

TWINING OF LANDSCAPE WITH EMOTIONS IN SANGAM POETRY

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at portraying the intertwining of emotions in the five tinai and how poets used landscape as a means of expressing one's intense feelings. The integration of tinai with emotions at display by the hero and heroine and other characters are spoken through mostly using imagery and metaphors in the corpus. The corpus also gives a vivid description on landscape and practices of the sangam age people with special references to their culture, rituals and day-to-day life.

Keywords: Sangam Age, Landscape, Emotions, Tinai

A bouque carries multiple colours and essences. The sangam corpus carries multiple emotions and lanscapes intertwined with each other.

The Sangam Age in Tamil Nadu (2nd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.) was the greatest period of literary outpourings. The Sangam landscape is the name given to a poetic device that was a characteristic of love poetry in classical Tamil Sangam literature. The core of the device was the categorisation of poems into different tinai or modes, depending on the nature, location, mood and type of relationship represented by the poem.

Each tinai was closely associated with a particular landscape, and imagery associated with that landscape - its flowers, trees, wildlife, people, climate and geography - was woven into the poem in such a way as to convey a mood, associated with one aspect of a romantic relationship. A singular likeness prevails in all the compositions even though multiple hands have played various roles in it with particular reflection to their thoughts and practices of the age. The conventions of sangam corpus are fulfilled in all the works.

“The world of nature and the world of man are two great fields in which the poet works.
The sangam poets work in both the great fields and it is, therefore that the reader finds in

their poems what Palgrave would characterize as the marriage of man with nature,” says JC Shairp in his work Landscape in poetry(28).

There are two kinds of sangam poetry: Akam and Puram. Akam poems had love as their main theme and Puram poems were about war and valor. In akam, we have pre-martial and martial, clandestine and illicit; conjugal happiness and infidelity; separation and union. In puram, we have war, valor, justice, retrieval of the cattle after the war, victory in war, raids during war, kings in battle, charity, fame and honour.

The work of nature observed in earth and sky and flora and fauna are portrayed through various literary compositions. This exterior landscape that mapped an interior terrain of emotion and feeling got associated with a phase of love. Kurinji landscape, the lush and beautiful land with waterfall and high hills was associated with the burst of passion in the first union of lovers. Mullai, the verdant forest land with the fragrance of wild jasmine, was associated with the patient waiting of lovers before their union in marriage.

Neidal, the coastal plain, was inhabited by hardy fishing folk who lived at the edge of life. This landscape was associated with the feeling of anxiety experienced by the lover waiting for her man who has braved the stormy ocean. Marudam, the fertile river plains and centre of urban life, was associated with infidelity and misunderstanding between lovers. Palai referred to the forest land and hillside parched by the scorching heat of sun in the summer months. The bleak and relentless dry lands of Palai were associated with the feeling of desolation experienced by lovers in life’s harsh terrain.

The physio-geographic conditions influence the writers and also reminds of the ‘growing civilization of man’. Aintinai deals with love in the five stages. These stages of love are correlated to the five kinds of natural environment. The five-fold division stands for the different culture and each division of the land preserves its characteristics of the stage of culture peculiar to it.

*“Mullai country is associated with the rainy season and evening
 Kurinci with the season of evening dew and midnight
 Marutham, with the later part of night and the dawn
 Neytal with the twilight or evening
 Palai with summer, the season of morning dew, and midday.”*

- Ramanujan, 238.

There is a remarkable blending of external nature with feelings of joy and sorrow in human life. It is the primary ‘pond’ or ‘the principal source of meaning’ and there is a deep bond between the human characters and the plants, birds and beasts. The landscape is the meta-language of the variety of moods.

Puram is also divided into tinai. They are categorised as follows:

“Vetchi (Kurunji) – capturing enemy cattle as prelude to war

Vanchi (Mullai) – invading the enemy
Ulinai (Marutham) – encirclement of enemy fortifications
Thumbai (Neidal) – waging of war
Vagai (Palai) – celebrates victory in war
Padan (Kaikkilai) – glory of warriors and kings in battle, in charity, in fame and honour.”

