

## THE SPRING SEASON IN CLASSICAL TAMIL POETRY

D. NADARAJAH

The treatment of nature in ancient Tamil poetry, also known as *Caṅkam* poetry, follows certain set conventions. This is especially so in love poetry. Land was divided into five divisions, namely, the montane region (*kuriñci*) the pastoral fields with shrubbery (*mullai*), agricultural and riverine plains (*marutam*), the littoral or maritime belt (*neytal*) and the desert (*pālai*). Love, with its numerous facets was divided into five aspects, corresponding to the five-fold division of land. They are the meeting of lovers (*punarttal*), the patient waiting of the wife for her husband to return after completing his mission (*iruttal*), the sulkiness of the wife due to the infidelity of the husband (*ūṭal*), pining in separation (*iraṅkal*) and parting (*pirivu*) respectively. Besides the geographical division, the time of day (*cirupolutu*) and season (*perumpolutu*) most suited to a particular aspect of love is also recognised by ancient Tamil poetic tradition. (See Table I).

Land	Aspect of love	Time of day	Season
<i>kuriñci</i>	<i>punarttal</i>	<i>yāmam</i> (midnight)	<i>kūtir munpani</i>
<i>mullai</i>	<i>iruttal</i>	<i>mālai</i> (evening)	<i>kār</i>
<i>marutam</i>	<i>ūṭal</i>	<i>vaikarai, viṭiyal</i> (dawn)	—
<i>neytal</i>	<i>iraṅkal</i>	<i>erpātu</i> (sunset)	—
<i>pālai</i>	<i>pirivu</i>	<i>naṅpakal</i> (midday)	<i>piṅpani ilaveṇil mutuvēṇil</i>

This correlation of emotion, land, and time of day or year is based on the realisation of the ancient Tamils that every landscape is made beautiful, expressive and capable of influencing human emotions under the illuminating effect of a particular period of day or year. This correlation and association of the different aspects of love with nature is known as *tiṅai* in *Caṅkam* poetry.

In *Caṅkam* literature, the region with the largest number of love poems is the desert. Strictly speaking, the Tamil country has no desert but certain parts of *kuṛiñci* and *mullai* become arid due to the want of seasonal showers.<sup>1</sup> Yet, like the other geographical divisions, this region is also named after a tree typical of the region. The *pālai* is named after a tree of the same name (*pālai* or *Wrightia tinctoria*) which is the most prominent vegetation found in the arid areas. The hottest half of the year, consisting of the late dewy season (*piṇpaṇi*), spring (*ilavēṇil*) and summer (*mutuvēṇil*), is suitable for depicting this aspect of love.<sup>2</sup> But the *Tolkāppiyam* which codifies these conventions governing *Caṅkam* poetry does not mention the season of spring or *ilavēṇil*. It only uses the term *vēṇil*. But the commentators like *Ilampūraṇar*<sup>3</sup> and *Naccinārkkīṇiyar*<sup>4</sup> have explained that it refers to both, the *ilavēṇil* and the *mutuvēṇil*. Though *Tolkāppiyar* does not use the term *ilavēṇil*, the *Caṅkam* poets have used it and other terms of similar meaning to differentiate it from the summer of scorching heat. This summer is said to be “the summer when the angry heat of the sun becomes more severe,”<sup>5</sup> because the warm season has prolonged into late summer (*vēṇil nīṭi*; *ninra vēṇil*).<sup>6</sup> It is therefore severe, hostile (*kaṭuntīral vēṇil*)<sup>7</sup> and unpleasant (*innāvēṇil*).<sup>8</sup> But the spring season is the sweet, young summer (*innīla vēṇil*),<sup>9</sup> a season of delight (*inpavēṇil*),<sup>10</sup> summer that has not matured (*mutirā vēṇil*)<sup>11</sup> or grown hard (*muṟṟā vēṇil*),<sup>12</sup> but still in its infancy (*kulavi vēṇil*).<sup>13</sup> This season is associated with the beauty (*kāmar vēṇil*)<sup>14</sup> and joys of nature (*innamar vēṇil*).<sup>15</sup> It is a sea-

<sup>1</sup> *Cilappatikāram*, 11:64–66.

<sup>2</sup> *Ilampūraṇar*, *Tolkāppiyam: Poruḷatikāram*, 11 & 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Naccinārkkīṇiyar*, *Tolkāppiyam: Poruḷatikāram*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Akanāṇūru*, 353:10.

