

CHAPTER XXII

THE CULT OF BHĀGAVATAS

The *Gīta* speaks of four kinds of devotees of the Lord. The afflicted, those in distress, who pray to Him for deliverance from misery are one class. Those who adore God for the object of knowing Him constitute the second class. Others who pray to Him for the attainment of objects of desire form the third category. The fourth are the wise man (*jñānis*) who are devoted to God for the sake of devotion only. The Lord says: "Of these, the wise devotee is ever in constant union with Me in thought and is attached to Me with single-minded devotion. For I am supremely dear to him and he is also dear to Me".¹ The *Mahābharata* also speaks four classes of devotees² of whom three are desirous of rewards while the best are the single-minded worshippers. Others ask for favours, but the sage asks nothing and refuses nothing. He yields himself completely to the Divine accepting whatever is given to him. His attitude is one of self-oblivious non-utilitarian worship of God for His own sake. It is the blessing of such great and lofty Mahātmās who are the walking gods of this earth that can elevate ordinary mortals like us and make it possible even for us to love, and be loved by God. And hence does Yāmunācārya invoke their loving and gracious *katākṣa* upon himself as the surest way of becoming one of the chosen devotees of the Lord: "O Lord; grant that I may be recipient of the gracious glances of those Mahātmās, who, in their intense longing to behold thy repturous Form once, reject the pleasures of the earth and the promises of the Paramapada, and separation from whom even for a moment is to Thee is most sufferable".³

1. Bh. G. 7: 17.

2. M.Bh. Śānti. 341. 13.

3. *Śotra-ratnam* - 56.

Bhakti is meditation on Brahman touched with love. It is absolute devotion to Bhagavān as the life of our life and is love for love's sake. The true *bhakta* is a true *jñāni*. He knows clearly well that God alone is the source and sustenance of life. So he meditates on Him as his self and cultivates exclusive devotion to Him. This state of *bhakti* is known as *ēkabhakti* as his devotion is controlled by the single idea of attaining *mukti*. It comes to one unsolicited by the Grace of God and sacrifice. Upon gaining it, man realizes his perfection and divinity, and becomes thoroughly contented. He desires nothing more. He is then free from grief and hatred. He does not rejoice over anything, nor does he exert himself in the furtherance of self-interest. The realization makes him intoxicated and fascinated as it were, because he is completely immersed in the bliss of Paramātman. Says Toṭṭaraṭip-poṭiyālvār: "Iccuvai tavira yāu pōy intira-lōkam ālum, accuvai peṇinum vēṇṭēṇ" – 'I do not desire even the pleasures of *svarga* except the pleasure (of meditating of Lord)'. Kulacēkatālvār goes a step further by saying, "Paṭiyāyk kiṭantu un pavaḷavāy kāṇpēṇē" – 'Remaining as a stepping stone in the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord I shall enjoy the beauty of Your coral lips'.⁵ Nammālvār's devotion to Lord is supreme. "Let it be that I may attain *mokṣa* or reach the place of heaven or hell, but I will go on meditating the Lord unceasingly without ever forgetting Him" says the Ālvār.⁶ One is reminded in this connection of Cēkkilār's tribute to the greatness of these devotees. Their mind, according to him, is pure and white like the sacred ash besmeared on the body. Even if the elements go astray, their minds will not swerve from the love of God. To them gold and potsherd are the same. They care not even for *mokṣa*, if only they could be assured of loving worship. They have no burden other than the service of the Lord, these merciful lovers and heroes wanting in nothing.⁷ Saivism refers to these devotees as 'Paramaṇaiye pātuvār' (the singer of the Lord).

4. T.M. 2.

5. Perum. Tm. 4: 9.

6. T.V.M. 2:9: 5.

7. P.P. Introduction part 6 to 8.

A devotee, who leads the ideal life by rendering service to God, is required to avoid two pitfalls which generally take those who are not aware of them. One is the company of the wicked and the other is offending God. Those who are deceitful, do not do their duty, and are bereft of the knowledge of ultimate Reality, are declared to be wicked.⁸ In a way, they are different from the good whose mind is set in *Puruṣottama* and so are free anger, envy, greed and evil thought.⁹ A good man who is devoted to Hari, will not desire for what belongs to another, and will not cultivate friendship with those who are mean and who, though not intending to do harm, support the sinners in their acts. He will spend his time with those who are righteous and would not extol any one except Tirumāl (Viṣṇu)¹⁰. Kulacēkarāḷvār's third hymn enumerates the mental attitudes and activities of such people who deserve to be classed as bad. Such persons prefer to live with the enticing material world.¹¹ They like most the company of woman.¹² They are interested in food and clothing only.¹³ To this Āḷvār, others are mad and to them he is mad.¹⁴ Tirumaṅkaiyāḷvār refers to his resolve not to take note of the existence of those who do not think of the Lord at Tirukkaṭalmallai.¹⁵ Those who do not become the servants of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, are not to be treated as man.¹⁶ The contact with such people, even if had for worldly purposes would change the devout persons into atheists. The other source of danger to the religious life is *apacāra*. The word '*apasāra*' means swerving from the path prescribed by God in the form of *Vedas* and *Śmṛtis*. Besides, in the real sense of religious life, to think of any other deity as equal to

8. *Manuśmṛti*,: 4: 30; *Yajñavalkyaśmṛti* 1. 130.

9. M. Bh. Anuśasana 232: 135.

10. M. Tv. 64.

11. Perum. Tm. 3: 1.

12. *ibid.* 3: 2, 3.

13. *ibid.* 3: 4.

14. *ibid.* 3: 8.

15. Peri. Tm. 2. 6: 1.

16. *ibid.* 11.7: 9.

or superior to Nārāyaṇa constitutes the greatest guilt.¹⁷ One shall also avoid offending the devotees of God. Some may sometimes be tempted to treat the Lord as powerless and so fit to be insulted. Nammālvār cites the attempt of Pūtana to kill Kṛṣṇa which brought her own end.¹⁸ Activities of this kind are to be treated as insulting God who, however, would not get offended, but would delay in showing His grace after enforcing a light punishment on the offender.

