

Antiquity of the *divyakṣetras* in Pāṇḍināḍu

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Abstract

The Ālvārs in their hymns, the *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam*, have listed 108 sacred venues or centers of worship of Viṣṇu in the Indian subcontinent, called *divyadeśa*. The 108 are brought under certain topographical segmentations such as Malaināḍu (Kerala), Pāṇḍināḍu (south of River Kāviri), Cōlanāḍu (Kāviri delta), Vaṭanāḍu (North India) and so on. Among these 108 are found 18 in the Pāṇḍya country. The hymns present a cavalcade of data bearing on these *sthala/kṣetras*, dealing with the Mūrti, *tīrtha*, *vrkṣa*, ecology, landscape, flora and fauna, *pūjās* and *utsavas*, mythologies bearing on Viṣṇu and so on. The impact of the *Vedas* and Sanskritic *purāṇas* such as the *Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* may be found in them. Besides, the Ālvārs have recast the theme to the Tamil taste to suit the local cultural traditions. The present article presents a summary of data bearing on the 18 *divyadeśas*, trying to locate the roots in an ancient poem, called *Paripāṭal*. The date of the Ālvārs is briefly discussed. Among the twelve only seven have extolled the *divyadeśas* in Pāṇḍināḍu. Of the 24 integral wings of the *Nālāyiram* eleven talk of these *sthalas*. The Ālvārs have presented a picture of the *deśas* as they found these around the 6th-9th century CE. Later the temples under

study have developed at the hands of the successive rulers of the land down to the 18th century CE. The photographic evidences we have presented relate to such a later phase while in some cases such as Tirumeyyam the early medieval rock-cut temples and images are to be found. The text is supported by maps and photographic evidences.

Keywords: Pāṇḍinādu, *divyadeśa*, *sthala*, *kṣetra*, Ālvār, *Paripāṭal*, *Nālāyiram*, Māliṛuñcōlai, Kōṭṭiyūr, Meyyam, Pullāṇi, Taṅkāl, Mōkūr, Kūṭal/Maturai, Villiputtūr, Kurukūr, Tolaiyillimaṅkalam, Cīvaramaṅkai, Puḷiṅkuṭi, Pērai, Vaikuntam, Varakuṇamaṅkai, Kuḷantai, Kuṛuṅkuṭi, Kōḷūr, *sayana*, *sthānaka*, *asana*.

The expanded version of the title to the present article may be “Antiquity of the Vaiṣṇava *Divyakṣetras* in Pāṇḍinādu (precisely Pāṇḍināṭu) at the southern-most extremity of the Indian subcontinent.” By immortal tradition, it is believed that the Vaiṣṇava *divyakṣetras* or *divyadeśas* are 108.¹ The Tamil Vaiṣṇava mystics, the Ālvārs, have extolled the praise of all these places in their hymns, called *Nālāyiratīvyapirapantam* (shortly *Nālāyiram*), known as the *Drāviḍa-veda*.² The Ālvārs were twelve in number. They are Poykai, Pūtam, Pēy, Nam (T. Caṭakōpaṅ, Skt. Ṣaṭagopa), Maturakavi (Skt. Madhurakavi), Kulacēkaraṅ (Skt. Kulaśekhara), Tiruppāṅ, Toṅṭaratiṭṭoṭi, Tirumaḷicai, Periya (T. Viṭṭucittaṅ, Skt. Viṣṇusiddha), Āṅṭāl and Maṅkai (Kaliyaṅ, also Ālināṭaṅ), all names suffixed with *ālvār*. Ālvār means one deeply immersed in love with Viṣṇu, T. Māl or Tirumāl (Kalidos1976: 103). The Ālvārs were held in very high esteem by the Tamil Vaiṣṇavas in so far as they were considered to be the Lord Viṣṇu himself or his various *aṅgas*, deified and festivals held in their honor, especially on the day of their natal star. According to a purāṇic concept Nam and Pūtam were the tiara of Viṣṇu, Poykai and Pēy the Lord’s eyes, Periya the face, Tirumaḷicai the neck, Kulacēkaraṅ and Tiruppāṅ the hands, Toṅṭaratiṭṭoṭi the chest,

¹ A later compilation, *Śrītatvanidhi* (6. 335) of Kṛṣṇarāja of Mysore (19th century), lists 112 *kṣetras* that includes Ahobalam, Yathokāri, Śrīmuṣṭṇa (Śrīmuṣṭṇam), Maṅṅarkuṭi, Maḥiṣūsthān (Mysore) and so on (Kalidos 2006: 307, cf. Hardy 1983: 256–61).

² For an alphabetical list of these places, listed by R.K.K. Rajarajan, see Kalidos 2006: 303–308.

Tirumaṅkai the umbilicus and Maturakavi the sacred feet (Devanathan 1971: Annexure p. 85). Nātamūṇi codified their *magnum opus*, collectively called *Nālāyiram*, at about the 10th century AD (Aiyangar 1940: 260, Hardy 1983). This work consists of 24 pieces. They are:

Author	Name of the work
Poykai	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> I
Pūtam	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> II
Pēy	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> III
Nam	1. <i>Tiruvāciriyam</i> 2. <i>Tiruviruttam</i> 3. <i>Periya Tiruvantāti</i> 4. <i>Tiruvāymoḷi</i>
Maturakavi	<i>Kaṇṇinuṇṇiruttāmpu</i>
Kulacēkaraṇ	<i>Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi</i>
Tiruppāṇ	<i>Amalanātipirāṇ</i>
Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi	1. <i>Tirumālai</i> 2. <i>Nāṇmukaṇ Tiruvantāti</i>
Periya	1. <i>Tirumoḷi</i> 2. <i>Tiruppallāṇṭu</i>
Āṇṭāḷ	1. <i>Tirupāvai</i> 2. <i>Nācciyār Tirumoḷi</i>
Tirumaṅkai	1. <i>Periya Tirumoḷi</i> 2. <i>Tirukkuṇṇuntāṇṭakam</i> 3. <i>Tiruneṇṇuntāṇṭakam</i> 4. <i>Tiruveḷukūṇṇirukkai</i> 5. <i>Āṇṭāḷ</i> 6. <i>Periyatirumaṭal</i> (cf. Kalidos 1999a: 223-24n).

The date of the Āḷvārs is not so vexed a question. Kamil V. Zvelebil (1974: 101–104) dates Poykai, Pūtam and Pēy at CE 650–700 and Āṇṭāḷ, including Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, in the 9th century (cf. Hardy 1983). Kalidos dates Poykai to Pēy in the 5th–6th century, Nam to Tirumaḷicai in the 7th–8th century and Periya to Maṅkai in the 8th–9th century. Poykai to Pēy, known as Mutal Āḷvārs “Early Āḷvārs”, are more likely to be dated in the 5th–6th century on a logical sequence of the Tamil *bhakti* literature for which the Vaiṣṇavas and their counterparts, the Śaivas have contributed. Some of the Śaiva mystics, e.g. Kāraikkālammaiṅṇār, are dated in the 5th century CE. An important question to be posed here is: who inaugurated the saga of composition of the *bhakti* literature in Tamil? Whether did the

Vaiṣṇavas or Śaivas? If the Mutal Āḷvārs are to be dated in the later half of the 7th century CE as suggested by Zvelebil, it is understood that the Śaivas began the Tamil *bhakti* earlier since Kāraikkālammaiṅṅār is dated in the 5th–6th century CE (Zvelebil 1974: 91 dates her in CE 500). The rudiments of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* may be found in the *Paripāṭal*, a post-*Caṅkam* work, assigned to the 4th century CE by Zvelebil. Its continuation occurs in the *Āycciyarkuravai* of *Cilappatikāram*, dated in the 5th century CE by Zvelebil (for a comprehensive analysis of these poems see Hardy 1983), which most art historians, including Raju Kalidos accept. The Mutal Āḷvārs took up further work only in the later half of the 7th century if Zvelebil's date is considered. Thereby, there arises a hiatus in Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* during CE 550–650. Logically, in a historical sequence it could not be so. It is a known fact that *bhakti* is the outcome of the Bhāgavata movement in the North that may be fixed in the early centuries of the Christian era (cf. Bhandarkar (1913/1995). It is likely to have percolated to the South and had its impact on composers of the *Paripāṭal* and ḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ, author of *Cilappatikāram*, in the 4th–5th century.³ The Mutal Āḷvārs must have continued the tradition in the later 5th or early 6th century CE so that from the *Paripāṭal* to Mutal Āḷvārs, there is an unbroken Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* activity. The Nāyaṅmār enters the scene around the 5th

