quality of one or more of the constituents. The mere presence of the elements belonging to a landscape leads in the majority of cases to the determination of the *tiṇai* or poetic landscape of the poem. But a combination of the natural elements or a configuration of a certain number of natural elements with their dominant qualities leads to a new compound with a different quality, which is different from the qualities of the constituting natural elements. Each configuration of elements in varying combinations leads to an effect in the Caṅkam poems. Ingenious poets like Kapilar abundantly make use of this technique. At times even when they use the same combination of elements in different poems, the ultimate configuration changes depending upon the highlighting of one of the qualities such as colour, smell, sound, motion and action of the constituent elements.²⁰ Combination alone is not configuration. Configuration is the technique of putting together and deploying natural elements of flora and fauna in a poem in varying combinations with varying emphasis on the specific

²⁰ See M. Varadarajan (1957: 110) and also A.K. Ramanujan (1985: 247).

quality of one or more natural elements of flora and fauna in order to produce an effect.²¹

Functions of the configuration of flora and fauna may be classified as, to present:

- **the decorative elements of a specific landscape:** The explicit presence of one or more elements may be for the sake of identifying the landscape. In such cases it has a decorative function.
- **an explicit role model** (e.g. the animals of your mountain enjoy; why not you, my dear?)
- **an implicit role model with an imbedded message** (e.g. My dear! You belong to a hilly region where a male elephant after killing a tiger puts his long and big trunk around his female and its calf to embrace them.)

Some of the animal models are unrealistic and look as if superimposed.²² Here is an example for an animal model that is in fact a human model, and thus superimposed on the animals.²³

Kalittokai, Kuṛiñcikkali 4: The mountain of the hero has monkeys. A stupid male monkey, which was engaged in secret meetings with a female monkey, goes to the relatives of the female monkey and asks their permission to marry the soft-fingered female monkey. This is the nature of his mountain. Configuration teaches the hero that he should not be as stupid as the male monkey of his region. Even this stupid monkey has now learnt the procedures of marriage

Methodology

Methodology²⁴ for the analysis of Configuration: Instruments for the analysis of configuration are provided by the following themes present in a poem:

1. Description of the hero's land.

²¹ M. Varadarajan (1958: 108-109) narrates a configuration found in the following poem of Paranaṅṅa, *Aka. 178*: "The picture of a wild pig is a complete one and it includes the description of its daily life in the mountains. It drinks water of a rocky pool, eats the *cēmpu* roots, comes down on a rock that appears like a sleeping she-elephant, treads on brushing on its way the bunches of the and has its back besmeared with their pollen so as to look like a touchstone with dust of gold, eats the *tiṅai* ears and sleeps there in a happy mood."

²² A.M. Dubianski (2000: 112): "It would be natural to assume that the mytho-poetic frame of mind which borrows images from the surrounding landscape to model human characters and human behaviour is prepared for a reverse procedure: to interpret natural phenomena as projections of human relationships." Dubianski's theory may be applicable to a limited number of poems belonging to the *tiṅai kuṛiñci*. Sometimes natural phenomena are taken as a model for human relationship, cf. the story of a *kaṭuvan* in *Narṅṅa. 2*.

²³ A.M. Dubianski (2000: 105) refers to (Zvelebil 1977a: 233) a divine model for human behaviour in the story of Valli and Murukan.

²⁴ K. Kailasapathy (1968: 208) provides a good example for the methodology one can follow while analysing a caṅkam poem. He takes a poem from *Puṛaṅṅānūṛu* and splits it into the following nine traditional themes: 1. The extent of the king's domain. 2. Toṅṅi and its description. 3. Some aspects of the king's benign rule. 4. References to his illustrious ancestors. 5. The simile of an elephant escaping from a pit-trap. 6. The reaction of the king's foes. 7. Description of forts. 8. Description of the king's troops, elephant, etc. 9. His boundless munificence. A.K. Ramanujan (1985: 247) analyses the comparisons in terms of shape, colour, action and result.

2. The fauna of his land.
3. The flora of his land.
4. Activities of flora and fauna.
5. The sounds emulating from flora and fauna.
6. The colours emulating from flora and fauna.
7. The shapes emulating from the flora and fauna.
8. The activities.
9. The psychological condition of flora, fauna and human beings.
10. Description of landscape is ornamental.
11. Description of landscape is functional.
12. Natural Role model (Animal model as an example for human beings.).
13. Reversed Role Model (Animals following the ethical code of conduct of human beings.).
14. Literal and figurative aspects of comparison.
15. Configurative aspects.

Elements of Configuration: Colour

Two important elements of configuration are colour and sound. Both of them contribute significantly to the formation of imbedded meaning. There are quite a few examples where colour plays an important role in the poems of different poets. Animals assume a different appearance when they are besmeared with the pollen of flowers. Sometimes they are unrecognisable for their immediate neighbourhood. In *Narriṇai* 359 of Kapilar the heroine hesitates to wear a dress presented to her by the hero. If she returns it, it would offend him, and if she wears it, then her mother would scold her. Meanwhile the dress remains idle. Kapilar describes the perils of the heroine through a description of the landscape of the hero. A cow that went for grazing comes back with its colour changed because the pollen from the *kāntaḷ* flowers has covered its body. Its confused calf doubts whether the cow is its own mother. The hero belongs to the country of this calf. The confused calf portrays the agony of the heroine when she received the dress from the hero. A peacock dancing under a *vēṅkai* tree appears as if it is decorated with the golden pollen shed by the blossoms of the *vēṅkai* trees (Peri Cattanar, Aka. 242). The back of a wild pig besmeared with the pollen of the *kūtālam* flowers looks like a touchstone with the dust of gold on it (Paranar, Aka. 178). A blossomed *vēṅkai* tree resembles a tiger with its dots and stripes. Elephants attack it (Kali. 38) or run away from it (Aka.12) because it looks like a tiger. *Narriṇai* 389 describes the blossoming as if the *vēṅkai* tree has given birth to tigers.²⁵

Sound²⁶

Patirruppattu 41 describes the anger of an elephant that hears the blended notes of the musical instruments of the musicians, and mistakes them for the roar of a tiger. It becomes angry and attacks a blossomed *vēṅkai* tree. It tears one of its

²⁵ See M. Varadarajan (1958: 266).

branches off, and wears it on its head, and makes a roar that echoes on the mountain rocks.

