

Tasting, feasting and chasing the great enemy hunger
– some attitudes and habits as reflected
in Old Tamil Sangam works

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Sangam poetry reflects various aspects of everyday life **realistically**,¹ including the habits connected with food in general.

On the one hand, old Tamil society was obviously struggling with poverty and hunger. On the other, hunger, which is a frequent topic, is counterbalanced by hospitality (offered especially to bards). There were feasts and drinking occasions as a part of victory celebrations, and the hospitality offered to the hungry bards and their experience of feasting and forgetting about their difficulties is joyfully described and the liberal chieftains are praised. Hunger can afflict not only humans, but also animals, and this is also occasionally vividly portrayed.

We also learn about what was eaten and in which way. There are innumerable references to various types of food, including meat and killing animals for this purpose (also including cows, see the references to *maḷavar* in *Akanānūru*). And not only food, but also intoxicating drinks are mentioned, liquor (*kaḷ, naṛavu* etc.) was drunk with pleasure allowing people to relax.² The descriptions are very graphic and perfectly in agreement with Sangam realism (which has been underlined so many times).

1. Underlined repeatedly by M. Varadarajan (1969) and Thani Nayagam (1966). Further cf. Vacek (2007, 2014a) and the author's series of papers in the *Pandanus* Journal with further references to the translations and grammatical descriptions of the Sangam Anthologies.

2. Meat eating and drinking liquor in the Sangam period is briefly summed up by V. Balam-bal (1998, 4; 2010, 319). She also mentions the Brahmins eating meat (2010, 319): 'Though the Brahmins of Sangam age ate meat, they abstained from it due to Jain and Buddhist influence'. Concerning the Vedic tradition see Section 2.2. below. I should also like to thank Prof. Govindaswamy Rajagopal (University of Delhi) for inspiration concerning meat eating in *Akanānūru*.

I. *Enemy hunger*I.1. *Hungry people*

Hunger is repeated very often in the texts, not only as a noun (*paci*, Sangam total 78x),³ but also as a verb, e.g. in the *Puṛanāṅṁūru* (*pacitta* ‘which was hungry’, *pacittu* ‘having become hungry’, *pacittanru* ‘was hungry-it’), and derived nouns (*paciyar* ‘those who are hungry’, *paciyār* ‘those who are not hungry’).⁴

Hunger is unequivocally defined as an enemy causing fear,⁵ but there are ways of relieving it, in other words, there are also ‘enemies of hunger’.

paci alaikkum pakai onru enku o (Puṛa. 136,9)

(Lit.): Shall I say that hunger is one **enemy causing suffering**?⁶

Thus, a *generous ruler* can be considered an *enemy of hunger*, as is said about Īrntūr Kilāṅ Tōyaṅ:

īrntaiyōṅ ē pāṅ paci pakaiṅṅ (Puṛa. 180,7)

iṅmai tīra vēṅṅiṅ emmoṭu (Puṛa. 180,8)

nī um vammō mutu vāy iravala (Puṛa. 180,9)

(Lit.): The one living in Īrntai is an **enemy of the hunger of bards** (7). If you want to remove [your] poverty, along with me (8) you also come, you eloquent begging [bard] (9).

3. Two texts have a greater number of occurrences, viz. *Puṛanāṅṁūru* (25x), *Akanāṅṁūru* (14x). Two most typical phrases are: *paci kalai-* (11x) ‘to remove hunger’; *paci tīr-* (9x) ‘to finish hunger’; both in various grammatical forms. Other phrases: *paci kūr-* (4x) ‘hunger to become abundant’; *paci nīṅku-* (2x) ‘to get rid of hunger’. Hunger can also consume the individuals: *paci tū-* (5x) ‘hunger eats’, ‘eaten by hunger’, as it is variously interpreted.

