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A Collection of Jaffna Tamil Riddles from Oral Tradition

Abstract
This paper presents, for the first time, a collection of nearly fifty orally transmitted Tamil riddles from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, with English translation. It also provides comparative material from Tamil Nadu, India, drawn from S. V. Subramanian's comprehensive Tamilil vitukataikal (1980) and gives references to Archer Taylor's classificatory work English Riddles from Oral Tradition (1951).

Many of the riddles presented here have no parallel among those riddles that have already found their way into print, a fact suggesting that only a modest fraction of all Tamil riddles have thus far been recorded and documented. Also noteworthy is the existence of riddles dealing with objects and phenomena of the modern age, indicating that riddling is an art still very much alive among the Tamil people.

Key words: folklore — oral tradition — riddles — Jaffna — Tamil

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Out of four syllables a riddle is formed
the first half of these four syllables means “to leave,“
the last half of these four syllables means “story,“
but if the third and the first syllable of the said (word) are joined, it means
“poetry“;
the third and the second of these four syllables mean “poison“;
if the first and the last syllable are joined, it means “seed."
What exactly is the word consisting of these four syllables?
After having well understood the riddle, explain it!
The riddle.1

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Charles Francis Potter, folklore “is a lively fossil
which refuses to die. It is a precipitate of the scientific and cultural
lag of centuries and millenia of human experience. . . . [In] a sense,
folklore is how we used to do it and wish we could now. Hence, folk­
lore is always the delight of children because it is the poetic wisdom of
the childhood of the race. It is also the pleasure of the old who are
wise enough to renew their youth by rebaptism in the eternal simplic­
ities in completing the circle of life” (1972, 401).

Among the many manifestations of folklore, riddles have long been
the object of scholarly attention, and it is commonly agreed that they
“rank with myths, fables, folktales, and proverbs as one of the earliest and most widespread types of formulated thought” (Potter 1972, 938).

From the olden times, as an early exercise of the primitive mind in its adjustment to the world about it, comes the riddle. . . . The fresher the vision, when the world was young, so much keener was the interest in the phenomena of nature, in the phenomena of life, and in the simple institutions which surrounded man. All harmonies and fitnesses, all discrepancies and inconsistencies attract the notice of children and the childlike man. Hence children love riddles; hence savages and primitive people put them. All folklore is full of them. They are the mystery and at the same time the rationalism of the juvenile mind. As civilization advances they still sustain life, but they grow more complicated, more conscious and exacting, as the simpler relations become commonplace, and interest in them fades and wears off. (Potter 1972, 939, citing Maurice Bloomfield)

[Riddles] are essentially metaphors, and metaphors are the result of the primary mental processes of association, comparison, and the perception of likeness and differences. . . . Possibly confirmatory of their antiquity, too, is the ubiquitous element of humor and wit. The essence of the ludicrous is the unexpected, so the laughter of primitive and simple-minded men and of little children is easily excited by the sudden discovery of similarity in two objects which a person would not ordinarily expect to resemble each other. Sophisticated persons and those of orthodox mind, whether that orthodoxy be of religion, social custom, or materialistic science, seldom appreciate or even understand riddles. (Potter 1972, 938).

Evidently I do not belong to either of the above-mentioned categories of people, for, from my very early childhood onwards, riddles have never ceased to fascinate me. Thus it is small wonder that, in the course of carrying out linguistic and anthropological fieldwork among various tribal communities (the Ālu Kurumbas, Pālu Kurumbas, Muḍugas, Beṭṭu Kurumbas, and Paṇiyas) in the Nilgiri Hills of South India in 1974–76 and 1981–82, I was particularly eager to collect as many riddles as my informants could provide. This endeavor resulted in four fairly representative riddle collections of varying sizes: Ālu Kurumba, 83; Pālu Kurumba, 21; Beṭṭu Kurumba, 41; and Paṇiya, 44. Three of these collections have been published and the fourth is in preparation (Kapp 1978, 1984, 1987).
During my stays in Tamil Nadu, however, I did not restrict my riddle collecting to the above communities but also spent some time recording those of the Tamils. Since that time I have attempted to enlarge my collection of Tamil riddles through correspondence with Tamil-speaking friends in Germany and Tamil Nadu, and now have over four hundred items. I am now in the process of preparing an edition of these riddles, with translation and commentary. This collection incorporates a number of Jaffna Tamil riddles, fifty in all, which I was able to obtain, through the kind mediation of N. Rajanayagam, from four Sri Lankan Tamils living in the Heidelberg area: J. Shanthakumary and Santhira Segara Pillaiyar Kovilady from Nallur, North Jaffna; and A.V. Jayavirasinkam and his sister, A.V. Thaneswary from Karaveddy, West Karaveddy.

The main aim of this paper is to present these fifty riddles, with comparative material subjoined in cases where parallel or related riddles are found in S.V. Subramanian's comprehensive Tamil riddle collection Tamilil vitukataikal (1980; hereafter abbreviated as TVK), which comprises 2,504 riddles in all, and Archer Taylor's fundamental classificatory work English Riddles from Oral Tradition (1951; hereafter EROT).

