

THE COMPOSITIONS OF ĀLVĀRS (I)

OF THOSE OTHER THAN NAMMĀLVĀR

The compositions of the twelve Ālvārs are twenty three in number, and they have been collected and collated later by Nāthamuni and given the name of *Nālayira Prabandham* (The book of Four Thousand verses) or the *Divya Prabandham* (The Divine Treatise). The names of the compositions and the pattern of their arrangement in the book have been stated and discussed in the previous chapter. So, only the content or the purport of these compositions is attempted here.

THE FIRST THREE ĀLVĀRS

The first three Ālvārs¹, namely, Poykaiyālvār, Pūtattālvār, Pēyālvār are the authors of the first three *Antātis*² centums of verses in the venpā metre (Nēricai Venpā) in praise of Viṣṇu. Each one of them has sung a hundred verses like a garland of flowers. The garland of verses (col-mālai) sung by Poykaiyālvār, Pūtattālvār and Pēyālvār are known as *Mutal Tiruvantāti* (first centum), *Iraṅṅām Tiruvantāti* (second centum) and *Mūṅṅām Tiruvantāti* (third centum) respectively. The first Ālvār starts singing of the universal God from the point of view of the phenomenon: "The world is the lamp-dish filled with ghee of sea; the shining sun is the lamp. God is

1. U.R.M. 7.

2. *Antāti* is a type of Tamil poem (Prabandham) where the ending of the first stanza (a letter, syllable or a word) comes as the beginning of the second stanza and so on till the ending of the last stanza is the same as the beginning of the first stanza. This type of poem is composed in nēricai venpā or kaṭṭalai-k-kalitturai metre the total number of stanzas in an antāti being 100; sometimes the Prabandham is composed with stanzas less or more than 100 as for instance *Nāṅmukan Tiruvantāti* and *Rāmānuca-nūṅṅantāti* (vide: *Yāpparuṅkalakkāṅṅat-17*).

the Light of lights. I make a garland of verses and place it at the feet of God, the Light of lights"³ The second Ālvār begins singing not of the outer light but the inner light, the noumenon: "Love is the lamp-dish; pining for the Lord is the ghee therein; the blissful melting heart is the wick; I have lighted this lamp. God is the Light of lights."⁴ The third Ālvār sees the lamp lighted by Pūtattālvār the Light of lights, the great God of his heart. His ecstasy broke into a song: "I have seen Tiru (Lakṣmī). I have seen a golden-hued beautiful figure (body). I have seen the lovely effulgence of the rising sun. I have seen the bright disc and the conch in His hands. All these I see today in my ocean-hued Lord."⁵

The three seers then elaborate the glory of the Person they had seen in their lyrical poems or *Antātis*. They glorify God as the Inner-self and the Saviour of all beings and, at the same time, as transcending the universe.⁶ By controlling the outgoing senses, they say that He can be intuited with the inner eye.⁷ God, in His infinite mercy and love, assumes the name and form which the devotees desire and reveals Himself in the same form.⁸ A spirit of tolerance is in evidence in the poems of these early Ālvārs; probably there were forms of images where one half was Śiva and the other half Viṣṇu.⁹ The stories of divine descent are told with a grasp of their essential message.^{9a} Some of the stanzas in these *Antātis* are

3. M. Tv. 1.

4. I. Tv. 1.

5. Mu. Tv. 1. cf. I. Tv. 67.

6. M. Tv. 9, 61, 62; I. Tv. 28; Mu. Tv. 37, 82.

7. M. Tv. 4, 12, 30, 32, 47, 50, 85; I. Tv. 6, 26, 42; Mu. Tv. 12, 14, 40, 79.

8. M. Tv. 14, 44.

9. M. Tv. 5, 98; Mu. Tv. 63.

9a. M. Tv. 2, 3, 4, 7-12, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23-25, 27, 29, 33, 36, 39, 46, 47, 48, 50, 59, 62, 69, 74, 79, 90, 91, 94; I. Tv. 8, 10, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30, 61-64, 68, 79, 84, 89, 96, 99, 100; Mū. Tv. 4, 6, 9, 13, 18-21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31-34, 36, 42, 46, 47, 49, 51, 53, 54, 62, 64-66, 68, 71, 6, 73, 74, 77, 80, 83, 85, 89-93, 95, 98, 99.

full of poetic beauty and they contain vivid poetic imagery.¹⁰ The verses are full of humour.¹¹ Because of the simplicity of these Ālvārs' language, there is a ring of sincerity in their utterances.¹² These three Ālvārs revel in the *avatāras* of Vāmana-Tirivikrama and Kṛṣṇa in their worship of *vibhava* form of God,¹³ and the deity at Vēṅkaṭam in their worship of *arcā* form.¹⁴ That is why the first two Ālvārs, according to traditional scholars,¹⁵ conclude their *Antāti* with the mention of these two *avatāras*.¹⁶ But the third Ālvār, unlike the other two of his colleagues, ends his *Antāti* by mentioning the sacred feet of the Lord and those of His consort Lakṣmī¹⁷ as *saraṅgati* for his salvation. There is only one verse in the whole of three *Tiruvantāti* on bridal mysticism.¹⁸

TIRUMAḶICAI ĀLVĀR

Tirumaḷicai Ālvār has left us only two compositions: the *Nānmukan Tiruvantāti* and the *Tiruccantaviruttam*.

NĀNMUKAN TIRUVANTĀTI: This work consisting of 96 verses in *veppā* metre (*Nēricai veppā*) is arranged in the *Antāti*

10. M. Tv. 38, 40; I. Tv. 75; Mū. Tv. 23, 45, 57, 58, 67, 68, 70-72, 75, 86, 89.
11. M. Tv. 6, 19, 24, 42, 47, 53, 54, 56, 67, 69, 70, 81, 84, 91, 92; I. Tv. 5, 9, 15, 16, 36, 49, 56, 61, 97, 98; M. Tv. 6, 33, 34, 48, 49, 52, 54, 60, 62, 64, 67, 73, 74, 81, 83, 84, 89, 91, 92.
12. M. Tv. 6, 16, 21, 30, 31, 50, 51, 57, 64, 67, 68, 72, 78, 79, 83, 86, 88, 89, 94, 95, 99; I. Tv. 4, 12, 21, 27, 34, 51, 55, 65, 74, 76, 81, 85, 87, 90, 92, 93; Mū. Tv. 2, 7, 8, 12, 17, 21, 23, 30, 35, 37, 40, 57, 59, 84, 92, 94.
13. M. Tv. 3, 8, 11, 14, 17, 18, 20-23, 27, 34, 35, 48, 39, 50, 54, 62, 79, 84, 86, 92, 100; I. Tv. 5, 8, 10, 15, 18, 19, 23, 28, 30, 34, 36, 47, 49, 61, 63, 68, 71, 78, 87, 89, 91-93, 98, 99, 100; Mū. Tv. 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 32, 34, 36, 40-42, 47-49, 51, 52, 54, 58, 65, 68, 71, 74, 80, 83, 85, 90, 91, 93, 98.
14. M. Tv. 26, 37, 38, 39, 40, 76, 77, 82, 99; I. Tv. 25-28, 33, 45, 46, 53, 70, 72, 75; Mū. Tv. 14, 26, 32, 39, 40, 45, 58, 61-63, 68-73, 75, 89.
15. Annangaracharia., P.B: *Divyārthadīpikāi-1yaṅpā Āyirām*. Vol. I, M. Tv. 100 and I. Tv. 10 (commentary).
16. M. Tv. 100; I. Tv. 100.
17. Mū. Tv. 99 and 100.
18. *ibid.* 69.

scheme. The main theme of this work is the supremacy of Nārāyaṇa, the consort of Śrī (Lakṣmī). He never thinks of Nārāyaṇa without the consort 'Tiru'-Lakṣmī.¹⁹ The statement that has been made in the first stanza of this *Prabandham*,²⁰ that Nārāyaṇa is the supreme Deity is expounded by the Āḷvār step by step with reference to the *Vedas*,²¹ *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas*.²² He finally clinches his argument in the last verse with full confidence.²³ The Āḷvār was a monotheist as he himself admits²⁴ and preached that the one and only God was Viṣṇu while the other two of the triad-Brahmā and Śiva-were created by Him.²⁵ He was sure of a place in Vaikuṇṭha for himself as he had placed a garland of verses (col-mālai) on His feet.²⁶ He declares that he would not sing verses on humans.²⁷ The literature, the music, the *Itihāsas*, the *Purāṇas*, the five elements, the code of Mānu and the *Vedas* are, according to the Āḷvār, the will of Viṣṇu.²⁸ Some thinkers consider that their minds are impediments of realisation and seek to dementalise themselves. But this Āḷvār holds, and this is the most interesting from the point of view of sublimational psychology, that mind is not an impediment at all. It can serve as the most useful and potent instrument of devotion. An easy way is the way of praise and prayer of the Lord by the mind.²⁹ The Āḷvār speaks of the greatness of the devotees of devotees. The devotion of the devotees to the devotees is greater than the devotion to God.³⁰ There is one

19. Nāṅ. Tv. 53, 62.

20. *ibid.*, 1.

