

CHAPTER XXI

THE WORSHIP OF THE DEITY

Mystic experience is not the only kind of religious experience. The intense kind of that experience does not last for long duration of time. Intensity or reverse of it, which characterizes the religious experience, is not acquired by the mystic through conscious efforts nor does it admit of development through practice and training. It is a gift from God and the mystic is to remain only awaiting for receiving it. Such being the case, the mystic has more occasions when he is aware of the stormy and disturbing world. The experience which he undergoes creates on occasions, when he is without it, a passionate longing to have it again. Mindful as he is of his inability to work for it, he feels the imperative need to pray and request for God's grace. The unscaleable dizzy heights of the Godhead and the ineffective and inefficient lowliness of the self reveal to the mystic that the flow of the Divine Grace has always a downward motion to inundate the rather uneven human frailties and relieve the selves of the parching of life here. He cannot on account of his natural incapacity raise himself up even to make an effort to go half way and receive the benign favour. He is not however forbidden from taking to such methods, which lie within his limits and power, to work for deserving Divine Grace.

The efforts of God-realization though of temporary duration are seen in the abolition of personal consciousness and in the realization that there is a Personality much vaster and much more powerful than his own. Any action that is to be undertaken or carried out by the individual is the action of God Himself prompted and accomplished by Him. The self is no longer desirous of any objective. It feels energetic and enthusiastic about life and life's purpose. It is rid of

the sense of possession and egoism.¹ In the most ideal spirit of God-intoxication, Nammālvār asks people to give up the possessive and egoistic attitudes. "Reach the Lord", he says, "tearing of the roots of the attitudes of 'You' and 'Your'".² The mystic saint should have perforce used the words 'I' and 'Mine' which stand for *ahaṅkāra* and *mamakāra*. He tries to avoid using them, as it would smack of himself becoming guilty of having such attitudes. Hence he carefully worded the expressions as 'You' and 'Your'. If 'I' and 'You' and 'Mine' and 'Your' are combined together as fit to be shunned, it is easy to understand that this leads to the realization that as there is nothing as 'Mine' or 'Your', everything must belong to Him and not to him or them. As 'I' and 'You' are required to be suppressed, He alone remains in the world. So much so, this concept is helpful to realize the ultimate tenet of the Vaiṣṇavite school that everything including 'I' and 'You' and therefore 'He' or 'She' or 'It' also should belong to Him. This shows further that every being animate or otherwise exists only for Him and so deserves the name *śeṣa* while He is *śeṣin*.

Every thought, word, or deed that is undertaken by a being is really prompted by God and belongs to Him, the self being only a medium for that thought, word or deed concerned. The responsibility for this therefore rests with God and the self which realizes this is actually not afraid of anything nor is it overburdened by anything. The self cannot therefore operate its senses on anything for deriving personal gratification. Hence the need to control the senses.³ This is the surest method for self-renunciation by the self. The difficulty in controlling the senses which drag the self as they choose points to the lowliness of human effort and to the need to practise humility, leaving one's self to the care of the Lord who alone could bring those senses under control. The desire for the sense objects and their transient pleasures are the root causes for *karma* in action. *Viśaya kāma* is the

1. cf. *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 436 - 7.

2. T.V.M. 1.2: 3.

3. *ibid.* 2.8: 4: M.Tv. 50.

desire for the object of senses, and its satisfaction is momentary and fraught with pain in all its stages namely originating in pain, mixed with pain, and causing pain. The primary cause of suffering is traceable to the desire for the objects of sense. While the moth, the deer, the elephant, the fish and the bee are drawn to death in the act of gratifying a single sense organ, man is allured by the cumulative charm and solicitation of the five senses and suffers physical and moral death.^{3a}

Nammālvār laments variously the hold of the five senses over him and pleads to God for an escape from it. He cries: "How long will You immerse wretched me in the petty pleasures of the five senses?"⁴ "Why should You still propose to keep me away from Your Lotus-Feet with the five senses within wearing me away?"⁵ Again he refers to these senses as: "Made to struggle day and night with the rival onslaughts of the tyrants (of the five senses) ruling over me;"⁶ "overwhelming and blinding me to Truth through five senses;"⁷ "milling me in the disease of the five senses without prospect of cure;"⁸ "the five senses which enslave even the Eternals (*nityasūris*)";⁹ "the five senses which can never be set at rest;"¹⁰ and "the five senses which entice every one as though they are nectar."¹¹ In fact the whole hymn is on the interplay of senses; finally the Ālvār prays to Him to grant freedom from the illusion of the five senses and the meditation of His symbol and form. Tirumaṅkaiyālvār also decries the role of five senses in him. "I have sought refuge in Thee" says the Ālvār, "for the five senses press me hard constantly."¹² He

3(a). *Tiruveṅkaṭak-kalampakam* - 27.

4. T.V.M. 6.9:
5. *ibid.* 7.1: 1.
6. *ibid.* 7.1: 2, 3.
7. *ibid.* 7.1: 4.
8. *ibid.* 7.1: 5.
9. *ibid.* 7.1: 6.
10. *ibid.* 7.1: 7.
11. *ibid.* 7.1: 8.
12. *Peri. Tm.* 7.7: 1.

again says; "While the senses have planted themselves in me to give me worldly pleasures, I reject them and seek Thy protection from them;"¹³ "the five senses harass me and spoil my soul; despite my determination for endurance, unable to withstand the senses, I reach Thee for rescue;"¹⁴ "the five senses like fierce and strong youths hold me from Thee; I have escaped their guard and reached Thy feet for deliverance"¹⁵ and "lords over me, the five senses having fixed their abode within me, pester me for their gratification and will not leave me. I cannot withstand them. At a loss as to what to do, I pray that Thou takest pity on me and relieve me."¹⁶ Thus from the cradle to the grave life therefore is a will-o'-the-wisp. When destiny drags the *jīva* down and subjects it to sorrow, the inner divinity in each *jīva* urges it to choose the way of blessedness, and it drifts between destiny and divinity till it decides on *mukti* and becomes a seeker after salvation.

Like all the poets who preface their works with an expression of their unworthiness to deal with the themes taken up by them, Nammālvār also does the same. But in his case it is not mere conventionality, but springs from a real and deep consciousness of his unworthiness to talk about God. For in him is seen this expression of humility being perceivable throughout all his four poems. The Lord is everything and beyond everything and hence arises the difficulty in calling Him by any definite name.¹⁷ It is equally difficult to name Him as having particular enchanting limbs or possessions. The *Upaniṣads* rightly refrained from describing Him, as He is beyond the reach of words and thought. Nammālvār's treatment of this matter in the decad under reference is a clear confession of his inability to describe the incomprehensible nature of the Lord. The greatness of the Lord is so impeccable that it would be tarnished if even

13. *ibid.* 7.7: 3.

14. *ibid.* 7.7: 7.

15. *ibid.* 7.7: 8.

16. *ibid.* 7.7: 9.

17. T.V.M. 3.4.

gods and sages were to worship Him with flowers in their hands¹⁸. To extol Him is definitely an impossibility, for there is no object that could bear any likeness to any part of His body or aspect of greatness nor could the expressions be of any use.¹⁹ All the available literature have only dealt with His greatness only to a limited extent.²⁰ The Ālvār appears to convey here that the disparity between the dizzy heights of His excellence and the depths of human frailties is so vast that attempt to praise Him or describe Him would rather belittle His greatness and would be an apology for praising Him.²¹ His first poem *Tiruviruttam* begins in a plaintive and humble mood by making a submissive appeal to the Lord. Again and again in the course of that poem the saint is assailed by a feeling of unworthiness born of a realization of his smallness. In moving words he says: "Only great orthodox people (*valdikas*) can truly claim to bow in all humility before Thy dark body and lotus eyes. Therefore, they alone are fit to talk about Thee. But here I am trying to sing about Thee. Shall I tell Thee what it is like? A vast herd of cows is being taken towards pasture-fields far away from the village. When, after going a long way, tempting and rich green grass is sighted, all the cows in the herd send forth sounds of joy. In their midst, however, is a blind cow which cannot see for itself those green pasture-fields that have been sighted by the rest. Nevertheless, along with them, the blind cow also bellows in unison. In such a manner I also speak of Thee. What else can I say?"²² In another verse he refers to the great skill with which Tirumāl (*Śrīyahpati*) gets Himself sung by one like his own humble self. He compares himself to the tiny bacillus wallowing in a wound in a living body, – living, moving and having its entire existence there; how can it know of the entire world? The idea embodied here is that he too knows, and can know, nothing of God. But he is sure and certain that his words

18. *ibid.* 1.5: 2.

19. *ibid.* 3.1: 2, 3.

20. *ibid.* 3.1: 6.

21. *ibid.* 3.1: 7 to 9.

22. T.V.R. 94.

will command attention. Is it not, he asks, an ancient custom to attach significance even to the sounds made by a lizard? ²³ In yet another verse the Ālvār says that his learning the names of the Lord (*Tirunāmac-col*) is like taking a bite out of an unripe fruit for want of a good ripe one. For, according to him, only the celestials of the earth (*nittai-tēvar*) can claim to pay their obeisance to God in the hallowed words of the *Vedas* (*irukkārmoli*).²⁴

In the Ālvār's second poem, *Tiruvācīriyam*, the same sentiment is reflected in one verse, as its central idea: "Is it possible for me to worship those highly exalted Feet of the Lord - of that great God of *māya* (wonder)?" ²⁵ The underlying idea is that those Great Feet are beyond his worship.

The Ālvār's third poem, *Pēriya - tiruvantāi*, starts with an apology. The second verse can be set out in full for our consideration here:

"Pukaḷvōm paḷippōm; pukaḷōm paḷiyōm;
Ikaḷvōm matippōm; matiyōm ikaḷōm; maṟṟu
Eṅkaḷmāl! ceṅkaṅmāl! cīraḷnī; tīviṅaiyōm
Eṅkaḷmāl kaṅṭāy ivai."²⁶

'Our praise of Thee amountst to dispraise, nay, even abuse. As long as we do not attempt to praise Thee, we at least have the satisfaction that we have not defamed Thee. If we demean Thee, it is really respecting Thee. If we do not pretend to respect Thee, it at least ensures that we do not demean Thee. Our own Lord of Love! O Lord with lotus-like eyes! kindly do not get angry. These are all the love-antics of ours, - sinners we are of the worst type'. In a paradoxical tone, the Ālvār talks in a wonderful strain

23. Ibid. 48.

24. Ibid. 64. The phrase 'irukkārmoli' means the hymn of the *Rg. Veda*. cf. Tc.V. 109; cf. T.V.M. 4.3: 9.

25. T.V.C. 4.

26. P.Tv. 2.

of the wide disparity between the object of the praise on the one hand, and the person who seeks to praise, on the other; The plural "we" in this verse signifies the unworthiness of mankind as a whole and not himself alone. Barring those who never care to utter one word of praise on or worship of, God, the saint thinks of the rest of mankind, and on their behalf, submits to the Lord how He transcends words and is beyond praise. The tone of apology in 'Please do not get angry with us, because we indulge in such behaviour' is noteworthy. And he seeks to justify the lapse by referring to the love that impels men to take to praising Him. As he sings seven more verses, this feeling of unworthiness overtakes him again²⁷ and in the next verse he addresses his mind and asks "who are we and where is worship of Tirumāl"?²⁸ He prefaces this by saying that possibly the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Ādityas, and the great Two (out of the Trinity, Brahmā and Śiva) may claim to worship Him. "Alas" concludes the Ālvār, "we have to our credit only immense faults." There are other verses in this poem disclosing a similar frame of mind.²⁹

The last poem, *Tiruvāymoli*, is a work of mature wisdom where is found this sentiment gathering greater momentum and is being expressed in several ways. In one hymn the Ālvār thinks of the superiority and transcendence of the Lord, and in a fit of depression at the thought of his lowliness as against His greatness he seeks to run away from Him. There he sings: "I of very small intellect hanker to see Him who cannot be known by any one..... Can there be a greater folly than this?"³⁰ Unfitness to sing of Him is gradually disclosed to be only a corollary to the appreciation of the Lord's unsurpassed greatness, which is far above human ken. Similar sentiments are voiced forth by the Ālvār: "I cannot find adequate and suitable words to describe Him";³¹ "Is it possible to study the glory of the

27. *ibid.* 9.

28. *ibid.* 10.

29. *ibid.* 16, 18, 20, 24, 27, 29, 33, 71, 76, 82.

30. T V.M. 1.5: 7.

31. *ibid.* 2.5: 8.

lion-shaped Lord ?”³² Finally the Ālvār says that the Lord has made him a medium to sing Himself; it is He that praised Himself with His own words. In the Ālvār’s own words: “God has made me a tool to sing the *Tamil Prabandham* in order to make known what even the *Vedas* have not unravelled;³³ the *Prabandham* of my own words and of my authorship is made popular by His efforts and by seeking a place in me, He has sung about Himself;³⁴ taking possession of my mind and investing me with clarity about Himself (as the Supreme God) He strung garlands of verses from my tongue and sang about Himself;³⁵ not being gifted with the ability to sing sweetly of His divinity, He took possession of a person most incompetent like me blessed me and through my agency had the sweet hymns praised all over the world sung about Himself;³⁶ the Lord of Vaikunṭha without getting the foremost poet of sweet expressions³⁷ to sing about Himself, reserving all the blessings for me, through me sings the best verses about Himself;³⁸ one most incapable like me has been made his equal, and rendered capable of singing all about Himself;³⁹ I had nothing to forget because I had nothing to remember and taking possession of me, He made me

32. *ibid.* 2.8: 9.

33. *ibid.* 7.9: 1.

34. *ibid.* 7.9: 2.

35. *ibid.* 7.9: 3.

36. *ibid.* 7.9: 5.

37. *cf. Divyārtha Dīpikā on this:* It is needless to take this as a reference to the first Ālvārs. The word does not refer to the composers as having used Tamil for their compositions. Eminent poets like Vālmīki, Vyāsa and Parāśara were better equipped for singing the glory of God in well-chosen expressions. They could have been chosen by the Lord for composing songs in His praise. Perhaps, the Lord chose this Ālvār to compose hymns in Tamil. Further there is objection to interpret this reference in favour of the first Ālvārs; for there is no evidence, except the tradition (*aitihya*) prevalent in certain sections of the Vaiṣṇavite community, to prove that Nammālvār knew about the first Ālvārs and their compositions.

38. *ibid.* 7.9: 6.

39. *ibid.* 7.9: 8.

inexhaustible in my utterances about Him;⁴⁰ in return for the gift of singing the *Tiruvāymoḷi* when my soul tries to find out what I can give back, the answer that I get is that even my soul is His. Therefore nothing can be too precious to be returned to Him.⁴¹

Similar sentiments have been expressed by the venerable saint in other places: "Having received the gift of performing consecrated service to Him, whatever may be exalted position as a result of His having taken possession of my most despicable body and given me the understanding about Himself, the joy that I would get by exhausting my hymns with the devotees of the Lord can bear no comparison to anything else;⁴² having been chastened out of all *nirguṇas* I have been ordained to sing the *Tiruvāymoḷi* as the food for the devotees of the Lord;⁴³ seeking a place in me and from there He performed the authorship of the great Tamil work, *Tiruvāymoḷi*;⁴⁴ He took possession of my mind and spirit even without the knowledge of His consort near Him and played the role of a poet incognito;⁴⁵ having destroyed the *aśuras* to the great joy of the *devas*, the devotees longing to know more about the Lord, He responded by His becoming myself and singing about Himself."⁴⁶ This is all a truly wonderful synthesis mingling in itself the humility of the Āḷvār, the unspeakable glory of God, His sport or *līlā* by which He enjoys Himself, and His grace with which He blesses His devotees.

The moments of disappointment created by the loss of God-realization oppress the Āḷvārs to such an extent that they do not find fault with God for their sufferings but prefer to condemn themselves as having committed sins and not

40. *ibid.* 7.9: 9.

41. *ibid.* 7.9: 10.

42. *ibid.* 8.10: 5.

43. *ibid.* 9.4: 9.

44. *ibid.* 10.6: 4.

45. *ibid.* 10.7: 1.

