

CHAPTER XVI

THE FORMS AND EXPLOITS OF NĀRĀYANA

The concept of divine perfection is open to an objection which is based on the existence of evil in the world. The prevalence of misery and suffering in one world would prove the Supreme Person guilty of partiality (*vaiṣamya*) and cruelty (*nairghṛṇya*). This charge against theism is to be met by tracing the sufferings to the moral responsibility of the selves.¹ Though this is in consonance with the True desire (*satyakāma*) and True will (*satyasaṅkalpa*) of the deity, yet the suffering self does not get any consolation from this. The school of Vaiṣṇavism brings in the redemptive grace (*dayā*) of God, which forgives the sins of the selves. It is this that explains why the Supreme Person presents Himself in a finitised form. While the self seeks to deserve this grace, the Supreme Person assumes forms to get at the self which yearns for union with Him. The forms are suited for the experience of the Self of Him and are mostly after the human pattern which is quite familiar to the self. The Supreme Person, according to Nammālvār, takes birth in the world in all categories of living beings for protecting them from their age-long sufferings and giving succour to them.² The *Pāñcarātra Āgamas* mention that the Supreme Person presents Himself to the suffering humanity in five forms known as the transcendent (*para*), the grouped (*vyūha*), the divinely descended (*vibhava*), the immanent (*antaryāmin*) and the idol (*arcā*).³ The Ālvārs believed in this tradition which influenced them to a great extent. While giving their experience of such forms of God, the Tamil saints do not forget

1. V.S. 2.1: 34; Br. Up. 44: 5.

2. T.V.R. 1.

3. L.T. 7: 19; 50: 7 Vide: Introduction to *Lakṣmīratna* 19.

that the formless and the Cosmic Person becomes possessed of form and frequently refer to this.⁴

The transcendental state which is the highest form is expressed in such terms as Nārāyaṇa, Parabrahman and Para-Vāsudeva. This is the self-realized absolute having the super-essential qualities of *satyam* (truth), *jñānam* (light), *anantam* (infinity), *amalam* (goodness), and *ānandam* (bliss). He is the Eternal of eternals which is formless, changeless, and transcendental. He lives in the city called Vaikuṇṭha in Paramapada where "matter exists without its mutability, time exists as eternity, and the *mukta* lives without the moral limitations of *karma*".⁵ The divine city is guarded by the city-watchers such as Kumuda, Kumudākṣa, Puṇḍarikā, Vāmana, Saṅkukarṇa, Sarvanētra, Sumukha, etc., who are equipped with divine weapons, ornaments, attendants and other paraphernalia.⁶ Nārāyaṇa is seated in a pavilion of gems on a couch in the form of the serpent Śeṣa placed on the throne having eight legs such as *dharma* and others in the *mahāmaṇḍapa* within the divine abode attended by the gate-keepers such as Caṇḍa, Pracāṇḍa, Bhadra, Subhadra, Jaya, Vijaya etc. He is the possessor of a divine auspicious figure adorned with divine ornaments such as crown and others. He is four-armed, equipped with the divine weapons such as conch, discus and others. He is accompanied by Śrī, Bhī, and Nīlā. His presence is being enjoyed by the eternal souls such as Ananta, Garuda, Viṣvakṣēna etc., and other *Sāma*-singing liberated souls. It is with this state of God that the finite self attains union. The *Upaniṣads* glorify the transcendental beauty of Brahman as *paramjōtis*.⁷ Paramapada is the highest world beyond which there are no higher worlds with the highest Person of infinite splendour in the supreme world of eternal glory or *nityavibhūti*⁸ of which this phenomenal world (*līlā-vibhūti*) is only a partial expression due to

4. Peri. Tm. 5.6: 5.

5. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 154.

6. *Yat. Dip.* IX-17.

7. *Mun. Up.* 2.2: 9, 10.

8. *Ch. Up.* 3. 13: 7.

His *yōga-māya*. Nammālvār refers to God in this form: 'the permanently great and the first and foremost of the celestials'⁹; 'the Lord reclined on the bed of the five mouthed snake'¹⁰ 'the One Who reigns in Vaikuṇṭha'¹¹; 'Nārāyaṇa the Lord of the seven worlds'¹²; 'the One Who became Trinity and the foremost of the Trinity'¹³; 'intense effulgence descended'¹⁴; 'the sole Lord who enjoys varied pleasures without hindrance, the one who is sugar-candy, honey, nectar, milk, fruit, sugar-cane for three worlds, One Who wears honey-secreting basil coronet in His head'¹⁵; 'the Lord of the celestials'¹⁶; 'the foremost of the heavenly who wields the sword, the mace, the conch, the discus and the bow'¹⁷ and 'the Lord Who has His abode in Vaikuṇṭha and Who is worshipped by all the gods in temples'¹⁸.

Perfection in Śrī Vaikuṇṭha does not afford much scope for the Supreme Person to display His *dayā*, there being none to suffer from any malady. Besides, this place is beyond the limits of the material world and so could not be visited by any mortal. The Lord therefore takes up His abode in the milky ocean which lies within the material world. The gods invariably proceed there headed by Brahmā whenever they are in distress.¹⁹ In the *vyūha* state (grouped form) Brahman the absolute becomes Īśvara the God-head Who is the ground of the universe as its creator, preserver and destroyer. The metaphysical absolute becomes Vāsudeva, the perfect, to satisfy the meditational needs of the *mumūkṣu* and for the creation of the universe. He manifests Himself

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9. T.V.M. 1.9. 4.
 10. *ibid.* 2.1: 6.
 11. *ibid.* 2.6: 1.
 12. *ibid.* 2.7: 2.
 13. *ibid.* 3.6. 2.
 14. *ibid.* 3.7: 1.
 15. *ibid.* 3.10. 3.
 16. *ibid.* 4.5: 2.
 17. *ibid.* 7.2: 6.
 18. *ibid.* 8.6: 5.
 19. Peri. Tm. 4.3: 4; V.P. 1.9: 38; 5.1: 31.

as Saṅkaraṣaṇa with the two qualities of *jñāna* (knowledge) and *bala* (strength), as Pradyumna with the two qualities of *aīsvarya* (lordship) and *virya* (virility) and as Aniruddha with the two qualities of *śakti* (potency) and *tejas* (splendour) without any diminution of Divinity. This, however, does not mean that each *vyūha* has only its two respective qualities, but each *vyūha* is Viṣṇu Himself with His six qualities of which two only in each case become manifest. The *vyūha* Vāsudeva is the same as the transcendent form of the Lord and replete with all the six qualities.²⁰ The other three are named after the elder brother, the son and the grand-son respectively of Kṛṣṇa. There is a distinctive function assigned to each of these *vyūhas* in cosmic creation as well as in the act of redeeming the souls. With Saṅkaraṣaṇa, creation assumes an embryonic form; through Pradyumna the duality of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* makes its first appearance; and finally, Aniruddha enables the body and soul to grow. As regards the process of redemption, Saṅkaraṣaṇa promulgates *Ekānti mārga* (monotheism), Pradyumna helps its translation into practice (*tat-kṛiya*), and Aniruddha brings about the fruit of this practice (*kriyā-phala*) which is liberation.²¹ The Ājvār refers to Him as "Vētam muṇ virittāṇ"²² - 'the first Unfolder of the *Vedas*' and as "Paṇpuṭai vētam payanta paraṇ"²³ - 'the Lord who created the beautiful *Vedas*'. Regarding the destruction of the universe the saint refers to as "Pālanāy ēl ulaku uṇṭu"²⁴ - 'a child who devoured the seven world'. In the history of the adventure of the souls occur certain epochs of moral crisis, when egoism becomes so inflated and sinfulness becomes so iniquitous that Īśvara in His infinite mercy withdraws the instruments of evil and thus arrests the wrong-doers from their career of crime and sin.²⁵ This is called *pralaya* and has a soothing effect on the self. Pradyumna creates the universe and introduces all

20. *Yatin. Dip.* IX. 19; cf. L.T. 6: 25.

21. *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra*, pp 37-39.

22. T.V.M. 2.10: 10.

23. *ibid.* 6.6: 5.

24. *ibid.* 4.2: 1.

25. *Dayāśataka-16.*

dharmas. Śṛṣṭi is also a redemptive process and after the refreshment of *pralaya*, the *jīva* wakes up to moral activity, enters on a new life. He is given a fresh opportunity for attaining freedom. The withdrawing and delivering the universe, as it were, thus reveal the redemptive mercy of the Saviour and cosmology is to be reinterpreted as a philosophy of redemption. Nammālvār revels in these two aspects. The Ālvār says: "Jñālam muṛṇam umiṇta Nārāyaṇē"²⁶ - 'Nārāyaṇa who released the whole universe from His mouth'; "Munnir jñālam paṭaitta em mukil vaṇṇaṇē"²⁷ - 'the cloud-hued Lord who created the sea-girt world'; "Muṇ ulakaṅkaḷ eḷlām paṭaitta mukil vaṇṇaṇē"²⁸ - 'the cloud-hued Lord who created the ancient worlds'. Sometimes both the withdrawal and the deliverance are referred to in one and the same verse. The Ālvār says: "Oruṅkākaṅḷ ulakēlum viḷuṅki umiṇtiṭṭa peruntēvaṇ"²⁹ - 'the great Lord who had swallowed and released the seven worlds together.' Again this involution and evolution of the universe are spoken of by other Ālvārs also; in fact, they have a strong appeal to their minds.³⁰ Tirumaṅkaiyālvār revels in this incident in one full decad.³¹

Each one of these four *vyūhas* descends into three sub-*vyūhas*. Vāsudeva hypostatizes into Keśava, Nārāyaṇa and Mādhava; Saṅkaraṣaṇa into Govinda, Viṣṇu and Maḍhu-sūdana; Pradyumna into Tirivikrama, Vāmana and Śṛīdhara; and Aniruddha into Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha and Damodara. These twelve tutelary deities are the presiding deities of the sun in the twelve months of the year. The names of these twelve deities are recited by the pious Hindus every day. There is a hymn by Nammālvār which goes by the name of

26. T.V.M. 4.3: 6.

27. *ibid.* 3.2: 1.

28. *ibid.* 6.8: 1. cf. 7.1: 9; 7.6: 1; 8.10: 7. cf. Tc.V. 30

29. *ibid.* 4.6: 4. cf. 9.3: 2; 10.2: 3. cf. Tc V. 28.