The best characteristic of a devotee is the philosophy of Vaiṣṇavism. Vaiṣṇavites are those who are in a way related to Viṣṇu who is *vibhu*, all pervasive. Therefore it becomes logically true that no one can exist without any relation to Viṣṇu. A true Vaiṣṇavite will realize this truth, basic principle. He will show true love and render service to one whether one is a friend or foe. The mention of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya's statement is relevant to the context. He says: "One should exercise forbearance, show sympathy with a smile and appreciation to those who have done evil; and also one should take it for granted that they have extended their help".¹⁹ This idea must have been prevalent prior to the period of that great *ācārya* among the Vaiṣṇavites and attained the status of a *mahāvākya* (significant statement) at his times. An incident in Parācara Paṭṭar's life may throw a clear light on the statement. One day Paṭṭar was standing in the Raṅganātha's sanctum sanctorum in a mood of self-examination. Without noticing his presence there, some heaped abuse after abuse on him. This saddened the hearts of *bhaktas* who were standing with Paṭṭar. But to the surprise and wonder of all the devotees present there, Paṭṭar presented his ring to one of those who abused him; he further blessed the one who abused him most with the honour of covering him by his gold-laced cloth. To them Paṭṭar said: "Don't think that I have made presents to them on account of the fear of their abuses". This statement increased their surprise and wonder. He further added: "I should be thankful to them for the help

17. Peri. Tm. 8.10, 3; cf. Nan. Tv. 68.

18. P.Tv. 14.

19. S.V.P. Ch. 3. Śūt. 122.

they have rendered to me by bringing to the notice of the Lord the mistakes which I was not conscious of and thereby helping in my self-examination". This utterance moved not only his friends but his foes as well. Tiruvalluvar suggests the novel method of punishing those who have done wrong to one: "Innā ceytārai oṟuttal avar nāpa, nappayam ceytu viṭal"²⁰ - 'The (proper) punishment to those who have done evil (to you) is to put them to shame by showing them kindness in return and to forget both the evil and the good done on both sides'. This teaching of the Tamil saint could have been responsible for shaping the life of the Vaiṣṇavites. The arrogance born of one's learning, wealth and high birth should have no place in a true Vaiṣṇavite. This has been metaphorically referred to by Amutaṅār as "Vaṅca mukkurumpām kuḷi"²¹ - 'a vile trap-like triple pit'. He is really a Vaiṣṇavite, who while listening to the harsh expressions uttered by a devotee, bows to him and addresses him patiently.²² Without the use of the word 'vaiṣṇavite' Nammāḷvār states that the trait of those who possess good qualities consists in rendering service to the Feet of the Lord, after controlling the mind and the five senses.²³ With keen religious insight, Pūtattāḷvār declares that kings who, before our presence, ride on horses, must be occupying their positions not by accident. They must have worshipped the feet of the Lord in their various previous births with flowers.²⁴ This is the only explanation that could be given to show how some people are able to occupy prosperous positions. Any position which an individual occupies is due to the will of God and the position of the kings can be no exception to this. The character of a true Vaiṣṇavite is also enshrined in the famous song of the true Vaiṣṇavite which was made popular by Mahātmā Gandhi :

"He is the true Vaiṣṇava who knows and feels
Another's woes as his own

20. *Kuṟal*. 314; cf. *Manuśmṛti* 6: 43; M. Bh. Śānti-300: 10, 12, 16, 18.

21. R. N. 7.

22. *Līṅgapurāṇam*. 2.4: 9, 10

23. P. Tv. 51.

24. I. Tv. 69.

Ever ready to serve, he never boasts
 He bows to every one and despises no one,
 Keeping his thought, word, and deed pure,
 Blessed is the mother of such an one. He
 Reverences every woman as his mother.
 He keeps an equal mind and does not
 Stain his lips with falsehood; nor
 Does he touch another's wealth.
 No bonds of attachment can hold him.
 Ever in tune with *Rāma nāma* his body
 Possesses in itself all places of pilgrimage
 Free from greed and deceit, passion
 And anger, this is the true Vaiṣṇava :"

Nammālvār speaks of Pattar,²⁵ Aṭiyār,²⁶ Aṭiyavar,²⁷ Toṇṭar²⁸ Pakavar,²⁹ Kēcavan-tamar,³⁰ Nāraṇan-tamar,³¹ Mātavan-tamar,³² Āḷiyān-tamar,³³ Vaikuṇṭhan-tamar,³⁴ and Vaiṭṭavar³⁵ in his *Tiruvāymoḷi*. 'Kēcavan-tamar' literally means relatives of Kēcavan or the Lord signifying His devotees; similarly the meanings of others (*tamar*-relatives). The word 'vaiṭṭavar' signifies a band of people who have embraced Vaiṣṇavism. But, Nañciyar, one of the Vaiṣṇavite *ācāryas*, gives the definition of Vaiṣṇavite like this: "Any one can test himself as a true Vaiṣṇavite or not. If, when seeing others' adversity, his pity be excited, and he does ejaculate 'oh!' he may know himself as a true Vaiṣṇavite; but if his heart be steeled against others' tribulation and further vitiated by emotions of vile pleasure surging up at his sight, he

25. T.V.M 1.5: 11; 6.4: 11.

26. ibid. 5.2: 9; 5.6: 1; 7.4: 11; 10.5: 11; 10.9: 7, 8, 11.

27. ibid. 3.5: 11; 3.7: 7, 9, 10.

28. ibid. 3.7: 4; 3.7: 11; 5.2: 10; 6.9: 11; 10.8: 11.

29. ibid. 5.2: 9.

30. ibid. 2.6: 11; 2.7: 1.

31. ibid. 10.9: 1, 2.

32. ibid. 10.9: 5.

33. ibid. 10.9: 6.

34. ibid. 10.9: 9.

35. ibid. 5.5: 11; cf. Periyāḷ. Tm. 5.1: 3.

may know himself as not belonging to such a holy band. To be a Vaiṣṇavite is to belong to God, and *vice-versa*. To belong to God is to be like God Himself, i.e., conform to the ideals which he has preached and practised, one of these ideals being to be "the Friends of all Creatures".³⁶ It appears that both these words relate to one and the same meaning. Again the words 'pāttar'; 'aṭiyār' (*aṭiyavar*), 'tonṭar' and 'pakavar' signify only devotees of Viṣṇu; they may be taken for granted emphasizing respectively: *Bhakti*-reverential love, *Aṭimat*-absolute self-surrender, and *Tonṭu*-service. "Pakavar" signifies a kind of devotees who carry 'mukkōl, or 'tiri-daṇḍa' with them. The *Tolkāppiyam* refers to them as 'antaṇar'³⁷ who are ascetics. The same work refers to 'pārppār' (brahmins),³⁸ 'arivar'³⁹ (sages or wise men), and 'tāpatar'.⁴⁰ It is certain that these words do not refer to the same class of people or each word does not refer to different types of people. *Pārppār* are different from *arivar* and *antaṇar*. The latter refer to ascetics, who have controlled their senses and the mind, always thinking of God, and who can predict the past, present and future incidents. *Tāpatar* are those who are *tapasvins* and who are ready to attain the state of *arivar*. *Pārppār* are brahmins who have only taken up the study of *Vedas*, but who have not attained the state of *arivar* or *antaṇar*. There are references in *Kalit-tokat*⁴¹ to *antaṇar*. The *tiri-daṇḍa* can be taken to signify *Īsvara*, *cit acit* and the relationship between which explain the principles of Viśiṣṭādvaitic Vaiṣṇavism. References to 'mukkōl' (*tiri-daṇḍa*) are found in the *Pattup-pāṭṭu*⁴² and the *Kalit-tokai*.⁴³ Naccinārkiṇiyar, the well-known commentator, gives the meaning of the phrase, 'mukkōl koḷ antaṇar' occurring in the work as 'saf-

36. *Iṭṭin Tamiḷākkam* Vol. I, 1.2: 1.

