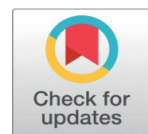


THE VEDAS AND BHAKTI HARMONIZED - KOVALUR: THE MUTAL ALVARS AND TIRUMANKAI

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ABSTRACT

The unanimous opinion among religious philosophers is that the Vedas and bhakti are two different denominators of approach to God in Indian tradition. However, the Tamil Vaiṣṇava mystics, the Ālvārs find a harmonious blend of the two modes in ritual worship. The present article examines the pros and cons of the problem from a study of the hymns beginning with the Mutal (Early) Ālvārs and last in the train, Tirumaṅkai. The cited hymns are replete with the bounties of nature associated with the divyadeśa-Kōvalūr that we examine for a case study. Bhakti or the Veda is the euphony linked with nature. The present article explains how the Ālvārs had harmonized the Veda with bhakti. These are complementary modes of approach to God. They are not conflicting phenomena. By the way, data bearing on flora and fauna dumped in the twenty-one hymns on Kōvalūr are presented in a capsule (Attachment).

Keywords: Mutal Ālvārs (Poykai, Pūtam, Pēy), Tirumaṅkai, *Veda*, *Bhakti*, *Nālāyirativviappirapantam* 'Nālāyiram', Flora and Fauna

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nīrār nīrār "Who are you, who are you?"¹

Aham Brahmāsmi "I am Brahman"

Amararum yāñē "I am the gods"²

It was thundering, lightning, and torrentially raining under the spell of an encircling gloom. Three mystics, the Mutal (Early) Ālvārs (viz., Poykai, Pūtam, and Pēy [Figure 4](#)) hastily moved to a dark chamber in the Viṣṇu-Trivikrama temple at Kōvalūr seeking shelter. Poykai (literally "Pond") of Kāñci arrived first in the *īṭaikkālī* that found space for him to sleep. The next to arrive was Pūtam ("Goblin", also "Truth") of Kaṭal-Mallai so that the two could sit in the room. Finally came Pēy ("Devil", also "Frenzy") of Mayilai/Allikkēṇi, and all three were standing. The Ārāyirappaṭi-G adds the three met in the *tiru-īṭaikkālī* of the temple. Did they pose the question: *nīrār nīrār*? The mystics introduced formally saying they are bhagavatśeṣabhūtas (cf. the name Pūtattālvār, Pūtam = Bhūta). When the three were standing, the presence of a fourth divinity was felt. It was none other than Viṣṇu, the presiding God of the divyadeśa (*divya* "holy", *deśa* "land"), 'Ulakaṭanta Perumāl' (cf. Trivikrama of Ūrakam) that commended them to commence the saga of Vaiṣṇava hymnal composition. The saints were inspired with a phrase each to begin their work that forms part of the first verse in *Tiruvantāti* I, II, and III³.



The *Ārāyirappati*-G adds the world was immersed in *ajñāna* (darkness, avarice leading to terrorism). The Lord appeared to light the lamp of *bhakti* (devotional reformation). Thus, the *tivviyappirapantam/divyaprabandha* (literally “divine twine”) came to be composed by the twelve Ālvārs. U. Vē. Vēlukkuṭi Krishṇaṇ, in his popular lectures on the *divyadeśas*, adds Viṣṇu is the sugarcane of which the juice is the three *Tiruvantātis*. Furthermore, His Holiness Aṅṅagarācārya declares ‘Tirivikiraman’ (Figure 6, Figure 7)⁴ is the favourite theme of the Mutal Ālvārs (cf. TI 1-2, Rajarajan et al. (2017b): 1428).

Kōvalūr (Figure 1 Map, Hardy (2014): Map 2) from the above account seems to be the earliest venue where the Ālvārs commenced the composition of devotional literature in a Drāviḍian language⁵. For the historical cross-currents of the *divyadeśas*, we have a long list of literature, e.g., Hudson (1980), Hardy 1983, Young (2000), Narayanan (2007), Rajarajan (2012), Rajarajan (2013), Kalidos 2016, and so on. The concern of the present article is to examine the part played by Kōvalūr in the history of South Indian Viṣṇuism. The venue, Kōvalūr, appears in the hymns of Ālvārs Poykai, Pūtam, and Tirumaṅkai (c. 6th-7th to 9th centuries CE), missing in Pēyālvār. The total number of hymns is twenty-one, most of which are by Tirumaṅkai (Figure 5). It might suggest a temple existed (Figure 3) at the time of the Mutal Ālvārs by about the 6th-7th century CE (Hardy (2014)). It acquired wider popularity during the time of Tirumaṅkai Ālvār, contemporary of Nandivarman Pallavamalla (731-796 CE) that has authored most hymns bearing on the *divyadeśas* in the Toṅṅaināṭu region Rajarajan (2013), i.e., the Pallava country Kalidos 2016. Most of the existing structures in the temple are the result of evolution over a millennium down to the 17th century CE Ragunath (2014), figs. 30-40, 102, 104-106, 109, 113-114, 123-125, 135, 137-140, 188).

The present article hopes to summarize the hymns bearing on Kōvalūr, focusing on the *bhakti* and Vedic modes of approach to God. As we understand from the hymns of Tirumaṅkai, the mystic has strived to bridge the Vedic mode with *bhakti*. A summary of the hymns is presented, followed by an analysis of religious systems and philosophies. Scholars interested in the Roman transcription of the hymns and *patavurai* (word to word or phrase to phrase meaning) may consult Rajarajan et al. (2017a). Few hymns in Romanized format may of help to compare the Sanskritic usage vis-à-vis their Tamil equivalents.

2. RÈSUMÈ OF THE HYMNS

2.1. TIRUVANTĀTI I (POYKAI ĀLVĀR)

77. “The abodes (of the Lord) are Vēṅkaṭam, Viṅṅakar, Vēḅkā and the venue of flower gardens Kōval[ūr], the gold-city. In these four venues, the Lord is present in standing, sitting, reclining, and walking modes. Those that mention the names of the venues are relieved of troubles in their life.”

86. “The Lord with Śrīdevī arrived at the venue to the hill-Govardhana and protected the cows from rains (Periyālvār *Tirumoli* 3.5.1-11). They neither got in nor get out but stationed close to the threshold at the flowery venue*, Kōval.”⁶

* Later *Svarga-vācal* opened once in the year on Vaikuṅṅha-*ekādaśi* day, month *Mārkaḷi* (see *Tiruppāvai* 1, the *Gītā* 10.35 *māsānāṅ Mārgaśīrṣo’haṅ*) see note 3.