<sup>6</sup> *Aiṅkuṟunūru*, 322:1, *Narriṇai*, 29:1.

<sup>7</sup> *Perumpānārruppatai*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Akanāṇūru*, 335:6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 229:20; *Paripāṭal*, 6:77.

<sup>10</sup> *Narriṇai*, 224:6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 337:3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 86:9.

<sup>13</sup> *Kalittokai*, 36:9.

<sup>14</sup> *Akanāṇūru*, 317:14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:7.



son of fresh shoots and flowers and so it is the early summer when buds open (*tātaviḷ vēṇil*).<sup>16</sup> Each day of the season can be filled with sweetness, delight and beauty (*nātpata vēṇil*)<sup>17</sup> and these are valuable to those in love (*arumpata vēṇil*)<sup>18</sup> or *perumpatavēṇil*.<sup>19</sup> It is also the season of fresh beauty and delights (*yānar vēṇil*).<sup>20</sup> Two *Akanānūru* poems use the epithet *cevi*, meaning newness, beauty, taste, smell and buds about to open, to describe this season (*cevi vēṇil*).<sup>21</sup> The *Kalittokai* calls it the spring of great excellence (*mētaka ilavēṇil*).<sup>22</sup>

This season corresponds to the Tamil months of *Cittirai* and *Vaikāci* and follows the seasons of early and late dew (*munpani* and *pinpani*). Both these dewy seasons are referred to as *arciram*. A *Narrai* poem depicts a hero who, having left on some mission during the season of severe dew (*kaṭumpāni arciram*) when the *pakanrai* blooms, returns home thinking of the spring season when the *kōṅku* buds open and the *īṅkai* puts forth fresh shoots. He is thoughtful of his beloved and returns during spring as promised. He has kept to his word and is therefore a virtuous man (*aravar*).<sup>23</sup> An *Akanānūru* poem states that this season consists of the days following the cessation of dew (*paṇi nīṅku vaḷi nāl*).<sup>24</sup>

By the time spring sets in, the excessive muddy water caused by rain has flowed, leaving the rivers, streams, ponds and tanks clear. Even the floods or increase in the volume of water in the Kāviri River that caused the water to rise higher than the poles used to push the boats, subside.<sup>25</sup> In fact, this is also said to be the season when the water becomes very clear,<sup>26</sup> so that the clear pond (*tuṇi kayam*)<sup>27</sup> reflecting the clear sky above seems to contain water as blue as sapphires (*maṇi nīrk kayam*).<sup>28</sup> Apart from the floods subsiding, some of the water would have

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:8.

<sup>17</sup> *Narrai*, 157:4.

<sup>18</sup> *Akanānūru*, 97:17.

<sup>19</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 400:3.

<sup>20</sup> *Akanānūru*, 341:12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 277:18, 355:8.

<sup>22</sup> *Kalittokai*, 29:9.

<sup>23</sup> *Narrai*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> *Akanānūru*, 259:8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 341:5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 279:13; *Kalittokai*, 32:6.

<sup>27</sup> *Kalittokai*, 34:5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:5.

evaporated during the hot afternoons of the dewy season. This leaves the banks broader on either side of the rivers so that cranes come there looking for food.<sup>29</sup> This swelling of the river during rain and the ebbing by the time spring sets in seems to have been a common sight and a heroine uses this to hint to the disloyal hero that she is aware of his extra-marital affair. She says,

“Your district is adorned by the river  
that offers cool, muddy water  
during the rainy season  
but  
takes on the hue of sappires  
during spring.”<sup>30</sup>

The implication is that, like the volume of water in the river, the intensity of his love is also changeable and changing. Though the streams are described as being thinner, this is only in comparison to their swiftness and fullness during the rainy season. During spring, the rivers are back to their normal size and still contain plenty of clear water. It is therefore described as the time of year when the water gets clear (*punal teḷi kālai*).<sup>31</sup> This makes the rivers safe and suitable for bathing, especially in the company of loved ones. A heroine, whose husband is away sporting in the waters accompanied by other women, sends the musician to remind him that the precious time when the River Vaiyai encircles the islets adorned with branches of flowers and sifts black sands on its banks has arrived.<sup>32</sup> To one poet, spring is the delightful season when the winding river flows slowly, resembling the back of a spotted serpent in motion.<sup>33</sup>

The sand-lines (*aṛal*) left by the slowly thinning stream is usually mentioned as a distinct feature of this season. The swift waters of the forest streams subside, leaving shiny lines on the long, sandy banks. Such lines are also to be seen along the banks of ponds or lakes.<sup>34</sup> These lines are usually compared to a woman's wavy tresses. The flowers that fall from the trees growing along the banks seem to add beauty to the dark sand-lines and this is said to be like the dark tresses adorned with various flowers. According to the poet Pālai Pāṭiya Peruṅkaṭuṅkō,

<sup>29</sup> *Paripāṭal*, 6:75–77.

