

The Tamil literary background of the Śakuntala Nāṭakam

A.M. Dubyanski

The interaction of the two outstanding Indian literary traditions, namely Sanskrit and Tamil, is without doubt one of the most important and interesting problems, pertaining to the literary process in India. Much has already been done by scholars in this connection, but the problem is still far from having been thoroughly investigated. One of the most interesting and intriguing aspects of the problem is the way in which a given literary tradition borrows texts from the other and adapts them to its own literary and aesthetic norms. In this case the receiving side sometimes discloses such norms, values and artistic principles especially clearly and expressively. That is why it is interesting and gratifying for a Tamil scholar to study methods with which the Tamil tradition interprets Sanskrit works and adjusts them to the system of ideas, images and conventions worked out by it. This paper aims at showing how it is done, taking as an example a Tamil play called *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam*, a version of a well-known story about Śakuntala and the king Dushyanta.¹

It is a known fact that the early Tamil culture was acquainted with the Sanskrit epic poems and the Tamil texts, presenting the tradition of the so-called caṅkam poetry, clearly mention epic heroes (for instance PN 2). It is worth noting that one of the poets who is considered to belong to the caṅkam tradition, was named *Pāratam pāṭiya Peruntēvaṅār*, that is “Peruntēvaṅār who sang *Mahābhārata*”. Unfortunately, nothing particular is known about his activity connected with creating and performing the *Mahābhārata* in Tamil. In medieval times some poets used episodes from the *Mahābhārata* for their kāvya-style compositions (like *Naḷaveṅpā* by Pukaḷēnti) or even tried to retell the whole story (*Pāratam* by Villiputtūrār). Some stories from the *Mahābhārata* were popular in local folk poems and dramas which were performed within the framework of various ritual events, especially connected with the cults of Draupadi and Aravan, the son of Arjuna, and the snake-princess Ulubi (for more detailed information about the *Mahābhārata* in Tamilnadu see [Hiltebeitel 1991; Mahapatra 1993; Venugopal 1993]).

The story of Śakuntala also aroused some interest in the South. There are several translations into Tamil of Kalidasa’s drama (by Maraimalai Adikal, Ra. Raghava Aiyangar and others; see [Perumal 1981, p. 207-208]) and dramatic versions, which appeared in the 19th century — *Cakuntalai Vilācam* by Irāmacantira Kavirāyar and *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam*, which was published from palm-leaves by the Institute of Asian Studies [CN 1994]. It was written by a certain Anantapalppanāpan (that is Ananda Padmanabha), about whom little is

¹ The names of the heroes of the play are given in the text in their Tamil variant: Vicuvamittirar, Cakuntalai, Tuṣṭiyantaṅ, Kaṅṅuvar. I use them in the paper in a more habitual form, which corresponds to Kalidasa’s play. The Tamil play, however, has nothing to do with “Abhijñāna Śakuntala” and is based on the story told by the *Mahābhārata* (I, 63-69).

known, apart from the fact that he was a court poet in Agastisvaram, a village near Kanyakumari, famous for the tradition of the so called bow-songs (*villuppāṭṭu*) [CN, p. VII-VIII]. It's appropriate to note here, that from the point of view of its form this drama belongs to the typical Tamil compositions for which the term *kaṭṭaikkūttu* was coined by the Dutch scholar Hanne de Bruin [Bruin 1999]. Their texts consist of monologues or dialogues in verses, often duplicated with prose fragments, and objective verses which announce the appearance of the heroes on the stage and describe them and their actions. There is also a preliminary part, an etiquette portion of a medieval piece of poetry: invocation to different gods, a panegyric to the author's patron, a self-humiliation before the audience (*avaiyaṭakkam*) and a verse in which the author is asking for the grace of Murugaṅ in order to stage the drama successfully.

Generally speaking the story in *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam* follows the main events of the epic poem. But the presentation and treatment of them by the author differ from the original source considerably. There are episodes that were enlarged, some were omitted and some were added. The drama begins with a scene presenting Vishvamitra and his disciples. The sage describes his supernatural powers and asks Śiva to give him mercy to perform penance (CN, p. 34). His words take a form of a typical *bhakti* hymn, very close to the *nāyaṅār* poetry.

