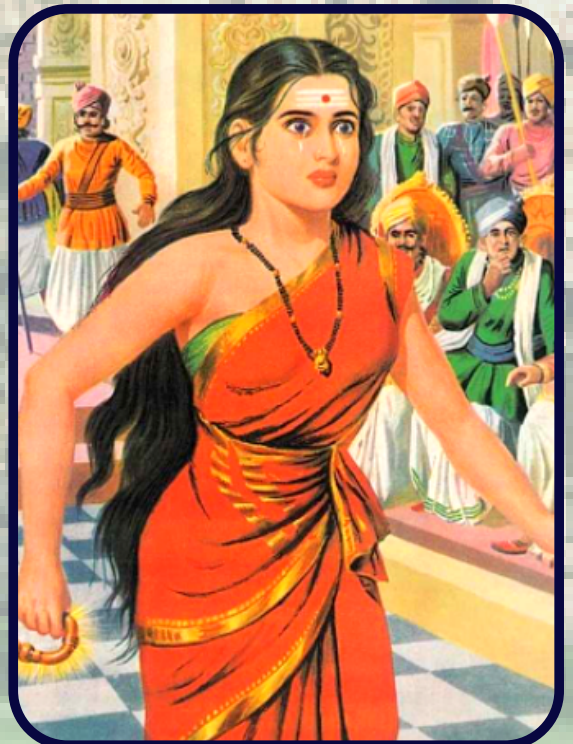
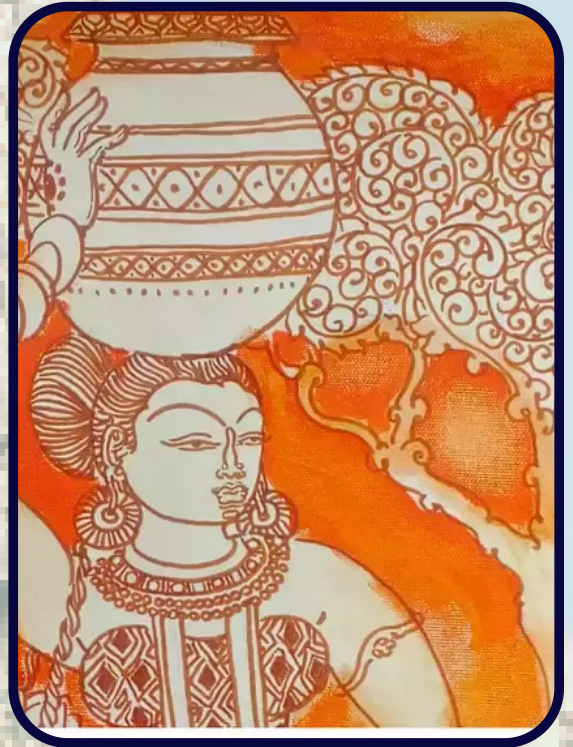



Sadbhavana

DIGEST



Sadbhavana Digest
Issue #10, February 2022
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“Make foes of bowmen if you must,
Never of penmen.”
— Tiruvalluvar, Kural

Editorial

The Tenth Issue of Sadbhavana Digest is dedicated to Tamil (Tamizh) thought, philosophy, culture and development- keeping in mind the three guiding principles that we try to follow in most of our issues. Inspired by our recent trips to Tamil Nadu with members from RGF team, this issue brings together a variety of literature, discussed as follows-

How to Deal with Self-

We start with a detailed essay on Kampa Ramayana. We contemplated a lot before including it- owing to how this narrative has been hijacked in recent political discourse. We've chosen to keep it as an act of resistance- to underline that Ramayana can still be discussed in different ways and that we all own that narrative. Often understood as the tatpurusha compound of Rama and Ayana (Rama's Journey), Ramayana can also be understood- following the logic of Babu Gulabray's 'Nar se Narayan' where he says, 'नारासु अयनं यस्य सः नारायणः' (the one who lives in water is Narayana)- as where Rama lives. In that way, every retelling of the story is where Rama lives. Written by Professor, C. R. Krishnamurthy, this essay also gets a little into the comparative study between Kampa's version and Valmiki's version, giving us a great sense of the Narrative history of Tamil Nadu.

Juxtaposed right next to it, is Samhita Arni's essay on Silapatikaram- the famous Tamil Epic. Arni, who has previously written books about both Ramayana and Mahabharata, here talks about her fascination with Silapatikaram, and also discusses how she finds it different from the other two epics- especially in the way personhood and empathy are placed in it.

This is followed by an introduction of Bharathiar by N. Nandhivarman. Bharathiar, often cited as one of the most important Tamil poets, is discussed here, especially through some of the central themes of his writing. This is further demonstrated by a poem by him, translated by Lekha Murali, titled: Liberation- Little Sparrow. The text of the original has also been produced here.

How to deal with others-

For this section, we have chosen three texts that address remarkably different aspects of otherness, and yet, are united by the central question posed by the theme of this section- what does 'otherness' mean?

We start with a profile of Mr. Dilip Kumar- a Tamil author of Gujarati descent. I felt this was a refreshingly interesting perspective to look at a culture- more in Wolfgang Welsch's 'Transculturality' way. How sometimes, we transcend the seemingly different attributes and embrace the similarities instead- becoming one, where one is difficult to separate from the other.

Almost echoing it, is 'The Brotherhood of Man' by Sangam Poet Kapila (translated). Kapila addresses the question of caste here, asking if nature differentiates the way we do.

To not make the volume Literature heavy (although I'm afraid it seems so in its current form) we have included an article on Mani Ratnam's Anjali (1990) which was about an intellectually challenged girl and her family. It addresses questions around disability and sensitivity towards persons with disabilities.

How to deal with Nature-

'Landscape in Sangam Literature' by Dr. P. Aruna Devi discusses at length various texts that address nature and human connections with it. Demonstrating these ideas through examples, the essay gives us a detailed view of how Sangam literature explored humans as an extension of nature.

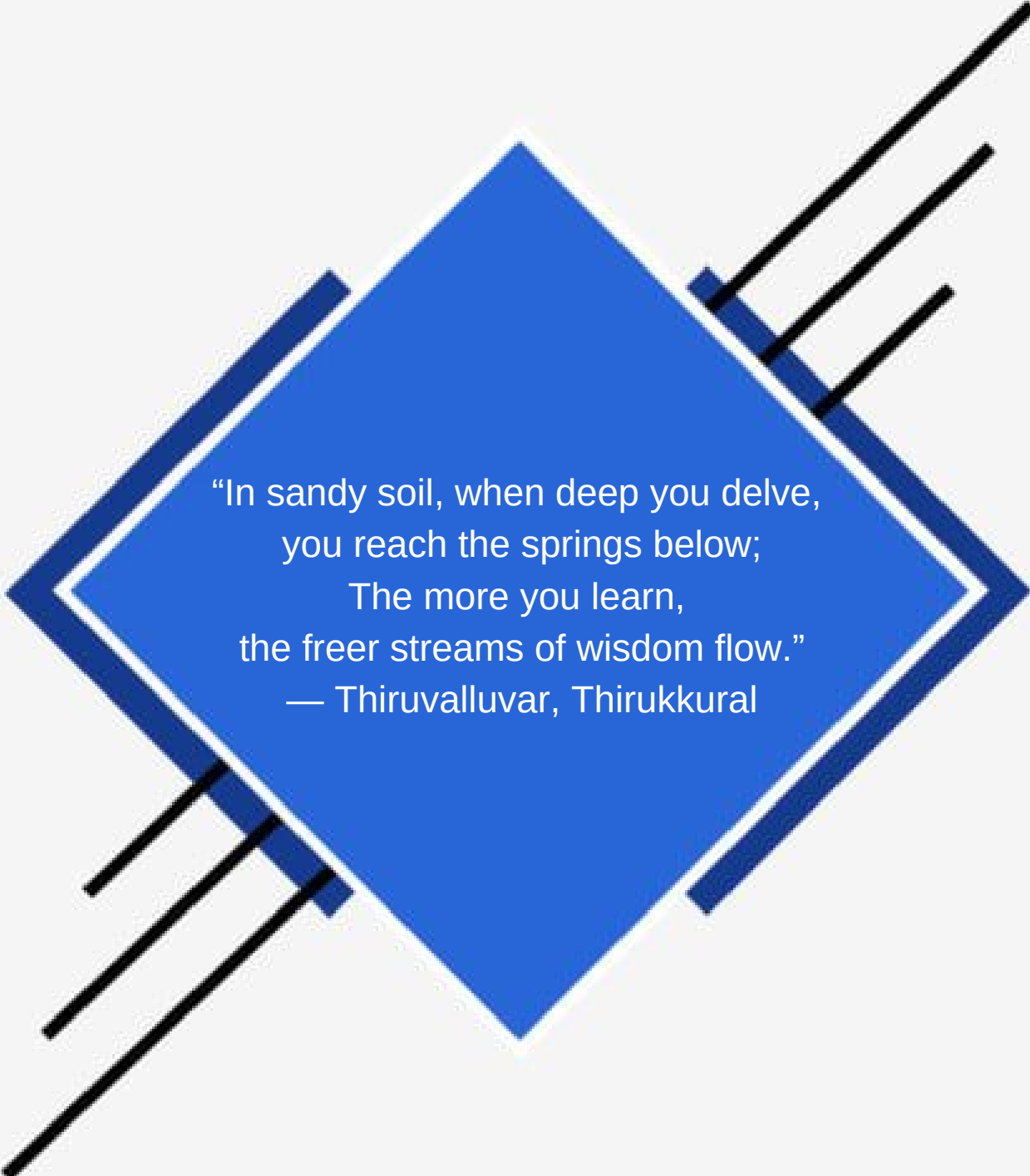
This is followed by a paper titled Transforming Rural Relations from the book The Dravidian Model: Interpreting the Political economy of Tamil Nadu.

The penultimate entry here is Pullinangal (a video of a song from a recent Tamil film called '2.0' that advocated the saving of birds.) which is followed by Chennai Poromboke Paadal ft. TM Krishna. In contrast to Pullinangal (Hey flock of birds, Ooh birds, I stood still by hearing your talking sound....), which is a romantic view of nature (birds), the Poromboke song talks about what damage humans have done to Nature and thus to each other.

All three sections are punctuated by quotes from the Tamil Poet Thiruvalluvar.

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have enjoyed compiling them together.

How to deal with self



“In sandy soil, when deep you delve,
you reach the springs below;
The more you learn,
the freer streams of wisdom flow.”
— Thiruvalluvar, Thirukkural

Kampa Ramayanam (கம்பராமாயணம்)

in Professor.C.R.Krishnamurthy's

Thamizh Literature Through the Ages



Kampan (கம்பன்)

For almost 400 years the Thamizh people were literally under the spell of the Bhakthi movement fully engorged with the heart rendering devotional poems of the Ayanmarkal and Azhvarkal. From the middle of the ninth century the Chozha Kings in Thanjavur (தஞ்சாவூர்) were gaining supremacy. The whole of the Kaviri (காவிரி) delta was studded with big and small temples devoted to either Sivan or Vishnu. It would be fair to say that the Buddhists and the Jains completely lost their influence and more or less disappeared from the scene. This left the field open for the two main Hindu sects to consolidate their popularity among the people.

The reign of the Chozha Kings extended approximately till the end of the 13th century. With their headquarters located in and around Thanjavur they ruled the fertile delta formed by the river Kaviri

and its tributaries, a rich rice growing area (சோழவள நாடுசோறுடைத்து). The Chozha Kings were renowned for their contribution to the temple architecture with the characteristically shaped towers (கோபுரங்கள்) at the four entrances. People of Thamizh origin owe their present legacy of music, dance and literature largely to the Chozha Kings under whose patronage they flourished.

The Thanchavur big temple is a magnificent masterpiece of Thamizh architecture and is now preserved as a national monument.



Every year it is visited by millions of tourists for its architectural splendour. It is unfortunate that a big fire which broke up during the renovation ceremony (கும்பாபிஷேகம்) in 1977 caused loss of several lives. It is my understanding that the damage was restricted to temporary structures constructed for the occasion. In this fertile Chozha Kingdom was born Kampan (கம்பன்) who made Thamizh literary history with his epic, ramayanam (ராமாயணம்).

In spite of his fame and glory as the author of a great Thamizh literary piece, all other aspects of his personal life including his real name, the place and date of his birth and his religion are topics of controversy. Kampan is believed to be the son of a priest (உவச்சன்) in a Kali (காளி) temple.

Periodic conferences of scholars had been held to discuss Kampan's dates exclusively. Critically analyzing all the available evidence, wading through inconsistencies and discrepancies in the dates of contemporary Kings, patrons and poets and sorting out interpolations from the main text based on their style, Zvelebil (1995) has suggested two probable dates for Kampan, 855 or 1185 A.D. This will correspond to the reign of utthama Chozhan (உத்தம சோழன்) or Kulothunka Chozhan III (குலோத்துங்க சோழன்).

An anonymous poem states that Kampan presented his ramavatharam (ramavartarm) in the Thamizh month of Pankuni (பங்குனி) in the year 807 of the Saka (சக) calendar. This is equivalent to 895 A.D. in the Christian calendars. According to the following anonymous poem, Kampan made his

presentation in Thiruvaramangam (திருவரங்கம்) in the presence of his patron, Satayappa Vallal (சடையப்ப வள்ளல்) of Thiruvannai allur (திருவெண்ணைய் நல்லூர்)

எண்ணிய சகாத்தம் எண்ணுற்று
ஏழின்மேல் சடையன் வாழ்வு
நண்ணிய வெண்ணைய் நல்லூர்
தன்னிலே கம்பநாடன்
பண்ணிய இராம காதை
பங்குனி அத்தநாளில்
கண்ணிய அரங்கர் முன்னே
கவி அரங் கேற்றினானே.
(தனிப்பாடல்)

Other works attributed to Kampan are Sarasvathi an^thAthi (சரஸ்வதி அந்தாதி) , Satakopar an^thAthi (சடகோபர் அந்தாதி), Erezhupathu (ஏரெழுபத்து) and Thirukkai Vazhakkam (திருக்கை வழக்கம்). His extraordinary skill in the epic narration type poems and devotion to Thirumai have earned him the prestigious titles of Kampa n^attazhvaR (கம்பநாட்டாழ்வார்), kampa n^Adudaiya Vallal (கம்பநாடுடைய வள்ளல்) and the 'learned Kampan' (கல்வியிற் பெரியவன் கம்பன்)

It is said that even inanimate objects in Kampan's house are capable of composing poems (கம்பன் வீட்டுக் கட்டுத்தறியும் கவிபாடும்). In recent times, Subramaniya Bharathiyar paid the highest compliment possible by saying that to the best of his knowledge, poets like Kampan, Valluvar or ilango have not been born anywhere in the whole world (யாமறிந்த புலவர்களிலே கம்பனைப்போல், வள்ளுவர்போல், இளங்கோவைப்போல் பூ மிதனில் யாங்கணுமே பிறந்ததில்லை).

Background to Kampa Ramayanam (கம்பராமாயணம்)

Setting aside the contradictory views on Kampan's specific dates, a more pertinent and rather intriguing question is why Kampan, endowed with an extraordinary talent to write an epic of his own imagination, chose to rewrite an ithikasa (இதிகாசம்) , ramayanam, very well known to Thamizh since the Sangam period. Though one will never know Kampan's own reason, certain speculations had been made by scholars. The views of Professor Gnana Sampan^than (அ.ச. ஞானசம்பந்தன்) (1993) appear logical and deserve serious consideration.

During the days of the n^Ayanmarkal and Azhvarkal it is no exaggeration that a devotional wave was spreading through the Thamizh country side. Extreme devotion to anything, however sacred it may be, is not conducive for the stimulation of open discussion or for a critical or unbiased analysis of alternate ideologies. This is particularly true of religious dogmas.

After the exit of the Buddhists and Jains from the scene, the devotees of the VishNu and Saiva groups indulged in attempts to establish their respective sectarian superiority. With the momentum of the Bhakthi movement slowing down, rivalry between the two groups grew worse. Though the spell of the devotional music still lingered, the underlying principles of the prayers and idol worships were

forgotten in the medley of sectarian views. Creeds were valued more than principles. Tholkappiar's definition of clandestine love (களவியல்) with reference to the role of unchaste women (பரத்தையர்) was probably misconstrued for legitimacy of the evil practice. The advice of the Buddhist and Jain monks on the control of the five senses (ஐம்புலனடக்கம்) for a spiritual life was not heeded. Thiruvalluvar's teachings on virtues also fell on deaf ears.

The chastity of Kannaki, the fidelity of Madhavi and the renunciation of Manimekalai remained only as fictional entities. To add to these perversions of individuals, the four Thamizh Kings, who spoke the same language, indulged in constant wars to expand their territory. The killing of Thamizh by Thamizh became the order of the day. Bravery, heroism and valour lost their sanctity. In general, there appeared to be an overall deterioration in the virtuous conduct of the people. Though the temples offered an ideal location for spiritual uplift and promotion of music and dance, the discipline of the mind by the people, at large, did not materialize. It is at this juncture Kampan appeared on the scene with a different strategy to inculcate virtuosity in the conduct of people.

Kampan's Philosophy

Regardless of whether the above summary of events paints an accurate picture of the social and cultural developments at the time, a study of the literature, which is generally regarded as an excellent window of its people, would lend support to such a contention. It is therefore likely that Kampan, who has been described as 'learned' both by his own peers and successors, would have observed the forces which were weakening his society. Being a scholar, he was perhaps aware that great and powerful empires and civilizations in the world have crumbled, when people indulged in excesses and deviated from the moral pathway. Being proud of the richness and antiquity of his language, he could not tolerate such a tragedy happening to his own people.

Prompted by these considerations, Kampan thought it appropriate, it seems, to write a literary piece, which would improve the situation. This would give him ample scope to emphasize the excellence of virtuosity, chastity, brotherhood and the oneness of the Absolute Being. To accomplish this objective, he chose the story of raman (ram[f] which was already very popular among Thamizh people. As an idealist he realized that the story offered him the latitude to introduce his own brand of ethical instructions which would supplement the earlier efforts of Thiruvalluvar and ilango atikal. Without changing the main story, he was in a position to mould it to satisfy the literary and religious tastes of the Thamizh community. In this respect, his knowledge of Sanskrit enabled him to study and appreciate the subtleties in the original text by Valmiki (வால்மீகி).

