THE VEDAS AND BHAKTI HARMONIZED - KŌVALŪR: THE MUTAL ĄṉṆĀRS AND TIRUMAṆKAI

R. K. K. Rajarajan

1 School of Tamil, Indian Languages and Rural Arts, Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram

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 Āḻvārs 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) Āḻvārs 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 Āḻvārs 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 Āḻvārs (Poykai, Pūtam, Pēy), Tirumaṅkai, Veda, Bhakti, Nālāyirativvīyappirappantam ‘Nālāyiram’, Flora and Fauna

1. INTRODUCTION

*Nīrār nīrār “Who are you, who are you?”¹
Aham Brahmāsmi “I am Brahman”
Amararum yāṉē “I am the gods”²

It was thundering, lightning, and torrentially raining under the spell of an encircling gloom. Three mystics, the Mutal (Early) Āḻvārs (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 itaikkal 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/Allikkiṇi, and all three were standing. The Āṟāyirappaṭi-G adds the three met in the tiru-itaikkalai of the temple. Did they pose the question: nīrār nīrār? The mystics introduced formally saying they are bhagavatśeṣ abhūtas (cf. the name Pūtattāḻvār, Pūtam = Bhūta). When they pose the question: nīrār nīrār? The mystics introduced formally saying they are bhagavatśeṣabhubhūtas (cf. the name Pūtattāḻvār, 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”), ‘Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ’ (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 Āṟāyirappaṭi-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 Āḻvārs. U. Vē. Vēlukkuṭi Krishṇaṉ, in his popular lectures on the divyadeśas, adds Viṣṇu is the sugarcane of which the juice is the three Tiruvantātis. Furthermore, His Holiness Anṇagarācārya declares ‘Tirivikiraman’ (Figure 6, Figure 7)4 is the favourite theme of the Matal Āḻvārs (cf. Ti 1-2, Rajarajan, R.K.K., Parthiban, R.K., & Kalidos, R. (2017b): 1428).

Kōvalūr (Figure 1 Map, Hardy, F. (2014): Map 2) from the above account seems to be the earliest venue where the Āḻvārs commenced the composition of devotional literature in a Drāvi ḍian language5. For the historical cross-currents of the divyadeśas, we have a long list of literature, e.g., Hudson, D. (1980), Hardy 1983, Young, C. (2000), Narayanan, V. (2007), Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2012), Rajarajan, R.K.K. (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 Āṉṟār Poykai, Pūtam, and Tirumaṅkai (c. 6th-7th to 9th centuries CE); missing in Pēyāḻvār. 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 Matal Āḻvārs by about the 6th-7th century CE (Hardy, F. (2014): 269). It acquired wider popularity during the time of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, contemporary of Nandivarmāṉ Pallavamalla (731-796 CE) that has authored most hymns bearing on the divyadeśas in the Ćoṭānaināṭu region (Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2013): 50), 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, M. (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, R.K.K., Parthiban, R.K., & Kalidos, R. (2017a). Few hymns in Romanized format may of help to compare the Sanskrit usage vis-à-vis their Tamil equivalents.

2. RÈSUMÈ OF THE HYMNS

2.1. TIRUVANTĀTĪ I (POYKAI ĀḻVĀR)

77. “The abodes (of the Lord) are Vēṅkaṭam, Vinṇakar, Veṅkā and the venue of flower gardens Kōvalūr, 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 (Periyāḻvār 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 Svara-gācal opened once in the year on Vaikoṇṭha-ekādaśi day, month Mārkāli (see Tiruppāvai 1, the Gītā 10.35 māsānāṃ Mārgaśīrṣo’ham) 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, Taṅkal, hill dear to the Bhāgavatas Vēṅkaṭam, the Ocean of Milk, the great Mallai, Kōvalūr, fortified Kuṭantai/Kumbhakoṇam and above all the mind of the devotee.”