O you, the Truth without beginning and end!
 Today give your favour to the *tapas* of the slave-me.
 O you, who wears *koṅṅrai* and *tumpai* flowers
 With their pollen dripping! You who kicked Yama
 For the sake of Mārkaṅṭaṅ (Markandeya)!
 You who burned Madan, who was against you, to ashes!
 You flayed the angry elephant and wore its hide!
 You come with your spouse Umai; — come
 And give your mercy to my mighty *tapas*,
 O God, you adorn yourself with the garland of snakes,
 O you with stained throat who drank venom for the gods!
 Give me the *tapas* that provides an eminent position,
 The liberation full of your mercy, goodness and glory!

Then Indra's court is presented. Indrani expresses her astonishment at an unexpected wave of heat that attacked the usually pleasantly cool paradise. Indra inquires the celestials about the reason of the heat and learns that it is caused by Vishvamitra's *tapas*. Indra sends one of the apsaras Rambha to destroy Vishvamitra's power. She rejects saying that she is unable to conquer such a great sage. Then another apsaras Menaka is asked to seduce Vishvamitra and she reluctantly consents. In the story told by the *Mahābhārata*, Menaka when going to Vishvamitra's place is accompanied by the wind, Maruta. In the Tamil drama she goes there with her friend Navarattinaṁṁlai. No doubt, the figure of a friend (*tōli*) was introduced in order to adhere to general conventions of the Tamil *akam*-poetry. The dialogue of the two women is also quite in tune with them: it is an exchange of verses in which Menaka, plunged in despair (because she does not know how to fulfill her task) addresses her friend asking

for advice. The friend consoles her and tells her what to do (to use her fragrance as an instrument of seduction).

The meeting of Menaka and Vishvamitra is presented in a very curious light. They literally change sides. Menaka, whose task is to seduce the sage, tries to persuade him not to be seduced by her and keeps repeating that she does not want to do any harm to such a great tapasvin. She says:

Listen, o muni! What is a desire for him who destroys maya
And practice the high tapas? What is the lust for women?
If I unite with you and spoil your tapas will there be any virtue?
O great rishi!
(CN, p. 84)

Vishvamitra, on the contrary, insists on sexual intercourse, extols pleasures of carnal love and actually makes Menaka to give in. I suppose that such an unusual treatment of an apsaras' behavior is connected with the author's disinclination to describe the mother of the heroine as an eager seductress and, more generally, with a typical for the Tamil culture sensitivity towards feminine chastity and modesty. Besides, from the structural point of view this dialogue provides a kind of a forerunner of the subsequent dialogue between Dushyanta and Śakuntala.

Quite in accordance with the story told by the *Mahābhārata* Menaka after giving birth (practically instantly) to Śakuntala leaves her and returns to Indra's court. Birds defend the child-girl until Kanva finds her and brings her to his ashrama. By the way, Kanva's speech which he pronounces on entering the stage shows him as an ardent śaiva-bhakta. He is extolling not only Śiva but also Kantana (Skanda), saying: *caṭāccarattaip* (that is *śatākṣara*, six-lettered mantra. — A.D.) *pūcai paṇṇu kantana taruvāṇ unakkuk katiyeṇru eṇṇu* ("make puja to the six letters and believe that Kantana will give you your fate") [CN, p. 96]. Thus, a general śaiva religious atmosphere which permeates the play, is once more strengthened.

Śakuntala appears before the audience in the 16-th scene as a lovely girl "conquering Rati while walking" (*ratiyaiyum velaveleṇṇa naṭantu*). After Śakuntala appears Kanva sends one of his disciples to the nearest town to bring a girl-friend for her.

The girl came onto the stage like a peafowl — the girl came.
The face of Cavuntiravalli is bright like the full moon—
The girl came!
The locks of the girl are like honey bees
Her words are sugar candy sweet
Golden decorations adorn both her breasts
On her slender creeper-waist the *mēkalai* belt twists —
The girl came.
(CN, p. 106)

This is a standard portrait of a heroine in Indian poetry. Later Śakuntala is described and much in the same manner, only in more details, like, for instance, in the 22nd scene:

