

# A Survey of the *Sthalapurāṇa* Literature in Tamil<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

According to a standard definition, *purāṇas* are “a class of Sanskrit books which deal with ancient and medieval Indian theology, astronomy, cosmogony, genealogy, accounts of kings and rishis, and miscellaneous materials, all illustrated by fables, songs, legends and tales: literally old or ancient lore. The oldest of the *Purāṇas* dates from some from 600 A.D. and some of them may be as late as the 13<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century. All of them have undergone revisions and each in its form enumerates the whole group. They [...] were originally written in verse in the form of a dialog between two persons into which are woven stories and discourses uttered by other persons. They are attributed to a rishi or to the gods. The five subjects which are proper to the *Purāṇas* are *sarga*, *pratisarga* (dissolution and recreation), *manvantara* (periods of the Manus) *vaṃśa* (genealogies), and *vaṃśyānucharita* (history of the solar and lunar races mentioned in the *vaṃśa*)” (Leach 1949, 910–911). But this definition has to be adjusted to include *purāṇas* in other Indian languages, which also have such compositions inspired by their Sanskrit counterparts as translations, adaptations, recreations and original creations in large numbers.

*Purāṇa* literature is traditionally divided into (1) *mahāpurāṇas* (2) *upapurāṇas* and (3) *sthalapurāṇas*. Among these, *sthalapurāṇas* may be considered as a subtype, derived from both *mahāpurāṇas* and *upapurāṇas*. The following is a survey of the *sthalapurāṇa* literature in Tamil.

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1 This is a completely revised version of a paper published by the present author as “*Sthalapurāṇas* in Tamil” in the *Research Papers* (Annual Journal of the Department of Tamil of the University of Kerala) (Nachimuthu 1984–1985). It is based on a survey and study of printed *sthalapurāṇas* called *Tamiḷil Talapurāṇa Ilakkiyam* (Krishnaswamy 1974), which formed part of the M.A. dissertation submitted by V. Krishnaswamy of the 1972–1974 batch to the Department of Tamil at the University of Kerala, Kariavattom under my guidance. Earlier Mu. Arunachalam (2005 [1977]) has covered many of these *purāṇas* in his books on the history of Tamil literature. This is the first complete study of this genre, though limited in some aspects. Since then a few studies have appeared in Tamil and English. In Tamil a two-volume study of *sthalapurāṇa* literature by Vē. Rā. Mātavaṇ (1995) and in English studies by David Shulman (1980), William P. Harman (1989) and recently Jay Ramesh (2020) have come out.

## 2. Tamil *Purāṇas*

### 2.1 Classification of the Tamil *Purāṇas*

The numerous Tamil works that go under the name *purāṇa* can be classified according to their subject matter as follows (cf. Krishnaswamy 1974, 3–4):

- (1) *Purāṇas* dealing with the deeds of gods:  
Examples: *mahāpurāṇas* and *upapurāṇas*, e.g., *Maccapurāṇam* (Viṣṇu, Śiva, Murukaṇ), *Kūrmapurāṇam* (Viṣṇu, Śiva), *Civamakāpurāṇam* (Śiva), *Kantapurāṇam* (Murukaṇ), *Upatēcakāṇṭam* (Murukaṇ), *Piramōttarakāṇṭam* (Śiva), etc.
- (2) *Purāṇas* dealing with the lives of great men:  
Examples: *Tiruttoṇṭar purāṇam* or *Periyapurāṇam* (legends on the lives of the sixty three Śaiva Nāyaṇmārs), *Cēkkiḷār purāṇam* (legends on the life of Cēkkiḷār, the author of the *Periyapurāṇam*), *Tiruvātavūraṭikaḷ purāṇam* (legends on the life of the Śaivite saint Māṇikkavācakar), *Pulavar purāṇam* (legends on the lives of seventy-two Tamil poets), *Cēyṭtoṇṭar purāṇam* (legends on the lives of seventy-eight Murukaṇ devotees), *Śrīpurāṇam* (legends on the lives of twenty-two Jain Tīrthaṅkaras and Jain kings), *Mērumantara purāṇam* (legends of Meru and Mandara, two great Jain devotees).
- (3) *Purāṇas* dealing with the legends of places (also called *sthalapurāṇas*), which enumerate the significance of *mūrti* (the deity), *sthalā* (the sacred locale) and *tīrtha* (sacred water bodies):  
Examples: *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* (legends of Śiva at Maturai), *Kōyirpurāṇam* (legends of Citamparam), *Kāñcippurāṇam* (legends of Kāñcipuram), *Tirunākaikkārōṇapurāṇam* (legends of Nākaikkārōṇam or Nākappattinam), *Taṇikaippurāṇam* (legends of Tiruttāṇi), etc.
- (4) *Purāṇas* dealing with *tīrthas* alone:  
Examples: *Kāvrippurāṇam* (or *Piramavaivarttam*) (legends of the river Kāvēri), *Ponṇiccintu māṇmiya purāṇam* (legends of the river Tāmpiraparāṇi), *Peṇṇainatip purāṇam* (legends of the river Peṇṇaiyāru).
- (5) *Purāṇas* dealing with *vratas* (religious vows, acts of austerity, holy practices, such as fasting, continence, etc.):  
Examples: *Civarāttiripurāṇam* (legends of Śivarātri connected with Śiva), *Ēkātacipurāṇam* (legends of Ekādaśi connected with Viṣṇu).
- (6) *Purāṇas* dealing with castes:  
Examples: *Cēṅkuntar purāṇam* (mythological account of the Tamil weaving and martial community), *Vēḷāḷar purāṇam* (mythological account of the farming class).
- (7) *Purāṇas* dealing with literary history:  
Examples: *Tirumuṛaikaṇṭapurāṇam* (a composition by Umāpati Civācāriyār (thirteenth–fourteenth century): legends about the discovery and compilation

of the Śaivite *Tirumuṟais* of the *Tēvāram* trio, i.e., Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar, at Cītamparam).

(8) Miscellaneous:

Examples: *Pūtapurāṇam*, *Māpurāṇam* (supposed to have been composed during the Caṅkam period, i.e., about third century BCE to second century CE), works which are not extant, etc.

## 2.2 *Sthalapurāṇas* in Tamil

Among the varieties of *purāṇas* in Tamil, *sthalapurāṇas* (or *talapurāṇam* in Tamil) are most popular and available in large numbers. They are also known as *oluku* (e.g., *Kōyiloluku*) or *mahātmiyam/māṇmiyam* (e.g., *Hastikiri mahātmiyam*, *Ātikamalālaya mahātmiyam*, *Kurukaimāṇmiyam*, *Cittavaṭa māṇmiyam*, etc.). *Māṇmiyakkōvai* (e.g., *Civālaya māṇmiyakkōvai*), *līlai* (e.g., *Tiyākarācalīlai*), and *vicēṭam* (e.g., *Cētuvicēṭam*) are some less used synonyms.

Prose versions of *sthalapurāṇas* are known under a wide variety of names viz: *urpavam* (557), *kaipītu* (399, 555), *talaviḷakkam* (439), *tiruppatippirapāvam* (460), *pirapāvaciṅtāmaṇi* (421), *makattuvam* (59), *mahātmiya cāram* (194), *makimai* (23), *māṇmiyakkōvai* (173), *māṇmiya caṅkirakam* (244), *rakaciyam* (159), *līlāpirapāvam* (98), *varalāru* (53), *viḷakkam* (171), *vaipavam* (134, 574).<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Tamil *Sthalapurāṇas* – an Overview

### 3.1 Origin and History of the Tamil *Sthalapurāṇas*

Even though *Māpurāṇam* and *Pūtapurāṇam* from Caṅkam times (third century BCE to second century CE), *Cantipurāṇam* and *Purāṇacākaram* from the tenth century, and some other *purāṇa* works which are not extant now are known to us from the literary history of Tamil, the origin of the first *sthalapurāṇa* can be traced back to the twelfth century only. In the twelfth century CE a work called *Kaṇṇivaṇapurāṇam* composed by one Vīraittaliṅga Paracamaiya Kōḷari is mentioned in the Tiruppātirip-puliyūr inscriptions of Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṅ I. Even though it is not extant now, one can infer that it is a *sthalapurāṇa* on Tiruppātirippuliyūr, Kaṇṇivaṇam being the legendary name for it. We do not know the nature of the other two works attributed to him, viz. *Aṣṭātacapurāṇam* and *Pūmpuliyūr Nāṭakam* (Arunachalam 1973, 334–335).

Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭarpurāṇam* or *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruviḷaiyāṭal* of the thirteenth century is the earliest of the available *sthalapurāṇas*.<sup>3</sup> The *Kōyirpurāṇam* of Umāpati Civācāriyār is a notable work of the fourteenth

2 The numbers in the brackets refer to the serial numbers in the *sthalapurāṇa* bibliography in V. Krishnaswamy's *Tamiḷil Talapurāṇa Ilakkiyam* (1974, 122–212).

3 Mu. Arunachalam (1970: 237–250) dates this text to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai (1952, 16) thinks that it belongs to the sixteenth century.



	<i>Kumpakōṇappurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tirukkurukkaippurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Kōyilūrppurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Cūraimāṇakarppurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Taṇiyūrppurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tirutturuttippurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tirunākaikkārōṇappurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tirupperunturaippurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tirumayilaippurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tiruvārāṅkulattalapurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Tiruvāḷolipurrūrppurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Paṭṭiṣvarappurāṇam,</i>	
	<i>Maṇṇipattikkaraippurāṇam</i>	
	<i>Tirunelvēlitalapurāṇam</i>	Nellaiyappa Kavirāyar
20th	<i>Aṇṇiyūrttalapurāṇam,</i>	Kantacāmi Cuvāmikaḷ
	<i>Kavacaippurāṇam</i>	

### 3.2 A brief survey of the Tamil *sthalapurāṇas*<sup>4</sup>

There are more than four hundred *sthalapurāṇas* in Tamil in verse form alone, only half of which have been published so far. A number of prose versions and adaptations of these *purāṇas* are also available. There is also the collection of local legends by Col. Mackenzie (1754–1821) in prose form, which is kept by the Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Ceṇṇai. A number of *sthalapurāṇas* are still in manuscript form and yet to be published, and a few published works cannot be traced any more.

We know of more than fifty *sthalapurāṇa* poets from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries. Some of them have written more than one *purāṇa* of this type: Caiva Ellappa Nāvalar (seventeenth century) wrote six *purāṇas*, Kacciyappa Muṇivar (eighteenth century) five *purāṇas* and Mīnāṭcicutaram Piḷḷai (nineteenth century) twenty-two.