Tiruvantāti II (Pūtattālvār)

70. “The hearts of devotees are full of the presence of the sacred venues where the Lord resorts for play. The *divyadeśas* are Tañcai, the foremost Araṅkam, Taṅkāl, hill dear to the Bhāgavatas Vēnkaṭam, the Ocean of Milk, the great Mallai, Kōvalūr, fortified Kuṭantai/Kuṁbhakoṇam and above all the mind of the devotee.”

Periya Tirumoli (Tirumaṅkai Ālvār)

2.4.1. “That day the Lord was pleased to unite with the damsel of the cowherds, Nappiṅṅai⁷ and the lady on a lotus flower, Śrīdevī. He was a merciless taskmaster of terrorists. The abodes where the Lord is pleased to present are Naraiyūr gifted with vast groves and floods abundantly flowing sacred Āli, Kuṭantai and the city of ponds, Kōval and Nīrmalai. These are the venues where the Lord is pleased to stand, sit, repose, and walk.”

2.10.1. Mañcātu varaiyēlum kaṭalkaḷeḷum vāṇamum maṅṅakamum maṅṅumellām Eñcāmal vayirraṭakki yāliṅmēlō riḷantaḷiril kaṅvaḷarnta vīcaṅṅaṅṅaiṅṅait Tuñcānīrvaḷamcurakkum Peṅṅai⁸tteṅṅpāl tūya nāṅmaraiyāḷar Comucceyyac Ceñcāli viḷai vayaluṭikaḷntu tōṅṅrum *tirukKōvalūraṅṅuḷ kaṅṅēṅ nāṅē*^{*9}

* Redundant in all hymns: “I have seen the Lord at sacred Kōvalūr”.

“The seven mountain ranges (Kulaparvatas), the seven oceans, the vast sky (Milky Way), the earth-world and all other cosmic installations are contained in the sacred stomach of Vaṭapatraśāyī that reposes on a leaf of the banyan tree, *ālilai/vaṭapatra*. The Lord has not left out anything. The immaculate *Caturvedis* are chanting the *Sāmaveda* on the southern Peṅṅai River (Figure 2). Everywhere ripe paddy crops are found proclaiming the prosperity of the land.”

2.10.2. Kontalarnta naruntuḷāy cāntam tūpam tīpaṅkoṅṅamarar toḷap paṅaṅkol pāmpil Cantāṅi meṅṅmulai malarāḷ taraṅimaṅkai tāmiruvaraṭi varuṅṅmtaṅ maiyāṅai Vantaṅaicey ticaiyēḷāraṅkamaintu vaḷarvēḷvi nāṅmaraikaḷ muṅṅrutiyum Cintāṅaicey tiruḷuṅṅ¹⁰ moṅṅruñcelvat tirukKōvalūraṅṅuḷ kaṅṅēṅ nāṅē

“The celestials carry fragrant holy basil, sandalwood, incense, and lights to offer worship. The Lord is reposing on the hooded serpent. The maid-Śrī of soft-breasts anointed with sandal-paste and the earth-maid (Bhū) gently massage the feet. The Lord is offered worship by tuning the seven musical notes, following the six *Vedāṅgas*, five sacrifices (Figure 8), recital of the four *Vedas*, and cultivating the triple fires. These are incessantly performed day and night. I have seen the prosperity assuring dignitary, Varadarāja at sacred Kōvalūr.”

2.10.3. “In a pond abounding with flowering plants, a demonic crocodile had caught hold of the elephant’s leg by its sharp teeth. The Lord appeared in the sky to confer grace and lifted the disc to redeem the suffering mammoth, Gajendra. See, the blue lily emerging from water shows the hue black. The Alexandrian laurels are shining like pearls in reddish-golden buds. Vibrant lotus flowers are projecting as lamps in pools full of water.”

2.10.4. “To cause the fall of Mālī, the Lord Rāma had to stage a battle. His customary operation is to arrive seated on the Garuḍa-*vāhana* Parthiban and Rajarajan (2016) to redress the gods’ grievances. He is the panacea for Bhāgavatas that shed tears under the impulse of devotion. In the groves therein, you find flowers of ironwood, gamboges, and blossoming common bottle. The swarms of striped beetles are generating sweet music to exhilarate the atmosphere. Sweet sugarcane plants have mushroomed in watery fields.”

2.10.5. Karaivaḷarvēl Karaṇmutalākak Kavantaṇ Vāli kaṇaiyonriṇāl maṭiya vīlaṅkaiṭaṇṇuḷ Piṛaiyeyiṛru vālarakkar cēṇaiyellām peruntakaiyōṭutuṇitta pemmāṇraṇṇai Maraivaḷarap pukaḷvaḷara māṭantōrum maṇṭapamoṇṭoliyaṇaittum vāramōtac Ciṛaiyaṇainta poḷilaṇainta teṇralvīcum tirukKōvalūratāṇuḷ kaṇṭēṇṇāṇē

“The Lord Rāma was pleased to extirpate the race of terrorists represented by Khara, Kabandha, Vāli, et alii by the shot of an arrow [Rajarajan \(2015\)](#), [Figure 1](#)). The operation included emasculating the demons’ race with teeth protruding as a crescent and their chief, Rāvaṇa. The peace assuring Vedic scriptures¹¹ recited in each household, in pavilions ([Figure 9](#))¹² meant for cultivation of the *Vedas*, in groves near brooks where the gentle breeze moves, and in all inns without fail.”

2.10.6. “Kṛṣṇa was intelligent enough to detect the butter stored in pots tied to the roof of the huts of milkmaids. He was pleased to dine his share when caught red-handed by Yaśodā. He was tied to a mortar where the little-Master, Dāmodara, stood as a black elephant. His eyes were brimming with snowy tears. The “lady on flower attended him”, Lakṣmī, along with the “lady of eloquence”, Sarasvatī, and the eight-armed “lady of the buck-vehicle”, Durgā¹³. All are present in the shining *maṇimāṭam* “bell-tower” temple.”

2.10.7. “Kṛṣṇa had to take to task the war-elephant, Kuvalayapīḍa. He smashed the snaffle of the horse-demon, Keśi. The seven bulls of fine breed were dislodged¹⁴. He pulled down the Queen’s flower trees, Yamalārjunabhaṅga; and shattered the wheel-demon, Śakaṭāsura. He finished the wrestlers, Muṣṭikāsura and Cāpūra. The little-Master was mandragora [Alexander \(1965\)](#) to the craftsman of all these devilish machinations of Kaṃsa. The black areca trees yield green shoots from which white pearls scatter, shining as emerald and coral. The pear tree has produced golden buds in the honey pouring groves.”

