

CHAPTER XXXI

THE COMMENTARIES ON THE NĀLAYIRAM

Perhaps the most intellectual among the *Nālayiram* lyricists, Nammālvār, who is extolled as the super-*prapanna* of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, has presented in his *Tiruvāymōḷi* consisting of one thousand and odd hymns the essence of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and the basis of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy which Rāmānuja later drew liberally on. The *Tiruvāymōḷi* constitutes the *summum bonum* of Śrī Vaiṣṇavite literature and implies and involves the most intimate acquaintance with the details of Śrī Vaiṣṇavite traditions and philosophy. This fact had been realised even in the days of Rāmānuja and a commentary was considered most essential for a proper understanding of the philosophical and the religious purport of the *Tiruvāymōḷi*.

It is known from the accounts contained in the *Guruparampara*, that Yāmunācārya taught the *Tiruvāymōḷi* to his disciples offering his own interpretations. Tirumālaiyāntān who was one of his disciples instructed Rāmānuja on the import of the *Tiruvāymōḷi*. The *Guruparampara* refers to a few interpretations where Rāmānuja suggested a different interpretation although he did approve of Yāmuna's interpretation as it was given by Tirumālaiyāntān. Rāmānuja too taught the significance of the teachings of Nammālvār to his disciples. Yāmuna's wish that Nammālvār's composition should be properly propagated was fulfilled by Rāmānuja through Piḷḷān whom he asked to write a commentary on the *Tiruvāymōḷi*. Tirumalai Nampi, father of Piḷḷān and maternal uncle of Rāmānuja was himself proficient in the interpretation of not only the *Tiruvāymōḷi* but also the other compositions of the *Nālayiram*. The inheritance which Piḷḷān had from his father was much useful to him in imbibing the authentic exposition of the *Tiruvāymōḷi* as it was given to him by Rāmānuja.

During the days of Piḷḷāṅ, Parācara Paṭṭar, Empār, Kiṭāmpi Āccāṅ, Mutaliyāṅṭāṅ and Nañciyar who were all his contemporaries were equally proficient in the correct exposition of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*. It is the only Nañciyar that wrote a commentary known as *Nine Thousand* on the *Ārāytrappaḷi*. When several preceptors had the unique privilege of discoursing and discussing with others about the interpretation of select verses of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, there must have been slightly different approaches made to appreciate the import of certain verses, which could have been just taken note of by the contemporary scholars. Such differences did not get recorded in any commentary till the period of Nampiḷḷai whose disciples Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai and Vaṭakkut-tiruvītip-piḷḷai took interest to have them recorded in their commentaries.¹ It must be noted in this connection that these two commentators did well in avoiding offering their criticisms on such references to the views of early scholars. Again it is to be admitted that in their zeal to have such matters incorporated, they had found room in their commentaries for some anecdotes² which have no relevance in certain cases to the verses that are explained. As anecdotes, they may have value but too often, the context in which they occur is undermined and the real significance of the verse is lost sight of. They are of great value while delivering discourses but not when a composition is commented on in the form of a work.

In order to fulfil the third wish of Yāmunācārya that the compositions of Saṭhakopa should be duly made popular, Rāmānuja authorised Tirukkurukaip-pirāṅ Piḷḷāṅ himself to compose an authoritative gloss on the *Tiruvāymoḷi* as taught and expounded by him.³ The disciple undertook the rather difficult project and completed it successfully.⁴ This commentary is known amongst the Vaiṣṇavites as the *Ārāytrappaḷi* or the *Six Thousand* (so called from the number of *granthas*, one *paḷi* or measure consisting of thirty-two letters).⁵ The author's

1. cf. *Iṅu* on T.V.M. 4.3; 5.10; 4.10a 2.

2. *Iṅu* on T.V.M. 4.3: 5; 6.7: 1; 6.7: 5; 6.9: 9.

3. G.P. pp. 278-279.

4. U.R.M. 41.

5. *Yāpparunkalak-kārṭikat*-Preface (Com.).

determination of the length of the number of *granthas* reflects his devotion to the Lord Viṣṇu whose story is told in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* in six thousand *grandhas*. This work is the earliest and, in some respects, the best commentary on the hymns of *Tiruvāymoḷi*. It served as the best model upon which many compositions were later written, particularly in the *manḷ-p-pravāḷa* or Tamil-Sanskrit mixed style.

This commentary is not a literal one nor a word-to-word exposition. An authentic exposition is attempted for each verse giving in prose its contents and purport. The authenticity of it is attested by its being the basis for the writing of several super-commentaries on it. Besides, its author Piḷḷāṇ⁶ was made the chief exponent of both the *Vedāntas*, that is, Rāmānuja's *Śrī Bhāṣya* and Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi*.⁷ Many of the expressions in Sanskrit which the author employs are taken from Rāmānuja's *Gadyatraya*, *Vedārthasaṅgraha*, *Śrī Bhāṣya* and *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya*.⁸ While commenting on T.V.M. 1.1: 2 Piḷḷāṇ writes that this verse establishes that Brahman is distinct from the sentient and the non-sentient. The next verse shows the Lord to be the only *śeṣin*, the Self of the whole world, untouched by the impurities of the world, or the controller of the world. The next three verses establish that the nature, maintenance and other aspects of the world are under the control of the Lord. In his comment on the seventh verse, Piḷḷāṇ cites the *Vedic* and *Purāṇic* passages profusely to show that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa alone is presented in these passages which are not sublated by any *pramāṇa* and thus the stand points of Saṅkara, Bhāskara, Yādavaprakāśa and others stand refuted. That Brahmā, Rudra and others could not be Brahman is shown while explaining the eighth verse. Taking up the ninth verse, the commentator remarks that the doctrine of the nihilists would not stand the test. Existence and non-existence when predicted to an object, say Brahman, mean only the different

6. He was born in the year *Śrīmukha* corresponding to 1033 A. D.

7. *Yatirāja-valbhavam* 108.

8. The very first sentence is a proof of this feature. cf. Piḷḷāṇ on T.V.M. 1.1: 3; 1.1: 7; 4.5: 1 to 3; 4.10: 1 to 5; 8.1: 1.

stages in which the Brahman is approached. Existence is an attribute at one stage and non-existence at another, both for Brahman which is ever existent. The explanation for the tenth verse seeks to show that Brahman is all-pervasive, that is, pervading the gross objects but also the subtle ones. His presence is not limited by any thing any where and could not be perceived by any one. He is thus only one Supreme Person. The phrase 'vētam vallār' is interpreted as Śrī Vaiṣṇavites.⁹ The word 'toṅṅar' which means one who serves (the Lord) also is taken to refer to Śrī Vaiṣṇavites.¹⁰ The Ālvār tells us that the name 'Nārāyaṇa' must be repeated to get at Him and uttered while worshipping His Feet with flowers. Piḷḷāṇ takes this as meaning the repeating of *Tirumantra*.¹¹

Besides writing this commentary, Piḷḷāṇ appears to have offered his own interpretations of not only *Tiruvāymōḷi* but other poems as well like *Tiruppāvai* probably during his discourses on these compositions or probably when his views were required to be offered on select passages of these compositions. Such expositions do not form part of *Ārayirappaḷi*. The references to these are contained in the commentaries of Periyavāccāṇ Piḷḷai¹², Vatakkut-tiruvitip-piḷḷai¹³ and Preriya Parakālasvmin.¹⁴ The Ālvār's utterance of his plight through the garb of a beloved shows that the Ālvār would cry in distress, embrace Him and bow to Him. This is the experience of the Ālvār.¹⁵ Circumambulating the hill Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai is the proper act which a devotee shall do, according to the Ālvār. Piḷḷāṇ remarks that this act would endow the devotee with the right knowledge.¹⁶ The word 'perumāyaṇē' which is

9. *Iu* on T.V.M. 4.6: 8.

