

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ECSTASY OF THE ĀḶVĀR'S GOD-EXPERIENCE

The transcendental nature of God is shown in the epics, *Purāṇas* and other ancient texts to be difficult for human comprehension. In His infinite mercy for the suffering humanity, God presents Himself to the world in the fivefold finitised forms. The selves which are under the spell of *karma* desire earnestly to get relieved from the effects of *karma*, but are not in a position to find out the proper means for it. Traditionally, knowledge of reality (*tattvajñāna*) is enjoined as the course open for man to achieve this and, but not all the *jīvas* could have the capacity for it. Adoption of the path of *karma* (deed) is also prescribed, but it is found in practice to lead not always to the desired end. Vaiṣṇavism has achieved distinction by restricting the scope of *jñāna* to realizing the real nature of the Supreme Person. Nārāyaṇa whose divine form is blue in complexion like the water-laden cloud and who protects the several worlds is the deity that could help the *jīvas* in distress.¹ Having created the world and reclaimed it from the waters, He had devoured it, let it out and measured it. He is not different from others who do, under His guidance, the works of creation and destruction. This knowledge of reality is to be acquired,² by the self in order to have faith in Him for obtaining relief from the worldly ills. People have to take to the footsteps of the seers who had realized Nārāyaṇa as the purport of the *Vedas* and other texts and as the remedy which could destory the diseases. Those seers acquired this knowledge by worshipping Him.³ It will be futile if one seeks to find out whether the Supreme Person would be like this or that or any

1. T.V.M. 9.3: 1.

2. *ibid.* 9.3: 2.

3. *ibid.* 9.3: 3.

other deity or beyond our reach, thus to realize His real status. Such an enquiry need not be conducted, as it would entail much wastage of time and energy. Nārāyaṇa is only Kṛṣṇa. The realization of this would lead to knowing that He is Himself any other deity.⁴

When utter disappointment was faced by the *Upaniṣads*⁵ in discerning His nature, it is foolish on the part of the selves to search for Him and try to obtain correct knowledge about Him. Brahmā who is sprung from the navel of Viṣṇu, could not have the perfect vision of His feet. This is proof to make clear that He is beyond comprehension.⁶ The great seers declare that He is the only God, but no one can know Him correctly. By adopting the various courses such as *jñāna* and *karma*, the result could not be obtained. Lord's grace alone could yield the intended result.⁷

There were many occasions when the Lord came down to the mortal world for helping those who had faith in Him and who looked upon His favour in times of dire distress,⁸ for destroying those who tried to violate His rules and make the innocent souls suffer, and proclaiming the way of good conduct. The divine descents which He took for achieving this end had provided the selves with occasions for their experience of His qualities such as *dayā*, *saṁlabhya*, *saṁsilya*, *vātsalya*, *aiśvarya* and *tejas*. The occasions when the Lord displayed these qualities caught the vision of seers like Vyāsa and Śuka who offered graphic descriptions of such occasions. The Ālvārs dived deep into the ocean of these qualities through the love they had for Him and presented in their compositions their experience of those qualities. Divine Grace came to be looked upon by them as a powerful weapon to strike at the very root of *karma* which brings untold sufferings to the

4. P.Tv. 36.

5. Taitt. Up. 2; 4.

6. M.Tv. 56.

7. Nāṅ. Tv. 2.

8. Bh. G. 4: 11.

jīvas and it is but natural that they should not only seek earnestly to obtain it but also to expatiate on the imperative need to deserve it. Hence the centrality of the idea of Divine Grace in the Śrī Vaiṣṇavite system of philosophy. No wonder that Nammālvār and other Ālvārs too insist on this idea. In their hymns are outlined the factors requisite for the attainment of Divine Grace as well as the effects it produces.

God seeks the soul even more than the soul seeks God, and it is therefore said that the soul-hunger of God is greater than the God-hunger of the soul. God is therefore aptly called the "Hound of Heaven" or the ravisher of the souls. The Hound of Heaven hunts the separated soul. The love-chase is so remorseless that the more the flight of the soul, the greater is the following of the Lord and the love-chase. The infinite auspicious qualities of Īsvara are dominated by the redemptive motive of Grace (*dayā*). Divine Grace is eternal and infinite, and it is immanent in all living beings. The descent of God typifies the soul-hunger of God and the idea transforms the Holy of holies into the ravisher of the souls. There is a reference in *Tiruvāymoli* to this beautiful concept of God's soul-hunger :

"Vārikoṅṭu unṅai viḷuṅkuvau kāṅil eṅru
 Ārvu uṅṅai oḷiya eṅṅil munnam
 Pārittut tāṅ eṅṅai muṅṅap parukināṅ."⁹

Using the metaphor of hunger and eating, the Ālvār says that, as he was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to 'devour' the Lord, the Lord ravenously 'devoured' him wholesale, and thus fore-stalled him. The Lord has already, 'eaten' his soul piece-meal,¹⁰ says the Ālvār, and now He has devoured his 'whole' and quenched His thirst. No doubt God is food and drink to the Ālvār; to Him the Ālvār is food and drink.

An object that is charming fascinates and creates

9. T V.M. 9.6: 10.

10. *ibid.* 9.6: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

avidity in man to possess it. As man's desire grows to have it, he is not satisfied with its mere possession by him and presence of it with him. He seeks to have it for himself, rather desires to devour it so that no one else could have any claim on it. This must be the reason for the depiction of a deep and intense longing to gaze passionately at a person as drinking the beauty of that person with the eyes.¹¹

Though the Vaiṣṇavite definition of Godhead includes the *Upaniṣadic* idea of Brahman and Īśvara and *Pāñcarātra* idea of Bhagavān, its concept of God as *dayānidhi* exceeds them all. "The Lord is rich in mercy and has not *dayā* as His differentia but is *dayā* itself and is therefore impersonal. *Dayā* is for *dayā's* sake, and is not the fruit of righteousness, and is therefore not juristic or moralistic. It is neither vindictive nor retributive. It does not brook bartering at all by the arithmetical calculations of *punya-pāpa* and scheme of rewards and punishments. *Dayā* is spontaneous in nature and instantaneous in effect."^{11a} It is the soul of the Lord Himself and it is the source, sustenance and satisfaction of the divine nature. The Lord saves the righteous but, with infinite loving kindness, He seeks and forgives the wicked of their transgression. His juridical severity is surpassed by His forgiveness. He makes haste to redeem the wicked from their wicked course and gives them succour. This divine Grace is natural (*śvabhavikā*) and unconditional (*nirhātuka*). God only waits for some pretext to save the soul. Even an act remotely connected with the Holy, such as the unwitting utterance of God's name, is sufficient to set the redemptive power of Grace to operate. In this act of operation of Grace, the office performed by Lakṣmī, the chief consort of Nārāyaṇa, is unique and significant. She is all tenderness towards the souls, her children, and

11. The queen Sudakṣiṇā is described to have drunk her husband with eyes which were as though fasting (*Raghuvamśa*) 2: 19 Janaka looked at the beauty of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa sitting by the side of Viśvāmitra (K.R. Pālakāṅṭam-kulamurāi 2).

11. a. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭadvaita*, p. 410.

intercedes with her Lord on their behalf. By virtue of her motherhood in relation to souls and wifehood in relation to the Lord, she is eminently fitted to play the role of mediator between the two. As Lord's Grace or Aruḷ is the Mother, the Śrī Vaiṣṇavite theism equates God-head with the dual self of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa or Śrīyahpati. This concept explains that while He loves rule, she rules love and transforms the love of law into the law of love. Surrender brings on the selves the Absolute rain of Grace which is bestowed and not merited by egoistic effort. Nammālvār refers to this Grace as "*His ttruvaruḷ*".¹² The Lord's lotus-like eyes are the fountain-head of this Grace. So the Ālvār prays to the Lord to turn those blessed eyes towards him - "*Tāmaraiḱ Kaṅkaḷāḷ nōkkāy*".¹³ The never-ending cycle of *karma* is then transcended. All the fetters and ignorance recede away like a mirage which has been deceiving and teasing as though it were a beautiful pond of pure water in the desert. When self-renunciation is fully accomplished by giving up the lusts of the flesh, divine communion results. Nammālvār says that he has, by contemplation of the Lord and by the singing of His praises, completely divested himself of age-old *karma*.¹⁴ He believes that he will remain free from the fear of hell for generations to come and that nothing will be impossible of attainment to him because the Lord has entered him, is not going to leave him and has weeded out all traces of *karma*.¹⁵ "The Lord in His Grace has ordained me to sing of His glory, His *paratva* and *saulabhya*, and has dispelled the sins of not only myself, but all those associated with me, for generations to come".¹⁶ "The Lord, solicitous of me, owned me and offered Himself up to me, and gave me all"¹⁷ "By clasping

12. T.V.M. 8.7: 5. Periyālvār calls it 'Pēr aruḷ' (Periyāḷ. Tm. 5.3: 7).

13. *ibid.* 9.2: 1.

14. *ibid.* 2.6: 6.

15. *ibid.* 2.6: 7.

16. *ibid.* 2.7: 4.

17. *ibid.* 2.7: 11. cf. T.V.K. 397 "Tantatu untannai koṅṅatu ontannai, caṅkarā ārkolō caturar" - 'What You gave me was Yourself; what I gave You was myself: who gets the better of the bargain?'

the Lord I have completely dispelled my *karma*".¹⁸ The last line of all the verses of this hymn¹⁹ runs in the same strain. Tirumaṅkaiyālvār says; "I have no refuge other than Thy Grace.....I have been redeemed on seeing Thee".²⁰ The Ālvār declares that he will rely on none else than the Lord who ordained him through His grace to long for Him as the calf does for its mother cow.²¹

It has been explained that the working of *karma* can be considered as a kind of redemption and punishment as *dayā-kārya* or work of compassion. It is meant for the redemption of the wrongdoer from his career of sin by the inflow of divine grace. Forgiveness is the foundation of the moral law, and redemption from sin is its religious fruition. To the logical intellect, the absolute is beyond description and definition. But to religious consciousness, He is the inescapable Redeemer. In His infinite mercy, He assumes suitable forms to recover, and reunite with, the lost self. The ascent of the self to the Absolute is not so valuable as the descent of God into evolutionary forms and into humanity. This quality of God is known in Viśiṣṭādvaitic philosophy as *saṁlabhya* or divine accessibility. *Karma* and other fetters are from one point of view fetters of ignorance and darkness which disappear when the light of the divine knowledge blazes forth. Nammālvār says that the Lord had stationed in his heart to dispel his nescience.²² The Ālvārs in general refer to *karma* as '*Iruḷ*' and '*Vīnai*'. Perhaps the references imply that these saints are equating '*Vīnai*' and '*Iruḷ*' as effect and cause. The great Tamil saint Tiruvaḷḷuvar speaks of "*Iruḷ cēr iruvīnai*"²³ and "*Iruḷ niṅki inṣam payakkum*".²⁴ The Ālvār refers to them as "*Iruḷār vīnai*"²⁵ - 'the darkness

18. ibid 3.10: 4.

19. ibid. 3.10.

20. Peri. Tm. 7.1:7.

21. ibid. 7.3: 2.

22. T.V.M. 1.7: 4.

23. Kuṟaḷ. 5.

24. ibid. 352.

25. T.V.R. 33.

of *karma*'. That cause of seed of all miseries is described as due to "*vināip paṭalam*"²⁶ - 'the cloud of *karma*'. The real is obscured in this darkness and therefore the name and form of various things in the world are not visible in their real perspective and hides the Reality from vision. This darkness is torn away by the pure light of real knowledge which is the brightness of the Absolute.