The story of Ramayanam (ராமாயணம்)

King Dasarathan (தசரதன்) , the ruler of ayodhya, had 3 wives, Kosalai (கோசலை) , Kaikeyi (கைகேயி) and Sumitthirai (சுமித்திரை) Kosalai had one son, raman (ராமன்) Kaikeyi had one, Bharathan (பரதன்); and Sumitthirai had the twins, lakshmanan (இலட்சுமணன்) and Satthurukkanan (சத்துருக்கனன்).

When raman was crowned as the prince, a hunch backed maid, Kuni (கூனி) spoiled the mind of Kaikeyi who trapped King Dasarathan into yielding to her boon, that raman should be sent to the

forest for 14 years while Bharathan, her own son should become the King. Raman followed by his wife, Sithai (சீதை) and one of the twin brothers, lakshmanan, proceeded to the forest as per the wishes of Kaikeyi and King Dasarathan. Unable to bear the injustice he had done, the King died. During their exile in the forest, the ten headed King, Ravan (இராவணன்) from the island of ilankai (இலங்கை), got infatuated with the beauty of Sithai, cunningly abducted her to the island and forced her to love him.



Raman & the Golden Deer

Sithai maintained her chastity in the midst of untold misery in the confinement of Ravan's garden. With the help of Kuhan, (குகன்) Hanuman (அனுமன்), Sugrivan (சுகரீவன்) and others, Raman found out where Sithai was held captive and, after a fierce battle, rescued her from the clutches of Ravan. Raman returned to Ayodhya with everyone and was crowned as the King. For a detailed and excellent version of the story, Rajagopal Achariyar's (ராஜாஜி) RamayaNam may be consulted.



Versions of Kampa Ramayanam (கம்பராமாயணம்)

The compilation of any ancient literary work has always been confronted with the problem of weeding out interpolations (இடைச்செருகல்) and addenda. The existence of different versions (பாட்பேதங்கள்) add further to the difficulties.

Thanks to the efforts of Kampan Academy (கம்பன் கழகம்), Chennai, a committee of scholars was set up who were able to complete this difficult job under the chairmanship of Professor T.P.Minatchi sun^tharan (தெ.பொ.மீனாட்சிசுந்தரன்). The result is the publication of "Kampa Ramayanam" in 1976 which serves as the standard authority commonly used at present. The revival of interest in Kampa Ramayanam is evident by the organization in several towns of annual debates and discussion groups in which reputed scholars participate. Some people believe that Kampan's adoration of Raman as the incarnation of Thirumai perpetuates caste differences.

The book has 6 chapters (காண்டங்கள்): Bala Kanda (பாலகாண்டம்), Ayodhya Kanda (அயோத்தியா), Aranya Kanda (ஆரண்ய), Kitkindha Kanda (கிட்கிந்தா), Sun^thara Kanda (சுந்தர), and Yuttha Kanda (யுத்த).

Each Kanda is divided into a number of sections (படலம்). There are 118 sections which collectively contain approximately 12000 poems. Kampan has elegantly employed the viruttham (விருத்தம்) meter in his compositions. Kampan's ability to use the san^tham (சந்தம்) in its varied dimensions to express human emotions faithfully adds colour to his poems and sets a musical flow to his verses. For example, the way Hanuman saw the withering Sithai in Ravana's garden (அசோகவனம்) is an example of the poet's tremendous capacity to capture thoughts and actions through san^thams and meticulous choice of words:

விழுதல், விம்முதல், மெய்உற வெதும்புதல், வெருவல்,
எழுதல், ஏங்குதல், இரங்குதல், இராமனை எண்ணித்
தொழுதல், சோருதல், துளங்குதல், துயர் உழந்து உயிர்த்தல்,
அழுதல், அன்றி மற்று அயல் ஒன்றும் செய்குவது அறியாள்.

Salient Features of Kampa Ramayanam

The noteworthy feature of Kampan's work is that his style is simple, yet very appealing. There is no need for frequent references in the dictionary (அகராதி). As an idealist and a humanist he takes every opportunity to express his philosophy in clear terms. His casting of specific characters to portray the trait(s) he wished to emphasize and the way that trait is maintained throughout the play are examples of his brilliant mind and well conceived plan to convey his message.

Kampan's concept of the Divine

It is true that, unlike Valmiki (வால்மீகி), Kampan regarded Raman as the incarnation of Thirumal (திருமால்).. However, he used the name Thirumal, in its broadest sense to refer to the Supreme or Absolute Being. Even at the outset he had expressed his secular views very clearly as seen in the invocation given below.

Indeed he followed Thiruvalluvar in this regard by first paying homage to the Divine (மெய் உணர்வு), then to learned people (நீத்தார் பெருமை) and finally to the ascetics (அறவோர்):

உலகம் யாவையும் தாம்உள வாக்கலும்
நிலை பெறுத்தலும் நீக்கலும் நீங்கலா
அலகு இலா விளையாட்டு உடையார் - அவர்
தலைவர், அன்னவர்க்கே சரண் நாங்களே.
(அலகு இலா= முடிவில்லாத)
சிற்குணத்தார் தெரிவு அரு நல் நிலை
எற்கு உணர்த்த அரிது, எண்ணிய முன்றனுள்
முற்குணத்தவரே முதலோர் அவர்
நற்குணக் கடல் ஆடுதல் நன்று அரோ.
(சிற்குணத்தார்= ஞானிகள், எற்கு = எனக்கு, முற்குணத்தவர் = சத்துவகுணம்
உடையோர்)
ஆதி, அந்தம், அரி என யாவையும்
ஓதினார், அலகு இல்லன் உள்ளன்
வேதம் என்பன மெய்ந்நெறி நன்மையான்
பாதம் அல்லது பற்றிலர் பற்று இலார்.
(பாயிரம் 1-3)

Kampan's concept of the Divine is beautifully expressed through the words of Ravanaan after his first encounter with Raman in the battle field. After getting a taste of Raman's strength, the almost invincible Ravanaan says that the man he fought with was not Sivan or Piraman or Thirumal but someone above all of them, the Ultimate or Absolute Being described in the Vedhas (வேதமுதல்வன்) :

சிவனோ அல்லன், நான்முகன் அல்லன், திருமாலாம்
அவனோ அல்லன் மெய்வரம் எல்லாம் அடுகின்ன்
தவனோ என்னின் செய்து முடிக்கும் தரன் அல்லன்
இவனோதான் அவ்வேத முதல் காரணன் என்ன.
(இராவணன்வதைப்படலம் 134.)

In describing the course of the river, Sarayu (சரயு) Kampan introduces another profound concept as if to appease the religious tensions prevailing at the time. He states that the big expanse of the river initially arises as trickles from among the rocks, gathers more and more water all along before joining the sea. The simile he employs is that the big river that flows through many villages and towns with different names has only one origin. This resembles the Absolute Being, that cannot be described fully by the Scriptures but is sought by different religions under different names, is ultimately only one. The following lines illustrate Kampan's religious broad mindedness and universal views of the Supreme Being.

கல்லிடைப் பிறந்து போந்து, கடலிடைக் கலந்த நீத்தம்,
எல்லை இல் மறைகளாலும் இயம்ப அரும்பொருள் ஈது, என்னத்
தொல்லையில் ஒன்றே ஆகி, துறைதொறும் பரந்த சூழ்ச்சிப்
பல் பெருஞ் சமயம் சொல்லும் பொருளும் போல் பரந்தது அன்றே.
(ஆற்றுப்படலம் 19)
(நீத்தம் = வெள்ளம்)

The manner in which Kampan expresses his acknowledgement to Valmiki in the following verse shows the humility one could expect only from a person of Kampan's high moral caliber. He states in the invocation that, of the three poets, Valmiki, (வால்மீகி), Vacittar, (வசிட்டர்), Bhodhayanar, (போதாயனர்), who wrote the story of Raman in Sanskrit, he followed the first author, Valmiki, for his Thamizh version.

தேவபாடையின் இக்கதை செய்தவர்
முவர் ஆனவர் தம்முளும் முந்திய
நாவினான் உரையின்படி நான் தமிழ்ப்
பாவினால் இது உணர்த்திய பண்பு அரோ.
(பாயிரம் 10)

Kampan's concept of virtue (அறம்)

When he describes the place, the people, the King and his ministers, Kampan's idealism comes to play immediately. He portrays that both the people and the rulers lead a virtuous life with tranquillity and peace. Right in the beginning Kampan does not waste any time in driving home his first message of control of the five senses. The river, Sarayu, he says, flows through the beautiful Kosala country, where people have complete discipline over their five senses so that they do not let their passions carried away by the dazzling eyes of (unchaste) women :

ஆசலம்புரி ஐம்பொறி வாளியும்
காசு அலம்பு முலையவர் கண் எனும்
பூசல் அம்பும், நெறியின் புறம் செலாக்
கோசலம் புனை ஆற்று அணி கூறுவாம்.
(ஆற்றுப்படலம் 1)
(ஆசலம்புரி = மிக குற்றம் செய்கின்ற)

Describing the kind of people in that country, Kampan uses his imagination and creates an ideal society where there is no philanthropy because there is no one to accept; there is no heroism because there are no enemies, there is no such thing as truth because no one utters lies; there is no ignorance because everybody is well read:

வண்மை இல்லை ஓர் வறுமை இன்மையால்
திண்மை இல்லை ஓர் செறுநர் இன்மையால்
உண்மை இல்லை பொய் உரை இலாமையால்
வெண்மை இல்லை பல கேள்வி மேவலால்.
(நகரப்படலம் 53)
(செறுநர்= பகைவர். வெண்மை =அறியாமை)

Kampan continues his concept of the ideal society by stating the attributes of King Dasarathan; he loved his subjects like a mother; his actions were always directed towards their welfare; he lead them like a son along the right path. he punished them like disease without showing favouritism; he served as their spiritual head by leading them with his wisdom and behaviour:

தாய் ஒக்கும் அன்பின், தவம் ஒக்கும் நலம் பயப்பின்
சேய் ஒக்கும் முன் நின்று ஒரு செல்கதி உய்க்கும் நீரால்
நோய் ஒக்கும் என்னின் மருந்து ஒக்கும் நுணங்கு கேள்வி
ஆயப்புக்குங்கால் அறிவு ஒக்கும் - எவர்க்கும் அன்னான்.
(அரசியற் படலம் 4)

Love redefined

The most significant contribution Kampan made to Thamizh literature and to humanity, in general, is his definition and clarification of love (அன்பு) . This word, unfortunately, has been grossly misused, in recent years in a restricted sense or confused to denote only the physical aspects of love.

According to Kampan, love refers to deep devotion or faith with perfect fusion of the minds. If this love is directed towards the Divine (பக்தி, தூயஅன்பு) , it becomes extremely unselfish and absolute. Love towards other human beings is mixed with varying degrees of selfishness. Love which comes close to divine love is that of the mother to the child (தாய் அன்பு); love between man and woman is (காதல்); love between brothers or family members is Pasam (பாசம்); love between friends is natpu (நட்பு). Kampan exploited the characters in Ramayanam to emphasize these subtle differences as described below.

a. Love (காதல்)

Kampan demonstrated his concept of love and chastity between man and woman using Raman and Sithai as the ideal couple; he used Ravanaan as an example of a very learned man degrading himself with infatuation (காமம்) with somebody else's wife. Perhaps this is Kampan's way of disagreeing with previous references to unchaste women (பரத்தையர்) in the literature by married men. In the following poem, Kampan describes the feelings of love that developed spontaneously between Raman and Sithai. When their eyes met, says Kampan, there was fusion between their feelings (நிலைபெது உணர்வும் ஒன்றிட). As if to reemphasize the point, he added that because their minds fused with each other, there was mutual exchange of their hearts (உள்ளம் ஈர்த்தலால் மாறிப்புக்கு இதயம் எய்தினர்):

எண்ண அரு நலத்தினாள் இனையள் நின்றுழி
கண்ணொடு கண் இணை கவ்வி, ஒன்றை ஒன்று
உண்ணவும், நிலைபெது உணர்வும் ஒன்றிட
அண்ணலும் நோக்கினான், அவளும் நோக்கினாள்.
பருகிய நோக்கு எனும் பாசத்தால் பிணித்து
ஒருவரை ஒருவர்தம் உள்ளம் ஈர்த்தலால்
வரி சிலை அண்ணலும் வாள்கண் நங்கையும்
இருவரும் மாறிப் புக்கு, இதயம் எய்தினார்.
(மிதிலைக்காட்சிப் படலம் 35,37)

b. Chastity (கற்பு)

The two significant lessons from Kampan's story are the value of chastity in both man and woman and the concept of one man, one woman in marital life. These are brought about in Sithai's own words, when Hanuman met her in Ravana's palace garden, Asoka Vanam. These words were spoken when Hanuman asked Sithai whether she had any specific message for Raman. "Please tell Raman that I still remember the promise that he made on the eve of our marriage that he will not see another woman even through his mind", she said. This is how high and noble one could get in married life.

வந்து எனைக் கரம் பற்றிய வைகல்வாய்
இந்த, இப்பிறவிக்கு இரு மாதரைச்
சிந்தையாலும் தொடேன், என்ற செவ்வரம்
தந்த வார்த்தை திருச் செவி சாற்றுவாய்

Sithai then reiterated her own steadfastness by saying that if, by chance, she died in captivity, the only thing she would pray was that she should be born again and Raman should come back and touch her body:

ஈண்டு நான் இருந்து, இன் உயிர் மாயினும்
மீண்டு வந்து பிறந்து, தன் மேனியைத்
தீண்டலாவது ஓர் தீவினை தீர் வரம்
வேண்டினாள், தொழுது, என்று விளம்புவாய்.
(சூடாமணிப்படலம் 34-35)

c. Sithai, the Queen of chastity. (கற்புக்கரசி)

Not satisfied with his efforts to stress the value of chastity, Kampan once again makes Hanuman to reinforce his points in the course of his report to Raman of what he saw in Asoka Vanam and how Sithai was getting along. Hanuman said, " I did see Sithai with my very eyes; I did see Sithai, the embodiment of chastity, across the sea in ilankai. Please forget your sorrow and doubts".

கண்டனென், கற்பினுக்கு அணியை, கண்களால்
தெண்திரை அலைகடல் இலங்கைத் தென் நகர்
அண்டர் நாயக இனீ துறத்தி, ஐயமும்
பண்டு உள துயரும், என்று அனுமன் பன்னுவான்.

To assure Raman that Sithai had not changed at all during her confinement, Hanuman continued, " Her behaviour was impeccable becoming of your wife, becoming of the daughter-in-law of King Dasarathan and becoming of the daughter of the King of Mithilai Janakan. Please rest assured she is all right".

உன்பெருந் தேவி என்னும் உரிமைக்கும், உன்னைப்பெற்ற
மன் பெரு மருகி என்னும் வாய்மைக்கும், மிதிலை மன்னன்
தன்பெருந் தனையை என்னும் தகைமைக்கும் தலைமை சான்
என்பெருந் தெய்வம் ஐயா இன்னமும் கேட்டி என்பான்.
(திருவடி தொழுத படலம் 25,26.)

d. Universal Brotherhood (சகோதரத்துவம்)

To demonstrate his vision of universal brotherhood, Kampan drew examples from Raman's own family as well as from that of Ravanaan. After Raman's departure to the forest, Bharathan, who was away at the time, returned to Ayodhya and found out what happened. Along with his step mother, Kosalai, Bharathan decided to follow Raman and plead with him to return. Kuhan, the hunter, helped Bharathan and his retinue to cross the river in his boats. Kuhan bowed towards the magnanimous lady in the boat and asked Bharathan who she was. In Bharathan's reply Kampan packed deep emotions, remorse and brotherly love in three short sentences: "She is the senior wife of the King of kings, Dasarathan and the unfortunate mother of the great Raman, a treasure which she has lost because I was born."

சுற்றத்தார் தேவரொடும் தொழ நின்ற
கோசலையைத் தொழுது நோக்கி
கொற்றத்தார்க் குரிசில் இவர் ஆர் என்று
குகன் வினவ கோக்கள் வையும்
முற்றத்தான் முதல்தேவி, முன்று
உலகம் ஈன்னை முன் ஈன்னைப்
பெற்றத்தால் பெரும் செல்வம், யான்
பிறத்தலால் துறந்த பெரியாள் என்ன.
(கங்கைகாண் படலம் 64)

Raman's friendship knew no boundaries and did not discriminate between friends or enemies. He did not even exclude members from the monkey family or the demon family if his friendship was sought with sincerity. He first embraced Kuhan (குகன்), who was an illiterate belonging to a low caste; then he embraced Sugrivan (சுகரீவன்), the monkey King who was ill treated by his brother, Vali (வாலி); finally he accepted Vibidanan (விபீடணன்), the brother of Ravanaan. To make it more effective, Kampan made these words come directly from Raman when Vibidanan (விபீடணன்) sought refuge with him. Raman said: "In my family there were four brothers; with Kuhan we became five; when Sugrivan, the King of mountains joined us we became six; now you have come to us with great love and affection so that we are now seven. Our father will certainly be proud of us".

குகனொடும் ஐவர் ஆனேம் முன்பு, பின் குன்று சூழ்வான்
மகனொடும் அறுவர் ஆனேம், எம்முழை அன்பின் வந்த
அகன் அமர் காதல் ஐய நின்னொடும் எழுவர் ஆனேம்
புகல் அரும் கானம் தந்து புதல்வரால் பொலிந்தான் நுந்தை.

Going to Ravanaan's camp, one finds the same kind of deep attachment of the two brothers, Vibidanan and Kumbakarunan (கும்பகருணன்) both of whom tried their utmost to put some sense into their brother's head in vain. Vibidanan tries his best to persuade Kumbakarunan to leave Ravanaan and join Raman in the name of virtue. In a few moving passages, Kampan packed all the emotions associated with the conflicts in their values namely: their helplessness in correcting their brother's sinful actions; their acceptance of the inevitable situation gracefully; finally their parting from each other, realizing at the same time, that this is going to mark the end of their brotherly relationship.

In responses to Vibidanan's plea, Kumpakarunan, who was himself a very learned man said, "In order to enjoy the transient worldly pleasures, I have been brought up by our brother, who fed me, clothed me and prepared me for the war; my duty therefore is to be on his side; I would rather die on his behalf instead of fleeing to the other side; my dear brother, do not worry about me; please go and join Raman as quickly as you can".

நீர்க்கோல வாழ்வை நச்சி நெடிது நாள் வளர்த்துப் பின்னைப்
போர்க்கோலம் செய்து விட்டார்க்கு உயிர் கொடாது, அங்குப்போகேன்
தார்க்கோல மேனி மைந்த என் துயர் தவிர்த்தி ஆகின்
கார்க்கோல மேனியானைக் கூடுதி கடிதின் ஏகி.
(கும்பகருணன் வதைப்படலம் 155.)