The girl Cakuntalai praised by the world
 Came before her father Kaṅṅuvar.
 Her breasts are hot and full, like jugs,
 Creeper waist and thighs that are plantain stems,
 Bracelets on her beautiful arms are chiming softly,
 Anklets on her feet are jingling melodiously,
 Fish-like dark eyes piercing like lances
 Voice is like a mixture of milk, honey and ghee.
 The girl Cakuntalai praised by the world
 Came before her father Kaṅṅuvar!
 (CN, p. 138)

In the subsequent lines of this spacious description some other details are given: her eyes surpass carp-fishes, her hair tresses scatter black clouds, her cuckoo's voice tunes her speech, her walk gathers elephant's gait, her grace seeks peacock's grace, her breasts defy horns, her face is envied by the moon. She has a creeper waist, plantain thighs, she wears jingling anklets, flowers in her hair and bees are buzzing around her.

As was stated above such is a conventional description of a young woman in Indian poetry. However, there are some details that can be considered especially typical for the Tamil *akam* poetry. The eyes of a girl are sometimes thought of as dangerous and are compared to arrows (*pakaliyaṅṅa ceyari maḷaiḱkaṅ* — NT 13, 4) or to spears (*vaṭivēl ekkiṅ civanta uṅkaṅ* — PN 350, 9) [Dubianski 2000, p. 98-99]. Śakuntala's eyes are also like lances (*vēlatu pōl vīli* — p. 138). A girl in Tamil poetry is often compared to a peacock by her gait and the color of her body [Dubianski 2000, p. 90]. "She is weary like a peacock" (*mayiliṅ olkuvanaḷ* — AN 158,5), "your hair with inserted flowers is like a neck of a peacock resembling a sapphire" (*maṇipurai eruttiṅ maṅṅai pōla niṅ vīpey kūntal* — NT 264, 4-5). Śakuntala (like Cavuntiravalli earlier) is also associated with peacocks: "peacocks entranced by her form followed dancing" [CN, p. 139]. Later Dushyanta many times calls Śakuntala a peafowl, as, for instance, in the episode when he sees her for the first time at a distance:

ārōṅā ṅarīkilanē inta vaṭivi ṅaticayan terikilanē
kāraruṅ cōlaiyil katiravaṅṅaṅ veyilō
kaṅṅiyiḷaṅ kuyilō vaṅṅa pēṭai mayilō
miṅṅalō cantiraṅṅō maṅṅataṅ tēvi viḷaṅkuṅ cuntaran tāṅṅō
miṅṅalē yāṅṅakkāl viḷaṅku mulaimukaṅkaḷ
viṅṅa vitattirukku meṅṅumaṅṅaṅ tikaikka.
 (CN, p. 168)

I do not know who she is. I can't understand the wonder of this image.
 Is it the warm light of the sun in a dark grove?
 A virgin young cuckoo? A peafowl?
 The lightning? The moon? The beauty of Manmadan's spouse?
 If she be lightning, how will the tips of her bright breasts be? —
 My heart is perplexed!
 (CN, p. 168).

The description of a person (mostly a beautiful woman) by means of a selection of identifications (given in a form of questions) is common in Indian literature (the *alaṅkāra* known as *ākṣepasamcaya*), but I think that we can consider this passage as an extended paraphrase of the famous *kuṛaḷ* 1081: *aṅṅaṅku kol āyṅmayil*

kollō kaṇaṅkuḷai/maṭarkōl mālumeṇ neñcē (“A goddess- aṇaṅku, an exquisite peafowl or a female with heavy ear-rings? Perplexed is my heart”). A reminiscence of the Tirukkural can also be noted in the following passage from the description of Śakuntala’s beauty: *pāluney tēṅkalantā leṇum vāymoli* (“voice luscious like milk, honey, ghee admix” [CN, p. 138-139]. It reminds us of the *Kuraḷ* 1121: *pāloṭu tēṅ kalantarrē paṇimoli/vāleyirūṟiya nīr* (“The moisture oozing through white teeth of her submissive speech is like a mixture of milk and honey”).

One more interesting detail of the portrait of a Tamil heroine: her palms and fingers (because they are usually covered with red varnish) resemble the red flower of *kāntaḷ* (*Gloriosa superba*): *kāntaṅ melviral* — KT 167,1 (“soft fingers like *kāntaḷ*”). Śakuntala’s hands are also compared to *kāntaḷ*: *kāntaḷiṅ malareṇa yēṅṅilai kaikaḷ* (p. 138). The flower of *kāntaḷ*, which is like human hand (*karanēr malar* — p. 166) is also mentioned later, in the scene when Dushyanta is entering a beautiful forest where Kanva’s ashrama is situated.