Taylor, who leaves the answers to the riddles out of account "except for subsidiary purposes," classifies his riddles according to the following method:

[The] fundamental conception underlying the enigmatical comparison determines the place of the riddle. The main subdivisions or chapters in this collection are descriptions of (1) something living, (2) an animal, (3) several animals, (4) a person, (5) several persons, (6) a plant, (7) a thing. In these varieties of the true riddle an object is equated to something entirely different from itself, and this latter thing forms the basis of the classification. (1951, 3–4)

Since the number of riddles in the collection below is, in my opinion, too small to warrant a classificatory system as detailed as Taylor's, I have decided upon a more lucid arrangement in which the riddles are classified according to their answers, under the topics of "nature" (riddles 1 and 2), "plants, including plant products" (riddles 3–13), "animals, including animal products" (riddles 14–27), "man" (riddles 28–31), and "things" (riddles 32–50). However, as a brief synopsis concentrating on the main subdivisions (with some modifications), I offer below a classification of the present riddle collection according to Taylor's method.
Classificatory synopsis of the riddles

1) Comparisons to a living creature
   1.1 Comparisons of a thing to a living creature: riddles 10 (paddy ears), 28 (eyes), 40 (match), 43 (watch), 44 (diary), and 46 (bicycle).

2) Comparisons to a person/persons
   2.1 Comparisons of an animal/animals to a person/persons: riddles 17 (crab to prince), 18 (butterfly to man), 19 (wasp to doctor), 20 (mosquito to man), 21 (ant to man);
   2.2 Comparisons of a thing/things to a person/persons: riddles 3 (jackfruit to persons), 6 (palmyra fruits to men), 7 (wild dates to ladies), 9 (blossom to Muslim), 12 (onion to man), 13 (turmeric to lady), 15 (cow's teats to queens), 29 (tongue to man), 35 (ladle to child), 36 (sweet dish to man), 37 (sweet dish to boy and girl), 41 (electric current to man), 45 (umbrella to man), 47 and 48 (postbox to lady), 50 (signpost to man).

3) Comparisons to an animal/animals
   3.1 Comparison of animals to an animal: riddle 22 (termites to snake);
   3.2 Comparisons of a thing/things to an animal/animals: riddles 11 (black gram to black and white cows), 24 (noise of butter churning to the barking of a dog, etc.), 33 (little curved hedge bill to palm squirrel), 34a (needle to horse).

4) Comparisons to a plant/plants
   4.1 Comparison of an animal to plants and things: riddle 14 (cow to green trees, etc.).

5) Comparisons to a thing/things
   5.1 Comparison of an animal to a thing: riddle 16 (palm squirrel to chain);
   5.2 Comparisons of a thing/things to a thing/things: riddles 1 (stars to popcorn), 2 (rain to the long ribs of palm leaves), 4 (ripe coconuts to hairy testicles), 5 (green coconut to pot), 8 (pomegranate to pot), 23 (elephant dung to black pot), 25 (white and yellow of egg to two types of unguents), 26 (egg to temple), 27 (honeycomb to mandapa), 30 (tongue to plank), 31 (palm of hand to courtyard and houses), 32 (iron to thing), 34b (thread to horsetail), 38 (betel leaf, areca nut, lime to things), 39 (matches to chips, matchbox to house), 42 (tāli to several things), 49 (road to mat).
This synopsis indicates that Jaffna riddles (at least to the extent that we can tell from this collection) tend to favor “comparisons of a thing/things to a person/persons” (2. 2.) and “comparisons of a thing/things to a thing/things” (5. 2).

Checking the TVK for parallels to the riddles in the collection below yielded the following interesting results. The TVK includes

1) corresponding riddles with identical wording: three riddles;
2) parallel riddles with nearly identical wording or identical wording in part: fourteen riddles;
3) parallel riddles with similar wording: six riddles;
4) related riddles with different wording but corresponding contents: seven riddles;
5) no parallels: twenty (!) riddles (4, 5, 6, 9, 18, 23, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49, 50).

These results, in particular that listed under 5), were unexpected and therefore surprising, indicating that of the wealth of Tamil riddles only a (modest) fraction has thus far been recorded and documented. Students of Tamil folklore should be encouraged by this to continue in their efforts to record orally transmitted riddles in all Tamil-speaking areas, and should not rest content with the available riddle collections.

In conclusion, at least three general characteristics of the present riddle collection may be mentioned:

1) The existence of riddles dealing with the phenomena of the modern world, such as 41 (electric current), 44 (diary), 46 (bicycle), and 47 and 48 (postbox), which demonstrates that riddling is still in vogue among the Tamils and by no means dying out;
2) The frequent occurrence of the alliteration and initial rhyme so typical of Tamil riddling, as in 6 (to-to-), 13 (ma-ma-), 14 (pa-pa-/vi-vi-), 20 (ta-ta-), 24 (ca-ca- / mu-mu-), 36 (ku-ku-), 37 (ci-ci-ci- / ci- / ce-ce-), 39 (ci-ci-), 42 (ta-ta- / i-i-), 46 (ma-ma-), 48 (va-va-), 50 (vi-vi-);
3) The occurrence of a formulaic sentence that, with some variation in wording, is not infrequent in Tamil riddling (though it appears here only once): . . . mālaiyai cikk-illāmal avilppavarukku cēnnaipattānām citānām (those who can untie the garland . . . without tangling it [will get] Madras as a dowry).
THE RIDDLES

NATURE

1a) culaku niraiya-c cōlam-pori;
   vitiya-p parttal, orrum illai. atu enna?
   A winnowing-fan full of popcorn;
   but if you look at it at dawn, there is nothing in it. What is it?
   atu naṭcattirankal. The stars.

b) culaku niraiya cōlam-pori;
   vītintāl, orrum illai. atu enna?
   (culaku=culaku; cōlam=cōlam)
   A winnowing-fan full of popcorn;
   but if it dawns, there is nothing in it. What is it?
   atu naṭcattiram. The stars.

