TIRUVĀYMOĻI
ENGLISH GLOSSARY

by
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TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

UNDER THEIR SCHEME

"AID TO PUBLISH RELIGIOUS BOOKS"
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VOLUME II
BOOK III

Third Centum—First Decad (III-1)  
(Mūṭīc cōṭī)

Preamble

In the end-stanza of the preceding decad, the Āḷvār had referred to himself as one possessed of a clear vision, absolutely free from doubt and despair, discrepancies and deviations. But in the very next song, that is, the first song of this decad, he seeks clarification of certain doubts and thus betrays his ignorance. Well, ignorance is of four different kinds, namely (1) Non-comprehension, (2) comprehension, halfway beset with doubts, (3) miscomprehension and (4) lapse of memory resulting in not remembering a thing previously known. In the present case, the Āḷvār is assailed by doubts and yet, it transcends the above types of ignorance to which those still relatively unevolved and in the grip of nescience resulting from Karma, are susceptible. Here it is the bewitching splendour of Lord Āḷakar which defies description and baffles correct and complete comprehension. Enthralled by the charming personality of the Lord, the Āḷvār enquires of the Lord, “Sire, has the effulgence of your face expanded itself upwards into the dazzling crown and Your dazzling feet likewise expanded into the lotus seat on which they are poised?” It is the exuberance of their God-love, too deep for words, that throws the Āḷvārs into an ecstatic state of mental imbalance and this only redounds to their glory.

The Āḷvār who expounded the glory of Mount ‘Māliruṇcōlai’ in the last decad, now proceeds to drink deep of the nectarean charm and enthralling beauty of Lord Āḷakar (The Beautiful), enshrined there.

muṭic cōṭiyāy uṇatu mukac cōṭi malarntatuvō?  
aṭic cōṭi nīṅga tāmaraiyāy alaranntāuvō?  
pāṭic cōṭi āṭaiyoṭum pal kalaṇṇy, niṅ paim pōn-  
kaṭic cōṭi kalantaruvō? tirumālē! kaṭturaiyē.  

(III-1-1)

Translation

May you clarify, oh, Tirumāl, if your crown aglow  
Is but the upward expansion of your facial glow,

T—7
Your lotus seat, but the reflection of your dazzling feet
And the many jewels on Your person and silken garment,
But the reflection of the glow on your waist radiant.

Note
The above poser of the Āḷvār is the result of his observation of the Lord's bewitching charm, in His iconic manifestation as Āḷakar, in conjunction with the jewels adorning Him, so well matched that the Āḷvār sees the crown as but an upward expansion of the effulgence on the Lord's face. At the other end, the lotus seat on which the Lord's feet are poised seems to be but a reflection of the effulgence on the Lord's feet. Perhaps, there are no Jewels as such and the jewels that are seen are but a manifestation of the brilliant complexion of the Lord's body and the flowing silken robe is, likewise, the reflection of the lustre around the Lord's waist. In short, it is the Lord's native charm and brilliance that pervade all round and give the beholder the impression that the Lord is bedecked with numerous Jewels and donning the silken robes. Even the 'Nityās', the ever-free angels in heaven, share this stunning experience with the Āḷvār who thus moves in good company. Indeed it is not too much to say that the Lord Himself is not aware of the precise extent of His charm and prowess.

kaṭṭuraikkil, tāmarai niṉ kaṇ, pāṭam, kai ovvā;
cuṭṭu uraittā naṇ pop up tirumēpi oli ovvatā;
oṭṭu uraittā iy ulakku uppaip pukalju ellām perumpālum,  
peṭṭuraiyāy, purku eṛē kāṭṭumāl; parāṅcōṭi! (III–1–2)

Translation
My resplendent Lord, if one described your charm exquisite,  
The lotus flower will into your eyes, hands and feet,  
Bear no comparison, the lustrous gold cannot compete  
With your complexion grand and all the eulogy  
On you heaped by men of this world, on the analogy  
Of things worldly, will be mere words, insipid and foggy.

Note
The Lord's exquisite charm can best be enjoyed only by drinking it in, with one's eyes and mind. Words are but
poor substitutes, and the comparisons, similies and analogies indulged in by us, worldlings, are much too-feeble and faulty too, and cannot, therefore, describe the Lord's exquisite features effectively.

\[\text{parāṅcōti ni paramāy, niṇ ikāṁtu, piṇ maṇgu ḍr param cōti iṅmaiyiq, pāṭi ḍvi nikalkigra parāṅcōti nįṅgulē paṭar ulakam paṭaṭita em parāṅcōti kōvintāl paṇpu uraikka māṭṭēpi.}\] (III–1–3)

**Translation**

Oh, Lord of splendour supreme, with none so resplendent, Comparison you transcend, by Your resolve radiant, You did the sprawling universe create, Oh, Kōvintā of rare brilliance, describe I can't Your attributes.

**Note**

**Lord to the Āḻvār:** “Āḻvār, I agree that the worldlings cannot praise Me adequately. But you should be able to do full justice, having been endowed by Me with knowledge, full and flooding”.

**Āḻvār to the Lord:** “My Lord, none in any clime can make pretensions to your unrivalled splendour. Having, by a mere resolve, created the entire Universe, you are beyond the ken of comprehension of any one. At the same time, your Saulabhysa (easy accessibility) is astounding. Even if one could find the summit of your transcendent glory, it is well nigh impossible to sound the depth of your amazing simplicity as Govinda (Kōvinta, in Tamil) and touch the floor space. The former can be talked about while it is pretty difficult even to ponder in one's mind about the latter and much less talk about it”.

\[\text{māṭṭēē ākilun, im malar talai mā ūlam, niṅ- māṭṭu āya malar puraiyum tiruvuruvar maṇam vaikka māṭṭāta pula camaya mati koṭuttāy; malart tulāy- māṭṭē ni maṇam vaittāy; mā ūlam varuntātē?}\] (III–1–4)
Translation

The sprawling world which did from your navel sprout,
Thinks not your glory and your form exquisite
(And worse still), many a religion is extant,
Preaching heretical doctrines, the mind errant
You gave them and yet if you are solely intent
On enjoying the fragrance from your tulāci garland,
Won't it be a grievous loss for this world indeed?

Notes

(i) Brahmā, the demi-urge, emerged from the lotus stalk
on the Lord's navel and created all the worlds; hence
the worlds are said to have come up from the Lord's
navel.

(ii) No doubt, in the preceding song, the Āḻvār confessed to
his inability to describe the Lord's attributes and yet
it is Lord Aḻakār's extraordinary beauty that eggs
him on, to speak out his mind, deploring, at the same
time, the aloofness of the world from the Lord, so sweet
and exquisite. People have already no taste for Godhead and it is grievous enough. Further deterioration
sets in, when diverse religious expound mutually
contradictory and incompatible tenets and doctrines.
The Āḻvār says that the Lord gave rise to all this hotch-
potch in as much as He didn't correct the minds of those
going the wrong way. If, in a grievous situation like
this, the Lord is complacent enough and his attention
gets fixed on the sweet fragrance and freshness of His
tulāci garland, instead of being harnessed to the reclamation of the errant Subject, there is indeed no hope of
redemption for this world. This observation of the
Āḻvār arises from his enjoyment of Lord Aḻakār's
exquisite beauty and the feeling of sorrow that the
world around is unmindful of the Lord, so sweet and
exquisite, because of the above factors. There is also
the grand poetic imagery, the poet bringing out that
Lord Aḻakār's charm is so alluring that it ensnares
Him as well and makes him oblivious of the imperative
need to correct the world from going the wrong way.
under the unwholesome impact of heretical doctrines,
propounded by perverts.

varuntāta arum tavatta malar kāṭirīṇ cuṭar utampu āy,
varuntāta ūṇām āy, varampu igī muḫtu iyagrāy!
varum-kālam, nikāl-kālam, kaḷi-kālam āy, ulakai
orunkkāka alippāy! cīr enku ulakka ōtuvaṅē? (III–1–5)

Translation

Your resplendent form you assume at your volition sweet,
The result perhaps of your devotees' penance great;
Knowledge supreme is yours with no effort,
Pervading without limits, the worlds you duly protect,
Time is at your beck and call, past, present
And future, how can I, your attributes fully relate?

Note

The preceding stanza (III-1-4) stands in isolation; in the midst
of his enjoyment of Lord Āḷakar, the Āḷvār's heart leapt
towards the straying humanity and deplored their failure,
rather their inability to feast on the exquisite charm of
Āḷakar. This song has, therefore, to be studied in continua-
tion of the third stanza where the Āḷvār had said "'Oh, Kovindā, how can I describe your attributes?'" The Lord
rebuts the Āḷvār's plea of inability, despite his supreme
knowledge. Here then is the Āḷvār's elucidation of his
limitations, despite all that massive knowledge, dowered
on him by the Lord whose glory, however, knows no
bounds and cannot, therefore, be fully comprehended and
expressed by any one. As a matter of fact, complete
enumeration of the Lord's glory, His auspicious traits
etc, would be possible, only if they remained encompassed
by known limits.

ōtuvaṅ āṛtu ell ām ev ulakattu ev evaiyum
cātuvaṅ niṇ pukāṇ takaī allāl piṣṭu illai;
pōtu vāḷ pugam tulāy muṭiṇiṇāy! pūviṇmēl
mātu vāḷ mārpiṇāy! en colli yāṁ vāḷṭtuvaṅe? (III–1–6)
Translation

My Lord, wearing on your crown tuḻaci garland,
Set with choice flowers and holding on your lovely chest
Mātu (Lakṣmi), the lotus-born! the scriptures and sacred texts,
In the entire land, out to praise you, lag far behind,
How indeed I can praise you occurs not to my mind.

Note

All the scriptures and sacred texts can only make an attempt
to sing the Lord's praise; none of these can, however, sing
His glory, in toto. These praises are like unto the rain
drops falling on the surface of the oceanic waters without,
however, swelling them up. The faculty of speech dowered
on us by the Lord is indeed put to proper use when we sing
His glory, however poor our capacity may be. If the
tongue is, however, put to any other use, it gets defiled like
rain drops falling on mud becoming muddy, unlike those
falling into the ocean remaining in tact.

vāḻttuvār pālar āka; nigguḷē nāṃmukapāi
mūḷţta nir ulaku ellām pāţai enṟu mutal-paţaittāy!
kēṟtta cīr araṇ mutalāk kilar teyyamāy kilaruntu
cūlttu amarar tutittāl, uṇ to pukal mācūṇātē? (III–1–7)

Translation

First and foremost, Nāṃmukap (Brahmā) You did, by your
resolve, raise
And bade him create the worlds many, out of the deep waters;
If Araṇ (Śiva) of prowess great and other devas who pose
As the gods potent, your creatures all, were to sing your praise,
Would it not your ancient glory efface?

Note

What does it matter how many sing the Lord's glory and
how powerful and knowledgeable they are? None can
indeed be more articulate than the Vedas and even they
can have only a sense of participation in a scheme of recital
of the Lord's glory, as distinguished from a sense of due
fulfilment. Even the exalted Śiva, known for His extra-
ordinary wisdom, is no exception and fares no better. The measure of the Lord’s glory is as unlimited as the capacity of even the most knowledgeable of His subjects to sing His glory is miserably limited and pales into insignificance. Any attempt on their part to exhaustively sing His glory is thus an affront to His hoary fame.

mācūnāc cuṭar utampuḥy, malarātu kuviyātu
mācūna ḫaṇam āy, muļutum āy, muļutu iyāṛāyal
mācūna vāŋ kōlattu amarar-kōŋ vaḷippaṭṭāl,
mācūna ḫaṇa pāṭamalarc cōti maḷuṅkāṭē? (III–1–8)

Translation

Oh Lord of radiant person, immaculate!
Your knowledge flawless, full and complete,
Neither expands nor contracts,
All things you control and in you they subsist;
Wouldn’t the splendour diminish of your blemishless lotus feet
Even if Brahmā, the impeccable chief sang your glory to his utmost?

Note

Even if Brahmā who is relatively superior to Śiva, attempted to sing the Lord’s glory, the result would be just the same.

maḷuṅkāṭa vain nutiya cakkara naι valattaiyāy,
toṭum kāṭal-kaḷiṁu alippāŋ, puḷ ēṛntu tōṛiṇayē;
maḷuṅkāṭa ḫaṇamē paṭai āka malar-ulkil
toḷumpāyärkku alittāl, uṇ cuṭarc cōti maṭaiyāṭē? (III–1–9)

Translation

(It was but meet that) you went and rescued
The elephant, passionately intent on worshipping you,
Mounted on that bird (Garuḍa) and wielding the discus ever acute;
(If instead), by mere resolve, ever alert, you did succour
Your devotees in this wide world, all over,
On your splendour great, it would indeed be a slur.
Notes

(i) The omnipotent Lord could, by a mere resolve, create this vast and wonderful universe. He can likewise achieve all things, by a mere resolve from His heavenly abode, without moving about. And then, He has such powerful weapons as the discus, ever sharp, which can be commissioned at any time, anywhere. And yet, when Gajendra the pious elephant, engaged in a titanic struggle with a crocodile, raised an alarum inviting the Lord’s help, the Lord rushed to the pond, mounted on Garuḍa, without merely commissioning the discus to do the job. In fact, He had no other option. The elephant entered the lotus pond, plucked a lotus flower to be offered to the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, and, in the process, got caught by a crocodile. In the long and grim struggle that ensued, the elephant got terribly emaciated and yet, his sole concern was to offer the flower to the Lord and hence, the alarum raised by him. Unto the Lord who presented Himself before the elephant, the latter declared;

“Oh, Slayer of Madhu, I was not in the least worried about this mortal frame, bound to decay some day, but my sole concern was to worship you and offer this lotus flower in my trunk (hand) at your golden feet”. How can the aspiration of such an ardent devotee be fulfilled by the Lord, in absentia, by the mere exercise of His ‘Sānkalpa’ (resolve) from where He is seated, like pressing a button afar, with all its mechanical efficiency? This brings us on to the purpose of the Lord’s Avatārs, main and secondary.

(ii) There are three components in the Lord’s motive behind His incarnations, viz,

(i) Paritrāṇāya Sādhūnāṁ—Sādhu paritrāṇam or protection of the righteous;

(ii) Vināśāya ca duṣkrtām—Duṣṭa nigraha or vanquishing the evil—doers,
(iii) Dharma Samstāpanārthāya—resuscitation and establishment of dharma, (moral standards).

(iii) A little probe into this will reveal that (1) above, is the main purpose and that the other two are merely auxiliary thereto or the ingredients thereof. Even so, would it be necessary for the Lord to assume a special form and incarnate without merely contemplating, "May the righteous prosper and the evil forces die out?"

No, this won't do, the Lord has to necessarily come down to meet the aspirations, the deep yearnings of the devout. What is, "Sādhu paritrāṇam" after all? It is nothing but the fulfilment of the aspirations of the devout and the cutting out of things disliked by them. He cannot resist their deepest urges and inclinations, such as drinking in, with their naked eyes, the Lord's nectar, the beauty of the Lord's beauty, an irresistible longing to embrace Him bodily and so on. It is during such contacts, that the Lord's auspicious traits shine forth and it is only the contemplation of these traits, down the ages, long after He has gone back to the Celestium, that sustains the Sādhus (the devout), down to the present day and this, in essence, is the "Sādhu paritrāṇam".

marai āya nāl vēttattul nippa malarc cutārē! muratyāl iv ulaku ellām paṭaittu, itantu, unṭu, umilantu, alantāy!
pītai ēru caṭaṭyānum nānpukaṇum intiraṇum irai ātal aṁintu ēṭta, viṭṭiruttal itu viyaṭṭe? (III–1–10)

Translation

My lustrous Lord, enshrined you are in the Vedas four
Which (unto aliens and heretics) reveal you not,
The worlds you did create, picked them out from deep waters,
Ate them up (during the deluge) and then spat them out,
You spanned them too; seen thus as the Supreme Master,
If you are worshipped by Śiva who does sport
The crescent Moon on matted locks, Nāḍmukan (Brahmā, the four-headed)
And Intira, is it really any wonder indeed?

Note

Brahmā was created by the Lord and all the rest created by Brahmana. And then, it is the Lord who redeemed the worlds from underneath the Oceanic waters, sustained them inside His stomach during the period of deluge and put them back, in position, later on. He also spanned all the worlds in just three strides. It is, therefore, hardly any matter for wonder that His Supremacy is readily realised by those super-eminent personalities created by the Lord Himself, Brahman, Siva and Intira, and He is worshipped by them all. Nor can the Lord feel flattered by such worship by His own creatures, a mockery of worship, like unto a person setting his foot on the head of a doll of his, decorated by him and pompously declaring that the latter worshipped him.

vīyappu āya vīyappu illā meyā fāṇa vētiyaṇaic
oṣaṇa pukaḷar palar vālum taṭam-kuruṣc caṭakopaṇ
tuyakku iqīt toļutu uṟattu ayirattu ip pattum
uyakkoṭu piṇappu aṭukkum oli munnir ēḷattē. (III—1—11)

Translation

This decade, out of the thousand, crystal-clear,
Composed by Caṭakopaṇ of Kurukṣu, the mighty abode
Of men of spiritual fame, in adoration of the Lord,
By Vedas truly revealed, above all known wonders,
Will from rebirth rid men of this world, bound by roaring
waters.

Notes

(i) The Lord is a marvel unto Himself. What appears
to be a matter of wonder for us, with limited intellect
and meagre perception, is by-no-means wonderful for
Him, who is the All-powerful Lord of the entire
Universe. If some one presented to another as many
as four cows at a time, it would indeed be a matter for surprise but if Lord Rāma gifted away thousands of cows to a poor brahmin (Tr̤eṣa) on the eve of setting out in exile, as we read in Chapter 32 of Ayodhya Kāṇḍa of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, it looks quite natural and there is nothing odd about it.

(ii) The chanters of this decad will get elevated from the bottom-most depths, as good as non-existent, to the highest heights.

Third Centum—Second Decad (III-2)
(Munnir ṇālam)

Preamble

We have only to imagine the pangs of a person unable to quench his extreme thirst, notwithstanding the availability of plenty of water near at hand, just because his mouth is sealed up (like Tantalus in the Greek legend). We will then be able to appreciate the most unenviable predicament in which the Ālvār found himself, suffering from the figurative lock-jaw. Here is the Lord in His worshippable form, of insatiable beauty, near at hand, and yet, the Ālvār is not able to comprehend and enjoy Him as well as He would like to, severely handicapped as he is, by the heavy limitations inherent in his earthly existence, tethered to this material body. No doubt, the Lord, in His unbounded mercy, has dowered on us limbs and sense-organs to impart mobility and put us on a career of gainful activity. Not stopping with this alone, He condescended to present Himself before the Subjects during His Avatāras and mixed with them freely. And yet, all these benefits do not currently fill the Ālvār’s bill. On the other hand, he is regretting his inability to enjoy the Lord, in His ‘Arcā (Iconic manifestation), in toto, and give the fullest expression to such enjoyment. God is limitless but the Saint has his limitations although his craving is very great.

The present agony of the Ālvār is thus due to his inability to limit the limitless, rather, the small range of the powers of his mind and the senses vis-a-vis the enjoyment of the boundless
beatific vision of the Lord. It is, however, seen that, towards the end of this decad, the Lord consoles the Ālvār by telling him that the Celestials, shorn of material contacts, are also on the same footing as the Ālvār and they too have their limitations. The Ālvār is, however, beckoned by the Lord to enjoy His iconic form at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, to his heart’s content. Thus consoled, the Ālvār ends this decad on a happy note.

When Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar discoursed on this song, his younger brother, Śrīrāmappillai raised the following point. “I find that the Ālvār’s distress is neither due to his longing for the heavenly bliss, right from here, nor due to his craving for the enjoyment of God in His incarnations in by-gone times. His distress seems to have arisen after the Lord was pleased to grant him the enjoyment of His worshippable (Arcā) form as Aḷakar, in ‘Tirumāḷiruṇi Cōḷai’, when, in fact, one should have expected him to go on revelling in the enjoyment of the Lord, so sweet and exquisite. It is indeed puzzling in this context how the anguish has, at all, arisen.”

The illustrious Bhaṭṭārya elucidated, as follows: “The different manifestations (Para, Vyūha, Vibhava, Antaryāmi and Arcā) of one and the same God cannot affect His Solidarity. God is immense and infinite. When His beatific vision was presented to the Saint through the medium of Aḷakar he could enjoy it only as much as his limited capacity could permit, even as one visualises the vast ocean, only as much as the eye apprehends. Here then is the tussle between the Ālvār’s limited capacity, on the one hand, and his enormous longing on the other, and the resultant mental agony”.

munnir nālam pāṭaitta em mukil vannapē!
an nāl ni tanta ākkaiyinvali ujalvēn,
vem nāl-nōy viya, viṇṇākala vēr āṟap pāyuntu,
en nāl yāṅ unnai īñī vantu kūṭuvapē?

(III–2–1)

Translation

My cloud-hued Lord, You raised this world,
Surrounded by oceanic waters; in this body, by you dowered
Stray do I, pursuing its (errant) ways; I know not when
My ills will be rooted out and you I shall attain.
Notes

Āḷvār to the Lord

(i) "I was like a wingless bird and by giving me the limbs etc., you capacitated me for a career of gainful activity. But alas! the body, so kindly dowered by you, was misused by me and I have got all miseries heaped on my head. Now that I can hardly brook any separation from you, when will my deadly sins, the impediments for my union with you, be rooted out and our union be hastened?

(ii) Empār is said to have lamented: "This boat of a body, dowered by you, could have been steered through to heavenly bliss but, alas! I have allowed it to be swept away by (worldly) current and capsize into the mire of sensual pleasures.

(iii) When Saints talk of ills (sickness and pain), it is not any kind of physical malady, such as remittent fever but the pain of separation from God.

vaṇ mā vaiyam aḷanta em vāmaṇā! niṉ
pal mā māyāp pal piṟaviyil paṭikīṟṟa yāp,
tol mā vaḷvināit toṭarkalai mutal arintu,
niṉ mā tāl cērntu niṟpatu eṉṉāṟṟukolô?

Translation

My Lord Vāmaṇā, You measured the Worlds, vast and strong,
Caught up in the meshes of varied births and still lingering,
When will my sins, hoary and violent, be rooted out
And I remain stable at your lovely feet?

Note

Lord to the Āḷvār

"Well, if you couldn’t go to me, I came to you, spanned the whole universe, high and low, and set my feet on one and all, with no distinction of rich and poor, Saint or debauchee, land and water"."
Ajlūr to the Lord

"Sire, it is a pity, even then, I was out of your reach. In spite of your initial help in endowing me with a body to eke out a promising career, I got myself drowned in the ocean of Samsāra. Again, when you sought me out, as Vāmana, I drifted to another part of the ocean, very much beyond your reach and failed to avail of that golden opportunity of mass benefit".

kollā mākkōl kolaicytu, pāratap pōr
ellāc cēnaiyum iru nilattu avitta entāy!
pollā ākkaiyin puṇarviŋai arukkal ara;
collāy, yāŋ uŋnaic cārvatu ŏr cūlciyē. (III-2-3).

Translation

My Master! With a (mere) non-lethal horse-whip in your hand.
You routed the armies in this vast land,
(Earth's wholesome burden) in Bhārat's battle great,
May you spell out the means for cutting out
My contact with this fell body, difficult to cut,
So that I do attain your lovely feet.

Notes

(i) It is sheer ignorance to hold that the great battle of Maha
Bhārata was won by the Pāṇḍavas. Actually it was
Lord Kṛṣṇa, who got Mother Earth rid of her unwholesome burden, and it was indeed the purpose of His
incarnation. Barring a few, on both sides (the five
Pāṇḍavas, Āsvattāma, Kṛpacārya and Kṛtavarmā),
all the rest were annihilated and it was all the work
of Śri Kṛṣṇa's whip. With no other weapon in hand,
the Master strategist directed and controlled the
military strategy at every turn and made it possible
for the Pāṇḍavas to claim victory. A mere chariot
driver holding the horse whip, He ostensibly was,
and yet, Arjuna thoughtfully leaned on Him, fully
conscious of the basic truth that, where Lord Kṛṣṇa
is, there and there, success is. On the other hand,
Duryodhana who had been advised by the grand old
Bhīṣmaćār to seek Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s help and enlist Him on the side of the Kauravas, did make a formality of an appointment with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but decided to give Him up, on being told that He was all alone, with no fighting force behind. The sagacious Bhīṣma regretted this fatal decision of Duryodhana and sent him back to Śrī Kṛṣṇa to extract an assurance from Him that He would not wield any weapon during the battle. The Lord readily agreed and, therefore it is, that Nammāḻvār says, in this song, that it was the mere horse- whip in the hand of the Divine Charioteer that proved so deadly.

(ii) The Saint laments that he had, not only missed the benefit of the Lord’s incarnation as ‘Vāmana’ but also that of Kṛṣṇāvatāra, the proximate one.

cūlci kāṭaṇca cutar cī śī kēti, cērum
cēci kētu iṇī, cūkaṇum nīrainta entāy!
tālcī marṛu eṅkum tāvrintu, nīn tāl-īṇaikkīl
vālcī yān cērumvakai aruḷāy vantē. (III-2-4)

Translation

My Lord, your radiant knowledge surrounds
One and all, you neither contract nor expand,
You pervade all over, at all times; do come and tell
How I can, thoughts other than you, dispel
And at your lovely pair of feet dwell (and revel.)

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord

“‘My Lord, let alone my failure to benefit by your Avatāras, as Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa. Even you, Omnipresence, and omniscience, directed towards the uplift of your subjects, ha. not delivered the goods in my case. It is now up to you to devise other ways of redeeming me, if need be, through yet another incarnation, wholly for my sake.’”
vantāy pōlē vantum, eṅ maṅattīgaṅ ni
caṁtāmal cēyyā; ituṅ ītu ākīl,
kontu ār kāyāṅg koḷu malart tiru niratta
entāy! ṣāṅ uṇṇāṅ enku vantu aṇukirpaṅē?

(III-2-5)

Translation
My Lord, like unto the bunchy flower red is your complexion grand,
Should you persist in denying me your helping hand
And fail to restrain my wandering mind,
How can I, on my own, attain you indeed?
Pray do appear before me, as you did
(For the sake of Gajerdra and Prahlād).

Note
In the preceding song, the Āḻvār requested the Lord to incarnate once more for his sake. The Lord tells the Āḻvār that, as Śrī Rāma, He was in this abode for eleven thousand years and, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He stayed here for one hundred years. It would be pretty difficult for Him to incarnate again. The Āḻvār, however, pleads that the Lord should incarnate for his sake, at least for a few days, and if it wasn’t possible, He could at least put in His appearance, as He did for Gajendra and Prahlāda. The Āḻvār cannot brook separation from the Lord because he cannot refrain from enjoying His exquisite beauty. And by himself, he cannot reach Him and hence the request, as above.

kūppāṅ, killēṅ enṟu ilāṅ mūnāṁ nālāl;
apa căṝṅkal-avai cuvaittu aṅkoḷintēṅ;
pēṟpal āyiram uyir ceyta paramāṅ niṅ
naṟ poṅ-cōṭittāḷ naṇukuvatu eṅṅāṟṟē?

(III-2-6)

Translation
I did nothing good in the days of yore, nor desist from evil,
Away from you strayed I and got absorbed,
In pleasures petty; myriads of Souls at your sweet will
You could animate, oh, potent Lord,
When shall I your feet resplendent attain?
Note

Ālvār to the Lord

"My Lord, I am guilty, both ways, not doing any good that will take me unto your lovely feet and at the same time, not desisting from evil, which puts me very much away from you. I strayed away from you, doing things as I liked. Seeing what you have done to myriads of souls for their uplift, I am sure I would not be asking of you too much if I prayed that you should redeem me and make me fit to attain your lustrous feet".

Translation

My mind, sunk deep in ignorance and sin
We have been journeying thro' births for ever;
Shall we ever attain Kannā?
The lustrous Lord omniscient, who for ever pervades all over?

Note

Mention of the Lord's resplendent feet, in the preceding song, set the Ālvār's mind throbbing for them and now the Ālvār hastens to disabuse his mind, sunk deep in age-long ignorance and accumulated sins, of its ill-conceived ambition.

Translation

I didn't extricate myself from sins that breed miseries many
Nor did I your holy feet worship continually;
My beloved Kannā of radiance supreme and grace in-born,
To behold you, the all-pervading, I call you out, now and again,
But you, where and how can I attain?
Note

Alvar to the Lord

"Sire, all along, I have been providing grist for the grinding mill of my senses but little did I do for my advancement. And now, I call you out, as if I have the necessary qualification to meet you. But you are everywhere, and in me too; you make me pounce upon your auspicious traits so natural to you that they attract even a sinner like me".

Translation

Caught up in worldly life dense,
The breeding ground for dire sins,
I missed my track and for ages groped,
Many a time do I call my Sire, who once shepherded,
The cows and all the worlds measured,
Where and how shall I get Him indeed?

Note

Alvar to the Lord

"My Lord, as Sri Krishna, you protected the cows in the pastoral village of Gokula and not a drop of rain fell on them although it was pouring down with mad fury for a whole week. And then, when you spanned the entire universe, as Tryvikrama, you set your lovely feet on one and all but I eluded you, even then. Having missed such a golden opportunity, where is the hope of salvation for me? Even so, I am not in a position to give you up, as it would be attempting the impossible, and I, therefore, keep on calling you. You will certainly hear me all right and respond too, by stretching out your helping hand. But then, I am sunk so deep that I am possibly out of your reach!"
talaippey kālam namāptamar pācam viṭṭāl,
alaippūn unṇum av allal ellām akala,
kalaip pal ḫāṇattu en kaṇṇaṇaik kaṇṭukonṭu,
nilaippettu en neṭacam petṭatu niṭu uyirē  (III–2–10)

Translation

Miseries gruesome, like unto yama's yoke have ended,
And seen have I kaṇṇaṇ, my beloved Lord,
By many a sacred text comprehended;
My mind is steady and my soul restored,
To pristine purity, its due stature.

Notes

(i) Śrī Nampillai elucidates the context of this song, as follows:

Finding the Ājvār in an extremely critical condition, the Lord calls upon him to enjoy His Iconic Form in Tiruvēṇakāṭam and sustain himself. Thereupon, the Ājvār feels greatly relieved and gives vent to his sense of relief, in this song.

(ii) Being away from the Lord is as gruesome as suffering from Yama's yoke, the tortures inflicted by Yama's hordes.

(iii) Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Pillāṉ, in his commentary known as Aṟāyirappati, presents the current scene of reunion of the Lord and the Saint as follows:

The Lord seems to have got frightened of His own loss of reputation when an ardent devotee, who has taken refuge at His feet, is left in the lurch, exposed to the vagaries of Yama's assistants. C.F. Śloka 25, of Saint Yāmuna's Stotra Ratna.

uyirkal ellā ulakamum uṭaiyavaṇaik
kuyil koḻ cōlaic teṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ
ceyir il col icai mālai āyirattul ip pattum
uyiriṅmēl ākkai ūṉitai olivikkumē.  (III–2–11)
Translation

These songs ten, in the hymnal garland of thousand, Chaste and sweet,
Knit by Caṭakōpaṇ of Kurukūr in whose orchards Koels go gay,
In adoration of the Sovereign Master of all the worlds and their beings,
Will rid (the chanters) of their fleshy shackles.

Notes

(i) The Ālvār invests the Lord and the surroundings with his own feelings. Now that he has been put back on his feet, he sees in the Lord a special aura, and His ownership of all things and souls now becomes more pronounced, with the resuscitation of the Ālvār himself.

(ii) Kurukūr is described, in this song, as a lovely place abounding in orchards, where koels sing merrily. When the Ālvār was sunk in dejection due to separation from the Lord, the Koels had also lapsed into silence. Now that the Ālvār is happy, these birds also sing sweet strains, as before.

Third Centum—Third Decad (III-3)
(Olivu il kālam)

Preamble

The Ālvār prayed to the Lord that his body, the material shackle, which stood in the way of his enjoyment of the Lord, be cut out. But then, the Lord pacified the Ālvār by pointing out that this body of the Ālvār in which the Lord eventually got hold of him was by-no-means an impediment, as he thought it to be. On the other hand, He literally coveted him, in that very body, and very much desired to take service from him, in his present embodied state. And so, the Lord beckoned the Ālvār to serve Him in His Arcā Form at Tiruvēṇaṅkaṭam. Against this background the Ālvār seeks to render blemishless service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṇaṅkaṭam in ever so many ways, without break, even as
a person, feeling the pinch of hunger and with the food packet in hand, sets the table as soon as he comes across a suitable spot with shade and water.

οἶλυ ἵνα λάμ άλαν υπάναυ ματη,
βάου ἵνα άτιμαι θείας άναμ-
τείκ καρά άρυντι τιρανταττή
εῖλ κολ θοτένται τανταίκκ." (III–3–1)

Translation

Serve we shall our Progenitor grand,
Of splendour galore, in Tiruvēṅkaṭam enshrined,
Amid roaring cascades, lovely and rapturous,
With neither break nor blemish, in attendance close.

Notes

(i) **Serve we shall**: Even the mere contemplation of service is good enough. In Śloka 4 of his ‘Śrīvaikūṭa Gaḍyā’, Śrī Rāmānuja stresses the need for developing, in an ever-increasing measure, the desire for Divine Service.

(ii) **The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, of Splendour galore**

The Lord in Heaven is like unto the lamp burning in broad day light, with its considerably diminished brightness. Further, His stay there is like feeding the fish with water.

The splendour of the Lord reclining on the blue ocean is literally lost on the blue sea itself, there being hardly a few beneficiaries. On the other hand, the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is like the lamp shining on the hill-top, in all its brilliance, making Him visible even to the most ignorant among us.

(iii) **Service at all times**

The Āḻvār pines for service at all times, including the days already gone. It sounds rather queer, if not fantastic, that the Āḻvār should seek service in the
irretrievable past as well. What is emphasised here is service of such a high order and efficiency, which will more than make amends for past lapses, drown the Āḻvār in an ocean of bliss and make him desist from brooding over his past omissions, rather render him oblivious of his dereliction in the past.

(iv) Service without break

Serving unremittingly the Lord at all places, both inside the Temple and at all places outside where He moves in ceremonial procession. Even when the Lord is screened from public worship by putting a drapery all around, the service should go on, such as tending the lamps, cleaning the vessels meant for containing the sacramental water and so on.

Tiruvaraṅkapperumāl Aralayar who recited this song before Lord Rāṅganātha, in that grand assemblage in the temple at Srīraṅgam, is said to have gone into a trance, while reciting the first line of this song, as in the original text, and he went on repeating, “at all times”. Evidently, he had got into the mood of the Āḻvār himself, whose passion for Divine Service was so great.

Service without break would also signify service, one after the other, with the same avidity with which Lakṣmīnāraṇa served the Divine Couple, Śrī Rāma and Sītā, during exile. It would also connote selfless service, absolutely free from any tinge of egoism and sense of self-enjoyment, that is, service motivated by the individual soul’s own sense of delight and enjoyment, as against service rendered solely for the Lord’s delectation.

When Śrī Rāmānuja discoursed on this song, he enquired which of his listeners, in that vast assembly, would like to go to Tiruvēṭikatam and render unto the Lord service, as envisaged by the Āḻvār. There was but a solitary response from one Agantāḻvān who volunteered his services and sought Śrī Rāmānu-
ja’s blessings for the proper fulfillment of the sacred mission. All the others seemed to have got scared of the climatic condition of Tirumalai Hills, frightfully chill, with an unbroken succession of rains. Śrī Rāmānuja embraced Āṇṭāḥvāṇ and endearingly and exclaimed that he was the one and only male (Āṇṭāḷḷai, in Tamil) in that assembly, who was really bold, ready to brave the climate of Tiruvēṇkaṭam. Thence forward, he came to be known as Āṇṭāṭṭāḷḷai. He went and served at Tiruvēṇkaṭam, to the immense delectation of Lord Śrīnivāsa.

entai tantai tantai tantai tantaikkum
muntai-vāņavar vāņavar-kōṅcūn
cintu pū mākĳum tiruvēṇkaṭātū
antam il pukak kār elil āṅgalē. (III–3–2)

Translation

Of endless glory and exquisite bluish hue,
Our great progenitor first and foremost, dwells in Tiruvēṇkaṭam,
Strewn with crimson flowers of unfailing hue,
Attended by the celestials from heaven and their chieftain.

Notes

(i) To a query why he is rendering service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṇkaṭam when the final goal is service of the Lord in Heaven, the Āḷvār replies that even the Celestials headed by Śrī Šeṅpāṭi Āḷvār (Cēṇaimutaliyār) come down, in their strength, to serve the Lord at Tiruvēṇkaṭam. That is because of the twin aspects of the Lord, namely, supremacy (Paratva) and simplicity (Saulabhya). The latter can be enjoyed only in Tiruvēṇkaṭam and hence, the Celestials come down here to enjoy that which cannot be experienced in Heaven. Even so, they get swept off their feet by the Lord’s amazing simplicity and the garlands, set with colourful flowers, brought by them to be offered to the Lord, drop from their hands unawares but these flowers of Celestial origin do not fade at all.
(ii) Limitless glory

The glory of the Lord, comprehended in Heaven by the denizens of the Eternal Land, would seem to be circumscribed, in as much as the ‘Nityās’ (ever-free angels) and ‘Muktās’ (released souls) inhabiting that region, endowed with the transcendent forms are well equipped to partake of all that bliss, emanating from the Lord. On the other hand, in this abode of ours, the Lord is revealing Himself in His Arcā (iconic) form to all and sundry, including wild beasts. His glory in this hallowed land is limitless indeed.

ānāl, māyāg, anī koj centāmaraik kaṇṇaṇā, ceṇkai vāy karumāṇikkam, tel-nilai cuṇai nirt tiruvēṇkaṭattu en il tol pukal vāṇavar icapē. (III–3–3)

Translation

Our wondrous sire at Tiruvēṇkaṭam,
Holding water fed from cascades, pure and plenty,
Shines like the lustrous blue gem,
With lotus eyes and lips, red and radiant, of rare beauty;
Of countless qualities, auspicious and abiding,
He, His sway over the Celestials, is holding.

Notes

(i) Questioned whether the Āḻvār would be able to put through the service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṇkaṭam, as contemplated, the Āḻvār says, with an air of assurance that the Lord is the Supreme Benefactor, making it possible for the Celestials and other numerous highly evolved souls to drink deep of His nectarean beauty in Mount Tiruvēṇkaṭam and He would certainly not deny this benefit to the Āḻvār. Otherwise, how can He live up to His glory as the possessor of innumerable auspicious traits, ever present in Him?
(ii) Of wondrous beauty

The radiant eyes, red like lotus flower, stand out foremost and what else is required to beautify Him? The Lord sheds His grace through His eyes and it is but proper that the eyes are mentioned first and next in order, the lips from which He utters words, full of affection for His devotees. Again, it is the bewitching smile on these coral lips, that attracts one and all to Him.

Icaŋ vāṇavarkku enpaŋ; eŋral, atu tēcamō tiruvēṅkaṭatāṃuku? nicaŋē; nigaiuv oṛyum ilēŋ-enkaŋ pācam vaṅta param cuṭarc cōtikkē. (III–3–4)

Translation

Would it at all redound to His great glory
Were I to call, as (mere) Lord of Heaven, Him
That shines in all splendour at Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
And fondles me, the lowliest of the lowly?

Note

In the preceding song, the Lord was referred to as the Chief of the Celestials, granting audience to them at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. And now, the Ālvār feels that it would be a gross understatement of His real greatness which lies in the condescending grace with which He mixes with the monkeys and hunters in Tirumalai Hills and what is even more, the profusion of love extended to one, as low as the Ālvār. This self-abnegation assuming the lowest depths of humility (c.f. Ālavantār's self—denunciation in śloka 62 of Stotra-Ratna) only heightens the glory of the Lord. As a matter of fact, if He were merely the Lord of the Celestials in Heaven, His glory stands circumscribed, that is, confined to that region alone. It is only here, against the background of the darkness and nescience we present, that His glory can shine in all its splendour. Not by His might and majesty, surrounded by the Angels in Heaven and unapproachable to us, is He great but by His loving grace
and great concern for us, deep down here, sunk in sorrow.
Thus and thus alone can He be God indeed.

cotti āki, ellā ulakum toḷum
ātimūrtti ēṟṟāl, alavu ākumō—
vētiyar muḷu vētattu amuttaṭṭai,
tītu il cirt tiruvēṅkaṭattāṭṭaivē?

Translation

How dare I circumscribe the glory
Of the immaculate Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Venerated by all the worlds, resplendent and hoary,
Nectarean essence of all Vedic texts, chanted by scholars of great fame?

Notes

(i) The Lord, venerated by all the worlds

The Ālvār says that he cannot circumscribe the glory of the Lord by telling that He is venerated by all the worlds. As a matter of fact, he has not said so earlier. But it is implied by the fact that even he, the lowliest of the lowly, worships Him. When it is said that the bottom-most boy in the class has got through the examination, does it not follow that all the others above him have passed? When the swollen waters of the river have submerged the top-most foot-step, it goes without saying that all the steps below have also been submerged.

(ii) The Immaculate Lord

The Lord is the repository of all auspicious qualities and is blemishless. He could be free from blemish only when He makes Himself accessible to the lowlie of the lowly. In His search for one such, He could get at any one worse than Ālvār unto whom He b extended His grace despite all his drawbacks. A now, He keeps standing at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, ever the look-out for one even more heinous than Ālvār, to shed His grace upon. It is this great
of the Lord that the Ālvār extols in this Song with characteristic humility.

vēm, kaṭāṅkaḷ meymēl viṇai muṟṟavum;
tāṅkaḷ taṅkaṭku nallapavi ceyvār—
vēṅkaṭattu uṭaiārkkku nama engal—
ām kaṭamaįatu cümantārkaṭkē. (III–3–6)

Translation

Inclination for selfless service into Vēṅkaṭattu-aivār (He that dwells in Vēṅkaṭam),
Shall our past sins burn down as well as those yet to come;
(With the dawn of favour thus conferred)
The devout shall in such wholesome service persevere.

Notes

(i) This song is the sequel to the first song of this decad where mention was made of rendering every kind of service to the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, without break or blemish. Asked how it would at all be possible to render such service, when the sins operate as serious impediments, the Ālvār clarifies that the mere contemplation of service unto the Lord will root out all sins committed so far as well as those likely to rear up their ugly heads in the days to come, by reason of our material contacts and ensure unremitting service, in a wholesome spirit. But then, it might be asked how the accumulated heaps of sins of ages could be destroyed by a simple gesture, as above. Śrī Bhaṭṭārya set at naught this doubt through the following illustration:

Śrī Rāma sought the help of the king of the ocean to bund the sea and cross over to Laṅkā, lying prostrate in front of the ocean, for full three days, with due austerity. When the king of the ocean failed to present himself, Śrī Rāma got enraged and was about to drive a shaft into the bosom of the ocean, threatening to dry it up. Struck with terror, the king of the ocean appeared instantly and made his obeisance. The king of the ocean
having thus capitualated and come to terms, Śrī Rāma was pacified. He not only generously pardoned the king but made the extraordinary gesture of asking him to indicate where his enemies were, so that the bow lifted against him could vent its fury on his enemies. Śrī Rāma’s bow was never lifted in vain, and the arrow sped in the direction of the target, pointed out by the king of the ocean, to vanquish his enemies.

In ‘Vigraha Sahasranāma’, there are, *inter alia*, two names of the Lord, viz., ‘Stavyah’ and ‘Stavapriyah’. The first means that the Lord is praiseworthy and each one of His several attributes would faithfully depict the Lord. ‘Stavapriyah’ means one, who is pleased with the praise showered on Him, in any form or language, correctly worded or not. And so, with all our limitations, even the feeble praise from our feeble tongues endears us to the Lord, Who overlooks all our faults and sins and regards us, in an ample measure.

(11) Would it be necessary to do hard labour to get rid of our Sins? Not at all; all that is needed is loving service, rendered disinterestedly, befitting one’s station in life and conforming to one’s essential nature (swarūpa). Even the simple word ‘nāmaḥ’ (I don’t belong to myself but to you), uttered by the devotee, is deemed by the over-generous Lord as very weighty indeed and He cuts out all the sins of the devotee and puts him on the path of unremitting Divine Service.

cumantu mā malar, nir cuṭar tūpam koṇṭu,  
amarantu vaṅavar vaṅavar-kōṇoṭum  
namaṇṛu ejum tiruvēṅkaṭam-naṅkaṭkuc  
camaṇ koḷ viṭu tarum taṭaṇ kuṛramē.  

(III–3–7)

**Translation**

By itself, Tiruvēṅkaṭam, that august mountain  
Where do repair the Celestials with their chieftain
And worship with choice flowers, water, lamp and incense,
Shall unto us grant the blissful emancipation (the eternal
service).

Notes

(i) "For securing the uninterrupted service in the Eternal
Land we pine for, the good offices of the holy mountain,
Tiruvēṅkaṭam, will do. It would be hardly necessary
for us to propitiate Lord Śrīnivāsa (enshrined there),
in this behalf" says the Ālvār.

(ii) The adjective ‘Choice’, in the third line, qualifies not
only the flowers but also water and incense, meaning
the best of each kind. The excellence of the material
offered, however, lies not in its physical quality but in
the devotion with which it is offered. Did not the Lord
say, in Bhagavad Gītā (IX-27), as follows?

"Whosoever shall offer Me, in faith and love, a
leaf, a flower, a fruit, water poured forth, that
offering, lovingly made with pious will, I do
accept".

The following illustration will drive home this point.

On one occasion, some princes had a desire to offer
Lord Jagannātha at Pūri (in Orissa), Campaka flowers,
said to be His favourite. Going to the flower-market,
they found that the flowers had been sold out and there
was but a solitary flower left. This gave rise to keen
competition among the princes and they went on
bidding till one of them staked his entire fortune and
bought the flower. The flower was offered by the
Prince to the Lord who appeared in his dream that
night and exclaimed that the debt of his flower was
indeed too heavy for Him, thereby signifying His
gracious acceptance of the sincerely made offering
which was even beyond His capacity to.

(iii) The term ‘Celestials’ has been used so comprehensive
so as to include besides the Nityānāts, (the ever-free
angels in heaven), Brahmā and others.
Brahmā and other Devas do not serve the Lord disinterestedly but always seek favours from Him for their own selfish ends, yet, the Āḻvār is charitable enough and invests them with his own bent of mind, painting them also as selfless, like him.

kuṟṟam ēntik kuḷir malai kāṭṭavaṉ,  
aṟṟu āḷām āḷanta pirāṉ, paraṉ  
ceṟṟu cēr tiruvēṇkaṭa mā malai  
ōṟṟumē toḷa nam viḻai ōyumē.  

(III–3–8)

Translation

Worship we shall Tiruvēṇkaṭam, the halo'd mountain,  
Favourite resort of the Benefactor great, who repelled the chill rains,  
Holding mount (Govardhana) aloft and who the worlds did once span;  
That's enough to extricate us from all our sins.

Note

Here again, the over-riding importance of the Sacred Mount vis-a-vis the Lord enshrined there, is emphasised. Mount Tiruvēṇkaṭam thus becomes the goal or destination of the Lord and His devotees alike. If it was Mount Govardhana during the Lord's incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa that shielded the subjects of Gokula it is now Mount Tiruvēṇkaṭam that operates as the Saviour, during His Arcā (Iconic) manifestation.

ōyum mūṟṟup pirappu irappu: piṇi  
vīyumāru ceyvāṉ tiruvēṇkaṭattu  
āyāṉ nāḷ-malar āṁ aṭittāmarai  
vāyullum maṇattullum vaippārkaṭkē.  

(III–3–9)

Translation

The shepherd (Kṛṣṇa) who dwells in Tiruvēṇkaṭam,  
Rids those, who meditate and sing the praise  
Of His Comely feet, dainty as lotus, in fresh bloom,  
Of fatiguing old age, birth, death and pestilence.
Notes

(i) In the preceding song, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam was said to deliver the goods. And now, it is said that even a part of it, namely, Lord Śrīnivāsa, will do the job. C.F. Tirumāṭkai Āḻvār's reference to Lord Śrīnivāsa, in Periya Tirumoli, ................., as the crest of the northern hill (Vaṭa māmalai ucci).

(ii) The Lord enshrined in Tiruvēṅkaṭam derives importance from His association with the Sacred Mount (Tirumalai) and hence the latter is our destined goal (Āṟāyirappati).

vaitta nāl varai ellaī kurukc ceṟṟu,
etytu, īlaippataṇ muṇṇam aṭaiminō!
paitta pāmpu-aṇaiyāṇ tiruvēṅkaṭam
moyta cōlai moy pūn taṭan tāḷvarē. (III-3-10)

Translation

Better reach the sacred precincts of Tiruvēṅkaṭam.
With orchards many and a cluster of tanks,
Where stays the Lord whose bed is the serpent,
With outstretched hoods, ere your life's quantum
Draws to a close and your health badly shrinks.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār exhorts us to take to the enchanting Tiruvēṅkaṭam, as the final goal. The All-Merciful Lord has indeed dowered on us life and limbs to help us move about and worship the Lord in His Iconic manifestation, in the various pilgrim centres like Tiruvēṅkaṭam and render unto Him every possible service. But, alas! we dissipate our lives and energies, in several ungodly pursuits, till, one day, old age and the attendant infirmity overtake us unawares and badly impair our mobility.

(ii) This song also stresses the grandeur of Tiruvēṅkaṭam which has attracted the Lord despite His having
Adisesa, the posh bed, highly delectable. Again, from the point of view of the devotees, it is equally attractive and if only they would care to go there ere old age catches them in its unrelenting grip, they could render service unto the Lord with great ease, absolutely free from fatigue, in that exhilarating environment.

tāḷ parappi maṇ-tāviya Icaṇai
nīḷ pojjil-kurukūrc caṭakōpan col
kēḷ il āyirattu ip pattum vallavar
vāḷvar vāḷvu eyti ḍālam pukalavē.  (III–3–11)

Translation

Those that recite these songs ten of peerless excellence,
Out of the thousand sung by Caṭakōpan of lovely Kurukūr,
Adoring Icaṇ (Lord), who spanned the universe, shall acquire World-wide fame and (everlasting) opulence.

Notes

(i) This decad sings the glory of the Lord at Tiruvēṇkaṭam and yet, it has been made out, in this end-stanza, that the decad extols the greatness of the Lord, Who, in His incarnate form as Trivikrama, spanned the entire universe. Our great Ācāryas hold that there is perfect identity between these two forms of the Lord. The Lord keeps standing at Tiruvēṇkaṭam to secure all His subjects under His patronising feet and so did Trivikrama, setting His feet on all and sundry, without distinction of high and low, rich and poor, Saint and debauchee. The Lord at Tiruvēṇkaṭam is also quite at home with the hunters and monkeys.

(ii) Everlasting opulence: This denotes the eternal service in Heaven, both body and mind being lovingly attuned to it.
Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Ālvār was all agog to serve the Lord, at all times and in every conceivable manner, without break or blemish. Profoundly impressed by the intensity of the Ālvār’s yearning for Divine service, the Lord very much wished to make his task easy and so threw into focus His unique faculty of omnipresence, pervading all things, all over and at all times. Coming face to face with the Lord’s immense ubiquity in various forms, the Ālvār was in the same predicament as the one gathering the fruits dropped down the trees in a violent gale, finding it difficult to pick and choose. The phenomenon before him was so amazing and of such astounding dimensions that the Ālvār, who resorted to singing the Lord’s glory (which is also a form of service, namely, service by word of mouth—Vācīka Kāṇḍikārya), just didn’t know where to begin and what to say. It is the Lord’s immanence that the Ālvār attempted to sing about, in this decad.

One of the Lord’s several names is ‘Ananta’, the endless. He is limitless and immeasurable, not being circumscribed by space and time. The unique feature about the Supreme Lord, Mahāviṣṇu is that He is not only not circumscribed by space and time but He also abides in all, without any exception, the sentient beings and non-sentient things, one and all, constituting, as it were, His bodies. This is, in fact, the keynote of Viśisṭādvaita philosophy. The ‘Śarīra-Śarīri bhāva’. This was mentioned in passing, in the first decad of the first centum itself. And now, this is being elaborated upon, in this decad.

pukalum nal oruvañ eṅkō? poru il cīrp pūmi eṅkō?
tikalum taṅ paravañ eṅkō? ti eṅkō? vāyu eṅkō?
nikalum ākācam eṅkō? nil cuṭār iṟaṇţum eṅkō?
ikalvu il iv aṅaittum eṅkō?-kaṇṇaṇaik kūvum ārē.

(III-4-1)

translation

How shall I speak of Kaṇṇaṇ, (my all-pervading Lord)?
Shall I say, He is the one by all sacred texts adored
Or shall I describe Him as peerless Earth or Ocean bright?

T—8
Could I say He is fire or air or the space athwart,  
Or the Sun and the Moon, rather their aggregate?

Note

The Āḻvār looks on, in bewildering amazement, when the Lord presents Himself as an embodiment of the elements that have gone into the making of the universe and its multifarious contents, His auspicious qualities also shining forth, side by side. Unlike others who could see everything in its outer form only, the Āḻvār discerns the Lord in each and everything, and nothing can, therefore, be eschewed by him as being disagreeable. He sees the Lord in every thing, individually and in the aggregate. What would seem despicable in the light of one’s own association, becomes wholly agreeable, viewed in the light of their conjunction with the Lord. (aphorism 149, Ācārya Hṛdayam).

Translation

I know not what to call kaṇṇaṇ, my lotus-eyed Lord,  
Of qualities great and vast; could He be called  
The aggregate of all mountains or the rains lovely  
Or the bright stars or all that learning by the tongue cultivated  
Or sweet sounds pregnant with meanings lofty ?

Notes

(i) In this song, the Āḻvār sees the Lord in the several products of the various elements, referred to, in the previous song. Thus, the lotus—eyed Lord is also seen as the mountain range. It is the earth (Pṛtvī) that hardens into mountains, providing, in turn, stable support to the former. The rains pertain to the element known as water. Pleasant to behold, the rains provide all facilities to the denizens of the world and the rain-clouds are also comparable to the Lord’s complexion.
The bright stars owe their structure, composition and luminosity to the element of fire, while all that knowledge imparted by word of mouth is rendered possible by the element called air. Transmission of sound is effected through the medium of space (ākāśa). If sound is looked upon as the body, knowledge is its soul. Sound becomes worth its while only when it conveys the right meanings and nourishes the soul with the right type of knowledge.

(ii) It only bespeaks the unlimited glory of the Lord and the immeasurable extent of His possessions, if even Saint Nammālvār, endowed with full and complete knowledge by the Supreme Lord Himself, should fumble and falter, unable to give adequate expression to the Lord’s attributes and acquisitions, His flooding fame etc.

pañkayak kaññañ ēṅkō? pavalac cevvāyaṅ ēṅkō?
am katir aṭiyaṅ ēṅkō? añcaña vaññañ ēṅkō?
ceṅkatir muṭiyaṅ ēṅkō? tiru maru mārpaṅ ēṅkō?
cañku cakkarattaṅ ēṅkō?- cāti mānikkattaiyē. (III–4–3)

Translation

Shall I call the rare blue gem of a Lord,  
The lotus-eyed or the coral-lipped 
Or the one with a pair of feet, lovely and bright  
Or one dark like collyrium or one that sports  
The crown dazzling red or one on whose chest  
Are ‘Tiru’ (Lakṣmi) and Maru (Śrīvatsam, the spiral spot)  
Or one thatields the conch and the discus?

Notes

(i) In the two preceding stanzas, the Āḻvār described the Lord’s universal aspect and now He describes Him, in His own exclusive form. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār could discern the Lord in both the Universal and Individual forms with the same ease.

(ii) It is indeed interesting to study the sequence set out in the above stanza. The Āḻvār begins with the Lord’s
lotus-eyes which shed grace on him and befriended him; next in order is the bewitching smile of the Lord which is an even greater attraction than the Lord’s entrancing looks and hence the mention of the coral lips. And now, the Subjects, attracted by the Lord’s lovely looks and captivating smile, seek refuge at His comely feet; the votaries then enjoy the charming complexion of the Lord. The Lord’s crown, indicative of His overlordship, does not, however, scare them off when they behold the Divine Mother, the grand Intercessor on the Lord’s chest. But then, this exquisite conjunction of the Divine couple induces a sense of fear, a growing apprehension in the minds of the devout regarding the safe continuance of this glorious combination but the weapons held by the Lord in His hands, the conch and the discus, dispel this fear and put them at ease.

cāti māṇikkam eṇkō? cavi koḷ poṇ muttam eṇkō?
cāti nal vayiram eṇkō? tavivu il cir vilakkam eṇkō?
āti am cōti eṇkō? āti am puruṭaṇ eṇkō?-
ātum il kālattu entai acutaṇ amalaṇaiyē. (III–4–4)

Translation

Shall I say that ‘Acutan’ is my immaculate Lord
Who fathered me, when forlorn and (ever afterwards)
Held on to me, is the pure gem or the shining gold
Or the ruby flashy or choice diamond or the eternal lamp
Or the One of resplendent form or the blissful Primate?

Notes

(i) Asked by a worldling for tips as to how to remember the Supreme Lord, a knowledgeable elder queried back, “Pray, tell me how to forget God”. The Lord is everywhere, stays in all things having name and form and hence the wise men always perceive the Lord’s intimate contact and presence in each and everything. That is why the Lord has said in His ‘Song Celestial’ (X-41) whatever is of superlative eminence contains a
special element of His all-conquering power. The Ālvār, therefore, says that, with a natural, built-in Grace, bliss and beauty, God is the very best of all good things.

(ii) The eternal lamp that God is, He is anterior to all other luminous bodies, like Sun and Moon.

(iii) Acyuta, the eternal Father: While in a forlorn state, with no attainment whatever, on his part, to attract the Lord’s grace, the Lord, on His own, revealed to the Ālvār the indissoluble bond subsisting between them, the inviolable ‘Father-Son’ relationship and held on to Him firmly thereafter.

accutaṇ amalaṇ ēṅkō? aṭiyavar viṅgai keṭukkum
naccum mā maruntam ēṅkō? nalaṅ kaṭal amutam ēṅkō?
ac cuvaik kaṭṭi ēṅkō? aru cuvai aṭicil ēṅkō?

Translation

Shall I my Lord, as Accutaṇ (the steadfast) call
Or the Immaculate or high class medicine delectable
That cuts out the devotees’ ills and evils
Or the nectar that came up the milk ocean fine or fix
Him as the cream delicious or the meal with tastes six
Or the honey as tasty as ghee or fruit or milk?

Notes

(i) True to the Upaniṣadīk text, depicting the Lord as very delicious, the Ālvār presents the Lord here as all those things that are juicy and appetising.

(ii) Cutting out the devotees’ ills and evils: The expression ‘Ills and evils’ is used in a comprehensive sense, covering the effective operation of both ‘Pūṇya’ and ‘Pāpa’, as the former is a golden fetter and the latter, an iron fetter and thus both are impediments, seeing that a golden fetter is, all the same, a fetter. The Lord, on His part, will not confine Himself to a life of ease and peace, in the high heavens, but come down post-haste
to the rescue of His devotees, as He did in the case of Gajendra, the elephant. Again, the ills He cures are not the ordinary bodily ailments but the much worse malady of the soul. The Lord is, therefore, referred to as the delectable medicine, easy to take and absolutely harmless even if the directions for its use are given the go-by or not closely adhered to.

(iii) The Lord is indeed far superior to the nectar that was obtained by churning the milk ocean. The Lord, the non-satiating nectar, will make Himself available to His beloved devotees without undergoing the rigours of churning the ocean.

pāl ēṇkō? nāṃku vētap payaṇ ēṇkō? camaya nīti
nūl ēṇkō? nūtāṅku kēlvi icai ēṇkō? ivarṟul nalla
mēl ēṇkō? viṟaiyīg mikkala payaṇ ēṇkō? kaṇṇaṇ ēṇkō?
mēl ēṇkō? māyaṇ ēṇkō?- vēṇavar ātiyaiyē. (III–4–6)

Translation

Shall I as Milk, (the Lord), foremost among celestials, call
Or as the paramount Vedās four or the Śāstras that reveal
The Vedic religion in proper light
Or as the music enchanting or as one above them all
Or as the fruits many of one's endeavour bright
Or as Kaṇṇaṇ, Māl (Tirumāl), Māyaṇ (the Lord of wondrous deeds and traits)?

Notes

(i) The Lord is the quintessence of the vedās, the supreme authority revealing Him. The Lord has Himself declared, in XV-15 of Bhagavad Gītā, that He alone is denoted by the Vedās, in their entirety.

The Śāstras, referred to, are the sacred texts, such as Itihāsas, Purāṇas etc, which elucidate the moot points in the Vedās and serve as an effective key or guide to the abstruse vedic texts.

(ii) The wondrous Lord: The wonder lies in that the Overlord of the Celestials serves His devotees in the humblest
manner, such as running an errand, driving the chariot etc.

(iii) Even as a small quantity of seeds sown produces a rich harvest of grains, the Lord showers on us a plethora of benefits, out of all proportion to the magnitude of our efforts, real or feigned.

\[
\begin{align*}
vāṇavar \ddot{a}tī \text{ epkō?} & \quad vāṇavar \text{ teyvam epkō?} \\
vāṇavar \text{ pōkam epkō?} & \quad vāṇavar \text{ mūrrum epkō?} \\
\text{ūpam il celvam epkō?} & \quad \text{ūpam il cuvarkkam epkō?} \\
\text{ūpam il mōkkam epkō?} & \quad - \text{ oli mani vaṇṇañaiyē. (III–4–7)}
\end{align*}
\]

Translation

Shall I call the lustrous Sire, gem-hued, as the Overlord
Of Celestials or the God Supreme by them adored
Or the One by them enjoyed and their all,
Or the treasure inexhaustible or undying pleasures
Of Suvarkkam (Svarga) or mōkkam (mokṣa), the bliss eternal?

Notes

(i) 'Celestials: This denotes, in particular, the 'Nitya Sūrīś' in Heaven to whom the Lord is the 'Be-all' and 'End-all', the Sole Sustainer.

(ii) Bliss eternal: Heaven, the Eternal Land, with its perennial scope for eternal service unto the Lord, as distinguished from the 'Kaivalya' type of Mokṣa or emancipation where the liberated (dis-embodied) Soul denies itself the bliss of Divine Service and gets lost in self-enjoyment.

(iii) While the pleasures of Svarga too, are of a limited tenure at the end of which the individual is hurled down to the Earth, the Lord is referred to in this context, as the everlasting pleasure, not time-bound.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{oli mani vaṇṇañ epkō? oruvaŋ ēṛu ēṭta nīṛra} \\
\text{naḷir matic caṭaiyaŋ epkō? nāṃmukak kaṭavul epkō?–} \\
\text{āli makīntu ulakam ellām paṭaittu, avai ēṭta, nīṛra} \\
\text{kāli malart tulavaŋ, emmāŋ, kaṇṇañai, māyaṇaiyē. (III–4–8)}
\end{align*}
\]
Translation

Could I call Kaṇṇaṁ, my Liege-Lord of wondrous traits and deeds,
Sporting the floral garland of tulacī which honey sheds,
Who the worlds did with delight create and is by them adored,
As the lustrous One of sapphire hue or as Śiva, who sports
The cool crescent Moon on matted locks and stands revered
(By his votaries) as the God supreme or as Nāṃmukaṁ (Brahmā,
the four-headed)?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār points out here that Śiva, sporting the cool,
crescent Moon on his matted locks, mistakenly revered
by some as the Supreme and Brahmā, the four-headed
Demi-urge, also form part of Lord Viṣṇu’s possessions.

(ii) ‘Liege-Lord’ Viṣṇu, who put the Āḻvār on the right track
and thereby made him solely worship Him, without
straying into the domain of worship of the lesser deities.

Translation

I know not how to comprehend Kaṇṇaṁ, the wondrous Lord,
The glorious Sire, Who the ocean churred and ambrosia
delivered,
Accutaṇ (the Protector steadfast) of glory unlimited,
Who on Aṇantaṇ (Serpent) does repose, safe and sound,
Tirumāl (of tender solicitude), who (during deluge) sustained
All th worlds in His stomach and (later) spat them out;
Indeed all things and beings He does Himself constitute.

Note

The Āḻvār who attempted earlier an enumeration of the
Lord’s cosmic wealth, has now given it up as impossible
and rests contented with a summary statement that He is
the aggregate of all non-sentient things and sentient beings.
C.F. the Lord’s own declaration, in Bhagavad Gītā X-19, that there is no end to the details of things and beings under His control (the vibhūtis).

yawaiyum evarum tāṇāy, avaravar camayam tōgum
tōyvu ila; pulaṇ aintukkum colappaṭān; uṇarvīg mūrtti;
āvi cēr uyirū ullal ātum ēr pāru ilāta
pāvai ataṇai kūṭil, avalaiyum kūtalāmē.  

Translation

Knowledge personified is my Lord who stays within
All things and beings and yet does apart remain
From their weal and woe, much beyond the ken
Of comprehension of the senses five; appreciate you can,
Growth and decay unto the body pertain and not the Soul
within,
Stays likewise the Lord inside the Soul (aloof from its weal
and woe).

Note

This stanza clearly brings out the fact that the Lord who
has stationed Himself inside all things and beings, is not
affected by their changing fortunes, weal or woe, even as
the Individual Soul occupying a particular body is not
affected by the biological changes of growth and decay
undergone by the body. But then, it might be argued that
the Individual Soul partakes of the pain and pleasure
experienced through the medium of the body and on this
analogy, the Lord inside all cannot also remain unaffected
by such experiences. This doubt can, however, be resolved
by contrasting the manner in which the Lord and the
Individual Soul got inside the body. Whereas the
Individual Soul has occupied the body as the medium
appropriate to his or her working out the load of Karma,
the Lord gets inside the soul at His volition, for the resuscita-
tion of the subject. The Individual is the convict serving
a term of imprisonment inside the prison-house, which the
body is, while the Lord is like unto the distinguished jail
visitor, contemplating the ways and means of welfare and
rehabilitation of the prisoners.
The above is the interpretation of Emperumāṇār (Rāmānuja); the other interpretation, namely, exclusive devotion unto the Lord (Super Soul) inside the individual Soul, will enable the latter to attain the former has been brushed aside by him as a misfit, in the present context of highlighting the immanence of the Lord, where it is imperative to bring out that the Lord pervades all things and beings without, at the same time, partaking of their character.

Translation

Those that are well versed in these songs ten,
Out of the peerless thousand sung by gracious caṭakōpaṇ
Of Kurukūr, amid blooming orchards many, in adoration
Of the cloud-hued Lord, sporting cool tulācī garland,
The gay resort of honey bees, will the heaven ascend
And eternal service enjoy, becoming the Celestials’ favourites.

Notes

(i) Gracious caṭakōpaṇ: The Āḻvār’s grace lies not in his seeing the Lord, in all things and beings, but in his making us also realise it, through these songs.

(ii) The Nitya Sūris (Celestials in Heaven) love those that recite these ten songs. This is because of their great love and regard for the Āḻvār who possesses Divine knowledge on a par with them, despite his location down below in this land of darkness and nescience.

Third Centum—Fifth Decad (III-5)
(Moym mām pūm pōli)

Preamble

In the last decad, we saw the Āḻvār enjoying the Lord’s immanence in quite a marvellous way. So ecstatic and love-
smitten did he become on beholding the Lord's 'Vibhūti', vast and varied, immense and interesting, defying description, that he was thrown into the rapturous state of singing and dancing. One has only to witness a Saint in his moments of rapturous ravishment in union with God, moments when his whole being thrills with love and his eyes swim with the pearls of tears of delight. This also reflects the behaviour of the exalted denizens of the high heavens, who drink deep incessantly from that inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the Lord. No wonder then, Sage Nārada and other celestial bards always dance as they sing, and sing as they dance, in the immediate presence of the Lord, completely swayed by God-love of extraordinary intensity. As a matter of fact, the hands and feet as well as the other limbs, graciously dowered on us by the Lord, can prove their worth only in this way. Naturally, the Ājvār felt disappointed, rather distressed when he found that, barring a handful, the bulk of the worldlings around was very far from such intoxicating God-love. While he is all praises for the few kindred souls, he is unsparing in his condemnation of the otherwise. This provides the theme of this decad.

