

3 Tracing the Name Nīli throughout Tamil Literature

My research necessarily included tracing the story of Nīli throughout the literary corpus. I have already noted¹ that the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition is only one among the various traditions which had accumulated around a nucleus narrating remarkable events of the past. Other genres, such as the *yaṭcakāṇam* tradition, *kāppiyam*, medieval religious literature, *viṭutūtu* (messenger poem), proverbs, phrases, and riddles, formed a web around the narrative, and in some cases made use of it for their own purposes, be it in the form of allusions or analogies. In short, there existed a shared knowledge and historical remembrance of the core events. Traditions often overlap, and in the listing below I present evidence of such cross-fertilisation between the literary and the oral traditions.

There are, as Zvelebil (1989:298f.) has pointed out, literary references to the name Nīli stretching back both to the *kāppiyam* work *Cilappatikāram* (450–475 C.E.?) and to Śaiva literature from the seventh to nineteenth centuries. Though Nīli in the *katai* is not always identical with the Nīli mentioned variously throughout Tamil literature, it can be stated, if not with finality, that in the Śaiva literature she very probably is so.

The following compilation of literary references to the name Nīli is based on Caṇmukacuntaram 1978 (and Caṇmukacuntaram 1984);² *Vālviyaṅ Kaḷañciyam*, Vol. 12, p. 211, “Paḷayaṅūr Nīli”; Jepakumār 1992; Perumāḷ 1990 (see also Perumāḷ and Śrīkumār 2002); Shulman 1980:195–7; Subramaniam 1996; and finally Zvelebil 1989:297–301. The survey of references in Caṇmukacuntaram 1978, from which I have greatly profited, may be considered the most complete. A very few newly discovered references have been added by myself. Still, I am convinced that more remain to be discovered. I consider the references highly significant and worth a thorough examination. This task, not undertaken in other studies, will be equally addressed in the survey below, with the aim of arriving at some conclusions.

1. The *Cilappatikāram*³ of Iḷāṅkō, 12.68; 12.21.3; 23.158-9 (450–475 C.E.?)⁴ –
A post-Caṅkam *kāppiyam*

The first occurrence of the name Nīli to be attested in classical Tamil literary texts is very likely the *Cilappatikāram*.

¹ See Sect. 2.1.

² The 1978 work (particularly the list) contains fewer errors than the later one (1984), in which some notes have been added, and others removed.

³ This *kāppiyam* deals with an important indigenous cultural topos: the Pattinī, that is, the chaste wife. Oddly enough, it is a violently heroic type of modesty that the heroine Kaṇṇaki embodies.

⁴ For this dating, see Zvelebil 1995:146, 409; see also Zvelebil 1989:297. On the problems involved in dating the text, see Vēluppiḷai 1997:53ff.

1.1. In *Cil.* 12.68 the name Nīli along with other epithets (e.g. Cūli [=Durgā with the trident] and Aiyai, the goddess of hunters) is mentioned as that of a violent goddess, a multiform of Korṟavai⁵ (the goddess of war and victory, the proto-Durgā). The scene is a temple of the goddess Aiyai, where a group of hunters and their women comes to worship her with ritual dance and song. A virgin girl is chosen to represent the goddess, and is dressed and adorned correspondingly. She undergoes possession and begins to dance and make inspired utterances.

63 சிலம்புங் கழலும் புலம்புஞ் சீறடி
64 வலம்படு கொற்றத்து வாய்வாட் கொற்றவை
65 இரண்டுவே றுரவிற் றிரண்டதோ ளவுணன்
66 தலைமிசை நின்ற தையல் பலர்தொழும்
67 அமரி குமரி கவுரி சமரி
68 சூலி நீலி மாலவற் கிளங்கிளை
69 ஐயை ...
(*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:314], Chapter 12, “Vēṭṭuvavari” [Hunter’s song], 63-9)

63 A circlet (*kaḷal*) and *cilampu* were chiming on her small (beautiful) ankle (*cīraṭi*). [They seem to augur]
64 a triumphant (*valampaṭu*) victory (*korṟam*) for the goddess of war (*Korṟavai*) in sword(-play)—
66 she who stood on the head
65 of the broad-shouldered Asura (*avuṇan*), whose body was parted in two.
66 Worshipped by many,
67 she was called Amari (Durgā the war goddess), Kumari (Durgā the virgin goddess), Kavuri (Gauri the white-coloured one), Camari (Durgā adorned with a serpent),
68 Cūli (Durgā holding a trident), Nīli (the blue-coloured one). She was the younger sister of Viṣṇu.
69 She was Aiyai (Durgā the goddess of hunters). [She was truly Durgā] [...].

Unfortunately U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar (referred to by his initials U.V.C.) has no comment to offer about these lines and the word Nīli.

1.2. In *Cil.* 12.21.3.,⁶ in a “song of sacrifice,” the fierce virgin goddess of the Eyiṇārs/Maṟavas (thieves) who accepts blood sacrifice is called, among other names, Nīli, a generic cognomen for the fierce goddess.⁷

20.3 ... குமரிநி னடிதொடு
படுகட னிதுவுரு பலிமுக மடையே.
[...]
(பலிக்கொடை) வேறு
21.1 வம்பலர் பல்கி வழியும் வளம்பட
அம்புடை வல்வி லெயின்கட னுண்குவாய்
சங்கரி யந்தரி நீலி சடாமுடிச்
செங்க னரவு பிறையுடன் சேர்த்துவாய்
(*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:319], Chapter 12, “Vēṭṭuvavāri,” 20.3-4, 21.1-4)⁸

⁵ Tiwari (1985:232f.), referring to *Cil.* 12, remarks: “While the conception of Korṟavai in the ‘song of the hunters’ in the *Cilappatikāram* is a very syncretic one, in which she appears identified with Aiyai, Aṇaṅku [*sic*], Durgā, Kāli, etc., elsewhere in the epic a distinction seems to be implied between her and some of these goddesses.” – Tiwari’s (1985:233) further remarks on the goddess Korṟavai are useful: “As presented in the Tamil heroic poems, there is no marked element of fertility in the character of Korṟavai, who remains primarily a goddess of war and victory. This, incident[al]ly, is also suggested by her name which is generally assumed to be derived from *korṟam*, meaning victory. [...] But, considering that sacrifices of blood, including human blood, were made to Korṟavai, and virgin priestesses probably officiated in her worship, an original fertility character of this goddess is not unlikely. In any case, Murukan, with whom she stood in closest relationship as mother, seems to have been originally a dreaded fertility god, propitiated with orgiastic rituals involving frenzied dance by young girls and offerings of blood and flesh.”

⁶ Zvebil (1989:297), referring to *Cil.* 12.21.3, writes: “We cannot say whether *this* Nīli is identical with the gruesome heroine of the Tamil folk-tale. She probably is, since the Nīli of the quoted stanza is a rather ferocious female deity.”

⁷ See Shulman 1980:196, n. 18.

⁸ There is no line-by-line counting at this point in the edition. The strophe is marked by the editor as an interpolation that in spite of its lower numbering follows the verses 12.63-69 (mentioned above), rather than preceding them.

- 20.3 O virgin goddess (*kumari*), as we touch your feet
accept our tribute (*kaṭaṇ*), this due blood sacrifice at your altar in fulfilment of the [Eyiṇārs's] vow (*kaṭaṇ*).
[...]
(Another song of sacrifice)
- 21.3 O Cankari, Antari, blue goddess Nīli, you who wears in your hair
21.4 the red-eyed serpent and the crescent moon,
21.2 accept the tribute of the Eyiṇārs, [who are equipped] with arrows and strong bows,
21.1 and [send us in return for it, in order to rob them,] many travellers along our path, [so] that our wealth may grow
immense!

1.3. The *Cilappatikāram*, the story of Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṇ, offers us still further material. The verses 23.138-70, spoken by the tutelary female deity of Maturai, contain a brief account of one Nīli, the wife of Caṅkamaṇ (lines 158-59). She committed suicide by jumping off a cliff after losing her husband tragically to the cruelty of Kōvalaṇ, who in his previous life was Parataṇ (Bharata). Nīli's curse has its inescapable effect on Kōvalaṇ and Kaṇṇaki. Since Caṅkamaṇ's unjust death has to be atoned for, Kōvalaṇ's fate takes its course, and like Caṅkamaṇ, he is executed on a false charge. According to Zvelebil (1989:297f.) "this story may have provided the original underlying motif of 'the laws of preordained fate' in the Tamil oral tradition." I cite lines 151-60:

- 151 சங்கம னென் னும் வாணிகன் றன்னை
152 முந்தைப் பிறப்பிற் பைந்தொடி கணவன்
153 வெந்திறல் வேந்தற்குக் கோத்தொழில் செய்வோன்
154 பரத னென்னும் பெயரனக் கோவலன்
155 விரத நீங்கிய வெறுப்பின னாதலின்
156 ஒற்ற னிவனெனப் பற்றினன் கொண்டு
157 வெற்றிவேன் மன்னற்குக் காட்டிக் கொல்வுழிக்
158 கொலைக்களப் பட்ட சங்கமன மனைவி
159 நிலைக்களங் காணா ணீலி யென்போள்
160 அரசர் முறையோ பரதர் முறையோ
(*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:505], Chapter 23, "Kaṭṭurai Kātai," 151-60)

- 152 Woman with gold bangles,
154 your husband Kōvalaṇ
152 in his previous birth
154 was known as Parataṇ.
153 He, who was in the army of the valorous king [Vacu of Kalinga],
155 had given up his vow of non-violence and was hated by all.
156 He believed
151 Caṅkamaṇ, the merchant,
156 to be a spy. He captured him, brought him
157 before the king of the victorious spear, and caused him to be beheaded.
158 The wife of the murdered,
159 Nīli by name, [now on her own and] not finding a place to stay,
160 cried, "O king, is this your justice? O merchants, is this justice?"

1.4. Based on the comparative study of Hameed (1971), who rightly emphasised parallels between the two heroines, Kaṇṇaki of the *Cilapatikkāram* and Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli, Shulman (1980:196), in brief, sums them up:

[...] both share the motif of a husband's impoverishment by a prostitute; in both the husband dies as he is disposing of his wife's jewelry, and false accusations are believed with fatal consequences.

It appears to me that there are, moreover, striking similarities in the lives of Nīli-Icakki and another figure of the *Cilapatikkāram* that other studies have passed over because they focus on Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli (the northern version) rather than on the *Nīli Katai/IK* (the southern version of the bow-song tradition). It is interesting to note the parallel roles the devadāsī Lakṣmī of the *IK* (southern version) and the courtesan Māṭavi of the *Cilapatikkāram* play in their relations with their lovers, the Brahmin and the merchant Kōvalaṇ respectively: both women share (apart from a natural interest in female heirs) the status of an independent lover; both impoverish their lovers; both share the fate of being abandoned after their lover's impoverishment; and both are lovesick and run after their lovers (Lakṣmī in person,

Mātavi by sending a letter-bearing messenger). But here their paths part, as is common for two different traditions, one vernacular, the other classic. The first tradition favours a raw articulation of emotion, while the latter resorts to more refined solutions:⁹ Lakṣmī is killed by the Brahmin in order to get rid of her, whereas Mātavi is left with her letter written to Kōvalaṅ unanswered. Moreover, Lakṣmī's response to her violent death is vengeance, whereas Mātavi renounces her passionate desires, finding solace from the pangs of despised love in the life of a Buddhist nun.

2. The *Maṇimēkalai*, 26.5-34 (500 C.E./600 C.E.)¹⁰ – A narrative related¹¹ to the *Cilappatikāram*

Nīli's story as the wife of the merchant Caṅkamaṅ of Simhapuram (whose names in their next births are respectively Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṅ) is retold in the *Maṇimēkalai* of Cāttaṅār, Chapter 26, "Vañcimānakarpukka-kātai" 5-34 (a narrative continuation of the *Cilappatikāram*). When *Maṇimēkalai*, the seed of the love between Mātavi and Kōvalaṅ, visits Vañci¹² and worships the images of Kōvalaṅ and Kaṇṇaki, the latter appears before her to tell her about Kōvalaṅ's past life. I borrow the translation of Chapter 26, "Entering the City of Vañci," from Nandakumar 1989:142:

The maid traversed the skies to the city,
Eager to see her mother, Kannaki
Of immense love, and father Kovalan
The caritable, who were now sculpted
As statues invested with divinity.
"Not seeking the duty of love, nor of
Renunciation, you took to the path
Of stern chastity for life's fulfilment.
Tell me why," she cried, praying in front
Of their images. The great chaste Goddess said:
"When Maturai was burnt by my anger
Due to the evil that had struck my lord,
Goddess Maturapathi appeared.
'This has been due to your evil past.
Vasu and Kumaran were agnate kings
Of Kalinga country with great gardens.
Simhapura and Kapila were their
Capitals: they battled amongst themselves.
Between the cities a stretch of sixty
Miles lay deserted, unapproached by man.
Eager to make money Sangaman brought
Jewels secretly, and with his wife went
To Simhapura. He was detected
And reported upon. Your husband

⁹ On the divergent treatment of topics within the two traditions, see Hildebeitel 1999:9, and Shulman 1986:127. See also Hameed 1971:196–204.

¹⁰ On the dating of 500 C.E., see Zvelebil 1995:409. Vēluppiḷḷai (1997) "finds it difficult to decide on the date of the narrative *Maṇimēkalai*, as it stands today"; all things considered, "[to him] the date of the sixth century A.D. [...] appears most probable, but interpolations could have been made almost up until the thirteenth century" (93).

¹¹ Commonly Tamil scholars have been of the opinion that the *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* are twin *kāppiyams*. However, more recent research (Vēluppiḷḷai 1997) shows a tendency to consider the two authors Iḷaṅkō and Cāttaṅār as independent of each other in time, and also to a certain extent with respect to narrative concerns. The epilogue (*nūr kaṭṭurai*) of the *Cilappatikāram* mentions that together with the *Maṇimēkalai* the story forms a complete whole, and indeed the two *kāppiyams*, as remarked by Vēluppiḷḷai (ibid.:54), "treat the story of one family." Yet, as Vēluppiḷḷai (ibid.:69f.) attempts to show, "Iḷaṅkō and Cāttaṅār seem to be so different in outlook that it is difficult to visualise a close personal friendship between the two." (69) Whereas he considers it "very difficult to pinpoint [Iḷaṅkō] to any one religion, any dynasty or any region" (69), he looks upon Cāttaṅār as "very sectarian (confessional) in his approach" (69f.). He further argues that the Buddhist poet of the *Maṇimēkalai* makes use of an earlier work (69), the *Cilappatikāram* (popular at the time), that mainly glorifies the Pattiṅi (78), but also attempted to popularise Jainism (70). The *Maṇimēkalai* itself is regarded as having a sectarian affiliation to late Theravāda schools (Schalk 1997:23).

¹² Nagaswamy (1995) shows that Vañci was the site of today's Karūr in Tiruccirāppaḷḷi district. See also Hudson 1997:152.

Bharathan, a cruel official of the King,
 Caught him, and accusing him as a spy
 To the King, had the innocent man
 Condemned to death. There his wife lamented
 Pitifully and went to a hill-top
 Getting ready to die. Her curses then
 Have now borne result. The evil of past
 Will inexorably chase the doer.⁷
 (*Maṇimēkalai* 26.5.34, transl. by S. Prema Nandakumar:142)

3. The *Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūttatiruppatikam* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār, strophes 2 and 5 (550–600 C.E.)¹³ – Devotional Śaiva literature

A further source is the devotional poems of the *Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūttatiruppatikam* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār (probably the earliest Śaiva poet-saint), who became the *kāraikkārpēy*, Śiva’s demon devotee in Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu¹⁴ (Zvelebil 1995:334). According to Shulman (1980), she is “[...] a form of Nīli, the ancient goddess [...]” (161) who “[...] is tamed by the dance [contest]” (203).¹⁵ Her legend, Shulman notes, has to be seen as “a hagiographic variant¹⁶ of the myth of Nīli,¹⁷ the ancient goddess of Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu” (13). Of course, what Shulman is referring to is not the deceitful heroine Paḷaiyaṅṇūr Nīli, as known to us in the *katai* (N7)—although the two do share a sacred space—but Kālī, who in the Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu-Sthalamāhātmya is identified with the ancient goddess Nīli, an active and fearsome goddess referred to in *Cil.* 12.68 as a multiform of Koṟṟavai.

