

POST-ALVĀR PERIOD

SUMMARY

In this section it is shown how the religion and philosophy of the Ālvārs were formulated by the Ācāryas and how the gospel of the saints had been kept alive. From Nāthamuni up to Vedānta Deśika on the one hand and Maṇavālamūnikal on the other it is shown, with reference to the sources in the relevant texts and their commentaries, how these Ācāryas and their disciples and followers have promoted the Ālvār cult

It was Nāthamuni who arranged for the recitation of the compositions in temples and in private worship and also composed introductory verses called '*taniyans*' to certain compositions, which tradition was followed by his successors for other compositions. The establishment of Ācārya cult, the installation of niches and temples for the Ālvārs and Ācāryas, the writing of commentaries for the Ālvārs' compositions and the writing of the original works on the Ālvārs' poems by way of explanation or elucidation have helped the propagation of the cult. The contributions of Uyyakkōṭṭār, Maṇakkāl Nampi, Ājavantār and his six important disciples and Rāmānuja have kept alive the tradition of learning the compositions of the Ālvārs.

It is also shown how Rāmānuja had fulfilled the desires of Ājavantār who had laid down the

fundamentals of Viśiṣṭādvaita, how he was fully equipped by his six preceptors who were the important disciples of Ālavantār, how he took special interest in placing the *Nalayiram* on an equal footing with the *Vedas* and also how the Ālvārs' poems had helped him in writing his works

Further it is also pointed out how Rāmānuja established Ācārya dioceses with pious householders who were his disciples as their heads to popularise *Vaiṣṇavism* and its philosophy with the zeal of missionarise and how his followers like Kūrattālvān, Anantālvān, Piḷḷān, Mutaliyāptān, Kitāmpi Āccān, Yajñamūrtti, Vaākipurattu Nampi, Piḷḷaittirunāraiyyūr - Araiyar, Empār, Parācara Pattar and others have kept the mantle of Ālvār cult burning by their composing of 'tanīyans' for the poems of the Ālvārs and by their expositions of the *Prabandhams* regularly in temples and other places, and how those expositions have become to stay as permanent commentaries in certain cases are discussed here briefly. It is also shown how the two schools of *Vaiṣṇavism* arose for the propagation of the compositions of the Ālvārs after the death of Rāmānuja with two conflicting sets of works, two *Guruparamparas* which give two different accounts of Rāmānuja's successors and their achievements and also the probable causes which give rise to this schism. It is further pointed out how Vedānta Deśika as a representative of *Vāṭakalai* sect had flooded the Vaiṣṇavite world with his copious writings of many forms of religious literature in Tamil as well as in Sanskrit for the propagation of the Ālvār cult and how Piḷḷai Lōkācāryar as a representative of the

Tenkalai school had produced an appreciable quantum of works in the field for the same purpose. It is shown also how an attempt was made to depict the lives of Ālvārs and Ācāryas in the form of epic as in the case of *Divyasūri-caritam* and to recount the tradition of *Vaiṣṇavism* as in the case of *Prapann-āmr̥tam* and *Aricamaya-tīpam* according to the sources available to the authors of these works. The eighteen points of difference between the two sects of *Vaiṣṇavism* have received some brief discussion here.

How the impact of the *Nālayiram* as their basic text had a powerful influence and appeal to the exponents of *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* is indicated here and how this sacred anthology provided the basis of a speculative philosophy and how it bridged the gulf between day-to-day life and religion have been pointed out. It is further shown that the influence of the *Nālayiram* on temple worship is unique in that in no *Vaiṣṇavite* shrine in the South, the daily routine worship and the during the days of festivals are conducted without the recitation of portions or whole of one or more compositions of the Ālvārs. The recitation of the *Nālayiram* before the deity in procession and on twenty days in the month of *Mārkali* (December-January), the singing of *Tiruppavai* and *Tiruppalli-eḷucci* during *Mārkali* month and of '*Vāraṇamāyiram*' during marriages illustrate the influence of these compositions on society.

Even in the days of *Rāmānuja* it was felt the necessity of having a commentary for the *Tiruvāymoli* for the understanding of its philosophical and

religious purport. The *Six Thousand* was the first work brought out by Pillāṅṅ. Very soon other commentaries followed from the pen of Nācīyar, Alakiyamaṇavāla Jīyar, Periyavāccāṅ Pillai, Vatakkut-tiruvītip-pillai Kōneri, Tāsyai, Raṅgarāmānujamuni, Periyaparakālaśvāmin, Vedānta Rāmānujaśvāmin and others giving out the various shades of meanings and different kinds of interpretations to certain verses in these compositions thus contributing a great deal towards the philosophy and religion of the Ālvārs.

NĀTHAMUNI TO RĀMĀNUJA

FROM THE ĀLVĀRS TO THE ĀCĀRYAS: There arose a new epoch in the history of *Sri Vaiṣṇavism* - the age of the Ācāryas. The hagiologists make a distinction between the Ālvārs and Ācāryas in this, that, while the former were only inspired men who were divers into divinity, the latter, though they too are inspired, had their inspiration tempered by learning and scholarship. The Ācāryas are the expositors of the Ālvārs' experience; they based their teachings on both the Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures. Their task was to interpret the Ālvārs' experience in terms of Viśiṣṭādvaitic thought and the Viśiṣṭādvaidic philosophy in terms of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and spread the gospel of *propatti* among all persons. They taught that Brahman is the *śarīra* of all persons and things and though He is the One without a second metaphysically, He also exists as Sri-man Nārāyaṇa in the interests of world redemption. Further, they did not solely rely on *bhakti* as the Ālvārs had done, but united *jñāna* and *karma* with it for realizing God. This was required to be done in the light of *Prasthanatraya*.