30. *Periyāl Tm.* 2.6: 6; 4.1: 9; 4.3: 9. *Perum. Tm.* 8.7. Tc.V. 10, 12, 22, 28, 30, 31, 105. A.P. 9. *Peri. Tm.* 1.8: 6; 1.10: 3; 2.2: 5; 2.4: 6; 2.9: 4; 2.5: 1; 3.1: 3; 3.9: 3; 3.10: 3; 4.1: 5, 6; 4.8: 6; 4.10: 5; 5.4: 2; 5.7: 9; 5.9: 2; 5.10: 2; 6.1: 5; 6.6: 1; 7.2: 4; 7.8: 10; 8.10: 2; 9.2: 9; 9.9: 3.

31. *Peri. Tm.* 11.6.

'Panniru tirunāmap-pāṭṭu'³² the recitation of which leads us to the God's lotus feet. A hymn of Periyālvār containing the advice to people to name their children with the names of the Lord bears some of these names.³³ Another hymn celebrating the piercing of the lobes of the ears of child Kṛṣṇa contains these twelve names. Yośoda addresses Him with the names in the hymn.³⁴ Again the images of the Lord are distinguished to represent these twelve forms by varying the order and arrangement of the appurtenances held in the four hands of each image.

The third state of Brahman is *Vibhava* which is the descent of Īswara among beings by means of forms similar to that genus. "It is the embodiment of the redemptive working of the *rakṣaka* in the moral will of humanity with a view to recovering it from its sinfulness". "It is a periodic invasion of *kṛpā* into all species and into the history of humanity, when evil triumphs over goodness and creates a crisis in moral life,³⁵ in order to arrest the progress of social disruption, redeem the sinner from his sinfulness, and commune with the devotee who thirsts for His living presence.³⁶ The ten principal descents are Fish (*Matsya*), Tortoise (*Kūrma*), Boar (*Varāha*), Man-Lion (*Narasimha*), Dwarf (*Vāmana*), Parasurāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin.³⁷ The redemptive grace of *Vibhava* is realized in the recovery of *Vedas* from its destroyers, the extraction of immortality (nectar) from the waters of life, the maintenance of cosmic order and the law of righteousness and the living assurance of salvation to all being.³⁸ According to *Viṣvaksēna-saṁhitā* and *Lakṣmitāntra*

32. T.V.M. 2.7.

33. *Perivāḷ. Tm.* 4.6.

34. *ibid.* 2.3.

35. *The philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 156.

36. Bh.G. 4:7,8

37. According to *Ahībudhnya-saṁhitā*, avatāras are thirty-nine; they are thirty-nine according to the *Sāttavata-saṁhitā* also. But *Yatindra mata Dipika* following Varavaramuni admits thirty-six avatāras only, since Kapila, Dattātreya and Parasurāma are supposed to be secondary avatāras.

38. *Yatin. Dip.* IX. 23.

all the *avatāras* descend from the fourth *vyūha*, viz., Aniruddha. But *Pādmatantra* declares that of the ten *Vibhavas*, 'Matsya, Kūrma and Varāha descend from Vāsudeva; Narasimha, Vāmana, Śrīrāma and Parasurāma from Saṅkarṣaṇa; Balarāma from Pradumna, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin from Aniruddha.'³⁹

Among the *avatāras* of the Lord, some get meagre and brief references because of the short time of His stay in that form and the particularly the smaller number of persons who alone were intended to be favoured by that form of the Lord. The *Matsya* descent has therefore a brief reference.⁴⁰ The *Kūrmāvatāra* has more references.⁴¹ Through the form of Parasurāma, He destroyed the insolent *kṣatriyas*.⁴² The descent Varāha, Vāmana-Tirivikrama, Narasimha, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have frequent references in the works of the *Ālvārs*. Even the first three *Ālvārs*, the earliest of the *Ālvārs*, refer to these *avatāras* in their poems⁴³ thereby proving the popularity of the worship of the several of them prior to the period of *Ālvārs*. As regards *varāha avatāra*, Nammālvār says: "Perunilam Kīṭṭavaṇ"⁴⁴ - 'the one who burrowed and dug out the earth'; "Poḷil eḷum eṇam onṛāy nuṇiār kōṭṭil vaithāy"⁴⁵ - 'in the form of a Boar You poised the seven worlds on Your tusk'; "Maṇ-maṭantai poruṭṭu eṇam āy āti am kālattu akal

39. *Introduction to Pāñcarātra*, p. 48.

40. T.V.M. 1.8: 8; 2.8: 5; Peri. Tm. 5.4: 8; 6.8: 2.

41. *ibid.* 2.8: 5; 7.1: 7; Peri. Tm. 5.3: 6; 5.4: 8; 8.4: 4.

42. *ibid.* 6.2: 10; Peri. Tm. 3.2: 5; 3.4: 5; 6.2: 7.

43. For these five *avatāras*, respectively be referred to: (i) M.Tv. 2, 9, 25, 39, 91; I.Tv. 30, 31, [47; Mu. Tv. 45, 54. (ii) M.Tv. 3, 14, 17, 20, 21, 48, 50, 79, 84, 100; I.Tv. 5, 10, 18, 23, 30, 34, 36, 47, 52, 61, 71, 78, 87, 91, 99; Mu. Tv. 4, 6, 9, 13, 18, 20, 23, 34, 36, 40, 41, 47, 49, 52, 58, 83, 90, 93. (iii) M.Tv. 17, 23, 25, 31, 36, 40, 90, 93; I.Tv. 18, 84, 94, 95; Mu. Tv. 31, 42, 49, 65, 95. (iv) M.Tv. 23, 27, 35, 59; I.Tv. 15, 25, 29, 43, 79, Mu. Tv. 51, 52. (v) M.Tv. 8, 11, 18, 22, 23, 27, 34, 39, 54, 62, 86, 92; I.Tv. 8, 15, 19, 23, 28, 49, 62, 63, 68, 89, 92, 93, 98, 100; Mu. Tv. 21, 28, 29, 32, 34, 41, 42, 43, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 60, 65, 68, 71, 74, 80, 85, 91, 98.

44. T.V.M. 1.7: 6.

45. *ibid.* 2.3: 5.

itam kīṅṭavar"⁴⁶ – ‘for the sake of Goddess Earth, You descended in the form of a Boar and brought out by digging the vast space’; ‘Ēnam āy nilam kīṅṭa en appanē"⁴⁷ – ‘my Lord who in the shape of a Boar brought out the earth’; ‘Niṅ tiru-eyirṅāl iṅantu nī koṅṭa nilamakal kēḷvanē"⁴⁸ – ‘the Lord of Goddess Earth whom You dug out by Your tusk’; Ālap-perum punal tāṅṅuḷ aḷuntiya jñālattait tāḷappaṭāmal taṅṅpāl oru koṅṭitait tāṅ koṅṭa kēḷal tiru uru āyirṅu"⁴⁹ – ‘in order to rescue the earth from submerging, He in the form of a Boar balanced it on His tusk’; ‘Kōla varākam onṅāy nilam kōṅṭiṅkaik koṅṭa entāy"⁵⁰ – ‘in the form of a fine Boar You carried the earth on Your tusk’. There are references to this *avatāra* in his other works also.⁵¹ Tirumaṅkaiyālvār beautifully expresses the grandeur and majesty of this *avatāra*. He says :

“Cilampḷṅ iṅaiṅ ciṅṅ paral-pōl periya mēru
tirukkūḷampil kāṅṅakaṅappa tiru ākārām
Kuluṅka nilamaṅṅantai taṅṅai iṅantu pulkik
kōṅṭiṅṅai valṅṅtaruḷiya kōmāṅ” – ⁵²

This can be translated as : ‘The Lord who, with Mount Mēru jingling like a trinklet within the anklet between His hooves, with Lakṣmī tossed about within His bosom, scooped up Goddess Earth, embraced and placed Her on his tusk’. The English rendering, however, hardly does justice to the beauty of the sentiments expressed, or of the eloquence of the language employed, by the Ālvār.

Innumerable references are found regarding *Vāmana - Tirivikrama avatāra* in the Ālvār’s works. The Ālvār says : ‘Perunilam kaṅṅanta nal aṅṅip-pōtu ayarppilaṅ alaṅṅruvan taḷuvuvaṅ vaṅṅaṅkuvāṅ"⁵³ – ‘I shall tirelessly utter the name

46. ibid. 4.2: 6.

47. ibid. 5.7: 6.

48. ibid. 7.2: 9.

49. ibid. 7.5: 5.

50. ibid. 10. 10: 7.

51. T.V.R. 45, 99; P.Iv. 7, 42.

52. Peri. Tm. 4.4: 8.

53. T.V.M. 1.3: 10.

of, embrace and bow my head, to the lotus-feet which measured the whole world'; "Pulaṅ koḷ māṇāy nilam koṭṭāṇē"⁵⁴ - 'the One Who acquired the earth as a youth (brahmachari) who had conquered the seuses'; "Oru māṇik kuṛalāki nimirnta karumāṇikkam"⁵⁵ - 'the Dark Gem which expanded itself from the state of a short youth'; "Uḷakēṇum ōr mūvaṭi koṭṭāṇāi"⁵⁶ - 'taking the seven worlds in three strides'; "Mēltannai mlṭiṭa nimirntu maṇ koṭṭa māi-taṇṇi mikkuṁ ōr tēvum uḷatē"⁵⁷ - 'Is there a Lord greater than the One Who acquired the Cosmic form and got the earth for Himself'; "Tirukkuṛalā"⁵⁸ - 'the great Dwarf!'; "Maṇ koṭṭa vāmaṇaṅ"⁵⁹ - 'the short One Who acquired the earth'; "Uḷaku aḷantāṅ"⁶⁰ - 'World-measurer'; "Uḷkam koṭṭa aṭiyavaṅ"⁶¹ - 'the One Who took the world in his strides'; "Aṅṇu orukāi vaiyyam aḷanta pirāṅ"⁶² - 'the Lord Who once measured the world'; "Aṭiyai mūṅṇai iranta āṇum āṅkē niṅṇu āḷkaṭalum maṅṇum viṅṇum, muṭiya ir aṭiyāi muṭittuk-koṭṭa mukkiyamum"⁶³ - 'the begging for three footsteps of land, and then taking in just two strides the deep sea, the earth and the heaven'; "Māṅṇu amai kōlattu em māyāk kuṛalārku"⁶⁴ - 'the mysterious Dwarf with handsome shape'; "Maṅṇum viṅṇum maḷiḷa kuṛalāy valaṅkāṭṭi, maṅṇum viṅṇum koṭṭa māya ammāṅ"⁶⁵ - 'O Lord Who acquired the form of the Dwarf to the delight of earth and heaven and acquired by treading both earth and heaven'; "Kuṅṇu ēḷ pāṛ ēḷ cūḷ kaṭal jñālam muḷu ēḷum, niṅṇē tāviya niḷ kaḷai āḷit tirumāḷē"⁶⁶ - 'O Lord who in

