

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

PURAM: SOCIETAL PHASE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AS PORTRAYED IN  
KALKI.R.KRISHNAMURTHY'S *PONNIYIN SELVAN*

PRINKLE QUEENSTA. M<sup>1</sup>, Dr.T.K. HEMALATHA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, Nirmala College For Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor of English, Nirmala College For Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India



ABSTRACT

The common shared features of man's life have facilitated the concept of the world shrinking into a global village. He is able to connect to any man from any part of the globe because of universal elements in life. In language, it is English which has played the lead role in connecting countries severed by national and cultural boundaries. Translation has further contributed to the growth of the world as one single unit. Kalki.R.Krishnamurthy is a common name in every Tamil-reading house because of his popularity achieved through his novels. His fame and relevance is so wide that his works have been translated into English as well. The paper focuses on the historical masterwork *Ponniyin Selvan* written by Kalki.R.Krishnamurthy. The article analyzes the societal code of ethics portrayed in *Ponniyin Selvan*.

**Key Words:** Puram, heroism, *Ponniyin Selvan*, the Tamil land, valour

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

All is fair in love and war is a common aphorism. Philosophers have long back realized the truth that love and war breaks all the established norms of a society. These two universal themes have posed a wide area of study in world literature. Every Literature, be it British or American or African or Chinese or Russian or Greek or Indian, covertly or overtly deals with love and war. This is because every society across the globe has certain shared emotions and cultural values.

The cultural values and emotions, pertaining to love, are expressed in different ways in different communities. Tamil Literature has its own unique manner to portray these experiences. Love and war has long been enunciated in *Tolkāppiyam*, an antique statute book on Tamil Literature. The voluminous work is not merely a book on Tamil grammar of inflection and syntax but also sets the norm for the theme of works of art. In ancient days,

poetry was the only known genre in Tamil literature. R. Parthasarathy in his postscript to *The Cilappatikāram* says

The most comprehensive statement of Tamil poetics is the third book of the *Tolkāppiyam*. It is basically a handbook for the making of poems. Poetry is classified into akam and puram, categories that extend, however, beyond poetry to permeate a whole way of life. (285)

This treatise explains in detail, the style and theme of Tamil poetry giving a picture of the political, social and religious life of that period. It clearly and systematically treats of only one of the time-honoured divisions of Tamil- Iyal or Natural Tamil. The book is divided into three major sections or chapters of nine subdivisions. The three major divisions are 'Eluthu' meaning orthography, 'Sol' which means words or etymology and 'Porul' referring to the subject-matter or theme of poetry.

It is this third section that is acknowledged by all scholars to be a unique one, for it includes classification of habitats, time, season, people, occupation, pastime, settlements, food, beasts, trees and gods pertaining to the regions of the Tamil land. The subject-matter dictated by *Tolkāppiyam* is love and war.

The subject-matter is classified into two divisions. Invariably all the poems of ancient Tamil fall under these two divisions in its theme which is explained in *Tolkāppiyam*. The two main groups are 'Akam' or 'Agam' and 'Puram'. Akam means internal while Puram means external, referring to the social world. Akam refers to love in its different phases and Puram to war and praise of kings. Puram concentrates on the outer field of life. The uniqueness of this book of Porul is that, it explains its themes by ascertaining particular landscapes to different phases in love and war. In other words, Puram constitutes seven 'thinai's or behavior patterns or phases of war and the social world. The predominant feature of Puram- aspects of war is dealt with in this article.

The seven thinai's are named after flowers of various species, worn as garlands at different stages of war. These flowers and places are native to the Tamil region. The thinai's in Puram are Veṭci, Vanji, Uḷignai, Tumbai and Vāhai. The last two thinai's which are not considered suitable for poetry are Kanchi and Pādān. It is evident from these thinai's that all is fair in war, especially in Tamil culture, because battles were not a disorderly confrontation among kingdoms. There was a code governing the conduct of warfare.

The first stage of war is Veṭci which refers to cattle lifting. To make it clear, it is the first phase, initiated by a tribe to start a war. The possessions of ancient chiefs were cattle. So, lifting cattle of a kingdom was reason enough for two kingdoms to start a battle. In the Tamil region, which gives predominance to valour, a slightest provocation served as a best cause for war. Veṭci is the provocation phase in a war. After initiating a battle, the king or chieftain conducts an expedition through the woods to reach his opponents' territory. This phase is Vanji. This invasion gradually leads to the siege of forts. This attack on the fort is called Uḷignai.