Nammālvār who experienced the unsolicited Grace of the Divine describes it in the following terms; "He made me an entity and reposed Himself in me"²⁷; "the Lord who came to me unawares and redeemed me";²⁸ "without my knowledge Thou gavest me wisdom and did so much for me";²⁹ "Thou transformed my evil heart into good by making me chant Thy names and worship Thy feet with songs and a pure heart";³⁰ "Thou gavest me the kind of heart which enables me to worship Thy feet in birth after birth chanting Thy names";³¹ "my soul and Thine merged so that one could not tell them apart from each other";³² and "what good did I do Him to deserve it that He has placed Himself in my heart?"³³

Piḷḷai Lōkācāryār in his *Śrī Vacana Pūṣaṇam* through a series of telling similies brings out the mode of operation of divine Grace and shows how the Lord takes all the initiative for saving the souls. Much as a father who, even though he lives happily with his other sons, longs for the company of one of his sons who lives abroad in a distant land, so also the Lord, even though He enjoys the company of the Eternals and *muktas* in Vaikuṇṭha, cannot brook separation from the souls wandering in the sea of *samsāra*, and so sees to it that

26. P.Tv. 76.

27. T.V.M. 10.8: 9.

28. *ibid.* 1.7: 5.

29. *ibid.* 2.3: 2.

30. *ibid.* 2.7: 8.

31. *ibid.* 2.7: 7.

32. *ibid.* 4.3: 8.

33. *ibid.* 10.6: 8.

they are reminded of their links with Him by giving them their senses. Perhaps the Lord with the fear that on His direct manifestation they might grow jealous of Him and drive him out, approaches them invisibly like the mother taking up the sleeping baby in her bosom without disturbing its sleep. All the time He stays in their company and watches their doings they are reminded of their links with Him by giving them with solicitude, and though they may perform a number of acts of evil, He looks out for occasional unconscious good deeds on their part such as the casual mention of the Lord's name or the name of the town where there is the Lord's shrine, or casual unwitting service to His devotees. He collects the merits of these good deeds, magnifies them and stores them up for them so that these accumulate into great merit, just as the goldsmith collects tiny amounts of gold left behind on his touchstone with his wax and accumulates them into a sizable amount of gold. An instance of this kind of concern of the Divine for the human is to be found in *Lalitācarita* in *Śrī Viṣṇu Dharma*.³⁴

Civajñāna yōkikaḥ explains the working of *karma* in the operation of the Divine Grace in his commentary on *Civajñānapōtam*. According to him all the good acts which the *jivas* perform, bring on good results, but they are after all gold-fetters as opposed to iron-fetters of evil acts. The yōkikaḥ terms these good acts as '*Pacupunṇiyam*' because they are not done with the proper feeling of self-sacrifice in the name of God; they will be '*Civapunṇiyam*' only when they are performed in that spirit. In the former the egoism is not dead, whilst in the latter it is completely annihilated. The saint offers this explanation to show how one escapes from these fetters by doing good acts: though the *Pacupunṇiyam* is intended to benefit some others in society, because the Lord is omnipotent and all pervasive, this act consciously intended for some one else, goes unconsciously to please the Lord ultimately. In this manner *Pacupunṇiyam* leads to *Civapunṇiyam*. No doubt by the performance of this act the result is the gold-fetters, but ultimately on account of accumulation

34. S.V.P. - Sūtras 381 and 382 (Śrī P.B. Anṅgarācāryārś edition).

of *Civapūṇṭyam* the soul is transformed and it experiences the Divine Bliss.³⁵

Again the Ālvārs praise this Grace of the Lord many a time and in many ways. He is the Lord of Grace - '*Pēraru-ḷaḷan*'³⁶ - according to Tirumaṅkaiyālvār. He is the munificent Lord who bestows His Grace to Nammālvār who is a devotee of God's devotees - "Arulperuvār aṭiyārtam aṭiyāṇṇṇṇu āḷiyān, arul taruvān amaikiṇṇān."³⁷ Parāṅkuṣa says: "Kuṇṇiḷḷi jñāṇaṅkaḷāl eṇai ūḷi cey tavamum, kiṇṇiḷḷi ippiṇṇappē cila nāḷil eytiṇṇān yān"³⁸ - 'Through the Divine Grace I, a poor person, could, within a few days, attain to accomplishments which are possible of achievement only through *yoga* and *sādhana* for generations'. When God's Grace flows freely no one can prevent it. The saint says: "Though I chanted the praise of the Lord with discus in hand as my Dark Gem (*karumāṇikkam*), in hollow fashion, and was wallowing in *samsāra*, I got the rewards of a true devotee. When God's Grace operates who can stifle it?"³⁹; "when I was helplessly tossed about like a boat in the stormy sea of *samsāra*, He with His divine Form with discus and conch in his hands took pity on me and merged with me to release me";⁴⁰ "Āṇān āḷuṭaiyān eṇṇu ahtē koṇṇu ukantu vantū, tāṇē inṇaruḷ ceytu eṇṇai muṇṇavum tān āṇān"⁴¹ - 'Taking me at my word that I was His slave, He affectionately blessed me with grace and became my all-in-all'. It is only by His Grace the Lord entered him even though he did not seek Him. Says the Ālvār: "The Lord whom I did not think of seeking and uniting with myself at all came of His own accord, fascinated my heart, and united with my body and life. How can He part from me

35. *The Religion and Philosophy of Tēvāram*, pp. 1214-15.

36. *Perl. Tm.* 9.5 : 4.

37. *T.V.M.* 10.6 : 1.

38. *ibid.* 2.3 : 8. Note Piḷḷāṅ's comment on this. The *ḷu* refers to the story of Dadhibhāṇḍa.

39. *ibid.* 5.1 : 1.

40. *ibid.* 5.1 : 9.

41. *ibid.* 5.1 : 10.

hereafter?"⁴² "He will put me on the road to *makṣa*, removing all hurdles, and liberating me from the two kinds of *karma*, and freeing me from illusory attachment, and finally making me lose my heart to Him"⁴³ The glorious Lord will remove two kinds of *karma* (*puṇya* and *pāpa*) – "Perumai uṭaiya pirāṇār irumai viṇai kaṭivārē"⁴⁴ The very contemplation of the excellent form of the Lord ensures freedom from the bondage of sin and merit alike.⁴⁵ The Ālvār terms our *karma* as 'bushes of diseases' (*ceṭṭiyār nōykal*).⁴⁶ The immortal poet Tiruvaḷḷuvar has aptly remarked that to those who are attempting to rid themselves of their future births, even their body is too much for them – "Piṇapaṇukkal uṇṇārkkku uṭampum mikai"⁴⁷ When the soul turns Godward forgetting its erstwhile identification with the imperfection and aims at communion with the perfection it enjoys freedom from this disease, and the bliss of spiritual health. God is therefore the medicine – "*viṇaittirmaruntu*"⁴⁸ He is the sweet medicine, according to Nammālvār, that dispels the sinfulness of the devotees.⁴⁹ He is the repository of wealth, the medicine of all ills, and the One Who saves man from getting destroyed by the five senses.⁵⁰ The Eternals praise Him as the medicine which gives them the joy of His experience.⁵¹ The Lord is also spoken of as '*Amutu*' in so many places by the Ālvār.

Nammālvār, when he attains realization, transcends the endless see-saw of *karma* and ethics. It is a negation of moral laws; it is rather their fulfilment and transcendence to the higher, more wonderful and more mysterious harmony of the Absolute. In the Absolute, all the contradictions,

42. *ibid.* 1.7:7.

43. *ibid.* 1.5:10.

44. *ibid.* 1.6:9; I.Tv. 67; Peri. Tm. 6.3:4.

45. *ibid.* 5.1:6.

46. *ibid.* 2.6:7 cf. *ibid.* 6.10:7.

47. *Kuraḷ* 345.

48. T.V.M. 7.1:4.

49. *ibid.* 3.4:5.

50. *ibid.* 1.7:2.

51. *ibid.* 9.3:4.

all the *dvandvas* or pairs of opposites like success and failure, pleasure and pain are transcended and harmonized. According to Pūtāt-tālvār the man who meditates on the feet of the Lord is not elated at the possession of wealth, nor does he feel dispirited when what he possesses is lost.⁵² Nammālvār emphasizes this importance of ethics. He speaks of the removal of the faults, the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine';⁵³ once the worldly pleasures and worldly attachment are given up *mokṣa* is immediately attained.⁵⁴ Therefore true renunciation is of the mind. The false sense of prestige and vain desire inhering in the mind should vanish. The God's devotees are described as those whose minds are saturated with God's love. Nammālvār describes them as those who take care of themselves in all their births. He calls them "Paramar"⁵⁵ - 'the great men'; "Nātar"⁵⁶ - 'the lords'; "Āḷuṭaiyārkaḷ"⁵⁷ - 'those to whom he is a slave'; "Perumakkaḷ"⁵⁸ - 'superior men' and so on. He refers to the three types of devotees.⁵⁹ "Cayame aṭimai talai niṅṅar" - 'the kind of service of which the depth is only known to those to whom the very performance of the service is itself the reward'; "nikkamil aṭiyār" - 'that kind of service which is rendered to God ever in His company'; and "kōṭṭi aṭiyār" - 'that kind of service which is flawless'. Service is said to be tinged with *few when*, in the idea of serving God direct and to the exclusion of His Elect, the element of pride enters, namely, the pride that he is face to face with God, and that he is preferred beyond others. This was present *passively* in Bharata (first type), *actively* in Lakṣmaṇa (second type), but *entirely* absent in Śaṭruḅhna.

52. I.Tv. 45.

53. T.V.M. 1.2: 3; 2.9: 9.

54. *ibid.* 1.2: 5.

55. *ibid.* 3.7: 1.

56. *ibid.* 3.7: 2.

57. *ibid.* 3.7: 3.

58. *ibid.* 3.7: 4.

59. *ibid.* 8.10: 2.

It is said that doing good to others is the highest *Dharma*. Tāyumāṇa Aṭikaḷ says: “Anpar paṇi ceyya eṇai āḷakki viṭṭuviṭṭāl, inpanilai tāṇē vantu eytum”⁶⁰ – the state of happiness will automatically come to one who is made to serve others’. Internal purity engenders this state of mind where sympathy and pity become almost an instinct. Tiruvaḷḷuvar calls this state of mind as “Maṇanalam” – ‘goodness of mind’ – which according to him brings future bliss⁶¹. Truly Nāṇciyar has said that “if when seeing the suffering of others, one’s pity is excited and one ejaculates ‘oh’, one may know of oneself as a true Vaiṣṇavite and such a person can be sure of his or her salvation. To be a Vaiṣṇavite is to belong to God, and to belong to God is to be like God Himself i.e., conform to His ideals, one of them being to be ‘the friend of all creatures’.⁶² When this sympathy is absent, there is no hope of salvation. When the feeling of desolation overtakes Nammālvār and he begins to condemn himself, he feels a revulsion at his imagined unsympathetic mind. ‘I have not ever given alms’ says the Ālvār, ‘in charity, nor drinks to the thirsty’ – “*Itakillēṇ onṟu aṭṭakillēṇ*”⁶³.

To yearn for His sight, it is essential that the *jitva* should have the heart rid of all the impurities. A heart that is purified would have enough control over itself and would not tend to be tempted by worldly attractions and so would continue to feel the unique nature of His *dayā* and other qualities and value them highly. Those who suffer from worldly ills will have to control their senses and get themselves absorbed in the experience of His ever fruitful qualities.⁶⁴ The Ālvār was able to have control over the senses only through God’s Grace.⁶⁵ Every accessibility could be said to crown all His auspicious qualities, as through it, He

60. *Tāyumāṇavar Pāṭal*: Parāparakkaṇṇi – 155.

61. *Kuṟaḷ* – 459.

62. *Bhag. Viṣ. Book I. 1.2: 1* (Commentary).

63. *T.V.M. 4.7: 9*; cf. *ibid.*, 5.1: 4, 5, 6.