2.10.8. “To relieve the earth from the burden of misrule, Kṛṣṇa was sent a *dūta* on the eve of the Bhārata War. He served as *sārathi* of Arjuna to resist the mighty army. The pride of the enemies, ruined in the Great War. The venue we resort to is the equal of *devaloka*, where the master of the single-bull, Śiva, Kubera, Indra, and the four-faced Brahmā are present. Several experts in the *Vedas* are busy with their avocations.”

2.10.9. “The Lord is a garden of the *kalpaka* trees united with the Goddess of the Earth, Bhū and the Lady of rank seated on the flower, Śrī. The disc and the conch are beaming on either side. He is inclined to bless those that unite with him. The sacred image is molten gold, *hemavighraha*, endowed with crimson feet, handsome hands, red lips, and yellow garments. Śiva and Brahmā are waiting to have a *darśana*.”

2.10.10. “Lord Black was pleased to redress the miseries of the devoted elephant-Gajendra. He is the blue, emerald akin to the hue of the rain-drenched cloud. His abode is full of optimistic experts in the Holy Scriptures. These hymns bearing on ‘I have seen the Lord at the auspiciously sacred Kōvalūr’ are the words of the king of Maṅkai-city. The experts in the ten hymns of the gladiator-Kaliyaṇ¹⁵ are sure to obtain liberation from mundane bondages. They are blessed to have a *darśana* of the omnipresent Lord.”

7.3.2. “As a calf thinks of its mother; I am persuaded to follow the Lord. The Patriarch is merciful Benedictine. His mouth that day swallowed and vomited the world, Viśvarūpa. His ears fitted with *makarakuṇḍalas*. the youth rushed to the courtyard of fortified Kōvalūr when the Mutal-Ālvārs were bewildered. The bull of a lion among the celestials, my beloved; I know the Lord only, none of the other *paradevatās*”.

7.10.4. “Our Lord is the little-Master, Kṛṣṇa that sucked forth the soul of the ogress-Pūtanā. He is the Māya worshipped by the clear-minded philosophers, sages, and seers. He is the youth that appeared to enlighten the Mutal Ālvārs in the *ītaikkālī* of fortified Kōvalūr. He is the Supreme God that governs the thoughts of the experts in the *Vedas*. The immaculate magnifying Light, Jyotisvarūpa. He is the horde that assures prosperity full of gold and gems if a devotee is impoverished. I went in search of the Lord and found Him at the holy land, Kaṅṅamaṅkai in the Kāviri estuary.”

Tiruneṭuntāṅṅakam (Tirumaṅkai)

6. “The king of gods, Trivikrama’s long hand, *varadamudrā* confers benevolences on devotees. He is the sole master of the bird-Garuḍa endowed with *suparṇa*. He admonishes demons and shows no mercy. Sing the praises of venues where the Lord’s feet are set. The River Peṅṅai (Figure 2) is forcefully inundating bunds. It is dragging bamboo plants that pour pearls, move into fields yielding gold. Kōvalūr¹⁶ is a venue full of flowering ponds. My mind, do pay reverence to the Lord and the venue.”

7. “Lord Paraśurāma lifted his graceful battle-axe to extirpate the race of *kṣatriyas*. Lord of the earth, his lance pierced the ocean projecting with hills (creation myth of Kēraḷa?). It is the city of the Lord that exhibited his heroism by wielding the axe. The chaste maiden, Durgā, is the protector of the city who hails from the Vindhya¹⁷. The city is full of groves, long and wide streets, and lotus ponds all along the pathways. The ruler of the hills, Malaiyamān,¹⁸ is offering homage to the Lord in the flowery venue at Kōvalūr. My mind is pleased to visit the venue.”

17. “The love-sick girl’s¹⁹ soft breasts are beaten to acquire the hue of gold. She is prepared to elope and get away from her troublesome mother with tears bubbling in fish-like eyes. She listens to the cryptic languages of doves that they talk to their mates. She is deeply engrossed. She starts singing the glories of Taṅkāl and cold-Kuṭantai and listens to the musical recitals on Kōvalūr. Looking at her fantasy, the mother enquires, ‘is my girl befitting our house’s status?’ On hearing these words, she starts extolling the fame of Naṛaiyūr.”

The *Cīriya Tirumaṭal* (69) and *Periya Tirumaṭal* (123) of Tirumaṅkai Ālvār make a note of ‘Kōvalūr’ and *Kōvalūr maṅṅum ītaikkālī*²⁰ *yemmāṅ* (my Lord resorting to the *ītaikkālī* of Kōvalūr).

Though Tirumaṅkai is the last²¹ to follow others, his hymns are of great value to single out the mode of inviting the Lord in ritual worship, i.e., the Vedic and *bhakti* Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (2014). The two-way process gets stabilized in the *Mahābhārata*, e.g., Viśvāmitra conducting the *yajña* Rajarajan 2015c and the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* piously uttered by Bhīmācārya. Again, the Buddhists, Jains, and certain later medieval sectarians, e.g., Vīra-Śaivism, did not accept the brāhmaṇical imposition of the *Vedas*²². It seems the Ālvārs strived to compromise *bhakti*, the *Vedas* and *yajñas*²³.

Bhaktimārga

T.M.P. Mahadevan (1976: 18-19) has stipulated the modes by which *bhakti* is expressed: *śravaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa*, *pādasevana* (the Bhāgavatas called Aṭiyār cf. Kalidos 2017b: 127), *arcana*, *vandana*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *ātmanivedana* and so on. Visiting the holy centres by walk (cf. Nātamunikaḷ in *Ārāyirappaṭi* pp. 115-121)²⁴; extolling the Praise of the Lord, listening to the *līlās* Narayanan (1995) told in the *purāṇas* (retold in the *Paripāṭal* and the *Cilappatikāram*)²⁵; worship by offering fragrant holy basil, sandalwood, incense and perpetual lamps (*nontāviḷakku* ARE

1900, no. 116)²⁶; fervent devotion and emotionalism, tears spontaneously overflowing (Periyālvār *Tirumoli* 3.6.3); shower flowers (*puṣpāñjali*, *pūppali* in *Cilappatikāram* 28.231), recite the *nāmāvalis*²⁷, petitions submitted to the Lord for absolution from sins accrued during human births, *karma*, and *saṃsāra*, and to reach the Lord's abode in the Vaikuṅṭha. God realized through *bhakti*, *yoga*²⁸, or *bhoga*²⁹ as it is amenable to the devotee (cf. the *Gītā*, chap. 12 on *Bhaktiyoga*).

