

Introduction

What do we know about the history of emotion in Tamil South India? How did pre-modern Tamil thinkers understand emotion? And how did they define and apply that understanding? What was the role of emotion theory? And what changes took place over time in theoretical emotion knowledge? Tamil theorising on emotions is a field that should be integrated into historical emotion research. However, research on the history of emotion in Tamil-speaking southern India is challenging. This is not only due to the conceptual asymmetry between the Western umbrella category ‘emotion’ and the Tamil meaning of emotion in theoretical-technical terms.¹ It is also because the extant Tamil treatises on emotion are solely treatises on poetics.² Other than these treatises, there are no treatises on emotions as such, whether on the phenomenology or sociology of emotions, or on emotions as expressed in all forms of literature.³

It seems that Tamil intellectual culture felt no compulsion to theorise on emotion as such. Only one early school theorising on emotion in poetry is known today, the school that developed from the *Tolkāppiyam*, a treatise on grammar.⁴ While in certain

-
- 1 On the difficulty of defining emotion in Western contexts and the lack of a consensus, see Thomas Dixon, ‘“Emotion”: One Word, Many Concepts,’ *Emotion Review* 4.4 (October 2012): 387–88; and James A. Russell, ‘Introduction to Special Section: On Defining Emotion,’ *Emotion Review* 4.4 (2012): 337. See also Paul R. Kleinginna, Jr. and Anne M. Kleinginna, ‘A Categorized List of Emotion Definitions: With Suggestions for a Consensual Definition,’ *Motivation and Emotion* 5.4 (1981): 345–79; as well as Kevin Mulligan and Klaus R. Scherer, ‘Towards a Working Definition of Emotion,’ *Emotion Review* 4.4 (2012): 345–57.
 - 2 In contrast, the Greek Aristotelian concept of emotions was determined by the arena of debate and public persuasion, being part of rhetoric theory; see Aristotle’s *Rhetoric II*. On emotions in Aristotle’s ethical theory, see also *Nicomachean Ethics IV*. See William W. Fortenbaugh, ‘Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* on Emotions,’ *Archiv fuer Geschichte der Philosophie* 52 (1970): 40–70; William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotions* (London: Duckworth, 2003); David Konstan, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). Translations consulted: Gernot Krapinger, trans./ed., *Aristoteles Rhetorik*, 2. Buch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2018), in particular, 76–114; Gernot Krapinger, trans./ed., *Aristoteles Nikomachische Ethik*, 4. Buch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017), 88–117.
 - 3 There are, of course, schools of Indian philosophy (in Indian traditions, there are no formal distinctions made between religious texts and philosophical texts), but few or none of them give a central role to emotions. It is rather taught that one should overcome emotions (e.g., Sāṃkhya-Yoga). Only when leading a devotional *bhakti* life are emotions welcomed, those emotions, however, that are directed towards god. For various philosophical accounts of emotions, see Joerg Tuske, ‘The Concept of Emotion in Classical Indian Philosophy,’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1 March 2011, last modified 26 July 2016): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-emotion-india/>
 - 4 Tamil grammars consider phonology and morphology to be inseparable from the treatment of

texts it is possible to find influences from other schools of grammar, no treatise from those schools have survived. The *Tolkāppiyam* grammar, dating to the middle of the first millenium, contains in its third section (*Poruḷatikāram*, ‘section on meaning’) an authoritative grammar on poetics. It was here that rules and conventions with regard to a theory of emotions were established, rules and conventions that were followed at least until the seventeenth century. Although a new type of treatise emerged in the sixteenth century, the *pāṭṭiyal* type (which did not belong to the school of *Tolkāppiyam*), it did not offer any contemporary systematic thoughts on literary emotions.

Since the only extant early school that we have derives from the *Tolkāppiyam*, we also have no category for emotion other than the technical term it uses, namely, ‘*meyp̄p̄āṭu*’. This term represents the Tamil concept of emotion, in this case, literary emotion (or, to be even more precise, literary emotion within the framework of the themes of love and war, the two main themes discussed in the *Tolkāppiyam*). This is our point of departure.

It should be made clear that the *Tolkāppiyam* is not the central object of study in this monograph, but rather the concept of emotion that developed out of its discourse on *meyp̄p̄āṭu*. The interest here lies in the history of emotion theories, and thus in the enquiries into emotion knowledge in treatises and commentarial works in premodern Tamil-speaking South India, in particular, in two periods: from the eleventh to thirteenth century, and the sixteenth to seventeenth century. Particularly the first period experienced a pinnacle of debates on literary emotion, with concepts elaborated in constant dialogue with rival currents, with an unprecedented and sudden increase in the number of Tamil treatises and commentaries on emotion.⁵ At this critical moment in history, a number of changes in emotion knowledge can be detected. And since Tamil thinkers only theorised on literary emotions (curiously neglecting, as mentioned above, any study of emotions as such), this monograph restricts its enquiry to that.