³ Brockington (1981/1991) advocates a controversially debatable thesis that the origin of Tamil *bhakti* is in the *Tirukkuraḷ* (Brockington's 1991: 130–31 date 4th century AD), which is a didactic work that could also be a blend of *dharmā-*, *artha-* and *kāma-śāstras*. The author of the work, Vaḷḷuvar, has no pretext to talk about God, excepting in the invocatory part that invites the presence of the Muse, which talks of God in generic terms and mentions no name of a personal God such as Viṣṇu or Śiva. Interpretations may bring Śiva, Viṣṇu or Brahmā into the picture but these are vague. For example, *Malarṁicai ēkiṅṅāṅ* (*Tirukkuraḷ* v. 3) “one who is mounted on a flower”, i.e., Brahmā (cf. Malaravaṅṅ or Malarṁōṅṅ, *Tēvāram* 3.276.9, 1.7.9), *Taṅakkuvamai illātāṅ* (*Tirukkuraḷ* v. 7) “the Lord to whom none is a match” maybe either Śiva or Viṣṇu (cf. Muṅikāṅmūrṭti “Seer seen by the seers”, *Tēvarkulakkoḷuntu* “Sprout of the House of Gods”, *Tēvāram* 7.4.3, 1.50.4), *Aravāḷiantaṅṅ* (*Tirukkuraḷ* v. 8) “the righteous person (*brāhmaṇa*)”, i.e. Brahmā. *Tirukkuraḷ* v. 10 notes God with the generic term *iraivaṅṅ*. The author vaguely notes Brahmā that might suggest he is a *brāhmaṇa*. If one advocates such a fascinating theory, a fanatic Tamil scholar may declare a *jehad* because the author, Vaḷḷuvar (soothsayers' caste), belonged to a *paṅcama* family (Hanumanthan 1996–97: 51). Jain scholars consider *Tirukkuraḷ* a piece of heterodoxical work (Bhaskaran 2001: 33). Again, the intense devotionism that melts the tissues of a devotee as in the *Tēvāram* or *Nālāyiram* (cf. Kalidos 1996: 78–89) is totally missing in the *Kuraḷ*.

century. At this place, it may be noted that there is no exclusive literature on Śiva or Śiva-*bhakti* down to the 5th or early 6th century. The Caṅkam and post-Caṅkam literature has an exhaustive work on Murukan, the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, including *Paripāṭal*, and Devī in the *Vēṭṭuvavari* section of *Cilappatikāram*. Where is the place of Śiva in these works? He is not even considered to be the god of a particular *tiṇai* (e.g. *kuriñci*, cf. Jeyapriya 2004). Śiva's personality is projected only after the time of Kārakkāmmaiyār, particularly in the hymns of the *Tēvāram*-trio (cf. Kalidos 1996: 13–56).

The antiquity of Māliṛuñcōlai could be pushed a few centuries back as it figures prominently in the *Paripāṭal* (vv. 1–4, 13, 15, *Paripāṭal-tiraṭṭu* v. 1). The first verse invokes the Lord in the *nāmāvali* pattern as follows:

Thou are *dharmā*,
 Thou are Blessing,
 Thou are Righteousness,
 Thou are trouble to trouble-mongers,
 Thou are the Sun, Moon and Fire,
 Thou are Śiva and his action, i.e. *saṃhāra*,
 Thou are the *Veda*,
 Thou are Brahmā and his action, i.e. *sr̥ṣṭi*,
 Thou are the *pañcabhūtas* and
 Thou are the Himālayas. (*Paripāṭal* v. 1 II. 37–48)

The Lord's *Viśvarūpa* is visualized in v. 3 II. 1–10, saying his hands are two to ten, 1000, 10,000 or 1,00,000. Māl's archaic name is Mā-ayōy (*Paripāṭal* 2 I. 1). The *Viśvarūpa* visualization is again repeated in vv. 4 II. 70–73, 13 II. 16–22. A clear impact of the *Bhagavatgītā* could be discerned as it is said:

Thou are Cold in Fire,
 Thou are Fragrance in Flowers,
 Thou are a Gem among stones,
 Thou are Truth in words,
 Thou are Love in *dharmā*,
 Thou are the Child of Heroism,
 Thou are the *Veda* of the *Vedas*,
 Thou are the First (i.e., land) among *bhūtas*,
 Thou are the Light of Sūrya (sun),
 Thou are Frigidity in Candra (moon),

Thou are All,
 Thou are the inner Meaning of All.
 (*Paripāṭal* v. 3 II. 63–68, cf. *Bhagavadgītā*, *Adhyāya* 10, vv. 21–38)⁴

Māḷiruñcōlai is called Neṭuñkuṅṅam, Iruñkuṅṅam and Māḷiruñkuṅṅam (*Paripāṭal* 15. II. 4, 14, 17, 23). Interestingly, Vēnkaṭam fails to appear. On the other hand, two other *kṣetras*, Iruntaiyūr and Kuḷantai are notified in *Paripāṭal-tiraṭṭu* v. 1. II. 5, 63). Even if Vēnkaṭam fails to appear in a Pāṇḍya country literature as is the *Paripāṭal*, it appears in earlier Caṅkam works, e.g. the *Akaṇānūru* (e.g. vv. 27, 61) and *Puṛaṇānūru* (v. 391). Therefore, its antiquity could be taken back to the early centuries of the Christian era, one or two earlier in the BCEs. Therefore, Vēnkaṭam happens to be the earliest Vaiṣṇava *divyakṣetra*, predating Araṅkam and Māḷiruñcōlai. It may note that even if traditional scholars bring Vēnkaṭam under North India and that it today falls in Andhra Pradesh, in those time of *Paripāṭal* it was within the decent limits of Tamiḷkūṛumnallulakam “the good land where pristine Tamil is spoken” (Kalidos 1999: 146), i.e. Tamilnadu. Kuḷantai is the same as it happens to be one among the 18 in the Pāṇḍya country. Even if it occurs only in the hymns of Nammālvār, its antiquity could be sent to the 4th century AD. Iruntaiyūr’s identification is a problem. It appears in an earlier Caṅkam literature, the *Kuruntokai* v. 335, assigned to c. 200 BCE to CE 200. Some consider it Māḷiruñcōlai because the Lord is *irunta* “seated” (and so Iruntaiyūr) in this *kṣetra*. It could not be taken for granted because Viṣṇu is seated in four places of the Pāṇḍyan sphere.

Āṇṭāl in her work has a reference to the rise of Venus (*Śukra*, T. *Velli*) and fall of Jupiter (*Brhaspati* or *Guru*, T. *Viyāḷaṅ*); *velliyeḷuntu viyaḷamuṛaṅkirru*, *Tiruppāvai* v. 13. Astronomical calculation says, it falls in CE 731 (cited in Kalidos 1976: 104). Therefore, Āṇṭāl may be dated in the 8th century. Periyālvār being her foster-father belongs to the same century. Periyālvār in his hymns notes the Pāṇḍyan Emperor, Neṭumāraṅ (PTM 4.2.7), identified with Jaṭila Parāntaka Neṭuñcaṭaiyaṅ *alias* Varaguṇa I, dated in CE 765–815 (Sastri 1929/1972) or 765–783 (Pandarathar 1974). The scheme adopted by Pandarathar would keep Periyālvār within the limits of the 8th

⁴ The original is worth quoting: *Pūviṇuḷ teral nī pūviṇuḷ nāṛra nī / Kalliṇuḷ maṇiyu nī collīṇuḷ vāymai nī / Aṛattiṇuḷ aṅṅu nī maṛattiṇuḷ maintu nī / Vēṭattu maṛai nī pūtattu mutalu nī / Veñcuṭar oḷiyu nī tiṅkaḷuḷ aḷiyu nī / Aṇaittu nī aṇaittiṇuḷ poruḷu nī.*

century. Periyālvār was ripe old who out-lived Āṇṭāl. She passed on to the Vaikuṅṭha (the Vaiṣṇava heaven) willingly at a young age. Her foster-father would not have survived long after the demise of his beloved daughter. Maṅkai received the favours of the Pallava Emperor Nandivarman II (CE 731–96). Maṅkai must have been young at the time of his association with the Pallava Emperor and lived down to the early 9th century CE. In any case, all the 12 Ālvārs could conveniently be placed within the time scale of later 5th or early 6th to early 9th century CE. Their literary dramatics lasted for nearly 300 years.



Map 0.1: Vaiṣṇava *divyakṣetras*: Around Maturai.

