**Conflation of Earth Mother and Mother Goddess Archetypes in Tamil**

Dr. S. Vanathu Antoni

vanathuantoni@gmail.com

**I**

With the introduction and popularization of the idea of archetype by Carl Gustav Jung, folklore, psychology and cultures studies have expanded their scope. As a central idea in Greek philosophy, archetype has come to signify a universal form across cultures. A whole range of symbols, feelings, beliefs, actions, and values within a culture is embedded in the collective unconscious of the participating people. It is the common reservoir from which the human psyche draws its literary inspirations and expressions. Myths and dreams capture the symbols which lend themselves to multiple readings and interpretations justifying a kind of rationality to the archetypes. While the archetype may provide scope for the study of human nature and the processes of human behaviour, they do not seem to carry any ethical overtone. It may have many shades of brightness and darkness which may refer to the personal and social consciousness of an individual.

An important archetype is the Great Mother which is full of suspense, secret and mystery. It houses immense potential for change and dynamism. Like the changing earth, the Great Mother embodies the cycle of birth, fertility, barrenness, maturity, old age, withering and regeneration all the while interacting only with herself. The great mother is the incredible and infinite powerhouse and source of life. Three significant characteristics of the Great Mother are her fertility, change or transformation and being an ancient woman and mother. Her identification with the earth throws up the imagery of fertility as soil, womb, and watery origin of life. Her capacity for change is pictured in the seasonal occurrence of nature and the cycle of birth and death. As the fountainhead of life, she provides the image of an ancient mother and feminine ancestor. This mother archetype is classified as ‘good’ and ‘terrible’ mother with power to create and destroy.

The myth of Kāli for example, as the Great Mother archetype represents a vast gamut of processes like, life, death, love, passion, new life, goodness, fear and wilderness. Human memory of the Great Mother gives a sense of meaning, place, power, survival, nurturance and freedom. **An appropriate relationship with the archetype has both positive and negative consequences. Humans become** conscious of this archetypal pattern, its complexity and shadow, its meaning and influence in life. By identifying with the archetype the distorted projections of the archetype are consciously removed. An understanding of individual women with great power and vulnerabilities facilitates the development of a mature relationship to the archetype and through that to the women ancestors as well. The relationship between nurturance and power and the nature of social and personal power in terms of nurturance is comprehended. It is a lifelong process to develop such a mature relationship with an archetype in any culture and the vast folklore resources of the world guide the humans in this enterprise.

Archetypal approach to the study of culture and literature has engaged cultural anthropologists and cultures theorists in recent times. In ethnographic analysis of primitive societies, field studies pay more attention to the residues of totems, taboos, myths and rituals. These studies bring immense intellectual satisfaction as they explore the bases of human and social values. They apparently work within a historical framework but by adopting a psychological standpoint, these efforts tend to become trans-historical as they try to recapture the spirit and value of literature. The primordial archetypes are deeply buried in the collective unconscious of a community and inspire the later exponents to embody those type-images as an enduring bridge through succeeding generations. Personal integration is sought to be accomplished through the process of socialization into these cultural imagery and social integration is achieved through adherence to the poetic principles and literary schemata laid down from time to time.

**II**

The Tamil ethnic community manifests a few salient features through its known cultural and literary history. “One significant aspect is the absence of supernatural origins of its history”. (Subramanian, 2010:7). It does not start its history with stories of gods or puranic myths. In fact myth making seems to be scarce. But certain archetypal stories related to women occupy its literary space. “Single breasted *pattiṉi*, Kaṇṇagi’s Difference with Pēgaṉ, Sorrow of Ādimandi Attanathi, Despondency of the Pāri Magaḷir, Opposition of Peruṅgōppeṇḍu to Enforced Widowhood, Accusation of Naṉṉaṉ as Woman Murderer, Munificence of Kumaṇaṉ and Pēgaṉ and the Friendship between Kōpperuñcōḻāṉ and Piciriāndaiyār are some of the archetypes which emanate from actual life situations”. (Natarajan 2008:15). Prominence of women in society and poetic justice in the face of male dominance seem to have engaged the sensibilities of the Tamils.