Kumpakarunan then becomes philosophical and says " When the time comes, everything has to come to an end no matter how badly one may cherish it; there is no one who appreciates this truth more than you; please do not feel sorry for me".

ஆகுவது ஆகும், காலத்து, அழிவதும் அழிந்து சிந்திப்
போகுவது, அயலே நின்று போற்றினும், போதல் திண்ணம்
சேகு அறத் தெளிந்தோர் நின்னில் யார் உளர்? வருத்தம் செய்யாது
ஏகுதி எம்மை நோக்கி இரங்கலை, என்றும் உள்ளாய்.

In the following poem, the parting embraces of the two brothers, the hesitating slow retreat of Vibidanan, his eyes full of tears, leaving his brother with a longing lingering look behind' are described. The thought that this would mark the end of his brotherly relationship ran through Vibidanan's mind.

என்று, அவன்தன்னை மீட்டும் எடுத்து, மார்பு இறுகப் புல்லி
நின்று நின்று, இரங்கி ஏங்கி, நிறை கணால் நெடிது நோக்கி
இன்஁டும் தவிரந்தது அன்றே, உடன் பிறப்பு என்று விட்டான்
வென்றி வெந் திறலினானும், அவன் அடித்தலத்து வீழ்ந்தான்
(கும்பகருணன்வதைப்படலம் 166-167)

e. Forgiveness

One of the noblest qualities of man is forgiveness which had been described as 'divine'. Raman's magnanimity is revealed when, at the close of the first day of the battle, he found Ravanana exhausted and said, " What a man you are! You are shattered like the petals of the Pulai flower (பூளைப்பூ); you better go away today and come back tomorrow to resume our fight."

ஆள் ஐயா உனக்கு அமைந்தன மாருதம் அறைந்த
பூளை ஆயின கண்டனை, இன்று போய், போர்க்கு
நாளை வா என நல்கினன் நாகு இளங் கழுகின்
வாளை தாவுறு கோசல நாடுடைய வள்ளல்
(முதற் போர் புரி படலம் 255.)

When Dasarathan was sent down from heaven to appease Raman, he requested his son to ask for a boon. Anxious to have his step mother, Kaikeyi, forgiven for all she had done, Raman realized that, if he asked his father directly to excuse Kaikeyi, he would not comply with his request. He, therefore, requested Dasarathan, "I want the one person whom you abandoned as wicked to be my mother whom I worship; I also want your son, Bharathan, to be my brother again." Lesser mortals than Raman would not have asked for forgiveness for a person like Kaikeyi.

ஆயினும் உனக்கு அமைந்தது ஒன்று உரை என அழகன்
தீயள் என்று நீ துறந்த என் தெய்வமும் மகனும்
தாயும் தம்பியும் ஆம் வரம் தருக எனத்தாழ்ந்தான்
வாய் திறந்து எழுந்து ஆர்த்தன உயிர் எல்லாம்.
(மீட்சிப் படலம் 128)

f. Kampan and Valmiki (வால்மீகி)

Though Kampan followed the original story by Valmiki, he certainly did not choose to undertake a translation of the same for two reasons.

First he knew that, in general, translations never have the same impact on people as the originals.

Secondly, by choosing the popular Valmiki's story, Kampan was in a position to introduce his own ethical messages to his society in a smooth manner. By keeping the main story intact there was enough latitude for him to change the scenario to suit his own cultural environment. For example he depicted Raman as the incarnation of Thirumal because that was the accepted trend during the days of the Bhakthi movement. Throughout the story, however, he maintained that by using the latter name he was in reality referring to the Divine.

Secondly small changes in the story put him in a better position to project the weakness of his society, as he perceived them. Over indulgence in sensual pleasures, the role of unchaste women in the society, the lack of seriousness in observing chastity in both males and females and above all, a general deterioration in moral standards were some of the observations he wished to address with Valmiki's story as his background. With this end in mind he had removed, added or modified sections of the original story as he thought fit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kampan made intelligent use of Valmiki's story, introduced appropriate changes in accordance with the tradition and culture of the Thamizh people and presented his own ideologies to rectify social problems.

To reduce the sectarian animosities arising out of the Bhakthi movement, he stressed the concept of the Supreme Being (முதற்காரணன்) notwithstanding the different names.

To minimize disruption of married life by uncontrolled passions and the involvement of unchaste women (பரத்தையர்), he introduced the 'one man-one woman' concept as his central theme.

To improve universal brotherhood regardless of caste or creed he set up the example of Raman, Kuhan, Sugrivan and Vibldanan.

To emphasize the nobility of forgiveness, he made Raman skillfully manoeuvre Dasarathan forgive Kaikeyi. Finally Kampan's genius may be ascribed to his deep moral conviction and idealism, to his capacity to express them with his tremendous literary skill, and to his success in conveying them to ordinary folks.

He first made the Absolute Being (முலப்பொருள்) born in the world as a human being, Raman. Once in this world, Kampan made Raman go through all the sufferings like ordinary men. At the end virtue won. Sugrivan's, the monkey King, on seeing Raman reflected that, after all, humanism won (மானிடம்வென்றது) :

தேறினன், அமரர்க்கு எல்லாம் தேவர் ஆம் தேவர் அன்றே
மாறி, இப்பிறவில் வந்தார் மானுடர் ஆகி மன்னோ
ஆறுகொள் சடிலத்தானும், அயனும், என்று இவர்கள் ஆதி
வேறுஉள குழுவை எல்லாம், மானுடம் வென்றது அன்றே.
(நட்பு கோல் படலம் 19)

The moral is that man can win over all his obstacles if he leads a virtuous life (அறவாழ்க்கை). This advice would be an excellent remedy to most of our social problems today! No wonder that Kampan is acclaimed as the King of literary kings (கவிச்சக்கரவர்த்தி கம்பன்).



Breaking up with the Ramayana: Why I chose texts that promote empathy and looking beyond one's identity

by Samhita Arni

After writing two books on the Ramayana, *The Missing Queen* and *Sita's Ramayana*, I'm breaking up with the epic that has obsessed us for millennia. The reason: A new epic has entered my life — the *Silappatikaram*.

Epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana focus on war and the story of men, the fate of princes and kings. But the *Silappatikaram* is different — it's a Tamil epic that focuses on a woman, Kannagi, who is possessed by rage after her husband is unjustly executed by the king of Madurai. Her rage transforms her into a goddess. The King, astounded at his own act, drops dead, Kannagi rips off her breast and throws it into Madurai, and the power of her fiery breast incinerates the city. The best part? It's written by a man, who is known as 'Ilango Adigal' (the prince who is also a monk). Legend has it that after a prophecy named him the next king, he renounced his claim to the throne in favour of his elder brother, and became a monk.

He was a Jain monk who wrote an erotic epic. A prince who dedicated an epic featuring the king-destroying rage of a common woman, to his brother, a king. A man who wrote an epic poem of a woman's quest for justice. In this one epic, so many paradoxes for us to wrestle with. (And that's why he's the subject of my latest book, *The Prince*.)

But the prince-ascetic and his epic offered me something new that the *Ramayana* couldn't. Ilango Adigal and *Silappatikaram* helped me realise that rage is necessary for justice and transformative change.

The stories of the past that we choose to retell, from the *Ramayana* for example, inform our beliefs and our idea of role models — patterns of behaviour that we are unconsciously programmed to

repeat. These patterns, subtly, insidiously, define many aspects of our lives — not just our marriages, but also our roles within relationships. Our concept of what it is to be a good son or daughter. Our ideas of right and wrong, of what's acceptable and unacceptable. We aspire to be a leader like Ram, or a good brother like Lakshman, a wife like Sita.



Representational image. Wikimedia Commons

This is, for many including me, regressive and claustrophobic. The 'values' of tradition were typified in the silent, submissive chastity of Sita. Or in the sacrifice of Sati, who immolates herself to avenge her father's slight to her husband's honour. Or in the deeply disturbing death of Shambuka, the Shudra ascetic who is killed by Ram.

But for someone who does not wish to suffer Sita's fate; nor face the mutilation that is visited upon Surpanakha when she expresses her desire; or who dreams of a different fate for Shambuka and for Ekalavya, the untouchable boy who dreams of being a warrior but who must maim himself to honour his Brahmin teacher, what do the stories that have been handed down in the shape of our myths and histories, offer us?

The Silappadikaram offered me something new; it is an epic that realised how necessary empathy is to reconcile the ruler and the ruled, man and woman, spirituality and sexuality, and how fundamental empathy is for justice. This empathy is only possible when we step out of the roles assigned to us. Empathy is nurtured through stories and literature, which allow us to imagine ourselves in different roles, places, contexts and bodies, and understand different emotional realities. There are other stories as well that can help us, perhaps, in time, to invent a new, secular mythology that can shape more egalitarian, empathetic beliefs.

The philosophic movement that preceded the invention of the zero, shunya, is Shunyata. And one of its greatest proponents is Nagarjuna, a great scholar and philosopher who at one time is reputed to have been the head of the famous ancient university of Nalanda. Legend has it that Nagarjuna dived into a lake and retrieved a treasure trove of lost texts, known as the Prajnparamita texts. These were one of the treasures, known as terma by the Buddhists, that had been strewn across the earth and hidden away by the great tantric master Padmasambhava (a bodhisattva, who sought Buddha-hood to benefit all sentient beings) and his disciples. In times when the tradition is lost or forgotten or misinterpreted, these hidden texts are suddenly rediscovered and can provide illumination, guidance and enlightenment.

My favourite one of these texts is the very short Heart Sutra. It talks about shunyata, about form and emptiness and the relationship between the two, and offers insights that can lead to freedom, nirvana, enlightenment. The Heart Sutra ends with a line that the Dalai Lama translates as: "Go, go beyond, and thoroughly establish yourself in Nothingness!" Not only are we nothing, but the Heart Sutra also tells us we should aspire to the state of nothingness and be nothing.

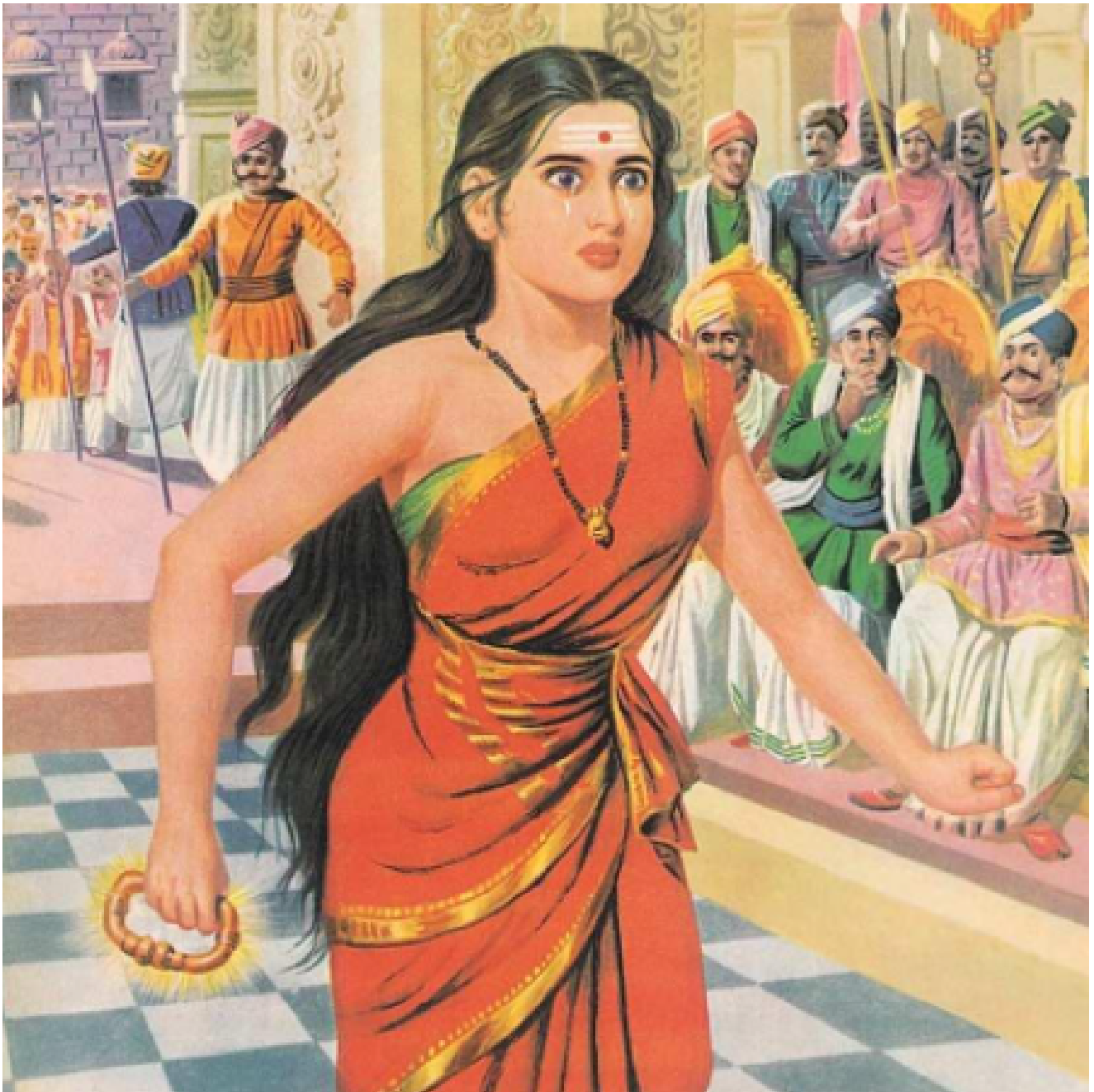
This runs completely in contradiction to every single rule or expectation that I was brought up with. I was told to be first in class, I was told that it was very important to aspire to something, to have a goal, to be ambitious, to be someone. And not just me. I meet many children who already feel burdened by the expectations imposed on them. Already at the ages of 10 and 11, they are thinking about careers, family, professional choices, colleges, Ivy Leagues, IIT coaching, SAT scores.

Yet we take pride in this achievement-oriented style of thinking. So how can being nothing be a good thing? It might be the right thing for a Buddhist monk or nun, but how can a dose of nothingness be beneficial to society today? Why should we teach this to our children, or to students in colleges?

But with this idea of nothing, you can, in fact, be anything.

It is the reason why for many, Buddhism is not merely a religion but also a movement for social reform. It is a revolution — it cuts away at the linear ideas that we have, it works towards zero hierarchies and power paradigms, it dismisses ideas of gender and biology that impose limits on us.

There are other stories, in other traditions, that talk of the possibility of not being fettered by forms and identities, but seeing past these. We live in the times of 'love *jihad*', of increased fear and paranoia about crossing or blurring lines between religions and castes. One of the original love *jihadis* was the 16th-century poet and mystic Shah Hussain, from Lahore. Shah Hussain fell in love with a 16-year-old Brahmin boy (not a girl, let me repeat — a boy) named Madho Lal. This love underwent many trials, and long separation. Eventually love prevailed and the lovers were united, merging into one form — Madho Lal Hussain. The shrine of Madho Lal Hussain, where Shah Hussain and his lover are buried, still exists in Lahore.



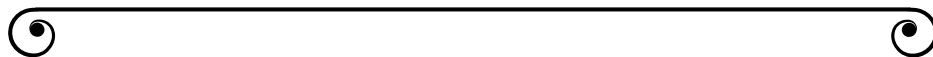
Kannagi from *Silappatikaram*. Facebook

What do the Silappatikaram, Shunyata and the story of Madho Lal Hussain teach us when taken together that the Ramayana doesn't? For me it is this: that one cannot truly imagine the plight of another, or envision a future for oneself, without empathy. And for empathy, we must learn, at the very least, a fragment of nothingness, for it is only then that we can step beyond the boundaries drawn for us by the identities imposed on us, and begin to understand the emotional experience of another. This is key to healing the schisms and the splits that we have created by holding so tightly onto places in hierarchies, so tightly onto identities that bind and constrict our understanding and our capacity for compassion, in order to envision a future that transcends binaries.

For myself, it is time to move past the Ramayana and the other stories from the past that we are familiar with, and the hold these have for us in terms of ideas of leadership, the roles of men and women, and even the way these narratives limit the expression of sexuality. There are other myths, from a multiplicity of traditions, that offer us different ways of being — many more than I have written about here. The story of the serpent king's daughter from The Lotus Sutra, the Manimekalai and the story of Sulasas, for example, offer us empowering stories of women and girls from the past. The poetry of Andal and Nammalvar, and many other poets from the Bhakti tradition, can offer us a way to perceive the spiritual in desire, allowing us greater freedom to express love and desire. There's so much that the boundary-crossing stories of Lal Ded and Sarmad the mystic can offer us.

It's time for a new, secular mythology. For our children and our adolescents and even ourselves, so that we can shape a more equal, compassionate, empathetic, and liberated tomorrow.

Samhita Arni is the author of Sita's Ramayana, The Mahabharata - A Child's View, The Missing Queen and The Prince.



The Greatest Bard of Tamil Bharathiar

by *N.Nandhivarman*

The 83rd anniversary of Mahakavi Subramania Bharathiar falls on September 11 of 2004. The Bharathiar Memorial Museum was set up by the Government of Pondicherry in 1972. In 1984 it was converted into a research center to which from all over the world people have come. The Government of Pondicherry headed by then Chief Minister D.Ramachandiran had brought out a beautiful book in French in 1982, which contains translations of Bharathiar's poems, prose and English articles. Such laudable exercises must be continued by successive governments to foster French and Tamil cultural exchanges by translating literatures belonging to both languages. But during his lifetime Bharathiar had struggled to bring out his works in print.

The ordeals of Poets in the colonial era to see their masterpieces in print could be easily understood by a letter through which Mahakavi Bharathiar sought financial support from his well-wishers. In an open appeal written in 1921, the Great Bard of Tamil Renaissance states, "All of my manuscripts, accumulated labour of my 12-year exile have arrived here from Pondicherry. They are to be divided into 40 separate books. Most of my works which I have selected for publication are prose, stories, sensational at the same time classical, very easy, lucid, clear, luminous and all but too popular in style and diction and at the same time chaste, pure, correct, epic and time defying." By this appeal the Poet not only exudes confidence in his creative literature and its contents but also is convinced that he is standing at the cross roads of critical times and is destined to play a crucial role. His words further down in the same appeal will be enough to portray the missionary zeal that burnt in him. "The historic necessity of my works for the uplift of the Tamil Land which again is a sheer necessity of the inevitable, imminent and heaven-ordained revival of the East", says Mahakavi. These words firmly reflect the inner feelings of the most enlightened Tamil mind of our times, which was destined to leave an everlasting impact on the Tamil society.