In the second decad of this centum, the Ājvār was in dire distress but the gloom was dispelled by the joy of contemplation of unremitting service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the meeting ground of the Celestials and the Earthly men. (III-3). In the fourth decad, the Ājvār's joy knew no bounds, as we have just seen. To the superficial observer, such alternating moods of the Ājvār may seem objectionable in as much as they appear to come into conflict with the general principles laid down for the pursuit of the discipline, known as 'Bhakti'. Of the seven steps leading to 'Bhakti', the first is 'Viveka' and the last two are 'anavasādaḥ' (non-depression) and 'anuddharsah' (non-elation). The practitioners of 'Bhakti' are prohibited from getting unduly depressed or unduly elated. These prohibitions, however, apply only to material things of the mundane world under the impact of physical pain and pleasure, commonly experienced by the Śculs in bondage. These injunctions cannot contain the ultra-mundane happiness of the Saints and other Godly men resulting from their constant communion with the Lord and joyful contemplation of His wondrous trails and deeds or their grief arising from the aloofness of the worldlings from God-thirst and God-hunger.
moym mām pūm pojil-poykai mutalaic ciṇaippaṭṭu niṇṭa
kaimmāvukku arul ceyta kār mukil pōl vaṇṇaṅ, kaṇṇaṅ,
emmāṇic collip pāṭi, ejuntuṃ pariṃtum tuḷṭātār-
tammāl karumam eq? collir, taṇ kāṭal vaṭṭatu ullirē!

(III–5–1)

Translation

Ye, men of Earth, bound by the cool oceanic waters!
Tell me what use there can be of those creatures
Who sing not the glory of Kaṇṇaṅ, our cloud-hued Lord,
Who rescued (Gajendra) the elephant that stood ensnared
By a crocodile in the pond amid orchards dense
And leap about and dance in gay abandon, with devotion intense.

Notes

(i) Unto him, who remains unmoved by the good turn done
by the Lord to Gajendra, the pious elephant in dire
distress, his very birth is a terrible waste.

(ii) The pond amid dense orchards: In the forest inhabited
by Gajendra, the pious elephant, who made history
in the world of devotion, all the lotus tanks had gone
dry, due to scarcity of rains. This put a grievous stop
to the daily offering of lotus flowers by the elephant to
the Deity and as such, empty days rolled on, the elephant
grew restless and went hither and thither, in search of
lotus flowers. Scenting his way through, at long last,
he came up to a hill-top where he sighted a lovely
pond, studded with lotus flowers, surrounded by a
nice cluster of gardens. In his eagerness to pluck the
flowers and resume the diurnal worship, long dis-
continued, the elephant just lost sight of a crocodile
lying across and got trapped by the fell adversary.
On hearing the alarum raised by the elephant after
a titanic struggle with its grim opponent, the Lord
rushed to the pond, post-haste, rescued the elephant
from the spacious jaws of the crocodile and caressed
the wounds on its leg.
While discoursing on this Song, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar
is said to have painfully observed, as follows:

We are here, at this end, to remain unmoved by
the multifarious good done to us by the Lord
and He is there, at the other end, to get con-
cerned about every little mishap that befalls us.
This sets out in sharp contrast, our callous
indifference to Him and His tender solicitude for
us.

tan kaṭal vaṭṭattu ullārāit tamakkų iraiyāt taṭintu unṇum
tin kaṭal-kāl acurarkkut tīṅku ṛaikkum tirumālaip
pāṅkal talaikkkollap pāti, pārāntum kuṅitrum ularāṭar
maṅ koḷ ulakil pīrappār, valviṅai mōta malaintē. (III–5–2)

Translation

Those that sing not tunefully the glory
Of Tirumāl, who does on the Asurās goy,
That kill and eat up the denizens of this Earth,
Bound by the oceans cool, pour all His wrath,
Tormenting them and fail to leap about and dance in gay-
abandon
Will in this sinful world get trapped, (again and again).

Notes

(i) The Ājvār deplores those who do not recognise the
everous good done to them by the Lord, by way of
protecting them from the devilish. Failure on their
part to gratefully acknowledge the Lord’s benefaction
will only get them consigned to Samsāra, the breeding
ground for sins and the resultant miseries and involve-
ment in the dreadful cycle of birth and death.

(ii) By ‘Asuras’ is not meant those born in the Asura clan.
As a matter of fact, the two broad classifications,
indicated by Lord Kṛṣṇa in Chapter XVI-6 of Bhagavad
Gītā, are ‘Devas’, the Divine and ‘Asuras’, the
Devilish. Whosoever renders service to the Lord and
His devotees or co-operates with those who render
such service is the ‘Divine’ while those who range themselves opposite and hate God and His devotees and obstruct the service rendered to them, are the ‘Devilish’. Even Lakṣmi, who is Grace personified and knows not what it is to punish (ajñāthā nigrahāi), is one with the Lord, in the matter of inflicting punishment on the ‘Devilish’.

malaiyai ēṭuttu, kal-māri kāttu, pacunirai-taṇṇait
tolaivu taviritta pirāṇaic collic colli, niṟṟu eppōtum,
talaiyinōtu āṭaṇam taṭṭat taṭukuttamāyṛ paṅavāṭār
alai kol narakattu ajuntik kiṭantu ulaiṅkkiṟṛa vamparē.

(III–5–3)

Translation

Those that do not spell, again and again,
The glory of the Lord who held aloft the mountain
And from the fury of stony rain saved the cattle
And leap about for ever, upside down and in joy rattle,
Are but duds destined to drudge in the dismal hell.

Note

Even remaining unresponsive to the great gesture of the Lord,
His acts of grace galore and the resultant failure to laud
Him and leap about with joy would be tantamount to entry into hell and these are the very persons eagerly sought after by yama’s hordes for being despatched to hell.

vampu avil kōtaiporuṭṭa, māl viṭai ēḷum aṭartta
tempavāḷat tiral vāyaṇ, cirttaraṇ tol pukaḷ pāṭi,
kumpitu naṭṭam īṭṭu āṭi, kōku ukaṭṭunțu ulalāṭar-
tam piṟappāl payaṇ eppe catu caṅkaṅkaiṭaiye?

(III–5–4)

Translation

Of what use are those born amidst the devout pure and pious,
That sing not and jump not, running riot,
Adorning the coral lipped cirītaraṇ’s glory great,
His taming of the unruly bulls seven for winning the hand
Of the Bride (Nappippai) wearing the highly fragrant garland?
Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is vexed with those indifferent sinners, born in the midst of the ‘Sātvik Souls’ (good and pure), not losing themselves in ecstatic adoration of the glory, of Lord Kṛiṣṇa who tamed, all at once, seven unruly bulls and won Nappiṟṟai, the charming bride, niece of Queen Yağodā,

(ii) Coral—lipped Cirītaraṇa: The red lips of Śrī Kṛiṣṇa, rendered all the more enchanting by His bewitching smile of victory over the unruly bulls.

(iii) Śrī Pillaiappilai, a disciple of kūṟattāḻvān, drew up the following contrasting picture, to illustrate the phraseology “persons born in the midst of the ‘Sātvik’ (pure and pious people), used in this song.

Near the holy tank, Candra puṟkaraṇī, within the precincts of the temple of Lord Raṅganātha in Śrīraṅgam, there is the sacred Puṇṇai tree. Under the shade of this tree, the religious Pundits used to give learned discourses to the handful of devout listeners, squeezed in the little space available in the passage around, in rapt attention. There would, of course, be no objection to a further influx of like-minded listeners, keen and receptive, adding to the congestion. But see how odd and irksome it would be, if the hefty villagers with their hairy, humpy shoulders, pot-bellies and head-gears, passing along, thrust themselves in, out of sheer curiosity, and elbow the pious listeners out.

catu capattai naliyum kaṇicaṇaic cāṭippattarku,  
hiti am cōti uruvaī ainku vaiṭtu, iṅkup piranta  
vēṭa muṭalvaṇai pāṭi, vitikaḷ tōrum tuḷḷāṭār  
hiti unarntavar muṇṇa eṉ cavippār maṇicarē?

Translation

Not all their learning and mumblings dry will make them men,
If they dance not in the open streets, love-smitten
And sing not the glory of the Lord, by Vedas acclaimed
As the foremost, who did in all that supernal splendour descend
From the high heavens, to kill Kañcana, the tyrant
Who did the soft and pious men torment.

Notes

(i) In the preceding decad the Āḻvār enjoyed the Vībhūtis collectively, being the Lord’s controlled possessions. But now he differentiates between the Lord’s subjects; he is all praises for those love-drunk and love-smitten possessing enormous God-hunger and God-thirst like himself but condemns unreservedly those who are not charged with such God-love. The Āḻvār has no hesitation in declaring the massive learning and ritualistic, prosaic exercises in mumbleings and genuflections, palmed off as prayers by those in the latter category, as wholly futile.

(ii) The Lord’s incarnations and the herculean deeds performed by Him during those incarnations, were due to the unpardonable sins committed by Kamsa and other demoniac forces, by way of teasing and tormenting the pious and the pure, like Vasudeva and Devakī. Whereas the Lord is least mindful of direct affront thrown at Him, He gets furious when His devotees are offended and He will never exercise His proverbial clemency in respect of such grievous offenders. Those who comprehend the Lord’s enormous love for His devotees cannot but throw off all their sophistication and conventional formalities and leap about and dance like mad men, in the streets, big and small, singing His great glory. It would be appropriate to mention the following anecdote, in this context.

The king built a cluster of houses for presentation to the poor. He was, however, very much averse to Vaiṣṇavites and so, he flatly declined to hand over one of the houses to Miḷākālvāṇ, a Vaiṣṇava, when approached by the latter for the grant. The supplicant, however, wanted to know from the king the grounds,
on which the grant was negatived. The king bluntly replied: "No doubt, you are worthy, in other respects, but as a Vaisnava and a disciple of Srí Rämānuja, you stand disqualified." So great was Mīlakālvaṇ’s love of his religion and his great Preceptor, that he exclaimed: ‘Oh, is that so? I am mighty glad, you recognise me as a Vaisnava although I thought I was not worthy of being called as one. "So saying, he gathered up his garment, threw it up in the air and danced with joy.

manicarum marum mûrum ây, mâyap piravi piranta
 taṉiyāñ pirappili-taṇṇai, taṭaṅ kaṭal-cërnta pirâpai,
 kaṇiyai, karumpiṅ in cāṟṟai, kaṭṭiyai, tēṅai, amutai
 mûṆivu iṅṟi ēṭṭik kuṟṟppār mûḷtu uṇar nirmaiṟṟâɾē.

(III-5-6)

Translation

Perfect knowledge vests in those that dance
And sing with great joy the glory of the Lord,
The delicious fruit, candy, honey and Cane-juice,
The nectar grand, reclining on the milk-ocean broad,
Who, birthless though, did come down in many ways,
Now as man, then as Deva and so on, wondrous and peerless.

Notes

(i) The Lord is birthless in the sense that He is not, by any means, involved like us, in the inevitable cycle of birth and rebirth, eking out the results of our good and bad actions. And yet, He incarnates many times and in many ways out of His own free will, assuming the form most appropriate to the particular occasion and purpose. Those who go into raptures in contemplation of these beneficent Avatāra of the highly delicious Lord, could indeed be deemed to have assimilated the quintessence of all learning.

(ii) Reclining on the milk-ocean: This refers to the 'Vyūha' aspect of the Lord reclining on the milky ocean, the centre of creative activity, where the Lord contem-
plates the ways and means of reclaiming us all from the ocean of Samsāra—birth and bondage.

(iii) With all their massive learning, if people are not visibly moved by the Lord's auspicious traits and do not take a deep plunge into them, they should indeed be deemed ignorant. On the other hand, those that are not conversant with any of the Śāstras but get into the region of ecstasy, entranced mentally, orally and physically, by the Lord's auspicious traits and wondrous deeds, are virtually all—knowing.

nīrmaï īl nūṟṟuvaṟ vīya, aivarkku aruḻceytu niṟṟu,
pār malku cēṟai avitta paraṇcuṭarai niṟṟaintu āṭi,
nir malku kaṉṉipar āki, neṟṟam kuḷaintu naiyāṭe,
ūṟ malki, mōṭu paruppār uttamarkaṭku eṉ ceṟvārē?

(III–5–7)

Translation

Of what use unto the devout are they
That are fat and pot-bellied, who melt not
In ecstasy, singing and dancing with tears of joy,
Meditating on the resplendent Lord Supreme Who did blot
The cruel hundred out and on (their cousins) five shed His grace
Routing the armies and ridding Earth of unwholesome populace?

Note

The 'Kauravas' (the cruel hundred) would just not allow their five cousins, the Pāṇḍavas, to co-exist. The Lord had, therefore, to annihilate such terribly hostile cousins of the Pāṇḍavas and, in the process, He got the Earth rid of its unwholesome burden. Crores of Śādhus would, by no means, be a burden to Mother Earth to whom they are just as light as cotton, but the sinners press too heavily on her. The Āḻvār deplores the conduct of those remaining unmoved by the Lord's enormous grace, shown to His devotees as above. These hapless men seem to have been born just to make their poor mothers suffer the pangs of labour. It is a pity such men cannot be of any use to
the devout Vaiṣṇavas at whose beck and call the Lord and all His possessions ever remain. While on this subject, the following episode will be interesting and instructive:

In the court of a Cōḷa Rājā, Periya Nampi, Śri Rāmānuja’s preceptor, had to undergo mortification owing to his refusal to subscribe to the slogan raised by the King and his men, “Śiva is the Supreme God”. Some of these men, however, wanted to claim the merit which accrues by cremating the uncared-for corpses of the destitute and rushed to the scene of death of Periya Nampi. But they shrank back, when they saw the illustrious Kūrattāḷvān by the side of that great Ācārya. Kūrattāḷvān admonished them by saying, “You fellows can hardly find a single destitute Vaiṣṇava by cremating whom you seem to be in for cheap merit. You should all know that the Lord and all His worlds are there to subserve the Vaiṣṇavas at all times”.

vār pūṇāl am tāṇ aruvi vaṭa tiruvēṅkaṭattu entai
pēr pala collip pitāṭi, pittar {texteisible_text}
pūkum pukātum, ulōkar cīrīkka nirṇu āti,
ārvam perukik kuṇippār amarar toṭappāṭuvārē.  

Translation

Those that articulate, with yearning deep, the names many Of our Lord in Vaṭa Tiruvēṅkaṭam, with its fountains many And cool, nice cascades, pass in and out of many a town, Singing and dancing in ecstasy like mad men, By worldlings ridiculed, will be worshipped by those in heaven.

Note

The Āḻvār extols those who worship the Lord in His Ārcā form at the various pilgrim centres, like Tiruvēṅkaṭam, despite their being steeped in ‘Samsāra’ in an abode notorious for its nescience. These men the Āḻvār would like to place in a category even above those exalted Souls in Heaven. Seeing that the Supreme Lord in His Ārcā form wherein converge all auspicious attributes in unlimited measure, is near at hand, easily accessible, these men go into a trance and keep on singing and dancing with wild
joy, moving round towns and villages, completely absorbed in devotion. While the worldlings callously look on with wonder and amusement, as they do in the case of mad men, even the Nitya Sûris, the ever-free angels in heaven, adore these devotees on Earth running riot with God-love. (The episode relating to Miñakâlvân, cited in the notes below III—5—5, could be recapitulated here as well.)

amarar toḻappâṭuvâṇai, aṅaittu ulakukkum pirâṇai,
amara maṅattṉul yōku puṇarntu, avaṅ-tattâṭṭu orṛu āka
amarat tuṇiya vallârkal oliya, allâtavar ellâm
amara niṅantu, eljuntu, âṭi, alattuvatē karumamē. (III—5—9)

Translation

Leaving the perverts alone who deem themselves on a par
With the Lord, in Amâraś’s hearts embedded, Sovereign Master
Of all the worlds, it behoves the rest to meditate and sing
His glory great, moving round in ecstasy, leaping and dancing.

Note

It is a great pity that the ‘Kevalās’ who develop their psychic powers and feel themselves on a par with the Supreme Lord in the final state of liberation, get lost in self-enjoyment, totally oblivious of the infinitely superior bliss of Divine Service perennially enjoyed by the ‘Amarâś’, the immortals, in the Yonder heaven. Leaving these unfortunate souls severely alone, the Âjvâr says it is the duty of all the others to deeply meditate upon the Lord’s auspicious traits, with selfless dedication, and sing His great glory all over the place, going about leaping and dancing.

karumamum karuma palaṇum âkiya kâranâṭ-tâṅṇai,
tiru maṇi vaṅṅaṇai, ceṇkaṇ mâlinai, têvâpirâṇai
oruma maṅâttâṇul vaittu, ullâm kulântu, eljuntu, âṭi,
perumaiyunum nânnum tavîntu, pitaṟṟumîṅ, pëtaimai tîntē!

Translation

• Shed all your conceit, sense of shame and ignorance
And leap about, uttering with ecstatic incoherence,
Third Centum (III-5)

The names of the gem-hued, red lotus-eyed Tirumāl, the Ordainer
Of the Universe, the deeds and their fruits, Chief of Celestials,
With a mind fixed on Him as the ‘Means’ and the ‘End’,
all at once.

Notes

(i) The Lord has to be looked upon, as both the ‘Means’ and the ‘End’.

(ii) As the Internal Controller of the Individuals, He enables them to perform deeds and He confers the results, reward or punishment, as the case may be, because the deeds by themselves can’t grant rewards or inflict punishments.

(iii) The Saint calls upon the people to shed their ill-conceived notions, born of conceit, which preclude them from coming under the emotional sway of the Lord’s auspicious traits and the stupid sense of shame that they shall not exhibit in public their emotional upsurge and join the ranks of the illustrious devotees moving along, singing the Lord’s glory and dancing in ecstasy.

tīrnta aṭiyavar-tammait tiruttippaṇīkollavaḷla
ārnta pukal accutaṇai, amararpirāṇai, enmāṇai,
vāyntavāḷavaḷayaḷ cūltanvalaṁkurukurcaṭakōpāṇ
nērnta Ārāyirattu ip pattu aruvēṇai niṟu ceyyumē.

(III-5-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand composed
By caṭakōpāṇ of fertile kurukūr, adoring Accutan, the Lord
Of glory great, Chief of Celestials, Protector steadfast,
Who redeems those that unto Him stick fast,
As sole refuge and enlists them in His service eternal,
Will to ashes reduce all sins, however cruel.

Note

Failure to go into raptures, in contemplation of the Lord’s auspicious traits and wondrous deeds, sing and dance,
literally dissolved in Him, would, no doubt, fall under the category of ‘irredeemable’ sins. These ten songs will, however, destroy even this type of sin and keep the chanters beyond its mischief.

Third Centum—Sixth Decad (III-6)
(Ceyya tāmāraik kannan āy)

Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Āḻvār extolled the devotees thrown into a state of ecstasy, enraptured by the contemplation of the Lord’s wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, moving about, all the time singing and dancing. In the same breath he spoke disparagingly of those who do not exhibit this kind of behaviour but remain callously indifferent, unmoved by and impervious to the glory of the Lord. But then, the Āḻvār, known for his deep compassion and love for the fellow-beings, wished to bring round even those in the latter category and impress, in their mind, the Lord’s extraordinary trait of tender solicitude and easy accessibility. No doubt, the Āḻvār had already expatiated on this in I-3, but that was in terms of the Lord’s incarnations (Vibhava aspect). And now, in this decad, the Āḻvār expounds the Lord’s ‘Saulabhya’—easy accessibility in His Iconic Form which is not only the most easily accessible but also the very embodiment of every known and conceivable good quality in a perfect measure, a complete enumeration whereof would be beyond the capacity of the omniscient Lord Himself. Verily, the Lord’s Arcā (Iconic) manifestation is the very acme, the farthest limit of His wonderful trait of ‘Saulabhya’. Nampīḷai likens the Āḻvār’s great gesture to that of Sītā, the captive in Laṅkā, who tendered wholesome advice to the lustful Rāvana who desired to have promiscuous relation with the Divine Mother, mistaking her for a mere woman. Even as the Āḻvār made no secret of his vexation, in the last decad, of callous indifference and aloofness of men devoid of God-love, Sītā too got vexed with Rāvana’s amorous advances and the death of wholesome counsellors in the land, who could bring round this fiend of a fellow, terribly love-smitten. But, being grace personified, she herself counselled him to befriend Rāma and avoid a gruesome death.
The ninth song is the crucial one high-lighting the theme of this decad.

cēyya tāmaraik kāṟṇaṅ āy, ulakū ējum unṭa avaṅ kāṟṭā!
vaiyam, vāṅam, maṇicar, teyvam, marrum, marrum, marrum, marrum āy,
cēyya cuḷa cuṭar nāṅaṅ āy, velippaṭṭu, ivai paṭaṭṭāṅ; pīṅgum, moy koḷ cōṭiyoṭu āyīṅaṅ-oru mūvar ākiya mūrttiyē.

(III–6–1)

Translation

Know ye, 'tis the red lotus-eyed Lord, Who did once contain
In His stomach, the worlds seven
And created this Earth, the upper regions, the humans,
Devas, beasts, plants and all else thro' His knowledge radiant;
He has His abode in the heaven resplendent
And carries out (the triple functions), standing as the Trinity.

Notes

(i) The opening stanza deals with the Lord's 'Paratva',
the transcendental glory, although this decad is in-
tended to spotlight the Lord's 'Saulabhya', or easy
accessibility. Indeed, the Lord's 'Paratva' serves as
a foil against which His astounding simplicity becomes
even more pronounced and amazing and hence the
Ājvār begins with this complementary role of the Lord.

(ii) The red lotus-eyes proclaim the Lord's supremacy.
c.f. tasya yathā kapyāśam punḍarīkaṁ evaṁ aṁśīṁ,
(Cāndogyopaniṣad). The Lord's eyes, highlight His
Supremacy, as far as His form is concerned; likewise
among His many attributes, 'pralayāpatsakhatva'
or sustenance of the worlds with their variegated
contents inside His stomach during the 'pralaya'
deluge), brings into focus His Supremacy over all the
rest, the 'Container' vis-a-vis the 'Contained'.

(iii) Of the triple functions of creation, sustentation and
dissolution, the middle one is attended to by the Lord
Himself, standing as Viṣṇu, while the other two functions
are carried out by Him through Brahmā and Śiva
respectively, as their Internal Controller. Whereas Brahmac and Śiva were produced by the Lord, Viṣṇu, standing in between, as a member of the Trinity, is the Lord Himself Who has none above, to create Him. In the cycle of cause and effect, if we go back from effect to cause of all things and beings, we will ultimately be left with the Lord who is His own cause, the Causeless Cause.

mūvar ākṣiya mūrttiyai, mutal mūvarkkum mutalvap-tappai, cāvam uḷaṇa nikkuvāṇai, taṭaṇ kaṭal kīṭantāŋ-tappai, tēva tēvapai, teṇa laṅkaṇa eri elac cerra viliyai, pāva nācaṇai, pāṅkayat taṭaṇ kaṇṇaṇaip paravumiiño.

(III–6–2)

Translation

Sing the glory of the immaculate Lord,
With large lotus-eyes, who set Laṅkā ablaze and destroyed
The enemies with His bow valiant, Chief of Celestials,
Destroyer of sins, who the Devas’ distress dispels.
Foremost among the first three, He does the Trinity compose
And on the broad milky ocean repose.

Notes

(i) On being told about the Lord’s transcendent glory, as in the preceding song, the Ālvār was questioned by his listeners as to how they could at all propitiate such an exalted overlord. The Ālvār, however, puts them at ease by pointing out in this song, the Lord’s simplicity in His incarnate Form as Rāma.

(ii) “First and foremost, Who the Trinity composes”: Please see note (iii), in the preceding song. Lord Viṣṇu’s supremacy over Brahmac and Śiva is further pointed out here, in that He dispels their distress and among those thus relieved could be added Indra and other Devas. In order to eliminate the possible confusion by including Viṣṇu as a member of the Trinity and making others look upon Him, mistakenly of course, as on a par with the other two, namely, Brahmac and Śiva, the trinity could be taken, within the meaning
of this song, to comprise Brahmā, Śiva and Indra. Even otherwise, it may be pointed out that unlike the other two, namely, Brahmā and Śiva, Viṣṇu, standing in between, is His own cause (the Causeless Cause) as well as the Cause of the other two.

(iii) "Set fire to Laṅkā: Rāma’s peerless bow played a lot of havoc and set fire to Rāvana’s Laṅkā which ‘Agni’, the fire-God, as one of the several elemental forces, Rāvana had kept under strict control, dared not enter before.

(iv) "Destroyer of sins": As Sage Agastya put it, the mere sight of Rāma, the immaculate Lord, with bow in hand, will destroy all our sins.

paravi vāṇavar ētta niṇa paramañai, parañcōtīyai, kuravai kōṭta kuḻakaṇnai, maṇi vanṇaṇai, kuṭak kūṭtaṇai, aravam ēri, alai katāl amarum tuyilkoṇṭa annalai, iravum naṇ pakalum viṭātu, eṉṟum ēttutal maṇam vaimmiṇḍo.

(III-6-3)

Translation

Day and night, without break, sing the glory of the supreme Lord,
Set your mind on Him, by Devas profusely lauded,
Who did (with Gopis) tastefully dance, hand in hand,
Of superlative splendour, the Pot-dancer of the complexion
Of blue gem, reposing on His serpent-bed, in the surging ocean.

Notes

(1) And now, the Āḻvār introduces his audience to the Lord’s Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, of unsurpassed simplicity and calls upon the folks to set their minds firmly on Him who cannot but be loved because of His loving condescension, tender solicitude, unique charm, adorability and a host of other auspicious attributes.

Tradition has it that Mother Earth bitterly complained to Brahmā about the atrocious burden she had to carry, with demoniac forces like Kamsa and Śīśupāla
let loose on Earth. Brahmā and other Devas then made a bee-line to the Lord who was reclining on His serpent-bed in the milky ocean and petitioned to Him. Thereupon, the Lord came down as Kṛṣṇa and His task duly done, He went back to the Milky-ocean and rested on Ādiśeṣa, as before.

(ii) The dance with the Gopīs: It was a classical autumn night in the bright fortnight, the unique night of unparalleled excellence when the marvel of a dance, the immortal 'Rāsa Kṛṣṇa', took place. 'Śrī Kṛṣṇa played on His inimitable flute, sending out sweet strains of music in all directions with their irresistible appeal to the young damsels of the pastoral village. They all left their homes, defying obstruction from the elders and converged towards the magic flautist. And then ensued the marvel of marvels, the wonderful wonder of wonders, the circular dance in which the ubiquitous Kṛṣṇa made Himself so very pliable as to be seen in between one Gopī and another, multiplying Himself in this fashion. Oh, how astounding that the Overlord of the Celestials in heaven should come down to Earth and mingle so freely with the shepherd-ilds and be quite at home with them! And to those who missed witnessing this grand spectacle, He would exhibit His physical charm right at the cross-roads as the skilful Pot-dancer.


Translation

Let alone my telling you about the wondrous Lord,
Calling upon you to set on Him your mind,
His glory and goodness are such that Indra, the Devas' overlord,
Nāṃmukaṇ (Brahmā) and Śiva of matted locks reverently contemplate
And are in the worship of His lotus feet for ever engaged.
Note

The Āḻvār tells his listeners: "Apart from people of my ilk dining into your ears the Lord's easy accessibility and his many other auspicious traits, I want you to note how Indra, Brahmā and Śiva, worshipped by many as their God, themselves keep meditating all the time on Lord Viṣṇu's glory and goodness and worship His lotus feet. If the supreme Lord has made Himself so pliable even to the self-seekers for facility of their worship, what more need I tell you about His easy accessibility and easy worshippability by those whose minds are rivetted on Him, as an end in itself?"

tiriyum kāṟṟōṭu akal vicumpu, tīṇinta maṇ, kiṭanta kaṭal, eriyum tiyōṭu iru cutar, teyvam, māṟṟum māṟṟum māṟṟum āy-kariya mēpiyaṅ, ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṅ, kaṇṇaṅ, vinnīr igai, curiyum pal karuṅ kuṅcī eṅkaḷ cutar muṭi aṇṇai tōrṟamē. (III–6–5)

Translation

The red lotus-eyed Kaṇṇaṅ of bluish hue, Chief of Celestials, With dark curly locks, wearing the radiant crown, Is manifest in the elements five, Sun and Moon, Devas, humans and other species, one and all.

Note

The Āḻvār speaks here of both the universal (lines 3 and 4) and the exclusive Individual (lines 1 and 2) Forms of the Lord, as visualised by him. (Āḻāyirappati).

tōrṟam, kēṭu avai illavaṅ; utaiyāṅ; avan oru mūrttiyāy, cīṟṟattōṭu arul perivavaṅ aṭik kēḷ puka niṅga ceṅkaṁmāl; nāṟṟam, tōrṟam, cuvai, oli, urai aki niṅga em vāṟavaṛ uṟṟalyē ańgi māṟṟoruvaṟai yāṅ ilēṅ, elumaikkumē. (III–6–6)

Translation

At no time shall I seek refuge in any one Other than my red lotus-eyed Lord, full of love For his devotees Who is unto me all the sciences five The subtle matter of smell, colour, taste, touch and sound
Chief of Celestials, free from birth and death, He owns
us all mortals; the peerless one (Naraciṅka) full of fury He was
And yet stood at His feet (Prahlāda) the recipient of His
grace.

Notes

(i) The Ālvar avers that He belongs to none but Naraciṅka,
the incarnate Form of the Lord, who exhibited bound-
less love for Prahlāda. To the question put to Śṛṅka
Rāmānuja, how the little lad, Prahlāda, could at all
approach the ferocious Naraciṅka, when He was
pouring His unmitigated wrath on Hiṃya, the great
Ācārya replied in a homely way that even while the
lion attacks the elephant, the lion cub could jolly well
suck milk from the mother’s teats.

(ii) The eyes of the Lord could be red, both ways, that is,
due to the wrath of Naraciṅka for Hiṃya or due to
His tender love for Prahlāda.

(iii) The five senses, namely, smell, sight, taste, sound and
touch, which are differently experienced by the world-
lings with reference to the external objects of the visible
world, are all experienced in the Lord Himself by the
Ālvar, like unto the ‘Nitya Sūrīs’ (ever-free angels)
in Heaven. These senses have a meaning for them
only in relation to God-enjoyment.

cēumaikkum eṉatu āvikku iṉ amutattippai, eṉatu ār uyir
keḻumiya katirc cōtiyai, maṉi vaṅṇaṉai, kuṭak kūṭaṉai,
vilumiya amarar muṉivar vilunjuk kaṅṅal-kaṉiyipai,
toṉumip, tūya maṉattar āy: iṉaiyum nilḷā tuyaraṅkaḷē.

(III-6-7)

Translation

If, with a mind clean, you worship the Lord,
The candy fruit, by Sages and Devas devoured,
My soul’s eternal nectar, of sapphire hue, the beaconlight in
my dear soul, absorbed,
The pot-dancer, You will from miseries be completely absolved.
Notes

(i) The Ājvār exhorts his listeners to shake off their fear of an unapproachable, distant Lord, by emphasising His easy-accessibility and enormous love for His devotees. There was indeed a time, when he too was afraid of mingling with the Lord, lest he should defile Him, but now, freed from such a complex, he is in grand communion with the Lord and his tempo goes up all the time beaming with God-love.

(ii) The cleanliness of mind, referred to here, is freedom from doubt and despair, fear and fright, in the matter of worshipping the highly adorable Lord of loving condescension, which tend to lead one astray into the domain of sensual pleasures. Shorn of all such doubts and fears, the Ājvār exhorts people to attach themselves solely to the Lord seeking no personal gains, and thus get absolved of all their sins.

tuyaramē taru tuṇṇa inppa ināikaḷ āy, avai allan āy, uyara niṇṇatu ñr cōti āy, ulaku ējum uṇṭu umīntān-taṅṇai, ayara vāṅkum namān tamarkku arunaṅciṅai, accutō-taṅṇai, tayarāṭkku makaṅ-taṅṇai āṇī marru ilēn taṅcamākavē.

Translation

I seek refuge in none but Tayaratap's Son,
Accutap (the Protector steadfast), the deadly poison
Unto Namaṇ's cruel hordes, Who the worlds seven
Did once sustain and later spat them out
The heavenly light of splendour unique, dealing out,
Rewards and punishments for acts, good and bad
And yet by them, by no means affected.

Notes

(i) The Ājvār declares his firm faith in Śrī Rāma (who incarnated as King Daśaratha's son) as his sole Refuge, in order to infuse in others a similar interest in the Lord.
(ii) As the Upaniṣads put it, the so-called rewards for good acts also operate as impediments for entry into Heaven and are thus no better then punishments undergone for bad acts. The best thing, therefore, is to look upon the Lord as the sole Refuge, the 'Means' and the 'End' rolled into one, instead of aspiring for the fruits of one's actions.

(iii) Daśaratha's son: The Lord was born as Rāma, Son of King Daśaratha, totally subservient to the father, subject to any kind of treatment at the latter's will. The king would now say that he is gifting away the kingdom to Rāma and a little hence ask him to go into exile!

(iv) Speaking about taking refuge at the feet of the Lord, there are some passages in the Iṭu commentary, which are very interesting and instructive. The Image of Kṛṣṇa, the child, fond of eating butter, was worshipped by Śrī Rāmānuja, as the household God. One day, a disciple handed over to the Preceptor an Image of Śrī Rāma. Thereupon the Ācārya exclaimed: 'Oh, He who did not impose the condition of seeking Him as sole Refuge, has come'. What was conveyed here by the great Preceptor was that Śrī Rāma was satisfied if one sought asylum in Him but once, saying that he belonged to Him. On the other hand, Śrī Kṛṣṇa laid down, "Resort to me as your sole Refuge", as a spiritual rule, so to say. The statement that no more than affectionate yielding or non-opposition when the Lord's grace is offered is needed as the price for salvation, only signifies the infinite mercy and readiness to reclaim, on the part of the Lord, as the great Redeemer of the straying Subjects. If, however, one started enumerating the positive qualifications on the part of the Individual to deserve the Lord's grace, one has to begin with 'implicit trust in, and abandonment to God' (māhāviśvāsa), which again is very difficult of attainment indeed. If a traveller on a long sea-voyage could trust himself to a mere floating wood (ship) and supplement it with a storage of food and
water for six months, all inanimate things, should we not have some such confidence at least in God as our Means of salvation, that is, crossing the much bigger ocean of Samsāra?

tañcam ākiya tantai táyōtu táŋum āy, avai allaŋ āy, eñcail il amarar kulamutal, müvar tammulm ātiyai, añci nir ulakattulliṅkal! avan īvaṅ engu kūḷēṅmiṅ; neñcīṅal niŋaippāṅ evaṅ, avan ākum niį kaṭal vāṇanep.  

(III–6–9)

Translation

Ye, men of the world, be not scared (of the supremacy)
Of our Lord, Chief of the Celestials, foremost of the three,
He is the Father benign, Mother and much more, you see,
Be not agitated whether He is other than the one in Image Form (You behold here); be sure, the Lord of oceanic hue does assume Whatever form you in your mind lovingly conceive of Him.

Notes

(i) The worldlings, addressed by the Āḷvār, expressed their difficulty in worshipping the Lord currently, either in His transcendent form or in His incarnate forms as Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. The Āḷvār puts them at ease by telling them now that the Lord is easily worshippable in any form they like, without any loss or diminution of His divine prowess and that they can, therefore, worship Him easily in His ‘Arcā’ (image) Form. This song is thus the keynote of this decad and all the preceding eight songs have only served as a preamble.

(ii) As we see among our earthly relations, the mother is different from the father. The Lord is, however, our eternal Father as well as Mother and has an individuality of His own, being very different from the earthly parents. The earthly parents have their own limitations and are not also always dependable, their own interests super-
seding those of the progeny. Instances of parents giving up their young ones under certain circumstances are not wanting. Further, it is our Karma that binds us to our earthly parents and this artificial link gets automatically severed with the severance of our own bonds of Karma, our relationship with the Lord is, however, eternal, being inalienable.

Further, there is scarcely a relationship which the Lord cannot assume, in regard to His subjects, being All-in-one, Father, Mother and all other conceivable relations put together.

\[
\text{kaṭal vāṇṇaṇ kāṇṇaṇ vīṇṇavar karumāṇikkam eṇatu ār uyyir, paṭa araviṇa naaikkitaṇa paraṇa cutar, paṇṭu nūṭuvar aṭa varum paṭai maṅka aivakāṭku āki vem camattu aṛgu tēr kataviya perumāṇ kaṇai kaḷal kāṇpatu eṇrukol, kaṅkaḷe! (III–6–10)}
\]

**Translation**

When shall I behold the victorious feet of my Lord, ‘Kāṇṇaṇ’ of oceanic hue, by those in Heaven adored,
Like unto a blue gem, the supreme light, my Soul dear,
Reclining on hooded serpent, unto the five (Pāṇḍavas) dear,
Who drove Arjuna’s chariot and did the armies annihilate,
Slaying the hundred (Kauravas) in the war of Mahābhārata?

**Note**

Having expounded the Lord’s easy-accessibility (Saulabhya) in all His manifestations, right up to the ‘Arcā’ (Iconic Form) the Āṭvār is now deeply absorbed in the Lord’s incarnate form as Kṛṣṇa, because it was in this Avatāra that he caught the first glimpses of the Lord’s amazing simplicity and went into a trance state, lasting several months. Picturing in his mind Kṛṣṇa, the Chariteer holding the whip and the reins, with the hair on his uncrowned bare head covered by the dust from the battlefield and a pair of legs dangling from the chariot, the Āṭvār hears (fanciful, of course) the tingling sound of the ornaments worn on those
legs and this is enough to stir up in him a strong desire to behold the Lord's exquisite Form.

Translation

Learn these songs ten out of the thousand tunefully composed By Caṭakōpana of Valutinātu, the doyen of fertile Kurukur, In adoration of the Supreme Lord, difficult to behold But easy to meditate, Who sheds His grace galore (Making Himself visible to one and all in this world, In His Image Form); you will also become devotees pure.

Notes

(i) **Difficult to behold but easy to meditate**: The Ājvār does not enjoy the physical presence of the Lord and, therefore, regretfully observes that the Lord is difficult to behold. Out of sight but not out of mind, as his forward mind keeps meditating on Him. As a matter of fact, throughout this work, the Ājvār's union with the Lord only connotes his mental comprehension of the Lord's vision, almost on a par with His physical presence and the Ājvār's separation from the Lord arises when he longs for the external perception of the Lord as well and his intuitive inner vision gets cut out in the bargain.

(ii) Chanting this decad, which highlights the Lord's amazingly easy-accessibility in His manifestation, will, by itself, engender God-love. Even as people will start a 'Treasure hunt' digging the ground deep, at the place where the sign-board "Here lies a treasure, buried" is put up, the Ājvār expects people, in quest of God-love to chant this decad.
Preamble

Despite his earlier disappointments, it was his extraordinary fellow-feeling that egged the Ālvār on, to address the worldlings once more, as in the last decad, pretty sure of bringing them round. Even the amazing simplicity of the Lord in His ‘Arcā’ manifestation, the sure plank, according to the Ālvār, for weaning them, made no visible impact on the unfortunate fellows wallowing in the sty of worldly life, much to the chagrin of the Ālvār. The Ālvār, however, drowns his disappointment, in this decad in the blissful contemplation of service unto the Lord’s devotees, the logical conclusion of service unto the Lord, in keeping with the essential nature of the Individual soul.

In ‘Periya Tirumoli’ (VIII-10-3), Tirumāṅkai Ālvār has declared that, as a result of learning the eight-lettered ‘Trumantra’, he became a vassal of the devotees of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkāppāpuram. Service unto the Lord’s devotees, as well, is implied in the middle part of ‘Trumantra’, viz, ‘namah’. It is held by some that service unto the Lord’s devotees is implicit in letter A of ‘Prāṇava’ (Aum), with its discarded dative case-ending, which brings into focus the soul’s dependence on the Lord; others say that the middle letter U of ‘Prāṇava’ emphasises the exclusive dependence of the soul on the Lord and that the farthest point up to which dependence on the Lord could go, by virtue of His unbounded love for His devotees, would be the individual soul’s utter devotion to those devotees as well. This is readily borne out by our common experience in the world of human affairs also. It, however, matters not whether this particular meaning goes with the word ‘namah’ or letter ‘A’ or letter ‘U’ of the Prāṇava (AUM). All the same, our great preceptors have thought it fit to link this concept with the word ‘namah’ which helps to discard the rags of ‘I-ness’ and ‘My-ness’, enveloping and disfiguring the individual soul.

Śatrugna provided the shining example of urfhirchirg service marked by extraordinary devotion to Bharata, a great devotee of Śri Rāma. Soon after the marriage of the four Princes, in Mithilā, Bharata had an invitation from his uncle, king Yudājit
of Kekaya (perhaps, modern Greece) to go with him to that country. Bharata set out on the said journey, on an auspicious day, appropriate to his birth star. The inseparable Satrugna also accompanied Bharata, out of his dutiful love for the latter, although the former had no invitation, as such, from King Yudājit nor did the day of the commencement of the journey suit his (Satrugna’s) birth star. According to Satrugna whose devotion to Bharata was of such a high order, there was hardly any need for all these, as he considered himself no more than a part and parcel of Bharata and not as a separate entity.

payilum cuṭar oḷi mūrttiyai, paṅkayak kaṇṇaṇai,
payila ḍiṭṭiya nam pāṅkaṭal-cērnta paramaṇai,
payilum tiru uṭaiyār evarēlum, avar kaṇṭir
payilum pīṭappiṭaitōṛu emmai āḷum paramarē. (III-7-1)

Translation

They that are with eternal wealth of God -love endowed
Whatever be their descent, meditating on our Lord Supreme
Resting on the milk-ocean, the lotus-eyed, of a form
Of solid splendour and mounting sweetness, shall hold
Me as their vassal, in all the births to come.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that all those who are steeped in the
enjoyment of the Supreme Lord’s auspicious traits and
enthral ling form, are his masters, irrespective of their
parentage. These devotees have now been accorded
by the Āḻvār the position of eminence attributed earlier
to the Supreme Lord alone.

(ii) The lotus-eyed: This special feature proclaims the Lord’s
transcendent glory (paratva). It is indeed a form of
supernal splendour that the Lord assumes, during His
avatāras, so as to enthrall His subjects; even if such an
exquisite form fails to attract them, His lotus-eyes will
do the job—the folks cannot but be entrapped by His
bewitching eyes.

(iii) Mounting sweetness: Unlike the ephemeral pleasures
of the world, which are alluring from a distance but
prove disappointing at close quarters, the Lord, with His enchanting looks and entralling form and a disposition of mounting sweetness, is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss.

(iv) *Eternal wealth of God-Love:* Those who employ the Lord as the 'Means' for achieving their personal ends, would drift from Him, once their ends are achieved. On the other hand, those that seek Him for His own sake, as their 'Be-all' and 'End-All', will stick unto Him for ever and there is no risk whatsoever of their getting parted from Him. Service unto the Lord, as an end in itself, is the eternal wealth referred to there. Take the case of Lakṣmaṇa who, at his volition, accompanied Śrī Rāma into exile. What wealth did the younger carry with him? With but a spade and basket in hand, the insignia of his incessant toil in his unremitting service unto the Divine Couple, he is glorified as ‘*Lakṣmaṇo Lakṣmi sampannaḥ*. Again, literally hounded out by Rāvana, Vibhīṣaṇa, still anchored in mid-air, sought asylum in Rāma's camp. Vibhīṣaṇa's admission into Rāma's camp was hotly debated and, in this unenviable position, when Vibhīṣaṇa was neither here nor there, he was referred to, as ‘*antarkṣagatas śrīmān*’. What was the wealth in him then to be called ‘Śrīmān’ (the wealthy)? It was his robust conviction that he shall not get back to the evil-minded Rākṣasas, even if he were to be denied admission in Rāma's camp! And then, Gajendra, the elephant, in dire distress, was referred to as ‘*Satu nāgavaraḥ Śrīmān*’, the wealth, in this case, being the elephant's singleminded devotion to the Lord, utterly unmindful of his own grim struggle with the crocodile. The elephant's one and only objective was to offer the lotus flower in his trunk to the Lord, while it was still fresh. It is such singleminded devotion to the Lord that is real wealth, everlasting.

Deeply grieved over his separation from Śrī Rāma, during the long years of the latter’s exile, Bharata would say that his grief would vanish only when Rāma wore
the regal crow (as Śesi—Master) and he wore, the crown of service unto Him (as Śega—the servant).

*Whatever be their descent*: Here, it may be added, whatever be the extent of their learning, manner of occupation etc.

*In the births to come*. Here, the Ālvār declares that he is the vassal of the Lord’s devotees, rather than of the Lord. The Ālvār who had earlier blamed the Lord for taking him through a gruesome succession of births, would now willingly court any number of future births out of sheer love of serving the Lord’s devotees in all those births.

āḷum paramaṇai, kaṇṇaṇai, āḷip pirāṅ-taṅṅai, tōḷum ēr nāṅku, uṭait tū maṇi vaṇṇaṇ emmāṅ-taṅṅai, tāḷum tāṭak kaiyum kūppip paṇiyum avar kaṇṭīr nāḷum pigappiṭāṭoru emmai āḷuṭai nāṭarē. (III–7–2)

**Translation**

They are the Masters that enslave me daily and life after life,  
Who do with joined palms and legs, prostrate  
Unto Kaṇṇaṇ, the Lord Supreme, the Benefactor great,  
Holding the discus, of the hue of blue gem immaculate,  
With peerless shoulders four, the reigning Chief.

**Notes**

(i) The Ālvār affirms that those that are swayed by the Lord’s exquisite charm, in all its details, are his perennial masters.

(ii) *Reigning Chief*: If the Lord’s devotees are the Ālvār’s masters, how could the Lord be called the reigning Chief? This prima facie contradiction is resolved by holding that the Lord’s reign over His subjects is directed towards reclaiming them and enlisting them in the service of His devotees. Right in the opening line of the first of his ten scintillating stanzas, Tiruppān Ālvār depicts this special feature of the Lord.
(iii) **Lord Kaṇṭha**: By His devoted service unto His elder brother Balarāma, a reincarnation of Ādiśeṣa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has demonstrated the importance of service unto devotees.

(iv) **The Shoulders four**: The Lord doles out the four 'Puruṣārtas', the ultimate values, as elected by the votaries, with His four arms, one for each. Once, when Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭārak happened to be in Tīrūkkoṭṭiyūr, he was asked by Anantājvāp whether the Lord is seen in His Celestium (Heaven-Parama pada) with two arms or four arms. Bhaṭṭārya replied that the 'Ekāyanas' (Madhvās) hold that the Lord has only two arms while others say four. In the temple at Śṛḍhaṇḍam, the stationary image of Lord Rāgaṇātha, reclining on the Serpent-bed, in the Sanctum Sanctorum (Known as Periya Perumāl) is seen by us, with the naked eye, as having only two arms while those, with spiritual vision, see four arms and even more. Tiruppaṇaḷṉār has seen Lord Rāgaṇātha with four arms, as set forth in his hymns (Amalaṇātipirān-7). Maṇḍodari, wife of Rāvaṇa, saw the ultra-mundane form in Śrī Rāma, standing beside her fallen husband and described the former as the one beyond matter, the Sustainer, wielding the Conch, Discus and Mace. Šrī Rāma was generally seen only with two arms; Hanumān, however, alluded to many arms (bhāhavah, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa IV-3-14). Kṛṣṇa was seen by Vasudeva and Devakī, with four arms, right at birth, and He concealed the two extra arms, as desired by His revered father. And then, on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra, Arjuna prayed that he be allowed to see Kṛṣṇa back again with four arms instead of the thousands of arms he saw in His universal Form (Viśvarūpa) a little while ago (Bhagavad Gītā XI-46). In Rāmāyaṇa, Uttara Kāṇḍa 8-26, Sage Agastya addressed Śrī Rāma, as. "Thou art Nārāyaṇa, the ancient, the four-armed". Nevertheless, one need not make a fetish of this, as four-handedness need not necessarily be a special sign of Divinity to wrest
allegiance from mankind. (It is learnt that a four-handed human form is kept embalmed in Fyzabad museum near Ayodhyā. Would it become worthy of worship? No, not at all.)

(v) Prostrate with joined legs and palms

*Joined legs* indicate immobility, ‘*ananyagatitva*’, or non-dependence on others—'nowhere else to go', in plain language.

‘*Joined palms*’ devote ‘Ākiñcanya’ or absence of any merit in the supplicant, attracting the Lord’s grace; in other words, it is only the Lord’s ‘*nirhetuka kṛpā*’, spontaneous or gratuitous grace that can deliver the goods.

nātaṇai, ṅālamum vāṇamum ēttum naṟuṁ tuḷāypp
pōtaṇai, poṅ neṭum cakkarattu entai pirāṇ-taṇai,
pātam paniya vallāraip pāṇiyumavar kaṇṭir
ōttum piṟappītāṭōgu emmai āḷuṭaḷyārkaḷē. (III–7–3)

Translation

Birth after birth, they my masters shall be,
Who prostrate at the feet of my Liege-Lord,
Holding the golden Discus grand and wearing a garland of tuḷaći
Of fragrance sweet, by those in Heaven and Earth adored.

Notes

(1) The Āḷvār declares that those God-lovers, who are lost in enjoyment of the Lord’s sinewy shoulders and the lovely tuḷaći garland adorning them, are his perpetual masters.

As a matter of fact, this fascinating combination of shoulder and garland attracts the denizens of Heaven and Earth alike. Even those who are out to denigrate God-head, get enthralled by the charming tuḷaći garland on the Divine person. Where even the tuḷaći garland fails to work, the effulgent Discus, held attractively by the Lord, has an irresistible appeal.
(ii) The following anecdote will show how difficult it is for us to bring ourselves to adore men who, for all outward appearances, are just like other men, the common run, eating and sleeping. To discover saintliness lying hidden in the Saints, calls for more than ordinary ken of perception in the on-looker.

Śrī Pillai Āttān, occupant of a spiritual gadi, in apostolic succession, sought from the great Naṅciyar, instructions in ‘Dramiḍopaniṣad’ (Tiruvāymoḷi). His Holiness, however, politely suggested that Śrī Āttān could as well go to Nampillai (Naṅciyar’s disciple) and enjoy a sumptuous repast at his hands. Śrī Āttān, however, demurred, on the ground that he may have to prostrate unto Nampillai in that case. Naṅciyar put Śrī Āttān at ease, by sending for Nampillai and ordering him to give Śrī Āttān a course of instructions without subjecting the latter to ceremonious formalities. And so, the instructions went on, but when the present decad stressing the importance of veneration of Godly men even more than God, came up, Śrī Āttān turned penitent and begged of Nampillai that he (Āttān) be treated thenceforward as a humble disciple and permitted to make due obeisance to the learned instructor. But Nampillai declined to act otherwise than as commanded earlier by his Master (Naṅciyar) and would not, therefore, be a party to this change-over on the part of Śrī Āttān. The remorseful Āttān sought the intervention of Naṅciyar and submitted that he (Āttān) be treated thenceforward as a humble disciple, now that he has come to know of the worthiness of Godly men, the living Saints.

There is yet another anecdote to illustrate that brotherhood among men is a virtue higher than even Fatherhood of God. Two favourite disciples of Naṅciyar, Virappillai and Pālikai vālippillai, once set out on a travel on friendly terms. But when some misunderstanding arose between them they gave up talking to each other. When Naṅciyar came to know of this, he admonished them, saying: “My Sons! it is
difficult to comprehend one brother being offended against another. It only shows that wealth and lust, the cause of hate and anger, have not been eschewed yet or things of God have not been felt of great worth”. This reprimand made them feel truly repentant and restored their former amity.

utai ärnta åtaiyān, kaṇṭikaiyān, utai nāpiṇān,
puṭai är pōṇ-nūliṇān, pōṇ muṭiyan, maṟṟum palkalōn
naṭaiyā utait tirunāraṇaṇ tōṇṭar tōṇṭar kaṇṭir
iṭai är piqupītaitōṟu emakkē em perumakkalē. (III-7-4)

Translation
In every birth, without exception, they are unto us
Far superior indeed, the vassals of the vassals
Of Tiru Nāraṇaṇ, of charm exquisite, smartly clad
And adorned by many a jewel, the waist band gold,
Necklace, Sacred thread, the crown delectable
And many more, unto Him befitting and natural.

Note
Here the Āḻvār avers that the vassals of the vassals of the Lord, lost in admiration of His natural beauty, imparting special lustre to the numerous jewels on His person, each one of which, from head to foot, steals the hearts of the beholders, are any day superior to him not only in this birth but in all future births also.

perumakkal uḷḷavar-tam perumāṇaṇ, amararkaṭku
arumai oḷiya aṟṟu är amtu ūṭṭiya appaṇai,
perumai pitaṟṟa vallāraip pitaṟṟumavar kaṇṭir
varumaiyum immaiyum nammai aḷikkum pirākkalē. (III-7-5)

Translation
They that do with ecstatic incoherence utter
The glory great of the Sire who once fed in full
The Devas with ambrosia, Chief of the exalted Celestials.
Are indeed our saviours grand, both here and hereafter.
Notes

(i) Chief of the exalted Celestials: The Nityasūrīs (ever free angels in heaven) stand on a high pedestal of their own and the Lord, as their Chief, is higher than the highest.

(ii) The Devas sought from the Lord the ambrosia in order to become deathless. No doubt, the Lord felt very much that the Devas should have been so short-sighted and under-evolved as to seek from Him a mere extract from the ocean instead of straightaway coveting Him, the insatiable Nectar, the inexhaustible fountain of bliss. And yet, it was some consolation for Him that they didn’t seek this favour, inferior though, from any one else. How generous of Him indeed that He took all the trouble to churn the ocean and get them what they wanted! Those that are lost in admiration of the great souls who recognise and adore this act of grace on the part of the Lord, are deemed by the Ājvār as his benefactors, the masters, who alone can save him, here and hereafter in this land by keeping him aloof from the Ungodly and, in the yonder heaven, by putting him on to the eternal service of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa.

Translation

They shall my saviours be and govern
In all my births, without break, that do enshrine
In their hearts, Kaṇṭaan, the donor superfine,
Of radiant form, like unto the blue gem immaculate,
Who does the discus wield and tulāci garland sport,
With fragrance full, shedding honey in plenty.
Notes

(i) *Donor superfine*: The Lord is not merely the Donor Supreme but also the Donor Superfine in that He gifts Himself away as He did during His Avatâra as Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) *The (beneficent) discus*: The Lord would not only give of Himself to His devotees but also give them His extraordinary weapons as He did in the case of King Ambaraśa. The Lord’s alert discus served as the King’s bodyguard and went in hot pursuit of sage Durvâsa.

(iii) No doubt, the Ālvâr courted, in the opening song of this decade, future births, if he could thereby serve the Lord’s devotees without break but now, the protection extended by them unto him, referred to in this song, would be by way of safeguarding him against the pitfalls leading to rebirth.

capma eapmântaram kâttu, atiyârkalai kônînîpoy, 
tapmai pêruttit tan-tâînakkil kollum appanâi, 
togmai pitaṟṟa vâllaip pitâṟṟumavar kântîr 
nâmâi pêruttu emmai nâl uyyakkoḷkînga namparē.

(III–7–7)

Translation

They are, you see, our saviours eternal, we can for our salvation Safely depend, that laud in profusion those vociferous In the praise of the Lord’s grace spontaneous, That cuts out His devotees’ cycle of births and does in them induce Knowledge true, so to enlist them in eternal service at His feet in heaven.

Note

The Ālvâr has been spot-lighting the Lord’s magnanimity in the last two songs, and he continues to dwell on the Lord’s generosity in this song also, by extolling those lost in admiration of this great trait of the Lord. It is the Lord’s extreme generosity that cuts out an otherwise interminable cycle of births and rebirths through which one’s ethical accounts, hopelessly unbalanced as they are,
have to be settled with the ever-increasing risk of losing merit faster than acquiring it.

nampanai, ñâlam pâitavâpanai, tiru márrapanai,
umpar ulakigil yârkkum upavru ariyâñ-tâppai,
kumpi narakarkâl ëttuvârelum, avar kanâññır
em pal pirappitaitôru em tojukulam tânkâññë.  (III–7–8)

Translation
Even if they be cruel sinners fit for dastardly hell,
They are the apostles, revered in my births, one and all,
That sing the glory of the Lord, our haven safe,
On whose chest ' Tiru ' (Lakṣmi) does inseparably stay,
Who did the universe ordain but is beyond the comprehension
Of one and all, even those in the upper region.

Note
The Ājvâr avers that those adoring the blissful conjunction of the Lord and the Divine Mother, are his spiritual mentors for generations, although they might be cruel sinners either fit to be condemned to the dastardly abyss, known as 'Kumbhipákm', or even those actually drudging there. This only shows the extreme lengths to which the Ājvâr is prepared to go in his adoration of the Lord's devotees, and it is, therefore, needless to subject it to closer scrutiny and raise doubts as to how the Ājvâr could see, from where he was, those people serving in the hell and the prospects of those suffering in hell contemplating the glory of the Lord and reciting His names and so on.

kulam tânku câtukañ nalilum kil ijintu, ettâññai
nalam-tân ilâta canţâla canţâlarkal äkîlum,
valam tânku cakkarattu anñal manivânamkaru ál engu ul-
kâlantâñr âtiyâr-tam âtiyâr em âtiñàññë.  (III–7–9)

Translation
They are my masters who the vassals are of the vassals
Of those that, as His loving servitors, do mingle
With the Lord of sapphire hue, holding the discus bright,
In right hand, albeit they are born in a down-trodden Caste, 
Worse than the Caṇṭāla with little or no repute.

Notes

(i) The servants of the servants of those devotees, enthralled by 
the bewitching beauty of the Lord holding the charming 
discus in hand, are said to be the Ālvār’s masters, even 
though the said devotees are otherwise terribly depraved, 
and worse than the ‘Caṇṭāla’, outside the Ken of the four 
prescribed, time-honoured castes. While devotion to the 
Lord’s devotees is the Key-note of this song, there is an 
unfortunate tendency on the part of the superficial modern 
critics, with a degree of perversion, to go by the letter of the 
song rather than the underlying spirit. These unrelenting 
critics question the bonafides of those who reverently chant 
‘Tiruvāyvālō’ and yet do not put into practice the 
principles, the Ālvār stood for and expounded in his works, 
e.g. this crucial song.

(ii) Stanzas, such as this one, would, however, appear to spot-light 
the greatness of such highly evolved spiritual personali-
ties as Tirumaḷicai Ālvār, Tiruppāṇālvār, Nampātvān, 
either born as outcastes or brought up by outcastes, who 
yet belong to a world of their own and a new denomination 
known as ‘The clan of God’s servants’, which has nothing 
to do with the conventional caste-system and classification. 
Of course, devotion has to be appreciated and adored 
wherever it is discerned, irrespective of considerations 
of caste and things of that sort. This love and reference for 
devotees cannot, however, override the prescribed norms 
of conduct, appropriate to one’s caste and station in life. 
This song should not, therefore, be misconstrued as con-
ferring unbridled authority for hammering down and 
brushing aside the mandates of the Śāstras, as restated by 
Lord Kṛṣṇa in His ‘Song Celestial’—(Bhagavad Gītā, 
XVI-24).

aṭṭī āṁta vaiyam uṇṭu, āḷḷai aṅṇavacameyyum 
pāṭi yātum il kulavippaṭi entai pirāṇ-taṇakkku 
aṭiyyār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyyār aṭiyār-tamakkku 
aṭiyyār aṭiyyār-tam aṭiyyār aṭiyyāṭkalē. (III-7-10)
Translation

Vassals we are of the last in the chain
Of the vassals of the devotees of our Liege-Lord
Who as mere babe peerless did recline
On a fig-leaf, holding the seven worlds,
In His stomach, which earlier He did span.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār affirms that he is the vassal unto those that stand last in the chain of the Lord’s devotees, sure and steadfast, lost in admiration of His once spanning all the worlds in just three strides and then sustaining, in His stomach, all the worlds, during the period of deluge.

(ii) The worlds devoured by the Lord during the period of deluge are just those measured by Him earlier and thus come up to His feet only, that is, they are no more than the size of His feet.

(iii) A mere babe lying on a fig-leaf, floating on the huge expanse of water, containing within its stomach all the world, is indeed a wonderful achievement, beyond imagination, which the Supreme Lord is capable of, the unique blending of the incompatibles. Attracting the Āḻvār by this means, He becomes his Liege-Lord and, in the process, the Āḻvār wants to be at the bottom-most rung of His devotees, even as He is the top-most, with none equal to or above Him. (Mukunda mālā, śloka 27).

(iv) Here is an important observation of Nampillai, which has to be studied in continuation of the notes below stanza 9 of this decad.

“Even if we are not able to translate into practice this lofty sentiment of the Āḻvār for obvious reasons, it will suffice if we delightfully contemplate on it and are thus aware that the Āḻvār thought on these lines”.
Third Centum (III-8) 271

ati ñoku nūrtivar viya, ari aivarkku arulceyta
nețiynată teŋ kurukûrc çaṭaköpaŋ kuṟṟēvalkal
ati ārnta ayirattul ivai pattu avan tonțarmel
muṭivu ārak kaṛkikil caṃmam ceyyāmai muṭiyumē. (III-7-11)

Translation

Those that learn, in right earnest, these songs ten,
Which expound the glory great of the Godly men,
Out of the chaste and elegant thousand of Caṭakōpaŋ
Of Teŋkurukûr, composed in a spirit of dedication
Unto the Lord who on the five (Pāṇḍavas) shed His grace
And put an end to the hundred (cousins) viciously prosperous,
Will have their cycle of births brought to a close.

Notes

(i) This end-stanza reveals the benefit accruing to those
learning this decad without skipping over any stanza.
They will not have to be reborn and caught up in the
unenviable meshes of worldly life militating against
service unto the Lord’s devotees.

(ii) The Kauravas’ advancement was at the expense of their
five cousins, the Pāṇḍavas, who were, however, very
dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The vicious hundred naturally
met their doom.

Third Centum—Eighth Decad (III-8)
(Muṭiyāṇē)

Preamble

While trying to sustain himself by recounting the glory of the
Bhāgavatas (Lord’s devotees), as in the last decad, the Lord’s
glorious traits and wondrous deeds were also dwelt upon, side by
side, in each stanza of that decad, in view of the irresistible appeal
of the latter. It may also be recalled that, in III-6-10 we could
notice the Ālvār’s deep anxiety to behold the Lord’s pair of legs
dangling down the chariot on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra. And
now, the other sense-organs of the Ālvār compete with the eyes
In the enjoyment of God. Each one of the Ājvae’s senses, limbs and faculties, would appear to have acquired intelligence, the stature of sentient beings, on a par with the Ājvēr’s soul, with the result that there is the competitive exuberance on the part of the Ājvār and his anatomical parts, come to life and capacitated for independent action, to get at the Lord individually and in the quickest possible manner and time. And, what is even more exciting is, each faculty aspires to transcend its functional limitations, resulting in an overlapping of functions as well. The hands would want to praise the Lord, the ears would long to drink deep of His nectarine charm, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth. Each sense yearning for the delight experienced by the other senses, is a very extraordinary state of affairs indeed! Does not the snake which does not have ears, as such, see and hear through the eyes only, the eyes performing the dual function of seeing and hearing, though not simultaneously? Again, the up-grading of the senses and limbs to the stature of sentient beings can only be compared to the Ājvēr being described, now and then, as melting down or getting dried up or cut into pieces, although the soul is beyond the mischief of the elements, cannot be burnt out by fire or drenched by water, or dried up by air or cleaved by weapons—vide Bhagavad Gītā II-23 and 24.

The Ājvēr’s plight, in this decad, is like that of the members of a family in a famine-stricken area, who try to snatch the little food that is available from each other’s mouth, each one of them, driven to extreme hunger, being mindful of his or her own appeasement. And here, the Ājvēr’s senses, limbs and other faculties are vying with him, like unto the members of the famished family in question, for the appeasement of their own God-hunger and God-thirst. The Saint’s yearning for the Lord’s beatific vision is of such great depth that every moment of separation from the Beloved seems an age. His cry of anguish in this decad, melting even stony hearts has to be appreciated against this backround.

muṭiyāṇē! mūvulakum toḻutu ēttum cir aṭiyāṇē! āḷ kaṭalak kaṭaṁtāy! puḻ-ūr koṭiyāṇē! koṇṭal vannā! anṭattu umparil netiyāṇē! enṟu kiṭakkum-en neḿcame.

(III-8-1)
Translation

My mind thaws down, calling you, my Lord!
As wearer of the crown regal, possessor
Of the feet by all the three worlds adored,
Churner of the deep sea, having on Your banner
The bird (Garuḍa), that also conveys You, cloud-hued.
Super-eminent among heaven's denizens and so on.

Note

The Āḻvār longs for the physical presence of the Lord whose resplendent crown proclaims His overlordship of the entire universe. Knowing full well that He can't be seen unless He deigns to come and present Himself, the Āḻvār's mind is, all the same, very much agitated, meditating on the various features and aspects of the Lord. The dovetailing of thoughts, as presented in this song, is indeed very interesting. Right from the crown on the Lord's head proclaiming His sovereignty, the Āḻvār comes down to His lovely pair of feet, fit to be adored by one and all, high and low, good and bad, without distinction. Unto those who adore His feet the Lord gives His whole body, in between, with which He performs many wonderful, breath-taking deeds for their sake. And for those, who are unable to come and worship His feet, He moves about on His unique vehicle, namely winged-bird, Garuḍa, the very embodiment of the Vedas and grants them 'darśan'. The blue-hued Lord, on His golden mount, the Garuḍa, affords a pleasant and attractive contrast in colours and the whole contour is exhilarating. Garuḍa, holding in his palms the feet of the Lord, proclaims the supremacy of the Lord, setting at naught the doubts of the Vedic scholars, confounded by the conflicting texts, some propounding the supremacy of Brahmā, the four-headed, some pointing to the supremacy of Śiva, a third set proclaiming the overlordship of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa and so on. These conflicting claims could, no doubt, be resolved by a careful study and Śrīman Nārāyaṇa's supremacy established, beyond doubt. But here is Garuḍa, with the Lord mounted on his shoulders and holding in his
palms His feet, the sole Refuge of one and all, simplifying our job and driving home the Lord’s supremacy.

neñcamē nil nakar āka irunta eñ
taṅcaṇē! tan ilaṅkaikku irayaic cērpa
naṅcaṇē! nālam kolvāṅ kuṟal ākiya
vaṅcaṇē! eṇnum eppōtum-eṇ vācakamē. (III-8-2)

Translation
My tongue always keeps uttering Your names, my Lord!
As my sole Refuge, in my mind firmly lodged,
As if it were a citadel big, the poison deadly
That destroyed Rāvana, Chief of cool Lāṅkā, the midget
(Vāmana) Who, on the sly, got hold of the worlds(from Bali).

Notes
(i) The Āḷvār’s tongue prays unto the Lord.
   “Sire, even as you have condescended to get into the Āḷvār’s mind, pray, get into me, as well, so that I keep on uttering your names. I do hope the Āḷvār’s mind has no monopolistic hold on you”.

(ii) My sole Refuge: The Āḷvār’s tongue is well aware of the fact that it is the Āḷvār’s mind that has sought refuge in the Lord who, in turn, has come into it and stays there as if it is a huge citadel. And now, the tongue gives expression to this fact, regretting very much that the Earthlings do not address the Lord likewise. The pangs suffered by the Āḷvār are in respect of his separation from the Lord driving him in frantic search of the Lord, seeking the help of even manimate things like mountains and oceans in the process. On the other hand, the pangs undergone by even Rīṣis of the eminence of Vāśiṣṭha and Vyāsa were due to their separation from their sons, as brought out vividly by the Purāṇas.