46. *ibid.* 10.7: 5.

capable of good nor had I engaged myself in achieving the finest wisdom' – "Nōṛṛa nōṅpu ilēṅ nuṅ aṛivu ilēṅ".⁵³ He confesses that he had been a pseudo-devotee: "I had falsely flattered Thy appellations as the possessor of discus and one with the complexion of the dark gem kindly disposed towards me; in this way I had wasted my time in ungodly ways".⁵⁴ About his pitiable condition he cries in agony: "koṭuvinaiyēṅ"⁵⁵ – 'I am the most unfortunate'; "valvinaiyēṅ"⁵⁶ – 'I am an irredeemable sinner'; "koṭiya valvinaiyēṅ"⁵⁷ – 'I am the worst sinner' and so on. In one of his soul-stirring verses the Āḷvār bemoans his lot:

"Aṅkurṅ allēṅ iṅkurṅ allēṅ uṅṅaik
kāṅum avāvil vīntu nāṅ
Eṅkurṅum allēṅ"⁵⁸

– 'I am not of those chosen few up above (the Eternals), gifted to be with Thee and by Thy side for ever and ever; nor am I one of those who spend a happy contented life over here (the terrestrials), without any trouble or fear about a life or lives beyond. Tormented by a passion to obtain a vision of Thee I am neither here, nor there, nor anywhere'. Even though such a matured and devout soul as Nammāḷvār has described his condition in the above words, the condition will truly describe the state of many here who have not the courage to be godly and strength of purpose to be saintly, but who at the same time are not thoughtless enough to mix freely with the world at large with all its temptations and allurements. Worldly-mindedness that has been with us for ages and the lives untold will not let go their ancient hold on us, and so the clinging to the flesh and all that the flesh is heir to, is present in us in a pronounced degree. At the same time, a little intellect, a few spiritual flashes vouchsafed to us now and then by a merciful God and an environ-

53. *ibid.* 5.7: 1; cf. *Peri. Tm.* 1.1: 5, 8; T.M. 25, 26, 30, 31.

54. *ibid.* 5.1: 1; T.M. 34.

55. *ibid.* 9.2: 10.

56. *ibid.* 8.1: 8.

57. *ibid.* 5.10: 9.

58. *ibid.* 5.7: 2.

ment of religiousness not entirely of our seeking, have worked serious havoc with our materialistic stability and equilibrium. And hence we are very often tossed between one extreme and another and as frequently deadened by a morbid feeling of inertia and helplessness.

Realization of *jiva's* lowliness incompetence and inefficiency to do what is good and to avert what is dangerous shows to the self that it is under the gentle control of the Lord who is ever ready to redress the miseries of the selves. It is beyond the normal ability of the self to carry out the *vedic* rites for purifying itself and to acquire the knowledge of reality. The only course open for the self is worship of the Lord. The word '*pūja*' which is used in the sense of worshipping God conveys the meaning of regard with deep respect for the perfection of the Lord and affection for the Lord's qualities which are endearing and attractive to the self. The words '*bhajana*' and '*bhakti*' reveal the self's awareness and admiration for the Lord and His possession of perfection which is unattainable to any one and therefore the self's willingness to serve Him. The word '*service*' which is derived from the Latin cognate '*servus*' is closely connected in its import with the Sanskrit word '*sevā*'. In its primary sense, the word '*sevā*' means labour and in the religious sense, it means the willingness of the self to offer himself as a slave to God. Worship can also be taken to stand for penance through love. Worship entails certain observances which are like the rigours of penance. Besides pleasing the Lord, this leads to the purification of the self.

This process of spiritual purification or catharsis is spoken of as '*tavam*' or penance. *Tapas*, as Tirumāṅkaiyālvār points out, is not merely torture of the body and the practice of austerity.⁵⁹ It has received its wider treatment in *Tirukkuṣaḷ* under the caption '*Tuṣavaram*' (ascetic virtue) which has been divided into two parts *viratam* (*tapas*) and *śūnānam*. The spiritual progress is really a spiritual discipline which restrains the free license of the mind and utilises its

59. Perl. Tm. 3.2: 1.

energies in fruitful and spiritual channels. Tiruvalluvar calls this process '*tuṟavu*' in the sense of renunciation because there is renunciation of selfishness. One who has reached this stage must have developed the feeling of universal love or *aruḷ*, a child of *aṁpu*, the love with which a man starts his life's journey. "Place yourself in the place of others" says the immortal poet to explain that feeling of universal love. At this stage of human development there cannot be any longer the distinction between 'You' and 'I', the '*Mine*' and the '*Yours*'. The life of renunciation is really the renunciation of this duality. It is the full bloom of the personality without these restraints; *Tapas* consists here in putting up with all sufferings and proceeding to do good acts to help even the dumb beasts. Truth to such a man is the progressive driving out of all injury and misery, which is the expression of *aruḷ*. In the spiritual path one may have to undergo suffering, but that suffering augments the love and attenuates misery. It is this positive feeling which Tiruvalluvar expresses it in a negative way in terms of its effect: "*Uṟṟa nōy nōṟṟal uyirṟku uṟukan ceyyāmal, aṟṟē tavattiṟku uru*"⁶⁰— 'the nature of religious discipline (*tapas*) consists, in the endurance (by the ascetic) of the sufferings which it brings on himself, and in abstaining from giving pain to others.' If the positive aspect of *tapas* is forgotten and emphasis laid only on its negative element, it reduces to nothing more than self-torture; it cannot be called a mere discipline.

In the absence of intense and deep love, the *tapas* becomes cruel. *Bhakti* is for the sake of *bhakti* and it has its fruition in absolute self-surrender to Bhagavān as the *upāya* or means and the *upēyā* or goal. In other words in this path of love the means and the goal are nothing but Bhagavān. The self enters the service of the Lord not owing to merely the attraction of His auspicious qualities but owing to its own real nature also. The devotee recognises God as his only Lord and serves His will, as such service is the only goal of religious experience and constitutes the highest joy of life. He longs to see the beautiful form of the Lord with

the eye of the soul and hear the music of love with the spiritual ear. He does not seek any other fruits as gifts from God, but the Giver Himself. Periyālvār says: "Now that I have the austerity (*tapas*) of rendering service to Thee, it would be detraction from Thy glory, if I were hereafter to stand with bowed head in front of the house of any other. Kindly note."⁶¹ The Ālvār has also pointed out that there will be no activity for securing other things (*upādāna*): "I will not beg of Thee food for eating or cloth for wear."⁶² Nammālvār will never adore any deity other than Bhagavān even in his thoughts.⁶³ "My thoughts" says the saint again, "are never with any deity other than the Lord. The omniscient Lord is aware of this."⁶⁴ Poykaiyālvār says: "The mouth will never sing the praise of any one other than the Lord."⁶⁵

The primary requisite for undertaking the act of worship is the purity of instrument (*karana*) which is employed for the purpose. In the absence of purity, the act itself becomes insincere and also would be ostentatious. Worship is through all the *trikaranas* - body, speech and mind. Nammālvār says that he has dedicated his mind,⁶⁶ his speech⁶⁷ and his sensory organs⁶⁸ to the services of the Lord.⁶⁹ Those who keep the Lotus Feet of the Lord both on their lips and mind will be relieved of old age, birth and death.⁷⁰ Poykaiyālvār says: "My lips will not praise any one except the Lord; my mind will not render service to any one except Him; nor my ear will hear any body's

61. Periyālv. Tm. 5.3: 3.

62. *ibid.* 5.1: 4.

63. T.V.M. 4.6: 10.

64. *ibid.* 7.10: 10.

65. M.Tv. 11.

66. T.V.M. 3.8: 1.

67. *ibid.* 3.8: 2.

68. *ibid.* 3.8: 3, 4, 5.

69. *ibid.* 6.5: 11.

70. *ibid.* 3.3: 9.

name except His",⁷¹ and again "one with control of one's mind and with discriminate understanding of *Swāmi-Dāsa* relationship will be willingly inclined in search of God's Feet as a calf does in search of its mother cow."⁷² Mind is much more important than the tongue and the body, for it is the mind that moves them. Nammālvār therefore advises us to devote our mind in worshipping the Lord day in and day out;⁷³ and that too with pure mind.⁷⁴ He is sure that the Lord who has taken His abode in his mind will not shift.⁷⁵ He refers to the devotees as those who contemplate the Light of light in their mind.⁷⁶ He affirms that his innermost recesses of the heart is enjoying His presence there to its full satisfaction.⁷⁷

The *pūja* or worship by the devotees or the followers of God is referred to by the Ālvārs as *pūcal* or *pūcanal*. Tirumajicaiyālvār says :

"Vācittum kēttum vanan̄ki vaḷipattum
Pūcittum pōtu pōkkinēṅ"⁷⁸

- 'I spent my time, reading (about Him), listening to (His praises and exploits), bowing (to Him), offering ritual worship and performing *pūja*'. This forms part of *caryāpāda*. The symbol, image or idol of God (*arcā*) is placed before the worshipper and God is felt or imagined to present Himself in that form. Usually that form is in human form with four arms with usual divine appurtenances made of stone or metal, Nammālvār envisions such a form of Deity at Tiruccenkunrūr as occupying his mind and heart with every one of His limbs and organs.⁷⁹ In his opinion the only God who created

71. M.Tv. 11 cf. *ibid.* 63; again cf. Mū. Tv. 12.

72. M.Tv. 30; cf. *ibid.*, 47.

73. T.V.M. 3.6: 3.

74. *ibid.* 3.6: 7.

75. *ibid.* 10.4: 5.

76. *ibid.* 3.7: 6.

77. *ibid.* 9.4: 7.

78. Nāṅ. Tv. 63.

79. T.V.M. 8.4: 7.

the four-faced Brahmā in His naval in order to create the celestials and all other things deserves offerings of flowers and *pūja*.⁸⁰ Worship is done, besides praising the Lord and his greatness, offering flowers. There are several rules and regulations which speak of the kinds of flowers that are to be plucked and the time of getting them. Offering a flower is only the representation by the devotee of his giving away something which he has by nature or acquired through the rightful means. This is the convenient way in which the self could overcome the feeling of possession over objects which do not actually belong to it. This is figuratively depicted as of eight kinds, namely, non-injury (*ahimsa*), control over senses (*Indriyanigraha*), sympathy for all beings (*sarvabhūta-dayā*), forbearance (*kṣamā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), penance (*tapas*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and truth (*satya*). All these would please Viṣṇu. It means that when these are practised, the devout worshipper is taken to have adored Viṣṇu with flowers. Love for God is stated by Nammālvār to have been used by him to adorn the Feet of the Lord, perhaps meaning that it is the basis even for offering the eight kinds of flowers.⁸¹ By worshipping the Lord with flowers, one gets rid of mental impurities, evils do not attend on him and he would also be materially prosperous.⁸²

Offerings are made to the Lord in the image. Any leaf or flower and a handful of water is enough to please the Lord Who is hungering for the love of the souls.⁸³ The worshippers usually do not stop with the leaves and flowers. They offer the Lord incense, lamp and sandal paste. The poems of the Ālvārs abound in descriptions of these things. Poykaiyālvār says: "Tiruvēṅkaṭam where converge discriminating and well-informed devotees from various directions every day bearing incense and lamp, flowers and holy water;"⁸⁴ "those who worship in strict accordance with the code the Lord with

80. *ibid.* 2.2: 4.

81. T.V.R. 2.

82. M.Tv. 43.

83. Bh. G. 9: 26.

84. M.Tv 37.

tulaci garland day in and day out;"⁸⁵ "devotees with offerings of flowers and holy water;"⁸⁶ "the thirty-three minor deities"⁸⁷ daily resort to Tirumāl with parti-coloured flowers, chanting *puruṣa-sūktā!*"⁸⁸ "O mind! let us redeem ourselves, gathering flowers and holding up the incense in worship of our Lord."⁸⁹ Pūtattālvār also refers to these rituals of worship: "With fresh-picked flowers, and with a mind full of devotion;"⁹⁰ "with the tongue praising Thee and with flowers (for Thee) in hand;"⁹¹ "those who offer worship at the Feet of the Lord daily with fragrant flowers praising Him as 'my Lord' and exulting that it is one's day to enjoy the auspicious presence of the Lord;"⁹² "with incense and fragrant flowers, I worshipped Thy Feet which measured the three worlds;"⁹³ "at nightfall decorate the Feet of the lion-shaped Lord with flowers and at daybreak worship Him with folded hands, and emancipate yourself;"⁹⁴ "I saluted Thy auspicious form, and lovingly offered at Thy Fair Feet, with my own hands, beautiful lotus-flowers;"⁹⁵ "every morn, noon and evening, I shall with the offer of available flowers contemplate the thousand names of the Lord with the discriminating understanding;"⁹⁶ "it is proper for the devotee to celebrate the twin Feet of the Lord and to bow to them, having procured choice sandal paste, excellent ornaments, silken shawl, and highly fragrant white jasmine;"⁹⁷ "making

85. *ibid.* 26.

86. *ibid.* 43.

87. They are the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Ādityas and the twin Aśvinidēvatas.

88. M.Tv. 52.

89. *ibid.* 58.

90. I. Tv. 6.

91. *ibid.* 10.

92. *ibid.* 31.

93. *ibid.* 34.

94. *ibid.* 47.

95. *ibid.* 65.

96. *ibid.* 73.

97. *ibid.* 76.

contact with the Lord with fresh-blooming flowers;"⁹⁸ "and the Lord Who is surrounded by the celestials who offer fine flowers to Him standing in hierarchical order".⁹⁹ Pēyāṭvār too echoes the same details in his poem: "Those who are free from the darkness of ignorance and who fold their hands in worship offering fine flowers at the Feet of the Lord;"¹⁰⁰ "and the handsome Eternals who daily bow their heads and scatter fragrant flowers at His Feet."¹⁰¹

The great Bhaktisāra gives similar details regarding the nature of worship: "Worship Him with cool flowers, bending the head;"¹⁰² "offering flowers at the Feet of the Lord who measured the earth and worshipping Him;"¹⁰³ "the four-faced god of the fragrant lotus and the three-eyed god constantly offer lotus-flowers at the Feet of the Lord and praise Him;"¹⁰⁴ "devotees of the Lord who present flowers with affection at His Lotus Feet and stand like the bare trunks of trees (whose branches have been lopped off)"¹⁰⁵ and "those who aspired to be stationed in Heaven and realized their aspiration are those who have offered various kinds of flowers at the Feet of the Lord".¹⁰⁶ According to the conception of this Āṭvār those devotees who offer lotus flowers at the Feet of the Lord are superior to the celestials like Brahmā and Śiva, the Eternals and all others.¹⁰⁷ The saint directs us to worship and praise Him with whatever flowers are available.¹⁰⁸

98. *ibid.* 86.

99. *ibid.* 99.

100. *Mū. Tv.* 19.

101. *ibid.* 22.

102. *Nāṅ. Tv.* 11.

103. *ibid.* 15.

104. *ibid.* 42; cf. *ibid.*, 82.

105. *ibid.* 45.

106. *ibid.* 90.

107. *ibid.* 91.

108. *ibid.* 64; In this connection one is reminded of Paṭṭar pointing out to Nañciyar in his explanation of the phrase 'purivatam pukai pūvē, (T.V.M. 1.6: 1) in the course of a discourse that only the flower with thorns (Kantakālip-pū) has been prohibited, that too

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār's poems also contain these details: "Piriti (a place in Himālayas) where the celestials, having bathed in pools full of fine flowers, carrying flowers and chanting the thousand names of the Lord, offer worship to Him";¹⁰⁹ "our Lord who blesses those who offer choice flowers with devotion and seek relief from the clutches of Yama with fervour;"¹¹⁰ "and the heart of myself who has been for long presenting various flowers at Thy Feet".¹¹¹ Kulacēkarālvār says:¹¹² "Brahmā, Śiva, Indra, and the great ṛṣis and the divine damsels jostle each other and rush strewing flowers in all directions towards the Deity at Śrī Raṅgam".¹¹³

Poykaiyālvār directs the mind to attain the Feet of the Lord.¹¹⁴ A devout worshipper cannot think of anything else.¹¹⁴ The very purpose of having *Vedic* study is only to worship His Feet.¹¹⁵ Performance of the sacred rites as per injunctions of the *Vedas*, acquisition of the knowledge of reality through the study of the *Vedas* and *Śāstras* and other activities which are based on the *Vedas* have only the direct results in these which in the long run should lead to the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Besides bowing down to His Feet, one shall, according to Pēyālvār, greet the Feet.¹¹⁶ The self shall be devoted to the Lord. It would be prudent on the part of the individual to be attached and devoted to the Lord's Feet which have more significance.¹¹⁷ The self shall not at any time forget His Feet.¹¹⁸ The Feet shall be adorned and worship-

not because the Lord does not accept it, but because the devotees' hands would be pricked by the thorns (vide *Ittiṅ Tamllākkam* Vol. I. 1.6: 1); cf. Peri. Tm. 11.7: 6.

