

THE NUMERALOGY OF NĀLĀYIRAM

A CONTINUATION OF THE EARLIER ANTHOLOGY TRADITION :

The *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* literally, the Four Thousand Divine Treatise, codified by Nāthamuni in the tenth century (or the end of the ninth century) was only a continuation of the anthological tradition of the Caṅkam age. But the earlier anthologies were broadly classified under *Akam* or *Puṟam* and secular and religious subjects were put together as, for instance, in the *Pattu-p-pāṭṭu* in which *Paṭṭina-p-pālai* which is purely secular is grouped with *Tirumurukāṟṟu-p-pātai* which is religious. The dominance of anthologies and anthology-making seems to have characterised only the pre-Pallava period, but sporadic attempts at anthologising were to be seen in the field of religious literature in the Pallava and post-Pallava age, thus continuing an ancient tradition in literature. The *Ākam-Puṟam* dichotomy was practically given up in literature during these ages and the emphasis was shifted from *genus* unity to *species* unity. In other words, in the anthological age, if it could be so called, the *Akam-Puṟam*, distinction was the sole basis of classification. Taking the *Pattu-p-pāṭṭu* again, the general theme is *Puṟam*, but there is fantastic diversity in the subject matter of the different works like *Kuṟiñci-p-pāṭṭu*, *Mullai-p-pāṭṭu*, and *Paṭṭina-p-pālai*. Some of the anthologies would appear to have been made mechanically without strict attention to unity. A critical consideration of the principles of anthology-making in the early period of Tamil literature is as interesting as it is ticklish; and before it is attempted in its fullness, only a guess as to the reason for the combination of the different works can be hazarded. The anthologist must have weeded out a number of inferior works and put together only the outstanding ones, and therefore, could not discover as much of the necessary ingredients of unity of subject-mat-

ter as might perhaps have better justified the proclaimed classification as *Akam* or *Puram*. In the later periods, however, it was possible to deviate from the basis of excellence and combine works with identical themes even if the different works did not demonstrate the same degree of superbness, either in language or in thought. The *Caṅkam* anthologies paid special attention to beauty and accuracy of language and applicability to common social life on the basis of a pragmatic philosophy. The later anthologists who were very few cared for the unity of the subject-matter and as it concerned only religion in most cases, the language aspect became secondary. The mind and personality of the author is not only reflected in the work but the work itself conferred upon him social esteem and reverence. Any vagueness of thought in the process of giving verbal form to emotional fullness and ecstasy or the inadequacy of diction was made up for by commentators whose commentaries were more inspired by devotion to the authors for their personal spiritual worth than embark on an attempt to appraise their scholarship.

The two great anthologies of the post-Pallava period are the Śaivite *Tirumurai*s and the *Divya Prabandham* the anthology *par excellence*. The difference between these two anthologies and the *Caṅkam* anthologies is obvious. A discussion was already under taken on the question of authorship and of the subject-matter elsewhere. While the *Nālayiram* certainly continued an earlier literary tradition, it was different from, and, from the point of view of the technical aspect of anthology-making, it was perhaps an improvement on the earlier concept of anthology. The unity of the subject is paramount in the *Nālayiram* in spite of the diversity of authorship and the chronological distance separating each work from others.

There is another difference which is remarkable between the *Divya Prabandham* and the earlier anthologies. While the *Divya Prabandham* is nothing more or nothing less than an anthology from the literary stand point, it is often equated with the *Vedas* and endowed with scriptural status. The same is true in regard to the Śaivite *Tirumurai*s. The

Ālvārs are invested with the sanctity attached to the *Vedic ṛsis* (composers) who, however, chose to remain anonymous. The *Nālāyiram* at least after its codification by Nāthamuni, became a book of daily 'pārāyaṇam' for Vaiṣṇavites in the Tamil country. The sanctity attached to it was such that even Andhras, and Kannadigas transliterated the work in the script of their own languages for their daily 'pārāyaṇam.'

AUTHORSHIP :

The anthology consists of the works of twelve devotees of Viṣṇu called Ālvārs. The word 'ālvār' sometimes interchanged with the word 'ālvār' meaning one who ruled the mind of God. Vaiṣṇavism elevates the devotee and even confers a divinity on him surpassing the divinity of God of whom he is a devotee. Therefore, this meaning is not unwarranted. But the exact root from which the word is derived is 'āl' or 'dive' and *ālvār* would get the meaning as one who is plunged in God-enjoyment or a diver in divinity. The Ālvārs were no doubt intellectually able persons, but their hymns were more the promptings of the heart than intellectual performances. Twelve Ālvārs share between themselves the three thousand and odd hymns comprising of the *Divya Prabandham*. They are the first three Ālvārs (Poykaiyār, Pūtattār, Pēyār), Tirupāṇālvār, Tirumaḷicaiyālvār *alias* Bhakti-sāra, Toṅṅaraṭi-p-poṭiyālvār *alias* Vipra-Nārāyaṇa, Kulacekarālvār, Periyālvār, Āṅṅāḷ, Tirumaṅkaiyālvār, Saṅṅakōpa *alias* Nammālvār and Maṅṅurakaviyālvār.