10. *ibid.* 4.7: 8.

11. *ibid.* 10.5: 1, 5, 10.

12. His commentary on T.V.M. 5.10:2; 6.4: 8; 6.8; 7.9: 9. 8.1: 6; 8.7: 1; *Peri. Tm.* 4.6: 9.

13. *Iu* on T.V.M. 1.3: 10; 1.4: 7; 2.4: 1; 2.4: 5; 5.9: 3; 5.10: 7.3; 7.8: 7; 7.10: 10; 9.8: 8.

14. His commentary on T. Pv. p.203.

15. *Iu* on T.V.M. 1.4

16. *ibid.* 2.10: 7.

used as a term of address and which means One Who is of wondrous activities, is interpreted as of the nature of all auspicious qualities.¹⁷ This interpretation is justifiable, as the main qualities of the Lord are required to be meant here for protecting the Ālvār from worldly distress. Nañciyar asked Piḷḷān once whether God's presence is to be known through his own nature (*svarūpa*) or His pervasion in the auspicious forms (*divyamaṅgaḷa vighā*) or both are acceptable. To this Piḷḷān replied that Rāmānuja, while delivering the discourse on the *Tiruvāymoli*, accepted only God's pervasion through His nature. Empār, however, remarked them that God pervades the *divyamaṅgaḷa vighā* in order to be ever present at the mind of His devotees who are devoted to Him.¹⁸

From the language employed here which is called *manipravāḷa*, it is evident that this kind of language must have been already familiar to Piḷḷān when he learnt the inner significance of the *Tiruvāymoli* from Rāmānuja. Anyway, the method of exposition and the nature of language employed by him paved the way for the writing of super-commentaries on the *Ārayira-p-paṭi* and also independent texts on select and fundamental doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism by Piḷḷai Lokācāryar, Vedānta Deśika and others.

The author of *Onpatāyirap-paṭi* or *Nine Thousand* is Nañciyar whose version of the commentary was in nine thousand *granthas*¹⁹ by way of reflecting his reverence for Śrī Rāmānuja whose *Śrī Bhāṣya* is in nine thousand *granthas*. Nañciyar secured a copy of the *Ārayira-p-paṭi* from the hands of his teacher and *guru* Parācara Paṭṭar and found that it required some elaboration. He obtained his *guru's* permission to undertake the great task and accordingly fulfilled it with success. Nañciyar devoted himself heart and soul to the preparation of this commentary. When Nañciyar succeeded headship of Śrī Vaiṣṇavites after the death of his *guru* he wanted to have a fair copy of the manus-

17. *ibid.* 7.1: 1.

18. *ibid.* 7.3: 1.

19. U.M.R. 42,

cript of his work. On the suggestion of his disciples, he secured the services of one Nampūr Varadarājar who had a fine hand for the task.²⁰

Nañciyar's *Nine Thousand* is a super-commentary on the *Ārāyirap-paṭi* and is for the most part an epitomized rendering of his exposition of Piḷḷān's work. According to him, the word 'avan' which is repeatedly used in the text T.V.M. 1.1: 1 shows that each quality proves God independently and declares that the Advaita tenet is wrong. The reference made by Nammālvār to the taking in of poisoned milk from Pūtana by the Lord is shown by Nañciyar as the Lord's assurance that the sins of His devotees would not affect Him in any way.²¹ While Piḷḷān states that the Ālvār asks people to bow at the Feet of the Lord, Nañciyar goes a step further and advises people to repeat uttering the exploits of the Lord, if he could not be visualized for bowing at His Feet.²² While interpreting the decad 1.8., he writes that the Lord permits for the selves communion with Him by contracting His nature and activities. The Lord devoured the worlds and measured them, without the selves ever requesting Him to do so. This is to prove that He would safeguard the interests even of those who do not expect a need for it and do not therefore make a request to Him for that.²³ His lying on the banyan

20. An interesting story is told that Varadarājar lost the manuscript in the floods of Kāviri which he was crossing with the manuscript tied on his head. However, Lord Raṅganātha appeared in his dream and blessed him with the power to recall the matter written in the lost manuscript and so Varadarājar found no difficulty in writing out the fair copy of the commentary by Nañciyar. In doing so, he introduced a few interpretations of his own unable to resist the temptation to demonstrate his scholarship which was nothing mean. Nañciyar was immensely pleased with the intelligent way with which the fair copy of his manuscript had been prepared and embraced him with the affection and delight and called him 'Nampiḷḷai - our son', give the spiritual name 'Tirukkalikaṅṅi-tāsar' and placed him by his side. From that day onwards Varadarājar was known as Nam Piḷḷai (G.P. pp. 283-284; cf. *Ittiṅṅi Tamilākkam* Vol. I, pp. 35-38).

21. Nañciyar on 1.5: 9.

22. *ibid.* 1.6: 7.

23. *ibid.* 1.10: 5.

leaf keeping all the worlds within Him is praised by the Āḷvār and is, according to Nañciyar, proof for His sovereignty (*iśvaratva*).²⁴ The reference to the Lord's lifting up the world as Varāha serves to show that He had taken the Āḷvār out of the sea of worldly existence.²⁵ According to Piḷḷāṇ, the Āḷvār requests the Lord to grant him the *puruṣārtha* which, according to Nañciyar, is that he should be only for Him.²⁶ The self cannot have full realization of the Lord with the body that is made up of matter. The Lord however permitted even the mortals to have communion with Him during His descents. Yet many could not enjoy His stay then and in order to allow them His presence, the Lord has taken His place on Tirumalai.²⁷ The Lord in the Tirumalai Hills is free from defects. This absence of defect is not merely a quality in that it does not allow the classification of people as those dear to Him and those not dear to Him. Besides, it is His nature.²⁸ That the Lord Whose bed is Ādiśeṣa has taken His abode in these Hills proves that He likes these Hills more than Ādiśeṣa.²⁹ Easy accessibility of the Lord is said to be had in *arcā* form.³⁰ The general sense in which the phrase '*mūvar aḷiṅga mūrṭti*' is taken is that Lord Viṣṇu presents Himself in three forms, one being His own and the other two those of Brahmā, and Rudra.³¹ The supreme position of the Lord is due to the presence of Śrī in His chest.³² The love-lorn condition of the bride is required to be remedied by applying the white dust to her uttering the Lord's names. Nañciyar writes that the utterance of the Lord's name would rectify the ailments which are created by having had contact with

24. *ibid.* 2.2: 7.

25. *ibid.* 2.3: 5.

26. *ibid.* 2.9.

27. *ibid.* 3.2.

28. *ibid.* 3.3: 5.

29. *ibid.* 3.3: 10.

30. *ibid.* 3.6.

31. *ibid.* 3.6: 1. *Twelve Thousand* also offers the same explanation. This could be justified on the strength of the passage in the *Nārāyaṇīya Up.*

32. *ibid.* 4.5: 2.

deities other than the Lord and the dust of the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavites would remove the ailments which rise by the presence of those who are in contact with the deities other than Viṣṇu.³³ The brahmins (*ceḷunilat-tēvar*) who worship the deity at Tiruccēṅkuṅṅūr are the Śrī Vaiṣṇavites.³⁴

It is of great interest to find that the commentaries of Piḷḷāṅ and Nañciyar are unique in the expositions they contain for the verses of Nammālvār. Except for some references to the views of others³⁵ whose names are not mentioned, Nañciyar's commentary is free from the mentioning of any exponent and is in this respect similar to the work of Piḷḷāṅ. For a careful reader who takes up both these commentaries together for the understanding of the composition of Nammālvār, there is no discrepancy in the interpretation of Nañciyar of the passages of Piḷḷāṅ. Rather, it must be unquestionably admitted that Nañciyar's gloss is faithful to *Ārāytra-p-paṭi* and throws much light on the brief exposition of Piḷḷāṅ.