(iii) Mahābali was not destroyed like Rāvana and the Supreme Lord even went to the former seeking alms, because he had the merit of being a great donor. The Āḷvār’s tongue which began by describing the Lord’s prowess
as Śrī Rāma, is now completely absorbed in the Lord’s diplomacy as Vāmana.

vācakamē ēttā, arul ceyyum vāṇavar-tam
nāyakaṅē! nāl īlam tiṅkaḷaik kōḷ viṭutta
vēy-akam pāl venṇey toṭu unṭa ṛp-āyār
tāyavaṅē! ēṟṟu taṭaṟum-eṇ kaikaḷē. (III–8–3)

Translation

My hands grope for you, the Celestials’ overlord,
The one by my tongue solely lauded,
Who, as the cow-herd (Krṣṇa) ate butter sweet,
Stolen from the houses, bamboo-built,
In the beam of light by your teeth lit,
Sparkling like the rising Moon bright.

Notes

(i) The hands longing to experience the bliss, hitherto enjoyed solely by the tongue, addressed the Lord: “Oh, Lord of the Celestials! the Ājvār’s tongue praises you as well as the Celestials do. Why has this special favour been extended by you to the tongue alone and what is it that precludes you from making us also taste that bliss?”

(ii) Krṣṇa, the dark lad, broke into the dark interior of the houses built of bamboo in the pastoral village of Gokula, to steal the butter stored up in huge pots. Groping His way through in the dark, when He felt, by the touch of His hands, the presence of the pots, He would feel gratified and smile. His pearl-white teeth, sparkling with the extra-brilliance of the full Moon just released from an eclipse, would then illumine the place, helping Him to get at the butter and eat it up.

kaikaḷāḷ ārat toḷutu toḷutu uṇṇai
vaikalum māttiraip pōtum ōr viṭu inṟi,
pai kol pāmpu ēṟī uṟai paraṅē! uṇṇai
meykollak kāṇa virumpum-eṇ kaikaḷē. (III–8–4)
Translation

Oh, Supreme Lord, resting on hooded Serpent,
My eyes long for the pleasure of my hands
Which have their fill of salutation unto you and besides
Wish to behold truly your form exquisite, with no respite.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār’s eyes pine for the experience of the hands besides their own. They long to enjoy the bliss of worshipping the Lord, thus performing the function of the hands. They also wish to truly (physically) behold His sweet Form, as distinguished from mere mental perception so that He can be touched and embraced.

(ii) That portion of this stanza (original) which deals with the intense worship of the Lord by the hands (repeatedly), is construed by a section of Śrī Vaishnavas as stressing the necessity for worshipping the Lord several times over, as against the creed of many others, to prostrate, at a time, only once. The latter avoid the overtone or semblance of self-effort for the propitiation of the Lord, which militates against the basic principle of ‘Prapatti’ or loving surrender to the Lord’s sweet grace. References to this very topic of worship elsewhere in ‘Tiruvāymoli’ (II-10-9 and IX-3-9), go to reinforce the latter code of discipline.

Translation

My ears long to see Vāmana (the Lord),
Who (from Bali) got hold of the land,
Moving on His merry mount, (Garuḍa)
And intently hear the sweet sound,
Of the tuneful wings of that bird.
Notes

(i) The Ālvār’s ears long both to see and hear and, therefore, 
drew up a picture, as above. The Lord moving on 
His merry mount, Garuḍa, must be seen by the ears 
which should also listen to the sweet strains emanating 
from the wings of that angelic bird, in flight, like unto 
the tuneful Sāma Veda (Bṛhat and Rantra Sāma).

(ii) As Vāmana or Tīvrikrama, the Lord did not press into 
service His standing vehicle, Garuḍa and yet, what is 
tended to convey here is that the Lord would fly, 
here and there, to reclaim His straying possessions.

(iii) Intently hear: Hearing the music of the wings of Garuḍa 
to the exclusion of everything else, not even the Lord 
or His mount. Even as the Ālvār is now seen engrossed 
in the music of the wings of Garuḍa, Rukmiṇī was 
thrilled and enraptured by the sound from Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s 
conch (Pāñcajanya), at the crucial moment near 
about the Devī’s temple where she was anxiously 
awaiting Him, the great Rescuer. And then, when 
Śitā was tortured into believing that Rāma was dead. 
Rāvaṇa holding out before her the severed head of an 
illusory Rāma the heartening sound came to her from 
Śrī Rāma’s bow, right from the sea-shore, and enabled 
er her to see through the dirty game of Rāvaṇa.

cēvikālāl āra niṣ kīrttik kapi ennum 
kavikaḷe kālap paṅ-ṭēṅ uraippat tūṟṟu, 
puviyinmēl poṅ netum cakkarattu unṉaiyē 
avivu inṟī atarikkum-ēṇatu āviyē. (III–8–6)

Translation

My spirit yearns to have its ears filled, oh Lord, 
With songs that do your glory laud. 
Sweet as fruits soaked in the honey of tunes appropriate 
And enjoy on Earth with no respite, 
Your form effulgent, wielding the discus large and exquisite.
Notes

(i) The Äljvär's spirit either wants to grow ears or be transformed into ears to feast sumptuously on the songs singing the great glory of the Lord, the delicious fruits rendered sweeter, soaked and saturated with honey. If the songs are like unto fruits the tunes in which they are sung, sweeten them like honey.

(ii) Hearing such melodies as Sāma Veda and beholding the Lord with His effulgent discus are experiences pertaining to Heaven and yet, the Äljvär aspires for them, right here, on Earth.

āviyē! ār amutē! ēnēi āluṭait
tūvi am pul utāiyāy! cuṭar nēmiyāy!
pāviyēn neficam pulampap palakālum
kūviyum kāṇappere pérd-ūpa kōlamē.

(III-8-7)

Translation

You are my very Soul, the nectar dear,
(Garuḍa), the bird with lovely plumes, my redeemer,
Is your glorious mount, You are the wielder
Of the discus resplendent, Your form exquisite,
This sinner couldn't behold, as yet,
Tho' many a time, my anguished mind called you out.

Notes

(i) From this stanza onwards, the Äljvär narrates his own woes and wants. Hitherto, those of his senses were described. This is like the king narrating the miseries of his subjects first and then talking about his own.

(ii) It is difficult to live apart from one's life. The Lord is not only dear to the Äljvär like his own life but is also extremely delicious, the rare Nectar.

(iii) Once the mind is bent towards God and steeped in enjoying Him, there is no question of the woes still sticking on. Perhaps such benefits accruing to other minds are denied to the Äljvär's mind because of his heavy
sins, according to him. While it would suffice if He is called but once, in this case, by calling Him out repeatedly, the Āḻvār has contravened his essential nature (Svarūpa) and yet, the Lord has not materialised, a double loss indeed!

kōlamē! tāmaraik kaṇṇatu ḍr aṇcaṇa
nilamē! niṟṟu enaṟu āviyar ikirṟa
cilamē! cenṟu cellātaṇa muṇ nilām-
kālamē! uppaṉa en nāḷ kaṇṭukolvāṉē?

Translation

Being lotus-eyed, with the unique complexion
Of a dark-blue mountain,
You are sheer beauty, Oh, Lord, Your loving condescension
Has my soul ensnared; Time you do ordain,
Past, present and future, you when can I attain?

Notes

(i) To the complaint made by the Āḻvār in the preceding song regarding the non-appearance of the Lord despite repeated calls, the Lord would appear to have observed that the Āḻvār should wait till the appropriate time for the bestowal of His grace. But the Āḻvār is quick to point out that ‘Time’ is also at the Lord’s beck and call and He is the sole Controller of ‘Time’, made up of the past, the present and the future and that the plea of time-factor cannot, therefore, hold water.

(ii) The Lord is not merely beautiful but is beauty itself. And it is not beauty alone but beauty and goodness combined. It is the persevering goodness on the part of the Lord that has enabled the Āḻvār to cling to Him, overcoming his natural tendency to run away from Him, for fear of defiling Him.

(iii) *When can I attain you?* The Āḻvār prays to the Lord to specify the point of time at which he can behold and enjoy His physical presence, even as Śrī Rāma told Bharata that, on the completion of fourteen years, they will get together again.
Translation

Oh Lord, flying the bird (Garuḍa)!
You did, on the sly, from Māvali demand
Three strides of land;
Kaśīcana's plans treacherous you foiled,
Vānapī's mental attitude you dispelled
And lopped his arms thousand;
When do I get unto you bound?

Notes

(i) Indra, Chief of the Devas was dispossessed of his Kingdom by Māvali (Mahā Bali), the Asura Chief. The former prayed to Lord Viṣṇu for the restoration of the lost Kingdom. But then, Mahā Bali was a generous donor, although he belonged to the Asura clan. So, the Lord had to adopt the peculiar method of seeking alms from Bali for getting back the lost domain. Not being conversant with the art of begging, the Lord, came down as Vāmana, the little lad, addressed Bali, by name, instead of the adulatory form of address, usually resorted to, by seasoned beggars. Bali didn’t mind it so much, seeing that the supplicant was but a lad, but when the demand, made by the lad, was just three paces of land, the pompous donor didn’t take it seriously. Looking at the indifference of Bali to the seemingly paltry demand, Vāmanamūrti reiterated His demand and compelled Bali’s attention.

(ii) Kaśīcana (Kamsa) kept himself in the background and hit upon many a treacherous plan to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The felon of an uncle would not indulge in a frontal attack on Kṛṣṇa, the nephew, and was hoping that one or the other of the several agencies energised by him would be able to kill Kṛṣṇa, so that he (Kamsa) might bemoan, in public, the loss of his nephew.
Alas! all his plans were thwarted by the Divine Lad, who vanquished the formidable array of His opponents and finally slew Kamsa himself.

(iii) Vāṇap (Bāṇāsura), an avowed enemy of Lord Viṣṇu, was, however, an ardent votary of minor deities. The Lord, appeared before him, mounted on Garuḍa, disabused him (Bāṇāsura) of his heretical notion of God-head and revealed His supremacy, chopping off his thousand arms, like felling trees in the forest. See also detailed notes under III-10-4.

poruntiya mā marutinp ītai pōya em peruntakāy! uṇ kājāl kāniya pēturru varunti, nāṇ vāeakamālai koṇṭu, uṇṇaiyē iruntuiruntu ettānai kālam pulampuvagē? (III-8-10)

Translation

My bounteous Lord, the ‘ maruta ’ trees huge, You broke, Crawling in between; how long shall I cry out, without break, Unto you, words of anguish, flowing like a wreath, Eager in the extreme to behold your lovely feet!

Note

Sage Nārada saw Nalakūpar and Maṇiṅgṛva, sons of Kubera, the Deity of Wealth, bathing in the river naked, and cursed them to become mere trees. Tied to a mortar by Queen Yasodha, as a punishment for His many pranks, Kṛṣṇa crawled on and hit the trees in question. The trees fell down and broke, releasing the regenerated Gandharvas from within. Sage Parāśara, who chronicled this episode in his Viṣṇupurāṇa, admired Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus eyes, in this context. The Ālvār’s mind is, however, steeped, as usual, in the feet of the crawling Lad.

pulampu cīrp pūmi alanta perumāṇai nalam koḻ cīr naṇ kurukūrc caṭakopapaṇ col valam koṇṭa āyirattuḷ ivaiyum or pattu ilaṅku vāḍ yāvarum ēruvar congālē. (III-8-11)
Translation

Those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand of great literary excellence,
Composed by the richly endowed Kurukār Caṭakōpaṇ,
In adoration of the munificent Lord who spanned the Universe,
Will, one and all, ascend the resplendent heaven.

Note

As the Āḻvār aspired for heavenly bliss in this decad those
that recite these ten stanzas are also assured of their ascent
to heaven.

Third Centum—Ninth Decad (III-9)
(Connāl Virōtam)

Preamble

(1) Among the myriads of the Lord's Creatures the human
form is a rare gift of the Lord. Even so, the human form, thus
dowered, has to be free from physical and mental handicaps.
Even then, acquisition of a high degree of learning is rare and
rarer still is the capacity for writing Verses. And then again,
this extremely rare gift of verse-making has to be put to proper
use but, more often than not, this talent is prostituted for the
poet's selfish ends, by indulging in praise of the petty humans,
as, for example, the Sanskrit work, entitled 'Pratāpa Rudrāyam'.
The Āḻvār naturally deplores such misguided poets and advises
them to give up their low base and elevate themselves to their
legitimate stature, as the Lord's bards, soaring high, singing
exclusively His great glory, in beautiful, medillustrical compositions.
The Āḻvār mostly bemoans his separation from the Lord during
those moments when communion with Him gets snapped, for one
reason or another. But now and then, he turns his attention on
the worldlings around, moved by their sad plight. In this decad,
he exhorts the poets to harness their literary excellence to useful
purpose by singing the many auspicious traits and wondrous
deeds of the Lord and not to go the wrong way, eulogising the frail
humans.
(2) The Āḷvār had addressed the worldlings earlier too, but with little success. In stanza 25 of his ‘Periya Tiruvantāti’, he exclaimed, in sheer disgust, that it was impossible to correct the worldlings and that he would, therefore, leave them severely alone, free to do whatever they liked. But then, his fellow-feeling asserts itself; his deep compassion for the suffering humanity wallowing in worldly life, was such that he just could not be indifferent to them and abandon them to their fate. That is why he turned his attention on them, now and then, in the midst of his own mystic experiences, alternating between union with and separation from God. The reasons prompting the Āḷvār to exhort the worldlings are three-fold, namely,

(i) the inter-relationship between Man and God is the same as that between God and the denizens of the high heaven and yet, while those in heaven partake of that perennial bliss emanating from the Lord, all the time, the worldlings are straying away from Him, bogged down in the difficult and miserable terrain of worldly life. The fundamental relationship between them and God, therefore, needs to be impressed upon the worldlings so that they may also be turned towards God;

(ii) The Āḷvār’s inability to stand the sight of the suffering humanity caught up in the unenviable meshes of worldly life and

(iii) The Āḷvār’s tender solicitude for the Earthlings overflows its continent and seeks to sustain itself by reclaiming even those given up by the Almighty Lord, as ‘Incorrigibles’. (See aphorism 203 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

(3) In the realm of God-love, the lovers’ thoughts are always rivetted to Him, their lives are nestled in Him and they sustain themselves through mutual joy and enlightenment derived by talking about His great glory and listening to it by turns. The Āḷvār turns round in search of such enlightened company but he is sadly disappointed. He advises the men around, hoping to bring them round to his way of thinking, but finds that his advice has once again fallen on deaf ears. He, however, ends up this
decad on a complacent note, satisfied with his own role as God's poet, unlike the Earthlings who misuse their poetic talents.

coppāl virōtam itu, ākilum colluvan; kēnmigō!
eṇ nāvil ēp kavi yān oruvarkkum koṭukkilēp-
tegā teṇā enṛu vanṭu mural tiruvēṅkaṭattu
en āṇai, en appan, em perumāṅ ullaṅkāvē. (III–9–1)

Translation

Listen, Ye, men, let me my mind speak out
Although it may not by you be liked;
The songs sweet that from my tongue sprout
Laud none but my Liege-Lord
At Tiruvēṅkaṭam, by humming bees swarmed,
My Benefactor great, majestic like elephant;
Waste I shan't on anyone else my poetic talent.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār does not straightaway say what he intends to preach, in this decad. He begins by stating his own case, namely, that his tongue shall sing exclusively the glory of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the holy Mount and its fauna and flora. The individual Soul is as good as non-existent, when it does not turn its thoughts on God and sustain itself by singing His glory. But, here is an extraordinary situation, the Lord stationing Himself in near-by Tiruvēṅkaṭan in order to sustain Himself through the songs sung by the Āḻvār. There is, therefore, no question of the Āḻvār turning his attention on any one else and, by saying so, he wants the men of the world to emulate him and follow in his foot-steps.

(ii) The Āḻvār is quite aware that calling upon the worldlings to desist from praising the frail humans, the so-called earthly Lords, will not be palatable to these shortsighted folks, as that would mean depriving them of the odds and ends, the petty favours they may otherwise
obtain. Nevertheless, he advises them, unable to stand the sight of their suffering, like unto the advice tendered by

(i) Śītā, the Divine Mother to the demoniac Rāvana, (ii) Prahlāda unto Hiraṇya and the fellow—pupils and (iii) Vibhīṣaṇa unto a terribly hostile Rāvana.

 ulaṅkavē ennī, tāppai orśaka, tāp celvattai
valaṅā matikkum im māṇiṭattaik kavi pāṭi eṇ—
kulaṅ ār kāḷaṇi cūl kāṇaṅ kuṅkuṭi meyṁmaiyē
ulaṅāya entaiyai, entai pemmāṇai olijavē?

Translation

What use is there in composing hymns
In praise of these frail humans
Who think no end of themselves and their wealth ephemeral,
Without lauding my benefactor great, the Lord eternal,
Truly abiding in Kuṅkuṭi, with many a pond and fields fertile?

Notes

(i) The Lord’s wealth and His auspicious traits are unlimited, in dire contrast to the petty wealth possessed, for a short while, by the mortals who still think no end of themselves and their so-called possessions. It provokes the righteous indignation of the Ālvār when he finds people running after the petty men and their equally petty wealth, as good as non-existent, without turning their minds on God (near at hand, full of auspicious traits) and singing His glory.

(ii) (a) What to do: The Lord Who stays in Heaven in His transcendental Form, Who reclines on the milk-ocean in His ‘Vyūha’ aspect, Who incarnated as Śrī Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and so on, who resides in His Iconic Form in Pilgrim centres like Kuṅkuṭi, is alone praiseworthy and, therefore, the few of us gifted with poetical talents should compose hymns singing the Lord’s glory, His countless auspicious
traits and wondrous deeds, cosmic wealth of unlimited dimensions etc.

(b) *What not to do*: Don't debase your poetic talent by composing poems glorifying the insignificant humans, importing merits where there is none and overlooking all their faults although they are too numerous to be ignored. Here is an interesting anecdote: A wealthy man, named, Cōla Brahmāyā, wrote out a commentary on 'Tiruvāymcţi' and gave it to Nāņcyyar for perusal and writing out the Foreword. The Saint did not, however, like to get involved in this, lest he should have to point out the mistakes and incur the displeasure of the glossator. He, therefore, passed it on to his disciple, Nampīḷḷai, who discreetly gave it back to the author after some time, complimenting him, more as a matter of formality, on his close adherence to Saint Nammāḻvār's philosophy. Thereupon, Cōla Brahmāyā felt unduly elated and went even to the extent of rating himself above Nammāḻvār on the ground that, with his superior talents, he was able to write out the commentary in the midst of the multifarious duties his high position demanded of him, while Nammāḻvār had nothing else to do when he composed 'Tiruvāvmcţi'. This brings to the fore the vanity of people who easily lose their heads, the more so, when they are surrounded by sycophants indulging in fulsome flattery.

(iii) *Kuruṇkuṭi*, a pilgrim centre, in the deep south in Tamil Nadu, is also known as 'Vaiṣṇava Vāmana Kṣetra'. It was due to the grace of the Lord enshrined here that Nammāḻvār was born.

 Olivu oṇrū illāta pal ūlītōru ūlī nilāvappōṁ
 vaḷiyait tarum naṅkaḷ vāṇavar lcañai niṟkap pōy,
 kaḷiya mika nalla vāṅ kavi koṇṭu, pulavūṟkāl!
 iliyak karuti, ōr.māṅṭam pāṭal eṉ āvātē?

(III–9–3)
Translation

Ye, men of learning, What do you gain at all
By lauding the petty humans thro' songs superfine,
Shutting your eyes to the glory of the Overlord of Celestials,
Who shall unto you vouchsafe everlasting service divine?

Notes

(i) In his address to the poets of the world, the Ālvār appeals to their good sense and discriminative faculty, to discern for themselves that the Supreme Lord, served and adored by the whole lot of them in the high heavens, the repository of innumerable auspicious qualities, is alone praiseworthy and one can praise Him till the end of time and still cannot exhaust His glory. And to those who adore Him He vouchsafes the eternal bliss of serving Him. Again poetry comes into its own only when it lauds His glory and not when it is profaned by making it the medium for eulogising the worthless humans.

(ii) And now, look at the other picture, dark and dismal. The so-called big men of the Earth these poets run after, get scent of the latter’s approach and run away from them for fear of having to bestow gifts. And then, the poets overshot the mark and make even people very much amenable to flattery suspect that they are either being fooled or the cap does not fit them. In this absurd chase for illusory gains, petty and ephemeral, the poets, far from edifying themselves, descend to the bottom-most depths of depravity, just the opposite of what they intend to achieve, all because they have chosen the wrong theme for their poems notwithstanding their literary excellence.

eḻ ṣāvatu-ettāñai nāḻaiikkup pōtum-pulavirkāl!
māṇṇā maṇiçaraip pāṭip paṭaikkuk perum porul?
mīn ār maṇi muṭi viṇṇavar tāṭaiyai pāṭiṅāl,
taṅṇākavē konṭu, caṅmam ceyyāmaiyum kolḷumē. (III-9-4)
Translation

Ye, poets, how long can the wealth immense you obtain,
By singing the praise of the mortals sustain
You all? better sing the glory of the Lord Supreme,
Wearing the crown resplendent set with gems,
The Devas' Sovereign; He will take you unto His fold,
Besides, you will from further births be freed.

Note

To the question put by the Āḻvār what the Earthly poets would gain by praising the petty humans, the poets say that their patrons do give them gifts, in appreciation of their composition. The Āḻvār, however, questions them again and asks them how long the wealth, they so obtain, will last. As a matter of fact, it takes the scholar quite some time to write out a book or compose a poem in adoration of these mortals and just when he sets out to meet the prospective donor, the shocking news comes of the latter having passed away. Even otherwise, the poets themselves do not live to enjoy the fruits of their labour and if they live long the gifts bestowed on them by the earthly patrons do not last long. Is it not therefore clear that the scholars should shift their base and concentrate on the glory of the Lord of the ‘Nitya Sūrīs’ (Eternal Heroes) in Heaven? The Lord, the one and only Giver, there being no gift beyond Him. will bestow on the hymnographers the choicest gift of eternal service unto Him and cut out the material body to sustain which they went about praising the frail mortals. The Lord has the unique reputation of elevating the subjects on a par with Him—the great giver with no restraint!

Translation

Ye, scholars, that do your tongue defile
In eulogy of the fellow-beings frail
Whose wealth is little better than a mound of filth!
Come and compose songs lauding the one, fully worth
All the praise you bestow on Him,
My Lord flawless, like unto blue gem,
The benefactor great, the donor supreme.

Notes
(i) It is indeed a deplorable exercise in futility to compose songs glorifying the fellow-beings who, far from being praise-worthy, will only have their many drawbacks exposed in the process, like unto the scrutiny of the contents of the dust-bin. Apart from not getting anything tangible and everlasting, from their mis-directed efforts, the poets lose their veracity by indulging in fulsome flattery. Thus, while there is no positive gain, there is indeed a positive loss.

(ii) Flawless: The Lord whose wealth is unlimited, is a flawless Giver, giving in plenty, without expecting anything in return. In His gifts there is no constraint; they are not merely abundant but exuberant.

vammiq pulavir! num mey varuttik kaiceytu uymmiqð;
im man ulakigil celvar ippõtu illai nokkipõm;
num iŋ kavi koŋtu num num iţća teyvam ďtiŋål,
cem miŋ cʊŋ-muṭi eŋ tirumālukkuc cērumē. (III-9-6)

Translation
Come, ye, poets, give up eulogising the humans,
There’s none in this land big, as I now examine,
Wealthy enough to reward you well for your hymns;
* Tis but meet, you shall, by the sweat of your brow, earn;
If you praise the deity of your heart, even then,
Those promises shall reach my Tirumāl, with lustrous crown.

Notes
(i) Come, Ye, poets: The Ālvār beckons the poets in the same way as a person invites persons caught up in a forest fire to come and have a dip in a pond, full of water, cool and deep. The poets, however, submit that they have
to eke out their livelihood by lauding the humans. The Āḻvār emphasises that they should not debase their talents and they might as well earn by physical labour. But then, the poets, not accustomed to bodily exertion, make out that composing poems was the easier of the two and that they should, therefore, be allowed to pursue their normal avocation. The Āḻvār does not, however, mince matters and rightly points out that there is none in this world wealthy enough to reward their talents suitably and that they should not undersell themselves.

(ii) *If you praise the Deity of your heart:* If you say that even if there be no wealthy person among the humans, Indra and other Devas could be considered wealthy and you would, therefore, compose poems singing their glory, well, whatever praise you heap on them will actually reach ‘Tirumāl’ (Lord Viṣṇu), as their Internal Controller, rather, it will be more appropriate to Him, being the one really praiseworthy. And, therefore, you had better praise the Supreme Lord, straightaway, instead of passing through intermediaries.

cērum koṭai pukal ellai tiḻāṇai, ṉr āyiram
pērum utāya pirāṇai allāl, maṅgu yāṅ kilēn-
mārti aṇaiya kai, māl varai okkum tīn tōl ēṅgu,
pārīl ṉr parāiyai paccai pucum poykaḷ pēcavē. (III–9–7)

*Translation*

Utter I Can’t damned white lies that project
The duds on Earth as the cloud munificent
And glorify their shoulders as mountains great,
Praise I can only my gracious Lord of glory unlimited,
Bearing a thousand names, my benefactor great.

*Notes*

(i) In the preceding songs, the Āḻvār addressed the world around but his advice fell on deaf ears, as before. In sheer disgust he withdraws unto himself, satisfied
that he could get back from the earthly poets, uncontaminated, like unto a person clearing a dacoit-infested area, without getting robbed,

(ii) *Thousand names:* Doesn’t mean exactly thousand. Actually, it connotes innumerable names, even as His glory is inexhaustible.

(iii) *White lies.* Abominable lies, without the slightest tinge of truth.

\[\text{vēiyignon malipura\textsuperscript{1} to\textsuperscript{1} pī\textsuperscript{1}ṇaikk\textsuperscript{1} manaḷaṇ\textsuperscript{1}a\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{āya perum puka\textsuperscript{1} jell\textsuperscript{1} ila\textsuperscript{1} ṭaṇa \textsuperscript{1}pāṭipp\textsuperscript{1} ṭ\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{kāyam kālittu, ava\textsuperscript{1} nāl-ṇa\textsuperscript{1}ṇi\textsuperscript{1}kkilp pukum \textsuperscript{1}kātalāṇ,\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{māya ma\textsuperscript{1}ṇica\textsuperscript{1}ra\textsuperscript{1} en colla vallaṇ\textsuperscript{1}ṇ, en vāykoṇṭe? (III–9–8)}\]

**Translation**

With passion deep to sing the limitless glory of the consort Of Piṇṇai with shoulders pretty, for a long, long time And then discard my body and attain His lovely feet, Shall my tongue praise, at all, men in mundane moorings?

**Notes**

(i) Even as the Lord cut out the impediments in the way of attaining the charming Nappiṇṇai, He destroyed all the obstacles confronting the Ḫvār in attaining Him. When, at last, the material body is shaken off, the Ḫvār will acquire non-physical (*ultra*-mundane) body and serve the Lord, staying at His feet all the time. How could such a one ever think of singing the praise of the miserable mortals caught up in the mesh of mundane life?

(ii) The Lord’s glory is unlimited and it can bear any amount of lauding for any length of time. Such being the case, there is hardly any scope for turning one’s attention on others. Even if the Ḫvār be inclined to sing the praise of others, his tongue would not be a party to it.

\[\text{vāykoṇṭu māṇītam pāṭa vanta kaviyēn allēn;\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{āykoṇṭa cīr vallāl ālip pirāṇ enakē uḷaṇ;\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{cāy koṇṭa impmaiyum cātittu, vāpanvar nāṭaiyum\textsuperscript{1}}\]
\[\text{ni kaṇṭukol egru vīṭum tarum nigrunīngē. (III–9–9)}\]
Translation

I am not the poet born to extol the frail humans,
My tongue shall praise only the Lord holding the discus,
The Donor great, full of qualities auspicious,
Who presents Himself here in iconic Form delicious
And grants heavenly bliss in due course.

Notes

(i) The Ālvār will not sing the praise of any but the extremely generous Lord. Although several Sages and Saints including the other Ālvārs have sung the Lord's glory, Namālvār's poems are hymns with a difference, of peerless excellence.

(ii) Although the Ālvār has expressed his abhorrence of this harrowing abode with its evil propensities, in several places, earlier, he does not mind eking out his stay here, because of the Lord's living presence, right here, in His iconic Form, a bliss which compares favourable with, rather excels, heavenly bliss. As a matter of fact, the Ālvār asked the Lord in stanza 53 of 'Periya Tiruvantāṭi' whether the heavenly bliss which He grants, is by-any-means superior to the sweet contemplation of His infinite glory.

(iii) In due course: Nampīḷḷai is of the view that the heavenly bliss is granted by the Lord duly regulated with regard to the capacity of the recipient, just like a person who has been on a month-long fast, breaking the fast by stages before he resumes the normal in-take of food. This theme has already been elaborated upon, in the preamble to I-9. Other commentators have, however, interpreted the corresponding phrase in the original text of this stanza as 'In due course', that is, at the appropriate time.

nirūnīṇgu pala nāḻ uykkum iv uṭal niṅkippōy,
cenruciṇṇu ākīlum kantu, caṃmam kalippāṇ ennī,
ōṅṟōṅṟi ulakam paṭaiṭṭāṅ kavi āyīṅṅkku
engumēntum īṇi māṭroruvar kavi ēṟkumē? (III–9–10)
Translation

Would it be appropriate if I, the poet of the zealous Lord Who with the creation of the worlds goes on, full of hopes That His subjects will some day (sooner or later) give up The age-long shackles of the material body and attain Him, Sang the glory of any one else, any more?

Notes

(i) At a time when the individual soul was lying defunct, just as inert as the non-sentient matter, devoid of the capacity to lament or enjoy, it was the Lord’s boundless grace that put the Souls back on their feet, by endowing them with body, limbs and sense-organs, for eking out their progress. Against this background, the Āljvār queries how the limbs, designed for the Lord’s service, can be put to any other use.

(ii) In the ancient farm of ‘Samsārā’, the Lord, as an indefatigable and time-honoured Cultivator, has been raising crop after crop (world after world) hoping for a richer harvest of ‘Bhakti’ (devotion) every time. There are four different routes taken by the Souls when they depart from the material bodies, namely, (1) garbhagathi, (2) yāmyagathi, (3) Dhūmagathi and (4) Arcirādi gathi. Although the Lord looks forward to the subjects attaining Him through the last-mentioned ascent of ‘Arcirādi gathi’, they are mostly moving away from Him, through the other routes. But that does not deter Him and He gets on with His work of creation, hoping for better results, some day, sooner or later. The Āljvār says that the Lord’s unremitting labour has yielded the desired fruit, at least in his case, inasmuch as he has become the Lord’s poet, singing exclusively His glory.

ēṟkum perum pukal vāṇavar icaṇ kaṇṇap-tanakkku
ēṟkum perum pukal vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpan col
ēṟkum perum pukal ăyirattul ivaiyum ăr pattu
ēṟkum perum pukal colla vallārkukku illai caṅmamē. (III–9–11)
Translation

Those that recite these praiseworthy songs ten,
Out of the praiseworthy thousand uttered
By the praiseworthy Kurukūr Cāṇakārpaṇ,
Adoring Kāṇaṇ, the praiseworthy Lord,
Chief of the Celestials, will from births be freed.

Notes

(i) Those that recite these ten stanzas will not run the risk of being born again and hankering after the earthly patrons, lauding them.

(ii) The Lord is praiseworthy, as the Supreme Master of all the worlds.

The Ālvaṃ is praiseworthy, as the Lord's poet, an appellation which fits him admirably;

Truvāyomoli is praiseworthy, as the 'Dramiḍa Veda', truly reflecting the Lord like a mirror and this decad is praiseworthy, in as much as it enjoins upon every one to preserve, in fact, the essential nature (svarūpa) by singing exclusively the Lord's glory and prohibiting the profanation of the tongue and the poetic talent, in singing the praise of others.

Third Centum—Tenth Decad (III-10)
(Caṇṇam Palapala)

Preamble

The Lord is most eminently suited for laudation by virtue of His innumerable auspicious traits, wondrous deeds and vast possessions. And yet, the worldlings would not listen to the Ālvaṃ's advice, as in the preceding decad, to praise Him exclusively and desist from praising others. The Ālvaṃ, however, felt happy that he could at least get back from them unseathed without following in their footsteps. That spirit of complacency runs through this decad also with an extra gusto. The Ālvaṃ gives expression to the various benefits accrued to him through his total absorption in the Lord, namely, full and complete freedom from (1) want, (2) obstruction in the enjoyment of the Lord, (3) trouble, (4) sorrow, (5) affliction, (6) hindrance, (7) fatigue etc.
Translation

Singing the glory of the benevolent Lord
Who took many a birth, visible unto the eyes naked
Of the worldly, wielding the sword, the mace,
The pounder bright, bow, conch and discus
And slew, flying that bird (Garuḍa), the Asuras and the fiends
Free from wants of any kind am I indeed

Notes

(i) While the Lord incarnates as a matter of grace we are born under compulsion, as the result of our past Karmas (deeds), to eke out our load. But by the Lord's spontaneous grace, the cycle of birth and rebirth will, some day, be brought to a halt in our case, and we won't have any more births, having once reached the Eternal Land (Heaven) whence there is no returning. The Lord, however, goes on taking births assuming the Form most appropriate to His needs. While recounting the Lord's Avatāras (incarnations) carrying about His person the unique weapons of transcendent fame, the Ājvār feels that he is above wants of any kind. As a matter of fact, only those can suffer from wants, who are either devilish (āsurik) or are running after petty men for paltry gains.

(ii) The fiends: Those whose hearts are hard like a rock impervious to the exquisite charm of the Lord's enthralling Form, and who become the targets of His bow and net of His beauty.
Translation

Hindrance there's none for me to sing,
Dance and enjoy my lustrous Lord, full of fame, resting
On the serpent-bed in the milk-ocean, full and broad,
Closing the red-lotus eyes, in deep thoughts absorbed,
Who came down here as Kaññan and destroyed
The fell Asuras, mounted on that bird with beak bloody.

Notes

(i) The Lord reposed on His serpent-bed in the Milk-ocean in ‘Yoga niddhra’, preparatory to His incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa to destroy the evil forces arrayed against the Godly men. The Āḻvār recounting, as he does, the great glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa, says that He has cut out all the impediments for his continual enjoyment of this bliss.

(ii) In deep thoughts absorbed: The Lord’s ‘Yoga niddhra’ referred to in (i) above is not the tāmasik variety of sleep but the highest form of activity, being the activisation of one’s energies inward. Deeply absorbed in finding out the sure solvent for winning over the straying subjects, tossed up in ‘the ocean of samsāra’, and taking them ashore, He visualised the enchanting form which would cast its irresistible spell on the worldlings and wean them. It was this very form He assumed and came down as Kṛṣṇa. In his inimitable diction, Nampillai observes that the Lord’s tongue got parched up due to His deep mental exertion in concerting the ways and means of redeeming the worldlings and just then, this enchanting form passed before His mind’s eye, like the edible camphor relieving the dryness of the tongue in an exhilarating manner.

(iii) That bird with bleak bloody: The blood-stains on the beak of the mighty Garuḍa caused by his slaying the opponents, has not been wiped off, there being hardly any time left for it. Far from presenting an untidy appearance, these stains seem to be decorative.
Third Century (III-10)  

muṭṭu il pal pōkkattu oru taṇi nāyakaṇṭ, mūvulakakku uriya kaṭṭiyai, tēṇai, amutai, naṇ pālai, kaṇiyai, karumpu-taṇṇai, maṭṭu avil taṇ am tuḷāy muṭṭiyāṇai vaṇaṇki, avaṇ-tiṟattu paṭṭa piṇṇai, iṟaiyākillum, yāṇ en maṇattu parivu ilaṇē.

(III-10-3)

Translation

Mental afflictions have I absolutely none, absorbed in my Lord  
Whose cool tulaci garland sheds honey in plenty;  
Full of bliss uninterrupted, He is unto all the worlds  
The peerless Master, delicious like honey and candy,  
Pure milk, fruit, nectar, sugar cane and all that.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār declares that, attracted as he is by the Lord’s extraordinary sweetness and steeped in His service, he is absolutely free from mental afflictions. Even the heavenly bliss he is having right here.

(ii) Of bliss uninterrupted: Unlike the felicities of all the others, including the exalted Devas like Indra, Brahmā and Śiva, which have their limitations both in regard to the quantum and duration, the Lord is a perennial fountain of inexhaustible bliss.

(iii) While the cool, honey-studded tulaci garland brings out the sweetness of the Lord’s Form (Divyamaṅgala vigraha), the other ‘ Rasas ’ (tastes) mentioned in the last two lines denote the highly delicious and delectable ‘ Ātmamsvarūpa ’ or attributes of the Lord.

parivu iri, vaṇaṇak kāṭtum enru, aru paṭṭaiyōtum vantu etirnta, tiripuram ceṟṟavaṇum, makaṇ gum, piṇṇum ankiyum pōr tolaiy, poru ciṟai pūḷai kāṭviyā maṇaṇai, ayaṇai, poqcaṅkarattu ariyinai, accutnai pārī, yāṇ iraiyēnum iṭar ilaṇē. (III-10-4)

Translation

Distraction there’s none whatever for me,  
The votary of the wondrous Lord, Accutap, (the steadfast),  
Ari, whose discus lovely destroys the enemies;
As Kṛṣṇa, mounted on that valiant bird, He made them all eat the dust,
(Siva), the destroyer of Tiripuram, his son and Aṅki, ranged opposite,
As sworn allies of the demoniac Vanaṇ, in a distant past.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār brings out here that the lesser deities can hardly protect their votaries while the Supreme Lord, 'Accuta' sure and steadfast, will never give up His devotees. The Āḻvār, therefore, feels he is in a very happy position, absolutely safe, free from obstruction of any kind.

(ii) Uṣā, the charming daughter of Bānāsura (Vanaṇ, in Tamil) fell madly in love with a very handsome youth during a dream, and insisted that her mate Citralekhā, of extraordinary occult powers, should arrange for the physical presentation of the youth of her (Uṣā's) dream. The figure of the youth in question having been projected on paper from the canvas of Uṣā's mind, Citralekhā identified him with Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Kṛṣṇa and managed to lift the youngster bodily, along with the cot on which he was fast asleep, and put him right in Uṣā's private apartment. With her dream realised, Uṣā was in the land of ecstasy in the company of her lover but when Bānāsura came to know of this intrusion, great was his wrath and he bound Aniruddha by a 'Nāgāstra', a serpent-missile. The whole of Dwāraka, Lord Kṛṣṇa's township got agitated over the disappearance of Aniruddha and when Sage Nārada acquainted Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the youth's whereabouts, the mighty Garuḍa was commissioned from Heaven. Mounted on Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by a host of others, sallied forth to Bānāsura's citadel to recover the missing youth. But Śiva, his son, Subramaṇya, their attendants, Agni (Aṅki, in Tamil) and other Devas ranged themselves on the side of Bānāsura, having vouchsafed protection unto him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa put Śiva out of action through a missile (Jrumbhanāstra) making him yawn all the time, drove the rest away and finally
encountered the thousand-armed Bāpāsura, lopping off his arms. A penitent Śiva then prayed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and at the former’s request, Bāpāsura was let off with a mere four arms, as against the thousand, he had before. The grateful Bāpāsura gave his daughter in marriage to Aniruddha and the wedding was celebrated with great éclat.

Śiva’s part in this episode was indeed most unfortunate. When the milk-ocean was churned Lord Viṣṇu functioned in eight different forms. Likewise, when Śiva encountered Tripurāsuras and destroyed their flying citadels, Viṣṇu imparted the requisite strength to Śiva’s bow, toughness to the bow-string, sharpness to the arrow and above all, He was within him as the Internal Controller, as ever. But when Śiva was extolled by the ignorant poets as the destroyer of Tripura, he got infatuated to such an extent that he was impudent enough to think in terms of taking up arms against Kṛṣṇa, Lord Viṣṇu, incarnate and allying with Bāpāsura. No doubt, Siva had to repent for it, as seen from the episode cited above.

(iii) Distraction, there is none for me: Despite being Lord Kṛṣṇa’s grandson, Aniruddha had to suffer imprisonment at the hands of Bāpāsura, as in the above episode. But, as the Lord’s ardent devotee, the Āḻvār doesn’t have to suffer any such indignity.

Translation

In me there isn’t the slightest tinge of grief,
Having attained my gracious Lord who delivered
The lost sons of a ‘Vaidik’ back to him quite safe,
Taking him and Arjuna in a chariot strong that covered
The upper regions, reclaiming from the Heaven resplendent
the sons (four).

Notes

(i) The Ālvār asserts that there is no question of his being
confronted by grief of any kind, having taken sole
refuge in the Supreme Lord, Who, as Kṛṣṇa, went right
into Heaven, reclaimed the four missing sons of a
'Vaidik' (Brahmin) and delivered them back to him
as promised.

(ii) The 'Vaidik', referred to in (i) above, lost three sons
successively; immediately they emerged from the
mother's womb, the babes disappeared. When his
wife conceived again, the Brahmin prayed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa
to ensure the safe retention of at least the current
progeny. At the time of confinement, however, Arjuna
dissuaded Kṛṣṇa from disengaging himself from a
ritual currently going on and undertook to look after
the Vaidik's affair himself. But then, Arjuna failed
miserably despite his standing guard at the Vaidik's
house, blocking, with arrows, entry into the house by
any outsider, not even air. The progeny disappeared
as usual soon after emergence from the mother's womb.

The Vaidik bitterly reproached Arjuna but Kṛṣṇa appeased
the grief-stricken brahmin, promising to get him back all
the four missing children. Just in one day the three
of them ascended the upper regions in a mighty chariot
specially commissioned for the purpose. Detaining the
Vaidik, Arjuna and the Chariot Just outside Heaven,
Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone entered the dazzling Heaven and located
all the four children in the company of His Divine
Consorts there, who longed for seeing Him in the
exquisite Form of Kṛṣṇa and lifted the Vaidik's sons, one
by one, unto Heaven, in order to secure their objective.
The children were thus recovered, safe and sound, and
restored to the Vaidik, a grand and thrilling feat which
none but the Supreme Lord could perform.
tuyar il cuṭar-oļi tāṇgūtaic cōti niṅga vaṅgam niṅkavē, tuyaril maliyum mapicar piraviyil tōngi, kaṅ kāṅa vantu, tuyaranḵal ceytu, tāṅ teyvanilai ulakil puka uykkum ammāy, tuyaram ilcīk kaṅnaṅ, māyaṅ pukal tuṅga yāṅ ḍor tuṅpam ilāṇē.

(III–10–6)

Translation

Absolutely trouble-free am I, singing the glory great
Of my wondrous Lord, full of auspicious traits
And devoid of qualities base, who did, as Kaṅnaṅ, come down
In all that splendour supernal, amidst sorrow-stricken humans
And spread, in this world, His glory unique, attracting every one.

Notes

(i) Though born among humans as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, the Lord retained His Supernal Form and traits in tact as He assumes the Form of His choice, unlike the bodies He dowers on us under compulsion, according to our Karma. Making Himself visible to the worldlings and mixing with them freely, He displays His auspicious traits in abundance. Meditating on these great qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvār affirms that he has no worries whatsoever.

(ii) The Lord attracts the devout by His auspicious traits and the ungodly men by exhibiting His strength and prowess.

(iii) Even while performing such functions as running an errand and driving the chariot, Śrī Kṛṣṇa displayed His transcendental glory, a rare thing indeed for the worldlings to have, right here, a taste of what obtains in Heaven.

tuṅpumum īppumum ākiya ceyviṅai āy, ulakaṅkalum āy, īppam il vem naraku āki, īṃya nal vāṅ cuvarkkaṅkalum āy, maṅ pal uyirkalum āki, palapala māya mayakkukkalāl īṃpurum iv vilaiyāṭṭu utaiyāṅaip pēru, ētuṁ allal ilāṇē.

(III–10–7)

Translation

Sorrows have I none, as I commune
With my Lord, the Sportive Controller overall,
Of the Creatures many, their pleasure and pain,
Their acts, good and bad, the pleasant Svarg and dire hell.

Note

The Lord who delights in the creation of the Universe as a pastime, is in over-all control of the acts, good and bad, of His subjects, the reward and punishments therefor, the seats of enjoyment of the reward (Svarg) and infliction of punishment (Hell) and so on. Having attained Him, the Āḷvār avers that he is free from sorrows of any kind, rid of the bonds of Karma, the fountain source of all sufferings, through His unfailing grace.

allai il ᵇppam ạḷavu ĩgantu eākum ạḷaku amar cāḷ oliyāp,
allii malar-makaḷ pōka mayakkukkal ākiyum nirḵum ammān,
ellai il ʰāṇattaŋ, ʰāṇam akṭē koṭṭu ellāk karumaṅkaḷum cey
ellai il māyānai, kaṇṇāṇait tāl parti, yān ḍr tukkam ilaṅpē.

(III–10–8)

Translation

I have nothing to worry, worshipping, as I do, the feet compact
Of the Lord of bliss unalloyed and beauty unlimited,
Permeating all over, who is rapturous in contact
With (Lakṣmi), the lotus-born, of radiant knowledge unlimited
By which He, the work-a-day worlds does create
Who did as wondrous Kaṇṇaṅ of glory unlimited incarnate.

Notes

(i) Bliss unalloyed: This obtains only in Heaven. Even Svarg, the seat of enjoyment of the reward for one’s good acts, known to be pleasurable, does not provide unalloyed happiness, as the inmates are haunted by the fear of being thrown out at the end of the prescribed tenure of their stay there. This fear gathers momentum every time a fellow-being is hurled down.

(ii) The Lord is, no doubt, the natural embodiment of bliss (Ānanda) but it is only His conjunction with Lakṣmi of ravishing beauty that confers on Him, the bliss supreme (Paramānanda). It is this blissful conjunction, par excellence, that provides the necessary incentive for
His creation of the Sportive Universe (Līla Vibhūti). Although He could create the entire Universe by a mere resolve (Saṅkalpa), He came down as Kṛṣṇa and enthralled every one by His entrancing beauty. As an ardent worshipper of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Ālvār confidently asserts that He has absolutely nothing to worry about.

tukkam il ūṅaṭ-cuṭṭar-oṭi mūrtti, tulāy alaṅkal-perumāṅ, mikka pal māyaṅkalāl vikirtam ceytu, vēṭtum uruve kopṭu, nakka pirāṅḍu ayaṅ mutalāka ellārum evaiyum tennul okka oṭuṅka vijuṅka vallāṅaḷa peṟṟu, onṟum talarvū ilaṅē.

(III–10–9)

Translation

Fatigue have I none, having attained my Lord beatific,
Of knowledge pure and form resplendent, with tulacī garland bedecked,
Who, by His wondrous prowess, assumes any form He likes and performs
Many a wondrous deed and inside His stomach contains all once (During deluge) Nakkapirāṅ (Śiva). Ayaṅ (Brahmā) and all other things and beings.

Note

It is only the Omnipotent Lord who can achieve the seemingly impossible and blend into harmony the incompatibles, such as floating on a tender fig-leaf over the vast watery expanse as a mere babe, holding in its stomach all the worlds with their variegated contents, all things and beings. Singing the glory of the great Sustainer, the Ālvār is naturally free from fatigues.

talarvū ippiyē onṟum enkum paranta tāṁmutal ūṅam onṟay aḷavu utai aṁpūḷakal aṟiyāvakaiyāl aruvu āki nirkum vāḷar oṭi icaṇai, mūrttyai, pūṭṭkal aṅtai, iru cuṭṭarai, kilar oṭi māyaṇai, kāṇṇaṅait tāḻparṭi. yāṅ onṟum kēṭu ilaṅē.

(III–10–10)

Translation

Never can any harm alight on me, adorning the feet
Of Kāṇṇaṅ, my wondrous Lord of form exquisite,
With radiance ever-expanding, who permeates at all times,  
All things, with no effort, of knowledge supreme,  
Controller of the elements five, whom the senses five can’t comprehend.

Note

The Lord is everywhere, permeating effortlessly everyone and  
everything, at all times and yet, He is not tainted by them  
nor can He, in His universal Form, be comprehended by the  
five senses. Far from being tainted by the persons and things  
wherein He stays, His resplendence goes up all the time and  
His exclusive, auspicious Form (Divya maṅgala vigrha) is of  
matchless grace and beauty; Adoring Him of such great  
prowess, the Āḷvār is naturally well beyond the mischief  
of harm of any kind.

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,  
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakopāṇ  
In adoration of Kēcavaṇ of undying fame,  
Will in His service be enlisted and granted by Him  
Heavenly bliss, well in sight of the men of this world,  
And made the sole monarchs of all His worlds.

Note

Those that can recite these ten stanzas will be blessed by the  
Lord, right here, with spiritual fervour of universal fame  
and, on their ascent to Heaven, He would invite them to rule  
over it.

The Centum, in retrospect  
(Decad-wise Summary)

(III-1)

In the opening decad of this Centum, the Āḷvār, who had ex-  
pounded the glory of mount Māḷirūfīcōlai in the immediately
preceding decad (II-10), drinks deep of the nectarean charm and
enthralling beauty of Lord Añakar (The Beautiful), enshrined there;

(III–2)

In the second decad, we note the Álvār’s mental agony due to his
inability to enjoy the Lord in His Iconic Form in toto and give the
fullest expression to such enjoyment. God is limitless and to
enjoy His boundless beatific vision in full, would be attempting the
impossible, namely, limiting the limitless. The Álvār is, however,
invited by the Lord to enjoy His Iconic Form at Tiruvēnkaṭam to
his heart’s content;

(III–3)

In the third decad, the Álvār seeks to render blemishless service
unto the Lord at lovely Tiruvēnkaṭam in ever so many ways,
without break, even as a person, feeling the pinch of hunger and
with the food packet in hand sets the table, as soon as he comes
across a suitable spot with plenty of shade and water;

(III–4)

Profoundly impressed by the intensity of the Álvār’s yearning
for Divine Service, the Lord threw into focus His unique faculty of
omnipresence, pervading all things, all over and at all times. It
is the Lord’s immanence, the astounding phenomenon in front of
him, that the Álvār attempts to sing in the fourth decad, with bewil-
dering amazement;

(III–5)

In the fifth decad, the Álvār extols the kindred souls, thrown
into a state of ecstasy, enraptured by the contemplation of the
Lord’s wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, moving about singing
and dancing, and condemn unreservedly those that remain callously
indifferent, unmoved by and impervious to the Lord’s glory;

(III–6)

Expounding the Lord’s extreme ‘Saulabhya’ (easy-accessi-
bility) in His Iconic manifestation, the Álvār exhorts, in the sixth
decad, the fellow-beings out of deep compassion and love to wor-
ship the Lord in His Iconic Form and make good their lives;
(III-7)

The Āḻvār's advice, as in the sixth decad, having once again fallen on deaf ears, he drowns his disappointment, in the seventh decad, in the blissful contemplation of service unto the Lord's devotees, the logical culmination of service unto the Lord, declaring that he is the vassal of those that stand last in the chain of the Lord's devotees, sure and steadfast, who are enthralled by the bewitching beauty of the Lord holding the charming discus in hand;

(III-8)

In the eighth decad, one witnesses a very extraordinary state of affairs, each one of the Āḻvār's senses yearning for the delight experienced by the other senses; in its competitive exuberance to enjoy the Lord, each faculty aspires to transcend its functional limitations. Thus the hands would want to praise the Lord, the ears would long to drink deep of the nectarean charm of the Lord, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth;

(III-9)

The ninth decad contains the Āḻvār's exhortation to the poets of the world not to debase their rare poetic talents by eulogising the frail humans for the sake of petty gains, flimsy and fleeting, or the minor deities, but to elevate themselves to their legitimate stature as the Lord's bards, soaring high, singing exclusively the Supreme Lord's great glory in beautiful metrical compositions;

(III-10)

Once again, the worldlings would not listen to the Āḻvār's advice as in the ninth decad and yet, it was no mean consolation for him that he could at least get back from them unscathed, without being contaminated by them. In the concluding decad of this Centum, the Āḻvār gives expression to the various benefits accrued to him through his total absorption in the Lord, namely, full and complete freedom from (1) want, (2) obstruction in the enjoyment of the Lord, (3) trouble, (4) Sorrow, (5) affliction, (6) fatigue etc.
BOOK IV

Fourth Centum—First Decad (IV-1)
(Oru nāyakamāy)

Preamble

The last centum ended on a very happy note, an exuberant Ālavār, gratefully conscious of the felicities showered on him by a loving Lord, declaring that he is above wants of any kind and free from afflictions of any kind. Just the opposite is, however, the plight of the ‘Samsāris’ (worldlings), and it was out of an irresistible fellow-feeling and deep compassion that the Ālavār tried to bring them all, on a par with him and advised them in III-9 (coonāl virōtam) to give up running after the petty humans and their petty wealth. The desired response was, however, not forthcoming presumably because the men whom the Ālavār then addressed were thinking in terms of somehow enriching themselves by waiting on the so-called earthly potentates. And yet, the Ālavār’s tender solicitude turns his attention on to them once again and that too, so soon. In this decad, he impresses upon his addressees that, for all their mountainous labours, they get much less than a mouse, in return, the so-called wealth they acquire being after all much-too-flimsy and fleeting. So saying, the Ālavār calls upon these straying subjects to realise the importance of holding on to the Supreme Lord as an end in itself, the wealth supreme and everlasting.

In VII-16 of Bhagavad Gītā, the Lord has referred to four types of votaries propitiating Him. These are: (1) Ārta, the sorrow stricken ones who wish to get back their lost wealth; (2) Asrāhārhi, the poor men craving for wealth and power, (3) Jījāsu, the seeker of the self, that is, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death and enjoyment of the disembodied soul in the ultra-mundane sphere, known as ‘Kaivalya Mokṣa’ and (4) Jñāni, the gnos’ic, fully alive to the essential nature of the Individual Soul as the sole servitor of the Lord, seeking the Lord as the final goal and looking upon Him as the sole Means for attaining the end in view.

All the four categories of supplicants have, however, been labelled as ‘Sūkṛts’ (persons with good deeds to their credit) although all but the ‘Jñānis’ would, strictly speaking, deserve to be
termed as 'Dhūṣkṛt', craving, as they do, for the lower or inferior fruits. This is because all of them seek whatever they want from the Supreme Lord, instead of committing the further transgression of cooling their heels elsewhere, that is, at the door steps of the minor deities or the so-called earthly magnates. Of course, the Lord would no more matter any more, and He brings out, in un-ambiguous terms, the special greatness and glory of the 'Jñāni' in the three succeeding ālokas (VII-17 to 19). The Jñāni, engrossed in the Lord as the highest goal, is dear to the Lord beyond words, and is looked upon by the Lord as His very self. The Ṛśvār is only echoing this theme in this decad, pointing out the Superior stance of the Jñāni, which the people of the world should strive after, and deprecating the pursuit after the intransient riches and the inferior goal of ‘Kaivalya Mokṣa’.

For facility of recapitulation it may be pointed out that the Ṛśvār has been similarly addressing the world, off and on, with an eye on its uplift and deliverance, vide I-2, II-8, III-6 and III-9.

oru nāyakamāy oṭa ulaku utaṇ āṇṭavār,
karu nāy kavarna kālar, citaikiya pāṇaiyar,
peru nāṭu kāṇa, immaiilē piccai tām koḷvar-
tirunāraṇan-tāl kālamperac cintittu uyymmiņō.  (IV-1-1)

Translation

The monarchs great who did once hold sway supreme, 
Will, under the nose of the worlds they ruled, seek alms
With broken bowls in hand, on legs by black dogs bitten.
Be quick, thereforie, ye, men, to meditate on the feet
Of Tirunāraṇan where indeed lies your salvation.

Notes

(1) The first three lines speak about the ephemeral wealth
while the remaining lines deal with Eternal wealth. 
That the earthly riches, whatever their magnitude, are
evanescent, has been brought out by citing the well-known
example of mighty monarchs being reduced, in one and
the same span of life, to abject poverty, seeking alms
under cover of night. Treading upon black dogs during
nights, the distinguished beggars get bitten of them but desist
from crying out their pain for fear of attracting public attention. But then, the earthen begging bowls drop down from their hands and the resultant noise draws huge crowds witnessing the pathetic plight of their erstwhile monarch. Oh, what a pitiable contrast between these broken earthen bowls and the decorated bowls of gold they ate from before; people who couldn’t have dreamt of coming face to face with the monarch or would have to wait for months before gaining entry into the Palace gates, could now see him right on the road, with an apology of a begging bowl held by the hand which once doled out large territories to petty princes and nobles. So then, the Ālvār exhorts the men around to adore the feet of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, the Donor, *par excellence* and attain salvation, the everlasting opulence of Divine Service.

This decad is in propitiation of the Deity, known as ‘Veda Nārāyaṇa’, enshrined in Tōṭiyam Tirunārāyaṇapuram, in Musī Taluk, Tiruchirappalli District, in Tamil Nadu. Tradition has it that, during his stay of twelve years in Tirunārāyaṇapuram (Meikōṭ), in Karnāṭaka State, Śrī Rāmānujaḻācārya affectionately bestowed this decade unto the Deity of that pilgrim centre, going by the name ‘Tirunārāyaṇapuram’.

Translation

Lose no time in worshipping ‘Tirumāl’, with lustrous crown, Seeing that the earthly overlords who did dominate for long, With many a minor Chief paying unto them tributes, grow forlorn,

Losing, in this very birth, their kingdoms and consorts dear And eke out miserable existence in the formidable forest yon-der.
Notes

(i) Even those mighty kings who held sway for long, keeping under their heels many a chieftain forced to pay them tributes, lose their vast kingdoms and become helpless spectators when the lovely damsels kept in their proud harem, are forcibly seized by others under their very nose. If this happens to the mighty overlords what to say about the lesser men and their so-called riches? The Ālvār, therefore, calls upon his fellow-beings to worship the feet of Lord Viṣṇu (Tirumāl) and attain Him, the Eternal Wealth, the inexhaustible fountain of perennial bliss.

(ii) The Paṅḍavas who celebrated the ‘Rājasūya Yāga’ with great pomp and eclat, had to retire into the forest and their wife, Draupadi, was badly handled under their very nose.

(iii) Unto those who seek Him, the Lord is there to part with His very crown; there are His consorts to plead for us and get from the Lord His choicest favours and yet, the default lies on our past, in not hastening.

افي cēr muṭiyinār āki aracarkāl tām tola,
iṭi cēr muracqānkal muṇṭattu iyampa, iruntavar,
pōṭi cēr tukaḷāyp pōvārkal; āṭalil, nokkepāk
kaṭi cēr tuḷāy muṭik caṇṇaṇ kaḷaḷkal nipaimpiṇo. (IV–1–3)

Translation

The earthly overlords of empires mighty, who care least For the kings who on them wait days on end and get lost In singing and dancing, the drums in the courtyards beating fast, Will, in no time, get ground to mere bits of dust, Be quick, therefore, to meditate on the feet of Kaṇṇaṇ, Wearing tulacī garland full of fragrance sweet on His Crown.

Note

The supercilious overlords who once took pride in despising their subordinates, will soon be reduced to a predicament
wherein they will, in turn, be despised by others. From the
durbar hall to the dust is not a long way off and these men
of erstwhile eminence become imperceptible non-entities,
as good as the life-less dust men tread upon. The Ālvār,
therefore, advises us to spurn the ephemeral wealth of the
world and switch on to the feet of the Lord wearing the
sweet tulāci garland on His crown, the symbol of His undis-
puted sovereignty over one and all.

niṇāippāṇ pukil, kāṭal ekkalig nuṇmaṇalul-palar
eqaiṭtōr ukaṇkaḷum iv ulakku āṇtu kāḷintavaṛ,
maṇaippāl maruṇku agra māytaḷ allāl, māṟṟuk kāṇṭilam-
pāṇait tāl mata kāḷitī aṭṭavaṇ pāṭam paṇīmiṇḍ. (IV-1-4)

Translation
The number of those that ruled for long this land
And into oblivion passed, leaving no trace behind
Of their erstwhile possessions and things around,
Far exceeds the particles of the sea-sand minute;
So then, worship the feet of the one Who slew
(Kuvalayāpiṭa) the monstrous elephant in rut.

Note
When a mighty tree comes crashing down, it destroys quite a
few things all around, as well Likewise, when the kingdoms
of the earthly Lords perished the territories around also
got wiped off, the unrelenting ravage of time! The Ālvār is
emphasising the intransigence of the mundane wealth in so
many ways, song after song. Side by side, he stresses the
positive need for worshipping Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord,
the Eternal Wealth. During His atavāra as Kṛṣṇa, the Lord
slew that monstrous elephant in rut set on Him by Kamsa,
the felon of an uncle, by pulling out the tusks.

paṇīmiṇḍ tiruvarul eṇnum am citāp paim pūṁ paḷḷi
aṇi meṇ kulāḷar ippak kalavi-amulu upṭār
tuṇi muṇṭu nāla, pal ēḷaiyar-tām iṭṭpa, celvar-
maṇi miṇṭu mēṇi nam māyavaṇ pēr colli vāḷmiṇḍ. (IV-1-5)
Translation

Sing and subsist on the holy names of our wondrous Lord,  
Shining like blue-gem, seeing that those who seek  
The bed, cool and lovely and pine for getting locked  
In the sweet embrace of the damsels sleek,  
With fine stresses of hair, become poor and under-clad,  
Going about begging, by many a woman ridiculed.

Note

Even the glamour of sensual pleasures wears out soon; with  
energy dissipated and wealth gone, the participants cut a  
sorry figure, becoming the objects of ridicule by those very  
persons who once adored them. The material wealth and  
the sensual pleasures derived therefrom, therefore, deserve  
to be eschewed alike. On the other hand, one should eke  
out one’s existence, singing the Sweet names of the Lord of  
innumerable auspicious traits.

vāḷtārkal vāḷntatu mā maḷai mokkuḷṇī māyntu máyntu,  
āḷntār eṉṟu allāl, eṉṟu mutal iṉṟu āṟuṭiyā  
vāḷntārkal vāḷntē nirpar ēṟpatu illai; niṟkūrīl  
āḷntu ār kāṭṟpallī āṉnaḷ atiyavaṟ āmiṇō. (TV–1–6)

Translation

Probing, since the beginning of time, into the lives of those  
Said to have flourished in this world in yonder days,  
You will find that they stayed not for ever  
In that state but vanished like bubbles in rain water;  
So then, if you seek life that truly lasts,  
Become the vassal of the Sire Who on the deep ocean rests.

Note

The earthly opulence goes on dwindling with the passage of  
time; from the beginning of creation up till now, it has been  
seen that the so-called earthly magnates, said to have flourished  
in this world with all that show of affluence, did not  
last long. They had their cups of sorrow duly served, while  
the riches of the mundane world buried them deep into the  
earth and they could thus never get off the ground to which
they got themselves consigned. The Lord’s lotus feet alone can lift us up to eternal existence in its true sense. The Lord reposing on the milk-ocean is concerting ways and means of reclaiming us and it behoves us to co-operate with Him and make His task easier.

ām iŋ cuvai avai ārōtu ațīcil uŋtu ārntapiŋ, tū meŋ moji mațavār irakkap piŋnum turguvār, īmiŋ emakku oru turgu enrgu itaŋvar; ātaliŋ, kōmīŋ tulāy muți ăti am cőti kuŋaŋkalē, (IV–1–7)

Translation

Those who had a surfeit of hearty drinks
And delicious dishes, pampered by sweet-tongued damsels,
Will soon lose all that wealth and, at ruin’s brink,
Go about begging for food, morsel by morsel,
Better sing and enjoy in a chorus the renown
Of the Lord resplendent with tulaci garland on His crown.

Note

This is yet another stanza wherein the Ālvār brings out, in sharp contrast, the fleeting and the firm, the ephemeral and the eternal. The pompous participants in the pleasures of the world put up a poor show when their wealth is gone and health is lost, naturally forsaken by the sycophants who once paraded in their courts and pampered them. Recounting the great glory of the Lord and His auspicious traits, one can, however, enjoy the eternal bliss, with no ups and downs like its earthly counterpart, the mundane happiness.

kuṇam koľ niŋai pukaľ maŋyar košaikkaŋaŋ puŋturuntu, ināŋki ulaku uṭaŋ ākkilum, āŋku avanai illār maŋam košta pōkattu maŋniyum mi.lvarkal; mi.lvul illai, paŋam koľ aravu-answers tirunāmam paṭimipō. (IV–1–8)

Translation

Even kings, good and bountecus, with a great name,
Who wealth immense do wield,
Will come to grief if they propitiate not the Lord Supreme;
Recite them, the holy names of the Lord on serpent-bed
And wealth eternal do earn.

Note
Even kings of flawless fame will get dislodged from their seat of distinction, if they do not turn their minds towards God in grateful acknowledgement of His gifts. But those who laud the Lord's glory and recite His holy names are bound to enjoy the perennial bliss of eternal service unto the Lord, even as Ādi-Śāṇā does. The Lord will also cling fast to such devotees even as He clings to Ādiśēṣa

pati maṅgu pal kalan pāṛṭṭu aṛuttu, aṁpulaṅ veṅgu,
ceti maṅgu kāyam cēṛṟakkalum, āṅku avaṅai illār
kuṭi maṅguṁ iṅ cuvarkkam eyṭiyum mīḷvarkal; mīḷvū illai,
koṭi maṅguṁ pul uṭai aṉṅal kāḷalkal kurukumīpo. (IV-1-9)

Translation
Even they that do wealth hereditary renounce
And conquer the senses five, doing hard penance,
With aversion great for this body, gross and dense,
Will but reach the pleasant Svarga and be hurled thence
Back to Earth; better attain the feet of the Lord
Who has, on His banner, that bird (Guruḍa)
And enjoy the bliss that for ever lasts.

Note
In the preceding stanzas, the Ālvaṅi deprecated the earthly pleasures. And now, he points out that the 'Svarga', the fairy land known for its unmixed pleasures attained through rigorous penance, abjuring the wealth and bodily pleasures over here, is not hospitable enough to provide these men asylum for all time. They are literally hurled down to Earth at the end of the allotted tenure of their stay in Svarga (Bhagavad Gītā-IX 21). If only these practicants had sought the Lord's grace instead, they would have been better off, enjoying the bliss of eternal service unto Him in the same way as Guruḍa, the Lord's proximate attendant, does.
even the gnostic who, thro' many an austerity, strives
for mere emancipation from rebirth and remains shut unto
service divine,
shall be, by petty desires, impediments to his goal beset
or shall in self-enjoyment be for ever lost;
better seek, therefore, refuge in the immaculate Lord
and reap the bliss supreme that does for ever last.

Note

The Ādvār exhorts people to give up striving after ‘Kaivalya Moṭa’, even though it is everlasting, unlike the limited stay in Svarga and seek, instead, the Supreme bliss of eternal service unto the Lord, as enunciated in the opening stanza of this decad. The ‘Kaivalya Niṣṭa’ subjects himself to an extremely rigorous course of mental and physical discipline in his attempt to perceive the Soul within and hold an exclusive rapport with it. In the process, he studiously eschews all other values of life and it is indeed most unfortunate that this exclusiveness even goes as far as keeping him away from God-consciousness and God-love. Thus, devoid of Divine grace, these people run the risk of not attaining their cherished goal of self-realisation, getting tainted by some petty desires lurking in remote corner of their minds during the last moments of their lives, which will put them back into the vicious cycle of birth and death as in the case of Ādi-Bharata (Jaḍabharata) who got distracted by tender solicitude for his pet deer at the crucial moment.
Translation

Those that learn well these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakopāṇa,
Chaste and elegant, stressing that salvation
Lies in adoring lord Tirunāraṇaṇa's feet and there alone,
Will from deep distress be relieved and salvation attain.

Notes

(i) The Ālvār ends up this decad, just as he began it, by stressing the importance of taking refuge at Śrīman Nārāyaṇa's lotus feet which dispel our distress and elevate us unto Him.

(ii) Chaste and elegant: The chastity of Tiruvāymoḻi', as a composition, lies in the fact that it has been compiled by the Ālvār in a spirit of Divine Service with supreme dedication. Again, 'Tiruvāymoḻi, as the Dvāmiḍa Veda, does not lag behind its Counterpart, the Sanskrit Vedas, in elegance and literary embellishments. The former has all the facets and ingredients corresponding to those of the latter.

