

## **References to Elephant as Gleaned from the Sangam Literary Works: Asian Elephants in Culture and Nature**

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Elephant in the narrations of Sangam poetry played a larger than life role in poets' imagination. It was a metaphor for describing kings' masculinity. The possession of angry elephants by a king showcased his strength and grandeur as the Sangam warfare depended heavily on the animal's strength and its ability to charge against the enemy. The size of its feet, its lazy movement, its trunk and its ivory horns reminded the poets of many events of everyday life. Festivals were inaugurated with elephants, Joyous occasions were announced to the public by beating the drum mounted on an elephant, Diadems were carried on the back of these animals before it was bestowed on the beneficiary, the love-sick heroines of Sangam poetry frequently remembered these majestic animals when they longingly remembered their beloved. There was even an elephant temple in the sea port of Puhar, the ancient Chola capital.

For this article I have referred to Sangam literary works of anthologies of Agam four hundred poems and Puram four hundred poems, and kavyas of Silapadhigharam and Manimegalai. I have referred to the original verses and the commentaries by modern authors. Through the study I have also tried to understand the ecology of ancient Tamilnadu. Though there is normally a paucity of references to microhistory subjects, Sangam literary works have more than covered up the everyday life of elephants. There are plenty of references to elephants and a critical reading of these would enable a researcher to write in detail about various aspects of the animal's life. Sangam literary works were said to have been written between 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D. In these the anthologies of Agam four hundred and Puram four hundred are secular literature. Agam talks about emotions and inner turmoil especially emphasizing on love and the subtle emotions the hero, heroine and their relatives feel due to two young people falling in love. The anthology of Puram four hundred is more about kings, their prowess, their ability and willingness to make charity, their queens and in general about the political and social life of both the royalty and the commoners. Silapadhigharam is the second century A.D., kavya set in the background of the famous city of Puhar and the Pandya city of Madurai. It is again a secular literature though from the time Kovalan, the hero of the story dies it becomes frequently surreal giving it a strong tinge of mysticism. On the contrary, the narration of Manimegalai is filled with fantasy which Silapadhigharam carefully avoids.

Through this article I have tried to trace the relations between human and non-human animals in Ancient Tamilnadu, to understand peoples' perception of elephants, to understand the emotions

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of elephants as observed by the contemporary poets and in the process to explore another dimension to understanding the society and beliefs of ancient Tamils. The sangam literature treats the area within Tiruvengadam or Tirumala hills in the north, the ocean in the south, the sea in the east and the sea in the west as broadly one cultural space with three major kingdoms namely the Cholas, the Cheras, and the Pandyas and a host of subordinate chieftains who subdivided the area. The kings were charitable in nature and there was a strong literary movement current during this period. The kings were constantly warring with each other. The success or failure in a war always gave opportunity to the poets to praise the kings. Some were genuinely, friends with kings and this is reflected in their concern expressed through the poems addressed to the respective kings. Western Ghats run through entire north-western and western Tamilnadu which ends near Kanyakumari. The whole mountainous region was a thick forested area and wild animals inhabited there. Herds of elephants, wild boars and tigers are frequently mentioned. The ferocity of male tigers and how they hid themselves in the recess of the mountains and managed to maul the elephants and how especially, the female elephant was no match for the fierceness of the tiger is a favourite theme in the poems of Agananuru. People lived everywhere, in the kurinji or the mountainous region, in the Mullai or the forest region which was adjoining the mountains, the Palai or the waste lands, and it was more populous in the Marudham or the agricultural tract and in the Neidhal or the coastal region. While the major cities such as Madurai, or Puhar or Vanji or Musiri were prosperous, in many regions people were poor and were constantly on the move looking for opportunity. Despite the thick forest cover and the danger of being mauled by an abundant tiger population, people moved frequently from coast to coast crossing the mountains either looking for jobs or for a better urban lifestyle. Warring troops and caravans regularly crisscrossed the mountains and the innocent maidens from the mountains frequently were lured by the urbane street smart soldiers who promised life in cities. Some eloped with these men leading to parental agony and in all this social milieu elephant is referred either as a metaphor or as a fellow traveler who faced similar hardships from humans and non-humans. The bards who praised kings either travelled alone or many a times with the entire clan looking for food and munificence from the patrons. During their travel they had plenty of opportunity to observe herds of elephants and their behavior and this they have articulated in their poetry.

