



தமிழ்மணம் சர்வதேசத் தமிழ் ஆய்விதழ்

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Kabila's Psychological Approach in Kurntokai

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ABSTRACT

Literature consistently centers on society, aiming to uplift human values and build a better world by reflecting shared human emotions and experiences. A prime example of this is Tamil Sangam literature—collectively known as Pāṭṭum Tokaiyum or Pathinenmelkanakku—which comprises 2,381 poems divided into Akam (interior/love) and Puram (exterior/heroic) genres. Among the Akam anthologies, Kurunthogai stands out as the only text distinguished by the honorific prefix "Nalla" (excellent). This article, titled "Kapilar's Psychological Approach in Kurunthogai Poems," investigates how the celebrated poet Kapilar, or "Kurinjik Kapilar," utilizes creative literary narrative techniques and a psychological framework across his twenty-eight poems in the collection. By integrating Western psychological theories and contemporary research interpretations, the study analyzes the alignment between these poetic compositions and psychological methodologies to demonstrate how emotional experiences are structured within the classical texts.

KEYWORDS: Psychology – Kabilar – Kurunthogai – Pattu – Thogai – Tholkapiyam – Akaporul – Ilakkanam – Kurinji.



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From the ancient period to the modern age, the forms of literature that are created have all been centered on society. They primarily aim at uplifting human values and dignity. A literary creator develops his works in such a way that every member of society can relate their own emotions and experiences through the created work. Through these literary texts, an attempt is made to build a better society. With the intention that people should praise, protect, and uphold the society in which they live, creative literature is produced.

In this way, Sangam literature is referred to as “Pāṭṭum Tokaiyum” (Songs and Anthologies) and also as the “Pathinenmelkanakku” (Eighteen Major Texts). Sangam literature consists of 2,381 poems. Among the Eight Anthologies (Ettuthokai), five are classified as Akam (interior/love) texts, two as Puram (exterior/heroic) texts, and one as a text containing both Akam and Puram elements. Among these, Natrinai, Kurunthogai, Ainkurunuru, Akananuru, and Kalithogai are collections of inner emotional experiences centered on the five landscapes of love (Anbin Ainthinai).

Of these five works, Kurunthogai is the only Akam text associated with the prefix “Nalla” (good/excellent). The poems of this work have been interpreted by various commentators. This article is titled “Kapilar’s Psychological Approach in Kurunthogai Poems.” The poet Kapilar, who is celebrated as “Kurinjik Kapilar,” has employed literary creativity through a psychological approach and narrative technique. The purpose of this article is to examine the manner in which he has used this approach in his literary compositions.

With the aim of providing support for this study, explanations of psychology given by Western scholars are also included. In addition, the interpretations of research scholars regarding the psychological approach are presented here. These explanations and approaches, along with the twenty-eight poems found in Kurunthogai, will be examined in this article to analyze how they correspond with the psychological approach.

Explanation of Psychology

Psychology refers to the way in which a person expresses their overall actions and emotions within the society in which they live. In the contemporary context, human beings make various efforts to present themselves as superior to others. In doing so, they come to realize that factors such as education, family, and profession greatly influence them. Because of these influences, both the mind and body become psychologically affected. Such effects hinder a person’s overall development. One major reason for this is the lack of proper understanding of the methods used to approach and manage psychology.

A human being can certainly achieve success in life. Success becomes assured when one transforms thoughts about how to function in the world into practical action. The term “psychology” is called Psychology in English. It is derived from the Greek words Psyche and Logos, which together form the word “Psychology.”

Psychology is defined not merely as the study of human external behaviour, but also as the comprehensive study of a person’s intellectual capacity, emotional expressions, feelings such as happiness, fear, and courage, and all related mental processes. Following these explanations,

psychology was also widely described as the study of the nature of the “soul” or the “spirit.” Scholars referred to the investigation of such concepts as psychology.

In the context of these definitions, several objections arose among social thinkers. Later, the meaning shifted towards the study of the human mind or the inner consciousness of human beings. The dictionary of Kriya provides the following explanation for the term psychology: “Psychology is the branch of science that studies the qualities and behaviours manifested through human mental activities.”

It is further stated that the field of psychology has passed through several stages of development and has paved the way for comparative studies in the growth of literary disciplines.