54. ibid. 1.8:6.
 55. ibid. 1.10: 1.
 56. ibid. 1.10: 5.
 57. ibid. 2.2: 3.
 58. ibid. 2.6: 1.
 59. ibid. 3.8: 5; 4.7.
 60. ibid. 4.4: 8.
 61. ibid. 5.3: 5.
 62. ibid. 5.4: 10.
 63. ibid. 5.10: 9.
 64. ibid. 6.6: 9.
 65. ibid. 6.9: 2.
 66. ibid. 8.3: 8.

your stationary position stood astride the Seven mountains, the Seven worlds surrounded by sea, and the universe'; "Ivvulakam mūṇṇum uṭaṇ niṇaiya ciṇmāmēṇi nimirṭta eṇ centāmaraiṅkaṇ tirukkuṇṇaṇ"⁶⁷ - 'the lotus-eyed handsome Dwarf who filled with His small body expanded into cosmic largeness all the three worlds'; "Kuṇṇāmal ulakam aṇanta aṇiyāṇai"⁶⁸ - 'the One Who completely taking the whole world in His stride'. After measuring the earth and the heavens with His feet, He puts His Foot on the head of Mahābali for the third step. The emphasis of the Āṭvār is that is the joy of the Lord in touching His children - all living beings in this act of measurement. The idea of inspiring the future generations with hope and love through and by this story is important. Reference to this *avatāra* are also found in his other three works.⁶⁹

The Āṭvār, when referring to *Narasimhavatāra*, says: "Iraṇiyaṇ akal mārvam kiṇṇa eṇ muṇṇaik kōṇariyē"⁷⁰ - 'O Lion Who tore the broad bosom of Hiranya'; "Kiṇṇar oṇiyāl kuṇaiṇu illā ari uruvāyṅ kilarantu eṇuntu, kiṇṇar oṇiya iraṇiyaṇatu akal mārvam kiṇṇittu ukanta, vaṇar oṇiya kaṇal-āli valampuriyaṇ"⁷¹ - 'the One with the brightening fire-spitting discus and the conch Who, vigorously rushing in the form of Man-Lion enjoyed the tearing of the bright bosom of Hiranya; "Allal amarataic ceyyum iraṇiyaṇ ākattai mallal ari uruvāy ceyta māyam"⁷² - 'the deed which He, in the form of the fighting Lion, performed on the chest of Hiranya who persecuted the *Devas*'; "Kaṇuttapōr avuṇṇaṇ uṭal iru piṇavāka kaiukir āṇṇa em kaṇalē"⁷³ - 'my Lord Who with Your hand-nails tore in two the body of the fighting demon'; "Cempon ākattu avuṇṇaṇ uṭal

67. *ibid.* 8. 10: 3.

68. *ibid.* 9 4: 10.

69. T.V.R. 38, 42, 58, 76, 79, 85. T.V.C. 5, 6 P. Tv. 8, 16, 20, 27, 42, 61.

70. T.V.M. 2 6: 6.

71. *ibid.* 4.8: 7.

72. *ibid.* 7.5: 8.

73. *ibid.* 8.1: 3.

kl̥ṅṅavan⁷⁴ – ‘the One Who tore the golden-red bosom of the demon’. References to this *avatāra* are found only in *Periya-tiruvantāli*⁷⁵ and not in other two works.

The Ālvār enjoys the contemplation of *Rāmāvatāra* in his works. He says: “Niḷ kaṭal cūḷ ilaṅkaik kōṅ tōḷkaḷ talai tuṇi ceṅṅāṅ⁷⁶ – ‘One Who hewed down the head and shoulders of the king of Lanka girt by the vast seas’; “Ilaṅkai ceṅṅavaṅ⁷⁷ – ‘O the Destroyer of Lanka.’; “Ilaṅkaiyai nīṅṅ ceṅṅa neṅṅuṅṅaṅ cōti.⁷⁸ – ‘the effulgent Light which burnt Lanka to ashes’; “Kompupōḷ cītai-poruṅṅu ilaṅkai eri uytavar⁷⁹ – ‘the One Who sacked the city of Lanka for the sake of Sītā, tender like a delicate creeper’; “Matil ilaṅkaik kōvai viyac cilai kuṅṅittāy⁸⁰ – ‘You Who discharged the arrow from the bow to fell the king of walled Lanka.’; “Kilimoḷiyāḷ kārapamāk kilar arakkaṅ nakaṅ eritta kaḷimalart tuḷāy alaṅkaḷ kamaḷ muṅṅiyaṅ⁸¹ – ‘the One with the honey-secreting fragrant basil coronet Who sacked the city of the bright demon for the sake of the one with the sweet voice of the parrot’; “Pēreyil cūḷ kaṭal tēṅṅilaṅkai ceṅṅapirāṅ⁸² – ‘the Lord Who burnt up the Southern Lanka surrounded by big ramparts and the seas’; “Āṅ tīṅṅal mīḷi moympin arakkaṅ kulattait taṅṅintu, mīṅṅum avan tampikkē virinir ilaṅkai aruḷi āṅṅu-tam cōti pukka amar ari ēṅṅu⁸³ – ‘the celestial Lion which wiped out the race of the manly and formidable demon, and vouchsafed the island of Lanka to his brother, and then entered the Realm of Light there’; “Tayaratan peṅṅa marakata maṅṅi⁸⁴ – ‘the sapphire gem-like son of

74. *ibid.* 9.10: 6.

75. P.Tv. 11,66.

76. T.V.M. 1.6: 7.

77. *ibid.* 2.4: 4; 5.7: 2.

78. *ibid.* 2.9: 10.

79. *ibid.* 4.2: 8.

80. *ibid.* 4.3: 1.

81. *ibid.* 4.8: 5.

82. *ibid.* 7.3: 7.

83. *ibid.* 7.6: 9.

84. *ibid.* 10.1: 8.

Daśaratha'. The Ālvār's other works also allude to this *avatāra*.⁸⁵

Inordinate love is evinced towards *Kṛṣṇāvatāra*. No other *avatāra* of the Lord exercised such a fascination over the saint's mind. The very thought of the birth of the Lord, the manner in which He grew up and how He managed the Great war of *Mahābhārata* melt his soul.⁸⁶ He is delighted to speak of the various exploits of Kṛṣṇa and He actually revels in them.⁸⁷ In other places the Ālvār says: "Vañcappēy viyat tūya kuḷaviyāy viṭap-pāl amutā amutu ceytiṭṭa māyan"⁸⁸ - 'the mysterious One Who as a cherub drank like nectar the poisonous milk of the false demoness and sucked her to death': "Eñkaḷ āyar koḷuntē"⁸⁹ - 'the true Sprout of our cowherds'; "Vem mā vāy kiṇṭa cem mā kanpaṇē"⁹⁰ - 'O Kṛṣṇa with the large reddish eyes Who tore the mouth of the terrible horsedemon'; "Okkalai vaittu mulaip-pāl uṇṇu tantiṭa vāṅki cekkam ceka aṇṇu avalpāl uyir ceka uṇṇa perumāṇ"⁹¹ - 'the Lord Who when placed in her arms and offered milk by the female demon sucked her to death so that the very (bad) thought may end with her'; "Uṛikkonṭa vepṇai pāl oḷittu uṇṇum ammāṇ"⁹² - 'the Lord Who ate (and drank) the butter and milk stored in the suspender'; "Kāmpu. aṇai tōḷ pinṇaikkū āy ēṇu uṭaṇ ēḷ cēṇṇatuvum"⁹³ - 'the One Who mastered the seven bulls and married Nappiṇṇai with shoulders like bamboo-sprouts'; "Malaiyai eṭuttu kalmāri kattu pacunirai taṇṇait tolaivu tavirtta pirāṇ"⁹⁴ - 'the Lord Who lifted the mountain, and protected the herds of cows against the hailstorm of stones'; "Vampu aviḷ kōtaiporuṭṭā

85. T.V.R. 36, 77,92; P.Tv, 64.

86. T.V.M. 5.10: 1.

87. *ibid.* 6.4.

88. *ibid.* 1.5: 9.

89. *ibid.* 1.7: 2.

90. *ibid.* 1.8: 2.

91. *ibid.* 1.9: 5.

92. *ibid.* 2.3: 8.

93. *ibid.* 2.5: 7.

94. *ibid.* 3.5: 3.

mālviṭai ējum aṭartta compavaḷat tīraḷ vāyaṅ⁹⁵ - 'the Lord Who with his coral lips quelled the seven bulls for the sake of the damsel like a garland emitting fragrance'; "Cātu caṇattai naliyum kañcaṇaic cātipparaku āti am uruvai aṅku vaittu iṅkup piṇanta vētamutalvaṅ⁹⁶ - 'the Originator of the *Vedas* Who left His original form in Heaven and was born here to destroy Kamsa who afflicted the innocent'; "Paṭarpukaḷp pārttanum vaiṭikaṅum uṭan ērat tīṇ tēr kaṭavi cuṭar oḷiyāy niṇra taṇṇuṭaic cōtiyil vaiṭikaṅ piḷḷaikaḷai uṭalōṭum koṭṭu koṭuttavaṅ⁹⁷ - 'the One Who ascended the chariot in the company of the reputed Pārtha and the orthodox brahmin and from His effulgence in Vaikunṭha restored the sons in flesh and blood to the brahmin'; "Pōrppāku tāṅ ceytu aṅṅu aivarai velvitta māyap-pōrt tērppākaṅār⁹⁸ - 'the mysterious Charioteer Who brought out a war and made the Five (Pāṇḍavas) win'; "Cāyak kuruntam ocitta tamiyaṅku, māyac cakaṭam utaitta maṇāḷaṅku, pēyaip piṇampaṭa pāl uṇ piṇāṅukku⁹⁹ - 'to the One Who felled the kurunta tree, who kicked away the mysterious cart, and who sucked to death the female demon'; "Maṅ aṅcap pāratattup pāṇṭavarkāp paṭai toṭṭāṅ¹⁰⁰ - 'the One Who ventured to wield His weapon to the terror of the kings, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas of Bhārata'. More references to this *avatāra* are also found in his other poems *Tiruviruttam*¹⁰¹ and *Periya Tīruvaṅkāṭi*.¹⁰²

Nammālvār fancies that the Lord ate in days of yore the seven worlds and kept them in His stomach and ejected them later. Some mud, which is one of the constituents of earth must have remained in the stomach. The Lord found delight in taking butter perhaps thinking that it may serve as a medicine to dissolve that mud.¹⁰³ There is frequent refer-

95. *ibid.* 3.5: 4.

