

## THE COMPOSITIONS OF ĀḶVĀRS (II)

## NAMMĀḶVĀR

Nammāḷvār, "Our Āḷvār", the greatest of Āḷvārs who is also known as Māraṇ, Śaṭhakōpa and Parāṅkuṣaṇ has given to the world four poems known as *Tiruviruttam*, *Tiruvācīriyam*, *Pertya Tiruvantāti* and *Tiruvāymoḷi* which are supposed to contain the essentials of the four *Vedas* and so equated to them respectively.<sup>1</sup> Like Śuka, he was conceived and born in godliness. With his instinct for the infinite his hunger and thirst were only for God. His divine love was a divine gift and he was immersed in it for sixteen years at the foot of a tamarind tree till he came down to the waking state and gave articulate expression to his infinite *ava* or love in the four soul-stirring poems mentioned above. His is the piercing cry and the inexplicable joy of the heart. All the four poems of this Āḷvār are in the *Antāti* arrangement. More than the works of any other saints, Nammāḷvar's hymns have shaped the conduct and faith of the southern Vaiṣṇavites. Possessing a matchless cadence and simple grandeur, they are characterised equally by their literary charm and by their ethical and spiritual values. To the emotionally inclined, the psalms are simple and appealing prayers to the different forms of Viṣṇu in different sacred places. To the less emotional and more philosophical, they seem to be the outcome of great learning in the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata* literature. To the practical spiritualist, they are of value as the achievement of one who was in holy communion with God.

TIRUVIRUTTAM: *Tiruviruttam*, the first work of

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1. U.R.M., 14.

Nammālvār.<sup>2</sup> which is considered by the orthodox to be the essence of the *Ṛg Veda* (*Ṛg Veda sāra*) consists of a hundred verses in *kaṭṭalai-k-kalitturai* metre.<sup>3</sup> This metre was in those days called *viruttam* and the name 'viruttam' has been given to this work as to all literary compositions in that metre. The term 'viruttam' applies to this work in another sense too. The poem is a narration of an incident in the life of Nammālvār, a *viruttānta*, and as such the work deserves to be called a 'viruttam'.<sup>4</sup> 'Tiru' is a word in Tamil, like Śrī in Sanskrit, being usually prefixed to any great man or good thing signifying sacredness or auspiciousness as in the case of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. Hence the name *Tiruviruttam* to this poem. The composition belongs to the feminine approach to the Divine as implied in *Vedic* literature. The Supreme Being is the One *Puruṣa*, the Primal male, all else, gods, men and other creatures are in the relationship of females, dependents, *aṅgas*, *śaktis* etc.<sup>5</sup> The mysticism of

2. T.P., 372.

3. The older metres such as *veṅpā akaval*, and *kall* became longer and longer during the period of Ālvārs and Nāyaṁmārs. They then came to be called *viruttam* and the name was first applied to *kaṭṭalalk-kalitturai* which consists of four lines of five cīrs, and later on was used for denoting all such developments. e.g., Poems of Appar, and those of Paṭṭiṇattup-piḷḷaiyār. Even in the Caṅkam age compositions were named after the same metre. In some cases the whole of the book is in the same metre. e.g., *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal*.

4. The incident referred to is this: Ever since his birth, Nammālvār did not open his eyes. When he was taken to the temple on the twelfth day, he opened his eyes, and the first object he beheld was God's image in the temple and therefore he was a god-man. Again he closed his eyes and was in that state for sixteen years immersed in divine love. The first work of his is this poem which makes an appeal to God to rid him from *samsāra*. (The word '*viṇṇappam*' in Tamil means 'appeal'). The tradition that the name of a work describing an incident (*viruttāntam*) is also called as *viruttam* can be known from the name of works such as *Nariviruttam*, *Kaliviruttam* and *Eliviruttam* most of which are Jain works. cf. Campantar's *Tevāram* 3. 39; 5.