64. *ibid.* 2.8: 4.

65. *ibid.* 7.1: 7.

gets easily mixed up with high and low and enables them to have communion with Him.⁶⁶ His transcendence does not suffer even though He becomes accessible to all⁶⁷. Those who commit sins act against the commands of God, but God has sympathy (*kāruṇya*) for them and enters into them and fills them, giving them the experience of His presence and of this quality.⁶⁸ The Lord who is in *Paramapada* comes down and attracts the mind of the Āḷvār, thus revealing how He is easy of reach to any one who is earnest to get at Him.⁶⁹ He is the Lord of gods and so He is at the highest position which is beyond the reach of all, including gods. The Āḷvār says that he is mean and low, indicating his or any *jīva's* position at the lowest level. Not only is the self thus an abode of all defects, but is having not even a single merit or virtue which could make him deserve the commendation of the wise. This is in wide contrast to the Lord who has no defects and is the abode of auspicious qualities. The Lord did not mind the littleness of the Āḷvār. As the Lord of Tirumalai, He possesses a body of supreme lustre and has passion for the Āḷvār. This suggests His *vatsalya* and also His ever-readiness to be of help to His devotees.⁷⁰ The little act, like uttering His name or the name of His place, is enough for Him to stand steadfast by His devotees without deserting them.⁷¹ The Āḷvār uttered the name '*Tirumāliruñcōlai*' the place of the Lord. At once the Lord came to the Āḷvār with His consort Śrī and filled his heart - "*Tirumāliruñcōlaimalai enṛēṇ; enṇa, Tirumāl vantu enṇēṇcu niṛaiyap-pukuntāṇ*".⁷² The Lord made an announcement assuredly to Ajuna that those who seek His feet would be rid of their sufferings and sins.⁷³ To fulfil His obligation. He protects people in every birth which they take and takes them in a particular birth of theirs to His

66. *ibid.* 1.3: 2.

67. Vide Parācara Paṭṭar's remark (*Itu* on T.V.M. 1.3: 2).

68. T.V.M. 5.1: 7: Piḷḷāṇ's remark (*Itu* on T.V.M. 5.1: 7).

69. *ibid.* 5.3: 9.

70. *ibid.* 3.3: 4.

71. *ibid.* 2.7: 3.

72. *ibid.* 10.8: 1.

73. Bh. G. 18: 66.

place and offers them the right occasion to render service. In this respect He is verily the father (*appan*) and exhibits His inborn nature of being true to His word.⁷⁴ It is really surprising that the Ālvār finds it difficult to control himself on hearing some one utter the name 'Nārāyaṇa' which he himself does not care to utter. He then tries to search for His presence, while He, Who is omnipresent, has taken pity on him and stays with him days and nights without a break. This is due to His confidence in the Ālvār.⁷⁵ He who is ever filled with all good qualities (*nampi*) has chosen not to leave away the Ālvār.⁷⁶ His liberality is displayed by offering Himself wholly to the Ālvār whom He has made His own. He is not simply the Absolute but the divine wish-yielding tree (*kaṣṣakam*). This quality is further attested by the Ālvār referring to Him as having the good mountain Vēṅkaṣam and as Dāmodara.⁷⁷ His tenderness is evidenced in His occupying the mind of the self of His own accord, although the fact is that the self is not competent to know that he is the servant of Him.⁷⁸ His quality of sympathy will only yield fruitful results, while that of deities other than Him would lead to no good end.⁷⁹

Among the *arcā* forms, specific mention is to be made, by way of implication, of the Tirumalai Hills which makes the flame of the heart of eternal selves shine with full radiance and puts out the blazing fire of *karma* of all those who do not care for God after obtaining their desires from Him, those who ignore Him after getting their isolation (*kaivalya*) and those who worship Him for ever to get final release.⁸⁰ This is mysterious since one kind of fire, namely, sins, is destroyed, and another kind of fire, namely, devotion or love, is made effulgent.⁸¹

74. T.V.M. 3.7: 7.

75. *ibid.* 1.10: 8.

76. *Iṣu* on T.V.M. 1.10: 8.

77. T.V.M. 2.7: 11.

78. I.Tv. 16.

79. M.Tv. 15.

80. *ibid.* 26.

81. *cf.* The wind behaves as the friend of the fire which burns the forest but that itself puts out a (burning) lamp. Who will be the friend of the weak? (original: a Samskrit Śloka).

The realization of the value and purpose of these qualities which show the Lord to be both transcendent and immanent is capable of causing thrill even to one whose heart is immune to emotional stress. Recapitulation of this experience will afford the *jivas* occasional vistas of bright joy amidst the dark and dense clouds of worldly sufferings. The Ālvārs, who are the divine beings descended on earth for the welfare of humanity, are immersed in the deep sea of God-realization and as such have perennial enjoyment of bliss, having nothing to suffer from worldly ills. Admiration of these qualities arouses in the mind of the self a state "of desire, vague and disturbed, very real, and liable to be very intense as a possession of the soul",⁸² With the repeated occasions that are obtained by the self for enjoying such qualities, this desire turns into a profound and lasting ambition. The idea of the objects of this desire becomes a steadfast property of the soul. This could be termed as the love which the self has for God. As this love becomes deep rooted, the self is affected by certain reactions. "The things that charmed us lose their colour; the things we had admired seem debased; our dearest affections cease to fill our hearts. The things of the world no longer hold us; each of them now awakens in us the idea of its opposite. In all the objects presented to our sight we see only the distortion, the empty image, wan and dead, of the living idea perfect and definite, which sensible realities are powerless to express. We conceive as the supreme object of our desires, the infinite, the eternal, the perfect - God".⁸³

The Ālvārs have laid emphasis both by their lives and their hymns on God-love. *Anpu*,⁸⁴ *vēṭkaṭ*,⁸⁵ *kātal*,⁸⁶ *ava*⁸⁷ (the words meaning 'love') used in their works for and towards God is the most noteworthy feature of the hymns of the *Nālāyiram*.

82. *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 367.

83. *ibid.* pp. 367-368.

84. T.V.R. 2; T.V.C. 2; Peri. Tm. 8; T.V.M. 6.10:2.

85. T.V.M. 2.1:10; 9.6:1; 10.3:2.

86. T.V.R. 59; T.V.C. 2; I.Tv. 56; T.V.M. 5.3:4; 5.5:10; 7.3:6; 7.3:8.

87. T.V.R. 64, 84; T.V.C. 2; T.V.M. 10.10:10.

But the traditional order of evolution of devotion is from *kātal* to *anpu*, from *anpu* to *vēṭkai* and from *vēṭkai* to *avā*. Yet it will be noticed that in respect of the Āḷvārs the stages of evolution do not strictly follow this order, or precede or succeed one another in strict conformity. This perhaps implies that the Āḷvārs' *bhakti* includes and transcends all the four stages at the same time all the time.⁸⁸ Or another explanation could be offered to this. The saints have the moments of ecstasy to be followed by occasions of disappointment. Severe longing was also given to their lot to obtain union with God.⁸⁹ The compositions of the Āḷvārs contain their expressions of ecstatic experiences as they were having then and also subsequently. As they had varied experiences alternately at the will of God, one cannot expect the graded development of their love for God. In fact, the saints take the generic name, 'Āḷvār'⁹⁰ (one who gets immersed) from the fact of their being eternally immersed in God-love. While to the Advaitin God-love or *bhakti* is only a means to the attainment of *jñāna* or true-knowledge, to the Āḷvārs, and indeed to all the Vaiṣṇavite *ācāryas*, *bhakti* is the *summum bonum* of religious experience. It is both the means and the end. It is an *upāya* or means, since it is a sure method of obtaining Divine Grace; it is also a *puruṣārtha* or goal, since there is no higher state to be realised by man than to love God as an end in itself. Usually *upāya* is difficult and hard and not very sweet in the process. But here *bhakti* as *upāya* is indescribably sweet and pleasant. In fact, before the practice of *bhakti* even the pleasures of *paramapada* pale into insignificance. *Sādhana bhakti* itself is so sweet indeed that there is no desire to think beyond it of *sādhya bhakti*. The sayings of several of the Āḷvārs are to the effect that the attainment of Vaikuṇṭha is not to be preferred to the enjoyment obtainable here by loving Him and singing about Him.⁹¹ The Āḷvārs,

88. A.H. Sū. 98 (Commentary).

89. *An Idealistic View of Life*, pp. 93, 94.

90. The word 'Āḷvār' means 'one who dives deep into divinity' or one who is immersed in God-love and God-bliss.

91. T.V.R. 108; T.V.C. 2; T.V.M. 2.9:1, 5; T.M. 2. I.Tv. 90; cf. Deśika's *Varadarāja Pañcasat*, 49.

mystics as they are, have the instinct for the infinite and to them the best proof of the existence of God is the immediate experience of God, a soul-sight of Him here and now and a revelling in His love. Just as famine-stricken ryots who long for rainfall are not satisfied with the weather chart, so also these mystics are not interested in the dialectic and divided thinking or in rational arguments. As the former are satisfied only with a down-pour of rain, the latter too are satisfied only in the integral experience of the deity.

While this amount of God-love is seen in every Ālvār, Nammālvār'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. His is a consuming passion. The Ālvār's songs of anguish, and his songs of rhapsody, both have their origin in this passion for God. While all devotees of God long mentally for communion with Him, the Ālvār pants for that communion with every pore and cell of his body and with every beat of his heart. In one beautiful hymn are shown the hunger and craving not only of the saint but of every one of his senses and faculties for God-realization.⁹² His mind, his mouth, his hands, his eyes and ears and even his soul—each faculty vies with the other in throbbing for consummation and fruition in the matter of God-enjoyment. And one very noteworthy feature of this very peculiar state is that each faculty is anxious to obtain realization not only in the manner legitimately and normally obtainable by it, but by exceeding and transcending even its functional limitations, — a sort of synaesthetic interchange of functions. Thus the hands want to praise Him with lofty words, the eyes desire to worship Him with flowers, the ears long to see Him and so on, in addition, of course, to respectively worshipping, seeing, hearing etc., in the exercise of their respective legitimate and normal functions. This extra-sensuous desire of each sense in the matter of God-enjoyment does not appear to have been given expression by any one else. The Ālvār appears to justify

92. T.V.M. 3.8.

93. *ibid.* 9.9: 9.

such a longing on his part, and to adopt the same procedure in which God Himself sports by talking with His eyes, and by looking through the melodious tunes of His flute.⁹³ This is a singular and single instance of the mystic realisation of the Ālvār which really baffles comprehension and classification. This super-sensuous and organic love and infatuation towards God is the hall-mark of this Ālvār's compositions. He makes no secret of it. In fact, he avowedly attempts to attain, and ultimately attains, God through love which he terms as '*matinalam*'⁹⁴ which Rāmānuja translates as '*bhakti-rūpapanna-jñānam*'.

Nammālvār uses the word '*avā*' very frequently in his hymns. The word signifies an intense craving. This *avā* or the God-infatuation of the Ālvār can be seen to have been mentioned in all his four works. This '*avā*' is seen sprouting in his first work *Tiruviruttam* where he says: "kayya poṇ āḷi veṇcaṅkoṭum kāṇṇāṇ *avāvuvan* nāṇ"⁹⁵ - 'I long to have sight of the One with the golden discus and the white conch in hand'. In the next work, *Tiruvāciriyam*, this *avā* begins to assault and outgrow the Ālvār. He says:

"Ulaku paṭaittu uṇṭa entai aṇaikaḷai
Cutarppūn tāmarai cūṭutaṇku avāvu
Āruyir uruki ukka nēriya
Kātal aṇṇil iṇṇuṇ tēral
Amuta veḷḷattāṇ āmciṇṇappu viṭṭu"⁹⁶

- 'The suffusion in a flood of joy of loving devotion springing from the soul's transport of longing to place the decorated feet of the Lord on his head is an incomparably great experience'. This infinite *avā*, it is seen, begins to flow like a river in his third work *Periya Tiruvantāti* where he uses the word '*aṇṇu*'. The Ālvār says: "arukum cuvaṭum teriya uṇarōm; aṇṇē perukum mika.....nummai numakku".⁹⁷ 'We

94. *ibid.* 1.1: 1.