* Compare TVK 1348 (answer identical), 2000 (answer similar):
1348. culavu niraiya veṇṭaikkāy;
   vītintu parttāl, orrum illai.
   (culavu=culaku)
   A winnowing-fan full of okra (Abelmoschus esculentus);
   but if you look at it after dawn, there is nothing in it.

2000. polatu pōnāl pūntōṭtam;
   vītintu parttāl, veru-t tōṭtam. atu enna?
   If the sun sets, a flower-garden;
   but if you look at it after dawn, an empty garden. What is it?
   atu vānām. The sky.


2) ĕkku ĕkku netum ĕkku,
   enna enna ennu-p-paṭātu. atu enna?
   (ĕkku=ĕrkku; ennuppaṭātu=enṇa-p-paṭātu)
   Ribs of palm leaves, ribs of palm leaves, long ribs of palm leaves;
   while you count and count, (you find that) they cannot be counted. What is it?
   atu malaL The rain.

* Compare TVK 390 (answer identical):
390. ĕkki ĕkki netum ĕkki.
   (ĕkki=ĕrkku)

PLANTS, INCLUDING PLANT PRODUCTS

3) tāy paṟaṭṭaiiccī,
möl puluttaicci,
tankacci pāṭi-k kutṭī,
tampi mā-k kutṭī. atu enna?
(möl = makal; tankacci = tankaicci)
The mother has shaggy hair,
the daughter is lean,
the little sister is a child of sweet juice,
the little brother is a child of flour. What is it?

* Compare TVK 109, 233 (answer identical), 1513 (answer different):
109. appan coriyān,
āṭṭāḷ caṭaicci,
aṇṇan muliyān,
nān cakkārai-k kutṭī.
(muliyān = miliyan; cakkārai = carkkarai)
The father is a scabby man,
the mother has shaggy hair,
the elder brother has big eyeballs,
but I am a sugar baby.

233. āy caṭaiceci,
appan coriyān,
nān cakkārai-k kutṭī.
Mother has shaggy hair,
father is a scabby man,
but I am a sugar baby.

1513. tāy parattaicci,
makāl uruttaicci. avai yāvai?
(parattaicci: from para, “to spread,” etc.)
The mother is flat,
the daughter is round. What are they?
avai ammiy kulavi. A grinding stone and a roller.

4) vaṭakkilē iruntu vāravarukku
puṭukku niṇaiya mayir. atu enna?
(vāravarukku = varukiravarukku; puṭukku = piṭukku)
Those men who come from the north
have testicles covered with hairs. What are they?
atu tēṅkāy. Coconuts.

5) nām nirappāta kuṭam tāṅē nirampi payaṅ tarum. atu enna?
A pot that was not filled by us, gets filled by itself and gives
us its yield. What is it?
atu ila-nir. The water of a green coconut.

6) tommeṇṭu viḷuntār,
toppi kalanthār. atu enna?
(entu=enru; kalanthār=kalanṛṛ)
They fell down with a thud and took off their hats. What are they?
atu pānankāy. Palmyra fruits (Borassus flabelliformis).

7) kāṭṭukkul karuppiyum civappiyum kai kāṭṭukiniam. atu enna?
(kāṭṭukiniam=kāṭṭukinṛṛ)
In the forest, a black lady and a red lady make signs with their hands. What are they?
atu iccankāy. The ripe and unripe fruits of the wild date palm (Phoenix sylvestris).

* Compare TVK 1957:
  1957. pāṭṭapōṭu maṁcaḷ,
pāṭṭatum civappu,
kāyttapōṭu civappu,
kāyttatum karuppu. atu enna?
(-pōṭu=-poṭṭu; karuppu=karuppu)
When it starts blossoming, it is yellow;
as soon as it blossoms, it is red;
when it starts bearing fruit, it is red;
as soon as it bears fruit, it is black. What is it?
atu iccampalam. (The ripe fruit of) the wild date palm.

8) cempu niraiya muttu. atu enna?
A pot full of pearls. What is it?
atu māṭulampalam. A pomegranate.
(māṭulampalam=māṭalampalam)

* Compare TVK 1101, 1391, 1393, 1408 (answer identical):
  1101. kutukkai niraiya vayira-mañi.
A pot full of diamonds.
  1391. cēppu niraiya māṇikkam.
A casket full of rubies.
  1393. cempu niraiya kempu.
A pot full of rubies.
  1408. cempu niraiya kempu.
(compu=cempu)


9) āṟrilai iruntu vāṟa cōṇakaṇukku cūṭilē oru ottai. atu enna?
A Muslim who comes from the riverside has a hole in his bottom. What is it?

atu iluppampā. The blossom of the tree Bassia longifolia.