96. *ibid.* 3.5: 5.

97. *ibid.* 3.10: 5. cf. 6.4: 9 and *Periyāḷ*. Tm. 1.5: 7.

98. *ibid.* 4.6: 1.

99. *ibid.* 6.6: 8.

100. *ibid.* 10.6: 4.

101. T.V.R. 8, 21, 38, 74, 78, 86.

102. P.Tv. 6, 12, 14, 18, 31, 38, 48, 54, 64.

103. T.V.M. 1.5: 8.

rence to the dance of Kṛṣṇa with the pots.¹⁰⁴ This is known as *kuṭakkūttu*.¹⁰⁵ Kṛṣṇa danced in between the horns of seven bulls which He controlled and thus won the wager to get the hand of Nappiṅṅai.¹⁰⁶

Balarāma, though He was an elder brother of Kṛṣṇa and was also an *avatāra* of Nārāyaṇa, receives meagre treatment at the hands of the Ālvārs,¹⁰⁷ perhaps His activities getting overshadowed by those of Kṛṣṇa.

The mysterious powers of Kṛṣṇa are referred to by Nammālvār. The flawless and brilliantly lustrous frame of the Lord remained unchanged when He came down to earth as Kṛṣṇa. He was born among men who are immersed in sorrow; yet He remained untainted by the impurities of the inhabitants of Gokulum with whom He moved very freely. By coming visible to all people, He made His divinity felt in the world. His divine perfection remained intact during this *avatāra*.¹⁰⁸

The compositions of the Ālvārs contain references to some other minor descents of God. A demon Somukha by name took away the four *Vedas* and disappeared in the flood of waters which filled the earth. Nārāyaṇa took the form of fish, killed that demon by tracing him inside the waters and appeared as the swan before Brahmā and imparted the *Vedas* to him. This is an incident relating to God's descent as Hamsa.¹⁰⁹ The gods, who were immersed in darkness when the *Vedas* were stolen, prayed to and praised Nārāyaṇa. Thereupon, the Lord took the form of the swan.¹¹⁰

104. T.V.R. 38; Peri. Tm. 2.5: 4; Periyā]. Tm. 2.7: 7.

105. Vide for details Appendix III.

106. T.V.R. 21.

107. Periyā]. Tm. 1.7: 5.

108. T.V.M. 3:10: 6.

109. Peri. Tm. 5.1: 8.

110. *ibid.* 5.3: 8; Periyā]. Tm. 1.8: 10.

The *avatāras* Varāha, Vāmana, Narasimha, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have frequent references in the works of the Ālvārs and frequency of the last two *avatāras* is still greater, the reason perhaps being that these two *avatāras* took birth seemingly like ordinary mortals, lived with them for a longer period and had contacts in the day to day life whereas the other *avatāras* were for a specific purpose at particular periods and when the purpose was fulfilled they disappeared. Yet the *Varāha avatāra* involves the acquisition by the Lord of his own consort in the shape of the earth which is the region of *karma*; the *Vāmana avatāra* resulted in the Lord's feet touching the whole of the earth and thereby all the selves in the world and emancipating them; and the *Narasimha avatāra* was itself for redeeming the wrong done to a devotee as though to prove that *Bhāgavata apacāra* is a more heinous sin than *Bhagavat apacāra*. For these reasons, these three *avatāras* too come in for large attention at the hands of the Ālvārs.

The fourth state, namely, the immanent form of God is *antaryāmin*, the indwelling self in the region of the heart. The Lord in this form stays with the individual self as its friend in its states of experience such as heaven, hell etc., and is perceptible only to the *yogins*. The moral idea of Īsvara taking this form is for making the *jīvas* pulsate with their creative life and participate in their inner joy and for making the mortal selves immortal. Though He co-exists with the individual self, He is untouched by the taints inherent in the latter. The *Upaniṣad* in its classical exposition of Brahman in this form defines His nature, immanence and intimacy in the following terms : "He who, dwelling within the self, is different from the self, whom the self does not know, of whom the self is the body, who rules the self from within, He is thy Self, the Inner Ruler Immortal".¹¹¹ The Upaniṣadic analogy of two birds on the same tree, of the shining one above, and the suffering one below, becoming united in the end is more sublime and appropriate.¹¹² Nammālvār refers to this form

111. Br. Up. 5.7 : 22 (Mādhyadina reading).

112. Mu. Up. 3.1 : 1. This verse is quoted from R. V. 1.164 : 20; repeated at Sv. Up. 4 : 6; cf. Kath. Up. 3 : 1.

in his *Tiruvāymoḷi*. He says: "Tān oṭṭi vantū entani neñcai vañcitta un oṭṭi niṅṅu eṅ uyiril kalantu"¹¹³ - 'He came of His own accord, fascinated my lone heart and incorporated Himself in my body and my soul'; "Māyau eṅ neñcil uḷḷān"¹¹⁴ - 'the Mysterious One is in my heart'; "Tānum yānum ellām taṅṅāḷḷē kalantoḷintōm, tēnum pālum neyyum kannalum amutum ottē"¹¹⁵ - 'He and I became One within me (Him?) as honey, milk, ghee, cane-sugar, and nectar all being mixed'; "Eṅatu āviyuḷ kalanta peru naḷ utavikku kaimmāṅṅu eṅatu āvi tantōḷintēn"¹¹⁶ - 'as return for the great, good help of getting communed in my soul I have given up to You my soul itself'; "Muḷu ēḷ ulakum uṅṅān ukantu vantū aṅiyēn uṅṅukuntān"¹¹⁷ - 'the One Who ate up all the seven worlds came affectionately of His own accord and entered my soul'; "Yātu avaṅkalum cērkoṭēn eṅṅu eṅṅuḷ pukuntu iruntu tītu avam keṅṅukkum amutam"¹¹⁸ - 'the nectar-like One Who in order to preclude any kind of harm coming to me got into me and stationed Himself there and undoes all harm'; "Mēḷāt tēvarkaḷum nilat tēvarum mēvit toḷum māḷār vantū iṅṅāḷ aṅiyēn maṅṅattē maṅṅiṅṅār"¹¹⁹ - 'the mysterious Lord, worshipped by the highest of the celestials and the devotees of this world, this day has lodged Himself in my heart'; "Veḷḷaic curi caṅkiṅṅōṭum āḷi ēnti tāmaraik kaṅṅān eṅ neñciṅṅūtē puḷḷaik kaṅṅaṅṅa āṅṅai kāṅṅiṅṅār"¹²⁰ - 'contemplate the mode of the lotus-eyed Lord with His white involute conch and discus riding on Garuda into my heart'; "Eṅṅum eṅṅōtum eṅ neñcam tutippa uḷḷē irukkiṅṅa piṅṅān"¹²¹ - 'the Lord Who is within me and Whom my heart worships for ever and ever'; "Ukantē unṅṅai uḷḷum

113. T.V.M. 1. 7: 7.

114. *ibid.* 1.9: 5, 6. The Āḷvār in this hymn finds the Lord in every one of his limbs and organs.

115. *ibid.* 2.3: 1.

116. *ibid.* 2.3: 4.

117. *ibid.* 2.6: 7.

118. *ibid.* 2.7: 3.

119. *ibid.* 5.1: 8.

120. *ibid.* 7.3: 1.

121. *ibid.* 7.10: 6.

en uḷḷattu akampāl akamtān amarntē itam koṅṭa amalā¹²² – ‘O the pure One, Who made a home for Yourself in my inner being which longingly hankers after You’; “Nīrmaiyaḷ neṅcam vaṅcittup pukuntu ennai, irmai ceytu en uyirāy en uyir unṭān¹²³ – ‘the One Who has merged with me, life into life, by fascinating my heart and entering it through His generosity and making it tender’; “En neṅcattu uḷ iruntu iṅku iruntamiḷ nūl ivai moḷintu, valneṅcattu iraniyanai mārupu itanta vāṭṭarān¹²⁴ – ‘the Lord of Tiruvāṭṭāru Who tore off the chest of the hard-hearted Hiranya, and Who stationing Himself within my heart composed great Tamil works’; “Tāmaraikkaṅ en ammaṅ nilaipērān en neṅcattu eppōtum¹²⁵ – ‘my lotus-eyed Lord will never shift from my heart’. In one hymn the Āḷvār gives an elaborate description of every limb and organ of the Lord with all His divine appurtenances, as He has become one with himself.¹²⁶ Again in one verse the saint envisions the Deity of Tiruccirāru at Tiruccenkunṇūr as occupying his mind and heart with every one of His limbs and organs.¹²⁷ In another verse he feels the presence of the Lord within himself in the body, with His large red-lined eyes, His coral lips, the white shining pearl-like teeth and prominent tossing ear-rings, cloud-hued and brightly crowned, with four shoulders bearing the bent bow, the white conch, the mace, the sword and the discus.¹²⁸

The Supreme Lord has entered into the self and does not leave it. Probably the hills like Tirumalai and Tirumāliruṅcolai, the noisy ocean and Vaikuṅṭha have been discarded as worthless (lit. straw) for His stay.¹²⁹ That the Āḷvār is conscious of His stay within himself is stated. He is not

122. *ibid.* 9.4. 1.

123. *ibid.* 9.6: 3.

124. *ibid.* 10.6: 4.

125. *ibid.* 10.6: 6.

126. *ibid.* 2.5.

127. *ibid.* 8.4: 7. cf. *Peri. Tm.* 7.3: 7.

128. *ibid.* 8.8: 1. *Peri. Tm.* 3.5.