95. T.V.R. 84; cf. *ibid.* 64.

96. T.V.C. 2.

97. P.Tv. 8.

do not know how to approach You or the means of access to You. Yet our longing for You keeps growing'. The love which flowed like a river becomes as big as the sea in his fourth and final work *Tiruvāymōli* where in one hymn the Ālvār says: *Pēramar kātāl kaṭalpuraiya vḷaiṅṅa kāramar mēni nam Kaṇṇan*⁹⁸ - 'Our cloud-hued Kṛṣṇa who has expanded my love for Him (which has a big scandal in store with it) as wide as the sea'. It then becomes bigger than the sea - "*Kātāl kaṭalṅ mīkap peritāl*"⁹⁹ as the Ālvār says; next it almost immediately grows to such universal and cosmic dimensions that it envelops the entire earth, the seven seas and even the immeasurable vast space. In the words of the Ālvār, "*Maṅṅi jñālamum ēl kaṭalum niḷvicumpum kaḷiyap peritāl*"¹⁰⁰ God does not vouchsafe His full Grace even now, and so the Ālvār whips up his love to even greater proportions. So far his love has grown big enough to envelop all matter, the entire *acetana tattva*; now it begins to excel the next bigger *tattva*, the individual soul, the *jīva*. He feels that his individual soul is too small to hold this divine love (here he calls it '*vēṅṅai*') and so he says: "*Akam uyir akam-akamtōṅum uḷ pukku, āvīyṅ param alla vēṅṅai*"¹⁰¹ - 'the innermost recesses of the soul are perhaps inadequate to accommodate the vast cosmic dimensions of my yearning (*vēṅṅai*) for the Lord has penetrated and soaked in it'. Thus the love outgrows the Ālvār and by degrees outgrows and envelopes the Lord Himself. Not till He, the biggest Being (Brahman), is made small by the fast-growing passion of the Ālvār's God-love, does God deign to vouchsafe His love and grace unreservedly to the Ālvār. The Ālvār says: "When my longing for You expanded, deepened, and enveloped the vast spaces, You enlarged Yourself into something greater than by longing (which comprehended the three *tattvas* of Viṣiṣṭādvaita (*acit, cit* and *Īśvara*) and merged Yourself into me, and thus satisfied my great yearning"¹⁰² The Ālvār now finds and

98. T.V.M. 5.3:4.

99. *ibid.* 7.3: 6.100. *ibid.* 7.3: 8.101. *ibid.* 10.3: 2.102. *ibid.* 10.10: 10.

realises that he has reached his goal. In this very strain he sings in the closing verse of this hymn. In the last line "*Cūṭtu atanīl periya en avā arāc cūṭtāyē*" he describes his *avā* as one which enveloped Him and outgrew Him; the Lord, on His part, outgrows and envelops that *avā* and thereby holds the Ālvār in His embrace.

The development of the saint's God-love as seen in and through his four works is something marvellous and unique in the history of Divine Love in any language and literature. That the love of a small child sitting under the tamarind tree in the Ātināta Temple in Ālvār-tirunakari could assume supra cosmic proportions and could even transcend Him, who as Tirivikrama has transcended everything and everybody, has been demonstrated by the songs sung by this super-mystic. His God-hunger was intense enough to consume that very God who was the object of his love. And it is because of such hunger and thirst for God evinced by the great saint that Parācara Bhatta has referred to him as the embodiment of '*Kṛṣṇa-Trṣṇā-Tattvam*'.

No descent other than Kṛṣṇa's exercised such a fascination over the saint's mind as this one. The very thoughts of the birth of the Lord, how He grew up and how He managed the Mahābhārata war melt his soul.¹⁰³ The incidents pertaining to Kṛṣṇa's life assail his soul in all their freshness, and steadily melt and eat it away. That his poems abound in references to Kṛṣṇa, His deeds and misdeeds, His *guṇas* and *aguṇas*, are but a corollary to the saint's great devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Every thing good was set apart for his Kaṇṇaṇ. Even when the Ālvār was in a peculiar mood wherein he thinks, talks and acts as if he were himself the God of the universe, the only descent of the Lord that he imagines himself to be is Kṛṣṇa. The Ālvār says: "It was I who lifted the Govardhana. It was I that subdued the seven fierce bulls. It was I that grazed the calves of Gokulam and protected the herds of the cows. It was I that was the chief

103. *ibid.* 5.10:1.

of the *gōpas*".¹⁰⁴ This experience of the saint gets justified from a passage of the *Upaniṣad*¹⁰⁵ Brahman gets the experience that It is everything. Gods, sages and men had the realization that they are Brahman or anything else. Sage Vāmadeva had adopted this process and had the experience that He was Manu. The *jīvas*, even of the ordinary kind, could have the full experience of Brahman, if they meditate upon It and intuit that they are Brahman. It must, however, be borne in mind that when a self meditates 'I am that' it must include Brahman or *Paramātmān* within 'I' and then meditate. Even gods cannot obstruct this kind of meditation. Prahlāda had a similar experience.¹⁰⁶

Many of the hymns sung by the Ālvār in a state of the lady-love, her mother and her companion are packed with words every syllable of which being loaded with indescribably acute God-love. At times the Ālvār gets into an exultant mood and imagines himself as the specially favoured devotee. Such periods are very rare, unlike the periods of depression which are more numerous and frequent. In one Tiruvāymoḷi, the Ālvār is seen indulging in a feeling of elation and that hymn is bound up with Kṛṣṇa. The Ālvār begins the hymn with a verse in the language of satisfaction and in a spirit of security by exclaiming that he has learnt day and night to expatiate upon the inexplicable and inscrutable sporting of Lord Kṛṣṇa. All the worlds cannot be equal to him as he has learnt to spend his time in love, his mind revelling in the contemplation of the sports of that sweet Flutist.¹⁰⁷ In fact, all the verses of this hymn run in the same strain and show us the pulse of the heart of the venerable saint being soaked with Kṛṣṇa-love. This is the only place where it is seen that the thirst of the Ālvār for Kṛṣṇa is being quenched in a measure. In almost all other places where Kṛṣṇa is referred to the saint is found thirsting and throbbing, pulsating and

104. *ibid.* 5.6: 6.

105. Br. Up. 1.4: 10.

106. V.P. 1.19: 85, 86.

107. *ibid.* 6.4: 1.

palpitating for the union with Kṛṣṇa. To Nammālvār, in short, Kṛṣṇa was everything. He was the food that he ate, the water that he drank, and the betel that he chewed – “*Uṇṇum cōru, parukum nir, tinnum verṇṇaiyum ellam Kaṇṇan*”.¹⁰⁸ The commentators on the *Tiruvāymoli* very often put down the Ālvār's intense longing for Kṛṣṇa to a feeling of frustration engendered by the thought that if he had only been born a week earlier he would have been blessed enough to worship the Lord in flesh and blood.¹⁰⁹ Parācara Bhatta's disciples asked him once: “How is it Master, that all the Ālvārs have showed a preference to God as Lord Kṛṣṇa, not as Lord Rāma, or any other descent?” Bhatta's reply was this: “When a man is subjected to bereavement from his loved ones, the grief caused thereby decreases as time elapses; when it is fresh, its pangs are acute. So to the Ālvārs, Kṛṣṇāvatāra is nearest to them in time; that is, more recent than all the *avatāras*. Hence their lamentations were great. Nammālvār who was born just forty five days after the Ascension of Lord Kṛṣṇa, groaned thus from love: ‘Sinful man that I am, I have been born six weeks late! Ah! that what had reached lip (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) has slipped away’.”¹¹⁰ Periyālvār's hunger for God is somewhat peculiar. He says that his hungry days are not those on which he forgoes food and drink but those on which he fails to worship at the Feet of the Lord with the chosen flowers culled from the four *Vedas*.¹¹¹

On His part, the Lord too finds it difficult to leave off the devotee whom He had chosen to bless and whose heart He had occupied. He will not leave the heart of that person who has found His presence there.¹¹² The Ālvār who has

108. *ibid.* 6.7: 1.

109. *Ittin Tamilākkam* – Vol. V. – Preface to Commentary on 5–10 (“*Piṇanta*”).

110. *Bhag. Vis.* Book V. Preface to the Commentary 5.10. “*Piṇanta*”. The chronology in the statement is undoubtedly incredible. The intensity of love of the Ālvār to God only is to be taken into account.

111. *Periyālv. Tm.* 5.1: 6.

112. P.Tv. 35.

realized that the Lord took His abode in his heart in order to dispel nescience from there and to lead him to do good and shines there with singular splendour, feels that there is nothing which could prompt him to leave Him.¹¹³ One more reason for his inability to leave Him is that He had come and settled in his heart out of a liking for him.¹¹⁴

Tirumankaiyālvār says that he would not give up the great joy he was having by his communion with the Lord. He could not also forget His charming person.¹¹⁵ He had kept Him steadfast in his heart and will not leave Him on any account.¹¹⁶ He will not even think of any other deity.¹¹⁷ Pēyālvār is happy to find the Lord who lies in the milky ocean, whose complexion is like the stagnant ocean and who is a remedy for getting rid of the hell-like worldly existence, present in his mind.¹¹⁸ The Lord left the fine couch of Ādiśeṣa and has occupied the bed of the mind of this Ālvār.¹¹⁹

It is very difficult to know Him.¹²⁰ He presents Himself to those who are true or straightforward in their behaviour though they have no mind to their credit. He does not appear to those who are unscrupulous or false in their conduct. It is at Śrī Raṅgam that this Lord who is charming to behold is present, setting aside any doubt that may arise for one who learns that there is God¹²¹ One must therefore be grateful to God who had done good to him like a father, mother and others and having shown him the righteous path.¹²² He is the relation of all sorts to the Ālvār, namely, wife of fish-like

113. T.V.M. 1.7: 4. cf. *ibid.* 1.7: 5, 6.

114. *ibid.* 2.6:7.

115. Peri. Tm. 6.3: 1.

116. *ibid.* 6.3: 2, 6.

117. *ibid.* 6.3: 5.

118. Mū. Tv. 3, 83.

119. *ibid.* 15.

120. *ibid.* 11.

121. T.M. 15.

122. P. Tv. 5.

eyes, good issues and respectable parents. He is also the vast wealth.¹²³

Beholding the charming person of the Lord at Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai, Periyāḷvār managed to leave his attachment for his body and so could not leave Him.¹²⁴ He has encircled the Lord and so would not allow Him to get away from him. He requests the Lord not to hide Himself from him.¹²⁵ He could not approach any ordinary fellow for favour, as it would belittle the greatness of the Lord as a saviour.¹²⁶ This Āḷvār is happy to state that he could not have a place of refuge like the Lord where he could find a shelter after much wandering or get water to quench his thirst anywhere else.¹²⁷

It is a herculean task to control the mind even if one knows well that one should be rendering service to the Lord. The mind behaves in its way going off the righteous path.¹²⁸ Though some could realize His presence within one's self, there are not many who could have the experience of Him. Those who extol Him through poetry will have only the consolation that they are singing in praise of Him, but really speaking they could not have a vision of Him.¹²⁹ Those can know Him, if they can control the five senses, forego the activities like taking food and sleeping, becoming afraid as to the occurrence of certain undesirable incidents and enjoyment of sensual pleasures, keep the quality of *sattva* in a dominant position by suppressing *rajas* and *tamas* and thus seek to cut at the root of worldly existence.¹³⁰ This is only deep meditation or *yoga*.¹³¹ It is also possible to direct the mind towards the Lord's feet but only those who could have control

123. T.V.M. 5.1: 8.

124. Periyāḷ. Tm. 5.3. 1.

125. *ibid.* 5.3: 2.

