

OF UBIQUITOUS HEROINES AND  
ELUSIVE HEROES

The Cultural Milieu of Medieval *Maṇipravāḷa Kāvya*s from Kerala

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I thank Professor Basudev Chatterji, the Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), for the honour he has done me by asking me to give the Foundation Day Lecture of ICHR this year.

I wish to make a plea for a literary (re)turn in the context of the talk of the ‘anthropological turn’ and the ‘linguistic turn’ that we are hearing about. Of course, the mutuality between history and literature has always been recognised; there is nothing new in this. Literature has been the historian’s mainstay, particularly of those working on the earlier periods. Over time, the use of other sources of information such as archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics propelled the development of the discipline of history. Indeed these sources came to be regarded as central to historical knowledge of the ancient world. Literature lost its earlier position – histories based principally on literary sources came to be regarded as less ‘scientific’. Happily, there has been a renewed awareness of the importance of literature in recent years, and alternative ways of using literature for historical writing have been developed. Apart from the time-tested way of using literature as a ‘source’ to study an event or an individual mentioned in a text, literature is also used to capture the climate, the spirit, of an age. The ambience within which a text was produced or the very sensibility of an age may be the subject-matter of the historian who wants to look at texts, including the visual images, in this way. While accepting the importance and legitimacy of both these, I believe that there is a third way: reading texts with a sense of history. That is what I presume to be doing here – a literary *re*-turn.

I thus seek your indulgence for making use of this opportunity to present a preliminary report of an attempt to read literary texts from medieval Kerala once again, particularly poetry in what is called *Maṇipravāḷam*. *Maṇipravāḷam*, literally ‘ruby-and-coral’, was an amalgam of Malayalam and Sanskrit, a new ‘language’, evidence of the use of which for purposes of literary production is available from Kerala from the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> It was also used for writing scientific treatises on subjects like astronomy and medicine. *Līlātilakam*, a fourteenth century work on the grammar, poetics and rhetoric of *Maṇipravāḷam*, defines it as ‘the union of *bhāṣā* and Sanskrit’, *bhāṣā* being used specifically in the sense of ‘the language of Kerala’ (*Keraḷabhāṣā*).<sup>2</sup> To be sure, using a

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<sup>1</sup> I may be allowed to clarify here that I am concerned with the early stages of *Maṇipravāḷam*. Even the works of later writers such as Kaṇṇaśśan, Ceruśśēri and Tuñcatt Eḷuttacchan, which are ‘*Keraḷabhāṣāgānams*’, use this amalgamated language. The still later *Śrīkr̥ṣṇacaritam* calls itself *Maṇipravāḷam* although it is very different from the early *Maṇipravāḷam* texts in terms of content. The term *Maṇipravāḷam* was a synonym for Malayalam [literature] even in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, *Naḷini* of Kumāran Āśān, which can be said to have inaugurated the modern in Malayalam poetry, used to be called a *Maṇipravāḷa-kāvya*! The late nineteenth century translation of *Abhijñānaśākuntala* into Malayalam by Keraḷa Varma Valiya Kōil Taṃpurān was known as *Maṇipravāḷa Śākuntala* (1898). Statements such as ‘Our Malayalam language that is *Maṇipravāḷam*’ (*maṇipravāḷam enna nammūṭe malayāḷabhāṣa*) were very common in the twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> ‘*Bhāṣā-saṃskṛta-yogo maṇipravāḷam*’: *Līlātilakam*, śilpa 1, sūtra 1, p. 284 (my translation). I have used the edition by Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, *Līlātilakam (Maṇipravāḷalakṣaṇam)*, Kottayam, reprint, 1990 (National Book Stall). The anonymous author explains in the *vṛtti* to this sūtra that *bhāṣā* is used here in the sense of the language of Kerala: ‘*bhāṣā cātra keraḷabhāṣā*’. There is some contemporary discussion whether *maṇi* is pearl or ruby, even while

blend of Sanskrit and the regional language for purposes of literary expression was not unique to Kerala. There are examples of such blending from many regions both in India and Southeast Asia where Sanskrit had been popular. Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* calls such blendings *miśrabhāṣā* and *ardhasaṃskṛtam*.<sup>3</sup> A verse in the *Kāmasūtra*

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it is accepted that *pravāḷa* is coral. *Līlātilakam* is clear: ‘Sanskrit [used in *Maṇipravāḷam*] should be delicate and well-known and *bhāṣā* should be acceptable to the learned. *Maṇipravāḷam* is so designated on account of a harmonious synthesis of these two. When ruby and coral are strung together by means of the same thread, the two will go well as if they were one on account of the similarity of colour – not ruby and pearl nor coral and sapphire: *atra bhāṣāvad atiprasiddham sukumārākṣaram saṃskṛtam. bhāṣā ca prāyaśo ’pāmarajanaprasiddhā. tathāvidhayoreva anayoḥ saṃśleṣo bhavet. tatsauṣṭhava-pratipādanārtham idam maṇipravāḷam iti samjñā. māṇikyavidrumayorhi samānasūtre protayostulyajātivarṇatayā aikyamiva ābhāti. na punar-māṇikyamuktayōḥ pravāḷanīlayorvā.*’ *Ibid, śilpa 1, sutra 1, vṛtti 1, p. 285* (my translation). Apart from this prescription, the authors themselves knew that they were composing poems in a language where elements of both *Bhāṣā* and Sanskrit were present: ‘*madhuramadhurabhāṣāsaṃskṛtānyonyasammelaṇasurabhilā kāvyavāṇīvibhūti*’: Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, Kottayam, reprint, 1983 (National Book Stall), v. 23, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Such blended language was known by the name *Maṇipravāḷam* itself in most of south India. This is attested by the Kashmirian polymath Abhinavagupta, who lived in the latter half of the tenth century and the first two decades of the eleventh century AD. He explains, in his *Abhinavabhāratī* commentary on Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, that the *miśrabhāṣā* and *ardhasaṃskṛta* that Bharata speaks about were used in different parts of the country and that what obtained in *Dakṣiṇāpatha* was ‘famous’ as *Maṇipravāḷam*. ‘*anyat trivargaprasiddham padamadhye saṃskṛtam madhye deśabhāṣādiyuktam tadeva kāryam. Dakṣiṇāpathe maṇipravāḷamiti prasiddham, kāśmīre śāṭhakulamiti. anye tu sakalalokaprasiddhairvyākhyānāpekṣibhiḥ*

states that ‘by telling stories at gatherings in a language which is neither too heavily Sanskritic nor too much in the local tongue, one earns esteem among people’.<sup>4</sup> This mixed language was known as *Maṇipravāḷam* itself in the Tamil- and the Telugu-speaking regions.<sup>5</sup> However, it acquired a certain autonomy in Kerala. I shall concern myself here with the world represented in that literature, making occasional references also to contemporary works in Sanskrit from

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*saṁskṛtaiḥ kṛtam ardhasaṁskṛtam āhuḥ apare vararucyādinā praṇītā prākṛtalakṣaṇānvitam śaurasenyādi deśabhāṣādyadhikṛtam prākṛtam evārdhasaṁskṛtam iti manyante.* Ramakrishna Kavi, ed., *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the Commentary of Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*, Baroda, 1954 (Oriental Institute), vol. IV, p. 379. I thank Chathanath Achyuthan Unni and Manu Devadevan for drawing my attention to this passage.

<sup>4</sup> *nāṭyantam saṁskṛtenaiva, nāṭyantam deśabhāṣayā | kathām gōṣṭhīṣu kathayanloke bahumato bhavet|| Kāmasūtra, 1.4.37* (my translation). The reference is to the version available on the Göttingen website: [http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1\\_sanskr/6\\_sastra/6\\_kama/kamasufu.htm](http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/6_sastra/6_kama/kamasufu.htm). Bhoja quotes this verse approvingly in his *Sarasvatīkaṅṭhābharaṇam*. Significantly, *Līlātilakam*, *op. cit.*, p. 285, too quotes it with approval.

<sup>5</sup> *Maṇipravāḷam* was used mainly for composing Śrīvaiṣṇava exegeses in the Tamil-speaking region while it did not go much beyond religious literature in Telugu, too, as in the writings of Pāḷkurki Somanātha. It is clubbed with *citrakāvya*s and riddles in Tamil grammatical tradition. For a discussion, K. Ramachandran Nair, *Early Maṇipravāḷam: A Study*, Trivandrum, 1971 (Anjali), pp. pp.67-72. Inscriptions from Southeast Asia too used a free mixture of Javanese and Sanskrit. Nair quotes a verse from Java: *samar divārātri nekaṁ surālayā/deniṁ prakāśātmaka sarvabhāṣvarā | aṇiṁ sekārniṁ kumadā jariṅkulam/muaṅ cakravākin papaśaḥ lavan priyam || Ibid.*, p. 70. It was in Malayalam that it gained the status of mainstream as a part of a strategy of asserting independence from the Tamil tradition. For this ‘declaration of independence’, as it were, see M.R.Raghava Varier, ‘Līlāthilakaththiṅre Rāṣṭriyam’ (The Politics of Līlātilakam), *Vāyanayūṭe Vazhikal*, Trichur, 1998 (Current Books), pp. 9-19.