Even though the *sthalapurāṇas* are distributed all over Tamilnadu, the Cōḷa country has particularly many of them because of its numerous temples. *Sthalapurāṇas* are also available for places like Kāṣī or Tirukkōṇamalai (Sri Lanka) outside of the Tamil country. Several religious centers have received more than one *purāṇa* written by poets in different periods. This includes Maturai (seven), Cītamparam (six), Tiruvaṇṇāmalai (five) Kumpakōṇam (four), Kāñcipuram (three), Cīrkāḷi (two) and Paḷani (two).

4 This discussion is based on the bibliography given in Krishnaswamy 1974, 123–212. Apart from old poetical compositions of *sthalapurāṇas*, it includes prose versions and also contains some repetitions. Therefore the statistics based on this bibliography are only indicative and need further verification.

Among the *sthalapurāṇas*, roughly three hundred belong to Śiva, thirty belong to Viṣṇu, and twenty belong to Murukaṇ. There are two Jaina *sthalapurāṇas*, but these seem to be prose versions (*Pūṇṭi Jinālaya tala varalāru*, *Tirunarūṅkoṇṭai tala varalāru*). The *Nākūr Āṇṭavar purāṇam* seems to be the only poetical version of this genre belonging to Islam.

### 3.3 Development of the *Sthalapurāṇa*: Motivating Factors

If we look into the origin of the *purāṇas* and *sthalapurāṇas* in particular, we can perceive how various religious, political, economic, socio-cultural, literary and intellectual factors have played important roles in the development of this genre.

#### 3.3.1 Religion

The Bhakti movement and the intense temple building activities of the Cōlas and subsequent rulers have created numerous religious centers as places of veneration by the devotees. The educated clergy together with the laity created Purāṇic and local traditional stories and synthesized them to increase the reputation of these temple centers. These stories later formed the nucleus of the numerous *sthalapurāṇas* (Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957, 311–319). A *sthalapurāṇa* marked the antiquity and sanctity of a place, trying to give it a pseudo-history and assert its eminence based on a mythical formula. Every place vied with each other in having a *sthalapurāṇa* to satisfy the pride of its inhabitants and to attract pilgrims.

#### 3.3.2 Politics

After the rule of the Cōlas, who unified the Tamil country and culture, the country was fragmented and came under alien rule. In the absence of a unifying leadership, the people and local leaders could not have a wider political outlook. This kind of political conditions fostered a form of patriotism that could only be local. Nampi (thirteenth century) in his *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* adds an invocation to the Pāṇṭiya country and Maturai, which shows his stirring up of sub-nationalism and local patriotism during the decline of Pāṇṭiya rule (see Readings 2.2). In the same vein the later poet Parañcōti (seventeenth century) in his *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* displays his fervour of nationalism and his love for his mother tongue Tamil in times of adversity (Nachimuthu 2009) (see Readings 3 and 5).

#### 3.3.3 Economic Conditions

At the time of the composition of the *purāṇas*, famines and pestilence were common and the general condition was one of adversity. People turned towards religion and found solace in the Purāṇic lore, which tried to create a utopia of the past and the future. These myths tried to provide a basis for social faith and action. Prof. T. P. Meenakshisundaram (1965, 166–167) is right when he observes that “in the age of despair and despondency, hope is stirred in the hearts of men” by these *purāṇas*. This may be illustrated from the rich descriptions of the landscape, country, city and

temple found at the beginning of the majority of *sthalapurāṇas*, a poetical prerequisite for a *mahākāvya* composition (see Reading 1).

### 3.3.4 Socio-Cultural Factors

*Purāṇas* of various temples can be seen as collections of folktales. Their value as such has remained clouded by their religious association. It is because of their being folk literature that they appeal to the common man (Meenakshisundaram 1965, 166–167). The *sthalapurāṇas* contain stories about gods, semi-gods, heroic kings, Brahmins, hunters, low-caste people (Paḷḷars/Paraiyars) and even animals and birds. All of them became equal in these *purāṇas* and they carry the message of God’s love for all, even to sinners. So the *purāṇas* tried to integrate the different social and cultural factions at least in their fictional world. It is this Purāṇic lore which has helped to build up common pan-Indian social and cultural traits at the all-India level. The *purāṇas* themselves state that they are intended to be used by the Śūdras and women, who are less educated, than the other three upper castes, who can directly read the scriptures.<sup>5</sup> Here it should be understood that the word *purāṇas* refers to the narratives or stories, which were rendered as literary compositions by poets with many literary embellishments and might have been read by the elite. Later they were rendered and delivered to the layman with appropriate discourses like oral, musical, dance or other fine art forms like sculpture, painting, etc.

Rather than depicting a utopia, some conservative poets attempt a realistic portrayal of the times, including the intrusion of foreign powers into the land. Maraiṇāna Campantar (sixteenth century) as a traditionalist describes the social structures as ordained in the works like *Manusmṛti* in his *Aruṇakirippurāṇam* (*valampuriccarukkam*). In his *Kamalālayaccirappu* (*Tiruvārūppurāṇam*), he bemoans the intrusion of foreigners and the attendant decline of old values (see Reading 5).

5 *Tirukkurrāḷattalappurāṇam*, *nūrpayaṇuraitta carukkam*, verse 2 (p. 201):

ஆதி மறை நூலோதி வீடுபேறெய்துவர்க ளந்த ணாளர்  
சாதி மனு வேந்தருக்கும் வைசியருக்கு முணர்த்து மறைச் சார்பாலெய்தும்  
நீதியிலா விப்பிர மங்கையர் சதுர்த்தர் பிறர்க்கு மறை நிகழ்த்தொணாதா  
லோதியபு ராணமவர்க் குறுதி நூலெனவுரைப்ப ருறுதி நூலோர்  
*āti marai nūlōti vīṭupēreytuvaruka ḷanta ṇālar*  
*cāti manu vēntarukkum vaiciyarukku muṇarttu marai cārpāleytum*  
*nītiyilā viṭṭira maṅkaiyar caturttar piṇarkku marai nikaḷṭtonātā*  
*lōṭiyapu rāṇamavark kuruti nūḷavuraippa ruruti nūlōr*

“The Brahmins will obtain salvation by reciting the ancient Vedas. The ruling kings of higher caste and the merchant class (Vaiśyas) will also obtain salvation by the authority of the Vedas. For the Brahmin ladies and the people of the fourth order, who have no legal status in the social order, the Vedas cannot be imparted. So the authors of scriptures will ordain that the *purāṇas* which are recited are the religious texts for them”.

See also such instances in other *sthalapurāṇas*, e.g. *Kamalālayaccirappu* (*Tiruvārūppurāṇam*), *pāyirac carukkam* 30.

### 3.3.5 Literary Background

During the epic age (early epic period: 750–1000 CE, late epic period: 1100–1300 CE; cf. Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957, 12), religion and the taste for romantic stories were the motive spirits behind most of the literary creations (cf. Krishnaswamy 1974, 5). But during the period of *purāṇas* and *prabandhas* (1500–1850 CE, cf. Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957, 12), religion appropriated all the literary pursuits and this has gradually led to the degeneration of the epic spirit and the multiplication of *purāṇa* literature. Tamil *purāṇas*, unlike the colorless Sanskrit Purāṇic accounts, which are more informative than literary, emulate an epic model with mythical content (see Readings 1). However, this exercise can be considered to have failed due to the lack of remarkable creative genius, sterile imagination, insipid style and imitative qualities.<sup>6</sup> We could still extract certain fine portions of literature in these works here and there, and a few *sthalapurāṇas* are as good as any other good epics. As poetic creations, these works must have been read and enjoyed by the highly literate elite of the upper social strata of society. They formed a source book for the popular speakers and experts in literary and religious discourses for making their own versions in speech, prose and ballad form for the benefit of the semi-literate womenfolk of the higher social strata and for the other less privileged of the society. Many of the episodes are enacted as dance and drama and also as rituals on festive occasions (e.g., *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*). Many prose versions of the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* based on the poetical versions in the popular idiom are available in the palm-leaf tradition and in print culture.<sup>7</sup> It shows how the *sthalapurāṇas* are transmitted across time and social groups. In the learned tradition the poetical versions were learned and commented upon regularly (e.g., Parañcōti's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*, *Kāñcippurāṇam*, *Taṇikaippurāṇam*, etc.).<sup>8</sup>

6 See for example the description of the semi-arid hillock of Ceṇṇimalai in *Ceṇṇimalaittalapurāṇam* 5.2, which is a mere imitation of the earlier conventions contrary to the realities. This seems to be the case with earlier works also.

7 Examples of prose versions of the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* are available in unpublished palm-leaf manuscripts. In the modern period, the prose paraphrase of Parañcōti's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* by Ārumuka Nāvalar (1822–1879) of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, is popular (Ārumuka Nāvalar 1957). Another popular version was prepared and edited by Aruṇācala Mutaliyār and Pūvai Kaliyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār and published in a large font by the famous Irattīṇa Nāyakar & Sons, Ceṇṇai (Kaliyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār 1971). Similarly, episodes like the *valai viciya tiruvīlaiyāṭal* (the game of Śiva fishing by casting the net in the sea) from the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* were rendered as *villuppāṭṭu* ballads in Tamil and Malayalam and were performed in Kaṇṇiyākumari district. At least three versions in Tamil (Vivēkāṇantaṅ 2000, 2006; Selvalakshmi 2005; *Valaivcupurāṇam*, ed. by Pulavar Vi. Cokkalinṅkam 2008) and one in Malayalam (Vivēkāṇantaṅ 2000) are available.

8 For example the writing of modern commentaries to Parañcōti's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* (1927) by Na. Mu. Vēṅkaṭacāmi Nāṭṭār and to the *Taṇikaippurāṇam* (1965) by Kantacāmiyār et al. These texts were part of the syllabi for graduate courses in Tamil in the universities of Tamil Nadu. See also the modern commentary to the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (2012) by Caravaṇa Catācivam.

The Tamil *sthalapurāṇa* compositions have generally been inspired by Sanskrit counterparts and so we see the reflection of a common literary milieu in them.<sup>9</sup> All the other Dravidian literatures show the same trend in this period (Mātavan̄ 1995).

### 3.3.6 Linguistic Milieu

The period of the *sthalapurāṇas* in Tamil literature may be roughly reckoned as eight hundred years from the twelfth century onwards. This was a period in which Sanskrit had gained much importance in education, administration, religion, philosophy and all the domains of knowledge. So Tamil-Sanskrit bilingualism was prevalent. The Tamil *sthalapurāṇas* always claim a Sanskrit source for their composition. Therefore one can notice the impact of ideas and the language of Sanskrit on the idiom of Tamil works, which may have to be worked out comparatively.