The text contains a fascinating description of a demoness at a cremation ground. I have chosen strophe 2, mainly in order to draw the reader’s attention to the milky *kaḷḷi* plant and its proximity to the

¹³ The exact date is unknown. On the dating, see Zvelebil 1995:334. See also the *Kāraikkālammaiṃyār Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūttatiruppatikam* (ed. Karavelane 1982:17, 19); the editor fixes the date to the middle of the sixth century C.E., referring to the fact that the poetess lived earlier than Campantar. This is based on Cēkkiḷār’s account that Tiruṅṇācampantar, while on a pilgrimage in Toṅṭaiṅṇu, refused to tread the ground of Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu, arguing that Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār had there walked on her hands in true respect to Śiva (ibid.:18, introduction).

¹⁴ On the importance of Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu in the clash between Śaivism and the Ammaṅ cult, and the Śaiva tradition’s aim of taming the cult, see Kulke 1970:124: “Beide Legenden aus Tiruvālaṅgāṭṭu, diejenige der Göttin Kālī und jene der Ammaiṃyār, kreisen damit um ein und dasselbe Thema, nämlich um die Auseinandersetzung des Śivaismus mit dem Kult einer Göttin. Dabei dürfte die Legende vom Tanzwettbewerb Śivas mit der Göttin Kālī insofern noch ältere Züge in sich bergen, als hier von einem Kampf die Rede ist, während in der Legende der Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār die Unterwerfung bereits vollzogen ist” (124). [...] Daß sie [Kālī] in diesem Kampfe unterlag, ist nicht der Schwäche der Göttin in diesem Wesenszug zuzuschreiben. Es ist vielmehr das Ergebnis der historischen Entwicklung des Śivaismus, der mehr als irgendeine andere der großen ‘Religionen’ Indiens in die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Kult der Göttin verstrickt und erfolgreich war. Dabei war das Ziel dieser Auseinandersetzung die ‘Bändigung’ ihres Kultes. Das Ergebnis war die ‘Heirat’ des mütterlichen Aspektes der Göttin als Pārvatī und die völlige Abdrängung ihres vernichtenden Aspektes (als ‘Cāmuṅḍā’)” (ibid.:124f.). Kulke (ibid.:123) draws a parallel between Cāmuṅḍā and Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār: “In ihrer von Sēkkiḷār beschriebenen und von den Künstlern Südindiens dargestellten Gestalt ähnelt sie ferner sehr stark der siebten Muttergöttin, der Cāmuṅḍā, die, wie Bhairava unter den Göttern, den furchterregenden Aspekt der Muttergöttin verkörpert” (123). [...] Ein ikonographisch sicherer Beweis für die Beziehungen zwischen der Kāraikkāl-Ammaiṃyār und der Cāmuṅḍā sind die deutlich erkennbaren Eckzähne der Ammaiṃyār. [...] Sie sind aus ihrer Legende heraus nicht zu erklären. Hier liegt sozusagen eine ikonographische Kontamination vor” (123, n. 302).

¹⁵ No. 12 below treats this dance contest in more detail. Interestingly enough, the pose of a devadāsī raising her leg above her head—the same dance figure with which Śiva defeated Kālī—was not uncommon, as the pose of a dancing girl in the Nṛtta Sabhā in Cidambaram shows; on the Cidambaram dance pose, see Smith 1996:219.

¹⁶ According to her legend, she was born as Puṇitavati, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and later married Paramatattāṅ, who, overawed by her miracle with a mango, left her and took a second wife. Cēkkiḷār deals with the legend in the *Periyapurāṇam*. See also Schomerus 1925:123–6. – An analogous hagiographic account centres on the *yakṣī* Ampikā, portrayed in the stories of the Jains as a woman with two children who was discarded by a husband who feared her. She eventually threw herself over a cliff; see also Sect. 7.3.1, point 6, p. 244, n. 100.

¹⁷ Shulman’s statement can lead to some confusion, since it does not distinguish between the “tamed” and “untamed” Kālī sufficiently clearly. The use of the name Nīli is here perhaps less satisfactory, for Nīli, in my opinion, is the “untamed” Kālī prior to the dance contest, whereas—and here I follow Kulke 1970:124—in Kāraikkāl’s hagiography the taming has already been accomplished (“während in der Legende der Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār die Unterwerfung bereits vollzogen ist”).

demonic (*pēy*), a matter of great inner logic that is confirmed in the close relation between the *kaḷḷi*-(turned-child) and the *pēy*-demoness Nīli-Icakki in the *IK*.

கள்ளிக் கவட்டிடைக் காலைநீட்டிக்
கடைக்கொள்ளி வாங்கி மசித்துமையை
விள்ள எழுதி வெடுவெடென்ன
நக்கு வெருண்டு விலங்குபார்த்துத்
துள்ளிச் சுடலைச் சுடுபிணத்தீச்
சுட்டிட முற்றுஞ் சுளிந்துழித்தி
அள்ளி யவிக்கநின் றாடுமெங்கள்
அப்ப னிடந்திரு ஆலங்காடே.

(*Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūttatirupatikam*, strophe 2, [ed. Karavelane 1982:61])

- 1 Her legs stretched—with a *kaḷḷi* plant in between the fork of her legs—
- 2 she takes the tip of a piece of coal from the fire and mashes it into collyrium
- 3 to mark her body. She laughs boisterously,
- 4 and at the same time causes fright with the sidelong look [natural to demons].
- 5 She jumps up, and [against] the hot corpse in the fire of the cremation ground
- 6 burns herself. Angrily
- 7 she kicks dust (6) to put [the fire] out where he is dancing, our
- 8 god of Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu.

4. The *Tēvāram* 1.45.1; 1.45.7 (of Tiruñāṇacampan̄tar; before 650 C.E.?)¹⁸ – Devotional (*bhakti*) Śaiva literature

4.1. The motif of a woman who suffers great injury and avenges herself appears repeatedly in Tamil literature from *Cil.* 23.138-70 on. The very first record of a link of the vengeful Nīli (of the *katai*) with the site Paḷaiyaṇūr-Ālaṅkāṭṭu and the Vēḷāḷa community is, however, found in the *Tēvāram*, a Middle Tamil text of the Śaiva canon comprising hymns by the most famous Nāyaṇmār poet-saints, and one of the most important sources for an understanding of Tamil *bhakti* (Zvelebil 1995, s.v.), a movement that inspired the landed caste of the Vēḷāḷas, and conversely threatened the mercantile Jains. The great Śaiva poet-saint Tiruñāṇacampan̄tar, a younger contemporary of Appar, mentions Ālaṅkāṭṭu (another name for Paḷaiyaṇūr) in “Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu,” *patikam* 1.45. There he makes an allusion to the story of the deceitful Nīli of Paḷaiyaṇūr, as it is known to us today in the *Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli Katai*,¹⁹ without, however, naming her. The Vēḷāḷas who entered the fire in order to keep their word are praised in these verses of the *Tēvāram*.²⁰ Within a landscape of changing socioreligious dominance, it is no accident that they are the heroic figures here.²¹ The fact that the allusion to Nīli appears in the first verse of the *patikam* is striking, and there is good reason to suppose that the poet considered the story of the deceitful Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli and the Vēḷāḷas as a most relevant and famous incident relating to Ālaṅkāṭṭu.

¹⁸ This date is taken from Zvelebil 1989:298. The question of the date of the *Tēvāram* poet is discussed in Zvelebil 1975:139f., and remains a matter of controversy. The same author (1995:682) fixes the poet’s lifetime between 625 and 660 C.E., basing himself on Campantar’s mention of the Pallava general Ciṟuttoṅṅar, who destroyed the Chalukya capital of Vātāpi in 642 C.E. For a further discussion, see Peterson 1991:19.

¹⁹ The story of the deceitful Nīli (of the *Nīli Katai*) referred to by Campantar is—I refer to the synopsis of Chakravarti (1936:13–14; see also in this section below)—a minor variant of N7 (see the synopsis in Sect. 2.4 above), the most striking divergence being that it lacks the episode of the self-impregnated child, leaving the reader with the impression that the murdered wife had sexual intercourse with her husband, which according to N7 was not the case. Moreover, Chakravarti’s synopsis depicts the murder as being motivated by the greediness of the husband for his wife’s jewels, whereas in N7 the murder is committed out of fear of having to face the humiliation of his wife’s infidelity, an accusation that was, of course, unjustified. – I agree with Chakravarti (1936:15) that the deceitful Nīli (of the *Nīli Katai*) should not be identified with the Kālī-(Nīli) of Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu, who has a famous temple there, but is a distinct figure.

²⁰ The poet’s reason for mentioning the well-known incident involving Nīli evidently is to give prominence to the Vēḷāḷas’ uprightness. Here the fame lies with the Vēḷāḷas, whereas in the bow-song I see it as attaching to Nīli, as is clearly stated in one of the verses. The bow-song bard T.M.P. confirmed the latter to me.

²¹ The setting presented to us is no longer influenced by Jains and merchants, as it was in the earlier *Cilapatikkāram*. – For a historical account of the *bhakti* movement, spearheaded by the Vēḷāḷa community, see Stein 1985:81, 88.

- திரு ஆலங்காடு 1-45
 1.1 துஞ்ச வருவாரும், தொழுவிப்பாரும், வழுவிப் போய்
 நெஞ்சம் புதுந்து என்னை நினைவிப்பாரும்-முனை நட்புஆய்
 வஞ்சப்படுத்து ஒருத்தி வாழ்நாள் கொள்ளும் வகை கேட்டு,
 அஞ்சும் பழையனார் ஆலங்காட்டு எம் அடிகளே.
 (*Tēvāram* [ed. Gopal Iyer and Gros 1984:47], “Tiru Ālaṅkāṭu,” 1.45.1)
- 1.4 O our Lord of Paḷaiyaṅūr-Ālaṅkāṭu, the site of those who feared [for their honour] when
 1.3 they heard of the method of the lady who takes life [*vāṅṅā!*] by a wilful deceit—
 1.1 He is the god who is in my dreams [when I sleep] and makes the people worship.
 [However,] he slips away²² after
 1.2 he has entered my heart and made me remember the former lover.

According to Chakravarti (1936:13f.) and others,²³ it is the following version that is alluded to by Tiruṅānacampantar and Cēkkiḷār:

A married Brahmin entrapped by a *dāsī* lost all his property. Pretending to return to his abandoned wife, who had been living with her parents, he killed her, throwing her and her baby into a well, and snatched her jewels. The Brahmin was reborn as a *Ceṭṭi*. Though he was warned not to go north, one day he crossed the forest of Paḷaiyaṅūr equipped with a magical sword. There Nīli, his wife in the previous birth, clung to him. He tried to escape, but in vain. She stubbornly claimed to be his legal wife who had been discarded in favour of prostitutes. In the village, before an assembly of seventy *Vēḷāḷas*, she insisted on getting him back, narrating in detail the whole family history of the merchant. Although the *Ceṭṭi* contended that she was a *pēy* who was trying to kill him, they consoled him and assured him that they would take responsibility for his life. However, this was to no avail. When they were alone at night, and he was unprotected (upon Nīli’s request, the magical sword had been taken away from him), she tore open his body. When the *Vēḷāḷas* discovered this, they entered the fire. (Synopsis on the basis of the summaries of the scholars mentioned above)

4.2. Another interesting verse in the *Tēvāram* is 1.45.7 and its mention of *aṅaṅku*.²⁴ That the word *aṅaṅku* also applies to the deceitful Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli (of the *katai*) may be unintentional, but is probably not, since the poet begins this *patikam* (1.45.1) with an allusion to Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli. It is useful to remember at this point that the two autonomous figures, the deceitful Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli and the “untamed” goddess Kālī(-Nīli) of Paḷaiyaṅūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, share a moment in history, inasmuch as the murder of the *Ceṭṭi* by the vengeful Nīli occurs in the shrine, the *mūlasthāna*, of the “untamed” goddess.²⁵ The poet obviously considers this cause enough to use the word *aṅaṅku* with its connotation of a “potentially dangerous female force.” We might read this force as attaching to both female figures,²⁶ keeping all the

²² The god’s slipping away, according to Shulman (personal communication), is a *Tēvāram* model of a devotee’s meeting with a god who comes into his physical presence (*arul*).

²³ See also Cōmacuntaraṅār (1964:24f.) and Zvelebil’s synopsis (1989:300).

²⁴ The concept of *aṅaṅku* (Smith 2006, Dubianski 2000, Rajam 1986, Zvelebil 1984, Burrow 1979, Hart 1976), central to Tamil culture (though argued over by scholars; e.g. Rajam 1986), signifies according to Dubianski (2000) “a certain force related to various objects and phenomena of the world” (7) and may be “benevolent and, also, intimidating and dangerous” (13). It can mean “to kill,” “to desire,” “to suffer,” or “to fear.” David Shulman tentatively defines it as “a hightened, maybe divine existence, intentionally dangerous, but not necessarily dangerous” (personal communication). See also the Telugu cognate *aṅa(ṅ)gu* (to submit, be humbled). Durgā is called *aṅaṅkāḷ* and *aṅaṅkinavāḷ*, hers, too, being a slightly dangerous presence. The *Tēvāram* contains frequent reference to Durgā, primarily as a goddess who heals, as in Tiruvannāmalai.

²⁵ See illustrations in P. Subramaniam’s edition of the *Nīli Yaṭcakāṇam*.

²⁶ There is perhaps reason to suppose that the poet is linking the vengeful Nīli (of our *katai*) and the ancient goddess by allusion to their *aṅaṅku*, given the link between the “untamed” goddess Kālī(-Nīli) and the fierce goddess Aṅaṅku (another form of Korṟavai) of *Cil.* 12.42, and given the atmosphere in *Cil.* 12 “Vēṭṭuvavari” (Hunter’s song) in general, and verse 12.21.3 in particular. See *Cil.* (ed. U.V.C. 1978:312f.) 12.42-44: ... அணங்கு முன்னிற்றி/விலைப்பலி யுண்ணு மலர்பலி பீடகைக்/கலைப்பரி யூர்தியைக் கைதொழு தேத்தி, “[Cālīni, the virgin girl of the Eyiṅārs,] stood before (42) the flower *pītam* pedestal (43) of [the goddess] Aṅaṅku (42), who feasts on (*uṅṅum*) [bloody] sacrifice, [giving victory in return] (*vilaippali*) (43) They, [the Eyiṅārs,] folding their hands in worship, praised [their virgin girl, who is] the goddess mounted (*ūrṭi*) on a stag (*kalaippari*)” (44).

while in mind that “*pēy* demonesses [are] known for their rare *aṇaṅku*” (Dubianski 2000:15). An additional fact adds to the argument that the verse is very probably alluding simultaneously to Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli (of the *katai*): Cēkkiḷār in *Periyapurāṇam* 19.1080, another verse alluding to the deceitful Nīli, obviously quotes from *Tēvāram* 1.45.7, since he uses the word *ciruttoṅṅar* (little devotees) when referring to the honourable Vēḷāḷas.

- 7 திரு ஆலங்காடு 1–45
நுணங்குமறை பாடி ஆடி வேடம் பயின்றாரும்,
இணங்கும் மலைமகளோடு இரு கூறு ஒன்றுஆய் இசைந்தாரும்—
வணங்கும் சிறுத்தொண்டர் வைகல் ஏத்தும் வாழ்த்தும் கேட்டு,
அணங்கும் பழையனூர் ஆலங்காட்டு எம் அடிகளே.
(*Tēvāram* [ed. Gopal Iyer and Gros 1984:47], “Tiru Ālaṅkāṭu,” 1.45.7)
- 5 O our Lord of Paḷaiyaṅṅūr-Ālaṅkāṭu,
4 where these humble devotees who bow down daily praise [him], wishing long life [and]—in the presence of the goddess [of Ālaṅkāṭu], who has *aṇaṅku*, the potentially dangerous female force, in her²⁷—
1 listening [4] to him as he chants the subtle²⁸ Veda, dances, and tries to disguise himself.
3 He is the one who was two and harmoniously became one²⁹
2 by including Pārvaṭī, the daughter of the Himālaya, who obeys him.