(iii) Deep distress: The dire distress resulting from hankering after material wealth, 'Kaivalya Mokṣa' etc; relief from distress would, in this context, mean abstinence from all else but exclusive devotion to the Lord.

Fourth Centum, Second Decad (IV-2)
(Pāḷaṇ āy, El ulaku unṭu)

Preamble

In the eighth decad of the third centum, the Ālvār and his sense-organs intensely longed for the enjoyment of God, in a spirit of competitive exuberance. In the three succeeding decades, this God-hunger was temporarily displaced, partly by the Ālvār's pre-occupation with his fellow-beings and partly by his joyous recounting of the various benefits conferred on him by the bounteous Lord. And now, in this decad, the Ālvār's God-hunger has lifted up its
head once again, the recoiling, as it were, of the Ālavār’s advice to the worldlings on the Ālavār himself. Well, this is precisely what happened when Vibhiṣaṇa advised Rāvaṇa. Vibhiṣaṇa’s advice, as we all know, fell on deaf ears but, at the same time, it led to Vibhiṣaṇa himself getting into Śrī Rāma’s camp. And then, take the case of Prahlāda. The little lad’s advice to an unresponsive and uncompromising fiend of a father (Hiranya) only tended to enrich the former’s Gcd-love. The Ālavār’s God-love having been excited, he longs for the Lord’s vision, as during His Avatāras, in the days gone-by. So deep is his longing that the frustration resulting from its non-fulfilment renders the Ālavār insensate, like a female forsaken by her lover after their erstwhile union. The mother steps in, once again, to describe the critical condition of her daughter, the Parānkuśa Nāyakī.

It is worth recalling, in this context, how Bṛhasena prayed to Hanumān, when the former met the latter several thousands of years after Śrī Rāma had gone back to the Celestium, that Hanumān be pleased to exhibit the gigantic form he had assumed while flying across the ocean to get into Laṅkā. Well, Bṛhasena was not that ludicrous sort to ask for the impossible. Actually, he was well aware cf Hanumān’s great prowess and his ability to meet the demand in question. Likewise, the Ālavār was also quite conscious of the Lord’s capacity to take him through back periods, cutting across even the proverbially irretreivable past. This knowledge of the Ālavār, coupled with his irrepressible longing to enjoy the Lord’s past Avatāras, could very well form the background for this decad.

pālaṇ āy, ēḻ ulaku uṇṭu, parivu ēṟṟi,
āḷilai appavacameyyum appalār
ṭāḷ-inaimēl anī ṭan am tuḷḷay ēṟṟē
māḷumāḷ-valvinaiyēn maṭa valliyē. (IV-2-1)

Translation
Alas! this fell sinner’s tender daughter, like unto a creeper young
Is madly in love with the Lord and keeps pining
For the tuḷḷai garland, cool and nice, on His feet worn,
When He, as a babe, held in His stomach, the worlds seven.
With no effort, reposing cn a fig-leaf thin.
Note

"It is amazing ", the Mother exclaims, "that my daughter should pine, at this distance of time, for the tulāci garland worn on the Lord’s feet when He contained, in His stomach, all the worlds and reposed, as a tender babe, on a fig-leaf, floating on the vast expanse of water. Had the Lord gulped down the worlds as an adult, it might not agitate my daughter’s mind so much. She is indeed worried that He should have done it, as a mere babe, even as children are generally prone to gulp down the mouth whatever comes handy. And then, I can understand her mouth constantly uttering the words, ‘tulāci, cool and lovely, at the feet of the Lord ’ confounded that she is with deep love but she longs to have it, right now. If a person comprehends as fire the lustre shed by a gem, should the heat of this imaginary fire be also felt? How strange is my daughter’s stance indeed!

vallī cēr nuṇ ṭai-āycciyaṟ-tammoṭum
kollaimai ceytu, kuravai piṇaṟtavar
nal aṭimēl anī nāru tulāy eṟē
collumal-cūl viṇaṟyaṭṭiyēn pāvaiyē.

(IV-2-2)

Translation

Ha! the statuesque daughter of this sinner dire
Always pines for the tulāci fragrant, worn on the lovely feet
Of the Lord who (as Kṛṣṇa) did around Him gather
The thin-waisted shepherdesses and on them unleash
Many a wily prank and with them merrily danced.

Note

It was a glorious night, the night of nights, when the classical dance, known as ‘ Rāsa Krīḍa ’, in Sanskrit and ‘ Kuravai ’, in Tamil, took place in Vrindāvan. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, assuming several forms, enchanting beyond description, danced in between one Gopi and another, His hands being locked up with theirs. Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī now pines for the fragrant tulāci worn by the Lord on His feet at that time, being a legitimate aspirant, comparable to the Gopis in question. Perhaps, the gnostic mother had pointed out to the Nāyakī
that her pining for the tulaci garland worn by the Lord during the great deluge as a measure of universal protection, in a remote past, was not merely out of date but also out of place.

pā iyal vēta nal mālai pala koṇṭu,
tēvarkal mā munivar īraṅca nīḷa
cevaṭimēl anī cem poṇ tulāy enē
kūvumāl-kōḷ viṅaiyāṭṭiyēṇ kōtalīyē. (IV-2-3)

Translation
This dire sinner’s daughter, with locks lovely,
Pines for the pretty tulaci, like red-gold, at the Lord’s feet
comely,
(That spanned the worlds), adored by Devas and Sages great,
Chanting the Vedas, set in metres appropriate,
Like unto many a garland exquisite.

Note
The Nāyakī covets the tulaci, worn at the feet of the Lord, when He spanned the Universe long, long ago and the great Sages and Devas worshipped Him with beautiful garlands, namely, the sweet metrical compositions of the Vedas. The Mother is indeed surprised that her lovely daughter of ravishing beauty, the garland coveted by the Lord Himself, should covet yet another garland.

kōṭu ila vaṇ pukāl koṇṭu, camaiyākāl
pētaṅkaḷ collip pitāṟrum pirāṇ, parantu
pātaṅkālmeḷ anī paim poṇ tulāy enē
ōṭumāl-ulviṅaiyēṇ taṭan tōliyē (IV-2-4)

Translation
Ha! this terrific sinner’s daughter, with shoulders fair,
Craves for the tulaci, pretty like Gold, fresh and pure,
That decorates the feet of the Supreme Lord in heaven,
Whose traits flawless are debated upon
By the votaries over there with great fascination
Notes

(i) The debate by the distinguished denizens of Heaven arises from the fact that one section feels attracted by the Lord’s transcendent glory (Paratva) while another is drawn towards His ‘Saulabhya’, simplicity galore. Each section adores the Lord from its own angle. A trait is said to be flawless only when the person who contemplates it is wholly immersed in it without being led on to any other trait. The Lord’s traits are flawless in the sense that each one of them is of unlimited dimensions and one can get immersed in, rather, rivetted to it, for all time.

(ii) The mother having pointed out that the Lord’s incarnate forms belonged to the irretrievable past, like the rivers, once in spate, having gone dry, the Nāyaki would be satisfied if she could at least get hold of the tulāci garland from the Lord, in His transcendental abode.

\[ \text{tōli cēr piṇṇaiporuṭṭu, erutu ēl taḻik} \]
\[ \text{kōliyār, kōvalaṅār, kuṭak kūttāṅār} \]
\[ \text{tāl-iṇaimēḷ āṇi taṇ am tulāy eṅē} \]
\[ \text{nāḷum nāḷ naikiṇṭatāḷ-eṅ-taṇ māṭarē.} \]  

(IV–2–5)

Translation

Alas! day by day, my daughter keeps withering down,
Pining for the tulāci, cool and lovely, on His feet worn
By Kōvalaṅ, the Pot-dancer, who pounced upon the bulls seven,
To win the hand of Piṇṇai, the pretty bride, with shoulders fine.

Note

Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī is said to be withering away, in contemplation of the tulāci worn by Kōvalaṅ (Gopāla Kṛṣṇa) when He tamed the seven unruly bulls to secure the hand of Nappiṇṇai, the charming niece of Queen Yāsodhā. If the gnostic mother could not get for the Nāyakī, the tulāci garland worn by the Lord in the heavenly abode, she would want to know why she cannot have the tulāci from the feet of
Śrī Kṛṣṇa who encountered the seven unruly bulls for the sake of one like her.

mātar mā maṇḍantaśaporoṭṭu, ēgam āy,
āti am kālattu akal-iṭam kṛṣṭavar
pātaṅkalmēl anī paim poṇ tujāy enē
ōtum māl eytinaį-en-taṅ maṭantaiyē.

Translation
My young daughter stands enraptured by the tulaci, superfine,
Which did the lovely feet of the Great Boar adorn,
Who the Earth pulled out in a distant past,
From deep waters to placate Mother Earth of charm exquisite.

Note
The Mother says that her daughter goes into raptures over the tulaci worn at the feet of the Lord who assumed even the form of a beast and reclaimed the earth from beneath the deep waters for the sake of just another lady, namely, Dame Earth.

maṭantaiyai, vaṇ kamalat tirumāṭiṇai,
tāṭam kol tār māṛpiṇil vaittavat tāḷiṇmēl
vaṭam kol pūm tan am tujāy malarkkē īvaḷ
maṭaṅkkumāl, vāḷ-nutālir!-en maṭakkompē.

Translation
Ye, damsels with foreheads bright! here’s my daughter,
Like unto the creeper young, madly after
The tulaci garland, cool and lovely, closely knit,
At the feet of the Lord who lodged on His broad chest,
With garland, bedecked (Lakṣmī), the lotus-born,
The lady, young and lovely (when He did the ocean churn).

Note
Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī’s mind leaps back to the churning of the Milk-ocean, when Lakṣmī emerged and got herself lodged on the Lord’s chest. Following the usual pattern, the Nāyakī is after the tulaci worn by the Lord on His feet at that time.

T—11
kompū pōl citaiporuṭtu, ilaṅkai nakar
ampū eri uyttavar tāḷ-ināimēañ aṅi
vampū avil taṅ am tulāy malarkē ivaḷ
naṅ-umāl-nāṅ itaṛku en ceykēṅ, naṅkaimir? (IV–2–8)

Translation

Ye, young ladies, what can I do for my daughter
Who does for the fragrant tulaci, cool and lovely, aspire,
Worn at the feet of Rāma whose arrows spat fire
On Laṅkā to reclaim Cītai. like unto the comely creeper?

Note

The creeper is but a part of the tree and Cītā, the lovely creeper
is thus part of the tree, namely, Rāma (like unto the gem and
its lustre, the Sun and its sheen)

naṅkaimir! nīrum ḍr peṅ peṛru nalkiṅir;
enaṅē collukēṅ-yāṅ peṛṛa ḍaiyai?
cāṅku ennum; cakkaram ennum; tulāy ennum;
iṅaṅē collum irāp pakal-en ceykēṅ? (IV–2–9)

Translation

Ye, ladies, you too have reared up daughters,
But what to say of mine, this odd thing of a daughter?
Day and night, she keeps mentionng the Lord’s conch,
The discus and tulaci; what can I do for her, as such?

Note

Addressing her mates, the Mother points out the difference
between their daughters and hers. Deeply engrossed with
God-love, Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki’s speech is haltng; not being
sufficiently articulate, she spells out, at long intervals, the
words ‘conch’, ‘discus’ and ‘tulaci’.

en ceykēṅ?—enṇuṭaip pētaī, en kōmāḷam,
en collum en vacamum allaḷ; naṅkaimir!
mīṅ cey pūṅ māripaṅ kaṅnaṅ kaḷaḷ-aṭal-tulāy
poṅ cey pūṅ meṅ mulaikku enṛu meḷiyumē. (IV–2–10)
Translation

Ye, ladies, what shall I do with my daughter?
She listens not to me, being immature and tender,
Well beyond control, poor thing, she is getting thinner,
Wanting to decorate her fond but languishing breast
With tulāci worn on the feet of Kaṇṇap on whose chest,
Broad and bedecked, the jewels gleam bright.

Note

The ladies, to whom the Mother complains, turn round and ask her whether she could not counsel her daughter suitably and keep her under restraint. The Mother regrets that her daughter has gone out of hand, being enthralled by the charming personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, bedecked with lustrous jewels. Unable to secure the tulāci, worn on His feet, with which Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki wants to decorate her emaciated but all the more attractive breast, she is thinning down and the Mother just does not know how to deal with a daughter like this, infatuated with God-love, too deep for words. The Mother cannot punish the daughter because she is not merely immature but much-too-tender to stand the punishment. Bringing the God-intoxicated daughter round to the commonplace standards through routine advice, is also out of the question.

meliyum nōy tirkkum nam kaṇṇap kaļalkaļmēl
mali pukaļ van kuruķūrc caṭakōpaṇ col
oli pukaļ āyirattu p pattum vallavar
mali pukaļ vāṇavarkku āvar nal-kōvaiyē. (IV-2-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten
Out of the thousand glorious songs of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṇ,
Of established fame, adoring the feet of Kaṇṇap,
The cure certain for the wasting malady of separation from Him,
Will on a par be with the celestials in heaven, of great fame.
Note

This end-stanza spells out the benefit accruing to those who are conversant with the ten preceding stanzas. The scholars will enjoy parity with the ‘Nitya Sūris’, the Ever-free angels in heaven. As the Āḻvār who pined for the tulāci at the feet of the Lord all along now describes those very feet as the cure for the malady of separation from Him, it is clear that the Lord has again obliged the Āḻvār with His beaming presence and regaled him, even as Lord Kṛṣṇa regaled the Gopīs, after a spell of separation from them.

Fourth Centum—Third Decad (IV-3)
(Kōvai Vāyāl)

Preamble

This decade would appear to have been appreciated in three different ways by the ‘Pūrvācāryas’ (Preceptors of yore), as indicated below:

Notes

(i) According to Empār, the Lord did not, as such, fulfil the aspiration of the Āḻvār, as set out in the preceding decade, but focussed his attention on some of His auspicious traits enjoying which the Āḻvār remains oblivious of his erstwhile longing. This is like the baby crying for the Moon being appeased by a substitute, say, a Coconut.

(ii) Tirumalai Nampi would have it that the Āḻvār could be placated by a mere assurance from the Lord to fulfil his aspiration. According to this preceptor, the Lord would seem to have told the Āḻvār to his face that his aspiration would be duly met and this assurance was enough to make the Āḻvār forget his erstwhile misery and exult as in this decad.

(iii) Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar does not seem to have been satisfied with such half-hearted compliance by the Lord. Time being at the beck and call of the Supreme Lord, He could
certainly meet the demand of the Āḻvār and regale him. 
It is a fully satisfied Āḻvār who, according to Bhattārya, 
gives expression to the resultant joy in this decad.

kovai vayalporutṭu, ēṟṟin eruttam iruttāy! matīl ilaṅkaik 
kovai viyac cilai kujittāy! kula nal yāṇai maruppu ocittāy! 
pūvai viyā nır tūvip pōṭāl vaṇāṅkēṇēḷum, niṅ 
pūvai viyām mēṅikkup pūcum cāntu eṅ neṅcamē. (IV-3-1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You broke the hump of the bulls truly
And secured (Nappīṟṇai), the red-lipped beauty;
The king of Laṅkā, with ramparts high, you killed
With Your bow infallible and out you pulled
The tusk fine of that majestic elephant and slew it;
At these crucial moments, I served you not in manner fit,
With flowers fine and water pure and yet
My mind is the sandal paste fit for your lovely body of lily tint.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār regrets that he wasn’t keeping himself close to 
the Lord, when He tamed the unruly bulls for winning 
the hand of Nappīṟṇai, the charming bride, when he
slew Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā and killed Kuvalayā-
pitā, the high class elephant, set on Him by the tra-
cherous Kamsa, by crushing its tusks. Had he (Āḻvār) 
been by the side of the Lord on those occasions, he 
could have tended Him well and relieved Him of the 
fatigue. Despite this lapse on his part, the Āḻvār 
worries how the Lord looks upon his mind, with 
great delight, as if it was aromatic like high class sandal 
paste, fit for anointing His exquisite body.

(ii) Had the Āḻvār been by the side of Lord Kṛṣṇa when He 
pounced upon the unruly bulls, he could have cautioned 
Him that they were not bulls, as such, but demons in 
disguise, even as Lakaṁṣaṇa, pointed out to Śrī Rāma, 
that the deer, coveted by Sītā, was but a Rākṣasa in 
disguise.
(iii) There is no greater security for us than the Lord and yet, Rāvaṇa relics on his forts and moats, and Kamsa, on Kuvalayāpita, the mighty tusker and the like and little wonder then, they all came to grief.

pūcum cântu en neñcamē; puṣaiyum kaññi epaṭutaiya vācakam cey mâlaiyē; vâṅ paṭtu âtaiyum aktē;
tēcam âna anikalañnum en kaiküppuc ceykaiyē–
īcaç, nâlam uṇṭu umijnta entai, ēka mûrttikkē. (IV–3–2)

Translation

My mind alone is the sandal paste eminently fit
For the supreme Lord of form unique
Who once did gulp the worlds and then spat them out;
The hymns by my tongue knit do His garlands make
And His silken robes as well; my salutation with joined palms
Decorates Him with many a jewel that gleams.

Note

The Āḷvâr keeps meditating on the Lord's resplendent Form and
His extraordinary love for him. All the three faculties
of the Āḷvâr—word, deed and thought—are extremely delectable
to Him and loom large in His eyes. If the Āḷvâr's
mind is unto Him as aromatic as the sandal paste, his
hymns are like unto the colourful garlands made of choice
flowers of special fragrance. These very hymns of the
Āḷvâr also serve as the silken robes donned by the Lord
with great pleasure. It is said that the apparel oft proclaims
the man, and here, the Āḷvâr's hymns, proclaiming the Lord's
glory, serve as His apparel. And then, a single salutation
made by the Āḷvâr to the Lord by joining his palms, makes
Him feel as though He has been fully decorated with jewels
of extra-radiance. The Āḷvâr is simply amazed at the
astounding love of the Lord for him, as above.

ēka mûrtti īru mûrtti mûṣru mûrtti pala mûrtti
âki, aintu pūtam ây, iraṇṭu cuṭar ây, aruvu âki,
nâkam ēgi, naṭuk kaṭalaḷ tuyīra nārāyaṇaṇē! uh
âkam mûṣrum akattu aṭakkā, āvi allal mâyattē. (IV–3–3)
Translation

You assumed a single form, then two, three and many,
The form you took of the senses five, the Sun and the Moon;
Formless, you did everywhere, as Internal Controller, pervade,
Repose you did, Oh, Nārāyaṇa, in mid-ocean on serpent-bed
And now your body and all it needs you have compressed
Right in my mind and thus feel fully relaxed.

Notes

(i) Here is a complete reversal of the picture, we saw in the
last decad. The Āḷvār, sunk deep in dejection in that
decad, is now very happy and proclaims that the Lord
is also jubilant that His task has been well done, having
taken the Āḷvār unto His fold, with great delight.

(ii) *Single Form*: This refers to the state of affairs prior to
creation, when the Lord alone subsisted, containing
within Himself, in a subtle state, all sentient and non-
sentient beings; there was no scope then for differenti-
tation, by name and form.

(iii) *Two forms*: Keen on creating the Sportive Universe, the
Lord assumes the twin forms of ‘Prakṛiti’ and ‘Mahān’

(iv) *Three Forms*: The triple ‘ahaṅkāras’ of Satva, Rājas and
tāmas;

(v) *Many Forms*: The wonderful variety (i.e.) variegated forms
of creation arising through inequalities among the three
‘Guṇas’, referred to in (4) above, the five sense-organs,
the five elements etc.

māyttal eṇṇi, vāy mulai tanta māyap pēy uyir
māyttta āya māyaṇē! vāmaṇaṇē! mātavā!
pūt taṇ mālai koṇtu uṇṇaip pōṭāl vaṇaṅkēṇēlum, niṇ
pūt taṇ mālai neṭu muṭikkup puṇaiyum kaṇṇi eṇatu uyirē.

(IV–3–4)

Translation

My Lord, I served You not with garlands nice, when You
killed
The strange demoness with poisoned breast, who suckled
You with intent to kill, when, as Vāmana, alms You did seek
From Bali, when You churned the ocean and as 'Mātavaś' took
Lakṣmi (Mother) on Your chest and yet, how is it, my life
You hold dear like the garland on Your crown high?

kaṇṇi eṇatu uyir; kātal kaṇkāc coti mutulā
ēn il pal kalāṅkājum; ēlam āṭaiyum aktē;
naṇṇi mūvulakum navīrnam kirttiyum aktē–
kaṇṇaṇ, em pirāṇ, emmāṇ, kāla cakkaraṭṭuṅukkē. (IV–3–5)

Translation

Unto Lord Kaṇṇaṇ, my benefactor great, holding the discus
that 'Time' controls,
Delectable like the garland fine is my soul;
Deems He my love as His gleaming gold crown smart,
The jewels innumerable on His person, the silken robes appro-
priate
And the praises the three worlds heap on Him, their aggregate.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār speaks of the Lord's adoration, strong and
steadfast, of his soul and inordinate love for him.
Having made the Āḻvār subsist in the real sense, the God-
bound, rejuvenated life of the Āḻvār is as dear to Him
as His famous garland 'Vaijayanti'. And what more? The
Lord sees the Āḻvār's God-love as manifesting itself
in His dazzling crown and the numerous jewels on His
glowing person as well as the silken robes befitting Him.
Again, He sees in the Āḻvār's devotion for Him, the
aggregate of the praises heaped on Him by all the worlds.

(ii) Controller of the wheel of Time: Had it not been for the
fact that the Lord is the Controller of the past, present
and future, He could not have fulfilled the aspiration of
the Āḻvār to have a glimpse of His past Avatāras, as set
out in the last decad. As a matter of fact, the present
decad is only the outpouring of the Āḻvār, in grateful
acknowledgement of the Lord's extraordinary com-
pliance.
(iii) Speaking about the Lord's acceptance of the Ālvār's devotion as equivalent to the silken robes of His choice, here is an interesting anecdote:

One day, a Dhobi of the holy men of Śrīraṅgam brought the clothes, laundered by him with loving care, to be worn by the Idol of Lord Raṅganātha, to the great Ācārya, Rāmānuja first, for his approbation. Very pleased with the extra-fine work of the washerman, Śrī Rāmānuja led him straight to the Shrine and requested Lord Raṅganātha to have a look at the clothes, laundered so well, befitting His august Self. The Lord not only condescended to signify His loving approval but also declared, “For the loving service of this washerman, we now grant reprieve to that other washerman, who offended us during our Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa”. It may be recalled that, when Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma went to Mathurā, escorted by Akrūra, the dhobi, who washed the clothes of King Kamsa, was passing along with a donkey-load of laundered clothes of the royalty. He, however, declined to supply the clothes demanded of him by the Divine Brothers. For that offence, committed nearly four thousand years earlier, the Lord, in His Iconic Form as Raṅganātha, now granted him pardon because of the devotion of the washerman ushered into His presence by Śrī Rāmānuja. This is a case of vicarious reward, rather, expiation, betokening the Lord’s adoration of the true devotion of His Subjects.

kāla cakkaratottu veṇcaṅkam kai ēntiṇāy!
ṭālam mūrum  металлum nārāyaṅanē! eṟṟu eṟṟu,
ōlum ēṭṭu nāṅ ālattāl ोṟṟum vārāyākillum,
kōlam ām, ēṟ ceppikku ṽū kamalam aṟṟa kuraṅkālāe.

Translation

Oh, Lord, holding In your hands exquisite,
The deadly discus and the conch white!
Oh, Nārāyaṇa, Who once ate all the worlds and then spat out!
Many a time, Your name I did call out;
Even if You don’t respond at all, Your lotus feet,
With the victorious anklets on, shall my head decorate.

Note
In the preceding songs of this decad, the Lord’s love for the Āḻvār was expatiated on, and now, the Āḻvār’s reciprocal love for the Lord is being talked about. The Āḻvār avers that, even if the Lord studiously kept Himself away without responding to the repeated calls from him, His feet shall always adorn his head. It might be asked how the Lord’s feet could adorn the Āḻvār’s head, even when He is away. The Āḻvār subsists only on the sweet contemplation of the Lord’s feet and when he says, as above, he is only dwelling in his thoughts.

kurai kaḻalkaḷ niṟṭṭi, maṇ koṇṭa kōla vāmaṇā!
kurai kaḻal kaikūppuvārkaḷ kūṭa niṟṟa māyaṇē!
virai koḷ pūvum nirum koṇṭu ēttamāṭṭēṇēlum, un
urai koḷ cōṭit tiru uruvam eṅṭatu āvi mēlatē. (IV–3–7)

Translation
Oh, Vāmaṇā, the handsome, Your resounding feet
Measured the worlds; they who but once salute
Those feet shall attain You, wondrous Sire,
Even if I worship You not with fragrant flowers
And water pure, Your resplendent Form, which beggars
Description, has made my Soul subsist, what a wonder!

Notes
(i) Despite the failure of the Āḻvār to worship, with flowers and water, the Lord, who is attainable by a single salutation with joined palms, the Āḻvār’s soul has become the sole object of redemption by the Lord! The Āḻvār simply thaws down at this boundless love and magnanimity of the Lord.

(ii) It was Vāmaṇā, transformed into Tyvikrama, that measured the worlds, in just three strides, and yet, the
Ālvār says, in this song, that Vāmapa did the job. This is because Vāmapa’s bewitching beauty has such a strong hold on the Ālvār.

eṅṇatu āvi mēlaiyāy! ēr koḷ ēḷ ulakamum
tuṅḷī mūṟṟum āki niṟṟa cōṭi niṟḷā niṟṟa mūṟtiyāy!
uṅṇatu eṅṇatu āviyum; eṅṇatu uṅṇatu āviyum;
iṇḍa vaṇṇamē niṟṟāy eṇṟu uraikka vallēṇē? (IV-3–8)

Translation

With love intense for my soul, you did, in full, pervade
The lovely worlds seven, all things are but your modes;
Radiant knowledge personified, you have my soul in you blended
And yours in me; how can I express this blending unique indeed?

Notes

(i) The original text lends itself to a two-fold interpretation, namely:

(a) Having secured my soul and thus made it subsist in the real sense, You are mighty pleased and are even inclined to feel that the purpose of Your immanence was achieved only when you got at me. This is like a whole town being besieged, for capturing just one person.

(b) Very keen on getting at me, You pervaded all things in their entirety, to ensure that I don’t slip off, by any means.

(ii) It sounds rather odd that the Lord’s Soul should be at the disposal of the Ālvār. But the illustrious Yāmunācārya put it straight, by pointing out that there was nothing odd about this, because there is none to inhibit the Lord when, at His volition, He chooses to place Himself at the disposal of one of His subjects. When the individual Soul has to attain the Lord, the former’s ‘Karma’ could operate as the impediment, which has to be cut out, by His grace. In the reverse gear of the
Lord subordinating Himself to the Individual, there can be no obstruction whatsoever!

uraikkava llen alla; uulappu il kiritti vejjattin
karaikkav enru celvan, nañ? katal maiyal eñiñ;
purappu ilaîa paramparaññe! poiy ilaîa parañcuñare!
iraittu nalla mënmakkaî ëttā, yâñum ëttinê.  (IV-3-9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, complete and certain are your sovereignty and splendour
(Like unto your mingling with me); I can hardly express
Whether at all I can find the shore of the ocean endless
Of your connubial love; steeped in love, I do praise
You, a little, in the foot-steps of the Celestials, good and great,
Who your glory chant in tones that reverberate.

Note

The Êlvar is well aware of his incompetence to sing the praise of the Lord of limitless glory; for the matter of that, the Celestials (Nitya Sûîs) also fall far short, in this regard, their eminence notwithstanding. Even the Lord does not know the full extent of His glory. That being the case, the Êlvar praises the Lord, in a state of ecstatic imbalance, lured by the roaring sound of chanting by the Celestials. After His mingling with the Êlvar, well and truly, the Lord's sovereignty is also complete and His splendour real.

yâñum ëtti, ël ulakum murrum ëtti, pîñnaiyum
tâñum ëttilem, tañnai ëttâ ënta eñku eytum?
têñum pâlum kaññalum amutum âkit tittippa,
yâñum em pirânaiyê ëttinê, yân uyyângê.  (IV-3-10)

Translation

How can it ever exhaust His great glory
If I sang His praise, followed by all the worlds
And the Lord Himself? sweet unto me like honey,
Milk and candy, subsist do I, lauding my nectarean Lord.

Note

The Āḻvār, blest by the Lord with divine knowledge, full and complete, sings His praise, all the worlds without distinction of high and low, knowledgeable or otherwise, extol Him and then, the Omniscient, Omnipotent Lord Himself follows suit. And yet, all of them, put together cannot exhaust His glory, even if they sang His praise for ages, notwithstanding the involvement of the Lord Himself in this project, because His glory is limitless. The Āḻvār, deeply conscious of the felicities showered on him by the Lord, goes on singing the glory of the Lord, sweet unto him like all things delicious put together; otherwise he just cannot subsist.

uyu upāyam maṟṟu iṟmai tēṟi, kaṇṇaṇ on kāḻalkaḻmēl ]+
cyya tāmaraip palaṇat teṭṭiṇ iṟṟuṟc caṭakopaṇ
poy il pātal āyirattū ivaiyum pāṭṭum vallārkaḷ
vaiyam maṇṭi viṟṟiruntu viṇṇum āḻva maṇṇūṭē. (IV–3–11)

Translation

Those well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the veracious thousand composed by Caṭakopaṇ
Of lovely Teṭhurstū, with lotus ponds and fields fertile,
Adoring the comely feet of Kaṇṇaṇ, for sheer survival,
Will for long flourish in this abode
And rule as well, right from here, the heavenly abode.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār spoke about the love that subsists between him and his beloved, the Supreme Lord, in this decad, not because he could talk about it, in any appreciable measure, but for his mere survival.

(ii) Even as Brahma assured Sage Vālmīki, that not a word in the great Kāvya (Rāmāyaṇa) would be untrue, the Dra-
miḍa Veda (Tiruvāymoḻi) is of unquestionable veracity.
The truthfulness, claimed for the Sanskrit Vedas, equally holds good, in respect of the Tamil Veda.

(iii) Prior to his being brought into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava fold, the illustrious Preceptor, Naṅcīyar (formerly known as Vedānti) was a staunch exponent of Advaita philosophy. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭār conquered Vedānti in a religious disquisition, held at the latter’s home town (Melkōt in Karnataka State) and thereafter, Vedānti, turned into the ascetic Naṅcīyar, got himself inducted by Bhaṭṭārya into the rapturous realm of the ‘Divya Prabhanda’s’. Little wonder, an intellectual giant that Naṅcīyar was, he soon mastered the four thousand hymns of the Ājvārś and imparted special lustre to the commentaries thereon. He longed to listen to the discourses at the feet of Bhaṭṭārya but the latter passed away at the tender age of 32. Whenever Naṅcīyar recited this Song, he suffered the pangs of separation from the Master, all the more.

(iv) Verily, the chanters of this decad would be able to grant passport to heaven, to the people of their choice, right from here, betokening their sway over heaven

Fourth Centum—Fourth Decad (IV-4)
(Maṅṇai iruntu tuḷāvi)

In the last decad, the Ājvār rejoiced, over head and ears, in the sweet contemplation of the connubial love subsisting between him and the Lord. The Lord, however, apprehended that the Ājvār might be swept off his feet and thrown overboard by such exuberance of joy, the overwhelming divine ecstasy jeopardising one’s very existence. As already pointed out, at length, in the preamble to I-9, He is known to regulate the flow of His grace, consistent with the recipient’s capacity for in-take and He, therefore, brought down the tempo, a little, just to stabilise the Ājvār’s God-enjoyment. Even this slight diminution, in his erstwhile enjoyment, upset the Ājvār and reduced him to the plight of Śrī Rāma, during his separation from Īḻā. Śrī Rāma is said to have gone about asking the
trees, the rivers (east-bound female rivers as well as the west-bound male rivers) and other inanimate objects, about the whereabouts of Sītā. And now, the Ālvār, transformed once again as Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki, in a state of heavy depression, runs after the objects resembling her beloved Lord, in one respect or another, and things usually associated with Him and the disenchantment brought about, on nearer approach, makes her dumb-founded. This is like a man, dispossessed of his treasure, the money-bag, running about frantically, mistaking, as his own, the bags of others resembling his lost bag.

The Mother comes on the scene once again and relates the pitiable predicament of her daughter and the words she utters. The Mother also reveals her own sad plight, seeing her daughter in great distress. The merciful Lord, however, presents Himself before the Ālvār, towards the end of this decad (tenth song) and puts the Ālvār back on his feet.

maṇṇai iruntu tulāvi. vāmanāṇ man itu eṇṇum;
vinnait tojutu, avaṇ mevu vaikuntam eṇru kai kāṭtum;
kaṇṇai uthir malka niṇṟu, kaṭalvanṇan eṇṇum; appē! enn peṇṇaipe perumayal ceṭṭarku eṇ ceykēn, pey valaiyirē?

(IV-4-1)

**Translation**

Ye, ladies, with bangles bedecked, thro' earth, her hands she runs

And exclaims, it is the one trodden upon by Vāmanāṇ,

The sky she worships with joined palms as Vaikuntaṃ,

Her Lord's transcendent abode, and points it to others as well;

Her mental anguish finds its outlet thro' tears torrential

And says she, her Lord is of oceanic hue;

Unto Him who has my daughter thus entranced, what to do?

**Notes**

(i) The Mother tells, as above, those who come and enquire of her about the condition of her daughter, Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki.

(ii) *Earth, trodden upon by Vāmanāṇ.* This kind of glamour for the earth, recalling its association with Vāmana who trod upon it, long, long back, has a parallel in Sage
Viśvāmitra: When Rāma and Lakaṃañā accompanied the sage to help him through his yāga, they passed by a nice orchard. On being asked by Śīl Rāma whose it was, the sage replied that it was the Siddhāśrama, where the Lord, as Vāmana, once resided, which the sage was still clinging to fondly, enjoying the scent of the soil.

(iii) Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki, pointing to the sky, says that 'Vai-kuṇṭa', the permanent abode of the Lord is over there. This has a parallel in Śloka 16 of chapter 160 of Vana-parva in Mahā Bhārata, where a few people are said to have had a glimpse of the Heaven, right from the hermitage of Ārṣṭiṣeṇa, the Rāja ṛṣi.

Unable to visualise the actual setting in Heaven, tears come to Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki’s eyes and musing on the Lord’s blue complexion, she says her Lord is of oceanic hue. The mother just doesn’t know how to deal with the situation, whether to ask her daughter to await His arrival patiently or to request Him to come quick and meet her daughter.

Translation

Hal comprehend I can’t the actions of my daughter,
Angellic little one, reverently joining her hands decked with bangles
And looking at the ocean as where reposes her great Bene-
factor;
Pointing to the Sun with red sheen peerless, she tells
That is just the complexion of Ciūtaraṇ; flooded with tears
In her languishing eyes, the word Nāraṇaṇ, she always utters.

Note

It is because Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki keeps meditating on her Lord of oceanic hue that the bangles could be sustained on her
wrist, despite her separation from her beloved. It is now night and nothing is visible. The pensive Nāyakī with joined palms, however, hears the roaring noise of the oceanic waves and instantly envisions her Lord of oceanic hue, with her mind’s eye, and says, it is the place where her Lord reposes. It could also be that she was recalling Śrī Rāma languishing before the ocean, without food, in order to get at Sītā.

And now, the Sun has risen and there is the visible Sun, unlike the ocean which she could only muse upon the previous night; without actually seeing it. The Sun reminds the Nāyakī of the conjunction of the Lord and Lakṣmī, like unto the combination of the gem and its lustre. Did not Sītā tell Rāvaṇa that she was but the sheen of Rāma, the Sun and that she could not be separated from Śrī Rāma? Śrī Rāma also echoed the same sentiment, later on. The Nāyakī is too feeble to mouth the word ‘Nārāyaṇa’, in full and merely mutters the incomplete word ‘Nārāṇ’.

Translation

This fell-sinner’s little daughter, whose wrists are with bangles packed,
Clasps the blistering flame red, saying it is Accutaṇ, her Lord
But remains unhurt; the chill wind that blows she does embrace,
Saying it is Kōvintaṇ, her Sire, and acquires the sweet fragrance
Of the tulaci on His person; many a thing like this do I witness!

Notes

(i) The flamboyance of the Lord’s person is referred to, as a bundle of brilliance. And so, the Nāyakī embraces the red flame with the same avidity with which she would embrace the Lord and because of her sincerity, she does not get blistered, even as Prahlāda was not scalded by fire and remained unscathed.
(ii) The cool, southerly breeze is unto the Nāyaki, like Kṛṣṇa, back home in the evening after tending the cows, coming towards her for a sweet embrace. . Locked in the Lord’s embrace, in the form of the cool breeze, the Nāyaki acquires the sweet fragrance of the tūḷācī on the Lord’s person. (It is well known that fire blisters the common man while even the cool, southerly breeze has a blistering effect on the lover during moments of separation from her beloved. From what the mother has seen of the Nāyaki, she does not fall in either category—inscrutable indeed are her ways.

ṅiṟiyā tiṅkālaik kāṭṭi, ṭi māṇi vanaṇē! eṇum;
ṅuṟu kuṟṟattīṇai nokki, neṭumālē, vā! eṇu kūvum;
ṇaṟu peyyum malai kānil, nāraṇaṇ vantān eṇu ālum;
eṇu īṇa maiyalkal ceyṭān-eṇṉuṭai kōmaḷattaiye? (IV–4-4)

Translation

Says my tender daughter, love-intoxicated, pointing to the full Moon bright,
“Ha! my lustrous Lord of sapphire hue,”; beckons she the mountain high,
Saying, “Come, oh, Neṭumāl,”; beholding the rain-clouds fine,
She exclaims, “Nāraṇaṇ has come.” and dances with great delight.

Notes

The Moon is said to have emerged from the Lord’s mind: The Moon is cool and exhilarating like the Lord and hence, Parāṇkuṣa Nāyaki looks upon the Moon as the Lord Himself. The well-grown mountain, tall and majestic, reminds the Nāyaki of the tall Trīvṛkrama, who measured the worlds. Naṇciyar puts it admirably that the Lord fights shy of coming to the Āḻvār straight, weighed down by a clogging sense of default and puts a cloak on His head. The green growth on the mountain-tops corresponds to this cloak and the Nāyaki now beckons the Lord, in the shape of the mountain, to come and shake off all reserve.
The water-laden cloud is taken to be the Lord Himself, and the Nāyaki dances with joy even as the peacock does, in rapturous delight, at the sight of the rain-cloud.

kōmāla vān kaṟṟaip pulki, kōvintaṇ mēytaṇa ennun;
pōm ila nākattun piṅ pōy, avaṅ kiṭakkaṅ itu ennun;
ām alavu oram ariyēn: aruviṇaiyāṭṭiyēn peṟṟa
kōmāla valliyan māyōṅ māl ceṭtu ceykiṅga kūttē. (IV–4–5)

Translation

My daughter, like the tendril young, has a hearty hug
At the young calves hefty, saying these are the ones
Tended by Kōvintaṇ; she runs after the crawling cobra young,
Saying that it is her Lord’s bed; what the wondrous Lord means
To do with her, I, the incurable sinner, know nothing.

Notes

(i) More than tending the cows, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was fond of looking
after the calves, the young ones, unable to look after
themselves. This only indicates the special care, bes-
towed by the Lord on the weaker subjects.

(ii) Least afraid of the poisonous cobra, Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki
would run after it, with the alluring affinity that it is
the Lord’s bed. The Mother stands perplexed, not
knowing to what lengths such things might go.

kūttar kuṭam cṭuttu āṭil, kōvintaṇ ām ennā ṧtum;
vāyttta kuḷal-ōcai kēṭkil, māyavaṇ ennū maiyākkum;
āycciya vēṇākaḷ kāṅil, avaṅ uṇṭa vēṇai itu ennun;
pēycci mulai cuvattārkku enn peṅkoṭi ēriva piṭṭē! (IV–4–6)

Translation

Whoever does the pot-dance, my creeper-like daughter
Takes him to be Kōvintaṇ and runs after;
The sweet sound of the flute, when she hears,
Thinks she of her wondrous (Kappaṅ) and goes into raptures;
The butter she beholds in shepherdesses’ hands, she avers
Is the same as that He ate; ḫa! she is over head and ears
In love with Him that sucked (unto death) the breast of the
demoness.

Note

No doubt, during the Lord’s avatarā as Kṛṣṇa, He partook of
the community life and excelled in pot-dance. But that was
long, long ago. But any one doing this dance as a piece of
public show for eking out his livelihood, is mistaken by
Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki for Kṛṣṇa and she runs after the perfor-
mer, despite the clarification furnished by the people around.
The sweet strain from a wayfarer’s flute electrifies the Nāyaki
who sees in it Kṛṣṇa Himself, who was known to go round
the Gopīs, playing on His enchanting Flute meaningful
songs, meant to placate the frustrated ones among them, by
vindicating His position. If a shepherdess brought butter
for sale, the Nāyaki would look upon it as what remained
after Kṛṣṇa had consumed. This extraordinary fasci-
nation for Kṛṣṇa, on the part of the Nāyaki, is said to be an
expression of her gratitude for Him for having killed, as a
mere babe, the treacherous Pūthanā, the imposter of a
mother. The Nāyaki thinks that the Lord survived the
ordeal, only for her sake.

ēriya pittunōtu ellā ulakum kaṇṇaṭ payippum eḻum;
niru cevvē īṭak kānil, neṭumāl aṭiyâr eḻu Ōṭum;
nāru tulāy malar kānil, nāraṇaṭ kaṇni itu eḻum;
tēriyam teṟatēm māyōn-tiṟattanēḻe it tiruvē.     (IV-4-7)

Translation

My daughter, in the mould of Tirumakal, knows naught
Besides the wondrous Lord, be her mind agitated
Or clear; well under the spell of God-love, she says,
“All the worlds are but Kaṇṇaṭ’s creation”; she goes
After those who, on their foreheads, apply the ash
Vertically, as Neṭumāl’s votaries; when she sees
A fragrant tulāci garland, “This is Nāraṇaṭ’s.” she says.

Notes

(i) The world might find the Nāyaki excited, being out of
the ordinary run, but she is absolutely clear, so far as
God-head is concerned. Actually, she knows nothing else. Even in her present state, she is voicing forth effortlessly, the Vedic truths dwelled into, by the great 'Brahma-Jñānis' like Sage Parāśara. This is like a Vedic scholar reciting the Vedas even during mental aberration.

(ii) The Ālvār is well aware that ash is eschewed by the votaries of Lord Viṣṇu and yet the vertical application of the ash on their foreheads, by a few, caught in two minds, makes the Nāyaki look upon them also as Vaiṣṇavas (wearing the vertical caste-mark) and go after them. The word ‘nīru’, in the original text of this song, need not necessarily denote ‘ash’ (bhasma); it could as well mean the dust off the feet of the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, as indicated by the use of this very word in IV-6-6.

(iii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki is said to be an incarnation of Goddess Lakṣmi. Lakṣmi is coveted by the Lord while the Nāyaki covets the conjunction of them both.

tiru uṭai maṇḍaraik kānil, tirumālaik kaṇṭēnē ennūm;
urū uṭai vāṇṇaṅkaḷ kānil, ulaku aḷañtāṉ ennū tuḷḷum;
karu uṭait tēvu ilkal ellām kaṭalvaṇṇaṅ kōyilē ennūm;
veruvilum viḻvilum óvāḷ; kaṇṇaṅ kaḷalkaḷ virumpumē.

Translation

On seeing the wealthy Kings (of the Earth), says my daughter, She has seen ‘Tirumāl’; nice things with gay colours, She jumps at, seeing in them her Lord, who did measure The worlds; any temple she sees, with idol inside, she adores As the temple of her cloud-hued Lord; pines she for ever, Kaṇṇaṅ’s feet, be she amorous or in a state of fear.

Notes

(i) Beholding the earthly kings, the Nāyaki says she has seen her Lord. As the Śāstras put it down, none can become a King without the grace of Lord Viṣṇu. The king is, therefore, said to contain an element of Lord Viṣṇu.
(ii) The Nāyaki visualises Lord Śrīvīkrama in all things gay and colourful, and any stone-image in any temple-like structure, she looks upon as the Iconic Form of Lord Viṣṇu and His temple respectively. As a matter of fact, salutation made to minor deities also reaches Him, as the Internal Controller of one and all. Indeed, the divine consciousness in her has developed to such an extent that she perceives Divinity in all external objects.

It is said that Saint Nāthamuni once saw a King mounting an elephant, by planting one foot on the head of a subordinate prince standing nearby, and exclaimed: “Well, this is how my universal Lord mounts His vehicle, Gaurḍa, stepping on the heads of Brahmā, the demiurge and others”.

During those periods when she is steeped in God-love, the Nāyaki is said to be in an amorous state while, at other times, she is seized with fright, at the sight of the earthly relations around.

virumpip pakavaraik kāñil, viyal-ītam unṭānē! eṇṇum; karum peru mēkaṅkaḷ kāñil, kaṭṭanē eṇu ēṟap parakkum; perum pula ā-nirai kāñil, pirāṇ uḷaṇ eṇu piṇ cellum; arum peral-ṭennai māyōḷ alargi, ayarppikkiṅṟānē. (IV-4-9)

Translation

This daughter of mine, difficult to attain, is made to cry out, Mad with love for her wondrous Lord; if ascetics she met, She would with devotion exclaim, “Oh, Saviour great, Who did the sprawling worlds in your stomach sustain,” She would want to leap up to the dark-cloud, dense, Saying, “Tis Kaṭṭanē, my Lord”; after cows, heftly and nice, Run she would, hoping to meet her Lord, the Cow-herd divine.

Notes

(i) Indeed, Paṟāṅkuṣa Nāyaki is a daughter, rare of attainment, who has enriched the world she lived in, with
her lofty thoughts and noble conduct, surcharged with God-love of a unique order.

(ii) Seeing the water-laden cloud, the Nāyakī felt that Lord Kṛṣṇa presented Himself before her and she would want to reach Him, high up there. Here is an anecdote to illustrate how devotees felt entranced by the rain-clouds, seeing their likeness to the Lord’s complexion.

Tiruvāykulattālvār, a resident of Rājendra Cōḷaṇ, went to the fields during a rainy season to inspect the crops. As he approached the fields, he saw the clouds above, which instantly put into his mind the cloud-hued Lord Viṣṇu. In a fit of ecstasy, he fell down unconscious. One of the cultivators, standing nearby, gathered him up and escorted him to his house. The escort, however, blamed the inmates of the house for having allowed one of such saintly temperament to go out for field-inspection during the rainy season.

ayarkkum: cūṟṟum pāṟṟi nōkkki, akalavē nil nōkkuk kolḷum; viyarkkum; malaikkam tūḷumpa, vevvuyir kolḷum; mey cōṟum; peyartum kaṟṇā! enṟu pēcum; perumāṇē, vā! enṟu kūyum; mayal-peruṇ kātal en pētaikkku eḻeceykēn valviṇaiyēn?

(IV-4-10)

Translation

Love-mad, my daughter looks around many a time (for Kaṟṇān) And then, she looks far across, with eyes wide open, Tears well up her eyes and (disappointed) she sweats and withers down, Hewing a deep sigh; even so, Him she fondly beckons, ‘Kaṟṇā, my Sire,’; what shall this sinner do for her, love-lorn?

Note

Unable to get at the Lord in the manner the Nāyakī attempted, namely, running after things bearing His likeness, the Nāyakī, stands dazed. However, in the certain hope that her beloved Kṛṣṇa will go to her, Pāṟāṅkuśa Nāyakī looks around but not finding Him anywhere near at hand, she fancies, He must be on His way, having already left the celestium, bound for her. And, therefore, she strains her eyes to look
at Him, coming down from Heaven, and enjoy His majestic gait. But then, she sweats heavily, with disappointment and tears well up her eyes. Withering down, she breathes hot and yet, she couldn’t resist calling out for Him, at the top of her voice. At this stage, due to the exhilaration of reciting the Lord’s names, she fancies that He has come within sight of her mind’s eye and lovingly welcomes Him, saying, “Come along, my Lord,”

valviṇai tirkkum kaṭṭanai vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ col viṇaiyal coṇṇa pāṭal āyirattul ivai patrum nalviṇai eru kaṭpākaṇ ṇalaṇṭai vaikuntam ṇaṇṇi, tolvīṇai tira ellārum toḻutu eja viṭṭirupāre. (IV–4–11)

Translation

Those that learn, with devotion great, these songs ten,
Out of the thousand skilfully composed by Caṭakōpaṇ,
Chief of fertile Kurukūr, adoring Kaṇṭan, the Redeemer
Of sins, one and all, will of all their sins be cured
And attain the blissful heaven, revered by the Celestials over there.

Notes

(i) Unable to stand the sufferings of the Ālvār any longer, the Lord came down post-haste and relieved the Ālvār of his erstwhile distress. That is why the Ālvār calls Him, the great Redeemer of all sins. Even if the parents give up their daughter, the husband who took her by the hand, will never give her up. The Lord’s paragata svikāra’ (i.e.) wooing His devotee and taking him within His grip always endures unlike the mother who finds herself helpless and plays the role of an anxious on-looker.

(ii) Those that learn this decad, either engrossed in its sweetness or banking on its potentiality for good, will attain the blissful Heaven, where there is no risk of separation from the Lord (viśleṣa), and have a royal reception, at the hands of the exalted band of ‘Nītyā Sūris.’ (The ever-free, eternal angels).
Fourth Centum—Fifth Decad (IV-5)
(Viṣṇiruntu el ulakum)

Preamble

If the Āḻvār was seen in the last decad in a heavy state of depression, it was because the Lord intended it to be so. Even as hunger is the pre-requisite for consuming food, for God-enjoyment in its entirety, a consuming passion of the highest intensity, as seen in the climactic tenth decad of the tenth centum, is imperative. Meanwhile, what is happening is a course of Shock-treatment, working the Āḻvār up to the required pitch. By experiencing, alternately, the bliss of Divine presence and rapport and the cruel pangs of separation from Him, the Āḻvār’s appetite for God-enjoyment is whetted and his divine love and wisdom enriched all the time. If the Lord had stayed away from the Āḻvār altogether without obliging him with His vision, now and then, both the Lord and the world would have lost him. Apart from the afore-mentioned technique adopted by the Lord to enrich and intensify the Āḻvār’s God-love, his continued stay in this abode has enriched the world through his hymns of unparalleled excellence, a rich fare for the devotees revelling in sweet contemplation of the Lord’s auspicious traits and wondrous deeds. This is yet another purpose of the Lord in lengthening the Āḻvār’s stay in this abode. And so, we see in this decad the very antithesis of the Āḻvār’s harrowing experience in the last decad; his joy knows no bounds and leads him on to exclaim, “Could there be any want for me hereafter?”, “Is there any one equal to me in all the world?” and so on. The structure of this decad suggests that the Āḻvār is right at the peak of divine bliss and, in the opinion of Naṭṭīyar, this could as well have been the very last decad of this grand hymnal.

Unlike the spurious objects which misled the Āḻvār in the last decad, he now visualises the Lord’s cosmic wealth in all its facts. The Lord seems to call upon the Alvar to sing His glory to his heart’s fill, adding that His cosmic wealth can acquire special lustre only through his laudation. Accordingly, the Āḻvār sings, with cymbals in hand, and goes into raptures.
vittiruntu ēj ulakum taµikkol cella, vivu il cīr
āṟṟal mikku ālum ammāṅai, vem mā piḻantāṅ-taṅīai,
pōṟi eṅē kaikaḷ ārat toḻutu, col-mālaikaḷ
ēṟṟa nōṟṟēku ini eṅa kurai eḻumaiyumē? (IV–5–1)

Translation

Could there be any want for me for generations,
Blest that I am to prostrate lustily, in benedictive adoration
And offer besides hymnal garlands appropriate
Unto the Lord, who the fierce horse-shaped fiend’s mouth smote
The repository of auspicious attributes endless, seated in heaven,
Holding sway unique over all he worlds with great serenity?

Note

Being in the happy position of lauding the Master of the
entire universe and envisioning, right from here, the heavenly
splendour, the Āḻvār feels he is above wants of any kind.
For instance, in the last decad, with joined palms, the Nāyakī
dpointed to the mere sky as the heaven and now the void is
more than filled, those hands being lustily fed by repeated
salutation of the Lord in all His splendour. Supreme
Sovereign though, the Lord is not a despot. He rules the
worlds with quiet dignity and is exceedingly generous even as
Śrī Rāma, the Lord in His incarnate Form, was at the
disposal of the subjects.

maiya kaṇṇāl, malar mēḷ uṟaivāḷ uṟai mārpiṉān,
cceyya kōlat taṭaṅ kaṇṇaṅ, viṇṇōr perumāṅ-taṅīai,
moyya collāl icaimālaikaḷ ētti, uḷḷappēṟṟēṇ–
veyya nōykaḷ muḻutum viyaṅ fiḻattu viyavē. (IV–5–2)

Translation

Blest am I, while still in this sprawling land,
To contemplate and laud thro’ hymnal garlands,
Well set, the Lord of Celestials, with large eyes,
Red and lovely, on whose chest always stays
Lakṣmi, the lotus-born with collyrium in her eyes, well set
And get all dire ills and evils rooted out.

Notes

(i) It is lakṣmi, the Goddess of plenty and riches, who adds
lustre to the Lord’s glory by making His chest, her
permanent abode. This glorious conjunction, which
the Āḻvār praises, cures all ills and evils. If the Divine
Mother looked at the Lord full in the face just once,
the latter would feel exhilarated, cool and pleasant,
as at the end of a heavy downpour. It is indeed a
matter of reciprocity that Lakṣmi’s eyes are dark and
the Lord’s eyes are red, the red complexion of the former
having got transplanted in the eyes of the latter and the
latter’s dark complexion having likewise been transposed,
when they gazed at each other

(ii) It is significant that there is no mention in the text, as
to whose ills have been rooted out by the Āḻvār’s hymns.
Evidently, it is intended to be of universal application
and not parochial, benefiting the Āḻvār only, like the
poor shade, thin and small, cast by the palmyrah tree.

vivu il ippam mika ellai nikānta nam accutaṅ,
vivu il ciraṅ, malark kaṇṇaṅ, vinṇōr perumāṅ-taṅgaṅil,
vivu il kālam icaimālaṅkaḷ ētti, mēvappētēpp;
vivu il ippam mika ellai nikāntaṅaṅ mēviyē. (IV–5–3)

Translation

Dwell do I at the very acme of bliss perennial,
Having attained Accutān, my Lord, Chief of Celestials,
Of limitless glory and eternal bliss, with red-lotus eyes,
By incessant praise thro’ hymns mellifluous

Notes

(i) The bliss that the Āḻvār experiences, as a result of singing
Tiruvāymoji’, is not merely unlimited but also supreme.
Unlike the Veda Puruṣa, who attempted the impossible
in trying to gauge the extent of the Lord’s bliss and had
to acknowledge defeat, the Āḷvār has, right from the
beginning, been declaring that the Lord is an inexhaustible
fountain of bliss. And now, he finds that the
bliss derived by him by singing the Lord’s praise through
his scintillating hymns is also endless and supreme,
there being nothing higher than this.

(ii) The tell-tale lotus eyes of the Lord proclaim His Sovereignty over all the worlds. It is not as if there is none to
enjoy the Lord’s charming eyes, like unto moon-shine
wasted over the depopulated jungle, as we are likely
to conclude, seeing the men over here turning their
faces against Him; the whole lot of Celestials, the
denizens in the yonder heaven, stand rivetted to these
eyes, enthralled by their magic spell.

mēvi nīṟu toḻuvār viṉai pōka mēvum pirān,
tūvi am pul uṭaiyān, aṭal ājī ammān-taṇṇa
nā iyalāl icaimālai kal ētti, nāṟṟap pēṟṟēn;
āvi en āviyai yān aṟiyēn-ceyta āṟṟaiyē. (IV–5–4)

Translation
I know not how the Lord, inside my soul,
Transformed it so as to sing His glory thro ‘hymns tuneful;
The Supreme Benefactor that He is, He does mingle
With those in Him absorbed and whose sins destroys, one and
all;
Garuḍa, the bird with lovely plumes, is His mount
And He holds in His hands, the discus valiant.

Notes
(i) The Lord gives Himself to those who long for Him ex-
clusively, cutting out all other desires. All other
desires gone, the sins also vanish. Oh, what a wonder,
the Lord of the Eternal Heroes lavishes His bounty on a
worldling like the Āḷvār, and the latter, a mere speck
enjoys the bliss and beatitude, on a par with the infinite
Lord, if not more!
(ii) The hymns come off effortlessly; the Āḻvār has only to set his tongue in motion, and there we have the meli-fluous songs, sending the listeners, in all ages and climes, into raptures.

āṟṟa nalla vakai kāṭṭum ammāṇai, ammaratam
ēṟṟai, ellāp porulum virittāṇai, emmāṇ-taṉṇai.
māṟra mālai puṇaintu ētti, nāḻum makiḻvu eytiṇēn–kāṟṟiṇ muṇṇam kaṭuki viṇai nōykal kariyavē. (IV–5–5)

Translation

Singing the praise of my Lord, Chief of Celestials, Who does unto His devotees, by stages, reveal The wholesome path of progress and knowledge sound impart, Thro’ hymnal garlands that do dense ills and evils cut out, Moving faster than wind, I feel for ever jubilant.

Notes

(i) That the Lord duly regulates the influx of His grace has been brought out at length, in the preamble to I-9, quoting the relevant aphorism of ‘Ācārya-Hṛdayam, which elucidates the theme admirably.

(ii) The great truths: In Bhagavad Gītā Lord Kṛṣṇa imparted to the world at large, through Arjuna, a volume of spiritual-knowledge—the distinction between the Supreme Lord and the Individual Soul (Jīva), the difference between the ‘Jīva’ and the non-sentient matter, immortality of the Soul, the Lord, as the Supreme Ordainer of all beings and things, controlling motion as well as rest, being easily attainable by devotees but difficult of attainment by others, differentiation between the Divine and the Devilish, equality in the eyes of the Lord, irrespective of caste, conduct and erudition, the path of loving surrender to His redemptive grace and all that.

(iii) All these benefits lavished by a loving Lord the Āḻvār could hardly repay, and hence he started lauding His great glory, which laudation assumed the form of
‘Tiruvāymoḻi’. Result: The miseries and the acts
giving rise to them have all been expelled expeditiously.

kariya mēñimicai veliya niru cirētē itum
periya kōlat taṭaṅkaṇṇān, viṅnor perumān-taṇṇai,
uriya collāl icaimālaikal ētti ullaperēēkku
ariyatu unṭō enakkku iru totīrum iṇi eṇrumē? (IV–5–6)

Translation
Could there be anything scarce for me, now and beyond,
Blest that I am to praise thro’ hymnal garlands,
In diction appropriate, the Chief of Celestials, my Lord
Whose large eyes lovely are with collyrium gently smeared?

Notes
(i) To a question put by the Lord to the Āḷvār what he needs,
pat goes the reply from him, saturated with divine bliss,
that there is scarcely a thing he hasn’t got already and
there would be nothing beyond attainment in the days
to come. This depicts the mental state of the divine
bard, in the realm of ecstasy, born of singing ‘Tiruvāy-
moḻi’, which stands on a pedestal of its own; It contains
nothing but the praise of ‘Tirumāl’ (Lord Viṣṇu), in
choice diction, true to the Āḷvār’s resolve in ‘Tiruvirut-
tam’, the first of his four works. Indeed, he who is
inspired by God Himself, becomes the most worthy
instrument to praise Him; he becomes the Lord’s own
poet. In his Rāmāyaṇa, Śrī Vālmiki introduced quite
a few extraneous anecdotes, such as the genesis of
Gahga, birth of Kārthikeya and so on. Sage Vyāsa’s
Mahābhārata also turned out to be a war-memoir, with
a bewildering maze of episodes, instead of telling
exclusively, the story of Nārāyaṇa, as the author had
intended at the outset. Herein lies the superior merit
of Tiruvāymoḻi.

(ii) The bewitching eyes of the Lord would certainly need
no further beauty-aids and yet, there is the ceremonial
application of collyrium.
Fourth Centum (IV-5)

Translation

Blest that we are to offer garlands of hymns
Unto the Benefactor great, who repelled the rains,
Holding the mount aloft, with none above or equal to Him,
Sovereign master of all the world’s, who constant remains
For ever, could there for us be any want?

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār declared that he is free from wants of any kind and shall be above wants in the days to come as well. This might sound boastful but such a stance on his part is attributable to his authorship of the marvellous hymns, the Tīruvāymoḻi, which again is due to the Lord’s grace, a fact emphasised in this song.

(ii) The Lord is constant and unchanging, whatever be His modes. In all His five manifestations, of ‘Para’, Vyūha’, ‘Vibhava’, ‘Antaryāmi’ and ‘Arcā’ the Lord has none above or equal to Him. Even so, it is in His Incarnate (Vibhava) Forms, that He excels. In fact, He excels in His trait of ‘Āśṭapāratanṭra ’ (subservience to His devotees) for which His incarnations afford the maximum scope and there is hardly any equal for Him, in this respect.

Translation

Is there any one, even in the spacious heaven, equal to me
Gifted with the capacity to compose hymns,
Adoring the Lord, dear alike to us and the lotus-born (Lakṣmī)

namakkum pūvīṉ micai nāṇkaikkum tūpāṟai, Ṇāḷattār
tamakkum vāṉattavarkkum perumāṉai, taṉ-tāmarai
cumakkum pāṭap perumāṉai, colmālaikkal collumāṟu
amaikkava vallēṟku ini yāvar nikar-akal vāṉattē? (IV-5-8)
Sovereign Master of those in heaven and all other realms,
Whose lovely feet the cool lotus bears?

Notes

(i) Seeing the Lord's overwhelming love for him, the Āḻvār feels tempted to declare that there is none equal to him, the Lord's poet, even in Heaven. The Lord's love for His devotees is even greater than that borne by Him for Lakṣmī, His consort, as could be seen from the fact that we the devotees, are mentioned first, in the text of this song, Lakṣmī comes next. This is further elucidated in aphorism 122 of Ācarya Hṛdayam. This fact is also reinforced by an episode in Rāmāyaṇa. Standing on a mountain top overlooking Laṅkā, Sugrīva saw, for the first time, Rāvana, on another hill-top, opposite. Swayed by the first impulse, Sugrīva leapt across and toppled down the crown of Rāvana. Śrī Rāma who witnessed that, gently reprimanded the Monkey-King, on his return, saying "what you have done is indeed something not expected of you. If Rāvana had harmed you or humiliated you in any manner what use is there for me in reclaiming Sītā thereafter?" This clearly shows that Śrī Rāma's concern for Sugrīva was even greater than that for Sītā. Sītā would be of no consequence to Śrī Rāma, once Sugrīva's honour was compromised.

(ii) As already stated in III-1-1, the Lord's feet stand poised on a lotus base. And here, the lotus is said to carry the Lord's feet. This is because the Lord's feet score over the lotus, in all respects-chillness, fragrance and tint. The lotus thus stands subjugated and carries its victor, the Lord's feet.

(iii) The Āḻvār's capacity to sing hymns is commendable, not because of his excellence as a poet, but because he could steady himself and sing, when called upon by the Lord to sing His praise, instead of thawing down in ecstasy. The Āḻvār's poetic excellence is not emphasised here;
actually, in the Seventh centum, ninth decad, the Āljvār says that it is the Lord who sings His own glory, keeping the Āljvār as but His mouthpiece.

vāṇattum vāṇattuṁ umparum maṇṇulum maṇṇīṅkīḷt
tāṇattum en-ticaiyum tavrātu niṅṛān-taṅṇai,
kūṭal caṅṅat taṭakkaiyavaṇṇai, kuṭam āṭiyai,
vāṇak kōṇai, kavi colla vallēkku ṭi māṟuṇṭē? (IV-5-9)

Translation

Is there a poet on a par with me,
Singing the glory of the Lord, pervading everywhere,
Top, middle and bottom, all things, all over,
Holding in His hand hefty the spiral conch lovely,
The pot-dancer entrancing, Chief of the Celestials?

Notes

(i) The Āljvār is the peerless poet, singing the Lord’s glory embracing all His five aspects of ‘Para’ (transcendent), Vyūha (Operative), Vibhava (Incarnate), ‘Antaryāmi’ (Internal Controller) and ‘Arca’ (Iconic) Forms. The ‘Nityas’ (Eternal Heroes) and ‘Muktas’ (Released Souls), in Heaven, confine themselves to the transcendent glory of the Lord; Sages like Parāśara and Vyāsa recount only Lord Kṛṣṇa’s glory even as Sage Vālmīki stands rivetted to Śri Rāma’s. Sages Sanaka, Sanandana and others of that group sing the praise of the Lord as the Internal Controller. Thus Nammāḷvār, stands out as the only poet covering all the aspects of the Lord. It is also noteworthy that the Āljvār repeatedly refers to the Lord’s inmanence, full and complete, setting at naught the controversial view held by some that the Lord’s pervasion is only partial and not complete.

(ii) ‘Spiral conch’ stands for all the Lord’s effulgent weapons, like discus, mace etc, even as ‘Pot-dancing’ stands for all the other activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

T—12
Translation

Joy do I rain on devotees thro' Tamil hymns fine,
I have the fortune to compose, adoring Him, who, from time to time,
Ate, spat, spanned and pulled out the worlds,
Who (as Rāma) lay (on sea-front) and (victorious) stood
(on the battlefield) and then sat for long, on the throne,
Acts which, on the fact, proclaim Him as Sovereign Supreme.

Notes

(i) The Ālvār feels doubly blessed, in that he not only renders service unto the Lord, by word of mouth, (Vācika Kaiṅkarya) but also regales His devotees, through his hymns. The Lord's wondrous deeds and marvellous achievements, the Ālvār recounts rapidly but with great ease. The Lord sustained, in His stomach, all the worlds, for the duration of the deluge and then let them out; He measured the worlds in three strides and on another occasion, retrieved the Earth from the ocean; He prostrated in front of the Indian ocean, invoking the help of the king of the ocean to bund it and cross over to Laṅkā and stood victorious, after Rāvana was slain, granting audience to the Celestials, gathered in the outer space. After His return from exile Śrī Rāma ruled this land for eleven thousand years and thus graced the earth, rather held Mother Earth in His embrace. All these deeds of the Lord clearly establish His Sovereignty over the entire Universe, even as we recognise the earthly owners of lands from their various dealings, connected with the lands.

(ii) The Ālvār is the joyous cloud, unleashing the rain of joy upon the Lord's devotees through Tiruvāymoḷi.
mâri mârâta tañ am malai vēṇkâṭattu apnalai
vâri mârâta paim pûm pojil cûl kurukûr nakark
kâri marâŋ caṭakopã col âyirattu ip pattâl
vēri mârâta pûmēl iruppâl viñai tirkkumē.  

(IV-5-11)

Translation

Lakṣmî, the lotus-born, of perpetual fragrance, will help those that learn
These songs ten, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakopan, Of Kurukûr, with perennial water and big gardens,
Full of flowers lovely, lauding the Lord at Vēṇkâṭam, the mountain
Cool and lovely, with continual rain, to get rid of all sins.

Notes

(i) There is no mention in any of the ten preceding songs, about the Lord enshrined in Tiruvēṇkâṭam, and yet, in this end-song, the Lord, in His iconic Form, has been referred to. This only shows that the emphasis rests on ‘Arca’ throughout ‘Tiruvâyîmolî’. In the eighth stanza of this decad, the amazing extent of God’s condescending love, giving precedence to the worldlings over even the Divine Mother, was alluded to. The Lord at Tiruvēṇkatam is the very personification of such condescending love, and He has, therefore, been referred to in this end-stanza. Continual rains in Tiruvēṇkatam ensure the abundance of water for all time in Kurukûr (Tirunakari), the birth place of the Ālvâr, and because of this plentiful supply of water, the fragrance of the lotus-flower on which Lakṣmî, the Divine Mother is seated, is undiminishing. (Grand poetic imagery indeed!)

