THE DATE OF TOLKĀPPIYAM—A RETROSPECT

B. G. L. SWAMY

I

8000 B.C.	"Terra Tamilica" (Purnalingam Pillai, 1927)
7000 — 8000 B.C.	Ceeni Venkatasami (1970)
5320 B.C.	Vellaivaranan (1962)
2000 B.C.	Pulavar Kulandaiyar (Naidu, 1962)
1200 B.C.	Subramanya Pillai (Naidu, 1962)
1000 B.C.	Varadarajan (Naidu, 1962)
700 B.C.	Ilakkuvanar (1963)
2nd half of the 1st millennium B.C.	Mahalingam (1967)
3rd century B.C.	Varadaraja Iyer (1948)
3rd or 4th century B.C.	Arokiaswami (1967)
Anterior to 350 B.C.	Srinivasa Ayyangar (1914)
300 B.C.	Rajamanikkam (1963)
Anterior to 2nd century B.C.	Sastri (1932)
200 B.C.	Raghava Iyengar (Naidu, 1962)
	Minakshisundaram (Naidu, 1962)
	Naidu (1962)
1st or 2nd century B.C.	Kanakasabhai (1904)
	Pillai (1969)
	Subramanian (1966)
Close to 300 A.D.	Sastri, K. A. N. (1955)
4th to 7th century A.D.	Sivaraja Pillai (1932)
500 A.D.	Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956)
650 A.D.	Ramana Sastri (Sesha Iyengar, 1933)
8th century A.D.	Burnell (1878)

These references, although not exhaustive, would serve the purpose of giving a fair idea concerning the period that has been proposed for the age of the Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam* or its author, Tolkāppiyar, by different authors of the 20th century (excepting the last reference). Several sources have been tapped to arrive at the conclusions: the time of appearance of the script for committing the spoken word in Tamil; the period of infiltration of Saṃskṛt into South India; the age of the Saṃskṛt grammarian Pāṇini, whose date itself, however, is yet uncertain; legendary or mythological episodes occurring in some of the commentaries of the second millennium A.D.; peculiarities of grammar and usage occurring in the text itself; references to social customs, manners and other information often squeezed out of the text, etc. A considerable number of authors have satisfied themselves by expressing their 'opinions' in quite a forcible manner without assigning reasons.

Recent years witness a growing tendency of abandoning the placement of Tolkāppiyar in the era after the birth of Christ and pushing him backwards in time as far as possible. This endeavour is surcharged with such a high degree of enthusiasm that it completely ignores a perspective concept of the literary history of the Tamil language and literature, and also of the conditions prevailing in lands adjacent to the then Tamilakam. The object of this paper is to analyse the consequences of fixing the date of Tolkāppiyar in remote centuries Before Christ in the light of other presumed periods of Tamil literary history that follow.

If the *Tolkāppiyam* was written in the seventh century B.C., as is vehementally argued for by a recent critic (Ilakkuvanar, 1963) what was its impact on Tamil language and literature until the beginning of the Christian era? This question attains much greater degree of validity if the date of the *Tolkāppiyam* is pushed further backwards to the sixth or the eighth millennium B.C. We know of no literary activity until the first century B.C. or A.D., a period which has been assumed to herald the onset of the Sankam age. Do we have to necessarily imagine that whatever literature that could have been produced during this interregnum is lost for ever?

From the first century B.C. or A.D. there has been a sudden explosion of literary productivity and the following two or three centuries are jammed with poetic creativity. It has to be again presumed that the *Tolkāppiyam* well served its purpose during this period as a guiding star for poets and writers. However, there do not appear to be valid reasons for such a presumption because, "we find therein (in the literature produced) many usages which are not sanctioned by the rules contained in the *Tolkāppiyam* and even those that are prohibited. We also find a large number of usages sanctioned by the *Tolkāppiyam* fallen out of use and some even viewed with disfavour. There are a few words which were current during the days of the *Tolkāppiyam* but subsequently fell out of use" (Mahalingam, 1967).

At the close of the third century A.D. or thereabouts this period, the Sankam period, ceased with the very same suddenness with which it boomed. Various causes have been attributed to this down-fall amongst which the most hackneyed one is the so-called *Kalabhra interregnum*, which lasted for the next three or four centuries. According to many authors, this period plunged the Tamil land — its kings and subjects, their tradition and culture, literature and arts, and their ideals and aspirations — all in complete darkness. In spite of the elegizing refrain that we are accustomed to hear about this interregnum, the period, after all, does not appear to be that, because the same bemoaning breath informs us of the contemporaneous birth of nearly a score of works of outstanding merit (Sadasiva Pandarattar, 1957).

Do we have once again to presume here that the *Tolkāppiyam* continued to be the beacon, although perhaps with a weakened intensity of its beam?

Nearly 300 years from the seventh to the ninth centuries constitute another saturation point of activity in Tamil literary history. This part of the gamut has been identified with the Hymnal production of the Śaivite Nāyanmārs and of the Vaiṣṇavite Āḻvārs. Did these authors ever care to listen to the dictates of the *Tolkāppiyam*? There is no convincing evidence for an answer in the affirmative in

spite of the labours of Vellaivaranan (1962). On the other hand, they appear to have evolved and followed their own ways in the use of the language, idiom and diction as demanded by their purpose and emotions.