Akanāñūru 4 illustrates the symbolic suppression of sound. The great hero, who promised to return before the rainy season, ties the tongue of his chariot's bell not to frighten the pairing bees.²⁷ The sound as well the gossip form an impending danger to the loving couples.

Narriṇai 4 is another example for the sound produced by nature and the sound produced by human beings. Both of them are unpleasant to hear. The sound produced by the rolling wheels of the carts loaded heavily with white salt, frightens the cranes standing in the paddy fields. The wheels roll on the sand near the sea, and the frightened crane is standing in the paddy field. The sound arising from the coast frightens the bird in the interior agricultural land. The configuration retells the effects of human gossip.²⁸

The Corpus

The study of configuration in the *kuṛiñci* poems of Kapilar is based on the following corpus. The *puram* poems of Kapilar are, for obvious reasons, not included in this list.

1. *Narriṇai* 16 poems²⁹
2. *Kuruntokai* 28 poems³⁰
3. *Kalittokai: Kuṛiñcikkali* (29 poems)
4. *Aiñkurunūru* 100 poems
5. *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu*, entire text
6. *Akanāñūru* 17 poems³¹

A poet's talent lies in using these so-called characteristic *karupporu!* or the sources, which are predominantly present in each landscape in such a way that they can function as natural background as well as carriers of suggestive meaning. Before I go further, I shall put before you a few concrete cases where Kapilar uses these sources.

The concept of 'configuration' may be explained through the following two poems of Kapilar attributed to the *Kuṛiñcikkali* in *Kalittokai*: 5 and 7.

²⁶ For a decorative function of sound, see *Malaipaṭukaṭām* 294-348, where the sounds belonging to a hilly area are described.

²⁷ *Aka. 4: pūta poṅkart tuṇaiyoṭu vatinta, tātu uṇ paṇavai pētural añci, maṇi nā ārtta māṇ viṇait tēraṇ*

²⁸ *Narr. 4: umaṇar, veṇ kal uppiṇ koḷḷai cārrik, kaṇa nirai kiḷarkkum neṭu neṇic cakaṭam, maṇal maṭuttu uraṇum ocai kaḷanik, karum kāl veṇ kuruku verūum, irum kaḷic cērppiṇ tam uraiviṇ ūrkkē (koṇṭum celvar kol tōli!).*

²⁹ Poems 1, 13, 32, 65, 77, 217, 222, 225, 253, 309, 336, 353, 359, 368, 373 & 376.

³⁰ Poems 13, 18, 25, 38, 42, 87, 95, 100, 106, 115, 121, 142, 153, 187, 198, 208, 225, 241, 249, 259, 264, 288, 291, 312, 355, 357, 361 & 385.

³¹ Poems 2, 12, 18, 42, 82, 118, 128, 158, 182, 218, 238, 248, 278, 292, 318, 332 & 382.

Kuriñcikkali 5

This poem contains a number of elements belonging to folklore. However, the present study is limited to the elements of configuration. The folk song is sung while pounding bamboo paddy in a rocky mortar with the tusk of an elephant as pestle. The pounded rice is separated from the chaff by using the leaf of *cēmpu* as winnowing fan. The black clouds surround the place accompanied by thunder and lightening. It is a dark midnight. In the light of the alternating lightening the male elephant comes to the dry land along with its female looking for food. The hunter hears the noise of the footsteps of the elephants. He climbs upon a breadfruit tree and takes his position in the watchtower. From here he pelts a stone from a speedy sling. The stone hits the glittering flowers of a *vēñkai* tree standing on the rocks. The flowers are now strewn everywhere. After hitting the flowers, the stone hits and causes the ripe soft breadfruit fall, and then it pierces through the beehives. From the beehives it speeds through a bunch of young mangoes, and then tears the fat leaf of a plantain tree from which a bunch of plantain is hanging. At the end it reaches a jackfruit and remains in it. There is a configuration such small mountains, which in their turn form a big mountain. The hero is the man of this big mountain. A river gushes out of his mountain. Rain falls here without fail. The heroine is full of hope that the hero will not cheat her. The maid is sure that her father will give her away to the hero under the shade of the *vēñkai* tree.

The configuration of elements and its symbolic inner meaning are the most important essentials of the *akam* poems. We have seen a number of elements belonging to the *kuriñci* landscape such as bamboo, rice, tusk, rocky mortar, *cēmpu* leaf as winnowing fan, male and female elephants, hunter, sling and stone, *vēñkai* flower, breadfruit tree, beehives, mangoes, plantain, jackfruit tree, river, rain and marriage under a *vēñkai* tree. Though the stone was aimed at the wild elephants, it never hits them; instead it destroys many other objects on its way. This is also the doubt of the maid and the heroine: whether the hero would ever come forward for a marriage. Each element plays its own role in the configuration. The total effect is the chemistry of the configuration, and no longer the separate effect of the individual element. Missing the target is the effect of this configuration.