Kerala. In fact, there is hardly any difference between the two in any respect except the language: *Kokilasandeśa* of Uddaṇḍa or *Śukasandeśa* of Lakṣmīdāsa might as well have been written in *Maṇipravāḷam*; alternatively, *Kokasandeśam* or *Uṇṇunīlisandeśam*, both of anonymous authors, might have been written in Sanskrit.

Scholars in the past approached the corpus of *Maṇipravāḷam* literature mostly from the perspective of ‘history of literature’, looking at it as a ‘movement’ in Malayalam literature.<sup>6</sup> Their concern was largely with fixing the chronology of individual works as well as the identity of their authors where clues to it were available. A few also undertook some literary appreciation of these works. Writing commentaries on these has been, and is, a flourishing industry ever since their discovery by the turn of the last century.<sup>7</sup> There have also

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, *Bhāṣācampukkaḷ*, Trivandrum, 1954. Ulloor Publishers; *idem*, *Kēraḷasāhityacaritram*, vol. I, Trivandrum, 1953 (University of Travancore); vol. II, 1962; *idem*, *Vijñānadīpika*, vol. IV, Trivandrum, 1938 (Ulloor Publications); T.M.Chummar, *Padyasāhityacaritram*, Kottayam, 1960 (National Book Stall); K.M.George, ed., *Sāhityacaritram Prasthānaññalilūṭe*, Kottayam, 1968 (National Book Stall); Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, *Keraḷabhāṣayūṭe Vikāsapariñāmaññal*; Kottayam, 1955 (National Book Stall); *idem*, *Uṇṇunīlisandeśam Caritradṛṣṭiyil Kūṭi*, Kottayam, 1957 (National Book Stall); *idem*, *Bhāṣayum Sāhityavum Nūṛṛāṇṭukaḷilūṭe*, Kottayam, 1958 (National Book Stall); etc.

<sup>7</sup> *Candrotsavam* was published in the year 1900 in a monthly, *Kavanodayam*. T K Krishna Menon reported the discovery of a *sandeśakāvya* on *Uṇṇunīlī* in 1903. Kotuññallur Kuññikkūṭṭan Tampurān published the work in the *Rasikarañjini* in 1906. Āṛṛūr Krishna Pisharody republished the same in 1923. P.K.Narayana Pillai published an anthology of 291 *Maṇipravāḷam* verses with the title *Padyaratnam* in 1949. He also serialized a *campūkāvya* named *Uṇṇiccirutēvī* in the *Bhāṣātraimāsikam* in 1949, which he later published as a book in 1954. E.V.Raman Nambudiri reported *Uṇṇiyāṭī*,

been attempts to use these as ‘sources’ for the economic and social history of Kerala.<sup>8</sup> However, reading these texts with a sense of history or placing them within the larger context of literary practices within the subcontinent is still a desideratum. It is in this context that I venture to make a fresh reading of these texts.

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another *campūkāvya*, and P.K.Narayana Pillai published it. Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer mentioned a *campūkāvya* on *Uṇṇiyaccī* in his book *Bhaṣācampukkaḷ*. P.K.Narayana Pillai edited and published it in *Bhāṣātraimāsikam*. Kuttamasseri Narayana Pisharody published the *Kōkasandēśam* in the *Sāhithyaparīṣat* Quarterly in 1954. Later, the work was republished by Kerala University in 1954. K. Ramachandran Nair edited and published a text called *Vaiśikatantram* containing 266 verses in 1969. There have been a large number of commentaries on most of these, particularly after one or the other text was prescribed as compulsory reading for the Master’s degree programmes in Malayalam in the Universities in Kerala and outside. See also Notes 18-23 below.

<sup>8</sup> Foremost among these is Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, *op.cit.* There is a brilliant Introduction to one of the *Maṇipravāla-kāvya*s in Chathanath Achyuthan Unni and M.R.Raghava Varier, ed., *Kōkasandēśam*, Edapal, 2007 (Vallathol Vidyapitham), pp. 5-31, who have, apart from looking at the entire corpus of creative literature in *Maṇipravālam* within the structuralist tradition, brought to bear on them a sense of history. Raghava Varier has a couple of important papers: ‘Līlātilakattinre Rāṣṭriyam’ *op.cit.*; ‘The Image of ‘the Other’ in the Early *Manipravalam* Texts’, unpublished, both of which are informed by a clear sense of history. Similarly, Rich Freeman, ‘Rubies and Coral: The Lapidary Crafting of Language in Kerala’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (February, 1998) p. 38-65, has interesting observations informed by insights from anthropology. See also his ‘Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala’ in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley, 2003 (University of California Press), pp. 437-502.

Earlier scholars writing about *Maṇipravāḷam* poetry in Kerala seem to have missed the extremely important fact that it is very much in the *kāvya* tradition in Sanskrit, both in form and content. I should even go the extent of saying that it is Sanskrit poetry, written in *Maṇipravāḷam*. In fact, the very first sentence in *Līlātilakam*, the significance of which has not been appreciated properly, reads: ‘What is stated to be the use as well as motive of Sanskrit *kāvya* itself is to be regarded as those of *Maṇipravāḷa kāvya*’.<sup>9</sup> It is not just in a prescriptive text that this identification occurs: *Candrotsavam*, one of the texts taken up for study here, looks upon *Maṇipravāḷam* [poetry] as of a piece with the Sanskrit *kāvyas* such as *Śākuntala*, *Mālavikāgnimitra*, *Kādambarī*, etc.<sup>10</sup> The failure to appreciate this has obscured the central features of *Maṇipravāḷam* poetry, namely, its

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<sup>9</sup> ‘yat saṁskṛtakāvyaṣya prayojanam kathyate nimittam ca asyāpi maṇipravāḷakāvyaṣya mantavyam’. *Līlātilakam*, op.cit., p. 283 (my translation). I should, however, like to make a distinction here. Sanskrit *kāvyas* are much more varied and have reached a greater height. Sanskrit *kāvyas* have their own central themes or subjects which differ from *kavya* to *kavya*, and also from the theory that it is all ultimately concerned with the enjoyment of the *rasa*. There is no comparison, for instance, between *Kirātārjunīya* and *Meghadūta* or between *Kumārasāmbhava* and *Rāvaṇavadha*. This diversity at different levels is not seen in the *Maṇipravāḷam* works. All centre on the courtesan; everything seems to gravitate towards her. What are borrowed from the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition are those words and expressions, similes and metaphors, motifs and tropes, which can represent the *bhoga* (enjoyment) ideal of the urban life that *Maṇipravāḷams* represents. I thank Manu Devadevan for suggesting that I make this important distinction.

<sup>10</sup> ‘śākuntalam tadānu mālavikāgnimitram  
kādambarīcaritamadbhūtabandhahṛdyam/  
marṛum marandamoli vaikiṇakūrudārā  
śuśrāva bhāvamadhuram ca maṇipravāḷam’|| Elamkulam  
P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, op. cit., Canto 2, v. 18, p. 55.

urban life-world, the definitive influence of *Kāmasūtra* on the one side and the literary theories in Sanskrit starting with the *Nāṭyśāstra* on the other, and other matters of detail. This putative urban world of *Maṇipravāḷam* was inhabited by the *gaṇikās* ('public women') and their *ceṭis* ('servant-maids'), the *naṅarakas* ('men-about-town'), the *viṭas* ('libertines'), the *lampaṭas* (the 'profligate') and so on, apart from the celestial *apsarās*, *gandharvas*, *cāraṅas*, *siddhas*, *yakṣas*, *kiṁnaras*, *vidyādharas*, *et al.* who frequent these *kāvya*s on various missions.<sup>11</sup>

In looking at *Maṇipravāḷam* poetry in this manner, I beg to differ substantially from earlier scholars who took it primarily as a 'movement' in the history of Malayalam literature. They saw it as the expression of cultural and moral decadence, the product of the 'season when the Nampūtiris went into heat' ('*Nampūtirimāruṭe poḷappukālam*').<sup>12</sup> The causality behind this statement was apparently

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<sup>11</sup> I owe a debt to Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, Ranikhet, 2010 (Permanent Black), which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. This book prompted me to read the *kāvya* literature in Sanskrit afresh as articulations of an urban sensibility, which in turn enabled me to read *Maṇipravāḷam* poetry in the way in which I seek to do here. I thank Kaul also for the many hours of interesting discussion we had on the subject. So also, M.P.Sankunni Nair's exceptionally brilliant studies (in Malayalam) of Sanskrit *kāvya*s in general and *Kālidāsa* in particular have influenced me in a big way. M.P.Sankunni Nair, *Chatravum Cāmaravum*, Calicut, 1988 (Mathrubhumi). It will also be interesting to compare the entire world of the *kāvya*s with representations of the urban sensibility in the visual arts. For a fleeting suggestion to this effect, Devangana Desai, 'Social Dimensions of Art in Early India', Presidential Address, Section I, Ancient Indian History, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Gorakhpur, 1989, pp. 21-56.