Studies comparing the field of psychology with Sangam literature have continued to be carried out. In the early period, Sangam literature followed the tradition known as “Pāṭṭum Tokaiyum” (Songs and Anthologies).

However, while speaking about Sangam literature, Tamilannal states that, “If one were asked to give another name to Sangam literature, without hesitation it could be called ‘psychological literature.’ One hundred percent of the Akam poems and seventy-five percent of the Puram poems are concerned with psychology.”

This statement emphasizes the deep psychological dimensions embedded within Sangam literary works.

Therefore, it can confidently be stated that Sangam literature is a form of psychological literature, as it reflects both the greatness of the Tamil language and the inner emotional life of the Tamil people. It portrays the inner experiences of love, including premarital (kalavu) and marital (karpu) life, which are central to Akam traditions, as well as the outward social life, such as charity and public conduct, classified under Puram, which can be understood and witnessed by others even today.

The divisions of Akam and Puram in Tamil poetry are fundamentally based on psychological principles. “Akam” refers to experiences that occur within the mind and are not outwardly visible. It represents emotions, especially the feeling of love, which blossoms inwardly within human consciousness. Tamil scholars defined “Puram” as the external and publicly visible aspects of life.

The five-fold landscape tradition (Ainthinai) explained by Tolkappiyam, along with the poems composed by Sangam poets following this tradition, are deeply rooted in psychological foundations. In these works, psychological realism is given greater importance than social realism.

Considering these ideas, one may arrive at the conclusion that Sangam literature is indeed psychological literature.

Psychological Approach of Kapilar in the Poems of Kuruntokai

The poems of Sangam literature are literary works woven together through the virtues, emotions, and feelings of the human mind. Based on the views of scholars who have studied Sangam literature, it may rightly be called psychological literature. Among the various methods of literary analysis, the psychological approach is considered one important method.

All Sangam poems primarily express the complete range of human emotions and inner

feelings. Therefore, through these perspectives, the psychological approach of Kapilar in the poems of Kuruntokai can be examined here.

Among the poems belonging to the five landscapes (Ainthinai), Kapilar was especially renowned for composing poems in the Kurinji landscape tradition. In Kuruntokai, he composed twenty-eight poems. Of these, five are voiced by the hero (thalaivan), fifteen by the heroine (thalaivi), and five by the friend (thozhi).

All the poems composed by Kapilar portray the love traditions and emotional experiences associated with the Kurinji landscape. This study attempts to explain the poetic patterns found in these poems through a psychological approach.

Psychological Approach in the Hero's Speeches

In Kuruntokai, the poems spoken by the hero (thalaivan) were composed by Kapilar in such a way that they fully express the thoughts and emotions of the hero. These poems were created through a psychological approach that reflects the inner feelings and emotional state of the hero.

There are five poems in Kuruntokai that are presented as the hero's speech. Among the characters who express inner emotions in Akam literature, the most important are the hero, heroine, friend (thozhi), companion (paangan), foster mother, and mother.

Many individuals support the transformation of the secret premarital love life (kalavu) of the hero and heroine into married life (karpu). Among them, the paangan stands as the hero's closest friend and confidant. After meeting the heroine, the hero shares his experiences and emotions with this trusted companion.

In highlighting this idea, Kapilar reveals the psychological depth of human relationships, friendship, and emotional expression within Sangam poetry.

“On the mountain slopes,
where the pure white waterfalls descend,
overflowing through rocky caverns
amidst clusters of many flowers,
there lived the young Kuravar maiden
with broad shoulders and tender beauty.
Her softness was like cool water,
yet her love burned like fire
and melted the strength of my heart”
- Kuruntokai – 95

“Mālvarai iḷitarum tūveḷ aruvi
Kalmuhaith thethumbum palmalarc cāral
Sīrukuṭik kuṛavan peruntōṭ kuṛumaḷ
Nīr ōr anna sāyal
Tī ōr anna eṇ uraṇ avith thannē”

Through this poem, Kapilar reveals a subtle psychological insight. In the poem, the hero describes the heroine as a woman possessing a gentle and pleasing nature. He tells his close friend (paangan) that her soft and graceful qualities have weakened his mind, which had once been as

strong and fierce as fire.

Just as water extinguishes fire, the heroine's tenderness has conquered and subdued the hero's inner strength. Through this comparison, the poet expresses the psychological transformation caused by love — where emotional affection overpowers masculine pride, courage, and mental firmness.

