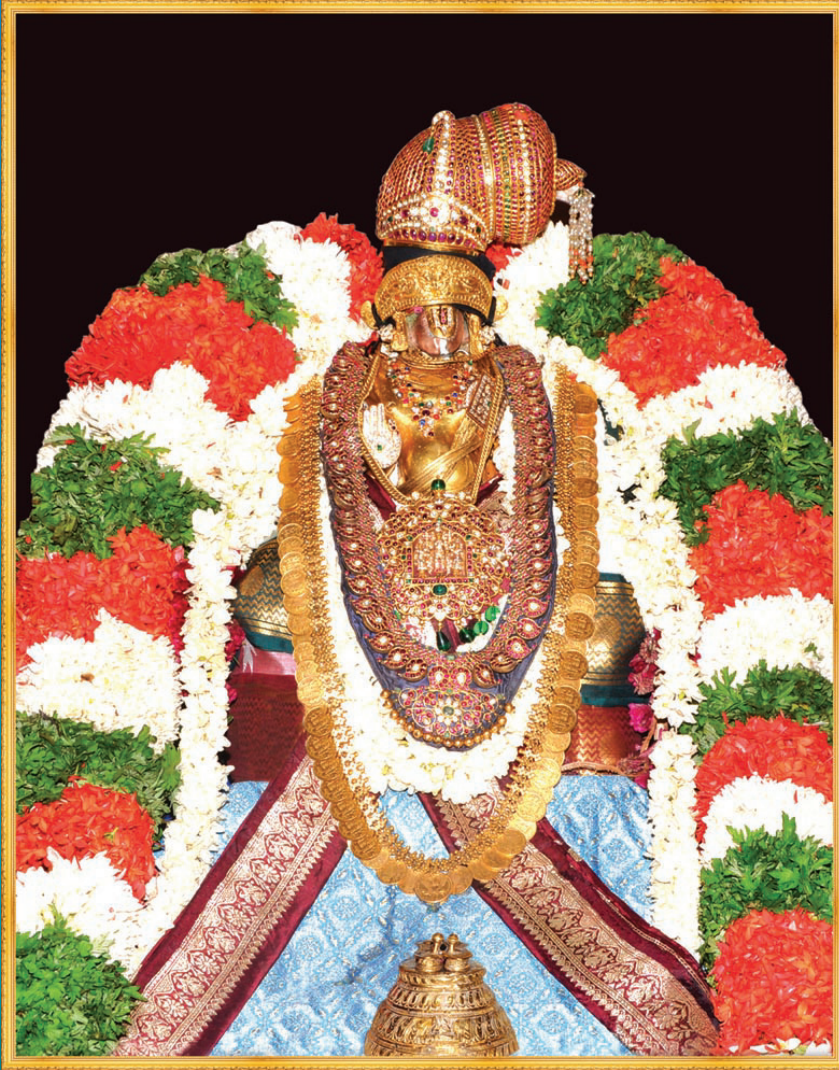


ĀḶVĀR SAINTS AND THEIR CELESTIAL SONGS – Some Glimpses



N. Rajagopalan

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Sri Nammāļvār at Āļvār Tirunagari.

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All twelve Āļvārs and Kumudha-Valli Nāchiār.

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‘Āļvārs’ Sannidhi at Richmond Hindu Temple, Toronto, Canada.

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Dedicated to the memory of my parents

Sri T.R. Narasimhachariar

And

Smt. N. Jayalakshmi

Abbreviations used in the Book

Tiruvāimoḷi	T.V.M.	Jitante Stotram	J.S.
Mudhal Tiruvandādhi	M.T.	Stotra Ratnam	S.R.
Irاندām Tiruvandādhi	I.T.	Nārāyana Upaniṣad	N.Up.
Munrām Tiruvandādhi	Mu.T.	Mahānārāyana Upaniṣad	Ma.Na.Up.
Tiruneduntāndakam	T.N.T.		
Peria Tirumoḷi	P.T.M.	Puruṣa Sūktham	P.S.
Nānmukan		Vishnu Sūktham	V.S.
Tiruvandādhi	N.M.T./N.T.	Brihadāranya Upaniṣad	Br.Up.
Tirucchandaviruttam	T.V.C.	Āchārya Hrudayam	A.H.
Tiruviruttam	T.V.	Sri Vachana Bhushanam	S.V.B.
Peria Tiruvandādhi	P.T.	Sri Varadarājastavam	S.V.Sta.
Perumāl Tirumoḷi	PML.T.M.	Harivamsam	Ha.Vam.
Periālvār Tirumoḷi	P.A.T.M.	Sri Rangarājastavan	Pur.Sat.
Upadesa Rattinamālai	U.R.M.		S.R.S.P.S./Pu.S.
Rāmānusa Nūtrandādhi	R.N.	Srimad Vālmiki	
Nācchiār Tirumoḷi	N.T.M.	Rāmāyanam	S.V.R/S.R.
Tirumālai	T.M.	Mahābhāratham	Mah.Ba.
Tiruppalliyezhuchi	T.P.	Mukundamālai	M.M.
Siria Tirumadal	S.T.M.	Upadesa Rattinamālai	U.R.M.
Yajur Veda	Ya.Ved.	Vishnu Purānam	V.P.
Taittiriya Upaniṣad	Tait.Up./ T.Up.	Godāstuti	G.S.
Chāndogya Upaniṣad	Ch.Up.	Mundaka Upaniṣad	M.U.
Brahmavalli	Br.Va.	Vishnudharmam	V.D.
Adhikāra Sangraham	A.S.	Sri Rangarājastavam	
Dēhaleesa Stuti	D.S.	Uttara Satakam	S.R.S.U.S.
Bhagavad Gita	B.G.	Srimad Bhāgavatham	S.Bha.
		Dramidopaniṣad	
		Tātparya Ratnāvali	Dr.Ta.Ra.

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Foreword

The Srivaishnava tradition holds on to the Sanskrit Vedas and the Nalayira Divya Prabandham known as Dravida Vedam as the two authorities (Pramanam) for establishing the Siddhanta. All the Acharyas in the lineage were rigorously trained and proficient in both the scriptures known as the Ubhaya Vedanta. The two Vedas are like two eyes that enable us to get a whole, panoramic view of the Tatva, Hita and Purusharta. The major differences between the two begin with their origin. The Vedas are 'Apourusham', meaning not created by anyone but the Nalayira Divya Prabandham has the glory of association with the sacred tongue of the Azhwar saints. The Vedas are vast and contain two parts namely the Karma Kandam and the Gnana Kandam. The former contain various prescriptions for day to day living, rituals and ceremonies while the latter part, the Upanishads are exclusive Vedanta. The verses of the Azhwar saints are pure, distilled experience of the Almighty flowing from the Yogic vision of the Seers.

The Tamizh verses are melodious, magical and enable us to peep into the rapturous flood of emotion in the hearts of these mystics. The Azhwars themselves spoke of their verses in words filled with awestruck joy and declared that the Almighty too was enamoured with their songs. Thondaradipodi Azhwar's last verse of Thirumalai where he pronounced that his work was sweet to the Lord "***Empirrakku iniyavare***" is just one example. When the Mudal Azhwars spoke, the Lord stood amidst them eager to soak in the adoration; he followed Thirumazhisai Azhwar captivated by his verses; he begged Nammazhwar to confer his verses of adulation on his Archa forms. Unlike the Vedas which issue commands and speak cryptically the Azhwars appeal to us with an understanding of human nature and the inexorable compulsions of life.

The Vedas can be taught only to a select few, the Brahmins, that too only the males among them. The hymns of the Azhwar's are open to all who have the desire to learn. The Azhwar saints condensed the substance of the vast, inscrutable, tough Srutis into nectar like classic Tamizh verses which pack the wisdom of all scriptures into them. The Dravida Veda is Intamizh, Sentamizh and Gnanatamizh. Swami Desikan has summarized the importance of the Nalayira Divya Prabandham in his Tamizh composition Prabhanda Saaram Verse 18 thus.

Andamila aarana naalagi ninra adan karuttai azhwargal
aayndeduttu

Seyya tamizhal arul seyda vagay togayyum sindamal
ulagankal vaazha venru

Sandamigu tamizhmarayon toopul tonrum vedantaguru
mozhinda prabhanda saaram

Sindayinal anudinamum sindiporkku semamadam
thirumaltan karunayale.

Interestingly Swami Desikan's Tamizh works collectively known as Desika Prabandham consists of 24 compositions equaling the total number of works in the Nalayiram. The Vedantacharya whose scholarship in the Ubhaya Vedanta was legendary, reveals his partiality towards the Tamizh Vedas by declaring himself a ***"Sandamigu tamizhmarayon"***. In the Vedic way of life it is customary to introduce oneself stating the Gothram, Veda branch to which the family belongs as in 'Bharadhwaja Gothram yajus saka adhyayi'. Swami Desikan, proudly proclaims himself, as belonging to the clan of chanters of the Tamizh Vedas. This declaration sums his devotion to the Nalayira Divya Prabandham. His Prabhanda Saram is a rich tribute to the divine hymns of the saints wherein the Vedantacharya with usual brilliance captures the uniqueness of each of the Prabhandhams, the lives of the saints who sang them, the number of verses in

each work. All this is achieved within the eighteen verses which can be easily stored in memory.

The Acharya was a prolific writer and has left behind a wide range of works in Sanskrit, Tamizh, Prakrit and Manipravala. He is perhaps the first in the Guru Paramparai to have written in the Dravida language. (Though there are a few verses like Tanians to Prabhandas attributed to Acharyas before him including Ramanuja). The parallel quality of the compositions in both Sanskrit and Tamizh is striking and is the delight of scholars. The beauty of his Sanskrit can be compared to the Stotras of Koorathazhwan and Parasara Bhattar while the sweetness of his rich Tamizh verses makes us wonder if the poetry is that of the Mudal Azhwars or Thirumazhisai piran. The Vedantacharya's scholarship in each of the languages seems to add to the felicity of expression in the other. Every one of his compositions, as short as a Nyasa Dasakam or long as Paduka Sahasram flow from contemplation of the divine, are surcharged with emotion and take the form of Upadesa for our welfare. In his Prabhandas Saram, the Acharya issues a command repeating it twice, with the intention of drilling the message into us. The crux of the edict issued by him is ***"Studying the Nalayira Divya Prabandham should be a lifetime preoccupation"***.

"Eththisayum vazha ivar padi vaitta nalayiramum engal vaazhve!"

"Tuyya tamizh irubattu nangun pattin togai nalayiramum adiyongal vaazhve!"

All the Acharyas in the illustrious Guru parampara have, like Swami Desikan, reveled in the boundless, mystical depths of the Arulicheyal. Acharya Nathamuni the foremost in the Acharya Paramparai after Swami Nammazhwar, was fascinated by the melody of the verses and is credited to have brought back the hymns which were lost over time by Yogic contemplation. The classification of the twenty four prabhandas into four parts as they are used today was

done by Nathamuni. What Sage Vyasa did to preserve the Vedas was done by this Acharya to the Tamizh Vedas. The ceremonial recital of Thiruvaimozhi started by Thirumangai Azhwar at SriRangam was revived and expanded to include the works of all Azhwars by Nathamuni. The Nalayiram was also tuned to be sung in the Lord's presence with talam as these verses are not only chaste, classic Tamizh but are Isai Tamizh too! It was the melody of the decad 'Aaravamude' which ends with the line 'Kuzhalin maliyach chonna orraayirattul ippattum' that charmed Nathamuni. Anecdotes in the commentaries speak of the ecstatic anubhavam of Sri Alavandar, Thirumalai Nambi, Embar, Anantazhwan, Koorathazhwan, Bhattar, Nanjeeyar while dwelling on the verses of the Azhwar saints.

Bhagavad Ramanuja is revered as the Thirupavai Jeer as he chanted Thiruppavai without fail during Bhiksha. Ramanuja revived the ceremonial chanting of Nalayiram in temple worship and the art of the Araiyaars. He was hailed as the foster mother to Nammazhwar's Thiruvaimozhi by Parasara Bhattar. ***"Eendra mudal tai sadagopan moympal valartta idaththai iramanusan"***. The Acharya breathed life into the Tamizh Vedas by initiating the Vyakhyana tradition with Pillan's Aarayirappadi commentary to Thiruvaimozhi. Ramanuja's ability to reconcile the Bheda, Abheda and Ghataka shrutis can be directly traced to the profound understanding of Thiruvaimozhi says Azhagiya Manavala Perumal Nayanar in his Acharya Hrudayam ***"Bhashyakarar idu kondu sutra vakyangal orungaviduvar"***. Thiruvarangath Amudanar's Ramanuja Nootrandadi speaks of Ramanuja's admiration and understanding of the verses of the Azhwars' particularly Thiruvaimozhi in glowing words. ***"Pantarum maran pasuntamizh aanandam pai madamai vindida engal iramanusa muni vezham"***, ***"Thiruvaimozhiyin innisai mannum idantarum Pukku nirkum ramanusan"*** are a few verses which capture this adoration.

Thus we learn from the lives and works of our Acharyas that a thorough study and uninterrupted contemplation of the Divya Prabandham is the surest means of understanding the Sidhanta. It is an enriching mystical experience and a medicine for all that ails us in worldly life. These works are both Marundu and Virundu. Rarely can any substance be used in the form of both. Medicines are bitter and are taken in small amounts as long as the symptoms of the disease persist. A feast is a big spread to be relished, every morsel of each dish to be savoured with delight. Acharyas who have made commentaries have always maintained that each one of the works like Thiruppavai, Kanninun Siruttambu, Amalanadhipiran or Thirunedundandakam are individually sufficient for learning the Sidhanta, striking at the roots of Karma and attaining the lotus feet of the Almighty. Indeed Swami Parasara Bhattar stated emphatically that merely chanting the Satrumarai verses of Thiruppavai, which constitute the crowning glory of the hymn, is adequate to become the recipients of the ***“Senkan thirumugattu selvat tirumal”***. Well then why learn or chant all the thirty verses? Why learn the entire Nalayiram? The answer lies in the magic of the Tamizh verses which enchant the celestials, the Almighty and the divine poets who sang them. No one can ever say enough, which explains why these works are called as ***“Arulicheyal Aaraavamudam”***. It is divine ambrosia which fills the tongue, the heart with infinite bliss. Indeed our elders didn't know of any other way to utilize the time at their disposal. They chanted parts of the hymns in every day Thiruvardhana, on special occasions like the sacred avatara days of the Azhwars and in temples to praise the Lord in Archa form. The very word ***“Kalakshepam”*** used in Vaishnava parlance to denote discourses on the Prabhandas is so very apt and evocative.

The motivation, inspiration and the energy to write a book of this scale springs from all the reasons spelled above. The

author of this book ***“Azhwar saints and their celestial songs – Some glimpses”*** Shri. N. Rajagopalan has earlier brought out three books on the three Thiruvandadhis of the Mudal Azhwars. All the three are expositions in English of the commentaries to the verbal garlands of the ***“Pattukkuriya Pazhayavar”*** who set the stage for the grand inaugural of the Arulicheyal. The author has now summarized the works of all the Azhwar saints in a single volume condensing the rich bhagavad anubhavam, capturing the hypnotic tone of the poetry, the special significance of the verses to the philosophy and the tradition. An exercise of this order gushes from the vast store of knowledge acquired by listening to many scholars and delving deep into the Vyakhyanas which are a huge treasure trove bequeathed on us by our preceptors. The distinct Manipravala rendering is exquisitely blissful and unravels the emotions in the sacred hearts of the Azhwars word by word. This has been cherished and protected through centuries and the need of the hour is to present it in a form which can be appreciated by the present generation and to pass it on to the future. This book will surely cater to the section of readers who are most comfortable in English and will be a valuable guide to them to pursue their study of the hymns with a greater understanding of their esoteric significance. The process of chanting the verses as part of daily prayer, musical rendering of it in keeping with the tradition that the hymns of the divine bards are meant to be sung, have all enriched the thought process culminating in this volume which is like a sweet dish made of condensed milk.

The author has modestly titled the book as ***“Glimpses into the divine verses”*** but the canvas is vast and has been dealt with in a systematic manner. The part summarizing Thiruvaimozhi stands as testimony to Swami Desikan’s assertion that a thorough study of the Divya Prabandham is the means to a clear understanding of the basic tenets

of the Sidhanta. ***“Seyya tamizh malaigal naam teliya odi Teliyada marai nilangal teliginrome”***. The poetic translation of the verses in English conveys the power and magic of the original as can be seen from the rendering of Kulasekhara Perumal’s verse ***“Van perum vanagam uyya amarar uyya”***. The exhilaration in the tone of the Azhwar reverberates in the English form. The final chapter neatly shows how the practice Srivaishnavam as a vibrant religion and its ideological basis are influenced and shaped by the Divya Prabandham. This book is meant for serious study and will be surely appreciated by lovers of Arulicheyal.

It is a great blessing to be able to read this book authored by my dear uncle Shri. N. Rajagopalan. It is a double blessing to be provided with this privilege of writing a foreword to it. Heartiest congratulations to my uncle on the successful completion of this noble Kainkaryam. I invoke the benign grace of the Azhwars and the Almighty on my uncle and his loving family in the words of Vedanta Desikan ***“Sindayinal anudinamum sindipporkku semmamadam thirumaltan karunayale!”***.

Smt. Radha Muralidhar,
Chennai, India.

Foreword

The ancient culture, philosophy, religion and faith of the majority of the people of Bhāratha Désam (known as India in modern times) are rooted in Védas. The Védic hymns are eternal and considered as **"āpaurushéya"** meaning **"not authored by any person or persons"**. They represent universal truths and revealed to the mystic seers of the hoary past. They are termed **"Sruti"** (**"what is heard"**) for the collective wisdom and knowledge of the ancient seers were passed on from time immemorial by oral tradition from teacher to the student or disciple.

The term **"Hinduism"** has been applied by the Western writers to this ancient faith and religion. It is perhaps best described as a way of life to be practiced as laid out by the Védic injunctions. The Védas consist of two main parts, the initial part referred to as Karma Kāndam and the later part called the Brahma Kāndam. The Pūrva Bhāgam (first part) expounds the various rituals and sacrifices and the Uttara Bhāgam (the later part) is of the nature of inquiry into the ultimate reality underlying the phenomenal world. The later part consists of Upanishad texts (Védānta) which contain many fundamental truths of universal knowledge and wisdom which had attracted the attention of thinkers and scholars from around the world. Védic thoughts and practices are widespread across the entire Indian subcontinent spread across the various regions of India. They were nurtured by two ancient languages namely Sanskrit and Tamil.

The contribution made by the Āļvārs (Āzhwārs) of Tamil Nādu to this heritage of Bhāratha Désam (**"our heritage"**) is quite unsurpassed. The term (**"Āzhwān"**) means (**"azhndu kidappavan"** meaning **"one who delves deeply into a chosen field and remains deeply immersed in it"**). **"Āļvār"** is a term of respect. The Āļvārs were a distinctive group of

Tamiḷ Sri Vaishnava saints who delved deeply into the Divine through intense devotion or Bhakti. They experienced the ultimate Reality in and through everything that they saw in the world of existence and poured their love and adoration for Him into beautiful poetry. The Reality that they experienced was not only transcendental but also all pervasive and immanent. Above all, the Reality was very personal and represented Sriman Nārāyanā ("**the support and the abode of hosts of souls**") with all auspicious and glorious attributes. The physical world is like the body of the Lord and the Lord is the life and soul of the physical world. The most important attribute of the Lord is His compassion, represented by "**Srī**" who eternally resides in His heart. "**Srī**" is mother Lakshmi, Who intercedes on behalf of the embodied souls and helps in their ultimate redemption. Hence Nārāyanā is known as Srīman Nārāyanā. The root "**matup**" in "**Srīmat**" indicates "**Nitya-Yōga**" or eternal association. Thus the word "**Srīman**" implies the inseparable union of Srī with the Lord and indicates the Divya Dampathi (the divine couple).

If the Reality is the ultimate cause of all physical forms in the cosmos and the substratum of their very existence, then it must exist in and through all of them. In fact nothing could exist without the underlying Reality. Thus the Ājvārs saw and felt Srīman Nārāyanā in everything. They experienced the Divine, visualizing Him in all His great Avatārās on this earth such as Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nrsimha, Vāmana, Rāma, Krishnā and others, which He had taken from time to time for the sake of human redemption.

Srīman Nārāyanā not only was in their hearts but also in the skies, the rivers, the clouds, the mountains, the oceans as well as in the lovely icons in the temples ("**Archa Avatārā**") and in short everywhere. Their poetic verses give true meaning to temple worship where the icon, is not a mere

symbol of the Lord but the actual Lord. The teachings of the Āļvārs brought the true spiritual message of the Védās and the Upanishads to the masses in their own vernacular.

The Āļvārs all hailed from the region in Tamiļ Nādu adjoining the rivers Kāveri, Pālār and Tāmra-barani. They were all from different walks of life, different social strata, and different periods. Yet they were amazingly unified in their vibrant divine experiences and their philosophic views. They were considered as incarnations of the eternal attendants of the Lord (Nitya Sūris). The first three of these great saint-sages, namely Sri Poikai Muni, Sri Bhudat Āļvār and Sri Pey Āļvār—called the Mudhal (First) Āļvārs, were contemporaries. They are believed to have lived in the Dwāpara Age and were considered to have had mystic origins. Thirumazhisai Pirān is said to have been born of a sage. Kulashékara Āļvār and Thirumangai Āļvār were kings and hailed from the ruling class. Sri Peri Āļvār, Thondaradippodi Āļvār and Madhurakavi Āļvār were from Brahmin families. Sri Namm Āļvār was born in a farmer's family and Thiruppān Āļvār was from the Pāna community considered at the time to be a low class outside the fold of the caste system. Sri Gōdā (Āndāl) was considered an incarnation of Bhū Dévi (Mother Earth) and was found in the field by Sri Peri Āļvār much like Sri Sītha was discovered by King Janaka of Sri Rāma Avathāra period.

The Āļvārs poured out their ecstatic experience of the Divine in chaste Tamiļ poems which are referred to as “*pāsurams*,” or ‘verses.’ Collectively, these pāsurams constitute the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham, which amounts to 4000 verses. They are famous for their poetic beauty, rhythm deep philosophic and spiritual truths. They are considered equal to the Védās, in both their revealed knowledge, and in their importance to spiritual and religious life. In addition they were lucid and very direct and succinct. Unlike the Védās, which were in Sānskrit and could not be learnt by all and often restricted

traditionally to some classes, the Divya Prabandham being in vernacular could be learned and recited by all. Despite the fact, the Āļvārs were not all contemporaries and were born from different places and strata of society, amazingly their statements as revealed in their works are uniformly similar. They speak with one voice as it were. The term Védas is linked to the root "**Véd**" meaning "**to know**". The derivation "**védayathīthi védaha**" will give the meaning "**that which gives knowledge**". Védas are also known by another name called "**Chandas**". The derivation "**chādayathīthi chandaha**" will give the meaning "**that which hides the knowledge**". In fact, the traditional term in Tamiḻ for Védas is which essentially conveys the latter meaning.

Sri Védānthā Désika, a great Sri Vaishnava āchāryā (1268-1370 C.E), who came after Sri Rāmānuja declares clearly that "**a devout study of their beautiful Tamiḻ garlands of hymns allows one to understand clearly many Védic texts which seem obscure and hard to understand**".

(endrivarkaḷ makizhndu pādum cheyya Tamiḻ mālaigaḷ nām teliya ōthi teliyātha marai nilangal telikindrōmé)

He refers to them as "**God's chosen preceptors**" – māluganda āsiriyar). This is appropriate since their knowledge of the divine is not a result of intellectual exercise but a clear apprehension of the Lord. By their own words, they were graced by the Lord to have such a clear knowledge without any clouds of doubts or confusion. (mayarvara madhinalam arulinan) declares Sri NammĀļvār in the opening verse of his famous Thiruvāimozhi. That is why the works of the Āļvārs are also known as "**Aruliccheyal**" meaning, "**the works arsing out of Divine grace**". Srī NammĀļvār declares that the Lord sung His own glories through the medium of Āļvār.

(Ennait thannākki ennāl thannai in Tamiḻ pādiya īsanai) (Thiruvāimozhi 7-9-1).

The famous Védic hymn Purusha Sūktam which glorifies the cosmic Person, states that He is (ajāyamāno bahudhā vijāyaté) meaning **"unborn, takes many births"**. Sri NammĀļvār literally states the same (pirappil palpiravip perumān) (Thiruvāimozhi- 2-9-5). The commentaries of the āchāryās make it clear that He does not take birth due to the effect of karma like all jīvas. Therefore He is (pirappil) - birthless. But He takes birth out of His compassion (Kārunyam) for the welfare of all beings. In Bhagavat Gīta also, the Lord declares (bahūni mé vyatīthāni) (Chapter 4-verse 5) similar to the Sruti (bahudhā vijāyaté) and Āļvār's words - palpiravip perumān. The Lord's compassion (unconditional grace is boundless) therefore there is no end to the number of His births. **"Sambhavāmi Yugé Yugé"** declares Sri Krishna (Bhagavat Gīta 4-8). Sri NammĀļvār indicates this vividly in another verse.

Mīnāi āmaiyumāi narasingamumāi kuralāi
Kānār énamumāi karkiyām innam kārvannané
(Thiruvāimozhi 5-1-10).

The usage of the word (kārvannané) is very beautiful and appropriate. The rain laden clouds are densely dark. After the down pour, the clouds will carry less water and the color will become less dark and even whiten. The Lord's Kārunyam is abundantly infinite. Therefore despite many births taken on account of His compassion, He remains always the same (Kārvannan) dark like the rain laden clouds (full of infinite compassion). Sri Nampillai's words in his commentary are of interest.

**"varshukavalāhakam pōlé irukkirān atthanai.
varshitthānāirukkirilan"**

(He is like the clouds abounding in rain. He is not like the clouds after the rains).

The Brahma Sūtras known as the Védanta Sūtras the work of Sage Vēda Vyāsa (known also as Sri Bādarāyana), is an important text for which all three Āchāryās namely, Sri Sankara, Sri Rāmānuja as well as Sri Mādhva have written commentaries to establish their visions of philosophy (darsanams), namely, Advaitam, Visishtādvaitam and Dvaitam. Sri Rāmānuja's commentary is the famous Sri Bhāshyam a title conferred upon by Sri Saraswathi Dévi herself. The great Āchāryā following his pūrvĀchāryās like Yāmuna Muni and inspired by the teachings of the Aruliccheyal (the four thousand divine verses) of the Āļvārs established that the Supreme Reality or Brahman is endowed with attributes (Savisésa Brahman) and is organically related to both the sentient souls (Chith) and the non-sentient matter (achit), both of which are very real. The Savisésa Brahman is no one other than the **"abode of Sri Lakshmi"**; Srīman Nārāyaṇa with infinite auspicious attributes (anantha kalyāṇa gunās) with no blemishes whatsoever. This is very clearly expressed in Āļvārs' divine verses. **"pon pāvai kélvā, kilaroli en késhavané"** thus Sri Thirumazhisai pirān addresses the Lord as Késhava indicating that He is the Lord of even Brahma and Siva qualifying Him first as the consort of golden lady, Sri Lakshmi - Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi-verse 59. Sri ThiruppānĀļvār begins his Pāsurams with the words **"amalan ādhipirān"** indicating the Lord of Srirangam as the immaculate blemishless ancient Lord, Sri Āndāl in her famous Thiruppāvai similarly addresses Sri Krishna **"kurai ondrum illāthā Gōvindā"**. Srīman Nārāyaṇa is the inner controller and all the sentients and the non-sentients form His body (Shareeree and Shareera bhāva, Soul- Body relationship and Séshi and Sésha bhāva, Master – Servant relationship). Sri NammaĀļvār expresses this precisely in the very first decad of his Thiruvāimozhi.

(Thidavisumperivali nīr nilamivaimisaip
Padarporul muzhuvathumāi avaiyavaithorum
Udalmisai uyirenak karandengum paranthulan
Sudarmiku suruthiyul ivaiyunda surané)
(Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-7)

"The Supreme Lord who shines as the inner substantive meaning of the resplendent Srutis, remains hidden pervading inside and out through the entire cosmos and all its constituent physical entities evolved from the five basic elements of space, fire, air, water and the earth, like the jīva (the individual self) inside the body, and it is the same Lord who swallows all these (at the time of dissolution)".

(karandha silidanthorum idam thikazh porulthorum
Karandengum parandulan ivai unda karané)
(Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-10)

"The Lord, who swallows everything at the time of dissolution, remains hidden pervading everything without any exception even in the subatomic regions including all the sentients and the insentient"

All of the Āḷvārs refer to themselves in their verses as the **"servants"** of the Lord. Sri NammĀḷvār clearly indicates the nature **"svarūpam"** of the jīva is that of being the servant of the Lord, who is the inner controller. To make it perfectly clear, he distinguishes the self from the body by saying **"adiyén ullān"** (He is in the self). **"udal ullān"** (He is in the body) in his Thiruvāimozhi (8-8-2). The word adiyén meaning **"servant"** is used to indicate the self. Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān, who came before Sri NāmmĀḷvār in the verse referred to above (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi-verse 59), describes himself as (adiyén nān āl) **"I am your servant, Thy eternal possession"**

Their verses reflect clearly the state of their mind and the intense love of the Divine.

(pālāzhi nī kidakkum panpai yām kettéyum
Kālāzhum nenjazhiyum kanchuzhalum)

(Periya Thiruvandhādhi of Sri NammĀļvār verse # 34).

"Merely hearing about Your beauty, as you lie reclined on the ocean of milk, we become weak in our legs, begin to lose our hearts with eyes bedimmed (with tears)"

(The usage of the plural **"we"** – **"yām"** is given by the Āļvār to indicate that this is shared by all the other Āļvārs also since all of them speak with one voice as well).

Āļvārs' Aruliccheyal uniformly point to the easy accessibility of the Lord.

Amarark kariyānai thamarkat keliyānai

Amarat thozhuvārkatku amarāvinaikalé -

(Thiruvāimzohi 10-5- 9)

"Unreachable even to the dévas. Accessible to His devotees. Effects of karmā will never accrue to those who worship Him without desires"

Their verses clearly indicate that the Supreme Lord is all loving and his unconditional grace (nirhétuka kripā) is boundless. The adorable Lord, the consort of Srī is the ultimate goal of human endeavour and He is also the means of attainment. It is also of interest to note here their experience about the status of the jīva after mukti (liberation). Srī Nammāļvār in his Thiruvāimozhi (8-8-2) clearly refutes the merger of jīva (the individual self) with the Supreme. Its continued existence enjoying eternal divine service (divine communion) is emphasized.

Kūditrākil nalluraippu kūdāmaiyaik kūdināl
Ādarparavai uyarkodi emmāyanāvathu athu athuvé
Vīdaip panni oru parisé ethirvum nikazhvum kazhivumāi
Ōditthiriyum yōgikalum ularum illai allaré
(Thiruvāimozhi_ 8-8-9).

"The union of the jīva with the paramātmā if it were to happen, it will be indeed nice. If these two totally different entities in fact become one (impossible were to happen) then the jīva can become the wondrous Lord who has Garuda for His flag. The jīva will always be the jīva and the Lord will always be the Lord. Not understanding this, considering the jīva (which takes repeated births in this samsāric (mundane world) as Brahman and imagining such a mōksham, indeed such wandering yōgis did exist in the past, do exist now at the present and may exist in future as well"

Unlike the Sruti (Védās and the Upanishads) which emphasize the **"paratvam"** (**"transcendental and the unreachable aspect"**), the Āḷvārs emphasize the (Saushīlya) **"the gracious condescension"** and (Saulabhya) **"easy accessibility"** of the Lord. That is the reason for their ever-loving hymns on the archa avatāra mūrthies in various holy shrines of the Lord. In fact, the term **"divya désam"** is given to a shrine or place only when one or more of the Āḷvārs had sung about the Lord enshrined there. Not only they actually visualized the Lord directly there but also were touched by His **"Saulabhya Guna"** (easy accessible nature). Āḷvārs ' experience of the Archāvatāras and their description in their verses are quite beautiful and fascinating. They tend to draw even our ordinary minds into the path divine.

In one of the verses of Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi, Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān, states that the Lord had taken abode in the holy shrines in the lying posture on the serpent-bed in Thirukkudanthai, Thiruvekhā, Thiruvevvul, Thiruvaramam, Thiruppér, Thiruanbil, and in the ocean of milk mainly with the sole intention of getting into the minds of His beloved devotees.

Nāgatthanaikudanthai vekha thiruvevvul

Nāgatthanai arangam péranbil – nāgat

Thanai pārkadal kidakkum ādhinedumāl

Anaippār karutthanāvān.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -36).

No distinction is made here between the archa form and the transcendental form.

The ecstatic divine outpourings of their direct experience of the Supreme Lord (Sṛīman Nārāyana) and their intense love and devotion, touch and awaken the body, mind and the spirits of all loving seekers of the divine. Almost all of the various works of this collection have been commented upon by the Pūrvāchāryās (Masters or Teachers of the past) of Sṛī Vaishnava tradition, who came after Sri Rāmānuja (1017 – 1137 CE). Sri Periyavācchān Pillai (1167-1262 CE) in particular stands out among them and had graced us with commentaries on all of the works of the Āļvārs. He was known as Vyākhyāna Chakravarthi meaning "***the Emperor among the Commentators***". These original commentaries were written in a mixed style of "***mani pravāḷam***" combining both Tamiḷ and Sanskrit. Understanding and appreciating these philosophic poetry and their commentaries required skill in both Tamiḷ and Sanskrit and familiarity of the phraseology and expressions of the past age. These have been taught and passed on by one on one basis for many generations in Tamiḷ Nādu, mainly among the followers

of Srī Vaishnava tradition. Limited printed versions of the original commentaries became available in the middle of the last century. With the pace of the modern world, we have seen basic sciences and technology usurping the time spent on learning languages in schools. It is not surprising to find a whole generation of youngsters growing up with lack of language skills in two of the most ancient and renowned languages of our ancient Bhāratha Désam.

Publication in English about the lives and the divine poetic works of the Āļvārs, is therefore timely and a welcome addition in this field. The author of this current work, ***"Āļvār Saints and their Celestial Songs"***, Sri Rajagopalan, had previously published nice translations into English of the first three Thiruvandhādies of the Mudhal Āļvārs based on the commentaries of Sri Periyavācchān pillai. His current work dealing with all of the Āļvārs and their divine verses is similarly thorough and thoughtfully organized. The narrative account is fluid and presented elegantly and eloquently. It captures the interesting aspects of the life stories of each of the individual Āļvār as well as the distinctive features of the respective Āļvār's works. The details about the pūrvācāryās' vyākhyānam (commentaries of the Masters of the past) and excerpts from them as well as ***"pramāna vākhyams"*** (references from valid scriptural and philosophic texts as well as from works of ācāryās) are very informative and make interesting read. The author gives a very nice detailed and comprehensive guided tour as it were of each of the individual work (works) of the Āļvārs covering the specific relevance in the Sri Vaishnava sampradāyam (tradition) as well as the general philosophic relevance. The details of the divya désa anubhavam (experience of the Lord enshrined in Sri Vaishnava holy shrines) of the Āļvārs reflected in their divine verses are refreshing and enjoyable. Compared to the richness of the Āļvārs' divine works, the available publications in English are still somewhat limited. I believe

this book will therefore serve as a nice guide to the rich treasures of the spiritual wisdom of the Āļvārs and their aruliccheyal and their brilliant expositions by the master teachers of the past. The author should be commended for this diligent and thoughtful work which I enjoyed going through. I sincerely thank my brother for asking me to write this foreword for this book. May the boundless grace of the Āļvārs, the Āchāryās and the Lord of Srī always shine on Smt Shanthi and Sri Rajagopalan and their family.

(Āzhwārkal āchāryārkal thiruvadigalé saranam)

Surrendering to the divine feet of the āzhwārs and the āchāryās.

Adiyén rangathan

Preface

The devotional hymns of the Vaishnava saints of South India revered as the Āļvārs, collectively called the 'Nālāyira Divya Prabandham' form an integral part of the rich literary, philosophic, and spiritual inheritance of India and are held in high esteem as equal in every respect to the Vedas and Upaniṣads. The Vedas are held to be 'apauruṣeya' or impersonal. But the hymns of Divya Prabandham were the ecstatic outpourings of the Tamil saints who were divine emissaries and trod the serene countryside on the banks of Tāmraparani and Cāuvēri and shores around Māmallapuram and Mylapore, immersed in the depths of the ocean of Divine Love. The language of these saints was Tamil. These mystic seers who had seen and known Srīman Nārāyaṇa at close quarters, face to face, purport to give us through their songs a true and graphic account of the Divine, as they actually realized Him, His qualities, and attributes, and the place of jīva or individual self in the scheme of creation, and in relation to God or Íśvara. Their mission was to infuse the Divine Consciousness in men, low and high, vain and humble, seeker and sinner. Their poetry was suffused with the lore of the Rāmāyaṇa, Viṣṇupurāṇa and the Bhāgavatha, the Pāñcharātra and Vedic truths. Making immense use of these sources, their mystico-religious consciousness synthesized the sacred truths contained in them to articulate through their hymns an integral philosophy of Divine life. To them God was a living presence experienced in the totality of His Being and manifestation in myriad form. The universe is real pervaded and permeated by His presence which is both transcendent with and beyond it and immanent in every cell and atom in an intrinsic organic relationship. All the twelve Āļvārs have dwelt either directly or indirectly on the three fundamental doctrines of Vedānta, namely, 'tattva', or Reality, the 'hita' or means of attainment and the 'puruṣārtha' or the supreme goal. They had an intuitive apprehension of the

ultimate Reality or ‘para-tattva’ of the God-head as within man’s reach, of the nature of the soul bound but yearning to be freed, and of the spiritual discipline that leads the soul to the attainment of the supreme goal. Their moving hymns not only reflect but reach into the deep yearning of the human soul to seek its Source, and in some blessed souls as these saints themselves, the ecstatic fulfillment of that yearning. It is this unparalleled spiritual soul-stirring sweetness of their songs suffused with philosophic truths and devotional fervor that invests this great Tamil Prabandham appropriately called *“Aruliccheyal Amudham”*, with the right to take precedence over the Vedas in the processional outing of the Divine Lord.

The Viśiṣṭādvaita or the Ubhaya (twin) Vedānta as it is known, draws its inspiration and derives its strength equally from the two sources, viz. the Vedas of Sanskrit origin and the Divya Prabandham of Tamil. Though of equal validity, one is really complementary to the other in the sense that the fundamental principles revealed to and by the Rishis of yore, are interpreted by the Āḷvārs in the light of their own mystic experience. Ubhaya Vedānta does not signify two Vedāntas, one in Sanskrit and the other in Tamil, nor is it to be taken necessarily to mean the same Vedānta or Vedāntic thought that is given expression to in Sanskrit and in Tamil respectively as understood in common parlance, but in a more real sense, stands for the philosophy of Srivaishnavism known as the Viśiṣṭādvaita which describes the essence of all existence as one in two or two in one. That was Sri Rāmānuja’s mission – the exposition of the ‘Sareera-Sareeri-Bhāva’ (Body-Soul- relationship) between the world and God as the ultimate meaning or ‘Parama-Tātparya’ of the Upaniśads, the Sutras and Divya Prabandham. ‘Ubhaya Vedānta’ thus is a characteristic expression ingeniously patented for and by Vaishnavas of South India who are followers of Viśiṣṭādvaita, for it is their proud privilege to be

endowed with a religion and philosophy presented uniquely in differentiated non-dualistic form. This has been elegantly summed up in the words of a 'Sampradāya' doyen of yester year, Sriman V.V.Srinivasa Iyengar as follows. ***"If true religion should be popular and popular religion should be true, it would appear to be necessary to be presented in this twin form. 'Jñāna' and bhakti are seen here functioning in mutual complementarity. Transcendental metaphysics and logic merges seamlessly with inner inspiration and direct enjoyment when the sweetness of Tamil is added to the pure milk of Sanskrit"***. It is the mellifluous Divya Prabandham of the Āļvārs which paved the way for this consummate and supreme spiritual synthesis of one in two and two in one the ideal of all synthesis. Swāmi Vedānta Desikan's contribution was monumental in this. It is said that Lord Ranganātha was so pleased with his achievement that He conferred the title of 'Ubhaya-Vedāntācharya' on Sri Desikan.

This work is intended to provide some glimpses from the lives of these saints , and a flavor of their songs. The thought of attempting a short book of this sort about the lives of the Āļvārs and their divine music occurred to me in a moment of inspiration, when I happened to listen to a recorded series of discourses on the Divya Prabandham works delivered by some distinguished Vidvāns. Under the scheme devised, each vidvān was assigned one Prabandham (collection of hymns forming one work) to discourse thereon within a duration of less than two hours. All the scholars, so profoundly knowledgeable and articulate, with their own distinctive styles and approaches, made their discourses a fascinating experience, notwithstanding the constraints of time. It was this experience of listening to these talks that provided the motivation to attempt a book of this sort drawing upon some thoughts picked up from them and filling in with familiar historical details from the

lives of the Āļvārs, and perspectives on their songs gathered from textual sources. It is obviously a token effort, more in the nature of scooping up a few drops of water from the ocean or a flowing river and sprinkling it on one's head in a symbolic dip in the waterbody. Nevertheless, I have chosen to write such a book in the hope that it might still provide a window view of the sublime hymns of the Āļvārs to readers who may not be proficient in Tamil to be able to savour and enjoy them in original. To this end, the Tamil and Sanskrit citations are transliterated by adopting the diacritical marks as are normally used for such texts. Readers who are acquainted with either or both of these scripts can refer to the original texts themselves. Languages such as Sanskrit and Tamil provide vocabulary uniquely subtle and precise, finely distinguished in its sensitivity to diverse shades of meaning in the expression of thoughts and concepts relating to metaphysical or spiritual domain. Such concepts are not always amenable to similar discriminatory expressions in English. I must admit that to that extent, the translations given in the book may sound somewhat imprecise or broad. I have, however, borrowed from other sources wherever I thought the translations so borrowed were elegant and clearly stated the meaning of the original texts.

I express my sincere appreciation to my younger brother Dr. N.Ranganathan and niece Smt. Radha Muralidhar for their patient and painstaking review of the book and valuable suggestions in the midst of their pressing work schedule as a clinical physician as my brother is, and as a regular writer-contributor to Sampradāya journals and as a home-maker as my niece is. I have no words to thank them adequately for their illuminating Forewords. I pray for the grace and blessings of the Almighty and the Āļvārs in their behalf and their wonderful families. I have dedicated this work to my parents Sri T.R. Narasimhachari and Smt Jayalakshmi who chose in their wisdom to raise their family

of five boys in a rural haven in the hinterland of Tamilnadu after the family's forced return in dire circumstances from Burma now Myanmar on the onset of the last war. While they were very liberal in their parenting, they unmistakably influenced our development grounded in a value-laden frame by their own exemplary life of simplicity, faith in the unconditional grace of God and adherence to Sampradāya ideals. I offer a silent prayer in homage to their memory for teaching us to live with modest expectations and take on life's challenges with faith in God's unfallible grace and accept his dispensations gratefully as a fail-safe recipe for a life of carefree contentment in the arc of his grace.

2A, 'Srinidhi' Apartments,
T- 37 A&B, 16th Cross Street,
Besantnagar, Chennai- 600090.

N. Rajagopalan

1

Ālvārs and the Origin of Divya Prabandham.

The Ālvārs were the celebrated Vaishnava saints of South India who heralded a significant religious movement devoted to the worship of Vishnu as the Supreme Deity. Vaishnavism as the oldest mono-theistic religion in India, had its roots in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, and passed through several phases in its development, through the period of Itihāsas and Purāṇas, and the Āgamas. The twelve Vaishnava saints of South India, through their spontaneous outpourings of divine vision, intuition, and experiences, represent the phase that marks the synthesis of the Vedic outlook, Itihāsic and Purāṇic tradition, and Āgama ideology. These saints were called Ālvārs because they were always immersed in God-experience. Their devotional outpourings in the form of hymns, in the language of their tongue namely Tamil, contain a cornucopia of rich philosophical and theological ideas, related to the three fundamental doctrines of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, and Vaishnava religion, namely, 'tattva' or the nature of Reality in order that one may find out what is the nature of ultimate Reality called God, 'hita' or the means of its attainment, and 'purushārtha' or the supreme goal of life. This provided the bed-rock for the development of a full-fledged theological system, with strong philosophical underpinnings, which expresses itself in a staunch Srivaishnava tradition oriented towards a piously spiritual focus in life, and Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta, the religion and philosophy being two sides of the same coin. This system crystallised by the three preeminent Srivaishnava Āchāryas Nāthamuni, Yāmunamuni, and

Rāmānujamuni in the next phase of the great Āchāryas' tradition of the Srivaishnava religion, provided the well-springs from which the waters of ecstatic devotion and intuitive wisdom gushed out to form a mighty perennial stream, that continues to nourish and sustain this rich tradition.

The Ālvār saints, lived in and around the regions served by various rivers in South India, Pālar, Cāuveri, Vaigai, Tāmiraparani, and Periar. Srimad Bhāgavatam had foretold of their advent in the land of sage Agastya, in the following words., *"Kalu kalu bhavishyanti Nārāyana parāyana: kvachit kvachit Mahābhāgā, Dramidēshu ca būrīsa.: Tāmiraparani nadhīyatra Kritamāla`payasvini I Cāuveri-ca mahābhāga`Pratīchi ca Mahānadhi II. 'Drawn'"* from diverse social backgrounds, they were mystic saints, blessed with spiritual insight and intense love for God, who through their inspirational hymns, devoted their entire life singing the glory of Vishnu, bequeathing a rich heritage of sublime poetical compositions known as Divya Prabandham. Collectively, these hymns constituting twenty-four individual Prabandhams, make upto a total of 4000 verses or pāsuras, and hence are called, Nālāyira Divya Prabandham. The Divya Prabandham has been called the Tamil Veda due to their rich philosophical content, and thought harmony with the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Their ecstatic musical hymns, suffused with deep spiritual fervor and emotional appeal, not only served to promote the bhakthi movement all over the South, but laid the foundations for disseminating the knowledge of the Vedānta philosophy among the common people, through the medium of Tamil. Affirming that the Supreme Being, 'Brahman' described in the Sruti as 'Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam', and 'Ānanda, and Amala - 'Real, Knowledge, Infinite, Bliss, and Immaculate', is Nārāyana,

Sriyahpati the Lord of Sri, they sang of Him, both as the Transcendent and Immanent God-Reality, pervading, inhering, and controlling the whole universe both within our knowledge, and beyond. They sang of Him in His diverse modes, 'prākāras' or as 'Para Vāsudeva' in His celestial abode of Sri Vaikuntam, in 'Vyuha' state in 'Kshirābdhi' or Milk ocean, in a four-fold form as Vasudeva or Lakshmi Nārāyana reclining on Ādiśeṣa, and the functional forms as 'Sankarṣana', 'Pradhyumna', and 'Aniruddha', for carrying out the functions of dissolution, creation, and protection respectively, in His 'Vibhavāvatāras in various ages, as Nrsimha, Rama, Krishna etc. as 'Antaryāmi' or the Inner Spirit in all beings and things, and in 'Arcā' form in His temples. God is as real and immanent in the simple 'arcā' form, as He is real and transcendent in 'Vaikuntam'. Thus, all the five-fold form represents the One and only Supreme Being, as the Upaniṣadic declaration puts it, *"Om! Pūrnāmada: Pūrnamidham, Pūrnātpūrnāmudachyatēl Pūrnasya Pūrnāmādāya Pūrnāmēvāvasiṣyatē II (Ya. Ved. Shanti Pātam)"*.

'All That is Infinite Brahman. All This also is Infinite Brahman. From the Infinite, Infinite originates. Taking Infinite from the Infinite, Infinite still remains.' The five 'Pūrna' states, represent the five modes of the Supreme Being as described above, namely, Para, Vyuha, Antaryāmi, Vibhava, and Arca. The same is summed up by Āṭvār in the lines, *"Vinmīdhiruppāi, Malaimēl nīrpāi, Kadalsērppāi, Manmīdhuzhalvāi, Ivatrulengum maraindhuraivāi"* (T.V.M.6.9.5), 'You reign over the heavens, stand on the hills, recline on the ocean, walk this weary earth, and abide invisible everywhere in these regions.'

The Supreme Being abides in 'arcā' form with the same qualities and character, as He is in Para state. The 'arcā'

form is felicitously simple to comprehend for the human mind, and hence, has been glorified in a special way by the Āḷvār saints. There are 106 shrines where the Āḷvārs have prayed to the 'arca' form of the Lord and sung about them. These shrines have, therefore, come to be addressed with the honorific of 'divya-desam'. In all there are 108 divya-desams. The other two 'divya-desams' are the Vaikuntam and the Milk ocean, representing the 'Para' and 'Vyuha' form of the Lord.

The Upaniṣads further define the Supreme Being described above thus: *"Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyantē, yena jātāni jivanti, yat prayanti abhiśamviśanti, tad vijigñāsasva, tad brahmēti"*, (Tait.Up.III..1). 'That verily from which these beings are born, that by which when born, they live, that into which, when departing, they enter, That seek to know that is Brahman. 'Jagad-kāranatva' or being the primary cause of the three-fold cosmic function, is thus the distinguishing characteristic of Brahman. The Sruti further states how it was all in the beginning thus, *"Sadeva saumya idam agra āsīd Ekam-eva Advitiyam"*, (Ch.Up.6.1.4.). Prior to creation, that is during 'pralaya' or dissolution, this 'manifested universe with name and form, (idam)` was in a primeval state, indistinguishable from Brahman 'Sat', without name and form '. That Sat was none other than Nārāyana, *"Eko vai Nārāyana āsīd na brahma nēṣāna:..."* (Ma. Up.). In the beginning, only Nārāyana was there, neither Brahma nor Siva, etc.`. In that seemingly interminable state of 'layā', when the whole universe with its beings and worlds was in limbo as it were, tucked away in the inner recesses of the Supreme being Nārāyana, the Lord was not happy contemplating the plight of the innumerable beings lying desolate and dormant in that primeval state, all bound by the long accumulated dross of 'karma'. The Lord then decided to end that long night, and create the universe

with name and form, and the beings with bodies, limbs, and faculties to function. In the course of this creation, which is by the Lord's will, the Lord enters the gross universe with name and form with all its sentient beings and non-sentient entities, as the Indwelling Controller. This process is called 'anupravēṣa'. Thus Brahman reigns as the Antaryāmi of the entire universe of beings and entities. The created universe is action-oriented, and called the Lord's 'lilā vibhūti-'. In Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta, this process is construed as 'parināma' or modification of 'sūkṣma-cid-acid viśiṣṭa Brahman' the unmanifest form devoid of name and form, into 'sthūla cid-acid-viśiṣṭa Brahman'. Thus, the Upaniṣad says, "*Tadātmānam svayam akuruta*"- (Taitt.Up.Brh.Va.-7). 'That, (Brahman) created Itself by Itself.' This is described below, further.

In the process of creation, the five basic elements (pancha-bhūtas) ether, wind, fire, water and earth, are produced out of the primordial matter known as 'prakṛti'. In between the gross elements, and 'prakṛti', there are other evolutes brought forth in the following manner- 'mahat', 'ahamkāra', the eleven 'indriyās' including the mind, 'manas', the five subtle elements, 'tanmātras' thus making a total of twenty-four elements. The process of creation upto the five gross elements is called 'Samaṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi' or the creation of the aggregate universe, which is done by Brahman Himself. In the second stage of creation, arises the formation of the manifold universe with different names and forms, which is called 'Vyaṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi' or the creation of the tangible universe, which is done through Brahma. The Lord having thus endowed the sentient beings with a mind and other indriyas to function, then gave the Vedas and Śāstras' as the guiding light to dispel their ignorance, and light their paths towards spiritual evolution and freedom. The Lord is likened to a cultivator of land who first prepares the

soil, then sows the seeds, waters the plants and removes the weeds, so that the crops can grow properly and ripen. But since that by itself was not effective enough in redeeming the humans from their entanglement in the gross world of matter, the Lord Himself then took multiple incarnations as Varāha, Nṛsimha, Rāma, Krishna etc. out of His infinite compassion to show the easier and direct means of reaching Him through the path of absolute surrender, like a mother jumping into a well to retrieve the fallen child from the well. But human nature being so fickle and steeped in ignorance and delusion, there were very few takers for His advice. So it was that finally, the Lord decided that just like, for taming the wild species of elephant or deer, the trained animals of the same species have to be deployed, in the world of human species, the best solution to seek is to depute His own attendants, as emissaries into the world to fulfil His purpose. The emissaries picked were the 'Nitya Sūris' who are the permanent blemishless denizens of the celestial world who perform service to Sriman Nārāyaṇa such as Ananta, Garuda, Viśvakṣena etc. There are others whom the Lord wears on His body as His adornments or weapons, like the divine 'Cakra', 'Sankha' 'Sāraṅgha' etc. Thus it was that these divine souls appeared in this world, as Āḷvārs.

The Āḷvārs came to be known as such, since they were always immersed in God-experience which was filled with intense emotions of diverse nature, all expressing their deep devotion to, and love for, God in varying moods of ecstasy, grief, resignation, pining, praise, doting, desire, surrender, etc.. But interwoven with their devotional and emotional experience or 'bhakti-', their spiritual outpourings in the form of devotional hymns, articulate the quintessence of the Vedic teachings, discoursing in varying degrees, on the philosophical and

theological doctrines, in some cases more directly and explicitly, in other cases not so directly. These hymns address the three fundamental doctrines of Vedānta namely, 'tattva', 'hita', and 'puruṣārtha', referred to earlier, but their central theme was in relating these three principles to the larger purpose of redemption of the human situation from the cyclical bondage of 'saṁsāra'. Thus they sought to drive home the truths about the supreme Divine Reality being Srīman Nārāyaṇa with overarching dispensation over creation, protection and dissolution of the universe and its beings, endowed with infinite auspicious qualities and love and compassion towards His children and power to grant them eternal freedom and bliss, the nature of the individual soul as His 'seṣā' or subordinate, the cardinal goal of human life as being eternal, loving service to the Divine Lord 'Paramātmān', the means to seek to rid oneself of 'saṁsāric' baggage which keeps the individual bound indefinitely, the obstacles in one's way in the form of attachment to bodily engrossment driven by notions of 'I' and 'mine'. These truths are called the knowledge of 'Arta-pancakam', which is the essence of all Śāstras and Upaniṣads, and the mantras of Aṣṭākṣara, Dvayam etc imparted by the Lord Himself, and the Divyaprabandham of the Āḷvārs. It may be germane to point out here that the Vaiṣṇava religion and Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Being and the propagation of the philosophy behind it by renunciate ascetics wearing thread and holding a tri-fold staff all over South India has been spoken of at several places in the early 'Sangam' works which predate the Christian era.

At this stage, some digression is made to touch on the the philosophy behind God, universe, and creation, from the Viśiṣṭādvaita standpoint since that forms the philosophic core of the Srīvaiṣṇava religion. We

have already discussed the 'tattvatraya'. This school of Vedānta, predicates that the first two realities 'cit' and 'acit' exist in an inseparable relationship with 'Īśvara' and are subordinate to God. Īśvara is the Supreme Lord of the universe, and is identified with the 'Brahman' of the Upaniṣads that we saw earlier. He is Puruṣottama, Sriyāhpati the Lord of Sri, Srīman Nārāyaṇa, Param Jyotiḥ, the Supreme Effulgence etc. He is full of innumerable auspicious qualities of which six qualities namely, 'jñāna', 'bhala' 'aiśvarya', 'vīrya', 'śakti', and 'tejas' are predominant because of which He is called 'Bhagavān'. He is the primordial Cause of the universe, the Efficient Cause or 'Nimitta-kāraṇa', the Material Cause 'Upādāṇa-kāraṇa', and the Accessory Cause or, 'Sahakāri kāraṇa'. The process of creation that we described earlier, is achieved through the synergy of these instrumentalities. Both 'cit' and 'acit' constitute Īśvara's body.

The Lord's essential nature is constituted of knowledge of all-encompassing nature, 'Sarvajñya', completely independent 'Sarva-Svatantra' overlord of everything 'Sarva-Sēṣin', all-controlling 'Sarva-Niyantā', holding everything together, 'Sarva-Ādhāra', protecting every thing 'Sarva-Rakṣaka', beyond space, time, and object, 'Tri-vidha paricchēda-rahita', and devoid of any imperfections, and on the contrary, full of all auspicious qualities, 'Sakala-hēyapratyanīka Samasta kalyāṇa-guṇāśryah', sole benefactor of all acts, 'Sakala-phala-prada', refuge 'āśrayanīya', etc. His 'divya-mangala-vigraha' is made up of 'Suddha-satva' 'pure matter, which is 'aprākṛta' 'eternal. The whole of 'Nitya-vibhūti' is also of the same pure matter and similarly 'aprākṛta'. For the same reason, the 'Arcāmūrti', the divine form in the temples is also looked upon as 'Suddha-satva'. It is wrong therefore to characterize it as an idol. 'Cit' tattva comprises the individual self, that is of sub-atomic character. It is also

called 'ātman', 'jīva', 'jīvāt-man' etc. It has the essential characteristic of 'Cetana' or intelligence, knowledge as an essential attribute of oneself which is called 'Dharma-bhūta-jñāna', and 'śeṣatva' or subservience only to the Supreme Lord, This is the defining quality or 'Svarūpa-nirupādhika dharma' of the individual self. There are three types of selves, the 'Nitya', 'Muktha'. and 'Bhaddha'. We have already seen who are 'Nityas'. Mukthas are liberated souls who have reached the Lord's abode, Vaikuntam, after obtaining Lord's grace by following the path of Bhakthi yoga, or Saranāgathi. In Vaikuntam, they join the Nityas and other Mukthas already enjoying the bliss of eternal service to the Lord. The 'bhaddha' is the bound self provided with a body according to his past karma, caught in 'samsāra' living out his 'karma', and awaiting the grace of the Lord.

The self is in inseparable relationship with the Lord in a nine-fold manner as follows: "1. 'Pitā-putra'- Father and son, 2. 'rakshya- Rakshaka'- the protected and Protector, 3. 'śēṣa- Śēṣi'- servant and the Supreme Master 4. 'Bartṛ-bhārya'- Husband and spouse 5 'jñātr- jñēya'- the knower and the Knowable 6. 'Ādhāra-ādhēya'- Support and the supported 7. 'sva-Svāmi'- property and the Owner 8. 'Bhōktā- bhōgya'- the Enjoyer and the object of enjoyment 9.'sarira-Sariri'- body and Soul". While all this is of cardinal importance in Srivaiṣṇava theology and philosophy, the relationship of the individual to the Divine as His subordinate, and as entirely dependent on Him, in other words, the qualities of 'śeṣatvam' and 'pāratantrya' are integral to spiritual faith and practice. It is important to keep in mind, that Īśvara resides in the individual self as 'Antaryāmi', but does not take part in the activities of the individual, but is always with him to help cross the ocean of 'samsāra'.

‘Acit’ tattva, comprises three principles, namely, ‘Prakṛti’ or primordial nature, kāla, or time, and ‘suddha- satva’ or pure matter that we saw earlier. Kāla or time has relevance in the cosmic sport of Īśvara, being the instrument for the functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the manifest universe, but does not cause any change in God’s enternal kingdom (nitya-vibhūti)

Prakṛti is also referred to as ‘Avyakta’-unmanifest and ‘Pradhāna’. This principle is always in a state of flux. It comprises three qualities or ‘gunas’, ‘satva’, rajas’ and ‘tamas’. When these qualities are in complete harmony, ‘mahāpralaya’ or dissolution of the universe occurs. When there is a state of disharmony, it gives rise to an evolute called ‘Mahat’, literally the ‘great’, the cosmic aspect of the intellect, along with the ego ‘Ahaṅkāra’. The evolute of ‘ahaṅkāra’ is of three kinds, ‘sātvā’- pure and illuminating, ‘rājas’- energy tāmas’- darkness. The middle one, namely ‘rājasa’ does not play any direct role except to act as a facilitator to the other two qualities in their further evolution as described below. From the ‘sātvika ahaṅkāra’, evolve mind, ‘manas’ and the five ‘jñānēndriyas’ of skin, eyes, ears, nose, and tongue, and the five ‘karmēndriyas’ of hands, legs, mouth, and the two excretory organs, in other words, eleven in all. The ‘tāmasa ahaṅkāra’, generates the five basic elements of ‘ākāśa’, ‘vāyu’, ‘agni’, ‘āpa’, and ‘pṛthvi’, with their subtle essences, ‘śabda’ or sound from ether, ‘śabda’ and ‘sparśa’, sound and touch from air, ‘śabda’, ‘sparśa’ and ‘rūpa’ or form from fire, ‘śabda’, ‘sparśa’, ‘rūpa’ and ‘rasa’ or taste from water, and ‘śabda’, ‘sparśa’, ‘rūpa’, ‘rasa’ and ‘gandha’ or flavor from the earth. This admixture of essences occurs through a process called ‘pancikaranam’ literally quintuplication – the theory that every physical object contains all the

five elements in various proportions. By themselves, the unique qualities of the five elements are, 'śabda' from ether, 'sparśa' from air, 'tejas' from fire, 'rasa' from water, and 'gandha' from earth. In all therefore, the 'acit' tattva comprises twenty-four evolutes, from mūla-prakṛti, mahat, ahaṅkāra, manas, the five jñānēdriyas, the five karmēdriyas, the five elements with their respective subtle essences. The twenty-fifth principle is the 'ātman' and the twenty-sixth is 'Īśvara'. This is elegantly stated in the Upaniṣad line, "*Kṣaram Pradhānam amritākṣaram Harah kṣaramātmānāu Īsatē Deva Ekah*:". The 'pradhānam' or the primordial cosmic matter is perishable, ('kṣara'); the 'hara' or jiva is immortal and imperishable. The one Supreme Lord (Deva ekah:) rules over both the 'kṣara and the 'akṣara'.

Thus 'Īśvara' reigns supreme over both 'Nitya-vibhūthi' and Līlā-vibhūthi'. His celestial abode is 'Vaikunta', where He resides with His Divine Consorts, Sri, Bhū and Nīlā Devis, served by a host of 'Nityasūris' led by Ādiśeṣa, Viśvakṣena, Garuda etc., and His adornments, Srivatsa, Kaustuba, Vijayanthi, etc., and the 'Divyāstras', Cakra or discus, Sārṅga or bow, Kaumōdhaki or mace etc. All these twenty-four categories of 'acit', along with the order of jivātman, are represented in the form of weapons and ornaments of the Lord, Sriman Nārāyana. This metaphorical description is to point out, that both the sentient beings and the non-sentient principles are ever subordinated to the will of the Lord and that they function only according to His will. This metaphorical representation is portrayed in the form of a verse (verse 41) of Sri Nigamānta Mahā Desikan in his 'Adhikāra Saṅgraham'. These three categories, namely 'cit', 'acit', and 'Īśvara', are briefly the enjoyer, 'bhoktā', object of enjoyment. 'bhogya', and the 'Prērita', the Divine driver immanent in, and pervading, the entire

‘cit’ and ‘acit’ domains, and distributing the fruits of action to the individual. This has been discussed in some detail here, not only to facilitate a basic understanding of ‘Viśiṣṭādvaitam’, but also since the Āḷvārs who incarnated in this world as divine emissaries, were believed to have embodied a specific divine representation, or ‘amsa’, and substratum, or ‘adhiṣṭhāna’ of the ‘cit’ and ‘acit’ categories described here. These representations are indicated in the table at the end of this chapter.

As stated earlier, the Āḷvārs were twelve in all. They were Poygai, Pūtatt, Pey, Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār, Nammāḷvār, Madhurakavi, Kulaśekharar, Periāḷvār, Āṇḍāl, Tondaradippodi, Tiruppānā-ḷvār, and Tirumangai Āḷvār. According to Āḷvār hagiography, the first four Āḷvārs in the order indicated above, were contemporaries who were born in Kānchipuram, Mahābalipuram or Tirumallai, Mylapore or Tirumayilai, and Tirumaḷisai, all either around or in Chennai. There is no definitive time period of the Āḷvārs conclusively established anywhere. Indicative evidence points to two presumptive time periods. One is the traditional account in literature such as Guruparamparāprabhāvam of Pinbhāḷagiya Perumāl Jīyar, wherein Nammāḷvār’s birth has been indicated as 43 days after the advent of ‘Kali yuga’, which is approximately 5100 to 5200 years ago. Some versions aver that his birth was after 4302 days after the advent of Kali allowing for the ‘yuga-sandhi’ period between the Dvāpara and Kali yugas. Nammāḷvār, believed to have been an incarnation of Viśvakṣena holds a preeminent position in the Āḷvār galaxy. He is considered the ‘Kulapati’ or Chief of the Āḷvār lineage. The first four Āḷvārs, namely Poygai, Pūtatt, Pey, (grouped together and referred to as Mudhal Āḷvārs), and Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār, were all born before Nammāḷvār.

The traditional order of dates of the Āļvārs indicated by Dr. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, (Ancient India-1911, p-404), is as follows: (Page 8-9, Chapt.1, The Āļvārs, K.C. Varadachari- Vol.5 Complete Works).

1. Poygai, Pūtatt, and Pey - 4203 B.C.
2. Tirumaļisai Āļvār - 4203
3. Nammāļvār - 3102
4. Madhurakavi - 3102
5. Kulaśekharar - 3075
6. Periaļvār - 3056
7. Āndāl - 3005
8. Tondaradippodi - 2814
9. Tiruppanāļvār - 2760
10. Tirumangai Āļvār - 2706

Dr. Krishnaswami Aiyangar has added a rider that the dates ascribed by hagiologists to these Āļvārs, would not bear scrutiny, but the order in which they are mentioned is substantially correct.

Academic literature based on other contemporaneous historical evidence as identified by the researchers,

places the probable time-period of Āļvārs between the sixth and ninth centuries. But there is no unanimity among them about this. But this is not discussed here. For further details of the literature and evidence, one may refer to the chapter of the aforesaid book.

It is interesting to note that Sri Vedānta Desikan gives two versions of the order as follows: 1. Poygai, Pūtatt, and Pey Āļvārs, 2. Nammāļvār, 3. Periaļvār, 4. Kulaśekhara Āļvār, 5. Tiruppānāļvār, 6. Tondaradippodi Āļvār, 7. Tirumaļisai Āļvār, 8. Tirumangai Āļvār. (A.S. 1). He has not included Āndāl and Madhurakavi in this order. The practice of expressing the Āļvār count as ten, or twelve is both followed in tradition. In the former case, Āndāl being looked upon as incarnation of Bhū Devi, and Madhurakavi Āļvār being totally devoted to the sacred feet of his master Nammāļvār, whom he looked upon as his “Tēvu,” or Divine Lord, are not counted in this order. But Sri Vedānta Desikan has mentioned Madhurakavi separately in pasuram 2 thereof. In his Prabandha Sāram, Desikan has indicated the following order, 1. Poygai, 2. Pūtatt, 3. Pey, 4. Tirumaļisai, 5. Nammāļvār, 6. Madhurakavi, 7. Kulaśekharar, 8. Periaļvār, 9. Āndāl, 10. Tondaradippodi, 11. Tiruppānāļvār, and 12. Tirumangai Āļvār, (17 P.S.).

The rationale adduced by some scholars for the order mentioned in Adhikāra Sangrahaṁ is attributed to grouping them in 1. the ‘Rahasyatraya’ order, and 2. to distinguish between adherence and non-adherence to ‘Varnāśrama’ dharma, and listing their names accordingly. Thus the Prabandham of the first three Āļvārs, is an elaboration of the ‘Aṣṭākṣaram’; Nammāļvār’s Tiruvāymoļi is a detailed exposition of the ‘Dvaya Mahāmantra’, and Periaļvār’s Prabandham exemplifies the Gita ‘Carama sloka’. Periaļvār.

Tiruppānāļvār, and Kulaśekharar followed the prescribed ‘varnāsrama dharma’ of their respective classes in as much as, Perīāļvār being a Sri Vaishnavite devotee of Lord Vatapatraśāyi by stringing flower garlands for the Lord, Tiruppānāļvār who belonged to the ‘Pānar’ class by worshipping Lord Sri Ranganātha from the farther bank of the river cauveri, and Kulaśekharar who was a warrior king by dedicating his rulership to the service of his personal God Sri Rama. The other three Āļvārs, Tondaraddipodi, Tirumaļisai, and Tirumangai, are grouped together last in the order, since they had slipped at some point in their lives from strict adherence to their respective ‘varnāsrama’ dharma, as we shall see in due course.

In sum, as eloquently stated by Sri K.C. Varadachari in his Introduction to his book, ‘The Āļvārs, (Complete Works- Vol.5)- p 4), *“The language of these saints was Tamil, but so replete is it with the lore of the Bhāgavatha, and Pancarātra and the Vedic truths, that it may well be, as it has been traditionally held, to be renderings of the imperative truths of Divine Life.....The Āļvārs made immense use of these, (Vedic (revelational), Brahminic (ritual), Upaniṣadic, (philosophic), Paurānic (historical), Itihāsic (anecdotal) in an integral manner, that is, by synthesizing these versions whenever possible, so as to yield unitary instruction or truth,”* without ever losing sight of the basic Upaniṣadic truth, ‘Ekam Sat’.

A brief sketch of the birth place, birth star and month of the Āļvārs, and the Prabandham sung by them is furnished below.

1. Poygai Āļvār – Kanchipuram – ‘Sravanam’, Tamil month ‘Aippasi’.- Mudhal Tiruvandādhī – 100 pasurams.

2. Pūtatt - Māmallai or Mahābalipuram- 'Sraviṣṭa' 'Aippasi' - Irandām Tiruvandādhi- 100 pasurams.
3. Pey Āļvār - Tirumayilai or Mylapore - 'Sadhayam' 'Aippasi' - Mūnrām Tiruvandādhi - 100 pasurams.
4. Tirumaļisai Āļvār - Tirumaļisai - 'Makam', 'Thai'- Nānmukan Tiruvandā dhi - 96 pasurams, and Tirucchanda Viruttam- 120 pasurams.
5. Nammāļvār- Tirukkurugur- 'Visākam','Vaikāsi'- Tiruviruttam-100 pasurams,Tiruvāsiriyam- 7, Peria Tiruvandādhi- 87, and Tiruvāymoļi- 1102 pasurams.
6. Madhurakavi Āļvār- Tirukkolor- 'Chithirai' 'Chithirai'- Kanninun Siruttāmbu - 11 pasurams.
7. Kulasekhara Āļvār - Tiruvanchikkalam- 'Punarvasu' 'Māsi'- Perumāl Tirumoļi - 105 pasurams.
8. Periaļvār- Srivilliputtur- 'Svāti' 'Āni'- Tiruppallāndu - 12, and Periaļvār Tirumoļi - 461
9. Āndāl - Srivilliputtur, - 'Pooram' 'Ādi' - Tiruppāvai- 30, and Nāchiyār Tirumoļi - 143
10. Tondaradipodi - Tirumandankudi- 'Kettai', 'Margazhi'- Tirupp- alliyezucchi- 10, Tirumālai-45.
11. Tiruppānāļvār - Uraiyur- 'Rohini', 'Kārthigai'- Amalanādippirān - 10 pasurams
12. Tirumangai Āļvār - Tirukkuraiyulur- 'Kārthigai', 'Kārthigai' - Peria Tirumoļi - 1084, Tiruvezukkūtirukkai - 1, Siria Tirumadal - 77½, Peria Tirumadal- 148½, Tirukkuruntāndakam - 20, Tiruneduntāndakam - 30.

The above enumeration is in accordance with the views of Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal and his followers. In this connection, it may be germane to bring out the slight

variation in the approach taken by Sri Vedānta Desikan in his work 'Prabandhasāram' (Verses 15 and 16), in the classification of the Prabandhams and reckoning of their numbers. Swāmi Desikan does not reckon Periaḷvār's Tiruppallāndu as a separate poem but treats it as part of Periaḷvār Tirumoḷi, and indicates the total number of pāsūrams as 473. He has arrived at the total number of Tirumangai Āḷvār's six Prabandhams as 1253. This number is on the basis of reckoning the verses of his Siria Tirumadal and Peria Tirumadal as 40 and 78 verses respectively instead of 77½ and 148½ as indicated in the enumeration given above. In order to make up the total of 4000; however, Sri Desikan has included the 'Irāmānuja Nootrandādhi' comprising 108 pāsūrams, composed by Sri Tiruvaranagattamudhanār in praise of Sri Ramanuja as a Prabandham. The justification for this is evidently that it is similar to Kanninun Siruttāmbu of Madhurakavi Āḷvār on his Āchārya Swāmi Nammāḷvār, and Sri Ramanuja had directed that Amudhanār's hymn be also recited under 'Iyal Sātthu' during the 'Adhyayana Utsavam' at Tiruvarangam temple. The total number of verses thus aggregates to 4000 collectively grouped under 24 'Prabandhams' in either case, and hence called 'Nālāyira Divya Prabandham'. This has been arranged under four groups as follows. Tiruvāimoḷi of Nammāḷvār of 1102 verses forms one part. The Peria Tirumoḷi with 1084 verses of Tirumangai Āḷvār along with his Tirukkuruntāndakam comprising 20 verses and Tiruneduntāndakam of 30 verses constitute another part. The Prabandhams of Periaḷvār, Āndāl, Kulasekharar, Tondaradippodi Āḷvār, Pān Perumāl, Madhurakavi Āḷvār, and Tirucchandaviruttam of Tirumaḷisai Pirān, are grouped together under the title of 'Mudhal Āyiram'. The rest of the Prabandham works including 'Irāmānuja Nootrandādhi' as mentioned above are categorized as a separate part under the title of 'Iyarpā'.

This includes the Prabandhams of the Mudhal Āḷvārs trinity, Nānmukan Tiruvandādhi of Tirumaḷisai Pirān, Nammāḷvār's Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāsiriyam, and Peria Tiruvandādhi, and as mentioned above Amudhanār's hymn on Sri Ramanuja.

It redounds to the credit of our venerable Āchāryas of later times to have authored 'Vyākhyānas' or discourses on the Prabandham works which is unique to this 'Sampradāya', and has enriched the tradition by facilitating an enlightened understanding and appreciation of the philosophical and spiritual truths enshrined in the Divya Prabandham. Two Āchāryas – Sri Periavācchān Pillai affectionately referred to in the tradition as 'Parama Kārunikar', and 'Vyākhyāna Chakravarthi', and Peria Parakālaswami have commented on all the Prabandhams in 'manipravla'. Several Āchāryas like Pillān, Nanjīyar and Nampillai, have written scholarly treatises on Tiruvāimoḷi. There are other Vyākhyānas on specific Prabandhams. A note containing information on these commentaries is placed at Annexure I.

'Taniyan' on Āḷvārs –recited before recitation of Divyaprabandham, composed by Parāsara Bhattar.

"Būtham Sarasya-Mahatāhvaya-Bhattanātha Sri Bhakthisāra Kulaśekhara- Yogivāhān I Bhakthāngrirēnu Parakāla-Yatīndramiśrān, Srimath Parānkuśa-munim pranatōsmi nithyam II".

Bhattar composed this when he was in Tirukkottiyur with his disciple Nanjīyar, by way of his homage to the Āḷvārs, and saint Sri Rāmānuja. He did not specify Āndāl in this sloka, presumably because he had separately composed the taniyan, 'Nilātunga'...dedicated to her. She could also be deemed as implicitly covered in her father Bhattanātha by shifting the 'Sri' before

Bhakthisāra, and taking it as a suffix to Bhattanātha, to read 'Bhattanātha Sri'. Similarly, Madhurakavi Āḷvār can be taken to be covered in his Āchārya's name 'Srimath Parāṅkusamuni' or in the generic term 'Yatīndramiśrān' which is an inclusive term. The first three names 'Būtham, Sarasya, and Mahatāhvaya' refer to the Mudhal Āḷvārs. Bhattanātha refers to Periāḷvār. Sri Bhakthisāra is Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār, who exemplified devotion to the Lord by specially praying for flow of bhakthi towards the Lord's feet. Kulaśekharar is mentioned next. The term 'Yogivāhān' at the end of first line, refers to Tiruppān Āḷvār who was carried by Sri Lokasāraṅghamuni at the behest of Lord Ranganātha, and thus came to be known as 'Munivāhanar'. Parakāla is Tirumangai Āḷvār. Yatīndra is Sri Rāmānuja who had a large following of 'yatis' or monks. Srimath Parāṅkuśamuni is Nammāḷvār. The prefix 'Srimath', is to emphasize that he is the Chief of the Srivaishnava lineage. 'Parāṅkuśa' connotes that he is like the sharp instrument used to make the wild elephant submit to commands. Here, it means that he is like that instrument in wiping out the three egotistic tendencies arising out of learning, wealth, and birth. The last word 'muni' means 'sage'. Thus, this is an invocatory sloka of tribute and worship to the Āḷvār saints, and Sri Rāmānuja.

TABLE.

No	Āļvār	Amśa	Adhiṣṭhāna
		(Representation)	(Substratum)
1	Poygai	Śankha	Tāmasa ahañkāram
2	Pūtatt	Kaumodhaki	Mahat
3	Pey	Nandhaka	Jñāna
4	Tirumaļisai	Sudarśana	Manas
5	Nammāļvār	Viśvaksena	
6	Madhurakavi	Kumudhar	
7	Kulaśekharar	Kaustubham	Jīva
8	Periāļvār	Garuda	
9	Āndāl	Bhū-Devi	
10	Tondaradippodi	Vanamāla	Panca-bhūtas and Panca- Tanmātras
11	Tiruppān Āļvār	Śri-vatsam	Mūla-Prakṛti
12	Tirumangai Āļvār	Śāraṅgha	Sātvika- Ahañkāra- Jñāna- Karmendriyas.

ANNEXURE

Vyākhyānam on Tiruvāimoḷi.

1. Tirukkurugai Pirān Pillān's "*Ārāyirappadi*" – with the grace of Emperumānār.
2. Nanjiyar with his preceptor Bhattar' grace – "*Onbadhāyirappadi*"
3. Periaṁcchān Pillai with the grace of Nampillai "*Irubbattunālayirappadi*"
4. Nampillai 'vyākhyānam' as documented in scrolls by Vadakku Tiruveedhi Pillai called "*Idu*" '36000 Padi'.
5. Azhagiya Manavāla Jiyar – '12000 Padi'

The above five vyākhyānas are listed in Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal's 'Upadesa Rattina Mālai' in verses 41 to 45. Apart from the above, Sri Periaṁcchān Pillai has written vyākhyānams on the rest of the 'Aruliccheyal' texts also as acknowledged by Māmuniḡal in verse 46 of U.R.M. It appears that Nanjiyar had written commentaries on a few other Prabandhams as evident from verse 47, but only those on Tiruppalliyezucchi and Kanninun Siruttāmbu are extant now. Sri Azhagiya Manavālapperumāḷ Nāyanār the younger brother of Pillai Lokāchāriar had similarly written vyākhyānams for Amalanāḍippirān, Kanninun Siruttāmbu and Tiruppāvai. Mention may also be made of the vyākhyānams of Sri Appillai for the Tiruvandāḍhi works of the first four Āḷvārs. One vyākhyānam for Periaḷvār Tirumōḷi attributed to the authorship of Sri Tiruvāimmoḷippillai the preceptor of Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal has been published. But there is no mention of it in his Upadesa Rattinamālai or on the commentary thereon by Pillai Lokam Jiyar. It has been

opined by Kānchi Mahāvidvān Prativādhibhayankaram Sri Annagara Chāriar that this author was not Manavālamāmuniḡal's Āchārya, but one with the same name of later period.

The common thread that runs through all the commentaries starting from Pillān's 'Ārāyirappadi' onwards, is that they are all set in the 'manipravāla' style with an admixture of Tamiḡ and Sanskrit. All the commentaries have drawn liberally from the Vedas, Upanisads, Smrithis, Itihāsa Purānas, and Tamil 'Sangam' literature. The commentaries are interwoven with intricate but clear elucidations on Viśiṣṭādvaita principles and other esoteric doctrines. These have formed the core on which later scholars like Kānchi Swāmi, and Purisai Sri Krishnamachari Swami, Vaishnava Sudarsanam Krishnaswami Iyengar, Uttamur Veeraragavachari have written vyākhyānam for various Prabandham texts for a wider reach and easier comprehension. These are, however, not detailed here.

2

MUDHAL ĀḶVĀRS - POYGAI, PŪTATT AND PEY.

Poygai, Pūtatt, and Pey ĀḶvārs are collectively addressed as Mudhal ĀḶvārs not only because they were the first three ĀḶvārs to incarnate, but were contemporaries, born in the same month and year on successive days, in and around places close to each other, in and near Chennai. They shared many other striking commonalities as we shall see. All three were 'Ayonijas', 'not born of mortal beings', and appeared on 'ketaki', 'mādhavi', and red water lily flowers, respectively. The eldest of the three Poygai ĀḶvār was born as an 'amśa' of 'Śankha' 'conch shell' of the Lord, in a pond behind the temple of Lord Yathotkāri in the town of Kānchi, in the Tamil month of 'Aippasi' under the star 'Tiruvōnam'. Pūtatt ĀḶvār was born the next day as an 'amśa' of "Kaumodhaki" or 'mace' of the Lord, under the star of 'Avittam', in the small town of Māmallai, or Mahābalipuram. The last of the three, Pey ĀḶvār was born in Tirumayilai or Mylapore in Chennai, as an 'amśa' of the Lord's 'Nandhaka' or 'sword', in a well of water lilies, under the star 'Sadhayam'. Coincidentally, or by design of the Lord, all the three ĀḶvārs were born in 'divya-desas' of shrines, where the Lord is in reclining state, 'Sonnavaṇṇam seitha Perumāl' or Yathotkāri in Kānchi, 'Sthala-śayana Perumāl' in Māmallai, and 'Mannātha Perumāl' in Tiruvallikkeni of which Mylapore was a part in earlier times. All the three shared Tamil names, of Poygai, Pūtatt, and Pey, though they are also identified by Sanskrit names, of Sara Yogi, Bhūta Yogi, and Mahatāhvya. All the three were wandering monks, visiting shrines of the Lord from place to place, singing the glory of the Lord, and sharing their experiences, with

the local people in places they visited. Strangely, that was how they happened to come together in the temple town of Tirukkovalur, on a historic stormy night.

Poygai Āḷvār, who was caught in that storm, sought a shelter, and was directed by the local people to a 'dehali' or front corridor of what had presumably been once the 'Āśrama' or hermitage of sage Mṛkandu. He went in, and finding the corridor vacant, laid down to rest for the night. In the meantime, the next Āḷvār, Pūtatt arrived there, and knocked on the door. Poygai Āḷvār, opened the door for him, and the space being too narrow for both to lie down, they both sat down there, after making mutual introductions. Shortly after, the third Āḷvār, Pey Āḷvār also arrived, and now all three could just stand there in that passage, which they did, exchanging their experiences during their peregrinations. It was then, that all three felt suddenly jostled, a curious feeling of being crowded in, in that narrow confines, by a fourth person among them. There indeed was a fourth person there besides them who was none other than the Lord Himself. The Divine Being did not want to let go of this rare opportunity of brushing shoulders with them, and listening in to their conversation. Being sages, they lit a lamp through their songs, to identify that invisible fourth person who had materialized in that dank, dark, narrow corridor. Thus Poygai Āḷvār lit the first song of Divya Prabandham, beginning with the words, "*Vaiyam thagaliyā*"..... visualizing 'the world as a lamp, the oceans as the oil, the blazing sun as the light', and dedicated his garland of verses, to the Feet of the Lord sporting the sparkling 'Sudarśana', so the suffering of the world may pass. The second Āḷvār Pūtatt Āḷvār followed suit with his song, "*Anbe thagaliyā*"..... 'with love as the lamp, devotion as oil, thoughts soaked in bliss divine as the wick', and in that light, saw the object of his search as Nārāyana. Thus, with both outer darkness, and inner

darkness dispelled by the lamps lit by the first two Āļvārs, the third Āļvār Pey sang, actually describing the Divine Personality Who had manifested before them, with words beginning, *“Tirukkandēn...”* *visualizing the Divine Mother first, and in Her reflection the golden effulgence of the form of the Lord, with the sparkling battle-tested discus in one hand, and the curved conch in the other”*. In this background and beatific vision, and flow of soul of these three saints, was born the Divyaprabandham in that sacred corridor on that historic night, with each Āļvār singing one hundred pasurams in chaste Tamil, in ‘Andādhi’ style, which, in due course, came to be designated as ‘Mudhal’, ‘Irاندām’. and ‘Mūnrām’ Tiruvandādhi.

Sri Vedānta Mahā Desikan has metaphorically characterized this, in a sloka in his hymn ‘Sri Dehaliśa Stuti’, where he has portrayed Lord Trivikrama as a plush sugar cane growing on the banks of the river Pennār, the three saints as the three wheels of the cane crusher, squeezing the sweet juice of the Lord, which flows out mixed with the honey of His sacred feet, as the nectar of ‘souśīlya’ or Lord’s gracious condescension towards His devotees, regardless of high and low, (D.S.-7). Swami Desikan adds that the lamp lit by the three Āļvārs that night in the form of their sublime poetry, ‘dispelled the darkness of ignorance in the world, and brought to light the esoteric truths contained in the Vedas....’ *“Nāttukku Irulseka nānmarai andhi nadai vilanga, vittukku idaikazhiye velikkāttum ammei vilakkē”*- (A.S.-50).