<sup>12</sup> The expression is used by Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, 'Tēvaṭicisthānam', in *Keralacaritrattinṅre Irulaṭaṅṅa Ēṭukaḷ*, reproduced in *idem.*, *ḷamkuḷam Kuṅṅan Piḷḷayūṭe Tiraṅṅetutta Kṛtikal*,

two-fold: a preponderance of eroticism in the poetry, with courtesans as the central characters, on the one side and the growth of the Brāhmaṇical establishment in Kerala on the other. It is a fact that many Brāhmaṇa settlements had come up and started controlling huge agrarian tracts with their corporations centred on temples by the time of the establishment of the Cēra kingdom of Mahodayapuram in the ninth century. The corporate character of these bodies was gradually giving way to the domination of individual Brāhmaṇa households as 'owners' of the substantial property of the temples in the post-Cēra period.<sup>13</sup> The growth of what is called the *janmi* system of landlordism was a concomitant of this,<sup>14</sup> which resulted in the emergence of a powerful class of Brāhmaṇa landlords with considerable leisure. At the same time, the practice of only the eldest male member of Nampūtiri families

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Thiruvananthapuram, 2005 (University of Kerala), p. 523. He reiterated it in *idem.*, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 11. He also believed that there was moral decay among Nampūtiris during the period when these texts were composed. Later scholars, such as K.Ramachandran Nair, *op.cit.* and P.V.Velayudhan Pillai, *Malayāla Sāhitya Caritram Kṛṣṇagātha Vare*, Kottayam, 1989 (National Book Stall), largely followed the construction of Elamkulam. However, N.Gopinathan Nair, who more or less shares the same tradition of scholarship, has struck a dissenting note in his Introduction to *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*, where he expresses doubt whether they were all Nampūtiris. Achyuthan Unni and Raghava Varier, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-31, look at these on a different plane altogether.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed study of the process, Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Calicut University, 1978 (Sandhya Publications).

<sup>14</sup> For Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai's understanding of the *janmi* system, *Janmisampradāyam Kēraḷattil*, Kottayam, 1953 (National Book Stall). For a critique and a fresh analysis, Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, New Delhi, 2009 (Oxford University Press), pp. 277-294.

marrying from within the caste, while the junior members went in for loose liaison with women of the various matrilineal castes, made the Nampūtiri morals less rigid than elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> It was this that prompted scholars to link the salaciousness in *Maṇipravālam* poetry with the rise of Nampūtiri landlordism. The literature, however, does not associate itself particularly with Nampūtiris. There is nothing in the texts to show that their authors, who were mostly anonymous, were Brāhmaṇas; and in at least one case where the authorship is known, it is a Cākyār, a caste of professional performers of Sanskrit drama as *kūṭiyāṭṭam* in the temple-theatre. Another occasion for propounding *Maṇipravālam* was that of the *pāṭhaka*, a different form of story-telling in temples. A verse in the *Padyaratnam* states: ‘This art of *Maṇipravālam* stays in *pāṭhakas*. It is accompanied by [the performer with] hanging head-gear and is based on women.’<sup>16</sup> This Cākyār association is of particular importance as we shall presently see.<sup>17</sup> So also, the men represented

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the ‘looseness’ in marriage was not just a Nampūtiri feature. All marriages among the matrilineal castes were of this kind, called *sambandham*, to begin and terminate which was very easy. For some reason, this got associated with Nampūtiris in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which has no factual foundation.

<sup>16</sup> *Maṇipravālavidyeyam pāṭhakeṣvavatiṣṭhate | lambaśipriparivārā mahiḷālimahāspadā* // P.K.Narayana Pillai, ed., *Padyaratnam*, Trivandrum, reprint, 1982 (University of Kerala), v. 2, p. 76 (my translation). The resonance that this has with the *Kāmasūtra* verse quoted above is too important to be missed.

<sup>17</sup> It was members of this caste who performed *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, Sanskrit plays as well as *kūttu*, the mono-act form of *prabandha* exposition. They used to call themselves as *naṭa*, *śailūṣa*, etc, as well as *sūtas* and *māgadhas*. The collapsing of the *sūta-māgadha* tradition with that of the *naṭa-śailūṣa* tradition is of great significance for understanding the process of amalgamation of the *mārgi* and *deśi* traditions.

in these texts are less often the landed Nampūtiris than members of other groups such as traders, fighters and even ruling elites. The context is rarely Nampūtiri *grāmas* and more often urban centres, marketplaces and even ‘royal’ households. In the circumstances, it becomes necessary to look at the evidence from this literature afresh.

The corpus that I seek to look at once again includes three *campūkāvya*s,<sup>18</sup> two *sandēśākāvya*s,<sup>19</sup> a *sargabandha* in five parts,<sup>20</sup> a collection of verses supposed to embody lessons given by a veteran courtesan to her daughter in their hereditary craft (*vaiśikatantra*),<sup>21</sup> a

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<sup>18</sup> *Campū*, by definition, is a *kāvya* where both prose and verse are used: *gadyapadyamayam kāvyam*. The ‘prose’ (*gadya*), however, is highly metrical.

There are various editions of the early Maṇipravāḷam *campūs*. The ones that I have used for the present purpose are N. Gopinathan Nair, ed., *Unniyaccīcaritam*, Calicut University, 2005 (University of Calicut); P.V. Krishnan Nair, ed., *Unniyāṭīcaritam*, Kottayam, reprint, 1976 (National Book Stall); Aymanam Krishna Kaimal, ed., *Unnicīrutēvīcaritam*, Kottayam, 1984 (National Book Stall).

<sup>19</sup> These *kāvya*s, too, have seen several editions and commentaries. The ones used here are: Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇūnilisandēśam*, Kottayam, reprint, 1983 (National Book Stall); Chathanath Achyuthan Unni and M.R.Raghava Varier, ed., *op.cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> K. Ramachandran Nair, ed., *Vaiśikatantram*, Trivandrum, 1969 (S.B.Press). M.R.Raghava Varier and K.P.Sankaran reject the idea that this is a single ‘text’ by any one author. M.R.Raghava Varier and K.P.Sankaran, ‘Illāṭṭa Oru Kṛṭiyeccolli’ (‘In the Name of a Nonexistent Work’), *Māṭṛbhūmi Weekly*, October 19-25, pp.30-33. They argue that these are largely stand-alone verses, used by Cākyārs in their *kūttu* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performances, many of these being part of the *āṭṭaparakārams* (‘stage manuals’) of *kūṭiyāṭṭams*, particularly *Mantrāṅkam*, which is the third Act of the play *Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa* by Bhāsa. Even accepting this very valid

poem describing a city<sup>22</sup> and several shorter *kāvya*s and stand-alone verses (*cāṭu* or *muktaka*) brought together in one volume by modern scholars,<sup>23</sup> apart from several verses quoted as illustration in *Līlātilakam* mentioned above. All these are generally centred on courtesans.

One thing that stands out clear and unmistakable about these texts is the heavily Sanskritic *kāvya* stamp they bear. The genres are mainly *campū* and *sandēśa*, with one single work that can be described as a *sargabandha*. There are several smaller *kāvya*s, *cāṭus* and *muktakas*. The narrative style, too, is comparable. *Nāṭakas* as such are absent; but the bulk of the *muktakas* and *cāṭus* brought together in the *Vaiśikatantram* and *Padyaratnam* as well as several of the illustrations given in *Līlātilakam* are from the stage manuals for the performance of Sanskrit *nāṭakas* in the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* mode known as *āṭṭaparakārams*. The metres used are invariably Sanskrit metres such as *Sragdharā*, *Śārdūlavikrīḍita*, and smaller ones like *Vasantatilakā*, *Anuṣṭubha* and *Āryā*. Interestingly, the *sandēśakāvya*s use *Mandākrāntā*, the metre that Kālidāsa has used in his *Meghasandēśa*, as if the use of any other metre would make it less than a *sandēśakāvya*! Dravidian metres, which are used in the Malayalam *pāṭṭu* that had become a popular genre by then, are scrupulously avoided in the verses, although the ‘prose’ (*gadya*) in the *campūs* is highly rhythm-bound, where the rhythm of some Dravidian metres could be identified.

The *kāvya* character of these works is not confined to their form. Their structure is entirely of the *kāvya*s in Sanskrit. This is clearest in the poetics and rhetoric of these works. We are singularly fortunate in getting a detailed contemporary discussion of its poetics and rhetoric in *Līlātilakam*. A word or two about the nature of this

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argument, there is no gainsaying that the verses contained in them represent the world of courtesans.

<sup>22</sup> K. Rathnamma, ed., *Ananthapuravarṇanam*, Trivandrum, 1997 (State Institute of Language).

