Useless Words: The Obsolescence of the *Nikaṇṭus* in the Tamil Literary Tradition

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Part One: Tamil Lexicography

Studies of the Tamil lexicographical works do not lack the kind of basic collation and descriptive account of the structure of premodern works similar in scope, if not in clarity, to the kind of overview of Sanskrit lexicography undertaken in Claus Vogel's superb, yet misleadingly titled *Indian Lexiography*.[1] Nevertheless, there is a lack of a detailed examination thus far of several of the authoritative *nikaṇṭu* (Skt: *nighaṇṭu*) works that emerged between approximately the 9th to the 16th centuries—works which then further spawned an efflorescence is such works in the 17–19th centuries in the Tamil country—let alone any detailed studies of many of these individual works.[2] Particularly influential and significant for the development of the *nikaṇṭu* tradition were the trio of works, the *Cēntaṉ Tivākaram* (9th century), the *Piṅkalanikaṇṭu* (ca. 12th to 13th century) and the *Cūṭāmaṇi-nikaṇṭu* (16th century), the one indebted to the next successively in terms of their historical chronology, as based on internal citational evidence.[3] The production of *nikaṇṭu*s remained an integral aspect of Tamil literary compositions well into the 19th century—Vaiyapuri Pillai, for instance, cites among such works the *Potikainikaṇṭu* of Cuvāminata Kavirāyar and the *Apitāṉattanicceyuḷnikaṇṭu* of Kōpāla-cāmi Nāyakar as 19th century works which follow the typology of these earlier *nikaṇṭu*s (which one might call the *Tivākaram* model), as well as those which consciously deviated from this model, such as the *Nāmatīpanikaṇṭu* of Cuppiramaṇiya Kavirāyar (the son of Cuvāminata Kavirāyar).[4] Yet already by the mid-19th century, the inclusion and memorization of the *nikaṇṭu*s in the elite world of those who composed

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and transmitted Tamil literature—the *pulavar*s and *vittuvāṉ*s—had become increasingly rare and was very shortly, by the latter half of the 19th century, to become entirely obsolete. By focusing on the *Cūṭāmaṇinikaṇṭu,* this working paper seeks to address the question of what engendered this obsolescence and what this, in turn, meant for how one was to conceive of "Tamil," the language and what constituted proper Tamil pedagogy and learning by the end of the 19th century.

Before turning to the *Cūṭāmaṇinikaṇṭu* (henceforth, *CN)* it might be best to clarify what genre of work we are dealing with when we speak of the Tamil *nikaṇṭu*s, since a comparison with the Sanskrit genre of this name is bound to generate confusion. The Sanskrit genre, as Vogel explains, refers to "word-lists (*nighaṇṭu*), giving rare, unexplained, vague or otherwise difficult words culled from sacred writings."[5] These were Vedic word-lists, to be sharply distinguished from the classical dictionaries which emerged much later and came to be called *kośa*/*koṣa*s. Apart from the fact that the categories of words which would be included in the Vedic *nighaṇṭu*s were much wider than the *classical kośa/koṣa*s, the two were composed for very different purposes: the former "served as teaching aids in the interpretation of scripture, while the Koṣas were primarily to help poets in composition, being an integral part of their education."[6] Once we recognize this distinction it also becomes clear to us immediately that the works I previously referenced are, in fact, not *nighaṇṭu*s, though they are called so; rather, they are actually *kośa*/*koṣa*s. And, indeed, Vogel confirms this peculiarly South Indian usage by stating in a footnote that, "A synonym of *kośa* current in South India to present day is *nighaṇṭu* (also spelt *nighaṇṭa, nighaṇṭi, nirghaṇṭa,* or *nirghaṇṭu*), probably a Middle Indian derivation from **nirgrantha* "decomposition"."[7] Thus, with reference to the *CN* we are speaking of a dictionary with a long genealogy in the Tamil literary tradition which is also deeply indebted to the conceptual apparatus of the Sanskrit *koṣa*/*kośa*s. This goes back to the *Tivākaram,* itself very clearly indebted for its framework and vocabulary both to a Tamil genealogy beginning with the section on words (*colati-kāram*, *uriyiyal*) of the *Tolkāppiyam*, as to a Sanskrit genealogy beginning with the early *kośa*s (which saw their apotheosis in the *Amarakośa*), which might well have preceded the *Tivākaram* by a few centuries. [8] Understanding the classificatory principles of the *Amarakośa,* followed by that of the *Tivākaram*, thus, becomes mandatory for us to understand the structure and framework of the *Cūṭāmaṇi*.

The Amarakośa *and* Tivākaram

The *Amarakośa*, composed in poetic metres and consisting of 1500 verses, consists of three large sections, or *kāṇḍa*s, each with several chapters, or *varga*s, within them. The three *kāṇḍa*s are *Svargādikāṇḍa*, *Bhūmyādikāṇḍa* and *Sāmānyakāṇḍa*. Varying editions of the text differ on the number of chapters in the first *kāṇḍa*, but tend to be consistent with regarding the next two.[9]

The following topics are dealt with sequentially in the first *kāṇḍa*: heaven (*svarga*), sky (*vyoman*), the quarters (*diś*), time (*kāla*), thought (*dhī*), sound, etc. (*śabdādi*), dance (*nāṭya*), the nether world and the serpents (*pātālabhogin*), hell (*naraka*), and water (*vāri)*. The second *kāṇḍa* consists of word lists on: earth (*pṛthvī/bhūmi*), towns (*pura*), mountains (*śaila*), forests and herbs (*vanauṣadhi)*, animals (*siṃhādi)*, man (*manuṣya*), and the four varṇas (*brahman*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*). The third and final *kāṇḍa* consists of five chapters on adjectives (*viśeṣanighna*), miscellaneous words (*saṃkīrṇa*), homonyms (*nanartha*), and indeclinables (*avyaya*) and closes with a section on gender (*liṅgādisaṃgraha)*. As Vogel (p. 22) points out the *Amarakośa* is mainly a synonymic dictionary in which articles are grouped according to their classificatory affinities even while the overall unfolding of the dictionary is patterned on a cosmogonic unfolding from the heavens and the gods to the earth and its beings, not unlike the unfolding of such categories in *Sāṃkhya*.