Only after the third phase, comes the warfront. This pitched battle is called Tumbai. The tribe which emerges victorious, wears the vāhai Flowers as garlands. This phase is called Vāhai. When a poet sings of the impermanence or the frailty of life and war, it falls under the Kanchi phase and the poet's song of praises for the victorious king is called Pādān. K.Gnanambal in *Home Life among the Tamils in the Sangam Age* explains Puram as

This part of their lives, i.e., their wars and other extraneous responsibilities and duties were called Puram. Puram literature is as vast as the literature on love. It was a proportionate combination of love and life that formed the aim of man in the Tamil land. (140)

Kalki.R.Krishnamurthy, one of the most popular novelists in Tamil Literature, is notable for his masterpiece *Ponniyin Selvan*. The historical novel written in Tamil is translated into English by C.V.Karthik Narayanan. Interestingly, though the novel is written in the twentieth century, it follows the pattern explained in the third book of *Tolkāppiyam* composed in the Pre-Christian era.

The novel is divided into six parts in English. The novel deals with the Chozha imperium during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Sundara Chozhar is the Emperor and his two sons, the Crown Prince Aditha Karikalan is in Kanchi and the younger one, Prince Arulmozhivarman who is the favourite of the Tamil people is in Lanka at the beginning of the novel. The story is vast but to put it in a few lines, it narrates the events concerning the accession of the next ruler after Sundara Chozhar who is sick to the point of death. The Crown Prince is considered to be the successor while the Pazhuvettarayers, important ministers at court, hatch a plot against it. Meanwhile the Chozha people, who hate the Pazhuvettarayers, get an inkling of the impending plot and they intend to crown their darling Prince Arulmozhi. The novel ends with unexpected turns, keeping in tune with history.

Patterns of Puram are seen in *Ponniyin Selvan*. There are a few battles portrayed in the novel. Out of which, the initial phase of Veṭci is seen in the Lankan war headed by Arulmozhivarman; and also in the internecine plots to thwart the accession

of the Crown Prince Aditha Karikalan to the throne. The Cheras and Pandyas, other two popular kingdoms in Tamil Nadu, were the arch enemies of the Chozha kingdom. In the novel, during Sundara Chozhar's time, the Crown Prince Aditha Karikalan has routed the Pandyan kingdom. But Lanka was a pain in the neck for the Chozhas. The first part of the novel describes it as "For some time it had been the practice for the Sinhalas to help the Pandyas in battle. Sundara Chozhar wanted to put a stop to this." (88) the unnecessary involvement of the Lankans in the war between the Chozhas and the Pandyas result in another war- the Chozhas' declaration of war on Lanka. The next phase is the expedition phase in which, the Chozhas under the command of the younger Prince, Arulmozhiarman travel on land and sea to reach the shores of Lanka. The siege of forts in this war is not explicit, however, the defending of the attack by retreating into their forts or territories is seen, when the Lankan king goes into hiding into his territory in the Simhagiri fort-this phase is called Karanthai. References to the pitched battle is narrated by Kalki when he says in *The Cyclone*, the second volume of the novel: "Now only Mahindan's troops and the Chozha troops are at war, and that only when they actually confront each other on the battlefield." (161) The final phase of victory is not complete in this war with Lanka. Though Arulmozhiarman is successful in conquering most of the regions in Lanka, he does not return home with his troops, because the king of Lanka, Mahindan, goes into hiding. However, the "Chozha forces have occupied it up to Thamballai" (161)

Another war of significance which is explained in the novel is the battle at Thirupurambayam. Kalki firmly reiterates that every Tamil citizen should have known the history of this battle. It narrates the heroics of one of the greatest Chozha kings, Vijayalaya Chozhan. During his reign, the Pandyas and Pallavas were constantly at war with each other. The Chozhas joined the war on the side of the Pallavas, primarily because the war was fought in their territory; and the Chozha realm being a very tiny kingdom at that time was like "a chicken between two warring elephants"; and they would have been destroyed by any one of the forces, if

they had remained neutral. So they sided with the Pallavas. The prominent phases of Puram in this battle are Tumbai and Vāhai. The first part of the novel has a description of the Tumbai phase of the bloody scene

When the elephants attacked one another, it was like the clashing of mountains, horses rushed at each other like storms and the swords in the hands of the warriors on horseback flashed like lightning. Chariots shattered into a thousand pieces and scattered in all directions. The fearful sound of swords and lances clanging against each other could be heard everywhere. (104)

The fierce battle weakened the Pallava forces. The Pandyas attacked and chased their enemies. The Pallava and Chozha forces were compelled to retreat. At that moment, the old Vijayalayar entered the battlefield and sat on two warriors killing the enemy on every side he faced. He infused a sense of courage into the soldiers and changed the course of the war, resulting in the retreat of the huge Pandyan forces. And the Vāhai phase in battle is described as "And so the benevolent eye of Jayalakshmi, the Goddess of Victory, turned in their direction." (105)