Yet, the later commentators refer to the views of Nañciyar which are not to be traced to the existing *Nine-Thousand*.³⁶ For instance, there is mention of *maṅgalāsāsana* in the *Tiruvāymoli*³⁷ for the devotees of God. To this an objection is raised on the ground that like Periyālvār *maṅgalāsāsana* is to be done at first to the Lord and then to His devotees. Nañciyar remarked that already *maṅgalāsāsana* was done to the Lord Whose glory stretches all through the seven worlds and it is here that the Ālvār does it to the devotees of God.³⁸ The author of *Īṭu* remarks that Nañciyar actually rejected while commenting on T.V.M. 7.8: 4 what Piḷḷāṅ wrote on T.V.M. 7.8: 2.

33. *ibid.* 4.6: 5.

34. *ibid.* 8.4: 8.

35. *ibid.* 5.2.

36. *Īṭu* on T.V.M. 4.6.

37. T.V.M. 5.2: 1.

38. *Īṭu* on T.V.M. 5.2: 1.

Aḷakiyamanavāḷajiyar, a disciple of Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai wrote a commentary known as *Twelve Thousand*.³⁹ The length of the work was decided by the author on a par with the length of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* which consists of twelve-thousand *granthas*.⁴⁰ According to the author, the ten centums of *Tiruvāymoḷi* deal respectively with the protector, that is *seṣin*, enjoyability of experience with Him, self, God's liking

39 U.R.M. 45. This commentary *Pannirāyirap-paṭi*, a later work in point of time to *Twenty-four Thousand* and *Thirty-six Thousand*. But it is placed here in the order of the number.

40. The story of its composition is very interesting by reason of its author having remained an illiterate until his thirty secondth year and having attained bedazzling scholarship at what ordinarily may appear a wrong age for education. There is the amusing story of his meeting a group of students studying something. Out of an innocent curiosity he inquired of them what they were studying. The students knew that the questioner was an illiterate person from the way in which he interrogated them, and in order to fool him they replied that they were studying '*Mucala-Kiśalayam*' (Mucala Kiśalayam—the sharp end of pestle. Mucalam-pestle, Kiśalayam—a shoot of a plant. '*Mucala Kiśalayam*' signifies imbecility, as the pestle cannot be expected to put forth shoots). Such a work did not exist, but the students wanted to indirectly make a big fool of the ignoramus. The illiterate person believed what the students said and asked Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai, his Ācārya, what the '*Mucala-Kiśalayam*' was. The learned Ācārya at once understood that the imbecile had been fooled by the young learners and frankly told him that as he was not educated it, had been easy for a set of arrogant students to fool him. The illiterate immediately realized the danger of his being illiterate and prostrated before Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai to accept him as a student. Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai gladly accepted him, in spite of his over age, as his pupil and taught him from the scrap. The student was very enthusiastic in his learning and in the long run the learned Ācārya taught him *Kāvya*s, *Nāṭakas*, *Alaṅkāra śāstras*, *Vyākaraṇam* and *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and *Uttara-Mīmāṃsā*. The illiterate very soon emerged as a great scholar and became renowned also as a dialectician and debater, which his name '*Vādi Kēṣari*' implies. He fooled those that fooled him by writing a beautiful *Kāvya* entitled *Mucala-Kiśalayam*. His interest in *Tiruvāymoḷi* was profound. He studied all the earlier commentaries and found them above the head of the common man. So he beautifully condensed the elaborate meanings and details and wrote this *Twelve Thousand* in a way which is understandable and easily comprehensible to all.

for the self, the means for *mokṣa*, prayer for His Grace, obstacle to *mokṣa*, its removal, nature of the result and the getting of it.⁴¹

The importance of this commentary lies in two respects: This is the earliest commentary to offer word for word meaning for each verse and to state the metre in which each decad is composed. While interpreting the decad 1.6., this commentator writes that the Lord would not mind the defects of His devotees. Merely folding the palms out of respect for Him would set aside what is undesirable and make the desired thing obtainable. Removal of what is undesirable depends on His will. Worship of the Lord is recommended by the Āḷvār which is justly interpreted as consisting in offering the *añcall*.⁴² The Lord's having Garuḍa as the vehicle is justified as knowable through Vedānta because of the vehicle Garuḍa being of the nature of the *Veda*.⁴³ Enjoyment of God's presence is stated by the Āḷvār to be delectable like honey, milk, ghee and sugar-cane. It would have been enough if only one had been mentioned for illustration. The mention of so many is to show that God-realization is delectable when viewed from all possible angles.⁴⁴ The creation of the world is a proof of His easy accessibility and His descent is intended to afford protection for the things created. His unsurpassed acts, affection for those who resort to Him, enjoyability, and revelation of His greatness even in descents and *arcā* are all meant to demonstrate that everything is subordinated to Him.⁴⁵ The Āḷvār refers to himself as the servant of the servants of those who are the servants of God, showing that the series could be extended further on, himself being at the lower-most level. Generally as in hereditary lineage, the seven steps are meant here also. The commentator remarks here that the ideal of a devotee shall be to choose service at

41. Bhag. Viṣ. Vol. I, p. 40.

42. *Twelve Thousand* on T.V.M. 1.6: 8.

43. *ibid.* 2.2: 10.

44. *ibid.* 2.3: 1; cf. for a similar interpretation.
ibid. 3.5: 6.

45. *ibid.* 3.6.

the lower-most level of the series and logically, this must be taken to mean that for a devotee, another devotee shall be his *śeṣin* and this shall be further adopted in the series. Thus there is a long series of *śeṣins* as that of *śeṣas*.⁴⁶ The verse 6.10:10 is exquisitely interpreted as suggestive of the significance of the *Dvaya-mantra*. This commentary contains here and there some references to the views of Parācara Paṭṭar⁴⁷ and others.⁴⁸ Tirumalai is a place which is common to the world and *Paramapada*.⁴⁹

Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai who was the direct disciple of Nampillai wrote *Twenty-four Thousand* reminiscent of the length of *Śrīmad Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*.⁵⁰ This commentary contains, besides word for word interpretation, much of what had been handed down by way of tradition. The views of many scholars on the interpretation of some verses, which were not incorporated in the works of Piḷḷāṅ and Naṅciyar, are cited here. This commentary was given publicity by his son Nainārāccāṅ Piḷḷai.

In the introductory portion, this commentator writes that the descent of the Āḷvār on earth is due to the good deeds

46. *ibid.* 3.7: 10.

47. *ibid.* 3.5: 1.

48. *ibid.* 3.9: 9.

49. *ibid.* 1.8: 3.