THE ROLE OF THE ĀCĀRYAS: The main object of the Ācāryas was to reconcile the teachings of the *Nālayira Divya Prabandham* with those of the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Gītā*. In fact, they aimed at interpreting the former in terms of the latter. In consequence of this, posterity has given them the significant title of *Ubhaya-Vedāntins*. It is worthy of note that the Ācāryas regarded the Ālvārs as objects of worship - in fact, as the incarnations of Viṣṇu's weapons, carriers, or immediate followers in Vaikunṭha.¹ They regarded the Tamil

1. According to the *Guruparamparās* Poykaiyār, Pūtattār and Pēyār were the incarnations of Śaṅkha (conch), Gada (club), Nandaka (sword); Tirumalicaip pirāṅ was regarded as the incarnation of Cakra (wheel) of Viṣṇu, Nammālvār that of Visvakṣena, Kula-

Prabandham as the equal of the *Vedas*, and introduced it in public and private worship. They thus broadened the curricula of holy studies so as to include Tamil scriptures, and were the promoters of the Ālvār cult. Further, they elaborated and perfected the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of thought with the aid of the doctrines, particularly that of self-surrender which they derived from the Ālvārs as well as from other sources. Ācāryas passed through the different stages of orthodox life, and discharged their duties so as to serve as patterns for their followers. All the Śrī Vaiṣṇava festivals, observances, fasts, vows and customs can be traced to the rules laid down by the Ācāryas. They were thus the makers of modern Śrī Vaiṣṇavism – its society, rituals, practices and ideals. It is not surprising, therefore, that they too, in their turn, have become objects of worship, and have been raised to equality with the Ālvārs whom they themselves apotheosized.

NĀTHAMUNI-HIS SERVICES TO VAISNAVISM: The first of the Ācāryas was the famous Nāthamuni whose full name was Raṅganāthamuni. Nāthamuni was an erudite scholar in the *Vedas*, *Smṛtis*, and other scriptures; he was a *yogi* and a great devotee of Viṣṇu. He was born, according to *Guruparamparā* tradition, in the year *Sobhakt* of *Kalyuga* 3684 which corresponds to 583 A.D. and lived for 340 years. This account becomes inadmissible, since the period of these 340 years corresponds to that of the Ālvārs, and it does not fit in with the tradition that Nāthamuni was for a long time not aware of the compositions of the Ālvārs till he heard the eleven verses of Nammālvār¹ sung by the devotees who visited his place Vīraṅārāyaṇapuram.² It is also said in the *Guruparamparā* that he did not live up to 916 A.D. when his grandson

cēkarap-perumāḷ that of Kaustubha, Periyālvār that of Garuḍa, Toṅṅaraṅgi-p-poṅṅiyālvār that of Vanamāla and Tirumaṅkaiyālvār that of Sāraṅga. Āṅṅāḷ was considered to be the incarnation of Nīla Dēvi.

2. T.V.M. 5.8.

3. G.P. p. 72. The place is now known as Kāṅṅumannār kōyil (South Arcot District).

Ājavantār was born.⁴ Therefore his date of birth could be fixed as 823 A.D. which was also *Sobhakṛt* year. He could have lived up to about eighty years, till 903 A.D.

HIS ELEVATION OF THE STATUS OF THE PRABANDHAMS: It has already been mentioned how Nāthamuni acquired the Four Thousand verses of the Ālvārs direct from Nammālvār.⁵ He collated these verses and arranged them into four parts of approximately one thousand verses each, in the manner of four *Vedas* arranged by Vyāsa, added introductory verses to some sections and classified the verses according to different metres; the musical modes of these verses were also settled by Nāthamuni with the help of his two nephews and introduced the *Prabandham* to be sung in the temple of Rāja opāla in his village.⁶ By giving the *Prabandham* the status of the *Vedas* in the temple, he proved that the holiness of the works written in Tamil was not in any way inferior to that of the works written in Sanskrit. Very soon the *Prabandham* came to be, like the *Vedas*, an essential part of Srī Vaisṇavas' education.

Besides arranging for the recitation of the compositions of the Ālvārs, Nāthamuni composed four introductory verses, three in Sanskrit and one in Tamil. The verses of this kind are technically known as '*tanḱans*'. They bring out the greatness of the particular Ālvār and of his contribution, before the compositions of the Ālvār are sung. The first piece is in praise of Periyālvār.⁷ Here it is said that this Ālvār was able to cite passage after passage from the *Vedas* when he argued before Vallabhadeva of Madurai and established the superiority of Viṣṇu over other deities. He had not studied the *Vedas* in the traditional manner, from any preceptor. Nevertheless, he could distinguish himself as well-versed in the *Vedas* through the Grace of God. He was the father-in-law of Lord Raṅganātha. He was respected by gods and was an ornament for the Brahmin community. This piece is recited

4. *ibid.* p.76.

5. *Vide* : Section III. Chapter X.

6. *G.P.* p.73.

7. This begins with the words "*Gur mukhamanadhitya*".

obscure passages had to be explained and commentaries had to be written. The words of the Ālvārs had to be interpreted in the light of the Śrutis and Smṛtis. All this required the formal recognition of an authoritative pontiff. This necessity together with that of expanding and defending the *Pāñcarātra* doctrine against rivals, led to the establishment of the post of a universal Ācārya, whose authority was law in religious worship and whose advice was a guide to temples and householders. It was natural that when the institution of the pontiff was established, the choice fell on Nāthamuni.