Stands Apart

The Poet's vision was clear and he pursued his life's mission with all his inherent strength, doing what was destined to be done. He wrote a satirical story "The Fox with a Golden Tail", which was published in 1914. It should also be mentioned that Aurobindo Ghosh lauded the flowery language of Bharathiar in that story. Dr.Nanjunda Rao of Chennai who was immensely pleased ordered for 500 copies and many letters of appreciation poured in from all quarters. Kuvalai Kannan read those letters to Bharathiar hoping he would be pleased. But Bharathiar stated as follows: "Using my brain to its fullest capacity while I write in my mother tongue Panchali Sabadam, you alone read it, whereas if it is in English our men who are slaves to English colonial culture order for copies after copies", the poet retorted with contempt records R.A.Padmanabhan in Chitra Bharathi, a compilations of pictures and historical notes on Bharathiar.

Tamil Medium

At that point of time when all men of letters under colonial rule were crazy over the proficiency in the tongue of the ruling classes, Bharathiar stands apart as a champion of the Tamil cause. In his book *Essays and Other Prose Fragments* published in 1937 writing under the title “Vernaculars” Bharathiar extends support to the Tamil medium of instruction in the schools of Education.

Let me reproduce his views in verbatim: “ I do not blame the Madras Council of Indian education for their anxiety to have Professor Geddes’ views on the subject of employing Indian languages as media of instruction in Indian schools. For I am aware those men’s thoughts are ordinarily molded by their environments. Nor do I blame the good and learned Professor Geddes for his innocent comparison of the revival of Indian languages with the Gaelic revival in Wales and in Ireland. I do not know if Gaelic has any extensive and living literature. But I feel it is high time to remind all parties concerned, in the discussions like this, that most of the Indian languages have great, historic and living literatures.

Of course, their luster has been slightly dimmed by economic conditions during these later days. The English educated minority in this country can be pardoned for being frightfully ignorant of the higher phases of our national literatures, but they will well do to drop that annoying attitude of patronage and condescension when writing and talking about our 62 languages. The Tamil language for instance has a living philosophical and poetical literature that is far grander, to my mind, than that of the vernacular of England. For the matter of that, I do not think that any modern vernacular of Europe can boast of works like *Kural* of Valluvar...” so goes on the Great Bard.

This quality and courage of conviction is rare among the educated of his times and even today the ignorance of the educated towards the grandeur of the Tamil language and their wild goose chase of the foreign language continues unabated even after the wise counsel by Bharathiar.

The themes

His book *Essays and Prose Fragments* contains the following topics 1) To the being of the Universe 2) The Service of God 3) The Siddha and the Superman 4) Immortality 5) Fatalism 6) The Dawn 7) Rasa- The Keyword of Indian Culture 8) Blunting the Imagination 9) The Crime of Caste 10) The Place of Women 11) Women’s Freedom 12) Love and Marriage 13) Patriotism and Religious Differences 14) The National Congress 15) New Birth 16) Matri Puja 17) India and the World 18) In Memoriam 19) The Coming Age 20) Reflections 21) Some Political Maxims 22) Free Speech 23) India and war 24) Nammalvar 25) Andal 26) Rights and Duties 27) Vernaculars 28) The occult element in Tamil speech. The list of the essays will reveal the subjects that were near and dear to his heart.

Feminism

Of particular mention is his voice for the cause of feminism. Speaking about the greatness of womanhood the Poet stands apart with no sign of male chauvinism, a characteristic flaw that causes even today gender bias and female infanticide. Let me quote him “ But if woman has always been the

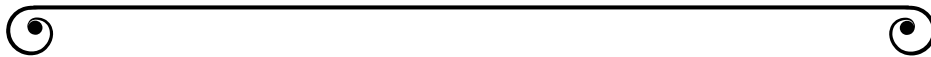
civiliser and, therefore, the spiritual superior of man, why did she get enslaved at all? For it is not only among Indians but also among the European and the Chinese and the Japanese and the Hottentots as, indeed all brutes and birds and insects, that the female has been content, till now, to occupy an enslaved, or if you please, a subordinate place to the male.” There cannot be a champion of the cause of feminism than Mahakavi Bharathiar in that point of time in the history of Tamils. A forerunner for the cause of feminism he had left his imprint by way of many articles and poems.

Crusader against Caste

Bharathi describes caste as a crime against humanity and let us know his feelings well expressed in his own style “You sometimes quote ethnology, eugenics, hydrostatics and what not, to support these four thousand castes! But, alas, the ignorant masses of our country have been made to believe that this caste chaos is a special divine gift to our country and whoever transgresses it has to go to Hell. It is this belief more than anything else that makes people insensible to the injurious results of caste. If you really have your justification in ethnology or hydrostatics, then you have been cheating people during all these centuries by telling them a different story. No science can justify cheating”. The scientific temper, which the poet possesses, is what anyone who cares for fellow beings will want to inculcate in a caste- ridden society. The Poets are conscience keepers of their culture and the society in which they hail, and in unmistakable terms Bharathiar registers his voice of protest against the caste-infected society.

Spreading his message globally

Bharathiar’s Tamil poems translated in many languages have established his greatness beyond an iota of doubt, at the same time very little attention is shown towards his writings in English, and it is high time his scholarly opinion on contemporary issues be understood. The Hindu in its sub-editorial dated 12 th September 1921 records the demise of this great poet thus: “We regret to learn the death of Varakavi Subramanya Bharathi at his residence in Triplicane last night. The deceased was an ardent nationalist, a great thinker, a shining speaker and a powerful writer. He is the author of number of Tamil works including National songs. His recitation of the national songs infused genuine patriotism in the hearts of his listeners. He, like many other patriots of India, was an exile in Pondicherry for some years, because his patriotic speeches did not please the Gods in power. He has for some time past been ailing and by his premature death the country has lost a born poet and a sincere patriot. Swadesamithran too paid tributes in its editorial. But it is a sad fact that only handfuls were present when his body was cremated. Let us learn to respect great men when they are alive and be grateful for the great bards who uphold our culture universally.



Liberation – Little Sparrow

by Bharathiyar

Translated by Lekha Murali

Liberation – Little Sparrow

Stay liberated –
Like this little sparrow

In eight directions, it flies and roams,
Into the air, it ascends; swims rapidly through,
In measureless abundance lay,
The sky awash in light, is the nectar it savors

Converse felicity with the she-sparrow, in exultation;
Free of affliction, build a nest
Nurture the hatchling that emerges from the egg and rejoice,
First feed the youngling, engulf in love

From the yards of homes and open fields,
Gather the grains that are found, bring home and partake;
In other times, tell stories and slumber; afterward
Long before dawn, sing a song and wake up.

*

Original poem in Tamil

விடுதலை-சிட்டுக்குருவி
பல்லவி

விட்டுவிடுதலையாகிநிற்பாயிந்தச்
சிட்டுக்குருவியைபோலே

சரணங்கள்

எட்டுத்திசையும்பறந்துதிரிகுவை
ஏறியகாற்றில்விரைவோடுநீந்துவை
மட்டுபடாதெங்கும்கொட்டிக்கிடக்குமில்
வானொளிஎன்னுமதுவின்சுவையுண்டு (விட்டு)

பெட்டையினோடின்பம்பேசிக்களிப்புற்றுப்
பீடையிலாதோர்கூடுகட்டிக்கொண்டு
முட்டைதருங்க்குஞ்சைக்காத்துமகிழ்வெய்தி
முந்தவுணவுகொடுத்தன்புசெய்திங்கு (விட்டு)

முற்றத்திலேயுங்கழனிவெளியிலும்
முன்கண்டதானியம்தன்னைகொணர்ந்துண்டு
மற்றபொழுதுகதைசொல்லிதூங்கிபின்
வைகறையாகுமுன்பாடிவிழிப்புற்று (விட்டு)

How to deal with others



Dilip Kumar, Improbable Tamil Anthologist

by Vijaysree Venkatraman

Dilip Kumar, Booksellers and Exporters, was the name of the Tamil literary bookstore he ran in Mylapore, Chennai. For over a quarter century, till 2016, research scholars and avid readers dropped in here to discuss books with the genial owner. He shipped books to the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington D.C. At 67, he is still a go-to person for anyone seeking recommendations on modern fiction in this ancient language spoken by eighty million people.



The retired bookseller is a gifted, though not prolific, Tamil writer. He has published three collections of short stories. With his appreciation for the absurd, he crafts short stories with universal appeal. They've have been translated into many European and Indian languages. Pavel Hons, a Tamil scholar from the Czech Academy of Sciences, says that he enjoys the author's sense of humor, which he finds, "very peculiar sometimes, but lovely..." Hons translated some of Kumar's work into Czech.

Kumar wants readers the world over to appreciate the works of serious Tamil writers. Recently, he edited *The Tamil Story: Through the Times, Through the Tides*, a comprehensive selection showcasing the best Tamil short stories of the 20th century. Tamil, which has a strong literary tradition is known for classics, but it has good modern literature too, Kumar has always maintained. Through his work as an editor, Kumar has tried to ensure that such quality work reaches its audience, both in the original, and through translations.

Interestingly, Kumar's first language is not Tamil. His ancestors – traders from the arid Kutch region of Gujarat – had moved south over a century ago. His father, a businessman in Coimbatore, died young. As a teen, Kumar dropped out of school and held a string of jobs – mostly as a sales clerk – to contribute to his family's finances.

In parallel, Kumar began his forays to Coimbatore's Old Market, saving up money employers gave him for afternoon tea to buy popular magazines from second-hand book stores. Early on, he stumbled on the powerful writing of Tamil author Jayakanthan whose protagonists were the working poor mostly. Kumar was stunned to see people not unlike himself on the printed page.

He discovered the Russian masters through Tamil translations and read American novelists in English, along with medieval English classics and modern poetry. When his reputation as a reader grew, occasionally books found him. A friend who cleared out his brother's collection had books to give away. "It could've been Harold Robbins, but it was the philosopher J Krishnamurthy's works," said Kumar. Such eclectic reading expanded his worldview.

One day, at the tea kiosk, Kumar found a little magazine edited by the star author Jayakanthan. This was a literary periodical, not a glossy for the masses. It was priced higher, which meant Kumar had to forgo more cups of tea than usual to buy the issue, but it introduced him to the work of other serious writers in Tamil. It helped him find his tribe. Eventually, Kumar started sending stories to little magazines himself. (When he spoke of this key episode to Jayakanthan decades later, the latter said dismissively, "You could've watched a movie instead.")

On to Chennai

Back in the 1970s, for anyone with literary ambitions in Tamil, Chennai was the place to be. When Kumar visited from Coimbatore, looking for jobs, he'd stay with his maternal uncle who lived not too far from the city's iconic Central Station. The neighborhood was called Sowcarpet, a North Indian enclave in Chennai. Kumar knew this place and its people well.

Sowcarpet, under-described in literature, was the setting for Kumar's story "Theervu," which won Kumar The Best Tamil Short Story of the Year award in 1977. It depicts a mini-crisis in the life of the Gujaratis in a building complex— a mouse drowns in their apartment well – and how a pragmatic elder resolves the matter. Though Kumar presents the people from the community just as they are, warts and all, it comes across as an endearing portrayal.

The prize money of Rs.300 did nothing to improve family's financial situation, but soon a literature-loving chemistry professor showed up at the store where Kumar worked, asking to meet the award-winning writer. He told Kumar of Cre-A, an upcoming publishing house in Chennai, whose goal was to introduce Tamil readers to books that would widen their interests and address their concerns. Unbeknownst to Dilip, he had already met with the founder of Cre-A.

(Dilip wrote in an article of his meeting with Cre-A's co-founder S.Ramakrishnan who would become his mentor:

My interest in Ashokamitran's stories made me go to his house in T. Nagar (in Chennai) to buy two of his wonderful collections (Vaazhvile ore murai and Innum sila naatkai), which he had self-published. On my way back, I was sitting in an empty bus that was yet to start its trip, engrossed in reading the stories. Ram, who was on his way to Mount Road (now Anna Salai), came and sat next to me. I later came to know that Ram was a close friend of Ashokamitran and they were a part of the little magazine Ka Sa Da Tha Pa Ra where I had read about the above two collections. Excited to see me with those Ashokamitran books, Ram started a conversation. We had an animated, though brief, chat until he got down at Mount Road. (We somehow did not share our contact information. We both perhaps knew that it was a small world, and if the need arose, we could always find each other.) Exactly three years later, I met Ram again, in a hotel in T. Nagar, and I was again reading a little magazine. This was not just a coincidence; it was Destiny, for neither of us could have imagined that

these two brief meetings would blossom into a friendship and association of almost five decades. We reconnected in 1979 when Ram set up Cre-A in an office-cum-showroom on Royapettah High Road next to Pilot cinema theatre. Although I started to work for Cre-A, Ram never ever made me feel that I was his employee.)

A literary career

At the age of 28, Kumar moved to Chennai with a job at Cre-A. The place became an important cultural center in the city back in the 1980s. Serious writers and modern artists gravitated there, as did people from theatre and serious cinema. “You can imagine how lucky I felt interacting with some of the best minds in the city,” said Kumar. In a decade-long apprenticeship, he learned the business of publishing, the art of translation. He translated Gujarati and Hindi works into Tamil, put together anthologies of revered Tamil writers, and blossomed as a writer himself.

Kumar who burst upon the literary scene with stereotype-busting characters from Sowcarpet writes with empathy of the marginalized elsewhere as well. His simple prose draws you into the inner lives of people you’d pay little attention to in real-life. And refreshingly, his characters are unapologetic about their physical desires: a widow with grown-up children who sleeps with a relative, the college student who experiments with lesbianism, or the 70-year-old foodie who also feasts his eyes on *Playboy* magazines.

When Kumar started his own bookstore in Chennai in 1990, he had a niche clientele. Some of the academics, who became good friends, invited him to speak on the topic of modern Tamil literature in the language department on campus. The first invitation came in 2000 from Professor George Hart of the University of California, Berkeley, the Padma Shri winner whose research established that Tamil is a classical language.

Last fall, Kumar was at the University of Texas in Austin to speak in a seminar about the difficult work of translation. But the harder job, one would think, is that of curation. A well-read person, who cares enough about the language, must decide what is worthy of being translated, of being better known. In the blurb to the anthology, *The Tamil Story*, renowned linguist David Shulman reminds us that we are lucky to have such sensitive connoisseurs as our guides to short Tamil prose.

Kumar’s most recent creative work is a play denouncing the rise of fundamentalism in India, but he remains a serious writer who refuses to take himself too seriously. In the past, he has poked fun at himself through characters in his stories, including a mouse, destined for death, who asks God to take the writer’s life instead. He writes so little and his stories are read by so few, the wily creature reasons.

Each of his stories is so well-crafted his fans would say. But the self-deprecating author with a distinctive voice — Tamil with a Gujarati accent if one is literal about it — could certainly be writing more.



Brotherhood of Man

by *Kapila*

Do wind and rain avoid
Some men among the rest
Because their caste is low?
When such men tread the earth
Does it quake with rage?
Or does the brilliant sun
Refuse them its rays?

Oh Brahmana, has our God
E'er bid the teeming fields
Bring forth fruits and flowers
For men of caste alone?
Or made the forest green
To gratify the eyes of
None but the Pariahs?

Oh Brahmans, listen to me
In all this blessed land
There is but one great caste,
One tribe and brotherhood
One God doth dwell above,
And he hath made us one
In birth and frame and tongue.

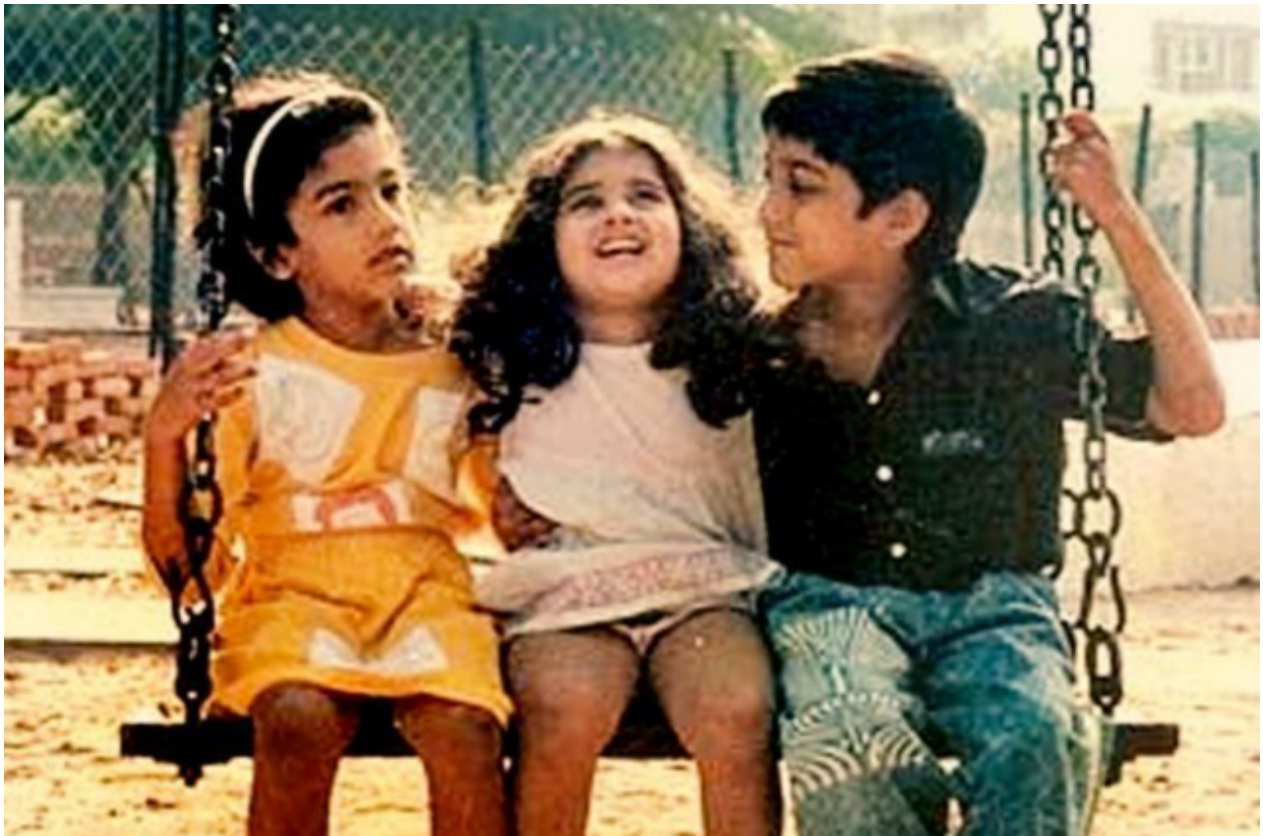
Kapila was a poet of the Sangam age; one of his compositions, the *Kapilar Agaval*, has remained popular among the Tamils since ancient times. Sangam poetry is a Dravidian, pre Common Era literary tradition of Southern India that carries no influence of Sanskrit.