50. U.R.M. 43: There is the interesting story of how he happened to write the commentary. A grandson of Kūrattāḷvāṅ, Naṭuvil Tiruvīti-p-piḷḷai Paṭṭar by name, was studying *Tiruvāymoli* at the feet of Nampillai. The disciple committed to writing every night what he had listened to from his learned teacher that day. At the end of the course the student discovered that he had written down a commentary in one lakh and twenty-five thousand *granthas*. This he showed to his master who was provoked that the student had done the work without his approval and took it from him and cast it away as food for white ants. However, Nampillai realized later that a new version of *Tiruvāymoli-commentary* was necessary and so he charged his most brilliant disciple Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai who had studied all the *śāstras* in every detail to write it out. And thus the commentary had to be written by Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai (*Vide G.P. pp. 299-301*; and cf. *Iṭṭiṅ Tamizākkam* Vol. I, pp. 39-41).

of the selves. Much of God-realization which the Āḷvār had experienced is so well presented in the *Tiruvāymoli* that it could clear any doubt that may be raised about the import of the *Vedas*, epics and *Purānas*.⁵¹

Nammāḷvār refers to his composition as admired by those who are poets of milk-like Tamil, those who are proficient in music and devotees of God.⁵² Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai takes this respectively to refer to the first three Āḷvārs, Maturakaviyāḷvār and Periyāḷvār. He makes references to Parāṅkuśānampī, a disciple of Maturakaviyāḷvār, Tiruvarāṅkapperumāḷ Araiyaṅ and others.⁵³ Such an interpretation like this requires careful scrutiny. Nammāḷvār should have meant only scholars of Tamil musicians and devotees in a general manner. There is no evidence to show that Nammāḷvār was aware of the other Āḷvārs as his predecessors. What Nammāḷvār would have meant is not and need not be the same as what the later exponents would like to convey as the sense of this verse. Any attempt as done by this commentator to illustrate this sense by referring to the savants of old and recent years who had achieved distinction in these spheres cannot easily be approved as conveying the import of the verse. It can serve better as an annotation which would serve the purpose through illustrations. Otherwise, anachronism would be the chief defect of interpretations of this kind. In all probability, what Nampīḷai had taught by way of annotation was sought to be recorded as much by Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai and treated by later generations as meant by Nammāḷvār himself.

The Āḷvār describes the Lord as not male, not female and not eunuch.⁵⁴ The commentator shrewdly remarks that this is merely to show that He is *Puruṣottama* but has no compeer.⁵⁵ Taking the verse 2.10: 10, the commentator interprets the

51. Bhāg. Viṣ. Vol. I, pp. 41-42.

52. T.V.M. 1.5: 11.

53. *Twenty-four Thousand* on T.V.M. 1.5: 11.

54. T.V.M. 2.5: 9.

55. *Twenty-four Thousand* on T.V.M. 2.5: 9.

phrase 'vētam mun virttan' as God's exposition of the sense of the *Vedas* through the *Bhagavad-gīta*. Tirumalai is also spoken of as Ādiśeṣa.⁵⁶ Service rendered at a particular holy place by having birth there would enable the removal of sins committed by the enjoyment of prohibited things.⁵⁷ The sound produced by the flapping of wings of Garuḍa is taken as that produced by the chantings of the *Sāma-veda*.⁵⁸ Tiruvēṅkaṭam is described as the holy place where the Lord lying on the serpent at ŚrīRāṅgam, stands in order to meet the gods.⁵⁹

While interpreting the verse 4.1:1, Periyavāccān Piḷlai writes that the use of the word 'tirunāraṇan' means that the deity to be sought after and reached is the divine couple, that is, Nārāyaṇa with Śrī is that deity and the whole thing is the *śeṣa* for this couple.⁶⁰ The self gets into mortal life because of not having the knowledge that the Lord is the Supreme Person and because of its feeling that it is independent. To get rid of these two factors, one shall get instructions regarding the supremacy of the Lord.⁶¹ The interpretation which this commentator offers for the verse 6.5:3 as *vyūha* and *vibhava* forms are experienced in Tolaiவில்லிமாங்கலம், does not appear to be correct, for there is no reference in the original passage to the *vyūha* form. Perhaps Kṛṣṇa, who is no other than Vyūha Vāsudeva, is taken to be referred to here but this interpretation is evidently far-fetched.

The views of Parācara Paṭṭar,⁶² Kiṭāmpi Āccān⁶³, Tirumalai Nampi,⁶⁴ Rāmānuja in reference to those of Ālavantār

56. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 3.3:10.

57. *ibid.* 3.6.

58. *Twenty-four Thousand* on T.V.M. 3.8:5.

59. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 7.2; vide *ibid.* 4.2:4; 5.1:10 for interesting discussions.

60. cf. *ibid.* 6.8:1 where the commentator declares that both the *vibhava* forms are subordinated to the couple.

61. *ibid.* 4.10.

62. *ibid.* 1.6:1; 1.10; 2.4:5; 2.4:9; 2.5:9.

63. *ibid.* 1.7:6.

64. *ibid.* 1.4:8.

and others⁶⁵, Mutaliyāṅṅāṅ,⁶⁶ Kūrat-tālvāṅ,⁶⁷ Piḷḷai⁶⁸ (Nampiḷḷai) and others are frequently cited. Special mention must be made of the fine expositions of Parācara Paṭṭar on some verses.⁶⁹ Many of these citations appear for the first time recorded in this commentary. There are many anecdotes⁷⁰ referred to in the commentary whose relevance to the context is better explained by the occasions when the relevant verses were expounded. One of the singular contributions which Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai made through this commentary is that he took the relevant verses from Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and offered interpretations to them.⁷¹

Iṭu which is also known as *Thirty-six Thousand*, is the commentary prepared by Vaṭakkut-tiruvītip-piḷḷai, another disciple of Nampiḷḷai. Being the product written under the guidance of the same preceptor, it bears much likeness to the *Twenty-four Thousand* of Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai. It contains more information than the latter and has been more popular also. The author's ardent devotion to Rāmānuja was reflected in his choice of the number of *granthas* for his commentary. *Śrī Bhāṣya* had a commentary entitled *Surtapraśāsika* by Sudarsana Paṭṭar in thirty-six thousand *granthas*. On the basis of its length this author also limited his commentary to thirty-six thousand *granthas* and hence the commentary came to be known as *Thirty-six Thousand*.⁷² As the real author of

65. *ibid.* 2.1; 2.3: 1.

66. *ibid.* 8.8: 5.

67. *ibid.* 8.9.

68. *ibid.* 5.9: 7; 6.7: 3.

69. *ibid.* 2.8; 4.9: 11; 5.7: 10; 6.1: 1, 6.2: 6.

70. *cf. ibid.* 2.7; 2.9: 2; 6.4: 9; 4.7: 1.

71. *cf. ibid.* 2.1; 3.5: 4.

72. There is a beautiful legend about how it happened to the world. The author used to take notes from the discourse on the *Tiruvāymoli* by his learned preceptor Nampiḷḷai and prepared a fair draft of his lectures with the help of his notes taken. One day he submitted the draft to his master telling him that it was the substance of his (the master's) discourse on the *Tiruvāymoli*. The master perused the whole draft and was immensely pleased with it because it was neither too long nor too short and it was to the length of

the work was Nampiḷḷai, the work is generally known as *Nampiḷḷai Iṭu*⁷³ or simply *Iṭu*.

The name 'Iṭu' has many interpretations. One meaning of the word 'Iṭu' is *kavacam* or armour.⁷⁴ As an armour, *Iṭu* protected *Tiruvāymoḷi* from fantastic expositions by half-wits and quarter-wits. Another interpretation is based on the circumstance of its being committed to writing by Vaṭakku-tiruvḷti-p-piḷḷai, 'iṭu' meaning writing. '*Iṭu*' means 'writing' in Tamil. Another meaning of the 'iṭu' is 'equal' in Tamil: "*iṭum eṭuppuṃ il icaṅ*".⁷⁵ 'Iṭu' here has this meaning. As this work is equal in length to *Śrutaparakāśika*, and as the commentary forms the link or chain binding the God and His devotee, it came to be known as *Iṭu* or the instrument of 'iṭupāṭu' or engagement with the theme of God. The author of the commentary himself had held the view that it was equal to the greatness of *Tiruvāymoḷi* itself.