The uniqueness of the *Divya Prabandham* arises out of the fact that many of its authors were neither scholars nor deeply versed in the sacred lore. Yet their spiritual experience which they have conveyed through their hymns, which are their effortless outpourings of the heart, constitutes a very important phase in the development of religion in general. If a study were made of the different religions of the world, Śri Vaiṣṇavism appears to have introduced the new concept of *anubhava* or god-experiencing and god-enjoyment. The corollary to this *anubhava* is the direct perception of the countless ecstatic qualities (*ananta kalyāṇa guṇas*). The devotee's

enjoyment of these qualities is shared with others through the hymns. The intellect is overwhelmed by the emotions so that experiences rather than ideas dominate the lyrical expressions. The modern student of psychology has plenty of material in the *Nalāyiram* to build up a new branch of psychology in which the mystical experiences could be taken away from the field of abnormal psychology which is not the appropriate head under which one could study this inner development. Excepting Nammālvār who was undoubtedly a genius among men as he was among the Ālvārs, all the other Ālvārs have only their experience or *anubhava* of God to share with others. The *Prabandham* thus becomes the common-man's literature embodying the spiritual experiences of persons from the most common run of society.

Religion owes much to this new aspect of spiritual development. The concept of god-intoxication was drawn upon by all the religions of the world, and there is no doubt that the Ālvārs were primarily responsible for this movement, if not the originators. Sufism which came later shows unmistakable evidences of how much it owes to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in respect of the doctrine of ecstatic spiritual experience.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND: The *Divya Prabandham* literature as also the movement connected with it is definitely post-Caṅkam and excepting the unproved spurious¹ poetical epistle fathered on Periyālvār as his message to the Tamil Caṅkam there is absolutely nothing to warrant the remotest association of any of the Ālvārs with the Caṅkam period, let alone the Caṅkam itself. Both the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite movements started as a result of the Āryan-Tamil interaction in the Tamil country under the stimulus provided by the first great monarchical power of the south – the Pallavas. In a sense, both the movements were parallel originating about the same time under identical stresses and stimuli with no rivalry, but as forces combined to destroy the influence of Buddhism and Jainism.

1. Vide : *Antakōḷa Mev-porul*.

The Pallavas fostered religion without any bias. All the cults and sects received their patronage. The climate was therefore favourable for a new religious explosion within Hinduism with its two aspects in the Tamil country. The age of the intellect and secularism which the Caṅkam age inaugurated was followed by an age in which emotions played a dominant role in literature because of the patronage of religion by the ruling power. The Pallavas either enlarged the old temples or added new ones, and the Tamil country became dotted with Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite shrines all over. The concept of idol-worship was considerably expanded and newer manifestations of Śiva and Viṣṇu were installed in temples. A large number of festivals were instituted on an elaborate scale. An atmosphere of religious activity and fervour was prevalent throughout the Tamil country and the Āḷvārs and the Nāyaṅmārs were the products of this atmosphere. They had something concrete to sing about and wherever they lived they were close to a *Tirupaṭi* or a *Divya Deśa*, a place hallowed by the manifestation of Śiva or Viṣṇu. The *maṅgalāsāsanam* of deities which constitutes the bulk of the *Divya Prabandham* was more or less the expression of personal ecstasy at the time it was sung. Little would the Āḷvārs have imagined that their ecstatic outpourings before the deities would be collected and invested with scriptural status. The *maṅgalāsāsanam* of a deity became more or less a must, and in fact the *maṅgalāsāsanam* by an Āḷvār became the mark to invest a temple with unique repute.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CODIFICATION: Nāthamuni takes on himself the credit for having collected the hymns of all the twelve Āḷvārs and codified them into the *Divya Prabandham*. He may be assigned to the later half of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century A.D.² Very little is known about the life of this great devotee who is ranked with the

2. *The Cōḷas*: (1955 edn.) p. 638. He was born in the year *Sobhakt* (823 A.D.) (A.G.P. II (b), and passed away before 916 A.D., when his grandson Yāmuna was born. The traditional version which mentions him as having lived for 340 years will have to be dismissed, as this comes into clash with the dates arrived at for the Āḷvārs in the previous chapter.

Ālvārs and with Rāmānuja except that he was born in Kāṭṭumaṇṇār koyil in the South Arcot District and that he led a pious life as a devotee of the local deity. It is possible, as is claimed, that he continued the tradition of the Ālvārs, but either his humility prevented his saving his own hymns for posterity, or they have been lost by neglect. His non-authorship, even if it is a fact, of any original work, does not make him inferior to any of the Ālvārs. On the other hand, he became not only the compiler of the anthology of the hymns of the Ālvārs, but he also synthesised their doctrines into one of the greatest movements of Indian history.

