

Poetics of place in early Tamil literature

by

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I discuss some representations of place in early (*ca.* 100 CE - 300 CE) Tamil poetry collectively called *caṅkam* literature. While previous research has emphasized the importance of place as landscape imagery in these poems, it has seldom gone beyond treating landscape / place as symbolic of human emotionality. I argue that this approach does not address the variety in the representation of place seen in this literature. To address this theoretical deficiency, I study place in *caṅkam* poetry as having definite ontological value and something which is immediately cognized by the senses of human perception. Drawing from a range of texts, I will argue that in these poems, the experience of place emerges in a dialogic between the human self and place - a dialogic which brings together sensory experience, perception, memory, and various socio-cultural patterns; place, in these poems, is not as much an objective geographical entity as it is the process of perception itself.

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिर्दृष्टे यस्मिन्निति श्रुतिः।
जगौ परावरं शान्तं तं विद्यातीर्थमाश्रये॥

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List of abbreviations and a note on translation and transliteration

- Aiñ. Aiñkurunūru*
Aka. Akanānūru
Cilap. Cilappatikāram
Ciru. Cirupāṇārruppaṭai
Kali. Kalittokai
Kuṛi. Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu
Kuṛu. Kuṛuntokai
Matu. Maturaikkāñci
Mal. Malaiṭṭukaṭām
Narr. Narriṇai
Pari. Paripāṭal
Pari. C. Comacuntaranar's commentary on the Paripāṭal
Parimel. Parimelalakar's commentary on the Paripāṭal
Pari. Ti. Paripāṭarirai
Perum. Perumpāṇārruppaṭai
Poru. Porunarārruppaṭai
Puṛa. Puṛanānūru
Tiru. Tirumurukārruppaṭai
Tol. Tolkāppiyam

In transliterating Indic words, I follow the scheme suggested by the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html>). For ease of reading, I have chosen not to transliterate names of people (except when they occur in poetry I quote). Nor have I transliterated more common words ("Sanskrit", "Tamil", "Madurai", etc.). Some of the translations were adapted from earlier work done in collaboration with Elizabeth Segran. These are indicated by an asterisk. All other translations, unless otherwise specified, are mine.

Chapter 1

Introduction

"சங்க நூல்களாகிய புதிய உலகத்தின் காட்சிகள் பனிமூடிய மலை போல் என் கண்ணுக்குத் தோற்றலாயின. பனிப்படலம் படர்ந்திருந்தாலும் மலையினது உயரமும் பருமையும் கண்ணுக்குப் புலப்படுதல் போலத் தெளிவாக விளங்காவிட்டாலும் அந்தச் சங்கநூற்செய்யுள்கள் பொருளமைதியினால் 'நிலத்தினும் பெரியனவாகவும் வானிலும் உயர்ந்தனவாகவும் கடல் நீரினும் ஆழமுடையனவாகவும்' தோற்றின." - உ. வே. சாமிநாத ஐயர், "என் சரித்திரம்", ப. 764

"To my eyes, the vistas of the new world of *caṅkam* texts looked like a mountain shrouded in mist. But just as one is able to perceive a mountain's loftiness and vastness despite it being covered by mist, by virtue of their connotation and context, the poems from the *caṅkam* texts - although I was unable to understand them clearly - appeared to me as 'wider than the earth, higher than the skies, and deeper than the seas'." - U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, *eṇ carittiram*, p. 764

This dissertation concerns the representation of place in the literature of the early Tamils - a literature which has come to be known collectively, as *caṅkam* literature. Of this literature, approximately 2300 poems are available to us today, constituting a wealth of primary source material. It should be obvious that not all of it was written at the same time, and the history of this literature, its chronology, *etc.* have been topics of considerable debate. For an excellent summary of the vexatious dimensions these questions can acquire, I refer the reader to a recent essay by François Gros (Gros 2009). Fortunately, much of this debate is irrelevant for the purposes of my discussion which will be largely ahistorical. Here, I will merely note the widely held view that a large fraction of the *caṅkam* poems were composed between the first and fourth centuries of the common era, with outliers on either side of this time period.

Why the specific interest in place and in what way can a study of place in these poems contribute to the existing body of knowledge on *caṅkam* literature? It is generally well known in the field of early Indian literature that landscape / place is an important ingredient in *caṅkam* poetry. So much so, representations of landscape in this corpus of literature are often adduced as evidence for a unique and distinct literary tradition (distinct from the other classical Indian language, Sanskrit). However, while previous research has emphasized the importance of place as landscape imagery in these poems, it has seldom gone beyond treating landscape / place as symbolic of human emotionality. In this dissertation, I will argue that this approach does not address the variety in the representation of place employed in *caṅkam* literature. To address this theoretical deficiency, I propose a new approach in analyzing the poetics of place based on a variety of poems drawn from the *caṅkam* corpus. The approach I pro-

pose is built on predicating place as something which is immediately cognized by the senses of human perception. Even a cursory reading of the *caṅkam* texts reveals that the protagonists in the poems experience place in the most direct and immediate way - *by being in that place*. Based on this, I will argue that the experience of place in these poems, emerges in a dialogic between the human self and place - a dialogic which brings together sensory experience, perception, memory, and various socio-cultural patterns. In these poems, place is not as much an objective geographical entity, as it is the process of perception itself.

I will begin this discussion by summarizing some basic features of *caṅkam* literature and the ways in which previous researchers have engaged with it.¹ This will also give me an opportunity to introduce a few terms and concepts that I shall use repeatedly in this dissertation. The first of these concerns a broad classification of *caṅkam* literature: the poems in this corpus are conveniently classified under two categories called "*akam*" and "*puṛam*". Manavalan notes that "... this classification is neither compilatory nor arbitrary, but thematic and traditional (Manavalan 1977)." The words, "*akam*" and "*puṛam*" mean respectively, "inner" and "outer" - referring to the inner and outer aspects of human experience. However, in the context of this corpus of literature, "inner" is not *any* inner experience but restricted to love between man and woman. The "outer" deals with warfare, heroism, generosity, instruction, *etc.* Notwithstanding this binary classification, one often finds strands of *akam* in *puṛam* poems and *vice versa*. Following Martha Ann Selby, it is perhaps best to view *akam* and *puṛam* as "two parallel systems but whose components often intersect (Selby 2008)." It should be noted that these terms are defined in the normative Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam* (henceforth, *Tol.*) and not in the poems themselves.

The next point is to note that much of this literature is extremely stylized. Themes, situations, and even metaphors can all be classified readily (as they have indeed been). As noted by Manavalan, in terms of both subject matter and poetic manner, "... the poetry is governed by well-codified principles ... and the spirit and the temper of this literature is therefore, unmistakably classical (Manavalan 1975a)." Here, Manavalan presumably refers to the codification found in the *Tol.*, the earliest extant Tamil grammar. Whether this text preceded the poems or otherwise is again a question which has not yet been settled conclusively.² But there is little doubt that almost every reading of these poems in the last thousand years has been informed by the *Tol.* This is particularly the case in the medieval commentaries - commentaries that have shaped contemporary understanding of these poems. It is also evident from the poems themselves that they were crafted within a literary space whose boundaries were well understood in practice; in short, there is every reason for us to believe that the poets were fully aware of a larger matrix of ideas from which they drew their inspiration.³

Where and how does place fit in this discussion? The best way to begin answering this question is to turn to the *akam* poems, where some aspects concerning the representation of place have been well understood and discussed at some length in previous works. Most of the *akam* poems belong to one of five poetic situations related to love. The five situations

¹My discussion will be brief as these topics have been discussed by numerous authors. See for instance, Manavalan (1975a,b); Zvelebil (1973, 1992).

²With the exception of a few Tamil scholars such as Vaiyapuri Pillai, this question has polarized the academic community along predictable lines, with most Tamil academics arguing for the antiquity of the text and most Western researchers taking the opposite stance. For a discussion, see Takahashi (1995).

³It may be argued that this is but an artifact of compilation - that the compilers of this literature (*ca.* 4-7th centuries CE) forced a certain integrity of style. The argument is valid but it does not in any way, mitigate the fact that so many of the poems share the same literary space.

are taken to represent five phases in the experience of love between man and woman. They are: (i) pre-marital or clandestine love, (ii) separation, (iii) waiting, (iv) anxiety and (v) lovers' quarrel. In the language of the *Tol.* these constitute the set of *uripporuḷ* or the *uri* - the 'proper' or 'specific' aspect of love. Specificity in this context is a particular poetic situation belonging to one of the five elements listed above. Interestingly enough, each of these five aspects is directly related (in the poems) to a specific landscape: (i) mountainous, (ii) barren or waste land, (iii) forest or pastoral, (iv) littoral and (v) agricultural or riverine. The way in which the relationship between landscape and a specific aspect of human experience operates in the *akam* poems is best understood by example and in the following, I will present two poems from the *Kuru.* translated by A. K. Ramanujan (Ramanujan 1967). I will also include excerpts from Ramanujan's interpretations of the poems that address the relationship between the representations of landscape and human experience.

1.1

You know he comes from
where the fresh-water shark in the pools
catch with their mouths
the mangoes as they fall, ripe
from the trees on the edge of the field.

At our place,
he talked big.
Now, back in his own,
when others raise their hands,
and feet,
he will raise his too... (*Kuru.* 8:1- 5)⁴

The speaker in this poem is the concubine and she is angry with the hero because he is unfaithful to her and has returned to his wife. Poems dealing with the theme of the hero's infidelity operate in a literary space called *marutam*. Typically, such poems are always set in an agrarian landscape.

Let us examine how the poem relate landscape to emotionality. A. K. Ramanujan writes, "... this is a poem about infidelity; the shark, the pool at the edge of the meadow, and the mango are properties of the *marutam* landscape and define the *marutam* mood of ironic and sullen comment on a lover's infidelity... the lover, by *ullurai* (a metonymic metaphor, which Ramanujan calls "inscape" elsewhere), is the shark in the pool he owns; the fish gets all it wants without any effort. By comparing herself with the mango, the concubine is reproaching herself for being easily accessible..."⁵ In Ramanujan's words, "... the inscapes of the natural scenes repeat the action of the poem." This is one of the typical ways in which an image from the landscape is used to enhance emotional affect. Before I discuss Ramanujan's analysis of this technique, let me note that imagery is used in other ways too, as in the following example:

⁴Translation by A. K. Ramanujan.

⁵A. K. Ramanujan 1967, p. 110

1.2

Will he remember, friend?
 Where the curve of the parrot's beak
 holds a bright-lit neem
 like the sharp glory of a goldsmith's nail
 threading a coin of gold
 for a new jewel.
 He went across the black soil
 and the cactus desert.
 Will he remember? (*Kuru*. 67)⁶

The speaker is the heroine who is separated from the hero. This theme is almost always set in *pālai* - barren land. Unlike the previous poem, landscape imagery is not an extended metaphor. As Ramanujan notes, "... the brilliant colors of the body of the poem are drained to the bleakness of the cactus desert (evoking the *pālai* desert, and separation) by the end of the poem."⁷ The juxtaposition of contrasting images accentuates the heroine's misery in separation.

Images such as the ones described in the two poems above are typical to the *akam* poems. The material used in crafting these images - landscape stuff if you will - is called "*karupporuḷ* (or *karu*)," by the *Tol*. It means literally, "things born," viz., things native to a specific landscape. At this point, I will also note that throughout this dissertation, when I use the words, "place" and "landscape," in the context of these poems, I refer to this set of elements. However, as I hope to argue in this dissertation, the *experience* of place cannot be reduced to this set. To understand the experiential aspect of place, one necessarily has to study the phenomenon of perception as described in the *caṅkam* poems.

Together with another set called *mutarporuḷ* (or *mutal*) or the set of "basic things" which includes land, time of the day and season, the triad of *mutal*, *karu* and *uri*, can be construed as constituting the literary space or *tiṇai* (of which there are five major types, as noted earlier) in which the *akam* poems operate. It follows that the *tiṇai* is the overarching type. I emphasize that while it comprises the three constituents stated above, *tiṇai* is not a reductive concept. Denoting "poetic context" (Selby 2008), *tiṇai* results from definite arrangements of the three constituents. For example, let us consider again landscape imagery. As we saw in the two examples above, these images are themselves drawn from the things specific to a given landscape. According to the *Tol*., the set includes, among other elements, "Gods, crops (food), animals, trees, birds, the drums, occupation or activity, *yāl* (a stringed musical instrument)." (*Tol. Poruḷ*. 20) Imaginative combinations of these elements lead to a "repertoire of images (Ramanujan 1967)," in the *akam* poems, and poetic context obtains when such images are arranged suitably together with the specific aspect of love. As a result, "... this (poetic) context (*tiṇai*) is sweeping, and includes geographical space, time, and everything that grows, develops and lives within that space and time, including emotion (Selby 2008)."

By now, it should be clear that landscape imagery plays a very significant and important role in the creation of poetic context. As summarized above, the association the poems

⁶Translation by A. K. Ramanujan.

⁷*Ibid*.

make between landscape and emotionality is codified in the normative grammar and this relationship has attracted the attention of commentators, scholars and the lay-reader for at least a thousand years now. Significant too, are the names given to the five poetic concepts: the names of the five *tiṅais* correspond to flowers specific to the appropriate landscape.⁸ For these reasons, the study of landscape / place in *caṅkam* poetry has occupied the attention of several scholars. In the following, I will discuss briefly the ideas of a few scholars who have contributed to our current understanding of this subject. I will also use this summary to indicate how I intend to contribute to this area of research and also how my analysis of place in *caṅkam* poetry differs from previous work.

I will begin with M. Varadarajan's dissertation, *The Treatment of Nature in Sangam Literature* (Varadarajan 1957;1969), arguably the earliest to study the representation of landscape in *caṅkam* literature.⁹ In this work, Varadarajan quotes copiously from the *caṅkam* poems although his analysis is guided strictly by the *Tol.* Following the *Tol.*, he says, "... in the (love) poems, the emotional experience of the lovers is most important, the objects of environment come next in importance and the region, the season and the hour are less important." Consequently, his analysis always makes a distinction (either implicitly or otherwise) between "Nature" and "human emotion". The configuration of landscape imagery in the love poems indicates to him that, "... the Tamil poets understood this *influence* of natural environment on the life (*sic*) of men ...(emphasis added)"¹⁰ To him, the poetic convention laid out in the *Tol.* only codifies nature's influence on man. Varadarajan then follows Naccinarkkiniyar (a commentator of the *Tol.*) and explains how for example, "the arid desert tract ... the noon day of the hot summer influence loneliness and solitude."¹¹ But very soon in his essay, Varadarajan shifts his stance. From describing the "influence of nature on man", he turns the other way and talks of a "... fundamental principle of human nature ... (by which) the appearance of objective phenomena is ever largely modified and colored by subjective feeling..."¹²

This ambiguity - whether the poems indicate landscape's influence on human emotion or *vice versa* - plagues Varadarajan's analysis especially since he never chooses to recognize it. Consequently, the conclusions he draws vary very widely. For instance, after stating that subjective feeling colors objective phenomena, Varadarajan reverts to his earlier stance and speaks of nature influencing human emotion, "... natural resources lend something of their own energy to the character of its inhabitants ... and their manners and modes of life undergo an imperceptible change owing to their (*i.e.*, natural resources) influence..."¹³ Throughout his essay, Varadarajan never addresses this apparent contradiction. It is perhaps a sign of discomfort that his final stance conforms to neither of these positions. He writes, "... external nature is *only illustration, or background* for the human emotions they depict. Descriptions of Nature are neither evocative nor revelative but are *only frames* for bright pictures of love or war or any other subject (emphasis mine)."¹⁴ At this point, instead of asking how is it that landscapes offer "frames" for human emotion or what is it about landscapes that makes them

⁸These are *kuṛiṅci*, *mullai*, *marutam*, *neytal* and *pālai*. They correspond respectively, to the mountain, forest or pastoral, agricultural or riverine, littoral and barren landscapes.

⁹A well known Tamil academic, Varadarajan has written extensively on *caṅkam* literature. He headed the Department of Tamil at the University of Madras between 1961-71.

¹⁰Varadarajan 1957;1969, p. 7

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 10

¹²*Ibid.* p. 11; Varadarajan cites Walter Greg's work on pastoral poetry in this context.

¹³*Ibid.* p. 13

¹⁴*Ibid.* p. 18

evoke human emotionality, Varadarajan chooses to ask "why Nature?" In reply, he says, "... the poetry of the ancient Tamils is only the form taken by their love of Nature as a background for the manifestation of their own inner feelings and passions."¹⁵

At the heart of Varadarajan's contradictory assertions is the failure to resolve the nature of the subject - object relationship as with humans and landscape. I submit that this failure is at a more fundamental level. Had Varadarajan chosen to ask *how* is it that landscape becomes such an effective "background for the manifestation of human emotion", he would have been forced to inquire into the nature of perception - the process by which humans cognize "nature", as he terms it, rather than positing a naive subject - object relationship between humans and nature. The only instance when Varadarajan refers to perception is when he lauds the *caṅkam* poets for their "accurate knowledge of Nature".¹⁶ He takes a tentative step towards discussing the role played by the human senses in perceiving landscape, by noting that the poems describe perception through different sensory modalities. But perhaps because Varadarajan is less interested in the process of perception, he does not go beyond positing an epistemological hierarchy - "the poets feel the beauties ... of the tangible world mostly through the eye... next to the eye, the senses of sound and smell have some prominence. The sense of taste comes next and the least important is touch."¹⁷

As I will argue in this dissertation, place as described in the *caṅkam* poems, cannot be understood without inquiring into the nature of perception; indeed, it is perception which ties landscape and emotionality and hence one has necessarily to study (a) what these poems have to say about the process of perception and (b) what is it about landscape that it is able to express and evoke emotionality. I will also note during the course of this dissertation that the *caṅkam* poems often blur simple binary distinctions (such as subject and object) in the perception of place. Moreover, as the examples discussed in this dissertation will demonstrate, descriptions of landscape / place vary widely in the *caṅkam* corpus. Therefore, any meaningful analysis of landscape in these poems cannot start by positing a distinct entity called "Nature" and attempting to shoehorn it within a naive subject-object relationship. It is admittedly tempting to preserve such a binary distinction, especially since the *Tol.* speaks of human emotion (the so-called *uri* which is usually understood as 'subjective') and landscape (*karu* - the 'objective' external world) as distinct categories. But more often than not, attempts to preserve this distinction lapse into contradictory assertions as exemplified by Varadarajan's analysis.

Despite these problems, Varadarajan's conclusions have been repeated uncritically by subsequent researchers. V. Sp. Manickam for instance writes that, "... we do not come across in the whole of Sangam (*caṅkam*) literature, be it *akam* or *puram*, any single poem depicting the nature of things such as flower, river, sky, and so on from the aesthetic point of view. The credit for the statement that no poem in the Sangam age deals with nature or aspects of nature as a theme goes to Dr. Varadarajan..."¹⁸ Manickam, like most other writers on *caṅkam* literature never bothers to explain what he means when he declares that the poems do not "deal with Nature". The closest he comes to clarifying this point is when he says that there are no poems in the *caṅkam* corpus that are "like the poems, Daffodils, the Cloud, To a Skylark, To

¹⁵*Ibid.* p. 23

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 23

¹⁷*Ibid.* p. 23

¹⁸Manickam 1962, p. 118

Night, etc. in English literature."¹⁹ He asserts further that, "... Suffice it to point out emphatically that the background of nature *i.e.*, *mutarporu!* and *karupporu!* was prescribed by Tolkaṭṭiyar (the author of the *Tol.*) and adopted by the Sangam poets, only for the love-aspects or *uripporu!* of *akattiṇāi*, and not for the theme of *purattiṇai*, *viz.*, heroism, munificence, eulogy, etc."²⁰ Thus, citing the *Tol.* Manickam implies that all representations of landscape have to be metaphorical, evoking only (five) specific aspects of human love.

Now, Manickam is indeed correct in noting that the *Tol.* relates the 'basic things' (*mutal*) and 'native things' (*karu*) to the theme of love. However, as I will point out later in this chapter, there are enough poems in the *caṅkam* corpus - both in *akam* and *puram* - that relate landscape to human emotionality in different ways and not just through metaphor. Even if one were to take Manickam's point of view that the *Tol.* was a prescriptive grammar - the rules of which were obeyed strictly by all available poems in the *caṅkam* corpus,²¹ non-metaphorical representations of landscape in *caṅkam* poems do not necessarily contradict the *Tol.* For one thing, the *Tol.* like most early Indian aphoristic texts, is very terse. The nature of the text is such that it breaks down poetry into a number of constituent pieces - the "ground-up" approach as Martha Selby calls it.²² But nowhere does it argue or even indicate that this is the *only* way or that a simple addition of such pieces results in poetic expression. I will elaborate on these points shortly.

A few years after Varadarajan's work, the subject of landscape in *caṅkam* poetry was revisited by Xavier Thaninayagam (Thaninayagam 1963;1966).²³ Thaninayagam's approach is closely allied with Varadarajan's. Like Varadarajan's work, his analysis of the poems is based largely on his reading of the *Tol.* and again like Varadarajan, his treatment of the subject is more descriptive than analytical. However, Thaninayagam's work is noteworthy in that it adumbrates two distinctly different approaches towards the study of landscapes in *caṅkam* poetry that were pursued subsequently by other researchers.

The first of these concerns the putative socio-historical origins of the *tiṇai* concept. As discussed earlier, the concept of *tiṇai* is strongly tied to landscape. Thaninayagam asks if there is something unique to Tamil society that it came up with a system of poetics which is strongly tied to geographical differences; *viz.*, he takes the position of the cultural geographer. It should be noted in this context that many of Thaninayagam's contemporaries were insistent that the *caṅkam* poems were characterized by a realistic portrayal of early Tamil society.²⁴ Thus for instance, Thaninayagam notes in the very beginning of his essay that, "... the poems present faithful portraits of the social, economic, political and literary state of the Tamil country, the two centuries after Christ."²⁵ So much so, he reads some of the poems in the *caṅkam* corpus as "guide-books and travelogues". Consequently, while discussing landscapes in *caṅkam* poetry, he turns predictably to the question "why?"; *viz.*, why did the *caṅkam* poets choose to relate landscape to human emotionality? According to him, this relationship indicates an endur-

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹I happen to think this is wrong. See also, Takahashi (1995).

²²Selby 2009, p. 25

²³The Reverend Xavier S. Thaninayagam was a well known Tamil academic. Born in Sri Lanka and educated in India, he went on to become the Head of Indian Studies at the University of Malaya between 1961-1966. He played an important role in setting up the International Association for Tamil Research and organized the First World Tamil Conference in Kuala Lumpur, 1966.

²⁴I note that this is also the prevailing view in contemporary Tamil academia.

²⁵Thaninayagam 1963;1966, p. 4

ing connection between the early Tamil and the landscape he inhabited. Thus, landscape imagery in the poems was unique to a society which "... had noted that the Tamil land contained five different kinds of landscape."²⁶ Thaninayagam goes on to assert that such was the deep connection between the early Tamils and the landscape they inhabited that, "... a complete and accurate study of Nature, was therefore, imposed on the Tamil poets by poetic tradition and rule."²⁷ He then goes on to discuss various allusions to historical events in the description of landscapes, allusions to religion, religious belief, *etc.* in an attempt to "trace the historical origin of this poetic convention".²⁸ While Thaninayagam's analysis often borders on the naive, his attempts to study landscapes in *caṅkam* poetry from a historical perspective inspired later academics to inquire into the socio-historical origins of a poetic convention which placed so much emphasis on landscape. Of these, the Marxist historian Sivathamby's work was the first and also the most complete of its kind (Sivathamby 1974).

Sivathamby's study of landscape in *caṅkam* poetry is an attempt to understand landscape from the point of view of cultural geography, drawing mainly from Marxist theories of socio-economics. Although his approach differs from mine in a very fundamental way, Sivathamby's work should be noted because it was the first analytical attempt at inquiring into the nature of the connection between the triad (of 'basic things', 'things native' and 'specific emotional aspect') constituting the literary space of *tiṇai*.

In Sivathamby's view, *tiṇai* is as much social space, as it is literary space. This hypothesis makes it possible to discern (or speculate on) the character of economic organization within each of the five landscapes. Sivathamby identifies them as five self-sustaining eco-regions, both from the grammatical scheme advocated by the *Tol.* as well as the poems themselves. He then argues that the poems reflect homogeneous economic pursuit within any given eco-region, but owing to the differences in development potential, economic development remains uneven in these different regions. The argument runs as follows. The *Tol.* lists personal names as derived from *tiṇai*; *i.e.*, a name refers to the region the person belongs to and the nature of his economic pursuit. Thus, inasmuch as these names are related isomorphically to the family or clan belonging to a specific eco-region, Sivathamby understands the *tiṇai* as the forerunner of caste. Taking this argument further, if names of people could be derived from their occupation, eco-regions ought to have been homogeneous economic units. If this is conceded, then uneven economic development in the different eco-regions follows naturally. For example, the hilly region *kuriñci*, not suitable to increase in production was likely to have been less developed than the agricultural land *marutam*. It is then possible to understand why capture of cattle and obtaining of yams by digging are classified in the *Tol.* as the war activity and occupation, respectively, in the hilly region, while guarding the settlement and cattle rearing are the corresponding activities in the pastoral land. Further since poems such as the *Perum.* describe the bard's journey through each of these lands, Sivathamby argues that the simultaneous existence of these eco-regions was both a geographical and economic reality, which led to a diverse cultural milieu.

For Sivathamby then, the modes of production in the different eco-regions are considered as exemplifying the "Asiatic mode of production" proposed by Marx wherein "... the combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus produc-

²⁶*Ibid.* p. 38

²⁷*Ibid.* p. 40

²⁸*Ibid.* p. 75; The phrase, "poetic convention" refers to the five-fold division of landscape.

tion..."²⁹ Such continuity of production (economic development) leads to continuity of social structures, which in turn leads to the continuity of typical behavioral patterns and/or social values. As a consequence of the uneven economic development, "social values are also uneven (different)..." For example, owing to its affluence, the agricultural community legitimizes "extra-marital indulgence" and harlotry becomes a "socially acceptable outlet" described in this landscape. This would explain why "*ūṭal*" or lovers' quarrel - a poetic situation which describes feigned dislike of a woman for her husband or lover - becomes the behavior typified in the *marutam* poems.

Despite a certain elegance to it, Sivathamby's approach in modeling *tiṇai* as social space and landscapes as economically self-sustaining eco-regions, is not without problems. Consider the example given above; viz., *ūṭal* as a characteristic situation in farm land. While Sivathamby proposes the emerging surplus economy in this region as a reason for the institution of harlotry, it is not entirely obvious that similar material reasons can be adduced to justify other assignments in the *Tol*. For instance, the theme of anxious waiting is assigned to the littoral region. The main economic activities in this region are salt farming and fishing. As Sivathamby rightly notes, the *caṅkam* poems describe not deep sea fishing but coastal fishing. I see no obvious connection then between economic activity and the behavior characteristic of the eco-region in this case - the heroine waiting in anxiety for days together while her husband is away. A more problematic example is perhaps the case of the hilly region (*kuriñci*). The *Tol*. assigns (pre-marital) sexual union as the behavior characterized in the *kuriñci* poems and here again I see no strikingly evident relationship between economic activity in the region and the allegedly characteristic behavior of its inhabitants. Sivathamby recognizes this and argues that the characteristic behavior is in fact illicit love and that the social values (recall that in this theory, social values are uneven as are economical values) of this underdeveloped region allowed such behavior. At least two objections may be raised against this argument. First, while Sivathamby is correct in identifying that the poems assign illicit love to the hilly region, there are also poems where the woman expresses anguish over the fact that the villagers are beginning to talk openly about her relationship, causing her great shame. Similarly, there are other poems where either the woman urges the lover to marry her.³⁰ Secondly, as Hart points out (Hart 1975;1999), there are many poems in the *caṅkam* corpus that detail the custom of inviting suitors to the bride's home (so that they could look at the bride), marriage between cross-cousins, as also poems that extol chastity of the woman. The argument that such examples only serve to underscore "uneven social values" is untenable since many of these are poems assigned to the same literary space as illicit love, i.e., the *kuriñci* or the hilly region.

Are the above objections sufficiently strong to invalidate Sivathamby's thesis in its entirety? To answer this, I first note that Sivathamby's arguments are strongest in the case of the *puram* category, or those poems dealing with the 'exterior'; i.e., a plausible connection can be made between the geographical reality of a particular *tiṇai*, the development potential of the region and the economic activity that can be sustained in some of the poems. The examples Sivathamby offers from the *puram* poems and his arguments concerning their *tiṇai* assignments in the *Tol*. are broadly consistent.³¹ But as I noted above, where the analysis seems

²⁹Sivathamby 1974, p. 32

³⁰Typically in these poems, the heroine's girl companion pleads with the hero and urges him to marry the heroine.

³¹For details, I refer the reader to Sivathamby's paper.

to fail clearly is in making the connection between economic structures and *individual* behavior patterns. To clarify this point further, I agree with Sivathamby that modes of production and economic relations may well be related to the continuity of certain social structures. However in my opinion, the focus of the *akam* poems is not on social structures, but the individual. In saying this, I do not propose that these poems are oblivious to social structures or that they are silent about such institutions. There are several references to institutions (such as marriage). Women gossiping about an illicit relationship and the social pressure (real or imagined) which causes the lovers to marry is a theme which figures prominently in the *akam* poems. Yet, the focus of the poems is always on the lover(s) and to extract sociological or historical information from them is a risky exercise - especially in the absence of any information outside of the texts themselves.

Here again, I emphasize the essentially stylistic nature of the *caṅkam* poems - especially love poetry. As Manavalan rightly notes, *akam* poetry is "neither wholly realistic nor wholly idealistic".³² It is primarily poetry composed within a set of norms developed over a period of time - norms that impart to the poetry its universal character. Hence any theoretical approach which uses the poems to make strong conclusions about the society which produced it is basically a theory of these norms. Herein lies the problem - we know very little about the manner in which such norms came into existence, excepting the poems themselves. Hence, any theory of landscape in *caṅkam* poetry which enquires into the socio-historical implications of place and literary space, can at best, aim to be self-consistent. Unfortunately, such approaches do not necessarily enhance our understanding or appreciation of the poems themselves. For example, let us concede that clandestine love and the mountainous landscape are related in the *kuṛiñci* poems for reasons grounded in specific socio-historical reasons. But the hypothesis, beyond explaining this association, does not help in understanding the different ways landscape and a specific emotional affect are related in such poems. Notwithstanding such shortcomings, Sivathamby's analysis is noteworthy because it is (to my knowledge) the only work which attempted to address the relationship between landscape and literary space in the *caṅkam* poems comprehensively and analytically.

Returning now to Thaninayagam's work, he also initiates a second approach in studying landscape - landscape more as a poetic device. Here, Thaninayagam is sensitive to the mutual influence between humans and landscape; he is more careful (and also slightly more explicit) than Varadarajan when he talks about the "influence" of man on nature or *vice versa*. Thaninayagam's analysis makes it clear that he does not want to abandon a position which clearly distinguishes human emotion and description of nature, the former considered more important for poetry than the latter. On the other hand, he is also acutely aware of empirical evidence - there are far too many examples in the poems where so-called descriptions of nature are more elaborate than the descriptions of human passions. So he observes,

"... though human emotions form the primary subject of these anthologies, it is the human emotions of a people who lived in intimate relationship and communion with Nature. The shorter the poem the more intense its suggestiveness regarding Nature; the longer the poem the more detailed is the description of Nature, and the more explicit the avowal of the *mutual influence* between Man and Nature. While human passions in these poems are suggested in a few lines, it is the description of landscapes and the natural setting appropriate to these passions which are described at length. Many of these poems are

³²See Manavalan (1977).

landscapes in verse (emphases mine).³³

But later in his analysis, Thaninayagam reverts to a position which is based on maintaining the strict distinction between "nature" and "human emotion"; thus for instance, he talks of "... Nature being the *sympathetic* background, ... did not cease to be a store-house of similes and metaphors to the Tamil poets."³⁴ It should be noted how the reluctance to engage with the dynamics of emotionality - the perceptual process which ties humans to landscape - leads to a progressive diminishing of landscape's ontological status. From something which is capable of "influencing human emotion", nature becomes a "sympathetic background", and finally reduced to a "store-house of similes and metaphors".

The idea of landscape as a store-house of metaphors is implied also in the writings of A. K. Ramanujan, that I will now discuss. Himself a poet of no mean merit, it is not surprising that Ramanujan's analysis of landscapes in *caṅkam* poetry is more sophisticated than most others. But as I will point out now, Ramanujan seldom goes beyond considering the symbolic value of landscape. According to him, the objective landscape is "a repertoire of images"³⁵ - images that the poets used cleverly to fashion what he famously called "the interior landscape". Ramanujan concedes that the poetry alludes to situations of real life and scenes in the real objective world, but "... the tradition of conventions does everything possible to depersonalize the poetry of *akam*."³⁶ Elsewhere, in his discussion of *akam* poetry, he quotes Marianne Moore and says, "...the real world is always kept in sight and included in the ideal symbolic. In this view of the relationship of reality to poetry, they seem to anticipate Marianne Moore who suggested that poets ought to be 'literalists of the imagination' and that poems ought to be 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' ...(Ramanujan 1999)"

Discussing the symbolic value of landscape imagery, Ramanujan elaborates on "inscapes" or *uḷḷurai* - a technique commonly used in *akam* poetry. He writes,

"*uḷḷurai* is a correlation of *karu* to *uri*, of the landscapes and their contents to the human scene ... it is a structural concept within the poem, ... essentially a metonymy, an *in presentia* relationship, where both terms are present. The man belongs to the scene and the scene represents the man... unlike metaphor and simile it leaves out all points of comparison and all explicit markers of comparison (*e.g.*, 'like', 'as'), which increases many-fold the power of the figure. This kind of 'metonymous metaphor' based on an entire formal scheme is a special feature of the classical Tamil poetic form..."³⁷ It is because of such symbolic value that landscape becomes a "language within language", and thus it is that, "the Tamil poets used a set of five landscapes and formalized the world into a symbolism."³⁸

Ramanujan further argues how such symbolic use of landscape imagery developed "by a remarkable consensus" into a common language of symbols, the poetic practice of which justifies the name *caṅkam* ("fraternity" or "community"). Somewhat similar views are expressed by A. A. Manavalan. He too argues that the function of landscape imagery is largely symbolic

³³Thaninayagam 1963;1966, p. 7

³⁴*Ibid.* p. 43. This characterization of Nature is also cited approvingly by Manavalan who translates "sympathetic background" as "*ottuṅarvup pinpulam*;" see Manavalan 1975b, p.37.

³⁵Ramanujan 1967, p. 106; the basic similarity between "storehouse of metaphors" and "repertoire of images" is to be noted.

³⁶*Ibid.* p. 114

³⁷*Ibid.* p. 207

³⁸*Ibid.* p. 115

- functioning largely to enhance the *uri* or the emotional aspect specific to that poem. But he also goes on to assert that, "Objects of Nature do form part of *akam* poems. Portrayal of the flora and fauna is copious but their function is most often *ancillary*. They serve as a *sympathetic background* to the human drama... Treatment of Nature is therefore not essential...(emphases mine) (Manavalan 1977)" Insofar as understanding landscape imagery in love poems as *uḷḷurai*, i.e., inscapes or metonymic metaphors, Ramanujan's view (which is largely also that of the Tamil literary tradition) cannot be contested. This view may be called the standard model of *akam* poetry.