Thus, the poem portrays not only romantic love but also the deep emotional changes that occur within the human mind through affection and intimacy.

The Hero Expressing His Distress to the Companion

In this situation from Kuruntokai, the hero goes to the place where the friend (thozhi) had asked him to meet the heroine. However, he is unable to see her there. He expresses his disappointment and emotional pain to his close companion (paangan). This circumstance is presented with a psychological perspective by Kapilar.

The hero compares the heroine to the famous Kolli Pavai associated with Valvil Ori of the Kolli hills. He says that she is youthful and beautiful like the sculpted maiden carved into the mountains of Kolli. Yet, embracing her broad shoulders and uniting with her has become difficult and rare.

The following lines express this idea:

“...like the maiden statue
carved in the mountain caves of Kolli
ruled by Valvil Ori of the mighty bow;
she, youthful and graceful,
whose broad bamboo-like shoulders
are difficult to attain in union.”
— Kuruntokai 100

“Valvil Ōri Kollik kuḍavaraip
Pāvaiyin maḍavan taḷē
Maṇaththirku ariya paṇaip-perun tōlē”

Kapilar thus presents love not merely as an external event, but as a profound psychological experience shaped by longing, imagination, and emotional yearning.

In another poem from Kuruntokai, the heroine is guarding the millet field. To drive away the parrots that come to eat the grain, she uses a musical instrument called “kulir.” However, instead of frightening the parrots away, the sweet sound of the instrument makes the birds believe that they are being lovingly invited. Enchanted by the music, the parrots remain in the field itself.

Seeing this, the heroine becomes distressed and begins to weep. Her tears are compared to raindrops falling upon the blooming blue lily flowers that blossom in the deep mountain springs.

The hero narrates this touching scene to his companion (paangan). Through rich similes and emotional imagery, Kapilar presents profound psychological ideas.

The poem states:

“Near the burnt field edges, in the flourishing millet land,

the sweet-toned kulir played by the vine-like maiden
did not sound harsh enough to chase the parrots away.
The parrots thought it was a call inviting them.
Unable to drive them away, she grew sorrowful and wept.
Her eyes resembled the cool mountain lilies blooming
in deep spring waters, their many petals disturbed
by the falling cold raindrops.”
— Kuruntokai 291

“Suḍupuṇal marungil kalitha ēṇal
Paḍukiḷi kaḍiyum koḍicchigaik kuḷirē
Isaiyin isaiyā inpāniththē!
Kilī avaḷ viḷiyena ezhal ollaavē
Athu pulandhu azhutha kaṇṇē, sārāl
Kuṇḍunīr paimchunai pūtha kuvaḷai
Vaṇḍu payil pallithazh kalaiith
Thaṇṭhulikkū ēṙra malarpōn maṇavē”

The tears flowing from her eyes are portrayed through natural imagery, creating an intimate relationship between external nature and inner emotion. Kapilar thus uses poetic similes to express delicate psychological states with great artistic beauty.

The Hero Expressing Psychological Distress Through Sorrow

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the hero returns home after meeting the heroine in a natural union (iyarkai punarchi). Even after leaving her, he remains completely absorbed in thoughts of her and returns with deep sighs of longing. Kapilar portrays the hero’s mental anguish through a subtle psychological approach.

The emotional condition of the hero is compared to the deep breathing of an elephant lying awake at midnight. The relevant lines state:

“...like the midnight-breathing
elephant lying in its resting place,
my heart still remains
beside her.”
— Kuruntokai 142

“Pāṇāl
Paḷḷi yāṇaiyin uyirththu, eṇ
uḷḷam pinnum taṇ uḷai yathuvē”

Kapilar thus transforms a simple emotional experience into a profound psychological portrayal, where the human mind continues to dwell on love even after physical separation.

In another poem from Kuruntokai, the hero and heroine are engaged in a secret premarital love relationship (kalavu). The poem explains the psychological subtlety of Akam tradition, where

the heroine carefully protects and preserves her love without allowing others to know about it until it matures into married life (karpu).