37. T.L.K. 3: Śūtras, 615, 616.

38. *ibid.* - Śūtras: 74, 175.

39. *ibid.* Śūtras: 74, 152.

40. *ibid.* Śūtra, 74.

41. K.L.T. 9, 119.

42. *Mullap-pāṭṭu* - 1. 38.

43. K.L.T. 126, 1. 4.

from colour dressed groups of people' thereby meaning ascetics⁴⁴. The later work *Taṅcālvāṇaṅ kōvai* speaks of 'mukkōṭ-pakavar'.⁴⁵ It is these ascetics who are referred to as *pakavar* in the ancient Tamil literature. The later works such as *Kōvai* literature refer to them as 'mukkōṭ-pakavar' and 'mikkōṭ'. It is said that a knowledge of philosophy and love of God are the two basic necessities for any kind of religious faith. It is also assumed that the former does intensify the latter. But it is well-known that these two are not found to exist in persons in equal measure. Some are more philosophical-minded and others more religious-minded. But the inclination of both is towards renunciation. Those whose inclination is more towards philosophy are known as 'pakavar' and those householders whose inclination is towards *bhakti* as 'aṭiyār'. Periyālvār not only refers to these types of devotees, but also sages who recite the *Vedas*: "Pattarkaḷum pakavarkaḷum paḷamoḷivāy muṇivarkaḷum"⁴⁶ – the *bhaktas*, *pakavars* and sages who mouth *Vedas*'. Nammālvār refers to both these saints in his *Tiruvāymoḷi*. Says the Ālvār: "The world is full of *aṭiyārs* and *pakavars* who render service to God by strictly adhering to the principles of *bhakti-mārga* and by uttering the *Puruṣa-sūktas*, *Nārāyaṇuvāka* etc.; so go to them, reverentially worship them and attain salvation".⁴⁶ This advice of the Ālvār, according to the commentators, relates to those who render service to the Lord as for example to Lakṣmaṇa to Rāma referred to here as *aṭiyārs* and to those who meditate the Lord and his manifold auspicious qualities as for instance Bharata to Rāma. Ājavantār interprets 'toṭṭar' (worship) as the worship of the devotees of God; but Rāmānuja interprets it as the worship of God. Even though all the words denote the *bhāgavatas* in general, some distinction can be seen through from the suggestive meanings of *toṭṭar*, *aṅpar* and *paṭṭar*. The word 'aṅpar' can be taken as emphasizing, 'toṭṭar' the bodily activity and 'paṭṭar' the speech aspect. *Aṭiyārs* are the life of the *Bhakti* cult. It is from this point of view that Vaiṣṇavism becomes a religion of service.

44. *Taṅcālvāṇaṅ kōvai*, 341.

45. Periyāḷ. Tm. 4.9: 6.

46. T.V.M. 5.2: 9. cf. 4.4: 9.

In regard to the Supreme Ruler of all, the *jīva* who is the *śeṣa* is bound to promote His glory. That glory will depend on the nature of the *śeṣa*, whether it be sentient or non-sentient. The *jīva*, with his body and the like, can confer only such glory as non-sentient things do. So this service is common to him and *acit*. The special glory that he can promote must be by means of his intelligence. "Bhagavān, Who has all beings as His body, rejoices when a *jīva* does what is good and does not rejoice when the action is evil"⁴⁷ when a man acts in accordance with the *Sāstras*, he gives thereby delight to the Lord and thus does not let his generosity and other qualities run to waste, but promotes the glory of the Lord so that He extols him as "All these are indeed, generous."⁴⁸ Again they are the devotees whose devotion is single-minded and whose highest goal is only the Lord. They live in the Divine. God is dear to them and they are dear to God. These devotees belong to God to be used according to His will. These can give rise to a special kind of enjoyment to the Lord and thus promote His glory in the same way as the *muktas* and the *nityas* do so by direct perception of the Lord's will and by acting in such a way as to give Him enjoyment. "When shall I always be Thy servant, look upon Thee as my Master and in this way give Thee delight?" says *Ālavantār*.

In Vaiṣṇavism the cult of the *bhāgavata* worship of the *aṭīyārs* or devotees - is considered greater than the worship of the Lord Himself. The *sāstras* disclose that the service rendered to His devotees is most delightful to Him. The following authoritative statements bear testimony to this: "Of all forms of homage, the homage paid to Viṣṇu is the best, but superior even to this, is the excellent homage or adoration to Viṣṇu's devotees"⁴⁹ "I have great affection to those who are devoted to my devotees. Therefore one should render

47 M.Bh. Śānti. 199 : 25.

48. Bh. G. 7: 18.

49. *Śotrāratnam*, 46.

50. *Padmottaram*, 29: 81.

devout service to them".⁵¹ "They are my devotees who do not show devotion to any other deity, who love those that are devoted to me and that have sought me as their *upāya*".⁵² From these statements it becomes clear that, of all forms of service which a *śeṣa* of the Lord may render, that rendered to the *bhāgavatas* is the most important and is the most pleasing to the Lord, in the same way as the fondling of the prince is most pleasing to the king. Again, according to *pramāṇas*, *śvara*, who has the *bhāgavata* as His body is the object of worship. As the devotees are His very self,⁵³ He would be pleased at the service rendered to *bhāgavata*, as if it were service rendered (directly) to His own inner self and not as that done to His body. Nammālvār speaks of service rendered to the *bhāgavatas* as the supreme goal of life. In referring to the result flowing from the recitation of his hymns the Ālvār says: "The Lord and His Spouse will possess them and they will get the benefit of rendering service to the devotees of Viṣṇu,"⁵⁴ and "they would live amidst wife and children a full life and yet to be dedicated to the service of the devotees of the Lord."⁵⁵ In this connection, a beautiful anecdote is referred to by the commentators⁵⁶

Again, those who look upon themselves as *śeṣas* to His devotees are, mediately through these devotees, *śeṣas* to the Lord Himself. Tirup-pāpālvār says: 'The Lord Who is spotless and Who has made me the servant of His servants'—

51. M.Bh. Aśvamedika, 116: 23.

52. *ibid.* 104: 91.