*Tolkāppiyam* as a work of poetics and grammar might be seen as the inaugurator of the archetypal approach to the study of Tamil literature. The *tiṇai* scheme of *akam* (pronounced *aham*) and *puram* comprehensively deals with the interior and exterior landscape life and civilization of the Tamils. It posits *nilam* (land, place) and *poludu* (time) as the first elements (*mudarporul*). Native or generative elements (*karupporul*) are enumerated as ‘deity, food, animal, tree, bird, drum, occupation, music and such like’. Human elements are appropriate behaviour patterns of love (*uripporul*). Place and more specifically land refers to five interior landscapes (*akam*) which are basic and five exterior landscapes (*puṟam*). *Tiṇai* is not to be viewed as a restrictive term just to refer to land, class and behaviour but as an archetype directing the entire gamut of individual and social life. “The *akam* poems have as their focus the individual within the matrix of familial relationships, foremost among them being love between man and woman, which is explored vertically, that is archetypal. The bias is impersonal: the experience itself is rarefied and frozen in the shape of a poem” (Parthasarathy 1993:285). The *puram* poems horizontally deal with the social life of the man with the world in concrete situations.

The five basic *tiṇai*s or landscapes are named after the characteristic flower of the tract of land. They are *kuṟiñci* (mountain/conehead), *mullai* (forest/jasmine), *marudam* (wetland/Arjuna), *neydal* (seashore/dark lily) and *pālai* (wasteland/ivory wood). These are protected and presided over by one of the inherent generative elements, namely the deity. These deities are māyōṉ of *mullai*, cēyōṉ of *kuṟiñci*, vēndaṉ of *marudam* and varunan of *neydal* (TK.PA.KVI. 5). *Pālai* as an emergent landscape on account of the vagaries of monsoon is associated with korravai, a female deity. “While male deities inhere in and protect the enduring permanent landscapes, a female deity is assigned to a changing landscape” (Jothirani 2011:25).This scheme indicates a philosophical preference for permanence over impermanence or change, a definite eco-feminist understatement. Time refers to both the seasons of the year and the hours of the day and night. The seasons are six. They are: *kār* (rainy season), *kūdir* (cold season), *munpaṉi* (early dew), *pinpaṉi* (late dew), *iḷavēnil* (early summer) and *muduvēnil* (late summer). The day has the following six parts: *vaigarai* (dawn), *kālai* (morning), *nanpagal* (midday), *erpāḍu* (evening), *mālai* (early night) and *naḷyāmam* (dead of night). Rainy season and evenings are assigned to *mullai*. Cold season and early dew and dead of night are linked to *kuriñci*. All seasons and dawn and morning go with *marudam*. *Neydal* has evening and all seasons. *Pālai* is associated with late dew, early and late summer and midday’ (TK.PA.KVI. 6–12).

Women pervade the *akam-tinai*s with their physiological and psychological expansion and sacralize the entire domain of love, be it *kaḷavu* (pre-marital), *karpu* (marital and extra-marital). “Their experience of love in all dimensions like, union, waiting, sulking, lamenting and separation find poetic expressions in the *akam* poems of the Sangam literature” (Jothirani 2011:7). Their expressive mode gets accentuated and vitalized by the concreteness of the native or generative elements which render the feminine experience of love semiotic. The fusion of nature and woman as a seamless fabric draws on the archetypes of the Earth mother and Mother goddess. Tamil *tinai* worldview as presented in *Tolkāppiyam* could be reconstructed as a framework of eco-feminist archetypes. *Kuriñci* can be read as an archetype with its mountainous landscape, cold season, midnight, thirst for union and consummation, secrecy, protest against authority like parents, elders and government, wild animals like elephant, tiger, monkey, boar and peafowl. *Mullai* might be studied as an archetype with supplementaries like rains, evening, pastoral lands, valleys, equality, family security, chastity, womanhood, yearning, aspiration, recycle, regeneration, resuscitation, games and cattle like goats, cows, bulls and deer. *Marudam* can render itself as an archetype with aspects like dawn, fertile lands, river bank zone, surplus profit, class hierarchy, male domination, flesh trade, liberalization of sex, women safety, domestic violence, pretence, sham, anger, loneliness and joy. *Neydal* may be understood as an archetype with every characteristic of the seaside such as the sand and surf, fishing, salt making, anxious waiting, separation, abandonment, journey of the hero, the bioregion associated with blue water lilies, cormorants, gulls, herons, pelicans, crocodiles, sharks and buffaloes, screw pine trees, water wells and salt water ponds, vilari music and cevvali tunes. *Pālai* would be amenable as an archetype with its components like midday, summer, sand dunes, sea, emptiness, desertification, sorrow, separation, family breakdowns, migration, diplomacy, murder, dacoity and victory.