The poem reads:

“Though our love is known only to the two of us,
like the chieftain of Mullur
who bears the victorious red spear in battle,
he came secretly at night.
In the deep midnight hours he stayed with me.
At dawn, she removed the flowers worn in her hair,
wiped away the sandal paste and fragrant oil,
and with an unchanged face,
appeared as though nothing had happened.”
— Kuruntokai 312

“Iraṇḍu aṛi kaḷvi nam kātha nalōḷē
Muraṅkoḷ thuppin sevvēl மறலயன
Mūḷḷūrk kāṇam nāṇ vandhu
Naḷḷeṅ kaṅgul nam oṛaṇaḷ
Kūndhal vēyntha viravumalar uthirhthuch
Sānthuḷar naṅgathuppu eṇṇey nīvi
Amarā mugaththaḷ āgith
Thaṇar oṛaṇaḷ vaigamai yānē”

Although the heroine experiences intense emotional intimacy inwardly, she outwardly behaves with calmness and composure. Kapilar thus portrays the complex psychological state of concealed love through refined poetic imagery and social sensitivity.

Psychological Approach Reflected in the Heroine's Speeches

In Kuruntokai, Kapilar composed sixteen poems in the voice of the heroine (thalaivi). These poems are structured according to the ethical and emotional codes of the inner love life (Akam tradition) shared between the hero and heroine.

All these poems subtly and delicately express psychological approaches and emotional experiences. Through the heroine's voice, Kapilar portrays:

- love and longing,
- emotional restraint,
- anxiety caused by separation,
- hope and expectation,
- inner conflict,
- and the sensitivity of feminine emotions.

The heroine's speeches reveal the hidden movements of the mind and the emotional struggles experienced within secret love and married life. Thus, these poems stand as refined examples of psychological expression in Sangam literature.

The Heroine Patiently Waiting for the Hero

In the poems of Kuruntokai, the heroine waits with emotional strength and determination because of her deep love for the hero. Two poems particularly explain her mental firmness and steadfastness. Through these poems, Kapilar portrays the psychological endurance of the heroine.

In this poem, the heroine speaks to her friend. Rain had fallen on the hero's mountain region, and the floodwaters carried with them fragrant kanthal creepers. One such creeper drifted along the river and reached their village riverbank. The heroine joyfully embraced it, brought it home, and planted it in her garden because it reminded her of the hero and his land.

When her mother saw the kanthal plant, she did not express anger toward her daughter. The heroine says that even if the heavenly world itself were given in return, it would still be too small a gift compared to her mother's understanding and kindness.

The poem states:

“O friend, may my mother live long!
Even the heavenly world would be too small a return
for her kindness.
From his mountain, where evening rains fall
and fragrance spreads with the flowing waters,
the kanthal creeper came in the morning flood.
I embraced it tenderly,
brought it home,
and planted it in our courtyard—
yet my mother did not grow angry.”
— Kuruntokai 361

“Amma vāzhi thōzhi! Annaikku
Uyarnilai ulaghamum siṛidhāthal, avar malai
Mālaip peydha maṇangamazh undhiyodu
Kālai vandha kāndhaḷ muzhumudhal
Mellilai kuzhaiya muyangalum
Il uyiththu naḍudhalum kaḍayā thōḷē”

Kapilar delicately portrays the heroine's inner emotional world, where even a simple creeper becomes a source of joy, hope, and emotional fulfillment.

This poem from Kuruntokai reveals the heroine's emotional confidence and psychological endurance. The heroine happily says that she embraced and planted the kanthal creeper that had come from the hero's land. Through this act, she expresses her firm belief that the hero will soon return. Until then, she is prepared to wait patiently for him with emotional strength and hope.

Kapilar thus presents the heroine's inner determination and emotional encouragement through a psychological perspective. In another poem, the friend says that the hero has gone away leaving them behind. However, the heroine responds that his return will bring her a joy far greater than the pain of separation she now suffers.

The poem states:

“In the pepper-growing mountain slopes,
where monkeys gather together
feeding on broken branches,
lives the lord of the great rocky land.
Since he is dear to me,
even the pain caused by separation
becomes sweet—
sweeter even than the heavenly world
praised for its bliss.”
— Kuruntokai 288

“Kaṛi vaḷar aḍukkaththu āṅgaṇ muṛi arundhu
Kuraṅgu oruṅgu irukkum perunkaḷ nāḍan
Iniyān ākalin inaththin iyaṅra
Innāmaiṅinum inidhō
Inidhenap paḍūum puththēḷ nāḍō!”