The Hymnal literature continued in the 10th and the following centuries in a somewhat modified way. Whether the authors of the 10th to the 12th centuries were guided by the *Tolkāppiyam* alone or by other compendia on grammar cannot be determined with certainty. Because, during this period two other treatises of the kind were available to them: the *Viracōḻiyam* of Buddhamitra composed during the time of Vīrarājēndra (A.D. 1063-9) and the *Nannūl* of Pavanandi, a contemporary of Kulōttuṅga III (A.D. 1178–1216).

The 13th century is suddenly flooded with commentaries of the *Tolkāppiyam* by Iḷampūraṇār (end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries), by Deivāccilaiyār, of Pērāśiriyar, and of Śēnāvaraiyar.

If the above chronological sequence is accepted, an important series of consequential questions pose themselves: If the *Tolkāppiyam* had been in existence from remote centuries Before Christ and had been the live standard all through the temporal gamut - in spite of the lack of evidence to this effect – why is it that commentaries for the text began appearing only as late as in the 13th century A.D.? Could it be that the text was clear enough to be followed without difficulty all through the centuries until the 12th, thereby obviating the need for a commentary? Or, should we, as usual, curse that Deity of Disappearance for having swallowed away whatever commentaries that had been written in earlier times in addition to all literature that was anterior to the *Tolkāppiyam*? Even granting that the entire bulk of literary output between the seventh century B.C. and the first century A.D., and another major bulk produced between the third century to the sixth century A.D. has been lost for ever, on what ground can we maintain that the *Tolkāppiyam* alone survived all through the centuries?

II

In general, it is the existing conventions and usages that later become subjected to codification or systematization. Language and literature are no exceptions to this sequence. In other words, a grammar for a language cannot arise out of nothingness. Furthermore, the necessity for a grammar becomes obligate usually when a language, during its successive stages of growth, acquires either a notorious heterogeneity of usage or an unmanageable variety of communicative idiom or a cumbersome admixture of influences from neighbouring or extraneous sources; it is also likely that an opportunity for formulating laws is occasioned by a 'fear' of the loss of purity of a language. Revising the existing grammars, adding emendations and writing commentaries or glosses for their elucidation, are normal and necessary adjuncts of any proliferating language.

It is also worth remembering in this connection that ever since man was endowed with the faculty of speech, he has been using it not only for routine communicative purposes but also for expressing his reactions of emotive nature. These two aspects of the faculty appear to have had a dove-tailed relationship in the sense that they are often inseparable from one another. That his spoken idiom was frequently interspersed with expressions of literary flavour can still be seen in unadulterated folk-lore and folk-verse. The origin of script just gave him a fabulous tool to record his spoken diction. Thus, the lack of a mechanism of recording the speech was no bar for his creative expression.

The consensus of contemporary opinion recognizes Brāhmi as the basic source for the evolution of the scripts of all Indian languages. Although the diverse languages are likely to have stemmed from separate sources, all of them show the influence of Saṃskṛt during their growth. The edicts of Aśoka represent the oldest phase of the Brāhmi script. The scripts of the individual languages appear to show rather unmistakable evolution through the cave-script stage by acquiring certain specific features of their own. Of the Dravidian languages of the South India, the scripts of Telugu and Kannaḍa appear to have undergone a somewhat parallel course

of modification from the beginning and began diverging from each other only in the course of time. There is a much less degree of likeness between the scripts of Tamil and Kannaḍa. From the point of view of language, however, there is a greater degree of similarity between these two languages than between Telugu and Kannaḍa. The likeness of the former pair of languages is obviously the outcome of their having had mutually harmonious coexistence over a long period of time subsequent to the separation of Telugu from the pro-Dravidian plexus. Although the degree of resemblance between Telugu and Kannaḍa languages is rather feeble, both these came under the canopy of the Hoysaḷa and Vijayanagar rulers from the 11th century onwards and to a large extent this historical factor appears to have been responsible for the attainment of morphological similarity of the scripts.

During the growth of these languages, they all show unmistakable reaction to the impact of Saṃskṛt and also of Prākṛt, a fact which has not been recognized and appreciated to the extent it deserves. At a stage when the South Indian Dravidian dialects were beginning to be written, we come across the incipient impact of these two languages. But when they were employed for administrative and literary purposes, the impact of Saṃskṛt and Prākṛt exerts itself in a more pronounced degree.

The earliest epigraphic records in the Tamil language appear in the commencing years of the seventh century A.D.; these are written in Grantha and Tamil scripts; and regular *Vaṭṭeḻuttu* inscriptions make their *debut* from the eighth century (Subramaniam, 1957). The cave-inscriptions of the Tamil country however, date from the third century B.C. to the corresponding century A.D., and contain a good proportion of Prākṛt words (Mahalingam, 1967). The earliest inscriptions in the Telugu language belong to the sixth century A.D., during the early period of the Rēnāḍu dynasty. The lithic records of the two earlier centuries contain a mixture of the Telugu and Prākṛt languages (Venkatavadhani, 1960). Kannaḍa inscriptions make their appearance from the fifth century A.D. (Narasimhacharya, 1940), and even this stage, the language is interspersed with a large proportion of Saṃskṛt, and this state of

affairs appears to have continued during the following two centuries (Mugali, 1953).

The earliest available literary work in Kannada is *Kavirājamārga* written in the ninth century under the patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Nṛpatuṅga (Amōghavarṣa), A.D. 815–77, by a Jaina author by name Vijaya (Mugali, 1968). This book deals with grammar and clearly shows the deep impress of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*. Vijaya's statements indicate that there was a considerable body of literature anterior to him; he specificaliy mentions two series of authors, writers of prose and writers of poetry; he also refers to some grammatical treatises, now lost, for example, *Kavimārga* (Mugali, 1953). Some of these authors find mention in epigraphy as well (Narasimhacharya, 1940; Govinda Pai, 1960).