4. But *pañcam* ‘famine’ does not occur in the Sangam Anthologies, it appears in a later text (cf. PPTI s.v.).

5. Its ‘quality’ can also be specified by some repeated attributes: e.g. *kaṭu paci* (5x) ‘fierce hunger’; *uṅṅaku paci (kaḷaiiyar)* (4x) ‘[to remove] the weakening hunger’; *uṅṅu paci* (3x) ‘excessive hunger’.

6. There are two more enemies and the author asks three similar questions – about the ‘lice’ (line 5), about ‘hunger’ (line 10), and about the ‘bandits’ (line 15). For lack of space we quote the literary translations only in some cases. The reader can find full literary translations of the poems in: Hart–Heifetz 1999 and Menon 2011 (for Puṛa.), or Vaidehi, web (for all texts). However, the literary translations (including those quoted below) are sometimes rather free. In fact, the translation into a European language of all the old Tamil poems (especially the longer ones) would be barely understandable, if it were to follow their complex syntactical constructions exactly. This is only possible for smaller sections of the poems.

Similarly, a *present* received from a chieftain (in this case Vallār Kīlāṅ Paṅṅaṅ) can also be the *enemy of hunger*:

uṅṅā vaṛu kaṭumpu uytal vēṅṅiṅ (Puṛa. 181,7)
iṅṅē ceṅmati nī ē ceṅru avan (Puṛa. 181,8)
pakai pulam paṭarā aḷavai niṅ (Puṛa. 181,9)
pacī pakai paricil kāṭṭinai koḷarḷku ē (Puṛa. 181,10)

(Lit.): If you want to relieve [your] starving poor relatives [family] (7), immediately you go; having gone (8) at the time when (9) he (8) has not yet left for the enemy land (9), you will display [your poverty] in order to obtain a **gift** [that is] **the enemy of** (10) your (9) **hunger** (10).

Hunger (*pacī*) is an enemy which must be overcome, and such occasions are sometimes very vividly described, for example, with reference to Cōḷaṅ Nalāṅkiḷḷi:

nār ari naṅaviṅ nāl makil tūṅkuntu (Puṛa. 400,14)
pōtu aṅiyēṅ pati paḷaka um (Puṛa. 400,15)
taṅ pakai kaṭital aṅṅi um cērntōr (Puṛa. 400,16)
pacī pakai kaṭital um vallaṅ mātō (Puṛa. 400,17)

(Literary translation:)

And I was filled with joy as I drank **liquor** that had been strained through fiber and I don't even know how much time I passed in that village! Not only can he drive away his enemies but **he can also drive away that enemy, hunger!** From those who come to him.
 (Hart–Heifetz 1999, 240-1)

Hunger can cause great family suffering, as is described in the sickening family scene (Puṛa. 164), which forces the bard to go and ask for help from the victorious Kumaṅṅaṅ from the Kutirai Hills, a respected patron of bards. He describes the situation very emotionally – the stove is covered with mushrooms; his wife suffers from hunger; her breasts are dry with no milk and she cannot feed her child.

1.2. *Hungry animals and even hungry Death*

Can we say that hunger is a *universal* permeating the whole world? It is not only human beings, who are hungry, but also animals and (ironically or metaphorically?) even Death, which seeks satiation.

The pair of **elephants** suffers hunger patiently (Aka. 91). Not finding water in the spring, the male elephant eats moss (*pāci*) and lies down with the female

elephant suffering hunger (*paci*). Note the play of words: *paci* ‘hunger’ – *pāci* ‘moss’.

Kites or vultures (*paruntu*) are also hungry. A good warrior, in this case Nākaṇ, the lord of Nālai, whose ‘straight spear of fine battles feeds the vultures’ (Hart–Heifetz 1999, 116), lit. ‘removes the hunger of kites’ (*paruntu paci tīrkkum*; Puṛa. 179,11), can also fill the poet’s begging bowl (Puṛa. 179,2).