A discernible linguistic domain of Tamil-Sanskrit interaction is the interpretation of the local names or what is called the etymological interpretation of place names. During this period the Tamil language was languishing due to the decline of native rule and consequent lack of patronage. It seems that the average education level in Tamil was very low and the spoken variety in different dialects of Tamil gained currency, leaving the standard language in the hands of a bilingual elite. Due to this, the standard forms of place name became corrupted, leading to fanciful etymologies. While this took place as an internal change the influence and prestige of Sanskrit led to a fashion of sanskritising Tamil names and translating the Tamil names into Sanskrit with bizarre etymologies and all such forms became standardized place names. At times a reverse translation of sanskritized names also took place. For example, the name *Cir̄rampalam* was corrupted to *Citamparam* due to regular internal changes in Tamil (*r>t* dentalisation, *r>l* alveolarisation) but later received a Sanskrit etymology (*cit*, “consciousness,” “wisdom,” *ambaram*, “atmosphere,” “sky,” “ether”). Cities had multiple names in different epochs. The names of rivers and other water bodies which are celebrated as *tīrthas* are mentioned in the *sthalapurāṇas*. The origins of all such names are explained with fanciful etymologies in the *sthalapurāṇas* (e.g., the multiple names of Maturai in Nampī’s *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*, verses 9–15). As such, the *sthalapurāṇas* provide a wide variety of linguistic data to know the folklore of place names. All these phenomena have been documented and studied on the study of place names by different authors (Puthusseri Ramachandran and Nachimuthu 1987, Nachimuthu 1993).

### 3.3.7 Other Factors

The *mahāpurāṇas* and *sthalapurāṇas* fulfilled the need of the society for a description of history and geography of the land and also as sources for the religious cosmogony and cosmology. One can observe these aspects in the Purāṇic literature with their own methods of historiography (Ali 1966). In addition to being epics and

9 Contrary to what S. Vaiyapuri Pillai says in his work (1957, 318).

myths, the *sthalapurāṇas* tried to be substitutes for history, geography, philosophy, ethics, fine arts, grammar and so forth. As such, they represent a premodern form of historiography. The critique of the *purāṇas* by the great social reformer Periyār E.V. Rāmacāmi Nāyakkar (1879–1973) is worth mentioning here (Vīramaṇi 2007).

The *sthalapurāṇas* served as pilgrims’ travel guides with details of places of interest to be visited in the holy cities by the devotees.

The *sthalapurāṇas* also served as a constant source for the poets, sculptures, painters, musicians, dancers and other artistic groups for creating their artefacts with special reference to the places of worship.

## 4. *Sthalapurāṇa* – Definition, Structure and Other Characteristics

### 4.1 Definition of *Purāṇa* in General

The Tamil poetological literature provides various definitions of the *purāṇas*. The oldest extant Tamil treatise on grammar and poetics, the *Tolkāppiyam* (ca. first–third century CE) discusses the concept of *tonmai* (narratives on antiquity), one of the eight *vanappus* (forms of beauty),<sup>10</sup> which may be equated with the *purāṇas*:

*tonmai tānē*

*uraiyotu puṇarnta paḷamai mērrē.* (*Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram Ceyyuliyaḷ* 237, Pērāciriyaṅgar’s commentary)

“That (composition) which is *tonmai*

is composed of old stories (in poetry) together with prose.”

The commentators give *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Takaṭūr yāttirai*, and *Cilappatikāram* as illustrations. Though some of these works belong to the group of *itihāsa*, the definition is applied to *purāṇas*, too (Subramanian 1978, 325).

The *Cēntaṅ Tivākaram*, a Tamil thesaurus (*nighaṇṭu*) of the eighth century, repeats the Sanskrit definition of the *purāṇas* (Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957, 13–15):

காவிய வியற்கை<sup>1</sup> விரிக்குங்காலை  
ஆரியந் தமிழால் நேரிதி னடக்கி  
உலகின் நோற்றமும் ஊழியி னிறுதியும்  
வகைசா றொண்ணூற் றாறுவாதியரும்<sup>2</sup>

10 According to Indra Manuel (private communication), the above portion of the *Tolkāppiyam* may be summarized as follows: *Vanappu* is the term used by Tolkāppiyaṅgar as per the reading of Pērāciriyaṅgar to refer to the final eight organs of poetry enumerated by Tolkāppiyaṅgar in the first *sūtra* of the *Ceyyuliyaḷ*. These eight deal with the characteristics that are commonly found in *toṭarnilaicceyyuḷ* (narrative poem or epic poem), i.e., poems other than single stanzas. These represent certain forms of elegance in poetry. *Ammai* – brevity and serenity; *aḷaku* – use of poetic words; *tonmai* – ancient story recited in verse mingled with prose; *tōl* – exalted theme and melodious language; *viruntu* – novelty in composition; *iyaiṇu* – the use of the same consonant to close all the sections; *pulaṅ* and *ilaṇ* – choice of sounds and prosodic feet are the criteria involved in the definition of these eight.

வேத நாவினர்<sup>3</sup> வேதியரொழுக்கமும்

ஆதிக்காலத் தரசர் செய்தியும்<sup>4</sup>

அவ்வளர்<sup>5</sup> நாட்டால் அறியு மாற்றலும்

ஆடியும் பாடியும்<sup>6</sup> அறிவு வரக்கிளத்தல் (*Cētan Tivākaram*, p. 309)

[Variants:<sup>1</sup> விளம்பிய இயற்கை, விளம்பனத்தியற்கை (விடம்பனம்),<sup>2</sup> அலகுசால் தொண்ணூற்றறுவர தியற்கையும்,<sup>3</sup> வேத நாவின்,<sup>4</sup> அரசரதியற்கையும்,<sup>5</sup> அவ்வவர்,<sup>6</sup> அறிவர]

*kāviya viyarkai*<sup>1</sup> *virikkun̄kālai*

*āriyan tamīlāl nēritin̄ atakki*

*ulakin̄ rōrramum ūliyin̄ irutiyum*

*vakaicā ron̄nūr rāruvātiyarum*<sup>2</sup>

*vēta nāvin̄ar*<sup>3</sup> *vētiyarolukkamum*

*ātikkālat taracar ceytiyum*<sup>4</sup>

*avvaḷar*<sup>5</sup> *nāṭṭāl ariyu mārralum*

*āṭiyum pāṭiyum*<sup>6</sup> *arivu varakkilattal.*

[Variants:<sup>1</sup> *viḷampiya iyarkai*, *viḷampanattiyarkai* (*viṭampanam*),<sup>2</sup> *alakucāl ton̄nūr rāruvara tiyarkaiyum*,<sup>3</sup> *vēta nāvin̄*,<sup>4</sup> *aracaratiyarkaiyum*,<sup>5</sup> *avvavar*,<sup>6</sup> *arivara*]

“When the nature of *kāvya*/*viṭampanam* is described, (it is like this:) it is composed including appropriately in *āriyam* (Sanskrit) and Tamil the origin of the world, the endings of epochs, the classification of the ninety-six types of people and so forth, the conduct of Brahmins who have the Veda on their tongue, the information relating to the ancient kings, the capacity to understand the knowledge of the above through their different countries/places/locales and narrates (these) to enable others to gain knowledge through the acts of dancing and singing.”

The above verse has several variant readings and seems to define an epic. The phrase *āṭiyum pāṭiyum* poses a difficulty. Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai thinks that it might have defined a dance/drama variety called *viṭampanam* according to another textual variant found in the *Yāpparuṅkalavirutti* (eleventh century) (*sūtra* no. 96) (Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957, 13–15). However, we can surmise that Purāṇic subjects might have been enacted with dance/drama and song. The *Pūmpuliyūr nāṭakam* of the twelfth century, which is no longer extant, might have been such a piece.

*Pāṭṭiyal* works (treatises on literary genre) also use the terms *kāppiyam* (long narrative poems) and *purāṇam* synonymously. The *Veṅpāppāṭṭiyal* (twelfth century) defines *kāppiyam* and *purāṇam* as defective in the four *puruṣārthas* (*urutiṭporuḷ*, “objectives worthy of human pursuit”) and states that the *purāṇas* in particular should describe the history of dynasties (*kulavaravu*, cf. *vaṃśānucarita*) in the *kārikai* (*kaṭṭalaikkalitturai*) meter. But no such work is extant now. The *Citamparappāṭṭiyal* (sixteenth century) and the *Pirapanta marapiyal* (eighteenth century) closely follow the *Veṅpāppāṭṭiyal*. For the *Tonnūḷ viḷakkam* (eighteenth century), *kāppiyam* and *purāṇam* are the same but the latter should narrate several stories. All of this

seems to indicate that Purāṇic materials have been composed in the form of epics (Subramanian 1978, 453–457; see Readings 1).

## 4.2 Definition of the *Sthalapurāṇas*

There is no specific definition available for *sthalapurāṇas* in these grammatical works, but the definition for *purāṇas* in general might have been applied to *sthalapurāṇas*, too. It is not clear whether the phrase *avvalar (avvavar) nāṭṭālarium ārral*, “to understand the knowledge of the above through their different countries/ places or locale” in the *Cēntaṅ Tivākaram* refers to *sthalapurāṇas*.

*Sthalapurāṇas* differ from *purāṇas* in their selection of content features and also in quantity. While the *purāṇas* conform to the fivefold definition (*pañcalakṣaṇa*) described above, the *sthalapurāṇas* have a restricted scope, i.e., they concentrate on *mūrti* (the presiding deity), *sthala* (locale) and *tīrtha* (sacred waterbodies) only. *Sthalapurāṇas* focus on a place, its history, geography, legends, traditions, etc., but many of the *sthalapurāṇa* materials are taken from *purāṇas* and modelled on them.

*Ūrinṇicai* (a eulogistic poem describing the town of the hero in fifty, seventy or ninety *inṇicai-veṅpā* verses), *ūrṇēricai* (a poem incorporating the name of the hero’s town containing fifty, seventy, or ninety *nēricai-veṅpā* verses written in eulogy of the town or place of residence of the hero) and *ūrveṅpā* (eulogistic poem describing the town of the hero, in ten *veṅpā* verses), the literary genres connected with hero’s place, might have developed in the course of time into *sthalapurāṇas*. However, the nature of these genres is not known except that they glorify a place (Subramanian 1978, 453–457).

## 4.3 Structure of the *Sthalapurāṇas*

### 4.3.1 Common Structural Features

Tamil *sthalapurāṇas* follow a common structure. Generally, all works begin with the following chapters:

1. *Kāppu* – invocation for safety
2. *Kaṭavulvālttu* – invocation of different deities
3. *Avaiyaṭakkam* – apologetic preface
4. *Tirunāṭṭuccarukkam* – chapter on the country
5. *Tirunakaraccarukkam* – chapter on the city
6. *Nāimicāraṇyaccarukkam* – chapter on the Naimiśa forest
7. *Purāṇavaralāru/payaṇ* – chapter on the history of the narration or the benefits (gained through reciting the text)
8. *Tirunaticcarukkam* – chapter on the river
9. *Talamakimaiccarukkam* – chapter on the legendary/mythical significance of the city
10. *Mūrtti vicēṭaccarukkam* – chapter on the significance of the presiding deity

Most of the chapters (except 6, 7, 9, and 10) are common to works of the *kāppiyam* genre, too. The order and the remaining chapters may change from one *purāṇa* to another.