Nannayya's *Bhāratamu* happens to be the earliest available literary composition in the Telugu language. Many are agreed that the earliest grammar of this language, *Āndhraśabdacintāmaṇi*, is also a work of the same author. Both these compositions are dated in the 10th century A.D. In addition to the impact of Samskṛt that is seen from the content of this text itself, yet another grammatical treatise, the *Janāśrayacchandas*, probably of the time of Mādhava Varman II of the Viṣṇukuṇḍin dynasty, also exhibits the same trend with a greater degree of emphasis. "The inscriptions of this dynasty are in Samskrit with an admixture of Prākṛt and Telugu words" (Sastri, 1955).

The earlier part of the history of Malayāḷam language and literature is still veiled. The oldest extant literary work in *Rāmacaritam*, written by one Cirāman round about the 12th or 13th century A.D. This text is written in a 'mixed' language of Malayāḷam and Tamil (George, 1968). The earliest available grammar for this language is *Līlātilakam* written in the 14th century A.D. This treatise, as in the earliest grammatical works of Kannaḍa and Telugu, - but in a most direct and emphatic manner - shows the impact of Samskṛt, and offers an elaborate treatment of *Maṇipravāḷam*. Chatterji (1967) thinks that the beginnings of Malayāḷam as a language may be seen in the 11th-12th centuries A.D.; and it is about the 15th century that "Malayalam had flowered into a

literature of classical standard and quality" (George, 1958). However, a totality of evidence "leads to the conclusion that the Malayalam language had an independent status at least as early as the ninth century (A.D.)" (George, 1956).

The first inscription available in the Malayāḷam language is presumed to be what has been designated as the Trivandrum Museum Plates, doubtfully assigned to A.D. 1065. In view of this uncertainty, the chronologically next inscription with an authentic date is the Āṭṭūr plates (A.D. 1251), which is written in the Malayāḷam language employing *Grantha Vaṭṭeḻuttu* scripts. It is presumed that the latter script was in use in the Malayāḷam country from the eighth century A.D.

The factual data presented above warrants certain valid observations of a general nature:

(a) In all languages of the Dravidian group in South India the spoken word began to be committed to writing between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D.

(b) Although the southern variety of the Brāhmi script appears in this part of the country much earlier - from the Asokan period - there is evidence of its having been employed for writing the South Indian languages prior to the fifth century A.D.

(c) The practically full-fledged status of the languages in the epigraphic records of the fifth to the seventh centuries AD necessitates the reasonable assumption that the languages should have attained near-maturity and characteristics earlier than these centuries.

(d) Through deductive reasoning it should also be assumed that some quantum of literature should also have developed prior to the fifth century A.D. But there is no way of guessing the extent or nature of such productions in the absence of any evidence of their having been committed to writing.

What little of it that is available shows clear and deep impress of Samskṛt and Prākṛt vocabulary or words derived there from,

mixed with a low proportion of words or word-forms from the respective Dravidian dialect.

(e) A comparative study of the earliest available literature in Kannaḍa and Telugu reveals that both were stongly influenced by the Samskṛt language and grammars. So also is the case with Malayāḷam, although belonging to a much later period. In fact, the earliest grammar for the Telugu and Malayāḷam languages have been written in Saṃskṛt itself.

III

The consensus of opinion agrees that both Buddhistic and Jainistic faiths in South India begin to show themselves as early as the third century B.C. The Āryan diffusion in this region appears to have had a much earlier history, so much so it had already become somewhat established by the Mauryan period (Sastri, 1955). With this background one can form a fairly clear idea of the cultural and linguistic matrix that was pervading over the major portion of the peninsular India, south of the Vindhyas in the early centuries of the Christian era. Buddhism, Jainism and Āryanism existed side by side with whatever animistic or totemistic and other forms of cults that were of indigenous origin. Added to this, the coastal areas had acquired extensive trade-contacts from the Middle and Far Eastern countries and their peoples through sea-routes.

Saṃskṛt, Pāli and Prākṛt were in extensive use by the incomers for their respective religious purposes. Although the followers of these faiths maintained themselves in rather rigid isolation as far as their practices were concerned, the languages, however, built mutual inroads, modifying each other and possibly corrupting each other. The Buddhists and Jains, as prescribed by their canons, were required to learn the indigenous dialect or language of the land to which they were assigned to preach their religions. Accordingly they learnt the regional dialect and used it as a medium for conveying the tenets of their religions (see also Mahalingam, 1967, p. 157). They also took the next step in adopting the Brāhmi script by modifying or introducing such of the sound

symbols that were necessary to translate or transliterate the regional languages into written records.

The zeal with which the Buddhists and Jains endeavoured in preaching their religions was soon repaid with a responsive following from the public, not to speak that from the rulers and kings. The spread of these movements also gave a tremendous impetus for a faster tempo in the development of the regional languages. Threads of new thought and idiom become interwoven with the already existing cultural and traditional matrix. Languages attained expressive maturity, pulsating vigour and mollifying plasticity. A multipurpose tool thus became available for the creative and expressive minds of the day.

What kind of literary output could have been produced at a period when the dialects were mature but yet without a means of recording it in writing? Obviously such endeavours should have been narrowly circumscribed in linear expanse. They could have been to a large extent cryptic, pithy and epigrammatic sayings, rhythmic compositions of a few lines, proverbial utterances, straight narrative accounts of popular appeal composed in simple lilting short metrical forms of indigenous genius, etc; in other words, compositions that could easily or with slight effort stay in memory and thus become perpetuated through generations. This activity was not restricted to any one part of South India or to any one linguistic group; nor was it confined to any one religion, caste or community.

