

## THE USE OF PASTES AND DYES FOR PERSONAL ADORNMENT IN THE CANKAM PERIOD

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Adornment of the body is said to have "appeared first in human history in the palaeolithic period, antedating pottery, agriculture and the domestication of animals."<sup>1</sup> The desire for personal adornment or self-decoration is a very human quality that is exceedingly old. Often ancient or primitive races that are "content to be naked" are still "ambitious to be fine." This ambition to be fine sometimes may not necessarily lead to neatness or personal cleanliness but is more concerned with decoration.<sup>2</sup> "Among wild people, we find tattooing and painting even prior to clothes", says Thomas Carlyle through his character Professor Her Teufelsdöckh.<sup>3</sup> The Tamils of the Cankam period, whose social life, customs and manners are depicted in the oldest extant Tamil Literature known as Cankam poetry,<sup>4</sup> also seem to have paid attention to personal adornment and self-decoration. They seem to have used various dyes and pastes. These unguents and colouring matter were obtained from many different plants and sometimes from minerals to be used literally from head to toe.

### Hair

The Tamils, both men and women, seem to have applied sandal paste to their hair. When describing the appearance of the hero in the *Kuriñcippattu*, the poet Kapilar mentions that his hair worn long and softened with the massaging of oil is further decorated and perfumed. The cool, fragrant sandal paste is applied and then spreading the hair, the fingers are drawn through it to remove knots and to dry the hair. The smoke of the eaglewood (*aquilaria agallocha*) is used to add more fragrance and quicken the process of drying. Finally, aloe-oil is applied and the hair is dressed before decorating it with various flowers.<sup>5</sup> It must be admitted that such descriptions of men's toiletry is not very common, but made necessary by the context of the

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (Ornament) New York, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Westermarck, Edward, *The History of Human Marriage*. Vol. I Pg. 495. ff. New York. 1971. pg. 495. ff.

<sup>3</sup> Carlyle, Thomas. *Sartor Resartus* London 1899 pg. 42.

<sup>4</sup> This is broadly divided into two, the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Idylls. The former are collections of verses called *Akañānuru*; *Narīnai*, *Kuruntokai*, *Aiñkurunūru*, *Kalittokai*, *Paripātal*, *Puranānūru* and *Paṭṭirupattu*. The latter consists of ten long poems viz. *Tirumurukāṟruppaṭai*, *Porunararruppatdai*, *Cīrupaṇarruppaṭai*, *Perumpāñāruppaṭai*, *Mullaippāṭṭu*, *Maturaikkāñci*, *Neṭunālvaṭai*, *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*, *Pattinappalai* and *Malaipaṭukataṁ*.

<sup>5</sup> *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* 107-114.

poem. The heroine has fallen in love with this youth and her friend is explaining the situation to her mother so as to obtain parental approval. Such a description tries to convey to the elders in the family that he is wealthy and thus his life is leisurely enough to afford the time and the means for such finery.

The use of sandal paste for their hair by women is more frequently mentioned in Cankam literature. The cool paste is applied to the hair to keep it fragrant.<sup>6</sup> It is also believed that besides its astringent quality, its coolness not only offers relief from the heat but also keeps the head and eyes of the wearer cool. This paste is obtained by rubbing briskly pieces of sandalwood on specially made slabs called the *cilavaṭṭam*<sup>7</sup> on *cāntarri*<sup>8</sup>. The musk paste obtained from the musk deer is another unguent used for the hair. Most of the Cankam poems mention "the dark tresses fragrant with *narantam*"<sup>9</sup>. But the word *narantam* in Tamil can mean three things depending on the context. It can be a kind of fragrant grass, popularly referred to as lemon grass (*andropogon schoenanthus*)<sup>10</sup> that grows along river banks, or it may be a certain species of citrus trees, the flowers of which have a tangy fragrance like the citrus *durantum* or *citrus aurantium nobilis*. These flowers seem to have been strung into garlands and used as decoration for women's hair or musical instruments like the *yal*.<sup>11</sup> But there is evidence to show that it may refer to musk, a fragrant secretion from the navel of the musk deer (*moschus moschiferus*). Like sandal, it is mixed into a paste before use.<sup>12</sup> The epic *Cilappatikāram*, which belongs to a slightly later period than the Cankam poems, clearly states that it was used to dress women's hair. Mātavi, having bathed and washed her hair with water perfumed by soaking astringents and odorous objects, dried it with fragrant smoke. Then she parted her soft tresses into sections and applied the thick paste of the musk (*maṇmatak koḷuñcēru*)<sup>13</sup>. Thus the hair fragrant with *narantam* may also refer to the perfume of the musk applied to it.