Emotions occupy a fundamental place in texts on poetics and dramaturgy, this going back to the Tamil *Tolkāppiyam*, and in Sanskrit, to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (c.300 CE). The natural starting point for an investigation on emotions would thus be these two treatises. To settle one thing right away, premodern Tamil thinkers did not investigate emotions in the same way⁶ Sanskrit discourses on ordinary emotion and aesthetic

poetic theory.

- 5 In Sanskrit according to Sheldon Pollock, trans./ed., *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 49, the commentarial tradition on the Sanskrit *rasa* (‘aesthetic emotion’) theory began most probably not much before the early ninth century.
- 6 The viewpoint in this study is more nuanced than that taken by Whitney Cox, ‘From Source-Criticism to Intellectual History in the Poetics of the Medieval Tamil Country,’ in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, eds Whitney Cox and Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, École Française d’Extrême-Orient [Collection Indologie 121], 2013, 115–60). According to Cox, we are ‘faced with the relative theoretical poverty of the received theory of *meyp̄p̄āṭu*’ (119).

emotion (*bhāva-rasa*) did.⁷ In Tamil there is no discourse on emotion that could have led to the far-reaching paradigm shifts we find in Sanskrit theoretical writings, of which some were quite revolutionary (as for example in the works of the Kashmiri theorist Abhinavagupta, c.1000 CE)⁸. Rather, Tamil thinkers show a continuing preference for older (pre-Abhinavagupta) paradigms. They did so even though texts codifying emotions were part of a multilingual field and the boundaries between the languages were permeable due to multilayered processes of transfer.⁹ An excellent source reader exists for Sanskrit *rasa* theory,¹⁰ Sheldon Pollock's *Rasa Reader*, but it does not include any discussion of Tamil thinkers. Although a reception of the Sanskrit *rasa* theory did exist in the South Indian Tamil tradition, this was beyond the scope of Pollock's book.

In this monograph several priorities have been set. First of all, it does not deal with the relationship between emotions as expressed in Tamil literature and what is theorised as *meyp̄p̄āṭu*. It also does not answer the question of how *meyp̄p̄āṭu* mapped onto Tamil poetic compositions.¹¹ It rather examines emotion knowledge as it stood at the height of debates on literary emotion. Such debates began in the eleventh century, when various strands of thought regarding emotion knowledge were brought together and related in different ways to earlier knowledge systems. This study examines the development of these currents. A number of discoveries will be presented, as for example, the sources of certain influences found in the concepts in question, and the points when certain emotion words passed out of use or lists of emotions changed. It will also be shown when Tamil literary theories of emotion introduced something akin to *rasa* (aesthetic emotion).

Regarding the technical term *meyp̄p̄āṭu* used in Tamil theories of literary emotion, one may ask: Does this term have an accepted etymology? Do we know what the term

7 Sanskrit was the *lingua franca* in India and beyond. Both Sanskrit and Tamil can be considered the classical languages of India.

8 The dominant question had come to be that of the nature of aesthetic reception (Whitney Cox, 'Bearing the *Nāṭyaveda*: Śāradātanaya's *Bhāvaprakāśana*,' in *Modes of Philology in Medieval South India* by Whitney Cox [Leiden: Brill, 2017], 81). On 'aesthetics' in classical India, see Pollock, *Rasa Reader*, 1ff.

9 On multilingual processes of transfer, see in particular, the writings of Anne Monius and Whitney Cox, who make this very clear. See also Jean Filliozat, 'Tamil and Sanskrit in South India,' in *Passages: Relationships Between Tamil and Sanskrit*, eds M. Kannan and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry and Tamil Chair, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 2009), 1–10.

10 In my translations I distinguish between *rasa* as an aesthetic emotion and *bhāva* as an ordinary emotion.

11 Grammar was strongly allied from the start with poetic praxis. However, there was no one-to-one correspondence between the grammarians' normative rules and poetry; see David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 31.

originally meant? Unfortunately the answer is no. Much hinges on the multiple meanings of *mey*, which range from ‘body’ to ‘truth’ or ‘reality’. Lexicons such as the *Glossary of Historical Tamil Literature (up to 1800 AD)*, *Tamiḷ ilakkiyaḷ pēraḱarāṭi* note that the first occurrence of *meypḱāṭu* is in the grammar *Tolkāppiyam* and translate it as emotion.¹² However, the eighth- to thirteenth-century medieval reference lexica *Tivākaram* and *Piṅkala nikaṅṱu* (which were used for interpretive questions as well as in the active production of texts) do not list the term in this particular technical meaning.¹³ Despite this, whatever the correct etymology or meaning, the technical term *meypḱāṭu* can be translated with the meta-category ‘emotion’. In the *Tolkāppiyam* emotion root-text, as I understand it, literary poetic emotion is simply emotion (equivalent to Sanskrit *bhāva*, ordinary emotion). Also in the *Tolkāppiyam*’s commentarial tradition up to the seventeenth century, the processes involved are not essentially different from those operative for ordinary emotion.