With the origin of script for recording thoughts on a permanent footing and with the growing awareness of Buddhistic, Jainistic and Āryan languages and cultural influences, newer literary forms and compositions of greater linear dimension came into vogue involving a wider variety of themes. Thus, literature acquired a new facet brimming with an amalgamated sheen of two distinct cultures, the northern and the southern.

During the earlier phases of this literary revitalization following the evolution of the script for the Dravidian languages, the pioneering efforts of the Jains (particularly in the Tamil and

Kannaḍa areas) stand out in bolder relief in several aspects than those of Buddhists and other Aryans. Although numerous Buddhistic antiquities have been unearthed from all over South India, the contribution of this sect to the growth of the Dravidian languages appears to be rather infrequent and comparatively not much. There have been some poets in the Tamil language who belonged to this following while in Kannaḍa, Telugu and Malayāḷam authentic examples of the kind are wholly wanting from all periods of their respective literary histories. The Jainas, on the other hand, appear to dominate in the earlier part of the literary growth of both Tamil and Kannaḍa. In fact, in Kannaḍa, the literary history commences with the Jaina period and the earliest productions both in prose and verse deal with Jaina Purāṇas written by Jaina authors.

The literary production of longer dimension, in all probability, belong to a period subsequent to the stabilization of the writing techniques and media for the languages of South India. In this connection it is natural to ask as to how the Vēdas and Vēdāṅgas (exegetical texts) — the longest compositions in Saṃskṛt — could have been composed at a time when there was no script and when long passages had to be transmitted on to generations only through a process of memorizing. In continuation of this question it may also be asked whether it is not likely that the presumedly ancient and lengthy compositions in the South Indian languages could have been composed during a period when there was no script and were handed down through oral repetitive method. That such doubts or arguments are futile in the case of the South Indian literature becomes obvious when it is realized that (i) a major portion of the Vēdas deal with the ritualistic aspects that were obligate on the part of the followers to live their day-to-day life and therefore there arose a necessity for them to memorize the relevant texts, and (ii) in order to facilitate disciplined memorization and accurate transmission special and exhaustive safeguards had been evolved by way of rigid rules for chanting. Neither of these factors are applicable to the literatures of the South Indian languages (see also Subramania Aiyer, 1959).

The Jainas of South India, in addition to their creative activities in the field of literature, also entered other areas, such as collecting and systematizing the then existing literary productions, analyzing the structure of languages and formulating the basic principles for usage and incorporating such information in grammar, writing dictionaries, etc. They were soon followed by persons belonging to other religious faiths as well, including the indigenous enlightened. The available evidence clearly indicates that in the wake of such a movement the authors made free use of their knowledge of Saṃskṛt and Prākṛt in varying measures; such trends are discernible even in works of the earlier periods whether the concerned author happened to be a Jain or otherwise. In other words, the primary factor that was operative appears to be one of linguistic, literary and cultural environment pervading at that period rather than the religious following to which the authors belonged. Such was the pervading climate throughout South India, practically till the 12th century A.D. As observed by a recent writer, "The socio-cultural evidence of the Tamil country from the time of its semi-urban origins, would show an inextricable interfusion of northern elements, and would not go to sustain any special individuality to the present inhabitants of Tamilnad. It is the indirect character of the diffusion of this heritage that tends to produce a local and seemingly autochthonous veneer to its matrix, which is due to its progenitors having been the contemporaries of northern groups, long ago in the latter's own zone, and their having developed, over the centuries, a degree of diversity in social traditions. The moorings, however, reveal many common linguistic and cultural traits and background between the north and the south" (Soundara Rajan, 1968; also see Sastri, 1973).

IV

Of the available commentaries on the *Tolkāppipam*, the one written by Iḷampūraṇan happens to be earliest (end of the 12th and commencement of the 13th centuries A.D). His style is simple, direct, to the point and unornamented; he has refrained himself from the art of legend-weaving. On the other hand, the subsequent commentators employ a somewhat ornate diction, often run

astray and reach beyond the border-line. Naccinārkiniyan (16th century A.D.) not only involves himself in a highly pedantic style but also crosses the limit of pertinency by offering imaginative mythological concoctions which were perhaps current in his period while commenting on the *pāyiram* part of the *Tolkāppiyam*. Here we learn that a Pāṇḍiyan king by name Mākīrti ruled for 24,000 years; that he was the ruler of 49 states lying to the south of River Kumari, which, however, sank under the sea; that the sage Vyāsa collected and systematized the four Vedas on a date posterior to the time of *Tolkāppiyam*; that Tolkāppiyan, the author of the *Tolkāppiyam*, was a student of Agastiyan with whom he fell out later due to some misunderstanding.