INSTALLATION OF THE IMAGES OF ĀLVĀRS IN TEMPLES: Nāthamuni took efforts to install the images of Ālvārs in the Śrīraṅgam temple and made arrangements for their birth-day celebrations. The recitation of the *Prabandham* was made an integral part of temple worship at Śrīraṅgam. This innovation effected a silent revolution in temple worship, as it raised the status of the *Prabandham* to the level of the *Veda* and liberalised the meaning of Revelation. The celebration of Prabandham-recitation festival, otherwise popularly known as *Pakal-Pattu* and *Irāṅ-pattu* (Day-Ten and Night-Ten) integrated with the great Ēkādaśi Festival in the month of Mārkaṣi (November-December) was introduced lasting for three weeks. The adoption of the *Prabandham* as a sacred text by the Śrīraṅgam temple and of the Prabandham-recitation festival was very soon taken up by the prominent Vaiṣṇavite temples of South India. The establishment of the images of the Ālvārs and the recitation-festival soon spread throughout the Śrī-Vaiṣṇavaite world. There is epigraphic evidence that at least from the time of the Cōja king Rājarāja I, the hymns were recited in Viṣṇu temples during worship and in festivals just as *Tēvāram* hymns were recited in Śiva temples. One inscription of 1242 A.D. mentions a choir of fifty-eight brahmins reciting *Tiruvāymoḷi* in Kāñcipuram¹³

THE WORKS OF NĀTHAMUNI: With Nāthamuni, Śrī Vaiṣṇavism commenced a new era of activity and expansion. As a scholar and thinker he wrote two Sanskrit works, viz.,

13. *Development of Religion in South India* - p.123.

Nyāya-tattva and *Yōga-rahasya*. Both the works are now lost except a few stray quotations from *Nyāya-tattva* which are given in the *Nyāya-Siddhānta* and other works of Vedānta Deśika.¹⁴ *Nyāya-tattva* is the first modern treatise on the Viśiṣṭādvaita Metaphysics and Logic and it was elaborated by the later Ācāryas. *Yōga-rahasya* appears to have dealt with the methods of meditation (*yōga*) for God-realization probably according to the Vaiṣṇavite school. Probably the doctrine of self-surrender, the most important dogma of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, was first authoritatively enunciated by Nāthamuni. He is said to have had eight disciples¹⁵ of whom Uyyak-konṭār and Kurukaik-kāvalappan were the most prominent. Nāthamuni imparted all the fundamentals of the Ācārya cult to these disciples.

UYYAK-KONṬĀR: Nāthamuni devoted all his time in his last days to the practice of *samādhi*.¹⁶ He was thus, in another respect, a true representative of the tradition of *Vaiṣṇavism* of adopting meditation as the appropriate means for obtaining direct vision of the Lord.¹⁷

Nāthamuni was succeeded by Uyyak-konṭār (826-931 A.D.)¹⁸ otherwise known as Puṇḍarikākṣa for a short period of spiritual headship. He had six disciples, namely, (i) Maṅgkāl Nampi, (ii) Tiruvallik-kēp-pāpperumāl araiyar, (iii) Ceṭṭaip-pūci-cenṭalaṅkārar, (iv) Śrī Puṇṭarika-

14. *Nyāya-tattva* is also referred to by Vedānta Deśika in his *Nyāya-parisuddhi* in which Gautama's *Nyāya-sūtras* were criticised and refuted. p. 13.

15. They are: (i) Uyyak-konṭār, (ii) Kurukaik-kāvalappan, (iii) Nampi karuṅkaratāsar, (iv) Ēru-tiruvuṭaiyār, (v) Tirukkanna-mākaiyāṅṭāṅ (vi) Vānamāmajai tēviyāṅṭāṅ (vii) Urupaṭṭūr Āccan Piḷḷai, and (viii) Cōkatūr Ālvāṅ (vide *Ālvārkaḷ Valikkuravar Varalāru*, p. 17).

16. G.P. p. 76.

17. There are mentioned two occurrences which happened in his last days which show how effectively he used this means to realize God (vide G.P. pp. 75-77).

18. He was born in the year *Parābhava* (826 A.D.) and lived for 105 years. Vide A.G.P. fol. 13(b), 14(a)

tāsar, (v) Kōmaṭam Tiruvinnakarappan and (vi) Ulakupperumāl Naṅkai. It is stated that Maṅkāl Nampī served his master Uyyak-koṅṭār for twelve years as a devoted disciple. After the death of his master's wife, he took charge also of the household duties of his venerable guru. Uyyak-koṅṭār asked Maṅkāl Nampī to teach Yāmuna all that he was taught. Yāmuna, however, was not born during the lifetime of Uyyak-koṅṭār,¹⁹ and Uyyak-koṅṭār only prophesied his birth in accordance with the old prophecy of Nāthamuni.

Uyyak-koṅṭār's training under Nāthamuni and in all probability his realization of the supreme significance of the *Dvaya-mantra*, made him endear himself to the message contained in the *Tiruppāvai* of Āṅṭāl. It is not therefore surprising that he, in his zeal to carry on the traditional responsibility entrusted to him by his preceptor, should have been alive to the need to propagate the philosophy of the Āḷvārs. Hence he composed two verses in Tamīl which are now sung before *Tiruppāvai* is recited.

The first verse²⁰ means that one must repeatedly utter the name of Āṅṭāl who was born in Srivilliputtur, who composed several lyrical verses in praise of Śrī Raṅganātha rendering them in musical melodies. She had also decked herself with flower garlands prior to the offering of them to the Lord. In the other verse,²¹ he addresses Āṅṭāl as a golden creeper. She was wearing various kinds of bangles, the resonant sounds of which were heard while she undertook an observance according to an ancient tradition. He desires that she should help him in scrupulously realizing the significance of the *Tiruppāvai* and putting it in practice. The purport of the *Tiruppāvai* is stated to be that its reciter requests Āṅṭāl to enjoin on him Kaiṅkārya to Śrī Vēṅkaṭēswara, the Lord of Tirumalai. Perhaps, this is suggestive of the practice of the

19. In the light of this information which is contained in G.P. p. 78, it is difficult to admit the evidence of P.T.A. on the direction of Uyyak-koṅṭār's life.