109. Peri. Tm. 1.2: 7.

110. ibid. 2.4: 8.

111. ibid. 3.5: 5.

112. Perum. Tm. 1: 6.

113. M. Tv. 21; cf. Mū. Tv. 92.

114. ibid. 31.

115. ibid. 58.

116. Mū. Tv. 95.

117. ibid. 44; I. Tv. 80.

118. I. Tv. 41.

ped.¹¹⁹ One whole decad of *Periyatirumoli*¹²⁰ is devoted to the glorious description of the Lord at Tirunāraiyūr. The mind is directed in every verse to think constantly of His Feet and attain them. The effects of worshipping, and constant thinking of His Feet are manifold. They would not have the haughtiness that they have some thing as their possession, nor would they lose their heart when their possessions are lost.¹²¹ Worship of their Lord's Feet with flowers, which could be taken as penance,¹²² was done by Brahmā¹²³ and when it is done by the selves would relieve them of the worldly bondage and would confer on them any benefit.¹²⁴ Nammālvār instructs his mind to offer flowers at His Feet and praise Him with folded hands in prayer¹²⁵ He refers to the details of ritual worship in his *Tiruvāymoli*. The celestials, the seers and others contemplate His qualities and worship Him with woven garland, holy water, sandal paste and incense.¹²⁶ The Ālvār refers to Tiruvēṅkaṭam as a place where the celestials led by their leader Indra, attain salvation by worshipping the Lord with choicest flowers, holy water, lamp and incense.¹²⁷ He makes frequent reference to the offering of flowers and holy water.¹²⁸ There is reference to the collection of flowers at appropriate times (for worship).¹²⁹ The devotees and the ascetics with *Puruṣa-sūkta* on their lips in strict accordance with the ritual code offer service at the Feet of the Lord with plenty of flowers, incense, lamps, sandal paste and holy water.¹³⁰ Circumambulating (the Deity) with folded hands is

119. *ibid.* 47.

120. *Peri. Tm.* 6. 9.

121. *I. Tv.* 45.

122. *ibid.* 77.

123. *ibid.* 78.

124. *Mū. Tv.* 4.

125. *P. Tv.* 84.

126. *TVM* 1.5 : 2; 1.6 : 1.

127. *ibid.* 3.3 : 7.

128. *ibid.* 4.3 : 7; 4.7 : 8.

129. *ibid.* 4.7 : 9.

130. *ibid.* 5.2 : 9.

one aspect of worship according to this Ālvār;¹³¹ and also doing the same thing with fragrant holy water.¹³² Sometimes circumambulating the town (or the mountain) is also spoken of.¹³³ The Ālvār again says: "O devotees! worship Him with fresh flowers",¹³⁴ "in strict accordance with code of worship offering flowers and performing *pūjā*";¹³⁵ "contemplate His name by offering flowers with holy water".¹³⁶ Again the saint refers to collecting the incense and fragrant flowers, absolutely pure and offering them at His feet;¹³⁷ and offering praises of the Lord with sandal paste, lamp, incense and good lotus flowers.¹³⁸

The mode of worship (*pūja*) referred to above is the replica of the services that are usually rendered to a beloved guest or an honoured king. The presence of the Deity is invoked (*āvāhana*); a seat is offered (*āsana*); the Feet are washed (*pādya*); an offering of sandal-wood paste and rice as a sign of respect is made (*arghya*); the sacred thread is put on the idol (*upavīta*); sandal-wood paste is smeared (*candana*); flowers (*puṣpa*) are offered; incense (*dhūpa*) is burned; the lamps (*dīpa*) are waved; food (*naivedya*) is offered and then the betel (*tāmbūḷa*); next camphor (*nīrājana*) is burned and gold is given as a gift (*suvarṇapuṣpa*); finally the Deity is bidden farewell to (*visarjana*). Thus the images of Viṣṇu and of His incarnations are the popular idols that are worshipped both in temples and in the household. In the temples the priest will attend on the Deity as he would on a king. The King of kings is roused from sleep with music early in the morning. Morning Songs (*Tiruppallī-eḷucci*) of Toṭṭaraṭṭip-poṭiyālvār is used for the purpose. Then after the ceremonial bath He is dressed in royal robes and decked with ornaments

131. *ibid.* 7.10: 1; 10.1: 5.

132. *ibid.* 7, 10: 2.

133. *ibid.* 10. 1: 7.

134. *ibid.* 9.10: 3, 4.

135. *ibid.* 10.2: 4.

136. *ibid.* 10.2: 5.

137. *ibid.* 10.2: 9.

138. *ibid.* 10.2: 10.

and flowers. Artistic lights are waved before Him. Food is offered at regular intervals. The King holds His daily court, gives audience to His devotees, hears their complaints and bestows on them His Grace.¹³⁹ On festive occasions He goes out in state with all the regalia befitting the King of kings. This mystery play God enacts in all Viṣṇu temples of Tamil Nad for enticing those who are not enlightened from their hum-drum ways of life that lead only into regions of blinding darkness.

The kind of worship that was referred to above is offered every day. The word 'nāḷum' signifies this.¹⁴⁰ Nammālvār says : "Worship the Lord both morning and evening, offering lotus flowers so that *karma* will be dispelled".¹⁴¹ Worship in the early morning is important as it begins the day with the sacred thought. Āṇṭāl says : "*Cirrañciṟukalē vantu unṇaic cēvittu*"¹⁴² - 'worshipping Thee at the early morning'. Pūtatār says :

"Mālai ariyuruvaṇ pātamar aṇintu
Kālai toḷuteḷumiṇ kaikōli".¹⁴³

The phrase '*toḷuteḷumin*' is to be noted. The word '*eḷumin*' (wake up) is important. The first word is '*toḷutal*' (bowing down). The phrase as it stands means that worship should occur first and then waking which is an impossibility. So the commentators generally change the word order and interpret them '*eḷuntu toḷumin*' i.e., wake up and worship. But following the traditions of Parimelaḷakar and Pērācīriyar, this could be interpreted in this way : the worshippers always contemplate on God; their last thought before they go to bed is their worship of the Lord and their first thought on waking up at dawn is the same worship, and therefore they wake up thus with the thought of worshipping the Lord. Worshipping and waking are said to occur simultaneously.

139. This is seen in Lord of the Seven Hills at Tirupati by millions of pilgrims and devotees daily.

140. M.Tv. 37.

141. T.V.M. 9.10: 1.

142. T.Pv. 29.

143. I. Tv. 47.

The worship is performed thrice a day, at morn, noon and evening.¹⁴⁴ Different forms of worship such as "toḷutaḷ" (bowing down),¹⁴⁵ "niṇaitaḷ" (contemplating on Him),¹⁴⁶ "vaḷḷ-paṭal" (worshipping Him),¹⁴⁷ and "eṇṇal" (thinking of Him)¹⁴⁸ are also referred to by the Āḷvārs. Bowing down, falling at the sacred Feet, touching them with the head, and folding the palms in what is called *aṅjali* pose are all mentioned by the saints. Rāmānuja has described, following the traditions of the Āḷvārs, the special form of worship (*pūjā*) which is referred to by Tirumaḷicaiyāḷvār:¹⁴⁹ "I will now explain the manner in which the man with exclusive devotion to Bhagavān should perform the adoration (*ārādhana*) of the Lord. Having become a worshipper with supreme and exclusive devotion to Him and with a desire only to serve Him, remain mediating on Him, with a vision as clear as visual perception and with extreme love to Him".¹⁵⁰ This service to the Lord consists in five forms in the course of the day. Kulacēkarāḷvār refers to these five forms as "*Iru muppoḷutu ētti*"¹⁵¹ - 'performing adoration five times in the day'.

The mystic saints who have sung hymns of *Tēvāram* have been referred to as "*paramanaiye pāṭuvār*" - 'those poets who sing songs only on the Lord'. According to the Saivite conception these poets have sung in Tamil and they have looked upon Tamil as the very form of the Lord. The later generations have considered these songs or hymns as the *Tamiḷ Vedas* and the verses in Tamil as *Tamiḷ mantras*. Similarly the Vaiṣṇavites also regard the hymns of Āḷvārs as the *Tamiḷ Vedas* and the verses as *Tamiḷ mantras*.¹⁵² The Āḷvārs them-

144. I. Tv. 73.

145. T.V.M. 5.2: 9.

146. Perum. Tm. 1: 9; T.V.M. 6.9: 11.

147. Nāṅ. Tv. 63.

148. T.V.M. 6.9: 11.

149. Nāṅ. Tv. 63.

150. Nitya. pp 1 to 14

151. Perum. Tm. 1: 7.

152. One *ācārya* refers to *Tiruvāymoli* as '*Drāvida Vedasāgaram*' and another refers to Nammāḷvār as one who has given the quintessence of the four *Vedas* in the *antāti* scheme (vide T.V.M. *tanṭyans*).

selves have said that they worship the Lord through their poetry, Nammālvār refers to his poems as "garlands of words addressed to the cloud-complexioned Lord",¹⁵³ "the Tamil garland of a thousand verses"¹⁵⁴ etc.; in Tirumaṅkaiyālvār's opinion his hymns are "the divine garland woven with sweet words by Kalikaṅṅi (Tirumaṅkaiyālvār)",¹⁵⁵ "the garland of fine words woven by the poet in great Tamil, the ruler of Tirumaṅkai",¹⁵⁶ "the cool garland of Tamil offered by Kaliyaṅ (Tirumaṅkaiyālvār)",¹⁵⁷ "the garland of verses sung by Kalikaṅṅi",¹⁵⁸ "the garland of fine words sung by Kalikaṅṅi in music of unabated sweetness",¹⁵⁹ "the garland of songs sung by Kaliyaṅ",¹⁶⁰ and "the garland of words uttered for the sake of the Lord's devotees".¹⁶¹ Again in other places he voices forth: "Through my songs Thou hast manifested Thy presence in my heart";¹⁶² "songs which do not celebrate the Lord Whose chest is decorated with the basil garland are no songs at all";¹⁶³ "I decorate my Lord with a pure garland of my own words".¹⁶⁴ Periyālvār, in his humility and self-condemnation, says: "I uttered wretched verses with my evil tongue on Thee Whose hands carry the conch and the discus".¹⁶⁵ Poykaiyālvār says: "I lay this wreath of words at the Feet of the Lord with the blazing discus so that the sea of troubles might vanish".¹⁶⁶ Pūtattār expresses this idea as: "My humble self, well versed in great Tamil, dedicates the garland of noble Tamil to Thy

153. T.V.M. 7.2: 11.

154. *ibid.* 2.7: 13.

155. Peri. Tm. 1.1: 10.

156. *ibid.* 1.7: 10.

157. *ibid.* 2.2: 10.

158. *ibid.* 2.3: 10.

159. *ibid.* 2. 8: 10.

160. *ibid.* 4.4: 10.

161. *ibid.* 7.3: 10.

162. *ibid.* 8.10: 9.

163. *ibid.* 10.7: 4.

164. T.K. 16.

165. Periyā]. Tm. 5.1: 2.

166. M. Tv. 1.

twin Feet";¹⁶⁷ "Nectar, honey, the One with the discus, the One Who delighted in bringing nectar (from the sea) – with a garland made of such nectar-like words I praised the great Lord."¹⁶⁸ The great Bhaktisāra gives expression to this idea thus: "I will not sing praises of man with my tongue which has sung of the Lord of Vaikunṭha Who did not deem it a great event even when Rudra with fire-red matted hair offered worship at His Feet with flowers".¹⁶⁹ Again Nammālvār says: "I extolled the golden Feet of my Lord sought and worshipped by the Eternals with my compositions"¹⁷⁰ "O my mind! Present your garland of verses to Mātava, Nārāyaṇa, Keśava, the Lord from time immemorial, the One as impressive and awe-inspiring as the mountains, if you want to scatter the heavy sorrows which afflict us".¹⁷¹ Again the Ālvār voices forth: "I long to merge into the Feet of the Lord by divesting myself of the body through sustained and long singing of His praises";¹⁷² "I am not the one born to sing the glories of man. The Lord of the numberless auspicious qualities with the discus in His hand is there for my lips to sing His praises";¹⁷³ "I am the poet-laureate of the Lord Who goes on creating world after world. Is it proper for me to compose verses in praise of any one else?"¹⁷⁴ "When Thou hast been the theme of my hymns, I would never address to another those sweet words that emanate from my tongue".¹⁷⁵ In the whole of one decad, invariably in the third line of every verse, the Ālvār refers to his destiny to praise the Lord in garlands of verses: "He that ripped open the horse-demon will not make me lack anything for seven into seven births if I continue to worship Him and raise my hands in prayer as much as I can and sing His praises for which I am

167. I. Tv. 74.

168. *ibid.* 85.

169. Nāṅ. Tv. 75.

170. P. Tv. 45.

171. *ibid.* 65.

172. T.V.M. 3.9: 8.

173. *ibid.* 3.9: 9.174. *ibid.* 3.9: 10.175. *ibid.* 3.9: 1.

gifted;¹⁷⁶ with words full of meaning and music my garlands of verses have saved me from the worst of sufferings and I have realized in my mind the Lord of Eternals;¹⁷⁷ for long I have worshipped and realized Him with my garlands of words full of music;¹⁷⁸ the Supreme Lord, armed with the invincible discus, has been approached with the service of my tongue which strung garlands of music for His worship;¹⁷⁹ the future cannot be fruitless to me who has suitably adored the Lord of the Eternals with the music the garlands of verses and realized Him in my experience;¹⁸⁰ I have been blessed with the gift of His accepting my garlands of words and therefore I lack nothing;¹⁸¹ even in the region of Eternity, I have none of my equals for my having obtained the mental tranquility to sing my garlands of words adoring the Supreme Lord Whose Feet are borne by the lotus-flowers;¹⁸² on the Lord of the Eternals it has been given to me to weave the *Tamil Prabandha* which, to the devotees, forms clouds capable of their rain of bliss (*ānanda*).¹⁸³ Tirumaṅkaiyālvār says: "Through my songs Thou hast manifested Thy presence in my heart".¹⁸⁴

The greatest contributions made to the tradition of divine enjoyment is by Tirumaṅkaiyālvār who is a great Tamil scholar— '*Irunṭamiḷ nūṟṟpulavan*'. The Ālvār is a master of the four types of Tamil poetry viz., *ācu* (sudden), *vittāra* (elaborate), *matura* (sweet) and *cittira* (artistic), and hence is known by '*nālukavīp-perumāḷ*.' The words he uses, the metres he chooses, lend themselves to such symphony and sweetness that to recite or sing his hymns is tantamount to enjoyment of God. He himself says to God: "*paṭṭinaḷ unṇai eṅ nēncattu*

176. *ibid.* 4.5: 1.

177. *ibid.* 4.5: 2.

178. *ibid.* 4.5: 3.

179. *ibid.* 4.5: 4.

180. *ibid.* 4.5: 6.

181. *ibid.* 4.5: 7.

182. *ibid.* 4.5: 8.

183. *ibid.* 4.5: 10.

184. *Peri. Tm.* 8.10: 9.

iruntamai kāṭṭināy—¹⁸⁵ 'By song Thou showest to me that Thou art inside my heart'. Really the Ālvār's hymns show Him to us.¹⁸⁶ The alliteration, the balance and the appropriate sound-sense all make for exquisite poetry that captures the ear and ravishes the soul. The aesthetic perfection and the captivating beauty of the Ālvār's *arcā* form in his birth-place (Tiruvāli) are equalled only by the ecstatic outpourings of his love-laden heart in the shape of the rapturous verse.¹⁸⁷ Thousands of devotees, votaries and admirers revel in feasting their eyes on the ethereal beauty of form and face, and regale their souls with the recitation of the soul-stirring hymns of this Ālvār-poet who has shown that the path towards God lies not through penance or self-mortification, but in literature and love.¹⁸⁸

Nature is looked upon as the very form of Godhead worshipped by almost all the Ālvārs. Tirumāliṛuṅcōlai, Tiruvēṅkaṭam and Ciṅkavēlkuṅṅam are to them the very Lord and the saints describe these mountains in their hymns without even speaking of the respective deities there.¹⁸⁹ Says Nammālvār: "*Tiruvēṅkaṭramāmalai onṅumē toḷa nam vlnai oṅumē*"¹⁹⁰—'all our sins will be removed by the worship of Tiruvēṅkaṭam mountain only.' Paykaiyālvār refers to the mountain as one which puts out the fire of *karma*—"*vlnaic cuṭarai nantuvikkum vēṅkaṭam*."¹⁹¹ Tirumaḷicaiyālvār directs us to go and worship the majestic Vēṅkaṭam as the hill dispels our sins.¹⁹² He speaks of his chance utterance of the name of

185. Ibid. 8.10; 9.

186. Ibid: 9.2 (for example).

187. Ibid. 3.5; 3.6; 3.7.

188. This reminds us Cēkkiḷār's statement '*arccanai pāttē ākum*' where he equates the recitation of the hymns and the chanting of the *mantras*, constituting His thousand names. (vide P.P. *Tatuttāṭ-koṅṅapurāṇam*, 70).

