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# War: An Ethical Representation of a Butcherly Enterprise in Kalki. R. Krishnamurthy's *Sivakamiyin Sabadham*

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# War: An Ethical Representation of a Butcherly Enterprise in Kalki. R. Krishnamurthy's *Sivakamiyin Sabadham*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Historical novels are set in the past and the plot revolves around historical events. Contrary to this nature, Literature affects the present. The historical works of Kalki. R. Krishnamurthy would not have earned mammoth readership if it had been a mere imitation of past events. Though the characters are dead and gone, Kalki as a writer brings them back to life by infusing the element of culture within them. Where history failed, Kalki has attained success in reviving the lives of the Chola dynasty and the Pallava Empire by making the characters live the culture that has been passed down for centuries in the Tamil region.

No phase in Tamil Literature is as memorable as that of the Age of Sangam Literature. Sangam literally means academy. There were three Sangams in the history of Tamil Literature. What is available to the modern reader is only a fragment of the second and third Sangam. But these works cannot be set aside as obsolete for its influence is mighty even in works of today.

Aiyangar in his book *Tamil Studies* says that the Tamil sangam is known to some English scholars as the 'Madura College' and to others as the 'Madura University.' The Age of Sangam may have been covered or even perhaps been buried by the subsequent ages. But the literary greatness of the epoch remains unparalleled for the simple reason that right from the works that followed the Sangam Age up to the present ones, reveal patterns established by the Sangam

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writers. Nature is a powerful presence in these works. Varadarajan in his book on Sangam Literature states that "These ancient poets do not treat of Nature alone, but resort to it always to describe human life in its varying aspects, chiefly love and war. In short, they knit together the feelings and the beauties of Nature in closest bonds and warmest associations" (2-3). Merged with nature is the universal theme of love and war and this has long been methodically categorized in an ancient voluminous work of the Sangam Age, *Tolkappiyam*. It appears to be a book on Tamil grammar but it is much more, for it encapsulates an entire way of life- not merely of an era but it is almost impossible to evade its clutches, however modern a Tamilian's lifestyle may appear to be.

The two themes of love and war are categorized under Akam and Puram. The former which literally means 'internal' deals with love and its associated emotions while the latter meaning 'external' refers to the social world. Puram primarily deals with war and also praise of kings. It concentrates on the outer field of life. It constitutes other aspects of human experience such as valour, heroism, ethics, benevolence, philanthropy, social life and customs of the people. Similar to Akam, Puram also constitutes seven 'tinai' or behavior patterns or phases of war and the social world. A major difference between the categories of love and war is that Akam poems highly depend on its image to deliver its objective since it delves deep into sensitive human emotions which are intangible. On the other hand, Puram is expansive. Tinai pertaining to Puram are based on action rather whereas in Akam, the principal speaker is the landscape.

The seven tinai are named after flowers of various species. These flowers which are native to the Tamil region, are worn as garlands at different stages of war. The tinai in Puram are Vetci, Vañji, Uliñai, Tumbai and Vähai. The two tinai which are considered unsuitable for poetry are Kāñci and Pādān. It is evident from these tinai that all is not unfair in war because battles were not a disorderly confrontation among kingdoms. There was a code governing the conduct of warfare. Cows, women and children were not injured during sieges and battles.



The first stage of war is *Vetci*. It refers to cattle lifting. It is the first phase, initiated by a tribe to start a war. *Vetci* is the provocation phase in a war. Before the rise of kings, the Tamil country was ruled by petty chieftains. The chieftains who desired to capture the neighbouring territory would start a war by raiding the cattle of the enemy. The possessions of ancient chiefs were cattle. So, lifting cattle of a kingdom was reason enough for two kingdoms to start a battle. In the Tamil region, which gives predominance to valour, a slight provocation served as a best cause for war. Stealth pervades this *tinai*.

The activity that follows is the expedition conducted by the chieftain through the woods to reach his opponents' territory. This phase is *Vaijji* which covers preparation for war and beginning of an invasion. The season is the rainy season and they march through the forests to reach the enemy's fort. This invasion gradually leads to the siege of forts or an inhabited fertile area in the city of the enemy's. The time is dawn. This attack on the fort is called *Ujñai*. Only after the third phase, comes the open battle. This pitched battle is called *Tumbai*. The time of the day associated with this *tinai* is evening and grief suffuses the entire *tinai*. The tribe which emerges victorious wears the *vāhai* flowers as garlands. This phase is called *Vāhai*. Abduction, possession of women, search for wealth and fame forms a part of the *Vāhai* *tinai*. When a poet sings of the impermanence or the frailty of life and war, it falls under the *Kāñci* phase and the poet's song of praises for the victorious king is called *Pādān*.

Apart from the seven *tinais*, the *tinais* attributed to Puram are *Karantahai*, *Nocci* and *Pothuviyal*. During the first phase, when the enemy tries to steal the cattle, the host defends the stealthy act. Defending against cattle raids is called *Karantahai*. Similarly, when the enemy attacks the fort and tries to take over, the natives try to safeguard their land. This contributes to *Nocci*. *Pothuviyal* includes general heroism, philosophical themes and elegies for heroes.