**Periya Tirumoḻi** (Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār)

2.4.1. “That day the Lord was pleased to unite with the damsel of the cowherds, Nappinṉai and the lady on a lotus flower, Śrīdevī. He was a merciless task-master of terrorists. The abodes where the Lord is pleased to present are Naṟa iyūr 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 kaṭalkaḷelum vāṇamum maṇṇakamum maṟṟumellām Eṅcămāl vaṉṟaṭakki yālinmēlō riṉantāril kaṉvārnta vīcaṉṟaṇlaṇṇatt Tuṅcānilvalamcurakkum Peṇnaiṭtenpāl tūyā nāṉmaṟaiyēḷ Comucceyyac Ĉecāli vilai vaṉṟaṭikāḷntu tōṟum *tirukKōvaluraṇuḷ kaṇṭēn nānē*

* 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 repose’s on a leaf of the banyan tree, āḷilai/vaṭapatra. The Lord has not left out anything. The immaculate Caturvedis are chanting the Sāmaveda on the southern Peṇnai River (Figure 2). Everywhere ripe paddy crops are found proclaiming the prosperity of the land.”

2.10.2. Kontalarnta naruntuḷāy cāntam tūpam tīpaṅ koṇṭamar toḷap paṇṅkoḷ pāmpil Cantaṅ malaraḷ taraṇınaṅkai tāmuruvaṟṟi varuṭuntaṅ maṟṟai Vantaṇaicey ticaiyēḷaṅkamaintu vāḷavēḷvi nāṉmaṟaiḍai ṁṭruṭiṭiḷum Ĉintaṇaicey tirupoḷuṭu10 moṟṟučcelvat tirukKōvaluraṇuḷ kaṇṭēn nānē

“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 Māḷi, the Lord Rāma had to stage a battle. His customary operation is to arrive seated on the Garuda-vāhana (cf. Parthiban, R.K. & R.K.K. Rajarajan (2016): fig. 12) 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. Karaivalarvel Karaţmutalakak Kavantaţ Vali kañaiyondrįnal maţiya vilanakatanţul Piriayeyиrru vâlarakkar ceñaiyellam peruntakaiyottuńitta pemmnârṇai Maçaivalararp pukalâlara maţantŏrŭn manątapamońtőlįyańayaittum vâramŏtac Ceiayanąainta poţlaniainta tenĚralvicum tirukKôvalûranţul kañtēnănē

“The Lord R âma was pleased to extirpate the race of terrorists represented by Khara, Kabandha, Vâli, et alii by the shot of an arrow (Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2015): Figure 1). The operation included emasculating the demons’ race with teeth protruding as a crescent and their chief, R âvaņa. 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. “Krşna 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 Yaśodâ. He was tied to a mortar where the little-Master, Dâmodara, stood as a black elephant. His eyes were brimming with snowy tears. The “lady on flower attended him”, Lakşmî, along with the “lady of eloquence”, Sarasvatî, and the eight-armed “lady of the buck-vehicle”, Durgā13. All are present in the shining maţimâţam “bell-tower” temple.”

2.10.7. “Krşna had to take to task the war-elephant, Kuvalayapidâ. 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, Yamalarjunaĥânga; and shattered the wheel-demon, Śakaţâsura. He finished the wrestlers, Muštikâsura and Câṇûra. The little-Master was mandragora Alexander, P. (1965): 1362 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, Krşna was sent a dûta on the eve of the Bhârata War. He served as sârathi 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 Brahmâ 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, Bhû and the Lady of rank seated on the flower, Śrî. 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, hemavigraha, endowed with crimson feet, handsome hands, red lips, and yellow garments. Śiva and Brahmâ 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 Kôvalû’ are the words of the king of Maṅkai-city. The experts in the ten hymns of the gladiator-Kaliyan15 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 Kôvalûr when the Mutal-Ăyârs 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 Āḻvārs in the itaikkāli 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, Kaṇṇamaṅkai in the Kāviri estuary.”