21. *ibid.*, 69, 72.

22. *ibid.*, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15-18, 21, 25, 28, 30, 33, 49, 50, 52, 53, 57, 58, 68, 70, 71, 77, 78, 85, 87.

23. *ibid.*, 96.

24. *ibid.* 2, 56, 66, 67, 69, 70, 74, 82, 84 - 86, 92, 93, 96.

25. *ibid.*, 1, 19, 26, 31, 42, 43, 54, 73.

26. *ibid.*, 65.

27. *ibid.*, 75.

28. *ibid.*, 76.

29. *ibid.*, 81.

30. *ibid.*, 18, 89.

stanza in this poem in which the idea of a *kuṛal* - nay the very line itself - is embedded.³¹

TIRUCCANTA-VIRUTTAM: This is the second composition of this Ālvār³² which consists of 120 verses in cantak-kali viruttam and it takes its title after the type of metre employed. This work is admired for its harmonious versification. It is sung to the tune of four equal measures in a line where each foot consists of a long monosyllable, a disyllable and again a monosyllable. This composition is full of rhythmic beauty, perhaps because of the new device thus introduced. Though the style is majestic and elevated, the ideas are crystal clear. It can very well be said that this work expresses the very rhythmic outburst of the Ālvār's heart, springing from his philosophy and religion, warped by the abundance of his love to the Lord. This work is more philosophical than the previous one. It is also more closely packed. It is more metaphysical in the sense that it enumerates the categories in such a way as to point out that everything is ultimately derived from the One. The Ālvār sometimes composes verses out of a series of numbers.³³ These verses describe the categories of existence which are declared to have their source in the Brahman - a doctrine adopted from the *Upaniṣadic* texts. Though this poem begins by employing several of the numericals strung together in pleasing symphony, the significance of which is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary person, the latter portion of the *Prabandham* blossoms into high class mystic poetry.

There are some autobiographical references in his poems. He is believed to have been the son of a *ṛṣi* named Bhārgava, but brought up by a man of the hunting tribe.³⁴ He was a staunch devotee of Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu alone, and

31. *ibid.*, 23, cf. *Kuṛal*-851.

32. T. P. 381.

33. Tc. V. 1 - 5, 77, 79, 83, 114.

34. *ibid.*, 90.

he knew no compromise or commerce with God.³⁵ Owing to his intense *bhakti*, he came to be known as Bhaktisāra. His divine experience was of the immanent type.³⁶ He declares that the Lord, before he was born, stood on Vēnkaṭam, sat in Paramapadam and laid Himself down in the sea of milk (Kṣīrābdhi). That great Lord who is arputaṅ, (one with wonderful powers), who is *anantaśayanān* (reclining on Ādiśēṣa), who is *ādibhūtaṅ* (the first and foremost Being) and who is *mādhavaṅ* (consort of Śrī) stands, sits and reclines within his heart.³⁷ Such was the God-enveloping love of Bhaktisāra. By his intense *bhakti*, the *arcā* as static God became a dynamic Deity of *dayā* or grace.³⁸

The Ālvār was a great scholar both in Sanskrit and in Tamil,³⁹ acquiring equal proficiency in them, and his poems show that he had a competent knowledge of the sacred books of other sects and religions.⁴⁰ His mastery of the *Ramāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is displayed in both of his poems. He is not tolerant as the first three Ālvārs but was even a rancorous opponent of the people of other faiths.⁴¹ He worked ceaselessly for the spread of *Viṣṇu bhakti*. His work was a miracle of mysticism, for it restored the ancient Vaiṣṇavite religion of South India which had been threatened with extinction by non-Vedic sects. It is said in the *Guruparampara* that the Ālvār had entered into the spirit of all the religions of the times before he became a Vaiṣṇavite, and when he was a Śaivite he assumed the name of Civavākkīyar. Civavākkīyar must be earlier than Paṭṭinattār of the tenth century who refers to him in

35. *ibid.*, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35, 44, 45, 48, 68, 72, 75, 78, 84, 86, 92, 98, 104, 105, 107, 111, 117, 118, 120.

36. *ibid.*, 64, 94, 95.

37. *ibid.*, 65.

38. *ibid.*, 61 *vide*. Commentary of Sri P. B. Annangarachariar (*Divyārthadīptikā*)

39. *ibid.* 112. *cf.* *Kural*-334. The idea expressed in both is identical and even the words employed are the same in both.

40. *ibid.*, 1, 4, 10.

41. *Nāṅ. Tv.* 6; *Tc.* V. 69.

his poem.⁴² There is such a close resemblance in the metre and harmonic flow of the poems of Civavākkīyar and the *Tiruccantaviruttam* as to make one believe that both the poems were composed by one and the same author. Further, a number of stanzas occurring in both are almost identical and it is probably this which is responsible for the story in the Vaiṣṇavite tradition. Perhaps in the verses which have come down to us as Civavākkīyar's there are interpolations which because of their style should be assigned to a later age. Similarly the story given in the *Guruparampara*^{42a} must therefore be a later interpolation.

TONṬARATI - P - POTIYĀLVĀR

TONṬARATI-P-POTIYĀLVĀR has left two poems, *Tirumālai*, the sacred Garland of Hymns and *Tiru-p-paḷḷi Eḷucci*, the Hymn of the Morning.

TIRUMĀLAI: The work consisting of forty five verses in aruḥir ācīriya viruttam is supposed to be the earlier composition of this Ālvār. The poem glorifies the greatness of Lord Raṅganātha, the presiding deity at Srīraṅgam. How deeply attached this Ālvār became towards this deity can be seen from the fact that he would not even once mention the name of the presiding deity of any other sacred place in this poem or in his other poem. Even Tiruppāṇālvār who is very much attached to this deity has referred to the Lord of Vēnkaṭam twice in his only hymn of ten stanzas.⁴³ But to Tonṭarati-p-poṭikaḷ Lord Raṅganātha was everything, and there is no place left in his devoted heart even for the same God residing elsewhere. The verses of *Tirumālai* make a direct appeal to the heart. To recite them or even hear them recited 'invariably means being moved to the depth of one's soul. There is no attempt made in the verses to elucidate high philosophy as in the case of Nammālvār, or to indulge in high flown language as in the case of Tirumaṅkai Maṅṅaṅ. Though the Ālvār, in the opening stanza, starts by saying that he has his senses

42. *Tiruvīṭaimaruṭūr mummaṅṅi-k-kōvai*-11, 33.

42a. G.P., pp. 21, 22.

43. A.P. 1, 3.

under control, in the latter stanzas⁴⁴ he refers very often to the time when he was the slave of his senses, and appeals to the Lord for help and succour. The verses stating that he does not even seek birth in this world,⁴⁵ are those asserting the superiority of *bhakti*⁴⁶, and those of vivid description of Lord Raṅganātha⁴⁷ are of great appeal. Many of the sentiments expressed by him about his personal life⁴⁸ really touch the heart of the sophisticated temple-goer and the pseudo-religionist. He tells them that he once tried to deceive the Lord by masquerading as the true devotee; but when he remembered that the person sought to be cheated was not one outside him but one who dwelt in his heart and took note of his thoughts, even as they arose in him, he realised what a fool he had been, and laughed outright at his own stupidity in trying to deceive such a one.⁴⁹ His faith in Viṣṇu has taken so deep a root⁵⁰ that he became intolerent of other sects. In short, this poem touches the heights of religious fervour.

The verse-forms employed in this poem bear a strong resemblance to Appar's *Tirunēricai* and *Tirukkuṟuntāṅṅakam*.

TIRUPPAḶI EḶUCCI: This poem consisting of ten verses in eṅcir āciriya viruttam is supposed to be his later work. This is a fine piece of Morning Hymn seeking to awaken the Sleeping Beauty from His *yoganidra*⁵¹ and make Him respond to the call of devotion for favouring humanity which suffers from the ills of *samsāra* and deserves the grace of God for redemption.⁵² In a way, this composition is similar in con-

44. T.M. 5, 16, 17, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33.

45. *ibid.*, 3.

46. *ibid.*, 41, 42, 43.

47. *ibid.*, 19, 20, 23, 24.

48. *ibid.*, 5, 16, 26, 30, 33.

49. *ibid.*, 34.

50. *ibid.*, 2, 10, 35, 36.