On the whole such a minute description of a heroine is a clear deviation from the *Mahābhārata*, where Śakuntala is scarcely described at all. Deviations are found also in connection with the figure of Dushyanta.

The appearance of Dushyanta on the stage is preceded by a spectacular entrance of the so-called *kaṭṭiyakāraṇ*, a characteristic figure of the Tamil *kaṭṭaikūttu*-theatre, a herald, a panegyrist and a sort of a buffoon. He extols the king and the latter enters in state onto the stage and starts the court (scene 19). He questions the minister about the state of affairs in his kingdom. In the short reports given by the minister a picture of an ideal state emerges: everyone does his duties, taxes are duly collected, services in temples are conducted, brahmins chant the Vedas properly, it rains thrice a month and even cows and tigers live without enmity.

Then dancing girls perform *bhārata-nāṭyam* before the king, shaiva mendicants and other poor and disabled people come. All are given riches, clothes and much food. On the whole the king is presented (quite in tune with Tamil *puṇam* poetry) as a generous sovereign who protects his subjects and looks after their well-being. Actually, the aim of Dushyanta’s hunting expedition is directly connected with these good intentions. In the *Mahābhārata* the king’s hunt is a huge royal ritual, very much alike a military expedition, during which he conquers and submits the wild nature, which results in a massacre of animals. In Kalidasa’s drama the motive of a hunt is not much developed. The hunt seems to be a brilliant royal game which shows Dushyanta’s strength, physical beauty and aesthetic taste. The reason of the hunt in CN is quite different: a group of peasants comes to the Dushyanta’s court and tells him that wild beasts destroy their crops (CN, p. 132). The king lifts taxes from them during three years, gives them gifts and issues an order:

All crops were spoiled by wild animals, they said.
That’s why we have to go to hunt
With various arms. O my minister!
Ask our victorious army to assemble.
(CN, p. 136).

The scene of Dushyanta's hunt, which constitutes the beginning of both the *Mahābhārata's* story and Kalidasa's drama, goes here only under the number 26. The hunt is described very much in the epic spirit and the motive of the massacre of animals is preserved in the Tamil text.

The great king Tuṣṭiyantaṅ
 Arrived in the wood to hunt.
 Spreading the strong net in the eight directions.
 Making traps, burning paths
 King Tuṣṭiyantaṅ arrived.
 Animals on hearing the sounds of bows being bent
 Were trembling with fear.
 Brave boars were massacred, tigers
 Shrank with fear — the great king Tuṣṭiyantaṅ [arrived].
 Fighters on seeing tigers threw lethal spears
 And chased beasts —
 King Tuṣṭiyantaṅ [arrived].
 (CN, p. 156)

Interestingly enough, a small episode with a fleeting deer is also introduced into the scene. It seems to be the only reminiscence of Kalidasa's oeuvre in the Tamil piece.

O minister! Behold the speed of this deer,
 It is running faster than wind and the mind;
 I'll follow this wonderful deer and on shooting it down
 With my own arm I'll return.
 (CN, p. 158).

Dushyanta, while chasing the deer, finds himself in a millet-field (*tiṅai*) (CN, p. 160). This detail is very significant in the light of a coming meeting of Dushyanta and Śakuntala. The author places it in the surroundings of a traditional landscape, which belongs to the *kuṟiṅci* theme (*kuṟiṅci-t-tiṅai*) of the early Tamil poetry. A millet field is a typical Tamil background of the first meeting of lovers and a characteristic feature of this landscape. The author, however, does not make the lovers meet on the field, but goes on adding appropriate details. The king moves to the forest where he sees a small pond (*cunai* — p. 162), trees and flowers, belonging to the *kuṟiṅci* landscape, mango and *kāntaḷ* among them (p. 166). It becomes clear that Kanva's ashrama is situated in the mountain forests. It is worth noting in this connection that a friend of Śakuntala invited by Kanva comes from the town "seeking the *kuṟiṅci* -land" (*kuṟiṅciyatu eṅkēyena nāṭiṭa* — p. 108). So, the intention of the author is absolutely clear — he wants to describe the first meeting of Dushyanta and Śakuntala using conventions of the Tamil *akam* poetry.