This commentary begins with a brief survey of the systems of Indian thought. Seventeen systems get treated here, the conclusion being drawn in favour of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of *Vedānta*. Nammālvār was responsible for the interpretation of the *Dvaya-mantra*: The divine couple, Nārāyaṇa with Śrī, is the deity.⁷⁶ The concept of *śeṣa* shall

Śrutaparakāśika. But as it was committed to writing without his permission, the master took it from his disciple and kept it idle with him. But one of Nampiḷḷai's disciples, Iyugṅi Mātava-p-perumāḷ by name, was very eager to have the commentary and prayed Lord Raṅganātha to fulfil his desire. To satisfy the 'pāravā' or the great desire of his devotee and also to bless the world with the commentary, the Lord hinted Nampiḷḷai who had come to worship His Feet through the temple priest to hand over the manuscript to Mātava-p-perumāḷ otherwise known as Cīriyāḷvaṅ Appiḷḷai. And thus the commentary came to us. (G.P. pp. 311-12; cf. *Iṭṭiṅ Tamiḷakkam* Vol. I, pp. 41-43).

73. U.R.M. 44, 48, 49.

74. *Paṭiṅṅ p-paṭṭu* 14, 21. Again cf. *Iṭu* 7.5; 9; *Civika Cintāmani* 534 (Nacciṅarkkṇiṅiyar's Commentary).

75. T.V.M. 1.6; 3.

76. *Thirty-six Thousand*. pp. 89-90 where the passage 1.1: 7 of T.V.M. is cited.

apply to the devotees of God as well as it does with reference to God.⁷⁷ While the *Vedānta* prescribes the path of devotion to the twice-born and that of self-surrender to those who have no other path to pursue, Nammālvār declares the path of self-surrender as the means for all.⁷⁸ The path of self-surrender is not the means for adopting the path of devotion, being an independent means by itself.⁷⁹ The second half of the *Dvaya-mantra* is expounded in the centums 1 to 3, its first half in 4 to 6 and the qualities helpful for this in the remaining centums.⁸⁰ Among the citations which this work contains to a large number, special mention is to be made of the *Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha*⁸¹ of Saṅkara and of the *Tattva-vicāraṇa*⁸² of Yādavaprakāsa.

The Lord cannot be known accurately to be of a particular nature but yet He has thousand names. Since He had shown Himself in several places, to several people, He came to be called by the names which came to be associated with His act at the particular places.⁸³ While interpreting the verse 1.3: 5, this commentator remarks that the word '*bhagavān*' has primary denotation to Him alone while it has secondary application to others. The phrase '*tava neṣi*' does not mean penance but devotion.⁸⁴

This commentator states that all other Ālvārs are to be treated as forming part of the whole which is Nammālvār.⁸⁵ This concept must be considered to have developed out of the importance the *Tiruvāymolī* gained as a work which came to be studied only through the preceptor. However, the fancied

77. *ibid.*, p. 90 where T.V.M. 2.3: 10; 3.1 are cited.

78. *ibid.* pp. 92-93 where are cited T.V.M. 5.7: 1; 5.7: 10; 5.8: 11; 5.9: 11; 5.10: 11; 10.10: 3.

79. *ibid.* p. 94.

80. *ibid.* p. 96.

81. *ibid.* p. 59.

82. *ibid.* p. 56.

83. *Iṭu* on T.V.M. 1.3: 4.

84. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.3: 5.

85. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.4: 2.

whole does not appear to have any basis, for like the *Tiruvāymōḷi*, the compositions of other Āḷvārs have their own individual importance and for that reason are not any the less in comparison to the *Tiruvāymōḷi*. The prime cause for the importance of the *Tiruvāymōḷi* lies in the fact that Nāthamuni became the pupil of Nammāḷvār who came therefore to be known as the head of those who have sought shelter under the Lord. Nāthamuni propagated the compositions of other Āḷvārs as well as he did those of Nammāḷvār and all the four thousand verses came to be treated as *Drāvīda Veda*. There is no separate treatment of the *Veda* as parts and whole in this *Veda* and this must mean that all the Āḷvārs are to be treated alike as ṛṣis, the ancient seers of truth but Nammāḷvār's composition is supreme as He is. This does not mean that there is anything like the concept of the part and whole among the Āḷvārs. That they occupy a position lower in order to that of Nammāḷvār must however be admitted.

Like Periyavācān Piḷḷai, this commentator also offers some interesting observations on T.V.M. 1.5: 11. The musicians are Maturakaviyāḷvār and Nāthamuni. Kūrattāḷvān is said to have referred to Parāṅkuṣa-nampī, the disciple of Maturakaviyāḷvār as the Tamil poet. Yāmunācārya is said to have referred to the first three Āḷvārs as Tamil poets, to Tiruppāḷvār as the musician and Periyāḷvār as devotee.

The sins of the devotees could be removed by Nārāyaṇa because He is the husband of Śrī.⁸⁶ Like Śrī, Nappingai too has *puruṣakāra* for the sake of the selves.⁸⁷ Detachment is to be given greater importance than knowledge, as it is clear from Sahadeva declaring Kṛṣṇa as most deserving worship. Hence there was a shower of flowers on his head. This anecdote has relevance to the interpretation of T.V.M. 2.2: 4, for Sahadeva said that he would set his foot on the heads of those who would not admit the overlordship of Viṣṇu. The word 'maṛai' in T.V.M. 3.1: 10 is interpreted in two ways. It

86. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.6: 10.

87. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.7: 8.

means *Veda* and means also that which conceals its own features to those who are unbelievers in the *Vedic* tradition but shows them to those who believe in the *Vedic* tradition.

While interpreting the verse 4.3: 3 this commentator renders 'ākam' is the *para* form, 'irumūrtti' as Vāsudeva and Sankarṣaṇa and 'mūṅṅu mūrtti' as Pradyumna added to these two. This is not only ingenious but also apt in the light of the Vaiṣṇavite tradition. On the verse 5.7: 11 this commentary states that although the thousand verses convey the sense of the *Vedas*, yet they did not come into being of their own accord like the *Veda*. The *Vedas* occupy a position that is comparable to that of *para* form, the epics and *Purāṇas* as that of the divine descent and these verses that of the *arcā* form. The decad 6.9 is said to expound the *Tirumantra* and 6.10 the *Carama-sloka*. The Tirumalai Hills are said to crown the beauty of the earth and in this respect, are like an ornament that gives perfection to the decoration of women.⁸⁸ While commenting on the verse 6.10: 10, it is remarked that *paratva* is far distant and hence beyond the reach of the self. *Vyūha* is enjoyable to Brahmā and others like grains. The divine descents are helpful only for those who are lucky to be present during the periods of those descents and are not useful for others and so are removed from them by time. The Tirumalai Hills do not have any deficiency of this kind and so the Feet of the Lord of Tiruvēṅkaṭam are the refuge.⁸⁹ *Paratva* is intended for those who are eternally released, *vyūha* for those who are almost released, that is, those pious selves who could be taken to be released for all purposes but for their possession of the physical frame and *vibhava* for those who have committed good deeds⁹⁰. The Āṭvār uses the word 'kunta' as the name of the Lord. The commentator remarks that the word 'mukunta' has become shortened into *kunta*.⁹¹

88. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 6;10: 2.

89. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 6.10; 10; cf. *ibid.* 7.2 for a slightly different version of this.

90. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 7.3: 3.

91. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 7.9: 7.

Like Periyavāccān Pillai, this commentator also cites several passages from the *Rāmāyana*⁹² and *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*⁹³ and interprets them. Besides citing the views of many earlier exponents like Parācara Paṭṭar,⁹⁴ this commentator refers to the views of a scholar who is named Ammāḷ⁹⁵ in some contexts and Ammaṅkiyammāḷ⁹⁶ in others. It is hard to find out whether these two were identical or different persons. If they were different, then Ammāḷ must be identical with Vātsya Varadācārya who was well known as Naṭātūr Ammāḷ who lived at least upto 1274 A.D., when he blessed Vedānta Deśika (c. 1268 A.D.).