<sup>30</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 45:1–5, also *Paripāṭal*, 6:75–77.

<sup>31</sup> *Akanānūru*, 279:13.

<sup>32</sup> *Kalittokai*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Narriṅṅai*, 157:3–5.

<sup>34</sup> *Kalittokai*, 31:2; *Akanānūru*, 26:1–3.



the sand-lines have become beautiful with the petals and shoots falling off from the trees and therefore resemble the hair of women united with their lovers (i.e. dressed with flowers).<sup>35</sup> In fact this simile is so common that it is often reversed, so that the long, dark, wavy hair of women is said to be like the dark sand-lines along the banks of ponds or rivers.<sup>36</sup>

Following the cold seasons of early and late dew, this seems to be the period when nature herself is happy to feel the warmth of the sun. The trees shed their old leaves and attire themselves in gay and pleasing colours in the form of shoots and honey-filled flowers.<sup>37</sup> The *kōṅku*, the mango, and the *īṅkai* are some of the species of trees that put forth new shoots during this season.<sup>38</sup> The trees on the banks grow well like the wealth of virtuous men<sup>39</sup> and bear dark, shiny shoots. These shoots are usually used as comparison for the satin-smooth skin of young women but this simile too is reversed at times.<sup>40</sup> The shoots are also compared to the spots on the bodies of women who have recently been delivered of their babies.<sup>41</sup> Creepers that grow, entwine themselves around the trees nearby and wave in the breeze. An *Aiṅkurunūru* poem describes this artistically.

“It is the spring season of great beauty  
with a rare sight.  
Women-like, swaying creepers  
dance  
embracing warrior-like trees.”<sup>42</sup>

Spring is essentially the season of flowers (*pūmali kālai*).<sup>43</sup> The ponds look lovely with new blossoms. The red petals of the *murukku* or east Indian coral tree, falling into the clear waters of the neighbouring pond, resemble coral scattered on marble-like glass, causing the bees to mistake the shadow for the flowers. Bead-like buds bloom on trees so that the branches look as if woven with

<sup>35</sup> *Kalittokai*, 27:5-6, 28:6-7, 29:6, 32:1-2, etc.

<sup>36</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 116, *Akanānūru*, 35:17, etc.

<sup>37</sup> *Akanānūru*, 259:4-7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 341:2; 355:1; *Narriṇai*, 86:7-8.

<sup>39</sup> *Kalittokai*, 27:1-2; 35:1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 32:7.

<sup>42</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 40:1-3; also *Kalittokai*, 32:12.

<sup>43</sup> *Narriṇai*, 118:6.

fresh flowers.<sup>44</sup> The *Caṅkam* poems mention a number of trees, plants and creepers as flowering during this season. The oft mentioned is the *kōṅku*. Its buds, resembling women's breasts, first open in spring on sturdy, leafless branches.<sup>45</sup> These large, rounded buds are compared to the golden ornament called *curitakam*, made by a skilled goldsmith.<sup>46</sup> The flowers are golden in colour but the trunk of the tree is cracked and rough.<sup>47</sup> A *Narriṇai* poem describes these flowers as having sepals (*pullital*) and soft petals. They are shaped like (open) umbrellas and glitter like the stars at dawn. This makes the forest beautiful.<sup>48</sup> The tall *ilavam*, which grows on mountain slopes, also has leafless branches but red flowers that resemble fire. They bloom in such abundance that from afar the whole mountain seems to be on fire.<sup>49</sup> Two poets, Auvvaiyār and Pālai Paṭiya Peruṅkaṭuṅko have compared these flowers to the rows of pretty lamps lighted by women during the light festival in November–December.<sup>50</sup> In the forest where the red-flowered *ilavam* and the *kōṅku* with blossoms of golden hue grow side by side, the petals fall one over the other and look very colourful by contrast. This reminds a king-poet of a sight seen in a jeweller's shop where the jeweller keeps gold in containers made of coral.<sup>51</sup> Another tree with red flowers that blooms in spring is the *murukku*. The flowers are shaped like the murderous claws of a tiger. They are full of pollen and therefore sought after by bees<sup>52</sup> and the *kuyil*.<sup>53</sup> The colour and bent shape of the flower have given rise to many comparisons. One poet compares it to fire and the red crown of a cockerel<sup>54</sup> while another compares it to the painted fingernails of women.<sup>55</sup> The shoots of the *kuravam* or *kuravu* appear in the season of early dew but the flowers bloom only in