Regarding the key-theme of investigation, it may state at the outset that Pāṇḍināḍu is the land that falls to the south of the River Kāviri (see map 1). The Koṅku (western Tamilnadu) and Putukkōṭṭai (northeast along with coast of the Bay) altered their allegiance to either the Pāṇḍyas or Pallavas, depending on the fortunes of these powers in the concerned zones. Most of the *divyakṣetras* in Pāṇḍināḍu, 18 in total, fall to the south of Māliṛuñcōlai (now called Aḷakarkōyil in suburban Maturai). Meyyam is midway between Putukkōṭṭai and (Tirup)Pattūr (cluster of ten villages? or Puttūr hamlet

of anthills?) on the Maturai highway. The other centers are Kōṭṭiyūr (Skt. Koṣṭiyūr), (Tirup)Pullāṇi (splinter like nail?), (Tirut)Taṅkāl, (Tiru)Mōkūr, Kūṭal (Maturai), Villiputtūr, Kuṟukūr, Tolaivillimaṅkalam (now called Tollaivillimaṅkalam),⁵ Cīvaramaṅkai, Teṅtiruppēreyil, Vaikuntam (Skt. Śrīvaikuṅṭham), (Tirup)Puḷiṅkuṭi, Varakuṅamaṅkai, (Tiruk)Kuḷantai, (Tiruk)Kuṟuṅkuṭi and (Tiruk)Kōḷūr. Kūṭal, Mōkūr and Māḷiruṅcōlai are within the limits of Greater Maturai. Kōṭṭiyūr and Tiruppullāṇi are to the east, centering on Rāmanātapuram. Taṅkāl and Villiputtūr are on the way from Maturai to (Tiru)Nelvēli. All other places hover around Nelvēli. The popularization of the *kṣētras* around Nelvēli was mainly due to the inspiration of Nammālvār who had his base at Kuṟukūr (now Ālvārtirunakari), his place of birth.

At this place, it is pertinent to note that the 108 *divyakṣētras* are scattered over the topographical segments of Tamilnadu, Āndhradeśa, North India and the Heavens. Within Tamilnadu and outside the distribution pattern is:

Pāṇḍināḍu	18
Cōḷanāḍu	40 (e.g. Tañcāvūr)
Malaināḍu (Kerala)	13 (e.g. Anantapuram)
Toṅṭaināḍu	25 (e.g. Kāñcīpuram, including Vēnkaṭam)
Vaṭanāḍu (including Āndhradeśa)	9 (e.g. Dvārakā, Mathurā)
Mythical	3 (e.g. Pārkaṭal, Skt. <i>Kṣīrābdhi</i>)

The above statistics would prove the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* was intensive in the Cōḷanāḍu and Toṅṭaināḍu regions, Pāṇḍināḍu coming third in the order of numerical priority of the *kṣētras*. Of all the *kṣētras* in the Cōḷanāḍu region, three are early. They are Araṅkam, Kuṭantai (Kumbhakoṅam) and Viṅṅakaram (Oppiliyappaṅkōyil). Ten are early in the Toṅṭaināḍu region. They are Kōvalūr, Kacci (Kāñcīpuram), Vēlukkai (Kāñci), Pāṭakam (Kāñci), Veḥka, Nīrmalai, Kaṭaṅmallai, Allikkēṇi and Kaṭikai (Cōḷiṅkar). Three figure in the early list of North India and the mythical list. They are Vēnkaṭam (strictly speaking falls within the bounds of ancient Tamiḷakam, *supra*),

⁵ This is the traditional sequence of the places. It could better be Meyyam, Pullāṇi, Kōṭṭiyūr, Mōkūr, Māḷiruṅcōlai, Kūṭal, Villiputtūr, Taṅkāl, Kuḷantai, Puḷiṅkuṭi, Varakuṅamaṅkai, Vaikuntam, Tolaivillimaṅkalam, Kuṟukūr, Tiruppērai, Kōḷūr, Cīvaramaṅkai and Kuṟuṅkuṭi.

Pārkaṭal and Paramapatam (Vaikuṅṭha). Out of the 108, 22 are early *kṣetras*, extolled by the Mutal Ālvārs. Excluding two of the mythical list, taking Vēnkaṭam into account 20 places are historically important as centers of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* that could be dated to the later 5th and early 6th century AD. Among these Māliṛuñcōlai, Araṅkam and Vēnkaṭam are very important as graphic descriptions of the *kṣetras* appear in the *Cilappatikāram* (5th century AD).

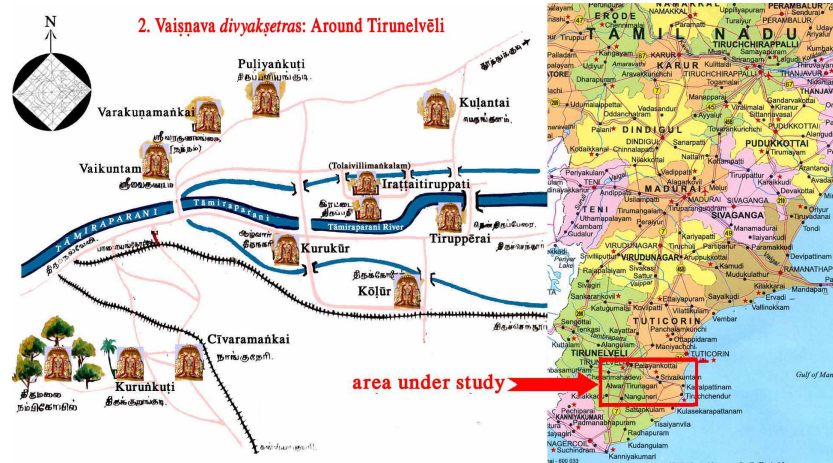
Of the twelve Ālvārs, seven have extolled the *kṣetras* in the Pāṇḍināḍu region. Those who have missed the *kṣetras* are Pūtam, Maturakavi, Kulacēkaraṅ, Tiruppāṇ and Toṅṭaraṭippoṭi. Of the 24 integral wings/poems of the *Nālāyiram*, 13 do not note the *kṣetras* in Pāṇḍināḍu. They are *Tiruvantāti* III, *Kaṅṅinūñciruttāmpu*, *Perumāḷ Tirumoli*, *Amalanātipirāṅ*, *Tirumālai*, *Tiruvācīriyam*, *Tiruviruttam*, *Periya Tiruvantāti*, *Tiruppāvai(?)* and *Tiruveḷukūṛṛirukkai*. It is interesting to note that Periyālvār is supposed to have composed the *Tiruppaḷḷielucci* (Sacred Arousal [of the Lord from Slumber]) in the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple at Maturai but there is no literary or epigraphical support for this notion. The concerned text also fails to say anything about it, excepting a vague clue to Maturai. Again, Periyālvār and Āṅṭāl are supposed to be residents of Villiputtūr, Periyālvār being its high-priest. Among the few hundreds of hymns composed by both these mystics, two have a bearing on the *kṣetra* (*infra*) at Villiputtūr.

The *kṣetra* in the Pāṇḍināḍu zone that could be dated to the 7th century is Kuṛuñkuṭi. Mōkūr, Villiputtūr, Kurukūr, Tolavillimaṅkalam, Teṅṅtiruppērai, Vaikuntam, Puḷiñkuṭi, Varakuṅamaṅkai, Kuḷantai and Kōḷur could be dated in the 8th century. Meyyam, Pullāṅi and Kūṭal appear in the hymns of Maṅkai that could be dated in the 8th–9th century. It may note that Meyyam and Taṅkāl are centers of early medieval rock-cut temples. The rock-cut cave for Śeṣaśāyī-Viṣṇu at Meyyam has been assigned to a much early date, may be the 6th century CE on art historical considerations (Rajajaran 2006: 59–61, Latha 2005: 29–32). Fact must have been that Meyyam did not receive popular appreciation until the time of Maṅkai who was the first to versify the place and thereby added value to its cult. The structural additions to the original cave temple could be dated since the early Pāṇḍya period in the later half of the 9th century, particularly during the later Pāṇḍys down to the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period as attested by the epigraphical sources (*vide*, Rajajaran 2006,

Latha 2005) and literary clues. Therefore, the temple that received the attention of Maṅkai was the original rock-cut cave, including few structural additions. Taṅkāl figures in the hymns of Pūtam and Maṅkai. That is to say, the cave temple on the site must have been existing by about the early 6th century. Of late scholars (Rajarajan 1991, 2006; Latha 2005), question the theory that Maṅtakappaṭṭu was the earliest cave temple in Tamilnadu. Basing on the Piḷḷaiyārpaṭṭi inscription in the rock-cut cave therein, dated at the end of the 5th century CE (cf. Mani 1990: 37–38), it is argued the cave temple tradition in the Pāṇḍināḍu region begins somewhere at the end of the 5th century CE, following the Guptas at Udayagiri in Central India. Therefore, even if Meyyam appears in a later literary work, its earlier origin could not be disputed.