Love, without doubt, is the main theme of the Tamil Śakuntala. In this respect it again differs considerably from its epic source. The main issue of Śakuntala's story in the *Mahābhārata* is, certainly, not love (which also dominates Kalidasa's version) but the king's duty to his wife and especially to his son, whom he promised to crown as his heir (incidentally, it was Śakuntala, who put the condition before the king). Generally speaking a problem of the inheritance of the kingship lies in the centre of the epic story. In the Tamil

version this problem is also present but not at all prominent. Dushyanta himself promises Śakuntala to crown their son (p. 192). As to Śakuntala, when surrendering to the king's amorous attack and giving consent to the gandharva marriage, she is worried only by the future faithfulness of Dushyanta and the absence of Kanva, whose consent to her marriage she considers necessary.

The 27th scene which presents the meeting of Dushyanta and Śakuntala is considerable in length and full of expressive dialogues and emotional amorous speeches. The king swears by goddesses of the sky and the earth that he will never leave Śakuntala (p. 198) and promises to send for her right on the next day. Kanva, on returning to the ashrama, blesses Śakuntala and immediately after that she utters a monologue in which the development of the embryo month by month is described. This passage most certainly echoes the famous fragment of *Tiruvācakam* (IV, 15-25) on the same subject.

Kanva invites a midwife, who is described as a comic personage typical for the folk theatre. At the same time she is presented as an expert in her field and in this respect reminds us of a *kuṛatti*, a fortune-teller from *kuṛavañci* plays. As J. Kusio has shown, in many of them *kuṛatti* is a specialist not only in fortune-telling, but also in medicine, herbs and even alchemy [Kusio 2000, p. 194-195]. When the *kuṛatti* introduces herself she always stresses that she never tells lies. The old woman who came to Śakuntala is stating the same (*poyyalla v-enru colli*).

A medical woman came, wisely speaking
 A medical woman came,
 A medical woman came!
 With a big grey head, with rolled hair,
 Coughing like barking — the medical woman.
 “ For pregnant girls. I've a life-giving elixir,
 O my lord, is there a match to me?
 I do not tell lies” — she said. — “Even when a medical woman
 Tells the state of things, barren women do not like it.
 I have many-many remedies
 For delivering a first baby”.
 (CN, p. 230)

The woman tells Śakuntala that her son will rule the whole world (p. 236) and the child is born. Kanva names him Parataṅ (Bharata). He teaches him many skills and sciences including Tamil grammar works, namely *Nannūl*, *Tolkāppiyam*, *Akattiyam* and *Cōliyam* (p. 246). When the boy reaches the age of seven, Kanva decides to send Śakuntala and her son to the court of the king. Beginning from this point the author treats the main conflict of the story along the lines of some basic Tamil mythological concepts. Presenting the subsequent events of Śakuntala's drama, he utilises some structural features of the classical Tamil poem *Cilappatikāram*. The central theme of this poem is feminine chastity to which a sacral status is given, or in other words, the transformation of a human being Kaṇṇaki, a paragon of a chaste and devoted wife, into a typical Dravidian goddess, powerful and wrathful [Dubianski 1994].

For the Tamil author, the most important aspect of the Śakuntala's story is feminine chastity, *kaṛpu*. That is why he constructs the development of the story in a way that very much resembles *Cilappatikāram*. He introduces an episode in

which the travel of Śakuntala together with her son and Kanva's disciple to Hastinapur is described. Such an episode is absent from both the *Mahābhārata* and Kalidasa's play. But the voyage of the heroes occupies a significant place in *Cilappatikāram*, that is the voyage of Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṅ from Pukār to Madurai. I maintain that it is absolutely not necessary from the point of view of the plot of the poem, but it has some important latent meaning. The way through a frightful desert-zone, called *pālai* in Tamil poetical tradition, can be understood as a kind of a trial, corresponding to the middle stage of a "rite of passage" and at the same time as a device, which ensures the accumulating and building up of Kaṇṇaki's inner energy [Dubianski 1994, p. 62-63]. In the end Kaṇṇaki turns into an angry goddess, who unleashes the accumulated energy in the form of fire. She is presented with some demonic features — covered with dust, with dishevelled hair, inspiring fear (XX, *veṅpā*). It is worth remarking, that in folklore versions of Kaṇṇaki's story she is described as an even more gruesome creature with the intestines of people wound around her head. It is said, that she had taken up a form of Kālī [*Kōvalaṅ carittiram* 1977, p. 76].