*Tiruvāymoḷi Vācakamālai*⁹⁷ which is also known as *Vivarāṇa-tatakam*, was written by a woman, Tirukkōṅēri Tāsyai. It is mentioned at the end of this commentary that the work was completed in the year *Āṅgiraśa* twenty-sixth day of *Mārkaḷi* month.⁹⁸ The author dedicated this work at the Feet of Śri Ārāvamutan at the shrine of Kumbakonam. She pays respect to her preceptors, Ālvār (Nammālvār), Emperumāṅār (Rāmānuja), Candragiri Ayyaṅ, Śrīman Nārāyaṅa-jlyar, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr-jlyar and Vatakkut-tiruvltip-piḷḷai. In all probability she was the direct disciple of Vatakkut-tiruvltip-piḷḷai.⁹⁹ Nothing is known about the three teachers who preceded Vatakkut-tiruvltip-piḷḷai. That she is citing a passage from Vedānta Deśika cannot be proved beyond doubt, as the two words which are supposed to have been cited occur in the reversed order in the work of Vedānta

92. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.4: 3; 1.10: 1; 1.10: 4; 2.2: 5; 2.4: 1; 2.9; 2.10: 4; 2.10: 7; 3.3: 7; 5.5: 10.

93. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 2.7; 3.7; 4.4: 3; 6.10.

94. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 1.6: 11; 1.8; 5.10.

95. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 7.4: 4; 7.6: 10.

96. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 4.5: 1; 5.9: 10; 8.3: 11; 8.4: 1.

97. For a detailed estimate of this work see Introduction of this work, pp. (62-71).

98. *Tiruvāymoḷi Vācakamālai*, p. 334. The year may correspond to 1273 A.D., or 1213 A.D.

99. He was born in the year *Sarvajit* which corresponds to 1168 A.D.

Deśika.¹⁰⁰ If reliance is placed on this citation, she must have lived posterior to Vedānta Deśika (1268-1369 A.D.) in which case she could not have been a direct disciple of Vaṭakkut-tiruvitip-piṭṭai. She could have hailed from the Andhra State, because of some errors crept in in the writing of Tamil in this commentary.¹⁰¹ Candragiri Ayyan who might have belonged to Candragiri, a place near Tirupati, happened to be in the line of preceptors of this commentator.

One noteworthy feature of this commentary lies in the exposition offered here only for one hundred verses of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* justifying the other title *Vivāraṇatatakam* of the commentary. Secondly, the metre is mentioned in which the particular verse that is taken up for interpretation is composed. Thirdly, the commentator seeks to show that all 100 verses of *Tiruvāymoḷi* are only expository of the first verse. The commentator must have been taught by her preceptor, the author of the *Itu* which speaks of the first ten verses as the epitome of whole work, the first three verses of the decad as the summary of this decad, the first verse that of the first three verses and the first line that of the first verse.¹⁰² The sense of the first verse can be taken up to mean this: 'O mind! worship the Lord's lustrous Feet which destroy the miseries of devotees, the Lord Whose bliss is unsurpassed, Who offers to the devotees the correct knowledge, and Who is the lord of the eternal selves'. This commentator takes up a verse in almost every decad and shows, by way of exposition, that it is only an explanation of the opening verse of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*. This is clear from the verse beginning with the words 'oḷivḷ kālamellām (3.3: 1). This verse means: 'We have to be steadfast in serving the Lord for all times'. This service shall never break up. The place for rendering service shall be Tiruvēṅkaṭam which resounds with the sounding waterfalls. The Lord Who is to be served is the father of the father of the

100. *Tiruvāymoḷi Vācakamālai*. Int. p.70. cf. Vedānta Deśika's *Nyāsa TĪkā* 22 with *Tiruvāymoḷi Vācakamālai*, p.204.

101. *ibid.* Int. pp. 60-61.

102. *Vide: Itu - Introduction.*

father and is enchantingly radiant'. The commentator explains that the first line refers to the unlimited bliss of the Lord at all times, places and stages. The second line shows that He favours the devotee to do all kinds of service without having any delusion regarding the goal. The third line shows the Lord to be supreme among gods who do verbal service by singing *Sāmvada*. The waterfalls appear to invite people for visiting the hills and sing His praise. The last line refers to the Lord as the foremost among others. The Feet are said to be lustrous and capable of destroying the miseries. The name '*Vēṅkaṭam*' is significant here and brings out the sense of the word '*tuyar*' which refers to the three *guṇas*, that is three debts¹⁰³ and three offences.¹⁰⁴ The lustrous beauty of the Feet sets aside the lustres of the sky, water, light and cognition.¹⁰⁵

In another verse (4.8:2), the Āṭvār means that His heart is occupied by Lakṣmī, His hands are charming and strong, He had taken the Āṭvār into His service and He is blue like the emerald. According to the commentator this verse establishes Śrī also as *īṣṭi* and also as His *śeṣa*. His arms are strong and award *mokṣa* through knowledge and devotion. He is addressed as '*Āravamutē*' in another (5.8:1)¹⁰⁶ meaning that He is delectable and is never satiable. In the exposition of each of these verses, the commentator refers to the *Taittirya* passage on the gradation of bliss.¹⁰⁷

There are references to the differences in the interpretations among the early exponents.¹⁰⁸ While Periyāṭvār refers to the extension of the Vaiṣṇavite tradition at least to

103. The three debts are for gods, the sages and manes and are discharged by performing the sacrifice, reciting the *Vedas* and begetting children.

104. The three offences are those incurred at God, God's men and by being hostile to God by nature.

105. The commentary bears here the influence of *Itu* on TVM 3.3:1.

106. The exposition for T.V.M 9.3; 6.10: 3; 10.6: 1 and 10.7:5 is detailed and highly informative.

107. *Taitt. Up.* 2: 8.

108. Vide: *Tiruvāymōḷi Vācakamālai* on 1.10: 1.

seven generations,¹⁰⁹ this commentator speaks of it as extending to twenty-one generations.¹¹⁰ There are few references to the difference in the interpretations of certain passages among the early exponents of Vaiṣṇavism.¹¹¹ The interpretation of the word '*catumūrīti*' is generally given in favour of the *vyūha* concept;¹¹² but according to this commentator, valour, heroism, prowess and others constitute His body which shows that his overlordship is due to His destroying the enemies of His devotees.¹¹³ There is also reference to the dialectal usage of a Tamil word.¹¹⁴

In the verse 10.8: 5 the Āḷvār speaks of his composition as causing disaster to the demons and as having hailed by gods and sages. The Lord Himself composed this by Himself. The hills at Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai are resonant with delightful music sung by the bees.¹¹⁵ The commentator remarks that the Lord listened to the composition of the Āḷvār and became very much delighted and sets the surroundings in the hills resound with the preliminary representation of the musical melody of the song which is generally done with the use of the letters '*ra*' and '*na*'. This is done through the humming of the bees. The Lord's composing of this *Tiruvāymolī* is like His own descent, causes destruction to the evil-doers and protects the good persons. This reveals that the Lord is the embodiment of supreme bliss. The composition itself is a gift of perfect knowledge to humanity. This is, unlike the *Vedas*, within the easy reach of all and successfully representing God's greatness in full. The reference to the sages getting delight through this composition shows that they contemplate on His Feet. It shows also that this composition would serve the purpose for enjoyment of God-realization and as such the sages could be taken to mean the eternal selves. As the Lord

109. *Pāllāṅgu*. 5.

110. *Tiruvāymolī Vācakamālai* on 2:7: 1.