53. Bh. G. 7: 18.

54. TVM 5.6: 11.

55. *ibid.* 8. 10: 11.

56. Once Rāmānuja returned to Tirukkōṭṭiyūr along with a great band of *bhāgavatas* and entered into the mansion of Celva Nampi who was then not in station. There was no rice in the house then except some hundred bundles of paddy-seeds reserved for sowing in the season. Nampi's wife hulled that paddy and fed the devotees. On the following day Nampi returned and when he enquired his wife about the absence of paddy-seeds, quickly came the reply "I have sown them in the Paramapada". (Vide: *Iṭṭin Tamil-ākkam* Vol. VIII 8. 10: 11 (Commentary).

“aṭiyārkkku ennai āṭpaṭutta vimalan.”⁵⁷ So does Nārada say: “I, Nārada, have come here with an eager longing to see you. To men like me, O Brahmin, those who are *bhaktas* of the Lord are masters.”⁵⁸ In this connection Periyālvār’s statement is very significant. “Those who are the servants of *bhāgavatas* – (devotees of devotees) – who utter such names as Kēcava, Puruṭōttama etc., of Bhagavān are entitled even to sell us.”⁵⁹ This is also the purport of the middle word in *Tirumantiram*, namely, *namo: na mama* (not for me). A reflection on this purport will clearly show that our being *śeṣa* to the Lord is both mediate (through the *bhāgavatas* and immediate (direct to Him). Accordingly the service that should be rendered by the *śeṣa* is also (both) mediate and direct. Therefore it is the farthest limit of our service to perform, as much as it lies in our power, service to the *bhāgavata*, since it is part of the duty of one who is *śeṣa* to Bhagavān. So this outer-most region of service to *bhāgavatas* should be kept properly cultivated so that it may not become fallow land full of weeds.

The *Āgamas* also support the service to the *bhāgavatas*. “It is not wrong for a wedded wife to honour her husband and to honour his servants, whether in his presence, or absence”⁶⁰ and “Among the Lord’s retinue are two classes: those that are dear to Him and worthy of His trust and those who are not. To the former class belong the Eternals, the released souls and the *bhāgavatas*. To the latter class belong Brahmā and other gods who are subject to the sway of past *karma*. The seeker after salvation should not adore the latter;”⁶¹ the devotee who is exclusively attached to the Lord and whose *dharma* resembles that of a chaste wife would therefore do well to act according to the will of his Lord. Since the relationship of *śeṣa* to *bhāgavatas* arises

57. A.P. 1.

58. *Padmottaram*, 81: 52.

59. Periyālvār. Tm. 4.4: 10.

60. Pous. Sam. cited in R.T.S. Ch. 16.

61. *ibid.* cited *ibid.*

from no other cause than the knowledge of our being *śeṣa* only to the Lord and to no other, this service to the *bhāgavatas* is not improper, because it does not arise from other causes like the desire for wealth or power.

Maturakaviyālvār can be cited as the best instance of a devotee of Lord's devotee as he says, "Nannit ten kurukūr nampi enṛakkāl, anṇikkum amutu ūrum en nāvukkē" - 'In clinging to Nammālvār, if I utter his name it is highly sweet; even nectar secretes in my tongue' and "Tēvu maṛṛaiyēn" - 'I do not know any other God except my own *guru*, Nammālvār.' Saivism refers to these type of saints as '*Pattarāyp-paṣṭivār*' (devotees of devotees). '*Paṇṭal*' emphasizes here bending low in humility and service. Like Maturakaviyālvār in Vaiṣṇavism were saints in the Saivism also who worshipped the three great *Tēvāram* saints with reverence and admiration. Kaṇanātar worshipped Campantar; Appūtiyaṭikal worshipped Appar; and Perumiḷalaikkuṟumpar worshipped Nampi Ārūrar. Irrespective of the greatness of Saivite *aṭiyārs* it was thought that one should offer one's service to the *aṭiyārs* in general looking upon them as no other than the Lord Siva himself. In the biography of certain saints like Ēnātinātar, Meyp-poruḷ Nāyanar, Pukaḷccōḷa Nāyanar and Kaḷaṟiṟṟaivār the reverence for the outward form is clearly brought out and they were prepared to offer their all and sacrifice their dearest and nearest as well as their own lives. This is termed as *Carṭya-mārga* in Saivism. According to Vaiṣṇavism, following the path of the Lord is *Sāra Dharma* the good; surrender to Him is *Sārataha Dharma*, the better; surrender to His devotees is *Sāratama Dharama*, the best. Therefore it is said that God would forgive an offence to Himself, but an offence to His devotees - *aṭiyārs* - was unpardonable. *Bhāgavata-apacāra* is more heinous than *Bhagavat - apacāra*.

Though it is said, in general, that one should serve the devotees of God, and the devotees of God are treated as deities, yet the best relation that could be said to crown the devotion for a devotee is that of an individual's treating the devotee as his spiritual preceptor. Maturakaviyālvār stands

at the head of the best of disciples who propitiated the devotee. God is available for man to get from Him enjoyment of bliss, *mokṣa* and detachment. The Lord Himself comes to rescue the devotee from sins. He teaches the nature of Reality to him and gives him His nature and descends down for the sake of those who are devoted to Him. Yet Maturakaviyālvār sought the feet of Nammālvār who rendered into Tamil the difficult imports of the *Vedas*⁶².

The idea of reverential feeling towards the devotees is nothing new. Periyālvār talks of these devotees as a separate community – “*tonṭakkulam*”⁶³ (a clan of divine servants or devotees) thereby abolishing the feeling of all castes, and creating a spiritual community of all those who worship the Lord to whatever caste or creed they may belong.⁶⁴ The love for God reaches its highest point only when it becomes the love of the *bhāgavatas* or *tonṭars*, even to the neglect of God. The phrase ‘*tonṭaraṭip-pōṭi*’ referred to by Kulacēkarālvār is very significant; the dust on the feet of the devotees is purer than the waters of the sacred Gaṅga according to the conviction of the Ālvār. “*Toṭṭaraṭip-poṭi āṭa nām peṭil, kaṅkai nṛ kuṭaintu āṭum vēṭkai eṇ āvatē?*”⁶⁵ is the statement of the Ālvār. In fact the whole hymn speaks out the Ālvār’s regard and respect for the devotees of the Lord. There is no greater profit or pleasure for the eyes than to look at a gathering of the true devotees of Lord Raṅganātha who dance in ecstasy out of feelings of love towards the ‘Dark Gem’ that resides at ṣrī Raṅgam. In Saivism Cuntaramūrtti creates a democracy of devotees, a democracy of all times and climes. In his well-known hymn of *Tēvāram*, better known as *Tiruttonṭattokai*, he enumerates with joy the names of all these saints.⁶⁶ It is a beautiful vision of all such *āṭiyārs* of the past, the present and the future belonging to the whole of the universe, a vision

62. *Guruparamparā-sāra* Introductory verse. 2.