Similar in valour is the war at Thakkolam led by the great Chozha warrior Rajadithar against Kannaradevan, the Emperor of Irattaimandalam. The Vanji phase which defines the expedition phase is described in this war in great detail. The fourth part of the novel, *The Crown* records it thus, "The moment he was given permission, Rajadhithar set forth. Three hundred thousand foot soldiers, fifty thousand cavalry, ten thousand elephants, two thousand chariots, three hundred and twenty commandants and thirty two princes were all part of that huge army." (9) The massive troop "After a journey of three days, the armies met at a place called Thakkolam, two kadhams north of Kanchi." (9)

War is an essential part of Tamil society to annihilate evil. The wars represented in the novel, not only reveal heroism, bravery and bloodshed but it is a sacrifice of the soldiers from the enemies who try to destroy their culture and very existence. Hence war is unavoidable in a society. Puram also includes courage and valour. To perpetuate the heroism of brave warriors, the Tamils followed a

tradition of building temples in memory of heroes who have died a heroic death. If a stone was erected in that place, then it was called a 'Nadukarkoil', and if a temple was built in memory of the warrior, then it was called a 'Pallipadai' or 'Cenotaph', better known as sepulchral temples. Ramachandra Dikshitar elaborates on the rituals followed in erecting these memorial stones

There are six stages in the planting of this stone according to Tolkāppianār. These were to find out the appropriate stone, to fix an auspicious hour for carving out the image and inscribing, to get the stone bathed in sacred waters, to plant it in the place already fixed and to celebrate it as a deity. (245-246)

There are quite a number of references to Pallipadai and Nadukarkoil in *Ponniyin Selvan*. Among them, the incident worthy of recognition is the one erected in honour of the Mute Queen, Mandakini Devi, who sacrifices her life in order to save the life of Emperor Sundara Chozhar. Prince Arulmozhivarman in the first half of the final part says, "To the Chozhas, she is now a goddess." (176) Kalki certifies the veracity of the Prince's statement by giving a historical proof: "When Ponniyin Selvan ascended the throne as Raja Raja Chozhar, he constructed a temple in Thanjavur for Mandakini Devi, whom he always called the Eezham Rani. The temple became famous over a period as the "Singala Nachiar koil" " (181) this also testifies the honour accorded to both men and women of valour, irrespective of their gender.

The titles bestowed on warriors were not easily attained. They had to perform extremely brave deeds to attain such fame. These titles earned by the warriors commanded a privilege in the society. One such man is the Periya Pazhuvettarayar who is renowned for his brave deeds accomplished in battlefields. He is the man "who fought in twenty-four battles, who bears sixty-four battle scars on his sacred self" (11)

The importance and the honour given to war and bravery can be summed up in the following words of Thirukoilur Malayaman, the Lord of Malainadu in the fourth part, "Neither the men or the women in my clan are known for their looks. The

more battle scars the men had, the more handsome they were considered. (6) These are the predominant war features of Puram exhibited in the novel

### Conclusion

The Puram elements in *Ponniyin Selvan* are not a depiction of sheer bloody battles, but it reveals a sense of justice, values and customs treasured by the Tamil people. Thus the social world of warfare is not a disorderly and unjust world of chaos but a systematic and an orderly way of determining the superiority of two kingdoms by upholding the value systems established by the society.

### References

- Dikshitar, Ramachandra V.R. *Studies in Tamil Literature and History*. Madras: Madras Law Journal Press. 1936. Print.
- Gnanambal, K. *Home Life among the Tamils in the Sangam Age*. Madras: Central Art Press. 1947. Print.
- Krishnamurthy, Kalki R. *Ponniyin Selvan The First Floods*. Trans. C.V. Karthik Narayanan. Chennai: MacMillan India Ltd, 1999. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ponniyin Selvan The Cyclone*. Trans. C.V. Karthik Narayanan. Chennai: Macmillan India Ltd, 2000. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ponniyin Selvan The Crown*. Trans. C.V. Karthik Narayanan. Chennai: Macmillan India Ltd, 2001. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ponniyin Selvan The Pinnacle of Sacrifice Volume 1(Chapters1-42)*. Trans. C.V. Karthik Narayanan. Chennai: Macmillan India Ltd, 2002. Print.
- Parthasarathy, R. Postscript. *The Cilappatikāram of Ilankō Aṭikaḷ: An Epic of South India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993. Print.