The circumstances under which he started his work on the anthology are, as usual, strange. During his time, the hymns of the Ālvārs had gone into oblivion. In fact, he does not appear to have heard of their existence before he had that experience which prompted his quest for the hymns. He had not heard of Nammālvār reputed to be the most intellectual among the Ālvārs.

The exact circumstances under which Nāthamuni commenced his quest of the hymns are as follows: He heard some worshippers recite ten verses from Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi* completely ignorant of Nammālvār as their author. He became inquisitive because the address to God as 'Ārāvamate'³ which he found in the recitation captivated his soul. He asked the worshippers about the authorship of the verses and also of the thousand verses which the last verse of the recited portion alluded to as 'Āyirattuḷ ippattum' (these ten verses from out of the one thousand verses). The worshippers directed him to Kurukūr where he could obtain the thousand verses of Nammālvār portions of which they had themselves memorised for their own contemplation and worship. Nāthamuni proceeded to Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammālvār, and after worshipping the deity of the place and at the direction of Parāṅkuśadāsa, a disciple of Maturakavi, went to the sacred spot under the tamarind tree in the hope of meeting the spirit of Nammālvār. But the expected

3. T.V.M. 5, 8.

miracle did not happen. He then recited the *Kaṇṇinūṅ Cīṟuttāmpu* composed by Maturakavi which he got from Parāṅkuśadāsa in Kurukūr 12000 times in front of the tree where the idol of Nammālvār had been installed. Pleased with Nāthamuni's devotion, Nammālvār appeared before him along with his disciple Maturakavi and taught him all his four *Prabandhams* with their full meaning. According to a slightly different account of the same tradition preserved in the *Divyasārl carita*⁴ all the four thousand verses were revealed to Nāthamuni during this extraordinary interview. There is a third version according to which Nāthamuni met Maturakavi from whom he learnt that Nammālvār, after composing a big Book of hymns in Tamil and instructing the hymns to him, had attained salvation. The people of the locality had the misconception that the study of the work would be detrimental to the *Vedic* religion and so they threw it into the river Tāmprapaṇi. Only one page of the Book viz., *Kaṇṇinūṅcīṟuttāmpu* was saved. Nāthamuni recited this poem 12,000 times, as a result of which Nammālvār revealed the purport of the whole work to him. But when Nāthamuni wanted to know all the verses, he was advised to approach an artisan of the place who was inspired by Nammālvār to reveal all these verses to him. So Nāthamuni received the entire work from the artisan.⁵

Nāthamuni went back to his native place and organised a band of disciples⁶ and started a musical choir for the new hymns as ordained by the God of his native place.

This is the only available account of how the discovery of the *Nālayiram* was made. Nāthamuni justifiably takes the full credit for the discovery of all the hymns which he codified into an anthology. He certainly did much to popularise the

4. D.S.C., XVI – 13 to 21; G.P. p. 73.

5. *Prapanāmṛta* Chaps. 106 and 107 (as quoted by Sri S. Dasgupta Vide : *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. III. P. 95.

6. The *Guruparamparās* mention that Nāthamuni had set these hymns to music with the help of his nephews Mēlaiyakatālvār and Kīlaiyakatālvār in the divine tunes (which please the gods).

recitation of the hymns during festival seasons and it is not improbable that he introduced special festivals at which the *Prabandhams* were to be recited by trained pandits.

One interested in the scientific approach to history might refuse to accept the veracity of the above story. It has, however, to be understood that every ancient tradition is a conventional method of stating historical facts, and one has to be acquainted with the symbols to be able to discover the history in a tradition. Barring the supernatural element in the story all else is true history. The supernatural is the inevitable ingredient in any tradition where there is an account of an effort to succeed in which divine help is necessary. One need not create imaginary situations by which Nāthamuni came by the hymns to substitute the supernatural in the story. Neither the historicity of Nāthamuni nor his being the anthologist of the hymns can ever be disputed. There is epigraphical confirmation of the historicity of Nāthamuni.⁷

THE DIVISION OF THE WORK : The following is the pattern of the arrangement of the Four Books of the *Divya Prabandham* by Nāthamuni called *Mutalāyiram*, *Periya Tirumōḷi*, *Tiruvāy moḷi* and *Ivar-pā*, the first three constituting the Icai-pā group :

Part I: Books of the Icai-pā group

Book I: Mutalāyiram (The First Thousand)

NAME OF COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF VERSES
1. Periyālvār Tirumōḷi	473
2. Tiru-p-pāvai	30
3. Nācciyār Tirumōḷi	143
4. Perumāḷ Tirumōḷi	105
5. Tiruccanta Viruttam	120
6. Tirumālai	45
7. Tiruppalli Eḷucci	10
8. Amalaṅātipirāṅ	10
9. Kaṅṅinūṅ ciṟuttāmpu	11
	Total : 947

7. *Anbil Plates of Sundara Cola*. E.I. XV. p. 54. Nāthamuni is referred to as Sri Nātha.

