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## Ethics of Kalavu in Kurinjippattu

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### ABSTRACT

The poem *Kurinjippattu* is a classical Tamil poem from the *Pattuppattu* (Ten Idylls). It is composed by the poet *Kapilar* in *Aasiriyappa* meter, this 261-line masterpiece serves as a profound cultural bridge. It was specifically authored to enlighten the Aryan king *Brahadatta* on the unique nuances of Tamil virtue and the ethics of "Kalavu" (secret love).

This poem set against the backdrop of the *Kurinji* landscape, celebrates the blossoming love between a hero and heroine through the lens of *Arathodu Nitral*, a literary tradition where a confidante reveals the heroine's secret love to her elders to facilitate a virtuous marriage. *Kalavu* in *Tolkappiyam* represents the pre-marital love union, often described as "furtive union" rather than mere theft, as it is based on mutual consent (*Okkuvarum*). There is another great treatise named *Irayianar Akapporul* which focuses mainly on love poems that talks about *Kalavu* (secret love) and *Karpu* (marital love). In this poem, the hero's perilous nightly descent through the mountain (*Iravukkuri*), the heroine anxiously fears for the hero's safety as he journeys through an obstacle-filled path showing their true love. This article is a serene study of the development of theory of *Kalavu* as mentioned in the *Tolkappiyam* and *Irayianar Akapporul* the literary conventions employed by *Kapilar* in his *Kurinjipattu*.

### INTRODUCTION

In Sangam Literature, there is a tradition of poetry particularly in *Akam* tradition, which focuses on love, personal emotions, and inner experiences. The two foundational theoretical works that define and influence this tradition are *Tolkappiyam*, a Tamil work on grammar and poetic theory and *Irayianar Akapporul*, an early medieval Tamil work on poetics that primarily explores the themes of clandestine love (*Kalavu*) and conjugal love (*Karpu*). *Tolkappiyam* has three parts: *Ezhuthadhikaram* (Phonology and Letters), *Soladhikaram* (Morphology and Words), and *Poruladhikaram* (Semantics, Life and Society). The third part of *Tolkappiyam* covers the aspects of *Akam* tradition under which there is the description of *Kalavu* phase of



love in chapter nine titled *Kalaviyal*. The term *Kalavu* refers to the union caused by destiny where the hero and heroine encounter each other by chance and fall in love as mentioned :

ஒன்றே வேறே என்று இரு பால்வயின்  
ஒன்றி உயர்ந்த பாலது அணையி, (Tolkappiyam, 1036)

Onrē vēṛē enru iru pālvaiṇ  
onri uyarnta pālatu aṇaiyi,

A well-matched man and woman fall in for each other

Willed so as they are by Destiny the eternal unifier,

The poem *Kurinjipattu* was composed by the poet *Kapilar* to teach the nuances of *Thamizh* love to the Aryan king *Brahadathan*. This poem starts with *thozhi* talking to the caretaker of the heroine, who is disturbed because of the illness of the heroine. The first part of the poem deals with the *thozhi* explaining the stress of the heroine about how she has united with the hero ruining the desire of her father to choose her a husband. She is confused and distressed about the situation. The second part of the poem explains the scenic view on the mountain describing a waterfall, 99 flowers, and also how the heroine encountered the hero and got saved from the elephant by him. He falls in love with a young woman while hunting and she reciprocates his feelings . In the last part, The young woman's friend helps facilitate their meetings every night. There is a description of the hindrances that the hero faces on the path while coming down the mountain during night tryst which disturbs the heroine. The heroine's behaviour changes at home due to her overwhelming experience of love. When her family notices changes in her behaviour, they grow concerned and go to diviners to understand the cause of her distress . However, the heroine's friend talks to her caretaker about their love in a calm way explaining the situation to arrange their marriage. This poem is the part of the *Pattupattu* (the ten idylls) and follows the Akam tradition specifically focusing on secret love (*Kalavu*). The incidents such as union by fate between *Thalaivan* and *Thalaivi*, falling in love, night trysts and *Thozhi* communicating their love to the heroine's foster mother vividly illustrate the features of *Kalavu* in this poem.