63. Periyālvār. Tm. 1.1: 5.

64. M.Bh. Śānti. 108: 32.

65. *Perum. Tm.* 2: 2.

66. *Tēvāram* 7.39.

of a spiritual democracy of love and service. In the hymns of Ālvārs there occur some requests to the birds to carry the message of love-sick maiden to the Lord. The Vaiṣṇavite commentators have always interpreted these birds as the *bhaktas*, as spiritual guides carrying the message to the Lord.⁶⁷ The four hymns of *Tiruvāymoḷi*⁶⁸ on sending of messages through birds have to be interpreted in this manner. Many of the Ālvārs take a pride in calling themselves as *Toṅṅarkal*,⁶⁹ *Toṅṅaraṭip-poḷi*,⁷⁰ *Aṭṭiyān*,⁷¹ *Toṅṅaṅ Caṭakōpaṅ*,⁷² *Toṅṅaṅēn*.⁷³

It was a common belief in the age of Ālvārs that for a full-blown devotee to be born, his previous seven generations should have been pure and should have been worshipping the Lord. Periyālvār refers to this as, "Entai tantai tantai tantai tam mūttappaṅ ēḷpaṭikāḷ toṅṅaṅki, vantu vaḷivaḷi āṭceykin-ṛōm"⁷⁴ – 'My father, his father, his father, his father, his grand father and like this we have been serving the Lord for the last seven generations.' The same belief is referred to by Nammālvār also. "We are the devotees of those people who have been worshipping the Lord Who is sleeping on the banyan leaf in the Milky Ocean as a small child after having taken the world trodden by His sacred Feet at the time of Tirivikramāvatāra in His stomach in their seven generations,"⁷⁵ says the Ālvār. The Ālvār considers those devotees of devotees as his masters provided they become the devotees of the *cāṅṅāḷas* of *cāṅṅāḷas* who are far beyond the lowest rungs of the four castes when these *cāṅṅāḷas* are the devotees of blue-coloured Lord with discus in His right hand.⁷⁶ Again, he says that the

67. Vide : A.H. Sūtras. 150-156.

68. T.V.M. 1.4; 6.1; 6.8; 9.7.

69. *Perivāḷ Tm*. 1.1 : 8.

70. T.M. 45.

71. T.E. 10.

72. T.V.M. 6.9 ; 11; 7.1 : 11; 8.9 : 11.

73. *ibid.* 8.5 . 6.

74. *Perivāḷ Tm* 1.1 : 6.

75. T.V.M. 3.7: 10; cf. *ibid.* 3.7: 1.

76. *ibid.* 3.7: 9.

people who are undergoing the most difficult punishment in the hell are worthy of His worship in His manifold births provided they worship the Lord Who is the creator of the world Whose greatness cannot be comprehended even by the celestials and in Whose bosom Lakṣmī has taken Her abode.⁷⁷ In another place he refers to God as "Empirānai entai tantai tantaikkum tampirānai"⁷⁸ - 'God not only as his helper, but also the Lord and master of his father and his father (meaning all his forefathers).' It may be noted the same belief being expressed in the Tirumaṅkaiyālvār's hymns also. "Oh the Lord of Tiruvintaḷūr! Thou art hesitating to show Thy physical presence to me who belong to a family in which the past seven generations are continuously rendering devoted service to Thee,"⁷⁹ says the Ālvār.

The compositions of the Ālvārs furnish much information on the greatness of the devotees. If people think simply that Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are only the Lord descended on earth, they would be the Lord's men (*bhāgavatas*) and the gods would be pleased at this and they will ever have their palms folded to respect them.⁸⁰ Nammālvār waxes eloquent while speaking the greatness of the devotees. The *bhaktas* sing the praise of the Lord and move about the earth with the result that the hells and the sins have been destroyed on earth and the lord of Death has no work to do nor has the *kali* age anything to do.⁸¹ This shows that the names of the Lord as also His praises, when uttered, purify not merely those who express or sing them but also those who listen to them. This does not stop there. The entire regions which are traversed by such devotees become purified, leaving no room for any evil force.⁸² On account of this, the *kali* age become *kṛta* age.⁸³ Diseases, hatred, hunger and other evil forces have

77. *ibid.* 3.7: 8.

78. *ibid.* 1.10: 3.

79. Peri. Tm. 4.9: 9.

80. P.Tv. 64.

81. T.V.M. 5.2: 1, 2; cf. *ibid.* 5.2: 4.

82. V.Dh. Ch. 90; cf. T.M. 12.

83. T.V.M. 5.2: 3.

become destroyed.⁸⁴ The *bhāgavatas* are the bodies of the Lord and as such they could be worshipped.⁸⁵ This decad 5.2 of *Tiruvāymoḷi* asks people to worship the devotees of God. The worship of such great souls is held to be greater significance than that of God Himself.⁸⁶ Affection for the devotees of God, rejoicing when God is worshipped by them, eagerness to listen to the narrations about Him, affection of the tone, eye and limbs while others worship the Lord, making one's own attempt to worship Him, straight forwardness (absence of hypocrisy) in dealing with the Lord, constant thinking of Him and dependence upon Him not for the ends other than *mokṣa* are stated to be the eightfold devotion. Even the misbehaved (*mleccha*), who has these, is the best among the brahmins, is a meditator, is prosperous, is a recluse and scholar. One shall give gifts to him and shall receive gifts from him. He is to be worshipped like God Himself'.⁸⁷

An ardent devotee shall aspire to long for the companionship of the *bhāgavatas*. The Āḷvār likes to have the company of the devotees of the Lord even in the state of release.⁸⁸ He is anxiously yearning to get the opportunity of rendering service to them.⁸⁹ Those fortunate persons who reflect upon the greatness of the sacred places like Tirukkāḷmallai are to be treated as lords,⁹⁰ nay they are the deities.⁹¹ They are to be worshipped⁹² and circumambulated.⁹³ The *bhāgavatas* who bow at the Feet of the Lord at Tiruccērai deserve to sit upon other's heads, that is, they

84. *ibid.* 5.2: 6.

