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Emotional Landscapes of Akam in Mullaippattu and Nedunalvadai

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ABSTRACT

In classical Tamil literature, the Akam tradition is directly intertwined with human emotions; particularly themes of love and relationships. This entire concepts rests upon the principle of Tinai (landscape), meaning that the surrounding environment directly reflects human emotions. This poetic art form beautifully captures the different aspects of love; like meeting, parting, longing and waiting, which clarifies the deep connection between nature and the human mind. It is on the basis that two poems from Pattupattu anthology, Mullaippattu and Nedunalvadai; reveal two unique expressions of love and separation. Mullaippattu depicts a state of calm and composed mind, in which the heroine waits for her lover in the quiet forest surroundings, full of trust and endurance. Conversely, Nedunalvadai conveys the deep pain of longing; the heroine bears the pain of being alone during a long, cold night, a surrounding that magnifies her suffering.

A comparative study of these poems highlights how many emotional states are conveyed through poetic form and landscape imagery, with each landscape symbolizing a particular emotion and influencing human nature in accordance with that feeling. The distinction between suffering and quiet anticipation reveals how the outside world influences inner emotions, showing the depth and the richness of the Akam sensibility that subtly and profoundly links the landscape to the various aspects of human emotion.

KEYWORDS: *Human nature, Emotional Landscape, poetics, separation.*

Introduction

The initial phase of Tamil literature is deeply connected to the poetic and grammatical framework established by the *Tolkappiyam* which systematically divides literary expression into two key areas: *Akam* (inner) and *Puram* (external). The conceptual underpinnings of Sangam literature are established by these two categories which offer an organised method for expressing human experiences. While *Puram* poetry relates to public life, heroism, kingship, ethics and social conduct, Akam poetry explores the inner realm of



human emotions, specifically love, longing, union, waiting, and separation. As A. K. Ramanujan notes in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems of Classical Tamil Anthology*, “Interior poems are not about named individuals, but about situations (xx), emphasizing the universality and subtlety of emotional expression in the *Akam* tradition.

The *Akam* tradition is a very refined poetic system in classical Tamil literature that expresses inner emotional experiences through the medium of external nature. It is shaped by the theoretical frameworks of *Tolkappiyam* and Iraiyanar Akapporul, both of which establish the principles of love poetry. The *Porulathikaram* section of *Tolkappiyam* establishes a clear differentiation between *Akam* and *Puram*, while also introducing the concept of *Tinai*; a framework that correlates emotional experiences with specific landscapes, seasons and circumstances. *Akam* poetry employs three interconnected components: *Mutal* (time and place), *Karu* (the environment and what goes with it), *Uri* (the emotional state), creating a complete structure where emotions and surroundings always coexist. *Puram* poetry mainly focuses on its theme, while *Akam* poetry combines these elements to offer a more intricate and symbolic depiction of human feelings. The Iraiyanar Akapporul gives a detailed description of this tradition, with a specific focus on the dimensions of love, differentiating *Kalavu* (pre-marital or hidden love) and *karpu* (marital love). The prominence of love themes in Sangam literature reflects their universal resonance, as emotions are viewed not as a personal experience but as common human situations.

Furthermore, Sangam poetry adheres to a highly refined aesthetics theory, wherein each *Tinai* is associated with a specific dominant emotional state, such as union, separation, expectation or desire. This is not to say that other emotions are not present; rather a primary emotional mood predominates within a given landscape, shaping the overall emotional tone of the poem. Just as human nature has many tendencies, but some qualities become more prominent based on circumstances, similarly, *Akam* poetry despite emotional life being diverse, centres around a prevalent mood. The surrounding environment strengthens and intensifies this major emotional state, gradually shaping the individual’s temperament and internal response. Therefore, the landscape in Sangam poetry is about more than simply feelings; it’s about how individuals are shaped by their surroundings, with some emotions being more intense than others. This classification system, which is based on *Tinai* shows how the environment and the human’s emotions are closely connected, recognizing Sangam literature as a unique literary tradition. It is only in the Sangam traditions that emotional experiences are categorized by ecological zones in such refined and structured way. This is one of the most unique things about the richness of traditional Tamil poetry. Even today, this principle is relevant, as it shows that how human behaviour change based on their surroundings and how an individual adopts a nature.