<sup>44</sup> *Kalittokai*, 33:2–6.

<sup>45</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 254:1–2; *Aiṅkurunūru*, 370; *Akanānūru*, 99:45.

<sup>46</sup> *Narriṇai*, 86:5–7.

<sup>47</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 367:1; *Kalittokai*, 33:12.

<sup>48</sup> *Narriṇai*, 48:3–5.

<sup>49</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 338:2–3, also 368:1; *Kalittokai*, 30:10.

<sup>50</sup> *Akanānūru*, 11:2–5; 185:12–13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:9–11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 99:1–3; 277:17–18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 229:16–19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 277:15–17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 317:4–6.



spring so that with the blooming of the *kurava* the dewy season comes to an end.<sup>56</sup> The buds which resemble snake's teeth<sup>57</sup> look like silver when they bloom. The petals of the *kurava* falling on the petals of the *kōṅku* also remind a poet of a goldsmith's shop. The *kurava* blooms are like fine silver wires and the *kōṅku* petals resemble the jeweller's weighing scales made of gold. The *kurava* petals scattered over the *kōṅku* petals seem as though the silver wire has broken and fallen in many small pieces on to the goldsmith's scales.<sup>58</sup> The *marā* or *maravam* flowers grow in bunches and contain plenty of honey.<sup>59</sup> These bunches shine like sunlight,<sup>60</sup> spiral towards the right (*valampuri iṇar*) and are attached by long stems to branches which are short and therefore easily held down by a man to pluck the flowers.<sup>61</sup> The *pātiri*, a forest tree,<sup>62</sup> has a broad trunk and bright flowers.<sup>63</sup> These flowers are also flame-coloured (*ariniṇṇam*), have dark sepals and grow on small stems.<sup>64</sup> They are bent (*kūṇmalar*)<sup>65</sup> and have short, hairy bristles.<sup>66</sup> Pālai Pātiya Perunkaṭuṅkō compares these to brushes which the skilled artists have dipped in bright vermilion (*oḷḷarakku*)<sup>67</sup> to paint, suggesting that the flowers are red in colour. The short-stemmed *kāñci* flowers bloom in long bunches that resemble garlands and are said to have an abundance of gold-coloured pollen that scatters on the ground.<sup>68</sup> The *atiral*, a species of wild jasmine, also blooms in spring. It is a gentle creeper<sup>69</sup> with fragrant flowers.<sup>70</sup> The mango tree, that puts forth dark shoots, also blooms in abundance during this season. The scented flowers, which attract

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 97:19–20; *Narriṇai*, 224:2–8.

<sup>57</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru*, 237:2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 317:8–11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 261:3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 317:15.

<sup>61</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 383:1–4; *Kuruntokai*, 22:3–4.

<sup>62</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru*, 261–1.

<sup>63</sup> *Narriṇai*, 337:4.

<sup>64</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru*, 237:1.

<sup>65</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 147:1.

<sup>66</sup> *Narriṇai*, 337:4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 118:6–8.

<sup>68</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru*, 341:9–11, 25:3–4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 237:1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 393:23–25; *Narriṇai*, 337:3–7.

bees and the *kuyil*, grow in bunches<sup>71</sup> and contain plenty of honey<sup>72</sup> and pollen.<sup>73</sup> The *vēṅkai* blooms in bunches<sup>74</sup> and its yellow flowers, scattered on the dark sand-lines left by the subsiding water, are like gold ornaments worn by women in their long hair divided into five parts and adorned with garlands of flowers.<sup>75</sup> Even the white bitter flowers of the margosa (*vēmpu*) which blooms in this season is treated as being symbolic of spring and its joys. A *Kuruntokai* poem depicts a heroine in separation who suffers, not only because the lovely season has set in and her husband has not arrived but also because of the gossip of neighbouring women. She complains to her friend,