5. Ch. Up. 8.12; 5; Taitt. Br. 10. 5; Taitt. Ar. 1.2. cf. *Viṣṇu Dharma* and *Viṣṇusahasranāma Bhāṣya*, name 4.1

other Āḷvārs also is highly coloured by this most significant attitude especially as it is of Āṇṭāḷ, Tirumaṅkai Maṅṅaṅ and Kulacēkarar. The feminine approach is what might be made by one who has been entranced by the Beauty of the Divine. The work of this Āḷvār mystic on the basis of this understanding renders the real and supreme nature of God as the most wonderful integration of all the manifold auspicious excellences. It is thus seen in this poem the representation of the supreme attractiveness of the Divine which makes him seek no other company, no other ordainer, no master other than the Divine Lord Himself. It is true that this is impossible for any one who is yet in the outercourt so to speak. The deep intimate and total offering that the Āḷvār wants to make, giving up all his other desires desiring Him as lover and husband is only possible to a soul made feminine. It is further beauty alone, not the outer beauty merely, but that supreme beauty which melts the soul. Not until the soul melts can it ever know how to enter the divine. That is, only aesthetic heat, or intention, can facilitate the union with the Beloved Object.

The poem reveals the reactions of a soul (here Nammāḷvār, as Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki) caught up by the Lord's beauty which from then on it has elected to follow as its one and only supreme object that shall govern the rest of its life. The very first verse shows the soul which already having beheld the beauty of the Divine Lord in His transcending Grace that had made Him descend into manifold wombs so as to relieve the distress of the souls, now seeks to appeal to Him to hearken to its appeals to remove the obstacles to its *brahmānubhava*. The sentiment embodied in this verse is exceptional and unique as no other devotee has started with a plea and a petition (*viṅṅappam*) on behalf of suffering humanity.<sup>6</sup> The Lord is all grace, who could be invoked

6. It is worthy of note that the first word of the first verse of his works stands for false-hood (*poṅ ninṅajñālam*) and the last word of the last verse stands for exaltation *uyarntē* (T.V.M. 10-10-11). If ever any soul migrated from false-hood to exaltation, it was Nammāḷvār as even the words used by him indicate.

through prayer and who, in spite of it too, is anxious to save all His creatures for which purpose He has taken many descents and forms. So much is the Āḷvār overpowered by the love shown by Him to all His sinning slaves that he surrenders his entire being to Him.

But the vision is obviously short-lived for the verses that follow intimate the feeling of separation. The vision has passed into remembrance. The next group of verses are all intended to demonstrate the growing intensities of the Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki (so the Āḷvār's soul is called) who had but a glimpse of the Divine like a lightning flash in a dark and heavy night. The condition of the love-smitten woman,<sup>7</sup> the blowing of the oppressive northern winds,<sup>8</sup> the oncoming of the rainy season, pseudo<sup>9</sup> as well as real,<sup>10</sup> when the hero would return as promised have all been vividly portrayed. The fever of love is being fanned into white-heat by the northern winds. The world-life for the Nāyaki without Nāyaka (God) is felt to be oppressive—it now appears to be a vast ocean which is dark, gloomy and serenely indifferent. The most poignant experience then runs with the collapsing feeling. Such is her condition that streams of water are flowing from her deep ocean-eyes.<sup>11</sup> The heart's lord the bridegroom had not arrived. An attempt is made to cure her love-sickness with magic such as that practised by devil-ostraciser and it has become an utter failure. The Nāyaki knows that the cure will prove futile because she knows the causes of her deepening distress and she is also aware of the chasm that separates her from her beloved Adorable Object of Union.<sup>12</sup> Then there comes the gentle breeze gathering the tuḷaci-scent nearing towards her. Now her joy is exceedingly great and intense.<sup>13</sup>

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7. TVR. 2.

8. *ibid.* 4, 5, 13, 28, 35, 41.

9. *ibid.* 7, 18.

10. *ibid.* 52, 68.

11. *ibid.* 16, 17, 18.

12. *ibid.* 20.

13. *ibid.* 25.