#### 4.3.2 Division and Size of the *Sthalapurāṇas*

The *sthalapurāṇas* are divided into chapters known as *carukkam* (e.g., *Cēṭuppurāṇam*), *paṭalam*, *māṇṇmiyam* (e.g., *Ceṇṇimalaitalapurāṇam*), *attiyāyam*, (e.g., *Kōlācala stalapurāṇam*), etc. Some *purāṇas* also contain a larger division into *kāṇṭams* (parts), e.g.:

Parañcōṭi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭarpurāṇam*: *maturaikkāṇṭam* / *kūṭarkāṇṭam* / *ālavāykkāṇṭam*

*Kūṭarpurāṇam*: *kirutakāṇṭam* / *tirētakāṇṭam* / *tuvāparakāṇṭam* / *kalikāṇṭam*

*Cuntarapāṇṭiyam*: *urpattiyakāṇṭam* / *tikkuvicayakāṇṭam* / *ukkirakāṇṭam* / *līlakāṇṭam*.

Nellaiyappa Kavirāyar's *Tirunelvēlit talapurāṇam* has 120 *carukkams*. Mināṭcicutaram Piḷḷai's *Tirunākaikkārōṇappurāṇam* contains sixty-one *carukkams* and the *Ceṇṇimalait talapurāṇam* is divided into six *māṇṇmiyams*. Among the *sthalapurāṇas*, the *Tirunelvēlippurāṇam* is the largest with 6912 verses and the *Kavacaippurāṇam* the smallest with 193 verses.

#### 4.3.3 Metre

Even though the *kaṭṭalaikkalitturai* metre is mentioned as proper for the *purāṇas* by the *Veṅpāppāṭṭiyal* (see above), no *purāṇa* composed in this metre is available. Different types of the *viruttappā* metre are widely used. *Kīrttanai* (*Tirumeyyam Īsvaraṇpēril stalapurāṇak kīrttanai*) and *kummi* songs (*Rāmēsvaram Tīrttamūrṭti visēṣa rattinam*) are also rarely used.

### 4.4 Other Characteristics of *Sthalapurāṇas*

Since *sthalapurāṇas* are modelled on both epics and *purāṇas*, they contain the elements of an epic that are enumerated by the poetician Taṇṭi and others.

#### 4.4.1 Plot Structure

The story of the *sthalapurāṇas* is not a connected and cogent one and so there is no plot structure worth the name. It is more episodic in nature. This is one of the distinctive characteristics of *sthalapurāṇas*.

#### 4.4.2 Sources of the *Sthalapurāṇas*

All the Tamil *sthalapurāṇas* claim a source in one of the *mahāpurāṇas* or *sthalapurāṇas* in Sanskrit:

Table 2: Tamil *Sthalapurāṇas* and their sources

No.	<i>Sthalapurāṇas</i>	Source in Sanskrit
1.	Nampi's <i>Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam</i>	<i>Uttaramahāpurāṇa</i> , <i>Sārasamuccaya</i> (not extant)
2.	Parañcōti's <i>Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam</i>	<i>Skandapurāṇa</i> , <i>Śaṅkara-</i> (Agastya-) <i>saṃhitā</i> , <i>Hālāsyamāhātmya</i>
3.	<i>Kaṭampavanapurāṇam</i>	<i>Katampavanapurāṇa</i> ( <i>Nipāraṇyamāhātmya</i> )
4.	<i>Kūṭarpurāṇam</i>	<i>Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa</i> , <i>Kṣētramāhātmyakhaṇḍa</i> , chapters 82–93
5.	<i>Pērūppurāṇam</i>	<i>Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa</i> , <i>Kaumārasaṃhitā</i> , <i>Kumārakhaṇḍa</i>
6.	<i>Tirunākaikkārōṅappurāṇam</i>	<i>Śaivapurāṇa</i> , <i>Sanatkumārasaṃhitā</i> , <i>Uparipāṭalam</i>
7.	<i>Kōlācalastalapurāṇam</i>	<i>Liṅgapurāṇa</i> , chapters 101–133
8.	<i>Tirukkurālappurāṇam</i>	<i>Dānavaibhavakhāṇḍa</i> , chapter 18
9.	<i>Avinācippurāṇam</i>	<i>Skandapurāṇa</i> , <i>Śivamāhātmyakhaṇḍa</i> , chapter 60

In some cases the purported Sanskrit original is not available. Even in Sanskrit, there will be many sources for a *sthalapurāṇa*. Even though all the *purāṇas* claim to have a Sanskrit source, no Sanskrit versions refer to any Tamil original source. It is a fact that many of the accounts in the *sthalapurāṇas* belonged to Tamil oral or written versions, but because of the perceived religious superiority of Sanskrit, even original Tamil works felt proud in calling themselves as translations or adaptations. This should be taken as an expression of authority and should be treated as overdoing a convention. The claim and extent of Sanskrit borrowing needs a closer study. The *Śivalīlārṇava*, a Maturai *sthalapurāṇa* in Sanskrit by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣitar (seventeenth century) follows the Tamil works on *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*. There are also works in Telugu, Kannada (*Hālāsyā* by Venkatesh of the eighteenth century) and Malayalam (*Hālāsyamāhātmyam* by Chathukutty Mannadiyar) that give the stories of the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* closely following the Sanskrit text.

#### 4.4.3 History of the Transmission of the Narration of the *Sthalapurāṇas*

Most of the *sthalapurāṇas* also claim that they have been transmitted from Śiva through several intermediaries like the following:

<i>Śivapurāṇas</i>	<i>Viṣṇupurāṇas</i>
1. Śiva	Nārāyaṇa
2. Pārvaṭī	Brahmā
3. Murukaṇ	
4. Nandi	
5. Nārada	
6. Vyāsa	
7. Vālmīki	

8. Sūta
9. Eccar
10. Agastya
11. The sages in the Naimiśa forest
12. The sages in Kāśī

The order through which the story was transmitted may vary slightly as in the case of the *Tirunākaikkārōṇappurāṇam* (Pārvatī narrating to Śiva) and the *Pērūrppurāṇam* (Murukaṇ to Vyāsa through Nandi and Nārada). Nampi and Parañcōti say that the *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* was finally retold by Agastya. The *Kūṭarpurāṇam* was told by Nārāyaṇa through Brahmā, Nārada, Vyāsa and Sūta to the sages in the Naimiśa forest. The *Kōlācalatalapurāṇam* was narrated by Vyāsa.

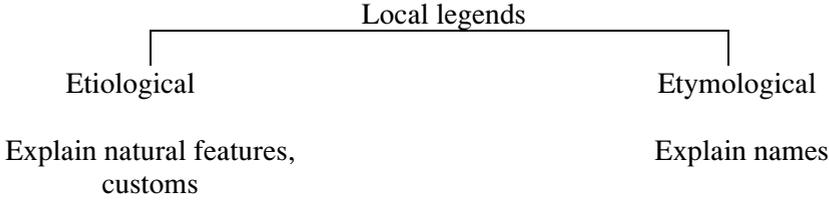
In the introductory part of each *sthalapurāṇa*, Sūta enters the the Naimiśa forest, which was created by Brahmā with his *cakra* for the rishis. On the kind request of the rishis, Sūta begins to narrate the story of one of the holy places for the benefit of the rishis. There are interruptions and questions by the fellow rishis, who are the audience to the discourse.

The earliest *sthalapurāṇas* mostly follow this model. But the later *sthalapurāṇas* vary much in these details. The *Cennimalaittalapurāṇam* (eighteenth century) narrates that it was found written on a copper plate in Kāñcipuram and was revealed by Lord Murukaṇ to one Caravaṇamuṇivar, who later built a temple and established a city. It tries to integrate Purāṇic and traditional accounts and purports to be historical. The modern *Anṇiyūrttalapurāṇam* (twentieth century) straight away narrates the mythical, legendary and other traditional accounts without the regular puranic introduction.

#### 4.4.4 *Sthalapurāṇa* Stories and their Classification

All the *purāṇas* purport to give the history of a place through four *yugas*. The history is narrated in several stories and these stories are of different kinds. Basically these local legends are either etiological or etymological. The former type of stories explains the origin of natural features, customs, etc. and the latter explains the origin of names.<sup>11</sup>

11 In the works *Motif index of Folk Literature* (Thompson 1955–58) and *The Oral Tales of India* (Thompson and Balys 1958), these types of stories are listed under the mythological motifs (A 600 – 899 – Cosmogony and Cosmology; 900 – A 999 – Topographical features). The motif No. A 1617 in these two works, is about the origin of place names. The different Tamil *sthalapurāṇa* stories have been subjected to a structural study by scholars of the Department of Tamil, University of Kerala, Kariavattom under the guidance of K. Nachimuthu (Nachimuthu 1976, 1981; Sankari 1976; Vijayalakshmi 1977; Lalitha 1978).



The stories can be further classified as follows:

Table 3: *Sthalapurāṇa* stories and their classification

No.	Story type	Characters	Yuga	Example
1.	Myths	Gods, goddesses (e.g., Śīva, Pārvaṭī, Indra, Viṣṇu, Vāyu)	Kṛta, Treta, Dvāpara	<i>Tatātakai varalāru</i> , <i>Intiran pali tīrttal</i> , <i>avatāra stories</i> , Vāyu-Vāsuki rivalry
2.	Myths	R̥ṣis, Asuras, Vāsuki, celestials, rivers, etc.	Dvāpara	Patañjali, Rāvaṇa, Kuṇḍodara, Ahalyā, Kamalinī, Aninditā, Gaṅgā
3.	Legends (mythical)	Mythical kings	Treta, Dvāpara, Kali	Malayattuvacaṇ, Mucukuntaṇ, Cipi, etc.
4.	Legends and tradition (historical)	Kings, saints	Kali	Ceramāṇperumāl, Varakuṇaṇ, Nakkīrar Periyālvār, Māṇikkavācakar
5.	Folktales (fables, animal tales, fairy tales, etc.)	Sparrow, pig, stork, etc.	Kali	<i>Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam</i>

#### 4.4.5 Two Kinds of Mythological Stories: Constitution of a *Sthalapurāṇa* Complex

The mythological stories are of two kinds: (1) common or cosmopolitan and (2) local. Legendary stories are either mythical or historical. All these stories aim at religious, philosophical and moral teaching. Some of them are treated as allegorical (Hiraṇyakaśipu story, Sūrapadma story, Tripurāntaka story). These stories continuously received accretions over the periods. For example:

- In the mythological story explaining the name Paḷaṇi, the story of Avvaiyār is added in modern times in popular and film versions.