According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, Elephant is the largest terrestrial mammal of India. Their food and water requirements are very high and therefore their population can be supported only by forests that are under optimal conditions. The status of elephants is the best indicator of the status of forests. Asian Elephants were distributed over a wide area of Tigris and Euphrates in West Asia through Persia into Indian sub-continent, and South-East Asia. However, currently elephants are confined to Indian Subcontinent, South East Asia and Some Asian Islands including Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Malaysia. About 60% of the Asian Elephant population is in India. Till about medieval times Elephants were to be found all over India but now its distribution is confined predominantly to South India, North East, and some parts of Central India. Within South India, Nilgiri-Eastern Ghat including Mysore, Wayanad, Nilgiri, Nilmabur, Coimbatore, Anamalai, Anamudi, Periyar, Srivilliputtur, and Rayala are the Elphant reserves<sup>1</sup>. It is believed that a

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, "Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change," [envfor.nic.in/division/introduction-4](http://envfor.nic.in/division/introduction-4), last accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2016

total of 12,000 square kilometer area spanning the states of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra houses about 6,300 elephants. Within this range Nagarhole, Bandipur, Wynaad, Mudumalai and the Nilgiri north division have been identified as one of the five most important zones within the range for long term conservation of the species. In the sangam period the forest near Tirumala hills were considered as the best place to snare elephants. Pulivar elephants as they were called were considered to be best to fight wars. But now these entire forest range has disappeared and the wild elephant population there is almost non-existent.

Microhistory was developed in Europe in the 1970s to fill the lacunae in the study of political events and social realities that could not be explained adequately through an existing macro historical studies. This led to micro-historians focusing on margins of power rather than its core. This branch of history focusses on study of the individual, intensive study of insignificant events, and the history of everyday life. The challenge that is faced by micro historian is lack of documented sources. Micro history makes history appealing to people who are not initiated into the subject.<sup>2</sup> It was designed to raise new questions and to provide new answers to existing historical issues.

Animal studies, an offshoot of microhistory, is one of the emerging areas of research in Social Science. It questions human exceptionalism and attempts to bring out a holistic study of life where both humans and animals interdepend on each other in an intimate way which till recently was accepted as given. It explores their complex relations with nature, and It focuses on the participation of non-human species in the cultural life of humans, on Man's relationship with animals or especially a few animals, on the socio-cultural, economical and psychological role played by these animals historically, and it also probes how men used animals as metaphors, allegory and fables to express various emotions. Scholars of animal studies need to concentrate on the account provided by the human actors who have used, been closer, and who have observed the herds of animals. Some do believe that animals are not actors but they are individuals in their own right. They also see how the animals behaved during various known historical events<sup>3</sup>, to document its sufferings and pain and the animal's unfortunate separation from its mother due to human intervention and if possible to construct its day to day activities.

Of the Sangam literature Agam poetry brings out the nuances of animal emotions much effectively as compared to others. While other contemporary literature uses the elephant as a metaphor to describe man's qualities, it is Agam poetry which treats the elephant as an individual and gives detailed information on its various emotions and activities.

Tamil lexigon offers the various names of elephants which in itself attests to the importance attached to the animals in the ancient Tamil life. The names include Tumbi, Karini, Tol, Sundali, Kumbi, Karaiyadi, Kunjaram, Pakadu, Kaliru, Putkai, Kari, Matangam, Vazhuvai, Vezham, Varanam, Moy, Umbal, Erumbi, Uva, Pongai, Tanti, Atti, Kadivai, Kayam, Nagam, Sinduram, Tungal, Nirumatam, Pazaikkai, Val Vilangu, Nalvay, Pukarmugam, Mataalm, Dantavalam, Mrunama, Kaimma, Vayama,