The Nāyaki has an ecstatic feeling but not yet a vision of presence. This makes her a little life-interested. But she is dragged into the divine centre. She yearns for the experience of his presence. She hopes that He does keep up or abide by His promises.<sup>14</sup> She lapses into herself and her loneliness leads to suffering. This second stage reveals her disgust at every other being that has some sort of connection with the Divine. She pleads with swans, herons and even clouds to take her plaint to her beloved Lord.<sup>15</sup> She even laments that outer objects prevented inward growth and total offering.<sup>16</sup> Her own inner voices, friendly to her, feel the callousness and irresponsiveness of the Lord and there is material and self-regarding voice within that even fears that she has entered into a veritable jungle of death.<sup>17</sup> At one stage even tulaci which she has considered as Lord's grace which is invigorating and increases her faith in Him has proved like remembrance-transitory ecstasy-food for memory, for rumination. At another stage she finds every tree, every bush, every cloud,<sup>18</sup> every blue lily<sup>19</sup> to reveal or recall Lord. Such is the intoxication of the vision, slowing blossoming out of the faith, prayer, longing consecration, and refusal to have anything to do with material and physical and sensory joys or wants. When searching for the beloved in every place, the Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki is gifted to perceive the Divine in all things, the *viśvarūpa*, the world-divine Love form.<sup>20</sup> Then His eyes welling up with love for all, that beauty of His lotus eyes, that beauty of Form, His superb greatness, are one after another revealed to her, all too deep for expression and overflowing all experience.<sup>21</sup> The stage is

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14. This reverberation of the feeling of hope coming to her mind is an *Akam* motif. This kind of suggestion, sometimes occurring in more than one hierarchic layer is called *iraicci* (Tol. Poru]-Sūtras.)

15. *ibid.* 30, 31.

16. *ibid.* 32, 38.

17. *ibid.* 35, 36, 37, 70, cf. v. 19.

18. *ibid.* 32.

19. *ibid.* 38.

20. *ibid.* 39.

21. *ibid.* 43.

psychically one of ardent expectancy. It would be clear that it is of the intensest quality. Now a soothsayer is sought after to give advice; she has diagnosed her real malady as God-infection.<sup>22</sup> Neither physical malady nor any psychical one is there; the real condition is soul-aspiration. And what she is yearning after is the total personality of God, nothing less can help. She has become thin;<sup>23</sup> her anguished cry is heard indeed, for she begins to hear the voice of the supreme Lord urging the charioteer to drive fast.<sup>24</sup> The Lord's own anxiety to meet and save the soul is great. Now the true rainy season has arrived indeed and the period of union is at last at hand.<sup>25</sup> The Nāyaki likewise has become tearfilled, inconsolable, since none but God could help. Urgency prompts her to send further messengers, this time, the beetles and bees. The significance of messengers of these kinds may be due to the fact that they have closer intimacy with the honey-laden garland of God.<sup>26</sup> Then happens the arrival of Lord not yet in front but intimated by the cool sweet southern breeze.<sup>27</sup>

The third coming is nearer and more intimate than any prior. The Nāyaka's love for the Nāyaki is made manifest by his secret presence that presents an aura of happiness. His passion too is manifestly sincere and reciprocative as a response to the agony of love of the Nāyaki. Faith has deepened; the impossible has now a chance of fulfilment. The Nāyaki has to get her assurance, and perfect assurance that she would be meeting her Nāyaka. The maid comes to her help. It is she who consoles both the Nāyaka and the Nāyaki. She narrates the greatness, goodness, puissance, condescension and other qualities of the Nāyaka and asks her to wait till His arrival.<sup>28</sup> She speaks to the Nāyaka also about the inconsolability and

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22. *ibid.* 53.

23. *ibid.* 47.

24. *ibid.* 50.

25. *ibid.* 52.

26. *ibid.* 54, 55.

27. *ibid.* 56.