“Will the fresh beauty of the bright flowers  
on the black-stemmed *vēmpu*  
be wasted without my lord?  
Like the single fruit —  
of the white-stemmed *atavam*  
growing on the river bank —  
trampled upon by seven crabs,  
I suffer due to cruel tongues  
that wag  
because he is still away.<sup>76</sup>

In this poem, the *vēmpu* flowers are considered sufficient to suggest the season of flowers. The same text also mentions the white flowers of the *iruppai* growing in the forests on the mountain slopes<sup>77</sup> as well as the flowers of the *punku* resembling fried grains.<sup>78</sup> The fragrant jasmine (*mauvval*) is also a bloom of this season.<sup>79</sup>

The flowering trees with their colourful blossoms add beauty to the districts in which they grow. A *Kalittokai* poem describes this scenery with similes from the Hindu pantheon.

<sup>71</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 97:21; *Narriṅai*, 157:5.

<sup>72</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 341:3.

<sup>73</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 192.

<sup>74</sup> *Ainkurunūru*, 367:2.

<sup>75</sup> *Kalittokai*, 32:2-5.

<sup>76</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 24.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 329:1.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 341:2; *Ainkurunūru*, 368:2; *Kalittokai*, 33:1.

<sup>79</sup> *Kalittokai*, 27:4.



“The *marām* flowers bloom in bunches and resemble  
the god wearing matchless ear-ornaments. (i.e. Balarāman)  
The *cerunti* opens its buds, resembling the sun god.  
The *kāñci* flowers, around which bees buzz, resemble  
the Fish-bannered. (i.e., Kāmaṇ)  
The *ñālal* puts forth bright flowers of dark hue  
like Kāmaṇ’s brother. (i.e., Cāmaṇ)  
The *ilavam* blooms in a contrasting colour resembling  
the Bull-bannered. (i.e., Śiva)  
Like the spotless excellence of these Five (gods)  
the trees open their buds  
beautifying the river banks lashed by the water.”<sup>80</sup>

The riot of colour and the fragrance of the flowers naturally attract the bees for there is an abundance of honey during this season.<sup>81</sup> The bees swarm around flowers like the *kōṅku* as if the whole family or group has come to partake of the honey.<sup>82</sup> They also hum around the *murukku*, *kurava* and other flowers sucking honey and causing the petals to fall off.<sup>83</sup> Since there is a variety of flowers with as many flavours of honey and pollen, they seem to be able to choose the type they want. When they have had their fill<sup>84</sup> they rest on branches bent low with the burden of fresh flowers.<sup>85</sup> Their humming is so pleasant to hear that it is usually compared to the sweet music of the lute played by an able musician.<sup>86</sup> They are able to obtain much honey without any effort and so the poet of the *Pālaikkali* compares them to people who receive their daily maintenance without having to work for it.<sup>87</sup> Many species of bees are mentioned viz. *citar*,<sup>88</sup> *vanṭu*,<sup>89</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:1–8.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 30:12.

<sup>82</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 370:1–2.

<sup>83</sup> *Akanānūru*, 277:18; 317:10–14.

<sup>84</sup> *Kalittokai*, 30:3–4.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:12, 16.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 32:9; 33:22–23; 38:2–3; *Akanānūru*, 355:3–5, etc.

<sup>87</sup> *Kalittokai*, 35:2–3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 34:12; *Akanānūru*, 27:9, 277:8, etc.

<sup>89</sup> *Akanānūru*, 317:10; *Kalittokai*, 30:3; 32:9; 33:5; 34:6, etc.

*tumpi*,<sup>90</sup> *curumpu*,<sup>91</sup> and *ñimiru*.<sup>92</sup>

Besides the humming of the bees, the cooing of the *kuyil*, the Indian cuckoo, is an important feature of the spring season. The dark *kuyil* with shiny feathers glittering like sapphire<sup>93</sup> and red eyes<sup>94</sup> is usually with its mate (*puṅar kuyil*)<sup>95</sup> enjoying the pleasures of the season (*nukar kuyil*)<sup>96</sup> and therefore happy (*makil kuyil*).<sup>97</sup> It is their mating season and they coo, calling out their mates or enjoying the pollen of the various flowers. Though this bird is also found on trees like the *kuravu*<sup>98</sup>, the *marā*<sup>99</sup> and the *kāñci*,<sup>100</sup> its favourite seems to be the mango tree with its flowers filled with honey and pollen. Nearly every poem that mentions the *kuyil* depicts it as cooing from the mango tree.<sup>101</sup>