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<sup>2</sup> "What is Microhistory?", <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/student/vicbrewery/content/microhistory.html> , last accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016

<sup>3</sup> Eric Baratay, Building an Animal History, "French Thinking about Animals", Stephanie Posthumas, (tr.), Michigan State University Press, Michigan, <https://books.google.co.in/books/animalstudies> , last accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016

Manthama, Mathakayam, Ambal, Ibam, Poakam, and Kalabam<sup>4</sup>. In the following passages I have traced the life of elephants in their various emotions and activities and have attempted to highlight aspects of animal life which remain unnoticed by the humans.

## **Elephants and Kings**

Rulers whether they were Chola, Chera or Pandya were described as ones being in possession of angry killer elephants<sup>5</sup>

Pandya King Karungai Olvat Perumpeyar Vazhudi was described as among other things the one who mounted the elephant which has the dotted trunk, fluid oozing out of its trunk, one which wears the bell, one which has a golden casing on its face and which pounds the fort wall of the enemies<sup>6</sup>

King Karikal Chola was praised by poet Adhanar for being able to mount a male elephant and wage war. The war elephants were always described as rutting elephants<sup>7</sup> Kings were described as the one who mounted on male elephants, which looked like God of Death.<sup>8</sup>

Chera king Selva Kadungo Vazhiyadhan was described by Kapilar, the poet as greatest amongst men, and proceeds to say that his hands were capable of goading the fearless killer elephant, who could break the Kanaya tree while riding, and who had the ability to balance the temper of such an elephant all at the same time<sup>9</sup>.

Pandyan King Palyagasalai Mudukudimi Peruvazhudi was described by the poet as the possessor of angry elephants<sup>10</sup>.

While describing Parambu hill after that death of King Pari, the poet Kabilar says that it resembled the discarded spat out by the elephant after it finished chewing the food<sup>11</sup>.

While describing the prowess of Chola king Perunarkilli and his warring style, the poet says that when he fought with his enemies, he entered their cities, took possession of their food grains, wreaked havoc there and among other things bathed his elephants in the much guarded water bodies in those cities<sup>12</sup>. While describing the elephants herd of Chera king Irumborai, poet Kurunkozhiyur

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<sup>4</sup> Tamil and Vedas, <https://tamilandvedas.com/2012/09/30/45-words-for-elephant/> last accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016

<sup>5</sup> Manickam A. (ed.), "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", (Tamil), Poems 3, 52, 53,55, & 66 Pp. 115-118, 120-123 & 141-142, Volume I, Chennai, 1990

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Purananur: Text and Commentary: Poem 3, Pp. 21-23

<sup>7</sup> Purananuru: Text and Commentary: Poem 9, Pp. 32-33

<sup>8</sup> Purananuru: Text and Commentary: Poem 13, Pp.38-39

<sup>9</sup> Purananuru: Text and Commentary, Poem 14, Pp. 39-41

<sup>10</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 15, Pp. 41-43

<sup>11</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem, 114, Pp. 216-217

<sup>12</sup> Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 16, Pp. 43-45

<sup>13</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", poem 17, Pp. 45-49

Kizhar says that seeing his large herd of war elephants, bees would swarm them mistaking them to be mountains<sup>13</sup>. In the mountainous region the elephants with musth or temporin would sometimes get into wild streams and would be washed away<sup>14</sup> One of the poets states that when they were not in musth the boys in the area could play with the male elephant and wash its tusk playfully.<sup>15</sup>

While describing the prowess of Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan, who Nilakanta Sastri dates at 210 A.D., who won both the Chera and the Chola kings in the battle of Talayâlangânam, and who was credited with killing the herd of elephants of enemies with arrows in such a way that they writhed in agony on the ground as a plough would on the field<sup>16</sup>.

