

# Framed Narrative and the Dramatized Audience in a Tamil Buddhist Epic

By

PAULA RICHMAN  
*Colby College, Waterville, Maine*

## INTRODUCTION

The story of Cātuvaṅ and the Nākas portrays the process by which a shipwrecked merchant persuades a tribe of naked islanders to change the way they live. Cāttaṅār, the author of the story, depicts in it a dazzling orator engaged in moral bargaining with the unsophisticated tribesmen. This particular story—like sixteen others—is nested within the Tamil Buddhist epic *Maṇimēkalai*. It portrays a preacher and the response to his preaching, and thus helps to shape and control the reader's own response to the story's message. By portraying the speaker's persuasive skills and their effect upon the dramatized audience, Cāttaṅār demonstrates the response he has in mind for his actual audience as well. A narrative which possesses many such framed stories with dramatized audiences possesses many opportunities for persuasion. The discussion below analyzes the manner in which framed stories can contribute to religious persuasion by using the story of Cātuvaṅ and the Nākas in *Maṇimēkalai* as a case study in religious rhetoric.

Scholars of South Asian texts have tended to overlook the contribution which framed narrative can make to the overall goals of the text. Several well-known Indologists have described the inclusion of framed stories in ways which disclose an assumption that such stories are superfluous. For example, in his classic history of Sanskrit literature, MacDonell describes the South Asian epic *Mahābhārata* as

. . . a congeries of parts, the only unity about which is the connectedness of the epic cycle with which they deal; its epic kernel, moreover, which forms only about one-fifth of the whole work, has become so overgrown with didactic matter, that in its final shape it is not

an epic at all, but an encyclopedia of moral teaching (MacDonell [1900] 1968: 281–283).

Hopkins describes the same epic as “a heterogeneous collection of strings wound about a nucleus almost lost sight of” (Hopkins [1901] 1978: 363). Gowen, following a similar line of argument, says that the *Mahābhārata* “could with great advantage, be reduced, excluding the ‘episodes.’” He characterizes these episodes as material which “interferes with the sequence of the narrative” (Gowen 1968: 207). A Tamil scholar writing on *Maṇimēkalai* also argues that the framed narrative diverts the reader from the main story but gives his discussion a new twist. Rather than seeing framed stories as digressive, he sees them as the superficial ornament which makes an otherwise boring story engaging.<sup>1</sup> “Through such stories . . . the story of *Maṇimēkalai* is endowed with a glitter which it otherwise lacks, for the story element is rather weak . . .” (Balusamy 1965: 177). In either case—whether treated as digression or adornment—the assumption is that framed stories are not crucial to the epic as a whole.

Careful analysis reveals, however, that the framed stories in South Asian epics often contribute a great deal to the rhetorical thrust of the entire epic. Ramanujan’s comments on the need to understand Indian texts as coherent wholes apply well to a discussion of framed stories:

Scholars have often discussed Indian texts . . . as if they were loose-leaf files, ragbag encyclopedias; taking the Indian word for text, “*grantha*” (derived from the knot that holds the palm leaves together), literally, scholars often posit only an accidental and physical unity. We need to attend to the context sensitive designs that embed a seeming variety of modes . . . This way of constructing the text is in consonance with other designs in the culture. Not unity (in the Aristotelian sense) but coherence, seems to be the end (Ramanujan 1980: 16).

Here Ramanujan argues against the view of Indian texts as random collections of parts, urging the reader to be sensitive to the manner in which component parts contribute to the whole. In analyzing *Maṇimēkalai* with Ramanujan’s arguments in mind, primary attention must be given to the way in which the components of the framed story contribute to the author’s desire to present Buddhism as a viable and attractive worldview.

Within the Buddhist tradition, a great deal of attention has been paid to the means by which people might be encouraged to enter upon the Buddhist path. In his *Skilful Means*, Michael Pye notes that Bud-

dhist teaching is pragmatically oriented, commenting that the key Buddhist concept of *upāya* (usually translated as “skilful means” or “skill in means”) is “about the way in which the goal, the intention, or the meaning of Buddhism is correlated with the unenlightened condition of living beings” (Pye 1978: 1). According to traditional Mahayana understanding of the term, the Buddha himself is said to have used “countless devices” to lead human beings along the path to enlightenment (Hurvitz 1976: 22). Within the story analyzed below, Cātuvan̄ uses bargaining about moral codes as a strategy to convince the Nākas to give up murder; on a larger scale, Cāttaṅār uses framed stories as an expedient to convince his readers of the validity of Buddhism. Because these framed stories play a great role in presenting Buddhism as a persuasive explanation of reality in *Maṇimēkalai*, they may be seen as an illustration of the Buddhist practice of skill in means.

In modern Tamil literary discourse, the self-contained shorter stories joined to the main story generally known as “framed stories” are usually referred to as *Kiḷaikkatai* or “branch stories.” *Katai* means “story” and *kiḷai* as a noun can mean “branch,” “sprout,” and “relatives,” or “relations.” One uses the verb *kiḷai* in the sense of “to branch out,” “to multiply,” or “to abound.” The concepts of multiplicity and branching outward, which the term thus suggests, are appropriate to describe the many shorter stories attached to the central plot of the epic (Richman 1983: 60–65). Because of these connotations and because the term is indigenous to the region from which the text originates, throughout the analysis of the story of Cātuvan̄ and the Nākas “branch story” is consistently used to refer to those parts supported by but vital to the growth of the whole narrative of *Maṇimēkalai*.

#### BRANCH STORIES IN A SOUTH INDIAN EPIC

*Maṇimēkalai* is a sixth century Buddhist epic composed by Cīttalai Cāttaṅār in Tamil.<sup>2</sup> It is the second epic in Tamil literary history. The first epic, *Cilappatikāram*, tells the story of a man who neglects his wife when he falls in love with a dancing girl; *Maṇimēkalai* is the daughter born as a result of their love affair. Because the characters in the first epic play a role in the second, Tamil tradition has conceived of the two texts as a pair and given them the title of “twin-epics.”