20. It begins with the words "Anṅvayal putuval".

21. This begins with the words "Cūṭikkotutta".

Hindus to undertake any observance in the name of Sri Venkaṭeśwarā, which is in vogue even today and must have been the case even in the days of Uyyak-koṭṭār.

The other chief disciples of Nāthamuni, named Kurukaikkāvalappan, inherited from his master the methods of meditating on God. He spent much of his time in meditation. Ājavantār, the grandson of Nāthamuni, missed initiation in *yoga* from him who directed the former to meet him on a particular day. Ājavantār did not remember the day and went to see only the vacant site where the master would be in deep meditation. These practices did not deter Kurukaikkāvalappan from evincing interest in the *Divya Prabandham*. His direct visualizing of God through *yogic* practices must have created a liking, in particular, for the *Third Antāti* of Pēyālvār who began his composition with his glimpse of Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa.²² Pēyālvār was also a *yogin*. Hence Kurukaikkāvalappan composed a verse in Tamil which is sung before this *Antāti* is taken up for recitation.²³ Here it is said that this Ālvār saw God who resembled the cloud in complexion in the beautiful Tirukkōvalūr. The mind is asked to think in praise of that Ālvār's feet who said "I saw Lakṣmī". In the *Tiruvāymoḷi*²⁴ the Ālvār says that God had entered into him. There He remained with unsurpassed knowledge and all auspicious qualities. The Ālvār is visualizing Him. The Lord is so attached to the Ālvār that he would not divert His attention towards anything else. Kurukaikkāvalappan is stated to have explained to Ājavāntar and added that even if Lakṣmī were to tighten Him in Her embrace behind, he would not have His attention diverted from the Ālvār.²⁵

Tirukkappamaṅkaiyāptān another disciple of Nāthamuni composed two verses which are sung before Āṅṅāḷ's *Nacciār-tirumoḷi* is taken up for recitation. In the first

22. Mu. Tv. 1.

23. This begins with the words "*Cirōrum māṭa*".

24. T.V.M. 2. 6: 2.

25. Vide Periyavāccāṅ Pillai's commentary to T.V.M. 2. 6: 2 in his *Twenty-Four Thousand*.

piece²⁶ Āṇṭāl is said to be the friend of the divine woman Lakṣmī whose seat is the lotus. Āṇṭāl was well-known as the beautiful daughter of Viṣṇu-cittaṅ not only in Srī Villiputtūr but also in the adjoining Malli-nāṭu. She was like the enchanting peacock for that region. This may be taken to mean that she captivated that region also through her qualities. She well deserved to be in the company of Kṛṣṇa. She was the lamp for the family of Vēyars in which her foster-father Viṣṇu-cittaṅ was born. In the second "taniyaṅ",²⁷ reference is made to Āṇṭāl's asking the conch *Pāṇcacaṅya* how it felt the mouth of the Lord when he blew it.²⁸ She asks it to explain how fragrant the mouth of the Lord would be. She was like the parrot moving in the groves and capable of offering to Srī Rāṅganātha the garland which she wore at first. Her holy Feet, Tirukkannamaṅkaiyāṇṭāṅ tells us in this verse, are the refuge for all. Tirukkannamaṅkaiyāṇṭāṅ must have been a native of Tirukkannamaṅkai which is a place rendered holy by the hymns of Ālvārs and situated near Tiruvārūr in Thanjavūr District.

Besides these, Īsvaramuni, the son of Nāthamuni, appears to have evinced a great interest in the propagation of the philosophy of Nammālvār's compositions. He composed a verse for being sung before *Tiruvāymoli* is taken up for recitation. In this piece which is in Tamil²⁹ the mind is asked to remain clear and think constantly of the place of Nammālvār which is called by several names such as 'Tiruvaḷuti nāṭu' 'Tenkurukūr', 'the beautiful Tāmparapaṇi'. The mind shall always contemplate upon the Feet of the Ālvār who composed Tamil *Antātis* equivalent to the *Vedas*. There is one more piece³⁰ by this scholar³¹ which is to be sung

26. This begins with the words "Allināṭṭāmarai".

27. This begins with the words "Kōlaccuriccaṅkal".

28. Nac. Tm. 7.

29. It begins with the words "Tiruvaḷuti nāṭu".

30. This begins with the words "Manattālum vāyālum".

31. This scholar is mentioned as Coṭṭai Nambi in the printed editions of *Tiruvāymoli*. He is identified with Īsvarabhattālvāṅ, son of Nāthamuni, since he belonged to the family known as 'Coṭṭai' (vide G.P. p.83).

before undertaking the recitation of *Tiruvāymoḷi*. Here the scholar says that he would not worship either by words or by thought any one except those who worship Nammālvār.³² He is not in any way poor for that. He has taken shelter under Saṅhakōpa.

MANKKĀL NAMPI: Maṅakkāl Nampi (889-994 A.D.)³³ who was also known as Śrīrāma was the successor to the pontifical seat which Uyyak-koṅṭār occupied. The latter could not live to see the birth of a grandson for Nāthamuni and so he instructed his pupil Maṅakkāl Nampi to carry on the tradition through 'Yamunait-turaivan' which, according to the wish of Nāthamuni, shall be the name of the grandson.³⁴ Accordingly, a son was born to Īṣvaramuni, son of Nāthamuni and he was named Yamunait-turaivan by him. After education, circumstances brought to Yāmuna which is the shortened form of the boy's name, a princely life in the palace of the ruling king where he was known as Āḷavantār. Maṅakkāl Nampi managed to meet him in person and took him to Srīraṅgam where he taught him the *Bhagavad-gītā* which he learnt from his preceptor.³⁵ His contribution to the study of the Ālvār's compositions is a verse which he composed in Tamil³⁶ to be sung before undertaking the recitation of *Perumālitirumoḷi* of Kulacēkarālvār. Here is a reference made to an incident which is narrated in the *Guruparamparās*³⁷ to have taken place in the life of Kulacēkarar when he was the king. An ornament was lost and the devotees of God, with whom the king moved freely, were suspected to have committed theft by the palace authorities. To convince them that the devotees of God would not have stooped to pilfering, Kulacēkarālvār introduced his hand inside a jar within which a poisonous cobra was placed. Their innocence was to be admitted if the

32: Bodily worship must be intended here.