While describing the generosity of king Vel Aye, poet Mudamosiyar says that he gave elephants as gifts to the bards who sung in praise of him that his elephants sheds were empty and wild peacocks occupied such sheds<sup>17</sup>. The same poet with concern says that as the ruler was constantly gifting elephants to the bards, the female elephants should give birth to ten calves at a time to fill the void.<sup>18</sup> When he crosses the forest he spotted a herd of elephants which remind him of king Vel Aye and he wonders whether the forest sung in praise of the king to have gotten such a large herd.<sup>19</sup> Even poor bards requested for a gift of elephants from the kings. One of the even asked for a tusker with the face shield and got it<sup>20</sup>. The kings at times gave the ivory pearls as gifts to the women<sup>21</sup>

## Description of Elephant

Male elephants will have dots<sup>22</sup> as their ears are equated with black palm<sup>23</sup> since they keep banging enemies' forts their cheeks are covered with dust. Their necks are rounded with metal collar.<sup>24</sup> In the wasteland near forests the forest dwellers dig pits looking for water. During dry season when the water too dries up the pit gets filled with leaves. The tuskers, which come looking for water, think humans dug these pits to snare them<sup>25</sup> In the hot sun when clouds gather suddenly to break into a convection rain the herd feels very happy as their bodies cool down<sup>26</sup>

## War and Elephants

Emperors who went to war had the service of the chieftains under them. Their flags along with the imperial flag were tied on their respective elephants and the tall-unfurled flags appeared like

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<sup>14</sup> Agananuru: Poem 18

<sup>15</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 94, Pp. 184-185

<sup>16</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem, 18, Pp. 49-52

<sup>17</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 127, Pp.238-239

<sup>18</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 130, Pp. 242-244

<sup>19</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 131, P - 244

<sup>20</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 161, Pp. 303-307

<sup>21</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 170, Pp. 323-325

<sup>22</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 119, Pp. 224-225

<sup>23</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 340, Pp. 233-234

<sup>24</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 387, Pp. 329-332

<sup>25</sup> Agananuru: Poem 21

<sup>26</sup> Agananuru: Poem 214

they were mopping the sky<sup>27</sup>. The war drums were sounded so loud and the angry male elephants walked behind thundering their presence through trumpeting<sup>28</sup>. The young male war elephants were always described to be oozing out musth and being very aggressive and this condition of theirs was considered conducive to fight enemies. The male elephants were goaded in the forefront of the battlefield to expand the space and behind which the infantry would follow to wage the war.<sup>29</sup> They were trained to hide stones within the folds of their neck, which they could hurl at the enemy.<sup>30</sup> The haughty elephants would bang the enemy's fort with such force that their tusks would get blunt in the act.<sup>31</sup> The tusks were covered with iron rings to enable them to attack the enemy fort without much difficulty.<sup>32</sup> Broken tusks of the male elephants were an indication of their participation in the war<sup>33</sup>. With their force they even broke open the doors made of bullet-wood's (Mimusops Elengi) bark<sup>34</sup> When the rulers won the war they seized the gold from the enemy's elephant's face shield called *Kimburi*<sup>35</sup> and gifted it to the poets who praised the king on his prowess.<sup>36</sup> The fierce ones strong as death, during war, threw men to the ground without missing their marks<sup>37</sup> In war expert throwers of spears targeted the war-trained male elephants to kill them<sup>38</sup>. Pachyderms were praised for their bravery, for not running away from the battlefield.<sup>39</sup>

## Elephant and masculinity

Chola king Nedunkilli's territory was besieged by rival claimant Nalankilli. Instead of defending his territory the former had shut himself within the fort. Poet Kovur Kizhar pointed out to him that it was cowardice and quoted how all those who depended on him suffered due to his inaction. One of the consequences he cites was the tuskers not being able to freely take bath in the water bodies with the female elephants, and they not being able to eat ghee laden rice and they trying to break free of the rope with which they were tied (perhaps out of shame and were waiting to offer war to the enemy)<sup>40</sup>.