129. *P.Tv.* 68. cf. *Peri. Tm.* 8.9: 5 where the Lord is stated as not intending to leave the heart of the Āḷvār.

worried about anything, since he had kept Him steadfast in his heart.¹³⁰ This realization is said to result by listening to the *Vedic* passages which speak about Brahman. The Lord has entered within the Ālvār through his ears. He refers to himself as having become great. In as much as the Ālvār has the Supreme Person within himself, the Ālvār asks the Lord to reflect and find out how He could still be great.¹³¹ The Lord has entered into the mind of the Ālvār and stands there, sits there, lies there and moves about there. Yet He is not satisfied with all this and so has not left it.¹³²

The fifth state of God is the permanent incarnation of *arcā* worshipped in temples, houses, villages, towns, sacred places and hills. The *para* and *vyūha* forms of the Lord are beyond the reach of the denizens of this *terra firma*. All the living beings have not been gifted to live in times when the Lord chose to come down as *avatāras*; owing to lack of *jñāna* and *bhakti* they are not able to see the over-present *antaryāmin* in them. Hence the only alternative left to people is to resort to the *arcā* form to satisfy the spiritual longings and aesthetic cravings.¹³³ This *arcā* consists of idols or images, made of gold, silver, or any material chosen by the worshipper. The belief is that God in the forms of Supreme Vāsudeva (*para*), the *vyūhas*, and the *vibhavas* descends into the idol and makes it divinely alive, so that He may be easily accessible to His devotees. In this manifestation, God, out of His condescension, chooses to will that He seem entirely in the hands of His worshippers, hiding His omniscience and omnipotence, or seeming the very reverse of these in His worshippers' hands. God Supreme (*para*) is experienced in this form. Idols are permanent incarnations, and reservoirs

130. *ibid.* 70.

131. *ibid.* 75.

132. *ibid.* 35.

133. 'Āgamūrti' is the name given to the *arcā* form of the Lord by Tirumalīcaiyālvār (Tc.V. 17). It is the corrupted form of 'Yāgamūrti' which is suitable for worship. It may also be conceived as the form which the Lord Himself has assumed by His divine will or *sāṅkalpa*.

of redemptive mercy. "Arcā is not the idealised projection of creative imagination touched by religious feeling nor the symbolic expression of the infinite in the finite",¹³⁴ It is but the descent of God Himself as the embodiment of His accessibility in the world of mortals. The infinite God enters into finite forms without the loss of His infinity and *Īśvaratva* for communing with the devotee that longs for His contact and for infinitising his religious consciousness. The *Ālvārs* had a genius for intuiting the *arcā*. They had direct sight of Him. Their inspiring utterances serve to invite humanity to share in the mystic rapture of such divine communion. *Bhagavān Saunaka* has said: "Having shaped a beautiful image of Viṣṇu with a lovely face and lovely eyes, out of gold, silver and the like in a manner that would be pleasing, one should adore it, bow to it, sacrifice to it and meditate on it. By doing so, one would enter into that form which is none other than Brahman and will have all one's sins dispelled".¹³⁵

This kind of experience is illustrated by the commentators with reference to an incident in the life of a *Vaiṣṇavite*.¹³⁶

134. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 208.

135. V. Dh. 103: 16.

136. An anecdote has been recorded by the commentators of *Tiruvāymoli* regarding the experience of God in this form. A *Vinṇappam ceyvār* (devotee) used to carry his nut-wallet with him; in it he had kept his *Sallgrāma*-image as his constant companion. When, by accident, the tiny marble-like image, mixed up with the nut (which he ate) entered his mouth, he would feel the hardness of the marble differing of course from the nut. He would then reverentially take it out, wash it in water he had in his vessel, dry it with his robe, dress it, and taking cymbals in his hand sing a song of praise from St. *Nammālvār* and then lull it to sleep again in his nut-wallet. This confusion often happened to him. A *Vaiṣṇavite* of ritual type (more than of love to God) often observed this. To him it was blasphemous. He went to the *ceyvār* and asked him to present his "desecrated marble-God" to him. The *ceyvār* gladly transferred his Holy Property. The *Vaiṣṇavite* took it home, and worshipped it with all the strict details of ceremonial worship, enjoined for such occasions. The Image appeared to him in his

The *arcā* form of God is the only form which is easily accessible to His devotees at all times. Piḷḷailōkācāryār makes the following comparisons with the five forms of God: the attempt to comprehend the transcendent form is like getting water from the other world for quenching thirst; the *vyūha* form is like the legendary ocean of milk which also is not easy of access; the descended forms are like the occasional floods that inundate the country for a while, but do not last long; the immanent form is like subterranean water which is not readily available to a thirsty man although it is right underneath his feet; and the *arcā* is like the pool which remains stationary after occasional freshes pass away and from which anyone at any time could slake his thirst.¹³⁷ This may be the reason why the Āḷvārs have preformed self-surrender to this form of the Lord which is the reservoir of divinity and redemptive mercy. According to yogi S. Parthasarathi *arcāvatāra* has the following advantages: (i) It is reachable by our senses and the mind; (ii) hence it produces a desire for godliness; (iii) as soon as such a desire is produced, it at once serves as a Means to lead us to the apogee of spiritual greatness; (iv) it serves to inspire the virtues of piety and love for God; and (v) it gives us an opportunity even while we are in the midst of our world-enemy to practise service, which we aim at performing in reality when we reach Heaven and there are face to face with God. Our St. Nammālvār had, while he contemplated the manifestations of the Lord in His *arcā* form at several holy places presented to his consciousness the several auspicious attributes of God as Holy subject for his meditation.¹³⁸

dream and spoke thus: 'Fool, I was happy in the temple of my ceyvār's nut-wallet, - ceyvār to whom Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoli* is his life and soul. I had the felicity of becoming bathed in the nectar-like saliva of his holy mouth. I had the delight too of listening to the sweet canticles from the Āḷvār's which he warbled to me. But you have deprived Me of this happiness and subject Me to all the tedious trials of thy formal worship'. The Vaiṣṇavite was by this dream put into great trepidation. He ran to the ceyvār forthwith and restored to him his *Saligrama*. (Vide: Bag. Viṣ. Book VI 6.8: 1 "*Vantiruntu*" (Commentary).

137. S.V.P. First part. Sūtra 39.

138. *Divine wisdom of the Dravida Saints* - pp. 195-196. Foot note (b). cf. A.H. Sūtra (159-186).

The *Sāstras* like *Pāñcarātra Āgamas* postulate God as a certain Being in one place, and hand Him down to us in another place, in the form of vivid Idols which, according to them, He has Himself chosen of His free will to make His special abodes. Once the omnipresence is conceded to God, it must logically follow that the Idol which is intended to visibly personify Him for the pleasure of His devotees must also contain Him. The efficacy of the consecrating *mantras* is said to be so potent that once the installation is duly performed, the Idol acquires abnormal, and super-natural powers. If by mere sight of certain Idols, as for example the one at Tirumalai, or the taking of vows with respect to certain others, as for example, the one at Cōlasimhapuram, certain phenomena occur which cannot be rationally explained or explained away with reference to any known theories of science or other laws, it must be admitted that the idols do have life to a certain extent or in a certain measure. To see Him fully manifested in the Idol is not to deny Him in other places, or in other forms. It is only seeing Him intensely at that place. One should meditate on the Lord's placing Himself at the disposal of those who seek His protection in a manner which cannot be understood by the mind or described in words, for it has been said, "Whoever wants to see Me and in whatever form, to him I reveal Myself in that very form";¹³⁹ as Poykaiyālvār says, 'He assumes the form desired by His devotees' - "Tamarukantatu evvuruvam avvuruvam tāṇē".¹⁴⁰ He should also meditate on the alluring beauty of the Lord of which Tiruppāṇālvār says: 'The eyes that have seen the Lord will refuse to see other things'.¹⁴¹

The *Nālayiram* is the treasure of experience or *anubhava* of the Tamil religious Seers who have uniformly sung in praise of the idols in the several sacred spots. Their sayings most emphatically and unambiguously point to the fact that they were not praising an abstract God, or His attributes in the abstract, but a personal living God, who to

139. Bh. G. 4: 11.

140. M.Tv. 44.

141. A.P. 10.

those saints stood personified in the piece of stone, wood or copper before them. Almost all the Ālvārs have uniformly sung the praises of the presiding deities in the several sacred spots situated throughout length and breadth of our holy land. Tirumāṅkaiyālvār alone has sung about eighty-six *Divya-Desas* out of the total of one hundred and eight situated from Badari in the north to Tiruvanparicāram in the south. It has been rightly pointed out and emphasized by later *Ācāryas* that the hymns of this Ālvār which constitute more than those of other Ālvārs put together are particularly intended to inculcate and enhance the enjoyment of the *arcā* forms of the Lord in the temples. It was left to this Ālvār to prove to the world that in each of the five forms of God the manifestation is full and complete and that there is no gradation among them, one leading to the other; and also how it is possible to get out of *arcā* form here and in this world the same bliss that the Eternals in Vaikuṅṭha are said to obtain in the transcendental form which is beyond the human ken. Otherwise, how else can one account for the Ālvārs' breaking their hearts over the pose or poise of the Lord at each of the several shrines? They saw the Lord in flesh and blood residing in the Idol. One can recall here the experience of Tiruppāṅālvār whose eyes, bewitched, as they were by the glory of the Lord's form travelling slowly from foot to head and drinking deeply from the fountain of Beauty and Grace. It is even said that with Tirumāṅkaiyālvār one of the most living and life-like of Idols held a conversation transgressing even the self imposed limitations of *arcā*. While at Kumbakonam worshipping in the shrine of Sāraṅgapāṇi Perumal (the '*ārāvamatu*' of Nammālvār), enraptured at the restful pose of that beautiful God, asked Him the reason for it: "Do the legs ache because of excessive walking (the earth from end to end as Rāma)? Or did the body get shaken far too much while You delved this trembling earth in the form of a Boar? What is the reason for Your lying down and resting in Kuṭantai on the banks of the Kāviri which spreads itself far and wide after crossing all the hills and dales that came in her way? Won't You rise up and speak?"¹⁴² At this request

made in a submissive tone and beautiful poetry, it is said, that this Lord lifted up His head and attempted to rise from His serpent couch. The Ālvār moved by this graciousness on the part of the Lord at once sang 'Vāḷi kēcaṅē' meaning "Thou with beautiful locks of hair! May Thou livest long and undisturbed!" The Lord stayed as He was at that moment. To this day the Idol is seen as one lying down with head slightly raised (*uttānasāyee*) and seemingly most ready to open Its lips.