85. *ibid.* 5.2: 7.

86. *Padmottaram* 29: 81.

87. *Gar. P* 219.6: 9.

88. *T.V.M.* 2.3: 10.

89. *T.V.C.* 3.

90. *Peri. Tm.* 2.6: 2, 3.

91. *ibid.* 2.6: 4.

92. *ibid.* 2.6: 7, 8, 9.

93. *ibid.* 2.6: 6.

are fit to be bowed by others.⁹⁴ Such persons dwell for ever in the heart of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār.⁹⁵ This Ālvār states emphatically that he would not leave the company of these great men⁹⁶ who could be taken to be superior even to the eternal selves.⁹⁷ His heart feels the delectable experience when it thinks of them.⁹⁸ His senses derive supreme satisfaction as they set on them.⁹⁹ Neither the god of Death nor sins would dare approach those who worship these *bhāgavatas*.¹⁰⁰ The Ālvār speaks with full of feeling that in worldly experience which is felt to be excruciating, he is singularly fortunate in that his mind is set on the devout persons who worship the Feet of Śrī Sārānatha at Tiruccērai.¹⁰¹ Again it has been stated in the *Śāstras* the choice of a proper residence for a devotee. A devotee shall choose to live in a place where the *bhāgavatas* dwell.¹⁰² The people, who live in Tirukkōṭṭiyūr must have practised austerities for living there where live the devotees of God.¹⁰³ That place shall be chosen where the devotees of God are honoured.¹⁰⁴

According to Vaiṣṇavism, offence against God's devotees (*bhāgavata apacāra*) is the worst of all sins. God will neither brook nor excuse who offend His devotees. It is to punish the offender of the devotees that God took birth again and again in this world. This is also the secret (*rahasya*) of His *avatāra* (divine descent).¹⁰⁵ One of the several kinds offence against God's devotees distinction of caste shown between one *bhāgavata* and another is worst. This is even more

94. *ibid.* 7.4: 1.

95. *ibid.* 7.4: 2.

96. *ibid.* 7.4: 4.

97. *ibid.* 7.4: 3.

98. *ibid.* 7.4: 5.

99. *ibid.* 7.4: 6, 7.

100. *ibid.* 7.4: 8.

101. *ibid.* 7.4: 9.

102. cf. R.T.S. : *Sthānaviśeṣādhikāra* (Chap. 19).

103. Periyāḷ. T.m. 4.4 : 7.

104. M.Bh. Śānti. 349: 86 to 88.

105. S.V.P. Chap; 2. Sūt. 78.

heinous than examining the material of which God's image is made in the temple. This has been pronounced in the *Śāstras* as equivalent to a man's examining the womb of his own mother.¹⁰⁶ The punishment for offending the feelings of God's devotees are, as it is seen in the ancient scripts, very severe and, strictly speaking, severer than offending God Himself. To cite a few examples, Tiricaṅku, a kṣatriya, became an outcaste (*caṇḍāla*) in one night by offending sage Vasiṣṭa; when Prahlaḍa, a devotee of Nārāyaṇa, was threatened by his father Hiranya, the Lord appeared as Narasimha and killed the offender of His devotee;¹⁰⁷ Garuḍa lost his wings by wounding the feelings of Cāṇḍilyai (a female devotee) residing in *Riṣaba* Hills. Garuḍa's crime was that he considered the residence of Cāṇḍilyai not as a holy Hill but as an ordinary mountain.¹⁰⁸ Soma Sarma, a brahmin possessed by a *brahma rākṣasa*, got himself free from it by the blessings of Nampāṭuvāṇ, an outcaste devotee.¹⁰⁹ From these examples it is learnt that there is no question of superiority of birth in a devotee.

Brahmin birth is intended to be useful for the study of the *Vedas* and thereby attaining God. But if that study conduces to *bhāgavata apacāra*, the study becomes useless and his birth has no value. God, according to *Taṇṭaraṭip-poṭiyālvār*, has instructed those (brahmins) who follow the traditional knowledge of the four *Vedas* to respect His devotees even though they belong to the lowest caste and give the highest truth to them and take the same from them.¹¹⁰ If they, though born of brahmin caste and learnt the *Vedas* and their *aṅgas*, speak disrespectfully of His devotees and their castes, the very instant they would become outcastes.¹¹¹ The *Ālvār* goes to the extent of saying that those who accept the remnants of food from the devotees of the Lord,

106. *ibid.* Chap. 2. Sūt. 83.

107. *Peri. Tm.* 2.3 : 8; 3.1 : 4.

108. *M.Bh. Udyoga Ch.* 112.

109. *Kalśika Vṛttānta.*

110. *T.M.* 42. cf. *ibid.* 39.

111. *ibid.* 43.

devotees in the sense that they have simply praised Him as the One Whom the celestials cannot see and as the One Who has worn the fresh *tuḷaci* garland, though the latter have committed baser acts and have abetted others to commit these acts.¹¹² By these, it is seen that one's high or low birth is not the primary cause for attaining salvation, but the true cause is his relationship with God. In attaining *mokṣa*, the brahmin is necessarily at a disadvantageous position if he is proud on account of his high birth. Secondly, by virtue of his birth, he is obliged to observe other means of salvation, namely, *bhakti-yoga* which is a steep path hedged in by the exacting conditions of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* including the wearisome disciplines of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* and the *sātvic* patience to endure the ills of *prārabdha-karma* till it is exhausted or expiated which are against the true nature of the soul. So long as a brahmin has got these two faults in him, it is ever difficult for him to attain salvation. Those in the other castes too have the same disability varying in greater or less degree.¹¹³ The *caṇḍāla* of the lowest rank has no such predicament; he is totally free from the superiority complex of birth which is a great impediment to salvation. So every one must cultivate the virtues of humility and recognise the utter uselessness of seeking other means of salvation.

On the other hand one must regard these low born devotees as equal to *ācārya*, and superior to *samsārtis* (worldlings), to himself and even to God. These truths are shown in *Itihāsas*, *Purāṇas*, and *Āḷvār's* hymns. It is generally believed that for the good done in this generation we reap the fruits in the next. So it may be argued that these *bhāgavatas* of the low caste can become sages only in the next. It is also argued that conversion will not be visible in the one and the same life. But it is not so in the case of *bhāgavatas*. The moment the *caṇḍāla* becomes a devotee, he becomes spiritually reborn and entitled to all respect. Nammāḷvār's reference to *caṇḍāla* as mentioned above can be an instance in point.