10) āṭuvar pāṭuvar cāyvar carivar, kākām irukka kopp illai. atu enna?
They can dance, they can sing, they can lean back, they can fall down, but there is no branch for the crows to sit. What are they?

atu neṟkatir. Paddy ears.

* Compare TVK 992, 1005 (answer identical)

992. kāykkum pūkkum
kalakalakkum, āṇāl
kākkāy uṭkāra tām illai.
It bears fruit, it flowers, it rustles, but there is no place for the crows to sit.

1005. kārāṇa karu-maṇalil
karutta vālai karuttu viṭṭu
cimpu viṭṭu cīṇukku viṭṭu
kākkāy ēta-k kopp illai.
(karutta = karutta; karuttu = kuruttu; cīṇukku = cīṇukku)
A black plantain in the pitch-black sand; it sprouts, and after that young stalks spring up, and after that knots appear, but there is no branch for the crows to perch on.

11) karuppum vellaiyumāṇa māṭukal kula-k-karaikkku kilikkka-p pōṇaṇa. karuppū māṭukal niṟka, vellai māṭukal tirumpi vantaṇa. atu enna?
Black and white cows went to the bank of a tank to take a bath. While the black cows remained (in the tank), the white cows came back home. What are they?

atu uluntu kaluvutal. The washing of black gram (Phaseolus mungo).

* Compare TVK 618, 866, 1136, 2448 (answer identical):

618. en kutirai karuppā-k kutirai;
kūḷippāṭṭiṇāl, veluppā-k kutirai.
My horse is a black horse; but if I wash it, it becomes a white horse.

866. karuppā-k kutiraiyum vellai-k kutiraiyum
135. கருப்பு-குறிச்சை கூடவுடன் செல்வது;  
பொகிப்பு-குறிச்சை கூடவுடன் செல்வது. 
(கருப்பு=கருப்பு)  
A black horse and a white horse go to a river;  
the black horse goes with the river,  
the white horse comes back home.

1136.  
1136. கருப்பு-மாடு குத்திக் கொண்டு போனே;  
கருப்பு-மாடு ஏற்போய் விட்டது,  
வெள்ளை-மாடு விட்டுக்கு வந்து விட்டது.  
I took two cows (to the river) to wash them;  
one was a black cow, the other was a white cow.  
But the black cow went away with the river and  
only the white cow came back home again.

2448.  
2448. வெள்ளை-குறிச்சையும் கருப்பு-குறிச்சையும் அழுக்கு பொச்சு.  
(பொச்சு=பொய்)  
A white horse and a black horse went to a river.  
The white horse came back home,  
but the black horse went away with the river.

12a)  
12a) மாண்டுக்குல் இருக்கும் மாயாங்கி;  
உற்றக உற்றக தொலாங்கி. அது என்பா?  
Under the soil, there lives a mysterious man;  
When you strip and strip him, (you find that) he is a man of  
only skin.  
What is it?  
அது வேங்காயம்.  
An onion.

b)  
b) உற்றக உற்றக, பொய்விட்டா என்பா?  
When you strip and strip him, (at the end) there is nothing left.  
What is it?  
அது வேங்காயம்.  
An onion.

* Compare TVK 516, 2049 (answer identical):

516. உற்றிருந்து வாங்கி வந்த மாதிக்கு  
உற்றக உற்றக வெச்சுத் தொல்.  
When you skin and skin a bullock which I brought from the town,  
(you find that) it is nothing but skin.

2049. மாண்டுக்கு பிராணாங்கி,  
மா-பொரும் தொலாங்கி,  
காண்மிரையும் தரையாங்கி.  
A man who was born in the soil,  
a man who abounds in skin,  
a man who makes you weep.
13) * mañcal niratt alaki,
    mankaiyar mukatt alaki. aval yār?
    A beautiful lady of yellow complexion,
    a lady more beautiful on the faces of ladies. Who is she?
    atu mañcal. Turmeric.

* Compare *TVK* 2019, 2048 (answer identical), 2027 (answer different):
2019. * mankalattin cinnam,
    mankaiyarin tōlī.
    A symbol of auspiciousness and
    the companion of a lady.
2048. * mannukku ḫīṭakhum,
    mankaiyarukku alaku tarum.
    It is born in the soil and
    it gives beauty to the ladies.
2027. * mañcal nita alaki nān,
    mañam illāta alaki nān;
    mārkāli vantāl, varavēṭ pār ennai. nān yār?
    I am a beautiful lady of yellow complexion,
    I am a beautiful lady without any odor;
    if December comes, people will welcome me. Who am I?
    atu pūcanṭi-p-pū. The flower of the pumpkin plant.

**ANIMALS, INCLUDING ANIMAL PRODUCTS**
14) * paccai-maram nālu,
    pāla-maram nālu,
    vicu-kōl onrū,
    viraku-tāṭi irāntu. atu ennga?
    Four green trees,
    four trees containing a milky sap,
    one (waving) switch,
    two pieces of firewood. What is it?
    atu pacu-māṭu. A cow.

* Compare *TVK* 1813, 1846 (answer identical):
1813. * paṭṭa maram iṛantu,
    paṭṭāta maram nāṅku,
    vicīṭi iṛantu,
    vencā-maram onrū.
    Two dead trees,
    four live trees,
    two fans,
one whisk.