There is a more fascinating spectrum of foundational archetypes like mother, father, chastity, munificence and power. The mother archetype includes motifs like light, lamp, compassion, auspiciousness, ignorance, land, water, earth, fertility, potency and divinity. The father archetype has such features as ownership, income, knowledge, dominance, power over the female, fire, wind and sky. The mother archetype opens the eco-feminist motifs of earth and woman. Tamil culture and literature syncretize archetypes of the eco-feminist motifs of earth mother and mother goddess. Human existence seems to have a foundational, subliminal and gyn-ecological mode. “The rudimentary eco-awareness of the humans begins in the amniotic fluid of the mother’s womb with the element of water and the originary sentience tied up with the female” (Vairamuthu 1996:6). This gynaecological beginning characterizes the mode of human existence. The plenary human integration becomes possible as women and men engage themselves as active eco-feminist agents. “Our first human moments of incipient noesis consist of the awakening of our subliminal consciousness to the comfortable darkness of water in the womb of a woman” (Pieris.1996:14). The history of the Tamils is tied up with the deluge that engulfs their early habitat of *Kumarikkanḍam* as illustrated in the People’s Epic *Cilappatikāram*. It recalls in the Madurai Canto ‘the existence of the earlier epochs of the Tamils in verse. The south of the present Kanniyākumari was a great expanse with the river *Pahruḷi* and a range of mountains of which *Kumari* is one’ (Cilappatikaram. 11:19–20). These disappear in a deluge. This points to the existence of an ancient of Tamil culture and literature, of which the extant Sangam poems and *Tolkāppiyam* could be seen as remnants and exponents. Tamil culture thus situates its origin in the primeval water.

**III**

*Kumarikkaṇḍam* or *Kumarināḍu* is seen as the seat of ancient Tamil civilization. It is still a hypothetical lost continent in the Indian Ocean. With lack of conclusive evidence for such a hypothesis, one can only hope for some remote sensing facility to scan the deep seas and come up with some proof. Unitl such time, the Tamil imagination can fancy its chances as the cradle of human civilization and the origin of Tamil as the first language of the world. As Nandivarman points out, the Tamils have a debt and obligation to humanity by showing their cultural precedence. “If there are 612 village names in the various states of India which are prefixed with the word ‘Tamil’, then its pan-Indian spread is in need of in-depth study” (Nandivarman 2010: 90). The *Kumari* (virgin or pure) nature of Tamil culture can inspire many to compose novels and poems. Scholars have come up with the *Lemuria* hypothesis, a land mass lost under the Indian and Pacific Ocean as the unknown continent. Claims to identify the *Lemuria* with *Kumarikkaṇḍam* are traced to some references in the Sangam literature.

There are theories about the lost continent due to pole shift, earthquakes and rise in the sea level. Continental drift theory states that due to some problem with the tectonic plates, this continent is said to have moved away. This theory seems to be popular and acceptable. *Skanda Purāṇam* written by Kacciyappa Śivāccāriyār gives the first evidence of *Kumarikkaṇḍam*. The Andakosappadalam section of *Skanda Purāṇam* describes the following cosmological model of the universe: There are many worlds, each having several continents, which in turn, have several kingdoms. Bharatan, the ruler of one such kingdom, had eight sons and one daughter. He further divided his kingdom into nine parts, and the part ruled by his daughter Kumari came to be known as *Kumarikkaṇḍam* after her. *Kumarikkanḍam* is described as the kingdom of the Earth .