Kapilar demonstrates that true love changes the perception of pain itself. The heroine’s mind converts sorrow into sweetness through faith in reunion, revealing a profound understanding of human psychology and emotional resilience.

The Heroine Waiting Patiently for the Hero’s Return and Marriage

In Kuruntokai, there are three poems that portray the heroine waiting patiently after the hero leaves, promising to return and marry her. The hero delays the marriage, and during this period the heroine endures separation with emotional strength and patience. In psychology, one of the important concepts is natural emotional motivation. The heroine waits for the hero with such inner encouragement and emotional determination.

The following poem explains this idea:

“There was no one else there—only he, the thief of my heart.
If he denies what happened, what can I do?
Only the crane that stood waiting
for the aral fish in the flowing stream
beside the small green millet stalks
witnessed the day he united with me.”
— Kuruntokai 25

“Yārum illai thānē kaḷvan
Thān adhu poyappin yān evan seynkō?
Thinaiythāl anna siṛu pasuṅ kāl
Ozhugunīr āral pārkkum
Kurugum uṇḍuthān maṇandha ṅāṅrē”

The external natural scene becomes a reflection of her inner emotional insecurity.
Another poem states:

“In the mountain forests of the hero’s land,
peacocks lay their eggs upon the rocks,
and black monkeys roll them about in play.”
— Kuruntokai 38

“Kāṇa maññai amai īṇ muṭṭai
Veyil āḍu musuvin kurumalai uruṭṭum
Kurra nāḍan kēṇmai”

Kapilar skillfully connects external nature with the heroine’s psychological state.
Another important poem illustrating the heroine’s psychological depth is:

“Though I endure my love within myself,
O friend, my eyes themselves
cannot bear it and continue to weep...”
— Kuruntokai 241

“Yām em kāmam thāṅgavum thāmtham
Kozhuthagai maiyin azhudhane thōzhi!”

In this poem, the heroine says that cowherds driving calves shout “Tiger! Tiger!” beneath flowering trees so that blossoms may fall down. Their loud cries echo through the mountain land of the hero.

The heroine says that she patiently waits for the mountain chieftain she loves. Yet, because of the affection and bond she shares with him, her eyes overflow with tears on their own.

Although the heroine tries to remain emotionally strong, her tears reveal the true depth of her longing and suffering. Kapilar thus presents a profound psychological understanding of human emotion, where the body itself expresses what the mind attempts to conceal.

In another poem from Kuruntokai, the heroine tells her friend that the hero has been separated from her. However, she says that she looked upon the rich mountain land belonging to the hero. In that mountain region, peacocks cry aloud, and monkeys tremble along with their young in the cold mountain climate. After seeing that mountainous landscape, the heroine asks her friend to observe whether her forehead has regained its golden radiance.

Through this poem, Kapilar gives special importance to the psychological approach expressed by the heroine in conversation with her friend. The sight of the hero’s land itself brings emotional comfort and inner transformation to her mind.

Another poem describing the hero delaying marriage states:

“...O friend,
he is harder even than stone!
Yet my heart, not understanding this,
continues to suffer for him.”
— Kuruntokai 187

*“Yām em kāmam thāṅgavum thāmtham
Kozhuthagai maiyin azhudhane thōzhi!”*

Kapilar thus reveals the heroine’s deep emotional attachment and unwavering faith through delicate psychological expression.

The Heroine’s Sorrow Over the Hero Visiting at Night

In Kuruntokai, the hero is deeply interested in enjoying secret love (kalavu) with the heroine. Therefore, he comes to meet her during the night. The heroine, however, worries that such nighttime visits may bring danger and suffering.

In this poem, the heroine tells her friend that even the cry of the owl from the hills or the sound of a male monkey leaping from one tree to another in search of jackfruit in the courtyard frightens her heart. She further says that whenever the hero travels through the dark and dangerous paths to meet her, her own heart goes along with him in fear and anxiety.

Kapilar thus portrays the heroine’s psychological conflict and emotional union with the hero through subtle poetic expression.

The poem states:

“...Now my heart itself
travels along the long mountain paths
whenever he comes
through the deep darkness of night.”
— Kuruntokai 153

The Heroine Saying that Her Shoulders Have Grown Weak Because of the Hero’s Failure

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the hero assures the heroine that he will never leave her. Even if separation becomes necessary, he promises that he will return soon. However, he fails to come back within the time he had indicated.