1846. pantal kāl nālu,
pavala-kāl nālu, velḷi-t taţi iranṭu,
vencā-maram onṭu.
(pavala = pavala)  
Four shed posts,  
four posts of coral,  
two silver sticks,  
one whisk.

* EROT 1476–94. Four Hang; Two Point the Way (610–21, 849–52).

15) nālu rācāttiyal malaiyil naṉaiyāmal pōkiṇam. atu ennai?
(rācāttiyal = irācāttikal; pōkiṇam = pōkiṇrā)
Four queens walk in the rain without getting wet. What are they?
atu māṭṭu-mulai. The teats of a cow.

* Compare TVK 100, 1527, 1569, 1633, 1851 (answer identical):

100. antarāla kāṭṭīle
nālu pēr naṉaiyāmal niṟkīṉrā.
In the middle of a desert,  
there are four people not getting wet.

1527. titu-tit-ena malai peyya-t,
tīṭṭi-y ellām velḷam ōṭa,
naṅku ūr rājākkaḷ
naṉaiyāmal varukīṟṟkaḷ.
(tīṭṭi = tīṭṭu)
While the pattering rain pours down,  
while the water floods all sandbanks,  
four village chiefs come along without getting wet.

1569. tonti utalile iūvaranka-y-p poṭṭalile
nālu pēr turai-makkal naṉaiyāmal vāṟānka.
(vāṟānka = varukīṟṟkaḷ)
With big-bellied bodies, with pouches (full) of pigeon-peas (Cajanus indicus),  
four noblemen come along without getting wet.

1633. nālu pāppān naṉaiyāmal pōṟān.
(pāppān = pāṟṟpān; pōṟān = pōkiṇān)
Four Brahmmins walk along without getting wet.

1851. payankaramāṇa malaiyilum naṅku
pēṟkal naṉaiyāmal celkīṉaṇar.
In a terrible rain, four people walk along without getting wet.

* EROT 961–63. Go through Rain; Are Not Wet. § 5 (cf. 354–55).

16) ēṟ ēṟu cankili,
irāṅk irāṅku cankili,
Climb, climb, O chain!
Descend, descend, O chain!
It's a chain that climbed all branches that cannot be climbed.
What is it?
atu anil.
A palm squirrel.

* Compare TVK 657 (answer identical), 658 (answer different):

657. ēr̄u ēr̄u caṅkili,
ird̄ānu ird̄ānu caṅkili,
ettu-a komp ellām
tottu va caṅkili.
Climb, climb, O chain!
Descend, descend, O chain!
Touch all branches that cannot be reached and come, O chain!

658. ēru caṅkili ird̄ānum caṅkili,
koṭṭāmpēṭṭī muṭaiyum caṅkili. atu enna?
(koṭṭāmpēṭṭī = koṭṭā-p-peṭṭi = koṭṭai-p-peṭṭi)
A chain that climbs, a chain that descends, a chain that plaits baskets. What is it?
atu micurum kūṭum. Honeybees and their comb.
(micur = mīnīru = nīmīru)

17a) ettu-k kāl ūṇri,
iru kāl paṭam ētuttu,
vatt-a-k kuṭai piṭittu,
vārār-ām vantiyaṇār. atu enna?
(vārār = varukirār)
Resting on eight feet, taking photographs with two feet, holding a round umbrella, a prince is said to come along. What is it?
atu naṇṭu. A crab.

b) ettu-k kāl ūṇri,
iru kāl paṭam ētuttu,
vatt-a-k kuṭai piṭittu,
vārār-ām vantiyaṇ-āl.
(vārār = varukirār)

c) ettu-k kāl ūṇri,
iru kāl paṭam ētuttu,
vatt-a-k kuṭai piṭittu,
vārār-ām vantiyaṇar.
Compare TVK 567 (answer identical):

567.  etti-k kāl uṇi,
     iru kāl paṭam etti,
     vaṭṭa-k kuṭaṭi piṭṭitu,
     vaṭṭukirām vanṭiyānūr.


18) vanna-vanna āṭaiyil tēn unna-c celluvān. avay yār?
   In a colorful robe, he walks round to eat honey. Who is he?
   atu vaṇṇattu-p-pūcchi. A butterfly.

19) tākkuttar vantār,
    uciyai pōṭṭār;
    ālai-k kāṇa-v-ilai. atu ennā?
    (tākkuttar = tāktar)
    The doctor came and gave an injection;
    but there was nobody to be seen. What is it?
    atu kulavi. A wasp.
    (kulavi = kuḷavi)

* Compare TVK 1419 (answer different):

1419. tāktar vantār, uci pōṭṭār;
       kācu vāṅkīrāml oṭi viṭṭār. avay yār?
       The doctor came and gave an injection;
       but without taking his fees, he ran away. Who is he?
       atu tēḷ. A scorpion.

20) tattināl, vārāṇ;
    tattināl, pōrāṇ. atu ennā?
    (vārāṇ = varukirāṇ; pōrāṇ = pōkirāṇ)
    If you chase him off, he comes again;
    but if you stroke him, he dies (dies). What is it?
    atu nūlampu. A mosquito.

* Compare TVK 1446 (answer identical):

1446. tattināl, parappāṇ;
       tattināl, cāvāṇ.
       If you chase him off, he flies away;
       but if you stroke him, he dies.