When we turn to the *Tivākaram*—whose twelve sections (called *tokuti*), and the classifications therein, become the basic model for the subsequent *nikaṇṭu*s (including the *CN*)—we find the following twelve-fold structure: a first ten chapters dealing with gods and heavenly bodies (*teyvam*), men (*mākkaḷ*), animals (*vilaṅku*), trees and plants (*maram*), place (*iṭam)*, things (*palporuḷ*), made products (*ceyaṟkai vaṭivam*), qualities (*paṇpu)*, actions (*ceyyal)*, and sound (*oli),* which collectively comprise a large synonymic section, a eleventh chapter dealing with polysemic words (*oru coṟ palporuṭ peyar*) and a twelfth chapter on group names (*palporuṭkūṭṭai oru peyar*). It is keeping this basic categorization in mind that I now turn to the *CN*.

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The Wordlists of the *CN*

The 'Special Introduction' (*ciṟappuppāyiram*) of the *CN* speaks of the authors both of the *Tivākaram* and the *Piṅkaḷa Nikaṇṭu,* stating that they composed works in the *nūrppā* metre.[10] It continues that, "thinking here, that both of these [works] are not easy to learn,"[11] the author Maṇṭalavaṉ, paying respects to his own teacher Kuṇapattiraṉ (< *Guṇabhadra*), composes this text in the (*āciriya*) *viruttam* metre.[12] Verse 7 lists the topics of the text, which are identical with the list given for the *Tivākaram* above.

The first *Aggregation of the Names of the Deities* (*teyvappeyartokuti*) lists approximately 133 categories, beginning with 33 deities arranged in order from the main Gods to ghosts (*pēy*). The list of main Gods begins, appropriately enough, with the Jina (*arukaṉ*) followed by Śiva (*civaṉ*), Baladeva (*palatēvaṉ*), Viṣṇu (*ari*), Brahma (*piramaṉ*), Buddha (*puttaṉ*), et cetera, down to the Goddesses, where Umā and Durgā and Kālī are listed separately. Fascinatingly, this list includes the woman who invites the wrath of the Goddess upon enemies (*kāḷiyēvalceyyummakaḷ).* This first grouping is followed by a listing of the elements, beginning with the sky, wind, fire, and water (but not the earth); then the sun and the moon, the twelve zodiacal signs, the 27 constellations (*nakṣatra*s) and the stars are enumerated. The next section includes a detailed listing of time, time-units, the names of times of the day, the divisions of the month, and end with a brief reference to the units of cosmic time, such as the time of Brahma. The final section gives us the names of rain, ranging from torrents to drizzles, and concluding, in a note of cheer, with the name of the rainbow—the *vāṉavil* which is also called the *intirataṉu* (< *Indra-dhanuṣ*).

The second *Aggregation of the Names of Peoples (makkaṭtpeyartokuti*), begins with sages (*muṉivar*), and lists twelve categories of religious figures before moving on to those engaged in activities like teaching (*paṇṭitar*), artists (*kalañar*), the kings of the Tamil territories, the four *varṇa*s and the professions associated with them, those who are citizens and non-citizens of a territory, appellations according to what one is or has done (a deaf person, a killer, one who torments others, etc.), the different names for women depending on their stage in life, the names of people according to the Tamil landscape they inhabit, kinship names; it concludes, after 106 verses, with the parts of the body.

The third *Aggregation of the Names of Animals* (*vilaṅkiṉpeyarttokuti*) begins, appropriately enough, with that king of beasts, the lion, and then,

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after listing elephants, tigers, horses, cows, the water buffalo, goats, pigs, deer, fox, donkeys, dogs, and cats, lists the common animals to roam the Tamil countryside, certain polysemic words which might refer to more than one type of animal (e.g., the word *mā* referring both to elephant and pig), and rare or literary words for animals, collective names for groups of an animal, names of their food, names of snakes, of different kinds of birds, of insects, of features, of eggs; it concludes with the names of fishes, after 78 verses.

The fourth *Aggregation of the Names of Trees* (*Marappeyarttokuti*), begins with the names of the vine that grows on the camphor tree (*kaṟpakattaru-viṟpaṭarkoṭi*), followed by a list of trees, flowering shrubs and vines, to the names of spices, cereals, vegetables, flowers including bunches of flowers, forests, and concludes after 68 verses with the names of some medicinal plants.

The fifth *Aggregation of the Names of Places* (*iṭappeyarttokuti)* shows us that this is not only about places of human habitation but about the habitation of the cosmos, beginning with the names of the worlds of gods, snakes, hell, the different directions, the earth (excluded in the first chapter but brought in here), and the places of the earth such as mountains, the seas, rivers, ponds and wells, waves, the names for mud, the names for cultivated land, names of the various landscapes, of towns and villages, of houses and mansions, of temple towers, the stalls of animals, the names of the streets through which only those of a certain caste may pass, the palaces of kings, the names of a bedchamber and the places of war and the names of ways, in 68 verses.