<sup>23</sup> P.K.Narayana Pillai, ed., *Padyaratnam*, *op.cit.*

remarkable text may not be out of place here. It is divided into eight chapters, each of which is called a *śilpa*. They deal with 1) the general features of *Maṇipravāḷam*, 2) the ‘body’<sup>24</sup> of the language where grammatical features like cases, person, gender, etc., are taken up for discussion, 3) *sandhi*, 4) the poetic flaws (*kāvyaśoṣas*), 5) the merits (*guṇas*) of poetry, 6) ‘embellishment of the sound’ (*śabdālaṅkāra*), 7) ‘embellishment of the meaning’ (*arthālaṅkāra*) and, finally, 8) consideration of the ‘flavour’ (*rasa*). It will be clear from this list of contents itself that the anonymous author follows Sanskrit rhetoricians to the last detail, and this is important because there is evidence in the text that he is familiar with not only the somewhat well developed literature on the subject in Tamil but also contemporary writings in Kannada and Telugu. At the face of this, his clinging on to Sanskrit theories is of great interest and importance.

In fact, Chathanath Achyuthan Unni has, in a thoroughgoing study of rhetoric in Malayalam, shown convincingly that the poetics and rhetoric that *Līlātilakam* sets out are, to the last detail, from Sanskrit.<sup>25</sup> He has shown how deftly the text uses theories of earlier masters such as Bharata (*Nāṭyaśāstra*), Bhāmaha (*Kāvyaālaṅkāra*), Daṇḍin (*Kāvyaśāstra*), Vāmana (*Kāvyaālaṅkārasūtra*), Bhaṭṭa Tauta (*Kāvyaśāstra*), Udbhaṭa (*Kāvyaālaṅkārasaṅgraha*), Ānandavardhana (*Dhvanyāloka*), Abhinavagupta (*Abhinavabhāratī* commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra* as well as *Locana* commentary on *Dhvanyāloka*), Rudraṭa (*Kāvyaālaṅkāra*), Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (*Hṛdayadarpaṇa*), Ruyyaka (*Alaṅkārasarvasva*), Kuntaka (*Vakroktijīvitā*), Rājaśekhara (*Kāvyaśāstra*), Bhoja (*Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*) and Vidyānātha (*Pratāparudrīya*), thus crafting a rhetoric of *Maṇipravāḷam* entirely on their basis. To be sure, the author of *Līlātilakam* does not propound any new theory; nor does he set out to defend one particular school

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<sup>24</sup> The practice of Sanskrit theoreticians looking at *kāvya* as consisting of body and soul is followed here as well.

<sup>25</sup> Chathanath Achyuthan Unni, *Alaṅkāraśāstram Malayāḷattil*, Trivandrum, 1984 (State Institute of Languages).

against other competing schools. His purpose was different – it was to examine the existing corpus of texts in *Maṇḍiravālam* and define, on the basis of this examination, the purpose and meaning of it. In doing so, he does it exclusively on the lines of his exhaustive knowledge of the literature on the subject in Sanskrit. In spite of his acquaintance with what is available in other south Indian languages such as Tamil and Kannada, *Līlātilakam* does not use their details there. This is not without significance.

*Maṇḍiravālam*'s total dependence on the *kāvya* tradition does not just begin or end with these external features or the prescriptive aspects of prosody, poetics or rhetoric – it goes beyond both form and theory. A reading of the texts shows that these texts are permeated through and through with the urban sensibility that *kāvya*s in Sanskrit express. This is based on a real urban experience that Kerala went through in the medieval period. True, historians have not so far made a detailed study of the urban processes or experience in Kerala in this period. There is, however, strong reason to believe that trade and urbanization had reached a relatively high level in Kerala in this period. The texts describe towns very elaborately. Thus, *Unniyaccāritam* has a lengthy passage on the town of Tirumarutūr.<sup>26</sup> In describing Tirumarutūr, the poet says that it is superior in all respects to not only towns like Aḷakā, Laṅkā, Bhogavatī, Amarāvātī (which may have existed only in the poet's imagination) but also Kollam, Koṭuṅṅallūr, Vaḷḷuvanagarappalli, Kuṇavāy, Maṅgalapuram and Dōrasamudram (of which he may have had firsthand knowledge). Similarly, *Uṇṇiyāṭīcaritam*'s description of the town of Śrīparvatam with its busy marketplace concludes by saying that it was equal to Kōlikkoṭu, Kollam, Vayaṅṅāṭu, Mutukōṭṭūr, Kuḷamūkkū and Māṭāvi,<sup>27</sup> each of which was a prosperous trading centre in medieval Kerala. *Uṇṇunīlīsandeśam* describes Kollam as putting even the town of Indra to shame. In the port there are ships big and small, coming from far and near, crossing the ocean like the

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<sup>26</sup> Gopinathan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 95-98.

<sup>27</sup> Krishnan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, p.50

fame of the ruler of Vēṇāṭu. In short, there is no place equal to it in the fourteen worlds.<sup>28</sup> The market of Kariyanāṭṭukāvu is described as unequalled even by Kōlikkōṭu and Kollam, although the goddess of prosperity along with all people gathered there withdraw from there by evening and not a child will be seen there after that!<sup>29</sup>

This growth in trade was the fallout of two developments. Much of the wetland in Kerala had been utilised for rice cultivation by the time of the Cēra kingdom of Mahōdayapuram (AD 800-1124). Dry land, known as *paṛampū* or *purayīṭam*, was gradually being exploited, particularly for purposes of cultivating what are known as ‘cash crops’ or ‘commercial crops’ such as coconut, areca nut, pepper, betel leaves, etc. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal have described this as the ‘*paṛampū-purayīṭam* system of economy’.<sup>30</sup> Inscription from the twelfth century onwards point to the increased use of such dry land,<sup>31</sup> which later came to be known as ‘garden land’. A verse in *Śukasandēśa*, a Sanskrit *kāvya* from Kerala in this period, introduces Kerala as ‘rich in coconut and areca palms on which climb pepper and betel vines’.<sup>32</sup> Accounts of trade contained in the writings of Arab, Chinese, and European travellers mention precisely these as the items that were traded in from the port towns of Kerala. Apart from this development of the production of tradable

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<sup>28</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇunīlīsandēśam*, vv. 68-71, pp. 69-71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 124, pp. 98-99.

<sup>30</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, *Madhyakālakeraḷam: Sampattu, Samūham, Samskāram*, Trivandrum, 1997 (Chintha Publications), pp 23-32. This article, ‘*Paṛampūpurayīṭasampadvavastha*’, is written jointly by him and Rajan Gurukkal.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, ‘The Perunchellur Copper Plates of AD 1145’ ed. by Kesavan Veluthat, *Sāhityavum Caritravum: Dhāraṇayūṭe Sādhyatakaḷ*, Kozhikode, 2013 (Mathrubhumi Books), pp. 151-159.

<sup>32</sup> *yam medinyām ruciramaricottālatāmbūlavallī-vellatkerakramukanikarān keraḷānudbaṇanti* in N.P.Unni, ed., *Śukasandēśa of Lakṣmīdāsa*, Delhi, 1985 (Nag Publishers), I, 34, p. p. 30 (my translation).

surplus, there was also a growing demand for these products in the international market. West Asian trade continued in the hands of Jewish, Syrian Christian and Muslim traders. Chinese trade opened up in a big way by the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. European travellers were visiting the coast of Kerala, trade being one of their primary interests.<sup>33</sup> This growth in trade brought in its train the rise of urban centres and urbanism.

Apart from mentioning the names of these towns and making comparisons among them, the texts contain detailed descriptions of marketplaces in individual towns. True, many of these descriptions are stereotypical in nature; but it can hardly be denied that the stereotype itself is based on the reality of a marketplace in a town. Thus we have elaborate accounts of the marketplace of Tirumarutūr in *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*,<sup>34</sup> of Kaṇṇiyūr in *Uṇṇiyāṭīcaritam*,<sup>35</sup> of Āyānārcira in *Uṇṇicirutēvīcaritam*,<sup>36</sup> and of various towns in *Uṇṇunīlīsandeśam*.<sup>37</sup> In the descriptions of these marketplaces are accounts of the various articles which were bought and sold in these markets. They included local products as well as items which were imported from places far afield such as China and Arabia. Nearly every text, describing a market, speaks about the quarrels among the vendors gathered

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<sup>33</sup> Vasco da Gama found two Berbers from Tunis, who spoke Castilian and Genoese in Calicut in 1498. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, New York, 1997 (Cambridge University Press), p. 129. Still earlier, there were travellers like Athansius Nikitin, Niccolo Conti and many others who visited the coasts of Kerala.

<sup>34</sup> Gopinathan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 125-133.