The **bears** too have to look for something to eat. Since bears ‘hate the sweet fruits on the tall branches of *iruppai* trees’ (*ōṅku ciṇai iruppai tīm paḷam muṇaiyir*; Aka. 81,2), they ‘look for prey’ (*irai tērum*; Aka. 81,5) in the ‘ant-hill with small holes’ (*pul aḷai purriṇ*; Aka. 81,3).

Death is also hungry and tries to relieve its hunger. One poem (Puṛa. 227) offers a symbolical and also ironical image. Hungry death took Vaḷavaṇ, a good warrior, who in fact had been feeding it regularly in battles. Thus death is called a ‘complete fool’ (*naṇi pētai*; Puṛa. 227,1).⁷ And after describing Vaḷavaṇ’s qualities as warrior, Death is asked, ‘Who else will remove your hunger now?’ *iṇi yār marṛu niṇ paci tīppōr ē*; Puṛa. 227,11).

2. Eating

2.1. Various occasions

Besides everyday eating, we hear much about hospitality, which was widely respected. Guests should not leave without at least tasting something. Hospitality is described very colourfully and repeatedly praised; a liberal chieftain removes not only the bard’s hunger, but also that of his family. And in their eulogies, bards ask that they may obtain gifts or food to satisfy themselves and their families as well.

E.g. this is how the bard Kallāṭaṇār was treated by Amparkilāṇ Aruvantai:

nīl niṛam citāar kaḷaintu (Puṛa. 385,6)
veliyatu uṭṭi eṇ paci kaḷaintōṇ ē (Puṛa. 385,7)

(Lit.): He had my blue colour rags removed (6)
Clad [me] in white and **removed my hunger** (7).

(Literary translation:)

He had my torn loin cloth removed, and clad me in white clothes. And

7. Possibly a play of etymologically related words? The word *pētu* ‘bewilderment, confusion, delirium, folly’, etc. (IL; DEDR 4437) can also designate death (e.g. Puṛa. 237,10; VIS *s.v.*). The word *pētai* ‘simpleton, ignorant person’ (IL; DEDR 4437) has some other semantic extensions (IL: 2. ‘woman as simple-minded’; 4. ‘girl between the ages five and seven’).

he **removed** the misery of **starvation** forever from me (...).
(Menon 2011, 576)

Or the poet Kaḷḷil Āttiraiyaṅār asks Nallēr Mutiyaṅ to be open-handed like his ancestor:

ātaṅuṅkaṅ pōla nī um (Puṛa. 389,13)
pacitta okkal palaṅkaṅ viṭa (Puṛa. 389,14)
vīru cāl nal kalam nalkumati peruma (Puṛa. 389,15)

(Lit.): Like Ātaṅuṅkaṅ, you too (13)
in order to remove the distress of [my] **hungry relatives** (14)
[kindly] give many nice ornaments, o chief! (15)

(Literary translation):
(...)You too, like Ātaṅuṅkaṅ,
should give us the finest of jewels, to lift away the suffering
of my **hungry family**! Greatness!
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 229)

And bards would also praise dead chieftains. In a song for a dead warrior, his abilities are extolled, including also the feeding of hungry (and thirsty) bards. Pēreyil Muṛuvalār sings about Nampineṭuñceliyaṅ, a vassal of the Pāṅṅiyas, who died of a disease and not in battle:

ōṅku iyala kaḷiṛu ūrntaṅaṅ (Puṛa. 239,15)
tīm ceṛi tacumpu tolaicciṅaṅ (Puṛa. 239,16)
pāṅ uvappa paci tīrttaṅaṅ (Puṛa. 239,17)
mayakku uṭaiya molī viṭuttaṅaṅ āṅku (Puṛa. 239,18)

(Literary translation):
He rode out on noble elephants!
He emptied jars of toddy, thick and sweet,
and he made **bards** happy, **freeing them of hunger**,
and he would never use bewildering words!
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 149)

Similarly, there are also descriptions of **feasting** as part of celebrating victory by chieftains or also offering hospitality to hungry bards. This included various items of food and also drinks.⁸

8. However, it is also possible to avoid eating. One reason may be e.g. falling in love. This is called *paci aṅaiṅṅal*, lit. ‘staying obstinately [in] hunger’, a term, which refers to ‘the situation in Aham of the lady love lacking all appetite for food as a result of her being love sick’ (PPTI s.v.).