*Sivakamiyin Sabadham* is a historical novel written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Kalki.R.Krishnamurthy. It exposit three different battles in the Pallava history fought during the reign of Mahendravarman I and his successor Narasimhavarman in the seventh century A.D. The Pullalur battle, the Vatapi invasion and the Pallava retaliation against the Chalukyas are the three wars that occur in the novel. War is resonant right from the beginning of *Sivakamiyin Sabadham*. The gates of the fort are sealed as early in the first chapter when the Pallava Kingdom's espionage informs their king about a possible Vatapi invasion. But before Pulikesi, the Emperor of Vatapi, arrives on the Pallava soil, Naganandi, a *bikshu* reaches Kanchi, the capital city of the Pallavas. He sends messages to other kingdoms in the four directions and he himself sets forth to the south to incite the other kingdoms against the Pallavas. His

plans succeed. The words of Kannabiran to his wife Kamali confirm the success of his designs: "The King of Ganga Nadu seems to be in a hurry. He is coming from the west with a large army, eager to reach Kanchi before Pulikesi does." (SK 74) This is proof of one of the many crooked strategies hatched by the *bikshu*. He tries to distract and weaken the Pallava troops. When they engage in a battle, their forces would be divided; but the Pallava army is unfazed by the sudden preparation for war. Rather, a tone of jubilation is present among the men folk- "War of a much larger scale than the Mahabharata War is about to break out only now. The opportunities for Mamallar to perform his gallant acts will arise only now" (SK 78). The hint of war arouses a sense of joy in the Tamil people, because the belief is that they are born to perform deeds of valour at the battlefield. And so, even the unexpected war does not have a terrifying effect on them.

The first stage in warfare is the prelude to war. Usually, a provocative issue ignites a battle. The prelude to the Pullalaur battle is fuelled by Naganandi. The two kingdoms were at peace and the Emperor Mahendravarman least expected an attack from this quarter because it is Mahendravarman's father who had gone to the Ganga Kingdom to crown the Ganga King, Durviveethan's father. The two kingdoms remained at peace until Naganandi sends messages to disrupt it through unfair means. The Queen, normally a symbol of patience says, "I too am enraged with the Gangapadi king's ungrateful and treacherous act" (SK 77). Gratitude is held in high honour among the Tamils. To return ingratitude to a person who extended help incurs wrath and curse not only by the society but also by the Creator is a widely accepted belief. The Pallava army only doubles its hatred towards the ungrateful king, which is but a natural emotion common to man. The Pallava king sums up the nature of the Ganga king and also the phase of *Vetci* initiated by the enemy: "Like a fox interrupting the combat between two lions, he has chosen to invade the Pallava kingdom when Pulikesi is attacking us! Durviveethan is hurriedly advancing towards us, even without halting at night!" (SK 77) The phrase 'hurriedly advancing' describes the *Vetci* phase where an army travels to meet its rival. Further, the army of the Ganga King travels even by night, a strategy which involves stealth- to attack the enemy even before they are aware of. This is characteristic of the first phase of war.

Ahead of the next phase, the *Vaijji*, where the invading army reaches the enemy's territory, Emperor Mahendravarman sends messages to his son to counter the Ganga King's strategies. "He has asked you to take the army stationed at Kazhukunram and vanquish Durviveethan before he reaches Kanchi" (SK 82). The counter attack by the Pallavas to stop the enemy reaching its territory falls under *Karantahai*, where the host initially tries to avoid the pillage of the enemies. The Pullalur battle is the first step taken by the enemies to

rout the Pallava Empire. In the first case, the dangers were unanticipated, least from a friend-turned-traitor like the Ganga King. The second is the closing in of different armies from all directions-Ganga Nadu from the west, the Pandya Kingdom from the south and the Vatapi from the north. The eastern border is covered by the Bay of Bengal. And so, "Mamallar has proceeded to the battlefield along with the army stationed at Thirukazhukunram for our self-defense" (SK 99). Defending the host territory becomes the reason for the Pallavas to retaliate.

The Pullalur battle does not exhibit the other two phases in warfare. The *Vaiñi* phase and *Uññai* is rerouted by the Pallava King's war tactics. Since the Pallava army marches towards their western borders, the enemy is barred from an invasion. Before they could invade, the Pallava forces retaliate. So the *Vaiñi* phase is partially present amidst the Pallavas progressing towards the battle. Another reason behind the partial portrayal is that the Pallava army does not plan a siege on the Ganga Kingdom's fort. But they progress towards the *Tumbai* phase. The phase of pitched battle is not a firsthand picture of war. It is narrated by Gundodharan and is also recounted by Sivakami, Ayanar and few other people. The sculptor and his daughter stay at the viharam in Ashokapauram, a short distance from the battlefield. There they see "Several people were frantically running down that road." Further, "At corner, a few people carrying a tall flag staff were running. The flag hoisted on the flag staff was torn to shreds" (SK107). Kalki describes the phase of *Tumbai* through eyewitnesses. A Tamil sense of valour is exhibited in this portrayal. Fleeing from war is the worst disgrace for a king and his warriors. Ayanar is anxious to learn as to which troop is fated to such an ignominy. Kalki builds up on the suspense as to how the battle proceeded. B. Kolappan in an article on *The Hindu* titled "Ponniyin Selvan in 32 Hour Animated Film" says, "The gripping narration of Kalki also has an element of suspense as he will suddenly change the scene." It is usually the case to kindle the reader's interest. In this context, Kalki does not change the stage to another character, rather opens doors, but one at a time. He does not give a sequent narration of the battle and he does not narrate it immediately. He first kindles the readers' interest through the eyes of Sivakami and Ayanar, who view these events from outside the battlefield-the entrance of the viharam. They gather only a few details-that "It is obvious that one side has lost the battle. The vanquished side is desperately fleeing" (SK 108). Kalki allows these two characters to speculate on the outcome to arouse the suspense of the events. Kannabiran who arrives at the scene adds a little more detail. He says, "We are pursuing those who are fleeing out of fear of fighting" (SK 111). Kannabiran displays that the Pallava Kingdom has gained an upper hand. But what exactly happened in the war is known only that

