The Female Voice and the Crossing of the Boundaries of Scholarship: 
A Note on the Rahasyam of the Lady from Tirukkōḷūr, with 
a Complete, Annotated Translation*

SUMMARY: The Śrīvaiṣṇavas are prolific writers, who masterfully used multiple languages for composing works in a range of genres, from commentaries to esoterical works, from devotional poetry to hagiography. But while this community, roughly half of which consists of women, claims equality with a difference for women—which includes the right to liberation at death and to religious, albeit non-Vedic, learning—it hardly seems to have encouraged them to emulate the male authors and produce works of any kind. Despite this attitude, a few female voices, sometimes muffled as they can be, are heard across the centuries. One such voice belongs to Tirukkōḷūr penpiḷḷai (“the woman from Tirukkōḷūr,” 12th c.?), who allegedly spoke words betraying her scholarly knowledge, and that, too, to the great Rāmānuja himself. Who this woman—who ventured into the jealously-guarded male domain of

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sugarl—I was, and what her ‘composition’ deals with are the topics of this brief essay.

KEYWORDS: Tirukkolur peppilai rahasyam, Srivaisnava hagiography, Ramanuja, women’s literature, Paayirayarappati guruparamparaprabhavam, Mummani rahasyam, Pillai Lokam Jiya

Introduction

Anyone who wishes to study Indian women, listen to their voices, and find alternative conceptions in Indian civilisation, often startlingly different from what one is used to in our classics, should turn to materials like the lives and poems of the women saints, women’s tales, songs, riddles, games and proverbs in oral traditions all over the country, and the myths and cults of goddesses.
(Ramanujan 1992: 64)

The Tirukkolur peppilai rahasyam (henceforth Rahasyam) is a highly popular work among the Srivaisnavas, found within the hagiographic work Paayirayarappati guruparamparaprabhavam (GPP12k). It is also the main work in the collection named Mummani rahasyam

1 Rahasyams are esoteric works that are part of Srivaisnava literature, which were initially conceived to explain the hidden meanings of the mantras (and other such important topics) sacred to the Srivaisnavas. This particular work is also known as Tirukkolur amma varttaikal—‘The words of the lady of Tirukkolur.’

2 A preliminary research points to the existence of two manuscripts of the Rahasyam at the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (GOML) in Chennai, India, but I am yet to come across a manuscript of the whole of the GPP12k. While most existent publications of the Rahasyam—which often include (sometimes lengthy) explanations of cryptic words—are not scholarly ones, the 1909 edition of the GPP12k seems like the result of serious traditional scholarship, whereas the version re-edited in 2018 appears to introduce typos and other errors. Please note that due
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(‘The three gems of rahasyams’ or ‘the secrets of the three gems’), all consisting of words allegedly spoken by women. The Rahasyam is made up of rhetorical questions, which, in this case, are asked by an unknown woman in reply to Rāmānuja’s query as to why she was leaving the sacred town of Tirukkōḷūr, which he was so eager to reach. These vārttais (‘phrases’), despite being words of humility, could sometimes come across as challenges, and at other times, as lecturing words: after all, they are pronounced by a woman who is justifying her decision to a man of Rāmānuja’s calibre, answering him back with questions of her own. How is it then that the Rahasyam is not perceived as being transgressive? Has its persistent popularity been translated into further scholarship at the hands of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, who are known for their commentarial works? If not, in what way does this work and its popularity celebrate the crossing of boundaries and venturing into an almost exclusive male domain of literate scholarship by a random woman?

The question of authorship and date

The authorship of this Rahasyam is doubly problematic, as we need to assert the authorship of this particular text (i.e. the Rahasyam), as well as that of the whole GPP12k. The latter is attributed to Piḷḷai

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3. The second work is known as the Tiruvallikkēni pen ṛahasyam, a set of 108 questions posed by a woman from Tiruvallikkēni in reply to Maṇavāḷa Māmuṇi’s (15th c.) three questions. The third and last one is called Ciṉṉiyammāḷ ṛahasyam, which consists of 24 questions asked by Ciṉṉiyammāḷ in reply to the same number of questions posed by Poṇṇaṭikkāl Jīyar, Maṇavāḷa Māmuṇi’s disciple. I plan to translate and study these works in the near future.

4. The only written Śrīvaiṣṇava work attributed to a premodern woman so far is a commentary on the Tiruvāymoḻi (TVM), Tirukkōṇēri Dāsyai’s (“handmaiden from Tirukkōṇēri,” 13th c.?) Tiruvāymoḻi vācakamālai or Vivaraṇaśatakam. For more on this, see Narayanan 2002 and Young 1997.
Lokam Jiär (ca. 16th c.)⁵ by most scholars.⁶ As for the Rahasyam, tradition has attributed it to a woman solely known after her native town, which, as we saw, plays a part in the story that states the origin of this work. She is almost a mythical figure, whose very existence can only be known through a brief mention in Nampiḷḷai’s Īṭu Bhagavadviśayam, a 13th-c. commentary on Nammāḻvār’s Tiruvāy-molĩ,⁷ and through the GPP12, as far as I know. Was the Rahasyam really authored by a woman? How do we assess that? Does it even matter, since the Śrīvaiśṇavas consider it a woman’s work (and that is what matters most for this study)? Does the way Śrīvaiśṇavas deal with this text still not show us their opinions on women theologians and authors?

²⁵ See Kiruṣṇamācāryar 2018 [1909]: ii–iv and Vēṅkaṭācāryar Svāmi (in Kiruṣṇamācāryar 2018 [1909]: xiii–xiv) for a discussion on the topic of authorship and dating. Kiruṣṇamācāryar notes the abundance of interpolations and thinks that this work follows closely Piṉpaḻakiya Perumāḷ Jiär’s Āṟāyirappati guruparamparā-prabhāvam (GPP6k). Vēṅkaṭācāryar Svāmi convincingly argues that the GPP12k is the first part, and the Yatīndrapravaṇaprabhāvam is the sequel of Piḷḷai Lokam Jiär’s hagiographic work.

²⁶ M. S. Ramesh (Ramesh 1996: 61) names Tiruvāy-molşi Piḷḷai (ca. 14th c.) as the author, which does not seem very likely to me, as Piḷḷai himself is mentioned as the source of a story which is reported by an Ācārya a couple of generations later (‘Thus graciously said Tiruvāy-molşi Piḷḷai, according to the Periya Jiär of Vāṉamāmalai’; See Appendix for the whole passage). It is, of course, possible that this particular passage is a later addition. Unless I thoroughly study the whole work and separate the original layer(s) from later additions, I will not be able to pronounce myself on the topic in a definite way.

²⁷ I found this reference at an advanced stage of the publication of this article, and have therefore been unable to deal with it more amply. This extract from the Īṭu commentary on Tiruvāy-molşi 6.7.1 only gives an outline of the story: emperumāṉār terkē eḻuntarulā nīrka, etirē varukyiṟḷ oru penpiḷḷaiyaik kaṇṭu, ‘eṅku niṟṟum?’ enṟa, ‘tirukkōḷūril nīrnum’ enṟa, ‘a- ūril pukka peṅkalum pōka kaṭavar āy iruppārkalō?’ enṟaruḷic ceṭṭār - ‘When Rāmānuja graciously went to the South, he saw a woman coming in the opposite direction, and asked [her], ‘Where from?’ As [she] said, ‘From Tirukkōḷür’, he graciously said, ‘Can women who have entered that town even leave [it]?’ In this kernel of the anecdote, which ends here in the Īṭu, the woman is thus neither named, nor identified. Moreover, she does not say much either.
The GPP12k contains interpolations (See fn 6). Is the Rahasyam one such passage? It is not really possible to say. While guruparamparās such as the Divyasūricaritam (DSC) and the GPP6k tell the life stories of the Āḻvārs and mostly of well-known Ācāryas (such as Rāmānuja or Maṇavāḷa Māmuṇi), the GPP12k includes stories of lesser known Śrīvaishṇavas, including non-Brahmin ones and women. It may have been within this framework that both the story and the words of this lady were included in it. Were they written by Jīyar in order to show that the Śrīvaishṇava fold is open to one and all, and values everyone? Or were they truly words of someone else, possibly a woman, which circulated in Jīyar’s times although barely hinted at (and en passant) in the Īṭu, and which Jīyar incorporated in his work, glossing them in his own words? It is possible, but we cannot prove or disprove this hypothesis. But would the Śrīvaishṇavas deliberately indulge in and perpetuate a fictio poetica in order to further their own agenda, whatever it may be? It is hard to say.