33. He was born in the year *Virōdhi* of *Kaliyuga* 4052 vide P.T.A. p.

34. G.P. p. 78.

35. *ibid.* p. 81.

36. It begins with the words "*Āram Ketapparan*".

37. G.P. p. 26.

serpent did not bite him. He thus got a victory over his enemies. A great archer and the king of Kolli, a Cera is addressed here as the chief of kings. This is clear proof to suggest that Maṅakkāl Nampi was in touch with the propagation of the Ālvārs. The suggestion that perhaps this verse which was composed by Maṅakkāl Nampi could have been intended by its author to wean Ālavantār away from the royal glory which he was then enjoying may be admitted but is lacking in evidence to support it. Besides, it is not stated that he taught any of the compositions of the Ālvārs to Ālavantār.

Maṅakkāl Nampi had five disciples, namely, (i) Yāmuna, (ii) Teivattukkaracu Nampi (iii) Kōmatam Tiruvinnakarappan, (iv) Ciṟupallūruṭaiya Piḷḷai and (v) Vaṅkipurattu āycci.³⁸ Maṅakkāl Nampi used to stay at Sri Raṅgam and expounded the doctrines of the Viśiṣṭādvaita.

YĀMUNA ALIAS ĀLAVANTĀR: Maṅakkāl Nampi was succeeded by Yāmuna as the spiritual head.³⁹ Even as a boy, it is stated, that Yāmuna showed his prodigious learning and skill when he accepted the challenge of Ākkiyālvān, the court Pandit of the Cōḷa King, made to his teacher Mahābhāṣya Paṭṭar and easily vanquished him in the learned assembly of the king by a clever puzzle.⁴⁰ He was at once greeted by the queen as "Ālavantār" for having conquered the proud poet, and was granted a portion of the kingdom according to the terms of the polemic duel. Thereafter he was known as "Ālavantār." He lived a life of luxurious ease for a long time, enjoying his riches, and took no notice of Maṅakkāl Nampi. But Maṅakkāl Nampi with some difficulty obtained access to him⁴¹ and availed himself of the opportunity

38. *Ālvārkaḷ Vaḷḷikkuravar Varalāru*, p. 35.

39. He was born in Kali 4017 *Dhātu* year (916 A.D.) and lived for 125 years vide P.T.A. p.

40. *Prapannāmṛtam*, Chap. III.

41. There is an anecdote in the *Prapannāmṛtam* to the effect that, when Yāmuna became a king and inaccessible to Maṅakkāl Nampi the latter was very much concerned as to how he could carry out the commands of his teachers and initiate Yāmuna into the path

of teaching him the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which aroused the spirit of detachment in him. Aḷvantār followed Maṅakkāl Nampi to Śrī Raṅgam eagerly to take possession of the treasure about which Maṅakkāl Nampi had intimated to him. There he was shown the Sleeping Beauty in the shining shrine and was told that was the patrimony bequeathed to him by his grand-father Nāthamuni. He became converted and, renouncing everything, became a great devotee and took *sannyāsa*. One of the last instructions of Maṅakkāl Nampi was to direct him to go to Kurukaik-kāvalappan and learn from him the *yoga-rahasya* which was taught to him by his grand-father who had asked his disciple, Kurukaik-kāvalappan to communicate the same to his grand-son Yāmuna.

YĀMUNA'S CONTRIBUTIONS: After becoming a *sannyāsi* Aḷvantār's whole life was dedicated to spirituality and service, the twin ideals of a Vaiṣṇavite and he made Śrī Raṅgam a veritable Vaikuntha on earth. As a philosopher his main task was the criticism of the *Advaita*, and he was an eminent controversialist and author of valuable treatises on *Vedānta*. He was fond of Nammālvār's works the doctrines of which were often explained to the people. He was the author of six *rahasya* works, viz., (i) *Siddhi-traya*, (ii) *Gitārtha-saṅgraha*, (iii) *Āgama-pramāṇya*, (iv) *Stōtra-ratna*, (v) *Catu-ślōki* and (vi) *Mahā-puruṣa-nirṇaya*. Of these the *Siddhi-traya* is the most important which explains the main teachings of Viśiṣṭādvaita in three sections: *Ātma-siddhi*, *Īsvara-siddhi*, and *Samvit-siddhi*, demonstrating respectively the nature of the individual soul, the supreme Lord and relation between the soul and the objects of percep-

of devotion. He got into tuch with Yāmuna's cook, and for six months presented some green vegetables (*alarka-śāka*) which Yāmuna very much liked. When, after the six months, the king asked how the rare vegetables found their way in the kitchen, Maṅakkāl Nampi stayed away for four days praying to the Lord Raṅgānatha, the the local deity, to tell him how he could approach Yāmuna. In the meanwhile, the king missed the green vegetables and asked his cook to present the old *sannyāsi* when next he should come to the kitchen: Maṅakkāl Nampi was thus presented to Yāmuna.