Kuriñcikkali 7

Another example for configuration is *Kuriñcikkali 7*. The white mountain-paddy is pounded in a rocky mortar with the pestles made of a tusk of an elephant, that has killed a tiger, and a sandal tree swarmed by the humming bees sucking the honey from its flowers. The mountain on which this takes place is also covered with beautiful black clouds. The hero is the man of this mountain. On this mountain the young ones of the deer are frightened at the sight of black monkeys, and run away to the nearby mountain. The spathe of the bamboos, which resembles the ears of deer, falls on the mountain slope. On the mountain are also seen the male elephants with beautiful tusks that are eating the leaves of *valaku* together with their females and walking like mobile mountains. On

the mountain slope are also standing the plantain trees with the curved plantains that resemble the feet of a tiger.

As in the case of poem 5 described above, a number of elements of *kuṛiñci* is involved in this poem: mountain-paddy, rocky mortar, tusk, sandal tree, humming bees, black clouds, deer with young ones, black monkeys, young bamboo branches, male and female elephants, plantain trees and tigers. Even if the god of death appears, he will not run away from the dear ones. This is the message of the poem. The young ones of the deer are frightened at the sight of the black monkey. The bamboos come out with new branches. The male elephants are eating *vaḷaku* together with their females. The plantain tree of his mountain did not fail. The hero too will not fail. The configuration reflects this message.

Configurations

In the following pages I shall discuss a number of configurations in relation to the effects produced by them.

Symphony as a result of configuration

A configuration, as we have seen, is employed to bring out a specific effect. One such effect is symphony. The participants who produce the symphony are the elements of nature or animals. I shall discuss below two such instances, which illustrate a configuration leading to symphony.

Symphony of nature and animal: *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 186-199.

Symphony of nature and animal: It deals with the hilly land of the man. The ripe pepper falls on the rock. A long mountain spring flows on the rock. The ripe mangoes fall into the water of this spring. The bees scatter honey in the water. The ripe jackfruit tasting like honey also falls into this water. As a result of the mixing of the fruits and honey fermented toddy is produced. A peacock drinks it thinking that it is water. The peacock walks with crossed legs and stumbles down like a tired dancing girl dancing in the open square, where the local festival is celebrated, on a rope in tune to the music produced by the music instruments. This is the nature of the mountain slope of the man.

In this configuration of rock, pepper, mountain spring, mangoes, honey, jackfruit, fermented toddy, peacock and a mountain slope join together to produce the effect: confusion. The hero embraces the heroine tightly. On the one hand there is joy and on the other hand there is confusion. The joy is the culmination of many activities, which preceded it. The fermented toddy is the result of the mixing of many natural objects. On the one hand the dancing girl enjoys the music and dances. On the other hand she has become tired. The peacock enjoys the toddy thinking that it is water. The peacock, which is traditionally described as the dancing peacock in *akam* literature, stumbles down. The dancing girl also stumbles down like the peacock. The hero tightly

embraces the heroine. After this instant joy the heroine is confused. What we have seen here is the configuration of nature, animal and human beings.

Symphony of animals/birds, Aiñkuṛunūru 291

The place where the heroine lives is the place where the peacock dances according to the duet of the male and female owls.

Configuration: Male and Female animals

Another configuration, which is prominently present in the poems of Kapilar, is the employment of male and female animals with or without the young ones. Animal behaviour is often a model for human behaviour. The animals involved in such pairing are the following ones: elephant, monkey, tiger, pig, sheep and cow. Male and female bees are also employed to bring out the message of the poem. The presence of such pairs is found, in decreasing order, in *Kurīñcippāṭṭu* (2), *Narriñai* (2), *Akanāñūru* (5), *Kalittokai* (6) and *Aiñkuṛunūru* (14). *Kuruntokai* does not reflect any such pair in the poems of Kapilar. The high frequency in *Aiñkuṛunūru* is due to the fact that a set of ten poems is devoted to pig or monkey.

Male and female elephants

- *Narriñai* 222: Clouds hide a female elephant. The male elephant, which could not see the female, thunders. He is the man of such a long mountain, where it happens.
- *Akanāñūru* 118: The man is told not to come at night to visit the heroine. The hungry tigers are wandering in the dark night to kill animals. The male elephant with the big mouth and large trunk protects the female elephant along with its calf from being caught by the hungry tiger. The man is asked not to travel alone during such a night even though the lady needs his love. The effect of the configuration is protection and love.
- *Akanāñūru* 218: In the night the strong and fast male elephant feeds its group with bamboos and leaves. The heroine refuses to sleep in the night if she cannot embrace the shoulders of the hero. The configuration brings out the theme of care and protection.
- *Akanāñūru* 332: On the one hand the configuration paints a beautiful picture of the land of the man, and on the other hand it brings out the message of care, protection and love. A male elephant breaks the bamboos and consumes them together with its group. When they went to drink water, it sees a tiger hiding near the water and preparing itself to attack them. The male elephant fights with it and kills it with its tusk. It washes the blood on the sharp edges of its tusk in the rain, and walks slowly towards the mountain. It is proud that it has destroyed its enemy. While the bees with six legs are producing music like a lute, it copulates with its female, and then it rests on the mountain slope where plantain grows. The hero is from this land. The sublime impression of the heroine about the hero is also, according to the maid, justifiable and true. He is a man of inseparable love. It is not the presence of the elements of the mountain landscape, but the chemistry of putting them together and producing a new effect, which is the essence of the role of flora and fauna in the *akam* poems. The nature is not empty; but it is symbolic.