Let us now consider the commonalities among the three Āļvārs and their Prabandhams, in some more detail. All these three Prabandhams are considered as a unitary ‘Śāstra’, due to the amazing identity of their thoughts, and styles of expression, though their experiences were somewhat varied. The state of devotion exemplified by the three Āļvārs, has been termed as ‘Parabhakti’, ‘Parajñānam’

and 'Paramabhakti' respectively. 'Parabhakti' is supreme devotion expressed by a sense of overwhelming yearning for the Lord, desiring 'Bhagavad-samśleṣa' or 'commingling with the Lord'. 'Parajñānam' is the expression of that yearning for that experience along with other devotees, with the knowledge of the Divinity as Sarva- Śeṣi. 'Paramabhakti' is that supreme devotion culminating in 'the actualization' of the Divine. These are respectively also called 'jñāna', 'darśana' and 'prāpti'. This is what is described by Lord Krishna, in the words, *"Bhaktya tvananyayā sakhya Ahamevamvidha: jñātum, draṣṭum, ca tatvena praveṣṭum ca"*, (B.G-11.54), 'Only by single-minded devotion, it is possible to truly know, see. and to enter into Me.' Poygai Āḷvār in his pasuram, *"Vaiyam thagali"*, (M.T.1), intuited the Lord as 'Ubhayavibhūthi Yukta', that is the Supreme Lord of both 'Nitya-vibhūthi', and 'Līlā-vibhūthi'. Pūtatt Āḷvār visualized the Supreme person as 'Nārāyana'. (I.T.1). Pey Āḷvār added the 'Sri' 'śabdha' to it, and sang of Him as 'Sriyahpathi'. The same truth is revealed by Nammāḷvār, in the first three decads of his Tiruvāymoḷi. Thus, in the first decad, he sings of the Lord in the words, *"Uyarvara Uyarnalam-Udaiyavan Evan ...Avan Amarargal Adhipati"*, highlighting His 'ubhayavibhūthimatvam'. In the second decad, *"Vīdumin"*, Āḷvār identified that Lord, as Nārāyana, in the phrase, *"Vanpugazh Nāranan"*. (T.V.M.1.2.10). In his third decad, *"Pathudai-adiyavarkku"*, he further qualified the same Lord, as Sriyahpathi in the words, *"Malarmagal virumbhum nam Arumperaladigal"*, - (T.V.M.1.3.1). It must be noted that all the three Āḷvārs were articulating the Divine Reality in terms of the same truth, though it may be that the way they experienced and articulated it, was somewhat divergent from each other. All of them were well-versed in Vedic, Āgamic, and Purānic learning, as Sri Vedānta Desikan has described them as having 'the Vedas, and yoga in their eyes, pure of mind, and

poets of the highest order', 'Svādhyāya yoga nayanā: sucaya: kavīndrā:', (Deh.Stu.-6). Thus Poygai Āḷvār, in intuiting the Lord as endowed with 'ubhaya-vibhūthimatvam', said so with all Vedic authority behind it. The basic substratum of the three experiential states is the same though they perceived the same differently. That is the *raison d'être* for treating all the three works as a unitary 'Śāstra', in the same manner as the 'Vyākaraṇa Śāstra' is known as one integral 'trimuni-śāstra', since it is a collaborative product of three sages. Yet a striking identity of thought, style, and imagery runs through it all. In pasuram 41 of Mudhal Tiruvandhādhi, Āḷvār advises his heart, "..... Puranuraiyē āyinum Ponnālikkaiyān thiranuraiyē sindhittiru", 'even if only for outward expression, dwell your thoughts on the greatness of the Lord of the golden Sudarśana'. Pūtatt Āḷvār, in a uniquely similar vein, sings, "*Vēmbin porul nīrmaiyeṅāyinum, Ponnāli pādenru arul nīrmaitanda Arul*"- (I.T.-58). Even if singing the praise of the Lord of the golden Sudarśana, were like the taste of neem, I am endowed with the grace to sing about Him.' Both Poygai Āḷvār and Pey Āḷvār address their hearts in identical style, "*Ulan Kandāy nannenjē, Uttamanenrum ulan kandāy, ulluvārullattulan kandāy,*" (M.T.-90, Mū.T.-40) 'My good heart, know that the great Lord, abides in us now and for ever, even as He does in the hearts of cherishing hearts.' Appropriately, they have been called, "*Pēsitrē pēsum eka-kantargāl*" or 'echoing the same thought with one voice'. In complete unison, in none of the three Prabandhams, there is any 'phalasruti' line at the end, nor any identity 'mudrā' or signature of the author, as in the case of many other Āḷvārs. In view of so many unique features characterizing these three Tiruvandhādhis, the Mudhal Āḷvārs, have been hailed as "*Pālēy Tamizhar*", "*Senchor Kavigal*" "*In kavipādum Paramakavigal*", "*Pāttukkuriya Pazhaiyavar*" etc.

With this background, we may now try to savour some select pasurams from each Prabandham. In a very evocative verse, Poygai Āļvār sings in the beginning, *"Onrumarandhariyēn, Ōdhanīrvannanai Nān, Inru marappanō..... Anru karuvarangathut kidanthu Kai thozhuthēn kandēn Tiruvarangamēyān dhisai"*- (M.T.-6). Āļvār describes that 'he has forgotten none of the experience of how, a long time ago, as he lay entrapped inside the mother's womb, he instinctively turned towards the direction of Tiruvarangam and folded his hands, and asks, if he would forget that Lord now'. It is said that the self who is blessed with the 'katākṣam' of Lord Madhusūdhana during birth, is a 'sātvika', a pure soul, and is oriented towards 'mōkṣa phalam'. In pāsuraṁ 44, *"Thamarugandhadu evvuruvam avvuruvam thāne, thamarugan-dhadheppēr matrappēr..... Avvannam Āļiyānām."*, Āļvār says, that 'the Lord assumes that form in which His devotees desire to worship Him, and that name which they like to address Him by, 'echoing Sri Krishna's statement, *"Ye yatā mām prapadhyantē tāmthataiva bhajāmyaham"*, (B.G.- 4.10) 'in what-ever way my devotees come to me, I accept and bless them the same way'. This pāsuraṁ underscores the 'soulabhya' or felicity of the 'arca' form of the Lord, what a later Āļvār, Parakālan hails as *"Pinnānār vanangum Sōdhi"*, (T.N.T.-10), 'the Radiance worshipped by later generations'. The story is told of Rāmānuja who during his 'nithya-bhikṣāvritti' happened to pass through a street, where some urchins had drawn some lines on street sand representing to their playful minds, Lord Sri Ranganātha, and seeing the saint pass by, drawn his attention to the same as the Lord. Not only Rāmānuja prostrated on the ground before the form, but reverentially accepted in his upper 'vastra', the sand offerings the kids had made to their Lord, as 'prasāda'. So also it was, that a later Āchārya Nanjīyar, had a small

‘ārādhana vigraha’ of Sri Krishna whom he used to address as “Āyar Thēvu”. A Srivaishnava elder named Engalāzhvān resided on the same street a few houses away. One night, a small boy appeared in the latter’s dream asking for some goose berries. The same dream recurred next day, and also the day after, due to which Engalāzhvān’s sleep was disturbed every night. The next day, when the boy materialized again in his dream, the elder inquired who he was, and where he belonged. The boy told him that his name was ‘Āyar thēvu’, and he belonged to Nanjīyar’s home. Next day around noon, Engalāzhvān knocked on the door of Nanjīyar with some berries and butter. Nanjīyar opened the door to find his neighbour at his door step with a basket. Engalāzhvān then apprised him of the reason for his visit and told him that he had brought some berries and butter for the boy Āyar thēvu of his home. Nanjīyar was surprised and moved by the ‘soulabhya’ of the Lord, but nevertheless went inside and gently ‘chided’ the Lord that he should not disturb others like that.

In a similar anecdotal story, on one occasion, a disciple of Nampillai approached him with a new ‘mangala vigraha’ of Krishna, he had got made, with a prayer to keep the same in his ‘ārādhana’ altar for some time and give the deity a name. Nampillai took that image and reflected over a suitable name for the deity over the next couple of days. Several names occurred to him, but he could not settle on any. On the second night, he had a dream, where Sri Krishna appeared before him, and bade him to call him by the name, “*Maduraiyār Mannan*”.

All the three Āļvārs, have displayed a common fascination for Tiruvenkatam hills of the Lord, and indulged their poetic imagery, describing the pristine beauty of the hills, their rich verdant forest cover and

denizens thereof, and some of the familiar scenes they can be seen acting out on the hills. In pāsuram 38, beginning with the words, “*Oorum variyaravam....*”, Poigai Āļvār describes how the sliding pythons of the hills which have lined skins and are afraid of the lightning hasten to seek protection in their holes when lightning strikes; but in this instance as visualized by the Āļvār, they hasten into their holes not because of lightning but terrified of the Kuravas hurling sapphire stones strewn on the hills to drive away the black elephants that have strayed into their habitat. To the snakes, the black complexion of the elephant tribe looks like sable clouds overhanging on the mountain slopes, and the semi-precious sapphire crystals that the ‘kuravas’ hurl, flash like lightning in the night.

In another interesting pāsuram (M.T.-26), beginning with the words, “*Ezhuvār vidai kolvār.....*”, extolling the lofty Venkata hills as the extinguisher of the fires of past sins, Āļvār speaks about the kinds of devotees who visit the hills to worship the Lord of the hills and the petitions they bring to seek the favours of the Lord. He classifies these agents into three categories, 1. ‘Ezhuvār’, 2. ‘Vidaikolvār’, and 3. ‘Vazhuvāvagai ninaindu vaigal thozhuvār’. The first category is the ‘aiṣvāryārthi’ seeking worldly wealth. They stay with the Lord only till such time as their prayer is granted; after that they leave the scene abruptly without even the formality of a ‘Thank You’. The second category is the ‘kaivalyārthi’, or the devotee whose goal is liberation for ‘āthmānubhavam’. Āļvār calls this class of devotees, as ‘vidaikolvār’ who extend the Lord, the courtesy of ‘taking leave’. The third category is the devotee who is the real seeker of the sacred feet of the Lord, and lives his day in constant remembrance and prayer. He is the ‘Bhagavallābhārthi’, who loves God for His own sake. Periaļvār’s Prabandham Tiruppallāndu. addresses these

three categories of devotees specifically, inviting them to come and join him in singing the praise of the Lord.

In a verse, that is recited in every Srivaiṣṇava household at the end of daily ‘Tiruvārādhana’ to the Deity, Āḷvār describes the multi-faceted role of Ādiseṣa in his service to the Lord in the words: *“Senrāl kudaiyām, Irundhāl singāśanamām, Ninrāl maravadiyām Nīlkadalul enrum Punayām Maniviḷakkām Poompattām pulgum Anaiyām Tirumārkkaravu”*- (M.T.- 53). ‘To the Consort of Sri, Ādiseṣa serves as the umbrella when on the move, as high throne when seated, as foot-rest when standing, as a mattress while resting on the milk ocean, and as a lamp, a mantle, and cradling head-rest.’ Sri Ālavandār in his Stotra Ratnam verse (39), echoing the same thought in the words *“Tayā sahāśīnam Anantabhogini prakṛṣṭa vijñānabalaikadhāmani I Phaṇāmaṇivṛātamayūkamandala prakāśamānodaradiviyadhāmani”* II also refers to the manifold roles that Ananta plays in serving the Lord.

Pūtatt Āḷvār’s Irandām Tiruvandādhī, strikes a distinctive style of its own, in some respects. At the outset, one can discern a sense of justified pride of language of the Āḷvār, in describing his hymn as ‘jñānathamizh.’ in his first pāsuram, and later on, in characterizing himself as ‘Perunthamizhan’, or ‘Tamil literateur’. Secondly, one can discern in the Āḷvār, a special fascination for the Lord of Tiruvenkatam hills and its environs, in the way he portrays the serene and idyllic beauty of nature and the animals inhabiting these hills. Having set his eyes on the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, his mind seeks, impelled by a surge of desire to rest on, and wrap around, the Lord, like a creeper seeks to find a support staff to hug and spread around. The imagery of the phrase, *“Kōl thēdi ōdum kozhundatē pōnratē Māl thēdi ōdum manam”*-(I.T.27), is very evocative.

In another verse in which the Āḷvār employs a telling metaphor to drive home, the indispensability of Divine

will in our actions ‘Bhagavad-sankalpa’, to advise us to hold dear to the thought of His presence in our hearts, and His quality of ‘rakshakatvam’, protective grace towards us. Āļvār says in this line, “*Vanathidarai Ēriāmvannam iyatrumidhuvallāl māriyār peykirpār matru*”, (I.T-16). ‘While one may prepare the ground in a wilderness to dig a lake, who can make it rain to fill it?’

In pāsuraṁ 74, Āļvār gratefully acknowledges, how he has been blessed through life after life, with the fruit of penance at the Lord’s service, and offers his garland of mellifluous Tamil verses to adorn the Lord’s feet. At the end, he proudly exclaims that he excels in Tamil arts due to the Lord’s grace.

“*Yānē tavam seidhēn ēzhpirappum eppozhudhum, yānē`tavamudayēn Emperumān --- yānē iruntamiḷinaiyaddikēsonnēn, Peruntamizhan allēn peridhu*”. Smiling as it were, at the Āļvār’s somewhat uncharacteristic self-assertion as “*Peruntamizhan*”, the Lord seems to suggest to the Āļvār that he may compose a pasuram in proof of this. The next pāsuraṁ of the Āļvār, is just that wherein Pūtatt Āļvār, in a free flow of soul, depicts a scene being played out on the exalted hills of the Lord, by a male elephant driven by ‘mast’. The elephant can be seen standing mesmerized in front of its mate, offering it, a succulent bamboo shoot with two rings plucked by it, and dipped in honey trickling from a honey comb nearby. The imagery is palpably beautiful, with esoteric undertones. “*Perugu madhavēzham Māppidikku munninru, Irukanil ila moongil vāngi- arungirundha, tēn kalandhu nīṭṭum Tiruvenkatam kandir, vān kalandha Vannan varai*.” This beautiful verse, bears ample testimony to Āļvār’s claim to the title of “*Peruntamizhan*”, which must have been approvingly conceded by the Lord. Interestingly, Tirumangai Āļvār, who also, among his other titles, had the reputation of being a “*Nālukavi Perumāḷ*”, has borrowed the

imagery of this pāsuram, in the following lines, “*Varaisey Mākkaliru Ilavedir valarmulai alaimighu tēn tōittu Pirasavāri tan ilampidikku arul seyyum*” .’ Mountain-like elephants pluck the tender bamboo shoots, and feed their young ones after dipping them in honey.’(P.T.M.- 1.2.5.).The succulent bamboo shoot, with two rings, referred to by Pūtatt Ālvār, signifies ‘Dvayam’, with the two rings signifying ‘Aṣṭākṣaram, and ‘Charamaslokaṁ’. Āchāryas like to recite and meditate on the ‘Dvayam’, which is like tasting honey. This pāsuram underscores the fact that under the benign grace of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, even animals like the elephants and monkeys, are an integral part of the Lord’s ‘rakṣana’ scheme, as Swami Nammālvār has affirmed, “*Kannāvānenrum MannōrVinnōrkum...*” (T.V.M-1.8.3.)

In another pāsuram, Ālvār sings about a simian group, with an interesting take that even the animals inhabiting the sacred hills of Tiruvenkatam, spend time in ‘bhagavad-anubhavam’ and back it up with ‘anuṣṭānam’. In this verse beginning with the words, “*Pōdharindhu Vānarangal*”, (I.T.-72), the primates rise at dawn and dip in the cool flower-laden ponds on the hills, and gather some fresh flowers to offer in worshipful prayer to the Lord, the Jewel of Tiruvenkatam. Even the primates of Venkata hills, possess, intuitively, the virtue of rising at dawn, for offering worship to Lord Hari, “*brāhmē muhūrtē chōṭthāya cintayēt āthmanō hitam I Harir Harir Harir Haririthi vyāharēt, Vaiṣṇavah: pumān*”. II A Srivaiṣṇava should rise at the stroke of dawn, and recite Hari’s name, seven times for his spiritual progress.

In yet another key pāsuram, beginning with the words “*Attīyūrān Pullaiyoorvān.....,*” and ending Engal Pirān (I.T.-96). Ālvār conjures up the vision of the celebrated ‘Garuda Sevai’ at Kānchipuram, in paying homage to Lord Varadarāja with ‘Garuda as

His vehicle, and the Serpent king Ādiseṣa for bed; describing Him as the substratum of the Vedas, the Lord of Rudra, He is our Lord too, says the Āḷvār. This is Āḷvār's 'mangalāsāsanam' to Lord Varadarāja as the essence of the Vedas and Upaniṣads, and the Lord of Nityavibhūthi and Līlāvibhūthi, as also beautifully hailed by Sri Kūrathāḷvān in his Sri Varadarājastavam, (1), "*Śvasthi Hastigiri mastaśēkharaśanthanōtu*". In this verse, which is a 'mangala' sloka on Lord Varadarāja, Kūrathāḷvān says, that the Lord here is the One Whom the Upaniṣads affirm as having no equal or superior, 'nissamābhyadhika:'. This is echoed in Āḷvār's line, "*Ottārum mikkārumilaiyāya Māmāyā*".

The unique glory of Pey Āḷvār's Mūnrām Tiruvandādhī is that this Prabandham commences with the auspicious word, 'Tiru', and ends on the same note. This Āḷvār was the first one to proclaim the Supreme Being as 'Sriyahpathi', the Lord of Sri. This is the central aspect of Srivaiṣṇava religion, in as much as 'Sriyahpathithvam' is considered as the 'svarūpa-nirūpādhika-dharma', 'the defining quality' of the Supreme Lord, 'Sraddhaya Devō devathvam asnutē', so it is said. This Prabandham thus has the distinction of starting with the 'Sri' sabdha.

It has already been said, that all the three Prabandhams are related to each other. At the first level, the human mind is clouded with outer darkness which has to do with the three kinds of 'kleṣa', or afflictions. Human life has been characterized as "Samsāra sāgaram ghoram anantha khleṣa-bhājanam", (J.S.-1.4), 'endless ocean of transmigratory existence fraught with terrible miseries'. Tiruvarangattu Amudhanār, termed this as 'Varuttum Puravirul', (R.N.-8), or 'afflicting outer darkness', the mistaken identification of the body as the 'ātman'. Poigai Āḷvār came into this world to dispel this darkness that

distorts the mind, by lighting the lamp of 'bhaktirūpāpanna jñānam', that is 'Parabhakti', where the 'self' yearns for the Divine to find its true niche. This leads to, 'ātma-jñānam', by removing the mental cobwebs of imagining that one is independent 'svatantra', and is the enjoyer 'bhokta' etc. That is the inner dirt, 'mananagamalam', as termed by Nammāļvār, (T.V.M.-1.1.2). Pūtatt Āļvār, lit the inner light of 'Parajñānam', where the individual self realizes its 'svarūpa jñānam' of 'seṣatvam' – the 'inalienable subservience' to the Divine, and 'svarūpa yāthāmya jñānam' of 'pāratantryam', of 'absolute dependence' on God and being His 'bhogya' or the 'enjoyed possession'. With both outer and inner darkness removed, Pey Āļvār had a vision of the Divine, not only he, but the other two Āļvārs too. This is "*Paramabhakti*" state of 'sākṣātkāram'. When the Āļvārs, felt being jostled in that corridor in Tirukkovalur, that was caused not just by the Lord. The Divine Mother was also there with Him, as She always is, "*Nithyaivaishā Jaganmātha Viṣnorēṣānapāyini*". What the third Āļvār experienced has been characterized as "Pratyakṣa darśana samānākāra Bhagavad Sakṣātkāram'.

The summum bonum of Pey Āļvār's Prabandham is the affirmation of the philosophic truth that the Lord's sacred feet are the 'prāpya' and 'prāpakam' 'the goal and the way', for the devotee. The Divine Mother is the mediatrix, 'puruṣakāra' to reach this goal. The Āļvār underscores this truth in several places in the Prabandham. Having said in the first pāsuram, that he saw the Divine Mother, and in Her reflected glory, the shimmering form of the ocean-hued Lord, with His divine attendants of Discus and Conch, he goes on to say in the second pasuram, that he also beheld the sacred feet of the Lord, and that at that very moment, his shackles of cyclical births were sundered. "*Inrē Kazhal kandēn ēzh pirappum Yānaruttēn*". This drives home another central article of

faith of Srivaishnava philosophy, that the Lord's feet are more important to the seeker than the Lord Himself, as the Mantra Ratnam 'Dvayam' clearly points to the sacred feet as our goal, "*Sriman Nārāyana Charanov Śaranam Prapadyē.*" Swami Nammālvār underscored this truth in his advice, "*ThuyararuSudaradiThozhudezhuEnmananē*"- (T.V.M.-1.1.1), and also in his own prapatti to the Divine couple, "*Agalakillēn enruraiyum AlarmēlMangaiyurai-mārbha*", *nigaril-pugazhāy! Ulagamoonrudaiyāy ! ennai yālvānē !pugalonrilā Adiyēn Nin Adikkīzhamarndu pughundēnē.*"- (T.V.M.-6.10.10). 'O,Lord Who bear the lotus-seated Dame on Your chest, Oh, my Master of matchless fame bearing the three worlds, Oh, Lord of Venkatam desired by celestials and sages, falling at your Feet, this refugeless self has found refuge.'

As already brought out earlier, this Prabandham starts with the word 'Tiru' and ends on the same word. What did we gain on the strength of the Divine Mother's 'puruṣakāram'. The gain is what Ālvār points out in the last pāsuram, "*Sārvu namakenrum Chakkarattān*"- 'The discus-wielding Lord is our haven of resort ever'. Swami Nammālvār, also confirms this, in his assurance, "*Sārvē Thavanerikku Dhāmōdharan tālgal*"-(T.V.M.-10.4.1.). 'Dhāmōdhara's feet are the reward of repose for our surrender.' The first three decads of T.V.M explicate this line. The first decad in the phrase "*Thuyararu Sudaradi*" stands for "*Tālgal*". The second decad "*Vīdumin-mutravum*", declares, "*Nāranan thinn Kazhal Sērē*" which is 'prapatti', or what is referred to here as "*thavaneri*". 'Dhāmōdharan' is "*Patthudai Adiyavarkku Eliyavan*" spoken of in the third decad. His feet are the unfailing refuge to reach one to the Lord under all circumstances, and all that one needs to do is to surrender to those feet. Ālvār assures us that the Lord's feet are 'the panacea for the ills of 'samsāra', the promise of prosperity on

this earth, and ever-lasting life after', or as he says, "*Marundhum, Porulum, Amudhamum thāne*". (Mu.T.-4). Āļvār's mind, then moves on to savour the beauty of the Lord in Vāmanāvatāra, in the next pāsuram. This incarnation holds special attraction to all the Āļvārs. Pey Āļvār too, is fascinated here, first by the beauty of the Lord's lotus feet, 'Adivannam thāmarai', then the complexion of the Lord resembling the blue ocean, 'Padivannam pārkkadal nīr vannam', and His crown a dazzling brilliance of the sun, 'Mudivannam Ōrāzhiveyyōn Oliyumahdanrē', (Mu.T.-5). Nammāļvār's depiction of the same theme is his "*Mudichōdhiyāy*", (T.V.M.- 3.1.0) decad, where, in the first verse, Āļvār quizzes the Lord, "*Mudicchōdhiyāy Un Mughacchōdhi malarndhadhu-Ō*" ?, meaning 'if the effulgence lighting up the Lord's face – He who is described in the Upaniṣads as 'Āpranakāt sarva eva Suvarnah:', (Ch.Up. 1.6.1), 'golden to the very tips of His nails'—'reflects as the brilliant dazzle of His crown, or vice versa' !; "*Adicchōdhi Nee Ninra Thāmaraiyāy alarndhadhuvō?*," "if the radiant pink of His feet blossomed into a lotus thereunder. !; "*Padicchōdhi ādaiyōdum pal kalanāy Nin paimpon Kadicchōdhi Kalandhadhuvō?*", 'if the shimmering gold of His frame mingled with the many-splendoured dazzle of His apparel and ornaments !'. Pey Āļvār sang about 'Adi vannam, Padi vannam, Mudi vannam', the 'Lord's feet, frame, and crown', respectively. Nammāļvār, sings about 'Mudicchōdhi, Adicchōdhi, and Padicchōdhi'. The reason why the latter addresses the crown first, is to be found in the fact that it is the majestic crown that first points to the overarching supremacy of the Lord, and His 'sarva-seṣitvam'. It is interesting that the 'Adi', 'Padi' and 'Mudi' of the Lord continue to fascinate Pey Āļvār so much, that he again reverts to the same theme in his pāsuram 13, where he conjures up the vision of the diminutive Vāmana` rising, in an instant,

as the colossal Trivikrama, straddling the earth and the heavens. Here, Āļvār uses the terms, “*Padivattam, Advattam, and Mudi vattam*”.

Again, continuing his fascination for Trivikramāvatāra, Āļvār says, that the same Lord abides in ‘arca’ form in the ‘divya-desams’ of Tiruvinnagar, Tiruvehka, Tiruvenkatam, Velukkai, Tirukkudandhai, Tiruvarangam, and Tirukkottiyur, (Mu.T.-62). This does not mean that the Lord in these shrines is Trivikrama, but only that, He exudes the felicity and compassion of Trivikramāvatāra. The next pāsura is a unique one as it captures the vision of the Lord of Tirumalai in a blend of contrasting images of Śankara-Nārāyana, with ‘matted locks, majestic crown, discus, shining axe, curling serpent, and gold waist band’, “*Tāḷsadaiyum, Nīnnmudiyum, Onmazhuvum, Sakkaramum, Soozharavum, Ponnānum, Tōnrumāl.*” This manifestation of the Lord, was to demonstrate the ‘Siddharūpa’, of the Lord, and the ‘Sādhakarūpa’ of the devotee, since Sankara is considered the first devotee of Lord Nārāyana, and always meditates on Him.

Pey Āļvār like Poygai and Pūtatt Āļvārs displays a special attachment to the Tiruvenkatam hills and the Lord there. He relates a scene of the sylvan springs where by the spring side, a male monkey is perched on a fruit tree, frozen in fear at the sight of his reflection in the water, mistaking it for an adversary, but still reaches out entreatingly for a fruit. (Mu.T- 68). “*Pārtha Kaduvan Sunainīr nizhal kandu,..... kārtha kalankanikku Kaineettum.*” At another place, his mind passes by the sight of a tusker, which holds a nectar-filled flower to offer to the Lord of Venkatam, (Mu.T.-70), “*..... Mighumadhattēn malar kondu Viral Venkatavanaiyē vanangum Kaliru*”. ‘On a moon-lit night when the silvery moon seems to skim the top of a towering peak on the hills, Āļvār’s attention is drawn to an angry panther

moving up the slopes in Krishna's mountain resort, lush with sweet-smelling trees, "*Tirumalaiyē Āyan Punavēnkai nārum poruppu*", (75).

Ālvār also, has reassuring words of advice to all 'samsāris' like us. Thus, he assures us, that there is 'no need for exacting penance like 'standing atop a mountain, dipping in cold waters, or standing amidst the five fires', etc. It is enough to offer Him, (Lord of Tiruvehka) fresh flowers, and worship Him with folded hands, for your 'karma' to end then and there. (76), "*Poruppidai ninrum punal kulittum aindhu neruppidayē nirkavum nīr vēndā Vehkāvē Sērndhānai meymmalar thooykkai thozudhāl ahkāvē thīvinaigal āyndhu.*" In pāsuram 78, he advises us to 'worship the Lord's feet as our 'Upāya', and not to bemoan our station in life, birth or destiny; he assures us that the Lord is our anchor, and will always be'. (78). "*ēdhu gathi, ēdhunilai, ēdhu pirappennādhē, ōdhugathi Māyanaiyē`ōrttu.*" Again, he assures us in another verse, 'there is no need to be assailed by doubt if that is good and this is bad, but instead worship the golden feet of the Lord common to all; all your karma will vanish in a trice.'. "*podhu ninra kazhalē thozumin muzhu vinaigal munnankazhalum mudindhu*"- (88). Finally, in pasuram 99, Ālvār recounts the episode of Gajendramokṣa where the Lord Who abides in the shrine of 'Aṣṭabujakara' in Kānchi, to hold out the promise to us that 'His feet are our sole recourse and haven', "*Tāl mudhalē nangatku Sārvu*".

Taniyans - Mudhal Thiruvandādhi- composed by Mudaliyāndān

*"Kaidhaisēr poompozhilsoozh Kachinagar vandudhitta,
Poygai Pirān Kavignār Pōrēru - Vaiyattu
Adiyavargal vāzha varunthamizh Nūtrandādhi
Padi vilangaccheydhān parindhu."*

Incarnating in a Ketaka- filled pond, in the city of Kānchi surrounded by flower gardens, Poygai Pirān, verily like a bull among the poets, lighted this chaste Tamil poem of hundred verses, in his compassion for Srivaiṣṇava devotees of the earth, so they may prosper.

Irandaṁ Tiruvandādhī – Tirukkurukaippirān Pillān.

*“En piravi thīra irainjinēn innamudhā
Anbē`thagali alittānai – nanpugazh sēr
Seedhattār mutthukkal sērum
Kadalmallai Pūtattaār Ponnankazhal”*

I worship the cherished feet of Pūtattār, who incarnated in the famed Māmallai by the ocean where cool pearls wash ashore, in order to gift us his Prabandham beginning with the words, “*Anbē thagali*”, so we may be rid of recurring births.

Mūnrām Tiruvandādhī – Kurukai Kāvalappan.

*“Sīrārum māda Tirukkovalūr adhanul
Kārār karumukilaik kānappukku,-- Ōrā`
‘Tirukkandēn’ enruraitta Sīrān Kazhalē`
Uraikkandāy nenjē ugandhu.”*

O, my heart, exult and speak the praise of the exalted feet of Pey Āḷvār, who internalized the vision of the sable cloud-like Lord, in Tirukkovalur of beautiful mansions, and sang his hymn ‘Tirukkandēn’ in one hundred verses.

3

Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār.

Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār was born in Tirumaḷisai, located very near Poovirunda Valli, a suburb of Chennai metropolis, as an ‘amśa’ of the Lord’s Discus, ‘Sudarśana’, under the star ‘Makha’, in the Tamil month, “*Thai*”, in ‘*Dvāpara*’ yuga. *The taniyan about his legendary origin, recited at his shrine in Tirumaḷisai is as follows:*” Makhāyām makarē māsē Cakrāmśam, Bārghavōdh bhavam I Mahīśārapurādiśam Bhaktisāram Aham bhajē II The legend has it that the Āḷvār was born to the sage Brigu and a celestial damsel called Kanakāngi, at the ‘Mahīśāra kṣētram’. Similar to the legend surrounding sage Agastya, who was sent by Siva to the South of the Vindhya mountains, to counterbalance the weight of the Himalayan region that, at one time, had become too heavy and started tilting due to the influx of too many celestials and sages, Brahma and sages like Bārghava, were said to have analysed and evaluated at one time all the sacred places on earth, and decided on this place known as ‘Mahīśāra’, as the most sacred, since the scales tipped in its favour over the rest. This was attributed to the fact that Lord Jagannātha is the resident Lord of the shrine here. For some divine reason, the sage Brighu couple abandoned the new born, which was still a fetus, in a field, under the shade of bamboo trees. But the fetus grew into a child with the Lord instilling life into it, and favouring it with His vision. A wood cutter found the baby on the field and took it home to his wife. Blessed with Divine vision, the child grew without need for milk, as the grace of the Lord was food and drink enough to him. It so happened that after some time, a farmer couple brought some milk, and the child took to their love, and imbibed a little of that milk, leaving the balance

in the cup, which was consumed by the farmer's wife. In due course, a child was born to them, whom they named as Kanikannan. This child grew up as an inseparable devotee and attendant of the son of Bārghava sage.

Being born of a sage couple, the child grew to become a yogi himself, learning, testing and practising first hand, different schools of thought and faiths both Vedic, and non-Vedic, before he realized the highest truth being enshrined in Sri Vaiṣṇava Siddhānta. This happened due to the intervention of Pey Āḷvār. It is believed that the son of the sage Bārghava was in deep meditation in a cave near Tiruvallikeni in Chennai, for several years. It was here, that he came in contact with the Mudhal Āḷvārs. At that time, the son of Bārghava was the worshipper of Siva. One day, he saw Pey Āḷvār engaged in watering some saplings which had been planted upside down. The Āḷvār was using a can for this, which had holes all around. On top of it, he was rushing back and forth to a well for filling the can by drawing water from the well with a pot, which too had holes all around. So very little water was left in the can to pour whenever Āḷvār went back to the plants which he knew would not survive in any case. The son of Bārghava who witnessed all this was intrigued but came near and told Pey Āḷvār that he was crazy to be engaged in such a futile act. Āḷvār retorted that if he thought him crazy, was he not a bigger crank than he, to be engaged in a futile pursuit too. Bārghava's son asked him, in what way he was crazy. Āḷvār told him, that while all the Vedas and Smṛiti declare that the first and foremost Supreme Being with powers over creation, sustenance and dissolution is Srīman Nārāyaṇa, would it serve any purpose to worship a minion of the Lord like Siva as he was doing, and asked him if his god Siva could grant him liberation sought by him. Āḷvār mockingly added that the youngster's pursuit was no less crazy

than his. Then both started arguing, and finally Pey Āḷvār prevailed over his opponent with the authority of Vedic and other ‘pramānās’ and reformed him. Bārghava’s son then, became a disciple of Pey Āḷvār, who initiated him into Srivaiṣṇava faith, and gave him ‘upadesa’ on the ‘rahasya mantras’. Thus sage Bārghava’s son became Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār. One can notice this traditional Guru-Śiṣya relationship between Pey Āḷvār, and Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār even now, at the shrine of Lord Kesavaperumāl in Mylapore, where the Āḷvār can be seen seated in meditation, facing his Āchārya Pey Āḷvār. Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār’s devotion to Nārāyana was total, such that it would later elicit the praise of Lord Siva who named him as ‘Bhakthi-Sārār’, as we shall see.

Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār was versatile in his attainments, as a yogi, a siddha, a seasoned thinker, and philosopher with a scientific mind that could articulate the Divine plan of the universe in such vivid detail, that would make modern philosophers sit up and marvel. As a yogi, he is said to have practiced the ‘aṣṭāṅgha yoga’. Presumably, all the Mudhal Āḷvārs too, were practitioners of yoga, as their names ‘Sarayogi’, ‘Pūṭayogi’, and ‘Bhrantayogi’ or Mahatāhvayar respectively would suggest. Nammāḷvār who came next, was a yogi too, as was Nāthamuni, the first Vaiṣṇava Āchārya but for whose vision and striving the legacy of Divya Prabandham would, perhaps, not have been rediscovered and handed down to posterity. Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār was always in a state of constant union with the Lord in his heart, “*Antaryāmi Brahman*”, which the Lord warmly reciprocated with equal commitment to the point of responding in tune with Āḷvār’s wishes.

There are many legends associated with Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār about his yogic powers. On one occasion, when Lord Siva and his consort Pārvathi were cruising in the

sky, they saw the Āḷvār, meditating on Nārāyana. The Āḷvār who was aware of this, adroitly moved aside to avoid their shadows. Siva who knew that the Āḷvār was a staunch devotee of Nārāyana, told his spouse about the Āḷvār's devotion to the Lord. Pārvathi, suggested that they stop over and, meet this devotee. When the celestial couple appeared before him, Āḷvār who was engaged in stitching his worn out apparel, took no notice of them, and went on with his work. Siva was miffed at Āḷvār's indifference towards them, and asked him if it was proper. Āḷvār replied that there was nothing that he needed from him, and so did not pay any attention to him. Siva then pressed the Āḷvār to seek some boon from him. At this, the Āḷvār asked him if he could grant him 'mokṣa'. Siva said that it was not within his powers to grant mokṣa. Āḷvār then asked, if he could grant him atleast long life. Siva replied that it entirely depended on the fruits of one's karma, and suggested that he ask for something that he could grant. Āḷvār, then sarcastically asked, if Siva could grant him that the thread follow the way the needle was going. Siva was enraged at the Āḷvār's rebuff and unleashed the fire from his third eye, at which the Āḷvār retaliated opening the eye on his right toe. which emitted greater fires that not only countered the fires of Siva's third eye, but started burning him. Siva then untied his head knot and let the waters of the Ganga gush out in a torrent, which after putting out the fires, caused a deluge. Amidst all this, the Āḷvār sat unfazed, meditating on the Lord. Siva then sobered down, and commending the Āḷvār's devotion, conferred the title of 'Bhakti Sārar' on him. Āḷvār has made an indirect reference to this incident, in his verse, "*Matruthozhuvār oruvaraiyum yāninmai, Katracchadaiyān Karikkandāy.....*" (N,T.-26).' There is no other deity whom I worship, as the one with matted locks, (Siva) will bear witness to'.

Āḷvār's 'bhakti' towards Srīman Nārāyaṇa had a direct, dynamic relationship with the 'arca' form in various shrines, like the 'attraction between the needle and the magnet', to borrow sage Ramakrishna Paramahansa's phrase, to describe the relationship between a true devotee and the Lord. Only it was difficult to tell in this case who was the needle and who the magnet. Such was the love of the Āḷvār for his Lord, that in his case, the Lord often chose to move and act as his devotee wished and directed. Thus, the Āḷvār spoke to the Lord of Tiruvehka in Kānchipuram as follows, "*Kanikannan is going. Lord of beautiful Kānchi, with the colour of emerald.! You shall not stay here. I the daring and righteous tongued poet, am also leaving. Pray roll up your 'serpent bed' - (Ādiseṣa).*" The Lord of Tiruvehka, known as Vegāsethu, obeyed by getting up and following the Āḷvār out of the shrine. This incident weaves around the life of Āḷvār's disciple Kanikannan. When the Āḷvār lived in Kānchipuram, an old lady used to do some work at the Āḷvār's Āśram by way of sweeping the precincts and keeping it tidy. Āḷvār was pleased with her service and blessed her. The old lady gradually grew younger, and very beautiful. The local king fell in love with her and married her. It so happened, that while the king grew old over time, his queen stayed youthful and beautiful as before, without any signs of aging. The queen told him that the secret behind this was the blessings of the Āḷvār, and on her advice, the king tried to earn the goodwill of the Āḷvār, by befriending Kanikannan. He requested Kanikannan to bring the Āḷvār to his court, so that he could honour him. Kanikannan declined saying that Āḷvār would never visit any man's house, even if it be a king. The king was annoyed at this, and ordered Kanikannan to compose a poem in his honour. Being the disciple of the Āḷvār, Kanikannan flatly refused saying that he would never ever sing in praise of a human being. The king became furious at this, and ordered him to be

banished from his kingdom. The disciple hurried forth to the Āśram, and narrated the happenings and the king's orders. It was then, that the Āļvār spoke the words cited earlier, to the Lord of Tiruvehka shrine, and prepared to leave with his disciple, with the Lord too following suit. Shorn of the Divinity in the shrine, the kingdom suddenly became desolate with natural disasters striking the city. Meanwhile, Āļvār and the Lord, with Kanikannan settled outside Kanchi at a place called Orirukkai. The people of the city were agitated by the unseasonal drought, and the king and his ministers, were worried. Finally, at the instance of his ministers, the king rushed to the Āļvār and falling at his feet, begged for his forgiveness and return. The Āļvār out of compassion, relented and forgiving the king, agreed to come back. He then again spoke to the Lord to return with him requesting Him to 'roll back His serpent bed' and lie down at the shrine as before. But on His return to the shrine, the Lord lay down on the side opposite to how He had lain before. In other words, He lay down with His head on the left side showing to the world that He had once got up at the bidding of His dear devotee, and earning the well-known title of Yathotkāri, or "*Sonnavannam Seidha Perumāl*". Sri Vedānta Desikan, in his hymn on the Lord here, called 'Vēghāsethu Stotram', says in verse 6 thereof, "*Pratyādiśanti bhavasancharanam prajānām Bhaktānugantiriha, Yasya gathāgathāni*", meaning, 'The Lord's 'goings and comings in accordance with the wishes of His devotees', are meant to cut asunder the 'samsāric cycle' of the people.' In that sense, the Lord is still 'Bhakthimatām Yathotkāri' as Swami Desikan says, that is "*Sonnavannam Seyyum Perumāl*".

After his stay at Tiruvehka, Āļvār shifted to Tirukkudanthai, and lived there rest of his life in the proximity of Lord Ārāamudhan in His temple. Amudhan too enjoyed the Āļvār's company and was only too eager to

do what His favorite devotee bade him to do. On the way to Tirukkudanthai, Āḷvār stayed at Perumpuliyur for some time. When he arrived at this place, he apparently rested on the “*Tinnai*” which is usually a concrete platform on the front portion of a Tamil home, There were some Brahmins inside the house reciting Vedic texts. Noticing his presence and taking him for a person of lower caste, the brahmins stopped their chant abruptly since they did not wish the sound of their chants to carry to his ears. Āḷvār, being sensitive and quick to grasp the hint behind the sudden silence that ensued, moved some distance farther in order not to cause any disturbance to their chant. The brahmins wanted to resume their chant now but had forgotten the place where they had stopped. The Āḷvār understood their plight, and helped them recall the line through sign language. The brahmins felt ashamed about their folly in not recognizing the greatness of the Āḷvār and repented their earlier conduct towards the Āḷvār. While the Āḷvār was at the same place he visited the local shrine, and as he was doing ‘parikrama’ or circumambulation of the Deity after his worship, the ‘mūrti’ also kept turning towards the Āḷvār in sync with Āḷvār’s movement. The people who noticed this marvel were surprised and hastened to the home of the ‘Dīkṣitar’ or the elder preceptor of the place to apprise him of the happening. At around that time, a ‘yajña’ was being conducted in the temple. So the Dīkṣitar took it as a good omen, and brought the Āḷvār to the ‘yajña śāla’ with all ceremony and respect, and offered him special honours of the temple. The performers of the sacrificial rituals were, however, angry with the Dīkṣitar for this, and reproached him openly for according such honours to a low caste stranger. Dīkṣitar was upset with their behavior and turned to the Āḷvār with a plea to reveal his greatness. The Āḷvār turned to the Lord residing within him as “*Antaryāmi*”, addressing

Him as follows: *“Ikkurumbai nġkki ennai Īsanāġka vallaiyēl, Cakkaram koġ Kaiyanē, Sadangar vāy adangida Utkidandha vannamē puramposittu Kāttide’.*” It runs like this. ‘Ridding me of this outer form, Thou can make a lord of me. O, Discus-wielding Lord, to silence these ritualists, staying inside as Thou art, pray show Thy hidden Form’. The Lord appeared on the bare chest of the Āġvār as prayed by him, with Discus, Conch, along with Ādiśeṣa and Mahā Lakshmi. Thus the Āġvār revealed the potency and the living personality of the ‘arca’ form in the temples where the Lord resides, revealing also in the process His presence as the *“Antaryāmi Brahman”* inside.

It is said that the Āġvār spent long years in Tirukkudanthai, or Kumbakonam as it is known now, in contemplation of the Lord Ārāmudhan of the shrine there. It is presumed that he spent some seven hundred years there in meditation at this ‘divya-desam’. Here also, his love for the Lord and the Lord’s warm reciprocation of his love bordered on the intimately interactive, as his second Prabandham Tirucchanda Viruttam indicates. On one occasion, Āġvār enraptured by the restful repose state, *“śayana tirukkolam of the beautiful Lord, asked him the reason for it. So he spoke to the Lord in these words, ‘Are your legs hurting?- the legs that trod this earth, (from end to end as Rama). Or was your body shaken far too much when you took the form of a mighty boar and delved deep into the ocean to retrieve the earth buried in the depths of the ocean floor. What is the reason for your lying down and resting in Kudanthai on the banks of Cāuveri which flows far and wide, after crossing all the hills and dales. Please rise as you lie and speak.”*

Nadandha Kālgal nondhavō?, Nadunga Jñālamēnamāy, Idandha mey kulungavō?, vilangumāl varaichuram, Kadandhakāl parandha Cāuvirikkaraik Kudandhaiyul, Kidandhavāru ezhundhirundhu Pēsu Vāzhi Kēsane’,

(T.C.V.-61). Touched by the solicitous concern of the Āḷvār, expressed in such beautiful poetry, the Lord Whose name is Unsatiating Nectar, (Arāamudhan), it is said, lifted His head and attempted to rise from His serpent couch. Bhaktisārar, who was profoundly moved by the graciousness on the part of the Lord, immediately stopped Him from rising any further and offered 'maṅgalā śāsana' to the Lord, in the words "*Vāzhi Kēsanē*", "*O Lord, with beautiful locks, May You live long undisturbed*". "*The Lord stayed in that slightly risen state called 'Uttāna Śāyanam*", in that very moment and can be seen in the same position even today. It is further said that the Lord loved the Āḷvār such that He decided to, and did exchange, His title of Pirān with the Āḷvār, and took on his title of Āḷvār, hence coming to be known since then as Ārāamudhāḷvān, while Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār has come to be called Tirumaḷisai Pirān. There is a rather amusing story told about the closeness the Lord felt towards the Āḷvār. It is said that on one occasion, when the Bhattar was going to offer 'bhojyāśanam'-food offering- to the Lord, the Lord expressed His wish that the food should first be offered to the Āḷvār. The Bhattar was surprised at the Lord's intriguing command, since only the food first offered to the Lord is to be offered to devotees as His 'praśāda'. Nevertheless the priest took the food and offered it to the Āḷvār as directed by the Lord. Āḷvār who was always solicitous in behalf of the Lord inquired if the 'praśāda' had been offered to the Lord. The priest then conveyed the Lord's wish that Āḷvār should first savour his meal, first before being offered to Him. Since it would be unrighteous on his part to taste any food before being offered to the Lord, Āḷvār declined it and asked the Bhattar to go back again and place the meal offering before the Lord. But on a rethink, he called back the Bhattar and accepted the food anyway as the Lord had wished. Why

did Āļvār do this? It was because, he knew that if he sent back the food to the Lord, the Lord would again send it back to him. It would only have meant delaying the Lord's meal further.

Tirumaļisai Āļvār has sung two Prabandhams, namely Nānmukan Tiruvandādhi of 96 pāsuras in 'andādhi' style and Tiruccanda Viruttam comprising 120 pāsuras in rhythmic sing-song cadences, called 'chanda'. The first one which takes its name from the first word of the Prabandham, is the fourth Prabandham in the 'Iyarpa' group of the four-thousand. The second is included in the 'Mudhalāyiram'. It appears that the Āļvār had authored many works during his long life, and at one point thrown all of them including these two Prabandhams in cauveri. All were washed away by the river except these two Prabandhams which floated against the current, and came back to the Āļvār. The chief message of the Āļvār in these two Prabandhams is the "*Paratattva nirṇayam*", the authoritative pronouncement on the primacy of Sriman Nārāyaṇa as the Primordial Being. This Āļvār was known as "*Uraiyilidādhavar*", for the forthright and assertive manner in which he pronounced Vedic truths to substantiate his thesis. Among Āļvārs, only this Āļvār and Tirumangai Āļvār had that reputation.

In the very first pasuram of Nānmukan Tiruvandādhi, Āļvār expresses the Upaniṣadic truth, "*Nārāyaṇan padaittān Nānmukanay, Nānmukanakku ērār Sivan pirandhān.....*" (N.T.-1). 'Sriman Nārāyaṇa created Brahma. Of that Brahma was born Siva.' "*Nārāyaṇāt Brahma Jāyate I Nārāyaṇāt Rudro Jāyatē*," (N.Up.). In the second verse, he articulates his settled conclusion voiced by all enlightened souls, that the 'Paramāthma' is only one, and whatever discipline one follows, the fruit of divine grace arises only from the Lord wielding the

discus'. *"tēruṅg kāl, Dēvan Oruvanē enruraippar....ōrum porul mudivum ittanayē etthavam seithārkkum Arul mudivadhu Āzhiyān pāl"* - (N.M.-2). Lord Krishna voices the same truth in the Gita verse, *Yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktha: sraddhayārccitum iccati, tasya tasyāchalām sraddhām tāmeva vidhadhāmyaham II*, (B.G.-7.21). 'In whatever form, a devotee wishes to worship with faith - concerning that alone, I make his faith unflinching.' In verse 4, he asserts that 'the Lord Nārāyana stands alone with no compeers for He is the inner meaning of all the words and things denoted by them'. *"... Vēroruvar illāmai Ninrānai, Emmānai Epporutkum Sollānai...."*. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, *"Mattah: Parataram nānyat kincidasti, Dhananjaya"*- II 'There is nothing above Me'. In this manner, Āḷvār goes on to affirm the Lord's unparralleled supremacy and sing the praise of His grace and qualities, and his own devotion to the Lord. Āḷvār concludes the Prabandham on the same note as he began asserting the overarching supremacy of Srīman Nārāyana, not once but thrice, in the following words,

"Ini Arindhēn Īsarkkum Nānmukarkkum Deivam, Ini Arindhēn Emperumān Unnay, Ini Arindhēn kāranam Nee, katravai Nee,- Narkirisai Nāranan Nee, Nangarindhēn Nān." -(N.T.-96). 'O' my Lord, now I understood that Thou art God to Siva and Brahma. Now I have realized Thy real nature, Lord. I know that Thou art the Cause of everything, All that is known, and to be known. Thou art Nārāyana, the Support of all. The Āḷvār's affirmation *"Ini Arindhēn"* thrice over, followed by the crowning assertion, a fourth time, *"Nangarindhēn Nān"*, is as emphatic as Sri Vyāsa Bhagavān's assertion, 'Satyam, Satyam, punah: Satyam.....Na daivam Keśavāth Param', 'it is the truth, truth, truth, there is no god greater than Keśava.' Vyāsa Bhagavān's declaration was based on a lot of deep contemplation having researched all the Śāstras.,

(Ālōṭya sarva Śāstrāṇi, vicāryas ca punah: punah:'). Bhaktisārar's pronouncement is stated by him to have been vouchsafed to him, perhaps in the vision of the Lord at Srirangam as reclining in the Milk Ocean and as the child on the 'Vata-Patra', (N.T.- 3). In this verse, Āḷvār says, *"Who can know Him as I do, That Which reposed on the Milk Ocean, settled in ancient times in Srirangam, and That which floated on a banyan leaf, the Primordial Cause of the cosmos, the true Substance enjoyable of all the eternal, and the Incomparable Person of the waters"*. It is said that when Brahma first appeared on the lotus that sprung from the Lord's navel, and was curious to know his origin, he tried to slide down the lotus stalk but tiring soon looked down but could not see anything except the seemingly interminable stalk of the lotus; Nārāyaṇa, realizing his predicament, blessed him with the vision of the emergence of the floating Sriranga Vimāna on the Milk Ocean with the Lord reclining on Ādiseśa in it. This was what Brahma worshipped. This eventually came to take its place in Srirangam, after having been the 'Ārādhana Perumāl' of the Ikṣvāku dynasty through generations of rulers till Rama gifted the Vimāna to Vibhiṣana.

Āḷvār's reference to the Lord floating on the banyan leaf during 'pralaya' is evocative of the parallel experience of sage Mārkaṇḍeya, narrated in both Maha-Bāratham, and Srimad Bhāgavatham. This speaks about how the sage was blessed by the spectacle of the 'pralaya' by Nārāyaṇa as a child floating on the flood waters on a banyan leaf. When the Child opened its mouth, the sage saw all the worlds and himself inside the Child's mouth. Āḷvār seems to have had great reverence for the sage, and refers in verse 15, to his having been a Siva devotee before turning to Nārāyaṇa at Siva's instance. He also refers to the fact in verse 17, that 'Siva who was a true sage himself, taught the path of dharma to his four disciples and the path of

worship of the Lord reposing on the cosmic waters, Who measured the worlds, and slept on the banyan leaf.'

In verse 8, the Āļvār beautifully expresses the mutual complementarity between man and God, in the lines
"Nānunnaiyanri ilēn kandāy -- Nārananē Nee ennaiyanri ilai." 'I do not have anyone for my refuge except you. And you will not find anyone more in need'. Both lines bring out the meaning of the word "Nārāyana": 'Nān unnaiyanri ilēn'- "Nārānām Ayanam ya: Sa:"- 'He Who is the ultimate destiny for all', (the host of sentients). 'Nee ennaiyanri ilai'- 'Nārā: ayanam Yasya Sa: '- 'One for whom the 'nāra samūha' or sentients form the abode.' What Āļvār means here, is that the Lord is the sole Protector of all and this role is what the Lord has designed for Himself, as Swami Ālavandār, has so elegantly stated in the line, 'Vidhi nirmitam ētam anvayam', (S.R.-53), meaning 'this conjointment, (rakshya- rakshakatvam) is ordained'. In pāsuram 92, he acknowledges how even whilst he was in the womb, he had been the recipient of the special protection of the Lord Sridhara, in Whose heart, the Divine mother resides. "Tiruvirundha-mārbhan Siridharanukkālāy karuvirundha nāll mudhalākāppu". His 'upadeśa' to us is 'never to think of anyone as a Lord, who has no "Tiru", "..... Tiruvillā tēvarai tērēl min tēvu"- (N.T.-53), The Āļvār feels the importance of the concept of God's nearness to man in his struggle to surrender to the Divine and attain liberation. God's descent into the world for the sake of helping humanity and creation is a positive fact of great importance; it is a fact of affirmation of God's assurance of protection, and man's faith that with His help, he can transcend the barriers of 'kārmic' existence and reach the Divine. Āļvār describes how the Lord manifests in the four-fold colours, white, red, green, and black, signifying the four 'yugas' in accordance with the desires, nature, and degree of spiritual evolution of

the sentients through these ages. The Āļvār mentions the various manifestations of the Lord, as Rama, Varāha, Vāmana, Trivikrama, Nrsimha, Krishna and Matsya, in various pāsuras, to underscore His ‘rakshakatvam’.

Āļvār seems to have a special fascination for ‘divya-desams’ where the Lord is in a reclining state, and for Tiruvenkatam to which he has devoted ten pasurams at a stretch, (N.T.-39-48). In pasuram 35, Āļvār expresses the same concern in behalf of Lord Mannāthan of Tiruvallikkeni as he does for Āmudhan at Tirukkudandhai in his solicitous query, *“Tālāl alandha vasave kol, vālā kidandharulum vāy thiravān,.....”* (N.T.-35). ‘Perhaps tired from measuring the worlds with His feet, and lying quiet on His serpent bed without uttering a word.’ This is at ‘Māmayilai-Māvallikkēni’ where large waves wash the shores. The Lord is stated to have appeared in a reclining state at this ‘divya-desam’ as prayed for by King Sumathi in an earlier age. In the next pāsuras, Āļvār mentions five divya-dēsams, Tirukkundandhai, Tiruevha, Tiruevvul, Tiruvarangam, Anbil, apart from the Milk Ocean where the Lord abides in reclining state for the sake of His devotees.

In pāsuras 39, the call of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam and His mountain is so irresistible to the Āļvār that he, like the love-lorn ladies of the past, deigns to draw chance circles on the floor to find out his luck in uniting with the Lord. *“Azhaippan Tiruvenkatathānaikkāna, izhaippan Tirukkūdal kāna,...”* ‘I call the Lord of Tiruvenkatam so my eyes may feast, I draw chance circles so I may unite with the mountain....’ In the next verse, Āļvār says that mere mention of Tirumalai promises to him the Lord’s abode of Vaikuntam. *“Verpenru Venkatam pādinēn, Vīdākki nirkinrēn”-* (N,T.-40). That thought puts him in a state of reflection with his mind entwined with the

feet of the Lord of Sri. His thoughts wander over the hills of Tiruvenkatam, which echo with the rustle of streams washing down pearls and resound with hymns of devotees. Āļvār beckons to us to go and worship the peaks of Tiruvenkatam in pāsura 42, in the words, “*Senru Vananguminō Sēnnuyar Venkatathai, Ninru vinai kedukkum nirmaiyāl.....*” ‘for they wash away all our sins’. The Venkata hills, and the Lord there at Whose lotus feet devotees offer flowers and prostrate, are the cherished treasure of celestials and humans alike, “*Vānōrkkum Mannōrkkum Vaippu*”- (N.T.-45).

Pāsuras 59-63, are gems of soulful poetry, in which Āļvār portrays the Lord as ‘love sublime and unsatiating nectar, devotee’s bliss and every kind of joy ‘ “*Anbāvāy, Āramudhamāvāy, Adiyēnukkinbāvāy ellāmum āvāy*”- (N.T.-59). ‘The Lord reaches out to His devotees, and becomes felicitously accessible to them’- qualities of ‘souśīlya and soulabhya-, “*Ātpārthuzhi taruvāy kandukolenru*”...(N.T-60). Then follows the assurance that ‘no harm shall befall one who takes refuge at the sacred feet of Madhuśūdhana,’- “*Manakkēdam sārā Madhusoodhan tannai tanakkēdān tanjamākkollil*”- (N.T.61). Finally, Āļvār opens up a window on his own way of life, of resting in the Lord’s grace ever ‘spending all his time meditating, writing, reading, listening, and worshipping.’ “*Theritthezhudhi vāsittum kēttum, vanangi vazhipattum, poosittum pōkkinēn pōdhu*”- (N.T.-63).

Tirucchandha Viruttam begins by using several numerological constructs in rhythmic symphony, describing the cosmic elements or categories of life that have their source in ‘Brahman’, in harmony with the Upaniṣadic texts. This kind of numerological description appears to be the first of its kind in Tamil literature, which is esoteric in nature and can be understood only with

the help of commentaries of scholars. The first verse, beginning with the words, "*Bhunilāyavaindhumāy.....*", describes the 'Jagad Sṛṣṭi' or origin of the five cosmic elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth, with their respective subtle essences, with Brahman as the material cause of the universe. Upaniṣads state this thus, "*Om Ata Puruṣo ha vai Nārāyanoakāmayatha Prajā: Sṛjēyēti I Nārāyanāt prāno jāyatē I mana: sarvēndriyāni ca I Kham Vāyujyothirāpa: Viśvasya dhārini I*" (N.Up.) The process of formation of the elements and the subtle essences called 'pancikarana-prakriyai' has been explained at length in the first chapter. Āḷvār concludes in the last line, "*Nīnilāya vannam Ninnai yār ninaikka vallarē*"?, meaning 'who can comprehend the way the Lord in His causal and the manifest states pervades both the insentient matter and sentient beings. In the second verse, Āḷvār describes how the Lord Who is the Cause of the entire cosmos, helps the created beings to attain everything through action and devotion, and how He helps develop devotion, and the protection He offers to His devotees. The third verse outlines the 'Paratvam' of the Lord in His cosmic manifestation, (Līlā vibhūti), and in His eternal realm, Nityavibhūti). The fourth verse describes that the Lord is the source of all words, 'sarva-vācaka-śabda', and the substratum of the Vedas as enshrined in the sacred twelve-letter mantra, "*Om Namō Bhagavathē Vāsudēvāya*". The fifth verse states that He is the primordial Cause, who created Brahma, and His wondrous nature as the inner permeating spirit of all is unfathomable even to the knowledgeable ones. God is all. "*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*", "*Nirkinrathellām Nedumāl*" (N.T.-54).

The sixth verse, adopts a mythological construct to state the unity of the material, efficient, and teleological causality of God, -'upādhāna, nimitta, and puruṣārtha kāranatva' of God. In the last line of this, Āḷvār says,

“Ēkamēndhi ninra nirmai, Nin Kanēyīyanrathē”, ‘That One Support of all is seen to rest only in Thee’. As the Upaniṣads state, “Dhātha`Vidhātha`Nārāyana:”, (Su. Up.). ‘The One that creates and protects, is Nārāyana.’ “Viṣvam bhibharthi bhuvanasya nābhi:” - (Ma.Na.Up.). ‘Remaining as the axle, as it were, of the wheel of the world, He supports everything’.

The tenth verse portrays the metaphor of ‘a large ocean which contains within itself the foamy waves that billow and settle within it’; in like manner ‘the Lord contains within Himself, the entire order of the worlds and entities that rise and rest in Him’. This is akin to the Upaniṣadic example of the spider, that makes from its saliva the web to catch insects and finally ingests the same within itself. Āḷvār reiterates this in verse 12 also, and adds how the Lord out of His ‘nirhetuka kṛpā’,- spontaneous compassion’, protects all the worlds and beings during cosmic dissolution in the ‘safety-locker’ of His stomach. Āḷvār adds that still, the Lord takes birth in this world like all ordinary human beings. *“Ajāya mānō bhahudhā vijāyatē” - (Pu-Su.-8). ‘He Who has no birth is born in many forms.’ ...” Vasurētha, Vasupradha: Vasupradho Vāsudevō Vasu: Vasumanā: Havi:”- (V.S.-74). ‘He Who employs His self-effulgence as the material cause for His Avatāra, Who gave the treasure of Himself as son to Vasudeva and Devaki, He Who as the father of the Universe including Vasudeva and Devaki, gave them parenthood, He in Whom all worlds rest, and Who lives in them as ‘Antaryāmi, He Who rests in the Milk Ocean, but Who gave his mind to Vasudeva,...’ As Pey Āḷvār says, “Makan Oruvarkkallādha Māmēni Māyan”... (Mu.T.- 92). Who can really comprehend His wondrous nature?, asks the Āḷvār. In verse 17, Āḷvār, brilliantly strings together the Pancarātra doctrine of the five-fold Form of the Divine Lord, the Upaniṣadic statement of the ‘Antaryāmin’*

doctrine, and the Gita affirmation of the ‘avatār’, in a luminous fashion to portray His many-splendoured Divine nature:

*“Ēka mūrti Mūnru mūrti Nālu mūrti nanmai sēr,
Bhōga mūrti Punniyattin mūrti Ennil mūrtiyāy
Nāga mūrti śayanamāy nalankadarkidandhu mēl
Āga mūrtiyāya vannam en kol Ādhi Devanē.”* – (T.C.V.-17).

“Ēka mūrti”, is Para Vāsudeva with the full complement of the divine qualities of ‘jñāna, bhala, aiśvarya, vīrya, śakthi, and tejas. *“Mūnru mūrti”* is the Vyūha Vāsudeva, manifesting in the functional modes of Śankarṣana, Pradhyumna and Aniruddha, each mode vested with two qualities predominantly, for carrying out the functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution. *“Nālu mūrti”* thus denotes the ‘Vyūha’ form as above, as also the four entities of primordial matter or ‘Pradhāna, the individual soul ‘Jīva’, unmanifest primal nature ‘avyakta’, and time ‘kāla’. Āḷvār mentions ‘Nanmai sēr bhoga mūrti’ which could be taken to mean a form visible in the world, namely the ‘Vibhavāvatāra’ for protection of good people ‘rakṣakatva svarūpa’, or the blissful form in His abode of Vaikunta. Next Āḷvār mentions *“Punniyattin mūrti”* to mean the ‘arca` and antaryāmi’ states, the form realized through merit. *“Ennil mūrti”* is the form of the manifold ‘Vibhavāvatāras’. Finally, Āḷvār mentions *“Nāgamūrti śayanamāy”*, the Lord in reclining form in the Milk Ocean.

We saw earlier, how Āḷvār shared a special bond with, and attraction for the Lord in Tirukkundandhai. In a similar vein, Āḷvār here dwells at length on his fascination for the ‘divya-desam’ of Srirangam and the Lord residing there, in a string of verses from 49 to 55. In Pāsura 46, Āḷvār makes a prayerful submission to the Lord inquiring about how he could find a way to break the cycle of births. To this, the Lord

indicates to him that he could be sought in any one of His various modes of manifestations such as Para, Vyūha, Vibhava, etc. Āḷvār pleads before the Lord that these are all too far removed and unapproachable for him, and implores the Lord in 'naichya -bhāva' to suggest an easier way in verse 47, in the words, "*Sēvidattai Nāyinēn therindhirainjumā solē*"- 'Please tell me where this lowly self can seek and find Thee'. The Lord then reveals to him His beautiful reclining form as He appears in Srirangam. Thus we see in the pāsuras referred to above, the free-flow of Āḷvār's soul entranced by the beauty, divinity and sacredness reigning in that 'divya-desam'. 'It is the abode of Rama Who as a small boy playfully aimed a soft arrow at the hunched back of Mantara to straighten her up and rejoiced'- (T.C.V.-49). In the same verse, Āḷvār paints an allegorical human situation around a familiar scene he comes across in the cool streams of Srirangam, which he portrays as a vivid metaphor thus: "*Nandai undu nārai pēra Vālhaipāya nilamē, andaikodu kendai mēyum andhanirarangamē*", 'in the cool waters, where the crane walks by slowly having swallowed the crab, the Vālhlai fish splatters the water fearing for its life, while the Kendai fish gently swim by fearlessly under the shade of the blue lilies'. The crane refers to all embodied 'jīvas'. living in the mundane world, indulging in sensual pursuits which are like crabs. The Vālhai symbolizes the seekers who dread the 'samsāra' and pursue various paths in search of liberation. The fearless Kendai fish, on the other hand, stands for the 'Prapannas' who bask in the glory of the Lord, having surrendered to Him and live their lives in a care-free manner under His protective shade. The divya-dēsa of Srirangam is the cool water that quenches spiritual thirst, and removes the sufferings

of the human condition in the form of the three ‘tāpās’ of ‘ādhyātmic’, ‘ādhi-daivika’, and ‘ādhi-bouthika’. It is also where people from eight directions come to worship and bathe in its purifying waters, “*Endisai kananagalum irainjiyādu tīrtha Neer*” - 50. It is ‘the permanent abode of the valourous Rama Who arched the ‘Sāraṅga’ bow to discharge arrows that felled the ten heads of the king of Lanka, the divine land desired by all surrounded by the surging waters of Ponni’- 51. Then in a verse of graphic imagery, the Āḷvār describes the eagerness with which the river Cāuveri splashes down ‘in full flow carrying with it a rich treasure trove of sandal wood trees and saffron flower creepers that break down making for a thick fragrant swirl of sandal paste and saffron powder’. “*Izhindhu vandhunundu sandhanamkulaithalayt-tiruttu erindha kunguma-kuzhambinodu alaithozhughu Cāuviri*” (T.V.- 54). As the river Cāuveri, which originates in the Sahya hills, flows towards Srirangam, thoughts cloud her mind. Her predicament is captured in vivid imagery by Parāsara Bhattar, in Sri Ranganājastavam, (sloka 21-Pūrva-Sathakam). As she nears Srirangam, mother Cāuveri sets thinking; ‘my husband, the Ocean king is the repository of all kinds of gems, corals, rubies and so on. I am rightly called Ponni for my golden touch. Sri Ranganāyaki is our only daughter whose Consort is the Lord Supreme of the whole universe. Would the gifts I carry for them now be in keeping with their unparalleled exalted status.? With such thoughts of excitement and eager anticipation of the prospect of meeting her daughter and son-in-law, mother Cāuveri surges forward in a torrential flow, carrying in her arms priceless gems, sandal wood trees, purified camphor, and saffron. Āḷvār’s pāsuram (54) also seeks to convey the same thought about the flow of river Cāuveri as it touches the Lord’s abode at Srirangam.

Āļvār's 'arcāvatāra anubhavam' continues to blossom in his pasurams 64 and 65. Thus in verse, 64, the Āļvār exults in the 'svāmitva' 'soulabhya' and 'ananya-bhogyatva svarūpa' of the Lord as Trivikrama in the divya-dēśams of Ooragam, as 'Pāndavadhūta' in Tiruppādakam, and as 'Yathōtkāri' in Vehka, respectively. *"Ninrathenthai Ooragathu, Irundhathenthai Pādakathu, Anru Vehkanaik Kidanthadhu..."*. In a touching mystical twist, Āļvār says in the latter two lines, 'all that happened long before He was born, meaning before the Lord in these 'arca' forms enveloped his heart in total love for Him. Once that happened, he can never forget his Lord who now stands, sits, and reclines in his heart'. *"Pirandhapin marandhilēn, ninradhum, irundhadhum, kidandhadhum en nenjulē."* True birth for the 'ātman' is when it attains 'Brahma-jñānam'. Continuing his god-experience, Āļvār says in verse 65, *"He stood on a hill, (Venkatam), sat in 'Paramapadha', and laid down in the ocean 'Kshīrābdhi'.* All that was before Āļvār was born. Now that great Lord, Who is *"Arpudhan"* one with wonderful powers, *"Ananthśayanan"* reclining on Ādiśeṣa, *"Ādhi-Bhūtan,"* the first and foremost Being, and *"Mādhavan"* Consort of Sri, stands, sits and lies down, all within his heart. Such was the God-enveloping love of Bhaktisāra for the Lord.

True to his honorific Bhaktisāra, Āļvār exemplifies total undivided devotion to the Lord. His prayer to the Lord contained in verses 100 and 101, is 'to be blessed with His grace endowing him with constant irrigation of 'bhakti' and single-pointed convergence of all thoughts on the Lord's feet.'.... *"Perarkariya Ninnapādha bhaktiyāna pāsanam, perarkariya Māyanē`enakku nalga vēndumē."* He follows this prayer with a further prayer in the next verse to the effect that the Lord should will so, that His

devotee's mind stay focused without distraction and break on His lotus feet." – *"Varantharum tirukkurippil vaithadhākil mannusīr, parandha sindhai onri ninru Ninna pādhapankayam, nirandharam ninaippadhāka Nee ninaikka vēndumē"*.(T.C.V.-101).

Āļvār's 'Śaranāgathi' to the Lord is phrased in a simple appeal in verse 92 of Tirucchandha Viruttam,*"Ninranakku Adaikkalam pugundha ennai anjalenna Vendumē."* 'Please pray assure me who has taken refuge in Thee,'do not fear' 'The fulfillment of his 'Śaranāgathi' is described with a grateful heart in verse 115, in the words, 'like Father, like Mother, the Lord Who fills the soul cuts the cords of countless births and takes us into His fold. Why wallow then in the ocean of misery?' *"Atthanāghi Annaiyāghi, Ālumempiranumāy othovvodhapal pirappozhittu nammai ātkolvān..... ethinālidarkkadal kidathi ēzhai nenjamē"*? That is Āļvār's assurance to us too ('nammai ātkolvān') which is followed by the promise also of eternal bliss of the experience of the Divine in His abode in verse 117. The Lord Who never lets go of us, will 'cut asunder all fear, disease, mental anguish, multiple births, old age and all other travail that stalk the mind and the body, and ensconce us in the Supreme abode', *"Accanōyōdallal palpirappavāyamūppivai,vaitthasin dhai vaitthavākkai mātri vānilētruvān--Accuthan..."* That is the summum bonum of life lived in constant remembrance of the Divine, as the Āļvār so beautifully rounds off in the concluding line of his Prabandham, *"Ennāvitān Iyakkalām aruttarādha inba Vīdu petrathē"* -(T.C.V-120), 'Cutting asunder all bondage, my soul has attained the eternal bliss of the Divine abode'.

Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār lived in Tirukkudandhai till the last. His “*Brindhāvanam*” or resting place, is there in this town in a quiet, unobtrusive corner. His “*Vāzhittirunāmam*” hails him as having lived for four-thousand seven hundred years. It is believed that he was inadvertently interred by his disciples while he was in a long state of meditation and that, not having completed his full life-term, he is still present at his “*Brindhāvanam*” in ‘jīva-samādhī’.

Taniyans composed by Tirukkacci Nambi.

1. “*Taruccandha Pozhilthazhuvu Tāraniyin tuyarthīra, Tirucchandha Viruttam sey Tirumaḷisai Paran varumoor, Taruchandhum kāraghilum kamazhkōngu mananārum Tirucchandhattudan maruvu Tirumaḷisai Valampathiyē*” “

The birth place of Tirumaḷisai Pirān who composed Tirucchandha Viruttam which is like the celestial ‘Karpaga’ grove in removing the pain of ‘samsāric ‘life of the world, is the richly endowed Tirumaḷisai, surrounded by sandal wood, and black ‘aghil’ and fragrant ‘kongu’ trees, where the Divine Mother whole-heartedly resides.

2. “*Ulagumazhisaiyum Ullunarndhu thammil Pulavar pugazhkkolāl thooka Ulagutannai Vaittedutha pakkattum mānir Mazhisaiyē Vaittedutta pakkam validhu.*”

When the Vedic sages appraised in their minds, the relative merits of each place in the world and Mazhisai in the scale of fame, the side of fertile Tirumaḷisai was weightier than the rest of the world on the other side.

3. Taniyan of Sri Ramappillai.

*“Nārāyanan padaittān Nānmukanai, Nāmukanukku
Ērār Sivan pīrandhānennum sol- Seerār
Mozhi seppi vāzhalām nenjamē, moyppū
Mazhisaip Paranadiyē vāzhttu.”*

Sriman Nārayana created the four-faced Brahma.
Of that Brahma was born
Siva who was filled with ascetic discipline. We will live
Recitng this renowned poetry carrying these words.

O Mind, praise the sacred feet of the ‘Pirān of Mazhisai’
abounding in flowers.

4

Nammāļvār

Swami Nammāļvār was born as an 'amśa' of Viśvaksena in Tirukkurugur, now known as Āļvār Tirunagari, near Tirunelveli on the banks of the Tāmirabarani river, to a pious couple Kāriyār and Udayanangaiyār, in the farmer class termed as 'Vellālar', in the Tamil month of 'Vaikāsi' under the asterism, 'Viśākam'. Tradition holds that Nammāļvār was born some forty three days after Lord Krishna had left for His celestial abode, that is the first year of 'Kali' yuga. But historians say that he was born in the seventh century A.D. The parents who had no child for long, prayed to the Lord of the shrine at Tirukkurungudi known as Kurungudi Nambi. The Lord blessed the couple with a child whom they named Māran. The child, strangely enough, did not show any normal signs of feeding etc, which filled the parents with sadness and anxiety. On the twelveth day after birth, they took the child to the sanctum of the Lord of Tirukkurugur known as Polindha Ninra Piran and left it there. The child crawled towards a tamarind tree nearby and sat there. The tamarind tree, which is still there in that shrine, is reverently referred to now, as Tiruppuliāļvār. The child remained there in a state of constant meditation on the Lord for sixteen long years.

Around that time a parallel story was unfolding. A Vaiṣṇava by name Madhurakavi, had been born some years earlier, in the Tamil month 'Chithirai', under the star of the same name in the nearby village of Tirukkōlur. Well versed in the Vedas and other scriptures and the Tamil arts, he had set out on a pilgrimage to the sacred places in the North, and was at about this time staying

in Kāshi, on the banks of the river Ganga. On one night, when he came out he was surprised to see a luminescent object on the night sky in the Southern direction. The brightness continued to appear the next night and night after. Madhurakavi guessed that some thing unusual must be happening in the South, which he wished to explore. He started travelling toward the South, resting during day and travelling at night. Strangely, the luminescence was also moving with him in the same direction. Travelling thus, he reached upto Tirukkurugur where, the object could no longer be seen at night. Thus having zeroed in on the site, Madhurakavi inquired of the people of the place, if anything extra-ordinary was happening there. He then found out about the miracle child seated in a meditative state under the tamarind tree in the local shrine there. Madhurakavi went there and saw the 'object' of his quest sitting in a motionless state. Curious to find out if the person sitting thus in a state of 'samādhi' had any signs of awareness, he picked up a pebble and threw it in front of him. The child showed some sign of life by slightly opening his eyes. 'There is life in him, but could he communicate too' wondered Madhurakavi. He then posed this question as if addressing no one in particular; "*Setthatthin Vayitril siriyadhu pirandhāl, etthai tinru engēkidakkum?*", 'If in the womb of what is dead, a subtle thing be born, what doth it eat, and where doth it abide?'. The child spoke for the first time in all these years and simply said, "*Atthai tinru angē kidakkum*", meaning. 'It eateth that, it abides there'. What it means is that the 'jīva' will experience the pleasures and pains of the body, and will have its existence in the body, according to its 'karma'. These were the first words uttered by saint Sri Nammālvār. Madhurakavi was pleased with the Ālvār's reply, and from that instant looked upon him as his Guru and stayed with him. Ālvār, then explained at length to Madhurakavi about the 'cit', 'acit' and 'Īśvara',

and about all other truths. The saint who had been completely lost to the outside world for years, started singing hymns of sublime poetic diction, which took shape as the four Divya Prabandhams of Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāsiriyam, Peria Tiruvandādhi, and Tiruvāymoḷi, numbering in all 1296 pasurams of exquisite lyrical beauty and philosophic content. As they contain the quintessential meaning and message of the four Vedas, 'Rik', 'Yajur', 'Atharvana', and 'Sāma' Vedas, they have been hailed as the 'Drāvida Vedam', and the Āḷvār as the sage personifying 'Krishnatattva'. Saint Nāthamuni has extolled him as "*Vedam Tamiḷ Seitha Māran Satakopan*". The reason behind his name 'Satakopa' is as follows.

Nammāḷvār is considered by all as preeminent among the Āḷvārs. All other Āḷvārs are equated to component parts and Nammāḷvār as the whole. He is hailed in the tradition as the "*Prapanna-jana-Kūtaṣṭha*", or the chief among all devotees who follow the path of 'Prapatti' or 'Śaranāgathi'. His special place in the Srivaiṣṇava Sampradāya, is evident from the fact that the Feet of the Lord inscribed on the 'krītam' or head gear that is placed on the heads of devotees in all Vaiṣṇava shrines, is called 'Satāri' which is named after the Āḷvār's other name of Satakopa. The term 'Sata' refers to the 'sata vāyu' of the outside world which, when it envelops a new-born fetus wipes out all past knowledge. It is stated that saint Nammāḷvār raised an angry 'humkāra' against that 'sata' when he was born, which drove away the possible ill-effects of the 'Sata', thereby retaining in tact his 'Brahma-dṛṣṭi' or God-vision, like Prahlāda and Vāmadēva of the Purāṇas. To him every thing that was seen or heard or other-wise perceived by the senses was God. It was not a mere mental apprehension of a feeling or thought. It was direct realization, seeing the Divine in everything. Such was his mystico-religious superconsciousness that

he would embrace fire, seeing the Lord in it calling it, 'Achyuta', and would not get burnt. The sight of butter would impel him to cry out, 'Here is what my Lord ate'. He would follow a snake saying, 'Yonder is my Lord's bed'. If he heard the musical strains from a flute, he would go into a trance saying, 'Yonder is my Mādhava'. These lines from his hymn 'Mannayirundhu thuzhāvi' (T.V.M.- 4.4.) are melting literature of the highest form of devotional ecstasy, not excelled by any other devotional literature, even if it be that of the other Āļvārs. Thus, the earth is Vāmana's earth, the ocean is 'Pirān kidakkum kadal', 'where the Lord lies', and the cattle are what Lord Krishna grazed. All that the Āļvār saw in the world around became that much dearer to him as a vision of the Lord Himself, as Tirumaļisai Āļvār sang, "*Nirkinrethellām Nedumāl*", - (N.M.-54). Equally unique is the advaitic "*Aham Brahmāsmi*" experience of the Āļvār, in the decad "*Kadal jñālam Seythēnum Yānē*"- (T.V.M.-5.6.), wherein he thinks, talks, and acts as if he were God himself. That the Āļvār enjoyed, experienced and interpreted the Sruti texts, "*Tat Tvam Asi*" and "*Aham Brahmāsmi*", in an intimately personalized way, not in the philosopher's analytical or intellectual way, shows that to a true Vedāntin, man and God are not two distinct factors, though they may be two separate entities. They are not different in connotation, but only in denotation. This is 'apṛthaksiddha viśeṣana' in the terse idiom of the Sri Bhāshyam. But all this is not merely some mystical emotion sprung from a supra-conscious state but pure God-love soaked in bhakti, on a level far more exalted and intense than seen elsewhere, that pours out whether in such personalized 'anubhavam' as described above, or in his songs of anguish or rhapsody through all his works. He calls it "*madhi nalam*", in the very first pāsuram of Tiruvāymoļi which Ramanuja translates to "*sēmushee-bhaktirūpa*" in the invocatory verse to his Sri Bhāshyam.

The claim has been made quite appropriately and with full justification, that Ramanuja, the propounder of the Vedānta Sūtras, drew inspiration from the intuitive experiences, and mystic reiteration of the Vedic truths by Nammāļvār. The most fundamental of these was the Āļvār's articulation of the all-pervasiveness and permeation of God even as the soul permeates the body, in the very first decad of his Tiruvāymoļi, in the lines, "*Thida-visumbu erivali nīr nilam ivaimisai padarporul muzhuvadhum āy, avai avaithorum, Udal misai Uyirena karandu engum Parandhulan*".....(T.V.M.-1.1.7.), "*The Lord is manifest as Sky, Fire, Air, Water and Earth. He pervades all of these and permeates as the inner self inside the body*'...", as echoed in Sruti texts, "*Yah Pritivyām tiṣṭan.... etc*" (Br. Up.3.7.). This drew Ramanuja to what are called the middle-ground '*ghataka-srutis*' of the Vedic texts, with the help of which he harmonized the '*beda-srutis*' and the '*abeda-srutis*' into an integral '*Sarvasamanvayasa-sāriraka-Śāstra*', where Śāstras are in perfect sync in identifying Brahman as both the material efficient and instrumental cause of all creation, which forms the bed rock of Sri Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta.

As already brought out, of the four works of the Āļvār, Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāsiriyam, Peria Tiruvandādhī, and Tiruvāymoļi, the first three considered the essence of Rik, Yajur, and Atharvana Vedas respectively, are part of the '*Iyarpa*' segment of the Divya Prabandham, while Tiruvāymoļi consisting of 1102 pasurams, and looked upon as the essence of Sāma Veda, is a segment by itself in the Prabandha classification. Azhagiya Manavāļapperumāl Nāyanār the younger brother of Pillai Lokāchārya, has authored a work of deep metaphysical insight called '*Achārya Hrudayam*' which, true to its name, mirrors the thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions, experiences, and message, in fact everything of what the

Āļvār says, and the gist of each of the hundred decads of Tiruvāymoļi, in the form of ‘cūrnikas’ or pithy prose. He states in cūrnika 50 therein, “*Iyarpā Mūnrum Vedatrayam polē; Pannār Pādal Panpurai isai kol Vedam polē.*” *“The term “Pannār Pādal” refers to Tiruvāymoļi. This term is what the Āļvār himself calls his hymns, in his line,“Pannārpādal inkavigal yānāyt thannaitthān pādi....”, (T.V.M.-10.7.5.). It is clear therefore that Tiruvāymoļi is very musical like the musical ‘svaras’ of Sāma Veda. Another feature of all the four Prabandhams is that they are all set in the ‘andādhi’ format. Nāyanār further states, “Vedachatushtaya Angōpāngangal Padhinālum Polē` Innoolukkum Iruntamizh Noolpanuvalārum matrai Enmar nanmālaigalum”, (A.H.-43), ‘like the fourteen Anga –Upāngas to the four Vedas, the six works of Tirumangai Āļvār and poetic garlands of the remaining eight Āļvārs are, to Nammāļvār’s four Prabandhams. The six Prabandhams of Tirumangai Āļvār, namely Peria Tirumoļi, Tirukkurunthāndakam, Tiruvezhukūttirukkai, Siria Tirumadal, Peria Tirumadal, and Tirunedunthāndakam, are like the ‘Angas’. The Prabandhams of the other eight Āļvārs are like ‘Upāngas’.*

In Srivaiṣṇava Sampradāya, the merit of a ‘grantha’ or work is evaluated not merely in light of literary merit, but in a higher degree in light of whether and in what manner, it is rooted in, and projects, knowledge of fundamental scriptural truths based on which the ‘Sampradāya’ superstructure has risen. These are the three principal esoteric doctrines, called the ‘Rahasya-Traya’, of ‘Aṣṭākṣara’, ‘Dvayam’ and ‘Charama Sloka’. Our Sampradāya is known as the ‘Guruparampara Sampradāya’, where the initiation into the ‘upadēśa’ of ‘Tirumantra’, has to be sought only from the direct Āchārya. Pillai Lokāchārya affirms this in his ‘Srivachana Bhūshanam’, in the cūrnika, “*Nēre`*

Āchāryan enbadhu samsāra nivarthakamāna Peria Tirumanthirathai Upadēsittavanai”- (S.V.B.-315). It is a well-known fact in the tradition, that Achāryas past or present, have always based their way of life, teachings and discourses, in pursuance and propagation of the ideals enshrined in these esoteric doctrines. From the standpoint of dissemination of the salient truths and knowledge of the ‘rahasyas’, not only these four Prabandhams, but also the entire ‘Aruliccheyal’ hymns of Āļvārs, are considered as the expositions of one or the other of these ‘rahasyas’.

Tiruviruttam envisages the substance of ‘Om Nama:’ in the ‘Aṣṭākṣara’ mantra, while Tiruvāsiriyam expresses the meaning of ‘Nārāyana’ śabda. Peria Tiruvandādhī articulates the meaning of the Gita ‘Charama Sloka’ of ‘Sarva-dharmān’. Tiruvāymoļi exposits the essence of the ‘Dvaya mahā mantra’. Achārya Hrudayam highlights this in ‘Curnika’ 210 as follows. *“Dvayārtham Dhīrgha Śaranāgathi yenradhu Sārasangrahathile”*. ‘Sārasangraham’ is an esoteric work of Pillai Lokāchārya on ‘Dvaya mahā mantra’, which has a nine-fold terminological classification, 1.Srimath, 2. Nārāyana, 3.Charanou, 4.Śaranam, 5. Prapadyē 6. Srimathē, 7. Nārāyana, 8. Āya, 9. Namah:. This ‘rahasya mantra’, figuring in ‘Ghatakavalli’ part of the Vedas, Smritis, Itihāsas, Purānas etc. is considered an ‘aiṣvarya’ of the Supreme Lord, and a vessel to help cross the ocean of ‘samsāra’ for the bound soul. It disseminates both the ‘upāya’ or means and the ‘upēya’ or goal. Hence, it is called as ‘Dvayam’. Tiruvāymoļi of Āļvār called by him as ‘Mundhayaṁyiram’(T.V.M.-6.5.11), which suggests that like the Vedas, it is also ‘apauruṣēya’-‘not authored as such’, is a detailed exposition of the meaning and philosophy predicated by the aforesaid nine-parts ‘Dvaya mahā mantra’. Hence it has been called *“Dhīrgha Śaranāgathi”*.