‘The current state of play as known to history, until the recently emerging evidence, is that the history of the Tamils is said to begin in the pre-historic or more acceptably in the proto-historic period of about 500 B.C. Tamil/Dravidian culture associated with the megalithic sites in places such as Ādiccanallūr (more correctly Ādityanallūr) in the Tinnevely District of Tamilnadu and across the Palk Straits in Pomparippu in north-western Ilaṅgai/Sri Lanka are regarded by historians/archaeologists as belonging to the Dravidian peoples of whom the Tamils at that time were their first and foremost representatives. Those finds from Ādiccanallūr though dated earlier to be around 300 B.C. have now been shown to date back to 1700 B.C., following the currently ongoing excavations with advanced dating techniques. The archaeologists, studying the inscriptions on stones and artefacts, reported recently on that basis that Tamil civilisation existed more than 4000 years ago. They went on to say that Tamil/ Dravidian civilization which began in present day Tamil Nadu spread to the other parts of the world from there, as they considered Ādiccanallūr to be the cradle of Tamil civilization. Linguistic data of Tamil and other existing Dravidian languages too support only a movement from south to north of the spread of those languages, as Tamil is shown to be their parent language. This present state of knowledge has however received a startling knock from another quarter with the recent underwater archaeological finds relating to the lost Tamil continent of Kumarikkandam. For what those discoveries reveal, though at the present moment only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, has been uncovered, is the existence of a lost continent and lost cities in an antediluvian era stretching back before the melt down of the Last Ice Age and the inundations of those lands. The evidence thus far reveals the existence of man-made structures twenty three metres beneath the sea, five kilometres off the Tarangampāḍi- Pūmpuhār coast near Nāgapattinam in South India. Its existence at such a depth is calculated as having taken place over many thousand years ago. This notion ties in with the geological evidence of such happenings at that time as well as the Tamil traditions of the first two Tamil Sangams referred to earlier. The unfolding archaeological and geological evidence is proving to be the historical validation that Tamil civilization which reached a high point during those two Tamil Sangams had their beginnings 11000 years ago or circa 9000 B.C. What is the evidence currently available, be it archaeological, geological or other which will substantiate the Kumarikkaṇḍam tradition?” (Parameswaran 2005, Tamil Guardian)

*Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ* mentions Kumarikkanḍam when it speaks about a lost continent in the ocean and specifically mentions a word *kadalkōḷ* which means 'seizure by ocean'. *Kalittogai* (KT) annotated by Naccinārkkiṉiyar (6th Century B.C.) makes a fairly good description of *kaḍalkōḷ*, *kaḍal perukku* in terms of *kadal vavval* (forceful rise of the sea), *‘Pali Tirnda Velayum’* (the white tides took revenge) and *“Mākkaḍal kalakkura mākonra madangappōr”* (The wide sea that waged a big war), (Kalitogai*.* 104). The commentary on *Cilappatikāram* makes a graphic narration of the process of the submergence of *Kumarikkaṇḍam* as ‘the land extending from *Pahruḷi* river in the north to *Kumari* river in the south. This land is located to the south of Kanniyākumari and covered an area of 700 kavattam and it is divided into 49 territories in the following seven categories, *Ēḻu teṅgu nāḍu* (Seven coconut lands), *Ēḻu Madurai nāḍu* (Seven Madurai lands), *Ēḻu munpālai nāḍu* (Seven front sandy lands), *Ēḻu pinpālai nāḍu* (Seven back water lands), *Ēḻu kunṟa nāḍu* (Seven hilly lands), *Ēḻu gunakarai nāḍu* (Seven eastern littoral lands) and *Ēḻu kuṟumpanai nāḍu* (Seven dwarf-palm lands)’. The epic for the first time mentions the area of this continent. The idea of seven as the favourite number seems to have caught on the Tamil imagination with seven planets, seven colours, seven days of the week, seven *kanni*s, seven *muni*s, seven stages of human life, seven stages of flower and seven notes of the music. However, there is no supernatural element in this scheme as the narrative is down to earth and land-based.