2.2. *What was eaten and drunk*

Various types of food and drinks were consumed on various occasions, either as a part of hospitality or celebrations. Only a survey of selected items is discussed in the following; for a more extensive presentation cf. the paper by A. Dubianskiy in this same volume.

2.2.A.

Meat was eaten and various animals were killed, including cows, and often consumed together with various intoxicating drinks. In fact, it is well-known that meat was also eaten in the Vedic period. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar (2001, 120 ff.) enumerates the animals eaten according to textual references, including eating beef.⁹ South Indian Brahmins also consumed the meat of various animals, a practice which was only given up after the 5th or 6th cent. AD.

There are a number of terms for meat or its preparation in the Sangam texts. It should also be noted that some of the lexemes have a number of meanings which become clear according to the contexts, and the meaning 'meat' may also be an 'applied' meaning. Occasional phonetic variants or the occurrence of a term in only one specific text may reflect the particular local dialects of the authors of the poems. The frequency and in some cases multiplicity of the terms in the texts also testifies to the importance of food in the description of everyday life:¹⁰

ūṅ (Sangam total **70x**): 'flesh' (Aka. 20x; Puṛa. 23x); cf. the following more frequent phrases (formulas); e.g.:

viḷar ūṅ 'fat flesh' (**4x**: Aka. 89,10; 265,15; Naṛ. 41,8; Puṛa. 359,5);

mai ūṅ 'meat of (kind of) sheep' (VIS), 'goat flesh' (Wilden 2008) (**4x**: Puṛa. 96,7; 261,8; Naṛ. 83,5; Pati. 12,17);

viḷar ūṅ tiṅṛa 'who ate fat flesh' (**3x**: Aka. 89,10; 265,15; Puṛa. 359,5).

pulavu (Sangam total **56x**): 'flesh' (Aka. 12x; Puṛa. 10x); 'smell of flesh or fish' (Aka. 4x); cf. the variants:

pulā (Sangam total **6x**): 'flesh' (e.g. Aka. 70,2; 89,14; Puṛa. 69,11; 181,5; 326,3);

pulāl (Sangam total **6x**): 'flesh' (e.g. Aka. 200,2; Puṛa. 99,6; 359,5);¹¹

9. Cf. also D.N. Jha (2004) and the title of the first chapter – 'Animals are verily food' but Yājñavalkya Favours Beef (27 ff.).

10. For lack of space we will only give a few textual examples. The topic itself is too broad and deserves special attention in the future.

11. PPII refers only to *pulāl maṅuttal* 'refraining from meat eating' (Kuraḷ, Chapter 26: 257,1; 260,1).

pulāal (Sangam total **2x**): ‘flesh’ (Aka. 265,18); ‘smell of flesh’ (Aka. 270,2).

niṇam (Sangam total **30x**): ‘flesh’ (e.g. Puṛa. 8x; Aka. 316,5); ‘fat’ (Puṛa. 8x; Aka. 8x); variants:

niṇaṇ (Sangam total **3x**): ‘fat’ (Aka. 375,6); ‘flesh’ (Puṛa. 373,37; Cīru. 198);
ñiṇam ‘flesh’ (only Puṛa. 177,14; see *tacai* below).

taṭi (Sangam total **18x + 5x** case form *taṭiyōṭu*): ‘piece of meat’ (Puṛa. 5x); ‘fish pieces’ (Vaidehi; SVS: ‘dried fish’; Aka. 60,6: *mīṇ taṭi*).¹²

tīrri (Sangam total **5x**): e.g. ‘meat’ (Aka. 2x), ‘food’ (Aka. 1x).