evening when "Gundodharan suddenly made his appearance" (SK 112). The Pallava spy cum disciple of Ayanar narrates that "The two armies met on the outskirts of the Pullalur village, which was two kadu to the South west of Kanchi" (SK113). He also describes the battle scene: "The Ganga Nadu army was thrice as large as the Kanchi army Mamallar headed. But Mamallar's brave army pounced unexpectedly on the Ganga Nadu army" (SK 113). He also narrates of the cowardly fleeing of Durvineethan, the Ganga King. Kalki does not take his readers to the battle front in the Pullalur encounter but narrates the facts through his characters, steadily building up on the details- Sivakami, Kannabiran, Gundodharan and finally the author himself narrates the tactics employed by Mahendra Pallavan. The reason behind the intervention of the author is to reveal the truth behind the war which the characters are unaware of- it is the Pallava King who intercepts the scroll sent by Naganandi and misleads the Ganga King to proceed immediately towards the Pallava kingdom. There are two motives for the Pallavan's message- firstly, he is sure that his army would be able to tackle the Ganga Nadu army; secondly, the immediate advancing of Durvineethan implies that he would not partake with the Vatapi army as allies, thereby reducing the strength of the Vatapi army to a certain extent.

The *Vāhai* phase which denotes victory seemingly appears as if incomplete. The reason being that is, when from the Pallava army, "A thousand hand-picked horsemen also reached the Pullalur battlefield. As the horsemen arrived unexpectedly at the battlefield and attacked, the Ganga army lost its nerve and fled" (SK 123). Because the opponent and his army run away from the battle, victory is not determined on the battlefield. However, the *Vāhai* stage is not totally absent. Mamallar and Paranjyothi, with a few men reach up to the banks of the South Pennai River to decimate the fleeing army. The Pallava army is again betrayed by the intervention of Naganandi, who makes a breach in the Thiruppaar Kadai Dam so that the entire area be flooded. He also helps the Ganga King and his army to reach the other side of the shore through boats. The Pallavas do not possess the privilege to imprison the Ganga King; but he is imprisoned by the Pallava Kingdom's neighbourhood friends- Anandhan Mazhavarayan in his fort. Thus *Vāhai* belongs to the Pallavas when they defeat the Ganga King.

The Pullalur battle does not exhibit all the phases enunciated in Puram. On the other hand, it follows the fundamental code of warfare as is appropriate in the Tamil society. Fleeing a battle is a shameful deed. The Ganga King flouts the code of valour and heroism. His imprisonment is therefore appropriate.

The war between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas "is a well-known incident in the annals of Dakshina Bharata" (BL 17). The war is a realistic

portrayal, not because it adheres to the patterns of Puram but also because of the duration it covers. *Ponniyin Selvan*, another historical masterpiece of Kalki, is a story that centers on love and war but *Sivakamiyin Sabadham* is primarily a tale of war interspersed with love. The Battle at Pullalur is only a miniature of war- it is in fact a strategy utilized by Mahendarar to mitigate the strength of the joined forces and also to provide a first-hand battle experience to his son. Contrary to the Pullalur Battle, the war against Vatapi is a well-planned one as it uncovers the protocol of warfare. The first part of the novel begins with a prelude to the Vatapi war and the fourth and final part of *Sivakamiyin Sabadham* ends with the after-effects of the same war. It is evident, therefore, that the entire novel runs on this much-spoken war as the scenario.

The Chalukya invasion in *Sivakamiyin Sabadham* begins with the *Vaṇji* phase and not the usual stage of *Vetci*. The *Vaṇji* phase begins in the first quarter of the first part. The Pallavas are least prepared for a war of high magnitude. However, it does not signify that they are incapable because in the seventh century India "Harshavardhanar rules the area to the north of the Narmada, Pulikesi reigns over the region between the Narmada and the Tungabhadra and Mahendra Pallavar rules the area to the south of the Tungabhadra" (BL 55). The Pallavas were the most prominent kingdom in the south during Mahendra Pallavar's reign. The Pallava Emperor had planted spies in various kingdoms so as to glean information about the kingdoms. But somehow, his spies are cheated, for the Pallavas come to know about the Vatapi army's plans only after the army begins marching in the *Vaṇji* phase. Mahendarar declares that "The King of Vatapi, Pulikesi, has mobilized a large army and is invading us. It would be necessary for us to gather a massive army and wage a bitter war" (PJ 92). The *Vetci* phase which normally precedes all the other stages in a war steps to the fore only after the *Vaṇji* phase. The *Vetci* phase comes ahead because the Pallava soldiers failed to ascertain the enemy's moves.