The sixth chapter, an *Aggregation of the Names of Many Things* (*palporuṭ-peyartokuti*), consisting of a mere 35 verses begins with gold and other metals, precious gems, auspicious perfumes and unguents, and vermilion, cow dung and dust, the names for cooked food, various cooked dishes, ingredients for cooking, the names for milk, for alcoholic beverages, and the names of the line in which one is seated for eating.

The seventh chapter, an *Aggregation of Names for Made Products* (*ceyaṟkaivaṭivappeyarttokuti*) lists bows, arrows, spears and other weapons, planks, the rig for animals, the names of the jewels worn in different parts of the body, the names of the pieces of attire worn on the body, of boxes, of the water pot, drums and musical instruments, chariots, beds and swings, ladders and mats, thread, ropes, equipment for play such as

balls, garments, the flag tied in the street (*vītiyiṟkaṭṭiyakoṭi*), and concludes, after 76 verses, with the word for tightening a garment.

The eighth chapter, an *Aggregation about the Names of Qualities* (*paṇpu-paṟṟiyapeyarttokuti*) ranges from qualities like breadth, width, curvature, et cetera, to the different words for colors, to words which have a long genealogy in Tamil literature like those referring to beauty or intelligence, to those which refer to specific emotions such as a gladden-ing of the heart (*uḷḷakkaḷippu*), or more generic emotions such as fear and confusion or anger, of physical experiences such as feeling hot or cold, ending after 82 verses with the disease of desire (*kāmanōy*).

The ninth chapter, on the *Aggregation of the Names of Action* (*ceyalp-paṟṟiyappeyarttokuti)* understands "action" in the widest possible sense, not just to cover "work," in the sense of an activity that one might do for a living, but all that one does as a human when one is in motion. These "actions" range, therefore, from professions to rites de passage, to festivals, to the names for the play of girls, to the names for eating, to charitable giving, writing, to making love, to embracing and to dying, with all that which happens between living and dying such as poking, yawning, throwing, waving, burying, jumping, warring, dancing, to pushing someone or throwing something away.

The tenth chapter, on the *Aggregation of the Names about Sound* (*olipparṟiyapeyarttokuti*) begins with laughter and other human activities—including gargling, breathing deeply, or sighing—which generate sound, different kind of speech acts including reciting proverbs, taking a vow, telling a story, questioning and answering, reviling, reviling together with someone else, and words which are exclamatory, interrogative or expressive of pity or horror. The understanding of religious and non-religious literature as about sound and orality means this section also includes wordlists of the Vedas as sound, the different categories of the Vedas, the sections and subsections of poetry and poetic units as well as of the sound of musical instruments such as the lute (*yāḻ*) and the flute, concluding, after 52 verses, with the listing of different pure sounds.

The last two sections of the *CN* fall into a separate category of consideration and deal with single words in Chapter 11 and group words in the final twelfth chapter. The verses in both these chapters are composed on the basis of assonaces (*etukai)* and deal with polysemic words—or, in the Tamil categorization, "one word with many meanings" (*orucoṟpalporuḷ*), where the listing of the words is on the basis of the Tamil alphabetization

of ka, ṅa, ca, ñ, ṭa, ṇa, et cetera. A sample verse with the words separated and the polysemic word in **bold**, the very first one of Chapter 11, should give us a clear sense of how the words are listed:

> **Kakaravetukai**:
> **pakavanēy** īcaṉ māyōṉ paṅkayaṉ ciṉaṉē puttaṉ
> **pakalē** nāḷ orumukūrttam pakalavaṉ naṭuvē tēcu
> **makaramē** cuṟā pūntātām **vaci** kūrmai vaciyam vāḷẹ
> **akam** maṉam maṉaiyē pāvam akaliṭam uḷḷumē.

Next, I give a number of word-lists from among the first ten chapters of the *CN*, described above, to illustrate the diversity of what the text deals with.

From Chapter One:

> **Śiva** (with Sanskrit words in red):
> Caṅkaraṉ, Iraiyōṉ, Cambu, Catācivaṉ, Pēyoṭāṭi, Aravaṇintamūrtti, Purāntakaṉ, Pūtanātaṉ, Kaṅkaivēṇiyaṉ, Kaṅkāḷaṉ,[13] Kaṭukkaiyaṅkaṇṇicūṭi[14], Maṅkaiyōrpākaṉ, Muṉṉōṉ, Makēccuvaraṉ, Vāmatēvaṉ, Nīlakaṇṭaṉ, Mātēvaṉ, Nirmalaṉ, Kuṉṟavilli,[15] Cūlapāṇiyaṉ, Īcāṉaṉ, Pacupati, Cuṭalaiyāṭi,[16] Kālakālaṉ, Kapāli, Uruttiraṉ, Kailaiyāḷi, Ālamarkkaṭavuḷ, Nittaṉ, Aimmukaṉ, Paracupāṇi, Antivaṇṇaṉ, Mukkaṇṇaṉ, Aḻalāṭi, Pāṇṭaraṅkaṉ,[17] Cantiracēkaraṉ, Āṉantaṉ, Anantaṉ, Āti, Tantiyurikkōṉ,[18] Nampaṉ, Tarpuraṉ, Nīraṇintōṉ, Nanti, Īccuvaraṉ, Ēṟūṉtōṉ, Nakkaṉ, Ñāṉamūrtti, Varaṉ, Maṟaimutali, Īcaṉ, Māṇiṭamēnti, Cōti, Piramaṉ, Māṟkariyoṉ, Tāṇu, Piñcakaṉ, Pinākapāṇi,Paramaṉ, Eṇṭōḷaṉ, Parkkaṉ, Pavaṉ, Yōki, Pakavāṉ, Ēkaṉ, Araṉ, Umāpati.[19]
>
> **Fire** (29 names of which 13 are directly from the Sanskrit):
> Ari, Vacu, Takaṉaṉ, Aṅki, Aṉal, Ayavākaṉaṉ, Tī, Eri, Ciki, Āral, Kāṟṟiṉcakāyaṉ, Kaṟuneri, Kaṉali, Aṅkārakaṉ, Cittirapāṉu, Taḻal, Utācaṉaṉ, Taṉañcayaṉ, Cātavētā, Muḷari, Teṉkīḻtticaiyiṟai, Cērntārkkolli, Eḻunā, Vaṉṉi, Pāvakaṉ, Tēyu, Aḻal, Cuṭar, Ñekiḻi.