But in this context, two important questions are often overlooked. First, the standard model (as for instance aphorized in the *Tol.*) is completely silent about the *effectiveness* of landscape imagery. Or to quote Ramanujan again, the model only speaks to the "*correlation of karu to uri, of the landscapes and their contents to the human scene* (emphasis added)." It does *not* specify what makes landscape imagery evocative that it can serve so effectively in the *akam* poems. More to the point, what is the correlation which Ramanujan speaks of and how does it obtain in the poems? Secondly, can all representations of landscape imagery in *caṅkam* poetry be understood as inscapes or variants thereof? To my knowledge, these questions have not been posed so far in studies of *caṅkam* poetry. At first sight, these questions may seem irrelevant but there are very good textual reasons why they have to be addressed as I will now argue.

(i) First, let me consider the oft-quoted aphorism from the *Tol.* which specifies the triad constituting *tiṅai* or the literary space of the *akam* poems. It says, "When we examine the materials of a poem, only three things appear to be important: *mutal* 'the first things', *karu* 'the native elements', *uri*, 'the human feelings' appropriately set in *mutal* and *karu*. " (*Tol. Poruḷ 3*; translation by A. K. Ramanujan) As I mentioned earlier, *karu* constitutes landscape. Elsewhere, the *Tol.* lists the elements belonging to this set - animals, trees, birds, drums, occupation or human activity, *etc.* In subsequent aphorisms, the *Tol.* clarifies that while the 'first things' and 'native elements' of different landscapes may mix in the same poem, a poem should always have a unique emotional aspect. For this reason and also because of the numerous examples in *akam* literature, scholars have always held that 'human feelings' or the 'emotional aspect' is the dominant aspect of *akam* poetry. What this means is that landscape imagery in the poems is always related to human emotionality in *akam* poetry; to quote Ramanujan on this point, "Mere nature-description or 'imagism' in poetry would be uninteresting to Tamil poets and critics."³⁹ But it should be noted that nowhere does the *Tol.* explore or state the connection between landscape and emotionality. That aspect of poetry is, one might well say, left to the imagination of the reader. It is clear that exploring this connection involves initiating an enquiry into the nature of human perception and the important role played by landscape in this process.

But why, one may ask, is this at all necessary? After all, so the objection goes, these poems are well understood within a framework which treats landscape as symbolism. The answer to this is quite simple. There are several poems in the *caṅkam* corpus where landscape imagery is *not* merely symbolic. As the examples discussed in this dissertation will show, there are very different representations of place in the *caṅkam* poems that require going beyond the standard model of landscape imagery in *akam* poetry. In fact as will be discussed later in this dissertation, such examples also include *akam* poems from anthologies like the *Narr.*, *Kuru.*,

³⁹*Ibid.* p. 108

and *Aka*. - viz., anthologies always understood as exemplifying the interior landscape.⁴⁰

(ii) This brings us to a more general question, "does all *akam* poetry use the technique of metonymic metaphors in their representation of landscape?" In the context of this discussion so far, the importance of this question can hardly be overemphasized. Indeed this question is not merely an academic one. In the previous paragraph, I noted that there are several counterexamples in popular *akam* anthologies such as the *Kuru*. But here, I refer to an entire anthology where the interior landscape fails to capture the poetics of place - the *Paripāṭal* (henceforth *Pari*). Several authors have noted that the treatment of landscape in this anthology is very different. For instance, Varadarajan says, "... (the) descriptions of Nature are also a different type. There are invocations to the God Murukan or Tirumal and in them (*i.e.*, in the poems), their hills ... are eulogized and described with pictures of their natural scenery. There is another class of poems, in which the river Vaiyai is depicted in detail in connection with the sentiments of lovers celebrating the new flood in it... Thus in the *Pari*, one meets with pictures either of the mountain scenery or of the flood in the river."⁴¹ Beyond saying that the descriptions of landscape imagery in these poems are "of a different type", Varadarajan is silent on how exactly they are different. In particular, what happened to the understanding of landscape imagery as metonymic metaphor? Still worse, do these poems deny conventional wisdom on *caṅkam* poetry and describe say, a river for the sake of the river?

Precisely this question was addressed by Annie Thomas in her study of landscapes in the *Pari*. (Thomas 1971) In her work, Thomas examines in particular, the *Pari* poems on the Vaiyai river. These poems are set in the agricultural / riverine tracts, viz., a landscape related to the poetic space of *marutam* whose theme is predominantly lovers' quarrel. She compares the poems to various *marutam* poems from other anthologies and by studying the correlation between the *karu* ('the native elements' of the landscape) and the *uri* (the emotional aspect), Thomas argues that, "... the theme of these poems in the *Pari* is Vaiyai and not the emotion specific to *ūṭal* (lovers' quarrel)."⁴² If conceded, this is a rather troublesome conclusion because it derails the assertion that the *caṅkam* poems are devoid of "mere imagism".

As for the *Pari* poems on the Gods Murukan and Mal, Thomas compares the descriptions of the hills in these poems with poems in other *akam* anthologies set in the mountainous landscape (called *kuṛiṅci*) and says, "... the imagery of *kuṛiṅci* now becomes the backdrop for the hills where the Gods reside. This change of landscape imagery from being a metonymic metaphor to a backdrop is consistent with the change in the *uri* - the specific human emotion."⁴³ This is even more disturbing than the previous conclusion, for it contradicts the postulate that the one thing which the *akam* poems have to preserve is the 'specific' aspect of human emotionality.⁴⁴ Indeed it is entirely because of this reason that the anthology poses a lot of difficulty to the commentators of the *Tol*. For a detailed discussion, I refer the interested reader to Sarangapani's work on this subject (Sarangapani 1972). There is an easy (and quite popular) way out of this dilemma - to dismiss the question of landscapes in the *Pari* by asserting that the text is a 'later text'; *i.e.*, composed at a later date than other *akam* poems such as the *Kuru*. However this does not clarify the matter at hand, viz., the representation of

⁴⁰See for instance, examples 2.15 and 5.13 discussed in this dissertation.

⁴¹Varadarajan 1957;1969, pp. 16-17

⁴²Thomas 1971, p. 135

⁴³*Ibid.* p. 93

⁴⁴The point here is that some of the poems in this anthology do not conform to any of the five specific aspects of human love listed in the *Tol*.

landscape in the *Pari*. and its relationship to poetics.

I will adopt a completely different approach in attempting to answer this question. While I agree with Annie Thomas that the *Pari*. poems are about the river (or the hill), this conclusion does not say anything about the correlation between the *karu* and *uri* which the *Tol.* implies. Indeed in her study, Thomas does not attempt to analyze the representation of place in *Pari*. and she chooses to study this text using the standard model of *akam* poetry, viz., metonymic metaphor and the interior landscape. Given her approach, the inconclusiveness of her conclusion is not surprising. In contrast to Thomas, I will argue that the completely different poetic register in these poems necessitates seeking a different kind of correlation between landscape imagery in these poems and human emotionality - a correlation which goes beyond understanding landscape as a mere metaphor or a sympathetic background. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, these poems are about the *experience* of place and not its *symbolism*. Indeed, a careful reading of the *Pari*. shows that one cannot overlook the central role in these poems given to the human body which actively *senses* landscape. When this aspect of the poems is recognized - which Thomas' study does not - it becomes evident that the connection between landscape and human emotionality in the *Pari*. goes from being metaphorical to experiential. I will further argue in Chapter 3 that place in the *Pari*. poems possesses a dynamic aspect to it which is not often the case in examples that typify the interior landscape of *caṅkam* poetry.

(iii) Upon a bit of reflection, the possibility that the *caṅkam* poems could feature representations of landscape that require thinking beyond the concept of the metonymic metaphor, is not very remote. Nor should such an idea be disturbing - which brings us to the third question on landscapes in *caṅkam* poetry: "what about landscapes in *puṛam* (or 'exterior') poetry?" All authors (including the ones I discussed in detail so far) agree that landscape as a metonymic metaphor is a device specific to *akam* poetry. Indeed, the aphorism in the *Tol.* (cited earlier) which lists the triad (of *mutal*, *karu*, and *uri*) occurs in the *akattiṇaiyiyal* or "the chapter on the poetic space of *akam*". This raises the obvious question, "how then are we to make sense of landscapes in *puṛam* poetry?" The commentators of the *Tol.* agree unanimously that insofar as *uri* is concerned, there is a counterpart in the poetic space of *puṛam* for every *tiṇai* in the *akam*. If so, what about the *karu* or things native to the landscape? Are we to understand that there is no landscape imagery in the 'exterior' poems? Surprisingly, these questions have never been addressed at any depth before, and again as my discussion will show, it is not because there are no examples in the *caṅkam* corpus that necessitate analysis. But before proceeding to the poems themselves, let me summarize what previous researchers have to say about this issue.

On the matter of landscape imagery in *puṛam* poetry, M. Varadarajan says, "The influence of Nature on man is not so much clear in the exoteric poems called *puṛam*.. Yet there are in them, descriptions of Nature, in brief and sometimes in detail."⁴⁵ But the admission that the influence of Nature on man is not clear does not deter Varadarajan from asserting subsequently that, "when poets seek patronage, they praise their patrons ... also praise the territories in their jurisdiction... (for example), Kapilar (a famous *caṅkam* poet) has many lines in praise of the Parampu hill but only a few on the patron himself... Among the idylls, the *Mat-uraikkāñci* ... (is) of this type, devoting hundreds of lines to such descriptions."⁴⁶ As I will dis-

⁴⁵Varadarajan 1957;1969, p. 14

⁴⁶*Ibid.* pp. 14-15. I mention these examples specifically since I will discuss the very same poems later in this dissertation.

cuss later in this dissertation (Chapters 4 and 5), the poems in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology contain long passages on landscapes, towns, hills and cities. To dismiss all of this by merely stating that such descriptions are intended to glorify the patron, trivializes the crux of these poems.

On landscape in *puram* poetry, Thaninayagam observes that, "... Nature is featured as the setting for poetry in a different manner in the two classes of poetry, *akam* and *puram*... In *puram*, there is neither impersonation nor imaginary situation... (and) the treatment of Nature is in no way controlled, and is left to the genius of each poet."⁴⁷ A. K. Ramanujan does not discuss this topic in any detail. He provides a translation of one *puram* poem and makes the following remark: "Whereas *akam* poems tend to focus on a single spare image, in *puram* poems images rush and tumble over one another. Yet they often use the same flowers and landscapes with a devastatingly different effect."⁴⁸

It is clear from these comments that there is no real understanding of landscape in *puram* poetry. In my opinion, the reasons why landscapes have not been understood- either in *akam* poems such as the *Pari*. or in *puram* poems like the *Maturaikkāñci* - are related. This is not to imply that there is a unified representation of landscapes in all *caṅkam* poems. Rather, I submit that for too long, studies have focused exclusively on the mechanics of metaphor in *akam* poetry. Consequently, previous works have not gone very much farther than stating that the representations of landscape in poems such as the *Pari*. or in *puram* poetry are "different". As I have tried to argue above, this is because our current understanding of landscape in *caṅkam* poetry is based on a framework which stops short of addressing the nature of perception - *the process by which landscape is perceived by the protagonists in these poems*. As a result, most studies do not go beyond making obvious observations of the kind, "landscapes influence human emotions", or *vice versa*.

In this dissertation, I will take a few tentative steps aimed at redressing this theoretical deficiency. The questions I ask are easily posed: (i) What is the ontological status of landscape / place in the *caṅkam* poems and what makes it so evocative of human emotion? (ii) How is landscape perceived and by whom? (iii) What role do the senses of perception play in correlating landscape and emotionality? I will address these questions primarily through the *caṅkam* poems themselves. I propose to show that in addition to the metaphorical representations of place in *caṅkam* literature, there is also a much more direct realization of place - place as experienced immediately by the human self. While the nature of experience will obviously be different in *akam* and *puram* poetry, that there is an experience independent of this distinction. As I will show in this dissertation, both types of poetry feature this experiential dimension of place.

The focus of this dissertation will not be on specific historical or socio-historical constructions of landscape / place; rather, my primary concern will be in the experience of place. Given this approach, I tend towards phenomenological descriptions of perception and place in the *caṅkam* poems. My analysis will draw from several phenomenologists and anthropologists who have engaged with similar questions in other contexts, notably the work of Edward S. Casey, whose thinking has contributed much to our understanding of the place-world.

I now summarize the approach I intend to take in this dissertation. Let me begin with

⁴⁷Thaninayagam 1963;1966, pp. 41-42

⁴⁸Ramanujan 1999, p. 211; It is not entirely correct that *akam* poems focus on a single image. Several poems in the *Aka*. feature multiple images. See for instance example 5.13 and my discussion of landscape in that poem; pp. 106-107.

the word which seems to be the most common in the characterization of landscape or place in *caṅkam* poetry - "background." Among the definitions of this word offered by the online Merriam - Webster dictionary, are: (1) an inconspicuous position; (2) the scenery or ground behind something; (3) the circumstances or events antecedent to a phenomenon or development; (4) the conditions that form the setting within which something is experienced; (5) the total of a person's experience, knowledge and education. From the discussion so far, it would seem that our current understanding of the *caṅkam* poems situates place somewhere between (1) and (3) above. At best, one might qualify background by saying that it is "sympathetic" - thus nudging its status upwards towards (4). As we have seen, previous authors tend to agree that landscape is capable of influencing human emotion and/or that it is capable of receiving and reflecting human emotionality. The efficacy of landscape in this regard is not questioned and consequently, its representation plays a fundamental role in the appreciation of *caṅkam* poetry. In particular, it is understood and taken for granted that subtleties of human emotion and the variety of human experience can all be evoked by metaphors that employ landscape imagery.

But what makes landscape so powerful? Surely, it cannot be a blank screen (like the canvas on which an image is screened or portrayed) which is capable of evoking, receiving, reflecting and influencing emotionality. For unless landscape is expressive to begin with, it cannot do even one, much less all of the above. All of us are aware how a certain scene around us - *e.g.*, a visit to the home where we grew up, or even something as mundane as the arrangement of furniture which suddenly catches our mind - triggers our emotions in intense and specific ways. Writing on this, Edward Casey (following Erwin Strauss) lists three basic features of landscape that make it central to perception and memory:⁴⁹ (i) variegation, (ii) its sustaining character and (iii) its expressiveness (Casey 1987;2000). Let me discuss these in brief.

- *Variegation*: Casey points out that it is because of variety that landscape offers us "something to grasp at the most basic level of sensory awareness".⁵⁰ This feature of landscape also makes it possible for us to *remember* it; *viz.*, landscape's variety helps us in isolating certain geographical features and metamorphose them into aspects of experiencing place.
- *Sustaining Character*: Landscape provides a natural boundary for our activities as well as imparting coherence to a set of actions - as actions that occurred 'here,' or 'over there.' It is this aspect of landscape which grants it the efficacy to serve both as a locator and container of memories.
- *Expressiveness*: Landscapes are not just reflectors of our expressiveness. Casey draws the distinction between the "expressive" and the "merely communicative", and cites the following example: "Consider only the way that an ordinary skyscape full of clouds can spontaneously suggest human figures and faces. It is at the basic level of *sensing* that such expressiveness arises unbidden and unrehearsed...(emphasis added)"⁵¹ A closely

⁴⁹In this dissertation, I do not always make a strict distinction between "perception" and "bodily sensing". As will be clear both from the examples I adduce and my own analysis, I understand "bodily sensing" to be fundamental in the perception of place and as noted by Erwin Straus (Straus 1963), "... the everyday world is a twilight region between the world of sensory experience which we share with the animals and the world of mind..." p. 390

⁵⁰Casey 1987;2000, p. 198

⁵¹*Ibid.* p. 199

related aspect is landscape's inherent emotionality - the power inherent in places capable of triggering our minds in specific ways. As I will argue in this dissertation (particularly in Chapters 2 and 3), the *caṅkam* poems are quite clear about this last aspect of landscape / place - the way in which it acts on us, thus forcing us to sense and remember it in specific ways.

From describing the features of place that contribute to its ability in being evocative and to its memorability, let me now turn to how such features are sensed. It is obvious that the inhabitants of place / landscape constitute the natural subjects of perception.⁵² In this process of sensing place, the body as lived, plays a central role. It is through the lived body that places are sensed just as places extend and exert their own influence on the lived body. This process which typically involves a combination of various sensory modalities, is in fact, the correlation between landscape and specific aspects of human emotionality; or to revert to the language of the *Tol.*, *sensing of place* as outlined above, constitutes the correlation between the *karu* and *uri*. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to this as *experiencing* landscape / place. Indeed it is precisely because place is experienced that it allows for an objectification of such experience - in the guise of metaphors, for instance.

In many *caṅkam* poems, the experience of place is characterized by a certain dynamism. Often, places are acts, events. Consequently, the poems are better understood as describing experiences *in* place rather than accounts *of* place. This distinction is best understood by considering a specific example - the genre of *Āṟruppaṭai* poems that I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. The poems take the form of a poet advising a weary traveler (usually an impoverished bard or a drummer) to seek out a particular king or chieftain. The poem then describes the way to the king's city, describing various places along the journey. Almost all researchers have noted that if the number of lines be the criterion, then it is the journey which dominates these poems. Typically 300 - 400 lines long, a good fraction of the poems is spent on the places encountered along the way to the king's city. How are we to make sense of these descriptions? To answer this, let me draw a comparison with Edward Casey's analysis of maps (Casey 2005),⁵³ and try to make the connection between this analysis and place in *caṅkam* poetry.

Casey distinguishes among four basic ways in which maps function: (i) mapping of, (ii) mapping for, (iii) mapping with/in, and (iv) mapping out.⁵⁴ These four ways can be understood in the following way.

- Mapping *of*: here one makes a map *of* a particular place or territory and the aim of the exercise is to reproduce a faithful representation of what is being mapped. The emphasis is on "mensuration in accordance with the strictest arithmetic and geodesic standards".⁵⁵ Obvious examples are satellite maps, land surveys, *etc.*
- Mapping *for*: Unlike maps belonging to the previous category, here the emphasis is on utility. For example, when I go to the Main Stacks of Doe Library, I am greeted by a sign which says "you are here", and tells me which way I should go to find a particular book. These maps are not cartographically accurate (*e.g.*, they are not drawn to scale)

⁵²A naive subject-object relationship here is indicated only for clarity. I will discuss later in this dissertation that the intense sensing of place tends to blur this relationship. See pp. 34-35.

⁵³After all, the *Āṟruppaṭai* poems do map out the way between two specific locations and we want to know what kind of maps these poems are.

⁵⁴Casey 2005 pp. xx-xxii

⁵⁵*Ibid.* p. xxi

and such maps "are primarily maps for getting somewhere in particular, that is, one's destination".⁵⁶

- Mapping *with/in*: Such maps do not portray place as a distinct geographical entity specifying (either precisely or otherwise) the distinct topographical relationships between different locales. Instead, "what is mapped here is one's *experience* of such locales. Such mapping concerns *the way one experiences* certain parts of the known world: the issue is no longer how to get there ... but *how it feels to be there, with/in that very place or region*."⁵⁷
- Mapping *out*: How does one represent one's own experience of being *in* a landscape? There must be a way for the human subject to convey to others what his/her experience of place was and Casey calls this mapping *out*, "... getting the experience (of being in landscape and belonging to it) into a format that moves others in ways significantly similar, if not identical with, the ways in which I have myself been moved by being with/in a particular landscape."⁵⁸

As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, the descriptions of landscape / place in poems like the *Matu.* and the *Ārruppaṭai* texts, belong squarely in the categories of mapping *with/in* and mapping *out*. For instance, the *Ārruppaṭai* poems do describe the way, but they are not to be understood as maps *for*, *viz.*, merely directions given to the traveler. Rather, they are descriptive of *experience* - the experience of being in a particular place, how it *feels* to be there. As noted earlier, the human subject experiences landscape / place primarily through his/her senses. For this very reason, while describing the way, these poems emphasize the role of the lived body in sensing the place - for example, invoking the sounds, smells at a given place or the food that can be had at specific places. The *Pari.* poems too belong to the category of mapping *in/with*. By this, I do not mean that they (like the *Ārruppaṭai* texts) give directions to a specific place. But if the representation of place in the *Pari.* may be considered analogous to the representation of place in maps, the poems in this anthology emphasize the experience *in* places - the Vaiyai river and the Parankunru hill. Continuing along the same line, many of the *akam* poems I discuss in this dissertation as well as those from the *Pura.* are better understood as mapping *out*; poems in which the speaker relives a specific *experience* of landscape in which features of the landscape are strongly tied to emotionality. Such poems can then be understood as constituting a mapping *out* of human experience.

By now, it should be clear we have come a long way from a theoretical framework which sees landscape solely as a metonymic metaphor - the standard model of place in *akam* poetry. This discussion reveals that it is only because landscape has *affordance* - a term coined by J. J. Gibson to denote the set of qualities and possibilities latent in the environment - that it is so effective in signifying, standing for, human emotion. In poems where landscape imagery is used as a metonymic metaphor, experiences that relate landscape and emotionality in specific ways are objectified. Whereas in other poems such as the ones I alluded to in the previous paragraphs (and which will constitute the bulk of this dissertation), landscape imagery *stands in for* (like mapping *in*) the experience of landscape itself. Such experiences of landscape need not necessarily be related only to themes relevant to love. As we will see, they cover a broader range of human emotion. The experience of place - as represented in these poems - I submit,

⁵⁶*Ibid.* p. xxi

⁵⁷*Ibid.* p. xxi; emphases in the original

⁵⁸*Ibid.* p. xxii

is not any less universal than the much quoted universality of human love expressed in the *caṅkam* poems. Thus if the lexical entry for "background" - "totality of a person's experience" can be understood to mean the totality of a person's experience *in-place*, then it may indeed be said that representations of place in *caṅkam* poetry cover the entire range of acceptable meanings conveyed by the word, "background."

The outline of this dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 2, I initiate a study into how senses and place are related in *caṅkam* poetry. To my knowledge, this is the first attempt of its kind in the study of early Indic literature (Tamil, Prakrit and Sanskrit). In this chapter, I draw from several examples from the *caṅkam* corpus to set up the analytical framework I use throughout the dissertation. In Chapter 3, I study the poems on Vaiyai and Vel from the *Pari* anthology. I read the poems on Vel more as poems on Parankunru - the hill where the God Vel is said to reside. In this chapter, I will argue for the centrality of the lived body in the experience of place and attempt to describe the latter as a process in which place and the human self constantly refashion each other. Chapter 4 begins with a discussion on the aural and oral aspects of *caṅkam* poetry. I then move on to a description of soundscapes in *caṅkam* poetry and will discuss excerpts that emphasize the aural dimension of experiencing place. Chapter 5, the last substantive chapter, deals with foodscapes in *caṅkam* poetry. I discuss mainly the *Ārṛuppaṭai* texts where the description of local cuisine and the partaking of food constitutes an important part of knowing and experiencing place. Chapter 6 contains a brief conclusion and some remarks on future directions of research suggested by this project.

Chapter 2

Senses, Place, and Senses of Place in early Tamil literature

புலம் : இந்திரியம், இந்திரியவுணர்வு, இடம் (தமிழ் அகராதி, ப. 2785)

pulam : sense, perception by senses, place (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 2785)

The Tamil word *maṇam* usually signifies one of two meanings: "fragrance" or "marriage". When it refers to smell, the word signifies fragrance, or a substance which exudes fragrance. In the context of a relationship between man and woman, *maṇam* typically refers to the wedding ceremony; sometimes, the word indicates union between lovers. The semantic ambiguity of *maṇam* is removed either by the context in which the word is employed or by attaching different prefixes that serve as qualifiers. Thus, *naṛumaṇam* always refers to fragrance, while *tirumaṇam* means marriage.¹

Not surprisingly, the verb *maṇattal*, related to *maṇam*, has a broad semantic range - "to be united", "to come together", "to embrace", "to emit fragrance", "to marry", etc. Based on these lexical connections, it may be supposed that *maṇam* - fragrance, and *maṇam* - marriage, are homonyms; viz., that the same word conveys such disparate meanings is much more than a linguistic accident. Indeed, with a little bit of thought, "fragrance" and "wedding" do not seem to be so far removed in semantic space. Even today, wedding ceremonies in Tamil Nadu are known for their lavish use of flowers, the abundance of various fragrances, and it may well be that the smells associated with a wedding, came to signify the very event.

Some natural historians assert that a natural connection exists between floral smells and sexuality. Writing about this, Diane Ackerman observes, "...as to why floral smells should excite us, well, flowers have a robust and energetic sex life: A flower's fragrance declares to all the world that it is fertile, available and desirable, its sex organs oozing with nectar. Its smell reminds us in vestigial ways of fertility, vigor, life force, all the optimism, expectancy, and passionate bloom of youth."² Indeed, this hypothesis finds favor in early Tamil literature; one finds many examples in the *caṅkam* corpus that associate fragrance with weddings / sexual

¹The word *tirumaṇam* is commonly used today to indicate marriage and understood to mean "an auspicious wedding". An equally popular word is *kaliyāṇam* or *kalyāṇam*, which is borrowed from the Sanskrit *kalyāṇa*. However, to my knowledge, neither of these words are to be found in the *caṅkam* literature.

²Ackerman 1995, p. 13

union.³ For example, one poem plays on the ambiguity of the verb *maṇattal* by having the heroine say:

2.1

"... as the moon waxed last month,
he embraced my shoulders
and they smell sweetly of jasmine buds,
even today ..." (*Kuru*. 193: 4-6).⁴

Note how the poem relates the sensory modalities of touch and smell to perception and memory. I will discuss these aspects of the poem in detail later in this chapter.

Returning now to the connection between *maṇam* and weddings, one poem refers to the bride as *putumaṇa makaṭūu* (*Aka*. 141:14); The word *putu* means "new" and *makaṭūu* stands for "woman". In this poem, the new bride is described as someone who wears fragrant garlands, her hair smelling of sandal paste. By using the word *maṇa* as a suffix, the poem invokes again, the association between fragrance and weddings. Similarly, the phrase *maṇamaṇai* is often used to signify the house where the wedding occurs (*maṇai*, "house"); thus, *maṇamaṇai* can be understood as "the house which smells of a wedding". In an interesting twist, one poem in the *Aka*. likens a forest to a marriage house: "fragrant flowers brimming with honey / strewn on big rocks in the forest / smelling like a marriage house..." (*Aka*. 107: 20-21);⁵ which brings me to the final example in this list - the Tamil word *kāṇam*, which could mean any of the following: a forest tract, a flower grove or fragrance, thus making the association between place and smell explicit.

The word *maṇa*, used as an adjectival prefix indicating fragrance, is not restricted to places such as marriage houses. The *Cilap.* refers to Madurai city as *maṇamaturai* (*Cilap.* 24:5). The old gloss to the text elaborates the phrase as "*maṇamaturai - kaliyānamaturai*".⁶ The distinguished Tamil scholar, U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar who first published *Cilap.* notes,⁷ "... *maṇamaturai* - can also be taken to mean 'Madurai which is fragrant' ..." and refers to the following excerpt from the *Pari*.

2.2

... fragrant flowers blooming in the creepers,
kāntaḷ flowers smelling sweetly everywhere,
honey dripping from
flowers in full bloom,
spreading their scents;
the breeze from the South
carrying these sweet smells... (*Pari*. 8: 25-27)

³In this context, I note that the noun *maṇral* has the same semantic range as *maṇam*. It could mean any of the following: fragrance, wedding, sexual union.

⁴ *tollait tiṅkaḷ neṭuvenṇilaviṅ*
maṇantaṇaṅ maṇ em tōḷē
iṅrum mullai mukai nārummē (*Kuru*. 193:4-6)

⁵cf. Example 5.10

⁶*kaliyāṇa* - see footnote 1.

⁷*Cilap.* 24:5

Quoting this excerpt, Swaminatha Aiyar notes the association between Madurai and the fragrance wafting from Parankunru hill (a hill near Madurai - the scene of several poems in the *Pari*. See Chapter 3.). What Aiyar does not mention in his footnote is that the poem takes the association between smell and place even further. The lines above are spoken by the hero of the poem. His lover is angry with him and the hero tries to convince her he has come all the way from Parankunru hill, and describes the road between the hill and Madurai city. Unfortunately for the hero, the heroine picks up the association between the description of floral smells and the hero's sexuality. This brief dialogue in the poem, reproduced below, summarizes almost everything I will discuss in this chapter: senses, place and senses of place.

Building on the theme of flowers and floral smells, the heroine says:

2.3

These days,
you are fragrant
with the smell of other women.
Every morning, you leave
to be with those -
whose eyes are like cool flowers.
In the evenings,
you come here,
like the flower that blooms at dusk ... (*Pari*. 8: 47-50)

The hero then swears by his fidelity and says:

2.4

Do not be angry!
Those sweet scents come from
the breeze that blows
in Parankunru hill;
this is just
the fragrance of flowers and fruit ... (*Pari*. 8: 53-54)

Another poem in the *Pari*. details the smells carried by the breeze in the Parankunru hill in this way:⁸

2.5

... sandalwood paste, smeared
on the broad chests
of men who wear lovely garlands;
fragrant pollen
in the dark, thick hair of women,
whose eyes look like the *kayal* fish;⁹

⁸Notice how the poem mixes the sacred and the sensuous. This has to do with the nature of the Parankunru hill which will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹*kayal* - Carp.

and
 the scented smoke which rises
 from the offerings to
 the glorious *Vēl*, who resides
 in the *kaṭampu* tree ⁻¹⁰
 whose flowers are large and round,
 like the wheels of a chariot. (*Pari.* 21: 46-51)

In this excerpt from a poem in the *Puṛa.*, a poet speaks of his hometown:

2.6

Fragrant -
 with the garlands on the chest
 of king *Kōtaimārpaṇ*,¹¹
 and the garlands worn by women
 who embrace him;
 Fragrant -
 with *neytal* flowers that bloom in the dark salt pans,
 and the woods that carry the sweet smell of honey -
 is *Toṇti*, my town ... (*Puṛa.* 48: 1-5)

Whether a city, marriage house or a hill, I suggest that these examples go beyond the *description* of a place by the smells that are characteristic to it; they underscore the *association* between place and how place is sensed. As I will argue repeatedly in this dissertation, perception of place emerges as an experience in which the physical senses (through which any object or place is perceived primarily) and place are entangled in very specific configurations. Steven Feld notes this succinctly, "... as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place." (Feld 1996) In the complex process of sensory perception, the physical senses run both *outwards* - towards the place being sensed, as well as *inwards* - fueling the mind; in this way, the experience of place is constantly redefined and refined by perception, memory and imagination.

It is precisely because perception is such a two way process that places possess the capacity to configure the senses in particular ways, just as the senses are equipped with the ability to perceive. As a consequence, the human self - loosely described as the subject of perception - and place (which may be termed equally loosely, as the object of perception) are engaged in an unending process of mutual redefinition. The self responds to place in specific ways and in doing so, invests place with new meanings and connotations. In this manner, the process of perception enhances subsequent experiences of the same place, making this experience much more than a replicative configuration between senses and place, resulting in identical bodily action and/or emotional affect. Note that in describing the self as the subject of perception, I use the adverb "loosely" to caution against reducing the connection between the self and place to a subject - object relationship. Indeed, the main thrust of my ar-

¹⁰*Vēl* is the god Murukan who resides in the sacred *kaṭampu* tree.

¹¹The name *Kōtai* is associated with the Cēra kings.

gument will be that the experience of place cannot be reduced to such binary categories; experience resides neither in the self nor in the place, instead it emerges in the very act of perception.

What are the various ways in which early Tamil literature exemplifies the subtle relationship between senses and place? How is place sensed and how does place make sense? How is it that places act as potent centers of emotion and expression? These are some of the questions I address in this chapter. But before plunging headlong, I will make a few remarks pertinent to my discussion, both to clarify the approach I intend to take, and in anticipation of some questions this approach may provoke.

- *Epistemology of Senses*: The epistemology of senses, as understood from the *caṅkam* corpus, and its relationship to early pan-Indic thought on senses and sensory perception, is an unexplored line of research and I certainly will not attempt to discuss this subject at any length. Instead, my treatment will be necessarily brief; it will be restricted to introducing concepts on sensory perception and place that I will use repeatedly in this dissertation. The reasons for this admittedly cursory treatment are two-fold. The first reason has to do with the
- *Character of the Poems*: It is well known that a large fraction of the *caṅkam* poems deal with either of the two themes - love and war. Although this characterization hardly does justice to the aesthetic variety seen in the poems, it can be safely said that the poems available to us cannot be used (by themselves) to initiate an epistemology of senses in the *caṅkam* literature. This is also in part due to the problems relating to
- *Historicity and Chronology*: I mentioned the problems associated with a historical reading of *caṅkam* literature in the introductory chapter and will not repeat them here. It suffices to say that these problems stand in the way of building a 'history of senses in early Tamil literature'. Despite this (and the two other reasons stated above), I believe it is possible to initiate a reasonably cogent discussion on the nature of sensory perception in the *caṅkam* corpus. Whether this belief is justified will of course, depend on the robustness of the arguments presented in this chapter.
- *Perception, Memory and Place*: I will initiate this discussion by focusing first on perception and memory and then bring place back into it. Although the terms, "perception" and "memory" are commonly used, they are not easily defined. For our purposes, it suffices to understand perception as the process by which we are aware of something (usually through the physical senses). Memory will be understood as the ability in retaining and recalling experiences, although its precise definition remains elusive.¹² The connection between perception and memory was elaborated at length, by Henri Bergson (Bergson 1911;1970). Bergson argues that it is memory, above all, which lends subjective character to perception. It is also through memory that the past insinuates itself into the present, making it difficult both in practice and in principle, to disentangle it from perception.

Quite apart from this (or perhaps because of this), many of the poems in the *caṅkam* corpus assume the form of recollection, reminiscence or narration. Such being the case,

¹²For a review, see the entry on *Memory* in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; available online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/memory/>

and given our interest in the relationship between sensory perception and the perception of place, we must necessarily clarify how and where memory and/or imagination figure in the perception of place, as also the role played by the physical senses in this process. Instead of attempting to address this as a single question, I intend to break it up into hopefully tractable parts. I will first illustrate the relationship between sensory perception and different types of memory. Then, I will discuss how place either serves to situate one's memories and/or serves as the primary object of perception. I will argue that in either case, place becomes a powerful and often inextricable part of perception.

Much of the discussion will be facilitated by examples I choose from the *caṅkam* corpus, especially since the poems state the matter more elegantly and clearly than any analytical attempt which often tends to get mired in detail.

There is every indication that the early Tamils subscribed to the pan-Indic notion of five physical senses and an internal organ / mind. In early Indian thought, the five senses derive their qualities from the five natural elements (ether, air, fire, water, and earth). This set of five natural elements is called *pañcabhūta* in Sanskrit, the Tamil equivalent of which, *aiṃpūtam*, is mentioned in a poem which also lists these elements.¹³ The association between the natural elements and the physical senses does not figure in the *caṅkam* poems, although there are explicit references to five different sensory modalities. In addition to the physical senses, there are frequent references to the mind. It is called *uḷḷam*,¹⁴ derived from the word *uḷ*, "interior". The verb *uḷḷutal* means "to think", "to consider", etc. Other names for the mind are *maṇam* (from the Sanskrit *manas*),¹⁵ and *neṅcam*,¹⁶ a word of uncertain etymology. To my knowledge, references to the collective set of five senses (either naming them together or using the phrase *aiṃpulaṅ*, "five-senses") are only found in the *Tol.* and the *Kuraḷ*, but not in the *caṅkam* poems. But this, as I implied earlier, may just reflect the nature of the poems in the extant corpus of *caṅkam* literature rather than a historical evolution of Tamil thought on sensory epistemology.