51. This means the sleep of the Lord is of the contemplative type when He is described to be lying on Ādisēṣa.

52. This is an instance of adaptation of the old form *Tuyileṭainilai* to suit the present need of the religion (vide: Tol. Poruḷ. Puṟatiṅṅal-iyal. 36).

tent to *Tiru-p-pāvai* of Āṇṭāl. Both serve the same purpose viz., arousing somebody from slumber though the ulterior motives in both are different. In this piece the symptoms of dawn are being described in such a vivid manner that even as one reads it one can see the glory of the dawn,⁵³ hear the sweet sound of the chirping of birds, and smell the morning fragrance of the blossoming flowers fondly opening their buds to the caressing kisses of the golden rays of the rising sun.⁵⁴ The total disappearance of darkness is well depicted.⁵⁵ In the last verse the Āḷvār entreats the Lord to get up in order to bless him with an appointment as a servant to do service to the devotees of the Lord (aṭiyārs); he has come, he says, carrying in his hands the tuḷaci-garland and the flower-basket on his shoulders.⁵⁶ This poem reaches the heights of pastoral poetry.

KULACĒKARĀḶVĀR

PERUMĀL TIRUMOḶI: The Āḷvār is the author of only one poem known as *Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi* consisting of 105 verses in six types of metres⁵⁷ roughly divided into ten decads. He has a vivid imagination which helps him portray in dramatic monologues the scenes which appeal to him in the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. But the Ramāyaṇa is his favourite theme. There are three decads each relating to the story of Rāma. In the first the Āḷvār sings a lullaby (tālāṭṭu) for Rāmā as a baby in the cradle.⁵⁸ This song of lullaby on the child Rāma by the Āḷvār gives really a joy to his readers. As one poet states "even when singing of the omnipotent divinity it is more charming and enchanting to sing of it as a child."⁵⁹ Love towards a child is

53. T.E. 1, 2, 3.

54. *ibid.*, 5.

55. *ibid.*, 7, 8.

56. The name borne by this Āḷvār. *Tuṭṭaṇṇi-p-poḷi*, meaning "the dust of the feet of true devotees" is really a title which he longed to have conferred on him as is clear from this stanza.

57. *encīr āciriya viruttam*, *aruṭṭi viruttam*, *cantakkali viruttam*, *aruṭṭi viruttam*, *cantakkali viruttam*, *kaliviruttam*, and *kocchaka-kalippā*.

58. *Perum. Tm. 8.*

59. *Amutāṇṇikal Pūllai-t-tumli. 1.*

the innocent joy of selflessness. In that mood, poetry becomes sincere and captivates any heart. In the second of the decads he becomes Daśaratha and we hear the heart-rending cry of Daśaratha, the father of Rāma when the latter was exiled.⁶⁰ It is difficult to read this *Tirumōḷi* without being moved to tears. The pathos is smiting and killing.⁶¹ The language and the sentiments are so realistic and touching. In the third, which is really the last decad of this poem, the Āḷvār gives a rapid recapitulation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a graphic manner mentioning such important episodes which appealed to him most.⁶²

As Rāma among the *avatāras*, Śrī Raṅganātha among the *arcās* exercised great fascination over the mind of this Āḷvar. There are three decads on the Lord of Tiruvaraṅkam. In the opening decad, he longs to have a vision of the grand Sleeping Beauty of Tiruvaraṅkam.⁶³ In the second, he reveals his zeal to be in the company of devotees; he points out that there is no greater profit or pleasure for the eyes than to look at the gathering of the meyyaṭiyārs (true devotees) of Raṅganātha who dance in ecstasy out of feelings of love towards the sweet Honey that resides in the small island.⁶⁴ The dust on the feet of these devotees is holier than the waters of the Gaṅgā.⁶⁵ In the third, the Āḷvār admits his madness after God.⁶⁶ The best known hymn of this Āḷvār is the one which

60. *ibid.*; 9. Kampan utilises this episode in his immortal Epic. In his *Rāmāyaṇa* a speech of this kind comes before Rāma actually leaves for the forest whilst Daśaratha is being attended by Kausalyā (*Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* 4: 54-65).

61. cf. Rāmā's lament: K.R. *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa*: Tiruvati-cūttup-paṭalam. (65-66).

62. *Perum. Tm. 10*.

63. *ibid.*, 1.

64. *ibid.*, 2.

65. *ibid.*, 2: 2. The phrase 'tonṭarati-p-paṭi'—'the dust on the feet of the devotees' is found as the name of an Āḷvār. In all likelihood, this is a reference to Tonṭaraṭippoṭi Āḷvār, who, it has been proved in the first chapter of this section, was a predecessor of this Āḷvār.

66. *ibid.*, 3.

relates to the Lord of the Seven Hills.⁶⁷ His God-love has assumed an extraordinary aspect. To be near Him, to gaze at and enjoy the beauty of His coral lips, he is willing to forego even the essence of his soul and become an inanimate, senseless and thoughtless object. He seeks to be a stork, a fish, a bearer of the Lord's golden spittoon, a flowering tree, a bush, a peak, a river, a pathway, a stepping stone⁶⁸ at the gate in the *sanctum sanctorum*, in that sacred Hill. The similes employed by him in the Vittuvakōṭu hymn are quite appropriate and convincing.⁶⁹

Kṛṣṇa, the sweet Enchanter, has claimed the attention of this Ālvār in two decads. In the one he puts himself in the place of Dēvakī, the mother who gave birth to Kṛṣṇa, and weeps and wails over the miserable fate of that lady who was obliged to give up the Divine Child born to her to the care and custody of another (Yasōtā), to whom alone was given the transcendental bliss of enjoying His cradle-days and watching with delight His lisps and numerous playful pranks.⁷⁰ The sentiments of an illfated mother have been expressed here with dramatic technique. In the other, he assumes the role of a gōpī who has found out what a "black-guard" this Black God really is, and assaults Him in the excess of her love towards Him, and accuses Him of several misdeeds and breaches of faith.⁷¹ It presents delightful reading.

TIRUP-PĀNĀLVĀR

AMALANĀTIPIRĀN: This poem of Tiruppānālvār is the shortest one in the collection of *Nālāyiram*. It consists of only one beautiful hymn of ten verses in two types of

67. *ibid.*, 4.

68. *ibid.* 4:9. It is because of this Ālvār that the step to the *sanctum sanctorum* in every Vaiṣṇavite shrine is known as *Kulacēkara-paṭi*.

69. *Perum. Tm.* 5.

70. *ibid.*, 7.

71. *ibid.*, 6. cf. *TVM.* 6.2.

metres⁷². *Amalanātipirāṇ*, the name of poem, is really not a name, but the opening words of the poem. The verses describe graphically the Ālvār's grand vision of the Lord at Tiruvaraṅkam (Śrīraṅgam) – His sacred feet,⁷³ His apparel,⁷⁴ His navel,⁷⁵ His waist girdle,⁷⁶ His chest,⁷⁷ His neck and shoulders,⁷⁸ His face and crown,⁷⁹ His eyes,⁸⁰ and His whole body,⁸¹ all so beautiful and captivating to the Ālvār's heart, so life-like and divine. The Ālvār winds up the poem by stating how the cloud-hued cowherd and butter-mouthed Lord has stolen his heart.⁸² The last line of this hymn breathes the transcendent air: "My eyes having beheld Thee cannot verily have any place for seeing anything else." The Ālvār follows here the tradition that physical frame of the deity should be described from foot to head (*pādādi keśa*). It is the Ālvār's vision of the Sleeping Beauty that is beautifully projected forth in these verses. God is defined as *amalan*, the eternally pure, whom only the pure in heart could see. He adores God as the Holy, the Pure and the Perfect (*amalan*, *vimalan*, *nirmalan*) and feels blessed by the fact that the divine love invaded his inner being and cleansed him of all sins.

This beautiful poem has appealed so very much to the heart of the great scholar, philosopher, logician and poet, Vēdānta Deśika, who has written a commentary on these ten verses. For an appreciative description of beauty in the *arcā* form of the Lord this poem has no equal. All the other qualities of God are really derived or inferred from that

72. *ācīriyat-turai* and *kaliviruttam*.

73. A.P. 1.

74. *ibid.* 2.

75. *ibid.* 3.

76. *ibid.* 4.

77. *ibid.* 5.

78. *ibid.* 6.

79. *ibid.* 7.

80. *ibid.* 8.

81. *ibid.* 9.