112. *ibid.* 41.

113. *Iti. Sam.* 30: 100.

There are other illustrations also. While Viśvāmitra, a *kṣatriya*, can become a *Brahma-ṛṣi* in the same generation, it is not strange or impossible that a devotee of God can become purified in the same generation. Śrī Rāma performed *Brahma-mēdha* (rites due to a Brahmin) to Jaṭāyu, a mere bird, because the latter had by devotion attained that merit. Dharmaputra performed similar rite to Vidhura though the latter was a *sudra*. Several *ṛṣis* waited at the gate of Dharmavyādha (the butcher devotee) to clear their doubts in the *Vedas*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, passing through the dwellings of learned Bhiṣma, the high born Droṇa, and of King Duryodhana, delighted in dining in the house of the blessed Vidhura, as he offered the food with all humility and God's own unlike the offerings of others which were tainted with *ahaṅkāra*. Again Śrī Rāma graciously accepted with love the half-bitten fruit from Sabhari, a hunter devotee. Periya Nampi, one of the spiritual masters of Rāmānuja performed *Brahma-mēdha* according to the highest Brahmin rites, to Māra-Nēr Nampi (equivalent to Parāṅkuṣa himself), a Harijan saint, a disciple of Ālavantār. Therefore in the philosophy of *aṭṭyārs* one attains one's greatness only by one's *bhakti*, not by one's birth. In the words of Piḷḷaipperumāḷ Ayyēṅār¹¹⁴ only those who transcend the barriers of consciousness of birth, caste and other factors are entitled to be included in the fold of *tonṭakkulam*¹¹⁵ – universal brotherhood – the *ḷ*vision of Periyāḷvār. Therefore one has to please the *bhāgavatas* in order to win the Grace of the Lord. This is a condition that is necessarily to be fulfilled.¹¹⁶ Such persons would be relieved of their sins.¹¹⁷ People meet with downfall by bending before those who are not the devotees of Viṣṇu, by insulting Kēcava and scandalizing the devotees of the Lord. Those who are unfavourably disposed to the devotees of the Lord are farther away from the Lord.¹¹⁸

114. *Tiruvarāṅkak-kalampakam*, 15.

115. *Periyāḷ. Tm.* 1.1: 5.

116. *Iti. Sam.* 27: 26.

117. *M.Bh. Āśramavāsika*, 96: 46.

118. *V.Dh.* 99: 13.

Even Garuḍa, the Lord's servant, friend, vehicle, seat and emblem on the banner, who committed an offence against the righteous Sāṅḍiliyai had to undergo the evil consequences of it until he obtained pardon from her. It may be asked whether an Eternal like Garuḍa could commit offences at all. The answer is that, if the Eternals incarnate like Bhagavān, they have to act the part of those who are subject to the sway of *karma* and perform atonement for offences in order to promote the good of the world by setting a proper example. Of these sins which have to be atoned for, Śrī Rāmānuja has pointed out that offences done to the *bhāgavatas* stand in the front rank like those done to the wives of a king.¹¹⁹ Rāmānuja says that though the fruit of *upāsana* or *bhakti* is *mukti* still the time of its attainment is uncertain, because of the presence or absence of obstacles. It may be asked whether there could be any such obstacle in the case of one whose *upāsana* which gets him *mukti* is far stronger than all other *karmas*. The answer is, according to Bhāṣyakāra, that even in his case there may be obstacles of the nature of offences done in the past to those who meditate on Brahman.

It is true that particular actions and absention from such actions have been prescribed in the case of *bhāgavatas* as due to conditions of caste and the like as stated in the *Vedānta Sūtra*: "That there is permission and prohibition in respect of castes is due to their relationship with their bodies as in such things as fire."¹²⁰ In spite of these ordinances the following also should be considered. "Even a man of bad conduct should be considered a good man if he worships Me without expecting any other benefit. He should be treated with respect."¹²¹ "The *caṇḍāḷa* who has devotion to Bhagavān – to think even by mere chance, of this *caṇḍāḷa* to talk to him and to treat him with respect – these purify the man who does so, O Brahmin."¹²² "Whether the devotee of Bhagavān be a

119. V.S. 3.4: 51 (Rāmānuja's commentary)

120. V.S. 2.3: 47.

121. Bh. G. 9: 40.

122. Iti. Sam. 31: 55.

sudra, a huntsman, or a man who eats a dog's flesh, the man who looks upon him as identical with other men of those respective castes will go to hell."¹²³ "Therefore one should do what one can to please the devotees of Bhagavān. By this, Bhagavān becomes favourably disposed to bless one. There is no doubt about this."¹²⁴ So also has it been said by Nammālvār that those who are the devoted servants of the Lord even if they are born of the lowest rung of the castes and *caṇḍālas* of *caṇḍālas* are his masters in all his future births;¹²⁵ and that the moment he made up his mind to render service to the Lord's devotees, his past *karma* was destroyed and that he would never think of giving up his service.¹²⁶ In the same way, it is our duty not to fail in reverence toward's Lord's servants. Even if there is only this mental reverence, it would amount to *śeṣa*'s service to the Lord Who is perfect and self-sufficient. The thought that "this man is of the Lord" is itself capable of doing good. If there is any deviation from this path, one should tremble in fear as if one has entered into the jaws of Death. In such a case, one should at once beg pardon of these devoted servants of the Lord, as in the case of Sugrīva and Lakṣmaṇa who apologise to each other."¹²⁷

Whether a man has offended *bhāgavatas* in this life or whether some *bhāgavatas* hate him owing to his wicked deeds in past lives though he has committed no offence in this life, he should obtain the pardon of Bhagavān by obtaining the pardon of such *bhāgavatas* by some means or other. If a man does not do so, he will pass beyond the reach of the Grace of the Lord and will lose also what is essential to his nature as a devotee to Viṣṇu, namely, his being a *śeṣa* to Bhagavān and, likewise, his qualities of self-restraint and patience. For it has been said: "Those who are *bhāgavatas*, they are Myself: There is no doubt about this; when they are adored, I am adored; when they are pleased, I am also

123. *ibid.* 27: 26.

124. *ibid.* 27: 27.

125. T.V.M. 3.7: 9; cf. Peri. Tm. 2 6: 2 to 10.

126. *ibid.* 8.10.