Māliṟuñcōlai appears in the hymns of Pūtam, Nam, Periya, Āṅṅāl and Maṅkai. The *mūlabera* in the temple is *sthānaka*. The *vimāna* is of special importance because from the base, *upapīṭha*, to the *grīva* the geometrical shape is circular. Kōṭṭiyūr appears in the hymns of Pūtam, Pēy, Maḷicai, Periya and Maṅkai. The *mūlabera* is in *bhujāṅgasayana* mode. Meyyam (*supra*) and Pullāṇi appear in the hymns of Maṅkai. The *mūlabera* at Meyyam is *sthānaka* as it appears in the later structural temple. The original dedication was to *sayanamūrti* (Kalidos 2006: Pl. III).⁶ The *mūlabera* at Pullāṇi is in *āsana* mode. The later structural temple at Taṅkāl houses a *sthānaka* image while the original dedication was to *sayanamūrti* in the small cave temple therein (Kalidos 2006: Pl. 5.2). The Mōkūr temple houses a *sthānaka* image but its original dedication was to *sayanamūrti* that appears in a subsidiary chapel. The ground floor of the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple houses a *āsana*-Mūrti. The *vimāna* here is *aṣṭāṅga* and houses all-three forms, the *sthānaka* and *sayana* appearing the upper storeys. Villiputtūr appears in the hymns of Periyālvār and Āṅṅāl. The *mūlabera* is believed to be *vaṭapatrasayana*, the Lord who reclines on the leaf of *vaṭa* (T. āl, *Ficus bengalensis*). The temples at Kurukūr, Tolaiyillimaṅkalam, Cīvaramaṅkai, Teṅṅiruppēreyil, Vaikuntam, Puḷiṅkuṭi, Varakuṅamaṅkai, Kuḷantai and Kōlūr appear in the hymns of Nam (see map 2).

⁶ We will take up this problem for discussion later. The question is why the original dedication should alter in a later age. We want to take the literary clues in the *Nālāyiram* and the type of Mūrtis that appear today.



Map 0.2: Vaiṣṇava *divyakṣetras*: Around Tirunelveli.

The following house *sthānaka-mūlaberas*: Kurukūr, Tolaivillimaṅkalam, Vaikuntam and Kuḷantai. The following house *āsana* images: Cīvaramaṅkai, Tiruppērai or Teṅtiruppēreyil and Varakuṇamaṅkai. The following house *sayana* images: Puḷiṅkuṭi and Kōḷūr. The Kurukūr temple is extolled in the hymns of Maḷicai, Nam, Periya and Maṅkai. The *mūlabera* is *sthānaka*. The total of *sayana-mūlaberas* is four. The total of *āsana-mūlaberas* is five. The present study finds the total of *sthānaka-mūlaberas* is nine. *Sthānaka* dominates the scene in the Pāṇḍināḍu zone, followed by *āsana* and *sayana*. All the *mūlaberas* are anthropomorphic. Zoomorphic or theriomorphic forms do not occur. The Āṇaimalai cave temple, close to Mōkūr houses Nṛsimha in its *garbhagrha*.⁷ This place is not counted under the *divyadeśas*. The Ādivarāha-Viṣṇu-*grha* in Māmallapuram houses Varāhamūrti. The Kōvalūr temple houses Trivikrama. Such occurrences do not find shelter in the Pāṇḍyan zone. In the pan-Indian context, out of the 108 *divyakṣetras* 27 are *āsana*, 60 *sthānaka* and 27 *sayana*. *Sthānaka-mūlaberas* come first, followed by *sayana* and *āsana* (Ragunath 2005: Chap. I).

It may be pertinent now to examine what the Āḷvārs have to say on each of the individual *kṣetras* in Pāṇḍināḍu.

⁷ Such images appear in the *garbhagrha* of the cave temples at Nāmakkal and Cīnkaperumāḷkōyil.

Māliṛuñcōlai

The name Māliṛuñcōlai appears redundantly (T II 48, MOLI 2.10.1, 3, 5–10, ANT 4.1, 9.4,5, MPT 1.8.5, 2.7.7). Other forms of the name are Tirumāliṛuñcōlai (MOLI 10.7 all hymns), Teṅṅirumāliṛuñcōlai (PTM 4.2.1, 2, 4.2.7,8), Māyirūñcōlai (PTML 1. 249), Iruñcōlai (MPT 1.8.5), Malai (PTM 1.5.8), Poṅmalai “Golden Hill” (PTM 4.2.3) and Tirumalai “Sacred Hill” (MOLI 2.4.10). The temple of the Lord is called Aḷakartanḱōyil “Temple of the Handsome Lord” (MOLI 2.10.2). This phrase gives clue to the present name of the place that is called Aḷakarkōyil. The temple was big, *Perunḱōyil* (MOLI 2.10.9). The Lord is supposed to be seated, *vīṛṛirunta* (PTM 4.2.10) or standing, *ninṛāy* (PTM 5.3.1, ANT 9.4,5, MPT 9.9.3, 4–7). It is the place where the Lord is pleased to slumber, *paḷḷikolluṁṭam* (ANT 4.1). The present *mūlabera* is *sthānaka* and east facing (see fig. 1).



Figure 1: Gold-cast *vimana* of Māliṛuñcōlai (recent work).

Periyālvār’s three eloquent hymns on the *kṣetra* are worth quoting:

... *Aḷakaṇalañkāraṅmalai*
Kulamalai kolamalai kulirmāmalai koṛṛamalai
Nilamalai nīṅṅamalai Tirumāliṛuñcōlaiyatē (PTM 4.3.5)

“... It is the hill of the decorated handsome (Lord),
The clan-hill, bedecked-hill, the great frigid-hill, Sovereign-hill,
Hill on earth, long-hill, this is the grove where Tirumāl resides.”

Āyirantōḷ parappi muṭiyāyiramiṇṇilaka
Āyirampaintalaiya aṇantacayaṇaṇāḷummalai
Āyiramārukaluṇ cuṇaikaḷ palavāyiramum
Āyiram pūmpoḷilumuṭai Māḷiruṇcōlaiyatē (PTM 4.3.10).

“His 1000-shoulders spread out, his 1000 tiaras shine and shine,
He is ruler of the hill who (reclines) on the 1000-headed Ananta,
There are 1000s of rivers, several 1000s of ponds,
And 1000 flowering lakes, this is Māḷiruṇcōlai.”

Māḷiruṇcōlaiēṇṇum malaiyuṭaiyamalaiyai
Nāḷirumūrtitaṇṇai nālvētakkaṭalamutai
Mēḷirunḷkaṇṇakattai vēṭāntaviḷupporuḷiṇ
Mēḷiruntaviḷakkai viṭṭucittaṇ virittaṇavē (PTM 4.3.11)

“He is himself the hill who takes possession of the Hill upon which
Māl resides,
He is himself the Aṣṭamūrti, He is the ambrosia of the Ocean of
Four *Vedas*,
He is up above, the all-giving *Kalpaka* tree; He is the meaning
of *Vedānta*,
He is the Lamp atop that Viṣṇusiddha⁸ explains.”⁹

All resorts of Viṣṇu are the abodes of nature’s blessing with lush green groves. Pūtam initiates the nature-loving saga with the saying that at Māḷiruṇcōlai *mūṅkil* (bamboo, *Bambusa arundinacea*) trees shoots up above the skies (T II 48). It abounds in good many numbers of lakes (MOLI 2.10. 1, 3, 5-10). In view of the presence of the huge quantity of water, it is the Tiruppārkaṭal “Sacred Milk Ocean”:

Tirumāḷiruṇcōlaimalaiyē tiruppārkaṭal (MOLI 10.7.7)
“The Sacred Ocean of Milk is the Hill where Tirumāl abides.”

⁸ This is the Sanskrit name of Periyālvār in its Tamil form.

⁹ The importance of Viṣṇu as Aṣṭamūrti has been elaborated (Rajajaran 2004: 86–91) in an article with special reference to this hymn.

It is really a fascinating poetic visualization because at Arāṅkam the venue falls in between two ocean-like rivers, the Kāviri and Koḷḷiṭam, the blessing of nature's wonder. The same hymn adds, Tiruvēṅkaṭam is the veritable Vaikuṅṭha:

Tirumāl vaikuntamē taṅtīrūvēṅkaṭam.

It is because Vēṅkaṭam lies on the top of seven hills, *saptagiri*, comparable to the mythical Meru. The lakes are full of flowers since the lotus plants fill the venue (*cuṅaiyil centāmarai* ANT 9.5). The flowers generate a rhythm of scented smell (*naṟumalar* ANT 9.4). The pleasant breeze moves gently, arousing a sweet aroma (*teṅṅal maṇam kamaḷum* ANT 9.7). The rich flora and fauna add a classical charm to the venue. Birds such as cuckoo, peacock (*kuyil mayil* ANT 9.4), cluster of bees (*vaṅṅiṅam* ANT 9.5) and a *gaṇa* of black birds (*kariya kuruvikkaṇaṅkaḷ* ANT 9.8) make their presence felt. They sing the praise of the arrival of Māl (*Māliṅ varavu colli pāṭu* ANT 9.8).