The *arcā* forms, as they are enshrined in temples, reveal two aspects of God's relation to man. Nārāyaṇa takes that particular form which His devotee desires to visualise.¹⁴³ Hence there is a large amount of difference in the postures of the images in the various shrines. The Paurāṇic versions¹⁴⁴ make this clear by declaring that the Lord appeared in a specific form before a sage or a king who was devoted to Him. The other aspect is that the principal (*mūla*) image in the shrines is made of stone dark in appearance, in all probability, to conform to the *Upaṅśadī* statement that Brahman has the blue *ākāśa* as his body.¹⁴⁵ The temples together with the images principal and the other ones as those taken out in procession during festivals came into existence before the period of the Ālvārs. Hence the frequent reference in their compositions to the complexion of God as bearing semblance to the sea,¹⁴⁶ water-laden cloud¹⁴⁷ and blue sapphire.¹⁴⁸

The Ālvārs, who were mad with love for God, had great veneration to the sacred places, hills and shrines. They bowed to those places¹⁴⁹ which is suggestive of specific impor-

143. M.Tv. 44.

144. Peri. Tm: 2.2. For instance, vide: Mark. P. Tīruvevvūḷūr Mahātmya ch. 1 to 11.

145. Taitt. Up. 1.6: 2.

146. T.V.M, 3.6: 10, 7.3: 11.

147. Ic. V. 120; Peri. Tm. 1.9: 10; T.V.M, 7.2: 11.

148. Mu. Tv. 59; Nan. Tv. 47.

149. Vide: Peri. Tm. 1.5; 1.8; 3.8; 3.9; 3.10; 5.10; 6.4; 8.6; 9.7; 9.8. T.V.M. 2,10,

tance which such places have enjoyed during their periods. The Tirumalai, Tirumāliṛuñcōlai, Tiruvaraṅkam, Tirukkanna-puram, Tirukkuṭantai, Tiruvehkā and others have relatively larger number of verses sung in praise of these deities. Tiruvaraṅkam has the credit of having the verses from all the eleven Ālvārs. Tirumalai comes next with ten Ālvārs' verses. Seven Ālvārs extolled Tirukkuṭantai. Tirukkanna-puram, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, Pāṭakam and Tiruvehkā have each the verses of five Ālvārs. The other shrines which are hundred and one in number have songs of a relatively less number of Ālvārs.

The compositions of the Ālvārs contain here and there enumeration of some shrines on certain principles. The Lord measured the worlds with His feet and perhaps of having stood for a time He became tired and therefore sat down in Vēlukkai in Kāñcipuram and lay down in Tiruvehka also at Kāñci.¹⁵⁰ He is lying down on Ādiśeṣa in Tirukkuṭantai, Tiruvehkā, Tiruvevūṭūr, Tiruvaraṅkam, Tiruppērnakar, Anpil and Milky ocean.¹⁵¹ The Lord is standing in Tirumalai, seated in Viṇṇakar, lying in Tiruvehkā and is walking in Tirukkōvalūr.¹⁵² The strain of churning the milky ocean made the Lord perhaps lie down in Tiruvehkā, sit at Pāṭakam, and stand in Tiruvūrakam, all in Kāñci.¹⁵³

The four compositions of Nammālvār contain in all 1296 verses of which 395 are devoted to the praise of the *arcā* forms of God. The traditional scholars treat all the verses of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* as dedicated only to the deity at Śrī Raṅgam. This is not, however, borne out by the availability of decads in the *Tiruvāymoḷi* in praise of the *arcā* forms in thirty-two shrines other than Śrī Raṅgam. The Ālvār treats of the nature of the Supreme Person in the first two centums¹⁵⁴

150. Mū. Tv. 34.

151. Nāṅ. Tv. 36.

152. M. Tv. 77.

153. Mu. Tv. 64. This order is reversed in Tc. V. 63 and 64.

154. These contain sixteen verses in praise of *arcā*.

much in the manner of the *Upaniṣads* and so draws little reference to the *arcā* form here. The third and the fourth centums, which treat the nature of the self, contain a little more reference, suggesting the relatedness of the self to God in *arcā* form¹⁵⁵. The fifth and the sixth centums deal with the means of getting at God and the verses on the images contained here¹⁵⁶ lay stress on the need for worshipping the *arcā* form of the Lord. The verses in the next two centums,¹⁵⁷ show how through the *arcā* worship, the obstacles in the path of attaining God are removed. Those in the last two centums¹⁵⁸ show clearly that the goal could be reached here itself, namely, experience of direct communion with the Lord. This could be achieved mainly through the worship of the *arcā* form of God.

Nammāļvār sang in praise of thirty-three sacred places out of which seventeen¹⁵⁹ were sung only by him. These seventeen and six more shrines¹⁶⁰ (which were sung by other Āļvārs as well) are all situated in the Tirunelveli District of the Tamil Nadu and in the adjoining areas of Kerala State. Of the remaining ten, Vaṭamaturai and Tuvarai (Dvāarakā) lie in the north, Tirumalai lies at the southern extremity of the Andhra Pradesh, Tirumāļiruñcōlai and Tirumōkūr in the Madurai District, Tiruvehkā at Kāñci and the remaining four in Thaņjavoor District of the Tamil Nadu. Of all these Tirumalai is the only shrine on which the Āļvār sang sixty-two verses. The next one which attracted his attention in importance was Tirumāļiruñcōlai which was being celebrated by forty-six verses. (Vide Appendix IV for the list of *arcā* forms of God celebrated by Nammāļvār with actual number of verses on each.)

155. There are fifty eight verses here.

156. One hundred and twenty two are found here on the *arcā* form.

157. Seventy-one verses are found here on the idol.

158. There are one hundred and eighteen verses here.

159. Most of these are treated in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth centums.

160. These are treated mostly in the fifth, eighth and ninth centums.

While expressing his surging love and devotion for the *arcā* form of the Lord in certain shrines the Ālvār does not fail to take note of the religious and ritualistic atmosphere prevailing in those places where some of the shrines are situated. Such references which the saint offers reveal the extent to which the culture of the *Vedas* and the religious practices prevailed in those places mostly situated in the southernmost regions of South India. Vāṅamāmalai, as known at present, is Śrīvaramaṅkalam where lived persons proficient in the four *Vedas*.¹⁶¹ Those persons, who were of perfect knowledge, performed the *Vedic* rituals.¹⁶² Another shrine called Ten-tiruppēreyil is said to be ever resonant with the recitation of the *Vedas* and the din and bustle of the festivities.¹⁶³ The *Vedic* rites¹⁶⁴ were ceaselessly performed here and the *Sāma-Veda* was chanted.¹⁶⁵ The Ālvār-Nayaki loses all her bashfulness and reticence to the enchanting figure of the Lord.¹⁶⁶ Tiruccēṅkuṇṇūr Tirucciṅṇāru is a shrine where lived three thousand Brahmins deeply learned in the *Vedas*.¹⁶⁷ The smoke to which fragrance is imported by the oblations offered into the fire, rises up high in the sky screening the sun.¹⁶⁸ Those Brahmins adore the deity from all directions.¹⁶⁹ They are liberal minded, individually reputed and have their knowledge equalled only by their spotless conduct.¹⁷⁰ The sound of the recitation of the four *Vedas* fill the places where the shrines Tiruvaṅvaṅṅūr,¹⁷¹ Tiruvallvā¹⁷² and Tirukkaṭṭāṅam¹⁷³ are situated. The holy smoke rising

161. T.V.M. 5.7: 3.

162. *ibid.* 5. 7: 4, 7, 9.

163. *ibid.* 7.3: 1.

164. *ibid.* 7.3: 6.

165. *ibid.* 7.3: 4.

166. *ibid.* 7.3: 3.

167. *ibid.* 8.4: 6.

168. *ibid.* 8.4: 5.

169. *ibid.* 8.4: 8.

170. *ibid.* 8.4: 9.

171. *ibid.* 6.1: 2; 4.

172. *ibid.* 5.9: 3. where the *Sāmaveda* was recited.

173. *ibid.* 8.6: 10.

from the fire fills the areas of Tiruvallavā¹⁷⁴ and Tiruvaṅ-
vaṅṭūr.¹⁷⁵

The Lord of the Tirupati Hills is praised by Nammālvār in sixty-two verses. Eight verses of *Tiruviruttam* portrays the mystic experience of the Ālvār who, as the bride of the Lord, experiences the pangs of separation from Him.¹⁷⁶ The deity at Tirumalai is visited by gods, men¹⁷⁷ and sages,¹⁷⁸ and Śiva, Brahmā and Indra who bring with them the members of the family for worshipping the Lord.¹⁷⁹ The Lord is present there with Śrī¹⁸⁰ as the parents of the world.¹⁸¹ In those Hills the Lord has manifested Himself with all His glory and splendour. 'It is our duty to render spotless service at His feet for all times to come' - "Oḻiviḷ kālamellām uṭanāy manṇi, vaḷuvilā aṭimai ceyyavēṅṭum nām".¹⁸² In this connection the Ālvār expresses anxiety about the past that has gone by and that has not been fruitful. He cannot get it back, but he is afflicted with the thought that it has been a waste. He does not want the very thought of the waste that has taken place. So he resolves to devote the rest of his life for austerity and devotion to the Lord of the hills. He says that the devotees recite the manifold names of the Lord at Vēṅkaṭam of north with cascades of cool waters in such a frenzy that others call them mad.¹⁸³ "When there is my Lord" says he, "father-like and elephant-like at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the haunt of murmerous bees, I will not compose verses on my tongue to any human being".¹⁸⁴ The depiction

174. *ibid.* 5.9: 3, 5.

175. *ibid.* 6.1: 2.

176. T.V.R. 8, 10, 15, 31, 50, 60, 67, 81.

177. T.V.M. 1.8: 3.

178. *ibid.* 6.10: 4.

179. *ibid.* 6.10: 8.

180. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

181. *ibid.* 2.6: 10.

182. *ibid.* 3.3: 1.

183. *ibid.* 3.5: 8.

184. *ibid.* 3.9: 1.

185. *ibid.* 3.3.

of the Lord is *Upantšadic* in purport.¹⁸⁵ The divine auspicious from is never lost sight of.

The Ālvār celebrates in forty-six verses his communion with the Lord at Tirumāḷirun̄cōlai. When he celebrates the Lord of Tiruppērnakar he could not avoid making reference to his realisation of communion with the Lord of Tirumāḷirun̄cōlai.¹⁸⁶ The Lord at Tiruppēr-nakar, the Lord who is lodged at the Hill of Tirumāḷirun̄cōlai, has entered into his heart saying that He would stay there (for ever).¹⁸⁷ He refers to the deity of the place who lodged the three worlds in His stomach, who is merciful towards generation after generation from time immemorial, who is beyond the reach of Brahmā and Śiva who praise Him has vouch safed Grace on him.¹⁸⁸ Even though he casually mentioned the name of the Hill of Tirumāḷirun̄cōlai as one of the series of hills, Tirumāl rushed and filled his heart because accidentally he uttered His name '*Tirumāl*' an element in the name of the Hill.¹⁸⁹ He advises the people of the world to pay a visit to the Hill before the bubbling youthfulness passes away¹⁹⁰ and circumambulate the temple daily.¹⁹¹ He is captivated by the beauty of the deity of the place and says: "Has the lustre of Your face blossomed forth as the lustre of Your crown? Has the lustre of Your feet blossomed forth as the lotus on which You stand?"¹⁹² The self shall entertain a desire to go on a pilgrimage to such a place.¹⁹³

Tiruvarāṅkam is praised by the Ālvār in one decad. The mystic experience of the Ālvār, as the bride of the Lord, is treated here, depicting the pangs of separation from the

186. *ibid.* 10.8.