The Chalukyas are successful in the *Vaṇji* phase, where they stealthily reach the borders of the enemy territory without them being aware of it. This stage also covers the reason for waging a war. Another reason for the laxity on the part of the Pallavas is that there was no reason for any realm to wage a war against them. The Pallava Emperor's confession to his son testifies their stand: "That's my mistake Narasimha! I did not anticipate a war during my lifetime. I spent the time I ought to have spent on warfare in dance, music, sculpture and painting" (PJ 121). The ulterior behind the invasion which also constitutes the *Vaṇji* tinai is known to the Pallavas at a later stage- only when the siege is about to begin. The prelude to the war is because a poet Bharavi who was closely associated to Emperor Pulikesi, refused to come to the Vatapi kingdom because he was enamoured by the beauty of the

Kanchi city. "It was the spark that the poet Bharavi ignited then that has become this war. Pulikesi wrote in one of his messages to Bharavi, 'I will come to Kanchi one day and see if what you say is true'" (SK 237). This serves as a prelude for the Vatapi King to march against Kanchi. Later, he himself tells King Mahendarar, "You take my large kingdom that stretches from Narmada to the Tungabhadra and give me just the city of Kanchi in exchange" (BL 80). Another reason for the Vatapi king to initiate a war is his brother Naganandi's provocation. These serve as proper reasons for the Chalukyas to attack the Pallavas during a time when they are least equipped to face a battle.

The Vatapi army is in the advanced stage of the *Vaṇji* phase when the novel begins. The *Vetci* phase is narrated only as events of the past. The Pallava army fails to identify the stealthy initiation of the Chalukyas. The Emperor's words reveal the magnitude of their precarious situation. "The King of Vatapi, Pulikesi has crossed River Tungabhadra and has entered our kingdom with a huge army. I heard that his army consists of lakhs of foot soldiers, thousands of elephants, hundreds of carts harnessed by powerful bulls, and sixteen thousand horsemen" (PJ 48). The prolificness of the *Vaṇji* phase lies not only in the massive number of the progressing troops but also because "Pulikesi's demonic army has effortlessly defeated our border forces and is rapidly advancing. We do not have the forces to stop Pulikesi's army. Our forces stationed at various locations are retreating. The Pallava Kingdom is in grave danger" (PJ 49). The *Vaṇji* phase is also symbolized in the Vatapi army involving in activities that would force the host to retaliate. The Vatapi force is successful in this phase of warfare because the Pallavas are defeated in their own borders and added to the woe is the retraction of their soldiers.

To retreat is an act of shame in the Tamil tradition. The young-blooded Narasimhan is unable to digest this shameful activity on the part of his army. But Mahendarar known for his astuteness takes control over the situation and asks his son to enforce patience. Mahendarar is quick to agnise the potential of his kingdom. He does not act impulsively because he weighs the situation pragmatically. He perceives that his army is unprepared for such a massive attack. He realizes that the only possibility is to play with time. Through his intuitive intelligence, he first secures the protection of the Kanchi Fort and simultaneously discovers the setbacks in his domain also. The Emperor's decree to procure food and weapons inside the Fort marks the beginning of the *Nocci* phase in warfare. Usually, the Karanthai stage precedes the *Nocci* tinai but preparation to secure food and weapons begins ahead, keeping in mind the enemy's treacherous attacks. The beginning of this phase is seen in sealing the food resources inside the Fort. "A column of boats sailed one after the other in that canal towards Kanchi.

Most of the boats were laden with sacks of paddy. Each boat was manned by two" (PJ 112). Securing weapons also take place concurrently. Kalki juxtaposes landscape and human activities to reiterate the significance of the context. He first describes the peaceful landscape and then proceeds to describe that This peace and serenity were deceptive as thunder, rain, storm and earthquake were soon to follow. Indicating this, a boat laden with weapons made its way along the canal amidst the boats laden with paddy. Several weapons like spears, swords, lance, knives and shields filled the boat. (PJ 112-113).

The peaceful boats that carry life-giving resource (food) are disquieted by the boat carrying munitions which are symbols of destruction. Such is the position of the Pallavas also.

With the onward motion of the Nocci phase begins the Karanthai stage too. Karanthai is the defending act against cattle raids. Although the Pallava army is not completely victorious in the Karanthai stage because of their retreat, it does not mean that they are defeated either-Mahendrar recovers from the news of the enemy's steady invasion. He lives by his words when he puts into action the dictum he earlier pronounces- "Rulers should always keep their eyes and ears open. This is extremely essential during war time" (PJ 114). He uses his 'laid-back approach' to set right the loopholes in his fort. He also gives orders to fortify the fort for the siege. Not only is the fort renovated, but he immediately calls for the Council and then stations his army at different quarters. He then disappears from the Kanchi Fort giving orders to wait till the enemy begins the siege. He disguises as Vajrabahu and proceeds to enter into the enemy barricade. His strategy of patience towards the bikshu allows him to extract the plans of the enemy. The King is quick-witted to realize the true colour of the bikshu when he surmises- "our enemies' spies may be camouflaged in the ochre robes of monks" (PJ 113). He is also correct in his judgments on Paranjyothis- "That youth is innocent. I believe that deceptive bikshu is trying to engage in treachery using that youth. I guess that the bikshu is an extremely clever spy of the Vatapi kingdom" (PJ 117). Had he arrested the bikshu, Pulikesi would have immediately stormed and razed down the Fort of Kanchi.