All this is not the sole creation of Naccinārkiniyan's imagination. The commentator of Iraiyanār's *Akapporuḷ* (whether he be identified with a Nakkīrar or with an anonymous person) has preceded Naccinārkiniyan in referring to the submergence of land masses promptly at the end of the first two Saṅkams; so also to the incredibly long regnal periods of some Pāṇḍiyan kings. Agastya's name in connection with a grammar has also been brought into the picture in the same commentary for the first time along with the *Tolkāppiyam* in *Panniru paṭalam* in about the same century. Parampāranan, the author of the introductory verses to the *Tolkāppiyam*, implies that the treatise was subjected to a critical assessment in a learned assembly gathered under the patronage of one Nilamtarutiruvin Pāṇḍiyan. Whether this assembly had anything to do with the classical Saṅkams or not is not clear. Nor has the identity or historicity of this king been established. The commentator on Iraiyanār's *Akapporul* avows that the standard consultative compendia for the authors of the second and third Sankams was the *Tolkāppiyam*. Thus for the first time a connection is sought to be established between the Sankams and the *Tolkāppiyam*. Pērāśiriyar, another commentator of the 13th century A.D., recalls this incident (Subramania Aiyar, 1959).

However, Naccinārkiniyan was successful in the bringing together whatever legends that were in currency during his time and perhaps added some flavouring of his own. He is also apparently the first

to mention that the *Tolkāppiyam* was composed before Vyāsa who arranged the Vedas into *Ṛg*, *Yajus*, *Sāma* and *Atharva*. In effect, the story caught up the imagination of scholars of the following centuries and in the 20th century it has formed an important edifice for arriving at the age of Tolkāppiyar, particularly in those attempts which place him in the era before the birth of Christ.

Vellaivaranan (1962) and the author of Terra Tamilica (cited in Purnalingam Pillai, 1927) believe in the historicity of the story of the Saṅkams narrated by the commentator on Iraiyanār's *Akapporul* and calculating the period based on the duration of the three Saṅkams and the number of kings who ruled during those periods, respectively arrive at the sixth and the ninth centuries B.C. as the date of the *Tolkāppiyam* (Ceeni Venkatasami, 1970). Srinivasa Aiyangar (1914) leans on another legend connected with Pāṇini. The latter grammarian mentions his 64 predecessors, one of whom was an Indra. Because the *Tolkāppiyam* is said to have been modelled after the *Indra* (*Aindiram*) school of grammarians and because Pāṇini's age is believed to be about 350 B.C., Srinivasa Aiyangar thinks that Tolkāppiyar must have lived anterior to B.C. 350. Rajamanikkam (1963) identifies the deluge mentioned in the commentary of Iraiyanār's *Akapporul* with the third deluge of the Ceylon chronicles and therefore pushes the date of the *Tolkāppiyam* to 306 B.C. Such arguments, based on imaginative myths and legends, lead only to equally spurious dates (Subramania Aiyar, 1970).

Other authors who place the treatise in centuries anterior to the Christian era (Sastri, 1937) consider the nature and extent of Samskṛt influence on the *Tolkāppiyam* and contend that its author should have made use of his knowledge derived therefrom in planning his treatise; thus Sastri assigns a period anterior to the second century B.C. Ilakkuvanar (1963) refutes all dates suggested by others and primarily because Tolkāppiyar does not mention anything about coinage, declares that he should be assigned to 700 B.C. Pillai (1969) accepts the pre-Christian era for the *Tolkāppiyam* on the ground that it does not mention later Hindu

pantheon, Kaṇṇan, Śiva and Baladeva; that it does not refer to any number beyond one-hundred-thousand; and that the poets of the third Saṅkam fail to follow certain specific instructions codified in the *Tolkāppiyam*; therefore he places the treatise in the first or second century B.C. Subramanian (1966) also expressed a similar opinion on considerations of style and contents of the text. Taken together, it has to be observed that these authors lean heavily on the 'internal' evidences which are extremely tenuous and flimsy. Mahalingam (1967) is quite aware of the difficulties of placing the *Tolkāppiyam* in pre-Christian period. Yet, "considering the scholastic orthodoxy and conservatism of the scholars", he assigns it "somewhere about the second half of the first millinium B.C., if not earlier."

In general, the approach of those who assign dates in the Christian era is of a more objective kind and takes into account the concerned factual information available from related sources. Burnell (1878), after all, does not deserve penalization for having suggested an eighth century date in *anno Domini*. Srinivasa Aiyangar (1914) dismisses Burnell's opinion on account of Burnell's assumptions, (1) that there was no Tamil literature before the origin of the *Vaṭṭeḻuttu* script which appeared in the eighth century A.D. and (2) that Tolkāppiyar professed Jainism or Buddhism. Burnell's statement as to the religious following of Tolkāppiyar may be open to doubts as there is no indication whatsoever in the text which would clinche the issue. Furthermore, the epithet, Tolkāppiyan or Tolkāppiyar, does not even indicate the personal name of the author, thereby any attempt to identify his religious faith is futile. However, this is not a point relevant in discussions pertaining to the age of the *Tolkāppiyam*. The other point raised by Srinivasa Aiyangar, pertaining to the existence of literature anterior to the origin of the script is, however, worthy of serious thought. As has been outlined in Section III above, there cannot be any doubt in regard to the occurrence of some kind and quantum of literature during the pre-script period. The bulk of that literary output could have been generally of a kind that would be short, simple and unsophisticated. Most of them were spontaneous, emotive, unlaboured

creations set to indigenous rhythm and idiom. Literary stages such as these are not exclusive to the Tamil language but are seen in all the languages and dialetcs of South India. The question is whether such literature needed a grammar for guidance. It is well to remember that the Tuḷu dialet has remained as such possibly from the early centuries A.D., if not earlier; the dialect of the Coorgies (koḍagu) may not be as old as Tuḷu, but yet is old enough. Although these dialects have all along been limited to the spoken sphere, folk-songs and folk-literature are not wanting. Yet they do not have old grammars. During the last century exploratory attempts were made by some Christian missionaries to 'obviate' this lacuna, but they are more of the type of analyses of the dialect rather than an effort towards codification and prescription for others to follow. Although the Tōḍas are now an extremely restricted community speaking a dialect of their own and the origin of which is controversial, many have heard the folk-songs and folk narratives in their dialect.