Mani Ratnam's 'Anjali' is 30 years old, and still has the power to move you

by Anand Kumar RS

Through the screenplay, Mani highlights the mental pain and challenges the parents undergo in bringing up a child with intellectual disability in a judgemental society like ours.



YOUTUBE SCREENSHOT

Anjali, in my book, may not feature among the top three best films from director Mani Ratnam's oeuvre. It might not be among the top grossers among his films as well, though the film did pretty well at the box-office when it released in 1990. Yet for me, *Anjali* stands out as an important film in Mani's impressive body of work.

First up, in *Anjali*, Mani takes up a very sensitive subject, completely different from the films he had done till then. His few films prior to *Anjali* were *Nayagan* (don story), *Agni Natchathiram* (urban family/love drama) and *Geethanjali* (romance). Not just that, *Anjali* was also different from the usual themes of Tamil cinema at that time, which were centred on love stories, revenge dramas, thrillers and other very hero-centric, masala subjects. But in *Anjali*, Mani, who wrote and directed the film, tells the story of a little girl with intellectual disability and how the outlook of the family and society around her evolves. I don't think anyone else had talked of this before.



The film's story has huge social significance even today. Through the screenplay, Mani highlights the mental pain and challenges the parents undergo in bringing up a child with intellectual disability in a very judgemental society like ours. That there is a need for maturity and sensitivity in dealing with such children is also brought about very movingly in the film.

The screenplay also beautifully captures the way the little girl Anjali gradually wins the hearts of her brother and sister, who are initially wary of treating her as their own sister. This happens after a very, very moving scene when the father (played by Raghuvaran) patiently talks to the elder son and daughter who are a bit disturbed after the arrival of Anjali into their family. I believe that Mani is often underrated as a writer but this scene clinches it. Raghuvaran, in his element in this scene, explains that Anjali is God's child and so God decided that she would be sent to a special family with a good mother, good brother and good sister who can take care of her with special attention. And that's how she landed up in their family. This is an object lesson in depicting sensitive scenes in a film.

Similarly, the film shows the gradual acceptance of Anjali as part of their own by the kids in the apartment complex. In fact, the phase in the film where Anjali slowly gets accepted by her mother first, by her brother and sister next, then the friends and finally the whole apartment complex is the most interesting and touching phase in the film.

The film is set in an upper middle-class family in a metro city. That even here the family has to face social stigma around rearing a child with intellectual disability is



well showcased in the film. The film came out in 1990, just a year before liberalisation in India. The scenario by the end of that decade was different, after the economic boom hit the country. But, in the period up to the 90's, Indian society in general and the middle-class in particular were extremely conservative. Even today, it probably is. But, in those days, extreme conservatism was the cornerstone of Indian middle-class living. Hence, even bringing up a child with intellectual disability would be viewed with a sense of contempt and scorn by society.

Mani brings forth this aspect extremely well in many scenes in the film like the meeting called by the apartment members to discuss the child and so on, but particularly in this one very moving scene. Anjali is brought home for the first time from the hospital. The family gets into the elevator which is not fully boxed but has collapsible gates. As the elevator goes up crossing each floor, you see neighbours watching and passing comments such as “*Spastic’a? Mental case’a?*” *Retarded’a, Paithiyama? Veetuleye vechukka porangala? Paakave oru madiri irukku illa?*” and so on. As they reach their floor, the lift man apologetically tells the mother (played by Revathi) not to take it to heart and that they were not human beings at all. Mani uses this scene to convey his own commentary on society where the privileged tend to be small-minded and the deprived large-hearted and mature, in general.

Through these scenes, Mani holds a mirror to society and emphasises the need for more understanding and empathy towards people with disabilities and their families. When I say disabilities, it could be those who with physical disabilities as well, as the society's outlook on them is no different.

In trying to be on point as far as the main theme is concerned, the director does well to do away with the familiar tropes of Tamil cinema of the time. In *Anjali*, there is no larger-than-life hero. In fact, there is no hero. The hero is the little girl around whom the whole narrative revolves. In terms of the lead cast, the only known star was Revathi. Raghuvaran, who had earned his stripes as an accomplished actor by then, was still an upcoming actor essaying character roles. The only exception was Prabhu, who filled in for a bit of action and drama in the film in a guest appearance. Anjali, played by child actor Shamili (actor Shalini's sister), was fantastic as the little girl with intellectual disability and one wonders how at that tender age she could grasp the emotional needs of a scene and perform so well when the camera started rolling.

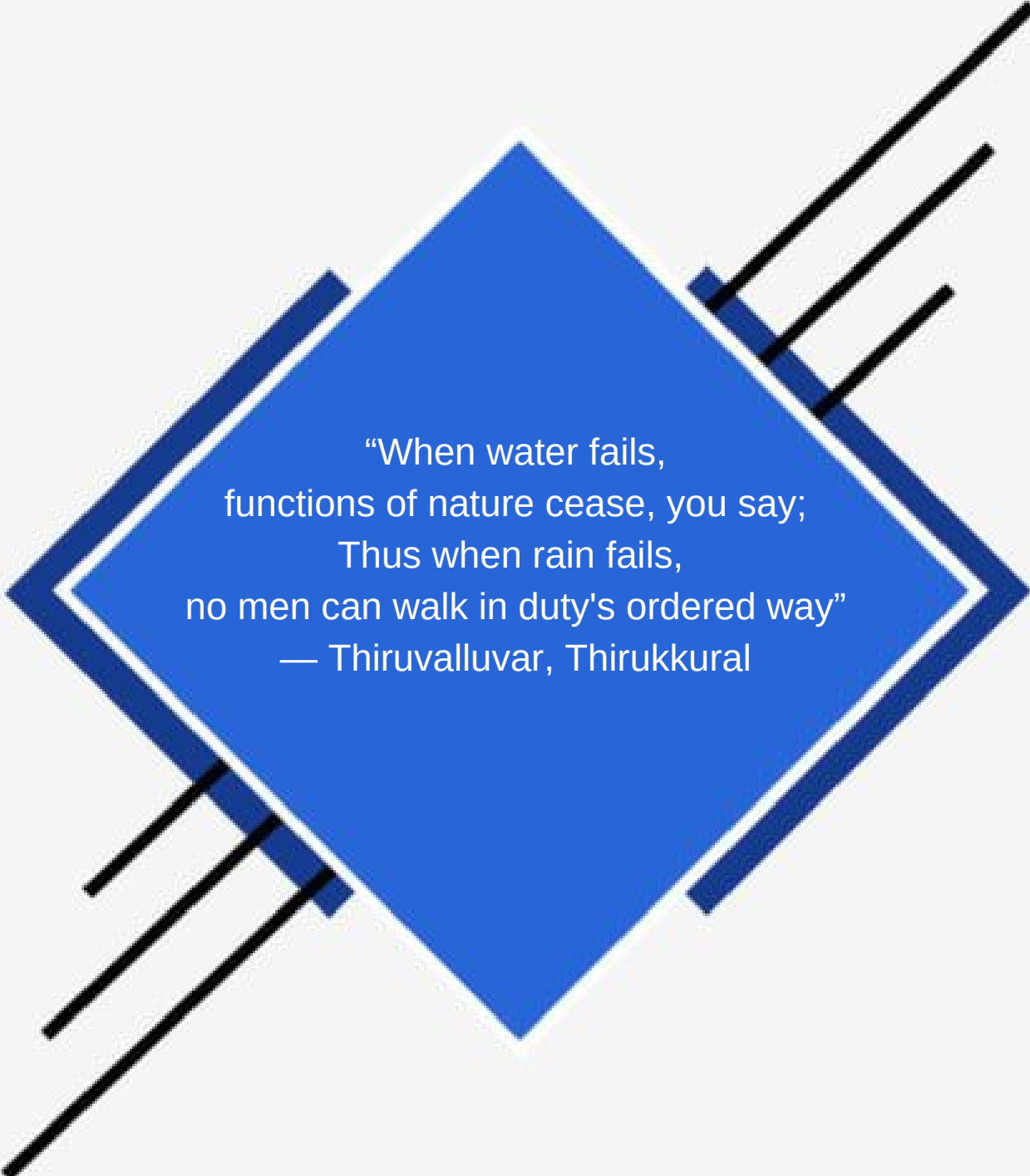
As the scope of this piece is limited to the subject and the treatment of the same, I'm not getting into other aspects of the film.

It is to Mani Ratnam's credit that he could take up such a socially relevant and sensitive subject and still package into a mainstream format, present it to the audience and still succeed. Thirty years since, when I watch this film now, I feel that we could do with films like *Anjali* even today, to jolt us out of other similar, deep prejudices prevailing in society.

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How to deal with Nature



“When water fails,
functions of nature cease, you say;
Thus when rain fails,
no men can walk in duty's ordered way”
— Thiruvalluvar, Thirukkural

Landscape in Sangam Literature

by Dr. P.Aruna Devi

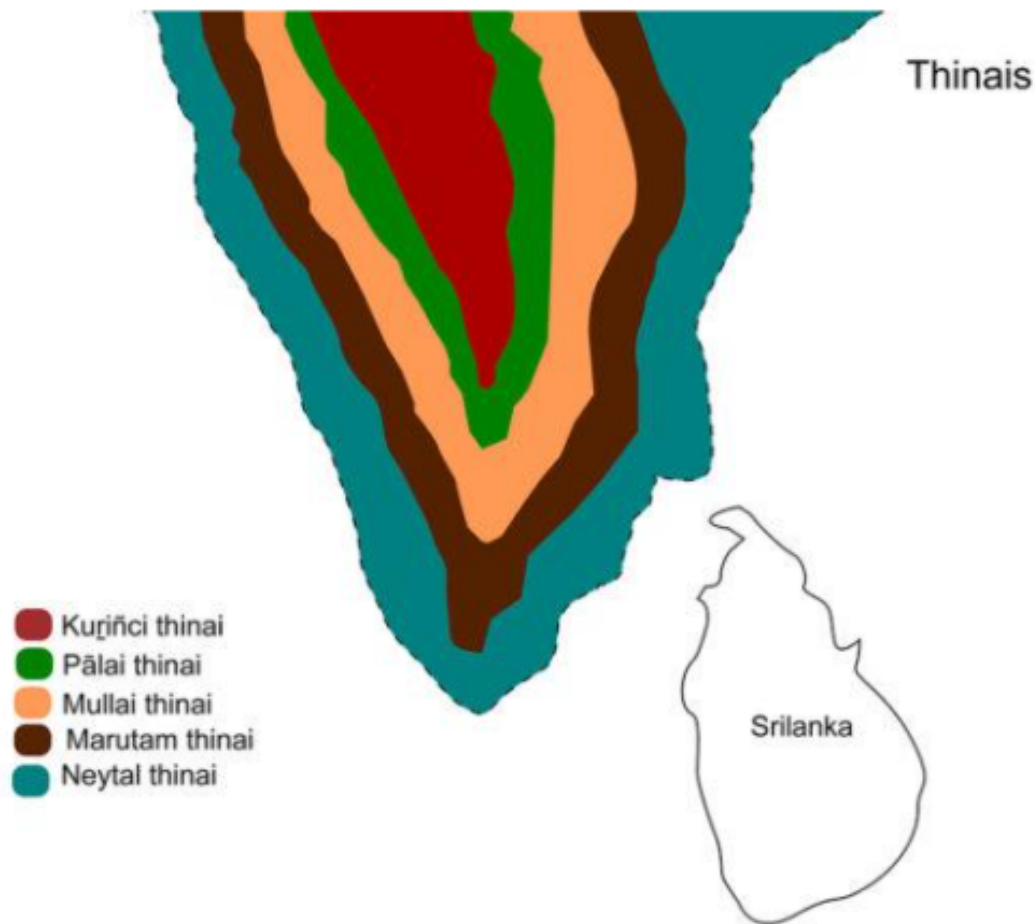


Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24282773>

Poetry is a literary art that reflects human life in an aesthetic way. It deals with many concepts like love, war, truth, happiness, frustrations, hopes, friendship, enmity and beliefs. If life is considered as a journey poetry which is a form of literature plays a vital role of a vehicle in expressing the feelings of mankind in various facets in their lifespan. The traditional treasury of Tamil literature, the sangam poems reflect on the concept of love and deals with various aspects of love like the consummation of love, waiting for lover's return after a long separation, small quarrels among them, etc. The poems deploy nature and its surrounding landscape as a framework to express human love. Landscape assumes the status of a strong raw material that is moulded to project the perceptions of man on the inextricable relationship that exists between the lovers both at premarital stage and after marriage. Daniel and Cosgrove define it as an outward expression of human perception, "a landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings" (Daniel & Cosgrove, 1988). The sangam literature is classified as the literature of "aham" and that of "puram". "Aham" deals with topics on personal or human aspects, such as love and sexual relationships, and are dealt with in a metaphorical and abstract manner. The 'outer field' topics discuss all other aspects of human experience such as heroism, war, valour, ethics, benevolence, philanthropy, social life, and customs.

The landscape is divided into different categories as per the geographical location .The flora, fauna, the climatic conditions, animals the inhabitants and their culture in association with the location are correlated with the mindset of the lovers in the poem. This device is called as *thinai* and each episode relating to a particular love event is codified. The *thinai*s are five namely *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Marutham*, *Neithal* and *Palai* .The details of these *thinai*s are dealt with as follows:

Poetic Attributes of the Landscapes:

Kurinji: This *thinai* speculates on the union of lovers. The landscape is a mountainous region with a special flower named *kurinji* that blossoms once in twelve years. Monkeys, elephants and bull are the animals of the location and are filled with bamboos, jack fruit trees and '*venkai*' trees. The occupants are tribal people who hunt and gather honey. The place is cool with water in abundance and represents midnight of a day.

Mullai: It is a forest region representing evening time when the lady love is patiently waiting for her lover. The specific flower is jasmine and the animal of the area is deer. The region is filled with '*konrai*' trees and due to the presence of rivers the soil is red and fertile paving way for rich farming by the farmers there.

Marutham: Here the event narrated is the fight and the mental conflict that takes place between the lovers at early morning time before sunrise. It is agricultural pasture lands with mango trees and ponds brimming with water. The fresh water fish and water buffaloes are in abundance here. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people residing here.

Neithal: This *thinai* describes the pangs of separation of the lovers and the background location is seashore, full of sandy soil. The place is filled with '*punnai*' trees, crocodiles and sharks. The inhabitants are the fisher folks who go deep into the sea to catch fish.

Palai: Dangerous journeys undertaken by the hero as well as both the lovers through desert areas and the hindrances they face are vividly described here. It is a parched wasteland or desert and the time associated is noon in the scorching summer .Elephants, tiger or wolf wander there and nothing but cactus can be seen in this desert area. The bandits steal things from the travelers for their food and other needs.

The traits of the above five kinds of geographical locations are intertwined with the lover's emotions. The sangam poems not only describe the love deal but goes beyond the personal details to portray the specific culture of the occupants and thereby the literary works attain universality with the deployment of such a device .The poems in other languages like English also reiterate the fact that the natural surrounding and the objects of nature correlates human life in all its phases. Poetry is nothing but the "overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth,1962,p.165).

When the feelings are channelized into different compartments the location acts as a scaffolding, triggering deep contemplation, enhancing quick and easy comprehension due to the imageries that emerge in the embedded framework. A poem of Philip Larkin can empirically prove that this is a universal technique adopted by poets of any language. The poem "*Wedding Wind*" by Larkin expresses the joy and excitement experienced by a young lady on the brink of her new life. The wind

symbolizes renewal and fresh energy. The newly wedded damsel realizes her multiple new responsibilities' as wife, lover ,life partner sharing the farm works of her husband. The inner experience and the inner growth from a simple maid to a responsible woman is traced here utilizing symbolic representation. The first night and the first day of her wedded life are special to her. Even in the absence of her husband on the very first day of her married life she could feel the impact of their union both inward and outward In kurinji thinai of sangam songs similar concept of the impact of the union and its lifelong effect is projected (Kuruntokai,Vol.1,p.113).

She recalls seeing her face in the “twisted candlestick” but yet she admits to “seeing nothing”. “Now in the day”, when she experiences the wind as she feeds the chickens that she fully realizes its meaning as a symbol for her own new energy and delight. Notice that there is no honeymoon. She must look to her chores as must her husband;“He has gone to look to the floods, and I carry a chipped pail to the chicken run,” This might be seen as tedium but the change she undergoes is an inward, spiritual one. It leads her to ask those profound questions (they are really statements) which end the poem.. “Can it be borne, this bodying forth by wind of joy my actions turn on, like a thread carrying beads?”

The thrill of her excitement is so intense that only the wind is big enough to embody it, “bodying forth”. The meaning of her life is clear to her now. Even her simple actions like feeding chickens feel as if they are part of a greater unified whole, “like a thread carrying beads.” The sexual joy, the romance, her ownership of the farm, the very newness of her situation makes her so giddy, so thrilled that she feels she will never be able to calm down again so that she may sleep. The windy morning symbolizes all that is new and energetic in her life. In Sangam literature four types of wind are mentioned .The wind from the southern side is known as ‘tendral’ and it is a gentle breeze; that which comes from northern side is termed as ‘vaadai’ and is cold.;from the west comes the ‘kootai’ and ‘kondal’ is from the east. Each one has its own features but in general wind stands for force and energy.

The brimming lake symbolizes new and satisfactory life and the cattle drinking water to quench the thirst is an expression of gratitude for the life gained. This poem tells how the lakes and cattle bring out the sense of satisfaction and self realization of the newly wedded girl. Keats also talks of the everlasting hunger of the male lover who tries chase and embrace her in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Similarly the *Aham* songs of the sangam literature are potential area of research and analysis and the paper tries to explain certain poems from Kuruntokai and Narrinai. Kalitokai also deals with all the five landscapes very deftly projecting the lovers’ intimacy and strong love knot.