The king who is gifted with a remarkable foresight, disguises as Vajrabahu and befriends Paranjyothis who himself is not aware that Naganandi is using him as a Vatapi messenger. Naganandi sends a scroll through Paranjyothis asking the Vatapi army to invade immediately and wage war against the Pallava kingdom. The innocent youth thinks that he is carrying a message pertaining to the secrets of the indelible Ajantha paintings. Vajrabahu who knew that Paranjyothis is carrying a scroll, stays in the Mahendra Rest House, drugs him in the night, reads the contents sent by the bikshu, burns the scroll and replaces it with a similar

scroll but with a different message- he writes an irrelevant message concerning the paintings in the Ajantha caves. Vajrabahu then proceeds to enter the enemy camp pretending to be a messenger of a friendly neighbouring kingdom. He also saves Paranjyothis who unwittingly gets trapped by Pulikesi who plans to behead him. The disguise of the Pallava King as Vajrabahu and his exploits to counter further invasion by the Vatapi army falls under Karanthai. The king tries to safely escort his kingdom against the siege planned by his opponents. By undertaking such a dangerous venture, he also gauges the strength of the enemy, where he sees

Thousands of elephants trained for war stood in rows like black hills. The white tents pitched amongst the elephants resembled white colour hills. Countless horses, camels, rams, chariots and carts dotted the landscape. Like ants that swarm a place strewn with sugar, lakhs of warriors were found in the army camp. (PJ 202)

The impossibility to attack and win such a huge well-armed force is confirmed by the King's visit to the enemy terrain. The Karanthai phase ends with the return journey of Vajrabahu and Paranjyothis to their own Fort. The journey symbolizes the Emperor's growth- he learns of the mistakes he had committed, especially the overindulgence in sculpture. His penitence results in setting things right by commanding the sculptors to build 'Bharata Mandapams' in every village where people can congregate and listen to discourses on Mahabharata. This is because the Emperor realizes that "This war cannot be won solely by Mahendra Chakravarthy and the army. The citizens of the Pallava Empire must also be motivated. They must be willing to give up their lives" (PJ 232). In other wars, the Karanthai phase does not prolong for a longer duration. But in the case of the war between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas, the Karanthai stage proves decisive. The novel is divided into four parts, in which only at the end of the second part comes the siege. The other two parts cover the remaining three phases, not inclusive of the other retaliatory war. This means that the first two parts of the novel concentrates on the initial stages of a military attack which emphasizes on the importance of the Karanthai phase. It is in this phase that the course of the war shifts to the advantage of the Pallavas. Moreover, it becomes a stage of physical and intellectual growth for the Rishaba army.

The Karanthai phase opens its portals to the Uliñai phase which deals with the siege of the enemy's fortress. The siege begins at a later time-period than scheduled. This is due to the interception of Naganandi's message in which he had originally written about the poor defense set-up of Kanchi; he had asked the Vatapi military to continue marching without stopping on the way so that they may capture the Fort in three days. But the Pallava King defends immediate

siege by misleading the Vatapi army. The Vatapi army on the other hand, waits for the bikshu's approval to begin the siege. Owing to the Pallavan's intervention, the siege begins eight months later. The span of eight months changes the course of the war. Mahendra Pallavar himself says "Had the Vatapi army directly marched to Kanchi, we could not have withstood them for more than three days. Fifteen of the fifteen thousand Chalukya war elephants would have sufficed to force open the gates of our fort" (SK 239). The Pallava head's insight and war strategies enable the Pallavas to strengthen their ramparts. And so, when the Vatapi forces surrounded the Kanchi Fort, they were not able to penetrate through the Fort.

The *Uliñai* phase begins when the siege of Kanchi starts. Contrary to the message stated earlier by Naganandi, the siege lasts for months. The Nocci phase is intertwined with the *Uliñai* and Karanthai part in this war. When the Pallava forces were gathering weapons to defend the invasion, Paranjyothi follows the Emperor's orders in beefing up the Fort. Paranjyothi and Mamallar under the command of Mahendarar take care of every single detail to defend the attack on the fort. The first step undertaken by any advancing army is to cross the moat. Commander Paranjyothi equips the Queen Bhuvana Mahadevi on the defense measures carried out on the fort. He tells about the moat- "I too saw it eight months ago. Previously, it was like a small canal. Now it is as large as an ocean. Crocodiles with their jaws wide open thrive in the moat" (SK 78). The possibility of building bridges across the moat will be countered by five thousand archers camouflaged within the fort walls to shoot arrows on the enemies. Concealed pits, invisible nets and traps are all set either to injure or kill the enemy. Boulders too are placed on the fort walls to roll it down at the opportune time. The strategy session to defend their territory is planned and executed meticulously by these three heads. They also gather the appropriate information regarding their attackers- their usual plan of action, their manner in laying a siege- and plan their defense accordingly. The Vatapi army is in the habit of intoxicating their elephants by making them consume liquor so that their strength grows manifold and also wild. To subvert this move, the Pallavas build an inner fort gate embedded with spear tips. If the outer wooden gate is broken, the spear tips on the inner gate would be a death knell to the elephants.