Vaiyapuri Pillai's main approach (1956) to the placement of the *Tolkāppiyam* in the fifth century A.D. concerns the frequent use of Saṃskṛt and Prākṛt vocabulary in the text. Ilakkuvanar (1963) has in vain attempted to discredit the views of the former author, not through adducing cogent evidences or through the application of the current principles of Linguistics, but by intensively assertive, wholly biassed and unscientific statements. The few examples given by Ilakkuvanar to 'prove' the indigenous nature of certain words, are neither logical nor plausible.

An over-all review of the contemporary situation clearly indicates that the tradition-centred authors and critics are invariably disturbed by the presence of Saṃskṛt/Prākṛt words and influences cropping up here and there throughout the treatise. And there has been a deliberate reluctance to admit the situation as a fact. On the other hand, circumbendibus explanations are offered to deny the fact or, those parts of the text that bear Saṃskṛtic impacts are summarily rejected on grounds that they are later interpolations (Ilakkuvanar, 1963). Ascribing pre-Pāṇinian or pre-Vyāsan or pre-Vedic dates for the *Tolkāppiyam*, thereby implying that the

text *in toto* is *purely* indigenous, is nothing but an example of desperate steps taken to deny any trace of Āryan influence.

What Burnell stated nearly a hundred years ago as a fact has remained so till today, propped up with unassailable support. There are no examples of writing in the Tamil language until the commencement of the Seventh century A.D.; and the *Vaṭṭeḻuttu* script appears a century later (Subramaniam, 1957; Sivaramamurthi, 1952). The same is the situation with reference to Teḻugu and Kannaḍa, although some examples of the latter appear from the fifth century onwards.

V

Even those scholars who have attempted to determine the age of the *Tolkāppiyam* on the basis of "internal" evidences appear to have overlooked the more significant points which are potent for historical analysis. One such refers to the institution of *naḍu kal*, the 'hero-stones'. Not merely the text mentions it casually, but gives the detailed stages (III. 60) of erecting one from start to finish, although some steps in the sequence of the process may possibly need rearrangement. It should be specially noted that the author clearly refers to the writing engraved on the stone which eulogizes the name and bravery of the involved person. It is likely that the custom of planting a slab or a pillar of stone hewn or unhewn over the graves is very old; this custom appears to have been world-wide in all primitive communities. And clearly the *Tolkāppiyam* does not refer to this habit. On the contrary, the specific reference to the legend inscribed on the slab is surely indicative of the 'hero-stones'. Now, the earliest 'hero-stones' that have been discovered belong to the 8th century. (The proposed earlier dates for the Saṅkam hero-stones by Nagaswamy (1972) are baffling and need re-study from a broader basis). There is no use in arguing that 'hero-stones' of earlier dates are yet to be discovered. Such a purely speculative possibility however, is always there in regard to every inquiry: but for a scientific approach what is available is of value as all our approaches are based on the *available* data. Under these circumstances, is it not glaringly clear that the *Tolkāppiyam* should

have been composed at a time when the institution of setting up the 'hero-stones' had become an established practice?

There is also a side light glittering in this connection. It is a known fact that the southernmost limit of distribution of the hero-stones lies across the present Coimbatore-Salem line cutting the peninsular India. In other words no 'hero-stones' have been discovered in farther south, which, has been the 'heart' of Tamiḻakam from remote times. These monuments are wholly absent in the typically Cōḻa, Cēra and Pāṇḍya confines, excepting in the border areas that were constantly changing hands with the ruling dynasties of the north, the Kadambas, the Gaṅgas and the Cālukyas. Wouldn't this situation circumscribe the topology of the composition of the work or at least suggest that the author belongs to an area where the custom of hero-stone erection was in popular vogue?

The *Tolkāppiyam* makes a passing reference to the heroic custom of killing oneself by tearing the flesh (III. 79). Instances of self-immolation by cutting off the heads of individuals find earliest sculptural representation in the Pallava monuments of Mahabalipuram. Such gruesome methods of mutilating limbs or of tearing flesh were resorted to as a ritual in the past for various reasons: as a fulfilment of vow, as an exhibition of loyalty, as an escape from falling into the hands of an enemy, etc. Although such practices appear to have been quite common in the Tamil, Kannaḍa and Telugu areas during the early medieval period, it is doubtful whether they were in vogue during the still earlier centuries. There is no evidence to trace this institution as an established custom in the earlier centuries of the Christian era (Chidanandamurthy, 1961; Raman, 1971/2).

VI

The South Indian polity from the dawn of history up to the medieval period is a story of gradual and progressive assimilation of northern influences in the realms of social structure, culture and literature by the peoples of the peninsular India. "For a sober student of India's history and culture.....South

India forms no exception from the rest of this vast country and its living culture of today is no less a blend of Aryan and pre-Aryan elements than elsewhere" (Sastri, 1967). The advent of the Pallavas, Kadambas, Gangas from the 4th–5th centuries A.D and the southern incursions, wars and conquests of the Cālukyas and Rāṣṭrakūṭas from the eighth century augmented the process of synthesis of cultural elements of the north and the south. In result, "there is no part in the extant Tamil literature which does not betray considerable acquaintance with Saṃskṛtic lore of all kinds" (Arokiaswami, 1967), and this "composite quality" is the "most striking feature of the culture of the 'Sangam' age" (Sastri, 1955). It should be emphasized that this situation was not confined to any one pocket of land but involved practically the entire peninsular land mass of India.