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From Chapter Two:

Girl:
Arivai, Aṅgaṉai, Maṭantai, Āṭavaḷ, Āṭṭi, Māyōḷ, Curikuḻal, Makaṭu, Kāntai, Cuntari, Vaṉitai, Mātu, Terivai, Māṉiṉi, Nallāḷ, Ciṟumi, Taiyal, Nāri, Piriyai, Kārikai, Aṇaṅku, Piṇā, Peṇṭu, Pētai.[20]

Body (22 Words of which 12 are of Sanskrit origin):
Uṭal, Uṟuppu, Aṅgam, Yākkai, Uyirnilai, Tēkam, Kāyam, Caṭalam, Mūrrtam, Mey, Tāvaram, Taṉu, Ātāram, Kaṭam, Putai, Puṇarppu, Cāttiram, Pūṭci, Ākam, Pūtikam, Carīram, Puṟkalam.

From Chapter Four:

Pepper,
Kaṟi, Marīcam, Kāyam, Kaliṉai, Kōḷakam, Tiraṅkal, Miriyal.[21]

Bunch of Flowers (5 words of which 1 is of Sanskrit Origin)[22]:
Tottu, Mañcari, Tuṇar, Iṇar, Kulai.

From Chapter Five:

Mud,
Aḷḷal, Cētakam, Tōṇi, Aḷaru, Aḷakkar, Toyyil, Koḷḷam, Cetumpu, Paṅkam, Kuḻai, Kuḻampu, Kālāḻ, Acaṟu, Ceyyal.[23]

Where humans sleep:
Caṭṭakam, Pāyal, Paḷḷi, Cayaṉam, Uṟaiyuḷ, Pāḻi, Kaṭci, Amaḷi, Cēkkai, Kaṇpaṭai.

Where animals sleep:
Paṭṭam, Pōttu, Cēkkai, Paṇṇai.[24]

From Chapter Six:

Cooked Food:
Aṭicil, Pōṉakam, Mūral, Amalai, Ayiṉi, Pommal, Maṭai, Micai, Uṇā, Puḻukkal, Valki, Pāḷitam, Aṉṉam, Patam, Mitavai, Pāttu, Tuṟṟu, Uṇṭi, Coṉṟi, Puṉkam, Caru, Acaṉam, Ūṇ, Kūḻ, Ōtaṉam, Pukā.[25]

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From Chapter 8:

Beauty:
Eḻil, Vaṇṇam, Yāṇar, Māmai, Irāmam, Ēr, Navvi, Nōkku, Ceḻumai, Cēṭu, Cevvi, Cittiram, Nalam, Mātar, Kuḻaku, Poṟpu, Naṉku, Kōlam, Maṇi, Vaṉappu, Viṭaṅkam, Māḻai, Pattiram, Tōṭṭi, Pāṅku, Cuntaram, Aṇaṅku, Mañcu, Cokku, Tēcikam, Am, Pōṉ, Cantam, Kārikai, Kaviṉ, Pū, Taḷimam, Vāmam, Kāmar, Antam, Mayam, Oṇmai.[26]

To Commiserate in Astonishment (*aticayamuṟaviraṅkal*):
Annō, Antō, Ā, Ō, Attō, Accō, Aiyō, Eṉṉē, Eṉṟu, Evaṉ.

Pearls and Corals and an Unstrung Necklace

These word list samples merely hint at the copiousness and the overflow, and the minutiae, which characterizes the *CN*. What does this word flow do and not do?

From one point of view, what we have here is Tamil and Sanskrit—the latter indicated in the above lists in red.[27] Yet the red is deceptive and must be immediately dissolved, for it is not intrinsic to the text. It must be avoided if it is seen as meant to heighten differences or propose a clear-cut linguistic division. Instead, what we see is a *flow*, a seamless movement from one word to another, where we do not have an explicit acknowledgement of two languages and, therefore, a clear-cut bilingual text. In certain contexts, we also see this seamlessness in the case of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *maṇipravāḷa* literature, such as in the glosses—called the "commentaries on rare words" (*Arumpatavurai*). A brief excursus into the possibly 14–15th century *maṇipravāḷa* work (and hence not more than a century prior to the *CN*)—the *Cīyar Arumpatavurai* to the *Īṭu Mupattāṟāyirappaṭi* commentary on the *Tiruvāymoḻi*—makes this bilinguality clear. Let us look at some examples from the gloss to *Tiruvāymoḻi*, 2.1.1:[28]

taṉṉattōraṇiyai – taṉṉakkuttāṉē advitīyamāṉa ābharamāṇavaṉai
payilappayila – abhyasikka abhyasikka
iṟaṅkuvatu – duḥkhappaṭuvatu
avadānam paṇṇikoṇṭu – pramādam iṉṟikkē
paṟiyuṇṭāy – apaharikappaṭṭāy
maṭappam – paṟṟiṟṟuviṭāmai
iṭaiyātē – caliyātē