126. *ibid.* 5.3 : 3.

127. *ibid.* 5.3 : 4.

128. P.Tv. 32.

129. MṬ. Tv. 84.

130. T.V.L.K. 11, 15 to 19.

131. Peri. Tm. 5.6 : 9.

over the activity of their five senses and realize that they are subordinates to the Lord can hope to do this.¹³² God-realization is not altogether an impossibility. He will Himself be present for realization in the mind of the self.¹³³ The intensity of this realization would be in proportion to the earnestness of the *jīva* to behold Him.¹³⁴

Nammālvār grows very happy to have had the experience of the great benefactor and master of all. People of seven generations prior to him and subsequent to him have gained the distinction of being the devotees of the Lord, through his realization of God.¹³⁵ Periyālvār says that He has entered the heart as a preceptor, removed the defects there and placed His feet on his head.¹³⁶

God-realization is not the result of the operation of any means of valid cognition such as perception, inference, or verbal authority. The sense-organs are totally incompetent to apprehend God and for that reason, inference which depends on the working of the perceptive process, cannot operate. Verbal testimony can only give rise to the knowledge of the deity. These *pramāṇas* do not therefore operate and as such could not be trusted for obtaining the experience of God. The Lord is beyond knowledge, contemplation and thought.¹³⁷ He is One with unparalleled glory.¹³⁸ He transcends everything else and all forms of ordinary knowledge. He is realized as an experience through intuition or mystic experience. He is therefore described as One who has no equal or comparison – "*Tan oppār il appan*".¹³⁹ That He transcends other kinds of knowledge excepting mystic experience is brought out by Nammālvār as that he cannot express adequately the quality

132. M.Tv. 30.

133. P.Tv. 55.

134. *ibid.* 28, 29.

135. T.V.M. 2.7 : 1; cf. *ibid.* 2.7 : 4.

136. Periyālvār, Tm. 5.2 : 8.

137. T.V.M. 6.9 : 11. cf. *ibid.* 5.5 : 11.

138. *ibid.* 6.10 : 10.

139. *ibid.* 6.3 : 9.

of the Lord ¹⁴⁰ He is the Lord of the form which cannot be known as anything distinct and which cannot be classified according to the ordinary sources of our knowledge.¹⁴¹ It is not possible to produce any evidence, because the Absolute is not something objective like the things or objects of the world. It is the integral experience or *Paripūrṇa Brahmanubhava* which is more than the perceptual, rational and intuitional aspects. It is the direct apprehension of the *svarūpa* or form of Brahman and the comprehension of its character or *guṇa*. It is, as it were, the recorded experiences of *Upaniṣadic* seers and the *Ālvārs*. The Lord is impossible to be reached even by contemplation by the mind for the reason that mind is also made up of matter. He transcends matter. Even the *Vedas* cannot reach Him : "*Nān maṛaiyum toṭarāta pālakan*";¹⁴² "*Nān maṛaikal tēṭi eṇṇum kāṇamāṭṭāc-celvan*".¹⁴³ Even those who have reached higher spheres cannot measure Him, measure His infinite greatness : "*Amararkkum ariyaṅ*"¹⁴⁴ - 'He is rarity to even the celestials'. His glory is unequalled and unsurpassed.¹⁴⁵

The direct intuitive experience which the *Ālvārs* had of God is more real and is fuller than that which is had through perception. This is mystic experience which is ineffable, transcendent and passive. "It is an immediate consciousness of God not to be mediated by the intellect or the will of the individual or of society, but attributed directly to God Himself".¹⁴⁶ However much an individual attempts to have this, he fails in obtaining it as there is nothing in him which he could make use of for the purpose. It is this aspect of the experience that is stated to be unobtainable through study, intelligence and rich learning. The Lord shows Himself to him

140. *ibid.* 3.1 : 3; cf. *ibid.* 2.5 : 9, 10.

141. *ibid.* 3.4.

142. *Peri. Tm.* 4.1 : 6.

143. *ibid.* 4.8 : 7.

144. *T.V.M.* 10.5 : 9.

145. *ibid.* 1.7 : 10.

146. *A Philosophy of Religion*, p. 432.

whom He chooses for the purpose and that person gets it.¹⁴⁷ The mystic gets the integral experience of the Lord together with the entire or part of the world which forms a portion of Him and which He chooses to show to His men.

Though mystic experience is ineffable, it is not unanalyzable. For others who have yet to enter into the realm of mysticism, two aspects are noticeable in the experience of the mystic. In one of them, namely, emotional, the mystic has as intense feeling which is not altogether without rich content. Some central idea, as intellectual certainty, is had by him through immediate intuition of reality. The mystic is able to communicate this. The more intense is emotion the more personal God becomes and less cosmic also. It is the personal Deity that tends to arouse sentiment in the self. This is the reason for the popularity and appeal of the later *Upaniṣads* like *Svetāsvatara*, *Bhagavadgītā* and *Purāṇas* as inspiring belief.¹⁴⁸ The other aspect of mysticism is cognitive and ideational. The mystic experience has immediacy, expressive of directness and stands by itself with the presentative character. Hence the ultimate truth is presented there as a Reality already established beyond doubt, not requiring any representative knowledge to prove it.¹⁴⁹ Neotic tendency is another mark of mystic experience which enables the mystic to have the reality revealed face-to-face like his sense of eye or ear would do. It makes the mystic speak emphatically about reality and its fundamental character is what is frequently called 'self transcendence', the direct cognition of reality other or larger than the cognitive state of consciousness itself.¹⁵⁰ The consciousness of the mystic is not only emotional but intuitive from the unknown 'Beyond'. The union between God and the mystic is actual perception of God.¹⁵¹ However, the cognitive and emotional elements of mystic experience are blended together and become mutually influential. It is not

147. Kath. Up. 1.2:23.

148. *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 348-49.

149. cf. *ibid.* pp. 400-01.

150. Cited as the view of Professor Ewer in *ibid.* p. 405.

151. View of Father Maynard cited. *ibid.* p. 412.

therefore possible to dissect mystic experience in two independent forms and analyse them without getting one related to the other.

When ecstasy is said to be the chief mark of mystic experience, it does not mean that the mystic has to his lot only joy and not pain. Pain and delight take their positions alternately. The feeling of pain could be the result of not having the continued vision of God. Ecstatic joy comes to the self of its own accord and makes him mystic who cannot order its continued presence in him. This may be due to the relatively beginning stage of mystic life. In the higher stage also, the mystic, who had intensely intuited the vision of God, does not feel joy because of the lack of communion. He will feel that he had been deserted by God because of himself having been a sinner and as such completely unworthy of God's presence. The mystic then struggles hard to get it in vain. He then feels the hollowness of life around him which brought in this separation for him from God. Even this immediate sense of separation "from a Being who yet is felt as in some way present"¹⁵² forms part of his mystic experience. The influence of beautiful, natural scenery and of music and poetry, which arouse emotion, tend to arouse religious emotion as well.¹⁵³

In the ecstatic condition of his realization of God, the mystic experiences an intense communion which "offers a far better solution of the ills of life than philosophy and metaphysics".¹⁵⁴ Ecstasy represents the unitive stage¹⁵⁵ in mysticism "when the soul begins to perceive the odour of the divine perfumes".¹⁵⁶ God does not let the self have His vision continued beyond a limited period and this arouses in the self a sense of disappointment, despair and intense longing

152. *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 353.

153. *ibid.* pp. 355-356.

154. *Theory and Art of Mysticism*, p. 156.

155. For other stages, vide *The Religious Consciousness* (a psychological study), p. 394.

156. *ibid.* p. 396.

to have the vision of the deity. "Ecstasy and dryness are episodes which oscillate and give place to each other through long years".¹⁵⁷ Certain features mark this stage of ecstatic joy. The self has its personal consciousness absorbed in the personality of the deity and realizes that he is taken possession by God for ever. Secondly, he has nothing to do, for God does everything through him and as such he has no longer any desire whatsoever to be fulfilled. Thirdly and lastly, there is the feeling of energy and fulness that God is good in looking after himself.¹⁵⁸ The previous experience of the worldly type which the Ālvārs had before are not helpful in interpreting the vision which God gives them.¹⁵⁹ It is therefore natural for the mystic to wonder at the mysterious presentation. The mystic finds the difficulty in translating his experience with adequate expressions, and so chooses a variety of images to represent by analogy the vision which is too great for his words.

Nammālvār describes vividly how the Lord entered into him and occupied in him. He did not know that He was entering within. He came of His own accord and deceived him, that is, He took possession of him who was till then feeling that he was independent by himself and brought him under His control without his consent and awareness. He entered into the body and got united with his self. The Ālvār declares that he could not leave Him on any account.¹⁶⁰ The Lord Who is pre-eminent among the sentient and non-sentient under Whom all these get their being and sustenance, Who is the Inner Controller of them, Who has demonstrated His easy accessibility in His descent as Kṛṣṇa, Who allows Himself to be enjoyed by the selves and also enjoys them and Who is the consort of Śrī, stood within the Ālvār and around Him. The Ālvār has

157. *ibid.* p. 436.

158. For a detailed treatment of this aspect, vide *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 437-439.

159. Note that Arjuna got dismayed unable to apprehend the cosmic form of God, though he was endowed by the Lord with divine vision. (Vide Bh. G. 11 : 52).

160. T.V.M. 1.7 : 7.

here direct experience of the Lord with Śrī.¹⁶¹ Not merely does the Lord present Himself in the finitised form but the form is synthesised by the Āḷvār with the forms with which He took the descent of Varāha, acquired the name of Keśava, killed the elephant Kuvalayāpīdā, Who is beyond the knowledge of the gods and Who lies on the deep and vast sea.¹⁶² The Lord is shown here to have come down to him as on other occasions mainly to protect those who are in distress. The Āḷvār was afforded by Him delectable experience of Him, allowing the former to visualise His blue-coloured body and lotus-like eyes.¹⁶³ He is identified here through His unique marks like the possession of auspicious attributes having no defect, possession of a divine form, and Garuḍa as His vehicle and being the Spouse of Śrī.¹⁶⁴ The Lord who has His consorts Śrī, Bhūdevi and Nippinnai and who laid Himself on the banyan leaf after devouring all the worlds, occupied his waist¹⁶⁵ and heart.¹⁶⁶ He, who is the body and self of all, far away for some and too near for others, lying beyond the comprehension of even the learned and enlightened and pure and from whom arise doubts and erroneous cognitions, occupied the shoulders of the Āḷvār.¹⁶⁷ The Lord is the source of recollection, knowledge and their removal or disappearance,¹⁶⁸ which means that He is virtually the controller of not only the beings, but also every aspect of their life. It is significant here that the Āḷvār refers to shoulders as having been occupied by Him, perhaps drawing a reference to the knowledge which the Lord gave to the child Dhruva by touching his shoulder with His conch.¹⁶⁹ This may also mean that the Lord occupied the shoulder of the Āḷvār and He would ride on the shoulders

161. *ibid.* 1.9:1. cf. *Twenty Four Thousand* on this verse.

162. *ibid.* 1.9:2.

163. *ibid.* 1.9:3.

164. *Twelve Thousand* on 1.9:3.

165. T.V.M. 1.9:4.

166. *ibid.* 1.9:5.

167. *ibid.* 1.9:6.

