



## Akaporul traditions in Paripadal

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### Abstract

This study examines the unique manifestation of Akaporul (subjective/interior) conventions within Paripadal, a pivotal late-Sangam anthology. While traditional Sangam poetry maintains a strict dichotomy between Akam (love) and Puram (heroism/public life), Paripadal represents a significant generic shift by blending human eroticism with religious devotion. According to the Tolkappiyam, Paripadal is specifically noted as a verse form suited for Akapporul, yet it diverges from earlier anthologies like Kuruntokai or Akananuru by grounding its "love" themes in specific geographical and divine contexts—predominantly the worship of Thirumal (Vishnu), Sevvēl (Murugan), and the Vaikai River

In the section on Cheyyuliyal (Prosody), Tholkappiyar states that "Paripadal, which stands as a unique poetic form without being a general verse type, arrives with four structural parts—Kochakam, Arakam, Surithakam, and Eruthu—specifically to convey the theme of love (Kamam)" (Thol. Chey. 1377, 1378).

In the section on Akathiniyiyal (Interior Landscapes/Aesthetics), Tholkappiyar notes:

"The high poetic tradition practiced by learned scholars > is specifically suited to the genres of Kali and Paripattu, > Say the experts." (Thol. Akath. 999)

Thus, Tholkappiyar establishes that the subject matter of Paripadal is primarily Akaporul (the interior landscape of love).

However, the Paripadal poems we find within the Sangam literature corpus sing of Thirumal (Vishnu), Sevvēl (Murugan), Madurai, Kali, and the River Vaigai. It is noteworthy that the deities surrounding Madurai and the river itself serve as the central themes.

**Keywords:** Paripadal, Akaporul, Sangam literature, late-sangam anthology, Tolkappiyam, akam

### Introduction

The Paripadal represents a fascinating turning point in the evolution of Tamil literature. As one of the Ettuthogai (Eight Anthologies) of the Sangam era, it acts as a bridge between the secular love poetry of the early classical age and the intense devotional movement (Bhakti) that followed. Here is an introduction to the Akaporul (the grammar and tradition of love) as found in this unique work.

### The Shift in Perspective on Akaporul

The theme of Akaporul, which formed the vast majority of Sangam literary subject matter, underwent a certain transformation during the era of Paripadal.

None of the classical anthologies that focused solely on Akaporul explicitly praised its greatness. Yet, in Paripadal, which focuses on deities, we see the excellence of Akaporul being celebrated.

In a poem praising Lord Murugan, it says:

"Listen, O poets of truthful words who explain the Vedas and spread fine fame! > Love is superior; within love, the superior form is the physical union of those who desire each other equally." It continues:

"Therefore, those who have not researched cool Tamil—which defines this undiminished 'True Wealth' of faultless love where women with beautiful ornaments never part—will not grasp the benefit of this hill." (Pari: 9: 12-26)

Here, we see an argument establishing that the path of Kalavu (clandestine love/pre-marital love) is the true "Tamil path."

In another poem, the transition from Kalavu to Karpu (wedded life) is used as a metaphor:

"Like lovers who, after meeting in secret, leave behind clandestine love to embrace wedded life, O fertile River

Vaigai, you have left the mountains to reside in the house (the plains); for you to go alone is beneath your dignity." (Pari: 11: 41-44)

This poem addresses the River Vaigai, suggesting that just as lovers move from secret unions to the virtue of marriage, the river has moved from the mountains to the domestic plains. The core idea explained here is that embracing the path of Karpu (virtuous wedded life) after Kalavu is the pinnacle of excellence.

Professor T. P. Meenakshisundaram (Te. Po. Mee.) Suggests that this shift in thought regarding Akaporul was driven by a social necessity of that era to protect and emphasize the "chastity" (Karpu) of women.

In this age this message of these verses is couched in such a way as to appeal to the learned. Probably because of the disturbed conditions it is an age which desires to safeguard the chastity of women by not permitting their free movement on the street. 60. A History of Tamil Literature, T. P. Meenakshi sundaram

### The Influence of Religion on Akaporul

It can be argued that the decline in the celebration of Kalavu (clandestine love) was due to religious influence rather than just a renewed emphasis on women's chastity. During the period when religious influence became dominant, the teachings of Jainism and Buddhism likely fostered a tendency to renounce or despise sensual pleasures (Chittinbam). Consequently, a situation arose where scholars felt compelled to elevate Akaporul and explain that the core of the Tamil literary tradition is, in fact, the tradition of love.

Thus, when an "alien" (non-Tamil) custom arrived—one that denied women's rights, condemned clandestine love,

and even expressed a hatred for womanhood—scholars found it necessary to argue that Akaporul (interior love) was the crowning glory of the Tamil language.

As the literary tradition shifted from celebrating the path of Kalavu as an ideal to making God the primary subject of poetry, romantic elements were pushed into the background.