tacai ‘flesh’ – (only Puṛa. **2x**); e.g.:

māṇ tacai, ‘deer meat’ (Puṛa. 33,2);

eymmāṇ eri tacai / pai ñiṇam perutta pacu veḷ amalai, ‘porcupine cut meat / fresh meat, big fresh white rice ball[s]’ (Puṛa. 177,13-14).

puḷukku (Sangam total **8x + 5x** case forms):¹³ ‘cooked meat’ (Aka. 6x); *puḷukkal* (Sangam total **6x**): ‘cooked meat’ (e.g. Puṛa. 363,12); ‘cooked rice’ (e.g. Puṛa. 399,9).

cūṭu ‘roasted meat’ (Puṛa. 7x), plus more meanings: ‘heaps of sheaves’ (Puṛa. 61,7; Aka. 84,12), ‘burning’ (Aka. 368,1) (Aka. 2x).¹⁴

There can be a rich meal containing several ingredients:

puṛavu karu aṇṇa puṇṇulam varakiṇ (Puṛa. 34,9)
pāl pey puṅkam tēṇōṭu mayakki (Puṛa. 34,10)
kuru muyal koḷum cūṭu kilitta okkaloṭu (Puṛa. 34,11)
(...)

12. The basic meaning of *taṭi* is ‘piece’ (derived from the verb *taṭi-* I. ‘to hew down, cut down, cut off’; TL *s.v.*; it occurs frequently in various forms in the texts). Cf. also the specific meaning of *taṭi* ‘plot of a field’ (Naṛ. 254,10); or *taṭivu* ‘piece’ (e.g. Puṛa. 320,13). This is the sense that should be given to the word in the combination with a specific term for meat: e.g. *ūṇ taṭi* (Aka. 193,9; Puṛa. 74,1); *koḷu niṇam taṭiyōṭu* ‘with pieces of fat meat’ (Peru. 345); *pai niṇam taṭiyōṭu* ‘with pieces of fresh meat’ (Malai. 563).

13. N. Subrahmanian (PPTI *s.v.*) gives the meaning ‘boiled dhal mixed with rice and sugar; also called Kummāyam’ (Peru. 165). *puḷukku* can also mean ‘sultriness’ (in: *puḷukkuṛra*, Aka. 136,21). There is a verbal form *puḷukkiya* ‘which was boiled’ (**2x**) < *puḷukku-* ‘to boil before husking, as paddy’ (TL *s.v.*). Obviously the general meaning is ‘something boiled’, which, according to the situation, can apply to various foods (possibly a special jargon), both in the form *puḷukku* and *puḷukkal*.

14. Similarly the basic meaning is ‘to burn, be hot’ (< *cūṭu-* ‘to be hot, burn’; TL, DEDR 2654) and it can be applied contextually or as jargon for ‘something burnt’.

em kōṇ vaḷavaṇ vāḷka (...) (Pura. 34,16)

(Lit.:) [bards] (...) with relatives tearing [=eating] **roasted fatty meat** of small rabbits (11)

[and] mixing [balls of] rice cooked in milk with honey (10)

With grains of millet from poor land [but as big] as pigeons' eggs (9)

(...)

Long live our king Vaḷavaṇ (...) (16).

Even the poet Kapilar consumed meat, as he says in Pura. 14, where he explains to Cēramāṇ Celvak Kaṭuṅkō Vāḷiyātaṇ why his hands are soft (cf. Iyengar 2001, 120-21):

pulavu nārṛatta pai taṭi (Pura. 14,12)

pū nārṛatta pukai koḷi ūṇ tuvai (Pura. 14,13)

kaṛi cōṛu uṇṭu varuntu toḷil allatu (Pura. 14,14)

pīṛitu toḷil aṛiyā ākaliṇ naṇṛu um (Pura. 14,15)

melliya peruma (...) (Pura. 14,16)

(...)