*Cilappatikāram*, primarily a literary text without any strong sectarian affiliations, differs greatly from *Maṇimēkalai*, primarily a religious text containing many highly didactic expositions of Buddhist doctrine. Although other Tamil Buddhist texts did exist at one time (Zvelebil 1974: 142), none of them survived after the Buddhist community in

Tamilnadu died out. In contrast, *Maṇimēkalai* did survive and scholars speculate that its strong links to the more popular *Cilappatikāram* account, at least in part, for this fact. Although Cāttaṇār's text is Buddhist in ideology, vocabulary, and character, it carefully presents Buddhist ideas in a manner which will enable an audience relatively unfamiliar with Buddhism to understand and accept them. Because it is an epic, the text's didacticism manifests itself in story form.

It seems reasonable to assume that all but the concluding chapters of *Maṇimēkalai* were originally recited. The ancient literary corpus of the centuries preceding *Maṇimēkalai* grew out of a long tradition of bardic recitation, as Kailasapathy has demonstrated (Kailasapathy 1968). Cāttaṇār himself used many of the literary conventions from such poems (Richman 1983: 99–164). *Maṇimēkalai*'s twin-epic, *Cilappatikāram*, is recited even today (Beck 1972). *Maṇimēkalai* uses a common type of meter and pattern of rhyme called *etukai*, which would function well as an aid to the memory. The majority of the text contains subject matter appropriate for recitation; the first three quarters of *Maṇimēkalai* portray men and women in situations which both hold one's interest as well as keep one's mind on Buddhism. One wonders, however, whether the final section of the epic would have been appropriate for general recitation. Its focus is narrower. It contains, for example, a detailed exposition of syllogisms and fallacies according to the school of Buddhist logic (Chap. 29) as well as a densely packed "Buddhist manual" enumerating key Buddhist formulations such as the four noble truths and the twelve nidanas (Chap. 30). Whether these chapters would actually have been recited is unclear.

Given the meager evidence available, we can only speculate as to what type of people comprised *Maṇimēkalai*'s audience. Since we have no outside historical evidence we must look at the nature of the text. *Maṇimēkalai* encompasses an extremely wide variety of types of discourse; thus, it seems likely that different parts of the text would have appealed to different kinds of people. For example, Chapter 6 tells a story which cannot be understood fully without some familiarity with Tamil conventions for love poetry. Thus, this particular story would appear to have been directed to an audience of connoisseurs, people schooled in the literary traditions. In a somewhat different vein, in Chapter 27 the heroine goes to speak with representatives of the major religious perspectives [*darśanas*] in order to determine the ways in which Buddhism was a superior system of thought. This particular chapter would make the most sense to those with some background in these philosophical schools of thought. On the other hand, the majority of the epic's narrative would be understandable without extensive training

either in Tamil literary tradition or in Indian philosophy. The one thing of which we can be fairly certain is that nearly all members of the audience for *Maṇimēkalai* would have been relatively ignorant of Buddhism. Cāttaṇār spends so much time explaining extremely basic concepts of Buddhism, increasing the complexity of his discussion gradually over the course of the text, that it seems reasonable to make such an assumption.

*Maṇimēkalai*'s main story, the framing narrative, concerns itself with the spiritual growth of its heroine. Maṇimēkalai, a courtesan's daughter, decides to renounce her hereditary occupation and become a Buddhist nun, even though she feels attracted to a prince and he longs to have her as his mistress. The main story then focuses largely on Maṇimēkalai's conflict between love and renunciation.

In contrast, the branch stories discuss a variety of Buddhist doctrines. They depict chaste housewives, philanthropic businessmen, naked tribesmen, shipwrecked merchants, and illegitimate children. These stories narrate a wide range of situations in which people come to live by particular religious ideals. The thread which ties these varied characters together is Buddhist teaching. Some of the components of this teaching are the inevitability of life's impermanence (*anicca*), the importance of compassion (*karuṇā*), the merit (*puṇṇa*) of generous gifts (*dāna*), the value of renunciation (*turavu*), and the necessity of practicing non-injury (*ahiṃsā*). Each of these instructional components forms the focus of a particular branch story. In the case of the story of Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas, the branch story describes how a group of people come to embrace *ahiṃsā*.

These branch stories are always related in some specific way to the main story; they are never mere digressions. Some explain what occurred during the previous lives of important characters in *Maṇimēkalai*. Others describe the history of a holy place or miraculous object which plays a significant role in the main story. Still others describe the deeds performed in the past by exemplary characters. Each story bears a particular and non-interchangeable relationship to the framing narrative, the main story.

The branch story of Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas, the case study of this article, functions to explain how Cātuvaṇ comes to be exemplary in the Buddhist practice of *dāna* (giving / generosity). When he convinces the Nāka tribesmen to give up cannibalism and embrace a modified form of the Buddhist practice of *ahiṃsā* (non-injury of living beings), he is given great wealth. With this wealth, he returns to the city and he and his faithful and chaste wife become great donors. Because his wife is so admired in the city, she is the first person the epic's heroine

Maṇimēkalai visits with her almsbowl. When she fills Maṇimēkalai's begging bowl, it never becomes empty again. Maṇimēkalai takes her bowl throughout the Tamil country and uses it to feed starving people. It is the wife's virtuous gift which makes Maṇimēkalai's generosity possible.

Let us proceed now to a translation of this tale,<sup>3</sup> then to a more concrete discussion of it.

*Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas: Translation* *Line Number*

Hear, O woman with beautiful jewels about Ātirai's husband, Cātuvaṇ, who lost his good character. Leaving his beautifully adorned wife, he spent his time with a courtesan who fed him tainted food. He lost such large sums of money at dice and other forms of gambling that soon all of his funds were exhausted. Even the courtesan, who had taken him in, pointed out to him the excellence of other men. Then, with a wave of her hand, she dismissed him because he had no money.