**Tiruneṭuntāṇtakam** (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 suparna. He admonishes demons and shows no mercy. Sing the praises of venues where the Lord’s feet are set. The River Peṇṇai (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 Vindhyas17. The city is full of groves, long and wide streets, and lotus ponds all along the pathways. The ruler of the hills, Malaiyamāṉ,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 Naṟaiyūr.”

Though Tirumaṅkai is the last21 to follow others, his hymns are of great value to single out the mode of invoking the Lord in ritual worship, i.e., the Vedic and bhakti (cf. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, M. (2014): 258-259). The two-way process gets stabilized in the Mahābhārata, e.g., Viśvāmitra conducting the yajña (Rajarajan 2015c: fig. 15) 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 Vedas22. It seems the Āḻvārs strived to compromise bhakti, the Vedas and yajñas23.

**Bhaktimārga**

T.M.P. Mahadevan (1976: 18-19) has stipulated the modes by which bhakti is expressed: śravaṇa, kīrtana, smaraṇa, pādasevana (the Bhāgavatas called Āṭiyār cf. Kalidos 2017b: 127), arcana, vandana, dāṣya, sakhyā, ātmanivedana and so on. Visiting the holy centres by walk (cf. Nātamuṅkai in Āṟāyirappatī pp. 115-121)24;
extolling the Praise of the Lord, listening to the līḷās (cf. Narayanan, V. (1995)) told in the purāṇas (retold in the Paripāṭaḷ and the Cilappatikāram)²²; worship by offering fragrant holy basil, sandalwood, incense and perpetual lamps (nontāvilakkuk ARE 1900, no. 116)²⁶; fervent devotion and emotionalism, tears spontaneously overflowing (Periyāḻvār Tirumōḷi 3.6.3); shower flowers (puspāṉjali, pūppali in Cilappatikāram 28.231), recite the nāṁvalis²⁷, petitions submitted to the Lord for absolution from sins accrued during human births, kárma, and saṃsāra, and to reach the Lord’s abode in the Vaikuṇṭha. God realized through bhakti, yoga²⁸, or bhoga²⁹ as it is amenable to the devotee (cf. the Gītā, chap. 12 on Bhaktiyoga).

The līḷās and māṭhymyas retold in the hymns bearing on Kōvalūr are rooted in the Harivamsa and Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and the regional Tamil redactions³⁰: the Lord is in seated, standing, reclining, flying or walking modes Kalidos, R. (1999); 226, Figure 5; the Lord is dear to Nappiṇṇai, Śrī, and Bhūmaṉrūm (PTM 4.3.7). Tirumāṅkai through Śrī Vēḻaṉai’s retold in the hymns bearing Nonāḷavar (cf. the Tirumavlai [vv. 39, 42-43] of Toṇṭai naṉṟum kāṇamāttāc celvaṉ (PTM 4.8.7).

The righteous Caturvedi are nurturing the Sāmaveda on the southern bank of the River Peṇṇar 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 extoll the Praise of the Lord; let that be Māl/Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu and Indra or Varuna. Sectarians may claim, it should be performed only by the vaidika[suddha]-brāhmaṇas (Rajarajan et al. 2017b: 1516); cf. the vaṭa-kalai approach and Śrī Rāmānuja permitting the non-brāhmaṇas to utter the astākṣara (Rajarajan 2015c citing the Tirumavlai [vv. 39, 42-43] of Toṇṭaṟatippoṭi Aḷvār resulting in vaṭa-kalai-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 Varuna-japa (cf. Tiruppāvaḷai 3-4). Tirumāṅkai Aḷvār adds the recital took place within temple, possibly the garbhaṅgaha, the priests spelling the Vedic intonation (divyadesa-Čemponeçeyköyil in Nāṅkūr cluster; ceṅcol nāṁmaṟaiyōr Nāṅkai nāţuvel Čemponeçey-kōyilinulē (PTM 4.3.7). Tirumāṅkai though a kaḷḷan by birth (robber by jāṭī/cāḷī noted in Tiruvāymoḷi 3.5.5, 3.7.9, 3.4.3-4) adds the Vedā is the illuminating Lamp³⁴ ‘Vēṭa-nal-vilakkku’, and the tilaka of the south ‘ten-ticait-Tilatam’ (PTM 4.3.8, 4.8.8). The Lord is singularly unique whom the Vedas could never discover, nāṉmaṟai kal tēṭi etrum kāṇamattāc celvaṇ (PTM 4.8.7).