- *Aiṅkurunūru* 239: The male elephant, which enjoys while the bees suck its rout, embraces the big rough rock thinking that it is its female elephant. The hero belongs to this hilly region. The hero is away and if he does not return and allows her shoulder to become lean, then the heroine and her maid may not live long. The configuration confirms that the hero can have only a false copulation as long as he is away.
- *Kalittokai, Kuṛiṅcikkali* 4: The beautiful male elephant being concerned at the great desire of its pregnant female breaks and brings the sugarcane with long branches. This is the nature of the mountain of the hero, who never leaves the one who joined him. The configuration heralds again love and care.
- *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 5: In the dark middle of the night and in the light of the intermittent lightening the male elephant came to the dry land accompanied by the female elephant, looking for food. A hunter tries to chase them out with the stone pelted from his speedy sling. The elephant couple forms a part of a natural configuration explained earlier. The behaviour of animals is a message meant for the human beings.
- *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 7: The hilly land of the man has male elephants. A beautiful male elephant with a pair of handsome tusks moves like a mountain eating leaves together with its female. The message of the configuration is companionship.
- *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 17: The tusk of an elephant is compared to the bud of a *kāntaḷ* flower. Though the configuration functions as a point of comparison, its ultimate effect is directly linked to the message meant for the hero. The male elephant is standing on a mountain slope together with its female. While the female is in the neighbourhood, another male appears. The angry male elephant forcefully pierces the dotted forehead of its enemy with its tusks, and subsequently pulls them out. The rising bud of the *kāntaḷ* flower resembles these tusks of the male elephant. This is the nature of the hilly land of the hero. The heroine is daunted by the local gossip. Like the male elephant chasing away its rival, the hero should come back and save the heroine. The implicit message of this configuration is protection as the duty of the male.
- *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 18: A hero smears a solution of sandal on the breasts and body of the heroine with his large hand. This is compared to a male elephant affectionately massaging the body of a female elephant with its trunk. The configuration is directly employed for the purpose of comparison. However, the effect of this configuration is compassion.

A picture that is common to the hilly tract, involves the portrayal of an elephant breaking *vēṅkai* trees, and fighting fiercely against a tiger, and entering the field and damaging the *tiṅai* crop.

Male and female tigers

- *Akanāṅūru* 238: The hilly region of the hero has tigers. In the thick forest a female tiger, which has given birth to cubs, is tired and hungry. The male tiger wanted to give it a young deer as its food. Therefore it set out in the darkness of midnight towards the mountain with caves looking for prey. The big male tiger with a neck that resembles a palm tree and with many stripes on its body attacked and killed a bull with curved horns in the wide forest, while the wild cows with beautiful eyes cry from a distance. The male tiger drags the carcass away in such a manner that the broad rock becomes red. The hero belongs to this hilly region. The configuration leads to the duty of the male tiger and the hero and thus implicitly informs the hero about his duty.

- *Aiṅkurunūru* 246: A male tiger residing in the cave of a mountain, on which the pepper creeper spreads, copulates with a female tiger, which is in fact a fake tiger-like figure with *molucca*-beans as its eyes and thus looking like a real tiger, and put up in the millet field by the hunters who have sown millet. After freeing itself from the sexual disease, it rests in the courtyard. The hero is from this hilly region. In order to free the heroine from the disease inflicted on her by the hero, arrangements are going on for a ritual dance of the *vēlan*. Configuration implicitly points at the egoism of the hero as in the case of the male tiger. Kapilar paints a sexually intoxicated tiger with ambivalent characters.

Male tiger and male elephant are depicted as the protectors of their 'family'. They care for food as well as the protection of the females and the calves. In this context, often a fight between a male elephant and tigers or between a male tiger and the elephants is depicted. *Aka*. 118 and 218 portray a male elephant fighting against a tiger to guard the female and its calf. *Aka*. 238 depicts a male tiger protecting its female and the cubs against an elephant. There are many such poems (*Aka*. 332), which portray a fight between an elephant and a tiger.

Male and female monkeys

Stupidity of the male monkey is the predominant feature of the configurations formulated around a pair of monkeys.

- *Aiṅkurunūru* 274: The stupid male monkey, which is the husband of the female monkey, is frightened at the roaring of the bright strong tiger, and runs to the top of the mountain. The hero is from such a hilly land. The configuration is aimed at the stupidity and irresponsible behaviour of the hero.
- *Aiṅkurunūru* 275: The head of the monkeys — the male monkey with the bright hair — beats the small bubbles, which emerge when rain falls on the wide rock. The hero is from this area. Stupidity of the hero is again the effect of this configuration.
- *Aiṅkurunūru* 276: A male monkey — the lover of a female monkey — eats young leaves sitting on a broad rock, and beats the ever-crowding light clouds with a fragrant creeper. The hero is from this area. The configuration points towards the stupidity of a male monkey.
- *Aiṅkurunūru* 277: In the hilly area of the hero are rocks against which the animals from the courtyard of the kuravars rub their bodies in order to be relieved from the itches. The stupid female monkey also rolls on this rock together with a male monkey. The configuration points to stupidity of the monkeys.
- *Aiṅkurunūru* 279: A female monkey after eating the fragrant wild jasmines of the jasmine creeper spreading on the fig tree, which grows from the rock, rolls on the rock along with its partner. This is the nature of the hilly area of the hero. The maid is afraid of gossips. When the female monkey rolls on the rocks along with its partner, such an open show will become the subject of gossips. The configuration warns that the lovers should not engage themselves openly like the stupid monkeys.
- *Kalittokai*, *Kuṛiṅcikkali* 4: The mountain of the hero has monkeys. A stupid male monkey, which was engaged in secret meetings with a female monkey, goes to the relatives of the female monkey and asks their permission to marry the soft-fingered female monkey. This is the nature of his mountain. The configuration teaches the hero that he should not be as stupid as the male monkey

of his region. Even this stupid monkey has now learnt the procedures of marriage.