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mānavyataiyum vaivarṇyamum – nōyum payalaimaiyum
maintaṉai – yuvaṉai
neñcam – antaḥkaraṇam.[29]

Here, there is also the fluidity between Tamil and Sanskrit, one in which sometimes a Tamil word is glossed with a Sanskrit word or vice versa, without any systematic structure in place to explain how or why this is done. Yet a closer look at the Śrīvaiṣṇava gloss also clarifies the difference between it and the *CN.* It shows us that in the *CN* Tamil, and the other language with which is it interwoven throughout, Sanskrit, are treated *not* as *maṇipravāḷam*; that is, if by *maṇipravāḷam* we understand a language that combines the 'pearl and coral' (the two languages in question) through syntax, which is present throughout the *Cīyar Arumpatavurai* and which, combined with the semantics of the word, generates overall meaning. This notion of a conjoining of Tamil and Sanskrit to create linguistic beauty is indeed the given meaning of *maṇipravāḷam,* whose usage for systematically creating a doctrinal system based both on Tamil and Sanskrit religious works was exploited to the fullest in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. A verse that illustrates this understanding of *maṇipravāḷam* sums up very clearly how it must be defined and its purpose:

> To praise the nature of this fine maṇipravāḷa language of pearl
> and coral combining the Southern and the Aryan language,
> O heart, resort to the feet of our Master, the Lord of Śrī,
> extolling the ancient Vedas of both languages.[30]

By contrast, in the case of the *CN* we cannot speak of a bilinguality but a single language—the language of the *Nikaṇṭu*. The language of the *CN*, if it is a *maṇipravāḷam* at all, is so with a crucial difference. It is one in which the beads are without the thread, like an unstrung necklace. And yet the beads are not higgly-piggly, not strewn about, left for us to pick up and make something of them. There is clearly some principle of coherence at work which shapes the word lists, and it is this which we must learn to decipher.

Here is where if the *CN* is seen, most plausibly, as a dictionary of synonyms, as a Thesaurus of sorts—and indeed the word *thesaurus* but means treasury or *kośa*—then the manner in which it is organized begins to make sense and come to light. As Hüllen has pointed out, the purpose

of a dictionary is to give a word followed by its many significations. The purpose of a thesaurus, by contrast, is the opposite: it presupposes the idea of something and then finds the word(s) that most fittingly expresses it.[31] When we examine the word lists of the *CN* we see this same principle at work. Let me illustrate this by elaborating on one string of words already given—those for cooked food:

> Aṭicil, Pōṉakam, Mūral, Amalai, Ayiṉi, Pommal, Maṭai, Micai, Uṇā, Puḻukkal, Valki, Pāḷitam, Aṉṉam, Patam, Mitavai, Pāttu, Tuṟṟu, Uṇṭi, Coṉṟi, Puṉkam, Caru, Acanam, Ūṇ, Kūḻ, Ōtaṉam, Pukā.

The broadest category is that of cooked food, in general, and unspecified: *Ayiṉi, Micai, Uṇā, Valki, Patam, Uṇṭi* (which might be the broadest category since it refers to the food of both humans and animals), *Acaṉam, Uṇ, Pukā*. More specifically, many of the words mean not just any edible thing that is cooked, but specifically boiled rice. Boiled rice is seen as synonymous with cooked food both in the extended meaning of *Micai* and *Valki* from above but, in addition, it is also the meaning of: *Aṭicil, Pōṉakam, Mūral, Pommal, Maṭai, Puḻukkal, Pāḷitam, Padam, Mitavai, Ōtaṉam* … or, in other words, the majority of the words in the list. Cooked food does not, therefore, mean cooked wheat, or barley, or millet but very specifically cooked rice. At the same time, there is a third category of meaning which refers to the consistency of the food—from solids such as cooked rice (those mentioned above) to thick porridge or thick gruel (*Mitavai, Kūḻ*), to a thin gruel (*Pāḷitam*). Food that is not just food but also an oblation to the Gods (*Caru*) is added to the list. Hence, what we have is a word list that paints a word picture of what the author of the *CN* saw as the normative idea of cooked food, suitable to the region that frames and is framed by the word list in an implicit coherence, a coherence which is for us to discern.

And, further, not just discern but *use*. For, the other intention of the thesaurus is one of utility—to ease the task of a person who engages with words as a poet or a writer, of a person whose profession is words. Vogel points out that the Sanskrit *kośa*s "were primarily meant to help poets in composition, being an integral part of their education."[32] This was also no less true of the *nikaṇṭu*s. What the *nikaṇṭu*s offered was an entire, rich and intricate *word-world*—one which presented an ordered cosmos, definitively a dharmaśāstric one yet one which had been adapted and extended also to that which is distinctly Tamil or vice versa—in its professions,

people, gods, flora and fauna, its animals, its kinship names, houses, and furniture right down to the exclamations of surprise—a world which once memorized and mastered could be accessed from the recesses of one's mind to weave one's own verses. Ultimate mastery was illustrated by extempore compositions—because the poet who garnered admiration was quick witted, an *ācukavi*, who could conjure up a verse to suit each and every occasion where he was present and allowed to or expressly commanded to voice himself. Yet, this word-world—taken for granted until the middle of the 19th century—came to an end by the end of that tumultuous century. Why it did so becomes clear when we understand the colonial transition from what Sascha Ebeling has called "the economy of praise" to the prevalence of print and research culture, not as impersonal processes but as ways of being and, as such, instantiated in the lives of those who lived through and were broken or transformed by these transitions and ruptures.[33]