In this, the first three hundreds, each hundred called “*pathu*”, that is 1 2 and 3, are considered a detailed exposition of the second line of the mantra, namely “*Srimathē Nārāyanāya Namah*: “. The first “*pathu*” discusses the first two terms, and the next two, the third term “*Namah*:” The next three, 4, 5, and 6, are a discourse on the first line, namely, “*Sriman Nārāyana Charanou Śaranam Prapadyē*”. The next three, 7,8, and 9, elaborate on the qualities of the ‘Siddhopāya’ of the Lord, and the mental actualization of the Divine that the Lord enabled in the Āļvār, his yearning for a direct vision and disinterest in, and disavowal of, anything that is not connected with it, and the Lord’s reassurance to him on the ‘nirūpādhika sambandham’ or ‘unconditioned relationship’ between them, and promise to fulfill his wishes, thereby allaying his misgivings. The tenth is the grand finale wherein the Lord reveals Himself as the “*Friend and Guide*” of Tirumoghur shrine, who would light the path of final ascension, and conduct the Āļvār, along the ‘Archirādhi mārgha’, to be received with all ceremony and honours at the portals of Vaikunta, and led all the way to the Lord seated on His Ādiśeṣa throne, to be enveloped in eternal bliss, as the Āļvār phrases it, “*Avāvarachoozhndhāyē*”, T.V. M.- (10.10.10). All this has been explained in greater detail in the second “*Mahāpravēśam Avathārikai*” to the “*Īdu Vyākhyānam, of Svāmi Nampillai.*”

It is held in the tradition that all the thousand and odd pāsūrams of Tiruvāymoļi were rendered by the Āļvār in homage to, and praise of, Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, as Parāśara Bhattar’s taniyan envisages, “*Vān thigazhum sōlai Madhil Arangar Van pugazhmēl ānra Tamizh maraigal Āyiramum, Īnra mudhal thāy Satakōpan*”. Āļvār has sung on around 35 ‘divya-desas’ in all, in this Prabandham. Of these, some are in the nature of whole decads, while others are sung about in between. As Āļvār

was born in what was once known as 'Pāndya' region of Madurai and south thereof, he has sung, by and large, about shrines in that region and those in what used to be referred to 'Malai Nādu', which is now the Kerala state of South India. Āļvār has sung only about five shrines of the 'Chola dēsa', of the cauveri river delta region. On Tiruvarangam as such, Āļvār has sung only one decad, T.V.M.7.2. But nevertheless, the hymns sung by the Āļvār on other shrines, would appear to be their respective 'shares' from the common pool all of which rightfully belongs to Srirangam, as the Āļvār himself has indicated at the end of each such decad, as for instance in the case of Tiruvenkatam, *"Tiruvengkata-thukkivaippathu", in the case of Tirumōgūr,"Van Tirumōgūrkkueendhapatthu"* etc. Āļvār confirms this position, in his decad on Tiruvarangam too, in his benedictory verse T.V.M.-7.2.11, as follows: *"Mukil Vannan Adiyai Adaindharul soodiuyn dhavan, moippunal porunal tukilvannatthu`nīrsērppan van pozhil soozh van Kurugur Satakopan Mukilvannan Adi mēl sonna sol āyirattuppathu....."*, 'This 'decad' of 'one thousand songs' sung through grace attained at the Lord's feet, on the feet of the Lord (of Tiruvarangam), by Satakōpan of fertile Kurugur set in groves on the banks of crystal clear Porunal waters.' It has been said earlier, that the Srivaiṣṇava Guruparampara tradition, is firmly grounded in the 'rahasya-traya', the triad of 'Tirumantra'- *"Om Namō Nārāyanāya"*, 'Dvayam'- *"Sriman Nārāyana Charanou Śaranam Praphdhyē, Srimalhē Nārāyanāya Namah:"* II, and 'Charama Sloka, *"Sarva Dharmān Parityajya Māmēkam Śaranam Vraja I, Aham Tva` Sarva Pāpēbhyō Mokṣayiṣyāmi, Mā Suchah:"* II. The 'Tirumantra' 'upadeśa' was given in the first instance, by Lord Nārāyana to His own 'amśa' of Nara at holy Bhadri shrine in the Himālayās. 'Dvaya mantra' was imparted by the Lord to Divine Mother in the Viṣṇulōka. 'Charama

Sloka' 'upadēśam' was given by Sri Krishna to Arjuna in the Kurukshētra battle field. How then did the knowledge of the 'rahasya mantras' come into the hands of the Guruparampara lineage?. Our Āchāryas have indicated to us, that the 'rahasyas' came down to the Guruparampara from the Lord of Srirangam shrine, in as much as the 'upadēśa' of these mantras, was first administered by Lord Sri Ranganātha to the Divine Mother Sriranga Nāyaki, who transmitted the same to Viśvakṣena, by the latter to Sri Nammāļvār who in turn, imparted the same to Sri Nāthamuni the first Āchārya in the Sampradāya, and so on. The Guruparampara 'taniyan' composed by Kūrathāļvān, thus reads, as under:

*"Lakshminātha samārambhām Nātha-Yāmuna
madhyamām, Asmad Āchārya Paryanthām Vandē
Guruparamparām ".*

It was said at the beginning that historians place Āļvār's time period in the seventh century A.D. after the Mudhal Āļvārs and Tirumaļisai Pirān. The Mudhal Āļvārs rendered their Prabandhams in the 'Venpā' metre of Tamil poetic grammar. Tirumaļisai Āļvār adopted the 'Venpā' and 'Kalippā' metres in his two works. Nammāļvār has composed his works in three kinds of metric structure, namely, 'Venpā', 'Kalippā', and 'Āsiriappā'. It is to be noted that none of the other Āļvārs who followed them has adopted the 'Venpā metre'.

It has already been said that Nammāļvār enjoys a very special place among the Āļvārs. Tiruvāymoļi, similarly, holds a special place in Divyaprabandham works, and is hailed as 'Bhagavad-Viṣayam'. It is therefore not surprising that a number of works have come up eulogizing the Āļvār and Tiruvāymoļi. First and foremost, Madhurakavi who became Āļvār's disciple and spent the rest of his life with him at Tirukkurugur, composed 'Kanninun Siruthāmbu',

of eleven verses, on the Āļvār, wherein he says that he served his feet and found the truth, that he knows of no other God than him, and would sing his songs and roam around to proclaim his grace to the world. In the process, Madhurakavi became Madhurakavi Āļvār, and his hymn found a place in Divyaprabandham. Legend has it that he took the palm-leaves documents of the songs of the Āļvār to Madurai, the seat of “*Tamil Sangam*”, where the calibre of a poet and his poems was tested in those days to prove their excellence on a ‘spinning slat’ in the tank inside the local goddess’s temple precincts. Though, the group of poets who were considered the ‘arbiters of excellence’ then, initially made slight of Madhurakavi’s initiative, the latter went ahead and just wrote two lines from Tirivāymoļi, “*Kannan Kazhalinai nannum manamudayīr, ennum Tirunāmam thinnam Nāranamē*”- (T.V.M.-10-5-1), ‘those of you who seek Krishna’s feet, meditate on His name; Nārāyana is the mantra of redemption.’ The leaf was placed alongside the works of many poets of the land on the slat that started spinning, and as it gathered speed, threw every other work into the water except the leaf containing the Āļvār’s verse. The judges were astonished and readily accepted all the songs of the Āļvār as divinely inspired beyond a shadow of doubt hailing him as a divine poet. Nammāļvār has endorsed the credentials of his thousand verses in his own words as follows, “*Aērkkum Perumpugazh Vānavariśan Kannan thanakku, Aērkkum Perumpugazh. Van Kurughur Satakōpan Sol, Aērkkum Perumpugazh. Āyiratthulivayum Ōrppatthu, aērkkum perumpugazh. Sollavallārkkku illai Sanmamē*” (T.V.M.-3-9-11), ‘This decad on the perfect thousand songs of the famous Kurugur city’s Satakōpan, addressing the glorious Lord of celestials Krishna, rids rebirth of those who can sing it’. Sri Manavālamāmunigal echoed the same truth in his rhetorical question,”*Undō Tiruvāymoļikkoppu,*

Thenkurugaikkum undō Orupārthanil Okkumoor?", (U.R.M.-15), 'Is there anything equal to Tiruvāymoḷi; is there any city in the world equal to Thenkurugur'?

Among the Āḷvārs, Tirumangai Āḷvār has been hailed, among other things, as 'Tiruvāymoḷi Pulavar'. His admiration and veneration for Nammālvār and his Tiruvāymoḷi is evident from the fact that it was due to his pioneering endeavor that the celebration of the 'Adhyayana Utsavam' was introduced at Srirangam shrine, since he prayed to the Lord that he listen to the recitation of Tiruvāymoḷi. For this purpose, he arranged for the 'mangala vighraha' of the Āḷvār to be brought to Srirangam from Āḷvār Tirunagari during such occasions, and the Lord's honours conferred on the Āḷvār. Tirumangai Āḷvār had a penchant for signing off his poems by appending his honorific titles, quite justifiably, since he was renowned and acknowledged as a versatile poet. Presumably desiring to disclose his closeness to Nammālvār, he signs off as "Iruntamizh Noolpulavan" in his Peria Tirumoḷi decad on the divya-desam, "*Singhavēlkunram*". The line reads as follows, "*Senghanaḷi Ittirainjum Singhavēlkunrudaiya Engal Īsan Empirānai Iruntamizh Noolpulavan Vandarai-thārk Kaliyan Senchholmālai*".....(P.T.M.- 1.7.10). Tirumangai Āḷvār has borrowed this phrase, "*Iruntamizh Nool*", from Nammālvār's hymn on the Lord of Tiruvāttāru, a 'divya-desam' near Tiruvananthapuram in Kerala. In this decad, Āḷvār says of his Prabandham as follows, "*Enninchathullirundhu Iruntamizh Nool Ivai mozhindhu*" (T.V.M.-10-6-4.), 'abiding in my heart, and rendering this great Tamil song'.

Nammālvār has commended his own songs in many resonant phrases. "*Pannār pādal*", "*Iruntamizh Nool*", "*Tondarkkamudham*", "*Avāvilandādhi*" etc. It would be

wrong to presume from this, that this is any kind of self-praise. Āļvār himself has made it clear that he is merely an instrument and it is the Lord Who sings through him, ".....*Inkavigal Yānāy Tannaithān pādi*"... (T.V.M.-10-7-5). At the end of each of his decads of Tiruvāymoļi, in the last verse, Āļvār appends his name. In most decads, he has adopted the name, "*Kurugur Satakōpan*". He has also styled himself in a few places as 'Māran', and "*Kāri māran*". Tamil poet Kambar who was a contemporary of Nāthamunigal, and who wrote the Rāmāyanam in Tamil, composed a poem of accolades on the Āļvār, titled 'Satakōpar Andādhi', in which he has commended Āļvār's Tiruvāymoļi as "*Ārāamudhakkavi Āyiram*". About Nammāļvār he had this to say, "*Tēvil Sirandha Tirumārkkutthakka Deivakkavijñan, Pāvil Sirandha Tiruvāymoļi paghar Pandithanē*", 'the divine bard who fits the role commensurate to the Supreme Divinity of all gods Vishnu, is the scholar who has sung the unequalled poem of Tiruvāymoļi.'

In the very first verse of his poem , Kambar pays a tribute to Tiruvāymoļi to the effect that while the effulgent Primordial Being may well go past the Vedas, Brahma and other celestials and the realized souls, He cannot go past even one verse of the holy poet-saint of Kurugur, "*Kurugur Punidhan Kavignarpādattin mun sellumē thollai moolapparañchudarē*."

Sri Vedānta Desikan has written two works on Tiruvāymoļi in Sanskrit, called 'Dramidopaniṣad Tātparya Ratnāvali', and 'Dramidopaniṣad Sāram'. Sri Manavālamāmuniṣal, the Achārya who came after Veda'nta Desika authored a work called 'Tiruvāymoļi Nūtrandhādhi' of one hundred verses in 'venpā' metre in Tamil, wherein each verse succinctly summarises the import of each decad of Tiruvāymoļi.

It was brought out earlier, that Tiruvāymoḷi has been commended as a detailed exposition of ‘Dvaya mahāmantra’, with each ‘pathu’ of one hundred verses elaborating on one term of this nine-parts mantra, ‘Sriman’, ‘Nārāyana’ etc. From another standpoint, Tiruvāymoḷi is an exposition of the five-fold principles of reality, referred to as ‘Arthapancakam’, knowledge of which is imperative for any individual seeking liberation. This has been stated as follows: *“Prāpyasya Brahmanō rūpam Prāptusca Pratyagāthmanah: I Prāptyuapāyam Phalam chaiva tathā` Prāpti-virodhi ca I Vadanti sakalā Vedāh: Sētiḥāsa-Purānakā: Munayas ca Mahāthmāno Veda Vedārtha Vedhinah:”* II (Ha. Vam.). ‘All Vedas and Itihāsa Purānas, sages, and scholars of Vedas, speak of i.the essential nature of the Supreme Being Who is the object of attainment; ii. The attainer who is the ‘jīvāthman’; iii. the way of attainment; iv. the fruit of attainment; and v. obstructions to that attainment.’

Bhattar in his second ‘taniyan’ to Tiruvāymoḷi has stated the same as follows, *“Mikkavirainilaiyum, Meyyām Uyirnilaiyum, Thakkaneriyum Thadayāghit-thokkiyalum, oozhvinaiyum Vāzhvinaiyum Ōdhum Kurugaiyar Kōn yāzhininisai Vēdatthiyal”*. ‘Irai nilai’ refers to the Supreme ‘Paramāthman’, *“Tatvam Nārāyana Parah:”*—(Up). ‘Meyyām Uyir nilai’, describes the ‘āthma-svarūpa nithyatvam’ characterised by ‘jñāna’ or knowledge of ‘śarira- śarīri bhāvam’. ‘Thakkaneri’ stands for the ‘upāya’ or means appropriate to ‘svarūpa-jñāna’ of Bhagavad-Bhāghavatha ‘śeṣatvam’. ‘Thadaiyāghitthokkiyal- oozhvinai’, stands for the obstacles in the way in the form of ‘ahaṅkāra-mamakāras’, and ‘prakṛti-sambandha- avidya-karma-vāsanās’, or the sense of ego, ignorance, and accumulated karma impressions. ‘Vāzhvinai’, is the fruit of eternal bliss at the feet of the ‘Paramāthman’. Our preceptors have clearly affirmed that any text or authority

on spiritual or ontological inquiry concerning human life and destiny, should address these five `principles, especially the relationship between the ultimate Reality and the individual being. Tiruvāymoḷi is an outpouring of the well-springs of the Āḷvār's visualisation of the 'svarūpa rūpa-guna-vibhūti' of the Divine. The learned elders have explored how Tiruvāymoḷi has addressed these principles. In this, four Tiruvūymoḷi decads have been identified as enunciating on each of the five principles out-lined above. 'Parasvarūpa' or the nature of the Supreme Being, is enunciated under the decads, T.V.M- 1.1. "*Uyar*",-2.2. "*Thinn*", -2.8. "*Anay*", and 4.10.- "*Onrum*". 'Bhagavad-svarūpa' is spoken of in two ways, i. by way of 'tattva-Para' or Ultimate Reality, and ii. 'Upāsana Para', or the path of devotion to attain the Supreme Being. One cannot reach the Divine merely by knowledge but only by 'upāsana' or 'bhakti', gained from knowledge, which has been characterized by Emperumānār as 'Bhaktirūpāpanna jñāna'. In his very first decad, "*Uyarvara Uyarnalam Udayavan*", Āḷvār articulated the central truth expressed by the Vedas about the Supreme Being, as i. endowed with `infinite auspicious qualities, ii. the Lord of all creation, support and sustainer of all, eternal, all-pervading, and immanent in all beings and things, iii. endowed with a divine form worship of whose feet wipes out all pain of 'samsāra' and assures everlasting life after. In the next decad, Āḷvār identifies the Supreme Being as Nārāyana in the words, "*En perukku annalatthu, onnporul īrila vann pugazh Nāranan thinnkazhal Sērē*"- (T.V.M.-1.2. 10), 'Unite with the sacred feet of the glorious Nārāyana, Lord of countless virtues and of incomparable good.' As the scriptures say, 'Kāranam tu dhyēyah:'- the Supreme cause is to be meditated upon, Āḷvār gives us the sage advice that the 'Upāsana para' is Nārāyana, whose feet we have to seek in our worship. Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal paraphrased

the same in his Tiruvāymoḷi Nūtrandhādhi pāsuram, in the words, “*Veedu seithu matrevaiyum Nāranan Thāll nādunalattāl adaiya nankuraikkum*”.....What we have seen thus far, is what is called, ‘Parathvēparathvam’, the nature of the Supreme Being in His Supreme state, though it may sound somewhat tautological. This is what was further indicated by the Ālvār, in the line “*Udalmisai Uyirena karandhenthum parandhulan, ...*”- (T.V.M.-1.1.7). ‘He permeates in all that exists in the universe as their ‘antarātma, and controls them from within, like the soul within the physical body.’

The second decad cited above starting with the words, “*Thinnan Veedu mudhalmuzhudhumāy, enninmeedhiyan Emperumān, mannum vinnumellām udanunda Nam Kannan kannalladhu illaiōrkannē*”- (T.V.M.- 2.2.1.), describes the ‘paratvam’ in the Lord’s ‘avathāra’ state. This is called “*Vibhave paratvam*”, that is in the Lord’s manifestations as Rama, Krishna, etc. The verse quoted above runs like this, ‘My Lord, the bestower of everlasting bliss of heaven and all else, endowed with infinite auspicious qualities, swallowed the earth and sky. He is my Krishna, the sole Saviour of all, none else.’ The verse speaks about the ‘rakshakatvam’ of the Lord, like the eyes protect a person. Does He not protect the worlds and the beings in tact even in the final act of dissolution, at the time of ‘pralaya’ ? The question may be asked, how the Lord retains His ‘paratva’ when He is born in this world, like any other human being, when He has to act dependent on others. Lord Krishna answers this in His affirmation, “*Ajoapi sun Avyayāthmābhūthānām Īśvarōpi sun I Prakṛtim svām Adhiṣṭāya Sambhavāmi Āthmamāyayā*” II, (B.G. 4.6.), ‘Though being birthless, immutable, and the Lord of all created beings, yet resorting to My ‘Prakṛti’, I manifest Myself through My own inscrutable power,’ (māya).

Next, the decad starting with the words, “*Anaivadhu Aravanaimēl Poompā-vai-āgham Punarvadhu Iruvaravar Mudhalumthān Inaivanām epporutkum Veedumudhalāy punaivan Piravikkadal Neendhuvārkkē*”.- (T.V.M. 2.8.1.), describes that He is the sole Bestower of liberation. This verse states, ‘My Lord, who reclines on the serpent bed united with Divine Mother, is the Cause of Brahma and Siva; He Himself becomes one with all, and is the bestower of celestial bliss to all those who aspire to cross the ocean of ‘samsāra.’ In this, Ālvār speaks about the ‘mokṣa-pradhatvam’ of the Lord. To those, who aspire for the eternal bliss of ‘Vaikunta’, He is the sole recourse. Brahma and Siva are all lesser gods who cannot grant liberation from the cycle of repeated births.

The last decad starting with the words, “*Onrum thēvum ulagam uyirum matrum yādhumillā anru, Nānmughan thannōdu Devarulaghōdu Uyir Padaiththān, Kunram pōl manimādam needu Tirukuruguradhanul ninra Ādhippirān nirkka matraitheiyvam nāduthirē ?*”- (T.V.M.-4.10.1), addresses the position of what is referred to as ‘Arcāyām Paratvam’, or the Lord’s supremacy in His manifestation in ‘divya-mangala-vigraha’ in temples. This verse says, ‘When none of the gods, worlds, and aught else existed, He created Brahma- with him the gods, worlds, and all the beings. Here, He stands as ‘Ādhippirān’ in fair Tirukurugur where bejeweled houses rise like hills; what other gods do you run after now?’. To the question whether, the Lord possesses ‘Svāmitvam’ in His ‘arca’ state, the answer is an emphatic ‘yes’ in full measure, as we have seen earlier. Pillai Lokāchārya, gives the example of the landlord who owns acres of land, but nevertheless sleeps on a cot in an open field to keep watch over the crops. “*Kudil katti payir kākkum krishikanaippolē*”. It has been said, ‘Bhūgatha jalam polē Antaryāmitvam, Āvarana jalam polē paratvam, Pārkkadal polē Vyūham,

"Perukkāru polē Vibhavam, Adhilē thēnghina Madukkal polē Arcāvathāram'. 'Antaryāmitvam' is like subterranean water, 'Paratva", the Lord's celestial state is like ocean water. 'Vyūha' state is like the Milk Ocean. 'Vibhava' is like an overflowing river. 'Arca' is like the small pools that the river creates in between places'. This is to emphasise the 'soulabhya' or felicity of the Lord in His 'arca' form which is accessible to all.

Next, the 'āthma svarūpa' is discussed under decads, 3.7.- *"Payilum Sudar Oli"*, 4.8.- *"Ērālum Iraiyoṇum"*, 8.8.- *"Kangal Sivindhu"*, and 8.9.- *"Karumānikkam"*. The decad 3.7. underscores the importance of 'Bhāgavatha-śeṣathvam' as intrinsic to the essence of 'āthma svarūpa'. Āḷvār says in the first verse, thereof, (T.V.M-3.7.1), that 'the devotees of the Lord, whoever they be, are my masters through seven lives'. Āḷvār refers to the Lord's devotees as 'Tiru Udayār', meaning that they are blessed by 'Sri'. It is not a mere coincidence that Vibhishana in Srimad Rāmāyana, who had come to surrender to Sri Rama is referred to by Valmiki as 'Antarikṣa gathah: Srimān', 'he who was in the sky and 'Srimān". Similarly, Gajendra who called to the Lord when he was caught in the clutches of the crocodile was 'Sa tu Nāghavarah: Srimān'. Lakshmana who shunned all regal power and panoply, was extolled as 'Lakshmi Sampannah: 'Bhagavadh śeṣatvam' would be fruitful only on the strength of 'Bhāgavatha-śeṣatvam'. 'Bhāgavatha-sēṣatva is said to be sēṣatva- kāshtai', or the 'outpost of subservience' so to say. The real devotee is very dear to the Lord. Sri Krishna confirmed this in his words, *"Jñāni tu ātmaiva Mē matham"*-- (B.G.7.18). 'The man of realization, I regard as my very self.' Being a devotee of a 'Bhāgavatha' is the ideal of a true Srivaiṣṇava, and the high water-mark of Vaiṣṇavatvam. In the decad commencing with the words, *"Ērālum Iraiyoṇum"*, (T.V.M.-4.8.), Āḷvār spurns everything that he may have, when he cannot

have the one and only thing that he yearns the most, which is 'Bhagavad-śeṣatvam'. Sri Ālavandār in his Stotra Ratnam prayer to the Lord in Sloka 57, expresses this thought as follows: *"Na dēham na prānān na ca sukhamaśeṣābhilaṣitam na ccātmānam nānyatkimapi tava śeṣatva vibhavāth I Bhahirbhūtam Nātha ! Kshanamapi Sahē yātu satadhā vināśam, tath satyam..."*. 'Lord, outside of the wealth of being Thy servant, I cannot bear my body, or my life, or pleasures desired by all else, or even my 'self', or anything else. Let all these, bereft of thy service, get lost. It is the truth.' In the decad, *"Kangal Sivandhu"*- (T.V.M.-8.8.), Āḷvār emphasizes 'Ananyārha śeṣatvam' as an imperative quality of 'jivāthman'. It is expressed as *"Tadhupakaranam Vaiṣṇavamidham"*. The 'jivāthman' indicated by 'ma' in the Pranava, is the subordinate and possession of Vishnu. After pointing out *"Adiyenullān Ennullān"*...in T.V.M. 8.8.2, meaning that being the subordinate is more intrinsic to the 'self' than the qualities of 'jñānānandha svarūpa', or as paraphrased beautifully by Pillai Lokāchārya, *"Aham enbadharkku Dāsyamirē Antharangha Nirūpakam"*, Āḷvār describes the inseparable mingling of the Divine in the 'āthma svarūpa' in the words, *"Yānum thānāy ozhindhānai... thēnum pālum kannalum amudhamāghi thithikkum, Oonil uyiril unarvinil ninra Onrai Unarndhēnē"*. 'The Lord Who became 'me', abides in my consciousness, in my life-force, and in my body, sweet as honey, milk, and sugar cane juice and nectar.' In the next decad, T.V.M.8.9, beginning with the words, *"Karumānikka malaimēl"*, the same substantive truth is expressed in the words of a companion lady of Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki essaying the emotions of her friend.

Next let us see how Āḷvār addresses the obstacles that have to be overcome in the pursuit of divine grace. These are summarized in the decads, T.V.M. 1.2., *"Veedu min"*,

3.9. “*Sonnāl Virōdham*”, 4.1. “*Oru Nāyakamāy*”, 9.1. “*Konda Pēndir*”. In T.V.M. 1.2. Āļvār, first gives the sage advice that ‘ahaṅkāra’ or ego sense of ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ is to be avoided in the line “*Nīr Numadhenrivay Vērmudhal māitthu, Irai Sērmin Uyirkku adhan nērnirayillai.*”- (T.V.M.- 1.2.3). Next in 3.9., Āļvār warns against the dangers of ‘devatāntara bhajanam’, ‘narasthuti’ etc., ‘worship of other gods and singing the praise of human beings for favours’,etc. and emphasises that ‘Bhagavad-gunānubhavam’ is the sole purpose of worship and prayer. In 4.1. Āļvār gives the message that hankering after ‘aiṣvarya-kaivalya’ etc be given up as lowly goals. Material wealth is transient, and ‘kaivalya’ or ‘āthmānubhava’ in some remote corner of space is only a shade more dignified. In decad 9.1. Āļvār warns against attachments to one’s worldly relations that come with ‘karma’, pointing out that the Lord is our only natural relation because of our intrinsic and eternal bonds with Him.

The fourth factor, namely ‘upāyathvam’ is addressed in the decads, 5.7. “*Nōtranōnbhilēn*”, 5.8. “*Ārāamudhē*”, 5.9. “*Mānēynōkku*”, and 5.10, “*Pirandha-vārum*”. These decads reveal to us that the means to pursue for a ‘prapanna’ to merit divine grace, starts with the awakening that the ‘upāya’ is the Lord Himself Who is there for us as ‘Siddhōpāya’. To this end, in the decad, 5.7. beginning with the words, “*Nōtranōnbhilēn Nunnarivilēn*”, Āļvār pleads before the Lord of Sirivaramangalanagar or Vānamāmalai, his “*ācincanyam*” or lack of anything to show by way of personal capital in the form of ‘penance’, and ‘subtle knowledge’, yet can no more bear to be separated from Him even for a moment. In 5.8. addressed to Amudhan, the Lord of Tirukkudandhai, Āļvār admits his ‘ananya-gathithvam’, that he has nowhere to go except knock at the Lord’s door, whether he accepts him or turns away from him. His words are, “*En nān*

seyghēn?, yārē kalaikan?, ennai en seykinrāy ?, Unnāl allāl yāvarālum onrum kurai vēndēn”(T.V.M.- 5.8.3.), ‘What can I do?, Who else can give relief?, what are you doing to me?, I seek not redress through anyone save You.’. Again, later in the same decad, “Kalaivāyt thunbham kalaiyādho- zhivāy; kalaikan matrilēn, talarādudalam enadāvi sarindhu pōmpōdhu ilaiyādhu Un tāl orungha pidithuppōdha isai Neeyē”- (T.V.M.-5.8.8),’ Whether you end my despair or not, You are my sole refuge. When the body languishes as my life ebbs away, grant that I may hold firm to your feet.’ In the next decad, 5.9. addressed to the Lord of Tiruvallavāzh, Āļvār is overcome with ‘bhakti-pāraṣyam’. In the next decad 5.10, beginning with the words, “Pirandhavārum”, Āļvār reminiscing the ‘soulabhyam’ of the Lord Sri Krishna in submitting Himself to be bound to the mortar by His mother, attains the state of ‘karanaṣaithilyam’ or melting frailty of the body and limbs.

Earlier, we had mentioned that Tiruvāymoļi has been commended as a discourse on ‘Dvaya mahāmantra’. Though in the four decads described above, Āļvār seeks refuge in the Lord, expressing his ‘ācincanyam’, ‘ananyagathithvam’, etc., his ‘śaranāgathi’ is not complete yet, since his act of surrender is not performed keeping in the forefront the Divine Mother as the mediatrix or ‘puruṣakāram’ to constitute completeness of the act. Āļvār therefore, performs his ‘prapatti’ in conformity with the terms of the ‘Dvaya’ mantra invoking the Divine Mother’s intercession in pāsuram T.V.M.-6.10. The verse is as follows: “*Akalakillēn iraiyumenru Alarmēl Mangai Uraimārbhā! Nigharil Pughaļāy, Ulaghamūnru-daiyāy, ennai Ālvānē! Nigharil Amarar Munikkanangal virumbhum Tiruvēnkatathānē! pughal onrilā adiyēn Unnadikeezh. amarndhu pughundhēnē!*”. ‘O Lord, ever united with the inseparable lotus-seated Dame

ensconced on Thy chest ! O my Master of matchless fame, bearing the three worlds,! O Lord of Tiruvēṅkatam desired by sages and celestials! Falling at Thy feet, this refugeless self has found his niche underneath'.The phrases of this verse match the 'Dvaya mantra' terms and substance as follows. 'Alarmēl Mangai' gives the meaning of 'Sri'. 'Akalakillēn' refers to the meaning of 'math'. 'Uraimārbha' refers to the 'nithya yoga', in the sense of inseparability of the Divine Mother from the Lord. The words from "*Nigharil Puḡaḷāy*" upto "*Tiruvēṅkatatthānē*" give the meaning of 'Nārāyana'. "*Puḡhal Onrilā Adiyēn*" refers to the agency seeking refuge. By "*Unnadikkeezh*" is meant the term "*Charanou*". "*Amarndhu puḡhundhēnē*", stands for the meaning of 'Prapadhyē'. Though there is no express term in the pāsuram to cover the meaning of 'Śaranam', it is implicit in the verb "*Puḡhundhēnē*". Again, while the pāsuram expressly covers the meaning of the first part of the 'Dvaya mantra', it also implicitly extends to cover the spirit of the second part of the mantra, namely 'Srimathē Nārāyanāya namah:' standing for 'Upēya viṣaya' or prāpyatvam', 'the goal to be attained'. This part is covered explicitly in the following paragraph.

Finally, we will briefly touch on the 'phala' or fruit that awaits the 'jivāthma' that has surrendered to the Lord. This is described in the decads 2,9. "*Emmā Veedu*", 3.4. "*Ozhivil kālamellām*", 8.10 "*Nedumārkku Adimai*", and 10.3. "*Veymaruthōlinay*".The decad 2.9. "*Emmā veettu thiramumseppum*" describes the 'kainkarya-puruṣārtha' or cardinal goal of service to the Divine. Āḷvār expresses this in his own inimitably evocative manner in the words, "*Enakkē Ātsey ekkālattum enru, en manakkē vandhu idai veedu inri manni, Thanakkēyāgha ennaikkollum idhē, Enakkē Kannanai Yān kol sirappē*"-(T.V.M.-2.9.4), 'Abiding in my heart for ever, the Lord said, 'Serve me alone at all times'. That He has taken me unto Him, is what I take as my

blessing and fulfilment for having Krishna to myself'. This is the consummate state of eternal togetherness with the Lord. This is the fruit reiterated in the next decad cited above, 3.3. "*Ozhivilkālamellām udanāy manni*", but with a prayer that such service to the Lord should be through a continuous time line "*Ozhivil kālamellām*", at all places in person "*udanāy manni*", and such stintless service should be in all states and flawless, "*vazhuvilā adimai seyya vēndum Nām.*" In the decad, 8.10, "*Nedumārkku adimai*", Āļvār next elevates the fruit of service to service of the Lord's devotees, 'Bhāgavatha kainkaryam', placing it on a higher pedestal than service to the Lord Himself. Such service is infinitely more precious than the three worlds. As Āļvār puts it, "*....kodu māvinaiyēn Avan Adiyār adiyē koodum idhu allāl, vidumāru enbhadhu en? Andhō! viyan mūvulaghu perinumē*", (T.V.M.8.10.1). In the earlier part of the verse, Āļvār says, "*Nedumārkku adimai seyvēn pōl, Avanaikkarudha vanjittu tadumātru atra theekatigal mutrum tavirndha sadhir ninaindhāl*", 'I merely thought I would serve the sweet Lord, Lo, all my evil 'karmas' just vanished without a trace'. Āļvār calls the Lord "*Nedumāl*", 'One who is enamoured of His devotees'. The result is that the Lord draws the Āļvār to His devotees who are even sweeter, and the fruit of being the Lord's devotee's devotee is a far greater reward than all other wealth one can think of. The decad 10.3. "*Vey maru tholinai*" is sung by the Āļvār in the emotional state of 'Nāyaki' articulating her feelings of privation, as if to her maiden companion, but actually intended for the Lord. Drawing from the metaphor of Krishnāvathāra episode of Krishna setting out to graze the cows in the forest and the misgivings voiced by cowherd girls about potential dangers that might befall the Lord from the demons, Āļvār, as Parānkuśa Nāyaki, voices the same misgivings transposing herself to that time and place

as someone like Nappinnai, and pines about being left forsaken in this world. But she recovers on receiving the Lord's assurance that He would not go.

Azhaghiya Manavāpperumāl Nāyanār in Curnika 211 of Āchārya Hrudayam, observes by way of summing up, that these twenty decads clearly expatiate in detail the five principles spoken of in a condensed fashion in the other three Prabandhams. His words are, "*Mūnriḷ surukkia aindhu*" "*irubhadhile`visadhamākki enbathilē parappugayālē aindhaiyum Arulinan*". The same subject is spread over in the remaining eighty decads. Of these five, two only namely 'Upāya' and 'Upēya' are of greater relevance. Nāyanār states in the same maxim these are shown by the Āḷvār by the terms, "*Arulinan*", (T.V.M.-1.1.1) which underscores the Lord's 'anugraha-viśēṣa', and "*Veedu Petra*". (T.V.M.10.10.11), which indicates 'kainkarya-prāpti'. Even out of these two, Nāyanār continues, "*Thozhudhu kalittēn, sollupetrēn paṇi sey enghira muktha-lakshana vrittiyālē, irandilonraiyum idhukku pramēyamennum*". The same is expressed as "*Bhaddhāṇjaliputā: Hṛṣṭā: Namaityēvavādhinah:*" - (Bha.Sha.-344-45). 'With hands folded, chanting 'namah', and blissful'. In other words, this constitutes the 'muktha-lakshana vritti', the bliss of kainkarya in eternal togetherness with the Lord, 'Nithyas', and other 'mukthas'. And this is the sole dominant message of the Prabandham.

The 'kalyānagunas' or auspicious qualities which are underscored in the ten 'pathu' groups of hundred pasurams each, are as follows. "1 - 'Parathvam' - Overarching Supremacy, 2.- 'Kāranathvam' - Being the Primary Cause. 3.- 'Vyāpakatvam' - All-pervasiveness, 4. - 'Nīyanthṛthvam' - Overarching Control, 5. - 'Kārunikatvam' Compassion, 6.- 'Śaranyatvam' Protectorship of the defenceless, 7. - 'Śakthatvam', Capacity, 8. - 'Satya-kāmatvam' -

Unfailing Will, 9. - ‘Āpathsakatvam’- *Removing perils*, and 10, - ‘Ārthi-haratvam’- *Removing distress of devotee*”. Significantly, all these ten qualities are also underscored in the Tiruvarangam decad T.V.M.-7.2., beginning with the words, “*Kangulum Paghalum*” as indicated below.

1. ‘Parathvam’- “*Vānōr Thalaivanē*”-7.2.10, ‘Lord of celestials’,
2. ‘Kāranathvam’- “*Mun seidha ivvulagam*”-7.2.2.’ You made this world’,
3. ‘Vyāpakathvam’- “*Katkilī*”-7.2.3., ‘One beyond human vision’,
4. ‘Niyanthṛthvam’- “*Kālaccakkaratthāy*”- 7.2.7., ‘One Who wields the time wheel’,
5. ‘Kārunikathvam’- “*Ival thirathu Arulāy*”- 7.2.6. ‘Pray show Your grace’,
6. ‘Śaranyathvam’- “*Patrilār Patra Ninrānē*”- 7.2.7., ‘Protector of the defenceless’,
7. ‘Śakthathvam’- “*Alaikadal kadaindha Āramudhe*”-7.2.5. ‘Nectar-like Lord who churned the ocean’,
8. ‘Satyakāmathvam’- “*En Tirumaghal Sērmārghanē*”-7.2.9., ‘One on Whose chest Divine Mother ever abides’,
9. ‘Āpathsakathvam’- “*Undumizhndhalandhay*”- 7.2.2. ‘One who swallowed, brought forth and measured’, (the worlds, meaning without any hurt), and
10. ‘Ārthiharathvam’- “*Mukilvannan adiyai adaindhu arul soodi uindhavan*”-7.2.11, ‘One at whose feet one can find abiding grace’.

Finally, one may conclude this section by briefly touching on the ‘Nāyikā- bhāva’, that is the ‘lady’s role’ assumed by the Āļvār in several situations in his hymns, as maid, mother, and daughter, the last as ‘Parānkuśa Nāyaki’ in love with the Lord. The entire decad 7.2. on Tiruvarangam is set as a narrative of the mother addressing the Lord in behalf of her daughter, relaying the anguished cries and emotions of the daughter to Him. Three decads are in the nature of ‘Thōzhi’ pāsuras where the Āļvār speaks in the voice of the maid. Seven are in the nature of the mother of the love-lorn daughter expressing her concerns, or portraying the daughter’s actions, privations and emotions. In the decad cited above, Āļvār in the role

of the mother of her daughter deeply in love with the Lord, seeks the favour of the Lord's ears to listen to her narrative of her daughter's anguish and woe, and poses the question to Him as to what he intends to do with her. The narrative ends well for the daughter` after all, with the Lord's grace dawning on her.

The decad 4.6. is a different kind of narrative, wherein the imagery portrayed is to the effect that the mother of a similarly stricken daughter seeks the services of a faith healer to cure her daughter, but the latter's friend lifts the veil of ignorance and assures her that the cure does not lie there because she ails pining for the Lord, and as such the cure is to be found through recitation of the Lord's names and associating with and seeking, the blessings of Srivaishnavas. Āļvār says in T.V.M. 4.6.8. "*Vedam Vallārgalaikkondu, Vinnōr Perumān Tiruppādhham panindhu, Ival Nōy theerthukkollādhu pōy, ēdham paraindu alla seithu....., Neerananghu āduthal keezhmaiyē*", "The cure for her ailment lies in the worship of the sacred feet of the Lord of all celestials by invoking the ministry of Srivaishnavas. Without doing this, it is demeaning to turn to lesser gods, and do wrong things like pouring liquor all over the house, and sing tunes to the rhythm of weird percussion'.

' Decad 5.5., beginning with the words, "*Éngyēnōyo Annaimīrgāl, ! Ennai muni-vadhu neer*", is again an interesting take on the Āļvār in the role of Parāṅkusa Nāyaki. The daughter seriously love-lorn with the Lord, and grieving over His silence, had been toying with the unbecoming step of declaring her love in public, through a ritual called in Tamil literature as "*Madaloordhal*" but could not summon the courage to do that, since it is considered undignified in Tamil culture for a girl to put up any public spectacle like this. She nevertheless

cannot help openly displaying her emotions with tears rolling down her cheeks, provoking the ire and rebuke of her mother. In this decad, Nāyaki who is blessed with the vision of the Lord of Tirukkurungudi, then shares her experience of the Lord in all His beauty, with His conch and discus, lotus eyes and coral lips with her mother, and asking her not to show anger but to empathise how she can help it if her heart goes after that Lord. The whole decad is a deeply sensitive portrayal of the 'rūpa- guna soundarya' of the Lord. Āļvār assures at the end of the decad, that the devotees who learn this decad on the 'gunādhikyam' of the Lord Nambi of Tirukkurungudi attain the 'Vaiṣṇavatvam' of the 'nithyasuris', in this world itself.

Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki, in some decads seeks also the services of birds as messengers to carry her message of love to the Lord. Thus in decad, 1.5.1, she addresses a female crane in these words. *"Anciraya Madanārāy Aliyatthāy! Neeyum nin Anciraya sēvalumāy 'Ah' 'Ah' enru enakkaruli Vencirayppul Uyarthārkkku en viduthūdhāy senrakkāl vanciraiyil Avan vaikkil vayppundāl En Seyumō?."* 'O Frail crane, compassionate with pretty wings and a handsome mate! Would the two of you not pity my plight, and take a message for me to my Lord Who rides the fierce Garuda bird? Why, were He to cage you both per chance, would that hurt you?'. The decad goes on like that with Nāyaki entreating different bird species to carry her message of love and loneliness to the Lord.

The 'tātparya' or significance of this, is that in Siddhāntha, the birds are the imagery used for Āchāryas who reach us to the Lord. Azhaghiya Manavālap- perumāl Nāyanār in Curnikai 150 says thus, 'Sērppāray Pakshikallākki jñāna-karmangalai Siragenru Guru sa Brahmachāri Putra-Sishyasthānē Pēsum'. Sri Manavālamāmunigal amplifies

the same thought in the following words, “*Jñānam-anuttānamivai nanrāghavē udaiya Guruvai Adainthakkāl Mānilat-theer! Thēnār Kamalattirumāmaghal Kozhunan thānē`Vaikuntham tharum.*” - (Up.R.M.- 61). ‘O, denizens of the world, if only you get a Guru who combines knowledge with impeccable practice, the Lord of the Lotus-seated Lakshmi, would on His own confer the celestial kingdom.’

Tiruviruttam which is the first of the Prabandhams of Nammālvār, is looked upon as the essence of Rigveda. This Prabandham comprising one hundred pāsūrams is considered a condensed version of Tiruvāymoḷi, each verse thereof summarizing a decad of Tiruvāymoḷi. The first two pāsūrams of this Prabandham are what the Ālvār has sung as himself, the remaining ninety-eight pāsūrams in the ‘Nāyaki bhāva’, broadly as ‘Thalaivi’, ‘Thāyār’, ‘Thōzhi’, ‘Thalaivan’ which terms stand for lady-love of the Lord, mother, maid friend, and the Lord. ‘Viruttam’ has multiple meanings. One meaning is ‘narrative’ or ‘happening’. Another meaning is ‘change’. Yet another meaning is ‘message’. This work has all three meanings, since it depicts a happening, changing moods and mental states, and carries a message too. ‘Tiru’ refers to the Divine mother. In that sense, the work may be said to relate to the change in the Ālvār as Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki, like Divine Mother. It may also be taken to mean ‘exalting’. In that sense it is an exalting narrative. This is a complex work wherein, behind the outward facade of the love theme ‘Sringāra rasa’, the entire Prabandham is suffused with deeper philosophic meaning. Thus, the soul of the Ālvār is placed in the position of the ‘nāyaki’, the lover whereas the Divine Lord is the Beloved. The same is expressed by Nāyanār as “*jñānattil thum pēchu, prēmattil Penn pēchu*” - (A.H.118). The mother is divine knowledge, ‘paripūrṇa jñāna’ as it were, playing the role of the introducer of one to the other. The maids

are devotees of the Lord. Nāyanār expresses this in the words, “*Sambhandha, upāya palangalil, Uṇarthi, Thunivu, Padhatramāgira Prajñyāvasthaigalukku Thōzhi, Thāyār, Maghal enru pēr*”- (A.H.133). The limbs of the ‘nāyaki’ described such as eyes, bosom, waist are all depicted as different psychological states of the ‘nāyaki, ‘awakening’, devotion, detachment etc. This Viruttam or composition is the story of the feminine approach to the Divine through ‘Sringhāra rasa’, experiencing the usual torment of separation, long wait, doubt, before the grace of the Supreme Self dawns. The narrative claims in one sense to get rid of the illusion of ‘dehātmabhimāna’ or confusing the body for the self, and to remove the obstacles to ‘Brahmānubhava’.

In the first pasuram, sung by the Āļvār as himself, he makes the submission to the Lord to rid him of the ugly ravages of ‘samsāra’. The verse reads as follows: “*Poyninrajñānamum pollāvohukkum azhukkudambhum, inninraneermai iniyāmurāmai Uyiralippān, Enninrayōniyumāyppirandhāy ! Imayōr Thalaiva’!, Meyninru Kēttarulāy, Adiyēn Seyyum Vinnappamē.*” ‘O Lord of the celestials,! You were born in all manner of wombs for the sake of saving the souls, so that we may not hence forth be touched by false knowledge, evil conduct, and unclean body, and all the qualities that lie within. Please condescend to give ear to the submission of Your slave.’ This verse is a prayer of the Āļvār for all of us, just as Sri Ramanuja addressed his ‘Śaranāgathi Gadyam’ for all humanity for all time. It is evident from the fact that whereas Āļvār refers to himself in the singular as “*Adiyēn*”, the redemption sought by him is for all in plural,” *Iniyāmurāmai*”. The prayer is for the Lord’s grace, “*Arulāy*”, and abiding with Him “*Uyiralippān*”. This is what is stated in the Viṣṇupurāṇa sloka, “*Samjñāyatē ēna tadastadhōkṣam Suddham Param*

*Nirmala-mēkarūpam, I Sandṛśyatē vāpyati ghamyatēva`
tat jñānam ajñānam athōanyadhuktham II*" That by
which the Supreme Divinity devoid of fault, That which is
Immaculate, and free from dirt, is known, perceived, and
attained, is real knowledge. The rest is ignorance.' In this
verse, Āḷvār not only addresses the 'paratvam' of the Lord,
but also His 'Soulabhya' in the words, "*Enninra yōniyumāy
pirandhāy*". The birthless Lord takes many births and
undergoes travail for us as Āḷvār says in another context,
"*Nāttil pirandhu padāadhanapattu*", (T.V.M. 7.5.2.). As
the Upaniṣad says, "*Ajāyamānō bhahudhā vijāyate*".
He suffers in the process to rid us of our suffering.
"*Vyasanēṣu manuṣyānām bruṣam bhavati duhkithah:I*"
'In the sorrows of citizens, He (Sri Rama), grieves even
more than they'. So Āḷvār says, He will see that we no
more suffer all that travail of 'samsāra', stemming from
'dehāthmabrama'- mistaking the body for the 'āthman',
the root of 'avidya' or ignorance, 'asmita', of 'I' and 'Mine',
and actions and attitudes arising therefrom.

The first vision of the Lord Who is all grace and could
be invoked through prayer, was shortlived. The verses
that follow spoken in different voices, by the maids,
by the love-smitten soul, the Mother, or the 'indriyas',
represent different strata of consciousness in the pursuit
of the Divine. The varying external conditions, the
winds, seasons, the sky, ocean etc only lead to moods of
intensifying dejection with no Lord in sight. There comes
some Divine response in the form of 'tulasi' of the Lord
which gladdens the heart of the 'nāyaki'. But that was
fleeting, a tokenism that only flattered to deceive. 'Would
He or not?'. That is the question. She tries another tack,
drawing circles on the sand on the ocean front, to find out
if He would come, but the waves wash over the circles,
arousing her to kick at the sand in anger. But soon, the
soul wakes up to soak in the divinity around in places,

‘shining like great lotus pools on a blue mountain broad, evocative of the beauty of the Lord’s eyes, the lord of earth grit by the roaring sea, Heaven’s Lord, the black-hued Lord of other good souls and Mine.’ *“Neelattadavarai pōl Pundarika nedunthadangal pōla, polindhu emakku ella vidattavum ponghu munnīr, Jñālappirān Visumbukkum Pirān matrum Nallār Pirān Kōlankariya Pirān Empirān Kanninkolanghalē”*- (T.V.- 39). But what the soul is yearning for is the total personality of God, nothing less can really help. The Nāyaki yearns and wilts. This shows up in the loosening of her bangles, thinner frame, and anaemic look. The mother earth seems to empathize with her wailing upto the sky, which opens up in beating rain announcing, as it were, the Lord’s cruelty. A sooth-sayer healer is consulted. The healer diagnoses her condition as a ‘divine benevolent ailment’, *“Deiva nannōy”*, and suggests fanning her with ‘tulasi’ stalk, or root. The ‘Nāyaki’ is distraught and cannot wait indefinitely. Urgency impels her to send messengers in the form of beetles carrying her message of love. Relief comes temporarily in the form of a cool breeze wafting the fragrance of ‘tulasi’. She finds consolation in reciting the Lord’s names constantly, as she confides in her friend. In the inner recesses of her being, there are visible changes of a positive nature. The Viruttam goes on thus exploring alternations in moods and symbols leading eventually upto a final happy denouement of a glorious marriage- a divine embrace of the soul by its true and inalienable Lord. The state of consciousness at this high plane of Divine Gnosis is a veritable masterpiece of the vision that is portrayed by the Ālvār. In that state, ‘can sleep ever come to those who gaze joyful with true love, at the Lord eternal, Whom adoring celestials surround?’, (T.V.-97). ‘From sleepless seers and others who adore, He takes away the pain of endless births. He is that unique self-dependent Lord –

the ‘butter-thief’, that slighting word the mystique behind which, is beyond the grasp of gods.’ *“Tunjāmunivarum, allādhavarum thodaraninra enjāppiravi yidar kadivān, Imayōrthamakkum tansārvilādha thanipperu Mūrthi tan māyam sevvē, nenjāl ninaipparidhāl Venneyūnnennum Īnacchollē”*- (T.V- 98). The Lord’s ‘parathvam’ is matched only by this adorable felicity, His ‘soulabhya’. Both are beyond anyone’s grasp. Nāyaki visualizes that Lord as Sri Varāha manifestation, Who rescued the mother earth, the Lord of infinite wisdom and good, the perennial Bestower and Benefactor to celestials, and all others.”...*Ēnatturuvāy idandha Pirān iruñkarpagamsēr vānattavarkkum allādavarkkum matrellāyavarkkum Jñānappirānaiyallāillai Nānkanda nalladhuvē*”,(T.V.-99). The ‘phalasruti’ carries the promise that ‘those who master this Prabandham will never get sucked into the mysterious quagmire of miserable births’.

Tiruvāsiriyam, the smallest Prabandham of the Āļvār comprising only seven pāsūrams, is the essence of Yajur Veda, specifically the ‘Nārāyana Anuvāka’ thereof. This hymn is set as an ‘Āsiriappa Viruttam’. Tiruviruttam was a prayer addressed to the Divine for the riddance of ‘samsāric’ bondage. This Prabandham is adoration and adulation of the ‘svarūpa, rūpa, guna vibhūti’ of the Divine Lord. Devotion to the Lord is the overflowing love that springs in the devotee’s heart in a spirit of self-offering or ‘āthma yajña’. ‘Śukla Yajur Veda’ concludes with the ‘Īśāvāsyōpaniṣad’ which shows that the highest among sacrifices is the offering of all without remainder to the Lord, knowing that the Lord is the indwelling and omnipervading Supreme Being. *“Ōm, Īśāvāsyamidham Sarvam yatkinca jagathyām Jagath I Thēna tyakthēna bunjīta`.....”*.(I.Up.-1). ‘Renouncing to Him one’s self, one attains immortality’. Tiruvāsiriyam teaches within the brief compass of seven hymns the ‘tattva’, ‘hita’ and the

‘puruṣārtha’, as well as the obstacles to the attainment of the goal, ‘prāptivirodhi’.

The first pāsuram or verse articulates the Āḷvār’s ‘anubhavam’ of the ‘lavanya’ of the Lord. He is the Trivikramāvathāra of Viṣṇu Who Strode the worlds. He is Nārāyaṇa in ‘yoganidra’ on the Milk Ocean Whom, all gods led by Siva, Brahma and Indra worship. Āḷvār visualizes Him thus, ‘Wearing the red clouds as vestments, the crimson sun as crown, the cool moon and many-splendoured stars spangled all over the sky, with bright coral lips, and green radiance spreading like emerald mountains, You lie in the arms of the sea-lord, wearing a yellow vestment, a crown and many golden jewels, the red of your eyes and lips glowing, the green of your body over-powering the red, in the middle of the Ocean of Milk on a serpent with many hoods, with a lotus on your navel, in deep sleep as it were.’ Sri Parāsara Bhattar in his Ranga-rājasthavam describes the beauty of Lord Ranganātha as follows: *“Sristhanābharanam tejah: Sri Rangēśamāśrayē I Chinthāmani ivodhvāntam Utsanghē Ananthabhoghinah .: II”* (S.R.S.P.S-8). ‘I take refuge in the Lord Who reclines on Ādiśeṣa’s lap like a jewel regurgitated by him, shining bright like the jewel ‘Chinthāmani’ adorning the bosom of Divine Mother at Srirangam’. Āḷvār says of the ornaments adorning the Lord, ‘Mudipoon mudhalāmēdhagu palkalananindhu’-. These are so many that Āḷvār can only use a generic term, ‘palkalan’. In a similar manner, Sri Ramanuja also in his ‘Śaranāgathi Gadyam’ describing the Lord’s jewels, says *“Svochhita vividha vichitra ananta āscharya nitya niravadya niratiśaya sukha-sparśa niratiśaya oujvalya kirita makuta chūtāvatamsa makarakundalagraovēyakahāra... aparimithadivyaabhūṣana,”* The Āḷvār thus describes the ‘lavanya’, ‘paratva’ and ‘soulabhya’ of the Lord in this pāsuram.

In the second verse, Āḷvār reveals the difference between the pleasures of the world and heaven and all lordships and ‘siddhis’ or attainments, and the exalted path of devotion to, and worship of, the Divine feet of the Lord whose sovereignty is so fully established by Trivikrama. In the third verse, Āḷvār prays that ‘Bhagavad-bhakti’ must flower into ‘bhāgavatha-bhakti’, devotion to the Lord’s devotees, “*Tanimād Deivarkkadiyār*”. In the fourth verse, Āḷvār imparts the message that such devotion should continue through aeons. The fifth hymn gives a grand description of the ‘viṣvarūpa darśana’, the omni-pervasive Form of Vāmana’s transformation as Trivikrama in His colossal stride across the sky and earth, with eyes like the lotus garden in bloom, wearing a crown like an infinite-rayed thousand suns, and with a thousand shoulders like the ‘kalpaka’ forest. The vision of the Lord as Trivikrama is again of a protective Deity Who is tender.

The sixth hymn is an indictment of the common worldly weakness of running after lowly goals, which he paraphrases as “*Īnrōlirukka manainirātti*”, or ‘adoring the wooden doll whilst the mother who brought him forth is before one’. Āḷvār winds up his Prabandham by making a solemn determination to worship the Supreme Lord alone for He is the Cause, the One Being Who unaided creates all living beings and matter in perfect freedom and perfection, sustains, redeems, loves and succours. He is our Lord Who, after ingesting Rudra, Brahma, the sun, moon, the earth, sky, water etc. in safe upkeep, during ‘pralaya’ quietly rests on a banyan leaf. ‘Do we have any other God than He’?, asks the Āḷvār, as reply to the Vedic poser, “*Kasmai Devāya haviṣām Vidhēma*”? “To which God shall we offer our oblation?”

Peria Tiruvandādhī, the third of the “*Iyal*” Prabandhams of Svāmi Nammāḷvār, comprising eighty seven pāsūrams

is said to be the essence of Atharvana Veda. In general, the purpose of the whole work is to instruct the mind to worship the greatness of God. It is intended to make the mind attain to its real 'svarūpa-jñāna', and make it bathe fully in the waters of Divine qualities, goodness, greatness and love. This is a kind of 'avaghāhasnāna', a spiritual dip in the cool waters of the Lord's "*kalyāna-gunās*", His infinite auspicious qualities, beauty and majesty. The work is called 'Peria' in this absolute sense to describe the greatness of the Divine Lord, Whom the Upaniṣads describe as, "*Yasmātparam nāparamasti kincit*".....- (M.N.Up.- 12.3.3), 'He beyond Whom there is nothing greater or smaller', and His auspicious qualities. So the object of the Prabandham is 'Bhagavad-gunānubhavam'. Āḷvār basks in the radiance of the Lord's 'gunās' which are greater than the Lord. And to the extent that he instructs not only his mind and heart to soak in that experience, "*Mundhutra nenjē`iyatruvāy emmodu nee koodi*"- (P.T.-1), 'O, my surging heart, join with us in singing', (this hymn), but seeks to share that experience for the greater good of all 'samsāris', the Āḷvār and his Prabandham which he himself describes at the end, as "*Sīr Kalandha Sol*", are the greatest of all. So in every way, this eminently qualifies to be called as Peria Tiruvandādhi.

In the first Prabandham Tiruviruttam, Āḷvār desired that the obstacles to 'Bhagavadhanubhavam' in the form of 'samsāric' bondage should get sundered by the Lord's grace. In Tiruvāsiriyam, Āḷvār soaked in the 'svarūpa-rūpa-vibhūti' of the Lord, which the Lord manifested to him in His multi-splendored magnificence. In this Prabandham, his desire is whetted further inducing in him a desire to dwell on the Lord's auspicious qualities, and articulate them. By way of contrasting the Āḷvār's internal states in all the four Prabandhams, Nampillai in his Īdu introduction, cites the parallel of Bharathāḷvān in

Srimad Ramayanam. Bharatha returned to Ayodhya from his maternal uncle's kingdom with all eagerness to serve the Lord, only to confront the rude shock of the news of Rama's departure to the forest. That is Āḷvār's state in Tiruviruttam. Bharatha left for the forest with a huge entourage to bring Rama back all the while thinking, 'My brother cannot bear to see my tears; if he sees this whole crowd in tears all united in a singular chorus of clamour for his return, would he still not show grace and accede to our prayer to return and accept the crown'? That is the state in Tiruvāsiriyam. Bharatha's state in Nandhigrām living his life in total devotion and servitude to the Lord's 'pādukas', and in eager anticipation of the Lord's return, is comparable to Āḷvār's Peria Tiruvandādhi state. Āḷvār's state in Tiruvāymoḷi is akin to Bharatha's life of carefree service to the Lord after his return to Ayodhya and coronation.

In the first verse, Āḷvār addresses 'his heart to join him in singing the praise, and weaving the glories, of the 'kāya' flower-hued Lord, with a string of passionate words'. The mind's co-operation is enlisted first since that is the instrument with which only, one can engage in 'Bhagavad-gunānubhavam'. As soon as the Āḷvār sets out to do that, he is overtaken by a sense of limitation, in a spirit of 'naichyā-bhāva' – 'admission of one's limitation'. So he says, 'If I speak about the Supreme, I would be belittling His greatness. If I did not praise him, then I would not have done it. If we tried to revere Him, that might be like reviling Him; if we did not we would not have revered. O Lord, do not get angry with us. It is our delusion due to terrible sin that makes us praise or not praise you.'- (P.T.-2). How can words describe One Whom the mind cannot grasp?, 'Yato vāchō nivartantē, aprāpya manasā saha'- (T.Up.-A`n- 9). Thus all efforts to praise God adequately are bound to fail and appear as mere

mockery of His real nature. Yet it is God Who beckons to us to offer our salutations to Him, and this because, He is supremely felicitous and easily pleased with our words of praise, however inadequate. Āļvār says that it is not within his competence not to praise, or dwell on, or describe Him. It is independent of him, he cries, “...ennāl seyarpālādhu en ?”- (P.T.-3). It is a natural and instinctive demonstration of a child’s love towards a loving, doting, mother or father because the child does not know of any thing other than that love, touch and expression. Āļvār says, “*Petrathāy Neeyē Pirappitta Thandhai Nee, matraiyrāvārum*”, (P.T.-5), ‘You are the Mother who brought me forth. You are the Father who gave me life. You alone thus are all to me.’ ‘Why have you brought us forth? Is it not for granting refuge to us from our sins’, asks the Āļvār in verse 6. Āļvār thus proceeds in his absorption with the Lord, flitting from topic to topic. There are several types of invocations and appeals to the Divine to come closer to the soul and make it His servant. Āļvār, then describes the ‘puruṣārtham’ of his worship at the feet of the Lord, in pāsuram 54, “*Vānō Marikadalō.....*...”, *in terms of ‘the complete disappearance of all miseries without a trace’*, “...*van thuyarai marungu kandilum*”. ‘He wonders where they went – into space, ocean, or winds, or fire’. ! In verse 68, Āļvār says that the ‘Supreme Lord of black hue, has entered my lowly heart, never to leave’, “...*Ul pughundu Nīnghān Adiyēnadhu Ullathaham*.” He wonders if it is because His mountain abode, the Milk ocean, and celestial abode, have become desolate wastelands.!, “*Pullenenru Ozhindhana kol? Ē pāvam*”. Then comes what is arguably the most provocative verse of this Prabandham in pāsuram 75, which reads as follows. “*Puviyum Iruviśumbum Ninnakatta Nee en Seviyin vazhi pukundu Ennullāy—avivinri Yān Perian Nee Periyay enbhadanai Yārarivār? Oonparughu Nēmiyāy*

Ullu.,” ‘The earth, and the expansive sky exist in You. You reside in my heart having entered into me through my ears. As between us, without doubt, I am greater; who knows about Your greatness. Ponder: O wearer of the Sudarśana which drinks enemies’ blood.’ Āļvār says ‘Avivinri’, meaning there is no doubt on this as far as he is concerned. He also quizzically challenges the Lord to ponder his claim. Scholars aver that the reconciliation to this daringly enigmatic poser by the Āļvār to the Lord, is to be found in Tiruvāymoļi pāsuram 9.6.10. *“Vārikkondu Unnai vizhunghuvan kānilenru ārvutra ennaiozhiya ennilmunnam pārittu Thān ennai mutrapparukinān.....”* I thought, *“If ever I see Him, I would gobble Him”*. But before that, He got the better of me and quickly drank me up.’ What transpired was that the mere thought of gobbling up the Lord like a dish made the Āļvār melt like liquid, and the Lord hastened to drink him in a trice since His love for the Āļvār was even stronger than the latter’s for the Lord. So in this manner, Āļvār graciously accepts the primacy of the Lord.

Finally, Āļvār sets out the message of the Prabandham in Pasuram 86, which asks what better way, if any, is available to the ‘samsāris’ to end all their ‘kārmic’ misery, other than dwelling on the glories of the Lord through ‘these excellent and emancipating words’. *“..... Seerkalandha sol ninaindhu pōkkārēl soozhvinayin āzhthuyarai, en ninaindhu pōkkuvar ippōdhu”*?. The earlier part of this verse describes the glorious Lord as, *“Kārkalandha Mēniyān, Kai kalandha Āzhiyān, Pārkalandha Val Vayittrān Pāmbhana iyān”*’, The Lord of sable hue, the Wielder of Sudarśana, the Lord Who swallowed the universe, the Lord Who reclines on Adisēṣa.’ These describe respectively, i. the beauty of the Lord’s body, *“Tirumēni śobhai”*, ii. the beauty of His ornaments, *“Ābharana-śobhai”* and *“virōdhi-niraśana,”*, iii. His protective power *“raksha-*

katvam” and *“Āpatsakatvam*”, and, iv. His Overlordship, *“Sarva-Śēṣitvam*. The words, *“Sīrkalandha Sol*” refer to the Prabandham. But in a ‘svāpadesa’ sense, this term has also been taken in juxtaposition with the Lord’s glory as described above. In this sense, this would read as *“Kārkalandha Mēniyān... Sīr kalandha Sol*” namely the Avatāra of Sri Rama and Srimad Ramayana. Similarly, the second description *“Kai kalandha Āzhiyān*” etc, refers to the ‘Avatāra’ of Sri Krishna Who was born with Sudarśana and Śankha, and the words *“Sīr kalandha Sol*” here, refer to Sri Bhāgavatham, Viṣṇupurānam, etc. *“Pārkalandha Palvayittrān Sīrkalandha Sol*” refers to the *“Vyuha”* state of the Lord as Sankarṣana and His *“Sarvēśvaratvam*”, and Sruti, Smṛiti etc. and Pambhanaiyān..... *Sīrkalandha Sol*” refers to *“Nityavibhūti*”, and *“Mōkṣa-pradatvam and Mukta-prāpyam*” and ‘Pancarātra texts etc. Thus, Svāmi Nammālvār has sought to present in this Prabandham, the Lord as the Beautiful and Beatitude. It is to the surpassing beauty and delight and infinity of the Lord, that he offers himself and exhorts us to offer ourselves, heart and soul for the bliss of everlasting service at His feet.

Taniyans.

Tiruvāymoḷi Taniyans.

1. Composed by Nāthamunigal:

*“Bhakthāmṛtham Viśvajānānumōdhanam
Sarvārthadam Sri Satakōpavāṅg- mayam I
Sahasraśākhōpaṇiṣatsamāgamam Namāmyaham
Drāvidaveda-sāgharam II”*

I bow to the Ocean like ‘Drāvidaveda’ song of the thousand-branched *“Sāma-veda”* essence of ‘Chāndogyōpaṇiṣad’, sung by Satakōpa, which is all-meaning- ful, a veritable nectar for devotees, and joy to the world’s populace.

2. Composed by Ísvaramunigal

*“Tiruvazhudhinādenrum Thenkurugurenrum
maruviniya vannporunal- enrum, Arumaraigalandādhi
seythānadiyinayē sindhiyāy nenjē thelindhu.”*

O my heart, meditate always on the sacred feet of Satakōpa who rendered the Vedas in Tamil, the Vazhuudhi land Kurugur, and the sweet waters of Tāmira- parani river.

3. Composed by Sottai Nambigal.

*“Manattālum Vāyālum Vannkurugurpēnum inattāray
yallādhiraiñjēn Dhanattālumēdhumkuraivilēn Enthai
Satakōpan Pādhangal Yāmudaiya-patru”.*

I shall not seek or praise anyone save those who think and speak adoringly of the great Kurugur saint Satakopa. I am not wanting in wealth, as I have my Father Satakopan’s feet as my refuge.

4. Composed by Anantālvān.

*“Eindha perunkīrthi Rāmānusamunithan
vāyndhamalarppādham Vanan-ghukinrēn, Āyndhaperum
seerār Satakōpan Sentamizh Vēdamtharikkum
pērāthaullam pera.”*

I bow to the feet of Muni Ramanuja of lasting fame, that I may be blessed with the heart to cherish the pure Tamil Vedas of Sri Satakopa.

5. Composed by Parāsara Bhattar.

*“Mikka irai nilaiyum meyyām uyir nilaiyum thakka
neriyum thadayāgitthokk- iyalum Oozhvinaiyum
Vāzhvinaiyum ōdhum Kurugaiyarkōn Yazhinisai
Vēdattiya.”*

The nature of god-head, nature of the soul, the path of worship, the obstacles and the means of overcoming

them--- these are the five truths expounded by the Lord of Kurugur in song, sweet as the 'Yāzh,' and of the substance of the Vedas.

6. Tiruviruttam Taniyan.

Composed by Kitāmbiyācchān

*"Karuviruttakkuzhi neetthapin kāmakkadunkuzhi
veezhndu, Oruviruttampukkuzhaluruvīr, Uyirin porulkat
Koruviruttampughudhāmal Kurugaiyar Kōnuraitta
Tirviruttattthōradikkatrīr Tirunāttakatthe".*

O People who take birth in the tomb of the womb, and suffer in the bottom-less pit of desires, becoming decrepit with age ! Save your souls from this cycle, and learn atleast one line from Kurugur Lord's Tiruviruttam, earning the passage to Vaikunta.

7. Tiruvāsiriyam Taniyan.

Composed by Sri Arulāpperumāl Emperumānār.

*"Kasiniyōr thām vāzhakkaliyugattē Vandhu Uditta
Āsiriappā Adhanāl Arumarai Nool Virittānaidh
Dēsikanai Parānkusanai Thigazhvaghulattārānai
Māsu Adaiyā manattu vaittu maravāmal Vāzhtudhumē."*

Cherish in your flawless hearts and praise the Vakula-flower clad great Āchārya Parānkusa who came in the Kali age and showered grace on the denizens of this earth with a discourse on Vedic texts set in Āsiriappa, so they may find salvation.

8. Peria Tiruvandādhi Taniyan

Composed by Emperumānār.

*"Munduttra Nenjē muyatrittharithuraitsu,
Vandittu Vāyāra Vāzhthiyē Chandha
Murugurum Sōlai soozh moimpoomporunal
Kurugūrān Māran Pēr Kooru."*

O Eager Heart ! Worship and praise the names of Māran Satakōpan, Lord of Kurugur set amidst fragrant, nectar-dripping groves and sweet waters, and bestir to cherish and recite his hymn.

Svāmi Sri Vedānta Desikan – Prayer to Sri Satakōpan,

***“Yasya Sārasvatam Srōtō Vakulāmōdhavāsitam I
Srutīnām Visramāyālam Śātārim tamupāsmahē” II
(Yatirājasaptati- 4)***

***‘May we worship Sri Satakōpa the torrent of whose
‘vakula’ flower-
smelling hymns adequately provide rest to the Vedic
scriptures.”***

5

Madhurakavi Āļvār.

It is singularly significant that the name Madhurakavi meaning 'sweet-tongued poet' is borne among the twelve Āļvārs only by the one who sang eleven verses of the most exquisite poetry in all, in praise of his own Āchārya Sri Nammāļvār. This hymn called "*Kanninun Siruthāmbu*", so named since it begins with these words, which figures as a Prabandham in the first group of thousand pāsuras called 'Mudhalāyiram', has been extolled by Sri Vedānta Desikan as "*Arumaraigal Tamiļ Seithān Thālēkondu Thunbatra Madhurakavi Tōnrakkāttum Thol Vazhi*", (A.S.-2), 'The royal road shown by suffering-free Madhurakavi with the grace of the feet of the One who rendered the Vedas in Tamil.' Sri Manavālamāmunigal who equates this Prabandham to the middle term "*Namah:*" in Tirumantra, in his Upadesarathina Mālai, observes that the learned teachers included this like a central gem in "*Aruliccheyal*" which refers to Divyaprabandham.

Madhurakavi begins his hymn by singing that his tongue by uttering the name of 'Kurugur Nambi', experiences a nectarine sweetness not attainable by uttering the name of the Lord Himself. Madhurakavi draws from the Krishnāvathāra episode of the wonder Lord submitting Himself to Yasoda meekly to be bound to a mortar by a small rope of several joints. "*Kanninun Siruthāmbināl Kattunnappanniya Perumāyan*". The reason why he refers to this is because, it is this vision which had haunted and enraptured his master Nammāļvār to go into a trance for six months in recalling this episode in his line "*Uralinōdu Inaindhu Irundhu Ēnghiya Elivu-Etthiram*"- (T.V.M.-1.3.1), how deceptively easily

He allowed Himself to be bound to the mortar', and *"Annai Kōlkola, Nee Un Thāmaraiikkangal nīr malgha paiyavēnilaiyum vandhu En nenjai Urukkunghalē"*, (T.V.M-5.10.3), 'Your standing in fear at the sight of Your mother picking up a stick, with tears rolling down Your lotus eyes,- this melts `my heart.'. Madhurakavi cites this to watch the Āļvār's face blossom in joy and wonder at the Lord's felicity and love. He is the Lord Who is the means for the bound souls to attain liberation from 'samsāric' bondage, but He submitted Himself to be bound out of love. Madhurakavi's mind which envisions the Lord in his mind's eye in this state, instead of settling there, shifts to his master, the very reference word of whom as *"Thenkurugur Nambi"* evokes a nectarine sweetness in him which he can feel on his tongue, *"En nāvukkē"*, and which is even sweeter than the Lord's. The master is the ultimate post of bliss, hence he is 'Nambi' who is the fullness of 'jñāna' and 'bhakti'. In the second pāsūram, Madhurakavi swears that he knows of no other God than his master, *"Thēvu matrariyēn"*, and his mission is to wander singing the musical hymns of Tiruvāymoḷi pāsūrams of his master Kurugur Nambi. *"Kurugur Nambi pāvin innisai pādittirivanē"*. In the earlier part of the verse, he says that he has taken to the golden feet of the Āļvār both as the pursuit and the goal, ('prāpaka-prāpya') not only here in this world, but in Vaikunta also. *"Mēvinēn Avan Ponnadi Meimmayē"*. *"Nāthāya Nāthamunaiyē atra paratra chāpi, nityam yadhīya charanou saranam madhīyam"*, (S.R.- 3). 'To me, my lord Nāthamuni's feet are the refuge not only here, but also in Paramapadha', sings Svāmi Ālavandār. Nammāļvār in his decads, *"Payilum Sudaroli"*, *"Nedumārku Adimai"*, (T.V.M.-3.7. and 8.10), affirms that devotion to the Lord's devotees is the ultimate defining pointer of devotion to the Lord.

Since that is the state most cherished by his master, Madhurakavi looks upon his own master as that preeminent devotee of Lord's devotees. So the master is his God and he knows of no other God. Sri Sahasranāma Adhyāya of Mahabhāratham undescores the fact that what the Achārya has favourably followed is appropriate to follow for others endowed with 'satva gunas'. Yudishtira after listening to all the instructions from Bhīshma, knowing what his grand father viewed and followed as the supreme goal and path in life, was appropriate for him also to follow, asked him, *"among the 'dharmas', what do you consider as the supreme"?*, and got the reply, that praying to and worshipping the lotus-eyed Lord was the supreme dharma of all. *"Eṣa mē Sarva dharmānām Dharmah: Adhika tamo mathah:I Yath bhakhyā Pundarikākṣam sthavai: archēn narah: sādha'II"*. Rama Who is described in the Ramayana in the words, *"Maryādhānām ca lokasya Kartā ca kārayithā ca"*, (S.R.Sun.Ka.- 35:11)., 'follower and enforcer of the societal discipline.' exemplified this by demonstrating adherence to the common or general dharma of obeying the father's dictat etc. *"Sa jagāhma vanam Vīrah: pratiḡyām anupālayan piturvachana nirdhesāth....."* (S.R. Bala- 1:24). Lakshmana sought to follow the special dharma of service to the Lord, with his prayer to Sri Rama, *"Kurushva mām anucaram vaidharmyam nēha vidyatē....."*, (S.R. Ayo. 31;22), and seeking in the process the 'puruṣakāram' of Divine Mother, *"Bhavāṁstu saha Vaidēhyā ghirisānushu ramsyatē, Aham sarvam karishyāmi jāgrathah: svapadascatē II,"* 'Pray make me your servant, there is no infraction in this. I will perform all service to you and Vaidehi,.....'. Bharata, on the other hand, chartered a different course from Lakshmana in implicitly following what the Lord desired him to do, with his assurance to the Lord. *"Rājyam ca tava rakshēyam Aham vėlēva sāgaram prati jānāmi tē Vīra mābhūvam*

vīralokabāk“ - (S.R. Ayo.23:37), ‘O, Braveheart, Like the shore to the ocean, I swear to protect you and the kingdom, otherwise, may I not stay in your kingdom but depart for the world to which King Dasarata went.’ By comparing himself to the shore of the ocean, Bharata hints that the ocean also will be bound by its own dharma of keeping within the shores. Thus Bharata exemplified the special dharma of implicitly complying with the servitude that the Master desires of the servant. This is ‘Bhagavad-pāratantryam’. Śatrugna who knew of no one other than Bharatha, followed the dharma of being the servant of the Lord’s devotee. The ‘pramānam’ or proof for this is to be found in the lines, “*Gachatha Māthulakulam Bharatēna thathā Anagha; Śatrugna nitya Śatrugnah: Nītah: preetipuraskritah: II.*” (S.R. Ayo.1:1).’ Śatrugna, faultless and winner over the adversarial sense organs, bestirred by (his brother’s) love, was led away by Bharata on his way to his uncle’s place’. The word ‘gaccatha’ is to show that he was a follower without any question of why. ‘Anagah:’ means ‘sinless’, implying not guilty of dividing his loyalty between Bharata and Rama’. To the question whether ‘Rama-bhakti’ can be reckoned in this category, the answer is ‘Rama-bhakti’ is like a gold chain being a ‘punya’, which would rank as much of an obstacle as sin to his goal of exclusive servitude to Bharatha. Did not Sumitra forewarn her son Lakshmana to beware of Rama’s beauty lest he should be distracted from the duty of safeguarding him? Śatrugna is described as ‘nitya Śatrugna’, meaning that he has not only been successful in combating the external enemies, but also in ‘indriya-nigraha’. By ‘Nītah:’, it is meant that he was taken by Bharatha, like any other thing a king might carry with him such as sword etc. Lest it be construed that he followed as some obligatory duty or rule, the sloka says, “*Nītah: Preetipuraskritah:*”, meaning that ‘he

went bestirred with eager anticipation to do service. It is the state that another Āļvār devoutly desired in his soulful prayer to the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, as expressed in his line, “*Padiyāy-kkidandhu Un Pavala Vāykkānbhēnē*”- (P.M.L..T.M- 4.9). In short, like Bharata knew of no one other than Rama, Śatrugna knew of no one other than Bharata. That was exactly how Madhurakavi was in his relationship with Nammāļvār.

In the third pāsuram, Madhurakavi describes how he was blessed with the grace of the Lord of Sri resembling the sable cloud, by virtue solely of being the servant of Kurugur Nambi, rather how the Lord’s grace flowed towards him as a reflected arc from the Āļvār, though he had been wandering singing the songs of the Āļvār. That is because as Sri Krishna says, “*Priyo hi jñāninōtyartam Aham Sa ca Mama Priyah:*”- (B.G.-7.17). ‘To the man of knowledge, I am very dear indeed even as he is dear to Me.’ Since it is reciprocal attraction the Lord’s grace does not stop with the Āļvār but flows towards Madhurakavi as he worships the Āļvār as his God. God’s love and grace thus was the bonanza that Madhurakavi received as a result of his being the ‘ananyārha-śeṣa-bhūtha’ to the Āļvār, since Madhurakavi in the beginning of the verse, says, “*Thiritandhākilum Tevapirānuday karia kolat tiruvuru Kānban Nān*”. ‘Thiridhal’ has also the connotation of ‘returning’. In this context, it could also be taken to mean that Madhurakavi who has been wandering immersed in the songs of Āļvār, shifted focus from the songs to the subject of the songs namely the Divine Lord. Madhurakavi describes his gain as “*Nambikku Āl Uriyanāy Adiyēn petra Nanmaiye*”. The ‘yē’ at the end underscores Madhurakavi’s affirmation that the grace of the Lord was due to his being the devoted servant of the Āļvār. He refers to himself as “*Adiyēn*” to indicate his having become a slave to the Āļvār’s compassion and grace.

In the fourth verse, Madhurakavi speaks of himself in the first two lines, in 'naichyabhāva' as a person of straw or worthless merit even in the most generous reckoning of evolved Vedic scholars who always sift for the good in others, discarding all that is bad in them. Sri Satakōpan on the other hand is like a mother who can only think of doing what is dear to the child, and father who can only think of what is good for the child, and hence he is my master and rules over me. Madhurakavi calls the Āḷvār as Satakōpan here implying thereby that by virtue of his touch, all that lack of merit in him vanished, making him worthy of becoming the devoted servant of the Āḷvār.

In the fifth pāsura, Madhurakavi introspects on the contrast between his past and the present. Time was when he had arrogated as his own what belonged to someone else, "*Nambinēn Pirar nanporul tannaiyum*". What is meant here is that he was under the delusion of 'dehātmabhīmāna', which is equivalent to stealing one's 'ātmā' from the Lord that rightfully belongs to Him. 'Pirar' here refers to the Lord, "*Uttamaha: Purusha: Anyah: Paramātmā iti Udhāhridah:-*" (B.G.- 15.17). 'Nanporul' refers to a 'thing', which means 'ātman' that is one of the nine things included in 'dravya', the others being earth, water, fire, air, space, time, direction, and mind. "*Yōnyathā santham Ātmānam anyathā prati padhyatē I Kim Thēna nakritam pāpam chōrēna ātmāpa-hārināII-*" (Bha-Udyo. Par.- 42:35). 'He who deems the 'self' that belongs to another differently meaning as 'his', commits the act of stealing his 'self'. What sin then, is not committed by him'. In a parallel thought, Sri Vedānta Desikan says, "*Ajanishi śiramādhōu hanta ! Dēhēndriyādhi:, tadhanu tadhadhikasan īśvarōham bhabhūva I Atha Bhagavatha ēvābhūvam - arthāth idhānīm tava punaraham āsam Pādhukē ēdhanyajanmā*"- (Pādhuka-Sahas- 997, (Phala paddhathi). In this sloka, Swami Desikan describes four

stages, first one characterized by “*Sarīra- āthma brama*” mistaking the body for the ‘jivāthma’, second ‘svatantra- āthma brama’ which he terms as the thought of ‘īśvarōham bhabhūva’ or being god himself, the third being ‘Bhagavad-śēṣa bhutha’, and the fourth, ‘Bhāgavatha-śēṣa bhutha’. Then life assumed meaning, “*Thava-punaraham āsam dhanya-janmā*”. Thus he expresses gratitude to the Lord’s ‘pādhukas’ for this transformation. Madhurakavi also says that he went through the first two phases, which led to his being driven by his senses to seek the pleasures of women, “*Nambinēn madavāraiymellām. Fortunately, that was all before.*” His transformation came in finding his niche in the Āļvār’s feet and his love that is full of auspicious qualities. Madhurakavi says at the end ‘Sadirthēn inrē’ meaning his finding fulfillment in ‘Bhagavad’ and ‘Bhāgavatha’ ‘śēṣatvam’. Incidentally, it is Madhurakavi who has taught us by this hymn to refer to the Achārya as ‘Nambi’ and to respond with ‘Adiyēn’ to Achārya’s call.

In the previous two verses, Madhurakavi recounted his ‘sins’ of omission and commission, and how that elicited Āļvār’s compassionate enlistment of him into his fold, and the consequent love and grace he found at his feet. As if anticipating the question from those around, ‘what if those sins should return to haunt you due to your association with this body’ ?, Madhurakavi says, that his sins left not due to his performing any ‘sādhana’, but due to the approving grace of the Āļvār. Anything contrary could happen only in the unlikely event of that changing. But he is positive that Āļvār would never forsake him. So in the sixth verse Madhurakavi speaks about the special grace Āļvār conferred on him, which was being chosen to extoll the auspicious qualities of the Āļvār from that very moment when Āļvār’s grace descended on him through all future births. “*Inru thottum, ezhumaiyum Empirān ninru*

tanpugazh êttha Arulinān". Madhurakavi addresses the Āļvāras "*Empirān*", which is evocative of Āļvār's description of the Lord as "*Pirān Perunilam Kīndavan*"- (T.V.M.-1.7.6), 'Lord Who as Varāha bored into the 'pralaya' waters to pick up and carry the earth to safety on His tusk'. Since Āļvār's greatness and grace was such that his experience contained within it the Lord's too, Madhurakavi says, "*tan pugazh êttha*". The term "*Arulinān*" implies that the Āļvār's grace flowed spontaneously like Āļvār himself had described the Lord's grace in the words, "*Mayarvara madhinalan Arulinen*"- (T.V.M.- 1. 1.1). Madhurakavi says in the last line, "*enrum ennai ighazhvilan kānminē*", that Āļvār's heart would never forsake him or tire of him.

In the seventh verse, he again gratefully acknowledges the grace he had received from his master who notwithstanding all failings of the disciple, set at nought all the long-embedded 'kārmic' impressions in him, though he himself had been oblivious to Āļvār's greatness whom he addresses here, as "*Kārimārappirān*", "*Pirān*" again underlining his benefaction to him. So in the next two lines, he vows to speak about the grace of Satakōpan for all the eight directions to hear. Madhurakavi's use of the term, "*Endisaiyum*" is symbolic for all ten directions. He describes the Āļvār's grace as "*Ontamizh Satakōpan Arul*", meaning that his grace towards him transcended even his grace in rendering the Vedas in sweet Tamil.

The reason for his resolve to spread the fame and name of Āļvār is indicated in the next pāsura. "*Arul Kondādum Adiyavar Inbura Arulinān Avvarumaraiyin Porul, Arul kondu Āyiram Intamizh Pādinān Arul Kandīr Ivuvulaginil Mikkathē*", (8).

'That the (Lord's) devotees who celebrate and wear His grace like a talisman may enjoy everlasting bliss, the Lord as Sri Krishna, rendered the substance of the Vedas

in the Bhagavad Gita. In light of the grace of the Lord, Āļvār sang in mellifluous Tamil the same Vedas in one thousand verses of Tiruvāymoļi. His grace abides on this earth as the greater grace.' *"Arulkondādum Adiyavar"*, refers to those like the Āļvār, as he refers to himself as *"Arul peruvār Adiyārtam Adiyan..."*- (T.V.M.-10.6.1). 'They are devotees who live by their faith in Lord's constant grace as their sole sustaining factor'. In *"Arulinān Avvarumaraiyin porul"*, the term 'Porul' refers to the message of 'sādhana' as love, and 'kainkarya' as the 'puruṣārtha'. *"Arulinān"* - what is the fruit of that grace which is attaining the bliss of the 'Ānandasvarūpa' of the Divine described as *"Rasovaisah:"* and *"Sarvarasah:"*, (Tait- An-7 & Ch.-3.14.2.). *"Padinān Arul kandīr"*- Āļvār was endowed with *"mayarvara madhinalam"* by the Lord. Āļvār out of his melting compassion for the hapless souls left bereft by the Lord Himself, sang his Tiruvāymoļi to reclaim and redeem them. His grace towers over the three 'tatvās' of 'acit', 'cit' and 'Īśvara', so Madhurakavi calls it, *"Ivvulaginil Mikkadhē"*. There is a story attributed to one Nambi Tiruvazhudhi Nādu Dāsar to emphasise that Tiruvāymoļi commanded greater acclaim than Bhagavad Gita. He used to say that if a Gita scholar went to a congregation of scholars he would be given a bushel of rice and allowed to rest on the 'tinnai' or platform outside the house. If a Tiruvāymoļi scholar went to a village reciting verses therefrom, he would be ceremonially received with temple honours and the house of a local nobleman vacated for him to stay and to be respectfully served.

In the ninth pāsuram, Madhurakavi first stresses Āļvārs Tiruvāymoļi as the essence of the Vedas. Secondly, he acknowledges how Āļvār has driven that essence home into the hearts of the listeners, *"nirkkappādi en nenjul niruttinān"*. Finally, he expresses his gratitude to the

atleast 'is there any `merit in a person to receive instruction?', so one would ask. What is the reason for a spiritual preceptor then to impart instruction of the 'hita' etc to others. It is because he cannot bear to see them go awry. Are there any who have given 'upadēśa' like this?. Achārya Hrudayam of Nāyanār cites examples, "*Thāikkum, Maganukkum, Thambikkum, Ivarkkum Ivaradi Paninthavarkkumē Ivai Ullana*"- (A.H.-204), 'this is valid only in the case of the mother meaning Sita, son meaning Prahlād, brother standing for Vibhīshana, 'Ivar' or he referring to Nammāļvār, and 'Ivar Adi' meaning Emperumānār. These are the only ones who out of their benevolence and compassion, ('nirhētuka krupā) sought to correct and redeem the errant souls. "*Pani Kolvān*", he would ignite the fire in them in matters of service in the cause of the Lord and His devotees, 'Bhagavad-Bhāgavatha kincitkāram'. "*Kuyil ninru āl pozhil*", 'even the cuckoos nesting in the gardens of Tirukkurugur would sing Āļvār's Tiruvāymoļi. "*Undhan moykazharkku anbhayē muyalkinrēn*", Madhurakavi says, 'I strive to love thy feet more and more.' Madhurakavi is at a loss how he can serve the feet of his master adequately, even as Āļvār pleads in a similar vein with the Lord, in the words, "*Ennai thee manam keduthāy enseigēn*", (T.V. M.-2.7.8.), 'You made my heart pure, what can I do?'

The last pāsuraṁ is the benediction of Madhurakavi Āļvār to all those who believe in this Prabandham that they will be blessed with eternal bliss in the Lord's abode of Vaikunta. The verse is as follows: "*Anbhan thannai adaindhavar katkellām Anbhan Thenkurugurnagar Nambikku Anbhanāy Madhurakavi Sonna Sol Nambhuvārpādhi Vaikuntham Kānminē*".-11. The Lord is described as "*Anbhan*" since his love or 'vāthsalyam' is common to all as the universal Father, "*Sarvēśānāmēva lokānām Pithā Mātha ca Mādhava:.....*"- (Bha. Āraṇ,-192:56), 'Madhava is

the Father, Mother, to all people'. Āḷvār's love and devotion is towards all those who are the Lord's devotees seven times over, "*Adiyārادیārtham Adiyārادیār thamakadiyār-tham Adiyārادیyōnghalē* "- (T.V.M.-3.7.10). Madhurakavi refers to himself as "*Thenkurugurnagar Nambikku Anbhan*"- 'his love towards his Achārya' is tantamount to love towards the Lord. As the Lord has said, "*Udhārāḥ: Sarva ēvaitē Jñāni tu Āthmaiva Mē matham I.....*" (B.G.-7.18), 'All are indeed noble, but the man of realization, I regard as My very Self.' Devotion to the Āchārya is devotion shown to all and pleases all. "*Achāryavān Puruṣō Vēdha*"- (Cha. Up.-6.14.2), 'One who has an Achārya understands'. First and foremost, it is the Āchārya who removes ignorance and imparts spiritual knowledge. He is again the one who mediates in our behalf 'puruṣakāra', with the Lord. Then he lights the path of the disciple by his 'anuṣṭāna' or 'practice', "*ācinōti ca svayam ācharathi*". Thus he is the teacher, mediator, facilitator, exemplar, and one can obtain the approving grace of the Lord only due to and through, the grace of the Āchārya, So Madhurakavi Āḷvār rounds up his Prabandham holding out the promise of paradise to all who have implicit faith in his words.