The author of *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam*, obviously having in mind the story of Kaṇṇaki, also sends his heroine to the desert and makes her suffer together with her son. Her mind is tormented, her face is sweating, her hair is dishevelled, her memory is confused. She encounters a crowd of hungry goblins (*kūḷi*) and in her laments she recalls Siva in his most aggravating images:

What shall I do? What shall I do
 For what the king has done?
 O you who ate the flesh of Palaka
 [a reference to the story of Ciṅṅṅaṅṅar — A.D.],
 You who defeated the sugarcane Manmadan
 A goblin is coming jumping,
 Many demons are shrieking around me,
 Poor me, my breath is perishing,
 What shall I do?
 I am stumbling, hopping and bending,
 Foxes, howling, are girdling me,
 My son is falling — what shall I do?
 As my son whirls and falls! Oh what shall I do?
 Dust is rising as my feet are sinking,
 Palm stems are falling on my shoulders,
 Tears are rolling from my fish-like eyes!
 What shall I do? (CN, p.262)

The goblins are jumping around in anticipation of a feast. Śakuntala in despair addresses Siva and asks him for a protection. Śiva comes and makes the goblins fly away. This episode in general reminds us of a famous Tamil medieval poem *Kaliṅkattupparaṅi* where the goddess Kālī and her retinue, crowds of hungry demons, (*pēy*) are vividly described.

At last Śakuntala reaches the king's palace and, like Kaṇṇaki, addresses a gate-keeper:

vācal kāvalārē kēḷir maṅṅava niṭattil ceṅṅru
rājaṅṅē yuṅṅatu tēvi nalmakaṅṅ taṅṅaiṅ kūṭṭi

*nēcamāy vantā leṅru nirupaṅṅuk kaṅṅikai ceytu
pācamā yīṅku vantū paṅṅuṭa nurai ceṅvīrē*

O sentry! Listen! Go to the king to tell
'O king! Your consort and your son
Have come here with love!
Informing him, return and tell me.
(CN, p. 284).

Kaṅṅaki says (XX, 24-29):

*vāyilōyē vāyilōyē
arīvu arāipōkiya porī aru nēncattu
īraimūrai pīlittōṅ vāyilōyē
īnai ariccilampū oṅṅru ēṅṅiya kaiya!
kaṅṅavanai ilattā! kaṅṅai akattal eṅṅru
arīvippāyē arīvippāyē*

O sentry! O sentry!
O sentry of him who has deviated from royal ways
In his senseless heart that has left the wisdom!
'She who is holding one of a pair of anklets,
Who has lost her husband, is at the door' — thus
Inform, inform [him]!

There is no doubt that these passages represent one and the same pattern but emotional attitudes in them are quite different. Kaṅṅaki came to the palace in an angry and aggressive state and began to accuse the king right away. When the gate-keeper informs the king about Kaṅṅaki's coming, he exclaims: "She is not Korṅṅavai with the victorious spear, nor she is a young sister of the six (that is Arundhati, one of the wives of the Seven rishis. — A.D.), nor Aṅṅaṅku, who saw the Lord (Śiva) dance, nor Kāṅṅi appropriate to the forest where Cūr dwells, nor the woman who tore the chest of *asura* Taruka" [XX, 36-40]. By saying these words the gate-keeper meant, that by appearance Kaṅṅaki is very much like them. Śakuntala, on the contrary, came peacefully, with love and affection. So, the guard informs Dushyanta, that a woman like Laksmi and a boy like Kama have come (p. 286). It is obvious that the author, while using the scheme worked out in *Cilappatikāram*, tried to evade its final implications and laid stress on the concept of wifely devotion (Śakuntala herself says that she is a truly chaste wife, p. 336). Nevertheless, when she enters into a heated exchange of words with Dushyanta, she is not at all a weak and obedient person. She is not afraid of throwing harsh expressions in the face of the king. "This king is a *rakshasa*, his minister is a cruel tiger and his reliable troops are like cocks! 'Like sovereign like citizen' is the saying" (p. 303). The king vehemently retorts and their lengthy dialogue resembles more a family quarrel than a serious argument. He calls Śakuntala a slanderer, a prostitute (*vēci* — p. 308), Māricakkāri (alluding to the demon, who had deceived Rāma — p. 319) and Nīli, a heroine of Tamil folk stories, who became a demoness and chased a merchant, accusing him of deserting her and her child (p. 288).