(...) *niṇ pāṭunar kai ē* (Pura. 14,19)

(Literary translation:)

Soft are the hands of those who know no work
more difficult than eating **rice and curry** and **chunks of meat**
from new-killed **flesh** with its aroma of **meat** cooked
in the smoke of fire burning with the aroma
of **flowers** – the **hands of those who celebrate you in song!**
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 12)

2.2.B.

The meat of animals that was eaten includes e.g. the meat of pigs, cows (!), goats and others.

naṛavu um toṭumiṇ viṭai um vīlmiṇ (Pura. 262,1)

(Lit.:) Strain the **toddy!** Slaughter a **male goat!**

Pork was prepared in ghee, as we learn from the poet Purattiṇai Naṇṇākaṇār in his praise of Ōymāṇ Villiyātaṇ, a chief of Ilāṅkai:

yāṇ ē peruka avaṇ tāl niḷal vāḷkkai (Pura. 379,1)

avaṇ ē peruka eṇ nā icai nuvaṛal (Pura. 379,2)

(...)

villiyātaṇ kiṇaiyēm peruma (Pura. 379,7)

kuru tāl ēṛrai koḷum kaṇ a vīḷar (Pura. 379,8)

naṛu ney urukki nāḷ cōṛu īyā (Pura. 379,9)
vallaṅ entai paci tūrttal eṇa (Pura. 379,10)

(Literary translation:)

May I gain a life shaded by his feet! May he receive, from my tongue, the accounting of his glory! (...)

My lord, O greatness! is well able to **relieve our hunger**, for in the morning he passes out **rice** and the fine **white meat** running with juice of a **short-legged pig**, all of it with **fragrant melted ghee**!

(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 220)

The eating of cows' meat is mentioned, e.g. in the *Akanāṅṅūru*, as it is consumed by the *maḷavar*:

koḷuppu ā tiṅṛa kūr paṭai maḷavar (Aka. 129,12)

(Lit.): robbers with sharp weapons who ate **fatty cows**

or

tōkai tūvi toṭai tār maḷavar (Aka. 249,12)

nāku ā vīttu tīṛi tiṅṛa (Aka. 249,13)

pulavu kaḷam (...) (Aka. 249,14)

(Lit.) (...) flesh-smelling place (14)

[where] robbers with peacock feather garlands (12)

are eating flesh having slain **young cows** (13)

or

(...) *kaṭuṅkaṅ maḷavar* (Aka. 309,2)

(...)

teyvam cērnta parārai vēmpil (Aka. 309,4)

koḷuppu ā eṛintu kuruti tūuy (Aka. 309,5)

pulavu pulukku uṅṭa vāṅ kaṅ akal aṛai (Aka. 309,6)

(Lit.): broad rock in a high place, where (6) cruel-eyed robbers (2)

were eating [smelling] cooked meat (6)

having killed a **fat cow** and spilled blood (5)

at the large-trunk neem [tree], where god[s] stayed (4).

2.2.C.

Other important component parts of food:¹⁵

cōru (Sangam total **48x**): ‘cooked rice’ (e.g. Puṛa. 18x; Aka. 8x); var. *cōrru* (Sangam total **48x** + **3x** case forms): id. (e.g. Puṛa. 9x; Aka. 5x).

pun̄kam (Sangam total **4x**): ‘cooked rice’ (Puṛa. 2x; Aka. 2x).

Isolated usage of a polysemous word: *maṭai*¹⁶ ‘cooked rice’ (Puṛa. 366,17); ‘oblation of food to a deity’ (Kuṛu. 362,3; Kali. 109,19).

tiṇai (Sangam total **94x**): ‘millet’ (Puṛa. 12x; Aka. 19x); frequent attributive phrases: *ciṛu tiṇai* (31x) ‘small millet’; *ce tiṇai* (12x) ‘red millet’.

varaku (Sangam total **11x** + **20x** case forms): ‘millet’ (Puṛa. 13x; Aka. 7x).

erutu kāl uṛāatu ilaiṇar koṇṇa (Puṛa. 327,1)
cil viḷai varakiṇ pulleṇ kuppai (Puṛa. 327,2)
toṭutta kaṭavarkku koṭutta miccil (Puṛa. 327,3)
pacitta pāṇar uṇṭu (...) (Puṛa. 327,4)

(Literary translation:)

whatever was left to him of his small low-yielding harvest
of **millet** that required only the stamping feet of boys
rather than buffaloes for its threshing was eaten up
by **hungry bards**.

