

**Exploring History Through Poetic Imagery:
What Do We See When We Read Poems from the Past?**



தாய்ப்பயிர் பிள்ளை வாய்ப்படச் சொரியும் ... நெடுந்தேர்
நெடுநீர்ச் சேர்ப்பன் பகலிவண் வரவே (*Narriṇai* 9)
The mother bird feeds its offspring directly from its mouth
Similar to how the king in a grand chariot distributes offerings to the people.

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ஒன்றாய் ஆக்க ஏர் பூட்டி யாக்கைச் செறுவுமுது... (*Cīvaka cintāmaṇi* 962:1)
Plow your body with a plow of inspiration.

**A critical study of the poems of *Caṅkam* Tamil,
a comparative study of *Caṅkam* and *bhakti* poems,
a close look at the Poetic devices and Literary Techniques,
the innocent captives of literary power and the covert actions exercised upon them.**

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Literary works exercise significant influence on individuals and society across various dimensions, manifesting both positive and negative effects, often in subtle and deceptive ways. While the observable impacts can range from beneficial to detrimental, it is crucial to delve deeper into how these works subtly manipulate readers' perceptions and behaviors. Upon engaging with literature, readers may adopt new viewpoints and attitudes, unknowingly incorporating them into their actions. Consequently, individuals might not recognize that their conduct stems from the influence of what they have read. Therefore, a critical examination of literary content is essential to unveil the covert mechanisms through which it shapes human thought and behavior. One of the enchanting aspects of literary works is their ability to evoke imagery from nature, which resonates deeply with both readers and culture. When authors weave natural imagery into human actions, it holds a special place in readers' hearts, as they often recognize these images from their own experiences yet may not have previously linked them to their own lives. The genesis of this work primarily stems from my extensive immersion in Tamil literary works across three distinct genres, coupled with a keen observation of the profound impact of imagery on my personal life. This book delves into numerous images that resonate deeply within the Tamil readership, often embedded within literature without their conscious awareness. I frequently find myself lamenting rather than celebrating the behaviors that have been ingrained in both me and the broader Tamil culture due to the enduring influence of literary works over centuries. I leave it to the readers of this book to uncover the true intent behind my decision to express it this way.

The imagery of a mother bird nurturing her young, men and women toiling in the fields, and red-winged ants in distress, contrast with the serene depictions of white conches, milk churning, and offerings of sugarcane, rice, and fruits. These diverse images were intricately woven into the minds of readers through literature, each carrying its own distinct context. However, certain images, like bees collecting honey from flowers, the significance of broken pottery fragments, or battlefields with elephants etc., failed to leave as profound an impression on readers, for reasons yet unknown. While some make momentary flashes in the spotlight particularly due to their deceitful and deceptive actions, others remain overlooked, their honesty and innocence rendering them invisible to everyone. The introductory chapter of this book establishes the groundwork for readers, guiding them on what to expect and how to approach

literary works, while also cautioning against falling prey to the deceptive aspects of literature. Chapters two to four aim to acquaint readers with the rich tapestry of Tamil literature across three genres, exploring their interconnections and disparities, and highlighting their ingenuity in captivating readers' interest. The emphasis of the fifth chapter lies in analyzing poems through the lens of literary techniques, including similes, metaphors, metonymy, the use of rhyme and so forth. These techniques serve as the primary instruments through which authors engage and sometimes redirect readers' attention, akin to how a patiently waiting white heron captures fish in a pond. The sixth chapter aims to illustrate how to detect clues in poems that reveal historical events.

While all six chapters of this book were freshly conceptualized for this volume, certain ideas and concepts drew inspiration from my previous works penned in Tamil. Specifically, my book இலக்கியப் பயணங்களும் தமிழர் வரலாறும் *ilakkiyap payaṇaṅkaḷum tamiḷar varalārum* ('literary journeys and Tamil's history' in Tamil), published by *Kālacuvaṭu* publications, Nagercoil in the year 2017 served as a catalyst for this endeavor. Readers proficient in both English and Tamil are encouraged to explore both books simultaneously, as it allows for a comprehensive immersion into the essence of these narratives. Much could be expanded upon regarding the subject matter at hand, but due to time constraints and other considerations, I plan to conclude with what I have presented here. Nonetheless, I aspire to persist in my literary journey, not as a creator of literary works, but rather as a critic or keen observer, continuing to examine how literature influences, disrupts, or elucidates the lives of individuals. I endeavored to translate the poetic imagery into tangible visuals, sourcing images from various platforms, duly acknowledging them as needed. Additionally, I extensively utilized <https://gemini.google.com/> and <https://chatgpt.com/> to craft imaginative visuals and refine textual style; <https://www.projectmadurai.org/>, <http://sangam.tamilnlp.com/>, and <http://sangam.tamilnlp.com/mp/json/> to look for relevant words and expressions from electronic resources of *Caṅkam* and *bhakti* poems. Although these online resources are used for word searches, all the poems quoted in this work are taken from the primary sources listed in the references section. Importantly, the source texts do not contain any punctuation, a characteristic style of ancient Tamil texts until the end of nineteenth century printed texts. Ideally, poems from both *Caṅkam* and *bhakti* texts should be read directly from their source texts, without any punctuation.

As I contemplated the themes explored in this book, I acknowledge my indebtedness to those who have subtly influenced, disrupted, or shaped my thoughts, both directly and indirectly. Primary among these influences are the Tamil poems themselves, which, with their blend of clarity and ambiguity, sparked my curiosity and prompted me to delve into them deeply. This engagement led me to spend significant amounts of time not only reading them but also pondering over them on various occasions, like a piece of wood caught amid a whirlpool. Amidst the daunting task of acquiring attention for my work and navigating the realm of publications and publishers, Dr. Jayakumar graciously directed me towards the world of the Tamil Linguistics Association, where I have found valuable support on my academic journey. I am immensely grateful to him for rescuing me from aimless wandering to search for a publisher, and I am equally appreciative of Prof. K. Karunakaran, President of the Tamil Linguistics Association, for graciously agreeing to publish this work under their auspices, as well as reading the earlier version of this manuscript thoroughly to offer his suggestions to improve further. I must also acknowledge Prof. KK's ongoing encouragement in promoting my works, and I fondly recall the release of my previous book, தமிழ் மொழியின் வரலாற்றுப் பயணம்: சங்கம் முதல் இன்று வரை *Tamiḻ mōliyiṇ varalārrup payaṇam: Caṅkam mutal inru varai* ('The historical journey of the Tamil language from *Caṅkam* until now'), under his support at the department of Linguistics, Bharathiyar University. I owe a great debt of gratitude to numerous friends and colleagues who have supported me throughout my academic journey. However, I wish to pay tribute, with a heavy heart, to the memories of my mentors: Professor S. V. Shanmugam, Professor Harold F. Schiffman, Dr. G. Ravisankar, and my father, Mr. S. Renganathan, whose unwavering guidance instilled in me the confidence to navigate through life's challenges like traversing through turbulent waters. Among the array of friends and colleagues who have imparted valuable lessons to me, I extend special gratitude to Professors A. Rajaram, K. Rangan and K. Karunakaran, Drs. A. Karthikeyan, L. Ramamoorthy, M. Ganesan, Appasamy Murugaiyan, and M. Jayakumar. I am grateful for Dr. A. Karthikeyan's diligent review of the earlier version of this manuscript, offering valuable comments and criticism to improve it. Lastly, I express my heartfelt appreciation to my mother Radha, my wife, Vijayabarathi Vasu, and my sons, Vinoth, Vimallesh, and Vignesh, who have accompanied me on the journey through the peaks of knowledge and wisdom.

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