168. Bh. G. 15:15.

169. V.P. 1.12:51.

of Garuḍa.¹⁷⁰ Then He, who wears the garland of *tuḷaci*, who is peerless and possesses a dazzling form, took His seat in the tongue of the Āḷvār which suggests that He became the subject for the Āḷvār's expressions.¹⁷¹ The eyes of the saint were then occupied by Him, remaining there with His divine appurtenances in His four arms. He is the controller of both sound and sense of all arts or subjects of study.¹⁷² He dispelled the defects such as imperfect knowledge of the Āḷvār. All the five sense organs were then filled by Him. The forehead of the saint was then occupied by Him.¹⁷³ Finally, He took His position on the head of the Āḷvār which is anxiously awaited and yearned for by the devout worshippers of the Lord.¹⁷⁴ This decad has supreme significance in as much as the Āḷvār gets the mystic vision of the Lord's communion with Him and graded occupation of his body limb by limb. The Āḷvār gives an elaborate description of the auspicious form of the Lord with all His divine appurtenances, as He has become one with himself.¹⁷⁵ The experience which the Āḷvār had of God's presence in him emboldens him to state that He would not leave him at any time.¹⁷⁶ He is delectable like nectar at all moments, days, months, years and aeons and His eyes, feet and hands are like the lotuses blossomed just at the moment they are seen.¹⁷⁷ Rather it must be said that the red corals do not bear comparison to His lips, lotuses fall down in point of standard of beauty when compared to His eyes, feet and hands and charming necklaces do not match His tresses, thus proving that these are only apologetic standards of comparison while describing Him.¹⁷⁸ The Lord alone is the source, sustenance and satis-

170. Pīḷḷāṅ on T.V.M. 1.9:6.

171. T.V.M. 1.9:7.

172. *ibid.* 1.9:8.

173. *ibid.* 1.9:9.

174. *ibid.* 1.9:10.

175. *ibid.* 2.5.

176. *ibid.* 2.6:7.

177. *ibid.* 2.5:4.

178. *ibid.* 2.5:5.

faction of life (*dhāraka, pōṣaka* and *bhōgya*) – “*Uṇṇum cōru parukum nir tinnum veṟṟilaiyum ellām Kaṇṇan*”.¹⁷⁹ The sooner he hears the name ‘Nārāyaṇa’ the quicker are his eyes welled up in tears.¹⁸⁰ “At the very utterance of the name of the Lord” says Tirumaṅkaiyālvār, “tears well up in my eyes. I am very much moved. I will not befriend anyone else than the Lord”.¹⁸¹

The Lord came to Nammālvār of His own accord and filled his heart fully.¹⁸² This mystic union aroused in the saint a sense of relatedness to God with the result that he feels very much for the Lord being alone as it were. The Lord does not have any servant for service. He has to bear the conch and discus Himself, as also the sword and the bow. There is no follower for Him. No one is offering worship to Him with hands losing himself to the beauty of His feet and shoulders.¹⁸³ He entered into the Ālvār in the form of having devoured the worlds and remained there as a lamp of knowledge. He remained there without looking to any of the sides.¹⁸⁴ The Ālvār had the direct experience of Kṛṣṇa and then composed the particular verses in praise of Him.¹⁸⁵ When the Ālvār bowed the Lord at His feet as He lifted the foot to measure the higher regions, His eyes looked like a charming lotus-tank with the slightly slanting stalk.¹⁸⁶ His eyes which were set on him, did not leave him.¹⁸⁷

The intensity of the direct experience fills the Ālvārs with remorse. They feel for not having had the vision earlier at times when they simply wasted their time. The Lord is

179. *ibid.* 6.7:1.

180. *ibid.* 1.10:8.

181. *Peri. Tm.* 7.2:1.

182. *T.V.M.* 10.8:1.

183. *ibid.* 8.3:3.

184. *ibid.* 2.6:2.

185. *ibid.* 9.4:8, 9. cf. *ibid.* 10.6:4; 10.7:5.

186. *T.V.R.* 42; cf. *ibid.* 45.

187. *ibid.* 63.

lying on His serpent couch. The waves of the sea gently touch and pat His feet as if to make Him sleep. Poykaiyālvār saw Him sleep with red eyes and feels that much time had elapsed not in beholding Him.¹⁸⁸ The Lord who ripped open the chest of the demon Hiranya with the sharp claws, who rides on Garuda, measured the worlds, with His shoulders pervading all the directions and His crown measuring the upper regions. The saint did not have then the occasion to have this vision.¹⁸⁹ The Lord left His place in the ocean and came over to Matura in order to remove the chains with which Kamsa had bound His parents Vāsudēva and Dēvaki. He measured the earth and made it His own denying its ownership to the demons. The gods then offered flowers to His feet and worshipped them. The Ālvār feels that he did not have an occasion to serve Him then.¹⁹⁰ Śrī Rāma went after the deer which was no other than Mārīca in disguise and killed it. Nammālvār gets the direct presentation of the Lord having the beautiful discus in his hand. He did not have then the feeling that the Lord did this and stood before him. He did not extol Him then. He wasted all the time before he got this vision due to lack of wisdom.¹⁹¹

When desolation overcomes the Ālvār at the sight of the world, especially after his mystic experience of the Lord, he often has the feeling that he bears on his shoulders the crushing weight of the faults and the waywardness of the world and sings hymns of self condemnation. Sometimes the picture painted in the very darkest colour is of himself as the very embodiment of all that is immoral. The saint says : "The wretched journey of life in which enemies rejoice and friends are filled with sorrow to see us suffer untold miseries!¹⁹² How wretched is life in the world in which sudden death, sufferings, and the grief of agnates and cognates over the dead

188. M.Tv. 16.

189. *ibid.* 17.

190. *ibid.* 20.

191. P. Tv. 82.

192. T.V.M. 4.9: 1.

body are the order of the day!¹⁹³ How wretched is life in which elation and arrogance, and the happy company of those near and dear and one's mate are made to leave by the sudden stroke of death!¹⁹⁴ As wealth accumulates, men decay and the *tamasic* quality predominates¹⁹⁵. Birth, disease and death are so common that one wonders whether there could be a hell worse than this world.¹⁹⁶ Ensnared through fear in the torture of the worldly existence, men have their maw for their gospel".¹⁹⁷

As against *tapas* and control of the five senses and their sublimation, which all form the way to attain His feet, Nammālvār speaks in one full hymn of his own slavery to the senses and of his being caught within the net spread over by the five 'lords'.¹⁹⁸ The revulsion of this kind can be seen here and there in many of his hymns. Tirumaṅkaiyālvār is more eloquent in his reference to this kind of revulsion.¹⁹⁹ The classical portrayal of this Ālvār of the tyranny of *karma* and the tragedy of human sorrows by the analogies of the storm-tossed ship,²⁰⁰ the dilemma of the ant caught between the two burning ends of the faggot,²⁰¹ the pack of jackals on an island enveloped by the rising floods²⁰² and the men dwelling with cobras in the house²⁰³ is unsurpassed in religious literature.

In other places, Nammālvār, and for that matter other Ālvārs too, exaggerates his faults: "I have not folded my straying senses in, nor have gathered flowers in due time

193. *ibid.* 4.9: 2.

194. *ibid.* 4.9: 3.

195. *ibid.* 4.9: 4.

196. *ibid.* 4.9: 5.

197. *ibid.* 4.9: 6.

198. *ibid.* 7.1.

199. *Peri. Tm.* 6.2.

200. *ibid.* 11.8: 2.

201. *ibid.* 11.8: 4.

202. *ibid.* 11.8: 5.

203. *ibid.* 11.8: 3.

everyday for worship. My hard and wicked heart overflowing with desire leads sinful me to grope for the Lord's help"²⁰⁴ He continues in the same strain: "I did not observe any penance; I do not have any subtle knowledge. Even then, as a man without resources, I cannot bear to part from Thee."²⁰⁵ I belong neither with the Eternals nor with the worldlings. I am neither here nor there in my pursuit of Thee"²⁰⁶

To Nammālvār, life appears to be hollow with nothing worthy to attract him. The pathetic nature of life which he comes to take note of when his ecstatic joy came to an abrupt end with the Lord going out of his vision presents a contrast to the enjoyable state in which he was then placed. In spite of his having had several births one after another, the Ālvār remarks that he had got some encouragement in the present life itself by having the enjoyment of delight. The Lord who rides on Garuḍa destroys the hosts of demons to protect those who suffer. Being thus a father to him also, He shall not have him removed from Him, as it would lead to becoming aware of the hell-like life of the world.²⁰⁷ "My sins are so powerful, though I am a small one. I place my palms on my head and request You to come to me to remove my distress."²⁰⁸ When shall I, to whom You had given an enjoyable experience of unlimited bliss, have the occasion to see You with my eyes? I am calling You day and night for help.²⁰⁹ I do not know how many sins I had committed which could not be brought to an end. I fervently appeal to You with tears.²¹⁰ I am a shameless fellow while calling Him for help. Even Brahmā and others are not able to see You.²¹¹ It is too much for me,

204. T.V.M. 4.7: 9.

205. *ibid.* 5.7: 1.

206. *ibid.* 5.7: 2.

207. T.V.M. 2.6: 8.

208. *ibid.* 4.7: 1.

209. *ibid.* 4.7: 2.

210. *ibid.* 4.7: 3.

211. *ibid.* 4.7: 4.

the fickle-minded, to have a vision of You.²¹² I know well that You are pervading every-where including myself, within the soul and the body. Yet I am stretching forth my tongue within myself to taste Your presence by casting my looks in all directions to behold You. This is a clear proof of my ignorance"²¹³ The Ālvār is conscious of having had the direct experience of joy with Him within himself and also of having his nescience removed,²¹⁴ but appeals for His immediate presence before him so that he could worship His feet using his arms fully for offering flowers there, sing His praise and dance with delight.²¹⁵ All these painful feelings arise because he could not get the vision of the Lord any where. He could desist from these attempts, but he had already a vision of Him who is made known by the light of the *Vedas*. Even though he has been pleading to the Lord, He had not shown any sympathetic consideration for him. The Ālvār asks the mind whether He is now occupying a place which He had specially chosen as to be beyond the reach for His mercy.²¹⁶

The feeling of separation is depicted with the touch of uniqueness and originality. The mind had gone after Him. The body is, however, placed far away from Him, much as it had committed sins.²¹⁷ This is indirectly expressing the Ālvār's anxiety and longing to be in direct physical communion with the Lord. All the same, his mind could not leave His vicinity nor will his tongue do nothing but praising Him. His body feels the thrill.²¹⁸ The Ālvār offers then a different kind of appeal to the Lord. "People who are placed in a superior position are found to help the people in the lower stratum of society who suffer and appeal to them for relief and they do this sometimes even by undergoing personal suffering. When I make this appeal to You, You are not to

212. *ibid.* 4.7: 5.

213. *ibid.* 4.7: 6.

214. *ibid.* 4.7: 7.

215. *ibid.* 4.7: 8.

216. P. Tv. 74.

217. *ibid.* 7.

218. T.V.M. 1.6? 3; cf. T.K, 1.

suffer in any way. Please accept my appeal and show Yourself to my vision".²¹⁹

Nammālvār pleads passionately to the Lord and asks whether he would get at least to the sacred shrine at Tirunāvāy which would remove the obstacles that lie in the path of God-realization.²²⁰ He is keen on serving the Lord²²¹ and enjoy His bliss.²²² He requests the Lord to appear before him at least for a day with the discus and the conch.²²³ Reminded by the act of measuring the world, he asks the Lord to show him His beautiful gait.²²⁴ In spite of having been for a very long period related to the Lord and Śri, he is now separated from Him.²²⁵ He requests the Lord to present Himself before him at least for a day with the sight of being served by Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and other gods.²²⁶ The Lord in His five forms hides Himself from him.²²⁷ The Ālvār does not know how long he would be required to wander about in order to have Him in his vision as Tirivikrama.²²⁸ As an Inner Soul of all, He is requested to show His compassion to his ignorant self.²²⁹ He does not know why the Lord should make him suffer more and more by subjecting him to sensual attraction upsetting his mental equipoise.²³⁰ Even the never-ending, ever-unchanging and unlimited joy of *kaivalya* does not bear any comparison to the act of service at His feet, even if it should last for a short duration.²³¹

219 P. Tv. 13.

220. T.V.M. 9.8: 1-3.

221. *ibid.* 9.8: 4.