The Lord is offered worship by tuning the seven musical notes (saptasvaras³⁵ cf. Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2017): Figure 1), chanting the four Vedas³⁶, examining the six
Vedāṅgas³⁷, 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., itihāsapurāṇas (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 (cf. Stietencron, H. v. (1977): 126-38 and Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, M. (2014) 2014: 258. 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 Venkaṭam, 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 urdhvapundra⁴¹ (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, R. (2015a): 137-39).

Tirumaṅkai was great among the Indian mystics, the coadjutor of Nammāḻvār. The later medieval bhakti savants (Nāmadeva, Mīrābāī, Jayadeva, Kabīr et alii followed the footsteps of the Tamil mystics (cf. Brockington, J. (1996): chap. 8. The naked fact is that Nammāḻvār and Tirumaṅkai were not brahmaṇas⁴² 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 bigotism, and caste disparity. The Āḻvārs 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 Āḻvārs 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 Āḻvārs 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 Āṇṭāḷ (Tiruppāvai 3) may be cited to this effect.

Ōṅki yulakalanta uttamaṇ... 
Tiṅkinī nāṭellām tiṅkal mummāri peytu...
Niṅkāta celvam niraṭitelōr 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, S. (1976): 2 cited in Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2016b): 84-85, Parthiban, R.K. & R.K.K. Rajarajan (2016): Figure 1. The way that the Āḻvārs taste, cuvai, God, and enjoy nature is quite natural. I am just listing the abundant data charted by the Āḻvārs in about twenty hymns. The venue, Kōvalūr, is set on the southern bank of the River Peṉṇai. Naturally, riverside regions are plenty in water,
rich in agricultural fields (paddy in Tamilnadu Figure 2), 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 (cf. Gallico 1999: fig. pp. 54-55); a case for Taylor, B. (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 Puñ-kitaṅku “repository of flowers (flowering groves)”
TI 86 Puñ-Kōval “Kōvalūr decorated with flower (gardens)”
PTM 2.4.1 Taṭam “perched Indian linden”, Grewia microcos
PTM 2.10.1 Iḷantasir tender leaf of al/vaṭa Ficus bengalensis (Wilkins, W. (2000): 469); cēncāli (cf. PTM 4.1.6, 4.2.4) a greater variety of paddy (Figure 10)