The *līlās* and *māhātmyas* retold in the hymns bearing on Kōvalūr are rooted in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and the regional Tamil redactions³⁰: the Lord is in seated, standing, reclining, flying or walking modes Kalidos (1999): 226, Figure 5); the Lord is dear to Nappiṇṇai, Śrī, and Bhū³¹; Viśvarūpa, Vaṭapatraśāyī, the butter-stealer, Dāmodara; Govardhanadhāri; Gajendra-*mokṣam*; *vadham* of Kuvalayapīḍa, Pūtanā, Śakaṭāsura, Keśi, Kaṃsa-, dislodging Muṣṭikāsura and Cāṇūra, bull-fight to take the hand of Piṇṇai, Garuḍa-*vāhana*, Pāṇḍava-*dūta*, Pārthasārathi; Kṛṣṇa the cute and handsome, *sarvalakṣaṇalakṣaṇyaḥ* (VSN-360); *gopī-nāyaka* Veṅugopāla; Paraśurāma-*garvabhāṅga*, Rāma admonishing Khara, Kabandha, Vāli et alii; and terrorists of Laṅka (Rajarajan (2016)), and above all the Lord is Varadarāja, King (giver) of the most excellent Paradise.

Vedic Rituals

Several Vedic rituals are recorded in the hymns, which the south Indian rulers seem to have adopted since the few centuries before the Common Era. Kings of the Caṅkam Age (c. 250 BCE to 250 CE)³² were credited with a name such as *Palyākacālai-mutukuṭumip-peruValuti* (the Pāṇḍya performing several Vedic sacrifices) and *Irācacuyam-veṭṭaperunar-Kiḷli* (the Cōḷa performing the *rājasūya*).

The righteous *Caturvedis* are nurturing the *Sāmaveda* on the southern bank of the River Peṇṇai in the sacred venue at Kōvalūr (PTM 2.10.1). *Sāmaveda* in this verse is *Cāmu*, *Somaveda*, according to PVP.³³ But for the intonation, no much difference between reciting the *Vedas* and *sahasranāmas* may be detected. The vital idea is to extol the Praise of the Lord; let that be Māl/Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu and Indra or Varuṇa. Sectarians may claim, it should be performed only by the *vaidīka[suddha]-brāhmaṇas* (Rajarajan et al. 2017b: 1516); cf. the *vaṭakalai* approach and Śrī Rāmānuja permitting the non-*brāhmaṇas* to utter the *aṣṭākṣara* (Rajarajan 2015c citing the *Tirumālai* [vv. 39, 42-43] of Toṅṭaratippoti Ālvār) resulting in *vaṭakalai-tenkalai* schism.

The Vedic scriptures were recited in households and pavilions meant to cultivate the *Vedas* in groves near pools or brooks. The breeze was moving to generate a serene atmosphere. The *Vedas* chanted endlessly to facilitate cosmic harmony (PTM 2.10.5, cf. Rajarajan 2015c: 140-42), inviting rains by way of Varuṇa-*japa* (cf. *Tiruppāvai* 3-4). Tirumaṅkai Ālvār adds the recital took place within temple, possibly the *garbhagrha*, the priests spelling the Vedic intonation (*divyadeśa-Cemponceykōyil* in Nānkūr cluster); *ceṅcol nāṇmaraiyōr Nānkai naṭuvuḷ Cemponcey-kōyilinuḷḷē* (PTM 4.3.7). Tirumaṅkai though a *kaḷḷaṇ* by birth (robber by *jāti/cāti* noted in *Tiruvāymoli* 3.5.5, 3.7.9, 3.4.3-4) adds the *Veda* is the illuminating Lamp³⁴ 'Vēta-nal-viḷakku', and the *tilaka* of the south 'teṅ-ticait-Tilatam' (PTM 4.3.8, 4.8.8). The Lord is singularly unique whom the *Vedas* could never discover, *nāṇmaraikaḷ tēti eṇṇum kāṇamāttāc celvaṇ* (PTM 4.8.7).

The Lord is offered worship by tuning the seven musical notes (*saptasvaras*³⁵ cf. Rajarajan (2017), Figure 1), chanting the four *Vedas*³⁶, examining the six *Vedāṅgas*³⁷, conducting five sacrifices (Figure 8)³⁸, and invigorating the triple fires (cf. PTM 2.10.2, 3.8.4, 3.10.7, 4.2.2)³⁹. PTM (4.4.8) includes *kēḷvikaḷum*, i.e., *itihāsa-purāṇas* (PVP) involving questions and answers. These were incessantly performed

day and night, a clear pointer that in addition to stimulating the *bhakti*-oriented rituals, the Vedic offerings took place simultaneously. This compromise should have been initiated to satisfy both the groups of priests that had given room for differences of opinion on ritual code [Stietencron \(1977\)](#): 126-38 and [Czerniak-Drożdżowicz \(2014\)](#) Today in temples, both the parties co-exist (cf. PTM 2.10.2), one reciting the *Vedas* and the other reciting the Tamil *pirapantam* in key-centres of Viṣṇuism such as Veṅkaṭam, Śrīraṅgam, Śrīvilliputtūr⁴⁰ ([Figure 9](#)) and so on. The counter-reformation within Viṣṇuism. Even then, the two parties are rebellious at times on trivial matters such as whether the temple elephant should be graced with “v” or “u” type of *ūrdhvapuṇḍra*⁴¹ (see [Figure 4](#), [Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#), [Figure 7](#)). A few scholars have a big issue with deciding whether a temple is *vaṭakalai* or *teṅkalai* oriented [Kalidos \(2015a\)](#): 137-39).

Tirumaṅkai was great among the Indian mystics, the coadjutor of Nammālvār. The later medieval *bhakti* savants (Nāmadeva, Mīrābāī, Jayadeva, Kabīr et alii) followed the footsteps of the Tamil mystics [Brockington \(1996\)](#), chap. 8. The naked fact is that Nammālvār and Tirumaṅkai were not *brāhmaṇas*⁴² but were experts in the Vedic lore. Their contribution to Tamil *bhakti* literature constitutes nearly 2/3 of the ‘Nālāyiram’. They were not prejudiced by modern politics-oriented ideas such as regional chauvinism, linguistic fanaticism, religious bigotry, and caste disparity. The Ālvārs were universal in outlook to facilitate Cosmic Harmony. They wanted to see the world a paradise and not a den of devils; cf. the long list of flowering plants over-spilling with nectar (see Attachment), symbols of “Universal Religion” ([Gallico 1999](#): fig. pp. 52-53). The Ālvārs were vociferously lovers of the bounty of nature. They wanted man to live in peace with nature and assure fellowship for “beauty of the world and the paragon of animals” (Shakespeare: ‘Hamlet’ II, ii). “Love thy neighbour as thyself” should be the message adumbrated in any inter-religious platform. Let us not propagate “vain wisdom and false philosophy” (Milton: ‘Paradise Lost,’ II, 265).