It is interesting that the arguably earliest collective reference to the five senses (in Tamil) also posits their hierarchy. The reference is to be found in the *Tol.* in the chapter, *Marapiyal*, "the chapter on the traditional usage (of words)". An aphorism in this chapter lists words like *ōraṇivu*, lit. "one-sensed". These words refer to living beings, understood as possessing a fixed number (ranging from one to six) of sensory modalities. Listing these words, the text classifies beings endowed with sensory perception, in the following way:

2.7

Those (beings) that perceive only through touch
have but one sense;
those with tongues, two
with noses, they possess three senses
with eyes, four and with ears, five
and those with minds have six senses. (*Tol. Marapiyal* 27)

¹³*Pura.* 2: 1-6

¹⁴See, for example, *Aka.* 47:1, *Kuru.* 102:1, *Pura.* 52:3.

¹⁵See, for example, *Aka.* 384:10, *Aiṅ.* 243:3.

¹⁶See, for example, *Aka.* 3:13, *Kuru.* 40:5.

The text thus proposes a hierarchy of complexity in living creatures - beings that are endowed with *ōraṛivu*, one sense, are placed at the bottom and those with *āraṛivu*, six senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing and the mind) at the top. Human beings are *āraṛivuṭaiyōr*, beings that possess six senses.¹⁷

While the *caṅkam* poems do not posit a hierarchy of senses explicitly, as the *Tol.* does, they are certainly not inconsistent with the idea of human beings as possessed of five senses along with the mind. Given the preponderance of love in the extant corpus of early Tamil literature, it is not surprising that many references to the senses in the poems concern human sexuality. The relationship between senses and sensuality is elaborated in several chapters of the *Kuraḷ*, a didactic text. For instance, one couplet says,¹⁸

2.8

Hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching-
the pleasure from these five sensations,
are found in her -
(she) who wears glittering bracelets.¹⁹ (*Kuraḷ* 1101)

In his commentary to this verse, Parimelalakar says,

"... the particle *um* (in the word *aimpulaṇum*) is a connective particle. The particle *ē* (in the word *kaṇṇē*) is for emphasis (signifying) the non-location (of all the five pleasures, as indicated by the connective particle) in different places; viz., the pleasures experienced at different times from different objects are all experienced in her at the same time. This is the meaning."

Evidently, neither the poem nor the commentary suggests a hierarchy of the senses.²⁰ In the *caṅkam* poems too, there are no indications that sensory pleasures are graded according to the primary sense of perception. Instead, there is often an emphasis on the relationship between specific sensory modalities and pleasure or pain.

The message in the poem from the *Kuraḷ* quoted above, applies to a large fraction of early Tamil love poetry. The *caṅkam* poems celebrate sensual pleasure, and the human body is given prominence in an unambiguous, yet subtle way. The delicacy in expression is because the poets are almost always sensitive to the emotional aspect of love - the aspect which for them, has to do with *uḷḷam* or *maṇam*, the human mind. Yet, sensuality is foregrounded even in poems that depict the complicated relationship between objects, (the physical) senses, the mind and place. Here is an example from the *Pari.* which makes the point.

¹⁷The Tamil scholar Vaiyapuri Pillai, notes the similarity between the classification in the *Tol.* aphorism quoted above, and the Jaina epistemology of senses. See Pillai (1949;1959).

¹⁸The fact that the *Kuraḷ* very likely postdates the *caṅkam* corpus, is irrelevant. I use this example only because the poem contains an explicit reference to the five senses in the collective. Other examples from the *caṅkam* corpus, adduced in this and subsequent chapters, illustrate the five kinds of sensory perception as recognized by the early Tamil poets.

¹⁹*kaṇṭukēṭ ṭuṇṭuyirt turrariyu maimpulaṇum*
oṇṭoṭi kaṇṇē yuḷa (*Kuraḷ* 1101)

²⁰Elsewhere in the *Kuraḷ* it is said that "amongst all wealths, the wealth of hearing is the greatest". For a discussion, see Chapter 4.

2.9

In the rushing Vaiyai waters,
he holds the stalk of a banana tree as a raft.

On seeing her,
the rapid waters sweep away his hands,
as she sweeps away his heart.

His long raft is swept away even further.

His eyes
are mesmerized by the spot where
the beautifully adorned one stands;
but the water, not carrying him
where he wants to go
flows as it pleases,
and washes him away
from the place that keeps him riveted. (*Pari. 11: 106-110*)

The different ways in which this poem relates the river to the hero deserve some comment. While the metaphor between the flood in the river and the hero's feelings is obvious, a careful reading reveals more. As the hero loses his mind, he also loses control over his senses - his eyes are transfixed at the woman, while he is being swept away by the river. The more he is intent on her, the farther he gets away from her - like the raft which is swept further away by the water. Flowing "as it pleases", the water may also be compared to the hero's senses that are now beyond his control. Underlying these various readings is the deep connection between the hero's predicament and the place where this drama takes place (the Vaiyai river). As I will discuss in the next chapter, the fickleness of the hero's mind and the capriciousness of the river are intimately related. This relationship is part of the experience of sensing place, an experience heightened by the fusion between physical and mental landscapes. As the example illustrates, the outcome of this fusion may result in 'taking leave of one's senses'. For instance, in this poem, it is not just the hero who is affected thus; this is what happens to the young woman who captured the hero's heart.

2.10

She breaks away from her friends, to follow him.

But her mother,
not knowing of her daughter's love,
stops her, saying,
"Do not be alone, go back to your friends."

The rushing red Vaiyai waters,
in the midst of the rains,
makes her cry. (*Pari. 11: 111-114*)

Despite portraying the hero and the young woman as not being in possession of their senses, the poem is sympathetic to their plight. As in this poem, heroes and their lovers in many other *caṅkam* poems act in seemingly irrational ways. But that is the very nature of love, the poems seem to say - something which is to be experienced and enjoyed.

There are also examples both in the *caṅkam* texts as well as later didactic texts such as the *Kuṛaḷ* that take a diametrically opposite stance. For instance, in stark contrast to the previous example I cited earlier, one couplet in the *Kuṛaḷ* says,

2.11

When, in one's life,
the five senses are restrained
like (the limbs of) a tortoise,
(that restraint) will protect him in successive births.²¹ (*Kuṛaḷ*. 126)

The above example from the *Kuṛaḷ* notwithstanding, the poems in the *caṅkam* corpus typically exemplify runaway senses by celebrating them and not by condemning them. This contrast in attitudes, especially between scriptural texts (like the two verses above from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*) and the love poems in Tamil, is made more interesting by the fact that some Tamil poets were seemingly aware of the contrast, and almost exultingly so, as the following example shows.²²

A hero addresses his Brahmin friend:

2.12

Brahmin lad! Brahmin lad!
Your water bowl hanging
from a staff
made from the stalk of the
muruku tree with its red flowers -
its bark stripped;
You, Brahmin lad,
with your austere food!
Learned in the unwritten lore-
in all your words,
is there a cure
which unites separated lovers?
This is just delusion! (*Kuṛu*. 156)

The colophon to this poem explains its context: A hero is infatuated with his lover and his (Brahmin) friend chides him for it. The hero responds implying that the Brahmin does not understand the workings of love. The tone of the hero's words does seem to imply as much. For, the hero's opinion of his friend is clear - the Brahmin carries a water bowl; the only use he can find for a tree with beautiful flowers is to make a staff out of its stalk; he eats sparingly.²³

²¹Note the similarity with this verse from the *Bhagavadgītā*: "And when he withdraws his senses fully from the objects of the senses, as a tortoise withdraws its limbs, then his wisdom remains stable." (*Bhagavadgītā* 2. 58)

²²A note of caution needs to be interjected here. There are some *caṅkam* poems that speak of the impermanence of life, *etc.* Although they are fewer in number, they do point to the fact that such ideas were very much in vogue. The scarcity of such poems may not reflect anything more than the thematic integrity necessarily sought after (and hence, found) in any compilation of this sort. Also, the conceptualization of love in the *Sat-tasāi*, a compilation of Prakrit poems (*ca.* 4th century CE), shows similarities to *caṅkam* poetry.

²³The poem says *paṭiva uṇṭi* - *paṭivam* means "austerity" or "penance" and *uṇṭi*, "food".

Living as he does, his senses subdued, how, the hero asks, can his friend understand love and its workings? The reference to the study of the Vedas (the unwritten text) implies further that the Brahmin is engrossed in a text which does not teach one how to love. In the last line, "this is just delusion", the hero refers to his friend's advice. He is not prepared to stop thinking of his lover, and so he sees his friend's attempts as meaningless.²⁴

Having discussed how the *caṅkam* poems relate the senses to sensuality, I shall now proceed to discuss the conceptualization of sensory perception in these poems by discussing two examples. The first is from the *Kuru.*, where a heroine speaks to her friend, recalling her lover's touch by describing the effect it has on her skin. She says her skin becomes lustrous and clear when her lover touches her, but when he leaves her, it turns sallow:²⁵

2.13

Like moss on water
in the town's water tank,
the body's pallor
clears
as my lover touches
and touches
and spreads again
as he lets go
as he lets go.²⁶ (*Kuru.* 399)

Note again, the primacy given to the physical senses. It is primarily through her body - through touch, to be specific - that the heroine experiences, recalls and relives her pleasure. The pleasure has a very specific sensory source as well: the lover touches some part of the heroine's body which responds to his touch. The converse is equally true; as he lets go, her skin loses its luster.

Another aspect of sensory perception, more obvious in example 2.1 which I discussed earlier, concerns its essentially cross-sensory character. In that poem, the heroine associates the fragrance of jasmine (smell) with her lover's embrace (touch). The cross-sensory character, is of course, entirely natural in the context of lovemaking - an intrinsically cross-sensory or inter-sensory activity. It is in this context that Parimelalakar's commentary on *Kural* 1101 (example 2.8) should be understood - while different sensory pleasures may be experienced at different times through different objects, lovemaking involves all of these at the same time.²⁷

²⁴I follow Swaminatha Aiyar in my reading. Others have taken "this is just delusion" to mean the hero referring to his own infatuation (Pillai and Ludden 1976). I should also note that this poem supports Naccinarkkiniyar's interpretation of an aphorism in the *Tol.* which lists the occasions when the hero's Brahmin friend can speak. See, *Tol. Poruḷ.* 177 and the commentaries. The first instance the aphorism states is called *kāmanilaiyuraittal*, which Naccinarkkiniyar understands as "advising (the hero) on the nature of his infatuation". Another commentator, Iḷampuranar interprets *kāmanilaiyuraittal* differently. As we will see in the next chapter, the austerity of Brahmins contrasted with the sensuousness of place is also a theme in the *Pari.* See in particular, examples 3.7 and 3.8.

²⁵Translation by A. K. Ramanujan; The colophon to the poem says the heroine is anxious about the delay in marrying her lover.

²⁶A poem in the *Kali.* plays on the same theme. See, *Kali.* 130: 18-20.

²⁷In Chapter 3, we will see how the same notion appears in the context of experiencing place; viz., a place where pleasure is experienced by all five senses.

Both poems from the *Kuru*. (examples 2.1 and 2.13) also illustrate the following important feature of sensory perception - the manner in which the lived body links past, present and the future. When the heroine recalls her lover's touch, she indulges in something more than idle recollection or a reminiscence about her lover. For, her words contain an anticipatory dimension to her feelings. One need not go as far as the colophon for *Kuru*. 399 (example 2.13) does in surmising that the heroine longs for wedlock. But both examples do carry the unmistakable suggestion that in recalling her lover's touch *then*, the heroine is actively longing for it *now*. The past is actively present in the heroine's memories, as it seeks a particular realization of the future. In this, the role played by the body, through which the heroine recalls her experience, is singular. This centrality of the human body in perception and its role in linking the past and the future has been noted by many philosophers, notably Henri Bergson. In his essay on memory, Bergson refers succinctly (if somewhat opaquely), to "... the body as an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future."²⁸

The above examples, representative of several poems in the *caṅkam* anthologies, also emphasize "body memory", a term coined by Edward Casey in his phenomenological study of remembering (Casey 1987;2000). Analyzing how the body retains memories of pleasures, Casey notes a few defining characteristics of erotic body memories: (i) Sensory pleasure is often recalled as occurring at a definite site (in the body). Yet, the totality of experience goes beyond that part of the body. To understand this, let us turn once again to example 2.1; although the heroine in this poem refers to her shoulders that were embraced, implied here is a more complicated modality of touch. It may only be described as the 'experience of shoulders-as-embraced'. It is this experience which is recalled and longed for, an experience which makes sensory pleasure go beyond something localized to a specific sensory site or even modality. (ii) For this reason, pleasure (going back to the same example) cannot be thought of as resulting from the shoulders being embraced and is part of the experience of embrace. (iii) Pleasurable body memories such as these do not draw a clear distinction between the pair of lovers. *viz.*, they cannot be recollected without including both people involved in the act of love making. (iv) Often, a non-erotic experience (smell of jasmine) triggers the recollection of the erotic (lover's embrace). Casey calls this "memorial mimetism" : eager as she is to re-experience her lover's embrace, the heroine associates two entirely different experiences.

Finally, I note that it is often difficult to distinguish body memory from memory of the body. The former refers to how one remembers primarily through one's body - recollecting a smell, a touch, *etc.* by being in the same situation and feeling it through the body. The latter is more objective, in the sense that the body is recalled as being in a particular situation. The difference, as Casey points out, is often blurred owing to the primacy of vision (mental imagery) in perception, and these poems are no exception to this.

Body and memory are entangled in a very different way in the following example from the *Pura*.. This poem draws on a motif we will encounter frequently in the next chapter - the hero playing in the water with young women. In this poem however, the scene takes the form of the poet's reminiscence. As we will see, the poet's recollection is primarily through his senses - water that is cool to touch, his hands that clasped young women, dolls decorated by flowers (the smell motif again), and his supple body which dances with the women and dives into the lake. In short, the emphasis in this poem, as in the previous examples, is on bodily experience. Nonetheless, it brings together the body, memory and narrativity in an

²⁸Bergson 1911;1970, p. 88

entirely different way.

2.14

Thinking of it now,
it feels so sad.
Clasping the hands of the young girls
who decorate
dolls made of dense sand,
with the flowers they plucked;
bathing with them in the cool water -
embracing them as they embrace us
and dancing with them as they dance.
And with our friends
who kept no secrets and who knew no deceit,
climbing the *marutam* tree
touching the banks of the lake -
its tall branches
bending gracefully towards the water -
and diving suddenly
into the water,
to fetch the sand from its depths;
the water making ripples,
much to the wonder of those
on the banks.
We played there,
in our innocent youth.
Oh! What a pity!
Where have those years gone now?
Carrying a thick cane
with an ornate head,
speaking a few words wearily
in the midst of coughing,
how old have we grown now! (*Pura*. 243)

Notice how in this poem, the past has a clear boundary. Unlike the previous examples, the past is no longer active in the poet's (who is the narrator) present; at best it intersects with the present during his narration. A related difference is the nature of the poet's memories. Previously, the memories were fleeting - a touch, a smell. But in this case, memories are not fragmented as the poet describes the happy days of his youth in a complete and cogent narrative.

It may be argued here that it is inappropriate to compare this poem with examples from the *Kuru*. (such as examples 2.1 and 2.13), the latter being short poems (the poems being typically 4-8 lines). But that is precisely the point being made - the narrative style in this poem precludes it from being short. We might say that the distance in the poem, between the poet's youth and his present state, stands for the years elapsed in the poet's life. Yes, he feels sad

about it, but note how even the sadness is turned almost impersonal by saying, "it feels sad now" and not "I feel sad now".²⁹ The poem achieves a sense of poignancy in the last few lines, where the poet describes his aging body, contrasting it with the description of his youth. Yet, the poem also manages to take some of this poignancy away by the self-deprecating reference to the poet's physical condition. This is the power of narration, an aspect completely absent in the examples I discussed previously in the context of pleasurable body memory. Narration creates a deliberate distance between the past and present, necessitated no doubt by the frailties of the human body, but equally by a defensive gesture that seeks to tame the sorrow resulting from the very same frailties.

It should, by now, be fairly evident where place fits in all of this. Almost all perception is place-specific; viz., perceptual acts (touching, etc.) and likewise, memories happen at a given place. Whether it is being or remembering, one cannot ignore *where* one is or was; and this becomes even more important when the object of perception happens to be the very place where one is situated. It is in this way that place and perception are attached to each other. For instance, in the example discussed above, one might suppose quite reasonably that the poet could have recalled his youth, watching the young reveling in the water. Or that the heroine in example 2.1 could have only relived her experiences as having happened *somewhere*. But we do not have to take this position purely by surmising how exactly and where could the heroine have recalled her lover's touch. There are many examples in the *caṅkam* corpus that illustrate well the connection between perception and place, and below, I discuss two from the *Aiṅ*. that bring place back into this discussion. They belong to a group of ten poems collectively titled, "*puṅalāṭṭuppattu*", ten poems on playing in the water.

2.15

The bright colorful dress made of leaves fluttered;
ornaments glittered on her lustrous forehead,
as she dived in the water.

The wide river,
smelt of *kuṅṅalai* flowers brimming with honey,
as the water turned cool. (*Aiṅ*. 8.73)

Glittering ornaments made from fine gold
glowed gently;
her cool fragrant hair -
lovely, like the plumes of a peacock
which descends from the sky,
as she dived in the water,
from the *marutam* tree
which stands on the bank. (*Aiṅ*. 8.74)

To understand the significance of these poems, it is necessary to clarify their context. The poems describe the hero playing in the waters with his lover(s). The wife, who hears about it, is angry at him.³⁰ The two poems above are attributed to the hero, who tries to placate his wife. He addresses her female companion and recalls how he and the heroine used to be happy, playing in the same waters.³¹ Notice the centrality of the river in these poems. Merely

²⁹*iṅiṅaiṅ tirakka mākiṅṅu ... (Pura. 243:1)*

³⁰This theme will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

³¹The colophon to the poem states that the hero refers to the days of *kaḷavu*, pre-marital love.

seeing the river triggers the hero's recollections in a specific mode because his memories of the time he spent with his wife are attached to the river. The river in short, acts to locate and contain his memories, and it is for this reason that place plays such an important role in memorability. Again as in the earlier examples, it is through his physical senses that the hero is transported back to the same place in his memories. But this, I emphasize, is much more than recollection - as for example, when we say, "I recollected my thoughts." When the hero recalls his wife diving into the water, he re-experiences the smells, the sights and the touch of the cool water, *etc.* The river has a specific and special sense for him; it acts both as the source of his feelings, *and* embodies them.

One way to understand the roles played by the senses and place in perception is to imagine them functioning as ordering fields. By this, I mean the following. When our senses become attuned to place in a particular way, the otherwise random flow of mental images yields way to a particular sequence of thoughts. Senses and place become locked, as it were, in a specific way, so as to provide directionality of thought - what I call ordering. In the previous example, the hero becomes attuned to the river - the smell and the feel of the water - and his senses get locked with the river. It is as a result of such locking that the river has a special sense for him now, in that it acts to order the flow of his mental images in a particular pattern, allowing him to re-experience the river in an equally specific way.

To clarify this further, I will now discuss two examples from the *Pura*. Unlike the previous pair of examples, these poems concern a sad memory, and a brief introduction is necessary to place the poems in context. In a series of poems, the *Pura* describes the death of Pari, a chieftain of the Parampu hills. Famed for his valor and generosity, Pari was defeated (by treachery, the poems hint) by the armies of the Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings who laid siege to his homeland. When Pari died, Kapilar, a renowned poet of the times, and Pari's dear friend, became the guardian of his daughters, and tried to find them suitable bridegrooms. Legend has it that Kapilar committed suicide after he was assured of the well being of Pari's daughters.

Composed by Kapilar in very different registers, these two poems offer a glimpse into the poet's relationship with Pari and Parampu. The poems also illustrate the expressivity of landscape and the power it possesses in unlocking our emotions. In the first poem, Pari and Parampu become undifferentiated; Kapilar's memories of Pari are so intimately tied to the hill, that place and patron are fused, losing their separate identities.

2.16

Opening liquor jars,
and offering us rice and thick stew
with the sumptuous flesh
of slaughtered male goats,
giving us what we coveted
and growing in your riches,
you befriended us
in the past.

Now that *Pāri* is dead
and we grieve greatly,
we pray to you, our eyes swollen with tears,
and praise you:

Paṛampu! Hill of great fame!
 May you live long!
 We take leave of you,
 seeking the men worthy of caressing
 the fragrant black hair
 of *Pāri*'s daughters -
 whose forearms are decorated
 by round crafted bangles. (*Pura*. 113)

The above example highlights two points that I already made. When the poem is read for the first time, one would imagine that the line "you befriended us in the past" refers to the poet's friend/patron. But the relationship between Kapilar's memories and *Paṛampu* (the place which contains these memories) is so profound that, the poet cannot think of his friend without thinking of the place where they became friends. This is the ultimate power place holds - that place and self can fuse, their identities no longer distinct. Equally important is the reference to how the hill befriended Kapilar - through food and drink. For, it is through the body (the sense of taste, in this example) that the self becomes familiar with the place it inhabits; one feels 'at home' in some places precisely because of this reason, as the body fashions an "attuned space"³² out of an initially unfamiliar place. With familiarity, the hill is no longer a place associated with memories that are recalled; instead it is now the very source of a multitude of Kapilar's experiences of 'being in-*Paṛampu*'.³³ Yet, in the poem Kapilar bids a final farewell to the hill, and the following poem tells us why.

As the poet leaves the hill, *Pāri*'s daughters (who accompany the poet) note that *Paṛampu* is visible even after they have traveled far. They say,

2.17

This hill is visible
 to those who stand near it
 as to the others who stray afar.

Weaving these lines together in the following poem, Kapilar replies,

2.18

Indeed!
 This hill
 which belongs to the eminent one -
 in whose dwelling are found numerous chariots,³⁴
 whose courtyard is damp

³²Casey 1987;2000, p. 193

³³This theme will be elaborated in later chapters. See the discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 on the expressivity of landscape and the role played by the senses.

³⁴The original reads, "... *vāracum poḷuku munṛiṛ rērvī cirukkai neṭiyōṇ kunrē* and I choose to construe the phrase, *tēr vīcu* with *irukkai*. Other readings construe it with *neṭiyōṇ*, which would mean, "the eminent one who freely gave chariots" (Hart and Heifetz 1999).

from the liquor
oozing
from kernels that look like balls of rice,
chewed and spat out by the elephant. (*Pura*. 114)

The old commentary (author unknown) to the *Pura*. explicates Kapilar's retort, "Indeed", thus: "When Pari was alive, the Parampu hill was known even to people who could not see it. For, such was Pari's greatness that even those afar had heard of the Parampu hill. But now that he is dead, this hill is just like other hills - capable of being known only through sight. This is the significance of the poet's words." With Pari's passing, the hill loses its essence and becomes just another mountain. It is seen, but there is nothing in it any more which can be experienced, nothing that distinguishes it any longer from other hills. This is also underscored by the poet's reference to kernels that are now devoid of liquor and the food masticated and spat out by elephants. In his commentary on the *Pura*., the Tamil scholar Auvai Duraiswamy finds the reference to the damp courtyard significant in that, "... the reference to the liquor oozing from kernels also conveys the meaning that the hill, although dispossessed of its essence by Pari's death, now causes us to grieve, tears brimming in our (*i.e.*, the poet's) eyes."

Kapilar's poems highlight a seemingly paradoxical feature in the perception of place: the more intense our experience of place, the weaker is the subject - object relationship between self and place. As his elegy shows, places possess the power to fuse self and place, in which process they "... possess us - in perception, as in memory - by their radiant visibility, insinuating themselves into our lives, seizing and surrounding us, even taking us over as we sink in their presence..."³⁵ Erwin Straus notes this as the single most important distinction between landscape (as in place) and geography, saying that the ultimate experience of place leads paradoxically to the invisibility of both the self and place, "... landscape is invisible, because the more we absorb it, the more we lose ourselves in it. To be fully in the landscape, we must sacrifice, as far as possible all temporal and objective precision."³⁶ It is but natural that the senses play an important role in this; for it is only when the senses are so finely attuned with place that place overwhelms us. I should note however, that this phenomenon is more general than only between self and place. In principle, any object in our perceptual horizon, the perception of which results in a feedback between the mind, the physical senses and the object, leads to the diminishing of the subject-object relationship. But by locating our experiences and by containing them, place is uniquely powerful in this regard, as underscored in the examples we discussed so far.

A different aspect of sensory perception, memory and place features prominently in some of the poems I will discuss in the next chapter.³⁷ In this case, the role of memory is so active - various acts that only exist as potentialities in other types of memories are realized through action in this case - that memory is perhaps a misnomer. The kind of memory I allude to involves the repetition of certain acts (or a sequence thereof) under identical or nearly identical circumstances. For example, in the next chapter, we will encounter heroes and heroines acting out very similar dramas every time the Vaiyai river (a river which flows through Madurai city) floods. A common theme is the hero's affair with his mistress. Here is a typical example, where the wife speaks almost resignedly. She says that the hero (her

³⁵Casey 1987;2000, p. 200

³⁶Straus 1963, p. 317

³⁷See, for example, the poems on the river Vaiyai from the *Pari*.

husband) placates his lover, who in turn is angry with the hero because he has been unfaithful to her too. But that, as the hero's wife says, is not the end of the story.

2.19

Once more,
the couple would bathe
in the river
And when their desire increased,
they would make love
then quarrel again.
Vaiyai!
you cause desire to swell in the hearts
of those who bathe in your water.
May this trait never leave you! (*Pari*. 6: 103-106)

Notice how the heroine's tone implies an almost ritualistic character to her husband's behavior.³⁸ Equally interesting is how the heroine attributes the hero's behavior (as well as his lover's) to the river. There are many such passages in the Vaiyai poems (some of which we will discuss in the next chapter) where the river impels the hero to act in a certain way. How are we to understand this?

First, let me note that the excerpt above constitutes the ending of the respective poems. This again, is a feature common to all the Vaiyai poems. They end by praising the river - either by describing ritual worship (of the river) or by referring to Vaiyai's ability to cause and sustain desire in the hearts of the people who bathe in it. The commentators of the *Pari*. rightly point out that such endings represent an invocation to the river. By itself, this observation is not very satisfactory. How is it possible, we ask ourselves, for a wife to invoke this river in prayer? a river, which after all, impels her husband to be unfaithful. Upon closer reading, the reader begins to wonder if these endings really portray the end of a particular poem or play. For, there is an obvious cyclicity in the construction of these poems. They begin by describing rains and/or floods in the Vaiyai, the people who flock to the river, the various dramas being enacted there, and end with a prayer that the rains not fail and that the Vaiyai be always full of water. The end, in short, brings us back to the beginning; the poems always take us back to the same place.

The second point is to note that the advent of the river is accompanied by the repetition of certain acts. The coming of the river, in short, induces a performance - a performance which is the experience of the river. And as with all performances, the senses, perception and memory are deeply entangled. Every time the river is in spate, similar dramas are enacted, similar rituals performed. Here again, the poems often remark that it is the river which causes these events to happen. How do cyclicity and repetition figure in the relationship between place and self? This question concerns one of the most fundamental relationships between place, body and memory, and hence deserves some attention. To understand it, I proceed to two important ideas - the potentiality for action and its relationship to place.

I will begin with a familiar, if trivial, example. A common aspect in the experience of place is the phenomenon best described by the phrase, 'going back to the same place'. There

³⁸Indeed, the very same poems refer explicitly to rituals performed every year in the river. See, for example, *Pari*. 11: 134-140.

are two (related) ways in which we go back to the same place. The first is the manner in which we acquire familiarity with place and the second is a more complicated collective experiential state, triggered by revisiting a place. In either case, there is an intimate relationship between memory and place, although as I will discuss shortly, "memory" in this context means something more active than say, recollection.

All of us have experienced how we tend to make ourselves familiar in a new place - by orienting it with respect to our bodies. Initially unfamiliar surroundings and objects slowly attain the status of 'being in place', as the relative orientation between the body and place becomes familiar. Mundane as it may seem, this is perhaps the simplest example of what I call a mutual configuration between senses and place. An important feature in this is the role played by the physical senses/ body. It is through *action* that the feeling of being-in-place arises. Conversely, it is again primarily through the body that we 'go back to the same place'. When we find ourselves in a place already familiar to us, we find ourselves performing the same set of actions without giving thought to them. On closer examination, it becomes evident that by repeating this set of actions, we aim to achieve the same mutual configuration between the senses and place that we initially established. In this case too, it is through action that the senses and place are configured. Given the role played by action (which happens in the present) in establishing this, the mechanism through which senses and place are configured goes beyond memory understood as something which *represents* the past. In this case, the past is *performed*. This dynamic aspect of memory, and the important role played by the body was discussed in detail by Bergson.³⁹ It is useful to summarize his ideas here, as they provide a natural starting point for including place in analyzing the nature of perception and the role played by the senses.

Discussing the nature of memory, Bergson distinguishes between two kinds of memories. The first kind records various events as they occur, in the form of mental images. We turn to this memory every time we try to recall a particular event from our past. However, Bergson argues that a collection of such memories may lead to an entirely different kind of memory - the kind that leads to habit. This is made possible primarily by the senses, *i.e.*, by the human body. In Bergson's model of habit memory, every mental perception (a single mental image, for instance) creates in the body, "new dispositions towards action". As a result, there accumulates in the body, *the potentiality for a set of coordinated actions*, enacted spontaneously under favorable circumstances. As Bergson says, this is very different from the first kind of memory which conserves images of the past. In this second type of memory, the accumulated actions of the past are recalled in a very definite order; it does not *represent* the past as much as it *enacts* it. The first kind of memory is related to imagination, whereas the second leads to repetition - to habit.

Bergson's analysis has been further extended by Casey in his discussion of habitual body memory.⁴⁰ He defines habitual body memory concisely as "... an active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting, and regular manner." In habit memory, the past is dynamic and it is so in at least two ways: (i) the past is actively involved in bodily movements that accomplish a particular action. In this way, the past becomes an ingredient of what is being acted out in the present, leading to the formation of behavioral tendencies that manifest again under favorable circumstances. (ii) However, this

³⁹Bergson 1911;1970, pp. 93-102

⁴⁰Casey 1987;2000, p. 149. The example Casey uses is an episode featuring his friend's (habit based) remembering how to drive a 1926 Model T Ford.

does not mean that habitual memory always leads to repetition. It is possible that every time the same set of actions are performed, there is a synthesis between what is already known and settled in memory, and that which is being sensed and acted now. To use Casey's phrase, habit memory is "performative remembering", and as in performance, the regulated character seemingly imposed by entrenched memory does *not* necessarily preclude the appearance of the new; *viz.*, every new performance goes in reshaping the habit memory that underlies it. This phrase brings to mind an obvious example of habit memory in an Indian context - a musician performing a raga. Here again, memory through the body plays a very important role - in the way the musician recalls without conscious effort, all the bodily actions required in playing/vocalizing patterns specific to the raga. But the performance is not merely a repetition of the past. While the building blocks of a given raga are the same in every performance, a good performance always brings something fresh with it. So too for the musician, every good performance adds to his/her conception of the raga, remembered and recalled in subsequent performances. This is another way in which habit memory is dynamic.

By orienting the body which performs a specific set of actions, habit memory thus links the past, present, and the future continuously. When such orientation or configuration is achieved in relationship to a place, we 'go back to the same place'. As we will see in the next chapter, performative remembering of this kind features prominently in the relationship between self and place.

There is yet another aspect of habit memory which needs attention - and this has to do with the relationship between habitual action and the functioning of the mind. While emphasizing the role played by the body in reenacting the past, Casey (and to a lesser extent, Bergson) marginalizes the role played by the mind in performative remembering.⁴¹ His argument is that habit memory is "spontaneous and without premeditation". Spontaneity of action, however, does not necessarily imply the absence of any role played by the mind, and it is by no means obvious that the mind's machinations or mediations "are uncalled for". Let me clarify this by way of the following example, which also illustrates how place can be included in this analysis.

It is a matter of experience that one does not have to be physically at a given place to 'go back' to it. Often, a smell, a sound, or a touch suffices in bringing about this experience. The experience, as I pointed out earlier, is not just going back physically to the same place. It is far more, in that it reproduces an entire set of feelings and actions that determine us in relationship to the place we find ourselves recalling, and *vice versa*. So, when I say, 'I found myself in the same place', it may also refer to an entire set of circumstances associated inextricably with a specific set of feelings and an equally specific set of actions. When I find myself in the same place, it is as though the mind runs in a pre-programmed way, with the body responding automatically. Note that this complements the earlier thesis - that it is through repeated action (*i.e.*, through the body) that the feeling of familiarity ensues. This complementarity is hardly surprising given the essentially cyclical nature of habit memory. If we grant that the past is actively immanent in the present, it follows that the present will be actively immanent in the future at which time it becomes the past.

More explicitly, if following Bergson and Casey, we agree that habit memory orients the

⁴¹It is sometimes difficult to understand if Casey refers to the mind or otherwise. For instance, he is categorical that his thesis concerns the "lived body" or the "phenomenal body" and not the "objective body of sinews and fibers". Yet at the same time, he also asserts that, habit memory does not require "... mediation by the mind (nor) ... its machinations..." *Ibid.* p. 178.

body in performing a specific set of actions, with every performance feeding back on to the mind, then it might be argued equally that such performative remembering leads to the mind becoming predisposed to a specific set of thought patterns or a specific trajectory of thoughts; in other words, the mind gets habituated to a set of patterns, linked as before to certain bodily acts. Just as every mental perception creates new dispositions towards action, so too repeated action creates predisposition of the mind. Allowing for this aspect constitutes a more general and perfectly cyclical characterization of habit memory - a characterization which recognizes the feedback that operates between the body (as understood by the physical senses) and the mind in establishing and reinforcing habit memory. Such a characterization is also in tune with early Indian thought on habit memory which I now discuss.

Most Indian schools of thought recognize the entanglement between the body and mind in the process of perception and / or memory;⁴² *i.e.*, the issue is not mind vs. body as it is of the mind *and* the body. The concept of *vāsanā* or *saṃskāra*, is but one way in which such a connection is theorized. Here, the idea is that every act, physical and/or mental is accompanied by the formation of root impressions in the mind called *saṃskāra* that can be revived under favorable circumstances; *e.g.*, the pleasure one acquires from sensory contact with a given object. The very fact that one has experienced pleasure suffices for the mind to retain this impression, and it requires very little for the experience to be reproduced in the future. Since perception (and action) involves both, the contact between mind - sense, and sense - object, the *saṃskāra* that is (re-)produced involves both - habitual flow of the mind, and a habituated sensory response. In other words, both mind and senses recall their relative configuration, leading to recollection and repeated experience. Thus, all experience, be it cognitive, emotional or conative, exists as subconscious mental impressions that are reproduced under favorable circumstances, as memory *smṛti*. Hence the term, *smṛtibīja*, seed of memory, which is often used synonymously with *saṃskāra*. The importance attributed to sensory perception in forming such a seed of memory cannot be overemphasized. It is primarily through the body, *viz.*, the senses that the mind cognizes objects and associates, for instance, pleasure or pain to specific objects.⁴³

Let us turn once again to example 2.1. As we saw earlier, the poem describes a heroine who makes the association between the smell of jasmine and her lover's embrace. Early Indian thought would understand this as arising from a *saṃskāra* which reproduces the specific mutual configuration between (her) sensory perception (of the smell), and the pleasure she recalls from her lover's embrace. Equally important (and this is the missing aspect in most writings on habit memory) is the connection her mind makes - that her lover's embrace is intrinsically pleasure-giving and is something to be desired. It is precisely this connection which manifests as the anticipatory dimension in pleasurable body memories.⁴⁴

Another term which denotes latent impressions in the mind is *vāsanā*. It is often used synonymously with *saṃskāra*, although Dasgupta opines that the word *vāsanā* is of later ori-

⁴²For a discussion, see Dasgupta (1922;1969). I use the term 'mind' in a loose sense to mean 'the internal organ'. Different schools use different terms such as *buddhi* (intellect), *citta* (mind), that have specific connotations referring to particular functionalities of the mind. But these differences are not germane to my discussion.