Two almost similar images created by Kapilar: it is very interesting to find out that two poems make use of almost the same picture: One is about a *kaṭuwaṅ* who, after drinking alcohol (*tēral*) produced by jackfruit and banana falling in a stream, forgot to climb on a sandal-tree and instead slept underneath on a heap of petal-bed (*Aka. 2, kuṛiñci* poem of Kapilar). If it is so easy for a male monkey to enjoy something, which it had not expected, is it difficult for you to get what you want, O man of the mountain? Almost a similar picture is seen in the following: See *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 187-194: "A peacock drinks the self-fermented toddy in a rocky pool formed of the water mixed with honey and with the pulps of the jackfruit and staggers like a lady dancing on a rope."

Male and female wild pig

- *Narriṇai* 336: A coarse necked boar together with a female pig with skinny breast loot a large number of millet plants. The hunter hides near a river, where the stones rattle, and kills the boar with his bow and arrow. He brings home the boar with the white tusks, and hands it over to his wife with black decorated hair. She cuts the boar and distributes the peaces among the neighbouring families. This is the nature of the hilly region of the hero. Configuration heralds the illegal enjoyment, which is punished. It is a lesson to the hero, who is engaged in the secret meeting with the heroine.
- *Akanāṇṇūru* 248: The poem praises the courage of a boar. After throwing away the hunting dogs, embracing the strong young pigs, blocking the approach of the young hunters, the boar leaves the forest along with its group and the happy female pig, with its hanging testicles. They run away to a beautiful river, and the brave boar waits near a narrow passage looking for the hunter. The hunter goes near the boar and stares at it. He decides not to shoot at the boar with the sharp arrow because it reminds him of his own victorious Lord, who once stood alone and stopped his enemies while his tired but strong army started fleeing. The boar is like the Lord of the hunter, and therefore he did not shoot at it. This is the nature of the hilly area from where the hero comes. The configuration itself is formulated in the form of a comparison, and reminds the hero of the poem of his responsibility to his heroine. Animal nature functions as example for humane nature.

Aiṅkurunūru devoted ten poems (261-270) to the pig.

- Poem 262: A boar that has eaten the small millet stays on the rough rocks together with its female companion. This is the nature of the hilly area of the hero of the poem. Companionship is the effect.
- Poem 264: A boar with tusks resembling the crescent moon copulates with his female, which is black and sweet as a black fruit. This is the nature of the hills of the hero, where water is ever in plenty. Companionship is the effect.
- Poem 265: A boar will look after the tender young ones with lines on their body. The young ones are left behind by a female pig, which is killed by a tiger. This is the nature of the hilly tract of the hero of the poem. Effect of the configuration is responsibility.
- Poem 266: A strong tiger with short fore legs fights against an angry small-eyed boar. This is the nature of the land of the hero of the poem. The configuration refers to an unequal fight.

- Poem 267: An angry small-eyed boar steals mountain-paddy by misleading the hunters with their bows. This is the nature of the hilly tract of the hero of the poem. Configuration suggests the deceitful nature of the hero.
- Poem 268: A boar sleeps on the top of a mountain instead of eating the small millet growing on the fertile hill together with the young ones with lines on their body. The young ones have lost their mother. Configuration refers to the irresponsible nature of the hero of the poem.

Sheep and Ram

- *Aiñkurunūru* 238: Even though the strong ram with long horns does not come to it anymore, the sheep with shining hair shall continue to live out of love. This is the nature of the hill of the hero of the poem. The configuration points to an unfaithful hero and a patient heroine.

Cow and bull

- *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* 133-142: A bull that has driven away other bulls is proud of itself. The hero of the poem visits the heroine like the bull that has seen new cows belonging to other areas. The configuration shows the infidelity of the hero.

Male and female bees

- *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* 142-152: The hero of the poem breaks a branch full of blossoms that have just opened, and on which are sitting the male bees looking for a union with the lovable female bees, which hum like the music from a lute. He throws the branch and waits for a reply from the heroine. The configuration is meant for the projection of the feeling of love.

Elements of Combinations

An analysis of the regional elements depicted in the poems of Kapilar results in the following combinations leading to different configurations:

- tiger + elephant + bamboo/ jackfruit tree / sandal tree / *vēñkai* tree
- tiger + elephant + jackfruit tree
- tiger + elephant + sandal tree
- peacock + parrot + *vēñkai* tree
- elephant + parrot + millet
- monkey + peacock + jackfruit/plantain/sandal/bamboo
- fish + crane bird
- male and female elephants, monkey, pig, tiger and bee.

Themes

One of the dominant themes in the poetry of love is the pair “hatred and fight”. In the descriptions of the configurations surrounding the male and female animals this theme is predominantly present. Even an element that resembles the enemy is shattered. *Vēñkai* tree is the best example of this confrontation. *Kuriñci* is the name of a flower, flowering in the hilly region and symbolising

the clandestine love. Clandestine love suggests confrontation with the surroundings, and thus the situation leads to hatred and fight. The frequent depiction of an elephant fighting against a tiger or against a tiger-like *vēṅkai* tree goes parallel with the theme of *kuṛiñci*. The flora and fauna, which form the make-up and configuration of a poem, play their role in telling the story of “hatred and fight” apart from decorating the concerned region or stage of action. In most of the poems the *talaivaṅ* or hero demands a major share of the description of nature through the configurations.