Ibid. 2 Tulāy: tulaci “holy basil” Ocimum sanctum (Wilkins, W. (2000): 470-72); cāntam sandalwood
Ibid. 3 Malarcōḷai “flower garden”; karunīlam “blue water-lily” Nymphaea stellata, puṇṇai “Alexandrian laurel” Calophyllum inophyllum, kamalam “lotus” padma (Wilkins, W. (2000): 459), a tropical plant and flower, lotos in Greek and Deutsch, Egyptian water lily
Ibid. 4 Karumpu “sugarcane”, curapuṇṇai “Gamboge” Ochnocarpus longifolius, vanṭu “beetle.”
Ibid. 5 Poḷil “grove” (Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2016b): 85-86); tenral “enchanting breeze”, the northern wind is cold-tormenting and the southern breeze the food for love (Maturait tenral vantatu kāṅīr “see, the breeze of Maturai has come” Cilappatikāram 13.132)
Ibid. 6 Kaliṟu “male elephant” (piṭi “female elephant” PTM 1.2.3, 2.4.8), paṇi “mist”, Malar-makal “Lady of rank on flower” (Lakṣmī), padmajaj; kalai “buck.”
Ibid. 7 Kari “elephant”, pari “horse”, viṭai “bull”, marutam Queens’ flower tree Terminalia arjuna, kamuku “area-nut” Areca catechu, pāḷai Spatha or pericarp of palms (Tamil Lexicon V, 2638), pāḷai “ivory wood” Wrightia tinctoria, muttu “pearl”*, marakatam “emerald”, pavaḷam “coral”, cerutti Ochna squarrosa, moṭṭu “(flower) bud”, tēṉ “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”, karpakam kalpaka-tree, cempoṇ “molten gold”
Ibid. 10 Varāṇam “elephant” (Nācciyār Tirumoḻi 6.1), maḷai “rain” (maḷai “hill” PTM 1.5.1, 7.1.3)
PTM 7.3.2 Makaram mythical fish (makarakkulai/makarakunḍala), ari “lion”, ēṟu “bull”
PTM 7.10.4 Pey “devil”, ghoul, mutalai “crocodile”, maṇi “gem” (cf. navaratna)
TAN 6 Aṅciṟaip-pul suparṇa-bird (Garuda), vēy “bamboo” Bambusa arundinacea (cf. Dendrocalamus strictus), poykai “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 Kövalur.

Figure 1 Map showing [Tiruk]-Kövalur

Figure 2 The landscape graced with the south-Pennai River, Kövalur
Figure 3 View of the Temple with Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period gopuram, Kōvalūr

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

Figure 5 Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār (bronze), Ātaṉūr
Figure 6 Trivikrama (calendar art)

Figure 7 Trivikrama (mūlabera - partial view), Kōvalū
Figure 8 View of yagaśālā (see cālai PTM 3.10.8), Āṇṭāḷ Temple, Śrīvilliputtūr: a-b) Ongoing rituals
Figure 9 Priests reciting the scriptures, Âṇṭāl Temple, Śrīvilliputtūr: a) ‘Nālāyiram’-kōṭṭi, b) ‘Veda’-goṣṭi

Figure 10 “Sea of rice” (see Harle, J. (1958)), Foothills of Koṭaikkāṉal (early 1990)

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ABBREVIATIONS*

* A few are listed under References

PVP Periyavāccān Piḷḷai
PTM Periya Tirumoḻi
TAN Tiruneṭunṭañṭakam
TI Tiruvantāṭi I
TII Tiruvantāṭi II

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Periya Tirumaṭal, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

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Tiruccantaviruttam, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tirumāḷai, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tirumoḻi of Periyāḻvār, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tiruvantāṭi I, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tiruvantāṭi II, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tiruvantāṭi III, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.
Tiruvāymoḻi, part of ‘Nālāyiram’.

Tiruvelukūṟṟirukkai, 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)

2. Vedānāṃ Śāmavedo’smi...bhaktah sa me priyah

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).

4. “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 saṃsāra) are exterminated.”

5. 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-Tāmil.”

6. “I have had a darśana of the auspicious Śri-Viṣṇu. I have seen the golden mien. 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.”

7. Trivikrama appears as mūlabera of the temples at Kōvalūr, Kalīcīrāma-vinnakaram (Kāviri delta) and Īrakam (Kānci). Vāmana is mūlabera in Vāraṇvilai/Ārāmulā (Kērala), called Kurāḷappān “Lord Dwarf” (‘Kural’ Nācīyār Tirumoli 4.9), also known as ‘Māṇi’ (literally “penis” Periyāḻvār TirukKōvalūrrataṉuḷ kāṇṭēṉ nāṉē)

8. “I have seen (the Lord) at sacred Kōvalūr” (cf. Kalidos, R. (1983) : figs. 1-6), Jeyapriya-Rajarajan. (2008): fig. 23), Rajarajan et al. (2017: 150-51) and Mankodi, K. (1991): fig. 71-72.