tion. His *Gītārtha-saṅgraha* is a masterly summary of the truths of the *Gītā* and it is a luminous exposition in about thirty two *ślōkas* of the nature of *prakṛti*, *puruṣa* and *puruṣōttama* and of the need of *bhakti* and *prapatti* as the supreme means of salvation. According to Ālvantār, *yōga* in the *Gītā* means *bhakti-yōga*. This work was later developed by Rāmānuja and further elaborated by Vedānta Desika. The *Āgama-pramāṇya* is a work in which he tries to establish the high antiquity and undisputed authority of the *Pañcarātra* literature, which is supposed to be the canon of the Śrīvaiṣṇavites. Ālvantār's *Śtōtra-ratna*, which is a master-piece of lyrical devotion, reveals his discerning faith in Nārāyaṇa and Śrī and the intense humility of the philosopher-devotee who pours forth his heart-felt *bhakti* in seventy soul-stirring verses to which there is no parallel in *Śtōtra* literature. It is really in ardent praise of the doctrine of self-surrender. The *Catu-ślōki*, as the name itself implies, is a poem consisting of four verses in praise of Śrī Lakṣmī. It describes the status of Lakṣmī as the consort of Viṣṇu and the part played by her in the soul's salvation. It is the earliest of the *śtōtras* sung about Śrī and furnishes the foundation and basis of later works on *Śrī Tattva* such as those of Ālvān, Parācara Paṭṭar and Vedānta Desika. In his *Mahāpuruṣa-nirṇaya*, Yāmuna proves the supremacy of Viṣṇu, who, he holds, is the *Mahāpuruṣa* of the *Puruṣa-sūkta*, "the essence of the *Vedas*". In fact, Yāmuna has clearly laid down the lines on which Rāmānuja later on elaborated the system of Viśiṣṭādvaita.

His *Śtōtra-ratna* is, firstly, highly suggestive of his indebtedness to the contents of the *Nālāyiram*. A casual study of this poem would suggest this, and a critical study would confirm it.⁴² Secondly, Yāmuna had three wishes to accomplish in this life-time, but he could not carry out even one among them. His hand had three fingers bent even

42. cf. *Śtōtra-ratna*, 40; M.Tv. 53.

ibid. 22; TVM 6.10: 10; 5.7: 1.

ibid. 38; ibid. 10.10: 2.

ibid. 61; Tc.V. 90.

though he expired. Rāmānuja, who was brought there by Periya Nampi, one of the disciples of Yāmuna, at the behest of the master, noted this and enquired if the master had any wish of his unfulfilled. The disciples who were assembled there informed Rāmānuja of the master's wishes. One among them was that much interest should be shown in the compositions of Nammālvār. Rāmānuja agreed to carry out all the three wishes upon which the fingers got straightened. From this, it is evident, Yāmuna had an earnest desire to make people familiar with the teachings of the Ālvārs.⁴³

A more convincing evidence to prove that Yāmuna had deep enthusiasm for the propagation of *Tiruvāymoḷi* is from the verse composed in honour of Nammālvār and which forms part of his *Śloṭra-ratna*. Here he tells of his bowing his head at the Feet of Nammālvār. These feet are attractive because of the *bakula* flowers adorning them. He admits the Ālvār as the chief of the entire family of those who had surrendered themselves to the Lord. The Feet of the Ālvār represent the mother, father, young women, sons and material prosperity and so for him, they are everything and there is nothing for him but them. While interpreting the verse⁴⁴ in *Tiruvāymoḷi*, Yāmuna is said to have interpreted the word '*tamiḷar*' as referring to the first three Ālvārs, the word '*caikārar*' to Tiruppānālvār and the word '*paṭṭar*' to Periyālvār.⁴⁵

In this connection it is amusing to find later sub-commentaries of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, frequent references to the view of Yāmuna on the import of some of the hymns of Nammālvār. The *Guruparamparā* does not mention anywhere that he was taught the *Prabandhams* from any preceptor, yet it is not proper to suggest that Yāmuna did not offer any comment on these hymns. What is difficult to understand is the absence of a single reference expressive of Yāmuna's views in the *Six Thousand* of Tirukkurukaip-pirān and *Nine Thousand* of Nānciyar. Frequent references to these are found in the

43. G.P. p. 102.

44. TVM. 1.5: 11.

45. *Iṭu* on 1.5: 11.

Twenty-four-Thousand of Periyavāccān Pillai (1168-1263 A.D.) and *Thirty-six-Thousand Itu* of Vatakkut-tiruvitip-pillai (1168-1265 A.D.). In all probability, these matters passed on orally from preceptor to pupil until they got recorded in the sub-commentaries of the above-mentioned two writers.

There is one aspect which remains inexplicable. In some of the cases noted by the commentators Rāmānuja explains in full, the significance of Yāmuna's interpretation.⁴⁶ In certain cases, the later commentators note a difference of opinion offered by Rāmānuja, when he was taught by Tirumālai-yāntān (Māladhara) the interpretation of Yāmuna. With reference to the purport of one *Tiruvāymoli*,⁴⁷ it is said that Tirumālai-yāntān said to Rāmānuja that this decad conveyed the significance of *prapatti*. After writing *Sri Bhaṣya* Rāmānuja took this decad to convey the sense of *bhakti*. Empār also followed Rāmānuja in this respect. It is a bit fantastic to note that Rāmānuja, who succeeded Yāmuna as the religious head in accordance with the instructions of Yāmuna and who expressly stated at the beginning of his commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* that he had become an entity at all only through the grace of Yāmuna, should offer a different interpretation to this decad even after Tirumālai-yāntān told him of Yāmuna's view. That *bhakti* is dealt with here is stated in the *Six Thousand, Dramidōpaniṣat-tātparyā-ratnāvali* of Vedānta Desika and *Dramidopaniṣatsaṅgati* of Aḷagiyamaṇavāla-jīyar. Evidently Rāmānuja's teaching was followed by all these writers but there is no evidence to prove that Yāmuna declared *prapatti* to be the purport except in these later commentaries. In all likelihood, Yāmuna did not subscribe to this view and so a reference like this cannot be valid by itself.⁴⁸ In some instances, Tirumālai-yāntān is said to have mentioned to Rāmānuja the name of Yāmuna with the interpretation.⁴⁹

46. *Twenty-Four Thousand* on TVM. 2.10; 3.3: 6; 5.1: 9; 5.10: 4; 6.1: 10; 7.9: 1; 8.9: 3; 9.9.