Uḷḷurai*, simile, metaphor, metonymy, inset and *iraicci

Discussions concerning the use of nature in the classical *akam* poems revolved around the following six terms: *uḷḷurai* or inset or hidden meaning, *uvamam* or simile, *uḷḷurai uvamam* or simile through indirect suggestion³², *uruvakam* or metaphor and *ākupeyar* or metonymy. The sixth term is *iraicci* or distilled information. Flora and fauna determine the life of these terms because they play a crucial role in the explication of these terms. Since flora and fauna are employed in the description of the place to which a hero or heroine belongs to, this natural description gets an extra meaning when it is related to the suggested human activity in a poem. The most important aspect of the natural description is its suggestiveness. Suggestiveness can be transposed, and this transposition can lead to an implicit comparison. For example, a man of the hilly area can also achieve what a monkey of the same region achieves without many efforts. In the case of a simile an explicit word of comparison such as ‘like’ will be used. The natural description of the landscape of the hero is not related to the hero himself through such a term of comparison. Thus in the strict sense of the term, we are not dealing with a simile in the classical *akam* poems. We are also not dealing with a metaphor because the elements of nature do not

³² G.L. Hart (1975) and S. Lienhard (see bibliography) discussed the parallelism between the *akam* poems and the poems in the *Sattasāi*, written in Prakrit and anthologised by Hala. Imagery and suggestion are the two important topics, which make a link between the *akam* poems and the poems of this collection. Nature plays an important role in both of them. The shorter poems belonging to the *Caṅkam* collection *Kuṟuntokai* may stand a comparison. However, it should be said that the longer poems in the collections like *Akanānuṟu* couldn’t be compared with the poems in the *Sattasāi*. They differ very much in the composition and especially in the technique of configuration. There is no internal evidence in these poems to prove that these poems were composed to appease sophisticated city dwellers. I have shown above a number of combinations of the natural elements. These combinations are absent in the *Sattasāi*. As far as the configurations are concerned, there is an enormous difference between the *akam* poems and the *Sattasāi*. Nature, imagery and suggestion are three important aspects of Indian classical literature. Mere use of them does not say much about the indebtedness of one language to the other. A critical study of the publications of Hart, Lienhard and H. Tieken (2001) is under preparation. Tieken’s (2001: 50-51) contention that the “poor and foolish” villagers depicted in the *akam* poems could not have composed these poems because: “The poems contain often highly subtle and intricate coded messages and all kinds of hidden paradoxes. However, the speakers in the poems themselves are throughout presented as too naïve to solve these messages and paradoxes, let alone to “create” them.” This contention misses a proper understanding of the village culture of the Tamils. Many of the villagers talk in riddles. Riddles are very popular, and there is also a considerable amount of Tamil literature dealing with riddles. Understanding and solving the riddles are part of the spoken language of the Tamils. No one is better than a Tamil villager in decoding a coded message.

eclipse the human beings. For example, the hero is not called as the monkey-man. We are also not dealing with metonymy because the hero is not addressed as monkey, unlike a king being addressed as the crown. We are left with the following three terms: *uḷḷurai*, *uḷḷurai uvamam* and *iraicci*.

Uḷḷurai is a poetic convention, as we have seen above, which is closely related to the flora and fauna of a landscape. *Uḷḷurai* is an important device linked to the configuration of flora and fauna. *Uḷḷurai* looks like a coded message. *Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷatikāram*, sutra 49 talks about *uḷḷurai uvamam* and the other (*ēṇai*) *uvamam*. Sūtra 50 describes the basis on which an *uḷḷurai* is built. It can be built on the basis of every element except god. *Tolkāppiyam* emphasises the fact that an *uḷḷurai uvamam* speaks out implicitly, and the implied meaning is derived in such a way that it agrees with what is said about the elements of nature except god. *Tolkāppiyam* does not mention further anything about the *uḷḷurai uvamam* when he devotes a complete chapter ‘*uvamaviyal*’ for the discussion of *uvamam* ‘simile’. However, in one of the *sūtras* (*sūtra* 278) in this chapter he gives instructions for handling an *uvamam*, which is not explicit. In such cases one has to juxtapose the meaning, and derive the implicit meaning. There are some contradictions in the *sūtras* because there should be an explicit word of comparison if it is an *uvamam*, and *Tolkāppiyam* supplements it with a list of words of comparison (*Poruḷ. sūtra* 282). In the light of the absence of a word of comparison, one can exclude *uḷḷurai* from the list of *uvamam*. The implied simile reflects the joy or the sorrow in the mind of the character, who speaks the *uḷḷurai*.³³ The dilemma is explicit! *Tolkāppiyam* considers it, on the one hand, as an *uvamam* and on the other hand it is an *uḷḷurai* because of the implicit nature of the so-called comparison. The truth is that there is no comparison. Rather it is an advice or a message meant for the hero of the poem. The hero is not like a male monkey or a tiger or an elephant; but he should try to achieve what they achieve so easily. There is only an imbedded message or advice. This advice or message is given by pointing at the elements of nature. Therefore I shall consider it as *uḷḷurai* or as implied meaning, and will not bring it out as an *uvamam* in the literary sense of this term. Shameful as well as joyful deeds are often wrapped up with a colourful *uḷḷurai*. Participation of the readers or hearers is of great importance in encoding these inner meanings. It is employed very often to say in a civilised way the things that are, in fact, uncivilised.

Ramanujan calls *uḷḷurai uvamam* an inset, which deals with implicit comparison.³⁴ According to him an inset is a correlation of the landscapes and their contents (*karu*) to the human scene (*uri*). In other words the description of the landscape should comply with the theme (*uri*) of the landscape, such as meeting, patient waiting, infidelity, sorrow of separation and separation. An inset integrates the different elements of the poem and shapes its message.³⁵ An

³³ *inīṭuruḷ kiḷaviyumuḷ tuṇiyuruḷ kiḷaviyumuḷ uvama maruṅkil tōṇṇum eṇpa* (*Poruḷ. 301* or *Tol. 1249*)

³⁴ A.K. Ramanujan (1985: 246-247).

³⁵ A.M. Dubianski (2000- 180): Dubianski discusses the question of how the merging of the situational element with the landscape element took place in reality. “...in the mythological mind of the early Tamil, love situations were tightly interwoven with certain processes in Nature.” This statement raises a number of questions. What is the mythological mind of the early Tamil? Is it

inset leaves out all explicit words of comparison, such as “like”, “as”. His observation that an inset is essentially a “metonymy” is far-fetched because the relationship is not like the use of “crown” for “king”. According to Ramanujan the signifier and the signified may belong to the same universe and share the same ‘landscape’. But an inset is more than the sharing of the same universe or landscape. The signifier functions as a ‘model’ for the signified. It is not a comparison; but it is often a lesson or advice to the signified or the ‘hero’ of a poem. The concept of ‘inset’ as exemplified by Ramanujan is only a partial description of the process of *uḷḷurai*.