Of these No. 1 is the composition of Periyālvār, Nos. 2 and 3 of Āṇṭāḷ, No. 4 of Kulacekarālvār, No. 5 of Tirumalicaiyālvār, Nos. 6 and 7 of Toṇṭaraṭi-p-poṭi Ālvār, No. 8 of Tiruppāṇālvār, and No. 9 of Maturakavi Ālvār. The absence of 53 verses to make up 1000 is not usually made much of and the calculation of 1000 is not meant to be arithmetical.

Book II: Periya Tirumoḷi

NAME OF COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF VERSES
10. Periya Tirumoḷi	1084
11. Tirukkuruntāṇṭakam	20
12. Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam	30

Total:	1134

All the three works are those of Tirumaṅkai Ālvār. The total number here is in excess of 1000, and should be treated in the same manner as in respect of Book I.

Book III: Tiruvāymoḷi

NAME OF COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF VERSES
13. Tiruvāymoḷi	1102

The whole of this Book is the work of Nammālvār

Part II: Ivaṅ-pā group

Book IV: Ivaṅpā

NAME OF COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF VERSES
14. Mutal Tiruvantāti	100
15. Iṅṇāṇṭam Tiruvantāti	100
16. Mūṅṇāṇṭam Tiruvantāti	100
17. Nāṅṇmukaṅṇ Tiruvantāti	96
18. Tiruviruttam	100
19. Tiru-Ācīriyam	7
20. Periya Tiruvantāti	87
21. Tiruveḷukkūṅṅirakkai	1
22. Cīriya Tirumaṭal	1
23. Periya Tirumaṭal	1

Total:	593

Of these Nos. 14, 15 and 16 were composed by the Mutalālvārs (Poykai, Pūtam and Pēy); No. 17 by Tirumaḷicaiyālvār; Nos. 18, 19 and 20 by Nammālvār; and Nos. 21, 22 and 23 by Tirumaṅkaiyālvār. The discrepancy in regard to the total in Iyaṟ-pā is rather more than could be treated with indifference. A discussion on the total numbers of verses in the *Nālāyiram* appears in this chapter and references to the statements of authorities are made not only in respect of the total number, but also of alternate schemes of numbering believed to be in vogue.

The *Kōyil-Oḷuku*⁸ mentions a tradition by which on the day of the Tirumoḷi-Tirvāymoḷi Festival which he had himself instituted, Nāthamuni got the first three Books belonging to the Icai-pā category in the finest music pleasing to gods (Devagānam) and the fourth Book belonging to the Iyaṟ-pā category without any musical form. On the basis of this tradition, confirmation is sought to be given to the traditional categorizing of the hymns as Icai-pā and Iyāṟ-pā.

The categorizing does not seem to be arbitrary or purposeless. The first three Books can be set to music and definitely intended to have the highest musical value as a Tamil parallel to the *Sāma Veda*. The music is not incidental, but integral and vital. The appeal to God is through the most enjoyable medium. Maturakavi goes one step further and proclaims that he became ecstatic by singing the sweet songs of Kurukūr Nampi and that he did not know of any deity (superior to Nammālvār).⁹ The existence of ancient manuscripts defining the appropriate tune (*Paṇ*) and tuning (*Tāḷam*) of the hymns also proves conclusively the nature and purposes of the first three Books.

THE ORDER OF THE ARRANGEMENT : Nāthamuni got into possession of the hymns in no codified form or in any order.

8. *Koyil-Oluku* pp. 33-37; cf *Śrī Raṅgam Temple* pp. 144-47.

9. *Kaṅṅinūciṟuttāmpu*-2. The implication is that Kurukūr Nampi (Nammālvār) was the object of his worship and he needed no other God.

The work of organising the hymns must have taken all his mental equipment and spiritual fervour. There were many approaches open to him like the chronological, the person to person, and sequence of religious topography. But his codification was based on the only objective of providing a scripture in Tamil with a status not inferior to that of the *Vedas*. This objective required a thorough reshuffle of the *Prabandhams*¹⁰ and reorganization on the basis of the requirements of recitation in temples. His work must have been to some extent facilitated by the Ālvārs themselves having presented the hymns inseparably complete in themselves in units of ten, thirty etc. Nāthamuni did not take liberty with these units, but just left them as separate divisions. For instance, each of the units of the first Ten of Tirumāṅkaiyālvār is organized into a division, but each Tirumoḷi (consisting of ten or more verses) is presented fully in its original form without a further mix-up of verses by different authors. In other words, he did not collect together stray verses from different *Tirumoḷis* by the same authors or by different authors just for the reason that they dealt with the same subject. Each *Tirumoḷi* has a concluding stanza in which the *phala śruti*¹¹ is given with the authorship which is an indication that the *Tirumoḷi* is full and intact. What Nāthamuni did was to arrange the hymns into tens possibly in conformity with the *Vedic* arrangement of the *sūktas*.