### TRAITS OF THE HERO AND HEROINE

The hero carries himself in a dignified and graceful manner reflecting high moral character and has virtuous strength of mind as mentioned :

பெருமையும் உரனும் அடே உடே. (Tolkappiyam, 1049)

Perumaiyum uraṇum aṭṭē uṭṭē.

Nobility of bearing and fortitude

Are such stuff as marks the male[hero].

In the poem *Kurinjipattu*, the hero has 'wide, lifted chest' and 'he appeared like *Murukan* causing fear in those who saw him'. The hero's noble character is visible in his elegant style and adornment with diverse mountain blooms and resembling the god *Murukan* shows divine power. This blend of refined grooming and inner strength defines his heroic nature, commanding both admiration and awe-inspiring fear. The hero makes bold to address the heroine and speaks of her beauty and put forward the proposal of marriage as mentioned:

"Woman with splendid jewels! Your family, holding your delicate forearms, will give you to me in marriage. I will conduct a fine wedding that the whole country will know about in a few days" Also, the act of rescuing the heroine and her companions from an elephant by striking it in the face with an arrow as well as saving them from drowning shows his braver nature. In contrast to the hero, the heroine should be naturally shy and gentle in her behaviour, she becomes hesitant and easily frightened in unfamiliar situations. *Tolkapiyam* states the female traits:



அச்சமும் நாணும் மடனும் முந்துறுதல்  
நிச்சமும் பெண்பாற்கு உரிய என். (Tolkappiyam, 1042)

Accamum nāṇum maṇanum munturuta

niccamum peṇpārku uriya enpa.

Timidity, Bashfulness and Credulity

Are the ruling traits in a woman [heroine].

In the poem also, the females are described as 'tender nature, beautiful and delicate'. The action of slipping away from the hero's embrace out of shyness and fear by the heroine shows her modesty and reserve nature. She does not share the reason for her harsh illness to her parents. She is deeply concerned with preserving her innocence, upholding her moral character, and safeguarding her family's honour.

### LOVERS' UNION

Irayianar Akapporul states:

அதுவே

தானே அவளே தமிழர் காண

காமப் புணர்ச்சி இருவயின் ஓத்தல்.

Atuvē

Tānē avalē tamiyar kāṇa

Kāmap puṇarcci iruvayin ōttal.

Which means, That, when he and she see alone, is the accord on both sides of the union of love.

As discussed earlier in Introduction, in *Kalavu*, the hero and heroine encounter each other accidentally. *Parimelahagar* in 2010 explained “*Kalavu* is not the taking of another's property in secret, but rather the union of suitable and superior maiden who has not been given by her kin, who unites with the hero by her own desire, in secret for her kin and then remains faithful to the path of the virtue.” In *Kurinjippattu* also, the heroine and her companions were sent to chase away the marauding parrots that could destroy the millet crop and after doing this work, they started cooling themselves beneath a waterfall and adorning themselves with flower, when they noticed a handsome man with curly hair . He was adorned with flowers and carried a bow in his big forearm. He appreciated the beauty of the girls and asked them about his hunt which escaped from him. At that point only, an angry elephant was running towards them in confusion, trembling with fear they ran towards the hero and hugged him. The hero saved them and looked at the heroine and said that she should not fear in his presence and embraced her. He accompanied them to the entrance of their town and promised her that he would ask her hand for marriage. It can be said that they crossed paths by chance as they met in the field for the first time when the hero came for hunting and the heroine came for a certain task, both were completely unaware about each other but brought together by destiny.

*Tolkapiyam* talks about the role of eyes in union:

நாட்டம் இரண்டும் அறிவு உடம்படுத்தற்குக்

கூட்டி உரைக்கும் குறிப்புரை ரை அகும். (Tolkappiyam, 1039)

Nāṭṭam iraṇṭum aṟivu uṭampaṭuttarkuk

kūṭṭi uraikkum kuṟippurai ākum.

The meeting of eyes is the pointer sure

Suggesting the union of minds.

There is no arranged or formal union in *Kalavu*, the hero and heroine meet by mutual consent. In the theory of *Kalavu*, an exchange of glances is symbolic of falling in love and it can be considered the first stage of *Kalavu* when the hero and heroine see each other for the first time.