What Tamil thinkers and commentators of the medieval period (eleventh to thirteenth century) were quite sure of was that emotions cannot be reduced to an inner space. Rather the opposite: they conceived emotions as arising through outer causal factors or situatedness. They can then be read in faces, physical postures, emotives,¹⁴ or physical manifestations such as horripilation, tears, or perspiration caused by bodily change. In addition to the causal impact of emotions on the sensory organs, it was understood that emotion is based on perceptive power and the mind, and that there is no basic opposition between reason and emotion.¹⁵ Whether it was theorised that objects have specific emotion-inducing properties is unclear with the information currently available.¹⁶ But what can be said with certainty is that the Tamil treatises define

12 See *Glossary of Historical Tamil Literature (up to 1800 AD)*, *Tamiḷ ilakkiyaḷ pēraḱarāṭi*, vol. 5 (Chennai: Cānti Cāṭaṅā, 2002), 2054, s.v., *meypḱāṭu*: ‘uḷḷattu uṅarcci’.

13 See *Tivākaram and Piṅkala nikaṅṱu* (Ti 11:242; Pi 10:100) in *Concordance of Three Nigandus / tivākaram – piṅkalam – cūṭāmaṅi akarāṭi aṅṱavaṅai* (Chennai: Cānti Cāṭaṅā, 2000).

14 William Reddy calls emotional utterances ‘emotives’; see William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104. Here I adopt only the term ‘emotive’, rather than the entire theory developed by Reddy. I would consider ‘sighing’ an emotive linked to conscious processes.

15 It is notable that the generic Tamil key term *uṅarcci*, a term referring in various ways to the modern term ‘emotion’, does not designate a dualistic polarisation between reason and emotion. The term *uṅarcci* is derived from the verb root *uṅar* and has a broad semantic range: 1. to be conscious of, know, understand; 2. to think, reflect, consider, 3. to examine, observe; 4. to experience as a sensation; 5. to realise; 6. to feel (*Tamil Lexicon*, 6 vols and supplement (University of Madras, 1982).

16 Neither the root-text nor the expository prose in the commentarial works gives a clue regarding this. Modern Tamil grammar encourages the view that emotion comes to the person: Dative + emotion-noun + verb *irutaḷ* = being affected by / happens to. This denotes the receptivity and passivity of the subject. E.g. *x-kku* (dative) *aruvaruppāka iruntatu*, ‘x was disgusted’; *x-kku ericcalāka iruntatu*, ‘x was annoyed’. – Tamil is an agglutinative Dravidian language, building left-branching sentences that produce a set of mental processes different than in Indo-European languages; for more details, see Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 7ff.

which emotions are expected for particular objectives or causal factors and thus, which are appropriate. This again involves registers of emotion knowledge such as an appraisal of the causal factor (with four factors usually mentioned), the actors involved, and cultural expectations.¹⁷ According to Tamil treatises, anger, for example, is not the same from one social group to another (such as kings or warriors, brahmins, merchants, or shepherds). Tamil premodern theorists view with approval the anger of a warrior, anger of someone whose kin has been harmed, or anger caused by murder and killing. In contrast, they view a warrior's fear with disapproval. This is a telling indication of how emotion treatises established emotion rules or norms, and how concepts of emotions as prescribed by these treatises led to emotion practice.¹⁸ However, only in the Buddhist emotion treatise under consideration is a categorical distinction made between good and bad, that is, between emotions that are pleasant and those that are painful or produce suffering.¹⁹

If we compare the premodern Tamil list of emotions with Western premodern lists of words describing emotions,²⁰ it is striking that in the Tamil treatises, various functional aspects are pooled under the single umbrella term of *meyp̄p̄ātu*. Some of the listed emotions are very close to Western ones, as for example disgust, joy, affection, jealousy and sloth,²¹ but other terms for emotions are closer to mental states (remembering, doubt, dreaming).²² Still others are of a physiological nature (trembling, weeping, laughter, perspiration, horripilation). The Tamil theorists did not make such distinctions, save presenting a double list of eight plus an additional thirty-two *meyp̄p̄ātus*.²³

17 For example, the emotion of disgust is evoked by four causes old age, disease, pain, and low social status.

18 An example of such a prescribed Tamil emotion notion is *ūṭal-uvakai*, the 'pleasure derived from reunion after sulking' (a staged emotion practice that still today is often part of the emotional life of amorous or married couples in the real world). On *ūṭal*, see also Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 96. – For a discussion of the premodern domination of theory (*sāstra*) over practical activity, as part of an Indian 'centrality of rule-governance in human behaviour', see Sheldon Pollock, 'The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105.3 (July-Sept. 1985): 499–519 (500).