5. Nīlitanallūr in a tenth-century inscription of Cōḷaṅ Talaikoṅṅa Vīrpaṅṅiyaṅ

Vetācalam, to whose study (1989:108) I owe the source, suggests that the name Nīlitanallūr found on a tenth-century inscription is linked with Nīli. He identifies Nīlitanallūr with a village in the area of Tirunelvēli, where an inscription of Cōḷaṅ Talaikoṅṅa Vīrpaṅṅiyaṅ written in *vattēḷuttu* characters was discovered in the local temple. The village name and its dating back to the tenth century, according to Vetācalam, imply that Nīli and her name had become popular in Tirunelvēli district by that period. In reality, it is difficult to know how to assess this supposed example of Nīli’s popularity in the southernmost part of Tamilnadu. I do not find the above conclusion fully convincing, any more than the entire undertaking of identifying various places with the Nīli/Icakki story. It would be desirable to know what other information the inscription supplies—for instance, why precisely the village is named such and what circumstance the inscription is referring to.

6. The Jain narrative poem³⁰ *Nīlakēci*, “Avaiyaṅṅakam” 4 (latter half of the tenth century)³¹ – Minor *kāvya* literature

The Jain work refers to the name Nīli as follows:

ஆய்நீல வுண்க ணவளா யடங்காமை செய்யும்
பேய்நீல கேசி ...³²
(*Nīlakēci*, [ed. Cakkaravartti 1984⁹:15], Avaiyaṅṅakam 4=௨)

She whose collyrium-smeared eyes (*uṅkaṅ*) are beautifully (*-āy*) dark (*nīla*)
is the *pēy* demoness named Nīlakēci, who commits atrocities.

²⁷ This is a slightly free translation.

²⁸ *nuṅaṅku*, Skt. *sūkṣma* (everything that is fine, subtle). On *nuṅaṅku*, see also *Tirukkuraḷ* 42.419: people who have the ability to listen to the nuances, the very subtle parts.

²⁹ He made one out of two (*kūru* = śiva and śakti).

³⁰ The work is one of the *cīrupaṅṅakāvīyam* (five minor *kāvya*s).

³¹ The dating is according to Zvelebil 1995:495. Zvelebil (1989:301) assigns Camayativākaravāmaṅa Muṅi’s commentary on the *Nīlakēci* to the sixteenth century.

³² *āynīl uṅkaṅ avalāy aṅaṅkāmai ceyyum pēy nīlakēci*.

Avalāy, according to the commentator Camayativākaravāmaṇa Muṇivar, refers to Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīlakēci (ibid.).

The *Nīlakēci*, as remarked by Chakravarti (1974:103, 94), is “an answer to” or “modelled after” the Buddhist work *Kuṇṭalakēci*,³³ and “intended to be a refutation of Kuṇḍalakēsi’s philosophy.” The title of the work discussed here, according to the anonymous author,³⁴ is based on the myth of the *pēy* demoness “Kālī-Nīlakēci of Paḷaiyaṇūr.” The setting is referred to in the work as Tenpaḷayaṇūr,³⁵ accepted by Tamil scholars as identical with Paḷaiyaṇūr on the outskirts of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu near Arkkōṇam, and renowned from the *Tēvāram*. Again, we are dealing with Kālī-Nīli,³⁶ the ancient demonic goddess³⁷ who was, according to myth, defeated by Śiva in a dance contest. The author renames her Nīlakēci, the Sanskrit equivalent of Tamil Vaṇṭārkuḷali (lit. “she whose hair is full of bees” and hence dark),³⁸ yet another of the goddess’s cognomens.

As Shulman (1980:196) notes, “her name was apparently so closely linked with violence that the Jain author of [...] Nīlakēci chose her to represent an extreme example of successful conversion [...].” However, as Chakravarti (1936:18) emphasises:

After all, we have to remember that the author of Neelakesi, though he takes her—the Kālī of Pazhayanur—as the heroine of the story, frankly confesses that the story [titled *Nīlakēci*] is [...] an entirely imaginative creation. He wanted somebody who was revelling in cruelty and himsa to be converted to the doctrine of Ahimsa [...]. He could not think of anybody else than the Kālī of Pazhayanur.

In attempting some clarification with respect to the different characters bearing the name Nīli, one must consider the following remarks by the same author (ibid.):

The Sthalamāhatmya of Tiruvālangādu identifies Neeli with Kālī of Pazhayanur. In this respect it is identical with Neelakesi. But the story [of Kālī-Nīli] is afterwards [...] leading to Siva’s conquest over Kālī in the dance contest.

It is true that the *Nīlakēci* starts off with the same character, namely Kālī-Nīli³⁹ (=Nīlakēci), the presiding deity of the Paḷaiyaṇūr cremation ground, but, unlike in the Śaiva myth of Kālī, the heroine of this Jain work becomes a disciple of the Jain ascetic Muṇicantiraṇ. Despite this divergence, it is striking that both stories share the theme of the goddess’s defeat in a contest: in the one case with Śaivism,⁴⁰ in the other with Jainism.

³³ For a synopsis of the life of Kuṇṭalakēci, see Chakravarti 1974:94f.

³⁴ The text and the commentator are wholly silent about the name of the author, and the date and place of origin of the work; see Chakravarti 1936.

³⁵ Chakravarti 1936:12.

³⁶ I refer to the introduction to the *Alaṅkāṭuttalapurāṇam* (Sthalamāhātmya of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu); see No. 12, below.

³⁷ On the nature of Nīlakēci-Nīli, cf. Cōmacuntaraṇār 1964:22–24: *nīlakēci eṇpavaḷ namatu tamīlnāṭṭilulla oru valiya peṇ pēyē āvaḷ. Innīlakēciyai ivvācīriyar “teṇṇīcai nīlakēci māteyvam” eṇṇē kurippitukīṇṇaṇar. Īṇṇu “māteyvam” eṇṇratu perumpēy eṇṇravāṇam. “teṇṇīcai nīlakēci” eṇṇpatarkup paḷaiya vuraiyācīriyar “paḷaiyaṇūr nīlakēci” eṇṇru kurippurai varaintuḷḷaṇar.* – See ibid.:24 for a summary of the Nīli story as it is known to Cēkkīlār.

³⁸ On Vaṇṭārkuḷali as a cognomen of the goddess Kālī-Nīli of Paḷaiyaṇūr, and appearing in the *Nīlakēci* as synonymous with the name Nīlakēci (Skt. *keśi*, Ta. *kūntal/kūlal*, “woman’s hair”), see Chakravarti 1936:18, 19. – Karavelane in his *avant-propos* (written 1956), p. 18, n. 7 of his edition and translation of the *Kāraikkālammaiṇār Tiruvālaṅkāṭu Mūṭṭaṭṭiruppatikam* (published 1982), also mentions the two interchangeable names of Kālī, stating with reference to the dance contest between Kālī and Śiva: “Elle s’avoua vaincue et devint l’épouse de Civa. Depuis on l’appelle Nīlakēci (sanskrit) ou Vandārkuḷali (tamoul), les deux mots signifiant ‘celle à la chevelure noire’” (She accepted defeat and became Śiva’s wife. Since then she has been known as Nīlakēci [Sanskrit] or Vaṇṭārkuḷali [Tamil], the two words signifying “a woman with dark hair”).

³⁹ I combine the names, considering them as multiforms of Koṇṇavai.

⁴⁰ On the clash between Śaivism and the goddess cult, see p. 31, n. 14 (to No. 3) above.

The following is a synopsis of the opening chapter, “Tarumav-uraic carukkam” (The Preaching of Dharma),⁴¹ which “serve[s] as a frame-work for introducing philosophical discussions”⁴²:

The story of the fierce goddess Nīlakēci begins with a description of Pāñcālam, also known as Pārttināṭu (v. 10=௫), a land ruled by the king Camuttiracāraṅ (v. 21=௫௨) from its capital, Puṅṅaravarttaṅam (v. 23=௫௫). It so happens that one day animals are offered by the people of the capital as a thanksgiving sacrifice for the goddess Kālī, who resides in a temple outside the city, on the cremation grounds called Pālālaiyam. The Jain ascetic Muṅicantiraṅ, who lives near the Kālī temple, decides on the basis of his Jain belief of *ahiṃsā* to teach his doctrine of nonviolence to the people who have come to venerate the goddess Kālī for having bestowed a child upon the queen.⁴³ Convinced by his teaching, they change their mode of sacrifice. The fact that the Jain *muni* denies that the queen’s offspring was due to the goddess’s potency in bestowing children, and that the people have changed the way they worship her, upsets Kālī, and she decides to challenge the *muni* for having interfered in such worship. Feeling herself powerless to defeat the Jain saint, she seeks help from her leader, the greatest goddess among the minor deities (*devatās*): Nīlakēci of the south.⁴⁴ Following Kālī’s request, Nīlakēci comes north and delivers a terrifying threat to the *muni*. However, she fails to accomplish her task, the *muni* remaining undisturbed in his ascetic contemplation. With the idea of disturbing his *tapas* (asceticism; lit. “heat”) she appears disguised as an enticingly beautiful woman and attempts to seduce him. Again, however, the goddess does not succeed, either in frightening the *muni* away or in seducing him, for he sees through her disguise to her true identity and intention. Amazed by the *muni*’s insight, she apologises, acknowledges defeat, and asks for an initiation into Jain doctrine. She is willing to sit at the feet of the *muni*, and to assume a human shape in order to propagate the doctrine of *ahiṃsā*. (My synopsis)⁴⁵

In brief, I conclude that the Jain author of the *Nīlakēci* knew of the ancient goddess Kālī-Nīli of Paḷaiyaṅūr-Ālaṅkāṭu and alludes to her in his work, taking her name and its association with *hiṃsā* (violence) as his starting point, with the aim of teaching *ahiṃsā*.⁴⁶ But he does not, in my opinion, portray the once human, later vengeful Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli who figures in the core events of our *Nīli Katai* (N7), although this Nīli coincidentally shares demonic (*pēy*) features with Kālī-Nīli-Nīlakēci.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Nīlakēci*, ed. Cakkaravartti 1984⁹:17–56.

⁴² I cite Chakravarti 1974:103.

⁴³ It is noteworthy that the fierce Kālī is portrayed as a goddess who bestows children.

⁴⁴ One wonders whether the “goddess of the south” is perhaps an allusion to Maṅimēkalā *teyvam*, the goddess who, in the *Maṅimēkalai* (a Tamil Buddhist *kāppiyam*), destroys the southern city of Pukār in a fit of rage and becomes a deity in the northern city of Kāñci.

⁴⁵ My synopsis is based on the *Nīlakēci*, [ed. Cakkaravartti 1984⁹], pp. 17ff., and Chakravarti 1936:13f.; cf. Chakravarti 1974:103ff.

⁴⁶ Chakravarti (1936:15f.) suggests that perhaps it is another Nīli who is alluded to in the title of the work, namely, a Nīli who appears in the “Ratnakarandaka Srāvakāchhāra” of “Swami Samanthabhadra” who lived in Kāñcipuram, an important centre of Jainism. In this Jain story, told by Chakravarti in his introduction to the *Nīlakēci* (1936:15–17), Nīli, a young Jain woman who ardently believes in *ahiṃsā*, is to her great horror deceived into marrying the Buddhist non-vegetarian Sagaradatta, who had seen her and coveted her. Being forced to cook a non-vegetarian meal for a Buddhist monk, she resorts to a ruse. As a result, the chaste wife is falsely accused of adultery by her husband, but proves her *karpu* (modesty) with the help of a friendly deity who locks the city gates, which Nīli alone is able to open. The story is also mentioned by Shulman 1980:196.

⁴⁷ Thus I concur with Chakravarti (1936:15), who writes with respect to the Nīli of the narrative, in the form in which it was known to Campantar and Cēkkiḷār: “It is quite evident that this Neeli, though an evil spirit, has nothing to do with the Kālī-Neelakesi.”

7. The *Nīli Katai* in the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam* (also known as the *Periyapurāṇam*) of Cēkkiḷār, 19.1080 (~1135 C.E.)⁴⁸ – Medieval Śaiva literature

In the mid-twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam* of Cēkkiḷār, a hagiography of the sixty-three Śaiva saints based on the *Tēvāram* and making use of additional material collected from oral tradition (Zvelebil 1995:546), we find a clear allusion to the *Nīli Katai*. In Chapter 19, “Tirukkuṟipputtoṅṭa nāyaṅār purāṇam,” strophe 1080(=3), Cēkkiḷār (a Vēḷāḷa born in Kuṇṟattūr, Toṅṭaināṭu), inspired by Campantar’s *Tēvāram* (Paḷaiyaṅūr-Ālaṅkāṭu 1.45.1 and 1.45.7), praises Toṅṭaināṭu for having inhabitants like the “humble devotees of Paḷaiyaṅūr” (*paḷaiyaṅūr ciṟuttoṅṭar*). Here the motif of the honourable Vēḷāḷas of *Tēvāram* 1.45.1 is reechoed, and the “*ciṟuttoṅṭar*” of *Tēvāram* 1.45.7 adverted to as well.

1080(=3) நற்றி றம்புறி பழையனூர்ச் சிறுத்தொண்டர் நவைவந்
துற்ற போதுதம் முயிரையும் வணிகனுக் கொடுகாற்
சொற்ற மெய்மையுந் தூக்கியச் சொல்லையே காக்கப்
பெற்ற மேன்மையி னிகழ்ந்தது பெருந்தொண்டை நாடு.
(*Periyapurāṇam*, [ed. Cuppiramaṇiya Mutaliyār 1975],
Chapter 19, “Tirukkuṟipputtoṅṭa nāyaṅār purāṇam,” 1080[=3])

1080(=3).1-2 When the righteous, humble devotees (*ciṟuttoṅṭar*) of Paḷaiyaṅūr faced blame,
2-3 they gave up their life in order to keep truth [firmly] in balance (*tūkkiya*)—based on their word given to the
merchant (*vaṇikaṅ*).
4 Great Toṅṭaināṭu owes its fame to their greatness.

The allusion to Nīli of the *katai* is primarily intended as a means of praising the virtuous Vēḷāḷas and the region of Toṅṭaināṭu.

8. Nīli in *Takkayākkappaṇi*⁴⁹ 359 (The *paṇi* of Takkaṅ’s sacrifice) of Oṭṭakkūttar⁵⁰ (twelfth century)⁵¹ – A medieval genre

Nīli as a name for the fierce goddess appears in *Takkayākkappaṇi* 359. This is a poem based on the myth of Dakṣa’s sacrifice, which was laid waste to by Kālī, whereupon evil spirits and ghosts enjoyed the feast. The poem is a description of Kālī worship, a genre of “poetic expression of gruesomeness and horror.”⁵² It tells, for instance, of the temple of Kālī in the wilderness (part 3: *kāṭu pāṭiyatu*), and offers a description of devils and evil spirits (part 5: *pēykalaiappāṭiyatu*). In it Oṭṭakkūttar, an ardent Śaiva, opposes the Jains and praises his patrons, the three Cōḷa rulers.⁵³

9. The *Cēkkiḷār nāyaṅār Purāṇam* (Biography of Cēkkiḷār) of Umāpati Civāchāriya’s *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam Varalāru* (History of the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam*), 5 (early fourteenth century)⁵⁴ – Late medieval literature

Umāpati Civāchāriya, the poet-philosopher who carried on the Śaiva hagiographic tradition after Cēkkiḷār, praises the greatness of the Vēḷāḷas who entered the fire in order to remain true to their word.

⁴⁸ The dating is by Zvelebil (1989:298); see also Zvelebil 1974:173.

⁴⁹ The reference is given in Shulman 1980:196, n. 18.

⁵⁰ For further details, see Zvelebil 1995:502, s.v. “Oṭṭakkūttar.”

⁵¹ His dates are not exactly known. According to Zvelebil 1995:502, he lived “during the reign of Vikrama Chola (1118–36), Kulottunga Chola (1136–46), and Rajaraja II (1146–62).”

⁵² I borrow this expression from Zvelebil 1974:207.

⁵³ See Zvelebil 1995:635f.

⁵⁴ He offers a date by himself: 1313 C.E.; see Zvelebil 1974:170, 173.