The succeeding centuries, with the rise of the Hoysāḷas, the Pāṇḍyas and Coḷas, are characterized by a more emphatic interplay of this trend. In spite of the constant wars and conflicts amongst these and other dynasties, cultural, literary and religious activities became escalated and the northern and Saṃskṛtic influences exerted a greater degree of impress. We witness, during this age, a vast quantum of literary production largely religious and Purāṇic — in Tamil, Kannaḍa, Telugu, and towards the close of the 12th century, in Malayāḷam. It is again in this period that new religious movements became initiated—Vīraśaivism and Dāsa cult in Karṇāṭaka, revival of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism in the Tamiḻakam. Jainism was still a dominantly competing religion and its literary activities had not yet declined.

The literary stream in the South Indian languages proliferated in multifarious directions and dimensions. While the Nāyanmārs and Āḻvārs adopted the *padikam* prosodies, which lend themselves to be logically analyzed on the basic principles underlying the Saṃskṛtic meters, the Saṃskṛt and Saṃskṛt-derived vocabulary find free expression in their compositions. The *Maṇipravāḷam* style—originally initiated by the Jainas as a synthetic language of Saṃskṛt-Prākṛt-Tamil—attained popularity amongst the Vaiṣṇavite writers. This was also the period when grammatical treatises were written

or collated - *Yāpparuṅkalam, Yāpparuṅkalakkārikai, Viracōḻiyam, Nēmināṭham, Nannūl, Daṇḍi-alaṅkāram*, etc. - and all these exhibit unmistakable ingredient of Saṃskṛtic influence.

In the Kannada language, the Jainas in the 10th century A.D. started off full-fledged works both in prose and verse. The poetical works were written in the *campū* style employing both Saṃskṛtic and indigenous metrical forms, and the prose works employ this medium for most effective narrative purposes. *Vaḍḍārādhana*, for example, is interesting in that its prose-style is a mixture of Old Kannaḍa and Prākṛt/Saṃskṛt usages. The early Vīraśaiva mystics and religious reformers and their followers evolved their own style and diction in the *vacana* and *ragaḷe* styles. Yet another new metrical form, the *ṣaṭpadi* came into vogue and held sway in the succeeding centuries. In spite of the rise of exclusively indigenous prosodic forms in literature, the themes, the rhetorical nuances, the word-combinations and idioms, all bear ample testimony to the pervading influence of Saṃskṛt, and hand in hand with the growth of these indigenous tendencies (*dēśi*), several poets still continued to prefer the use of Saṃskṛtic metrical forms (*mārga*). Thus the impact of Saṃskṛt in no way hindered the growth of the Kannaḍa language or literature, but, on the contrary, greatly enriched and invigorated the indigenous elements.

"In the beginning Telugu had much in common with Kannada and this affinity persisted to a relatively late stage in the development of the two languages" (Sastri, 1955). The origins of the *dēśi* meter, *sīsa*, is seen as early as the Ninth century A.D. and the *mārga* literature which was highly influenced by Saṃskṛt comes into vogue from the beginning of the 11th century. The literary productions of Nannayya (see Section II), and those of Bhīma kavi not only draw source materials from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* but also were written in highly Saṃskṛtized Telugu. *Kumārasambhava* of Nannecoḍa, is again based on the Samskṛt text of the same name and on Śaiva Purāṇas; he has, however, used both Telugu and Kannaḍa meters. The Vīraśaiva authors of this period like Mallikārjuna Paṇḍita and Pālkurikē Sōmanātha have chosen for their themes the Śaiva Purāṇas and legends.

The Saṃskṛtic influence on the early Malayāḷam literature has already been referred to in Section II above. It only remains to be added here that this influence continued in the succeeding centuries in *sandeśa* poems, and it may be noted that *Uṇṇunīli sandeśa* is written in the *maṇipravāḷam* language.

Simultaneously with the growth of the Southern languages and literature during the medieval period, Saṃskṛt itself was maintaining a living tradition. "The foundation of the Cola and Vijayanagar empires was marked by the notable efforts to elucidate the Vedas." *Ṛgarthadipikā* was written on the banks of the Kāveri during the reign of Parāntaka I. Sāyaṇa's commentaries on Vedic texts appeared under the patronage of Bukka I. *Sāmaveda* was commented upon by Bharatasvāmin under the Hoysaḷa Rāmanātha. The *Bhāgavata* "was composed somewhere in South India about the beginning of the 10th century". Commentaries on the *Rāmāyaṇa* poured out from South Indian soil during the succeeding centuries.

The *Mukundamālā* by a ruler of Kerala, and the drama *Āścarya-cūḍāmaṇi* by Śaktibhadra were again works produced in the West Coast of South India; so also the *Naḷōdaya* and the *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta*. The encyclopaedic *Mānasollāsa* was composed under the patronage (?) of the Caḷukya Someśvara II, while *Rāghava-pāṇḍavīya* and *Pārijātāpaharaṇa* were written in the time of the Kadamba Kāmadēva. South India of the medieval period was also the fertile bed for the growth of considerable volume of *Mīmāṁsā* literature and the philosophies of *Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita* and *Dvaita* had their origin and fostering here. Commentaries on ancient Saṃskṛt classics and doctrinal works alsò grew on the same terrain and period.