189. T.V.M. 2.10; 3.3; Peri. Tm. 1.7; 1.8; 2.1; Nac. Tm. 9; M. Tv. 76; 1. Tv. 53, 75; Mū. Tv. 58, 68, 71, 75; Naṅ. Tv. 39, 47, 48.

190. Ibid. 3.3: 8.

191. M. Tv. 26.

192. Naṅ. Tv. 42.

that hill giving him emancipation.¹⁹³ Nammālvār advises us to go and worship the Tirumāliručōlai hill before our bubbling youthfulness begins to disintegrate.¹⁹⁴ *Śāṇḍilya Sūtra* compares the creation proceeding from God with the creation of poetry or any work of art proceeding from the imagination of the poet or artist. This gives us a better understanding of the poetry of the Ālvārs.

To Nammālvār Nature is the beautiful form of the Lord. "*Yāvalyūm yāvarum āy ninra māyan.*"¹⁹⁵ - 'Māyan Who becomes all objects and all persons too.' He is known by many names; his resplendent forms are many.¹⁹⁶ He is neither male nor female nor neuter; it cannot be said that He is, nor He is not.¹⁹⁷ The Ālvārs see the Lord as the pure form reflected in Nature. At other times, Nature itself appears to them as worshipping the Lord very much like themselves. They see in Nature the animals such as elephants, lions and monkeys, birds such as parrots and peacocks, and insects like the honey bees worship and sing the glories of the Lord. For example, in the Tirupati Hills a male elephant performs its ablutions by washing its mouth and its feet in its rut (ichor) gathers fresh flowers laden with honey and offers its worship to the majestic Lord at Vēṅkaṭam.¹⁹⁸ Tirumaḷicaiyālvār speaks of an elephant which has its trunk uplifted with the intention of getting the moon for a lamp for the Lord.¹⁹⁹ The mythological lion (*āḷi*) kills an elephant, takes out its tusks and offers oblations at the feet of the deity at Ciṅkavēḷkunḡam.²⁰⁰ The monkeys enter the floral garden in the early

193. *ibid.* 40. According to Sanskrit tradition the word '*vēṅkaṭam*' is made up of two words viz., *vēm* + *kaṭam*; *vēm*-sins. *kaṭam*-burning; the one which burns our sins.

194. TVM. 2.10: 1.

195. *ibid.* 6.8: 7.

196. *ibid.* 2.5: 6.

197. *ibid.* 2.5: 10.

198. MU. Tv. 70.

199. Nāḡ. Tv. 46.

200. Peri. Tm. 1.7: 1.

hours of the morning, gather flowers just blossoming and offer worship.²⁰¹

No doubt the whole teaching of the Ālvārs is suffused with the principles of the *Bhakti* school as set forth in the *āgamic* text-books. Even the first Ālvārs have direct references to the general principle inculcated in the work that unalloyed and single-minded devotion to Viṣṇu in the simplest form possible is the most efficient means for the attainment of salvation.²⁰² In fact, they state that the more elaborate forms of worship in the manner of *Vedas* and *vedic* learning may be suited to those that have the equipment for doing it; but, for actual attainment of salvation, that is not at all necessary for those who do not have the equipment. A far simpler method of devotion, the mere recitation of the names of God, is enough, provided only that devotion is absolutely single-minded. The great Bhīṣma gave a list of thousand names of Viṣṇu to Yudhiṣṭhra who asked for an easy means to be freed from bondage. Thus arose the thousand names of Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇu sahasranāma*) to which frequent references are contained in the works of the Ālvārs. He is referred to as one having thousand names.²⁰³ The utterance of even one among these would bring to the person who utters it results which increased thousandfold of what would normally be the effect of uttering a single name.²⁰⁴ The thought that His names are to be uttered drives away the sins.²⁰⁵ Through the resolve of this kind, the individual gets lustre, valour, wealth, handsome appearance and good qualities.²⁰⁶ The compositions of the Ālvārs contain frequent

201. I. Tv. 72.

202. *ibid.* 38.

203. P. Tv. 70; T.V.M. 8.1: 10; 9.3: 1.

204. T.V.M. 10.2: 2,3.

205. P. Tv. 53.

206. MĪ. Tv. 10.

207. Peri. Tm. 1.2: 7. Prahlāda is said to have recited them much to the discomfort of his father (Peri. Tm. 2.3: 8). The cowherds and gods too did the same (*ibid.*, 3.3: 3).

references to the thousand names of Viṣṇu, to the need for their recitation and also to the efficacy of this recitation.²⁰⁷ The thousand names show only that the Lord's names are innumerable. His names are countless and in an apologetic tone, Bhīṣma refers to them.²⁰⁸ However, He is referred to as one having thousand names.²⁰⁹ To the atheist and the idealist, the repetition of such names would appear as superstitions, but "there is also a subjective element, a recognition that the creed or prayer or formula thus recited, even though not understood, brings with it a certain religious atmosphere, a sense of reverence or dependence, or a renewed and strengthened faith."²¹⁰ "The very form of words itself has a kind of sanctity, is peculiarly religious, and is naturally regarded as specially pleasing to the deity."²¹¹

The devout brahmins worship the feet of the Lord by chanting the *Vedic* hymns. Those, who are not qualified to study the *Vedas* could, with the same effect, utter His names.²¹² Names like Viṣṇu, Govinda, Kuṭakkūttan, Kōvalan are uttered by the Āḷvār.²¹³ This means that any name of God, whether it forms the *Sahasranāma* or it is a word in Tamil referring to God, could be uttered. Nammāḷvār goes on further to suggest that if any one simply counts the numbers as one, two, three.....the Lord will present Himself before the devotee. The Lord would surely appear when in this enumeration, number twenty-six is mentioned.²¹⁴ "Well and good" says Pūtattāḷvār, "if you can, chant the *Vedas*; if not, the utterance of the names of the Lord brings you the essence of all the *Vedas*; the ultimate significance of the *Vedas* lies enshrined in these names."²¹⁵

208. M.Bh. Karṇa. 83: 15.

209. Peri. Tm. 1.5: 4; 1.8: 7; 6.6: 9; M.Tv. 68; Periyal. Tm. 3.7: 8.

210. *The Religious Consciousness*, pp. 284-285.

211. *ibid.* p. 313.

212. T.V.R. 64.

213. T.V.M. 2.7: 4; cf. *ibid.* 10.2: 10.

214. The numbers 1 to 24 refer to the Twenty-four *tattvas* of matter. The soul is the Twenty-fifth and the Lord is the Twenty-sixth. vide *Itu* on T.V.M. 1.10: 2.

215. I, Tv. 39.

Poykaiyālvār says : "As long as you have the power of utterance, if you utter the various names of the Lord, that by itself will be better than ritual worship through the conventional charms."²¹⁶ The name of the ocean-hued Lord is heard, remembered and meditated upon by His devotees who wake up early in the morning.²¹⁷ Again Pūtattālvār says : "Thy auspicious names is the inner meaning of *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas*; Thyself are the essence of these; let me realise Thee through the perfect Logos,"²¹⁸ and "We will be elevated to the status of Eternals if we utter the names of the Lord with understanding by *jñāna*."²¹⁹ Pēyālvār's advice to his mind is this: "O mind! let us fold our hands in worship, uttering the names of the Lord like Nārāyaṇa and so on."²²⁰ The daily work of Tirumaḷicaiyālvār is to repeat the names of the Lord. Unlike the rest of the world, the uttering is a whole-time pre-occupation with him.²²¹ According to Periyālvār our fingers are meant for counting the auspicious names of the Lord.²²² The Ālvār's foster-daughter Āṇṭāḷ in the course of waking her comrades asks the lady of one house, "The utterance of various such names as Māmāyaṇ, Mātavan Vaikuṇṭhan gives delight to your daughter and pushes her into bliss of sleep"²²³. "To those who chant the names of the cloud-hued Lord" says Nammālvār, "there is no sorrow; whatever the births they take they are equal to the Eternals,"²²⁴ and again "We acquired the Grace of Nārāyaṇa by simply chanting His various names."²²⁵ The Ālvār as the bride takes particular delight in the utterance of

216. M. Tv. 70.

217. *ibid.* 66.

218. I.Tv. 64.

219. *ibid.* 2.

220. Mū. Tv. 8.

221. Nāṇ. Tv. 85.

222. Periyāḷ. Tm. 4.4: 3.

223. T.Pv. 9.

224. T.V.M. 10.5: 8; cf. the whole decad 10.5.

225. *ibid.* 10.6: 3.

His names : "All the words that emerge from her lips without intermission are the names of the blue-hued Lord."²²⁶ "How beautifully the distinguishing features and the names of the Lord emerge from her lips!"²²⁷ "The delight that Ālvār-nāyaki as a child gets from uttering the names of the Lord is greater than the delight she gets from the pet birds *pūval*, parrots, the playball, the toy cooking pots and the flower baskets."²²⁸ "Leaving this bliss of uttering Thy names, I do not want even the bliss of going to the world of the celestials and ruling over it"²²⁹ is the statement of Tonṭaratip-poṭiyālvār. "Whether I am destined to go to the world of Eternals or celestials, I will always cherish the name of the Lord without forgetfulness"²³⁰ says Nammālvār.

Bhagavān Nārada has declared in *Śrīmad Aṣṭākṣara Brahma Vidyā* that there are in different men varying degrees of faith in the *Mūlamantra*. He says: "In proportion to the degree of faith that a man has in the eight-lettered *Mantra* will he attain the fruit thereof. It is impossible to measure its greatness".²³¹ The Supreme Ruler of all will ultimately protect even those devotees who are far from perfect and whose faith is not strong enough. For it has been said: "By the man who has once uttered the two syllables 'Hari' - by him steps have been taken for entering *mokṣa*".²³² In accordance with this, Ālvantār has conveyed the same idea: "Whoever folds his hands in worship to Thee in any manner and at any time - his sins vanish at once. It penetrates all good things. It never fails to bear fruit",²³³ and so also, "A single drop of the ocean of nectar called *bhakti* towards the two lotuses of Thy Feet will extinguish instantly the spreading wild fire called *samsāra*, and confer

226. *ibid.* 6.5: 6.

227. *ibid.* 6.5: 7.

228. *ibid.* 6.7: 3.

229. T.M. 2.

230. T.V.M. 2.9: 5.

231. Nār. Kal. 1: 14.

232. V.P. 70: 84.

233. *Śtoṭraratnam*-28.

superior happiness.²³⁴ "By uttering the three syllables 'Govinda' says Toṣṭaraṭip-poṭiyālvār, "Kshatrabandu who stood surrounded by his past *karma* swarming like ants, attained the highest state".²³⁵ It is therefore seen from the above, that *Īsvara* will promote perfection of the *upāya* and protect the man. "The divine seers say that Thou art to be sought as the Saviour and that Thou protectest those who have sought Thy protection."²³⁶

The utterance of Bhagavān's name will destroy all sins, provided the man who utters it does not hate Him. The man, who, even without his being aware of it, pronounces the name of Bhagavān, is freed from all sins, in the same way as a forest is freed from deer owing to the fear of a lion²³⁷. "The mention of Bhagavān's name - though it be to call a person who (merely) bears that name, though it be in irony, though it be pronounced wrongly, though it be in derision - the mere mention of His name will destroy all sins".²³⁸ "The mention of many of the names of Bhagavān which describe his attributes and actions is much more than necessary. The mention of a single name is enough."²³⁹

The devotee believes in the mercy of God, but cannot undertake any initiative in adopting the means for the removal of his own distress. He realizes that his efforts would only become abortive. The one act (apart from uttering His names), which he could undertake is offering prayers to the Lord. While doing this, love and endearment should guide his prayers²⁴⁰ and not fear and dread that God would punish him for the offences. Hedonistic tendencies are found to

234. *ibid.* 29.

235. T.M. 4.

236. Ram. Yuddha. 120: 18.

237. V.P. 6.8: 19.

238. Bhāg. P. 6.2: 14.

239. For example; Ajāmila, sinful though he was, attained *mukti* by calling his son Nārāyaṇa at the time of his death (Vide Bhāg. P. 6.3: 24).

240. P. Tv. 37.

have left ultimately a hollow on the seekers of pleasure which leaves dissatisfaction and disappointment on them. Besides producing a salutary effect on those who pray with faith, the prayers are unsurpassed in being the effective means to turn grief into resignation. Fears are replaced by readiness to face dangers. Mental calmness takes the place of the din and bustle of life. In addition, there is no other method for appealing to God like this more simple for application and certain in producing the result. If prayers could not be offered at all times the intervals when they are not offered could be spent by simply talking about the Lord in any way, even if it be irrelevant.²⁴¹ At least the mind and speech are directed towards the single purpose, that is, God, though lacking in concentration. This need not be considered as worship, but as living in God for the time being. When prayers are not offered, when there is no one with whom one can talk about God,²⁴² one can simply think of Him, not, of course, undertaking any contemplation.

One attractive feature in prayers is the inclusion of music. Prayer assumes the highest form of expression when it is set to music. The rhythm and speech produce a profound and powerful effect on the mind of the singers. Music has more a subjective influence, though the objective one is not to be ruled out, but has a singular appeal. Very often the spontaneous utterances of the mystic singers of earlier periods are put to music and sung or recited as the case may be. It is in this sense that the *Vedic* recitals are arranged both in temples and houses and for the same reason the hymns of the *Ālvārs*, together with the *stotras* of the *ācāryas*, have become part of prayers both in private and temple worship.²⁴³ Quite often, these prayers are in the form of descriptions of the Lord, His body, His retinue and exploits. While praying to God for protection, the devotee must appeal for protection to the discus, conch, sword, bow, club or mace, the guardians of the eight quarters. They are to be requested to be on the

241. P. Tv. 38.

242. *ibid.* 66.

243. *ibid.* 86.

alert. Garuda shall not be asleep. All these have to keep watch over the body of the devotee, as the Lord has occupied the bedroom of the devotee's body.²⁴⁴ In practice, the religious-minded people continue to offer their prayers, even if they find their prayers not answered. They find "in prayer something of very much greater value than an easy means of satisfying particular wants."²⁴⁵

The prayers take also the form of conversation. "The individual praying talks to the Great Listener and feels at times some faint suggestion of a response."²⁴⁶ The method is helpful for making a personal confession of one's sins. Though pragmatic, the devotee finds it easy to be frank about his sins. Āṅṅāl in one of her lovely lyrics puts the question: "*Kovintarṅku ṛ kurṅēval immaip piṅavi ceyyātē inip pōyc ceyyum tavamtān en?*"²⁴⁷ - 'If it is not serving Govinda here and in this life, what else as penance have I to perform?' In another context the lady-saint says:

"Eṅṅaikkum ē! ē! piṅavikkum untannōṅu
Uṅṅōmē āvōm uṅakkē nām āṅceyvōm."²⁴⁸

- 'For ever and anon and for as many as seven times seven births, we are Thy kith and kin; we are Thy bond servants'. A bird in the hand is certainly worth many more in the bush. Here we are, blessed with a thoughtful and feeling life, unlike myriads and myriads of souls which are dragging on their miserable existence in unthinking animal and bird bodies. If here and now God, whom we so eagerly long after cannot vouchsafe to us the sweetness of His company and the rapture of His enjoyment, a fig for the hereafter, the problematical uncertain hereafter, of which we can be sure only by the strength of our faith and not by positive proof of the senses! Tirumaṅkaiyālvār poses the question: "*Er ṛ muyalviṅṅuk*

244. Periyāl Tm. 5.2 : 9.

245. *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 324.

246. *ibid.* p. 326.

247. Nāc. Tm. 13 : 9.

248. T. Pv. 29.

*kākaip pin pōvatē?*²⁴⁹ - 'When one can get enough food from out of sure *terra firma*, why go after the winged denizens of the air?' About such consecrated service of the Lord, Periyālvār says :

"Unakkup panicey tirukkum
tavamuṭai yēṇiṇip pōyoruvaṇ.