Iṛai is the distilled information of a configuration. For example, see the distilled information in *Narṛ*. 24, where the poet Kaṇakkāyanār describes the path through a desert. The essence of the description is the plentiful availability of the wood-apple. Many wood-apples are lying under the tree unconsumed. People who consume them have them in plenty. This is an indication that the hero has gone to a country where he can earn much in a short time, and return back to the heroine. The distilled information is that the hero will return soon with abundant wealth. The configuration of the elements of nature belonging to the landscape *pālai* brings out information implicitly. It is not a description of the country of the hero, but a description of the path through a desert.

The sixth sense and configuration

While discussing the use and cross-use of the *karupporuḷ* (elements of nature) in figures like metaphor and personification, Ramanujan quotes philosophers, who consider a metaphor as a “category mistake” — one thing mistaken for another.³⁶

A tree with one sense (touch) may mistake an untimely sprinkle for the real monsoon; but a woman should use her other senses and should not make the same mistake. Some poems refer to the unmistaken activity of an animal, while the human beings, especially a hero, err. The implied meaning is meant for the human beings with the sixth sense. A human being with six senses should not err while an animal with a limited number of senses is capable of executing an action. A being (human being) with a higher sense is incapable of undertaking an activity, which is easily undertaken by a being of a lower sense. While a male elephant looks after its female and calf, why a hero neglects his heroine? Ramanujan points out the use of animal, which lack mind — the sixth

interwoven or is the nature used as a simile to say more with fewer words? Not only nature is used for the purpose of simile; but also many other objects such as cities. “The presence of sacred energy in women and Nature and the realisation of this fact has lead to the natural poetry in Tamil”. A wild guess from Dubianski! The female sacred energy is represented by the ritual-like situations, landscape and mythology in the *akam*-poems. This is the view of Dubianski. Landscape is linked to mythology; sacred energy is linked to the heroine; situations are linked to ritual contexts. This is the view of Dubianski. Is it possible to prove this? Dubianski, p. 181: “The main tendency in the course of development of this system is, it seems, the ancient poets striving to broaden the framework of conventional symbols and images, to create unusual pictures, to complicate the imagery, turning it into subtle enigmatic hints.”

³⁶ A.K. Ramanujan (1985: 239).

sense — and plants, which have only one sense, in the figure of speech.³⁷ However, I have also shown above how the Caṅkam poets have imposed human models on the animals. For example, a male monkey visits the parents of a female monkey, and asks them whether he can marry their daughter. We come across a predominant use of animal models, which suggest by “parallels and contrasts” the desired human behaviour. There are no clear textual evidences in the poems of Kapilar to determine whether he was aware of the number of senses possessed by the natural elements of a landscape. However, he has shown time and again the benevolent animal models in the process of building up a configuration.

Comparison with other poets of *Kuṛiñci*

In order to determine whether the configurations formulated by Kapilar are unique, a comparison is made with the poems of three poets who have also sung about *kuṛiñci*. Paraṇar has a number of *kuṛiñci* poems to his credit. Consider the following *Narriṇai* 247 poem of Paraṇar. The *tiṇai* is *kuṛiñci*. The configuration is about an elephant that has killed a tiger. A strong and angry elephant has red tusks after killing a tiger. The soft cloud sprinkles drops of water, and washes the red tusks. The cloud moves on the top of the mountain. The hero is from this hilly area. Compare this poem with the following poem of Kapilar, *Aka.* 332: A male elephant breaks the bamboos and consumes them together with its group. When they go to drink water, it sees a tiger hiding near the water and preparing itself to attack them. The male elephant fights with the tiger and kills it with its tusk. It washes the blood on the sharp edges of its tusk in the rain, and walks slowly towards the mountain. It is proud that it has destroyed its enemy. The configurations are almost similar.

Consider the following (*Akanānūru* 148) poem of Paraṇar: The *tiṇai* is *kuṛiñci*. The male elephant has a strong, curved and beautiful trunk. After killing another animal, its anger has not subsided. It is strong and proud. Bees swell around its rout. It has tusks, which rise above. It breaks the trees on the slopes of the mountain. It pierces a tiger that came its way. The tiger roars. The elephant destroys its bravery. Afterwards it gets into the big millet field and eats the millet. This is the nature of the land of the hero. Descriptions of the millet fields in combination with an animal such as boar, tiger and elephant are also found in the poems of Kapilar described earlier (Cf. *Aiṅkurunūru* 246, 262, 268 and *Narriṇai* 336). The description of a male elephant, its fight against a tree and against a tiger, entering into a millet field and eating the millets together with or without a female and a calf are some of the elements of nature, which are common for many poets, who sing about the hilly regions. This comparison does not deny the differences among the poets. The point is that Kapilar is not alone in faithfully recording the natural phenomenon unfolding in a forest or hilly region. The arrangement of the elements or the configuration of the elements differs from poet to poet. The implicit meaning regulates the

³⁷ A.K. Ramanujan (1985: 240-241).

arrangement. It is necessary to make a complete study of Paraṇar before drawing definite conclusions.

Vaṭamavaṇṇakkaṅ Pēricāttanār

Consider the following Akanānūru 268 poem of Vaṭamavaṇṇakkaṅ Pēricāttanār. The *tiṇai* is *kuṟiṅci*. On the hill a tiger fights against an elephant with dots and lines on its forehead. The ground is littered with blood and flesh. The smell of the beautiful flowers of *vēṅkai* mingles with the smell of wild jasmine, and the combined smell removes the bad odour of flesh and blood. The hero is from this hilly landscape. We have seen in plenty similar images in the poems of Kapilar.