9. Vēḻkā/Kāṇchipuram (in Perumpāṇāṟṟuppatai), Śrīraṅgam, Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati/ Tirumala), Māliruṅcōlai, and Āṭakamāṭam/Aṉantapuram (Kalidos, R. (2015) : 312-18) are the earliest divyadesas notified in Tamil literary tradition, e.g., the Puripāṭal and the Cilappatikāram. The north Indian divyadesas codified in the itihāsas (e.g., Ayodhya, Dvārakā, Śālagrāma, Devaprayāga, Badrinātha and so on) are the earliest in the history of religions, dated in the immortal past.

10. This hymn has noted ‘Kōval itaikālī’. The commentators (PVP: Periyavācchān Piḷḷai c. 1167-1262 CE) suggest the Mutal Āḻvārs met at Kōvalūr.

11. Nappiṉṉai is the Niḷādevi of the Ācāryas and later Rādhā in Jayadeva’s Gītāgovinda (12th century).

12. Today is known as Peṇṇāṟu (noted in Akanāṉūṟu 35, Purāṇāṉūṟu 126; peṇ “woman, bride or wife” Tamil Lexicon V, 2856), it is the south Peṇṇai (Figure 2); the north-Peṇṇai is to the south of the Krṣṇa (Telugu Peṇṇēr).

13. All hymns end with tirukKōvalūrrataṉul kaṇṭēṉ nāṉē “I have seen (the Lord) at sacred Kōvalūr” (cf. Seifert, J. M. (2013) & Shah 2013: 69-70).

14. The Vaṅkānasāgama (Kalidos, R. (1989) : 219) notes six saṭkāla-pūjās at prayāṣakāla or uṣākāla (dawn), prabhāta or prātaḥkāla (early morning), madhyadina (noon), aparāhāna (afternoon), sāyaṅkāla (evening), and niṣi or ardhayāma (night).

15. Om śaṁtiḥ śaṁtiḥ śaṁtiḥ; see the Gītā 4.7-8.

16. Raman, K. (2006): 108-109) notes Tīrūvāyōmoḷi-маṇḍapa, Vyākhyāna-маṇḍapa, Gāyatri-маṇḍapa and so on (cf. Rajarajan 2006: Annexure I).

17. Kalaiyamarcelvi or Mṛgavāhāni, T. Koṟṟavai or Mahiṣamardini, Durgā (Cilappatikāram 12.16, 70-71, cf. Rajarajan 2015a: 205-209, fig. IIIa; 2015b: 173-75, Figure 7): Māmakaḷum Nāmakaḷum māmayiṭaṟ ceṟṟukanta Kōmakaḷum...

18. “Umā, Vācdevi, and Šridevi that slaughtered mahiṣāsura…” (Cilappatikāram 22, Veṉpā).

19. Krṣṇa tamed the virulent bulls to take the hand of Nappiṉṉai. Bull-fight was an ancient martial game of the Tamils (Rajarajan et al. 2017: 205-15).
The triple fires are

The six

The four

For a compilation of the

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts

Veda

[Cittirakūṭam]. They taught parrots to speak the language of the-

a thriving aristocratic population (3,000) in Tillai

Tirumaṅkai (6

Pūtam, Pēy, Tirumaḻicai, Nammāḻvār, Maturakavi, Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, Tiruppāṇ, Kulacēkarar, Periyāḻvār, Āṇṭāḷ, and

scriptures of the Āryans and Drāviḍians.

cf. Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2016a):

Govindasamy, M. (1979)

Kalidos, R. (2017b): 1652-57).

Kaṇṇamaṅkai (PTM 7.10.4, TAN 6

Taṇkāl, the Ocean of Milk (Pāṟkaṭal), Mallai, Kuṭantai (TII 70); Naṟaiyūr (TAN 17), Āli, Nīrmalai (PTM 2.4.1);

Kanñamaṅkai (PTM 7.10.4, TAN 6-7, 17); Kōval or Kōvalūr appears in all hymns.