### THE MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER

In *Tolkappiyam*, there is the description of trysting which means planned private meetings. It states there are two kinds of trysts: day tryst which is more risky and may extend beyond the home's limit and night tryst which is secretive and socially controlled meeting and the meeting place does not extend beyond the heroine's home. It says that 'rendezvous is the trysting spot where the hero and heroine meet by mutual consent.'

இரவுக் குறியே இல்லகத்துள்ளும்  
மனையோர் சிளவி கேட்கும் வழியதாவே  
மனையகம் புகாஅக் காளை. (Tolkappiyam, 1075)

Iravuk kuṟiyē illakattuḷḷum  
maṇaiyōr kiḷavi kēṭkum valiyatūvē  
maṇaiyakam pukāuk kālaiyana.

Trysting by night occurs

In the precincts of the heroine's house,  
A spot within hearing of the household,  
And it occasions

Before the hero finds access into her house.

In this poem, the hero comes every night to meet his beloved and sleep in her delicate arms but the meeting is not that easy, many a time the guards are alert, dogs starts barking, the heroine's caretaker wakes up, or there is bright moonlight or hints are misunderstood by him, so he has to go back without even seeing her but he never gets angry because of these mishappenings and he has the fine traits of his clan. The journey of the hero during trysting:

அற்றினது அருமையும், அழிவும், அச்சமும்,  
அளறும் உளப்பட, அதன் ஒன்ன. (Tolkappiyam , 1080)

Arriṇatu arumaiyum, aḷivum, accamum,  
aḷarum uḷappaṭa, ataṇ oranna.

Deterred the hero is not too

From his rendezvous with the heroine

By the hardness of the path,

The dispiritedness[ born of hostile men and things around],

And by the fear of perils and obstacles to his love.

In this poem, the heroine worries about the hindrances that the hero faces in the path. As he comes down the mountain during night time, there are animals such as tigers, bears, wild bulls, snakes, dark ponds with crocodiles waiting for food and he would be killed by any of these because it's hard to escape , once you are caught by these animals. It shows that he loves her and is ready to take the risk to just meet her. It also details the heroine's emotional response by using the imagery of flower and peacock trapped in a net and her complexion grows pale because of crying all the time.

### THE ROLE OF THE THOZHI

This subtopic is of great importance as the poem Kurinjippattu starts with the heroine's friend telling about the reason behind the heroine's illness to her caretaker emphasizing the importance of the role of a confidante(*thozhi*) in the *Kalavu* phase of love. In *Iraiyana Akapporul*, there is a term called *Aranotu nirral* which literally means adhering to virtue. In the context of *Kalavu* phase of love, it refers to 'the revelation of the heroine's secret love with the hero to the caretaker by the heroine's confidante in order to make the caretaker arrange the heroine's marriage with the hero.' Her caretaker observes changes in the heroine that is her illness that caused her jewelry to slip down. The heroine is not herself and she is unable to deal with the harsh pain. So, the heroine's companion gives an explanation to her. But, there is also this condition that the explanation given to her should not contradict her knowledge, the greatness of the heroine, her modesty and also the ethical values. It is given in *Tolkapiyam*, 1058 : “

As she clears the doubt

From the mind of the heroine's mother

As to the heroine's proclivity to fall in love

Showing it to be specious,

In the poem, the confidante speaks carefully and requests the caretaker to not get angry after listening to the reason behind her daughter's illness. She explains how her daughter met a hill chieftain by chance and conducted 'a rare secret love union boldly and with protection.' She also explains that circumstances were built in such a way that her friend has to run to him in order to protect herself. She also describes the heavily built body of the hero and how he saved the heroine. Furthermore, she explains about the hero's country which has ripe pepper, sweet mangoes, jackfruits signifying prosperity that her daughter would live her life to the fullest. She also explains that the sweet man desires marriage and he has promised to marry her in front of the whole country. She presents the hero as a handsome man with a great strength who belongs to a fantastic clan and loves her with the same intensity from the first day and goes through problems and difficulties to meet his beloved. The confidante's great effort to showcase the hero's virtues, while safeguarding the heroine's character before the foster mother proves instrumental in securing her consent for the marriage. Therefore, the role of the *thozhi* in the *Kalavu* phase of love is very essential, as she not only helps the hero and heroine in communicating, meeting secretly but also helps in conveying their love to her family. So, the union in marriage could be solemnized with parental consent, in accordance with social norms.

