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Restoring knowledge by integration and refutation:
Sivagnana Munivar's conceptualization of tradition

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  A grammarian creates knowledge of the structure of a language; to be precise, makes explicit the innate knowledge that underlies the language and in the mind of the speaker of that language. He creates a metalanguage including the conceptual framework and terms for making this explicitness possible and precise. He needs the authority of the community to make this knowledge acceptable as authentic. Adherents of this knowledge make a school and this school preserves, reinterprets, extends this knowledge. The terms authority, community and authenticity mentioned above are problematic and they will be examined in this paper in the context of their understanding in Tamil tradition. The examination is done based on Sivagnana Munivar's understanding of these terms.

Sivagnana Munivar lived in the 18th century, which is a period of reevaluating the grammar, literature and philosophy, being at a transitioning point –one of many in the history of Tamil. The transition is repositioning Tamil in the context of Tamil (local) Saivite assertion and Sanskritic (pan-Indian) ideological dominance. Munivar was the leading light in reconfiguring Tamil grammar, literature and philosophy. He was the scholar-laureate of the Saivite Thiruvavadudurai Mutt. The mutts had the role of preserving and transmitting the knowledge of the past; the former was done by collecting and curing the manuscripts and the latter was done through teaching and creating disciples to carry on the transmission work, while offering interpretations of the works coding the knowledge and adding to that knowledge by way of explication. Munivar was a master of knowledge in the fields of grammar, literature and philosophy and of them in two languages viz., Tamil and Sanskrit. He was prolific in his writings, and at the same time polemical. The means to establish one's intellectual position about the knowledge is debate and Munivar debated for his ideas in his writings. His exposition of the grammar of Tolkaappiyam (ilakkaNam), elaboration of the philosophy of MeykaNDaar (caaStiram) and composition of mythological epics (puraaNam) are legendary (K. Subramania Pillai, 1973) and influential in the intellectual paradigm of his times.

With regard to knowledge creation, the Sanskrit tradition makes a difference between rishi 'seer', whose statements are unquestionable and acharya 'teacher', whose rules could be found deficient. Panini is placed in the latter category, but such categorization of a grammarian may change over time (D'Avella 2018:6). The Tamil equivalents respectively are munivar and aaciriyar. Tamil may not have had this categorization consistent with regard to the nature of knowledge created. Nevertheless, Akattiyan is referred to as munivar and Tolkaappiyan as aaciriyar. Sivagnanam, which must be his name after initiation (diksha), has commonly the title munivar, but also yogi and swamigal. These titles have more than religious significance. Munivar, at his times, has the meaning of 'seer' but in the sense of 'pervasive

knowing'. Sivagnana Munivar is praised to know the past knowledge to establish it authentically in the present (and for all times to come). He represents the system of periodically authenticating the established system of knowledge.

For Munivar, the original source of knowledge of all aspects of Tamil (the natural (iyal), the musical (icai) and the performative (naaTakam)) is Akattiyan, which he transmitted to his select students, one of whom is Tolkaappiyan. Akattiyan, being a munivan, is infallible and hence the knowledge from him is the truth. The transmission of knowledge is through teaching for ensuring comprehension and memorization.

Any transmission of knowledge either orally or through palm leaf manuscripts is liable for loss, addition and change of parts of knowledge, which would raise questions of authenticity and integrity. This problem is dealt with by modern editors by comparing multiple manuscripts that represent the same text, or the knowledge in it. We don't know if this was done at earlier times. This is variation within a text by the same author. There are different texts, usually created at different times by different authors, of the same knowledge, for example, the grammar of Tamil. The intellectual unity of variant texts by different authors, on the other hand, is established by evoking the concept of lineage by Munivar.

Munivar's term for lineage is marapu nilai 'standing or staying in the tradition'. The beginning of the tradition is traced to the first person who created the knowledge (or was revealed to) in the first place. Munivar takes that one to be Akattiyan for Tamil. The concept of lineage helps to relate various texts by relating them to the text / knowledge of Akattiyan and thus to relate varying bodies of knowledge.

A set of texts are argued to belong to one lineage when certain conditions are fulfilled that establish the fact of a text's variations are not significant. There are certain other conditions that would prove a text to be outside a lineage. Lineage may be considered to be the equivalent of a school that adheres to a body of knowledge including its axioms, postulates and analyses. But lineage has strong cultural connotations. The conditions laid down by Munivar to claim lineage for a text in his commentary of the text-specific introductory description (ciRappu-p paayiram) are discussed below. The specific text is Tolkappiyam and the author who introduces it to other scholars is Panampaaranaar, who the tradition claims to be a contemporary of Tolkappiyar, but he probably wrote it centuries later. Paayiram has the role of authenticating a text at a later time as a representative work of the lineage. In the case of Tolkaappiyam, it is to authenticate it as the authoritative text of the knowledge of Tamil grammar, which reproduces in writing Akattiyar's original knowledge of Tamil.