187. *ibid.* 10.8. 6.

188. *ibid.* 10.7: 6.

189. *ibid.* 10.8: 1.

190. *ibid.* 2.10: 1.

191. *ibid.* 2.10: 8.

192. *ibid.* 3.1: 1.

193. *ibid.* 2:10.

Lord which is experienced by the Ālvār.¹⁹⁴ The Sleeping Beauty at Tirukkuṭantai is shown as love in corporeal form with all divine perfections and qualities of unsurpassed excellence.¹⁹⁵ The auspicious and divine form of the Lord is described as present in Tiruviṅṅakar which is enriched in natural and material prosperity. The Lord's glory is admirably shown to consist in the pairs of many opposites which are mutually incompatible but could subsist only in Him.¹⁹⁶ The huge, lofty ramparts, dashed by the waves of the sea, mark the shrine at Tirukkannapuram wherein the Supreme Person presents Himself to the selves, grants refuge to those who perform self-surrender, and emancipation after their death. The only way open for the devotees to get rid of the sufferings of the world is the worship of His feet with flowers.

The Ālvār's direct experience of the Lord in many shrines near his birth place produced an indelible and deep impression that he is reminded of the divine enchanting form of the Lord and yearns to have direct experience after the manner of His bride.¹⁹⁷ He prefers to send messengers to the Lord.¹⁹⁸ The feeling of separation is much intense in the background of the pleasant natural surroundings of the Tāmpraparāṇi river and of the prosperous life in certain places where the shrines are situated.¹⁹⁹ That there is no refuge apart from the Lord is stated repeatedly by the Ālvār who had communion with Him whose divine figure refuses to leave his heart.²⁰⁰ Much stress is laid on the significance of the name Kālamēkam of the deity at Tirumōkūr,²⁰¹ and Ātippirān at Tirukkurukūr.²⁰² The graceful looks which the

194. *ibid.* 7.2.

195. *ibid.* 5.8.

196. *ibid.* 6.3.

197. *ibid.* 5.5; 5.9; 6.5; 7.3; 8.9.

198. *ibid.* 6.1; 9.7.

199. *ibid.* 5.7; 6.5.

200. *ibid.* 7.2; 8.4.

201. *ibid.* 10.1.

202. *ibid.* 4.10.

Ālvār received compel him to wish to offer service to the Lord in many shrines.²⁰³ The saint has a call to Tiruvāraṅ-
viḷai. He is eager to settle with all his filial devotion,
circumambulate the temple and lift up his hands in prayer,²⁰⁴
the diety will have to be sprinkled with sweet-smelling water
and he will walk round the temple and offer his worship;²⁰⁵
he will pray to the diety every day for all times to come;²⁰⁶
once he gets an opportunity to worship round the temple, all
his sins will vanish;²⁰⁷ his deep thoughts are to reach the
temple and pray the diety round the sanctum;²⁰⁸ once he has
become a slave to the Lord, He will be able to know whether
all his thoughts were not centred on Him and Him alone.²⁰⁹
The Ālvār requests the Lord at Tiruppuḷinkuṭi to set His eyes
on and say a few words to the devotees "who have been for
generations doing service in Your temple through Your grace
and the grace of Lakṣmī from times immemorial".²¹⁰ In the
conception of the Ālvār, the presiding diety at Tiruvananta-
puram is the same as the Lord at Paramapadam and the divine
service at one is as important as at the other. The Lord
there is majestic in reclining posture;²¹¹ those who wor-
ship Him with flowers are those that are the most virtuous;²¹²
those who reach His lotus feet attain the status of the
Eternals;²¹³ those who get a chance to sweep and clean the
temple yard will get rid of their worst sins;²¹⁴ those who offer
worship with sweet smelling flowers and incense will be bereft
of their sins;²¹⁵ those who worship Him with sandal paste,

203. *ibid.* 7.10; 9.2; 9.6; 9.8; 10.2.

204. *ibid.* 7.10: 1.

205. *ibid.* 7.10: 2.

206. *ibid.* 7.10: 3.

207. *ibid.* 7.10: 8.

208. *ibid.* 7.10: 9.

209. *ibid.* 7.10: 10.

210. *ibid.* 9.2: 3.

211. *ibid.* 10.2: 1.

212. *ibid.* 10.2: 4.

213. *ibid.* 10.2: 5.

214. *ibid.* 10.2: 7.

215. *ibid.* 10.2: 9.

light, and incense along with select lotus flowers for daily prayer will be entitled to immortal greatness.²¹⁶ The Lord at Tirukkuruṅkuṭi is referred to as the soul of all and as the consort of Śrī.²¹⁷ The Ālvār-Nāyaki has lost her heart to the Lord who is seen by her in her vision with all His appurtenances.²¹⁸ The delectable experience which the Ālvār had in some places is recollected with much gratefulness to the Lord for His grace.²¹⁹ The Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāru has ordained that the Ālvār after giving up his worldly attachment should serve Him incessantly. He that had ripped open Hiraṇya in His Narasimhāvāṭāra has stationed Himself as *seṣa-sūrya* at Tiruvāṭṭāru conveying a message that those who surrender to the Great can be sure of unexpected rewards.²²⁰

One whole hymn is devoted to stress on the easy accessibility of *arcāvātāra*. The Ālvār assures the men of the world that the *arca* form of the Lord is indistinguishable from Śrīman Nārāyaṇa of Vaikunṭha and that if this form (*arca*) is contemplated Śrīman Nārāyaṇa Himself responds to the prayer.²²¹ In all these aforesaid five states Bhagavān is ever present with Śrī; this import is established by scripture and other means of knowledge.²²² In these varied forms He creates, maintains and destroys all, is also the giver of *mokṣa* and has such other activities. These activities of His are, as it were, due to the over-flow of His bliss or *ānanda*. Again, the five forms of God are equally real in the philosophical sense, though from a point of view of religious value each succeeding manifestation may be more valuable to the devotee. Knowledge and other attributes of God are not in the least affected when any of these forms is assumed.²²³ It

216. *ibid.* 10.2: 10.

217. *ibid.* 1.10: 9.

218. *ibid.* 5.5.

219. *ibid.* 8.6; 10.6.

220. *ibid.* 10.6: 10.

221. *ibid.* 3.6.

222. *Yat. Dip.* IX. 29.

223. *L.T.* 2: 69.

is God's will that brings into existence these forms which are of pure *sattva*. The Lord takes up these forms to protect the good people and establish righteousness.²²⁴ Consequently, all these forms have equal importance and significance. Hence the Ālvārs are found to treat an *arcā* form as identical with the *vibhava* or *para* form. All these or some among them are said to be same as the Indweller. The Lord who lies in the ocean is Keśava, the destroyer of the demon Keśin. He lies in Tirukkuṭantai wearing a gem-set crown. He is the protector of the cows.²²⁵ The primeval Lord of the gods, who measured the entire world, leaving no inch of land has become born among the cowherds.²²⁶ The Lord who lies on Ādiśeṣa in the milky ocean and is in yogic slumber, takes in the worlds at the time of deluge, lifts up the Govardhana for protecting the people.²²⁷ It is the Lord whose chest is ever occupied by Śrī that became Govinda and removed the deformity of the hunch backed woman.²²⁸ The Lord who lifted up the earth from the waters is permanently stationed in Tirumalai,²²⁹ which place He reached after measuring the earth and He is the same as the Lord who lifted up the Govardhana to protect the kine and cowherds from torrential rain of pebbles.²³⁰ He punished Bali, made the demon Bāna become submissive by cutting of the thousand arms and killed Kamsa.²³¹ He who tore open the beak of the crane, passed through the twin Maruta trees making them fall down, and controlled the seven fierce bulls has taken His dwelling in Śrīvaramaṅkalam (Vānamāmalai).²³² The Lord who brought the earth out of the waters, who acquired the name Keśava by killing Keśin, who killed the elephant Kuvalayapīdā and who,

224. Bh G. 4: 8.

225. T.V.M. 10.9: 7.

226. T.V.R. 61.

227. *ibid.* 74.

228. T.V.M. 1.5: 5.

229. *ibid.* 1.8: 3.230. *ibid.* 3.3: 8.231. *ibid.* 3.8: 9.232. *ibid.* 5.7: 9.

being beyond the comprehension of gods, lies in the ocean, has come very near to Nammālvār.²³³ Nārāyaṇa who withdrew the earth during deluge, released it at the time of creation, measured it at one time, and raised it at another from the waters, had coronation as the Lord of the earth, ruled it and married Bhūdevi.²³⁴ The Lord who is in Paramapada stands in Tirumalai, sleeps in the ocean and moved about in the world in His divine descents. He remains unseen within all objects and is staying in the mind of the Ālvār.²³⁵ He created the earth, lifted it up from the waters, kept it within the stomach during involution, released at the time of evolution, and measured it as Tirivikrama.²³⁶ All these forms have been assumed by the Lord only to protect the world and the beings inhabiting it from difficulties.²³⁷ The Ālvār's attempt to offer a synthesis between these forms is aimed at to prove that the Lord is only one, though for the specific reasons which prompt Him to appear differently at different times.

The Ālvārs revel in the exploits of Nārāyaṇa both in the transcendental state and in the states of *avatāras*. Periyālvār says :

“Unṇuṭaiya vikkiram onru oḷiyāmal ellām
Eṇṇuṭaiya neṅcakampāl cuvarvaḷi eḷutik-koṇṭēṇ”²³⁸

—‘I have frescoed in my heart all thy exploits without exception’. He celebrates the heroism of the Lord in His Narasimha,²³⁹ Varāha,²⁴⁰ Rāmā²⁴¹ and Kṛṣṇa²⁴² *avatāras*

233. *ibid*, 1.9. 2.

234. *ibid*. 4.5: 10; 8.1: 5.