The Mutal Ālvārs showed the way to Tirumaṅkai to propagate the philosophy of “Universal Love”. The *mūlabera* in the Kōvalūr temple is Trivikrama assuring peace and prosperity for the Cosmos. A hymn from Āṅṅāḷ (*Tiruppāvai* 3) may be cited to this effect.

Ōṅki yulakaḷanta uttamaṅ ...
 Tīṅkiṅṅi nāṭellām tīṅkaḷ mummāri peytu ...
 Nīṅkāta celvam niṅaitēlōr em pāvāy (cf. PTM 7.10.4)
 His Majesty that grew taller and taller ...
 Let the rains shower thrice a month unfailingly ...
 We are promised the Paradise of everlasting peace and prosperity

Attachment

Euphony of Nature

Scholars have examined how nature and religion interplay where God’s presence is felt [Kramrisch \(1976\)](#) cited in [Rajarajan \(2016b\)](#), 84-85, [Parthiban and Rajarajan \(2016\)](#), [Figure 1](#)). The way that the Ālvārs taste, *cuvai*, God, and enjoy nature is quite natural. I am just listing the abundant data charted by the Ālvārs in about twenty hymns. The venue, Kōvalūr, is set on the southern bank of the River Peṅṅai. Naturally, riverside regions are plenty in water, rich in agricultural fields (paddy in Tamilnadu [Figure 2](#))⁴³, flora, and fauna making up the cradle of civilizations. Many flowering plants and trees are flourishing on the venue that makes it the Garden of Eden [Gallico 1999](#) a case for [Taylor \(2013\)](#): 239)

“aborphilia”. Birds and bees fly freely, relieved from the molestation of camouflaged jungle monsters (when we write today [15 September 2017], the TV announced the bombardment of a metro rail station in London). *L’homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers*: the good job the terrorists could do to undo environmental resources!

I am just presenting a catalog of flora and fauna and related data appearing in the cited hymns.

- TI 77 *Pūñ-kiṭaṅku* “repository of flowers (flowering groves)”
 TI 86 *Pūñ-Kōval* “Kōvalūr decorated with flower (gardens⁴⁴)”
 PTM 2.4.1 *Taṭam* “perched Indian linden”, *Grewia microcos*
 PTM 2.10.1 *Iḷantaḷir* tender leaf of *āl/vaṭa* *Ficus bengalensis* (Wilkins (2000): 469); *ceñcāli* (cf. PTM 4.1.6, 4.2.4) a greater variety of paddy (Figure 10)
 Ibid. 2 *Tuḷāy*: *tuḷaci* “holy basil” *Oscimum sanctum* (Wilkins (2000): 470-72); *cāntam* sandalwood
 Ibid. 3 *Malarccōlai* “flower garden”; *karunīlam* “blue water-lily” *Nymphaea stellata*, *puṇṇai* “Alexandrian laurel” *Calophyllum inophyllum*, *kamalam* “lotus” *padma* (Wilkins (2000): 459), a tropical plant and flower, *lotos* in Greek and Deutsch, Egyptian water lily
 Ibid. 4 *Karumpu* “sugarcane”, *curapunṇai* “Gamboge” *Ochnocarpus longifolius*, *vaṇṭu* “beetle.”
 Ibid. 5 *Poḷil* “grove” (Rajarajan (2016b): 85-86); *teṇṇal* “enchanting breeze”, the northern wind is cold-tormenting and the southern breeze the food for love (*Maturait teṇṇal vantatu kāñīr* “see, the breeze of Maturai has come” *Cilappatikāram* 13.132)
 Ibid. 6 *Kaḷiru* “male elephant” (*piṭi* “female elephant” PTM 1.2.3, 2.4.8), *paṇi* “mist”, *Malar-makaḷ* “Lady of rank on flower” (Lakṣmī), *padmajā*; *kalai* “buck.”
 Ibid. 7 *Kari* “elephant”, *pari* “horse”, *viṭai* “bull”, *marutam* Queens’ flower tree *Terminalia arjuna*, *kamuku* “areca-nut” *Areca catechu*, *pāḷai* *Spathe* or pericarp of palms (Tamil Lexicon V, 2638), *pālai* “ivory wood” *Wrightia tinctoria*, *muttu* “pearl” *, *marakatam* “emerald”, *pavaḷam* “coral”, *cerutti* *Ochna squarrosa*, *moṭṭu* “(flower) bud”, *tēṇ* “honey”, *cōlai* “grove.”
 * For the past two millennia, ‘Italiano *signore*’ are crazy after *perla collana*!
 Ibid. 9 *Pūmaṅkai* “Lady of the Flower” (Lakṣmī), *caṅku* “conch-shell”, *kaṇṇakam kalpaka*-tree, *cempon* “molten gold”
 Ibid. 10 *Vaṇṇam* “elephant” (*Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* 6.1), *maḷai* “rain” (*malai* “hill” PTM 1.5.1, 7.1.3)
 PTM 7.3.2 *Makaram* mythical fish (*makarakkuḷai/makarakuṇḍala*), *ari* “lion”, *ēṇu* “bull”
 PTM 7.10.4 *Pey* “devil”, *ghoul*, *mutalai* “crocodile”, *maṇi* “gem” (cf. *navaratna*)
 TAN 6 *Añciraip-puḷ* *suparṇa*-bird (*Garuḍa*), *vēy* “bamboo” *Bambusa arundinacea* (cf. *Dendrocalamus strictus*), *poikai* “pond.”
 Ibid. 7 *Kaṭal* “ocean”, *poḷil* (*supra*), *kamalam* (*supra*)
 Ibid. 17 *Poṇ* “gold”, *kayal* “fish”, *puravam* “pigeon.”

Flora and fauna listed above are attestations of the gorgeous setting of the topography of Kōvalūr.