#### **Lord Murugan: The Akaporul Backdrop in Paripadal**

In the hymns dedicated to Murugan (Pari. 8), while describing the glory of Thirupparankundram, the poet evokes the blissful state of romantic life by presenting dialogues between the Hero (Thalaivan), the Heroine (Thalaivi), and the Companion (Thozhi).

The poet depicts scenes where the Heroine sulks (Oodal) because the scent of another woman lingers on the Hero's body, indicating his infidelity. The Hero denies this and takes an oath of loyalty; subsequently, the Companion intervenes to counsel the Hero. Finally, the scenes conclude with everyone offering worship to Murugan.

Despite the hilly backdrop (traditionally the setting for Kalavu or secret love in Sangam conventions), the poem focuses on Karpu (wedded life/loyalty). This illustrates a shift where Karpu gained a more prestigious status than Kalavu.

Notable Observation: When love was the primary subject, God remained in the background as a thematic element. When God became the primary subject, the lovers were moved to the background.

#### **The Akaporul Context in Vaigai Paripadal**

There are eight Paripadal poems concerning the River Vaigai (Pari. 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 18, 20, 22). Among these, the thematic notes (Thurai) for the final poem are missing, but the remaining seven contain specific Akaporul notations. Interestingly, such romantic notations are not provided for the hymns dedicated to Lord Murugan or Lord Thirumal.

Out of the eight Vaigai poems, romantic messages are central to only four.

For instance, one poem (Pari. 6) describes the Heroine refusing entry to a Virali (a female singer/messenger). While the thematic note mentions this refusal, the explanation describes the Heroine recounting how the Hero reconciled and united with his concubine (Parathai) after resolving a tiff. The poem begins with a 60-line description of the River Vaigai, followed by the romantic narrative. The dialogue between the concubine and the hero spans 40 lines. The poem concludes by praising the river: "O Good Vaigai! You have spread wide so that my husband and his women could play in your waters and resolve their lovers' quarrels." Neither the thematic notes nor the structure of the poem itself confirms that this is strictly the speech of the Heroine (Thalaivi).

#### **Analysis of Vaigai and Murugan Hymns**

In another poem (Pari. 7), the arrival and beauty of the Vaigai waters are described, followed by a scene of a man and a woman in a lover's quarrel (Oodal). The thematic note (Thurai) states: "The Foster-mother, hearing the Hero played in the water with the Heroine, asks the Friend to describe the bliss of their water-play. The Friend describes various pleasures, mentions the Hero's lack of love, and concludes by praying for this bliss to continue." However, such elaborate thematic notations were not a tradition in

early Sangam poetry. Furthermore, in this 85-line poem, 66 lines are dedicated to the description of the Vaigai and the final 10 lines to its praise. The middle section merely describes people on the shore. For instance, a man praises a woman whose eyes are red from drink; another woman is infatuated by this, and seeing her reaction, he fearfully resolves her sulking. These actions do not fit the standard conventions of Akaporul. It is inappropriate to label a poem based on a minor scene occurring on the riverbank.

In Pari. 16, a man approaches a woman standing in the water near her friends. The friends lie, saying she is menstruating to keep him away, but he realizes the truth and leads her away. There is no mention of the Hero, Heroine, or Concubine here. Yet, the thematic note claims: "The Hero, who played in the water with a concubine, asks the Friend to mediate; she refuses after describing their water-play." This notation is entirely inconsistent with the actual content.

In Pari. 20, erotic revelry is described in detail. A man gives his wife's jewelry to a courtesan. Upon seeing the jewelry, the wife insults her, and they exchange verbal abuse. The intense vilification of a concubine seen here is unique to this poem and absent in all other Sangam literature. The poem ends by stating that such quarrels are the specialty of the Pandyan King's Vaigai. The thematic note claims a Panan (bard) acted as a messenger to tell the Hero about the rainy season and the Vaigai festival—there is no alignment between this note and the poem's content. These depictions do not fit Sangam traditions.

#### **Conclusion on the Four Poems**

In these four poems (Pari. 6, 7, 16, 20), the romantic content is minimal and deviates from Sangam conventions. The behavior of the Hero, Heroine, and Concubine is inconsistent with their established characters. The thematic explanations do not match the Sangam tradition or the poems themselves. Therefore, these should not be treated as Akaporul (love) poems, but rather as poems about the River Vaigai, similar to how we view the hymns to Murugan.

#### **Findings**

A significant shift occurred in the concept of Akaporul during the era of Paripadal. The reason for this shift was the influence of religions (Jainism/Buddhism) that promoted a distaste for sensual pleasures (Chittinbam). Consequently, scholars felt the need to argue for Akaporul as a fundamental "Tamil Path." The depiction of Karpu (wedded life) in hymns to Murugan shows that marriage had gained more prestige than Kalavu (secret love). A decline in traditional Akaporul conventions is evident. The Vaigai poems should not be classified as Akaporul poems; they are poems celebrating the river. These poems cannot be viewed as the speech of specific characters (Story Personas); instead, they should be treated as the direct descriptions provided by the poet.

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