"Tanakkup paṇintu, kataittalai
nirkainiṇ cāyai aḷivukaṇṭāy-"²⁵⁰

- 'Having once become a devotee to Thee by virtue of my great luck if I leave Thee and go to serve another Your supremacy will crumble';

"Kātam palavum tirintuḷaṇ
reṇkaṅkōr niḷalillai nīrillai, un
Pāta niḷalallāl maṇṇōr
uyirppiṭam nāneṅkum kaṅkiṇṇilēṇ"²⁵¹

'Having roamed about in vain for leagues and leagues without water or shelter I have at last discovered that the shelter of Thy Feet is the only life-giving spot, which I have not come across with any where';

"Anṇu vayirriṇ kiṭantirun
tēyaṭi māiceyyal uṇṇiruppāṇ
Inṇuvantu inṅunṇaik kaṇṭukon
ṭēniṇip pōka viṭuvatuṇṭē"²⁵²

'Even when I was in my mother's womb I had determined to serve Thee: now after having come out of it and having enjoyed Thy divine presence, wherefore can I be gone?' Some of the Ālvārs, as it has been pointed out elsewhere in this work, have not hesitated to whittle down the pleasures attainable in Vaikuṇṭha. Even Nammālvār, in one of these 'drunken moods' of spiritual bliss, interrogates God Himself thus: "To me who regard Thee as my food, my drink, and my joy, what have You to give in return for my unceasing

249. C. TML. - kaṇ. 8.

250. *Perivāḷ. Tm. 5.3: 3.*

251. *ibid. 5.3: 4.*

252. *ibid. 5.3: 9.*

love?" "Vaikunṭha" replies the Lord, "is my supreme possession and nothing higher have I got to bestow on you". The Āḷvār rejoins: "Do you think that Vaikunṭha is sweeter than the mind of Your devotee deeply lodged in Your goodness, greatness and grace? Why, if it were so, have You Yourself discarded Your lofty seat in that Vaikunṭha and come to dwell permanently in our hearts?"²⁵³ This conversation is but one of the many in which these holy saints, immersed in the deluge of divine bliss, indulged pretty often

There are also prayers of the cosmic type, where the petty things here become known as insignificant and God's real nature is getting felt directly and the devotee gets more occasions for direct communion with God. This kind of prayer leads to meditation. This could be considered as the exalted type where there is the emotional awareness of the ultimate Reality. Mystic experience is another result of this kind of prayer.

The devotee, while offering his prayers, is reminded of the exploits of the Lord and the occasions and instances which reveal His acts of help to the suffering humanity. It is but natural that he should mention such instances in his prayers to strengthen his claim for God's grace.²⁵⁴ The qualities of the Lord²⁵⁵ are also recounted showing that the devotees have faith in their efficacy for winning the Lord. Nammāḷvār records the effects of singing the glories and attributes of God through his personal experience. He has nothing to complain or worry about; by praising Him, singing in musical melodies about His greatness and dancing with joy he has supreme satisfaction.²⁵⁶ Nothing obstructs his realizing God nor does any affliction affect him.²⁵⁷ He does not feel the fatigue of the worldly life nor has any suffering.²⁵⁸ The Āḷvār expresses

253. P. Tv. 53, 68.

254. P. Tv. 40.

255. *ibid.* 39; cf. *ibid.* 78.

256. T.V.M. 3.10: 1, 2.

257. *ibid.* 3.10: 4, 5.

258. *ibid.* 3.10: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

his joy at having the fortune to worship and pray at the Lord's Feet.²⁵⁹ He asks his mind not to forget the Feet and have permanently the daily experience of them.²⁶⁰

The very first verse of *Tiruvāymoḷi* is in the form of an appeal to the mind which is asked to worship the Feet which are lustrous enough to remove the miseries. The Feet of the Lord are brilliant and so they remove the darkness of the worldly sufferings. The selves have only one duty to perform and that this worshipping the lustrous Feet of the Lord. This leads to the spiritual elevation of those selves.²⁶¹ The prayer of a self shall also be not to get any thing from the Lord but only receiving the touch of His Feet with its head.²⁶² The Āḷvār requests the Lord to bestow on him the knowledge and strength to pray and have His Feet on the head.²⁶³ The Lord shall not permit him to get into the material world.²⁶⁴

The Āḷvār who had the delectable experience of having the Lord's Feet on his head had sold out his self to God. Since it has been sold out, the Āḷvār cannot any longer claim possession of it, that is, cannot have either *ahaṅkāra* or *mamakāra*. The Lord's Feet are there on the head of the Āḷvār who, in the absence of *ahaṅkāra*, cannot also lay claims to them, though he had as it were purchased them for the self.²⁶⁵ The elephant Gajendra which was firmly seized by the crocodile, could not find any one for its rescue and hence shouted out to the Lord. This cry brought the Lord to it. The elephant used to pluck the flowers for worshipping the Feet of the Lord. It must have had the firm conviction that nothing but the Feet of the Lord could be a refuge for people.^{265(a)} When the crocodile seized it, it was then having

259. *ibid.* 10.4: 6.

260. *ibid.* 10.4: 8.

261. *ibid.* 1.1: 1; 1.2: 10.

262. *ibid.* 2.9: 2; *cf.* *Śotraratnam* 31; P. Tv. 87.

263. *ibid.* 2.9: 3; P. Tv. 12.

264. *ibid.* 2.9: 10.

265. *ibid.* 8.1:10.

265(a) *Mumukṣup-paṭi* - 146.

flowers in the trunk for offering them at the Feet of the Lord but alas, it could not do so and so the Ālvār fancies that the painful feeling which the elephant had then for not being able to offer the flowers at the Feet of the Lord was removed by the Lord who appeared before it and killed the crocodile.²⁶⁶

Prayers which are offered by the devotees to God are generally in the form of supplications. The self feels much worried about the material disadvantages, once it realises the nature of God and its relationship to Him. Too often, it requires freedom from the dangers that lie in wait for him and people of his kind would be content with the minimum facilities which are available to them. On such occasions, he finds no one to come to his rescue and realizes that men of his kind are of limited powers and so appeals to God for safeguards from dangers.²⁶⁷ The prayers are offered on the conviction that the Lord would surely lend his ears to them and attend to his needs. Petitional is the important form of prayer. More intelligent and enlightened selves make an appeal for spiritual blessings. The times of crisis do not affect this attitude of theirs considerably. They ask for reunion with God here and here itself. Rarely, the prayers are offered in order to reach Him after death. Sometimes, the prayers take the form of thanksgiving. Instances are not rare when the devotees wish well of God, out of deep love for Him in order that His position would continue to be stabilized. It is not as if a poor self could contribute to God's stabilized greatness, but ardent love and abiding faith in Him establish a bond between Him and the devotee and this tie makes the Deity present Himself to him more as a lovable person than a Deity who is difficult for approach.

Weeping is one of the methods invariably resorted to by the weak and the impotent for the attainment of their heart's desire. Weeping excites sympathy, disarms opposition, and goes a long way in securing the desired object from the hands of the unwilling giver. It is also designed by nature to

266. T.V.M. 7.10: 8.

267. Peri. Tm. 4.7.

indicate pain and the existence of suffering. No wonder then that the seekers after God also weep and wail a great deal. They feel incomplete without God Who is the Object of their love; they feel desolate and forlorn when they think that they have been abandoned by their God in a wilderness of suffering and sorrow; they feel further deeply distressed at their helpless plight; they are daily in mortal dread of the temptations and allurements of the material world which threaten to drag them away from their spiritual path. Experiencing all these and seeing by introspection several other kindred sensations of fear and insecurity, they wring out their hearts in grief and break out into rhapsodies of melancholic strain which are as beautiful in their melody as they are striking in their disconsolateness. The songs and hymns of the devout men of yore are nothing but a musical record of the wailing of their souls in the fulness of their longing and the poignancy of their yearning for a God Whom they loved, worshipped, and sought after. Intense dissatisfaction at their present state, and a keen aspiration to true spiritual greatness shook these devotees to the very foundation of their beings, and the result is a series of sobbing songs sung out of sheer agony of the soul.

It is a matter of common knowledge that only the materially-minded and sordid man-of-the-world, who does not feel the existence of a spirit behind and beyond the matter that meets the eye, that can be satisfied with his present state, and be content with mere animal existence. He may be troubled by unfulfilled desires and thwarted ambitions in material life, but he is not worried by spiritual wants and longings of which he knows nothing. On the other hand, there are a few others who out of their faith in God have made it their pleasure to love Him, their duty to do His behest, and their purpose to reach Him. These men of God are not satisfied with their present lot; nor are they content with their present existence. Their noble soul clamours for a beatific union or a coalescing unity with God, and they will know no satisfaction, nor find any comfort, till they attain their ultimate goal, God. It is these disappointed devotees, and disquieted seekers that have specialised in the art of weeping

and they have left to us a large legacy of laments, portraying their divine discontentment. The loudness of their lament is in direct proportion to the intensity of their longing that prompts us to weep. If one feels like a fish out of water one is sure to writhe in agony till one is thrown back into the water, or till one dies. If one feels only lukewarm in one's desolation, then one simply moans in a low tone about one's woes. In the course of a man's spiritual progress, a certain amount of sick-mindedness is a necessary stage. A dispassionate contemplation of the futility of the human endeavour is an absolute prerequisite for spiritual stability. In other words, as soon as a discriminating self-analysis of one's ways of life discloses to one what one really is and has been, and what one really ought to be, a sense of remorse is an invariable sensation that results out of the introspection. This feeling of remorse causes the first weeping. When one takes stock of one's past life, nothing is left to one but to exclaim: "*ūmānār kaṅṅa kaṅṅavilum paḷutāy oḷintana kaḷinta annāṅkaḷ*"²⁶⁸ - 'the days that are past have gone away like the dreams of a dumb man, useless and unexpressed.' Like the water that has flown down a river, those days are no more to be, and there is no possibility of redeeming them from the lap of the past. This feeling of lost chances is so bitter that Poykaiyālvār cries out: 'I wept in sheer dread that all the several days that are past have been spent to no purpose' - "*paḷutē pala pakalum pōyina enṛu aṅci aḷutēn*"²⁶⁹ Nammālvār regrets that he has wasted all his past days without any feeling for God.²⁷⁰ After one has wept out this feeling and risen chastened out of it, one makes a big effort to be pure in future, and to learn to pine for God Whom one has so long forgotten. Here again the feeling of one's smallness and His greatness may oppress and depress one. Here is the second lament, on the unworthiness of the individual soul laden with past sins and full of potentiality for future sins to realise the pure and blemishless God. The

268 *Peri. Tm.* 1.1: 3.

269. *M.Tv.* 16.

270. *P. Tv.* 82.

failure to qualify for true spiritual greatness in the past was the first cause of grief; the incapacity to qualify for it in the present is the second cause, and perhaps a more disquieting one. This feeling is also in turn wept out. Wide reading and deep reflection on the Lord's abounding *saulabhya* (accessibility) and abiding Grace, dispel all fears born out of inequality, and it is realised that with all His greatness, God is not quite approachable. As Nammālvār says: "*pattuṭal aṭiyavaṛkku eṭiyavan*" - 'He is always amenable to love or bhakti of His devotees.'²⁷¹ It has been elsewhere described the stages in the growth of love in the case of Nammālvār and one can presently see how the venerable saint wailed and wept through over the thousand verses of *Tiruvāymōli* with emotion and fervour.

Nammālvār's songs especially those of the *Tiruvāymōli* are the best example of this cult of weeping as a method of God attainment. The Ālvār says in a verse: "*ceṭiyār ākkai aṭiyāratē cērtal tirkkum tirumālai, aṭiyēṇ kāṇpān alarṟuvan*"²⁷² - 'He that can redeem me from mortality characteristic of the jungle of *samsāra*, Him I would bewail for to enjoy *darśan* of;' in another verse he cries: "*kūvik kūvik koṭuvinaṭt tūṟṟul niṇṟa, pāviyēṇ palakālam vaḷi tikaṭtu alamarkinṟēṇ*"²⁷³ - 'Embroided as I am in the inextricable tangle of *samsāra* for long years without knowing how to extricate myself, I shout and shout for redemption.' In another place his God-hunger finds expression thus: "Thou art my very life; Thou art the very precious nectar; Thou hast enslaved me; Thou that hast Garuda for Thy chariot and the resplendent discus for Thy weapon; Thou, most handsome of visage! I am a sinner; I yearn with a poignant heart in my appeal to Thee; but it has not been given to me to enjoy the experience of Thy *darśan*"²⁷⁴; in another verse of the same hymn he pathetically

271. T.V.M. 1.3: 1.

272. *ibid.* 1.5: 7.

273. *ibid.* 3.2: 9.

274. *ibid.* 3.8: 7.

exclaims: "How long can I mourn interminably? Thou hast uprooted the twin *maruta* trees by the mere act of Thy crawling between them. My great Lord, mine is the longing to enjoy *darśan* of Thy Feet. In my utter futility I became woe-begone and through my garland of verses I still make appeal to Thee."²⁷⁵ In an attitude of confession of sins the Ālvār prays for divine presence :

"Tāvi vaiyam koṭṭa entāy tāmōtarā enṟu enṟu
Kūvik kūvi neṅcuuruki kaṅpaṇi cōra niṅṟāl
Pāvi niṅṟu oṅṟu collāy pāvīyēṅ kāṇa vantē."²⁷⁶

– 'Thy Feet covered the whole world in conquest; Thou shrank into a meek being for cords ! In this way I shout for long. My heart melts; my eyes overflow. I may be a sinner. But if Thou appeared before me to condemn me even as a sinner I can enjoy Thy divine presence'. In another place the saint cries : "Great God, Thou hast installed Thyself at *Kuṭantai* (Kumbakonam) for worshippers of my calibre. My lot has been to look up the heavens to enjoy Thy divine *darśan*. I cry hoarse and I worship Thee. In my ecstasy I trepitate; I put down my head in shame, sinner as I am. Though I am most loathsome I sing of Thy praises"²⁷⁷ Here is the struggle of the Ālvār as Nāyaki; the struggle has found expression in the words of the maid-companion: "At first sight the Ālvār-nāyaki talks of the beautiful white conch and blazing discus, and of the lotus-eyes of the Lord. Her eyes overflow and she stands breathless and speechless";²⁷⁸ "she stands petrified. As soon as she hears the holy name '*Teva-pirāṇ*', she softens herself, her lips seem to utter, betimes her eyes overflow";²⁷⁹ "she is in a divine trance; she mutters the *vyūha* state of the Lord in the milky ocean, of the three strides of the Lord to conquer the world, and of His role as a cowherd";²⁸⁰ "all her utterances are inclined towards the blue-complexioned Lord, *Kaṅṅapirāṇ*. Her coyness has given

275. *ibid.* 3.8: 10.

276. *ibid.* 4.7: 3.

277. *ibid.* 5.8: 4, 5.

278. *ibid.* 6.5: 1.

279. *ibid.* 6.5: 2.

280. *ibid.* 6.5: 3.

place to an inward joy and an inner ecstasy".²⁸¹ The Ālvār calls loudly in words that could possibly melt away the hearts even of listeners. In a verse he pathetically cries: "*Tāvi vaiyam koṅṭa taṭam tāmaraikaṭkē, kūvikkolḷum kālam innam kuṟukātō*"²⁸² - 'The God's handsome but gigantic Feet have subjugated the world. When will it be given to me to repose in Them?' The Ālvār-nāyaki says: "He has enjoined me to describe Him by the names Māl, Hari, Nāraṇaṇ, Śrī Māta-vaṇ, Gōvindaṇ, Vaikuṇṭhan; but He never once cared to show Himself up or even to give a semblance of His coming".²⁸³ The intensity of his feeling of woe reaches its peak in one *Tiruvāymoḷi*. Having failed in all his appeals and utterances to have a glimpse of the beauty of the Lord's *Divyamaṅgala* *vigraha*, despair leads to despondency and the Ālvār comes to the end of his tether. He has deeply yearned to have His *darśan* in full, His handsome appearance, His vision like the clouds, His majesty like the rising sun, all these have been great expectations. "Alas! I met my bitterest disappointment; I am on the point of frustration. Will it end in my death?"²⁸⁴ Finally the God-enveloping love was vouchsafed to the Ālvār. Such is the potency of weeping for God that a small child under a tamarind tree at Ālvār-tirunakari was able to outgrow in love the big Brahman by the sheer strength of his loud lamentations in the ecstasy of an unfulfilled love felt for the lotus Feet of the Lord, Who was made to feel that even a remote Paramapada is not secure from the reach of the loud notes of a languishing and agonized soul below, pining away in love and crying aloud for the fulfilment of that love. Among the Saivite saints Māṅikkavācakar has won the distinctive title of "*Alutu Aḷutu Aṭiyāṭainta Anpan*"²⁸⁵ - 'One who reached God by the strength of his weeping'. The noble saint has prescribed weeping as a means for attaining God: "*aḷutāl unṇaip peṟalāmē*"²⁸⁶ - 'I can attain Thee if wept'.