21) antā pōrāṇ, intā pōrāṇ;
    atiyai pārtiṭāl, teriya-v-ilai. atu ennā?
    (pōrāṇ = pōkirāṇ)
    He goes that way, he goes this way;
but if you look for his track, it is not to be seen. What is it? *atu erumpu.* An ant.

* Compare *TVK* 92 (answer identical):
  92. ato pōkirāŋ cītāṇṭi (cirwan);
  avan pōkum taṭam teriyātu.
  (cītāṇṭi =cītāṇṭi) Look, there goes a little man; but his track is not to be seen.

* *ERO* 181–85. Moves; Leaves No Track. § 12. Ants (64–65, 705).

22) *veliyai curb nīla pā mpū. atu enna?* Round about a fence a dark snake. What is it?
  *atu kāraiyyān.* Termites.

* Compare *TVK* 2492 (answer identical), 2493 (answer different):
  2492. *veliyai-c curb nīriya mālai.*
  (*nīriya = nēriya*) Round about a fence a straight garland.
  2493. *veliyai-c curb nīliya-p pāmpu. atu enna?* Round about a fence a dark snake. What is it?
  *atu araiān-kayāvā.* The cord to which the loincloth is attached.

* *ERO* 1342. Round As a Hoop, Long As a Snake (553–54, 835).

23) *kāṭṭukkul karī-c-cattī mūṭi-y-irukku. atu enna?*
  (*karī = karī∗; -irukku =-irukkum*) In the forest, a smutty pot is covered by a lid. What is it?
  *atu yānai-malam.* Elephant dung.

24) *cala-valla nāy kuraikkum cāntapaṭiyān toppilē; muṭṭai iṭṭu kuṇcu porikkum mūnkilaṭiyān toppilē. atu enna?* A dog barks angrily
  in the grove of a man from Cāntapaṭi; having laid eggs, it hatches the young ones
  in the grove of a man from Mūnkilaṭi. What is it?
  *atu morum venṇaiyum.* The buttermilk and the butter
  (*venṇai = venney*)
  (the churning of curdled milk).

* Compare *TVK* 1247 (answer identical):
  1247. *cala-valla nāy kuraikkum cāntappāṭiyān toppilē; muṭṭai-y iṭṭum kuṇcu porikkum mūnkilaṭiyān toppilē.*
A dog barks angrily
in the grove of a man from Căttappāṭi;
it lays eggs and hatches the young ones
in the grove of a man from Mūṅkilaṭi.

* EROT 387. Squeals (129, 726).

25) oru peṭṭikkul iru tailam. atu enṇa?
Two (types of) unguents in one box. What is it?
atu muṭṭāi. An egg.

* Compare TVK 692 (answer identical):
   692. oru kuppikkuḷē īraṇṭu enṇai.
   (enṇai=enṇey)
   Two (types of) oils in one bottle.


26a) vellai-k kōyil, viluntu kumpitē ītam illai. atu enṇa?
A white temple, but no place to bow and worship. What is it?
atu muṭṭai. An egg.

b) cāntu pōṭṭa kōyilukkuḷ viluntu kumpitē ītam illai. atu enṇa?
In a whitewashed temple, there is no place to bow and worship.
What is it?
atu muṭṭai. An egg.

* Compare TVK 1261, 2460 (answer identical):
   1261. cāntu pūcina kōyilukkuḷ
   puṇṭu putappaṭa vali-y illai.
   (puṇṭu=pukuntu)
   There is no way to enter a whitewashed temple and come out again.

2460. vellai-p piḷḷaiyār kōyilukku-p
   pūṭṭum illai torappum illai.
   (torappu=turappu)
   For a white Ganesa temple there is neither lock nor key.

* EROT 1133. Little White House without Doors (475, 814–15).

* EROT 1187. Box Cannot Be Opened (502–503).

27a) āyiram taccar kūṭī,
alakāṇa maṇṭāpam kaṭṭī,
oruvar kan-paṭṭu,
uṭaintat-ām maṇṭāpam. atu enṇa?
A thousand carpenters came together
and built a beautiful maṇḍapa (hall),
but when a single person had spotted it,
it is said to have broken in pieces. What is it?
atu tēṉ-kūṭu. A honeycomb.

b) āyiram taccar kūṭi,
alakāṇa maṇṭapam kaṭṭi,
oruvaṅ kai paṭṭāl,
ūṭaintu viṭṭum. atu enṇa?
A thousand carpenters come together
and build a beautiful mandapa (hall),
but if a single person touches it (accidentally) with his hands,
it breaks in pieces. What is it?
atu tēṉ-kūṭu. A honeycomb.

* Compare TVK 239, 241, 1859 (answer identical):
239. āyiram taccar kūṭi,
alakāṇa maṇṭapam kaṭṭi,
oruvaṅ kan-paṭṭāl,
ūṭaintat-ām maṇṭapam.
241. āyiram pēr kaṭṭiyā arāṅka-manī maṇṭapam,
oruvaṅ kan-paṭṭāl, oliyum anta maṇṭapam.
(kaṭṭiyā = kaṭṭīna)
There is a maṇḍapa (hall) (studded) with pearls and (furnished) with
a stage that has been built by a thousand people;
but if a single person spots it, that maṇḍapa will go to pieces.
1859. pala pēr kaṭṭiyā viṭṭu
oruvaṅ kan-paṭṭāl,
ūṭaintat-ām.
(kaṭṭiyā = kaṭṭīna)
After a single person had spotted a house
that many people had built,
it is said to have broken in pieces.