Another important source of information on the catastrophic deluge is the many temple paintings and inscriptions which include those in Kanniyākumari, Tiruvorriyūr, Sīrkāḻi, Kumbakōnam and Madurai. The significance of the puranic accounts placing the Flood myth and the story of Manu in South India is to be noted. *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (*c*.500 B.C.–A.D. 1000) speaks of Manu (*Satyavrata*) as the Lord of Dravida (South India). The Matsya[*Purāṇa*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsya_Purana) (*c*. 250 B.C.–A.D. 500) narrates the *tapas* of Manu on Mount Malaya of South India. *Manimēkalai* (*c*. 600A.D.) mentions that the ancient Cōḻa port city of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam (present day Puhar) was destroyed by a flood. It states that this flood was sent by the Hindu deity Indra, because the king forgot to celebrate a festival dedicated to him (Manimekalai. 7:62). The myth of the deluge finds mention in many other classical literatures around the world, perhaps each of them trying to draw attention to their origin from the primeval waters.

Water as the most contested category among nations within a continent and among the states within a nation, particularly in India throws light upon its cultural aspects. As Tamil Nadu is in the tropical zone, the need for water is significantly more and this need has shaped the beliefs and attitude towards water. Set against the backdrop of a water scarce situation, the preciousness of water can be comprehended. Global warming and the need for green cover can be emphasized. A Sangam poem speaks of water scarcity as follows: “The mountain is parched and barren like an enemy land blazed by a king with great rage.  Not finding food to eat, a delicate deer with spots those appear like popped grains, and a stag with twisted antlers, run toward mirages. Hemp plants are ruined and the place  
is scorching.  Female monkeys are in anguish. Elephants with feet like pounding stones are distressed having no water to drink in the dried up springs.  They eat mud to save their lives.  Rains have not fallen in the harsh wasteland” (Kalitogai. *Pālaikkali*.13, Tr. Vaidehi ).In fact, the very word Tamiḻ means *“inimaiyum nīrmaiyum Tamiḻ enal āgum”* (“Sweetness and Flowingness is Tamiḻ”). The term *‘nīr’* is suffixed to form independent words like, *tannīr* (cool water), *vennīr* (hot water), *padanīr* (palm-tapped water), *iḷanīr* (tender coconut water), *kuḍinīr* (drinking water), *munnīr* (three water-sea as it has water from rain, river and sea), *mudunīr* (stagnant water) and of course now *railnīr* (train water). “As water is cool, it is called *‘tannīr’*. As it cools the body, the term for bathing is ‘cooling the body’ (*kuḷirdal*). As rain drops fall from the sky, rain water is called *‘amiḻdam’* (ambrosia). Water bodies are teleologically named and they are always linked to the purpose of their usage. Springs which are self-flowing are called *‘cunai, kayam, poygai* and *ūrru’*. A puddle or collection of rain water is called *‘kuṭṭai’* (short expanse of water). A pond that is used for bathing is *‘kuḷam’*. A pond that is used for drinking is called *‘ūruni’* from the verb *‘un’* (intake). A lake meant for agriculture is called *‘ēri’* named after farming (*ērtoḻil*). A water body which receives only the rain is called *‘ēndal’* and a water body which has sluices is called *‘kanmay’* named after eyes (*kan*) which are open to the world” (Paramasivan 2013: 20). Non-Vedic Tamil culture celebrates water as archetypal just as the Vedic tradition holds the primacy of fire. Tamil language itself has come to be treated as mother and divine during the medieval period when Sanskrit and Telugu gain ascendancy in Tamilnadu.

Leopold Sedar Sengkor, President of Senegal in a lecture delivered at the International Institute of Tamil Studies in 1974 speaks of the possible link between South India and the East African countries with the same latitude. Only the Indian Ocean separates the eastern coast of Africa from the south of India. Tamil legends refer to the existence, from time immemorial, of flourishing cities long since buried beneath the seas. Civilizations which start in the valleys of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, and lastly of the Indus, bear the residues of the black humans. The memory of the universal flood is recalled in the poetic work of *Cilappatikāram*. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) in his work *The Appearance of Man* mentions that the earliest humans simultaneously proliferate in East Africa and Southern India. ‘It was on a tropical and subtropical area of the Old World, an area which in fact extended across to India and Malaysia, but basically located on the African continent that the evolution of the higher primates took place’.