At the core of this poetic system lies the concept of *tinai*, wherein the landscape actively expressing feeling rather than just being a passive location. In Sangam literature, four main landscapes are traditionally identified: *Kurinji* (mountain region), *Mullai* (forest region), *Marutam* (agricultural region), *Neytal* (coastal region), and each is associated with a primary emotion. Specifically, *Kurinji* represents union; *Mullai*, *iruttal* (patient waiting), *Marutam*, family love, and *Neytal* for longing. The fifth landscape *Palai* is not a naturally existing geographical region like desert with sand; rather it is formed when the fertile regions of *kurinji* or *Mullai* undergo extreme heat and drought. In other words, *palai* represents a transformed or disturbed state of the landscape, symbolizing *pirivu* (hardship and separation). George L. Hart argues in *Poets of Tamil Anthologies: Ancients poems of love and war* that Sangam poetry employs a symbolic system in which each *Tinai* conventionally links a specific landscape with a corresponding emotional situation, making nature a poetic medium for expressing inner human experience. Thus, nature plays an active and responsive role, expressing the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of love. Tamil love poetry shows a close interdependence between human life and the natural world, where the surroundings both reflect and deepen emotional states.

The living reality of early Tamil society, when individuals lived in intimate harmony with their local environment, serves as the source of this connection, because their lives relied on nature, poets used the landscape to convey their feelings. In *Akam* poetry, emotions are more than just state of mind; the place itself shapes them.

The physical landscape of South India, due to their well-defined ecological regions, forms the basis for this poetic classification. Every place possesses its own unique natural characteristics, cultural practices and emotional bonds, which shape the themes and expression of its poetry. Frequently, a character's feelings align with their surrounding environment. This shows how the outside world slowly becomes a key part of who we are. Consequently, an individual's nature is gradually shaped by their environment and eventually becomes permanent. This perspective holds that the core character is established during early life events and is always visible, even though behavior may evolve.

In this way the poet carefully connects the description of nature to the characters' feeling establishing a connection between their inner emotions and outside surroundings. In the works such as *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai* the portrayal of the environment transcends the mere depiction of the physical surroundings; it explains the characters state of mind. In this way, *Akam* poetry creates a strong connection between the external scenes and the inner sentiments. By employing a skilful blend of landscape, era and poetic theory, it elevates personal feelings into universally relevant human experiences. By comparing these two texts, this research paper explores how ancient Tamil poetry illuminates a wide range of human emotions through the use of various landscapes.

Emotional Landscape in *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai*

The poem *Mullaippattu* composed by Napputanar, explores emotional life by utilizing a forest landscape, reflecting of the human experience, as its backdrop. Falling under the category *Mullai Tinai*, traditionally tied to *iruttal* (patient waiting), this poem places the heroine within surroundings imbued with peace, steadfastness and quiet strength. The natural environment isn't just a passive backdrop; it actively shaper her emotional responses. The poetic descriptions constantly blend the external scenery within the heroin's inner state of mind. For instance, the opening lines use powerful cosmic imagery to describe the weather:

மால் போலத் தோன்றும் மழை மேகம்

The rising rain clouds appeared like towering Thirumal (Mullaippattu 1)

This sets up direct connection between divine power and the huge power of nature. It also says:

பெரும் பெயல் பொழிந்த சிறு புன்மாலை

Heavy rains fell during the evening hours of

Painful separation (Mullaippattu 6)

By showing the storm like this, the poet gently ties the natural water cycle to the heroine's emotional pain, demonstrating that her personal sadness is deeply connected to the rhythm of the seasons. Even with this distance, the core emotion of the poem isn't disappointment, but a quiet and controlled endurance. The heroine's feelings reflect the inherent character of *Mullai* region; mild, permanent and resolute, where waiting is seen as a strength instead of weakness. The cultural practices presented in the text emphasizes this connection between the environment and human behavior. For instance, elderly women gather with grains of paddy and jasmine buds in search of auspicious signs, interpreting everyday occurrence as hopeful omens.

The landscape of the *Mullai* region is described in great detail through imagery of blooming flowers, fertile land, calm animals. These images portray abundance, continuity and renewal, thereby reinforcing themes of enduring hope and ultimately, reunion. Even within the king's war camp structure and discipline prevail. Women light lamps and maintain decorum, reflecting a community grounded in a deep sense of duty and resilience.