<sup>35</sup> Krishnan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>36</sup> Krishna Kaymal, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>37</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *op.cit.*, vv. 63-65, pp. 68-9; vv. 79-85, pp. 75-6. The editor thinks that there is no place for such elaborate description of marketplaces in a *sandeśakāvya* and that nothing will happen if we read the *kāvya* leaving out these descriptions! p. 76.

there, the acrid tongue of the fishwives, the unintelligible speech of people from far-off places and so on.<sup>38</sup> The price of an Arabian horse is mentioned in one place.<sup>39</sup> Ships from China as well as the Coromandel Coast are described in the *Uṇṇunilīsandeśam* as docked in the port of Kollam.<sup>40</sup> Texts abound in motifs of ships. Thus, a ship approaching the port is used as metaphor to describe a woman going to a man.<sup>41</sup> The *Candrotsavam* advises the heroine to behave with prudence, which is likened to a ship steered properly.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, another verse in the same text uses the motif of a ship in the ocean to describe the circumlocution of a woman.<sup>43</sup>

Incidentally, Chinese and Arabic pottery dating from this period (thirteenth-sixteenth centuries) have been discovered in huge quantities from Kollam and other coastal towns of Kerala.<sup>44</sup> This has to be read with descriptions of these towns by Arab and Chinese travellers in this period. So also, the texts give detailed accounts of the varieties of coins transacted in these marketplaces. It is interesting that, apart from local issues such as *kāśu*, *kalāñcu*, *kāṇam*, *accu*, *āṇayaccu*, etc., even foreign coins such as *tiramam* (for Dirham) and *aśaravi* (for Ashrafi) find a place in the lists.<sup>45</sup> On the

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<sup>38</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇunilīsandeśam*, vv. 63-75; pp. 68-79; Gopinathan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 125-133.

<sup>39</sup> Gopinathan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇunilīsandeśam*, v. 70, p. 71.

<sup>41</sup> Narayana Pillai, ed., *Padyaratnam*, v. 35, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op. cit.*, Canto 3, v. 52., p. 93.

<sup>43</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op. cit.*, Canto 3, v. 65, p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> Noboru Karashima, ed., *In Search of Chinese Ceramic-sherds in South India and Sri Lanka*, Tokyo, 2004 (Taisho University Press), esp., pp. 44-54.

<sup>45</sup> *Tiramam* is mentioned in Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇunilīsandeśam*, *op.cit.*, v. 63, p. 68; it is mentioned with a variation

whole, therefore, there is reason to believe that there was brisk trade and a concomitant urban atmosphere in many centres in Kerala in this period. The towns and marketplaces in the *Maṇipravālam* texts are not just matters of imagination, although the image of the urban, as carried in the *kāvya* literature in Sanskrit, may have heavily influenced the authors.

Urbanism was not just about the existence of trade and marketplaces. Although it is argued that marketplaces constituted the 'core' of the urban space structure,<sup>46</sup> there were other parts of the town which were no less of 'cores', depending upon the point of reference from which one is looking at it.<sup>47</sup> The *Maṇipravālam* texts describe other aspects of the towns as well, such as the 'royal' palaces, the temples, other residential mansions, the roads, gardens, tanks and so on in relation to the towns, references being too many to be quoted. Towns were also the places where the *naṅarakas* ('men-about-town') lived. The description of one of the paramours of Uṅṅiyaccī is as if it is copied from the *Naṅarakavṛtta* in the *Kāmasūtra*: 'wearing sandals, smearing his body with musk and vermilion, exuding fragrance of sandalwood and aloe...'<sup>48</sup> Similar descriptions are available in *Uṅṅiyāṭicaritam*,<sup>49</sup> *Candrotsavam*,<sup>50</sup> etc. So also, there is

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in spelling (to suit the metre) as *tramam* in Krishnan Nair, ed., *Uṅṅiyāṭicaritam*, *op.cit.*, p. 49. *Aśaravi* is mentioned in Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op.cit.*, Canto 1, v. 105, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> B.D.Chattopadhyaya, 'Urban Centres in Early Medieval India: an Overview', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, eds., *Situating Indian History: For Sarveppalli Gopal*, Delhi, 1986 (Oxford University Press), p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> Kaul, *op.cit.*, p. 109, n. 131.

<sup>48</sup> Gopinathan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 148-151 (my translation). Compare this with what the *Kāmasūtra*, 1.4.5 expects the *naṅaraka* to do: *sa prātarutthāya kṛtanīyatakṛtyaḥ, grhītadantadhāvanaḥ, mātrayānulepanam dhūpani srajam iti ca grhītvā...*

<sup>49</sup> Krishnan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, vv. 164-170, p. 69.

the presence of other kinds of profligate libertines that the *Kāmasūtra* speaks about, although they do not play any central role in the texts.<sup>51</sup>

We have descriptions of the courtesans which answer, to the last detail, to what the Sanskrit *kāvya*s see in them. There is, however, a major difference. While the *gaṇikā* is generally the female counterpart of the *nagaraka* in Sanskrit literature,<sup>52</sup> they are the central figures in *Maṇipravāḷam*. This is no contradiction; but it is important that the *nagaraka* hero's presence is much less visible than that of the *gaṇikā* heroine who is ubiquitous in the texts. This may be explained against the peculiar social reality in Kerala. Most non-Brāhmaṇa upper castes were matrilineal and women had a much stronger presence in Kerala. Marriage as an institution was not very deeply entrenched, with *sambandham* or a somewhat loose liaison being the accepted practice. It was not just that the *Nampūtiri Brāhmaṇas* courted such alliances – members of other castes too entered into such alliances from one's own caste or from other, upper, castes. Women in such a situation had a greater presence than men. Thus it may be said, even at the expense of using an oxymoron, that the *nagaraka* hero had only an absent presence in *Maṇipravāḷam*.

In fact, as I mentioned earlier, it is this celebration of women and looking upon them as so many instruments of pleasure that attracted the ire of modern scholars who were brought up within the tradition of Victorian prudery. While there is no denying that these

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<sup>50</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op. cit.*, Canto 5, v. 11, p. 153.

<sup>51</sup> They are mentioned as making a beeline to see the courtesan in all the three *campūkāvya*s we have taken up. So also, they figure in the verses in *Vaiśikatantram*.

<sup>52</sup> Kaul, *op.cit.*, p. 144; Sankunni Nair, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-75; 103-116; Desai, *op.cit.*

poems are 'a little warmer than necessary',<sup>53</sup> it is equally important that the debt that they have to the *kāvya* tradition in Sanskrit should not be lost sight of. In fact, there are *kāvyas* in Sanskrit which are equally warm or warmer.<sup>54</sup> In seeing these heroines as cast in the same mould of their counterparts, namely the courtesans of the *kāvya* literature in Sanskrit, we should also be able to appreciate similar expressions of art such as sculpture, dance in the *Mohiniyāttam* style and so on. Rather than recognising them as expressions of an urban sensibility, to say that they mark moral degradation or cultural decadence is passing unnecessary judgements.

The courtesans of the *Maṇipravālam* texts belong largely to the elite category of *ganikās*, courtesans *de luxe*; they are no ordinary prostitutes. This distinction is very significant. Courtesans, it may be remembered, form an important urban phenomenon. In fact, the courtesans of *Maṇipravālam* texts are cast in the same mould of their counterparts in the Sanskrit *kāvyas*, where they are part of the urban setting. It will be interesting to compare the descriptions of the

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<sup>53</sup> This is the title of a chapter on Khajuraho in John Keay's book, *India Discovered*, London, 1981, New Delhi, Reprint, 1989 (Rupa), Chapter 8. Keay quotes Captain Burt, one of James Prinsep's rowing engineers, to have reported in the *Asiatic Journal* that he 'saw seven Hindoo temples, most beautifully and exquisitely carved as to the workmanship, but the sculptor had at times allowed his subject to grow a little warmer than there was any absolute necessity for his doing; indeed some of the sculptures here were extremely indecent and offensive...' p. 99. This kind of disapproval informs the understanding of *Maṇipravālam* poetry in the writings of earlier scholars.