The presence of perennial water is due to not only the poor monsoon but also a river that cuts across the hills. It takes its origin on top of the hill in an artesian well and flows downward. Even today, the flow of water does not stop during the acute summer. The river is called *nūpura* (anklet)-Gaṅgā, Cilampāru in Tamil “Anklet River” (PTM 4.2.1, 4.3.9, ANT 9,10, MPT 4.9.9). The river does not flow with water but honey (*tēṅṅāru pāyūm* PTM 4.2.4).

The Lord is invoked with eloquent *nāmāvalis*. He is Aḷakar “the Handsome” (MOLI 2.10.2), Skt. *sundara* or *saundara* “lovely [or] lively.”¹⁰ The other epithets are Māyavaṅ “Illusionist” (MOLI 2.10.8), Tirumāl (MOLI 3.1.1), Ṇāṅavēṅṅiyan “Wisdom-expert in the Scriptures” (MOLI 3.1.11), Paraṅcōti “Eternal Light” (MOLI 3.1.2–3), Kōvintaṅ/Govinda (MOLI 3.1.3), Kaḷvaṅ-Māyaṅ “Burglar-Illusionist” (MOLI 10.7.1), Teṅṅaṅ “Southerner” (MOLI 10.7.3),¹¹ Ūḷimutaḷvaṅ “the First-born Primordial” (MOLI 10.7.9), Ēḷicaiyiṅcuvai “Melody of the Seven Music” (MOLI 10.8.2), Cōlaimalai-aracu “King of Hill of Groves” (PTM 1.5.8), Maṅivaṅṅaṅ “Gem-coloured” (PTM 4.3.2) or Māmaṅivaṅṅaṅ (MPT 9.8.10), Kaṭalvaṅṅaṅ “Sea-coloured (blue)” (PTM 4.3.3), Nampi (ANT 9.3),

¹⁰ Today the Lord is called Saundararāja “King of Loveliness”.

¹¹ It is a favourite epithet of the Pāṇḍya.

Cuntaraṅ (Skt. Sundara [*supra*], ANT 9.10), Māyaṅ (Skt. Māyā or T. Māyī;¹² MPT 2.7.7, 7.9.7, PTML 1. 249), Karumāṅikkamāmalai “Great Hill of a Black-gem” (MPT 9.9.3), Mūvarilmuṅmutalvaṅ “First and foremost among the Three (the Trimūrtis)” (MPT 9.9.1), Kōvalarkōvintaṅ (Skt. Gopāla-Govinda MPT 9.9.1), Mutalmūrṭti “Lord First” (MPT 9.9.2), Vāṅavarkōṅ “King of the Celestials” (MPT 9.9.5), Aṅṭarkō “King of those in the Cosmos” (MPT 9.9.3–7), Kēcavanampi (Skt. Keśavanambi (MPT 9.9.6) and so on.

Several mythological events are associated with the Lord. To note briefly at random:

He lifted the big hill, *perumalaiēttāṅ*, Govardhandhāri (MOLI 2.10.4);

He eats the butter from the pots, *urīyamar veṅṅai uṅṅavaṅ* (MOLI 2.10.6);

He mounted the bird, *Garuḍa*, *puḷḷūrntu* (MOLI 3.1.9);

He ordains all the worlds, punishes, eats and vomits *ulakellām paṭaiṭṭantūṅṅumīṅṅāy* (MOLI 3.1.10);

Śiva¹³ and Brahmā¹⁴ attend on him (MOLI 3.1.10, 10.7.7, PTM 5.3.6);

He took into service a monkey (Sugrīva) and did away with the life another monkey (Vāli), *oruvāraṅam paṅikoṅṅu oruvāraṅam uyirunṅāṅ* (PTM 4.2.5);

He recovered Rukmiṅī (and married her), *Uruppiṅī nāṅkai mūṅṅāṅ* (PTM 4.3.1);

He did away with Kaṅcaṅ (Kamsa), Kāḷiyaṅ (Kāḷiyamardana), *kaḷiru* (the elephant, Kuvalayapīḍa), *marutu* (toppling the trees, Yamalārjunabhaṅga) and *erutu* (the bull, Dhenukāsura-*vadham*) (PTM 4.3.2);

Lord of Dvārakā, *Tuvarāpatiempurumāṅ* (ANT 9.8);

¹² These three are very popular personal names among the *Pirāmalai-kalḷar* people who live in the region around Maturai. The *Kalḷar* in the Taṅcāvūr region hold Tirumaṅkai-āḷvār in high esteem and observe a fast (by not taking non-vegetarian food) in the Tamil month of *Puraṅṅāci* (September-October), holy to Viṣṇu, especially Vēṅkaṅṅeśvara as his *brahmotsava* takes place in this month at Tirupati-Tirumala, the cherished Vēṅkaṅṅam.

¹³ Śiva is called *Piraiyērucaṅaiyaṅ* “He with matted locks of hair that bears the crescent” (MOLI 3.1.10), *Mukkāṅṅaṅ* “three-eyed” (MOLI 10.7.7) and *Erutukkoṅṅiyāṅ* “holder of the banner of bull” (PTM 5.3.6).

¹⁴ Brahmā is called *Nāṅmukaṅ* “the four-faced” (MOLI 3.1.10) and *Piramaṅ* (MOLI 10.7.7, PTM 5.3.6).

The Dwarf who elongated as Trivikrama, *Kuṛalāyimirnta tirivikkiramaṇ*, (MTM 9.9.5);
Born in north Madhurā, *Vaṭamaturaippirantāṇ* (MTM 9.9.6); Dancing bird, *āṭarparavai* (*infra*, cf. Kalidos 1999a: 229) (MPT 9.9.10) and so on.

Another important dimension of the mythical accounts is that the Lord is supposed to have presented the *kuṭakkūttu* “pot-dance” and the dancer is called Kūttan (cf. Kalidos 1999a), *Kuṭaṅkalantāṭik kuravai muṅkōtta kūttavemmaṭikaḷ* “Dignified Dancer” (Naṭeśvara? MPT 9.8.6), cf. *āṭarparvai* (*supra*).

The rituals, services, *nityapūjās* and *utsavas* that took place on the venue are described graphically:

Damsels present their dance recitals, *teyvamakaḷirāṭum* (PTM 4.2.1);
The *kuṛatti* damsels (hill-folk, gypsies) cultivate the dance, *kuṛamātar naṭampayil* (PTM 4.3.4);
The *āyar* sing and dance his praise (PTM 3.4.5) that recalls the *Āycciyarkuravai* of *Cilappatikāram*;
The festivities were instituted by the cowherds, *āyarkūṭi amaittavilā* (PTM 4.2.4);
Neṭumāraṇ, the King of Kūṭal, celebrates the Lord, *Neṭumāraṇ tenkūṭarkōṇ teṇṇaṇ koṇṭāṭum* (PTM 4.2.7);
The six-legged bees recite the 1000 names and sing the Lord’s glory early in the morning, *aṛukālavaṇṭiṇaṅkaḷ āyiranāmaṅcolli ciṛukālaip pāṭum* (PTM 4.2.8);
The *bhūtas* (mass) offer red-blood and conduct the evening *bali*,¹⁵ *ceṅkurutikoṇṭu pūtaṅkaḷ antippalikoṇṭuttu* (PTM 4.2.9);
The food offering included 1000 pots of butter and 1000 pots of a sweet dish called *akkāraṇaṭicil*¹⁶ (ANT 9.6).

From the above account, it is quite clear the cult orientation of the Māliṛuṅcōlai temple gets back to the 4th century AD and today it continues to be a living tradition. There could have been some setback during the days of Islamic depredation in the 14th century and after as

¹⁵ The author (Rajarajan 2006: 15) has noted the non-vegetarian food served in the Maṅṅārkuṭi temple, a *divyakṣetra* in Cōḷanāḍu. In addition to chicken, several varieties of cooked birds and fishes were offered.

¹⁶ It is delicious sweet rice, now available in a hotel on the south gate of the temple at Śīraṅgam.

some destroyed *maṇḍapas* are found within the present temple complex and the fact that the present temple in its entirety was the outcome of the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period (Rajarajan 1995) and no trace of pre-Vijayanagara architecture is present, excepting the literary clues.