(ii) The text, as in the original, is misconstrued by some as placing the Divine Mother on a par with the Lord, in regard to the grant of ‘Mokṣa’. Hers is only a recommendatory role and she can only be instrumental in our attaining Mokṣa at the hands of the Lord whose indivisible and inalienable prerogative is ‘Mokṣa pradatva (grant of Mokṣa). The following is the elucidation
of Śrīman Nigamānta Deśika, in his commentary on Saint Yāmuna’s Catuś Šlokt ’ in regard to this point. “It is the sole prerogative of the Lord to reward or punish the subjects, in the light of their ‘Karma’, the good and bad deeds. The Merciful Mother, however, makes admirable use of her position and privilege and gets the reward magnified and the punishment minimised through her good offices.”

The chanters of this decad are thus quite safe under the apron of the Divine Mother, the sure deliverer of the goods.

Fourth Centum—Sixth Decad (IV-6)

Tirppārai yām inī

Preamble:

In the last decad, the Āḻvār was seen at the acme of divine bliss, bubbling with joy and fully satisfied. The Lord has, however, since withdrawn Himself from the Āḻvār’s mental vision and he is now consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection, transformed once again as a ‘Nāyakī’, unable to speak out her woe. It is her mate that speaks, in this decad. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is thinning down alarmingly, in her present state of extreme desolation. The elderly women around who notice this with great concern, seek the help of the professional sooth-sayer (a female gipsy) for divining the cause of the Nayaki’s malady and suggesting the remedies therefor. On being told by the gipsy that the Nāyakī is under the spell of a minor (inferior) deity, these women proceed to propitiate that deity with the customary offerings of meat, liquor etc, as advised by the concerned priest. This only aggravates the mental agony of the Nāyakī and, at this stage, her mate, who knows the real cause of the Nayaki’s malady, is critical of the steps taken by the women-folk and vehemently condemns them. Thus, this decad brings out the Āḻvār’s singular devotion to Lord Viṣṇu and his total abhorrence, rather intolerance of anything which smacks of allegiance to the minor deities.

It is indeed puzzling that such a traumatic experience should at all overtake the Āḻvār, just after what we had seen of him in the
last decad. If one searches for any link between these two consecutive decades and attempts to explain the violent fluctuations in the Āljār’s fortunes, lack of coherence seems to be the only coherence, as Empār would put it, ‘asaṅgathireva saṅgathiḥ’. Of course, ‘asaṅgathi’ could mean either lack of coherence or disunion (i.e.) Separation from the Lord (viśleṣa). As a matter of fact, the vicissitudes in the mystic experiences of the Āljār, alternating between the satiate and disconsolate states of mind, constitute the chief feature of ‘Tiruvāyimolī’. The Lord’s purpose in bringing about such contrasting situations has already been elucidated, time and again.

tirppārai yām īṇī eṇāṇam nāṭutum, aṇāmimir!-
ōṛppāl iv oḷ-natal urṛa nal nōy itu tēginōm;
pōṛppāku tān ceytu, aṛgu aivarai velvitta māyappōrt
tēṛppākanārkku īval cintai tulāyō ticaikkīṅrātē?  (TV–6–1)

Translation

Ye, Elders, where shall we seek hence, the one that can cure
The malady of this young one, with forehead bright?
A delightful sickness of Spirit ‘tis, I am sure,
She her mind has lost in Him that drove the chariot
In the wondrous battle and victory for the (Pāṇḍavas) five did secure.

Note

Face is the index of the mind. The agony of those killed
by arrows or drowned in water is writ large on their faces.
The unique sickness of spiritual character, the Nāyakī is
suffering from, is reflected on her forehead. The glow on
her forehead helps to diagnose her malady as one that can
be cured only by the Lord who inducted it, by stealing away
her heart. Far from finding a cure for this, it is but meet
that every one should aspire to acquire this kind of sickness
and develop it. The Nāyakī felt entranced by the Lord’s
overwhelming love for His devotees, doing all odd jobs, such
as driving their chariots, running errands on their behalf
and so on. The present malady is the result of such an
infatuation. Actually, this reflects the mood of all the
Ālvārs, steeped in God-love, in sharp contrast with Rṣis, noted for clarity of mind, unperturbed by the sentimental God-love, God-hunger and things of that sort.

Ticaikkikṣatē ivaḷ nōy; itu mikkā perun teyvam;
icaippu itriśi nir anaṅku ātum ilan teyvam anūru itu;
ticaippu itriyē caṅku cakkaram enru ivaḷ kēṭka, nir
icaikkiḷḷirākīl, nāṅē il perum; itu kāṅmiṅē. (TV–6–2)

Translation

Ye, mothers, confounded, do not go the wrong way and propitiate
The minor deity, You should know it is inappropriate;
This young lady's sickness is induced by the Supreme Lord.
Better utter the words' conch' and 'discus', so as to be heard
By her and you will then see it does her real good.

Notes

(i) The mate clarifies to the bewildered womenfolk, going the wrong way by propitiating the inferior deity, that the Nāyakī is not under the spell of any but the Supreme Lord and the cure for her malady, therefore, lies in their singing His glory, in a chorus, within her hearing. In fact, nothing but this will enter the Nāyakt's ears.

(ii) Here is an anecdote. One Āyccumakan, a pious non-brahmin was sick and lying unconscious. As he was a great devotee of Lord Raṅganātha, Śri Parāśara Bhāṭṭar went to see him and whispered into his ears, "Lord Raṅganātha (Ālakiya Maṅavāḷa Perumīḷ) is the sole refuge". This at once brought the patient back to his senses and he went on repeating these words, till the end.

(iii) There is yet another anecdote to drive home the fact that minor deities dare not approach the devotees of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu and much less make use of their belongings, for self-propitiation. One of the land-tenants of Pijklai urarākavilli tācēr, a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, was tormented by the village deity known as Aiyaṭṭar. For the appeasement of its wrath, the deity demanded that
it be offered milk and fruits, be smeared with scented sandal paste, be nicely dressed and bedecked and then be taken out in a ceremonial procession in a litter with umbrellas held over its head. The villagers borrowed all these things from their master, the Tācār, and put through the procession, as demanded by the deity. But what was the result? The tortures of the tormented tenant were only redoubled. Queried by the villagers about its strange behaviour, the deity gave out: “You fellows have brought me the articles belonging to Tācār; under his umbrella, I feel blistered by the Sun, the sandal paste burns me out like fire, his ornaments hang on me like heavy fetters and so, I shall surely take this man’s life.”

Translation

Look here, ye, elders, try the recipe I suggest,
Listen not to this gipsy, you’d better desist
From offering meat and liquor; if you would but laud
The feet of the wondrous Lord with tulāci garland,
Studded with honey, on His crown, the sure remedy
It will be for this young lady’s unique malady.

Note

The mate appeals to the good sense of the elderly ladies, not to be led astray by the queer nostrums of the gipsy, the votary of a deity of a very low order, and defile the sacred precincts of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī with such unsavoury things like meat and liquor, totally repugnant to her breeding. She also stresses the importance of singing the Lord’s praise, as a sure and certain remedy for curing the Nāyakī of her malady, induced by the Lord Himself.
maruṇṭu ṣkum eṅṛu, aṅku ḍr māya valavai col-konṭu, nṛ
karuṇi ēṉum mharāic ceṅi cōrūm kaḷau ḫaḷitdu eṅ payaṅ?
oruṅkākavē ulaku ēḷum viḷunīk umiṅntīṭṭa
peruntēvaṅ pēr collakiṅkil, ivaḷaip pērūṭirē, (IV–6–4)

Translation
Ye, ladies, what use is there, applying remedies queer,
Leaving lumps of cooked rice, black and red,
At the junction of cross-roads, by a quack misled?
For this Nāyakt’s revival, better chant within her hearing,
The holy names of the Lord Supreme, Who ate
The worlds seven (during deluge) and then spat out.

Note
Once again, the importance of chanting the Lord’s holy names,
proclaiming His glory, is emphasised by the mate besides
repeating the warning, not to be led astray by the quacks.

ivaḷaip pērūm paricu iv aṅaṅku āṭutal aṅṛu; antō!
kuvāḷit taṭaṅ kaṅṇum kōvaic cevvāyum payantuṅaḷ;
kaḷalak kaṭāk kaḷīṛu aṭṭa pirāṅ tirunāmatṭāl
tavāḷap poṭik koṇṭu nṛṛ iḷṭṭuṁūṛī; taniyūmē. (IV–6–5)

Translation
Ye, folks, this Nāyaki is terribly off colour,
Alas! the methods you adopt can’t save her;
Singing the names of the Lord who slew the tusker
In must, let the dust from the feet of devotees pure
Be on het strewn, there’s no remedy, so sure.

Notes
Finding that the methods, adopted by the elderly women
around, worsen the condition of Parāṅkūsa Nāyaki, her
mate lustily pleads with them to give up all their unwhole-
some activities and follow the certain remedy suggested by
her. All that needs to be done is to scatter on the Nāyaki’s
person, the dust collected from the feet of the devotees,
pious and pure, to the accompaniment of the chanting of
the names of the Supreme Lord. To preserve the Nāyakī is to preserve the Lord Himself, as the Lord thrives and subsists on her nourishing looks.

Two separate remedies, namely, chanting the names of the Lord within the Nāyakī's hearing and smearing her with the dust off the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, have been prescribed for warding off the twin evils of contact with inferior deities and contact with those who have dealings with those deities, respectively.

taṇiyum poļjutu illai nīr aṇāṅku āṭutir; aṇṇaimir!
piniyum oļiṅṭatu illai, perukum itu aļļāl;
maṇiyiṅ ani nīr māyā-tamar aṭi nīr koṇtu
aṇiya muryaliṅ, māṣtu illai kaṇṭir-iv aṇāṅkukkē. (TV–6–6)

Translation

Ye, mothers, pity it is, in wrong methods you persist,
It does only aggravate the malady; I insist
That you on this young lady smear the dust
Off the feet of devotees of the Lord Who excels
The blue gem rare; no other remedy can work so well.

Notes

(i) The elders pay no heed to the advice of the mate and persist in propitiating the inferior deity, which only aggravates the malady of the Nāyakī. An exasperated mate now asks them to stop their activities forthwith and smear the Nāyakī with the dust from the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. When the women plead that it is beyond them to collect the dust in question, the mate advises them to think of it, at least, as even the mere thought of doing so will cure the Nāyakī. Resolving to do the right thing and giving up the wrong things are two of the six pre-conditions for 'Prapatti' or loving surrender to the Lord's grace, as laid down in 'Śrī Pāñcarātra'. Whereas even the mere resolve to do what is right is enough, the evil or wrong things have to be necessarily given up. And so, the elderly women
are asked to give up their unwholesome activities and just contemplate the right step, namely, smearing Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki with the dust off the devotees' feet.

(ii) Here is an anecdote to prove the efficacy of the dust from the holy feet of devotees, by way of removing the contamination from inferior deities. Two devout followers of Śrī Rāmānuja accompanied Akaḷaṅka nāṭṭāḷvāṇ, a prince, while going to some place. On the way, the Prince pointed to a jain temple with images of lion in front, and jokingly asked his followers to prostrate, saying that it was their favourite Viṣṇu temple. It was dark and they couldn't clearly make out which temple it was but they took the Prince at his word and reverently prostrated in front of the temple. When, however, a little later, they came to know that it was a jain temple, the shock was too great for them and they fainted. It was only when Piḷḷai-uraṅkāvillī Tācar, a very intimate disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, arrived on the spot and smeared them with the dust from his feet, that they recovered their consciousness and got up. (The greatness of Tācar has already been alluded to, in the notes under IV-6-2).

(iii) Once, when Naṅciyar and his disciples were assembled in an enclosure, near the holy pavilion inside the temple of Lord Raṅganātha, this very theme of smearing the dust of holy men on the God-sick came up for discussion. One of the disciples wished to be enlightened as to how the foot-dust of the holy men is prescribed as the cure for a malady induced by the Lord Himself, instead of the very cause (the Lord) being also looked upon as the cure for the God-afflicted. The illustrious Preceptor elucidated that there are two distinct stages, namely, initial recovery through first-aid and then the Sovereign remedy. If buttermilk, the antidote for fits is not ready at hand, ginger-powder is applied to the patient's nostrils, as a preliminary measure. The sprinkling of the dust of the holy men corresponds to the application of ginger-powder to the patient's nostrils and when the patient recovers his breath somewhat, then the butter
milk, the sovereign remedy, the beatific vision of Lord 
Kṛṣṇa (the Divine Charioteer, longed for, vide IV-6-1) 
will be administered.

anāṅkukku aru maruntu eṇu, aṅku ὤr ātum kaḷḷum paraẏ, 
tuṇaṅkai eṅtu, num tōl kulaikkappātuṁ aṅnaimir! 
uṇaṅkal keṭak kaḻutai uṭaṭu āṭṭam kaṇṭu eṇ payaṅ? 
vaṇaṅkirkal māyap pirāṅ-tamar vētam vallāraiye. (IV-6-7)

Translation

Ye, elders, you think it is a cure rare and dear, 
For this young lady's sickness when you offer 
Unto the inferior deity, sheep and liquor and, in distress, witness 
Men with trembling shoulders in awkward dance; 
Could you the moving lips of a donkey keep admiring 
As it eats up the paddy, spread out for drying? 
Better worship Vedic scholars, the holy men of the wondrous 
Lord.

Notes

(i) The mate disconcertingly asks the elders what exactly 
they mean by persisting in all that tom-foolery, at the 
expense of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakti. What they do is like 
admiring the movement of the lips of a donkey noted 
for its ugliness, as it eats up the boiled paddy spread out 
in the open for sun-drying, unmindful of the loss of 
paddy. She advises them to worship the holy men who 
realise that Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme God 
and revere Him. There and there alone lies the cure for 
this God-sickness.

(ii) The mate feels distressed that the women-folk should 
indulge in such futile exercises, ill-conceived and disas-
trous, notwithstanding their special religious back-
ground and their ingrained belief that a single salutation 
by them would be deemed by the Lord, too heavy a 
burden imposed on Him.
vētam vallārkaḷaiṅ koṇṭu, viṅṅār perumāṅ tirup
pātam paṇṭintu, ival nōy ītu tīṟṭuk koḷḷātu pōy,
ēṭam paṇṭintu, alla ceytu, kal ītu kalāy tūy,
kītam mulavu iṭṭu, nir anāṅku āṭutal kīḻmāiye.  (IV–6–8)

Translation
What you do, ye, mothers, is derogatory indeed,
Speaking words unseemly, with a liberal use of liquor
Amidst drum-beats propitiating the deity inferior,
Instead of worshipping the feet of the Supreme Lord,
Chief of Celestials, thro’ the good offices of Vedic Scholars,
To cure the sickness of this young lady, the remedy sure.

Notes
(i) The mate advises the womenfolk to desist from the propi-
tiation of minor deities and adore instead the feet of
the Supreme Lord through the good offices of the Vedic
Scholars, the Lord’s devotees, and get Parāṅkuśa
Nāyakī cured of her God-sickness.

The direct approach to the Lord is hazardous like mount-
ing an elephant in the absence of its keeper. That is
why it has been ordained that the supplicant should be
ushered in by the Lord’s devotees. It is noteworthy that
Vibhīṣaṇa sought asylum in Rāma’s camp, only through
his appeal to the monkeys around and Sugriva also
got at Śrī Rāma only through Hanumān.

(ii) In the preceding song (IV-6-7), the holy men were required
to be worshipped, while in this song, the Lord is required
to be worshipped through the mediation of the holy
men. This apparent discrepancy is reconciled by Nam-
pillai, as follows: “There is, of course, no need to
worship anyone other than the pious Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.
And yet, it is extremely difficult to shake off the complex
of fellowship and look upon other humans, like our-
selves, as the Supreme and revere them with unflinch-
ing devotion. Hence, the next best, namely, looking
upon them as efficient mediators for presenting us to the
Lord, is recommended ".
(iii) The unseemly words are those uttered by the priest or other oracle of the inferior deity, getting into a trance, possessed by the deity. The mate warns the elders that the wrong tactics adopted by them will be a slur on their progeny as well and pull them down.

ki|maiy|māl aṅku ὲr ki|mākaṇa iṭṭa muḷaiṇi ki|nālmai pala colli, nir aṇaṅku āṭum poh kāṅkileṅ; ē|māip pirappukkuṁ cēmam; in nōykkum itē maruntu; ū|maiyil kaṇṇa-pirāṅ kaḷal vāḷttumiṇ, uṇṇittē!  (IV–6–9)

Translation

Ye, womenfolk, witness I can’t your activities base,
The dirty concert of a mean fellow and hear the rotten words
By him uttered; meditate on Kaṇṇa’s feet and praise
His glory; for generations it will do you good,
It will cure this lady’s sickness besides.

Note

While condemning the base activities indulged by the womenfolk, the mate advises them to meditate on Lord Kṛṣṇa’s feet and sing His glory, as this will operate both ways, that is, it will stand them in good stead for generations to come besides curing Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki of her God-sickness. This is like those harvesting jute making bundles of it with jute itself, unlike the paddy stalks, for tying which one has to look for some other material, a string or rope.

uṇṇittu maṛṛu oru teyvam toḷāal, avaṇai allāl;
num iccai colli, num tōḷ kulaikkappatum aṇṇaimir!
maṇṇapattum maṛaiṇaṇai, vaṇ tuvarāpati
maṇṇaṇai, ēttumiṇ! ēttutaluṁ, toḷutu āṭumē.  (IV–6–10)

Translation

Mother, You mouth base words at will
And in awkward dance your shoulders tremble;
None but the Lord Supreme this lady will deem
Fit for worship, You’ll therefore do well to hymn
In praise of the lovely Prince of Tuvarāpati, by scriptures adored
And revive this lady, make her dance and go gay galore.

Notes

(i) The mate insists that the womenfolk should take due note
of the Nāyakī’s unbounded love for Lord Kṛṣṇa, the
Prince of Dwārakā and remould their activities suitably.
“What fun is it, tending the nose for an injury in the
knee?”

(ii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī has never worshipped any one but the
Supreme Lord, not even as a tender child. The crescent
moon is usually worshipped by young children but
Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī didn’t do that, even at that tender
age.

(iii) The mate vehemently deprecates the elderly women’s
mis-directed activities, ill-fitting and totally unbecoming
of the clan to which they belong. By indulging in these
activities, they harm themselves as well as the cause
they intend to serve, namely, relieving Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī
of her sickness. On the other hand, if they praised the
Prince of Dwārakā, it will elevate them and also revive
the Nāyakī, making her get up and dance with Joy.

toḻutu āṭi, tū maṇi vāṇṇaukkku āṭceytu, nōy tirnta
vaḻuvātā tol pukal vān kurukūr caṭakōpaṇ col
vaḻuvātā ayirattuḷ ivai pattu veṭikaḷum
toḻutu āṭip pāṭa vallār tukka cīḷam ilarkalē. (IV–6–11)

Translation

They will of miseries be rid that recite, adoring and dancing,
These songs ten, deprecating those that go about appeasing
Minor deities, out of the flawless thousand of Caṭakōpaṇ,
Chief of lovely Kurukūr, of flawless fame in-born,
Who danced in adoration of the lovely Lord, gem-hued
And serving Him, with devotion great, got his sickness cured.

Notes

(i) This decad has clearly brought out the Āḻvār’s unflin-
ching and exclusive devotion to Lord Viṣṇu (Śrīman
Nārāyaṇa), of sapphire hue and his intolerance of those who stray into the domain of worship of the minor deities. The elderly women listened to the mate's advice, at long last, and by adoring the Supreme Lord and dancing, in a body, singing His praise, they did help the Nāyakī regain her consciousness. It is not as if she got a cure as such, much less a complete cure. Actually, it is an incurable malady, not being of the ordinary run. This God-sickness lasts as long as the Soul exists and the Soul never dies.

(ii) This end-song confers the boon of relief from all miseries, particularly, the pangs of misery of separation from the Lord, like those undergone by the Ālvār, on all those who recite these ten songs, with great devotion. The chanters will not run the miserable risk of contamination by straying into the domain of worship of minor deities.

Fourth Centum—Seventh Decad (IV-7)
(Cīlam illāc cīriyāṇ)

Preamble

The Ālvār, who was insensate in the last decad, due to the poignancy of his separation from the Lord, just regained consciousness, when the holy names of the Lord, chanted by the women around, trickled down his ears. This is like a creeper, dried up and lying low, becoming green again, when rain-drops fall on it. But then, it has only made matters worse for the Ālvār. While in a state of coma, the patient feels no pain but when he regains consciousness, the pain becomes all the more acute. Hunger pinches a person to the marrow of his bone but luckily, sleep overtakes him. Hunger does not press its claim for the duration of his sleep but when he wakes up, the pangs of hunger are even more pronounced than before.

The Ālvār keeps mulling how the Lord, who is a friend-in-need, capable of dispensing the appropriate remedies, could keep away from him. Unable to stand the separation, he cries out his
heart so lustily that it melts down the hearts of his listeners too, as Sīta did, during her captivity in Lāṅkā.

cīlām illus cīrīyapēlum, ceyviṇaiyō peritāl;
ñālam unṭāy! ñāya mūrtīl nārāyaṇāl eṛu eṛu,
kālantōrum yāṁ iruntu, kaitalaipucaiṭṭāl,
kōla mēni kāṇa vārāy; kūviyum koḷḷāyē. (IV–7–1)

Translation

Bereft of merit, I am indeed small
And yet, the evil in me looms large;
Alas! respond you don’t to my lusty call
As Nārāyaṇa, Sustainer of the worlds (during deluge),
Knowledge incarnate, and so on, many a time, with hands lifted overhead;
Neither do you come And let me your bewitching Form behold
Nor do You lift me up, unto your sweet fold.

Notes

(i) Even if one did not actually do anything good, the mere thought or intention to do good things will suffice and it can yield good results. In respect of evil, however, it is only the actual commission of evil acts that is harmful and not the mere contemplation of it. And so, the Āḻvār says that he has actually perpetrated evil deeds to a very large extent and that this impedes his getting at the Lord.

(ii) Knowledge incarnate

The individual Soul also possesses knowledge but that gets perverted and puts him or her, right into the world, eking out a miserable existence, literally lame and blind. On the other hand, the Lord’s knowledge is pure and unalloyed; there is scarcely a thing He doesn’t know and nothing is beyond His capacity to do. The Individual, lame and blind, therefore, needs to be guided by the Lord. Such an obligation, on the part of the Lord, cannot be disowned by Him because He is Nārāyaṇa, in whom all things and beings subsist.
(iii) The Lord’s bewitching Form is intended to be seen and enjoyed by His devotees and yet, how can He stay away from the Ājvār, like keeping a pot of nicely flavoured water out of bounds to the thirsty? The other alternative, which is only the second best, is to call him off to the heavenly abode.

(iv) It is noteworthy that all the five topics (Artha pañcaka) have been mentioned in this song: (1) Nārāyaṇa—the Super-Soul; (2) The small self—the Individual Soul; (3) Beckoning the Lord—The Lord is at once the ‘Means’ for attaining Him; (4) Beholding the Lord—The ‘End’ or the destined goal and (5) Large volume of evil—The impediments for the influx of the Lord’s grace.

kollä mālā iśpa vellam kōtu ila tantiṃ em vallalēyō! vaiyam koṇṭa vāmaṇāvō! euru euru, nal irāvum nān pakalum nān iruntu, olamittāl, kallā māyā uṇṇai em kaṇ kāṇa vantu iyāyē.  (IV–7–2)

Translation

Day and night, I call You out with love immense
And ardour great, as Vāmaṇa, Who the worlds did measure,
The Donor great, Who on revelling devotees confers
Bliss unlimited with no reserve and Yet there’s no response
Oh, elusive Lord, You deign not to come and feast my eyes.

Note

When the Ājvār refers to the Lord as the great Donor, conferring limitless bliss, he is only recalling his own experience in IV–5, a painful contrast indeed, with the present predicament. If, as Vāmaṇa, He could beg of Bali and get back the lost territory for Indra, the self-seeker, should the Lord withhold Himself from a selfless devotee like the Ājvār who seeks none but the Lord Himself?
Ivu ilāta tiviṇakāl ēttatāi ceṭṭapāṇkōl?
tāvi vaiyām koṇṭā entāy! tāmōtarā! ēṟu ēṟu,
kūvīk kūvi, nekkō uruki, kaṇponce cōra niṟṟāl,
pāvī ni ēṟu ēṟu collāy, pāviyēp kāṇa vantē.  (IV-7-3)

Translation
Endless sins I should have indeed committed,
Therefore it is, You come not before this sinner,
At least to say so, though I call You out many times over,
With melting heart and tearful eyes, as my Lord,
Who measured the worlds and Tāmōtarā, (got bound by a cord).

Note
The Āḻvār lustily calls out the Lord, stressing alternately His transcendent glory when He measured all the regions, high and low, in just three strides, and His amazing simplicity as the naughty child (Tāmōtarā), whose tummy was bound by a rope, as a punishment for stealing butter. It matters not to him whether the Lord calls Him a Saint or a Sinner and even if the Lord wants to despise him as a sinner, the Āḻvār would want Him to come, face to face, and say so, as he will then have the pleasure of seeing Him. Even if the Lord would not appear before the Āḻvār, the latter will be pleased if the Lord could tell, within his hearing, that he is a despicable sinner. The Āḻvār will then have the satisfaction of hearing the Lord’s voice.

kāṇa vantu, en kaṃmuṇkappē tāmaraikkaṇ pīṟaḷa,
āṇi cempoon mēṇi entāy! niṟṟu-arulāy! ēṟu ēṟu,
nāṇam illsä cīṟutakaiyēp nāṇ iṅku alarruvatu en–
pēnī vāṇār kāṇamāṭṭāp piṟu uṭai appaṇaiyē?  (IV-7-4)

Translation
To come up to me, shamelessly do I beckon, all the time,
The redoubted Lord, even (Brahmā and other Devas) seeking Him
Can hardly behold, of the hue of red gold, pure and fine,
That this mean fellow may on His lotus eyes feast, how futile!

Notes

(i) In aspiring to behold the Supreme Lord, beyond the reach of even Brahmā and other Devas seeking Him ardently, the Ālvār feels that he is attempting the impossible. And yet, he calls Him out all the time, because of his deep yearning.

(ii) The cloud-hued Lord is referred to here, as of the complexion of red gold. The comparison is not on all fours and what is intended to convey is that the Lord’s complexion is just as attractive as red gold of the highest refinement. It could also be that the gold complexion of the Divine Mother is reflected on His person, turning it also into gold colour.

Translation

Oh, Benefactor great, my potent Lord, holding the discus valiant,
The ocean deep you did churn and delivered the nectar,
Eager to behold your lovely shoulders four, I want
You to come up to me right now; tears welling up for ever,
Greedily do I look around my Soul drying up, again and again.

Notes

(i) The Ālvār exclaims how greedy he is trying to see the Lord, inaccessible even to the exalted Brahmā and other Devas, and that too, right now. But then, he longs to see the Lord’s shoulders unlike the Devas who were, all the time, looking at the ocean for the nectar to come up, foregoing the pleasure of beholding the Lord moving around with His thousand shoulders, gaily bedecked with exquisite garlands. With the prior knowledge of
His condescending love unto Gajendra and Prahlāda, the Āḷvār is so certain of the Lord’s unfailing response that he keeps looking around for Him all the time.

(ii) The greedy looks: Here is a thrilling anecdote. Krimikanṭha, a colossal king, was a rash bigot of Śaivism. He launched a crusade of religious persecution and forcibly compelled every one to sign a bull, he had proclaimed, to the effect that there was no other God but Śiva. Kūrat-tāḷvāṁ, an intimate disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, was also ordered to sign the declaration in the Royal court. He not only declined to do so but vindicated the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, quoting chapter and verse. The enraged king, however, ordered Āḷvāṅ’s eyes to be gouged but Āḷvāṅ plucked out his eyes himself, exclaiming that the pair of eyes which had the misfortune to see the wicked king, weren’t worth having any more. When Śrī Rāmānuja got to know about this later, his heart bled at this catastrophe and he intensely longed for the restoration of Āḷvāṅ’s eye-sight. At the Master’s command, the blinded Āḷvāṅ composed hymns lauding Lord Varadaraja, enshrined in Kāṇchipuram, known as ‘Varadarāja Stava’ when the verses were read out by Āḷvāṅ to Śrī Rāmānuja, the latter rejoiced, in particular, when he came upon the twentysecond verse, and burst out, “Āḷvāṅ, when the Lord listens to this particular verse, He cannot but grant you the vision to behold Him. Well, turn this side, let me scan your face, right now”. This anecdote illustrates the firm belief of the devotees that the Lord will surely respond to such a moving submission.

nōkki nōkki, ungaik kānpān, yāṁ eṇatu āviyullē nākkku nilvaṁ; ṇāṭam illai-nāṭṭorum eṇquṭaiyā ākkaiyullum, āviyullum, alla purattinullum nikkaṁ iṛi, cūkum niṟṟāy! niṟḷai aṟintu aṟintē. (IV–7–6)

Translation
What a fool am I to hold out my tongue (and in my heart) Long to behold Your form exquisite and for You look around,
Knowing full well that You who pervade all round
And at all times, my body, soul, limbs and other parts,
With no exception, will not unto me Your grace impart!

Notes

(i) Āḻvār to the Lord: “My Lord, You don’t make yourself visible unto poor me, despite Your pervading among other things my entire being, because You are not so inclined. This is quite evident and yet, I keep looking for You in all directions, like the innocent children aspiring for things they can’t have, holding out their tongues all the time, unable to conceal their longing. Of course, as You are aware, seeing You is an end in itself, as far as I am concerned.

(ii) Here is a juicy observation of Nampillai: Like unto a person having plenty of money, tied up in bundles and kept inside, still wandering about in search of money outside, with aching legs (swollen), the Āḻvār is not contented with the enjoyment of the Lord in His full complement inside him, and tires himself out, looking for Him outside!

arintu arintu, tērit tēri, yān ecatu āviyulē
nirainta ūnna mūrttiyāyai niṟmalamāka vaiṭtu,
pirantum cettum niṟru iṟṟum pētaimai tirntolintē—
narun tulāyīn kaṇṇi ammā! nān uṟṇaik kaṇṭukonṭē.(IV–7–7)

Translation

Oh, Sire, sporting the tulaci garland fragrant,
(My mind) could behold You and knowing You full well
(As the ‘Means’ and the ‘End’ combined), I do revel
With all clarity and in my heart immaculate
Is my nescience which gave rise to birth and death.

Note

Lord to the Āḻvār: Oh, Āḻvār, why do you vex yourself in this manner as though I have done you nothing? Can’t you recollect at least a few things you have got from Me?
Alvar to the Lord: My Lord, I wouldn't fail to acknowledge the many favours you have done me. you have of course imparted to me knowledge, clear and concise, free from imperfections and blemishes of any kind, and further clarified it by impressing upon me Your transcendent glory, easy-worshippability, easy-accessibility, readiness to forgive, the pre-eminence of your ‘Arca’ (iconic manifestation) etc. With my nescience thus rooted out, I also stand rid of the terrific involvement in the cycle of birth and death. I also enjoy your vision mentally; you are perfect knowledge personified. And yet, how can I rest contented unless I came face to face with you?

kanṭukonṭu, en kaikal ṣara, niu tiruppātaṅkālmēl en-ticaiyum uḷḷa pūk konṭu ētti, ukantu ukantu, toṇḍarōṅkāl pāṭi āṭa, cūl kaṭal ḥalattuḷḷē vāṇ-tulāyin kāṇṇi vēṇēl vantīṭakillāyē. (IV–7–8)

Translation

Oh, Sovereign Master, bedecked with tulaci garlands comely.
Why don’t you appear before me in this very land,
By ocean surrounded, that I can feast on Your Form lovely,
Gather choice flowers from everywhere and with my hands
Offer them lustily at Your holy feet and laud you in a chorus,
Singing and dancing with delight immense?

Note

Having enumerated in the preceding song, the favours already received by him from the Lord, the Āḷvār now lists out what he stills needs from Him. The eyes, hitherto starved, must feast on His nectaran charm, the hands which remained idle so far, should be fully engaged in gathering flowers from all the eight directions and offering them at the feet of the Lord to his heart’s content; seeing the Lord’s delight, he and his fellow-devotees should give vent to their joy, singing and dancing. Without deferring all this enjoyment till he reaches heaven, he should be enabled to have it all, right here. When one feels enormously thirsty, the thirst needs
to be quenched there and then; there is hardly any point in extending a promise to relieve the thirst some time later, at some other place. The Lord is required to present Himself before the Ālvār, right here, in all that heavenly splendour, which is precisely what the Celestials drink deep all the time. This, he has been praying for, since long, and yet, the Lord hasn’t responded. This sums up the present plight of the Ālvār.

Translation

Alms I gave not, nor did I allay to any extent
The thirst of others, the senses five I kept not under restraint,
Flowers I offered not unto the Lord at the appropriate time,
Rash and hard-hearted, an impudent fool I am,
Sinner heavy, I am still fondly groping thro’, to get hold
Of the Lord, wielding the discus; Him where shall I behold?

Notes

The Ālvār puts himself the question whether he, who did not pursue the disciplines of ‘Karma-yoga’ etc, had at all the ‘Means’ to get at the Lord. All the above-mentioned omissions and transgressions notwithstanding, the Ālvār fondly hopes to get hold of the Lord, gripping the discus even as Queen Yaśodhā caught hold of Śrī Kṛṣṇa red handed while gripping (stealing) butter.

cakkarattu anṇalē! eḻṟu tāḻatu, kaṇṇir tatumpa,
pakkam nōkkī niḻṟu alantēn; pāviyēn kaṇkiūrīlēn;
mikka nāṇa mūrtti āya vēta vilakkīnai eṉ
takka nāṇak kaṇkalaḷē kaṇṭu tāluvuvanē. (IV-7-10)

Translation

With tears welling up my eyes, I looked around,
But sinner that I am, I remain worn out and frustrated;
Behold I don’t my Sire, holding the discus and yet, in my mind, Him I see and embrace, fed by Knowledge appropriate, The One who is supreme knowledge personified, by Vedas illumined.

Note

If, in spite of all the efforts of the Āḻvār to see the Lord outwardly, He abstained from the Āḻvār the other alternative would be for him to forget all about the Lord and carry on as before. But then, the Lord has endowed the Āḻvār with the appropriate knowledge and is perpetually in front of his mind’s eye. Forgetting the Lord is, therefore, out of the question. And so, there are two distinct facets in the Āḻvār, namely, God-love (Prema) and knowledge (Jñāna); the former makes him intensely long for external perception of the Lord, formal worship with flowers etc, as distinguished from a mere mental rapport with the Lord, which always subsists by virtue of the Āḻvār’s profound knowledge (Jñāna)

tāḻuviniṟṟa kātal-tāṇāi tāmaraik kaṇṇaṇ-tāṇai kuluvu māṭat teṇ kurukūr māṟaṇ caṭakōpaṇ col valuvu ilāta on tamiḻkaḷ āyirattūḷ ip pattum tāḻuvap pāṭi āṭa vallār vaikuntam ēṟuvarē. (IV–7–11)

Translation

Those that sing with zeal and revel in these songs ten, Out of the thousand flawless Tamil songs bright of Caṭakōpaṇ, Chief of Teṇkurukūr with a cluster of castles, Adoring the lotus-eyed Lord with love inexhaustible, Will the high Heavens scale (and enjoy bliss perennial).

Notes

(i) The lotus-eyed Lord having blessed the Āḻvār, right inside his mother’s womb, the Āḻvār emerged into this world with God-love, ingrained in him.

(ii) The clustering of houses in Kurukūr would, ipso facto, denote the clustering of people, in that town. A juicy explanation for such crowding, furnished in ‘Iṭu’, is
that the Lord's advent in Kurukūr was expected any moment, in view of the Ālvār's inordinate longing and people clustered around him to watch the great event. There is a strong parallel to this in Vālmīki Rāmāyana. At the end of his long exile Śrī Rāma met Sage Bharadwāja at the latter's āśram, enroute to Ayodhya and enquired about Bharata's welfare. The sage replied: "Yes, all are well; anxiously awaiting your return, Bharata is spending sleepless days and nights, smeared with mud raised by torrential tears from his eyes falling on the ground ". If Bharata is in such a forlorn state, how could all be well there? What the Sage emphasises here is that the Intensity of Bharatha's devotion was such that it inspired robust confidence in the citizens that Śrī Rāma would hasten his home-coming and So, they had all gathered, in great glee, to greet him.

Fourth Centum—Eighth Decad (IV-8)
(Ēru āḷum Iraiyoṇum)

Preamble

The Ālvār's passionate appeal to the Lord, in the last decad, did not yield the desired result. The Lord didn't present Himself before the ardent devotee, and the latter, therefore, concluded that he was not in His good books. And, in this context, the Alvar felt that neither he nor his possessions deserved to exist. The very valuable Śāstraic meaning that anything, which hinders Divine Service and does not actively aid and participate in such service, deserves to be eschewed, is imparted in this decad. The Ālvār is now in the same predicament as that of Sītā during her captivity in Laṅkā. Sītā then exclaimed that her very existence was meaningless, staying so far away from her Lord and not rescued by Him as yet. The sentiments expressed by the Ālvār in this decad, are fully echoed by Saint Yāmuna, in Śloka 57 of his ' Stotra Ratna '. The saint swears that he would not tolerate for a moment anything which was outside the domain of His service, be it his body, his very life, the happiness desired by all beings, the Soul and other social relations like wife, children, friends etc., and that he
would want all these to get destroyed in a hundred ways, if they proved a hindrance to Divine Service.

Even in this decad, the Āḻvār continues in the feminine state, as is evident from the text of the songs referring to the Nāyaki’s bangles, garments, complexion etc. Śrī Āṇṭā] is found even more emphatic when she says in ‘Nācciyār Tirumoḷi’ that, if her beloved Lord would not come and embrace her, she would rather pluck out her breasts from their base, and throw them at Him. The breasts, as already explained earlier, signify the emotional upsurge, divine love, too deep for words.

ēṟu āḷum iṟaiyōnum, ticaimukaṉum, tirumakaḷum,  
kūṟu āḷum ṭaṇi uṭampaṉ, kulam kulamā acurarkaḷai  
nigū ākumpaṭiyāka nirumittu, paṭaitoṭṭa  
māṟalai kavarāta maṉi māmai kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–1)

Translation

Of what use is my complexion lovely  
If it attracts not my valorous Lord,  
Who resolved to rout the Asura hordes  
And destroyed them with weapons deadly,  
On whose unique person, vast and expansive, dwell  
Ticaimukāṇ (Brahmā), Iṟaiyōṅ, whose mount is the bull  
And Tirumakaḷ (Lakṣmī) (well apart)?

Note

The Āḻvār highlights the Lord’s ‘Sauśilya’ or condescending love, allotting portions of His body, well demarcated, for the occupation of Iṟaiyōṅ (Śiva), Brahmā and Lakṣmī. And then, the Lord’s valour is talked about. By a mere resolve, He could create the entire universe and likewise, He could as well destroy all the evil forces. And yet, He incarnated, now and then, and engaged the ungodly in a personal combat and destroyed them with His mighty weapons, simply because of His intolerance of their affront to His devotees. The enemies of His devotees are regarded by Him as His opponents and He will never forgive them. If the Lord, so loving and valorous, did not come and delightfully pounce upon
Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, of what use is her lovely complexion?
She too, finds no charm in a complexion which ceases to attract the Lord.

maṇi māmai kuṇaīvuy illā malarmāṭar ṛṇī mārpau,
aṇī māṇat taṭa varaīttōl aṭal-aṭit taṭakkáiyaṇ,
panicī māṇam pilaiyāmē aṭiyēnaip paṇikōṇa
maṇimāyaṇ kavarāta maṭa nečcāl kuṇaīvuy ilamē. (IV–8–2)

Translation

Even my docile mind I shall discard outright,
If it attracts not my Lord of sapphire hue,
Who did in His service enlist this vassal all right,
Who holds the discus bright in His hand huge,
Of shoulders, stout and strong, on whose chest
Resides the lotus-born (Lakṣmī), of hue exquisite.

Notes

(i) It was the charming conjunction of the Lord and Lakṣmī of exquisite complexion that attracted theĀlvar and enlisted him as their vassal. And yet, if the Lord is not attracted by his docile mind, of what use is it to him either? Nañciyar would elucidate this, as follows: There was a time when the Nāyakī’s mind was unto her lover as delectable as high-class sandal paste vide IV-3-1. The Nāyakī’s discarding her mind in the present state is comparable to the frustrated female lover breaking the cosmetic bottle, right in front of her beloved to express her resentment over the latter’s delayed appearance.

(ii) Lakṣmī’s complexion is exquisite and of undimining charm as she dwells on His winsome chest inseparably, unlike the Ālvar’s complexion, which suffers for want of such patronage.

(iii) The Ālvar’s service, referred to, in this song, is the ‘Vācika Kaiṅkarya’, that is singing the Lord’s glory in these hymns. The Lord is said to have enlisted the Ālvar, in His service, in a punctilious manner. Here is an
instructive anecdote. In the holy monastery of Śrī Rāmānuja, the Śrī Vaiśṇavas used to be fed daily and they were served by Kṛtāmpī-Ācārā, a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja. One of those days, Śrī Rāmānuja noticed Ācārā serving drinking water to the guests, standing sideways, a sort of indifference or lack of respect for the guest, Śrī Rāmānuja ran up to him and striking him on the back, burst out: “You dud! don’t you know that you have to serve the guests reverently, by standing in front and facing them?” Without feeling hurt, in the least, Ācārā gratefully acknowledged the Master’s correction, administered out of his abundant affection for the disciple and bowed unto him, reciting the appropriate line from this song as in the original text.

maṭa neṅcāl kuṭāivu illā makoṭāyceytu oru pēycci
viṭa naṅcā mulai cuvaitta miku ṇāṅac ciṅu kuḷavi,
pata nāktatu aņaik kīṭanta paru varait tōl parampuruṭaṅ,
neṭumāyaṅ kavarāta niṟaiyināl kuṭāivu ilamē. (IV–8–3)

Translation

My sense of modesty I shall abjure if it attracts not
The Lord Supreme, of wondrous deeds unlimited,
Of shoulders, huge and hefty, resting on hooded serpent-bed,
Who, as the little babe with Knowledge great, sucked the life out,
Of the demoness that played the mother perfect
And suckled Him with deadly poison on her breast.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Nāyakī disowned her mind, on the ground that it failed to attract the Lord and become the object of His affection. And now, she is prepared to abjure her sense of modesty, which had kept her under restraint so long, thinking that the Lord would come to her of His own accord. What is the good of her modesty, after she has been discarded by the Lord who had once lavished on her all His affections?
(ii) *The little Babe with knowledge great*

Pūtanā, the demoness played the perfect mother and Kṛṣṇa, the Omniscient Babe also played the perfect babe, and sucked her breasts, coated with deadly poison, without the reservation usually shown to strangers and, in the bargain, sucked her life out. Thence forward, even Yaśodhā was awakened to the realisation that it was not a mere babe and began to look upon it with great awe. That is why Śrī Kṛṣṇa is referred to, in this song, as the Omniscient Babe, *'the little babe with great knowledge'* , even as the Lord's devotees have been referred to elsewhere as the 'little big men', that is, men of great prowess moving about, in frail physical frames.

(iii) *The Lord Supreme (Parampuruṭan):* It is only when He reclines on Ādiśeṣa, the Lord looks the Supreme Sovereign that He is, like unto the gem, well set on the foil.


dūraiyyiṇāl kuṭaiyu illā netum pāṇatt tōḷ māṭap piṇṇai
poṛaiyyiṇāl mulai añciṟaṅ, poru viṭṭai ēḷ āṭarttu, ukanta
kaṟaiyyiṇār tuvar uṭukkai kaṭai āviṅ kāḷ kōḷ kaic
caṟaiyyiṇār kavarāta tāḻir niṟattāl kuṭaiyu ṣamē.

(IV–8–4)

**Translation**

This tender leaf-like complexion of mine
Is by me hardly liked when it holds no attraction
For (Kṛṣṇa), my Lord, Who His body tends not, whose cloth leathern.

Bears many a stain, Who, with bamboo pipe and lovely whip,
Moves about, Who tamed the unruly bulls seven, to grip
And embrace piṇṇai with shoulders long and feminine perfection.

**Note**

The pastoral life led by the Lord, as Kṛṣṇa, the young cow-herd is vividly described in this song, in all its details. The shepherds wear cloth made of leather, when they move about in the forests tending the cows and calves, as a safeguard against brambles and bushes. The wild fruits they gather
in plenty, tie them up in clothes and eat, thereby staining the clothes. They always carry with them the whip to control the cattle and the vessel made of bamboo pipe to hold milk, as and when the cows are milked. They seldom bathed, and even on the few occasions they had some sort of a bath, it was only partial. Even this semblance of a bath, Kṛṣṇa didn’t have, as he had hardly the time for it, tending, as he was, the cattle all the time. This only exemplifies His sole concern for His subjects. The word, ‘Caṭaiyinār’, in the text of this song, could mean either the one, not tending his body or the bell the shepherds tie round the waist the tingling sound whereof would guide the movement of the cattle following them.

taḻr nirattāl kuraivu illāt taNIC ciraiyil vilappu urra kilimojīyāl kāraṇamāk kiḻar arakkaṇ nakar eritta kaḻi malart tujāy alasankal kamaḻ muṭiyān, kaṭal nālattu αlīmkkāṅ kavarāta aṟiviṇāl kuraivu ilamē. (IV–8–5)

Translation

Knowledge is of no avail unto me as well
If it attracts not (aids not service unto) the Lord,
Full of love, sporting on His crown tulaći garland of fragrance
cull,
Shedding honey in plenty, Who the city destroyed
Of (Rāvaṇa), the demon haughty, and rescued
The sweet-tongued (Sītā) of peerless grace
And exquisite complexion from her captivity unique.

Notes

(i) Captivity unique: Rāmāyaṇa is said to describe the greatness of Sītā, the captive. The greatness of Sītā’s captivity in Laṅkā lies in the spontaneity with which she courted imprisonment in Laṅkā and underwent un-speakable sufferings, in order to secure the release of the numerous celestial beauties, kept in bondage by the formidable Rāvaṇa—an act of grace galore! The super-ficial reader who sees not the element of grace but only a Sītā, forcibly abducted by the love-smitten Rāvaṇa, completely misses the mark.
(ii) *Sweet-tongued Sītā*: On return from his pioneering visit to Lāṅkā, Hanuman narrated to Śrī Rāma, the dialogue between him and Sītā. This sent Śrī Rāma musing over the sweet speech of Sītā and he exclaimed: 'Madhurā Madhuralāpā.'

(iii) True knowledge is that which keeps one's mind wetted to the Supreme Lord. The so-called knowledge of mundane affairs, divorced from divine consciousness, however perfect in its own right, is hardly worth its while; it is not knowledge in the real sense.

**Translation**

My charming beauty is unto me of no avail
When it holds no charm unto the Lord unique, of Knowledge full,
Who did, unto the people of this wide world, knowledge impart,
The ways and means of attaining Him and all that,
Who, as the midget resourceful, got land (from Bali), on the sly.

**Note**

The Lord Himself has clearly set out, in Bhagavad Gītā, the ways and means of attaining Him. Those who are not amenable to advice, He would entice by His alluring Charm and His exquisite Form, enthraling every one, as in the case of Mahā Bali. "Of what use is my comeliness if my Lord, so generous, is not attracted by it? the Āḻvār questions himself.

kīlar oḷiyāl kuṟaivu illā aṟi uruvāyk kiḻarntu ejuntu,
kīlar oḷiyā irañiyaṟṟatu akal māṟpam kiḻittu ukantā,
vāḷar oḷiya kaḻal-āḷi valampuriyāṇ, maṇi nila
vāḷar oḷiyān kavarāṭa vari vāḷaiyāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–7)
Translation

I wouldn’t need the bangles nice, disliked by the Lord,
Lustrous like the blue gem, who the discus flamboyant holds,
Who, as ‘Ari’ the Man-Lion of mounting radiance, emerged
with rage
And gladly split the broad chest of Iraṇiyāṇ, of prowess great.

Notes

(i) The Lord, who emerged as Narasimha, the effulgent Man-
Lion, split into two, the powerful Hiranya’s broad chest
and rejoiced that He had destroyed the enemy of Prahlāda, His great devotee. The only weapons, He then
used, were His sharp nails. The boons which had
fortified the demon, virtually served as the feed for his
gigantic strength of formidable proportions and yet
it could hardly appease half the hunger of Narasimha’s
nails. The ferocious Man-Lion’s formidable appearance
with open mouth, tongue protruding over the lip, clen-
ched fist, ready for the knock and tumultuous ejacu-
lations, reduced Hiranya to the sad plight of a roasted
pig and the Lord tore him off effortlessly. The discus
and the other weapons of the Lord should have
obviously been flaming with rage that they could not be
commissioned to share the spoils in the peculiar context
of slaying the demon, armed with special boons of
a bewildering variety.

(ii) The Nāyakī laments that she hardly needs to be bedecked,
when He, who came to the aid of Prahlāda, the young
lad whose very father had turned terribly hostile to him,
would not succour her, who also pines for His patronage.
(Itu)

vari vaḻaiyāḻ kuṟaivu illāp peru muḻakkāl ataṅkārai
eri aḷalam puka ūti, itu nilam muṇ tuyar tavirrta,
terivu ariya civaṅ, piramaṅ, amarar-kōṅ, paṇintu ṛtṛum
viri pukajāṅ kavarātā mēkalaiyāḻ kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–8)
Translation

I needn’t the garments which attract not
My Lord of fame far-flung, who rid the Earth vast
Of its burden heavy and did in the enemies kindle
The fire of mounting fright when He blew the conch spiral,
Adored by Civaŋ, Piramaŋ, Amararkōŋ and other Celestials.

Note

When Lord Kṛṣṇa blew ‘Pāṅcajanya’, His conch, on the battlefield, it instantly unnerved all His enemies. On the other hand, it warmed up the ardent devotees. Rukmini was in such a forlorn state, after her betroth l to Śiśupāla, that she was on the very verge of collapse and it was the heartening sound from Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s conch, from an ambush nearby, that revived her. When the severed head of an illusory Rāma was exhibited before Sītā, in Aśoka Vana, it was the sound from Śrī Rāma’s bow-string on the battlefield that disillusioned her and put her at ease. Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would say that Parānkuśa Nāyaki naturally pined for similar relief as she was also one like Sītā and Rukmini.

Translation

We have no need for this body disliked by the Lord,
Who seems asleep on the bosom of (Ādiśeṣa) the serpent
But thinks out ways and means of the worlds’ betterment,
Who the sturdy shoulders severed of Vāṇaṇ, the redoubted Father of (Uṣā) the young lady of supple grace
And ravishing beauty, with plenty of garments nice.

Note

If Bānāsura’s life was spared by the Lord, it was only out of consideration for Uṣā, that she shall not be orphaned. The Nāyaki naturally feels that the Lord does not extend
a similar care in her case and if her body holds out no charm for Him, it hardly deserves to be relished by her.

uṭampiṅāl kūraivu illā uyir pirinta malaṭṭuṅṭam
kiṭantaṅnapōl, tuṅi palavā, acurar kulām tuṅṭitu, ukanta,
taṭam puṉala caṭainuṭiyāṇ taṇi orukṭu amartu uṭḍiyum
uṭampu uṭaiyāṇ kavarāṭa uyiriṅāl kūraivu ulamē. (IV–8–10)

Translation
My Soul I can hardly love if it repels the Lord,
Who into bits many did split the hefty Asura hordes
And complacent feel, on whose body huge does reside
Śiva, bearing the cool waters (of Gaṅgā) on matted locks.

Note
The essential nature of the Soul is to subserve the Lord but if He doesn’t like to take service from it, it just doesn’t deserve to exist. The immortality of the Soul is not to be brought in here and the point at issue confused. What is emphasised here is that things which are not linked up with God, are as good as non-existent. The Nāyakī is indeed vexed that the Lord who has allotted a portion of His body even to Śiva whose ego often times gets bloated and makes him feel that he is the Supreme, does not oblige her likewise. It is a pity that the Lord who destroyed all the evil forces out of loving condensation for the welfare of His devotees, should be indifferent to the Nāyakī, who is as good as non-existent (asat), when not sustained by His loving attention.

uyiriṅāl kūraivu illā ulaku ēj taṇṇul oṭukki
tayir venṇey uṭṭāṇait taṭam kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ
ceyir il col icaimālai āyirattu īp pattāl
vayiram cēr piṟappu āṟuttu, vaikuntam naṇṇuvarē. (IV–8–11)

Translation
Those that chant these songs ten
Out of the thousand, flawless and mellifluous, of Catakōpaṇ,
Adoring the Lord, Who did in Him compress and sustain
The souls innumerable and their worlds seven
And then ate up the curds and butter (as child Divine),
Will have their chronic cycle of birth and death ended
And attain Vaikuṇṭam (the high heaven)

Note
Unlike the worshipper at the sanctum, remaining worried about the safety of the pair of sandals left by him at the temple gate, the Lord attended to His cosmic duties first, such as the sustenance of the worlds and their contents in His stomach during the deluge, and then addressed Himself to the task of eating up the curds and butter in the pastoral village of Gokula, with no let or hindrance from other quarters. Even as pregnant women get extra-nourishment, the Lord, holding in His stomach all things and beings, had all the nourishment He could have in Gokula.

Fourth Centum—Ninth Decad (IV-9)
(Nannāṭār Muruvalippa)

Preamble
In the last decad, the Āḻvār got terribly vexed with himself and his possessions and wanted to give up his body, life, that and the other. But, even for this kind of dissolution, he had to depend upon the Lord’s help, as in the case of salvation. And so, he prays to the Lord to finish him off altogether. The Āḻvār’s ardour in this respect is remarkable. His longing to get out of this world is due to (1) frequent interruptions in communion with the Lord and the resultant pangs of separation, (2) intolerance of contacts with the worldlings, straying away from Him and (3) the cruel impact of the five senses and the domineering sense-organs, with the serious risk of his straying back into the domain of the sensual pleasures.

In the last decad, we saw the Āḻvār’s pangs of separation from the Lord; in VII-1, he dwells upon the cruel impact of the sense, while, in this decad, he displays his intolerance of living in the midst of the worldlings.
It would indeed be some consolation if the Ālvār who had the misfortune of not being able to see God, lived at least in the midst of those who were not averse to seeing Him. But even this bit of solace, the Ālvār felt, he was being denied, having to live in the midst of the worldlings, watching their scramble for food and raiment and their stupid pursuits after sensual pleasures, farther away from God. How then could he tolerate this agonising state of affairs? Did not Tirumāṇkai Ālvār declare that he shall not think, even for a moment, about those who do not meditate on the Lord reclining on the seashore at the pilgrim centre, called ‘Kaṭaṇmallai’ in the Bay of Bengal? Conveying the same sentiment, in a slightly different manner, that Ālvār also said that sweet were the moments when he didn’t think of those miserable humans who would not cherish in their hearts the Lord enshrined at Tirukkaṇṭamaṇkai and bear His lovely feet on their heads. Vibhiṣāṇa abandoned Laṅkā and flew towards Rāma’s camp on the other shore, determined to get out of the territory of Rāvana, the heinous offender, whatever be the prospects of his (vibhiṣāna) admission into Rāma’s camp. Saint Nammāḻvār would likewise want to get out of this wretched abode but even this could be got done only at the Lord’s volition. Therefore it is, he appeals to Him, in this decad, in such moving terms as, ‘pray, deign to take me unto Your feet expeditiously’, ‘Pray, hasten my death that I may unto Your feet attain’, “when will you clear me out of this fortress and lift me unto Your feet in Heaven?” etc. Life in the midst of blazing fire is indeed preferable to staying in the company of the sinners who just do not know what it is to think of God.

The genesis of this decad is appreciated by Empār and Kūrattāḻvān in two different ways. According to Empār, it is like this: The Ālvār prays unto the Lord, “My Lord, I could, in a way, put up with my grief due to my separation from you. But it is very much beyond me to bear the misery of staying in the midst of the worldlings who do not reckon with you at all, and wallow in sex and sensuality; you would, therefore, do well to put an end to this kind of misery which can neither be cured nor endured and take me out of this abode”.

Kūrattāḻvān’s elucidation is, however, as follows: The Ālvār’s attention turned on the world around in search of like-minded persons with whom he could share his grief due to separation from
God and secure some relief. But he found them all steeped in sensual pleasures, as intensely as he himself was in the realm of God-love and God enjoyment. This was, according to the Āḻvār, far more calamitous than his own privation and he, therefore, forgot his own misery, like unto a person stung by a scorpion not minding his own agony so much, when he sees another in greater distress, smitten by a sword. The Āḻvār, therefore, enters into a dialogue with the Lord and pleads for the redemption of the worldlings but the Lord asks the Āḻvār not to worry about them who are sense-buried, totally oblivious of Him and leave them to their fate. Thereupon, the Āḻvār insists that he should no longer be kept in their midst. The Lord, however, consoled the Āḻvār by pointing out to him that he was already on a pedestal of his own, unattached to the world. As a further concession, by way of curing the Āḻvār's grief caused by his looking at the world, the Lord revealed to him the glorious setting in Heaven where He is seen along with the Divine Mother, Lakṣmī, surrounded by the exalted Celestials. Beholding this heavenly splendour with great joy, the Āḻvār ends this decad on a jubilant note. Such an approach is only indicative of the melting tenderness of heart of Kūrattāḻvān and his extra-ordinary solicitude for fellow-beings. It is said that once he saw, as he was passing along, a frog in the jaws of a snake, croaking piteously in agony. He sighed, "Alas! to whom does this frog appeal and who will hear it and come to its rescue?" and fainted.

nappāṭār muṟuvalippa, nal urṟār karaintu eṇka,
enn āṟat tuyar vijaikkum ivai eṇa ulaku iyarkai!
kaṇṇāḷa! kaṭal kaṭaintay! ūna kaḷarkē varum paricu,
tañṇavatu atiyēṇraip panī kaṇṭay, câmārē.

(IV–9–1)

Translation

Oh, what a world is this, which countless miseries breeds,
Where over one’s privations, friends and relations do grieve
While the hostile ones do with joy immense chuckle!
Oh, merciful Lord who did the milk-ocean churn,
Pray hasten my end so that I do your feet attain.

Notes

The Āḻvār lays before the Lord two options, namely, curing the miseries of the worldlings or terminating his stay over
here. It is a fantastic world, without a correct perspective of good and bad things. When calamities befall a person, his friends and relations bemoan his lot while his foes rejoice, as if there is a festivity in their homes. This is indeed too much for the Älvär to bear.

The Älvär seems to suggest to the Lord who undertook all that trouble to churn the milk-ocean and deliver the nectar unto the selfish Devas, that He could also mend the ways of the world and cure them of their miseries. The Lord said, there was nothing He could do in the case of the worldlings who did not reckon with Him at all, and struck a divergent path. So then, the Älvär is pressing the other alternative, namely, cutting out the tenure of his stay here, like unto the one caught up in forest fire looking for water and shelter, the immediate needs.

cám ārûm, keṭum ārûm, tamar, urrâr talaittalaiyppetyu, ōmārik kitantu, alārûm ivai eṅga ulakku iyarkai!
ām āru ouṟu ariyēn nāṇ; aravu-anaiyāy! ammānē!
kūmarē viraikaṇṭaṅ-āṭiyēṇai kūrikkonṭē. (IV—9—2)

Translation

My Sire, resting on serpent-bed, I shudder
How I can out of this mesh escape unhurt,
Pray call me quick unto your lovely feet;
Oh, what a world this is! death befalls all of a sudden
And people are beset with miseries umpteen,
Grief-stricken, the near ones do their lots bemoan,
Falling on each other, indeed a pathetic scene.

Notes

(i) The material world taints people to an alarming extent. They plan ahead for a long stay here but death suddenly overtakes them like the thunderbolt. They set much store by their so called possessions, and sink into grief, when they get dispossessed due to loss by fire, theft etc. They are so miserably addicted to lure as to look upon their dear money as even more valuable than life. They look upon their earthly relations as all-in-all
and when they pass away, they cry out their hearts. Apprehending that continued stay in such a world might taint him also, the Ājvār lustily pleads with the Lord to arrange for his early exist from this abode. In this land of nescience, the Ājvār is probably the solitary Soul crying out for such emancipation, and the Ājvār wants the Lord to take special note of it.

(ii) A striking illustration has been given in Ḫtu, depicting the worldly men’s morbid love of lucre. A man, accused of treason, had his legs and hands lopped off under the King’s orders. However, when his friends came to condole with him in his dire misfortune, he took the initiative and asked them to congratulate him, rather than condole with him, for having been let off so lightly without being called upon to part with a portion of his dear money. The compassionate hearts of Saints like Namāḷvār naturally deplore the fate of such men who pin all their faith on lucre, totally oblivious of God.

koṇṭāṭṭum, kulam puṇaivum, tamar, urrār, viju nitiyum, vaṇṭu ār puṇ kulalājum, maṇai oliya, uyr māytal kaṇṭu ārēn ulaku iyarkai!-kaṭalvannā! atiyēnaip paṭēpōl karutātu, uṇ atikkē kūyp pānikollē. (IV–9–3)

Translation

My Lord of oceanic hue, think not of this vassal as before, Lift me up that I may serve right at your feet, Endure I can’t the trends of the world, any more; Unto name and fame shoot up people overnight, these upstarts Acquire home and hearth, the bride fair and all that, But leaving them all behind, life suddenly departs.

Notes

(i) The Ācāryas who have delved deep into the śāstras and acquired a keen insight of Vedanta, the spiritual domain, are no less keen in their observation of the mechanics of the mundane world, as revealed by the commentary on this song. A fellow who was nobody till yesterday,
suddenly comes by a few chips and gets boosted by people around, waiting for a suitable opportunity to grab from him. The fellow of obscure origin and humble parentage, having risen to fortune, becomes vain and starts masquerading as one of high descent, under the cloak of his new-found wealth. Relations who would not acknowledge him earlier, throng round him now and openly parade their kinship with him. Fathers who would not even look at him and much less consider him as eligible for the hand of their daughters, now vie with each other in netting him. Our hero who has now amassed money which generally accumulates like the dried leaves dropped from the trees during autumn, also thinks it worthwhile to marry, although he is well beyond the borders of youth. The poor girl, his partner, still in her teens, falls an easy prey to the prying eyes of the greedy youngsters around. The home is jolly well there, built by our hero for him and his wife to live in privacy, but, leaving all these behind, he gives up his ghost one day all of a sudden. Oh, how pathetic! The Ājvār doesn’t want to stay in this abode any more, watching such harrowing scenes.

(ii) *Think not of this vassal as before:* As one Cīṟālkōṅṭār would put it, the Saint wants the Lord to note that his present appeal is not on a par with his earlier ones, being the offshoot of his mental agony over the calamitous ways of the world and the Lord should not, therefore, ignore his call even as people are prone to ignore the continual tittle-tattles of the newt (wall-lizard).

koḻ eṟu kilamtu ejunta perum cvamv neruppu āka,
kol eṟu tamam mūṭum; ivai eṟa ulaku iyarḵai!
vallalē! manivarṇa! uṇa kalaṟkē varumparicum,
vallal oeytu aṣiyēṇai uṇatu arulāl vāṅkāyē.  \(\text{IV—9—4}\)

**Translation**

Bounteous Lord of sapphire hue, may Your benevolent grace
On me alight and lift me up to Your feet!
How impudent is this world, in nescience steeped,
Madly after the riches elusive, which only gut
The whole lot like the fire well ablaze!

Notes

(i) Material wealth is a virtual man-killer, being open to the
hazards of theft, arson and even murder, not to speak of
the rank jealousy it kindles in the have-nots, friends and
the relations and the disastrous results that follow. In
short, the so-called earthly riches literally burn down the
wielders, like fire which burns out whatever it gets hold
of. The worldlings are fully aware of the potential
harm of the riches and yet, truly characteristic of the
‘tamas’, darkness that envelops their minds, they
do not profit by this knowledge but madly run after
the mundane wealth and perish. Persistence in mist-
takes without profiting by the experience of their own
and others is a fundamental characteristic of ‘tamas’
which dominates these unwary people, who would
tumble, during nights, into the very pits which they
had clearly seen by day.

(ii) It is indeed His unbounded generosity, that the Lord
presents His exquisite Form of Sapphire hue!

vāṅku nīr malar ulakil nirṇaṇavum tirīvaṇavum
āṅku uyirkaḷ pirappu ipippu piṅī mūppāl takarpuppuṇnum
īṇku itaṁmēl vem narakam; ivai eṅga ulaku iyarkai!
vāṅku eṅai ni, manīvaṇṉā! aṭiyēṇai mārukkēlē.  (IV-9-5)

Translation

Confound not this vassal, oh, gem-hued Lord,
Pray take me out of this sprawling world,
Which from the waters emerged, where all creatures.
Static and mobile, are seen screaming,
Ground by the wheel of birth, death, old age
And pestilence and going hence to hell to drudge.

Notes

(i) Āḻvār to the Lord: “Sire, are you keeping me on in this
abode, just to witness and realise the harrowing depth
of the sufferings of the worldlings, tossed up between birth on one side, and death, on the other, and old age and pestilence, in between? and then there are the post-mortem sufferings in hell, far more severe. I pray Thee not to stir up my feelings any more, but to take me unto Thy feet without any further delay."

(ii) The frequent reference to the Gem hued Lord in these songs, emphasises the fact that the Āḻvār was weaned from the world, only when he came under the magic spell of His exquisite Form.

Translation

Oh, Lord, wearing on Your crown tulāci garland fragrant,
My perfect Nectar, You have as Your vassal enlisted
This sinner great and now I pray that You grant
Me a lift and clear me out of this place I detest,
Where men live by torturing others, immorality running rampant.

Note

It is indeed remarkable that Saint Nammāḻvār, seated in the hollow of a tamarind tree inside the temple, could televise, as it were, the happenings in the world around and lament, "oh, the ways of the world!" He deplores the unfair means by which people hoard lucre, throwing morals to the winds. Here is a typical example of the nefarious means by which people stuff their stomachs.

A poor, harmless soul, having a little bit of money, went to a village, thinking that he could live there in peace. The headman of the village, however, frightened the new-comer by telling him that the people around suspected him and might even harm him. Put in dread, the simple fellow succumbed to the artifice of the headman and entrusted all
money and land to the latter’s custody. Lest the poor victim should, later on, make bold to demand his money and land, the headman got a document executed in his favour for a loan, not actually paid, and interest was made to accumulate thereon. Not stopping with all these machinations, the headman feared exposure of his infamy sometime or the other and, therefore, contrived to murder the poor fellow and thus did away with him altogether.

Little wonder then, the Saint deplored and detested such surroundings and longed to get away.

āyē! iv ulakattu niṟpaṇavum tirivaṇavum niyē; maṟṟu oru porulum ingi ni niṟṟamaiyāl, nōyē mūppu, ippāppu, piṟṟappu, piṇiyē eṟṟu ivai oļiya, kūyē koḷ aṭīyēnai; koṭu ulakam kāṭṭēlē. (IV–9–7)

Translation

My Lord, all things in this world,
Still or mobile, are by you controlled;
I pray that this vassal be not shown
This wicked world but be shorn
Of birth, death, old age and pestilence
And lifted up to Your feet in high heavens.

Notes

(i) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: Why don’t you try to get what you aspire for, without my interference?

(ii) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: Sire, not a tiny twig can move without Your aid. Having segregated me from the rest, as a legitimate aspirant for entry into heaven, why don’t you release me from this world and make me a ‘Mukta’, the released soul in heaven, which You intend me to be?

kāṭṭi, ni karantu umilum nilam, nir, ti, vicumpu, kāl īṭṭi, ni vaittu amattra imaiyōr vāḷ taṇi muṭṭaik kōṭṭaiyinil kalittu, eṇai uṇ koḷum cōṭi uyaṟṟattuk kūṭṭu-ariya tiruvatikkal eṇnāṟṟu kūṭṭutiye. (IV–9–8)
Translation

My Lord, when will You take me unto Your feet
In the resplendent heaven, difficult to attain,
Pulling me out of this fortress the cosmic egg You did ordain
Out of the elements five, which for a time shone
Then got inside Your stomach and was then let out?