⁴³It is for this reason that schools of thought such as Yoga and/or Vedanta attach much importance to the eradication of *saṃskāra*. See for example the *vāsanākṣayaprakaraṇam* (the chapter on the effacement of latent impressions) in the 13th century text, *jīvanmuktiviveka*. This again, is of no concern to us.

⁴⁴See discussion in pp. 29-30.

gin.⁴⁵ As we shall see now, the word *vāsanā* is particularly suggestive in the context of my discussion so far. The word is derived from the root verb *vas*, "to dwell" and the etymology provides a concise characterization of habit memory. For instance, the *śabdakalpadruma* (a popular Sanskrit lexicon) derives the word as,

vāsanā - that which causes to dwell, yokes the minds of living beings through action.⁴⁶

The transformation of the root verb *vas* to *vās* turns the root verb to its causative form: "to dwell" --> "cause to dwell"; the -*an* suffix is applied in the sense of a habituating agent (called *yuc* in Sanskrit grammar). Thus, the word *vāsanā* signifies a *mental* impression which is caused and sustained through *action*, *i.e.*, habit. It should be clear from this derivation that *vāsanā* does not connote something that is passive. It is dynamic, both by virtue of being entrenched by action *and* by impelling similar action. To state it differently, people tend to act in particular ways because of specific predispositions, themselves engendered by previous action. It is in this way that *vāsanā* "yokes" or habituates the minds of living beings.

An interesting cross-cultural similarity between the roots of the words, *vāsanā* and 'habit' should be pointed out here. In his discussion of habit memory, Casey remarks,⁴⁷ ... that habitual action is an active matter is also evident from the Latin root of "habit": *habēre*, to have, to hold. To be habitual is to have or hold one's being-in-the-world in certain ways, *i.e.*, those determined precisely by one's settled dispositions to act in particular patterns. Habituality means consistency in action, the ability to stay the same over time." The similarity between the characterizations of habit and *vāsanā* is evident. It is equally interesting to note the similarity between "*vāsanā*" and the near homonym, "*vasanam*", "a dwelling", "a residence", "a garment".⁴⁸ All these words share a similar connotation - to abide. Tendencies caused by repeated action abide, and in turn, lead to similar action.

Interestingly enough, the word "*vāsanā*" also means "perfuming" or "scenting" suggesting that the word was coined in full awareness of the empirical relationship between smell and long term memory. Mental impressions are like perfume applied to a cloth. The scent lingers long after the contact between cloth and the perfume ceases to be. Understood this way, the frequent references in *caṅkama* poetry to smell, especially in the context of desire, love and memories is no accident. Almost all of us are aware of the power the perception of smell has in unlocking old memories; to quote Diane Ackerman, "nothing is more memorable than a smell."⁴⁹ More than sight, sound, or touch, smell is the sense most closely linked with memory and emotion.⁵⁰

A final metaphor for *vāsanā*, and one which will be pertinent to my discussion in the next chapter, is to compare it with the flow of water. As water flows, it leaves behind an

⁴⁵See, Dasgupta 1969, *ibid.* p. 263. He also suggests that the term *vāsanā* denotes latent impressions carried over from previous births, as opposed to *saṃskāra* - mental impressions formed in this life. This putative distinction is irrelevant to my discussion.

⁴⁶ *vāsanā vāsayati karmaṇā yojayati jīvamanāmisīti | vas + ṇic+ yuc | tāp*

⁴⁷Casey 1987;2000, p. 150

⁴⁸Taking the cross cultural analogy further, the word "habit" could also mean clothing. I thank Prof. Robert Goldman for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁹Ackerman 1995, p. 1

⁵⁰Contemporary research in the cognitive sciences suggests that the strong connection between smell and memory / emotion is because the primary olfactory cortex (the part of the brain where high level processing of olfactory information takes place) is directly linked to the amygdala and the hippocampus - parts of the brain belonging to the human limbic system responsible for memory and emotion. See Herz and Engen (1996).

impression, which if sufficiently deep, becomes a channel along which path water tends to flow again. Similarly, through repeated sensory perception, the mind is habituated to flow along certain channels, the senses being configured in ways specific to these channels.⁵¹

The two facets of habit memory I discussed so far, *i.e.*, an active immanence of the past in the present, and the related predisposition of the mind to certain thought patterns, are illustrated concisely in the following two poems (composed by the same poet, *Milai Kantan*). In the first, a hero addresses his friend and in the second, the friend talks to the hero. (Note the common beginning the poems share.)

2.20

Love - they always talk about love.
 But love
 is no evil spirit,
 nor is it disease -
 that it
 rages, cools and subsides.
 Like the madness of the elephant
 chewing on *kuḷaku* leaves,⁵²
 love -
 reveals itself
 when there is someone to look at. (*Kuru*. 136)

2.21

Love - they always talk about love.⁵³
 But love
 is no evil spirit,
 nor is it disease -
 that it
 rages, cools and subsides.
 Broad-shouldered one!
 Thinking about it,
 like the longing of an old cow
 which licks the fresh grass
 growing on the ridges in tilled land
 love,
 always feels new. (*Kuru*. 204)

⁵¹This image is invoked repeatedly in the Vaiyai poems of the *Pari*. that I will discuss in the following chapter.

⁵²*kuḷaku* is a generic name for "leaf" and some commentators identify it with a specific kind which induces intoxication in the elephant.

⁵³The same word, "*kāma*" is used in both poems and it conveys a wide range of meanings. In the second poem, I prefer to understand it as "desire".

First let us look at what the poems say love is not. It is not a spirit which terrifies. Here, the poem uses the word "*aṇaṅku*", a word which has a wide range of meanings. I chose to translate it as "evil spirit" since there are many poems where the heroine's mother, not recognizing the symptoms of love-sickness in her daughter, concludes that the heroine is possessed by a spirit. Further some poems use the same word to imply an almost magical power which a woman possesses.⁵⁴ In the *caṅkam* poems, the spirit is usually appeased by sacrifice of some kind.⁵⁵ But according to these poems, love cannot be satiated this way. Likewise, love is not a disease. By rejecting either of these, the poems say that love cannot be cured. Furthermore, invoking the metaphor of the elephant chewing leaves, the hero suggests that love is not something which is created either; he is predisposed for love, just as the elephant is predisposed for madness. Love, rather *the potentiality* for love, is always within him and only waits for an opportune time, "*pāṇi*", to reveal itself. The appropriate time is not just once. Every time the elephant chews these leaves, it becomes mad. So too, the hero is overpowered by love every time "there is someone to look at".⁵⁶ Love is the disposition towards certain actions which manifests under favorable conditions. Impelled by it, the hero can only act.⁵⁷

In the second poem, the hero's friend points out that in fact, the hero's predisposition for love is only because he (the hero) thinks there is something pleasurable about it. The metaphor used here is equally interesting - an old cow which tries to chew fresh grass.⁵⁸ Being old, it is unable to do so - yet, perhaps because it recalls enjoying the grass, the cow is convinced about grass as a source of pleasure and licks it. In his commentary on this poem, Swaminatha Aiyar remarks, "... licking the grass which it is not able to chew, the old cow becomes happy. The source of happiness is not really the grass, but the cow's longing for it. Just as the cow's longing for grass yields happiness to it, thinking about desire creates in our minds, the feeling of a new happiness ("*viruntu*", "novelty")..."⁵⁹ Note too the contrast between the two metaphors - in the first one (the mad elephant), the emphasis is on action while the second metaphor (old cow) hints at a state of mind, which the body likes to realize in action, but incapable of doing so. But common to both poems is however, the potentiality for action.

How does place fit in all this? Earlier in this discussion, I argued that by locating and containing memories, place plays a very important role in memorability. In habit memory, realized in the repeated action of certain deeds, *where* the past is performed can become as important as *what* is performed. I argued previously that the acute sensing of place involves an interlocking between senses and place which leads to directionality of thought. In the context of habit memory, place - by virtue of locating this configuration - then becomes very powerful in the reenactment of the past.

⁵⁴For a discussion of *aṇaṅku*, see Hart (1975;1999); Rajam (1986).

⁵⁵See for instance, *Kuṟu*. 362.

⁵⁶The phrase used by the poem is "*kāṇuṇarp perine*" - "*kāṇuṇar*" is "someone who is looked at". The poem does not specify it is the same person who is being looked at, although all commentators understand this to be the case.

⁵⁷The hero feeling overpowered by love is also fairly common in the *caṅkam* poems. In one poem for example, the hero compares himself to a mute person without hands, who tries to guard with his eyes, butter melting on a hot rock in the sun (*Kuṟu*. 58).

⁵⁸The friend's choice of metaphor also suggests that the object of the hero's affections is too young, and/or that the hero is too old.

⁵⁹"Thinking about it" - the poem says, "*ninaippin*". As Swaminatha Aiyar notes, the poem is ambiguous. The phrase can be construed as "thinking about love" (my translation) or it can also be construed with the cow - "thinking about grass, the cow feels the longing for it".

Furthermore, as we will see in the next chapter, the *caṅkam* poems credit special places with a sensuous core. For instance, the *Pari.* repeatedly portrays the Vaiyai river as a place to be enjoyed by all five senses.⁶⁰ In such cases, place goes beyond being a mere catalyst which triggers memories, and can now create new experiential dimensions that add further dispositions towards action. Here again, the role played by the physical senses becomes important. As Edward Casey remarks,⁶¹ "... the body as lived and remembered, ... is between *mind* and *place*... (the body) does not only take me into places; it habituates me to their peculiarities and helps me to remember them vividly..." As a result, when such special places are sensed and sensed acutely, they become active participants in the dialogic which constitutes the performance of the past. Indeed, as some of the poems in the *Pari.* suggest, such a performance of the past is the experience of place. To understand this, we must turn to these poems - which I now do.

⁶⁰Compare example 2.8. See also, p. 59.

⁶¹Casey 1987;2000, p. 180

Chapter 3

Sensuous Landscapes in the *Paripāṭal*

"ஐம்புலன்களாலும் இன்பம் நுகர்தற்கு இடனாயிற்றென்றவாறு", பரிமேலழகருரை;
பரிபாடல் 11:62-71

"by which is meant, a place for experiencing pleasure through all five senses",
Commentary by Parimelalakar; *Paripāṭal* 11:62-71

The *Paripāṭal* (*Pari.* is an anthology of poems in the *caṅkam* corpus. It was first published in 1918 by the renowned Tamil scholar, U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar. In the introductory essay to this edition, Aiyar refers to an old poem, which specifies the contents of this anthology. According to the poem, the *Pari.* comprises seventy songs - of which, eight poems are on the God Mal, thirty-one on the God Vel (also called Murukan), one on Korravai the Goddess of the Forests, thirty-six on the river Vaiyai and four on Madurai, the capital city of the Pandiya kings.¹ Among the twenty-two poems available to us today as the *Pari.*, six are on Mal and eight each on Murukan and the Vaiyai.² The poems contain many references to the Pandiya kings and it is reasonable to speculate that the text was written in southern Tamil Nadu - more precisely, around the region of Madurai.³ This view is also supported by the observation that the places described in these poems - the Vaiyai river, Parankunru and Maliruncolai hills where the Gods Vel and Mal reside - are all in the vicinity of Madurai.

In many ways, the *Pari.* is strikingly different from other texts in the *caṅkam* corpus. Although we only have a third of the original compilation now, the themes employed in the *Pari.*, poetic style and the prosody of these poems are very different from other anthologies in the *caṅkam* corpus. For a detailed discussion on this topic, I refer the interested reader to Sarangapani's review (Sarangapani 1972), and Annie Thomas' insightful analysis of the *Pari.* (Thomas 1971). For the purposes of this discussion, I will merely point to the fact that forty (of the seventy) poems are preoccupied with place - Madurai city and the Vaiyai river. Further, I will argue later in this chapter that many the songs on Murkan (Vel) in this anthology can be read equally as poems about the Parankunru hill where Murukan is said to reside. Unfortunately,

¹The commentator of *Kaḷaviyal* mentions that the *Pari.* comprises 70 poems. The same number is quoted by Peraciriyar, the commentator of the *Tol.* An old verse found in some of the *Pari.* manuscripts provides details about these 70 poems, viz., eight poems on Mal, etc. For more on this issue, see Gros 2009, pp. 70-71.

²As with most of the *caṅkam* corpus, there is considerable controversy over the date of the *Pari.*. Some scholars conclude that the text was written in the 2nd century CE, while others think the text could be as late as the 7th century. For an excellent summary, see Gros (2009).

³The same observation applies to the *Kali.*, another *caṅkam* anthology.

none of the *Pari.* poems on Madurai are available to us, and so my discussion will mostly focus on landscapes in the poems on Vaiyai and Vel.

But first, some geography: Vaiyai is the name given to the river which flows through the city of Madurai. Originating in the hills of Western Tamilnadu, the river flows today for approximately 50 km. before entering a large reservoir in the Ramanathapuram district. In an essay, "The song of the river Vaiyai: *Paripāṭal*", François Gros quotes from the *Ramnad Manual*, published by the colonial administrators:⁴

"... its periodic floods are so irregular that they can never be predicted with any certainty nor counted on with any confidence. Due to the inclination of its course, the current of this river is very violent. This, and the fact that the sand on its bed moves at a depth of several feet makes crossing it, even in normal water, an operation of considerable difficulty, sometimes with fatal consequences."

Indeed, the *caṅkam* poets too considered the Vaiyai a capricious and mercurial river. For them, Vaiyai was as unpredictable as the fickle human mind. In one poem, a lover is late for a meeting with his mistress. He blames it on the floods in the river. She replies:

3.1*

Can
 desire born from love
 be the same always?
 It shrinks as swiftly as it grows -
 like the Vaiyai's flow.

 When the clouds pour
 the river is in spate
 and even though my town is near
 you are delayed by the boat.
 But in the pleasant mild summer
 the river is so dry
 birds stand in the trickle
 to catch fish.
 Isn't this Vaiyai's nature?
 Such is your love for me. (*Pari.* 6: 71-78)

In translating this excerpt, I added the word "like" in the (last line of the) first stanza so that the metaphor between the hero's feelings and the river's flow comes out clearly. The original version does not have the sign of comparison ("like"), leaving the relationship between the river and the hero delightfully ambiguous.⁵ As I will discuss shortly, this is not a coincidence. The Vaiyai poems bind the protagonists and the river in a subtle way which brings out one of the most significant aspects in the perception of place.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 90

⁵... *kāṭalaṅ kāmam*
orukka orutaṅmai nīrkumō ollaic
curukkamu mākkamuñ cūḷural
vaiyaiṅ perukkaṅṅō ... (Pari. 6: 71-74)

The etymology of the name Vaiyai is unclear. The Tamil Lexicon suggests a derivation from the Sanskrit *Vegavatī*, "the swift one". However, there are no instances in the entire *caṅkam* corpus where this name (or its Tamil form *Vēkavati*), is used.⁶ Perhaps the word Vaiyai derives from the root *vai*, "to create"; there are several instances in the *Pari*. where the river is described as the creator of all things good.⁷ For example, one poem declares,

3.2*

So that the words
of the Tamil poets
may remain true
these waters rush on forever,
making this land prosperous.
Beautiful, cool waters
come bursting forth. (*Pari*. 6: 7-10)

Similarly,

3.3*

The rushing Vaiyai
flows for well being:
to flourish fields
and foster beauty
in the land.
The Vaiyai comes! (*Pari*. 7: 8-10)

For the people in the *Pari*. however, the Vaiyai is not merely a source of water. To use Edward Casey's words, the river possesses "a core of immanent sense" (Casey 1996), and the poems themselves describe the protagonists' perceptive experience of this immanent core. There is a name given to Vaiyai's core in these poems, and this word is worth some discussion. The word is *iyalpu* (*Pari*. 16:38, 47; 18:14; 20:111); sometimes, the commentator Parimelalakar (who seems to have recognized the unique treatment of place in these poems) uses the word, *taṇmai* (*Parimēl.* 6:105-106). Both words underscore the immanence of Vaiyai's sense. The word *iyalpu*, meaning "nature", "property", or "quality" derives from the root verb *iyaltal* - "to possess", or "to abide". Thus, *iyalpu* refers to a quality which is intrinsic to the object, or a quality rooted in the object. Similarly, the noun *taṇmai* refers to an inherent quality or state. It is derived from *taṇ*, an oblique case-form of the reflexive pronoun *tāṇ*; viz., *taṇmai* is a quality which is one's own.⁸

⁶The earliest reference in Tamil literature to this river as *Vēkavati* seems to occur as late as in the 13th century. The *Tēvāram* poems of the poet-saint Campantar (ca.7th century) for instance, refer to the river only as Vaiyai. The name *Vēkavati* appears first in the *Tiruvālavaiyūṭaiyār Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*, a 13th c. text. This text uses both names Vaiyai and *Vēkavati*; See poems 30.2, 38.35, 7.6, 7.11, 30.4 in this text. For reasons best known only to himself, Swaminatha Aiyar who first published this work notes, "Vaiyai - a corrupt form of *Vēkavati*. Also called *Vaikai*". For its part, the *Pari*. proudly calls the river *tamiḷvaiyai* (*Pari*. 6:60).

⁷The nominal form *vaiyōṇ* - the Creator, is commonly used in devotional literature.

⁸A common synonym of *iyalpu* or *taṇmai* is *cupāvam*, borrowed from *svabhāvaḥ* (Sanskrit), "one's own nature".

Who perceives Vaiyai's core? Even a cursory reading of these poems reveals the answer - the protagonists in these poems form the natural subjects of perception, and they experience Vaiyai's nature in the most immediate way: by being in the Vaiyai, and by immersing themselves in its waters both literally and figuratively. But as we will see in this chapter, their perception of place is far more complex than sensory reception; *i.e.*, the people described in these poems are not passive recipients of sensory data, instead their relationship with the river is characterized by a process which Keith Basso calls "interanimation". Discussing the lived experience of place, Basso elaborates on interanimation thus (Basso 1996),

"... The experience of seeing places, then, is thus both roundly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process - inward toward the facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together - cannot be known in advance."

Being in the Vaiyai and responding to it, by acting in specific ways, the people in these poems define themselves with respect to the river; but in doing so, they redefine the river by investing it with newer meanings. The relationship between self and place is thus an intricate and dynamic process of mutual redefinition (called "interanimation" by Basso).⁹ It constitutes a never ending dialogic between perception and place, as the following excerpt illustrates.

3.4*

The water comes down from the mountains,
 carrying branches of flower clusters,
 that adorn the banks
 carrying cool flowers, rich in nectar
 swept from women's hair,
 carrying petals from garlands
 on the men's broad chests.

The Vaiyai resembles the Ganges,
 which flows in the sky
 amongst the stars that glitter like pearls.

This is the Vaiyai's nature,
 the river where the bees hum.

Eyes are red, because of
 palm liquor
 flowing water
 lovers' quarrel.

Eyes, shimmering fish-like,
 enlaced with collyrium,
 become redder still.

In the waters,
 where nectar trickles from the flowers
 fallen from women's hair,

⁹See discussion on habit memory in the previous chapter.

the beautiful striped bees
teem around the petals,
mouths to the flowers.

There,
he embraces
the bathing women,
over and over.

The musk paste on his chest
smears as he rises in the water
resembling a mountain peak
where stored honey trickles
as the bent bamboo springs up.

This is the Vaiyai's nature,
the river which belongs to the one
whose chariot bears the flag of victory. (*Pari*. 16: 32-47)

Commenting on these lines, P. V. Comacuntaranar writes,¹⁰

"... The women's eyes become red because of his (*i.e.*, the hero's) embraces and nectar drips from the flowers they wear on their hair. His broad chest, scarred by repeatedly embracing the women who bathe in the waters, resembles a mountain. It should be understood that Vaiyai's nature creates this resemblance. The eyes (of the women) already red because of liquor, water and quarreling with their lover, turn redder from the hero's embraces... And by saying 'this is the Vaiyai's nature', she (the speaker) really means that 'bathing like this in the river with your lovers is your (the hero's) nature...'¹¹

Following the poem's colophon, Comacuntaranar reads this poem as a monologue delivered by the heroine's female companion. The heroine (and her companions) are aware of the hero playing in the water with his lovers. When he returns home, he is turned away by his wife's companion who speaks to him.¹² In the passage above, the commentator refers twice to Vaiyai's nature. The first is when he notes "Vaiyai's nature" causing the hero's chest to resemble a mountain. It is unclear why the commentator makes this connection, since comparing the hero's chest to a mountain is an altogether familiar trope in *caṅkam* literature. The second instance is when Comacuntaranar construes the line (in the last stanza of the above excerpt) "this is the Vaiyai's nature" with the stanza immediately preceding it. Read this way, Vaiyai's nature is little more than a metaphor; thus, the commentator suggests that the heroine's companion, unable or unwilling to comment directly on the hero's infidelity, employs the river as a metaphor for his passions. This is of course, a perfectly reasonable reading - as we saw in example 3.1, the river *is* used as a metaphor in a dialogue between a hero and his lover. But, in example 3.4, it is possible to go beyond the idea of the river as a metaphor and inquire into the relationship between self and place - a relationship which defines the nature of perception. I shall proceed to do this now.

¹⁰P. V. Comacuntaranar (b. 1909), is well known for his commentaries on *caṅkam* literature.

¹¹*Pari*. C. 16:39-47

¹²Refusing entry to the hero (either by the heroine or her companion) is a standard poetic situation in the Tamil literary tradition.

According to the poem, Vaiyai's nature is not only in being cool, colorful and fragrant. The waters that are cool to touch, made fragrant and colorful by the flowers swept away from garlands, evoke multiple sensations. The commingling of flowers worn by men and women brings forth images of lovers sporting in the water, and by engaging the senses directly, the river possesses a vast potential for myriad sensations and emotions. To state this differently, the immediate *experience* of Vaiyai's sensuality heightens the bathers' emotive states and also becomes an *expression* of their own sensuality. The river is not only where the hero's potentiality to act is realized, but it also embodies such potentiality in a singular way.¹³ It is for this reason that the hero sporting in the water with his lovers, is declared to be part of Vaiyai's essence. By acting the way he does, the hero also (re-)establishes the Vaiyai as a place "for experiencing pleasure through all five senses",¹⁴ his consonance with the Vaiyai arising primarily from the river which unlocks various memories and sensations from the recesses of his mind. Commenting on the intimate connection between the integrity of perception and place, Edward Casey notes that,¹⁵ "... the coherence of perception at the primary level is supplied by the depth and horizons of the *very place* we occupy as sentient subjects" (italics his).

As with the Vaiyai poems, the Vel poems in the *Pari*. too are emphatic about the intrinsic nature of place. These poems describe Parankunru hill, a place which embodies both the sensuous and the sacred. The poems delineate the connection between the sensuous and the sacred in many ways. For instance, the poems extol Vel or Murukan, as the God who comprehends the uniquely Tamil (according to the text) tradition of *kaḷavu*, pre-marital love. For, it is in Parankunru (also called Parankunram, Tirupparankunram) where Murukan falls in love with Valli (daughter of the mountain folk), and the place where he marries her subsequently. This marriage replicates his celestial wedding with Devayanai, daughter of Indra, the king of the celestials.¹⁶ In this same hill, Devayanai quarrels with Murukan over his love for Valli and he appeases her by prostrating to her.¹⁷ By invoking these stories, the *Pari*. poems relate Parankunru hill to two themes prominent in Tamil *akam* literature - *kaḷavu* (pre-marital love) and *ūṭal* (lovers' quarrel). However it is important to note that the relationship between place and myth is not passive; viz., in the poems stories about the God Vel are not myths frozen in time that associate Parankunru with events long past. The hill is invested, as it were, with the emotions and actions intrinsic to these events - illicit love, lovers' quarrel, and the subsequent reconciliation between lovers. Indeed, they *are* the hill's nature, affirmed and reaffirmed by the people who gather in Parankunru and who enact their versions of Murukan's love for Valli and Devayanai. It is this performance which constitutes their experience of place.

3.5

The peacock -
its spots shining like lustrous gems -
dances.
And he watches it.
Seeing him look at the peacock
she - whose forehead is lovely -

¹³See the discussion on habit memory in the previous chapter.

¹⁴*Parimēl.* 11:62-71

¹⁵Casey 1996, p. 18

¹⁶*Pari.* 19: 1-7

¹⁷*Pari.* 9: 30-37

imagines what he thinks.
She: "I know what you are thinking.
 Do not hide your ridicule,
 speak out now."
He: "My beloved!
 I saw this peacock exulting in its joy,
 trying to steal your charm and
 shamed into failing.
 Why do you think I am scorning you?"
 Saying so, he flatters her.
 Such is the nature of the hill,
 which belongs
 to the One with beautiful chariots. (*Pari*. 18: 7-14)

In the above example, the reference to the peacock hints at Valli - Murukan's human consort. In one poem, the *Pari*. refers to Valli as the "creeper who is as graceful as a dancing peacock".¹⁸ Read this way, the hero in the poem who watches the peacock imitates Murukan who falls in love with Valli, and his lover who quarrels with him plays the role of Devayanai (who quarrels with Murukan).

Here is another example where the *Pari*. talks about the nature of the Parankunru hill. In this passage, the word "*vakai*", is used as a synonym for "*iyalpu*" and "*taṇmai*", the nature of a place. The Tamil Lexicon derives *vakai* from *vakuttal* - "to classify", "to assign"; as we see from this example, specific acts are classified as being natural to certain places like the Parankunru hill.

3.6

Wearing splendid jewels,
 she bathes
 in the mountain spring -
 where the waters roar as they descend from the hill.
 She calls out to her husband,
 "These waters tug at my hands.
 Throw me the bamboo float."
 Instead, he throws
 a squirt filled with perfumed water.
 Then, sensing her distress
 in those deep waters
 abundant with flowers,
 he jumps with joy into the mountain spring,
 and holds her tightly.
 Such is the lovely nature
 of the cool Parankunru hill. (*Pari*. 21: 39-45)

¹⁸*Pari*. 19: 7. The Tamil word "*valli*", means "creeper", "a woman of the hills".

In the previous chapter, I argued that places possess the ability to engage the senses of perception in a very specific way. As I discussed there, place and the physical senses of perception function as ordering fields, orienting the mind in very specific ways. While the examples above illustrate this adequately, the *Pari.* also notes the contrapositive relationship between senses and place - when the senses do not make sense of place, then one feels out-of-place. The following example (drawn from the Vaiyai poems) describes the advent of the Vaiyai river by describing the scenes of love-making and people playing in the water. Smiling lovers are spurred to dress themselves up in fine clothes, people wander everywhere and all roads to the river are blocked by the teeming crowds. The water turns murky from the festivities, full of flowers fallen from the garlands adorning women's hair and men's chests; the Vaiyai is a place of unbridled revelry. But the austere ones find the river's sensuality unpalatable.

3.7*

Garbed in splendid regalia
ready for bathing
young men and sweet girls
declare
"the water fight has begun!"
Their weapons: spurts of perfume and horns of perfumed water.
...
In this charming battlefield,
people frolic in the cool water.
The river releases the scents
of lotions
pastes
oils
and flowers.
This is the coming of the river.
The Brahmins,
reciters of the Vedas,
are troubled.¹⁹
They think, "The river's nature
is changed.
Soiled by perfumes, it is impure." (*Pari.* 6: 11-45)

My translation, "the Brahmins ... are troubled" does not do justice to the original. The Tamil uses the finite verb *kalaṅkiṅar* to indicate the plight of the Brahmins. The root verb is *kalattal* which can also mean "to be muddled", "muddied", "stirred", etc. The poem suggests that as the waters of the Vaiyai get muddied, the Brahmins get muddled. In his commentary, Parimelalakar is more explicit and adds, "... they (the Brahmins) are troubled and leave the river without bathing, sipping the water and other ablutions..." (*Parimēl.* 6: 43-45).

A similar idea is found in another *Pari.* poem on the Vaiyai.

¹⁹The poem uses the word *antaṅar*: *pulampuri yantaṅar kalaṅkiṅar maruṅṭu* (*Pari.* 6:45). Some scholars argue that the word *antaṅar* does not necessarily mean "Brahmin". However, I believe there is no ambiguity - especially in the *Pari.*, as the next example shows. See also the following footnote.

3.8*

...
 And there in the Vaiyai,
 the *pārppārs* avoid their austerities.
 They say,
 “The river contains brewed liquor
 and swarms with flies.”
 The *antaṇars* do not bathe.
 They say,
 “The river is strewn with fragrant flowers,
 worn by both men and women.”
 The *aiyars* do not sip the waters.
 They say,
 “Vaiyai is thick and unctuous
 with the honey flowing in it.”²⁰ (*Pari. Ti. 2: 58-63*)

Common to all these examples is the the experience of place as an act. As discussed in the previous chapter and as these examples show, place is possessed of dynamism. The perception of place emerges in a dialogue between the senses and the very place that is perceived. Its representation in poetry is studied best by choosing a single theme. To do so, let me consider once again, the example of the river; the Tamil literary tradition portrays it as a place intimately related to two acts - lovers playing in the river (called *āṭal*) and their quarrel (*ūṭal*). This relationship takes many hues in the *caṅkam* poems, the variety in the representation of the river (in the *caṅkam* poems) commensurate with the semantic range of *āṭal* and the spectrum of sentiments covered by *ūṭal*. The noun "*āṭal*" is derived from the verb "*āṭutal*" which can mean, "(to) move, dance, wave, gesticulate, bathe, sport in the water, enjoy". Correspondingly, the nominal form expresses various meanings such as shaking, playing (*Pari. 11:88*), dancing (7:17, 71, 80; 9:72; 10:56; 10:117), bathing (6:97; 7:76; 12:31), playing in water (10:9), and love-making (11:89).²¹ The word "*ūṭal*" refers to lovers' quarrel. Within the Tamil literary tradition, *ūṭal* is usually initiated by the hero's wife or lover. Unhappy with the hero's relationships with other women, the wife or the lover expresses displeasure. The Tamil Lexicon derives the word from the verb, "*ūṭutal*" and translates it as "to feign displeasure, as a wife for her husband or *vice versa* in order to enhance his or her affection; to be sulky".²² Although used widely in the literature,²³ this characterization does not capture the range of emotions behind *ūṭal*, as the following examples show.

To the Tamil literary theorist, all the examples I discuss subsequently are classified under the same theme - "refusing entry to the hero". The hero in these poems seeks to return to his

²⁰Commenting on these lines, Comacuntaranar uses the word *pārppār* (Brahmins) synonymously with *antaṇar* and *aiyar* and adds, "These three stanzas form a *tāḷicai*-triad of a kalippā, developing the same theme." (*Pari. Ti. C. 2:57-63*) Elaborating the same theme (in this example, the Brahmins in the river) in different ways and in different stanzas is called *tāḷicai* in Tamil prosody. The *tāḷicai* is employed commonly in poems belonging to the *kalippā* meter. For a discussion on Brahmins in early Tamil Nadu, see Aiyar (2007), Vol. I, pp. 192-206.

²¹Poems from other *caṅkam* anthologies cover a similar semantic range.

²²The lexical entry is based on a poem from the *Kuraḷ*, *ūṭutal kāmattir kiṅṅam* "to feign displeasure is pleasure in the act of love" (*Kuraḷ* 1330). Most scholars also quote this to characterize *ūṭal* as a sentiment which enhances marital love.

²³See for instance, Takahashi 1995.

wife, after spending time with his lover(s). The wife (or her female companion) tells him that she is aware of his infidelity and turns him away. A familiar situation arises when the hero is accused of bathing in the river with his mistress (or a lover). With some minor variations, this theme - where *āṭal* (bathing in the river) leads to *ūṭal* (quarrel between the hero and his wife or lover) - is commonly employed in *caṅkam* literature. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of this theme, my analysis will focus on the variety in the representation of place in these poems. I will now discuss a few examples that differ in the way they represent the river as a place where *āṭal* and *ūṭal* are enacted. The examples also illustrate how the treatment of the river (as a place) is very different from other poems in *caṅkam* poetry that deal with the theme of *ūṭal*. As we will see, the emphasis in the *Pari.* is on the river - the place where *ūṭal* happens.

The first example is an excerpt from the *Aka*. In this poem, the wife addresses her wayward husband:

3.9*

“ ... Yesterday, you frolicked
 in the *Kāviri*'s abundant waters²⁴
 where even oars cannot stand without bobbing,
 with your beloved
 adorned with glittering earrings and jewels,
 holding the white sugarcane as if it were a raft.
 You were as happy as the elephants
 that seek the lake of the *Pūliar*,
 the flowers on your ravishing chest
 withering.
 Today, you come,
 speaking deceitful lies:
 “You, with yellow specks on your lovely breasts”.
 “You, of unblemished chastity, the mother of our son”.
 It is not becoming to mock my age. ...
 ... our youth too
 is long gone.
 How can your lies
 bring us any happiness?” (*Aka.* 6: 6-22)

Note how the entire passage is centered around the heroine's feelings. Drawing attention to the heroine's appearance, the poem contrasts her loneliness with the scenes of the hero bathing in the river. The river is only incidental to the poem - it is a site marked by the hero's infidelity and not a place which is perceived, much less experienced. Now, it may be argued that owing to their length (20 lines on an average), the poems in the *Aka.* do not provide enough scope for depicting the experience of playing in the river. However, this argument can be contested in two ways. The first is to note that the length of the poem does not, in any way, preclude representing (for example) the river in a manner which foregrounds the role

²⁴*Kāviri* or Kavery originates in the Western Ghats of modern day Karnataka, flows south - southeast through Tamil Nadu before emptying into the Bay of Bengal.

played by the senses. Recall in this context, example 2.15 in the previous chapter, excerpted from the *Aiñ*.

Conversely, there are longer poems in the *cañkam* anthology that deal explicitly with the theme of the hero playing in the river, yet their depiction of the river is very much different from the *Pari*. I will now present one such example from the *Kali*. The original runs to 39 lines, and like many other poems in this anthology, this poem also has an element of drama.²⁵ The reader hears a conversation between an erring husband and the angry wife. The husband claims he was delayed because he went bathing in the *Vaiyai* (*āṭal*). The wife invokes the river as a metaphor for his lover, scorns him (*ūṭal*) with withering sarcasm. Her sarcasm is the central theme in this poem which manages to inject an element of humor even while highlighting the heroine's despair.

3.10

She: Who are you?
 Entering our home,
 flaunting your festive clothes everyday?
 Like the bee that seeks fresh flowers,
 you chase women everywhere;
 and the streets that echo
 with the sounds
 of your mighty chariot drawn by horses,
 are rife with gossip.
 In the past too, I heard it.
 But now,
 I know about your deceitful affairs.

He: Lovely woman with crafted garlands!
 Why do you berate me
 for what I did not do?

Understand this.
 I stopped on the way to bathe in the *Vaiyai* -
 in the waters that carry flowers
 and crash against the banks.