- The Nakkīrar tale from the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* has been amplified with new motifs in the *Cīkālattippurāṇam* (seventeenth century) (Nachimuthu 1976).
- A new motif of the visit of Cuntarmūrtti Nāyaṅār to Tuṭiyālūr (near Coimbatore) is found in the *Tuṭicaippurāṇam* (nineteenth century), but it is not found in the *Pērūrppurāṇam* (eighteenth century) or in the *Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam* (*Periyapurāṇam*) (twelfth century).
- A new motif of Śiva's visit in the guise of an untochable is added in the story of Cōmāci Māraṅāyaṅār in the *Amparppurāṇam* (Arunachalam 1977), but is not found in the *Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam* (*Periyapurāṇam*).

In these stories, we see mythology and legend intermingling. Generally, we see in these stories the opposition of good and bad and how they are mediated. Many of the *sthalapurāṇa* stories are intimately connected with the stories of the nearby famous temples (e.g., Paḷaṅi with Ceṅṅimalai in the Kongu Country; Kaṅṅiyākumari with Cucīntiram in Nāṅcīlnāṭu; Citamparam with Tiruvārūr in the Cōḷa country; Maturai with Tirupparaṅkuṅṅam in the Pāṅṅiya country) and they constitute a *sthalapurāṇa* complex (or cluster or network) of a particular area (Nachimuthu 1974, 21). This is a networking device by which later settlements and places tried to partake in the antiquity of the nearest famous centers. This also helped the less popular and local temples to link themselves with the major temple centers and to get a regional (or sub-regional) and sectarian identity. Sometimes the networking may be a reflection of the political and religious administrative control from above. Apart from this, common religious practices and festivals in the temples also foster an integration into the network.

The second kind of local stories reflects a local or native ambience for the devotees to feel empathy with the religious centers. The story of God becoming a member of a subaltern community as *paḷḷaṅ*, “male tiller,” and *paḷḷi*, “female tiller,” in the *Pērūrppurāṇam* and the distribution of stories among the different castes and groups in different *sthalapurāṇas* aim at a social integration in the context of religion and people. A story in Nampī's *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* about the rendering of justice in the Pāṅṅiya court with an etiology of a proverb is an interesting example for the absorption of folklore into the *purāṇas* (Reading 2.1).

#### 4.4.6 Two streams of Folklore: Higher and Lower or Cosmopolitan and Local

As explained earlier these Purāṅic stories belong to the realm of folklore. Two streams of folklore join in these *purāṇas*. One belongs to the educated or higher folklore and the other the uneducated or lower (non-literate) folklore. The mythological accounts belong to the first variety and the other types to the second. Since the *purāṇas* have been influenced, modified and transformed by the higher folklore, it is very difficult to separate the one from the other. On the whole the literature is intended for the folk and so the folk motifs were accepted with due transformation.

#### 4.4.7 Characterization

*Sthalapurāṇas* being collections of short stories and episodes, the epic characterization is absent and whatever is available is only fragmentary and only in few cases we can see some examples worthy to remember (e.g., Nakkīrar, Tarumi and Vanti in the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*).

#### 4.4.8 Hero of the Epic: Place as the Parallel Hero

The presiding deity is generally considered as the hero of the *sthalapurāṇa*, and the individual tales are connected through the heroism of the deity. But the adventures and deeds of the deity alone are not completely described. On the other hand, we see that the origin, growth, history and other manifold significance of the place are depicted in the *sthalapurāṇas*. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate to call the place the *parallel hero* or the *hero eulogized in the work* (*pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*) of the *sthalapurāṇa*, the main hero or *hero protagonist* being the presiding deity. This may be equated with the concept of *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ* (hero eulogized in the work or external hero of poetry) and *kīlavittalaivaṇ* (the hero as a protagonist proper of the plot). In the *sthalapurāṇas*, the place or locale (*sthala*) is equal to the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ* and the presiding deity is equal to the *kīlavittalaivaṇ*. Parañcōti (seventeenth century), in his *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*, explicitly declares that the god of Madurai, who himself is the Pāṇṭiya king, is the hero of the epic (*nakarappaṭalam* 108). Perum-parrappuliyūr Nampi (thirteenth or sixteenth century), in his *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*, adds invocation verses to the Pāṇṭiya country and to Maturai. This deification of the country and the place by the two poets may be due to the nationalistic spirit in the midst of alien rule during their times. But literally it can be interpreted as denoting the external hero of the work (see Reading 3).

#### 4.4.9 Other Elements

The other epic elements like four *puruṣārthas*, descriptions of the country, city, river, sun, moon, reasons, etc. are vividly added in the *sthalapurāṇas* like in any other epic. In fact, many poets displayed their skill in imageries, and narration in the sections dealing with these elements (see Reading 1).

#### 4.4.10 Imagery

The imagery of these poets is marked by mythical or supernatural imagination and fantasy. Even the natural descriptions are influenced by mythical elements. The mythical and the real world intermingle and create a world of fantasy. When we approach them with an open mind and heart, some of them are appealing and initiate in us an intense feeling of oneness with the gods and celestial beings at least in our mental word (see Reading 1).

#### 4.4.11 Style

The style of these works is archaic, imitative and difficult to understand and certainly it needs an exponent to interpret. Since most of the *purāṇas* were intended for oral discourse (*katāppiracaṅkam*) by an expert with an elaborate commentary and interpretation, they can afford to be like that. The *purāṇa* itself is narrated by a mythical story teller, Sūta.

The *purāṇas* contain many word plays and varieties of *collaṇi* (figures of speech based on words). There are also imageries pertaining to grammatical and philosophical concepts (see Reading 6.2). This was due to the fact that the *purāṇa* poets were great scholars too. Some of them wrote grammatical works (Vaitṭiyanāta Tēcikar, seventeenth century) and commentaries (Civañāṇa Muṇivar, 1753–1785; Nirampavaḷakiya Tēcikar, sixteenth century). Due to their erudition, these scholar-poets could not but betray their scholarship through these works (Selvanayakam 1965, 192–193).

### 5. *Sthalapurāṇas* and Other Disciplines

#### 5.1 *Sthalapurāṇas* and Classical Literature

In the *sthalapurāṇa* age, classical literature and religious literature were learned side by side. The *sthalapurāṇa* poets tried to give a continuity to the old classical traditions by incorporating them in the *purāṇas* in form of imageries and in the plot structure (Murugavel 1975). For example, Kacciyappa Muṇivar introduces the old *akam* (love) and *puram* (war) concepts of Tamil poetics in his *Taṇikaippurāṇam* (*kaḷavuppaṭalam*, *cīparipūrṇanāmappaṭalam*) and employs images based on grammatical and philosophical concepts (see Reading 6).

#### 5.2 *Sthalapurāṇas* and History

All the *sthalapurāṇas* pretend to give a history of the place from the religious point of view, which amounts to a remote knowledge of certain historical occurrences and personalities, highly influenced by mythical formula, and so they should not be relied on as such. A few exceptions exist like the *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* of Maturai.

#### 5.3 *Sthalapurāṇas* and Other Branches of Knowledge

As these *purāṇas* were also intended as “applied literature,” other important branches of knowledge were elaborated in them, which is also a feature of epics (see Readings 4 and 6). Nampī’s *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* (twenty-eight *nari kutiraiyāṇa tiruvilaiyāṭal*) adds an account of horse breeding, just like the *Cilappatikāram* (third–fourth century) (fourteen *ūrkaṅkātai* 180–200) adds *ratnaparīkṣā* (gemmology). Some *purāṇas* explaining the rituals, ethical codes and philosophic ideas for the

benefit of the common man, e.g., the summary of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta Āgama text *Civatarumōttaram* (sixteenth century) (see Reading 6) and a brief summary of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy in the *Taṇikaippurāṇam* (chapter 8, *Nanti Upatēcappaṭalam*). In addition, many *sthalapurāṇas* are constructed as catechisms of tenets and practices of religion, theology and philosophy (e.g., *Taṇikaippurāṇam*, *Pērūrppurāṇam*, *Kāñcippurāṇam* of Kacciyappa Muṇivar, *Kūṭarpurāṇam*) (see Readings 4 and 6). It may be pointed out here that the last chapter, called *civapunṇiyappaṭalam* (total verses 121), in the first canto of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, composed by Civañña Muṇivar (1753–1785), has sections dealing with the iconography of twenty-one idols of Śiva (7–36), the construction and renovation of Śiva temples and the liturgical details of rituals (37–121). Civañña Muṇivar’s pupil Kacciyappa Muṇivar has also included similar portions in his *Pērūrppurāṇam* (*kālavaṇ valipaṭu paṭalam*, *marutavaraiṭṭaṭalam* and *vicēṭa pūcappaṭalam*). The cultural data from these *purāṇas* are also interesting and help us understand the cultural developments of different groups of people in different periods.

#### 5.4 *Sthalapurāṇas* and Other Artistic Forms

*Sthalapurāṇas* have also intimate links with other artistic forms. The architecture, sculpture, paintings, dance, music and other literary genres are explained in these *purāṇas* and in turn the *sthalapurāṇa* accounts are illustrated and explained by these artistic forms (sculptures and icons in the temples).

#### 5.5 *Sthalapurāṇas* and Other Contemporary Literary Genres

*Sthalapurāṇas* and the *prabandha* works (shorter poetic genres) in Tamil literature were considered two offshoots of epic literature (Vaiyapuri Pillai 1957). A comparison of these two reveals something about the literary activities and milieu of those times.

The *sthalapurāṇas* describe *mūrti*, *sthalā* and *tīrtha* with story content; the shorter *prabandha* works do the same, but with more literary flavour and with less story content. The former are more informative and the latter are more entertaining. The *sthalapurāṇas* consider the place as source for all other important things; the *prabandhas* derive the importance of the place from other sources. In the *prabandhas*, narration, description of nature, imagery, etc. are in most cases independent of any other purpose and they are intended for their own sake. But the *sthalapurāṇas* utilize them for teaching religion, morality, philosophy, etc. *Sthalapurāṇas* are mainly intended for recitation, but some of the *prabandhas* were also enacted as dance drama (*kuravañci*, *paḷḷu*, etc.).

There are three types of *prabandhas* viz: (1) *prabandhas* on kings and other human beings; (2) on gods and (3) on places. Among these three, the third type of *prabandhas* are more numerous than the other two (Subramanian 1978, 1984). For example, half of the *kōvai* works belong to the the third type (Hepzi Bai 1971,

127ff.). This may also be the case with other *prabandhas*. This shows the literary milieu, which valued this type of literature as well as *sthalapurāṇas*.

## 6. Conclusion

In short, the *sthalapurāṇa* genre is an experiment in continuing the epic tradition in literature in combination with religion. It also belongs to folklore. It was a product of multiple historical factors. It is mythological in content and tries to be literary in other aspects. Its literary qualities entertained the elite and the story aspect the common man. It was highly applied in nature and it was educative too. Later, it became stereotyped and tended to be formulaic and less literary. At the same time, it gave sustenance and hope in life to the despondent and depressed. As such, it deserves a thoroughly new and sympathetic treatment in the hands of literary historians and critics.