Notes

(i) The Lord tells the Ālvār that He would certainly fulfil the Ālvār’s desire. The Ālvār, however, wants to know when exactly He would do it. The Lord has to set a date for the Ālvār’s entry into heaven, even as Bharata was assured of Śrī Rāma’s return from exile at the end of fourteen years.

(ii) Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Araiyan is said to have observed that the net woven around each individual soul by the Almighty Lord, in the light of past Karma, has to be disentangled by Him alone, seeing that we are much-too-feeble and cannot disentangle even a bird’s nest. It is a matter of common knowledge that the intricately woven bird’s nest is neatly disentangled by the bird itself and man can, at best only destroy it, if ever he attempted to disentangle the nest. And so, He alone can undo this bondage of ours, and that He will do, when we clasp His holy feet.

kuṭṭuti niṇ kurai kajalka; imaivyōrum tojavakaiceytu,
āṭṭuti ni; aravu-aṇaiyāiy! aṭiyēṇum aktu azivaṇ;
vētkai ellām viṭṭtutu eṇṇai uṇa tiruvaṭiyē cumantu ujaḷak
kuṭṭu-ariyai tiruvaṭikkai kuṭṭiṇai-nāṇ kaṇṭēṇē. (TV–9–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, this vassal too knows your ways,
That unto your jingling feet you lift (those by you favoured)
While even (the exalted) Devas you just keep away;
Perceive do I, my craze for pleasures sensual you have destroyed
And me, unto your feet difficult to attain, you now admit
That I may on my head bear them and roam about.

Notes

(i) The Lord having revealed to the Ālvaṛ the glorious setting in Heaven, he rejoices.

(ii) Śrī Rāma gave to Bharata only a pair of wooden sandals. But the Lord has now made it possible for the Ālvaṛ to bear His very feet on his head, and move about. The Ālvaṛ’s joy, therefore, knows no bounds. The observations made by the Ālvaṛ, in this song, about the Lord’s ways are not based on hear-say but on his personal experience.

Translation

I beheld you, my Lord, in the glorious company
Of Tirumakal, wearing on her wrist bangles lovely
And I abjured the pleasures lowly
Of the sense-organs five besides the Kaivalya state
Of bliss limitless, yet inferior and attained your feet.

Notes

(i) Besides the Lord and Lakṣmi, the Divine Consort, there are millions of ‘Muktas’ (Released Souls) and ‘Nityas’ (Eternal Heroes) in Heaven, in constant attendance on the Divine Couple. Reference to the Lord and the Divine Mother only, in this song, goes to show that all the other denizens of Heaven literally merge in the patronising love of the Divine Couple and do not require to be mentioned separately.

(ii) The bangles rest well on the wrists of the Divine Mother, as She is inseparably planted on His winsome chest, unlike the lady-love, separated from her love, who
thins down alarmingly and her wrists cannot, therefore, keep the bangles on. Beholding the Lord, in conjunction with the Divine Mother, the Āḻvār naturally pines for uninterrupted bliss of service unto the Couple, eschewing all else on both sides—the sensual pleasures over here and the limitless self-enjoyment (Kaivalya) on the yonder side.

tiruvaṭiyai, nāraṇaṇai, kēcavaṭai, paraṇicutarai,
tiruvaṭi cērvatu karuti, cēlun kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ
tiruvaṭimēl uraitta tamil āyirattuḷ īp pattum
tiruvaṭiyē ataivikkum, tiruvaṭi cēntu onṛumīṇē. (IV–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṇ
Of fertile Kurukūr, adoring the lovely feet of Nāraṇaṇ,
The Lord Supreme, Kēcavaṇ, of splendour supreme,
In order to gain these feet, will lead the chanters on,
To those very feet; steadfast unto those feet do therefore remain.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts the people of this world to keep on chanting this decad, as long as they stay in this abode, as that will ensure their attaining His feet in Heaven. Throughout this decad, the Āḻvār longed for the feet of the Lord and by merely chanting this decad, one can attain those very feet in Heaven and render uninterrupted service.

Fourth Centum—Tenth Decad (IV-10)
(Oṇrum-ṭēvum, ulakum)

Preamble

The Āḻvār expressed his abhorrence of the ways of the world and lustily pleaded with the Lord, in the last decad, that he be removed at once from this infernal land. And yet, the Lord did not take him away but contrived to pacify him by exhibiting to him the heavenly splendour, right here, and to keep him on here. The
Lord’s idea in doing so was to propagate, in this confused world, the true knowledge about God-head, through the Āḻvār’s hymns, par-excellence, shorn of doubts, discrepancies and deviations. The Āḻvār seems to have taken due note of the Lord’s intentions; he preaches, in this decad, the Supremacy of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) and tries to disabuse the people of their mistaken notions in this regard and wean them away from the propitiation of other deities. Of course, the Āḻvār has already dwelt on the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in I-1 and II-2, based on His ‘Para’ (transcendent) and ‘Vibhava’ (incarnate) aspects, respectively. And now, he establishes the Lord’s Supremacy in His ‘Arca’ (iconic) aspect and, for this purpose, he concentrates on the Lord, enshrined in Kurukūr itself, as He bears the name, ‘Ādinātha’, the First Lord or Progenitor and it comes in handy to establish His Supremacy.

The Supreme Lord should obviously be the first cause of all things and beings. Who this One is can, however, be ascertained only from the Scriptures. Even without such a study, the Lord, in His ‘Arca’ (Idol) Form, compels attention and makes one instinctively cognise Him, as the causeless Cause, the Primordial Lord. Some might say that Brhamā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are all, on a par, of equal eminence. Some others might hold that there is yet another Power, superior to these three, which should be revered as the Supreme. In stanza 72 of his ‘Peria Tiruvantātī’, the Āḻvār corrects these misconceptions and avers that the lotus stalk which sprouted from the navel of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), tells the true story. From this stalk emerged the four-headed Brahmā from whom Śiva, the five-headed, appeared and Śiva, in turn, gave rise to the six-headed Subramanya and so on, resulting in the many heads we see in the world.

In Cândogya Upaniṣad, the text, ‘Sadeva Somya idamagra āsīth’ indicates ‘sat’ as the first Cause. In another Upaniṣad, the first Cause is indicated by the word ‘Ātma’, in the text ‘Ātma vā ayameka evāgra āsīth’, while yet another upaniṣad employs the word ‘Brahmā’ to indicate this, in the text ‘Brahmā vā idamekamevāgra āsīth’! While, in the above texts, the First Cause or the Ordainer of the Universe has been referred to, in such general terms as ‘sat’, ‘Ātma’ and ‘Brahmā’, the text in Mahopaniṣad pin-points this Supreme Authority as Nārāyaṇa—‘Ekohavai Nārāyaṇa āsīth na Brahmā neśānah’, that is, Nārāyaṇa was the only one then, when
Brahma, Isāna and others were in the unevolved, subtle state. The Lord, Whose Supremacy is thus established only after such a herculean task as delving into the different texts of Vedāntas, is, however, easily accessible in Tirunakari (Kurukūr). The Āḻvār, therefore, calls upon people to worship the Lord in His iconic Form, right here, and be redeemed, instead of going adrift, running after lesser deities. Thus, this decad shakes off the stupor of the votaries of the minor deities and exhorts them to concentrate on the Supreme Lord, the one and only God.

There are very many persons, in this world, who are quite conversant with the scriptural texts in all their ramifications and yet, do not have a clear conviction as to who exactly is the Supreme Lord to whom they should owe undivided allegiance. These people, therefore, waver and bow unto a number of deities. The followers of Śri Rāmānujacārya, however, stand out in dire contrast to these so-called learned men, and have unflinching faith in the Supremacy of Viṣṇu (Śrīman Nārāyaṇa), although they may not have any academic learning, as such, to their credit. This is, of course, due to the grace galore of Saint Nammāḻvār in bequeathing this decad to posterity, as Empār would put it. An illustration of this robust faith is given below.

Tripura Devi, the wife of Rājā Akalāṅkanāṭṭāḻvāṅ, in the holy fold of Śri Rāmānuja’s faith, would not worship the idols of the minor Gods, although she was not quite literate. When asked to quote the authority supporting her conviction, the queen replied: ‘I know no authority other than the dictates of Śri Rāmānuja, my Saviour. Should he command me so I would certainly worship even the deity guarding the north-east (Īsānya) point of the Compass, where our waste-water pots are kept’.

ongum-tēvum, ulakum, uyirum, margum yātum-illā
āṟṟu, nāṟṟukkan-taṟṟoṟu tēvar ulakōṭu uyir pāṭattāṇ, 
kunṟam pōl maṇi māṭam niṭṭu tirukkurukūr-ataṟṟul
niṭṭa atippīṟu niṟkā, maṟṟait teyvam nāṭutirē? (IV–10–1)

Translation

Ye, folks, why do you run after other deities,
When in holy Kurukūr with towering castles
Is our Lord Āḻippirāṅ, unto one and all visible,
The Progenitor who created Brahmā and other Celestials,
The worlds, men and animals, when there was none of these?

Notes

(i) The Ālvār deplores the fate of those who fail to worship Lord Ādinātha (Ātippirāṇ), the Supreme God, making Himself easily accessible to all, in Tirunakari (Kurukūr) and go past Him, in quest of lesser deities. This is just as absurd as a thirsty fellow trying hard to dig a well on the bank of Gaṅgā river, in order to quench his thirst, instead of drinking handfuls of the flowing water of Gaṅgā.

(ii) Creation is just the refunding into the gross state and assortment of the different entities as Devas, humans, etc., from the erstwhile subtle or unevolved state, when they could be hardly distinguished from inert matter and were as good as non-existent. (Īḻu)

nāṭi nir vaṇaṅkum teyvamum, ummaiyum muṇ paṭaitṭāṇ, vīṭu il cīrp pukal ātippiraṇ-avaṇ mēvi uṟai kōyil, māṭa māḷikai cūntu ajaku āya tirukkurukūr-ataṇaip pāṭi, āṭi, paravic celmiṅkal, pal ulakir! parantē. (IV–10–2)

Translations

Ye, men of this diverse world, move about all over,
Dancing and singing the praise of lovely Kurukūr,
By stately mansions surrounded, where lovingly resides
Lord ‘Ātippiraṇ’ of traits, auspicious and abiding,
Who created both you and the deities you revere.

Notes

(i) In this song, the Ālvār exhorts the people of all sorts to converge into Tirunakari (Kurukūr) from different directions in great jubilation, dancing and singing the praise of that pilgrim centre, even as people congregate in a festive mood at Sriratīgam during the ‘big festival’ (Paṅkuṇi uttaram celebrations). The emphasis has now shifted from the Lord to the pilgrim centre where
He lovingly resides and even the different routes leading thereto. The Lord loves the pilgrim centres on Earth even better than His stay in Heaven, where His heart always pines for the teeming millions of His straying subjects down below. Such an attitude is His crowning trait and it does not alter the fact that Heaven is a land of unalloyed bliss. In the midst of all that bliss, His heart leaps towards the weaker sections elsewhere, because of His tender solicitude.

(ii) It is Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme, that ushered in all the subjects, classified under different denominations and so, worshipping the lesser deities amounts to the worship of one section of the Lord’s subjects, by another. The Ālvar deprecates the men of this world running after these deities, searching for them, instead of searching for the Supreme Lord, as enjoined by the Scriptures, ‘Sonveṣṭavyah’.

(iii) The Universal Father is the only Lord and all the others are His vassals. Whoever arrogate to themselves independence are veritable thieves. The lesser gods also are such thieves in as much as they gulp down the sacrificial food which should legitimately go to the Lord and when the sacrificers seek them with prayers for boons, they run away like thieves. These gods only rob from the sacrificers what is God’s own and they have nothing which they can call their own and grant.

paranta teyvamum, pal ulakum paṭaṭtātu, aṟṟu uṭṭaṇē viluṇki, karantu, umijntu, kaṭantu, iṭantatu kaṇṭum teliyakkīr; ciraṇkaḷāl amarar vaṇṇākum tirukkurukur-aṭaṇuḷ paraṇ tīrgu aṟṟi, pal ulakir! teyvum maṟṟu illai pēcumīṇē.

(IV-10-3)

Translation

There’s no God other than the One who did create
The Universe vast, Devas and other denominations,
Kept them all within Him (during deluge) and then spat,
Who spanned the worlds in strides three and from the ocean
Pulled the Earth out; how is it you aren’t clear yet,
Ye, men of this diverse world, You’d better speak out
If there is another beside the One by Devas revered
In lovely Kurukür, bowing low their heads.

Note
The herculean tasks performed by the Lord Who created the
worlds to protect them on different occasions, should be
sufficient to dispel all doubts regarding His Supremacy.
And yet, the worldlings are not clear-sighted, a distressing
state of affairs indeed, according to the Ālvār, the more so,
when those very deities whom these people adore, come and
worship the Lord in Kurukür

Note

Translation
What use is it to the votaries of Ihnlkam, who take
Their stand (on mere inference) and heresies talk
About the Lord, in lovely Kurukür enshrined,
With smart and stately walls around?
Learn, ye. men, who talk of Civa as God Supreme,
From the way the skull in his hand was redeemed
That He (Nārāyana) is unto him, Brahmā and others, the Lord
Supreme

Notes
(i) Those who determine the Supremacy of God, purely on
the basis of inference, as well as those who assert the
Supremacy of Śiva (Ihnkam) and Brahmā, are disabused
of their wrong notions by this song. Basing their
stand on certain texts, in isolation, some people affirm
the Supremacy of Śiva and some others look upon
Brahmā, as the Supreme. There are, however, various
other texts establishing the Supremacy of Viṣṇu,
Relying on these numerous texts, Saint Nammāḷvār has
clarified the position here and asserted the overlordship
of Viṣṇu.
(ii) The five-headed Śiva, born of the five-headed Brahmā, abhorred the similarity between him and his sire and, in an uncontrollable moment, plucked out one of Brahmā's heads, by way of removing the vexatious parity. The skull of the Father, however, stuck fast to the Son's palm. On the advice of the Sages and Devas, Śiva went a-begging. The skull would not drop out, unless it was filled with the alms and unfortunately, it was never full. It was only when he went to Badrīnāth and appealed to Lord Nārāyaṇa that He gave alms, uttering the word 'aṅgayām' (plenty) and instantly, the skull got completely filled up and dropped out of Śiva's palm. Surely, neither the chopper nor the chopped could be the Supreme God.

iliṅkattu iṭṭa purāṇattirum, camanarum, cakkiyarum, valintu vātu ceyvīrkālum, marrum num teyvamum āki niṟṟāṉ, malintu cennel kavari vicum tirukkurukkūḷ-ataṅṉul polintu niṟṟa pirāṉ kaṇṭir-ōṟrum poy illai, pōṟṟuṅiṅē.

Translation

Ye, hardened perverts, led away by stories about Iliṅkam, Jains, Buddhists, heretics, one and all! you see, the Lord Supreme, Internal Controller of you and your deities, Polintunṉṟapirāṉ does gleam In Tirukkurukūr with paddy fields rich, better worship Him, There isn't any untruth whatever in what I proclaim.

Notes

(i) Addressing the aliens and heretics, the Āḻvār sums up beautifully the quintessence of the vedic texts and purāṇik teachings, other than those pertaining to the 'Rājasik' and 'tāmasik' varieties. He affirms that his addressees and the deities they revere (Agni, Śiva, Brahmā etc.) are all controlled by Lord Viṣṇu, as the Supreme Controller, seated inside one and all. Unlike 'Liṅga Purāṇa' and other Purāṇas, which treat of the origin and prowess of particular deities and are prone,
in the particular context, to exaggerate the importance of those demi-gods, Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa says, in reply to a general question as to who is the Supreme God who brings into being all things and lives and finally dissolves them, that Viṣṇu controls all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution. And this Supreme Lord, the Āḻvār now points out, is right here in Kurukür, in His Arca (iconic) manifestation, wherein all His superlative excellences converge in a perfect measure as His name, ‘Polintu niṅga pirāṇ’ connotes. This being the dark land of nescience, His great qualities shine here far better than in Heaven, where it is all day and no night, that is, all light and no darkness.

The Āḻvār avers that what he says is perfectly true, as there is no need for him to import greatness to the Lord Who is greatness itself unlike the demi-gods who need special boosting to prop them up.

\[ pōri maṟṟu ṥṟ ṣṟṟam peṉap puṟattittu, ummai iṟne \]
\[ teṟṟi vaṟṟattu, ellirum viṟu peṟṟāl ulaku illai eṟṟē; \]
\[ cēṟṟil cennel kamalam ōṅku tirukkurukūr-ataṇuḷ \]
\[ āṟṟa vallavaṉ māyam kaṇṭhir-atu aṟṟintu aṟṟintu ōṟumē. \]

*(IV–10–6)*

**Translation**

Know, ye, men adoring the lesser deities,  
‘Tis your past Karma that has kept you in this state,  
Away from the goal of emancipation, under śāstraic restraint;  
Better realise you can this ocean of māya ford  
Only if you can get hold of the Almighty Lord  
Who resides in Tirukkurukūr with fields fertile and lotus ponds fine,  
And knowing this, do unto His feet hasten.

**Note**

To a question supposed to have been put to the Āḻvār by the votaries of minor deities, as to why Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, declared by him, in so many ways as the Supreme Lord, did not bend them towards Him, instead of allowing them to drift in the manner they were doing, adoring the lesser gods,
this song provides the answer. It is because of the heavy sins committed by them in the past that they have been tied down to their present lot of worshipping lesser deities, with the result that their emancipation from the dreadful cycle of birth and death and attaining Heaven have also been put off. Their hopes of redemption, therefore lie only in taking refuge at the feet of the Supreme Lord in His worshippable Form in Kurukür. c.f. the Lord’s statement in Bhagavad Gîtâ, (VII-14) that only those who take refuge in Him, cross beyond this ‘mâyâ’, prakrit which helps their liberation instead of hindering it by concealing His real nature, as it does, in the case of the non-seekers of His grace.

ō̄ti ō̄tī, pala pirappum piṇantu, marku őr teyam pāṭi ātip paṇintu, palpaṭikāl valī ērīk kaṇṭīr– kūṭi vāṭavar ēṭta niṟra tirukkurukür-ataṅkul āṭu pul-koṭī āti mūrttikku aṭimaipukuvatuvē. (IV–10–7)

Translation

Serve you did for ages and in many ways,  
The lesser gods, passing thro’ several gates of birth,  
Well have you seen the extent of their so-called grace;  
Better seek refuge at the feet of Lord Ātinātā,  
With the bird (Garuda) on His banner, enshrined in Kurukür,  
For Devas, in their strength, to come and revere.

Notes

(i) The text, “Brahmāṇam Śītikaṇṭāṇa ca yās cānyā Devatāḥ smrutāḥ, pratibuddhā na sevante yasmāt parimitam phalam” says that knowledgeable persons do not worship Brahmā, Śiva and other lesser deities, as the benefits derived thereby are much-too-slender and limited. The Ālvār, therefore, exhorts people to seek refuge in Lord Ātinātha, in lovely Kurukür. The very fact that these people have been worshipping the godlings in myriads of ways through countless births and have still not been able to get rid of the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth, shows that these deities could do precious little for their emancipation. What is even
more noteworthy is that those very deities throng round the Lord, enshrined in Kurukūr and sing His praise to their hearts’ content.

(ii) Actually, these deities derive all their power from Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord, see also I-1-5; again, in spite of their internal bickerings, these deities join together in the face of a common danger and propitiate the Lord, in a body. The Āḷvār, therefore, advises his addressees to seek refuge at the Lord’s feet with immoveable faith. In his scintillating commentary, Nampiḷḷai cites, as examples of such robust faith, king Ambariṣa and Saint Tiruṉaiḷai Āḷvār.

In order to test Ambariṣa’s steadfastness the Lord appeared before the King, disguised as Indra, mounted on Airāvata, the white elephant (which again was but Garuḍa, the Lord’s mount, in disguise) and offered to grant him boons. Pat came the King’s admonition, as follows:

“Who are you and what is this insect you have brought with you? Don’t you know that I am votary of Lord Viṣṇu from whom all of you derive your position and authority. Surely, I am not the one who would pay homage to strollers like you, passing along the streets. May it please you to depart from here”.

Saint Tiruṉaiḷai Āḷvār (BC 4202) was sitting with his legs stretched, stitching his torn-out garments, when Śiva and Pārvati passed by. The Āḷvār’s nonchalance, unmindful of the presence of the exalted couple, provoked Pārvati and, at her insistence, an indignant Śiva demanded the Āḷvār’s explanation for his disrespectful behaviour. Calm and unruffled, the Āḷvār queried whether the distinguished visitor could grant him salvation (mokṣa) but the latter said, “No, it is beyond my jurisdiction; it can be attained only by resorting to Viṣṇu”. The considerate Āḷvār, thereupon asked Śiva whether he could postpone the death of creatures, at least by a day. On his betraying his helplessness once again, the Āḷvār jeeringly asked the visitor to decree
that the thread, the former was holding, did follow the needle as he was sewing. Unable to brook this insult, Śiva opened up the third eye on his forehead but the Saint overpowered it by pointing to the innumerable such eyes in his leg.

(iii) There is yet another anecdote, cited in Īḻu commentary, to illustrate the certainty of salvation through oneness of faith in the Supreme Lord.

When Śri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was once reading that portion of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, dealing with the life of the meritorious King Yayāti whom Indra conspired to pull down apprehensive of the usurpation of his own position, two of the listeners, Pillai Vilupparaiyar and Appān Tируvaḻuntur Araiyaṉ asked the learned discoursor about the chief lesson to be learnt from the life-story of king Yayāti. Bhaṭṭarāyava eluciated: "Here is the lesson; the lesser gods, when propitiated, grant men their desires, but, side by side, envy rankles in the hearts of the former over the latter's mounting stature and they seek an opportunity to pull the votaries down, to prevent their drawing level with those very gods. On the other hand, Lord Viṣṇu looks upon His creatures' happiness as His own and He can never be swayed by such base passions as the lesser gods. One should not, therefore, resort to lesser gods but place all one's faith in the Supreme Lord ".

(iv) Bhaṭṭarāvya also cited the example of Lord Rāma and Laksmana serving Sage Viśvāmitra as his humble servants. On being questioned at this stage how the Yādavas came to grief, in spite of their close association with Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhāṭarāyava pointed out that the Yādavas had to share the fate they did, because of their irreclaimable ways, although Lord Kṛṣṇa did His very best for them, such as bringing from Kubera, the God of wealth, Treasures such as Śanka nidhi' and 'Padma nidhi '. Further, they looked upon Kṛṣṇa, not as God but as a mere kinsman, companion and so on, an ephemeral passing relationship which automatically lapsed at the end of their lives.
pukku atimaiyinthal tanwaik kanta markkanthyan-avanai
nakka piranum anru uyyakonpatu narayana arule;
kokku alar tatam talai velit tirukkurukur-ataunul
mikka atippiran nirka, marait teyvam vijamputir. (IV-10-8)

Translation

‘Tis the grace of Narayana Whom Nakkapirana (Siva) did invoke
That succoured Markkanthya (from Yama’s yoke)
And made the latter peep into His stomach and have a look
(At Siva) inside; the Lord Supreme now stands enshrined
As Atipirana, in Kurukur with lovely hedges, white as the crane;
Why then do you at all about other deities mention?

Note

Some persons would appear to have objected to the Alvâr
under-rating Siva, despite his fame as Markanâthya’s Saviour,
who successfully resisted Yama’s attempt to take away the devotee’s life, at the tender age of sixteen. The Alvâr now
disabuses them of their wrong notions about that episode by
giving them the correct perspective in this regard. Sage
Mrkanþu’s ardent prayers for the grant of a son were heard
by Brahmâ who, however, asked the Sage to opt for either a
son, deformed and devilish, with a long life or one brilliant
and beautiful, but short-lived, his term of life not extending
beyond sixteen years. The Sage having indicated his
preference to a son of the latter category, he was gifted with
the gem of a son, Márkaṇḍeya. As the little lad was approa-
ching the end of his brief tenure of life, the parents were
throbbing with painful anguish. The young one, however,
placated them by asserting that he could surely overcome the
ordeal through the good offices of Siva whom he
worshipping intensely. At the zero hour, when the boy
completed sixteen years of age, Yama’s hordes came down
to snatch him away but the aura of his piety for Siva was
such that they could not get anywhere near him. They
went and reported this strange phenomenon to their boss
who sent his Minister Kâlan who fared no better. The
infuriated Yama himself came and threw his life-snatching cord along, which, however, encircled the idol of Śiva also, Mārkaṇḍeṇya was then embracing tight. Śiva meditated on Śrīman Nārāyaṇa and with His grace, he emerged forth from inside the idol, kicked yama out and blessed Mārkaṇḍeṇya with perpetual life and perennial youth. Although the superficial reader takes it that it was Śiva who rescued Mārkaṇḍeṇya from Yama’s clutches, the truth of the matter is that it was Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, as the Supreme Lord and Internal Controller of Śiva, among others, who did the job, as narrated by Mārkaṇḍeṇya himself to Yudhiṣṭhira, (see Maha Bhārata, Āraṇya Parva, chapter 192* that he (Mārkaṇḍeṇya) sought refuge in Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. This is also corroborated by the eighth chapter of the twelfth skanda of Śrī Bhāgavata which clearly says† that by propitiating Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Mārkaṇḍeṇya defied Yama and conquered death.

As a matter of fact, Śiva who was immensely pleased with Mārkaṇḍeṇya’s devotion, wanted to reward him suitably and, therefore, put him on to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Whom he (Śiva) himself was worshipping. Mārkaṇḍeṇya, blessed with immortality, prayed intensely to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa that he might be allowed to witness the Deluge (Mahāpralaya). Swimming across the vast expanse of water, he could not merely have access to the Lord reclining, as a mere babe, on a tender fig-leaf afloat but he was also allowed to peep inside the Lord’s stomach. Seeing inside the Lord’s stomach, one and all, including Śiva, whom he had been worshipping for long, Mārkaṇḍeṇya had no longer any doubts about Śrīman Nārāyaṇa’s Supremacy. He took refuge in Him and was admitted by the Lord unto His fold.

vilampum āru camayamum, avaikīyam mṛṟum taṇṟpāl aḷandu kaṇṭarku ariyaṭ ākiya atippirāṇ amarum vāḷam koḷ taṇ paṇai cūṇtu aḷaku āya tirukkurukkūr-ataṇai uḷam koḷ ṇaṇattu vainmiṁ-ummai uyyakkōntu pōkuṟilē.

(IV-10-9)

* Pitrbbhaktosī Viprāṅge māṇcaiva śaraṇam gataḥ.
† Ārādhayan Hṛṣikeśaṁ juye mṛtyum sudurjayam.
Translation
Neither the aliens preaching their systems six
Nor the heretics can by-any-means fix
And measure the glory of ‘Ālippirāṅ’ the Primordial Lord,
Who, in fertile Kurukūr, cool and lovely, has His abode;
Better keep Him for ever in your mind firmly lodged
If you are keen on your salvation indeed.

Note
The aliens are those who do not admit the authority of the Vedas and the Śāstras expounding them. The six systems of such aliens are: ‘Śākhya’ (Buddhists), ‘uluṣka’ (Cārvākas), ‘Kṣapāṇa’ (Jains), ‘Aksapāda’ (Naiyāyikas), ‘Kapila’ and ‘Patanjali’. And then, there are those perverts or heretics who admit the authority of the Vedas but not in their entirety. They also misinterpret the texts and say that God has no form and no attributes, reducing Him to the position of a vast wilderness, mere icy abstract, cold and colourless. Both the aliens and the heretics are thus bungling in their own ways. These people cannot, therefore, comprehend the Lord’s cosmic wealth and gauge the extent of His glory, which is unfathomable and unlimited.

Translation
‘Tis but meet that you should serve the immaculate Lord
Whose bodies, the Devas all, the worlds many and all else are,
Who did as the celebrated midget (Vāmana) descend
As well as (Kaṇṇaṇ), the pot-dancer grand
And now in Tirukkurukūr, in full splendour stands,
Amid bumper sugarcane crops and rich paddy fields

Note
Indra, Candra, Kubera and all other Devas as well as all the worlds, with their contents, sentient and non-sentient, are like unto the Lord’s bodies, directed, controlled and sup-
ported by Him. That Lord resides in Kurukūr (Āḻvār-Tirunakari), in unabated splendour. The Āḻvār, therefore, calls upon people to come and worship this Lord, going by the name of ‘Āṭināṭan’ standing firmly in Kurukūr and get redeemed.

āḻ-ceytu āḻip pirāṇaic cērtavaṇ, vaṇ kurukūrṇakarāṇ, nāḻ-kamal mākīl mālaī māripaṇ, māṟaṇ, caṭaṭāpaṇ vēṭkaiyāl coṇṇa pāṭal āyirattul ip pattum vallār mīṭci iṉgi vaikunta māṇakar māṟṟatu kaiyattuvē. (IV-10-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung with deep devotion
By Kurukūr Caṭaṭāpaṇ, wearing on his chest,
The fragrant narcissus garland and blest
By the Lord donning the discus, to render Him service grand,
By turning unto God the wayward worldlings,
Are assured of the eternal Kingdom in Heaven.

Notes

(i) In the original text of this song, it has been said that the Āḻvār attained the Lord donning the discus, through service. The finale is, however, yet to come and he has to wait till X-10. The service rendered by the Āḻvār by hymning the Lord’s peerless glory and clearly establishing His Supremacy, in this decad, is unique. The votaries of the minor gods have been weaned away, en masse, through the Āḻvār’s grand exposition, in this decad and all of them have become ardent followers of Viṣṇu, a great feat indeed, not achieved even by the Almighty Lord.

(ii) Saint Nammāḻvār, known in sanskrit parlance as Vaku-lābharaṇa, is said to have been wearing the narcissus garland with perennial fragrance. Śrī Vedānta Deśika has said in his ‘Yatirāja-Saptathi’ that the fragrance of the narcissus permeates ‘Tiruvāymoḻi’ (Dramiṇa Veda) as well, whereas such an exhilarating fragrance cannot be found in the Sanskrit Vedas which are indeed the poorer for it.
THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(IV-1): The Ālvār’s tender solicitude and irrepressible fellow-feeling induce him to turn his attention to the world once again and that too, so soon after his repulsion in III-9. In the opening decad of this Centum, the straying subjects are called upon by him to eschew the so-called material wealth, much-too-flimsy and fleeting, and realise the importance of holding on to the Supreme Lord, the wealth Supreme and everlasting, unlike the earthly monarchs who once held supreme away, being ground to mere bits of dust and reduced to abject beggary in one and the same span of life;

(IV-2): The Ālvār’s advice, as in the first decad, to an unresponsive world has only served to excite his own God-love to such an extent that he longs for the ‘ tulacī’ (basil leaves) worn on the Lord’s feet, during His Avatāras, in the days gone-by and feels frustrated due to the immediate non-fulfilment of his aspiration by the Lord. The Ālvār becomes insensate, like a female forsaken by her lover after their erstwhile union and the gnostic mother steps in to describe the critical condition of her daughter (Parānkuṣa Nāyakī), as in the second decad. It is, however, clear from the end-song of this decad that the Lord did, at last, oblige the Ālvār and regale him;

(IV-3): Time being at the beck and call of the Supreme Lord, He could certainly fulfill the aspiration of the Ālvār, as in the second decad, and regale Him. In the third decad, a fully satisfied Ālvār gives expression to his immense joy over the unique blending of his soul with the Lord, with perfect reciprocity of connubial love,

(IV-4): Apprehending that overwhelming divine ecstasy, as in the third decad, might jeopardise the Ālvār’s very existence, the Lord reduced the tempo a little, just to stabilise the Ālvār’s God-enjoyment. Even this upsets the Ālvār, whom we see, in the fourth decad, transformed once again, as the Nāyakī (female lover), in a state of heavy depression. She runs after the objects bearing the likeness of the Lord in one respect or another but disenchantment, on nearer approach, makes her sweat with disappointment and wither down. The gnostic mother steps in and relates the pitiable condition of her love-smitten daughter and the words she utters. The merciful Lord, however, presents Himself before the Ālvār towards the end of this decad and puts the Ālvār back on his feet:

(IV-5): Visualising, right from where he is, the Lord’s cosmic wealth and splendour, the Ālvār sings, in the fifth decad, with cymbals in hand, the Lord’s glory to his heart’s fill and goes into raptures. It seems as though the Lord had called upon the Ālvār to sing His glory so that it can acquire special lustre through his laudation. (The spiritual vicissitudes of the Ālvār, alternating between satiate and disconsolate states are studiously engineered by the Lord, in order to enrich and intensify the Ālvār’s God-love and stabilise his God-enjoyment, by stages);
(IV-6): In the sixth decad, we see the Ājvār, once again consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection, transformed (figuratively) as a Nāyakti, insensate and thus unable to speak out her woes, the Lord having once more withdrawn Himself from the Ājvār's mental vision. It is the Nāyakti's mate, who speaks out in this decad, extremely critical that she is of the wrong steps taken by the elders around, such as propitiation of minor deities with meat and liquor, to cure the Nāyakti of her strange malady, misled by a female gipsy whom they had approached for divining the cause of the malady. The recipe strongly suggested by the mate who vehemently condemned the activities of the elders, is that the holy names of Lord Viṣṇu be uttered in the Nāyakti's hearing besides sprinkling on her the dust collected from the feet of the Lord's pious devotees;

(IV-7): As the holy names of the Lord trickled down his ears, the Ājvār regained consciousness but kept pondering how the Lord, the friend-in-need, capable of dispensing the appropriate remedies, could keep away from him. Unable to stand the separation from the Lord, the Ājvār cries out his heart, in the seventh decad, so lustily that it melts down even the stony hearts of his listeners;

(IV-8) Continuing in the feminine state, the frustrated Ājvār laments in the eighth decad, that neither he nor his possessions (bangles, garments, complexion etc.) deserved to exist, so long as he was not in the good books of the Lord, as evidenced by the absence of response to his passionate appeal, as in the seventh decad,

(IV-9): In the ninth decad, the Ājvār displays his intolerance of living in the midst of the worldlings, with their stupid pursuits, straying away from Him, with the serious risk of his straying back into the domain of the sensual pleasures, under the cruel impact of the five senses and the domineering sense-organs. As in the case of salvation, the Ājvār has to depend upon the Lord even for this kind of dissolution and hence his dialogue with the Lord, as in this decad, to get him removed from the wretched surroundings;

(IV-10): Having already dwelt on the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in His "Para' (transcendent) and 'Vibhava' (Incarnate) aspects, in I-I and II-2 respectively, the Ājvār proceeds, in the concluding decad of this centum, to establish His supremacy, in His Arca (Iconic) manifestation, as well. For this purpose, the Ājvār concentrates on Lord Ātinātha, the First Lord or Progenitor, enshrined in Kurukūr, the Ājvār's birth-place, whose exquisite Form compels attention and makes one instinctively cognize Him as the Supreme Lord, the causeless Cause, the Primordial One. The Ājvār calls upon people to worship the Lord in His iconic Form, right here and be redeemed of their age-long sins, instead of going adrift, running after lesser deities. Thus, this decad shakes off the stupor of the votaries of the minor deities and exhorts them to concentrate on the Supreme God, the one and only God.
BOOK V
Fifth Centum—First Decad (V-1)
(Kai ār Cakkarattu)

Preamble

Through his brilliant exposition of the Lord’s Supremacy, in the last decad, the Ālvār could wean away the worldlings from propitiating the minor deities and turn their attention to the Supreme Lord (Viṣṇu). The Ālvār is about to sing the song of benediction for the new state of affairs to flourish in all its glory, vide V-2. Meanwhile, he draws the searchlight inwards to examine the root-cause of the extraordinary grace showered on him by the Lord, whereby he could not merely stand apart from the worldlings without wallowing as one of them, but also advise and correct them. This introspection, however, reveals that even for a mere show of piety by him devoid of genuine love for God, He has condescended to open up the floodgates of His grace on him, without caring in the least to go beneath the skin and expose his hollowness. The Ālvār just marvels at the Lord’s overwhelming grace and gives vent to his wonderment, in this decad

\[
\text{kai ār cakkarattu ēn karumāṇikkamēi ēṟṟu ēṟṟu, poyyē kaṁmaĩ collī, puramē puramē āṭi, meyyē perṟolintēṅ; viti vāykkirṟu kāppār ār? aiyō! kanna-pirṇū! araiō iṟṟp pōṟāleī! (V-1-1)}
\]

Translation

Still engrossed with pleasures sensual, I did sham
Love unto you and called you out many a time,
As my Lord of sapphire hue, holding the discus majestic and so on,
And yet, you did your grace on this imposter rain
As if I am genuine; ha! who can its influx resist?
Oh, Kaṇṇapirāṇ, You can’t from me part hence, even if you insist

Note

No doubt, the effulgent discus in the Lord’s exquisite hand and
His sapphire hue are very attractive and can easily steal
away the hearts of beholders. The Ālvār’s heart, hard like steel, is, however, impervious and yet he called out the Lord, not once, but several times, shamming the love of true devotees. Apart from this treachery of the tongue, the Ālvār’s behaviour, as he puts it, was also most unworthy of the Lord’s grace. And yet, he now exults that he has been rewarded like the true devotees soaked in God-love, and exclaims that none can obstruct the influx of His voluntary grace, flowing with remarkable spontaneity. In this hour of victory the Ālvār challenges, with a gusto, even the Lord to get parted from him, if He can! Did He not declare, as Śrī Rāma, on the seashore, that He would not give up any one who sought refuge in Him, even if the supplicant be a foe in the disguise of a friend, an imposter? It is not as if the omniscient Lord has been duped into believing a pretender and taking him at his face value. The truth is that, though He is Omnipotent, He elects to be incapable of abandoning the sinner, when the latter seeks His protection, half-hearted though, in view of the eternal bond of relationship subsisting between the Creator and the Creature. Perfectly safe under the wings of the Lord’s mercy, the Ālvār makes bold to declare that the Lord cannot tear Himself away from him.

pōnāy mā marutiṇu nātuvē eṁ pollā maniyē!
tēṇē! iṁ-amūṭē! eṁu eṁuē cīla kūttuc colla,
tūṇē, em perumāṁ avan eṁ-āki ojintāṇ;
vānē, mā nilamē, marrum, marrum eṁ uḷḷaṭavē. (V–1–2)

Translation

Shamming deep love, I called out the Lord  
As the One who ‘tween the twin trees crawled,  
My honey, nectar grand, gem of the purest ray serene  
And so on; lo! the Lord and His possessions have now become mine  
And the cosmic duties He carries out from within me.

Note

The Divine child (Kṛṣṇa) was tied to a pounder by the Mother, as a punishment. But the child dragged it along and crawled
in between two 'Maruta' trees and felled them. The Mother grew apprehensive of the safety of the child and it was, therefore, quite all right when she questioned the young one anxiously, 'Ha! my darling, did you crawl between the trees?' But the Āḻvār repeats it now, as if he had even a fraction of the concern of the Mother. How pretentious! And yet, the Omniscient Lord has been pleased to take it at his face value and unto him repaired with all His retinue and got inside him. The Āḻvār wonders how this could be. (In him that is charged with God-love, the entire world of God stands illumined. This is now demonstrated.)

Translation

My Lord, resting on serpent-bed in the milk-ocean,
My mind was in other things steeped, but time and again
I tried to deceive you and uttered words insincere
Calling you out, oh, my Lord of sapphire hue, generous Sire,
And so on; with a mind by you redeemed and rendered pure,
You I now enjoy, I can't from you be apart any more.

Note

With a mind duly reconditioned by the Lord, purged of all its erstwhile grossness, dirt and delivery, the Āḻvār says, he cannot think of any but the most delectable Lord and there is no question of his giving up One who has such a strong hold on him and running after others who are hardly adorable and having nothing to grant, even if adored.

cu kolvan unna vittu?—ennum vācakaṇkaḷ colliyum,
vāṇ kalvanēṇu maṇattai valittu, kaṇṇa nir karantu,
niṅkaṇ neruṅkavaittē, ennai āviyai nikkakkilēn;
cuṅkaṇ maḷiṇam arūttu, ennai kūviarulāy, kaṇṇaṅē! (V–1–4)

T–14
Translation

Oh Kaṇṇā, I, a terrible thief, uttered words insincere
That I would think of none but you and now, may I implore
That you do forcibly reclaim my wayward mind with its woeful tears
And fix it on you besides ridding me of nescience dark
And lifting me up to you, away from the mesh intricate
(Of worldly life), whence my soul I am unable to extricate.

Note

There are two ways of appreciating the genesis of this song. The first is: "My Lord, You have no doubt redeemed my mind but I am still apprehensive of slipping back to my old ways, because of the impact of this material body and the mundane surroundings. I, therefore, pray that you be pleased to steer me clear of the material contacts and lift me up to your feet in Heaven". The other elucidation is: In the preceding song, the Āḻvār declared that he had attained the Lord from whom he could not be separated any more. But that was only a mental appreciation while the Āḻvār longed for physical contact as well and actually held out his hand to clasp the Lord. The Lord could not be got hold of physically and the Āḻvār was quick to realise that it was not possible because of his material shackles. Hence, he prays unto the Lord to cut these out and make him stay at His feet for ever.

Terrible thief: The Āḻvār played the thief in two ways: While he was actually steeped in sensual pleasures, he addressed the Lord, professing great piety, that he thought of none but Him and things of that sort. Again, by holding himself as the Master of his soul which actually vested in the Lord, he had committed theft, a serious one, at that. The magnitude of a theft is determined by the value of the thing stolen and the rank and eminence of its owner. Seeing that the Jiva (Individual Soul) is the coveted possession of the Supreme Lord, the theft committed by the Āḻvār is terrible indeed.

It is indeed a very difficult task to wean the mind away from its escapades and ungodly pursuits and the Āḻvār has given it
up, as one much beyond his capacity. Only the Almighty Lord could do it and hence His intervention has been sought.

Translation
Oh, Kaññā, I am near yet far from my nectar sweet,
The blue gem by Celestials adored, being put by you aside,
In a body by violent desires bound, neat outside
But full of dirt within and in blinding ignorance rendered weak.

Note
In this song, the Āḻvār expatiates on the heinous material contacts, referred to in the previous song. In the first two lines, he draws a picture of God-head, with melting tenderness, while, in the next two lines, he speaks of his own inglorious material shackles, with great abhorrence. Neatly cloaked outside, this body is but a bundle of guts and glands, blood and bones, nerves and muscles, dirt and delivery. But for the skin outside, it would become an easy prey to the greedy crows and man’s whole occupation would then be to keep off the crows from pecking at the human flesh. This body stands as a big barrier between the Āḻvār and the Lord and therefore it is that the Āḻvār lustily pleads for its removal.

Translation
Seen have I my Sire of sapphire hue with shoulders four,
Broad and lovely, coral lips, lotus eyes red and hands comely,
Wielding the discus dutiful and thus cut out the entry
Into this body, of actions good and bad that seek to enter
By turns and get badly mixed up, hard to decipher.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār, who grieved over his serious handicap, the material shackles, in the two preceding songs, was compensated by the Lord, when He blessed him with the vision of His exquisite Form. In the resultant joy, the Āḻvār drowned his erstwhile miseries.

(ii) The so-called merit (Puṇya) and demerit (Pāpa) play havoc with this body, the seat of action, the one being as fettering as the other. A golden fetter is a fetter all the same.

(iii) The Āḻvār feels that the Lord is embracing him and His shoulders are thus mentioned first. Then He addresses sweet words and casts sweet glances and, in this very sequence, the Āḻvār refers to the Lord's coral lips and lotus eyes. The hands wielding the discus, a prominent member of the Lord's protection force, are mentioned next.

Notes

(i) One can't but shrink back while contrasting one's own abject lowliness with the Lord's peerless excellence. Reciting the first line of the original text of this song,
Pillai-amutaṉar would exclaim: "How great and worthy He is, the Lord wielding the discus!" raising his arms up, pointing to heaven and then drop them down earthward, saying "how vile and unworthy I am!"

And yet, when His grace descends and overflows its continents, this enormous disparity is more than made up. Then it is all one vast expanse of water (grace), where the high and low, big and small, cannot be differentiated. Śrī Vedānta Deśika would appear to echo the substance of this song in Śloka 65 of his ‘Dayā śatakam’, where he has observed that inundation of the Lord’s grace has rendered one and all, big and low, quite even, all of them having been submerged under the vast expanse of His grace-people of low stature like Guha, the hunter chief, Sugriva, the monkey King, a jungle inhabitant, named Šabarī, kucela, the famished brahmīn in rags, Kubjā, the malformed maid of Kamsa’s establishment, the young Gōptī of Vraja, Mālākāra, the flower vendor etc., on the one hand, and Lord Śrīnivāsa Himself at that charming eminence, known as Tiruvēṅkatam, on the other.

(ii) The Lord’s grace becomes all the more lustrous and pronounced, when it embraces even fakes like the Āḻvār (as he puts it). He just feigned devotion and referred to the Lord’s rescue of Gajendra in distress, though not with the intense feeling of a true devotee whose heart can’t but melt down at the Lord’s post-haste arrival in the pond which was the scene of a titanic struggle between the elephant and a crocodile. The Lord pounced upon the Āḻvār even as a famished fellow pounces upon food.

mēḷāt tēvarkāḷum nilat tēvarum mēvit toḷum
māḷār vantu, iṉaṉāl aṭiyēṉ maṉattē maṉipār;
cēḷ ēy kaṇṇiṉarum, perum celvamum, naṉmakāḷum,
mēḷāt tāy tantaiyum avarē īṉ āvārē. (V-1–8)

Translation

The Lord, by the exalted Celestials and Brahmins revered
And adored, now in my heart lovingly inheres;
He is from now on, All-in-one unto me,
The fish-eyed damsels, riches big, adorable parents and sweet progeny.

Note

The Lord, lovingly worshipped by vast multitudes in Heaven and the pious brahmins on Earth, has condescended to exhibit even greater love unto the Āḻvār than to them all. What is more, He has got right inside the Āḻvār. Little wonder then that the Āḻvār looks upon the Lord as the aggregate of all happiness derived by the earthlings through various sources, Father, Mother, Wife and all these.

āḻvār ār tuṇāi? eṟṟu alai nīrk kaṭaḻul alun tum nāvāy pōl piṟavikkaṭaḻul naiṟṟu, nāu tuḻānka, tēvu ār kōlattoṭum tiruc cakkaram caṇkiṇoṭum, āāl eṟṟu arulceytu, aṭiyēnoṭum ánāṇē.  (V–1–9)

Translation

Like unto a ship sinking in the surging ocean,
With none going to its rescue, I was struggling hard
In the ocean of worldly life when the resplendent Lord,
Wielding Conch and Discus and bursting with compassion,
Shed unto me His grace and in me joined, in a state of fusion.

Note

The Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the supreme grace of the Lord in dispelling all his erstwhile miseries by exhibiting His exquisite charm and entering his person, making His union with him just as natural and perfect as His holding the glorious weapons-Conch and Discus.

āṇāṇ āḷūṭaiyāṇ eṟṟu aktē koṇṭu, ukantu vantu,
tāṅē in-arulceytu, eṟṟai muṟṟavum tān āṇāṇ;
maṇ āy, āmaiyum āy, naraciṅkamum āy, kuṟal āy,
kāṇ ār eṇamum āy, kaṟki ām iṅṇam-kār vaṇṇāṇē,  (V–1–10)

Translation

That the cloud-hued Lord has me His vassal made
I gratefully uttered and He has His grace on me shed
Most lovingly and unto me become everything delicious;
He is the One who did incarnate as Fish, Wild Boar, Tortoise,
Man-Lion and Midget and will, as Kalki, appear in due course.

Note
The age-long efforts of the Lord, an indefatigable cultivator,
to redeem and reclaim the Ālvr, have, at long last, yielded
results. The Ālvr who is now God-bent, gratefully
acknowledges the Lord’s herculean efforts. And this simple
gesture of the Ālvr has drawn the Lord inside him, where
He lovingly stays, firm and fast. This is, however, nothing
new for the Lord who spared no pains in the process of
sustentation and incarnated in various forms. Even as the
clouds go on unleashing the rains, the cloud-hued Lord will
not stop with the many incarnations already made by Him;
He will also incarnate as Kalki hereafter. Looking at all
the past incarnations of the Lord as those solely directed
towards the Ālvr’s reclamation, His future Avatāra as
‘Kalki’ would seem to be superfluous but it is not so,
being intended as a safeguard or corrective against the
possible future pit-falls, as long as the Ālvr remains in this
abode.

kār vāṇṇa, kanna-pirān, kamalattātaṁkaṇṇaṁ-tappai
ēr vala on kālanik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṁ cogna
cir vāṇṇam on-tamiḻkal ivai āyirattul ēp pattum
ārvaṇṇattāl uraiṟpār aṭikkilp pukuvār polintē. (V-1-11)

Translation
Those that lovingly recite these songs ten,
Out of the perfect thousand Tamil songs, composed by
Caṭakōpaṁ
Of Kurukūr, with fertile fields where many a plough plies,
Adoring Kaṇṇaṁ, the cloud-hued Lord with lotus eyes,
Will remain pious unto Him and His feet attain.

Note
Those that recite these ten songs with intense love, as if they
are drinking nectar, will remain pious Śrī Vaiṣṇavas during
their stay here, and attain the Lord’s feet, like unto children
reposing on the mother’s lap.
Fifth Centum—Second Decad (V-2)
(Polika Polika)

Preamble

In IV-10, the Āḷvār preached to the world at large the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in convincing style and thereby weaned the people from propitiating minor deities. The resultant upsurge of devotion to the Supreme Lord converted this abode into a land of bliss, hardly distinguishable from Heaven. This again resulted in a free flow of visitors from Heaven and other upper regions to this land, to behold and admire this new state of affairs. A golden era having thus been ushered in, the Āḷvār hails it in this decad. He also envisaged, with a prophetic vision, the happy preservation and propagation of God-love thus generated, in the coming ages as well, through the advent of the illustrious Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār and Saint RāmānujaEcārya, the veritable destroyers of the evil forces of Kaliyuga.

Translation

Hail! hail! hail! the state of affairs new!
Gone are the sins heavy, the hells with miseries strewn
Have been destroyed; no work here for Yama’s hordes
And Kali too will soon be destroyed, please note.
Seen everywhere are the devotees of the sea-hued Lord,
Singing sweet songs in His praise, all over the land.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār says, “May this state of affairs flourish!” thrice over, after the Vedic pattern of “Sāntiḥ, Sāntiḥ, Santiḥ”.

(ii) All sins, however, deadly, having been destroyed, there is no question of the Subjects going to hell and hence, there is no work for Yama, so far as the denizens of this abode are concerned.
(iii) Even Kali Puruṣa will soon become defunct—this was the prophesy of no less than Saint Nammāḻvār, blessed by the Supreme Lord with far-sighted knowledge, envisioning the future advent of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār and Śrī Rāmānuja. The expression, "Please note", carries with it an aura of certainty, the sure fulfilment of this prophesy. This is further reinforced by saying that the entire land is filled with devotees, singing the Lord’s praise, leaving no room whatsoever for Yama and his hordes or Kali and his agents to step in and play their pranks.

kaṇṭōm, kaṇṭōm, kaṇṭōm; kaṇṇukku īpiyaṇa kaṇṭōm;
toṭir! ellirum vārī; toḻutu toḻutu niṟṟu Ārttum;
vaṇṭū ār taṇ am tulāyān māṭavaṇ pūtaṅkal maṇmēl
paṇ-tāṇ pāṭi niṟṟu, āṭi, parantu tirikirṇaṇavē. (V–2–2)

Translation

Seen, seen, seen we have indeed, sights feasting the eyes!
Devotees of Māṭavaṇ, donning tulacī garlands, cool and nice,
Studded with honey, are ambling about all over the place,
Singing songs tuneful and dancing merrily; Come, one and all,
Ye, pious men, revere them we shall and revel to our heart’s fill.

Note

In the exuberance of his joy, the Āḻvār beckons like-minded devotees to come and enjoy this grand gathering of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. This is in dire contrast to the unsightly world from which he wanted to be removed earlier (IV–9). The eyes prove their real worth, only when they behold such pious gatherings.

tiriyum kaiyukam niṅki, tēvarkal tānum pukuntu,
periya kitayukam pāṟi, pēriṇpa veḻlam peruka,
kariya mukilvaṇṇaṅ, emmāṅ, kaṭalvaṇṇaṅ pūtaṅkal maṇmēl
iriyap pukuntu, icai pāṭi, eṅkum ēṭam koṭṭi-ṇaṅvē. (V–2–3)

Translation

Kaiyukam, with its morals topsy-turvy, is gone
And the golden Kitayukam, with morals sound, is back again;
The Devas too have come close to devotees, in ecstasy bound,
Singing with great eclat, filling the space all round,
The glory of the Lord of oceanic hue, like unto water-laden cloud.

Notes:

(i) Packed with Śrī Vaiṣṇavas Lord Viṣṇu’s devotees all over, this land now easily attracts even the exalted Nitya Sūrīs from the High Heavens. Earlier, as we saw in IV-9, this was a forbidden land of dirt and delivery.

(ii) The trend of Kali yuga, that is, toppling down all moral values, has been forecast in ‘Mokṣa Dharma’ of Mahā-Bhārata. And yet, Saint Nammāḻvār, born as early as on the 43rd day after the advent of Kaliyuga, could, ironically enough, turnout to be the destroyer of Kali, almost at its very inception.

(iii) The Heaven is reputed to be the land of perfect bliss and beatitude while this Earth used to be just the reverse. But what is the position now? The Earth is now inundated with bliss, ever in spate, throwing into shade even the Heaven.

(iv) The Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are now thronging all over, like the inhabitants of Ayodhya who went to Citrakūṭ to meet Śrī Rāma, singing all the way, “When are we going to have darsan of our cloud-hued Rāma, with valiant shoulders, firm and steadfast, the destroyer of the sorrows of the Universe?”

ītām koḻ camayattai ellām eḻuttuk kāḻaivaṉa pōlē,
ṭatām kāṭal-pāḷḷip perumāṉ tāṇṇuṭaip pūtaṅkaḷē āy,
kiṭantum, iṟuntum, eḻuntum, kiṭam palapala pāṭi,
naṭantum, pāṟantum, kuṇittum, nāṭakam ceykiṇṇaṉaṉē.

Translation
This land is full of ardent devotees of the Lord,
Reposing on the milk-ocean; lying, sitting and standing,
Walking along, singing many a song and dancing,
Flying about with heels above the ground, they are revelling
Like those out to uproot the heretical religions rampant in the
world.

Notes

(i) It is a matter of common knowledge that unwanted things
easily multiply themselves at random and can be had in
plenty dirt-cheap while life-saving herbs are very rare,
need'ing such herculean effort to get at them, as Hanu-
mân undertook to secure the life-giver, in the story of
Rāmāyana, uprooting the mount as a whole. Even so,
the heretical religions grow up like mushrooms on a
rainy day, while the Vedic religions are few, and so
their propagation is limited. But now, the Āḷvār is
most agreeably surprised to find the land seething with
Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, bubbling with God-love. These God-
lovers do not have to make any effort, as such, to root
out the heresies. The latter will automatically vanish
like the blade of grass when the paddy is harvested or
the light introduced into a dark room, clearing the
darkness as a matter-of-course.

(ii) As the devotees are entitled to even greater reverence than
the Lord Himself, the Āḷvār enjoys the different post-
ures of the devotees in their ravishing moments of
God-love, even as he mentions the Lord’s postures of
sitting, standing and lying, quite often

ceykiṅgatu en kaṇṇukku oṛṟē okkiṅgatu-iv ulakattu
vaikuntan pūtaṅkaḷē āy, māyattīṇāl enkum mappi;
aiyam oṛṟu illai; arakkar acurar piṟantīr uḷḷīrēl,
uyyum vakai illai, toṇṭīr! ūlī peyartīṟum kōṟē. (V-2-5)

Translation

I see this land with the Lord’s devotees full
And they act in many ways; the ungodly and devilish
Among you, worldlings, have no means of survival;
They will just finish you off and the world replenish
With the golden age ,there is hardly any doubt about this.
Note

To the Āḻvar’s eyes, it is all one vast concourse of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, including the ‘Nityas’ and ‘Muktas’ from Heaven, gathered here, there and everywhere. No doubt, Heaven is the Eternal Land whence there is no returning to this abode. There is, however, no bar for the denizens of Heaven moving out, at their volition, as distinguished from forcible expulsion. In this pious gathering, there is absolutely no place for the ungodly and the devilish, who will fare no better than Suka and Śāraṇa, the two spies from Rāvana’s Lāṅkā, who smuggled themselves into Śrī Rāma’s camp.

The Lord’s devotees will not merely vanquish these quislings but also redeem the ‘yuga’ itself and usher in the Golden age (Krta yuga).

Translation

Devotees of the Lord wielding the discus have come here And spread themselves out, singing and strutting about, To banish from this abode pestilence, hunger and hate, Evils, one and all; Ye, worldlings! let not your minds wander, Better fix them on morals sound and revere, with a mind pure, These devotees and at their feet salvation secure.

Note

The Lord’s devotees are here in this abode to quell all evils, just as His discus does. The Āḻvar exhorts the worldlings to get themselves salved through this holy band. A pre-condition for worship is concentration of the mind and this is being stressed here. Again, purity of worship consists in seeking nothing in return, worship being an end in itself.
niṟttti num uḷḷattuk kōḷum teyvaṇkaḷ ummaṟ uyyakkol
maṟuttum avaṇṭe kaṇṭir; márkaṇṭeṇaṇuṁ kariyē;
kaṟutta maṟam Ṽṟṟum vṛṇṭā; kaṇṇaṇ alal, teyvaṁ illai;
iguppatu ellāṁ avaṇ múṛtti-yāyavarkku Ṽṛumiṇē.  (V–2–7)

Translation

The deities whom you in your minds forcibly lodge
And worship, help you only thro’ the Supreme Lord
Whom they revere; Sour you needn’t feel when I say
There’s no God but Kaṇṇaṇ and all homage you pay
To other deities goes but to Him, as they His bodies are;
Well, Mārkkaṇṭeṇaṇ will unto this witness bear.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvar was mighty glad that this land was full of Śrī
Vaiśṇavas but suddenly, he happened to notice a few
non-vaiśṇavas too, here and there These were not
only not attached to the Śrī Vaiśṇavas but were immersed
in the propitiation of the Godlings (minor deities). And
so, the Āḷvār wished to bring them also round through
advice. He tells them. “If you think you should
persevere in your present method of worshipping the
minor deities and propitiating them, you may, by-all-
means, do so, but with the knowledge that there is but
one God, namely, by Lord Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) and all the
other deities are but His bodies as stated in the upani-
śad. All the homage, that you pay unto your deities,
actually reaches Him, as they are but His bodies.
Already, you have blackened your faces by worshipping
the lesser gods but now I find your minds also turning
black, as you are evidently not happy with what I say.
But then, I am telling you the barest truth. Mārkka-
ṭeṇaṇ whom you have all known as a staunch devotee
of Śiva, will bear me out”

(ii) Very pleased with Mārkkaṇṭeṇaṇ’s penances and deep
devotion, Śiva told the supplicant:

“Mārkkaṇṭeṇaṇ, you have waited on me so long. I will now
recommend you to our Sovereign Lord Nārāyaṇa whom
I myself wait upon, to hold my present position. The Supreme Lord will then requite you for all your services unto me. In doing this, I only follow the rules of hospitality which demand that if a guest happens to come, the host must offer food. If, however the host has no food, he has to guide the hungry guest to a good neighbour’s house where he is sure to be fed; otherwise, the host will sin”. Vide also notes under IV-10-8.

Translation

'Tis the Supreme Lord who has set up in different climes
The minor deities appropriate, to receive the homage the votaries pay them
And grant them boons; the devotees of the Lord with (Śrī-vatsa) the mole
On His winsome chest, singing songs of His glory, flourish well
In this abode; better revere them and in their footsteps follow.

Note

The Emperors of yore used to receive the tributes payable to them through the subordinate officials and, in the present day, Government dues are collected through a vast network of agencies. The Scriptures likewise prescribe the rites and rituals to be offered to the various deities who are but the agents of the Supreme Lord, rather, His bodies through which He carries out His enormous functions. The Álvār says that those who propitiate the minor deities can as well emulate the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, who are spread all over this land and strightaway worship the Supreme Lord, the Sovereign Master to whom the minor deities owe allegiance.
mēvit tōjutu, uymmiŋ nirkaḷ; vētap puṣita irukkai
nāvil koṇṭu, accutan-taṟṟai ṅaṇaviti pījaiyāṁē,
pūvil pukaiyum vilakkum cântamum nirum malintu,
mēvit toḷum aṭiyārum pakavarum mikkatu ulakē.  (V–2–9)

Translation

Here we have those that with devotion great serve the Lord
With flowers and incense, chanting the Vedic mantras sacred
And those immersed in deep contemplation of His traits auspicious;
Revere them all lovingly, ye, worldlings, and redeem yourselves.

Notes

(i) The two types of devotees, referred to here, correspond to
Lakṣmaṇa who followed Śri Rāma into exile and
served Him in all ways, and Bharata who was sta-
tioned at Nandigrām, in devout contemplation of Śri
Rāma.

(ii) ‘Devotion great: This refers to the discipline of Bhakti
mārga taught by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

mikka ulakukaḷ tōrum mēvi, kaṟṟṇaṟ tirumūṟṟi
nakka pirāṉōṭu ayaṟṟum intiraṟṟum mutalākat
tokka amarar kuḷāŋkaḷ eṅkum parantaṇa; toṅṭir!
okkat toḷa kiggiṟākil, kaliyukam oṟṟum illaiyē.  (V–2–10)

Translation

Ye, worldlings, the deities whom you do adore,
Nakkapirāṅ (Śiva) Ayaṇ (Brahmā), Intiran and all others
Worship, in strength, the Lord Supreme of form exquisite and
thrive well,
In their sprawling worlds; like these celestials you will also do
well
To worship Him and thus Kali’s mischief quell.

Note

Here is the certain recipe for counteracting the trend of Kali-
yuga, which detraacts men into worshipping the minor deities,
instead of adoring the supreme Lord.
kaliyukam oṭrum igaikkē taṭ aṭiyārkku arulceyyum
maḷiyum cūṭar oḷi mūrṛti, māyap pirāṇ, kaṇṇaṭ-taṇṇai,
kaḷi vayal teṇ nāṇ kurukurk kārimāraṇ, caṭakōpaṇ
oḷi pukaḷ āyirattu ip pattu uḻḷattai mācu aṟukkumē. (V–2–11)

Translation
The hearts of those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the glorious thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṇ,
Of lovely Kurukūr in the south, with many a field fertile,
Adoring the wondrous Kaṇṇaṭ of resplendent Form that does dispel
Kali’s influence unwholesome, will be rid of blemishes, one
and all.

Note
This Tiruvāyumōli will cleanse the minds of its chanters thorou-
ghly and fix them, firm and fast, on to the Supreme Lord,
to the exclusion of everything else, such as the adoration of other deities and selfish desires, the blemishes referred
to in this end-song Constant meditation on the Supreme Lord is characteristic of Kṛta yuga while such a thing is conspicuous by its complete absence in Kaliyuga. Thus the change of mind wrought by this decad changes the character of the Yuga too, replacing Kali by Kṛta yuga

Fifth Centum—Third Decad (V-3)
(Mācu aṟu Cōti)

Preamble
The Āḻvār now reverts to the state that obtained in IV-8 and is all agog to get united with the Lord. Non-fulfilment of his intense longing, however, induces him to contemplate the drastic step of coming into the open and carrying his tale of woe to the public at large so that the unresponsive Lord could be arraigned at the bar of public opinion and the union with Him got accelerated. It might be recalled that Śrī Rāma who had invoked the King of the oceans, got furious, when the latter didn’t turn up, and bade Lakṣmaṇa to bring unto Him the bow, so that the entire ocean could be dried up
for the monkey battalions to walk through to the other shore. The frustrated Āḻvār is also likewise poised to negative God-head altogether, if the union longed for, so intensely, by him cannot materialise, there and then.

It can now be easily inferred that the Āḻvār is once again in the ‘Nāyaki’ state, that is, the forlorn female lover, weighed down by the intensity of God-love, unable to brook separation from her Beloved, any longer. In Tamil literature, there is what is called the ‘maṭal’, the episode of the hero going a-hunting and casually meeting the heroine who happens to be alone, having got accidentally separated from her maids when they were all playing about, picking up flowers etc. The hero and the heroine exchange erotic glances and part. The heroine whose heart has been stolen away by the hero, draws a sketch of him and keeps on gazing at it, days on end; she languishes without food, does not tend her person, scratches her body with the teeth of a palmyrah stem and runs about with dishevelled hair, bitterly complaining to the on-lookers that she has been badly let down by a heartless fellow and things of that sort. Moved by the piteous condition of the forlorn lady, the people would intervene to hasten the union of the hero and the heroine or the hero himself would rush in, terrified by the slander heaped on his head, and take the lady. The third alternative would, of course, be for the lady to seek relief through death (suicide). The underlying sentiment is thus ardent love, egging the desperate lover on, to a public declaration of such love, sometimes culminating in the tragic act of self-immolation. ‘Tolkāppiyam’, the ancient Tamil work, seems to confine this to the males only, the mad lovers riding to death, through the Streets, on the toothed edge of a palm-yrah stem, as if on a horse. But, in the North, females were also permitted to have recourse to ‘maṭal’ (e.g.) Sitā, Vegavati, Vāsavadattāi, Umā, Uṣā, Ulūpikā etc.

The Āḻvār’s contemplated move is indeed extraordinary, the more so when he is in the vanguard of ‘Prapannas’ who are not to invoke any means other than God Himself and put to the imperative necessity of catering to His sole delight. Nevertheless, it cannot be criticised as improper; it is the exuberance of such love-intoxicated super-personalities that made them overshoot their mark. The Āḻvārs were no doubt endowed with supreme knowledge by the Lord Himself and they could, therefore, be expected to be above
criticism. But their knowledge was not the dry-as-dust stock but one transformed into intellectual love of God. In the exuberance of such love they were thrown into a state of mental imbalance (Bhakti pāravāśya) and acts performed in such a state are indeed praiseworthy and, surely, these are not comparable with the transgressions committed by the common people due to immaturity and ignorance in a relatively unevolved state, still under the grip of nescience. The Āḻvār’s mental attitude is but an inevitable facet of God-love, seeking quick consummation by the Lord. It is worth contrasting the Nāyaki’s present stance with that in IV-8. Whereas she was then prepared to abjure herself and her possessions if they could not be engaged in the Lord’s service, she is now out to destroy Him and His cosmic wealth if He would not make Himself pliable to her. The mate could no longer keep the Nāyaki under sobering restraint and the letter was determined to destroy God-head even at the cost of her own destruction. The Lord could no longer afford to be a passive witness to this state of affairs and, therefore, He presented Himself to the Nāyaki and thus redeemed her and Himself.

mācu āru cōti en ceyya vāy maṇikkuprattai,  
ācu āru cīlanai, āti mūrttiyai, nāṭiyē  
pācāgavu eyti, āgivu ījantu, eṇai nālaiyam?  
ēcu ārum ēravar kavvai tōḷi! en ceyyumē?  

(V-3-1)

Translation

You know, my mate, my awareness is lost  
And my lustre gone since long, in quest  
Of the primordial Lord of splendour unalloyed and coral lips,  
The mount of emerald, of loving condescension with no lapse;  
How then will the rebuke of slanderous folks aﬀect me?

Notes

(1) The mates of Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki, who had prior knowledge of her contemplated move, dissuaded her, in a low whisper, from going ahead with it, lest the people around should reproach her for her aggressive stance. The Nāyaki was, however, not in the least worried about public opinion; as a matter of fact,
she had become impervious to it long back. The Nāyakī stood on a pedestal of her own and the magnitude of her privation from God, of Supreme eminence, was not comparable with any known to the common man of the world. Hence her reactions were also bound to differ widely from those of the worldlings in regard to their individual privations.