After that, Cātuvaṇ gave in to his uncontrollable desire to set out to sea with a group of merchants. In the vast, teeming ocean, the wind overturned their vessel. Tossed about by the rolling waves, Cātuvaṇ grabbed onto a length of the mast and eventually drifted to the shore of the mountainous land where the naked wanderers called Nākas [Sanskrit, Nāga] lived. There he fell into their hands.

Some others also survived just as Cātuvaṇ had escaped by holding onto a piece of the sturdy mast from the wrecked ship. After reaching home, they reported that Cātuvaṇ had perished in the dark middle watch of the night, along with the others who had drowned in the dashing waves of the great ocean.

When that good woman, Ātirai, heard the news, she cried, "Oh townspeople, build me a funeral pyre and set a bright fire to it." They dug a pit in the cremation ground and set fire to the brittle stiff wood. Then she entered the fire, declaring, "I will go where my excellent husband has gone, driven by the fruits of his deeds." But the bright fire touched neither the clothes she wore nor her resting place in the pyre. The garlands that adorned her blowing hair and the sandalpaste she had spread on her body did not even change color. Sitting there sweetly like the incomparable Fair One of Fortune [the goddess Lakṣmī] on her fragrant lotus flower she thought, "I have done such evil deeds that even the fire will not kill me. What will I do?" And she wept.

At that moment a bodiless voice came from the sky. It said, "Hear me, Ātirai: The rolling waves seized your precious husband and brought him to the mountainous shore where the naked wanderers called Nākas live. He will not stay there long. Soon he shall return in the merchant Cantiratattan's boat. Cease your grieving." So that woman, whose eyes were adorned with collyrium and highlighted with beautiful red lines [a sign of beauty], stopped mourning. She entered the house, dismissing all grief from her mind like a woman who emerges from a pond after bathing. Then she proclaimed, "May he who is like the jewel of my eye<sup>4</sup> return quickly."

Subsequently, Ātirai did so many meritorious deeds that she was admired and worshiped lovingly even by those rare chaste women who, according to tradition, have the ability to bring pouring rain.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the pain that her husband had experienced in the cloud-covered ocean grew worse. Due to that pain, he fell into a deep sleep in the shade of a tree on the steep, mountainous, wave-washed shore. Then the naked wanderers, people without love who lived in that fearful mountain, appeared. As soon as they reached the spot where Cātuvaṅ slept, they said, "Poor man, he came here all by himself. He has suffered greatly. Nonetheless, the flesh of his body will be food for us." And so they woke him up.

Now, Cātuvaṅ had learned the language of these people perfectly. So when he spoke, these people of cruel work who had encircled him, backed off. After showing reverence to him, they conversed among themselves and a few said to him, "You who have a rare strength, listen: Our guru is nearby. Be gracious enough to go to him."

When Cātuvaṅ reached the guru's dwelling, he saw pots for cooking toddy and dried white bones scattered about. The overwhelming stench of raw meat pervaded everything. Cātuvaṅ saw how the guru sat with his woman like a bear with his mate. Going into the cool shade of a lofty tree, he won them over with his spellbinding mastery of their language.

The guru asked why Cātuvaṅ had come. As soon as Cātuvaṅ told him of his experiences in the rolling sea, the guru proclaimed, "He suffered great hunger in the tossing ocean, poor man. Come, my people, give this distinguished man what he must desire—a young girl, intoxicating toddy, and meat."

Cātuvaṅ grew faint as he listened to that command and

said, " I heard those vile words. I don't want those things!"

The guru grew angry and asked, " What is there for people to live for besides women, eating and drinking? If there is something else, show it to us. Say what it is and let us see it." 80

Cātuvaṇ said, " People who are free of all confusion do not take lives and drink toddy, which deludes the mind. Listen. The truth is that the death of those who are born and the birth of those who die are like sleeping and waking. Resolute people avoid killing and drinking because they realize that those who are virtuous (*nallazam*) attain good worlds but those who are not virtuous (*allazam*) go to terrible hells. Understand this." 85 90

The Nāka guru laughed derisively and questioned Cātuvaṇ saying, " You just told us that the life breath runs away from the body, takes on another form, and enters a different place [in its next birth]. Tell us clearly how that life breath can go and enter another place the way you just said it does." 95

Cātuvaṇ replied, " Listen to what I have to say and refrain from anger: While the life breath resides in the body, the body knows what is happening. But, when the life breath leaves, that very same body doesn't realize what is happening to it—even if it is cut apart and set on fire. If this is the case, clearly an entity exists which can leave the body.

" It is not just me—everyone knows that whatever leaves must end up somewhere. You see, even when one dreams, the life breath leaves the body behind and travels a long distance, travelling in a similar fashion, and then assumes the kind of body appropriate to its deeds." 100 105

As soon as Cātuvaṇ finished speaking, the fiery-eyed Nāka fell at the feet of the good merchant who knew virtue, saying, " If I give up toddy and meat, I cannot sustain the life breath which dwells within this body. Choose and explain to us which of the determined virtuous paths (*nallazam*) is appropriate for us to follow until we die." 110

Cātuvaṇ answered, " Your request is admirable. You will follow a good path (*nezi azam*). I'll tell you the path of virtue (*azam*) possible for you: If people escape shipwrecks and come ashore here, do not kill them. Instead, save their lives, which are precious. And, give up the evil practice of eating the flesh of all beings except those animals which die of old age." 115

The low one said, " We will follow this virtuous path



which is appropriate for us here and you take these 120  
precious things which are appropriate for you there. Often  
in the past we have eaten shipwrecked people. All these  
valuable things are what we got from them. Take these  
fragrant woods, soft clothes, piles of treasure, and other  
things.”

Bringing them along with him, Cātuvan boarded the boat  
of the merchant Cantiratattan, which had arrived at that  
island. He returned to this city. There he lived with  
Ātirai, giving many generous gifts.

#### NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN CĀTUVAN AND THE DRAMATIZED AUDIENCE

In Buddhism, the practice of *ahiṃsā* (non-injury) is enjoined for lay-people and monks alike. *Ahiṃsā* is a state of mind leading to the rejection of certain kinds of actions which entail harming living beings (Conze 1967: 212–213). Non-injury, in its broadest sense, comprises an attitude of gentleness which grows out of a recognition that all living beings participate in *samsāra*, the cycle of rebirth. For example, a human being may be born as an animal in another birth or an animal might have been one’s relative in a previous birth. Compassion, thus, must be extended not only to humans but to all living beings. The story just translated leads up to the point at which Cātuvan convinces the cannibals never again to kill human beings and to eat only animals which die of old age. Let us explore how Cāttaṇār portrays the shipwrecked merchant persuading the tribesmen to practice *ahiṃsā*.

Cāttaṇār’s portrayal of Cātuvan, the Nākas, and *ahiṃsā* suggests a preaching situation with three extremely unusual elements. The preacher, though marooned upon a wild and hostile island, strangely enough uses the obscure native language so well that he sweeps his listeners off their feet. In addition, the audience of cannibals is wont to eat shipwrecked people such as Cātuvan. And finally, the preacher’s decision about the proper kind of behavior for the Nākas is based upon an unusual set of negotiations centering upon what actions can and cannot possibly be abandoned in order to be virtuous.

*The preacher.* Cātuvan’s startling effectiveness as a preacher clearly arises from his mastery of a foreign language. His extraordinary linguistic abilities help him both to save himself from Nāka cannibalism and to convince the tribesmen to reform their lives. Cātuvan must have studied the islanders’ language, since lines 60–61 state that he “had flawlessly learned the language of these people.” This skill dissuades the Nākas from consuming him. Although they contemplate his body with hungry longing, as soon as they hear his discourse they

tell him he has a “rare strength” and request that he visit their guru. When he preaches to the guru and his tribesmen, he literally “binds them with his language” (*pāṭaiyil piṇittu*) and wins them over (line 70).

Cātuvan’s impact upon the Nākas can be gauged from their leader’s response to his preaching. Since the text refers explicitly to this leader as their guru, a “spiritual preceptor,” one can infer that until Cātuvan’s arrival, the islanders viewed him as their ultimate source of knowledge. At first the guru reacts with anger at Cātuvan’s new explanation of life’s goals, but gradually he becomes convinced of their validity. Both Cātuvan’s wider range of knowledge and his convincing interpretive framework for analyzing experience persuade the guru to change his mind about Cātuvan. As a gesture of submission to his superior spiritual mentor, the Nāka guru then falls at the merchant’s feet.

*The audience.* Cātuvan’s flawless linguistic facility and knowledgeability contrast vividly with the utter lack of sophistication and ignorance of his audience. The language Cāttaṇār uses to describe the Nākas throughout the story indicates that they should be perceived as “savage” because of their lack of the standard accoutrements of society, their impure food habits, and their profound moral ignorance. Unlike people of “civilized” societies, the Nākas lack clothing and proper housing.<sup>6</sup> Wandering naked over the island, they hunt and eat animals as well as shipwrecked human beings without remorse.

Even the most respected Nāka, the guru, lives in a squalid dwelling permeated by the stench from rotting carcasses. The text’s graphic description of the toddy and bones lying about implies that such things should be considered repulsive. Because the guru consumes impure food, Cāttaṇār labels him “low,” in the sense of low or impure status. He also describes the Nākas as “people without love” and “people of cruel work.” The guru’s inability to conceive of goals in life other than the pleasures of sex and food and drink, points to his stunted moral development. In short, the Nākas are savages, close to animals in behavior. For this reason, Cāttaṇār compares their leader and his woman to a bear and his mate (lines 68–69).

*The message.* Since the Nākas are so ignorant, Cātuvan uses very simple arguments based upon their own limited experience in order to persuade them to give up their cruel ways. His basic line of reasoning focuses upon the inevitability of retribution for evil deeds in the next life. When the Nāka guru expresses doubt about the postulated existence of rebirth, Cātuvan explicates it in greater detail. In his speech, Cātuvan never relies upon any technical language to make his case. Instead, he phrases his discourse entirely in terms understandable to the

Nākas and in comparisons readily familiar to them. He compares the topics he discusses with the Nāka's experiences of waking and sleeping, cutting up a dead body, and dreaming.

Cātuvan's specific preaching about the nature of the body and karmic retribution, however, comprises only one section of a larger rhetorical pattern within the branch story. This larger rhetorical strategy consists of initially setting up uncompromising injunctions but eventually specifying more realistic behavioral laws to set moral goals for this particular audience. In a sense, the interaction between Cātuvan and the Nākas takes the form of a series of negotiations about how much "virtue" the tribesmen can actually accomplish, given the limitations within which they must live.

Initially, Cātuvan's condemnation focuses upon eating flesh, drinking liquor, and indulging in sexual pleasure. The guru's behavior horrifies Cātuvan because he sees the great leader intoxicated with these pleasures. When offered meat, toddy, and a woman, the merchant grows faint with revulsion. The guru, however, claims there is nothing worthy of living for besides them.

Cātuvan then narrows the focus of his censure to drinking toddy and eating flesh. He warns the guru that unconfused people shy away from the evil deeds of eating toddy and meat. The guru again protests, claiming that without even these two, he could not go on living. Then he entreats Cātuvan to propose a realistic set of moral injunctions which will be possible for them to follow.