மாறுகொடு பழையனார் நீலி செய்த
 வஞ்சனையால் வணிகனுயி நிழப்பத் தாங்கள்
 கூறியசொற் பிழையாது துணிந்து செந்தீக்
 குழியிலெழு பதுபேரு முழுக்கிக் கங்கை
 யாறணிசெஞ் சடைத்திருவா லங்காட் டப்ப
 ரண்டமுற நிமிர்ந்தாடு மடியின் கீழ்மெய்ப்
 பேறுபெறும் வேளாளர் பெருமை யெம்மாற்
 பிறித்தளவிட் டிவளவெனப் பேச லாமோ
 (Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam Varalāru 5 [ed. Cuppiramaṇiya Mutaliyār 1975])

- 1 The death of the merchant at the hands of the deceitful Nīli of Paḷaiyaṇūr, a place of conflict and strife,
- 2 caused the seventy Vēḷālas to enter boldly the pit of fire in order to remain true to their word.
- 3 They have reached the feet of the Appar of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, who wears the Gangā in his matted tuft of red hair.
- 4 Am I competent to talk of the greatness of the illustrious Vēḷālas?

Umāpati Civāchāriya’s work provides us with the earliest known explicit reference to Nīli of the *katai* by name. To all appearances, the main narrative sequence of the *IK* (more precisely, one of its two strands⁵⁵) is attested here in a relatively complete shape.

10. The *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* (a *sandēśa-kāvya* in the Maṇipravāla style; late fourteenth century)⁵⁶

To what extent the *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* (The Message to Uṇṇunīli),⁵⁷ a Kerala *sandēśa-kāvya*,⁵⁸ concerns itself with Nīli—as stated by P. Subramaniam⁵⁹—I cannot say, having not seen the text. According to Freeman, it is written in the high Maṇipravāla style⁶⁰ (a mixture of Sanskrit and the local Kerala *bhāṣā*) and has been dated to the fourteenth century by its collator Śūranāṭṭu Kuṇṇanpiḷḷa.⁶¹ Freeman in his essay on the “Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala” (2004) remarks that “much of Manipravalam literature was devoted to the culture of courtesans” (454). As an example, he cites the first Maṇipravāla work, the *Vaiśikatantram* (perhaps thirteenth century),⁶² “being instructions from a courtesan to her daughter” (454), in which the mother expresses “her pride in their fine lineage and tradition” (455). The *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*, too, focuses on a devadāsī. Uṇṇunīli (thus her name) is the recipient of a “love message” from a “prince of Vēṇāṭu” (472f.). As remarked by Freeman (ibid.:474), the work “is given over to erotic praise not just of the heroine but of numerous other courtesans and dancing girls along the route.” The territory featured in the poem seems to be western Nāñcilnāṭu, since the circuit of travel described is “across four discrete kingdoms in southern Kerala.”⁶³ It will be crucial to learn more about the contents of the *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* and its supposed incorporation of our well-known oral narrative

⁵⁵ See Sect. 4.7 below.

⁵⁶ On the dating, see Freeman 2004:465.

⁵⁷ About the accuracy of this translation Freeman (2004:472f.) is in no doubt: “*Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* is titled after the recipient of the love message [...] against the Sanskrit convention of titling such poems by the messenger-vehicle.”

⁵⁸ According to Freeman 2004, this is a genre “unquestionably modeled on the Sanskrit messenger genre” (471), which in Kerala is “ostensibly in praise of courtesan-dancers” (470). Freeman (ibid.:472; see also the footnote) remarks that some of the passages of the *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* have close parallels in the *Śukasandēśa*, to which it seems indebted.

⁵⁹ See Subramaniam 1996:xv-xvi (Tamil with an English translation of the *Nīli Yaṭcakāṇam*), who writes: “*Karirācaṅ Katai* (The Story of the Dark King) in Kannada bears a close resemblance to the story of Nīli and may be an adaptation of the same. The original of the story is traced to the Malayalam work *Uṇṇu Nīli Cantēkam* [sic; read *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*].” For the *Karirācaṅ Katai*, see No. 26 below. Unfortunately, I do not have access to the edition by Iḷaṅkuḷam Kuṇṇanpiḷḷa, *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative, [1954] 1985 (the reference according to Freeman 2004:497).

⁶⁰ On this characterisation of the work, see Freeman (2004:465), who at the same time provides a short citation illustrative of this mixed language.

⁶¹ See Clothey 1982:40. As mentioned above, Freeman (2004:465) characterises the work more precisely as being a “late-fourteenth-century” one. Note that the collator Śūranāṭṭu Kuṇṇanpiḷḷa, whose name is given by Clothey as Śūranād Kunjan Pillai, is not identical with the editor Iḷaṅkuḷam Kuṇṇanpiḷḷa referred to in Freeman 2004:465.

⁶² On the dating, see Freeman 2004:454. The author follows scholarly opinion in placing it within the period spanning the eleventh to thirteenth century (with a preference rather more towards the thirteenth century).

⁶³ Freeman 2004:473.

if the earliest appearance of a southern version of Nīli's story is to be properly evaluated.⁶⁴

11. The *Tiruppukal* of Aruṇakirinātar (fifteenth century)⁶⁵ – Late medieval literature

On one occasion, while talking about harlots (*maṇṭaikal*), Aruṇakirinātar, “the greatest poet of the 15th century” (Zvelebil 1995:71), compares them to Nīli, obviously with her seductive manner in mind.⁶⁶

நீலி நாடகம் பயில் மண்டைகள்
(Cited from Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:29=1984:65)

The seductive play of harlots (*maṇṭaikal*) is like that of Nīli, [for both turn men's heads].

The comparison in the *Tiruppukal* is very interesting, inasmuch as it is the earliest literary source that moulds our view of Nīli by associating her not with the virtuous Vēḷāḷas but rather with clever and irresistible temptresses. Aruṇakirinātar's recasting of Nīli's image to accord with the life of harlots is a point of some significance, and gives force to the suggestion that by this period of time the focus had shifted to the world of the senses.⁶⁷ This probably came naturally to an ardent worshipper of Murukaṇ, a god who combines both eroticism and devotionalism.

Unfortunately, Caṇmukacuntaram does not provide a detailed reference to the part of the *Tiruppukal* from which the quoted line comes. In a voluminous work without an index, it is a matter of speculation whether the line refers to Nīli-Icakki's seductive manner displayed in her second birth as a demoness, or that of her first birth as a devadāsī. The latter would supply an argument for the suggestion that a southern (perhaps *villuppāṭṭu*) version may have existed at the time of Aruṇakirinātar. The life of a devadāsī and the milieu in which it is spent are well depicted, explored, and elaborated on in the southern *villuppāṭṭu* versions (and particularly how a devadāsī attracts clients), whereas all this has no place in the northern version. In the northern version,⁶⁸ as far as I can see, Nīli never appears as a *vēcai/maṇṭai* (harlot) or temple dancer; in all the versions known to me, she is a married woman.⁶⁹ That Aruṇakirinātar may have had in mind the Nīli in her first birth as a devadāsī is perhaps not unlikely, since extracts from elsewhere in the *Tiruppukal* illustrate the poet's knowledge of the world of a harlot.⁷⁰

I was ensnared and smitten with love
of maids whose tresses are fragrant night,
I was attached to mountain-like breasts
of women arousing lust,
fed by desirous lips
of females skilled in Madana's tricks!
(*Tiruppukal* 200; translation cited from Zvelebil 1973:241)

⁶⁴ Cf. Sect. 2.6 above.

⁶⁵ On the dating (probably 1370–1450 C.E.), see Zvelebil 1995:71.

⁶⁶ Cf. Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:29.

⁶⁷ An example cited from Zvelebil's (1974:110) translation of the *Tiruppukal* provides a taste of the poet's sensuous language: “You came—beautiful, mighty, magnificent chest— / you came to feed—and climbing my venus-mound / you drink with your lips one of my breasts, / you caress another with gentle strokes, /and they both languish, in their turn; / as you don't eat them, they long and yearn.”

⁶⁸ See, for example, N7, along with the synopsis of the *Nīli Katai* given in Chakravarti:1936 and by other scholars.

⁶⁹ Blackburn (1980:206) confirms this.

⁷⁰ One of the legends says that he was the “son of a temple-courtesan,” while another claims that he was born in a *Vēḷāḷa* family in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai (Zvelebil 1995:71). Again, according to legend, he “spent his early life as [...a] seducer of women in debauchery [...].” (Zvelebil 1995:71). The *Tiruppukal* is “based, to a great extent, on personal, autobiographic experience.” (Zvelebil 1974:110).

Further, *Tiruppukal* ii, 26, again verses in which the temptation exerted by those expert in erotic play is communicated:

Those women
with swaying breasts
[...]
By them I was lured
in their magical ways
[...]
(*Tiruppukal* ii, 26; translated by S. Kokilam; cited from Zvelebil 1973:242)

And in another stanza:

[...]
They come these women
who trade for wealth
with sweet words
with soft caresses
These lewd women lured me
into their homes
[...]
(*Tiruppukal*, translated by S. Kokilam; cited from Zvelebil 1973:243)

If it is indeed Nīli the devadāsī that Aruṇakirinātar’s *Tiruppukal* alludes to, this could be seen as evidence that a southern version existed in the fifteenth century, at a time when music had become an integral part of literary texts and was treated as such.⁷¹ As for the question whether a southern version of the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition could have existed at all at that early time, “definite evidence [of the existence of a *villuppāṭṭu* tradition] is available only from the mid-16th century,”⁷² according to Blackburn (1980:81), though he admits that “[i]t is possible [...] that the vil pāṭṭu tradition existed for many centuries prior to [that time]” (82).⁷³

Whether or not at the time of the *Tiruppukal* Nīli’s story had advanced to the first stage of a southern version that existed beyond the Toṇṭaināṭu region, Aruṇakirinātar is intent on associating Nīli with prostitutes rather than with the honourable Veḷāḷas (the latter a theme that had been treated in literature repeatedly ever since Campantar).

12. Nīli in the *Alaṅkāṭṭuttalapurāṇam* (Sthalamāhātmya of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu)⁷⁴ – Late medieval literature

As mentioned earlier, Paḷaiyaṅūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu has a famous Kālī temple of great antiquity. “The

⁷¹ See Zvelebil 1973:239 and Zvelebil 1974:110. In the latter the author remarks: “*Tiruppukal* [...] is the first step towards *kīrtanaī*.” According to Shulman (personal communication) “it was treated as equally important, a fact which was not given in the period of Kampaṇ’s *Irāmāvatāram*, for instance. At the time of *Tiruppukal* the music has become completely integral. We cannot imagine a *Tiruppukal* verse as text without the music.” Kersenboom-Story (1987:32) states: “[T]he syllable-based and *mātrā*-oriented prosody of Sanskrit poetry was superimposed upon the *acai*-based system of Tamil metres. When this process had reached its completion by the 15th century the Tamil poem had usually acquired a double prosodic organisation [...]. Due to this process the relation between the literary text and its vocal rendering became even closer than the original association of text and melody (*paṇ*) since the rhythmical quality of the text provided a sense of *tāḷam* (rhythmical pattern).”

⁷² By then it had become an integral part of temple festivals. Blackburn (1980:81, n. 13) gives as a reference Vāṇamāmalai 1959:27; the latter author in turn refers to the *Teyvavaccilaiyār Viṅaliviṭututu* by Kumāracuvāmi Avatāṇi.

⁷³ Blackburn (1980:81) gives some “suggestive” examples, along with his reference (n. 11) to Kōmatināyakam 1979:73.

⁷⁴ I have come across no date for this work, though it probably falls in the period between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, when *purāṇas* were being written. (I follow herein Zvelebil’s categorisation in 1992:271). There is a publication on the work by U.V. Camināyār in the Adyar Library, I am informed.

author [of the Tiruvālaṅkāṭu] Sthalamāhātmya in his introduction calls this Kālī as Neeli.”⁷⁵ Chakravarti (1936:12f.) writes:

[...] according to [the Tiruvālaṅkāṭu Sthalamāhātmya...] Kālī of Pazhayanur [...] was a terror all round since she created a havoc among men and animals in the surrounding [*sic*] area. Even the gods found it intolerable. [...] Kālī of Pazhayanur had the [...] patronage of Pārvati [...]. Śiva instead of waging an open war against Kālī [...] challenged her to a contest of dancing [...]. Kālī being a female Goddess could not follow Śiva in this chanda dance [Ūrdhva-Tāṇḍava] by lifting up her leg in the presence of Devas. Hence she had to admit her defeat and recognise Śiva as the victor of the dance—Natarāja.

Again, as I have argued in the preceding pages, the identification of Nīli with Kālī of Paḷaiyaṅṅūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu cannot refer to the deceitful Nīli of Paḷaiyaṅṅūr (of the *katai*), who has suffered an untimely death. Rather, it is safe to assume that the identification of the still “untamed” Kālī of the *mūlasthāna* (outside the main shrine) is with the ancient fierce goddess Nīli mentioned, for instance, in *Cil.* 12.68. As noted earlier, a possible link of the deceitful *pēy* demoness Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli (of the *katai*) with the incident is, however, given, in that she murders the Ceṭṭi in Kālī’s *mūlasthāna* shrine.

13. Nīli in *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurānam* of Maturai, 3.43 (seventeenth century?)⁷⁶ – Late medieval literature

14. The *Kampan Tirukkai Valakkam* of Kampan (of Tiruveḷuttūr?)⁷⁷ (seventeenth century?)⁷⁸

Kampan (of Tiruveḷuttūr?) mentions Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli in this minor poetic work that is “in praise of farming”⁷⁹ and “in praise of [the] liberality of [the] *veḷḷāḷa* chief.”⁸⁰

நீலி தனக்கஞ்சி நின்ற வணிகேசர்க்காக
கோலியபயங் கொடுக்குங்கை

(*Kampan Tirukkai Valakkam*, cited from *Cēkkilār Piḷḷaitamiḷ of (Trichi) Miṇṇāṭci Cuntaram Piḷḷai*, [ed. Catāciva Ceṭṭiyāravarka] 1987:77)⁸¹

They gave their protecting hand to the merchant who was afraid of Nīli.

15. Nīli in the *Tamiḷ Nāvalar Caritai* (History of Tamil Poets) of unknown authorship, 139–41⁸² (probably seventeenth or eighteenth century)⁸³

According to To. Paramasivan,⁸⁴ the *Tamiḷ Nāvalar Caritai*, a compilation of literary legends, refers to the *Mūvēntar Pāṭalkaḷ* as a supporting secondary account of the three kings (Cōḷa, Pāṇṭiya, Cēra) who

⁷⁵ I cite Chakravarti 1936:13; see also *ibid.*:18.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the controversial dating among scholars, see Zvelebil 1995:695. The origin of the work is probably to be sought in the twelfth-century Sthalapurāṇa of the Miṇṇākṣi temple.

⁷⁷ The suggestion is Zvelebil’s (1995:317). This minor work is attributed to a person named Kampan, but very probably he is not the great poet Kampan of the *Irāmāvātaram*, for according to Zvelebil (1995:317), it is “almost certainly [a] much later work.”

⁷⁸ On the problematic of dating, see Zvelebil 1995:316f. where reference is made to Mu. Aruṅācalam’s proposal placing it in the seventeenth century.

⁷⁹ Cited from Zvelebil 1995:319.

⁸⁰ Cited from Zvelebil 1995:317.

⁸¹ On this citation, cf. Perumāḷ 1990:42. Since *Tirukkai Valakkam*, Vai. Mu. Kō. Patippu, 1969, verse 15/T. Vēḷāyuta Mutaliyār’s ed. 1886 (an edition proposed by Zvelebil 1992:36) is not available to me, I cite the verse from the *Cēkkilār Piḷḷaitamiḷ*, ed. Catāciva Ceṭṭiyāravarka] 1987:77.

⁸² Referred to by Shulman 1980:195, n. 13.

⁸³ On the dating, see Zvelebil 1995:643.