She: Oh! Indeed
 I heard you bathed in the waters.
 The waters
 with sprawling black sands - her long curly hair,
 and leaping fish - her lovely eyes lined with collyrium;
 where you bathed in the early evening,
 with the *pāṇaṇ* as your raft -²⁶
 in those fresh waters that spread in the early afternoon,
 across gardens covered with fragrant blue flowers,

²⁵An analysis of the poems in the *Kalittokai* and a comparison with other *Akam* anthologies, will be presented elsewhere.

²⁶In many poems, the *pāṇaṇ*- a bard/musician - is portrayed as an emissary between the hero and his mistresses. The heroine often refers to him as someone who procures lovers for her husband.

breaking the dam called chastity.²⁷

And I also heard that
after bathing in those waters
with undiminished love,
you took a shower -
for fear that I would hear the gossip.

Not liking that,
the fresh waters rushed,
anklets tinkling and eyes crossed in anger,
checked your stride and swept you away.
Many are those who saw this happen.
Swept away thus by the clear fresh waters,
your good heart, greatly praised,
is yet to reach the shores.

He: Lovely woman wearing a row of bangles!
Why do you berate me
for what I did not do?

I will swear to God and convince you
that I stopped on the way
to bathe in the Vaiyai -
the river which belongs to the Southern King,
who wears crafted anklets,
whose army is famed
for its unfailing swords.

She: Quite so.

But, riding your chariot
to those deceitful waters covered by flowers
where you always desire to bathe,
be careful -
that your foot does not slip
and get trapped,
when there is none around to help you -
bringing smiles to the faces
of those with lovely white teeth
that look like tender sprouts. (*Kali*. 98)

The difference in the heroine's tone notwithstanding, these two examples (examples 3.9 and 3.10) share a common aspect - both marginalize the perceptual experience of the river. In the former, the river is a site which marks the hero's infidelity and in the latter example, Vaiyai is a metaphor for the hero's love/mistress. But in either case, the river is not portrayed as a place which emerges in experience. Indeed, the distinct absence of synesthetic perception, "an affair of the whole body sensing and moving",²⁸ is no coincidence. For, to bring

²⁷By saying that the waters "spread early in the afternoon, ... breaking the dam called chastity", the heroine implies that the hero's lover seduced him shamelessly during the day.

²⁸Casey 1996, p. 18

back place in this discussion of *āṭal* and *ūṭal*, a third aspect, distinct from these two, is essential. This is *uṭal*, the human body - the body which is emplaced, and which constitutes "the natural subject of perception of that place".²⁹ For the dialogic between the self and place - a dialogic, which constitutes the experience of place - there must be a subject who perceives the place. The obvious subject is the human body - called "*uṭal*" in Tamil.³⁰ The etymology of the word "*uṭal*", is unclear. The Tamil Lexicon suggests that it derives from "*utaṇ*" - an adverb which means "together with". We are always together with our bodies and it is the body which finds itself in a place and integrates itself with it. The myriad sensations emanating from a place make an impression on the body, just as the body vitalizes the place which is perceived. It is this reciprocity between senses and place which is constantly underscored in the *Pari.*, and it is this feature which makes these poems unique. Indeed, this aspect is highlighted throughout the poems; *viz.*, sensory perception is underscored in almost all aspects of any given poem and therefore *cannot* be overlooked in a discussion of its poetics. I will now substantiate this claim by adducing some examples that are representative of the poems in the *Pari.*

All the Vaiyai poems begin with a description of the rains in the hills surrounding Madurai, and the advent of the river Vaiyai. In the poems, the people of Madurai sense the waters of the river in many different ways. One poem describes the colorful flowers that the waters carry and the various sounds that accompany the advent of the Vaiyai.

3.11*

At night, the rains are abundant in the mountains;
by morning, they merge with the boundless sea,
alleviating the earth's suffering,
covering the wide, sandy banks
with intricate blankets of flowers.

The river mixes banana leaves with the tender shoots
of the mango tree
whose branches blossom with buds,
circled by bees that sing melodiously

The river takes in the sounds -
too many to measure,
too difficult to discern,
accompanied by the throbbing of *parai* drums.

The Vaiyai comes! (*Pari.* 10: 1-8)

In another poem, the people of Madurai are made aware of the river by the different smells that it carries, as well as the sounds that accompany the river.

²⁹*Ibid.* p. 22

³⁰Although *uṭal* in Tamil means the body, I use it here also to include the mind/intellect - the lived body. See discussion in Chapter 2.

3.12*

At night,
 the world sleeps
 as the clouds surround the hills.
 The rain
 mixes
 the sweet smells
 of honey-laden tree flowers;
 of water on the dry forest ground,
 afflicted by sun and wind;
 and of fruit fallen from branches.
 These smells, Vaiyai mingles
 carries
 and offers to others.
 People who love the fragrance
 of warm waters,
 and of the lush gardens,
 sound the *paṛai* drums.
 As water flows
 along channels
 on high walls
 people wake from their sleep
 to water sounds. (*Pari*. 20: 7-14)

The above examples illustrate the primacy of sensory perception - it is primarily through their senses that the people of Madurai are aware of the river. But this is not all; as they become aware of the fresh floods in the Vaiyai, their sensuality is heightened. In this way, by foregrounding the role played by the senses in perception, the *Pari*. poems set the stage for *ūṭal*. After describing the advent of the river, the poems go on to describe how the people of Madurai prepare themselves to go the Vaiyai. Note again the emphasis on sensuality.

3.13*

They hear that the beautiful cool waters have come,
 crashing against Madurai's city walls,
 carrying flowers.
 Men
 wear ornaments that glitter like lightning
 and gold engraved with flowers.
 They remove sandalwood paste from their bodies;
 and smear, instead, well-smoked *akil* paste.³¹
 Women

³¹*akil* - fragrant Eaglewood tree.

braiding their locks of hair dark as clouds,³²
 adorned by flowers tied with fragrant roots,
 garbed in saris,³³
 necks laced in strung necklaces with clasps.
 Chewing scented betel-nut³⁴
 they glimpse themselves
 in mirrors
 cleaned with fragrant ghee and fine powders
 Their reflections reveal
 natural beauty
 well tended faces
 and the glow
 that comes from making love.³⁵

Some wear
 crafted bangles and
 arm bands on their shoulders;
 some wear anklets inlaid with gems,
 others wear garlands of flowers,
 trickling with honey.
 They sprinkle their bodies
 with perfumes
 and the fragrance travels one *ōcaṇai*.³⁶

...

crowds and crowds,
 rushing, rushing
 frolicking so beautifully
 everywhere. (*Pari*. 12: 10-33)

The reciprocity between the river and the people is to be noted: the river is bedecked with flowers and people wear equally colorful flowers; the river carries wonderful scents, and so too the people. If the coming of the Vaiyai animates the people of Madurai, then their presence in the river makes it even more beautiful. Or as the following excerpt says,

³²Braiding - one of the five modes of women's hair dressing mentioned in early Tamil poetry. According to Comacuntaranar (who quotes from an old Tamil thesaurus), the five different modes are *koṇṭai* (tuft at the side of the head), *kuḷal* (curls), *paṇiccai* (locks), *muṭi* (tuft on top of the head), *curuḷ* (braided locks); *Pari*. C. 12: 9-18. The word, "*aiṃpāl*" (five-moded), is often used in Tamil poetry as a synonym for women's hair.

³³The text reads *puṭṭakam poruntuva punaikuvōrum*, "wearing appropriate garments"; Parimelalakar glosses *puṭṭakam* as *putaivai*, "sari". According to him, the women wear saris appropriate for bathing in the river.

³⁴In his commentary to the *Cilap.*, Atiyarkunallar specifies the five kinds of aromatics used to flavor betel nut: clove, cardamom, camphor, nutmeg, and cubeb or tailed pepper, called *vāl miḷaku* in Tamil.

³⁵The text uses three different words, *vaṇṇam*, *tēcu*, and *ōḷi*, to describe the luster on the women's faces. According to Parimelalakar, they are respectively, "natural beauty, artificial beauty and the color that comes from sexual union ..." *Parimēl*. 12: 20-21.

³⁶From the Sanskrit *yojanam* - a unit of distance, measuring approximately 8 miles.

3.14*

Do they adorn the lovely Vaiyai,
or does the Vaiyai adorn them?

Those
watching
and pondering
cannot tell. (*Pari*. 22: 32-34)

It is because the poems emphasize the role of the senses so explicitly that the commentator, Parimelelakar remarks that Vaiyai is a place which is to be enjoyed by all five senses. He makes this comment in his gloss to the following lines.

3.15*

women with breasts like mountains,
wear fragrant garlands dripping with honey
and matching adornments.

...
sipping fresh, sweet liquor,
intoxicated, their desire growing,
making love like the Nāka people
who perform good deeds
that yield riches,
drinking in each other's beauty
with their eyes,
their aroused ears sated
by sweet music, set to rhythm. (*Pari*. 11: 62-69)

Commenting on this passage, Parimelelakar remarks that the Vaiyai is a place where sensual pleasure is experienced by all five senses. This comment should be juxtaposed with the commentary on *Kura!* 1101 (example 2.8) where Parimelelakar emphasizes that "pleasures experienced at different times from different objects are all experienced in her (a woman) at the same time."³⁷ The notion that place and woman offer sensory gratification is perhaps the reason why several poems in the *caṅkam* corpus compare a woman's beauty to a city, hill, etc. For example, the breasts of the heroine in *Aka*. 61 are compared to the city of Potini.³⁸

It is not only in immediate experience that the *Pari*. poems foreground sensory perception, but also in memory and imagination. In the following excerpt from a poem on Vel, the poet likens the various mental images he recalls of Parankunru hill to portraits. Sensory patterns shift variously in these images and between them as the poet's memory proceeds primarily through fragments captured by different sensory modalities. As I noted in the previous chapter, erotic memories are often characterized by such fragmentary recall. Each fragment is sufficiently satisfying by itself, "the detail ... (being) memorable just as *detail*",³⁹ and not because it is part of a larger narrative.

³⁷See p. 26.

³⁸"... your lovely breasts shining with fine ornaments / as beautiful as the vast city of Potini decked in gold ..." *Aka*. 61: 16-18

³⁹Casey 1987;2000, p. 162

3.16

Slayer of Cūr!⁴⁰
 In your mountain,
 a dancer,
 intoxicated by brewed liquor,
 raises her arms and taps her feet
 to the rhythms of the *tuṭi* drum;
 the pearls in her anklets-
 made of smelted gold,
 tinkle.
 Seeing the dancer's beauty,
 a woman is angry with her husband,
 who stands beside her.
 She looks at him,
 her glance - sharp
 like the tip of a glittering lance.
 Another woman
 looks at herself in a mirror,
 adjusts her crafted ornaments
 that gleam like fire.
 One woman smears sandalwood paste
 on her swollen breasts.
 Then, she wipes the paste away
 only to smear herself once again.
 And when
 we recollect these sights,
 they resemble lovely portraits
 painted by one who knows his craft. (*Pari*. 21: 18-29)

I now turn to a different feature in the *Pari*. poems which illustrates yet another important facet in the experience of place. This has to do with place's ability to gather.⁴¹ Places gather people, things, memories, stories, *etc.* The converse is equally true; *viz.*, people gather to places. Indeed, places like the Vaiyai and Parankunru are seldom experienced in social isolation; rather they are sensed together.

Such sensing together adds a new dimension to the perceptual experience of place. Sensed together, places gather layers of significance generated by the intersection of multiple perceptual trajectories. As a result, various senses of place are continually added to the equally various senses of community. This aspect of place does not go unnoticed in the *Pari*. poems where place and community are brought together in many ways. Below, I shall discuss a few excerpts that exemplify this aspect.

The communal aspect of place, juxtaposed with love leads to a theme common to all *caṅkam* poetry. This is the theme of *alar*, gossip. The word, "*alar*", derives from "*alartal*", "to

⁴⁰Cūr - a demon slain by Murukan in battle. There are many references in the *caṅkam* poems to this story; see, for example, *Aka*. 59:10.

⁴¹Casey 1996, p. 24

blossom". Like a flower in full bloom, the love affairs are for everyone to see and provide material for gossip.⁴² A common theme features the husband playing with his mistress, and the gossip reaching his wife's ears even before he returns home. In the following excerpt (from the *Aka.*), the wife shames her husband, saying that she has heard the gossip.

3.17*

Yesterday, you enjoyed in intimacy
the fresh sparkling waters of the Vaiyai,
with her - she, whose lovely eyes
are enlaced with collyrium.
Her companions try to prevent it in vain,
as the gossip spreads. (*Aka.* 256: 9-13)

In their treatment of *alar*, some poems imply a greater significance to the river as part of the social fabric. The river becomes the epicenter of gossip, providing a way in which the heroine and the hero's mistress communicate with each another. With very few exceptions, the mistress never addresses the heroine (or *vice versa*) directly in the *caṅkam* poems. Instead, their respective friends who gather at the river, convey messages to one another - primarily through gossip. In the following example for instance, the hero's mistress proclaims the power she holds over her lover, the hero. Although she addresses the hero in the poem, the intended recipient of her message is the heroine.

3.18

Live long, my Lord!
I will say this to you:
Come with us!
We shall play in the cool waters,
stirring it with waves,
as the gossip spreads in this big town.⁴³
Do not go to your home! (*Aiñ.* 8.77)

As with *ūṭal*, the *Pari.* contains some distinctive features in its treatment of *alar*. Both *alar* and *ūṭal* are considered part of experiencing the river; *viz.*, unlike the two examples above where the river front is described as a place from which "gossip spreads", the Vaiyai *induces* both gossip and lovers' quarrel. This, the *Pari.* asserts, is also part of the Vaiyai's nature.

3.19*

The learned and unlearned,
the lowly,
parents,
women who submit to their husbands,
the people of the city,
together with the rider of the golden chariot,⁴⁴
come from *Kūṭal* with its beautiful walls,⁴⁵

⁴²In the *caṅkam* poems, gossip almost always occur in either of the two situations: pre-marital love between the hero and the heroine, and the husband's extra marital affairs. Here, I focus on the latter.

⁴³The hero's lover implies that gossip will spread in the town just like the waves that spread in the water.

⁴⁴This is a reference to the Pandiyan king.

⁴⁵*Kūṭal* - another name for Madurai.

to crowd Vaiyai's shallow waters. (*Pari. Ti. 2: 24-27*)

What do all these people talk about?

3.20*

In the shallow waters
 groups of people
 speak -
 unrelated words,
 at the same time.
 Who, indeed, could hear them all clearly?
 As for us, we could only catch snippets.⁴⁶

...

"Friend! where is her pride?
 After enjoying her beautiful shoulders,
 her husband left her for a graceless mistress.
 Yet, with no dignity left,
 she mounted the tall black elephant
 with him, her dear one,
 in the fresh, abundant waters,"
 they say.

"In the crowds,
 he sees the slender woman's
 round breasts -
 this fickle-minded fellow
 with a tender heart,"
 they say.

"She rejected his gifts and words,
 yet she blushes and loses her heart
 to another - a wayfarer she doesn't know.
 Even if she is in love,
 we cannot accept this,
 fearing for our chastity,"
 they say.

"Saying he wanted to see
 her necklace,
 he stared at her breasts.
 Yet, this woman
 is not ashamed,"
 they say... (*Pari. 12: 36-56*)

One would imagine that lovers would choose to quarrel far away from the range of such keen ears. But paradoxically enough, the ability of the Vaiyai to gather also nourishes its ca-

⁴⁶At this point, the poem describes the music heard on the waterfront. The poet implies that the conversations could not be overheard clearly because of this.

capacity to evoke *ūṭal*. The emotions of the men and women in the *Pari*, as well as their connection to places such as the *Vaiyai*, are intensified by the very fact that these places are sensed together. The *Pari* poets recognize this aspect of place and so it is that intimate quarrels between lovers happen in the most public of places - the waterfront.

The poem goes on to describe what happens in the river.

3.21*

(... And there,)
 A beautiful woman gives him a sweet look.
 His companion sees this
 and strikes him with her fragrant garland,
 as if it were a stick.
 Using the chain around her neck,
 she ties up his hand
 twisting tightly, tightly
 saying, "You have done wrong."
 But he cannot see what his mistake is. She says,
 "That one looked at you –
 you must have given her
 false promises of your love."
 He says,
 "I do not know that one
 who looked at me,
 whom you say
 I deceived with words."
 The soft natured one says, "Promiser of lies."
 She stands sullenly,
 refusing his embraces
 as he tries to placate her.
 To stop her sulking
 he rebukes her in anger.
 So she throws her squirt,
 full of fragrant colored water,
 on his chest.
 With a troubled mind,
 and an aching heart,
 he falls to the ground
 covered in blood-like water.
 It flows like a wound
 caused by a *vēl*
 on his chest,⁴⁷
 the target of her piercing eyes,
 lined with collyrium.

⁴⁷*vēl* - lance or spear, often used in the poems as a simile for women's eyes.

She fears she has
wounded him –
suddenly, her wrath is gone.
She runs back to her
lover's beautiful chest.

The Vaiyai's waters, always strong,
make this happen. (*Pari*. 12: 57-75)

In one of the Vaiyai poems, the lovers' quarrel takes a very different turn when the hero's mistress is accosted by his wife and her female companions. In this poem, the waterfront becomes a court of public opinion where justice is meted out by older women who pacify the heroine and the hero's mistress. The poem itself starts innocently with a description of the people in Madurai aroused from their sleep, by the scent of Vaiyai's waters. They beautify themselves and rush to the river in haste. There, the poem says, "the people gather in crowds, climbing the lovely banks, to see what everyone else is wearing" (*Pari*. 20: 31-32). Among the crowds are the hero, his wife and her female companions. It is at this point the poem departs from similar poems in the *Pari*. As they scan the crowds gathered at the waterfront, the heroine and her friends see another woman wearing the heroine's jewels – jewels given by her father as a bridal gift. They accost the woman and exchange harsh words. A crowd of older women gathers to witness this altercation. At one point, the other woman asks angrily why she is being pursued. The heroine's companions reply,

3.22*

To discipline our unruly ox,
we bring him to the cattle shed,
to strike him in anger:
we bring our man
to the Vaiyai
and whip him with our garland.
It is not the way of farmers
to let go of the ox,
that refuses to do his work:
we bring this ox here
for the gathering to see
that it belongs to us. (*Pari*. 20: 59-63)

Invoking the metaphor with the ox, the poem portrays the hero as one who lacks free-will. Describing the erring hero as a victim of his own urges, is quite common in the *caṅkam* poems that speak about marital infidelity.⁴⁸ In this poem too, the bystanders who come to judgment declare that it is difficult for a man to control his sexual passion (see below). In the context of this discussion, what makes the metaphor with the ox interesting is the reference to the Vaiyai as the "gathering". The poem uses the word "*avaiyam*",⁴⁹ which means an "assem-

⁴⁸See for example, *Aka*. 36: 1-8; 46: 1-6.

⁴⁹*avaiyattut toṭarntēm...* (*Pari*. 20: 61-62)

bly" or a "gathering". Typically, the word is used to imply a gathering of the learned or an assembly of judges.⁵⁰ The choice of this word highlights the significance of the river in the fabric of social life and its function as a social institution. Justice, in this story, is meted out after a fashion by a group of older women. The women first pacify both the heroine and the mistress. To the mistress, the older women say that the jewels are for her to keep - "...the world knows that gifts offered in moments of desire are yours to keep." (*Pari*. 20: 84-85) They then turn to the heroine and impress upon her that men's passions cannot be controlled and that it is futile for chaste wives to expect that they can contain men's passions.

3.23*

"O innocent one,
You are angry,
but ignorant of the
ways of the world.

...

Can a wife spurn her husband
who is besotted by the other women
he desires?
Can she stop him?
Of course not.
Do not be angry.
Do not be angry.

O, woman, as slender as a creeper,
can the flow of passion
be stopped or contained
when it is let loose?"
Of course not. (*Pari*. 20: 90-95)

The poem concludes by going back to the same place where the story starts - the river.

3.24*

In this way,
the Vaiyai of the Southern King,
in its greatness,
produces anger, quarrel,
and their acceptance. (*Pari*. 20: 96-97)

There are several ways other than gossip, through which the communal self finds expression in the *Pari*. poems. These include acts such as rituals, prayers, or in the celebration of place through music and dance. One poem on Vel describes the various prayers and offerings the people make in the Parankunru hill. Women are often described as praying for progeny; some women pray that their husbands are victorious in battle. Lovers pray that their dreams turn real, and some pray to Vel that the Vaiyai river be always full of water (*Pari*. 8:90-103).

⁵⁰See, for example, *Matu*. 492.

Another significant aspect in these poems is the description of song and dance. From the poems, it would seem that both the Parankunru hill and the Vaiyai river were places where music and dance were performed. Very often, brief descriptions of these performances are tied to the narrative, and almost all the Vaiyai poems end by describing how the people of Madurai return to the city (after bathing in the Vaiyai), singing and dancing in groups.

3.25*

In the evening's darkness,
dispelled by a glowing moon,
the crowds prepare to return to
their town of *Kūṭal*.

Preparing to go home,
they cast off their swimming clothes,
and wear garlands of blossoms,
arm bands, shining jewels and pearls.
People sing prayers and praise.
Dancers sway to befitting rhythms.

...

In the town of *Kūṭal*,
which receives the waters
that take away the sorrows of the land,
bards and dancers sing in praise
of the Vaiyai. (*Pari.*) 10: 112-131

I noted in the previous chapter, that these invocations (with which the poems end) are linked very naturally to the beginning of the poems, turning the poem into a performance which is repeated. The repetition accentuates the connection between community and place; it is by way of this performance that people affirm and re-affirm who they are and where they are. Keith Basso elaborates this point thus,⁵¹

" Relationships to places may also find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, ... and in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political ritual. Thus represented and enacted, ... , places and their meanings are continuously woven into the fabric of social life, anchoring it to features of the landscape and blanketing it with layers of significance that few can fail to appreciate."

It is the special character of places that they possess the ability to arrest our senses - an ability which is depicted as the emotional core inherent in places such as the Vaiyai and Parankunru in the *Pari.* poems. In such cases, places become special because the self's relationship to place is most actively sensed. Edward Casey terms this "visibility ... the kind of light that seems to stem *from within* an object rather than being merely refracted onto it from some external source..."⁵²(italics his). Closely related to this inherent emotionality of place is its expressivity - a topic which I will discuss in the following chapters.

⁵¹Basso 1996, p. 57

⁵²Casey 1987;2000, p. 200

3.26

Carrying
lamps, incense and fragrant powder,
musical instruments and clear sounding bells,
garments made of leaves and honey-laden flowers,
and the *vēl* with its shining tip,⁵³
they gather
at the foothills of *Parāṅkunru* -
where the trees are damp
from the honey which oozes from flowers.

There,
singing melodiously,
they praise the sacred tree-⁵⁴
smeared with sandal paste,
where the *Vēlaṅ*
ties the sacrificial goat.⁵⁵

Who,
among these people
who gather at this hill every evening,
would want to live
in the celestial world? (*Pari. 17: 1-8*)

⁵³The *vēl* or lance, is Murukan's weapon, with which he is said to have destroyed the demon *Cūr*; See, *Aka. 59:10; Pari. 14:18*.

⁵⁴"sacred tree" - the *kaṭampu* tree where Murukan is said to reside.

⁵⁵*Vēlaṅ* - priest who conducts the sacrificial worship. Some poems describe him being possessed by Murukan during the ritual worship.

Chapter 4

Soundscapes

செல்வத்துட் செல்வஞ் செவிச்செல்வ மச்செல்வம்
செல்வத்து ளெல்லாந் தலை (குறள் 411)

"The wealth of hearing is the wealth amongst all wealths; for, it is the greatest wealth", (*Kural* 411)

The expressivity of landscape manifests itself in various ways; of these, the sounds that are part of the landscape are perhaps the most eloquent. Almost everything around us creates sounds and unlike the eyes, our ears cannot be closed at will. Given this, it is not surprising that the frequency range of the human ear spans three orders of magnitude, from 20 to 20,000 Hz (approximately ten octaves!). The ear's sensitivity to loudness is equally stunning - the ratio in amplitudes between the loudest noise we can tolerate and the faintest sounds we can hear, is approximately one million. Such being the sensitivity of the human ear, the connection between emotional affect and sound is only natural, although we may not understand this connection in all its complexity.

There is a rather simple connection between the landscape of Tamil poetry and sound. Earlier in this dissertation, I listed the elements of landscape, native to any given place. These included gods, animals, birds, trees, the *yāl* (the stringed instrument), and activity. Note how each of these carry distinct sounds - whether it is worship of the gods or threshing wheat, the roaring of a tiger or birdsong, landscape is intrinsically sound-filled. For this reason, we find several instances in the *caṅkam* poems, where the protagonists are described as responding to sounds. Music is an obvious example, as this excerpt from the *Pura*. shows.

4.1

... with the evening fading,
we tuned the small *yāl*,
and played the *ceṅvali* melody,
singing of your forests -
lush and green with the coming of the rains.

There,
she, whose eyes -
darkened with colyrium -
looked like large fragrant *neytal* flowers,
wept without end;

her chest - decorated by ornaments -
wet from the falling tears.

And we asked her,
“Young woman!
Are you related to him -
he who likes our company? ...” (*Pura*. 144: 1-7)

The way in which this poem relates emotion to sound requires some comment. By referring to the forest and rain, the poet makes it clear that it is the time of the year (monsoon) when lovers yearn to be united,¹ and here is a woman who weeps upon hearing a melody about the forest - "your forest" refers to the hero (a king, in this poem). By comparing the heroine's eyes to *neytal* flowers, the poem makes an oblique reference to *neytal* - the coastal region which, within the literary tradition, is associated with a heroine pining for her hero. Finally, when the poet asks the heroine, "are you related to him?" he uses the word *kiḷai*, "related".² This is a clever pun as the word *kiḷai* has a musical connotation - it is the name given to the fifth note of the gamut, considered a consonant interval in early Tamil music. With this choice of word, the poem implies that the heroine and the hero are like consonant tones in a melody.

There are several other poems in the *caṅkam* corpus that relate music and emotion in the way the above example does, viz., by using elements of landscape as emotional markers that the reader / listener familiar with this poetic tradition can readily appreciate. In poems such as these, sounds, are *indicative of something else* - the heroine's sentiments. Features of the landscape do not carry meaning by themselves, as their experiential content is only reflective; viz., emotionality derives solely from *akam* - the protagonist's interior, and does not inhere in landscape. It is also the view held by the influential commentarial tradition.³ A ready example is Naccinarkkiniyar's commentary to the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, the ten long poems.⁴ Many of the poems in this anthology have long passages on the sounds characteristic of a place. For example, a passage in the *Maturaikkāñci* describes sounds from different regions (agricultural, forest, mountain, wasteland and coastal). In the poem, these descriptions occur successively (lines 239 - 325). There is nothing in the poem which associates these tracts of land with different phases of a heroine's love (for the simple reason that the poem does not feature a heroine). Yet, when Naccinarkkiniyar comments on the lines describing sounds of the landscape, he always adds a line like, "... thus is described, the agricultural tract, specified by *ūṭal* - the emotion corresponding to the lovers' quarrel."⁵ Now, there is no way for us to know why the learned commentator added this, but it certainly suggests that he (and almost everyone else who wrote subsequent commentaries to this text) did not inquire into the possibility that expressivity and emotionality could inhere in place.

In dealing with texts like the *Maturaikkāñci*, some contemporary scholars tend to take a more historical approach. The poem is understood to have served some socio-historical

¹For a note on the monsoon motif in Tamil and Sanskrit poetry, see George Hart 1971.

²*ḷaiyōy! kiḷaiyai maṅ* (*Pura*. 144: 6-7)

³By this, I mean the commentators of the *Tol.* whose views have informed almost every reading of the *caṅkam* poems.

⁴Naccinarkkiniyar is a particularly unique example - in addition to the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, he has written commentaries on the *Tolkāppiyam* (only parts of this commentary are available today), the *Kalittokai*, twenty poems from the *Kuṟuntokai* (this commentary is not available), and the *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*, a famous work of the 11th century.

⁵See Naccinarkkiniyar's commentary to the *Maturaikkāñci*, line 270.

function that the historian/philologist seeks to unravel. For instance, the Tamil scholar Sami Chidambaranar writes in the preface to his book on the *Pattuppāṭṭu* that the book aims, "... to bring out the life of the Tamils, their habits, the social and political conditions in Tamil Nadu, ... during the period when the *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems were written."⁶ The historical approach often ignores features in these poems such as soundscapes, beyond making generalities like, "... in listing these sounds, the poet describes the fertile and flourishing land ..."⁷

In my discussion of soundscapes in *caṅkam* literature, I will try to go beyond both these approaches. I do agree that many poems (like the example from the *Pura*, discussed above) lend themselves naturally to a reading which hears soundscapes as echoes of a heroine's feelings. So too, descriptions of soundscapes in anthologies such as the *Pattuppāṭṭu* can be subjected to careful and sensitive historical analysis. But my emphasis will be on a third, and an entirely different, approach: an approach which hears in soundscapes, the experience of place. Consequently, instead of hearing sounds as signs that hold the key to a poem's aesthetic expression, or revealing a sociohistorical function in them, I will explore in this chapter how sounds, by themselves, constitute landscape and are thus crucial to the experience of landscape. Taking this view to its logical conclusion, the experience of sounds (as part of the experience of place) depicted in some poems may be considered an aesthetic category by itself - much like the experience of music is. I claim that such perceptual experience of place is no less universal than the conceptualization of love in the *caṅkam* poems, considered by many scholars as being universal in its scope.⁸

Having stated this, I must address a question which I should have addressed earlier in this dissertation: is it at all possible for the written word to convey sensory experience? The question becomes acute now that we are faced directly with the problem of interpreting / understanding soundscapes. To restate the question in the current context, I ask is it possible that these poems convey auditory experience? While it may have been the case that the *caṅkam* poems were recited or performed two thousand years ago, we (much like the medieval commentators who played a very important role in the preservation of these texts) see, and I use that verb deliberately, these poems as texts; *i.e.*, when we relive these texts in our reading, vision plays a dominant role in our perception. Visual imagery often becomes the predominant sensory mode as we make sense of metaphors, a point emphasized by Brigitte Cazelles in her work on soundscapes in early French literature (Cazelles 2005). Indeed, this is one of the reasons why one turns naturally, as it were, to visual meanings of sound; *e.g.*, picturing the image of a heroine pining for her lover, as we read about the haunting melodies played on the *yāl*. In doing so, vision has become more than a sensory modality, and comes to be allied with mental perception. For much the same reason, any attempt in reading these texts, however sensitive it may be to different sensory modalities, suffers from the same shortcoming when communicated through the written word (such as this dissertation). I believe there is no obvious solution to this impasse, except to seek analyses that are, at the very least, conscious of the role played by different sensory modalities in perception, as described in the specific text/s under consideration.

This brings me to the texts I choose to analyze in my discussion of soundscapes. Most of my examples are chosen from the *Pari*. and the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthologies. From the *Pari*., I will largely choose examples from the poems on Vel and as we discussed in the previous chapter,

⁶Chidambaranar (1964), p. 7

⁷*Ibid.* p. 184

⁸See for instance, Zvelebil 1973; p. 96

these poems can be well understood as composed in praise of the Parankunru hill. From the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthologies, I will draw from the *Maturaikkāñci* and the so-called *Ārruppaṭai* texts. I will now describe briefly certain features unique to these texts - features that should be remembered as one embarks on a sound-sensitive reading.

- *Pari*: This collection of *caṅkam* poems is unique, since it is the only anthology which seems to have been compiled on the basis of melody. The ordering of poems does not reflect thematic integrity or verse length - two criteria that are commonly used in compiling *caṅkam* anthologies. Instead, the ordering in the *Pari* is based on the *paṇ* - the melody in which these poems were sung / performed; viz., poems tuned to the same melody (irrespective of the theme) are grouped together. In addition to this, the manuscripts also mention the names of the music composers. Although it is not possible for us to reconstruct the music of the *Pari*, our analysis must be aware of some of the features unique to the *Pari*. These include descriptions of the sounds produced by musical instruments played on specific occasions in special places (like the Parankunru hill), dialogue and the drama-like setting of the poems; for example, each poem on Vel starts with a scene about the hill, moves on to a dialogue between the protagonists, and ends with the people celebrating the hill together, to the accompaniment of music.
- The *Ārruppaṭai* texts: The word *Ārruppaṭai* derives from *āru*, "way" and *paṭuttal*, "to cause" etc., in this context, "to direct"; the verb *ārruppaṭuttal* means to direct someone along the (right) way. By itself, the definition underscores the importance of place in these poems - someone is told how to go somewhere. All the *Ārruppaṭai* poems employ the following setting:⁹ a group of weary and impoverished travelers (usually bards of some sort) happen to meet another poet or a bard along their way. After sympathizing with the travelers, the poet directs them to a generous patron - a chieftain or king known for his munificence and appreciation of the arts. He describes the gifts that he received from this king and urges the travelers to seek out the king's patronage likewise. The speaker then proceeds to describe the way to reach the king's city, the places along the way, places where the travelers could stay and other places they should avoid. It is within this context that soundscapes (along with foodscapes and sights) are described in these poems.

In addition to the *Pari* and the *Ārruppaṭai* texts, I will also draw from the *Maturaikkāñci*, in which the poet (Mangudi Marutanar) addresses the Pandiyan king Nedunchelian, impressing upon him the impermanence of material pleasures. Despite the underlying message, much of the poem describes the city of Madurai and its surrounding landscape - using a combination of visual and aural representations.

Although brief, I want to emphasize in this summary, the importance afforded to both aurality and orality in these poems. In the *Pari*, as we will see later, the poems describe how people join together and celebrate the hill by singing and dancing. It is very likely that such scenes were originally enacted in some form. We can only speculate what this music could have meant to the people of the *Pari*. But this lack of historical information should not prevent us from recognizing that the sounds in these poems must have conveyed something to the people. Such recognition is the first step towards a sound-sensitive reading. As for the *Ārruppaṭai* texts, they were, as I said earlier, clearly meant to be heard. By this, I do not mean

⁹An exception is the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, whose theme is religious.

that these poems are scenes from 'real life'; it is very likely that these poems, like almost all other *caṅkam* poems were *read* or *performed* in the presence of a patron. The point I labor to make here is that, one cannot disengage one's auditory modality and 'read' these poems as text; or to paraphrase David Howes, the medium should not be confused with the message.¹⁰ Given this, I will digress briefly on the aurality and orality of *caṅkam* poems as well as the importance given to hearing in old Tamil.

The importance given to the oral rendering of *caṅkam* poems was discussed at length by Kailasapathy (Kailasapathy 1968). As noted by him, there are several examples where the *caṅkam* poets are praised because of the value attached to their words - words often described by such adjectives like "musical". Kailasapathy makes the astute observation that the word *vāy* in Tamil which means "mouth", and in the context of the *caṅkam* poets, "sound that comes from the poet's mouth" or "words of a poet", also means "knowledge" or "wisdom". But in his enthusiasm to establish that the tradition of revering a poet's words comes from a belief that the poets "... were considered possessed and prophetic",¹¹ and arguing for the possible mantic origins of early Tamil poetry, Kailasapathy ignores the other half of the story - the half which has to do with hearing.