Because of this delay, the heroine suffers emotionally, and her shoulders become thin and pale due to sorrow and longing. The sign or indication given by the mountain hero regarding his return has also failed. When the friend later tells the heroine that the hero has finally returned, the heroine responds with doubt, asking whether what she says is truly real.

The poem states:

“...Because the sign he gave
failed to come true,
my broad and tender shoulders
have themselves grown pale.”
— Kuruntokai 121

The fading of her shoulders symbolizes the visible effect of inner sorrow upon the body. Kapilar thus presents a refined psychological insight into how emotional pain, longing, and anxiety influence both the mind and physical appearance.

The Heroine Expressing Her Mental Strength

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the friend tells the heroine that because the hero, who loved her deeply, failed to return at the promised time, she has become affected by pallor and suffering (pasalai disease).

However, the heroine replies that even though this illness of love torments her,

the firmness of her mind has not weakened in the slightest. She explains that her inner strength itself arises from the affection and bond the hero has shared with her.

The poem states:

“...The friendship he formed with me,
though it has caused suffering,
will never allow my heart
to lose its strength.”

— Kuruntokai 264

Although the heroine undergoes physical and emotional pain, her mind remains firm because of her trust in the hero's affection.

The Heroine Describing the Pallor Spread in Her Eyes

In another poem, the hero departs in search of wealth. Before his separation, the heroine's eyes were compared to blooming kувалаi flowers. But after his departure, her eyes lose their brightness and become pale due to sorrow and longing.

Kapilar explains this psychological condition through the heroine's speech. The poem states:

“...O friend,
sorrow has overtaken me;
my kувалаi-like eyes
have now become filled with pallor.”

Kapilar delicately illustrates that prolonged longing and emotional pain alter not only the inner mind but also outward appearance. The fading eyes symbolize the heroine's deep psychological sorrow caused by separation from the beloved.

The Heroine Speaking to the Friend While the Hero's Messenger Listens

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the friend tells the heroine that a message has arrived revealing the hero's faultless and sincere heart. She suggests that they should send a favourable reply through the messenger sent by the hero.

The heroine responds by saying that the messenger will surely convey to the hero the true and steadfast love they continue to cherish for him.

The poem states:

“...We too shall receive him
as fire receives clarified ghee poured upon it,
and send this message through the messenger.”

— Kuruntokai 106

The heroine's response reveals that although there may have been suffering and delay, her inner love remains unchanged. Kapilar thus delicately presents the emotional continuity and psychological depth of love through symbolic imagery and refined expression.

The Heroine Speaking During Marriage Arrangements by Strangers

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the secret love life (kalavu) between the hero and heroine remains unknown to the people of the village. Because of this, the villagers begin arranging marriage proposals with other suitors for the heroine.

Realizing this situation, the heroine says that the people of the town are narrow-minded and quick to gossip. She explains that the hero still possesses the same love and affection he showed her from the very beginning. He remains a man who stands as the very embodiment of

true friendship and loyalty.

Unable to bear the misunderstandings and words of the villagers, the heroine wishes to free herself from such social pressure. Therefore, she requests her friend to support her desire to marry the man she truly loves.

The poem states:

“...The lord of the great mountain slopes
remains even now the same in love as before.
Yet this troubled town,
thinking only of strangers,
speaks otherwise.”
— Kuruntokai 385

The heroine’s inner conflict arises between personal love and societal expectations. Kapilar delicately portrays her psychological state, where trust in the hero remains firm despite external pressure and uncertainty.

The Heroine Explaining Why Her Mind Is Distressed with the Hero

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the heroine tells her friend that she is not truly incompatible with the hero. On the contrary, she says that she will always remain united with him in heart and affection.

However, she explains the reason for her present emotional distress through a symbolic natural image. In the hero’s mountain land, an elephant that had fought fiercely with a tiger became filled with rage and trampled the base of a vengai tree, causing it to bend downward. Because the tree had fallen low, the Kuravar women could pluck its flowers easily from the ground and wear them in their hair without climbing the tree.

The heroine says that she feels hurt only because of the actions of such a mountain chieftain. In this poem, the vengai tree symbolically represents the heroine herself, while the elephant stands for the hero.