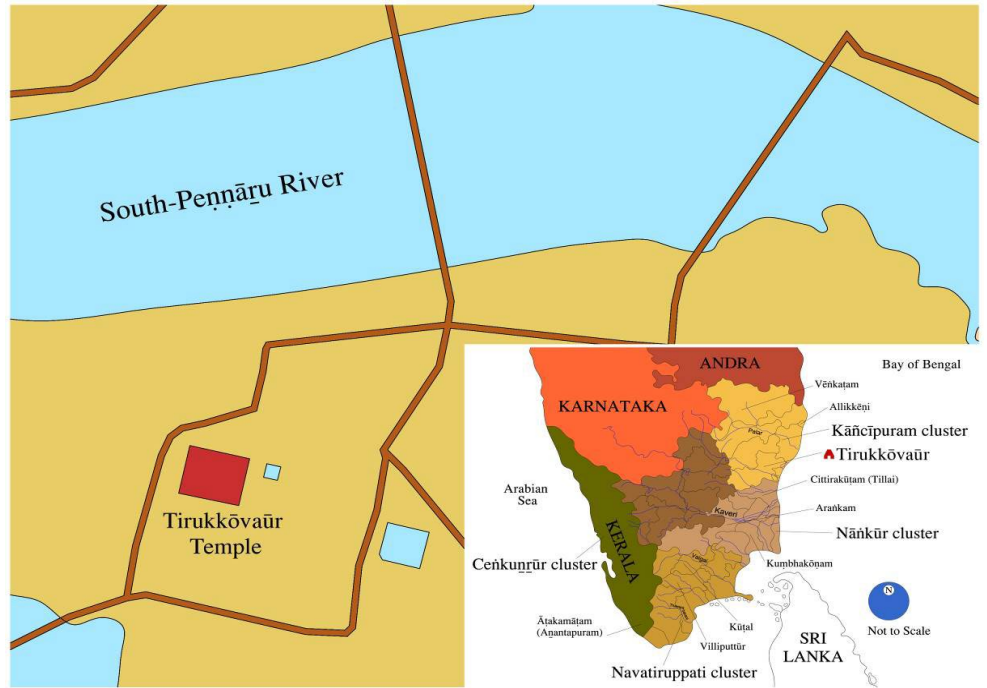


Figure 1 Map showing [Tiruk]-Kōvalūr



Figure 2 The landscape graced with the south-Pennāru River, Kōvalūr



Figure 3 View of the Temple with Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period *gopuram*, Kōvalūr



Figure 4 Mutal Ālvārs (bronzes under worship in the temple), Kōvalūr



Figure 5 Tirumaṅkai Ālvār (bronze), Āṭaṅūr

Source <https://anudinam.org/2013/11/21/thirumangai-azhwar-avathara-utsavam-at-thirunagari/>



Figure 6 Trivikrama (calendar art)

Source <https://kshetrapuranas.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/thiru.jpg?w=584>



Figure 7 Trivikrama (*mūlabera* - partial view), Kōvalūr





Figure 8 View of *yagaśālā* (see *cālai* PTM 3.10.8), Āṅṅāḷ Temple, Śrīvilliputtūr: a-b) Ongoing rituals





Figure 9 Priests reciting the scriptures, Āṅṅāḷ Temple, Śrīvilliputtūr: a) 'Nālayiram'-kōṭṭi, b) 'Veda'-goṣṭi

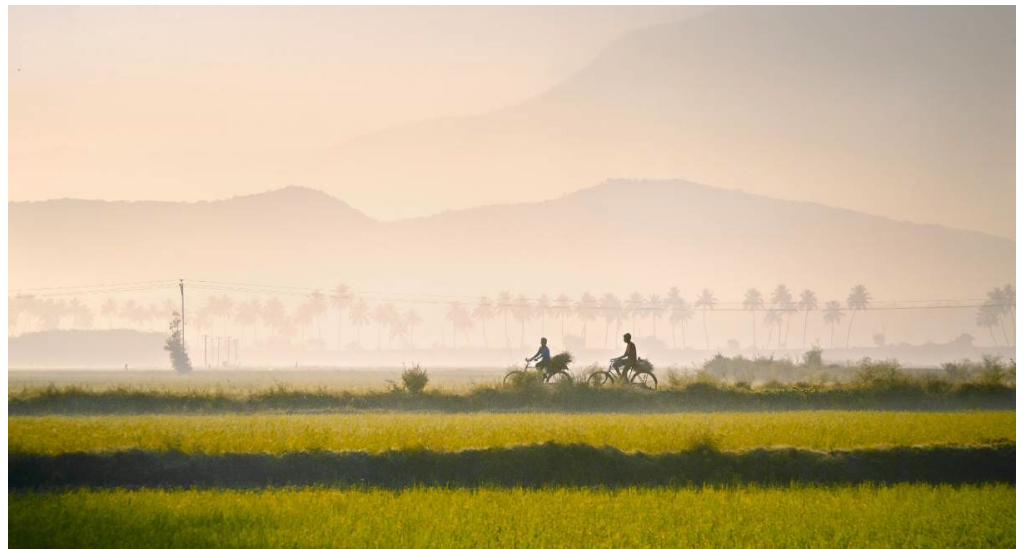


Figure 10 "Sea of rice" (see [Harle \(1958\)](#)), Foothills of Koṭaikkāṇal (early 1990)

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ABBREVIATIONS*

* A few are listed under References

| | |
|-----|--------------------------|
| PVP | Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai |
| PTM | <i>Periya Tirumoḷi</i> |
| TAN | <i>Tiruneṭuntāṅṭakam</i> |
| TI | <i>Tiruvantāti I</i> |
| TII | <i>Tiruvantāti II</i> |

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Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Periya Tirumaṭal, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Periyālvār Tirumoḷi, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

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Tiruccantaviruttam, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tirumālai, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tirumoḷi of Periyālvār, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tiruvantāti I, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tiruvantāti II, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tiruvantāti III, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tiruvāymolī, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

Tiruveḷukūrṛirukkai, part of 'Nālāyiram'.

VSN: *Viṣṇusahasranāma*:

- 1) T.M.P. Mahadevan ed. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 1976 [1972].
- 2) Svāmi Tapasyānanda ed. Mylapore: Śrī Rāmakrishṇa Maṭha, 1986.

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Notes

- ¹ I am the *Vedas*... I am for *bhakti* (cf. the *Gītā* 10.22, 14.14)
Vedānām Sāmavedo'smi...bhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ
- ² *Tiruvāymoḷi* (5.6.8 cited in Santhana-Lakshmi-Parthiban (2015), 24)
- ³ The Roman transcription and English summary of the three hymns are presented hereunder (cf. Rajarajan et al. 2007: 43, 89, 133; for a comprehensive dictionary on 'Nālāyiram' see Rajarajan et al. 2017b).