“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?” (Ciḷappatikāram 17, ‘Patarkaipparval’ 1-3; cf.

Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2016a): 342). See ‘Tiruvanikamālai’ in Tēvāram (4.9).

Inscriptions in the temple are dated since the Middle Cōḷa period (Rājarāja I et alii) recording donations for food

offerings (amutu), abhiṣeka and utsava (for s summary of the inscriptions see Ragunath, M. (2014): 64-67).

For a compilation of the Viṣṇusahasranāma arranged in alphabetical order see Rajarajan, R.K.K., Parthiban, R.K., &

Kalidos, R. (2017b): 1652-57).

Paṅcāgnitapa killing the body was not encouraged (Periya Tirumolī 3.2.2, cf. Bon 1974: figs. pp. 54-55).

Pōkattil vaḻiuvāta that never departs from bhoga-mārga.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, dated c. 950 CE (O’Flaherty, W. D. (1994): 17) was not extant during the time of the Āḻvārs

(Hardy 1983).

The Lord’s mistresses are in several thousand (for citations see Rajarajan, R.K.K., Parthiban, R.K, & Kalidos, R.

(2017b): 1362-63).

Ciṟiya Tirumaṭal and Periya Tirumalṭal draw a sharp distinction between the Sanskrit Veda and Tamil Maṟai,

scriptures of the Āryans and Drāvidians.

The irony in history is that the ‘Nālāyiram’ came to be designated the Drāviḍa

Vēṅkaṭam, Viṇṇakar, Veḥkā (TI 77); Tañcai, Araṅkam,

Taṅkāl, the Ocean of Milk (Pāṟkaṭal), Mallai, Kuṭantai (TII 70); Naṟaiyūr (TAN 17), Āli, Nīrmalai (PTM 2.4.1);

Kaṇṇamaṅkai (PTM 7.10.4, TAN 6-7, 17); Kōval or Kōvalūr appears in all hymns.

“At what time is the utility of years that do not listen to the glories of Krṣṇa; 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?” (Ciḷappatikāram 17, ‘Patarkaipparval’ 1-3; cf.

Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2016a): 342). See ‘Tiruvanikamālai’ in Tēvāram (4.9).

Inscriptions in the temple are dated since the Middle Cōḷa period (Rājarāja I et alii) recording donations for food

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(Hardy 1983).

The Lord’s mistresses are in several thousand (for citations see Rajarajan, R.K.K., Parthiban, R.K, & Kalidos, R.

(2017b): 1362-63).

Cf. Choḍa Pāḍā Satiyaputo Ketalaputo (Cōḻa, Pāṇḍya Satyaputra and Kēraḷaputra) in the Girṇār Edict of Āśoka Maurya

Mookerji, R. (1972)

Cf. Choḍa Pāḍā Satiyaputo Ketalaputo (Cōḻa, Pāṇḍya Satyaputra and Kēraḷaputra) in the Girṇār Edict of Āśoka Maurya

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Mookerji, R. (1972)
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 (cf. Parthiban, R.K. & R.K.K. Rajarajan (2016).

Indian adjudicators of litigations in High Courts are much more prudent than temple priests. When the Kāṇcīpuram case was moved in the Court of Law (1970s) the judge judiciously ordered “let the *tenkalai* and *vāṭakalai nāmams* be affixed to the temple elephant on alternative weeks”.

Among the twelve, three were brāhmaṇas Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, Periyāḻvār, and Āṇṭāḷ by adoption (notes *pārppaṉac-ciṭṭār* in *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* 6.4); and almost all the Ācāryas beginning with Nātamuṉi (c. tenth century Zvelebil, K. V. (1974): 91).

In the illustrated photo in between the paddy fields and yonder the hills, a rivulet called Mañcalāṟu (Yellow River) flows (Parthiban, R. (2013): 93, cf. Map, Plan 3, Figure 9).

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).