<sup>54</sup> Such 'warmth' can be felt in the eighth canto of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*. For works which are almost entirely of this category, see the four *bhāṇas* of Vararuci, Īśvaradatta, Śyāmilaka and Śūdraka included in the *Caturbhāṇi*. I have used the edition by D.G.Sharma and Krishna, Trichur, 1922 (Mangalodayam Press).

details of the palatial residential houses of the *gaṇikās* in the *Maṇipravāla kāvyas* such as *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*, *Uṇṇiyāṭīcaritam* and *Uṇṇunīlīsandeśam* with the descriptions of the houses of *veśyās* in the *bhāṇas* like *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda*.<sup>55</sup> Our heroines answer to all the details in the descriptions of the *gaṇikā* in the narrative texts as well as the prescriptions in normative ones like the *Kāmasūtra*.<sup>56</sup> The debt to *Kāmasūtra* that *Maṇipravālam* acknowledges is so much that there are many direct references and indirect allusions to the work in the poems. Speaking about the arrival of the rainy season, the poet says in a verse in the *Padyaratnam* that the time is most opportune for making an exegesis of the *advaitaśāstra* of Manmatha.<sup>57</sup> *Kāmasāstra* is spoken of as dealing with *Vedānta* in another verse as well.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere in the same collection, it is stated that a few youngsters had composed a commentary on *Vātsyāyana* on the wall the previous night.<sup>59</sup> Another verse in the same collection almost copies the prescriptions of foreplay in the *Kāmasūtra*.<sup>60</sup> *Candrotsavam* says that Candrikā entertained Moon with the different *karaṇas* such as *praṇayakalaha* (love-quarrel), *alpaḥāsa* (reserved smile), *adharadāna*, *cumbana* (kiss), etc.<sup>61</sup> The heroine's mother prays to Kāmadeva for a

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<sup>55</sup> For the references in the *Maṇipravāla kāvyas*, Gopināthan Nair, ed., *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*, *op.cit.*, 'prose' 17, pp. 143-147; Krishnan Nair, ed., *Uṇṇiyāṭīcaritam*, *op.cit.*, vv. 126-7, pp. 61-2; Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Uṇṇunīlīsandeśam*, II, vv. 33-38, pp. 121-3. For *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda*, *Caturbhāṇī*, *op.cit.*, p.7 (Each of the four *bhāṇas* included here is separately paginated). There are similar correspondences between the descriptions of the *cēṭīs*, in both the *Maṇipravāla kāvyas* and the *bhāṇas*.

<sup>56</sup> *Kāmasūtra*, 6.1.

<sup>57</sup> Naryanana Pillai, ed., *Padyaratnam*, *op. cit.*, v. 161, p. 114.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 175, p. 119.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 168, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 171, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Candrotsavam*, *op. cit.*, Canto 1, v. 92, p. 46.

girl child and takes a vow that if she is blessed with one, she would have her perform the whole of *Vātsyāyanam* every day!<sup>62</sup> *Śukasandēśam*, a Sanskrit *sandēśakāvya* from contemporary Kerala refers to young prostitutes (*veśakanyāḥ*) being teased by libertines (*viṭa*) when they reach late for lessons in *Kāmasūtra*.<sup>63</sup>

The image of the courtesan in *Maṇipravāḷam* poetry seems to have had its prototype in that of the *apsarās* of Sanskrit literature. A courtesan in many cases is an *apsarā* fallen as human following a curse. *Uṇṇiyāṭī*, the heroine of the *campū* bearing her name, was *Prāvṛṭ*, an *apsarā*, reborn following a curse of *Rōhiṇī*. *Naiṇaippilla*, the grandmother of the heroine of *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*, was of *apsarā* extraction. *Uṇṇiyaccī* herself is described as ‘stealing the charm of *cāraṇa*, *siddha* and [other] celestial women’.<sup>64</sup> *Medinīcandrikā*, the heroine of *Candrotsavam*, was born on earth following a curse of the Moon provoked by *Menakā*, the *apsarā*. In a similar fashion, celestial beings are the cause of separation between the heroes and heroines in the *sandēśakāvya*s. This *apsarā* connection is extremely important because, when their images got crafted in Sanskrit literature, it was the model of the *gaṇikās* that fired the poets’ imagination. M.P.Sankunni Nair has demonstrated that the *apsarās* are *gaṇikās* in celestial guise.<sup>65</sup> The *gaṇikā* of Sanskrit *kāvya*s, very much part of the urban setting that saw the production of these *kāvya*s, inspired the image of the *apsarā* and the *apsarā* inspired the *gaṇikā* of *Maṇipravāḷam* literature. A full circle!

These courtesans were well-educated. Even here, there is a close correspondence between the descriptions of the education of the courtesan in the *Maṇipravāḷam* texts and the prescriptions in the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Canto 2, v. 23, p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> Unni., ed., *Śukasandēśa*, op. cit., II, v. 12, p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Gopinathan Nair, ed., op.cit., p. 112.

<sup>65</sup> M.P.Sankunni Nair, *Chatravum Cāmaravum*, op.cit., pp. 103-116. This brilliant piece by Sankunni Nair provides rare insights into the world of Sanskrit *kāvya*s.

*Vidyāsamuddeśa* section of *Kāmasūtra*.<sup>66</sup> The curriculum seems to have included music, dance, painting, story-telling, versification, *kāvya*s in both Sanskrit and *Maṇipravālam*, juggling, chess, different games played during the Oṇam festival, gambling, and so on.<sup>67</sup> So also, they were adepts in the different ways in which they could entertain their patrons (or clients?).<sup>68</sup>

In this context, special mention may be made of the *Vaiśikatantram*. The title of the work, if it was in the original and if indeed an 'original' existed, demands special attention for the strong association it has with the title of a whole section in *Kāmasūtra*, namely *Vaiśika*.<sup>69</sup> It is in the form of advices given by an experienced *gaṇikā* to her daughter, based on what she in turn had acquired from older generations. It shares all features with the *Kuṭṭanīmata* of Dāmodaragupta. As indicated by the title, the text aims at exposing the secrets of the whole craft of prostitution. It is significant that many of the verses contained in it as well as those in the *Kuṭṭanīmata* are used by Cākyārs in the performance of Kūṭiyāttam. In fact,

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<sup>66</sup> *Kāmasūtra*, 1.3. Bharata enjoins that the *gaṇikās* speak Sanskrit and recommends Sanskrit education for them.

*rājñyāśca gaṇikāyāśca śilpakāryāstathaiva ca |*  
*kāryāvasthāntarakṛtaṃ yojyam pāṭheṣu saṃskṛtam ||*  
*krīḍārtham sarvalokasya prayoge ca sukhāśrayaṃ |*  
*kalābhyāsāśrayam caiva pāṭhyaṃ veśyāsu saṃskṛtam ||*  
*kalōpacārajñānārtham krīḍārtham pārthicasya ca |*  
*nirdiṣṭam śilpakāryāstu nāṭake saṃskṛtam vacaḥ ||*

*Nāṭyaśāstra*, Chapter 18, vv. 37, 40, 41. See Babulal Shukla Sastri, ed., *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Varanasi, 1978 (Choukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan), pp. 339-40. I am grateful to Chathanath Achyuthan Unni for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>67</sup> Many texts give indications of this. A very good representative is the education that Medinīcandrikā got in *Candrotsavam*, *op.cit.*, Canto 2, vv. 59-66, pp. 67-8.

<sup>68</sup> *Vaiśikatantram*, *op. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> *Kāmasūtra*, *Adhikaraṇa* 6.

modern scholars depended heavily on the stage manuals used by the Cākyārs for constituting the text of *Vaiśikatantram*. Whether a single work called *Vaiśikatantram* existed or not, the verses in it were in circulation in the period that we are concerned with, particularly among the Cākyārs who performed in the theatre.

This Cākyār factor gives a clue to not only the origin and development but also the specific character of *Maṇipravāḷam* in Kerala. The *Padyaratnam* verse quoted above unequivocally states that the art of *Maṇipravāḷam* obtains in *pāṭhaka* performances, which in turn was inspired by the *bhāṇas* in Sanskrit. A Sanskrit *bhāṇa* from Kerala, the *Rasasadana*, though slightly later in date (sixteenth century), has the following description of the performer of the *bhāṇa*:

On the stage with a lighted lamp in the middle, with the *Naiṇyār* women on the side [marking the rhythm], with the front glittering with Brāhmaṇa connoisseurs, and with the *Nambyār* playing on the earthenware drum behind, a *naṭa* acts a *prabandha* with clear expressions.<sup>70</sup>

This is a realistic description of a Cākyār performing *kūttu*. In other texts, too, there are similar statements. Three verses in *Uṇṇiyāṭīcaritam*, on the heroine, are stated to have been recited by the Cākyār during a performance.<sup>71</sup> Indra overhears a *Maṇipravāḷa śloka* that a paramour sings in the *Unniccirutēvīcaritam* and promptly falls in love with the heroine.<sup>72</sup> The *vidūṣaka* in the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* used to explain the theme and the progress of the story in *Maṇipravāḷam* and even recited parodies (*pratiśloka*) of the verses recited by the main characters.

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<sup>70</sup> *madhye dīpajvalanamadhure pārśvataḥ pāṇighastrī-  
citrībhūte sarasaḥṛdayairbhūsurairbhāsītāgre|  
prṣṭhe mārdāṅgikavilasite raṅgadeśe praviṣṭaḥ  
spaṣṭākūtam naṭayati naṭaḥ ko'pi kañcit prabandham||*

quoted in N.P.Unni, ed., *Prabandhamanjari*, New Delhi, 1998 (Rashtriya Sanskrita Sansthan), p. xlvi (my translation).

<sup>71</sup> Krishnan Nair, ed., *op.cit.*, vv. 118-20, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> Krishna Kaymal, ed., *op.cit.*, v. 3, and *gadya* 14, pp. 27-8.