28. *ibid.* 58, 61.

utter helplessness of the Nāyaki; she also points out to Him the uninterrupted aspiration or total consecration or offering of her to Him.<sup>29</sup> The Nāyaki refuses to listen to others who say that she has not His grace<sup>30</sup> and finds fullest consolation in reciting constantly His name.<sup>31</sup> Such is she in complete absorption. In the recesses of her being there occur visible changes. The Lord has indeed arrived; her beauty has increased. It is not the physical beauty now but the beauty that is intrinsic, psychical, inalienable, of knowledge too<sup>32</sup>. She is in the madness of love; she is transforming herself in the passion of her Lord. Everywhere she sees His glory, a hallucination as it were.<sup>33</sup> It is under such conditions of psychical exaltation and complete overwhelming absorption that the tulacicool fragrant breeze blows from the direction of the Divine.<sup>34</sup> There is silent grief of being separate from the Lord unlike those who are blessed to be always by His side, inseparably so in worship, work and service, and the present loneliness and evening darkneses are symbolic of the soul's (Nāyaki's) despairs and languishments.<sup>35</sup> But they are no longer of the doubting kind, for absolute fidelity is affirmed.<sup>36</sup> There is impatience and grief which are results indeed only of the separation from the Nāyaka.<sup>37</sup> The whole situation indeed breathes a tense atmosphere of denouement. There is to be a glorious marriage a divine embrace of the soul by its true and inalienable Lord, a superb acceptance of her by the Divine as an eternal companion. The states of consciousness at this high place or altitude of Divine Gnosis are veritable masterpieces of Vision.<sup>38</sup>

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29. *ibid.* 62.

30. *ibid.* 63.

31. *ibid.* 64.

32. *ibid.* 74, 75.

33. *ibid.* 80, 82, 85, 86.

34. *ibid.* 74.

35. *ibid.* 77, 78, 79, 80, 86.

36. *ibid.* 91, 95, 99.

37. *ibid.* 87, 88, 89, 90.

38. *ibid.* 96, 97.

Thus the poem is an account of the pilgrimage of the soul to its real Self, of the Nāyaki to her real and eternal Nāyaka, the Lord. Nammālvār has shown that one who sees God becomes a woman.<sup>39</sup> Such is the mystic nature and rapture of the soul in relation to the Universal Soul.

**TIRUVĀCIRIYAM :** This poem, which is stated to be a mystic rendering of the truths of the *Yajur Veda*, is the second work of this Ālvār and it is the smallest among his works. It consists of seven verses in āciriyaṅgā metre<sup>40</sup> arranged in the Antāti scheme<sup>41</sup> and the poem takes its name of the metre employed. This small poem teaches within the brief compass of seven verses the *tattva* (Nature of Reality), the *hita* (the Means) and the *puruṣārtha* (the Goal of human endeavour) as well as the obstacles to the attainment of that ideal and goal.

In the opening verse the nature of God is explained as the supremely adorable Transcendent Object. God is compared to a mountain in the ocean, the Rock of Ages in the *samsāra*; the Tirivikrama-*avatāra* of Viṣṇu, His primeval dwelling place as Nārāyaṇa in the waters of the milk ocean,

39. The *Akam* motif found in Caṅkam literature, beautifully systematised in *Tolkāppinm*, has been excellently handled by this Ālvār for the divine purpose.

cf. *Bhāgavatam*. V. 5: 15, 16. The motif has received a different treatment. It has been stated that those, who enter the Ilāvarta country where Śiva is worshipping Nārāyaṇa as Saṅkaraṣṇa become women at once, due to a curse. (Perhaps curses by gods or goddesses may be symbolic of good leading to revelation of reality).

40. Verses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 are Nīaimaṅṭila āciriyaṅgās and 5 and 7 are Nēricai āciriyaṅgās.

41. But in this poem the ending of the last verse is not the beginning of the first one. This along with the fact that the Ālvār's name is not given in the last verse as he has given in *Tiruvirūttam* and *Tiruvāymoḷi* have led some to think that the poem *Tiruvāciriyaṅgā* is not a complete poem and some of the verses might have been lost. But this is not sufficient ground to arrive at such a conclusion as the other poem *Periya Tiruvantāti* also does not have his name. The only possible reason may be that the Ālvār has not preferred to mention his name in these two works.