(ii) The Ājvār was no doubt endowed by the Lord with knowledge, full and complete. But, intoxicated by God-love, the Nāyakī had long ago lost her mental equipoise; else, would she fall at the feet of bees and birds and beg of them to carry her message to God?

eṇ ceyyum uravār kavvai, tōṭi! iqi nammai?
eṇ ceyya tāmaraik kāṇṇāṇ eṇṇai nirai kōṇṭāṇ;
muṇ ceyya māmāi iñjantu, mēṇi melīvu eytī,
eṇ ceyya vāyum karuñ kāṇṇum payappu ūṁntavē. (V–3–2)

Translation

My Lord with red-lotus eyes robbed me of my modesty,
With my complexion gone, my body is thinning down,
The hue of my red lips and eyes black is also going down
What indeed is the reproof of these folks unto me?

Note

Queried by her mates as to how she could afford to ignore public opinion and be indifferent to it, the Nāyakī says that she is well past that stage, having lost all sense of awareness of the world long ago, when the Supreme Lord of exquisite charm stole away her heart. Pining for Him, she has thinned down alarmingly and is terribly off-colour. When she recounts these disquieting changes, it is not by way of stating her own loss; these were the things which had once attracted the Lord and the loss is, therefore, His and not hers.

ūṁnta cakaṭām utaitta pāṭattāṇ, pēymulai
cāṟntu cuvaitta cēvāyāṇ, eṇṇai nirai kōṇṭāṇ;
pēṟntum peyərtum avāŋtō uṟi ṥor col ilēŋ:
tirnta eṇ tōṭi! eṇ ceyyum uravār kavvaiye? (V–3–3)
Translation

My seasoned mate, now and again, I keep talking of none
But the coral-lipped Lord who sucked the life out of the demon
And unto pieces kicked the devilish wheel; He robbed me
Of my traits feminine and now what is it to me,
The rebuke of these slanderous folks around?

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki enlightens her mate by saying that the Lord
kicked the demon who entered the cart-wheel, to a thousand
pieces, and sucked the demoness who feigned as the
good mother, unto death, only to attract her and steal her
heart away. It was earlier assumed by the mate that these
incidents formed part of the general scheme of annihilation
of the Lord's enemies set upon Him by Kamsa.

The Nāyaki feels tortured and tormented, due to her separation
from the Lord. The mate whose role it is to put the Nāyaki
on to her beloved, now questions the Nāyaki's wisdom in
being soaked in God-love despite her pangs of separation
from the Lord and suggests that she might as well turn her
attention on other things and get over her misery. But the
Nāyaki asserts that her thoughts are always riveted to Him
and consequently, her conversation has to necessarily
revolve round Him. This gladdens the heart of the mate,
quite in keeping with her true role and she hugs the Nāyaki
to her bosom, in appreciation of the Nāyaki's steadfast love
to God. It is against this background that the Nāyaki
addresses her mate as the seasoned one. This is like Sītā's
appreciation of Hanumān, after her initial doubts about his
bonafides were dispelled.

ūravar kavvai eru iṭṭu, anañai col nīr paṭuttu,
frā nel vitti, mūḷāitta neṇcap peruṇ ā czyuḷ
pēr amar kātal kaṭal puraiya viḷaiyyita
kār amar meṇi nam kaṇṇaṇ, tōḷ! kaṭiyye.  (V–3–4)

Translation

Kaṇṇaṇ, my cloud-hued Lord, has indeed done me so much;
The rebukes of the folks around He made the manure rich,
My mother’s sobering counsel, the channel of irrigation
And sowed He the seed of devotion that raised the crop rich,
Of God-love, in the spacious field of my heart, big as the ocean;
Could such a one, my mate, be dubbed cruel devoid of compassion!

Notes

(i) Mate to the Nayaki: “I don’t mind your being indifferent
to public opinion, if the Lord were at least with you, but now, you are neither here nor there. Why not give up the Lord who seems to treat you as of no consequence? “.

Nāyaki to the Mate: “Is it you speaking like this? How can I at all blame the Lord Who has kindled in me the undying flame of love? Smitten I am, no doubt, by the reproof of these folks, on one side and the poignance of my separation from the Lord on the other. But, don’t you see that my mind dwells not on any but Him, under all circumstances? ”

(ii) This song indicates the manner in which God-love of such magnitude was generated in the Nāyaki. The earthlings tried to nip her God-love right in the bud but their admonitions only intensified her love and thus proved a blessing in disguise. The constant attention of her mother and her wholesome counsel tended and nurtured this God-love in the Nāyaki, like unto a steady flow of water irrigating the fields. Having created such a fertile background, the Lord, as an indefatigable cultivator, sowed the seed of devotion in the Nayaki’s heart and there sprouted the rich crop of God-love, sustained further by the vision of His exquisite Form, like unto the rain-cloud. The precise manner in which the Lord reclaims the sense-buried Soul and eventually takes it on to His exalted abode has been admirably set out in aphorism 104 of Ācārya Hṛdayam.
kaṭiyaṇ, koṭiyaṇ, neṭiya māl, ulakam koṇṭa
aṭiyaṇ, arīvu-aru ṁēṇi māyattāṇ; ākillum,
koṭiya en neṭcam avan enē kiṭakkum; ellē!
tuṭi koḷ ḍai maṭat tōjī! aṇṇai en ceyyumē?

(V-3-5)

Translation

Agile and alert or cruelly indifferent could be the Lord,
Big beyond comprehension, His feet measured the worlds,
His form bewitching puts one in a daze and yet
My stubborn mind clings to Him alone, my thin-waisted,
modest mate!
How can mother over me prevail [if you can’t]?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī reinforces her stand vis-a-vis the Lord, as
set out in the preceding song, by stating that she would
adore the Lord even if He were to be a callous despot,
bereft of good qualities, and that it was, therefore, no use
trying to draw her away from the Lord. Be it a matter
of recounting the auspicious traits of the Lord or of
cataloguing His oppressive methods and tactics as
listed in this song, the Nāyakī was indeed far more
competent than the mate. This is because it is the
Nāyakī and not the mate who has alternately tasted the
bliss of union with the Lord and suffered the pangs of
separation from Him.

(ii) If it suited His purpose, He could do a thing with the
utmost speed and pounce upon the Subject, lulling the
latter into a sense of false security that the union would
last for ever; He would also not hesitate to leave the
Subject in great distress by snapping Himself suddenly.
Bent upon getting back the Kingdom lost by Indra, the
Lord would leave no space for Bali and send him to the
depths of the underworld. Knowing these oppressive
tactics of the Lord as well as she did, the Nāyakī would
nevertheless cling fast to Him. Drawbacks though
these might be, still they are His drawbacks and the
Lord’s contact with them is enough to make the Nāyaki
feel attracted to them. The emphasis is on the Lord’s
contact, as such and not the nature or quality of the contact c.f. aphorisms 108 to 110 of ‘Śrī Vacana Bhūṣāṇa’. Were it not disinterested love of God, love for its own sake, as distinguished from love induced by the Lord’s auspicious traits, there should be an end of such love during those moments when the devotee feels frustrated and thinks that God is bereft of all those endearing qualities, he pined for. The Lord might be anything, selfish, time-serving, elusive and so on, but He shall be the sole refuge of the Āḻvār, under all circumstances. In Periya Tirumoli, XI-8-7 Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār also picturesquely brings home the inalienability of the ‘Master-Servant’ relationship between God and Man, whatever be the vicissitudes. Addressing the Lord, he says: “My Lord! you are generally known to be sweet as sugar-cane; even if you turn bitter like the margosa fruit, I, Your eternal servant, will covet nothing else but Your comely feet, like unto the caterpillar, bred on margosa leaf, eating nothing but that.”

(iii) It is worth recalling, in this context what transpired between Anasūya Devi, wife of Sage Atri, and Śītā. Felicitating Śītā on her fidelity to her husband (giving up the palace and all its wealth and relatives and following Śrī Rāma into exile) Anasūya Devi exhorted that the husband needs to be venerated as God Himself, be he in town or wood, well or ill. Swayed by modesty, the bashful Śītā stood with down-cast eyes and spoke out: “It is indeed difficult for one to prove that my fidelity to Rāma stands by itself without any external provocations or inducements, as Rāma and his excellence can never remain apart. My fidelity will remain constant even if he were the exact reverse of what he is.”

( V-3-6)
Translation

It matters not, my mate, what the mother says
Or the folks around, leave me alone, will you?
Ensnared am I by Vācutevan of sapphire hue
Prince of Tuvāarakai, the city beautiful, chief of ‘Nityas’.

Notes

(i) Nityas—the ‘Nitya Sūris’ or the Eternal Heroes, the ever-free angels in heaven.

(ii) Finding the Nāyakī implacable, her mates tried to impress upon her that, by her conduct, she would only imperil the life of her mother and it would be a terrible loss, all round—the Lord hasn’t come to her, her mother would die and the folks around would heap abuses on her. But the Nāyakī tells them that, entranced as she is by the bewitching looks of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Prince of Dvārakā, all the above considerations would be of no avail and that they would do well not to pin their hopes on her any more. Actually, she has lost alike her vision and heart unto her Lord.

valaiyul akappaṭuttu, eṇṉai nal neṉcam kūvikkontu,
alai kaṭal-paḷḷi ammāṅai, āḷippirāṅ-taṅṅai,
kalai koḻ akal alkul-tōḻi nam kaṅkāḷāl kaṟtu,
talaiyil vaṇaṅkavum ām kolō, taiyalār muppe? (V–3–7)

Translation

My lovely mate, well-clad, shall we with our eyes behold
The Lord who ensnared me and away with my good heart fled
And rested on the surging ocean, the Benefactor, who the discus wields
And bow unto Him, well in front of these (rebuking) ladies?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī longs for the Lord’s presence so as to enable her to fall at His feet, right in front of the slanderous folks and silence them. These folks were slandering the Lord as faithless to the Nāyakī and the latter as foolishly sticking on to Him.
(ii) When Kūrathālvāṇ-discouraged on this song in a place called Rājentracrōḷaṇ, a centenarian got up, shaking from head to foot and reverently queried whether it would be appropriate for the Nāyaki to bow unto her lover. The illustrious discoursers quoted Sītā's conduct in this regard as the precedent. She told Hanumān when he took leave of her in Aśokavana at Laṅkā; “Pray, tell Śrī Rāma, corn to protect the entire world, that I prostrate unto Him”. Sundara Kānda XXXVIII 53.

The Sandals got separated from Rāma and went north. Sītā was separated from Him, later on, and she went south. Whereas the sandals, installed on the throne ruled over a whole Kingdom, Sītā was a miserable captive in Laṅkā, tormented and tortured by the seven hundred and odd Rākṣasis Sītā must have pondered within herself and realised that this disparity was due to the contact of the Sandals with Śrī Rāma’s feet and the absence of such contact, in her case. Therefore it is that she now tells Hanumān, the Ācārya, that she prostrates at the feet of her Lord, albeit from that distance.

pēy mulai unṭu, cakatam pāyntu, marutu it ai
pōy mutal cāytu, pul vāy pīlantu, kalīru aṭa,
tū muṟuval-ṭoṇṭaivai piraṇai en nākolo
yām uṟukiṟatu, tōli! anṇaiyar nāṉave?

(V-3-8)

Translation

When shall we attain, my mate, the coral-lipped Lord,
Of smiles pure, who the demon’s breast sucked, crawled
‘Tween the twin trees and uprooted, unto pieces smashed
The wheel, cleaved the bird’s beak and the elephant slammed,
So that these elders do their heads hang in shame?

Note

The Nāyaki enumerates the deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa, directed towards the annihilation of the evil forces, the opponents of the devotees. If such a great Benefactor could come and
join her, it would put to shame the elders who were all bereft of good qualities, condemning Him as heartless, faithless and so on. It needs to be specially noted that the Lord’s appearance is sought, in this song, by the Nāyaki, not for her embrace but to vindicate her Lord’s glory in the eyes of the elders as the One who is not only quite responsive but also remorseful. Did He not, as Śrī Rāma, rush to the Rṣis of Dandākārāṇya, to enquire their needs and place His services at their disposal and apologise to them profusely, finding that they had already come a few steps forward to exhibit their sufferings at the hands of the Rākṣasas?

नापुम निगायुम कवर्न्तु, एण्णै नाल नफ्फऽम कुविक्कोण्तु, ।
चेन युय वापात्तु इरुक्कुम तेवा पिराण-ताणै ।
अणै एप तोड़ु इलाकूरु अलर तुग्री, अम ।
कोणाकाज़े्य जेय्तु, कुटिरियाइ माताल इर्तुमेः ।

Translation

Oh, mate, be sure, I shall unto maṭal resort, getting out of hand
And arraign, in every way and in all lands,
The Chief of the Celestials, Who my good mind stole
Besides my shyness and modesty and stays now in the heaven
tall.

Note

In the seventh song of this decad, the Nāyakī had complained that the Lord had stolen her heart and fled with it to the milk-ocean. Apprehending that the Nāyakī might get at Him even there, He seems to have since gone to the high heavens, so as to be out of her reach. But the Nāyakī is now determined to get out of her shell and ferret Him out wherever He might go and expose Him thoroughly all over the land.

याम माताल इर्तुम, एम आलिं अंकैप पिराण उताई ।
तु माताल ताण अम तुलाय-मालर कोंसु चुतुवोम- ।
अम माताम इप्पी, तरुवुटोरू अयल-तायलार ।
नाम माताहाप दाल तुर्की, नापुम इराक्कावेः ।

(V–3–10)
Translation

Shaking off all reserve, street after street shall I enter
And make women in all the worlds shout beside me and clamour,
In sheer sympathy for me, having recourse to maṭal,
And from the Lord, wielding the discus lovely, procure
And wear the tulaci garland, cool and lovely, with petals pure.

Note

If the Nāyakī contemplates such a drastic move, totally repugnant to her essential nature, it is because of the exuberance of her God-love and the resultant intolerance of delayed consummation. This aspect has already been dealt with, in extenso, in the preamble to this decad. At the end of all these hectic activities, all that the Nāyakī aspires for is the Lord’s tulaci garland, that sacred basil. The Nāyakī still hopes that, frightened by this harrowing state of her darting forth, with ‘Maṭal’ (the tooth-edged branch of the palmyrah tree) in hand, the Lord would rush forward, with discus in hand, and placate her by bedecking her with the tulaci garland worn on His person; if, however, He did not turn up, it would mean, she threatens, the end of them both as in a holocaust.

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{iraikkum karuṇ kaṭal vaṇṇaṇ kaṇṇa-pirāp tāṇṇa
    \text{viraik kol pojil-kurukūr caṭakōpaṇ coppa
    \text{niraik kol antāti ŏr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
    \text{uraikka vallāikku vaikuntam ākum tam ŏr ellām. (V–3–11)}
\end{align*}
\]

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten,
Out of the thousand, chaste and elegant, of Caṭakōpaṇ,
From Kurukūr, abounding in orchards, full of fragrance,
Adoring Lord Kaṇṇaṇ, of the hue of the roaring ocean,
Will heavenly bliss enjoy right at their residence.

Notes

(i) The Lord will court those that recite these ten songs and remain inseparably united with them. Where the Lord
is there is Heaven and thus the chanters of this Tiruvāy- 
moji (decad) get the Heaven transported unto them.

(ii) “Roaring ocean”—The ocean is in a state of upheaval, the 
bottom of the sea throwing the sands right up to the 
surface in violent agitation, like unto the king of the 
ocean who appeared before Rāma trembling, when the 
latter threatened to drive a shaft into the bosom of the 
sea and dry it up altogether. The Lord was in the same 
predicament as the King of the ocean when the Nāyaki 
threatened Him with dire consequences.

Fifth Centum—Fourth Decad (V-4) 
(Ūr ellam tuṛci)

Preamble

In order to put through the proceedings contemplated by the 
Nāyakī in the preceding decad, she has to first of all draw a sketch 
of her lover (the accused) for public exhibition and arraignment. 
But it is pitch dark and she can’t draw the picture. It seems as 
if the Lord is afraid of being exposed by the Nāyakī and has deli-
berately induced darkness of such intensity, The whole world is 
fast asleep, and she has no company. In such a nūleu, she has 
recourse to the contemplation of the Lord’s auspicious traits, 
soothing indeed unto her aching heart.

ūr ellām tuṛci, ulaku ellām naḷ ṛuḷ āy, 
nir ellām tēṭi, ōr nīḷ iravūṇy niṇṭatāl; 
pār ellām uṇṭa nam pāmpu-anṇaiyāṇ vārāṇāl; 
ār-ellē! valviṇaiyēṇ āvi kāppār, īṇiyē?  
(V-4-1)

Translation

The town is asleep and the world in darkness plunged, 
Very, very quiet, the land and water have become; 
Alas! ’tis one long night, the Lord on serpent-bed, 
Who once ate up the worlds, unto me doesn’t come; 
Who will save the life of this terrible sinner indeed?
Note

The Nāyakī laments that the benevolent Lord, who sustained all the worlds with their contents, in His stomach and protected them during the deluge, does not come to her aid in her present state of distress. The slanderous folks whose gossips actually fostered her God-love are fast asleep and so is the rest of the world. The Nāyakī cannot move about either because it is one long night, even longer than the longish* nights of the Devas and visibility is next to nil. Further, there is none awake except her lone self.

āvi käppär ini ār?-āl kaṭal maṇ viṇ múṭi,
mā vikāram āy, or val iravāy niṇṭatāl;
kāvi cēr vaṇṇaṇ en kaṇṇaṇum vārāṇāl;
pāviyēṇ neficamē! nlyum pāṇku allaiyē.

(V-4-2)

Translation

Who will save my life hereafter?
You, this sinner's mind, aren't friendly either;
Alas! tis one long, grim night that hides
The deep sea, the land and the sky; Kaṇṇaṇ, my Lord
Of blue tint, my sole Refuge doesn't unto me come.

Note

In the middle of the famous ‘Rāsa Krīḍā, when Kṛṣṇa danced with the Gopīs, the damsels of Vṛindāvan, He disappeared for a while, and the Gopīs were thrown on tenter hooks. But then, Kṛṣṇa reappeared and made amends for His sudden withdrawal by assuming the form, par excellence, far more exquisite than in the earlier session. The Nāyakī too probably expected the Lord to present Himself before her likewise, but this expectation didn't materialise. Hence, this lamentation.

* Whereas 'Time' stands still in the self-luminous region, known as the 'High Heaven', and it is all day and no night (darkness-tamas), the day of the 'Devas' in the lower reaches of the upper worlds is as long as one year of ours, six months (mid-January to mid-July-Uttarāyana) constituting a day for them and the remaining six months (mid-July to mid-January—Dakṣināyana) their night.
nfym pâńku allaikân, neñcamé! nîj iravum
ôyum pôjutu lûri, ûlîây nîñtâtal;
kâyum kâtum cilai eñ kâkuttaŋ vârâpâl;
mâyum vakai âryeñ, valviñiayêñ pen pîrantê. (V–4–3)

Translation
You too, my mind, do not with me co-operate;
Like unto eternity does the longish night further elongate;
Kâkuttaŋ, whose stern bow does the enemies annihilate,
Appears not before me; this fell sinner knows not
How to end this life, born a woman, alas! what's my lot?

Note
The Nâyâkî is in the same predicament as Sitâ during her captivity in Lâñkâ. Sitâ lamented that there was none in that hostile land who could help her with poison or a sharp knife to end her miserable life. There at least, Sitâ could hear the heartening sound from Śrî Râma's (Kâkuttaŋ's) bow in the nearby battlefield, which disillusioned her and set her mind at ease, when Râvana produced the illusory head of Râma and wanted her to believe that Râma had been killed and his head severed. And now, Râma does not come and present Himself before the Nâyâkî. Her own mind, the principal accessory, does not subserve her, the darksome night, interminably long, aggravates her misery and above all, a woman that she is, with no independence, she is not free to die at will, by putting an end to her life.

pen pîrantâr eytum perum tuyar kânkilêñ enêru
en cuṭâroŋ vârâtu olittâq; im man aîlanta
kañ periya cevvây em kâr ēru vârâpâl;
en periya cntai nôy tirppâr âr enñaiyeñ? (V–4–4)

Translation
Methinks the Sun from me hides and declines to see
A woman in such great distress; my cloud-hued Lord,
Trim as the bull, with eyes wide and lips red,
Who the worlds spanned, comes not unto me;  
Alas! who can indeed cure me of my cruel mental malady?

Note

The sun's diurnal course is put through, regularly, at the  
Lord's command and he dare not disobey. And yet, he  
would not come out, for fear of seeing the Nayakñ in such  
great distress. At the same time, he is afraid of being hunted  
out by the Lord's emissaries and, therefore, keeps hiding  
somewhere beyond their reach. This has resulted in prolong-  
gation of the night. Well, Sun or no Sun, why should the  
Lord who had enthralled the Nayakñ and kept her madly  
in love with him, keep Himself away from her? This makes  
the Nayakñ dread the frightful prospect of having to linger  
for ever with her mental malady for which there seems to be  
no cure.

är eṅgai ārāyvär?—aṅṇaiyaram tōliyaram  
nĪr eṅgē! eṅṇatē, nīr iṟavum tuṇcuvarāḷ;  
kār aṅṇa mēṅi nam kāṇṇaṅum vāṟāṅañ;  
pēr eṅgai māyātāl, valviṅaiyēṅ pīṅ niṅgē.  

(V-4-5)

Translation

The unrelenting elders and mates sleep thro' the long night;  
Alas! our cloud-hued Kaṇṇañ too appears not before me,  
Thus there's none to stand by and think of me  
And yet, my name shall stay on, all right,  
Although this fell sinner be dead and gone.

Note

Oh, how enchanting is this God-sickness! The Ājvār who  
keeps scanning the whole scene, laments that there is none  
to think of him. What is even more exciting is his own  
statement that his name will outlive him. How true! the  
entire vaiṣṇavite world rests on him. But there the Nayakñ  
means to say that, on the one hand, the mates and the elders  
sleep on with no thought of her, while, on the other, the  
cloud-hued Lord is withholding Himself. And, therefore,  
she finds herself left alone and even if she dies, as she would
very much like to, her name would still stay behind, making it impossible to close the pages of history upon her. It is noteworthy that the Álvār bears the name of the Lord’s feet (Śaṭakōpa) where all of us rest our heads.

piṇ nīṟṟu kātal-nōy neṇcam peritu aṭumāl;
muṇ nīṟṟu irā-ūli kaṇ putaiya mūṭtiṟṟāl;
meṇ nīṟṟa cakkaraṭṭu em māyavaṉum vārāṇāl;
in nīṟṟa nil āvi kāppār ār, iv iṭṭṭē ?

(V–4–6)

**Translation**

This love-sickness which from behind eggs me on, Does my mind consume; alas! this age-long night, right in front, Blinds my eyes, my wondrous Lord who the inseparable discus holds on, Comes not; who then can unto my lingering life protection grant?

**Notes**

(i) It is a strange sickness that afflicts the Nāyakī. This Godsickness or God-love keeps on pushing her from behind and will, she says, pursue her even on the yonder side of death, unlike the earthly kind of sickness, which holds sway only as long as there is life.

(ii) While the night makes for physical blindness, God-love screens her mind’s eye. It is a pity, the darkness prevents the Nāyakī from beholding her Lord, if He were at all to present Himself before her at that hour.

kāppār ār, iv iṭṭṭu? kaṇku ṛuḷīnuṇ-ṭuḷi āy,
cēṇ-pālātu ūḷi āy, celkiṇṇa kaṇkulvāyṭ
tōp pāla vep caṇku cakkaraṭṭaŋ tōṛapāḷ;
tip pāla valvipaiyēn, teyvaṅkāl! ep ceykēṇō ?

(V–4–7)

**Translation**

The Lord, donning the discus and the conch, white and immaculate, Appears not before me, this night, dark and dewy;
Who indeed can protect me, in this state?
Oh, godlings, what can this dreadful sinner do?

Notes

(i) When the whole world is plunged in protracted darkness the Nāyakī finds the godlings awake and, in a spirit of companionship, the wakeful Nāyakī cries out her woe to the wakeful deities and perhaps enlists their sympathy.

(ii) The Nāyakī who had earlier been proclaiming from the house-top that the Lord is the Sole Protector and we, His Subjects, are His exclusive vassals solely dependent on Him, now looks at the ' Jiva ' (Soul), in isolation, and feels tormented, saying "how am I to be protected?"

teyvaṅkāl eṇ ceykēṇ—atiravu ēḷ ūḷ āy,
meṣy vantu niṟgū, eṇatu āvi melivikkum;
kaivanta cakkaraṭtu eṇ kaṇṇaṇum vāṟañāl;
taivanta taṅ tēṅṟal vem cutaril tāṅ aztumē (V-4-8)

Translation

Oh, godlings, what can I do? ages, a single night does loom, To torment my life, it has, in flesh and blood, come; Even Kaṇṇaṇ, my Lord, who the Discus always wields Comes not; so then the cool and soothing southerly breeze Blisters me worse than the fire well ablaze

Note

The Nāyakī is already emaciated due to separation from her Lord; the dark night of extra-ordinary duration now exploits her weakness by inflicting on her countless miseries. In her present state, even the cool, southerly breeze is far from soothing; actually, it produces the diametrically opposite effect. The night seems to assume, with a vengeance, several forms, (even as Sage Saubhari did for the enjoyment of pleasures with his numerous wives), to torment the Nāyakī in ever so many ways. In the olden days, when a person was pilloried in public for criminal offence, he would break down but the authority would nevertheless go on with

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the punishment, after providing due nourishment for his
revival such as butter-milk etc.

vem caṭaril tāṇ āṭumāl, viṅku iṛuḷin nuṇ tuļi āy;
am caṭara veyyōṇ anī neṭum tēr tōṇrāṭāl;
caṭ caṭa tāmarakkāṉ-celvaṇum vāraŋāl;
neṇcu iṭar tīṛppār ini yār?—niṅgu urukukunēṇē  (V–4–9)

Translation

The darksome night with minute dew beset
Is unto me hotter than fire; alas! nowhere in sight
Is Sun’s chariot, large and lovely or the opulent Lord bright,
Of red-lotus eyes; my heart does all the time melt,
Who will indeed my mind’s ache dispel in such a state?

Note

The night is very oppressive and the Nāyaki is sinking deep
in dejection. There is, however, no hope of relief yet,
neither the Sun has come out nor even the Lord whom an
ardent devotee of the calibre of the Nāyaki could reasonably
expect in such moments of distress Indeed, the Lord is
the Sun that never sets and He illumines the entire universe
Heaven downwards The rising of the Sun would but be
the dawn heralding the appearance of that Great Sun, the
Lord. But then, the night is tormenting the Nāyaki, through
its accomplice, the blistering dew, like unto Mātica, pressed
into service by the nefarious Rāvana.

niṅgu urukukunēṇē poṇa, neṭu vāṇam
ceṇgu uruki, nun tuļi āy, ceḷkaṅra kaṅkulvāy
aṅgu orukāl vaiyaṃ aḷanta pirāṅ vāraṅ enṛu
orgu orukāl collatu ulako uṛaṅkumē!  (V–4–10)

Translation

Alas! the world had into deep slumber gone.
In this dark night, the minute dew drops down the sky broad,
Like poor me, the sky too seems to melt down,
There’s none to tell me but once that the Lord
Who spanned the worlds once upon a time,  
Would not unto me care to come.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī thinks that the dew drops come from the sky, melting down, in distress, like her c.f. similar sentiments expressed by the Nāyakī in II-I ante.

(ii) It would be some consolation for her, if there was yet another soul, awake like her, to recounting the Lord’s wondrous deeds as Tṛvikrama or tell her that she needn’t expect the Lord whose habit it was to keep away like this. In the latter case, the moment the Nāyakī was disabused of her fond hopes, her life would be extinct.

Translation

How can those that recite these songs ten  
Out of the tuneful thousand, composed by Caṭakōpan  
Of Kurukūr, surrounded by orchards lovely,  
Adoring the Lord who is asleep apparently  
But thinks out ways for His Subjects to thrive,  
Fail to enter Heaven at the end of their lives?

Note

The Nāyakī had said, in the preceding song, that the whole world was asleep, suggesting that even the Lord had gone to sleep. The Lord was, however, quick to point out to the Ālvār that He was not asleep but was only contemplating the manner in which He should present Himself to the Ālvār and regale him. Thus informed, the Ālvār could sustain himself and so also, the very township of Kurukūr, as could
be inferred from the reference to its orchards, gay and lovely. Those that are conversant with this decad are bound to reach at the end of the present span of life, the high heaven, the land of perennial light, presided over by the Lord, the perpetual Sun.

Fifth Centum – Fifth Decad (V-5)
(Ennaŋeyō, aṇṇaimirkāḷ)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Ālvār felt miserably handicapped by darkness and dew, the inner meaning whereof is that this land of nescience is enveloped in ‘tamas’ or darkness. The Nāyakī’s irresistible urge for the speedy attainment of the Lord, witnessed in V-3 (Mācu aru côti), violently disturbed her firm conviction in the Lord as the Sole Means for attaining Him and made her contemplate the devious indulgence in self-effort, such as embarking on the technique of ‘maṭal’. The dark, dewy night, presented in V-4 (Urellām tuñci), only typifies the Samsāra, with its characteristic nescience, into which one is thrown back, when one loses track of one’s essential nature and with that, the correct perspective. In śloka 49 of the ‘Stotra Ratna’, Saint Yāmunācārya only echoed this, when he likened a person, entangled in ‘Samsāra’, to one badly caught up in foul weather, with dark, dense clouds gathering in, losing the sense of direction, beaten continually by ever-expanding miseries pouring in like the torrential rain. The sun-rise symbolises the removal of darkness, that is, ignorance and the influx of spiritual light (Satva) or purity. The Ālvār could, with the return of light, enjoy, in his mind’s eye, the glorious vision of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkuṟuṟukūṭi.

This decad is sung by the Ālvār, while still in the feminine state. The elders who tried to bring the Nāyakī round by admonishing her, are hit back. The Nāyakī questions the propriety of their admonishing her whose heart stands rivetted to the exquisite form of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṟukūṭi.
Translation

Lift I can’t my mind from Nampi, the Lord exquisite,
I beheld at Tirukkuṟukkuṟuṟu, the conch and discus
In His hands, His lotus eyes and red lips, peerless,
With me how can you, elders, find fault?

Notes

(i) This pilgrim centre, deep south in Tamil Nadu, is also known as Vaishnava Vamana Ksetra. The end-stanza of this decad also says that those who learn this decad will become Vaishnavas. Further, it was at this particular shrine that Karivyār, the father of Maraṇa (who later became Saint Nammalvār), prayed for an issue and the Lord signified to him through the temple priest that He would Himself incarnate as his son and blessed the couple with temple honours. At the Lord’s command, His high Chamberlain, Šeneša, otherwise known as Visvakēšena, incarnated as Nammalvār, the Saviour of mankind. And so, this pilgrim centre is intimately linked up with the advent of Nammalvār.;

(ii) The query, as in the last line of this verse, serves to bring out the fact that the Nāyaki has only followed in the footsteps of the elders who had initiated her in the worship of the Lord and, far from being blamed, she is really praise worthy. Be they one’s sons or disciples, when they stand launched into the domain of God-love, they become worthy of worship. In this context, Ītu cites the following apt anecdote. When Kurattālvār lost his mother, Nākayār, the father wavered for a while whether he should marry again and lead the life of a householder as ordained by the Śāstras. Seeing, however, the way step-mothers generally behave, the bereaved father’s sympathy was on the side of the son.
the more so, when the latter was advancing spiritually. The father, therefore, decided to lean more on the son than on the Śāstras and thus be more serviceable to the son than be a slavish stickler to the ordinary rules for one’s own gratification, rather than edification.

eṣ neṣcīṇāl nōkkik kāṇīr eṇṇai muṇiyātē;  
ṭen naṇ cōlait tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṇ kaṇṭatapīṇ,  
mīṇu nāḷum, kuṇṭalamum, māṟpil tirumaṟuvum,  
māṇu pūṇum, nāṇku, tōḷum, vantu edukum niṅṭitumē.  

(V—5—2)

Translation

Rather than admonish me, you elders will do well  
To see thro’ my mind; after I beheld  
The Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi with lovely orchards  
The mole on His winsome chest, the shining sacred thread,  
The ear-rings, the jewels on His person inseparably worn  
And His shoulders four are by me seen wherever I turn.

Note

The elders will not allow themselves to be bamboozled by  
the Nāyaki and they insist that they too have seen the Lord  
at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi. The Nāyaki sharply retorts that, if  
only they could see through her eyes, they would feel the  
difference all right. Wherever she turned, she saw the  
shining sacred thread like the lightning tearing the bosom  
of the cloud, the mole on the Lord’s chest, the sweet array  
of jewels and the shoulders of the Lord.

niṅṭitum, ticaikkum, naiyum eṇṟu aṇṇaiyarum muṇitar;  
kūṟa māṭat tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṇ kaṇṭatapīṇ,  
vēṅṟi villum, taṇṭum vāḷum, cakkaramum, caṅkamum,  
iṇṟu tōṅrik kapṇul niṅkā; neṭcullum niṅkāvē.  

(V—5—3)

Translation

You, elders say all things harsh about me,  
That I wither down, looking stupid and dazed;  
Better know that after my beholding the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi
With its castles tall, His victorious bow, mace,
Sword, conch and discus cannot from my mind be effaced.

Note

The Lord’s lovely weapons also decorate the Lord’s person just like His numerous jewels. This twin aspect is extended to the Nāyaki’s own experience, the Lord’s weapons feasting her eyes as well as her mind.

niṅka nillā kaṇṇa nirkaḷ eru aṇṇaṭayarum mupūr,
tēŋ koḷ cōlait tirukkuṟuṅkuti nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapu, pūn taṉ mālait taṉ tulāyum, poṉ muṭiyum, vātivum, pāṅku tōṅṟum pāṭṭum, nānum, pāvīyēṉ pakkattavē. (V–5–4)

Translation

You are indeed cross with me, oh, Elders,
That it isn’t possible to wipe off my tears;
After seeing the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuti, with orchards lovely,
His gold crown, tulacē garland, cool and comely,
His form exquisite, the waist-band and silk robe fine,
All these beside this sinner do always shine

Notes

(i) It is but appropriate that one sheds tears of joy while contemplating His auspicious traits And so, the Nāyaki is at a loss to understand why the elderly women should frown at her for being in tears, all the time She says that with the glorious vision of the Iconic Form of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuti, ever in front of her, she can’t but shed tears of ecstasy, which will never dry up. Perhaps the flow of honey from the flowers in the big gardens of the pilgrim centre might stop but not the Nāyaki’s tears There is, therefore, no point in the elders being cross with her on this account.

(ii) The Nāyaki calls herself a sinner in spite of the glorious vision before her, because it is only a vision after all, outside the purview of her physical senses, the external perception, embrace etc
pakkam nokki nigkum, naiyum egru appayarum mupitir;
takka kirltit tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapin,
tokka cōttī toṉṭai vāyum, nīṭṭa puruvaṅkam,
takka tāmarai kaṇṭum, pāviyēṅ aviyyin mēḷaṅvē. (V–5–5)

Translation

That I pine for my Lord, you, elders, fret and fume,
Look do I, in all directions, for Him of great fame;
Having seen the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, His red lips radiant,
Long brows and lotus eyes, a mass of radiance,
Prey on this sinner’s life, in constant attendance.

Note

The Lord’s fine features with symmetrical perfection naturally
enthral the Nāyaki’s mind and it meet would be that the
elders looked upon her with pride instead of frowning at
her.

mēḷum van pāḻi nam kuṭikkku ivai eṟṟu appai kāṉakkotāl;
cōḷai cūḷ taṇ tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapin,
kōḷa nīḷ koṭi mūkkum, tāmarai kaṇṭum, kaṇṭi vāyum,
nīḷa mēṇiyum, nāṅku tōḷum, en neṅcam nigaintaṅvē. (V–5–6)

Translation

Mother fears this girl will bring a bad name
Unto her sacred clan for all time to come,
And the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, she wouldn’t allow me to
behold,
But Him I have beheld, His nose, long and lovely, lips red,
Lotus eyes, blue tint and shoulders four have my mind filled.

Note

The Mother is apprehensive that the Nāyaki is transgressing
her bounds as a ‘prapanna’ who has to await the descent
of the Lord’s grace, and decides not to allow the Nāyaki
to see Nampi, (The perfect Lord) at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi. But
then, this is like erecting a bund after all the water in the
basin has flown down the stream. The truth of the matter
is that the Nāyaki has already seen Nampi and right from the moment she beheld Him, all the features of the Lord, as set out in this song, stand indelibly imprinted in her mind. The restrictions now imposed by the Mother have, therefore, no meaning. What would have been exceptional in the earlier stages becomes praiseworthy in such an advanced state of uncontrollable yearning for quick consummation of God-love. It is a pity the elders could not appreciate this.

nirainta vañ pañi nam kuṭikkul ival enru appai kānakkoṭāl;
cīranta kīrftit tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiṣai nāy kāntapin.
nirainta cóti velḷam cūlta nīḷa poñ mēṇiyotum
niraintu, en ullaś nirōjintap; nēmi ankai ulātē.  

(V-5-7)

Translation

The mother wouldn’t allow me to behold the Lord. 
At Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi of high renown, lest I should, 
a standing slur on her clan prove; but I’ve seen Him, 
And in my mind stands He firm, of golden form, 
Radiance, full and flooding, with the comely Discus in His lovely palm.

Note

As already stated in V-3-4, the rebukes of the elders who can’t see eye to eye with the Nāyaki in the matter of God-love, sedulously nurture it and the Nāyaki only feels elated, rather flattered by such rebukes. With all His ineffable radiant beauty, the Lord has entered inside the Nāyaki and filled her entire being (Vigraha vyāpti or specific presence as in His beautiful person, the iconic Form), as an act of benign grace. The Divine presence (Vigraha vyāpti), of God who abides latent (Svarūpa vyāpti) in the heart of one and all, becomes manifest when His grace and our sanctity co-operate. This was elicited by Naṉciyar from Tirukkurukai Pillāṉ one day when the former was proceeding to the temple of Lord Raṅganātha.
kaivyul naŋ mukum vaikkum, naivyumęŋu aŋŋaiyarum muŋitir;
mai koŋ māṭat tirukkuṟunukuṭi nampiyai naŋ kaŋṭapiŋ,
ceyya tāmaraik kaŋnum, alkulum, ciṟṟiṭaiyum, vaṭivum,
moyya nil kujal tāḷṇata tōḷkalam, pāviyeŋ muŋ niṟkuṟumē.

(V–5–8)

Translation

You, elders, fret and frown that I do dwindle
And bury my lovely face into my palms;
Having seen the Lord at Tirukkuṟunukuṭi with black castles,
His eyes like the lotus red, His exquisite form,
The waist thin, the abdominal region and the shoulders
With the locks playing thereon, stay firm before this sinner.

Notes

(i) Seated inside the hollow of a tamarind tree in the quadrangle of the temple at Kurukūr (Āḻvār Tirunakari),
the Saint enjoyed the vision of the Lord, enshrined at Tirukkuṟunukuṭi, as set above. Carried away by the
splendour of the vision, the Nāyaki was, however, tempted to clasp the Lord of such exquisite charm.
Her inability to do so makes her very sad and she, therefore, buries her face in her palms.

(ii) The mansions in Tirukkuṟunukuṭi have become black
either on account of their antiquity or because the dark blue tint of the Lord’s image enshrined there is reflected
all around.

muŋ niṟkāy enru tōḷmārkalam aŋŋaiyarum muŋitir;
maŋnu māṭat tirukkuṟunukuṭi nampiyai naŋ kaŋṭapiŋ,
çeŋgi nil muṭi āṭi āya ulappu ċil anakallattan-
kappal, pāl, amutu āki vantu-en nežam kalijāṆē.  (V–5–9)

Translation

You, mates and elders, do chastise me
That I appear before all; I did see
The Lord at Tirukkuṟunukuṭi with mansions stately,
Wearing the crown long and countless other jewels lovely;  
Firmly fixed in my mind since then stands  
Like cane-juice, milk and nectar, this spectacle grand

Note
The mates and the elders would want the Nāyaki to keep indoors, consistent with feminine modesty. But she says that the exquisite charm of the Lord at Tirukkuṟūṅkuti, bedecked with a vast array of lovely jewels, has already taken possession of her and that she is not, therefore, in a position to conform to the ordinary norms of feminine conduct. With the Lord in front of her mind all the time, how could she shut herself up behind the doors?

\[\text{kaḷiya mikkatu ὼr kāṭalaḷ ivaḷ eṟṟu appai kāṇakkoṭāḷ;}\]  
\[\text{valḷu il kīrttit tirukkuṟūṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kāṇṭapiṅ,}\]  
\[\text{kujumīt tēvaḷ kulaṅkāḷ kaitoḷaḷ cōṭi-velḷattippuḷḷē}\]  
\[\text{eḷuvatu /owl uren ep nefcuḷ elum; āṟkkum aṟivu-aritē. (V—5—10)}\]

Translation
My mother sees my God-love intense  
And decides not to allow me access  
To the Lord at Tirukkuṟūṅkuti any more.  
Well, what does it unto me matter?  
After I beheld Nampi of fame flawless,  
The effulgent Lord, adored by Celestials in strength,  
Does in my heart shine ever but this none here can comprehend

Note
Surely, this is not a case of “out of sight, out of mind” or the proverbial mellowing of sorrow due to separation, with the passage of time. The Lord shines perpetually, in all His resplendence, before the Nāyaki’s mind, a grand spectacle attracting even the denizens of heaven, clasping the hands of one another, so as not to be swept off by the Lord’s brilliance in spate.
agnu-ariya piragai, ala anukaiyapaiyai alagai
naivy naq malar nati, naq kurukurca caṭakopan congga
kuqi kol aiyattul ivai pattum tirukkurunkuṭi-ataṇmēl
ariyak karu vallar vaiṭṇavar, ala ḍaṭal ḍālattulē. (V—5—11)

Translation

Those that learn well these songs ten,
Which unto holy Tirukkurunukuṭi pertain,
Expiating the grandeur of Nampi, His form, jewels and
weapons,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukur Caṭakopan,
The connoisseur of fragrant flowers fine,
Chanting lustily the glory of the Lord, difficult to comprehend,
Who does the discus hold in His lovely hand,
Will as chaste vaiṭṇavar be lauded, in this world, sea-bound,

Notes

(i) Fragrant flowers fine: This could refer to either these
hymns full of fragrance, like unto a collection of choice
flowers of sweet fragrance of soulful flowers offered
in a genuine spirit, emitting the fragrance of self-less
service.

(ii) Chaste Vaiṭṇavas: Those who fully appreciate, despite
their stay in this arid land of samsāra, the sanctity of
the pilgrim centres, hallowed by the Lord’s loving
association, as well as the ‘Nitya Sūris’ in the High
Heavens do.

Fifth Centum—Sixth Decad (V-6)
(Kaṭal—nālam ceṭēnum)

Preamble

The Mother finds Parāṅkuşa Nāyaki, seated like a discouer, with
the fingers in an instructional pose and declaring that it is she that created the whole world, that she would become the
world herself and so on. The bewildered mother, when queried
by her kinsmen says that the Nāyaki is perhaps possessed by the
Supreme Lord who is the Inner Self of all beings. Every song in this decad is in two distinct parts, namely, the narration of the Nāyaki’s God-vision (man identified with God), followed by the Mother’s suggestion that it is perhaps God who has taken possession of the Nāyaki, that speaks through her. There is of course, a parallel for this kind of behaviour of the Nāyaki in Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa, V-13-23. In the midst of that rapturous ball-dance, the classical ‘Rāsaṅkridā’, Lord Kṛṣṇa suddenly withdrew Himself from the Gopis of Vṛndāvan, who were literally bursting with joy in the company of the Divine cowherd boy, who danced in between every two girls, assuming ubiquity to the extent needed. The Lord’s sudden disappearance was motivated by His desire to stabilise the Gopis’ God-enjoyment, which was at its highest ebb at that crucial moment, much beyond their capacity to bear. Some time later, He appeared in their midst back again, assuming a far more enchanting Form than before, as if to make amends for the pangs of separation inflicted on them. But what happened to the Gopis during this interval? They were sunk deep in dejection, expressed by them in immortal songs, known as ‘Gopikā-Gītā’. Some of the Gopis also resorted to the technique of impersonation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, so as to sustain themselves, as brought out in the Śloka of Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa, referred to above. There was a Gopi claiming to be none other than Kṛṣṇa and calling upon her mates to verify the truth of her statement from her gait. Another asserted that she was Kṛṣṇa and started playing on the flute; yet another, posing as Kṛṣṇa, addressed a Gopi as: “You, deadly snake, stay, or I will kill you.” That other Gopi deigned to play the role of Kāliyaṇ, the snake, so that she could be smeared with the dust from the feet of Kṛṣṇa (the Gopi simulating Kṛṣṇa). With appropriate gesticulations and a great deal of gusto, a Gopi feigning as Kṛṣṇa, performed feats such as holding Mount Govardhan aloft, slaying of Dhenukāsura and so on. By such means, these Gopis managed to sustain themselves without succumbing to the pangs of separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There is also the example set by Śrī Āṉṭāḷ through her immortal “Tirumāḷ”, the daughter of a high class Brahmin (Viṣṇucittta) adopting, by inclination, the pastoral life of the shepherds and becoming one of them. This provides, therefore, the key to this decad.
kātal-ñālam ceytēnum yāpē ēŋgum;
kātal-ñālam āvēŋgum yāpē ēŋgum;
kātal-ñālam konēnum yāpē ēŋgum;
kātal-ñālam kīnēnum yāpē ēŋgum;
kātal ñālam unēŋgum yāpē ēŋgum;
kātal ñālattu ḫaŋ vantu ērakkolō?
kātal ñālattērkku īvai ēŋ collokēn-
kātal ñālattu ēŋ maku l kārkiŋravē?  
(Ṿ-6-1)

Translation

Says my daughter of this sea-bound world,
‘ Tis she that this world did create,
And all the world she would permeate;
It was she that took (from Balī) all the worlds,
She it was that pulled the world out and held
In her stomach (during deluge) all the worlds;
Unto You worldlings, what can I say about this?
She is by the Lord Supreme possessed, perhaps

Notes

(i) It is God that created the entire Universe. The relevant expressions in 'Candogya Upaniṣad' are 'Sadeva', 'Ekameva' and 'advitiyam', indicative of the fact that the Lord combines in Himself all the three causes of creation, namely, the 'Upādhaṇa' (material cause) 'Saḥakāri' (Operative cause) and 'Nimitta' (Instrumental cause). The fact that the Lord is the sole cause of creation is underlined by the Nāyaki's statement that it is She (God, manifest in her) that created the sea-bound worlds.

Apart from the Lord combining in Himself the triple causes of creation, yet another unique feature is that He is not apart from the things created. He resides in all things and beings, having name and form. The different names denoting them all, refer to Him as well, He being the Inner Soul of all. This is indeed unique, as, in the work-a-day world, the names of the creator and the things created are distinct. In the terse language of Vedanta, this special feature is known
as 'aparyavasāna vṛtti' and this is what the Nāyaki emphasises. Having created the world, she also becomes the world, the thing created) by permeating the whole of it.

(ii) The mother wonders how her daughter, a staunch exponent of 'Viśisṭādvaita', the triune monism, says things smacking of absolute monism (advaita) and apprehends that the Nāyaki, perhaps, stands possessed by the Lord Himself and, therefore, speaks in this strain. The kinsmen who expected the mother to be more specific in her diagnosis of the Nāyaki's malady, are cut to size, when she says that her daughter is in such a highly evolved state of God-love, on a par with the exalted ever-free angels of Heaven, that her actions and utterances are much beyond the grasp of the worldlings who were utter strangers to such ennobling experience of God-love and God-enjoyment.

\[
\text{kārkum kalvikkū ellai ilaṇē emṇum;}
\text{kārkum kalvi āvēṇum yāṇē emṇum;}
\text{kārkum kalvi ceyēṇum yāṇē emṇum,}
\text{kārkum kalvi tirppēṇum yāṇē emṇum;}
\text{kārkum kalvi cāramum yāṇē emṇum;}
\text{kārkum kalvi-nātaṇ vantu ētlakkolō?}
\text{kārkum kalviyīkku ivai ēṇ collukēn-
\text{kārkum kalvi ēṇ makal kānkīṟṟavē?}
\]

(V-6-2)

Translation

On learning's threshold is my daughter and yet she says,
All branches of learning she had mastered, she is
Learning itself, all learning by her was set up,
She puts an end to it all and just stores it up
Inside her, she is the quintessence of all learning.
Evidently, she is by the Lord possessed, whom all learning
Reflects, what can I tell you, at the bottom of learning?

Notes

(i) The Lord is the embodiment of all learning, the aggregate of the Vedas; He disseminates particular branches of
learning at the appropriate moments; He is the final arbiter of the true meanings of the texts and at the time of dissolution of the worlds, He stores up all learning in His mind. Indeed, the object of all learning is to know Him.

(ii) Mastered all learning: Transposed as Kṛṣṇa, that the Nāyaki is, this could refer to the mastery attained by Śri Kṛṣṇa within a marvellously short period of sixty-four days, as the pupil of Sāndipini.

kānkiṅga nilam ellām yāṇe eṇnum;
kānkiṅga vicumpu ellām yāṇē eṇnum;
kānkiṅga vem tī ellām yāṇē eṇnum;
kānkiṅga ik kāṟṟu ellām yāṇē eṇnum;
kānkiṅga kaṭal ellām yāṇē eṇnum;
kānkiṅga kaṭal vaṇṇaṁ ēṟakkollō?
kānkiṅga ulakattōrkkku ēṇ collukēn-
kānkiṅga ēṇ kārikai ceykiṅṟavē?

(V-6-3)

Translation

Says my daughter with insight clear,
The visible elements, the Earth, Wind and Water,
Sky and Fire she is; seems she possessed indeed
By the sea-hued Lord, what can I tell you, of this world?

Note

The mother tells the kinsmen that, unlike them all, with a narrow vision, confined to the things seen around, her daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki) has a cosmic vision. New visions of beauty shine before the eyes of a Saint. He alone can see and enjoy the viśvarūpa (Universal form) of the Lord. He hears the unheard melodies and enjoys divine scents, unfelt on the Earth, and soars into an ampler ether, diviner air. The Nāyaki, deputising as God, says that she is everything, the elements and all, with the clear knowledge that the elements are subject to His control and are ordained by Him.
Fifth Canto (V-6)

tīramāmal, maṇ kākkiṇēṇ yāṇē ennum,

tīramāmal, malai eḻuttēṇē ennum;

tīramāmal. acuraraik konēṇē ennum;

tīram kāṭṭi, anṟu aivarai kāṭtēṇē ennum;

tīramāmal. kāṭal kāṭaintēṇē ennum;

tīrampāta katalvaṇṇaē ḍrakkolō?
tīrampāta ulakattirkkku en collukēṇ-
tīrampātu en tiru makal eytiṉavē? (V-6-5)

Translation

Declares my darling, ‘tis she that justly governs the worlds.
She ‘tis that lifted effortlessly mount (Govardan),
Slew the Asuras many unerringly and churned safely the milk-ocean,
Controlled once the military strategy and victory for the five
(Pāṇḍavas) secured;
She seems, possessed by the sea-hued Lord of unremitting
attention
Unto His devotees; to you, bent upon having all the information,
Oh, worldlings, What can I say of her that is beyond reclamation?

Note
All these deeds performed by the Supreme Lord, from time to
time, the Nāyaki, possessed by Him, attributes to herself.
How can the worldlings standing ashore comprehend the
mysticism of the Nāyaki (Ājvār), sunk deep in the ocean of
Divine consciousness?

<i>ṇa vēy m lai ēntīneṇ yāṇē eṇṇum;
<i>ṇa ērukaḷ ceṟṟēnum yāṇē eṇṇum;
<i>ṇa āṁ-kaṁtu mēyttēnum yāṇē eṇṇum;
<i>ṇa ā-nirai kāṭṭēnum yāṇē eṇṇum;
<i>ṇa āyar talaivanum yāṇē eṇṇum:
<i>ṇat tēvar talaivas vantu ērakkolō?
<i>ṇa vēl-kaṇ matirkkku ivai eṉ cēllukēn-
<i>ṇa vēl-kaṇṇi eṉ mākaḷ uṟṟaiṉavē?</i>
(V–6–6)

Translation
My spear-eyed daughter avers, 'tis she that lifted
Mount (Govardana) with bamboos profuse, slew the bulls
seven,
She is the Cowherd-Chief that tended the calves many
And a multitude of cows: seems possessed by the Lord,
Chief of Celestials; unto you, the spear-eyed dames,
What can I say about my daughter, thus transformed?'

Note
The Supreme Lord, Chief of the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven,
having taken possession of the Nāyaki, she identifies herself
with His incarnation as Śri Kṛṣṇa, as set out above. As a little lad, Kṛṣṇa tended the calves. Laterly played with them, as one of them and when He came of age, He grazed the cows, a vast multitude, like unto the change-over from, ‘Brahmacarya’ (bachelorhood) to the next stage of ‘Grahasta’ (householder).

\[
\text{uṛṛṛārkāḷ epākku īḷḷai yārum eṇṇum;}
\text{uṛṛṛārkāḷ epākku īṅku ellārum eṇṇum,}
\text{uṛṛṛārkāḷaśī ceyvēngum yāṅē eṇṇum;}
\text{uṛṛṛārkāḷaśī alippēngum yāṅē eṇṇum;}
\text{uṛṛṛārkalukku uṛṛṛēngum yāṅē eṇṇum;}
\text{uṛṛārili māyāṅ vantu ēkakkolō?}
\text{uṛṛērkaṭku eṅ collic collukēṅ yāṅ-
\text{uṛṛu eṇṇutaip pētaī uṛṛkkīṅtavē?} (V–6–7)
\]

Translation

What indeed can I tell you, my kinsmen?
Says my little one, with vision clear, relatives she has none
And yet, all are related to her, she makes relations
And ‘tis she that destroys them too, she is all-in-one
Unto those that seek her, heart and soul; seems taken in
By the wondrous Lord whom by mere self-effort none can attain?

Notes

(i) The Lord can be said to have no relations, in the sense that the individual souls either stray away from Him and run after minor deities or those that seek Him are not quite conscious of their true inter-relationship. In any case, none has ever attained Him through self-effort alone, without His co-operative grace.

(ii) All are related to the Lord, as they are all His subjects for whom He has great concern and He helps them all, unseen, even though they may not be conscious of this. Even if the subjects propitiate minor deities, He is the ultimate object of adoration, being the Internal Controller of those deities as well.
(iii) The Lord makes relatives in the sense that He attracts the subjects unto Him by exhibiting His charms. He also puts aside those, who are, by dint of their Karma, oblivious of their relationship with Him and are inclined towards minor deities. This is just as bad as destroying their relationship with Him. In a sense, the Lord can also be taken to destroy His devotees, exclusively related to Him, by making them solely absorbed in His beauty, traits and deeds and destroying their sense of individuality. Thus, they get literally lost in Him.

(iv) The Lord is ‘All-in-one’ and constitutes every conceivable relationship unto those that look upon Him, as the Sole Sustainer. (c.f. Śloka 5 of Stotra Ratna of Saint Yāmuna, where he adores Saint Nammāḻvār, in this manner)

uraikkintai mukkañ–pirāñ yāṇē ēppum;
uraikkintai ticaimukañ yāṇē ēppum;
uraikkintai amararum yāṇē ēppum;
uraikkintai amarar-kōn yāṇē ēppum;
uraikkintai mupivaram yāṇē ēppum:
uraikkintai mukilavaṇṇaṇ ērakkōlo?
uraikkintai ulakattīkkku ēn collukēn-
uraikkintai ēn kōmala on koṭikkē?

(V-6-8)

Translation

How nice is my tendril-like darling’s speech! What can I tell You worldlings that insist I should about her tell? Claims she to be Mukkatpirāñ (Śiva) who, some proclaim, Is the Lord Supreme, as well as Ticaimukañ of great fame, The exalted devas and their eminent chief besides the Sages Of great renown; Could it be that she stands Possessed by the redoubted Lord, cloud-hued?

Note

What the Nāyaki brings out here is that the Supreme Lord is the Internal Controller of all, including Śiva, Ticaimukañ
(Brahmā), Indra and other celebrities. They just constitute His bodies, in the same way as all other beings and things.

koṭiya viṇai yātum ilaṅe eṇṇum;
koṭiya viṇai āvēṇum yāṅe eṇṇum;
koṭiya viṇai ceyvēṇum yāṅe eṇṇum;
koṭya viṇai tirppēṇum yāṅe eṇṇum;
koṭiyāṅ ilaṅkai ceṛṛēṇē eṇṇum:
koṭiya puḷ utaḷiyavaṇ ērrakkolō?
koṭiya ulakattīrkku ivai eṅ collukēn-
koṭiyēṅ koti eṅ makal kōlaṅkāḷē? (V–6–9)

Translation

Unto you, importunate worldlings, what can I say
About the antics lovely of this sinner’s daughter, like unto a creeper?
Aloof she stands from (the subjects’) evil acts, she says
While in evil acts persist (those that do her displeasure incur),
Again, she it is that cures the (devotees’) fell sins and passes
Them on to (their opponents) others, ‘tis she that reduced to ashes
The felon’s Laṅkā; is she by Him possessed who bears
The bird tough (unto His opponents) on His banner?

Note

The sentient and non-sentient beings are the Lord’s bodies.
He is thus the ‘Viśeṣya’ or Substance present in all these bodies, known as the ‘Viśeṣaṇa’, the attributes or modes of the Lord. While the attributes undergo transformations, such as growth and decay, enjoyment and misery, the ‘Viśeṣya’ undergoes no changes and is ‘nirvikāra’. While the ‘Jiva’ or the individual Soul experiences alternately, weal and woe, the Lord inside the ‘Jiva’ remains unattached to the fruits of the actions of the Jiva. While the body, the outer cloak of the ‘Jiva’, is imposed on the latter by dint of its past ‘Karma’ (acts), the Lord enters the Jiva, as a matter of grace, not bound by the compulsions of a pre-determined factor. Creation actually means that
He makes the non-sentient things undergo the changes of state and endows the individual souls with bodies and sense-organs, thus providing the necessary scope for expansion of their knowledge. The disparities in the created beings, some being happy and others sorrowful, will not, however, render the Lord guilty of partiality and cruelty. The inequalities are the direct results of the actions of the individuals, and their sufferings are intended to chasten them and cure their ills through a cleansing process.

kölam kol cuvarkkamum yānē ennum;
kölam il narakamum yānē ennum;
kölam tikal mōkkamum yānē ennum;
kölam kol uiykaḷum yānē ennum;
kölam kol taṇimutal yānē ennum;
kölam kol mukilvaṇṇaṁ ēṛakkolō?
kölam kol ulakattīkku ēṇ collukēṇ-
kölam tikal kōtai ēṇ kūnt. lukkē?

(V-6-10)

Translation

Says my daughter, she is the cuvarkkam lovely, the dismal hell
And heavenly bliss (mōkkam); the souls with bodies many,
at her disposal
She has; the Primordial Force, she also is, with its wonderful
potential;
Perhaps, she is by the lovely cloud-hued Lord possessed.
What can I tell unto you people squatting here so well,
About my daughter whose locks are with lovely garland
bedecked?

Notes

(i) The Lord dominates every thing, the Svarga, the Hell
and the Heaven. The gnostic, whose goal is God,
attaches little importance to the Svarga, as, in his eyes,
it is no better than hell, the one being a golden fetter
and the other, an iron fetter. And yet, the worldlings
are enamoured of the pleasures of Svarga and perform
austere penances for gaining access to it. It is only
from their angle of vision, the Svarga has been qualified
by the epithet, lovely, here.
(ii) The ‘Mūla-Prakṛti’, or the Primordial Force works wonders but even that can function only at the Lord’s will. Hence, the Nāyaki, possessed by the Lord, says that she is the Mūla-Prakṛti also.

kūntal malṛ-maṅkaikkum maṅ-maṭant ikkum
kula āyar-kolvuntukkum kēvi ṃ-tanŋai,
vāynta valuti vala nāṭaṅ, maṅgu
kurukūrc caṭakōpaṅ, kuṟṟēval ceytu,
āynta tamil-mālai āyīṛattul ivaiyum ḍr
pattum vallār ulakil
ēntu perum celvattarāyāt tirumāl-
āṭiyārkalai pūcikka nōṟṟārkālē.  

(V–6–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṅ,
In intimate service of the Consort of (Lakṣmī) the lotus-born
With locks lovely, Dame Earth and (Nappiṅṅai) cream of sheepd clan,
Will, in this world, be blest with the huge wealth of devotion
Unto Tirumāl’s votaries, for their due propitiation

Notes

(1) Worship of the Lord’s devotees is even more meritorious than worship of the Lord and it is rendered possible only through the Lord’s special grace. The influx of the Lord’s grace in this regard, is assured to the chanter of this decad.

(11) Lakṣmī, the unfailing intercessor between Man and God, unleashes her irresistible physical charms on the Lord, when, in His unbridled independence, He turns a deaf ear to her entreaty to admit unto His fold, the contrite supplicant at His door-step. By virtue of her privileged position, as His beloved spouse, she casts a bewitching spell on Him; enthralled by her ravishing
beauty, He then carries out Her dictates in full. The lovely locks of the Divine Mother of extraordinary fragrance play a very important part indeed, in this context. Hence, the reference to the Divine Mother’s lovely locks, in this song.

Fifth Centum—Seventh Decad (V-7)  
(Nōṟṟa Nōṟṟu)

Preamble

For the nonce, the Āḻvār attempted to sustain himself by impersonating the Lord, even as the damsels of Vṛndāvan did, during that oppressive break in the middle of the rapturous ‘Rāsa Kridā’. But there, Lord Kṛṣṇa reappeared in an even more enchanting form than in the earlier session. But here, the L-ord is still keeping Himself away from the Āḻvār, although, on the previous occasions, He obliged the Āḻvār with His appearance, mental vision of course, whenever the Āḻvār’s longing for such communion was far too intense. Pondering within himself, the Āḻvār apprehends that the Lord might either want him to adopt other means such as karma, Jñāna, Bhakti yogas or intend to give him up on the ground that he was pursuing other means, instead of looking upon Him, as the sole Means. The Āḻvār, therefore, hastens to clarify his true stand at the feet of the Lord, enshrined in Vāṇamāmalai. This pilgrim centre, also known as Cirivara Maṅkai, Cirivara Maṅkalam and Nāṅkuṟṟēri, is deep south in the Tamil Nadu. In each of the various pilgrim centres, the Lord displays one of His numerous auspicious traits prominently. In Vāṇamāmalai (Cirivaramaṅkalam) shines, with extra-brilliance, the Lord’s generosity, whereby He gives out to the devotees seeking Him with single-minded devotion, His very feet as their Sole Refuge. (vide aphorism 163 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

nōṟṟa nōṟṟu ilēṟ; nūṟ-arivu ilēṟ; ākilum, ini uṇṟai viṭṭu āṟṟa kirkirilēṟ; araviṟ aṇai aṁmaṟē! [ōṟṟum cēṟṟut tāmarai cennel ūṟu malar cirivaramaṅkalanakar vīṟṟunta entāy! uṇṟakku mikai allēṟ aṅkē. (V-7-1)
Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, in Cirivaramaṅkalam you graciously reside.
Abounding in paddy fields rich where blooms lotus fine;
Rituals I haven’t performed any, while of knowledge acute I am devoid
And yet, even for a while, apart from you I can’t remain;
Surely, you can’t keep me outside the scope of your protection.

Notes

(i) There was a time when the Āḻvār knew neither his essential nature (Svasvarūpa) nor that of the Supreme Lord. It was but natural that he should have foregone Him while in that state; how could he be made to forego Him even now when he is quite alive to His greatness and his own lowness? But then, he hasn’t pursued any of the well-known paths of discipline, karma yoga or Jñāna yoga or Bhakti yoga. The Āḻvār is, therefore, in the predicament of a hungry person without food, the means of appeasing his hunger. He wants the Lord, as the liberal Benefactor, to feed him looking to his enormous appetite (God-hunger) and he can’t think of any other means but the Lord Himself

(ii) Reference to the Lord’s serpent—bed (Ādi Śeṣa) in the opening line, is suggestive of the Āḻvār’s inordinate longing to serve the Lord, in ever so many ways, like the Ādiśeṣa. Here then is the suggestion to the Lord to enlist the Āḻvār in His service, like Ādiśeṣa.

Translation

Neither here nor there nor anywhere else am I,
But to behold you, oh, Sire, Who routed Ilaṅkai! I am sunk
In desire deep; my Lord wielding conch and discus, in Cirivaramaṅkai,
With spacious streets and castles, stately and shining,
Pray do I unto you to salve this soul forlorn.

Notes
The Āḻvār submits that he does not belong to the happy band of denizens in the high Heavens, enjoying the immortal bliss of perpetual Divine Service nor has he joined the rank and file of the worldlings, following one or the other of the several paths of discipline, calling for personal effort to attain to His feet. There is also no question of his falling in line with the latter category, at least hereafter as he stands enthralled by the Lord’s exquisite beauty and is languishing to behold Him, unable to brook separation from Him. Surely, He who routed Laṅkā and reclaimed Śītā, should have no difficulty in rooting the Āḻvār out from ‘Samsāra’. Could there be a better recipient of His grace than the Āḻvār who is solely dependent on it?

karuḷap pul-koti, cakkarap paṭai, vaṇa ṇaṭā!
eg kārmukil-vaṇṇā!
porul allāṭa egṇaip porulakkī atimaikoṇṭāy!
 terul koḷ nāṟmaṇai vallavar palar väl cirivaramaṅkaṅaṅkarkku arul ceytu, aṅku iruntāy' aḻyēṇ oru kaimmārē (V–7–3)

Translation
Oh, Lord of Heaven, on Your banner is Karuḷaṅ and in Your hand
Is the discus valiant, my cloud-hued Lord, mere chaff was I
And yet, You Who gracefully reside in Cirivaramankai,
Full of Vedic scholars of knowledge chaste, have turned
This dud into Your vassal [hymning Your glory great]
I know not how to recompense You, my Benefactor great.

Note
In between the preceding stanza and this one, there would appear to have ensued a scintillating dialogue between the Lord and the Āḻvār. Put briefly, the Āḻvār who prayed in
the last song for the bestowal on Him of the Lord’s grace, gets pulled up by Him, saying that there should be due merit in him deserving of His grace. The Āḻvār is quick to put the ball back into the Lord’s court, by pointing out that He had already enlisted him, a mere dud with no equipment whatever, in His service. Had it not been for His grace galore, the Āḻvār wouldn’t be able to render the glorious service (vācīka kaṇṭkaryā) of singing the Tiruvāymoḷi, songs, par excellence. And so, the Āḻvār prays unto the Lord to go on bestowing His spontaneous grace on him as before, without looking for any merit (Means) in him, in fact, he has none whatsoever, comparable to the end in view, and what little merit there is in him already, has also been implanted by Him only. Oh, how gracious is the Supreme Lord of Heaven, obliging the pious and scholarly residents of Vācāmāmalai with His nectarine presence, in the same way He does unto the denizens of Heaven and how indeed can the Āḻvār recompense Him for His Grace galore!

māṭu cēṛ patai nūṟṟuvār manka ṵr aivarkkuṟųy, anṭu
māyappōr pannu,

nṟuceyta entāy’ -nilam kĩnta ammāńē’

teṛu ūaṅattar vēṭa vēḷvi aṟτc cirivaramaṅkalakar
ēṛi vīṟṟiruntāy’ Ṽppaḷ eñku eytak kūv感人ē?

Translation

The five (brothers) You befriended and had their hundred (cousins) routed, It was a battle of wonderful strategy, by you directed, My Lord, the Earth You once salvaged and now have You resorted To Cirivaramaṅkalam, inhabited by men of wisdom sound, Where Vedic rituals go on, all the year round; You, where and how indeed can I attain?

Notes

(1) In accordance with the Lord’s avowed creed, He looks upon all impartially, no one is His foe or His favourite on grounds of caste, culture, beauty and temperament.
And yet, the Lord completely identifies Himself with His lovers, who stand rivetted to Him in thought, word, and deed and He looks upon their enemies as His. That is how, the Kauravas (hundred brothers) who were hostile to the Pāṇḍavas (their five cousins), became His enemies.