"Siddhi: bhavathi vānēti samśaya: Achyuta Sēvinām, na samśaya: asti Tad Bhaktha paricharyārathātmanām"- (Sandilya Smriti- 1:95). 'There is some element of doubt on whether the worshippers of Lord Achyuta may attain 'mōkṣa pada', but there is no doubt for those who are servants of the Lord's devotees.' Hence, the Lord is deemed as 'prathama parva' or the first recourse, whereas the Achārya is looked upon as the ultimate recourse, 'caramaparva' The Lord comes in the person of the Achārya Himself becoming the way-faring ferry to help cross the ocean of 'samsāra'. "*Gurumūrtya Stitha: sākshāt Bhagavān Purushottama: Uddhārāyati samsārāttad Upāyaplavēna tu II*".

Nambi Tiruvazhuudhi Valanādu Dāsar used to say that the words, “*Nambhuvārpādhi Vaikuntham*”, could also be taken to mean that the places where such believers lived, would themselves become “*Vaikuntham*”. Has not Āļvār himself sung, “*Uraikkavallārkkku Vaikunthamāgum Thammūrellām*”- (T.V.M.-5.3.11), ‘those who sing this, will find their Vaikuntham wherever they live’. It used to be said by ‘Petri’, (Contemporary of Kūrathāļvān), that ‘samsāra’ and ‘Paramapadha’ became one and the same, without a dividing wall as it were, or as was actually said, “*Samsāramum Paramapadhamum idaichuvar thalli Oru Poghi āyittrukkān*”. “*Poghi*” refers to the experience of the ‘Vaikunta’.

The remarkable identity that runs in the thought and expression between the disciple Madhurakavi and the Master Nammāļvār is highlighted below.

M. “*Annikkum Amdhūrum*”, (K.S.T.-1); N. “*Appolzhuthikkappozhudhu Ennārāvamudhē*”- (T.V.M.- 2.5.4).

M. “*Nāvināl navittrinbham eithinēn*”, (K.S.T.- 2) ; N. “*Mālukku nāvudaiyērkkku māruladhō*”- (T.V.M.- 6.4.9.).

M. “*Mēvinēn Avan Ponnadi*”, (K.S.T.- 2) ; N. “*Adikkīzhamarndhu Pukunthēnē*” (T.V.M.- 6.10.10).

M. “*Tēvumatrariyēn*”, (K.S.T.-2); N. “*Kannan Allāl Deivamillai*”, (T.V.M.- 5.2.7.),

M. “*Pādittirivānē*”, N. “*Pādi ilappilam*”, (T.V.M.- 1.7.10).

M. “*Thirithandhākilum*”, (K.S.T.-3); N. “*Ingē thirindhērkkku*”- (T.V.M.- 8.10.4.).

M. “*Annaiyāy Atthanāy*”, (K.S.T.- 4); N. “*Thāyāyt Thandhaiyāy*”, (T.V.M.- 7.8.1).

M. “*Nambhinēn Pirar nanporul thannaiyum*”, (K.S.T.- 5);

N. “Yānē Enthanathē”, (T.V.M.- 2.9.9.).

M. “Inru thottum ezhumaiyum Empirān”- (K.S.T.- 6); N. “Emar Kīzhmēl ezhupirappum,” (T.V.M.- 2.8.1).

M. “Satakōpan Arulaiyē” (K.S.T.-7); N. “Mayarvara madhinalam Arulinan”- (T.V.M.-1.1.1).

M. “Arul kandīr Ivvulaghinil”, (K.S.T.- 8); N. “Arul Udaiyavan”, (T.V.M.- 2.10.11), M. “Nirkkappādi En nenjul Niruttina`n”, (K.S.T.-9); N. “Pērēnenru En nenju niraiya”, (T.V.M.- 10.8.2),

M. “Ātpukka kādhal Adimaippayan”, (K.S.T.- 9) ; N. “Vazhuvilā Adimai Seyya Vēndum”, (T.V.M.- 3.3.1.)

M “PayananrākilumPanikolvān”, (K.S.T.- 10); N. “Porulallāda Ennai Adimai Kondāy” (T.V.M.- 5.7.3.)

M. “Thenkurugurnagar Nambikku Anbhanāy” (K.S.T.- 11); N. “Malarppāvaikkanbhāghiya En Anbhē”, (T.V.M.- 10.10.7)

M. “Nambhuvārpādhi Vaikuntham”, (K.S.T.-11); N. “Vaikunthamāghum Thammoorellām”, (T.V.M.-5.3.11).

That is how closely the master and the disciple have experienced and expressed their respective interests of “Bhagavad-vishaya” and “Āchārya-vishaya”.

We saw about the life history of Madhurakavi Āļvār in the earlier sketch on Nammāļvār. As described therein, after Nammāļvār ascended to Vaikuntham, Madhurakavi after his work in this world was done, spent his time singing his Prabandhams. He begot an ‘arca vighraha’ of the Āļvār from the waters of the Tāmiraparani river which he installed at the Ādhippirān shrine at Thirukkurgur, and arranged for daily worship and celebrations of special occasions associated with the Āļvār.

It was around then that the Academy of Tamil poets at Madurai summoned him on hearing that he was singing the songs and praises of Nammālvār demanding that he submit the writings of the Ālvār for being subjected to the test on the spinning slat floating on the temple tank in Madurai. Madhurakavi just wrote two lines of the Ālvār from the the verse 10.5.1 of Tiruvāymoḷi, beginning with the words, *“Kannan Kazhalinai”*, meaning, ‘Nāranan is the holy name you have to meditate upon. Besides this, let me affirm ‘there is none to reckon. Take note ye men, yearning for the lovely feet of Kannan, our Lord.’ When the palm leaf containing the above lines was placed on the slat along with manuscripts of all other poets, the slat started spinning. As it gathered speed all the manuscripts starting falling off one by one. When it stopped finally the only leaf that remained thereon was the one which contained the Ālvār’s two lines.

The ‘Sangha’ or academy of poets got a fright if they had not, by their slight of the Ālvār, committed a grave sin. The President of the Academy composed and recited a poem with the words, *“Īyāduvatō Garudarkethirē ? Iravikkethir minminiyāduvatō?nāyāduvathōurumippulimun? “narikesarimunnadaiyāduvatō?peyāduvatōvezhilurvasimun?PerumānadisērVaghulābharananŌrāyiramām araiyin Tamizhin orsorporumō Ulagirkkaviyē?”*. What in effect it meant was to ask if all the poetry in the world could measure upto one word of the Ālvār. In atonement of their sin, all the poets of the academy assembled there, composed poems the first words of which when put together made coherent sense as a tribute to Nammālvār. It read as under: *“Kshemankkurugaiyō seyya Tiruppārkadalō, Nāmam Parānkuśamō Nāranamō`--thāmantulavamō Vaghulamō, Tholirandō Nānghumulavē Perumānukku”*. Madhurakavi Ālvār thus lived his life true to the spirit of the maxim, *“Gurumprakāśayēth Dheemān”*,

and left a legacy of immense value to ‘Sampradāya’, which has been most aptly described by Swami Desikan, as ‘tunbatrathol vazhi’, (A.S.-2) the travail-free, time-tested royal highway to heaven.

Taniyans.

Composed by Sri Nāthamunigal.

*“Avidhitha Vishayāntharas Satārēh; Upaniṣadhām
upaghāna mātra bhogha:*

*Abhicha ghuṇavaṣāth thadhēka śeṣi`, Madhurakavi
hrudayē mamāvirastu.”*

‘May Madhurakavi who is ever immersed in singing the Upaniṣads -like hymns of Āḷvār, who knows of none except him, and drawn by his qualities looks upon him as his sole master, ever abide in my heart.

*“Vēronrum Nān Ariyēn Vēdam Tamiḷ seitha Māran
Satakōpan Vankurugur--*

*Ēruengal Vāzhvāmenru ētthum Madhurakavi yāremmai
Āḷvār Avarē Aran.”*

‘Sri Madhurakavi Āḷvār is our master, who professed not knowing anyone beyond the master of Tirukkurugur Satakōpan known as ‘Māran’ who rendered the Vedas in Tamil., and worshipped him as his Be-all and End-all.

He is the guarding sentinel of all Srivaiṣnavas.’

6

Kulasekhara Āļvār.

Revered as Kulasekhara Perumāl in Srivaiṣṇava Sampradāya, Sri Kulasekhara Āļvār was born in Tiruvanchikkalam in Kerala, as an ‘amśa’ of ‘Kaustubha’ of the Lord. While the general belief is that he was a king of the Chera lineage of kings who ruled in regions covered by western ghats and the Arabian sea, some doubt exists as regards his actual lineage with some researchers such as M.Srinivasa Iyengar holding the view that he was most probably a king of the Pandya dynasty with propinquity to Chera royalty. A valorous and just king like Janaka was in Vedic age, it is most likely that he ruled over several regions including Madurai, areas near ‘Kolli’ hills, and regions in Kerala under one umbrella as is evident from the titles he lists in his hymns, ‘Kolli Kāvalan, Kūdal Nāyakan’, ‘Kōzhikkōn’, ‘Kongar Kōn’, and ‘Kūdai Kulasekharan’. His Prabandham known as Perumal Tirumōļi of hundred and five pasurams under ten ‘decads’ called ‘Tirumōļi’ is included in the ‘Mudhal Āyiram’ of ‘Divya Prabandham’. He was well-versed in Sanskrit also as is evident from his devout hymn ‘Mukundamālai’. But his predilection for the mellifluent Tamil language is clear from his line, “*Tamizhinippāvinai Avvadamozhiyai*”..... (1.4.PML.TM.). Among the Āļvārs, he along with Tirumaļisai Āļvār hold the unique distinction of carrying the divine honorific ‘Perumal’ and ‘Pirān’ respectively, as a suffix to their names. We saw how the Lord of Tirukkudandhai Ārāamudhan exchanged his title ‘Pirān’ with Tirumaļisai Āļvār for his ‘Āļvār’ title, so that the Lord came to be known as ‘Ārāamudhāļvār’, the Āļvār becoming Tirumaļisai Pirān. Among the ‘avathārās’ of the Lord, Sri Rama is associated with the appellation

of ‘Perumāl’ in Srivaiṣṇava Sampradāya. This honorific of ‘Perumāl’ is held among Rama’s devotees only by two close devotees of the Lord. One was Kulasekharar, and the other was Guha Perumāl. Kulasekharar’s life story reveals his special emotional attachment to Sri Rama. That was presumably why he came to be addressed as Kulasekhara Perumāl, and his Prabandhadham as Perumāl Tirumoḷi. Tiruvarangathamudhanār in his Ramanuja Nutrandādhi has extolled this Prabandham and the reverence that Sri Ramanuja had for the devotees who sang his hymns, in the words, *“Kollikāvalan sol pathikkum kalaikkavi pādum Periar pādhangalē thuthikkum Paraman Ramanusan”*, (R.N.-14). He describes Kulasekharar’s Prabandham as *“kalaichol pathikkum kavi”*, meaning ‘poetry with words of ‘Sāstraic wisdom engraved like precious stones’. Those who sing the hymns are ‘Periavar’, or elders whose venerable feet drew the devotion of Ramanuja. Sri Vedānta Desikan describes Kulasekhara Perumāl as ‘tuyya Kulasekharan’ meaning ‘pure’, (A.S-1). Sri Manavāla māmuniḡal praises his birth in the words, *“Kollinagarkkōn Kulasekharan pirappāl Nallavargal Kondādum nāll.”* (U.R.M.- 13). The term ‘Nallavargal’ refers to Srivaiṣṇavas for whom the king had a special affinity and ‘bhakti’. This had its downside too, leading as it did to some heartburn and jealousy among the officials of the court that was the cause of an unsavoury incident in the palace as we shall see later.

In this Prabandham, Kulasekhara Āḷvār has sung about the ‘vibhava’ manifestations of the Lord as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, and the ‘arca’ Lords of Srirangam, Tiruvenkatam, Tillainagar Tiruchittirakoodam, Vittuvakkōdu, and Tirukkannapuram. The last one on Tirukkannapuram is set as a ‘lullaby’ to Sri Rama by mother Kauśalya. Srirangam which evidently was a favourite haunt for the Āḷvār receives the lion’s share

with first three ‘Tirumōḷis’ being dedicated to this ‘Divyadeśam’ presumably due to its close sentimental association with the Ikshvāku dynasty and Rama. So it was with Sri Kulasekharar that a royal visit to Srirangam used to be announced everyday whether the king could make the trip or not. *“Gushyatē yasya nagharē Rangayātrā dhinē dhinē”*. That was how sentimental and devoutly devoted Kulasekharar was to the shrine at Srirangam and the Lord Sri Ranganatha. In all in seven ‘Tirumōḷis’, the above five ‘divya-deśams’ are covered. There is a reference to the ‘divya-deśam’ ‘Tiruvāli’ in one verse in Tirumōḷi 8.7. on Kausalya’s lullaby song, and Ayōdhya in Tirumōḷi 8 and 10. The remaining three ‘Tirumōḷis’ are on the theme of the cowherd damsels’ satirical jeering at the deceitful dalliances of Sri Krishna in Tirumōḷi 6, Devaki’s tearful song on the missed motherhood joys in Krishnāvathāra ---Tirumōḷi 7, and king Dasaratha’s pitiful wail on sending Sri Rama to the forest, --Tirumōḷi 9. The last Tirumōḷi dedicated to ‘divya-deśam’ Tiruchittirakūdam is a beautiful narrative of Srimad Ramayana including episodes from ‘Uttara Kānda’. In this Prabandham, six ‘Tirumōḷis’, (1,4,7,8,9,10) have each eleven verses. Tirumōḷis 2, 5, and 6 have ten verses each. One Tirumōḷi 3 alone has only nine verses. Thus all the ten ‘Tirumōḷis’ add upto a total of 105 verses.

The life of a king had little appeal for Kulasekhara Peruāl. As it probably happened, his reign did not last long since he either abdicated out of his increasing disenchantment with worldly life, or had to quit due to force of circumstances. His heart was on the Lord and the Lord’s devotees. He constantly engaged himself listening to readings from itihāsa-purānās especially Ramayana. As mentioned earlier, Sri Rama among the avathārās of the Lord, and Sri Ranganatha among the ‘arca’ forms, exercised great fascination over the mind

of Kulasekharar. Everyday, a royal trip to Srirangam was planned and announced with great fanfare for devotees to join the caravan, throwing the ministers into a tizzy as to how to cancel the visit and get the king's attention to pending royal duties. The only thing that would stop the king was if some Srivaiṣṇava devotees turned up unexpectedly, in which case the king desired their company more and liked to attend to their hospitality and service. Often times, such situations were contrived by the officials to get the king's attention to state work in between. Everyday, the king used to listen to readings from the Ramayana. The king would listen to the episodes unfold one by one, enraptured and deeply engrossed. One day as a part from Āranyakāṇḍa was being read in which the Śūrpanakha's brothers Kara and Dhūshana and their army of fourteen thousand 'rākshasas' invaded Sri Rama's 'āśrama' to avenge the mutilation of her nose and ears, and Sri Rama prepared to face them after securing Sita in the āśrama and leaving Lakshmana behind to stand guard there, the king was alarmed and leapt to his feet shouting, 'My Rama is alone, brother Lakshmana has gone to guard my mother, while Rama faces the fourteen thousand 'rākshasas' all by himself; I must go to his side. We shall march with our army'. And march he did, before the ministers could cook up a plan to halt the king by sending a contingent to go ahead and march back as if returning from Panchavati and proclaim to the king that Rama had single-handedly killed the entire 'rākshasa' army. The king calmed down after listening to the line from the Ramayana "*tham drishtvā śatruhantāram maharishinām sukhāvaham, bhabhūva hr̥shtā Vaidehi bhartāram pariśaśvajē*", 'seeing Sri Rama who had destroyed the enemy, and was a great comfort to the sages, Vaidehi rejoiced and embraced her husband.'

Initially, the court officials aware of the king's deep reverence and love for Srivaiṣṇavas, and his eagerness to serve them, encouraged Srivaiṣṇava pilgrims to visit the royal palace to stop the king from setting out on trips to Srirangam and other 'divya-desams'. But over time, however, the ministers resented the freedom and liberty accorded to such devotees as they enjoyed unrestricted access to every quarters in the palace. The ministers then conspired and arranged to have a valuable jewel of the 'ārādhana' deity at the palace temporarily disappear from the chest containing the jewels. The loss was reported to the king with a hint that it must have been stolen by somebody having free access to the king's quarters for performing 'ārādhana' to the deity. The king who had unassailable faith in the Lord's devotees, would brook no such charge being made against them. He asserted even as the Lord had said to His Consort Mahā Lakshmi, -- "*En Adiyār adhu seyyār seithārēl nanru seithār enbar*", (P.A.T.M.-4.9.2), 'my devotees will never do that, even if they did they did well',-- that Srivaiṣṇavas would have never done such a thing as alleged. He followed it up with a dangerous oath to put his hand into a pot containing a serpent, with the remark 'if what you all say is true, then let the serpent sting me'. The ministers were taken aback by the king's extreme step. A pot with a starving serpent was arranged to be produced as demanded by the king. Kulasekhara Perumāḷ inserted his hand into the pot, and while everyone watched, the snake merely kissed his hand as if to reassure him about his unshakeable faith in the innocence of the Lord's true devotees.

We referred earlier to Kulasekhara Perumāḷ's special love for Sri Rama, He shared with Rama several characteristics. First and foremost he was a 'kshatriya' king like Rama was. Like Rama he was born under the asterism of 'punarvasu'. He also like Rama cared little for the pleasures, powers or

pageantry of royalty. Rama had to sacrifice his kingdom and suffer the fate of a hard life in the forest for fourteen years. Kulasekharar also abdicated his kingdom at some point, and led the rest of his life in the worship and service of the Lord and His devotees. Kulasekharar was also similar in his traits to Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna. Lakshmana was bound to Rama in an unbroken and unbreakable relationship as a 'seṣa' or servant of the Lord. When Rama received the king's orders to go to the forest conveyed by Kaikeyi, and prepared to go, the people of Ayodhya could not bear the thought of separation from their icon, and prepared to follow him to the forest. Kulasekharar mentions this in PML.T.M.- 8.6. in the words, "*Sutramellām pinthodara thol kānam adaindhavanē*", meaning 'you reached the deep forest with people following you'. Did the denizens of Ayodhya really follow Rama into the forest?. No, Rama was accompanied only by Mythili and Lakshmana. But why did Ālvār say like this? The answer is that the people came to know that Lakshmana was going to accompany Rama to the forest. Lakshmana was a friend of many, and known as 'mitranandhanah.' They knew then, that his single-handed watch over, and service to, Rama and Sita was more than equal to what they all could have collectively done in the service of the Lord. They were content to rest in that thought. Like Lakshmana, Kulasekharar dedicated himself throughout his life in the service of the Lord especially at Srirangam. He was like Bharatha a true 'paratantra' in his quality of wishing to be in a state of constant dependence on the Lord, and accepting to do whole-heartedly whatever the Lord willed for him in His service. He enunciates his philosophy of rulership clearly in his declaration, "*Arasu amarndhān Adi soodum araisai allāl, arasu āgha ennēn matru arasu thānē*", (PML.T.M- 10.7), 'Other than the sovereign rule of His feet, I do not recognize any other kingdom'. Satrugna was an uncompromising 'bhāgavatha' in the sense of not

looking upon anyone else beyond Bharatha as his master, 'Achārya' and god. He is described as "*Satrugna: nitya satrugna:*", 'one who had vanquished all enemies external as well as internal, namely his 'indriyās'. We saw how Kulasekharar considered serving the Lord's devotees first and foremost over everything else, whether it was matters relating to royal responsibilities or Sriranga 'yātra'. Like Sri Nammālvār in his 'Tiruvāymoli, "*Payilum Sudaroli*", (T.V.M.-3.7.10), "*Adiyāradiyārthammadiyār-adiyār thamakkadiyāradiyārtham adiyāradiyōngalē*", -'may I be the servant of Thy servant through multiple times over', Sri Kulasekharar also prays to the Lord in similar vein as follows: "*Tvadbruthya-bruthya-parichāraka-bruthya-bruthya- bruthyasya bruthya iti mām smara Lōkanātha*", (M.M.-27), 'Pray, remember me as thy servant's servant seven times over'.

In the first Tirumoli, Kulasekharar's love towards Sri Ranganatha finds expression in the form of deep longing to have a vision of the majestic Lord of Srirangam reclining on the thousand-hooded serpent, His feet caressed by crystal-clear, soft-flowing waves of river cauveri.

"Iruliria sudarmanigal imaikkum netri inattutti ani panam āyiranga; ārttha aravu arasupperunchōdhi Ananthan ennum Tiruvarangapperunagarul thenni`rpponni thiraikkaiya`l adivarudappallikollum karumaniyaikkomalathai kkandukondu en kanninaigal enrukolō kalikkum nālē", (1.1.).

'The dark gem-hued Lord reclines on Ananta, the white coiled serpent with a thousand hoods each marked with a 'U' - the lord's feet—and bearing radiant gems that dispel darkness everywhere around.' Sri Parāsara Bhattar visualises the Lord reclining on Ananta as an emerald regurgitated by him, "*Chintāmanimivodhvaāntham Utsangē Anantabhoginah:*"

To the Āļvār, the waters of the river cauveri look clear, 'thennīrpponni. Thondaradippodi Āļvār has a different vision of the river as *"thelivilākkalangal nīrsoozh"*... (T.M.- 37). Āļvārs are known as all speaking with one voice, *"Pesitrē pēsum ekakantar"*. How is it then they both portray the river in a diametrical opposite way. Both are correct in their own ways. We ourselves ordinarily see changes like this happening in nature. But there is yet another deeper metaphysical meaning behind this. The river cauveri is the mother of Mahā Lakshmi, and as she nears Srirangam, she brims with excitement at the prospect of visiting her famous son-in-law Sri Ranganatha and daughter. When one visits the daughter and son-in-law, nobody goes empty-handed but carries gifts, and in this case, where the son-in-law is the Supreme Lord of the universe, would she not like to carry gifts appropriate to His status? Tirumālisai Pirān provides the answer in pasuram 54 of Tiruccandha-viruttam,*"malaithalai pirandhu izhundhu vandhunundhu-cchandhanam kulaitthalait-tirutterindha kunghamakkuzhambinodu alaithalaittozhugu cauveri Arangamēyavannale"*, 'Lord residing in Srirangam, where the river cauveri flows from its origin in the peaks of Sahya hills. splashing down and dragging sandal wood trees, and saffron flower creepers, breaking them to form a fragrant florid mix of saffron petals and powder.' Sri Parāsara Bhattar visualizes the mixed emotions of mother cauveri as she flows girdling the island of Srirangam as follows, *"Dukdhābdhijanaka: jananyahamiyam Srīrēva putri varah:, Sri Rangēsvara ētadarhamiha kim kuryām itivākulā, chanchachāmara Chandra chandana mahā mānikya mukthōtkarān cauveri laharī karai: vidhadati` paryētis āsēvyatām"*- (S.R.S.-P.S.-21) II 'As she flows in a flood of emotion, mother cauveri is lost in concern, 'my husband is the ocean lord a storehouse of corals, pearls and emeralds, I am myself

the golden Ponni. Our only daughter is Sri Mahalakhshmi who was born in the milk ocean. Our son-in-law is Sri Ranganatha, the Supreme Lord of the whole universe. Is the 'Sridhana' I carry for them now, really in keeping with the status of all the four of us or not?' Flush with supreme joy after setting his eyes on the beauty and majesty of the Lord's reclining state, Āļvār next wishes to soak in that experience and offer 'mangalā sāsana' to the Lord, but drunk deep in the heady ecstasy of the vision of the 'kāya-flower hued Lord,--"*Pālāzhi Nee kidakkum panbhai yām kēttēyum kālāzhum, nenjazhiyum, kan suzhalum*"-- (P.T.V.-34),- who is described as 'sarva-gandha: sarva-rasa:', Āļvār feels the need for some hold to gather himself. The two 'tirumanatthoon's or pillars in the sanctum provide that hold for the Āļvār. Āļvār would offer his benediction holding those two pillars, "*Māyōnai manatthoonē patrininru en vāyāra enru kolo vāzhttum nālē*"- (PML.TM-1.2). Parāsara Bhattar expresses this in his own unique way thus:

*"Seṣasayalochanāmriṭha nadhīrayākulitha
lolamānānām,I ālambhamiva āmōdhasthambadvaya
antarangam abhiyāmah:II"*- (S.R.S.Pu.- 59).

'For those who are caught in the vortex of the reclining Lord's eyes that sparkle in a flood of nectarine grace, the two pillars serve as a proximate hold. We reach the same.'

Thus the Āļvār entranced in the majestic beauty of the Lord with joy overflowing in him, feels the poetic fervor welling up leading up to the unceasing praise of the beauty and glory of the Lord. This leads to the Āļvār seeking the company of the devotees of the Lord, men of like intent and purpose like himself, and offer freshly gathered flowers to the Lord and place his head at the sacred feet of the Lord in a spirit of total surrender. To the Āļvār the 'divya-desa' experience is only complete if

he can exult in the company of the Lord's devotees. Āļvār craves that experience in his next Tirumol.i. So he sings:

*“Tēttarumthiral tēninai thenaranganai tirumādhuvāzh
vāttamil vanamālai-mārvanai vāzhitti mālkol
chinthayarāy, āttamēvi alandhazhaittu ayarveidhum
meyyadiyārkal tham ittam kandidakkoodumēl adhu
kānum kan payanāvadhē”- PMLTM-2.1.).*

‘if only mine eyes can get their fill seeing those bands of true devotees of the Lord, who sing and dance, despair and call ‘Ranga’ till they weaken with fatigue, -- the lord difficult to attain, but sweet as honey, wearing the ‘vanamāla’ with dame Lakshmi abiding in His chest--- would they not have then served their purpose?’

The main idea that runs through this decad is continuous contemplation of those ecstatic souls who have found fulfillment in enjoying supremely the beauty and glory of God, and serving Him and His dear devotees. Āļvār visualizes a scene being played out on the inner courtyard of the temple in Srirangam through which the thronging bands of devotees pass, their eyes shedding tears that flow like the river cauveri itself, to form a wet slush in the ground they trod over, which the Āļvār would then scoop from the ground and wear it on his forehead. To the Āļvār all this is a purificatory process, the company of holy men of god in whose minds not a vestige of evil or unkindness exists, whose thoughts rest constantly in the contemplation of the Divine.

In the third decad, Āļvār expresses his resolve to devoutly avoid any association with the mundane and materialistic world which is engrossed in sensual pleasures running after transient creature comforts and sense gratification. He characterizes such people as, *“Undiyē udaiyē ugandhōdum immandalam”*, (PML.TM-3.4.). Their crass

world view of life is totally against the grain of his god-view of life and the world, and is to be eschewed in an attitude of 'prātikulya-varjanam'. In a comical dig at himself, he characterizes how the society views him and conversely how he views the society around him, in the words:

.....*"Pithanāyozhindhēn Empirānukkē", "pēyare` enakku yāvarum yānum, oru pēyanē evarkkum, idhu pēsilen,?....."*(PML.TM.-3.7.& 3.8.)."

'I have become crazy for the love of my sweet Lord.' To me the world is mad. To them I appear mad, why dilate on this?'

It is interesting that in an empathetic echo as it were, Tirumangai Āļvār echoes the same thought to the Lord of Tirunaraiyur. Āļvār said plaintively to the Lord,, *"pitthā enru pēsugirār pirar ennai"*, (P.T.M-7.1.8), 'others call me crazy'. The Lord asked the Āļvār, why would they call you like that. Āļvār said, *"Atthā!, Ariyē! enru Unnai azhaikka"*, 'I called You, *"My Lord, Hari"*. Nāradha Bhakthi Sutram characterizes such god-intoxicated state as 'unmatthavath, jadavath, pisāchavat, 'like 'mad, inert-matter, and possessed by a spirit'.

The fourth Tirumōḷi is in the form of a long intense prayer to the Lord of Tiruvenkatam hills for His grace and compassion to break the vicious-circle of 'samsaric' bondage, and grant just some connection and proximity to the Lord's abode on the hills of Tirumalai. It can be anything so long as it has some connection to the sacred hills and the Lord's proximity at Tiruvenkatam shrine. Āļvār enumerates a long wish list. Why not a crane that nests near the 'Kōnēri pond. What if it should fly away from there. So may be a fish inhabiting the pond might be a better option, thinks the Āļvār. The fish has the advantage

of not even batting its eyelids, or may be it has none. So it might have uninterrupted experience of the Lord. But that does not somehow seem to satisfy him, presumably because of its cloistered seclusion. Āḷvār would prefer some way to serve the Lord. Would it not be ideal to become a 'kainkarayapara' to the Lord, and carry the golden "āchamana' vessel into the Lord's sanctum, or as he expresses it, "*Pon vattil pidittu udanē pughapperuvan-āvēnē*". From this, it appears that even in Āḷvār's time, it was not easy to enter the Lord's sanctum that easily. But what if gold should tempt the mind? So Āḷvār's mind flits from one thing to another, a 'champaka' tree, a pillar, a peak, a wild stream, or footpath through which pilgrims could pass. But realizing that time might cause change in the environment resulting in sundering his connection in whatever form he might stand on the hills, Āḷvār finally settles on the doorstep at the portals of the Lord's sanctum as the best place to be. "*padiyāykkidandhu un pavala vāy kānbhēnē*".... (PML.TM.- 4.9). In saying, "*padiyāykkidhandhu*" Āḷvār makes it clear that in serving the Lord, he has no principal enjoyment or 'pradhāna-bhoga', that principal joy is the Lord's which is indicated by his reference to "*Un pavala vāy*". But he has a secondary experience of that joy as evident from his mention of "*kānbhēnē*". The Lord happily granted the Āḷvār's wish of serving as a step in the sanctum. Since then, the inner step in the sanctum of the Lord's sanctum at Tiruvenkatam as indeed in all shrines, has come to be addressed as "*Kulasekharan padi*". In this verse, Āḷvār addresses the Lord as "*Sediyāya valvinaigal thīrkkum Tirumālē !, Nediyanē !, Vēnkatavā !*", 'O Lord of Sri Who extirpates the 'kārmic' misery like weed, Lord of unchanging will, Lord of Venkatam'. By addressing the Lord as 'Tirumāl', the 'puruṣakāra' role of Sri is expressed. Next, in addressing the Lord as "*nediyanē*", what is conveyed is the Lord's assurance 'Aham smarāmi', from

Varāha Charamasloka. There is no need for any anxiety over the Lord's protection. In the last verse, Āļvār goes on to pray *"Emperumān ponmalai mēl ēdhēnum āvēnē."*, 'let me be anything on the Lord's golden hill'. It seems that Sri Anantāzhvān used to say that this line meant that one could become anything at Tiruvenkatam including the Lord himself, if the Lord so wished.

An interesting story revolves round the phrase 'ēdhēnumāvēnē'. A woman devotee at Tirukkolor the birthplace of Sri Madhurakavi Āļvār, not very learned in a formal sense, but astute due to association with learned devotees of the Lord, happened to meet Sri Ramanuja on the outskirts of the town as she was leaving the place at the same time as Sri Ramanuja was entering it to worship the Lord and the Āļvār. She paid her obeisance to Ramanuja and conversed with him. The latter asked her why she was leaving a 'divya-desam' like Tirukkolor to go elsewhere. She expressed her view that a person who has no jñāna like her, and no special merit, could just live anywhere. To support her supposition that she did not have any special merit to live in a 'divya-desam', she submitted eightyone pithy statements, each in the format of an inquiry in folk-lore style. They in truth comprise esoteric sayings uttered by great Srivaishnavas, the truths embedded in their lives and also anecdotes from itihāsas and puranas. Hence these are hailed in tradition as 'Tirukkolor Penpillai Rahasiyam'. Secrets of the lady of Tirukkolor One of these statements is, *"Did I say like Kulasekharar 'to be anything at all'?" – "ēdhēnum enrēnō Kulasekharar pole "?.*The phrase *"to be anything at all"?* means' in Lord's golden hill'as Kulasekharar's line reads, *"thēnār Emperumānponmalaimēlēdhēnumāvēnē !"* – which has captivated the minds and hearts of many, and also made this lady of Tirukkolor reflect on it and frame her intended query behind her epigramatic poser

to mean – ‘Was I like Kulasekharar inclined to remain at Thirumalai ? No!. Then what merit do I have ?’. The statement thus has a deep meaning. The lady’s wisdom earned the admiration and esteem of Emperumānār.

The Tirumōḻi No 5 dedicated to the Lord of Vittuvakkōdu articulates Kulasekhara Āḷvār’s ‘ākinchanyam’ and ‘ananya-gathitvam’ ‘no capital-stock or other recourse than the Lord’, in a free flow of soulful poetry. In the very first verse, the Āḷvār emotes the anguish of a babe that weeps thinking only of the mother’s love and touch of grace though she with anger has cast it away from her closeess. Analogous imageries follow one after another in increasingly poignant intensity, like for instance, a great bird on a ship which goes round and round, and seeing no shore comes back at last to perch again on the ship’s mast, (5.5). This last analogy is, far and away, the most powerful, evocative of the idea that God is the raft or ship, and the world’s miseries are the ocean, the bird is the individual soul seeking liberation, but finding no worthwhile shore must inevitably return to the ship’s mast and wait for it to take it ashore. One can see a parallel thought in Mukundamālai prayer, Sloka 12, “*Vishama vishayathōyē majjatāmaplavānām bhavatu saranamēko` vishnupōthōnarānām*”, ‘for those drowning in the sensual waters of ‘samsāra’, may the ferry of Mahā Vishnu become the refuge.’

In the first pasuram, Āḷvār says, “*Tharuthuyaram thadāyēl Un saranallāl saranillai*”, ‘if you do not help me overcome the obstacles you place in my path, I have no recourse except your refuge’. When the Sāstras say that one must oneself by his own ‘sāadhanānushtāna’ endeavor to resolve the self-created adversarial conditions, how does the Āḷvār foist his problems on to the Lord’s door, as if He is the author of our problems and as such He

should solve them for us. That is because of Āḷvār' s 'prāpthā-prāptha viveka'. In effect, the argument before the Lord goes like this, 'I am a'paratantra', so is the 'karma' I do, and for whatever 'sāadhanānushtāna' I may undertake, You are the 'phala-pradha', or dispenser of fruit thereof.' So Āḷvār says, 'tharuthuyaram'..... etc..The Lord, says in the Gita, "*mama māya duratyayā` , mā mēva yē prapadyantē māyām ētām tharanti tē*" (B.G. 7.14), 'this divine illusion of mine is hard to surmount; those who take refuge in Me alone, can get over this illusion'. Since the Lord is our 'nirupādhka-bandhu' or 'unconditioned friend and well-wisher, who has the capacity and power to remove our suffering, if He would not help us to overcome our obstacles, the blame would lie at his door. Pillailokāchārya says, in Srivachana Bhūshanam, "*prajayai kinatrin karayininrum vānghāthozhindhāl thāyē thallinālenakkadavadhirē.*", (Cur, 371), implying that 'if the mother does not pull away her child seeing it straying close to a well, resulting in the child's fall into the well, would not she be responsible for the child's fall?'

In the next decad Sri Kulasekhara Āḷvār, following the Bhāgavatham style of expression of love to the Lord, reveals himself in the simulated attitude of a maiden pining for Krishna's arrival for his tryst with her on the banks of the river Yamuna. But it is not pure and simple lover's pining, but a complex tangle of ardour and jealousy at Krishna's other dalliances, impatience at his not showing up as promised and resulting helplessness. The wait seems long and interminable, the cold wind on the lonely sand bank only aggravates the internal freeze on the discovery of what an unfazed liar he is, feigning love to her while carrying on multiple liaisons with other maidens. But alongside all the doubt and irritation that assails her overwrought imagination, the beloved is

consumed by total single-pointed concentration of the soul on the Divine. In another pāsuram (PML.TM-6.6), the 'nāyika' chides Krishna addressing him as 'Vāsudeva' before laying out her charges. The father Vasudeva had an impeccable reputation for truth and honesty, and what an ironic imitation of his father that he is, who is full of lie and deceit! wonders the Āļvār as the wronged beloved. Recalling how Krishna had given her the slip in the middle of the night as she lay asleep on the settee, and after spending that night and whole of next day too, in the embrace of other girls, and coolly comes back to her now for another night tryst, as if nothing had happened, she rebukes him squarely, and says, "*....etrukku en marungil vandhāy ? Emperumān Nee ezhundharulē*", 'why have you come to hold my waist now?, My dear Sir, would you please find your way out and leave?'. What a summary dressing down of the Lord, is that! In a similar vein, Sri Nammāļvār says to the Lord, "*Minniday madavārgal Un arul sooduvār munbhu nān adhu anjuvan; man udai ilangai aran kāindha Māyavanē !, Unnudaiya sundāyam nān arivan; ini adhu kondu seivadhu en? ennudaiya pandhum kazhalum thandhu pōghu Nambi.*", (T.V.M.-6.2.1), 'O Lord Who destroyed the fortress of Lanka! Slender-waisted damsels would wear your grace. I am afraid what would follow. I am aware of your tricks, what can you do with them now? Sire return my bat and ball and leave'.

After exploring the landscape of 'madhura-bhāva', Āļvār traverses the whole gamut on the motif of 'vātsalya-bhāva' in the form of the mother's love towards the child in the seventh and eighth decads. In the seventh Tirumōḷi, Āļvār takes on the persona of Devaki Krishna's real mother, who had had to forego all the joys of the relationship yielding the same to foster mother Yasoda. What a glorious motherhood the latter turned out to be that the world cherishes and celebrates wherever a

mother-child relationship is spoken of or sung about. But Āļvār, uniquely remembering and paying a tribute to the forgotten mother Devaki, devotes a whole Tirumōḷi to sing about that great mother whose womb the Lord chose to spring from. Her love, longing, sigh and anguish, and all her deprivation is poignantly portrayed in Āļvār's vivid and empathetic narrative. Āļvār so perceptively describes in verse 6, how a child graduating to the second stage of tasting little morsels of solid food, is sometimes allowed the privilege of dipping its fingers in the bowl and stick its fingers in its mouth with what little it can gather in that tiny hold. The proud mother mixes lot more food than what the child can eat. After the feed is over, the mother loves to eat the remains in the bowl. Remembering that scene, Devaki laments, “*..vannac chenchiru kaiviral anaitthum vāri vāykkonda adisilin micchil, unnappetрилēn ; Ō kodu vinayēn! ennai en seyya petradhu em mōyē !.*”, ‘...I never got to tasting the remnants of sweet rice that my child savoured by sticking his pink fingers into the mouth. Oh, the terrible sinner that I am, for what good my mother begot me!’ In the next pāsuraṁ, Devaki prays to the Lord, after recounting some of the sport activities of child Krishna while growing up,-- such as holding up the hill Govardhana` as an umbrella, dancing the ‘kuravai’ dance with girls, dancing on Kāliya’s head etc.--, that if there is any way she could see all that she had missed, His grace should enable her to relive that experience. And the Lord did oblige her.

The eighth decad of the Āļvār is a lullaby sung to Rama by mother Kausalya recounting stories from the Ramayana. The lyrical beauty and the slow restful cadences of the song are such that over the ages, mothers in the South, especially the Tamil regions, have been singing the lines from this Tirumōḷi while rocking their babies to sleep. The credit for elevating this kind of lullaby which is an

integral part of Tamil culture, to the annals of a literary genre` belongs to this Āļvār and Perīāļvār. They were the pioneers of what is called ‘thālattu’ that later grew into the Tamil literary form of “*Pillai Tamizh*”. This Tirumoļi is addressed to the Lord of Tirukkannapuram. In the ninth decad, the Āļvār captures the pathos, the ‘śoka-rasa’ of the helpless king Dasaratha grieving for his son after he was banished to the forest at the instance of Kaikeyi.

The last Tirumoļi is a condensed Ramayana, covering all the seven ‘kāndas’ from Sri Rama’s birth upto His ascent to Sri Vaikunta. In this hymn which is dedicated to the ‘divya-desam’ Tiruchittirakūdam, Āļvār enters into, and participates in, the world of sage Vālmiki and Rama. The last pāsūram contains a benediction to the effect that those who learn these ten verses would attain immortal bliss in the auspicious feet of Srīman Nārāyana. In verse 10 of this Tirumoļi, Āļvār sings of the Lord in the lines, “*Anru charācharangalai Vaikuntathētri adalaravappagaiyēri asurar thammai venru ilanghumi nedunthōll nānghum thōnra vinnmuzhudhum ethirvarat tan dhāmamēvi senru inidhu veetrirundha Ammān...*” ‘after elevating all living things---moving and non-moving---- to Vaikunta, the Lord who had earlier destroyed the asuras, assuming His glorious four-armed form and mounting His Garuda ‘vāhana’, entered His abode to the tumultuous welcome of gods, and ascended His eternal throne.’ Sri Kulasekharar explicitly states here, that Sri Rama took all living creatures with Him to Vaikunta. Sri Nammāļvār in a slightly less explicit fashion, says, “.... *Pur pā mudhalāppul erumbhu ādhi onru inriyē nar pāl Ayothiyil vāzhum charācharam mutravum narpālukku uythanān*”, (TVM-7.5.1), ‘He bestowed an exalted position to all the sentient and insentient down to the meanest grass and insect’. Again in verse 7.5.2. he says, “*Nāttai alitthu uyyaccheydhu nadandhamai*”, ‘He

gave the kingdom (to Vibhīshana), and liberation to all. In the last pāsūram of the tenth decad, Āḷvār says that ‘the Lord presides along with Māruthi in Tiruchittirakkūdam. The whole narrative of how the same Lord took birth as the son of King Dasaratha upto His ascension to His abode has been set in the auspicious style of’ ‘sopānam’ in sweet Tamizh by ‘well-armed, well-protected Kulasekhara, Commander and King of Uraiyur’. *“Kol iyalum padaithānaik kotra ollvāl Kōzhiyar Kōn kudaik Kulasekharan Sorseidha”*. Those who master these ten verses would attain the sacred feet of Nārāyana.

Scholars have perceptively opined that Kambar the Tamil poet who came later than Kulasekhara Perumāl was greatly influenced by the Āḷvār’s poetic style, especially the *“Anganedumadhil”* decad which has been eulogized as ‘Kulasekhara Rāmāyanam’ in writing his epic on Rama. Kambar seems to have learnt some subtleties in Rāmāyana through Kulasekharar, as we shall see briefly. In the Vālmiki Rāmāyana there is no information on Rama seeing Sita before their wedding. But Kambar infuses a romantic touch to the story by portraying a scene in which they both steal a glance at each other momentarily for which we find the kernel in Kulasekhara’s narration in 10.3. of P.M.L.T.M., *“Sevvarinarkarunedunkan Sīthaikkāghis sinavidaiyōnsilaiiruttu..”*, yielding to Sita with long, black, red-lined eyes, and breaking the bow of Siva riding a fierce bull’. This suggests that Rama had seen Sita, and was drawn towards her, lured by her long, black eyes. Kambar has evidently chosen to go by Kulasekharar’s script rather than Vālmiki’s in this respect.

Similarly, in the ‘Sūrpanaka chapter, Kambar prefers to toe the Āḷvār’s line which depicts the demoness as pretty and ‘endowed with eyes that put to shame the

eyes of a deer'. In Vālmiki's narrative, she appears as a demoness only. Kambar visualizes her as a stunning beauty passing for a 'young peacock, a swan bird' before Rama making him wonder 'who is she!'. "*Māninvizhipetru mayilvandhenavandhāl*" says Kambar.

Kulasekharar in his portrayal of Dasaratha's lament in decad 9 of his Prabhandam poignantly phrases the event of the King's tragic end in the king's own words as follows; "*kānaghamēmighavirumbhi nee thurandha valanagaraitturandhu nānumvānaghamēpōghinrēn*", 'desiring the forest most, you renounced this lovely country; I will also reject it and happily go to the home above.' Kambar while retaining this central idea, builds on the scene with multiple dramatis personae enhancing the poignancy. On hearing news of Sumantra's return he, who was till then in a near comatose state, stirs to inquire of Vasishtha standing before him if Rama has come back. Eliciting no response from his preceptor who stands mute unable to answer 'yes' or 'no', he then turns to enquire from Sumantra who has just entered if his Rama has gone farther into the forest or stays closer, "*Sēyanō, aniyānō*", as if distance matters. Sumantra replies that they have gone deep into the forest. Hearing this, the king's life ebbs away. Kambar touches the bar of Āḷvār poignant phrases, in words that read; "*he said, 'into the deep forest, He and his brother and Mithila's gold have gone'; at that moment, his life departs*", "*Vaeyuyarvānil thānumthambhiyum mithilaipponnum pōyinānenrān, enrē pōzhndhadhē āvipōnān.*"

Researchers of Āḷvār's time period like M.Raghavalyengar have inferred from coincidental events, that Kulasekharar, Tondaradippodi and TirumangaiĀḷvār were probably contemporaries. In support, they point to the fact that when

TirumangaiĀļvār built the peripheral wall and towers around Srirangam temple, he made some adjustments in the alignment of the wall in deference to Tondaradippodi whose flower garden was in the path of the original alignment. Kulasekharar uses the term *“Tondaradippodi”* or ‘dust of the feet of devotees’ in his pāsura 2.2, and repeats it in other pāsuras too, to say that he has no liking for royal power and loves to serve the devotees at Srirangam, and sing and dance with them. Presumably, either Kulasekharar rendered this phrase having Tondaradippodi Āļvār in mind, or the latter whose given name was Vipranārāyanar, assumed Kulasekharar’s phrase as his service name since he also like Kulasekharar had a special attachment for Lord’s devotees. These researchers have construed that the three Āļvārs lived during the eighth century C.E.

Kulasekhara Perumāl married off his daughter Sērakulavalli Nācchiyā`r who was believed to have been an ‘amśa’ of Nilā Devi to Sri Ranganatha offering all his wealth as ‘Stridhanam’. He settled in Srirangam for many years in the worship of the Lord, and undertook many undertakings in the Lord’s and His devotees’ service. The third perimeter wall around the shrine called ‘Kulasekharan vedhi’ is one of the many relics that stand testimony to his contribution. Legend has it that apart from his pilgrimage to the shrines at Tiruvenkatam, Tiru Ayōddhi, Tirucchittirakūdam, Tirukkanapuram, Tirumālirunchōlai, Tiruvittuvakkodu, to worship and offer ‘mangalāsāsana’ to the Lords of the shrines there, he visited in the last stages, Tirukkurugur to worship Sri Nammāļvār. It appears that he reached a place known as ‘Brahmadeśam’ near there, and was involved in serving the Lord Rajagopala at the local shrine there. He shed his mortal coil while there at the age of sixty-seven and attained ‘parama-padha’.

Taniyans.

Composed by Emperumānār,

*“Innamudhamūttughēn inghē vā paingkiliyē,
Thennarangam pādavalla sīrpperumāl --- ponnin
Silaisēr nudhaliyarvēl Seralarkōn engal/
Kulasekharan enrē kooru.”*

Come to me my lovely parrot, let me feed you with sweet morsel. Just utter the name of our Chera king ‘Kulasekhara’ --the head of us ‘prapannās’--, the gifted bard who sang on Srirangam, endowed with devout love for the Lord earning the name Perumāl, with eye brows shaped like a bow and adorable to women.

Composed by Manakkāl Nambi.

*“Āraṅkedappar anbar kollārenru avarkalukkē
vāraṅkodu kudappāmbhil kaiyittavan mātralarai
veeraṅ kedutta senkōl kollikāvalan villavar kōn
Chēran Kulasekharan mudi vēndhar sikhāmaniyē.”*

He, (Kulasekhara Perumāl), is the crest jewel of Chēra clan, vanquisher over enemies, Ruler of Kolli, and king of kings, with a staff synonymous for righteous justice, who when the palace jewel went missing, swore that the Lord’s devotees would never covet things of others, and in their behalf lowered his hand into the pot containing a serpent.

7

Periālvār.

Periālvār was born in Srivilliputtur, a small town south of Madurai in a Srivaishnava family, as an 'amśa' of Garuda, in the Tamil year 'Krodhana' and month 'Ani', under the asterism of 'Svāthi'. He was named Vishnuchitta. Srivilliputtur was renowned then for its Vedic community, and the shrine of Vatapatraśayi. Under the benign grace of the Lord, Vishnuchitta grew up to be a great devotee of the Lord, with a natural desire to engage himself in the service of the shrine and the Lord. Contemplating about what kind of service would be appropriate for him to undertake, he quickly realized that whatever service it was, it must be something that the Lord wished for him to undertake as Sri Nammālvār expressed it, "*Thanakkēyāgavenaik kollum idhē*", (TVM- 2.9.4). He then thought about Sri Krishnāvatāra, and recalled the story of Mālākāra in Srimad Bhāgavatham. When Sri Krishna visited Mathura at the invitation of Kamsa, he and brother Balarama wished to go round the city, but in doing so they both wanted to drape themselves in finery and wear fragrance like sophisticated city-folk. In the course of their efforts to find suitable adornments, they entered the house of the flower-seller who strung garlands for Kamsa, and requested him for some flowers. The devotee that he was, the simple Mālākāra was overwhelmed and ecstatic at the Lord's request, "*Praśādha paramou nāthou mama gēham upāgathou, dhanyōham archayishyāmi ityāha mālyopajīvanah*:", 'I am blessed to have the grace of the Lords' visit to my home, and will offer garlands to them.' So saying, he offered freshly strung fragrant flower garlands to the Lord. Vishnuchitta decided then to cultivate a flower garden where he tended different kinds of fragrant flower

plants and tulsi. He started to gather these flowers every morning and evening, making beautiful flower garlands for the Lord Vatapatraśāyi. He took them and offered them to the priests at the temple for daily worship.

Around the same time, a Pāndya king by name Vallabhadēva was ruling over that land with his capital at Madurai. As a righteous king who always had the welfare of his subjects at heart, he used to go round the city in cognito at night on a reconnaissance mission to gather information about any unusual happenings, and get a feed-back on the administration. One night during his round, he came across a wayfarer who had settled himself for the night on the front porch of a house. The king woke him up to find out who he was and what he was doing in the city. The visitor replied that he was a Brahmin and had just returned after a pilgrimage to Kāshi, and was passing through the city to his home in a nearby place. The king asked him to recite some verse he knew. The brahmin recited a verse which went like this, 'for eight months during the year work for the rainy season; during the day for the night, during prime for old age; during this life for the next life.' To the king who was worldly-wise, the mention of the next life and what lies beyond the present life, posed a troublesome question. Next morning, he sent for his most trusted minister and counsel Selvanambi of Tirukkottiyūr, and asked him what was the means to attain the supreme goal of reaching the divine. Selvanambi suggested that a conclave of scholars from all corners of the land be convened for ascertaining the scriptural position on the Supreme Being. A bounty of golden coins was set as the prize money for the one who could make a duly validated pronouncement on the identity of the Supreme Being.

A divine directive came to Vishnuchitta in a dream to attend the conference convened by the king, and win the coveted prize. Vishnuchitta was beside himself with total surprise at the directive. He asked, 'who am I, who just knows how to hold a hoe to tend flower plants and string garlands, to attend a conference of scholars?' The Lord said, 'so you think you do all this by yourself, Are We not the One Who is the actuating force behind your actions. You may do this also as directed'. Next morning, the temple priests brought a palanquin to take him to the king's court in Madurai. When he arrived at the convention centre, the king himself with his minister Selvanambi and other functionaries received Vishnuchitta ceremoniously, struck by the effulgence on his face. After being seated with all courtesy, Selvanambi requested Vishnuchitta to begin his exposition. Inspired by the unconditioned grace of the Lord, Vishnuchitta then proceeded to expatiate on the 'paratattva' as none other than 'Sriman Nārāyana', marshalling 'pramanas' from Vedas, Upaniṣads, Smṛiti- Itihāsa-purānas etc. Apart from discoursing on Sriman Nārāyana as the Supreme God of all beings and the worlds, he also drove home to the awe-struck assembly the greatness of Sri Vaishnava Siddhānta as a philosophy of religion. The mast on which the prize had been tied, bent before him on its own, enabling him to cut the bag containing the gold coins. The king and the assembly of scholars and ministers were wonder-struck that Vishnuchitta had uncovered the shining light behind the inner regions of the Vedānta, and the honouring him with the title of 'Pattarpirān', the king arranged for him to be taken on a decorated elephant in a ceremonial procession through the avenues of Madurai city, to the accompaniment of all royal insignia of flags, umbrellas, bugles and drums proclaiming the achievement to the teeming populace, with the king and his courtiers in tow.

Like a proud parent basking in the reflected glory of a worthy child's accomplishment, the Lord Himself with the Divine Mother seated on Garuda, appeared in all His majesty and splendor over the skies of the city to savour the sight of this public honour to their dear devotee. The whole celestial glitterati of Brahma, Indra and other gods also took their place on the sky, to witness this unprecedented Divine spectacle. When Vishnuchitta saw the Garuda-borne Lord with Divine Mother appear on the sky, with all His accouterment of 'Śankha', 'Chakra' etc. he was taken aback lest some danger should befall his Lord. Such was his overwhelming concern and love for the Lord, that he broke out in song using the bells pinned on the elephant's head crest as cymbals, "*Pallāndu, Pallāndu*", 'Long live the Divine'. This benediction to the Lord sung by him from the back of the elephant is the Prabandham hailed as "*Tiruppallāndu*" of twelve pasurams sweet to the ears and rich in meaning.

This is a unique 'mangalāśāsana' hymn where the blessed assumed the role of the blesser. It is this quality of overwhelming love and protective concern exhibited by Vishnuchitta towards the Lord, that was behind the endearing name of Perīālvār by which he has come to be addressed in the Sampradāya. Sri Manavālamāmunigal phrased this elegantly as "*ponghum parivu*", 'overflowing love' as from a parent to a child, and said, "*ponghum parivāle`petrān.....Periālvārennumpeyar*", (U.R.M.-18). Pillaiālokkchārya observes in Sri Vachanabhūshanam, "*Ālvārgal ellāraiym pōlallar Perīālvār. Avargalukku kādḥāchityam, ivarkku idhu nityam*", (250-251). 'Pēriālvār is distinct and apart from the rest of the Ālvārs. To them, this, namely 'mangalāśāsana' is sporadic, to him it is everyday.' To the question, if that kind of protective concern for the Lord, is not against the grain of one's position vis-à-vis the Supreme Being,

Pillailokāchārya's explanation is” *Jñāna dhasayil rakshya-rakshaka bhāvam’ tan kappilē kidakkum, prema dhasayil thattumārikkidakkum*”, (S.V.B.- 244), ‘in the intellectual state, the spirit of protected and protector is in accordance with one’s true nature. But, in the state of love, the role is reversed.’ If one contemplates the Lord’s ‘svarūpa’, then one would be concerned with his own goal; if on the contrary, one contemplates the ‘soundarya’ and ‘soukumārya’ of the Lord, then one can only think of Him and nothing else. The poignant benediction of Jatāyu to Sri Rama as “*Āyushmān*”, even in his dying state, is an instance in point. This overwhelming love towards the Lord, has been beautifully described by Tiruvarangattu Amudhanār, as an undying immense whirlpool of love, “*Sōrādha kādhal perum suzhippu*”, (R.N.-15). It is interesting to visualize this. The swirling current in a whirlpool sets up a bi-directional churn, water plunging down in one instant and the water from below swirling up. Likewise, an intensely spiritual person caught up in a swirl of love rises up and poses as the protector in a curious relegation of his ‘jñāna’ to the background, whereas the true Protector is pushed down, as it were by the force of love, as an ‘object’ to be protected.

Tiruppallāndu, the song of benediction that Perīālvār sang forms part of the First Thousand, ‘Mudhalāyiram’. Apart from this, Perīālvār has rendered another Prabandham called “*Perīālvār Tirumoli*” comprising 461 pasurams which, write alia, is taken up by what is known as ‘Pillai-Tamizh’, or the enjoyment of the childhood and boyhood stages of Lord Krishna. Together, both these Prabandhams aggregate to 473 verses. Tiruppallāndu enjoys the preeminence of being the first Prabandham in the sense that though chronologically later than those of the Mudhal Ālvārs etc. it is recited in all Vishnu temples in the morning and evening worship

as a prelude to the recitation of other Prabandhams. Sri Manavālamāmuniṅgal says, “*kodhilavām Āḷvārgal kooru kalaikkellām ādhi Tiruppallāndu*”, ‘Tiruppallāndu is first amongst the flawless arts of the Āḷvārs.’ In this Prabandham of twelve verses, Āḷvār performs his own ‘mangalāsāna’ – ‘desiring all things auspicious’- to the Lord in the first two pāsurams. But not being satisfied with that, in a broader inclusive spirit of concern in behalf of the rest of the humanity, he hearkens to three kinds of devotees namely, ‘*Bhagaval-lābhārtis*’, ‘*kaivalyārtis*’, and ‘*aishvaryārtis*’ respectively to join him in performing ‘*mangalāsāna*’ to the Lord in the next three verses. The first group consists of people who are in constant communion with the Lord or ‘jñānis’ as Lord Krishna calls them, (B.G.-7.16). The second group are those who desire freedom from the world to retire to ‘kaivalya padha’ for ‘self-enjoyment’ or ‘āthmānubhūti’. The third category of seekers are ‘aishvaryārtis’ who worship the Lord for wealth and happiness in the world either because they are in distress having lost material wealth or health in order to regain the same, or because they seek more wealth. In the Gita lexicon, they are termed as ‘Ārtis and ‘Arthārtis’. In the next three pāsurams 6,7, and 8 he sings about their joining him. In the third triad of pāsurams 9,10 and 11, he sings Tiruppallāndu with them. The last pāsuram 12 is the ‘phala-sruti’.

In the first pasuram, Āḷvār wishes the Lord, “*Pallāndu, Pallāndu, Pallāyirattāndu, Palakōdi nūrāyiram*”, ‘many years, many more years, many thousands of years, and many crores and hundreds of thousands of years’. The repetition of ‘pallāndu’ four times over, is by way of our world measure of time, the celestial measure, Brahma’s ‘Satyalōka’ measure, and the measure of the countless universes and Brahmas thereof. Āḷvār addresses the Lord herein, as “*mallānda tintōl manivannā*”, ‘O Lord of blue

emerald hue and great shoulders that vanquished the mighty wrestlers'- of Kamsa- Āļvār's words of benediction are addressed to the Lord's sacred feet. "*Un Sēvadi sevvitirikkāppu*", 'May thy beautiful crimson feet be protected'. In the second pāsuram, Āļvār sings 'pallāndu in inseparable union with the Lord. "*Adiyōmōdum Ninnōdum pirivinri āyiram Pallāndu*", 'may both of us live for many thousands of years without separation.' After wishing the Lord, Āļvār then wishes, "*Vadivāy Nin valamārbhinil vāzhkinra Mangaiyum Pallāndu*", 'may the Goddess Lakshmi, the embodiment of beauty, residing on thy right chest live long for many years.' Then he goes on to wish the blazing Discus and the beautiful conch of the Lord on similar lines. The first two pāsurams contain the essence of the 'Tirumantra'. "*Adiyōmōdum*", conveys the meaning of 'pranava' 'Aum'. The term "*Pallāndu*" conveys the meaning of "*namah*". The words, "*mallānda tin tōl manivanna*", connote the 'vigrahayoga' and the qualities of 'sourya-vīrya' of the Divine. The second pāsuram speaks about the 'vibhūti-yoga', and conveys the meaning of 'Nārāyana' śabdha. The fourth case "*āya*" is conveyed by the words, "*Un Sēvadi sevvit Tirukkāppu*". In so far as the hymn Tiruppallāndu is short and recited in the beginning, it has been compared to the Pranava "*Aum*", which is recited before and after any Vedic recitation. It is said that the pranava serves as the lid and bottom of a container for the Vedas. Without reciting it at the beginning of a recitation, the Vedas would slip away, and similarly if the recitation is concluded without uttering 'Harih Aum', the Vedas would scatter away.

In the third pāsuram, Āļvār invites the 'Ēkāntins' desirous of doing service to the Lord, "*Vāzhātpattu ninrīr ullīrēl*" to join him in 'Bhagavad-kainkaryam', and take the 'prasāda' of 'sand' and 'sandal' "*mannum manamum*". Then in the fourth, Āļvār's call goes out to the 'kaivalyārtis'

to join the group before their subtle body falls off, “*Ēdu nilattiduvadhan munnam*”. In pāsuram 5, Āļvār welcomes the vast multitude of ‘aishvaryārtis’ filling the world, who are joining the band of the Lord’s devotees abandoning their mundane links, “*Thondakkulattilullir.. pandaikkulattait-tavirndu*”.

In pāsuram 6, Āļvār acknowledges the assembly of the blessed god-centred ‘Ekāntins’ who have been engaged in doing service to the Lord through seven generations. In pāsuram 7, the transformed ‘Kaivalyārtis’ arrive to join the Āļvār and are consecrated to become worthy of service to the Lord with the insignia of ‘śankha’ and ‘chakra’. In pāsuram 8, Āļvār sensitive to the psychology of the multitude of ‘Aishvaryārtis’, enumerates the special grace bestowed by the Lord on them in the form of the best food mixed with ghee, opportunity for ‘nitya-kainkarya’ and on special occasions, remnants of betel and nuts, adornments for the ears and neck, and fragrant sandal paste to put on the body, thus transforming them into purified souls. It is an implicit assurance to all, that all these special blessings await them too. Man’s true state is as a ‘Śeṣa’, subordinate of God, and every good thing in life is to be offered in the first place for God’s enjoyment, that is oriented in the end to fulfilling the needs of body, clothes, flowers and so on, which must be gratefully accepted as ‘ucchiṣṭa’ of God. It is in the nature of the ‘mahāprasāda’ of the Lord, and comes to us with His grace, (B.G.-3.13), and has power to purify the soul, (“*Velluyir*”).

In the next three pāsurams namely 9,10, and 11, Āļvār sings “*pallāndu*” with the respective groups. In pāsuram 9, the Lord’s grace, in general, is presented to all devotees. Āļvār says, ‘we are all your servants, “*thondargalōm*”, and ‘wear the yellow silken garments worn by the Lord, eat

the remnants of food offered to Him, and decorate our heads with tulsi leaves and flowers worn by the Lord.' Such devotees are 'mumukshus' desiring the grace of divine service in the Lord's abode. In pāsuram 10, Āḷvār extends the assurance, that it is written into the contract the devotee enters into with God, whereby he takes on the role of Lord's servant, "*Unthanakku Adiyōm*", which then carries a reciprocal promise of eternal bliss, "*adiyōngaladikkudil veedu petruuyndhadhu*". Such devotees will then join the Āḷvār in singing 'Long years' in "*nithya vibhūti*", or eternal abode of the Lord. In pāsuram 11, the poet-saint addressing the Lord as "*Tirumāl*", 'Lord of Goddess Lakshmi', says: 'I am also thy devotee and servant like Selvanambi (the principal counsel of king Vallabhadeva), who is bereft of the slightest trace of wickedness, the leader of men of Tirukkottiyur held in high esteem for his great love towards thee and thy devotees'. Let me sing in praise of you 'Pallāndu' after chanting your multiple names and say "*Namō Nārāyāna*". Āḷvār says of himself as "*nānumunakku pazhavadiyēn*". The very moment the touch of grace of the Lord's feet and that of Lord's devotee, (what Parāsara Bhattar refers to as "*Rāmānuja padhacchāya*"), descends on such a devotee it wipes out at a stroke, all dross which arises out of the sense of the ego of birth, wealth and learning, and purifies one as though no dross ever existed in the first place. Of Selvanambhi Āḷvār says, "*Alvazhakku onrumillā ani Kōttiyūr kōn*", 'blemishless leader of denizens of Tirukkōttiyūr'. The term 'Alvazhakku' stands for all obstacles to spiritual evolution. These are many like, delusion of taking the body for the 'ātman', imagining one's 'ātman' as a free agent, seeking lowly rewards, "*prayōjanāntaram*", taking 'bhagadhanubhavam' as the enjoyer or 'bhōkta' instead of 'bhōghya' viz. as for Lord's enjoyment, which is what 'mangalāsāsana' entails, and so

on. Incidentally, what kind of pitfalls confront us in the spiritual path, and how the ‘Tirumantra’ serves as a sure-fire safety-net in providing protection from these perils, has been explained at length in Bhattar’s *“Ashtasloki”*, in the sloka, *“Dehāsaktātma bhuddhi”*, (sloka 4).

In the concluding pāsuram, Āļvār assures that those who recite this hymn and chant *“Namō Nārāyanāya”*, will gain entry into the Lord’s abode and sing *“Pallāndu”* to the Lord, along with the denizens of ‘paramapadha’. It is interesting to note that Āļvār’s style of singing ‘Long live the Divine’, flows over in some verses in the Āļvār’s other Prabandham of Perīāļvār Tirumōļi. Perīāļvār returned to Srivillipputtur and used the prize money for the renovation and beautification of the Vatapatrasāyi temple and resumed his service of cultivating the flower garden, and stringing garlands for the Lord’s worship at the temple as before. The second Prabandham sung by the Āļvār is named after him as Perīāļvār Tirumōļi comprising 461 pasurams grouped under 43 ‘decads’, each decad being referred to as ‘Tirumōļi’, which are again aggregated under five ‘patthus’ on the lines of Tiruvāymoļi. The tradition of treating both Tiruppallāndu and Perīāļvār Tirumōļi as a unitary work named Perīāļvār Tirumōļi also exists in which case the total works out to 473 pasurams in all under 44 decads, Tiruppallāndu figuring as 1.1 thereof. For both these Prabandhams ‘Vyākhyānās’ or detailed commentaries were written by Sri Periavācchān Pillai. But unfortunately, the document containing the commentary for the first four hundred pasurams of Perīāļvār Tirumōļi had been lost to posterity. This gap was very thoughtfully filled by Sri Manavālamāmungal who wrote the vyākhyānam only for the portion which had been lost. Perceptive scholars have not failed to express their unqualified approbation and admiration for the singular identity of thought and

style of presentation between these two great Āchāryās. Apart from this, Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal's Āchārya Sri Tiruvāymoḡi Pillai has written a 'svāpadesa vyākhyanam' for Periaḡvār Tirumoḡi. In recent time, Kānchi Swāmi Annangarāchārya has written a beautiful 'Deepikai Urai' for both these Prabandhams.

As mentioned earlier, a major portion of Periaḡvār Tirumoḡi is taken up by what is called "*Pillaittamizh*" or savouring the child's growing up experience, in this case revisiting Sri Krishna's childhood in Brindāvan through the experiential narrative of mother Yasoda. The rest is of different kinds, some as experiences articulated by those in love with Krishna, some as mother's concern over the daughter in love with the Lord, some on 'divya-desams', one as Hanuman's address to Sita, some as 'hitopadesa' to the world, some as Āḡvār's own prayers or introspections etc. The first Tirumoḡi "*Vannamādangal soozh Tirukkōtṡiyur*", describes the celebration of Sri Krishna's birth. The verse reads in full as follows: "*Vanna mādangal soozh Tirukkōtṡiyur Kannan Kesavan Nambi pirandhinil, ennai sunnam edhiredhir toovidak kannan mutram kalandhu mutrāyitrē*", 'When the lord Krishna was born in Tirukkōtṡiyur of beautiful mansions, they sprinkled fragrant oil and sandal powder on one another, slushing the portico of Krishna's house'. Krishna was born in Mathura, not in Tirukkōtṡiyur, "*Ēshah: Nārāyana; Srimān Kshīrārnava nikētanah: I nāga parayankam utsrujya āgatho Madhurām purīm*". One might wonder, 'how come the Āḡvār starts with a factual inaccuracy'. The explanation given is that much before Krishna's birth, the Devas were believed to have assembled in this 'divya-desam' in a conclave to discuss the atrocities of Kamsa to seek redress for the same, when they decided to seek the Lord's protection for the same. Moreover, Āḡvār's associate in 'mangalāśāsana'

being Selvanambi who hailed from Tirukkōttiur which was close to his heart, Āļvār presumably wished to experience that place-association. So there is nothing unusual in Āļvār characterizing Tirukkōttiur in the above fashion.

The next Tirumoḷi 1.2. beginning with the words, "*Sīdhakkadalul amudhanna*" is an adoration of child Krishna from head to toe or rather the other way about. The first pāsuraṁ invites the neighbourhood 'ladies of coral lips to come and witness the act of the darling child Krishna in the cradle grabbing his foot and sucking his toe'. "*Pēdhaikkuzhavi pidittu suvaittu unnum pādhakkamalangal kānīrē, pavalavāyīr ! vandhu kānīrē*" ! "*Vishnō padhē paramē madhva utsa:*", (V.Suk.), 'from Vishnu's feet flows honey'. Sri Nammāļvār phrases it as "*thēnē`malarum Tiruppādham*"- (T.V.M.-1.5.5). Āļvār first describes the feet of the Lord since that is the haven every 'prapanna' seeks.

In Tirumoḷi 1.6. Āļvār describing the child Krishna learning the art of clapping, or what is called "*chappāni*", makes a very evocative reference to the Lord's Nrsimhāvathāram in 1.6.9'. in the words, "*Alandhu itta thoonai avan thatta, āngē valarndhitta val ughir singa uruvāy ulan thottu, iraniyan onmārbu agalam, pilandhitta kaigalāl chappāni.....*", 'with these clapping hands, thou as a fierce lion with sword-like nails tore into the wide chest of Hiranya feeling the depths of his heart -- when he smote the pillar he had got made to his measure.' Āļvār says here that lest Lord Nrsimha should already take His position inside the pillar as it was being made, Hiranya got it made under his care and watch and that he smote the pillar himself. Āļvār says that after tearing open the demon's chest, Lord Nrsimha patiently probed the demon's heart for some wet spot indicative of some sign of compunction

in him, since his child Prahlāda had implored him several times to do an ‘anjali’ to the Lord, implying thereby that even at that late stage, the Lord wished he could find some semblance of a predisposing factor in the form of ‘anukūla bhuddhi’ in the demon to pardon him. Such is the dripping compassion of Nrsimhāvathāra, “*Nārasimha vapuh: Srimān*”- (V.S.- 21-22). As another Āḷvār describes this Lord, “*Azhagiyaṇ thānē ariuruvam thānē*”, (N.M.T-22). ‘Beautiful is the Lord Who came in Nrsimha form’.

In decad 1.8. on mother Yasoda entreating child Krishna to come to her, Āḷvār makes a passing reference to the Vāmanavāthāra of the Lord in two lines with specific reference to the episode wherein King Mahābali is forewarned by his guru Sukrāchārya that the Brahmin in front of him is the Supreme Lord who has come in disguise to do the bidding of celestials, and that his real intent is to divest him of all his possessions. When Mahābali asked the Brahmin what boon he desired, the Lord simply said, “*Kolvan nān Māvali moovadi thā*”, ‘O Bali, I will take three feet of this earth’. Warning his disciple not to concede the Brahmin’s wish, the preceptor in a preemptive move, entered and sat in the nozzle of the water jug taking the form of a fly. While Bali ignored the warning of his preceptor and went ahead with the gift and tilted the vessel to pour drops of water on the Lord’s hands to solemnise the act, the Lord using the ‘pavitra’ he was wearing on his finger as the discus, poked the nozzle to remove the obstruction. The ‘chakra’ pushed aside Sukra but in doing so made him blind in one eye. Āḷvār refers to this episode in his lines “*Sukkirān kannai turumbhāl kilariya Sakkarkkaiyanē Achō Achō Sankhamidanthānē Achō Achō*”- (1.8.7). Mahābali was consigned to the nether world by the Lord. The preceptor who told the truth in revealing the identity and intent of the Brahmin lost his eye. And King Bali who gifted what was asked for

to the Brahmin was punished. In this context, a question was believed to have been addressed to Nāloor Pillai, *"What justice was it ? Was this fair?"*. Nāloor Pillai was believed to have answered as follows. Mahābali was punished because he did not listen to his preceptor's advice. The preceptor was duly punished also since he tried to stop a gift to a worthy person. Both were wrong. Sri Nammālvār says of the Lord, *"Poyyanāgum puramē thozhuvārkkellām"*- (T.V.M.- 9.10.7.), 'He is false to those who worship him outwardly.'

The decad 2.9 is a very captivating narrative on Sri Krishna's 'bhāla līla' or child sport by way of stealing butter from the homes of cow-herd women and their complaints to mother Yasoda. In 2.9.10, beginning with the words, *"Sollil arasippadudhi nangāy !"*, Āḷvār describes a piquant episode where a woman has brought in the back lane of Krishna's house, a basket of rose-apples or *"nāval pazham"* a favorite fruit of Sri Krishna. Krishna runs to her for some fruits but she says she can only give him some for a price. Krishna is at a loss how to cobble the money to buy the fruits. He spies a tiny girl inside a neighbour's home wearing some bangles. There is no one noticing. So Krishna tiptoes quietly into the girl's home, calls the girl and beguiles her to part with her bangles which he takes to the fruit-seller woman and exchanges for some fruits. The mother of the girl meanwhile has noticed her child minus her bangles, and quickly spots Krishna quietly enjoying the fruits. Forgetting the bangles, she catches him and producing him before the mother, demands action saying 'see what your boy has done'. When caught red-handed thus the little imp still grins disarmingly with an innocent look, and says, *"no, I didn't do anything"* Āḷvār says in the last line, *"Nānallēn enru srikkinnānē"*. Like this, there are numerous complaints from affected cow-herd women to a hapless mother

Yasoda, torn between her motherly instinct wanting to believe that her wonder child can do no wrong, and the striking similarity and multiplicity of such allegations confirming her suspicions that may be her dearest child is not a 'paragon of perfection' after all, but 'a naughty kid' as alleged by others, and compelling some punitive action, to show a semblance of even-handed justice and fairplay in her attitude. An anecdote is cited in this connection. Pillai Engalāzhvān, who presumably resided a few houses down the same street where Nanjīyar lived, had a dream one night in which an urchin appeared before him demanding some rose-apples or 'nāvarpazham'. This dream recurred several times on subsequent nights till Āļvān who could barely sleep any more asked him, 'who are you, and what is your name?'. The urchin replied, 'I am Jīyar's son and my name is Āyar Kō'. Next morning as he woke up, Āļvān walked upto Jīyar's residence and knocked on the door. When Jīyar opened the door, Āļvān handed him a basket of rose apples to him, and said in mock plaintive tone to him, 'Jīyarē, your son won't let me have a wink of sleep in the night and probably would not let me stay in peace in my home'. He then related what transpired in his dreams on several nights. Jīyar was overwhelmed by the Lord's 'soulabhya' after hearing Engalāļvān, but went inside to his 'ārādhana' deity room, and mildly chided the Lord 'Āyar Kō', 'it was not appropriate on your part to have done this'.

One can say that the verses covered by the 1st 2 nd and 3rd (upto 3.6.) capture the gist of the tenth canto of Srimad Bhāgavatham. The decads 3.7. and 3.8. are also set in the mode of 'Krishnānubhava depicting the mood of the concerned mother voicing her emotions over her infatuated daughter's tender age, and her mixed feelings about her departure to Mathura with her Lord. In pāsuraṁ 3.8.4. Āļvār says, "*Oru magal thannai udayēn, ulagam*

niraindha pughazhāl Tirumagal pōl valarttēn", Sengan Māl thān kondu pōnān, perumagalāykkudi vāzhndhu perumpillai petra Asodai marumagalaikkandughandu manāttuppuram seyyunkolō ?, 'She was my only daughter. I raised her like the goddess of wealth praised by the whole world. The lotus-eyed seducer took her away. When the matriarch Yasoda mother of a great son sees her daughter-in-law, would she receive her with exultation and shower gifts on the bride?' By describing her daughter as 'oru magal', Āļvār implies that she is incomparably unique. She is obviously the mother's pride. So the mother rightfully claims she is hers 'udayēn', and what is more, raised her like the veritable goddess of wealth adored by the whole world, "*ulagam niraindha pugazhāl Tirumagal pōl valarttēn*". The enchanting Lord of lotus eyes carried her away literally. "*kondu pōnān*". A very emotion-filled parallel is cited in this connection. When Sri Kūrathāļvān departed for Lord's abode, Udayavar who was beside himself with unbearable grief, repeated this line about how he felt at that moment, "*Oru magal tannai udayēn, Tirumagal pōl valarttēn, Sengan māl thān kondu pōnān*".

The decad 3.9 beginning with the words, "*Ennāthan Devikku*" is set in the frame of two gopika girls singing alternately about Krishna and Rama, describing their various qualities and acts of valour, strength, and protection, righteous conduct, simplicity, accessibility etc. This decad, inter alia, recapitulates the story of how after the elimination of Narakāsura, Krishna's consort Satyabhāma who played a major role in that battle happened to be with Indrāni in her quarters, and on seeing the 'kalpaka' flowers there desired a branch thereof to take home, but Sasi Indra's wife, conceited like him, refused to part with even a tiny branch to their benefactor claiming that it must remain in the celestial

kingdom. To teach them a lesson, the Lord had the whole tree uprooted and taken by Garuda to earth to fulfill Satyabhāma's wish. This portrays the Lord's quality of 'āsrita-rakshanam'.

The next decad 3.10 is on the Sundara Kānda episode of Hanumān presenting Rama's ring to Sita, after narrating the anecdotal reminiscences recapitulated by Rama to cite as proof that he was indeed a bona fide emissary of the Lord.

The fourth 'patthu' is taken up with Āḷvār's 'anubhavam' or experience of divyadesas and 'hitopadesam' to samsāris. Āḷvār devotes two decads to Tirmālirunchōlai, and three to Srirangam, and one each to Tirukkōttiyūr and Devaparayāg. In Tirumoḷi 4.4. dedicated to Tirukkōttiyūr, Āḷvār sings exaltingly of devotees who abide with the 'arca' form of the Lord in thought, action and by recitation of His names, and castigates those pseudo-devotees who lead a life of lie and are sanctimonious in their religious practice. The true devotee is one who lives by principles with genuine qualities, and caring of the preceptors and Lord's devotees. Such devotees are representations of the divine on earth which is ever purified by the dust on their feet. 'Bhāgavatha-śeṣavam' is of the highest order of devotion in Āḷvār's scale, and he would happily let the devotees of the Lord sell him, if they so wished. Several of the sentiments expressed by the Āḷvār in the next Tirumoḷi, contain sage advice warning the 'samsāris' of the miserable plight that awaits an ungodly way of life here in this world and after, and exhorting them to open their minds and hearts to God in order to obtain His grace. In this vein, he also advises people in decad 4.6. to name their children after the sacred names of the Lord, so that when calling them by these names they could be earning the merit of reciting Lord's names.

Tirumōḷi 4.8. and 4.9. are dedicated to the divya-desam Srirangam. In 4.9.5. beginning with the words, *“Āmayāy, Gangaiyāy Aazhkadalāy”*, Āḷvār relates an interesting story from Harivamśam about sage Nārada and a tortoise living in the river Ganges. The story goes like this. When Lord Krishna was with the assembly of Pāṇḍavas and Duryōḍanas who had come to pay Him a visit at Dvāraka, in a region just outside of Dvāraka where Krishna had earlier received them himself, Nārada too turned up there and offered his salutations to the Lord saying, *“Āscharya: kalu devānām ekastvam Purushōttama, Dhanyaschāsi Mahābhāhō Lokē nānyasti kaschana”* II. O, Lord Purushōttama, Thou art wonderful and singular. O Lord of valiant arms, there is none except Thee anywhere in the whole universe.’ The Lord smiled at Narada, and replied, *“Āscharyaschaiva dhanyascha dakshinābhisahēritah”*, meaning, ‘I am all that you described, and come ‘with a sacrificial fee’. Nārada said that he was gratified by the Lord’s words, and asked the Lord’s leave to go. So saying he prepared to leave, when the assembled kings who were puzzled by the above words requested the Lord to enlighten them about what was the purport of the message they had exchanged. Krishna said to them, ‘ask, Nārada’, but without waiting for them to ask, He turned to Nārada and prompted him to relate the story behind their exchange. Nārada said that once upon a time, he reached the banks of the river Ganga, and rested there for the night. Next morning as the sun rose, he went to the river for his bath and to offer prayers. As he scooped up some water to offer ‘arghyam’, he sighted a leviathan tortoise in the water pleasing to the eyes, but covered fully with mud and slush on its back. Nārada said to the tortoise, ‘you live in this river without a care or thought. You indeed are a marvel and blessed.’ The tortoise speaking in a human voice, said, ‘what is the marvel in me?. There are thousands of creatures which move about in this river. So

really speaking, it is the Ganga which is truly marvelous and blessed. Nārada then said to the river Ganga, 'you are truly a marvel and blessed to hold and sustain thousands of beings like the tortoise.' Ganga spoke to Nārada, 'what is marvelous about me? There are numerous rivers like me supporting innumerable living creatures. They all ultimately flow into the great ocean. So truly speaking, it is the ocean which is wonderful and blessed. 'Then Nārada went to the ocean and addressed the ocean king as he had to the river Ganga. The ocean said, 'I am not qualified for your description of me as marvelous and blessed. It is the earth that supports me. So that honour belongs to the earth'. Nārada then went to the earth and addressed it in terms of his earlier encomiums to the ocean. The earth was abashed at Nārada's compliment and said, 'No, it is the mountains that are my support. So the description fits them.' The mountains in turn pointed to Brahma the creator, who in turn said that he derived all his powers of creation from the Vedas. He said, 'the Vedas are the repository of all knowledge and support me and the worlds. So they eminently qualify to be called marvelous and blessed'. So Nārada approached the Vedas, and said, "*you are indeed truly marvelous and blessed*". The Vedas, said, 'no, we are invested with powers only from 'yajñās' or sacrifices. So it is they that deserve to be called wonderful and blessed.' So Nārada wended his way to the 'Yajña' and said, 'there is nothing more marvelous and blessed than you..'. The Yajña Puruṣa said these words, "*āscharyassabdhō nāsmāsu dhanyasabdhōpivāmudhē āscharyam paramam Vishnussahyasmākam Parāgathi: Iyadājyam vayamaśnimo hutamagnishu pāvanam, tat sarvam Pundarikākshō Lōkamūrti: prayacchati II.*" 'The terms 'āscharyam' and 'dhanya' are not in us. The real marvel is the Supreme Lord Vishnu. He is our ultimate way. It is the lotus-eyed Lord Who is the master of the universe, who grants the fruits of all the sacred offerings into the sacrificial fires that we

ingest.' Nārada concluded his narrative saying, that after hearing this he came back to the earth, to seek Krishna out in this assembly and worship him in the manner described at the outset. Nārada continued, 'Lord, in reply to that, You said, "*dhakshinābissahētyēvam*". That seems appropriate to me, since it is said, "*yajñām hi gathir Vishnus sarveshāncha sadakshinah: I dakshinassahētyēvam praśnō mama samāptavān*". 'The ultimate path of all sacrifices is the Supreme Lord Vishnu, who is always with "*dakshina*" or the 'sacrificial fee'. With this clarification, "*dakshinābissahētyēvam*", my query has run its course to resolution'

Sri Vishnu Sahasranāmam, addresses the Lord under twelve names in relation to "*yajña*" as follows, "*yajño yajñapati: yajvā, yajñangha: yajñavāhana: (104).*" "*yajñabrt, yajñakṛt, yajñi, yajñabuk, yajñasādhana: I yajñāntakṛt, yajñaguhyam*"-(105), 'He is of the form of 'japayajña' to those who have no material wherewithal. He as 'yajñapati: confers the fruits thereof on the performer. As 'Yajvā', He Himself helps acting as the performer enabling one who has no strength to function as a yajña-performer. Yajñangha: means that the Lord treats the yajñas performed by competent persons as auxiliary to the above yajña performed by Him. The Lord as yajñavāhana: enables the yajvās to carry out the yajña with ability, diligence, and the right. The source of perfection in the performance of a yajña is none other than the Lord. As yajñabrt, in the event of any deficiency during performance, remembrance of the Lord, is enough to consummate the yajña. The Lord is also the yajñakṛt, the creator in the early part of Time of the ritual of yajña for the good of the world. The Lord is the yajñi or Seṣi for all yajñas. All yajñas are for the Lord's pleasure. He as yajñabuk is the sole enjoyer of the yajña. The yajña is the channel through which the Lord can be reached. So

He is the 'yajña-sādhana:'. Finally, 'yajñaguhyam', conveys the essential secret that the Lord partakes of the 'havis' or offering as if with great love even though He has no interest as such in it, and showers benedictions on the performer as He is pleased with the latter's effort and sincerity.

The decad 4.10 addressed to the Lord Sri Ranganatha is the Āḷvār's moving 'śaranāgathi' prayer to the Lord, with a candid admission that he might not be able to think of the Lord in his dying moments, with life ebbing away and faculties dysfunctional, and hence the Lord should accept his prayer made, now and here, whilst his faculties are in tact, and remember to protect him at the crucial time. Āḷvār's prayer runs on the following lines. *"eyppennai vandhu naliyum pōdhu anghu ēdhum nān unnai ninaikka mātṭēn, appodhaikkippodhē sollivaittēn Arangathu Aravanaippalliyānē"*, (4.10.1). In 4.10.3. further, Āḷvār says: *"ellaiyil vāsal kurugac-chenrāl etri naman tamar patrum pōdhu, nillumin ennum upāyamillai..... allal padāmal kākka vēndum Arangathu Aravanai palliyānē,.."* 'when the gates of the nether world approach, and Yama's agents kick and grab me, I will have no power to say 'Stop'. At that point you should protect me from suffering, O Lord reclining on the serpent bed at Arangam.'

It might appear strange that Āḷvār should express any fears on account of Yama's messengers, in the face of Yama's specific injunction to his agents to keep away from Lord's devotees, *"parihara Madhusoodhana prapannān, prabhuraham anyanṛunām na vaishnavānām"*- (V.P.-3.7.14). *"Irainjiyum sādhuvarāy pōdhumingal"* ,(N.M.T.-68), 'Salute and be gentle as sādhus.' Accepting the Lord's unconditioned free will to protect him, Āḷvār may still seem to have an element of fear, 'what if the Lord didn't remember'. The explanation is that it is born out of a

fleeting cloudiness of mind natural in deep engagement of the mind in the experience of the Divine. Other Ālvārs too have expressed similar feelings. Tirumangai Ālvār “*innam ātrankarai vāzh maram pol anjukinrēn*”- (P.T.M.-11.8.1), ‘I fear like a tree on the banks of a river’. Again, “*Naman thamar patri etrivaittu erieyehukinra sembināl iyanra pāvaiyaip pāvi! thazhuvena mozhivadarkku anji nambhanē! Un tiruvadiyadaindhēn*”, (P.T.M.-1.6.4), ‘O, Unfailing Lord, I quail in fear of the prospect of being caught by the emissaries of Yama and tied to a blazing hot copper statue of a woman with the command, ‘Sinner, now embrace this’

Tirumāḷisai Ālvār, “*Vaitta sindhai vānghuvittu nīnghuvikka nīyinam meittan vallai – uyndhu nin mayakkiniḷ vaikkal ennai māyanē*”- (T.C.V.- 85). ‘Thou art ever free and truly capable of disengaging my mind that is fixed on thy lotus feet. Therefore, I understood Thee (as free and independent) O wondrous Lord, please do not ensnare me into the net of Thy māya, (prakṛti), and cast me away in the trap of sensory matters.’