Cātuvan, after having finally realized the implications of their environment and limited sources of food, modifies his original program

TABLE 1  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN  
CĀTUVAN AND THE NĀKAS

Lines	Incidents	Sexual Enjoyment	Toddy Drinking	Meat Eating
68-69	Guru disparaged for practicing:	X	X	X
76-77	Guru offers to Cātuvan:	X	X	X
80-81	Guru asserts as aims in life:	X	X	X
84-85	Cātuvan argues that unconfused people reject:		X	X
108-109	Guru counters that he could not live without:		X	X
114-115	Cātuvan determines the path appropriate for the Nākas, which prohibits only:			X, if killing is involved

greatly. He declares that abstaining from all meat, except that obtained from animals who died of old age, will suffice to guarantee that they are living virtuously.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 outlines Cātuvan̄'s ever-shrinking set of expectations for moral rectitude.

Within this branch story of Cātuvan̄ and the Nākas, Cāttaṇār has portrayed a knowledgeable preacher and an extremely ignorant audience; the two sides eventually come to agree upon the moral code appropriate for tribal life. The Nākas are allowed to eat only the meat of animals which they do not kill. The compromise—only to refrain from killing living beings—does not include all the major prescriptions listed in Buddhist texts, but it does eliminate the most shocking way in which the Nākas were transgressing those moral laws, namely by killing human beings. In this story, Cātuvan̄ effectively preached non-injury (*ahiṃsā*) to a group of people who were practicing the most extreme form of *hiṃsa* (injury) possible.

#### THE LARGER MESSAGE FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE

In addition to its particular message about the merits of *ahiṃsā*, the story of Cātuvan̄ and the Nākas possesses a larger message as well, concerned with the viability of Buddhism as an option for *Maṇimēkalai*'s readers. Through its portrayal of Cātuvan̄'s preaching, it implies that Buddhism is accessible to all because its preachers provide moral codes appropriate for the lives of their listeners. Cāttaṇār makes this point through his use of a dramatized audience (the Nākas who listen to Cātuvan̄'s discourse).

The response of a dramatized audience in a branch story to a particular idea shows the text's external audience what its own reaction to a particular Buddhist idea should be. The branch story explores the implications of an idea, allowing its listeners to see how individuals in particular circumstances actually embrace that idea. Branch stories in *Maṇimēkalai* provide small-scale "preaching events," which explore the practical implications of doctrines *in situ*. A dramatized audience gives the readers cues about how to understand what the preacher in the story relates. In the story of Cātuvan̄ and the Nākas translated above, the response of the Nākas to Cātuvan̄'s preaching demonstrates how one should react to the story.

In order to explicate the way in which Cāttaṇār demonstrates to his readers how they should understand the story of Cātuvan̄ and the Nākas, the analysis below will return to the three categories of "preacher," "audience," and "message," focusing upon Cāttaṇār's integration of biographical, mythical, and syntactical devices to encourage his reader to identify with the audiences portrayed within the text. The story of

Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas furnishes biographical data in order to demonstrate that the preacher described was formerly engrossed in worldly pleasures—just as any “unenlightened” member of the audience would be. The story also incorporates mythological material on the Nākas to emphasize that even though the Nāka audience Cātuvaṇ addresses lacks the sophistication of Cāttaṇār’s Tamil audience, it is still able to find Cātuvaṇ’s message accessible. By implication, the Tamil audience should find his message even easier to grasp. In addition, the text presents its message in a particularly coherent form, by utilizing certain features of Tamil semantics and syntax to hold the attention of its listeners and make its message particularly clear.

*The preacher.* Just as Cāttaṇār’s intended audience (like any audience of people not yet converted to Buddhism) exists in a state of attachment to worldly desires, the preacher Cātuvaṇ too was ruled by such attachments earlier in his life. In fact, the short and selective biography of Cātuvaṇ provided in the text (lines 3–12) emphasizes his earlier decline into immorality. Although married to a virtuous woman, he neglects her in order to spend time with a courtesan. When even the sources of his wealth are depleted, his mistress loses all interest in him. According to tradition, a courtesan should abandon an impoverished client.<sup>8</sup> This Cātuvaṇ’s mistress does, throwing his poverty in his face.

The specific theme of a man who bankrupts his family through attraction to a prostitute appears throughout Indian literature, in instances too numerous to mention. Of particular relevance, however, is its presence in *Cilappatikāram*, the text closest to *Maṇimēkalai* in date and genre. There Kōvalaṇ (Maṇimēkalai’s father) abandons his wife for a dancing girl (Maṇimēkalai’s mother), loses all his money, and must leave home in an attempt to regain his fortune.

Besides being a common theme, the “dissipation of a good man” motif in the story of a religious saint or preacher serves a rhetorical purpose. In structure, the saint’s formerly dissolute state contrasts vividly with his later commitment to preaching. In religious biography, the “scoundrel then saint” pattern (Zvelebil 1973: 239) serves to emphasize the magnitude of the transformation involved.

This pattern occurs in many South Indian religious biographies. For example, Ramanujan points out a pattern of stages found in the biographies of many of the saints he studied. The stages included a life of pleasure followed by abasement, loss, and awakening. After a religious conversion or initiation, the saint then goes on to convert or defeat men of other religions (Ramanujan 1982: 316–324). Although *Maṇimēkalai* does not mention Cātuvaṇ’s own conversion per se, he

does leave a life of pleasure and become a preacher to the Nākas. The profligacy of his past life testifies to the strength of his present religious commitment. It adds authority to his preaching about what constitutes good and evil behavior since he has “been through it all” and now is committed to the path of goodness.

*The audience.* Cāttaṅār’s choice of the term Nāka to describe Cātuvan’s audience indicates a great deal about what kind of audience it was. In South and Southeast Asian texts, the term *Nāka* (Sanskrit *Nāga*) is strongly associated with societies which lack sophistication and knowledge. A quick survey of mythological texts roughly contemporary with *Maṇimēkalai* reveals that the word “nāga” consistently denotes half-snake / half-human beings or snakes whose social order bears strong resemblances to human society. For example, in the *Mahābhārata*, the events which lead to Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice describe how the Nāgas possess an ophidian social order, complete with kinship ties and status hierarchy (van Buitenen 1973: 68–123). Other texts go further, assuming an entire Nāga *loka* or “world.” For instance, the *Bhūridatta Jātaka* portrays such a world, complete with king, messengers, palaces, and kinship relations modeled upon human ones (Cowell 1978: 6: 80–113). Nāgas, in this first set of representative examples, are lower than human beings but they possess certain human characteristics.