Imageries and culture in Kurinji Thinai:

In Kuruntokai (Kuruntokai,2007,p109) song no.40 deals with the intimacy of love between the lovers. Though they do not have any blood relation their love knot is strong and they can never be separated as the mixture of red earth and the rain water (Agesthilingom,2002,p.46-47). The consistency and the amalgamation is so perfect in this mixture, the dry parched earth with red soil on the surface and the rain water. If analyzed deeply the growth of relationship is visible-getting deepened from the older generation to the younger. Still moving further down the mentioning of the *Kurinji* flower which blooms once in twelve years is symbolic in indicating the blossom of the feminine sense ready to get united with the mate physically and spiritually. The three dimensional semantic interpretation is made possible with the imagery related to the particular landscape. The poem goes as follows:

*What could my mother be
To yours? What kin is my father
To yours anyway? And how
Did you and I meet ever?
But in love our hearts are as red
Earth and pouring rain mingled
Beyond parting.*

In Narrinai (Narrinai,2007,p.17)song no. 6 describes the mental happiness the lady love would attain if she comes to know of the arrival of her lover. The excitement and joy is equated with that of a deer when it gets its hunger satisfied with a share of tasty ripe fruits of the Kumizhi tree. The deep level indication is that the lady love even without the physical union experiences the pleasure of consummation like the deer deriving after having consumed the fruit. The third level of interpretation is the quality of love is like the high quality of the edible, the fruit. In song 1 the 'talaivi' talks high of love of her 'talaivan'. She emphatically tells her friend that talaivan's love is as splendid as the honey gathered by the honey bee from the cool stem of the lotus flower and hoarded in the sandal trees. Like Lord Muruga, the chief of the mountains, the sandal tree with red wood and fragrance hints at the physical charm of the male lover. Further she assures his awareness that his lover will not exist without him and therefore he will never part with her.

The example of the perennial water flow indicates the durability and constancy of the love of both. In song 5, the lady indicates the pangs of separation during early winter through her eyes to the hero. When the entire nature will be nurtured and flourishing-the vegetation rich due to rain, waterfalls overwhelming with cool water, the 'nara' creepers spreading on the sandal trees rejuvenating, the clouds moving towards them, this specific season reflects sexual union and pleasure and this is not the time for separation. The ambience endorses the erotic thought waves of the lady and the poem signifies the powerful association of nature with man's mental, spiritual and physical feelings. In the kurinji thinai another significant tree mentioned is the mango tree which is the personification of Kama, the god of love and sex .A female lover is always said to have the colour of fresh sprouts of mango (mantalir in song 6),or dark blue. Similarly as mentioned earlier the ripeness of the fruits, the rich vegetation and the overflowing water flow symbolically signifies the maturity of the mind and the physical body ready to accept and taste the sexual union with a male and realize the real meaning of family life. The traits of love as expressed here are true in any part of the world (Compare Larkin's poem mentioned earlier) and invisibly the poet moves from personal representation to impersonal and thereby his poems reach the height of universality.

Neithal Thinai:

In song 5 of Kuruntakoi (Kuruntokai,2007,Vol.1,p.19) the pangs of separation experienced by the 'talaivi' and her mental agony is depicted. In this context the songs vividly portray the sea shore and its surroundings- the 'punnai' trees that offer shades to the birds to sleep and the waves dashing against the sands on the shore, from where the *talaivan* originates. The message conveyed is the restless mind and sleeplessness of the lover can very well be compared to the waves which is always moving forward and receding continuously without stopping. In another song the lady love expresses her pain as her husband neglects her, going behind another lady called as '*parathai*' equivalent to a prostitute. The environment of the water reservoir like sea, ponds etc. the drowning '*neithal*' flower

and the ponds rich with ferns- all these give deeper insight into the love relationship. The over flowing water which causes the flowers' downward movement can be taken as a symbolic outlet of the pent up emotions of the lady who suffers within herself without letting out the secret love of her husband.

The simile employed here is the eyes of the lady and the flower. The aptness of the comparison can be felt as both are outlets of emotions ,the eyes and the drowning flower moving downwards exhibiting negative emotions. (Kuruntokai,Vol.1.p.31). The *neithal thinai* has an environment that is filled with water. The five materials of the cosmos earth, water, sky, wind and fire are life giving as well as damaging factors and these materials connotes both positive and negative concepts and type of water reservoirs mentioned in the songs with the particular landscape is an indication of negative connotation as the mood exhibits separation and the mental agony of the lady love due to separation. The 'talaivan' can be separated from his lady love in anyway, either to earn money or for having extra marital relationship with some other lady.

Palai Thinai:

This particular *thinai* talks of wasteland or deserts and the journeys undertaken by the lovers as they elope through the desert. Obviously they have to face many problems and overcome hurdles on their way. The forceful West wind hits the '*vaha*' tree causing noise which is like the loud sound of the drums that accompanies the dance of *ariya koothers* on the ropes, across the roads. The male lovers wear anklets like, '*kazals*' that symbolizes bravery while the lady love wears anklets on her feet. Along with such explanations the song also talks of ceremony in which the anklets will be removed before marriage, and this is specified as 'anklet removal ceremony'. (Kuruntokai,Vol.1.2007,p.25).The journeys of the lovers through the wasteland can also be viewed as the lovers spiritual and internal journey where they need to walk hand in hand overcoming all hurdles on their family life to have a full consummation of love beyond physical union. This is very subtly mentioned in song (Narrinai,2007,p.17), where the friend requests the hero that he shouldn't betray her friends even in the old age as she has eloped with him based on the trust on his sincere, true love. The journey as per the Tamil philosophy is a divine and sacred pilgrimage where the lovers are replicas of divine beings and are expected to lead a truthful lead a life with unbound love and unity. The path is not as cool as *kurinji*'s mountainous region or as fertile as the pasture land of *mullai* and *marutham*. The time of the landscape is noon with scorching sun on the top. This is to symbolize that the journey is not safe and smooth but is a complicated one and tests the strength of the love knot between the lovers.

Marutham represents the agricultural and pastoral lands exhibiting the intricacies of the relationship of the lovers; it may be a strained one or an insincere love of the hero. In song no. 8 of Kuruntokai (Kuruntokai,Vol.1,p.28), the harlot mocks at the henpecked husband who dances to the tune of his wife who is not young according to the '*parathai*', old with a son. The poem starts with the portrayal of the landscape. The hero belongs to a place which has rich farm full of mango trees. The riped mango fruits are gulped by the '*vaalai*' fish in the pond. The mango fruits and the tree symbolize unrestricted passion of the hero towards his wife even when he is deviated from the family with extramarital relationship. In another poem by Ooram Pookiyar (Kuruntokai,2007,Vol.1p.35) the hero's activity of love making with a '*parathai*' and returning home is compared with a farmers act of his agricultural work like ploughing, sowing the '*kanji*' flowers on the fields as fertilizers for the crops and going back home. The '*kanji*' flowers stick on the body of the farmer. Likewise there are some identity marks on

the body of the hero indicating his illegal relationship with the 'parathai'. Yet his wife, displaying no ill feelings, gives a warm welcome to the husband.

The mullai thinai gives vent to the anxiety of a lover who patiently waits for the arrival of her lover. In a poem by Parunar (Kuruntokai, 2007, Vol.1, p.72) the apprehensive lady love's mental agony is portrayed vividly. She is doubtful whether she can enjoy the hailing new season with the flowers of the neem tree blooming. She is like the damaged 'atti' fruit squeezed by seven crabs in the field. The seven crab indicates the force of the vacuum she feels in the absence of her lover. Like the crabs he impairs her kind mind and beautiful body. Yet she never finds fault with him instead rebukes those who find fault with him.

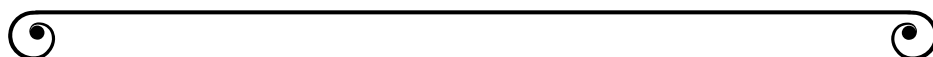
Sights and sounds of mother nature manifested in different locations like the mysterious mountain peaks, murmuring cool ponds and rivers, noisy sea shore, dry soulless desert land and rich agricultural pastures influence the creativity of a poet who channelizes his concepts and notions in lofty literary outburst. The concept of love with all its associated sentiments is narrated in "aham" poems of sangam literature. The geographical location encompasses all shades of senses that inflict the lovers. These poems are the music of human love, enchanting the entire humanity by unfolding the secrets of true love in all its varieties. These poems are also an easy access to Tamil culture of different inhabitants of different locations and give an insight to Tamil society at large of the sangam age.

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Transforming Rural Relations

by Kalaiyaran A. and Vijayabaskar M.

Many scholars have suggested that identity-based mobilisation in the state has ignored class-based issues such as land reform or empowering of labour (Mencher 1975; Thangaraj 1995; Subramanian 1999). In this and the next chapter, we argue for a more nuanced understanding of how the subnational state has negotiated the question of labour welfare even as it sustained capital accumulation. In this chapter, we focus primarily on how mobilisation and policy interventions have improved the terms of work, incomes and status of rural labour including small holders and tenant farmers. As we argued in Chapter 2, ensuring inclusive structural transformation was critical to the Dravidian vision of social justice. Translated into development challenges, this implies two sets of processes. First, interventions ought to ensure shifts of people out of agriculture and other traditional occupations into secure livelihoods in the non-agricultural sector to undermine caste hierarchies. Second, while this involves shifts over time, interventions should also secure place-based livelihood and income security at a given point in time.

We map three policy interventions that have made this possible. First, though land reforms were not pushed through strongly by legislation at one stroke, land transfers from upper-caste landlords to lower-caste tenant farmers did take place through molecular interventions and pressure from collective mobilisation. Second, investments in physical and social infrastructures have enabled diversification of rural livelihoods away from agriculture. Such diversification, accompanied by investment in education, in turn has led to better bargaining power for labouring households within agriculture. Third, an important argument that both this chapter and the next make is that substantial interventions in the labour market have been indirect through economic popular and social popular measures outside the domain of the workplace. Rural welfare intervention primarily through the public distribution system (PDS) and caste mobilisation sought to undermine hierarchical labour relations between the landed and the landless. Availability of food through the PDS weakened the basis of labour control and opened up economic possibilities for labouring households outside the domain of agriculture and the rural milieu. Such mediations outside the workplace have not only transformed rural social relations, but have also helped poorer households diversify into the non-farm sector on relatively better terms.

The chapter is organised in three parts corresponding to the three domains of interventions. In the first part, we map the changes in land relations and the factors that brought about such change. We next address the extent of non-farm diversification and the drivers of the process. Finally we trace welfare interventions of the state and their impact on labour, particularly, the process of weakening of the social hierarchy in rural Tamil Nadu. The section takes up two such schemes, the PDS and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) to demonstrate how these schemes weakened hierarchical labour relations between the landed and the landless. We begin with the changes in land relation in the state.

Weakening Rural Hierarchies:

Caste and Land

Micro-level studies hint at the decline of landlordism in the state (Harriss and Jeyaranjan 2016.) Macro-level data on landholding size in rural Tamil Nadu indicates that the share of land held as large landholdings is much lower than the all-India average (see Table 1.1 and Table 1A.1). We map the trend in landholdings since the 1970S based on the agriculture census. The agriculture census collects data from comprehensive land records on villages, and hence offers reliable information on operational holdings in India from the first census conducted in 1970-71 to the latest—2015-16.

THE DRAVIDIAN MODEL

Table 1.1 Distribution of Rural Households by Size Class (Landholdings) for Tamil Nadu

	Size of Landholding (in Hectare)					All	Average Size Holding
	Marginal (up to 1)	Small (1 to 2)	Semi-medium (2 to 5)	Medium (5 to 10)	Large (10 and above)		
1970-71	58.8	20.9	13.1	6.1	1.1	100	1.5
1980-81	69.7	16.8	9.2	3.7	0.6	100	1.1
1985-86	71.3	16.3	8.4	3.4	0.5	100	1.0
1990-91	73.1	15.9	7.7	2.9	0.4	100	0.9
1995-96	74.3	15.4	7.5	2.5	0.3	100	0.9
2000-01	74.4	15.6	7.3	2.5	0.3	100	0.9
2005-06	76.0	15.1	6.6	2.1	0.2	100	0.8
2010-11	77.2	14.6	6.2	1.9	0.2	100	0.8
2015-16	78.4	14.1	5.7	1.6	0.2	100	0.8
Area under Control of Different Sizes							
1970-71	17.1	20.5	24.8	24.6	13.0	100	1.5
1980-81	24.7	22.2	23.6	20.2	9.3	100	1.1
1985-86	25.9	22.7	22.8	19.3	9.2	100	1.0
1990-91	28.3	24.0	22.6	17.4	7.7	100	0.9
1995-96	30.3	23.6	22.2	15.5	8.4	100	0.9
2000-01	31.0	24.6	22.2	15.7	6.5	100	0.9
2005-06	33.5	25.2	21.5	14.0	5.7	100	0.8
2010-11	35.3	25.3	20.9	13.1	5.4	100	0.8
2015-16	36.3	26.0	20.3	12.0	5.3	100	0.8

Source: All-India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey, 2016-17 (NAFIS), NABARD.

Data from the above tables shows that marginal small landowners, who constituted about 78 per cent of all landowners, controlled 37.6 per cent of the total land in 1970-71. By 2015-16, while their share in the number of total Landholdings had increased to 92 per cent, their control of the total land had increased to 62.3 per cent. These figures refer to operational holdings. There may be variations between operational holdings and ownership patterns but in the absence of tenancy, one may assume that the differences are not large. Their share in the total number of holdings and the amount of land held is also higher than the all-India average suggesting that the state has a relatively better share of land operated as small and marginal land holdings. Similarly, the average size of holdings in the state has come down from 1.5 hectares in 1970-71 to 0.8 hectares in 2013-16 as against 2.3 to 1.1 hectares at the all-India level during the same period. Scholars cite division of holdings due to Inheritance as a major factor behind decline in landholding size over time in India (Mahendra Dev 2018). Given the much sharper decline in fertility in the state, this factor is likely to have played less of a role. In face, across the state, the share of Dalit households who reported as cultivators has gone up from 6.5 per cent in 1993-94 to 13 per cent in 2017-18 while it has declined for non-Dalits from 25 per cent to 17 per cent (see Table 6A.2 in Appendix 6A). Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj (2012) Observe that in 2010, land was predominantly owned by Pallars (a Dalit caste) and Thevars (a backward caste) in the case village they studied in southern Tamil Nadu.

Based largely on Jeyaranjan's work (2020), we argue in this section that legislative measures combined with pressure brought on landlords through collective mobilisation by the Dravidian and Left parties, and the coming to power of the DMK did result in transfer of land to the lower castes. After assuming power in 1967, the DMK government enacted the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Lands (Record of Tenancy Rights) Act, 1969. Through this formal institutional process (*de jure* mechanism), the state managed to transfer some land to tenant cultivators. However, more transfer of land to its tenants took place through non-institutional processes that Jeyaranjan refers to as *de facto* mechanisms. If *de jure* processes involved a slew of formal legislation, *de facto* transfers worked through political mobilisation.

Jeyaranjan argues that Brahmin and Vellala elites who historically inherited land in the fertile deltaic region of the Cauvery basin often migrated to cities after selling their lands to backward caste and Dalit tenant households on terms that were favourable to the tenants. According to him, the dislodging of caste elites from the rural areas was not an organic process driven merely by the attraction of accumulation and economic mobility prospects in urban areas. Mobilisation played a key role in this regard. Jeyaranjan starts with the dominant consensus in existing literature on land reforms in the state. Citing a range of literature from the early 1970s up to the first decade of the 21st century, he points out that they all concur that despite the passing of several pieces of legislation in favour of tenants and agricultural labourers since the 1940s, the proximity of the landowning classes to those in state power enabled them to flout such formal legal measures. Jeyaranjan questions this hypothesis by starting from the present. If indeed this was true, how does one explain the collapse of landlordism in the state? Further, he points to the disappearance of tenancy in several parts of the state as well as the substantially improved terms of tenancy in the Thanjavur delta that is historically known for wealthy landlords exercising control over the labour of tenants and agricultural labourers through extreme non-economic forms of coercion. He then goes on to demonstrate that this shift in power from the landlord to the tenant was an outcome of molecular changes at the micro-level which in turn were enabled by legislation and collective action. He demonstrates this through a study of land transfer records from 1967 to 2014 and changes in

tenancy in a village in the western part of the Cauvery delta that is historically known for its high levels of tenancy and control over land by caste elites.

While the role of the Communist Party in mobilising tenants and agricultural labourers in the region is well known (Gough 1981), Jeyaranjan highlights the less known but equally significant role played by the Dravidar Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam (DVTS) (Dravidian Agricultural Workers' Union) formed by the Dravidar Kazhagam in 1952. 2 Citing a memoir by an activist Kasthurirangan, which documents the struggle in the region, he points out that the union had a membership of '15,000 dalit agricultural workers and another 5,000 backward caste workers as members in [the] Nagappatinam³ are alone' (2020:p.258). In another region, he cites an even stronger presence with more than 50,000 members. Mobilisation by the union was originally against the hegemony of Brahmin landlords. The union often collaborated with the Communist Party union but also had conflictual relations with them. Due to political contingencies, members of the DVTS joined the Communist Party union and even assumed leadership of the union. In a recent work, Thiruneelakandan (2017) recovers another micro-history of the SRM taking up the cause of Dalit agricultural workers against upper caste landlords in the Thanjavur delta during the 1930s. Such collective action translated into a set of empowering interventions in the domain of land relations.

Although the Congress party had passed acts like the Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act, 1952, the Tamil Nadu Cultivating Tenants Protection Act, 1955 and the Tamil Nadu Cultivating Tenants (Payment of Fair Rent) Act, 1956, these acts were ineffective in the absence of a registry of tenants. Tenants could not provide documentary evidence in courts that they were actually working as tenants on a particular landlord's land. The DMK Passed the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Lands (Records of Tenancy Rights) Act, 1969, that sought to address the issue. Revenue officials were instructed to prepare a register of tenants in each village. Tenants were given a document certifying their claim to tenancy rights. Importantly, the tenants were not required to provide documentary proof of their status to get such a certificate. Oral evidence and statements by neighbouring households were deemed sufficient evidence to demand their tenancy rights. This proved to be a major victory for the movement with nearly 7,00,000 acres of land being registered under about 5,00,000 tenant farmers. While the Congress government passed the land reform act restricting a family of five members from owning more than 30 acres, the DMK government reduced it further to 15 acres. Rental shares too were reduced, allowed to be paid in instalments and also waived on occasion. While the latter is an economic popular intervention that provides only short-term relief, the earlier interventions have clearly sought to undermine the basis on which the power held by landlords was being reproduced. Another important legislation passed by the DMK government in this regard was the Congerment of Ownership of Homestead Act, 1971 which gave ownership to all those living in homesteads belonging to someone else or on land belonging to the government. This move further enhanced the freedom of the tenant or the agricultural labourer.