Sri Kulasekhara Perumāḷ seeks that reassurance internally in his own mind in the words, “*mābhīr mandhamanō vichintya bahudhā`yāmischiram yātanāh:*”, (M.M-11). ‘O, my witless mind, do not fear over too much thinking of Yama’s persecutions for too long’.

Periālvār reiterates his prayer for Lord’s reassurance in decad 5.3.7 in the words, “*Akkarai ennum anarttakkadalul azhundhi un pērarulāl ikkaraiyēri ilaittirundhēnai anjēl enru kaikaviyāy...*”, ‘Cast away on the farther shore of a senseless ocean, I have come up on this shore weary, O Lord, lift thy hand and say, fear not’. Even after reaching the nearer shore after the dawn of ‘śeṣatva’ knowledge in his mind by Lord’s ‘nirhētuka krupā’, Ālvār still pleads for Lord’s assurance for ‘prāpti’ or attainment of what he is seeking on ‘this shore’. Sri

Ālavandār in a similar vein prays “*Aparādha sahasra bhājanam patitam bheema bhava arnavōdharē agathim śaranāgatam Harē! Krupayā kevalam Āthmasāt kuru*”- (S.R.-48) ‘O Lord Hari, Being a repository of innumerable transgressions and fallen into the ocean of samsāra, and without any recourse whatever, I have sought Thy refuge. Pray by Thy mere grace, make me Thine.’

Āļvār rounds up his Prabandham with a Tirumoļi addressed to the Lord of Tiruvenkatam in an exultant vein recounting the special grace of the Lord he has been blessed with in various ways, after the Lord has taken him under his wings, so to say. “*Nee ennaik kaikkonda pin*”, (5.4.2). Āļvār goes on to say that he has drunk deep of the Lord like a nectar-filled vessel. In a capstone expression of his joy and fulfillment, Āļvār captures, in 5.4.5. the quintessential spirit of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta in the words, “*unnaikkondu ennul vaittēn, ennaiyum unnilttēn*”, ‘I have placed you within myself, and have placed myself in you.’ This is evocative of Āļvār’s evolution from the stage of his being a ‘Vishnuchitta’, (one who had Vishnu in his heart), to the crowning moment when he transformed into one who lives in Vishnu’s heart.

The Lord had blessed him with yet another unique honour of becoming the foster father of Goda, the divine child devotee non-pareil, whom Sri Vedānta Desikan beautifully describes as the wish-granting creeper that the flower garden of the Āļvār yielded, “*Sri Vishnuchitta kulanandhana kalpa valli*”-(G.S.-1). Āļvār tended with great care and love this golden creeper till in time, she would entwine herself in that glorious “*Harichandana*” called Sri Ranganatha. That is how Vishnuchitta earned the befitting honorific title Periaļvār twice over. “*Undō Periaļvārkku opporuvār*” ?, wonders Sri Manavālamāmuniṅal, (U.R.M.-20), ‘is there any one comparable to Periaļvār’!

Taniyans- Tiruppallāndu.

Composed by Nāthamunigal.

1. *“Gurumukamanadheetya prāha Vedān aśeṣān,
Narapatiparikluptam śūlkam adhātukāmah: I
Svaśuram Amaravandhyam Ranganāthasya sākshāt
dvijakulatilakam -tham Vishnuchittam namāmi” II*

‘Salutations to Vishnuchitta, the crown-jewel of Brāhmanas, who spoke the truths of all the Vedas without the initiation of a Guru, who won the prize offered by the king, and became the father-in-law of Ranganatha Himself worshipped by the celestials.’

Composed by Pāndya Bhattar.

2. *“Minnār tadamadhil soozh Villiputtur enroru kāl
sonnār kazharkamalam sūdinōm, munnāl kizhiyaruttān
enruraittōm keezhmayinil sērum vazhiaruttōm nenjamē
vandhu”.*

‘O! My heart, We wear the lotus-feet of those who speak even once of Villiputtur of grandiose walls, we said that he won the prize-bag and sundered our old ways leading to lowly ends.’

3. *“Pāndian kondādap Pattarbhīrān vandhān enru eendiyā
sangam edutthūdhā -vēndiyā Vedangal ōdhi viraindhu
kizhiyaruttān pādhangal yāmudaiya patru”*

‘The Pāndya king rejoiced and exulted to the sound of multiple bugles and conches -- that Pattarbhīrān came and revealed the Vedic truths about Divine Reality and quickly bagged the prize—may his adorable feet be our refuge. Alternately, taking the phrase as, “eendiyā sangam eduttōdhā”, this might be interpreted to mean, ‘shutting the mouths of the assembly of the doubting Vedic scholars of the King’s Court’.

8

Āndāl

Sri Āndāl or Goda holds a very unique position in the Ālvār pantheon and Sri Vaishnava Sampradāya, as one who is also the divine consort of Lord Sri Ranganatha. In the mystic symbolism of the individual soul seeking union with the Divine, Āndāl's life and work holds out an intimate appeal to the mind of every devotee, and especially of every Srivaishnava as evident from the fervor evinced in the wedding celebration of Nārāyana with Āndāl in Vishnu temples on Ādi pooram day and again on the day of 'boghi' festival which is a day preceding the Tamil 'Pongal' celebrations every year. It is interesting to note that in Srivaishnava marriage custom, it is not uncommon to dress up every bride as Goda, and in specific symbolism of association with the divine marriage, a ceremony called 'sīrpādal' takes place as part of the wedding with the recitation of Āndāl's "*Vāranamāyiram*", (N.T-6.0) -- Āndāl's dream song visualizing in detail her own wedding events in sequence--, during which the bride and the groom sit face to face on a mat, rolling alternately turmeric-coated coconuts towards each other to the rendition of the above hymn. Another important aspect is that the 'Dhanurmāsa vrata' (known also as 'mārgaśīrṣa snāna') has been a sacred ritual observed by all Srivaishnavas from the hoary past, when it is incumbent on the participants to get up very early in the morning, and after their bath and rituals, visit the temple to recite the Tiruppāvai consisting of thirty pāsūrams every day, and understand and implement in practice the spiritual truths garnered therein. Tiruppāvai is indeed an integral part of the daily 'anuśandhānam' or recitation of hymns from Divyaprabandham etc. in Sri Vaishnava tradition.

Sri Āndāl made her appearance in the world as an incarnation of Sri Nīla Devi, as a baby under a tulsi bush in the garden of Perīāļvār in the Tamil year Nala, (98 th year after the advent of Kali age, according to Guruparampara Prabhāvam), in the Tamil month Ādi, under the star Pūrvaphalguni or Pooram in the waxing phase of the moon. Sri Manavālamāmuniḡal exults about her birthday in the words, “*Inrō tiruvāḡippooram, emakkagavanrō Āndāl ingavadarittāl....*” (U.R.M.- 22). As in the case of Āļvārs whose lives were interconnected with contemporary historical facts, the life period of Āndāl also, has been a topic of much research among scholars. The refrain of ‘Ēlōrempāvāy’ is common in both Āndāl’s poem Tiruppāvai and the Tamil Saiva saint Mānicksa Vāchakar’s Tiruvempāvai. The date of the latter is fixed in the latter half of the ninth and first half of tenth century. There is no doubt that Mānicksa Vāchakar came after Āndāl since the birth of Nāthamuniḡal who is the first Vaishnava Achārya has been determined as 823 A.D. that is first half of ninth century. Sri Raghava Aiyangār, based on a research into Āndāl’s reference to “*mathi niraḡndha nannāl*” (full moon day) in the Tamil month ‘mārgḡazhi’, and the use of the phrase, ‘Velliezhundu Vyāzhan urangitru’, in the thirteenth verse of Tiruppāvai beginning with the words, “*Pullin vāy kīḡḡānai*”, which refers to the opposition between Venus and Jupiter (identified with pure knowledge presaging the rise of the age of enlightenment and subsidence of forces of ignorance respectively), came up with the date of 18 Dec. 731. He also correlated this dating to Perīāļvār’s reference to the Pāḡḡya king Nedumāran in his Tirumoļi (4.2.7.) as follows, “*Nedumāran then Koodarkōḡ thennan kondāḡum Tirumāḡiruncholaiyē*”. There is some broad agreement among various scholars about the probability that Āndāl belongs to sometime close to the latter half of eighth century.

Like Sita who was also an 'Ayōnija', (incarnation of Bhū Devi) brought up by King Janaka who found her while ploughing the field, Andal who was found in the flower garden was brought up with doting care by Periaḷvār whose god-love was intense. Associated with fragrant tulsileaves and the unique natural flavor of mother earth, child Andal was attracted to the garlands that her father strung every day for the Lord Vadaperunkōyiludaiyān, (Vatapatraśāyi) of Srivilliputtur. Periaḷvār told her stories of Sri Krishna and Rama, and his devotion and daily routine of God-worship and service of taking flower garlands to the shrine of the Lord, cultivated in her mind intense God-love. Stories of Krishna especially cast a magic spell over the heart of the little child, and Krishna became an object of her love and affection, which grew in intensity and dimension as she grew in age. She imagined herself as a bride set to marry Krishna, and started wearing the flower garlands that her father used to make for the Lord, wondering if she made a worthy bride for the Lord. By her contact, she imparted a rare ethereal fragrance to the garlands which became specially dear to the Lord. Thus the Lord who is 'Sarva-gandha:' and has the perfume of the Vedas in His feet, the fragrance of the high-class sandal paste smeared by Mahālakshmi in His chest, yearned for the fragrance (āmōdha`) of the flowers worn by Goda. The unwitting father who used to carry the garlands worn by Goda to the temple for offering to the Lord, came up on her on one occasion, wearing the garlands he had kept to be taken to the shrine, and looking at her image in the mirror, jingling her bangles and adjusting her saree and facial angle to check if she looked pretty enough for her Lord. Ḍvār was taken by surprise and remorse at his child's transgression and told her so. He did not take the garlands she had worn to the temple

on that day. Later in the day, he gathered some flowers from the garden and made fresh garlands which were offered to the Lord. In the night, the Lord of the shrine at Villiputtur appeared in his dream and expressed his special preference for the flowers worn by Goda, and asked him to bring garlands worn by her to the shrine. Periaḷvār was overcome by surprise and filled with ecstasy and on the next morning, he bade Goda to wear the garlands he had made first before taking the same to the Lord's shrine. Āḷvār then shared his dream of the previous night, and told her that she ruled over the heart of the Lord Vatapatraśāyi Himself. As the Supreme Lord had accepted the flower-garland doffed by her, she has come to be known as 'Soodikkodutta Nācchiār', 'Soodikkodutta Sudarkkodi' and 'Āmuktha Mālyada'. Sri Vedānta Desikan expresses his joy reminiscing on this, in his lines, *"Tvanmouligandha śubhaghām upahr̥tya mālām laebhē Mahattarapadha anugunam prasādam"*, 'Your father received the Lord's grace of the honorific of 'Periaḷvār' by offering garlands invested with the special fragrance of your hair'- (G.S.-10).

Periaḷvār had earlier been concerned as to how to find a groom for his daughter little realising that she was always clear in her mind that, 'not for any human she would live'," mānidavarkkenrup pēchuppadiḷ Vāzhakillēn", (N.T.-1.5). After this incident, he veered round to the conviction that Goda was destined for the Lord, but which Lord it was that she desired, was the question. It is said that he broached the subject with Goda, and found out that her heart had settled on Lord Sri Ranganatha of Srirangam, whom she would describe as *".....EnArangattinnamudhar, Kuzhalazhagar, Vāyazhagar Kannazhagar koppoozhil Ezhukamalappoovazhagar".....* (N.T.-11.2), 'my sweet Arangar lord has beautiful locks, beautiful lips, bewitching eyes, and a beautiful lotus on

his navel'. Lord Sri Ranganatha appeared in Periaľvār's dream, and assured him that He would marry Goda. Accordingly, he was directed to bring her to His shrine at Srirangam. The 'archakas' or priests of the temple were despatched to Villipputtur with all temple honours, to escort the bridal entourage to the Srirangam shrine. King Vallabha Deva and his ministers also joined the procession. When they all reached the Srirangam temple, Goda got off the palanquin carrying her, walked to the Lord's shrine, and while others watched, she stepped into the sanctum and ascending the folds of Ādiśeṣa, merged with the Lord. A happier version of the legend would have it, that Sri Ranganatha went to Sri Villipputtur, and wed Goda with all due religious rites, pomp, and grandeur, and remained at Srivillipputtur as Lord Ranganannār where He presides at His shrine in 'arca' state along with Andā and Garuda. The Lord showered His blessings and temple honours on His father-in-law who earned the coveted title of 'Periaľvār' once over. Legend has it that Āľvār retired to Tirumālıruncholai to continue his floral service as before.

Āndāl as the Consort of Lord Sri Ranganatha thus enjoys a status even superior to Periaľvār. The unique greatness of Āndāl is that while the other Āľvārs had been in a varying degree of torpor or dormancy before Lord aroused them by endowing them with 'mathinalam' or spiritual enlightenment that enabled them to experience the Divine, Āndāl had herself approached the Supreme Lord, and arousing Him, announced herself to Him. Hence it is that she is given the pride of place among the Āľvārs, as Sri Manavālamāmunigal's lines attest to, "*Āľvārgal tancheyalai vinjinirkkum thanmayalāl pinjāyppazhuttāl Āndāl.*".. (U.R.M.-24). In other words, as the sole heiress to the magnificent inheritance of the spiritual wealth of the earlier Āľvārs, she even excelled them when

she was barely a child. The other Ālvārs were men in physical form ; they acquired femininity in their minds by intense imagination. Āndāl was, however, feminine both in outward form and inward mould, and had been absorbed in the Lord and His attributes from her childhood, and could easily reach the climax 'parākāśhta' in her love for Him. It came so natural for her to assume the role of a simple gopika of Nandavraja and act out to such perfection the rite of 'Mārgaśīrṣa' nōnbu', through a ritual bath and her prayer to the Lord to grant her the privilege of rendering such service as was consistent with the nature of her being.

Deeply enamoured of Krishna and his pranks as a child growing up in Nandavraja, her absorption in Him became an obsession as to how to get him and failing that, how to live that experience. What could she do? She was a simple girl in Villipputtur. Gokul and Govardana, and Yamuna were all too far-fetched for her to even imagine. Just then, an anecdote of the gopis' experience came like a flash to her mind. She had heard that on one occasion, while the gopis were led into ecstatic trance in their dalliance with the Divine, (rāśa-kreedā), they became so intoxicated with vanity about their experience, that Krishna desired to bring down their happiness to the range of their spiritual level by eliminating excess emotion. So He disappeared from the scene. Not finding Krishna in their midst, the gopis wept with agony and tried to keep alive their experience by imitating the sporting pranks of Krishna. On recalling this to mind, Āndāl felt that she too could do likewise. So she decided that by adopting the rite performed by the gopikas to secure Krishna's union, she could, in the intensity of her imagination, realize the same happiness. She did this by imagining Srivilliputtur to be Nandavraja, her companions to be gopikas, the temple of Vatapatraśāyi to be Nanda's

mansion, and the Lord of the shrine, Sri Krishna. She is no longer Āndāl but a gopika, and she is now in Nandavraja. In the ecstasy of her imagination, she became identified with an unsophisticated gopika of Nandavraja, acquiring in the process the gait, the mode of dress, the hairstyle, the accent, and even the peculiar smell associated with milkmaids. As Sri Periaṁcchān Pillai phrased it, “*Idai mudiyum, Idaippēchum, Mudainātramumāyitru*”. She would secure Krishna as her spouse, by performing this rite in the manner of the gopikas. What is more, knowing that only Krishna could help her to conduct this rite to fulfillment, she would appeal to him for his help. Thus was born her Tiruppāvai ‘nōnbu’, as a revelation of her inner emotions, and expression of ‘bhāvana prakarṣam’, just like Sri Nammālvār’s when he sang, “*Kadal jñālam seidhēnum yānē ennum, kadal jñālam yāvēnum yanē ennum*” (T.V.M.-5.6.1), ‘I made this earth and ocean, I am the earth and ocean’. Or as Prahalāda when he said, ‘Aham Sarvam, Mattah: Sarvam, Mayi Sarvam’, ‘I am everything, everything is from me in me everything’. As part of this rite, Āndāl got up first, gathered some gopikas, and rousing others who were asleep, proceeded to the mansion of Nandagopa where Krishna was resting. This rite extended over a month. And with a hymn for every day, Tiruppāvai contains thirty songs. Rousing ten gopikas, and reaching Nandagopa’s mansion, they managed to awaken Nandagopa, Yasoda, Balarama, Nilā Devi, and finally Sri Krishna. They then made their hearts’ wish known to Him, if only to render service to Him as long as their souls would last.

The term Tiuppāvai has several meanings. ‘Pāvai’ refers to a beautiful maiden like a perfect portrait. ‘Tiru’ refers to the divine Mother Lakshmi. So Tiruppāvai can be taken to mean a beautiful maiden close to Mahā Lakshmi. As Nammālvār phrases it, “*Kolamalarpāvaikku Anbāghiya*

en anbēyō” - (T.V.M.-10.10.7), ‘O my Love, You became the love of the lotus-dame’. Tiruppāvai here means however, the ‘Sri Vratam’, a rite that bestows material prosperity ‘aishvarya’, worldly happiness ‘Priyam’, as well as spiritual and other-worldly bliss ‘Srēyam’ in consecrated service to, and in eternal union with, the Divine. This rite draws from the parallel of the Bhāgavatha story in which the unmarried girls of Vraja observed a strict penance during the month of ‘mārgaśīrṣa, and prayed to Durga Kāthyāyini to bless them with Nandagopa’s son as their husband. Tiruppāvai is a testament of mystic religious consciousness, wherein Goda seeks to rouse the Lord only to make the submission that she has become of her real being, reminding Him of the Upaniṣadic secret that the individual self, (jivātma) is entirely dependent on the Supreme Self, (Paramātma). This is what has been described in her ‘taniyan’ as “*pārārtyam svam sruti sata śirassiddham adhyāpayanti*” or, ‘teaching Him the esoteric doctrine of ‘paratantrata’ as enunciated in the Upaniṣads’. This predicates the three-fold bond of ‘ananyārhaṣeṣatvam’, ‘ananyaśaranyatvam’ and ‘ananya-bhogyatvam’, ‘being the servant only of the Lord, seeking solely His refuge and being an exclusive object of His enjoyment’. Hence, it is that Tiruppāvai has been called, “*Vedamanaittukkum Vittu*” or the seed of the Vedas, Vedānta and ‘itihāsa-purānas’.

The first five songs are a foreword for the whole Prabandham. The first song is a declaration of the intent and purpose of the rite, what is called ‘upodhgātham’. A similar statement is Sri Manavālamāmuniṅgal’s first verse in his Upadesa Rathinamālai, beginning with the words, “*Endhai Tiruvāymozhipilai.....*”, wherein he states his purpose as articulating, after deep contemplation, the message he had received from his preceptor Tiruvāymozhipillai with his grace, as a message for

the benefit of future generations.’ In the first pasuram, “*Mārgazhi thingal*”, Āndāl sings the praises of the season and time for performance of the rite, then addresses her bejeweled sisters to join for the bath, “*Neerādap pōdhumīn*”, so they, the graceful girls of ‘Āippādi’, can approach the young son of Nandagopa known for his sharp spear, the lion-cub of the beautiful-eyed mother Yasoda. He is the dark-hued, radiant, moon-faced Lord Nārāyaṇa who alone would grant them the ‘parai’ they seek for their rite. So she issues the call, ‘Girls, come assemble, and win the world’s praise.’ Here, it is important to understand the concepts of certain terms which occur multiple times, as for instance the term ‘Neerāttam’. This term is used in first pāsuraṁ, in the phrase ‘neerādap pōdhumīn’. Again in the second pāsuraṁ, it figures in the phrase, ‘nātkālē neerādi’, in the third, ‘sātri neerādināl’, and in the fourth, as ‘mārghazi neerāda’. The ‘neerāttam’ that Andāl refers to, is not in the literal sense of bathing, but in the sense of ‘avagāhasnānam’ of ‘bhagavad-samślēṣa’, or union with God. “*eṣa Brahma praviṣṭōsmi grīṣhmē sītamiva hrdaam*”. ‘In the same way, as a man parched in mid-summer heat immerses in the cool waters of a pond, I enter into God-consciousness’. It is in this sense, that Āndāl uses the term ‘neerādi’ etc. The man who takes a plunge into God-consciousness, is cleansed of the triple evils or afflictions of ‘ādhyātmika,’ ādhi-daivika’ and ‘ādhi-bouthika’-tāpās’. Though the gopikas are exhorted to come for a bath, there is no indication anywhere that they have indeed taken their bath. After all gopis meet, they straight head to Krishna’s place. Eternal union with Krishna is the bath they have all contemplated. In this context, the lines of Parakāla Nāyaki’s mother in Tirunedunthāṇḍakam expressing her disavowal of her daughter’s conduct are interesting, (pāsuraṁ- 19). She says,“*Atrāl tan niraiazhindhāl āvikkinrāl aniarangam*

ādudhumō ! Thōzhi ! ennum, petrēn vāicchol iraiyum pēsakkēlāl....." Potrāmaraiikkayam neerādappōnāl"

I got this daughter of mine who would not listen to my words, lost herself and heaving a sigh, told her friend, 'Shall we go to Arangam to dance?', but instead got immersed in "*Azhagiyanamanavāpperumāl*". 'Parāsara Bhattar interprets 'Potrāmaraiikkayam' as Lord Sri Ranganatha.

The other term is 'Parai' which is what the gopikas seek from Krishna. 'Parai' is a drum, a kind of percussion instrument which is fastened to the bosom and played on, while singing and dancing. The gopikas seek this 'parai' since it is required for their rite. So Āndāl assures them that Nārāyana will grant this in the first verse, "*Nārāyananē Namakkē Parai tharuvān*". Later, when they get to meet Krishna, they make the prayer in pāsūram 25, "*Aruttittu vandhōm Parai tharudhiyāgil*", again in 26, "*Sālapperum Paraiyē*", in 28 "*Iraivā Nee thārāy Parai*", and in 29 "*itraipparai kolvān anru kān Govinda*". There is an interesting twist in connotation at this stage, which occurs when Krishna offers the group of gopikas a musical drum in answer to their prayer, and in keeping with their cultural mores. But the bevy of girls protest, saying that this 'Parai' is not what they had come for. The female of the species are apt to talk in a veiled, suggestive manner at times, when they hint at their wishes to their sweet hearts. Then it is not the literal meaning of their words that counts; it is what the words imply that matters. They throw a puzzled look at their Idol, as if to imply, 'could it be that by following the cows everyday to the forest, their Govinda had literally imbibed the inherent quality of the cows'!, they wonder. In the two previous pāsūrams, (27 and 28) the gopikas referred to Krishna by the appellation 'Govinda', here too in pāsūram 29, they call him by the same title. On the first occasion, they called him Govinda,

in order to express their gratitude that he had drawn them to himself like a magnet and that he had turned their hostility to friendship by manifesting his attributes and by favouring them with the privilege of getting united with him: "*Koodāraivellum Sīr Govinda*"- 27.

Then declaring that they had no other means, they admitted that He was perfect and complete and competent to supply their deficiency in knowledge: and become their only means in attaining their cherished objective: "*Kurai onrum illāda Govinda*"- 28. And lastly now, they submit that they have no other objective: "*Itraipparai kolvān anrukān Govinda*"- 29. They remind Krishna teasingly, "*Your occupation of tending the cows and giving them protection has made you forget your true nature and ours, our objective and your birth*". "*Petrammēyttunnum kulattil piranda Nee*", they say to him in a manner that almost amounts to a barb, 'having taken birth in the community that makes a living of tending cattle!'. Now Krishna says to them that he has understood their use of the word 'Parai' in the exact way as other people commonly understand it. It was their fault, that they had not made their meaning plain and clear in the first instance. Now if they say that they wish to tender personal service, "*Kutrēval engalaikkollāmal pōgādhu*", they must clarify what they mean by 'personal service'.

The gopikas then come out with a clear enunciation of their hearts' longing, which is phrased by Āndāl in a language of unsurpassed elegance and precision of what constitutes the magnum bonum of life for a true devotee of God, "*Etraikkumēzhēzhu piravikkum Undannōdu utrōme` yāvōm Unakkē Nām Ātcheyvōm*". 'We should have an inseparable kinship with you for all time and through successive births; and we 'be rendering service to you only.' The phrase "*Undannōdu utrōmeyāvōm*", is

unique. It may be any kind of the nine-fold relationship predicated for a 'jivātma' in relation to the Lord. The important thing is, it should be of eternal inseparability. It is the consummation devoutly wished by another Āļvār: *"Ozhivil kalamellām udanāy manni vahuvilā adimai seyya vēndum nām,.. yezhil kol sōdhi endai tandai tандаikkē"*, (T.V.M.-3.3.1.), 'At all times, and for ever by His side, we must perform flawless service to the radiant Lord of Venkatam'.

Another unique feature that recurs through the whole poem is the Lord's names. We saw how Āndāl has referred to the Lord as 'Govinda' three times over in pāsūrams 27 to 29. Similarly, Āndāl refers to 'Nārāyana' in the first, seventh and tenth pāsūrams. Thus she says *"Nārāyananē Namakkē Parai taruvān"* in the first pāsūram. In the seventh, *"Keesu Keesenru"*, she addresses the Lord as Nārāyanan Mūrthi Kesavanaippādavum, 'to sing Nārāyana's form in Kesava's grace.' In the tenth, she again invokes Nārāyana's name, in *"Nātrattuzhāymudi Nārāyanan"*, 'Nārāyana adorned with fragrant tulasī'. Scholars aver that Āndāl uses the name three times over in 1,7, and 10 in reference to the three qualities of 'Svāmitvam', 'Vātsalyam' and 'Vyāpakatvam' - 'overarching Lordship, doting care and love of the parent towards the child, and His transcendence and immanence.' In pāsūram 2, Andal refers to the Lord as 'Pārkkadalul payyattuyinra Paraman', in 3 'Ulagalanda Uttaman', in 4 as Padmanābhan', and in 5, as 'Māyan' and Vadamadurai Myndhan'. The three names 'Nārāyanan', 'Pārkkadalul payyattuyinra Paraman' and 'Vadamadurai Myndhan', speak about the states of 'Param' 'Vyūham' and 'Vibhavam' of the Lord. Elders have observed that Āndāl has addressed these names in light of the Harivamśa Sloka, *"Ēṣa Nārāyana: Srimān Kshīrārnavanikēṭana: -- nāghaparyankam utsrjya yāgathō Mathurām Purīm"*.

“Para-Vyuha-Vibhavātmanā trividham Brahma iti Bhāgavatha Siddhāntah:”, says Sri Parāsara Bhattar in his Sahasranāma Bhāshya.

The gopikas are addressed in the first pāsura as *“Nērizhayīr”*, that is ‘decked in sparkling ornaments’ literally, but in this context, it stands for the ornaments of knowledge and devotion. In the second pāsura, the gopikas dwell on the austerities to be observed for the duration of the ritual, the things to be done and things to be avoided. The rules governing what is to be avoided are set out as, *“Neyyunnōm pālunnōm”*, that is gopikas do not accept things that sustain the body. Fasting is an essential adjunct of the penance. Next *“Maiyittezhudhōm”*, which means they would not put collyrium for their eyes. *“Malarittu nāmmudiyōm”*, -‘would not wear flowers’. Then *“seyyādana seyyōm”*-‘would not do things not approved by elders’. *“thikkuralaichenrōdōm”* ‘would not utter words that harm others.’ Then the things to do are enumerated as, *“nātkālē nīrādi”*—bathing at dawn before Krishna gets up. The objective of the ritual is singing hymns to the feet of the Lord,- *“payyattuyinra Paramanadipādi”*. Next, *“Aiyamum picchaiyum āmdhanaiyumkai kātti”*- ‘to bestow gifts and give alms till the recipients say, ‘enough’. If we cannot give ourselves, we should show the way to another who can fulfill the alms seeker’s expectation. All the austerities must be observed with joy –*“Ugandēlō empāvāy”*.

In the third pāsura, Āndāl enumerates the benefits that would accrue by the observance of the ‘Nōnbu’ by invoking the incarnation of the Lord as ‘Vāmana’ who strode the three worlds as Trivikrama. He is *“Uttama”*, the magnanimous person symbolizing growth. For the land, it assures *“theenginri Nādellām tingal mummāri peydu”*, ‘three showers of rain every month free from pests and similar evils.’ It is said that the three showers are for

Brahmins, kings and virtuous women. It also assures cattle wealth, "*vallal perum pasukkal*", and inexhaustible prosperity "*neengādhā selvam niraindu*".

Āndāl invokes the rain god 'Parjanya' in the fourth pāsuram, to drink deep of the ocean waters, rise with a roar and flash forth in a lightning, and shower in such abundance and continuity that the whole world feels refreshed. In the previous pāsuram, having craved for God's plenty and the plenitude of God's devotees, here Āndāl implores that great devotees equipped with scholarship and enriched with love of God should, after drinking deep at the fountain of God's grace, assume the role of preceptors, and fill the world with the clarion call of God's name and the refreshing showers of God's grace. The demigods wait with folded hands before such devotees of the Lord.

The fifth pasuram holds out the assurance that if the Lord is worshipped by all faculties, mind, word, and body by offering flowers, our agelong sins will get burnt like cotton in the fire, "*Pōya pizhaiyum pugaruvāninranavum theeyinil thoosāgum Seppu*". Here all three kinds of works or 'karma' good or bad are implied, 'the Sanchita-karma' the accumulated works in the bag, the portion drawn from this bag and being experienced in the present which is called 'Prārabda', and works done in the present to be added to the remainder of the pile called 'Āgāmi' karma. The moment we approach God and receive His grace, the entire 'Sanchita karma' is burnt to ashes as a pile of cotton lit by a spark. The 'Prārabda karma' has to be endured, but God's grace may lighten the burden thereof. The 'Āgāmi karma' does not cling to us in the same way as drops of water on a lotus leaf. In this pāsuram, Āndāl says, "*thooyōmāy vandu nām thoymalar thoovi-thozhudu*", 'with purity, Him we pray, with flowers

fresh'. Āndāl will repeat this term 'thooyōmāy' in verse 16 also, "*Nāyakan*". Purity precludes, 'Prayōjanāntarparam' and 'Upāyāntaraparam' "*sarva-dharmānscha santyajya sarvakāmānca*". The Lord is the only 'Upāyōpēyam', and any alignment with other means and goals is wrong.

The first five pāsūrams of Tiruppāvai are a kind of Foreword to the whole poem. Scholars aver that the rest of the twenty-five pāsūrams are in the nature of a more detailed exposition of the first five hymns. Thus the first pāsūram "*Mārgazhi thingal*", is further explained in the sixth pāsūram beginning with the words, "*Pullum Silambina Kān*", and the next four pāsūrams, "*Keesu keesu*" (7), "*Keezh Vānam*" (8), "*Thoomani*" (9), and "*Nōtruchuvargam*" (10). The second pāsūram "*Vaiyattu*" is similarly elaborated in pāsūrams 11 to 15, and so on.

In the next ten pāsūrams 6 to 15 all the girls participating in the rite are sought to be awakened so that they may all congregate at a common trysting site, "*Pāvaikkalam*" for proceeding to Krishna's residence. The imagery of the manner of awakening the participants, the phrases used, alternately coaxing, teasing or recriminating is charming, but through it all also holding out the promise of fulfillment that awaits, 'Bhagavad-samśleṣam'. These ten verses are a clarion call to the devotees of the Lord designed to arouse them from sleep, lethargy, and engrossment in the mundane. 'Are thou asleep even though you heard the songs of praise of the destroyer of Keshin?' asks Āndāl of one of the sisters. 'Is she dumb, deaf or an ignoramus that she does not get up from her dreams?', she asks of another. Experience of God is distinctly personal, and each individual gopika has her own instruments for seeking that god experience. The time is also ripe since the elders of the place have been favorably disposed towards it. When conditions

are propitious, how is it that the gopikas, instead of making an isolated approach, each by herself seeking, and enjoying communion with Krishna, choose an united approach as a group, taking with them even those who they rouse from sleep.? The explanation is that the stream of God-experience is swift, bottomless and boundless. It is like bathing in a mighty river with swirling currents where it is usual for people who wish to have a bath to go in a batch holding hands for mutual security and protection. The simple gopikas may be limited in their knowledge, but are wise enough to know that the bliss of God-experience must be shared to be perfect for them, and to enjoy it in isolation smacks of selfishness. It is said that even Nityasuris in the Heavenly Abode with their resplendent bodies and strength of illimitable knowledge hold together in each other's company to enjoy the Lord. Like her father, Āndāl also realizing that religious consciousness is a congregational experience and a social institution, calls upon her sisters to join together for enjoying God-experience together. Throughout the poem she refers to the collective 'we' and 'us', not 'me'.

In a deeper sense, these ten pāsurams are inlaid with a 'Sampradāya' symbolism to the effect that they represent the Āļvār fraternity. The first Āļvār Poygai is called "*Pillāy*" (6), Pūtatt Āļvār as "*Pēyppen*"(7), the third Pey as "*Kōdhukalamudaiya Pāvāy*"(8), the fourth Āļvār Tirumāḷisai is referred to as "*Māman Magal*" that is daughter of uncle, (sage Bhārgava) (9), Kulasekharar is addressed as "*Aruṅkalam`*" (10), Āndāl's own father Vishnuchittar is called "*Porkodi*" 'golden creeper' (11), Tondaradippodi is referred to as "*Narchelvan Thangāy*", 'sister of one who has immense wealth' (12), Tiruppān Āļvār is called "*Pāvāy*" 'the tender lady' (13), the principal Āļvār Nammāļvār is spoken of as 'one who promised to

awaken the others' "*Yengalai Munnam Ezhuppuvān-Vāy pēsum-Nangāy*" (14), and the last one Tirumangai Ālvār is called by the endearing name of "*Ilamkiliyē*" 'tender parrot', (15).

Thus the sixth pasuram ("*Pullum*"), simply addresses the first gopika who is a novice in God-consciousness and is clinging to it in isolation lest it should dissipate if she should share it with friends. She is simply awakened with the call "*Pillāy Ezhundirāy*". The girl within inquires how they happen to rise earlier and who has awakened them. In reply, they ask her if she has not heard the 'Munis' and 'Yogis' uttering the name 'Hari', as they rise quietly and leave for the Lord's service. Poygai Ālvār to whom the address "*Pillāy*" is believed to allude was known as Sarayogi, as also the other two Mudhal Ālvārs who were known as Pūtayogi and Mahatāvyar or Mahāyogi. In pāsuraṁ 7 (Keesu keesu), the girl addressed is "*Peippen*", 'mad girl' who is also a leader "*Nāyakappen Pillāy*". The import is the same, namely that a girl who is capable of taking the lead should not lie still in bed. So after reminding her if she has not heard the twitter of birds, the jingle of bracelets of the gopika mothers churning curds and them singing the praises of the Lord, they entreat her to open the door with another complimentary term "*Tēsamudaiyāy tiravēlōrempāvāy*", 'O radiant one, open the door and allow us to witness your radiance'. Sharing spiritual experience with kindred souls is stressed as essential. The gopika to be awakened on the third day, (Keezhvānam 8), is an accomplished woman, skilled in feminine arts and capable of stimulating the curiosity of Krishna himself. So she lies still, confident that he will come to her. Considering it improper to go to Krishna leaving her, the gopikas arouse her pointing to the day-break and the eastern sky lighting up and she-buffalos let free to graze on the inner meadows. She is

"Kôdhukalamudaiya pāvāy", 'woman of intense longing'. They entreat her with the words, 'Āvāvenrārāyndarul ēlo`rempāvāy", 'seeing us with you in our midst, he will bestow grace on us.' The fourth gopika awakened next (*"Thoomanimādam"* 9), sleeps in a mansion of mirrors on a comfortable couch surrounded by flaming wicks. She has reached the zenith in her firm abidance in God as the means, and has completely given up all self-effort as she has fully grasped the meaning of the word 'Namah;'. Her aunt is called to wake her up singing and glorifying the names of the Lord as *"Māmāyan Mādhavan and Vaikunthan"*. The girl to be awakened next (*"Nōtru"* 10) is the next-door neighbor to Krishna. Only a single wall separates them. Krishna has secret trysts with her by simply scaling over the wall. She does not have to seek him out for she knows that he will come to her anyhow. So she sleeps lightly with a disburdened heart. The girls outside know that she is sleeping like that because she is satisfied with the union she has had earlier. She is the one who has reached the state of 'Pāratantṛya parākāshtha'. She is addressed as *"Aruṅkalamētetramāyvandu tiravēlōrempāvāy"*; 'O rare ornament, steady yourself and then come and open the door.' They mean, 'you may not do anything at all; your mere presence with us gives us a gem of a leader, and our whole group will shine in the reflected glory of your radiance'. The gopika of pāsuraṁ 11 (*"Katrukkaravai"*) is born in a family, the head of which is known for his strict adherence to his natural obligations, ('svadharmanirata'). His duties consist in tending the cows and drawing their milk; and facing their opponents and overcoming them. But in discharging these duties, he takes care to see that no blame sticks to him following diligently the Gita maxim, *"Yogah: Karmasu Kausalam"*, (B.G.-2.50); 'to perform the task with skill is what makes it Yoga.'. She is addressed as the golden creeper of the

gopa community, 'Kovalar tam Porkodiyē'. By calling her 'creeper' the gopikas mean that she cannot stand without support. By the word 'golden' they indicate that she is bright and strong. As she is entirely dependent on God she is called 'creeper'. She is also addressed as "*Putraravalgul Punamayilē*" "O! girl with hips resembling the serpent in the hole" and "*Selvappendātti Nee*"; "O dear one possessing immense wealth". In the Sri Vidya tradition, the pelvic region is supposed to be the base of 'Kundalini' which takes the form of a coiled serpent in repose, and when aroused by yoga unleashes power that shines in a thousand -petalled lotus at the crown of the head. The yogi then becomes worthy of the love of the Supreme Person. This gopika is invited to rise and come, "*Pōdharāy*". The subject of pasuram 12 ("*Kanaittilan*"), is the sister of a 'gopāla' who has given up doing the prescribed duty. The other 'gopālas' do their duty but cling to God as the means to their cherished end, carrying out their duty only because it is their 'svadharma' done under the direction of the Supreme for His pleasure. But the brother of this gopika even in not performing his prescribed duties is on par with the previous set because he accompanies Krishna to all places, at all times, and in all conditions and states, and renders service to him. While doing duty in the former case is to please Krishna, not doing so here, also is designed to please him. With no one to milk and tend them, the buffaloes pour their milk making the floor of the house wet and mired with mud. The gopika who is in deep slumber is thus awakened by the other gopikas singing the glory of Rama. The girl to be awakened in pāsura 13, ("*Pullinvāy*"), is a gopika with beautiful eyes resembling a lotus flower enfolding a bee inside, "*Pōdarikkannināy*". She is also called "*pāvay*" the shy one of tender susceptibility. She has the desire to reach Krishna but makes no effort towards that end. She

just continues to linger in the bed instead of having a cool refreshing bath which stills the torment of separation from Krishna. She is entreated to give up her shyness and join the group. The gopika in pasuram 14 (*"Ungal Puzhakkadai"*), is one who had promised to get up early and awaken the other girls, and who is capable of being the leader of the company. Losing herself in complete spiritual experience, she now remains asleep having totally forgotten her promise. She has a garden behind her house; and in it there is a well with steps leading to the water. Red tulips flourish in the water. She is addressed as *"Vāy Pēsum Nangāy ! nānādhāy, Nāvudayāy"*-"O! chatter box of a girl, shameless and big-tongued one'. She is asked to come and sing the glory of God. Pasuram 15, (*"Ellē Ilankiliyē"*), awakening the tenth gopika takes the form of a conversation between the gopika within and those outside, the lines being recited alternately. Each accuses the other as hard-hearted; but finally the gopika within takes the blame upon herself, enduring the charge without smarting, *"Nānēdānāyiduga"*, 'may I be the one to blame'. Finally, hearing their hymns of praise of Krishna the slayer of Kuvalayāpīda, she starts singing in sweet strains, as she is asked to sing and join the group. Among the qualities of Srivaishnavas, *"naichya bhāva"* or humility, where each regards himself as inferior to every other is considered to be the best quality. Bharata was the best exemplar of this trait. The gopika within has reached this trait primarily as a result of close association with devotees. Her words, *"Nānēdānāyiduga"*, 'I am the harsh girl', represent the farthest limit of 'sāttvik' tendency, thus earning the fitness to seek goodwill and further aid from an āchārya.. This humility is a stepping stone in seeking spiritual guidance from a preceptor who is begotten by so many predisposing factors, and most importantly by : *"Īśvarasya cha souhārdam yadrucchā*

sukṛtam thathā, Vishnōh katākshaschādveṣa ābhimukhyam cha sāttvikaih sambhāṣanam sadētāni tvāchārya prāpti hētavah:". 1. Favorable disposition of the Lord, 2. Incidental or unintended good deed of the individual self, 3. Lord Vishnu's grace, 4. Absence of ill-feeling, 5. Spiritual orientation, 6. Conversation with pure-minded souls; these six factors lead an aspirant to seek the spiritual guidance of an 'āchārya.' The gopika within, in this pāsuram is addressed endearingly as "*Elleē Ilankiliyē*", 'O tender parrot'. From this address, it is evident that the words to be uttered in spiritual matters should be sweet, pleasing, and clear.

Having aroused the ten gopikas, the party arrives at the mansion of Nandagopa. It is not merely ten that Andal has aroused but all those who yearn for, and are worthy of, union with Krishna. The gopikas then seek the permission of the Guard of the mansion and the keeper of the gate to enter the house. The sixteenth pāsuram, "*Nāyakanāy*", (which is interpreted to refer to saint Ramanuja likened to the centre-piece of the necklace of Srivaishnava Sampradāya.) envisages the need to approach the Divine Lord through the guard of the sacred place (Kshētrapālaka'), and the 'gate-keepers' or 'Dvārapālakas' who are the sentinels of God's kingdom. If one wishes to see the boss in an office, we see that one has to first approach the watchman and the secretary and get their nod of approval. It is the same in God's kingdom. Āndāl teaches us here the etiquette of temple conduct. The Lord's attendants are compassionate since they are His dearest devotees themselves, and would accord permission straight away. That we should make an approach to God only through a mediator is intrinsic to our spiritual tradition. Sri Yāmunāchārya while composing 'Stotra Ratnam' thought it proper that expression of obeisance to Āchāryās should precede

glorification of the Lord and also succeed it. Sage Vālmiki begins his Rāmāyana with supplication to the Āchārya. The Āchārya alone can open the perceptual gates for us and send us in. The gopikas urge the gatekeeper to open the door himself, “*Manikkadhavam tāl thiravāy*”. Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad says, “*Hiran mayēna patrēna satyasyāpi hitam mukham, tattvam pūṣannapāvṛnu satya dharmāya dṛṣhtayē*.” II – (15). ‘O’ Lord! objects of pleasure, glittering like gold, dazzle and close the mind, which is the face of the self and prevent it from having the experience of the Supreme Self. O, Saviour of the supplicant! We pray, remove them Yourself for the sake of giving us a vision of Thyself.’

In the conversation that ensues between the gate-keeper and the gopikas, the gate-keeper asks them to explain fully the purpose of their visit. The gopikas inform him that Krishna had promised the previous day to give them the musical instrument ‘parai’ and that they had come to get it. Seeing that the gate-keeper is not fully convinced, they assure him that they are of pure minds, and had come to sing so as to awaken him. The gate-keeper seems surprised as if to say, ‘Who ever sings to awaken one who is asleep? No it is wrong to do so’. The gopikas have some further explaining to do saying that they have not come to disturb his sleep but wish to see his beauty as he wakes up, and so on. Finally, noticing that the gate-keeper is still mumbling some objections, they appeal to him saying, “*Vāyāl munna munnam māttrādē’ Ammā*”, ‘Sir, do not at the outset refuse entry with your words. You are our refuge and protector.’ Thus they entreat him to open the love-laden doors himself.

Having thus gained entrance to the mansion, the gopikas pray to awaken Nandagopa, Yasoda, Krishna and Balarama in the 17th pāsuram “*Ambaramē*”. They address Nandagopa

as a magnanimous Chieftain from whose hands raiment, water, and food flow in charity to the needy. *“Ambaramē, tanneerē` sōrē aram seyyum Emperumān Nandagopala”*. Nandagopala here stands for the Āchārya who gives food, water and clothing to the disciple. They similarly address Yasoda comparing her to a tender shoot among women and shining light of the community. If Nanda is the Āchārya, Yasoda is the ‘Mantra’. She lies in the middle between her child Krishna and husband Nanda, like the the letter ‘U’ signifying inseparable relationship between ‘A’ and ‘M’ which denote Supreme Self and the individual self in the pranava ‘AUM’. The letter ‘U’ therefore represents Divine Mother. Krishna is then sought to be awakened by addressing him as the Lord Who split the firmament midway growing in stature and measuring the worlds with His feet. Then the gopikas approach Balarāma addressing him as the affluent one wearing a red gold anklet, and pray that he and his brother may wake up.

The gopikas in their eagerness to enjoy Krishna hoped that they could awaken him at once. But Krishna was unmoved even after their invocation to his big brother. Then they come to their senses and realize that they should have first approached Nīlā Devi and sought her intercession. So hymn No 18 *“Undhu Madhakalitrān”*, is addressed to her. In Sri Vaishnava Siddhānta, the Supreme Lord has to be approached only through the ‘puruṣakāra’ in the person of the Divine Mother who makes the Supreme Lord the *“Puruṣa”* that He is, the one who gives plentifully, (‘Puruṣanōti iti Puruṣah’). She is the One Who mediates between the individual self and the Lord, and invokes the grace of the Lord to flow towards the suppliant. Significantly, Āndāl addresses Her as *“Pandhārvirali”* here, which symbolizes that she has the universe of souls in one hand as a ball whilst she holds the Lord with the other. She is also the girl who has braided

tresses exuding fragrance. The gopikas then pray to her to come and open the door for them with joy with that hand of hers resembling a red-lotus flower to the jingling sounds of her beautiful bangles, *“Senthāmaraikkiyāl sīrār valaiyolippa vandu thiravāy”*.

This pasuram is stated to have been Emperumānār’s favorite hymn. Legend has it that he was in the habit of reciting daily all the thirty pasurams of Tiruppāvai, as he used to do the rounds of ‘unchavritti’ along the neighbourhood streets. He was known as *“Tiruppāvai Jiyar”* for the special affinity he had for Āndāl and her sublime poem. On one occasion, when he was reciting this pāsūram doing his rounds as usual, he saw a latch being lifted and a door open and his preceptor’s daughter Attuzhāy come out with her bangles and anklets jingling. For one moment, he felt as though Nīlādevi herself had emerged from behind that door with her bangles jingling. It is said that he fell into a swoon in the ecstasy of that vision. It is believed that if this verse is recited with similar identification in spirit, the Divine Mother is sure to give a glimpse of Her vision.

In pāsūram 19 *“Kutthu Villakku”*, the gopikas awaken Sri Krishna and Nīlādevi together. This hymn is full of ‘Sringārarasa’. When the gopikas approach her for her grace as the mediator, Nīlādevi wishes to respond to their prayers, and attempts to rise and open the door. But Krishna who shows great consideration to those related to her, wishing to open the door himself draws her back, but in doing so throws her on the couch holding her in a tight embrace. He forgets himself in the exhilaration of her touch, and the door remains unopened. The gopikas plead with him to open his mouth and say something, Hearing their cries, Krishna now rises to open the door but Nīlā’s collyrium-lined expressive eyes just would

not let him go. The girls now plead with her, 'just how long will you keep your lover from waking up, is it fair ? Can you not bear separation from him ? Such conduct is unworthy and uncharacteristic of you'.

In pāsuram 20 "*Muppattu moover*", the gopikas first switch back to Krishna knowing that he is the final benefactor, and try again to awaken him by glorifying him as the puissant warrior who once rushed to the battle-field in the rescue of the celestial denizens from their miserable plight. They pray, 'Please wake up! Of immense strength and great uprightness and absolute purity, you are by nature always inclined to give protection; and strike terror into those foes of your supplicants as your own, we request you to rise.' Finding no movement from him still, and imagining that he is irritated with them for having spoken brusquely to his Nīlā, they again turn to her praising her beauty, calling her 'Lakshmi' and imploring her to rise, pray that she grant them the fan and the mirror, and help them to bathe together with her lord, Krishna. Addressing Nīlādevi as "*Tiruvē*" is smart of the gopikas because they know that it is through kinship with Lakshmidēvi that the Lord has attained divinity. "*Sraddhayā Devah: devatvam asnutē*". The bath that the gopikas hanker for is the plunge into God-experience. The fan and the mirror are allegorical, meaning getting rid of the afflictions of egoism and possessiveness "*Namah*", and enabling us to see our true form as in a mirror, "*OM*".

Nīlādevi wakes up and tells the gopikas that she is one of them and they will never find her wanting in fulfilling their wish. She invites them to join her in waking up Krishna. She takes them to Krishna and starts waking him up. The pāsuram 21 "*Ētra- kalangal*", glorifies the Lord first as the son of Nandagopa who has innumerable cows that just rain milk into the pots placed under their

udders to overflowing. Being their Chief's son, they found it easy to approach him. But the gopikas declare that they have recognized that Lord Krishna is none other than the Supreme Brahman propounded by the Vedas. But they have come not to that Quiescent Form that has stretched Itself on the serpent bed on the milk ocean, not even to Srīman Nārāyaṇa who is forever adored by 'Nityasuris', but to Krishna for shelter who had chosen to be born in their community as the son of Nandagopa. They offer their benediction saying, 'In the same way as your enemies overcome by your valour humble themselves at your feet, we have come to your door, unable to keep away from you, to glorify your feet.' *"Pōtriyām Vandhōm pugazhndēlōrempāvāy."*

In the previous pāsuram, the gopikas have indicated that they have gone to Krishna in the same way as enemies who submitting to superior strength, seek the grace of the victor, and refusing to be restored to power, stay on rendering service to him. In pāsuram 22 *"Anganmājñālam"*, the idea that there is no refuge other than the Lord is further elaborated. In the same way, the gopikas have also sought refuge with Krishna. In doing so, they have rid themselves of attachment to possessiveness. 'mamakāra'. With this, the misconception that one is independent disappears, and in its place the conviction that one is dependent on Him grows. The spirit of independence yields place to a feeling of humility and servitude. With this feeling comes the knowledge that the Supreme is the sustenance, and the object of adoration and enjoyment, and the idea that one belongs entirely to God emerges. Then one becomes worthy of God's grace and by virtue of his belonging to God, he is to be enjoyed by Him and by no other. The gopikas reach this stage here, and become worthy of Krishna's grace. So they pray to Krishna, *"In the same way as monarchs who had ruled*

over vast tracts of land, now humbled and their arrogance of power gone, wait in obeisance before your couch, we too have gathered together beneath your seat of glory. Open slowly and gradually your eyes which resemble the lotus that is slightly open like the small lips of a small bell, and which are tinged red with your gracious love for us. Do direct your glance upon us. Should your charming eyes resembling the rising sun and moon glance at us, all our curse-like karma will vanish on its own."

In the twenty-third pāsuram "*Mārimalai*", the gopikas entreat Krishna to walk out of the inner quarters in the same way as the lion that has lain long in sleep in his den during the rainy season. The valiant lion awakens, directs his furious glances here and there, pricks up the smelly hair, rolls over on all sides and shakes violently, stretches forward and backward, and roars signalling that he is emerging from the den. The gopikas request Krishna to emerge like that lion and be seated on his majestic throne and graciously consider the submission they are going to make and grant it. "*Koppudaiya Seeria Singāsanattirundhu yām vandha kāriyam ārayndarul ēlōrempāvāy.*" The Supreme, in whom both the primordial nature "*prakṛti*" and the self "*jīva*" inhere in a subtle form is the Causal phenomenon. Viśishtādvaita consists in knowing that the Cause and Effect are the same phenomenon of the Supreme Self. The Vedic declaration "*Tattvamasi*" inculcates this principle of oneness. The gopikas pray that they may be enabled to understand this oneness of cause and effect. Once this oneness is realised, on whatever object our looks are cast, a train of thought emerges which takes us to the Supreme because every object is identified with God. In this process, all the reactions that normally result from external differences in name and form, such as hatred and jealousy disappear; only love remains. That is why the gopikas desire that

Krishna should come out and be seated on the throne, and consider their hearts' longing. The lion in the den invisible, is the Supreme Sriman Nārāyana, the "*Kāraṇa-tattva*" or the 'Causal-Phenomenon' in which are merged 'Prakṛti' 'primeval nature' and 'Jīva' 'Self' in their subtlest essences. The lion that has emerged from the den and in full flow is also the Supreme Sriman Nārāyana in the "*Kārya-tattva*" the 'Effect Phenomenon' in which Nature takes a gross form and the Self is merged in its fleeting changes. In the same way as Krishna who has lain on the couch within, comes out and occupies the throne, the Causal Phenomenon within, stirs and takes shape as the Universe without. Arjuna's devotion gets firmly established when he is blessed with the vision of the Lord enfolding the entire universe within Himself. Likewise, the love of the gopikas for Krishna becomes full and ripe with their understanding of his essential nature. Krishna's gait has a unique beauty. One of the names of the Lord in Vishnu Sahasranāma is "*Chaturgatih*:". It is that the Lord has four kinds of gait ; the gait of an elephant heavy and stolid signifying ponderous strength, of the lion majestic and imperious signifying valour, the gait of a bull steady and indifferent signifying hauteur; and the gait of a tiger fierce and agile, signifying rage. It is said that the celestial damsels had given up dancing after seeing Krishna's graceful rambles through the forests of Vrajabhūmi. The gopikas wish to see the same in Krishna's leonine gait here.

Krishna who is felicitously accessible to his supplicants readily accedes to their request and walks to the throne accompanied by Nīlādevi who pronounces benediction to him. The gopikas who drink in the beauty of his gait and the redness of his feet, as he takes his seat on the throne with one foot on the footstool and the other resting on his thigh are awe-struck. They who had earlier urged him to

come out and be seated on the throne, are now overcome by a sense of remorse that his feet have become sore with the strain of walking, and begin to chant benediction to him, forgetting to seek the musical instrument ‘parai’ from him. In Dandaka forest, the Rishis who had gone to Sri Rama to seek protection from their afflictions at the hands of Rākshasas, forgot their purpose on seeing Rama’s exceptional beauty and tender delicacy, and struck by remorse that such tender feet were now going to be subjected to the strain of walking, began to glorify him, “*Mangalāni prayumjānāh parivāyōpatasthire*”. When Sriman Nārāyana who reigns in the Heavenly Abode descends like us into the world as the incarnations of Rama and Krishna, people bewitched by their beauty sing their benediction from the depths of love. The all-saving Lord somehow seems, to the beguiled human senses like someone needing protection rather than the universal Saviour that He is, and pronouncement of ‘mangalāsāsanam’ to such beauty springs spontaneously in our hearts. When we worship the Divine in ‘arca’ state also in temples, we recite mangalāsāsanam to the deity at the end as part of our tradition. Legend has it how Pillai Urangāvilli Dāsar used to carry a dagger close to his chest keeping a watchful eye over Lord Ranganatha whenever He was taken out in procession. So the gopikas who have gone beyond the stage of knowledge and entered the stage of deep love for Krishna’s delicate beauty sing their benediction, “*Anru Ivvulagam Alandāy Adi Pōtri*” (24), ‘Blessed are the feet that measured this world then’ ! The pāsuram begins with the word ‘Anru’ referring to the time when King Bali put the Lord to the strain of walking the worlds. The gopikas recalling this episode feel bad that they have also caused their Krishna to endure the strain of walking in a similar fashion. So at the end, Āndāl adds the word, ‘inru’ ‘now’ referring

to the present. The gopikas sing “*Pōtri*” “*Pōtri*” six times to Trivikrama as above, to Rama’s valour in annihilating Lanka, Krishna four times over referring to Sakatāsura, Vatsāsura, and Govardhana episodes and last holding the traditional spear of the gopās. In a worldly sense, a meal satisfying the six tastes of the palate is supposed to give maximal satisfaction. Similar happiness is provided in the minds of devotees by the word “*pōtri*” or ‘mangalam’; hence it is repeated six times. The gopikas end their song of benediction with a prayer for granting them the ‘parai’.

Krishna is pleased with the gopikas’ offering of benediction and tells them so and asks, if they have any other wish that he can fulfill for them. The gopikas say that their main objective is to sing his praise, and if he should like to help them, he may give them the instrument ‘parai’ which they need for the rite they are performing for the benefit of mankind. They say that they know their nature and his nature and are content singing his benediction. Thus they tell him that they know the secret of his incarnation in the pasuram 25 “*Orutti Makanāy*”. The gopikas, like the Āḷvārs are overwhelmed with joy thinking of the manner of Krishna’s birth. Knowing that Krishna is the Supreme who has come down to earth so as to be easily accessible, the gopikas wonder at the felicity and compassion he shows them for the slight trouble they have undergone in walking a few steps to reach him. Their trouble is an infinitesimal part of the trouble he has taken for them. Āṇḍāl recalls in this pāsuraṁ how Krishna was born to the peerless mother Devaki in fulfillment of her wish that she should become the mother of Bhagavān, and how on the very same night he clandestinely became the child of Yasoda of unequalled glory to be raised with such unmatched love, how while growing up thus Krishna foiled all evil attempts designed by wicked Kamsa, eventually burning

him like infernal fire. The gopikas pray at the end," *we have come desiring you alone. If it pleases you, kindly give us the 'parai'. Fatigue yields place to bliss when we sing of your magnificent affluence, which Lakshmi herself might covet, and of your multiple heroic exploits.*" The gopikas feel unhappy that the Supreme Lord who had descended to the world to be freely enjoyed by everyone, has had to be brought up in utmost secrecy. Mantra (incantation) is the mother of Bhagavān.

In the same way as the infant nestles close in the mother's womb, the Lord Who cannot be confined within limits, and who is beyond the reach of mind and words, becomes subservient to Mantra. Krishna has two mothers Devaki and Yasoda. Likewise there are two principal incantations; 'Aṣṭākshari' and Vāsudēva 'Dvādasākshari'. Of all the names applied to God, there are two which indicate His all-pervasiveness, – Nārāyana and Vāsudēva. 'Nārā' means 'all the everlasting objects' and 'Ayana' means 'Support'. Thus Nārāyana means the Support of all objects and who is immanent in them. That Supreme presents himself in 'Nārāyana Mantra' which is Devaki. The Supreme is born of her with all his divine symbols in tact. In the same way, through Nārāyana Mantra are propounded the nature and form and all the attributes and glories of the Supreme Self. Yasoda is Vāsudēva 'dvādasākshari'. In this Mantra, the God-phenomenon does not manifest itself so clearly as in 'Nārāyana Mantra'. But the same Supreme who is so explicitly declared in 'Nārāyana Mantra' is presented implicitly in this Mantra. The Supreme descended into the world making Himself submissive to these two incantations.

Krishna is delighted with the sight of the charming gopikas with beaming eyes and their sweet words of love but desiring to engage them more, raises a doubt

for clarification. “You say you have come here desiring me only. How come then that you ask me to give you the ‘parai’ if I choose to. Those who desire me have no other wish, What is your intention then in asking for the ‘parai’”? Those who surrender to God with the firm conviction that He is the means and the end, should entertain no other wish, perform no other rite. “*Bhagavat pravṛtti virōdhi svapravṛtti nivṛtti Prapatti.*” Complete surrender is defined as giving up of all activities connected with ourselves, that come in the way of God’s endeavours in our behalf. Should the gopikas who have surrendered themselves to Krishna with complete faith that he is the means and the end, undertake to perform any rite? The answer is that a supplicant for grace, (prapanna) does not give up rituals as such, he performs the conventional rites, established in tradition, in the spirit that God has made him the instrument in performing these rites in His service, and for His pleasure. So the gopikas answer the question posed by Krishna that this ‘mārgaśīrṣa’ ritual has the sanctity of tradition, and is in conformity with the practices of the learned elders of the community, and helps them to look at Krishna’s radiant face and glorify his names. Then Krishna feels satisfied and asks them “*What is this rite? What are the things to be procured for this? Give full details.*”

Then the gopikas list out in this pāsuram 26 “*Mālē Manivannā*”, the materials required for the performance of the external ritual as conceived by their elders. They address Krishna as “*Mālē*”, one who is exceedingly fond of his supplicants. So far, they had been thinking of him as the Infinite Absolute; to them this was his assumed attribute. But after experiencing his overflowing love towards them, they now learn that his natural and principal characteristic towards his supplicants is intense love. So they address him as “*Mālē*”. They then

call him “*Manivanna*”, ‘shining like a colourful sapphire’. They submit that they have come to seek materials for the ritual of ‘mārgazhi bath’ as their elders have performed, “*Mēlaiyār Seyvanagal*”. As Krishna says to Arjuna in the Gita, “*Yadyadācharati Srēṣṭah tattadēvētaro janah.: I Sa yatpramānam kurutē lōkastadanuvartatē*”II (B.G.3.21) ‘whatever the great man does, that the world also tries to do, whatever authority he accepts, the world also accepts’. They submit their wish list starting with conches resembling Krishna’s ‘Pāñchajanya’ white as milk in colour and capable of producing a sound that makes the earth shudder. In asking for conches resembling the ‘Pāñchajanya’, the gopikas wish that they may do service to Krishna by becoming useful in some measure, to those who have established links with him. It may also be taken that they implore Krishna to give them the conch of Pranava which breaths on them the boom of knowledge that they belong to him and none else. Then they ask for large-sized instruments used for drumming. These are instruments used by Yādavā community in social gatherings of festivity. Next they want devotees who would sing the benediction. They also ask for an auspicious wick-stand with wicks lit, flag-staff and awning. The flag-staff which is carried in front indicates that the people in the procession are devotees of the Lord. All these are mere symbols. What the gopikas really want by all this, is an abiding sense of His eternal presence in their midst and the opportunity of consecrated service to Krishna. In the end they pray, “*Ālinilaiyāy Arul ēlōrēmpāvāy*”, ‘You who have lain on a fig-leaf, be merciful to us’.

The gopikas in their ingenuity have furnished their wish list which, *prima facie*, looks easy to satisfy, but with specifications difficult to fulfil. Krishna knows that their hearts’ wish is not to have the articles but to have him only. But he would play their game as they have spelt

out. So He produces three conches one his 'Pāñchajanya, second the conch he uses to herd his cattle and the third the conch used in the temple to summon devotees. Similarly, he produces a big percussion drum that had been used by Jāmbhavān in time of yore to proclaim the victory of Trivikrama; yet another 'parai' that had been used to proclaim Rama's victory over Rāvana, and one smaller one used by him in the Yādava 'Kambhu' dance. Krishna offers all these three to the gopikas. As for the band of devotees desired by gopikas, Krishna suggests that they enlist the cooperation of the Ālvār saints celebrated for their singing of benediction like Periālvār. Krishna agrees that the Divine Mother Mahā Lakshmi would be with the gopikas as the lighted wick-lamp. He consents to give Garuda as the flagstaff and the most versatile Ananta who is at once his bed, seat, garment, sandals, pillow, and umbrella, as the awning. Krishna now enquires of them, *"Now that you have all the requisite articles for the rite, let me know what fruit you expect to derive from the rite."*

So in pāsuram 27 "*Koodārai Vellum*", Āndāl describes the results that accrue for the general benefit of all, and mentions the particular benefits that spiritual aspirants receive. Āndāl addresses the Lord here as "*Koodārai vellumsīrGovinda*", 'O Govinda, of innumerable auspicious qualities who wins over adversaries averse to you'. She then narrates the great reward that we expect to receive after glorifying Krishna and receiving the 'parai', which will be of universal acclaim. For receiving that, 'we will put on many ornaments: bangles on forearms, armlets on the upper arms,; studs for the lower lobes, and rings embossed with flower designs for the upper lobes; and anklets for feet. Then we should wear beautiful sarees. Afterwards, we should sit with you happily and together we shall coolly enjoy the feast of sweet pudding of rice

cooked with milk, sugar and ghee such that the fluid will trickle down our forearms to the elbows’.

Āndāl addresses Krishna by the most endearing name of Govinda, instead of Keśava, Nārāyana to underline his supreme felicity of access. The reason behind it is set out in the next pasuram as we saw at the outset. He is “*Koodārai Vellum Govinda*” because he has qualities which overcome those averse to him whether hostile or indifferent, and also those who are his great devotees but have turned away momentarily due their own sense of gross inadequacy and lowliness to merit any grace from him who is so exalted. This is ‘naichya bhāva’ as displayed by Ālvārs. Sri Yāmunācharya wished for the company of God, but considering how such a wish was improper for ‘a cruel, shameless, impious and impure man.’ – “*amaryādahkshudraschalamatih*”..... (S.R.-62), he tries to withdraw. But the Lord exerts to draw such saints under his fold by showing them his easy accessibility and entrancing beauty.

The gopikas have observed how graciously their Krishna keeps company with the cattle which have neither an aspiration to join him, nor the temerity to reject his following them, nor a sense of gratitude for the protection he gives them on his own accord. How then could he ever refuse them his company?. So they affectionately call him “*Govinda*” for taking them into his fold. And they characterize the reward of his company as “*Yām perum sammānam*”, ‘the honour we receive’. By declaring the plural ‘we’, Āndāl declares their uniqueness, “*Nārāyananē namakkē*”. The gopikas plead for an honour that the world would acclaim “*Nādu puhazhum parisu*”, but that which Krishna does as a matter of privilege not as an obligation, and that too through Nīlādevi, even as Hanuman was honoured at Rama’s coronation by his asking Sita to give

the pearl necklace with the words, "*Pradēhi Subhagē hāram yasya tushtāsi Bhāmni*", 'O Sita, give this to the one who has pleased you with his valour, prowess and wisdom.' Then they list five types of ornaments and add an *ominibus* clause "*enranaiya palkalanum yām anivōm*" meaning 'all other similar ones', that they would like to deck themselves with. In an implied philosophical sense, the ornaments are symbolic of the three esoteric secrets the supplicant receives through the Āchārya, the 'Tirumantra', which imparts to the aspirant knowledge of the true nature and beauty of the self, like the ear stud adds the final touch to the beautiful appearance of a woman, the 'Dvaya' mantra which enables the self to be a fit object of God's enjoyment in the same way as the ornamental flowers worn on the upper lobes of ears, are symbols of enjoyment of union, and the 'Charama' sloka which is like the anklet assuring that the self is taken to the Supreme when, leaving all other means, the aspirant holds on to the conviction that He alone will take him there. The anklet symbolizes the giving up of self-effort. It may also be said that the ear stud stands for knowledge, the ornamental flowers for devotion, and the anklet for renunciation. Then the gopikas say "*ādai uduppōm*", 'will wear garments'. This symbolises right conduct. As Sri Rama clarifies, "*Vritta māvaranam Strīyāh*", for woman right conduct alone is the cover'. The feeling of happiness in having done the services assigned to them by God, and the feeling of satisfaction of God in having received those services from His devotees, are symbolized by their eating the sweet pudding together. What the gopikas want is the shared feeling of sublime bliss. "*Sōśnute Sarvānkāmānsaha Brahmanā vispaschita*",(Taitt-2.1)-- 'God-experience consists in enjoying all the auspicious attributes of the Lord together with the All-knowing God'. The Upaniṣadic saying, "*Ahamannādah, ahamannādah*",-

(Tatt.Up.-3.10) shows that the food most enjoyable for the self is the Supreme Being. Milk represents all the glorious and auspicious attributes of God. “*Pālsōru*” or rice cooked in milk symbolizes the Supreme Being filled with all the glorious qualities. Ghee stands for infinite love which endures the anguish of separation from God. The ‘*gunānubhava*’ which the liberated soul experiences is suggested in this pasuram. “*Tathā Vidvān punyapāpē vidhūya niranjanah: paramam sāmyamupaiti*”- (M.U.-3.1.3).

In pāuram 28, “*Karavaigal Pin Senru*”, ‘Going behind the cattle’, the gopikas elucidate the six pleas advanced by supplicants who believe in God as the only means of realizing Him, i. that there is no meritorious work they have done as a means of attaining him; ii. they have no deserts by way of knowledge or practice to qualify them for His grace; iii. they know that their only merit (*sukṛtam*) is having for their Lord, One Who is perfect with all auspicious qualities; iv. they know that they have an inseparable connection with that Perfect One; v. they seek His pardon for all the outrages committed by them unawares and for all the offences done in the mistaken belief that they were rendering service to Him; and vi. they invoke His aid as their only means that He may be pleased to do them a favour. When Vibhīshana seeks refuge with Sri Rama, he submits: “*Rāvanō nāma durvrittaḥ: Rākshasēśvarah: tasyāha manujō bhrātā Vibīshana iti Srutah:*”, ‘my brother is the well-known Rāvana notorious for his evil conduct. He is the king of Rākshasas ; himself a demon, he can command others to be like him. I am Vibhīshana his younger brother.’ He goes on to say that born of the same parents as his, and following him as a younger brother, and subject to his control, he also comes with a record of bad conduct. The gopikas too declare that they are worse than the

cattle they tend to earn a living. They are abyssmally ignorant, rustic in their ways and totally unaware of civilized world's courtesies and manners. Out of their love, they called the Supreme Lord, by 'small, inferior' names due to the inalienable connection they enjoy with him. But however innumerable and insufferable their deficiencies may be, they know that He is wanting in nothing which fact will more than adequately make up for their deficiencies.

"Karavaigal Pinsenru kānam Sērndunbōm"- 'Following the cattle we go into the forests and there we take food'. In the previous pāsuram, Krishna had asked them what spiritual practices they have cultivated to merit the enjoyment of the dish of sweet pudding, ("bhōgam"). To this the gopikas give this reply. "The preceptors we follow are the cattle. The place we reach is the forest. What we do after reaching the forest is to eat food for the sustenance of the body". Krishna suggests in response to this, that their going to the woods, following the cattle and tending them, comes under the category of obligations imposed on their community and prescribed at particular stages of life, ("Varnāśrama-dharma") and can be called "Karma-Yoga". Krishna further says, "So you have this means of Karma-Yoga to have your wish fulfilled. Then why do you say you have nothing to fall back upon ?". The gopikas argue that they are not going to the forest in the course of discharging any duties nor for fulfillment of any obligation to the āchārya, nor for penance. They add, 'after going to the forest we perform no work. We simply eat and rest under the trees. It may turn out to be a karma if we atleast bathe and eat or after giving food to others. But we just eat for ourselves.' Lord Krishna pursues the point, "Is going into the woods following the cattle a flaw? Is it objectionable to take food there? No, I do the same things as you do. One cannot determine that simply

because you appear low by the standards of birth and karma now, you lack merit or are deficient in knowledge. You say you know how to tend cattle. Do you not know about the life of Dharmavyādha, who used to kill cows and sell meat. Though he lived like this, he could clear the doubts of learned people. Jada Bharata who sauntered in the woods eating whatever he could lay his hands on, was a great sage. Have you not heard about Sabhari who was also born in a low community like you? She was adept in righteousness. A person, even in the meanest occupation and with the vilest practices, turns out to be a righteous man provided he has knowledge and devotion. *"Kshipram bhavati dharmātma"*. *"So you do not have to think that you are low, of yourselves"*. When Krishna thus suggests that though they may not be having karma yoga, they may still be having knowledge and devotion as means, the gopikas protest how they are without any means whatever, except Krishna. They say about themselves as *"Arivonrumillādha vāy kkulattu"*, 'we are born in the gopa community which can lay no claim to knowledge. We do not have knowledge of the true nature of the 'self', or knowledge which manifests itself as devotion. We are devoid of 'karmayoga', 'jñānayoga' and 'bhaktiyoga. We eat and have no knowledge.' Then Krishna says, *"you say you have nothing by way of knowledge, or karma, and that your devotion is negligible. Could there be any merit at all which you can claim for yourselves?"* The gopikas submit, *Āykkulattu Undhannaippiravi perundhanai Punniyam Yāmudai yōm*", 'all the merit we have is that you have chosen to take birth in our community, which does not even smack of knowledge.' They say that they have no acquired merit which evokes God's grace but merit fulfilled which is God Himself. They have not observed any righteousness for their own sake, but it is their good fortune that Lord Krishna Who is the Embodiment of

righteousness is one of them; and to them He is both the 'Upāya' and the 'Upēya'. Seeing Krishna in their midst as one of them, did not the sages wonder, "*Ahī bhāgya-mahōbhāgyam nandagopa vrajankasām, yan mitram Paramānandam Pūrnām Brahma Sanātanam*", 'Indeed the people of Nandavraja are unique in their good fortune. The Eternal Supreme Who is Infinite Bliss has come to move with them as their friend and companion'.

So the gopikas tell Krishna, "*Kuraiyonru Millādha Govinda*", 'O Govinda, you have nothing wanting'. We only said, we had nothing, but You have everything, knowledge, power, fullness and perfection. Your perfection is meant to fill our crass ignorance with your full knowledge. Your fullness is bound to eliminate any defects we may have.' Krishna remarks, 'how is it you plead ignorance when you know so much? Does it not show that you know your true nature? Why then have you said that you do not know your true nature'? In reply, the gopikas turn his argument on its head and say, "*Govinda, when you do not have knowledge of your Own Nature, how can you expect us to have knowledge of our nature? You are to be in the midst of 'Nityasūris', the blessed celestials. How is it that you have left them and are in the midst of cows and those who tend them. Is it not our good fortune that you have forgotten your true nature. It is your 'amnesia' that has got you in our midst. The very fact that you are one of us, has made us bold to aspire for your union.*" Krishna does not seem to relent that easily, and comes out with more objections, "*even if I be full and perfect as you say, what is the compulsion that I must show any favours to you.?*" The gopikas now adduce their clinching argument, "*Undannōdu uravēl Namakkingozhikkavozhiyādu*", 'because the kinship we have with you is ineluctably binding mutually, and cannot be severed even if we or you wish to cut it off. O

Krishna, on the day you held aloft the Govardhana, do you remember what you said, seeing us aghast and trembling at a distance, “I am not a gandharva; I am not immortal, I am not a yaksha or rākshasa; I am your kin, I am one of yourselves.” This was what You, yourself, had said then. After lifting the Govardhana and being coronated as Govinda, his earlier names like ‘Nārāyana’ had become insignificant. All of a sudden, the names suggestive of His Supremacy (Paratva), Sovereignty (Īśvaratva) and Pervasiveness (Vyāpakatva) had nothing special about them. The Lord Supreme had become accessible to all as ‘Krishna’ leading the life of an ordinary cow-herd boy, meekly submitting himself to be bound, and going about tending the cows. He now deems it a privilege to be named after them as ‘Govinda’. That name, ‘Govinda’ has now become a great name, an exalted name, a name coveted by the Supreme Being. There might have been occasions when he could have felt sore or offended by being called by the little innocent girls as ‘Nārāyana’, ‘Padmanābha’ etc. The gopikas pray that they might be pardoned for calling him by these ‘little’ names, *“Ariyādha Pillai galōm anbināl Undhannais Sirupērazhait tanavum sīriyarulādhē”*. What a contrast is this from the predicament of Arjuna, when after having the cosmic vision of the Lord on the battle-field, he had to seek the pardon of the Lord for having called him in the past, out of familiarity and love, as ‘Krishna’, ‘Yādava’, ‘Saka’ etc.! The gopikas pray *“Iraivā Nee tārāy Parai”*, ‘Lord give us the ‘Parai’ we eagerly long for.’ Thus the gopikas conclusively establish before the Lord, that it is incumbent on him to bring their work to fruition, whatever their shortcomings or blemishes.

We had already outlined in some detail that the gopikas had undertaken the ‘Dhanurmāsa vrata’ with the approval of the elders for the ostensible purpose of

obtaining rain, while their inner aspiration was for an inseparable association with the Lord. They have spoken of 'bath' in the sense of attainment of God, and by 'parai' the fulfillment of the highest objective of consecrated service to God. The 'purushārtha' they seek is 'Bhagavat prāpti' and 'Bhagavat-kainkarya'. In pasuram 28, they have made it clear that Sri Krishna is their sole means or instrument.; and that they have nothing of their own by way of good works or knowledge, and all their merit lies in Krishna who is one of them and their abiding love for him. While launching the ritual they had declared that Nārāyana alone would bestow only on them the needed 'parai'. "*Nārāyananē Namakkē Parai tharuvān*". Now in pāsuraṁ 29 they set forth the grounds on which they claim their fitness for it. The true nature of the self is marked out by three qualities: 1. 'Ananya bhōghyatva', not having any desire to be enjoyed by any other than Nārāyana; 2. "*Ananyōpāyatva*", believing that the Lord Himself is the means of attaining Him and that there is no other means; and 3. "*Ananyārhatva*", having the conviction that the self deserves to belong to the Lord alone, and to none else. In pāsuraṁs 28 and 29 the gopikas reassert in clear terms how they know the true nature of the self, the means to adopt and the end to reach. In pāsuraṁs 5 and 16, they referred to themselves as 'pure', the purity that they had ascribed to themselves being 'purity' of their means, "*Upāya-pariśuddhi*", and 'purity of their final objective, "*Phala-pariśuddhi*". These two purities receive elaborate exposition in these two pāsuraṁs. In pāsuraṁ 28, the gopikas have elucidated 'Upāya-pariśuddhi'. In 29 "*Sitram Sirukālē*", they expound their 'Phala-pariśuddhi'. It is wrong for those who accept the Lord as the proper means to adopt a different means. Similarly, it is wrong to hanker after a different objective after aspiring for the Lord as the end to attain. Godadevi knows this long-

standing tradition. So she makes the gopikas here who had been clamouring for 'parai', to clarify beyond any shadow of doubt that what they are aspiring for is not the 'parai' as such but perennial consecrated service to the Lord.

The gopikas pray "*Sitram Sirukālē*" etc. as follows: 'Listen to the purpose behind our coming to you early before dawn and our serving you and singing benediction to your memorable feet which are beautiful as golden lotus-flowers. Having been born in the community of 'gopālas' who first graze their cattle and then only take their food, you should not reject the personal services we render with all our hearts. We have not come merely for the 'parai' from you and then depart. We should become united with you by an inseparable kinship for all time and through successive births, and be rendering consecrated services to you alone for ever and anon. We pray that you forbid any other desires that may fleet through our minds.'

"*Sitram Sirukālē*"- Andal underlines that the early part of the dawn called the 'Brahma-muhūrta' is the most propitious time for contemplation on the Divine. "*Unnaichēvittu Un potrāmarai yadiyē pōtrum*", 'serving you and singing benediction to your feet resembling golden lotus-flowers'. They sing that those auspicious feet should for ever remain safe as they are both their means and the end. After this 'mangalāsāsana' comes their submission, which they deign to the Lord to listen. "*Kutrēval engalaik kollāmal pōgādhu*"- 'You must accept us for your personal service.' Krishna accedes to their request : 'All right, I shall take you into personal service and assign duties as desired. You have asked for 'parai' several times; you may now take it from me'. The gopikas then clarify that it is not the 'parai' offered by him that

was their objective but the 'Govinda' who had taken birth in the community that made their living of tending cattle: "*Petram mēyttunnumkulattil pirandanee Govinda*", not any other Govinda such as might refer to, Varāha, Vāmana, Hayagrīva, or Srīman Nārāyaṇa etc. as 'Goh' has a multiplicity of connotations as the 'earth', 'śabda' or word, or 'rays of light', but only their 'Govinda'. They then declare in unequivocal terms, "*Etraikkumēzhēzhu piravikkum Undhannōdu utrōmē yāvōm Unakkē nāmāt cheyvōm*", 'we should forever, and through successive births, be in inseparable kinship with you; and be rendering service to You only perennially.' 'The inseparable union we seek is in eternity, unaffected by time, in all places and in all states, like the Divine Mother never leaves you and is for ever with you, "*Nityaivaiṣā Jagan Mātā Viśhnōranapāyīni*". And throughout this continuum of time, our service to you should also continue. These services should not be oriented only for what we deem as 'Your pleasure'. These services should not be in the nature of our asking, but what you, of your own volition, assign to us. The gopikas pray that the Lord should dispel all other desires that might crop up in their minds, "*Matrai nam kāmangal mātru ēlōrempāvāy*". Not for them is the desire for a life in Vaikuntha along with the blessed eternal or 'mukta's' reciting 'Sāma' hymns. They simply wish to have a life of unparting kinship where their Govinda can summon them calling them 'dear girls' and they, in turn, can freely go to him calling him 'Krishna'. They should always have this single thought in their minds, that he is their goal, their support, and refuge.

The gopikas thus elucidate in this pasuram that the fruit of their rite, the highest end they have been aspiring for, is to render freely, without any obstacle or break, perennial service to the Lord, at all times and in all places and circumstances; and while rendering this consecrated

service, to be absorbed in the thought that their Lord is getting this service done by them for His own purpose. This pasuram also elucidates the meaning of the ‘Tirumantra’. By saying ‘To you, Govinda’, that is ‘to the Supreme Lord’, the Creator and Protector of the world, the meaning of ‘A’kāra’ is signified. By saying to you alone, (nikē), the meaning of ‘e’kāra which is the same as ‘U’kāra’ in the Pranavam (Omkāra) is brought out. ‘U’ka`ra’ implies that the self belongs only to the Supreme Self, and not to itself or any one else. By saying ‘We’, ‘M’akāra’ in the Pranavam is indicated, meaning the species of sentient beings. Thus the meaning of Pranavam is brought out. By saying ‘we have every type of relationship with you’, the meaning involved in the “*Nārāyana*” ‘śabda’ is brought out, namely the bond of inseparable relationship that exists between all objects and the Supreme Self. By saying, ‘For all time through successive births,’ the prayer implicit in ‘A`ya’ is indicated.

It was mentioned earlier while covering Goda’s life story, how following the example of the gopikas, she performed this rite and like them, she also attained her dream- union with Krishna in the form of Ranganatha, and how that occasion of their union in holy wedlock is celebrated all over the South as ‘Bhogi’. Goda exhorts in the concluding pasuram that all people who cannot perform this rite can, if they devoutly recite these thirty pasurams regularly, achieve the same result that the performance of this rite gives. Constant recitation of these pāsuras not only effects liberation from bondage to non-self; it procures material prosperity as well.

The effort that the Lord has made to secure Lakshmi for his consort may be seen in the enormous trouble he took during the churning of the Ocean of Milk. The efforts that the Lord makes to claim us as His own exceed and excel, by

far, our own timorously tentative and frankly fragmented attempts to reach Him. So in this pāsuram “*Vangakkadal*”, Āndāl sings of the glory of that episode of churning the ocean of milk to assure us that the Lord will make efforts, on his own initiative, to receive into Himself those who reverently recite these thirty pāsurams regularly. Her words carry the imprimatur of the grace of the Divine couple. As we all know, Tiruppāvai is an integral part of the ‘nitya-anusandhāna’ of every Srivaishnava.

The reference to the episode of churning the Milk Ocean contains also an esoteric truth. The body which the individual ‘self’ assumes is the boat. There are countless number of such boats in the ocean of ‘Samsāra’, ‘this life of bondage’. The body is the boat given to the ‘self’ as the means to cross the ocean of ‘samsāra’. The great Lord places the ‘Mandara’ of His will (Sankalpa) in this ocean, binds it with the cord of his ‘nirhētuka kripa’ – natural compassion, and churns it with the hands of sheer grace—all the while taking care to see that the boat of the body is not damaged. By this churning, the individual self obtains knowledge of the true nature of the Supreme Self. On account of this, the self becomes dear to the Supreme and reaches Him. Mindful of the great favour done by the Lord in enabling them to attain Him, the gopikas solicit the grace of ‘Mādhava’ and ‘Kēśava’ who have churned ‘the ocean filled with floating ships’. They had begun the rite with the glorification of the Lord who reclines in ‘yoga nidhra’ on the ocean of milk in the second pāsuram. Now they complete their ritual with taking refuge in the Supreme who has churned the ocean and become the Lord of Lakshmi. The special excellence of Goda is highlighted in the description of herself as “*Ani Pudhuvai painkamallattan teriyal Pattarbirān Kōdhai*”, ‘Gōda of Sri Bhattanātha, who wears the memorable rosary of lotus-beads and the resident of Srivillipputtur which is the jewel

of the world'. She describes her Prabandham as "*Sangat Tamizh Mālai*" or garland of Tamil verses. "*Sangam*" refers to a congregation. Tiruppāvai is an expression of a song sung in the company of five lakh gopikas. It is not a song born in isolation from one individual. That is why even today Tiruppāvai endures as a composition that is sung and enjoyed by people assembling together in groups. Āndāl adds "*Muppadhum thappāmē*", meaning 'without any deviation in the order'. Tiruppāvai is a necklace of gems strung together, and even if one gem is missing or misplaced, the necklace will be incomplete. The profound meanings of the thirty pāsūrams, have to be borne in mind in the logical sequence and spirit in which Āndāl has presented them, and none of them should be missed. Then only it will be possible to have a perfect and complete God-realisation. Āndāl invokes for all those who render the legends of the 'parai' earned by the gopikas, divine grace in every place and time, of the four-shouldered 'Tirumāl' of red eyes, lustrous face and immense wealth symbolized by the benign presence of the Divine Mother.

Āndāl's second Prabandham 'Nāchiār Tirumōḷi' consisting of 143 pāsūrams arranged in 14 'decads', symbolises what has been characterised as 'bridal mysticism' representing the individual soul 'jivātman' which is temporarily separated from God 'Paramātman', longing for reunion with Him. Āndāl yearns for this spiritual reunion in the garb of a maiden devoutly aspiring for her marriage with the Divine. The poem starts in an intense mood of pining for God-experience on a personal level with a vow and appeal addressed to the god-of-love Kāmadeva or Anangadeva to help her in her 'nōnbu' or ritualistic ceremony to attain the Lord of Venkatam. This, she would like him to do by deploying her soul as a dart and inscribing her name on it, and

shooting it with his sugar cane bow towards the Lord as the final target. In pāsuram 5 of the first decad, Āndāl pronounces an express, if grim, vow that any whisper of life with a mortal man would snuff out her life. That would be as outrageous as a fox roaming in the woods entering the sacrificial altar and licking the oblations defiling the sanctity of the place and offerings.

The Lord appears before her and her friends playing on the sands building tiny sand-castles but only to tease and eventually wreck their construction despite their pleas not to interfere in their play. At the end of the second decad, Āndāl's Govinda has not only undone her play-houses but set-off ripples in her heart going round in ever-widening circles laden with thoughts about Him. In the third decad, Andal visualizes the Bhāgavatha scene in which Krishna appears suddenly at the bathing-ghat where she and her friends of Brindāvan are bathing in the Yamuna in the early morning, and makes off with their garments. They see him perched on a tree on the bank. Āndāl makes repeated appeals to Krishna to return their dresses, pleading how terribly embarrassed they are, and promising not to come to the river ever again and offering salutations with folded hands as commanded by him. The fourth hymn describes a game the girls played in old Tamil culture called "*Koodal*", to test the probability of achieving their hearts' desire of getting married to their cherished love-heroes. The game consisted of drawing a big circle on the ground, and putting smaller circles within it all over, and counting the number of circles at the end. If the outcome results in an even number, then a favourable outcome is predicated. The word "*Koodal*" which literally means 'union', and the refrain in the hymn 'Koodidu Koodalē' at the end of each verse, can also be taken to mean her prayer to the 'arca' Lord of 'Koodal' shrine in Madurai which is sentimentally associated with the origin of the "*Tiruppallāndu*" hymn of Periālvār.