111. *ibid.* on 1.10: 1; 8.7: 3; 10.6: 1.

112. *Vide: Itu* on T.V.M. 8.10: 9.

113. *Tiruvāymolī Vācakamālai* on T.V.M. 8.10: 9.

114. *ibid.* 9.8: 1.

115. *Arūyirap-paṭi* on *ibid.*

Himself is said to have composed this, this composition can be treated on a par with the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The musical melody which the hills are resonant with can be treated as not different from the chant of *Sāma-veda*. The Lord has sung this by entering the interior of the Ālvār.¹¹⁶

Raṅgarāmānujamuni (c. 1650 A.D.) the commentator on the main *Upaniṣads*, *Surutaprakāśikā* and works of Vedānta Deśika, wrote a Sanskrit commentary on the *Tiruvāymoḷi*. It is on the model of *Ārāytrap-paṭi* and should have been written to make the *Tiruvāymoḷi* popular among those who do not know Tamil.

Periya Parakālasvāmin (c. 1700) commented on the *Ārāytrap-paṭi* in his work called *Eighteen Thousand (Paṭinemyāyirap-paṭi)* which is written in a *śāstric* manner explaining the meaning of each word, offering critical exposition for each verse. He refers to the views of Rāmānuja¹¹⁷ and Nāñciyar.¹¹⁸ The exposition of verse 10.8: 9 is superb and the conclusion drawn on 10.10: 10 gives a well-reasoned exposition of the tenets of the Vaiṣṇavite school in the light of the tradition of the *Drāvīda Veda*. Like Vedānta Deśika this author gives at the end of the work, in the *manipravāḷa* style, the substance of each decad in the *Tiruvāymoḷi*.

Of all these commentaries, the commentary of the Vedānta Rāmānujasvāmin (c. 1700 A.D.) who was also reputed as Śākṣātsvāmin seems to be an ideal exposition. It gives an accurate explanation with sufficient criticism on the commentary of Piḷḷāṅ. Almost every word in the *Ārāytrap-paṭi* is taken up and explained. This commentary which is known as *Twenty-four Thousand* is written in the manner of *bhāṣyas* on the Sanskrit *Śāstrā* texts. For instance, the gloss on 4.4: 4 is ably expounded by citing and identifying the passage in the *Ārāytrap-paṭi* as expository of the passage in the *Tiruneṭuntanṭakam*.¹¹⁹ Piḷḷāṅ's gloss on T.V.M. 4.3: 3 is strictly

116. cf. Peri. Tm. 8.10: 9; T.V.M. 10.8: 1.

117. *Eighteen Thousand* on 10.7: 1.

118. *ibid.*, 10.7: 3; the commentator defends Nāñciyar's interpretation on 10.10: 10.

119. T.N. 24.

followed without trying to make a reference to the *vyāsa* doctrine. Services through the body, mind and word are said to be conveyed by the verses 2.9: 1 to 3. The meaning of the *Dvaya-mantra* is said to be conveyed in the verse 6.10: 10.¹²⁰ This commentary refers to the differences in the readings of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* and *Āraṅytrap-pāṭi*.¹²¹ There is also reference to some previous gloss by a writer whose name is not mentioned.¹²² Besides this commentary, this author had also written a gloss on the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, explaining each verse word by word and offering informatory explanation wherever necessary.¹²³ But for a solitary reference to a tradition involving Rāmānuja's explanation, the commentary is free from anecdotes and presents a faithful explanation for a critical understanding of both the *Tiruvāymoḷi* and *Āraṅytrap-pāṭi*. Attempt is thus made to make the text of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* understood and there is presented a criticism on the verses directly and then the exposition follows on the *Āraṅytrap-pāṭi*.

Vedānta Deśika presents a critical epitome of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* in one hundred and thirty-three verses in Sanskrit of which the first ten are introductory and the last twelve offer concluding remarks, the remaining ones giving a gist of each decad in the *sāstric* fashion. The *Tiruvāymoḷi* is a treatise on *mokṣa* and has the sentiment of quietitude as the dominating element.¹²⁴ This work was written by Vedānta Deśika at the request of scholars. What is best as the gem in the ocean of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* is taken out by churning the *Upaṇiṣad* of Nammāḷvār.¹²⁵ Bridal mystic element is dominant in this composition and in a composition of this mystic

120. For similar expositions vide *Twenty-four Thousand on Āraṅytrap-pāṭi* on T.V.M. 1.3: 7; 2.6: 1; 4.1: 1; 4.3: 2; 4.8: 4; 4.10: 1; 5.3: 1; 6.2: 1; 8.9: 1.

121. Vide: *ibid.* on 1.3: 10; 1.4: 10; 1.6: 1; 1.7: 6; 4.9: 10.

122. Vide: *ibid.* on 1.6: 2.

123. Vide: the gloss by Vedānta Rāmānujaśvāmī on T.V.M. 4.5: 1; 7.5: 5.

124. *Drāmidōpaniṣat-tātparyaratnāvali* 1.

125. *ibid.* 2.

Apart from the *Tiruvāymoli* the other three compositions of Nammālvār and those of other Ālvārs also were commented on by several writers of course all of them being posterior to Pillān and Nañciyar. Periyavāccān Piḷḷai was the earliest scholar who commented on the entire four thousand verses of the *Nālāytra Divya Prabandham*.¹³⁵ While heaping insult after insult on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śisupāla was only getting freed from sins and thus his act could be considered as recollecting God before death.¹³⁶ The Lord's name is to be uttered. Then the Lord will come to that self who utters it. Brahmā occupies the navel of Viṣṇu. Yet he does not know the greatness of the Lord. Simply by standing or being near the sea coast, one cannot have the estimate of the sea.¹³⁷ The Lord at ŚrīRangam is lying facing the southern direction. The commentator remarks that the region lying to the north of Tamil Nad does not have the fortune of being popular with the singing of the hymns of the Ālvārs. The beauty of His back is presented to such regions in order to attract the people there to ŚrīRangam and make them acquainted with the songs of the Ālvārs. This interpretation has much poetic beauty but looks rather exaggerated. There is a vast area lying to the north of ŚrīRangam forming part of Tamil Nad wherein are numerous shrines whose glory was sung by many an Ālvār. The suggestion could be admitted, if the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam had been in the lying posture facing the south. The real position happens to be that the Lord chose to face the south wherein lay the kingdom of Vibhīṣana. The Lord is the gem resting on the golden plate of Ādiṣeṣa.¹³⁸ The verse 38 of the *Tirumālai* can be treated as the *Carama-śloka* for this composition. It conveys the sense of *Dvaya-mantra*¹³⁹. Nammālvār¹⁴⁰ gave the import of the first half of the *Dvaya-mantra* and Āṇṭāḷ¹⁴¹ gave that of the

135. Some verses in *Periyal. Tm.* are lost and Maṇavālamāmuṇi commented on these.

136. Periyavāccān Piḷḷai on M.Tv. 35.

137. *ibid.* on M. Tv. 56.

138. *ibid.* on T.M. 19.

139. *ibid.* on T.M. 38.