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## Part II: Readings (Excerpts) from Tamil *Sthalapurāṇas*

### Introduction

The eight excerpts given below are selected from the poetical compositions of six famous Tamil *sthalapurāṇas* composed during the six hundred years between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries to illustrate the descriptions and generalizations made in the first part of this contribution. The selection covers both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava texts. Four examples are from the three *sthalapurāṇas* of Maturai. The remaining four are from the *sthalapurāṇas* of Mayilāṭuṭurai, Tiruvārūr and Tiruttanikai.

1. *Māyurappurāṇam* by Tiricirapuram Mīnāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815–1876), *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verse 61 (see Part I, 3.3.3, 3.3.5, 4.1). It illustrates the description of the richness of the locale, one of the topoi of the *mahākāvyas*, based on which model the Tamil *sthalapurāṇas* were composed. It also shows the romanticization of the past.
2. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* by Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi (thirteenth century)
  - 2.1 *Paliyañcīna tiruvilaiyāṭal* (the sacred sport called God's fear of blame [or dereliction of duty], verses 6 and 30 (see Part I, 3.3.7). It is an example to illustrate how the *sthalapurāṇas* are valuable collections of religious legends and local folklore.
  - 2.2 *Kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* (eulogy to the gods) (see Part I, 3.3.2). This example and the other one below (3) show how the authors of *sthalapurāṇas* on Maturai display a sense of patriotism to the Pāṇṭiya country and love for Tamil. They exhibit a form of Tamil linguistic nationalism with the Pāṇṭiya country as a epicenter of a larger Tamil country.
3. *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam* by Parañcōti Muṇivar (seventeenth–eighteenth century) (see Part I, 3.3.2), *Pāṇṭittirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verses 64, 87 and 88 (see also the note above)
4. *Kūṭarpurāṇam* (author unknown) (ca. sixteenth century), *Meypporuḷ kūrip porkiḷi perra paṭalam*, verses 24 and 25 (see Part I, 5.3). The excerpts here illustrate how the *sthalapurāṇas* are constructed as catechisms of tenets and practices of religion, theology and philosophy.
5. *Kamalālayaccirappu* or *Tiruvārūrppurāṇam* by Maṛaiñāṇa Campantar (sixteenth century), verses 858 and 889 (see Part I, 3.3.4). The excerpt here shows how the *sthalapurāṇa* poets display their ideas of society in addition to the religious beliefs.
6. *Tanikaippurāṇam* of Kacciyappa Muṇivar (d. 1790) (see Part I, 5.3)
  - 6.1. *Akattiyaṅ aruḷ peru paṭalam*, verse 393
  - 6.2. *Kalavup paṭalam*, verse 223

The above two excerpts illustrate how the authors of the *sthalapurāṇas* conceive their work as compendiums of religion and literature in the epic model.

1. *Māyurappurāṇam* by Tiricirapuram Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815–1876) (see Part I, 3.3.3, 3.3.5, 4.1)

This is a *sthalapurāṇa* in Tamil describing the legends of modern Mayilāṭuṭurai. The author of the work, Tiricirapuram Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, was one of the greatest Tamil *sthalapurāṇa* authors of the nineteenth century and the author of many such *sthalapurāṇas*.

The *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* or “chapter on the holy country” describes the different landscapes of the place as per the the poetical rules of a *mahākāvya* in Tamil poetics. The following verse describes the riverine landscape. The *sthalapurāṇa* poets display their poetical skills in describing such topoi. When they indulge in their flight of fancy, they always keep the religious or philosophical ambience in mind. In this piece, the poet combines the mundane and esoteric experiences equally.

*Tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verse 61

உடைகரையடைத்துமள்ளரொருவழிச்செலுத்தலாலே  
யடைமனூத்தகைக்கப்பட்டவரவெனவடங்கிச்சென்று  
மிடைதருபொறிவாய்தோறும்விரைந்துபோய்ப்புகுமனம்போற்  
புடையமர்மதகுதோறும்போய்ப்புகுந்ததுநீர்வெள்ளம்.

*uṭaikaraiyaṭaittumallaṟoruvalicceluttalālē*  
*yaṭaimanuttakaikkappattavaraveṇavaṭaṅkiccenru*  
*miṭaitaruporivāytōrumviraintupōyppukumaṇampōr*  
*puṭaiyamarmatakutōrumpōyppukuntatunīrvellam.*

“Because of the peasant folks blocking the breached banks and channelising the flood water in a single channel, it flowed with obedience like a snake subdued by a group of human beings and reached and entered every sluice gates like the mind which enters quickly into every tormenting sense organ.”

2. *Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruviḷaiyāṭarapurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟappuliyūr Nampi (thirteenth century)

This is the first extant *sthalapurāṇa* and also one of the earliest versions of the *sthalapurāṇas* on Maturai. The other well-known *sthalapurāṇa* on Maturai is the one by Parañcōti Muṇivar (sixteenth century), also called *Tiruviḷaiyāṭarapurāṇam*.

Major portions in Tamil temple *sthalapurāṇas* are comprised of native Tamil folklore and local traditions in addition to the standard Sanskritic mythical lore. The different works known as *Tiruviḷaiyāṭarapurāṇam* illustrate this phenomenon. The legends of Maturai narrate the 64 sports of Siva that are connected with the legends, history and folklore of Maturai. Nampi’s composition is more direct in its narration, unlike Parañcōti who adds more details and poetic embellishments. All the *sthalapurāṇas* of Maturai are valuable collections of religious legends and local folklore. In

addition, all the authors of *sthalapurāṇas* on Maturai display a sense of patriotism to the Pāṇṭiya country and a form of Tamil linguistic nationalism with the Pāṇṭiya country as a epicenter of a larger Tamil country.

2.1 *Paḷiyañciṇa tiruviḷaiyāṭal* (the sacred sport called God's fear of blame [or dereliction of duty]) (see Part I , 3.3.7)

The excerpt given here is from the thirty-third episode, called *paḷiyañciṇa tiruviḷaiyāṭal* (the sacred sport called God's fear of blame [or dereliction of duty]). It illustrates a strand of folklore about the facets of judicial investigations and the administration of justice in the Pāṇṭiya court.

#### Summary of the episode:

Once a Brahmin who was travelling with his wife to his father-in-law's home town left her in the middle of his journey under the shade of a banyan tree, in order to fetch water. While he was away, an arrow which had long hung suspended in the tree, in consequence of the latter being shaken by the wind, descended and penetrated the body of his wife, who instantly died. At that time, a hunter appeared in search of his catch at a distance. The Brahmin, on returning, was astonished to find his wife dead, looked round and discovered the hunter, charged him with the crime of murder, and took him along with him and his crying child, together with the body of his wife, to the court of the Pāṇṭiya king. The hunter, on investigation, maintained his innocence. The king ordered him to be put in prison, gave the Brahmin a present, and asked him go to cremate his wife's mortal remains. The king was in a dilemma to decide on the case. The king prayed to the god of Maturai that his doubt might be cleared. A celestial voice advised him to go in for the routine inspection of the city in the night so that the truth would be revealed. As per the god's bidding, the king went around the city in the night and he noticed two dreadful figures sitting on the veranda (*tiṇṇai*) of a house of a bachelor, where his wedding was arranged. The king watched them in disguise and overheard their conversation about their plans to take the life of the groom tonight. Having mustered strength, the king came out openly and approached them requesting them to reveal their identity. He further asked how they were going to take away the life of the bridegroom when his marriage was being held. The dreadful two revealed their identity as the messengers of Yama, the god of death, and that they were on duty to take away the life of the groom on the orders of Yama. They also told him that they would accomplish this task by letting loose a bull from the cattle stall. They further narrated that, when it was scared by the sound of drums, it would enter the marriage hall and gorge to death the groom. On hearing this, the king went to the Brahmin and brought him to the scene so that the Brahmin could overhear the conversations of the messengers of Yama. The conversation between them was about the pretexts by which the messengers of Yama usually take away the life of people unawares. During their conversation, they mentioned many such earlier episodes from history including about the previous day killing of the

wife of the Brahmin by a pretext, i.e., making an arrow struck earlier in a tree shot by a hunter fall on her chest due to the blowing of wind. On hearing this conversation, the Brahmin told the king that he would like to witness and confirm the impending calamity the messengers of Yama planned to inflict on the young bridegroom. And soon it happened as they had said earlier. Now the Brahmin was convinced. The king returned to the court and declared the innocence of the hunter and freed him to the satisfaction of all his ministers. The Brahmin was compensated with a purse to start a new life. Finally the king was saved from a great blame by the grace of Śiva of Maturai and from then on the God of Maturai was called with the sobriquet *paḷiyañciṇa cokkan* ‘the god Cokkan who feared the blame [or the dereliction of duty].’ From those days onwards, there came into being a proverb that goes thus: “The begging Brahmin’s complaint has been abandoned/dismissed with the jumping of the hornless or dehorned cow”.

The excerpt given here describes the dramatic dialogues between the king and hunter. It illustrates the narrative skill of the poet to make the *sthalapurāṇa* more as a literary piece than a mere informative one.

*Paḷiyañciṇa tiruvilaiyāṭal* (the sacred sport called God's fear of blame [or dereliction of duty]), verse 6:

வினையுறு வேடுவ நின்னைக் கொல்வதில்லை மெய்ப்பட நீ  
செய்தியுரையென்னவேடன்  
கனைகழற்றாண் மன்னவனே நீதி வேந்தே கருணையனே நாயடியேன் கொன்றதில்லை  
மனுநெறியி னாராய்ந்து கொள்க வென்றுவணங்கியுடனடுங்கிவியர்த்துரைப்பக் கண்டு  
தனதுளநொந் தருமறையோன் மனத்தகத்துத் தணியாத பெருந்துயரந்  
தணியச்சொல்வான்.

*vinaiyuru vēṭuva niṅṅaik kolvatillai meypṇaṭa nī ceṭiyurai yeṅṅavēṭaṅ  
kaṅaikaḷarrāṅ maṅṅavaṅē nīti vēntē karuṅaiyaṅē nāyaṭiyēṅ koṅratillai  
maṅuneriyi nārāyantu koḷka veṅṅruvaṅaṅkiyuṭaṅaṅuṅkiyartturaippak kaṅṭu  
taṅaṭulaṅon tarumaṅaiyōṅ maṅattakattut taṅiyāṭa peruntuyaran taṅiyaccolvāṅ.*

“As the king said thus: ‘O Hunter who is befallen with the sinful deed! I am not going to kill you. You tell me the fact truthfully.’ The hunter, having bowed and shivering in body and sweating, said: ‘O you king who has a foot/ankle wearing a clinking anklet (as a mark of bravery)! O you just king! O you full of compassion! I, being a slave like a dog, never killed (the Brahmin lady). You investigate it for yourself (and find out) through the law of Manu.’ The king, having seen (the pathetic condition of the hunter), became pained in his heart and told the Brahmin the following words so that his unceasing great misery was reduced.”