⁸⁴ To. Paramasivan in “Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli Katai,” a short essay in *Puṇaikāḷam*, February-March 2002.

applauded the virtue of the Vēḷāḷas upon learning of their self-immolation.⁸⁵ Here the story of Nīli serves again to accentuate the greatness of the Vēḷāḷas. Mū. Irākavaiyaṅkāṛ, a great traditional Tamil scholar of the twentieth century, drew upon the *Tamil Nāvalar Caritai* and included songs from it in his *Peruntokai* (The Great Anthology).⁸⁶ As neither work is available to me, I cite from Caṅmukacuntaram:

பிழைத்தாரோ காராளர் பேய்மகள் சொற்கேட்டுப்
பிழைத்தார்கள் அல்லர் பிழைத்தீர்த்தார் - பிழைத்தார்கள்
எல்லாருங் காண எரியகத்தே முழுகினார்
எல்லாரும் இன்று முள்
(Cited from Caṅmukacuntaram 1978:31=1984:68)⁸⁷

- 1 Have the Kārāḷar [=Karaiyāḷars/Vēḷāḷas] escaped? When they heard the words of the *pēy* demoness (*pēy maka!*)
- 2 they could not escape; rather, they fulfilled their vow, [and] this is how they escaped.
- 3 They entered the fire in the presence of all the people.
- 4 All those [Karaiyāḷars] are living even today [in literature and art].

16. The Nīli story in the *Toṅṭaimaṅṭala Catakam* of Paṭikkācu Pulavar (late seventeenth to early eighteenth century)⁸⁸

The *Toṅṭaimaṅṭala Catakam*, an “important work in praise of northern Tamilnadu” (Toṅṭaināṭu) containing “allusions import[ant] for Tam[il] liter[ature] historiography” (Zvelebil 1995:709)—and “anecdotes” (ibid.:535) as well—was composed by Paṭikkācu Pulavar, a “court poet (Ramnad)” and “wandering bard” (ibid.) of the Ceṅkuntar (weavers) community. What in the devotional hymns of Campantar and Cēkkiḷār is a one-dimensional record alluding to Nīli here becomes an entire story. Remarkably, the names of the characters and places in the *Nīli Yaṭcakānam* (N12)⁸⁹ are identical with those of this work. In practical terms, this means that the *yaṭcakānam* genre has fully adopted Paṭikkācu Pulavar’s text.

As the text is not available to me, I shall present a synopsis of it on the basis of Perumāl 1990:114ff., appendix n. 3:⁹⁰

The married son of the Brahmin Nāṅātipaṅ of Kāñcipuram, Puvaṅamati by name, once went to Kāci. He met Sattiyāñāni [in N12: Meykkiyāni of Avināci], who gave his daughter Navañāni in marriage to him. On his return from Kāci to Kāñcipuram, the Brahmin Puvaṅamati was accompanied by his newly married second wife Navañāni and her elder brother [in N12: his name is Civakkiyāni]. When they were passing Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, the Brahmin decided to kill Navañāni, now pregnant, in the brother’s absence. The death of his younger sister caused the brother to commit suicide. Both brother and sister after their untimely deaths were reborn as twins to Puricaikiḷār and his wife Tirupati Nācciyār [rather than to the Cōḷa king] in Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam. They were known as Nīlaṅ and Nīli. In the daytime they were innocent children, but during the night the twins took the form of

⁸⁵ For a reference to Nīli in the context of the *Mūvēntar Pāṭalkaḷ*, see Mu. Arunachalam (in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures*, Madras, January 1975, p. 21), who in turn is referred to by Zvelebil (1989:299, n. 18).

⁸⁶ To. Paramasivan in “Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli Katai,” in *Puṅaikaḷam* (February-March 2002), writes: “The fire in which the seventy Vēḷāḷas entered had been burning for a very long time. When the three kings (Cēra, Cōḷa, Pāṅṅiya) came to know about this, they appeared in person, and in their surprise they sang in praise of the Vēḷāḷas. These three songs were taken from the *Tamil Nāvalar Caritai* by Mū. Irākavaiyaṅkāṛ, who included the three poems in his book *Peruntokai*.” – The *Peruntokai* (The Great Anthology) of Mū. Irākavaiyaṅkāṛ, Maturai: Maturait Tamilc Caṅkam, 1935–36, is a “relatively modern compilation of various stray poems and verses selected from different literary works and inscriptions [...] provided with copious notes and [an] excellent index” (Zvelebil 1992:101).

⁸⁷ The citation is from Caṅmukacuntaram since the *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures*, Madras, January 1975 containing the article of Mu. Arunachalam is not available to me.

⁸⁸ For the dating, see Zvelebil 1995:535. Paṭikkācu Pulavar was born in 1650.

⁸⁹ Ed. Subramaniam 1996.

⁹⁰ See also Caṅmukacuntaram 1978:30=1984:66.

ghosts and committed atrocities in the town. When the culprits came to be known, Puricaikilār took the twins to the forest, where they resided under a margosa tree. The people of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu cut down this very same margosa tree in order to construct a public building (*ūrkaṭṭaṭam*). Nīli went to Tiruccēṅkōṭu. [Nothing further is known about Nīlaṅ according to Perumāḷ's synopsis].⁹¹

The Brahmin Puvāṇamati of Kāñcipuram was reborn as the son of Nākananti Ceṭṭi [in N12: Nākantai Ceṭṭi]. He was named Taricaṇa Ceṭṭi [rather than Ānantaṅ]. When he once was passing through the forest of Tiruccēṅkōṭu for business purposes, Nīli obstructed his way. When the Ceṭṭi complained to the Vēḷāḷas of Paḷakainallūr, Nīli revealed to them the murder he had committed in his previous birth. The Vēḷāḷas could not do anything. Nīli took revenge on the Ceṭṭi. The Vēḷāḷas entered the fire and died in consequence of the fact that they were unable to protect the Ceṭṭi, who had had to surrender to Nīli.

The first four lines of the synopsis suggest that we have a case here of polygyny (as in N12) rather than adultery. The second wife is murdered as the result of the first wife being favoured, as the text corpus illustrates, very much in contrast to the other northern variant, N7, where the wife is killed as the result of a devadāsī being favoured.

17. Ziegenbalg's account (1711)⁹² of the story of Nīli according to the *Nīli Nāṭakam*

In W. Caland's *Ziegenbalg's Malabarisches Heidenthum*, Chapter 23, pp. 153–9 under the title “Von den Teuffeln und ihren Verführungen,” Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) describes the religious atmosphere of the region around Puḷḷirukkuvēlūr, a place he seemingly lived not very far from.⁹³ He notes the worship of *pēys* in trees, and the gifts of terra-cotta figures offered to them. Referring to the *pēys*' ability to change their shape and seductive character, Ziegenbalg exemplifies the people's beliefs in a synopsis (pp. 154–8) of the story of Nīli, as he had found it in the edition *Nīlinādagum* (*Nīli Nāṭakam*; 154). The story-line and the names of figures and places are identical with those in the sword [here: gun!⁹⁴]-fire type of story, as found in the *Toṇṭaimaṅṭala Catakam*⁹⁵ of Paṭikkācu Pulavar.⁹⁶ However, the first lines of the synopsis fail to contain the first birth of Nīli as a wife who is murdered. The synopsis begins with the two hungry spirits Nīli and Nīlaṅ, and only describes the death of the twin brother, who as a consequence of the felling of the tree by the Vēḷāḷas is killed by Kuṇṭōtaraṅ.

Im Flecken *Alankadu* [Ālaṅkāṭu] genant, stehet ein Götzenbild in der Pagode *Ammeiappen* genant. Dasselbst wohnt ein Kauffmann *Pūruschākīrān* [Puricaikilār] genant, welcher mit seiner frau keine Kinder hatte. Deszwegen ging er hin in die Pagode zum ietzt gedachten Abgott, und bittet umb ein Kind. Dieser aber saget: Du hast nicht nöthig ein Kind zu verlangen. Er hält dennoch inständig an, dasz er möchte ein Kind zeugen, und casteyet sich deszwegen sehr hart. Alsdann verordnet dieser Ammeiappen, dasz **zwey Teufel als Zwillinge** von seiner Frau möchten gebohren werden: einer als ein Knäbchen und der ander als ein Mädchen. Als diese gebohren, kan ihnen die **Mutter nicht genug Milch** zu trincken geben. Des Nachts, da die Eltern solche zwey Zwillinge zwischen sich geleget, gehen diese von den Eltern hinweg in den Flecken, nehmen ungeheure Gestalten an sich, **stehlen die Kühe, Ochsen, Schafe, Ziegen etc. hinweg und freszen sie**. Des Morgens aber, wenn es hat wollen Tag werden, haben sie sich wieder als kleine Kinder zwischen ihre Eltern geleget.

⁹¹ Caṅmukacuntaram in his synopsis of the story as it appears in the *Toṇṭaimaṅṭala Catakam* writes that Nīlaṅ died.

⁹² I refer to Zvelebil 1992:2, where Ziegenbalg's *Malabarisches Heidenthum* is dated to 1711.

⁹³ See p. 159 where he states: “Eine solche Pagode soll nicht allzu weit von hier seyn, in einem Orte *Pullirukkumwehlūr* [...]” Velūr is situated north-west of Kāñcipuram and south-west of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu in the northern part of Tamilnadu. The temple site of Vaitticuvaraṅkōyil, a renowned “site where Vaidyanātha-Śiva, ‘the lord who is a physician,’ cures his devotees of all diseases” (Shulman 1980:18), is closely associated with Puḷḷirukkuvēlūr. This point was brought to my attention by Professor David Shulman, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁹⁴ Engl. “gun,” Ger. “Gewehr.” *Gewehr* carried in the now antiquated German of the seventeenth century the meaning *Degen* or *Säbel* (Engl. “sword”), see *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch* 1989:240. I would like to thank Professor Dr Lambert Schmithausen, University of Hamburg, for bringing this point to my attention.

⁹⁵ Accordingly, the text of the *Nīli Nāṭakam* also highly resembles that of the *Nīli Yaṭcakāṇam* text (N12).

⁹⁶ The citation is given in full, since it offers an interesting insight into early missionaries' perception of folk narratives.

Die Hirten und alle Einwohner werden endlich gewahr, dasz solche Diebe in dieses Kauffmanns Hausze seyn müszten. Auch selbst mercken es die Eltern, dasz ihre Kinder des Nachtes von ihnen weggehen. Dahero nimmt sie der Vater, **bringt sie in die Pagode, legt sie unter einen Baum**, und spricht zu dem Abgott *Ammeiappen*: Siehe! dies sind deine und nicht meine Kinder, gehet darauff wieder zu Hausze und ist sehr bekümmert. Das Knäbchen hatte den Nahmen *Nilen* [*Nilan*] und das Mädchen den Nahmen *Nili*. Alsdann hielten diese zwey Geschwister Rath, was anzufangen sey. Sie werden endlich **schlüssig, dasz sie wollen von einander ziehen**, und ein jeder sein Regiment à part führen. Das **Mädchen** nimmt noch einige andere Teuffel zu sich, und hält sich **in einem Walde** auff. Der **Bruder** aber versammelt auch viele andere Teufel, und hält sich **bey der Pagode auff demjenigen Baume** auf, darunter ihn der Vater geleet hatte. Es sind aber in einem anderen **Dorffe *Bāreianur* [Palaiyañūr] genant, 70 Wellarer [Vēlālas]** oder Ackersleute. Diese **hacken selbigen Baum ümb, und verarbeiten ihn in der Pagode**. Dazumahl war eben der Teufel *Nilen* mit seinen anderen Teuffeln auff einen anderen Ort zu spielen ausgegangen. Als er nun wiederkommt und solches sehet, wird **er sehr erzürnet** darüber und spricht: Demjenigen, der solches gethan, wil ich den Halsz umdrehen und sein Blut sauffen, giebet alsobald befehl, dasz seine Unterteufel den weg zu selbigem Dorffe einnehmen, wo die *Wellarer* sind, und allerley böses verursachen solten, damit er sich an ihnen rächen könnte. Dazumahl kommt ein *Bramanen* aus selbigem Dorffe, gehet zur Pagode und wil den Gott *Ameiappen* ein Opfer thun. Der Teufel *Nilen* **aber nimmt alles, was er herzu gebracht, und frists auff**. Der *Bramanen* beklaget sich darüber bey dem Gott *Ammeiappen*. Dieser schicket alsobald seinen Sonnenschirm-Träger hinaus, ***Kondödiren* [Kuñōtarāṅ] genant, und läszet den Teufel tödten**. Dieses Teufels Schwester, die *Nili*, siehet alles im Schlafe, wie die *Wellarer* haben den Baum ümbgehauen und wie ihr Bruder wäre ermordet worden; auch hat ihr solches der Unterhauptmann unter denjenigen Teuffeln, deren Oberhauptmann der Bruder gewesen, durch einen Brief kund gethan. Darauff gehet sie an denjenigen Ort, wo ihr Bruder ermordet worden, fängt ein grosz Wehklagen an und stellet sich sehr ungeberdig über den Todt ihres Bruders. Alle andere Teufel kommen zu ihr und helfen ihren Bruder mit beklagen. Und als diese alle ihr verkündigen, wie die **70 Wellarer die erste Ursache zu diesem Tode gegeben**, so verschweret sie sich, dasz sie nicht eher ruhen wolte, bisz sie den Tod ihres Bruders an den 70 persohnen gerächet habe. In einer nicht all zu weit abgelegenen Stadt ***Kanschipuram* [Kāñcipuram] genant, ist ein Kauffman namens *Neganden* [Nākantai]**. Dieser hat keine Kinder, und thut deszwegen harte Busze, dasz er möchte einen Sohn zeugen. Darauff wird ihm ein Sohn gebohren; es wird ihm aber geweihszaget, dasz er in jungen Jahren sterben werde. Darauff thut ein *Bramanen* ein Feuer- oder Brandopffer, worinnen ein Gewehre erschaffen wird. Dieses giebet er selbigem Sohne, damit er nicht so bald sterben möchte. Der Nahme solches **Sohnes war *Dirischinen* [Taricaṅa]**, welcher nachmahls heyrathete und ein Kind zeugete. Als sein Vater sterben wil, so vermahnet er ihn, er solte nicht weit ausgehen, und auch **das Gewehre**, so ihm der *Bramanen* gegeben, niemahls aus seinen Händen laszen. Einsmahls aber gehet er ohnbewust seiner frau auff einen anderen Ort seiner Handelschafft wegen. Seine frau gehet aus umd ihn zu suchen, da ihr denn die Teufelin *Nili* genant, begegnet, und sie fraget, warum sie doch so betrübt wäre. Und als sie saget, dasz sie ihren Mann suchete, tröstet sie die Teufelin, und spricht, sie solte nur nach Hausze gehen, ihr Mann würde zu rechter Zeit wiederkommen. Mittlerweile nimmt sie selbst die Gestalt solcher frauen an, stellet sich vor selbigen Kauffmann und lächelt. Dieser aber erkennt sie alsobald, vermittelst seines Gewehres, und spricht, sie solte von ihm gehen. Nachmahls nimmt sie die Gestalt einer ernsthaftigen Frauen an, und stellet sich vor ihm, als er etwas weiter gegangen war. Er aber spricht zu ihr: Du magst eine Gestalt annehmen, welche du wilst, so werde ich dir nicht glauben. Nachmahls praesentirete sie sich als eine Dewatäschi [Devadāsi] oder Götterdienerin, ist schön geschmückt, und bietet ihm Geld an, suchet aber hierdurch mit ihren worten und Gebärden ihn zur Unzucht zu reitzen. Er aber trauet ihr nicht, verläszet selbigen weg und gehet einen anderen weg. Alsdann nimmt sie eine ander Gestalt an sich, sitzt am wege, da der Kauffman her kommt, hat allerley waaren feil, und hält ihn an, dasz er ihr abkauffen möchte. Er aber mercket auch solches, schläget die Augen nieder und gehet fort. Nachmahls verwandelt sie sich **in eine schöne Huhre, praesentiret in dem walde ein schönes Hausz und Bette**, und nöthiget den Kauffmann, dasz er mit ihr Unzucht treiben soll. Er will aber nicht nach ihrem willen thun. **Darauff wird sie erbittert, praesentiret sich in ihrer teuflischen Gestalt, und saget, dasz sie wolle den Tod ihres Bruders durch ihn an den 70 Wellaren rächen**. Er läufft von ihr, und will seine Zuflucht nehmen zu den **70 Wellaren** in *Bareianūr* [Palaiyañūr], das vor ihm lag. Sie aber verwandelt sich wieder in seiner frauen Gestalt und trägt ein Kind auff den Armen, das seiner frauen Kind ähnlich. Der Kauffmann siehet, dasz die *Wellarer* eben auff dem Felde versammelt sind, kommt unter sie geschryen und ruffet ümb Hülffe. Die *Wellarer* reden ihn freundlich an, und fragen ihn, warümb er so kläglich thue. Er erzehlet ihnen, wie er von einem Teufel verfolgt würde. Darauff tritt die Teufelin auch einher, hat alle diejenige Geschmeide und Kleidung an sich, als die Kauffmanns Weiber zu tragen pflegen, stellet sich sehr jämmerlich, kneipet das Kind, dasz es weinen musz, saget, dasz sie dieses Kauffmanns Weib sey, und wie er sie nunmehr verlaszen und unbilliger weise von sich stoszen wolte, da sie doch von sehr vornehmen Geschlecht und aus einer groszen Freundschafft, auch von reichen Eltern wäre. Die *Wellarer* sehen, dasz sie sehr wohlgestaltet, und in allen Stücken als ein *Settters* [Ceṭṭiyārs] oder Kauffmanns Weib einhergehe, auch sehr vernünfftig rede, und sehr demütig sich geberde, glauben also ihren worten und versprechen ihr Hülffe. Der Kauffmann aber spricht: Es ist nicht mein Weib, sondern eine Teufel, der mich ümbs Leben bringen will. Sie erzehlet darauff, wes Geschlechts sie sey, wie sie nach der *Settier* [Ceṭṭiyār] Manier im fünfften Jahre mit ihm wäre getrauet worden und wie er sie erst so lieb gehabt habe, nachmahls aber, als sie das Kind gebohren, ihm so gram worden wäre, also, dasz sie nicht wüste, ob ihm etwan von einer anderen ein Liebes-Tranck beygebracht worden; denn sie möchte ihm im Hausze thun, was sie wolte, so schry ens [so die Hs.] aus als Schuld und Verbrechen. Sie solten demnach als solche *Wellärer*, die den Ruhm hätten, dasz sie niemahls falsch urtheilen, die Sache erwegen, obs recht wäre, dasz ihr Mann sie nunmehr so verstoszen wolle. Die *Wellarer* sind gantz auff ihrer Seite, und reden dem Mann zu, dasz er solches nicht thun solte. Der Mann aber spricht: Glaubet doch ihren worten nicht, denn es ist alles bey ihr eine Verstellung, und suchet mich zu tödten. Sie spricht: Er ist deszwegen so böß auff mich, weil ich wider der *Settier*-weiber Gewohnheit aus dem Hausze ihm so gar weit nachgegangen bin; fehlte es ihm sonst an Gelde oder anderen