281. *ibid.* 6.5 : 4.

282. *ibid.* 6.9 : 9.

283. *ibid.* 8.2 : 7.

284. *ibid.* 8.5

285. *Paraṅcōṭṭivār Tiruvilāiyāṭal* - Maturai - k - kāṅṭam, St. 21.

286. T.V.K. 94.

The prayer takes sometimes the form of an yearning to see His fascinating figure.²⁸⁷ Some of the prayers contain pleadings for protection.²⁸⁸ The God shall not keep the devotee away but advise him as to how he should live happily.²⁸⁹ On some occasions the Ālvār expresses his difficulty to live without seeing Him²⁹⁰ and requests to provide him with facilities for doing service.²⁹¹ He desires to know when He would allow him to be near Him²⁹² and be at His Feet.²⁹³ He does not know when he would be able to go round Him and worship Him:²⁹⁴ He prays to God that he must not be made to forget His enchanting divine form. More than rendering service to Him, he likes not to forget Him at any time.²⁹⁵

One important aspect of worship is that self should not feel simply satisfied with God's vision. 'Its endearing love for Him must make it wish for the well-being of that vision, that is, shall treat the Lord as the most beloved person and offer prayers in order that evil eyes would not cast on Him to suffer that vision.'²⁹⁶ This is technically known as '*maṅgalā-sāsanam*' and takes the form of a blessing denoted by such expressions as '*pallāṅṅū*', '*vāll*' and '*pōṟṟi*'. This '*maṅgalā-sāsanam*' is also the means for removing the mental distress.²⁹⁷ This is not the only direct result of this act. Happy life here is also assured by the constant performance of this act.²⁹⁸ The act must really be made for the Feet of the Lord.²⁹⁹

287. T.V.M. 3.8: 7, 8.1: 1, 2; 8.9: 10.

288. *ibid.* 5.7.

289. *ibid.* 5.7: 7 to 9.

290. *ibid.* 5.8: 2; 7.1; 10.3.

291. *ibid.* 5.8: 8.

292. *ibid.* 5.10:2, 9; 7.6.

293. *ibid.* 6.10: 4.

294. *ibid.* 7.10: 1 to 4

295. P.Tv. 58.

296. *ibid.* 67; cf. T.V.C. 4.

297. *ibid.* 43.

298. *ibid.* 83.

299. *ibid.* 84.

Besides controlling the senses, one will have to put them to proper use. By control is meant the restraint put on the senses which attempt to get directed towards the sensuous objects. Once they are controlled, they cannot become defunct. They have to be used for spiritual purposes. The eyes, which are once set on the charming person of the Lord Who took the descents like the Dwarf and Kṛṣṇa, do not see any other object. The mouth, the organ of speech which shall be used for praising Him, would not like to taste any food and feel delight.³⁰⁰ "My mouth will not greet any one but Him. The hands will not worship any one but Him Who measured the worlds. The eyes will not be set at any one but Him, the blue-complexioned Lord Who killed Pūtana. The ears will not listen to the expressions about any one but Him."³⁰¹ The only function for the tongue is to recite His names.³⁰² The shoulders would have served the purpose of their existence only by serving the Feet of the Lord.³⁰³ Tirumaḷicaiyālvār asks people to fold the palms, bend the head before Him and worship Him with flowers. Their mouth shall greet Him, eyes shall feast on Him and ears listen to His exploits.³⁰⁴

The intense experience of the Lord makes the Ālvār take up the role of the bride and express what the Lord does not find interesting in her, than that limb or aspect of life shall be given up. Charm in the bride shall be considered to be purposeful, if it could be of use or could attract her lover.³⁰⁵ Otherwise the bride loves interest in herself and life. Therefore the bride does not have any liking for complexion,³⁰⁶ mind,³⁰⁷ feminine modesty,³⁰⁸ sweet colour,³⁰⁹

300. P. Tv. 52.

301. M. Tv. 11.

302. I. Tv. 38.

303. *ibid.* 43.

304. Nāṅ. Tv. 11.

305. *cf. Kumārasambhava*, 5.1.

306. T.V.M. 4.8: 1.

307. *ibid.* 4.8: 2.

308. *ibid.* 4.8: 3.

309. *ibid.* 4.8: 4.

her own knowledge,³¹⁰ beauty³¹¹ bangles,³¹² waist girdle³¹³ body³¹⁴ and self³¹⁵ which have failed to attract Him. In a word, this decad is highly suggestive of the need to ignore the personal decorations and attractions on the part of the devotee. It is for this reason that the limbs are required to be used in serving God. The hands shall be folded to worship Him. The ears shall exist only for listening to the sweet utterances about Him. The tongue shall speak of His feet.³¹⁶ The prayer of the devotee shall be that his mouth shall always greet His feet. If this could happen at least in the future, the devotee need not worry about the past or the present.³¹⁷

The Ālvār emphasizes, both positively and negatively, the importance of our contemplation of God in inspiring His Grace. God blesses only those who have thoughts about Him and He hides from those who are devoid of this capacity. The Ālvār says :

"Meyyaṅ ākum virumpit toḷuvārkkku ellām
Poyyaṅ ākum puṛamē toḷuvārkkku ellām"³¹⁸

- 'To those who contemplate on Him as *upāya* with sincere heart He goes as the very Truth; to those who contemplate on Him for some material benefits, He does not reveal Himself in His true form.' He will be nearer to those who worship His Feet.³¹⁹ He goes away if one goes away from Him. He draws nearer if one approaches Him.³²⁰ But to those who think of Him for a moment with a melting heart, He enters their heart and resides there taking it as His abode.

310. *ibid.* 4.8: 5.

311. *ibid.* 4.8: 6.

312. *ibid.* 4.8: 7.

313. *ibid.* 4.8: 8.

314. *ibid.* 4.8: 9.

315. *ibid.* 4.8: 10.

316. M. Tv. 63; cf. *ibid.* 72.

317. MĪ. Tv. 7.

318. T.V.M. 9.10: 7. cf. *ibid.* 10.4: 5.

319. *ibid.* 9.10: 8.

320. *ibid.* 1.7: 10.

"He came of His own accord, fascinated my lone heart and incorporated Himself in my body and in my soul."³²¹ "My lotus-eyed Lord will never shift from my heart."³²² The Lord is impossible of approach to those who do not approach Him with loving contemplation overflowing with devotion. Has not Śrī Kṛṣṇa said that He is the dice of the gamblers?³²³ The Lord takes His abode in the mind of those who do not swerve from the right path. "(The Lord) stationed in my heart with love in order to destroy my *karma*" - "*En val vinal māyntu aṟa, nēcattināl neñcamnāṟu kuṭikonṇāṇ.*"³²⁴

The highest goal of man is *kaṅkarya* or consecrated service to God through self abnegation; it is the highest spiritual ambition of man in his religious experience. The self belongs to God, exists for His satisfaction and surrenders itself to His redemptive mercy. The moral self realizes its freedom by subduing the self or *ahaṅkāra*, attunes its will to that of Īśvara and views every *karma* as *kaṅkarya*. Every deed is consecrated service to Īśvara, as *kaṅkarya* and the gift of the self is the supreme *kaṅkarya* to the Lord Who is its real Self and Redeemer. This ultimate solution of the Problem of Life is enunciated in a verse which Nampīlāi used to repeat:

"That soul indeed has reached bliss,
Which hath its nature realised:
Its nature:- 'Dependence of God';
Its end:- 'ternal service to Him'.³²⁵

Nammālvār refers to this service as "*antam-il aṭmai*" - 'endless service';³²⁶ "*vaḷu ilā aṭmai*"³²⁷ - 'spotless service'; and "*tonṇu*"³²⁸ - 'service'. The last verses of *Tiruvāymoḷi* hymns

321. *ibid.* 1.7: 7.

322. *ibid.* 10.6: 6.

323. *Bh.G.* 10:36.

324. *T.V.M.* 8.6: 4.

325. *Bhag. Vis. Book IX.* 9.4: (Commentary).

326. *T.V.M.* 2.6: 5.

327. *ibid.* 3.3: 1.

328. *ibid.* 9.8: 6; 10.4: 9.

give the results which will flow from a recitation of the hymns. The opportunity to perform *kainkarya* is one among them as the following statements will show: "They will get the rare opportunity of service at His Feet";³²⁹ "they will be able to do daily service to the Lord";³³⁰ "they will be able to engage themselves in their daily service to the God with the discus";³³¹ "they will for ever be pleased with the service of the Lord";³³² "they will be redeemed from the sins of their previous births and will live to enjoy the great pleasures of service to God".³³³

Among the different modes of *bhakti* such as *dāsya-bhakti*, *sakhyā-bhakti*, *vātsalya bhakti* etc., the attitude of a servant viz., *dāsya bhakti* is the best as it obtains a superior spiritual gain. To be more of the character of a servant is better fitted to win the master's mercy than to be objects of love like children to their father. Children but inherit portions of the master's property, but servants become objects of his strong affection. The former is but a material gain, whereas the latter is a superior spiritual gain. The efficacy of this *dāsya-bhakti* is brought out by the incident regarding the offence committed unwittingly by Piḷḷai Akaḷaṅka Brahma Rāya, the disciple of Kūrattālvāṅ, against the holy Parācara Paṭṭar, who left Śrī Raṅgam for Tirukkōṭṭiyūr on account of this and how reconciliation was brought out by one Iruṅkaimata - Vāraṇam the intimate servant of Paṭṭar serving as mediator in this case.³³⁴ Similarly

329. *ibid.* 3.4: 11.

330. *ibid.* 6.5: 11.

331. *ibid.* 7.3: 11.

332. *ibid.* 8.9: 11.

333. *ibid.* 4.1: 11.

334. Rāya was very anxious to conciliate with Paṭṭar. He sent Iruṅkaimata-Vāraṇam to Tirukkōṭṭiyūr for this peace mission. Vāraṇam opportunely plied Paṭṭar in a coaxing language which pacified and pleased the holy *ācārya* so much as to deign forgive Rāya. When certain observers remarked about the exemplary way of bringing out this event by Vāraṇam, Paṭṭar said: "No wonder, He is a born servant (i.e. his very nature is made for service) which conquers all". (vide: *Ittiṅ Tamilākkam*, Vol. IX. 9.4: 10).

service to God as a servant to God excites His Grace. The self in the *dāsya-bhāva* very soon realizes its noumenal nature as a spiritual being and attains self-mastery and autonomy. The true meaning of the spiritual freedom thus won consists in the knowledge that the real author of all our actions is the Inner Ruler of all beings and in the dedication of every act of ours as the adoration of the highest Self. The motive of conduct is also shifted from the self to its Inner Self and every *karma* is consecrated as *kaiñkarya*. In this way, according to Vedānta Deśika, the *śeṣa-śeṣi* relation between the finite and the infinite is transformed and deepened into the relation between servant and master, *dāsa* and *svāmin*, or servant and master.³³⁵ When the spiritual self has attained this conception, it offers its freedom as a self-gift to God as the real Self or author of all activity; it attunes itself to the will of the infinite as the *sarva śeṣi* and *svāmin*. It further realises that there is no God but God and He alone is omnipotent and His will is eternally self-realized and also that every creature depends on His redemptive will for its being and function. But the self has the creature-consciousness that it is made in the image of God, and owes its nature and value to Him as the master. *Dāsyaiva* or the idea of being a servant of God is thus the self's consciousness of the eternal self-dependence of *Īśvara* and the dependence of the self on *Īśvara* and its free submission to His redemptive purpose. It is also realized that the supreme goal of life is attained not in the natural world of *prakṛti* or in the spiritual world of *ātman*, but in the religious sphere of *Paramātmān*. The idea of *śeṣi* gives the highest meaning to moral and spiritual experience as He is the means as well as the end of conduct. This is the true meaning of conduct as *kaiñkarya*, and the highest freedom of life lies in the self-less service to the Supreme Who is the only Self without a second. That is the reason why the attitude of the slave has always been the richest ambition of the devotees of God Who do not feel it as loss of independence any more than the sovereign sitting on his throne and administering justice feels that the rules, laws and codes of mercy and justice he is dispensing bind him.

In the very notion of bondage to God, there is the notion of freedom and independence; for is it not God the very life – *antarātma* – of our lives?

The *svāmi-dāsa* relation is rooted in the living faith that God as *svāmin* alone is the Lord of our being, and in the feeling of the absolute dependence of the soul on Him. *Dāsyam* or service is not prostration to God as enforced obedience is the pathological expression of a slave mentality which makes Deity a capricious demoniacal despot and the creature a cringing crawling servitor. But it is the self-gift of the *ātman* that is not the slave of sense and sensibility, but is the autonomous sovereign of the ethical realm that exalts itself by submitting to the will of the *svāmin* and is the servant of God. The spiritual motive of Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa is the motto 'I serve', and the free man's worship is really like that of the wise Hanuman, who, by serving Rāma, His Lord, could conquer the whole universe.

Like Bharata³³⁶ who conducted himself like a servant of a king before Śrī Rāma's sandals, the devotee should render service as to a king, with materials earned righteously. He should look upon this service as a wedded wife would look upon the careful custody of her sacred wedding-thread and the like. He should have the conviction that he has attained this ultimate aim of life, which begins from service to Bhagavān and extends up to the service to His devotees, by his relationship with his good *ācārya*; for it has been said that Kṣhatrabandhu,³³⁷ the great sinner, and Puṇḍarīka,³³⁸ the virtuous

336. Rām. Ayodhya. 2.115:27.

337. Kṣhatrabandhu led the life of a highway man in a forest. He was a source of terror to the sages who lived in that-forest. Once when the sage Nārada happened to pass by him, he rushed at him with his stick. Nārada took pity on him and asked him to find out from his wife and children whether they would share the sin he was committing, as it was done for their sake. They refused and Kṣhatrabandhu realized his folly and begged to be instructed by Nārada in the truths of religion.

338. Puṇḍarīka was a virtuous brahmin, who, though he followed the righteous path and went on a pilgrimage to holy places, did not get a vision of God. It was only after being initiated into *Aṣṭākṣara* by Nārada that he realised God.

attained *mokṣa* by having *ācāryas*. So also has it been said: "Our *ācāryas* are like bees which place us at the flower-like, holy Feet of the Lord, Who is our Master and Who renders help to the Eternals"³³⁹ and "If Viṣṇucittar (Periyālvār) who was born in the city of Villiputtūr and who was perfect in the qualities of the spirit, by some means in his power, makes the Lord appear before us, we can see";³⁴⁰ in other words, without the grace of Viṣṇucittar, the *ācārya*, they cannot do anything themselves. The devotee should feel grateful to the Lord at the thought of His innate compassion which is the common and primary cause of all these and which, in the state of *mukṭi*, removes the dreaded possibility of a break in the enjoyment of Bhagavān Whose independent will cannot be questioned. For it has been said by Periyālvār: "The Lord makes us climb to Vaikuṅṭha through the centre of the sphere of the sun whose rays dispel darkness and He removes the ladder that helped to climb, so that there may be no coming back",³⁴¹ and again, "If one goes to Vaikuṅṭha after performing *prapatti* by uttering the words 'Namō Nārāyaṇa', He will not let one come back to the world of *samsāra*, even if one should furnish security for going back to Vaikuṅṭha".³⁴² Nammālvār says: "The firm Feet of Nārāyaṇa whose praise is unsurpassed" (the Feet being firm, those who have caught hold of them can never slip down);³⁴³ and again, "Bhagavān is our Father who takes away from His devotees their future births, leads them to Vaikuṅṭha, helps the manifestation of their essential nature (*svarūpa*) and sees to their ever remaining under His Feet even like the lines on the soles (of His Feet)",³⁴⁴ and further, he adds, "the Lord looks after our welfare by taking us to His Feet and by preventing our fall therefrom".³⁴⁵ The devotee should feel grateful to the Lord of Lakṣmī, the *śeṣi*, Whose will is ever absolute and who, even

339. T.V.R. 54.

340. *Nāc. Tm.* 10.10.

341. *Periyāḷ. Tm.* 4.9: 3.

342. *ibid.* 4.5: 2.

343. T.V.M. 1.2: 10.

344. *ibid.* 3.7: 7.