Jeyaranjan also highlights some of the failed legislative efforts in this regard. One bill that gave the right to purchase the landlord's land by payment of 12 times the fair rent by the tenant failed to receive Presidential assent. Resistance by religious mutts which controlled vast tracts of land is seen to have played a part in this. Subsequent developments led to consolidation of backward-caste tenant power in the delta, their de facto rights becoming stronger than what legislation allows. As a result, according to a senior party functionary of the Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) tenancy is a dead issue in the delta region at present (Jeyaranjan 2020:p.268). Jeyaranjan goes onto

further map the transfer of land from the upper castes to the backward castes and to a lesser extent, to Dalits, over the last 40 odd years.

This narrative overlaps partly with processes mapped by Neelakantan (1996). Discussing the rural and urban transformation of the Karur region (in central Tamil Nadu), Neelakantan provides anecdotal evidence of the increasing costs that landlords had to incur to retain their lands and resist claims by tenants. While he attributes this to increased transaction costs, he does not engage with the possibility that transaction costs have actually increased because of the power of tenants and their ability to resist them and the local bureaucracy and judiciary. He shows how on occasion tenants, including Dalit tenants, managed to acquire ownership through shifts in rural power relations made possible by political mobilisation. Such accounts demonstrate how caste and land relationships have been reconfigured in rural Tamil Nadu and the strong ties that bound lower-caste landless labourers and tenant farmers to land and landowners stand dissolved. Another significant move that undermined elite power in the Tamil countryside is the abolition of traditional village heads.

Democratising Bureaucracy

To abolish caste in rural areas, Periyar had suggested that traditional administrative jobs such as that of the accountant or revenue collector, held by caste elites, should be handed over to Dalits (Thirumavelan 2018:p.8). The abolition of hereditary village head (karnam) by the DMK in 1975 in line with such reasoning changed social dynamics in the rural hinterlands (Narayan 2018). Until then, village administration was in the hands of the village heads (karnam) who usually came from upper castes and were appointed by inheritance. The village heads used to be a part of the colonial bureaucracy introduced in Indian villages for revenue and other administrative purposes. The abolition of such hereditary appointments opened up space for participation of lower castes in village administration. Recruitment through the public service commission meant that control over land administration was no longer with the landed elites. Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj (2010) had only one president between 1957 and 1977 who was a landlord in that village. It was only in the 1980s, however, that things started changing on the ground. At the time of their study, the village panchayat had four Vanniyar members (classified as a most backward caste) and two Dalits while the president is a Dalit widow. The appointment of village administrative officers through the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) unsettled the inherited social power of the dominant castes and opened another pathway to democratise rural caste relations. Such efforts to reconfigure rural land relations were also accompanied by shifts in rural labour relations that contributed much more to the mobility of Dalit households.

Labour Diversification

Recent micro-level studies suggest that rural Tamil Nadu has become 'post-agrarian' with a reduced role for agriculture in contributing to household income (Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj 2010,2012). In this section, we establish using unit-level data various NSS rounds that this is indeed a state-level phenomenon, with rural labour considerably diversifying out of agriculture. Though the rural non-farm sector has become a significant source of livelihood for rural households across India, the levels, patterns and drivers of the non-farm sector are distinct in the state. For the purpose of this chapter, we define the non-farm sector to include all income-generating activities that are not agricultural but located in rural areas.

The share of the rural workforce in agriculture which was 70 per cent in 1993-94 has come down to about 43 per cent in 2017-18. The decline is much faster than in Gujarat or Maharashtra (see Table 1.2). Rural Tamil Nadu has a higher share of population dependent on income accruing in the non-farm sector compared to other high income states in the country. Non-farm sectors have in fact emerged as the biggest source of livelihood. According to the recent National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) All-India Financial Inclusion Survey (NAFIS) conducted in 2016-17 (see Figure 1.1), only 13 per cent of the rural households in the state can be classified as 'agricultural' even under a very generous definition of what constitutes an agricultural household.

Table 1.2 Rural Non-farm Employment

	1993-94			
	Agriculture	Non-farm (including MFG)	MFG	All
Tamil Nadu	70.1	29.9	12.9	100.0
Gujarat	78.5	21.5	9.2	100.0
Maharashtra	82.4	17.6	5.0	100.0
All-India	78.1	21.9	7.0	100.0

	2017-18			
	Agriculture	Non-farm	MFG	All
Tamil Nadu	42.5	57.5	14.3	100.0
Gujarat	66.6	33.4	9.1	100.0
Maharashtra	74.5	25.5	5.4	100.0
All-India	59.4	40.6	7.8	100.0

Source: Estimated from various rounds of NSS-EUS unit-level data sets.

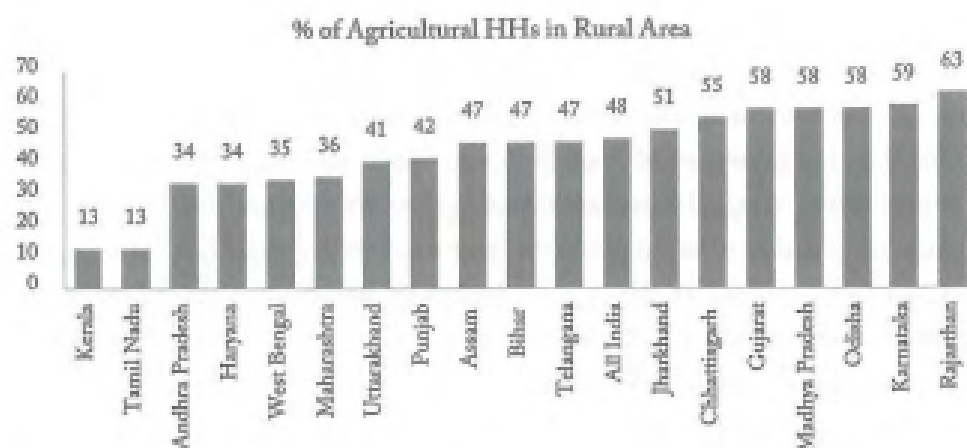


Figure 1.1 Share of Agricultural Households in Total Rural Households

Note: An 'agricultural household' is defined as a household that has received some value of produce more than INR 5,000 from agricultural activities (for example, cultivation of field crops, horticultural crops, fodder crops, plantation, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, piggy, bee-keeping, vermiculture, sericulture and so on) and having at least one member self-employed in agriculture either in the principal status or in a subsidiary status during the last 365 days. The condition of land possession was dispensed with.

Source: NABARD All-India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey, 2016-17 (NAFIS), NABARD, 2018.

Clearly this is much lower than the all-India average of 48 per cent or that of Maharashtra or Gujarat, and along with Kerala, is the lowest among the major states. Income of farm households from wages and salary and from non-farm business in Tamil Nadu is the second highest among all the states. Household income from cultivation has also declined. Among farm households in the State, only about 43 per cent of the household income is from agriculture, as against 60 per cent for the rest of India. In fact, if we take cultivation alone, it accounts for just 27.5 per cent of agricultural households in the state as against 48 per cent for all India. Diversification into livestock accounts for a significant share of farm incomes, The percentage of cultivators in rural Tamil Nadu has also come down from 29 per cent of the rural workforce in 1981 to just 13 per cent in 2011, which is again one of the lowest shares in India (Vijayabaskar 2017). Further, about 40 per cent of the rural households live in areas classified as semi-urban having a population less than 50,00 in Tamil Nadu as against 16 per cent at the all-India level. The rural is no longer synonymous with agrarian life in Tamil Nadu, with the working population moving out of agriculture at a faster pace than in other Indian states.

If the declining share of agricultural labour in the total workforce indicates the opening up of opportunities in the non-farm sector, increased bargaining power due to new non-farm opportunities is likely to have weakened the control that the landed could exercise over agricultural labour. This is also borne out by the increase in agricultural wages. The state has seen an increase in real agricultural wages (Harriss and Jeyaranjan 2016) in spite of a relative stagnation of the agricultural economy. The recent wage data (2017) from the Labour Bureau suggests that agricultural wage rates in the state are the second highest after Kerala. See Figure 1.2

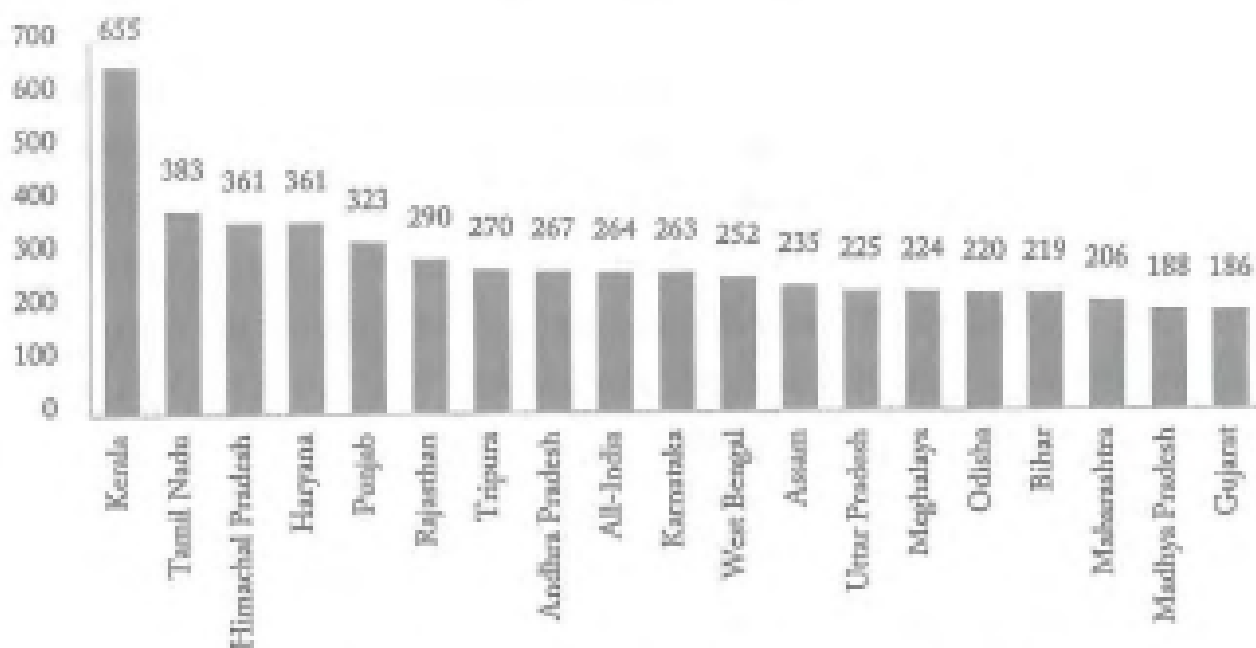


Figure 1.2 Inter-state Differences in Rural Agricultural Wages (2017)

Source: Labour Bureau (2018), Ministry of Labour & Employment.

Wage rates are also relatively higher in the non-farm sector. The average nominal daily wage in the non-farm sector, as Figure 1.3 indicates, is once again the second highest in the country after Kerala.

If we compare over time, the state has seen a faster rate of growth of real wages compared to either Gujarat or Maharashtra. Real wage has increased from INR 72 in 1993-94 (at 2011-12 prices) to INR 179 in 2011-12, an increase of 148 per cent while it increased only by 72 per cent in Gujarat and 109 per cent in Maharashtra. We also see the wage picking up from the second half of last decade. Between 2004-05 and 2011-12, the real wages witnessed a rise from INR 114 to INR 179, and increase of 57 per cent. The remarkable increase in wage rates, particularly in rural areas, is generally attributed to the spillover effect of MNREGA on the one hand, and the shortage of labour, partly due to higher participation in education, on the other (Mehrotra et al. 2014). The demand for workers in the non-farm sector, particularly in states like Tamil Nadu, too, is likely to have played a role.

This diversification out of agriculture has also importantly been accompanied by relatively lower inequality between rural and urban areas (see Table 1.3). The ratio of rural to urban wage a measure of disparity is not only higher as compared to other states but also improving over time indicating that the rural labour markets are getting better integrated with urban labour markets. This diversification has also been relatively inclusive in terms of caste. The share of Dalit households in agriculture is 37 per cent in Tamil Nadu as against 68 per cent in Gujarat, 57 per cent in Maharashtra and 47 per cent at the all-india level. Their dependence on agricultural labour has also come down. The percentage of Dalits working as agricultural labourers declined from 71 per cent in 1993-94 to 24 per cent in 2017-18. The corresponding figures for non-Dalits in the state are 32 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively. What we see therefore is a trend of Dalits moving away from being agricultural labourers and accessing increased job opportunities outside agriculture. A section of them have also become cultivators as we pointed out in the previous section.

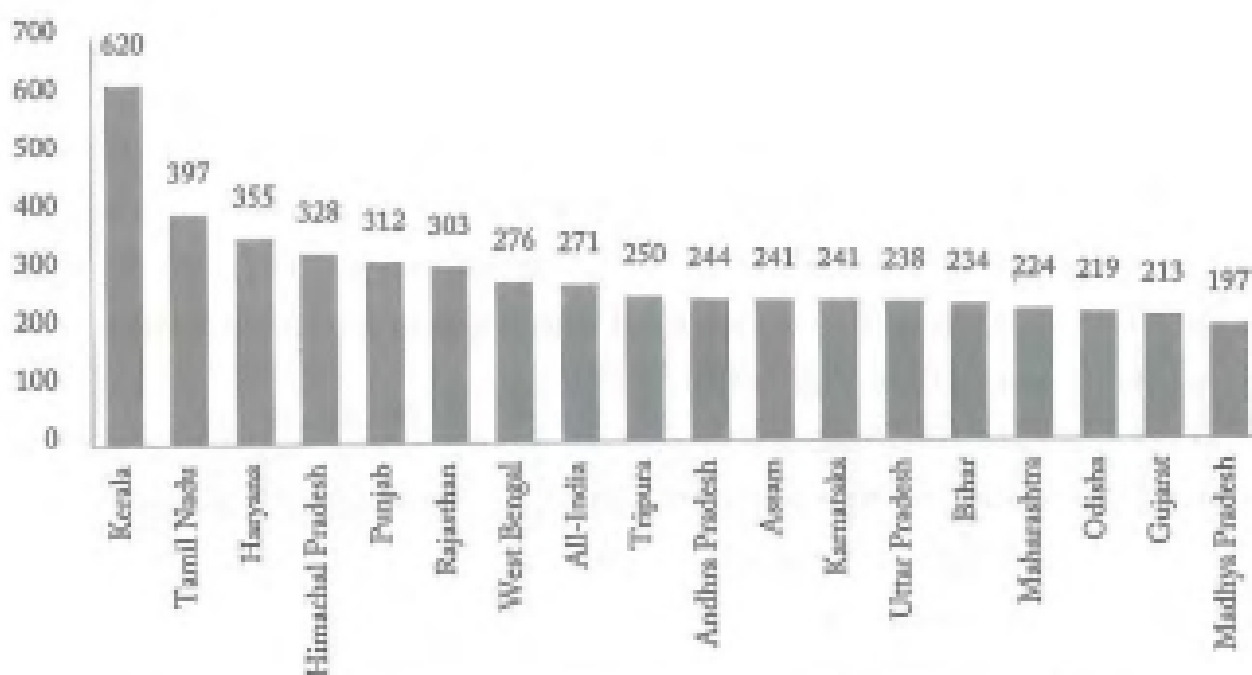


Figure 1.3 Inter-state Differences in Rural Non-agricultural Wages (2017)

Source: Labour Bureau (2018), Ministry of Labour & Employment.

Data also suggests that within the non-farm sector, Dalits in the state have been able to access a relatively higher share of 'regular salaried' jobs, an indicator of better quality jobs (Table 1A.2). Twenty-four per cent of Dalit households held regular salaried jobs in rural Tamil Nadu as against 20 per cent among non-Dalits. The corresponding figure for Dalits in the rest of India is about 12 per cent (see Table 1A.2). This is indeed significant though we are aware that 'regular, salaried' jobs may not always imply better quality jobs. We therefore also traced the educational background of salaried workers. Graduated accounted for 32 per cent (see Table 1.4) of such salaried Dalit worker households which is similar to that of non-Dalits suggesting that education has indeed enabled mobility of Dalits into relatively better quality jobs. The remaining Dalits are engaged in casual jobs in the rural non-farm sector. Dalits employed under this category have gone up from 12 per cent in 1993-94 to 20 per cent in 2017-18 while the corresponding figures for non-Dalits are 13 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. Thus, a section of Dalits is reducing the economic distance between them and the non-Dalits in rural Tamil Nadu, at least those occupying economically and socially lower rungs of the rural hierarchy. This, as recent episodes of caste violence suggest, poses anxieties among sections of other caste groups. In sum, Dalits are a lot less dependent on the landed non-Dalits for livelihood with a section of them entering into relatively remunerative jobs in the non-farm economy. While the educational mobility of Dalits is a trend that is visible across India, it is much sharper in Tamil Nadu.

Table 1.4 Educational Status of Rural Workers (in Per Cent)

	Salaried Workers		All Workers	
	SCs	Non-SCs	SCs	Non-SCs
Illiterate	11.8	7.5	27.6	24.7
Primary and Middle	31.5	33	46.8	47.5
Secondary and Higher Secondary	24.6	27.7	15.2	17.5
Graduate and Above	32.2	31.8	10.4	10.3

Source: Estimated from NSS-Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) unit-level data sets.