The flowering trees, the bees and the cuckoos make the park along the river or the pond a beautiful place, suitable for spending the day happily, especially for lovers. It is so shady with the branches of trees covered with flowers that the cool park does not seem to know the rays of the sun.<sup>102</sup> It is made cooler by the southern breeze (*teṇṇal*) that blows in this season. It blows through the flowering trees and branches<sup>103</sup> spreading fragrance everywhere and causing the shoots and creepers to wave gently.<sup>104</sup> The gentle movement of branches in the breeze reminds a poet of a lithe dancer and her graceful movements.<sup>105</sup> The pleasant beauty of the parks makes it suitable for the lovers to spend time there, forgetting

<sup>90</sup> *Kalittokai*, 29:16–17; 36: 4; *Akanāṅṅūru*, 317:12, etc.

<sup>91</sup> *Kalittokai*, 34:6; 36:3, etc.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 33:22–23; 35:2, etc.

<sup>93</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 25:6; *Kuruntokai*, 192:3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 229:19; *Narriṅṅai*, 243:4.

<sup>95</sup> *Narriṅṅai*, 157:15.

<sup>96</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 97:23.

<sup>97</sup> *Narriṅṅai*, 157:15, 9÷10.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 224:2–5; *Akanāṅṅūru*, 237:2–5; *Aiṅkurunūru*, 369:6–5.

<sup>99</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 317:15–16.

<sup>100</sup> *Kalittokai*, 34:3.

<sup>101</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 192; *Narriṅṅai*, 9, 118, 243, 246; *Akanāṅṅūru*, 25, 97, 229, etc.

<sup>102</sup> *Kalittokai*, 30:5.

<sup>103</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru*, 237:4.

<sup>104</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 400.

<sup>105</sup> *Kalittokai*, 32:10.



their wealthy homes.<sup>106</sup> The evenings are also pleasant with the milky rays of the moon.<sup>107</sup> The high mansions of the rich had balconies and open terraces meant for the enjoyment of the cool rays of the moon. To add to the sensation of coolness, sandal paste was smeared on the body and strands of pearls were worn as ornaments.<sup>108</sup> A *Kalittokai* poem mentions that it is also the time for the people of Madurai to listen to and appreciate poetry.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps this is in conjunction with the festival that is also mentioned in the poems from the same text. There seems to have been a festival for Kāman, the god of love.<sup>110</sup> One of these poems mentions that the proper time has come for the spring season to hold a festival<sup>111</sup> while another seems to explain that this is really to welcome the new season.<sup>112</sup>

The coolness and beauty of this season may make it seem unsuitable as a background to *pālai* and its emotion, *pirivu*. But though *pālai* and *pirivu* usually denote temporary separation it also has another important aspect, namely elopement (*uṭanpōkku*). When a heroine is unable to convey her feelings to her family or inform them of her choice, she goes away with the man of her choice to be married elsewhere. Because of her separation from her family and friends and the sorrow felt by those who are left behind, this is considered as an aspect of *pālai*. But most of the poems depicting *uṭanpōkku* seem to show that the path taken by the lovers is cool, beautiful and thus suitable for love and union. A friend tells the heroine,

“There have been showers to remove the heat of  
parched earth.  
The trees, shedding their dry leaves,  
have put forth small shoots.  
The parks look as if decorated with flowers  
and are filled with honeyed blossoms.  
The forests have become very beautiful (and beneficial).  
At this time, following the passing of the dewy season,  
Evening, when the moon spreads its milky rays,

<sup>106</sup> *Akanānūru*, 355:7–8.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 259:9–10; *Kalittokai*, 32:6.

<sup>108</sup> *Cūlappatikāram*, 8:17–20; *Neṭunalvātai*, 51–52; 60–61; 95 etc.

<sup>109</sup> *Kalittokai*, 35:17–18.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:13–14; 27:24.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 36:9.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 92:67–68.