The fifth decad is about Āndāl enticing a 'koel' bird which is fortunate to live in bliss with a mate, to carry her message of love to her beloved Lord. The pain of separation is palpably intense in some of the lines as when she wails "*....thunbakkadal pukku vaikuntanenbadhu ōr thōni perādhu uzhalinrēn*", (N.T.-5.4) 'drowning in an ocean of sorrow without the canoe of Vaikuntan's grace'. Even in her anguish, she displays shrewd practical sense in negotiating a deal with her emissary by offering to reward her own pet parrot to be the koel's friend and play-mate, if it succeeds in securing her union with the Lord. She goes to the extent of prostrating to the koel, if her sweet call can make the Lord to come to her.

From the depths of despondency to the heights of a lofty dream is but a small step for Āndāl who in hymn 6, "*Vāranamāyiram*" portrays her divine wedding which captures, in the lilting cadences of its musical lyrics, the beauty and grandeur of the Vedic wedding ritual of South Indian cultural tradition, that takes its pride of place by being reenacted in every Srivaishnava wedding as the event of 'Śīr pādal'. The decad is Āndāl's narrative of a dream to her companion wherein Nārāyana the Supreme surrounded by thousands of elephants walks along a street decorated with festoons and flags and golden pots filled with water. He is Nrsimha the groom, the beautiful Mādhava, the loving Govinda who enters like a majestic bull and takes His place under a bedecked bower, as Indra and other gods look on in awe, and 'Anthari' the Lord's sister helps the bride with her dress and decoration. The learned Brahmins sprinkle holy waters brought from the four corners to the chants of prayers and fasten the amulet solemnly sealing her union with Nārāyana the Pure and Immaculate. To the ensemble of drums and conches, Lord Madhusūdhana clasps her hand walking round the sacrificial fires as the priests perform the

ceremonial rites. In a grand finale, Āndāl also describes how she rode the procession round the streets seated on an elephant along with Lord Krishna.

The dream comes as a good omen to Āndāl who derives some comfort from it as foretelling a favorable outcome, but her racing mind is after immediate enjoyment. The next decad 7, is a song of envy about the divine conch 'Śankha' which is blessed with the nectar of the Lord's lips. She enquires fondly if the red lips of Krishna smell like the refined camphor or that of the fresh lotus flower, or have their own fragrance. She pours her ire on the 'Śankha', accusing it saying, *"your ways are selfish and unjust; no wonder women clamour, quarrel with you"*. The passive conch remains silent. The moving dark clouds resembling her Lord now attract her attention. In growing desperation, Andal endeavours to work up some empathy from them for her situation confiding in them that she has lost everything, facial complexion, the colour of the body, the bangles, her mind and sleep, on account of her depression over her separation. She is just surviving, singing the glory of the Lord Govinda of Tirumalai hills. She prays, *"would you please inform the Lord there, that my youthful breasts ache for His embrace?"*(N.T- 8.3&4).

The clouds move away as if they are off to carry out her errand. Āndāl then notices freshly blossomed flowers and creepers, in the lush flora around where the cuckoos, peacocks, and the humming bees flit about. All these only intensify her pangs of separation, which she now shares with her friend in decad 9. *"The creepers on which the small white 'mullai' flowers dangle remind me of His sweet smile; the trees with blooms spread all over appear to laugh at me. The lovely dark blue-black 'kāya' flowers reveal to me the colour of 'Sriyahpati'. But they do not tell me the means of survival. She asks if it was fair that*

the Lord of Tirumāḷirunchōlai entered her house and snatched her bangles. She addresses in one breath the cuckoos, the peacocks, if the colour of the divine body of the Lord of Tirumāḷirunchōlai which has been assumed by all these objects serves any useful purpose, except to torment her. She appeals to the bees and flowers to find out a way of sustaining her life. She takes a vow to offer large quantity of delicious food to the Lord of Tirumāḷirunchōlai and prays that her cherished desire be fulfilled, (N.TM- 5&6). The next decad 10 continues in the same vein with Āndāl appealing to the flowers and creepers not to aggravate her torment. The sound of the cuckoo becomes intolerable, and so does the dance of the peacock. She implores the rain gods to induce the Lord of Tiruvenkatatam to reveal Himself in her mind. The ocean is requested to report her sufferings to the Lord.

In the decad 11, Āndāl addresses the mothers and companions who have come to see her pathetic plight confiding her miserable condition caused to her by the Lord of Tiruvarangam. Her plaint is long. 'The Lord has not cared to look at her face. The ambrosial delight of the Lord of Tiruvarangam with His flowing tresses, coral lips, lovely mouth and enchanting eyes, with a beautiful lotus stemming from the navel, was the reason for my bangles to loosen and roll away. He has burgled my very soul and all that belongs to me'.(N.TM-11. 1,4,6).

In spite of all her pleadings, She does not get a response from her Beloved Lord. She is at the end of her tether, and does not have the patience to wait till the Lord decides to shower His grace on her. It is in this state of dire desperation, that she makes up her mind to proceed to Mathura where her Lord Mādhava resides. Whatever others may say to dissuade her, would be falling on deaf ears; she can no longer hide her feelings, and does not

mind going her own way regardless of any public uproar about the unabashed display of her inner feelings, in spite of parents, relatives, and friends. Here, nobody seems to comprehend the intensity of her mental agony. The only remedy for it is Krishna's healing touch. So she appeals and beseeches with repeated pleas to those around, to take her and leave her at any of the familiar places in the environs where she can find her Lord, at Gokulam, on the banks of Yamuna, the pool where Krishna jumped and danced on Kāliya, or the Govardhanā hill or even Dvāraka. Having forsaken food and losing sleep, her body and senses are languishing, its radiance gone, and her lips turned pale. All that could only be assuaged if she were to wear the Lord's cool tulasi garland.

Her pleas do not strike a chord in her friends or mothers. They cannot take her to Mathura or Brindāvan. But they would comfort her by singing the glory of Lord Krishna. She therefore appeals to them in hymn 13 that instead of wasting words waxing on his greatness which only rub salt into her hurt, they should fetch for her the garment, the tulasi garland and other articles used by Krishna which would have some soothing effect on her. He is the one who does not understand a woman's anguish. *"Fetch"* for me the wet yellow waist cloth of *"Perumān"* and place it on my body, so that my pain may subside.....Get the garland of tulasi worn by the Lord lying in Tirukkudandai and place it on my dying body to revive its life. Bring that water used for the Lord Ārāamudhan and sprinkle it on me. Smear on my body the dust particles trampled by His feet. She gets aggressive towards the end not being able to brook the nonchalance of her Lord, and cries out: *"While I am pining with grief, Lord Krishna has not even enquired if I am still alive or dead; He has taken away everything that belongs to me; He has been tormenting this woman who loves him. If I ever meet Krishna, I would*

pluck out my breasts along with the roots and hurl the same at his chest so that I could overcome my grief.”- (N.TM- 13.8).

Āndāl has now reached a stage, almost the climax of her irrepressible longing for direct communion with Lord Krishna. The Lord being the ‘āsrita-sulabha’ and ‘āsrita-vatsala’ that He is, cannot also remain passive to the sufferings of the soul deeply in love with God and yearning for communion here and now, and that too when such a soul is the goddess-incarnate person of Nīlādevi herself. He, therefore, condescends to come down and reveal Himself in His full splendor to fulfil the cherished desire of Āndāl. The concluding decad of Nāchiār Tirumōḷi indicates that Āndāl was blessed with such a God-experience. The pāsūrams in the fourteenth decad are in two parts; the first part giving a brief description of the glory of Krishna poses a query, ‘have you not seen Krishna’ (Kandīrē). The second part also speaks about the glory of Krishna, but contains the answer to the query posed earlier, to the effect ‘we have seen Him in Brindāvan’ (Vrindāvanattē kandōmē). The question is in the format of Āndāl’s poser to the fellow devotees, and the answer is through the media of the fellow devotees confirming, ‘yes, we have seen Him’, indicating that Āndāl’s real intention is that they too should share in her joy of the grandeur of Lord Krishna as revealed to her in Brindāvan with all devotees at large.

In Nāchiār Tirumōḷi Āndāl articulates the mysticism of the ecstatic love and devotion of the gopika damsels in their simple-minded yearning for union with God-experience in the person of Lord Krishna. But unlike in Tiruppāvai, where it is congregational, here it is intensely individualistic, as in the yearning and striving for God-experience, the soul’s craving is for such experience

in whole and for itself. Thus the agony and ecstasy of the love and devotion displayed here, is centred round two primary elements, “I” ness and “my” ness, in relation to Krishna-experience, to the exclusion of everything else, the ‘i’ ness ever so miniscule though set somewhere in the very centre of total ‘Krishnānubhavam’, but the “my” ness’ ever so big a circle enveloping, in toto, Krishna Who is now the cynosure at the very centre of existence. It is that ‘my’ ness that each gopika damsel must have yearned for in relation to Krishna, which Āndāl identifies with, and gives expression to in such a powerful and moving manner. The story goes about what Uddhava is reported to have said to Yasoda on one occasion when he visited Brindāvan and the mother had inquired about her beloved son. Uddhava said, “Mother, Your Krishna is the Lord of the Universe, and not a common human being. “Oh” exclaimed Yasoda, *“I am not asking about your Lord of the Universe. I want to know how my Krishna is faring, not the Lord of the Universe, but ‘my’ Gopāla”.*

Taniyans.

Invocation by Parāsara Bhattar

*“Nīlā tunga stana giri suptamudbōdhya Kṛṣṇam
Pārārthyam svam sruti sata sirasiddha madhyāpayanti
Svōcchishtāyām sraji nigalitam yā balātkṛtya bhunktē
Gōdā tasyai nama idamidam bhūya ēvāstu bhūyāh.”*

Lord Krishna has lain asleep on the elevated hill-sides of Nīlādevi’s bosom. Sri Goda Devi has roused this sleeping lion and taught him the esoteric doctrine of ‘Paratantra’ (soul’s dependence on the Supreme Self) as enunciated in the Upaniṣads. She bound him with flower-garlands previously donned by her and forcibly enjoyed him. To that Goda Devi, I offer my salutations over and over again.

Taniyans by Uyyakkondār

*"Annavayal puduvai yāndāl arangarkku
Pannu Tiruppāvai ppal padiyum innisaiyāl
Pādi koduttāl narpāmālai poomālai
Soodikkoduttālaic chol."*

O Mind ! Meditate on that Āndāl, who has manifested herself in Srivilliputtur, which abounds in fertile lands, filled with waters on which swans move about. With her mind absorbed in contemplation of Sri Ranganatha she has composed these hymns (Pāsurams), rendered them in her melodious voice and offered them to Him. This garland of words is called Tiruppāvai. In the same way, she has offered Him flower-garlands after decking herself with them. O mind, concentrate your mind on her.

Soodikkodutta Sudarkkodiye! tol pāvai

*Pādi yarulavalla pal valaiyāy—"nādinee
Vēngadavarkennai vidhi yenra vimmatram
Nānkadavā vānnamē nalghu.*

O slender Creeper of gold ! You have offered the flower garland worn by you to Sri Ranganatha. O wearer of divine bracelets ! You have elevated us by rendering into song the divine rite, (Vrata) observed by the gopis in the past. You have prayed to Cupid, the Lord of love (Manmatha), seeking his favour to secure for you the place of the beloved Lord of Venkata hills. Pray, grant us, your servants, the strength not to violate that prayer.

Nāchiār Tirumoḷi Taniyan

Composed by Tirukkannamangaiyāndān.

*Allināt tāmaraimēl araginin tunaivi
Mallinadānda madamayil - melliyaḷāl
Āyar kula Vēndanāgattāl tenpuduvai
Vēyar payandha Vilakku.*

The slender princess of 'Malli' land, beautiful as a peacock, sweet companion of the lady-on the-fresh lotus Lakshmi, shining light of the learned Puduvai clan, became the bride of the cow-herd Lord Krishna.

9

Tondaradippodi Āļvār

Tondaradippodi Āļvār, (Bhaktāṅgrirēnu) meaning 'dust of the feet of devotees', was born under the name Vipranārāyana in a well-to-do Brahmin caste, in the village of Tirumandangudi as an 'amśa' of 'Vijayanti' (Vanamāla) necklace of Srīman Nārāyana, in the Tamil month 'Mārgazhi' under the lunar asterism 'Jyēshta'. According to the Guruparampara Prabhāvam, the date of birth of this Āļvār is 'Kali' era 289 (B.C. 2816) Tamil 'Prabhava' year. Modern historians have, however, placed him during 8th century A.D. as an elder contemporary of Tirumangai Āļvār. Legend has it, that he presented Tirumangai Āļvār with his gardening tool, a trowel or shears, which he called "Arulmāri". Tiumangai Āļvār 'wears' this name proudly among his many signature titles. His 'dhyāna-sloka' gives his birth details as follows: *"Kōdande'jyēshtanakshatrē Mandangudipurōdhbhavam I Chōlōrvyām Vanamālāmśam bhaktapādhārēnum āsrayē"*.

Initiated into Vedic learning and brought up as a devout Brahmin, he grew up as a great devotee of Lord Sri Ranganatha of Tiruvarangam. Like Mālakāra and Gajendra -with the venerable prefix of "Srimān" by virtue of his 'kainkaryasri'" - of an earlier time, and Vishnuchitta before him, he undertook the service of cultivating a flower garden and making and supplying flower garlands for the Lord's worship at Srirangam shrine.

On one occasion, a dancing girl by the name of Devadevi and her sister who happened to pass by Vipranārāyana's garden on a hot day, rested for awhile under the shade of a tree near there. She was struck by the serene ambience

and colourful beauty of the garden. Inspecting the landscape more closely, she was impressed with the neat, manicured and impeccable upkeep of the garden, and saw nearby a small cottage, and a young Vipranārāyana tending the plants with intent concentration. On inquiry, she learned that the garden belonged to Vipranārāyana, and it was him that she had seen earlier working in the garden, and that he lived alone in that cottage, that he was a devout devotee of Lord Sri Ranganatha and a staunch celibate, who would not as much as look at any woman. Devadevi being proud of her seductive beauty decided to make the Brahmin Vipranārāyana fall for her charm. Her sister who had a different view, challenged her that it would be very difficult for her to seduce such a saintly devotee of the Lord who was totally immersed in divine service. Devadevi accepting her challenge, vowed that if she failed to ensnare Vipranārāyana into her net, she would become a servant of her sister for six months. The sister went her way thereafter, while Devadevi stayed behind and on the next day, wearing plain clothes she approached Vipranārāyana in the garden. After narrating the story of the ignominious way of life she had been born to which she said she had decided to discard now, she added that she wished to make a new beginning by rendering some service to a Lord's devotee like him in atonement of her past life, and would like to stay there and keep the precincts of the garden clean. Vipranārāyana allowed her to stay near the 'āsram' and help keep the garden clean as she wished.

One day, there was a heavy down pour and Vipranārāyana who was inside his cottage, came out and saw that Devadevi was standing outside completely drenched. He took pity on her, and called her inside the hut. As she was dripping wet, he gave her his upper cloth to wear. For the first time, Vipranārāyana gazed at her attractive form

and beauty, and instantly became infatuated with her. Devadevi worked her charm on him, and from then on, Vipranārāyana started leading a life of passion and living with her as her lover, neglecting the service he had been rendering to the Lord at Srirangam temple. He lost all his wealth in meeting the demands of Devadevi who after some time returned to her place, leaving him derelict and verily waiting at her door yearning for her love. It was under these circumstances, that the Lord Sri Ranganatha and Mother Lakshmi took pity on him, and decided to reclaim him from his errant life. Taking a golden vessel from the temple collection used for daily worship, the Lord went to Devadevi's house and announcing himself as an emissary of Vipranārāyana with the name of 'Azhagiyanamanavālan', gave her the vessel stating that his master had sent a gift with him to be delivered to her. Devadevi then took Vipranārāyana back into her house. Next day, the temple priests noticed the golden vessel missing from the sanctum, and reported the matter to the local Chieftain who ordered the arrest of all the immediate temple functionaries to find out the truth. But that proved to be futile. In the meanwhile, the maid who worked at Devadevi's house, on hearing of the missing gold vessel and the resultant commotion at the temple, reported that one young man representing himself as the servant of Vipranārāyana had, on the previous day, given her mistress a golden vessel as a gift from his master to her. After this news broke out, the Chief got both Vipranārāyana and Devadevi arrested, and arranged to retrieve the vessel from her house. Soon, it became clear to everyone that the vessel was indeed the one used in the sanctum in daily worship. On being questioned, Devadevi confessed that the vessel had been delivered to her by an emissary of Vipranārāyana of the name of 'Azhagiyanamanavālan'. Vipranārāyana who was dismayed by the revelation, said

that he had no servant by that name, nor had he sent any vessel to Devadevi as charged. The Chieftain mulled over the contradiction between their respective versions, and deferred decision in the case till the following day. In the night, the Lord Sri Azhagiyamanavālan appeared in the Chief's dream, and informed him that it was He Who had delivered the golden vessel of the shrine to Devadevi, and both she and Vipranārāyana were indeed innocent in the matter. He made it clear to the Chieftain that the incarceration and humiliation that His devotee Vipranārāyana had been made to suffer, had been only His plan to reclaim him to His service as before. Next morning, the Chieftain related his dream of the previous night to Vipranārāyana, asking his forgiveness for his wrongful confinement and suffering. Vipranārāyana who had already been overcome by repentance about his past sinful life, was overwhelmed by the Lord's immeasurable grace and compassion in his redemption. Rededicating himself to the Lord and Lord's devotees, he continued his service of cultivating and supplying flower garlands to the Lord's shrine. He became a cherished devotee of Lord Ranganatha, becoming known as 'Tondaradippodi' for his distinctive trait of 'tadhīya-śeṣatvam'- being a servant of Lord's devotees.

Tondaradippodi Ālvār has sung two Prabandhams, 'Tirumālai' comprising 45 pāsurams and 'Tiruppalliyezuchi' of ten pāsurams, both exclusively on the 'arca' form of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. Ālvār's Sanskrit taniyan beginning with the words "*tamēva mathvā Para Vāsudēvam Rangēśayam*" confirms that he adored and worshipped the Lord as the ultimate Reality, Para Vāsudeva dwelling in the supreme abode (paramapada), even as Nammālvār felt, "*Ādhiyanchōdhiyai angu vaittu inghu pirandha*", (T.V.M.-3.5.5.). Sri Āndāl also had sung in the same vein : "*Pongōdham soozhndha*

bhuvaniyum vinnulagum angādhum sōrāmē ālginra Emperumān Senkōludaiya Tiruvarangacchelvanār," (N.T.-11.3), 'the wealthy Prince of Arangam is the sovereign lord who rules eternally over the ocean-girdled Earth and Sky with his regal staff'. This is also explicitly expressed in the 'Srirangamāhatmiyam' thus : "*Kāvēri Virajāśēyam Vaikuntham Rangamandiram I Sa Vāsudēvō Rangēśah: Pratyakṣam Paramam Padam*" II

As mentioned earlier, both his prabandhams of 55 pāsūrams in all, were about Srirangam and Lord Ranganatha. Consequently, Lord Ranganatha came to hold the singular distinction of the title of "*Padhinmar pādiya Perumāi*", as all Āḷvārs have sung about Him. Except this Āḷvār, all others have sung about the Lord of Tiruvenkatam also. But bereft of this Āḷvār's 'mangalāśāsana', Tiruvenkatam could only claim the second position after Srirangam, this Āḷvār's Prabandhams being the capstone that tilted the scales in favour of the latter. Incidentally it is to be noted that Madhurakavi Āḷvār did not sing of any 'divya-dēsa', since his Prabandham 'Kanninun Sirutthāmbu' is entirely on his master Nammāḷvār.

Both 'Tirumālai' and 'Tiruppalliyezucchi' are included in the 'Mudhalāyiram' segment of Divyaprabandham. Tondaradippodi Āḷvār's 'Tirumālai' describes the greatness and exalting quality of reciting the Lord's names. It is said that the background to this Prabandham is Saunaka Maharishi's work of 'Vishnudharmam' which extolls the 'Bhagavan nāmasankīrtanam', that is singing the many names of the Lord for their own intrinsic joy without any expectation of reward. The joy of the experience then leads one to other paths like Bhakti Yoga or 'Siddhōpāya nishtai' of 'Prapatti mārga'. This has been borne out in the following pronouncements, "*Kim*

japan muchyatē jantur janma samsāra bandhanāth”- (Sahasranāma Adhyāya- 3), ‘reciting which the sentient self is liberated from its bonds.’ “*Vāsudēvārayō martyō Vāsudevaparāyanah: I Sarvapāpa visuddhātmā yāti brahma sanātanam*”- (V.S.-117), ‘The man who seeks refuge in Vāsudeva, and has Vāsudeva as his path and goal, is cleansed of his sins and reaches the eternal ‘Brahman’’. Hanumān is cited as a prime example of a devotee of the Lord who is constantly absorbed in the recitation of “*Rāma nāma*” declining the invitation of the Lord to accompany Him when He ascended to His abode, saying ‘bhāvo nānyatra gacchati’, ‘my being does not rest anywhere else.’ The Lord’s name ‘Govinda’ came to Draupatī’s rescue in the Kaurava Court, when she called out to Sri Krishna in distress, “*Sankha chakra gadhāpānē Dvārakanilayāchuta, Govinda Pundarikāksha raksha mām śaranāgatām*”. Pillai Lokāchārya in his Mumukshupadi Sutra said about this, “*Draupadikku āpathilē pudavaī surandhadu Tirunāmamirē*”. Realising the efficacy of reciting the Lord’s names, Āḷvār says at the outset of his Tirumālai, that he would not trade his enjoyment of singing the Lord’s names for the taste of paradise, “*Acchuvai perinum vēndēn Arangamānagarulānē*”- (T.M.-2)

Among the five-fold representations of the Divine manifestation, the ‘arca’ state has been held out as the most felicitous form for the human mind to grasp and meditate on. Sage Saunaka praises the greatness of the ‘arca’ form as follows, “*Surūpām pratimām Vishnōh: prasanna vadanēkshasām I kṛtvātmanah: prītikarim suvarnarajatādibih: II tāmarchayēt tām prenamēt tām bhajēt tām vichintayēt I Visadhyapāstadoshastu tāmēva brahmarūpinīm*”-(V.D.-103.30), ‘He shall worship Vishnu’s beautiful image of gold or silver or other metal, endowed with smiling eyes, and pleasing to behold; he shall prostrate to it, sing its praises, and meditate on

it constantly. Cleansed of his faults, he will reach the effulgent Brahman thus.' Among the Āļvārs, the Mudhal Āļvārs were fascinated with the transcendent 'para svarūpa' of the Divine, and the compassionate Lord of Venkata hills. Pariāļvār and Nammāļvār were attracted by the 'Vibhavāthāra' of Sri Krishna. Tirumaļisai Āļvār was inwardly drawn towards the 'Antaryāmitva' state of the Divine. While the Āļvārs sang about the 'arca' form of the Lord as 'Sarvam Pūrnām', to Tirumangai Āļvār this form more than any other expression of the Divine, had a special fascination as evident from the fact that he has sung about the 'Arcāvatāra' Divinity in many shrines from Bhadri to Tirukkurungudi. Like Tirumanagai Āļvār, Tondaradippodi was also fascinated by the 'arca' form of the Lord, but as earlier mentioned, for him it had to be that of Lord Ranganatha and none else. Among the 'Divyadesams', Tiruvarangam is looked upon as preminent, the 'Bhūlōka Vaikuntha', and referred to, as just "Kōyil". Sri Vedānta Desikan said about it "*Ārādha Arulamudham podhindhakōyil*" (A.S.- 42). Similarly, 'Tirumālai' and Tondaradippodi Āļvār have a special place in the 'Sampradāya', by virtue of the fact that Lord Ranganatha Himself listened to his hymns. Like a doting father to whom even the prattle of his child is sweet to hear, this Āļvār being like the Lord's favoured child, listened to his hymns in rapturous attention, as he himself has said at the end of Tirumālai, "*Ilaiya pun kavidhaiyēlum Embirārkkku iniyavārē*"- 'even if it was 'childish and inelegant', 'it would still be sweet poetry to my Lord'. It is no wonder that it is said, that one who does not know 'Tirumālai' does not know 'Tirumāl'. This Prabandham is a feast of thought and flow of soul, which is virtually in the nature of a confidential tête-à-tête between the Āļvār and Lord Sri Ranganatha, reflecting as it does, the struggle, the anguish, and the aspiration

of the human soul yearning to escape from the vice-grip of samsāric bondage and find its niche in the feet of the Divine in immortal bliss.

The first pāsuram of Tirumālai “*Kāvalinil pulanai vaittu*”, describes the efficacy of the Lord’s name in purifying the mind, and elevating the spiritual quality of the person who has had the benefit of a preceptor’s instruction in learning the Lord’s names. It enables one to overcome the sensual forces of desire and anger generated by one’s ‘vāsanas’ or tendencies, and sets him on the path of spiritual evolution, ridding him of the fear of death, hell and so on to the point that he can even feel justifiably proud. The second pāsuram (Pachaimāmalai), is Āļvār’s soulful description of the rapturous beauty of the reclining Lord at Tiruvarangam. Laid out like an emerald mountain with coral lips and lotus eyes, He is ‘Achyuta’, the Lord of celestials, and the tender prince of the cow-herd clan. Having tasted the sweet Lord here, he would not like to exchange this for life in the Lord’s kingdom itself. The Lord tells the Āļvār that if he did not desire the prospect of life in the ‘Parama-padha’, he may remain in this ‘samsāric’ life and recite His names as he wished. Āļvār rejects that pointing out the reasons therefor in the third pasuram, “*Veda nool pirāyam nooru*”. Even though man’s prescribed age is hundred years, half of it goes in sleep, and the remainder of fifty years, is spent in childhood, adolescence, wayward youth, disease, hunger and old age. So Āļvār says, “*Ādhalāl pīravi vēndēn Arangamānagarulānē*”, ‘So I seek not this kind of birth, O Lord of Arangam.’ Āļvār points out the obstacles in the way of recitation of Lord’s names. Half the life is gone in sleep. Out of the balance, Āļvār says, ‘*Ninra ippadhinaiyāndu pēdhai, bālakan adhākum*’, that is fifteen years will be gone as baby and boy, another fifteen years as an adolescent youth, Āļvār does not wish

to name the last one, but simply says, ‘that’—Both phases have their own problems in reciting the Lord’s names. The remaining period is only twenty years, which is beset with problems of old age, disease etc. Āḷvār rejected the ‘nithya-vibhūti’ of the Lord in pāsuram 2, but is averse to a life in the phenomenal world ‘līlā-vibhūti’ in pāsuram 3. This throws the Lord into a dilemma. What could He now offer to satisfy His devotee? As if sensing this, Āḷvār implicitly prays for a corner in Lord’s ‘Arangam’ itself, where he can go on singing his praises of the Lord.

In the first three pāsurams, Āḷvār has spoken about himself in introspective vein. In the next eleven pāsurams from 4 to 14, Āḷvār addresses the world around giving some sage advice. The reason for this is two-fold, one has to do with his sensitive nature, of not being able to bear the plight of the ‘samsāris’ who are lost in the worldly life without a clue to their future; secondly, his generosity of spirit which impels him to share the benefits of Lord’s names so simple for others to follow, yet for ever eluding them due to their ignorance. In pāsuram 4 (*“Moytta valvinaiyul”*), Āḷvār laments how people are caught up in birth, unheeding of the Lord of Tiruvaangam Who is enamoured of His devotees and is lying in a long wait to save them. He cites the case of Kshatrabandhu who had been trapped in encircling sin, and found his redemption merely by learning the three letter word of the Lord. Āḷvār does not explicitly mention the Lord’s name, but merely says, *“moonnrezhuttudaiya pērāl”*; a word of three letters’ which might be ‘Sridhara’ or ‘Govinda’ or ‘Kesava’. The length of the Lord’s name does not have to be longer or shorter, in any kind of proportion to the magnitude of sins committed. The letter by itself would suffice, like the letter ‘A’ in ‘Pranava.’ *“Mērumantarmātrobbi rāṣih: pāpasya karmanah: I Kesavam vaidhyamāsādhyā durvyādhiriva naśyati II”* –(V.D.), ‘Even mountain loads

of sinful action of the size of Mēru, on reaching ‘Kesava’, are wiped out like a dangerous illness cured by the touch of a physician’. The reason why Āļvār mentions ‘three lettered word’ is to arouse the curiosity of the learner, as it would set him wondering, ‘is it Govinda’ or Sridhara’, or Kesava’ etc. Kshatrabandhu, a lowly ‘kashatriya’ by birth and a forest brigand, was touched by the grace of a sage there who initiated him to the ‘Govinda nāma’, and attained liberation by recitation of this ‘mantra’.

In pāsūram 5 (Pendirāl sugangal), Āļvār deprecates a life given entirely to sense gratification and concerns of the body, and resultant bondage to human masters to care for it, far removed from our moorings in the Divine, and the eternal nectarine joy it assures us. Āļvār, in pāsūram 6 (“*maram suvar madhileduttu*”), has a dire warning to the crass humanity which, for ever, is engrossed in the mundane pursuit of sensory pleasures for the falling body- which even the birds would not care to peck for food- instead of taking refuge in the Lord of Tiruvarangam who is like a fortress of ‘dharma’ to seeking devotees. In pāsūram 10 (“*Nāttinān deivamengum*”), Āļvār affirms the ‘paratva’ of the Lord at Tiruvarangam Who has Goddess Sri on his chest and Garuda for his vehicle, and hearkens men of God to seek Him for everything including liberation, in stead of running after lesser gods whom He has established assigning them corners, worlds, and quarters as His minions. Seeking favours from them is like seeking riches from ‘goddess of misfortune’ (‘Jyēṣṭā’), instead of Goddess Sri. In pāsūram 12 (“*Namanum murkalanum pēsa*”), Āļvār once again reaffirms the efficacy of God’s name “*Tirunāmam*”, by drawing from the ‘Vishnu-Dharma’ story narrating the ‘Mudgala-Yama samvādha’ or conversation. Mudgala had been a sinner all his life who sought to atone for his sins by gifting a cow at the fag-end of his life, by invoking

the name of the Lord to the effect, "*Sri Krishnārpanam*". Yama's emissaries dragged him to hell on his death, where, however, Yama received him with honours and courtesy. Mudgala was surprised at this, and asked Yama how in contrast to his emissaries' punitive attitude, he was extending such kindness to him. Yama then related how his invocation of the Lord's name at the end of his life, had earned him not only a reprieve but the reward of heavenly joy. What is more, those who were around hearing their conversation, were rid of their infernal misery and experienced this heavenly bliss. Yama was actually trying to correct a mistake committed by his emissaries in having brought the wrong man to hell, for fear that his position would itself be in jeopardy if he did not do so. Heaven is where the Lord's name is uttered. Hell is purified and mortality extinguished, and sorrows are wiped out, by mere utterance of God's names. Ālvār commiserates those miserable men who, forgetting the Lord's temple of Tiruvarangam, are caught up in the web of misery. Poigai Pirān's pasuram "*Nāvāyilundē Namō Nāranāvenru*", (M.T.-95), expresses the same thought.

Pasuram 14 "*Vandinam Muralum Sōlai*", portrays the beautiful gardens of Srirangam where honey-bees hum, peacocks dance, clouds hang on tree tops, and the koel birds make love calls to their mates. This is where the Lord of celestials abides. Ālvār derides those who do not utter the name of Srirangam as fools, from whose mouths the food they are eating should be taken away and fed to dogs. Sri Paraāsara Bhattar in his Rangarājastavam describing the gardens on the banks of Cauveri and his devout desire to live in its environs thus. "*Cauvēriparicharitāsupāvanishu Srirangō pavanātishu vartishīya*"', may I live in the gardens of Srirangam washed by the purifying waves of Cauvēri'. (S.R.S.Pur,Sa.-27).

Feeling exhausted with the unresponsive mindset of men, Āḷvār withdraws from trying to reform the outer world, and instead focuses on all the blessings he has received from the Lord of His 'nirhētuka krupā, in the next ten pāsuras, 15 to 24. His heart overflows with gratitude and wonder how the Lord had not only corrected his worldly ways, but elevated him to the level of offering sage advice to others on the means to pursue for liberation from worldly woes, and sowing the seeds of 'parama-bhakti' in him towards the Lord. In pāsuram 15, Āḷvār says of the Lord, *"Meyyarkkē Meyyanāgum, vidhiyilā vennaippōla poyyarkkē poyyanāghum"*. To those, who are true in the sense that they have no ill-disposition to the Lord at the least, the Lord is true in that He is benevolent to the point of taking the supplicant into his fold. But to those who are untrue and have no semblance of goodwill towards him, He is likewise untrue, which means that he reluctantly gives up on them. The Lord said, *"Mithra-bhāvēna samprāptam na tyajāyam kadanchana I dōshōyadyapi tasya syāt sadāmē tadagarhitam"*, (V.R.Yud.-18.3), 'I shall not abandon him (Vibhīshana) who has approached me in ostensible friendship. Even if he should be flawed, in good people it is not to be faulted.' The Lord becomes the natural protector of those who come to him even if with only an iota of a good disposition towards him. *"Poyyē kaimmaisollippuramē puramēpādi meyyē petrozhindhēn, vidivāikkinru kāppārār"*? (T.V.M.-5.1.1). Nammāḷvār says that he 'just mouthed some words of praise to the Lord, while in fact his mind was engrossed in outward pursuits of the senses, but obtained the true grace of the Lord. When the Lord's grace flows so spontaneously, who can stop it?'. The Lord gives up on one, only if, even a pretence of absence of enmity, 'advēṣā' is not likely to be found in him. Āḷvār says that he temporarily fell from the Lord's grace when he had been under the spell of Devadevi.

But he goes on to assure those who seek to become regenerate, the Lord of celestials, who has Garuda as his flag, cuts asunder all doubts, by revealing the beautiful city of Srirangam.

In pāsuram 16, (*"Soodhanāykkalvanāghi"*), Āļvār recalls the time when he had been a gambler and thief, having expropriated his 'ātman' as belonging to him, and caught in the net of a woman's fish-like eyes, ending up being charged with the theft of a gold vessel, how the Lord called him, entered into his mind, thus making him realize the immensity of the Lord's love and beauty, which melted him and made him a lover athirst for the Lord's vision. Nammāļvār, describes the 'soulabhya' of the Lord, in the words, *"Yānotti ennul niruttuvamenrilan, tānotti vandu en tani nenjai vanjittu ūnotti ninru ennuyirilkalandhu iyal vānottumō"* ?... (T.V.M.-1.7.7), 'I wished to go near and ensconce Him in my heart, but before that He came nearer, and beguiling my heart, entered my body and mingled with my soul; is the high heaven comparable to this bliss?'-

In pāsuram 19 (*"Kudadhisai Mudiyaivaittu"*..), Āļvār describes to the world, the melting sight of the ocean-hued Lord reclining on the serpent bed in 'yoganidra' state at Arangam, exclaiming how then they still could remain so solid in the face of that sight, while he is himself on the verge of flowing like melted ice. Āļvār says, *"Udal enakku urughumālō"*, enseigēn Ulagattirē?. 'my body melts to the Lord, O people of the world, what can I do?' The Lord lies placing His crowned head in the western direction, stretching His feet in the eastern direction, showing His back to the north, and gazing at Lanka in the Southern direction. The Lord's crowned head in the west is symbolic of His 'Sarvaśeṣitva', that He is 'Ubhaya-Vibhūti Nāyakan'. Sri Ālavandār, it is said, used to hurry past the

western side of the Lord, when he circumambulated the shrine, characterizing it as ‘Duryōdhana sthāna’. Duryodhana, when he had come to seek Lord Krishna’s help for the battle, finding the Lord asleep, went and took his seat near the Lord’s head, whereas Arjuna who came subsequently, prayed to the Lord’s feet and sat at His feet. For this reason, Ālavandār used to walk slowly as he came to the eastern side. Swami Nammāļvār aptly describes it as *“Moovulagum thozhudēttum Seeradiyān”*, (T.V.M.-3.1.8.), ‘The Lord whose sacred feet, the beings of all the worlds praise and worship’. Āļvār’s place Tirumandangudi and that of Tiruppānāļvār, Uraiyur, both lie to the east of the shrine. So while this Āļvār says, *“gunadhisai pādham neetti”*, ‘stretching out His legs to the east’, he probably implied also, ‘stretching as far as even Tirumandangudi to reach up to him’. The Lord lies with His back to the northern direction. North is where people conversant with Sanskrit, considered a rather ‘harsh’ language lived, the South being where the mellifluent Tamil Āļvārs lived ; so the Lord wished to show His rear which (in the case of the Lord) is considered more beautiful than the front, in order to attract the denizens of the north. The Lord faces South toward Lanka to keep His word to His devotee Vibhīshana. As Perīāļvār says, *“Mannudaiya Vibhīdanarkkā madililaingai disai nōkki malarkkan vaitta ennudaiya Tiruvarangarkku”*, (P.A.T.M.-4.9.2), ‘the Lord reclines with his eyes set in the direction of fortified Lanka with concern for the good Vibhīshana’. Sri Parāsara Bhattar visualizes the Lord’s abidance in reclining state in Srirangam as an expression of His ever-lasting concern for the people in the world, *“..Ārtasvā ghadikai: krupākalushitai: ālōkithai: ārdhrāyan viśvathrāna vimarśanas kalitāya nidrā si jāgaryayā”*, (S.R.S.-U.S.-75). ‘You lie as if in slumber but lost in thought about saving the world, welcoming the seeking devotees with deep

compassion, cooling their three kinds of 'tāpās' or 'heat' with your assuring gaze'.

Pāsuram 23 is another beautiful depiction of the unique charm of the reclining state of the Lord. Among the four 'arca' positions of the Lord. standing, seated, reclining and walking, Āḷvārs have always had a special fascination for the reclining state. Here, Āḷvār sings about the surroundings in which the Lord is lying in Tiruvarangam. He lies in the midst of the river Cauvēri which is holier than the Ganga, whose gushing waters flow over fragrant bowers. Having seen His beautiful form thus, he asks himself, 'how can I forget this sight ever, and still live? O poor helpless me!'. According to legend, Cauvēri which had attained equal status with Ganga due to the Lord's grace, became even greater than Ganga after the 'Sriranga Vimāna' and the Lord found their resting place there. So Āḷvār says, "*Gangaiyil punidhamāya cauviry*". In a beautiful sloka, Sri Parāsara Bhattar, says of the river Cauvēri, "*tīrttam sundati, pāthi, nandanatarūn, rathyānganān yukshati, snānanīyārhana pānavāri vahati, snātah: puniitē janān I śyāmam vēdarahō vyanakti pulinēphēnai: hasantīva tat gangām vishnupadhītvamātra mukharām hēmāpagā hantvagam II*", (S.R.S- P.S.-22). The river 'Ponni' purifies the waters flowing into it; nourishes the gardens in Srirangam; cleans the streets and corners; provides water for Lord's worship in the shrine and at homes, and for drinking and bathing. Above all, it reveals that secret Reality hidden in the Vedas, the blue-hued Lord for all to see and rejoice over on its sand banks'. Now, Cauvēri has the last laugh over her arch rival Gangs, as if to say, 'Your moment of glory came and went with the Lord's Trivikramāvathāra. Ponni that I am, flow in eternity now touching the feet of the Lord.' Did not Sri Kulasekhara Perumān also endorse this, with his line, "*Tiruvarangapperunagarul*

thennīrpponni tiraikkaiyāl adivaruda", (PML.T.M.-1.1). Āļvār marvels at the Lord's reclining state in the words, "*Kidandadhōr Kidakkai*", 'what lovely sight it is'. It is to show his love towards us; so Āļvār says, "*Engal Māl*". Is He not the One Who has such overflowing 'Āsrita Vātsalyā'? That is due to His unconditioned relationship with us as our 'Svāmi'. So Āļvār says, "*Engal māl Iraivan*". If one had not seen such a riveting sight, one could forget. But 'having seen this, how can one forget?', asks the Āļvār. Sri Nammāļvār also sang in similar vein, "*Engal kōlat Tirukkurungudi Nambiyai nān kanda pin, enjēnēyō annaimīrgāl ennai munivadhū nīr*"?. (T.V.M.-5.5.1). 'After seeing the beautiful Lord, in Tirukkurungudi,..... how now, Ladies, you blame me!' In saying at the end, "*Ēzhaiyēn ēzhaiyēnē*", Āļvār reveals his emotional fragility in being caught in the net of 'bhagavad-vishaya'. The desire to experience is so intense that he can hardly do justice to it. If for a moment, he could take his mind off that, he cannot live another moment. That is the languor brought on by his 'karma', feels the Āļvār. Sri Tirumaļisai Pirān who exhibits a broader attraction for 'arca' form in all positions, standing, seated or reclining, considers himself not having been born before he developed love for the Lord, and once endowed with that love, could never forget, since that Lord has come to reside in his heart. Thus, the Lord in Tiruooragam in standing position, the seated Lord at Tiruppādakam, and the reclining Lord in Tiruvehka all came to reside in his heart, So he sings, "*.... Anru nān pirandhilēn, pirandapin marandilēn, ninradhum, irundadhūm kidandadhūm en nenjulē*"- (T.C.V.-64), 'once I was born, I could never forget. My Lord now stands, sits and reclines in my heart.' "*asannēva sa bhavati ! asat brahmēti vēda chēt I asti Brahmēti cēt vēda! Santamēnam tathō vidhu: "II,* (Tait.Up. 2.6). 'He who takes Brahman as unreal, truly

he becomes a non-entity. He who understands 'Brahman is', the wise consider right and good.'

In pāsurams 25 till 34, Āḷvār expresses his 'ākinchanyam', 'absence of any kind of merit' in him for claiming Lord's eternal grace. In the previous ten pāsurams, Āḷvār had recounted all the grace he had received from the Lord including how he had been rescued by Him when he had gone astray. Since the knowledge of the Lord's grace had dawned in him owing to Lord's own munificence, he felt that this experience could not last for ever beyond the present. The Lord tries to assure him that he could follow one of the methods prescribed in the 'Sāstrās' for the three 'varnās' Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas namely karma- jñāna-bhakthi yogas, or 'Prapatti'-- the path of absolute surrender, or atleast simply 'Tirunāma sankīrtanam' easy to follow for all, and earn the privilege of eternal togetherness with the Lord. Āḷvār in pāsuram 25 and those following, admits his inability to fulfill any of these requirements. 'O Lord,' he cries, 'I have lost the brahminhood that comprises in bathing and worshipping the three fires without any flaw in performance; nothing is to me; but in respect of you, I have become bereft of love; with what shall I do, O perfect Lord! O Lord of the ocean colour! O Lord dweller in Srirangam? I am imploring you with loud cries. Make me your object of mercy and deliver me.'

Āḷvār says in verse 25, "*Kulittu moonnranalai ōmbum kurikkol andhanamai tannai olittittēn*", 'I have lost my brahminhood of worshipping after bath, the three fires of 'gārhapatyam', āvahanīyam', and 'dakshināgni', with due recitation of mantras without any slippage.' So he cannot claim any merit by way of 'karma yoga'. Āḷvār further says, "*en kan illai*", 'I have no self-knowledge' or 'jñāna yoga' merit either of this birth or carried forward

from the previous. If there is no 'karma' or 'jñāna' yoga, can he not claim 'bhakti yoga'? Āḷvār says, "*Nin kanum bhakthanallēn*", 'I have no love for you'. Has it not been said, "*janmāntara sahasrēṣu tapōjñāna samādibhiḥ I narānām kshīnapāpānām Krishnabhakthih prajāyate*", 'after several thousand births of observance of 'karma-jñāna yogas', and cessation of sins, love towards Lord Krishna originates.' Purānic models illustrate each of the three paths with the other two as 'angās' or accessories, as leading to liberation, the three being Janaka for 'karma yoga' path with 'jñāna' and 'bhakti' as accessories, Jadabharatha for 'jñāna yoga' with 'karma' and 'bhakti', and Prahlāda for 'bhakti' yoga with 'karma' and 'jñāna'. These are also underlined in Gita slokas, "*karmanaiva hi samsiddhim āstitā Janakādayah*:" (B.G.-3.20), "*Sarvam karmākīlam Pārtha jñānē parisamāpyatē*:" (B.G.- 4.33), and "*bhakyātvananyayā sakyam Ahamēvam vidhōrjuna, jñātum, drashtum, cha tatvēna pravēshtum cha, Parantapa*". (B.G.-11.54). 'Indeed, by Karma Yoga alone did Janaka and others reach perfection.' ; 'All actions and everything culminate in knowledge,' 'But by single-minded devotion alone, it is possible to truly know, to see, and to enter into Me, O Arjuna.'

Sri Nammāḷvār in his "*Nōtra nōnbilēn nunnarivilēn*", (T.V.M.-5.7.1), and Āndāl in her "*Karavaigal*" (T.P.-28), had pleaded their 'ākinchanyam' to the Lord. Ālavandār too in performing his 'Śaranagathi' to the Lord, pleaded that he was not grounded in 'karma yoga', nor possessed 'ātma-jñāna', nor could lay any claim to have 'bhakti' towards the Lord, and without any means and no where to go, took refuge at the Lord's feet as the sole means. "*Na dharmanishtōsmi na ca āthmavēdi*"....., (S.R.-22). Imagining the Lord saying to him, that since he atleast had the quality of 'ākinchanyānushtānam' taking him that much nearer the goal, Āḷvār says, "*Kalippadhen*

kondu?”, ‘is it something to rejoice over?, I do not even seem to have any remorse over my lack of ‘karma yoga’ etc. If atleast that is there, you might possibly assure me of your grace’. Āļvār continues, ‘though I have nothing deserving your grace, You have everything, you have all auspicious qualities’. Āļvār cries out addressing the Lord, “*Nambi*” which means just that, even as Āndāl had sung, “*arivonrumillādha āykkulam*” about the gopikas, and of the Lord, “*Kurai Onrumillāda Govinda (T.P-28)*” The Lord asks the Āļvār, ‘what do you want me to do?’ Āļvār makes his final prayer in the words, “*alittu arul sei kandāy*”, ‘Lord, have compassion and do grant me your grace, including the worthiness on my part to receive such grace.’ Without His grace, where can we go?

In pāsuraṁ 26 (Pōdhellām pōdhukondu), Āļvār says, “I am not given to worshipping you with choice flowers, morning, noon and evening,; I am not accustomed to speak of your qualities in faultless words; nor is my heart imbued with feelings of love towards you. Therefore, I have nothing. I am nothing to you. Oh why was I born?”. *En seivān thōnrinēnē?*” Can any one read Tirumālai without feeling atleast a fraction of the pathos-filled emotion that is soaked in, and drips out of, these moving hymns.?

‘I have cast truth to the winds’ (Meyyallām pōgha vittu), says the Āļvār in stanza 33. This is an emotion-laden rewind to his earlier life. “*I had got entangled with females with beautiful hair. In me, is deeply embedded all untruth and falsehood. And yet I have dared to come and stand before you, my Sire ! Oh Arangā ! Induced by the desire to secure Thy mercy and in the hope that I shall be the recipient of it, this liar comes and stands before you – a liar alas once, twice, thrice over.*” ...” *poyyanēn vandhu ninrēn poyyanēn poyyanēnē.*” Can there be any greater penitence ?

When all his cries and pitiful pleas do not seem to elicit any comforting response from the Lord, Āļvār feels let down wondering if the Lord is under the impression that he may have other relations to take care of him, or perhaps, that He still wished for him to wallow in this 'samsāra' more. He says reproachfully about the Lord to himself in verse 37, "*Aliyan nampayal Ennār Ammvō kōdiyavārē!*". Drawing on the metaphor of the turbid waters of Cauvēri surrounding Srirangam, Āļvār whose mind is also clouded likewise, that the Lord seems to keep him in suspended animation, sings, 'after all, the effulgent Lord Who abides in the shrine at Tiruvarangam is my Father and Mother. All that He has to do in my case is to shower His simple benign grace. He is my benevolent Lord; if only He were to say just, 'This boy of ours deserves', I would have lived on. Yet he does not say that! How unrelenting his heart has become!'! "*Sarvēṣāmēva lōkānām pithā māthā cha Mādhava: I gacchadvamēnam śaranam Śaranyam puruṣarishabha*"- (Bar. Āra- 192.56). 'O good men, the Lord of Divine Mother Lakshmi is the father and mother of all the worlds. Take refuge in Him worthy of surrender.' This advice was given by sage Mārkaṇḍeya in an assembly of Yudhishtira with his brothers and their wife Draupadi, in their forest life, when Krishna, Sage Parāsara and others were also present, in response to a query from Yudhishtira why, while they who were following the path of dharma were suffering, evil people like Duryodhana were thriving in this world. Sri Parāsara Bhattar was said to have cited this sloka to his brother Sīrāmappillai, when the latter faced a situation of great personal distress in his life.

Pāsuram 38 "*Mēmporul pōghavittu*", is the quintessential song of this Prabandham, set as it is like the 'charama-sloka' for the Bhagavad Gita. In fact, it is held by Sri Periaṁbāchan Pillai, that the Prabandham

originated just for this pasuram. As such scholars aver “*Tirumālaiyengiradhu ippāsuraṁ*”, ‘this song is the virtual Tirumālai’. The song exposit on the meaning of the ‘Dvaya mahā mantra’, “*Sriman Nārāyaṇa Charanou Śaranam Prapadyē Srimathē Nārāyaṇāya Namah:*”. The song states in effect, ‘O Lord who abides in Tiruvarangam girded by the waters of the Cauvēri, it appears that you exult over those devotees, who casting aside the unreal importance given to the material world, know rightly the truth of the ‘self ‘and learn that service (to Thee) is the goal to seek, and controlling firmly their five senses, cutting asunder all other means and giving up all burden, seek refuge and rest at Thy portal.’ The singular feature of this song is that it comprehensively encompasses the meaning of both parts of the ‘dvaya mantra’, the first part of which states the ‘prāpakam’, ‘that which makes one attain the end’, the second part stating the ‘prāpya’, ‘the end to be attained’, but with a difference that the song in the first two lines states the ‘prāpyam’, and the last two lines the ‘prāpakam’. Thus the first two lines of the verse, “*Mēmporul pōgha vittu meymaiyai miḡha unarndhu, āmpariṣu arindhu kondu aimpulanagattadakki*”, state the ‘upēyam’, ‘the goal’. The latter two lines, “*kāmbhara thalai sirraittunkadaittalai yirundhu vāzhum sōmbharai ugattip pōlum....*” state the ‘upāyam’ or means. This is attributed to the fact that the song is sung at the point of origin, as the Āļvār experiences it; hence, the goal is stated first, and then the means. The ‘dvaya’ is set in the format of observance or ‘anushtāna’; so it states the ‘sādhana’ first, and then the ‘sādhya’, since observance or effort always has to precede reward. Nammāļvār is stated to have meditated on the first part of the ‘dvaya’ in his ‘Śaranāgathi’ pāsuraṁ “*Aghalakillēn*” (T.V.M.-6.10). He dwells on the second part, “*upēyam*” in his “*Ozhivil kālamellām*,” (T.V.M.- 3.3). Āṇḍāl is stated to have practiced

the second part of the 'dvaya' in her hymn "*Sitram siru kālē*" (T.P.-29), and the first part in "*Karavaigal pin senru*" (T.P.-28). This Āļvār practises them together in this hymn.

Man has three states of ignorance; loss of the knowledge of God due to continuous engrossment in material things enjoyable to the senses, ('mēlezhundha porul'); incapacity to get rid of the view that the 'self' is identical with the body, (mēvina porul); and thirdly, the misperception that those whom one has attained are omniscient. This is what Āļvār urges 'giving up' in the phrase "*mēm porul pōghavittu*". Thus one has to get rid of the thought that the body and soul are identical, that the material things related to the body are one's own and that the soul, though different from the body, is independent of God (svatantra). "*meimmayai migha unarndhu*", - 'mey' refers to the 'self' which is sub-atomic but eternal, self-luminous, with "*dharmabhūtajñānam*" or 'attributive consciousness', and dependent on God and His devotees. "*āmparisu arindhu kondu*"- 'learning that service to God and His devotees is the ultimate reward in one's life pursuit'. The knowledge a sentient being must develop is three-fold, attachment to body and material things must be given up; that the 'ātma' is a 'śeṣa' and 'paratantra' of the Supreme Being; that the most precious goal to attain in life is 'kainkarya' or service to God and His devotees. If this knowledge is there, one does not need to seek any other means for liberation for he then becomes the 'Siddhōpāya nishtā'. It is the Lord's role then to liberate one from the bonds of 'samsāra', and sins and rewards in life. One devotee asked Nanjīyar, "*Vidugai upāyamō? patrugai upāyamō?*", 'is holding on (to God) the means or giving up (of attachments etc) the means?'. Nanjīyar replied, "*irandumanru, viduvittu patruvikkum Avanē upāyam*"; "neither, the Lord who makes you give up in order to hold on to Him, is". "*Aimpulan agattadakki*"-

‘controlling the five senses’. This is already covered in the phrases “*mēm porul pōgha vittu*”. But nevertheless, Ālvār reiterates it for the reason that at the stage of ‘kainkarya’, the sense that one is doing it for one’s enjoyment must be got rid of, since the service is for His enjoyment, and His joy is our reward. This is what is called ‘Svarūpa yāthātmya jñānam’ comprising ‘pāratantryam’ and ‘bhogyathvam’. Pillai Lokāchārya terms it as ‘panippon pōlē’, meaning a finished gold jewel; In contrast, ‘svarūpa jñānam’ relates to ‘śeṣatvam’ and ‘bhoktṛtvam’ which he calls ‘kattippon’ or ‘gold ingot’. The former knowledge is what Nammālvār characterized as, ‘tanakkē yāga enaikkollumīdhē’- (T.V.M.-2.9.4.), and Āndāl prays for, in “*unakkē nām ātcheyvōm*”, (T.P.-29). Incidentally, these two lines also exposit on the meaning of ‘Tirumantra’ as follows: “*mēm porul pōgha vittu*” meaning, ‘Om namah:’ and ‘aimpulan agattadakki’ meaning ‘Nārāyanāya’.

The ‘prāpakam’ or means, is covered in the latter two lines as already mentioned. “*kāmbara talai siraittu*”- ‘abandoning all traces of ego, the impression that one can redeem himself by his own self-effort, and ‘sundering connection with all other self-defeating means that is like a big load on one’s head’, which is what “*thalai siraittu*” stands for. This is what is stated in the Gita charama sloka as, “*sarva dharmān parityajya*” or ‘upāyāntara parityāga’. Literally, “*siraittu*” means ‘shaving off one’s hair completely’ which is symbolic of wiping out all trace of one’s pride and ego. “*un kadaittalai yirundu vāzhum*”,-- ‘seeking refuge at thy portals’ literally, which in the ‘dvaya’ mantra, is “*charanou saranam prapadyē*”. “*Sōmbarai ugattippōlum*”, ‘having invested one’s redemption in the safe hands of the Lord, one can take it easy, ‘laze’ so to say’, devoid of the responsibility for one’s own protection. The Lord is pleased with such devotees who rest under His shade and live in his glory

and service. “*Soozhpunal Arangattānē Un kadaittalai*”- refers to the meaning of “*Nārāyana*” śabda in the first part of ‘dvaya’ which connotes the qualities of the Lord, ‘sousilya’, ‘soulabhya’, ‘vātsalya’ and ‘svāmitva’. ‘Un’ implies association with Divine Mother Mahā Lakshmi.

The backdrop to the pāsuram 38, is as follows. Having heard the Āļvār cry out in pain “*aliyan nam payal ennār ammavō*” in the previous verse, ‘He does not say, ‘this is our boy’, alas!’ and realizing how much his dear devotee is pining for His grace and compassion, and bemoaning his indefinite wait, the Lord grants His vision to the Āļvār showing His evident joy. Āļvār is overwhelmed and breaks out in this song before the Lord, in his ‘siddhōpāya nishtai’.

The six songs from pāsuram 39 upto 44, describe the exalted nature of Lord’s devotees who live in the true spirit of the meaning envisaged in pāsuram 38, with unconditional love for the Lord and in His service, irrespective of their birth, vocation, conduct etc. These devotees are much nearer to the Lord’s heart than the Vedic pundits if the latter do not have the more important knowledge that service to God’s feet is the goal of all learning. Those devotees who have that knowledge are a source of delight to Him like the fragrant ‘tulasi’ He wears on his head (39). These are the devotees about whom Nammāļvār sings in his decads, “*Payilum Sudaroli*” (T.V.M.- 3.7), and “*Nedumārkkadimai*” (T.V.M.- 8.10). Pāsuram 40 says, that the constant remembrance of the Lord that He is the surest panacea for the sins committed in life, however heinous, and the means of emancipation from such sins, will keep at bay even the worst sin of murder from such a devotee. “*pāpānām vā śubhānām vā vadhārhanām Plavangama I kāryam karunamāryēna na kaschināparādhyati II*” (Sri.Ra.Yud.116.44). These

were words spoken by mother Sita to Hanuman, in which she says, 'O Simian emissary, whether one is sinful or of righteous conduct, or even fit to be put to death, compassion should be shown towards such a person. There is none who has not sinned in his life.' In pāsuram 41 Āļvār says that the 'samsāris' who come in contact with the Lord's devotees, are purified. The residue of food consumed by them becomes 'prasāda' which has a purifying effect on the receiver. "*pōnagam seidha sēdam taruvarēl punidhamanrē*". In hymn 42, Āļvār makes an indirect reference to the advice tendered by the Lord, in an earlier age, to all beings from Brahma downwards who followed the traditional knowledge of the four Vedas faultlessly, to worship and learn from the 'bhāgavathās' regardless of their caste, and give them freely of their knowledge, for the Lord looks on such devotees as His equals. These devotees who have evolved over several births in their realization that the Lord is everything are the Lord's very 'selves' and are indeed few and far between, whom He acknowledges as great souls, 'Mahātmas' They are those who are always engaged in God's service, whose hearts are ever soaked in constant enjoyment of the divine, who love being the devotees of His devotees with mutual 'naichya-bhāva' towards each other. Such a saint was Nampāduvān born in a low caste whose touch cured a 'brāhmana' of his 'brahma-rākshakasatvam'. Lord Ranganatha demonstrated the truth that such a saint is to be worshipped like the Lord Himself ("*Ninnodumokka Arulināy pōlum*") by making the Lokasārangamuni, the Vedic Brahmin priest carry Tiruppānāļvār into His shrine.

The Lord's words referred to by the Āļvār in this verse are from Gāruda Purāna to the effect, ".....bhaktirashtāvidhah yeshā yasmin mlēcchēpi vartatē I sa viprēndrō munih: srīmān yatih: sa ca panditah: I tasmai dhēyam tathō

grāhyam sa ca pūjyō yadhā hyaham”, ‘in whom this eight-fold ‘bhakthi’ exists, regardless of he being born in a low caste, is a venerable Brahmin; he is a sage; he is endowed with wealth; he is learned. One can impart wisdom to such a person and from him one can accept instruction. He is worthy to be worshipped like God.’

In pāsuram 43, Āļvār indicts those born in higher castes, and learned fully in the four Vedas and their subsidiaries (angās), should they act contemptuously of, and deride, the Lord’s devotees of other castes. The Lord ostracizes them as outcastes. *“vidhyāmadho dhanamadhas tritīyōpi madha I ēthē` madhāvalipthānām....”*, ‘to vain men, learning, wealth and birth become causative factors of their vanity.’ To good men, they are conducive in fostering humility. In Varāha Purāna, the Lord takes a very trenchant view of those who speak scathingly of His devotees, even if they be social outcastes, and says, ‘padmakōti sathēnāpi na kshamāmi kadhāchana’, ‘I will never forgive them even after crores of years.’

In pāsuram 44, Āļvār speaks about the difficulty of attaining the Lord even for celestial gods after aeons of penance on the one hand, and the felicity (soulabhya), with which He hastened to the side of Gajendra on the other, while all celestial beings stood wonder-struck, and showered His grace and compassion. Āļvār is awe-struck by the Lord’s enigmatic ways, in one case showing indifference to those who strive by their own self-effort, to attain Him, and on the other hand, showing such concern and compassion to those who have given up all effort and solely look upto Him. This apparent contrariness makes the Āļvār wonder, ‘Can He truly be called a ‘sarva-rakshaka’, equal protector of all ? “..... Unnai kalaikanā karudhum āru ennō”, ‘how to think of you as the refuge of all ?’

In the 45th and last hymn of this mellifluous prabandham, Āḷvār recalling the episode of 'Kuvalayāpīda' elephant killed by Sri Krishna, says his poetry, though 'amateurish and flawed' "*ilaya pun kavithai*", was actually sweet to the ears of the Lord who reclines in Srirangam full of beneficence towards His devotees. Āḷvār uses his signature at the end of the pāsuram as "*Thulavat thondāya tholsīrt Tondaradippodi*", 'Tondaradippodi who does service by making tulasi-garlands for the Lord'.

Tondaradippodi Āḷvār's Tiruppalliyēzucchi is a lyrical poetry in ten verses. in which Lord Ranganatha is gently awakened from His yogic slumber;- "*Uranguvān pōl yoghu seitha Perumān*"(T.V.M-5.4.11) – with a prayer to bless all beings by His benevolent and graceful glances and protect them. It is set as the eighth prabandham in the 'Mudhalāyiram' part of the classification of Divya Prabandham works. The song seeks to awaken the Lord pointing out the signs and marks of the day-break, the retreat of darkness, the rising sun to the east, the twitter of birds and hum of bees in the beautiful gardens of Srirangam, the music of the flute of the simple cow-herds, cows and buffalos setting out to graze in the green pastures, hosts of gods and men waiting at the gates of the Lord's shrine eager for the first glances of the awakening Lord, auspicious things like mirror and cow (kāmadhēnu) arranged in front, and pretty damsels emerging after their bath in the cool refreshing waters of the river Cauvēri. It is mellifluous poetry, sweet to the ears and pleasing to the heart for the evocative portrayal of the natural environs of the shrine, and the deep spiritual fervor evinced by the Āḷvār in singing this morning benediction to the Lord, with such love and devotion. Thus this hymn underlines the importance of 'gāyika kainkaryam'. The Upaniṣad addresses the Lord on similar lines in the words, "*Uttishta, Puruṣa harita*

pingala lohitākshi....." (Taitt.-4.64-66), 'Awaken, O Lord Hari with eyes like the red lotus'. Sage Viśvāmitra similarly awakened Sri Rama addressing him as "*Kausalya Supraja Rama pūrvā sandhyā pravartatē, uttishta nara śārdhūla kartavyam dhaivamāhnikam*" (Val.Ra.-1.23-27). Āṇḍāl Nāchiyār also in her Tiruppāvai awakens Sri Krishna with the address, "*Umbar kōmānē urangādhezhundirāy*".... (T.P.-17). Thondaradippodi Āļvār uses the refrain, "*Arangattammā Palliyezhundarulāyē*," (except in song 5 where he says, "*Emperumān palliyezhundarulāyē*". Incidentally, in Saiva Siddhānta also, this type of prayerful singing to God by way of awakening has been followed by Mānickavāchakar. He uses the refrain "*Emperumān palliyezhundarulāyē*" in seven (1,3,4,5,6,7 and 9 stanzas) of the decad Tiruppalliyecchi of Tiruvāchakam.

Tirumālai and Tiruppalliyecchi differ in the following respects in their orientation. In Tirumālai, the Lord awakened the Āļvār from his state of spiritual 'slumber' caused by the long entrenched 'māya'. Here, Āļvār awakens the Lord from His 'vyāmoha' or lulled state of love towards the Āļvār. Tirumālai is a hymn which Āļvār intended as a 'vāchika kainkaryam' oral service, as he described it as "*ilaiyapunkavidhaiyēlum*" in the concluding pāsuram. Tiruppalliyecchi is a 'gāyika' kainkaryam' of Āļvār to the Lord, 'a musical awakening song'. In Tirumālai, Āļvār expressed the fulfillment of his 'kainkaryam' as he added at the end that the Lord had graciously accepted it, "*Embīrārkkū iniyavārē*". Here in Tiruppalliyecchi Āļvār prays at the end "*Adiyārrkkū ātpaduttāy*", 'to bless him with 'tadhīya śeṣatvam', 'servitude to the Lord's devotees'.

In the first pāsuram, Āļvār hearkens to the Lord to awaken pointing to the day-break heralded by the rising sun in the east and the blossoming flowers. The first

caller-devotees have already arrived for His audience, comprising kings and celestials who vie with one another to get to the sanctum first. In the second song, Āļvār describes the morning breeze gently blowing over the ‘mullai’ flowers spreading their heady scent around, and the swans flapping their wings wet by the overnight dew. Then Āļvār wakes up the Lord recapitulating how He had rescued Gajendra from the jaws of the crocodile. Āļvār evidently makes special mention of this episode to underscore the Lord’s immense concern in behalf of His devotees, ‘āsrita-rakshanam’. Sri Parāsara Bhattar describes this quality of the Lord recapturing in vivid detail the circumstances under which Gajendra’s rescue was carried out by the Lord. This sloka from Sri Rangarajastavam Uttara Satakam (57), narrates how the Lord in ‘Parama-padha’ on hearing Gajendra’s anguished cry for Him, jumped off from His serpent couch, not heeding the hand given by Viśvaksēna, ignored the sandals kept ready for wear as His consorts wondered in dismay, ‘what is happening ?’, waved aside the dress materials usually kept ready for His flights out, and got on Garuda nudging him to rush. Bhattar offers salutations to the Lord’s speed, in the words, “*Bhagavat tvarāyai namah:*”. In song 4, Āļvār points to the early morning sounds – the strains from the cow-herds’ flutes, the tinkling of the bells worn by the cattle setting out to the meadows, and the bumble bees humming over the rice fields. Here, Āļvār reminds the Lord of his incarnation as Sri Rama during which He stood guard with his bow over sage Viśvāmitra’s ‘yāga’, and later destroyed the Lanka clan. He addresses the Lord ‘Oh Lord, Ayodhya’s coronated King, O Lord of Arangam, pray arise and bless us’. Pāsuram 5 announces the day-break with yet other sounds, the birds chirping in the groves, and the sound of the waves washing over the eastern shores. The gods

have come to worship the Lord's feet, bringing with them flower garlands over which honey-bees hover. He is the Lord of the holy shrine of Arangam, where Vibhīshana King of Lanka offers worship to the Lord.

The Supreme Lord of the celestials and the whole universe that Lord Ranganatha is, there is a veritable parade of all celestial beings who have come to offer obeisance to the Lord; pāsuram 6 lists who all have arrived at the gates of the holy shrine resembling a great mountain, to get the Lord's first merciful and matchless glances; there are the (twelve) Ādithyās (iraviyar) with their lofty chariots bedecked with jewels; the eleven Rudrās (iraiyavar) riding the bulls, who rule over the worlds; the six-faced Subramanya rider of the peacock; the Maruts and Vasus (eight) all with their retinue, singing and dancing in delight. Āļvār prays, 'O Lord, wake up and bless them'. The gods are generally referred to as 33 in number, (muppattu moovar amararkku mun senru (T.P.-20). In this verse, Tondaradippodi Āļvār lists 12 Ādityās, 11 Rudrās and 8 Vasus. The remaining two are 'Aśvini' devas not specified herein. But Sri Poigai Āļvār lists all in his line, "*Enmar, padinoruvar, iraruvarōriruvar...*" (M.T.- 52)

In Pāsuram 7, Āļvār apprises Lord Ranganatha of the more important personages who have come to pay obeisance to the Lord. There are many hosts of gods from the celestial region, "*Andarattamarargal koottangal*", there are many great sages of avowed austerities, the maruts, as also god Indra riding on his elephant 'Airāvata'. Several 'gandharvas' ('Sundaras') and 'Vidyādharas' are jostling for space cramping each other; the Yakshas considered weak have also turned up with earnest devotion. There is no moving space at the entrance to the shrine both in the sky and below the earth. The celestials are referred to as "*Andharattamarargal*", 'denizens of the sky or space

‘the sky here meaning the ‘Devaloka’. Srivaishnavas, on the other hand, who are Lord’s devotees are referred to in association with Vishnu, as “*Kesavan Thamar*” as Sri Nammālvār addresses them.

Pāsuram 8 describes the treasures brought by gods to offer unto the Lord and receive His grace and generous glances. They have brought the ‘vāyurai’ (arukambul grass), the cow ‘Kapilai’, mirror and such other things as ‘padimakkalam offerings’ made use of during worship. Sages like Tumburu and Narada have come to sing their benediction. It is day-break as the sun rises and spreads his rays around dispelling the darkness of night. Ālvār sings, ‘Pray wake up and bless us’. According to Srivaishnava practice, the important auspicious objects which are to be placed in front of the deity are stated as ‘sankhanidhi’, ‘padmanidhi’, nine gems, the cow (Kamadhēnu), mirror etc. The sages are referred to as “*Nanmunivar*”. The sages are always said to be pronouncing ‘Great Glory to the Lord’. “*Svasti ityuktvā maharishi-Siddha-sanghah stuvanti tvam stutibhih puṣkalābhīh*”, (B.G.- 11.21). Ālvār says about the offerings to God “*ērpana vāyina*”, meaning that they must be merit-worthy and befitting His unique supremacy.

In pāsuram 9, Ālvār apprises the Lord of what had transpired in the night hours as the Lord lay in ‘yoga-nidhra’. The semi-divine beings – ‘Kinnaras’, ‘Garudas’ (winged beings), ‘Gandharvas’ (adept in music), were singing praises of the Lord, playing over the faultless kettle-drums, the ‘veena’ of single string, the ‘ekkam’ a percussion, the big drum ‘mattalam’, veena ‘yāzh’, flute and a large musical drum ‘muzavam’. The sounds of all this enveloped all four quarters. All ‘Kinnaras’ and others are there to offer their obeisance to the Lord’s sacred feet. In addition to them, there are saints of rigorous austerities

‘Māthavar’ celestials ‘Vānavar’, ‘Chāranas’, ‘Yakshas’, and ‘Siddhas’, who as they wait, are fainting. Hence Āļvār prays, O Lord, please arise from Your serpent bed, (for blessing at the early morning, all of us with your gracious vision).

The tenth and concluding song of this Prabandham contains an earnest prayer from the Āļvār to the Lord of Srirangam surrounded by the sacred waters of Cauveri. It is early morning and the sun has arisen from the eastern ocean; the fragrant lotuses are blooming ; women of slender waist and curly tresses have dried their clothes after their bath, and wearing new garments, have got up on the river bank. Āļvār prays, ‘O Lord, please wake up and make me, your humble devotee, be ever keen on doing service to your ardent worshippers: let me submit that I am your devotee, named “*Tondaradippodi*” (one who rejoices in besmearing the whole body with the dust of the feet of your devotees) whose shining shoulders always hold the flower-basket filled with fragrant ‘tulasi’ leaves (and other flower) fit to be worn by you.

Sri Nammāļvār desired the state of ‘vaishnavatvam’ being the ‘dāsa-bhūta’ of Srivaishnavas, proving his earnestness through seven lives, in his words, “*adiyāradiyār tammadiyār tamakkadiyār tam adiyāradiyōngalē*”- (T.V.M.- 3.7.10). Sri Tondaradippodi Āļvār mentions his name in the signature stanza, in the same way as he has done in Tirumālai, as “*tulavat thondāyathol sīr Tondaradippodi sol*”, but with a difference that here, like Nammāļvār, he makes a moving prayer to the Lord for the blessing of “*tadhīya-śeṣatva*” ‘being a servant of Lord’s devotees’. Pillai Lokāchārya, underlines the prime importance of this in his ‘sutra’, “*prāpyattukku pratama parvam Āchārya kainkaryam; madhyama parvam Bhagavad kainkaryam; charama parvam Bhāgavatha kainkaryam.*” (S.V.B.- 412).

The following Sanskrit verses endorse this view: 1. Etat samastapāpānām prāyaschittam manīsibhih I nirnitam bhagavad-bhaktha pādhōdaka niśēvanam”; 2. Nirapēksham munim santam nirvairam samadarśanam I anuvrajamyaham nityam puyēya ityanghrirēnubhih”II

The following Āļvār pāsūrams also emphasise the significance of “*tondaradippodi*”, or “*Anbarthāll thūli*”, (U.R.M.- 4).

“*Māyan thamaradi nīru kondaniya*”, (T.V.M.- 4.6.6.).

“*Nādhanai Narasinghanai navindrēttuvārgal uzakkiya pādha tūli padudhalāl ivvulagam bākkiyam seidhadhē*”, (P.A.T.M.- 4.4.6.).

“*tondaradippodiya dhanam peril gangai nīrkudainādum vētkai ennāvadhē*”, (PML. T.M.- 2.2.).

Taniyans.

Composed by Āchārya Tirumālai Āndān,

“*tamēva matvā Paravāsudēvam,
rangēśayam rājavād-arhanīyam I
prābhōdhikim yōkṛta sūktimālām,
bhakthāngrirēnum bhagavantam-īdē*” II

‘I praise and bow to the venerable saint Bhakthāngrirēnu (the dust of the holy feet of Lord’s devotees). Who composed the divine garland of songs, (Tiruppalliye-zucchi) to awaken the Lord Who is reclining (on the serpent couch) in the holy shrine of Srirangam, the One Supreme God (Paravāsudēva) meriting all adoration as the King (of all worlds and beings).

Composed by Āchārya Tiuvarangapperumālaraiyar.

***“Mandangudiyenbhar māmaraiyōr manniyasīr
tondaradippodi tonnagaram--
vandu tinarttavayal tennarangat-tammānaippalli
unarttum pirān udittavoor.”***

The great Vedic scholars refer to, and hail the sacred and ancient city Mandangudi, as the famous place of the saint Tondaradippodi, who composed the celebrated hymn (Tiruppalliyezucchi) to awaken the Lord from His ‘yoga-nidra’, in the great temple town of Srirangam girdled by rice fields dotted with hordes of honey-bees.

10

TIRUPPĀNĀLVĀR.

Tiruppānālvār was born as an 'amśa' of the Lord's 'Srivatsa' in the 'Pānar' caste considered a lowly social occupational group, in Nichulāpuri now known as Uraiur near Tiruchi on the southern bank of river Cauvēri, under the asterism 'Rohini' in the Tamil month 'Kārthigai', and year 'Durmathi'. The 'Pānar' class was outside of the traditional four-fold caste stratification in olden times, and hence referred to as 'panchamar' or 'fifth' group as a pejorative term. The name 'pānar' probably referred to the musical string instrument known as 'Pān' which the group used to hold and string when they sang. Blessed with the Lord's grace at birth, Pānan grew up spiritually charged like saint Nārada and 'Nampāduvān' (of a similar social background, who used to render 'gāyikakainkaryam' to the Lord at Tirukkurungudi stringing a 'veena' or 'pān'). In a similar manner, Pānan, who exhibited profound attachment and devotion to Lord Ranganatha, used to sing hymns in the Lord's praise lost in thoughts about the Lord. Hampered by the constraints of his caste, Pānan dared not enter the holy Tiruvarangam on the northern bank of the river Cauvēri. He, therefore, sat on the southern bank of the river with his 'pān' in hand, singing in rapturous devotion of the glories of the Lord.

One day, in the early morning hour when he thus sat in the shimmering haze of the dawn on the steps leading to the river bank, immersed in devotional singing, a temple priest by name Lokasāranga mahāmuni arrived at that river bank to fetch water from the river in a vessel for the Lord's 'tirumanjanam' at the shrine. He could barely

notice in the misty haze of the early dawn, the outlines of a human figure sitting on the steps. Since Pānan was too close for the priest's comfort, the latter called to him to step aside, so that he could descend the steps to the river, but Pānan who was lost in his devotional singing could not hear and did not respond to his call. Lokasārangar felt offended by this, and picking up a pebble from the ground threw the same in the direction of that figure to alert him to move away. Jolted back into conscious state by the stone that landed plump on his forehead, Pānar moved away in haste and confusion apologizing for his infraction. But the object had caused a gash on his forehead with a trickle of blood flowing down his face. Lokasārangar, not aware of the hurt he had inflicted on the hapless bard, descended the steps and filling his vessel with water, returned to the temple accompanied by the ceremonial umbrella and drums and music. The pebble that had struck Pānar was like a missile that struck at the very heart of Lord Ranganatha. The Lord was deeply hurt by the priest's act, and showed his displeasure in his countenance. The Divine Mother was concerned too, and submitted to the Lord that their beloved devotee should not be left to languish and pine for the Lord from a distance, but invited soon inside the sanctum and their grace showered on him. That night, the Lord appeared in Lokasārangar's dream, and expressed his unhappiness about the wrong committed by the Māmuni towards His dear devotee. He commanded Lokasārangar to seek out Pānar the next morning, and carry him on his shoulder all the way right upto His presence inside the sanctum.

Next morning, the penitent priest hastened to the river to look for the bard with the 'pān', and found him in a corner on the river bank in the early morning haze, stringing his instrument as before and singing his songs on the Lord. Lokasārangar approached him reverently

and remorsefully, and said to him, 'O, great soul, pardon me for my cruel act of yesterday towards your pure and noble self. I have come here by the command of Lord Ranganatha to take you on my back to His sanctum at the shrine.' Pānar with his characteristic humility and 'naichya bhāva', drew back as the priest tried to get near him trying to keep a respectable distance from the elderly Brahmin before him, imploring him not to come near pleading, 'who am I to pardon you sir, and how can I, a low-born untouchable, set foot on the sacred soil of Srirangam, let alone step inside and desecrate the holy shrine?' Lokasārangar would not listen, and politely explained to Pānar that he should not say like that, since it was the Lord's command which was binding on both equally and had to be carried out exactly the way as the Lord had directed. As such, it was his bounden duty to carry Pānar on his back into the Lord's shrine. He requested Pānar to co-operate and abide by the Lord's wish, and bade him to get on his back without any hesitation. Pānar then acceded to Māmuni's request, and the latter made his way back to the shrine, jubilantly carrying aloft on his back the venerable saint, mightily relieved that in carrying out the Lord's decree, he would also secure his absolution.

The simple bard of Pānar class, till then dreaming of the Lord in the Srirangam shrine from the farther shore of the river divide, thus became known to the world at large as Tiruppānālṽar or Pān Perumāl like Kulasekharar is referred to as Kulasekhara Perumāl. Since he rode on the back of the Māmuni, he has also come to be called 'Munivāhanar'. As he was being carried by the priest towards the shrine, the vision unfolded before his mind's eye of the reclining Lord in the shrine limb by limb, the sacred lotus feet, the crimson robe covering the Lord's form, the Lord's navel, the band girdling the Lord's belly,

the bejeweled chest, the Lord's neck, the coral lips of the wondrous Lord, His bewitching eyes long and broad, with red streaks running along the white eye balls and ebony dark pupils, the endless charm of the strings of sparkling pearls and rubies set on a surreal form of a babe in bluish tint, a babe laid on a tender banyan leaf. It was the reclining Lord, 'Peria Perumāl', worshipped by Sri Rama known as 'Perumāl' in an earlier age, who was revealing His beautiful form in the above manner to Tiruppānāļvār, starting with His lotus feet that seemed to project on its own into the visual frame of the Āļvār. He started to sing about the unfolding divine form as he saw, beginning with the words, *"Amalanādippirān"*. The prabandham sung by Pān Perumāl of only ten stanzas, came to be known as 'Amalanādippirān', like Sri Madhurakavi Āļvār's 'Kanninnun Sirutthāmbu'. This prabandham which describes the divine form of the reclining Lord of Srirangam is included in the 'Mudhalāyiram' section of the Divya Prabandham.

The subject of the prabandham 'Amalanādippirān' of ten pasurams is the Lord's reclining form in Srirangam shrine. Out of these ten verses, the description of the Lord in the first nine verses as envisioned by the Āļvār, (sākshātkāra) were sung by him from outside the sanctum as he was being carried by Lokasārangar on his back. The tenth song was sung inside the sanctum as he actually witnessed the reclining form of 'Peria Perumāl', still mounted on the Māmuni's shoulders. It turned out to be a grand debut as well as finale of the Āļvār's vision of the Lord, since after the experience of that nectarine sight, his eye wished to see no more, *"Amudhinaikkandakangal mutronrinaik kānāvē"*.

Among the Āļvārs, both Tondaradippodi Āļvār and Tiruppān Āļvār were 'ekāntins' in their steadfast devotion

to, and love for, the ‘arca’ form of Lord Ranganatha. But out of these two, Tiruppān Āļvār had no other extraneous concerns such as ‘parōpadēsam’ or tendering advice to others, or condemnation of other faiths etc, like Tondaradippodi Āļvār had. The exclusive focal point of Pān Perumāl’s life and experience was the Lord’s ‘arca’ form. Amalanādippirān is the nectarine extract of the Vedic truths which is expressed in mellifluous Tamil. Sri Tiruvarangattamudanār glorifies the work and the Āļvār in the words, “*Seeria nānmaraisemporul sentamizhālalitta pāriyalum pugazh Pān Perumāl,*” (R.N.A- 11). Swami Vedānta Desikan in an effusive tribute to this prabandham and the Āļvār has this to say, “*Kānbanavum uraippanavum mutronrik Kannanaiyē kanduraitta kadiya kādhal Pān Perumāl arul seidha pādalpattum pazhamaraiyin porulenru paravukinrōm,*” (Amrutasvādhini- 37), ‘we pronounce that the song of ten verses that Pān Perumāl sang describing Lord Krishna as he saw and loved so dearly, with nothing else to see or speak about, is the quintessence of the ancient Vedas’. In essence, Amalanādippirān is not only a beautiful description of Lord Ranganatha’s supernal form of exquisite charm as envisioned by Pān Perumāl, but a gospel of God-love opening the eyes of the lay people to the spiritual truths of the Vedas symbolized by the Pranava “OM” as follows: The Supreme Lord is our Master, ‘Svāmi’ ‘Sarvaśeṣi’ and we are His exclusive vassals, ‘svam’ ‘śeṣa-bhūta’ over whom He has absolute ownership/ mastery. He is not only the goal of attainment, (‘upēya’) but the means *upāya) of attaining Him. “*Svatvam ātmani sanjñātam, Svāmitvam Brahmani stitham*”.

In the first pāsuraṁ, Pān Perumāl sings, “*Amalanādipirān adiyārkkennai ātpadutta Vimalan vinnavar Kōn viraiyār pozhil Vēṅkatavan, Nimalan Ninmalan Nīdhivānavan neelmadhilarrangattammān* *Tirukkamalapādham*

vandhu enkanninullana okkinradē". In this song, Āļvār starts with the complete statement of the unity of the five-fold Divinity – 'Para', 'Vyuha', 'Vibhava', 'Arca', and 'Antaryāmi'- in the totality of the splendor of Lord Ranganatha's charm. 'The dainty lotus feet of our immaculate Lord of Arangam', -*"Amalanādippirān.... Tirukkamalapādham"*- 'have projected on their own into my eyes'- *"en kanninulla okkinradhē"*-- Āļvār addresses the Lord as 'Amalan', 'purest of the pure'. Literally, it means 'hēya-pratibatan' or 'free from blemish', which effectually translates to pure, full of the most auspicious qualities, ('pavitram pavithrānām, yo mangalānām ca mangalam'). It is significant that the song starts with the letter 'A' which is the first letter in the 'Pranava' signifying the *"Paramātman"*. Next Āļvār says about the Lord *"Adiyārkennai ātpadutta Vimalan"*, 'immaculate that He is, He also imparts purity to all that He touches, and has done so in having made the Āļvār a devotee of His devotees. He is the Supreme Lord of the celestials Who descended from His heavenly abode on to the beautiful Venkatam hills. The Lord of Tiruvenkatam is the one Who has made Tiruvarangam His shrine. Āļvār then goes on to describe the Lord as 'Nimalan' and Ninmalan', both terms again being etymologically the same as 'Amalan' and 'Vimalan', but carry different shades of meaning. Thus He is 'Amalan' 'akhila-hēya pratyānīkan'. Sri Nammāļvār paraphrased it as *"thuyararu sudaradi"*. He is 'Vimalan' in the sense of his magnanimity in putting the Āļvār on to the feet of his devotees for rendering service. Pān Perumāl who studiously kept aloof earlier, was induced by the Lord to yield to the Mahāmuni's behest. 'Nimalan' connotes the Lord's extra-ordinary gesture in showering His grace on the Āļvār on His own, unasked and unsolicited, ('soulabhyam'). He is 'Ninmalan' in the sense that He showers His grace for His own benefit,

deeming it His reward. It has been said, 'Chetana lābham Īśvaranukku'. Sri Ramanuja liked to describe the Lord's feet as 'thuyararum sudaradi', 'feet that shed sorrow' on gaining the 'samslēṣa' or union with a 'jivāthma'. The Lord Srinivāsa of Tiruvenkatam wore with love the clay flower that Kurumbaruttanambi the potter-devotee used to make with the left over clay for the Lord, and leave outside the shrine at his native Kuravai, before going home. He was a devotee of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, but could only worship him from a distance. Legend has it that King Thondaimān who was a devout devotee of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, noticed that the flower offered by this devotee to the Lord stayed on the Lord's crown fresh next day, even when all other flowers had fallen off. But the King had no knowledge of the background to the secret behind it. The King who enjoyed a close relationship with the Lord, asked Him about it. The Lord broke the secret to the king about His dear devotee at Kuravai against the injunction of Nambi who had vowed that if his pact with the Lord about his flower offering to the Lord to be kept a secret between them, was ever infringed by the Lord, he would not like to live anymore in this world. The king wished to see this special devotee of the Lord. So he went and met him, and told him about how much the Lord cherished his flower offering. Nambi was surprised that the Lord had broken his part of the pact, and hitting his head with the spade he had in his hand, he left this world. This is cited in Nāyanār churnika 85 of Ācharyahrudayam.

Āļvār says next "*Needhivānavan*", referring to Him as 'Nithyavibhūti Nāyakan' or Lord of the celestials whose writ rules everywhere in the universe. He is "*nīn madhil-Arangattammān*", Lord of the shrine at Arangam of formidably long boundary walls, to signify His 'rakshakatvam'. In saying "*vandhu*", the fact that the

Lords's feet on their own came and entered the Āḷvār's vision is indicated. The Lord's lovely lotus feet delicately massaged by the Divine Mother (Tirukkamalapādhm), slowly extended from the sanctum, to seek and find Pān Perumāl's eyes while still on his way to the shrine.