Even with her problems, the heroine doesn't collapse from emotional pressure. Instead, she remains calm:

இன்பல் இமிழிசை ஓர்ப்பனள் கிடந்தோள்

She lies down listening to the sweet sounds (Mullaippattu 87)

Thus, she exemplifies the patience that is characteristic of the *Mullai* region. This analysis reveals the crucial insights that, in Akam poetry, the nature of the people directly reflects the land where they live in. The forest environment recognised for its stability and predictable seasonal changes, is also reflected in the heroine's temperament as well, particularly in her calmness, dedication and capacity for patient waiting. This illustrates how human nature is connected to its setting, gradually shaped by the landscape until it becomes an essential part of one's identity. Cultural symbol such as the Mullai flower strengthens values of sanctity, purity and patience, bridging natural elements with ethical and emotional ideals. *Mullaippattu* thereby demonstrates that the landscape is far more than a descriptive element; it becomes a formative power that influences both emotional expression and human character. Conversely, a tougher and more unsettled environment influences emotional intensity and human behavior in the exact same way.

Within the *Pattuppattu* anthology, the poem *Nedunalavadai* stands out as another major work, providing a potent depiction of the emotional distress stemming from a harsh, stormy environment. Composed by Nakkirar, the verse examines the theme of *Pirivu* (separation), concentrating on the intense grief of heroine whose husband is distant at war. In contrast to the peaceful forest setting of *Mullaippattu*, this poem occurs during a cold, wet, and cruel winter that actively intensifies the pain of separation.

The poem opens by evoking a sense of an unstable and formidable natural force:

வையகம் பனிப்ப வலன் ஏர்பு வளைஇப்,

பொய்யா வானம் புதுப் பெயல் பொழிந்தென

Unfailing clouds climbed to the right

Circling and chilling the earth and came

Down as fresh rains (Nedunalvadai 1-2)

This constant rain and intense cold create a deep unease and nervousness, which perfectly matches the emotional chaos in the heroine's mind. Her sadness isn't just an isolated human feeling; it spreads through the whole setting and impacts the entire community. This environment totally disrupts daily existence and creates a collective sense of crisis, which poet depict through the suffering of common people:

ஆர்கலி முனைஇய கொடுங்கோல் கோவலர்,

ஏறுடை இன நிரை வேறு புலம் பரப்பிப், ...

Agonized cattle herders wielding rods

With curved ends, hated the floods and... (Nedunalvadai 3-4)

The intensity of this cold season emerges from a clear portrayal of nature's miserable state. The weather is so unforgiving that animals quit eating, birds fall from trees and cows angrily push away their calves. This signifies a complete breakdown of normal natural behaviors. The cold is so intense that it feels as though it has frozen the very mountains, turning the whole environment into an enemy force. Nature's harshness directly reflects the heroine's emotional isolation. Instead of comfort, the cold weather amplifies her pain, intensifying her feelings of being alone and distant. The heroine condition shown with remarkable emotional depth. She is lying on her bed, deeply sorrowful in the absence of her husband. Her appearance reflects her shattered state of mind; wearing no jewellery, looking like a sketch that was never colored. Her refusal to adorn herself reveals her inner void, while here constant crying and restless thoughts indicate that she can't

find peace anywhere. Even though she is surrounded by companions and foster mothers who attempt to console her by assuring her that her husband will soon return, she remains trapped in her sorrow. When she gazes upon the Rohini star and the moon illustrates the depth of her longing for him in his absence. The poem provides glimpses into daily cultural life, from busy street where men battle storms to women performing evening prayers with flowers and lamps. However, this lively community scene doesn't lessen the heroine's sadness; instead, they make her feel more alone in this busy world. The sharp contrast between the active outer world and her quiet, broken heart makes her story extremely touching.

The cold volatile and stifling atmosphere of *Nedunalavadai* renders the heroine's mind restless, anxious and steeped in profound sorrow. The outside world, full of chaos and difficulties settle inside us as mental stress. This shows that a person's nature is heavily affected by its surroundings; staying in one place for a long time determines our feelings and actions. In the contrast to the patience cultivated in Mullai region, the harsh climate here increases anxiety and emotional instability.