47. *Itu* on TVM 1.2.

48. There are similar instances: Vide *Twenty-Four Thousand* on 2.3: 1; 2.3: 3; 2.5: 1.

49. cf. *Twenty-Four Thousand* on 1.2; 10.4; 5.2.

YĀMUNA'S DISCIPLES: Yāmuna is referred to by later writers as Periya Mudaliar.⁵⁰ Though he did not write anything by way of a commentary on the *Nalāyira Prabandham* he was instrumental in arousing a living interest among his pupils and grand pupils for the study of the compositions of the Ālvārs. It is stated that Ālavantār had twenty-one disciples⁵¹ of whom six were most prominent, namely, (i) Periya Nampī, (ii) Tiruvaraṅkap-perumāl Araiyaṅ, (iii) Tirukkacci Nampī, (iv) Tirumālai-yāṅṅān, (v) Tirumalai Nampī, and (vi) Tirukkōṭṭiyur Nampī. The other disciples were: (i) Māraṅṅer Nampī, (ii) Ālavantār Ālvān, (iii) Vānamā-malai-yāṅṅān, (iv) Teivavāri Āṅṅān, (v) Iṣanāṅṅān, (vi) Jiyar Āṅṅān (vii) Tirukkurukūrappan, (viii) Tirumōkūrappan, (ix) Tirumōkūr Ninrān, (x) Teivap-perumāl, (xi) Vakuḷaparapa Comāciyār, (xii) Tirukkurukūr-tāsar, (xiii) Tirumāliruṅcōlai-tāsar, (xiv) Vaṭamaturaip-pirantān, and (xv) Ātkoṅṅiyammaṅki.

Among his disciples, Tirukkacci Nampī,⁵² composed two verses in Tamil to be sung before taking up the *Tiruccanta-virutam* of Tirumaḷicaiyālvār. In the first verse,⁵³ the place Tirumaḷicai is described to be an enchanting one with fragrance of sandal and aloe wood emanating, the kōṅku trees spread all over there emitting delectable aroma. The Ālvār composed the *Tiruccanta-virutam* to relieve the world of its miseries, and this means that a recital and understanding of this composition would rid people of their sufferings. The other verse⁵⁴ means that in ancient days, a question arose as to the relative superiority of the earth and the sacred place Tirumaḷicai. So the two were placed in a balance and it was found that Tirumaḷicai was found heavier than the earth.

50. *Itu* on 6.2: 1; 9.8; *Rahas'yatrava-sāra*. p. 308.

51. *Ālvārkaḷ Valikkuravar Varalāru*, p. 34.

52. He was born in the year *Sobhakṛt* which corresponds to 943 A.D. A.G.P. 19(b). He was also known as Kāñci-pūrṇa.

53. This begins with the words, "*Taruccantap-poḷil*".

54. It begins with the words, "*Ulakum maḷicaiyum*".

because of its superior excellence.⁵⁵ Thus the greatness of this sacred spot is referred to here.

Tiruvarāṅkaṭṭa-perumālaraiyar (son of Yāmuna)⁵⁶ who was also known as Ālavantārālvār taught Rāmānuja the *Divya Prabandham*. He is referred to as a good singer who could depict the emotions of the hymns of *Tiruvāymoli* with appropriate gesticulations.⁵⁷ The later commentary *Itu* contains a reference to his interpretation of a hymn of Nammālvār.⁵⁸ In a verse composed in Tamil⁵⁹ in praise of the *Tirumālai* of Toṅṅaraṭṭi-poṭiyālvār this scholar asks the mind not to wander unnecessarily elsewhere. He wants to speak of this Ālvār who composed *Tirumālai* which is in praise of Lord Raṅganātha who went after cows while they were grazing. The other Tamil verse⁶⁰ composed by him is in praise of the place of Maṅṅaṅkuṭṭi which was inhabited by brahmins learned in the *Vedas*. It was an old town, the residential place of this Ālvār. The fields all round are resonant with the humming bees. The Ālvār has sung the hymn *Tiruppaṭṭi-eṭṭu* to arouse Lord Raṅganātha from His holy slumber.

Tirumālaiyāṅṅān,⁶¹ known also as Mālādhara, taught Rāmānuja the interpretations of *Tiruvāymoli* as he was taught by Ālavantār. According to him, *Tiruvāymoli* 1.2 conveyed the sense of *prapatti*. The finite self shall consider itself as lucky if it could recollect God's name and His greatness at the point of death and be clearly conscious of himself being the *śeṣa* of God.⁶² This scholar is sometimes referred to as simply Āṅṅān.⁶³ The views of this scholar are said to have

55. Civaṅṅāṅga Muṅṅivar in describing the beauty of the city of Kaṅṅci employs the same analogy, but in a more improved form (Vide *Kāṅṅci-purāṅṅam-Nakarap-paṭṭalam*. St.1.).

56. He was born in the year *Pingala* which corresponds to 957 A.D. A.G.P. fol. 18(a).

57. *Itu* on T.V.M. 5.3: 6.

58. *ibid.* on. T.V.M.5.10: 6.

59. The verse begins with the words, "*Maṅṅaṅṅum vēṅṅā*".

60. It begins with the words "*Maṅṅaṅṅuṭṭi-eṅṅar*".

61. He was born in the year *Sarvadhāri* which corresponds to 988 A.D. Vide A.G.P. fol. 19(a).

62. *Twenty-Four Thousand* on TVM 8.8: 8.