**IV**

Archaeological excavations in the Indus Valley sites exhibit ‘the figurines of the Mother goddesses’ (Subramanian 2010: 95). Villages in Tamilnadu do not boast of big temples but the village deities are numerous. ‘Small deities’ is the term first used by Appar in his *Tēvāram*. Of these deities more than half are some or other form of the Mother Goddess. The figures of the mother goddesses are north facing and in a standing position and angry. Propitiatory sacrifices in the form of blood seem to be the normal way of worship and celebration. As the worshippers consume the sacrificial meat, they are considered mostly to belong to the lower strata of society. Land-related communities offer uncooked rice and sprouted pulses, probably more as the remnants of food gathering and food producing stages. Quite a number of these mother goddesses are depicted as protective war deities. These democratic women deities seem to have inspired the Women poets of the Sangam era. Tamil Sangam literature has a very definitive world orientation and rational outlook. It exhibits a very democratic and non-confessional language hue. There are poems composed by as many as 41 (43) women poets, a phenomenon found nowhere else in any classical literature. The women poets along with their compositions are: 1. AñciyattaiMagaḷ Nāgaiyār (ANU. 352), 2. Ancil Anciyār (NṞI. 90), 3.Aḷḷūr Naṉmullaiyr (ANU. 46, KṞT. 32, 67, 68, 93, 96, 140, 157, 202, 237, PNU.  306, 340), 4.Ādimandiyār (KṞT. 31), 5. Unpodiyar (KṞT. 232), 6. Okkur Mācāattiyār (ANU. 324, 384, KṞT. 126, 139, 186, 220, 275, PNU.  279), 7. Avvaiyār (ANU.11, 147, 273, 303, KṞT. 15, 23, 28, 29, 39, 43, 80, 91, 99, 102, 158, 183, 200, 364, 388, NṞI. 129, 187, 295, 371, 381, 390, 394, PNU. 87-104, 140, 187, 206, 231, 232, 235, 269, 286, 290, 295, 311, 315, 367, 390, 392), 8. Kaccipēṭṭu Naṉṉāgaiyār (KṞT.30, 172, 180, 192, 197, 287), 9. Kaḻārkkīraṉ Eyiṟṟiyār (ANU. 163, 217, 235, 294, KṞT.  35, 261, 330, NṞI.281, 312), 10. Kākkaippāḍiṉiyār Nacceḷḷaiyār (KṞT.210, PNU. 278, PPU. 51-60), 11.Kāmakkani Pasalaiyār (NṞI. 243), 12. Kāvaṟpeṇḍu (PNU. 86), 13. Kumulijñālār Nappasalaiyār (ANU. 160), 14. Kuṟamagaḷ Iḷaveyiṉi, (PNU. 157), 15. Kuṟamagaḷ Kūreyiṉi (NṞI. 357), 16. Kuṉṟiyaṉār (ANU. 40, 41, KṞT. 50, 51, 117, 238, 301, 336, NṞI. 117, 239), 17. Tāyaṅkaṇṇiyār (PNU. 250), 18. Nakkaṇṇaiyār (ANU. 252, NṞI. 19, 87, PNU. 83, 84, 85), 19. Nalveḷḷiyār (ANU. 32, KṞT. 365, NṞI. 7, 47), 20. Naṉṉāagaiyār (KṞT. 118, 325), 21. Neḍumpaḷḷiyattai (KṞT. 178), 22. Pārimagaḷir (PNU. 112), 23. Puṇkaṇ Udiraiyār (KṞT. 48, 171, PNU.  277), 24. BhūdapPāṇḍiyanDēviyar Peruṅgōppeṇḍu (PNU. 246), 25. PeruṅkōlināygaṉMagaḷ Nakkaṇṇaiyār (PNU. 83, 84, 85), 26. Pēymagaḷ Iḷaveyiṉi (PNU. 11), 27. Podumbil Pullalaṅ-kaṇṇiṉār (ANU. 154), 28. Poṉmaṇiyār (KṞT. 391), 29. Poṉmuḍiyār (PNU. 83, 84, 85), 30. Pōndai Pasalaiyār (ANU. 110), 31. Madurai Mēlaikkaḍaiyattār Nalveḷḷiyār (ANU. 32, KṞT. 365, NṞI. 7, 47), 32. Māripittiyār (PNU. 251, 252), 33. Mārōkkattu Nappasalaiyār (NṞI.304, PNU.  37, 39, 126, 174, 226, 280, 383), 34. MulliyūrpPūdiyār (ANU. 173), 35. Varumulaiyaridi (KṞT. 176), 36. Veṇṇikkuyattiyār (PNU. 66), 37. Veṇpūdiyār (KṞT. 97, 174, 219), 38.Veṇmaṇip pūdiyār (KṞT. 299), 39.Veḷḷivīdiyār (ANU. 45, 362, KṞT. 27, 44, 58, 130, 146, 149, 169, 386, NṞI. 70, 335, 348), 40.Veḷḷaimāṟaṉār (PNU. 296), 41.Veṟipāḍiya Kāmakkaṇṇiyār (ANU. 22, 98, PNU. 271, 302, NṞI.268), 42. Kāmamcērkuḷattār (KṞT.4), 43. Pūṅkaṇuttiraiyār (KṞT. 48, 171, PNU.  277)” (Murugesa Pandian 2010: 14).

