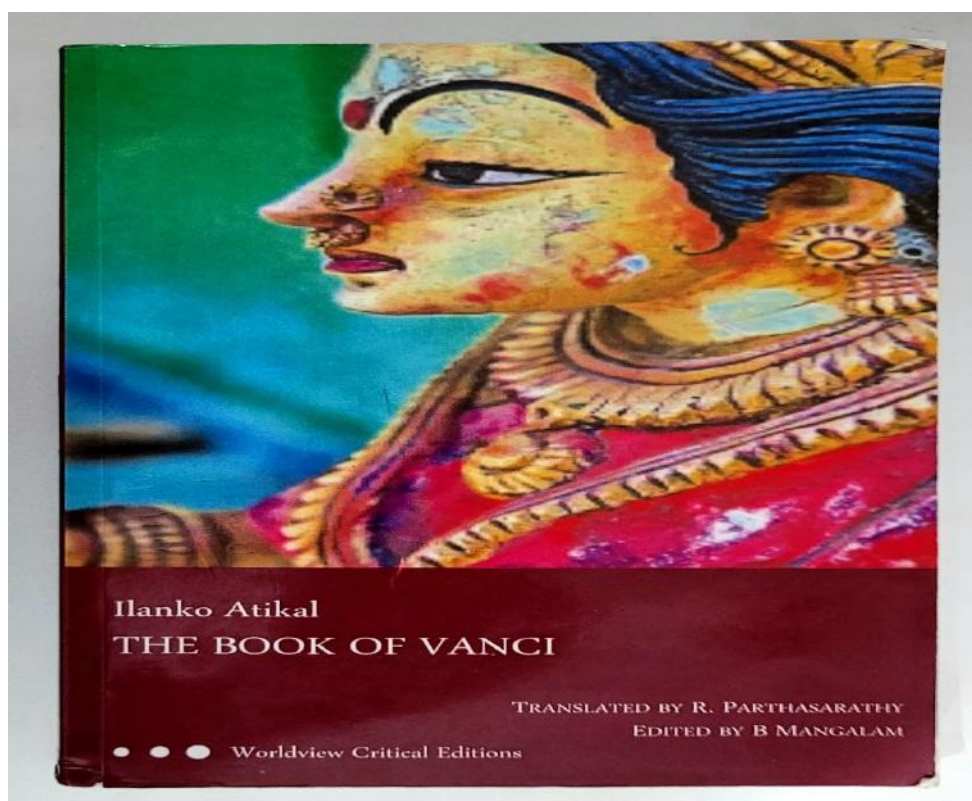


**The Tamil Epic Tradition, *The Cilappatikaram* and
“The Book of Vanci” (Ilanko Atikal)**

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I. Introduction to the Tamil Epic Tradition

1. Historical Context

- The Tamil epic tradition flourished during the Sangam period (300 BCE - 300 CE).

- Influenced by both indigenous Tamil culture and interaction with neighbouring cultures.

2. Key Features

- Rich poetic and literary heritage.

- Blend of myth, legend, history, and moral lessons.

- Deeply intertwined with the socio-political and religious life of ancient Tamil Nadu.

3. Major Works

- *Cilappatikaram* (The Tale of an Anklet)

- *Manimekalai* (The Jeweled Belt)

- *Jeevakacintamani*

- *Valayapathi*

- *Kundalakesi*

- The epics are attributed to the post-Sangam period, part of the Tamil classical literature.

II. Akam & Puram Traditions

1. Akam (Interior) Tradition (5 Thinai appropriate for poetry, and Thinai 6 & 7 are not apt for Poetry)

- Deals with personal and emotional themes, primarily love and relationships.
- Features subtle and metaphorical language.
- Uses landscapes as symbolic representations of emotional states.

Thinai	Flower/Trees	Region	Phases of Love
Kurinci	conehead	hills	clandestine meeting of lovers
Mullai	jasmine	pastures	waiting in hope ✓
Marutam	arjuna tree	countryside	wife's sulking/ infidelity of man
Neytal	dark lily	seashore	lamenting/ anxiety for husband's return ✓
Palai	ivory wood	wasteland	parting/ lover's departure in search of wealth or knowledge

Thinai 6 and 7, *Kaikkilai* — unrequited love, and *Perunthinai* — mismatched love or lust were considered inappropriate subjects for poetry.

2. Puram (Exterior) Tradition (7 Thinai)

- Focuses on external themes like war, politics, heroism, and ethics.
- More direct and grandiose in expression.
- Emphasizes public and communal life.