The arsenal of the Pallava Kingdom alone is not depleted. Mahendra Pallavar considers a gamut of defense measures to keep his kingdom safe from the enemy's clutches. He gathers the Council to explain the practical difficulties the kingdom might encounter. "The Chakravarthy expects the siege to continue for even up to a year" (SK 232) says the Commander Kalipahayar. So they gather all the available food supplies for the people in the fort. The primary concern of the King is the

safety of his people. He frankly tells them of the possibilities in case of a long siege. He arranges for the chieftains to reach their respective places before the siege and asks if they would stand by him.

By dawn tomorrow, the Vatapi army would have reached our fort. All of you should leave the city before that. All of you should rush back to your respective kottams. When the Kanchi Fort is under siege, there will be no communication between you and those of us within the fort. When Pulikesi is defeated, he will vent his anger on the surrounding villages. You should be prepared for all this. Chiefs of the Kottams! Think well before you respond. Are you prepared to sacrifice all you have to safeguard Kanchi? Will you tolerate all the atrocities perpetrated by the demonic Vatapi army? Will you be steadfast even if famine strikes the nation and people die of hunger? asked the Chakravarthy majestically. (SK 240).

The chiefs answer positively in unison which echoes the Tamil social life where unity is considered the primary strength. This becomes the case with the Pallava army too. The humanistic approach followed by the King delineates the kingly features in Mahendarar, where his prime concern lay in the safety of his people and he does so through love. Another tactic adopted by the Pallava men which brings out the unity and sacrifice is that "Our spy force headed by Shatrugna functioned excellently. The Chiefs of the Kottams have also worked skillfully. Unmindful of the famine that the country may face, they broke down all the dams and canals" (BL 42). The Pallavas break down the storage resources of water to inflict their enemies of thirst and dryness. The Nocci phase is meticulously capitalized by the Pallava forces. And so, when the *Uliñai* stage begins, the ramparts prove indestructible to the Vatapi army.

The Vatapi soldiers do not have new tricks up their sleeve in the siege of Kanchi. They act as per the expectations of the Rishaba army- their infantry try to scale the Fort walls, cross the moat, build bridges and intoxicated elephants which were half successful in ripping open the outer wooden gate only to be injured by the spear-embedded gates. After some time, they managed to break the spear tips through heavy logs of wood only to be barred by a strong inner wall. The *Uliñai* phase continues as Pulikesi plans to starve the inhabitants of the fort but it backlashes on him for it is his men who are left without food. The food scarcity for the Vatapi army is because "The villages that surrounded Kanchi were evacuated" (BL 118). At the beginning of *Uliñai*, the Vatapi King had an upper hand but the situation topples to give way to the Pallavas. The success of their defense lay on the fact that "The siege lasted for about eight months during which time the ramparts of the Kanchi Fort stood tall without any damage being done. Not even one soldier was able to enter the Kanchi Fort" (BL 17). Mahendarar's defense stands an example of the 747<sup>th</sup> Kural in which

Thiruvalluvar says "A fort should be impregnable to foes who gird it round, //Or aim there darts from far, or mine beneath the ground." The kural defines the term fort—that which cannot be captured by blocking, assaulting or even undermining it. The *Uliñai* stage does not lead to the expected sequence—the Tumbai.

The stage of siege yields to a truce called by the Vatapi king Pulikesi. He initiates the armistice not only because his troops languished without food resources but also more importantly because of the message he received that Naganandi is imprisoned and is about to be impaled on a stake. In spite of warnings "We have heard that the Vatapi king is a treacherous man who has no code of ethics and that he has a demonic character. Can there be a hidden ruse behind his stated intention of visiting Kanchi?" (BL 57) from the Ministers' Council and also from his own family, Mahendra Varmar invites the enemy on the grounds of the 'Pallava dynasty's dharma' and also to avoid unnecessary loss of lives. The Vatapi King is accorded a royal welcome. When the two kings meet, "Their eyes met. Mahendar's face bore a slight smile and conveyed no emotion. But Pulikesi's face reflected the fury that was simmering within him" (BL 57). The Pallava King, who displayed remarkable statesmanship earlier, is suddenly bereft of even the fundamentals of logical reasoning. Like the man mentioned in the 792<sup>nd</sup> Kural which says "Alliance with the man you have not proved and proved again, //In length of days will give you mortal pain" (164), Mahendar fails to make repeated inquiry before trusting his enemy which finally wounds him mortally. He flaunts the city's greatness and in one of the conversations, he divulges the gimmicks he employed to thwart the invasion earlier. His conversation with Pulikesi seem to justify his irrational act: "I revealed the tactics I had employed to counter your invasion as I thought that would be betraying our friendship by suppressing them" (BL 83). The Tamil custom could blame fate for the actions of the Pallava king but the same tradition has framed the Council and granted powers to the council in order to temper autocracy. A King who is like a deity to the Tamil people cannot afford to commit mistakes. If it is so, then the entire nation suffers. The careless tongue of Mahendar reaps its own disaster. Pulikesi embraces Mahendar's friendship superficially and does not act according to the treaty. This is because "When Pulikesi took leave of Mahendar Pallavar and left through the northern gates, he was a disgruntled man. His heart was akin to a volcano filled with black smoke, molten lava and fire that was waiting to erupt" (BL 101). Pulikesi was fuming within because he felt that he was deceived and that had he arrived earlier, the beautiful city of Kanchi would have been annexed. He breaks the ethics of warfare by issuing a decree that