The more than 3000 year old Sanskrit literary tradition which deifies *Vāc* (speech) and acclaims Saraswati as the goddesss of learning does not seem to have many early women writer sages. The following women are mentioned in the Vedas but no text is ascribed to any of them: (Aditi,  Apala, Dakshina, Gārgi,Gosha, Indrāni, Juhu, Kadru, Lopamudra, Maitreyi, Rātri, Romasa,  Sasi, Sashvati, Sikandini Kāshyapi, Sraddha, Sarama, Sikta, Sudevi, Sūrya, Sarasvati, Ushas, Ūrvasi,Visvara, Visvruha, Vispala, Vakambhirini, Vachukra’s wife, Vāc, Yāmi). Gārgi is shown to be engaged in a philosophical debate with Yajñavalkiya. Greek literature can boast of only six women poets before the Common Era. The argument of the young and beautiful sannyasin Sulabha with king Janaka of Mithila in *Mahābhārata* has been viewed by some scholars as the most illustrative paradigm for the construct of the non-gendered Self of the woman. While this understanding of the Self as beyond gender and caste does reflect the relation between *Prakrti* as the most fundamental category and *Puruṣa* as the enjoyer of the activities of *Prakrti*, the text itself is not attributed to feminine wisdom but seems to be an imaginative construct of the *Samkhya* philosophy. There is an effort on the part of women writers to discover the feminine voices in the classical Sanskrit literature but it pertains to a much later period between A.D.700 and 1300 (Shalini Shah 2008 ). But there seems to have been women priestesses in Tamil land as indicated in *Maduraikkāñci* verse. *“Nalmāmaiyiliṉ meṉmēla iyali/ kaḍuñcūl magaḷiṟ pēṇi kaitoḻudu/ peruntōḷ sāliṉi maḍuppa”* (“Women in their first pregnancies, of delicate nature and peacock walk, pray and give offerings along with large shouldered female priests”), (Maduraikkāñci .608–10).

The women poets of the Sangam period render their songs with abandon and literary felicity. Their literacy levels seem to be on a par with those of the men poets and point to their social eminence. Their creative impulse comes out in the spontaneous insertion of their bodies and minds into the *tiṇai* landscapes. The voices of women poets serve as a prism to reflect their perceptions of land and the relationship of their own bodies with the land. *“Ōrirā vaigaluḷ tāmarai poygaiyuḷ/nīrnītta malar pōla”* (After being ruined like a lotus blossom at dawn in a pond where the water has drained overnight?), (Kalitogai*.*Palaikali.5). Embodied feminine consciousness merges with the regional geography and roots its emotional experiences into the generative elements of each region. By merging appropriate behaviour patterns of love into the first elements of land and time, they create an aesthetic attractiveness in their literary compositions. While there is a poetic demand to reconcile with the emerging patriarchal politics of control over the woman’s body and familial control, by playing the roles of lover, wife, widow and concubine, there have been poems of protest against such domination. These examples belong to the aesthetics of protest. There are instances through which the women authors centre their creativity on their bodies. Contrary to traditional limits, they have made uninhibited manifestations of their feelings of love, feelings, desires, passions and aspirations. “The conflict between the picture of a silent woman under social control and the picture of woman raising an anguished voice of protest gets registered. It is these moments of liberative thrusts which contain lessons for gender justice” (Murugesa Pandian 2010: 4).

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