Comparative Analysis: Landscape, Emotion and Poetic Representation

The language of Tamil poetry, with its imagery and metaphors is deeply influenced by the ecology and climate of the region where it evolved. The moderate South India climate, which hardly ever prevents life outside encouraged a strong continuous relationship with nature. Whether it's shade of trees in the intense heat or the cool water, human existence has always been profoundly connected to its environment. Through this constant interaction, poets recognized nature not just as a sight, but as a reality one can experience. Therefore, nature goes well beyond just the physical form, color or texture of a landscape; it embodies a huge, self-sufficient reality that is deeply connected to human thought and perception. Tamil poets see the natural world not as a static background, but as a living medium vital for expressing emotional and cultural experiences. This perspective clarifies why natural elements in *Akam* poetry consistently mirror inner emotions, showing an effortless, living connection between the surroundings and poetic thought. Ultimately, a profound study of *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai* proves that the environments described in these works are never just descriptive. Although both works focus on the pain of separation, their unique emotional impact stems directly from their differing environments and distinct stylistic structures.

The difference between *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai* is that one landscape changes a person's character over time, rather than just creating a temporary mood. In *Mullaippattu* the forest area is peaceful and full of a regular natural rhythm. The poem beautifully captures this when it describes the continuously blooming flower in the forest:

கொன்றை நன் பொன் காலக்,

கோடல் குவி முகை அங்கை அவிழ், 95

தோடு ஆர் தோன்றி குருதி பூப்ப,

கானம் நந்திய செந்நிலப் பெருவழி...

Kondrai trees with tender

Shoots and flowers clusters have dropped

Gold-like flowers on the ground; pointed

Kodai buds have opened like the palms of... (Mullaippattu 94-97)

This calm environment teaches the people how to be patient. When the king is away, the queen neither worries nor gets suddenly upset; instead, her mind aligns with quiet woods around her, allowing her to wait with a calm strength. The forest isn't just a symbol of patience; it actually teaches her to endure.

Nedunalvadai presents a conflicting scene; the environment is volatile and harsh. The landscape is marked by cold, non-stop rain and total chaos. The poem captures this brutal setting by illustrating how it interferes with the natural instincts of animals:

மா மேயல் மறப்ப, மந்தி கூர,
பறவை படிவன வீழ்க், கறவை
கன்று கோள் ஒழியக் கடிய வீசிக்,
குன்று குளிர்ப்பன்ன கூதிர்ப் பானாள்;
*Animals forgot grazing, female monkeys
Struggled greatly, birds fell off their tree
Perches and cows kicked and chased away
Their suckling young calves in anger
Such was the night's cold that could freeze
A mountain (Nedunalvadai 9-12)*

The nature here is unpredictable, causing a profound sense of insecurity. Since life is a struggle, beings can't find peace, and animals actively abandon their adaptive behaviors. Queen's emotional breakdown is not merely a simple reaction to being left alone; it is an extension of a cold world in which she lives. Being in these cold, harsh places for a long time causes deep anxiety, restlessness and emotional pain. Ultimately, this situation doesn't just make her feel lonely; it creates a mindset based entirely on feeling unstable and uneasy.

Mullaippattu and *Nedunalvadai* both discuss the theme of marital separation, but their heroines' differing responses to comfort show how different landscape aesthetics determine each poem's dominant emotional tone, which can range from patience endurance to complete despair.

The central theme in *Mullaippattu* is patient waiting and hope. The positive signs (*virichi*) from the elderly women effectively comfort the queen:

என்போள் நன்னர் நன்மொழி கேட்டனம், அதனால்,
நல்ல நல்லோர் வாய்ப்புள், தெவ்வர்
முனை கவர்ந்து கொண்ட திறையர் வினை முடித்து
வருதல் தலைவர் வாய்வது, நீ நின்

The elderly women who heard that
Took that as a good omen and
said to the queen
“we've heard very good words. Your
Husband will return with tributes from
His enemies, for sure... (*Mullaippattu* 16-21)

In this scene, queen grief is portrayed through her complete isolation from society. The elderly women bring with them with the noisy, hopeful energy of the outside world; trying to cure her pain with rational words of comfort, signs of victory and promises of political success. However, “the queen ignored their constant consolation.” The poet shows that deep emotional trauma creates an invisible barrier, completing cutting off the grieving person from social comfort or good news, by contrasting her silent, floating tears with their well-meaning words.