(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 187)

ēṇal (Sangam total **42x**): ‘millet’ (e.g. Aka. 5x; Puṛa. 0x); ‘millet field’ (e.g. Aka. 6x; Puṛa. 1x: 28,9); cf.:

ēṇal am ciṛu tiṇai – ‘tiny millet in the millet field’ (2x: Aka. 73,14; Kuṛu. 357,5);

pular kural ēṇal – (Lit.): ‘mature cluster millet field’ (Aka. 118,12).

15. To say nothing of spices and various types of fruits, also including the general terms *paḷam* (‘ripe fruit’) and *kāy* (‘unripe fruit’), which can also relieve hunger and which could be mentioned only in passing.

16. Cf. DEDR 4657: *maṭu* to take food or drink, devour; cause to eat or drink, feed; *maṭai* boiled rice, offering of food to a god, cooking etc. (Kota, Toda, Telugu); cf. 4678: Konḍa *maṇḍi* earthen pot, a covering dish (etc. Pengo, Kui, Kuwi, + cf. 4682: Tamil *maṇṭai* mendicant’s begging bowl, earthen vessel, head, etc.). But the lexeme is a homophone (Sangam total **19x**) which also appears to have more meanings in Sangam: hooking, sluice, division (Puṛa., VIS); joint, the act of chasing (Aka., SVS) etc. The Puṛa. occurrence of the meaning ‘cooked rice’ may be unique, since the other available indexes do not provide it (Aiṅk., Kuṛu., Nar.).

2.2.D. *Drinking*

Drinking fermented liquors was quite common. A number of terms are used, although some may vary semantically, or the meaning ‘liquor’ may be a contextual (jargonistic) meaning of lexemes with different basic meanings.

kaḷ (Sangam total **69x** + **36x** case forms): ‘fermented liquor’, ‘toddy’ (Pura. 34x; Aka. 17x), ‘honey’ (Pura. 48,4; Aka. 400,22); cf.:

kaḷ tēral ‘clear essence of toddy’ (PPTI *s.v.*; Sangam total **9x**);

iṅ kaṭu kaḷḷiṅ ‘of sweet strong toddy’ (Sangam total **6x**).

naṛavu (Sangam total **30x** + **29x** case forms): ‘fermented liquor’, ‘toddy’ (Pura. 12x; Aka. 16x); also ‘honey’, ‘odour, fragrance’, or ‘Arnotto’ (a special bush; e.g. Aka. 19,9); variant: *naṛavam* (Sangam total **5x**) id. Cf.:

nal amiḷtu āka nī nayantu uṇṇum naṛavu ē (Pura. 125,8)

(Lit.): may that toddy you drink with pleasure be the finest *amṛta*

maṭṭu (Sangam total **10x** + **1x** case form *-iṅ*, Pura. 120,12): ‘fermented liquor’ (Pura. 5x; Aka. 346,15), ‘liquor jar’ (Pura. 120,12), ‘honey’ (Pura. 188,10; Aka. 212,16).¹⁷

Two marginal terms – polysemous words where the meaning ‘toddy’ is an occasional ‘metaphorical’ usage, possibly jargon:

tēral (Sangam total **37x** + **2x** case form + **3x** pronominalized forms): ‘clarified juice’ (e.g. Pura. 6x), ‘toddy’ (e.g. Pura. 9x, Naṛ. 1x), ‘honey’ (e.g. Aka. 1x); often combined with the specific terms for ‘toddy’: e.g.:

kaḷ tēral (see *kaḷ* above); *tēm kaḷ tēral* ‘clear essence of sweet toddy’ (Sangam total **4x**).

naṇai (Sangam total **51x** + **13x** verbal forms): ‘honey’, ‘toddy’ (e.g. Aka. 4x; Pura. 1x), ‘must of an elephant’, ‘flower-bud’; ‘to become wet, moistened’; cf. e.g.:

naṇai kaḷ ‘flower honey’ (Pura. 396,7); *naṇai naṛavu* ‘limpid liquor’ (Pati. 40,19).