His perfect creative *yōga* called *susūpti* of the transcendent *Prajñā* and that wonderful form the gods ever adore and would like to behold, are all described together. The second verse reveals the Ālvār's infinite *avā* or desire to worship the lotus feet of the Divine whose sovereignty is so fully established by the three-strided Tirivikrama.<sup>42</sup> The third verse points out that offering oneself to God will involve also the devoted and consecrated service to the devotees of God (*aṭiyārs*) who have realised the truth that their "I" is God alone. But the Ālvār feels also that not all devotees can equal the one Lord, because their powers are only God-limited since they are God-granted. It is necessary to reach the source. So the supreme ideal is indeed the Supreme alone, who has become the "I" of oneself and of all and the fourth verse therefore points out that it is the refuge at His feet alone that grants supreme felicity. The fifth verse gives a grand description of a *viśvarūpa darśana*, the vision of the World Omnipervasive Form of the Lord which is a tender grace-granting figure<sup>43</sup> and it is to that Supreme Divine that *saranāgati* is to be performed. The sixth verse points out the weaknesses of mankind, its inveterate tendency to choose the evil and not the good means which is God Himself and also the sympathy of the Ālvār to them.<sup>44</sup> The seventh and final verse makes the stern determination to worship the Supreme Godhead alone for He is the cause, the One Being, constantly reiterated in the earlier verses, who, unaided, creates, sustains, redeems, loves and succours, withdraws and manifests souls and all creation in perfect freedom and perfection.<sup>45</sup> In short, this final verse most conspicuously shows the original total cause of the existences to be Himself.

42. cf. Tc. V. 108.

43. The description given in the verse is that of the great exploit of Viṣṇu which, it must be remembered, is nowhere attributed to any other godhead in the *Vedas*. cf. M. Tv. 17.

44. The commentator Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai remarks that the intensity and volume of the Ālvār's note of sympathy will be sufficient to reach all the worlds wherever such ignorant people are inhabited.

Again Cf. TVM. 4. 6: 2, 3, 7 and 8.

45. Cf. M. Tv. 69; Peri. Tm. 11. 6: 2 and 3.

**PERIYA TIRUVANTĀTI:** This poem consists of eighty seven verses in *venpā* metre (*Nēricai venpā*) and the work is said to be the essence of *Atharvana Veda*. Even though the poem contains eighty seven verses it is called *Periya Tiruvantāti* (Great Tiruvantāti) because its greatness consists in the beauty of its diction and in the beauty of its esoteric meanings. Another reason may also be attributed to its name as the Āḷvār himself says in one verse,<sup>46</sup> rather humorously, that he is greater than God since he has in him the God who is the owner of the two worlds, the celestial and the terrestrial (*ubhaya vibhūtis*); and the work which speaks of the Āḷvār's greatness is called *Periya Tiruvantāti*.

The purpose of the whole poem is to instruct the mind to worship the greatness of God. It is intended to make the mind attain its real status, *śvarūpajñāna* and make it bathe fully in the flowing waters of the Divine goodness, greatness or majesty and love. The Āḷvār begins the poem by expressing his extreme desire to praise the infinite auspicious qualities of God; but he feels his inability to grasp the glory of God. He submits to the Lord how He transcends words and is beyond praise. The tone of apology in particular is noteworthy where he says, "Please do not get angry with us, because we indulge in such love-antics of ours."<sup>47</sup> And he seeks to justify the lapse by referring to the love that impels men to take to praise Him. As he sings in seven more verses<sup>48</sup> this feeling of unworthiness, for worship overtakes him again, and in the next verse<sup>49</sup> he says "Who are we and where is worship of Tirumāl?" If at all the only persons who can possibly claim to worship Him are the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Ādityas, and Śiva and Brahmā and concludes "We have to our credit, immense faults." There are other pācu-

46. P: Tv. 75.

47. *ibid.* 2. The verse uses the plural "we" throughout and not the singular "I". It must be taken for granted that the Āḷvār here sings about the unworthiness of mankind as a whole and not of himself alone.

48. *ibid.* 3 to 9.