127. Rām. Kiṣkinda 32: 7; 33: 11; 36: 28.

pleased. He who hates them hates Me also."¹²⁸ Toṅṅaraṅip-
poṅṅiyāṅṅvār who realised and enjoyed his relationship of being
a śeṅṅa to the bhāṅṅavatas, which he considered as his distinc-
tive feature, has described how miserable it is to be outside
the pale of Lord's Grace as follows: "My Lord has not said
'This is a lad deserving of my affection.' How wicked are my
sins!"¹²⁹ The Āṅṅvārs in general are always conscious of not
committing offences to the devotees of Bhagavān, as in the
following passages: 'We will never do what ought not to be
done. We will never go to any ācārya and study heretical
Śāstras' - "ceyyātana ceyyōm, tikkuraṅṅai ceṅṅru oṅṅōm,"¹³⁰
and 'Vouchsafe Thy Grace so that I may not do wicked deeds' -
"ceyyēṅṅ tṅṅivai eṅṅru aruṅṅ ceyyum."¹³¹ If we consider the
statement of Tirumaṅṅicaiyāṅṅvār viz., "O Lord of the world!
Consider my offences as virtuous acts," it also means the
prayer that offences should be pardoned. Therefore, if a
devotee happens to commit an offence, he is bound to obtain
pardon. "Whether offences are committed deliberately or
out of ignorance, the only expiation that is required is to say
'Pardon me'."¹³² Periyāṅṅvār says: "My servants will not
commit offences. Even if they ecommit them, I will consider
them as if they were virtuous."¹³³ Even this verse indicates
that offences are not unlikely. The sentence "If they commit
offences, I will consider them as virtuous actions" means
"If done out of ignorance, I will pardon them. If offences
are committed deliberately and if they do not obtain pardon,
I will condone them after inflicting punishment, but will never
forsake them." That, as a matter of fact, these offences are
not virtuous acts as is indicated therein when it is said: "It
will be considered as if they were good deeds." It is
distinctly stated: "If there is an offence, expiation should
be done at once. The expiation that is to be done is to per-
form *prapatti* again."¹³⁴

128. V.Dh. 52: 20.

129. T.M. 37.

130. T.P. 2.

131. T.V.M. 2.9: 3.

132. Vaṅṅkipuram Nampi: Kārika. 520.

133. Periyāṅṅ. Tm. 4.9: 2.

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

The celebration of festivals and observance of sacred days play an appreciable role in the cult of the *bhāgavatas*. The sanctity of certain moments and periods of time by association with memorable events, holy persons, and notable psychic experiences is the basic idea underlying the observance of sacred days and festivals. The one noteworthy feature of the Hindu attitude in this respect is the thoroughness with which the principle is worked out in the programme of devotions and pious exercises for every month and almost every day. All Hindu festivals are predominantly religious in character and significance. Though the origins of many of them are lost in the gloom of remote past, they all alike bear witness to the wide-spread popular faith and interest in the exercise of piety and devotion - in fasting, in vigils, in worship, in ablution, in offering to the manes, in gifts to holy persons, and in the practice of austerities and physical hardships as benefiting the spirit within. They also show as it were, how festivities lent joy and jest and variety to life's monotonous routine.

The observances of fasts and feasts are spread over all the months of the year, and are intended to serve as occasions for intensive contemplation of God. They are meant to be holidays from worldly life, especially the fasts giving opportunities to man to look within and search his heart. Many of these festivals are commemorations of great events recorded in the *Purāṇas*. The advent of *avatāras* like Narasimha, Rama and Kṛṣṇa, and the momentous events like the vanquishment of the demon Naraka by Viṣṇu are celebrated. One observes colourful scenes on such festive days in Indian cities and villages alike, because they are meant to be occasions for joys and thanks giving. Each one of these festivals commemorates the glory of God which puts down evil and enables good to prevail. Symbolically these feasts mean the overcoming of all that is base in us by the higher or real self.

A different group of festivals are the purificatory fasts. The followers of Vaiṣṇavite cult have their own special days in the year which they spend exclusively in prayer and worship. Many people on these occasions fast and keep vigil during the

night, read from the sacred texts and keep their minds engaged in thoughts on God. Birthdays (*Tiru-naksatrams*) of the Ālvārs and those of great spiritual teachers like Rāmānuja, Vedānta Deśika and Maṇavālamūnikāḥ are also celebrated in temples. During those occasions verses from the *Nālayiram* are recited. Hinduism has always given the pride of place to the *ācāryas*. In the temples are honoured not only the idols of the Lord but also the images of the devotees. The true leaders of humanity are they who lift the veil of ignorance and let the lamp of God-knowledge shine. They are the real heroes who through spiritual valour and divine courage conquer the forces of evil and help their fellow-men to cross safely the ocean of *samsāra*. It is but fitting, therefore, that the dates of their advent should be commemorated every year.

The one purpose that runs through all the festivals is to create a spiritual climate for the people, a climate in which they could find their spiritual health and cultivate their soul. It is on these days, if properly observed, that one really lives. They are days of renewal of contact with God but for Whose presence no creature can live even for a moment. It is true that the ideal life is that which is spent without any break in the contemplation of God and in the service of all beings. To the truly wise all days are holy and sacred. But the people at large who have a long way to travel on the spiritual road need special days of prayer and religious rest. The festivals which are such days serve the same purpose in *time* as the temples do in *space*. Just as the temples are places which remind us of God, the festivals are times which make us commune with Him. Not only through worship and daily service of the images of the deities, but through the grand celebrations of their annual festivals, when the deities were taken out in procession, these temples created religious fervour among huge crowds of people drawn from far and near. The car-festival, specially, drew together the entire population of the locality. That such festivals in temples served as suitable occasions for religious discourses is also known from a reference in the Tamil work *Peruṅkatai*¹³⁵

135. *Peruṅkatai*.

The compositions of the Ālvārs refer to the occasions of festivals connected in temples. It is natural that the devotees of the Lord would throng in larger numbers on such occasions. Tirunaṟaiyūr¹³⁶ is said to have the streets ever putting on festival appearance. Those who are well-versed in the four *Vedas* are stated to join together and celebrate the festival for the Lord at Tirukkōṭṭiyūr and greet Him.¹³⁷ Tirukkappapuram is also a place of the Lord where the devotees of God have gathered in larger numbers in connection with festivals.¹³⁸ There are frequent references¹³⁹ to the celebration of the festival on the day having 'Tiruvōṇam' as the constellation which has Viṣṇu as the presiding deity.

136. Peri. Tm. 6.4: 8; 6.7: 1.

137. Periyal. Tm. 4.4; 7.

138. Peri. Tm 8. 7: 2.

139. Tiruppallāṅṅu. 6, 9; Nāṅ. Tv. 41.