Conversely, *Nedunalvadai* is renowned for being a combined text; it presents both the harsh, lonely interior of the palace, which function more like a desolate *Palai*, and the piercing cold of the winter wind (*Vadaai*). Due to this harsh Environment, the elderly women's traditional words of comfort completely fail to ease queen's pain:

ஒல்லாள், மிகக் கலுழ்ந்து,
நுண் சேறு வழித்த நோன் நிலைத் திரள் கால்
ஊறா வறுமுலை கொளீஇய கால் திருத்திப்
புதுவது இயன்ற மெழுகு செய் படமிசைத்

*Their consolation did not afford
Any relief to the queen who cried a lot,
As she sat on a well-carved,
Finely-stained, waxed bed with
Strong, thick legs that have carved... (Nedunalvadai 156-159)*

In these lines, the poet employs a beautiful contrast between human comforts and material luxuries to portray the depth of queen's grief. Even though well-intentioned old women talk hopefully of victory and good fortune, their words don't reach her. Instead, her surroundings, especially her magnificent, empty royal bed, intensify her grief. The bed's fine design and "strong, thick legs" form a harsh contradiction; the object is whole and steady, but her inner world is completely shattered by loneliness.

Another clear difference is portrayal of women in *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai*. While *Mullaippattu* portrays women as active and emotionally stable, *Nedunalvadai* depicts the queen as physically and emotionally shattered due to separation. In *Mullaippattu* the women of the camp are portrayed as the active and purposeful:

நெய் உமிழ் சுரையர், நெடுந்திரிக் கொளீஇக்,
கை அமை விளக்கம் நந்துதொறும் மாட்ட,

*"They poured oil from the sprouted containers...
Lit the tall wicks
And tended them.*

They lit the flames whenever they died down." (Mullaippattu 48-49)

These lines depict a scene of activity, attention and vigor. Women are busy keeping the lamps lit, which represents hope, strength and continuity, even when the things are hard.

In contrast, *Nedunalvadai* portrays the queen as completely emotionally distressed:

நெடு நீர் வார், குழை களைந்தென குறுங்கண்
வாயுறை அழுத்திய வறிது வீழ் காதின்,
பொலந்தொடி தின்ற மயிர் வார் முன் கை
வலம்புரி வளையொடு கடிகை நூல் யாத்து

*"Removing her bright, long pair of earrings,
Instead of her usual gold bangles...
She wore those made from conch shells
Lying on her bed without any makeup..." (Nedunalvadai 139-142)*

These lines express the queen's sorrow through her physical appearance. Unlike the active women in *Mullaippattu*, she abandons her adornments, remains weak in bed and seems lifeless and pale. Therefore, *Mullaippattu* portrays women as symbols of strength and endurance, whereas *Nedunalvadai* depicts the queen as consumed by sorrow.

This comparison makes it clear that both poems do much more than just a scene. Rather they show how a person's long-term engagement with a specific environment actively builds their emotional behavior and identity. The peaceful forest setting of *Mullaippattu* builds endurance and a quiet optimism, while the severe, piercing weather in *Nedunalvadai* causes significant worry and trouble. Across both poems, the poet uncovers a deep reality; the outside environment, felt consistently over time, becomes an internal part of us, eventually turning into a basic element of human character.

Conclusion

The richness of Akam poetry is demonstrated by how it uses landscapes to portray our inner feelings, as seen in both *Mullaippattu* and *Nedunalvadai*. The difference between calm, steadfast patience and intense, freezing pain shows the incredible depth of this ancient poetic tradition. Nature isn't just a quiet setting; it actively shapes how characters feel and act. The *Mullai*-forest brings hope and patient waiting, while the harsh winter storm in *Nedunalvadai* causes deep anxiety and totally disrupts normal life. The strong connection between the outside world and inner emotions highlights that human nature deeply tied to its environment. Ultimately, by modifying these backdrops, the Akam poems prove its unique ability to capture the contrasting elements of the human experience with incredible precision and insight.

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