82. *ibid.* 10.

beauty, and enjoyed as adjuncts to that beauty. The exquisite simplicity of this beautiful hymn and the deep, sincere emotion it evokes make it an outstanding contribution among the poems of the Ālvārs. Vēdānta Deśika has aptly said that the hymn of this Ālvār contains the quintessence of the *Nālāyiram*,⁸³ that it is the seed of all that the Vēdāntins have said⁸⁴ and that it is the essence of the four *Vedas*.⁸⁵

TIRUMAṆKAIYĀLVĀR

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār, also known as Tirumaṅkai Maṅṅaṅ, Kaliyaṅ and Parakālaṅ, is the most learned of the Ālvārs and he has left to us six poems, namely, *Periya Tirumoḷi*, *Tirukkuṟuntāṅṅakam*, *Tiruneṅuntāṅṅakam*, *Tiruvelukkūṟṟirukkai*, *Cīṟiya Tirumaṅal*, and *Periya Tirumaṅal*.⁸⁶ He is quite conscious of his own distinction as a Tamil scholar,⁸⁷ like Campantar among the Nāyaṅmārs. The works of this Ālvār and those of Nammālvār constitute the major portion of the Tamil *Veda* (Tamil Maṟai) by which name the *Nālāyiram* is known to the Śrī Vaiṣṇavites.

PERIYA TIRUMOḶI: This beautiful long poem consisting of 1084 verses in eleven types of metres⁸⁸ arranged in eleven centums each containing ten decads (hymns) of at least ten verses in each decad is the collection of lyrical utterances on his enjoyment of the beauty and other auspicious qualities of different deities installed at the various sacred places from Badarināth⁸⁹ in the north and Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi⁹⁰ in the south. Two shrines, those of Nācciyārkoṟil⁹¹ near Kumbakonam and

83. T.P., 130.

84. *ibid.*, 131.

85. *ibid.*, 132.

86. U.R.M. 9.

87. Peri. Tm. 1. 7: 10; 4.4: 10; 5.1: 10; 6.6: 10; 9.3: 10; 10.1: 10.

88. Koccakak-kalippā, kaḷittāḷicai, kalinilaittuṟai, veṅṅuṟai, ācīriyat-
tuṟai, aṟucīr ācīriya viruttam, eḷucīr ācīriya viruttam, eṅcīr
viruttam, kaliviruttam, vaṅci viruttam, and cantakkaliviruttam.

89. Peri, Tm. 1.3; 1.4.

90. *ibid.*, 9.5; 9.6.

91. Called Tirunaṟaiyūr in the poem. *ibid.*, 6.4. to 6.10; 7.1 to 7.3.

Tirukkannapuram⁹² near Nannilam in Thaṅjavūr District, have 100 verses each at a stretch to themselves. Several others have far less, but even then quite a considerable number to themselves. In all, this Ālvār has sung about eighty-six sacred places out of the total of 108 according to a Vaiṣṇavite tradition.⁹³ His journey from one end of the country to the other singing the praise of God and practising His loving presence is really the pilgrim's progress to and in God and ascent from earth to heaven. He begins this poem in his own characteristic way with a confession of his previous sinfulness followed by the feeling of security obtained by uttering the holy name of Nārāyaṇa and ends it with a celebration of the joy of *mukti* or the freedom from the fear of *samsāra*.⁹⁴ The agonies of *samsāra* are compared by him to the state of a storm-tossed vessel,⁹⁵ of the ant caught up between the burning ends of a faggot,⁹⁶ the pack of jackals on an island enveloped by rising floods⁹⁷ and a person facing a cobra in his residence.⁹⁸ His self-accusations are spontaneous and sincere, though disproportionately heavy to the actual sins committed by him and not merely conventional self-reproach. They were the result not of sick-mindedness but of devotional sensitiveness and fervour.⁹⁹ In his hymns of glory of God, he visualises the varied incarnations of Viṣṇu, especially of Śrī Kṛṣṇa owing to his *saulabhya* or unique accessibility even to the worst sinner.¹⁰⁰ He calls out to his fellow-beings not to starve their senses or go to the forest,

92. Peri. Tm. 8.1 to 8.10.

93. Vide: Piḷḷaip-perumāḷ Ayyengar's *Nūrṇettu-t-tiruppati Antāḷi*.

94. Peri. Tm. 1.1

95. *ibid.* 11.8: 2.

96. *ibid.* 11.8: 4.

97. *ibid.* 11.8: 5.

98. *ibid.* 11.8: 3.

99. *ibid.* 1.1: 1; 3.5: 8; 1.6:1 to 9; 1.8; 1.10; 2.1; 2.5; 2.10; 3.5; 3.8; 3.9; 3.10; 4.3; 4.6; 4.7; 4.9; 5.3; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8; 5.9; 5.10; 6.1; 6.2; 6.3; 6.4; 6.8; 6.9; 6.10; 7.1; 7.2; 7.3; 7.4; 7.5; 7.6; 7.7; 7.9; 7.10; 8.6; 8.8; 8.9; 8.10; 9.3; 9.5; 9.7; 9.8; 9.9; 9.10; 10.9; 10.10; 11.1; 11.2; 11.4; 11.8.

100. *ibid.*, 10.6; 11.5 Besides these decads, there are innumerable references in the Peri. Tm.

and do rigid *tapas* amidst the five fires ; he advises them to quench their passion by communion with God.¹⁰¹ But he always emphasizes that to realize God one should be righteous, should subdue or sublimate one's five senses and fix one's mind on Him with love and devotion. He prefers the feminine path of bridal love.¹⁰² He uses folk-song motifs.¹⁰³ In one decad he makes the *rākṣasas* pray for refuge from Rāmā and seek his sympathy¹⁰⁴ and in another he makes them dance praying the monkey chiefs not to harm them any further since they recite Rāmā's name with devotion.¹⁰⁵ The Piḷlai-t-tamiḷ motif is also found in this poem.¹⁰⁶ Besides his innumerable references to *vibhava* forms of God in the poem, he revels in *avatāras* in one decad.¹⁰⁷ In another hymn the Ālvār speaks of nine *avatāras*.¹⁰⁸ In one group, the verses contain in each of them a general statement, rather in the form of a proverb, to support the particular event described therein.¹⁰⁹ This long poem contains a mine of information on matters of great interest useful for life.

THE TWO TĀṆṬAKAMS : *Tāṇṭakam*¹¹⁰ is a form of poetry, generally a poem on God which consists of *viruttams*

101. *ibid.* 3;2: 1, 2, 3 etc. (whole decad) 3.4 (whole decad).
 102. *ibid.* 2.7; 2.8; 3.6; 3.7; 4.8; 5.5; 8.1; 8.2; 8.3; 8.5; 9.2; 9.3; 9.4; 9.5; 9.9; 10.9; 10.10; 11.1; 11.2; 11.3.
 103. Where there was not a Tamil king as in the Caṅkam age, the poets had to look to the common man for support. They therefore began to sing folk-songs and develop folk literature. The genesis of this interest in the common man began only at the time of Nāyanmārs and Ālvārs. The earliest work on Śaiva Siddhānta, *Tirūvuntiyar* by Uyyavanta Tēvar, is a folk song. This motif was successfully handled by Tattuvarāyar, the eighteen *cittars*, Tāyumāṇavar and Rāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ.
 104. Peri. Tm. 10.2. Poṅkattam Poṅkō.
 105. *ibid.* 10.3, Kulamaṇitūram.
 106. *ibid.* 10.4; 10.5 cf. Periyal. Tm. 3.1. and 1.6 respectively.
 107. *ibid.* 11.4.
 108. *ibid.* 8.8.
 109. *ibid.* 10.9., Paḷamoḷiyāl paṇintu uraitta pāṭtu.
 110. This is one of the compositions of ninety-six kinds, and the *Pāṭṭiyals* (grammatical works on prosody and poetics) give us the explanations about a number of these compositions. But no work

of four feet verses containing *six cirs* or *eight cirs*. A Poem containing *six-cir viruttams* is known as *Kuṟuntāṇṭakam* and the one containing *eight cir viruttams* *Neṭuntāṇṭakam*.¹¹¹ The genesis of this form of poetry is traced to Tirunāvukkaracar *alias* Appar whose *Tirut-tāṇṭaakam* is so simple, so sincere, full of all the varying emotions of his heart, full of that divine message so appealing even to an illiterate person. It is said that in this particular kind of composition he has no equal and he has rightly earned the name 'Tāṇṭaka-vēntu'. (Master of Tāṇṭakam). The *Tāṇṭakams* of Appar are only *Neṭuntāṇṭakams*.

It is perhaps that Tirumānkaiyālvār has modelled his two *Tāṇṭakams*, namely, *Tirukkuṟuntāṇṭakam* and *Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* on Appar's poems. The former poem contains twenty verses in *aṟuctr āciriya viruttam* and the latter thirty *pacurams* in *eṇctr āciriya viruttam*. Some scholars will classify the thirty verses of the second poem into three decads on the basis of its content or purport. *Kuṟuntāṇṭakam* is not found any where else in Tamil literature except in the *Divya Prabandham*.¹¹² In the first poem, the Ālvār says

has arrived yet at the figure ninety-six. These *Paṭṭiyals* give some astrological explanation of words and metres as being auspicious and unauspicious with reference to the nativity, star and caste of the patron on whom a poem is composed. This poetic tradition of astrological convention is not accepted by the commentators like Nacṇārkkīṇiyar, probably because it is not even hinted at in *Tolkāppiam* (vide commentary on *Paṭṭuppāṭṭu* by Nacṇārkkīṇiyar-*Malaipaṭukaṭām*, 1.145.).