140. Vide: Commentary on T.M. 38.

141. T.Pv. 29.

second half of the same *mantra*. The interpretation¹⁴² of the word '*kōḷkkōn*' as the Lord of Uṟaiyūr does not seem to be justified as the author Kulacēkarāḷvār was the king of Kōḷikkōṭu (modern Calicut) in the Kerala State while Uṟaiyūr lies near Śrī Raṅgam. The Āḷvār in the guise of the bride feels the night unbearable. The commentator remarks that the Lord controls every one. By manliness, He subjugates those who are opposed to Him and those who are favourable to Him through His charming appearance.¹⁴³ The sacred rites have to be performed in order that devotion to the Lord would increase and sins would get destroyed.¹⁴⁴

Vedānta Deśika commented on the *Amalanātipirāṇ* of Tiruppāṇāḷvār. This commentary which is known as *Munivāhanabhōga* was composed by the author for pleasing a pious soul who was then living at Śrī Raṅgam. At the end of his commentary the commentator writes that he explained this work of the Āḷvār for the delight of a pious self (*sāttvika*). There is a difference of opinion regarding the identity of the pious self. While the fact is that there is no definite evidence for identifying this person, the *Tenkalai* school takes this person to be Periyavāccāṅ Pillaḷ¹⁴⁵. Many such persons were the contemporaries of Deśika at Śrī Raṅgam. If guess could have its sway the person could have been Pillaḷ Lokācārya.

Vedānta Deśika speaks of Tiruppāṇāḷvār as having acquired the bliss of Paramapada on earth and had the experience of that at the Feet of the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam which took the shape of the ten verses beginning with the words "*amalanātipirāṇ*". The entire composition is described to be an exposition of *Tirumantra*. Great care and minute study of the poem exercised by the commentator explain how the Tamil poems convey the sense of the import of the *Vedas*.

142. Perum. Tm. 9: 11. This may perhaps be due to Uṟaiyūr being known also as Kōḷiyūr.

143. Periyavāccāṅ Pillaḷ on T.V.R. 12

144. *ibid.* on M. Tv. 12.

145. cf. Duṣṣa Nirāsa. Śrī Vaiṣṇava sudarśana.

It is held that Vedānta Deśika wrote also *Maturakavi-hṛdayam*, a commentary on the piece *Kaṇṇinum-ciṭuttāmpu* of Maturakaviyālvār but this is now lost.¹⁴⁶ It is also held that this commentator expounded the *Tiruvāymoḷi* in a work known as *Nigamaparimala*.¹⁴⁷

In the third section of his work *Upakārasaṅgraha* Deśika takes up the first verse of *Tiruviruttam* and interprets it. The Ālvār represents to the Lord for listening to the four compositions of his, in all of which he prays for rendering service to Him. The words are individually expounded and the senses suggested to show that the entire principles of Vedānta are conveyed by this verse. The main import of this verse consists in giving expression to the sense of gratitude which the Ālvār feels for God offering His own place to His devotees.

The *Tiruppāvai* of Āṇṭāḷ has unique popularity in having many commentaries. Attempts were made by most of these writers to interpret the verses as they convey sense and also to suggest the underlying import intended to be conveyed by Āṇṭāḷ. Raṅgarāmānujasvāmin, who wrote commentaries on the ten principal *Upaṇiṣads*, composed his exposition of each verse of Āṇṭāḷ in Sanskrit. The commentaries of Periya Parakālesvāmin and Raṅganāthasvāmin are very useful as they are written on the *śāstralc* lines, conveying the actual meaning of each word and discussing the sense and import of it in the context. The commentary refers to the explanations of several early exponents which were not however recorded in the form of works of these writers. The explanations of Kiṭāmpi Āccāṅ,¹⁴⁸ Piḷḷāṅ,¹⁴⁹ Tirumalai Nampī,¹⁵⁰ Eṅkaḷālvāṅ¹⁵¹

146. Introduction to *Saṅkalpasūryadhaya* p. 36.

147. *ibid.* p. 37.

148. Periya Parakālesvāmin's commentary on *Tiruppāvai*, p. 32.

149. *ibid.* p. 32.

150. *ibid.* pp. 62, 109, 169, 241.

151. *ibid.* p. 62.

Ālavantār,¹⁵² Empār,¹⁵³ and Emperumānār¹⁵⁴ have found places in it. There are also certain anecdotes referred to in the commentary.¹⁵⁵

Periya Parakālasvāmin achieved distinction like Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai in commenting on all the four thousand verses of the *Nalayiram*. Aḷakiyamaṅvāḷa-jīyar wrote a *svāpadeśa* commentary on the *Tiruppāvai* on which Nampiḷḷai is said to have commented in a work which is also called *Ṭṣu*. Nañciyar's commentary on the *Tiruppāḷi Eḷucci* is available. *Amalaṅtipirāṇ* has a commentary by Aḷakiyamaṅavāḷap-perumāl Nāyānar, the younger brother of Piḷḷai Lokācāryar. Nālūr Piḷḷai the disciple of Īyūṇṇi Padmanābha, wrote commentaries on the compositions of Periyālvār and Tirumānkaiyālvār.

Apart from these some other attempts were made to expound and interpret the *Tiruvāymoḷi* and one such attempt was made by a group of people who are referred to by Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai and Vaṭakkut-tiruvṭip-piḷḷai as Tamilians.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps, such persons depended more on the Tamil classical literature for offering their interpretations. Rejection of such interpretations perhaps shows that they did not have the traditional authority of Vaiṣṇavism for interpreting the *Tiruvāymoḷi* which had become then raised to the rank of the *Veda*. Nañciyar took objection to such interpretations.¹⁵⁷ The verse 8.2: 2 means that the bride is skilful to proceed to God with a view to get something from Him but she could not get it. The Tamil scholar remarked here that what the bride means here is that the statement that God would grant what all the devotees want to get from Him is only true as far as the statement is made. It has failed to produce the effect in

152. *ibid.* p. 189.

153. *ibid.* p. 241.

154. *ibid.* p. 241.

155. *ibid.* pp. 113, 203.

156. *Twenty-four Thousand and Thirty-six Thousand* on T.V.M. 1.6: 2; 2.1: 5; 4.6: 2; 3.9: 7, 9; 4.6: 2, 5; 4.10; 5.4: 6, 7; 5.9: 7, 7.5: 8; 7.7: 2.

157. *Vide: Twenty-four Thousand* on T.V.M. 7.R 6.

her case.¹⁵⁸ In verse 9:6:6, the Ālvār says that Kṛṣṇa's exploits or deeds would be honest and sincere to him. The word 'cem' means straightforward. The Tamil scholar however took this in the sense of helpful.¹⁵⁹

The text of the *Tiruvāymolī* and the commentaries on it have become popular and are held sacred for spiritual study directly under the preceptor. This literature alone has won the enviable position of being called *Bagavad-viṣayam*. The knowledge of this brought in the name *Ubhayavedānta* for one who had already studied Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya* with commentaries on it.

During the period of the commentator Nampiḷḷai, an interesting feature began to mark the writing of the commentaries. Some of the compositions of the Ālvārs seemed to convey an inner sense in addition to the direct one which is available at their first reading. The Ālvār expressed his views and representations in the garb of another person. For instance the Ālvār addresses the Lord as a bride would do to her lover, as a mother to the daughter and as a lady-friend to a lady who is in love with the man of her choice. In all such cases, there is the primary sense available for such passages. Since the Ālvār is the person conveying his views, it cannot be admitted that he actually intends to convey this sense, since he is neither a woman in love, nor a mother or a lady-friend. There must be some other inner sense which is suggested. The commentators therefore grouped in such cases the utterances of the Ālvār as *svāpadeśa* and *anyāpadeśa*. The former means utterance of one's own intention and the latter his own through that of another. That is, the former is conveyed by the Ālvār himself while the latter is done through some one else. Thus there is the *svāpadeśa* commentary for the *Tiruviruttam* of Nammālvār by Āḷakiya maṇavāla-jiyār. Similarly, Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppāvai* has the outer garb of

158. *Iḥu* on T.V.M. 8:2:2.

159. *ibid.* on T.V.M. 9:6:6.

taking bath in the early hours of the morning and worshipping the Lord. But this is only the *anyāpadeśa* in sense for by *svāpadeśa* Āṅṭāḥ intends to gather the devotees together and render service to God in congregation.