<sup>6</sup> *Paṭiṟruppattu*, 89:16-17.

<sup>7</sup> *Pattuppāṭṭu* with U.V. Ca's Commentary, pg. 451.

<sup>8</sup> *Paripāṭal* 21:30

<sup>9</sup> *Kuṟuntokai* 52:3; *Kalittokai* 54:5 etc.

<sup>10</sup> *Paripāṭal* 7:11

<sup>11</sup> *Pūṟaṇāṇūru* 302:305

<sup>12</sup> *Maturaikkāñci* 552-554.

<sup>13</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 6:78-82.

## Forehead

Women's forehead adorned with the *tilakam* or *poṭṭu* is mentioned. The phrases used in the different poems are sometimes identical. For instance, a *Narriṇai* poem describes the hero as saying that when he saw the moon during one of his past journeys, he remembered that he had a full moon at home with thistle-like teeth and a forehead made beautiful with the *tilakam*.<sup>14</sup> The phrase "*tilakam taiiya tēnkamaḷ tirunutaḷ*" is found verbatim in the *Tirumurukāruppaṭai*<sup>15</sup> and with a mere change in the word— order in the *Akanānūru* as *tēnkamaḷ tirunutaḷ tilakam taiiyum*<sup>16</sup>. The colour of the *tilakam* on the forehead is not mentioned in these verses. The *Cilappatikāram* mentions the courtezans of King Chera's capital as wearing black *tilakam*.<sup>17</sup> However the *tilakam* also refers to the adenothera pananina, commonly known as the *mañcāṭi*, with shiny, red, round seeds which would resemble the red dots worn on the forehead. Kālidāsa's play, the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, describes, the palace garden in the spring season as follows:—

The gleaming red of the *āsoka* excels the paint applied to the *bimba*-like lip; the *kurabaka* with its dark, bright and red (colours) surpasses the paintings on the foreheads; the *tilaka* blossoms, with the bees clinging to them like collyrium, have grasped well the art of adorning the forehead with the *tilaka* mark; thus the vernal beauty seems to hold up to ridicule the art of adorning the face as practised by women.<sup>18</sup>

This description takes for granted the various decorations used by women to enhance the beauty of their faces and the *tilaka* mark on the forehead is associated with the *tilaka* blossoms which are of a pale, cream colour, and the black bee. In another of his works Kālidāsa himself says that the vernal beauty "displayed on her forehead a *tilaka* mark artistically painted with black pigment (*añjana*) in the shape of the bees"<sup>19</sup>. While these describe the *tilaka* mark that is black, there is also reference to the mark that is greenish yellow or red, made with the orpiment or arsenic of the respective colours.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that these were the colours that were

<sup>14</sup> *Narriṇai* 62:6

<sup>15</sup> *Tirumurukāruppaṭai* 24

<sup>16</sup> *Akanānūru* 389:3

<sup>17</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 28:27

<sup>18</sup> Kālidāsa, *Mālavikāgnimitram*. Act III verse 5. (Devadhar's Ed.).

<sup>19</sup> Kālidāsa *Raghuvamśam* IX:41

<sup>20</sup> Kalidasa *Kumārasambhavam* 7: 23–24.

also popular among the Tamils of the classical period for traditionally, black is used for children and young girls, red for married woman and yellow, usually the paste of sandal, is used by all including men.

Apart from the cosmetic or aesthetic reasons, the spot on the forehead is also believed to have some magical or supernatural power. It is believed to ward off the evil-eye that may be cast on children and unmarried girls by acting as a "blemish" on the face. It is also widely believed that the dot, whatever the colour, prevents a person from being hypnotized. To the Shaivites, it is representative of the third eye of Shiva which is said to be located on the forehead. It is symbolic of His divinity and wisdom.