Part Two: U. Vē. Cā, the Demise of the Pulavar, and the Movement from *Nikaṇṭu* to *Akarāti*

The extraordinary document which is the autobiography of U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar (U. Vē. Cā) may be read in many ways and mined for the different things it tells us about the historical transition between the years 1855 and 1942. It may be read as an idealized ethnographic document, acute in its details, about an ordered village life, and ways of living, in the colonial period. It may be read as a fine, mellifluous example of Tamil prose, worthy of being regarded as a classic of early 20th century Tamil non-fiction. It may be read as an account of the relationship between Brahmin and non-Brahmin and, hence, also as the relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil, prior to the hey-day and conflicts of Dravidian nationalism. It may be read as the Tamil equivalent of a Lexicon of Poets and Musicians, containing as it does vignettes of several of the most signifycant literary figures of his time. It may be read as the story of the Golden Age of the most illustrious Śaivite *maṭha* of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, the Tiruvāvaṭituṟai *ātīṉam*, its heads, its patronage of Tamil literature and religion and, above all, the story of the poetic jewel in its crown, its learned poet-in-residence, Makāvittuvāṉ Mīnāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. It may be read as a narrative in which a long string of single verses is threaded by

anecdotes—so plentiful are the single verses that U. Vē. Cā quotes in the narrative. And it is also very much a Tamil picaresque novel and coming-of-age story—of a boy who sets out on a journey spurred by his love of Tamil and reaches shores he had not anticipated to reach when he set out. And, in doing so, he encounters, learns, interiorizes, and ceases to exteriorize, the *nikaṇṭu*s.

When we follow the thread of the *nikaṇṭu* in *Eṉ Carittiram* we come upon the following two short anecdotes:

- In speaking of the texts he studied at a young age with his first, really inspirational Tamil teacher Caṭakōpaiyaṅkār, U. Vē. Cā tells us that this included not only extremely popular *pirapantam*s that crossed sectarian lines like the compositions of Piḷḷai Perumāḷ Aiyaṅkār (ca. late-16th–mid-17th century)[34] such as the *Tiruvēṅkaṭattantāti* and the *Tiruvēṅkaṭamālai* but also the entire twelve sections of the *Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu*.[35]

- The next, and final, explicit reference to the *nikaṇṭu*s in the autobiography is when the boy finally reaches his longed-for goal—to become a pupil of Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. In Chapter 27 his father brings him to Māyūram where the latter is currently residing, and entreats the great scholar to take on U. Vē. Cā as his pupil. Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai questions the boy about what he has studied and with whom. Then he begins to test him, firstly, by asking him to recite a verse from the *Naiṭatam*.[36] Once this is done, Piḷḷai has U. Vē. Cā sing one more verse, after which this anecdote follows:

  > "Have you memorized the *Nikaṇṭu*", he asked. As I said, "I have memorized all twelve sections", he had me recite, repeatedly, some of the verses and said, "Learning the *Nikaṇṭu* by heart is a good thing, indeed. The habit of memorizing it has vanished these days. No one listens if one tells them to."[37]

  It is after this that Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai accepts the boy as his pupil.

Even though direct references to the *Nikaṇṭu* vanishes from the autobiography after this, the mastery of words that its ingestion implies—along with innumerable grammatical works (the *Naṉṉūl* chief among

these), several more devotional *pirappantam*s as well as *talapurāṇam*s and, inevitably, the *Irāmāvatāram* of Kampaṉ—forms the background to the insistent and copious single verses which U. Vē. Cā composes throughout the book.

This work of versifying is also very clearly, in the first half of the autobiography, a part of his persona as a public *pulavar,* who becomes the de facto poet-in-residence at the Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai *ātīṉam*, even when not being given this title, after the death of his beloved teacher. The entirety of Chapter 77, for instance, has verse citations that show how he composed verses to suit quotidian life, on the most mundane of occasions, to delight his companions at the *ātīṉam*. Here, the word-world of the *Nikaṇṭu* still serves a workman-like purpose for him, its usefulness evident in the daily business of his life.

This changes with dramatic speed once he moves from Tiruvāvaṭuṟai to become a Tamil teacher at the Kumbakonam Arts College. His interview there is a clear indication of the approaching change. A close look at crucial moments of the interview process and its implications highlight this change. U. Vē. Cā is being considered for the position at the behest and insistence of Tiyākarāca Ceṭṭiyār, the current incumbent who is retiring and wishes to be replaced by the former. Before he is to be interviewed by the Principal of the College, Tiyākarāca Ceṭṭiyār is determined to win over other colleagues to the cause and has them come to test U. Vē. Cā's Tamil prowess. He gathers together around a hundred Tamil books, places them before the gathered collegium and asks each of them to pick up any book and test U. Vē. Cā on it. The testing commences and proceeds to everybody's delight and satisfaction. At this point a new topic is introduced which is well worth quoting:

> "Then, Ceṭṭiyār saying, 'He is also in the habit of composing new verses of his own', asked me to recite some of my own compositions, which I did. Srinivāsa Aiyar, 'We need only pay attention to whether he has the vigour to teach lessons. We need not pay attention to whether he has the skill to compose poetry.'"[38]