MAN

28) kamerā illānal paṭam eṭuppatu enṇa?
What is it that can take photographs without having a camera?
atu kaṅ. The eyes.
29) vāṭā pōṭā eṭpāṅ.
avan iruppattē āla-k kuliyil. avan yār?
He commands: “Hey, come!” “Hey, go!”
But the place where he lives is a deep pit. Who is he?
atu nākku. The tongue.

* Compare TVK 58 (answer identical):
58. aṭē pūṭē eṭpāṅ.
vēṭṭai viṭṭu veḷiyeṭṭa māṭṭāṅ.
(aṭē = aṭi-y-e; pūṭē = piti-y-e)
He commands: “Beat (him/her/it)!” “Catch (him/her/it)!”
But he cannot come out of his house.

30) *nāṭṭu viṭṭukkul muṭṭu-p palakai. atu enna?*
(*nāṭṭu=nuṭtu*)
In the middle of a house an obstructing plank. What is it?
*atu nākkai.*
The tongue.


31) *aṁtu viṭṭukku oru murram. atu enna?*
There is one courtyard for five houses. What is it?
*atu ullankai.*
The palm of the hand.

* Compare TVK 663 (answer identical):
663. *aṁtu ūrkaluhku orē mantai.*
There is only one grazing ground for five villages.

**Things**

32) *ōṭṭumpōtu karaṇṇu;*
*ilukkumpōtu civaṇṇu. atu enna?*
(*-pōtu=-polutu*)
When you push it in, it is black;
but when you pull it out, it is red. What is it?
*atu kollan paṭṭatāi irumpu.*
The iron in the smithy.

33) *cuṭṭa anil koppile pāyutu. atu enna?*
(*pāyutu=pāykiratu*)
A burnt palm squirrel jumps on a branch. What is it?
*atu kokka-tati cattakam.*
A little curved hedge bill.

34) *kutirai ṣṭa ṣṭa, vāl kūrakiratu. atu enna?*
While a horse runs and runs, its tail shortens. What is it?
*atu ucīyum nūlum.*
A needle and thread.

* Compare TVK 1119 (answer identical):
1119. *kutirai ṣṭa ṣṭa, vāl kūrakiratu.*

* EROT 203. Goes About; Leaves Its Tail Behind (73–74, 707).
* EROT 351–53. Form (109, 720).
* EROT 531–34. One Eye and a Tail (187–90, 745).
35) *ippa piranta pillai appanukku cōru pōṭukirān. avan yār?*

(ippa = ippolutu)

A newborn child serves rice to daddy. Who is he?

*atu akappai.*

A ladle [made of a coconut-shell].

36) *kuḷattukkullē kutittavan kūmmaḷam pōṭukirān. avan yār?*

A man who jumped into a tank romps about there. Who is he?

*atu palakāram.*

A palakām [a kind of sweet dish].

* Compare TVK 1286 (answer identical):

1286. *cilu-cilutta tattānil cemmatiyātu mēyutu.*

(mēyutu = mēykiratu)

A sheep grazes in bubbling water.

37) *cūṇṇaṇ cīrukkanum cūṇṇaṇ cīrkkhiyum cērntu maktu kōṛtta mālaiyai cikk-illāmal avilppovarukku cennaiptaṭṭanam cīlānum. atu ennā?

(maktu = maktiṇtu; kōṛtta = kōṛtta = kōṭṭa)

Those who can untie the garland that a young man and a young woman have jointly strung in a joyful mood without tangling it, (will get) Madras as a gift. What is it?

*atu itiyappam.*

An itiyappām [a kind of sweet dish].

* Compare TVK 1309 (answer different):

1309. *cinna-c cīrkkhiyum cinna-p paiyanum cirittu-k kaṭṭinā taḷi cikk-illāmal avilppovarukku-c cennai paṭṭinam inām. atu ennā?

(cirittu = cirittū; cennai paṭṭinam = cennai(i)paṭṭanam)

Those who untied the marriage badge a young woman and young man had tied while giggling without tangling it, (got) Madras as a gift.

*atu tūkkaṇāṅkurvi-k kūṭu.* The nest of the weaverbird (Ploceus baya).

38) *onṭu mitakkum, onṭu tāḷum, onṭu karaiyum. atu ennā?

(tāḷum = tāḷum)

One floats (on the water), one sinks, and one dissolves. What are they?

*atu vettilai, pākkku, cūṇṇāmpu.* The betel leaf, the areca nut, and the lime.
2082. malaikku pōnen,
manakkamalai-k kantēn.
mūnu cāmānakal tantāl,
onu mulikirru,
in-anonu mitantatu,
matt-onu karaintatu.
I went to the hills.
There I saw Maṅkammāl.
She gave me three things:
one sank (in the water),
the other floated,
and the third dissolved.

2172. murukan viṭṭikku pōnen.
mūtu vastu-p pertēn.
tanniyilē pōṭēn,
onu karaintatu,
onu mitantatu,
onu amintatu.
(tanniyilē = tanniērilē)
I went to the house (temple) of Murukaṇ.
There I obtained three things.
I put them in water;
one dissolved,
one floated, and
one sank.