In a second set of texts, Nāgas are humans but beyond the pale of Indian civilization and thus considered very low, close to animals.<sup>9</sup> This second set of associations for Nāgas, which receives some of its mythological momentum from the first set, predominates in certain southeast Asian origin stories.<sup>10</sup> An example of such a conception of Nāgas, specifically as those without the benefit of Indian culture, can be found in a myth referred to in various documents dealing with the origins of Funan, a Southeast Asian kingdom. A Sanskrit inscription referring to the myth identifies the queen of Funan as a daughter of the king of the Nāgas. It further describes Kauṇḍinya, the foreigner who conquers her, as an Indian brahmin (Coedès 1968: 37; 1911: 391). By piecing together fragments from Chinese sources, we learn how Kauṇḍinya arrives from a foreign land and is immediately attacked by the Funan queen. After he subdues her, she becomes his wife (Coedès 1968: 37; Goloubew 1924: 501–10). But her new husband makes certain changes in her dress. According to Coedès, “. . . unhappy to see her naked, he folded a piece of material to make a garment through which he had her pass her head.”<sup>11</sup> In the Cātuvan story, Nāgas are held in contempt for their nakedness. Further, the reader will recognize Kauṇḍinya as being from the brahmin caste of knowledge and

high status, representing pan-Indian Sanskritic civilization.

In both of the contexts identified above, the term *Nāga* connotes a being whose nature lies somewhere between human and serpentine. The snake *Nāgas* have animal (or half-animal) bodies, yet still participate in some kind of rudimentary society organized along human lines. The Cambodian *Nāgas* lack clothing and sophistication, as do beasts, yet they possess human shapes. *Cāttanār's* use of the term “*Nāga*” as the name for the tribesmen to whom *Cātuvaṇ* preaches reinforces the impression—given to his audience and evident in the branch story itself—that these naked wanderers are animal-like and uncivilized. Thus, because *Cāttanār* chose to portray *Nāgas* as the recipient of *Cātuvaṇ's* message, *Cāttanār's* historical audience can tell how necessary it is that these tribesmen ameliorate their condition by taking *Cātuvaṇ's* preaching to heart and embarking upon a life of virtue.

*The message.* *Cātuvaṇ's* preaching on the subject of actions and their fruits, which lies at the heart of the story, is structured so as to point out to the reader the most important formulations, junctures, and emphases of his preaching. A close analysis of the structure of his speech and his choice of words suggests that *Cāttanār* employed particular rhetorical devices designed to lead his audience carefully through the arguments being made. Such mechanisms serve to hold the audience's attention, to make explicit the connections among steps in complex arguments, and to highlight the implications of the argument along the way. Although such devices form part of any Tamil author's tools of the trade, the presence of so many of them within the space of a twenty-five line passage is unusual. These devices include the skillful use of repetition, emphatic markers, demonstratives, parallel construction, and imperatives.

*Cāttanār's* use of repetition indicates the direction of his argument in what might otherwise be, at times, a somewhat roundabout discourse. A quick look at where *Cāttanār* employs repetition indicates how it functions within the discourse. The guru begins (lines 80–83) by asking *Cātuvaṇ*, “. . . what is there [*uṇṭu*] for people to live for besides women and refreshment? If there is [*uṇṭu*] . . . say [*col*] what it is . . . Then, *Cātuvaṇ* said [*col*] . . .” The repetition of the verbs *uṇṭu* (to be) and *col* (to say) indicate that the discourse to follow will ultimately answer the guru's question about what one ought and ought not to do. Since the speaker explores many other issues before he addresses the question directly, the repetition of these words helps the hearer perceive the overall direction of the discussion.

The *Nāka* leader often acts as a mediator between *Cātuvaṇ* and his

two audiences—the Nākas as well as the historical audience reading *Maṇimēkalai*. For example, in lines 92–95, the guru interrupts Cātuvan, sums up his perception of what has been said, and then asks a question based upon it. The guru says, “You just told us that the life breath runs away from the body, takes on another form, and enters a different place. Tell us clearly how . . .”

Use of an emphatic marker also helps the hearer follow the preacher’s logical progression. Lines 96–97 provide an example of this device: “While the life breath resides in the body, the body knows what is happening. But, when the life breath leaves, that very same body [*uṭampē—uṭampu*, ‘body,’ plus emphatic *ē*] doesn’t realize what is happening to it . . .” Such emphatic repetition clarifies the argument as well as stressing it.

Cāttanār achieves a similar effect through the use of demonstrative prefixes. In Tamil, an “a” prefixed to a noun “x” makes it “that x”; an “i” so affixed makes it “this x.” One finds an example of the “a” demonstrative in line 94: “Tell us clearly how that life breath (*a[vv]uyir*) can go and enter another place that way (*a[vv]vakai*).” Here it serves to summarize as well as stress what has just been said and urge the merchant to explain more about the topic. Several other examples of these “a” or “i” demonstratives used to stress points and direct one’s attention can be found within Cātuvan’s short discourse (lines 104–105, 118).

Cāttanār’s use of another sophisticated rhetorical device, antithetical parallel construction, insures that his audience will comprehend two possible and mutually exclusive options. A literal translation of lines 88–89 makes the parallelism of the lines clear:

<i>nallaṟam</i>	<i>ceyvōr</i>	<i>nalla</i>	<i>ulaku</i>	<i>aṭaital</i>
good virtue	those who do,	good	worlds	attaining
<i>allaṟam</i>	<i>ceyvōr</i>	<i>aru</i>	<i>naraku</i>	<i>aṭaital</i>
non-virtue	those who do,	terrible	hells	attaining

The Tamil and English here indicate the almost exact semantic and syntactic symmetry used to describe the results of good acts and those of bad acts. Such symmetry serves to emphasize the rigidly dichotomous nature of the moral system under discussion.