Given the authorship issues, dating this composition is also difficult. If written by Piḷḷai Lokam Jīyar, then the GPP12k probably belongs to the 16th c., with the Rahasyam possibly forming an older layer. If the Rahasyam is an interpolation, then the best we can do is to suggest a terminus ante quem based on the date of the two palm-leaf manuscript copies that exist at the GOML (see fn 7), which I have not had the occasion to check yet. If Tiruvāyumoḻi Piḷḷai is the author, then it would be from the 13th c., which does not seem plausible to me, especially since the language itself does not seem that old.

Moreover, his disciples’ disciples, such as Parāśara Bhaṭṭa, are also mentioned, which seems to weaken the particular date claim. As for a sample of the Tamil language closest to Rāmānuja’s time, space and thought, we only have Tirukkurukkai...
that a few Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas are mentioned in it (see Table 1), and because the latest of them seems to be Parāśara Bhaṭṭa, we could presume that these sayings originated around his lifetime (ca 12th c.). However, this reconstruction could be endangered by a seeming quotation from Maṇavāḷa Māmuṉi’s (15th c.) work (see fn 28). Further questions arise in this connection: Could it be that this expression \( \text{piñc’ āy paḻuttāḷ} \)—‘She who ripened while being unripe’—was used by someone before Māmuṉi, who simply re-used it?\(^{11}\) Or, could this particular \( \text{vārttai} \) (11) be a later insertion? But then, there are a few other \( \text{vārttai}s \) (60, 61, 73, 76, 78) that seem to mention events that could not have happened before this alleged meeting between Rāmānuja and the woman. How could we explain them? Are they all later insertions? Or could they be signs that the author, while in the process of making their words seem to have come from older times than they really were, included later elements in a fit of oblivion or distraction? If so, why did she most scrupulously try to limit herself to mentioning people who lived during or before Rāmānuja’s lifetime? Is this an attempt at building a certain aura around this teacher?\(^{12}\)

Pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ’s commentary on the \( \text{Tiruvāymoḻi} \), the \( \text{Āṟāyirappati} \), and a couple of other poetic works, e.g. Tiruvaraṅkattu Amutanār’s \( \text{Irāmānuca nūṟṟantāṭi} \) and Aruḷāḷa Perumāḷ Emperumānār’s \( \text{Jñānasāram-Prameyasāram} \). Being of a different genre and size, it is a challenge to compare them with the language used in the \( \text{Rahasyam} \).

\(^{11}\) Caṭakōpaṉ (Caṭakōpaṉ 2008: 88) states that commentators have used this expression to refer to Āṇṭāḷ, but does not give any precise source. I am yet to come across this expression elsewhere, as neither the electronic text of Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai’s commentary on Āṇṭāḷ’s \( \text{Nācciyār tirumoḻi} \), nor Piḷḷai Lokam Jīyar’s commentary on the \( \text{Upatēca rattiṉamālai} \) have yielded anything.

\(^{12}\) Besides, how could the story of a relatively unknown (possibly fictional) person, Koṅku Pirāṭṭi, be known within her lifetime by a woman of a different region? See also fn 49.
### Table 1. A list of (possibly) historical people mentioned in the *Rahasyam* (and who are attested in other works)

| No of vārttai | Name/expression given in the *Rahasyam* | Relation to Rāmānuja                  |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 57, 71, 72    | Rāmānuja (unnamed, only alluded to)     | -                                    |
| 62            | *Emperumāṅgar* (Rāmānuja)              |                                      |
| 37            | *Tirukkaccinampiyār* (Tiruk-kaccinampiyār) | teacher                            |
| 56            | *Vāṭuka nampi*                          | disciple                             |
| 59            | *Nāthamuni* (Yāmuna’s grandfather)     |                                      |
| 60            | *Mārutiyaṇṭāṉ* (Ciṟiyāṇṭāṉ)            | disciple                             |
| 61            | *Āḷvāṅ* (Kūrattāḷvāṅ)                  | disciple                             |
| 63            | *Nallāṉ* (Nallāṅ Cakravarti)           | disciple                             |
| 64            | *Āḷavantar* (Yāmunācārya)              | teachers’ teacher                    |
| 65            | *Teyvavāriyaṇṭāṉ*                      | (Yāmuna’s disciple)                 |
| 66            | *Amutaṅgar* (Tiruvaraṅkattu Amutaṅgar) | disciple                             |
| 69            | *Periya Nampi* (Mahāpūrṇa)             | teacher                              |
| 70            | *Tirumālaiyaṇṭāṉ*                      | teacher                              |
| 71            | *Tirukkōṭṭiyūr* (Nampi)                | teacher                              |
| 73            | *Naṟaiyūrār* (Naṟaiyūr Araiyar)        | disciple                             |
| 75            | *Tirumalai Nampi*                      | uncle? and teacher                   |
| 78, 80        | *[Parāśara] Bhaṭṭar*                   | disciple’s son/disciple             |
| 79            | *Empār* (Govinda Bhaṭṭa)               | disciple                             |
| 81            | *[Villipputtūr] Pakavar*                | ?                                    |

Other possibly historical people are the lady from Koṅku (40) and Kaṇapurattāḷ (76).

### Language and structure of the *Rahasyam*

The GPP12k is composed in Manipravalam, a highly Sanskritized form of Tamil, a veritable lingua franca for many Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas,
as we can see from the sample text which introduces and concludes the Rahasyam (See Appendix). As for the Rahasyam itself, its language can be better defined as Tamil, rather than Manipravalam, especially when compared with the rest of the GPP12k. For, after all, most of its Sanskrit-origin words are proper names.

The work itself is a set of 81 rhetorical questions, which the Tirukkōḷūr lady fires away in reply to Rāmānuja’s original questions. And the interrogative sentences merely replace a negative answer, as the expected reply is no.13 The narratorial voice, which does not allow us to determine its gender, is always the grammatical subject. Each question includes a comparison, and roughly follows the pattern: ‘Did I do such-and-such thing, like so-and-so did?’ The so-and-so often includes a name of a real or epic/Purāṇic character, both male and female (both at times suffixed with a honorific marker, e.g. tirumālīcayār in 13 and devakiyār in 22), and even non-human (the elephant in 42). And their action refers to something praiseworthy that they did. The Tirukkōḷūr lady asks whether she accomplished such great actions in order to deserve staying at an auspicious place like Tirukkōḷūr.

The vārttais themselves are elliptical, and sometimes downright cryptic. For example, “Do I not know of ‘another God,’ like Mahārāja did?” (21) But then, a Śrīvaiṣṇava audience would either have a teacher to explain to them what is not self-evident, or they would

13 One of the anonymous reviewers made the following interesting point: “…the meaning of the verb in this particular form (ceyteno, enreno etc.) can be understood as the exclamation, such as: didn’t I do...?, didn’t I say ? (whether I did not do?)—as a positive statement. In this case the author being a bhakta addresses the God saying that he/she identified himself/herself (or melting) with the heroes mentioned. And, perhaps, it is a kind of a complaint: I did all this things but you do not gratify me (also a typical motive in bhakti poetry). It is but a suggestion but I think this approach is possible. (sic)” While this certainly is a possibility, I have simply followed the traditional interpretation here, which fits best with the context given for the birth of this Rahasyam. Besides, with all the will in the world, the lady of Tirukkōḷūr could not possibly have given up her body like the ascetic’s wife (3) or served human flesh to God like Ghaṇṭākāraṇa (6). So I am not sure that the interpretation would be entirely possible.
be knowledgeable enough to understand on their own (e.g. who Madhurakavi is and what is meant by his not knowing another God but his teacher Nammāḻvāṟ), for the Rahasyam was definitely written by a Śrīvaishnava for fellow Śrīvaishnavas, as the references to their Ācāryas and the Śrīvaishnava paribhāṣai (‘jargon’) show.

The contents of the Rahasyam

Each vārttai gives a name or an epithet of a character or person, which makes the Rahasyam rich in stories and allusions, and possibly in historical events. Other than the Śrīvaishnava Ācāryas (and other potentially historical, or at least non-epic/Purānic people), most other characters belong to the two Sanskrit epics and the Purāṇas, mostly the Bhāgavata purāṇa, although the source of the Kṛṣṇa stories for the author could also be the Āḻvār poetry.

The prominence of Rāma-related stories (21 or 22 of them) is unsurprising, given the obvious preference for this incarnation over Kṛṣṇa or any other for the Śrīvaishnava Ācāryas (especially those from Śrīraṅgam), from at least Nampiḷḷai onwards. Kṛṣṇa follows, with 14 allusions or direct mentions. As for women characters, 14 of them are mentioned in the Rahasyam, which represents one fifth of all references. While this does not allow us to deduce the gender of the author, it does help us note that there may be a will to have a relatively balanced list of men and women.