### Eyes

Dark eyes are considered beautiful in Indian women and they are often compared to aquatic flowers like the *kuvalai* (Blue nelumbo) and the *neytal* (nymphae lotus alba)<sup>21</sup> to express the cool, pleasing and langurous quality. The eyes were made darker and more attractive by the application of soot or surm to the eye lashes and inside the lower lid of the eyes. The Cankam poems simply refer to eyes with collyrium as *uṅkaṅ*<sup>22</sup>. Except in instances where the word *uṅ* is used in the sense of "like" or "resembling" as in *pallital uṅkaṅ*<sup>23</sup> ie "eyes like the many petalled lotus", the word "mai" or collyrium is understood though not mentioned. The *Cilappatikāram* uses the word *añcaṅam*<sup>24</sup> for the dark paste used to darken the eyes.

*Añjana* or *añcaṅam* is also the name for the black ore of antimony (antimonium) called tersulphide. It is also called *surma* and obtained in great abundance in the Himalayan range. It is "used as a cosmetic for the eye. It is also supposed to act as a tonic to the nerves of the eye and to strengthen the sight." It is also believed "to prevent the injurious effects of the glare of light on the eyes which it does by absorbing the rays"<sup>25</sup> Besides, it is believed to have a cooling effect on the eyes. The *surma* is referred to as *kalāñjanam* or "black surm" by Kalidasa and it is considered auspicious to wear it.

It is not certain whether the Tamils used the black antimony or used the soot they prepared themselves. Traditionally it is prepared by collecting

<sup>21</sup> *Puranāṅṅūru* 144:4; *Akanāṅṅūru* 179:12 etc.

<sup>22</sup> *Kuruntokai* 38:4; *Narriṅai* 20:6; *Aiṅkurunṅūru* 16:4 etc.

<sup>23</sup> *Kuruntokai* 5:5; 167:3; 339:5 etc.

<sup>24</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 4:53; 15:13.

<sup>25</sup> Watt, George, *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* Calcutta 1889 pg. 271.

the soot of a wick lamp containing castor oil which is obtained from the seeds of the *ricinus communis* that grows naturally in South India. This soot is believed to have a cooling and cleansing quality. It is usually mixed with castor oil to make a paste. Sometimes the wick is also dipped in the juice of the *ponṇāṅkaṇṇi* leaves (*aterranthera sessilis*) which are said to be cooling and considered to be of medicinal value.

### Lips

Nearly every anthology of Cankam poems mentions the coral-lips or *tuvarvāy*<sup>26</sup> which of course refers to the redness of the lips. One of the long poems of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* sings of

“the coral-lips that utter sweet words and red like the petals of *ilava* blooms.”<sup>27</sup>

The *ilavam* or *ilavu*, is the red-flowered silk cotton tree (*bombax malabari-cum*) and it is obvious that the poet, not satisfied with the oft used metaphor “coral-lips” explains further the redness of the lips. The epic *Cilappatikāram* also uses the metaphor coral-lips<sup>28</sup> but in addition there is a description that suggests the fruit of the *kovvai* or *kōvai*<sup>29</sup> (*coccinia indica*) as a comparison for red-lips. This simile, not found in Cankam Literature, is very common in Sanskrit though the word *bimba* is used.<sup>30</sup> Sanskrit literature also mentions a red dye *alaktaka* that was applied to the lips to look red like the *bimba* fruit but in Cankam Literature there seems to be no reference to any such dye used for the reddening of the lips. It is doubtful that the Tamils were ignorant of it but it is possible that the lips were not given the kind of prominence the eyes were given. This may be a cultural trait of the ancient Tamils.

### Hands and Feet

The blooms of the *kāntaḷ* or *gloriosa superba* are often used as comparison for women’s hands.<sup>31</sup> This flower, at its prime, is creamy yellow at the bottom while its top half is a bright red. This redness of the top half of the

<sup>26</sup> *Akanāṅṅūru* 162:13; 179:11; *Aiṅkurunūru* 185:2; *Narriṅai* 190:9; etc.