Nevertheless, the collegium eventually goes on to decide to test U. Vē. Cā's poetic skills and has him compose a praise verse on Ceṭṭiyār, extempore, in a notoriously difficult meter, the *āṟucīr kaḻineṭilaṭi āciriyaviruttam*. This, he succeeds in doing brilliantly within five minutes and wins their

wholehearted support for his candidacy. After this, what we notice is that in the remainder of the book U. Vē. Cā's own poetic compositions are reserved for specific *private* moments: for epistolary correspond-dence with a literary friend (where both of them take delight in writing versified letters to each other as an expression of affection[39]); at the death of a patron, as when his lifelong supporter ,Cuppiramaṇiya Tēcikar, head of the Tiruvā-vaṭuturai *ātīṉam* dies[40]; or to thank a patron like Pāṇṭiturait Tēvar, who subsides his publishing activity or the composition of a devotional set of verses to Murukaṉ when he is feeling emotionally distressed.[41]

Thus, it becomes clear to us that the innocuous remark of Srīnivāsa Aiyar when he is selected to become a teacher becomes, in some sense, prophetic—what is the use of the word-world and the poetry after he has moved into the world of a teacher, who does not need to be a poet, or a research scholar, who does not need to be either? The professionalization of the category of the educator within the colonial context through the creation of new institutions such as the colleges and English-medium schools marks not just a decisive transition in his own financial prospects for the better (leading, as he himself acknowledged, to fame if not fortune); it also marks the transition of the composing and reciting of a high literary Tamil poetry from the public sphere to the world of private connoisseurship—where it becomes a shared language within an ever dwindling circle of friends and patrons, and ultimately, an anachronism even within his own lifetime. Ultimately, U. Vē. Cā's autobiography marks the transformation of the teacher/poet to a teacher/research scholar—and hence, also, the transformation of the linguistic tools that define each of these ways of being.

Thus, it is that the *Nikaṇṭu* and its word-world gives way to the *Akarāti*: the dictionary. The genealogy of the *Akarāti* is, of course, far older than that of the 19th century. Its use of the alphabetical style of listing words manifests itself first in the mid-18th century, already in late *Nikaṇṭu*s such as the *Potikai Nikaṇṭu* of Cuvāmināta Kavirāyar. As Vaiyapuri Pillai points out, there was already a movement from word-lists that were created for memorization to thinking about words for reference, and this movement finds its first landmark in Constanzo Beschi's *Catur Akarāti*, which does away decisively with the versification of the *Nikaṇṭu*s and follows the alphabetical form.[42] The other great innovation of Beschi is stated in his Introduction (*muṉṉuṟai)* to this work, ready in manuscript

form in 1744 and brought out in print in 1824. Beschi makes clear one of the main intentions of his dictionary, after having thoroughly studied the main *Nikaṇṭu*s and their commentaries in preparation for his own work:

> "Finally, since many words have been brought in [in the *Nikaṇṭus*] from the Northern language, I studied carefully these Northern works, corrected the inadvertent mistakes that had crept in, in accordance with their proper usage, and by removing, to the extent possible, several words from that treasure house (*karuvulaku*) of [Sanskrit] I have made an effort, through this, to make flourish the treasure house of Tamil."[43]

The re-working of the vocabulary of the *Nikaṇṭu*s in the *Catur Akarāti*, and the winnowing of Sanskrit, is but one of those linguistic moves in the long, rich, complex, and vexed history of the interaction of Tamil and Sanskrit.

There had always been two ways of looking at this relation from the perspective of Tamil: it could be seen as Tamil exercising its own transformative power, to expand and to enrich itself in order to incorporate other concepts, other texts, other worlds. This, indeed, is the kind of thinking that led to the creation of *maṇipravāḷam*. But there has always also been the other view, depending on who changes the language: that the volition and willingness of a language to expand is governed by institutional power and status relations, and that where these relations are seen to be uneven and even coercive the expansion of the language must be viewed with suspicion and resisted—that we might actually be looking at a forced expansion and transformation of a language based on its weakness vis-à-vis another language within dominant modes of discourse.[44] A rejection and ejection of Sanskrit from Tamil then becomes intertwined with the rejection of what is seen as dominant modes of discourse, of institutionalized caste and religious power structures.

The anonymous editors from the venerable Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society of the 1978 edition of the *Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu*, forlornly state in their *Introduction*,

> "Those who wished to attain literary expertise by studying works of grammar and literature had to first learn, without mistakes, the *nikaṇṭu* works. This definitive rule had existed among the old teachers. This rule had been in use till recent times. The old teachers' principle that one must teach liter-

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> ature only to those students who obtained practice in grammar after having studied the *nikaṇṭu* did not waver even a little. Once, in the Tamil country, after universities and schools spread in a new way, the old ways (*paḻaṅkāla muṟai)* was fundamentally broken."[45]

In the final analysis, as the arc of U. Vē. Cā.'s life shows, it is not just the old work and the old ways that changed but also old word-worlds. With the passing of the *nikaṇṭu* as part of an obsolete canon of learning, pedagogy, and erudition, some books and some words were also rendered useless—expendable, futile, valueless, and, ultimately, idle—within the Tamil literary tradition.

Notes

1 This work was published in the Jan Gonda edited series on the history of Indian literature and came out in 1979. It has since been reissued in the series *Indologica Marpurgensia* in 2015. We might say that the nearest equivalent to Vogel's work but aspiring also to be a broader theoretical analysis is Gregory James's *A History of Tamil Dictionaries* (2000), itself much indebted to the pioneering observations of Vaiyapuri Pillai in his editorial introduction to the first volume of the *Tamil Lexicon* of the University of Madras.