Finally, the passage contains numerous commands which draw the audience’s attention to particular points: “Listen” (line 85), “Understand this” (91), “Listen” (94), “Realize this” (99), and “Understand clearly” (105). These commands punctuate the text, marking the culminating point of each argument within the discourse.

The significance of these examples of small-scale rhetorical tech-



niques lies in their frequency of occurrence. Although each might be insignificant in itself, the presence of carefully structured repetition, emphatic markers, demonstratives, antithetical parallel construction, and "guiding" imperatives within a very short passage indicates the care with which Cāttaṅār constructed this discourse. These rhetorical devices help to make Cātuvaṅ's preaching readily understandable not only to the Nākas but to *Maṇimēkalai's* audience as well.

In sum, through the use of biographical, mythological, and syntactical devices, Cāttaṅār has structured his story so as to indicate that Buddhist ideas are applicable to a variety of situations. A preacher who has experienced all aspects of life and now expounds upon virtue can be counted upon to speak to the experience of many people. A discourse aimed at naked savages can certainly be understood by a Tamil audience sophisticated in literary matters. A religion whose preachers state their doctrine so clearly that even ignorant tribesmen find much of merit in it, will certainly be accessible to those of greater sophistication.

#### CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated how a framed story (also called a "branch story") can advance the overall goals of the author of a religiously didactic text at two different levels. First, I showed how Cāttaṅār's portrayal of Cātuvaṅ's spellbinding oratory and the Nāka's ignorance culminate in negotiations which define virtue in a way appropriate to the environmental limitations of Nāka life. Buddhism's preachers, thus, are presented as people able to adapt their message to the needs of their audience. Second, I showed how the story was constructed to demonstrate to Cāttaṅār's sixth century Tamil audience that Buddhism was a viable religious system appropriate for all types of people. Clearly, the framed story provides an opportunity for a resourceful author to embed various kinds of messages in the layers of a text.

Although folklorists deal with framed narrative in much of their research, very little has been written about the actual manner in which a frame story functions. One of the few explicit definitions of framed stories available describes them in this way:

a story forming a frame in which stories are told; a narrative permitting the introduction of several (often many) other stories, unrelated to and having no effect on the frame story itself. The technique is to give a group of unrelated tales an overall unity and dramatic meaning by making them part of a common situation (Leach 1950: 415).

This definition reflects the assumption that the distinguishing function

of a frame story is to relate a series of stories to the main story.<sup>12</sup> According to this definition, a frame story is a technique which draws a group of stories together.

In general, such stories are “unrelated to” and have “no effect on the frame story itself,” according to the definition quoted above. A good example of this type of frame story is *Arabian Nights*. The text is composed of a framing narrative and a series of framed narratives. The framed stories are not necessarily related to each other nor do they bear a special relationship to the exact point in the framing narrative at which they are introduced. For example, Scheherazade could have as easily told Story Y first and X second as the other way around. The order of the framed stories can, thus, be altered without much effect upon the overall text. Additional stories could have been included or included stories could have been omitted, again without much effect upon the overall text. In such a text, framing can be labelled “a technique for inclusion.”

However, at least in a text like *Maṇimēkalai*, frame stories play a much greater role in advancing the overall goals of the text than Leach’s definition implies. By following Ramanujan’s suggestion that we stop treating Indian texts like “ragbag encyclopedias” and start attending to their “context sensitive designs,” we have seen that the frame story of Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas is integral to Cāttaṇār’s goal of persuading his audience of the viability of the Buddhist worldview. Such a suggestion takes us away from the definition of frame stories provided by Leach and towards an implied definition of frame and framing narrative used recently by literary critics. In the past few years several critics of Western literature have turned their attention to analyzing the variety of literary, hortatory, and rhetorical uses to which frame stories have been put.<sup>13</sup> These uses will be briefly explored below.

Humma, in his analysis of Scott’s *Old Morality*, rejects the claim that the framing structure introduces superfluous material:

But what is important in these matters is that our attention to them leads us to the overdue recognition that the prolegomena and conclusion [the framing structure] of *Old Morality* are not, as is frequently charged, extraneous and distracting but that instead they stand in essential relation to the novel as a whole (Humma 1980: 302).

Humma then goes on to elucidate the way in which Scott’s attention to the roles of the framing narrative and framed narratives makes the reader’s literary experience richer.

Glancy has explored Dickens’s fascination with frame stories and

his attempts to use them as a vehicle for moral exhortation. Dicken's early enchantment with *Arabian Nights* developed into a strong interest in a form which encompassed a special relationship between the story and its teller (Glancy 1980: 54). Over time Dickens experimented with several different frame stories, exploring their potential as a means for moral exposition:

He [Dickens] never ceased to hanker after framed tales, to see them as vital imaginative and moral expressions made possible through the relationship of narrator and listener, writer and reader (Glancy 1980: 72).

For Dickens, frame stories became a way of providing concrete and personal examples of moral ideals being discussed.

In his examination of *The Turn of the Screw*, Goetz interprets the frame as a narrative which instructs the reader about how to understand the tale which follows:

I would like to propose a different use for the 'frame,' and consider it not so much as an informative background to the principal narrative but as an exemplary scene by means of which James tells us how to read his tale. In this light, these opening pages of the text can be regarded as establishing a protocol for reading (Goetz 1981: 71).

Frame stories establish "a protocol for reading" in a number of different ways. Because they include a dramatized audience, the portrayal of that audience can give the reader cues about how to interpret the story.