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14 For example, Kūrattāḻvāṉ, one of Rāmānuja’s disciples.
15 For example, the expression periya uṭaiyār (‘the elder lord’) is used to refer to Jaṭāyu (48), and perumāḷ (‘great man’) for Rāma.
16 There are a few exceptions, like King Toṇṭaimāṉ (5), who appear in minor Purāṇas.
17 See Narayanan 1994 for more on this topic.
18 In at least two cases, we can see that non-Vālmīkian stories were also known to the author, e.g. the help of the squirrels in the building of the causeway (25), or Ahalāyā turning into a stone (10).
19 Rāma: 4, 7, 10, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 27, 29 (32), 35, 39, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 54, 67. Kṛṣṇa: 1, 2, 3, 6, 16, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 43, 44, 52, 55.
Table 2. Women referred to in the *Rahasyam*\(^{20}\)

| Divine women | Semi-divine women |
|--------------|-------------------|
| Goddess [Sītā] (4) | The ascetic’s wife (3), Anasūya (7), Ahalyā (10), Devakī (22), Yaṣodā (24), Śabarī (50), Draupadī (55) |
| divinised | Āṇṭāḷ (11) |
| others | The woman from Koṅku (40), the hunchbacked woman (43), the woman from Kaṇapuram (76) |
| | Trijaṭā (18), Mandodarī (19) |

It is noteworthy that no stories from the Vedas or the Upaniṣads, which are traditionally considered as parts of the Vedas, are mentioned. Could that be because women were not supposed to know them?\(^{21}\) It is hard to say, although it does seem that the author remains on safe ground.

In contrast, Śrīvaiṣṇava theological ideas and ideals abound, for example, having absolute faith in God (e.g. 42, 55); respecting the Ācāryas more than God (e.g. 21, 56, 60, 61, 65, 76); considering that being a Śrīvaiṣṇava is more important than the caste one is born into (63, 69); believing oneself to be inferior (75), especially to the other Śrīvaiṣṇavas; being favourable to God (17, 27); and serving God (e.g. 31, 36, 37, 41, 46, 54). It does not seem that anything in this text could go against the Śrīvaiṣṇava beliefs, there is nothing revolutionary, nor are there ideas which advocate anything for women, for example.

\(^{20}\) Please note that some categories might overlap, and some women are difficult to fit into any.

\(^{21}\) It would be worthwhile to see what this author’s Brahmin/non-Brahmin counterparts did, but that is beyond the scope of this essay.
The author’s extensive knowledge is unquestionable: s/he knows and uses various sources, but also glosses words from original texts freely or even quotes them directly sometimes: thus, reported speech from epic and Purānic works is common (e.g. Dhruva’s words in 8, Kṛṣṇa’s parents’ in 23 and Vasiṣṭha’s in 39). Direct quotes also exist: Periyāḻvār’s, Nammāḻvār’s, Kulaśekhara Āḻvār’s and Madhurakavi’s words are quoted in 11, 14, 15, and 21 respectively. The most striking direct quote is: ahaṃ vedmi (‘I know’), a direct Sanskrit quotation from VR 1.18.4 (in 20), which shows that the author was exposed to this language; and Maṇavāḷa Māmuṉi’s words in 11, which we discussed above in connection with the dating.

Let us now read through the Rahasyam in order to try and answer some of the questions that we have raised.

**Tirukkōḷūr peṇṉillai rahasyam: text and translation**

1. *aḻaittu varukinṟēṉ enṟēṉō akrūrarai pōlē?*

→ Did I say ‘I will bring [Kṛṣṇa]’ like Akrūra did?

V:23 1b varukinṟēṉ T1; varukirēṉ T2+T3+T4

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22 This text is based on the Kiruṣṇamācāryar edition of 2018, which itself is based on a 1909 edition. I have corrected some typographic errors, solved the sandhi, and checked for variants in a couple of printed editions of the Rahasyam while waiting to check the existent manuscripts. Please note that the Kiruṣṇamācāryar edition (2018) gives the text in Tamil with numerical diacritics to mark the Sanskrit sounds that do not exist in Tamil (e.g. ka, ka2, ka3, ka4 refer to ka, kha, ga, gha). Therefore, I have directly given the word with the proper diacritics. I have not modified the text while transliterating, except when I found obvious typos. While it is true that the text is Tamil (more than Manipravalam), except perhaps for the proper nouns, because the transliteration corresponds to an edition that marks out the Sanskrit syllables, I have done the same.

In the notes following each statement, I have tried to give the context which will help the reader understand the meanings of the elliptical vārttai (>), and give a source when it is known to me. Please note that the sources I cite are not necessarily the only ones or the oldest for any given story. Between {} I have given the traditional interpretation (based on Velukkudi n.d.) on what the specific quality is, which the lady claims to be lacking.

23 V = variants. T1 = Kiruṣṇamācāryar edition; T2 = Rāmānujan edition; T3 = Caṭakōpaṉ edition; T4 = Velukkudi. Between '{}' are additional variants that are
> Akrūra agreed to bring Kṛṣṇa to Mathurā as per the order of Kaṃsa, who planned to kill Him (BhP 10.38) {brining God along and eagerness in meeting the Lord}

2. akam oḻittu viṭṭēṉō vidurarai pōlē?

→ Have I cleared the house/the mind\(^{24}\) like Vidura did?

V: 2bc oḻittu viṭṭēṉō T1+T2+T4; oḻintuviṭṭēṉō T3

> Vidura cleaned his house for Kṛṣṇa’s visit/ his heart to let Him in (MBh. 5.89) {being with a pure heart}

3. dehattai viṭṭēṉō ruṣipatniyai pōlē?

→ Did I give up the body like the ascetic’s wife?

> When Kṛṣṇa asked some ascetics to feed Him and His friends, they ignored the request. Their wives, however, did feed the boys, disobeying their husbands. But one of them, who was kept back by force by her husband, gave up her life (BhP 10.23)\(^{25}\) {giving up the body if His grace is not forthcoming}

4. daśamukhaṉai cerrēṉō pirāṭṭiyai pōlē?

→ Did I kill/hate the ten-headed one, like the Lady [Sītā] did?

mentioned by each edition. Please note that I have recorded only the significant variations, and left out the differences when I suspected a typo, a different way of transcribing a Sanskrit word in Tamil or sandhi-related choices. Also, in the construction X pōl (‘like X’), X can sometimes take the accusative in Tamil (X-ai), and T3 seems to prefer to have the accusative marker, while the others do not (NB: Kiruṣṇamācāriyar 2018 is not consistent with the usage of the accusative, but I have followed the edition all the same). So I have also ignored that ‘variant’, especially since it is not clear what T3’s sources are.

\(^{24}\) Akam can mean both in Tamil, and both are true in the case of Vidura. It might also be possible to read this as akam = aham + oḻittu viṭṭēṉō = have I destroyed ‘I’ (in the sense of egotism). Caṭakōpaṇ (Caṭakōpaṇ 2008: 18) takes it this way.

\(^{25}\) Another version suggests that she did so because she was not taken back by her husband (Velukkudi s.d.: 3).
> Sītā indirectly killed Rāvaṇa/ She detested all the offers of luxury that he made Her (See for example, VR 5.19–20) {staying firmly dependent on no one but the Lord}

5. \textit{piṇam eluppi viṭṭēṉō toṇṭaimāṉai pōlē?} 

→ Did I revive a corpse, like [King] Toṇṭaimāṉ did?

> A Brahmin requested the king to take care of his family while he was away in Kāśī. When he later sent for them, the king realised that he had neglected his duty and the family had died. He then worshipped Veṅkaṭeśvara, who resuscitated that Brahmin family\textsuperscript{26} {possessing such love for God}

6. \textit{piṇa-virunt’ iṭṭēṉō kaṇṭhākarṇaṉai pōlē?} 

→ Did I serve a feast of corpse, like Ghaṇṭākarṇa did?

> Ghaṇṭākarṇa, a Rākṣasa, offered a Brahmin’s corpse to Kṛṣṇa as per the Rākṣasa custom, as a result of which he reached Vai- kuṇṭha (\textit{Bhaviṣya purāṇa} 80–92) {worshipping God everyday, which will destroy karma}

7. \textit{tāy kōlam ceytēṉō anasuyai pōlē?} 

→ Did I adopt the form of a mother, like Anasūyā did?

> This is a reference to Anasūyā acting as a mother to Sītā during the initial part of Her stay in the forest (VR 2.110) {feeling motherly affection for God}

8. \textit{tantai eṅkē enrēṉō dhruvaṇai pōlē?} 

→ Did I say, ‘Where is [my] father[’s lap]?’, like Dhruva did?