39) cinna viṭṭil ciṟāy athukki irukku. atu enna?
(athukki irukku = athukki-y-irukkum)
Chips are piled up in a little house. What is it?
atu ti-p-petṭi.
[The matches in] a matchbox.

* Compare TVK 2082, 2172 (answer identical):

1320. cinna-cītu viṭṭilē
ciṟpāykaṭ pala pēru.
In a tiny little house,
there are many sepoys.

1325. cinna viṭṭukku nitaiya-c ciṟā. atu enna?
(ciṟā = ciṟāy)
A little house full of chips. What is it?
atu parkal.
The teeth.

* EROT 907. Flat-top House (334, 774).
* EROT 924 (343).

40a) talai-y unṭu, vāl illai;
uṭamp uṇṭu, kāl illai;
āṅāl taṭṭa-c cīrum. atu enṇa?
It has a head, but no tail;
it has a body, but no legs;
but when you hit it, it hisses. What is it?
atu neruppu-k-kuccu. A match.

b) taṭṭināl, cīrum. atu enṇa?
If you hit it, it hisses. What is it?
atu neruppu-k-kucci. A match.

41) nallavan, tōṭtu-p pēcīnāl keṭṭavan. avan yār?
A good man—but if you move freely (carelessly) with him, a
bad man. Who is he?
atu mincāram. The electric current.

* Compare TVK 458, 1565 (answer identical):

458. uyyr illā maṇiṭan tōṭṭālam viṭṭālam piṭṭhikēṇān.
       (illā = illātā)
A lifeless man gets hold of you if you touch him and [if so] if you
[wish to] leave him.

1565. tōṭṭāl piṭṭtittu-k kollum,
       āṅāl pocai-y alla;
       viṭṭāl vēlai ceyyum,
       āṅāl entiram alla.
If you touch it, it catches you,
but it is no glue;
if you leave it alone, it works,
but it is no machine.

42) tala-tala tankład pōla,
tāmarai-salaityam pōla,
iyamaṇin palla pōla,
iṭirāṇiyin kaṇṇai-p pōla. atu enṇa?
It's like glittering gold,
it's like a lotus stalk,
it's like Yama's teeth,
it's like Indrāṇi's eyes. What is it?
atu tāli. The tāli [marriage badge].

43) oru vēlai unav iṭṭāl, oru nāl ulaikkum. atu enṇa?
If you give it a meal once [a day], it works hard the whole day.
What is it?
atu kaṭikāram. A watch.

44) atuttavār kataliyai alupp illāmal
       anuṭiṇām cumakkum cumai tāṅki. atu enṇa?
A carrier of burdens carries daily the stories of others without getting bored. What is it?

atu taṟi.

A diary.

45) maḷai-kālam ulēvaruvān. avaṇ yār?
He wanders about during the rainy season. Who is he?

atu kuṭai.

An umbrella.

46) maṭittāl, niṟkum;
mitittāl, oṭum. avaṇ yār?
If you pay respect to it, it stands still; but if you tread it, it runs. What is it?

atu miti-vāntī.

A bicycle.

* Compare TVK 169, 1023 (answer identical):

169. alutti mitittāl,
alari-k koṇṭu oṭum.
If you tread it hard, it runs off crying.

1023. kāal utaittāl,
kāṭṭāl urulūm.
If you tread it with your foot, it rolls with the help of air.

47) civappu celai uṭuttu-k koṇṭu,
ā enṟu niṟpāl-am. avaṇ yār?
She is said to stand there dressed in a red sari with her mouth wide open. Who is she?

atu pōṭ-bāks.

* Compare TVK 424, 2374 (answer identical):

424. utal civappu, vāy akalam,
unavu kākitam.
The body, red; the mouth, wide open; the food, paper.

2374. vāṅnāl ellām
vāyai-t tirant-irukkum.
All the days of its life, it keeps its mouth open.

48) vāyāl vilunkkum alaki;
vāyirrai tirantāl,
attaṇaityum appatiyē. avaṇ yār?
(tirantāl = tirantāl)
A beautiful lady who swallows [everything] with her mouth; but if you open her stomach, [you find] everything just as it was. What is it?

atu tapāl-peṭṭi.

A postbox.

(tapāl-peṭṭi = tapārpeṭṭi)
49) cuttā-c cuttā, cuttā-p-paṭātu pāy enṇa?
(cuttā=curra)
What kind of mat is it that cannot be rolled up even if you go on and on rolling it?
atu rōṭṭu.  
A road.

50) viṭu illātavan
viṭi-y ellām
veliṭcam pōṭukirṇy, avan yār?
A man who has no house of his own boasts on all streets. Who is he?
atu vali-kāṭṭi.
A signpost.

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NOTES


2. Riddles 1a, 11, 12b, 17c, 26a, 27b, 28, 31, 40b, 45, and 47 were communicated to me by Mrs. J. Shanthakumary and Mrs. Santhira Segara Pillaiyur Kovilady from Nallur, North Jaffna. All other riddles were noted down for me by Mr. A. V. Jayavirasingh and his sister, Mrs. A. V. Thaneswary from Karaveddy, West Karaveddy.

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