111. The principle of *Tāṇṭakam* is not based on the canons of Tamil Grammar. It is based on Sanskrit prosody and poetics according to which the principle is based on letters called '*laghu*' and '*guru*' (vide *Paṇṇirupāṭṭiyal* commentary to Sūtra 196). There is a letter-limit to each foot of a *Tāṇṭakam* verse. In a *Kuṟuntāṇṭakam* the lower limit is fifteen and the upper limit is twenty six letters including the consonants; in a *Neṭuntāṇṭakam* verse each foot should contain more than twenty six letters.
112. But this poem is equated with Appar's *Tirunēricai* in accordance with the rules of prosody. (*Paṇṇiru Tirumuṟai Varalāṟu*-pp.321, 331.). Another scholar equates *Tāṇṭakam* with '*Koccakavorupūku*' of *Tolkāppayim*) *Yāḷ Nūl*, pp.219-220).

that the Lord has taken abode in him;¹¹³ he cannot leave him and he will enjoy his innumerable auspicious qualities.¹¹⁴ The Lord is the unsupported supporter. He is the independent on whom all can depend or do depend.¹¹⁵ The only way to get rid of the possible causes of the mental distresses is to praise the lotus feet of the Lord; there seems to be no other method or means.¹¹⁶ God came to him, out of His own accord and revealed himself in the inner eye and by this vision, there has occurred purification after this vision of the Divine the Ālvār refuses to see any thing else.¹¹⁷ It is this vision that is the true beginning of faith which serves as the raft to cross over the oceanic experience of *saṃsāra*. Not *yōga* nor steady seat nor the control of senses nor *prāṇāyāma* grants this fixity of mind but His grace that cuts our sins and grants the Vision of the most attractive form which alone can salvage man and his soul.¹¹⁸ Worship of God, to chant His name, to sing His praise in all forms of His are the ways and the means to this intimacy of Vision and the Kingdom Eternal, the resplendent abode of Bliss.¹¹⁹ In the second poem the Ālvār speaks directly in the first decad; and in the second and third decads he speaks in the guise of the bride's mother and the bride respectively and so they relate to the bridal mysticism of the Ālvār. It is said that the famous Vaiṣṇava ācārya Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was an adept in discoursing on this poem especially the twenty first verse. The verses in this poem are not given to verbosity or florid style; they are simple, soulful utterances which reach the innermost recesses of our beings.

TIRUVELUKKŪRRIRUKKI: This is a beautiful single Hymn of Surrender, to the deity at Kumbakonam Who is in the lying state. It consists of forty seven lines and is in *ācīrt-*

113. T.K. 1.

114. *ibid.* 2.

115. *ibid.* 6.

116. *ibid.* 11.

117. *ibid.* 12, 13.

118. *ibid.* 18.

119. *ibid.* 15, 16, 17 and 20.

yuppā metre¹²⁰ (*Nilaimaṅṅila āciryappā*) of Tamil prosody. It belongs to 'rathabandha', a kind of poem among the group of poems called acrostics (*citrakavis*). The words and phrases of this poem can be arranged in the form of a *ratha* or chariot the upper and lower parts of which are symmetrical to each other.¹²¹ The Āḷvār extols the creative and saving power of the Lord and signifies absolute surrender to Him. So we have in this poem a complete illustration of the multiplanal nature of God, His absolute and sovereign transcendence as well as the beneficence of the Deity fully inculcated. It reveals the *tattvaśhita* and *puruṣārtha* and thus gives an integral account, as far as it goes, and reveals that it is only an integral surrender, or surrender to the godhead in all levels of His and our existence that can help the attainment.

THE TWO MAṬALS: *Maṭal* is one aspect of *Akam* poetry and the literary composition on that aspect of love came to be called *Maṭal*. This composition will usually be in *Kalivenpā* metre. Of the two beautiful poems on the deity at Tirunaṟaiyūr, otherwise called Nācciyārkoil near Kumbakonam, the shorter one consisting of 155 lines was called *Cirṭya Tirumaṭal* and the longer one consisting of 297 lines *Periva Tirumaṭal*. In Caṅkam literature itself we have refe-

120. *Āciryappā* is of four kinds: *Nēricai āciryappā*; *Nilaimaṅṅila āciryappā* *ṅaikkuraḷāciryappā* and *Aṭimarimaṅṅila āciryappā*. In the first kind there will be four cīrs in all the lines excepting the last but one which consists of only three cīrs; in the second all the lines contain four cīrs, in the third the first and the last line contains four cīrs and the lines in between two cīrs and three cīrs; and in the fourth if stress is given in the beginning, the middle at the end, there won't be any change either in the rhythm or in the meaning. There is no fixed number of lines in the four kinds. (vide; *Yāpparuṅkalakkārikai-28*)

121. Even the saints and the religious poets indulged in this kind of acrostics. There are five poems of this kind, so far known to Tamil literature. The poem of this Āḷvār and a poem found in *Māṟaṅ Alankāram* by Tirukkurukai - p-perumāl kavirāyar belong to Vaiṣṇavite literature; the poem found in the *First Tirumuṟai* by Campantar and the one composed by Nakkīratēva Nāyaṅār found in the *Eleventh Tirumuṟai* belong to Śaivite literature. The fifth poem is found in *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti with varia lectico* (p. 500).

rences to the possibilities of a lover committing suicide when his love is not returned.¹²² A Caṅkam poet Mātaṅkīraṅār who has sung only two poems¹²³ on this minor theme has his name prefixed by the title 'maṭal pāṭiya' (one who has sung maṭal). The maṭal is stated to be the palmyra stalk which the lover rides on in order to make public the love that he bears in acutest form. The *Tolkāppiyam* mentions this as maṭal-mā, that is, a horse made of palmyra stalk.¹²⁴ In *Kalittokai* we get a detailed description of a disappointed unfortunate lover besmearing himself with ashes, wearing the wreaths of unblossomed erukkam buds (*calatropis gigantea*) on his chest, holding in his right hand the portrait of the lady whom he loves and being dragged round whilst he is seated on a horse made of the sword-like palmyra branches.¹²⁵ This in motion will cut through his body. The idea behind this act is to create a public rumour or clamour about her and her lover, so much so, that the lady in love will come to know about his feelings. That the maṭal leads to this public scandal or sympathy, whatever be the case, is considered to be a great gain, for the goal is the thing and not the means. There is nothing unworthy in such unilateral love, even though the maṭal may not be the wisest way of making one's innermost inexpressible desires. But love knows neither rhyme nor reason, neither decorum nor decency. Its one aim is to achieve the beloved or die. In *Akam* poetry there is merely a threat to perform this ritual. Man only is qualified to undergo this trial.¹²⁶ But Tirumaṅkaiyālvār in both his

122. NRR. 146, 152, 342, 377; KRN. 14, 17, 32, 173, 182. The reference is for pure *aiṅṅai* only.

123. KRN. 182; NRR. 377.

124. TLK. Porul - Sūtra. 99 (Ilam).

125. Neytal Kali. 21, cf. *Ilakkana Vilakkam-Sūtra*. 857 and KRN. 17. There is a reference in *Tirūkkurāḷ* also. Vide Kurāḷ. 1131 to 1137. Vide also: *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*. (1956), p. 123.

126. *Panniru-pāṭṭiyal* - sūtra. 146. But in the next sūtra (147) women also get the qualification to perform the ritual if gods become their heroes or lovers. But it is in any way not the Tamil ideal. vide. Kurāḷ - 1137; TLK. Porul - Sūtra. 54 (Ilam). The commentator Ilāmpūraṅār emphasizes that the act will be performed by man only.

Maṭals, makes this threat come from a woman. The woman here is the soul in love with God. The Āḷvār himself feels this threat by a woman is unknown in the Tamil Land as it is exotic to the Tamil ideal, but he will prefer, he says, to follow the Northern Practice (*vaṭaneṟi*) which permits even women to exhibit their erotic ardour¹²⁷ and therefore appeals to the story of Vācavatattai going on her own accord in search of her husband Utayanaṅṅ.¹²⁸ Even according to the philosophy of this Āḷvār, God the lover should come to save the soul; but the soul is so evolved as to bear no separation any more and hankers, if one may use the word, after the Lord; and this may be described as running after Him. The mere reference to resort to such an act of maṭalēṟutal by a lover is made in '*anpin aintiṅai* (idealised love aspects);¹²⁹ but the actual riding is treated in *peruntinai* (improper lust),¹³⁰ The maṭal motif is beautifully handled by Tattuvarāyar and others for expressing their love towards their Guru¹³¹. But in later day works this motif came to be used in an obscene ways.¹³² A new and glorious use, however, has been made of this conception of maṭal by Kirusṅa Piḷḷai. The poet speaks of Christ's crucifixion as Māṭalēṟutal, sacrificing himself for this love of mankind.¹³³ Here is indeed a flash of original poetic imagination bringing out the underlying idea of crucifixion in terms of a convention of *Akam* poetry.