2 For a comprehensive overview of the contents of the three *nikaṇṭu*s, see Vaiyapuri Pillai 1982 as well as Mātaiyan 2005.

3 Thus, the *ciṟappuppāyiram* of the *Cūṭāmaṇinikaṇṭu* explicitly refers to both the *Tivākaram* and the *Piṅkaḷanikaṇṭu* and how it has built upon them. For a detailed analysis of the *Tivākaram* as the model for all remaining *nikaṇṭu*s, see Aruṇācalam 2005:61–174.

4 Vaiyapuri Pillai 1982:xxix–xxx.

5 Vogel 2015:11.

6 Vogel 2015:12.

7 Vogel 2015:11n1. Aruṇācalam (2005:64–65) suggests that, to the best of his knowledge, the texts themselves self-referentially called themselves works about adjectives and adverbs (*uriccol*) rather than *nikaṇṭu*s, a word that first comes into vogue only with the *Cūṭāmaṇi* which refers to itself as thus.

8 On the speculative dating of the *Amarakośa* to the 6th century, see Vogel 2015:19–20. Zvelebil (1995:702) suggests the date of 9th century for the *Tivākaram* based possibly on the brief historical observations in Vaiyapuri Pillai (1982:xxvi) and the extensive treatment of the text in Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005:61–174). The close patterning of specific verses of the *Tivākaram* on that of the *Tolkāppiyam* is discussed in Aruṇācalam 2005:63. On the development of the *Tivākaram* from the *uriyiyal* section of the *Tolkāppiyam* also see Chevillard 2010.

9 On this, see Birwé 1972:384.

10 *CN* 1935:2, verse 3, lines 2–3:

> *cenkatir varattir̲ rōn̲r̲un* ***tivākarar*** *cir̲appin̲mikka*
> ***piṅkaḷar urai nūr̲r̲pāvir̲ pēṇin̲ar*** *ceytār cēra.*

11 *CN* 1935:2, verse 3, line 4: *iṅk ivai iraṇṭuṅ kar̲kav eḷitalav en̲r̲u cūl̲ntu*.

12 *CN* 1935:4, verse 8:

> *oruṅk uḷa poruḷum ōrntiṭṭ* ***uraittan̲an̲ viruttan tan̲n̲il***
> *iruntavai nallōr kur̲r̲am iyampiṭār en̲pat eṇṇit*
> *tiruntiya kamalavūrti tirupukal̲purāṇañ ceytōn̲*
> *parantacīrk* ***kuṇapattiran̲ rāl̲ paṇinta maṇṭalavan̲ rān̲ē***.

Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005:80–81), in his masterly analysis of the *Tivākaram*, points out that the author of the *CN* abandons the *nūr̲ppā* of his predecessors for the *āciriyappā* because it allowed for easier memorization. We see this particularly when it comes to the poetic assonances (*etukai)* in the final sections of the *CN.*

13 'Skull-wearer.'

14 'Wearer of the laburnum and Pārvatī.'

15 'Has the mountain for a bow.'

16 'The One who dances on the cremation grounds.'

17 'He whose dance destroyed the three cities.'

18 'The elephant-skin wearer.'

19 *CN* 1935, verses 15–18.

20 *CN* 1935:45.

21 *CN* 1935:89.

22 *CN* 1935:91.

23 *CN* 1935:105.

24 *CN* 1935:113.

25 *CN* 1935:121.

26 *CN* 1935:151.

27 The words taken in entirety from the Sanskrit unchanged, except for minor adaptations to Tamil phonetics, are given in red. The complex issue of what constitutes *tatsama* and *tadbhava* words in the context of Tamil have to also be seen in terms of how Sanskrit words, or *vaṭacol*, were perceived as a category within the Classical Tamil grammatical tradition, beginning with the *Tolkāppiyam*. For a brief overview of this issue, see Chevillard 2013.

28 Here, I give the Sanskrit phrases in the standard transliteration for Sanskrit.

29 Kiruṣṇamācāriyār 1925:3–11.

30 Cited in Raman 2007.

31 Hüllen 2004.

32 Vogel 2015:12.

33 Ebeling 2010.

34 For a brief synopsis of this Śrīvaiṣṇava poet see Zvelebil 1995:561.

35 Cāminātaiyar 1950:114.

36 Composed by Ativīrarāma Pāṇṭiyaṉ in the 16th century, and based on Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhacaritram*, the poem enjoyed immense popularity for the next two hundred years, as part of the repertoire of the *pulavar*.

37 Cāminātaiyar 1950:230. All translations are my own.

38 Cāminātaiyar 1950:678.

39 For example, Cāminātaiyar 1950:856.

40 For example, Cāminātaiyar 1950:864–66.

41 For example, Cāminātaiyar 1950:897.

42 Vaiyapuri Pillai 1982:xxxvi.

43 Beschi (1979:xvii):

> *iṟutiyāka, mikap pala vārttaikaḷ vaṭamoɨyiliruntu koṇṭuvarap-paṭṭuḷamaiyāl, vaṭamoɨnūlkaḷai nuṭpamāka āyntu, teṟceyalākap pukunta tavaṟukaḷai uṇmai oḻuṅkukku ēṟkat tiruttavum, atē (vaṭamoḻi) karuvulakattiliruntu iyaṉṟa aḷavu mikap pala coṟkaḷai eṭukkavum, ataṉāl intat tamiḻk karuvulattai vaḷamperac ceyyavum muyaṉṟuḷḷēṉ.*

44 On this see Asad 1993:189–91.

45 *Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu* 1978:1.

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