<sup>27</sup> *Porunararuṅpaṭai* 27

<sup>28</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 28:22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 8:74–76

<sup>30</sup> Kālidāsa, *Mālavikāgnimitram* Act III Verse 5; *Vikramorvaśīyam* Act IV verse 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Aiṅkurunūru* 293:1–2; *Kuṅṅtokai* 167:1; *Cirupāṅṅaruṅpaṭai* 167; *Kalittokai* 40:11–12 etc.

flower suggests that the fingers too were painted red. One of the poems describes the wife of a minstrel. She is gentle and pretty.

Her slim fingers are like the petals of the *kāntaḷ* blooms that grow on tops of lofty hills. Like parrot bill seem her dainty shining fingers.<sup>32</sup>

The redness of the top half of the fingers and the finger nails is obviously due to the paint applied to them. Similarly, the small feet were also adorned with a red dye.<sup>33</sup>

The juice of leaves from the henna bush or *marutāṇi* (*lawsonia alba*) is popularly used to this day to beautify hands and feet including the palms, fingers, fingernails, soles, toes and toe-nails. The Cankam poems do not seem to mention this plant but the *pañci* (cotton) or *cempañci* (red cotton)<sup>34</sup> is mentioned. This suggests that the Tamils have been familiar with dyes made from the cotton tree (*gossypium barbadense acuminatum*). The roots and flowers of the this tree are sources of dyes ranging from yellow to orange and red. These dyes are not soluble in water<sup>35</sup> and this quality must have been an added advantage. For, once applied, the colour would last for at least a few days before another application become necessary. The *Cilappatikāram*, however, mentions *alattakam* (Sanskrit *alaktakam*) as being used to beautify the feet.<sup>36</sup> This is also found in Sanskrit literature as a liquid dye (*dravarāga*) used for the feet<sup>37</sup> as well as for the lips.<sup>38</sup> These dyes, whether made from the henna bush or the cotton tree, are believed to keep the hands and feet cool and encourage a healthy growth of the nails. These dyes, because of their coolness, also prevent the cracking of skin along the soles of the feet and keep the skin soft and supple.

## Face

One of the Cankam poems mentions that the *alaktaka* dye was also used on the cheeks but the manner of application is not known.<sup>39</sup> In fact, except for the *tilakam* on the forehead and the collyrium for the eyes,

<sup>32</sup> *Porunarāruppaṭai* 33-35

<sup>33</sup> *Akanāṇuru* 6:82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 389:7; *Paripāṭal* 6:17.

<sup>35</sup> Watt, George *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*. p. 30-32.

<sup>36</sup> *Cilappatikāram*. 6:52

<sup>37</sup> Kālidāsa *Abhiñānaśākuntalam* Act IV. verse 4; *Kumārasambhavam* VII, 58; *Vikramorvaśīyam*. Act IV. Verse 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kālidāsa, *Mālavikāgnimitram* Act III. Verse 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Paripāṭal* 6:17.

hardly any other paste or dye for the face receives mention. Even this solitary reference merely mentions that the various dyes and pastes on women were washed off by the floods of the Vaiyai river in which they bathed. But Sanskrit literature abounds in description of the decorations applied to the face. The women of Alaka rub the pollen of *lodhra* (*symplocos beddomei*) flowers to give a yellowish white colour to the face<sup>40</sup> and Parvatis' face has the *lodhra* powder and gorocana (bezoar taken from the stomach of cows) on her cheeks.<sup>41</sup> Besides these powders used to add the desired colour to the complexion, ornamental figures of leaves (*patralekha*) were also drawn on the cheeks.<sup>42</sup> Translators invariably translate the term *patralekha* as "amorous paintings. This could be an indication to the real purpose of these paintings which is to add beauty and attract the attention of the opposite sex. It is also in keeping with the main sentiment or *rasa* of these Sanskrit works, which is love or *sr̥ṅgāra*.