Munivar gives illustrative examples of deviation (he calls it tiripu) from texts including commentaries, which do not change the status of the text as belonging to the lineage. We could deduce the principles of which they are illustrations. One is the deviation in the ordering of sutras and of grammatical elements. Nannul describes elongation (aLapeTai) of pure consonants along with the elongation of short vowels in the chapter on Sounds (Ezuttu), while Tolkappiyam describes the former in the chapter on Prosody (ceyyuLiyal). In this one, they use different criteria for deciding on the place in the grammar to describe a particular grammatical element but they do not have different descriptions of the same

grammatical elements. So this deviation is not significant. Another illustration is the difference in sandhi derivations. Words like tankai 'sister (our smaller one)' are derived from tam+kai and described in Tolkappiyam (PuLLi mayankiyal 20) as a two-step process of loss of /m/ and appearance of the homorganic nasal in its place. Nannuul (MeyyiiRRu-p puNariyal 16) describes the same sandhi derivation as a one-step process of /m/changing into the homorganic nasal. There is a similar difference in the derivation of ankai 'palm' from akam+kai 'inside of hand', where additionally /ka/ is also lost for Tolkappiyam and Nanuul. This difference in the number of steps in sandhi derivation is not significant. Yet another illustration is the derivation of naakiyaatu 'which is the buffalo' from naaku+ yaatu. For Topkappiyam /u/ is lost and /i/appears; for Nannuul /u/ changes into /i/. This difference is not significant. Munivar does not think such differences of sandhi derivation to have significance to merit removing these two texts from one lineage because the rule of loss of a consonant and the rule of change of a consonant are needed independently to describe the sandhi of consonants elsewhere. Tolkaappiyam extends them to these cases. These are merely different ways of analysis for Munivar. However, one could argue that there is a difference in the conceptualization of morphophonemic change reflected in the different analyses. Tolkappiyam prefers dropping and adding sounds over changing one sound into another in spite of latter's simplicity. In other words, economy of rules is not a preference for this text.

In morphology, the difference between Tolkappiyam and Nannuul comes from the way morphological segmentation is done. The empty or link morphs (caariyai) illustrate this. The link morph -vaRRu- (as in palavaRRai 'many (acc.) is –aRRu- for Nannuul, which takes -v- as a glide (ignoring forms like ivaRRai 'them', where –v- cannot be a glide)'. Tolkaappiyam segments it as –vaRRu-. The neuter plural morpheme is –va for Tolkaappiyam (as in varuva '(they) will come', celva '(they) will go') but it is –a for Nannuul, which takes –v- as future tense marker; it could not be a glide (as celva would show). In monosyllabic pronouns, the oblique form has an –a in dative case declension (for example, enakku 'to me'), which is a part of the genitive (ena etc.) for Tolkaappiyam, whereas it is a link morph inserted between the genitive or oblique noun and the dative case for Nannuul. The nouns of time such as the names of month (they end in the vowel /i/ are used in a locative syntactic construction –kku is used. This is taken not as a case marker but as an empty morph by both Tolkaappiym and Nannuul. Tolkappiyam segments it as -ikku- (as in aaTikku-k koNTaan '(he) got (it) in the month of Adi'), but Nannuul takes the empty morph to be –ku-. One could argue that there is more than the problem of segmentation in these cases, but it is beside the point for this paper. The point is not about which is a better analysis but the difference, whatever the value of the specific analysis, is insignificant.

In poetics, the thematic classification of poems into akam 'internal' and puRam 'external' in Tolkappiyam is expanded into four (akam, akappuRam 'external inside internal', puRam and puRappuRam 'external of the external ') in Panniru PaTalam. This difference is accommodated within the same lineage by Munivar. So is uzinjci-t tiNai that is bifurcated to include veTci-t tiNai. These are cases of subdividing   conceptual category, not changing the concept underlying the category itself. Hence the difference is insignificant.

Munivar argues that the above differences in analysis and in categorical sub-divisions will be considered to belong to the same lineage and so to constitute the same body of knowledge. In other words, these

analytical differences are variations within a lineage and are not strong enough to indicate a different lineage. He uses these illustrations to argue in summation that the final outcome (muTipu) of combined morphs (puNarcci), inflected words (col) and poetic content (poruL) respectively of the three sets of illustrations remain the same. This can be said to be similar to producing the same food item and having one name for it even when different recipes have been followed. Texts of the same legacy (marapu nilai) may employ different processes and do not deviate from the legacy when the final product is not altered. The final outcome is the essence of a body of knowledge, not the route taken to arrive at. This is a philosophical position that Munivar holds.