Song 2 starting with the words, "*Uvandha ullattanāy ulagamalandha*", speaks about the Lord's Trivikrama incarnation when He jubilantly spanned the universe in two giant strides to bless all creation, high and low, with His sacred feet, and about Sri Ramāvathāra in a later age, when He slew single-handed, the 'rākshasa' hordes at 'Janastānam'. As the Āḷvār contemplates these two incarnations, his vision now slides up from the feet of the Lord to the radiant red robe of the Lord. In the previous pāsura, as 'Nimalan' and 'Ninmalan', the Lord of His own volition, and for His own benefit, extended His sacred feet to reach upto the Āḷvār's eyes. After that first initiative, the Lord felt fulfilled like Rama after Vibhīshana accepted the crown of Lanka when it was offered to him, "*kritakrityatadhā Rāmo vijvarah: pramodhaha*", 'exulting after having done what he had to do'. From now on, Āḷvār's stream of consciousness starts to flow, to explore on its own, the beauty of the Lord's form. His vision now traverses up from the feet to settle next on the radiant red robe the Lord is wearing," *sivandhavādainyin mēl senradhām en sindhanaiyē*". It is significant that the first letter in this pasuram 'U' is the middle letter in 'pranava' which indicates that the 'jivātma' signified by letter 'M', is in eternal and inalienable relationship with paramātma' who is signified by letter 'A', and none else. This is what is termed as 'ananyārha sambandham'.

In the third song, which again starts with a reference to Venkata mountain in the north, "*Mandhipāy VadaVenkatamāmalai*", Āḷvār's mind is attracted to the

crimson robe resembling the skyline just before dusk, and the Lord's beautiful navel the seat of Brahma's origin, just above the robe, "*andhi pōl nirattādaiyum adhan mēl ayanaip padaittadhōrezhil Undhi*". In this song, Pān Perumāḷ first speaks about the Tiruvenkatam hills as the common centre of attraction for the celestials, 'samsāris', and the simian species. Celestials like 'Nityasuris' come down here, to offer their morning and evening prayers to the Lord, "*Vānavargal sandhi seyya ninrān*". In this connection, Swami Desikan classifies the 'jivātmas' in terms of the presence or absence of 'śeṣatva jñānam' in them, under three categories those in whom such knowledge is ever present, those who do not have such knowledge ever, and those who exhibit such knowledge when in trouble but otherwise think of themselves, as gods. The first category is the "*Nityas*" or "*Vānavargal*" referred to by Tiruppānāḷvār in this song. The second category is the 'Samsāris' whom the Āḷvār dubs as "*mandhi*". The third category are those gods like 'Brahma-Rudhrādis' referred to as "*Ayan*" in the song, who when in trouble, approach the Lord, saying "*adiyēn*" and at other times think of themselves as "*īśvarōham*", 'I am the lord unto myself'. The Venkata mountain is a haven for the arboreal simian species habitating the fruit-laden trees on the hills, jumping from branch to branch, "*mandhi pāy vada vēnkata māmalai*". Perhaps, in Āḷvār's imagery of the flitting monkeys in the mountain ranges of Tiruvenkatam, there is a faint self-deprecating hint of his own fickle-mindedness in flitting from one part of the Lord's form to another. The charm of the deep-set navel, 'nimaghna nābhi' touches the inner recesses of Āḷvār's heart, "*adiyēn ullattinnuyirē*". The same Lord of Tiruvenkatam hills now abides in Srirangam as reclining Lord, "*Arangattaravin-anaiyān*".

It would be noticed that this song starts with the letter 'M'

which in pranava stands for the 'jivātma'. The first letter of the first three songs put to gether, thus constitutes the Pranava 'AUM'. It has been said that this three-letter Pranava is the embodiment of the three Vedas 'Rik' 'Yajus' and 'Sāma'. "Akāro` Vishnurityuktō Makāro` Jiva vācakah: I tayōstu nithya sambandha Ukārēna prakīrtitah:.". "Pranava imamartham samadiśat", 'Pranava reveals this meaning very much.' It would be noted that the first song of Tiuvāymoḷi beginning with the phrase "Uyarvara" in the first line, and "Ayarvaru Amararagal" in second line, and 'Mayarvara madhinalam" in the third, thus making up "U A M" is also so structured to signify the pranava except that the order is jumbled up there. This is in keeping with the pronouncement in Chāndogya Upaniṣad, "Eṣāntarādhithyē puruṣō druṣyatē hiranmayamasru hiranya kēśa āpranakhātsarva ēṣa suvarnah: I tasyayathākapyāsam pundarikam ēva makshini tasya "Udhiti" nāma ".....(Ch.Up.- 1.6.6.).' Now the golden Person (Purusha) who is seen within the sun, has a golden beard and golden hair, who is golden to the very tips of his nails. His eyes are like a red lotus flower. His name is 'Ut'. Azhagiyamanavāla Perumāl Nāyanār has alluded to this in his Āchārya Hrudayam, "Nān enra sāmam thōnra Udgītapranavattai pratamattillē mārādi,..."(Ch. 52). Sri Nammāḷvār at the end of Tiruvāymoḷi also has ended with the same letter 'U' in the phrase, "Pirandhār Uyarndhē", (T.V.M.-10.10.11). It is significant, Pān Perumāl says at the end of the pāsuram, "Adiyānullattinnuyire", being overwhelmed by the beauty of Lord's navel, the seat of origin of Brahma and others. It was Rudra who said "Dāsabhutāh: svatah: sarvē hyātmanah: paramātmanah:", 'all jivātmas are by nature servants of the Supreme Lord'. Legend has it that an Āchārya Pillai Azhagiyamanavalariyar, on one occasion, prayed for Lord Ranganatha's leave to proceed

to Thiruvenkatam to worship the Lord there. The Lord directed him to recite ‘Amalanādhippirān’ for Him before he left, which the Araiya did once, and again a second time. After that, the Lord said, ‘you may go now if you wish to’. But the Araiya gave up the idea of Tiruvenkata ‘yātra’ altogether. Such is the powerful attraction of the Lord’s navel which is what greets the devotee first.

In the fourth song beginning with the letter ‘cha’ (“*Chaduramāmadil soozh ilangai*”), Ālvār’s mind saunters along the gold-plated band that girdles the Lord’s waist, “*tiru-vayittrudarabandham ennullattil ninrulāginradhē*”. In this song also, Pān Perumāl evokes the Ramāvathāra in which the sea-hued Lord’s supermissile felled, in one stroke, all the ten heads of the monarch of the well-fortified Lanka surrounded by lofty walls. The band covers the three folds underneath signifying the three kinds of souls, viz. ‘Nityas’ or immortal angels in Lord’s eternal abode, the ‘muktas’ ‘liberated souls’ and the ‘baddhas’ or ‘bound souls’, and also the scar beneath the folds caused by the rope with which Yasoda had bound Him to the mortar in Krishnāvathāra. He is that Lord of Arangam where honey-bees hum tunefully and peacocks dance in merriment.

In song five beginning with the words, “*Pāramya pazhavinai*”, the bejeweled chest of the Lord at Arangam with Divine Mother Lakshmi ensconced snugly thereon, gets inside of the Ālvār, rooting out in a trice, as it were, his age-old sins hanging like a mill stone around his neck, “*pāramāya pazhavinai patraruttu*”. Not only that. He was washed over by a sudden flood of grace, and found himself being swept into the loving fold of the Lord. What was more, the Lord Himself took over his person, and entered his soul to become part of him. “*Ennaittan vāramākki vaittān, vaittadanri Ennul pukundhān*”. Amazed, Ālvār is led to introspect and figure out

as to what terrible penance he had ever done in ages gone-by to deserve this sudden deluge of grace, but could only draw a blank, “*ghōramātavam seithanan kol, Ariyēn*”. Then it comes to him in a flash, that he owes this grace entirely to the presence of the Divine Mother near at hand on the Lord’s bejeweled chest, “*Arangattammān Tiru āra mārbadanrō Adiyēnai ātkodadhē*”. In that propitious milieu, would Her prompting to the Lord in Āļvār’s behalf be far away? Swami Vedānta Desikan sees this line “*ghōramātavam seithanan kol, Ariyēn*” from the perspective of the Lord, and observes that the Lord must have made severe penance to claim Āļvār to His fold. As Sri Kurattāļvān observes, “*Anubhavamēva yuktam hi mē, Tvayi nihitabharōsmi soham yatah:*”, (S.V.St.-91), ‘my part is to experience (what is granted by You), having entrusted my burden to you.’

Pān Perumāl’s vision moves up next to the Lord’s neck which in the great deluge gulped down all creation and helped shelter all the beings till the deluge subsided. Song six begins with the episode of lord Siva who had plucked his father’s fifth head, wandering along with Brahma’s curse afflicting him, in not being able to rid himself of the skull that had got stuck in his palm. He suffered the ignominy, consequently, of having to use it as his food bowl to beg. It was only when, at long last, he sought out Lord Nārāyana at the holy site of Bhadri and prayed to the Lord and Divine Mother for relief, that the Lord swiped a few drops of wet from His chest and sprinkled them in the mendicant’s bowl stuck in Siva’s hand, which filled up and broke into pieces and fell off. Tirumangai Āļvār refers to this episode in his Thirukkuruntāndakam pāsuramā 19, in his description “*pirar manai tirindunnum mundiyān sāpam thīrtta Oruvan....*” of the Deity of Tirukkandiyūr, ‘One who rid the curse on the hapless Siva who wandered around looking for food at others’ doorsteps.’

In song seven, Āļvār says how his mind was suddenly bewitched by the coral lips of the Lord, when his vision moved a notch above the Lord's neck. That sight moves the Āļvār to exclaim "*Seyya vāy iyōh en sindhai kavarnndhaduvē*". In this song, Pān Perumāl describes the exquisite charm of the Lord of Arangam holding the spiral conch and the fire-emitting discus, reposing like a mountain on serpent-couch, wearing the long crown bedecked with fragrant tulasi garlands. Āļvār says, 'Aravin anai misai mēyamāyanār', 'the bewitching Lord reclining on the serpent couch'. It is interesting to note that the recumbent Peria Perumāl in Srirangam, manifests Himself as only a 'dvi-bhuja' 'with two arms', and holds neither conch nor discus. But to Pān Perumāl's vision, He must have manifested Himself as a 'Chatur-bhuja' that is with four hands holding conch and discus. There is proof to indicate that the Lord had appeared thus selectively in His incarnation, as evident from Arjuna's plea addressed to the Lord at the end of His 'Viśvaroopā darśanam' to Arjuna, "*..... tēnaiva rūpēna chaturbhujēna sahasrabhāho bhava Viśvamūrthē*", (B.G.-11.45), 'Please assume that very form with four arms, O thousand-armed One, O You of universal form'. Similarly, when Mandodhari saw Sri Rama for the first time, Sage Vālmiki describes her as having envisioned Him as the Divine Lord with four arms, "*tamasa paramōdhātā Sankha-Chakragadhādharah*:"(S,V.R.-Yu.114.14), though Sri Rama, who had preferred being in human form, "*Ātmānam mānusham manyē*", was with two arms only. In the next incarnation, however, when the Lord was born as the child of Vasudeva and Devaki, He appeared with four arms with conch and discus. The anxious parents who were startled by these tell-tale signs of the Lord's form and the dangers they posed from Kamsa, had to make a request to the Lord to conceal the arms holding

the conch and discus and appear as any ordinary child, which Krishna obliged.

The anecdote is cited of Sri Anathāļvān having inquired of Sri Parāsara Bhattar when he was staying in Tirukkottiyur, if the Lord in Vaikuntha presided with two hands or four hands. Bhattar replied, that depended on the devotee's choice, how he wished the Lord to appear to him. Anathāļvān further asked him, of these two forms, which he (Bhattar) considered more beautiful. Bhattar replied, 'both, if He is with two arms (dvibhuja), I would take Him as Peria Perumāl, if He appears with four arms, I would think of Him as Namperumāl (the 'utsava' deity in Srirangam). For the few specially cherished devotees like the Āļvār, the reclining Lord had presumably appeared with four arms.

Incidentally, the first letters of the previous three pasurams 5, 6, and 7, beginning with the words, "*Pāramāya*", "*Thundavenpiraiyan*" and "*Kaiyinār*" respectively, form the word, "*Pādukai*", meaning 'Sandals' of the Lord, or in another manner of speaking, 'sacred feet' of the Lord. This indicates the 'ananyārha-śeṣatvam' of the 'jivātman' in relation to the 'Paramātma' as connoted by 'Namo Nārāyanāya'. Thus, the first three pasurams and the three mentioned above together signify the sacred 'ashtākshara' mantra.

If it was the coral lips of the Lord that took Āļvār's mind and breath away in the previous song, in song 8 the eyes of the immaculate Lord of Arangam, "*Arangattamalan*", long and wide set in a melange of colours, with red lines streaking over the white eye balls, and dark pupils, bewitching in their total magical effect, completely mesmerize and drive Pān Perumāl 'crazy'. The description is vividly evocative in its phraseology in conveying the psychedelic effect, the vision of Lord's lotus eyes must have created on

the Āļvārs mind, *“kariyavāki pudaiparandhu milirndhu sevvari yōdi neendavap-periavāyakangal ennai pēdhamai seithanavē”*. Āļvār uses the description *“apperiavāya kangal”*, ‘those big eyes’, like Periāļvār did of the Lord’s conch in his *“Tiruppallāndu”* hymn, *“appānchajanyamē”*, implying presumably, that the Āļvār hurriedly looked away unable to absorb the sight in its full magnitude and mind-boggling magnificence. Even whatever little, he could absorb in that moment was so powerful that he is constrained to admit, *“Ennaip pēdhamai seithanavē”*, ‘turned him crazy’. *“neendaapperiavāyakangal”*- The Lord in His Varāhāvatāra has been described as *“Mahāvarāha: Sputapadma lōchanah:-* In every incarnation, the eyes of the Lord are always distinctively like the freshly blossomed lotus flowers. Swami Nammāļvār describes Him as *“Perunkēzalārtam perunkanmalar pundarīkan”*, (T.V.-45). In the first two lines of this song, Āļvār refers to Lord’s Nrsimhāvathāra. The demon Hiranya was a veritable mass of fleshy ignorance, fattened by boons of sorts. Pointing to a column of pillar, the irate father threateningly questioned his son Prahlāda, if that Hari whose name was on the child’s lips, was right there in that column or not. The little one affirmed without a tinge of hesitation, that his Hari was everywhere inside all animate beings like him and his father, as well as inanimate things like that pillar Hiranya was pointing to. As if to prove the child wrong, the demon struck at the pillar, and Lord Nrisimha responded to the prayer of His beloved devotee, by putting in His appearance between the two vertical halves of the pillar. *“Satyam vidhātum nijabhruthya bhāshitam, vyāptim ca bhūtēshu akhilēshu ca I Adhrushyata atyadbhutarūpam udvahan, sthambē sabhāyām na mrugam na mānusham II”*. (S.Bhag.). Thus appeared the wondrously beautiful man-lion form of the Lord, in answer to child Prahlād’s prayer. But Lord

Ranganatha came down here from His transcendental abode on His own, to abide here in Arangam between the two rivers, making Himself so felicitously accessible and visible to throngs of longing devotees by reclining between two pillars (Manatthoon- 'Āmōdha sthamba') to redeem the endless stream of lost souls who would seek Him out just for once. That is why Pān Āļvār reiterates in this song that He is none other than the Lord of celestials, descended here for our sake, to purify us from all 'kārmic layers' by the grace radiating out of His lotus eyes and touch of His sacred feet, *"Amararkkariyavādhippirān Arangattamalan"*. He may be difficult for celestials, but for us He is near at hand, and reclining in endless wait for us.

In song 9, the Lord reveals His enthralling form to Pān Perumāl, as a tiny babe on a tender banyan leaf floating on the flood waters, after having tucked into His stomach all the seven worlds, like He had revealed in aeons gone by, to sage Mārkaṇḍēya. *"Ālamāmarattin iliai mēloru bhālayanāy jñālamēzhumundān"*..... Pān Perumāl says that it is the same Lord Who is now reclining on the serpent couch at Tiruvarangam as *"Arangattaravin Anaiyān"*. "The endless charm of the peerless necklaces, gem sets, and pearls casting their lustre on the ocean-blue dazzle of the Lord's complexion, has stolen my mind, Alas'!, exclaims the Āļvār. *"Kōlamāmaniyāramum muttuthāmamum mudivilladhōrezil nīlamēni iyōh nirai konda tennenjinaiyē"*. This is the second time, that the Āļvār expresses his sheer wonder with the exclamation 'iyōh' to indicate that the soft, mellow charm of the vision before him is too much for him to absorb with the limited capacity of his mental vista, compelling him to exclaim 'iyōh', 'alas'. In a similar expression of this wondrous form of the Lord, as a babe resting on a banyan leaf on the 'pralaya' waters, Poigai Pirān poses a piquant query

to the Lord Who had lifted and held the Govardhana hill surrounded by gardens, to resolve the enigma troubling him, if at that moment when he lay like this, whether the banyan leaf floated on the waters, or hung from the sky, or was meshed with the dissolved earth, "*Ālanru vēlai nīrulladhō vinnadhō mannadhō sōlai soozh kundreduttāy sollu*"-(M.T.-69). 'You tell me O Govardhana Giridhārī' asks the Āļvār of the Lord.

The first nine songs were rendered by Tiruppān Āļvār as the Lord was unveiling before his mind's eye, the vision of His 'avayava soundarya' while being carried to the Lord's shrine on the back of Lokasārangamunigal. Song 10 is the grand finale, the total ensemble, the culmination of the transition from the virtual world to the real, in the final fulfillment of a mutual longing for Āļvār as well as the Lord in a close face-to-face commingling of both eyes and spirit. The story runs that when he was taken right inside the sanctum of the shrine by Lokasārangamāmuni, Pān Perumāl opened his eyes wide and full for the first time, and gazed at the reclining Lord from the crown to the feet, "*āpādha-choodam*", his eyes bewitched as they drank deep of that fountain of beauty and grace, the total magnificent splendor of the reclining Lord before him in one long deep devouring absorption of the 'samudhāya-śōbhāi' of 'the sable cloud-hued, butter-mouthed cow-herd, the Sovereign Lord of the universe of ornate 'Arangam', "*kondal vannanai kōvalanāy vennai unda vāyan enullam kavarn dhānai, Andar kōn Ani Arangan*". Then Āļvār who could not continue anymore trailed off, 'having beheld my Nectar-non-satiate, none else shall these eyes see,' "*En Amudhinaik kanda kangal matronrinaik kānāvē*". Granting the Āļvār's wish, Lord Ranganatha gathered him into Himself. "*kanda kangal matronrinaikkānāvē*", 'these eyes do not wish to see anything else'. Āļvār's line is evocative of Hanuman's

words to Lord Rama when the Lord desired to take his beloved devotee to His abode Vaikuntha, *“Snēhō mē paramo rājan tvayi nithyam pratishtitha: bhaktisca niyatā vīra bhāvō nānyatra ghacchati II”*. (R.Ut.-40.15). ‘O my Master, my love for thee is well poised, O valiant prince, my devotion is similarly steadfast ever. But I do not wish to go anywhereelse’, (even Vaikuntha). Incidentally, it deserves to be noted that Sri Rama fought his battle with Ravana mounted on Hanuman. Even as Hanuman enjoyed his role as Rama’s chariot, it has been pointed out by our Āchāryas that Lokasārangamuni too enjoyed his role as Pān Perumāl’s mount duly realizing the latter’s pre-eminent stature as the Lord’s beloved devotee.

“Kovalanāy vennai unda vāyan”, ‘butter-mouthed cow-herd’. Legend has it that if one could get near the Lord’s face and smell His breath, it would reek of the butter that the Lord ate in Krishnāvathāra. Sri Nammālvār gives a humourous twist to the Lord’s special craving for butter in Krishnaāvathāra in this mocking poser to the Lord, ‘O wondrous Lord, you swallowed the seven worlds, and brought them out again. What a wonder, that you took birth as child Krishna, and ate butter merrily, leaving not a trace behind ! Was it that a little mud stayed behind inside, and the butter that you ate was expellent medicine to dissolve that mud, to ward off anaemia that is caused to humans by eating mud?’ *“mandhān sērndhadhundēlum manisarkku āgum bīr siridhum andāvannam, mankaraiya neyoon marundhō Māyōnē”*, (T.V.M-1.5.8).

Apart from Sri Periaṇṇa Pillai, Sri Azhagiyaṇavālapperumāl Nāyanār has also written a ‘vyākhyānam’ on this Prabandham. Sri Vedānta Desikan has uniquely written an explanatory text only on this one prabandham called ‘Munivāhana Bhōgham’,

which is included among his ‘Rahasya-granthas’, ‘esoteric texts’. Swami Desikan has at the end of this ‘grantha’, added two verses in Tamil (one of which was cited earlier) wherein he has proclaimed that the ten songs graciously bequeathed by Pān Perumāl epitomize the teachings of the hoary Vedas. These two pasurams are included in his compilation ‘Sri Desika Prabandham,’ in ‘Amrutaśvādhini’ – (36 and 37). Sri Desikan says in the last line thereof, *“Nān periōmallōm nām nanrum thīdhum namakkuraippārular enru nāduvōmē,”* ‘we shall not claim to be august and all-knowing, but shall always be on the look out for those who can guide us to tread the right path and avoid the wrong one.’ Swami Desikan has also composed a hymnal called ‘Bhagavad Dhyāna Sōpānam’ (ladder), comprising twelve sparkling slokas in Sanskrit on the lines of Amalanāḍippirān, containing a description of the Lord of Tiruvarangam, from the lotus feet of the Lord to the Lord’s resplendent crown, which is included in his ‘Stotra granthas’. In the concluding sloka thereof, Swami Desikan says:

*“Rangāsthānē rasikamahitē ranjitā śeṣachittē,
Vidavatsevā vimalamanasā Venkatēśēna kluptam I
Aklēsēna pranihitadhiyām āruukshōn avasthām,
Bhakthim gādām disatu bhagavaddhyāna
sōpānamētat II”*

‘Holy Arangam, the coveted resort of the devout, enchants everyone and sanctifies the spirit of those who learn at the feet of the lofty savants residing there bound in humble service as in Venkatesa’s case, so may this superfine hymnal refine its chanter’s devotion and mental state’.

Taniyans (Composed by Peria Nambi)

*Āpādhā choodamanubhūya Harim śayānam
Madhyēkavēraduhitur muditāntarātmaā I
Adṛshṭrītām nayanōr viśhayāntaranām
Yō nischikāya manavai Munivāhanam tam II*

*"May I meditate upon Saint Munivāhanar who,
having beheld Lord Hari in sweet repose between
twin banks of Cauvēri from feet to crown, swore with
the joy of fulfiment that his eyes shall none else see
anymore."*

(Composed by Tirumalai Nambi)

*Kāttavē kanda pādhakamalam nallāдай unti
Tēttarum udara bhandam tirumārбу kantam sevvāy
Vāttamil kankal mēni muniyērittani pukuntu
Pāttināl kandu vāzhum Pānar tāl paravinōmē.*

*"We are blessed to worship the feet of Pānar the bard,
Who saw, mounted on Muni's back, the enthralling
Form of the Lord as revealed, His lotus feet, radiant
robes, the navel, glittering waist-band, the winsome chest
adorned by Tiru, lovely neck, coral lips, and shining lotus-
red eyes."*

11

Tirumangai Āļvār.

Tirumangai Āļvār, alias Kalikanri, who was arguably the most romantic, articulate and prolific of the Āļvār galaxy, was born as an 'amśa' of the Lord's bow 'Sārngha' in the martial 'Kallar' clan belonging to the fourth 'varna' at Tirukkuraiyalūr in Thiruvāli in Tamil Nādu. He was born on a full moon day under the asterism of 'Kārthigai' in the Tamil month 'Kārthigai' in the Tamil year 'Nala' after three hundred and ninety seven years in Kali age. Since he was born with a bluish complexion, he was given the name of Neelan by his parents. His father was a chieftain in the army of the Chola king of the time. As he grew up he learned archery and other martial arts characteristic to his clan's occupational skill, and became, in due course, a chieftain in the royal army. Endowed with exceptional daring and battle prowess, he won many conquests for the king meriting and earning recognition and accolades, and became famous as 'Parakālan' or god of death to foes. The Chola king rewarded him by making him a king in his own right for Tirumangai region, but still owing allegiance to him. Intellectually, he exhibited exceptional flair and forte in all three kinds of literary skill, Poetry, Prose and Drama. He had versatile mastery over four forms of poetic skill, namely, 'aasu', 'madhuram', 'chitram' and 'vistaram', which would, in time, earn him the honorific of 'Nālu kavi Perumāḷ'. But his youth and way of life as a militia chief constantly engaged in battles drew his mind towards seeking sensual pleasures seeking the company of women and wine. It was at this point that he came to know about a beautiful woman in the village of Tiruvellakkulam ('Annan Kovil') with the name Kumudhavalli growing up as the daughter of a Vaishnava in that temple town.

Kumudhavalli, who actually was a celestial nymph, had come to bathe in the lotus pond at that place along with her companions, but had opted to stay behind there itself enchanted by the serene beauty of its environs. Assuming human form, she lingered at the pond where the Vaishnava found her. He took her home and entrusted her to his wife's care. As the couple had no child of their own, they adopted her as their daughter giving her the name of Kumudhavalli. Parakālan visited the place after hearing about Kumudhavalli's beauty and went to the Vaishnavite's residence. As he was engaged in talking to him, Kumudhavalli walked in. Parakālan was swept off his feet by the beauty and qualities of the girl, and offering expensive gold jewels to the father as presents for his daughter, asked to marry her. The parents were willing, but the girl was not and set a precondition. Her condition was that she would marry only a Vaishnava in conviction and deed, who had been properly initiated into the faith with 'pancha-samskāra'. Readily accepting her condition, Parakālan left for Tirunaraiyur near Kumbakonam, where he prayed to the Lord of the shrine Naraiyur Nambi for granting him the five-fold merit required of a Srivaishnava, which the gracious Lord was happy to fulfill for him. He came back to Tiruvellakkulam hoping to win the hand of the prospect bride, only to be confronted by yet another condition, tougher than the previous one to fulfil this time, which was that he should arrange to feed one thousand and eight Srivaishnava devotees every day for a period of one year, taking the sacred water purified by their feet and the remnants of the meal offered to them as 'prasāda'. Parakālan unhesitatingly accepted this condition also, after which his marriage with Kumudhavalli was duly celebrated.

In trying to live upto the requirements of the second condition, Parakālan's life turned trouble-some and

topsy-turvy. The feeding of one thousand Srivaishnavas every day posed a formidable challenge, since it required considerable sums of money which Parakālan increasingly found difficult to raise. He, therefore, started misappropriating the revenues of the state, and in the process fell afoul with the law. When he ran out of such funds, he became a highway robber, compounding his felonies against the state. In this, he was ably aided by four uniquely gifted assistants, one of whom could walk on water, the second could creep surreptitiously behind a person in the latter's own shade, the third could open any lock or padlock merely by blowing over it, and the fourth, an adroit arguer who never lost any court case. The king to whom the matter regarding the misappropriation of state funds and robberies committed by Parakālan was reported, sent his army to apprehend him, but Parakālan remained invincible in battle. So the king devised a more subtle plan to capture Parakālan by deceit, whereby he sent his minister ostensibly to placate him and entice him to the king's court on promise of a royal pardon for his offences, and a public honour for his many combat-exploits. When Parakālan turned up at the king's court, the king had him taken into custody with the stipulation that he could win back his freedom only after settling all the purloined state funds. Parakālan languished in jail for three days during which Parakālan prayed to Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi. Lord Varadaraja appeared in his dream and assured him of providing him with a treasure if he would come to Kanchi. Parakālan conveyed this to the king's minister who obtained the King's permission to escort Parakālan to enable him to get the largesse promised by the Lord. But after arriving in Kanchi, though Parakālan wandered all over looking for the treasure, his search turned out to be futile with no specific clue about the whereabouts of the treasure to guide him. Becoming

dejected, and losing hope, Parakālan again prayed to Lord Varadaraja and received directions from the Lord to go to a specified spot on the Vēgavathi river bed, and institute a search there. Parakālan went to the Vēgavathi river bank as directed, where his search unearthed a huge cache of gold and other valubles. With the proceeds realized from selling the treasure, Parakālan paid off all the state dues, keeping back the remainder for continuing his service to Lord's devotees. On learning from the minister about how Parakālan came by the treasure, the king was astonished and hastened to Parakālan to seek his pardon, giving back to him all the money remitted by him into the treasury by way of restitution, with full freedom to utilize the money for the continuation of the godly service he was rendering to feed one thousand Srivaishnava devotees every day.

Parakālan continued his service with zest partaking the 'prasāda' of the Srivaishnava devotees daily, and basking in the radiated glory and bliss of their touch. Before long however, all the money that Lord Varadaraja had helped provide him with, ran out and Parakālan resumed his earlier ways of robbing way-farers on highways. One day, when he was on the look out for any potential catch resting with his men under the shade of a holy fig tree in a grove called Tirumanankollai near Tiruvāli,, he chanced upon a slow-moving bridal couple's caravan, carrying the newly weds in a palanquin, and wending its way in their direction. The marital couple were none other than the Lord and the Divine Mother Mahā Lakshmi, dazzlingly decked all over with shining jewels of inestimable value approaching the grove with their entourage. Parakālan's band of dacoits stopped the party with daggers drawn, and ordered them to surrender all the jewels and valuables they were wearing. The Divine couple meekly submitted and one by one they took off all the jewels they were wearing, and surrendered them to Parakālan

who was intently watching them. All the removed jewels lay on a sheet of cloth spread before them. Parakālan looked them over up and down to make sure that all their jewellery had come off, when he noticed, as he was peering at the Lord's feet, a 'nupur' or toe ring on one foot. He bent down before the Lord and tried to wrench the ring out with his hand. The ring would not come off that easily. So he bent all the way down and yanked the ring off the toe with his teeth, making the Lord exclaim in wonder and appreciation of his nonchalant showmanship, "*Nam Kaliyanō*", 'how brave'. In the process, his head came into contact with the Lord's feet, a contact for which the whole universe of gods and celestials hankers. As the Divine couple were watching, Kaliyan (the name given by the Lord to Parakālan), bundled up all the jewels taken from the divine couple, and tried to lift the bundle off the ground, but the bundle felt too heavy to lift. He tried several times but could barely move it. Suspecting that the couple were upto some sorcery tricks and had cast some tantric spell, Kaliyan flashed his dagger before the Lord, and ordered him to dislose the secret 'mantra' behind the spell that had caused the bundle to feel too heavy to lift. Kaliyan's contact with the Lord's feet had borne fruit. Beckoning Kaliyan closer to Him, the Lord whispered with joy, the 'upadesa' of the sacred 'Ashtākshara' mantra into Kaliyan's ears, the mantra that is the quintessential substratum of the Vedic truths, the 'mantra-raja' that wipes out in a trice the heaviest load of human sins. As Kaliyan lifted his head, the Lord appeared before him, with the resplendent Divine Mother and the shining conch and discus on either side, mounted on His chariot Garuda, like a forest of lotus flowers on a hillock. The erstwhile Neelan of sinful ways, now transformed by the Divine touch and direct spiritual knowledge received from the Lord, sang his first hymn on the Lord beginning

with the words “*Vādinēn vādi*, becoming in the process, Tirumangai Āļvār, the youngest of the Āļvār fraternity

The first hymn of ten pāsūrams mentioned above, of his first Prabandham known as ‘Peria Tirumōļi’, is the story in a nut shell of his transformation of this great saint, and celebration of the divine name ‘Nārāyana’ in nine of these ten verses in the by-line, “*Nān kandu kondēn Nārāyana ennum Nāmam*”, ‘I now found the good name of Nārāyana’. In the first pāsūram, “*Vādinēn vādi varundinēn manattāl*”, he recounts his past life, how he ‘wilted, wilting, despaired in his heart, being born to a life of unmitigated suffering, mingling with young women and running all his life, but after all the running, found by the grace of the good Lord the way of salvation, and sought, and seeking thus, found the good name of Nārāyana.’ In his introduction to his Peria Tirumōļi “*vyākhyānam*”, Sri Periaivācchan Pillai describes Tirumangai Āļvār as one who had put his “ātman’ in the sun and body in the shade’, meaning that for long he had been obsessed with sensual pursuit which wilts the spirit like the hot sun, completely oblivious of the real shade of divine grace “*Vāsudeva tarucchāya*”. The Lord took him into his fold out of his ‘nirhētuka krupa’ by manifesting to him His divine form. So he says, “*Kandu kondēn Nārāyana ennum nāmam*”, like Pey Āļvār who had sung “*Tirukkandēn, Ponmēni kandēn*” on his ‘sākshātkāra’ of the Divine couple.

The first taste of Lord’s form and name generated in him a gargantuan thirst for worshipping the Lord’s ‘arca’ form in the various ‘divyadesas’, through the length and breath of the land, in a ceaseless life quest that sets this Āļvār distinct and apart from all other Āļvārs. The quest took him far to the northern most corner near the lake Mānasarovar in Himalayas to Lord’s shrine at Tiruppiridhi and then to the shrine of Bhadri where

Lord Nārāyana had first imparted the ‘mahā mantra’ to His alter ego ‘Nara’. These two were presumably in the nature of ‘mānasa sākshātkāra’. After offering his mangalāśāsanam to these two shrines, Kaliyan starts descending towards Tirusālagramam (Mukthināth) and from there to Naimiśāranyam. The order of his peregrinations to the ‘divya-desas’ thus proceeds, region by region, upto the Southern most corner shrines of Tirukkurungudi and Tiruppullāni. In all, this Āļvār is said to have offered his benediction to the ‘arca’ God-form in as many as 86 ‘divya-desas’ out of 108. Of these, 51 ‘divya-desas’ figure as complete ‘padhikams’ or decads, twenty three as individual pāsuras, and the remaining 12 figure in other Prabandhams of the Āļvār. It is of particular interest to note that as many as 47 shrines owe their unique status as ‘divya-desas’ to the singular contribution of this Āļvār. In other words, the total ‘divya-desam’ would have remained not 108, but only 61, but for Kaliyan’s prayers at these shrines.

Sages like Śukabrahmam and the Mudhal Āļvārs were drawn to ‘Parasvarūpam’ of the Divine Lord. Sages like Sanaka, and Tirumaļisai Pirān were lost in contemplation of the Divine in ‘Antaryāmi’ state. Vālmiki ‘maharishi’ and Kulasekhara Perumāl were fascinated by Lord’s ‘Vibhava’ incarnation as Sri Rama. Parāsara Bhagavān, Vyāsa, Nammāļvār, Periāļvār, and Āndāl were enamoured of ‘Krishnānubhavam’. Tondaradippodi Āļvār and Pān Perumāl were spell-bound by the Lord of Tiruvarangam. To Tirumangai Āļvār, the ‘arca’ form of the Lord in His manifold ‘divya-desas’ held a perpetual attraction. Starting his second decad of the first centum (1.2), upto the first decad of the second centum (2.1) of Peria Tirumōji, he covered the divya-desas in northern part of India, (according to the then prevailing reckoning). Next he worshipped the shrines in what was then known

as 'Thondainādu' south of Tiruvenkatam covering the region around Chennai from 2.2. upto 2.9. Thereafter proceeding further South, he worshipped the two shrines at Tirukkovalur and Tiruvahindrapuram near Cuddalore, in what was looked upon then as 'Nadunādu', in 2.10 and 3.1 respectively. This was followed by him on a much more extensive quest which took him to thirty one shrines of the then 'Chola' kingdom, offering 'mangalāśāsana' to the Deity in those shrines which is covered from 3.2. till 9.2. Out of these nearly 610 pāsūrams, Tirumangai Āḷvār has dedicated one hundred pāsūrams each to his Āchārya Naraiyur Nambi who initiated him, and Lord Sourirajan of Tirukkannapuram Who imparted to him the esoteric meanings of 'Tirumantra'. Thereafter, he embarked on his tour of the shrines in the then Pāndya region around Madurai and further south, to which he has dedicated his hymns from 9.3 to 9.10. The rest of the hymns upto the last decad 11.8 are devoted to his involvement with Vibhavathāras of Krishna, Sri Rama etc. Like Nammāḷvār, Periāḷvār and Kulasekharar, Kaliyan also assumes the 'nāyika' role as Parakālanāyaki not only in Peria Tirumōḷi but in his other Prabandhams also.

Kaliyan's Peria Tirumōḷi is considered a detailed exposition of 'Tirumantram'. In the very first hymn, he extolls the *"Nārāyana nāmam which in effect, 'bestows a good life of wealth and family, celestial and earthly joys with benign grace and love that is greater than a mother's'."* Later, he underlines the sweetness or 'bhōgyatva', and redeeming power of the 'mantra' of eight letters, *"Pēsūm Intirunāmam Ettezhuttum Solli"* (P.T.M.-1.8.9), in his hymn on Tiruvenkatam which inspires those who chant it just once to continue to dwell on it by the grace of the Lord Who abides there, and sunders the vicious circle of repeated births and grants us immortal bliss. Then he goes on to narrate how the Lord

of Tirukkannapuram imparted to him the inner secrets of the 'mantra', including the inalienable and indivisible bond that binds him to the service of the Lord and not only to Him but extending to His devotees "*Bhāgavatha śeṣatvam*", but precluding any relationship or allegiance to other gods including those who look upon such other gods as their masters. As he expresses it, "*Matrum ōru deivam uladhenru iruppārōdu utrilēn, utradhum Un Adiyārkkadimai matrellām pēsilum Nin Tiruvettezhuttum katru...*" (P.T.M.-8.10.3). The ultimate goal for him then becomes inseparable service at the feet of 'bhāgavatās', and union with the elders who always meditate on the Lord and chant His name, "*Pērālan pērōdhum periyōrai orukālum pirikilēnē*", (P.T.M.- 7.4.4.). In this connection, it may be of interest to relate an anecdote from Emperumānār's life. On one occasion, Lord Namperumāl was being taken out in a procession accompanied by the temple preceptors and devotees. It started raining then, and therefore the group took shelter in a Siva temple nearby with the Lord. Emperumānār who was also present in the group, however, stood outside in the rain at some distance away from the temple precincts. A devotee went to him to request him also to come inside the temple shade beside the Lord. Emperumānār is said to have replied that Namperumal being the All-Supreme Being, could be anywhere He liked as everything belongs to Him, but if he came there, he would have entered an 'outsider's residence'. He could not compromise on Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār's desideratum of "*marandhum puramthozhā māndhar*", (N.M.T.- 68).

In all Tirumangai Āḷvār has sung six Prabandhams which are equated to the six 'Angas' of the Vedas, namely 'Siksha', 'Vyākaranam', 'Chandas', 'Niruktham', 'Jyothisha' and 'Kalpa'. These Prabandhams are as follows:

Peria Tirumoḷi 1084 pāsurams in eleven ‘Tirumoḷis’ each comprising ten decads or ‘pathikams’ except 11 which has only 8.

Tirukkurunthāndakam - 20 pāsurams

Tiruvezhukkūtirukkai – single poem in 47 lines.

Siria Tirumadal comprising 155 lines equated to 40 pāsurams

Peria Tirumadal comprising 297 lines counted as 78 pāsurams

Tirunendunthāndakam - 30 pāsurams

Tirumangai Āḷvār concludes his Peria Tirumoḷi with a prayer to the Lord in the last ‘pathikam’ (11.8) to sever his physical bonds and grant him liberation. In the second prabandham Tirukkuruntāndakam, Āḷvār reaching the state of a person of unquenchable thirst for water falling into a river and drinking therefrom and splashing all over, seeks to assuage his inner craving for the Lord by vocalizing his emotions and internalizing in his heart. This only accentuates his helpless craving and desire to hasten in seeking fulfilment which, he articulates by performing ‘Śaranāgathi’ to Lord Amudhan of Tirukkudandhai in his Tiruvezhukkūtirukkai. Even after this, a feeling of rejection overtakes him hardening his resolve to attain union with the Lord anyhow, which drives him to seek recourse to going public and laying bare his feud with the Lord through the two ‘madal’ Prabandhams. ‘Siria Tirumadal’ is his endeavor to portray the ‘Vibhava’ manifestations of the Lord with a ‘coloured’ perception, and Peria Tirumadal is to take his ‘battle’ to the outposts of Lord’s ‘soulabhya’ and ‘karuna’ namely, the ‘arca’ Form of the Lord in His various shrines. At the end of it all, the awakened Lord, concerned that

any more delay on His part would only drive all sensient beings away from God and religion to the point that they may lose all faith, hastens to bestow His grace upon Kaliyan who, with his goal of attaining union with the Lord fulfilled, articulates this through his sixth prabandham Tirunedunthāndakam.

In his versatile poetic style, ornate and innovative in form and content, emotionally surcharged and soul-stirringly spiritual, this Āļvār is unmatched and charts his own unique course strikingly different from the other Āļvārs. Reference has already been made to the singular tribute he has been invested with, of the title of “*Nālu kavi Perumāl*”, not equalled by any poet ever, even the poet of poets among Saiva saints Tirujñāna Sambandhar of his own time qualifying only as “*Moonru kavi perumāl*” These four types of poetry are ‘Āsu’ or sudden or on the spur of the moment, ‘Vistara’ elaborate, ‘Madhura’ sweet, and ‘Chitra’ or ‘artistic’. He also enjoys the honorific of ‘Iruntamizh Noolpulavan’. Tiruvarangattamudanār in his Ramanuja Nūtrandhādhi, describes his hymns in Peria Tirumōļi as ‘Oli mikka Pādal’ or “majestic illuminating songs, imbibing which Emperumānār’s heart got strengthened like a lion’s, “*tan ullam tadittu vali mikka seeyam Irāmānusan*”, (88). Sri Kūrattāļvān describes his literature as, “*Nenjukkirul kadidheepam*” ‘light dispelling the inner darkness of heart’, and ‘Ārana sāram’ or ‘quintessence of Vedas’. Swami Desikan describes his Peria Tirumōļi as “*Arivu tarum Peria Tirumōļi*” ‘imparting knowledge’. Āļvār’s love for the purity and sweetness of Tamizh language is borne out by the lovely names used by him in addressing some of the divya-desams such as ‘Singavēl Kunram’, ‘Tirukkadal Mallai’, ‘Tiruvattabuyakaram’, Tiruparamēchuravinnakaram’, ‘Tirukkāzhichīrāmavinnakarm’ “Tirumanimādakkoyil’, Arimēyavinnakaram, etc to cite only a few.

An interesting anecdote is cited from his life story of how during his pilgrimage to the 'divya-desas' in the South, he visited the shrine of Tirukkannamangai where the Lord known as 'Arumākkadalamudhu' was immensely pleased with his beautiful alliterative hymn on Him (P.T.M.- 7.10) beginning with the words, "*Perumburakkadalai*". Ticked by the special glow of joy lighting up the Lord's face, and imagining that the Lord was probably eager to learn from him, Kaliyan threw a piquant bait before Him, 'O Krishna, if you are so inclined I can give you some lessons in literary arts', "*Nintanakku kurippākil karkalām Kaviyin porulē*", (7.10. 10). The Lord was pleased to hear that, but since He could not oblige the Āḷvār in His 'arca' state, He did accede to submit to his offer in a later era, which He did by taking birth as Sri Periaṅcchān Pillai, (hailed as 'Parama Kārunikar' and 'Vyākhyāna Chakravarthi') under the constellation 'Rohini' in the Tamil month 'Āvani' and becoming the disciple of Swāmi Nampillai who is considered the alter ego of Kaliyan born like him under the asterism 'Kārthigai' in the Tamil month 'Kārthigai'.

Two other legends of interest associated with this Āḷvār are as follows. One of them relates to his encounter with the Saiva saint Tirujñāna Sambandhar at Sīrkāzhi. During the course of the Āḷvār's visits to the shrines in the South to offer 'mangalāsāsana' to the presiding deity, when he was near Sīrkāzhi, his disciples who served as pilot flag-bearers announcing his advent, were at one point leading the way with announcements of his various titles as "*Nālukavi Perumāl*" vandhār, "*Arulmāri vandhār*", "*Ālinādar*" vandhār, "*Arattamukki*" vandhār, "*Adayār Seeyam*" vandhār, "*Parakālar*" vandhār and so on. The disciples of Jñāna Sambandhar who was being carried in a procession, raised objection against the announcement, and an altercation broke out between

the two groups over inter se precedence in passage. A poetic duel ensued between the Āļvār and the Nāyanār which Parakālan won hands down with his hymn on Lord ‘Thādālan’ of Tirukkāzhicchīrāma Vinnagaram, (P.T.M.- 3.4.) *“Oru kuralāy irunilam moovadi man vēndi”* exhibiting his skill not only as an ‘Āsu kavi’ but also as ‘Chitra kavi’. In appreciation of his superior talent, Sambandhar presented his spear to Parakālan which even now adorns the beautiful ‘vigraham’ of the Āļvār in his shrine at Tirunagari. It is interesting to note that he also commended all the titles enjoyed by the Āļvār as befitting his preeminent merit. Incidentally, Parakālan, in a rare flamboyant self-portrayal and insinuation of this incident, appends his titles in the concluding pāsura of this hymn as “Ankamalattadavayalsoozh Ālinādan, Arulmāri, Arattamukki, Adayār Seeyam, Kongumalarkkuzhaliyarvēlmangai vēndhan, Kotravēl Parakālan, Kaliyan sonna Sanghamukhattamizh mālai”.

The other legend associated with Parakālan is about the daring exploit of the Āļvār as a rebel with a cause when the occasion demanded it. The need arose for him to raise resources to carry out some construction works for the temple in Srirangam such as building a periphery wall, ‘mandapam’ and renovation of ‘vimāna’ and so on. So he decided to carry out a secret raid on a Bhuddist ‘vihāra’ in Nāgappattinam with his four associates, and confiscate the golden image of Bhuddha installed there. When he and his associates visited the ‘vihāra’, they found it to be intricately designed to prevent any intrusion. When Kaliyan inspected it closely, he found a revolving discus kind of contraption at the top. Kaliyan had to figure out a way to stop the revolving apparatus to facilitate entry; this he managed to achieve by feeding layers of the outer skins of a banana tree that got stuck in its wheel and stopped it from revolution. He then sent one

of his emissaries to enter the 'vihāra' and get the image. Strangely, the idol also exhibited some magical power and kept moving from place to place evading hold. But finally, Kaliyan's associate managed to get hold of it and brought it out. As it was nearing dawn, the group took shelter under a 'Sleep' tree near a ploughed rice field in Tirikkannangudi, where they buried it under ground and waited. In the early morning, the farmer who owned the field came with rice saplings to plant. Since the image was buried there, Kaliyan and his mates did not want to leave the booty buried in the field behind. So he started arguing with the farmer that the field belonged to him as inheritance from his grandfather. When asked to prove ownership by producing proper documentation, he said he would produce it next day. The farmer was also asked to bring his documents next day for village elders to decide who was the rightful claimant. The farmer left for the day. As night fell, Parakālan retrieved the image and the party disappeared hurriedly from the place proceeding towards Srirangam. There is a local story in circulation at this village which is a 'divya-desam', to the effect that Parakālan who was thirsty asked for water from a woman drawing water from a well. The woman refused to give water to the Āļvār since she recognized him as the person who was involved in the altercation at the rice field, and told him that he would perhaps raise a similar dispute with her and claim that the water vessel too belonged to him after drinking water from it. It is said that the water turned saline in the whole village thereafter, which it is even to this day, except at the Lord's temple in Tirukkannangudi.

With the money found by melting the idol and selling it, Āļvār completed the works at the Srirangam shrine as planned by him. Sri Parāsara Bhattar in his Srirangarājastavam has paid a tribute to the Āļvār's

signal contribution to Srirangam shrine in building a 'manimandapam', boundary wall and so on in a verse in his Srirangarājastavam, (1.36), noting that in the process, the idols of religions like Jainism and Bhuddhism that are non-vedic, were refashioned to Vedic use. It is said that when building the temple wall, the flower garden of Tondaradippodi Āļvār came in the planned alignment. The younger Āļvār Parakālan in devout deference to Tondaradippodi Āļvār diverted the course of the wall around the latter's garden, making sure that it was in no way affected. It is said that Tondaradippodi adopted Kaliyan's title of "*Arulmāri*" to refer to his garden scalpel thereafter in grateful appreciation of Kaliyan's gesture.

Tradition has it that when on one occasion, Āļvār rendered his Tirunedunthāndakam in 'dēva-ghāna' before 'Peria Perumāl' at Srirangam temple, the Lord was immensely pleased with his rendering and granted him a wish. Kaliyan prayed to the Lord expressing his wish for the Lord to listen to the rendering of Swami Nammāļvār's Tiruvāymoļi which paved the way for the tradition of the 'Adhyayana Utsavam' celebration at the shrine. In the years following, Parakālan arranged for Nammāļvār's 'divya-mangala vighraha' to be brought from Āļvār Tirunagari ceremoniously to Srirangam for due conduct of the celebration, during which Tiruvāymoļi of Nammāļvār was rendered along with other Āļvār's Prabandhams before Lord Sri Ranganatha as a ten-day festival. In later times, owing to difficulties in bringing the image of Nammāļvār all the way from Āļvār Tirunagari, the idols of Āļvār's came to be consecrated in Srirangam temple, and the celebration of the entire 'Aruliccheyal' in the present format of a twenty-one day festival, has become an established tradition in Srirangam temple. It is significant that the festival commences with the recitation of Tirunedunthāndakam first.

In his evening years, Tirumangai Āļvār with his consort Kumudhavalli Nācchiār retired to Tirukkuringudi and spent his time in close communion with Lord 'Nambi', totally withdrawn into the beauty of the Lord there. He shed his mortal frame in this state and attained 'moksha' there. There is a small sanctum for the Āļvār in this shrine. It has been pointed out and emphasized by later Āchāryas that this Āļvār more than any other, has made a monumental contribution in terms of inculcating and enhancing the enjoyment of the 'Arca' form of the Divine in temples across the land-- the 'divya-mangala vigraha' in which the Divine manifests in full as in other forms, namely 'Para, 'Vyuha', 'Vibhava' and 'Antaryāmi' as confirmed in the Pāncharātra Āgama. Tirumangai Āļvār by his extensive 'mangalāsāsana' through soulful pāsūrams, of the Lord at several shrines, many not sung about by other Āļvārs, has proved how true is this great Siddhānta, and how it is not only possible, but also easy to derive from the 'Arca' 'divya-mangala vigraha', here in this world, the bliss of 'Vaikunta'. To those who yearn for the bliss of 'parama-padha', Kaliyan poses the question, *"why do you all give up the hare in your hand and run after the crow?"* "Ērār muyal vittuk kākkaippin pōvadhē"- (S.T.M-8). Āļvār's experience of God as expressed in Peria Tirumōli has two major aspects. The first one consists of the actual visits of the Āļvār to different shrines from the northern most corner to the southern most tip of the land as already explained, spread over one thousand pāsūrams from pathikam 1.2 till 9.10. One unique aspect of this Āļvār's God-experience is that in the course of singing about the Deity of a particular shrine, his mind oftentimes switches to the Lord of another shrine, even multiple shrines at times, which makes him to map that on to the Lord and shrine he is addressing his hymn to. Thus, for instance, in decad 6.8. which is part of the hundred

pāsurams dedicated to Tirunaraiyur, he visualizes the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, Tiruvāli, Tirunāvai, Tirunīrmalai, in successive pāsurams. After that his mind switches to the 'vibhavāvathāras of Sri Rama, and Sri Krishna in the next two pāsurams. Then in the next pāsuram, he refers to both Tirumeyyam and Dvāraka, before Sri Krishna draws his mind away again in the very next pāsuram. His alltime favourite divya-desam Tirukkundandhai catches his fancy in the following pāsuram. Decad 10.1 beginning with the words, "*Oru nal sutram*", is yet again a different kind of 'anubhavam' of multiple 'divya-desams' occurring in the same decad, wherein Kaliyan draws a virtual line between two shrines in each verse, and makes a statement that the Lord of the shrine mentioned first is to be seen in the other. Thus he says in 10.1.1 "*Orunal sutram enakkuyironporul varunal tolgathi āghiya maindhanai nerunal kandadhu Nīrmalai inru pōy karunelsoozh Kannamangaiyul kāndhumē*", 'My Lord, my best friend, my very life and purpose, my future eternal home, -- we had His 'darshan' at Nīrmalai: today we shall go and have His 'darshan at Kannamangai surrounded by ripe rice fields.'

The second aspect comprises a strong mystical element in Āļvār's experience of the Divine by donning the role of lady-love of the Lord as 'Parakālanāyaki', like Nammāļvār's Parānkusa Nāyaki. This role-playing surfaces in several decads in Peria Tirumōļi, becoming the most predomint experience later in his two Madals and Tirunedunthāndakam. It redounds to the versatility of the Āļvār that this mystical quality springs up in manifold ways that demonstrates that Kaliyan is the only Āļvār who treads his own path in so many different ways as we shall explore selectively. In his decad 2.7 addressed to the Lord of Tiruvidavendhai between Chennai and Mahābalipuram, Āļvār assuming the role of the mother

of Parakālanāyaki, who seeing her daughter pining for the grace of Lord's feet, directly intercedes with the Lord of Tiruvidavendhai in her behalf to find out His inner disposition towards her. She submits that the daughter is aware of the presence on the Lord's chest of the Divine Mother, born in the nectarine Milk Ocean with a face effulgent like the full moon, but still cannot give up her desire and is in love with the Lord's feet. Her daughter is beautiful too, like a statuette from Kolli hills, with eyes resembling the red-lilies. The mother inquires of the Lord, what He intends to do with her. She asks, "*Nintāl nayandhirundha Ivalai Unmanattāl yen ninaindirundhāy, Idavendhai Empirānē*". The daughter is in love with the Lord's feet, unlike the Divine Mother Who is seated on His chest, meaning that the daughter is not a competitor of the Mother though she is equally beautiful, since she only seeks union with the Lord's feet, not a place on His chest.

In the sixth decad of the third Tiromoḷi, Āḷvār assuming the role of Parakālanāyaki expresses her inner feelings and love pangs to the Lord of Tiruvāli through the medium of a bee as her emissary. She wishes the Lord to know that though He may not think about her, she is wilting with constant remembrance of Him, but in no way she would 'wilt for the shafts of the fish-flag bearing god of love', "*mīnāya kodonedu vēl vali seyya melivēno*"? (P.T.M.- 3.6.4.). But in the following pāsuras in the decad, Parakālanāyaki is overtaken by such a surge of emotional build-up, that she starts addressing her feelings to the Lord directly. Thus in 3.6.5, she addresses the Lord, 'O, my Lord with Feet that scaled the worlds, O, Ruler of Kudandhai! O Lord whose shoulders lifted the mountain high, my spear-like eyes well up in tears, my tender breasts have lost their colour. Every day I think of you and wane, won't you ever become my savior '?

The varying emotional states through which Parakālanāyaki passes in her God-intoxicated mystic experience is graphically presented in five decads of the 8th Tirumol.i, (8.1 to 8.5), on the Lord of Tirukkannapuram touching the very depths of despondency at times. In decad 8.2, which is again expressed through the voice of the distressed mother over the distraught state of her love-lorn daughter, the mother remonstrates, ‘O wise One !, Lord of the celestials !, Blemishless One worthy of Sri !, O Lord of golden hue !, my daughter only folded her hands in the direction of the rustling waters of Kannapuram, was that a crime ? Is it proper to take away her bangles ?’, (8.2.1). In the next pāsuram, the mother depicts the moon-struck daughter’s state in the words, ‘she stood on the moon-lit terrace and scanned the sky, brightened up and pointed, “*Look, there, Kannapuram*”, said she. With ‘madal’ singers standing by, would she feel shy now? Good, good, for the Lord of Naraiyur who has shown her the way.’ The daughter alternates between euphoric mood and tearful incoherence prattling about cool-streams of Tiruvenkatam and water-logged Nīrmalai. She inquires about Meyyam, but it is Kannapuram she reverts to in her speech, melting into tears and growing thinner by the day. The mother wonders, ‘Alas! what would this lead to?’ (P.T.M.-8.2.4). The mother touches the very nadir of despair in behalf of her daughter in the next verse bemoaning, “*Unnum nāl illai, urakkamum tān illai.....*”, ‘There is no day when she is not fasting, nor a night when she is not on vigil. Poor thing, she is just a small girl, barely a young maiden, yet she keeps looking wistfully and saluting her Krishna’s abode of Kannapuram. I wonder how she developed such a passion for the Lord of that place. What now?’ The whole of decad 8.5. depicts the agony of the lady love who languishes through the live long day waiting for her

Lord only to suffer a let down, as the night descends on her and the cool rays of the moon and the gentle breeze heighten her loneliness and misery, (8.5.1). In one intensely graphic line, the Nāyaki exclaims, ‘The place seems so still, the world has gone to sleep, the chariot of the sun-god has gone, the directions have disappeared, alas ! I am at a loss what to do !’ –(8.5.2), *“Oorum tunjitru; ulagamum tuyinradhu; oliyavan visumbiyangum tērum poyitru; disaigalum maraindhana; seivathonrariyēnē”*!

A very moving anecdote is related in this context. Emperumānār had a very loyal devotee Pillai Urangāvilli Dāsar. Dāsar and his wife Ponnāchi who had shared a life of deep mutual affection, led their life in later years engaged entirely in the service of Emperumānār. The day came when Dāsar departed from this world and his mortal remains were laid on a decorated chariot – like hearse. As a grief-stricken Ponnāchi looked on, the chariot moved fast and disappeared from her view. Ponnāchi’s lips were muttering the last two lines as above at that moment, ‘the chariot has gone and the directions have disappeared, alas! I am at a loss what to do,!’. In that agonized state, Ponnāchi fainted and fell on the floor. Her life too had passed.

Parakālanāyaki does not shy away from showing her sterner side to the Lord when her Lord turns up for His tryst with her late, by chastising Him. Sri Krishna who had gone home after grazing cattle to freshen up and wear some ornaments before meeting the lady, being already late for the appointment and in a tearing hurry, turns up wearing only one ear ring, probably losing the other one on the way in his haste, and dressed too flamboyantly for her fancy. Thus in decad 10.8. she dares to pull Him up directly for keeping her waiting. In the first few pāsūrams, she comments critically on His

sartorial sense and failure to keep time. Thus in the first pāsuram, she says, ‘you are wearing a new ear- ring; you have put on a black dress and a garland of ‘tulasi’; you come and stand outside long after the hour, what for?, why?. why?, why?’ *“Kadhirkadippittuk kalingamuduttu thadhunalla thannanthuzhāy kodanindhu pōdhu maruttup puramēvandhu ninrīr ēdhukku idhuen? Idhuen? Idhuennō?”*. She continues her tirade in the next pāsuram, ‘wearing a red vest, tossing a bouquet casually, your coiffure secured loose, wearing a frilly red-band, you come and stand by the half-closed door. Who are you? What is this? What is this?’. Later in pāsuram 10.8.7, she lays out another charge typical of His intriguing ways, “... allē arindhōm Num manattin karuttai, sollādhu ozhyīr, sonna pōdhināl vārīr ellē idhuen? Idhuen ? idhu ennō ? ”...’ *You leave without telling, and never come as promised, O, What is this?, what is this?, what is this? ‘Interestingly, Āļvār demonstrates that he can pick up a feud even with the ‘arca’ Lord at times. The story goes that when he arrived at the ‘divya-desam’ of Tiruvindhalūr and went to the shrine to worship the reclining Lord Parimala Rangan there, he found the temple doors closed. The whole of Āļvār’s hymn in 4.9 is set in a plaintive tone articulating his disappointment with the Lord for not granting him the vision of His “ divya-rūpa”, auspicious form. In a telling rebuff to the presiding Lord, he says, “We worshipped You as our means and goal, and blessed with the knowledge of ‘śeṣatva’, becoming your ‘dāsa-bhūtas’ by serving you with joy in this life. O, Lord of Indalūr, You are like mother to me, can’t you take pity on me and confer your grace on us by revealing your form, so we may flourish ?’(P.T.M.-4.9.1) Later, in 4.9.4., ‘O Lord of Indalur, all the praise and prayers that we unfailingly offer you out of love have come unstuck; the whole world knows that we go around this land as your servants and of none else. Yet,*

you do not condescend to show the effulgence of your form, more lustrous than melted gold. We were not aware that you have your preferences in showing grace. May you live on with your body for your own enjoyment.’ Āļvār’s punch line in this pasuram. “...Vāsi vallir Indalurir, Vāzhndē pōm Neerē”.

Another facet of Āļvār’s style in Peria Tirumōli is his usage of ‘Pillai Tamizh’ like Periāļvār, in decads 10.4 and 10.5., where he turns into mother Yasoda, entreating child Krishna. In 10.4. she coaxes Krishna to come and have his feed at her bosom. In 10.4.1. she entreats him, ‘O Lord born to Nandakopa, my sweet ambrosia ! My Master! With your beautiful flower- tresses falling over your face, come running to me alone, take my swollen breast into your mouth and suck at it. Come, take suck.’ The next decad is a clap-song which is called ‘sappāni’ which mothers sing to the toddler cajoling the child to clap to the rhythm of a song being sung by them. In a very unlikely imaginative state, Kaliyan cuts new ground by portraying his devotion to Sri Ramavathāra in the garb of the demons of Lanka after the killing of Ravana and his clan of warriors appealing in abject fear for mercy to Rama, Lakshmana and the simian chiefs Sugriva and Angada, through a dance form of “*kootthuppāttu*” which is part of the Tamil rural culture. The particular dance form in which Āļvār’s two decads 10.2 and 10.3 are set is called “*Kuzhamanidhūram*” in which the vanquished sing and dance in rhythm heaping praise on the victors in order to evoke sympathy to their plight. The decad 10.2 which is replete with admission of the grave offences committed by Ravana and his persistence in his follies in the face of the sane advice offered by Vibhīshana, and praising the prowess of Rama, is a song by the demons to a dance drum-beat called “*pongattam pongo*”, as every pasuram ends on this note. In the first pāsūram of 10.2.

the survivors sing, ‘Masters! Heartlessly our king did many wrongs, here and now, they are rebounding on us. What is the use in dwelling on all this ? Ravana has paid with his life, whom to tell this ? Kings of the big monkey clan ! O, Prince Lakshmana! O the valiant bow-wielding Rama ! Alas, there is no one to plead for us now. We dance in fear to the sound of the wardrum, “*pongattam pongo*”. The decad 10.3 is on the same theme of appeal for mercy praising the monkey chief Sugriva, Nīlan, Hanuman, and others, lest the monkey army should unleash terror and wipe them out. In this decad, every pasuram ends with the refrain of ‘kuzhamanidhūram’.

Kaliyan borrows from another folklore cultural tradition of rural South India called “*Chāzhal*” which is a game played by young girls like “*kummi*” and “*kōlāttam*”, wherein two groups of girls sing in a kind of musical question-answer duel with each stanza ending on the refrain, “*chāzhalē*”, which means, “*thōzhiyē*”, or ‘lady companion’. Kaliyan adopts this style of poetry to sing about the ‘paratvam’ or ‘transcendence’ and “*soulabhyam*” or felicity of approach to the Lord, sung alternately by two girls in decad 11.5, beginning with the words, “*Mān amarum Mennōkki*”. In 11.5.3, one girl sings, : ‘Āho, Sister! With the whole world heaping slander, the “*Āippādi* “*son ate the butter kept by braided-hair dames, see. !*” The other girl responds, ‘Yes, but the golden stomach that filled itself with the curds churned by the braided-hair dames, swallowed these seven worlds and still had space for more.’ Periālvār’s comparative evaluation of the qualities and deeds of Rama-Krishnāvathāras, through the minds of two young maidens pitting their wits against each other in P.A.T.M-3.9. is somewhat on similar lines, but this is couched in the form of one pāsūram on Sri Rama and the subsequent one on Krishna, unlike two alternating lines on Krishna

in the pāsuram of Kaliyan cited above. Incidentally, Āndāl's Nācchiār Tirumōḷi decad 14 beginning with the words "*Patti meyndhōr Kārēru*", describing the sighting of Krishna in several spots in Brindhāvan, which is set in the format of one group of girls inquiring of the other group, if they saw Krishna "*Kandirē?*", and the group answering where they saw Him in 'Brindhāvana' with the refrain, "*Virundāvanattē kandōme*" is also somewhat on these lines, but this is not a 'chāzhal'.

Mention may also be made briefly of other distinctive features of Āḷvār's poetic styles. Āḷvār adopts the 'andhādhi' grammar in his hymn 11.3. which is about Nāyaki bemoaning her withering state in her separation from the Lord, reminiscing the Lord's amazing feats in His incarnations. Early evidence of Kaliyan's numerological penchant is evident in his hymn 3.4.1 on Tirukkāzhichīrāmaṇṇagaram in the first pāsuram, "*Oru kurālāl irunilam moovadi man vēndi... arumaraiyin tiral nāngum vēlvi aindhum angangal avaiyārum disaigalēzhum....*". Kaliyan among the Āḷvārs is the only one (except for Periāḷvār in his fleeting reference to Selvanambi of his time), who brings to bear historical narratives in his Prabandham. An important historical fact is highlighted in his Tirunaraiyur hymn 6.6. throughout which he heaps praise on the Chola king 'Chenganān Kōcchōzhan (Nāyanār) who is believed to have built as many as 70 Siva temples, and only one Vishnu temple that of Tirunaraiyur of whose Deity he was an ardent devotee. The evocative refrain in the hymn reads, "*Chembian Kōcchenganān Sērndhakōyil Tirunaraiyur Manimādam Sērminkalē*". In his hymn on Tiruvallikkēni 2,3, Kaliyan pays tribute to Thondaimannan in his concluding verse in the words, "*Thennan Thondaiyarkōn Seidha nan Mayilai Tiruvallikkēni....*". Again in his hymn on Tiruchitrakkoodam, 3.2.3. Kaliyan records

his appreciation of the contribution of Pallava kings in promoting Vishnu temples, in the words, “...*Paimponnum Muttummaniyum konarndhu padaimannavan Pallavarkōn panindha Semponmanimādangal soozhnda Tillaittiruchitrakkoodam.....*”.

Yet another aspect of Āļvār’s poetic style is his usage of metaphors and proverbs to good effect as in his decad 11.8 which is his final prayer in Peria Tirumoļi, addressed to the Lord to cut the gordion knot of ‘samsāric bondage’ he is caught in, wherein he portrays his plight and affliction by drawing from common sayings to drive home the gravity of his condition. In the first pāsura, he says, “...*thōtrakkuzhi thōtruviṇṇāy kol enru innam, Ātrankarai vāzh maram pōl anjukinrēn*”, ‘like the proverbial tree growing on the bank of a river, I dread the thought that you might cast me into the bottomless pit of birth and worldly existence.’ In 11.8.3, he describes his fear of the prospect of ‘samsāric’ life and the consequent unnerving flutter that his heart goes through, as akin to ‘sleeping in a hut with a snake’. In the next pāsura, he uses the saying “*irupāderikolliyinul erumbē pōl*” ‘like the red ants caught in a fire wood burning at both ends’. In 11.8.5, he says that his heart sinks in fear like ‘a pack of foxes caught in a flood’. In 11.8.7, he cites the proverb “*Vēmbin puzhu vēmbanri unnādhū*”, and affirms “*..Adiyēn nānpinnum Unsēvadiyanri nayavēn*” meaning ‘a worm growing inside a neem tree must eat only neem to survive’, and likewise he also has no recourse other than the Lord’s feet. It may appear paradoxical that Āļvār who always sings of the Lord as ‘sugarcane’ and ‘ambrosia’ – ‘Thondar thangal sindhaiyullē mulaittezundha theenkarumbu, amudham’, ‘podiiyin suvaikkarumbu’ etc- should use the analogy of neem to refer to the Lord. The deeper meaning behind this would appear to be to emphasize that he loves the Lord not merely because He is sweet, but he would love

him just the same since he is so irrevocably bound to Him in a relationship of ‘svarūpa-prayukta dāsyam’. In Āndāl’s inimitable expression it is “*uravēl namakku ingu ozhikka ozhiyādu*”. Swami Desikan lauds this as “*ādhamam mikka adimai*”, as exemplified by Lakshmana. At the end of the decad, Kaliyan ardently prays to the Lord to grant him liberation from the travails of ‘samsāric’ bondage and give him an opportunity to render service in the ‘paramapada’ with a moving plea, “*nandā narakattu azhundāvagai nālum...Adiyērkkku arulāy Un Arulē*” (P.T.M.-11.8.9.), ‘Pray show me a way out without drowning in eternal damnation. Thou alone should save us by Thy grace.’ The word “*Adiyērkkku*” is the keyword, and is verily a prayer for all of us. Such was Kaliyan’s compassion for all of us caught in the vicegrip of the ‘kārmic’ vicious cycle.

It is noteworthy that Tirumangai Āļvār thoughtfully follows the practice of spelling out the ‘phalasruti’ at the end of each decad of his Tirumōḷi, deeply conscious of the psychology of the worldly beings who seek divine grace with some motivation of a reward or benefit at the end. In his very first hymn describing his discovery of the Lord’s auspicious name Nārāyana, he beautifully enunciates the manifold grace that the ‘Tirunāmam’ assures to the devotees in this life and after, in pasuram 1.1.8:

*“Kulam tarum selvam tandhidum Adiyār padu
tuyarāyinnavellām,
nilam taramseyyum nīlvisumbarulum arulodu
perunilam alikkum,
valamtarum matruntandhidum
petrathāyinumāyinaseyyum,
nalam tarum sollai Nān kandu kondēn Nārāyanāvennum
Nāmam”.*

‘Bhagavad sambandham’ overrides the lowliness

attached to one's station in life that comes with one's birth. So Āḷvār says, 'kulam tarum'. Dharmavyādha born and engaged in the lowly life of a meatseller was sought out by sages and seekers for clarifying their minds on questions relating to Dharma. Kaisika Purānam exemplifies how a brahmin condemned to wander as a 'brahma-rākshasa' for his sins got liberation at the hands of a Lord's devotee born in a lowly caste. Yudishtira who was a purist on matters of rightful conduct in strict conformity with 'dharma-sāstra', did the final rites for Vidhura directed by a divine command. All these cases and others are cited by Pillai Lokāchārya in Srivachana Bhūshanam, (230-234). Secondly, Lord's name confers prosperity in this life itself, "*selvam tandhidum*". "*Ninnaiyētān vēndi nīl selvam vēndātāntannaiyē tān vēndum selvam*", says Sri Kulasekhara Perumal in 5.9. of Perumāl Tirumōḷi., 'like wealth spurned by a 'Bhagaval-lābhārthi' or 'seeker of God', 'coming back to him on its own'. Next, "*Adiyār padu tuyarāyinavellām nilam taram seyyum*", 'it scatters to dust all of the devotee's suffering'. "*Yatrāśtāksharasamsiddhō mahābhāgomahīyatē na tatra sancharishyanti vyādhi durbhiksha taskarāh:*" I Periāḷvār' expresses the same thought in his line, "*summanādhēkaivittōdi toorugal pāyndanavē*", (P.A.T.M-5.4,3.),'all miseries of the world have released their grip and just run away to hide in bushes'. The celestial kingdom will await him, "*nīl visumbu arulum*". Āḷvār promises next, "*arulodu perunilamalikkum*", 'it assures the grace of 'kainkarya-sri', as desired by Nammāḷvār in his hymn "*Ozhvil kālamellām*", (T.M.- 3.3.1.). Āḷvār follows it up with the promise that concurrently the Lord also endows the 'śakthi' or strength equal to that of the celestials for the enduring experience of all that grace. So he says, "*valam tarum*". Lord's grace by bestowing divine enlightenment is more than mother's

love which is afterall born out of a physical connection, “*petratāyinumāyina seyyum*”.That is the summum bonum of Lord’s “Tirunāmam, “*Nalam tarum sol*”.

He has some sage advice to offer to seekers in his hymn 11.6. not to run after unworthy gods but to realize that the Lord to seek is the Universal God, the Wielder of the sharp discus, Who lies in the deep ocean, Who is our true Protector. He advises them to recite the thousand names of the Lord, even if they cannot comprehend, but can atleast imagine that it is the same Lord, in whose stomach the whole universe engulfed by a vast ocean lay in time past, and Who had scaled the worlds. He is the Lord who abides in Kannamangai. Those who do not seek recourse to His feet and cherish them in their hearts are not men, says the Āḷvār in a more caustic vein. But those who learn this garland of songs by Kalikanri will receive the grace of Divine Mother Sri. Āḷvār being only too well aware of the way of the world at large, has dire words of warning for human beings engrossed in materialism in his decad 11. 7. In sum, he outrightly condemns them who lead a life far removed from the divine as ignoramus whose every limb, eyes, ears, tongue, hands, mind, and heart are absolutely futile. He reiterates that those who do not serve the Lord’s purpose are not even human beings. His sage advice to us, therefore, is to seek redemption from all accumulated sins that bind us birth after birth, through recourse to the Lord’s sacred feet and sing and dance with Kaliyan’s “*oli mālai*”, ‘his garland of musical cadences’, which he had at the very outset in P.T.M.-1.1.10, described as “*Sencholāledutta deiva nalmālai*”, ‘a garland of exquisite divine poetry strung with mellifluous words’, with which he exhorted all to recite the Lord’s name unafraid of death in any kind of grievous situation, and for the sheer joy of the experience of chanting the Lord’s auspicious name, for that is the antidote for our ‘karma’. As he reaffirms,

“enakkenrum thēnum pālum amudumumāya Tirumāl Tirunāmam Nānum sonnēn namarum uraimin Namō Nārāyanamē”, (P.T.M.-6.10.6), ‘The auspicious name of the enchanting Lord who melts for His devotees, is always sweet to my heart like honey, milk, and ambrosia; so I chant and so may you too, *“Namō Nārāyana”*’.

An attempt has been made in the following few paragraphs to give a fleeting flavor of Kalikanri’s ‘divya-desa anubhavam’ providing some insights and sidelights to the extent possible. It was pointed out earlier that Kaliyan had worshipped at as many as 86 shrines from the northern most ‘divya-desam’ of Tiruppiridhi to Tiruppullāni in the southern tip. But there is no evidence to suggest that Āḷvār had actually visited the shrines at Tiruppiridhi supposed to be located near Mānasarover, Bhadrināth or Tiruchālagrāmam. As far as Tiruppiridhi is concerned, Āḷvār’s hymn only suggests at the end of each pasuram, *“Piridhi senradai nenjē”*, that he only exhorts his heart to go and worship at the shrine. The hymn on Tiruchālagrāmam is on similar lines. As far as Bhadri is concerned, he uses the phrase, *“Vadhari Vananghudumē”* and *“Vadhariyāsramattullānē”* (1.3 & 1.4). But whether he actually visited these shrines or not, he certainly must have had ‘mānasa-sākshātkāram’ of these shrines, a virtual visualisation granted by the Lord of these shrines. In pāsuraṁ, 1.2.3 on Tiruppiridhi, Kaliyan describes a phenomenon on the gem-rock beds covered by a soft cushion of fragrant ‘Kongai’ flowers, where an elephant couple sleeps quietly to the back-ground hum of bees in ‘Piridhi’, *“.... Vēzham pidiyinōdu vandu isai pāda thuyil kollum Piridhi”*. Āḷvār sings on similar lines in 2.10.4 P.T.M. on Tirukkōvalūr, *“Kuzhām varivandu isaipādum pādal kēttu tīnkarumbu kanvalarum kazhani soozhnda Tirukkōvalūr”*, ‘hearing the sweet songs of the swarm of bees in the fields (of Tirukkōvalūr), the sugar cane grows

a node taller'. The sugar cane is a metaphoric reference to the Lord 'Āyan' there, the songs of the bees similarly referring to the Mudhal Āļvārs' Tiruvandhādhis. Kaliyan's decad 1.6. on the Lord of Naimisāranyam beginning with the words "*Vānilāmurual*" is Āļvār's first 'Śaranāgathi' prayer. The hymn is replete with Kaliyan's graphic retrospect on his past profligate life with women. In 1.6.4. he visits the horror scene of retribution that awaits him in hell for his sinful life, where Yama's agents fashion a statue of a damsel in sizzling red-hot copper and order the terror-stricken arrival with the command, 'Sinner, embrace this now'. Āļvār soulfully prays, 'O, trust-worthy Lord of Naimisāranya, dreading these words, I have sought refuge at your feet', "*Nambanē! vandhun Tiruvadi adaindhēn, Naimisāranyattul endhāy*".

Āļvār has sung four decads on Tiruvenkatam, from 1.8. to 2.1. In 1.8.9. exhorts all to recite the 'eight-lettered' Tirumantra and his own heart also in the process, not once but over and over again, for the gracious Lord of Tiruvenkatam elevates them and rids them of their birth-cycle, the Lord who resides in the hill of Tiruvenkatam which is the shining beacon for the whole world surrounded by fragrant flower-gardens. "*Pēsumin*" is an action word addressed to others, 'parōpadēsam'. "*Pēsum In*", is addressing one's own heart by way of self-experience, 'svānubhavam'. Āļvār describes the hills of Tiruvenkatam as "*...Vāsamāmalar nāruvār pozhil zoozh tarum ulagukkellām dēsamāy thigazhum malai Tiruvenkatam*". While on this subject, in a unique pāsura Pey Āļvār (M.T.-69) transforms into the state of a mother of a young maiden who is in love with Krishna, describing the behavior of her daughter. She says, "*Verpenru Venkatam pādum*"..... 'when someone talks about a mountain, my moon-struck daughter breaks into a song in praise of Tiruvenkatam'. In a way, this is a

forerunner for all Āļvārs in role-playing as ‘Nāyaki’, her mother, and so on. The decad 1.9. beginning with the words, “*Thāyē thandaiyenrum*”, is Āļvār’s ‘Śaranāgathi’ prayer to the Lord of Tiruvenkatam with Divine Mother as ‘puruṣakāra’, in the words, “*....nāyēn vandhadaindēn nalgi āl ennaikkondarulē*”, (1.9.1.). ‘this ‘dog of a self’ has come to you seeking refuge. Pray, take me into your service’. Āļvār lays bare before the Lord his errant past, and pours out the pain and mortification of his soul in this emotionally surcharged hymn.

Kalikanri’s ‘Tiruvallikkēni’ ‘pathigam’, 2.3. is a mellifluous hymn in which he offers ‘mangalaśāsana’ to all the five representations of the Lord in this shrine, as the presiding Deity Venkatakrishnan in gracious response to the prayer of King Sumathi in an earlier age, as the reclining Lord described by Kaliyan as “*Vēdattin Suvaippayan*”, “*Kuvalayattōr thožhudēttum Ādhi*”, (2.3.2, ‘the delectable fruit of the Vedas’ and ‘the Primordial cause worshipped by earthlings’, as Sri Rama with Consort Mythili, and brothers, Lakshmana Bharatha, Satrugna, (2.3.8), as “*Telliya Singam*” Lord Nrsimha, (2.3.8.), and as Gajendra Varada, (2.3.9.).

A prapanna’s inherent character presupposes “*ānukūlyasya sankalpa*”, (mindset and action conforming to the will of the Lord), and *prātikūlyasya varjanam*”, (rejecting what is disagreeable to the Lord), as essential traits. Kulasekhara Perumāl in his Perumal Tirumōli, sang, in the first decad about, ‘Bhagavadanukūlya sankalpa’, about ‘Bhāgavadānukūlya sankalpa in the second, and about ‘prātikūlya varajanam in the third. Kaliyan in ‘pathikam’ 2.6. on Kadalmallai, sings in 2.6.1, “*Talaśayanuttu Uraivārai ennādhēyiruppārai iraippozhudum ennōmē*”, ‘We shall not for a moment regard those who do not think of the reclining Lord of Kadalmallai.’ In the next verse, he says,

‘Kadalmallaittalaśayanam ārennum nenjudaiyār Avar emmai ālvārē.’ ‘those who cherish the thought about Kadalmallai ‘Talaśayana’ Lord, rule over us’. Thus he first speaks about ‘prātikūlya varjanam’, and ‘ānukūlya sankalpam’ next. In whichever order they are, both are equally essential ‘Srivaishnava lakshanam’.

Kaliyan offers his ‘mangālaśasana’ prayer to the Lord of Tiruvellakkulam by first praying for Divine Mother’s ‘puruṣakāram’. His 4.7.9 addresses the Lord in the words, *“Pūvār Tirumāmagal pulghiya mārḥa`!... Sīrār pozhilsoozh Tiruvellakkulattu Uraivānē !..... āvā ! adiyān ivanenru Arulāye` “.”* O Lord who enjoys the snug abidance of the Lotus Dame. Lord of Tiruvellakkulam surrounded by beautiful gardens, Pray, say, *“Oh, Oh, this is my servant”*, grace me thus.’ This is evocative of Māran’s pāsuram 6.10.10. of T.V.M., *“Agalakillēn iraiyumenru Alarmēlmangai Urai Mārḥa`”.....* In this context, an interesting ‘samvādam’ or dialogue between Nanjiyar and Bhattar is cited. Nanjiyar’s query is, ‘if the jivātman’ is śeṣa` of the Lord, and the Lord ‘Śēṣi’, what is the role of relationship to the Divine Mother.? Bhattar replied, ‘Listen, the Crow (Kākāsura) and Ravana were alike in their character and act, yet for his curse Ravana paid dearly with all his heads cut down. But though the Crow’s offence towards mother Sita was equally abhorrent, he escaped with his life in view of the Mother’s presence there. Ravana met with his death as she was not there. In matters involving her children, the mother’s disposition is not the same as the father’s. Not only the mother is disposed to gloss over the child’s infractions, but is so favorably predisposed to concealing any wrongs committed by the child, from the father’s prying eyes. That is why in our ‘Sampradāya’ we place her before us first, and invariably seek recourse to the Lord through her intercession.’.

Kaliyan has sung five ‘pathikams’ on Tiruvarangam, (P.T.M.-5.4 to 5.8). Of these the first one 5.4. is a narrative of the natural beauty of the ‘divya-desam’ where the river Cauvēri flows through beautiful groves wafting their fragrance all around, and filled with devotees from all over the earth and the heavens thronging to offer worship to the Lord on whose chest the lotus-seated Lakshmi resides. The decad 5.5. is a song sung by the Āļvār in the role of the mother describing the love-stricken daughter prating all the time about the Lord. Her daughter is in love with the Lord of Tiruvarangam, but her mouth keeps prattling, ‘O Venkatam ! O Venkatam’ ! all day long. She would not sit on the mother’s lap to be comforted. Her long eyes have lost their sleep. The mother charges, ‘how can I accept what He did to my frail daughter?’. Kaliyan’s pāsuraṁ 5,7,1. is a beautiful enunciation of the Lord who resides in ‘Arangamānagar’ as the primordial cause. It states, “*The timeless Vedas, the Sacrifices, the ‘Praśnas’, the ‘Vyākhyānas’, their meanings,- the cause of all these-, the sacred fire-altar, the holy waters of rivers, the earth, the clouds, the wind, the seven oceans, the seven mountain ranges, the sky, the Universe- the Lord stands as all these, is the One Who abides in Tiruvarangam.*

Kaliyan’s hymn 5.8. is his ‘Śaranāgathi’ to the Lord of Tiruvarangam in a palpably moving spirit of ‘naichya’, recapitulating legendary illustrations from earlier times to build up a credible case for himself for the Lord’s grace. In the first pāsuraṁ, 5.8.1. Āļvār recalls how the Lord as Sri Rama in a supreme gesture of ‘souśeelya’ condescended to graciously accept the boat-man Guha as his brother. Āļvār says of Rama’s act of grace thus. “*Ēzhai, Ēdhalan, keezhmagan ennādhu irangi*”, ‘You never addressed Guha as, ‘Poor, woe-begotten, and low-born’, but were compassionate to assure him of your grace, thus, “*Māzhai mān madanōkki un thōzhi, umbi embi enru*

ozhindilai, thōzhan nee enakku ingu ozhi”...’ Fawn-like tender-eyed Sita your friend, you made your brother his too; come my dear brother, be my friend always’, you said to him’. Prefacing this legend, Āļvār makes his prayerful submission in the words, “*enra sorkal vandhu Adiyēn manattu irutti, Āzhivanna Nin Adiyinai adaindhen, anipozhil Tiruvaragattu Ammānē!*”, ‘these words come to my mind to haunt me, Ocean-hued Lord, I have come to your lotus feet, O Lord, surrounded by beautiful gardens of Tiruvarangam !.

In 5.8.7. and 5.8.8. Kaliyan describes two legendary episodes from Sri Krishnāvathāra. The verse 5.8.7. is a narrative of Krishna’s schooling and training in the 64 arts under Sage Sāndhipini. On His ‘graduation’, when Krishna inquired of the sage what He could give to him as ‘guru-dakshina’ for the instruction he had received, the master narrated how his only son had been lost in the western ocean and desired Krishna to bring him back to him. Krishna retrieved the lost son of his master, and brought him back as he was when he had gone missing. In 5.8.8. Kaliyan narrates the story of a Brahmin well-versed in all four Vedas, who came with his wife to Krishna, and lamented that no sooner than their children had been delivered, they disappeared through the foul-play of some ogress. The next time a child was due to be born, Arjuna stood guard outside the Brahmin’s house with his bow keeping constant vigil. But this time also eerily and unluckily for the Brahmin couple, the new born mysteriously disappeared, leaving Arjuna perplexed and dumb-founded. Krishna smiled at Arjuna, for the Lord knew that they were in His abode of Vaikunta playing with His consorts. He took Arjuna with him and flew on Garuda towards His celestial abode, whizzing past the ‘archirādi’ path. Asking Arjuna to wait there, He crossed the Viraja river, found the children playing happily in

the Divine Mother's quarters. He then took the babies and brought them back, all four of them, to earth and restored them to the delighted Brahmin couple. Āļvār cites these anecdotes to underline the Lord's 'sakthitva yoga' and 'upāya-pūrti'.

In 5.8.9. Āļvār narrates the story of 'Thondai Mannavan' the king of 'Thondainādu' who was an intimate devotee of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, and enjoyed the special privilege of interacting with the Lord. The verse, describes how the Lord divulged the meaning of the eight-letter 'Tirumantra', and bestowed him with the blessing of 'svarūpa jñāna'. Life thus bore merit for the king who spent his time thereafter in more meaningful pursuits. Āļvār does 'Śaranāgathi' to the Lord referring to this episode. In the same pasuram, Āļvār addresses the Lord as, "*Ulagam alanda Ponnadiyē adaindu uyndēn*"- 'I have reached to thrive under those golden feet that measured the worlds'. Swami Nammāļvār says, "*Anru jñālam alandha Pirān paran senru sēr Tiruvenkatam*"- (T.V.M.-3.4.8). The 'Nityasuris' who wished to have 'darshan' of the Lord of Tiruvenkatam, expressed their desire in the words, "*Ennālē nām mannalandha iñai tāmaraigal kānbadharkku*", (T.V.M.- 6.10.6.). Upaniṣads also affirm, "*Mṛghō na bheema: kucharo girishtā: I Yasyōrushu trishu vikramanēshu* "I Adhikshiyanti bhuvanāni Viśvā" I (V.S.). The Lord presides on that hill in majestic splendor full of eagerness to fulfil Māran's words, "*Adikkeezh amarndu pugundhu Adiyīr ! Vāzhmin*", (T.V.M.-6.10. 11.). It is the same Lord who reclines on his snake-bed in Tiruvarangam, as evident from Pān Perumāl's line "*Vēnkatamāmalai mēl ninrān Arangattaravin Anaiyān*"- (Amalan.). He also refers therein "*Nīlmadhil Arangam*", 'Arangam of long walls' It is in deference to Pan Āļvār's phrase, that Kaliyan constructed the pheripheral wall at Srirangam. Both Āļvārs experienced the Lord of Tiruvarangam as the

altar ego of the Lord at Tiruvenkatam. Incidentally, both Āļvārs were born in the same Tamiḻ month of “*Kārthigai*”, and their stars are contiguous to each other. What similarities between them !