To understand the extent to which labour relations have been democratised in rural Tamil Nadu, it is worth recalling the extent to which labour relations were caste-hierarchical in the past. Besides being agricultural labourers for daily wages, Dalits historically worked as panaiyal or padial (attached labour) for landlords- a tradition of semi-servitude in this region that can be witnessed in both the colonial and postcolonial period. The system of padial tied labour to land and the landlord's family. Padial did not have mobility and she or he could not work on others' land. She/he was paid in kind usually through food grains. As Gilbert Slater, who pioneered village studies in India, defines it:

...'padial' is a sort of serf, who has fallen into hereditary dependence on a landowner by debt...Such a loan never is rapid, but descends from one generation to another; and the padials themselves are transferred with the creditor's land when he sells it or dies (Cited in Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj 2010:p.55)

Padial is different from daily agricultural labour. While agricultural labour was also paid in kind through food grains, she or he was not tied to land or the landlord's family permanently. The system of padial continued as late as the 1980s. Guhan and Mencher (1983a, 1983b) observe the presence of 36 padials working largely in households of persons belonging to the dominant caste of the village they studied. Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj (2010) who visited those villages in 2008 observe that while the system of padial had vanished, there are still some who are engaged in such jobs though with better remuneration. Given this history of such limited mobility and strong bonds of dependence on the landowning castes, economic diversification in rural Tamil Nadu has helped weaken these dependent relations and improved livelihoods for Dalits.

The question therefore is what made this diversification possible? Standard explanations for non-farm employment are broadly two-fold (Davis et al. 2009). One source of expansions is rooted in agricultural dynamism which allows for surplus to be transferred to investments in the non-agricultural sector, particularly in agro-processing, trade in inputs and output, repair and maintenance of assets and infrastructure related to agricultural production and trade. The other mode of diversification is distress-induced. While agro-processing has contributed to non-farm dynamism, the state has witnessed more penetration of other modern manufacturing activities.

Rural Manufacturing and Infrastructure

At 14 per cent, the share of manufacturing in the total rural workforce is one of the highest in the country (see Table 1.2). Rural Tamil Nadu has a sizeable number of units. There are 5,036 units with 20 or more workers, higher than the 3,356 factories in Gujarat and 3,075 in Maharashtra. The share of rural manufacturing units in total manufacturing in the state is about 41 per cent in Tamil Nadu as against 31 per cent in Gujarat and 34 per cent in Maharashtra (Economic Census 2013-14). It is, therefore, plausible to argue that manufacturing is an important source of productive employment in rural areas in the state (Sarkar and Karan 2005). The reduced gap between average rural and urban wage rates may also be because of such penetration. Though construction is the biggest employer of rural labour after agriculture, the relatively higher wages in construction in the state (Government of Tamil Nadu 2017) suggest that wage rates are influenced by demand across such sectors.

In addition to this process, two more variables shape the rise of the non-farm sector in the state: rural transport and electricity infrastructure. As we discussed in the previous chapter, a significant increase in the spread and development of the road network, particularly 'minor' roads has enabled intra- and inter-state mobilities of people, goods and services. The percentage of minor roads to total roads increased from 47 in 1960-61 to 80 per cent in 1990-92 (Rukmani 1994). Thanks to policy interventions to build broad based road transport infrastructure and lower costs of access, the state has managed to link the rural households.

Similarly, we pointed out in the previous chapter that the state was a pioneer in rural electrification.. The long term-trend towards higher non-farm diversification is therefore rooted in the provisioning of rural infrastructure such as electrification and transport that allowed not only for accumulation within agriculture but also for non-agricultural activities to take off in rural areas. In addition, free power for poor households was introduced in Tamil Nadu in the 1970s. Initially, each hut (up to 200 square feet) was to be provided with a single light bulb not exceeding 40 watts under various schemes

including the Jawahar Velai Vairippu Thittam (Jawahar Employment Opportunity) and TAHDCO Kamarajar Adi Dravidar housing, which was increased to 100 watts after 2006. Apart from diversification contributing to the tightening of rural labour markets and facilitating greater integration with the urban labour market, there were other policy moves that undermined traditional relations of power. Welfare interventions like the PDS not only offered freedom from hunger, but also substantially weakened relations of dependence and hierarchy. Access to food was a significant factor that tied labour to land and the landlord's family. The PDS contributed in good measure to break such ties of economic coercion.

Welfare and Labour

The state's better ability to design and implement welfare interventions like the PDS and other central schemes like MNREGA is well recognised (Vivek 2014; Dreze and Sen 2011; Vijayabaskar and Balagopal 2019). Some of these schemes are path dependent and have become irreversible given their link with electoral political appeals. The rural population has also acquired an ability to negotiate with the state over the years to ensure that such welfare schemes are implemented better. Put simply, what began as economic popular appeals have evolved to become legitimate claims of people and if the state fails to deliver such services, people resort to collective action. Srinivasan (2010) maps the process of how collective action has worked towards making public institutions more accountable and implement welfare schemes better. Here, we discuss two schemes the PDS and MNREGA, which have direct implications for changing labour relations in rural Tamil Nadu.

Making of the Public Distribution System

The PDS has become an important institution in shaping and influencing the way the economy works in rural Tamil Nadu. This section explores briefly the functioning of the PDS in Tamil Nadu, its effect on rural social relations and reason for its relative success in the state. We suggest that the PDS and its evolution in the state is intimately tied to the history of the Dravidian movement and its vision of social justice.

The DMK came into power with a promise to supply three measures of rice per rupee which was part of its election manifesto (Venkatsubramanian 2006). The new DMK government declared food policy to be a central concern. The first step taken in this regard was the establishment of Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) in 1972. Until then, food supply policies were designed by the union government. The state government was dependent on the central pool for food grains and had to seek the permission of the union government to procure them from other states. Guided by its commitment to state autonomy, the DMK established the TNCSC to govern supply and distribution of food grains without interference from the union government. Mirroring the union government's procurement and distribution architecture like the Food Corporation of India (FCI) at the state level, the TNCSC began to procure paddy directly from farmers, process and distribute it to various parts of the state through its transport contractors. The government established fair price shops across the state and enacted guidelines to ensure that no PDS beneficiary has to travel more than 2 kilometres to access a fair price shop. Using cooperatives as the primary instrument for extending these shops to all villages across Tamil Nadu, by 1982 there were 17,536 fair price shops in the state.

Political commitment to the PDS continued to be firm in the state even when the union government attempted to dilute it following the macro-economic reforms of the 1990s. In 1997, the union government initiated the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) by introducing below poverty line (BPL) and above poverty line (APL) categories and setting differential prices for the two. The DMK government that was in power rejected the proposal and reaffirmed its commitment to a universal PDS (Venkatasubramanian 2006). The state's commitment to the programme is visible in the amount of subsidies that go into it. In its initial stage, the open market price, central price and the state procurement price within the PDS were the same for rice (Venkatasubramanian 2006). It was perhaps meant to ensure the availability of food grain more than subsidising it. The state, however, started to gradually subsidise it to the extent that the price at PDS stood at 22 per cent of the open market price (see Table 1A.4 in Appendix 6A). When the centre imposed the TPDS, the state continued the universal PDS, at times bearing the associated fiscal cost too.

Content of the Public Distribution System

Along with the increased coverage, the basket of commodities provided within the PDS has also widened. Initially, the TNCSC provided rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene. Under a special PDS, it further included tur dal, urad dal, palmolein oil, fortified wheat flour, rava and maida at subsidised prices. In addition, the TNCSC also started supplying cement at concessional rates, free LPG stoves and LPG connections to poor families. Importantly, the price of essential commodities under the PDS in Tamil Nadu is much lower than the price fixed by the Government of India. The issue price of rice under the PDS as fixed by the Government of Tamil Nadu was INR 1 per kilogram during 2006-11, after which it was made completely free. This is against the Government of India's issue price of INR 3 per kilogram under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana allotment, INR 5.65 per kilogram under BPL allotment and INR 8 per kilogram under APL allotment (Venkatasubramanian 2006).

As it is universal, the PDS has become a source of income support and social protection in the state (Dreze and Khera 2013). Dreze and Khera's study (2013) study estimates that the state offers the highest implicit subsidy through the PDS. The same study also provides estimates of the potential effect of the PDS in reducing poverty. Income transfer through the PDS accounts for about 11 per cent of the total poverty reduction in rural India whereas for Tamil Nadu, the effect of the PDS in reducing poverty is as high as 44 per cent, which is again the highest among all states in India. Commitment to the PDS is reflected in its efficiency and coverage as well.

PDS: Efficiency and Coverage

Khera (2011b) ranks the performance of the PDS across states based on eight parameters such as degree of inclusiveness, quality of PDS grain and physical access. At 4.4 per cent, Tamil Nadu has one of the lowest diversion rates (the proportion of grain that does not reach beneficiary households) compared to the all-India average of 44 per cent. The state has an efficient tracking mechanism in place to prevent diversion (Vydhanathan and Radhakrishnan 2010). Further, card holders can also check the stocks by sending short message services (SMSs). In addition to such technical interventions, awareness and mobilisation of users PDS also contributes to its effective and transparent functioning (Vivek 2014). As a result, both coverage of and consumption through the PDS are better compared to other major states in the country. Importantly, as Tables 1A.5 and 1A.6

in Appendix 1A indicate, this is true for households at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy. The coverage of the PDS measured as a percentage of households availing BPL cards and access among lower castes and lower income groups are all better in Tamil Nadu than in other major states.

The success of the programme becomes more evident if we look at the actual reliance of rural households on the PDS for food consumption. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) consumption survey (68th round—2011-12) offers insights on the consumption of various goods (see Table 6A.6 in Appendix 6A). The monthly per capita average consumption of rice in rural Tamil Nadu is about 9 kilograms, of which, the PDS alone accounts for about 5 kilograms (56 per cent). In other words, on average more than half of the household consumption of rice comes from the PDS in the state while the corresponding figure at the all-India level is just 29 per cent (see Table 1A.6 in Appendix 1A).¹² If we disaggregate by deciles, for the bottom decile—the poorest of the poor, about 73 per cent of the consumption of rice comes from the PDS in Tamil Nadu while such category gets only 42 per cent in the rest of India. The PDS in fact accounts for more than 50 per cent of household rice consumption for 70 per cent (until the 7th decile) of households in Tamil Nadu. While the programme is universal, the poor and lower castes gain more from such universal provisioning.

Apart from its role in social protection and poverty reduction, an important outcome of the scheme is that it has enabled Dalits to be freed from food-related servitude. As pointed out earlier, food grains constitute the single most dominant factor in controlling labour. The PDS, on an average, accounts for 50 per cent of the total rice consumption of Dalit households in Tamil Nadu (see Table 1A.7 in Appendix 1A). The poorest households among Dalits (the bottom decile) actually get 74 per cent of their rice from the PDS. The PDS therefore, apart from ensuring a degree of food security, has also undermined relations of coercion. This once again shows how interventions in the domain of the economic popular have implications for the social popular domain. This undermining is likely to have been accompanied by better bargaining power apart from a rise in the reservation price of labour. The PDS in addition to ensuring freedom from hunger has also worked in conjunction with MNREGA to enhance the bargaining power of labour in the state. The next section maps this process.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)

This section explores three aspects with respect to MNREGA, a national legislation passed in 2005: its relative performance in the state, factors that made the programme successful and finally, its implications for rural power relations. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is rural job guarantee programme funded largely by the central government through which rural households have the legal right to get up to 100 days of on-demand employment in public works every financial year. The programme is generally evaluated based on the three stipulated components in the Act: (a) at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to each household requesting work in a rural area, (b) every worker entitled to wages at the specified wage rate for each day's work based on minimum wages set by the government and (c) one third of the beneficiaries of the programme to be women. A study by Princeton University (Bonner et al. 2012) shows that Tamil Nadu has topped all states in ensuring women's participation in the programme and also does better on the other two dimensions. Though higher women's participation may well have to do with the

possibility that male workers access higher wages jobs in the rural economy and hence prefer to not seek MNREGA work, effective implementation has nevertheless made it possible for women in rural Tamil Nadu to enhance their incomes. The higher level of women's participation in Tamil Nadu is also endorsed by other micro-level studies (Dreze and Oldiges 2011; Carswell and de Neve 2014).

The state also scores better with regard to caste-wise inclusiveness. As per NSSO data (2012), a larger share of lower castes participated for more than 60 days in Tamil Nadu. The macro-level success story in terms of caste inclusiveness is also borne out by evidence from micro-level studies such as by Carswell and de Neve (2014).

Interviews with bureaucrats reveal how efforts were made by the state government to ensure that persons from the lower castes, particularly Dalit households, could access MNREGA work.¹⁵ Rather than using the village as the basis for identifying work sites, they worked with dta on habitations within villager. As residential neighbourhoods in rural areas are segregated on the basis of caste, it is possible that some work sites cannot be accessed by Dalits. Further some sites may not be close enough for residents in some habitations to access. Working with habitations as the unit to identify work sites, bureaucrat respondents are of the opinion that they were able to ensure employment access across caste groups better.

Scholars agree that MNREGA has pushed up rural wages (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2011; Mehrotra 2013). Given the rapid sectoral changes in the structure of the state economy with negative employment generation in agriculture, MNREGA has also helped sustain the livelihoods of those in rural Tamil Nadu who cannot access the non-farm sector for work. As stated earlier, the rural real wage has doubled between 2004-05 and 2011-12 both in Tamil Nadu and at the all-India. Level. It can therefore be argued that such welfare interventions do enhance bargaining power in the rural labour market. Though the number of days of employment has been falling in agriculture, a combination of investments in education, demand from the non-farm sector, a universal PDS and MNREGA employment has pushed agricultural wages up as well. Such interventions therefore not only effect changes in rural labour markets but, as Carswell and de Neve (2014) point out, can also contribute to a progressive shift in social relations and empower historically marginalised caste groups in rural areas.

As in the case of PDS, the relative success of the programme in the state is definitely in part due to the presence of an efficient bureaucratic-administrative mechanism for its monitoring and implementation (Abraham 2016). But as a senior bureaucrat who was in charge of implementing the programme clarified, 'It is only because of the political will that we are able to implement better. Without the political leaders giving us direction, we would not be in a position to implement.'¹⁶ Leveraging this programme to seek electoral support, as in the case of other welfare measures, has therefore contributed to populist politics in the state. Further awareness has also led to increased public demand for employment. Often, the administrative mechanism has been forced to meet the heightened public expectation due to collective action by people at the ground level.¹⁷ Vivek (2014) argues that the reductions in caste inequalities due to social movements the state has witnessed for a century have expanded the 'substantive freedom of lower caste groups', changed the unequal social norms and influenced institutions to deliver better. In other words, while lower-caste mobilisation has led to better implementation of programme like MNREGA and the PDS, better implementation in turn contributes to expanding the substantive freedom of the poor and lower casts in rural areas. It

the PDS worked to free labour from food-related dependence on landlords, MNREGA has certainly worked in setting a reserve wage and freeing them from dependency on landowners and petty capitalists in rural Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

Rural Tamil Nadu is arguably the least agrarian in the country with the exception of Kerala. While this transformation is in line with the Dravidian vision of moving the subaltern out of caste bound traditional occupations, limits to structural transformation also imply that those who are unable to make the transition have to be provided with a degree of social protection. The analysis clearly shows that the state has not only seen greater economic transformation in rural areas, but such transformation has also been accompanied by improvements in the well-being of people and undermining of traditional labour and land relations. Contrary to popular perception, rural land has indeed been transferred to backward castes and to a lesser extent to Dalits. The non-farm sector has acquired a predominant role in providing opportunities in rural Tamil Nadu. It has undermined rural wage relations, offered a degree of mobility for the lower castes and supplemented farm incomes for the lower classes of farmers. Such diversification only affirms the 'post-agrarian' character of the state. Intervention through infrastructure, education and welfare has only accelerated such transformations. If rural-urban connectivity through roads and transport opened up new opportunities and widened access to the world, the network of primary health centres (PHCs), mid-day meals for school children and education for all contributed to building the capabilities of individuals. Economic popular welfare interventions such as the PDS and MNREGA have not only worked to cushion the rural poor from economic shocks but have crucially freed lower castes from social bondage and weakened hierarchical labour relations between the landed and the landless. If promotion of the rural non-farm sector opened up opportunities for the mobility of lower castes, state welfare interventions equipped them to participate in the market and negotiate with the state. Mobilisation that sought to undermine status based inequality and populist policy interventions in response have therefore not only improved socio-economic conditions of lower castes in rural Tamil Nadu, but have also improved the terms on which they could participate in the labour market.

APPENDIX 1A

Table 1A.1 Distribution of Rural Households by Size Class (Landholdings)—All-India

Marginal (up to 1)	Size of Landholding (in Hectare)				Average Size Holding
	Small (1-2)	Semi-medium (2-5)	Medium (5-10)	Large (10 and Above)	All
1970-71	19.1	15.2	11.3	3.9	100.0
1980-81	18.1	14.0	9.1	2.4	100.0
1985-86	18.4	13.6	8.1	2.0	100.0
1990-91	18.8	13.1	7.1	1.6	100.0
1995-96	18.7	12.3	6.1	1.2	100.0
2000-01	18.9	11.7	5.5	1.0	100.0
2005-06	18.5	10.9	4.9	0.8	100.0
2010-11	17.9	10.0	4.2	0.7	100.0
2015-16	17.7	9.5	3.8	0.6	100.0

Area under Control of Different Sizes				
1970-71	9.0	18.5	29.8	30.9
1980-81	12.0	21.2	29.6	23.0
1985-86	13.4	22.3	28.6	20.1
1990-91	15.0	23.2	27.0	17.3
1995-96	17.2	23.8	25.3	14.8
2000-01	18.7	24.0	24.0	13.2
2005-06	20.2	23.9	23.1	11.8
2010-11	22.5	23.6	21.2	10.6
2015-16	24.2	23.7	20.0	9.0

Source: Computed from the First Agricultural Census 1970-71 to the 10th Agricultural Census 2015-16 compiled by the EPWRF.

Pullinangal from 2.0



Click the link below to watch the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNm55ptmDcs>

English Translation of the Tamil Lyrics

Hey flock of birds
Ooh birds
I stood still by hearing
your talking sound.

Hey flock of birds
Ooh birds
I'm praying to hear
ur chirping sound.

No language
No religion
You live
Everywhere.
You eat every small
Organisms as
its yours.

Where did you
built swing to
play in atmosphere.
You pluck the heart of human
how live with dept

My soul..
my dear
Needs a heart like you
even if this world ends,
love you save
you in extinction.

Fly fly fly
Fly fly fly
across all borders
Fly fly fly by
carrying me too

You begin rays of
gold age by
shooking your feather.
you sit on the
lady deer and
make it sleep by hugging

With our little
legs soft walk you make
Big kolam
You make me longing
to fly like you in the sky

Hey flock of birds
Ooh birds
I stood still by hearing
your sound.

Chennai Poromboke Paadal ft. TM Krishna



Click the link below to watch the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82jEyeV5AHM>





Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Rajiv_Gandhi_Memorial_entrance.jpg.

The Rajiv Gandhi Memorial (entrance) at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, India.



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