Munivar gives illustrations of deviations that separate one lineage from another. Tolkaappiyam identifies three 'dependent sounds/letters' (caarpu ezuttu), which are predictable by the linguistic context in which they occur. Nannuul (Ezuttiyal sutra 5) expands the membership of this category into ten. This is not a case of making more sub-divisions in a category (see above). The expansion is a result of a different criterion, viz. role in making the basic unit (acai) of meter in prosody. Hence, it is qualitatively different. The first person (and the second person) pronoun are treated as human (uyar tiNai) in Tolkaappiyam, but as common to human and non-human (viravu-t tiNai) in Nannuul. The former's criterion is verbal ending, which is human whereas the latter's criterion is referential, where the referent is any animate being, both human beings and animals. The difference in the criterion is theoretical and therefor significant. In poetics, the theory of akam poetry of Tolkaappiyam does not assign a land to paalai- tiNai, which describes the behavior in separation. IRaiyanaar AkapporuL assigns a land to paalai. This is not a case of making the match between akam behavior (tiNai : ozukkam) and land (tiNai : nilam) consistent. This difference has a theoretical consequence and hence significant. The reason for paalai not having a land is that the behavior of this category (tiNai), viz. the pain of separation, is omnipresent in love, whatever the particular behavior is, and so is true of all lands.

All the above illustrations that Munivar selects from the chapter on Sound structure, on Sentence structure and on Poetic structure indicate a shift in theory, which affects the analysis. Hence they cannot be said to be of the same lineage. Different destinations need different routes.

There is an anomaly in Munivar's argument. Nannul belongs to the lineage of Tolkaappiyam and it does not, as can be seen from Munivar's elucidations. Munivar introduces the concept of slip or error (vazu). A text in the same lineage may err. But it is disrespect (இழுக்கு, bordering blasphemy) to the lineage. Nannuul simply errs in the treatment of dependent sounds and first and second person pronouns. And so is not out of the lineage of Tolkaappiyam. There is a crucial difference between error and deviation. The latter, when it becomes a refutation determines the status of a text in a lineage.

This raises the question of differentiating innovation from error. And it raises the question whether an author could make innovations. This is a serious question about flexibility in a lineage. It is also a question about innovations go very far to challenge the lineage. Munivar envisages two sources for introducing new elements in a lineage. One is author's own knowledge. Munivar excludes this. In support of his stand, he misquotes a sutra from Tolkaappiyam PoruLatikaaram S 91), which is marapu nilai tiriyin piRitu piRitaakum 'when a lineage deviates it makes it a different one'.

This sutra actually is to disfavor altering the words that are conventionally used for a specific referent, such as the specific words for the off springs or females of certain animals. This sutra is about the conventionality of words and about breaking lexical conventions. It has nothing to do with innovations and about lineage. The word marapu in Tamil is polysemous; its senses include lineage and convention.

The other source is the actual language (vazakku) used in real life. Can these find a place in the lineage as innovations in the grammar, as changes in the speakers' knowledge of grammar. Munivar is conservative about this. He frames the question this way: Since the language in vogue (vazakku) changes over time, will the text (nuul) that accommodates them keep coming different? He answers it with a rhetorical question: If only the forms out of use (archaic forms) are excluded from grammar, the forms that come newly into use will be included in the grammar. He concludes that the forms used by ancient authors (tollaaciriyar) alone are the (authentic) use (vazakku). The authors referred to here are authors of grammar. Though he disallows innovations in the lineage, he makes an exemption for the usage of the higher people (uyarntoor), which term is left undefined, citing a Tolkaappiyam sutra subsequent to the above misquoted one. He imposes a crucial condition on accepting innovations (putiyana puNarttal), which is that they should not contradict (muraN) the old forms of use, i.e. the forms already authenticated by the grammar. Munivar's position may be understood as claiming that the lineage could add new knowledge conditionally, but could not replace or drop any part of knowledge from it.

There are two kinds of relationship between the texts of the same lineage. Munivar endorses such textual relationship. One text is the original text or Ur text (mutal nuul). Munivar takes Akattiyam to be this text of the Tamil lineage. A derivative text from the Ur text is called the follower text (vazi nuul). A text gets this designation of relationship when it shortens (தொகு, like in abridging) the Ur text for the benefit of those who are not up to reading the original (the pithy description of Munivar of such people is 'less intelligent people of mortal life prone to many diseases' (cinnaaL palpiNic ciRRaRivnar). Or, this text might rearrange the sequencing of the original text to reduce the difficulty of following it. Tolkaappiyam is a follower text of Akattiyam for Munivar, which shortens the three dimensions of Tamil viz. the natural, musical and performative dimensions, and limits itself to the natural language alone. It is representative text of the grammatical lineage of Tamil and the grammatical knowledge of Tamil.