> The child Dhruva sought to sit on the lap of his father, who ignored him in favour of his stepbrother. Dhruva then went

\textsuperscript{26} Velukkudi (s.d.: 5) cites as a source for this story the \textit{Veṅkaṭācala māhātmya} 10 (which I have been able to trace) in the \textit{Tīrthakāṇḍa} of the \textit{Brahmāṇḍa purāṇa}, which I have not been able to trace.
to the forest, sat in penance and gained a most prominent position thanks to Nārāyaṇa’s boon (<i>Viṣṇu purāṇa</i> 1.11–2; BhP 4.8–9) {considering Nārāyaṇa as one’s father and all other relations}

9. <i>mūṉṟ’ eluttu koṇṇēṉō kṣatrabandhuvai pōlē?</i>

→ Did I utter the three syllables, like Kṣatrabandhu did?

> A royal prince of a vile nature, he was chased away into the forest by his people. But he saved a drowning ascetic, who suggested that he recite God’s [three-syllabled] name. As a result, Kṣatrabandhu was saved from his fate (<i>Viṣṇudharma purāṇa</i> I.94) {reciting God’s names}

10. <i>mūtal aṭiyai perrēṉō ahalikaiyai pōlē?</i>

→ Did I obtain the feet of the First Cause [of the universe], like Ahalyā did?

> This is a reference to Ahalyā being redeemed from her husband’s curse thanks to Rāma’s foot<sup>27</sup> (VR 1.49–51) {bearing the dust from the feet of God on one’s head}

11. <i>piṅc’ āy paḻuttēṉō āṇṭāḷai pōlē?</i>

→ Did I ripen while being unripe, like Āṇṭāḷ did?

> Āṇṭāḷ is ripe with devotion for Kṛṣṇa at a very tender age<sup>28</sup> {being devoted to God even as a child}

12. <i>emperumāṉ eṉṟēṉō paṭṭarpirāṉ pōlē?</i>

→ Did I say, ‘Our Lord’, like Bhaṭṭarpirāṉ did?

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<sup>27</sup> While Vālmīki’s version suggests that she lies in dust, Kampaṉ has her turned into a stone, upon which Rāma steps and removes her curse. It does seem that this <i>vārttai</i> has this latter story in mind.

<sup>28</sup> This question almost includes a direct quotation from Maṇavāḷa Māmuṉi’s <i>Upatēca rattipālai 24</i> (<i>piṅc’ āy paḻuttāḷai āṇṭāḷai</i> - ‘Āṇṭāḷ, she who ripened [while] being an unripe one’).
> This is a reference to Periyāḻvār, who established Nārāyaṇa as the sole God at the Pāṇḍya king’s court in Madurai (GPP6k, ‘Periyāḻvār vaibhavam’)\(^{29}\) {establishing Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Being/ being enslaved to God and performing service to Him}

13. ārāyntu viṭṭēṉō tirumāḻicaiyār pōlē?

→ Have I examined [all the doctrines] and given up [the rest], like the honourable Tirumāḻicai [Āḻvār] did?

> This Āḻvār examined many doctrines (DSC/GPP6k, ‘Tirumāḻicaiip pirāṉ vaibhavam’) and declared in his Nāṉmukaṉ tiruvantāti (96),\(^{30}\) that he had realised that Nārāyaṇa is God {analysing what true faith is}

14. avaṉ ciṟiyaṉ enrēṉō āḻvārai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘He [God] is an insignificant/small one’, like [Namm]āḻvār did?

V: 14a avaṉ T1+T3(+T2+T4); nāṉ T2+T4

> Two possible interpretations: 1) If we take the variant in which “I” (nāṉ) is the subject, then the Āḻvār\(^{31}\) calls himself a small/insignificant person, as in TVM1.5.7 or 4.7.1.;\(^{32}\) or, 2) if the subject is in 3\(^{rd}\) person, then God is said to be small because He lives in the devotees’ hearts {accepting that I am insignificant}

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\(^{29}\) Emperumāṉ is also a direct quote from his Tiru pallāṇṭu (10).

\(^{30}\) Ini arintēṅ icarkum nāṅmukarckum teyvam | ini arintēṅ emperumāṅ uṉṇai ini arintēṅ |

kāraṇaṅ ni karrapai ni karpavai ni nal kiricai | nāraṇaṅ ni naṅk’ arintēṅ nāṅ.

‘I have now understood [You as] Śiva’s and the four-faced one’s God! I have now understood You, O our Lord! I have now understood that You are the Cause, You are what has been learnt, You are what is to be learnt, You are Nārāyaṇa of good actions. I have well understood.’

\(^{31}\) The appellation “Āḻvār” by default refers to Nammāḻvār in the Śrīvaiṣṇava milieu.

\(^{32}\) TVM 1.5.7. aṭiyēṅ ciṟiya ńaṅattag (‘I who am a slave, one of insignificant knowledge’); TVM 4.7.1. cīlam ıḷā ciṟiyēṅ (‘1, an insignificant one, devoid of good conduct’).
\textbf{15.} ētēṉum enrēnō kulaśekharar pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘Anything!’’, like Kulaśekhara [Āḻvār] did?

> This Āḻvār says in his \textit{Perumāḷ tirumoḻi} 4.10 that he is willing to be born as \textit{anything} on the hills of Veṅkaṭam \{wishing to be always united with God\}

\textbf{16.} yāṉ satyam enrēnō kruṣṇaṉai pōlē?

→ Did I declare, ‘I am the Truth’, like Kṛṣṇa did?

> This is traditionally interpreted as ‘I speak the truth’, although Kṛṣṇa, as opposed to Rāma, is known as a liar \{telling the truth\}

\textbf{17.} aṭaiyāḷam coṉṉēṉō kabandhaṉai pōlē?

→ Did I describe \[identifying\] marks, like Kabandha did?

> This Rākṣasa attacked Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa before they cut his arms off, and thus released him from his curse. He then suggested that they meet Sugrīva in order to get Sītā back, and gave them directions to get to him (VR 3.68–9) \{giving help to the Lord\}

\textbf{18.} antaraṅgam coṉṉēṉō trijaṭaiyai pōlē?

→ Did I give secret \[news\], like Trijaṭā did?

> Trijaṭā, a Rākṣasī in Laṅkā, consoled Sītā and told Her of her dream of better things coming up for Her (VR 5.25) \{speaking good words to people\}

\textbf{19.} avaṉ teyvam enrēnō maṇḍōdariyai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘He is God!’’, like Mandodarī did?

> Mandodarī, Rāvaṇa’s chief wife, warned him that Rāma was no ordinary human, but God (VR 6.99\textsuperscript{33}) \{recognising God\}

\textsuperscript{33} The verses that assert this statement are not part of the critical edition. See instead the Sastrigal edition (Sastrigal and Sastri 1933).
20. *aham vedmi enrēṇō viśvāmitraṇai pōlē?*

→ Did I say, ‘I know [Him]’, like Viśvāmitra did?

> Viśvāmitra requested a reluctant Daśaratha to send Rāma with him to protect his sacrifice, insisting that he knew what Rāma was capable of (VR 1.18.4) {knowing and speaking the truth}

21. *tēvu marr’ ariyēṇō madhurakiyār pōlē?*

→ Do I not know of ‘another God,’ like Madhurakavi did?

V: 21c *ariyēṇō T1+T2; ariyēṇ enrēṇō T3+T4(+T2)*

> Being exclusively devoted to his teacher Nammāḻvār, Madhurakavi Āḻvār declared that he knew no other God in his *Kañṇi nūn ciṟu tāmpu* 2 {having firm belief in one’s Ācārya more than in God}

22. *teyvattai prerēṇō devakiyārai pōlē?*

→ Did I beget God [Kṛṣṇa], like Devakī did?

> Devakī and Vasudeva gave birth to Kṛṣṇa (BhP 10.3) {being so full of good merits as being blessed to bear God in one’s womb}

23. *āḻi marai enrēṇō vasudevarai pōlē?*

→ Did I say, ‘Hide the discus!’’, like Vasudeva did?

> Kṛṣṇa was born with his four arms, discus and conch. His parents did not want Him to show His discus, etc., so as not to attract Kaṃṣa’s attention (BhP 10.3) {worrying about the safety of God}

24. *āyaṉai vaḷarttēṇō yaśodaiyārai pōlē?*

→ Did I bring up the Cowherd [Kṛṣṇa], like the honourable Yaśodā did?

V: 24a *āyaṉai T1+T2+T3; āyaṉāy T4(+T2)*

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*aham vedmi mahātmānaṁ rāmaṁ satyaparākramam* (‘I know that Rāma is great and truly valorous’; Goldman 2007 [1984]: 163).
> (BhP 10.5 onwards) {raising Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd so that everyone knows how accessible He is}

25. anuyātraī ceytēṉō anilaṅkaḷai pōlē?