127. P. TML. - couplets 39, 40. cf. *Rg Veda*. X. 95,. 14. practised by Pūruruvas or threatened to be practised by him against Urvasi who pleads with him not to do so, cf. also *Sat Brah.* XI. 5.1: 6-9.

128. C. TML. - Couplets - (66-68).

129. TLK. *Porul* - Sūtra. 99 (Ilam); the nine poems in *Narṅṅinai* and *Kuṅṅutokai* already referred to.

130. *ibid.*, Sūtra. 54. There are ten poems in *Kalittokai* (138-147) relating to this theme. Among them, four poems describe masculine *Peruntinai* and six feminine *Peruntinai*. cf. "Woman.....has far greater gifts for love than man, that is, taking love in its nobler meaning, for that feeling which fills the whole being, is steady and faithful, grows ever deeper, and is strongly mingled with altruistic elements" (Meyer: *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, p. 277).

131. Tattuvarāyar: *Kal Maṭal*.

132. *Varuṅkulattittan Uḷā Maṭal*.

133. *Iratcaṅṅya yāttirṅkam*.

In both the *Maṭals*, the Āḷvār posits that out of the four-fold goals or *summum bonum* of life viz., *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mōkṣa*, *kāma* alone is the true goal of the human endeavour that a knowing person ought to desire for; he even makes fun of the states attained by the votaries of the other three goals as they are utterly unverifiable and shifty.¹³⁴ The hankering of modern mind to fulfil itself here and now, without waiting to go to regions beyond and in times to come, is very well reflected in these two poems. Indeed, if the story of the Āḷvār prior to his conversion is to be considered in this context, it is clear that he had loved his beloved deeply and wholly. He was prepared to dare to do any thing for the sake of his object of adoration. Not to have loved at all is one of the things he could hardly put up with. In the *Maṭals* he just transfers his affection from his dear wife who had been his teacher too in one sense,¹³⁵ to the Lord Nārāyaṇa. These two beautiful poems are, in short, merely dramatization of the acute psychosis set up by his faith in absolute self-surrender to the Lord.

* * * * *

In the poems of this Āḷvār the hills¹³⁶ and rivers¹³⁷ get a pictureseque description. The groves, fields and the humming of the bees with the sprightly fishes jumping from one rivulet to the adjacent water-way¹³⁸ add to the attractiveness of the shrines which are dealt with by the Āḷvār. The recitation of the *Vedas*, the training which the learned brahmins had in the *Vedāṅgas* and the holy rituals which were undertaken by them tend to glorify the religious atmosphere in which the deities in some shrines are described.¹³⁹ Apart from the religious fervour which actuated this Āḷvār to undertake a pilgrimage, the beauties of nature did not fail to attract the

134. *P.TML.* Couplets (10-37),

135. It was she (Kumutavalli) who directed the Āḷvār's affection in religion to the Object Adorable, Nārāyaṇa.

136. *Peri. Tm*; 1.2; 1.7; 2.1.

137. *ibid.* 1.4.

138. *ibid.* 2.10; 3.1, 4, 8, 9, 10; 4.10; 5. 2, 3, 4; 9.8.

139. *ibid.* 3.4: 1; 3.5: 6; 4.2: 2; 5.1: 8; 7.5: 1; 9.7: 10.

Ālvār which, unlike as in the case of nature poets who had given themselves to epic glorification, were meaningful to this Ālvār only when they were presented in the association of the Lord.

PERIYĀLVĀR

PERIYĀLVĀR TIRUMOLI: Viṣṇu-cittaṅ whose surname, or rather title is Periyālvār¹⁴⁰—the Great Ālvār (Elder Saint)—is the author of *Periyālvār Tirumoli* consisting of 463 verses in eight types of metres.¹⁴¹ The first Tirumoli is known as *Tiruppallāṅṅu*.¹⁴² There is a Vaiṣṇavite traditional story about the birth of this decad. Pāṇṭiya king was so pleased with the exposition by this Ālvār of the superiority of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Deity and of the greatness of Śrī Vaiṣṇava *Siddhānta* as a philosophy of religion that he honoured him in the right royal style and arranged for a procession through the streets of Maturai for Viṣṇu-cittaṅ seated on an elephant. As if to enjoy the unique honour done to His devotee, the Lord Himself seated on His vehicle Garuda appeared with all His beauty, majesty and glory. Viṣṇu-cittaṅ witnessed Him and felt the magnanimity with which the Lord was possessed, as a result of which He gave *darśana* to him and to the large concourse of people thronging in the streets. In a trice he forgot His greatness, supremacy and prowess about which he had discoursed so eloquently in the polemic held in the king's court a little while ago. A great fear seized him that some evil eye (Kaṇ eccil) may be cast

140. There is a vaiṣṇavite tradition about this title to this Ālvār. No Ālvār before or after him sang the song of long life (*Tiruppallāṅṅu*) to God and for the enduring kingdom of God and Glory on earth. This is one of the two reasons why Viṣṇu-cittaṅ is called Periyālvār (U.R.M. 18). The other reason is that the Ālvār was given the opportunity of offering to the Lord the garland worn by Āṇṭāl. He got the reputation of having become great (*mahattara*) which he could not get by singing in praise of the Lord (*Gōḍaṣṭuti* 10).

141. arucīr ācīriya viruttam, ejuēr ācīriya viruttam, eñcīr ācīriya viruttam, cantakkali viruttam, kali viruttam, kalittāḷicai, kalinilaittuṇṇai and kuṇṇai veṇcentuṇṇai.

142. A discussion about the nature of its composition is included in the previous chapter.

on Him and his beauty, to the right of which human eyes are not accustomed, and that some evil may befall Him on its account. At once he burst into song praying for, or rather blessing Him with, long life (eternal years) and every prosperity. This is *Tiruppallāṅṭu*.¹⁴³ Such a mental frame and such a song can only be the outcome of overwhelming love towards God, so overwhelming that it makes one forget His great power and reduces Him to the state of an object of protection, though in truth and fact He is the protector of the world.¹⁴⁴

Periyālvār is the poet of the divine child. His love towards God is peculiar. It is one of a father to a son, of a mother to her darling and there is appropriateness in his wishing God "eternal years". That love had converted him into Yacōtai and made him enjoy the pleasures and ecstasies of maternal love towards Lord Kṛṣṇa. Barring the first *Tirumōḷi*, a major portion of this *Prabandha* deals with the child-life of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is from the second decad of his first *Tirumōḷi* that the Ālvār sings, perhaps as His loving mother in all the details of a child's life in the nursery, where the background is mythological. Beginning with the birth of Kṛṣṇa in the second decad of the first *Tirumōḷi* the Ālvār goes on in the succeeding decads to describe His beauty,¹⁴⁵ to put Him in the cradle and sing lullaby to Him,¹⁴⁶ and call Him with extended hands to toddle towards him¹⁴⁷ and clasp His hands,¹⁴⁸ to invite Him to come and bathe and to wear

143. This reminds us at once of Cētanār's *Tiruppallāṅṭu* in the ninth *Tirumurai* of the Saivites.

144. Such a blessing in Vaiṣṇavite parlance is called *Maṅgalāśāsanam* or wishing for, desiring, and praying for *maṅgalam* or auspiciousness (welfare). *Āśirvādam* (blessing) is what a superior or elderly person utters or invokes in regard to one inferior or younger; when an inferior invokes the welfare of the superior person, generally and only God, it is called *Maṅgalāśāsanam*.

145. Periyal. Tm. 1.2.

146. *ibid.* 1.3.

147. *ibid.* 1.4; 1.5; 1.7; 1.8.

148. *ibid.* 1.6.

flowers¹⁴⁹ and so on.¹⁵⁰ It is therefore that the commentator Periyavāccāṅ Pillai has fittingly said that Lord Kṛṣṇa who resides in the Ālvār's heart heard the story of His birth and growth narrated by him.¹⁵¹ It is said by learned Tamil scholars that the germs of the *Piḷḷai-t-tamiḷ* type of poetry singing the childhood of any hero or God, has been first laid down by this Ālvār.¹⁵² As the trammels of conventionalised poetry are not seen in this Ālvār, he may be looked upon as the originator of this new kind of poetry.¹⁵³ It is only from the fourth *Tirumōḷi* onwards the Ālvār deals with the sacred shrines.