19 This categorical distinction is an important part of discussions in Christian treatises on emotion.

20 Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Emotion Words,' in *Le sujet des émotions au Moyen Âge*, ed. Piroška Nagy and Damien Boquet (Paris: Beauchesne, 2008), 93–106.

21 On *acedia* and that sloth has gone out of fashion in today's western emotion vocabulary, but in Thomas Aquinas' medieval Europe, sloth was seen as an emotion, even a deadly sin, see Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2011); and Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 11.

22 Modern neuroscience has shown that emotions have an integrated functionality in human mental life. See Lisa Feldman Barrett and Ajay B. Satpute, 'Historical Pitfalls and New Directions in the Neuroscience of Emotion,' *Neuroscience Letters* (2017): 1–10: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neulet.2017.07.045>

23 In these Tamil treatises, as in similar treatises in Sanskrit (see Pollock, *Rasa Reader*, 8), there is

Although no systematic thoughts regarding emotion are available other than the theories on literary emotions of the Tamil grammarians, practical emotion knowledge existed, of course, as for example in Tamil *siddha* medicine, which is based on bodily humours, the causal role of emotions in disease and recovery, and the link between diet and emotion.²⁴ This medical science, which developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was interested in the mental-somatology of the emotions. However, to my knowledge, it did not develop a specific thought system regarding emotions. Also in other types of texts, practical emotion knowledge is found, such as in the ethical aphorisms of the *Tirukkural*.²⁵ In this text, also known as the *Kural*, we find aphorisms offering advice on virtue, right conduct, and fame, as well as on the emotions of envy, wrath, sympathy, sloth, etc. This practical emotion knowledge represents a future perspective for research on the history of Tamil emotions.

This volume is divided into two chapters; these are, however, not in the sequence usually expected. Sections 1 and 2 of the first chapter contain the results of my enquiry into emotion knowledge as found in premodern Tamil treatises. They present the questions that premodern Tamil thinkers were interested in, as well as those they did not engage with. Moreover, they summarise the changes that occurred over time in emotion knowledge (with detailed evidence for this given in the ‘*Meypāṭu* source readings’ of chapter 2). Section 3 discusses the problems in translating Tamil technical terms. The second chapter has two sections. Section 1 presents the current state of research on *meypāṭu*. Section 2 contains the *Meypāṭu* source readings. Rather than a philological enquiry, it presents a systematic overview of how *meypāṭu* was seen by premodern Tamil theorists. The source reader investigates core ideas and changes, and provides Tamil texts and translations.²⁶ For a deeper understanding of the current Indological scholarly debate, the latest research results on the Sanskrit *rasa* theory are also outlined briefly.

a preference for ‘counting and listing’, and the belief ‘that emotional phenomena can be listed and counted’. Today one might make possible distinctions between these emotions based on their characteristics or nature (simple external *meypāṭu* [e.g. perspiration], complex higher order external *meypāṭu* [e.g. anger, joy, disgust], internal short-lasting *meypāṭu* [e.g. doubt], or internal *meypāṭu* with respect to reactions [e.g. recollection]).

- 24 On diet and emotion, as well as the regulation of emotions, see Barbara Schuler, ‘Introduction: Historicizing Asian Community-Based Emotion Practices’ and ‘Food and Emotion: Can Emotions Be Worked On and Altered in Material Ways?’, both in *Historicizing Emotions: Practices and Objects in India, China, and Japan*, ed. Barbara Schuler (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- 25 In later times, this work became known as an example of *nīti* literature. On the *Tirukkural*, which dates to the middle of the first millennium or somewhat later, see Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 94. On the author of the *Tirukkural*, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, as a collective persona, see Shulman, *ibid.* – The editions used are *Tirukkural mūlamum parimēlaḷakar uraiyum*, ed. Vaṭivēlu Ceṭṭiyār, 3 vols (Maturai: Maturaip Palkalaikkalākam, [1904] 1972–1976); *Tirukkural teḷivurai*, ed. Pa. Cuppiramaṇiyaṅ (Tirucci: Icaiyaraci Patippakam, n.d.).
- 26 An overview of all positions held in the Tamil debate on the nature of literary emotion is, however, beyond the scope of this *Meypāṭu* source readings.

This survey contains available current knowledge, but it will, no doubt, need to be revised as more research into these matters is undertaken.

Readers who would like to focus on the original texts, literally rendered, and on the changes chronologically presented, may wish to skip the discussions in chapter 1. For those who would like to gain a deeper understanding of the premodern scholarly debate and the emotion knowledge involved, chapter 1 is the place to begin.