The purposes of his division and sub-division of the whole work are also to be related to his desire to present a Tamil parallel to the four *Vedas*. First they are intended to be recited like the *Vedas*. The *Sāma Veda* being the most pleasing to hear on account of its musical character must have inspired his musical arrangement of the first three Books under the broad category of Icai-pā.

There is needless controversy over the possible order in which the Ālvārs might have composed the hymns. For

10. It means here 'poems' and nothing else.

11. The purpose to be attained by reciting the particular unit of stanzas is mentioned in the last stanza of each unit.

instance, the order of the *Prabandhams* of Tirumaṅkai Ālvār has engendered a lot of heat with every little light at the hands of enthusiastic expositors.¹² But we can easily dismiss the subject of order as purposeless, because the order found in the anthology as organized by Nāthamuni and finally fixed as unalterable by Vēdānta Deśika is the order of the anthologists and not of the Ālvārs.

THE PLACE OF RĀMĀNUJA-NŪRRANTĀTI: There is a school of opinion which believes that the *Rāmānuja-nūrrantāti* forms part of the fourth Book, the *Iyaṟ-pā*. But the opposition to the belief stems from the travesty, arising out of the inclusion of the praise of a human being along with the praise of God. Historically the inclusion must be a later-day action as Rāmānuja was later than Nāthamuni and the codification had been settled by Nāthamuni. Nāthamuni does not appear to have designed the anthology as a *En-Nūl*. The *Nālāyiram* prefixed to *Divya Prabandham* is certainly of later origin; it probably belongs to the Vijayanagar period when a new interest was evinced in Vaiṣṇavism and Vaiṣṇavite literature. The prefix must have originated during the period of Vēdānta Deśika whose last year is believed to be 1371 A.D. or a little later as a Śrīraṅgam inscription of his composition would testify.¹³ This can be accepted as almost the final answer to the origin of the prefix because for the first time it appears in a statement of Śrī Deśika.¹⁴ Tiruvarāṅkatta-

12. One section of Vaiṣṇavites holds the opinion that *Periya Tirumaṅal* is the last poem sung by the Ālvār and according to them the order is *Periya Tirumoli, Tirukuruntāṅtakam, Tirunetuntāṅtakam, Tiruvelukkuṟṟirukkai, Ciṟiya Tirumaṅal* and *Periya Tirumaṅal*. This is the order held by Vēdānta Deśika (T.P. 379). According to another section, *Tirunetuntāṅtakam* is the last poem of the Ālvār and their order is: *Periya Tirumoli, Tirukkuruntāṅtakam, Tiruvelukkūṟṟ-irukkai, Ciṟiya Tirumaṅal; Periya Tirumaṅal* and *Tirunetuntāṅtakam* (U.P.R. 9. P.B. Annankaracarya's commentary).

13. *Madhurā Vijayam* - p. 65. (Śrīraṅgam inscription composed by Deśika) in praise of Gōpanna who restored normalcy in the Śrīraṅgam temple after the defeat of the Maturai Sultan by Kampana-II).

14. T.P. 382, 383.

mutaṅṅār, the most devoted disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, after composing *Rāmānuja-nūṛṇantāti* had its 'araṅkeṇṇam' (or the formal release) in the presence of Śrī Raṅganātha, the presiding deity at Śrīraṅgam and it was Śrī Raṅganātha who ordained that this work be included in the *Divya Prabandham*.¹⁵ While there is no doubt about the literary excellence as also the wealth of *bhakti* in the work, it is not possible to believe that Śrī Rāmānuja could have permitted something in praise of himself to be included in what was purely a book of prayers and praises of God. However, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar composed a verse (Taniyan) in honour of the Āḷvārs which is recited before any composition of the Āḷvārs is taken up for recital. Rāmānuja's name is included by him along with those of the Āḷvārs. He must have treated Rāmānuja on a par with the Āḷvārs and in all likelihood *Rāmānuja-nūṛṇantāti* could have been considered as part of the *Nālāyira Prabandham* during the life time of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar who was born in the year 1062 A.D.¹⁶ and received the blessings of Rāmānuja. He died in his thirty second year. *Rāmānuja-nūṛṇantāti*, in praise of Rāmānuja, could have therefore been included in the *Nālāyiram* at least soon after 1137 A.D., the date of Rāmānuja's death. Here Rāmānuja is not the author of any Tamil hymn but came to be venerated by Parāśara Bhaṭṭar giving him the status equal to that of an Āḷvār. In order to justify this, the composition *Nūṛṇantāti* in praise of him by Amutaṅṅār, could have been included in the *Nālāyiram*. The composition of the Āḷvārs were regarded as the *Tamil Vedas*. It is but natural that a poem in praise of Rāmānuja who was treated like an Āḷvār should get the status of the *Veda* and so included in the *Nālāyiram*. The appellation 'Prapannagāyatri' lends justification to this.

15. cf. D.S.C., 18: 51, 52.