Several of the sentiments voiced forth by this Ālvār in his *Prabandha* show the intensity and sincerity of his devotion towards God. He counts among his hungry days not those days on which he starves, but those on which he does not resort to the Lord with the flowers culled from the *Vedas*.¹⁵⁴ He advises people to name their children with the names of the Lord so that when calling them they will be necessarily uttering the names of the Lord and thereby unwittingly earning the merit of having repeated the Lord's names.¹⁵⁵ To Lord Raṅganātha, the presiding deity at Tiruvaraṅkam, he pays his humble obeisance even now—a prayer made in advance—so that He may come and protect him during his last moments when he may in all probability be unable to think or talk.¹⁵⁶ He winds up his *Prabandha* by exultingly speaking the infinite mercy of the Lord to save his soul of how the Lord has taken His seat within him and how fondly He has come and

149. *ibid.* 2.4; 2.7.

150. *cf. Periyālvār Tirumōḷi* 1.2 to 3.6 with the early portion of the *Daśāmaskandha* (Tenth canto) of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* dealing with Kṛṣṇa's birth, infancy and boyhood.

151. *Commentary to the hymn. Periyal. Tm. 5.4: 11* (last stanza).

152. *A History of Tamil Literature. p. 78.* For a full discussion vide *ibid.*, pp. 144-146.

153. The influence of this Ālvār can be seen in Vallabhācārya's worship of Bālakṛṣṇa.

154. *Periyal. Tm. 5.1 : 6.*

155. *ibid.* 4.6.

156. *ibid.* 4.10.

settled in his heart after rejecting and renouncing His glorious bed in the midst of the cool ocean and his soft couch on Ādiśeṣa¹⁵⁷ There is one verse here which shows the appropriateness of his having been named Viṣṇu-cittaṅ.¹⁵⁸ His powerful description of Gaṅgā descending from the top of the Himālayas with unprecedented force reminds us of Tirumañ-kaiyālvār who describes things of that sort with poetic elegance and grandeur.¹⁵⁹ There is another verse which gives the quintessence of philosophy.¹⁶⁰

Though the poetry of this Ālvār is of a high order, it is his language that arrests our attention. He avoids the learned style and uses colloquialisms, mostly brahminical, of his age. A proverb 'paṅṅaṅṅu paṅṅinam kāppu', very much in vogue during his time is found in a whole decad.¹⁶¹ The Ālvār introduces certain stories of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma which must have been current in the Tamil country as for example the story of Cīmālikaṅ¹⁶² and the incident of Rāma being bound by Śītā with a jasmine garland¹⁶³ which have not been mentioned by Vyāsa, Śukā or Vālmiki. There is an element of bridal mysticism in two decads.¹⁶⁴

157. *ibid.* 5.4: 9, 10. cf. 5.2: 10.

158. *ibid.* 5.4, 5. cf. 5.4: 7, 9.

159. *ibid.* 4.7: 4, 9. cf. Peri. Tm. 1. 4.

160. *ibid.* 4.7: 10 where there is a play on the number Three as we find in the poem of Bhaktiśāra.

161. *ibid.* 5.2. This *Tirumoli* can be compared with a verse in Piḷḷaperumāḷ Ayyengar's poem *Tiruvarāṅkattumālai* (st. 102). Here 'paṅṅinam' stands for the individual soul. The implication is that the soul is not in its previous state; it is now fortified by Him.

162. *ibid.* 2.7: 8. (vide Appendix. III).

163. *ibid.* 3. 10: 2. Perhaps the Ālvār is influenced by the incident narrated about this Dīōnāga's *Kundamāli*. In this hymn Hanumāṅ refers to certain episodes known only to Śītā and Rāma in order to prove that he is the accredited messenger from Rāma. Kampaṅ utilises these and elaborates them in the scene where Hanumāṅ meets Śītā in the *Aśoka vaṅgam*. (K.R. Cuntara *Kāṅṅam*. 4: 60-62).

164. *ibid.* 3.7; 3.8.

It is interesting to note that Periyālvār's life and philosophy has so attracted Kṛṣṇadēva Rāya, the emperor of Vijayanagar that he wrote a beautiful *kāvya*, *Āmuktamālyadā* or *Vijñāna-Cittiva*, one of the five great *Kāvyas* in Telugu. This *kāvya* deals with the life of the Ālvār, his exposition of Vaiṣṇavism and the love between his foster-daughter Āṇṭāl and the Lord Raṅganātha. The style of this work which marks the beginning of the influence of Vaiṣṇavism on Telugu literature is involved and complex, the similes are sometimes far-fetched, but all the same the effect achieved is majestic and sublime.¹⁶⁵

Periyālvār is known also as the author of the *Kalpasūtra*.¹⁶⁶ Neither the name of the work nor the work is extant. Vedānta Dēsika cites the passage from *Periyālvār's Tirumōḷi* and justifies the contents of it.¹⁶⁷ The Ālvār means that those who recite the names of God have a right to purchase him. The implication is that He is the seṣa of the devotees of God. The relationship of the principal (śēṣin) and the secondary (śēṣa) and the nature of purchasing and selling are all dealt with the *śrauta* section of the *Kalpasūtras*. Periyālvār, who commented on these *sūtras*, must be quite familiar with the question of purchasing and the conditions governing it and so is this passage cited by Vedānta Dēsika.

ĀṆṬĀḶ

Āṇṭāl the only feminine mystic in the galaxy of Ālvārs has left two poems viz., *Tiruppāvai* and *Nāccivar Tirumōḷi*.

TIRUPPĀVAI : This beautiful small piece of work consisting of 30 verses in *iyal taravinai-k-koccakak-kalippā* metre is a well-known spiritual Tamil lyric and a pastoral poem of a very high order. It is a spiritual song of songs for the Divine Enchanter of Br̄ndāvan. 'Tiruppāvai' means a sacred girl, a divine girl, and therefore, is likely to indicate Āṇṭāl herself. Her work also is *Tiruppāvai* which is so called

165. *A History of South India* (1966), p. 412.

166. *Rahasyatrayasāra - Puruṣārtha kāṣṭhādhtkāra*.

167. *Periyāl. Tm. 4.4: 10.*

because it relates to the observance of a Pāvai or Nōṅpu.¹⁶⁸ In fact, all the verses excepting the thirtieth end with 'Elorem-pāvai' and the thirtieth ends with 'Empāvāi' *simpliciter*. One of the several meanings, perhaps the correct one in the context, attributed to this refrain is based upon the meaning 'Nōṅpu' for the word 'Pāvai'.

The poem has its genesis in Āṅṅāl's love of Kṛṣṇa. The scene and setting of *Tiruppāvai* conforms to the archetype of gōpi-love to the Divine cowherd boy who as māyōṅ captured their souls by His bewitching beauty. Āṅṅāl's poetic soul—the māke-believe element in her—helped her convert herself into a gopl and with this frame of mind she starts singing *Tiruppāvai*. She visualised a congregational procession with her companions aroused from sleep to the mansion of the Sleeping Beauty to wake Him up and pray for the boon of *paṛai* or drum (which is a symbol or token of His inescapable love) to be received from Him. The poem is held to be marked by five divisions representing (i) the purpose of their observance of the nōṅpu;¹⁶⁹ (ii) awakening the maidens, the companions of Āṅṅāl from their sleep, and calling them to participate in the observance of the nōṅpu,¹⁷⁰ (iii) awakening the persons in the mansion of the Lord beginning from the gate-keeper and ending with Nappiṅṅai¹⁷¹ (iv) arousing the Sleeping Beauty and making their representations to Him¹⁷² and (v) the fruits of their observance of the nōṅpu.¹⁷³ The situations connected with these descriptions are depicted graphically and with meticulous care to mark the steps that precede the situations at dawn.¹⁷⁴ The folk-song motif prevalent in those

168. This has been mentioned in *Bhāgavatapurānam* 10th canto, 22nd chapter. There is also reference in *Paripāṭal* - 11 to this nōṅpu. The nōṅpu has been observed in the Tamil Nāṭu in some form in the month of Mārkaḷi (December-January) and the 'Ātirai Tirunāḷ' being celebrated in the same month in Kerala signifies this nōṅpu.

169. T.Pv. (1-5).

170. *ibid.* (6-15).

171. *ibid.* (16-18).

172. *ibid.* (19-25)

173. *ibid.* (26-30).

174. *ibid.* (6-8).

times has been taken by Āṇṭāl and handled with exquisite skill and masterly technique to give expression to the external longing of the human heart for the love of God. The prayer is for the love of God with whom our relation is eternal and everlasting. The prayer is for service, for *kaṅkarya* and is for the removal of all other desires. The poem *Tiruppavai* is noted for its poetic beauty and philosophic suggestiveness.¹⁷⁵ Among the Vaiṣṇavites it is regarded as an *Upaniṣad* as it contains the quintessence of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and Śrī Vaiṣṇavite tradition.