→ Did I follow [the monkeys], like the squirrels did?

V: 25a anuyātraī T1+T3; anuyātraī T2+T4

> A story from a non-mainstream version of the Rāmāyana describes squirrels following and helping the monkeys while they built a causeway to Laṅkā so that Rāma could recover Sītā {performing even little acts of devotion according to one’s capacity}35

26. aval poriyai īntēṉō kucelarai pōlē?

→ Did I give flattened rice, like Kucela did?

> Kucela/Sudāmā, Kṛṣṇa’s childhood friend came to meet Him. Being impoverished and burdened with a large family, he brought flattened rice as a gift for Him (BhP 10.80) {performing service with no selfish motive}

27. āyutaṅkaḷ īntēṉō agastyarai pōlē?

→ Did I bestow weapons [upon Rāma] like Agastya did?

> Agastya gave weapons including Viṣṇu’s bow to Rāma (VR 3.12) {helping in the mission to protect God}

28. antaraṅgam pukkēṉō sañjayaṉai36 pōlē?

→ Did I enter [the room and witness] intimacy, like Sañjaya did?

> Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s charioteer and advisor was sent by him to see the Pāṇḍavas after their exile (MBh 5.58). Kṛṣṇa let him witness a private time, during which He, His wife Satyabhāmā, Arjuna

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35 See Buck 2000 [1981]: 277.

36 T1 has janakaṉaip pōlē here, but given that the next statement also has Jana-ka, I presume that it is simply a typo, especially since mentioning Sañjaya makes sense here. All other editions have sañjayaṉai.
and Draupādī were lying in one bed, which convinced Sañjaya that given this kind of friendship that they had with Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas were bound to win {getting to witness an intimate scene involving Kṛṣṇa}

29. karmattāl perṟēṉō janakarai pōlē?

→ Did I obtain [realization of God] by means of karma[yoga], like Janaka did?

> Janaka, Sītā’s father, was known as a performer of the karma-yoga. Cf. Bhagavadgītā 3.20 {performing karma-yoga, understanding the nature of the self}

30. kaṭitt’ avaṉai kaṇṭēṉō tirumaṅkaiyār pōlē?

→ Did I see [the real] Him by biting [His toe], like the honourable Tirumaṅkai [Āḻvār] did?

> When Tirumaṅkai, who took up highway robbery in order to feed the Vaishnavas, managed to get all the jewellery of Nārāyaṇa, who came disguised as a bridegroom, except for the tight toe ring, which he removes by biting it off. But Tirumaṅkai could not lift the bundle of jewellery, so he asks the Bridegroom what magic He wielded to pull this trick off. To this, He recited the Nārāyaṇa mantra in his ears, which later allowed him to realize God (GPP6k, ‘Tirumaṅkai-Āḻvār Vaibhavam’) {being the object of God’s causeless affection}

31. kuṭai mutalāṉavai āṉēṉō anantāḻvāṅ pōlē?

→ Did I become things like [His] umbrella, like Ananta-Āḻvāṅ did?

V: 31b mutalāṉavai T1; mutalāṉatu T2+T4; mutal T3

> Ananta-Śeṣa (with the suffix ‘Āḻvāṅ’ that refers to a great devotee) is said to take many forms (bed, seat, and so forth) whenever Nārāyaṇa comes down to the earth37 {performing service to God taking suitable bodies for that purpose}

37 Cf. Mutal tiruvantāti 53.
32. koṇṭu tirintēṉō tiruvaṭiyai pōlē?

→ Did I go about carrying [Him], like Garuḍa/Hanumān did?

> Both Garuḍa and Hanumān carried Nārāyaṇa on their shoulders\(^{38}\) {carrying God on the shoulders}

33. iḷaippu viṭāy tīrttēṉō nampāṭuvāṉai pōlē?

→ Did I end the tiredness and thirst [of a Rākṣasa-birth], like Nampāṭuvāṉ did?

> Nampāṭuvāṉ, an outcast singer-devotee, removed a Brahma-Rākṣasa’s curse by giving him the merits of his singing of one particular melody for God (Kaisika māhātmya in the Varāha purāṇa) {having such greatness that God Himself mentions you\(^{39}\)}

34. iṭaikaliyē kaṇṭēṉō mutal āḻvārkaḷai pōlē?

→ Did I see [Him] in the threshold, like the first three Āḻvārs did?

V: 34a iṭaikaliyē T1+T3; iṭaikaliyil T2+T4

> The first three Āḻvārs (Poykai, Pēy and Pūtam), who met on a rainy night in a threshold in Tirukkōyilūr, felt jostled there, and realised that it was Nārāyaṇa present among them (DSC/ GPP6k, ‘Mutalāḻvārkaḷ Vaibhavam’) {seeing the Lord, as He shows Himself to you}

35. iru maṉṉar peṟṟēṉō vālmīkiyai pōlē?

→ Did I get [to raise] two kings, like Vālmīki did?

V: 35d vālmīkiyaipt T1; vālmīkiyaipt T2+T4; vālmīkaraip T3

> After Rāma sent his pregnant wife to the forest, Sītā stayed at Sage Vālmīki’s ashram, where She gave birth to twins, Lava and

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\(^{38}\) Tiruvaṭi (‘sacred feet’) generally refers to Hanumān (also known as ciṟiya [‘younger’] tiruvaṭi), while Garuḍa is known as the periya (‘elder’) tiruvaṭi, following the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition that considers the devotees to be the equivalent of their Lord’s feet.

\(^{39}\) The story is told by Varāha-Nārāyaṇa in the Varāha purāṇa.
Kuśa, future kings, whom Vālmīki took care of from the time of their birth (VR 7.58 onwards) {raising and educating the Lord’s children}

36. *tirumālai īntēṉō toṇṭaraṭippoṭiyār pōlē?*

→ Did I offer [Him] sacred garlands/[the poem] *Tirumālai*, like Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi Āḻvār did?

V: 36a *tirumālai* T1; *irumālai* T2+T3+T4 40

> See fn 40 {offering garlands without selfish, ulterior motives}

37. *avaṉ uraikka perrēṉō tirukkaccinampiyār pōlē?*

→ Did I get Him to speak [to me], like the honourable Tirukkacci Nampi did?

V: 37d T1 *tirukkaccinampiyār*; T2+T3+T4 *tirukkacciyyār*

> A non-Brahmin teacher of Rāmānuja’s, Gajendradāsa/Kāñcīpūrṇa served in the Varadarāja temple in Kāñcīpuram, where he waved the fan for the Main Deity, with whom he had one-to-one conversations (GPP6k, ‘Iḷaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {performing private service to and receiving instruction from God}

38. *avaṉ mēṉi āṇēṉō tiruppāṇarai pōlē?*

→ Did I become His body, like Tiruppāṇ [Āḻvār] did?

> The supposedly outcast Āḻvār saw His favourite Deity in Śrīraṅgam for the first time, and disappeared in Him (GPP6k, ‘Tiruppāṇāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {merging with God}

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40 Rāmānujaṉ (Rāmānujaṉ 2009 [2000]: 25) suggests the variant *iru mālai* (‘two garlands’), which he explains as being either a reference to Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi-yāḻvār’s two compositions (*Tirumālai* and *Tiruppalliyelucci*), or to the two garlands, the *pūmālai* (‘flower garland’) and the *pāmālai* (‘song garland’), which he offered to the Lord. Velukkudi (s.d.: 36) points out that *iru* can mean either great or two, the greatness of the garland lying in its being given without expectation of return.
39. anuppet vaiyum enreṇō vasiṣṭharai pōle?

→ Did I say, ‘Send Him [with Viśvāmitra]!’, like Vasiṣṭha did?

> When Daśaratha hesitated to send Rāma with Viśvāmitra to help protect his sacrifice, the family preceptor, Vasiṣṭha, convinced him to do so (VR 1.20) {having the greatness of convincing Daśaratha, or the latter’s to obey}

40. aṭi vāṅkinēṇō koṅkil pirāṭṭiyai pōle?

→ Did I obtain [Rāmānuja’s] foot[wear], like the lady from Koṅku did?

V: 40c koṅkil(r) T1+T2+T4; koṅkup T3(+T4)

> Sumatī, known as the lady from Koṅku, was initiated by Rāmānuja into the Śrīvaiṣṇava faith. But as she forgot what she had learnt from him, he taught her again following her bold request, and gave her his sandals (GPP12k, ‘Iḷaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {obtaining and worshipping Rāmānuja’s sandals}

41. maṇ pūvai itṭēṇō kuruva nampiyai pōle?