16. *Satsampradāya Muktvāli* p. 13. A latest date 1122 A.D., which is suggested in the *Guruparamparās* in order to justify the tradition that he was a child when Rāmānuja made him his successor is not acceptable for the reason that his father Kūrattāḷvāṅ was 91 years old in 1122 A.D. For a discussion on his date, see T.A. Gopinatha Rao; *Lectures on Vaishnavism*. He must have lived for more than one hundred years.

There is another instance of praise of a human being appearing among the *Prabandham* hymns. It is a composition of Maturakavi in praise of Nammālvār. But the work had already attained classical value and both Nammālvār and Maturakavi were considered as Ālvārs. Therefore Nāthamuni with whom alone we associate the codification chose to include the praise of Nammālvār in the *Prabandham*. The story of how Nāthamuni came by the hymns of the Ālvārs makes *Kaṁṁinun-ciṟuttāmpu* the starting point of the effort to unearth the missing hymns. If that were true, Nāthamuni must have had a special reason to include this piece of human praise among the God's prayers and praises. There can, however, be no disputing the fact that after Rāmānuja's passing away the interest in the *Divya Prabandham* which Rāmānuja himself had inspired must have led to a new look at the organisation of the *Prabandham*. By the time Śrī Deśika's eminence was established, a little change over the content of the anthology could have already taken place and the *Divya Prabandham* must have got finalised into *Nālayira Divya Prabandham*. One wonders if Śrī Deśika himself might not have played the second Nāthamuni and without taking too much liberty with the Nāthamuni's codification regularised the contents by treating the *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* as definite part of the *Divya Prabandham*. In fact, it is Śrī Deśika who presents the first statement in regard to the numbers of verses by the Ālvārs as also the number of verses in the whole anthology itself as Four Thousand. He also specifies twenty four *Prabandhams*¹⁷ including *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti*. Either Śrī Deśika was repeating traditional account of numbers or himself furnishing the picture of the final codification in which he had a prominent part.

VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S FINAL VERSION: Between Nāthamuni and Vedānta Deśika there must have arisen a new interest in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism with its supreme product in Śrī Rāmānuja who justly takes the credit as the codifier of the new Tamil Vaiṣṇavism, spade work for which had long before been completed by a number of religious leaders including Nāthamuni and Ālavantār. During the period of Rāmānuja,

the old Nāthamuni code does not seem to have undergone any transformation. But during the period of Vedānta Deśika there was the usual historical process of reaction and recession. By then the Vijayanagar empire had come into existence (1336 A.D.) and with it was renewed the old interest in the *Vēdas* and Vedic study. The *Divya Prabandham* which had for centuries remained the scripture, in a sense, of the Tamil Vaiṣṇavites was now getting alternative status with the original *Vēdas* themselves. Vedānta Deśika, however, successfully staved off the trend which might have destroyed the status of the *Prabandham* as scripture, if only he had yielded to the temptation to join the movement of reaction. Under his leadership the very last codification must have been effected. This was done without any damage to the Nāthamuni code. There are two verses of Śrī Deśika indicating this final codification. A free translation of the verses is as follows :

“If we are to take count of the number of hymns of the first Ālvārs (Poykai, Pūtam, and Pēy) we get 300; Tirumaḷicai contributed 216; those of Nammālvār of profound vedic insight 1296; those of Maturakavi of eminent charity and *guru-bhakti* 11; those of Kulacēkara king of the Vañci country 105; those of Periyālvār, also named Bhaṭṭanātha 473; those of Āṅṭāl, a manifestation of Goddess Earth 173; those of Tonṭaraṭi-p-poṭi 55; those of Tiruppāṇālvār 10 – to these must be added 1253 hymns of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār who was the veritable Death to his enemies and whose hymns sang the glorious praise of the world’s Great Father Tiruvēṅkaṭamuṭaiyāṅ and also those in praise of Yatirāja (the prince of *yatis*) numbering 108 (composed by his worthy disciple Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṅṅār).¹⁸

If the numbers found in these two verses translated together, when added become 4000, the prefix ‘*Nālayiram*’ seems perfectly justified. But the problem is not so simple as it looks.

The arithmetical statement of Śrī Vedānta Deśika has now to be analysed. The number in respect of all Ālvārs

except Tirumañkaiyālvār is correct. There is controversy only over two subjects: viz., the number of the two pieces, the *Periya Tirumaṭal* and *Cīṟiya Tirumaṭal* and the inclusion of *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti*. If the *Periya-Tirumaṭal* and the *Cīṟiya-Tirumaṭal* are considered one long poem each and if 108 *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* verses are excluded, the total number is 3776 which is the correct number. The additional 224 is got in the following manner :