Poykai: Vaiyam takaliyā vārkaṭalē neyyāka/ Veyya katirōṅ viḷakkāka ceyya Cuṭarāli yāṇaṭikkē cūṭṭiṅēñcon mālai/ Iṭarāli nīnkukavē eṅru

“The earth is the lamp-cup! The ghee is the ocean! The scorching sun is the Light! I have offered the garland of words to the burning-Disc (Lord Viṣṇu) so that the cycle of bondages (*karma* and *samsāra*) are exterminated.”

Pūtam: Aṅpe takaliyā ārvamē neyyāka/ Inṅpuruku cintaiiṭu tiriyaṅ naṅpuruki/ Nāṅac cuṭarvilak kēṅṅiṅēṅ Nāraṅaṅkku/ Nāṅat Tamil purinta nāṅ

“With love as lamp-cup; willingness as ghee; affable mind as a wick, and in deep devotion, I lighted the lamp of omniscient-wisdom of the Lord Nārāyaṇa. I spin a garland in excelsior-Tamil.”

Pēy: Tirukkaṅṅēṅ poṅmēni kaṅṅēṅ tikaḷum/ Arukkaṅṅiṅaramum kaṅṅēṅ cerukkaḷarum/ Poṅṅālikaṅṅēṅ puricaṅkam kaikkaṅṅēṅ/ Eṅṅālivaṅṅaṅ pāliṅru

“I have had a *darśana* of the auspicious Śrī-Viṣṇu. I have seen the golden mien. I have enjoyed the ocean-hue of the Lord. I have seen the brilliance of the Sun’s radiance. The Lord carries the golden disc ready for war to annihilate the wicked. I have seen the warped conch in the hand of my Lord today.”

4 Trivikrama appears as *mūlabera* of the temples at Kōvalūr, Kāliccīrāma-*vinnakaram* (Kāviri delta) and Ūrakam (Kāñci). Vāmana is *mūlabera* in Vāraṅvilai/Āramulā (Kēraḷa), called Kuraḷappaṅ “Lord Dwarf” (‘Kuraḷ’ *Nācciyār Tirumoli* 4.9), also known as ‘Māṅi’ (literally “penis” Periyālvār *Tirumoli* 5.2.5), ‘Vāmaṅ’ (TII 20) and ‘Māṅ’ (*Tiruvāymoḷi* 4.8.6). For details and illustrations see Kalidos (1983), Jeyapriya-Rajaraman (2008), Rajaraman et al. (2017) and Mankodi (1991): fig. 71-72).

5 Veḷkā/Kāñcipuram (in *Perumpāṅṅaruppatai*), Śrīraṅgam, Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati/ Tirumala), Māliṅcōlai, and Āṭakamāṭam/Aṅantapuram (Kalidos (2015): 312-18) are the earliest *divyadeśas* notified in Tamil literary tradition, e.g., the *Paripāṭal* and the *Cilappatikāram*. The north Indian *divyadeśas* codified in the *itihāśas* (e.g., Ayodhyā, Dvārakā, Śālagrāma, Devaprayāgaḥ, Badrinātha and so on) are the earliest in the history of religions, dated in the immortal past.

6 This hymn has noted ‘Kōval itaikkāli’. Commentators (PVP: Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai c. 1167-1262 CE) suggest the Mutal Alvars met at Kōvalūr.

7 Nappiṅṅai is the Nīlādevī of the Ācāryas and later Rādha in Jayadeva’s *Gītagovinda* (12th century).

8 Today is known as Peṅṅāru (noted in *Akanāṅṅuru* 35, *Puṅṅāṅṅuru* 126; *peṅ* “woman, bride or wife” *Tamil Lexicon* V, 2856), it is the south Peṅṅai (Figure 2); the north-Peṅṅai is to the south of the Kṛṣṇā (Telugu Peṅṅēr).

9 All hymns end with *tirukKōvalūrrataṅṅuḷ kaṅṅēṅ nāṅē* “I have seen (the Lord) at sacred Kōvalūr” Seifert (2013), Shah (2013): 69-70).

10 The *Vaikhānasāgama* Kalidos (1989): 219) talks of *ṣaṭkāla-pūjās* at *pratyakṣakāla* or *uṣākāla* (dawn), *prabhāta* or *prātaḥkāla* (early morning), *madhyadina* (noon), *aparāhana* (afternoon), *sāyaṅkāla* (evening), and *niṣi* or *ardhayāma* (night). Kulacēkara Ālvār notes the six *pūjās* at Śrīraṅgam (*Perumāḷ Tirumoli* 1.7).

11 Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ; see the *Gītā* 4.7-8.

12 Raman (2006): 108-109) notes *Tiruvāymoḷi-maṅḍapa*, *Vyākhyāna-maṅḍapa*, *Gāyatrī-maṅḍapa* and so on (cf. Rajaraman 2006: Annexure I).

13 Kalaiyamarcēlvi or Mṛgavāhinī, T. Korṅvai or Mahiṣamardinī, Durgā (*Cilappatikāram* 12.16, 70-71, cf. Rajaraman 2015a: 205-209, fig. IIIa; 2015b: 173-75, Figure 7): *Māmakaḷum Nāmakaḷum māmayiṭar ceṅṅrukanta Kōmakaḷum ...* “Umā, Vācdevī, and Śrīdevī that slaughtered *mahiṣāsura* ...” (*Cilappatikāram* 22, *Veṅṅā*).

14 Kṛṣṇa tamed the virulent bulls to take the hand of Nappiṅṅai. Bull-fight was an ancient martial game of the Tamils (Rajaraman et al. 2017: 205-15).

15 Tirumaṅkai Ālvār known as Kaliyan (enemy of the Kali age) and Maṅkai (literally means “maiden”). For references see Rajaraman (2016): 82).

16 PVP spells Kōpālapuram/Gopālapura that seems to have been a popular name of Kōvalūr during the 12th-13th century.

17 Cf. Vintakkaṭikai is “tutelary deity of the Vindhya” (*Maṅimēkalai* 20.120); Vindhyaśinī-Durgā (*Śrītattvanidhi* 1.123, Liebert (1986): 339, Santhana-Lakshmi-Parthiban (2014): 76).

18 Malaiyamāṅs were feudatory of the region round Kōvalūr, rulers since the Caṅkam Age Sastri (1984): 122, Govindasamy (1979): 168-87, cf. Seifert (2013), Shah (2013) cf. Satyaputra in the Edicts of Aśoka (see note 32).