345. *ibid.* 7.5: 10.

after *mokṣa*, shows the same compassion as during *samāra*. Our Ālvār says : "By Thy Grace and the Grace of Thy Spouse Who lives in the lotus, I served at Thy shrine".³⁴⁶ A devotee shall attempt to any kind of service to God.³⁴⁷ He shall not be trying to find out what sort of service could be done to God and what service he could take up. The devotee shall seek to take up any service, for any service to God is good as any other service.³⁴⁸ Sweeping the gate of the Lord at Tiruvaṅṅantapuram (now Trivandrum in the Keral State) is enough to remove the heinous sins.³⁴⁹

A figurative description of service is given by Nammālvār who states that his mind which is too closely attached to Him could be treated as the sandal paste fit for blue-hued frame³⁵⁰. His expressions are the garlands, silken cloth and ornaments for Him.³⁵¹ His self becomes the flower-wreath for his crest³⁵². His love becomes ornaments, cloth and also glory for Him.³⁵³ This hymn brings out the mystic bliss of the Lord which the Ālvār had experienced and at the same time it shows that he had rooted out completely the feeling of 'I' and 'Mine' and also that he exists for His purpose.

The decad 4.4 of the *Tiruvāymoli* is held to preach the cardinal principles of Vaiṣṇavism. Here the devotee who is a mystic after the manner of the bride, finds the Lord in everything through some trait found there which is treated to be related to God. If any one has smeared his forehead with a vertical line of the ashes then she treats him as the devotee of Viṣṇu.³⁵⁴ This does not mean that ashes are to be used by the Vaiṣṇavites. It means only that anything that has the

346. *ibid.* 9.2 : 1.

347. *ibid.* 1.2 : 6.

348. *ibid.* 1.6 : 2.

349. *ibid.* 10.2 : 7; cf. 10.2 : 6.

350. *ibid.* 4.3 : 1.

351. *ibid.* 4.3 : 2.

352. *ibid.* 4.3 : 4.

353. *ibid.* 4.3 : 5.

354. *ibid.* 4.4 : 7.

vertical resemblance is treated as the *ūrdhvapundra* and as such denoting the person who has it as a Vaiṣṇavite.³⁵⁵ Or, the word 'niṣu' shall be taken in the sense of the dust of the feet of the devotees of the Lord.³⁵⁶ This interpretation gets support from another passage in the *Tiruvāymoḷi*.³⁵⁷ The real Vaiṣṇavite would not use the ashes but those who do not have the correct mode of conduct are found using the ashes.³⁵⁸ In a different context,³⁵⁹ the Ālvār uses the word 'niṣu' with the attribute 'veḷṭya' which means the black pigment.³⁶⁰ It can also mean the powder of 'paccai karppūram'.³⁶¹ That the white mud alone is used by the Śrī Vaiṣṇavites is further evidenced by Tirumaḷicaiyālvār obtaining this mud from the Lord of Tirumalai.³⁶²

Congregational prayer is another form of worship. The greatest contribution of Tamil Nad to the sphere of devotional music is the body of the hymns called *Tēvāram* of the Saivite lore and the *Nālāyiram* of the Vaiṣṇavite literature. From very ancient times the month of Mārkaḷi (November-December) has been considered especially sacred and appropriate for adoring the Lord and the Saivites and the Vaiṣṇavites have their own devotional recitals for this month, the *Tiruvempāvai* and the *Tiruppāvai*; and even special temple endowments were made for the latter in Cōḷa times.³⁶³ Similarly in the times of Rājarāja I, Rājendra I, and Rājādhirāja endowments were made for the singing of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* at Uttaramērūr, Śrīraṅgam, Enṇāyiram and Tribhuvani.³⁶⁴ A fifteenth century record in the former

355. Piḷḷāṅ on T.V.M. 4.4: 7.

356. *Saccaritrarakṣa*, p. 68.

357. T.V.M. 4.6: 6

358. *Iṣu* on T.V.M. 4.4: 7.

359. T.V.M. 4.5: 6.

360. *Twelve Thousand* on *ibid.* 4.5: 6.

361. *Dramidopaniṣat-tāt paryaratṇāvaḷi* 4.5.

362. *Divyasūrlcaritam* 3.17.

363. Nos. 12 of 1905, 421 of 1912 and 128 of 1912.

364. Nos. 181 of 1923, 61 of 1892, 176 of 1923, 194 of 1923. 333 of 1917; and 557 of 1919.

Pudukottai State makes a gift of a village to the recitor of the hymns of Nammālvār.³⁶⁵ This special adoration of the Lord through devotional singing in Mārkaḷi has continued to the present day. Parties of devotees get up early in the Mārkaḷi mornings, bathe despite the chill, and go round the local temple and the tank singing devotional songs. *Tiruppāvat*, as the author herself refers to as '*Caṅkat-tamiḷmālai*'³⁶⁶ (a garland of verses to be sung in chorus) is intended only for group-singing. This practice is popularly called *bhajana*. While a few gifted singers, who led these *bhajana* parties, stopped at particular places to sing elaborate songs, there were *nāmāvaḷis* or simple strings of God's names and epithets which they uttered as they moved on and which the accompanying congregation took up in chorus. As each song or *nāmāvaḷi* was finished, the leader pronounced what is called *puṇḍarika*, an expression of devotion to God like '*Śitā-kāntasmaraṇam*' or '*Govinda nama saṅkirttanam*' to which the whole party would respond with formulas like '*Jaya Jaya Rama*' and '*Govindā, Govindā*'. This *bhajana* was conducted in a more organized manner, within the precinct of *bhajana-maths*, everyday or on special week-days (in many places, Saturdays being preferred) or on holy days like the *Ēkādaśi*.

Sometimes a whole *bhajana*-session was conducted for several days once or twice a year in a far more elaborate manner. This was usually done when the *bhāḡavatas* would celebrate festivals, *utsavas*, of the marriage of Śitā-Rāma or of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. During these days the *bhāḡvatas* go through their entire repertoire, *Gopika-gītā*, the *kīrtanas* of Rāmdās and similar devotional songs. Besides these, they sing, during these festivals, special services of songs called *utsava-sampradāya kīrtanas* and songs invoking the Lord with simple addresses and epithets *divyanāma-saṅkīrtanas* to both of which the renowned saint-musician Tyāgarāja (1767-1847 A.D.) made an outstanding contribution and provided a rich musical medium for this method of worship. Some of these

365. No. 70 of 1909.

366. T.Pv. 30. cf. Peri. Im. 3.4: 10.

are sung with a simple dance movement around a brass lamp-stand or *tuḷaci* pot, in imitation of the circular *rāsa*-dance. Some *uttava* specialists among these execute more difficult dances, carrying the lamp-stand or circumambulating it with their prostrate bodies. Large numbers of devout people of both sexes take part in these *bhajanas*.

There are several references in Nammālvār's poem to such rapturous, congregational worship. The Ālvār says: "What is the use of those who do not sing the names of my Lord Kannaṅ, leap up and dance about in ecst'asy?"³⁶⁷ Those who do not sing the Lord in strains full of music and leap and dance are sure to be born again and again in this mundane world.³⁶⁸ Those who do not somersault in their rapturous repetition of the Lord's praises are bound to be plunged into Hell.³⁶⁹ What use is the birth of such people among the good as do not sing the real praises of Śrīdhara and dance in ecstasy headside down without restraint?³⁷⁰ Those such as do not praise the Lord extolled in the *Vedas* and walk the streets forgetting themselves in chanting His praise, however great their scholarship might be, do not deserve to be called men.³⁷¹ Those who celebrate the Lord, and caper in their enthusiasm are as good as the all-knowing.³⁷² Those who fail to praise the Lord and to dance about in the rapture of devotion are not likely to do any service to the devotees, and are there only to feed and fatten themselves.³⁷³ Even the Eternals worship those who constantly blabber the names of the Lord both in solitude and in company and frisk about in extremes of devotion and love of God so that the others call them mad and laugh at them".³⁷⁴ In another place he says

367. T.V.M. 3.5: 1.

368. *ibid.* 3.5: 2.

369. *ibid.* 3.5: 3.

370. *ibid.* 3.5: 4.

371. *ibid.* 3.5: 5.

372. *ibid.* 3.5: 6.

373. *ibid.* 3.5: 7.

374. *ibid.* 3.5: 8. cf. *Perum, Tm.* 3: 8.

that the world is full of the devotees of the Lord who constantly chant His names, sing His praises and dance about, and lose themselves in the rapture of devotion ³⁷⁵

The devotees of the Lord have to follow a course of action which is faultless and agreeable. They should observe the code of conduct prescribed for their *varṇa* and their *āśrama* and for the sake of delight in the enjoyment of the auspicious qualities of the Lord; they should study *Vedānta* with good men, should teach the sweet and noble utterances of the Āḷvārs always and also listen to the religious discourses. They should follow this line of conduct as long as they live. The following passages from the *Nalāyiram* indicate the line of conduct: "I read the books which describe the attributes and qualities of Bhagavān; I listened to other people reading them; I bowed to Him, I worshipped Him always and performed service to Him and thus saw to it that my time was not spent in vain".³⁷⁶ "Men should get rid of their sorrow which is as deep as the sea on account of past *karma* surrounding the soul, by meditating on those passages which reveal the Lord's qualities. If they should not do so, by what other thought can they get rid of their sorrow while in *samsāra*?"³⁷⁷ "We should without intermission render service to the Lord in all places and in all circumstances and at all times".³⁷⁸ "If the Lord is so gracious as to enable me to spend my time always with the passages which describe His qualities in my mouth, with His form alluring the eye and other senses in my mind, and with flowers fit enough for His form in my hands -- if I find this grace, what is there unpleasant for me while living here?"³⁷⁹ "This is the only object that I desire -- that the Lord should take me into His service for His own satisfaction"³⁸⁰. "I do not long for birth accompanied with wealth that only

375. *ibid.* 5.2

376. Nāṅ. Tv. 63.

377. P. Tv. 86.

378. T.V.M. 3.3: 1.

379. *ibid.* 8.10: 4; cf. *ibid.*, 1.4: 9; 9 2: 10.

380. *ibid.* 2.9: 4; cf. T.Pv. 29; Nāc. Tm. 4: 1; Periyāḷ. Tm. 4.4: 3.

makes the flesh grow but pray to be born as a heron in the sacred *Puṣkaraṇi* in the Vēṅkaṭa Hills³⁸¹

A devotee should not remain complacently ignorant of what should be known in that state, on the presumption that he has already known what should be known. Knowledge and love are both essential for the perfect enjoyment of the Lord. Therefore he should not beg of the Lord any thing but knowledge and love for His holy Feet. Periyālvār says: "The Lord of the yellow raiment (*pitṭaka āṣṭaip pirāṇār*) has incarnated as the *guru* to teach the *Vedas*"³⁸² So the devotee should learn from such *ācāryas* possessed of exclusive devotion to the Lord and having a clear knowledge of the truth. He should obtain clear knowledge from them by following the injunction of the *Gītā*. "Learn that by humble reverence, by enquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the truth will instruct thee in knowledge"³⁸³ He should have his knowledge rendered clear and pure, as Kālidāsa says, even a man that is dull becomes intelligent by seeking the company of the wise as muddy water becomes clear and pure by being mixed with the lather from soap-nut.³⁸⁴ It has been said: "He whose knowledge of the truth (concerning Bhagavān) extends up to the enjoyment of the Lord – all those who fall within the range of his eyes will be purified of all their sins"³⁸⁵ So a devotee should live in close contact with such men who are well established in this knowledge. "In a tank which is intended for all and for various purposes, one should take only as much of the water as is required for one's purposes"³⁸⁶ So a devotee should determine what he should choose, from among their ways of life and conduct, what is in accordance with his *varṇa*, his *āśrama*, his *gotra*, his character and the like and conduct himself in keeping with that determination. He should walk warily lest he should fall into the pitfall of think-

381. Perum. Tm. 4:1.

382. Periyālvār. Tm. 5.2: 8.

383. Bh. G. 4: 34.

384. *Mālavikāgnimitra*. 2.7.

385. Sātt. Sam. cited in RTS. Ch. 15.

386. Bh. G. 2: 46.

ing of his own superiority and the inferiority of others, which might arise from his conceit while observing this code of conduct.

Even if, as it occurred to such great men of yore as Nammālvār and Nāthamuni, the devotee is blessed with the special grace of the Saviour so as to enjoy the rise of such benefits as the vision of the Lord, he should feel sure that it is not due to any merit of his own as Periyālvār says "I do not know what is good and what is bad"³⁸⁷ and "Even if I know what is good and what is evil, I cannot obtain what is good and avoid what is evil". He should see to it that his being destitute of all *upāyas* (*ākiñcanya*) which is due to his *svarūpa*, his maintenance (*sthithi*) and his activities (*pravṛtti*) being entirely dependent on the Lord does not suffer any change or loss. He should remember his utter helplessness (*kārpānya*) as described in the *ślōka* "I am the abode of all transgressions, I have no means of protecting myself and I have nothing else to attain than Thee",³⁸⁸ and in such verses of the Ālvārs as: "I have not seen observing the code of the disciplined life, nor have I keen intelligence",³⁸⁹ "What can I do? Who will protect me?",³⁹⁰ "May my misery be put an end to by Thee! If Thou doest not do so, there is no one else to protect me",³⁹¹ "I have no other *upāya* and no other protector",³⁹² "I do not know of any one whom I can hold as the Saviour of my soul",³⁹³ "We are such as ignorant women belonging to the race of cowherds who eat in forests while grazing the cows there"³⁹⁴, "I have given up the rites pertaining to brahmins of worshipping the three fires after ablutions",³⁹⁵ "I was not born in any of the four castes wherein one is fit to

387. Periyālvār. Tm. 5.1: 3.

388. Ahir. Sam. 3: 30.

389. T.V.M. 5.7: 1.

390. *ibid.* 5.8: 3.

391. *ibid.* 5.8: 8.

392. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

393. *ibid.* 10. 10: 3.

394. T. Pv. 28.

395. T.M. 25.

follow *dharma*'',³⁹⁶ "I am ignorant and of low birth"³⁹⁷, "I have no one to seek for support",³⁹⁸ "Even if Thou dost not remove from me the sufferings due to *karma*, I have no other refuge than Thee"³⁹⁹, "I have not practised *karma-yoga*; I have not understood the real nature of the disembodied self i.e., I have not performed *jñāna-yoga*; nor have I *bhakti* towards Thy holy Feet".⁴⁰⁰ The devotee should realise his own helplessness by remembering the statements as embodied in the verses of the Āḷyārs.

Owing to the knowledge of his own unfitness from time immemorial and the loss of the Lord's service which resulted from it, which may cause excessive disgust, the devotee should not fall into despair which make one lament in the words of the Āḷvār saying, "The nature of the man in *samsāra* is such that he identifies himself with the perishing body and calls it 'I'; from it arises also evil conduct and from it arises again the body that is foul".⁴⁰¹ Without falling into despair he should hearten himself with the latter part of the same verse: "O Lord of the immortals, Thou wast born into all castes and even from the wombs of animals in Thy eagerness to protect the *jīvas*": He should comfort himself with the words of the Saviour to Arjuna as "For the protection of the good and the destruction of the wicked and so also for the establishment of *dharma* I am born again and again in every *yuga*".⁴⁰² He should bathe and dive deep, as it were, in the words of Bhagavān which reveal the secret of the *avatāras* and take courage: "Whatever a man may have been in the past, if he lives a righteous life in his old age, it will do him good; his evil deeds in the past will do him no harm"⁴⁰³ and "A man may have been wicked in his past life; he may have fed on anything

396. Tc. V. 90.

397. Peri. Tm. 5. 8: 1.

398. ibid. 1. 1: 9.

399. Perum. Tm. 5:1.

400. *Śotra-ratna* 22.

401. T.V.R. 1.

402. Bh. G. 4: 8.

403. Bhōd. Dh. Sūt. 14: 10.

(however impure); he may have been ungrateful; he may have been a sceptic; in spite of all that, if he earnestly seeks the protection of the Lord, Who is the cause of the world, know that man is faultless owing to the Lord's greatness"⁴⁰⁴, "In one half of an instant, a *jīva* commits a sin which cannot be expiated even in the course of ten thousand *kalpas* of Brahmā. But Thou pardonest him if only he gives up the thought of sinning again, even though he has transgressed. "How wonderful this is!"⁴⁰⁵ "The past is past, what can we do concerning it? The wise man should think of erecting the dam, even when the water is flowing".⁴⁰⁶ "It is good to die after performing *prapatti* to the Lord at least in the dying moments".⁴⁰⁷

In accordance with what has been said above, the devotee should not lament over the past. He should not run away at the thought of his past unfitness. He should make himself fit for the future by reflecting on the present fitness which has resulted from the infinite greatness of the Saviour which brooks no questioning, like those who construct a dam for the water that will come up in the future. He should not stray from the path of performing the commands and permissions of the Lord which are in keeping with his present state as a devotee. As described by Nammālvār,⁴⁰⁸ the senses which have become tired with expectations of enjoying the Lord should be rendered fit to enjoy Him by means of pure food and service and directed towards such spiritual experiences as are available and turned away from the desire for unwholesome objects, like cows that are turned away from stealthily eating the crops.