49. *ibid.* 10.

rams in this poem disclosing a similar frame of mind.<sup>50</sup> At another stage the Ālvār says that by praising the God's auspicious qualities, all our sins will be washed away.<sup>51</sup> Among the innumerable qualities, *śaulabya*,<sup>52</sup> *vātsalya*<sup>53</sup> *śousilya*,<sup>54</sup> have been praised. The attraction of the Lord is great, for He is independent, and He has made several descents which show His inimitable ever ready grace, incomparable, perfect indweller of all creatures. These distinguishing features make us get closer to Him.<sup>55</sup> The nearness to God is only a token of sacrificing our egoism. "By becoming the servants of God, we have become as it were His sacred sandals."<sup>56</sup> Service is sacrifice and once this is made, God becomes nearer and uses us for His divine purposes and thus we become dear to Him. The path and way is God.<sup>57</sup> Sacrifice or surrender makes the Divine come close to the soul and destroy all obstacles.<sup>58</sup> He becomes the protector of the soul.<sup>59</sup> The necessity, however, is that the soul should desire Him intensely and devote itself to Him and His service. Indeed He alone is the adorable, worshippable object.<sup>60</sup> Then the Ālvār describes the process of his absorption.<sup>61</sup> The Lord has become his father, mother and teacher and has established with him every kind of relationship.<sup>62</sup>

The topics once dealt with recur to be treated more than once and present no scheme as in the case of his other

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50. *ibid.* 14, 20, 32, 34, 38, 59, 84.

51. *ibid.* 15, 38.

52. *ibid.* 36, 37.

53. *ibid.* 17.

54. *ibid.* 19.

55. *ibid.* 24.

56. *ibid.* 31.

57. *ibid.* 46, 47, 48, 52.

58. *ibid.* 33.

59. *ibid.* 36.

60. *ibid.* 42, 43.

61. *ibid.* 38, 40, 41, 45, 46, 47, 49, 52, 53, 55, 56, 60, 62, 63, 64, 68, 69, 70, 76.

62. *ibid.* 5, 77.

three works. There are several types of meditation or prayers to the Divine to come closer to the soul and make it His servant. And a superb note presented in one verse appeals to our mind; the realisation of the Lord here on this planet, in this mortal existence, will remove every desire for the most desirable *paramapada*.<sup>63</sup> The Lord indwelling in the heart of the devoted servant and contemplative will make all sins non-existent. In short, the teaching of this poem mainly consists in revealing the most fundamental aspect of the doctrine of Surrender through service to the Divine, which alone makes for the inward realization of the Divine at the very heart of the devotee. The steps for this are devotion, service or servanthship, contemplation, indwellingness, intimacy, exaltation and infinitisation or divinisation.

**TIRUVĀYMOĻI:** This long poem consisting of 1102 verses in nine types of metres<sup>64</sup> arranged in 100 decads which are divided into ten sections known as '*Pattu*'.<sup>65</sup> This work is considered to be the essence of the *Sāma Veda*. The hymns of other Āḷvārs are to the effect that the attainment of Vaikuṅṭha is not to be preferred to the enjoyment obtainable on this earth by loving Him and singing about Him. But Nammāḷvār's God-love is on a level far more exalted and far more intense. It is more an organic craving than a mere mental feeling. It is more or less a consuming passion. It is seen in this poem the hide and seek which the eternal enchanting lover of his heart plays with him, at one moment the joy of the incomparable blessing, at the other the feeling of isolation, the despair of the dark chamber with intermittent glimpses of the love; finally the eternal joy and light of God, to whose presence he is taken with all pomp and grandeur.<sup>66</sup>

63. *ibid.* 67.

64. Kocakakkalippā, ācīriyatturai, kalinilaittuṟai, vañcittuṟai, aṟuṇṇi ācīriyaviruttam, eḷuṇṇi ācīriyaviruttam, eṇṇi ācīriya viruttam, kaliviruttam and vañci viruttam.

65. One '*Pattu*' contains ten decads each decad approximating to 100 verses. Each decad is called a *Tiruvāymoḷi*. Therefore one '*pattu*' will contain ten *Tiruvāymoḷis*. Throughout this thesis the decad is referred to as hymn.