→ Did I place earthen flowers, like Kuruva Nampi did?

V: 41d kuruva T1+T3; kurava T2+T4

> Bhīma, a potter and a devotee of Veṅkaṭeśvara, made earthen flowers, and offered them to Him, every night. These flowers would be found upon the body of Veṅkaṭeśvara, while King Toṇṭaimāṉ’s flowers, offered at the shrine itself, would be found beneath {doing private service to God, and offering flowers with pure devotion, which were accepted by the Lord}

42. mūlam enr’ aḷaittēṇō gajarāṇañai pōle?

→ Did I call out ‘[Primal] Cause!’, like the king of elephants did?

> Unable to protect itself from the crocodile, an elephant called out to the Lord, who hastened to help it (BhP 8.2–4) {calling out the Lord}
43. *pūca koṭuttēṉō kūṉiyai pōlē?*

→ Did I give [unguents] to anoint [Him], like the hunchbacked woman did?

> A provider of unguents for Kaṃsa in Mathurā, this woman gave some to Kṛṣṇa, after which He straightened her back (BhP 10.42) {giving something befitting for Kṛṣṇa}

44. *pūvai koṭuttēṉō mālākārarai pōlē?*

→ Did I give flowers, like the garland-maker did?

> Traditionally, this garland-maker was the one who provided garlands for Kaṃsa in Mathurā, and who gave a few to Kṛṣṇa (BhP 10.41) {making pure offerings to God}

45. *vaitta iṭattu iruntēṉō bharataṉai pōlē?*

→ Did I stay put where I was placed, like Bharata did?

V: 45b *iṭattu* T1+T2; *iṭattil* T3.

(NB: 45 and 46 are interchanged in some editions.)

> Bharata obeyed Rāma without questioning Him, when He asked him to stay back and take care of the kingdom (VR 2.105) {serving Him according to His wishes}

46. *vaḻi aṭimai ceytēṉō lakṣmaṇaṉai pōlē?*

→ Did I perform service [Rāma on His] path, like Lakṣmaṇa did?

> As opposed to Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa refused to obey Rāma when He asked him to stay back in Ayodhyā, and followed Him to the forest and served Him devotedly (VR 2.37 onwards) {performing all kinds of service to God}

47. *a- karaikkē viṭṭēṉō guha perumāṉai pōlē?*

→ Did I take [them] to the other shore, like lord Guha did?
> Guha took Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa across the Ganges (in e.g. *Perumāḷ tirumolī* 10), and then, later, took Bharata and the others so that they could meet Rāma (VR 2.83) {being friends with God}

### 48. arakkauṭaṇ porutēṇō periya uṭaiyārai pōlē?

→ Did I fight with the Rākṣasa, like Jaṭāyu did?

> When the eagle Jaṭāyu (known affectionately as *periya uṭaiyār* among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas) saw Rāvaṇa carrying Sītā away by force, he fought him and was eventually killed by him in the process (VR 3.49) {giving up life for God}

### 49. i- karaikkē ceṅgēṇō vibhīṣaṇarai pōlē?

→ Did I come to this shore, like Vibhīṣaṇa did?

> Leaving his brother Rāvaṇa and his country Laṅkā behind, Vibhīṣaṇa crossed the sea in order to join Rāma (VR 6.12) {giving up one’s relatives for God, and trusting Him to give him refuge}

### 50. iṇiyatu onru vaittēṇō sabariyai pōlē?

→ Did I place something sweet, like Śabarī did?

> A huntswoman and a disciple of the ascetic Mataṅga, Śabarī served sweet fruit to Rāma, as He came to her ashram while searching for Sītā (VR 3.70) {choosing the best fruit offering to Rāma}

### 51. iṅkum uṇṭu eṉṟēṉō prahlādaṇai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘[God] is here, too!’, like Prahlāda did?

**V: 45e perumāṉaip T1; perumāḷaip T2+T3+T4**

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41 In the VR, Guha does not perform that act. See Anandakichenin 2014.
As his father Hiraṇyakaśipu asked him if Nārāyaṇa existed even in a certain pillar, Prahlāda declared that He did. The former broke it, and Nārāyaṇa appeared in the form of a Man-Lion from it, and killed him (BhP 7.8) {establishing the omnipresence of God to an adverse person}

52. iṅk’ illai enṛēṇō dadhibhāṇḍanai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘[He] is not here!’, like Dadhibhāṇḍa did?

Chased by His angry mother, Kṛṣṇa hid Himself inside a big pot with the help of Dadhibhāṇḍa, who duly told her that He was not there. But once she left, he refused to let Kṛṣṇa out unless He gave mokṣa to him as well as to the pot, to which He agreed\textsuperscript{42} {committing acts of (de)merits for His sake}

53. kāṭṭukku pōgēṇō perumāḷai pōlē?

→ Did I go to the forest, like Lord [Rāma] did?

(\text{VR} 2.37 onwards) {considering good and evil things that happen to one as one and the same}

54. kaṇṭu vantēṇ enṛēṇō tiruvatīyai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘I have come back, having seen [Sītā],’ like Hanumān did?

(\text{VR} 5.63) {serving God in a great way}

55. iru kaiyum viṭṭēṇō draupadiyai pōlē?

→ Did I let [down] both arms, like Draupadī did?

Seeing that she could not protect herself by holding on to her clothes when Duḥśāsana disrobed her, Draupadī stopped making any efforts and surrendered unto Kṛṣṇa (MBh 2.61.40d*) {having unshakeable faith in God}

\textsuperscript{42} This story is popular among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, but it does not seem to exist in any of the Purāṇas.
56. iṅku pāl poṅkum enrēṇō vaṭuka nampiyai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘Milk will boil over here’, like Vaṭuka Nampi did?

> Vaṭuka Nampi/Āndhrapūrṇa refused to come out and worship the processional Deity, because watching over the milk that he was boiling for his Ācārya (Rāmānuja) was more important for him (GPP6k, ‘Vaṭukanampi Vaibhavam’) {treating the Ācārya as God}

57. iṟu miṭaṟu piṭittēṉō celva piḷḷaiyai pōlē?

→ Did I hold [Rāmānuja’s] great neck [in embrace], like Celva Piḷḷai did?

> When Rāmānuja found in Delhi the utsava-mūrti (‘processional icon’) of the Tirunārāyaṇapuram (Melkote) temple, the mūrti of the Lord (named Celva Piḷḷai, or ‘beloved child’) came on His own and embraced Rāmānuja (GPP6k, ‘Iḷaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {being embraced by God}

58. nil eṉṟu peṟṟēṉō iḷaiyāṟṟūr nampiyai pōlē?

→ Did I get to say, ‘Stay [here]!’, like Iḷaiyāṟṟūr Nampi did?

V: 58b ennup T1+T2+T3; ennap T4(+T2); 58d ilaiyāṟṟūr T1; ilaiyāṟṟukkuṭi T3; itaiyāṟṟūr T4

> When old Nampi expressed his worry about ever attending any festival in Śrīraṅgam again, the Lord said ‘Stand there!’ and gave him mokṣa right then {being close to God and consider visiting Him as good as having food}

59. neṭum tūram pōṉēṇō nāthamuniyai pōlē?

→ Did I go very far, like Nāthamuni did?

> A king and his wives visited Nāthamuni during his meditation. When the latter later heard about the visit, he thought that they were the Lord and His entourage, and followed them for a long distance. (GPP6k, ‘Śrīmannāthamunikaḷ Vaibhavam’) {having pure devotion for God and seeking Him out}
60. *avān pōṉāṉ enrēṉō mārutiyāṉṭāṉ pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘He has left’, like Mārutiyāṉṭāṉ did?

> Rāmānuja had to exile himself when pursued by a Cōḷa king. Mārutiyāṉṭāṉ Ciṟiyāṉṭāṉ, his disciple, went to Śrīraṅgam and returned to announce this king’s death after twelve years, which paved the way for the Ācārya’s return to Śrīraṅgam\(^{43}\) (GPP6k, ‘Iḷaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {serving the Ācārya}

61. *avān vēṇṭā enrēṉō āḻvāṉai pōlē?

→ Did I say, ‘No need for Him [Raṅganātha]’, like [Kūratt]āḻvāṉ did?

V: 61b vēṇṭā T1+T3; vēṇṭām T2+T4

> The above-mentioned Cōḷa king gave the command that those associated with Rāmānuja should not be allowed inside the Śrīraṅgam temple. When Kūrattāḻvāṉ once went there, a guardian was willing to let him in in spite of his connection with Rāmānuja (his Ācārya), because he thought Kūrattāḻvāṉ to be a good individual. But the latter refused to enter the temple, refusing a sight of God that came without an association with His Ācārya\(^{44}\) {refusing God for the sake of the Ācārya}

62. *advaitam veṉṟēṉō emperumāṉārai pōlē?