If words are wisdom, then to hear is to know. It is for this reason that the *Kuraḷ* says, "amongst all wealths, the wealth of hearing is the greatest".¹² Equally revealing is the fact that this couplet is found in the chapter titled *kēlvi*, a word which means "hearing" (*Pura*. 68:3), but also denotes, "learning" or "knowledge" (*Pura*. 26:12; 53:12). Poets were considered wise and their wisdom was imparted, chiefly through the word of mouth. But equally important was the capacity of the ear to comprehend; which explains why in Tamil, both *vāy* (mouth) and *kēlvi* (hearing) are understood synonymously with knowledge.¹³

Understood within a context which bestows equal importance on both the speaker and the listener, it is not difficult to imagine one of the *Āruppaṭai* poets standing (or sitting) in front of his patron and reciting his poem. This does not necessarily mean, as Kailasapathy concludes, that the process of poetry making itself was oral - understood in the sense that the poet composed it spontaneously, using techniques of oral verse-making. Indeed, as pointed out by Hart, the complexity of these poems makes a strong case for pre-composed, rather than spontaneous verse.¹⁴ The most likely scenario is one which has the poet reciting his works in the presence of the king. Further, since some of the poets seem to have travelled in the company of musicians (recall here, example 4.1), it is probable that at least some of this poetry was performed to the accompaniment of music. I will sound another cautionary note here: Kailasapathy seems to make a rather simplistic connection between the aural medium and orality (as opposed to literacy). I have already indicated that I do not subscribe to the view that this poetry was oral. Furthermore, my aim is to draw the reader's attention to soundscapes

¹⁰(Howes 1991), p. 285

¹¹Kailasapathy 1968, p. 65

¹²*Kuraḷ* 411

¹³For instance, even today, Tamil musicians use the phrase *kēlvi nāṇam*, literally, "knowledge from hearing", when referring to knowledge that comes only from informed hearing. By equating intelligence with both, hearing and speech, the Tamil tradition does not seem to fit Devereux's hypothesis of two different sensibilities, "selflessness" (hearing) and "self-expression" (speech). See George Devereux, *Ethnopsychological Aspects of the Terms 'deaf' and 'dumb'*, Howes 1991, p. 45.

¹⁴See, Hart 1975;1999, p. 154. For instance, the *Maturaikkāñci* comprises 782 lines and is one single sentence. It takes several pages of written material for the commentator to construe various participles and verbs in this sentence.

in the *caṅkam* poems, but not at the expense of rejecting other sensory modalities, or to posit a fundamental duality (say, auditory vs. the visual) in sensory experience.

A final point to note in this discussion is the choice of meter. The *Ārruppaṭai* poems are set in a meter called *ācīriyam*, from the Sanskrit *ācāryaḥ*, "teacher". The other (and likely earlier) name for this meter is *akaval*, from *akavutal* "to address", "to call". I have described the characterization and possible functionality of this meter elsewhere,¹⁵ and I will summarize some pertinent features here. The commentators of *Tol.* understand *akaval* as a voice pattern characteristic to exposition and /or recitation. In his commentary to the *Matu.*, Naccinarkkiniyar clarifies the meaning of the word *akavuṇar*, referring to a class of poets, as "those who call out". Kailasapathy says of these poets that "... these bards (are) not associated with any particular musical instrument or form of dance, as are the others..."¹⁶ The *akaval* meter has a very distinctive rhythm (four beats in a line) and it is entirely plausible that they were recited with rhythmic accompaniment.¹⁷ In contrast to these poems, the *Pari.* does not use the *akaval* meter. Although its exact metrical structure is a subject of debate, based on the textual flow (and no doubt influenced by the fact that the poems were set to tune) scholars agree that it is a meter suited to song. From these observations, it should be clear that the poems belonging to the *Ārruppaṭai* variety and the *Pari.* songs were recited or performed to an audience, and their import conveyed aurally.

So much then, for the sound of early Tamil poetry. Now, let me turn to sounds *in* these poems, by way of turning towards the soundscapes in *caṅkam* poetry. I will begin with an excerpt from the *Matu.* where soundscape brings together the experientiality of time and place. The place is Madurai city and the time is daybreak. The poem describes, in 32 lines, the sounds heard in the city. J. V. Chelliah (a Tamil scholar in Sri Lanka) who first translated the *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems in English, adds a footnote to his translation of this section, "Lines 655-686: in these thirty one lines (*sic*), the poet makes the reader listen to the various sounds heard in Madurai at daybreak. The reader should listen to these with his inner ear and enjoy the poem ..."¹⁸ I will now analyze this soundscape, by describing what my "inner ear" hears.

4.2

... Brahmins sing the Vedas,¹⁹
 their chant,
 like the song of the bees
 that sip honey from
 the flowers blooming
 in a fragrant lake.
 Songsters
 tune the sweet strings of the *yāl*,
 and play the *marutam* melody,
 the rhythm sounded gently.
 Elephant trainers with sticks,

¹⁵See Muthukumar (2008).

¹⁶Kailasapathy 1968, p. 111

¹⁷For a discussion, see Marr (1985).

¹⁸Chelliah (1946;1985), p. 268

¹⁹The text uses the word *antaṇar*, which I translated as "Brahmins". See footnotes 19 and 20 in the previous chapter.

feed mighty elephants
 balls of rice,
 while horses that draw chariots,
 now tethered in stables,
 chew loudly on grass.
 Shops that sell various foods,
 are cleaned with water and cow-dung
 and toddy sellers shout out
 the price of a drink.
 Women,
 having slept in their lovers' arms,
 wake up as daylight spreads;
 their ornaments -
 that glitter like lightning
 which dazzles the eye -
 tinkling as they walk,
 the doors creaking as they are opened
 in houses with strong walls.
 The sounds of
 drunkards, still intoxicated -
 stuttering;
cūtar, *mākatār* and the *vētālikār*
 sing songs of praise,²⁰
 while timekeepers and the king's drums
 announce the new day.
 Bulls snort angrily,
 as the rooster with its spotted comb
 proclaims the dawn;
 males of herons and lovely swans
 call out;
 the peacock summons;
 large elephants trumpet,
 the mingled cries
 of wild beasts in cages ... (*Matu.* 654-677)

This is a rather remarkable passage, and below I will discuss some of its key aspects, paying attention both to the sounds and their representation in (as) poetry. In particular, I argue that some of the poetic devices used to portray soundscape in this passage, are adapted from similar techniques and devices commonly employed in *akam* or love poetry.

Cascading sounds: This is one of the more striking features of this excerpt. The poet follows a technique common to much of *caṅkam* poetry - a technique in which the poem shifts

²⁰The names seem to refer to singers/bards; *cūtar* is perhaps from *sūtaḥ* (Sanskrit), so too *mākatār* from *māgad-haḥ*, and *vētālikār* from *vaitālikaḥ*. Winternitz quotes Manu and says, "... the Sūtas are .. usually called singers.. In war, also charioteers of princes ... the Māgadhās were undoubtedly bards from the land of Magadha...", Winternitz (1927) v.1, p.315. It would be interesting to study the roles of bards in battlefields across ancient India.

swiftly between various images often located in different points of space and time. The net effect is that the poem resembles a painting with multiple images, the reader discovering new meanings as s/he travels between them. The same device is employed in this excerpt, but with a twist. Each shifting image has its own aural representation; or as I would prefer to state it, the poem shifts between different aural representations accompanied by shifting (visual) images. First, the poem refers to Brahmins chanting the Vedas and compares it with the sound of bees humming. Notice how the poem emphasizes the shift in location: the Brahmins are in Madurai city, presumably in their homes, or in the *antaṇarppalli* - a place where Brahmins gather to recite and learn the Vedas (see *Matu.* 474); the bees are said to hum in a lake with blooming flowers. From the latent musicality in the chants of the Vedas and in the humming of the bees, the poem shifts to the sounds from the *yāl*.

Although the reader hears these sounds in sequence, it should be remembered that there is no necessity for the sounds to be heard sequentially. As we experience landscape, the ear is open to all sounds that are part of the landscape. But just as visual perception at any instant is anchored around particular images, so too is aural perception dominated by few sounds. However, it is the presence of all sounds (even if they may not be heard consciously) which lends a defining character to the particular sound/s singled out in perception. It is also for this reason that the poem points to differing sounds. I will elaborate on this point shortly when I discuss the description of morning-sounds in Madurai city.

Contrasting and Simultaneous sounds: Many poems in the *caṅkam* corpus use contrast as a poetic device in the technique of suggestion. This is achieved typically by drawing the reader's attention to images from two entirely different realms (say, the home and the battle field) juxtaposed with each other. By presenting this contrast, the poem opens itself to several suggestive layers of meaning.²¹ In this passage however, the contrast is in the aural, rather than the visual realm. As we become attuned to the different sounds in a soundscape, we begin to appreciate the contrast between them. Take for example, the sounds (described in the poem) of tinkling ornaments as a woman walks, with the creaking of the door being opened. Or the more amusing example - the king's bards heralding the dawn of a new day, the drums being sounded in the palace, while on the streets, we hear the slurred words of a drunk still inebriated from the previous night's excesses.

While the contrast in sounds always enhances the experience of sound, it often plays a more significant role by defining both time and place where the sounds are heard. Consider for instance, the lines that describe shops being cleaned with water and cow-dung, and the toddy seller shouting the price of a drink.²² Anybody who has spent some time in India will testify readily that the act of cleaning a shop (or a house) with water and cow-dung is characterized by distinctive sounds - the sounds of water being splashed on the ground, the sounds the broom makes when the floor is swept, *etc.* When those sounds are heard simultaneously with say, the sounds of shops being opened, we 'know' that it is morning. The experience of dawn is diminished when either sound is heard without the other.

Cross-sensory perception: I discussed the essentially cross-sensory nature of perception at some length previously in this dissertation. Here, I will only note that in most cases, the perception of sounds is only part of perception of place. For this reason, the perception of place, even when dominated by acoustic modalities, will always involve an inter-sensory dimension.

²¹For a discussion, see for instance, Hart 1975;1999, pp. 162-169.

²²The practice of consuming toddy at dawn is prevalent amongst agricultural laborers in rural Tamil Nadu even today. I thank Prof. Raghuraman for pointing this out to me.

It is a matter of personal experience that changing contexts are accompanied by shifting sensory patterns and *vice versa*. Sensory shifts occur naturally when people move between places - like the woman described in example 4.2; the reader follows her as she wakes up and walks (presumably to open the door, although the poem does not say as much). While she walks, her ornaments tinkle and at the same time, our eyes are arrested by the way they glitter like lightning. Similarly, when the poem makes us hear the toddy seller shout or points us to the words of the drunk wandering on the street, it also encourages us to smell the liquor sold in the streets of Madurai; for, that is just the way one would experience the street - taking in the sights, smells and sounds all together. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the same poem in two successive passages describes the city's market place by the sounds, sights and the aroma of various food items sold in the shops.

Suggestion: I alluded to this technique in the context of contrasting sounds. But there is another way in which suggestion animates this passage, which I will now discuss. Let me begin with the lines on the elephants and horses being fed. First, note that this passage comes immediately after the lines that describe the musicians playing the *yāl*; two different places are contrasted by this shift - the musicians' abodes and the king's stables. But as the scene shifts to the stables, our ears pick up the sounds (sounds that are very different from the music of the *yāl*) that the poem suggests by a careful choice of words. Describing the elephant trainers feeding the elephants, the poem uses the participle "*kaippa*". As for the horses, the word "*teviṭṭa*" is used. The respective root verbs are "*kaittal*", "to feed" and "*teviṭṭatal*", "to chew cud". But these verbs are also used to denote sounds. For instance, one of the meanings of *teviṭṭatal* is "to make a sound", "to make noise".²³ To the informed listener (of the poem) then, imagining the stable as a place where horses chew loudly, follows naturally upon hearing the word. Note that the poem only suggests this and does not state it explicitly. Similarly, when the poem contrasts the sounds of the king's drums (sounded at daybreak) with the slurred speech of the drunk, the phrase used to describe the latter is *taḷaṅku kural*; "*ku-ral*" means voice, and the verbal adjective "*taḷaṅku*" derives from the root "*taḷaṅkatal*", "to rattle, like a drum".²⁴ In effect, the poem suggests a contrast between the rattling drums in the king's palace and the drunk's rattle on the streets. Similarly, when the poem refers to the musicians play the *yāl*, the word used is "*paṇṇa*" - *yālōr marutam paṇṇa* - a literal translation of which would read, "as the players of the *yāl* make the *marutam* (melody)". Here again, the choice, "*paṇṇa*" immediately suggests the verb, "*paṇṇatal*", "to make" - which is also the root verb of "*paṇ*", the Tamil equivalent of "*raga*".²⁵

The same technique is used when the poem describes the sounds made by various animals; each of the verbs has an underlying connotation which the informed listener readily hears. For example, the verb used to denote the snorting of the bulls, is "*cilaittal*", "to roar", "to bellow loudly". But this verb could also mean, "to be angry", "to be enraged", suggesting to the listener, a herd of bulls snorting angrily.

In the same way, all the other verbs signify not just the sound specific to the animal or the bird, but also suggests a specific emotive content. For instance, when the sound of the peacocks is described by a word which derives from the verb "*akavutal*", the poem suggests

²³See, for example, *Aiṇ*. 468:1.

²⁴See, for example, *Aiṇ*. 448:1; *Aka*. 24:15.

²⁵The melodic form in Tamil music is called *paṇ*, because sound is understood to be 'made' by eight parts of the human body (chest, throat, etc.) and also because it is 'made' by eight musical gestures (tonal oscillation, etc.). See commentary to the *Cilap*. 3:26.

that the peacock is calling out to its mate, or perhaps it is dancing (since the verb carries these meanings too). The Sanskrit grammarians called this aspect of poetry, the ability of words to be enveloped in layers of associated meanings and significations, *dhvani*, a word which means, among other things, "suggestion" (in the context of literary theory) and "sound".²⁶ The similarity in function (*i.e.*, that of suggesting meanings) between the resonance of sounds and words in poetry was noted by Anandavardhana, the famous Sanskrit theorist who expounded *dhvani* in his work *Dhvanyāloka*. He writes,²⁷ "...the wise men who knew the true essence of poetry, ... (gave) the title *dhvani* to that verbal entity which contains a mixture of denotative and denoted elements and which is designated as "a poem". They did so because of the similarity to *acoustic dhvani* in its being a manifestor (of suggested meanings just as the heard sounds manifest words) ..." (emphasis mine) One might then say that the above passage from the *Matu.* exemplifies how a poem can convey *dhvani* (suggestions) carried by *dhvani* (sound). Table 4.1 lists the various sounds in this passage, along with their direct and suggested meanings.

Animals/Birds	Participle	Root Verb	Meaning(s)
Bees	<i>murala</i> (655)	<i>muralutal</i>	"to hum"; "to sing"
Bulls	<i>cilaiippa</i> (672)	<i>cilaittal</i>	"to bellow"; "to be angry"
Roosters	<i>iyampa</i> (673)	<i>iyamputal</i>	"to sound"; "to praise"
Swans	<i>karaiya</i> (675)	<i>karaital</i>	"to sound"; "to call"
Peacocks	<i>akava</i> (675)	<i>akavutal</i>	"to sound"; "to summon", "to dance"
Elephants	<i>muḷaṅka</i> (676)	<i>muḷaṅkatal</i>	"to be loud"; "to proclaim"
Caged Animals	<i>kuḷuma</i> (677)	<i>kuḷumutal</i>	"to roar in company"; "to gather together"

Table 4.1: Soundscape in the *Maturaikkāñci*: Daybreak in Madurai. Bracketed numerals refer to line number in the text.

Finally, I note that for a poet, the description of soundscape is a very natural place to invoke the technique of suggestion. This is because a soundscape (like place, as discussed in the previous chapter) is an event. But unlike an event perceived predominantly by vision, an audible event can often have a strong imaginative component to it. Owing to the longer wavelength of sound (compared to light), we can hear sounds from places that we do not necessarily have to see. So, when we register a sound without seeing the source, we tend naturally to imagine an event associated with it. The very perception of soundscape thus has a strong imaginative element to it, and for this reason, well suited to the technique of poetic suggestion.

Sounds, Time and Place: After listing the various sounds in Madurai city, the poem goes on to say, "... as darkness leaves, and a new day dawns..." (line 686) making it very clear that the various sounds described are to be associated with a specific time of the day, *viz.*, dawn. But time, as described in this passage, is not just chronometric - although that aspect of time is also stated clearly. Recall that the sounds of daybreak listed in example 4.2 include the drums being sounded to announce the new day. Similarly, the poem mentions those who announce the *nāḷikai*, a unit of time (*Matu.* 671), perhaps referring to a group of timekeepers who announce the time of the day to the king. But this quantitative or chronometric aspect of time is subsumed by the larger experience of time which the passage depicts - the experience of being in Madurai at daybreak - and this experience tends to look to the *past*, rather

²⁶For a readable account, see for instance, Raja (1963), pp. 277-315.

²⁷Daniel H H Ingalls and Patwardhan (1990), p. 169

than the *future*. For example, the sounds of the Vedas and the *yāl* tend to freeze the passage of real time by the feelings they invoke. Similarly, the sounds of various animals evoke a sense of familiarity (again, a feeling necessarily characterized by the past), the repetition of which serves to impart a sense of "immobile time". (Corbin 2004) When taken together with the references to chronometric time, these two aspects of the poem - one referring to (or implying) the arrow of time and the other to frozen or memorial time - might seem contradictory. But this apparent contradiction is resolved once we recognize that the poetic gesture towards the past is, in fact, *a journey to a familiar place* (in this case, the city of Madurai). Let me illustrate this by way of the following example.²⁸ Imagine we are at work or away from home for a few days. At some point of time, we decide to return home. While doing so, we do not experience the journey as much as a forward movement in time, as we view it as a return to familiar surroundings. It is this aspect of experiential time (which always tends to mix the absolutes, 'space' and 'time') that the passage captures.

The manner in which the poem depicts experiential time also demonstrates a fundamental connection between place and sound; viz., sounds are naturally affixed to place. Although most of us experience this connection, we seldom pay any attention to it. But note that when I say sounds are affixed, I do not mean that sounds (of the kind I discuss here) exist independently of a place which then somehow becomes endowed with them. Rather, I suggest that in our perception and/or memory, sounds are naturally co-located with place, just as places are easily perceived and/or recalled by the sounds inherent in those places. Following Murray Schafer, one might call such sounds, "keynote sounds".²⁹ Keynote is a musical term, which Schafer uses deliberately. He makes the point that keynote sounds in a soundscape are like the fundamental tone in a musical composition. Other melodic material may modulate the keynote, but it is with reference to the keynote that other such material becomes meaningful within the composition. So it is with keynote sounds in a soundscape. We may not listen to them consciously, but "they become listening habits".³⁰ When we read the passage from the *Matu.*, we realize that the sounds are all characteristic of the inhabitants of Madurai city (although some of these inhabitants like the caged animals, may not have been city dwellers always); in the language of the *Tol.*, these are sounds native to the landscape; viz., sounds intrinsic to the *karupporuḷ* or the things that constitute place. Without hearing such sounds, our experience of place is distinctly impoverished. Sounds then, reinforce one's sense of being-in-place, just as they fashion an attuned place from a place which may have been initially unfamiliar.

If the soundscape of Madurai in the *Matu.* evokes a feeling of familiarity, a completely different affect underpins the soundscape of Parankunru hill, as heard in the *Pari.* poems. This came across very clearly to me as I put together various descriptions of the hill from all the eight Vel poems. Indeed, one of the more significant aspects of these poems is the importance given to the sounds and smells in the hill - a fact noted by Annie Thomas (Thomas 1971), who remarks that unlike most *caṅkam* poems (whose themes are centered around the mountainous landscape) that emphasize visual imagery, the sounds heard in the hill are given prominence in the *Pari.* poems on Vel. As I remarked earlier in this discussion, there is every reason to believe that the *Pari.* songs were performed and this observation may explain, at

²⁸This example is adapted from Yi-Fu Tuan's discussion on "Time in Experiential Space"; see Tuan (1977), pp. 127-128.

²⁹Schafer (1994), p. 9

³⁰*Ibid.*

least in part, the importance given to sounds. But what can be said about these sounds? (In what way) is the soundscape representative of landscape? Is there a dominant affect which these sounds convey? To attempt answering these questions, we must turn to the poems.

The first aspect of Parankunru's soundscape is its texture. The poems describe a variety of sounds that participate in the creation of soundscape and as we will soon see, these sounds are not arbitrary, but are intimately related to one other. But let us begin with an excerpt which lists some of the sounds heard in the hill.

4.3

Your hill - ³¹
 resounding with
 the powerful beats of drums
 and the thunder in the clouds -
 sounds
 like a battlefield.
 The roaring water
 which cascades downhill
 looks like a necklace of pearls;
 stalks of millet are piled up,
 and the birds chirp in joy.
 In the mountain springs,
 bees with striped wings
 hum
 around colorful flowers
 that touch the tall *kōrai* grass
 bending towards the water ...
 ...
 together with our songs,
 the music of the many-stringed *yāl*,
 the sound of the Vedas ... (*Pari*. 18: 43-52)

Almost everything in the hill is represented in this soundscape - the people who worship Murukan, the bees and the birds and the water are all part of this orchestra and so too are the clouds that surround the hill. Hearing all these sounds for the first time, we may be excused if they sound utterly discordant. But, the poems say, this is not correct. The sounds only seem to be discordant.

4.4

... here,
 the melodious sounds of the *pāṇaṅ*'s *yāl*
 and there,
 the humming of the bees that buzz
 around fresh flowers;

³¹Parimelalakar interprets "hill" as "your (Murukan's) temple in the hill.

here,
 the sounds of the flute with its holes
 and there,
 the music of the swarming bees;
 here,
 the beats of the *muḷavu* drum made from mud
 and there,
 the roaring waters as they cascade
 down the towering peaks ...
 here,
 the sweet voice of the *pāṭiṇi*³²
 singing the *pālai* melody
 and there,
 the cries of the peacock
 dancing in rhythm;
 Discordant, they may seem,
 yet this hill - which belongs
 to the One who vanquished His foes -
 welcomes these sounds. (*Pari. 17: 9-21*)

The last line of this passage uses the verb "*etirkoḷal*", "to welcome" or "to accept". We may then ask, how does the hill "welcome" these sounds or accept them as its own? One way to understand these sounds is to treat their descriptions in the above passage as similes; viz., the music of the flute is like the humming of the bees, etc. This is for instance, how the learned commentator Parimelalakar interprets the text. But this interpretation is rather unsatisfactory because it rejects the question - how does the hill accept these sounds - by refusing to ask it. To understand the nature of these sounds, I suggest we should compare this passage to descriptions of the very same soundscape in other poems from this collection. Doing so, we begin to suspect that there may be more to these sounds than that meets the ear. In the following, I reproduce excerpts from two different Vel poems.

4.5

The clouds resound
 to the trumpeting of Your elephant;
 the rooster by Your side crows
 as the hills echo to these sounds. (*Pari. 8:17-21*)

The bees hover around
 flowers that bloom,
 humming in tune
 with the sounds of the flute,
 played by dextrous fingers.
 The buzzing of the bees

³²*pāṭiṇi*: a woman singer

accompanies
 the music of the *yāl*,
 as the sounds of the water
 add
 to the booming beats
 of the *mulavu* drums. (*Pari*. 21: 33-36)

Reading these two passages,³³ we note that the sounds in the hill, far from discordant, are in essence, imitative. Imitation is another feature of Parankunru's soundscape. The hill echoes with mimetic sounds; they sound and re-sound, as the hill accepts these sounds as its own. Indeed, the very act of Murukan vanquishing his foes (which the above passage refers to) involves acceptance or welcoming them as his own. As the story goes, when Murukan defeats Cur, the demon asks for forgiveness and requests that he be spared from death. Murukan then turns Cur into a peacock, which becomes his vehicle.

Adding to the captivating quality of echoing sounds are the myths associated with the hill.³⁴ As seen in the above examples, the humming of the bees and the sounds of the birds are prominent sounds in Parankunru's soundscape. One *Pari*. poem tells us the following story:³⁵ Devayanai, Murukan's celestial wife is angry with him because of his love for Valli, the woman of the hills. To appease Devayanai, Murukan falls at her feet and she accepts him once more. Seeing this, Valli gets angry with Murukan and prevents him from going to Devayanai. A battle then erupts between the female companions of either wife. In the end, Devayanai's companions are vanquished, and they become "bees that hum like the strings of the *yāl* / crested peacocks that spread their feathers as they dance / cuckoos that sound longingly..." (*Pari*. 9: 63-66). The elephants in Parankunru too have a special meaning, for Murukan rides the elephant when he goes to war with the demon, Cur.³⁶

Taken together, the texture of Parankunru's soundscape, its imitative character and the myths associated with the hill impart a magical quality to this place. This is not Madurai - where we are attuned to the morning sounds of the city; this is a hill whose sounds and echoes tend to confound us even as we attempt to make sense of the place that it is.

4.6

A small girl, separated from her parents,
 loses her way in the rocky paths.
 Not finding mother and father,
 afraid she has lost her way,
 she cries out aloud,
 " Oo Oo Aa Aa "

³³These exemplify other such passages in the Vel poems. See, for instance, *Pari*. 8: 29-35; 18: 38-50; 21: 30-38. The theme of the hill echoing with mimetic sounds is also found in one poem on Mal which describes the Maliruncolai hill - see, *Pari*. 15: 38-45.

³⁴An echoing soundscape as sacral landscape is also to be found in the works of Tirugnanasambandar, the poet-saint who lived in the 7th century. A comparison drawing on features common to his poems and the *Pari*. songs, will be discussed elsewhere.

³⁵*Pari*. 9: 28-69

³⁶See, *Pari*. 5: 2; 17: 49. The elephant is called *pinimukam*. One poem describes the devotees of Murukan carrying various things to Parankunru hill for their worship. The list includes figurines of peacocks and elephants; *Pari*. 8: 100-101.

The mountain
 does not understand her
 and echoes her cries,
 "Oo Oo Aa Aa".
 And she, thinking
 that her parents beckon her,
 goes seeking them in the hills.
 Not finding them there,
 she weeps ...
 weeps ...
 Confounding simple minds
 is the nature of the hill,
 belonging to the One
 pleased by those who praise Him. (*Pari*. 19: 58-66)

The final example I choose to study, is excerpted from the *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (*Mal.*) - a poem (five hundred and eighty two lines) in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology. This poem also belongs to the class of *Ārṛuppaṭai* texts; the poet (Kausikanar) addresses a group of *kūttar* (dancers) and advises them to seek the patronage of king Nannan whose territory includes Naviramalai, a mountain range in Northern Tamilnadu which features prominently in the poem. Many contemporary scholars agree with Swaminatha Aiyar's opinion that this mountain range is situated in the North Arcot district of modern Tamil Nadu, and that Naviramalai is now called "Parvatamalai". One of the pieces of evidence which favors this assignation is the name mentioned in the poem, "*kāriyuntikkaṭavul*", "the God who drank poison", referring to God Siva who resides in this hill (*Mal.* 83). Today, the deity in the hill temple is called by the Sanskrit name, "*kālakaṇṭheśvaraḥ*" - "the God whose neck is dark-blue". There is also a small river which flows in the area. In the poem, it is called *Cēyāru*, the river of *Cēy*, usually understood to be Murukan (the word "*cēy*" means among other things, "red", and "son"). Today, the river goes by the name, *Ṣaṇmukhanadī*, the river of Shanmukha or Murukan (the son of Siva).

I will begin with the name given to the poem, as it has everything to do with this discussion. The very name, *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (*lit.* the rut produced by the mountain) is unique since it is the only *Ārṛuppaṭai* text in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology which does not have the *Ārṛuppaṭai* suffix.³⁷ Some scholars call this poem *kūttarārṛuppaṭai*, to bring it within the norm. But it is the phrase, *malaipaṭukaṭām* which appears in the text:

4.7

... the foothills and the peaks
 resonate
 with countless sounds,
 as the quarters of the sky
 echo
 to the sounds of this hill -
 like an elephant in rut. (*Mal.* 345-348)

³⁷Compare for example with other *Ārṛuppaṭai* poems: *cirupāṇārṛuppaṭai*, *porunarārṛuppaṭai*, etc.

Although my translation makes the analogy between the elephant and the hill explicit, the poem only implies it. The relevant line in the poem reads, *malaipaṭu kaṭā mātirat tiyampa* (*Mal.* 348) "the quarters of the sky sounding to the rut of the mountain"; as we will soon see, the context demands "rut" to be identified with sounds. But rut, as we know, is produced by elephants. In effect, the poem compares the mountain range to a herd of elephants. The tall peaks resemble mighty elephants and used in this context, the word "rut" brings to mind not just the sounds in the hill but also the various smells and sights. By using the seemingly incongruous phrase, "rut produced by the mountain", the poem in fact forces us to engage in a sensuous reading. It is perhaps for this reason that the compiler of the *Pattuppāṭu* anthology chose this sense-ful phrase as the poem's title.

The elephant as an implied metaphor for the hill is also found in one of the *Pari.* poems. A poem on Murukan describes Parankunru hill rising to the skies - the waterfalls are like decorative cloth (adorning the face of an elephant) and the mountain ridges with fragrant *pālai* trees resembling a carriage with a canopy (the *howdah* on the elephant's back). Commenting on this, Swaminatha Aiyar says, "from the references to the decorative cloth, carriage with the canopy and the naming of the *pālai* tree whose fragrance is often compared to rut, it is clear that the metaphor of an elephant is being invoked." (*Pari.* 21: 13-15).

In the following, I will discuss a passage from the *Mal.* which describes the soundscape of Naviramalai.³⁸ This is a very famous passage (especially since it features the name of the poem) and has been discussed at great length by several scholars. Many of them point out how the passage emphasizes the abundance of Nannan's mountain or the vastness of Nannan's kingdom which encompassed the hills, forest and agricultural tracts.³⁹ One scholar compares the mountain (described in this passage) rather poetically to a musical instrument which plays sounds of two thousand years ago (Seturaghunathan 1952). I will follow a slightly different approach in reading this passage, and attempt to make the connection between journey, desolation, the sounds of the mountain and habitat.

The opening lines provide the context, with the poet addressing the group of traveling dancers,

4.8

Walking along the path which
those who know the way
point out to you,
cross the hillocks - short and tall,
carefully,
in the treacherous ranges -
fearful
even to look at!
And if you then rest
in the shade of the trees
lined with flowers,
you will hear
many different sounds. (*Mal.* 287-291)

³⁸*Mal.* 287-348; the passage concludes with the excerpt discussed in the previous paragraph.

³⁹See for instance, Nagarajan (2004;2007).

Let me begin my analysis by considering the main themes in the *Ārṛuppaṭai* poems. Most scholars consider *ārṛuppaṭuttal*, the direction / advice the speaker of the poem gives to the travelers, as the central theme. For instance, discussing the *Ārṛuppaṭai* poems in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, M. Varadarajan quotes the *Tol.* aphorism which says that this poem takes the form of "an instruction given to the impoverished which tells them of the riches bestowed (upon the speaker, by the patron) and which urges them to go and seek wealth" (*Tol. Poruḷ* 88). Varadarajan says, "there are many who suffer in poverty but later become wealthy because of unexpected magnanimity. Isn't it the duty of these people to help others who suffer, by advising them where they could go and obtain help?" (Varadarajan 1952;1969) Admittedly, this is an important, if not the central theme in these poems. However, while reading the poems we cannot help but note another dominant motif, *viz.*, journey. In these poems, the travelers have to journey a long way before reaching the king/ chieftain who would eventually welcome them. This journey is so long that most of the poem describes the way, rather than the destination and what happens there. Take for example, the *Mal.* The poem is 583 lines long, of which approximately 380 lines describe the way to Nannan's city. The emphasis on the journey and the way or the path (called "*āru*" in Tamil) is not unique to the *Mal.* and is to be seen in all the *Ārṛuppaṭai* poems in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*. Indeed, the same *Tol.* aphorism which Varadarajan quotes also says that these poems also contain a description of the various sights along the way.⁴⁰

I will therefore take a slightly different view here - a view which shifts the focus from the patron (praised by the poems) and/or the speaker (the poet) but instead turns to the act of journeying. One might say that such an approach places the traveler at the center of the poem, but this statement has to be qualified further. Although the poems describe the way or the journey, the various sights and scenes are recounted as experienced by the speaker, who, is/was also a traveler. For this reason, I prefer to study these poems as telling us something about the very act of journeying. This is also consistent with the observation that much of *caṅkam* poetry focuses on the theme of journey. For example, it is well known that every other poem in the *Aka.* is set in the *pālai* or wasteland. The sequence of poems in this anthology takes us across different landscapes, but the journey always takes us through the wasteland. This is not a coincidence because journeys always entail displacement and displacement is often accompanied by desolation.

Desolation, when it refers to human despair, is usually the name given to the feeling of being alone and without help; it is "intensified solitariness" (Casey 1993:2009). However, it is important to realize that solitariness in the *Ārṛuppaṭai* poems may *not* refer to the feeling of being alone; *i.e.*, alone without family and/or friends. Almost all poems speak of the traveling bard or dancer accompanied by his wife and other bards / dancers.⁴¹ The general impression one gathers is that these performers travelled in groups. Thus, at least in these poems, desolation or solitariness has nothing to do with being alone and everything to do with the feeling of being displaced. Desolation here, is the despair that arises from displacement - "the loss of an accustomed center",⁴² which necessarily obtains as the traveler leaves home for a new place. Desolation can also arise from certain features of the landscape such as bar-

⁴⁰ ... *ārṛiṭaik kātci yuraḷat tōnrip*
perṛa peruvaḷam perāark karivurūic
cenrupaya netirac coṅṅa pakkamum ... (Tol. Poruḷ. 88)

⁴¹ Very often, these poems begin by describing how tired the wife looks.

⁴² Casey 1993;2009, p. 195

renness and isolation that appear particularly forbidding to the traveler. Finally, there is a third aspect of the journey in the *Ārruppaṭai* poems, which aggravates desolation - the journey is always long. As the poems describe it, the journey is punctuated by short stays at various strange places. Just as the traveler gets accustomed to the ways of this strange place, he is forced to resume his journey, which takes him to a string of unknown places. As Edward Casey observes, a feeling of forlornness then arises within the traveler, primarily from the fear that no place may harbor him. Casey also remarks that "no panacea exists ... no concretely practicable steps are yet available ... at the moment of transition from one place to another..."⁴³ But the *Ārruppaṭai* poems attempt to do precisely this - they tell the traveler that the way may be weary and at times, even dangerous. Yet the poems assure and reassure the traveler that the way is not desolate. To understand the connection between this and soundscape, one first has to note the strong association found in the *caṅkam* poems between sounds and habitat.

Sound, in *caṅkam* poems often signifies habitat. Many of the words that refer to "sound", often refer very specifically to *places* that are characterized by such sounds. Consider for instance, the word, "*cummai*". One of its meanings is "sound" and the word itself (not in vogue now) seems to be onomatopoeiac in origin. It is often used in conjunction with *iḷum*, another onomatopoeiac word which indicates a persistent hum. For example, we hear a bard saying in the *Poru.*, "... then I entered the gates of his vast city which hums with sounds." (*Poru.* 64-67)⁴⁴. What could these sounds possibly be? The *Matu.* lists some sounds typical to a city; among these are the sound of the wind which blows through the windows in tall buildings, crowds on the streets speaking various languages, the voices of those who announce (to the accompaniment of drumbeat) impending events, sounds from musical instruments that imitate the sounds of water being scooped out and the revelry of those who dance to these sounds, ... (*Matu.* 357-365). According to the commentator, *cummai* is the collective sound, the "hum" or the "bustle" which envelops all these individual sounds; it is the collective breath of soundscape / place. It is also this bustle which reaches the weary traveler's ears first, effectively ending his loneliness. The bustle is agreeable to his ears and this is perhaps why *cummai* is often qualified further by saying it sounds "*iḷum*". This is an onomatopoeiac word typically used in the poems as indicating an agreeable sound - the sound of the sea, waterfalls, rain, etc. Another onomatopoeiac word which often goes together with *cummai* is *kal* - a word which hints at excitement, to which the itinerant performer (such as a bard or dancer) is naturally drawn - for exciting sounds represent habitat, festivity and the opportunity for him to present his art. This aspect of sound - as something indicative of habitat - comes across uniformly in all the *Ārruppaṭai* poems; thus for instance in the *Mal.*, when the dancers finally reach Nannan's city they hear the city, which sounds, "... like the sea, like thundering clouds" (*Mal.* 483).