### UNIVERSALITY OF THE EMOTIONS

An outlining characteristic of the Akam poetry is the universality of experiences and feelings. Since the central theme of the akam poetry is love, the poem tries to incline towards subjectivity. But, the akam tradition ensures that the poem remains depersonalised and objectified. In order to maintain this, no proper names have been given to the characters. Instead, role based names or gender based names are given to the characters. This has been stated by Tolkappiyar also:

மக்கள் நுதலிய அகன் ஐந்திணையும்

கட்டி ஒருவர்ப் பெயர் கொளப் பெறா. (Tolkappiyam, 1003)

Makkal nutaliya akan aintinaiyum

cutti oruvarp peyar kolap peraar.

No proper names

Shall designate the human characters

That people the compositions



Treating the [centrally placed] fivefold akam love conduct.

In the poem *Kurinjippattu* also, there have been no names assigned to characters. Instead of this they have been addressed by their role, for example, hero, heroine, heroine's friend known as confidante, heroine's caretaker, wife and husband. By this, the poem tries to transcend personal identity and represents collective emotions. This anonymity allows readers to relate more broadly emphasizing that the theme of love is shared across society rather than being confined to a particular person.

### **KALAVU AS A LITERARY TECHNIQUE**

Literary techniques are specific methods authors use to enhance writing and convey deeper meanings. *Akam* has been well explained by *Tolkapiyar* describing the seven modes of love that are : *Kurinci*, *Mullai*, *Palai*, *Neytal*, *Marutam*, *Kaikkilai* and *Peruntinai*.

Primarily,

The Akam love behaviour

Comprises seven strands

From Kaikkilai through Peruntinai,

So has it been held.( *Tolkappiyam*, 947)

The theme of love in *Akam* Poetry is conveyed through the concept of “*Tinai*”(mode) which integrates three key factors: land(*Nilam*), family(*Kulam*), and conduct(*Olukkam*). *Tolkapiyam* has stated about *Kurinci* mode in Akam poetry describing that it takes place in a mountainous region. In this book, it has been further explained that *Murugan* as the deity, wild rice and millets as staple food, and tigers and elephants as fauna. The *Kurinci* mode portrays the hero and heroine's first encounter in a mountainous landscape and meeting secretly(*Kalavu*), using imagery of waterfalls, peacocks, and millet fields. This whole description and the details about *Kalavu* given in this book could be considered as a rule and the poet *Kapilar* has focused on every minute detail highlighting the *Kalavu* in *Kurinci* mode. In this poem, there is a detailed description of flora and fauna on the mountain, how destiny helps in the meeting of hero and heroine, *Murugan* as the deity, night trysts and role of confidante meeting all the rules as defined by the *Tolkappiyam*. In this way, *Kalavu* has been used as a literary technique in the poem *Kurinjippattu*, making it beautiful and enhancing the meaning by creating vivid imagery.

### **CONCLUSION**

The *Kurinjippattu* stands as a pertinent work of *Kalavu* phase of love and by intertwining the theories of *Tolkappiyam* and *Iraiyanaar Akapporul* and with the detailed narrative, *Kapilar* portrays *Kalavu* not as an act of mere theft or impulsion but a sacred union decided by destiny and mutual consent. This research paper explains that the traits of hero and heroine are not just description but functional requirements for the sacred union. *Kapilar's* description of midnight meeting shows the willingness of the hero and his devotion towards the heroine that he is ready to face the dangers of the mountain. The most crucial topic in this paper is the role of the confidante as the whole poem describes how the heroine's companion tries to convey the message of their love to the foster-mother and seeks permission from her for marriage. Thus transforming the hidden *Kalavu* into the honorable *Karpu*. Finally, by sticking to the rule of anonymity, *Kurinjippattu* reaches the stage of universality because the characters remain unnamed. This research concludes the theory of *Kalavu* relevant today as it prioritizes mutual consent and self-selected union as an ethical path to marriage serves as an ancient precursor to the modern idea of romantic autonomy.

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