Has come as a messenger,  
You too, accept my words without fear (or confusion).  
Though the plants on the platform dry up,  
    the *vayalai* creeper withers  
    the bent flower bunches on the soft-branched *nocci* droop,  
Considering the pain your loving mother will undergo  
    and the authority of your tiger-like brother,  
May you agree (to go away with him)."<sup>113</sup>

Here, the spring season is shown to be favourable for the heroine to travel without difficulty. The forest-tract that she will traverse with the hero is not cruel or forbidding as described in poems which show the hero's reluctance to take her along with him.<sup>114</sup> During their journey together, the hero sometimes holds down the branches of flowering trees for his beloved to pluck flowers<sup>115</sup> or shows her the beauty of the trees, flowers and hillocks on the way.

"The withered flowers of the *murukku*  
    which opened its red buds  
    resembling the murderous claws  
    of the strong, striped tiger  
    lay scattered,  
    still humming with bees.

The *kōṅkam*,  
    resembling the adorned breasts  
    of women wearing beautiful, glittering ornaments,  
    having opened,  
    lay scattered with bunches of *atiral* flowers.

The attractive, broad, cool *pātiri* blossoms  
    falling from the lovely branches  
    lay mixed with *marā* flowers  
    of contrasting colour.

The forest is desirable,  
    like the temple where the deity  
    has been worshipped with mixed flowers.

<sup>113</sup> *Akaṇānūru*, 259:3-18.

<sup>114</sup> *Kaiittokai*, 6 and others.

<sup>115</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru*, 383:1-4.



Look at it, my dear.  
Also look at the hillocks, big and small.  
They resemble the male elephant  
that faced your father's foes  
in the battlefield  
and ruined the ferrule on its tusk  
but is now surrounded by female elephants.<sup>116</sup>

The description of the various flowers scattered about makes the path seem pleasant while the comparison of the hillocks and mounds to the male elephant surrounded by the female elephants is suggestive of love. Like the male elephant, the hillocks could be harsh during summer but it is not so now.

In the *Caṅkam* poems depicting *privu* or separation the description of spring as a season suitable for love only seems to heighten the poignancy of the emotion of the lovers in separation. These poems do not describe the season for its own sake but use it as a backdrop to the love and longing of the lovers and to show the influence these objects of nature have on the emotion of the people concerned. For example a heroine tells her friend,

“He has not come.  
But it has come —  
the season  
when the black-stemmed *nuṇā* tree  
with large branches  
on which bees hum with joy  
spreads its fragrance.”<sup>117</sup>

Here, the emphasis is on the first line — “he has not come” and the rest of the poem which is a clear description of the *nuṇā* tree in spring suggests that it is the season which is joyous, but only to those united with their beloveds. Sometimes, this is expressed a little more explicitly as for instance in the complaint of a lady to her friend.

“You say,  
‘My friend in distress!  
Do not cry. He will return’.  
Can I stop crying?”

<sup>116</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru*, 99.

<sup>117</sup> *Aṅkurunūru*, 342.

Even during the season  
when the dark *kuyil* with shiny feathers  
pecks at the mango blossoms  
and being covered with the pollen,  
looks like a touchstone,  
I have to stroke my unadorned hair.”<sup>118</sup>

While hair adorned with flowers is symbolic of love in union, the unadorned hair is symbolic of her separation and therefore the lack of the pleasures of love. The hero who is away in search of wealth also thinks of his beloved at home and is concerned when the spring season begins. He tells himself,

“In the days following the heavy downpour  
of rain that makes work possible  
on this big, broad earth,  
In spring when the winding river flows  
like the moving back of a striped serpent,  
Each time the mating *kuyil* coos  
on the mango tree that blossoms in bunches,  
She will shed tears in solitude.  
She is a dark beauty with spots  
resembling the pollen of the beautiful flowers  
which grow on the long-trunked *vēṅkai*  
near the hillock.”<sup>119</sup>

The most important aspect of this poem is his concern for his beloved who will shed tears of loneliness in his absence. Instead of her beauty being enhanced by wearing flowers like the *vēṅkai* which blossom during spring, it will be unadorned and even spoilt because of her pining.

Sometimes, the normal changes in the environment and the behaviour of the fauna or avifauna caused by the change of seasons are interpreted according to the moods of the characters concerned. A lady whose lord has left home to earn more wealth in order to discharge well his duties as a householder pines for him. To her the cooing of the dark *kuyil* in the mango orchard seems to mean,

<sup>118</sup> *Kuruntokai*, 192.

<sup>119</sup> *Narriṇai*, 157.