222. *ibid.* 9.8: 5.

223. *ibid.* 6.9: 1.

224. *ibid.* 6.9: 2.

225: *ibid.* 6.9: 3.

226. *ibid.* 6.9: 4.

227. *ibid.* 6.9: 5.

228. *ibid.* 6.9: 6.

229. *ibid.* 6.9: 7.

230. *ibid.* 6.9: 8.

231. *ibid.* 6.9: 10.

In a mood of abject dejection, the Āḷvār speaks of not having done any good act, not having refrained from doing sinful deeds and was far away from the Lord owing to his indulgence in matters of little significance. The Lord is, however, capable of creating wonders and so is requested to take him to His feet.²³² The behaviour of the world is really wonderful. Some people get their daily bread by terrorising others and forcing them by torture to commit sinful deeds. The Āḷvār cannot live in such a world any longer and therefore requests the Lord to take him whom He had already admitted as His servant.²³³ Again, the five senses are so powerful that they afflict even the Eternals if they were to come down to this mortal world and stay for sometime. One can easily imagine how powerfully they would subjugate an ordinary being. The Āḷvār tells the Lord that if He were to let him down, then his position at the hands of these senses would be very pitiable. He requests the Lord to come and give him a word of encouragement.²³⁴ The Lord has control over the Āḷvār and the seven worlds. He is Himself the deities whom He had ordained to carry out His injunctions. He is everything in the world, remaining on occasions in a subtle form as causes and not visible to the senses. How can then the Āḷvār get at Him?²³⁵

It should be taken for granted that Nammāḷvār sings in this strain only in moments of despair when he feels for the world or when he thinks that he is away from God or godly life. This represents only the value he sets on ethical codes. As the saint has undergone the purgation, he is the purest soul, the very embodiment of morality. The Āḷvār himself gives expression to his conviction: "The Lord dispelled my two *karmas* and He has taken me to His fold";²³⁶ "I have worn His feet on my head".²³⁷ He continues: "The Lord who cannot be apprehended by the *Vedas* or by those who are

232. *ibid.* 3.2: 6.

233. *ibid.* 4.9: 6.

234. *ibid.* 7.1: 6.

235. *ibid.* 8.1: 6.

236. *ibid.* 10.4: 2.

237. *ibid.* 10.4: 3.

well-versed in them has been depended upon by me as the medicine to cure all ills".²³⁸ "I shall tirelessly utter the name of, embrace and bow my head to, the Lotus Feet which measured the three world".²³⁹ "I extolled the golden feet of my Lord sought and worshipped by the Eternals with my compositions".²⁴⁰ "When Thou hast been the theme of my hymns" says the Ālvār in another context, "I would never address to another those sweet words that emanate from my tongue".²⁴¹ Can we not take our Ālvār to be one who always sings exclusively the Lord – in the language of Saivite saint Cuntaramūrtti, a '*Paramanaiyē pāṭuvār*'?

When the devotee cries out for having God's presence, God certainly listens to His appeal and presents Himself before him. The Ālvār was struggling hard to live without God and was about to get drowned like a boat in the sea of worldly existence; the Lord came and joined him with a divine form bearing the conch and the discus. The Ālvār remarks that the Lord felt compassionate towards him crying 'ah, ah' thereby revealing that He could not any longer bear the torments of His devotee, the Ālvār.²⁴² The Lord stood in his heart casting a favourable look at him.²⁴³ He got united with the saint destroying completely the power of the senses and stood always looking at him.²⁴⁴ The Ālvār could not visualize anything except Him with red lips, the white teeth and shining ear-ornaments. The lustre of each of His limbs vies with that of the other. He is remaining in the mind of the Ālvār displaying a smile in His red lips.²⁴⁵ The Lord will show His sympathy to those whom He likes to receive it without expecting anything from them. He stays on in the mind of a small person like the Ālvār.²⁴⁶

238. *ibid.* 9.3: 3.

239. *ibid.* 1.3: 10.

240. P.Tv. 45.

241. T.V.M. 3.9: 1.

242. *ibid.* 5.1: 9; cf. Peri. Tm. 7.6: 2; 7.7: 9.

243. *ibid.* 8.7: 1.

244. *ibid.* 8.7: 2.

245. *ibid.* 8.7: 7.

246. *ibid.* 8.7: 8.

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār uttered the names of God who is the Self of all and stays in the shrine at Śrī Raṅgam. Though these holy names were uttered by the impure and filthy-bodied being with the sullied mouth, the blue-coloured Lord appeared within his eyes offering shelter for him²⁴⁷ The effect of the sight of the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam dispelled all the sins which are irremediable and which give rise to diseases.²⁴⁸

Nammālvār had a rich and enjoyable experience, at the shrine Tiruvīṅṅakar, with the Lord whose prosperous states include all the mutually contradictory factors known to man such as poverty and riches, hell and heaven, hatred and enmity, poison and nectar, pleasure and pain, confusion and clarity, punishment and favour, heat and shade, town and country, knowledge and nescience, light and darkness, earth and sky, merit and sin, union and separation, memory and forgetfulness, existence and non-existence, crookedness and straightforwardness, black and white, truth and falsehood, youthfulness and old age, rejuvenation and decrepitude, the three worlds and the *Paramapada*, likes and dislikes, prosperity and adversity, fame and infamy.²⁴⁹ He has a body which is not the product of the matter and also a body in the form of the dirty world. He is concealed and explicit.²⁵⁰ He is the refuge for the gods and the lord of Death for the demons. He keeps the world well protected under the shade of His feet and does not protect those who depend on others.²⁵¹ He is the shade and sunshine, microcosmic and macrocosmic, short and long, and moveable and immoveable.²⁵²

From the point of view of ordinary knowledge the insoluble philosophical problems relating to the Absolute lead to series of contradictions as these mentioned by Nammālvār. These contradictions proclaim with a loud note that He can-

247. T.K. 12.

248. *ibid.* 13.

249. T.V.M. 6.3 : 1 to 6.

250. *ibid.* 6.3 : 7.

251. *ibid.* 6.3 : 8.

252. *ibid.* 6.3 : 10.

not be understood by man - "*aṟivu ariya pirān*".²⁵³ He is the End, the Beginning and the Beginning of the Beginning.²⁵⁴ He is the ancient Lord without end.²⁵⁵ He is the Principal behind root and seed.²⁵⁶ He is the true cause in its entirety and the overlord of everything, the sole Original and the Primal seed of all things: "*mūvāt tanimutal*",²⁵⁷ "*tanī vittu*"²⁵⁸, "*muḷu mutal*"²⁵⁹ etc. All these do not satisfy the dialectical arguments. Again, contradictions like these show that the Absolute presents a philosophical problem, as the *Upaniṣads*²⁶⁰ do, which baffles the metaphysicians. These features present themselves to the mystic Ālvār as part of the *vibhūti* of Nārāyaṇa and so does not require any proof to reconcile them. They are irreconcilable and remain as such for the immature mind whose vision is limited to the comprehension only of the parts or those features and not as related or integrated into one composite whole.

Ecstasy, which falls to the lot of the fortunate few, lies indescribable, for want of adequate expressions, but the person who had the experience of it cannot but give expression to it. He could use only such words and expressions with which he is familiar to describe his experience, but these are poor and inadequate aids. The Lord is described and addressed with those expressions. He is delectable and so is insatiable nectar which by its superworldly nature could be the nearest equivalent to describe Him. He is enjoyable and so is the perfect note played on the *viṇa*. It is these objects that serve as fit for presenting a likeness to Him under His various aspects. Thus metaphors and similies play a dominant role in such descriptions. Attractiveness of the Lord's appearance is an important aspect in the depiction of the

253. *ibid.* 5.5 : 11.

254. *Peri. Tm.* 9.7 : 1.

255. *T.V.M.* 1.3 : 5.

256. *ibid.* 2.8 : 10.

257. *ibid.* 2.8 : 5.

258. *ibid.* 1.5 : 3; *T.V.C.* 4.

259. *ibid.* 1.7 : 8.

260. *cf. Sv. Up.* 3 : 19; *T.V.M.* 1.3 : 4, 7.

Lord. From this point of view the Lord is the most beautiful blue-diamond (*ōr eḷil nilamaṇi*),²⁶¹ and the purest (*amalan*)²⁶² and the faultless (*ninmalan*).²⁶³ Periyālvār calls Him 'Alakan'²⁶⁴ and 'Maṇavāḷan'.²⁶⁵ Nammālvār refers to Him as 'Aḷakar'²⁶⁶ and he revels in the ocean-hued or cloud-hued colour of the Lord and in many places he calls Him 'the Dark gem' (*karumaṇikkam*)²⁶⁷ He addresses Him as 'parañcōṭṭi'²⁶⁸ (or the supreme shining self); to him He is *Bhuvana Sundara* without any shade of ugliness. Aesthetics as art criticism applies the criteria of immanence and transcendence, and elevates the science and art of aesthetics into a philosophy as the critique of the creative impulse. It is the intuitive expression of infinite beauty through the medium of the finite, and it portrays the beauties of nature and the embodied self as partial revelations of the absolute beauty of God. Nammālvār expresses the beauty of the Lord: "My Lord! Has the effulgence of Thy face turned in itself into the effulgence of Thy crown? Has the splendour of Thy feet become the splendour of Thy foot-rest? Has the brightness of Thy waist spread itself into Thy ornaments and garments?"²⁶⁹

The most intimate experience of the Lord's bliss is often spoken of as 'amutu' (the nectar).²⁷⁰ The commentators of *Nalayiram* bring out the greatness of this conception of 'ārāvamutu' which is according to them unique in their mystic language.²⁷¹ Says the Ālvār "He and I became one

261. A.P. 10.

262. *ibid.* 1.

263. *ibid.* 1.

264. Periyāḷ. Tm. 4.3: 5.

265. *ibid.* 4.9: 4.

266. T.V.M. 2.10: 2.

267. *ibid.* 3.3: 3; 5.1: 5; 5.10: 7; 8.9: 1; Kulacēkarālvār refers to Him as Karumaṇi (Perum. Tm. 1.1).

268. *ibid.* 3.1: 2. cf. Muṇ. Up. 2.2: 9 and 10.

269. *ibid.* 3.1: 1.

270. *ibid.* 1.6: 6; 2.3: 7; 2.5: 5; 2.7: 11; 3.3: 5; 3.4: 5; 3.5: 6; 3.6: 7; 3.8: 7; 3.10: 3; 4.9: 6; 5.5: 9; 5.8: 1; 5.9: 5; 6.3: 1; 6.10: 3; 7.1: 1; 7.2: 5; 8.1: 1; 8.4: 2; 8.8: 4; 9.2: 10; 10.7: 2; 10.8: 6; 10.10: 5.