17. Cf. DEDR 4662: Tamil *maṭṭu* honey, toddy, fermented liquor, sweet juice, drink taken at the time of sexual union, liquor jar, fragrant smell etc. Malayalam *maṭu* sweetness, honey; *maṭṭu* nectar. Tulu *miṭṭi* sweetness. The lexeme is not easy to interpret etymologically. The DEDR offers the possibility that the lexeme is derived from IA when adding; or < IA; cf. Turner, CDIAL, no. 20299. This would be Skt. *mṛṣṭa*-1 rubbed, washed etc.; sweet, pleasant (*Mahābhārata*) etc. with a number of Pkt. and NIA variants.

nīr ‘water’ (occasionally mentioned as a drink):¹⁸

puṇ kāl nelli pai kāy tīṇṇavar (Aka. 54,15)
nīr kuṭi cuvaiyīṇ tīviya mīlārri (Aka. 54,16)
 (...)
 (...) *eṇ makaṇ* (...) (Aka. 54,18)

(Lit.): my son (18) (...) spoke sweetly like the taste of **drinking water** (16)
 after eating **fresh nelli fruit** with small seeds (15).

We have briefly surveyed some of the component parts of food with the main textual references and a few examples of selected poems. It is obvious that the picture of everyday life was referred to in detail, even though this was not the main purpose of Sangam poetry. Food was one of the items in what is called the *karu poruḷ* (natural subject matter or ‘native things’; Zvelebil 1973, 69; plus Table 10, *ibid.* p. 100). It represented the general context or framework of the *urī poruḷ* (the ‘proper, specific’ subject matter; Zvelebil 1973, 95). The general principles of Sangam poetry have been repeatedly described in detail e.g. by Thani Nayagam (1966), Mu. Varadarajan (1969), K. V. Zvelebil (1973, 1986), E. Wilden (2006) and others (for references cf. Vacek 2014b). The above description should be understood in this context.

3. Conclusion

The references to food and eating (and drinking) appear to be another aspect of the very **realistic** image of everyday life offered by the Sangam Anthologies. We have only been able to touch upon a few interesting examples, which we have tried to present in a logically arranged manner. However, the topic is very broad and would in fact supply material for a whole book. Apart from the often colourful descriptions of the scenes of eating, drinking and tasting, it would be especially interesting to carry out a systematic survey of what was eaten and drunk, which could also be mentioned only selectively. This would be a topic for a special study.

18. This is a highly frequent lexeme (over five hundred), but it can also mean ‘you’ (plural), and therefore exact mechanical counts would be misleading.

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Abbreviations

- Aiñk. = *Aiñkurunūru*
 Aka. = *Akanāñūru*
 Cīru. = *Cīruppāñāñruppaṭai*
 Kali. = *Kalittokai*
 Kuṟu. = *Kuṟuntokai*
 Malai. = *Malaipaṭukaṭām*
 Naṟ. = *Narriṇai*
 Paṭi. = *Paṭirrupattu*
 Peru. = *Perumpāñāñruppaṭai*
 Puṟa. = *Puṟanāñūru*

- CDIAL = see Turner 1966.
 DEDR = see Burrow–Emeneau 1984².
 PPTI = see Subrahmanian 1966.
 SVS = see Subramanian 1972.
 TL = *Tamil Lexicon*
 VIS = see Subramoniam 1962.

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