Kōṭṭiyūr

Since the *kṣetra* figures in the hymns of Pūtam and Pēy, it is clear the antiquity of the temple gets back to the later 5th or early 6th century AD. Others to extol the place are Maḷicai, Periya and Maṅkai. The place is called Tirukkōṭṭi (T II 46, 87, PTM 4.4.5), Kōṭṭiyūr (NTV 34, PTM 1.1.1, 2.6.2, MPT 10.1.9, PTML 1. 250) and Tirukkōṭṭiyūr (PTM 1.1.10, 4.4.1, 4.4.1, 3-4, MPT 7.1.3). The Lord is called Kōṭṭiyar (PAL 11) and Kōṭṭiyūrāṇ (MPT 9.10 all hymns), He of Kōṭṭi. He is Maṇivaṇṇaṇ (PTM 4.4.2), Tirumālavaṇ (PTM 4.4.3), Naraciṅkaṇ/Nṛsiṃha (PTM 4.4.6, 9), Kōvintaṇ/Govinda (PTM 4.4.8), Kēcavaṇ/Keśava, Puruṣottamaṇ/ Puruṣottama, Kuṛaḷ “Dwarf” (PTM 4.4.10), Iruṭikēcaṇ/Hṛškeśa (PTM 4.4.11), Neṭiyāṇ “the Tall” (MPT 9.10.5) and so on. He is viewed as a dancer, *kuraikaḷar*-Kūttāṇ who wears the anklets (PTM 10.1.9). Nothing regarding stance of the Lord is said. It is simply added that the Lord resides, *uraikiṇra* (PTM 4.4.8). It may note that the *vimāna* is *aṣṭāṅga* today, housing the *āsana*, *sthānaka* and *sayana* images in its three vertical tiers. The temple is east facing. The *utsavabera* is *sthānaka* (see fig. 2).

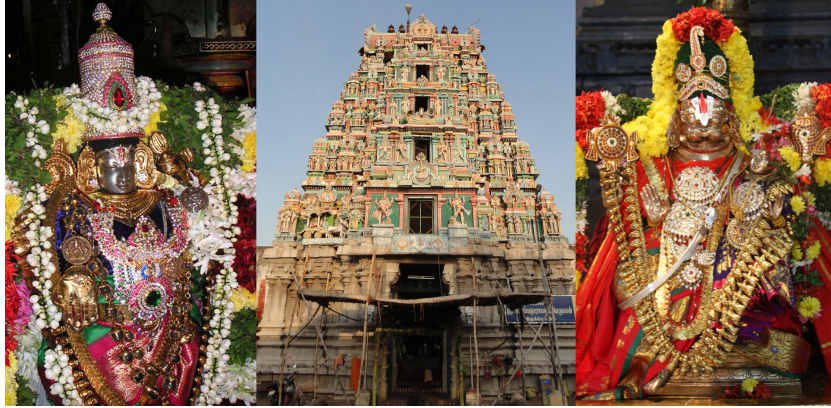


Figure 2: Kōṭṭiyūr, *utsavaberas*.

The *kṣetra* was surrounded by groves, *aṇitikaḷum cōlai* (T II 46). Again, it was full of fertile paddy fields (PTM 1.1.10). Red lotuses abounded in the fields, *ceṅkamalavayal* (PTM 4.4.4). The city all the time felt the nice smell of jasmine and other scented flowers, *mullai (Jasminum auriculatum) mallikai maṇakkum* (PTM 9.10.7). It was full of tanks, *nīrttirukkōṭṭi* (PTM 4.4.5). It is an *araṅkam* “stage (for dance)” where the Lord cultivates dance, *payiṇṇratarāṅkam* (T II 46). The city was filled with palatial building, *māṭaṅkaḷcūl* (PTM 1.1.1). Though in the plains, the mystic finds it a sea or hill, *kaṭalē malaiyē tirukōṭṭiyūrē* (MTM 7.1.3).

Few of the purāṇic episodes are associated with Lord. It was he whose foot measured the worlds, *aḷantatiruvaṭi* (T II 87). He is the Lord who moves everywhere by leaps, plays and dances: *eṅkuntirintu viḷaiyāṭum* (PTM 2.6.2). He is the one who gulped the seven worlds, *yēlulakuṇṭa* (PTM 4.4.2). He willingly offered half his body to Śiva and thus became Harihara, *Īcaṅkicaintu uṭampilōr kūrutāṅ koṭuttāṅ* (MPT 9.10.4). He is pleasing to Śrīdevī, *Tirumāmakaṭkiṇiyāṅ* (MPT 9.10.2). He was the dancer who plucked the tusk of an elephant, Kuvalayapīḍa. While enacting such a heroic feat, the Lord performs a dance, *kuraikaḷarkūttāṅ* (MPT 10.1.9). He lifted the mountain and protected the world from the rains, *māmalai niṇṇru kāttukantāṅ* (MPT 9.10.7). His tiara was high, *nīṇmuṭi* (MPT 9.10.5).

The cult orientation is specified. It is a known fact that the *kṣetra* in a later date was linked with Rāmānujācārya who is said to have gone to top of the temple and uttered the *aṣṭākṣara*, the eight-syllabled *mantra*, so that every one, including the *pañcama*, could utter it.¹⁷ It was a *brahmadeya* with large settlement of *brāhmaṇas*. Periyālvār, himself a *brāhmaṇa*, avers the place was full of those who study the *Vedas* for making a livelihood, *vētampayinṇuvāl* (PTM 4.4.1). The experts in the four *Vedas* extol the praise of the Lord day and night and live here, *nāṇmaṇṇaiyōrirāppakal ētti vāl Tirukkōṭṭiyūr* (PTM 4.4.7). Those wearing the *purinūl/yajñopavita* sing the Tamil and dance the *kuṭam*. This may confirm the fact that intra-sectarian tug-of-war such as *vaṭakalai-tenṅkalai* did not peep into the picture

¹⁷ It was part of the *vaṭakalai-tenṅkalai* rivalry. According to the orthodox *vaṭakalais* (Northern Order) the *brāhmaṇas* alone were entitled to mutter the sacred *aṣṭākṣara* (Om Na Mo Nā Rā Ya Nā Ya) who depend on the Sanskritic *Vedas* and *purāṇas*. The *tenṅkalais* (Southern Order) held any lover of Viṣṇu could utter the sacred mantra who depend on the Tamil *Veda*, the *Nālāyiram*.

that time since they gave equal importance to Tamil and Sanskrit. The experts in *Vedas* perform the five kinds of *vēḷvi/yajña*, *nāṇmaraiṁvānar...aivakaivēḷvi* (MPT 9.10.9).

Pullāṇi

Maṅkai has two *patikams* on the *kṣetra* (MPT 9. 3, 4). The place name is Pullāṇi (MPT 9.3–4 *passim*). The Lord is called Pullāṇittēṇṇaṇ “Southerner at Pullāṇi” (PTML. II. 261-62) and Māyaṇ-maṇivaṇṇaṇ (MPT 9.3.6). Nothing is told of the Lord’s stance. Today the *mūlabera* is seated and east facing (see fig. 3).



Figure 3: Pullāṇi, *mūlabera* and *utsavabera*.

The Āḷvārs’ description mainly concentrates on the ecological setting of the venue. Pullāṇi is beautiful, abounding with *puṇṇai* (*Colophyllum inophyllum*) plants¹⁸ and ponds that yield pearl, *puṇṇai muttam poḷil cuḷntu aḷakāya pullāṇiyē* (MPT 9.3.1). The fact that the venue was full of lakes and ponds are affirmed again and again (9.3.2–5). The ponds are called variously as *taṭam* or *taṭākam* (MPT 9.3.3), *nīr* (MPT 9.3.2), *paḷaṇam* 9.3.6) and *poḷil* (MPT 9.3.10). Black bees hum about the flowering water sources, *karivaṇṭiṇam pāṭum*

¹⁸ This plant sheds flowers that arouse carnal feelings.

(MPT 9.3.8). The ponds teem with pearls, corals and enchanting lotuses (MPT 9.3.1). Gold sediments are found (MPT 9.4.8). The urban status of the venue is attested with reference to the palatial structures on the site, *maṇimāṭappullāni* (MPT 9.4.7).

Rarely few mythological scenes are alluded. The Lord came as a Dwarf and conquered the worlds in three steps, *kuṛaḷuruvāy mūvaṭimaṅkoṇṭa* (MPT 9.4.2). That he cleaved Hiraṇya, having come as a lion, *Irāṇiyaṅ...Ariyuruvāykkīṇṭāṅ* (MPT 9.4.4). The presence of *brāhmaṇas* is affirmed because the *Vedas* and *veḷvis* were cultivated incessantly (MPT 9.4.9–10).