Periya Tirumaṭal is taken as a subject in 78 verses and *Cīṟiya Tirumaṭal* as one in 40 verses. Between these two we account for $78+40=118$ verses. The *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* contains 108 and the total comes to 226 verses. Śrī Vēdānta Deśika thus adds 226 new verses to the number in the Nāthamuni code and rounds it off as 4000.¹⁹ There can be no serious objection to this, but for certain criticisms in respect of an arbitrary dissection of one long poem of 297 lines into 78 smaller verses. A poem is a unity by itself and not a convenient stoppage of equal length. Both the *Tirumaṭals* are in kali-veṅpā metre which is peculiarly suited to the composition of a single poem of any length. According to conventions of prosody whatever the number of lines or the length the poem is to be taken as a single unit and not to be dissected into verses. In this light the *Periya Tirumaṭal* is just one long poem and the *Cīṟiya Tirumaṭal* is another slightly shorter than the first as the name itself implies. Nāthamuni who must have given the names to the two *Maṭals* to distinguish each has purposely adopted the simple names instead of any name suggestive of the number of verses for the simple reason that he took each *Maṭal* as a single poem as per rules of prosody. In fact, Nāthamuni had no obsession with regard to the total number.

Vedanta Deśika who made the anthology a definite Ep-Nūl did not wish to exclude the *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti*.

19. The calculation is as follows: The total number of verses in the Four Books comes to 3776 ($947+1134+1102+593$). If the two *Maṭals* are taken away the number reduces to 3774; the number is less by 226 to 4000 ($4000-3774=226$). Then the number 4000 is got by adding 3774 and 226 ($78+40+108$).

So he had to provide for 108 in his calculation of 4000 and provided 118 to the two *Maṭals* and made up his 4000.²⁰

Appiḷlai Ācīriyar another keen student of the *Divya Prabandham* excluded the *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* from his calculation and instead considered both the *Maṭals* themselves as consisting of 226 verses. According to him the *Periya Tirumaṭal* consists of $148\frac{1}{2}$ verses and the *Cīṟiya Tirumaṭal* $77\frac{1}{2}$ verses. His dissection was into *Kaṇṇi* couplets and this was not against a common convention, though the counting of each *Kaṇṇi* as a verse is not warranted.²¹ The author of *Nālayira Divya Prabandha Akarāti* also follows the principle of dissection in connecting the *Maṭal* verses.²²

Now there are two distinct numbers 3776 and 4000 and three approaches. Śrī Dēśika's version seems to be the most acceptable and final. Even today the inclusion and non-inclusion of *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* is a disputed issue though no irreverance is implied. In fact, whether included or not within the anthological system, the *Rāmānuja-nūṟṟantāti* is given a place of honour as a separate section in every edition of the *Divya Prabandham*. It is also recited along with the other hymns in all Vaiṣṇavite temples. It could be concluded with the statement that no bones can be made about the arthmatical accuracy in respect of numbers. Even if a few verses are wanted to make up 4000 what is of essence is not the arithma-

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20. The inclusion of human praise in a book of prayers to God was done on the basis of a spiritual belief. Rāmānuja was considered an *avatāra* of Ādiśeṣa and the praise of Ādiśeṣa is appropriate amidst praises of Śrī Nārāyaṇa whose bed the Ādiśeṣa is. Nam-mālvār is also considered an *avatāra* of Viṣvakṣeṇa and the inclusion of his praise by Maturakavi is also justifiable. Vēdānta Dēśika invested the inclusion with the seal of his approval to neutralise the vehemence of the objection to its inclusion.
21. The calculation according to Appiḷlai Ācīriyar is as follows: The total number of verses in the Four Books comes to 3776. The number reduces to 3774 by taking away the *Maṭals*. Total number of *Kaṇṇi* couplets = $148\frac{1}{2} + 77\frac{1}{2} = 226$. Then we have 4000 by adding 3774 and 226.
22. pp. 26-28; 41 and 43.

tical accuracy in literature, but the completeness of each idea. The *Divya Prabandham* does not suffer in this respect. The number 'Āyiram' has been considered very auspicious by the Hindus. Anything slightly less or in excess of it is also taken as 'Āyiram'. Thus the 1008 names of Viṣṇu are called 'Sahasranāma'. The *Puruṣa-sūkta* begins with the verse "Sahasra Śirṣā Puruṣaḥ, Sahasrākṣa Sahasrapād" etc.²³ We could overlook the fact of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* consisting of 1102 verses by accepting its classification as an 'Āyiram' by the author himself.²⁴ The *Periya Tirumoḷi* also containing 1084 verses gets the title 'Maṟai Pār-Āyiram, Āyiram, etc., from its author.²⁵ Therefore, there is nothing wrong in imagining that each Book contains 1000 verses and the four Books 4000.