66. TVM. 10. 9.

In between these moods, the Ālvār addresses the world and directly delivers his message of Love and Hope. He often tries to express the inexpressible, in mystic songs of *Akam* poetry. His is a heart-melting poetry giving us the quintessence of his divine experience. Even in such moods the idea of *kuṛaḷ* finds a place in his verses;<sup>67</sup> the very line of one *kuṛaḷ* is embedded in one verse.<sup>68</sup>

The first section of a hundred verses insists on *kaiṅkarya* to God as the chief goal of life.<sup>69</sup> Bhagavān is the Supreme Lord,<sup>70</sup> who is ever adorable, accessible,<sup>71</sup> holy and blissful<sup>72</sup> and the Saviour of all. The second section analyses *kaiṅkarya* in all its aspects, pointing out the obstacles in the way,<sup>73</sup> and concludes that *kaiṅkarya* is only for His satisfaction without any taint of egoism.<sup>74</sup> In the third section, *kaiṅkarya* has an extended meaning as it finds its completion in *Bhāgavata kaiṅkarya* (service to the Lord's devotees or godly men), irrespective of their birth or status.<sup>75</sup> It is the Ālvār's firm conviction that the intensity of one's devotion to the Lord will be explicit in one's devotion to the Lord's devotees. The fourth centum traces the way in which the obstacles to the divine life like the temptations of *aiśvarya* and *kaivalya*, are surmounted.<sup>76</sup> The Ālvār makes it clear that the greatest obstacle lying in the path of *kaiṅkarya* is the enjoyment of

67. *ibid.* 5. 3 : 1, 2. cf. *kuṛaḷ*. 1147.

68. *ibid.* 5. 3 : 3 cf *ibid.*

69. *ibid.* 1. 1 : 1 and 1. 10 : 11.

70. *ibid.* 1. 1.

71. *ibid.* 1. 3; 1. 5.

72. *ibid.* 1. 6; 1. 7.

73. *ibid.* 2. 3 : 10.

74. *ibid.*, 2.9. There is an anecdote in the *Itu* according to which when Empār begins his discourse on this Tiruvāymoḷi he used to examine each one in the audience present weed out the undeserving and close and bolt the door signifying perhaps there is none in the world qualified to listen to the *purusārtha* which is its purport (vide : *Īṭṭin Tomilākkam* Vol. II (Ed. 1952), p. 241.

75. *ibid.* 3. 7 : 9.

76. *ibid.* 4.1 : 1, 9, 10.

sense pleasures.<sup>77</sup> The fifth section is justification by the faith that the Lord Himself removes these hindrances. The Lord Himself has shown His feet as the *upāya* by which to have whatever the Āḷvār wishes to have and to avoid whatever he wants to avoid.<sup>78</sup> This part contains the decad on the deity at Kumbakonam which had been the key to Nāthamuni to unearth the whole of *Nālāyiram*.<sup>79</sup> The sixth section is rather the epitome, the sum and substance, of the spiritual experience of the Tamil seers (or Āḷvārs). It is an important stage in the spiritual life of this Āḷvār, who is extolled as the super-*prapanna* of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, as it defines *prapatti* as the only way to God and the whole attitude of devotion is consummated in *prapatti* or self-surrender.<sup>80</sup> But *mukti* or release from the cycle of births and deaths is not yet in sight to the Āḷvār in spite of self-surrender to the Lord and so the Āḷvār portrays his feeling of dejection in the seventh centum. At first the Āḷvār thinks of the cruelty of God in subjecting him to further hardships in the world of *saṃsāra*;<sup>81</sup> but very soon he realises the reason for the delay to *mukti* as perhaps the Lord enjoys his hymns, however imperfect they may be and that is also by His divine grace.<sup>82</sup> The eighth centum is an account of the purificatory value of the Āḷvār's disappointment as it leads to further self-naughting and introversion, and increases the hunger of God.<sup>83</sup> It is seen here the redemptive love of God who is drawn by love and dwells for ever in the heart of devotees with a view to saving them from sin.<sup>84</sup> In the ninth centum the Āḷvār's feeling of dejection is soon transfigured into hope and it makes love an irrepressible longing.<sup>85</sup> It is shown here God as the eternal friend and

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77. *ibid.* 4. 9. 10. cf. Kuṛaḷ-1121. cf. also TVM. 7.1.