So, it is not unlikely that *Maṇipravālam* poetry as it developed in Kerala had its origin in the Sanskrit theatre. Starting with the *miśrabhāṣā* and *ardhasaṁskṛtam* that Bharata advised in performances and the *goṣṭhīs* that *Kāmasūtra* speaks of where the *nagaraka* is advised to tell stories in a language ‘which is neither too heavily Sanskritic nor too much in the local tongue’, it grew through the *pāṭhaka*, *kūttu* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performances. *Maṇipravālam* gradually became a new language in Kerala. The process was slow, complex and interesting. The earliest literary compositions from Kerala, such as the *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra (eighth-ninth centuries) or *Tapatīsamvaraṇam* and *Subhadrādhanāñjayam* of Kulaśekhara (ninth century) were not only *nāṭakas* but were also used in a big way by Cākyārs for the performance of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. The Cākyārs made improvisations to suit local sensibilities, which were duly resented to by purists.<sup>73</sup> The Cākyārs, however, carried on. The *vidūṣaka* who has only a marginal role in the original plays began to take the centre-stage. He claims four full nights all for himself in the plays as his *nirvahaṇa* which purports to be expounding the ‘*puruṣārthas*’, *puruṣārthas* in this case being *aśana*, *rājasevā*, *veśyāvinoda* and *vañcana* in the place of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. They regaled the audience with ribald jokes and erotic poems from well-known texts such as *Kuṭṭanīmata* and so on as well as verses composed *de novo* in the *veśyāvinoda*. Such verses became part of the Cākyārs repertoire. Whole new *kāvya*s were composed on these lines. In this way, a *Maṇipravālavidyā* came to be established, which was ‘based on women’ – *mahilālimahāspadā* – all the way. If it is permeated through and through with the *kāvya* tradition in Sanskrit, it is because it had its basis in Sanskrit *nāṭakas*. The ambience, too, was comparable.

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<sup>73</sup> A whole treatise chastising the Cākyārs for the freedom they took came to be written in the period around fifteenth century. K.G.Paulose, ed., *Naṭāṅkuṣam*, Trippunithura, 1993 (Government Sanskrit College).

A question may raise itself here. Why did the poets choose to write in *Maṇipravālam* if they were expressing things Sanskritic all the way? The explanation is found in the verse quoted from *Kāmasūtra*: a language which is too Sanskritic would fail to communicate to an audience of considerable variety; and telling stories exclusively in the local tongue will be too pedestrian. This was a strategy that had been suggested by Bharata, commented on by Abhinavagupta and followed by Vātsyāyana and others, perhaps all over the country and even outside. The only difference is that it saw its fulfilment in Kerala, taking the *kāvya* tradition in Sanskrit to *Maṇipravālam* in a consummate manner. The reason for this is to be sought in the preponderance of the Brāhmaṇical element in society with a heavy dose of Sanskrit *kāvya* in the education, not only of the Nampūtiris but of the upper sections of society who were under their influence. This combination did not obtain in other parts of south India where, in spite of the presence of *Maṇipravālam*, we do not find its development along the lines it took in Kerala.

The above examination shows that the literary practice in medieval Kerala in what was called *Maṇipravālam* was actually a continuation of the *kāvya* tradition in Sanskrit. The *kāvya* reached Kerala mainly through the *nāṭakas* and took roots there through their performances. This is not to deny the presence of other kinds of *kāvyas* which are explicitly mentioned. A second aspect that comes out of this examination is the urban ambience of the poems, contrary to what earlier scholars had thought about them. True, we have beautiful vignettes of the rural in them; but they are as seen by a townsman. It did express the sensibility that had developed in Kerala by this period; but the cultural baggage that it had carried with it was what it had carried from the larger cosmopolis of which it had become part by the tenth century. Was it really a case of the cosmopolitan world of Sanskrit disintegrating,<sup>74</sup> or was it that even

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<sup>74</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in a World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2006 (University of California Press), p. 410.

the literature in the regional languages started behaving like ‘the vernacular form of the cosmopolitan’ rather than ‘the cosmopolitan form of the vernacular’, where it indicates not exactly the disintegration of the cosmopolitan? Alternatively, it may be possible to speak about the phenomenon more meaningfully in terms of the emergence of a regional identity – the self confidence that the region of Kerala had acquired by now, defined in its own terms as well as in contradistinction with its ‘others’.<sup>75</sup> The identity that Kerala had acquired by the time of the Cēra kingdom of Mahōdayapuram had its special features including a heavy Brāhmaṇical character. Those sections of society which were responsible for this identity were representing the region that had taken shape by then in a particular way; in so representing, they were making use of the tools available in the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition with which they were familiar from the period from which the identity and its affiliation had been articulated.

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<sup>75</sup> Kesavan Veluthat, ‘Evolution of a Regional Identity’, in *The Early Medieval in South India, op. cit.* , pp. 295-311.

## APPENDIX

I give below brief outlines of the texts used here for the benefit of those who are not familiar with Malayalam, particularly as none of these is available in English translation.

### I. **The *campūs*:**

#### 1. *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*

The earliest of these, *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam* ("The Story of Uṇṇiyaccī"), is a *campūkāvya* set in the northern parts of Kerala, in what are today the Kannur and Wynad districts. The surviving portion of the work opens with the description of Ardhanārīśvara in the temple of Tiruccaḷari. After praising the local king, Purakiḷār who got the roof of the temple covered with copper, the work goes on to describe the different deities and *tīrthas* in the temple. It proceeds to the nearby temple of Tirunelli where Viṣṇu is worshipped. An elaborate description of the town of Tirumarutūr follows. There is the temple of Śiva in that town, where the Aṣṭamī festival is being celebrated with much pomp. All beautiful women of the region are assembled there. A Gandharva youth, who was watching the festival from above, happens to see Uṇṇiyaccī, a vivacious damsel: Is she Lakṣmī? Śacī? Rōhiṇī? the Goddess of Light? Moonlight that has taken feminine form? or another arrow that Brahmā created for Kāmadeva? The Gandharva youth forgot his station in this trance and descended on the earth taking human form. He met a *caṭṭa* (Brāhmaṇa student) whom he asked: 'Who could this lady be, who has stolen at once the lovely charm of *cāraṇa*, *siddha* and [other] celestial women as well as my heart?' The *caṭṭa* gave him details about the lady. A beautiful woman of the race of *apsarās*, called Nāṇṇaiṇṇiḷḷa, was born in Atiyamānallūr. She had a daughter, Acciyār by name, through the chief of Aḷḷariṭam house and the girl whom the Gandharva saw was Uṇṇiyaccī, the younger of Acciyār's two daughters. She has taken up residence in the town of Kōlam, the capital of Purakiḷārnāṭu.

The Gandharva stays awake all night, thinking of Uṇṇiyaccī. Accompanied by the *caṭṭa*, he proceeds to her house in the morning. Then follows an elaborate description of the prosperous marketplace on the way, where he sees merchants from far and near. The poet gives a detailed account of the merchandise of different varieties. He reaches Uṇṇiyaccī's palatial residence, the description of which answers to all prescriptions of architectural treatises. There is a hilarious description of those who have assembled there just to have a glance of Uṇṇiyaccī. They included merchants, sorcerers, physicians, astrologers, Brāhmaṇas, students

and others, their boastfulness being particularly the butt of the poet's laughter. The Gandharva's day is made when he was able to see Uṅṅiyaccī at last. Following an elaborate description of her from tip to toe, the poet closes with a prayer to the Goddess of Paḷāncēri that She protect us.

## 2. Uṅṅiyāṭīcaritam

*Uṅṅiyāṭīcaritam* sings in a similar fashion the praise of Uṅṅiyāṭī, daughter of the ruler of Ōṭanāṭu in what later was central Travancore and a danseuse called Kuṭṭatti of the Cerukara house. The poem tells us that she was actually a Gandharva woman born on earth on account of a curse that had befallen her. It opens with the description of Udayaparvata and two Gandharva lineages that lived in its valleys. One of them worshipped Sun while the other were worshippers of Moon.

Into the lineage of the Sun-worshippers was born the extremely beautiful girl, Prāvṛṭ. Once when Prāvṛṭ was playing with her friends, Moon happened to see her and was overtaken by lust. He spent some time with her; but was not entirely satisfied. He approached Rohiṇī, still fired by the urge for sex. Realising the background, Rohiṇī cursed Prāvṛṭ that she be born as a human. However, on the supplication of Maṇisekhara, her father, it was granted that she would retain her charm and vivacity as well as accomplishments in dance, music and poetry.