THE PROBLEM OF TIRUPPALLĀṆṬU

There is another interesting problem in regard to the 'Pallāṅṭu' part of *Periyālvār Tirumoḷi*. According to some, it should be treated as a separate *Prabandham* and not as a part within another *Prabandham*. Again, it is intellectual gymnastics and nothing serious is involved in it. Perhaps for a scientific reason, we might say that the *Pallāṅṭu* cannot be a separate *Prabandham* and must be considered just as the first part of the first *Tirumoḷi* which should be considered to have ten parts collectively called a 'Pattu'. As it is, the first part is the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* and the *Tirumoḷi* itself commences as the second *Prabandham* separately. The first *Pattu* (Ten) in this arrangement is really nine because of the exclusion of the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* considered as a separate *Prabandham*. While there is nothing wrong in separating the *Tiruppallāṅṭu*, the organisation of the work suffers to some extent by its exclusion. Even at the commencement the equal division of ten *Tirumoḷis* is affected and only nine have to be designated a 'Pattu' (Ten). The pattern of division of each *Prabandham* into ten *Tirumoḷis* each is common to the works of *Periyālvār*, *Tirumaṅkaiyālvār* and *Nammālvār* which share the common connotation *Tirumoḷi*. This seems to be some kind of an application of an organisational pattern adopted in the *Vedas*.

23. R.V. 10.90:1

24. TVM. 1. 1 : 11; 1.3 : 11; 1. 4 : 11; 1. 6 : 11 etc.

25. Peri. Tm. 1. 5: 10.

The *sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda* may be considered the genesis of the concept of *Tirumoḷi*. A *sūkta* is not a *sūtra* but a reasoning complete in itself. Its form is more elaborate than the aphoristic *sūtra*. In the same way, in each *Tirumoḷi* there are a number of verses though ordinarily even this number is to be restricted to ten. But this restriction is not strictly followed by the Āḷvārs. Those who argue that Periyāḷvār's First Ten did not include the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* arrived at ten as the exact number of *Tirumoḷis* totalled up all the verses in the nine *Tirumoḷis* excluding the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* and got one hundred which they argued should be the correct quantity for ten *Tirumoḷis* at ten verses each. But while this approach may serve the purpose of an argument to explain away a difficult position, it fails to take note of the unity of the Ten.

In the *Periya Tirumoḷi* of Tirumaṅkaiyāḷvār and in the *Tiruvāymoḷi* of Naṅṅmāḷvār the *sūkta*-like *Tirumoḷis* are arranged as a series of Tens without any numerical inaccuracy. In the *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* of Āṅṅṅāḷ the arrangement into Tens has not been adopted, because of the inadequate number of *Tirumoḷis*. The traditional belief is that division into Tens is called for only when there is material for more than two Tens. The *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* does not satisfy this principle.

The *Tiruppallāṅṅu* part is considered separate also on the basis of eminent authority. In the *Upadēsaratanamālai*²⁶ of Maṅṅavāḷa māmunikaḷ the reference to Periyāḷvār is in association with his having been the author of the *Tiruppallāṅṅu*. In the same work the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* is mentioned as the ancient or *Āṅṅi Tiruppallāṅṅu*, an artistic work without a parallel. One need not be led away by the overwhelming praise of the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* and invest it with a separateness for this reason. That the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* is an excellent piece of composition in the richness of its devotional fervour, nobody denies. The question is whether it should be treated as a separate *Prabandham*. The volume of opinion leans on the side of its being an integral part of the First Ten. Those who would make it a separate *Prabandham* are swayed by its

superior quality as a hymn and its abstract form contrasted with the anecdotal hymns that follow in the First Ten. But there is nothing objectionable in taking the *Tiruppallāṅṭu Tirumōḷi* of the First Ten as indicating the subject matter of the other nine *Tirumōḷis* which is the story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's boyhood. The references in *Upadēśaratnamālai* do not imply separate *Prabandham* status for the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* but equate it with the Vedic *praṇava* or *Om* which is an auspicious beginning for any thing. The fact that the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* is the beginning of every recitation of any *Prabandham* in the *Nalayiram* only shows its greatness and not separateness. The *Tiruppallāṅṭu* has become the *Pūrvāṅga* of every auspicious recitation and epitomises the entire substance of the First Ten. Much credence need not be placed on *Upadēśaratnamālai* whose purpose is entirely different from evaluating the *Divya Prabandham*. It is purely a source of information about the date of birth and place of the Āḷvārs. Therefore a casual statement in it about the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* need not be made much of²⁷. Periyavāccāṅ Pillai (1168-1263 A.D.) who is held to belong to a school which is opposed to that of Vēdānta Dēśika has treated *Tiruppallāṅṭu* as a hymn which forms part of *Periyāḷvār Tirumōḷi*.²⁸

The number of *Prabandhams* has been taken to be twenty four. This is arrived at in two different ways. One is to exclude the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* from the list of *Prabandhams* and include the *Rāmānuca-nūṛṇantāti*; another is to exclude the *Rāmānuca-nūṛṇantāti* from the list and give separate status to *Tiruppallāṅṭu*. Vēdānta Dēśika must have considered the *Tiruppallāṅṭu* as part and parcel of the First Decad because he includes *Rāmānuca-nūṛṇantāti* among the *Prabandhams*. The division into twenty-four is long accepted and therefore there need be no controversy about it.

27. D.S.C. also refers to the two compositions of Periyāḷvār. V. : 76.

28. *Tiruppallāṅṭu vyākhyāna* (Kāñchipuram), p. 24.