63. *Itu* on T.V.M. 5.6: 7; 5.8: 4; 8.8: 8.

been expressed by his disciple Iḷaiyaperumā].⁶⁴ It is said that he was surprised to hear from Rāmānuja different interpretations for the compositions of Nammālvār different from what he learnt from his master.⁶⁵ He composed a verse in Sanskrit to be sung before taking up the recitation of Toṅṅaraṭip-poṭiyālvār's *Tiruppaḷḷi-eḷucci*.⁶⁶ Here the author conveys his respects to the holy Toṅṅaraṭip-poṭi who composed the composition to awaken the Lord from slumber. He considered Lord Raṅganātha as Para-Vāsudeva, the supreme deity in Sri Vaikunṭha and also was respected as though He were a king.

Periya Nampi (997-1102 A.D.)⁶⁷ who was also called Mahāpūrṇa was the immediate preceptor of Rāmānuja and was one of the disciples of Yāmuna. It was he that initiated Rāmānuja in the secret doctrines of *Viśṇuism* including the purport of the *Brahma-sūtras*.⁶⁸ He composed a verse in Sanskrit⁶⁹ to be recited before Tiruppānālvār's *Amalanātipirān* is taken up for recital. Here it is said that this Ālvār rejoiced by beholding the Lord Who is reclining in the midst of the river Kāviri. He had the full experience of the Lord Who is reclining there, from foot to head (*paṭai-kēcam*) and decided that his eyes could not be set on any other object in the world. This Ālvār occupies the enviable of position of having been carried to the shrine of Lord Raṅganātha by sage called Munivāhana.⁷⁰

Tirumalai Nampi, one of the disciples of Yāmuna, who was also known as Sri Saila-pūrṇa was the maternal uncle of Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja, it is said, got to know from him the full sense of *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁷¹ He composed a verse in

64. *ibid.* 5.6: 7.

65. G.P. pp. 124-125; *Iṭu* on T.V.M. 2.7: 5.

66. It begins with the words, "Tameva matva".

67. He was born in Kali 4098 *Hēvilāmbi* year (vide P.T.A. p. 12).

68. A.G.P. fol. 22(a).

69. It begins with the words; "Āpādacūdam".

70. G.P. p. 45.

71. *ibid.* p. 134.

Tamil⁷² to be sung before Tiruppānālvār's *Amalanātipirān* is taken up for recitation. Here it is described how the Ālvār had the vision of delectable experience of Sri Rāṅganātha from feet, clothing, navel, waist girdle, chest, neck, coral lips, eyes and the whole body of the lord. We shall sing the praise of this Ālvār who had the direct communion with God through music. This scholar offers a fine observation on a hymn in *Tiruvāymoḷi*.⁷³ The Ālvār says here that he could not offer any refreshing service to the Lord when He performed great exploits. However, the Lord has now applied the mind of the Ālvār as an unguent which will soothen the tiresomeness of the Lord. This scholar remarks that ordinarily any one who gets the object which he is keen on getting, then slackens his interest on it in course of time. That is not the case with God-realization. He is never satiated with the vision of God which he is lucky to get.⁷⁴ Two illustrations are contained in the *Itu* and are given within brackets. It is not clear whether they could have been given by Tirumalai Nampi himself. Kausalya said to Rāma that she could not live without him and desired to follow him to the forest. When Rāmā pointed out to her that what she was intending to do was against *dharma*, as she was attempting to leave her husband behind, she forgot all her misery and offered him all her blessings for a safe journey. Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna not to grieve or think of flight from fighting the enemies. Arjuna gave up his nervousness and expressed his willingness to fight.⁷⁵

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār sings in praise of the Lord at Māpallapuram⁷⁶ and identify Him with Kṛṣṇa with the manifold exploits and God as Kalki. In this connection, he describes the deity as resembling the blue cloud which takes in the waters from the tanks that are situated in the forests on the hills. Tirumalai Nampi offered here an interpretation for this. The comparison of the deity with the blue cloud

72. It begins with the words, *Kattavē kaṅṅa*.

73. T.V.M., 4.3.

74. *Itu* on T.V.M., 4.3.

75. Bh. G. 18: 73.

76. Peri. Tm. 2.5: 3.

be justified by showing the purpose for this comparison. The calves which Kṛṣṇa would be tending would move through the hills, bamboo groves and forests. Naturally they would become thirsty. The Lord creates a lake here. He takes water there along with them. With two palms dipped in water and face downwards, He would drink water. Having done this He becomes full (*paripūrṇa*),⁷⁷ that is, pleased that others are happy.

Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi,⁷⁸ who was one of the disciples of Yāmuna, taught Rāmānuja the secret doctrines (*rahasya*). He composed a verse in Sanskrit⁷⁹ to be sung before the *Periya-tirumōḷi* of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār is taken up for recitation. Here it is said that this scholar remembers the name of this Ālvār with great regard. This Ālvār had destroyed the evil effects of the *kalyuga*. He was a sun illumining the world of poets. This is a direct reference to the title 'Poet in the four-fold branches of Tamil poetry' (*Nālukavīperumāḷi*) which he acquired through his literary skill⁸⁰ and so was at the head of the poets. His compositions dispel the ignorance (or darkness) created by nescience. Internal darkness which is there in man due to past deeds is removed by the illumining compositions of this Ālvār.

Thus the six disciples of Yāmuna kept alive the tradition of learning the compositions of the Ālvārs. Much of what they had said by way of expounding and interpreting the hymns in these compositions should have remained unrecorded. The oral traditions kept some of these preserved to posterity. Rāmānuja should have derived immense inspiration from these scholars and their contributions. All these interpretations found themselves recorded in the commentaries of Periyavāccān Piḷḷai and Vaṭakkut-tiruvītip-piḷḷai.

77. *Nigamaparīmaḷa* of Periya Parakāla Swāmin on Peri. Tm. 2.5:3

78. He was born in the year *Sarvajīti* which corresponds to 987 A.D. Vide P.T.A. p. 12.

79. It begins with the words, '*Kalyāmi kalidhvamsam.*'

80. G.P. p.52.