Gütern, so will ich ihm aus meiner Eltern Hausze zur Gnüge bringen. Nur dasz mir der Schimpff nicht möchte angethan werden, dasz er mich verlasze. Ich weisz nicht, was ich hierbey gedencken soll. Es müszens ja aber wohl meine Sünden verursacht haben, dasz ich, der ich aus so vornehmen Geschlechte, anietzo gleichsam als ein Bettel-Mädchen, ihm weinend hintennach lauffen musz. Sehet demnach zu, dasz wir zu einem Vertrag kommen, und als Eheleute in gutem Verständnisse nach unserem Wohnplatz reisen können. Hierauff nennet sie viele Götter mit Nahmen, und beschweret die *Wellaren* mit vielen Eyden über den Göttern, dasz sie ihr glauben und helffen sollen. Überdisz läszt sie ihr Kind nieder auff die Erde, und spricht zu ihren allen: Sehet, ob nicht das Kind seinen Vater erkennen, und zu ihm gehen wird. Da denn nun unter so vielen Leuten das Kind gleich zu dem *Settier* oder Kauffmann läufft, so glauben sie alle, dasz sie wahrhaftig sein Weib seyn müste. Daher urtheilen sie, dasz die Schuld auff dem Kauffmann liege, und verlangen, dasz er ihnen das Gewehre aus seinen Händen geben solle, und stellen ihm darbey seine Ungerechtigkeit vor. Er aber spricht: Ich gebe euch solches nicht, ihr seyd mir feind, und wolt mir nicht Hülffe verschaffen. Denn dieses Kind ist nicht mein Kind, und diese frau ist nicht meine frau, sondern der Teufel selbst. Darauf stöszet er das Kind von sich. Solches fänget an zu weinen. Die Mutter nimmt es auff und stillt es durch singen, unter welchem Singen sie alle ihre Geschlechter und ihre Vorfahren-Herrlichkeit vorstellet, und sich über das grosze Unglück beklaget, das ihr nunmehr wiederfähret. Als die *Wellärer* solches hören, werden sie destomehr über sie bewogen und nahmen dem Mann das Gewehre. Dieser aber sagt: Ich bin reicher Leute Sohn, meine Eltern haben mich wol erzogen, und anietzo musz ich von euch diesem Teuffel übergeben werden. Gott sey Richter hierüber! Als die *Wellärer* hören, wie sowohl des Manns als des Weibs Rede wahrscheinlich sey, gehen sie endlich hinein ins Dorff, thun alle **beyde in ein Gemach, das in der Pagode war**, und horchen auszen zu, was sie mit einander reden. Dieses vermercket sie, und spricht zu ihm: Siehe, was thust du doch? Ich bin aus so groszem Geschlecht und von so reichen Eltern. Soltestu denn ümb einer geringen Rede willen einen so groszen Zanck machen? Wenn wir nun werden nach unserem Wohnplatz kommen, so werden mich ja alle Weiber meines gleichens auslachen, deszgleichen werden dich auch alle Mannspersohnen auslachen, etc. Als die *Wellärer* solche Rede hören, so urtheilen sie, dasz über dem Weibe keine Schuld sey, und dasz sie keinesweges der Teufel seyn könne, laszen sie beysammen bleiben, und sagen zum Manne, dasz sie ihm vor sein Leben gut seyn wolten; stöszet ihm etwas zu, so wären sie resolviret, alle ihr Leben zu laszen. Darauf geht ein jedweder nach Hausze. Alsdann **nimmt sie ihre vorige Teufelsgestalt an, und spricht: Ich habe nicht in willens gehabt, dich zu tödten, du bist ein schöner und schicklicher Mensch, aber ümb meines Bruders Todt an den 70 Wellaren zu rächen, tödte ich dich anietzo**. Darauf tödtet sie ihn und verschwindet. Des Morgens gantz frühe verwandelt sie sich in die Gestalt des getödteten Manns Mutter, kommt in selbiges Dorff geheulet und geschryen, und spricht zu den *Wellaren*: Ihr habt meinen Sohn einem Teufel übergeben, dasz er getödtet worden. Diese gehen hin in die Pagode zu dem Gemache und finden den Kauffmann tod. Als sie das sehen und das grosze Lamentiren der alten Mutter hören, gedencken sie an ihr Versprechen, dasz sie ihm vor sein Leben gutgesaget, erkennen, dasz sie Mitschuld an seinem Tode sind, und resolviren sich umb seinetwillen alle zu sterben, graben eine grosze Grube, legen Holtz und **feuer darin, springen** in solche Grube und sterben. Es ist aber unter diesen 70 *Wellaren* einer gantz frühe, ehe solches gehöret worden, auf seinem Acker pflügen gegangen. Daher die Teufelin die Gestalt seiner Tochter an sich genommen und bringet ihm Eszen, darbey erzehlende, was vorgegangen wäre. Als er solches höret, spricht er: Warum solt ich allein übrig bleiben? nimmt das **Pflugschaar und schneit sich damit die Gurgel ab**, etc. Solchergestalt hatte diese Teufelin ihres Bruders Todt gerächet. (*Ziegenbalg's Malabarisches Heidenthum*, pp. 154–158; the bold text is mine).

One particularly remarkable feature in Ziegenbalg's retelling is an explanation of Nīli's main motivation, which is revealed by Nīli herself at the moment she is about to kill the Ceṭṭi. It supports my argument that the Ceṭṭi's death mainly serves the larger purpose of avenging the death that Nīli's brother suffered at the hands of the seventy Vēḷāḷas. As I argue elsewhere, there was no other way for the demoness to approach and exact retribution on the Vēḷāḷas than by the strategy she ultimately followed. The crucial factor I point to is Nīli's words to the Ceṭṭi. According to Ziegenbalg's synopsis, Nīli explains to the Ceṭṭi that originally she had no intention of killing him, whom she regards as a handsome man, but finally she is forced to do so in order to avenge her brother's death. This could be viewed as black humour or mockery, but in the end is probably not, as I attempt to show in my discussion of the sister–brother bond, in Tamil culture one that is strong.

18. Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli in the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṇ Viṇaliviṭutūtu* of Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar (eighteenth century)⁹⁷ – Pre-modern literature

Traces of a historically later literary analogue to Nīli (Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli) are found in an eighteenth-century text of Nayaka literature, the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṇ Viṇaliviṭutūtu* of Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar,⁹⁸ a

⁹⁷ On the dating, see Shulman 2001:92.

⁹⁸ According to Zvelebil 1974:218, “The greatest name among the poets of this [*tūtu*] genre is Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar, a Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇ from Srīraṅgam [...]. He lived under the patronage of Kūḷappa Nāyaka, the ruler of a fortress near Dindigul

comic heretic poem full of “explicit eroticism”⁹⁹ belonging to the *tūtu/viṭutūtu* (messenger) genre¹⁰⁰ of the *pirapantam* literature (minor poetry). The episode mentioned in the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Viṛaliviṭutūtu* as a story within a story is more or less identical with the events in the northern sword–fire type version of our *katai*, along with a very similar type of character portrayal illustrative of the “predatory sensuality of the courtesan.”¹⁰¹

Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar, born in 1758 near Maturai and brought up in the Kammālar tradition, tells the story of Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli—a fairly complete version of it¹⁰²—embedded in the story of Aṣṭāvātāṇi,¹⁰³ a poet who, impoverished by a devadāsī, becomes involved in a quarrel with her old mother, who then takes the case to temple officials (*koyiṛ talattār*). They listen to the Brahmin’s plea, in which he narrates the story of Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli, the bloodthirsty *pēy* demoness who deceitfully deceived the Vēḷāḷas’ assembly of justice in order to kill the merchant. Here, analogously to the decision of the Vēḷāḷas in the *Nīli Katai*, the judge decides in favour of the old devadāsī mother. Like the Ceṭṭi, Aṣṭāvātāṇi the poet, fails to convince the judge of a miscarriage of justice. Citing the Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli story as a precedent proves futile in his case.

The story of Paḷaiyaṅūr Nīli recounted in the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Viṛaliviṭutūtu* (161ff.) begins with the Ceṭṭi’s encounter with the demoness Nīli in the middle of the forest; her foul play in disguising herself as his wife and appearing with a child on her hip in front of the assembly of Vēḷāḷas in Paḷaiyaṅūr, whom the Ceṭṭi has approached for help; the Ceṭṭi’s pleading with the assembly to drive away the demoness; Nīli’s response of lamenting her lot and insisting, behind a clever mask of tears, that her husband had deserted her halfway through the journey and threatened her with a sword. The story continues by narrating the trial before the assembly: how Nīli places the baby on the lap of the Ceṭṭi; how the elders condemn his earlier action as a violation of custom; further, how they lock the couple up for a whole night, sealing the door; and how it all ends with Nīli’s brutal killing of the Ceṭṭi, and the Vēḷāḷas’ realisation of their guilt in mishandling the affair.

There is yet another *viṭutūtu*, by the poet Caravaṇa Perumāḷ Kavirāyar from Mutukuḷattū, with the title *Cēṭupati Viṛaliviṭutūtu*¹⁰⁴—a work modelled on the earlier *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Viṛaliviṭutūtu* of Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar.¹⁰⁵ Although this poem does not refer to Nīli, it deserves mention for its forceful and colourful depictions of the milieu of courtesans.¹⁰⁶ Considering the fact that such depictions of courtesans tally with the portrait of the devadāsī in the southern version of the *Nīli Katai/IK*, it is important to remember what Shulman (2001:97), in his discussion of the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Viṛaliviṭutūtu* and *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Kātal*, states as being of significance, namely:

[...] a general process of combining hitherto distinct actors, a process which is one of the hallmarks of the Nāyaka period: the critical distinctions between king and deity, palace and temple, courtesan and *devadāsī*, have by now nearly collapsed, and we can observe an amazing pattern of assimilation toward single, complex but unitary types.

One is emphatically reminded of the episode of the devadāsī Lakṣmī and her Brahmin lover, and of the devadāsī’s courtesan-like skills—in some other variants of the southern version even more elaborately described (e.g. N5) than in N1—and is tempted to see in Lakṣmī what Shulman (2001:97) calls the

[...]” See Shulman 2001:97ff., where the poem is summarised and examined at length along with a second poem composed by the same author, the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Kātal*.

⁹⁹ See Shulman 2001:100.

¹⁰⁰ On the *viṛaliviṭutūtu* genre, see also Zvelebil 1974:218.

¹⁰¹ This phrase is Shulman’s (2001:100).

¹⁰² The account takes up several pages.

¹⁰³ For a summary, see Shulman 2001:97ff. – Aṣṭāvātāṇi means: “one who can devote attention to eight different subjects at the same time.”

¹⁰⁴ According to the edition, the work dates from the nineteenth century, in deviation from Zvelebil (1974:218), who assigns Caravaṇa Perumāḷ Kavirāyar to the eighteenth century.

¹⁰⁵ On the adaptation, see Zvelebil 1974:218.

¹⁰⁶ For a synopsis of the story of the *Cēṭupati Viṛaliviṭutūtu*, see Zvelebil 1974:218f.

“single, complex” type,¹⁰⁷ that is to say, a combination of a devadāsī’s characteristic features and the traits of a courtesan, as found in the *pirapantam* literature, examples being Māṇikkamālai’s daughter, the courtesan Mataṅgāpiṣekam, of the *Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṅ Viraliviṭutūtu*, or Ceṅkamalavalli and Mōkaṅamuttu of the *Cēṭupati Viraliviṭutūtu*. It is not unlikely that the portion of the *IK* concerned with the devadāsī Lakṣmī, perhaps originally rudimentary, was inspired in its detailed description of skills (love spells, magic, juggling, and so forth) by such works. The courtesan, as depicted in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *viraliviṭutūtu* literature, as “a clever and almost irresistible temptress,”¹⁰⁸ is strikingly similar to the character portrayal of the devadāsī Lakṣmī and her mother Śivakami of the southern *IK* (and of the Keralese version as well).¹⁰⁹ Such similarity in the depiction of the courtesan milieu extends equally to the set of instructions for courtesans found in the Keralese *Vaiśikatantram* and, anchored to it, the *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* (fourteenth century).

19. The *Cēkkiḷār Piḷḷaitamiḷ* of Mīnāṅci Cuntaram Piḷḷai, 6.57 (1815–76)¹¹⁰

The *Cēkkiḷār Piḷḷaitamiḷ*, another work of the *pirapantam* literature (minor poetry), promotes the values of the *Vēḷāḷas* by applauding their honourable deeds.

நூலத்தின் உயரும் பழையனூர்
 நாளும் பொலியும் அவையகத்து
 நலிவு புரிநீ லியைக்கண்டு
 நடுங்குந் நின்ற வணிகனுக்கு
 நிலத்தில் இயல்நின் உயிர்க்கிறுதி
 நேரு மாயி னியாமெல்லாம்
 நெருப்பில் முழுகி உயிந்துறப்போம்
 நீஔ ருதிஎன் றுரைத்தபடி
 வலத்தின் உயரச் சொல்தவறா
 வண்ணம் எழுநாக் குழிமுழுகி
 வடஆ ரணியத் தாடொருவர்
 மலர்த்தாள் அடைந்த எழுபதின்மர்
 (*Cēkkiḷār Piḷḷaitamiḷ* [ed. Pālūr Kaṅṅappa Mutaliyār 1964:518], “Vārāṅai paruvam,” 6.57)

- 1-2 At famed Paḷaiyaṅūr, a beautiful and tranquil site,
 3-4 the merchant stood frightened by Nīli, who was giving him trouble.
 5-6 “If anything happens to your life in this country, and if you happen to die,
 7-8 you can be sure that we all together will enter the fire and die [too].”
 9-12 To keep their word, the seventy [Vēḷāḷas], who had great will power, entered the fire, and rising high, attained the lotus feet of the dancing god of the northern forest (*vaṭa āraṅiyam*) [of Tiruvāḷaṅkāṭu].