*Paliyañciṇa tiruviḷaiyāṭal* (the sacred sport called God's fear of blame [or dereliction of duty]), verse 30:

முட்டிப் பார்ப்பான் முறையீடு  
மொட்டைப் பசுவின் பாய்ச்சலொடும்  
விட்டுப் போன தெனவின்றும்  
வட்டத் தலத்து வழங்கியதே 30

*muttip pārppāṇ muraiyīṭu*  
*moṭṭaip pacuvin pāyccaloṭum*  
*viṭṭup pōna tenavinṇrum*  
*vaṭṭat talattu vaḷaṅkiyatē.*

“Even today it (the following proverb) is in use in and around this place: the begging Brahmin’s complaint has been abandoned/dismissed with the jumping of the hornless or dehorned cow”.

## 2.2 *Kaṭavul vālttu* (eulogy to the gods) (see Part I, 3.3.2)

*Kaṭavul vālttu*, verse 8 (the Pāṇṭiya country):

ஆவியந் தென்றல் வெற்பினகத்தியன் விரும்புந் தென்பால்  
னாவலந் தீவம் போற்றி நாவலந் தீவந் தன்னுண்  
மூவர்கட் கரியான் நிற்ப முத்தமிழ்ச் சங்கத் தெய்வப்  
பாவலர் வீற்றிருக்கும் பாண்டிநன் னாடு போற்றி.

*āviyan tenral verpin akattiyaṇ virumpun tenpāl*  
*nāvalan tīvam pōrri nāvalan tīvan taṇṇuṇ*  
*mūvarkaṭ kariyāṇ nirpa muttamilc caṅkat teyvap*  
*pāvalar vīrrirukkum pāṇṭinan nāṭu pōrri.*

“Hail the Nāvalan Tīvam (Jambudvīpa), which possesses the southern part, which is liked by Agastya who resides in the Potikai from where blows the nice fragrant southern breeze! Hail the Great Pāṇṭi Nāṭu, which is in this Nāvalan Tīvam (Jambudvīpa), in which the one who is preeminent among the Three (Rudra, Brahmā and Viṣṇu) (i.e., Śiva) rules over and the divine poets of the threefold Tamil reside majestically!”

*Kaṭavul vālttu*, verse 9 (the city of Maturai)

தேனிமிருந் தொடை வாகைச் செழியர் குலம்விளங்க  
வீனமில் பல் லுகங்கடொறு மிருநிலத்தி யாவரு முய்ய  
வானபெரு நான்மறைக்கும் யரியயற்குந் தெரியாதார்  
மானிடராய் விளையாடு மாமதுரை நகர் போற்றி.

*tēnimirun toṭai vākaic ceḷiyar kulamviḷaṅka*  
*vīṇamil pal lukaṅkaṭoru mirunilatti yāvaru muyya*

*vāṇaperu nānmaraiḱkum yariyayarkun teriyātār  
māṇiṭarāy vilaiyāṭu māmaturai nakar pōrri.*

“Hail the great city of Maturai, where the one who is unfathomable for the very great Vedas and for Ari (Viṣṇu) and Ayaṅ (Brahma) and who sports as a human being so that the dynasty of the Celīyar, who wear the garland of victory, swarmed by honey bees, prosper and all the people of this great world in many decadence-free epochs be redeemed!”

### 3. *Tiruvilāiyātarpurānam* by Parañcōti Muṇivar (seventeenth–eighteenth century) (see Part I, 3.3.2)

Among the *sthalapurāṇas* of Maturai, the one by Parañcōti Muṇivar stands apart due to its length and also due to its literary embellishments. The author has taken pains to make it a complete epic. The other aspect of it is its passionate espousal of a nationalistic outlook.

It conceives the Pāṇṭiya land and the Tamil language as beautiful ladies and mothers. In the prefatory sections of this work, the author gives the description of the country and the capital city with rich imagery and attendant embellishments. This deification of the country and land may be due to the nationalistic spirit in the midst of alien rule during the seventeenth century CE. But literally it can be interpreted as denoting the external hero of the work (see Part I, 4.4.8).

The excerpts here illustrate his passion for his nation state that is the Pāṇṭiya country and his mother tongue Tamil. It seems the author throws up a subtle political message in addition to the celebration of the greatness of Śaivism. According to him, the Pāṇṭiya country is the stage for the lady Tamil, who was developed as equal to Sanskrit by Lord Śiva. In the Tamil academy at Maturai, Lord Śiva himself presided over it, and such a holy Tamil cannot be downgraded comparing it with the languages which have no standard grammars. This is an obvious reference to the dominance of Telugu and Kannada in the Vijayanagara and Nāyaka courts at Maturai, where Tamil had no seat.

*Pāṇṭittirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verse 64:

பின்னெவ னுரைப்ப தந்தப் பெருந்தமிழ் நாடாங்கன்னி  
தன்னிடை யூர்க ளென்னு மவயவந் தாங்கச் செய்த  
பொன்னியற் கலனே கோயின் மடமறப் புறநீர்ச் சாலை  
இன்னமு தருத்து சாலை யெனவுருத் தரித்த தம்மா.

*pinneva nuraippa tantap peruntamiḱ nāṭāṅkanni  
tanniṭai yūrka lennu mavayavan tāṅkac ceyta  
ponniyar kalanē kōyiṅ maṭamarap puranīrc cālai  
innamu taruttu cālai yenavurut taritta tammā.*

“Then what else to narrate? Oh! That great Tamil country called *kanni* (i.e., the Pāṇṭiya country as a lady) has taken shape/appeared with its cities and towns as

its body parts and the temples, mutts, alms houses, feeding places and inns serving sweet food as the ornaments put on its body.”

*Pāṇṭittirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verse 87:

விடையு கைத்தவன் பாணினிக் கிலக்கண மேனாள்  
வடமொழிக்குரைத் தாங்கியன் மலயமா முனிக்குத்  
திடமுறுத்தியம் மொழிக்கெதிர் ஆக்கிய தென்சொன்  
மடமகட்கரங் கென்பது வழதிநாடன்றோ.

*viṭaiyu kaittavaṇ pāṇinik kilakkaṇa mēṇāḷ*  
*vaṭamo likkurait tāṅkiyaṇ malayamā muṇikkut*  
*tiṭamu ruttiyam molikketir ākkiya teṇṇon*  
*maṭama kaṭkaraṅ kenpatu valutinā ṭaṇrō.*

“Is it not that the country of Valuti is the dancing forum for the young girl called Southern Word (i.e., Tamil), who was made an adversary to that language (i.e., Sanskrit) by the Lord who rode the ox, taught definitively the grammar of Tamil to the Sage of the Malaya mountains (Agastya), just like he taught Pāṇini the grammar of Sanskrit in earlier times?”

*Pāṇṭittirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, verse 88:

கண்ணு தற்பெருங் கடவுளுங் கழகமோட மர்ந்து  
பண்ணுறத்தெரிந்து ஆய்ந்தவிப் பசுந்தமி மேனை  
மண்ணிடைச்சில விலக்கண வரம்பிலா மொழிபோல்  
எண்ணிடைப் படக் கிடந்ததா வெண்ணவும் படுமோ.

*kaṇṇu tarperuṅ kaṭavuḷuṅ kaḷakamō ṭamarntu*  
*paṇṇu ratterintu āyṅtavip pacuntami lēnai*  
*maṇṇi ṭaiccila vilakkaṇa varampilā molipōl*  
*eṇṇi ṭaip paṭak kiṭantatā veṇṇavum paṭumō.*

“Will this Tamil, which was studied deeply and systemically/musically even by the great god Śiva, who has the third eye on his forehead, sitting in the Tamil Academy along with other poets, be considered as one among/equal to the other few languages on the earth, which have no proper grammar of their own?”

#### 4. *Kūṭarpurāṇam* (author unknown) (ca. sixteenth century) (see Part I, 5.3)

This is a Vaiṣṇava *sthalapurāṇa* of Maturai. Unlike the Śaivite *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇams* of Maturai, which are based on the episodes connected with the greatness of Śiva as the main presiding deity of the Ālavāyūṭaiyār temple and other Śiva devotees, it speaks the greatness of Viṣṇu as a presiding deity at Kūṭalalakar temple and the Viṣṇu devotees. In an effort to imitate the Śaivite narratives, this work invents episodes with motifs of *cintācamutti* (a skill of composing a stanza guessing the idea

in mind of the proposer) and *Maturai Tamil Caṅkam*, similar to the motifs in the popular Nakkīrar Episode in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurānam*. In the *Kūṭarpurānam*, the Pāṇṭiya king had a doubt about who is the supreme god and he wanted an answer from the scholars of his country. For that he announced a prize of a purse of gold coins which was hung in the court to be won by the contestants after giving the correct answer that the king had in mind. The great Periyālvār or Viṣṇucittaṅ of Srivilliputtūr was invited to give the correct answer. He came to Maturai and gave the answer that Viṣṇu is the supreme god. It was accepted by Sarasvatī, and the purse went to him. The following excerpt describes this episode.

*Meyporul kūrip porkili perra paṭalam* (chapter on winning the golden purse after giving the correct answer), verse 24:

பாசுர மிதனைத் தால பத்திரத் தெழுதிப்புத்தூர்  
பூசுரனெடுத்தானன்னலாவணம்புறநூலோரை  
மாசுறத் துணிப்பான் சென்றவாளெனப் பிறங்கி யோடித்  
தேசுறநிறுவும்விஞ்சைக் கிழித்தலைச் சிறந்ததன்றே.

*pācura mīṭanait tāla pattirat telutipputtūr*  
*pūcuraneṭuttāṇṇalāvaṇampuranūlōrai*  
*mācaṛat tuṇippāṇ cenṛavāleṇap piraṅki yōṭit*  
*tēcuraniruvumviñcaik kiḷittalaic cirantatanrē.*

“The Brahmin from Puttūr (Periyālvār), having written this verse on a palm leaf, presented it. That very good document ran shining like a sword that cuts without error the heretics and stood magnificently on the magical golden purse set up with splendor.”

*Meyporul kūrip porkili perra paṭalam* (chapter on winning the golden purse after giving the correct answer), verse 25:

அத்தலை யமர்ந்த தேவராவணமது கைக் கொண்டு  
மொய்த்தனர்மகிழ்ச்சி தூங்கமுனிவரர் குழாங்களோடுஞ்  
சத்தியவாணியென்னும் சாரதாதேவி தோன்றி  
வித்தகக் கிழியைப் பட்டர்வேந்தன் கைக்களித்தாளன்றே.