Having said as much, we must however note that at this point in the poem (i.e., the above passage from the *Mal.*), the traveler has not yet reached his final destination. He is on his way, and has to cross this mountain (described in the passage) first before he sees Nannan. What is it in the mountain's soundscape which could possibly alleviate the desolation of landscape? To answer this, we must first clarify how the process of making sense of place can be grounded in the acoustic dimension and here, I will follow closely, the work of Steven Feld, who studied the notion of acoustic space among the forest-dwelling Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea (Feld 1996, 2005). Feld introduced the notion of "acoustemology" - a study of how sound-

⁴³*Ibid.* pp. 197-198

⁴⁴*yānumava niḷumeṇ cummai yiṭaṇuṭai varaippin ... naṇperu vāyir pukku...* (*Poru.* 64-67)

scapes fashion a people's sense of place. It is "an exploration ... of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth" (Feld 2005). That the process of making sense (in general, and making sense of place in particular) entails reflection cannot be denied. Nonetheless, such reflective process may have a strong auditory component to it. Places are "potentially reverberant as they are reflective",⁴⁵ and therefore one's perception and memory of place, viz., one's experience of place, may be grounded strongly in an acoustic dimension. An example of this was discussed earlier - the soundscapes of Madurai at dawn. But in situations like those described in the *Ārruppaṭai* poems, sounds have a very practical significance as well. In a forest for example, or in the hill which the traveler in the *Mal.* finds himself, the traveler hears much he cannot see. It is very likely that the auditory information he receives far outweighs (both in magnitude and variety) visual input. At any given time he hears a multitude of them, with one particular sound appearing to gain primacy in the soundscape, only to be overwhelmed by another. On the other hand, the eye is preoccupied only with that which is immediately visible. Feld notes that, "... acoustic revelatory presence is ... always in tension with visual hidden presence in primal experience of the forest"⁴⁶. As a result, the dialogic of perception - the experience of place - is underpinned by what is heard but not seen.

Here, an apparent similarity between this and my earlier discussion of unseen sounds in Madurai city may be noted. In that example, we discussed how the act of hearing sounds from hidden (or distant) sources is strongly cross-sensory and how one hears additional meaning in the sounds. However there is an important difference between the soundscapes described in the *Matu.* and say, the *Mal.* Whereas Madurai is experienced by an *emplaced* self, it is the *displaced* traveler in the *Mal.* who hears the soundscape of Naviramalai. In the former, visual absence enhances the imagination in the dialectic of perception; but imagination here is free from anxiety, since the emplaced self is at home in these surroundings. But in the *Mal.*, the fact that the traveler is in a strange place accentuates the tension between the acoustic presence and the visual hidden presence. This tension may never be resolved unless the traveler has some idea about what the strange sounds in a strange place could possibly mean - and so it is that the speaker reassures him, "rest in the shade and listen to the various sounds", which he goes on to describe. Instead of translating this long passage,⁴⁷ I will point out how the passage makes the very fundamental connection between sounds and habitat.

A striking aspect of this passage is that the sounds are almost always associated with humans. When read together with the line which summarizes the sounds - "the sounds of the mountain" (line 348) - the connection the speaker makes between sounds and human habitat becomes evident. On the face of it, it may seem odd that the mountain is identified by the people or animals (the sources of the sounds described) that dwell therein. But upon some reflection, it becomes clear that these poems do not understand place as geographical terrain which is filled with things native to the terrain. The inhabitants and/or objects that are characteristic of a place are not *in* a place, rather they are *of* that place; they are intrinsic to the very notion of place being *that place*. Therefore, the sounds of the mountain are not different from the sounds made by the people who dwell there; and it is this connection between sound and habitat, I pursue as the central theme of this passage.

How then does this place sound? To begin with, we hear the sounds made by celestial

⁴⁵Feld 2005, p. 185

⁴⁶*Ibid.* p. 186

⁴⁷For a translation, see Chelliah 1946;1985, pp. 309-312.

maidens who bathe in the waterfalls of Naviramalai - they scoop the water with their hands, making a sound which the poem compares to the sounds of the traveling dancers' drums. Among the other sounds we hear are the clamor of the hunters who encircle a trapped elephant, the cries of the hunters injured by the quills of the porcupine, the songs of women who soothe their injured husbands (the hunters), the shouts of the young women who gather flowers, music to which the women in the hills dance, and the songs women sing as they pound millet. As Table 4.2 shows, almost all these sounds are identified unambiguously with humans and a specific (human) activity.

An interesting contrast can be seen on comparing Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. When the former refers to the sounds made by animals, they are either domesticated or caged. In the latter however, the reference to animals is almost always associated with human activity. This clarifies what I mentioned earlier - the difference between the soundscapes heard by an emplaced city-dweller and a displaced traveler. The sounds of wild animals do not cause anxiety in the city-dweller for he knows these animals are caged; in fact, hearing the sounds of controlled wilderness creates a feeling of romance which enriches his experience of being at home. But the traveler in a strange place has to be reassured of human presence, even as he hears the sounds of wild animals. In this particular example, the soundscape tells the traveler that this mountain is not desolate and that he is in the midst of habitation.

Source of sound	Sound	Activity	Meaning(s)
Celestial maidens	<i>iṇṇicai</i> (296)	playing in the water	"sweet sound", "music"
Hunters	<i>pūcal</i> (299)	trapping elephants	"din", "clamor"
Hunters	<i>aḷukai</i> (301)	hunting porcupines	"sound in pain", "weeping"
Women	<i>pātal</i> (304)	singing	"song"
Young girls	<i>pūcal</i> (306)	gathering flowers	"din", "clamor"
Elephants	<i>kural</i> (310)	calling the leader of the herd	"sound", "voice"
Monkeys	<i>pūcal</i> (314)	grieving for a young one	"din", "clamor"
Hunters	<i>uvakai</i> (318)	gathering honey	"joy", "joyful sounds"
Women	<i>kuravai</i> (322)	dancing	a kind of dance
Water	<i>icai</i> (324)	echoing in the caves	"sound", "music"
People	<i>ōtai</i> (327)	training elephants	"sound", "vocal sound"
Young girls	<i>pūcal</i> (329)	chasing birds away	"din"
People	<i>ārppu</i> (333)	watching bulls fight	"tumult", "joy"
Bulls	<i>kampalai</i> (336)	fighting	"roar"
Children	<i>ōtai</i> (339)	driving calves	"sound", "vocal sound"
Sugarcane press	<i>ēttam</i> (341)	crushing sugarcane	"noise"
Young women	<i>vallai</i> (343)	pounding millet	a type of song
People	<i>parai</i> (344)	sounding the drum	a kind of drum

Table 4.2: Soundscape in the *Malaipaṭukaṭām*: The sounds of Naviramalai. Bracketed numerals refer to line number in the text.

This point is emphasized when the speaker concludes his description of Naviramalai's soundscape, where he draws an analogy which the traveling dancers / bards can readily appreciate.

4.9

... echoing with sounds,⁴⁸
 his vast mountain⁴⁹
 is like
 a festive city - where
 women adorned with
 garlands of colorful flowers,
 dance
 to the beat of *mulavu* drums
 that never fall asleep.
 Enjoy its sights, sounds,
 food of various kinds,
 and thinking
 "may we continue to enjoy these",
 feel at home
 as though you were family... (*Mal.* 349-355)

This place is not only inhabited, but its people are so hospitable that the traveler feels he is family. No longer does the mountain hold the terrifying prospect of being desolate. Its sights, sounds and perhaps most importantly, food of various kinds are to be enjoyed - I note here that the reference to hospitality and food after describing the soundscape is no accident. If the soundscape assures the traveler that the mountain is a dwelling place for people, hospitality and the offering of food reassure him that he can "feel at home ... as though (he) were family...". By their very nature, hospitality and the offering of food connect people to places, a connection which the traveler seeks during his journey. How such a connection is made in these poems and how food plays an important role in the experience of place constitutes the next topic in this discussion.

⁴⁸See lines 345-348, translated in example 4.7.

⁴⁹"his mountain" - King Nannan's mountain.

Chapter 5

Foodscapes

"Why would anyone want to remember anything they had eaten?"¹

5.1

"There,
 you will get rice -
 cooked from
 the grain which bears
 the name of a bird-²
 together with hot pieces of
 green pomegranate,
 fried in butter -
 churned from the
 buttermilk of plump cows -
 and seasoned with
 fragrant curry leaves, pepper,
 and pickles made
 of mangoes cut from tall trees..." (*Perum.* 305-310)

Food is a recurrent theme in the *Ārruppaṭai* poems.³ In the previous chapter, I indicated that the cast of characters in the *Ārruppaṭai* texts include the speaker, the traveler and a chieftain or king whom the speaker praises for his benevolence. Interestingly, food features in these poems in the context of all three characters. But that is not all, for as we will see shortly, food also features prominently in the description of journey.⁴ But as a theme, food is represented in these poems in different ways. This plurality of representation offers the possi-

¹David Sutton quoting an (unnamed) Oxford don; see Sutton 2001, p. 1

²The reference is unclear. In his commentary, Naccinarkkiniyar asserts that the phrase denotes a particular variety of grain called *irācaṇṇam*. "By referring to 'the grain which bears the name of a bird' is meant, *irācāṇṇam*..." P. V. Comacuntaranar thinks this is a faulty reading (of the commentary) and says the reference is to a type of grain called *karuṭaṇ campā*, "eagle-grain".

³For the purposes of this discussion, I do not consider the *Tiru.* in this group, since its theme is religious.

⁴This is seen in three of the four *Ārruppaṭai* texts I analyze, with *Poru.* being the exception.

bility of understanding the seemingly simple act of eating (or offering something to eat) described in these poems, as related to more intricate aspects that characterize the complex nature of human experience. As we shall soon see, food and the acts of receiving / giving food in these texts represent different ideas and ideals that include poverty, benevolence, hospitality, community, and most importantly (for the purposes of this dissertation), place memory. Since I am unaware of any discussion of the *Āruppaṭai* poems which pays particular attention to food,⁵ I will begin with the more obvious representations of food in these poems, before proceeding to analyze the relationship between food, perception and place.

Here for example, is a passage (excerpted from the *Cīru.*) where the speaker of the poem (a bard of some sort, possibly a drummer as the passage indicates) speaks of poverty and hunger in his family.

5.2

"In our shabby kitchen
lies the dog, barking,
unable to feed
her pups - their eyes closed
and ears drooping -
nibbling her dry teats.
Hollow mushrooms sprout
on crumbling walls
that serve as food
for swarming white ants;
the roof has collapsed.
And there,
this drummer's wife -⁶
bangles on her wrists,
her slender waist made thinner
by gnawing hunger -
chops
a few *vēlai* greens -⁷
plucked
from the rubbish heap -
and cooks them without salt.
And we -
ashamed
of being seen by the eyes of fools -
close the doors and sit down to eat
with our large family." (*Cīru.* 130-140)

⁵I am yet to come across a serious analysis of food in the *caṅkam* poems. The few works on the foods featured in them do not go very much beyond a listing of various foods. See for instance, Namacivayam (1981).

⁶The poem uses the phrase *kiṇaimakaḷ* - *kiṇai* is a kind of drum and the word denotes the drummer; *makaḷ* in this context means wife. The phrase suggests that the speaker is a drummer.

⁷*vēlai* - plant variety

Notice how in this single passage, every stanza refers to food. The passage is bracketed by two scenes - a hungry dog failing to feed its equally hungry pups and a poor musician struggling to feed his family. By framing the passage between these two scenes, the poem suggests a comparison between the dog which is unable to feed its brood and the impoverished musician who is too poor to take care of his family. The reference to the pups with closed eyes and drooping ears is to emphasize that the pups are so small that they cannot really drink much milk; nor can they suck at the mother's teats too strongly. Even if they could, the mother is so starved that she is unable to feed them. Similarly (the poem implies), the bard's children do not require much, but he and his wife are so poor that they cannot feed them much more than leaves plucked from a rubbish heap and cooked without salt.

In this rather stark passage, food is represented in its most obvious and fundamental form - as something which sustains and nourishes life. At the same time, the passage also hints at the subtle relationships between food, its consumption and social values - as for instance, the reference to "ashamed of being seen the eyes of fools," which translates the phrase, "*maṭavōr kāṭci nāṇi*". Most commentators understand "fools" as referring to people who delight in others' misfortunes. The reference to closed doors also carries another implication: owing to his poverty, the speaker is unable to discharge his duties as a householder. Important among such duties is the giving of food to strangers. In this context, the door is used as a common motif in the *caṅkam* poems. The door constitutes the boundary between the inner world (the home) and the outer. These two worlds are bridged by the mere act of giving (and receiving) food, an act which thus connects place and people in a very fundamental way. For this reason, the *caṅkam* poems glorify the hospitality of the householder who eats with his doors open; *i.e.*, an ideal householder is one who welcomes guests and feeds them. For example, the hero in the *Kuṛi*. attempting to assure his lover that he intends to marry her, speaks of their married life. He describes a "prosperous household which looks beautiful/ its doors wide open/ giving plentifully/ to the wayfarers who gather /rice cooked in a large vessel / with ghee and meat / and eating whatever is left after they have eaten ..." (*Kuṛi*. 202-204). Thus, when the passage in the *Cīru*. says, "... we.. close the doors and sit down to eat...", its implications go far beyond a description of the drummer's material poverty and conveys a householder's sense of shame in being unable to perform his duty as a gracious host.

A very different representation of food is seen in the passage below. Here, the speaker (of the *Poru*.) tells the traveler of king Karikalan's hospitality.

5.3

"Inviting us to his quarters,
he served us with food - ⁸
urging us to eat
well cooked thighs of
goats, fed on twists of grass;
juicy pieces of meat,
strung together on iron spits,
and roasted so hot
that we cooled them with
our mouths,

⁸In this passage, "he" refers to the king Karikalan.

again and again.
 And when we tired
 of eating this,
 he gave us
 sweets of various kinds.
 Drinking toddy,
 while lovely women
 with bright foreheads
 danced -
 to the music of the melodious *yāl*
 and the beats of the *muḷavu* drums
 made of mud -
 we spent several days.
 One day, saying "try this rice,"
 he offered us cooked rice -
 white as jasmine buds,
 well formed and long -
 like the fingers of a hand -
 together with roasted seeds,
 and fried food.
 This, we ate so much
 that the food stuck
 in our throats.
 Feasting on meat
 day and night,
 our teeth became
 blunt,
 like the plough which tills dry land.
 Unable to breathe any longer,
 we shuddered
 at the thought of food."⁹ (*Poru*. 103-119)

Prompted perhaps by such descriptions in the *Ārruppaṭai* texts, J. V. Chelliah, the translator of the *Pattu*. poems, says the following about bards and food: "... They (the bards) suffered from chronic poverty, and were generally half starved ... When, however, they succeeded in getting the favor of kings, they were well-fed and given valuable presents. They were gluttonous, drinking toddy and eating meat to excess."¹⁰ One can almost hear the translator clucking with disapproval, writing those lines. Quite apart from the troublesome enterprise of judging the eating habits of bards, dismissing detailed descriptions of food in these poems by relating them merely to momentary metabolic necessities ignores deeper connections between food and various other aspects that include the modality of giving and receiving food, the relationship between performer and patron, and the act of remembering. Under the seemingly simple acts of giving and eating, food often hides various other meanings

⁹"We shuddered at the thought of food translates "ūṇ muṇintu" - "we despised food" (*Poru*. 118).

¹⁰Chelliah 1946;1985, p. 7

and socio-cultural connotations.

Of these, the role of food in the relationship between patron and artist is arguably the most obvious. It is also the only theme related to food discussed previously by scholars who studied the *Ārruppaṭai* texts.¹¹ As the above passage from the *Poru* indicates, court feasting is a familiar theme in the *caṅkam* poems. But in court feasting, as with hospitality in a household, the mode of giving food (or other gifts, for that matter) takes precedence over what is given.¹² In a famous elegy, the poetess Auvai sings of the king Atiyaman's generosity:

5.4

"If he had only a little toddy, he would give it to us.
 Alas, not anymore!
 If he had more,
 he would drink it happily,
 as we sang.
 Alas, not anymore!
 If he had only a little rice,
 he would set it on many plates.
 Alas, not any more!
 If he had more,
 he would set it on many plates.
 Alas, not any more! ..." (*Pura*. 235: 1-5)

But in another poem, the same poetess has the following to say of the same king. As the story goes, the king delayed giving her gifts which caused Auvai to become angry.

5.5

... does the king Atiyamān Añci -
 whose horses are swift -
 not know himself? or not know me?
 Not all wise and great ones are dead
 that this world has become empty.
 We shall carry our instruments,¹³
 and pack our bags.¹⁴
 Like children - of the carpenter who chops trees -
 who wander in the forest,
 their hands skilled at wielding the axe,¹⁵
 whichever way we go,
 that way we will get rice! (*Pura*. 206: 6-13)

¹¹ See for example, Varadarajan 1952;1969 and other essays therein.

¹² For a discussion on this point from a pan-Indic perspective, see Khare (1986).

¹³ The poem uses the word "*kalam*" which the commentators interpret as the stringed musical instrument, the *yāl*. See following footnote.

¹⁴ The word used here is "*kalappai*"; "*pai*" means "bag" and if "*kalam*" were to be understood as referring to musical instruments, "*kalappai*" would denote bags in which instruments were packed and carried by wandering musicians. The word, used in this sense, also occurs in the *Mal*. (*Mal*. 13)

¹⁵ This is a simile; the children refer to the poets / bards, the ax - their learning, the forest - the world where they wander, and the wood corresponds to the food they receive.

"Does the king not know himself? or not know me?" - this line illustrates the complicated nature of giving and receiving. It is not enough that the king give generously. He is also expected to be gracious in giving. Only then, will he be counted amongst the "wise and great ones" and only such gracious giving counts as hospitality. That a poet could say boldly to a king that she would get food wherever she goes, also shows the complex relationship between kings and poets. This was certainly not a unidirectional relationship in which, "... the poets had perforce to depend on the few patrons on whom they lavished their choicest eulogia in return for the food and clothing they were provided with ..." ¹⁶ Nor was it a relationship driven merely by the fact that kings and poets benefited mutually from one another - the kings patronized the poets who legitimized the leadership of the former through their poems. There are no doubt elements of both hypotheses in the relationship between kings and poets, but a careful reading of the poems reveals a more complex interaction which includes among other things, the propriety of giving, regard and genuine mutual affection. I recall in this context, the poet Kapilar's elegy to Pari which I discussed in Chapter 2. ¹⁷ In that poem, Kapilar speaks of the the dead king who befriended him by offerings of food and drink. Such is the power of food that Kapilar memorializes his friend through the place (the Parampu hill) where their friendship grew and the food that was partaken.

There is another aspect to the passage from the *Poru*, which demands our attention - the insistence with which the bard describes (and often repeats) the details of the food he ate in Karikalan's court. This is clearly a memorable meal - a meal which is distinguished as a special event, and it is interesting to see how the poem achieves this. Mary Douglas who studied the structure of a meal (as well as the structural relationship between one meal and another) makes an analogy with music and/or poetry, the latter being of particular relevance in the context of this discussion (Douglas 1971). In her view, a memorable meal has something in common with music and poetry - the relationship between 'part' and 'whole'; The 'part' always recalls the 'whole' just as the 'whole' reveals the 'parts' underlying its structure. This is a well known relationship both in music and in poetry and is used extensively in focusing the listener's attention on the theme or the motif. David Sutton takes this analysis further by noting that there are at least two forms of repetition - repetition with difference and repetition that is savored (Sutton 2001). Both forms are seen in the passage from the *Poru*. Of course one can argue whether such descriptions of court feasting in the *Ārruppaṭai* texts are poetic representations of food events (that employ the technique of juxtaposing the 'part' and the 'whole') or if they point to a poetic characteristic of a food event. I propose that it is the latter and will attempt to justify this claim shortly, by adducing several other examples from these poems that describe food in other settings and also by noting how specific poetic techniques (such as metaphor) are used to impress upon the listener, the intensely sensuous nature of the feast. But before I proceed to do so, I will point out a few other symbolic aspects of food.

Although all the examples I discussed so far deal specifically with the munificence of kings, the notion of gracious giving underlies almost all representations of food and giving in the *caṅkam* poems. Domestic hospitality is commonly eulogized in these poems (as it is in almost all cultures); the ideal is expressed in the *Kuraḷ*, which asserts, "the only reason for leading the life of a householder is to afford hospitality to strangers" (*Kuraḷ* 81). The same text indicates that householder can think about food for himself, only after he has offered food to

¹⁶Sivaraja Pillai's introduction to the *Tol.*, quoted by Kailasapathy; see Kailasapathy 1968, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷See examples 2.16 and 2.17.

others. A famous couplet specifies the hierarchy of giving - "one's ancestors (Manes), gods, guests, family and self: performing one's duties to all these five constitutes the ideal for the householder." (*Kuṛaḷ* 43). The word used here for "guests" is "*viruntu*", a word which demonstrates a very interesting semantic connection which Tamil makes between strangers, hospitality and food. Today, the word "*viruntu*" means, "feast" and guests are called "*viruntinar*". But in old Tamil, the word "*viruntu*" meant among other things, "novelty", "new", "newcomer". For instance, in his commentary on *Kuṛaḷ* 43, Parimelalakar says, "... '*viruntu*' means 'new'.¹⁸ In the given context, the word represents the newcomer..." Among the duties of the householder is hospitality offered to a newcomer and for this reason the very act of offering food (to the newcomer) came to be called metonymically, "*viruntu*."

While the relationship between food and hospitality (as described in the *caṅkam* poems) has been commented upon by several scholars, another aspect of food - as featured in these poems - has been entirely overlooked. I refer here to a class of poems where food is seen as an important vehicle in the recollection of intense bodily memories connecting (foster-) mother and daughter.¹⁹ While this theme is not as common as hospitality, court feasting *etc.* there are enough examples that warrant analysis. Relating the act of feeding / eating to an emotionally more intense and perduring act of remembering, these examples also set the ground for my subsequent discussion on food and perception / memory.

The poems I will now discuss concern the following situation: the heroine has eloped with her lover and the mother (and/or the foster mother), unaware of the daughter's love affair, grieves at the daughter's elopement. It is interesting to note that the editors of the anthologies compile all such poems under the *pālai* or wasteland. Given the description of the landscape (arid, barren, dangerous) in many of these poems, this may not be such a surprising assignment; but, as I discussed in the previous chapter, desolation in this context is equally the loneliness which comes from being displaced. Furthermore, in reading (this class of) poems where the speaker is the mother, one can also understand desolation to include the aggrieved mother - the woman who has now lost an important focal point of her existence. The following poem (from the *Kuṛu*.) exemplifies the theme:²⁰

5.6

A man who wears a hero's anklet
keeps her safe as she hurries
through barren, dry lands
where the shade shrinks and dies.
At the bank of a scorched pool,
she sips at muddy steaming water.
Where does she find the strength,
this girl soft as a sprout,
with her tiny curving bracelets?
She had refused even to touch milk
mixed with fine, puffed rice

¹⁸See discussion following example 2.21.

¹⁹The relationship between mother and daughter in the *caṅkam* poems has not been explored in any great detail. A recent exception is Selby's work on Tamil Geographies which I discussed in the introductory chapter (Selby 2008).

²⁰Translation by Martha Ann Selby.

in a bowl clad in blushing gold
that I'd held out for her,
saying that it was too much. (*Kuru*. 356)

Although short, the poem conveys a range of emotions. The most obvious one is the mother's sense of loss - a loss accentuated by the physical and emotional closeness which she experiences for her daughter. But notice how it is primarily through food and the act of feeding that she conveys her loss. When the mother refers to the daughter refusing "even to touch" the milk held in a golden bowl, she alludes to very happy memories - memories of her daughter's childhood, when tender and loving feelings are exchanged between mother and child. An important part of this relationship is the intimate act of nurturing and feeding. For the mother (the speaker in these poems), it is also an intensely sensuous act retained in bodily memory and for this reason, food and feeding play a very important role in the recollection of such memories. The sensuous experience of feeding is also tied to *place* - the home. Although the daughter (who has eloped) may no longer consider her mother's house to be 'home', the mother's perspective is quite different. Her sorrow stems from two distinct sets of feelings: sadness at the daughter being in a strange place (*i.e.*, a place which is not home), compounded by the sorrow arising from the fragmentation of her own home - a fragmentation caused by the daughter's absence.

Having said as much, I should also note that typical readings of these poems ignore the fact that the speaker is the mother and instead tend to focus on the heroine. In such readings, the emphasis is on the heroine's love for the hero - it is so intense that the heroine could "sip muddy steaming water," although being brought up on rice and milk. However, this reading too emphasizes the importance of food just as much, albeit in a slightly different way. If we choose to read it this way, then the poem underscores the role played by food in constituting the experience of being-at-home. Eating practices, and preferences are not merely forged in childhood at home; in many ways, they come to characterize what is experienced and recalled later in life, as home. By contrasting what the heroine eats (and how) at home and while she is with her lover, the poem emphasizes the difference between being emplaced and displaced; *viz.*, emplacement and displacement are two entirely different domains of experience and the way in which the poem highlights their difference is through food. As I will discuss shortly, the *Ārruppaṭai* texts also make a similar connection between food and place. In those poems, the experience of emplacement is evoked explicitly by a sequence of images relating to food and feeding in a familial setting.

Here is another example (from the *Narr.*) which brings together food, family and the relationship between mother and daughter. The speaker is the heroine's mother. From the poem, we gather that the heroine is married and her husband's family has fallen into poverty. The mother feels sorry for the daughter, yet at the same time expresses wonder at her daughter's fortitude. To underscore the contrast between the heroine's past and her present, this poem too chooses to focus on food.²¹

²¹Translation by Martha Ann Selby.

5.7

I held in one hand
 a pot of glowing gold
 full of sweet milk,
 white and tasty,
 mixed with honey.
 I ordered her to eat
 and as I beat her,
 raising a small rod
 with a soft tip
 wound round with cloth,
 she toddled away,
 her golden anklets clattering
 with their fresh-water pearls inside...

....
 where did she learn this knowledge,
 these manners?
 As her husband's family grows poor
 she doesn't think once
 of the rich rice her father used to give
 and more pliable
 than fine black sand
 under running water
 she eats when she can,
 that little one
 with such great strength. (*Narr.* 110)

The analogy with black sand in the last stanza needs some clarification. The phrase in the poem is "*oḷukunīr nuṇaṅku aṛal pōla*"; "*oḷukunīr*" is "trickling water" and *poḷutu* "*aṛal*" is the dark fine sand on the seashore or the bank of a river. It is usually dry. But when water trickles over it, it gets wet; but soon, it reverts to being dry. This does not happen regularly and one does not know when the sand will become wet again. This is compared to the heroine's hunger (the dry sand) which is quenched only occasionally by the sparse food (trickling water) she gets. As it turns out, this imagery is retained in contemporary (colloquial) Tamil. Often, hunger is referred to as "*vayīru kāyṭal*" - the stomach (*vayīru*) being dry (*kāyṭal*). Similarly when one only gets to eat minimally, the phrase used is "*vayīru naṇaittal*" - the stomach getting wet or "*vayīru kaḷuvuṭal*" - the stomach being washed.

As in example 5.6, this poem too uses the food motif to symbolize the larger concept of home: when living with her parents, home (for the heroine) meant milk and honey. But when she is married, it is the occasional meal she gets to eat. Unlike the example from the *Cīru*, discussed earlier in this chapter (example 5.2), in this poem eating sparse food symbolizes "knowledge and manners" - or to quote the phrase in the poem, "*aṛivum oḷukkam*"; "*aṛivu*" is "knowledge" and "*oḷukkam*", "right conduct." Implied here is the knowledge of acting according to custom, *i.e.*, decorum. It is, the mother implies, only correct that the daughter eats in her husband's house, whatever she gets and whenever she gets it, although this sen-

timent does not fully reconcile her with the anguish she feels on account of her daughter's poverty.

Having initiated the study of foodscapes in *caṅkam* poems by discussing the symbolic power of food, I will now proceed to examine how the poems relate food, the act of giving and receiving and tasting to perception (and memory) - in particular, the perception of place. I will begin this analysis with the *Ārruppaṭai* texts. In the *Ārruppaṭai* poems, the act of gracious giving (of food to strangers) becomes particularly important for the following reason. In the previous chapter, I discussed how journeys often lead to a sense of desolation.²² But when the traveler is assured that his journey will take him to places where people receive him (and his family) hospitably, the severity of the impending journey is diminished. This is because eating is often a communal act. When the wayfarer is invited to partake of food in a home, a social bond is created and in this case, it may be argued that the relationship which ensues is a direct consequence of food (Korsmeyer 1999). Eating also lapses easily into other activities such as music and dance (as we saw in example 5.3), and there are examples in the *Ārruppaṭai* poems where the traveling bards sing / perform in the company of their hosts. That the *Ārruppaṭai* poems also emphasize this aspect of food is evident from the numerous scenes that depict the act of offering food to strangers. Here, for example, is a passage from the *Mal*.

5.8

Take the road lined
with red *ceyalai* trees;
then, walking along the steep paths -
where you will hear
the sound of the bamboos
that rustle in the wind -
you will reach
the hamlets on the slopes of the hill.

There, if you say,
'we are the dancers of Nannan -
the king of great pride and valor,
victorious in battle-'
you may enter the homes
as though they were yours;
not standing at the door,
but talking to your hosts
as though they were family.

And they -
speaking kind words
that will take away
the solitude
you felt in your long journey -
will offer you
rice, cooked
from colorful mountain grain,

²²See pp. 84-86.

with large chunks of meat
fried in ghee. (*Mal.* 160-169)

This passage highlights the hospitality of the village folk in many ways. To begin with, the passage describes the way to these villages.²³ The journey is arduous and the speaker refers to the "solitude ... felt in ... long journey". It is worth recalling here that the traveler is not alone in the strict sense of the term. The poem describes him traveling with other bards and female dancers (likely to have been the bards' wives; lines 1-40 in the poem). Yet the poem uses the word, "*pulampu-*" which means "solitude," "despair," "lamentation," *etc.* As discussed in the previous chapter, solitude in this context is really the solitude which arises from being away from one's home - to be away from a place where one feels at home. Recognizing this, the poem first talks about how the traveler is welcomed by the people in the village and then goes on to describe the food which can be eaten there.

Welcoming acts such as "speaking kind words", and the response of the traveler, "... entering (their) homes as though they were family," *etc.* are also significant for another reason. *They are as much a part of the meal* as the more mundane and physical act of eating itself. Let us try to understand this in some detail. Earlier, I discussed how eating is often a communal act, and in this example it is fairly obvious how the acts of (the villagers) welcoming and feeding the traveler create a social bond. But there is another aspect in all this which is perhaps not as evident. Like the narrative *Ārruppaṭai* poems that describe it, eating is a narrative act in itself. As Caroline Korsmeyer points out, "*eating is an extended event*: it takes time to accomplish. Its effects and enjoyments happen not all at once but sequentially (emphasis mine)."²⁴ In the *Ārruppaṭai* texts, eating is an extended event much like the journey which precedes it. The speaker of the poem remembers various places and describes them in rich detail, his sensory recollections captured vividly by the poems that also describe his thoughts and recollections. Such a narrative context to eating suggests that we reflect more carefully on the relationship between eating and perception / memory.

A connection between eating and perception can be posited through many ways. Most obvious among these is the association between smell and taste as well as their relationship to affect. Ingestion of food is normally accompanied by the act of smelling since the chewing of food forces air upwards from the mouth. This leads to the well-known loss of taste when being infected by the common cold. According to researchers in the cognitive sciences, the areas of the brain that represent the affective values of taste and/or smell are closely related to those involved in emotion.²⁵ But instead of pursuing the connection between food and perception by analyzing the psychophysics of taste, let me attempt to do this by staying within the rubric of the discussion so far.

In chapter 2, I presented several examples and made the case for associating the sense of smell with memory: in particular the sense of place is associated with (a particular) smell. Likewise, in the previous chapter, I argued that perception can often have a significantly aural dimension to it. Following these, it is only natural to conjecture that perception can have a gustatory component too. Note that this does not mean that one should be able to justify this using examples where perception is grounded solely on the tasting of food. As emphasized in the previous chapters, perception is almost always inter-sensory and when we talk of a pu-

²³The entire description runs to 70 lines.

²⁴Korsmeyer 1999, p. 186

²⁵See for instance, Rolls (2006).

tative relationship between food and perception, we only mean that the process of perception may have a strong gustatory component. As it turns out, this hypothesis is supported by several examples in the *caṅkam* poems and in the following, I will discuss one such.

This is a passage excerpted from the *Matu*, which describes the crowds in the main streets (four of them, according to the text) of Madurai. This is a long passage (35 lines) and begins with a description of various things for sale that are on display. Relevant to our discussion is the manner in which the poem invokes different sensory modalities. It begins by describing, among other people and things, "those who craft bangles from conch shells (line 511)," "glittering plates made from smelted gold (512)," "unfolded garments that look like the shining sea lined by black sand (518-519)." In these lines we see how perception is dominated by the visual - people, things and scenes that captivate our eyes. But the street is experienced in other ways as well: as the eye takes in these sights, the ears experience place too, as the following lines tell us.

5.9

... people jostle one another
in these four streets;
voices raised and
spoken at the same time -
it sounds like
the tumultuous gathering
of the learned ones
who flock to the court
of the king, who wears the golden flower
on his chest,²⁶
and who is praised by
troupes of dancers sounding the
curved *paṛai* drums...

The inter-sensory experience of place is brought out further as the passage segues smoothly into a description of the foods sold on the streets, the various smells in the air before returning to the sounds on the streets.

... the wafting aromas of
juicy jack fruit and mango,
vegetables and fruits
of different shapes,
black pepper - its tender leaves
unfurling from the recent rains,
candy made from sugarcane juice
which tastes like crystals of nectar,
rice cooked together with meat -
that people eat with relish,

²⁶Naccinarkkiniyar identifies the king as one of the Cheras, as the poem refers to "*kōtai*" - a word normally used to identify the Chera kings. See example 2.6. In support, Comacuntaranar cites the *Maṇimēkalai* which refers to debates between religious scholars in the Chera court.

roots, tubers
 and various other foods,
 rice with sweet milk;
 people - eating these foods
 here and there,
 the streets sound like
 a harbor where
 ships - masts unfurled -
 unload their cargo... (*Matu.* 522-538)

The above excerpt shows how gustatory perception is a valid means of local knowledge - that the sensations of taste and smell can (and do) contribute significantly to our experience of place. Indeed, tasting the food which belongs to a place is perhaps the most intimate taste of place, for the sense of taste is a very intimate sense. It is also one of the reasons why, of all sensory modalities, taste is singled out as a metaphor for (artistic) "Taste" by aesthetic theory.²⁷ But this does not mean that taste can only be used to infer something about the eating (or remembering) subject; viz., taste is *not* so purely subjective that it has nothing useful to say about the world. This is an important point which has to be clarified especially since I propose that taste is a valid means of perceiving (and remembering) place.²⁸ Korsmeyer notes that it is precisely because "... taste points inward and outward simultaneously..." (inward towards the tasting subject and outwards towards the external object) that taste is such an intimate sense. But this does not mean, to paraphrase Korsmeyer, that we go around licking everything around us to find out what they are; taste is simply not convenient for that purpose. But as the *caṅkam* poems (like the example from *Matu.* discussed above), food does have referential quality. Similarly, taste has epistemic value which can be conveyed (like other sensory experiences) to the interested listener, as the following example from the *Mal.* shows. In this passage, the speaker describes the villages on the mountain slopes. Note here, how food (and taste) are juxtaposed with the sights of the place.