The commentator of the edition (*ibid.*:520) summarises the story on the basis of the Nīli story known to *Cēkkiḷār*: A man who falls in love with another woman kills his wife. The murdered woman becomes an evil spirit seeking revenge. The story is of the wife–sword–fire type.

20. A multiform of the Nīli story in *The Mackenzie Collection* (1828)

Colin Mackenzie was a “soldier, engineer, and surveyor-general of the Madras Presidency from 1786 to 1815.”¹¹¹ For a synopsis of the Nīli story as found in *The Mackenzie Collection*, see Shulman 1980:195, n. 13, where reference is made to H.H. Wilson 1828, vol. 2:54–56. The story belongs to the wife–sword–fire type of the northern branch.

¹⁰⁷ On the merging of both the devadāsī and the courtesan type as attested in the *Kaṅṅaki Purāṅam*, a nineteenth-century biography of a Ceylonese devadāsī, see Zvelebil 1994:265.

¹⁰⁸ Shulman 2001:98.

¹⁰⁹ For the Kerala story of Icaṅki, see Jepakumār 1992:31.

¹¹⁰ On the dating, see Zvelebil 1995:436.

¹¹¹ Stein 1985:472.

21. The Nīli story in the *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi* of Ā. Cinkāravēlu Mutaliyār – An encyclopaedia of Tamil literature (1st ed. 1899)¹¹²

The Nīli story is mentioned in the first encyclopaedia of Tamil literature (repr. 1996:992):

Navaññāṇi was a Brahmin woman. When her husband killed her and her baby boy, she sought vengeance. Born as the daughter of Puricaik Kiḷār, she roamed about in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu. When she came to know that her husband in her previous birth was reborn as Taricaṇa Ceṭṭi, she attempted to lure him into the forest. Finally, she complained to the Vēḷāḷas of Paḷaiyaṇūr and avenged herself on the Ceṭṭi.

Again, we are dealing here with the co-wife–sword–fire type of story familiar to us from the *Toṇṭaimaṇṭala Catakam*: Nīli is said to be the hungry spirit of the second wife, Navaññāṇi, murdered by the Ceṭṭi in his previous birth. The story involves polygyny rather than adultery.

22. Nīli in the *Apitāṇa Kōcam* of Ā. Muttutampi Piḷḷai, Jaffna – A Tamil encyclopaedia started in 1886 (1st ed. 1902, Jaffna)¹¹³

The *Apitāṇa Kōcam*, based on Cinkāravēlu Mutaliyār’s *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi*,¹¹⁴ mentions according to Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:31,¹¹⁵

[...] that Nīli went to Kāñcipuram and made a complaint to the Vēḷāḷas there. Moreover, it is said that Nīli, the second wife of the Ceṭṭi, appeared to him in disguise and obstructed his way [31].¹¹⁶

Why the entire episode featuring the Vēḷāḷas’ judicial assembly should have shifted in the *Apitāṇa Kōcam* (a work based on the *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi*) to Kāñcipuram is not clear to me.¹¹⁷ Despite this obscure variation, the story referred to is the co-wife–sword–fire variant that is known to us from the *Toṇṭaimaṇṭala Catakam*.

23. The Nīli story in the *Kalaikkaḷaṅciyam* – An encyclopaedia of Tamil literature

According to Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:31 (=1984:68), the *Kalaikkaḷaṅciyam* briefly mentions “that the Ceṭṭi killed his wife” and “that Nīli argued her case in Paḷaiyaṇūr.”¹¹⁸

24. The Nīli story in the *Cirappup Peyr Akarāti* (Dictionary of Famous Names)

The Nīli story is also mentioned in the *Cirappup Peyr Akarāti*. According to Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:31 (=1984:68)—whom I cite in lieu of this unavailable work—the dictionary informs the reader that “the wife of the merchant died shortly after marriage. She became a ghost, roamed about,

¹¹² See Zvelebil 1995:50, 150. In Zvelebil 1992:102 we read: “1st ed. 1910,” which is unlikely, if the *Apitāṇa Kōcam*, first published in 1902, was indeed based on the *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi*.

¹¹³ According to Zvelebil 1995:51, it is “not available in libraries or anywhere obtainable.”

¹¹⁴ See Zvelebil 1995:50.

¹¹⁵ I refer to Caṇmukacuntaram since the original is not available to me. And containing as it does fewer errors, I quote from Caṇmukacuntaram 1978 rather than from 1984:67f.

¹¹⁶ நீலி காஞ்சிபுரத்தில் போய் வேளாளரிடம் முறையிட்டதாகக் குறிப்பிடுகிறார். அத்துடன் நீலி செட்டியின் இரண்டாம் மனைவி போன்று வடிவெடுத்துச் சென்று வழி மறித்ததாகவும் கூறுகின்றார்.

¹¹⁷ Caṇmukacuntaram (1978:31) confirms that it is Kāñci where the case (*valakku*) is pleaded: எனவே இவர் கூற்றுப்படி செட்டிக்கு இரு மனைவியர் என்றும் வழக்கு நடந்த ஊர் காஞ்சிபுரம் என்றும் அறிய முடிகிறது.

¹¹⁸ [...] செட்டி தன் மனைவியைக் கொலை செய்ததாகக் கூறுகிறது. பழையனூரில் நீலி வழக்காடியதாகவும் ... அறிகிறோம்.

obstructed her husband along the way, and finally took revenge.”¹¹⁹ As remarked by Caṇmukacuntaram, no other information is supplied apart from this.

25. The Nīli story in modern retellings¹²⁰

25.1. Ekāmpara Mutaliyār of Ceñci, *Nīlikatai*, Madras, 1922.

25.2. Aru. Rāmanātaṅ, *Paḷaiyaṅṅūr Nīli*, Madras, 1954:5–50.

25.3. Mū. Irākavaiyaṅkār, *Ilakkiyakkaṭṭuraikaḷ*, Madras, 1955:38–45.

For a synopsis of the Nīli story as found in these works, see Shulman 1980:194f. The story is of the wife–sword–fire type familiar from the northern version N7 of my text corpus (see Section 2.4). It is the abandonment of the wife in favour of a dancing girl that sets the story going.

26. The *Karirācaṅ Katai* – Resemblances to the Nīli story in a Kannada work

As P. Subramaniam has pointed out, the *Karirācaṅ Katai* (Story of the Dark King), a work in the Kannada language, resembles the story of Nīli.¹²¹ The *Karirācaṅ Katai* is the story of Karirājaṅ (the son of King Mārapūpati of Tārāpuram), who is about to marry Taraṅmōhiṅi, daughter of King Vallājarājaṅ of Hauṇṇaḷ Nāṭu, but on his way to her falls in love and elopes with Tāmarai Kaṅṅi, the daughter of a rakṣasī (*rāṭcaci*). This was done against the wishes of the mother, who decides to take revenge on Karirājaṅ. The story shares the following story-line with *Nīli/Icakkiammaṅ Katai*: The rakṣasī (the mother of Tāmarai Kaṅṅi) follows Karirājaṅ to Mallikaiūr with a magic child on her hip. There she pleads her case to the headmen, twelve Kautars. She convinces them that Karirājaṅ is her husband and that he had abandoned her for a prostitute. Both are put inside a temple, where the rakṣasī kills her victim and drinks his blood. The twelve Kautars realise the miscarriage of justice and enter a fire.¹²²

27. The *Nīli Kathā* – A Malayalam work

Caṇmukacuntaram (1978:32) mentions a Malayalam work called the *Nīli Kathā*, a text that according to him is known as *Pañcavaṅkāṭṭu Nīlippāṭṭu*, belonging to the *tekkapaṭṭu* type of literature.¹²³ As Perumāḷ (1990:41) writes, the text is today sung in the western taluks of Kalkuḷam and Viḷavaṅkoṭu of Kaṅṅiyākumari district.¹²⁴ From Caṇmukacuntaram 1984:70 it is not clear whether this text can be identified with the *villuppāṭṭu* version he refers to¹²⁵—the latter a text, according to the scholar, that

¹¹⁹ வணிகனது மனைவி மணஞ்செய்த சிறிது காலத்திலேயே இறந்து பேயாய் திரிந்ததாகவும் கணவனை வழி மறித்து பழி வாங்கியதாகவும் அறிகிறோம்.

¹²⁰ Referred to in Shulman 1980:195, n. 13.

¹²¹ See Subramaniam 1996:xv–xvi (Tamil with English translation of the *Nīli Yaṭcākāṅam*). For the reference cited, see p. 38, n. 59 (to No. 10 *Uṅṅunilisaṅdēṣam*) above.

¹²² My synopsis is drawn from Perumāḷ (1990:117f., appendix, n. 5), who refers to Pi.Es. Cami, *Tamil Ilakkiyattil Nāṭṭār Paṅpāṭṭu* (Nāṭṭār Culture as Found in Tamil Literature), a work that is not available to me. See also Subramaniam 1996:xvi, where slightly different names are given for the characters: for instance, instead of “a rakṣasī,” the “queen mother Rāṭcaci”; instead of “King Vallājarājaṅ of Hauṇṇaḷ Nāṭu,” the “king of Vallāḷa.” – Perumāḷ additionally remarks that all the characters are revived by Siva, owing to the chastity of Taraṅmōhiṅi who entered the fire in an act of *satī*.

¹²³ கேரளத்தில் தெக்கன்பாட்டு வகையைச் சேர்ந்த பஞ்சவன்காட்டு நீலிப்பாட்டு நீலிகதையைக் கூறும். இதனை நீலிகதா என்றும் அழைப்பர்.

¹²⁴ Perumāḷ 1990:41: தமிழ் நீலிகதையே மலையாளத்தில் மொழிபெயர்க்கப்பட்டுள்ளது என்றும் கூறலாம். குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் கல்குளம், விளவங்கோடு தாலுகாக்களில் வழக்கில் உள்ள பஞ்சவன் காட்டு நீலிகதை என்ற மலையாளக் கதைப்பாடல் இன்றும் அதே வடிவில் பாடப்படுகிறது, “We can state that the Tamil *Nīli Katai* was translated into Malayalam. Even today the Malayalam ballad *Pañcavaṅkāṭṭu Nīli Katai*, which is in circulation in the taluks Kalkuḷam and Viḷavaṅkōṭu of Kaṅṅiyākumari district, is sung in the same form.”

¹²⁵ Note that the passage with this reference to the *villuppāṭṭu* version is missing in Caṇmukacuntaram’s earlier edition of 1978.

while written in Malayalam script, is in the Tamil language. This version, which starts off with praise for “beautiful Paḷaiyaṇallūr and the Ammaiyappaṇ temple,” treats in detail the character of Nīli, and particularly her seductive art, with which she succeeded in enticing the Brahmin.

28. The name Nīli and its link to the ballad *Alliyaracāṇimālai*¹²⁶ (nineteenth century)

Shulman (1980:210f.) argues that “the ballads of Alli,” which “dwell on the theme of the goddess’s war with her consort,” are related to Nīli. According to him,

[t]he link with Nīli, which is stated explicitly and frequently throughout these works, is significant: [...] Alli [...] is a multiform of Kaṇṇaki/Kālī and of Mīnākṣī [...]. From birth Alli is an Amazon, physically female but masculine in instinct and action [...]. In the case of Alli, even marriage fails to suppress the masculine component of the androgyne [...].

Shulman seems to be referring to Kālī(-Nīli) of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu. This goddess and Alli, the princess of Maturai, share the fate of being subdued and possessed by deceitful means: the one by the dance figure with a leg rising straight upwards, the other by being raped, impregnated, and married¹²⁷ while asleep. Both clash with lustful males: Kālī-Nīli with Śiva, Alli with Arjuna. However, there are also features that Alli shares with the Nīli of the *Nīli Katai*, and even more so with the heroine of the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai*: all are portrayed as non-compliant, indomitable women—of a character that is neither timid nor naive. While there are only some few links with the *Nīli Katai*, there are striking similarities with the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai*: both are stories centred on women; both queens live in a female space that is depicted as homosocial and, in point of eroticism, self-fulfilling; both resist the urge for vengeance after being violently invaded and penetrated, and instead leave it up to their offspring to exact retribution.¹²⁸

29. Cu. Caṇmukacuntaram’s publication of the *Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli Katai*, also known as the *Paḷakanallūr Nīli Katai* (1st ed. 1934)—in my text corpus version N9—the first published version of the southern branch

According to Zvelebil 1989:299, the version of the Nīli story published by Caṇmukacuntaram in 1978 (first edited by Koṭumuṭi Caṇmukaṇ in 1934)—in my text corpus N9 (see Section 2.4)—is the one best known in Tamilnadu. In our tracing of Nīli throughout Tamil literature, it is the first southern version¹²⁹ we come across—a text that is performed in Nellai (Tirunelvēli) district.¹³⁰ Perumāḷ (1990:54/2002:24) dates this version (=N9) to the nineteenth century.

Tamil literature has either explicitly or implicitly accepted as the main figure of the Nīli story a wife who is murdered by her Brahmin husband during her pregnancy. However, in the version entitled *Paḷakainallūr Katai* a reconceptualisation takes place. It is easy to understand why several Tamil critics all too superficially consider this a “vulgar” story: the heroine is now a devadāsī with sexual appeal.¹³¹ That this change is reflected in an overall more intimate tone and erotic content hardly bears saying. The version exposes in detail the character of Nīli, who in her former birth captivates the Brahmin by her words and way of acting, and seduces him by administering a love potion. We may well ask what motivated this change of image in the story’s main figure, to the point that the heroine is now situated

¹²⁶ The story of Alli is, like all *katais*, authorless, though it is ascribed to Pukaḷēnti Pulavar, who was dubbed the author of a large number of Tamil *katais*.

¹²⁷ Arjuna tied a *tāli* string around Alli’s neck that she was unable to remove.

¹²⁸ For the tale of Alli, see Natarajan 2002.

¹²⁹ The southern versions are marked by one or more of the signifiers: devadāsī, margosa leaf, and plough.

¹³⁰ My statement is based on Perumāḷ 1990:54.

¹³¹ As mentioned earlier (see Sect. 2.1) Blackburn (1980:206) suggests that the change from a husband–wife relationship to a man–devadāsī one is a marker of the *villuppāṭṭu* version.

at the opposite pole from a conventional wife.¹³²

Although we do not have here a pregnant wife, the story-line otherwise to a great extent retains its old features: A Brahmin priest at the Paḷakainallūr Ammaiappar temple, Nampi by name, having been impoverished¹³³ by Cantāṇa Naṅkai, a devadāsī of the same temple, is loath to accept his misfortune. Laying the blame for his misery on the devadāsī who had followed him in love, he kills her and seizes her jewels. The story is familiar enough, resembling in most respects the N1 version of Kaṇṇiyākumari district that I have translated.¹³⁴ What sets this N9 version apart, however, is the identification of Nīli with the fierce goddess Cāmuṇḍā at the beginning of the story. This is the first and only time I have come across this explicit association.

REFERENCES TO NĪLI IN THE POPULAR TRADITION

30. Nīli in an oral popular story

Perumāḷ (1990:116) has collected one version of the Nīli story in the oral popular tradition. It focuses on adultery, and how this sets in motion a fateful sequence of jealousy, intrigue, and revenge that culminate inevitably in murder, and in murder avenged.

A young man from the merchant community was happily married to his wife Nīli. One day he saw another woman, one of great beauty, and fell in love with her [...].

Once it happened that the man's lover came to his house in search of him. Nīli, immediately recognising her, became angry and told her to leave the house. The lover swore an oath to take revenge on Nīli.

Next day the young man visited his beloved. But she, who had decided to seek vengeance, referring to the humiliation she had experienced at the hands of Nīli, told him that she would only meet him again if he brought Nīli's *tāli* with him. The young man, ready to fulfil this wish, set off with his wife to another place with the idea of playing foul with her. Along the way they tarried in a forest, and Nīli, exhausted, laid her head on her husband's lap. Her eyes were heavy. Her husband gently removed Nīli's *tāli* and then threw her into a well. He gave the *tāli* to his beloved and lived happily together with her. In his next birth, the murderer met Nīli's evil spirit (*pēy*) in a forest. Nīli, who had waited for him in order to seek revenge, followed him. Deeply frightened, he ran away. He ran to a nearby village and complained to the elders about Nīli's evil spirit. He asked them to protect him. However, the elders could not imagine that she was an evil spirit. They insisted that the young man spend the night with her. By the next day Nīli had disappeared and the young man was dead. (Perumāḷ 1990:116f., appendix n. 4)

31. Nīli in a popular song of the Nāṭārs

The following song emphasises both the beauty and cruelty of Nīli, and her divine nature (as revealed by her thousand eyes).