Perum Kuṇrūr Kiḷār

Consider the following Akanānūru 8 poem of Perum Kuṇrūr Kiḷār. The *tiṇai* is *kuṟiṅci*. A male tiger with a big mouth, which has killed a big boar, draws the carcass through the mountain, where the jackfruit trees are in abundance (indirectly meaning that the smell of the carcass is overwhelmed by the sweet smell of the jackfruits.). It is here that the sound of the rubbing bamboos is also heard. In the slope of this mountain, where the trees *valai* and banana rise, is a pit from where water oozes out. A male elephant falls into this pit. In order to remove the sufferings of this male elephant, its female companion breaks trees and lays them as steps. The sound, which arises from the breaking of the trees, echoes from the mountain that touches the sky. The hero is from this hilly landscape. Different scenes of Kapilar are put together in one poem. Jackfruit, banana, pig, tiger and male and female elephants form together the configuration. The effect of the configuration is the spreading of the stinking gossip, and the readiness of the heroine to help the hero out of it.

The comparisons with the other authors of *kuṟiṅci* often point out the same elements of nature, and in some cases the same type of configuration. The fine details of the natural elements as well as the configuration may differ; but the elements as well as the configuration remain the same in the poems of different authors. This makes the identification of the originality of an author difficult. However, a distinctive feature analysis of all the elements and configurations is a method to find out the originality.

Conclusions

The following four points are added here as conclusions:

1. The configuration of *karupporu!* is more important than the individual members. The existence of a particular relationship among the members of *karupporu!* enhances the inner meaning of a poem.
2. Tamil literary theories and the grammatical traditions are more interested in enumerating the members of *karupporu!* belonging to the *tiṇai*'s. However, the interrelationship of these members in a poem is more important than the mere presence of them as an indication of the *tiṇai*. The configuration of the elements is a

reflection of the configuration of human activities. On the one hand the elements belonging to *karupporuḷ* are distinctive features or symbols of a *tiṇai* or landscape, and on the other hand the configuration of them in a poem and in a poetic context gives them life as models of comparison.

3. Poets, confronted primarily with the human behaviour in relation to contexts and persons, use animal behaviour as background. The grammars and literary theories provide the elements, and the poets add the configuration of these elements that draws a parallelism between the animal and human behaviours. Looking at the parallelism, it is logical to ask: Is the animal model based on the human model or is the human model illustrated on the basis of a superimposed animal model? Some of the animal models, as the one in *Aka. 2* where a *kaṭuvan*, the male monkey, unexpectedly enjoys drinking alcohol, are based on the human models. The rhetoric question asked in the poem is: Is it then difficult for a man of this hilly tract to achieve a joy which he really wants and has also aimed at it? Some of the animal models are unrealistic and look as if superimposed. Such a superimposed animal model has been discussed above under the three functions of configuration of flora and fauna and the role models.³⁸
4. A formulisation in terms of elements and configurations may serve to investigate deeply the psychological conditions of the persons involved in the poems. Further an analysis of the stylistic configuration of *karupporuḷ* either in the poems of one author or in the poems of one region will help in solving problems related to authorship and poetic conventions. The human behavioural patterns are related to the patterns of flora and fauna. The poets often treat elaborately the patterns of nature and with a configuration relate it as a model to the human behavioural patterns. The technique of configuration looks as if a poet is laying much emphasis on nature and less on human beings. The contrary is true. Without spending many words on the human behaviour, it is explained elaborately through an animal model. It demands a close and intimate knowledge of flora and fauna. From the study of a biologist like P.L. Sami it is clear that the Caṅkam poets are well aware of this requisite.³⁹

³⁸ K.V. Zvelebil (1977: 233) mentions a divine model for human behaviour in the story of Valli and Murukan. See also A.M. Dubianski (2000: 105).

³⁹ See K. Kailasapathy (1968: 191): "The division of nature and human behavioural patterns set forth in the Tol. and similar works has no doubt been based on the poetry that preceded them. That the poems must have lent themselves to be classified in this manner may be safely presumed." According to Kailasapathy, the classification into *tiṇai*, *tuṇai* etc. came later than the poems themselves.

While concluding, I would like to quote Kailasapathy⁴⁰:

The word-groups — ranging from a part of a line to a sequence of lines — having been ready made for all sorts of occasions, virtually dictate their own combinations. They tell what the minstrel wants to tell, yet they can be used by the minstrel in a number of possible combinations and variations, depending on the different factors that are favourable to such richness of expression, as is the case with matured narratives.

Kailasapathy's observation deals with orality. However, this is also applicable to the concept of configuration. I have shown above the frequency of repetition in different poems belonging to different poets. The configurations employed by Kapilar, and the same words and phrases of Kapilar are also found in the songs of other poets. Resemblance of words and phrases in the songs of two or more poets leads to the question of plagiarism. The individuality of the poet is not detected in the presence of these words or phrases; but it can be detected in the configuration of these elements.

Abbreviations

<i>Aka.</i>	<i>Akanāṅṅūru</i>
<i>Kali.</i>	<i>Kalittokai</i>
<i>Kuru.</i>	<i>Kuruntokai</i>
<i>Narr.</i>	<i>Narriṅṅai</i>
<i>Pari.</i>	<i>Paripāṭal</i>
<i>Poruḷ.</i>	<i>Poruḷatikāram, Tolkāppiyam</i>
<i>Puṇam.</i>	<i>Puṇanānūru</i>
<i>Tol.</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam</i>

⁴⁰ K. Kailasapathy (1968: 138-139).

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