### Body

The cool paste obtained by rubbing the fragrant sandalwood on a circular stone specially made for this purpose (*cilavattam*) was popularly used by men and women of the Tamil country. The kings, warriors and others daubed this paste on their chests and shoulders.<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that Sanskrit works do not mention this practice except in the case of the Pandya king who is said to have gone to Vidarbha as one of the suitors at Indumati's *svayamvara*<sup>44</sup>. Among the women this was far more popular and during the cold season this cool paste was discarded in favour of the warmer paste or powder of the musk<sup>45</sup> or saffron<sup>46</sup>. The practice seems to have been found in the north as well, for most of the works of Kalidasa refer to it. The *Raghuvamsam*, describing the water-sports of King Kusa and the women of his *antahpura*, says that the sandal paste worn on their bodies was washed off by the water of the Sarayu<sup>47</sup>. These pastes, however, were not worn all over the body. Ancient Tamil literature shows that just as the men wore

<sup>40</sup> Kālidāsa *Meghadūtam* II : 2.

<sup>41</sup> Kālidāsa *Kumarāsaṃbhavam*. VII : 17.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, III : 38; *Raghuvamśam* XVI. 67; *R̥ṭusaṃhāram* IV: 5; VI: 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 193; *Maturaikkāñci* 225-227; 492; 715; *Paṭṭiṇappālai* 295-297.

<sup>44</sup> *Raghuvamśam*. VI:60.

<sup>45</sup> *Neṭunalvātai* 50-52.

<sup>46</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 14: 81-92; 8: 19-21.

<sup>47</sup> Kālidāsa *Raghuvamśam* XVI: 58; also *R̥ṭusaṃhāram*. IV: 5.

sandal paste on their shoulders and chests, the women too wore it on their shoulders, upper arms and breasts. Often it was painted in the form of pretty designs.

### Shoulders and Upper Arms.

Ancient Tamil literature pays a great deal of attention to this part of a woman's body. The upper arms are compared to the smooth, luxuriant part of the bamboo between two joints.<sup>48</sup> They are adorned with ornaments called the *toṭi*<sup>49</sup>. To enhance the attraction further, they are painted with pastes. The form of the sugar cane was painted on the arm only. Poets have therefore described the upper arms and shoulders as having the sugar cane<sup>50</sup>. The sugarcane-painting was believed to enhance the attraction of this part of the body so as to afflict young men with love<sup>51</sup> and this painting is referred to as "the sugarcane that is not planted or cultivated" (*naṭākkarumpu*)<sup>52</sup>. Women from respectable homes as well as harlots used this design and often the hero himself painted it on the arms of the heroine as an act of love or part of their love-making<sup>53</sup>.

The exact reason for the choice of this pattern is not known. Sugar and molasses obtained from the juice of the sugarcane are useful in the preparation of various medicines and to disguise their unpleasant taste. However, this practice of painting the sugarcane on the arms or shoulders and the importance given to this part of the body in love poems might have added to the anthropomorphism of Kāma, the god of love. He is pictured as holding a bow which is made of the sugarcane. It is believed that Kāma uses this bow to shoot his arrows, consisting of flowers, at the hearts of those whom he wishes to afflict with love. In one of the *Narṛinai* poems a hero tells his beloved,

You do not speak when I speak.  
You lower your head in bashfulness.  
When love exceeds, can it be borne easily?  
Not only are your eyes —  
their corners red like the blood-tipped tusks  
of the elephant which struck in leisurely sport  
the black-striped tiger — angry.

<sup>48</sup> *Akanānūru* 18: 16-18; 271 : 13-15 etc.

<sup>49</sup> *Puranānūru* 83:1-2; *Kuṟuṅṭokai* 84, 185 etc. *Narṛinai* 197.1 etc.

<sup>50</sup> *Kuṟuṅṭokai* 384:1

<sup>51</sup> *Narṛinai* 39:1

<sup>52</sup> *Kalittokai* 112:6

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* 143: 31-32.



Your upper arms with the sugarcane  
and resembling the great-famed Kūtal –  
belonging to Celiyan, capable of  
overcoming enemies who beset his forts,  
snatching their war drums  
and killing in battle –  
afflict me.<sup>54</sup>

The word he uses to denote the effect of her arms that have the sugarcane painted on them is *aṇanku* which may mean fear, disease, affliction, deity, goddess, an evil spirit or being under the influence of any of the latter three, woman or beauty. Such sentiments aroused by the shoulder with the painted sugarcane could easily have led to the association of the sugarcane with the god of love.