Fifty four thousand of the sturdiest soldiers in the army would be left behind. They would form small

groups, plunder and then set fire to the villages and towns that lay within a radius of four kadu from Kanchi. These soldiers would imprison the young men in the villages and towns, kill the young men, maim the aged and seek revenge in any other manner they deemed fit. Importantly, all sculptors and sculpture galleries had to be demolished. One arm and one leg of the sculptors had to be amputated. (BL 105)

The Vatapi forces execute the order of their king. The Pallavendra who trusts the friendship of Pulikesi and blurts his tactics, reaps untold miseries for himself and his kingdom. Though Mahendar is left with most of his forces, his son Mamallar and his aide Paranjyothi were not present to shoulder his burden as they were sent to a battle against the Pandian army. Mahendar gathers his forces to combat the remaining Vatapi soldiers. This Tumbai phase of battle scene is the Manimangalam battle which witnesses the fall of the Pallava King. Mamallar and Paranjyothi hasten to join their leader but not before he receives the fatal wound wielded by a poisonous dagger. As they arrive, they see that "the majority of the soldiers who accompanied Mahendra Pallavar from Kanchi had died fighting bravely on the Manimangalam battlefield" (BL 140). The Chalukyas with their meager army emerge victorious in this battle. All the same, they scatter and flee the Sooramaran encounter against the Pallavas. The *Vähai* phase, nevertheless, belongs to the Chalukyas because the Pallavas suffer heavy losses. "The Chalukyas had set fire to the houses, huts, haystacks and crops ready for harvesting. Ashes covered the entire region. It seemed as though the Pallava Nadu had become a large and horrific graveyard" (BL 141). Excluding these inflictions, the major loss they suffer is the loss of their king. He fails to recover from the injuries he sustained in the battlefield.

The war initiated by the Chalukyas exposes all the phases elaborated in Puram. The different stages are projected in its own pattern to enforce the historicity of this major war. This war does not come to an end with the *Vähai* phase. Rather, another cycle of these stages is repeated when Narasimha Pallavar assumes charge as king.

The growth of Narasimhar is evident in the second cycle of the war. He is no longer the same Mamallar who yielded to anger and impatience. Revenge contributes towards the *Vetci* phase and serves as the best cause to restart the battle that had ended earlier. But a thirst for vengeance does not blind the eyes of the new Emperor. This is evident in his conversation with Aayanar: "When I failed to bring your daughter back from Vatapi, I thought I could mobilize an army in three years and invade Vatapi." But the initial plan encounters practical difficulties and so, "The task we set out to accomplish in three years has taken us nine years" (SD 22). The *Vetci* phase which is inclusive of the preparations to begin a war reaches its heights at



Thirukazhukunram, the place where the Pallava army had camped.

Horsedrawn chariots, bullock carts and beasts of burden like cows, camels and donkeys occupied the area up to the southern horizon. Sacks of grains, clothes, daggers, shields, swords, spears, lances, tridents, bows, and arrows, several other uncommon weapons, mounds of thick ropes, rope ladders, hooks, spades and torches were stocked in those carts lay around. Observing the canopies that were heaped up like a mountain in one place, one would think that it was possible to cover the sky with these without allowing a single raindrop to reach the earth. (SD 23-24).

The war preparation far exceeds that of the Chalukya invasion. Manavanman, the Prince of Lanka and the Cholas join the Pallavas in order to decimate the Vatapi army. Following the Tamil ritual to start on an auspicious day, the army sets out on the dawn of Vijayadasami. "Mamalla Chakravarthy after performing ceremonies like Yatra Danam and Graha Preethi at the entrance to the ancient Pallava palace, sought the blessings of the elders including Rudrachariar, took leave of his mother Bhuvana Mahadevi and left for the battlefield mounted on the royal war elephant" (SD 69). The Tamil customs of departure for war are far more elaborate-war drums were followed by the woman folk showering flowers and blessings on the warriors. The Veṭci phase encapsulates the Tamil customs as well. The parting of soldiers from their wives and family form a part of this tinai also. Mamallar entrusts the safety of the palace to his wife from her brother's possible invasion also falls under this tinai.