Throughout the decad 7.4 on Tirucherai Lord Sāranātha “*Kansōra*”, Kaliyan dwells on his “*bhāgavatha-śeṣatvam*”, being the loving devotee of Lord’s devotees, on the lines of Swāmi Nammāļvār’s “*Payilum Sudaroli*” (T.V.M.- 3.7) and Kulasekharar’s “*Tēttarumthiral*” (PMLTM-2.1). It is also set on the lines of his own second decad 2.6. on the reclining Lord of the ‘divya-desam’ of Kadalmallai. Thus in the first pāsuram 7.4.1. he says that those who worship the Lord of celestials who abides in cool Tirucherai of bejeweled mansions that rise high to touch the moon are his masters, at whose feet he would like to rest his head, “*En thalai mēlāre*”. Legend has it that when Kaliyan reached the temple here, its entrance was cluttered up with bricks such that he had to crawl on his knees to enter the shrine giving him the virtual experience of touching the feet of the devotees of the Lord who must have passed through the ground at that shrine. Such devotees are always in his heart who worship the Lord with flowers, pure water and chants and are worthier than celestials. His eyes and heart rejoice at their sight. The ultimate goal for him is inseparable union with the elders who always meditate on the Lord and chant His name, “*Pērālan pērōdhum periyōrai orukālum pirikilēnē*”. (7.4.4) The mere thought of such devotees who worship the Lord of Tirucherai with misty eyes and melting heart offering flowers with folded hands, keeps at bay all past ‘karma’ and agents of death.

Finally, we will briefly dwell on Kaliyan’s ‘anubhavam’ of the Lord of Tiruvazhundur, a beautiful ‘divya-desam’ set in serene idyllic surroundings near Tirukkundandhai.

Kaliyan devotes four 'pathikams' to this 'divya-desam' of the Lord "*Āmaruviappan*". the presiding Deity who abides under 'Garuda vimāna'. Garuda enjoys special honour here as in Tirunaraiyur and Srivilliputtur. The 'stala purāna' has it that Lord Āmaruviappan accorded a special status to Garuda since he is 'Vedasvarūpa', in deference to the truth "*Dharmo viśvasya jagatha: pratishtā, Vedō akilō dharma mūlam*". Kaliyan's 7.5. is a narrative on the distinguishing features of Tiruvazhundur.

Kaliyan is fascinated by the streets where Vedic Brahmins worship daily the three fires of 'dakshināgni, gārhapatyam and 'āvahaniyam'. The rich fertile fields, the canals on the banks of which the birds look for food for their young ones, bees that hover in the flower bowers, the smell of fragrant 'aghil' wood smoke with which the women perfume their coiffure, and the tinkling sound of their anklets, all this impresses the Āļvār. In 7.6.2, Kaliyan praises the 'soulabhya' of the Lord in the words, "..... Adiyārkkku 'ah'! 'ah'! enrirangit thennazhundaiyil manni ninra Devādhidevanai yān kandu kondudhilaittēnē", 'the Supreme Lord of all celestials whose heart melts for his devotees with an expression 'ah ! ah !' in compassion, abides here in sweet Azhundhai where I have seen him today'. The decad 7.7. is Āļvār's 'Śaranāgathi' to the Lord of Azhundur whom he addresses in a most endearing way as "*Tiruvukkum Tiruvāgiya Selva!, Deivattukku Arasē !, Seyya Kanna*" !, 'Wealth of the Lady of all wealth, Emperor of all gods, O Darling', (7.7.1). Swami Desikan describes Divine Mother's grace as "*Sarva ākāra sthira samudhayām śampadham*", 'multi-polar, multi-pronged, ever multiplying wealth', and "*Srēyō` Mūrtim Sriyam,* 'embodiment of all prosperity'. Such is Her wealth, and the Lord is Her wealth. Kaliyan goes on to address the Lord with titles galore, among them as 'Sandhogā! Pouzhiyā! Taittriyā !, Sā mavēdiyanē !, Nedumālē!'" 'You are the One

praised in Chōndogya Upanisad, as “Yo vai bhūma` tat sukham....”etc, ‘Brahman the Bliss’. ‘You are the Universal Protector who showers grace and prosperity on those who worship you with Rig Veda hymn “Prajapatē na tvadēdānyanyē viśvājātāni baritā bhabhūva ! yatkāmāstē juhumastannō astu vayam śyāma padhayōrayinām”. ‘You are the exalted One worshipped in ‘Taittriya’ texts as “Tadēvāgni tadvāyustadsuryas tadchandramā: I tadēvasukramamritam tad Brahma tadāpas sa Prajāpati:” I”You are the One worshipped through Sāma chants of “svasti na Indro vriddhasravā: I svasti na: pūshā viśvavedāh; I svasti nastākshyō arishtanēmih:I svasti na: Bruhaspatidadhātu I”. Āļvār performs śaranāgathi with the prayer, “Anji ninnadi adaindēn Azhundurmēl disai ninra Ammāne””, ‘I have sought refuge in your feet, O Lord-in-residence in the western Azhundur’. In decad 7.8 Āļvār worships Lord Āmaruviappan as the representation of Lord’s various incarnations, as Lord Hayagrīva, Gajendra Varada, Mahā Varāha, Nrsimha, Vāmana, Rama, and Krishna.

Kaliyan’s second Prabandham ‘Tirikkuruntāndakam’ a short poem of twenty pāsūrams, is virtually a take-off from Peria Tirumōļi to dispel his sense of let-down in the face of Lord’s silence to his prayers in the last section thereof. He does this by seeking vicarious relief by indulgence of his thoughts and feelings in Lord’s auspicious qualities. It is like a person of unmitigated thirst, finding a cool stream and not only drinking from it, but playing around in it to show his appreciation. Likewise, Āļvār’s Tirukkuruntāndakam is a poetical composition addressed to the Lord in His praise as a staff of support and a source of sustenance, the expression of the soul seeking recourse to the Divine through sincere prayers and worship to escape from the worldly bondage. Scholars aver that though in its technical Tamil ‘yappu’

grammar, the poem may not fit into the ‘tāndakam’ structure, it is musical like its foil Tiruneduntāndakam Āḷvār’s last Prabandham which satisfies the grammar in part. Both are a continuation of Āḷvār’s ‘arcāvathāra-anubhavam’. As Sri Azhghiyamanavāḷapperumāl Nāyanar makes the point in churnikas 131 and 132 of his Achāryahrudayam, like a river in spate foraying for multiple outlets to the ocean, there is no grammatical boundary for the divine devotional poetry of Āḷvārs.

The very first verse sets the tone for the lilting rhythm of the phrases and divinity-soaked music that runs through the whole poem. In the first verse, Kaliyan describes the Lord in the words, “*Nidhiyinai, Pavalattoonai, nerimaiyāl ninaiya vallār gathi- yinai, Andam ālum madhiyinai,.. vāzhitti en manattu vandha vidhiyinai*”, ‘the Lord is my treasure, my coral pillar, sole refuge of those who seek him through worship, the supreme Ruler of the universe, the Divinity that has entered my heart. Āḷvār says in the last line that having worshipped him, he would never ever leave him. In the fourth verse, Āḷvār pours out his overwhelming love for the Lord in the words, ...”*poonkezhvu vannanārai podharakkanavil kandu vākkīnāl karumam tannāl manattināl, siraddhai tannāl vētkai midhūra vāngi vizhunginērkkku inaiyavārē*”, ‘having seen the soft-flower like Lord in my dream, and pulling him to me through thought, word, deed and faith, I have swallowed him with love. How sweet He is to me!’ There is a resonance of Tondaradippodigal who was probably his contemporary in his verse 13 on the Lord of Tiruvarangam, in the last two lines of which he uses the same words as Tondaradippodi Āḷvār in Tirumālai (17). The lines read, “... ‘*surumbu amar sōlai soozhnda Arangamākoyil konda karumbinaik kandu kondū en kan inai kalikkumārē*”, ‘my eyes feast on the sweet-as-sugarcane Lord of Arangam, who has his shrine amid

groves where bees hum.' Pāsurams 15 and 16 beginning with *"Mun polā Irāvanan"* and *"Māyamān setru"* on Rāmāvathāra and the churning of the Milk Ocean are *"Sātrumural pāsurams"* recited daily in temples and homes after the Lord's 'Tirumanjanam'.

The verse 18 *"Īlaippinal iyakkam nīkki"*, describes the 'yoga' discipline which, along with 'bhakti-mārga' was being followed in Vaishnavism before Ālavandār's time at one stage. Guruparamapara records how sage Nāthamuni passed on the Āļvār Prabandhams to Uyyakkondār and his 'yoga-sāstra' to his other disciple Kurugai Kāvalappan. Owing to a quirk of fate, this was lost after him. This is only incidental as all this happened after the Āļvār's age. Pāsuram 18 explaining the 'yoganeri' sums it up as follows: 'Seated firmly without fatigue, bringing the eyelids together and subduing the senses, harness the mental faculties directing the free flow of thoughts with love in one's heart to centre on the Lord. In the unfolding effulgence, that emerges, one can see the Divine in a brilliant arc of light'. Āļvār says that 'those who do so surely see the truth'...." *Ātmā vā arē drashtavyah; srōthavyah; manthavyah; nidhidyāsithavyah;....*" (B.Up.-2.4.5). In verse 19, Kaliyan says that the Lord who once rid the curse of Siva who had had to wander around begging with the skull of Brahma stuck in his hand, resides in the 'divya-desam'(s) of Tirukkandiyūr, and Arangam, Tirumeyyam, Kanchi, Tiruppēr and Mallai. The only way to salvation is to worship Him. Incidentally, Kaliyan is the only Āļvār who by offering his 'mangalāśāsana to Lord Haraśapavimōchana of Tirukkandiyūr, elevated this shrine to 'divya-desam' status.

Āļvār's Tiruvezhukku Tirirukkai which is his third Prabhandam is a pictorial poem called 'Ratha bandham' (as depicted in the Annexure called 'Rathabandham'

using numbers from 1 to 7 in two pyramids to resemble a chariot, in the middle of which the Divine Lord's image takes its place. Each half is then in the form of a seven-tiered pyramid with the top one an upright pyramid and the bottom one an inverted one, with 13 slots at the broad end and three where the pyramid tapers off. Each of these slots is filled with numbers from 1 to 7; for instance the top most tier of three slots would be filled with 1,2,1, the next one with 1,2,3,2,1, the third one with 1,2,3,4,3,2,1 and so on, with the base ending with 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,6,5,4,3,2,1. The Prabhandam should begin with words incorporating the numbers, one, two, and one again, and proceed in this manner to the last line of the pyramid, with words containing the numbers 1 to 7, and back to 1 again. The entire structure would be in reverse order in the upturned pyramid with the first tier consisting words with numbers 1 to 7 and back to 1, gradually decreasing to three slots 1,2,1 in the smallest tier.

It is said that Kaliyan got inspiration for this prabandham from the divine sanctum of Lord Amudhan of Tirukkudandhai which is a carved structure of a chariot with elephants and horses yoked to the chariot. It is a magnificently unique piece of temple art, the like of which does not exist anywhere else. Āḷvār's poem is woven out of words representing numbers either literally or with meaning, into an enthralling garland in 47 lines, of superb aesthetic sense and deep spiritual thought, which is lilting in metric harmony, profound in message, soaked in 'bhakti' and conceptually magnificent overall. 'Tiruvezhukkutrirukkai' is Kaliyan's homage to his most favorite Deity Amudhan who enjoys the unique pride of place in all of his Prabandhams. At the end of it, Āḷvār perform 'Prapatti' to the Lord. Legend has it that the Āḷvār had a 'Chitrattēr' or Chariot built for Amudhan and presented it to the shrine. The Saiva saint Tirujñāna

Sambandhar who was a contemporary of Kaliyan has composed a poem dedicated to Lord Siva in Sīrkāzhi in a similar fashion comprising 56 lines.

It needs to be pointed out in this context, that another Āḷvār who had a fascination for numbers was Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār who also, like Kaliyan, had a magnetic attraction for Lord Amudhan and vice versa, such that the Lord wished to appropriate his 'Āḷvār' title, conferring on him His own 'Pirān' title in exchange. Tirumaḷisai Pirān's first pāsura in his Tirucchanda Viruttam beginning with words "*Bhūnilāyavaindumāy*", uses numbers from one to five, and gives the following meaning: 'O Lord, Thou art the five gunas inhering in the earth, the four subtle essences in water, the three inherent in fire, the two in the mighty wind, and the one in space. Thou art the Soul of the sentient entities. Who can understand Thee as Thou art.'

The poem of Kaliyan begins with the description of the creation of Brahma in the first two lines which read as follows: "*Oru pēr undhi irumalattavisil, oru murai Ayanai eenranai*"; 'On an incomparable navel from which a lotus of commensurate expanse - "*iru malar*", or 'a lotus seat on which Brahma sprang sitting cross-legged'- 'once You brought forth Brahma'. It does not mean that Lord created Brahma only once. It is just symbolic of Brahma's creation after every 'kalpa'. Āḷvār then proceeds to describe the Rama, Vāmana, Gaṇeśa Varada, and Varāha incarnations. Describing the Vāmanāvatāra, Āḷvār says, "*moovadi nānilam vēndi, muppuri noolodu mānuriyilangu, mārvinin iru pirappu, oru māñāgi, orumuraiyīradi moovulagalandhanai*", 'asking for three footsteps of land (four types, of land, viz. "*mullai*", "*kurunji*", "*neidhal*", "*marudham*"), wearing three-stringed thread, and covering his chest with deer skin,

the incomparable Brahmin celibate – “*dvija*” – measured with two steps the three worlds’. The rescue of Gajendra the elephant king is described thus : “*nāttrisai nadunga anjiraipparavai ēri, naalvāy mummudhat tirusevi oru tani vēzhat tarandaiyai, oru nāl irunīr maduvul tīrttanai*”..... Then ‘with all beings in the four directions trembling’, at the Lord’s rising anger at the elephant’s distress call and crocodile’s truculent strangle-hold on the hapless elephant-, ‘you got on the colourful fast-winged bird Garuda, to save the long-mouthed, three- secretions-flowing, two-eared unique elephant Gajendra’, and ended his suffering one day in a brimful pond’. Alternatively, “*irunīr madu*” could be taken to mean the pond which is favorable to amphibians like the crocodile, but unfavorable to land species like the elephant. Perīālvār’s line “*oppilēnāgilum ninnadi adaindhēn Ānaiṅku Nee arul seidhamaiyāl*” is evocative; Kaliyan’s inner desire is that the Lord should rescue him like He did Gajendra. Legend has it that when the Lord came to the bank of the pond, for one moment he tarried because he did not want to cause more damage to the elephant in trying to extricate him from the crocodile’s mouth. So he first lifted both the elephant and crocodile out of water, and embracing both brought them on to the bank. Then He adroitly cut open the jaws of the crocodile with his discus, before safely pulling out the elephant’s leg. Then like a mother would closely examine the child fallen into a well and rescued from it if it had suffered any hurt anywhere, the Lord also showed His melting concern for the elephant by closely looking at all its limbs, its ears, mouth etc. Someone asked Bhattar in this connection, if the Lord should have embraced the ‘bhāgavatha’ adversary crocodile also along with the elephant. Bhattar is said to have replied, that it is akin to a wrestler engaged to train with the royal prince getting equally royal fare like the prince to nourish his body.

Āḷvār goes on to describe that the Lord is very much the granter of the goals of those who undertake 'karma yoga' practices,- "*karmanaiva hi samsiddhim āstitā Janakā-dayah:-*" (B.G.- 3.20) 'by action alone Janaka and others attained their sublime goal.' and also the Supreme Goal attained by 'bhakti-yoga nishtās'. Of Karmayoga practitioners, he says, "*muttīnānmarai ivaigai vēlvi, aruthozhil andhañar vaṅangum tanmaiyaī*", 'He is worshipped with three fires, ('gārhapatyam' 'āvahanīyam', 'dakshināgni'), four Vedas, five-fold sacrificial rituals, ('deva yajña', 'pitṛu-yajña', 'bhūta yajña', 'brahma-yajña' and 'manushya yajña'), by Brahmins of six-types of occupations, ('adyayanam', 'adyāyanam', 'yajanam', 'yājanam', 'dhānam' and 'pratigraham'). They can learn, teach, conduct sacrifices, have sacrifices conducted for them, give gifts or alms, and accept gifts or alms.). Kaliyan continues to dwell on the Lord's overarching supremacy and powers. He is the Lord in 'yoga-nidra' whose lotus feet are lovingly caressed always by Sri Devi and Bhū Devi of luminescent countenance like the moon. Evidently, the reference is to Lord Amudhan of Tirukkudandhai in reclining pose with Sri Devi and Bhū Devi at His lotus feet. There is a fascinating description of the natural ecological richness of Tirukkudandhai which is surrounded by nectar-filled flower-gardens due to the grace of the 'katāksham' of the Lord, creepers (betel leaves which abound there), the full-flowing Cauvēri which washes down gold and gems, (Āḷvār's imagery) which adorn the palatial homes of its denizens, and the amber-coloured rich rice fields. It is prosperous Tirukkudandhai, the haven of the learned Brahmins who seek the Lord for His own sake with chants from the Vedānta. Āḷvār's devout prayer to the Lord is, "*Ādaravamaliyil arituyil amarndha Parama, ! Ninnadiyinaip panivan varumidara-gala mātrō vinaiyē*", 'O Lord, Who art in 'yoga-nidra'

repose under the well-spread hood of the serpent ! I have surrendered unto Thy feet, so You may remove my affliction of ‘samsāric’ bondage. Āḷvār’s prayer resonates with Swami Nammāḷvār’s line, *“tariyēn ini Un Saranam tandhu en sanmam kalaiyāyē”*, (T.V.M.- 5.8.7.), ‘I cannot bear anymore, pray O Lord, grant me refuge under thy feet, and rid my repeated births.’

The Tamil poet Kambar is believed to have composed a verse beginning with the words, *“Idankonda nenjattinangi kidappana”*, in honour of the Āḷvār, which is also recited at the end of the recitation of this Prabandham. This verse is to the effect that the Āḷvār’s expansive heart is for ever in union with Lord Amudhana’s lotus feet. As Swami Nammāḷvār puts it, *“nenjamē nīl nagarāgha irunda en Tanjanē”*, echoing the Upaniṣadic pronouncement, *“Hrudayam tat vijānīyāt viśvasyāyatanam mahat”*. This Prabandham is recited during ‘ratōtsavam’ festival in most ‘divya-desams’.

Even after all his exertion to woo the Lord, finding no sign of any thaw on the part of the Lord, Āḷvār decides to exert pressure on the Lord by resolving to snatch His grace any how, through open exhibition of inner feelings, and trying to paint the Lord in a ‘red’ light, as hard-hearted and uncaring, in the hope of whipping up some sympathy. The Āḷvār’s next two Prabandhams called ‘Siria Tirumadal’ and ‘Peria Tirumadal’ are the outpourings of his emotions in this direction. In Siria Tirumadal he takes up a stance towards the ‘Vibhava’ form of the Lord, while in the Peria Tirumadal, his attempted tirade is towards ‘archa’ Lord in ‘divya-desams’, looked upon as the ultimate outpost of compassion. This had its desired effect on the Lord, who was dismayed that if He should remain unresponsive now, the worldly beings would lose faith,

and write off the principle of divinity itself as a figment of imagination or futile, and rushed to shower His grace on the Āļvār by appearing before him. Āļvār's last Prabandham 'Tiruneduntāndakam' is the celebration of the fulfillment of Kaliyan's spiritual saga.

The term 'madal' refers to a mat woven out of palm leaves. In ancient Tamil culture, there was a practice in rural South of a male lover spurned by his object of love, daring to publicly display his ire and frustration with her, by having a small chariot, or make-believe pony, made out of palm leaves, and painting himself black, and going round the village seated thereon pulled by some sympathisers of his cause bemoaning his fate, and publicly denouncing her as the agent provocateur with no real love for him, in order to win her back. There is mention of this practice in Tamil literature such as 'Silappadhikāram' etc. Cultural modesty evidently had prevented women from revealing their passion in public, and attempting anything in this manner. Kaliyan, himself mentions, *"Annanadaiyār alarēsa ādavarmēl mannu madaloorār enbadhōr vāsagamum, tennuraiyil kēttarivadundu"*, 'I have heard that in Tamil tradition, swan-gaited women would not resort to this 'madal' for their men'. So he says that he prefers to follow the northern tradition in this respect where he finds a precedent in the character of Vāsavadatta, daughter of Indra who took to the streets for the sake of her lover. This story is related in Kalidas's Vikramoorvashiyam. Āļvār clearly sings these two Prabandhams assuming the role of a 'nāyaki'. It is relevant to mention though, that while Parakāla Nāyaki says, she would resort to 'madal oordal', fortunately for her and the Lord, she did not have to resort to anything like that. It is really an expression of Āļvār's sublimation of the third 'purushārtha of kāma' by channelising the superb emotion of love towards the

Divine. As Tiruvarangattamudanār says in ‘Rāmanusa Nootrandādhi’, “*Kannanukkē āmadhu kāmam*” (40), ‘Love is Divine’. The Lord is the embodiment of love.

The undertones of Āļvār’s ‘madal oordal’ endeavor, find an echo in Peria Tirumoli itself, in his Tiruppullāni hymn 9.3., wherein the Nāyaki, unable to bear her separation from the Lord anymore, invokes the companionship of her heart in her journey to Tiruppullāni. She addresses her heart to confide how the Lord beguiled her and blended with her in the garden of flowers uttering sweet-nothings, and swearing his love saying that His life would ebb away without her, but just vanished to far shores of Pullāni to reside there.

Āļvār begins his Siria Tirumadal with an astute observation on human psychology. He says that this wide world which is the embodiment of Bhū Devi, is inhabited by humans who live their life by the cardinal principles of “*dharma, artha, and kāma*”. Those who seek the third, get the other two as well, while those who swear by a fourth, can only speak of it, and that too as hearsay. They who manage to enter the domain beyond the stellar regions, and remain there enjoying the nectar of immortality, never return to tell their story, do they? Be that as it may. ‘Why would one hanker after the crow in the sky, when one already has a hare in hand’!,

Parakāla Nāyaki then goes on to set the background to her story by saying how she, a demure innocent damsel fell for the lovely Lord of lotus eyes who had come calling to her neighbourhood doing steps with pot in hand to the beat of drums, asking the women to take their turn to tango with him, and how she was nudged by them went too, unsuspecting, only to fall victim to cruel fate. She lost her sheen and mind, bangles got loose and fell off, her body itself became sickly. The worried mother

smearred red 'kumkum' over her, and worshipped 'sāsta', (rural guardian demi-god) for her, but all that did not cure her heart-ache or help restore her colour. Then as a last recourse, the sooth-saying gypsy, "*Kattuvichi*" (in Sampradaya, it refers to Āchārya) was summoned to diagnose her ailment. A dark-haired gypsy came and threw a handful of grain on a winnow plate, then sweating and shaking all over came up with the diagnosis. She said, 'it is the One with a thousand names', "*Devō nāma sahasravān*". She drew a dark frame, and drew thereon a symbol to resemble a conch, and showed a 'tulsi' garland before elaborating. She said assuringly not to fear anything. She added that she knew Him well, and went on to describe that what ailed the girl was nothing but the Lord who had measured the worlds, ground Lanka to dust, and held aloft the mountain as shield against the hail. She followed it up with a fascinating narrative on the various episodes of stealing butter, dancing on the serpent from Krishnāvathāra etc, and the events leading to the slaying of Ravana from Ramāvathāra. Then she related the legends of man-lion form the Lord took to finish off Hiranya, the Vāmanāvathāra He took to save the three worlds from the tyranny of Mahābali, the rescue of the elephant Gajendra who called pitifully to the Supreme Being, "*Nārāyana! O Manivanna ! Nāganaiyāy, ! Vārāy, en ār idarai neekkāy!*" "*Nārāyana !, O Gem-hued Lord !, O Serpent recliner!, Come save me, and remove my distress !.*" The "*Kattuvichi*" concluded that it was that One of thousand names that was 'afflicting' the daughter.

The mother felt reassured that it was none else except Him whom the daughter was devoted to. So she said addressing the women around, 'when my daughter is so devoted to him, would He not give His cool 'tulsi' garland and assuage her fever; after all He is no stranger to her.' With no one to come to her succour, the girl addressed

her heart to take a message from herself in secret to the gem-hued Lord, to find out if He would grant His excellent 'tulsi' garland, whether he paused or said 'no', cautioning it not to stay on there itself, but come back to her. But lo !, the heart deserted her and stayed back as she had feared. The girl growing increasingly despondent that there was none else to turn to now, and cursing herself that she had become an object of fun to the neighbourhood, is on the verge of delirium, her soul melting away like candle and starts raving his names loud. She is awake while the whole town sleeps. Her love wells up like the tides in the ocean. Who knows how cruel can that kind of unrequited love get? She cannot stand it any further. She does not care any more, let people dare to preach to her. It would not matter to her in the least. Now she would not cease till she gets to see the dark-hued frame of the Lord who broke the maruda trees. She will go roam the streets of all temple towns where the Lord resides, raving the countless auspicious names of the red-lotus-eyed, 'tulsi'-clad Lord, crying out his thousand names. So saying, Parakāla Nāyaki swears she will ride the long rough-edged palmyra hobby-horse through the streets of these towns, no matter what it takes, and regardless of whatever public disdain it might unleash. Āḷvār lists the names of 28 divya-desams from Tiruvenkatam, Tirukkoyalur to Tirumogur, and Māḷiruncholai, even northern Bhadri and Mathura.

Peria Tirumadal is a take-off from Siria Tirumadal. Sri Periaṁcchān Pillai likens 'madal oordhal' attempt to a zero-sum game. His phrase is "*pōr suttu porī korikkai*". What it means is that it is as satisfying an experience as lighting up a pile of straw and trying to savour the sparks that fly therefrom. The madal-lady's daring can only be self-destructive since those who are her kin would drop her like hot coal. Those around the hero the love-object

of the ‘madal’, would move away from him hearing all the slogans riled against him by his own lover designed to make his qualities look diminished by such negativity. Siria Tirumadal only served to enhance the desire in the Āļvār for the Lord’s experience. It is said that even a fool would not indulge in a futile exercise. But why would he want to try the same gambit? It is because Vedāntic bhakti transforms into love “*bhakti: srungāravrutya parinamati*”, (Dr.Ta.Ra.- 3). Without that intense and unswerving mental focus and determination, attainment of the Divine is not possible; “*paramātmani yo rakthō virakthō aparamātmani*”, ‘he who loves the Divine is indifferent to things other than that’.

At the outset of the Peria Tirumadal, Āļvār’s Nāyaki seems to scoff at ‘dharmārtha- moksha’ ‘purushārthas’ when he comments on those who torture their bodies with severe penance to get to heaven, questioning if there is someone, anyone at all, who had gone there and ever returned to tell about it. His idea is not to detract from it, but to commend the ‘kama-purushārtha’, directed toward the Divine as more pragmatic and immediately rewarding. She cites from the Ramayana, to make the point how the delicate, Sita of swan-like gait walked behind Rama to forest, with unflinching loyalty and love braving all the hardships, “*Anna nadaiya anangu nadandilalē*”. Other legends are described to illustrate how resolute women can be in their love, and pursue their goal with unstinting focus and determination. Then Parakāla Nāyaki reverts to her own story of affliction. Her crush is on the Lord who resides in Tirunaraiyur divya-desam surrounded by groves. The slightly high-raised shrine looks big like a mountain, due to the heightened level of bhakti in her. She went past the golden doors somehow, her mind racing before her to enter. There she beheld the Lord with delighted eyes, “*kankalippa nōkkinēn*”. But she could first only reach upto

His chest out of shyness, since beside Him was Divine Mother clinging to Him like a tender creeper. The Royal of royals stood there like a dense thicket of lotuses with all His divine accoutrements. That was all. She felt growing weak on her knees, her mind and heart were slipping away with her bangles and waist band; calm sea was roaring now, the moon light felt like the hot sun, the cool breeze from southern hills wafting sandal fragrance felt like hot wind. The cupid's arrows struck her before anyone could stop him.

Nāyaki's fully evolved spiritual sense is imbued with consciousness of her self's dependence on the Lord, 'pāratantryam'. The 'bhakti' or devotion born out of that knowledge can only be to her Lord. In Āḷvār's metaphor, it is Nāyaki's ripe womanhood and her soft heaving breasts which crave a niche in the broad chest of the Lord who abides shining like a golden mount in Tirukkannapuram. If that does not happen, what use is it ? It can only be akin to a nectar-filled fragrant flower of a rare creeper in a rocky forest wasting its aromatic nectar on to the hard floor, instead of bathing the target object. She mourns 'what use are my limbs to me now', like Āndāl Nāchiār felt when she expressed, "*kollum payanonrilāda kongai*". 'Is there no medicine to conserve their youthfulness'? Nāyaki reflects on who had brought her to this pass. Then follows her litany of grievances on, how and by whom, she has been brought to this intolerable condition. First and foremost, it is "*my King*", who wears the 'tulasi' garland, the dark cloud-hued one who rid the moon of his curse and exuding the fragrance of the tiny 'kāya' flowers, who made a bridge to cross over to Lanka and felled the ten heads of the Rākshasa king. It is the same One who had come as a strong, fiery-eyed man-lion who grabbed the 'Asura' king Hiranya, and grabbing and placing him over

His lap, tore into his mighty chest with His bare nail. Earlier, He had come as a boar with sharp-curved tusk and lifted the Earth when the demon Hiranyāksha had hidden it under the ocean, and danced with it. He came as the benevolent one who churned the ocean once with a mountain for a churning stick and a snake for a rope, and brought forth the ambrosia which He gave to gods to end their long period of agony. Then again, the same one came in disguise as a dwarf Brahmin to Mahābali's sacrifice and charmed and tricked him to gifting him three foot- steps of land, only to grow in an instant and touch the sky taking the whole universe as His, He who is the spouse of slender-waisted Mahā Lakshmi.

Then Nāyaki turns her attention to the 'arca' form of the Lord in His various shrines, since it is her avowed intention to chase Him through wherever she can find him and hold him to account. He is the one that 'shines like a gold mountain in Vinnagar. He is the gem-washed Kudandhai's fighter-bull; the coral mountain of Kurungudi; the benevolent One of cool Tiruchera; 'my sweet ambrosia' of Vayalali where swans nestle among lotuses; the 'kalpaka' tree, the radiant Son of Kannamangai; the emerald treasure-house of Vellarai; the fighter-bull of Pukkuli; the mountain gem of wealthy Arangam; the groom of Nappinnai in Vallavāzh; the birthless One of Tiruppēr; the uncut Gem reclining in the ocean ; the wonder Lord of Kadalmallai; the deft strong one of Tiruttankāl; the Lord who swallowed the Universe; the wonder Lord who appeared in a vestibule in Kovalur; the wonder child who sucked the life out of the ogress; wealth of Tillai Chittrakootam; the Lord of the cloud-covered Venkatam, and on and on the list runs its long course, describing in between His distinctive supreme powers as the sole master of time, the substratum of the Vedas, the Supreme Being sung about in "*Aruliccheyal*"

hymns, and spoken about in 'itihāsic' text of Ramayana and others.

Finally, Nāyaki zeroes in on her specific target of interest who has made her heart beat faster and given her all the ache that drove her to crave and cringe and rave and rant. She says, "*Nān vanangum Kannanai, Kannapurattānai, Tennaraiyur mannu Manimādakkoyil Manālanai*", 'my lord Krishna of Kannapuram, the groom Lord who abides in the shining gem-studded elevated shrine at Tirunaraiyur'. She will see him with folded hands, and post him completely about her state, as she has been trying to do from time to time, starting from "*Unnai kānbadorāsaīyīnāl vēyēi poom pozhil soozh viraiyār Tiruvenkatavā Nāyēn vandadaīndēn*", (P.T.M.-1.9.1.), 'this dog-begone self has come with a desire to see you', to "*Ōdhamum nānum urangādirundēn*" (P.T.M.-9.4.9.), 'the ocean and I never slept a wink', and "*manjuru Māliruncholai Manālanār nenjam nirai kondu poyinār ninaikinrilar*" (P.T.M.-11.2.8.), "the bridegroom Lord residing in misty Mālirincholai robbed me of my heart's peace without any consideration'. 'If He does not show me His grace, and embrace me, I know what I will do', she says sounding ominous. 'I will unbundle and scatter around all his canards, in the bylanes of thin-waisted ladies (like those in Āyarpādi), before the believing Vedic Brahmins, His own devoted 'bhāgavatha' groups; I will relate all about the specious make-believe show of endearment He enacted only to forsake me and drive me to this situation. I will quote, chapter and verse, from his life of dubious fame at Gokulam, of his stealing butter, of his having been bound to the mortar for petty theft by his own mother, of how as a fearsome 'mahā-bhūtam' he gobbled up, all by himself, a mountain of food at Govardhana, how he went as a lowly messenger of the Pāndavas, with the message leaf tied round his neck to their adversary Duryodhana's court ; what is still worse,

of how as Rama He cut the ears and nose of the Rākshasa woman who was after all love-smitten like me, and as if to cap it all, how he despatched the demoness Thātaka to the nether world, cleverly imputing the blame for the act on to the Brahmin sage. I have much more of Him in my bag, and before I am through with it, He surely would not be able to take it anymore and put up his hands'. The madal concludes on this note.

The last Prabandham of the Āļvār namely Thiruneduntāndakam is the grand finale and celebration of his direct perception of the three fundamental 'tattvas' or 'principles' of 'acit', 'cit' and 'Īśvara', as revealed to him by the Lord. Swami Nammāļvār had a similar experience in 'charama' Prabandham Tiruvāimoli, and affirmed this in his decad 10.10.10. before he found his liberation, "*avāvatru Veedu petra*". In a similar vein, Kaliyan also expresses the fulfillment of his heart's desire at the end of this work in the words, how the Lord came in the form of 'a beautiful cool rainbow-clad rain-filled, dark cloud', "*minnu māmazhai tavazhum mēgha vanna*"- (T.N.-30). This Prabandham is famous for its deep 'sāstraic' significance. Sri Parāsara Bhattar was very much drawn towards it, and won over the famous 'advaitic' Vedāntin from Karnataka and brought him into the fold of 'Viśiṣṭādvaita' as Nanjiyar. Lord Ranganatha "*Peria Perumāl*" was fascinated by Bhattar's rendering of this Prabandham and granted his wish to have a 'Tiruvadhyayana Utsavam' in the present form at Srirangam. Tiruneduntāndakam is recited as a special celebration by itself one day preceding the 'Adhyayana Utsavam'.

Tiruneduntāndakam comprising 30 pasurams is structured in the following manner. The first ten pāsuras are those which Āļvār has sung as his own

person. The next ten are those sung in the voice of the compassionate mother describing the forlorn state of the 'Nāyaki' who is separated from the 'Nāyakan, the Lord'. In the last section of ten pāsuras, the first five are in the nature of the Nāyaki confidences to her companion. Pāsuras 26 and 27 are Nāyaki's message to the Lord addressed to the messengers, the honey bee and crane respectively. Pasuram 28 again is Nāyaki's sharing her emotions with her companion. The last two pasurams are those sung by the Āļvār as his own self.

In the first pāsura which expresses the basic thought of the Viśiṣṭadvaita philosophy, Āļvār says that the Lord, in his grace, revealed to him the three entities of 'acit' tatva, 'cit' and 'Īsvara'. Āļvār uses the term, "*munuruvil minnuruvāi*", 'the lightning - like primordial nature and its evolutes-- the basic elements, 'indriyas', mind etc. comprising twenty-four elements, to refer to 'acit'; the 'cit' or 'jivātma' is referred to as "*pinnuru*", 'the life-force behind the physical body'. The 'God-principle' is described as "*ponnuru*", the golden form of the Divine. It is not possible for anyone to comprehend the true nature of all this in this fashion since one is bound by the enveloping grossness born out of 'karma'. But when Lord's grace descends on the 'jivātman', then the screen of grossness is lifted enabling the 'self' to comprehend the nature of the three principles in their true light. Āļvār speaks from that enlightened plane. The 'jivātman' is further described as "*vilakkoliyāy mulaitthezhunda thingaltānāy*", 'like the rising luminiscent moon in the sky'. Āļvār says "*Vedam nāngāy*," to describe that the Lord has given the sentient beings the 'sāstras' to light up their minds with 'jñāna' to understand the true nature of the 'self' as immortal or what Kaliyan calls 'pirappili', unaffected by age, disease etc afflicting the body "*pinimooopilla*", and as 'śeṣa' meant to serve the Supreme

Being. This was expressed by Parāsara Bhattar in the words, *“hartum tamah: mānam pradeepamiva kārunikō dadhāti”* (S.R.S- 2.1). The Upaniṣad declared it as, *“ātma vā arē ‘srotavya: mantavya: nidhidyāsivyah: drashtavya:”*. The term *“mulaittu”* refers to knowledge arising out of ‘śravaṇa’: *“ezhunda”* is the further refinement brought on by ‘manana’ or ‘dhyāna’ which is the shining moon in the sky. The term *“thingal thānay”* is ‘darśana’ knowledge or actualization. But this is realization of the true nature of the ‘self’ which is like the moon but without the detracting shadow in the moon. In the state of true realization, one can get to see the ‘jivātman’ in its pristine self-luminiscent, blissful state without the shadow of gross cover arising out of contact with the body. The moon analogy is to highlight that since Āḷvār’s ‘ātma darśanam’ is granted by the Lord in His grace, it is pure bliss devoid of any heat. By describing the self as *“pinimoo pillā pirappili”* Āḷvār says that ‘ātma’ is unaffected by the six stages of change, namely ‘asti’, ‘jāyate’, ‘vardhate’, ‘parinamate’, ‘apakṣiyate’, ‘mriyate’. that occur to the body from conception to death. Āḷvār goes on to say about Lord’s grace *“irappadarkkē ennādhū ennum”*, meaning that with His grace, the ‘ātma darśanam’ that ensues is not for ‘kaivalya’ or enjoyment of the self, but for the ultimate ‘purushārtam’ of ‘moksha’. This pāsuram thus expresses Āḷvār’s gratitude to the Lord for granting him the gift of true realization of the ‘svarūpa, rūpa, and gunās’, and reclaiming him from the dangers of ‘prakṛti sambhandam’. This, the Lord did by manifesting His golden form to him, His ‘svarūpa’ and ‘guna-vibhūti’.

In the second pāsuram Āḷvār says that the ocean-hued Lord is the sole Supreme transcendent Being pervading the whole Universe, and Brahma and Rudra are His subordinates. This verse carries the meaning of the Upaniṣadic declaration *“Ekō vai Nārāyaṇa āsīd, na*

brahma nēśānah:”... (M.U.-1). In the third verse, Āḷvār brims with justified pride that the Lord Who assumes different colours in different ages, white in ‘kṛita yuga’, amber in ‘trēta’, green in ‘dvāpara’ and ‘black’ in ‘kali’ age, blessed him by revealing His natural form out of His ‘nirhētuka’ ‘kṛupa’, exulting ‘who could have seen His form as I have seen’ ?. In the fourth verse, Āḷvār underlines the importance of the constant dwelling of the mind on the ‘Tirumantra’ to attain the Lord Who inheres in the transcendent universe as ‘Nārāyana’. He hearkens his heart to join him in this pursuit. The fifth verse is a fascinating description of the Lord’s ‘Trivikramāvathāra’ to exemplify the ‘Nārāyana śabdārtha’. It is the manifestation that one can relate to, to easily grasp the fact that the Lord is ‘Sarva-śeṣi’ or the sole Master of all sentient beings. In the sixth verse, the Lord reassures the Āḷvār that he need have no regret that he had not been born in that age to have been able to enjoy His ‘Trivikrama’ form as He reveals the same form in the ‘divya-desam’ of Tirukkovalur. Āḷvār hastens his heart to bestir to enjoy the Lord’s form there. The seventh pasuram also dwells on Tirukkovalur and its verdant surroundings guarded by the security provided by Durga Devi. In pāsuraṁ 8, Āḷvār reverts to what he likes to do best, that is to let his thought waves linger on ‘divya-desa anubhavam’. In the ninth pāsuraṁ, Āḷvār articulates his anguish as ‘bhagavad-samsleṣam’ seems nowhere in prospect, and his sense of helplessness feeling imprisoned in a body that has very much become a ‘yātana sarīra’ one takes on to suffer the pain of hell which one cannot bear nor has any option to escape. In the tenth and final verse of the first section, Āḷvār expresses his ‘ākinchanya’ or lack of personal capital such as ‘karma’ ‘jñāna yoga’ like Swami Nammāḷvār did in his *“Nōtranōnbilēn”*, (T.V.M.- 5.7). Nammāḷvār confessed that he had no personal capital to

show by way of merit for Lord's grace, but nevertheless was not lacking in his craving and thirst for the Lord, "*ātrakirkinrilēn*", which no one could quench except the Lord. Similarly, Kaliyan also makes clear in this section, that his experience of the Divine through "Tirumantra" is by far his sole pursuit and pastime, and his pursuit is not by way of a 'sādhana' expecting any extraneous reward at the end, but as the goal and fruit in itself.

From the beginning of verse 11, Ālvār gives up his sense of self-identity, and assumes the 'bhāvana' or emotional state of "*nāyaki*", and that too in an advanced transformed state, beyond capacity for clear communication of her feelings. But from her outward signs of behavioural changes, the mother is able to infer and portray her mood and feelings and interpret her actions, aided by a 'Vaishnavite sooth-sayer "*kattuvichi*" when the former seeks her help for diagnosis and remedy of her daughter's malady. In the first pāsuram, the mother says about her doe-eyed daughter of long black tresses, that she is in a state of acute distress with tears welling up in her eyes, does not care for her play-doll, cannot rest on her lap any more or sleep, and keeps inquiring 'where is Tiruvarangam'? So she asks the "*kattuvichi*", 'can you throw light on who did this, tell me'. The latter replies, 'it is the ocean-hued Lord who brought her to this pass. Who can now help her now except Him?'. Pāsuram 12 describes a slightly more alive girl but still in a lachrimose state of trance, who regales herself singing and dancing about the reclining Lord on the serpent, and His chariot Garuda. 'What have I done to deserve this girl who is too much for my hands?', moans the mother. The mother knew that her girl used to sing the Lord's names, and taught her parrot to sing with her. So thinking that if she could now hear the parrot sing the Lord's names, that might bring comfort to her; she brings out the parrot to sing for her,

but the parrot too seems affected by the sad mood of her friend, and does not oblige. Ālvār implies by this, that the disciple is not supposed to recite the Lord's names before the 'Āchārya' (in this case, the 'nāyaki'), without her nod of approval.. Seeing this, 'Nāyaki' the affected daughter, who had taught her parrot to sing, starts singing the Lord's names so that the parrot could follow suit. When the parrot starts singing, the Nāyaki ruminates on the meaning of the Lord's names sung by the parrot. The parrot sings about the Lord who held aloft the Govardhana hill to ward off the pelting rain, who in an earlier incarnation had broken the bow to marry Sita and so on. In the distressed state of Nāyaki, the Lord's names only add to her sense of anguish, and unable to continue further, she lapses again into a languorous state, and seeks refuge in her mother's bosom with tearful eyes. The parrot noticing and empathizing with her mistress, and remembering the Lord's names taught by her in her clear mental state, starts singing them to her in order to revive and rekindle interest in her. The parrot sings, 'O Rising Sun! O sable cloud of Kurungudi! O First One beyond the three worlds! O Immeasurable Ambrosia! O Lord of Arangam who resides in the thought of Vedāntins! O Beacon of Tiruttanka! O Emerald of Vehka! O Lord Tirumāl' ! Gratified by the parrot's song Nāyaki said to the parrot, 'Welcome my pet, my labours have been rewarded,' and folded her hands. Now that Nāyaki has regained her composure, she starts singing herself after tuning up her veena. This refreshes old memories of her union with the Lord, when she has sung dwelling her thoughts on the Lord's qualities, and she, for now, basks in the vicarious enjoyment of those times, strumming the veena as if her fingers were running over the Lord's form. The mother wonders, what if her daughter wakes up to the realisation that she has just been playing on the veena in a state of euphoria that does not represent fact.!

In pāsuram 16, shaken back into her conscious state now, Nāyaki again reverts to her pitiful call to her Lord. She sings *"O my proud Lord, who enjoyed grazing the cows, O my fruit of Kannapuram surrounded by gardens,!"*... and so on, but overcome by emotion again, she tires and leans over her instrument with tearful eyes. Seeing her alternating between extremes in mood and emotion, the mother ventures to counsel her saying that it is not proper for her womanhood or family honour to display her emotions so unabashedly, and she should calm down and just wait. The daughter remonstrates that she cannot worry about her womanhood and family now. The mother tries to convince her that she should desist, lest those around should blame the Lord for acting heartless with her. Those words do not have any effect on Nāyaki who continues with her singing of the Lord of Tirunaraiyur. The mother thinking that it is best to leave her daughter to her devices, inquires of her what she intends to do. Nāyaki responds that there is no point in calling out to him from here, and she would now embark on a visit to where her Lord resides. The mother, inwardly proud of her daughter, shares her confidences to her with others, 'my pretty lass would not listen, and keeps singing that 'her dark-hued Lord has eyes, lips, hands, and feet like lotus petals'. She inquires, 'where is Tiruvarangam?', and adds, 'I will go to the compassionate Lord's shrine at Tirunīrmalai.' Is it not proof that she is beyond her own control?'. The ladies who listened to the mother counter-question the mother, 'why did you not tell your daughter that the Lord whom she covets has a consort who resides in His chest'? The mother replies, 'I tried doing that, but it just boomeranged on me. She said that she would go for the same reason all the same, adding, 'can we go and dance at Arangam?', and has now already left to take a dip in the golden lotus tank. Is your daughter too like her?',

asks the mother. The dip Āḷvār refers to here is ‘avabhruta snānam’, “*ēṣa brahma pravishtōsmi...*”, what is described in Tamil as ‘sunaiyādal’ or delving into ‘bhagavad-vishaya’. The mother concludes her description of the daughter with the trite remark, ‘how can one find a comparison for this girl except to say that she is blessed.?’

The three ‘pathigams’ of Tiruneduntāndakam have been spoken of by Pūrvāchāryas as representing the Lord’s saying in the Gita “*Machittāh: mathgataprānāh: bhōdhayantah: parasparam*” (B.G.-10.9). ‘with their hearts fixed on me, their very breaths centred on me, and sharing their thoughts on me mutually.... Explaining that “*macchittāh:*” is “*madhēka chittāh:*” ‘directing their hearts only on me’, the first ‘pathigam’ which Āḷvār sang as his own self, represents this part. The next phrase “*mathgataprānāh:*” ‘meaning their very lives centred on Him’ encapsulates the next ‘pathigam’ that we saw above. The last phrase “*bhōdayantah: parasparam*” is what is covered in the next ‘pathigam’ which is set in the format of the ‘Nāyaki’ and her companion’s mutual heart exchanges on the Lord. It has also been held that the first ‘pathigam’ is an exposition of “*Tirumantra*”, the second of “*Dvayam*” and the third of the Gita “*Charama Sloka*”. This is discussed at length in the ‘vyākhyānam’ of Swami Perivācchān Pillai, but not touched upon here.

In pāsūram 21 beginning with the words, “*Maivanna narungkunchi kuzhalpin thāzha*”, Nāyaki describes to her companion, ‘My friend! He came and stood before me like the celebrated two-some, with a powerful bow as his companion. His dark, fragrant tresses hung low over His shoulders, his fish-like ‘makara’ earrings dangled flashingly on either side. His hands were like red lotuses, and so were his lips, eyes, and feet. Seeing Him thus, we feared that He was some god on earth’. Nāyaki’s last

words indicate that momentarily, without realizing His 'svarūpa', – as He Himself had said in his incarnation as Rama, "*ātmānam mānusham manyē*"- she had thought of Him as "*vijāthiya*" of a different class, and took a step back in fear, before His reassuring, protective hands. Had not Sri Krishna also said to His Yādava relations not to think of him any differently other than one of their own?, "*Nāham devah: na gandarvah:..... I Aham vō bhāndavō jātah: naitacchintyāmitōnyatā II*"- (V.P-5.13.2.) Legend has it that Sri Parāsara Bhattar had a special fascination for this verse, and the 'vyākhyanam' on this by Sri Periaivācchān Pillai is of great philosophic import. Nudged by the friend to narrate what had actually transpired between Nāyaki and the Lord when they were together, Nāyaki continuing her narrative in verse 22, says that He lingered somewhat taken aback by her recoiling gesture born of shyness, and started singing in a classical raga. Hearing His sweet song, her eyes averted a direct look at Him, and were fixed on His feet. Her bangles broke in joy and the saree slipped (inner meaning being the shedding of ego), she looked up somehow managing to see His 'makara' ear drops and four shoulders. She asked summoning some courage, 'how far is your residence?' He replied pointing to the ground, 'here it is, this beautiful Tiruvāli'.

Her friend then asked her, why she had not tried to stop Him. Nāyaki replies in the next pāsura (23), that she tried but then it had not worked. She says that His chariot Garuda took Him away saying it was not proper to stay in an unfamiliar place for long. So He departed after telling her that Tiruvarangam is His residence. After giving her a dream experience of joy, the honey-dripping 'tulsi'- clad Lord left her behind in Tirumanankollai pining in a state of mental affliction. Suddenly, in her desolate state at His

departure, her body became thinner with the result that her bangles slid down from her wrists. In pāsuram 25, Nāyaki reverts to her image of the Lord's shining form with broad shoulders and long hands, beautiful eyes, the 'makara' ear drops dangling below the line of the fragrant 'tulsi' garland, all of which dazzled before her for what seemed like a lightning duration only to vanish with the same suddenness. In the process, He stole her thoughts, well-being and peace, making her a bond slave of Him to follow Him around, and went away saying that He lives in fertile Tiruvarangam set amid groves of golden blossoms of 'serundi' trees.

In the next two pāsurams, Parakāla Nāyaki seeks to dispatch emissaries to her Lord with her message. In Pāsuram 26, she addresses the six-legged bumble-bee sitting happily with its companion in sweet blossoms of fragrant groves sipping nectar, to proceed to the cow-herd Lord residing in Azhundūr and give him the message without fear that a girl loves him so, and to wait for his response. Nāyaki prefers these beings over human beings in view of past precedents where Hanuman's mission as emissary ended in success, while Krishna botched His mission when he went as the Pāndavas' emissary. Why would 'Nāyaki' address the bee as six-legged specifically as if they help the bees to fly which they do not, since they fly with their wings. Parāsara Bhattar had an interesting take on this. The pāsuram reads, "*aru kāla siruvandē thozhudēn unnai*", 'O, six-legged bumble-bee, I prostrate to you'. Bhattar said that 'Nāyaki' exulted that the bee had six-legs to place on her head by way of benediction. Why should 'Nāyaki' send the bees to Tiruvazhundur, when her Lord is in Tiruvarangam? The answer is that the Nāyaki presumed that the Lord must also have felt bad on the way about giving the slip to a very genuine

lover, and got down at Azhundur instead, to catch a few moments of comfort and peace. So She asked the bee to go to Azhundur instead.

In the next verse (27), "*Senkālamada nārāy*", Nāyaki addresses the lovely red-footed stork to go to her lotus-eyed Lord of Tirukkannapuram and tell Him of her love, promising the stork that if he did that for her, she would gift him with rich pastures for ever where, she would like him to settle in with his mate and choose his pick of juicy fish to feast upon in the water holes and reside in paradisaical bliss. Nothingelse would give her greater satisfaction since she seeks similar blissful experience with her Lord herself. But here too, as in the previous verse, the Nāyaki'dispatches the stork to a different destination namely Tirukkannapuram, instead of Tiruvarangam. Evidently, it must have been due to Āļvār's special affinity to this 'divya-desam'. Or Nāyaki must have thought that once the Lord received her message at Azhundūr, He would not have felt at rest staying there any more, and would have left and arrived in Tirukkannapuram. It is interesting that Āļvār very solicitously offers the choicest of fish to the stork, "*pazhanameen kavarnundunnattaruvan*", aware of the stork's taste for fish, true to the dictum that the disciple (who the Nāyaki is) should always make such offerings to the Āchārya, (the stork) as would please him.

Through pāsūram 28, Nāyaki works out a strategy to take up a resolute stand being miffed by the Lord's dilly-dallying to all her beseeching overtures to come back to her. As against her previous distraught state, she now wears a brighter and clearer look, prompting her companion to inquire how it was possible that notwithstanding her hard feelings about her Lord's indifference to her, she could still appear so bright

and calm. Nāyaki replies to that saying, that she is now determined not to cozy upto him any more, since He was adept in such fleeting dalliances and sudden disappearing acts thereafter. This time, she would see to it that it does not happen, as she is determined to make it her last tryst and embrace. Her companion tries to mollify her, saying that it was quite the normal thing for the Lord to tease even His dearest devotees by seeming to be indifferent. Nāyaki says in this verse, that she would wait for her Lord -- who had destroyed the fortress of Lanka and killed the demon king, Lord who strode the three worlds, and steered the royal chariot in the Bharata war, Lord who is like a dark mountain, a huge elephant,-- to take him into her golden bosom in a deep embrace to show all her bottled-up desolateness, and harness the thrill of all her limbs in that big hug climaxing in a timeless constant of inseparable togetherness.

In pāsuram 29 beginning with the words, “*Anrāyar kulamakalukku*”, sung as his own self, Āļvār in a mood of ‘naichyabhāva’, realizing the unbridgeable chasm between his position – ‘a lowly dog-self’ “*adi nāyēn*”- vis-a-vis the Supreme Lord, but knowing that he resides in fresh water-fed Tiruvinnagar and cool Tirukkudandhai, assures himself that he shall always live thinking of Him. It is this Āļvār’s unique trait to lay bare his ‘shortcomings’ on the one hand, and his total lack of personal credentials or recourse on the other, (“*ākinchanyam*” and “*ananyagatitvam*”), before the Lord, whenever he seeks refuge at Lord’s feet. He had admitted to his lowly ways early on in his life with his confession, “*venriyē vēndi veezh porutkirangi vērkanār kalaviyē karudhi ninravānillā` nenjinai udayēn*” (P.T.M- 1.1.4), ‘looking for success, stooping to ignoble ways, seeking the lascivious company of lowly women, and endowed with a wandering heart never resting anywhere’. As time

passed this ‘naichya bhāva’ became a part of him and stayed till the end. When he had been a common – place thief, the Lord had shown His grace out of His ‘nirhētuka krupā’ at Tirumanankollai. Āļvār prays in verse 29, that the spontaneous and unconditioned grace of the Lord should last with him for ever. Pāsuram 30, the concluding verse of Tiruneduntāndakam is the benedictory verse assuring those who acquire proficiency in this literary garland of Tamil songs sung by Parakālan, dedicated to the cloud-hued Lord of celestials, that their age-old ‘karma’ shall be cut asunder by the Lord who revealed the Vedas taking the form of a swan, and worshipped by sages and seers seeking refuge with him. In addressing the Lord in this pāsuram as, *“Minnu māmazhai tavazhum Mēghavanna”*, ‘O Lord resembling the cool rain-filled cloud capped by the glitter of lightning’, Kaliyan expresses his joy of fulfilment of his quest like Swami Nammāļvār’s exultation in attaining the Lord’s abode in T.V.M.-10.10, *“avāvatru veedu petra Kurughur Satakōpan”*.

We will conclude this narrative about Kaliyan by drawing some comparisons between the distinguishing characteristics of his poetic style and panache and those of other Āļvārs. Sri Parama Kārunika Periaṁvācchān Pillai observes that in pāsuram 13 beginning with the words, *“kalleduttu kalmāri kāttāy! enrum”*, and 16 beginning with the words, *“kanru mēyttu inidhuganda kālāy enrum”*, and a few others, Kaliyan exhibits a flair for describing a ‘vibhavāvathāra’ in one line and ‘arcāvathāra’ in another alternately, unlike other Āļvārs who usually enjoy singing about ‘vibhava’ form in one pāsuram or stanza and ‘arcā’ form in another. Sri Periaṁvācchān Pillai says that the royals being used to patrician and epicurean tastes and mores have this habit of adding ghee to each morsel of food they eat; in similar vein, this Āļvār has to include his favourite ‘arca anubhavam’ also, in every stanza where he enjoys the ‘vibhavam’. As we saw at

the outset, his primary focus of interest is ‘divya-desa anubhavam’; that is his main source of sustenance. Other Āļvārs, on the other hand, experience the different forms of the Divine in discrete segments. Thus, when they wish to experience and sing about the Lord’s supremacy and exalted nature, they would sing about Lord in His celestial abode. When they wish to speak about His felicity and protective condescension, they would sing about the ‘vibhava’ manifestations. In order to experience the visual joy of these qualities, they would sing about the ‘arca’ form in His various shrines. Kaliyan sees all this in one consolidated form in the ‘arcāvathāra’.

Interesting contrasts have been drawn between Kaliyan’s and Swami Nammāļvār’s styles. Kaliyan mentions the ‘divya-desa’ name in the concluding pāsūram of the decads. This feature does not always find place in Nammāļvār’s Tiruvāymoļi. For example in the case of Nammāļvār, in the decads on the ‘divya-desams’ of Tirukkurungudi (Tirukkurungudiyadanmēl), Sirivaramangalanagar (Sirivaramangai-mēya), Tiruvallavāzh (Tiruvallavāzhtennagarmēl), Tiruvanvandūr (Tiruvanvandūrkkū) the name of the ‘divya-desam’ is mentioned in the concluding pāsūram as shown in the brackets. In the decads on Tirukkurugur, Tirukudandhai, Tiruvāranvilai, Tiruchittrāru, Tiruppuliyūr, Tiruppulingudi, Tirukkātkarai, and Tirukkannapuram, there is no mention of the name of ‘divya-desam’ in the concluding pāsūram. Kaliyan who normally mentions the name of ‘divya-desam’ in the concluding pāsūram, sometimes leaves out any such mention elsewhere in the decad. In the decad on the ‘divya-desam’ Tirunāgai 9.2. Kaliyan mentions “*Nāgai-Azhagiyār*” in the concluding pāsūram, but does not mention the ‘divya-desam’ anywhere else. Similarly, in the decad 8.5. on Tirukkannapuram, Kaliyan mentions the ‘divya-desam’ in the ninth pāsūram, but not elsewhere.

Nammāļvār would not refer to any other ‘divya-desam’ in his ‘mangalāsāsanam’ on a ‘divya-desam’. The only exception to this is “*Pulingudi kidandu*” T.V.M.- 9.2.4. where in he also mentions “*Varagunamangaiyirundu*”, and “*Vaikuntattul ninru*”. Kaliyan’s decads are replete with references to multiple ‘divya-desams’ in several decads. Similarly, he sometimes mentions the Lord’s name of a ‘divya-desam’ in a decad on a different ‘divya-desam’, as for example, “*Tiruvenkatamāmalaimeya Ārāamudhē*”, (P.T.M.1.10.3), “*Āmaruvinirai mēytta Arangattammān*”, (P.T.M.- 5.6.10). Āndāl has also sung in a similar vein, “*Nalvenkatattul ninra Azhagappirānār*”- (N.T.- 10.8.). Among Āļvārs only Kaliyan has sung in the ‘Chittirakkavi’ grammar. It is significant that Kaliyan has commended his Peria Tirumozhi as “*Intamizh*”, while Swami Nammāļvār lauds his Tiruvāimoļi as “*Iruntamizh nool*”. Both have not claimed as having sung their poetry of their own volition as free agents, but as instruments of God Who sang of Himself in their voice. As such, it was eminently appropriate of them to have commended their own poetry as “*Intamizh*” and “*Iruntamiļnool*” respectively. This is the hallmark and crowning glory of “*Aruliccheyal*” pāsūrams of Āļvārs as they truly are the celestial songs of the divine bards.

Taniyans—Peria Tirumozhi.

Composed by Tirukkōlur Nambi.

*“Kalayāmi kalidvamsam Kavim lōkadivākaram I
Yasya gobhi: prakāsabirā vidyam nihatam tamah: II
I salute Kalikanri the destroyer of Kali, the poet who
shines like the sun on earth whose rays dispel the
darkness of ignorance.”*

Composed by Emperumānār.

*“Vāzhi Parakālan vāzhi Kalikanri
vāzhi Kuraiyalūr vāzhvēndan – vāzhiyarō
māyōnai vālvaliyāl mandirankol mangaiyar ko`n
thooyōn sudarmāna vēl”*

Long live Parakāla, long live Kalikanri, long live the king of Kuraiyalūr, long live the chief of Tirumangai who, by the prowess of his sword, extracted from the mesmerising Lord the eight-letter Mantra, and long live the shining big spear of the immaculate One.

Composed by Koorattālvān

*“Nenjukkirul kadidheepam adangā nedum piravi
nanjukku nallavamudham tamizh nannool turaigal
anjukkilakkiyam āranasāram parasamayap
panjukkanalin pori Parakālan panuval galē”.*

The poetry of Parakālan is the lamp dispelling the mind’s darkness, the elixir for the poison of endless travail of rebirths, the unique exemplar of the five-fold rules of excellence in Tamil arts, quintessence of Upaniṣadic truths, the spark of fire for the rags of heretic religions.

Composed by Embār

*“Engal gathiyē Irāmānusa muniyē’
sangaik keduttānda tavarāsā -- pongu pugazh
mangaiyar kōn eendha maraiyāyiramanaittum
thangumanam nee yenakkut tā”*

O Ramanuja Sage, our refuge, the king among seers and ascetics who ruled by resolving all knotty doubts in ‘Sāstraic’ texts, pray grant that we may treasure in our hearts all the thousand songs of the famous chief of Tirumangai Kaliyan.

Kaliyan’s Tirunakshathra couplet.

*“Vricchikē Krittikā jātam chatushkavi Sikhāmanim I
Shat-prapandha kritam Sārngamunim Kalihamāsrayē II*

I seek refuge with Kaliyan born under star ‘Krittikai’ in Tamil month “Kartikai”, the crown jewel among poets skilled in all four facets of poetry, who sang six prabandhams, the celestial seer who was an ‘amśa’ of the Lord’s bow.

Taniyan of Tiruvezhukkūtrirukkai

*“Seerār Tiruvezhukkūtrirukkai ennum sentamizhāl
Ārāvamudhan Kudandhaip Pirānran adiyinaikkeezh
Ērār maraipporulellām eduttivvulaguyyavē
Sōrāmar sonna Arulmāri pādham tunai namakkē”.*

The shower of grace – “Arulmāri”-- Tirumangai Ālvār rendered in mellifluous Tamil ‘Tiruvezhukkūtrirukkai’, in dedication to the sacred feet of Lord Ārāamudhan of Tirukkudandhai, filled with the quintessential truths of the Vedas, for the elevation of the worldly beings. His feet are our refuge.

Taniyan of Siria Tirumadal

*“Mullic chezhumalarōr tārān mulaimadhiyam
kollik kennullam kodhiyāmē – vallal
tiruvālan Sirkkaliyan kārkkaliyai vetti
maruvālan tandān madal. “*

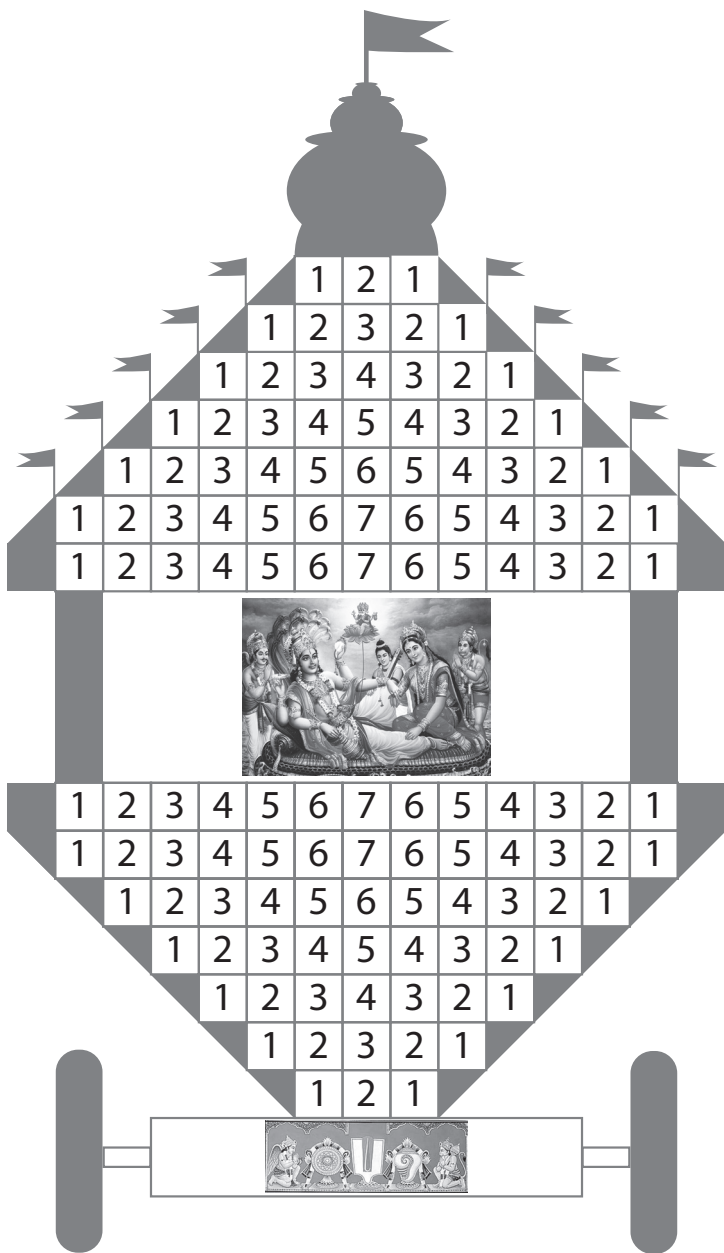
Lest my heart burn in desire after seeing the rising moon, the gracious and auspicious Kaliyan – wearer of the Mulli flower garland – unexcelled in wielding the sword, destroyed the darkness of Kali age and sang for us the Madal.

Taniyan of Peria Tirumadal

*“Ponnulagil vānavarum poomagalum pōtri seyyum
nalnudhalīr ! Nambi Naraiyūrar – mannulagil
ennilaimai kandum irangārēyāmāgil
mannu madaloorvan vandu. “*

O Bright- headed friends ! If the Immaculate Lord whom the celestials and the lotus-dame Lakshmi worship, who now abides in Tirunaraiyur on this earth, does not feel compassionate towards my plight, I am set on wandering the temple town with my ‘madal’.

ANNEXURE



12

Contribution of Āṭvārs to Sri Vaishnava Sampradāya and Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta.

At the outset, the difference between Sampradāya and Siddhānta may be noted. Siddhānta is the final and settled philosophical foundations on which a religion is based. Sampradāya is a social and religious tradition of handed down instructions, (upadēsa) and practices governing administration of temples, rites, festivals, worship methodologies and so on, community and cultural mores and customs, sāstraic and moral prescriptions and injunctions of society etc.. The philosophical and religious teachings of the Āṭvārs are enshrined in their four-thousand hymns and are in perfect harmony with the Upaniṣads, the Pāncarātra Āgamas, the Itihāsas, and Purānas. These were synthesized by Sri Rāmānuja with a synoptic vision and woven into a coherent theoretical tapestry of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇava Theology which has formed the bedrock on which the Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya has evolved in the post-Rāmānuja period. The fundamental principles underlying this Vedānta are briefly as follows. The Universe is Real and created by a Supreme Being through a process of evolution from the primordial form – ‘Prakṛti’. Srīman Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Being, ‘Brahman’ the Creator, Controller and Sustainer of sentient beings and the universe, transcendent and immanent, and endowed with ‘kalyāṇa gunas’ or auspicious qualities-, ‘vibhūti’ and ‘divya mangala vighraha’. The sentient beings are distinct from gross matter, different from one another and born in this world due to their beginningless bondage and seek to attain the bliss of liberation through eternal union with God and ‘kainkarya or service to Him. This then

is the Supreme Goal or ‘parama-puruṣārtha’ of life which is facilitated through ‘Sādhana’ of karma bhakti yoga practices in an egoless and renunciatory spirit or ‘Prapatti’ or absolute surrender to the Supreme Being.

It entirely redounds to the credit of the genius of Sri Rāmānuja that he, through his monumental work Sribhāshya, could come up with an interpretation of Vedānta –sūtras reconciling the apparently contrary views of ‘bheda-abadha Sruti’ pronouncements on the basis of ‘sarirātma bhāva’, so explicitly stated in Nammāḷvār’s very first Tiruvāymoḷi, and evolving out of this principle, a single unified thought upholding the ‘saviśeṣa-brahmanvāda’ or Brahman as endowed with attributes as against the ‘nirviśeṣa brahmanvāda’ of Advaita Vedānta which identifies the metaphysical absolute with the personal God of Religion. The Divyaprabandham serves as an important source-book for such a system of philosophy with the celestial songs of Āḷvārs providing sufficient material in expounding the fundamental tenets of Viśiṣṭādvaita Philosophy and Religion. As pronounced in Lakshmitantram, “*Lakshmyā saha Hrishīkeśo Devyākāranyarūpayā I Rakshaka sarvasiddhāntē Vedāntēpi ca ghīyate*” II, ‘that it is Hrishīkesa, in conjunction with Lakshmi the embodiment of compassion, who is the universal Protector has been declared in all siddhāntic (Sāstraic and Āgamic) and Vedāntic texts’. The Āḷvārs, through their Divya Prabandham, affirmed the truth of Srīman Nārāyaṇa as the Principal God. The Divya Prabandham and especially the Tirivāymoḷi of Nammāḷvār was most appropriately accorded the status of Tamil Veda in terms of their sanctity and authoritativeness (prāmānya). Nāthamuni, the foremost Āchārya of the Sampradāya, who was the first to rediscover and recognize the greatness of Divya Prabandham, singled out the Tiruvāymoḷi as ‘Drāvida

Vedasāgara'. Sri Vedānta Desika gives it the title of Dramidopaniṣad. It can be treated as Veda or Upaniṣad because it contains the essential teachings of the Vedas including the Upaniṣads. This view is warranted by the statements made by Madhurakavi Āḷvār who revered his master as "*Vedam Tamizh seida Māran*", Nāthamuni and Swami Desikan. In addition, Tiruvāymoḷi has also been accorded the status of Tamil Vedānta in the technical sense of denoting the system or school of thought (darśana) as commonly applied to the Vedānta sūtra of Bādarāyana, the bottomline scripture on the basis of which different schools of thought such as Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita originated. Vedānta is primarily devoted to the study of the nature of the Ultimate Reality (tattva), the means of attaining it (sādhana) and the supreme goal (parama-puruṣārtha). The Vedānta-sūtra, the primary text on Vedānta deals with these subjects – the first two adhyāyas with tattva, the third and fourth with the other two topics respectively. While all the Prabandhams dwell on these topics either directly or indirectly, in particular, Tiruvāymoḷi substantively expatiates on these aspects. As pointed out by Vedānta Desika, the first twenty and the concluding twenty verses of Tiruvāymoḷi present briefly and clearly the substance of the Vedānta Philosophy following the same sequence as adopted by the Vedānta sūtra (śārīraka arthakrama). We had earlier seen how Tiruvāymoḷi deals with the five aspects of Ultimate Reality 'Parasvarūpa', the nature of individual self 'pratyagātma svarūpa', the nature of the ultimate goal 'phalasiddhi', the means of attainment 'upāya', and the obstacles in the way of attainment and their removal 'prāptivirodhi-nivṛitti'. The central doctrine of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is that Brahman as the Śārīrin or the universal soul is organically related to the universe of cit (sentient souls) and acit (non-sentient entities)

in the same way as the soul is related to the physical body. This ‘śarīrātma -bhāva sambandha’ stated in Sri Nammāļvār’s line “*udal misai uyirenakarandengum parandulan*”, and exposted in the Antaryāmi Brāhmaṇa of the Bṛhadāranya Upaniṣad (“*yasya pṛitvi śarīram yat pṛitvimantarēyamiti yam pṛitvi navēda*” etc.), provided the inspiration for Sri Rāmānuja in interpreting this particular Upanisadic passage in favour of his main thesis as mentioned already.

From the standpoint of Vaishnava theology, the entire Divyaprabandham is an exposition of the inner meaning of the three esoteric mantras - the Aṣṭākshara, the Dvaya, and the Charamasloka of the Gita. These mantras contain the quintessence of Vedānta in general, and in particular the tattva, hita and puruṣārtha. The key note of Vaishnavism is that Vishnu or Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Deity (para -devatā) who is unequalled by any other deity, Brahma, Rudra etc. and with whom Goddess Sri is inseparably related. Para-tattva in other words is Sriman Nārāyaṇa or Sriyahpati or Tirumāl. Though this theory is explicit in Upaniṣads, Vishnupurāṇa and other religious texts, it was the Āļvārs who enunciated it in a clear-cut way as already stated, on the basis of their intuitive experience of God. This is a central concept of the Vaishnava theology and Sampradāya that has been upheld and highlighted in all the works of Sri Rāmānuja.

The description of Godhead in all its aspects such as svarūpa, rūpa, guna, vibhava, līlā, etc which finds iterative prominence in the Gadyas of Sri Rāmānuja again has its genesis in the Divyaprabandham of Āļvārs. The concept of nirupādhika-śeṣatva or the absolute unconditioned subordination of jīva to paramātmān and the concept of Bhāgavata-śeṣatva or the subordination of an individual to the devotees of God again, are key aspects of Vaishnava

theology and faith that have their genesis in Āḷvār poems. Yet again, the ideas and concepts of parabhakthi, parajñāna and parama-bhakti which figure repeatedly in Sri Rāmānuja's gadyas, but do not find any mention in the Upaniṣads or the Vishnupurāṇa, have their basis in the three facets of the mystic experiences of the Divine of the Mudhal Āḷvārs as further supported in the implicit ideas expressed in the Bhagavad Gita.

Far and away, the single most significant contribution of the Āḷvārs to Vaishnavism as further expounded by the Āchārya lineage from Sri Ālavandār, Rāmānuja and others, is the espousal of the doctrine of Prapatti as a direct means to mokṣa which is the central piece of Sri Vaishnava theology and religion. Although one can find the kernal of this doctrine in the Upaniṣads, Pāncarātra Samhita, the Itihāsas and Purāṇas, the acceptance of Prapatti as a sādhana in preference to the Bhakti yoga and its observance not only as a ritual but life pursuit, for the attainment of the goal of mōkṣa evolved guided by the course chartered by the Āḷvārs, especially by the manner in which Swami Nammāḷvār performed his prapatti in his Tiruvāymoḷi 6.10.10. Among the Āchāryās Yāmuna adopted it, and Rāmānuja who followed in his foot steps has demonstrated the method and its observance as a direct means or sādhana to mokṣa in his Saranāgathi Gadyam. The lead for this system has thus originated in Sri Nammāḷvār's observance of prapatti to the lord of Thiruvēṅkatam. It is for this reason that he has been reverently referred to as 'Prapann-jana-kūtasta'. The theory of 'nitya-kainkarya' or uninterrupted service to the Divine in the parama-pada as the supreme spiritual goal is intrinsic to the Vaishnava theology and has been incorporated by Sri Rāmānuja in the Vaikunta Gadyam

In conclusion, any evaluation of the contribution of Āḷvār saints and especially Sri Nammāḷvār, to Vaishnavism and to the world, would not be complete without commenting on their humane, inclusive, and compassionate view of the human condition and the workings of their hearts in redeeming that situation and setting them on to seeking the spiritual path. All Āḷvārs offer sage advice to humanity in this direction. Periāḷvār's Tiruppallāndu hymn born out of his overwhelming joy after beholding the vision of God expressed in the form of a mangalāsāsana prayer, combines within itself a spirit of inclusivity to share that joy with humanity at large, as well as an important message to them to become the Lord's devotees and engage in His service. Āndāl's Tiruppāvai held in the highest esteem by Srivaishnavas as the spiritual "*song of songs*", sung in the guise of a gopi of Brindāvan in love with Krishna observing a religious rite in the winter month of Mārgaśīrsa along with other companions, imploring the Lord to fulfill their cherished desire, carries a deeper import of a spiritual character designed to bestir and arouse the dormant human soul to seeking and finding its real moorings in the Divine and the exalted goal of service to the Divine.

KulasekharaPerumāl in his PerumālTirumoli (1.10) echoes the 'Ram rājya' ideal of a land free from drought and disease, and plenitude of prosperity, by suggesting that the Lord at Arangam abides there just to accomplish that, not only on this earth but in the heaven. His lines translate to ; " To redeem the mighty heaven and the angels; to redeem the earth and the earthly beings; to assuage painful angst and alleviate tired spirit; to foster wellness and bless joyous devotees; lies kindly south-faced, bejeweled Arangan." Āḷvār's refrain throughout these lines is, " to redeem, to redeem", which sounds so compelling an appeal for Lord's help to redeem the

world! The way he repeats, “ Vānakamuyya, amarakuyya, munnuyya, manisakuyya, manisakuyya.....” (the word ‘uyya’ meaning ‘redeem’), reveals his concern and empathy for suffering humanity. He goes on to emphasize that the compassionate Lord’s purpose Who lies facing south in Tiruvarangam, is the same, namely to assuage the painful angst of man and ameliorate his condition in order to prepare his mind and soul to receive the Lord’s grace. The earnestness of Kulasekharar’s song is sure to touch a chord in all humanistic minds.

In this respect, perhaps Swami Nammālvār, more than other Ālvārs, demonstrates a deep compassion for the human situation wallowing in the morass of bondage for ever and seeks divine intervention for the redressal of the same. The very first song with which he opened his lips is a humble appeal for mercy for the whole of mankind. Even like the Rishis of Dandaka who drew the attention of Sri Rama to the mutilated limbs of their kind tortured by the Rākshasas, “*Ehi pasya sareerāni*”, in order to enlist His sympathy and obtain the promise of protection, Ālvār starts his first poem, the Tiruviruttam, with a petition (vinnappam) to the Lord imploring the Lord to his humble submission. The gist of the verse is, “*May we all (entire mankind) never more wallow in this woeful state of false knowledge, evil conduct and filthy body*”. If this is the sentiment voiced by one who never uttered a word since birth, and who had, moreover, sat through this period in cloistered seclusion without a semblance of human contact, what springs of compassion must have been coursing in the inner recesses of his being to well up and pour out drowning even the God-love that had kept him speechless for so long ! This is an exceptional and unique prayer for the whole of mankind as this kind of generosity of spirit and compassion for the human travail and tribulation and lightning transience which passes for

man's life in this world, is perhaps unprecedented in any saint or devotee of God who has ever prayed for fellow human beings. His compassion for the world is only commensurate with his love towards God. This is what Vaishnavism is all about, this sublime expression of love for all that we see around us, even the ugly and the repugnant, since compassion and love towards fellow-beings and a genuine desire for their well-being are a *sine qua non* of true religion. This is what is expressed in the lofty Upaniṣadic benediction, "*Sarvējanāh: sukhinō bhavantu*", or as Godha assured all humanity in her own inimitable way, "*Engum Tiruvarul petru inburuvar*". Nothing we see around is all nice and sweet, as we would wish. There is so much of egregiousness in man and the way he looks at life. Āṭvār recognizes this contradiction prevailing in the world, and sometimes alternates in his feelings between empathy for man in his distress, and disgust at man's waywardness and arrogance, which makes even an all-merciful God to turn away from man. He does not despair but takes heart to call out inviting the reluctant man to the Divine fold by offering short and sweet advice in three Tiruvāymoḷis which coincidentally or by design are also couched in short metre unlike others. He dwells on the theme of emptiness of human life and vanity of human desires in a recurring manner at several places. He is amazed how God himself combines all the contradictions known to man in Tiruvāymoḷi 6.3. He is poverty, and He is wealth. He is perdition, and He is perfection, and so on; he enumerates about 32 contradictions, throwing a poser to God himself, expressing wonder how He is all this. It is a poser which must for ever remain that, for He is inscrutable, "*Arivariya Pirān*."

The discoveries of modern science of the latter part of the twentieth century and after, concerning the origin of the universe-- the Big Bang, the existence of innumerable

galaxies beyond the Milky Way, Super Novas and theories relating to expanding and isotropic universe,-- quantum mechanics and new revelations in particle physics, the discovery of DNA and modern genetics, to name only a few, for ever keep pushing the boundaries of human knowledge about life and the universe. But in the deep core of all this new knowledge, the Scientific community is amazed, if baffled, to find the existence of an order, precision, and super intelligence which they acknowledge, but can never explain. If anything, there is increasing recognition that it validates the insightful Upaniṣadic truths about the unity of life and creation, and the overarching Divinity behind it, addressed as Brahman and Sriman Nārāyaṇa in the Viśiṣṭādvaita Siddhānta. The limited mind of man may certainly never get to unravel the mysteries of cosmos and creation. Albert Einstein, one of the best scientific minds mankind has ever known, echoed this thought in no uncertain terms while commenting on his own spirituality thus. He says, *"The scientist's religious feeling takes the form of rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, in comparison with it, all the systematic thinking of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This is the guiding principle of my life and work."* No amount of scientific quest can possibly unravel this harmony, or unlock the secrets of heaven and the divine, or solve the problem of the world and human life. The only way to overcome it as the sages and seers of the past have shown us, is by invoking the Lord's Grace and throwing ourselves on to it, even as the Āṭvārs did through their Celestial Songs.

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Glossary

acit	insentient , matter
āchārya	preceptor
ananyagatitvam	having no other recourse
andādi	poetic composition where last word of a verse forms the first word of next verse
ākinchanyam	lack of personal merit
ārādhana	worship practice
Arulicceyal	Divya Prabhandam
arca	image, icon
anupraveśa	process of inhering of the Divine in the act of creation
Angas	ancillary scripture to Vedas six viz. 'śiksha', 'vyākaranam', 'chandasa', niruktam, jyotisham, and kalpa
Ananyārha śeṣatvam	subordination to none other than the Supreme Being.
anukūlyam	in conformity with the will of God
antaryāmi	indwelling spirit
apauruṣeya	impersonal
arthapancakam	five-fold principles of reality – Divine Reality object of attainment, the individual self the attainer, the way of attainment, the

	fruit of attainment, and obstacles to that attainment.
asmita	ego
āsrita	vātsalya love shown towards one looking for support
avidya	ignorance
bhaddha	bound soul
Bhagavān	Íśvara, God, possessing six divine qualities – knowledge, (jñāna), strength (bhala) lordhip (aiṣvarya) potency (sakti) virility (vīrya) and splendor (tejas)
bhāgavatha	devotee of Nārāyan
bhaktiyoga	unceasing meditation on God as a means to mokṣa
bheda	difference
bhogyā	object of enjoyment
bhokta	enjoyer
Brahman	ultimate Reality
Cit	consciousness, spirit, the indivisual self
Cetana	sentient being
darśana	direct vision
dharmabhūta jñāna	attributive consciousness
divyaprabhandam	Divine hymns of the Āḷvārs
dravya	substance

drāvida	Tamil
ghataka	a mediator
guruparampara	tradition of the genealogy of preceptors
heya	defect
heyapratyanīka	opposed to everything evil or defiling
hita	means to achieve the supreme goal
indriya	sense organ
jiva	individual self
kainkarya	loving service to the Divine
kaivalya	the state of existence of the self free from bondage
kalyāna gunas	auspicious qualities of the Lord
kārana	cause
līlā	divine sport
līlā-vibhūti	cosmic manifestation of the Divine
mangalāśāsana	benediction uttered in praise of the Divine Lord
mantra	esoteric syllables signifying spiritual truths
māya	illusion, screen between the apparent and the real
mokṣa	state of liberation with comprehensive experience of Brahman

mukta	liberated soul
naichya	admission of lowliness
nimitta-kāraṇa	efficient cause
nirhetuka-kṛpā	unconditional flow of divine grace
nirupādhika	unconditioned
nirūpaka	correlated
nityā	eternal being
nitya-vibhūti	eternal transcendal realm of Nārāyaṇa
niyantā	controller of all beings, God
pancarātra	Vaishnava Āgama governing worship etc
pancasamskāra	spiritual initiation-five fold.
pañcīkarana	quintuplication
para	the supreme
parabhakti	supreme devotion expressed by a sense of overwhelming yearning for commingling with God
para-jñāna	yearning for that experience along with all other devotees
parākāśhta	climax
paramabhakti	actualization of God- experience
paratantra	solely dependent on God
pāratantrya	sole dependence on God
paratattva	the Ultimate Reality, Nārāyaṇa

pradhānam	primordial matter
prakṛti	primal Nature
pramāna	validating proof
prārabdha	accumulated past action fruits of which now being experienced
prāpakam	that which makes one attain an end
prapanna	one who has surrendered his 'self' to God
prapatti	doctrine of absolute surrender
prāptāone	who attains his goal
prāpya	that which is to be obtained
prasāda	grace
prātikulya	that which is opposed to God's will
pratyagātman	individual self
prerita	the divine driver
puruṣākāra	divine mediator – Divine Mother Lakshmi or preceptor
puruṣārtha	the four goals of human life 'dharma' 'artha' 'kāma' and 'mokṣa'
rakshaka	Saviour
rūpa	form of divine personality
rahasya	esoteric doctrine
rahasya-traya	the three esoteric doctrines, the 'Aṣṭākṣara', 'Dvayam' and 'Carama Sloka'

sādhana	self-effort, spiritual self-discipline
sahakāri kārana	accessory cause
sākṣātkāra	actualization
samāśrayanam	spiritual initiation
Sampradāya	tradition
samśleṣa	communion with God
sankalpa	will
śaranāgati	surrender to God
sarīra-sarīri	body-soul
sarvajña	omniscient
sarva-śeṣitvam	overarching lordship
śeṣa	the subordinate, the dependent self
śeṣin	the principal; Lord
Siddhāntā	the final view, settled principle
Siddhopāya	the means to liberation which is self-accomplished
Sriyahpati	Consort of Goddess Sri
soulabhya	ease of approach or access
svarūpa	essential nature
svarūpa-jñāna	knowledge which is nature of the Self
suddha-satva	pure matter
tadhīya-śeṣatvam	being a servant of Lord's devotees
taniyan	adulatory verse

tanmātra	subtle essence
tātparya	purport
tattva	reality, principle
ubhaya	two-fold
ubhaya-vibhūti	nitya and lilā
ubhaya-vedānta	the two-fold Viśiṣṭādvaita vedānta developed on the basis of Upaniṣads and Ālvārs' Divya Prabhandam
ucchiṣṭa	remnants of food
upāsana	meditation, worship
upāya	means
upēya	goal
upādhāna	kāraṇa material cause
upāṅgas	itihāsa-purāṇas, dharma sāstra, mimāṃsa, nyāya sāstra, etc.
vātsalya	tender affection usually towards a child
vibhava	incarnations
vibhūti	glory of God
vigraha	image of the divine
viśleṣa	separation from God
vyuha	one of the five forms of manifestation of Vishnu

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