19 Parāṅkuśanāyaki, denotes the Ālvār Tirumaṅkai; might as well be a *devadāsi* or vestal virgin.

- 20 *Iṭaikkaḷi* here seems to suggest a secret chamber for the Lord (see note 7).
- 21 The Ālvārs in chronological sequence may tentatively be fixed as follows Hardy (2014): 261-70): Poykai, Pūtam, Pēy, Tirumālīcai, Nammālvār, Maturakavi, Toṅṅaraṭṭipōṭi, Tiruppāṅ, Kulacēkarar, Periyālvār, Āṅṅāḷ, and Tirumaṅkai (6th-7th to 9th century). For an elaborate introduction see Rajarajan et al. (2017a): 6-42) and Parthibanand and Rajarajan (2016) (2016: 1-24).
- 22 The *Cīriya Tirumaṭal* and *Periya Tirumaṭal* draw a sharp distinction between the Sanskrit *Veda* and Tamil *Maṛai*, scriptures of the Āryans and Drāviḍians.
- 23 The irony in history is that the ‘Nālāyiram’ came to be designated the Drāviḍa-*Veda*.
- 24 The *divyadeśas* appearing in the cited hymns are the following: Vēṅkaṭam, Viṅṅakar, Vēḥkā (TI 77); Tañcai, Araṅkam, Taṅkāl, the Ocean of Milk (Pārkaṭal), Mallai, Kuṭantai (TII 70); Naṛaiyūr (TAN 17), Āli, Nirmalai (PTM 2.4.1); Kaṅṅamaṅkai (PTM 7.10.4, TAN 6-7, 17); Kōval or Kōvalūr appears in all hymns.
- 25 “What is the utility of years that do not listen to the glories of Kṛṣṇa; what is the value of eyes not viewing the Lord’s dramas, and what is the use of tongues that do not extol the wonders?” (*Cilappatikāram* 17, ‘Patarkkaipparval’ 1-3; cf. Rajarajan (2016a): 342). See ‘Tiruvaṅkamālai’ in *Tēvāram* (4.9).
- 26 Inscriptions in the temple are dated since the Middle Cōla period (Rājarāja I et alii) recording donations for food offerings (*amutu*), *abhiṣeka* and *utsava* (for s summary of the inscriptions see Ragunath (2014): 64-67).
- 27 For a compilation of the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* arranged in alphabetical order see Rajarajan et al. (2017b): 1652-57).
- 28 *Pañcāgnitapas* killing the body was not encouraged (*Periya Tirumōḷi* 3.2.2, cf. Bon 1974: figs. pp. 54-55).
- 29 *Pōkattil valīuvāta* (*Nācciyār Tirumōḷi* 8.10) Āṅṅāḷ that never departs from *bhoga-mārga*.
- 30 The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, dated c. 950 CE O’Flaherty (1994): 17) was not extant during the time of the Ālvārs (Hardy 1983).
- 31 The Lord’s mistresses are in several thousand (for citations see Rajarajan et al. (2017b): 1362-63).
- 32 Cf. Choḍa Pādā Satiyaputo Ketalaputo (Cōla, Pāṇḍya Satyaputra and Kēraḷaputra) in the Girṅār Edict of Āśoka Maurya Mookerji (1972): 131-32, 223).
- 33 ‘Nāṅmaraiyāḷar’ (*catur*-Vedis), ‘tolcīr-maraiyāḷar’ (primeval-Vedis) and ‘arumaraiyantaṅar’ (gifted *brāhmaṇas*) were a thriving aristocratic population (3,000) in Tillai-[Cittirakūṭam]. They taught parrots to speak the language of the *Vedas* (*Periya Tirumōḷi* 3.2.2, 6, 8).
- 34 The *kaḷḷaṅs* till the mid-twentieth century did not follow the Vedic culture in domestic and temple rituals Dumont (1986) citing Edgar Thurston 1909: see under *kaḷḷaṅ*). Today, they are *dādās* that could kidnap a *brāhmaṇa* priest for his family function (source: contemporary movies).
- 35 The Kuṭumiyāmalai Inscription in the Putukkōṭṭai region (c. 7th century) lists the *saptasvaras* (IPS, no. 2, pp. 2-7).
- 36 The four *Vedas* are *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva*.
- 37 The six *Vedāṅgas* (again noted in *Tiruccantaviruttam* 15; PTM 2.5.9, 3.4.1, 5.9.9, 9.1.1) are *sikṣa*, *chhandas*, *vyākaraṇa*, *nirukta*, *jyotiṣa* and *kalpa* (Rajarajan et al. (2017b): 1586).
- 38 The five sacrifices, *pañcamahāyajñas* (*Tiruccantaviruttam* 2) are *devayajña*, *pitṛyajña*, *bhūtajajña*, *manusyayajña* and *Brahmayajña* (Rajarajan 2017b: 25; see Periyālvār *Tirumōḷi* 4.4.6, *Tiruvāymōḷi* 7.10.3, PTM 2.5.9, 3.4.1).
- 39 The triple fires are *garhapatyā*, *āhavanīyā* and *dakṣiṇāgni* Rajarajan et al. (2017b): 870; see TII 96; *Tiruveḷukūrṅirukkai* l. 11; PTM 5.1.8).
- 40 R.K. Parthiban working on the Śrīvilliputtūr was annoyed when we were finalizing the present article. He was terribly upset because he read the news in the dailies to the effect that the *nitya-amutupati* (daily food offering) to the Nācciyār is stopped because politicians had swindled the 1,000 acres of lands belonging to the temple Parthiban and Rajarajan (2016).
- 41 Indian adjudicators of litigations in High Courts are much more prudent than temple priests. When the Kāñcīpuram case was moved in the Court of Law (1970s) the judge judiciously ordered “let the *teṅkakai* and *vaṭakakai nāmams* be affixed to the temple elephant on alternative weeks”.
- 42 Among the twelve, three were *brāhmaṇas* Toṅṅaraṭṭipōṭi, Periyālvār, and Āṅṅāḷ by adoption (notes *pārppanac-cittār* in *Nācciyār Tirumōḷi* 6.4); and almost all the Ācāryas beginning with Nātamuṇi (c. tenth century Zvelebil (1974): 91).
- 43 In the illustrated photo in between the paddy fields and yonder the hills, a rivulet called Mañcalāru (Yellow River) flows (Parthiban (2013): 93, cf. Map, Plan 3, Figure 9).
- 44 A number of medieval inscriptions record gifts for maintenance of flower garden in temples, e.g., Śrīraṅgam (vide, 1938-39: 126; 1948-49, no. 3, 109).