*attalai yamarnta tēvarāvaṇamatu kaik koṇṭu*  
*moyttaṇarmakiḷcci tūṅkamuṇivarar kuḷāṅkaḷōṭuṅ*  
*cattiyavāṇiyennum cāratātēvi tōṇri*  
*vittakak kiḷiyaip paṭṭarvēntaṅ kaikkaḷittāḷaṅrē.*

“The celestials who sat at that spot took up that document in their hands and gathered with rejoice abound together with the groups of sages. At that juncture, Sāradādevī alias Cattiyavāṇi appeared and handed over the wonderful purse to the hands of the king of Brahmins (i.e., Periyālvār).”

5. *Kamalālayaccirappu* or *Tiruvārūppurāṇam* by Maṛaiñāṇa Campantar  
(sixteenth century) (see Part I, 3.3.4)

This is a *sthalapurāṇa* on Tiruvārūr written by Maṛaiñāṇa Campantar (sixteenth century). He is a well know theologian and philosopher and author of many works connected with the Śaiva Āgamas and the religious practices of Śaiva Siddhānta. His most notable work is the translation of the Sanskrit *Śivadharmottara* into Tamil, called *Civatarumōttaram*. He is a good scholar-poet and authored two *sthalapurāṇas*, this one on Tiruvārūr and another on Tiruvannāmalai, called *Aruṇakiripurāṇam*. As he was a theologian and philosopher, he included ideas from such domains in his *sthalapurāṇas*. Being orthodox and conservative, he was more concerned with the maintainance of the social order, which was constructed with the inbuilt ideas of caste inequalities, pollution and obscure practises. In this excerpt, which is from the twentieth chapter, called *caruvatīrttācirayaccarukkam*, he narrates an account of life in the different epochs. In the example here, he refers to the presence of foreign people and their rule. This could refer to the Muslims or Christians. He bemoans the fallen values. The high-caste people were stooping low and the lower caste people were getting arrogant. It shows how the *sthalapurāṇa* poets display their ideas of society in addition to the religious motifs.

Verse 858 (the ascendancy of foreigners):

பழித்துவை திகத்து நீதி பஞ்சராத்திரமுஞ் சேர்வார்  
ஓழித்தலால் வைதிக த்தை யுணர்வற மிரண்டுங் குன்றி  
இழப்பரா மிருந்த தேசம் புளிநர் வந் தெதிர்ந்த போது  
வழக்கறி யாத வந்த மறவருக் கொளிப்பர் மற்றென்.

*paḷittuvai tikattu nīti pañcarāttiramuñ cērvār*  
*oḷittalāl vaiṭika ttai yuṇarvara miranṭuñ kuṇri*  
*iḷapparā mirunta tēcam puḷiṇar van tetirnta pōtu*  
*vaḷakkari yāta vanta maṛavaruk kolippar marreṇ.*

“Blaming the methods of Vaidikam, some people will join the Pañcarāttiram. Since they avoided the Vaidika path, they are languished in spirit and good deeds and loose their country or place where they lived. When the Puḷiṇar or foreigners confront them, they will hide from those wicked persons, who do not know the customs. What else can they do?”

Verse 889 (the arrogant behaviour of the lower caste people):

வேதிய ராதி யோர்க்கு விழைந்துசென் றேவற் செய்யார்  
ஆதனத் திருப்பர் வந்தாலவரடி தொழாரு மஞ்சிப்  
பூதல வேந்தர்க் காளாய்ப் புரப்பர் சூத்திரரும் பூமி  
வாதையும் புரிவ ரந்த ணாளாரை மற்றை யாரும்.

*vētiya rāti yōrkku viḷaintučen rēvaṟ ceyyār  
ātanat tiruppar vantā lavarāṭi tolāru mañcip  
pūtala vēntark kāḷāyp purappar cūttirarum pūmi  
vātaiyum puriva ranta nālārai marrai yārum.*

“The people of fourth caste (i.e., *sūdras*) will not do their duties with love to the Brahmins and so forth of the upper castes. They will take seats equal to them. When the people of upper castes come, they will not pay obsequence with fear. The *sūdras* will become the servants of the ruling kings and administer the land. All such others will also harass the Brahmins.

#### 6. *Taṇikaippurāṇam* of Kacciyappa Muṇivar (d. 1790) (see Part I, 5.3)

Among the authors of hundreds of *sthalapurāṇas*, Kacciyappa Muṇivar (d. 1790) stands out as one of the most eminent and prolific authors due to his vast erudition and skill in poetical mastery. Scholars admire him as *Kavirākṣaṣa*, “a poetic giant.” Kacciyappa Muṇivar, as a *kāvya* poet and an erudite scholar in Tamil grammar and Śaiva Siddhānta, made his compositions a repository of knowledge on literature and religion. They can be called compendiums of religion and literature in the epic model. He is an author of many works among which the *Taṇikaippurāṇam* is unique.

In the eight chapter of the *Taṇikaippurāṇam*, titled *nanti yupatēcap paṭalam*, a succinct summary of Śaiva Siddhānta tenets is described. In the ninth chapter, titled *akattiyaṅ aruḷ peru paṭalam*, consisting of a total of 513, verses a succinct summary of the Tamil *Civatarumōttaram* composed by Maṛaiṇāṇa Campantar (sixteenth century), a translation of the *Śivadharmottara*, one of the *upāgamas* of the Śaiva religion in Sanskrit, is presented in 366 verses (148–509). In the tenth chapter, titled *Cīparipūraṇa nāmap paṭalam*, the valour of Murukaṅ in his war against the *asuras* is described in the mould of the *purāṇam* themes of old Tamil poetics. Similarly the mould of *akam* themes is used in describing Murukaṅ’s premarital love in the sixteenth chapter, titled *kaḷavup paṭalam*, and his marital love in the seventeenth chapter, titled *vallināyaki tirumaṇap paṭalam*.

The first excerpt illustrates the skill of summarising a large treatise in verse, and the second one his poetical skill as a scholar-poet.

##### 6.1. *Akattiyaṅ aruḷ peru paṭalam*, verse 393

ஒருவரொரு தெருவினறின் முகடொன்றில்வழுக்குண்  
டோரைம்ப திடையறின்விற் கிடைமுப்ப திடையே  
தெருவில்லங்கி னப்பாலின் றொருபதிற்றொன் றேனைத்  
தெருக்களுக்கு முப்பதுதண் டாலயத்துக் குண்டால்  
அருமறையா திகடொடங்க லுடலெடுக்கு முன்ன  
ரந்தணர்முன் னால்வாக்கும் பிறப்பிறப்பின் வழநான்  
ஒருபதுபன் னிரண்டுபதி னாறுபதி னைந்த  
மொழுக்கமிலாச் சூத்திரர்க்கு முப்பதிற்று நாளே.

*oruvaroru teruvinirīṅ mukāṭonrilvaḷukkuṅ*  
*tōraimpa tiṭaiyarīṅviṭ kiṭaimuppa tiṭaiyē*  
*teruvilaṅki nappālin rorupatirron rēnait*  
*terukkalukku muppatutaṅ ṭālayattuk kuṅṭāl*  
*arumaraiyā tikaṭoṭaṅka luṭaleṭukku munna*  
*rantaṅarmuṅ nālvarkkum pirappirappiṅ vaḷunān*  
*orupatupaṅ niraṅṭupati nārupati naintā*  
*moḷukkamilāc cūttirarkku muppatirru nālē.*

“If a person dies [in his house] in a street [of a village], if the ridge of the roof [of the house of the deceased] is connected, there is defilement up to one [length of] fifty [bow-lengths]. If a gap intervenes, the defilement is thirty bow-lengths. In between, if a street intersects, there is no defilement beyond. For other streets, ten plus one bow-lengths, and for the temple there is [defilement] for thirty *taṅṭu*. Do not start reciting the precious Vedas and so forth before the body has been taken out. For all the four groups beginning from the Brahmins, defilement resulting from birth and death is of four types, namely for ten, twelve, sixteen and fifteen [days], they say, and for the *sūdras*, who do not follow the [āgamic] practices, it is thirty (*muppatirru*) days.”

This corresponds to the verses 11.6–7 of the source text *Civatarumōttaram*.

## 6.2. *Kaḷavup paṭalam*, verse 223

The chapter 16, which is a long one with 520 verses, is like the minor literary genre called *kōvaikkalitturaṅai* with a lot of innovations and embellishments. Kacciappa Muṇivar proves to be a scholar-poet in this chapter. He makes beautiful similies and metaphors out of the grammatical lore of Tamil.

இருவருந்தணவா வியல்பிருதிறத்து  
 மருவியபாங்கி மதியுடம்படுத்தல்

*iruvaruntaṅavā viyalpirutiṭattu*  
*maruviyapāṅki matiyuṭampattal*

The lady friend/the confidante of the heroine or of both the hero and heroine discovers the fact that they will not be separated.

அஃதாவது நடுங்கநாடிய தோழி இவ்விருவர் தன்மையினை இருவர் மாட்டும்  
 ஒற்றித்துணர்ந்த தோழி வேற்படையையுடைய இவனுக்கும் இத்தலைவிக்கும்  
 உயிரொன்றாயும் உடலிரண்டாயு முளவெனக் கூறா நின்றல்.

*aktāvatu naṭuṅkanāṭiya tōli ivviruvar taṅmaiyiṅai iruvar māṭṭum orrittuṅarnta tōli*  
*vērpaṭaiyaiyūṭaiya iṅvaṅkkuṅ italaiivikkum uyironṅrāyumu ṭaliraṅṭāyumu muḷavenak*  
*kūrā nīrral.*

I.e., the saying of the maid, who narrates a fictitious accident to make the heroine tremble for her lover's safety, seeks an open avowal of her clandestine marriage, having known closely the love between the hero and heroine that for them there are two bodies but one soul.

பன்னீ ருயிரும் பதினெண் ணுடலும் பயின்றியக்கும்  
அந்நீ ரெனவடல் வேலோன் றனக்கு மமிழ்துயிர்க்கு  
முந்நீர்த் தரள முறுவன் முரிபுரு வத்திவட்கும்  
நன்னீ ருயிரொன்று மெய்யிரண் டாகி நயந்ததுவே.

*pannī ruyirum patineṅ ṇūṭalum payinriyakkum  
annī reṇavaṭal vēlōṅ ṛanakku mamiṭtuyirkku  
munnīrt taraḷa muṛuvaṅ muripuru vattivaṭkum  
nannī ruyironru meyyiraṅ ṭāki nayantatuvē.*

“Like the twelve vowels and eighteen consonants are combined and pronounced as one syllable (*uyirmey*), for the hero, who is holding a ferocious spear, and the heroine, who has teeth like pearls from the ocean and bent eyebrows, the good-natured soul is one and the bodies are two perfectly.”