→ Did I defeat advaita, like the honourable Rāmānuja did?\(^{45}\)

Rāmānuja refuted the tenets of advaita, *inter alia* {establishing the Vedic path}

\(^{43}\) Caṭakōpaṉ (Caṭakōpaṉ 2008: 434) points out that this event would have happened a long time after Rāmānuja’s meeting with the Tirukkōḷūr lady, and that this must be an interpolation.

\(^{44}\) Caṭakōpaṉ (Caṭakōpaṉ 2008: 443) makes a similar remark as for vārttai 60 (See fn 50).

\(^{45}\) Caṭakōpaṉ (Caṭakōpaṉ 2008: 449) thinks that the scribe who wrote down a copy of the Rahasyam could have used the word *Emperumāṉār* for Rāmānuja, rather than the 2\(^{nd}\) person singular.
63. arul āli kaṇṭēṉō nallāṉai pōlē?

→ Did I experience the gracious discus, like Nallāṉ did?

V: 63b āli T1+T2+T4; āli T3(+T2+T4)

> This Brahmin peformed the last rites of a man whose body he found afloat a river, upon seeing the embossed conch mark of a Śrīvaiṣṇava on his shoulders. So the rest of the village shunned him for that. One day, the Lord claimed through a priest that that man was a pollāṉ (‘a bad man’) for them, but a nallāṉ (‘a good man’) for Him {being good to the [Śrīvaiṣṇava] people}

64. anantapuram pukkēṉō āḷavantārai pōlē?

→ Did I enter [Tiruv]anantapuram, like Āḷavantār did?

> An Araiyar-priest recited Tiruvāymoli 10.2 in Śrīrāṅgam, which invited people to go to Anantapuram. Hearing this, Āḷavantār/Yāmunācārya felt that it was a hint for him, so he went there taking his disciples along, except Teyvavāriyāṇṭāṉ (see next vārttai). This made him miss an important appointment that he had made with Kurukai Kāvalappaṉ to learn secrets on yoga (GPP6k, ‘Yamunait-tuṟaivar Vaibhavam’) {getting hints from God}

65. āriyaṉai pirintēṉō teyvavāriyāṇṭāṉai pōlē?

→ Did I part from the teacher, like Teyvavāriyāṇṭāṉ did?

> See note on the previous question (64). This disciple became ill after parting from his Ācārya, so he was taken to him. As he got closer to his teacher, he got better and better (GPP6k, ‘Yamunait-tuṟaivar Vaibhavam’) {suffer from separation from one’s Ācārya}

66. antāti coṉṉēṉō amutaṉārai pōlē?

→ Did I utter the [Irāmānuca nūṟṟ]antāti, like the honourable [Tiruvaraṅkattu] Amutaṉ did?

46 Rāmānujaṉ (Rāmānujaṉ 2009 [2000]: 80) gives the variant arul ālam ‘the depth of [His] grace.’
This is a work on Rāmānuja in Tamil, considered to be as important as the *Nālāyirativviyapirapantam* {making efforts to have Rāmānuja’s greatness known}

67. *anukūlam conñēṉō mālyavānai pōlē?*

→ Did I speak what is favourable, like Mālyavān did?

> Mālyavān was Rāvaṇa’s mother’s paternal uncle, who advised him to give Śītā back to Rāma (VR 6.26) {giving good advice even to evil people}

68. *kaḷvaṉ ivan enṛēṉō lokaguruvaivai pōlē?*

→ Did I say, ‘He is a thief!’ , like the teacher of the world did?

> Based on Velukkudi n.d.: 68, *lokaguru* is sometimes taken as a reference to Nammāḻvāṛ, who called Nārāyaṇa’s incarnations as Buddha (TVM 5.10.4) or as Vāmana (TVM 3.8.9) deceitful; or it could refer to Tirumāṅkai Āḻvār (TNT 8); or even Śiva (as per TVM 2.2.10) {having a close relationship with God}

69. *kaṭal ōcai enṛēṉō periya nampiyai pōlē?*

→ Did I say, ‘Sound of the ocean!’, like Periya Nampi did?

> Periya Nampi performed the last rites of his non-Brahmin co-disciple Māṟanēri Nampi. When egged on by the others, Rāmānuja asked him why he did so. Nampi then asked him whether the various Āḻvārs’ verses, which placed devotion over birth, had any meaning at all (in which case his act was justified) or if they were meaningless like the sound of the ocean (GPP6k, ‘Ilaīyāḻvār Vaibhavam’) {ignoring the caste of the devotee}

70. *cuṟṟi kiṭantēṉō tirumālaiyāṇṭāṉ pōlē?*

→ Did I constantly revolve around [Rāmānuja], like Tirumālaiyāṇṭāṉ did?

V: 70c *tirumālaiyāṇṭāṉ* T1+T3; *mālaiyāṇṭāṉ* T2+T4
> One of Rāmānuja’s teachers taught him the TVM without leaving him. Or this can be interpreted as the teacher-disciple relationship was twisted around (cūṟri), given Rāmānuja’s [superior] knowledge (Velukkudi n.d.: 70) (GPP6k, ‘_Ilaiyāḷvār Tirumālalaiyāṇṭāṉṭattu Tiruvāyumoḷi kēṭṭal’) {teaching Rāmānuja}

71. cūḷ-uravu koṇṭēṉō tirukkōṭṭiyūrār pōlē?

→ Did I obtain an oath, like the honourable one from Tirukkōṭṭiyūr?

V: 71c cūḷ T1; cūḷ\(^{47}\) T2+T3+T4; 71d tirukkōṭṭiyūrār T1+T3; kōṭṭiyūrārai T2; kōṭṭiyūrarai T4

> This teacher of Rāmānuja’s had the latter visit him 18 times before initiating him into a sacred mantra, but not before making him swear not to give it indiscriminately. But Rāmānuja revealed it to the common man in public (GPP6k, ‘Ilaiyāḷvār Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampiyinṭattu višeśārtham kēṭṭal’) {bearing love for Rāmānuja like Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi}

72. uyir āya perrēṉō ūmaiyai pōlē?

→ Did I have [Rāmānuja] as [my] life, like the dumb person did?

> Rāmānuja placed his feet upon a deaf-and-dumb devotee in order to grant him mokṣa, as he was incapable of receiving any instructions from him (GPP6k, ‘Ilaiyāḷvār Vaibhavam’) {believing that Rāmānuja’s feet are the goal}

73. uṭampai veṟuttēṉō tirunaṟaiyūrārai pōlē?

→ Did I renounce the body, like the honourable one from Tirunaṟaiyūr did?

V: 73c tirunaṟaiyūrāraip T1+T3; naṟaiyūrāraip T2+T4

\(^{47}\) Please note that cūḷuravu is found lexicalised in the Tamil Lexicon, while cūḷuravu is not. Moreover, cūḷ has the meaning of oath, which suits the context here, which cūḷ does not.
> When someone set the Deity of a temple on fire, this priest threw himself on the deity along with his family, and they all gave up their lives to protect Him\(^{48}\) {sacrificing one’s body for safeguarding God’s sacred ‘body’}

**74. enṉai pōl enṉēṉō uparicaraṉai pōlē?**

→ Did I say, ‘Like me!’, like Uparicaravasu did?

> This king mediated in a problem between ascetics and gods, saying ‘Be like me!’ (Matsya purāṇa 152) {following dharma}

**75. yāṉ ciṟiyaṉ enṉēṉō tirumalai nampiyai pōlē?**

→ Did I say, ‘I am an insignificant one!’, like Tirumalai Nampi did?

> Tirumalai Nampi/Śrīśaileśa Pūrṇa himself came to receive Rāmānuja during his visit to Tirumalā, and explained that he had not been able to find anyone less important than him to do the task (GPP6k, ‘Tirumalai Nanpiyittattu Uṭaiyavar Śrīrāmāyaṇam kēṭṭal’) {considering oneself as inferior to the other Śrīvaiṣṇavas}

**76. nīril kutittēṉō kaṇapurattāḷai pōlē?**

→ Did I jump into the water like the woman from Kaṇapuram did?