One day Moon heard a song in captivating female voice from the earth. He was promptly stricken with love. He asked Suvāka and Matidīpa, descendants of the Moon-worshippers living on Moon's path, to go and find out whose song it was. They went, taking an aerial route. They saw the earth surrounded by the oceans and centred on the Meru. They go on to describe the most beautiful Kerala, celebrated in all three worlds and the town of Tṛṣṣūr famous for the Śiva temple and Mahōdaya, the capital of the kings of Kerala. In that blessed country was the principality of Ōṭanāṭu, where there are many houses of great men, prosperous with grain and wealth as well as accomplished in all arts including sweet music. The city of Kaṅṭiyūr, its capital, was 'celebrated in all ten directions and destroying the pride of Indra's capital'. The description of the marketplace of Śrīparvata there is very elaborate and so is that of the other quarters of the city. In that city are the two palace complexes of the ruler of Ōṭnāṭu, comparable to Aḷakā and Indrapurī. Even poets like Bhāravi would find it difficult to describe these.

Here they descend on the earth. They worship at the temple of Kaṅṭiyūr, which is described in great detail. In an exquisitely decorated hall, a performance was going on. The actor was elaborately dressed and commanded respect. The verses he recited were on Uṅṅiyāṭī. When they enquired who this performer was, they were told that it was Damōdara, a Cākyār, accomplished in all branches of knowledge. Paying their respects to him, they introduced themselves as from *paradeśa*, and told him the purpose of their visit. He told them that a number of

verses have been composed on her and took them to her place. Asked about her lineage and other details, the Cākyār tells them, in several verses, about her parents, the ruler of Ōṭanāṭu and the danseuse of the Cerukara house. He goes on to describe the birth of Uṅṅiyāṭī and then dwells upon the beauty of Uṅṅiyāṭī. They reach her house and see the variety of people gathered to see Uṅṅiyāṭī, whose description is highly sarcastic. Passing the *ceṭīs*, they wade through the several halls and rooms in the house to finally see Uṅṅiyāṭī. The Gandharvas pay their obeisance to her and then follows an elaborate description of her beauty, where the poem ends as the last leaves have not come down to us manuscript.

### 3. *Uṅṅicirutēvīcaritam*

*Uṅṅicirutēvīcaritam* has a similar theme. It opens with a description of the beautiful brāhmaṇa *grāma* of Cōkiram in the present day Malappuram District, the accomplished Somayājins there and the temple of *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*. This is followed by the description of the place called Poyilam within Cōkiram, where the garden takes the central place. *Viṭas* (libertines), danseuses and several others live there, where it is noisy with galloping sound of horses and even rulers approaching. The poet describes the other temples, and the house of the heroine, Tōṭṭuvāyppalli and the gardens, tanks and paddy fields attached to it. There, a poet composed and sung a *śloka* in *Maṅṅipravālam*, hearing which Indra approached the poet and asked who she was. He told Indra that in the vicinity there was the house of the accomplished danseuses of Poyilam which surpassed the fame of Lamkā, Aḷakā and Amarāvati. A great danseuse by name Naṅṅa Ayya was born into that house. Her daughter was Rāyirampiḷḷa. Uṅṅicirutēvī, (about whom the *śloka* was sung) was her daughter. Then follows an elaborate description of the beauty of Uṅṅicirutēvī. Accompanied by the poet, Indra goes to the house of Uṅṅicirutēvī and then there is the regulation description of the marketplace, the vendors there and the female servants. Indra sees the house of Uṅṅicirutēvī, which is described very elaborately. There he says men-in attendance as well as paramours of different descriptions. At the end of these hilarious descriptions, the poem ends abruptly as the last few leaves have not survived.

## II. The *Sandeśakāvya*s:

There are two *sandeśakāvya*s in *Maṅṅipravālam*, both using the structure and theme of *Meghasandēśa*. *Lilātilakam* alludes to a third one, *Kākasandēśam* and quotes one verse from it; but it has not come down to us. The Sanskrit *sandēśas* from Kerala produced in this period, viz., *Śukasandēśa* of Lakṣmīdāsa and *Kokilasandēśa* of Uddaṅḍa too can be included in this category.

### 1. *Uṅṅunilīsandeśam*

*Uṅṅunilīsandeśam*, like its exemplar, has two parts: the *pūrvasandēśa* and the *uttarasandēśa*. It has for its theme the separation of a paramour from his love and a message of love he sent to her through a messenger. A *yakṣī* kidnaps the hero when he was sleeping with his love and takes him away through the aerial route. When the *yakṣī* reached Tiruvananthapuram, the hero woke up on the strength of the *mantras*. Dropped by the *yakṣī*, he landed softly inside the temple of Padmanābha. He was stricken with the pain of separation when Ādityavarman, the crown prince of Tṛppāppūr, appears before him. The hero requests Ādityavarman to take his message of love to his parted heroine away in Kaṭatturutti. A detailed description of the route from Tiruvananthapuram to Kaṭatturutti follows, with the important chieftains, temples, towns, marketplaces and, of course, courtesans en route getting due attention. The *uttarasandēśa* contains an elaborate description of the town of Kaṭatturutti, the heroine's house, the message of love and closes with the regulation prayer that this mission be no cause for separation between the messenger and his beloved.

### 2. *Kokasandēśam*

*Kōkasandēśam* is slightly different in theme. The hero, who was sitting with his heroine in Dēśinṅanaṅṅu, suddenly faints. The reason was that he was separated from the heroine in a dream as a celestial being (*khecara*) carried him away and dropped him on the banks of a tank. He comes across a *cakravāka* (*anas casarca*) bird, and sends a message to his separated heroine, all in the dream. The route from Tṛpraṅṅōṅṅu in Malappuram District to the destination is described with all the usual details. Unfortunately, as the manuscript is incomplete, it stops with Eṅṅappaṅṅi and the remaining part of the *pūrvasandēśa* and the whole of *uttarasandēśa* have not come down to us.

## III. Other *Kāvya*s

There are a few other *kāvya*s as well in the corpus of *Maṅṅipravāṅṅam*.

### 1. *Candrotsavam*

*Candrotsavam* is a *sargabandha* in five cantos. The poem opens with a *gandharva* falling in love with a *kiṅṅnari*. She is attracted, a la *Kalyāṅṅasauṅṅandhika*, by the strange fragrance of a flower which she had not seen so far and asks the *gandharva* to get her the flower and the *gandharva* promptly sets out. After wandering in different places he returns on the sixth day and tells his love that the fragrance was not of any particular flower but that which emanated from the

'moon festival' that was celebrated on the earth. Apologising for the delay caused by his being detained by the moon festival, he goes on to describe it and the circumstances leading to its celebration.

The moon festival is something which the gods used to celebrate. Once when Indra was celebrating one, Moon was present there with his wife, Candrikā. Menakā, the *apsarā*, who came to attend the festival, fixed a rendezvous with Moon with a gesture through the corner of her eye. Candrikā got scent of this and reached the appointed spot earlier in the guise of Menakā. They engaged in all love-sports, when Menakā reached there. Felt cheated, Moon cursed Candrikā that she be born a human on earth. When Candrikā applied for *śāpamokṣa*, it was granted that she would be redeemed after celebrating a moon festival.

There was a celebrated family of courtesans in the territory of Cīrilappalli. Into that family was born a beautiful girl, Mediniveṇṇilāvu (Moonlight on Earth) by name. Her childhood is described appropriately as a preparation for the days to come. When she came of age, she decided to celebrate the moon festival. She confers among the major courtesans of Kerala about its desirability to which all concur. A priest was consulted and he prescribes the details of the conduct of the festival.

The festival is described elaborately. Residential quarters for the distinguished guests are erected and so is the hall where the festival is to be celebrated. Nothing is wanting in luxury in these. The local ruler arrives, followed by the courtesans *de luxe* all over Kerala. Many rich men, the *cāttira* troupes for the entertainment, poets, scholars and many other respectable invitees arrive. The festival is described in elaborate detail. The poem closes with the blessing that Moon be pleased by the offering of the flowers that are descriptions of the story of Mediniveṇṇilāvu.

## 2. *Vaiśikatantram*

*Vaiśikatantram* is not quite a *kāvya*. It is a collection of verses supposedly containing advices by a veteran courtesan to her daughter in the craft of prostitution. All tricks that the courtesan has to play to keep her customers in good humour are described. Many verses are repetitive and there is no single theme which informs the work. Many of these verses are available in the *āṭṭaparakārams* of *Kuṭiyāṭṭam*. Scholars have doubted whether this is a single 'work' or a collection of stand-alone verses. In any case, the debt it has to similar texts like the *Kuṭṭanīmata* of Damodaragupta from early medieval Kashmir is striking.

## 3. *Padyaratnam*

*Padyaratnam* is a collection brought together by modern scholars. It contains several short *kāvyas* about courtesans, containing one, two, eleven, etc.

verses about individual heroines, the longest being on Kaunōttarā, where 50 verses are devoted to her. There is considerable intertextuality in these, where the heroine of one *kāvya*, such as *Candrotsavam* or *Uṇṇunīlīsandeśam* finds mention here. A whole verse is common between this collection and *Candrotsavam*. The world of courtesans is brought out authentically in these verses.

4. *Anantapuravarṇanam*.

This is a dry account of the city of Thiruvananthapuram with its famous temple.