Another kind of text in the same lineage is called a fellow text (caarpu nuul). These are the texts that explicate the original (mutal nuul) or the follower text (vazi nuul). Commentaries that do not contradict these texts must belong to this kind. Nannuul, however, describes this kind of text (also called by it a circumferential text (puTai nuul) as a text that partly follows the lineage and partly deviates from it. Munivar, who added, deleted and changed some of the descriptions in the commentary by Cankaranamaccivaayar of Nannuul, leaves this description unchanged (Dhamotharan 1999). Hence it may be inferred that he is in agreement of this description of the fellow text (caarpu nuul). This commentator compares vazi nuul and caarpu nuul to mutal nuul as that of the son and son in law respectively. He also mentions the relativity in such designations of texts. What is vazi nuul may be a mutal nuul for another text whose vazi nuul it is. Though Munivar does not make any change in this observation of Nannuul's commentator, this may not be in agreement with his conception of mutal

nuul. There could be a vazi nuul of a vazi nuul, but there is only one mutal nuul, the fountainhead and definer of the lineage.

Munivar does not name a text that counters the original or follower texts by way of arguing against them or writing a text in a different lineage. Mayilainathar, a fourteenth century commentator of Nannuul, calls it an adversarial text (etir nuul).

The grouping of texts under one lineage with their relationship with the Ur text tells the fact that knowledge reproduction covers a range. This allows amalgamation of centripetal and centrifugal nature of knowledge production. This should help one to see historical continuity in knowledge production and thus to preserve the body of knowledge over time. This is different from text reproduction by a genealogy of copyist, who participate in a different way in knowledge production.

It must be noted that Munivar establishes a lineage and its characteristics, which is about grammar, a text of thoughts. This does not extend to literature, a text of imagination. This suggests that for Munivar lineage (marapu nilai, to which paramparai is used synonymously) is relevant for the production of knowledge, and not for the production of aesthetics. It may be noted that in the Sanskrit tradition grammar is classified under Shastra 'science'.

Munivar expands the lineage (marapu nilai) to include texts in Tamil and in Sanskrit. The lineage of knowledge is not restricted by language. This stems from his stand that Akattiyar is the pro-genitor of knowledge in Tamil and in Sanskrit. He acknowledges the difference between the grammar of Tamil and the grammar of Sanskrit and thus between the knowledge of Tamil and of Sanskrit. He notes the following to be specific to Tamil grammar and not found in Sanskrit grammar: sandhi rules, verbs unmarked for tense (kuRippu vinai), verb+noun compounds (vinai-t tokai), which are word categories, the poetic content categories interior (akam) and exterior (puRam), behavior (tiNai) categories, prosodic meter categories and others. Language specific grammatical properties and analytical categories do not prohibit a common conceptual lineage between languages to belong to the same lineage in spite of requiring different analytical categories like the above.

Because of this claim, Munivar builds arguments for grammatical descriptions of Tolkaappiyam using facts of Sanskrit grammar. One example is the relation between a certain vowel and a consonant like /i/ and /y/ described in Tolkaappiyam (Ezuttatikaaram, mozi marapu sutre 21, 22) is held to be true citing similar relation between vowels and consonants mentioned in Mahabhashya. In a sutra about compounds ( ). Tolkaappiyam says there are *also* noun+noun compounds. Commentators say that the use of 'also' in the sutra warrants the interpretation that there are verb+noun compounds in Tamil. Munivar argues against this interpretation citing the fact that Sanskrit does not have the second type of compounds. He views the sutra to be true of Tamil and Sanskrit.

Munivar is noted for refuting the commentators of Tolkaappiyam and other grammarians to make the point that their interpretation is not what the author, i.e. Tolkaappiyar, meant. This is how he preserves the lineage by restoring. Not only innovations but also new interpretations of the sutras of Tolkaappiyam are discouraged. It is through refutations of the deviations from Tolkaappiyam by other

authors and commentators, as he perceives them, Munivar tries to preserve the integrity of the original text and its meaning over time. He comes about a millennium and a half after Tolkaappiyam

From Munivar's point of view, a grammatical text belongs to an intellectual lineage (or tradition or genealogy) by the virtue of adhering to the principle of insignificant deviations from the original text. This is the way of preserving certain knowledge without losing it as it was produced, as other texts in the lineage do. Does it mean that a static knowledge is preferred over a dynamic one? The answer depends on how narrowly or broadly the lineage of a text is conceived using deviations from the original.