In the *Mahābhārata* Śakuntala pronounces a big monologue, in which she touches upon aspects of marriage and matrimonial relations, the importance of having off-springs, duties of parents, different problems of ethical conduct and

so on. To prove her stand convincing she appeals to mythological precedents, treatises, authorities, habits and her speech is in itself a sort of a treatise. In one place she reminds Dushyanta that she is superior to him by birth, alluding to her origin from an apsaras [I, 69, 1-14]. The Tamil heroine never mentions either her origin, or supernatural powers of her parents. And she does not intend to teach the king. In a couple of places she allows herself didactic notes, but on the whole she appeals to Dushyanta as a lover and wants only one thing from him, — that he, adhering to the oath he had made, should recognize her as his wife. She is quite distressed by the falsehood of the situation and by Dushyanta's behavior in particular.

In the end Śakuntala in despair addresses Śiva, but rather unexpectedly Indra and Indrani appear on the scene. Indrani asks Indra to remove the distress of Śakuntala: "Listen, pure one, the king of this world has committed injustice, and the chastity (*karpu*) of this woman has blazed up and can burn the whole world, including our realm. Be kind and end her sorrow" (p. 352). Indra readily agrees to do so and calls Śakuntala "the nectar of chastity" (*karpukkellām amutu*). These remarks are clear reminiscences of the Kaṇṇaki story and this reminds us again of the ideas which were in the mind of the author of Tamil Śakuntala.

After that he quickly leads the story to a happy end. Goddesses of Sky and Earth testify to what Śakuntala says and Dushyanta explains his behavior, stating, that if he had accepted Śakuntala he wouldn't have been understood by his people and now, because of what he has done, everybody sees the purity (*karpu*) of this woman (p. 364-365). Then he requests Indra to crown Bharata as the emperor of the earth.

So, the play *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam* provides a good example of a remake of an old story from the epic poem composed in Sanskrit into a literary piece well understood and accepted by the local Tamil audience. As I tried to show, the author preserved the chain of events but treated the story rather freely, giving way to his fantasy and sometimes developing small episodes into full-fledged scenes (or eliminated lengthy descriptions or monologues). He lavishly used Tamil poetical patterns and conventions and practically transferred the story to the South of India, placing it into the Tamil cultural milieu. By doing this he had to reinterpret its themes and motives. The main issue of the conflict between Śakuntala and Dushyanta in the *Mahābhārata* is a king's duty and the problem of a legal inheritance of royal power. We can't say that it is totally absent from the *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam*, but it is certainly drawn to the periphery of the Tamil piece. The author concentrates his main attention on what occupies one of the central places in Tamil traditional culture, that is, the problem of feminine chastity and marital purity. Viewed from this angle the story of Śakuntala becomes a story of a devoted wife who was put in a situation of a trial but could overcome all difficulties, gain victory over the circumstances and restore the family unity. It is known that the theme of feminine chastity is traditionally associated in the Tamil cultural context with the image of Kaṇṇaki. Accordingly, the author used some attributes of Kaṇṇaki's story, but only to a certain extent. He understood well that the images of the two women in

question, though to his understanding essentially similar, develop in opposite directions. Kaṇṇaki underwent a transformation from an ordinary girl into a mighty goddess, whereas Śakuntala, on the contrary, a half celestial creature by birth, became a human being full of emotions, a loving and devoted wife. Of course, there are many other innovations in the old story which were brought into it by the demands of the specific genre of a theatrical performance represented by this piece, and also by the time in which it was created, but the task of analyzing them lies outside the scope of this paper.

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Abbreviations

- CN — *Cakuntalai Nāṭakam*
 KT — *Kuruntokai*
 AN — *Akanāṅṅūru*
 PN — *Puṇanāṅṅūru*
 NT — *Narṇinai*