The poem states:

“I am not one apart from him;
I am one with him.
Yet, like the vengai tree
bent low by the battling elephant
in the mountain land,
whose flowers the Kuravar women gather
while standing below,
so have I become, O friend.”
— Kuruntokai 208

The heroine clarifies that neither she nor the hero is truly at fault. Just as the elephant carelessly bends the vengai tree in its emotional fury, the hero, overwhelmed by love and passion, has caused her emotional weakening and sorrow without intending harm.

Thus, the heroine says that her mind feels disturbed toward the hero only because of this single reason. Kapilar delicately portrays the psychological complexity of love, where deep affection itself becomes the cause of emotional pain and inner conflict.

Psychological Approach Reflected in the Friend’s Speeches

In Kuruntokai, the role of the friend (thozhi) is immeasurable in preserving and guiding the inner moral code (Akam tradition) of the hero and heroine. The friend acts as a close

companion throughout the entire course of their love relationship — from the beginning of secret love (kalavu) until its fulfillment in married life (karpu).

She is portrayed as one who is completely trustworthy to the heroine. The friend serves as a bridge that strengthens the love life of the hero and heroine through affection, understanding, and wisdom.

Whenever difficulties arise in the heroine's love life, the friend resolves them through a psychological approach. She handles emotional situations with great subtlety and intelligence. Her role is to ensure that no obstacles disturb the relationship between the lovers.

Kapilar delicately presents this psychological skill of the friend through seven poems spoken in the voice of the thozhi.

Psychological Importance of the Friend

The friend's character reveals:

- [1]. emotional intelligence,
- [2]. mediation and conflict resolution,
- [3]. empathy toward both lovers,
- [4]. social awareness,
- [5]. and psychological guidance during emotional crises.

She understands the feelings of both the hero and heroine and acts carefully to maintain harmony, secrecy, and emotional balance. Thus, in Sangam poetry, the friend is not merely a supporting character but a psychologically mature figure who sustains the emotional structure of love and relationships.

The Friend Speaking to the Hero During the Night Meeting

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the friend addresses the hero who has come secretly at night to meet the heroine. She describes the dangerous natural conditions surrounding his journey.

She says that because of the heavy rain, the sky itself cannot be seen. Floodwaters flowing everywhere hide the earth from sight. Darkness has spread intensely because the light of the sun has disappeared. In such a violent natural setting, she wonders how the hero managed to arrive safely.

The friend further says that all the people in the village are asleep in deep night, and asks how he was able to find their small village filled with the fragrance of vengai flowers. Seeing him come through such hardship causes her heart pain and concern.

The poem states:

“The rain clouds hide the sky from sight;
the overflowing waters hide the earth.
Darkness has greatly spread everywhere.
In this midnight when all others sleep,
how did you come here,
O lord of the lofty mountains?
How did you find our little hamlet
fragrant with vengai flowers?
Seeing this, my heart grieves.”
— Kuruntokai 355

The Friend Subtly Refusing the Hero's Request for a Night Meeting

In another poem, the hero requests the friend to arrange a nighttime meeting with the heroine. The friend appears to agree outwardly, yet subtly refuses through psychological tact and wisdom.

The poem states:

“Even if opportunities for union disappear,
O lord of the land
where waterfalls echo endlessly
through mountain caverns after great rains,
will my affection for you
ever diminish?”

— Kuruntokai 42

Psychological Interpretation

Here, the friend tells the hero that although the heroine may not be able to meet him secretly at night and enjoy love with him, her affection for him will never lessen.

Through this psychological approach, the friend indirectly advises the hero to avoid dangerous secret meetings and instead marry the heroine openly so that the relationship may become socially accepted.

The poem reflects:

- emotional diplomacy,
- social awareness,
- concern for the heroine’s reputation,
- and mature psychological mediation.

Kapilar presents the friend as a wise emotional guide who carefully protects both the lovers’ feelings and their social future.

The Friend Speaking to the Hero Through the Heroine

In this poem from Kuruntokai, the friend speaks in such a way that the hero may overhear and understand the emotional suffering of the heroine.

She says that before the mountain chieftain united with the heroine, her shoulders were strong and beautiful. But now, her broad bamboo-like shoulders have grown thin and weak because of emotional suffering caused by separation. They have lost the beauty for which they were once admired.

The friend further explains that the heroine is now distressed, unable to sleep, and overwhelmed by sorrow. Tears continuously gather in her dark, beautiful eyes, causing them to lose their former radiance.