In *Maṇimēkalai* the frame stories serve the same three functions they serve in the literary works analyzed by Humma, Glancy, Goetz. The story of Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas forms an integral part of the text rather than a digression. It advances the moral didacticism of the text, and it provides "a protocol for reading."

First, the story of Cātuvaṇ and the Nākas is integral to the overall goal of *Maṇimēkalai*. At a specific level, the story contributes directly to the epic by providing the background of two of *Maṇimēkalai*'s most generous donors, Cātuvaṇ and his wife. It explains how these two came to be the pre-eminent donors in their city, exemplifying the highly regarded Buddhist virtue of *dāna*, "giving." At a general level, the story provides an example of a Buddhist ideal—in this case, *ahiṃsā*—*in situ*. That is, the story shows how the practice of *ahiṃsā*, "non-injury," can actually be implemented. It describes the need for the Nākas to commit themselves to *ahiṃsā*, their reluctance to do so, and their eventual acceptance of a moral code based on *ahiṃsā*. In this way,

Cāttaṅār provides his audience with a chance to witness commitment to Buddhist ideals.

Second, the story of Cātuvaṅ and the Nākas provides an opportunity for Cāttaṅār to include moral teaching. Cāttaṅār portrays Cātuvaṅ's discourse in a way both convincing and appropriate to his audience. Cātuvaṅ comes across as a spellbinding preacher, fluent in the Nāka's language, who eventually wins over the Nāka guru. The Nākas then become convinced of the moral justification for abandoning cannibalism. The tribesmen are initially portrayed as absolutely ignorant of the proper moral path and thus their conversion is all the more impressive. Because Cāttaṅār makes it easy for his audience to relate to Cātuvaṅ and because Nākas are portrayed as extremely ignorant, the story can be instructive to a whole range of people. Cātuvaṅ gradually modifies his message as he comes to understand the environmental limitations under which the Nākas live. Such an action implies that Buddhist morality is adaptable. If even the ignorant Nāka cannibals can find a way to live according to Buddhism, it must be a viable religious path for others as well.

Finally, the portrayal of Cātuvaṅ's preaching includes a "protocol for reading," both through its dramatized audience and in the rhetorical devices used in Cātuvaṅ's discourse, which carefully direct the reader's attention to the key points. The reaction of Cātuvaṅ's dramatized audience helps to shape and control the response of *Maṇimēkalai*'s audience. Because Cāttaṅār provides a portrayal of an exemplary response to Cātuvaṅ's preaching, the text's audience receives clear signals about the appropriate response to that message. At an even more concrete level, particular rhetorical devices help to indicate exactly what the protocol for reading should be. The guru acts as a mediator between preacher and audience, summarizing and clarifying certain points and then voicing the objections which might logically come to mind. In addition, the very syntactic and semantic choices the author makes serve to guide the reader through the religious discourse, emphasizing important points.

Although this article deals only with *Maṇimēkalai*, it seems likely that other South Asian texts composed of framing and framed narrative possess more coherence and structure than is generally recognized. The frame story is particularly appropriate to epics whose goal is to persuade their audiences of the validity of particular sets of religious ideals. In texts like *Maṇimēkalai* and the *Mahābhārata*, the framed narratives contribute greatly to the overall ideological thrust of the epic. The frame structure enables the author to include a wide variety of stories, each one illustrating the practical implications of a particular

religious tenet. The framed narrative also helps to shape and control the reader's responses to particular ideas, either by including a dramatized audience or portraying a response to the story in the framing narrative. Further research is needed to explore the ways in which frame stories function in other South Asian epics.

## NOTES

1. For a critique of Balusamy's appraisal of *Maṇimēkalai*, see Richman 1983: 64-65.

2. For a more detailed discussion of the major scholarly issues concerning *Maṇimēkalai*, such as dating, genre, and its role in Tamil literary tradition, see Richman 1983: 1-33.

3. This is my own translation of *Maṇimēkalai*, chapter 16, lines 3-127. I have tried in the translation to preserve the rhetoric of the Tamil version. The spacing of the line numbers in the translation is uneven because the sentence structure of Tamil differs greatly from that of English. Sometimes the order of the Tamil sentences (which extend through several verses) is entirely turned around in the English translation.

4. This image expresses the idea that her husband is as necessary to her as the pupil in her eye.

5. This verse refers to a couplet from Tiruvaḷḷuvar's *Tirukkuraḷ* which attributes to chaste woman who worship their husbands, the ability to make the rain fall. For a discussion of the manner in which Cāttaṇār incorporates this couplet into *Maṇimēkalai* see Richman 1983: 255-257.

6. In the analysis here, I am using the terms "savage" and "civilized" as they are implied in the text.

7. Eating this kind of meat is considered less sinful, according to Buddhist philosophy, than eating meat one has killed. In the former case, the eater does not intentionally kill the animal to provide food for himself. He simply takes advantage of the fact that the animal is already dead.

8. The point that a courtesan should never remain with one man long, especially if her client runs out of money, is assumed in this story as well as in tales such as that of Sānudāsa found in the *Bṛhathkathāślokaṣaṅgraha* (van Buitenen 1961: 208). Sānudāsa learns this lesson painfully when he is unceremoniously thrown out of a courtesan establishment because he has lost his fortune, abandoned just as Cātuvan has been abandoned in *Maṇimēkalai*.

9. For an ethnographic account of the modern-day Nāga tribe see von Fürer-Haimendorf 1962.

10. Although *Maṇimēkalai*'s audience might not necessarily have been familiar with the specific myths cited below, these myths suggest a general meaning for the term.

11. The theme of the great man who marries a Nāgi is explored in Przyluski 1925: 265-284. For a good discussion of the relationship between all these legends, see Majumdar 1980: 17-20.

12. Although many of Leach's definitions are not really standard, "frame story" has seldom been defined elsewhere. Most scholars using the term have not written explicitly about its definition and function.

13. See also Lohman's much older (1935) study of frame stories which focuses primarily upon European materials from a comparative literature point of view.

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