> This woman threw herself into the floods to protect her teacher, when the raft that she was travelling in needed to be unburdened a little. In the end both escaped\(^{49}\) {protecting the material body of the Ācārya and having complete faith in him}

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\(^{48}\) Caṭakōpaṇ (Caṭakōpaṇ 2008: 536) points out that this event could not have happened before Rāmānuja’s time, and that it is mentioned in Piḷḷai Lokācārya’s Śrīva-canabhūṣaṇam 1.84 (14\(^{th}\) c.). Please note that the Tirunārajīyūr Araiya is mentioned in earlier texts, including Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai’s commentary on Perumāḷ tirumoḻi 5.1, although it is not clear whether this particular event involving him was narrated before Lokācārya.

\(^{49}\) This Ācārya has been identified as Nampiḷḷai by the GPP6k (‘Naṅcīyar nampiḷḷai vaibhavaṅkaḷ’), which does not name the woman. If the event did happen, and that too, during Nampiḷḷai’s time, then this vārttai is an interpolation.
77. nīrōrukam koṇṭēṉō kāciciṅkaṉai pōlē?

→ Did I take lotuses [to the Lord] like Ciṅkaṉ from Kāci?

V: 71a nīrum T1; nīrōrukam T2+T4; nīrūkam T3

> A devotee used to swim across the Ganges to bring lotuses for the Lord, which made him proud. Once, he got stuck in a whirlpool and he prayed for help. Saved, he got back safely to the banks without letting go of the lotuses that he had picked {putting full trust in God}

78. vākkiṉāl venrēṉō bhaṭṭarai pōlē?

→ Did I win by means of words, like [Parāśara] Bhaṭṭa did?

> While still a child, Bhaṭṭa won in an argument against Sarvajña Bhaṭṭa, a renowned scholar (GPP6k, ‘Bhaṭṭar Vaibhavam’) {winning arguments thanks to verbal prowess}

79. vāyil kaiy iṭṭēṉō empārai pōlē?

→ Did I put [my] hand in the mouth [of the snake], like Empār did?

> Empār saved a snake by removing a thorn stuck in its mouth {having compassion for all living beings}

80. tōḷ kāṭṭi vantēṉō bhaṭṭarai pōlē?

→ Did I come back showing the shoulder, like [Parāśara] Bhaṭṭa did?

> Velukkudi (Velukkudi s.d.: 80) points out that this question does not have a clear source. Bhaṭṭar was accidentally hit on the shoulder and showed the other shoulder to receive another shove, as he was

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50 T1 seems to be a typo. While nīrōrukam, which means ‘lotus’ is suitable, T3 opts for nīrūkam (Caṭakōpaṇ 2008: 568) taking it to mean nīr + ūkam = ‘deliberation [made upon] the water,’ which sounds far-fetched to me.

51 Caṭakōpaṇ (Caṭakōpaṇ 2008: 578) suggests this vārttai is an interpolation, as this is a later event.
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sorry to have stood in the way of a religious procession {having great devotion}

81. tuṟai vēru ceytēṉō pakavarai pōlē?

→ Did I make [the choice of] a different ghat, like Pakavar did?

> Villiputtūr Pakavar preferred to use the ghat of a waterbody used by Śrīvaiṣṇavas, rather than the one used by the fellow Brahmins {having a mind to serve}

Conclusions

We can see that the author, whoever s/he may be, is an educated, knowledgeable person, who knew the epics, Purāṇas, Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiography and theology well. As mentioned earlier, there is nothing to show in the text itself that it was composed by a woman, and to some extent, it does not really matter, because the tradition does believe her to be a woman. On the one hand, we can go with the tradition and believe the author to be a woman, and on the other, we could still see how this Rahasyam, attributed to a woman, has been dealt with, compared to other writings. First of all, it has probably been praised and made popular, because although (supposedly) produced by a woman, it does not threaten the established practices. And despite having a challenging tone and a scholarly content, it does not cross the boundaries of the acceptable, as it insists on its author’s worthlessness again and again, besides not touching upon exclusive material like the Vedas. On top of it, it incorporates all the important Śrīvaiṣṇava theological ideas, which it presents as ideals.

Secondly, there is no traditional commentary on the Rahasyam that is comparable to, say, Maṉavāḷa Māmuṉi’s (14th century) Upatēca rattinamālai, which was commented upon by Piḷḷai Lokam Jīyar, or even a commentary by an eminent 20th-century scholar, like Prativādi Bhayaṃkaram Aṉṇaṅkarācārya or Uttamūr Vīrarāghavācārya. We may wonder whether the reason for such neglect is the nature of the work (hagiographic prose has hardly been commented upon),
its size or the language of the composition, the general belief with regards to the identity (read, the gender) of the author or the tradition\textsuperscript{52} to which it belongs (see below). It does seem, therefore, that this work, other than leading to the composition of two works of a very similar nature (that are part of the Mummani rahasyam), did not disturb or erase the boundaries of the male dominion over serious scholarship.

This Rahasyam (as well as the other two mentioned in fn 4) clearly points to an affiliation to what would much later become the Teṉkalai (‘southern school’) tradition, and so does the only premodern written work by a Śrīvaiṣṇava woman, Tirukkōṉēri Dāsyai (see fn 5), presumably a disciple of Nampiḷḷai (13\textsuperscript{th} c.). Why did the premodern women of the Vaṭakalai tradition not produce any writing? Did the different beliefs and status of women cause this discrepancy? These are some questions that need to be explored further.

Appendix

Tirukkōḷūr peṇpiḷḷai rahasyam: the text within which the Rahasyam is found.

\begin{verbatim}
tirukkōḷūruruku emperumāṉār eluntarulum pōtu, tirukkōḷūrūrulminrum oru peṇpiḷḷai etirē vanu ķaṅdaniṭṭu nīrka, ‘peṇnē! nī eṅkuninrum purupattaṭṭyay?’ ēnru kēṭṭ’aruṇa, peṇnum, ‘tirukkōḷūrūrulminrum viṭaikkoṇṭēn’ ēnru viṇṇappam ceyya, ataṇait tiruccevic cārri aruli emperumāṉār, ‘oruvar kūṟai eḻuvar uṭuttuk kāy kilaṅku cāppiṭṭu, “tiṇṇam eṅ ila(m) māṉ pukum ūr” uṇakkup purap-paṭum ūr āyirrē!’ ēn’ arulicceytār. ataik kēṭṭu antap peṇpiḷḷai viṇṇappam ceyta paṭi eṅnaṇam ēṅnil ‘atiyēṉ, nāyantē! nāyantē!

aḷaittu varukirēṅ ēṅrēṅō akrūraraip pōlē (…)
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{52} On the two Śrīvaiṣṇava subsects, Vaṭakalai (‘northern school’) and Teṉkalai (‘southern school’), see Mumme 1988.
When Rāmānuja was approaching Tirukkōḷūr, a woman came on the opposite [direction] from Tirukkōḷūr and stood [there] making obeisance [to him].53 As he graciously asked [her], ‘O woman! Where have you set out from?’, the woman respectfully said, ‘I have left from Tirukkōḷūr.’ Rāmānuja, who graciously heard that, graciously said, “Tirukkōḷūr, the town which my young deer[-like daughter] enters for sure” (TVM 6.7.1),—[to enter which] seven people wear the clothes of one and eat fruits and vegetables54—has become a town that you leave!’ If one asks how that woman, hearing that, spoke respectfully, [it was thus]: ‘I am a slave, my lord, my lord! Did I say, ‘I shall bring [Kṛṣṇa], like Akrūra did? (…) According to these [vārttais], as said in “What good did I perform for Him of Vāttāru, whose divine form is like a black mountain, [for Him] to shine in my heart!” (TVM 10.6.8), if I, a slave, had the knowledge of [at least] one among those people [mentioned above], who had such [types of] knowledge, I could have arrived in Tirukkōḷūr. I, a slave, do not have such an excuse. What does it matter if rabbit dung lies in the field or if it lies in the ridge?’

53 For the sake of comprehensibility, the long sentences in Manipravalam have been turned into short, finite sentences in English.
54 This simply means that one goes to great trouble to just go to Tirukkōḷūr.
Speaking respectfully thus, she respectfully made the [following] request, ‘If Your Highness would come [to Tirukkōḷūr] and worship [there], the regular, fortnightly, monthly and annual festivals will be conducted for [the main Deity] Vaitta Mānidhi and Madhuraka- vi.’ Graciously listening to that and rejoicing exceedingly, he went to that woman’s house and graciously bestowed the gift of [leftover] boiled rice [after he had it], and sacred water from [His] feet upon that woman. Thus graciously said Tiruvāymoḻi Piḷḷai, according to the Periya Jīyar of Vāṉamāmalai.

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55 This is Maṇavāḷa Māmuṇi’s (Varavaramuni’s) Ācārya.
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GPP12k = Paṇṇirāyirappāţi guruparamparāprabhāvam. See Tirukkōḷūr peṉpiḷḷai rahasyam.

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