271. *Itṭin Tamilākkam* Vol. V. 5.8: 1 (Commentary).

with me (Him?) as honey, milk, ghee, sugar-cane juice and nectar, all being mixed".²⁷² The idea conveyed is that, whilst sense enjoyment is exciting and exhausting, the joy of Divine contact expresses the inexpressible joy which is satisfaction without satiation. Almost all the Ālvārs refer to the Lord by this term. The hymn on the deity at Kumbakōṣam beginning with "ārāmutā" is unique in its experience. Our Ālvār refers to the Lord as 'amutu' with so many prefixes and suffixes with that word: "kaṣal-pāṣa amutē"²⁷³ - 'the nectar which has no connection with the salt sea'; "ārā amutam"²⁷⁴ - 'insatiable nector'; "vetattu āmutam"²⁷⁵ - 'the nectar of the Vedas'; "nalam-kaṣal amutam"²⁷⁶ - 'the nector of the milky ocean'; "inna-mutu"²⁷⁷ - 'sweet nectar'; "eṇṇam puḡuntu tittikkum amutē"²⁷⁸ - 'the nectar which enters the mind and is sweet there' etc. The Lord is the sweetest experience to the devotee and for want of apt words the Ālvār speaks of Him as "tēn" (honey), pāl (milk), ney (ghee), kannal (sugar-cane juice)²⁷⁹. Again he refers to Him as "karumpin in cāṟu, (the sweet juice of the sugar-cane), kaṣṣi (sugar-candy)²⁸⁰ and "kani" (fruit).²⁸¹ To Periyālvār the Lord is 'nālvētak-kaṣalamutu' (the nectar of the seas of the four Vedas)²⁸². These several metaphorical expressions used by our saint are all too sweet by themselves.

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār could not contain himself while having the direct vision of the Lord at Tirukkaṇṇamaṅkai. The Lord is like a bull which is uncontrollable. He is a man in being independent of others and is a woman by His depend-

272. *ibid.* 2.3: 1.

273. *ibid.* 2.3: 5.

274. *ibid.* 2.5: 4.

275. *ibid.* 3.3: 5.

276. *ibid.* 3.4: 5.

277. *ibid.* 3.6: 7; 5.1: 2; 5.9: 5.

278. *ibid.* 6.10: 3.

279. *ibid.* 2.3: 1; 5.1: 2; 5.5: 9.

280. *ibid.* 3.5: 6; 3.10: 3.

281. *ibid.* 3.10: 3.

282. Periyālvār, Tm. 4.3: 11.

ence or sub-servience to His devotees. He is a necklace of pearls and a heap of pearls. He is a bud and full-blown flower. He is a sugar-cane of sweet taste having been grown watered by nectar. He is the sweet fruit,²⁸³ the sugar-candy and the juice of the sugar-cane.²⁸⁴ He is treasure, gold and gem.²⁸⁵ He is air and water.²⁸⁶ He is music, musical melody, lustrous light, and mountain.²⁸⁷ He is pearl and lustrous green emerald.²⁸⁸

To Nammālvār He is the fresh-drawn milk, ghee and sweet taste of ghee, nectar, taste of nectar, and the joy of having tasted it.²⁸⁹ He is nectar and honey.²⁹⁰ He is a pillar of corals, because of the support He affords to people to rely on and because it cannot be taken to parts. He is the sweet sugar-cane grown in the hearts of the devotees. He is a golden hill, perhaps because a hill rises above many mounds all round and its golden nature shows its charming hue, stiffness and high value. The Lord is the highest and unchangingly charming unlike the host of gods. He is the divine wish-yielding tree (*karṣakam*), thus a boon to the devotees.²⁹¹ He is the young elephant in the groves of Tiruvintaḷūr.²⁹² The happiness of the Ālvār is greater when he says that the Lord is the sweet nectar to his soul and transcendent light intermixed with his life. He is the sweet fruit experienced by the seers and *ṛṣis*.²⁹³ "One cannot adequately describe", says Periyālvār, "the greatness of those who, at the point of death, chant the several names of the Lord, instead of calling upon

283. Peri. Tm. 7.10: 1.

284. *ibid.* 7.10: 2.

285. *ibid.* 7.10: 3.

286. *ibid.* 7.10: 4.

287. *ibid.* 7.10: 9.

288. T.K. 10.

289. T.V.M. 8.1: 7; cf. T.K. 5.

290. Peri. Tm. 5.6: 3; cf.

ibid. 7.3: 5.

291. *ibid.* 2.5: 1.

292. *ibid.* 4.9: 2.

293. T.V.M. 3.6: 7.

one's kith and kin."²⁹⁴ Again the Ālvār says that he had filled his body with the bliss of the Lord as if a vessel is being filled with the nectar by churning the sea.²⁹⁵ "As a return for the great, good help", says Nammālvār, "of communion in my soul, I have given up to Thee my soul itself".²⁹⁶ The Lord has incorporated Himself with the Ālvār, life into life, by fascinating his heart and entering it through His generosity and made it tender.²⁹⁷ "The Lord has merged into me" says the saint, "having absorbed into Himself my life and heart, filling these with Himself, without the knowledge even of His consort and associates".²⁹⁸

Nammālvār describes Bhagavān as the very embodiment of moral grandeur. The Lord not only loves morality in His followers but He Himself is pure, holy and moral. He helps His followers, the devotees, to become moral and pure. He is the Truth—"Meyyan",²⁹⁹ He is the Pure—"punitan";³⁰⁰ the Holy—"tirttan",³⁰¹ In other places He is described as "tūyāy",³⁰² "tūmoḷiyāy",³⁰³ "tūyan",³⁰⁴ all giving the same sense that Bhagavān is the pure One. The Lord is the Holy of holies destroying sin—"pavitran",³⁰⁵ "pāvanācan";³⁰⁶ He is the very form of Virtue—"pūṇṇiyan".³⁰⁷ In Tirumā-liruñcōlai hymn He is described as "Aḷakar".³⁰⁸ His incom-

294. Periyā]. Tm. 4.5: 1.

295. ibid. 5.4: 4.

296. T.V.M. 2.3: 4.

297. ibid. 9.6: 3.

298. ibid. 10.7: 1.

299. T.V.M. 9.10: 7 cf. A.P. 7.

300. Peri. Tm. 7.1: 4.

301. T.V.M. 2.8: 6; 7.2: 7.

302. Peri. Tm. 7.1: 9.

303. Peri. Tm. 6.2: 9.

304. T.V.M. 1.9: 6.

305. ibid. 2.3: 7, 9.

306. ibid. 3.6: 2.

307. Peri. Tm. 6.1: 8.

308. T.V.M. 2.10: 2.

parable beautiful form is brought out in another hymn.³⁰⁹ The Beautiful Absolute, *Bhuvana Sundara*, can only be the Purest. The aesthetic philosophy of the Āḷvars transforms the Brahman of metaphysics and the Īvara of Ethics into the *Bhuvana Sundara* of *Bhagavata*. The absolute of metaphysics becomes the beautiful God of aesthetic religion. He is "*nanṇu eḷil nārāṇan*"³¹⁰ Sometimes the Lord is described metaphorically as "*Tūya amutu*"³¹¹ - 'the pure nectar' and as "*Oṇ cuṭār kaṭṭai*"³¹² - 'the Resplendent Bundle of Rays'.

The idea described above is also expressed in a negative way. He is "*amalan*"³¹³ - 'the taintless One', "*ninṇamalan*"³¹⁴ - the 'faultless One. Negative metaphors are also employed to describe Him. The Lord is "*ūnamil celvām*"³¹⁵ - 'the wealth devoid of any deficiency'; "*antamil pukaḷāy*"³¹⁶ - 'the One with endless glory'; "*ēttu arum kirttiyinaṅ*"³¹⁷ - 'the One with praiseless glory'; "*iṭum eṭuppuṃ il iṇan*"³¹⁸ - the Lord without equal or superior'; "*tōṇṇam kēṭu avai illavan*"³¹⁹ - 'the One who is neither created nor destroyed'; "*kēṭu il viluppukal kēcavan*"³²⁰ - 'Kēcava with imperishable, great glory'; "*ellai il jñānattan*"³²¹ - 'the One with endless knowledge'; "*tannai oppār il appan*"³²² - 'the One without any equal to Him; "*kōṭu il pukalk kaṇṇan*"³²³ - 'Kṛṣṇa with faultless [glory]';

309. *ibid.* 3.1.310. *ibid.* 1.3: 7.311. *ibid.* 1.7: 3.312. *ibid.* 1.7: 4.313. *ibid.* 3.4: 4; cf. A.P.1.

314. A.P. 1.

315. T.V.M. 3.4: 7.

316. *ibid.* 5.7: 7317. *ibid.* 7.6: 3.318. *ibid.* 1.6: 3.319. *ibid.* 3.6: 6.320. *ibid.* 3.10: 11.321. *ibid.* 3.10: 8.322. *ibid.* 6.3: 9.323. *ibid.* 8.2: 11.

"*ulappu llān*"³²⁴ – 'the One with endless auspicious qualities; and "*piṟappill*"³²⁵ 'the One without birth'. He is also referred to as "*piṟappu il palpiṟavip perumāṅ*"³²⁶ – 'the One without birth, but taking countless births'. This means that He is beyond birth which is not conditioned by *karma*, but his births are self-determined and self-evolved.

The Lord is full of those rare and auspicious attributes and there is no comparison to Him in this respect. He is therefore called "*viripukaḷaṅ*"³²⁷ – 'the One with extensive and vast glory'. He is without birth which is the basis for all defects. He is "*uttamaṅ*"³²⁸ – 'the Supreme Being' who is possessed of all moral attributes. Because of His infinite attributes, He has a thousand names - "*pērum ōr āyiram piṟa pala uṭaiya emperumāṅ*"³²⁹ – 'the One with a thousand names along with many others, being our Lord'; "*nāmaṅkaḷ āyiram uṭaiya namperumāṅ*"³³⁰ – 'our Lord possessed of a thousand names'. Among these qualities knowledge, strength, lordship, valour, energy and splendour – these six are associated with His nature as the Supreme Being, the other qualities like goodness, spontaneous love etc., making Him easily accessible to us. These qualities have an eternal appeal to the humanity. So *Brahmanubhava* differs with different seekers of salvation and this brings out the uniqueness of each experience and its universality. The seeker after salvation meditates on some single quality of the Lord according to his or her inclination and even the eternal seers, it is said, enjoy only one aspect of the divine nature. Even though the methods and the starting points may vary with the psychological variations of the individual, the goal is the same, namely, the intuition of Bhagavān, which is of the nature of supreme unsurpassable Bliss.

324. *ibid.* 5.8: 4.

325. *ibid.* 3.5: 6.

326. *ibid.* 2.9: 5.

327. *ibid.* 4.8: 8.

328. T.P. 3.

329. T.V.M. 1.3: 4.

330. *ibid.* 5.9: 11.

Has not Nammālvār said that "He is all knowledge and bliss?"³³¹

The intensity of God-love of Nammālvār or rather his God-infatuation can be seen in all his four compositions. His is not mere emotion, divorced from intellect. It is an emotion born out of *jñāna*. That is why it is called '*matl-nalam*'³³² in the phraseology of the Ālvār. Mere *jñāna* leads to dissection and vivisection of God and God-concepts, and can be of little or no help to the pursuers after it. Similarly mere faith and fervour border on sensuousness and sentimentalism, and are apt to drown the seeker into vice and sin and borne out by many an instance in daily life. A happy blend of *jñāna* and *bhakti* is what is most beneficent to the human soul dissatisfied with worldly pursuits. *Jñāna* must ripen into *bhakti*, "*Jñānam kaṇṭā nalam*"³³³ as Amutanar terms it. Knowledge divides, but love unites. Nammālvār has exemplified by his life and works the glory that a man can achieve by a happy blend of knowledge and love. Love towards God fulfils itself in the case of the Ālvār in love towards the entire creation which is organically one with God, all beings and things being but His body (*Sarira-sariri bhāva*). And that is why Nammālvār is sought after by man as much as God Himself, Who, after a long long search, found a person who could say 'All is Vāsudeva' - "*Ellam Kaṇṭān*"³³⁴.

331. *ibid.* 1.1: 2.

332. *ibid.* 1.1: 1.

333. R.N. 66.

334. T:V.M. 6,7: 1; cf. Bh.G. 7: 19.