ஆயிரம் கண்ணுடையாள்
அழகில் சிறந்த கண்ணு
பதினாயிரம் கண்ணுடையாள்
பாதகத்தி நீலியவள்
(தமிழர் நாட்டுப் பாடல்கள், ப. 44)¹³⁵

She who has a thousand eyes,
eyes full of beauty—
She who has ten thousand eyes
is the wicked (*pātakatti*) Nīli.

¹³² The opposite ends of the spectrum of womanhood occupied by wives and courtesans/harlots are nicely exemplified in the *kāppiyam Cilappatikāram* in the exodus from the burning town of Maturai, a scene which makes the social division of women into these two groups highly visible.

¹³³ He wasted not only his own property, but also temple property.

¹³⁴ For a comparison of the story of Nīli/Icakki as related in Nellai and Kaṇṇiyākumari districts, see Sect. 2.4, N9.

¹³⁵ The citation is from Perumāḷ 1990:44; see also Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:40=1984:77.

32. Nīli in Tamil riddles

32.1. Here Nīli's association with danger (forest, thieves) and her demonic features (the child she carries is born by sleight) are alluded to. – A riddle with Nīli as an answer:

காட்டுக்குள்ளே நிற்பாள்
கள்ளர் உடன் பிறந்தாள்
பிள்ளை எடுக்கத் தெரியும் – ஆனால்
பிள்ளையை ஆட்டத் தெரியாது
அவள் யார்.¹³⁶

She lives in the forest.
She was born among the Kaḷḷars (thieves).¹³⁷
She knows how to carry a child, but
she doesn't know how to rock a cradle.
Who is she?
(Answer: Nīli)

32.2. There are riddles that play on still other associations produced by the name Nīli—for example, bodily pleasures and being abandoned. – A riddle with a plant as an answer:

பச்சைப் பட்டதனைப் பிடித்திழித்து
இச்சை தீர்க்கும் நீலியைக் கொண்டு வந்து
அறுகவை உண்டி அன்புடன் அளித்துத்
தெருவில் விட்டு விட்டேன் தேவியவளை
(விடை: வாழையிலை)¹³⁸

I caught and dragged the green silk sari
and brought Nīli, who satisfies our pleasures (*iccai*).
After serving the delicious food,
I left her in the street.
(Answer: a plantain leaf [in South India used as a plate])

32.3. The following riddle, too, plays with the traits associated with Nīli. While the first line alludes to her ability to change her appearance, the fourth line tells of her destructive force, a characteristic that was evidently thought worth mentioning. – A riddle with an animal as an answer:

வையகத்தில் பலவுருவம் பூண்ட நங்கை
வயிறுண்டு காலில்லை சடையோ குட்டை
கையில்லை வாயுண்டு பேசமாட்டாள்
காசினியில் வெகுபேரை கெடுத்த நீலி
ஐயமின்றி வாரிதனில் விசயஞ் செய்து
அகில மெலாந் தெரிசனஞ் செய்தானந்திப்பாள்
மெய் வேந்தர் வீணருக்கும் விருந்துக் கேற்பாள்
மேதினியி லிவளாரென் றியம்புன்றே¹³⁹
(தமிழில் விடுகதைகள், ப. 245)
(விடை: மீன்)

A lady who took several forms in this world,
she has a stomach but no legs, plaited hair (*caṭai*)—yet it is short;
no hands but a mouth, yet she won't speak.
She is the Nīli who spoilt so many in this world.
Having travelled in the sea beyond suspicion,
she is worshipped in the entire world.
She accepts the feast of the king and the wicked.

¹³⁶ The citation is from Perumāḷ 1990:44; also Perumāḷ 2002:18.

¹³⁷ One wonders whether this line is meant to recall *Cil.* 12.21.3, telling of the fierce virgin goddess of the Maṇavas (a social group traditionally categorised as thieves).

¹³⁸ This is cited from Perumāḷ 2002:19.

¹³⁹ This is cited from Caṇṇukacuntaram 1978:39=1984:77.

O people of this world, tell who is she?
(Answer: a fish)

33. Nīli in proverbs and sayings

Jensen (1993:26) provides us with a proverb (No. 249; together with a translation) that is associated with Nīli: *āmpuṭaiyānaik* (com. *akamuṭaiyān*) *koṅra ara* (or *paṭu*) *nīli*, “After killing her husband she feigns sorrow” (249), a proverb that echoes in the words *nīlikkaṅṅīr* (Nīli’s tears) and *vañcakakaṅṅīr* (false tears), which even today remain in colloquial usage in Nāñcilnāṭu.¹⁴⁰ In the speech of Tamil people, one can hear as an equivalent to the word *koṭumai* (cruelty) the expression *nīlittaṅam* (of a Nīli-like character).¹⁴¹ It is common to refer to a cruel woman as *ivaḷ paḷavūr nīliyammā*, “She is a Paḷavūr Nīli.”¹⁴²

CONCLUSION

The preceding excursus through the history of Tamil literature reconfirms what is generally accepted by scholars, namely that no text is free from the influence of other texts. The discussion above clearly suggests that the texts being focused on have continually been in a dialogue, borrowing from one another and developing through a process of elaboration. My observations in the excursus are original unless otherwise stated, and so is the conclusion that is attempted in the following.

– The first historically documented mention of the name Nīli in a literary source comes from the *kāppiyam* work *Cilappatikāram*, which interestingly enough contains the first mention of an Icakki as well. The *kāppiyam* thus presents us with two autonomous and unrelated female deities who have their abode either in the wilderness or in other uninhabited places, the former worshipped by the Maṇavas, and the latter having probably been popular among the Jains and cowherds of Tamiḷakam.

As to the name Nīli, in the *kāppiyam* the name is apparently associated with Koṅravai, the goddess of war (*Cil.* 12.68); moreover, with a tribe, namely the Maṇavas/Eyiṅārs, who worship her as a fierce virgin goddess (*Cil.* 12.21.3) by offering blood sacrifice to her. On the other hand, the name is applied elsewhere in the text to a human being—a merchant (Ceṭṭi) woman (23.159), the wife of Caṅkamaṅ—who suffers a miscarriage of justice and curses the guilty party.¹⁴³

Turning to the name Icakki, in the *Cilappatikāram* the name is generic, and refers to a seductive, at times disturbing pan-Indian form of a *yakṣī* figure that waits in the forest for passers-by (*Cil.* 11.111 and 171). Further, the name is associated with a particular protective deity named Pūṅkāṅ Iyakki (*Cil.* 15.116), probably revered by Jain sages¹⁴⁴ in Maturai—a goddess who is also worshipped by members of the herder community. I shall return to the name Icakki in detail in Section 7.3.

It seems as if these connotations in the early layers of popular socioreligiosity are re-echoed in the story and worship of Icakki as we know them today.

– While the *kāppiyam* literature presents a view of two unrelated traditions of its time that spun themselves out around the names Icakki and Nīli, the *bhakti* literature, by contrast, occupies itself with Nīli alone—more precisely, with Nīli at Tiruvālaṅkāṭu. However, it is interesting that Tiruñāṅacampantar, the *bhakti* poet of the seventh century, adopts both strands of the tradition

¹⁴⁰ See Caṅmukacuntaram 1978:39=1984:77.

¹⁴¹ See Zvelebil 1989:300.

¹⁴² See Caṅmukacuntaram 1978:39=1984:77; also Zvelebil 1989:300.

¹⁴³ Nīli is likewise found as a Ceṭṭi woman in the *kāppiyam* *Maṇimēkalai*, a Buddhist work.

¹⁴⁴ For a late record of the Jain connection with a goddess named Icakkiyammaṅ, I draw the reader’s attention to the late-sixteenth-century Jain text *Appāṅṅainātar Ulā*; see Sect. 7.3.1, point 6 below.

surrounding the name Nīli that was passed down through the *kāppiyam Cilappatikāram* (23.159 and 12.68/12.21.3). In doing so, he not only transfers to the *Tēvāram* (1.45.1¹⁴⁵ and 1.45.7 respectively) these two parallel strands (of a woman who curses and the untamed ancient goddess), but also connects them by alluding to the two female figures' *aṇaṅku*.¹⁴⁶ That *aṇaṅku* also applies to the vengeful Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli (and not only to the goddess) is a reasonable assumption, for which I have given arguments elsewhere.

The survey of references has made it clear that it is in the verses of Campantar that Nīli's story is first indirectly alluded to and set within a local geographical context (Paḷaiyaṇūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu). That Campantar's reference to Nīli links her at the same time with the Vēḷāḷas is of significance, too. Her connection with this socioreligiously dominant landed community and the exalting of the latter is carried forward—first by Cēkkiḷār (twelfth century), and then by Umāpati Civācāriyar (fourteenth century)—and remains part of the discourse throughout the Śaiva *bhakti* literature, to the point, we may say, of being institutionalised. From its roots in the devotional poetry of Campantar, the story of Nīli in the Śaiva literature tends to a reformulation in both devotional and social terms, its primary attention coming to be focused on the Vēḷāḷas and on themes of honour and faithfulness to oaths—seemingly superior male virtues (as important as one's life) associated with this social group. While *Tēvāram* 1.45.1 of Campantar is the first documented literary allusion to the Nīli of the *katai*, it is Umāpati Civācāriyar's fourteenth-century work that provides us with the earliest mention of this Nīli by name (along with a relatively complete account of the core events of her story).

– Coming to the *ciṟupaṇcakāviyam*, we may state that, although the Jain author of the *Nīlakēci* (second half of the tenth century?) carries forward the strand woven around the name Nīli and establishes a link with the untamed goddess Kālī-Nīli-Nīlakēci of Paḷaiyaṇūr-Ālaṅkāṭu, adopting as he does the name and its association with a demonic force as his starting point, the name of the work cannot be said to relate to the once human Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli and the core events of the *Nīli Katai* (N7)—unless one has in mind the demonic features the vengeful Nīli shares with Kālī-Nīli-Nīlakēci.

– As far as I can see from my efforts to piece together the various references to the name Nīli and her story, Aruṇakirinātar, in the late medieval period (fifteenth century), is the first author in the history of Tamil literature to be seriously inspired by another aspect of Nīli than her link with the Vēḷāḷas and Paḷaiyaṇūr-Ālaṅkāṭu. His *Tiruppukal* places her in the world of harlots—a world of eroticism and temptation. The question arises how this new slant taken by Aruṇakirinātar can be made to tally with the northern branch, which depicts Nīli as a pregnant wife, the sole profile of her that has been visible so far. Presumably it cannot be. It remains an open question whether we should interpret the simile of likening harlots to Nīli as providing us with historical evidence of a possible southern version of the Nīli story¹⁴⁷ existing in the fifteenth century.

– With the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the story of Nīli emerges into the full light of day. What comes across in Campantar's verse (seventh century) as a blurred and timeless reference, and what emerges with the medieval Śaiva poets—mainly Umāpati (early fourteenth century)—as a relatively complete sketch of the core events, now becomes a coherent story that presents itself from various angles. The crystallisation process culminates in the *Toṇṭaimaṇṭala Catakam*, a work in praise of Toṇṭaināṭu.¹⁴⁸ That Nīli here once again figures within a tradition similar to the one exemplified in Cēkkiḷār's work, namely one in praise of a region, is perhaps a coincidence, but probably it is not.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ While this *Tēvāram* verse very probably refers to the legend of Paḷaiyaṇūr Nīli, *Cil.* 23.159 refers to Nīli the wife of Caṅkaṇaṇ (see No. 1.3 within this chapter). The theme of an untimely death and the figure of a vengeful woman who utters curses are reechoed in both.

¹⁴⁶ For *aṇaṅku*, see No. 4.2 above.

¹⁴⁷ I.e. a version with a devadāsī as its heroine.

¹⁴⁸ A full-fledged story of Nīli can be witnessed around the same period in Ziegenbalg's account (1711).

¹⁴⁹ These works aim at the formation of regional identity. It is noteworthy that in present-day Kāṇṇiyākumari district Nīli-

What can be stated with some certainty is that the *Nīli Katai* must have been in the hands of a dominant social group. It is further quite certain that the story of Nīli gained entry into a semi-courtly environment. This is suggested by the fact not only that the *yaṭcakānam* genre likewise drew upon the narrative (see N12),¹⁵⁰ but also that the author of the *Toṅṭaimaṅṭala Catakam*, Paṭikkācu Pulavar, was a court poet in addition to being a wandering bard.

– That courtly genres have explicitly incorporated the well-known oral narrative of the Nīli story, which circulated in contexts well outside the royal courts, is certain in view of the *Kūlappa Nāyakkāṅ Vīraliviṭutūtu* of Cuppiratīpa Kavirāyar (eighteenth century)¹⁵¹—an explicitly erotic Nayaka poem on which Paḷaiyaṅṭūr Nīli has likewise left her mark. The *pirapantam* literature (minor poetry), which includes along with *viṭutūtu*, just mentioned, genres such as *piḷḷaitamiḷ* and *paraṅi*, accounts for various aspects of the Nīli narrative. It takes interest in other features of the story—for instance, the gruesome (*paraṅi*, twelfth century) and the erotic (*tūtu*). However, it still retains the theme of the “honourable Vēḷāḷas” (*piḷḷaitamiḷ*, nineteenth century). In conclusion, we may state that the *pirapantam* literature fits the story out with new themes, while still praising the virtuous Vēḷāḷas. There is no doubt, then, that Nīli occupied an important place in minor poetry as well.

– To sum up, apart from the themes of *violent death* and *vengeance*, and the link to the Vēḷāḷas, it is the introduction of Paḷaiyaṅṭūr-Ālaṅkāṭu as the scene of events that is the most significant fact associated with the name Nīli since the time of Campantar. Despite all the minor transformations that the story has undergone, Ālaṅkāṭu remains the main setting throughout the history of Tamil literature. In fact, this feature together with the components *pregnant wife*, *sword*, and *fire* is what defines the northern version. It is noteworthy, by contrast, that despite “a period of considerable literary production [...] during the 17th and 18th centuries” in the manuscript tradition of Nāñcilnāṭu,¹⁵² the southern version, marked by the figure of the *devadāsī*, and the *margosa leaf* and *plough* motifs, was consigned to virtual anonymity, even in the accounts of missionaries, compilations, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. It was only in the year 1934 that Cu. Caṅmukacuntaram published a version of the southern line with a *devadāsī* as its heroine. Despite this fact, a few works listed in this chapter display a well-documented continuity linking Nīli to the *devadāsī*–courtesan milieu, commencing perhaps in the fifteenth century (the *Tiruppukal* of Aruṅakirinātar) and still in evidence in the eighteenth-century *tūtu* works, in which the incorporation of the Nīli story into an explicitly sensual Nāyaka period¹⁵³ style of literature is attested.

In the oral popular tradition the picture is one of greater diversification. Among its various genres we find a wide spectrum of attributes ascribed to Nīli: above all, beauty combined with an inner quality of cruelty conveying a sense of danger, destructive force, and deceit. Moreover, there is a sense of illusion (the magic child) and bodily pleasure. The oral tradition leaves us in little doubt as to social themes that are associated with Nīli, namely murder and retaliation against it, all more or less reactions to an underlying repression of energy resulting from husbands’ adulterous conduct.

Icakkiammaṅ serves as a representative of just such regional identity.

¹⁵⁰ As stated earlier, the names of the characters and places featured in the *Nīli Yaṭcakānam* text are identical with those in the *Toṅṭaimaṅṭala Catakam* of Paṭikkācu Pulavar.

¹⁵¹ See Shulman 2001:97ff., where the poem is summarised and examined at length.

¹⁵² I cite Blackburn 1980:106.

¹⁵³ For a detailed “Nāyaka [a]nthropology” (113) and the link between “the new military elite, “social upheaval” (124), “new sensibility [...] in relation to the human body and its sensory resources” (113), “tales of anti-normative violation, always of a sexual character” (124), and the courtesan–body–status–power nexus, see Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 1998:113ff.