Another pattern painted on the body is the *toyyil* creeper. The Tamil classical anthologies do not contain any details about this creeper except for a solitary mention in a poet's description of the *mullai* region. The golden hued flowers from the *koṇṇai* (cassia fistula) the sapphire-like blooms of the *mucuṇṇai* (*rivea ornata*) and the whole blooms of the *mullai* (arabian jasmine) lay scattered on rocks. In a nearby trench, the *neytal* (*nymphaea lotus alba*), also with sapphire coloured flowers, blooms with the soft-leaved *toyyil*<sup>55</sup>. There is no mention of the colour, shape or size of the *toyyil* flower, but it is evident that it grows luxuriously in areas with plenty of water. It is said to have soft leaves (*mel-aval*) and is a water-spinach (*amaranthus polygamous, amaranthus polygonoides*).

This pattern is either painted on the upper-arms and shoulders<sup>56</sup> or the breasts, though more poems mention the sugarcane on the shoulders and the *toyyil* on the breasts. From the Cankam poems it is clear that this practice was also found among the women from respectable homes and the harlots<sup>57</sup>. One of the poems indicates that the pattern of the creeper is drawn as a dotted design (*puḷḷit toyyil*)<sup>58</sup> on the shoulders and breasts. Other poems use words like *elutiya*<sup>59</sup> (written, drawn) *ilaitta*<sup>60</sup> (drawn, painted, daubed) *varitta*<sup>61</sup> (drawn, painted, adorned) to denote the painting of the sugarcane or the *toyyil*. The word *vari*, besides meaning "spots" also may mean "lines" and could also refer to the drawing of linear designs. The

<sup>54</sup> *Narṇai* 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Maturaikkāñci* 278–282

<sup>56</sup> *Kalittokai* 18:2–3

<sup>57</sup> *Maturaikkāñci* 416

<sup>58</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru* 389:6

<sup>59</sup> *Kuruntokai* 276

<sup>60</sup> *Kalittokai* 64:19

<sup>61</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru* 177:20; 359:6.

*Cilappatikāram* mentions the *eḷutu varik kōlam*<sup>62</sup> (the beauty of the lines drawn) on the bodies of women participating in the celebrations in honour of Indra. The designs, when completed, look like the spotted or linear designs of the tattoo. But while the *toyyil*, like the *tilak* mark, surm and sandalpaste, may be washed off, the tattoo is permanent. It is possible that the *toyyil* was the forerunner of the tattoo among the ancient Tamils.

The painting of the *toyyil* may be done either during calendestine meetings during courtship<sup>63</sup> or after marriage<sup>64</sup> and is considered to be an act of love and intimacy, just like the hero's placing of flowers in his lady-love's hair. In the case of harlots, it seems to have been a part of their daily decoration and ornamentation to enhance their youth and beauty. The *toyyil* is believed to add to the youthful beauty of younger women<sup>65</sup> but all these paintings with fragrant pastes cannot hide the languor and paleness caused by the sorrow of separation<sup>66</sup>. Besides, the tears shed during separation wash away the *toyyil* on the breasts.<sup>67</sup> A hero separated from his lady for too long is accused of having spoilt her *toyyil* (*toyyil cittaitāṇ*)<sup>68</sup>. To understand this accusation we must bear in mind that these paintings are symbolic of the youth of the maiden and the joys of love that the lover would share with her. Hence we have the confidante of a heroine whose husband plans to go on a journey to amass wealth, reminding him,

Lord! Do not think of separation though goaded by your heart desiring rare wealth.

Think of her shoulders painted with the *toyyil* which leave spots on your strong chest.<sup>69</sup>

A heroine complains that the women in the neighbourhood would gossip saying "He has forsaken her *toyyil*". Here she means that they would talk of his forsaking her embraces.<sup>70</sup>

This manner of personal adornment seems to have been just as common in the north, according to Sanskrit literature. The name, however, is understandably different while the design seems to be also of leaves as suggested

<sup>62</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 5:225

<sup>63</sup> *Kuṟuntokai* 276

<sup>64</sup> *Kalittokai* 142 : 31-32

<sup>65</sup> *Akanāṇṇūru* 177

<sup>66</sup> *Narriṇai* 225:7

<sup>67</sup> *Kalittokai* 125 : 8 - 9

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 142 : 44

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 18:1-4

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 24:15

by the term *patra-lekham*<sup>71</sup> the leafy drawing. M.R. Kale refers to these drawings as *patralata* or leafy creepers.<sup>72</sup> They were drawn on various parts of the body including the face<sup>73</sup>. They also seem to serve the same purpose as in Ancient Tamil literature. They were decorations that enhanced the beauty of the maidens and often translators used the term “amorous paintings”<sup>74</sup> or “ornamental paintings”<sup>75</sup> in place of *patralekhāni*.