In sheer poetic quality, Āṇṭāl is not below the very best of poets. The range of her experience is strictly limited; but the elusive charm and the penetrating sweetness of her tone, which she maintains throughout, is what even the most fastidious of critics might well appreciate. Hers is a truly feminine genius, and for that reason stands by itself in Tamil literature.

An element of *svāpadeśa* or inner, allegorical meaning, is traced to some of the verses of *Tiruppāvai*. For instance, the verses from 6 to 15 are interpreted as each directed towards the awakening from sleep of one of the ten Ālvārs - Periyālvār,¹⁷⁶ Kulacēkarālvār,¹⁷⁷ Nammālvār,¹⁷⁸ Tirumalicaiyālvār,¹⁷⁹ Pēyālvār,¹⁸⁰ Pūtattālvār,¹⁸¹ Poykaiyālvār¹⁸² Toṅṅaraṭip-poṭiyālvār,¹⁸³ Tiruppāṇālvār,¹⁸⁴ and Tirumaṅkaiyālvār.¹⁸⁵ Likewise the same songs are explicated as rousing the Bhāgavatas from sleep. Such allegorizing and reading into lines of meanings are far-fetched and strained and speak

176. T.Pv.6.

177. *ibid.* 7.

178. *ibid.* 8.

179. *ibid.* 9.

180. *ibid.* 10.

181. *ibid.* 11.

182. *ibid.* 12.

183. *ibid.* 13.

184. *ibid.* 14.

185. *ibid.* 15.

more of the overingenuity of the commentators than of the actual meaning of the verses.

NĀCCİYĀR TIRUMOḶI: This poem of Āṇṭāl consists of 143 verses in five types of metres¹⁸⁶ and they have been grouped in fourteen decads. In this poem, Āṇṭāl pours out her burning passion for union with Lord Kṛṣṇa. When there is no response to the message of love sent by her, she pines away in gloom. Then she invokes the aid of Manmatha for her union with the Lord. She describes the ritual of a penance, and a worship and a prayer to that God.¹⁸⁷ But even the seductions of Manmatha's shafts have no power over the Ravisher of souls. There is a description of a dream in which the love-sick maiden goes through the ritual of a marriage with Kṛṣṇa—a marriage as conducted in the those days.¹⁸⁸ In other hymns one gets the neytal theme—the song of despair, full of love and pathos.¹⁸⁹ There is a request to the cuckoo to cry welcome to her Lord;¹⁹⁰ and a group of ten verses sending a message through the clouds to Him.¹⁹¹ A decad of verses deals with a mystic circle (kūṭal) by which Āṇṭāl tries her success in attaining the Lord.¹⁹² The poem is an excellent piece of work which has set a standard in erotic

186. aruṅcīr ācīriya viruttam, eluṅcīr ācīriya viruttam, kāli viruttam, kaliniṭaittūrai and koccakakkalippā.

187. Nac. Tm. 1. A question may be posed whether it would be proper on the part of a true Vaiṣṇavite to worship other deities than Viṣṇu and the answer is, such means namely invoking other deities is approved since efforts are taken owing to intense longing for attaining the justifiable end, namely, Kṛṣṇa and further in bridal mysticism such efforts as taking Matal, or the observance of a *vṛata* etc., are approved, because they have been resorted to in order to please God.

188. *ibid.* 6.

189. *ibid.* 10.

190. *ibid.* 5.

191. *ibid.* 8.

192. *ibid.* 4. This is an omen-circle drawn by a lady-love on sand closing her eyes so that the line drawn by the hand completes the circle correctly. Or else concentric circles are drawn and then these are counted. If they are an odd number, success is not predicted; if even, success is assured. cf. Nāṅ. Tv. 39.

literature. Addressed to God, this eroticism is as pure as it is intense. At one stage Āṇṭāl's passivity gives way to aggressive love and in the frenzy of fierce love, she assaults the Lord by attempting to pluck out the very roots of love budding from the bosom and aim them at the Torturer so that His heart may be pierced by the wounds of unrequited love.¹⁹³ Kṛṣṇa has had several abuses hurled at Him – by His parents when He was mischievous, by His playmates when He was exceptionally teasing, and by His consorts in later life whenever they are in suspicion of His fidelity towards them. But the epithets that Āṇṭāl uses to depict and describe Him stand on a class apart. She calls Him one who tells white lies,¹⁹⁴ a mischief monger who is ignorant of *dharma*,¹⁹⁵ one who never knows how to say 'Don't fear'¹⁹⁶ in short, one who is as black in the interior as He is in the exterior, black of heart and black of body – a black God in his exterior and a Blackguard in His interior¹⁹⁷ and a shameless one with a double tongue like His snake Āḍiśēṣa,¹⁹⁸ terms which ought to make even Him blush with shame and remorse.

Both in her poems and in her father's the cycle of Kṛṣṇa stories is most effectively used to rouse the devotion of the hearer, and to a Hindu the repeated allusions to the tales in different settings constitute not the least attractive feature of her work. The hymn '*vāraṇāmāyiram*'¹⁹⁹ telling of her dream-marriage with Lord Viṣṇu is sung at all Vaiṣṇavite marriages of today.

MATURAKAVI ĀḶVĀR

KANṆINUN CIṚU-T-TĀMPU : This poem of Maturakavi ĀḶvār consisting of eleven verses, arranged in Antāti scheme,

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193. *ibid.* 13: 8.
 194. *ibid.* 14: 3.
 195. *ibid.* 14: 6.
 196. *ibid.* 13: 3, 5.
 197. *ibid.* 14: 7.
 198. *ibid.* 10: 3.
 199. *ibid.* 6.

is not on God but on Nammālvār, his spiritual guru. The name of the poem is not really a name, but the opening words of the *Prabandha*. To sing of Kurukur Nampi (Nammālvār) is sweeter to this Ālvār than to sing of Lord.²⁰⁰ In the first five verses the Ālvār speaks of how he approached and relied on the saint of Kurukūr as his all, and in the second five verses how the *ācārya* functions to secure to the disciple the saving grace of the Lord. The tenth verse is very significant because it shows how the *ācārya* out of his grace towards the disciple corrects his errors and erring ways and makes him a true and loyal servant. In this way Nammālvār becomes the first *ācārya*, or the *ācārya* amongst the Vaiṣṇavites²⁰¹. It is considered that these verses of the poem reveal the supreme poetic quality of the Ālvār. The poem is held in high esteem by all Śrī Vaiṣṇavites and has been ranked on a par with the mystic utterances of the other Ālvārs exuding God-love. It is therefore prefixed and suffixed to the recitation of Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi* even like the sacred *praṇava* in relation to the ancient Sanskrit *Vedas*.

RĀMĀNUCA-NŪRRANTĀTI: Tiruvarāṅkattamutaṅār rendered services to Lord Raṅganātha in such an exceedingly splendid way that his admirers began calling him Periyakōyil Nampi. His deep erudition in all *śāstras* at a very early stage, the good services which he rendered and the reputation which he enjoyed there turned him conceited with the result that he felt he had no compeer. At the instance of Rāmānuja, his disciple Kūrattālvāṅ contacted Periyakōyil Nampi and relieving him of his conceit by training him in the right path brought him to the side of Rāmānuja²⁰² whose devoted disciple he chose to remain ever after. Rāmānuja's desire to make Periyakōyil Nampi contribute to the greatness of the Ālvārs yielded the appreciable result through the composition

200. K.C. 1. Vedānta Dēśika has nicely put this as "Maturakavi who freed himself from all sorrow by relying solely on him, who rendered the *Vedas* into Tamil-Saint Saṅhakōpa" (T.P. 41).

201. The spiritual lineage of Rāmānuja is traced back to Nammālvār through Periya Nampi, Yāmunācārya (Ājavantār), Maṅakkāl Nampi, Uyyakkōṅṅār, and Nāthamuni.

202. R.N. 7.

of 108 verses by him in praise of the Ālvārs, each one containing the word 'Rāmānuja'. This work received the approbation of all the learned men of the day and was named '*Rāmanuca-nūṟṟantāti*'. In point of its grand style rich diction and inner sense no other composition can bear comparison with it. The author was therefore conferred the title 'Amutaṇār' from the Tamil word 'amutam' meaning 'nectar'.

This composition of Amutaṇār which is in *Kaṭṭalaik-kalittuṟai* metre glorifies Rāmānuja, in the main, recounting the latter's contribution for Vaiṣṇavism. It is through Rāmānuja, the author feels, that he would get all good things in life here and hereafter. The composition contains realistic depiction of the greatness of each of the Ālvārs,²⁰³ Rāmānuja,²⁰⁴ Nāthamuni²⁰⁵ and Yāmunācārya.²⁰⁶

203. *ibid.* 8 to 18.

204. *ibid.* 19.

205. *ibid.* 20.

206. *ibid.* 21.