Meyyam

Figuring in the hymns of Maṅkai, the place is called Meyyam (MPT 2.5.8, 5.5.2, 6.2.3, 10.1.5, 11.7.5, TKT 19) or Tirumeyyam (MPT 3.6.9). The Lord is Tirumeyya-malaiyāḷaṅ (MPT 3.6.9) or Meyya-malaiyāḷaṅ, meaning ruler of the Meyyam hill. *Mey* means “body”. *Mey* also means “truth” and so the epithet gives the meaning “Lord Truth”. Talking of the Lord at Māliṛuñcōlai, Periyālvār says “He is not true to anybody”, *nī yoruvarkkum meyyaṅallai* (MPT 5.3.2).¹⁹ These epithets would contextually suggest that the hill itself is an abstraction of the Lord’s body. Therefore, the Lord is Meyyāṅ and Meyyamalaiyāṅ (MPT 11.7.5). The Lord is said to be in the reclining mode, *taṭavaraimēl kiṭantāṅ* (MPT 2.5.8). The mystic says he is gratified for having seen the Lord in such a tranquilizing slumbering mode, *kiṭantāṅnai...kaṇṇāṅnai kaṇṇāraḱaṅtukōṇṭēṅ* (MPT 2.5.8). This phrase suggests that the Lord is dear to him as the eyes, *kaṇṇāṅnai*, thereby opening an avenue to explore the meaning of the darling Tamil name Kaṇṇaṅ, which means “one dear to the eyes.” The Lord is also said to be in seated mode, *Meyyamārnta-perumāṅ* (MPT 6.8.7). The hint to the reclining mode is definitely to the rock-cut image. The note on seated mode would suggest that by about the time of Maṅkai some structural addition, housing a seated image of the Lord is likely to have ushered into the scene. Today the *mūlabera* in the structural temple is *sthānaka* and in the cave temple a *sayanabera* (see fig. 4).

¹⁹ Why? It is because he had to resort to foul means under certain compelling circumstances to overcome evil forces; e.g. deception of Mahābali, dislodging Vāli, killing Duryodhana and so on. The way he deceived Mahābali forces Namālvār to call the Lord a cheat, *vañcaṅ* (MOLI 3.8.2, cf. Kalidos 2006: 8).

Meyyam was full of water resources; *puṅgalcūlnta Meyyam* (MPT 2.5.8) and today the visitor may find an ocean-like concourse of water close to the hill, especially during the monsoon.



Figure 4: Meyyam, *utsavabera* in rock cut cave.

Few references underline the mythological setting of the *kṣetra*. The Lord came as a damsel and coveted the ambrosia that denotes the Mohinī *aṃśāvatāra* (MPT 2.5.8). He is said to have increased as a fierce lion, Siṃha or Nṛsiṃha, *aṭalariyāy perukiṇāṇ* (MPT 2.5.8). He was chiefly instrumental in setting fire to the Kāṇḍava forest as a prelude to the *Mahābhārata* war, *kāṇṭavattai tīmūṭṭi* (MPT 6.8.7). He was the Lord who annulled the imprecation on Śiva who was wandering at others houses a mendicant, holding the begging skull in a hand and eating, *maṇṭaiyētip piraṇmaṇai tirintuṇṇum uṇṭiyāṇ cāpam tīrttu* (TKT 19). He was the chief of the gods, *vāṇavartam talaivaṇ* (MPT 5.5.2). His mien was dark as the collirum-like sea, black hill, rain-drenched cloud, the *kuvalai* (blue lily, *Nymphaea nouchalia*) flower and *kāyā* (*Memecylon edule*) flower, *maiyaṛkaṭalum maṇivaraiyum mā mukilum/ koyyaṛkuvalaiyum kāyāvum pōṇṇirunṭa* (MPT 11.7.5). Today if you look at the image of Śeṣaśāyī in the rock-cut cave the depth of this statement could be understood (Kalidos 2006: Pl. III) because the pale pink coloured rock-cut image is made

dark as collirum by the application of herbal stuff during *abhiṣeka* on the image.

Taṅkāl

Talking of Taṅkāl, Pūtam says the Lord's residences are at Tañcai, Araṅkm, Taṅkāl, Māmallai (Māmallapuram), Kōval (Kōvalūr) and Kuṭantai (Kumbhakoṇam) (T II 70). The place name is Taṅkāl (T II 70, CTML I, 141, PTML, TNT 17) or Tiruttaṅkāl (MPT 5.6.2). The Lord is Tiruttaṅkāluraṅ "He of Tiruttaṅkāl" (MPT 5.6.2). The people sing and dance the praise of the Lord (TNT 17). Nothing is told of the Lord's stance. The *mūlabera* in the structural temple is *sthānaka* and *sayana* in the cave temple (see fig. 5).



Figure 5: Taṅkāl, *mūlabera* and *utsavabera* in structural temple.

Mōkūr

The place name is Tirumōkūr (MOLI 10.1.1, 4, 7, 10, CTML 1. 147). The Lord's names are 1000, a clue to *sahasranāma*. He is reclining on a snake, *pāmpānai pallikoḷvāṇ* (MOLI 10.1.4). His name is Kālamēkam. Today the Lord is called Kālamēkap Perumāḷ. The *mūlabera* is *sthānaka* (see fig. 6). The place is surrounded by fertile fields, *vaḷavayalcūḷ* (MOLI 10.1.7). The fields in eight directions are full of fishes where rice and sugarcane grow, *eṇṭicaiyu mīṇ karumpōṭu peruṅcennelviḷaiya* (MOLI 10.1.5). The Lord's eyes are lotus-like or flower-like and the mouth fruit-like or coral-like, *kamalakkaṇ kaṇivāy* (MOLI 10.1.1), *malarkkaṇ pavaḷaccevvāy* (MOLI 10.1.9).



Figure 6: Mōkūr, *utsavabera*.

Few mythological events are linked with the *kṣetra*. He measured the three worlds, *aṅgamūvilakāḷantavaṇ* (MOLI 10.1.5). He destroys the demons by taking a lascivious form, i.e. Mohinī, *vallacurarai... kāmarūpaṅkoṇṭu eḷuntaḷippāṇ* (MOLI 10.1.10). He destroys the three worlds in the presence of Brahmā, Śiva and the gods, *Nāṇmukaṇ araṇōṭu tēvarkaḷ nāṭa/mūvilakāḷittu* (MOLI 10.1.3). Few references notify the dancing aspect of the Lord. The Lord is Kūṭṭaṅ-Kōvalaṅ, dancer-cowboy (MOLI 10.1.7). He is the Dancer

who performs the pot, *kuṭamāṭukūttan* (MOLI 10.1.11). The dance recital by the Lord was so ecstatic that the devotees were enamoured to imitate him by presenting an orgiastic group dance by circumambulating the temple, *kōyil valaṅceytu ikkāṭutum kūttē* (MOLI 10.1.5, cf. Kalidos 1999: 232). The venue abounds in the presence of the experts in scriptures, *maṛaivāṇarvāl* (MOLI 10.1.2). This is to attest the cultivation of the *Vedas* and the sacrifices.

Kūṭal

Maṅkai alone has a rare reference to the place that names the venue Kūṭal (MPT 9.2.5). The Lord himself is a *gopa*, *kōvalarēoppar*. He holds the *śaṅkha* and *cakra*. His lips are coral-like, and the body is a coral hill, *pavaḷakkunru* (MPT 9.2.5). The *vimāna* of the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple is *aṣṭāṅga* and houses all three stances in its three vertical tiers. The ground floor houses a seated *mūlabera* (see fig. 7).

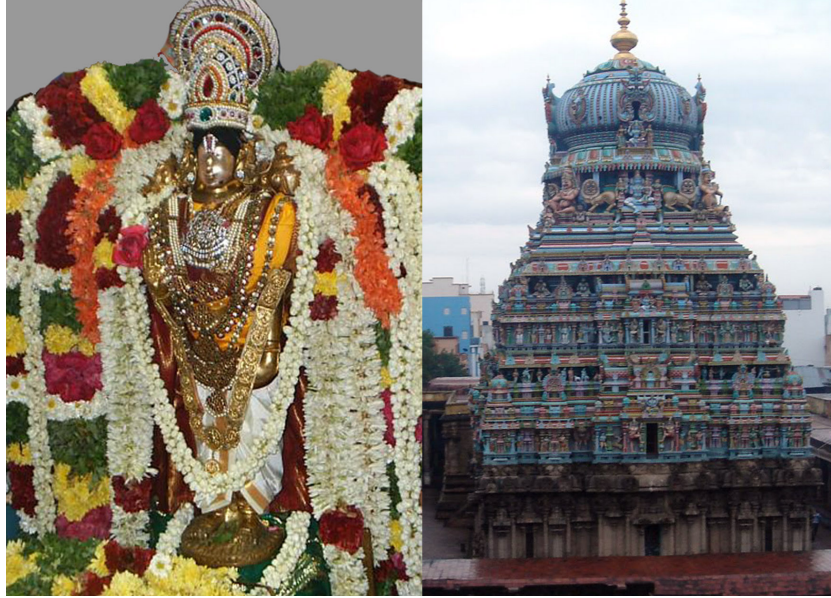


Figure 7: Kūṭal, *utsavabera* and the rear view of the *vimāna*.