Vedānta Deśika illustrates the condition of the devotee by means of a beautiful analogy.⁴⁰⁹ When people

404. Sūtt. Sam. 16: 23, 24.

405. *Vaikuṇṭhastava*. 61.

406. Vaṅkipuram Nampi : *Kārika* 31.

407. T.V.M. 1.3: 8.

408. *ibid.* 3.8.

409. R.T.S. Ch. 15.

are waiting for the boat in order to cross the stream to go to a place of their desire, some of them may avoid playing chess or other game with stakes, as it could not be stopped whenever desired but may be engaged in playing the game without any stakes so that they might be in a position to give up the game when the boat has come. Though they play merely for the enjoyment and not for money, they move the pawns on the board in strict accordance with the rules of the game. In the same way though the devotee does not expect any profit out of it, he performs gladly the rites commanded and permitted by the Lord, which are really services to Him, in accordance with the specific time and place at which they are ordained for performance. In performing them, he should resemble not those who drink milk for relief from excess of bile, but like those who have got well easily and quickly with the help of a medicine and who drink milk with pleasure, not as a cure for disease.

It has been pointed out that a *bhāgavata* has, by nature, the sole character of a *śeṣa* to *Bhagavān* and he takes delight in rendering service to Him. It is not at all likely that he will offend against the Lord. If as a result of a past *karma* which has begun to operate (*prārabdha*) and under adverse conditions of place, time and circumstance slight offences against the Lord take place through inattention in the waking state or in dreamless sleep and other such states those offences will disappear without causing any stain. Again as the devotee is in close association with *prakṛti* like one who lives under the same roof with a serpent,⁴¹⁰ it is just possible that, owing to his deficiency in spiritual qualities, certain lapses might, as in the case of weak-hearted *ṛṣis*, even occur with his knowledge. If such lapses do occur, the Lord of *Mahālakṣmī* Who, by His very nature, is his well-wisher, stands ever ready to save him. These lapses in his actions will therefore be momentary like lightning; he will quickly reflect on these lapses from his state as a devotee, feel ashamed at them, repent of them, and perform proper atonement (*prāyacitta*) that is suited to his competence. "If there

410. Peri. Tm. 11.8: 3.

is offence the atonement that is to be done is only the performance of *prapatti* again. If, after performing *prapatti* for the sake of *mokṣa*, a man should perform *karma-yoga* and the like with the thought that these are *upāyas* (to *mokṣa*), it would also constitute an offence. In order that this offence might disappear, *prapatti* alone should be performed again.⁴¹¹ "Whether a man commits an offence knowing that it is an offence or does it without knowing it to be one, the only atonement that has to be performed is to beg in these words: 'Pardon the offence.'⁴¹² If the devotee does not obtain pardon by atonement, he will not go to the world of Yama, but receive punishment in this very life. For it has been said: "Seeing his attendants with the noose of death in their hands Yama whispers in their ears: "Do not approach those who have performed *prapatti* at the Feet of Madhusūdana. I have sway only over others and not over the devotees of Viṣṇu"⁴¹³ and again "O Thou with lotus-like eyes, O Vāsudeva, O Viṣṇu, O Thou that bearest the earth, O Thou that art armed with the conch and the discus, be Thou my refuge – those who utter these words, –leave them at a distance for they are not the sinners"⁴¹⁴ and further "Those that perform *prapatti* to Viṣṇu, the God Who is armed with a bow, never go to the world of Yama, for Hell is not their dwelling place".⁴¹⁵ As stated in these treatises the offenders do not go to the land of Yama, but are punished with the blindness of an eye, or the lameness of a leg, or some such thing and thus relieved of their burden of sin. They will be punished in this life itself here. The Supreme Lord, being possessed of forgiveness, kindness, compassion and over-flowing love, relents in His anger and protects the devotee after light punishment for his offence. Even in the case of deliberate offence the punishment is not severe. When the offences have been committed, atonement also will have to be made in

411. L.T. 17: 91, 92.

412. The Verses of Vaṅkipuram Nampi, 520.

413. Vām. P. 94: 31.

414. Yama's words. V.P. 3.7: 33.

415. Vām. P. 94: 43.

public. This is for the sake of setting an example to the rest of the world. If it were not done, it would be a transgression of the Lord's command.

The atonement is prescribed only for a sin that has already been committed. If a man dreads the possibility of future sins committed deliberately, he should perform atonement in the form of a *prapatti* for the sins of the past life which have begun to operate and which are the causes of these possible future sins. It has been said: "The sins committed in previous births afflict a man in the present life as diseases. They can be got rid of by medicines, charitable gifts, *japa*, offerings to the fire (*homa*) and adoration of Bhagavān."⁴¹⁶ It is indeed stated here that, even by *japa* and *homa*, the sins of the past which have begun to bear fruit in the present life can be destroyed. Such being the case, there is no reason to doubt that *prapatti* can destroy such sins. Therefore if a man performs *prapatti* in dread of the possibilities of future sins which might be caused by the sins of the past, these can be got rid of and no such future sin will be deliberately committed.

It is, therefore, clear that the process ultimately consists in purifying the mind and the heart, a sort of catharsis. When one thinks of Him for a moment, He makes that heart as his abode. If the mind is oriented towards Him, He rushes into it. If the soul is hungering for God, God is also hungering for the soul. Nammālvār speaks of this experience: "When I stood tip-toe eager to swallow Him up, He, Who had put the idea into my head, came of His own accord and devoured me into Himself".⁴¹⁷ "The very hearing of the name of the Lord" says the Ālvār, "brings tears to my eyes. I searched for Him, but He has been there with me always".⁴¹⁸ This is a statement reminding us of the Prophet Mahomet's saying, "When man walks towards God, God runs towards him". It looks as though He has no grandeur elsewhere.

416. *Ālavantār Śotra* 4.

417. T.V.M. 9.6: 10.

418. *ibid.* 1.10: 8.

Again, the Ājvār says: "The Lord, reclining on the ocean of milk, without minding the fact that I am so lowly that I do not deserve His grace, has entered into me on His own initiative and relishes me day and night".⁴¹⁹ Dependence on the Feet of the Lord will wipe out age long sins.⁴²⁰ Constant relishing of the nectar-like Lord has dispelled the delusions due to birth into the world.⁴²¹ "My soul has made contact with the Scion of the Yādavas and has merged with Him inseparably".⁴²² "The Lord Who mixes butter with His hands and eats up every day has merged with my body".⁴²³ "By contemplation of Thee and by singing of Thy praises I could divest myself of my age-old sins".⁴²⁴ "The Lord is like insatiable nectar to me every moment, every day, every month, year and *kalpa*".⁴²⁵ "Now that the Lord has entered my heart, the former inhabitant there, my *karma* has no longer room for itself there, and has to quit".⁴²⁶ Afraid of the fierceness of *karma*, I offered praise to the Lord through my verses".⁴²⁷ "To herd together the five senses which rule over the heart and to quell them and to drive them afield".⁴²⁸ "Now the five senses which were once fiercely dominating me have left me hanging their hands in shame".⁴²⁹ "Redeemed by Thee, and having got rid of heinous sins, I entered Thy eternal service. There is no leaving this state hereafter".⁴³⁰ "After repeatedly undergoing a number of births, I reached Thy feet, cleansed my mind and got immersed in the ocean of bliss".⁴³¹ Again the saint says: "Thou shouldst remove every trace of

419. P. Tv. 81.

420. T.V.M. 1.3: 8.

421. *ibid.* 1.7: 3.

422. *ibid.* 1.7: 9.

423. *ibid.* 1.8: 5.

424. *ibid.* 2.6: 6

425. *ibid.* 2.5: 4.

426. P. Tv. 30.

427. *ibid.* 45.

428. *ibid.* 51.

429. *ibid.* 69.

430. T. V.M. 2.6: 5.

431. *ibid.* 2.6: 8

fascinating *samsāra* which is of Thy making and enable me to contemplate and worship Thy divine weapons and auspicious form in thought, word and deed".⁴³² "The Lord of myself as much as the Lord of the Eternals, has in an instant removed my age-long sins".⁴³³ "I strayed in the path of the pleasure of the body which Thou gavest me. When can I attain to Thee, after a period of remorseful realization during which I could get rid of *karma*?"⁴³⁴ The same sentiment is expressed in the next verse also.⁴³⁵ The Āḷvār continues further: "Delicious as insatiable nectar to my life and body, Thou rulest over me, to the destruction of my *karma*".⁴³⁶ He prays: "Unite me unto Thy feet adorned with flowers",⁴³⁷ and he asks the Lord, "How can I adequately contemplate the great help of the Lord in wiping out my sins, cleansing me, merging with me, and, above all, making me celebrate Him in verses as the Lord of Vaikuṅṭha?"⁴³⁸ The whole decad is in the same strain. "I do not know" says the Āḷvār, "how my soul which is lost in the affairs of the three worlds can find its way to effulgent Thee at Vaikuṅṭha".⁴³⁹ Again he says: "My Lord who destroys root and branch the two-fold *karma* and keeps the soul distinct from the body redeems His devotees".⁴⁴⁰ "The Lord ever removes the two-fold *karma* and reigns over me".⁴⁴¹ He prays to the Lord: "Even if Thou showest not Thy grace to me, make me an object which can stay near Thy feet".⁴⁴² "Thou, the Lord of Tiruvinnakar, if Thou grantest me to worship Thee, I shall give up my desire for family life"⁴⁴³ -

432. *ibid.* 7.1: 8.

433. *ibid.* 8.4: 3.

434. *ibid.* 3.2: 1.

435. *ibid.* 3.2: 2.

436. *ibid.* 5.8: 10.

437. *ibid.* 6.10: 4.

438. *ibid.* 7.9: 7.

439. *ibid.* 7.6: 5.

440. *ibid.* 9.3: 8.

441. *ibid.* 10.4: 2.

442. *ibid.* 9.8: 8.

443. *Peri. Tm.* 6.1: 1.

this offer to reject family life is repeated as a refrain in all the verses of the hymn. Tirumaṅkaiyālvār says: "I developed tolerance and indifference to blame; I gave up the pleasures of the senses, exhausting them, and wealth and desire; I have abandoned love and hate alike. I have surrendered at Thy Feet".⁴⁴⁴ "I forgot Thee: therefore in that forgetfulness, I fell into the pit of birth, and suffered. Now I am fit for surrender at Thy Feet".⁴⁴⁵ "Having realised that mate and children cannot stand by me at the hour of judgement, I gave up contact with them; wielding the weapon of absolute surrender which is Thy gift, I get rid of the trouble brought by the five senses and reach Thy Feet".⁴⁴⁶ "Having realised that the greatest of kings have gone the way of all flesh, I gave up interest in mundane life and seek Thy Feet".⁴⁴⁷ and "the fiery mouthed, fell sins stayed by me like my relations and were about to throw me into Hell. Therefore I seek Thy help".⁴⁴⁸ "Those who lead blameless and sinless lives constantly praying to Thee live happily".⁴⁴⁹ Again Pūtattālvār says: "O heart! you have realised the evil nature of *samsāra*; you have experienced its ills; you have developed a repulsion towards *samsāra*".⁴⁵⁰ According to Nammālvār, those who have grasped the hundred verses of *Tiruviruttam* will not get stuck in the bog of birth due to *karma*.⁴⁵¹ He again refers to the purification of mind as one of the results flowing from the recitation of his hymns. The minds of those who recite his *Tiruvāymoḷi* hymns, according to the Ālvār, will be rendered pure;⁴⁵² they will be blessed with clarity of mind

444. *ibid.* 6:2: 1.

445. *ibid.* 6.2: 2.

446. *ibid.* 6.2: 4.

447. *ibid.* 6.2: 5. cf, Paṭṭinattār's statement: "Even the great kings are, at the end, reduced to a handful of ashes.....". (*Paṭṭinattār Paṭalkaḷ Tiruttillai.* 7).

448. *ibid.* 6.2: 7.

449. I.Tv. 20.

450. *ibid.* 66.

451. T.V.R. 100.

452. T.V.M. 5.2: 11.

amidst the encircling gloom of the world.⁴⁵³ Further, the Ālvār says : “My heart and I have agreed upon the need for dispelling the evil *karma*”.⁴⁵⁴ Even the Lord taking possession of the Ālvār’s heart, is due to His Grace only.⁴⁵⁵ Once the Lord takes possession of his heart, the Ālvār does not think that he thinks, he acts or he sees, or he moves in the world; God alone thinks, lives and moves thereafter. In this connection one is reminded of what St. Paul has said : “It is not I that live, but Christ dwelleth in me”.

It is thus seen that worship of the Deity has a particular meaning in the Vaiṣṇavite school. Acts of worship, whatever form they take, are reducible to the level of service (*kainkarya*) to God. Service (*aṭimai*) as the Ālvārs conceive of, is to be rendered to *Puruṣottama* and as such does not have any disadvantage or inconvenience attached to the result as understood in the ordinary sense of the term. This position cannot be objected to on the ground that dependence on another is painful,⁴⁵⁶ for what another is for depending upon is to be explained through the real nature of the self. The selves acquire the physical frames of the tiger, deer, cow, man, bird and another species due to *karma*. Being distinct from the body, the self is of the nature of consciousness and its nature is to be subsidiary to the Lord. Those who have not realized this truth may have notions such as ‘I am a tiger’, ‘I am a man’, ‘I am a master’, ‘I am a servant’ and so on. The relation of *śeṣa* and *śeṣi* justifies that any other relation between the self and God would declare pain as the only result of service. The Lord is of the nature of bliss. Every other thing becomes pleasurable or painful due to circumstances.⁴⁵⁷ Dependence on such things would lead only to pain. Service that is rendered to an unworthy person will necessarily lead to pain. The Lord is the most deserving person and as such is to be served by all at all times. The Lord

453. *ibid.* 7.5: 11.

454. P.Tv. 26.

455. T.V.M. 8.8: 3.

456. *cf. Mānuśmṛti*: 4. 160.

457. V.P. 2.6: 47.

Himself declared: "He, who serves me, following the path of undivided *bhakti*, transcends these qualities (of *prakṛti*) and will attain self-realization".⁴⁵⁸ He, being the storehouse of unlimited bliss, would enable the devotee partake of His bliss and make him happy.⁴⁵⁹ The bridal aspect of love, which provides the woman with more joy due to her passivity and willing subservience and thus enables her to find delight in pleasing her lover through service, adds to the charm of the aspect of Worship as *kaiñkarya*. Worship is thus delectable and is therefore cherished as life's purpose, beyond which there is nothing that a devotee could wish for.

Kaiñkarya is to be undertaken by a devotee to the Lord in any of His forms. Since the *para*, *vyūha*, and *antaryāmin* are not within the easy reach of the mortals, the Vaiṣṇavite school has performed to enjoin service to the deity in the *vibhava* and *arcā* forms. Of course, neither the *Āgamas* nor the *Ālvārs* have expressed any preference to the *arcā* form of worship to the exclusion of other forms. The *Ālvārs* often draw a synthesis of these five forms and are ever reminding us that it is impossible to think of one form without reference to the other. The *ācāryas* have suitably presented a form of worship in *arcā* where the *Ālvārs* find the *vibhava* forms of God⁴⁶⁰ and recommended it for doing *kaiñkarya*.⁴⁶¹ It is this aspect of doing service that assumed prominence in the days after the *Ālvār* period. Hence it is that Manakkāl Nampī took *Ālavantār* to Śrī Raṅgam for service. Thereafter, Śrī Raṅgam became the ideal place for doing service and after its model, other shrines also gained importance as places for the rendering of service by the devotees.

458. Bh. G. 14 : 26.

459. cf. *Vedārthasamgraha*, pp. 244-250.

460. cf. Peri. Tm. 7.2: 2; Mū. Tv. 34.

461. T.V.M. 3.3; Peri. Tm. 2.1; A.P. 10; R.T.S. ch. 15.