The stride of the male elephant was said to be leisurely and majestic and the bells tied to their thick neck sounding rhythmically to their stride, their eyes shimmering with anger and the tusk being very long. They ooze out odorous temporin, which drips to the ground and being surrounded by buzzing bees, which attempt to drink it<sup>41</sup>. Elephants with wide feet and long legs were considered

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<sup>27</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem, 38, Pp. 91-93

<sup>28</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 79, Pp.165-166

<sup>29</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 26, Pp. 68-70

<sup>30</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 30, Pp. 76-77

<sup>31</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 31, Pp. 77-79

<sup>32</sup> Op cit. Agananuru: Poem- 26

<sup>33</sup> Vaidehi Herbert, (ed), "Agananuru: Text and Commentary, Poem 1, <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-1-100> , last accessed on 02<sup>nd</sup> July 2016

<sup>34</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 97, Pp. 188-191

<sup>35</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 377, Pp. 305-308

<sup>36</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 126, Pp.235-238

<sup>37</sup> Op cit. Agananuru: 93

<sup>38</sup> Agananuru: Poem 216

<sup>39</sup> Agnanuru: Poem 100

<sup>40</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 44, Pp. 102-104

<sup>41</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 22, Pp. 58-61

sought after and they were tied to the trunk of sturdier trees so, that they didn't run away from their shed<sup>42</sup>.

## The art of taming the elephant

Agam poetry talks about how in the bamboo-filled mountain slopes a male elephant was caught in the slippery mud hole near thriving banana plantain and the female broke and threw a big tree to help him step out and to end his misery<sup>43</sup>. People who wished to catch wild elephants would first dig a pit and spread over it thin sticks, and over that would spread sand to make it appear like earth. The elephants, which walked over it got trapped into the pit and they would then be caught with the aid of trained elephants.<sup>44</sup> The Pandyan kings got the white-tusked elephants from the Venkadam hills.<sup>45</sup> It was considered dangerous for a novice to go before a wild elephant in captivity<sup>46</sup> and Kings were praised for possessing well trained elephants. Pandyan General by name Panni was said to have spent time regularly to train wild elephants<sup>47</sup>. Agam poetry talks about the hero of the poem witnessed a few uneducated men caught a young male elephant in the forest while his naïve mother with legs like pounding mortar screamed, and they later tied him to the door of a house with a thick rope where liquor was sold<sup>48</sup>. When the elephant got the musth and went on a rampage it was difficult for people and even its rider to control it. Manimegalai describes one such scene wherein the Chola royal elephant by name Kâlavegam went on a rampage in the city of Puhar when it was about to be ravaged by a hurricane, it scared everyone on the streets as the animal appeared like a moving blue hillock. It was then goaded and brought under control by the crown prince Udayakumara<sup>49</sup>.

## Elephants' eating habits

Elephants eat bamboo<sup>50</sup>, they strip of the trunks of yâ tree in the mountainous region to eat and thereby leaving a trace of mud on the trees while doing so<sup>51</sup>. Agam poetry describes about a bull elephant with green eyes bringing tender sprouts of bamboo to his naïve female which just gave birth in the Venkadam Hills.<sup>52</sup> The bull elephants that protected its heard gave the sprout to the herd and ate the leaves<sup>53</sup> At the same time people were afflicted with an eating disorder called “Yaanaï thee noi” wherein the afflicted person ate enormous quantities of food and still felt unsatisfied<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid Purananuru: Text and Commentary : Poem 57, Pp.125-126

<sup>43</sup> Agananuru: Poem 8

<sup>44</sup> Op cit., Purananuru poem 17

<sup>45</sup> Op cit. Agananuru: Poem 27, Venkadam hills is modern Tirupati in the state of Seemandhra

<sup>46</sup> Seethalai Sathanar, “Manimegalai” K.Kadhiresan (ed.), (Tamil), Sri Selva Nilayam Publications, Chennai, 2012, P-72

<sup>47</sup> Agananuru: Poem 13

<sup>48</sup> Agananuru: Poem: 83

<sup>49</sup> Manimegalai Pp. 27-28

<sup>50</sup> “Purananuru: Text and Commentary”, Poem 73, Pp. 155-156

<sup>51</sup> Agananuru: Poem 17

<sup>52</sup> Agananuru: Poem 85

<sup>53</sup> Agananuru: Poem 218

<sup>54</sup> Manimegalai: Ulaga Aravi Pukka Kaadhai, P-94

## **Elephants in agony**

In the kuthalam falls during monsoon an elephant calf was dragged into the whirlpool of uncontrollable flood, the female elephant trumpeted and created an uproar and the male elephants with lifted white tusks gathered together and trumpeted helplessly<sup>55</sup>.