78. *ibid.* 5.7. 10.

79. *ibid.* 5.8.

80. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

81. *ibid.* 7.1.

82. *ibid.* 7.9.

83. *ibid.* 8.1; 8.3; 8.4; 8.5.

84. *ibid.* 8.6; 8.7.

85. *ibid.* 9.3; 9.4; 9.10.

companion to the *mumukṣu*.<sup>86</sup> The tenth and last section marks the completion of the spiritual progress of the Ālvār.<sup>87</sup> It gives a glowing account of his glorious ascent to *Valkunṭha*, his divine abode and thus the attainment by him of the eternal bliss of Brahman having its fruition in *kaiṅkarya*.<sup>88</sup> Here God is shown seeking the Ālvār more than he seeks God,<sup>89</sup> and so He can be called aptly the "Hound of Heaven."

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The descriptions of the shrines whose praises the Ālvār has sung here contain the representation of the intense passion for the Lord in the ideal setting of the beautiful natural scene. The hills, thick with forests and marked by the presence of the beasts, get a vivid description.<sup>90</sup> The surroundings of some shrines breathe the aroma of the fragrant offerings made in the sacred fires, revealing an atmosphere of Vedic study.<sup>91</sup> The sprightly movements of the fish in the adjoining fields of certain shrines add to the attractiveness of the places testifying to the peace and plenty reigning there as a gift from the particular deity to the local inhabitants for which act of grace they remain ever grateful to Him.<sup>92</sup>

GENERAL PURPORT OF THE HYMNS: The hymns of the Ālvārs, without any exception, hold that Nārāyaṇa as the supreme Lord, the inner Controller of all beings; He is also the Creator of the Universe. The efficacy of *Mūlamantra* has been stated by the Ālvārs in unequivocal terms in their poems. The poems of the Ālvārs deal extensively with the enjoyment

86. *ibid.* 9.1; 9.2; 9.4; 9.10.

87. *ibid.* 10.1; 10.2; 10.4; 10.6; 10.7; 10.8.

88. *ibid.* 10.9; 10.10.

89. This trend is seen from the hymn 10.6 to the hymn 10.10. Nampillai, the author of *Thirty-six Thousand* when he begins his commentary to the hymn 10.6 refers to this trend: "We see the Ālvār pursuing God from the first verse of *Tiruviruttam* up to this hymn; and from this onwards God's pursuit of the Ālvār is noted" (*Ittin Tamilākkam*, Vol. X., p. 183).

90. TVM. 2.10; 3.3; 10.8.

91. *ibid.* 5.7; 7.3; 8.6.

92. *ibid.* 5.9; 6.1; 7.3; 7.10; 8.4; 8.9; 9.2; 9.6; 9.7; 9.8; 9.10; 10.1; 10.2; 10.6.

of *arcā* form of God in several sacred spots. In all, Tirumañkaiyālvār has sung about 86 out of 108 *Divya Dēśas*; and Toṅṅaraṭipotiyyālvār has sung only one, and that is Tiruvaraṅkam; and Tiruppāpālvār has sung Tiruvaraṅkam and Vēṅkaṭam. Other Ālvārs have sung a considerable number in their praise. Again the Ālvārs refer to innumerable auspicious qualities of the Lord and revel in them especially *kṛpā*, *śaulabhya* and *sauśilya*, and so many *avatāras* which are the concrete manifestations of *kṛpā* and its periodic invasion into all species when evil triumphs over goodness and creates a crisis in moral life figure in their poems. Even mythology becomes real and vivid to these imaginative poets; and the stories based on mythology are told with a grasp of their essential message. The stories – sometimes cruel and wild – become revelations of only the love of the Lord to the suffering *jīvas*. It may, in this connection, be pointed out that the novelty, superiority and popularity of the hymnal literature of the Ālvārs in Tamil is due to the happy blending of spiritual love with the literary form of human love.<sup>93</sup>

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93. *Tiruvalluvar Nūlnayam*, p. 86; *Studies in Tamil Literature and History*, p. 275.