The Puram poetry was also codified by seven *thinai*, six of them named after flowers/trees indicative of combat situations:

Thinai	Flower/Tree	Situation
Vetci	Scarlet ixora	cattle raiding
Vanci	Indian willow	invasion ✓
Ulinai	Balloon vine	siege ✓
Tumpai	White dead nettle	pitched battle ✓
Vakai	Sirissa tree	victory ✓
Kanci	Portia tree	impermanence of life ✓
Patan	Not specified	praise of kings ✓

III. Background of *Cilappatikaram*

1. Authorship

- Attributed to Ilango Adigal, a Jain monk.
- Believed to be a prince who renounced his claim to the throne.

And, also the younger brother of the Ceral King, Cenkuttuvan. His name only appears in the "Prologue", which scholars are of the opinion is a later interpolation.

2. Structure, Content & Meter

- Consists of three books: Puhar Kandam (Cola), Maduraikandam (Pantiya), and Vanci Kandam (Ceral).
- Blends elements of both Akam and Puram traditions.
- Themes of fate, justice, and retribution.
- Containing 5,730 lines, the text is composed in akaval or aciriyam meter.

3. The Etymology: *Cilappatikaram* > Tamil *atikaram* < Sanskrit. *Adhikarah*, meaning story or tale containing some chain of events, and Tamil *cilappu*, *cilampu*, meaning anklet.



IV. The Three Books of *Cilappatikaram*

1. Book I: Puhar Kandam (The Book of Puhar) (Tamil Kingdom: Cola)

- Introduction to the protagonists: Kovalan and Kannagi.
- Depiction of their life in the city of Puhar.
- Kovalan's infatuation with the dancer Madhavi and his subsequent financial ruin.

2. Book II: Maduraikandam (The Book of Madurai) (Kingdom: Pantiya)

- The couple's move to Madurai.
- Kovalan's wrongful execution by the Pandya king.
- Kannagi's fiery vengeance and the destruction of Madurai.

3. Book III: Vanci Kandam (The Book of Vanci) (Kingdom: Ceral)

- Kannagi's journey to the Chera kingdom.
- The Chera king Senguttuvan's vow to build a temple in her honour.
- The establishment of Kannagi's cult and her deification as goddess Pattini.

V. Detailed Study of the Book of Vanci (Vanci Kandam)

1. Narrative Summary

- Kannagi's Departure: After the destruction of Madurai, Kannagi continues her journey, arriving at the Chera kingdom.
- Cheran Senguttuvan's Resolution: Impressed by her virtue and her story, King Senguttuvan vows to build a temple in her honour.
- Kannagi's Deification: The king's efforts lead to the establishment of Kannagi as a goddess, symbolizing purity and justice.
- Procession to the Himalayas: Senguttuvan undertakes a grand journey to the Himalayas to fetch a stone for the idol of Kannagi.
- International Implications: The journey and the subsequent construction of the temple highlight the regional unity and the king's power.

2. Themes and Symbolism

- Justice and Retribution: Continuing from Kannagi's actions in Madurai, her journey to Vanci underscores themes of divine justice.
- Deification and Devotion: Illustrates the process of mortal transformation into divine, reflecting societal reverence for moral righteousness.
- Political Unity: The cooperation and respect among South Indian kingdoms reflect the political and cultural unity of the time.

3. Cultural and Religious Impact

- The story of Kannagi becomes a foundational myth in Tamil culture.
- Her worship as a deity, particularly in South India and Sri Lanka.
- Influence on subsequent Tamil literature and art forms.

4. Literary Techniques

- Rich poetic language, vivid descriptions, and dramatic dialogues.

- Use of epic conventions like grand journeys, divine interventions, and moral lessons.

VI. Conclusion

1. Legacy of Cilappatikaram

- Integral part of Tamil literary canon.
- Continues to inspire contemporary literature, cinema, and arts.
- Symbolizes the enduring themes of justice, morality, and cultural pride in Tamil tradition.

2. Reflective Discussion

- The relevance of Cilappatikaram's themes in modern times.
- The impact of ancient epics on contemporary South Indian culture.
- Kannagi's role as a cultural icon and its implications for gender and justice.

Suggested Reading and Resources

1. Translations and Commentaries

- *The Cilappatikaram* translated by R. Parthasarathy (Penguin Classics)
- *The Tale of an Anklet: An Epic of South India* by R. Parthasarathy.
- *The Book of Vanci* translated by R. Parthasarathy, edited by B Mangalam (Worldview Critical Editions)

2. Academic Articles and Books

- "Tamil Literature" in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* edited by Amaresh Datta.
- *The Tamil Epics and the Epic Tradition* by Kamil Zvelebil.

3. Multimedia Resources

- Documentaries and lectures available on educational platforms like YouTube and academic websites.
- Cultural performances and adaptations in theatre and film.

THANK YOU