- Thangappa, 28.

Looking back at akam poems that reflect a lot of emotions based on love, they are twined with the flora and fauna of the tinai. This inter-twining of landscapes with emotions is hard to come by but writers of the sangam corpus does it effortlessly and with steady flow of thoughts and ideas mingled along with nature. Nature becomes the screen on which their emotions are painted.

KURINJI: Clandestine meeting of lovers. The landscape is a mountainous region with a special flower named kurinji that blossoms once in twelve years. The subject of the kurinji tinai poems is mainly the secret meeting of the lovers, the gossip that starts because of that and the talk about the hero getting married to the heroine. Kurinji tinai's main sentiment is the love and union of the lovers.

The poems in kurinji tinai bring before us the beautiful landscape of the mountains along with the fauna and flora. We can imagine the girls living close to the nature, playing in the waterfalls, chasing parrots, meeting the hero and falling in love. The poems also bring out the scenes of the monkeys leaping around in the trees, the steep valleys, waterfalls, the flowers, and about everything nature offers in the mountains.

Lovers' Meetings:

What she said

Bigger than earth, certainly,
 higher than sky,
 More unfathomable than the waters
 Is this love for this man
 Of the mountain slopes
 Where bees make rich honey
 From the flowers of the kurinji
 That has such black stalks”

- Tevakulattar
 Kuruntokai 3

Muthal is the land, sky, mountain and ocean. Karu elements are honey and kurinji flowers. Uri is the love feeling that the heroine has for the hero. The heroine is very happy about her love for the hero. The union is not described or talked about but rather it is enacted through the scene of

the bees making honey from the flowers of kurinji. There is a hidden metaphor in this as the description of the flower that blooms in twelve years to that of the heroine.

What she said

Only the thief was there, no one else.
And if he should lie, what can I do?
There was only
A thin-legged heron standing
On legs yellow as millet stems
And looking
For lampreys
In the running water
When he took me.”

- Kapilar
Kuruntokai 25

The poem speaks of clandestine love of the lovers. The heroine reveals that no one was there except the heron which stood as witness when the hero took the heroine.

NEYTHAL: seashore and the adjoining lands. The name of the god is Varunan. 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. The subject is often separation, during which the heroine believes that her lover has abandoned her. Occasionally, neythal poems concern the journey of the hero along the beach in his chariot as he comes to see his beloved. The time is afternoon, evening or occasionally night. Anxious waiting is the theme of neythal. The situations could be pre-marital or post-marital.

What she said

The fishermen who go
From the little town in the seaside groves
Into the sea
Wait in the thick shade of the blue laurel tree,
Looking for the right time
To enter the cold wide waters,
Spreading and drying meanwhile their nets
With many eyes and knots,
In the sea side of my man.
If only someone would go to him
And tell him,
“If mother should ever hear

The scandal about us, it would be hard for me
To live here,”
 May be he’ll take me then,
 Through these places where
 The salt merchants trading in white rocksalt
 Wake up the cows sleeping on the long road
 As they crunch their carts through the sands,
 Their loud wheels
 Scaring the black-legged white heron in the fields,
 To his hometown
 Surrounded by salt pans?”

- Ammunvanar
Narrinai, 4

The hero is looking for the right opportunity to unite with the heroine, just like the fishermen are waiting for the right moment to enter into the sea. The herons fearing the sounds of the salt wagons and fleeing away, is like the heroine fearing gossips and scandals that will rise in town. The sounds of the grinding wheels are the gossips and scandals.

PALAI – The lovers journey through the wilderness. It is the opposite of Kurinji. The goddess for this region is Kotravai. 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 hero sets out across the wilderness to elope with his beloved, or, if he’s unaccompanied, to make enough money to marry her on his return. Occasionally the hero is married and undertakes a journey for business purposes, or for some god. The time is midday and the season is summer. Separation of the lovers is the theme of Palai. The situations could be pre-marital or post-marital.