The poem states:

“Her dark eyes, worn by sorrow,
overflow with tears.
Her bamboo-like shoulders
have become thin and weak,
losing the beauty once praised as perfect...”
— Kuruntokai 357

emotional distress.

The friend indirectly communicates the heroine’s condition so that the hero may understand the depth of her suffering and respond responsibly.

The Friend Advising the Hero with Psychological Tact

In another poem, the friend addresses the hero, whose chest carries the fragrance of sandalwood from the forests of Mullur ruled by Malaiyaman Thirumudikkari. She tells him not to come secretly to meet them at their present place because the heroine's mother frequently visits there.

Instead, she says that they will be going to guard the millet fields, and it would be easier for him to meet them there.

The poem states:

“...O lord whose broad chest
carries the fragrance of sandalwood
from the forests of the mountain land,
do not come here;
our mother often visits this place.
Come instead to where we guard the millet fields.”

Kapilar portrays the friend as emotionally intelligent and tactful, guiding the lovers toward a socially accepted union while safeguarding their emotional well-being.

The Friend Urging the Hero to Marry the Heroine Soon

In Kuruntokai, the hero continues to spend time only in the pleasures of secret love (kalavu) without taking steps toward marriage. The friend addresses this situation with deep psychological insight and rich poetic simile.

The poem states:

“O lord of the mountain slopes
where jackfruit trees grow beside root-fenced lands,
act rightly and without delay!
Who truly knows what may happen?
Like a huge jackfruit hanging
from a slender branch upon the hillside,
her life is small,
but her love is immense.”
— Kuruntokai 18

The friend's speech becomes a compassionate psychological appeal urging the hero toward responsibility and commitment.

The Friend Reminding the Hero Not to Forget Their Loyalty

In another poem (Kuruntokai 225), the friend tells the hero not to forget the help and support they gave him during the period of secret love.

She warns him that forgetting them after gaining happiness would be like a king who forgets those who supported him during times of poverty once he attains prosperity and wealth.

Psychological Interpretation

The friend subtly reminds the hero of his moral and emotional responsibilities toward the heroine. Kapilar presents the psychological truth that love relationships are sustained not only by desire, but also by remembrance, gratitude, and commitment.

The Friend Advising the Hero During the Elopement

In Kuruntokai, the friend agrees to the heroine leaving with the hero in an

elopement (udanpokku). After consenting to this union, she speaks to the hero with a deep psychological awareness and sense of responsibility.

The friend says that when someone does a great favour, people of the world never forget it. Help rendered at the proper time is considered especially valuable, and people continue to honour those who supported them in times of need.

Likewise, the heroine has courageously chosen to leave everything behind and come with the hero, trusting him completely. Therefore, even if she may later be able to offer only small assistance in life, the hero should never reject or neglect her. Instead, he must cherish, protect, and care for her, because she has accepted him as the sole support and foundation of her life.

The poem concludes with the line:

“...O lord of the good mountain land!
Other than you, she has no one.”

— Kuruntokai 115

The friend acts not merely as a mediator but as a guardian of emotional and social balance.

Conclusion

Among the literary treasures of Sangam literature, Kuruntokai stands as an important source for understanding the life and emotional world of the ancient Tamils. In particular, the twenty-eight Kurinji poems composed by Kapilar have been examined through a psychological approach.

At the beginning of this study, the explanations of Western scholars regarding psychology were discussed along with the fundamental principles of psychological theory. The importance and relevance of psychological approaches in modern literary studies were also highlighted.

Kapilar’s poems in Kuruntokai continue to remain relevant to contemporary society because they portray timeless human emotions and relationships. The study explains the subtle psychological techniques found in the hero’s speeches, where Kapilar imaginatively enters the inner emotional state of the hero and expresses his feelings with great sensitivity.

Similarly, in the heroine’s speeches, the poet reveals the delicate inner emotions, emotional struggles, longing, patience, and mental strength of women. The friend (thozhi), who is considered the life-breath and essential support of Akam life, is also portrayed with remarkable psychological depth. Through the speeches of the friend, Kapilar expresses emotional intelligence, mediation, care, and social responsibility with exceptional poetic skill.

Therefore, the study titled “Kapilar’s Psychological Approach in Kuruntokai Poems” can be considered highly valuable for modern literary and psychological research, offering meaningful insights into human emotions, relationships, and the psychological richness of Sangam literature.

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