## **Elephants to enforce punishments**

Chola King Killivalavan captured Malayamaan territory and enslaved his two children. He then proceeded to kill them by making an elephant trample their head. Kovur Kizhar the poet established the innocence of the children and saved them from death.<sup>56</sup>

## **Elephant in popular art during Sangam Period**

Stories from epics were enacted frequently during Sangam period. The most popular one was “Alliyam Koothu” or Alliyam dance-drama which was based on a story from Bhagavatam in which Kamsa, the adversarial uncle of Krishna invited the latter to a wrestling contest and at the entrance of the venue had arranged to keep a rutting elephant called “Kuvalayapita”. It was trained to hurl Krishna into air once he got closer. But Krishna anticipated what was imminent and instead hurled the elephant by its trunk and broke its tusk holding which he danced around the arena, which made all other wrestlers tremble with fear<sup>57</sup>. In Puhar, the chief danseuse Madhavi did this piece as one among the eleven themes she chose during her performance<sup>58</sup>

## **Analogy of Elephant while expressing love**

One of the love poems of Aham describes the love sick heroine yearning for the company of the hero who had gone to distant land and hopes that he would see male elephant bending and breaking the tall ya tree for pidi, the female elephant to eat and remember her.<sup>59</sup> In another poem the hero remembers the gait in heroine’s happy countenance and compares it with Poolivar elephants that loved playing in the ponds.<sup>60</sup> The love sick hero who was separated from his beloved was said to have been sighing like a male elephant which got separated from its herd<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Agananuru: Poem 68

<sup>56</sup> “Purananuru: Text and Commentary”, Poem 46, Pp. 105-107

<sup>57</sup> “Purananuru: Text and Commentary”, Poem 33, Pp. 81-83

<sup>58</sup> Ilango Adigal, “Silapadhikaram”, S.V. Subramanian (ed), (Tamil), Gangai Book House, Chennai, 2004, Pp. 72-75

<sup>59</sup>Op. cit. Agananuru: Poem 58, <https://karkanirka.org/2009/07/25/akam59/> last accessed on 03<sup>rd</sup> July 2016

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, Agananuru: Poem 6

<sup>61</sup> Agananuru: Poem 32

<sup>62</sup> Op. cit. Silapadhikaram, P-6

<sup>63</sup> Silapadhikaram, Pp. 31-36



## Elephants in ceremonial events

When Kovalan and Kannagi, the hero and heroine of Silapadhikaram, the second century A. D. Kavya, were betrothed their parents announced their impending marriage to the city dwellers by mounting bejeweled women on the back of an elephant and made them break the news. In the entire city.<sup>62</sup>

In Puhar, the coastal capital of the Sangam Cholas, during the time of Emperor Thirumâvalavan or Karikal Chola in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., the danseuse who was chosen as the chief royal performer was given the title Talaikol which originally was the stem of the royal parasol of the enemy kings he defeated. Roughly about 5 feet was cut from the stem and it was cased with a variety of gold sheet called sâmbunadham and at regular intervals studded with precious stones. In the royal palace it was offered obeisance as it was personified as Jayanta, son of Lord Indra. On an auspicious day, Talaikol was anointed with water brought from sacred rivers and was garlanded. It was then carried by the royal elephant which was adorned with gold facial casing, on its trunk. The king along with his ministers, purohit, military commander, royal envoy, chief of espionage followed it to the accompaniment of royal drum beat and to the tune of musical instruments. The procession ended at the hall where the danseuse was to perform. It was then handed over to the chief poet who placed it on stage where everyone could see it. If the danseuse during her arangetram (the first public performance) performed exceptionally well, she was felicitated and designated as the Talaikol of the country and was given many rewards<sup>63</sup>