In short, the medieval South India as a whole was supercharged with creative and thinking minds in religion, philosophy, literature and culture, all closely inter-related in one way or another. Not only the Southern group of languages, but also Saṃskṛt breathed this atmosphere, living in harmony and deriving mutual contacts and benefits. Under such conditions as these there is no evidence to show that any language in vogue in the Peninsular India

suffered intellectual encystment: the indigenous languages and cultures fail to reveal any hiatus in their progress, bottle-necks of stifle in their growth and proliferation or instances of one language wiping out the other.

During the medieval period Saṃskṛt and Tamil developed a tradition which is almost absent in the other South Indian languages. This pertains to the writing of commentaries on literary or religious texts. In Saṃskṛt, the tradition is a very old one while in Tamil, such an endeavour started in the early medieval period, mostly by authors of the Jaina faith, which trend, however, was taken up by the followers of other religions as well.

The commentaries on the *Tolkāppiyam* abruptly spring up in the late 12th and 13th centuries A.D. (Section I). As sketched above, this was a period of intense literary productivity in all spheres not only in Tamiḻakam, but all over South India. If the *Tolkāppiyam* should receive the attention of so many Commentators within the limits of just one century, there must be some special underlying reasons. One of the possible factors could be that it was a treatise which was perhaps obscure and not in vogue for a long time and thus remained neglected. It is quite possible that more recently written grammars like *Viracōḻiyam* and *Nannūl* had eclipsed the *Tolkāppiyam*, whatever the reasons were. Or could it be that the treatise was not recognized because nothing was known about its author, although the 13th century traditions glorify him by associating him with the Saṅkam and Pāṇḍyan legends? Alternatively, could it be that the *Tolkāppiyam* was also written at a period when other grammars were holding the day and that the *Tolkāppiyam* outlined or expressed views quite different from his contemporary tradition, as a result of which it had to remain in the background? The story of the rejection of the *Tolkāppiyam* by the Learned assembly presided over by Agastya may perhaps be taken to imply such a situation.

In spite of the ingenious explanations and arguments offered by some of the modern critics to completely exclude any possible

Saṃskṛtic flavour from the *Tolkāppiyam*, an unprejudiced approach from a broader angle leads one to perceive the baselessness of such opinions. To say that this treatise is completely free from Saṃskṛtic influences or that it represents a composition written prior to the Saṃskṛtic inroads into the South India and Tamilaham, are both far from truth. As long ago as 1875, Caldwell stated that there is no warrant to presume the existence of archaic grammatical forms in the text. The treatise contains many Aryan words, Āryan customs and manners and Āryan thoughts and ideals (Chidambaram Pillai, 1928). The fact that rules are laid down (in the treatise) to absorb Saṃskṛt/Northern words indicates that the impact of these languages (Saṃskṛt in particular) was in evidence in the period when the author lived (Subramania Pillai, 1944). "The *Tolkāppiyam*, despite its name and tradition about its mythical antiquity, betrays signs of not being absolutely the earliest work in Tamil language. It is quite possible that a critical study of the linguistic and sociological data embedded in the 1600 *sūtras* of this work may establish a relatively late date for it" (Sastri, 1932). The broader aspects of the socio-cultural data implied in the *Tolkāppiyam* lend themselves to be fitted into any period from the sixth century A.D. to the medieval age in South India. As we have seen before, it is in this age that highly diversified and prolific growth of all Southern languages and culture became intensified along with identical trends in Saṃskṛt. Is it not more likely that the *Tolkāppiyam* could also have flowered as an associate of this very matrix during the beginning stages of the medieval period? Perhaps because of its rather unorthodox nature in certain respects, or because of its presumed modelling after the *Aindira* school, it lay unnoticed until the 13th century when it suddenly drew the attention of the commentators. They christened it the "Old Kāvya", the *Tolkāppiyam*, as nothing was known about its author or his times and also perhaps on account of its having been discovered at a period when other grammatical works were dominating the day.

SUMMARY

In historical perspective, the origin and development of the Dravidian group of languages in South India exhibit more or less parallel trends in their reaction to the Saṃskṛtic or Northern influences, although the interaction varied qualitatively and quantitatively in reference to any one language and this was largely circumscribed by local influences. These interactions are perceivable from the beginning of the Christian era and received a momentous impetus during the 5th–7th centuries A.D. by the development of script, which in turn caused a rapid growth of literature in the concerned languages. Mutual struggles of the then ruling dynasties among themselves and with the new dynasties which came into operation, the revivalistic religious movements and their interaction with the existing faiths, and also the indigenous factors provided the initiative for all-round and intense literary production from the 11th–12th centuries A.D. throughout South India. This was also the period when Saṃskṛt in South India assumed a more or less equal status with the existing Dravidian languages and contributed its notable share of knowledge. The intermingling of diversified cultures thus gave rise to a "hybrid vigour" of unlimited verve, unbounded enthusiasm and bubbling creativity. It was in this synthetic climate that numerous larger items of writing blossomed forth—secular and religious literature, grammatical treatises, commentaries, etc., in all the languages of the Dravidian stock in South India. The socio-cultural data depicted in the *Tolkāppiyam* is of such a general kind that the period of its authorship may as well be fitted homogeneously into the cultural matrix of the earlier centuries of the medieval period, that is, the decades contemporaneous with the birth of other grammars in the Tamil as well as in the associated Dravidian languages. The fact that five of its commentaries appeared in the 13th century A.D. alone suggests that the treatise could have been written a century or two earlier. Legends purporting to place the *Tolkāppiyam* in ancient centuries were written for the first time only in the age of its commentaries.

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