The marching of the army towards the Tungabhadra border (Chalukya Kingdom) forms the Vaṇji tinai. "The Pallava army crossed the North Pennai River a week ago. It must have neared the Tungabhadra River by now" (SD 144). The Vaṇji phase is similar in style to that of the Chalukyas when they marched against the Pallavas. Contrary to the Pallavas who displayed solidarity during the invasion, the Vatapi kingdom begins to fall apart during this phase and hence the Karanthai and Nocci stage of protecting their territory is totally absent. This becomes a major setback to the host army. The major divide is the fraternal fights between Pulikesi and his brother Neelakesi (Naganandi Bikshu) over Sivakami. Others include the division of Vatapi forces that are stationed at the other borders in their kingdom; Pulikesi himself is held at Ajantha and he races with time to enter the Vatapi Fort. In addition to these impediments, a famine breaks out near the Tungabhadra River and so the army stationed close by was redirected to the distant land of Vengi. Pulikesi is devoid of time to regroup his entire forces.

The Karanthai phase is spoiled by Naganandi who then played traitor, dons the same role against his own brother. He had dismissed the Chief of the spy forces and assumed charge over it. Pulikesi was led into

the belief that Mamallar was gathering a huge army to invade Lanka. Naganandi who knew about Narasimhar's planned attack does not inform his brother. Therefore, only words of hope and courage fill the Karanthai phase.

The *Uliñai* stage commences when the Pallava army "surrounded that expansive city's fortress from all sides" (SD 148). The *Uliñai* stage is cut short when the invaders learn about the absence of Pulikesi inside the fort. The stage is disrupted of its importance when only a small army is left behind- "After deploying a small force to continue the siege at Vatapi fort, a major portion of the Pallava army started marching northwards" (SD 150). The short *Uliñai* phase quickly paves way to the phase of pitched battle. The Vatapi emperor who expected that the Pallavas would attack the Fort and that he could wait till he gathers his other forces and then attack is left with no choice but to face the combat. He is forced to forego a retreat as it would cause a slur on the heroism of the entire army. The two armies lock horns in the northern outskirts of Vatapi where the battle proceeds for three continuous days and nights. The butcherly Tumbai phase of this war reflects the fatality of war.

The dead elephants that lay on the battlefield resembled black granite hills. The corpses of humans and those of horses were all piled together. The pathetic moaning of humans, the horrific shrieking of elephants and the sorrowful neighing of horses that were on the verge of death mingled together to form an intolerable din. Rivers of blood flowed in all four directions on the battlefield. The mutilated limbs of warriors floating on the rivers of blood presented an excruciating sight. It is impossible to provide an accurate description of that war in which lakhs of warriors and thousands of elephants and horses were deployed. (SD 150)

The gory Tumbai phase prolongs for three days. Loss of lives affects both the sides but the Chalukyas receive the major blow when Pulikesi is killed in the encounter. But none of the armies are able to ascertain it. The victory phase belongs to the Pallavas. The garland is its symbol and so is jubilation: "the Pallava Chakravarthy and his commanders garlanded and congratulated each other and celebrated the conclusive victory secured by the Pallava army" (SD 151). The Vāhai phase is not complete in this victory on the battlefield. The Pallavas return to the camp and join the rest of the forces to continue with the siege. The *Uliñai* phase reenters to ensure complete victory to Mamallar and his army. Initially, the Vatapi forces offer a truce because they thought their King is dead. Even Paranjyothi and the Ministers accede to it but this suggestion is vehemently disfavoured by Mamallar. He averts the same mistake committed by his father- he learns a valuable truth to never trust an enemy's peaceful offer. True to his doctrines, the Vatapi army lowers its white flag from the fort and deploys soldiers. They exult over their king's return; the Pallava army

erects scaffolds, throws sulphur bombs and illuminated torches into the city. Through elephants, wooden masts and iron rods, they break open the gates and enter the city that was already set on fire. The invasion which ensues constitutes the *Uliñai* phase. The Pallava forces emerge victorious and the *Vahai* phase becomes complete when Paranjyothi hoists the Simha flag of the Pallavas atop the Jayastambham erected earlier by the Chalukyas.

The tinais of Puram are all exhibited in the war between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas. The Chalukyas resort to chicanery in most of the phases. In the initial stage, the Bikshu roams the territory as a friend to the Pallava Empire, Pulikesi oversteps the treaty, the Chalukyas brutally murder the villagers on their way and finally they call for a ceasefire but suddenly withdraw it during the siege of the Vatapi Fort. War, from ancient times is seen as a clash between good and evil. This battle in *Sivakamiyin Sabadham* also echoes similar thoughts. The Vatapi King and his army represent deceit and lack of cultural values. Hence war becomes necessary to weed out evil.

Puram centers on action and so landscape is subsidiary in nature. Nevertheless, Kalki does not permit landscape to dwell in its supplementary state. In every possible comparison, elements of nature relevant to the Tamil region are fused into the context. The phases of war are also a reflection of the social life in the land. Puram deals with social life in which the predominant occupant is war because war was the ancient system of life. But the brutality of war is not praised. Rather it is heroism that is extolled by the Tamils. Heroism is the cornerstone of war. Puram which most importantly deals with warfare reveals a thirst for honour and renown. Fame induced the kings of the past to undertake conquest on an extensive scale in order to earn an undying name in the world. Monarch and warrior in unison bowed to the principle of conquering kingdoms. The martial spirit was rife in the ancient Tamil land. However war was not totally devoid of ethics. The five major phases in warfare is enough testament that there existed a code even in carrying out a butcherly enterprise.

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