5.10

kāntal flowers
 so red that they glow like fire,
 blossom after the rains.
 Thinking it is meat,
 the small-backed eagle swoops down.
 Then realizing its mistake,
 drops the flowers
 on the sides of the hill -
 fragrant like a marriage house;²⁹
 and the wide rocky space
 strewn

²⁷For an excellent discussion, see Korsmeyer 1999, pp. 38-67. Korsmeyer notes this metaphor was used in almost every old ; this includes the Indian concept of *rasa*.

²⁸For a phenomenological treatment of taste, see *Ibid.* pp. 94-102

²⁹*cf.* p. 21

with petals that resemble the tongues of flame,
 looks like the altar
 where the *Vēlan* dances in frenzy.³⁰
 And when you reach
 the bountiful villages
 on the sides of this hill,
 you and your large family
 will be fed
 honey and tubers,
 meat - freshly cut and sorted -
 of the wild boar with small eyes
 stored in baskets
 carried by the hunters,
 hanging on a pole - made from the tusks
 of an elephant killed in a fight.³¹ (*Mal.* 145-155)

Evidently, these examples make no distinction between sensory modalities as valid means of acquiring local knowledge. Taste has as much epistemic value as does, say, sight or sound. All these poems evoke primary perceptions by a sequence of 'images' that can be visual, aural or gustatory.

If food (taste) has referential and epistemic value, it is only logical that food and the acts of giving / receiving food play a role in memory and in the following, I will discuss how food and memory - especially place memory - are related in the *Ārruppaṭai* texts. To do so, we should first recognize that the speaker in these poems *recalls* the places he has seen along the way; *viz.*, the poems can be equally well understood as reminiscences. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, these poems are a *mapping in place*. They are not as concerned about getting from point A to point B as they are about *being* in a given place and experiencing it. Part of this experience, as we have seen so far in this chapter, arises through food and the tasting of food. The way in which this gustatory experience of place is recalled in memory (and recounted) is largely similar to the relationship between say, sounds or smells and place memory that I discussed throughout this essay. Therefore in the following, I will use the *Ārruppaṭai* poems only to point out a few details unique to the modality of taste and their relationship to place memory. For a full blown discussion on food and memory, I refer to Sutton's work on this subject (Sutton 2001), and a review article by Holzman (Holzman 2006).

In the *Ārruppaṭai* poems, food is clearly represented in the form of embodied and emplaced memory. As is the case with perception /memory through other sensory modalities, food derives its power for recall primarily through synesthesia. We have already seen how this feature plays out in perception (examples 5.9 and 5.10) and memory is no exception to this. However, there are some features in food-memories that distinguish how food is related both to other sensory modalities and to the situation being recalled. These are best understood by turning to the poems themselves.

Before proceeding to the first example, I will summarize a few details that are common to all the *Ārruppaṭai* poems (where food plays a role in the speaker's reminiscence of place). The poem proceeds through the speaker's narrative which takes the traveler to a string of

³⁰*Vēlan* - see p.67

³¹The commentators understand this as a fight between elephants.

places. As the speaker describes his journey, he describes the way to go to a particular town or village, then describes the destination which includes (and culminates in) the description of food which the traveler might expect at that place; viz., food, which the speaker himself had partaken of during his journey. The same cycle is repeated for the next destination and the poems end with the speaker / traveler reaching the town/city where the king resides. A striking aspect of the speaker's descriptions of each destination (along the way) and the food is the manner in which they evoke an *event*. The event here is not just reaching a place, but in experiencing it - taking in the sights and smells, being received by gracious hosts, exchanging kind words and finally of course, the partaking of food. It is in this context - experiencing place as an event - that I will analyze the *Ārṛuppaṭai* texts.

I will begin with a passage from the *Cīru*. where the speaker describes a town called Amur.³²

5.11

Perched on the branches
of the *kāñci* tree -
with its short stem,
its branches blooming
with fragrant flowers
bunched together as in a garland -
the kingfisher, which looks
like a blue gem with a golden mouth
stares into the deep waters
of the pond
and catches the smelly fish;
its sharp talons
ripping apart,
the green leaves of the lotus plant
with its thorny stalk,
its flower in full bloom,
around which,
dark blue bees with red eyes
buzz
and sip honey,
resembling the snake which devours the full moon.

When you reach
these cool *marutam* lands of³³
Āmūr - guarded securely
by a moat with cold water -
a town of wide spaces,
where the Brahmins live in large numbers,
you will be met by

³²This is a town in modern day South Arcot district. In post-*caṅkam* Tamil literature, the town became famous as the birthplace of Appar, the 7th century poet-saint.

³³*marutam* - agrarian landscape.

the children
 of a lovely woman with bangles on her arms,
 the long black hair on her slender back
 looking like the trunk of an elephant,
 sister of the farmer,³⁴
 whose sturdy bulls with strong necks,
 walk with a powerful gait.
 They will stop you from going onwards
 and feed you
 cooked silver-white rice
 pounded by a big black pestle -
 its crowned rim well worn -
 and the meat of the crab with forked legs. (*Ciru*. 179-195)

Let me first note how the poem injects a sense of wonder which often accompanies seeing a place for the first time. The speaker recalls the arresting looks of the kingfisher catching smelly fish (the food motif) and the lotus surrounded by bees sipping honey (again the food motif) which resembles a full moon eaten by the snake.³⁵ The descriptions are explicitly synesthetic, making this place appetizing at so many levels. The narrative or event-like character of going to this place can hardly be missed either. The speaker crosses a moat, presumably sees Brahmin households, before being stopped by children on his way. Notice too how the description of food in these poems is often characterized by similes and metaphors. In this poem for instance, the rice is "silver-white." In the previous examples, we heard references to cooked rice looking like fingers of a hand, sugar-candy which tastes like nectar, rice cooked from colorful mountain grains, *etc.* As David Sutton notes,³⁶ discourse on food tends to focus on the sensory qualities of food and metaphor is commonly used to communicate something which is not easily communicable (taste) by words.³⁷ Furthermore, by evoking the acts of food preparation, giving (of food) *etc.*, in great detail together with the use of metaphors, the speaker recalls the intensity of his sensory experience which he also impresses upon the traveler. In this, taste (like smell) plays a very important role, being closely associated with episodic memory.

In the following example excerpted from the *Peru*., the speaker describes a village on the way to Kanchipuram - a famous city in Northern Tamil Nadu.

³⁴The reference to "sister" as opposed to "wife" is unclear, and all the commentators are silent on this point.

³⁵This is an allusion to the myth behind the lunar eclipse - the full moon is devoured by the Rahu, the snake. In early Indic astronomy, Rahu and Ketu were the north and south lunar nodes respectively.

³⁶Sutton 2001, p. 96

³⁷On a related note, research on the psychophysics of olfaction suggests a connection between odors and the role of names in attempting to retrieve memories of smells. See Engen (1991). The parts of the brain that are involved in the use of language do not have direct links with the olfactory system. Hence, it is likely that while trying to place a smell, we tend to revive memories that involve far more detail than the smell itself. Similar arguments can be advanced with respect to taste.

5.12

calves with bent legs,
 tied with long ropes
 tethered to poles
 on the sides of fine homes;
 granaries - so tall
 that even the tallest
 ladder cannot reach them -
 stacked in full
 with various grains,
 poured inside by opening the top;
 Here, the children play
 with toy chariots, made of wood -
 so finely crafted
 that even the carpenter's children
 long for them.
 As they grow tired,
 they embrace the *cevili* ⁻³⁸
 whose breasts are like blossoms -
 drink milk,
 and go to sleep in their beds
 in this charming household.
 When you stay in this village -
 which has never known hunger
 and never been deserted by its people -
 you will eat
 cooked white rice and
 the fried meat of domestic fowl,
 offered by farmers who never tire in their labor.
 Relish too,
 sugar candy and sugarcane juice,
 from the sugarcane press
 which roars loudly-
 like the loud trumpeting of a
 herd of elephants
 attacked by the fearsome mountain lion
 in the high hills -
 where the tall bamboo grows,
 shrouded in clouds. (*Peru*. 243-262)

The sequence of images in this poem animates the feeling of being in-place, specifically - home. Recall that both the speaker and the traveler are away from their respective homes. But, the speaker says, one can still be part of a place which is home to someone else. This

³⁸*cevili* - the foster-mother.

is suggested by a sequence of images pertaining to home and homely activities: calves tied to poles on the sides of the houses, children playing with toys, being fed, *etc.* We may as well use Sutton's terminology for this - "revitalization"³⁹. In the context of this discussion, I define revitalization as the iteration of a single image or a sequence of images that evoke the experience of home both to the speaker and the traveler. In the above passage, revitalization emphasizes the centrality of receiving food and eating to the experience of 'being at home'. Earlier in this chapter, while discussing the social nature of eating, I pointed out that sensory experiences when shared by a group (as for instance in a family at home) tend to become intensified. Consequently, their memories linger longer. But if, as in the case of traveling bards, one is away from home, then the particular experience of 'being at home' has to be recreated. This is achieved in these poems by invoking explicitly a sequence of images as in the above excerpt.

The converse of this - *viz.*, invoking a sequence of images to represent the feeling of being *displaced* - food being part of such experience, is also seen in the *caṅkam* poems. Here is an example from the *Aka*.⁴⁰ The speaker is the mother whose daughter has eloped.

5.13

When the demon-haunted sea dries, white salt lies crystallized
like ambrosia on the salt flat. Men, brave enough to take it west
over the forking paths that traverse the burning wilderness,
look at the omens, take their weapons and set out.

As they go their white-backed donkeys
moving in a line with their heavy loads
kick and jumble the stones with their worn hooves.
A long-tusked elephant, suffering as the heat beats down,
keeps his musth hidden in his cheeks as bees buzz close
and scratches out a hole for water with his great trunk grown smooth from thirst.⁴¹

And my daughter's man, who has no sense of what is right,⁴²
digs there and gets a half-cup of clear, salty water⁴³-
I don't know how she can drink that water as she sweats
and sighs in the heat, her forehead bright as the crescent moon.
Before, I would offer her sweet milk mixed with honey,
smooth her hair, beg her,⁴⁴ but she wouldn't drink
and pushed it away in disdain.⁴⁵ (*Aka*. 207)

The similarity between this poem and example 5.6 is evident. Both poems evoke the same image - the mother feeding her young daughter milk and honey, who now does not

³⁹Sutton 2001, p. 76. Sutton, borrows the concept of revitalization from the work of Fernandez; see Fernandez (1986).

⁴⁰Translated and annotated by George L. Hart.

⁴¹"from thirst" - added in translation.

⁴²"Who has no sense of what is right" is *aṇṇilāṇ*, "he who is without *aṇam* (dharma, righteousness)". She says the man who eloped with her daughter is unprincipled.

⁴³"Half cup" is *kuṛaikkuṭamukavai*, "(water) drawn up in a small (or partly full) water pot".

⁴⁴"Beg her" is *mōlaimai kūravum*, which the Lexicon says means "ridiculing". Clearly, the meaning intended—and given by the commentators—is begging, cajoling.

⁴⁵"Pushed it away" translates *maṛutta collaḷ*, "with words that refused".

think twice before drinking salty water. But the difference between these poems lies in how the *Aka.* turns drinking "half-cup of clear, salty water" into an event. This is achieved by the same technique of revitalization which we saw in the previous example. Invoking a sequence of images - salt merchants treading desolate ways, a donkey which finds nothing to do except kick at stones, a thirsty elephant, *etc.* - leading up to the act of the heroine sipping salt water. By stringing together such images, the poem underscores the experience of 'being away from home' (in contrast to the previous example which describes 'being at home') and exemplifies the poetics of displacement.⁴⁶

To summarize this discussion, foodscapes in the *caṅkam* poems can be understood in several ways. Food is not only a powerful symbol for social bonds and structures but also plays a key role in their creation and existence. In complete analogy with my earlier discussions on sounds and smells, I propose that the experience of food - as described in these poems - can be understood as both cognitive and emotional. As the discussion in this chapter shows, there are several examples in the *caṅkam* corpus where perception in general and the perception of place in particular, involve a gustatory dimension. By featuring the act of eating prominently in describing the experience *in place*, the *caṅkam* poems offer a very intimate taste of place. The seemingly quotidian act of eating turns out to be an important piece in the poetics of place.

⁴⁶The poetics of displacement and desolation will be explored in detail elsewhere.

Chapter 6

Some concluding remarks

"சங்க காலத்து நூல்களில் வழங்கிய மரபை அறிவதற்கு அவை அனைத்தையுமே ஆராய வேண்டும். சங்க நூல்களவ்வளவும் சேர்ந்து ஓர் உடம்பு போன்றவை. அவ்வடம்பு முழுவதும் ஒருவகையான நாடி ஓடும். ஆகையால் அவற்றை முற்றப் பயின்றால் தான் அந்த மரபு தெளிவாக விளங்கும்." - உ. வே. சாமிநாத ஐயர், "என் சரித்திரம்", ப. 725

"It is necessary to study all the *caṅkam* texts if one were to understand their literary tradition. Taken together, the *caṅkam* texts are like a body threaded by a single central nerve. Therefore, this tradition can be understood only after all these texts are studied thoroughly. " U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, *eṇ carittiram*, p. 725

While spending time in India studying the *caṅkam* poems, I was asked by a Tamil academic about my dissertation. I mumbled something incoherently about the "poetics of place." He laughed and said, "poetics? of place? How can there be poetics of place? Maybe you can say something about 'the role of place' in *caṅkam* literature." To me, his response summarized received wisdom on the role of place in *caṅkam* poetry: there is no place for place; place is at best, "sympathetic background," and at worst, "insignificant" in *caṅkam* poetry.¹ It seemed to me that underlying this conventional understanding (or otherwise) of place in *caṅkam* poetry were the following convictions: (i) in love or *akam* poetry, landscape / place is a "background" used cleverly to evoke emotionality; (ii) in *puṛam* poetry, place is either unimportant or if described in detail, a ploy used by the poet to ingratiate himself to the patron; viz., singing in praise of the kingdom was guaranteed to fetch purses of gold from the pleased king. A more nuanced version of this two-fold conviction is to hold that (i) *akam* poetry objectifies emotionality through landscape as metaphor whereas (ii) descriptions in *puṛam* poetry are 'historical.' To begin with, I found this unsatisfactory because of the following reasons: (i) how does one explain, for example, the descriptions of the Vaiyai river in the *Paripāṭal*? As far as I was concerned, the possibility that the *Pari.* is a later text, was largely irrelevant. If anything, this hypothesis instead of attempting to answer the question, rejects it. (ii) To read the long passages that describe journey and various places in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* as 'historical,' or as 'travelogues,' seemed nothing short of ludicrous to me. No doubt one could extract (with some care) some historical material from these poems as indeed historians like Nilakantha Sastri did. But does it mean that the only way to understand these poems is to read them as *The Lonely Planet Travel Guide* in verse?

¹See Chapter 1 for a full discussion.

I did not have to wonder long about why understanding place in either of these ways dominates the discourse on *caṅkam* literature. For too long, research on *caṅkam* poetry and poetics was focussed on a single aspect - the metonymic metaphor or the so-called 'interior landscape'. As explained in the Introduction, this is a poetic device which uses landscape imagery as symbolic of human emotionality. Many love poems in the *caṅkam* corpus use various things specific to a landscape (trees, birds, *etc.*) to create a repertoire of images that evokes specific human emotions. Landscape in these poems, becomes a metonymic metaphor for specific aspects of human emotionality. As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, there is little doubt that many poems in the *caṅkam* corpus employ this specific representation of landscape. But the overemphasis on this aspect of *caṅkam* literature is not entirely devoid of shortcomings.

Of these, the first is an ever increasing urge to read landscape imagery in the love or the *akam* poems as a puzzle. Instead of asking how is it that landscape evokes emotionality in powerful and profoundly moving ways, many authors have tended to treat landscape imagery in the poems as a code which needs to be cracked. The poems are treated as "a storehouse of metaphors," (Thaninayagam 1963;1966) and following this, many authors make a catalogue of the images in stock. The ostensible aim is to help the reader to put the pieces together the correct way. Discussions on *caṅkam* poetry commonly feature tables that tell the reader what bits and pieces of landscape imagery 'really' mean: buffalo = hero; fields = place where harlots live; fish = harlot's mother, *etc.*² Even someone like A. K. Ramanujan, known for his sensitive renderings of these poems in English, is not immune to this obsession to uncover the symbolic. Writing on "Form in Classical Tamil poetry," he muses on why for instance, the poets chose the *kuṛiñci* flower to name the *tiṇai* or the poetic space corresponding to the theme of premarital love. He writes,

"Here are a few botanical facts: the *kuṛiñci* plant, of the *Strobilanthus* group, grows only 6000 feet above sea-level; so it is the mountain flower par excellence. Botanical calendars kept for a century on South Indian hills like the Nilgris shows that a *kuṛiñci* tree comes to flower only from nine to twelve years after it is planted - this identifies it with the tropical virgin heroine who comes to puberty at the same age."³

Even conceding that Ramanujan found a way to read the minds of the compilers of *akam* poetry, are we now to embark on an exercise trying to figure out how botanical aspects of other flowers prominently named in *akam* poetry (corresponding to the four other major themes of human love) correlate with a tropical woman's biological clock? Owing to this preoccupation with landscape as always meaning something else, previous works on *caṅkam* literature have largely avoided inquiring into the relationship between landscape and emotionality. As I argue in this dissertation, understanding this relationship is very relevant to the study of *caṅkam* literature.

Throughout this dissertation, I discussed several examples drawn from anthologies such as the *Aka* and the *Kuru*. (anthologies in which landscape has been discussed largely as a metaphor, by previous authors) that depict how *the process of perception* of landscape / place is deeply related to emotional affect. To state it otherwise, many *akam* poems have something definite to say about the relationship between *where* people are and *what* they feel. In the context of early Tamil literature, *where* takes a very specific meaning. Let me quote, for the

²See for instance, Nadarajah (1994), pp. 274-281.

³Ramanujan 1999, p. 210

last time, the *Tol.* aphorism which lists the 'things native' to landscape: "Now, each landscape has as its native elements, gods, foods, animals, trees, birds, drums, human activity, the *yāl* (a stringed musical instrument), and other such things." (*Tol. Poruḷ* 20) Together with a specific aspect of human love, this set of native things and land, time/season constitute the triad of *akam* poetry - the *uri*, *karu* and *mutal* respectively. Unfortunately, this classification has been (mis)construed in a way which treats elements (in the poem) belonging to the *mutal*, *karu* and *uri* as independent of one another. In my opinion, this view is untenable because of the following reasons.

The first is that there is no land without 'things native' to it. Edward Casey notes quite rightly that "...the idea of no-thing at the origin is unsustainable. On the contrary, nothing is not at the origin. *At the origin are things in places...*" (italics his)."⁴ Things that are native to or characteristic of that place are of that place - indeed, *they are very intrinsic to the notion of that place*. When this is understood, then the second point follows obviously - humans are part of place. It is neither warranted (nor is it easy) to remove humans from place in the *caṅkam* poems. Ironically, this is something that has been declared repeatedly in writings on *caṅkam* literature - that the poems do not describe nature for nature's sake (whatever that means). If this is true, then one cannot understand human emotionality in the *caṅkam* poems simply as something which is either infused into the landscape / place (where the human self is) or reflected from it. *Emotional affect is intrinsic to the experience of place*.

For these two reasons, the categories of *mutal*, *karu* and *uri* cannot be understood reductively. Here, I emphasize that I do not reject these three categories. Rather, my point is that one cannot understand the *caṅkam* poems by analyzing these three categories independently because the aesthetic effect carried by the poem does not reside in any one of these - rather it emerges in a specific arrangement of these. To borrow an example from another discipline, *viz.*, Indian music, just because we know that the fundamental constituents of a *rāga* are notes, a mere specification of the musical scale cannot and does not describe the *rāga*; the bottoms - up way is inherently inadequate in the analysis of structures that emerge in arrangement.

(Why) is all this important? It is important because landscape as metaphor is *not* the only representation of place in *caṅkam* literature. Quite apart from my misgivings about the manner in which landscape is understood, the question about the ontological status of place or the *karu* of the *Tol.* gained more clarity as I began studying poems from different anthologies. Annie Thomas' work on the *Paripāṭal* (Thomas 1971) which concludes that the poems in that anthology do not conform to the interior landscape, only confirmed my suspicions; *viz.*, in the *caṅkam* poems, landscape is not merely a sympathetic background or a storehouse of similes and metaphors. The question, "are there better ways in which landscape can be understood?" assumed greater significance while studying poems in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology. Here were poems with passages often running to hundreds of lines on place and yet there was (to my knowledge) not a single attempt to make sense of place in such poems. Instead, they were summarily dismissed as "insignificant" (Manickam 1962) or explained away as describing the "beauty and fertility" (Varadarajan 1957;1969) of landscape. Both authors note that the *Tol.* specifies *karu* only in the context of love poetry, thereby implying that nothing much or worthwhile can be said of place in other poems.

As it turned out, the central idea behind this essay occurred to me while reading Parimalakar's commentary on the *Pari*. In his commentary on one of the *Vaiyai* poems (*Vaiyai* 11),

⁴Casey 1993;2009, p. 214

he makes a seemingly casual remark on the Vaiyai river, "... by which is meant, a place for experiencing pleasure through all five senses..."⁵ Reading this, it became clear to me that an important aspect missing in almost all analyses of place in *caṅkam* poetry was the role played by the body. By itself, this is a remarkably surprising omission because the body is given so much prominence in much of *caṅkam* poetry - both in *akam* and *puṛam*. In the context of place, the lived body plays a central role in the *caṅkam* poems. The protagonists in these poems experience place in the most direct way, *viz.*, by being in that place. Places are always sensed by the subjects in these poems and so it is that, "the body as lived and remembered is crucially interstitial in status. The basic borderline it occupies is traced between *mind* and *place*: it is their middle term, their *tertium quid*."⁶ In sensing place and in remembering it, the human body experiences place while being part of that very place. It is because the self is part of place that the integrity and coherence of perception (the process by which the human subject senses place) derives from the very place being perceived. In Chapter 2, I adduced several examples from the *caṅkam* corpus - poems that depict how human emotionality and place are strongly tied that naive binaries such as cause and effect, subject and object, become meaningless. The examples I discussed in that chapter also show how place, by virtue its being able to contain and locate memories, contributes significantly to memorability.

Regarding the status of place, I argued in Chapters 3 - 5 that place does have ontological value in *caṅkam* literature. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the *Pari* is quite specific about this - it declares that places have *iyalpu*, a core of immanent sense. As elaborated in that chapter, the perception of this core is dynamic; *viz.*, the protagonists in the *Pari* poems are not passive recipients of sensory data, instead their relationship with place is reciprocal. Places like the Vaiyai river and the Parankunru hill animate the feelings of the people who in turn, define themselves with respect to these places. In these poems then, place is not just a list of 'native things' that are inert; rather *place is something which is well within the realm of being experienced, remembered and recalled*. Whether through repeated action or recollection, the senses and place are locked in a process which defines and redefines the mutual relationship between them. It is this process which leads to various senses of place.

My analysis also brings out another significant aspect of place in *caṅkam* poetry - place is possessed of dynamism. Place is not merely something which activates different sensory modalities. Instead, one often finds in these poems the experience of place being enacted as an *event*. Consider for instance, the poems on Vel in the *Pari*. Invoking stories of Murukan's love with Valli and Deivayanai, the poems relate Parankunru hill to two common themes in *akam* literature - *kaḷavu* (pre-marital love) and *ūṭal* (lovers' quarrel). But the relationship between place and these stories is not passive in that the stories related in the poems are not myths frozen in time. Instead the hill *embodies* the themes of these stories - illicit love, lovers' quarrel, and the subsequent reconciliation between lovers. This core sense of place is affirmed and reaffirmed by the people who gather in Parankunru hill - the people who enact their versions of these stories, and it is this performance which constitutes their experience of place. This aspect of place is distinctly different from metaphorical representations of landscape.

As the examples I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 show, the experience of place (depicted in the *caṅkam* poems) need not necessarily be restricted to emotions pertaining to human love. This is another important observation which follows from my analysis. By itself, the notion that the experience of place can relate to emotions other than love is not at all surprising.

⁵For a discussion, see Chapter 3.

⁶Casey 1987;2000, p. 180

However, in the context of *caṅkam* poetry, most researchers have been reluctant to think beyond relating landscape to human love as suggested by the *Tol.* (in *akattiṇaiyiyal*, the chapter on the poetic space of human love). For instance, in his discussion on "The Evolution of *akattiṇai*", V. Sp. Manickam has a section on "The background of Psychology" where he defines "psychology" as,

"... the peculiar bent of mind of the Tamilians which was responsible for the birth of *akattiṇai*."⁷ In this discussion, he asserts that, "... the Tamils ... learnt a lot from Nature... (but) they did not love nature for nature's sake...", citing in his favor, "... Suffice it to point out emphatically that the background of nature, *i.e.*, *mutarporuḷ* and *karupporuḷ* was prescribed by Tolkappiyar and adopted by the *caṅkam* poets, only for the love-aspects or *uripporuḷ* of *akattiṇai* and not for the theme of the *purattiṇai*..."⁸

Consistent with this stand, two sections of his discussion are titled, "Its (*i.e.*, landscape's) insignificant influence on non-love aspects," and "Its prominent influence on love." In the former, Manickam makes the following remarkable claim,

"... The above difference of treatment between love and all other human behaviours in Tamil poetry will lead one to observe that there might have been an intimate relationship of the elementary passion of sexual love with nature, so far as the Tamil race was concerned."⁹

Manickam then lists a few examples of what he considers to be indicative of the relationship between "nature and human behavior" - a coward being transformed into a hero looking at an elephant battling a tiger, a man who is convinced of the virtues of compassion after seeing a jackal devour a goat, *etc.* But, he says, there are no poems in the *caṅkam* corpus that indulge in such themes. Therefore, he concludes, "...things in Nature do not seem to have roused the kinds of feelings mentioned above, in the minds of the ancient Tamils..."¹⁰

Manickam's analysis may be questioned on several grounds,¹¹ and in the following, I will discuss how my approach to the poetics of place in *caṅkam* poetry differs with his. Central to Manickam's stance is the statement that the *Tol.* prescribes 'basic' (*mutal*) and 'native' (*karu*) things only in conjunction with a specific aspect of human love (*uri*). Here, Manickam is quite correct. As I noted earlier in this essay, the *Tol.* specifies this triad in the chapter on the poetic space of love poems. But where Manickam goes wrong is in asserting that in the *puram* poems, "the background of nature ... was not adopted by the *caṅkam* poets ..." The (counter)examples I discussed in chapters 4 and 5 suffice to make my case.

The issue here is *not* whether the *caṅkam* poets adopted Tolkappiyar's stance, rather it is a matter of what the poems contain; and as the examples I adduced in chapters 4 and 5 show, there are many passages (often running to a hundred lines) that represent exactly what Manickam denies in *puram* poetry - the aspects of *mutal* and *karu*. Indeed, almost every modern edition of *caṅkam* poetry names these passages using these very terms. Consider for instance, the *Maturaikkāñci*. P. V. Comacuntaranar, the 20th century commentator uses labels

⁷Manickam 1962, p. 116

⁸*Ibid.* p. 118

⁹*Ibid.* p. 119

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 119

¹¹For instance, the methodological. It is not at all clear that one can make grandiose conclusions about "the psychology" of the "ancient Tamils" from a corpus of poems - the history of which is at best sketchy, with little or no information about its audience.

such as *mullainila vaḷam* 'fertility of the *mullai* landscape' (lines 271-285; p. 111) *kuṛiñci vaḷam* 'fertility of the *kuṛiñci* landscape' (286-290; p. 113), *kuṛiñcinilattiṅ kaṇ eḷum palvēru ōcaikaḷ* 'various sounds in the *kuṛiñci* landscape' (291-301; p. 115). As Comacuntaranar rightly recognizes, the poem indeed describes the *mutal* and *karu* of specific landscapes. How then are we to make sense of these two elements in a poem which has nothing to do with love? Let us turn to Comacuntaranar again. After his commentary on the lines that describe the mountainous landscape (*kuṛiñci*), he writes, "... *kuṛiñciyeṇṇum uripporuḷ amainta pakkamalaikaḷaiyuṭāiya ... periya malaikaḷ...*" (301; p. 115) 'the big hills that have for their *uripporuḷ*, the poetic space of *kuṛiñci*;' viz., he goes back to the *Tol.* which as we saw earlier makes a specific correlation between five types of landscape and five conditions of human love. But this connection - in the context of a poem which has nothing to do with love - is irrelevant. If anything, it only shows the commentator's reluctance to venture beyond the connection advocated in the *Tol.* I should point out that this stance is not specific to 20th century academics. It goes back to the illustrious commentator, Naccinarkkiniyar. His commentary on the same lines ends with the statement, "*puṇarcciyākiya uripporuḷ amainta...*" (301) '(the hills that) have for their *uripporuḷ*, sexual union (among lovers).'

The conclusion of this rather long winded presentation is quite simple - so far, there has been no serious inquiry into how representations of landscape / place may be related to human experience in ways other than the *karu* - *uri* connection specified by the *Tol.* in the context of love poetry. As I have argued in this work, there are enough examples in the *caṅkam* corpus such as the *Paripāṭal* and the *Pattuppāṭṭu* that warrant an alternate framework and my work is an attempt in this direction. I suggest that these poems represent a very natural connection between place and emotionality - a connection which arises in the very process of perceiving place. Indeed, both Manickam and Comacuntaranar come very close to recognizing this. For instance, referring to *puṇam* literature Manickam says, "... in that literature we find the frequent use of nature ... in reference to the manners and customs of society..."¹² As for Comacuntaranar, the very choice of titles (to passages) such as 'various sounds in the *kuṛiñci* landscape,' etc. show that at he recognizes at some level, the connection between humans and landscape. However, neither attempted to pursue this line of thought and ask what are the different ways in which the human subject and place related in these poems.

Throughout this dissertation, I discussed one of the more striking answers to this question: the connection between the self and place is no more and nothing less than *being in a place*. What does this mean? By now, the reader should have noticed something common to the representations of place in say, the *Vaiyai* poems of the *Paripāṭal* and passages in the *Maturaikkāñci* that describe Maturai city. Although these poems are from the opposite ends of poetic space in *caṅkam* literature - *akam* and *puṇam* - it is quite appropriate to characterize representations of place in these poems as representations *in place*. I discussed this point at some length in the introductory chapter of this dissertation with reference to the *Āṟruppaṭai* texts. Unlike poems where landscape imagery may be considered *indicative of something* (as for example, the poems where landscape is a metaphor for human emotionality), examples such as descriptions of Maturai in the *Maturaikkāñci* or the *Vaiyai* in the *Paripāṭal* anthology are primarily poems that describe one's experience *in landscape / place*. So too, the main concern of the *Āṟruppaṭai* texts is not really how to get from point A to point B in the shortest time interval. Instead, there is a preoccupation in these poems with *what it feels like to be there*. I sub-

¹²*Ibid.* p. 119

mit that there is no better way to understand the many hundreds of lines in these poems that describe the sights, sounds, smells and food specific to a place.

In terms of organizing principles, there is no simple mapping in these poems between the experience in place and specific aspects of human emotion. As we have seen during the course of this dissertation, the poems cover a broad spectrum of emotional affect. If the Vaiyai poems relate emotions like jealousy, lovers' quarrel and reconciliation, the poems on Parankunru hill often evoke a sense of wonder. While the sounds of Maturai city at daybreak may evoke primarily, a sense of belonging in-place to someone who lives there, the *Ārruppaṭai* texts evoke a similar sense to the traveler, alleviating the desolation of his journey. Whatever the specific emotion may be, place in these poems embodies experience in a very fundamental way - a way which is very different from representations of place either as a metaphor or as a signification of specific emotions. This is not to say that these two *teloi* in *caṅkam* literature are antithetical. As I emphasized throughout my work, it is only because place possesses the power to evoke strong emotions and is a natural container of human experience and memory, that the *caṅkam* poems turn to metaphorical representations of landscape. In this dissertation, I have attempted to bring both - representations *of* and representations *in* - place in early Tamil literature under a single theme, the poetics of place.

Finally, I will point out a few broad directions of research suggested by my treatment of place in *caṅkam* poetry. My discussion of place in this dissertation was built mainly on poems that describe landscapes, cities, *etc.* In these examples, the perceptual horizon of the human self is initially the wide horizon of the landscape / city. This horizon changes with the experience of this place, *i.e.*, the process of perception takes the human self to other 'places'. But there are also poems in the *caṅkam* corpus where the human self, to begin with, is in a more self contained place - a "site of intimate lives", to paraphrase Bachelard (Bachelard 1964). An example is the *Netunalvāṭai*, a poem in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology. The scene of the poem shifts sequentially from the outer most and open place - the fields surrounding a city - to the inner most and intimate place: the chamber where the heroine waits for her husband, who is away fighting a war. The way in which the poem telescopes-in from the open fields to the heroine's chambers is accompanied by frequent shifts between the two broad representations of place I identified in this essay, *viz.*, place as signification and place as experience. The poem deserves careful study along these lines.

The *Mullaikkali* is an interesting anthology of poems on the poetic space of *mullai*. In *akam* poetry, this poetic space is usually identified with sentiments associated with 'waiting' - *e.g.*, the heroine awaiting the hero's return, the hero's journey while returning to his wife, *etc.* However, the *Mullaikkali* (part of a bigger *caṅkam* anthology, the *Kalittokai*) features several poems that feature an entirely different theme - the poems describe the events surrounding *ēru taḷuvutal* - the subduing of a bull as proof of the hero's bravery. The poems describe in detail, the arena where the bull fights take place, the bull fight, *etc.* either through the voice of the heroine or her friend. In these poems again, the *mullai* or the pastoral tract does not find expression as a metaphor, instead it is the arena in which specific events such as the bull fight and the dance subsequent to the bull fight happen. A comparison of landscape in these poems with other poems in the *caṅkam* anthology on the interior landscape of *mullai* will be discussed elsewhere.

Stepping out of *caṅkam* literature, it will be very interesting to compare representations of place in *caṅkam* poetry and in early Sanskrit and Prakrit literature. For instance, it was pointed out by George Hart many years ago that the poetic devices in the *Sattasāi* (a com-

pilation of early Prakrit poetry) have elements in common with *caṅkam* poetry (Hart 1971, 1975;1999). But since Hart's work, most comparative studies have tended to focus on the (seldom enlightening - at least from the perspective of poetics) question of which of these two formed the basis for the other. I believe the ideas in this dissertation can be used in analyzing early Indic literature more fruitfully.

Appendix A

List of primary sources

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