(ii) It was a wonderful battle indeed where devious methods were justifiably adopted to quell the wicked opponents. The Lord is known for upholding truth and justice and yet, if He adopted devious methods for outwitting the wicked opponents, it was perfectly justified.

(iii) Even as the Lord condescendingly came down and took His abode in Vāśaṇaṁalai like the pious ones of sound knowledge, who had already settled there and mingled with them delightfully, the Ājvār wants the Lord to take the initiative in his case also, that is, He should either come down to him or take him up to His feet, adding to the list of many favours already heaped on him.

eytak kūvutal āvatē çnakkā? evva tevvattul āyumāy nītgu, kaitavaṁkaḷ ceyyum karu mēni Ammāṅē! ceyta vēḷviyar vaiyattēvar aṟṟc cirivaramaṅkalanakar kaitoḷa Iruntāy! atu nāṇum kāntēṅē. (V-7-5)

Translation
Oh, dark-hued Lord, it isn’t proper that I make any effort To attain you; you would with the ungodly mingle and pervert Their minds and get their brute strength cut out; Adored by Brahmins who the vedic rituals have put thro’, Reside you do in Cirivaramaṅkalam, well, I have seen it too.

Notes
(i) The Lord to the Ājvār: “You cry out as if You haven’t received any benefit from me; haven’t You been shown my Iconic Form in Cirivaramaṅkai?”
Ājvār to the Lord: “Sire, I don’t deny that, but that is hardly enough for me. I do long for perennial service at Your lotus feet”.

Īśvara (God) is the ‘Svāmi’ (Master) while the Četana (Jiva, the individual Soul) is the ‘Svuh’ (Property). It is this fundamental relationship that gives rise to the inescapable obligation of the Master in regard to His property, a matter of personal gain for Him indeed. It is against this back-ground that the Ājvār points out, in this song, the impropriety of the property trying to get at the Master; it should actually be the other way round.

(ii) By sheer eloquence and fallacious arguments, the Lord did, as Buddha, pervert the minds of the ungodly Asuras, bent upon torturing and tormenting others, and beat them back. If these methods did not succeed, He would, in the last resort, mystify them and render them defunct by exhibiting His exquisite charm, vide detailed notes under V-10-4

ćam āy, nilam kīṭa en appanē! kaṅnā! enṛum enṇai ālutaṁ váṇa nāyakanē! maṇi māṇikkaccautarē! tēṇa māmpojīl tan cilvaramaṅkalattavar kaṭoḷa uṛai váṇamāmalaiyē! aṭiyēṇ tola vantaruḷē. (V-7–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord Vāṇamāmalai, reside you do in cool Cīrivaramaṅkaii, Surrounded by mango-orchards with honey in plenty, And adored by its residents; as the Boar huge You pulled The Earth out and put it back in its place, my Lord, Me you have enlisted as Your vassal, oh Lord of heaven, Radiant like gem and ruby, oh, Kaṅnā, Pray come down Unto me here that this vassal may also offer Thee salutation.

Notes

(i) ‘Vāṇamāmalai’ is alike the name of the Deity and the Pilgrim centre. It means, ‘mountain, sky-high’; so very imposing is the Lord’s Image there indeed and this description fits in admirably.
(ii) The Lord’s incarnations are referred to by the Āḻvār, only to remind the Lord of the basic idea, namely, the elevation of the souls down below. ‘Avatāra’ means descent and He comes down to push up the subjects, working like a pulley system. The resuscitation of the Earth from under the waters of the Deluge, the Lord assuming the form of a Boar for this purpose, is specially mentioned by the Āḻvār to remind the Lord that he should also be similarly rescued from the bottomless ocean of Samsāra (worldly life).

(iii) The Lord is required to walk down to the Āḻvār’s place, for the latter to enjoy His glorious gait.

 vantaruḷi en neñcu ḻam koṇṭa váṉavar koḻuntē! ulakukku ķr muntait táy tantaiyē! mulu ĵl ulakum uṇṭāy! centōḷilavar vēṭa vēḷvi arāc cirivaramañkalanakar antam il pukalāy! aṭṭyēpaī akaṟṭēḷē. 

(V–7–7)

Translation

Oh, Chief of Celestials, You desired to come and lodge
In my heart; oh, Primate, You sustained, (during the Deluge),
All the worlds in Your stomach and now Your limitless grace
You do shed in Cirivaramañkai where the pious ones
Of good deeds are in vedic rituals engaged;
Pray, despise not this vassal, my Lord.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār longed to see the Lord in His Iconic Form at Vāpiṭamāmalai, right where he was (inside the hollow of the tamarind tree in Āḻvār Tirunakari temple). But the Lord has not responded yet, giving room for the Āḻvār’s apprehension of indifference on His part and hence he prays now that he should not be despised and denied the favour sought by him.

(ii) This song, where the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the boundless grace of the Lord of the Celestials in choosing his heart as His habitat, is said to have had a special appeal for Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. He asked his
disciple, Nañciyar, to recite this song, and, following it up himself in rapturous strain, he observed with great feeling that it was indeed very nice of Saints like Nammâlvar to have bequeathed such verses of melting tenderness to soften our stony hearts He added that our hearts which are no better than barren rock, rough and rugged, despite the severest course of discipline and austerity, such as 'yama', 'niyama', etc, could be mellowed, tempered and liquefied, only by verses like this Nañciyar was never tired of relating this incident to his disciples

akârta ni vaîtra màya val aîmpûlaṅkaḷâm-avâînaṅku arîntāpâñ, akârta eṅgâiyum ni arum ēṟṟil viḷḷîkântây- pakal-kâṭir maṇi māṭam nîtû cîrvaramaṅkâr vângâñē! eṅrum pukârku-ariyâ entây! pulliṅ vāy pîlantânē!  
(V-7-8)

Translation

Well aware am I of the mischief of the senses five, You have set upon me to keep me aside And push me back into the fell bog of pleasures sensual, Oh, Lord, residing in Cîrvaramaṅkâr with its castles tall, You are, my Sire, ever beyond reach (Of the ungodly), oh, you who tore off the demoniac bird's beak!

Note

The Álvâr pleaded, in the preceding song, that He should not be despised by the Lord and made to drift away from Him. The Lord, who had endowed the Álvâr with perfect knowledge of the Divine, could not, however, appreciate the basis of the Álvâr's complaint The Álvâr makes his position abundantly clear in this song Situated as he is, in this land of nescience, open to the hazards of succumbing to the mischief of the senses, he is afraid of untoward developments, despite all the knowledge imparted to him by the Lord. The Álvâr, therefore, prays that he be untethered from the present moorings, so as to eliminate the possible risk of contamination, even as He tore off Bakâsura's (the demoniac bird's) beak.
pujjip váy piłantáy! marutu ītaí pőyínáy! erutu ēj aṭartta eŋ kaḷa máyavaṇē! karumāṇikkac cuṭarē!

telliyar tiru nāṃmaṇikāḷ vallār mali ṭañ cirivaramaṅkai-
yul irunta entáy! arulāy uyyumāṟu-eṇakkē.  (V—7—9)

Translation

My Lord, staying in cool Cirivaramaṅkai where do dwell
Many a vedic scholar with knowledge sound! You tamed the
bulls,
Wondrous and tricky, the bird’s beak You did pull and quell,
‘Tween the twin trees You crawled, oh Sire of sapphire hue!’
Pray let me know the means of attaining You.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār laid two charges at the Lord’s
door, namely, (i) he had been kept away from the Lord
and (ii) he got bogged down in the difficult terrain of
samsāra. The Lord sent a feeler round, suggesting that
it was due to his past sins he was in that predicament, to
which this song is the rejoinder. Surely, the Āḻvār’s sins
were not as tough as the evil forces referred to in this song,
which the Lord destroyed effortlessly. Removal of the
so-called impediment, in the case of the Āḻvār, was so very
trivial that the Lord should not hesitate to cut it out and
enable the Āḻvār to render service at the Lord’s feet,
even as the pious Vaiṣṇavas of Vāṇamāmalai, with blemish-
less knowledge, do.

āṟu eṇakku niṟ pātamē caraṇ ākat tantaṭiṇṭāy; uṇakku ērkaim-
maṟu nāṇ oru ilēn; eṇatu āvīyum uṇatē-
cēṟu koḻ karumpum perum cennelum mali taṇ cirivaramaṅkai
nāṟu pūn taṇ-tulāy muṭiyāy! teyva-nāyakaṇē!  (V—7—10)

Translation

Oh, Teyvanaṅka, You wear on Your crown tulacī garland of
fragrance sweet
And grace cool cirivaramaṅkai, with paddy and sugarcane
in plenty;
As my sole refuge, You have unto me vouchsafed Your lovely feet;
How indeed can I repay You for this gracious bounty?
Even my soul is Yours and there's nothing I can unto you offer

Notes

(i) 'Teivanâyakaṇ is the name of the Deity, enshrined in Vāgamāmalai, meaning the overlord of all godlings, the Supreme Lord

(ii) This deced began by emphasising the resourcelessness of the Ājvār, that is, absence of any means other than the Lord Himself (ākiñcanya) And now, in this concluding song, the Ājvār compliments himself on the strength of his conviction that the Lord is at once the Means and the End and that the Lord's lovely feet, the ultimate destination, constitute the Means as well, his sole refuge. Giving up the means which have śastraic backing and desisting from the pursuit of the prescribed paths of discipline, should not, however, be construed as being tantamount to atheism or loss of faith in the sanctity of the Scriptures. The point driven home here is the Ājvār's robust faith and love in the Supreme Lord as the Means and the End, rolled into one, and sticking to Him exclusively. This is like Service unto the Lord taking precedence over the daily rituals enjoined by the Śāstras. No harm will accrue to the Subject by skipping over the rituals, in this particular context, even as the snake-charmer, armed with the requisite herbal antidote, inserts his hand into the viper's mouth with impunity. Any other person, not so equipped, will meet certain death, if he ventures to take liberties with the poisonous snake; likewise, it will be grievously wrong to give up the religious pursuits enjoined by the Śāstras, when not actually engaged in Divine Service.

(iii) Aphorism 19 of "Ācārya hṛdayam" succinctly brings out the difference between those who pin their faith to the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra', inculcating a sense of total surrender to His grace and complete subservience
to the Lord as His eternal vassal and those guided by other texts. The latter category (Śāstrajñās, well-versed in Śāstras) can be likened to those trying to swim across deep waters, clinging to an inflated tube or raft with one hand and oaring with the other—a combination of the light obtained from the Śāstras with their own individual effort. The former category is like unto those seated on the cross planks of a boat (the Lord’s grace) launched into the waters, eagerly looking forward to reaching the shore, thus depending entirely on the Lord’s grace, with no effort of their own.

(iv) Called upon by the Lord to offer unto Him whatever the Āḻvār deems proper by way of expressing his gratitude to Him for sustaining in him such a strong conviction, the Āḻvār submits that there is nothing of his own to offer and even his soul actually belongs to Him. The Āḻvār says: “How can this insignificant self pay you back, the overlord of the exalted Devas? You are the incessant Benefactor and You are so full, above wants of any kind, that you need hardly anything from me. While there are those who care not for your favours and engage themselves in mad pursuit of food and raiment, there are also the silly brats who fancy that they have required you for favours received at your hands.”

teyva-nāyakaṁ, nāraṇaṁ, tirivikkiramaṁ aṭi-māmacāṁ
koy koḷ pūm pojil cūḷ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṁ
ceyta āyirattul ivai taṇ cirivaramaṅkai mēya pattuṭaṁ
vaikal pāṭa vallār vāṇārkkku ārā-amute. (V–7–11)

Translation

Those that zealously chant, with no break, these songs ten,
Which unto the Lord of Cirivaramaṅkai pertain,
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṇ
Of Kurukūr, adorned by many a flower garden,
Adoring the feet of Tiruvikkiramañ, the Lord Supreme,
Will unto Celestials be delectable like insatiable cream.

Note
Those that enter into the spirit of these ten songs, highlighting
the Lord’s boundless love for His devotees, whose reclamation
is indeed His gain and His readiness to offer them
His very feet, as their sole refuge (vide-V-7-10, the key-
song), will indeed be highly delectable to the Nitya Sūris
in Heaven.

Fifth Centum—Eighth Decad (V-8)
(Ārā–amute)

Preamble
Despite the Āljvār’s intense longing for communion with the
Lord enshrined in Vāṇamāmallai, at whose feet he fell like an
uprooted tree and sought refuge, he was not favoured with the
Lord’s presence. The Āljvār now turns his attention to the Lord
gracing Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakonam in Tamilnādu), hoping that
He might be intending to grant him audience at that centre. The
Āljvār is contemplating with all the fervour at his command, the
enchanting prospect of the Lord casting His sweet glances at him,
conversing with him and gathering him up to His bosom, in sweet
embrace. Akrūra was also in such a happy reminiscent mood
during his journey to Vṛndāvan to fetch Kṛṣṇa to Kamsa’s
court. Whereas Akrūra had his ambition duly fulfilled, the Āljvār
has once again met with disappointment, like Bharata who could
not prevail over Śrī Rāma to get back to Ayodhya from exile.
Depressed like the babe, wanting to suck milk from the mother’s
breast, being denied access by the mother, the Āljvār ends this decad
on a despondent note, exclaiming that he just doesn’t know how
many more pilgrim centres he has still to knock at in this manner.

ārā-amute! atiyēṇ utalam nupāl annāyē,
niray alaintu, karaiya urukkukenra netumāle!
cfr ar cennel kavari vicum celu nirrt tirukkuṭantai
ēr ar kōlām tikalak kiṭantāy! kaṇṭēṇ, emmāṅē!  (V–8–1)
Translation

Oh, non-satiate Nectar, Your form enchanting does enthrall
And thaw my body down; in Tirukkuṭantai, the land fertile,
With bracing climate, paddy fields rich and plenty of water,
I've seen you reclining, my Lord, sweet indeed are you beyond measure.

Notes

(i) This decad which opens by addressing the Lord as 'non-satiate Nectar', has always had a special fascination for the great Ācāryas of yore. The Supreme Lord is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss and it was but meet that Nammāḻvār addressed the Lord at Tirukkuṭantai as above. All the same, this appellation sounded unique unto one Lōkaśāraṅga mahāmunī who lived in North India. When he enquired of a sojourner from South India as to whether there was any special news from the South, the latter said that, in that part of the country, people were chanting Saint Nammāḻvār's Tiruvāymoḻi. When called upon by the Mahāmunī to cite a verse from the said work, the traveller said that he knew but one phrase, namely, "Ārā Amutē!" (non-satiate Nectar!). On hearing this sweet epithet, the Mahāmunī exclaimed "What! do they have an epithet like this also, when there are several others such as Nārāyaṇa etc.?" So saying, there and then, the Mahāmunī left for the holy land where this grand epithet of the Lord was current.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Lord's entralling Form at Tirukkuṭantai makes even the Āḻvār's body which is non-sentient, melt down in ecstasy, competing, as it were, with the Soul inside. Even as He is reclining on the Serpent-bed with eyes closed, it is very enchanting and one would want to enjoy it all the time. This is in dire contrast to us, humans, who present a trim appearance when we are up and moving. while, during sleep, we look very awkward indeed.
emmanaē! en veḷḷai-mūrtti! enṇai āḻvāṇē!
em mā uruvum vēṇṭum āṟṟāl āvāy! eḻil ēṟē!
cem mā kamalam cēlu nīrmicaiṅkaṅ malarum tirukkuṭantai
am mā malarkkaṅ vaḷarkiṅṭāṅē! en nāṅ ceykēṅē! (V–8–2)

Translation

You are the immaculate One that made me Your vassal,
Oh, charming Lord, assume You do any Form at Your
sweet will;
In Tirukkuṭantai red lotus flower large blooms everywhere,
But You repose with Your lotus eyes closed, how can I endure?

Note

The Āḻvār sees the red lotus flowers in full bloom in the
ponds of Tirukkuṭantai. But the lotus-eyed Lord doesn’t
open His eyes yet and greet the Āḻvār with sweet glances.
This is more than the Āḻvār can bear. The Saint would
expect quite a lot of favours from the Lord besides those
already heaped on him. Although the Lord, in His iconic
Form, does not, as a rule, open His mouth and speak or
embrace the yearning devotee, yet the Āḻvār would want
Him to make an exception in his case. If He could at
least open His lotus eyes and look at the Āḻvār, it would
be some consolation for the latter. Otherwise, the Āḻvār
cannot sustain himself. In the ponds, where the lotus
flowers are in full bloom, the bees are feeding themselves
snippetsuously with honey but here is a bee (Āḻvār) languish-
ing without food because the Lord’s lotus—eyes still remain
closed

en nāṅ ceykēṅ? yārē kalaikan? enṇai en ceykiṅṭāy?
unṭall allall yāvarālam oṅrum kuraṅ vēṃtēṅ;
kaṅ ār matil cūl kuṭantaik kiṭantāy! aṭiyēṅ aru vāḷnāl
ceḷ nāḷ en nāḷ? an nāḷ uṇa tāḷ piṭittē celakkānē (V–8–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reposing in Kutantai with parapet walls artistic,
What can I do and who shall my protector be?
What indeed do You propose to do with me?
Means other than You I crave not; pray let me stick 
Unto Your feet during the days this vassal is still to eke.

Note
Finding the Lord unmoved by his ardent entreaties, the Ālvār apprehends that the Lord expects him to fall back on other means and, therefore, puts the Lord the triple questions spelt out in lines 2 and 3 of this stanza. In essence, the Ālvār asks the Lord whether He expects him to fend for himself or run after some one else seeking protection, or He would do the job Himself. Side by side, he has also clarified his position beyond any manner of doubt, namely, he has no other means but the Lord Himself. The Ālvār’s stand has been discussed threadbare in aphorism 46 of Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇa against this particular background. It is reproduced below:

No doubt, the Lord had endowed the Ālvār with supreme knowledge and yet, it was that very knowledge that stood in the way of his adopting any other means for attaining Him, as it would come into conflict with his essential nature as the Lord’s vassal, solely dependent on Him. Even if he could overlook this basic objection and pursue other paths of discipline, the knowledge bestowed on him by the Supreme Lord was saturated with God-love (Bhakti)—intellectual love of God. It is this God-love that threw the Ālvār into a state of ecstasy, precluding recourse to any means other than the Lord Himself, which would demand steady and constant physical and mental exercise

cēla kāṅkṣātācāra caṅma alāvatum cellum kṛttiyāy!
uṟṟum mēṅ kēṟṟum orum mēṟṟum!
nalattāl mikkār kuṟṟantaik kīṟṟantāy! uppāk kāṟmāṇ, nāp
alappum āy, ākācattai nokki, aluvaṇ; tojuvaṇē. (V–8–4)

Translation
Oh, peerless Lord of all the worlds, Your traits auspicious soar
As high as one can see and even beyond, without end;
To behold Thee reposing in Kuṭantai where men of piety galore
Do dwell, I look at the sky, weep and in worship bend.

Note

The Āḻvār does not seek out the Lord in Heaven or in the
Milky-ocean but the One in nearby Tirukkuṭantai. Seeing
the Lord connotes not merely seeing His Form, as others
do, but conversing with and embracing Him. The Āḻvār is
gazing at the sky, hoping that the Lord would drop down,
from above, as He did, to rescue Gajendra, the elephant in
distress. The Āḻvār weeps like a child and worships like
elders.

Translation

My Lord, with red lotus-eyes, in Kuṭantai, rich and fertile,
You repose; I do cry, worship, sing, dance and prattle,
Feeling shy, my head I bend and enveloped in heavy sins,
I look for You in different directions; the ways and means
You should concert so that Your feet I do attain

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that he has tried all methods at his disposal
to induce the Lord’s response, but in vain The young
ones cry out their needs and get them while the knowledge-
geable elders achieve their purpose through worship;
the Āḻvār has tried both these methods It is now up to
the Lord to take him on to His feet

(ii) The sins, referred to here, cannot be the Āḻvār’s God-love
remaining unreciprocated by the Lord.

(V-8-5)

(V-8-6)
Translation

Reposing in Kuṭantai of hoary fame, oh, Chief of Celestials,
You are the sweet strain from the lyre and delectable
Like nectar, the end of all knowledge You are, and grand
Like the lion and the bull; I am unto Your feet bound,
I know and yet sense-buried am I; from You apart
How long can I be? I pray unto You to cut out
My sins hoary and poor me unto Your fold admit.

Note

The Lord is unto the Āḻvār, the sum total of all things delicious,
and he prays that the Lord should cut out the sins of one
so deeply absorbed in Him, even as He did in the case of the
chaste ones worshipping Him in Tirukkuṭantai. The
ultimate aim of knowledge is to secure happiness and: the
Lord is happiness itself.

Translation

My Lord of shoulders four, you stand
Like a coral mount, stellar-bound,
The golden beam lovely, oh, best of lions,
A blue mount you are, with red eyes lovely; by your grace,
You did enlist me in your service,
Oh, Sire, residing in Kuṭantai, no longer can I be apart
From you, pray cut out this body and grant me your feet.

Note

The Āḻvār's complaint is that, even after having induced in
him God-love of such a high order, the Lord has kept him
in this material body, instead of lifting him up to His feet.
In nearby Kuṭantai, the Lord and His Divine Consort are
gracing the votaries, enlisting them in Divine Service.
Is it not odd that the Āḻvār should languish like a child, dying
of hunger, right at the feet of the parents, rich and bounteous? The Ālvār prays that he be granted the Lord’s feet so that his body (earthly existence) may be cut out even as the babes are fed on the mother’s breast prior to surgical treatment.

kalaiyāy tuppam; kalaiyātu olivāy; kalaikaṇ marći ulep,
vaḷai vāy nēmip paṭaiyāy! kuṭantaiṅ kitanta mā māyā!
taḷarā utalam, enatu āvi carintu pōmpōtu
ṭaiyātu upa tāl oruṅkap pītittup pōta icai niyē

Translation

My wondrous Lord, reposing in Kutantai, when life ebbs out
Of my body worn out, let me by you be blest.
Oh, wielder of the discus lovely, with its mouth bent!
That I relax not my hold on your feet; whether or not
You do my miseries cut out. other than you I’ve no resort

Notes

(i) The ‘Prapanna’, pursuing the path of loving surrender to the Lord’s spontaneous grace, has to invoke the Lord’s grace as the sole saviour, for deliverance from all ills and evils, he shall not knock at any door other than His, whatever be the provocation. Whether the Lord fulfils His part of the obligation or not, the Ālvār will not budge from his avowed stand

(ii) Why should the Lord not cut out the Ālvār’s ills despite His holding the discus, ever ready for going into action? This seems to be the Ālvār’s idea in referring to the Discus in the Lord’s hand.

(iii) What indeed is the purpose of the Lord’s manifestation in His iconic Form at Tirukkuṭantai, if not to cure the ills and evils of devotees like the Ālvār? The Ālvār invokes the Lord’s grace, so that he may remain steadfast unto Him.
icaivittu en̄ṇai un̄ tāḷ-ṇaikkēḷ iruttum ammāṅē!
acaivu il amaran talaivar talaivā! ātip peru mūrtti!
ticai vil vicum ceļu mā maṇikaḷ cērum tirukkuṭantai
acaivu il ulakam parvak kiṭantāy! kāṇa vārāyē. (V–8–9)

Translation

Chief Supreme of the eternal heroes in Heaven! Oh, pri-
mordial Lord,
Strayed I from You for long but unto Your feet, oh, Sire,
You have fathered me, inducing in me the desire therefor;
Reposing without break in Tirukkuṭantai where muster
gems rare
And you are by the whole world adored,
Pray come down, my Lord, for me to behold.

Notes

(i) It is all due to the Lord’s grace and age-long effort that the
straying individual is brought round and made to sub-
mit to the Lord’s protection, giving up all notions of
self-ownership and self-protection. Having generated
in the Āḻvār God-love of such great magnitude, the
Lord should naturally follow it up by obliging Him
with His presence. Having seen the Lord in repose,
the Āḻvār now wants to behold and enjoy the Lord’s
majestic gait.

(ii) The lustrous gems assembled in Tirukkuṭantai obviously
refer to luminaries like Tirumaḷisai Āḻvār.

vārā aruvāy varum en̄ māyā! māyā mūrttiyāy!
ārā amutāy! aṭiyēy āvi akamē tittippāy!
tirā viṇaiκāl tira en̄ṇai aṭṭiyāy tirukkuṭantai
ūrāy! uṇakkū āl-paṭṭum aṭiyēy innam uḷalvēṇō? (V–8–10)

Translation

My wondrous Lord of supernal Form, formless You stay in
my mind
And sweeten it but Your insatiable Form alluring,
You won’t unto me show; sins beyond cure
You destroyed and me, as Your vassal, did bind;
Oh, Lord, holding sway over Tirukkuṭantai,
Even as Your vassal, suffer still should I?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār who was fondly hoping to enjoy the resplendent
form of the Lord enshrined at Tirukkuṭantai, feels
frustrated, as the Lord didn’t come up to him and reveal
His alluring Form, insatiable The Āḻvār, therefore,
asks the Lord whether He intends that he should knock
at many more pilgrim centres.

(ii) When the Āḻvār addressed the Lord as ‘Insatiable
Nectar’, it is not a mere vocal exercise; it goes right
to the interior of his heart and sweetens it

ulalai eppil pēyec mulaiyūṭu avalai uiyir unṭan
kajalkal avaiyē caraṇ ākak koṇṭa kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ
kuḷaliq maliyac coṇṇa őr āyirattul ip pattum
malalai tirā vallār kāmar māṇ ēy nōkkiyarkkē. (V–8–11)

Translation

Those that thoroughly earn these songs ten;
Out of the thousand, sweeter than flute, composed by Kurukūr
Caṭakōpaṇ
Who sought refuge at the feet of the Lord Who sucked
The tough-boned devil’s life out of her breast, will be liked
By the doe-eyed damsels as their lovers dear

Note

This end-stanza reveals that those who learn this decad
thoroughly, will unto the Lord’s devotees be as dear as the
erotic lovers are unto their suitors. The doe-eyed damsels,
obviously, refer to the Apsarās in Heaven, beyond the mis-
chief of sensuality. The Āḻvār’s intention could only be
as explained above, as he is not the one to hark back to the
domain of sensual pleasures. What is said in this stanza
is a mere simile, not to be taken literally but applied to
God and the Godly who would feel attracted to the chanters
of this Tiruvāymoli.
Fifth Centum – Ninth Decad (V-9)
(Māṇ ēy nōkku)

Preamble

A frustrated Āḻvār turns his attention on yet another pilgrim centre, named Tiruvallāḷ (in Kerala), the coveted communion with the Lord at Tirukkuṟaṅtaī not having materialised. Even so, he couldn’t get there, being obsessed with the fragrance wafted across from there along with the breeze, the musical drone of the bees humming in the orchards over there, the vedic chantings etc. Thus stranded, en route, the Āḻvār assumes the state of Nāyakī who speaks out her infatuation to her mates. Of course, it is all mental experience and no physical movement, as such, is involved.

māṇ ēy nōkku nallir! vaikalam viṇāiyeṇ mēliya,
vāṇ ēr vaṇ camukum, matu mallikai kamaḷum
tēṇ ēr cōlaikal cūḷ tiru vallāḷ uraiyum
kōṇārai aṭiyēṇ aṭikūṭuvatu ēṇrūkolō? (V–9–1)

Translation

Ye, doe-eyed ladies, when will this vassal be blest to join
The Lord in Tiruvallāḷ, with its orchards holding honey in
in plenty,
Where stand arecanut trees sky-high and jasmine sheds
honey
And throws forward its fragrance fine, making this sinner
thin down?

ēṇrūkol-tōḷimirkāḷ! emmaī nir nalintu ṇē cēṭirō?
pōṇ-tikăḷ purṇai, makīḷ, putu māṭavi mīṭu pōṇai,
tēṟral māṇam kamaḷum tiruvallāḷ nakarul
niṟṟa pirāṇ aṭiniru aṭiyōm koṇṭu cūṭuvate? (V–9–2)

Translation

Ye, mates, does your tormenting me make any sense?
My mind is unto the Lord drawn, who in Tiruvallāḷ stays
Where the southerly breeze does the fragrance sweet convey
From posh puṇṇai trees and their attractive kind;
When shall the dust from His feet anoint us indeed?

Notes

(i) The mates who were critical of the Nāyaki’s attitude are reprimanded by her. She says that her mind is attracted by the Lord in Tiruvallāḷ through the fragrance wafted from there Having known her as well as they do they would do well to smear her head with the dust from the Lord’s feet instead of trying to pull her back.

(ii) The Āḻvār’s special fascination for the trees etc., in Tiru-
vallavāḷ, only typifies the great love and esteem in which the devout hold the several Pilgrim Centres where the Lord lovingly stays for the reclamation of His subjects. Their deep faith is reflected in their belief that the trees etc., in these centres, are but the angels of Heaven transplanted here and that this sportive Universe (Līla vibhūti) itself is but the garden lovingly raised by the Lord and His Divine Consort as a pastime. That was why one Jananātha Brahma Rāyar āhās Allalapperumāḷ was pulled up by Śri Empār when the former attempted to fell down trees in holy Śrīraṅgam, Empār is said to have questioned the Rāyar whether he intended to take liberties with the Lord’s garden (Iśvara vibhūti)

cuṭu malarkkuḷalir! tuyarāṭṭiyēn mēlya,
pāṭum nal vēta oli paravaṭ tirai pōl mulaṅka,
māṭu uyaṛntū ōmap pukai kamaḷum tan tiruvallāḷvāḷ
 niṭu urāikīngā pirāṅ kalal kāṇṭumkol niccalumē?  (V–9–3)

Translation

You, ladies, having tresses with flowers bedecked.
When can I, for ever, behold the feet of my Lord,
In cool Tiruvallavāḷ amid holy fires that send
Fumes sky-high and vedic chantings that resound
Like the billows of the sea, thinning this miserable one down?
The mates, happily bedecked with flowers on their long locks, would expect the Parâṅkūṣa Nāyaki to fall in line with them. But the Nāyaki is inclined otherwise; drawn towards Tiruvallavāl, with its sacred setting as above, she longs to behold the Lord’s feet there for ever and anon. If the mates can tell her when and how she can realise her ambition, well and good; otherwise, they would do well to desist from criticising and pulling her up.

niccalum tōjimirkāḷ! emmai nīr nalīntu eṉ ceytirō?
paccilai nil kamukum, palavum, teṅkum, vājaikālum, maccu ani màṭaṅkkaḷ mitu aṉavum tān tiruvallavāl
naccu araviṅ aṉaimēl nampirāṇaṭu nal nalame. (V–9–4)

Ye, mates, what do you gain by teasing me always?
Know ye, my good soul unto the Lord belongs, Who does repose
On serpent-bed and stays now in Tiruvallavāl, cool and nice.
With arecanut trees, green and tall, the plantains,
Jack and cocoanut trees hanging over the huge mansions

Note

The Nāyaki tells her mates point-blank that she belongs to the Lord in Tiruvallavāl with its enchanting scenery and is, therefore, not free to respond to their wishes. It is no use trying to veer her round to their way of thinking and all their attempts will only prove futile. It was by revealing the charming setting in which He reposed on Ādīśēṣa (Serpent-bed) that the Lord initially attracted the Ālvār. Therefore it is the Nāyaki pines for intimate service unto the Lord, emulating Ādī-Śēṣa.;

nal nalat tōjimirkāḷ! nalla antaṇar vēḻvīp pukai
main nalam koṭu uyār viṅ maṟaṅkkum tān tiruvallavāl
kaṇṇal am kaṭṭi-taanṇai, kaṇiyai, iṅ amutam-taanṇai,
ēṅ nalam koḷ cuṭarai, enṉukol kaṅkaḷ kāṇpatuṅvē? (V–9–5)
My wholesome mates, when can I, the radiant Lord behold,  
The candy flawless, the nectar, the fruit delicious, Who stole  
My all, staying in cool Tiruvallavāl, where go up dense fumes,  
inky,  
From the holy fires of vedic brahmins and hide the sky?

Note
Unlike the Mother and other elders who cannot see eye  
to eye with the Nāyaki, the mates know her mind well  
enough, although, now and then, they too try to get her  
round, seeing her extremely critical condition. That is  
why the Nāyaki finds the mates friendly and addresses them  
as such. She would want them to tell her when she could  
behold the Lord in Tiruvallavāl of ravishing charm in that  
highly delectable setting. The nectar obtained long back by  
churning the ocean (treated lightly by our Ācāryas as mere  
salt-extract) pales into insignificance, in comparison with  
the soul-stirring, soul-elevating Nectar, the Lord is unto  
the Nāyaki.

Translation
Ye, charming mates, When can this sinner behold  
The lotus feet of the lovely Midget Who has His abode  
In Tiruvallavāl on the seashore, fall of orchards fine,  
Where plays all over cool, southerly breeze and tuneful bees  
drone.

Note
Although the Lord stays in this holy place as vāmana of  
bewitching beauty, with a happy blend of beauty and  
bounty (easy accessiblity), yet His feet hold out a special  
charm to the Nāyaki who covets the lovely pair all the  
time, repeatedly mentioning them song after song.
pātaṅkajmēl aṁ pūn tojaṅ kūṭuṅkol-pāvai nēllir!
ōta nētuṁ taṭattuḷ uya rāmasai, cēṅkajumīr,
māṭarkaḷ vāj-mukkumum kāṇṇum ēntum tiruvallavāḷ
nātaṅ, iṅ flālam uṇṭa nam pirāṅ-taṅgai nāḷtorumē?  (V–9–7)

Translation
Ye, charming mates, shall I worship daily the flowers at the feet
Of the benefactor great, who the worlds sustained during deluge
And now presides over Tiruvallavāḷ where the ponds huge
Are studded with flowers fine and the women wear faces bright?

Notes
(i) The bright faces and bewitching eyes of the womenfolk compete with the high class flowers in the ponds, lotus etc., and it is hardly possible to distinguish the one from the other

(ii) The Lord’s sustenance of the worlds, during the Deluge, is not merely a matter of past history but one of personal experience of the Āḻvār who has been redeemed by the Lord from the deluge of ‘Samsāra’ and elevated to the present pitch of devotion

nāḷtorum viṭu iṅgīyē tojaṅ kūṭuṅkol-nal-nutālir!
ātu uṛu tīṅ karumpum vilai cennelum āki cēṅkum
māṭu uṛu pūn taṭam cēr vayal cūl taṅ tiruvallavāḷ
nītu uraiṅga pirāṅ nilam tāviyā nil kāḷalē?  (V–9–8)

Translation
Ye, mates with foreheads bright, shall I worship for ever
The feet of the Lord Who the worlds once spanned and now resides
In cool Tiruvallavāḷ with sweet sugar canes all over,
Ponds packed with flowers lovely and rich paddy fields along-side?

Notes
(i) Reference to the bright foreheads of the mates is but wishful thinking on the part of the Nāyaki who expects the Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ to come down where
she is, through the good offices of the mates. On the Lord's arrival the faces of the mates will naturally brighten up by way of expressing their gratitude to Him.

(ii) The Nāyaki pines for the continual worship of the feel of the Lord of loving condescension gracing Tiruvallavāl, cool and exhilarating

kaḻal vaḻai pūrīppa yām kaṇṭu kaṭoḻak kūtunkolō- kuḻal egṇa, yāḷum egṇa, kuḻir cōlayuḷ tēŋ aruntu majaḻai vai vaṇṭukaḷ icat pātum tiruvallavāl cuḷalīṅ mali cakkaraṇ perumāṇu tōl arulē?

Translation:
Will the Lord, wielding the discus dynamic, shed His grace natural.
For me to joyously behold, with bangles well set and adore Him.
That stays in Tiruvallavāl where pretty bees hum
Like flute or lyre, fed on honey from the orchards cool?

Note
The Nāyaki invokes the Lord's spontaneous grace for her to behold Him with great joy, her bangles well set on her wrist in the process and continually adore Him

tol arul naḷ viṇṭayāl colak kūtuṉ\ol-tōḷimirkāḷ!
tol arul maṇṇum viṇṇum toḷa niṅḍa tirunakaram
naḷ arul āyiravaś nalaṉ ēntum tiruvallavāḷ
naḷ arul naḷ perumāṅ nāṟāyaṅaṉ nāmankalē?

Translation
Ye, mates, shall Nārāyaṅaṉ's grace inborn on us descend
That we may His holy names recite? By His grace grand
He resides in gracious Tiruvallavāl, by Heaven and Earth adored,
Where thousands of brahmins, pious and gracious, have their abode.
Notes

(i) Tiruvallavāl is described here as the city of grace, adored alike by those on Earth and in Heavn. Actually, this description holds good in respect of all the pilgrim centres on Earth, where the Lord of limitless grace makes Himself visible and easily accessible to one and all, in His iconic (worshippable) Form, adored best of all His five manifestations.

(ii) Tender solicitude for His subjects is a remarkable trait of Lord Nārāyaṇa; the pious inhabitants of Tiruvallavāl are even more solicitous than the Lord, of the welfare of mankind and its uplift.

nāmāṅkaḷ āyiram uṭaiya nam perumāṉ aṭimēl
ōēmam koḷ teṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ terintu uraitta
nāmāṅkaḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum tiruvallavāl
ōēmam koḷ teṇ nakarmēḷ ceppuvār cīrantār pirantē. (V—9–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten, which laud
The glory of Tiruvallavāl, the walled city lovely,
Out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṇ of Teṉkurukūr, well-laid,
Adoring the feet of the Lord with thousand names holy,
Will gain fame and distinction, though born in this land.

Note

Those that recite this decad will indeed gain fame and distinction, not attainable by other househoders. They will not suffer from the disability the Āḻvār suffered and they can thus freely move round and visit the pilgrim centres. The thousand names (Sahasranāma), which actually connote not a mere thousand names but many more without number, depict the auspicious traits and glorious deeds of the Lord. The thousand songs composed by the Āḻvār who considers the Lord's feet as his sole Refuge also reflect the glory of His traits and deeds.
Fifth Centum—Tenth Decad (V-10)  
(Piranta ārum)

Preamble

Unable to reach the holy place of Tiruvallāṇi, the Āḻvār contemplated the Lord enshrined there, from the outskirts of the holy city, as we saw in the last decad. The Saint thought, he would sustain himself by meditating on Lord Govinda's (Krṣṇa's) auspicious traits but it made him thaw down. And so, he prays unto the Lord in this decad to grant him at least the stamina to contemplate His glory and sustain himself, even if He would not oblige him with His company. For this purpose, he turns to the Lord in His Incarnate Form (Vibhava), having failed to realise his longing for communion with the Lord in His Arca (iconic) Form, in successive pilgrim centres.

On the face of it, the Āḻvār would appear to be moving in the reverse gear. The Lord's Arca (Workshippable) Form is intended to overcome the formidable handicaps and obstacles that confront one in worshipping Him in any of His other aspects of 'Para' ‘Vyūha’, Vibhava’ and ‘Antaryāmi’. And yet, the Alvar has recourse to the Lord’s Incarnations, overlooking the time-lag, for the simple reason that the devotees could mingle with the Lord freely, converse and embrace during His Avatāras, unlike the ‘Arca’ where such exchanges are not possible, resulting in the Āḻvār’s frustration. Even among the Incarnations it is noteworthy that all the Āḻvārs had a partiality for Krṣṇa. The illustrious Parāśara Bhaṭṭār explained this special preference, as follows:

The grief caused by one's bereavement loses its intensity with the passage of time, while the pangs are very acute when it is fresh. To the Āḻvārs, Krṣṇavatāra was the nearest in point of time and hence, their lamentations. In the case of Saint Nammāḻvār, in particular, he missed the Krṣṇavatāra by a bare six weeks. Tradition has it that he came into this world just forty three days after Lord Krṣṇa's ascension to the Celestium. The Āḻvār cursed himself as a sinner, born six weeks late, missing the Krṣṇavatāra like unto a delicious dish hitting the teeth and falling to the ground, while attempting to eat it. It was as if Krṣṇa had
left the pastoral township of Tiruvâyppâti by the North gate even as the Āḻvâr was entering the place by the South gate.

Translation:

Oh, Lord of radiance beyond measure, The manner of Your birth,
The manner You grew up, Your wondrous military strategy
In the great battle of Bhârata leading the five to victory,
And Your return to Celestium thereafter, all these, taking one’s breath,
Get into the vital region of my heart, sapping my soul
All the time; when indeed will You be joined by this vassal?

Note

After briefly touching upon the Lo’d’s Avatâra as Śrî Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvâr deplores his inability to remain steady and recount His wonderful deeds, as they send him into a trance, touching as they do the inner core of his being. As a matter of fact, even as he contemplated the manner of the Lord’s birth as Kṛṣṇa, entering the mother’s womb as we, bound souls do, he fell into a trance which lasted six months. This song did not, therefore, progress beyond the opening phrase, ‘the manner of Your birth’ (as in the original text), for six months. Then again, he was struck by the way Kṛṣṇa grew up, how He was shifted from the place of birth the same night and brought up by a different set of parents, under cover, the odds and ends He had to contend against, right from infancy, the many miracles He wrought in the battle that ensued between the Pâṇḍavas and Kauravas, after His peace-parleys proved abortive, His functioning as Aruṇa’s charioteer and so on. Briefly put, in the inimitable language of Ītū, the way Kanṭan grew up was precisely the way the inimical ones were made to eat the dust and the friendly ones drank deep of His nectaran
charm (a continual feast for their eyes), gobbling up ghee and other milk products stored up in the pastoral township of Tiruvāyppāṭi (Gokula)

vatuvai vārtāiyuḷ ēru pāyntatum, māya māvīṇai ēru piḻanta-matuvaḷ vār kuḷāḷār kuravaḷ piṇanta kuḷakum, itum, atu itu utu eṅṇalāvaṇa alla; eṅṇai ēpu ceykaḷ naiviikkum; mutu vaiya mutalvā! uṇṇai ēru taḷaipeyyyaṅē? (V–10–2)

Translation

Oh, Primate, your wondrous deeds do description baffle
And make me thaw down; pounce you did upon the bulls
When the talk of your wedding (Nappiṅṅai) was on,
The mouth of the treacherous fiend, horse-shaped, you tore open,
Dance you did merrily in the sweet company
Of those damsels whose locks shed plenty of honey,
When can I your lovely feet attain?

Note

The moment the challenging task of taming the seven unruly bulls, all at once, was set up as a pre-condition by the fair Nappiṅṅai’s father for winning her hand, Kṛṣṇa dashed forward and pounced upon the animals, killing them all. Again, when Kṛṣṇa was in the company of the Gopīs, a demon in the disguise of a horse came running fiercely to trample upon Him, but, with perfect case, He tore open the longish mouth of the treacherous horse and put an end to it. And then, there was the classical ‘Rāsa Kriḍa’ in which Kṛṣṇa assumed many forms and stood beside each Gopi, vide detailed notes given earlier about this wonderful wonder of wonders. There is hardly any need to single out any one of His many deeds. Each and every one of His deeds sends the Āḻvār into raptures and sweeps him off his feet. And so, he prays that he may at least have the requisite stamina to sustain and steady himself, recount the Lord’s glory and revel in it without breaking down.
Translation

The innocent looks on Your infant face as You sucked
The devil’s breast, the juvenile valour of Your foot red that kicked
The demon in the wheel, the fright You displayed with tears
In Your lotus eyes, when, before You, Your mother did appear
With stick in hand, to question You about stealing butter,
All these now do I in my mind envision, making it melt down!

Notes

(i) The infant looks of the Babe reveal His innocence, the inability to distinguish between the real mother and the Imposter.

(ii) The Babe had pinching hunger and cried for the mother’s breast-milk, casually kicking the cart-wheel. But then, what a mighty kick it was and, that too, just from one foot of the tender Babe! The wheel broke into bits and with it, the demon who had taken possession of the juvenile valour indeed!

Translation

The form dubious You assumed (as Buddha) oh Lord!
And entry into the citadels three manoeuvred,
Mingling freely with the Asuras, their outlook You altered
And got them annihilated; (Śiva), with Gangā on matted locks
In close unison with You, I behold and in my mind locked
Are all these, making my soul just melt down

Notes

(i) The Ālvar characterises the advent of Buddha as a mask put on by Lord Viṣṇu, in order to sow the seeds of doubt, dissension and heresy among the Asuras (who were very powerful, by dint of their rigorous rituals, but most unscrupulous and destructive), with a view to reducing their prowess and strength and getting them annihilated thereby. The story of Buddha, as recorded in the third Amśa of Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa, is as follows:

Once upon a time, the Asuras invoked Śiva by their rigorous austerities and when he appeared before them and enquired of them what they wished to have, they asked for three cities, invulnerable to attack from any source. While granting their wish, Śiva warned that the cities should always move in the air without touching each other and if ever they chanced to collide, great misfortune would befall them. The three cities, one made of iron, another of silver and the third of gold, came into existence forthwith. Living in these flying citadels, the demons waged war against the Devas and the Brahmins who offered libations to the latter. Deprived of the sacrificial offerings from the Brahmins, the strength of the Devas dwindled and they fell an easy prey to the Asuras. When requested by the Devas to destroy the Asuras who posted themselves with their flying citadels at all places where sacrifices were performed, molested and slew the performers, Śiva declined to fell the three, he himself had planted, even if it be poisonous. Thereafter, the Devas went with their tale of woe to Viṣṇu, resting on the Milky ocean and begged of Him to destroy the demons. Queried by the Lord whether the Devas and the Brahmins could not, with their combined might, destroy the demons, the Devas clarified that the Asuras were invincible because they too performed rites and rituals and sacrifices and gained strength, all the time.
Assuring the Devas that He would destroy the demons, the Lord proceeded to the cities of the demons, disguised as an aged Buddha (wise man), carrying a book under his arm and wearing a twisted Kuśā grass round his finger, ring-like. He preached to them morals in a telling manner, and they had no hesitation in adopting Him as their mentor (wise counsellor). When they began performing some Yāga (ceremonies), Buddha accosted them: “What are these sticks for?” Pat came the reply, “For offering into the fire”, evoking the observation from Buddha that it was better to be born a grass-eating cow than a stick-eating fire. Likewise, Buddha enquired the purpose for which huge stocks of food had been kept in the venue of the Yāga. When He was told that it was all meant to be offered to the Gods, He spoke derisively that it would be nice to do so if they could satisfy the hunger of a traveller by feeding some one at home. Buddha asked next why the goats were kept there and elicited the reply that the omentum extracted from the animals would be offered to the Gods. Buddha remarked, “Oh, I see, butchers seem to be the righteous people then!” By means of such preachings, Buddha succeeded in cajoling the demons and with their faith in the sacrifices and their efficacy shaken, they gave them up altogether. They even began to revile Śiva, their great benefactor, and thus reached his ears through Buddha. Theirate Śiva resolved to destroy the ungrateful demons. In the battle that ensued, the Earth became the chariot, the sun and Moon, its wheels, the four vedas were the horses, Brahmā, the charioteer, Mahā-Meru, the mountain was used as the bow and Ādiṣeṣa, the bow-string. Thus equipped, the vile demons were exterminated by Śiva. The old order of things was restored whereby the Devas and the Brahmmins could live in peace, the latter providing the former with their usual sacrificial offerings.

The authoritative texts (Mahā Bhārata, Karṇa parva) declare ‘Viṣṇurātmā Bhagavato bhavesyāmita tejasāḥ’ and true to this, Śiva could conquer the demons only through Lord Viṣṇu, his Internal Controller. This is
precisely what the Āḷvār intends to convey when he
refers to Śiva standing in close unison with the Lord
This Buddha should not, however, be confounded with
Śāṅkhya Muni (Gautama), born about 2,500 years ago

(ii) Read also the arguments, Sage Jābāli advanced in Rāmā-
yaṇa (II-108 ), to induce Śri Rāma to get back to the
Kingdom, giving up the exile imposed on Him by His
father Śri Rāma had, however, no hesitation in casti-
gating the sage for his specious advice, wide apart from
Dharma, about which Śri Rāma had a very clear
conception.

(iii) The accord of Śiva with Viṣṇu, referred to here, denotes
the intimate relationship between the two, as Body and
Soul respectively, the latter being the ‘ Antaratmā ‘ or
the Inner Soul of the former. It is worth recalling, in
this connection, the dialogue between Kūratālvān
and king Kṛmikānta cōla in the Royal Court. When
the king insisted that Kūratālvān should subscribe
to the bull that Śivā is the Supreme Truth, Āḷvān pointed
out, quoting chapter and verse, that Śiva derived all
the power he had only from the Paramount Lord of the
Cosmos, Viṣṇu. Āḷvān would not sign the order, as
commanded by the King and chose to submit himself
to the inquisitorial torture of the bigoted king (“ Bles-
sed are they that suffer persecution for the sake of
justice, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven ” —Bible)

Translation

Like wax set on fire, my mind does melt
Whenever I meditate on the Lord’s wondrous deeds
How He consurred all the food by the cowherds set
Unto Devas’ chief, how He did the rains repel,
Holding the lovely mount aloft, how, in the days of old,
He did the worlds create, ate and spat, spanned and pulled
Them out of the waters deep and did (Mother Earth) wed.

Note

The Ālvār says that his mind thaws down in contemplation of
the Lord’s wondrous deeds, those performed for the general
weal of the Universe, as well as specially directed towards
the amelioration of His ardent devotees.

niṟṟa āṟum, irunta āṟum, kiṟtanta āṟum niṟṟaiṟṟu-ariyana;
oṟṟu ala uṟuru āy, aṟuru āya niṟṟ māyaṅka]
yēṟkku
niṟṟu niṟṟu niṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiṟṟiற் (V–10–6)

Translation

The manner in which You stood in one place, sat in another,
And reposed in yet another, these and several other
Wonders indefinable are indeed beyond my mind’s reach,
Ponder do I over them little by little; You, I beseech,
Oh, resplendent Lord, Who the worlds once gulped down,
To grant this sinner, strength to meditate without wearing down

Note

(i) The places where the Lord stood, sat and reposed, not
having been specified in this Song, the Ācāryas take
delight in interpreting this in a number of ways, as
elucidated below:

I Standing

(Incarnate Forms)

Śri Rāma standing at the entrance to Laṅka with bow in hand;
The victorious Rāma standing with bow in hand after slaying
Vāli;
Śri Kṛṣṇa standing, holding mount Govardhan aloft;
Śri Kṛṣṇa standing inside the cradle, holding on to the side-rods;
(Iconic Form)

Standing

In Mount Tiruvenkaṭam, Ṭrakam, Śrī Vaikunṭam etc.

II. Sitting

(Incarnate Forms)

Śrī Rāma sitting in citrakūṭ and other places, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sitting in the cradle, unable to stand any longer

(Transcendent Form)

Sitting in the High Heavens on the Serpent-Couch

(Iconic Form)

Sitting in Pāṭakam, Varakuṇamaṅkai etc;

III. Reposing

(i) Incarnate Forms

Śrī Rāma, reposing, in front of the ocean, Śrī Kṛṣṇa reposing on the laps of the Gopis, just before the commencement of Rāsakrīḍa; Śrī Kṛṣṇa reposing in the cradle, as a tender Babe,

(ii) Vyūha

The Lord reposing in the Milky-ocean, in Yoga Nīḍhrā,

(iii) Iconic Form

Reposing in Tiruvekkā, Puḷiṅkuṭi, Tirukkuṭanta, Śṛirangaṁ-Anantaśayanam etc.

(ii) Although the Incarnations took place long ago, it should still be possible to meditate on them even at this distance of time. But the wondrous deeds of the Lord are too numerous to be narrated, with any degree of cogency and precision and, in the case of the Āḻvār, he is unable to study himself and recount them without wearing down. And hence, the prayer, as in this song.
(iii) The Lord’s wondrous deeds and the different postures assumed by Him at various centres, have been mentioned here by the Āḻvār, only to stress His gracious response to the devotees who give their hearts to Him. It would, therefore, be relevant to cite the following anecdote to illustrate the manner and extent of the Lord’s approach to us, when we will but take one step towards Him.

A certain devotee, proficient in singing, came all the way to Śrīraṅgam from the far north, longing to worship Lord Raṅganātha. When he went to the temple, it was the concluding day of a certain festival. Āḻvār Tiruvārān-kapperumāl Araiyar, the Temple Bard, chanted a hymn of Tontaratippūr Āḻvār before Lord Raṅganātha with great feeling and literally coaxed the Lord’s pleasure. The Lord was highly pleased with His Minstrel and seemed readily inclined to do the latter’s bidding. At this ripe moment, the Araiyar introduced the devout visitor from the North, who had covered, on foot, more than two thousand miles, and prayed for the Lord’s condescension to honour the visitor with a special recognition of his great devotion unto Him. The Lord immediately responded by walking four paces of a rod length each (uyāra natai) in the hands of His holy bearers, from the laurel tree in the cloisters of the temple. Addressing the Holy choir, the Lord enquired: “Come, Ye, holy chan ters, tell us whether what we have done is adequate to the pains taken by this northern supplicant of ours.” Here then is the tradition highlighting the truth that, when man ascends to the God’s foot-stool, God descends to the soul of man.

ον κυτατού ιρυμαίνι ιγγα αριμ, ινματού ιγμαίιγα νατου, έν καν ιολοφακα ικ χαραντς, ένναικ ιερηκανα
έν κολ ινταίψ ινατκιγες; έν καρια νάνικκακε! έν κανκακτού
την κοιλα ορου ιναρλαγ, ον ιτιρουπού.

(V—10—7)

Translation

My Lord of sapphire hue, with all radiance You shine
In my heart and yet, outside You aren’t seen,
And ' tis darkness indeed; 'tween such contradictions torn,
I ponder which is true and which is false and dwindle,
Once in a way let me see Your Form tangible

Note

The Āḷvār prays unto the Lord who has blest him with perpetual light inside, the glorious mental vision of the Divine, to make Himself perceptible to the external senses as well, at least once in a way. The Lord does exist for the devout and sheds light on them while He does not exist so far as the sceptical unbelievers are concerned and non-existence of God is but synonymous with darkness or blindness. For the conflicting individuals these contradictions do exist

tiru-uruvi kitanta ārum, koppūle centāmaramēl ticaimukăn karuvul vīṟturuntu paṭaṭittta karumaṅkalum, [niṟṟu nekku, poru il uṇ taṇi nāyakam avai kētkumtōrum, eṉ nefīcam aruvi cōrum kaṇnir, eṉ ceykēn atiyēnē?] (V-10-8)

Translation

Your exquisite form in repose (on the Milk-ocean)
The emergence, from the lotus stalk on your navel, of (Brahmā)
Ticaimukăn,
For the creation of the worlds, pervaded by you as Internal Controller.
All these proclaiming your glory peerless, I hear (the Vedantin:
utter),
My mind mounting down in ecstasy and into torrential tears
Do my eyes break; oh, how can this vassal hold up?

Note

The Āḷvār is simply overwhelmed by the Lord's transcendent glory and, in an unsteady frame of mind charged with great emotion, he is unable to do any sustained thinking clear and cogent.
Translation

Your great glory by the devout recounted, I do hear,
How You (from Bali) sought land of three strides,
The unique valour with which You did cover
The Earth, the ocean deep and the Heaven, in two strides
And my mind, in You absorbed, thaws down; sinner heavy
That I am, when will I on You meditate, calm and steady?

Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, the way You churned the Milky ocean,
In conjunction with Devas and Asuras but gave the nectar
To Devas alone, keeping Asuras away, deep into my Soul enters
This scheming wonder of yours and waters it down;
Say how I can Your glory contemplate without breaking down.

Note

The fickle-minded Asuras gave up their bid for the nectar that came from the Milky ocean, when they beheld Lord Viṣṇu’s Mohini Avatāra of ravishing feminine charm and ran after the strange Visitor. Contemplating this wonderful sequence of events, the Āḻvār thaws down in wonderment and prays that he should be enabled to meditate on Him with that steadiness with which Ādiśeṣa serves Him. Reference to the Lord’s serpent-bed is thus quite significant.
nāku-anaśimcī nam pīrāṇ caraṉē caraṉ namakkû eŋṟu nāṭ
ēkā cintaiyānyk kurukürk caṭākōpaṇ màṟaṇ [torum
ēkā nūṟṟa antāti āyirattul ivaiyum ŷr pattum vallār
mākā vaikuntattu makilvû eytuvar vaikalumē (V-10-11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Catakōpaṇ
Of Kurukūr for his edification, with singular devotion
Unto the Lord on Serpent-bed, whom he looked upon
As his sole refuge, will enjoy bliss eternal in high heaven

Note

Ādiśeṣa, the Lord’s couch cum bed will not allow the Lord to
give up the supplicants and therefore it is that the Āḻvār
seeks to take advantage of this favourable combination.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(V-1). The Āḻvār draws the searchlight inward, to discover the root-cause
of the extraordinary grace showered on him by the Lord, whereby he could
not merely stand apart from the worldlings, without wallowing as one of them
but also advise and correct them Finding, however, that, even for a mere
show of piety, devoid of genuine love for him, the Lord has condescended
to open up the flood-gates of His grace on him, without caring in the least
to go beneath the skin and expose his hollowness, the Āḻvār just marvels, in
the opening decad of this Centum, at the Lord’s overwhelming grace and gives
vent to his wonderment;

(V-2): The Āḻvār having weaned the people from propitiating minor
deities, through his splendid exposition of the supremacy of Mahāvīśnu in
IV-10, this abode has now become a land of bliss, hardly distinguishable from
Heaven. A golden era has thus been ushered in here, attracting ever the
denizens of the upper worlds to this land, to behold and admire this new state
of affairs. It is such an exhilarating milieu that the Alvar hails, in the second
decad, besides envisioning the advent of Tirumāṅkaḷ: Āḻvār and Saint Rāmānuja,
in the days to come, the veritable destroyers of the ungodly forces of
Kaliyuga;
(V-3): Reverting to the ‘Nāyaki’ state, which obtained during the three consecutive decades (6 to 8) of the fourth Centum, the Ālvar is seen, in the third decad, all agog to get united with the Lord or at least procure from Him the tulacī garland and wear it on her locks. Non-fulfilment of her intense longing, however, induces her to contemplate the drastic step of embarking on what is known as ‘Maṭal’ in Tamil literature, that is, coming into the open and carrying her tale of woe to the public at large, so that the cruelly unresponsive Lord could be arraigned at the bar of public opinion and the union with Him got accelerated.

(V-4): In order to put through the proceedings, contemplated in the preceding decad, the Nāyaki has to, first of all, draw a sketch of her lover (the accused), for public exhibition. But it is pitch dark and she cannot draw the picture. It is an unusually long night, dark and dewy. The whole world is fast asleep and the Nāyaki has no company. Against this background, the Nāyaki is seen, in the fourth decad, having recourse to the contemplation of the Lord’s auspicious traits, soothing her aching heart.

(V-5) The fifth decad is sung by the Ālvar, while still in the feminine state. The Sun having risen, at long last, the Nāyaki could enjoy, in her mind’s eye, the glorious vision of the Lord, in His Iconic Form at Tirukkuṟuṅkūṭi (also known as Vaśṇava Vāmana Kṣetra). The elders, who tried to bring the Nāyaki round, by admonishing her, are hit back by her, questioning the propriety of their admonishing one whose heart stands riveted to the exquisite Form of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkūṭi;

(V-6) The gnostic mother finds Parāṇkuśa Nāyaki (Ālvar), seated like a discourses, with the fingers in an instructional pose and declaring that she had created the whole world, that she would become the world herself and so on. Queried by her kinsmen, the bewildered mother says that the Nāyaki is perhaps possessed by the Supreme Lord, who is the Inner Self of all beings. Every song in the sixth decad is in two distinct parts, namely, the narration of the Nāyaki’s God-vision (Man identified with God), followed by the mother’s suggestion that it is perhaps God who has taken possession of the Nāyaki, that speaks through her;

(V-7) The Lord is still keeping Himself away from the Ālvar, although, on previous occasions, He obliged the Ālvar with His presence (mental vision of course), whenever the Ālvar’s longing for such communion was far-too-intense. Pondering within himself, the Ālvar apprehends that the Lord might either want him to adopt other means, such as ‘Karma Yoga’, ‘Jñāna Yoga’, and ‘Bhakti Yoga’ or intend to give him up on the ground that he was pursuing other means, instead of looking upon Him as the Sole Means. In the seventh decad, the Ālvar, therefore, hastens to clarify his true stand in this regard, at the feet of the Lord ensnared in Vāpamāmalai, also known as Cīrvarā−mankalankar, deep south in Tamil Nādu;

(V-8) In the seventh decad, the Ālvar fell, like an uprooted tree, at the feet of the Lord ensnared in Vāpamāmalai and sought refuge and yet, he
was not favoured with the Lord’s presence. The Alvar, therefore, turns his attention, in the eighth decad, to the Lord gracing Tirukkuṭanthai (Kumbakōnām in Tamil Nādu), hoping that He might be intending to grant him audience at that centre. The Āḻvār is contemplating, with all the fervour at his command, the enchanting prospect of the Lord casting sweet glances at him, conversing with him and gathering him up to his bosom in sweet embrace. The Āḻvār has, however, met with disappointment once again and he ends this decad on a despondent note, exclaiming that he just does not know how many more pilgrim centres he has still to knock at in this manner.

(V-9): In the ninth decad, we see a frustrated Āḻvār turning his attention on yet another pilgrim centre, named Tiruvallavāl (in Kerala), his coveted union with the Lord at Tirukkuṭanthai, not having materialised. Even so, he could not get there, being obsessed with the fragrance wafted across from there, the lovely breeze, the musical drone of the bees humming in the orchards over there, the Vedic chantings, etc. Thus stranded, the Āḻvār assumes the state of Nāyaki and apes out her infatuation to her mates.

(Of course, it is all mental experience and no physical movement, as such, is involved.)

(V-10). In the concluding decad of this Centum, the Āḻvār prays unto the Lord to grant him at least the stamina to contemplate His glory and sustains himself, even if He would not oblige him with his company. Having failed to realise his longing for communion with the Lord in His Iconic Form, in successive pilgrim centres, the Alvar turns to the Lord in His Incarnate Form, overlooking the time-lag for the simple reason that the devotees could freely mingle with the Lord, during His Incarnations, converse and embrace, unlike the ‘Arca’ (iconic manifestation), where such exchanges are not possible. Even among the Lord’s many incarnations, the Āḻvār has a partiality for the proximate Kṛṣṇāvatār, the manner in which He was born and the way He grew up, touching the inner core of his being and sending him unto a trance.
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<td>8</td>
<td>(From bottom) <em>For</em> into <em>read as unto.</em></td>
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<td>195</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Insert — before ‘too’.</td>
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<td><em>For in as much read as inasmuch.</em></td>
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<td>(From bottom) <em>For him read as Him.</em></td>
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<td>Delete ‘’ after ‘said,’ and insert ‘’ before ‘oh’.*</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td><em>For Kovindā read as Govindā.</em></td>
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<td><em>For Intirā read as Indrā.</em></td>
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<td>16</td>
<td><em>For wholesome read as unwholesome.</em></td>
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<td>Delete , after ‘had’.*</td>
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<td>(From bottom) <em>For has read as have.</em></td>
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<td><em>For Thence forward read as Thenceforward.</em></td>
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<td>Insert , before ‘first’.*</td>
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<td>Insert , after ‘forms’</td>
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<td><em>For into read as unto.</em></td>
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<td>(From bottom) <em>For th read as the.</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>(From bottom) <em>For traits read as traits.</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Insert ‘’ after ‘one’ and delete ‘‘ before ‘So’.*</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td><em>For He read as he.</em></td>
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<td><em>For then read as than.</em></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Substitute , for , before ‘our’.*</td>
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<td>(From bottom) insert , after ‘hearts’</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Substitute , for full-stop after ‘dead’.*</td>
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<td>Insert , before ‘the’.*</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td><em>For Vācakamālai read as Vācakamālai</em></td>
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<td>282</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Insert , before ‘in’ and ‘those’.*</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><em>For glorifying read as glorifying.</em></td>
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<td>287</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Insert , after ‘Earth’.*</td>
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<td>Insert , after ‘Him’.*</td>
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<td>(From bottom) <em>For promises read as praises.</em></td>
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<td><em>For favourable read as favourably.</em></td>
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<td>20</td>
<td><em>For heavenly read as heavenly.</em></td>
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<td>295</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(From bottom) insert , before ‘carrying’.*</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>(From bottom) <em>For Stains read as Stain.</em></td>
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<td>(From bottom) <em>For fatigues read as fatigue.</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>(From bottom) insert , before ‘out’ and after ‘love’.*</td>
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<td>308</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Insert , after ‘Lord’.*</td>
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<td>Last <em>For of read as by.</em></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Insert , after ‘from’.*</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td><em>For past read as part.</em></td>
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<td>311</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Insert , after ‘Lord’.*</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Insert , after ‘Lord’.*</td>
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<td>Insert , before ‘is’.*</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td><em>For them read as then.</em></td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Insert , before ‘thence’.*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Page 314
10 (From bottom) insert, before 'land' and 'pleasures'.

315
4 Substitute, for; before 'vitu'

316
9 (From bottom) For El read as Ėl.

317
5 (From bottom) insert, after 'young'

319
11 (From bottom) For cove read as covet

321
8 (From bottom) insert, after 'bedecked'.

323
13 (From bottom) insert, before 'through'

326
5 For epaṭutaiya read as epaṭutaiya

330
4 (From bottom) For Ālvər read as Ālvār

338
6 Delete the bracket

344
10 For vipaiyāl read as vipaiyāl

345
4 (From bottom) For facts read as facets

347
4 For lakṣmi read as Lakṣmi

349
3 (From bottom) insert, after 'benefits' and 'Lord'

352
17 (From bottom) insert, before 'in' and after 'manner'.

354
12 For fact read as face

362
Last Insert — at the end

365
12 (From bottom) insert, after 'jute'

368
14 For And read as and

371
10 (From bottom) insert, after 'around'

372
22 Insert full-stop before 'when'

373
Insert between lines 29 and 30

374
9 (From bottom) For stills read as still

375
10 (From bottom) insert, after 'discus'

377
12 (From bottom) For inders read as hinders

381
13 Insert, before 'moving'.

382
11 Insert, after 'waist'

383
6 For wetted read as rivetted

387
9 For Himself read as Himself

391
4 For exist read as exist.

394
7 (From bottom) For stomaches read as stomachs

396
4 Insert, after 'fortress'.

400
11 (From bottom) insert, after 'so'

402
7 (From bottom) For teyvum read as teyvam.
403 5 Insert, after 'Lord'.
6 Insert, after 'worlds'.
407 20 Insert 'the' after 'am'.
408 11 Insert, after 'down'.
409 7 (From bottom) insert 'was' after 'he'.
411 4 For Ājippūrān read as Ātippirān.
412 2 (From bottom)—For indeed read as indeed.
413 9 For away read as sway.
414 15 Insert, after 'aspiration'.
422 5 Insert, before 'that' and 'of'.
426 14 For turnout read as turn out.
429 13 (From bottom) insert, after 'Lord' and before 'have'.
429 13 (From bottom) delete 'by'
436 Last Insert, before 'He'.
437 15 Insert, before 'on'
441 8 For corn read as born
12 Insert, after 'throne'.
19 Insert, after 'is'.
5 (From bottom) For it read as in
443 20 Insert, before 'as'
451 17 For eññapēyō read as eñkapanēyō.
452 7 For Eññapēyō read as Eñkapanēyō.
10 (From bottom) insert, after 'minorities'
454 3 (From bottom) insert, after 'elders'
456 13 Delete 'meet' after 'it' and insert 'meet' after 'be'.
459 Last Insert, before 'in'.
460 18 Substitute 'or' for 'of' after 'fragrance'.
474 1 Insert, after 'Lord'
488 14 Delete, after 'and'.
489 12 (From bottom) For whether read as whether.
490 9 For fathered read as gathered.
12 (From bottom) insert, after 'gems' and 'Tirukkuṭantai'.
492 13 (From bottom) delete 'in'.
493 14 (From bottom) substitute full-stop for , at the end.
495 9 (From bottom) For fall read as full.
8 (From bottom) insert, before 'all' and 'cool'.
497 5 For feel read as feet.
498 3 For own read as Heaven.
499 14 For worshipable read as worshippable.
500 11 (From bottom) For months read as months.
501 9 Delete 'to'