Every year at Puhar the festival of Indra was celebrated. As Indra was the Lord of East, his worship was very popular amongst the sangam cholas. Inauguration of the festival was done with people gathering at the temple of Vajrayudham, thunderbolt, the weapon of Lord Indra. Valluvan who belonged to the ancient lineage mounted the festival drum on to an elephant and in a procession took it to the temple of Iravatam<sup>64</sup>, the elephant of Indra and announced it to the general public the opening of the festival. They then moved to the temple of karpagatharu, the wish fulfilling tree, and hoisted the festival flag which had the emblem of iravatam on it. Similarly, when the festival closed after a month, the flag was downed and the closure was announced at the temple of Iravatam<sup>65</sup>.

## Elephants in popular myths

King Sembiyan (Shibi of Shibi Jataka) saved the dove from the hawk by giving his own flesh, which he weighed on the ivory balance, was said to be the ancestor of the Chola king Killivalavan.<sup>66</sup>

## Elephant as a Metaphor

While describing the anger of Athigaman, the ruler of Thagadur, during war the poetess Avvaiyar compares him to an angry elephant, which just fought with a tiger<sup>67</sup>. The besotted hero of

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<sup>64</sup> Manimegalai Pp. 3-11

<sup>65</sup> Silapadhikaram, Pp. 56-59

<sup>66</sup> Op cit. "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 37, Pp. 93-94

<sup>67</sup> "Purananuru: Text and Commentary", Poem 100, Pp. 196-197

Agam poetry while thinking of the heroine compares her braid to the elephant's trunk<sup>68</sup> At the same time a worried mother while describing the man who bewitched her daughter and who wished to take her with him compares him with a tiger taking down an elephant.<sup>69</sup> Agam poetry is replete with examples of how tiger stalks and kills tired elephants among tangled vines and bushes<sup>70</sup> and how hearing its roar the elephants tremble<sup>71</sup> and especially so the female which was no match for the fearsome felines<sup>72</sup>. The hero of another poem describes his wasted efforts in trying to find work by explaining the way a proud elephant during summer would run to mirage looking for water and when it could not find it, would lie down with sorrow looking like a boat without water<sup>73</sup>. Agam poetries abound with descriptions of how the male elephant with green eyes searched for water and not seeing it, ate moss, and lied down with his hungry female, their strength sapped<sup>74</sup>. Another poem describes how the aged male elephant looking for water broke out with sweat as the harsh sun scorched its tired body<sup>75</sup> It also talks about the bull elephant lifting its trunk and heaving a sign of relief after it successfully fought a tiger, notwithstanding its wounds, it made the female and the herd happy<sup>76</sup> and whenever it spotted a vengai (Petrocarpus-Indicus or Mahogany) tree the bull elephant got into a rage and presumed it to have been a tiger and tried to rip it apart<sup>77</sup>.

Elephants played a significant role and they were game changers in the history of South Asia. These animals decided the fate of warfare, they bestowed prestige on the king who possessed them. The possessor of angry, trained war elephants was considered as an alpha male and winning over an elephant in musth was the epitome of masculinity. It is in this background with an understanding of the social fabric where it played a significant role, the cultural context in which was revered, its moods, and agonies and the popular metaphors and analogies lead to beginning of understanding the domesticated animals' issues which in turn would lead to a holistic study of history.

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<sup>68</sup> Op cit., Agananuru: Poem 9

<sup>69</sup> Ibid Agananuru: Poem 22

<sup>70</sup> Agananuru: Poem 88

<sup>71</sup> Agananuru: Poem 92

<sup>72</sup> Agananuru Poem 221

<sup>73</sup> Agananuru: Poem 28

<sup>74</sup> Agananuru: Poem 91

<sup>75</sup> Agananuru: Poem 207

<sup>76</sup> Agananuru: Poem 202

<sup>77</sup> Agananuru: Poem 227