235. *ibid*. 6.9: 5. All the five forms of God are mentioned here.

236. T.V.C. 6.

237. T.V.R. 1.

238. Periyāḷ. Tm. 5.4: 6.

239. *ibid*. 1.5: 2; 1.6: 8; 2.7: 7; 4.8: 8.

240. *ibid*. 2.10: 9; 3.5: 5; 4.8: 8.

241. *ibid*. 1.6: 8; 2.6: 8; 3.9: 6; 4.1: 3; 4.2: 2; 4.3: 8; 4.7: 1 etc.

242. *ibid*. 1.5: 5; 1.5: 2; 1.5: 4; 1.9: 9; 2.5: 2; 2.5: 5; 3.6: 4; 4.3: 2; 4.8: 1; 4.8: 2 etc.

revelling the manifold exploits in them. The incidents of devouring the worlds by the Lord,²⁴³ and the churning of the ocean by Him,²⁴⁴ are extolled by this Ālvār. The hurling of Namuci, the son of Bali, in the air is praised by him.²⁴⁵ Almost all the Ālvārs praise the incidents of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa more in their poems than those of other *avatāras*.

Nammālvār celebrates in his poem the Lord's exploits. The Lord who, though reclining on the small banyan leaf, could lodge within Himself the seven worlds,²⁴⁶ and again "Our Kaṇṇan swallowed the earth, heaven and all".²⁴⁷ He portrays the churning of the ocean by the Lord: "O my Lord, Thou churnedest the ocean with the snake with the two ends held by the Devās and the Aśuras and Thou heldest aloft the Mantara mountain".²⁴⁸ When referring to the Lord of the three strides, he says that from being a midget He became the titanic Supreme Lord.²⁴⁹ He delineates the episode of the three demons facing the Lord, one of them, Māli, getting killed and the other two getting pushed into the nether world.²⁵⁰ He mentions the Hiranya incident. "O the lion-shaped Lord! Thou torest asunder the boom of Hiranya who entertained insulting thoughts about Thee".²⁵¹ The axe-wielding Lord, in the form of Parasurāma, rooted out the Kṣatriya race for twenty-one generations.²⁵² The Lord hacked down the shoulders and heads of the lord of Lāṅka begirt with the seas.²⁵³ He caused Lāṅka to be set on fire, consigned

243. *ibid.* 1.2: 13; 2.7: 9; 4.1; 9. 4.3: 9. etc.

244. *ibid.* 1.6: 10; 2.2: 9.

245. *ibid.* 1.8: 8; 2.5: 9; 2.10: 7.

246. T.V.M. 2.2: 7. cf. *ibid.* 1.8: 7; 2.1: 10; 2.3: 4.

247. *ibid.* 2.2: 1.

248. *ibid.* 7.1: 7.

249. *ibid.* 1.10: 1.

250. *ibid.* 7.6: 8.

251. *ibid.* 2.6: 6. cf. *ibid.*, 4.8: 7; Peri. Tm. 3.3: 8.

252. *ibid.* 6.2: 10. cf. Peri. Tm. 6.7: 2; 7.2: 7; 7.6: 2; 8.5: 8; 8.8: 6; 9.1: 6; 11.4: 6.

253. *ibid.* 1.6: 7.

to the flames.²⁵⁴ He hit the seven trees (*marāmaram*) set in a zig-zag order with a single arrow.²⁵⁵ "My Lord" says the Ālvār, "lifted up the great earth"²⁵⁶ and again, "My Lord Keśava in the form of a Boar poised the whole earth on the tusk".²⁵⁷ The Lord reclines on the earth; He is seated on it; He stands upright on it; He devours it; He spits it out; He embraces it in the form of His consort.²⁵⁸ This incident of lifting up of the earth by the Lord in the form of a Boar is celebrated by Tirumānkaiyālvār in a beautiful picturesque language.²⁵⁹ The Ālvār evinces inordinate love towards *Kṛṣṇavatāra* and so he takes a keen interest in mentioning the exploits of Kṛṣṇa frequently in his hymns. The smiling, red-lipped Lord who sucked the breast of the demoness (*Pūtana*), kicked away the demon in the form of the wheel, uprooted the maruta trees by walking in between them, tore apart the mouth of the horse-demon, and slew the elephant (*Kuvalayāpidā*).²⁶⁰ He held aloft the Govardhana mountain effortlessly.²⁶¹ He subdued the seven ferocious bulls.²⁶² He cut off the thousand arms of Bāṇāśura.²⁶³ The Ālvār celebrates the incident in which the Lord set the demon in the form of a calf on the demon in the shape of a wood-apple tree and dispatched them both at once²⁶⁴ and also the slaying of the two wrestlers Cānūra and Muṣṭika and Kamsa too.²⁶⁵ He delineates the Lord's ascending into the Heaven in the company of Arjuna and the orthodox Brahmin and bringing back and restoring to the Brahmin his four sons placed in

254. *ibid.* 2.1: 3. cf. *ibid.* 2.6: 9.

255. *ibid.* 1.7: 6.

256. *ibid.* 1.7: 8.

257. *ibid.* 1.9: 2.

258. *ibid.* 2.8: 7.

259. *Peri. Tm.* 4.4: 8. cf. *ibid.*, 3.4: 3.

260. *T.V.M.* 5.3: 8. cf. *ibid.* 1.8: 2; 1.9: 2; 1.9: 5; 2.1: 8; 2.1: 10; 2.10: 10; 4.8: 3.

261. *ibid.* 1.8: 4.

262. *ibid.* 1.8: 7; 2.5: 7; 2.9: 10; 5.7: 9. cf. *Peri. Tm.* 3.4: 4.

263. *ibid.* 2.4: 2; 3.4: 10; 3.8: 9; 4.8: 9. cf. *Peri. Tm.* 6.7: 2.

264. *ibid.* 7.3: 5.

265. *ibid.* 8.4: 1. cf. *ibid.* 3.8: 9.

Heaven in exactly the same state in which they were born.²⁶⁶ Most of the exploits of the Lord in *Kṛṣṇavatāra* are narrated in one hymn—the lifting of the mountain, the subduing of the serpent Kāliyaṅ, the slaying of the wrestlers, and of the elephant, of Pūtana and of Sakatāsura, the cunning disposal of Kamsa, and of the demon in the form of a crane, the subduing of the bulls, the uprooting of the tree into which the demon entered, the cutting down of the Bāṇa's shoulders, the acquisition of the earth as Vāmana, the rescuing of the four sons of the orthodox Brahmin, and the conduct of Bhārata war.²⁶⁷ Similarly Tirumaṅkaiyālvār also, in one hymn, celebrates the exploits of Kṛṣṇa.²⁶⁸ The incident in which Śrī Kṛṣṇa brought and planted the *Pārijāta* tree from the land of the Devas for the sake of His consort Satyabhāma has been celebrated both by Periyālvār and Tirumaṅkaiyālvār in their hymns.²⁶⁹

The Ālvār allots one full hymn to a commemoration of the Lord's exploits: each verse to a description of a particular accomplishment. The cosmic dimensions of the Lord with all His accoutrements in Tirivikramāyatāra striding the earth are outlined.²⁷⁰ The phenomenal noise and impact of movement and counter movement produced at the time of churning the ocean are brought out.²⁷¹ The delicate poising achieved by the Lord at the time of having up the earth in the form of a Boar is portrayed.²⁷² The chaotic dissolution into which He cast the Universe while devouring it at the time of Deluge is indicated.²⁷³ The unprecedented noise caused by him at the time of the Bhārata war with soldiers fighting and the Devas watching is referred to.²⁷⁴ The strength of the impact

266. *ibid.* 3.10: 5; 6.4: 9.

267. *ibid.* 6.4. cf, *ibid.* 5.10.

268. Peri. Tm. 7.4.

269. Periyālvār. Tm. 1.9: 9; 3.9: 1; Peri. 3.4: 8; 4.6: 8.

270. T.V.M. 7.4: 1.

271. *ibid.* 7.4: 2.

272. *ibid.* 7.4: 3.

273. *ibid.* 7.4: 4.

274. *ibid.* 7.4: 5.

involved in the killing of Hiranya in Narasimhāvatāra is described.²⁷⁵ The exploits of the Lord during the war with Rāvaṇa are depicted.²⁷⁶ The Lord's direct facing and hacking down of Bāṇāsura and defeating of Subramanya, Agni and Śiva are portrayed.²⁷⁷ The Lord's creation of the elements, the stars, and planets, and all forms of life, all in a trice, is wondered at.²⁷⁸ The way the Lord lifted up and held as an umbrella the Govardhana mountain for the protection of the cows and cowherds is traced.²⁷⁹

The Ālvār gets himself lost in admiration while recounting how the Lord whose mouth²⁸⁰ is described to be very huge for eating the world, kept it within His stomach and lies like a very small child on the tiny banyan leaf. He sleeps there for a long time. This state of childhood is peerless and could not be imagined.²⁸¹ Of all these forms, the significance of the Lord using Garuḍa as His vehicle requires to be mentioned. An elephant had once quenching its thirst by drinking water in a deep pond. Its legs were seized by a crocodile. The elephant put up a tough fight and tried to extricate itself from the clutches of the crocodile, but with no result. It then realised the futility of its personal endeavour and remembered the *mantra* which it was taught in the previous birth and shouted it out in dire distress. The Lord at once started on His vehicle Garuḍa hurried to rescue the elephant. He killed the crocodile with the discus. There were several poets like Pōtana²⁸² who were stuck with admiration at this ever readiness of the Lord to rush for protecting the devotee, and depict Garuḍa and weapons running swiftly after the Lord to be of use to Him but the Lord was more alive to save the life of the devotee than to take to the

275. *ibid.* 7.4: 6.

276. *ibid.* 7.4: 7.

277. *ibid.* 7.4: 8.

278. *ibid.* 7.4: 9.

279. *ibid.* 7.4: 10.

280. *ibid.* 2.6: 7; 4.2: 1; 6.10: 1 etc.

281. *ibid.* 3.7: 10.

282. Pōtana, B: *Mahābhāgavatamu*: Ch. 8: 96 to 98.

weapons which He would like to make use of. Some versions of this incident depict the elephant as entering into the tank to fetch the lotuses for worshipping the Lord and as having got then into the clutches of the crocodile.²⁸² Besides revealing fully that the Lord has unbounded mercy for the suffering humanity, this incident has been mainly instrumental to declare the Lord's greatness, superiority over others and His individuality.

283. *ibid.* 3.1: 9.