What the passersby said

To the lover eloping with the girl

The sun is down
listen
to that sound.
don’t go there
with your girl,
she’s like a young she-elephant.
 Forest bandits are at the fence,
 long ringed lances
 gripped as in the heat of battle,
 signaling
 with drum-taps, now,

and now again,
the coming of the traders.”

- Uraiur Mutukorran
Kuruntokai 390

The karu in this poem are elephant and wasteland robbers. The muthal is the forest. The passersby are warning the hero who is eloping with the girl about the dangers of the forest and ask them not to leave at the moment but to wait till dawn.

MULLAI: Forest and adjoining lands; Patient waiting and happiness after marriage. Jasmine is the typical flower of this land. It is also the Karupporul of the region. Patient waiting and sustained hope of the heroine during separation is symbolized through this flower. In Kalavu she waits for the hero to arrange for the marriage and in Karpur, she waits for the hero to return back from his journey. The coming of the rainy season is intimately connected with the lover's return. Mayon is the dark god of this region.

What her girl friend said

To her lover on his return
Melt all the butter
From all the cows of the cowherds
In the woods of Nalli has strong chariots,
Mix it
With the steaming rice
From the dense white paddy
Of Tonti fields,
Heap them
In seven bowls
And offer it all to that crow
That cawed those good omens
Bringing guests
And an end to the grief
That has been wasting my girl's arms.
Even so,
The offering
would still be too little.

- Kakkai Patiniyar Naccekaiyar
Kuruntokai 210

Muthal is the forest. Even if we had offered seven pots full of cooked hot, white rice, got from all the paddy grown in Thondi city, mixed with ghee from the milk of many cows of the cattle herders in the forest of Nalli with sturdy chariots, it would have just been a small reward for the crow that called out the good omen that brought the hero and ended the distress that made the heroine's thick arms become thin.

MARUTHAM: The lover's unfaithfulness after marriage. The tinai is named after the flowering tree martham in this region. The god of this landscape is Indran. After marriage and usually after the couple have a child, the hero leaves his wife and begins to live with courtesans. The time is day. Lover's infidelity and the beloved woman's resentment are the themes in marutham.

The situations are post-marital. 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.

What she said

In his country,
 Spotted crabs
 Born in their mother's death
 Grow up with crocodiles
 That devour their young.
 Why is he here now?
 And why does he
 Take those women,
 A jangle of golden bangles
 As they made love,
 Only to leave them?

- Orampokiyar
 Ainkurunuru, 24

The poem is about infidelity which is set in the fertile, watered countryside. The spotted crabs and crocodiles kill and eat their loved ones when they were responsible for protecting and caring for it. The case of the hero is similar to it when leaves them and goes.

The inter mingling of emotions with the five different landscapes show the various traits of love. The specific culture of the occupants along with personal details is depicted alongside love in the poems of the sangam corpus. The embedded framework of feelings painted through imageries makes it outstanding and deem it an extraordinary status in the poetic world.

What she said

The bare root of the bean is pink
 Like the leg of a jungle hen,
 And herds of deer attack its overripe pods.
 For the harshness
 Of this season of morning dew
 There is no cure
 But the breast of my man.

- Allur Nanmullai
Kuruntokai 68

This poem is unique in its way. It is a mixture of landscapes. Kurinji is depicted through the morning dew and mullai is represented through the jungle hen and the deer. The kurinji and mullai mingling is shown through the lovers union and patient waiting of the heroine. The mixing of memory and desire is done to bring out the nuances of the heroine's mood and her patient waiting.

The akam poems portray the concept of love with all its associated meanings with its particular landscape. The akam doesn't speak directly but through the persona. This is evident in the poems of sangam corpus. The combination of speaker, listener and theme in each of the poems in the Sangam age and it has been practiced by almost all the writers of the age in keeping with conventions.

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