These designs were drawn with fragrant pastes referred to as *toyyl elutu kulampu* by commentators like Naccinarkkiniyar<sup>76</sup>. Hardly any detail is found in Cankam poetry regarding the pastes used for this purpose. The *Maṇimēkalai* mentions the saffron paste (*kuṅkuma-varuṇam*)<sup>77</sup> which is red in colour. The *Cilappatikāram* lists the various pastes available in the outer-city of Madurai. They are black aloe (*kālakil*) saffron (*kuṅkuman*) civet (*nāvik kulampu*) sandal (*tēyvai*) and musk (*māṇmatac cāntu*)<sup>78</sup> and these must have been used as articles of toiletry. Sanskrit classical literature also refers to *gorocana* and white aloe. (*sūklāguru*)<sup>79</sup> used for the painting of the body.

From some of the Cankam poems it is evident that apart from pastes and sometimes along with these pastes, the petals of flowers or leaves of some plants were also pressed to the bodies. The petals of aquatic flowers like the lotus (*tāmarai* and *alli*)<sup>80</sup> and the *neytal*<sup>81</sup> seem to have been popular. This, perhaps, is due to the cooling effect of these flowers. The tender shoots of the *punku*<sup>82</sup> (*pongamia glabra*) and the *vila* or wood apple also seems to have been used for this purpose. The *Tirumurukāṟruppātai* describes that women, having smeared the fragrant sandal paste on their breasts, also applied the pollen of *vēṅkai* (*pterocarpus marsupium*) flowers and the shoots

<sup>71</sup> Kālidāsa *Kumārasambhavam* III 38; *Rṅusamhāram* IV:5; VI:7; *Raghuvamśam*: XVI: 67.

<sup>72</sup> Kale, M.R. *The Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa* Delhi 1967. Pg. 124.

<sup>73</sup> Refer Fn, 66 above.

<sup>74</sup> Kale, M.R. *The Raghuvamśam of Kālidāsa*.

<sup>75</sup> Kale M.R. *The Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa*, pg. 40.

<sup>76</sup> *Maturaikkāñci* 416

<sup>77</sup> *Maṇimēkalai* 19:87

<sup>78</sup> *Cilappatikāram* 13:115-118

<sup>79</sup> Kālidāsa *Kumārasambhavam* VIII 15, 17; *Rṅusamhāram* VI:12.

<sup>80</sup> *Akanāṇūru* 389:4-5

<sup>81</sup> *Kalittokai* 143:31

<sup>82</sup> *Narṅṅai* 9:5-6

of the *vīlā* (feronia elephantum) over the paste<sup>83</sup>. Sanskrit literature also mentions the pollen of flowers applied to the body as enhancing the beauty of women. Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvamśam* says that the pollen of the *ketaka* (pandanus odoratisimus) blown by the sea breeze decorates the face of Sītā after she was purified by fire.<sup>84</sup> The pollen of *lodhra* flowers which make the face fairer (*pāṇḍu*) also seem to have served the same purpose.<sup>85</sup>

The specific reason for such decoration is not mentioned in either the Tamil Cankam poems or the Sanskrit works of about the same period. But, the frequent reference to the different forms of personal decoration in love (*akam*) poetry while the poems on other aspects of life like war, heroism, and generosity hardly refer to these, shows that the chief purpose must have been, sexual attraction. However, it cannot be denied that the objects used for decoration or the designs painted may have some magical or medicinal reasons that could have been forgotten with the passage of time.

<sup>83</sup> *Tirumurukārruppatai* 35-37

<sup>84</sup> Kālidāsa *Raghuvamśam* XIII : 16

<sup>85</sup> Kālidāsa *Meghadūtam* II : 2

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