Periyālvār is supposed to have composed his *Tiruppallāṅṭu* at Kūṭal, especially in the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple. Scholars are of opinion that there is no authentic evidence to prove this fact. However, the

Great (*Periya*) Āḷvār refers to Tirumaturai (*Tiruppallāṅṭu* v. 10) where Rāma bent the bow (? [Mithilā] to take the hand of Śītā) and pounced on the five-hooded cobra (Kāliyamardana), *tiru maturaiyul/cilai kuṇittu aitalaiya painnākat talai pāyntavan*. It may be an indirect clue to the composition of the hymns at Maturai/Kūṭal. It may also note that Maturai in this reference is believed to refer to Mathurā in the north. It need not be so. There is no positive clue to this assumption.

The *Tiruppallāṅṭu* is the most sacred among the hymns of the Āḷvārs that extols the praise of the Lord's sacred feet for several years, several more years, several thousands of years and several thousands of millions of years:

Pallāṅṭu pallāṅṭu pallāyirattāṅṭu palakōṭi nūṛāyiram
Mallāṅṭa tintō! Maṇivaṅṅā uṅ cēvaṭicevvit tirukkāppu (v. 1).

It is the most sacred of the hymns that extols the praise of not only the Lord Viṣṇu but also his consort:

Vaṭivāy niṅ valamārpiṇil vāḷkiṅṅra maṅkaiyum pallāṅṭu
...cuṭar āḷiyum pallāṅṭu...ap pāñcacaṅṅiyamum pallāṅṭu (v. 2).

“Let the Maid who resides in your right chest (Śrīvatsa) be extolled for several years... the shining disc for several years... and the *Pañcajanya* (conch) for several years.”

The other hymns extol the praise of the Lord for *pallāṅṭu* “several more years”:

Pallāṅṭu to the Lord who toppled the flanks of the demons of Laṅkā v. 3.

Pallāṅṭu to all those that sing the praise of Nārāyaṇa v. 4.

Pallāṅṭu to those that mutter the Lord's *sahasranāma* v. 5.

Pallāṅṭu to the Lion (Nṛsiṃha) who slaughtered a lion-like demon, Hiraṇya v. 6.

Pallāṅṭu to the Lord who overcame the demon, Bakāsura v. 7.

Pallāṅṭu to the enemy of snakes, *Garuḍa* v. 8.

Pallāṅṭu to the Lord who reclines on the snake at the time of *tiruvōṅṅam* festival v. 9.

Pallāṅṭu to the Lord who pounced on the five hoods of a demon-snake, Kāliya v. 10.

Pallāṅṭu to the Lord's devotees who mutter the *aṣṭākṣara* with devotion v. 11.

Extol the *pallāṅṭu* to the Lord of *pallāṅṭu* v. 12.

Even though the data on Kūṭal is less, the *Pallāṅṭu* adds to its credit.

Villiputtūr

Periyālvār and Āṅṭāl have only two hymns on Villiputtūr.²⁰ The Lord is pleased to be seated when damsels play a melodious music. The Great Ālvār eloquently says what a penance his mother should have undertaken to beget him as her son, *empirāṅ nī pīranta piṅṅai/ettanṅaiyum ceyyapprrāy* (PTM 2.2.6). Āṅṭāl says the Lord resides at Villiputtūr, *villiputtūruṛaivāṅ* (ANT 5.5). *Uraivan* (*urāi* literally “freeze”) is likely to denote the reclining Lord. The Lord was a bedecked parrot that was fed with milk-rice. He skipped the worlds as Trivikrama. Today the *mūlabera* in the temple is in *sayana* mode (see fig. 8).



Figure 8: Villiputtūr, *mūlabera* and *utsavaberas* Vatapatrasayi and Antal.

²⁰ I (R.K.K. Rajarajan) first visited the place with my father (Prof. Raju Kalidos) and Prof. Vidya Dehejia when a school going boy at the age of 15. It was this visit that aroused in me a curiosity to select art history for higher studies that finally honoured me with the Alexander von Humbolt post-doctoral Fellow at Berlin.

Āṅṭāḷ composed the *Tiruppavai* at Villiputtūr for the sake maidens (T. *pāvais*) to cultivate a fasting in favour of the Lord and take a good husband. Āṅṭāḷ's dream was to take the hand of Māl/Viṣṇu himself, much more erotically (Friedhelm Hardy's *virahabhakti*) adumbrated in the *Nācciyār Tirumōḷi* (Kalidos 1997: 117–38). Though the scene of Āṅṭāḷ's dreams are set in Āypāṭi (Mathurā) and Tuvārakai (Dvārakā), the actual scene falls within the bounds of Villiputtūr.²¹ Therefore, all the 30 hymns of *Tiruppāvai* may be counted under the *kṣetra* Villiputtūr.

Kurukūr

Kurukūr (today's Āḷvārtirunakari) has gone deep in the Vaiṣṇava matrix of the Tamil country as the birthplace of Nammāḷvār. He has no mania to adumbrate the glories of his nativity, as it was the case with Periyāḷvār and Āṅṭāḷ. Nam has a *patikam* MOLI 4.10 on the *kṣetra*. The place name is Tirukkurukūr (MOLI 4.10 all hymns). Today the *mūlabera* is *sthānaka*. The beautiful venue was full of palatial buildings, proclaiming its urban status, *maṇimāṭa nīṭu Tirukkurukūr* (MOLI 4.10.1), *māṭamāḷikai cūḷntaḷakāya* (MOLI 4.10.2) and was fitted with a lovely fort, *matilcūḷntaḷakāya* (MOLI 4.10.4). The Āḷvār is nostalgic of the beauty of the place, *aḷakāya (infra)*. The place was full of muddy fields in which paddy and lotus blossoms, *cērril cennel kamala mōṅkum* (MOLI 4.10.7). Palm trees surrounded the venue that decorated it, *vēṇuvaṇam (vēṇu “bamboo”?)*, *paṇai cūḷntaḷakāya* (MOLI 4.10.9). Paddy and sugarcane grew richly tall in that fertile soil, *cennel karumpōḷōṅku* (MOLI 4.10.10).

The Lord is called Ātimūrṭti (Skt. Ādimūrṭi MOLI 4.10.7). Today the presiding God is called Ādinātha. He is the Kuṭakkūṭṭaṇ, one who performs the *kuṭakkūṭṭu* (MOLI 4.10.10). He is said to be seated or standing, *amar* (MOLI 4.10.9) or *nirka* (MOLI 4.10.10). He is the creator who ordained the gods, the worlds, Nāṇmukaṇ and all the living organisms (MOLI 4.10.1). He created all and at the same time swallowed and spit the same, *paṭaittu anruṭaṇē viḷuṅki/karantumiḷntu* (MOLI 4.10.3). He is the Nāyaka of Brahmā and Civaṇ/Śiva (MOLI 4.10.4). Let the experts in *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Jains and Buddhists deliberately debate with him (regarding the high status of their cults) but he is the Lord of all, *ilinkattiṭṭa purāṇattīrum*

²¹ For an analysis of the *Tiruppāvai* see Kalidos 2006: 84–9.

camaṇum cākkīyarum valintu vātu ceyvīr (MOLI 4.10.5).²² He is himself the six-religions, *arucamayam avaiyāki* and was himself the Ādibrahmā (MOLI 4.10.9). Nārāyaṇa is the Ultimate God who blessed Mārkaṇḍeya (MOLI 4.10.8).

Tolaivillimaṅkalam

Today's name Tollaivillimaṅkalam is a meaninglessly corrupt jargon; *tolai* means “distant” or “far away” and *tollai* “trouble” or “disturbance”. Nam has a *patikam* 6.5 in MOLI on the *kṣetra*. The place name is Tolaivillimaṅkalam (e.g. 6.5.1,4). The place was on the northern bank (of the River Tāmiraparaṇi), *vaṭakarai* (MOLI 6.5.6, 8). The Lord is called Tēvatēvapirāṇ (Skt. Devadevamūrti MOLI 6.5.2), Tevapirāṇ (Skt. Devamūrti MOLI 6.5.11), Kaḷḷapirāṇ (MOLI 6.5.4),



Figure 9: Tolaivillimaṅkalam, *mūlabera* and *utsavabera*.

Maṇivaṇṇaṇ (MOLI 6.5.6, 9) and Mukilvaṇṇaṇ. Today the *mūlabera* and *utsavabera* are *sthānaka* (see fig. 9).

The place was fitted with towering palatial buildings, *māmaṇi māṭamoṅki* (MOLI 6.5.1). It was full of ponds in which several flowers as if *kuvalai* (blue lily) blossomed (MOLI 6.5.1). It was also full of fields in which paddy, sugarcane and red lotus grew abundantly, *karumpōṭu cennellōṅku centāmarai* (MOLI 6.5.6). Rarely the Lord's purāṇic *līlā* is hinted: *tīcai ṅālam tāviyaḷantu* “He leaped and measured the directions and the worlds (as Trivikrama)” (MOLI 6.5.3). His consorts were the daughter of the earth and the

²² Rival parties of various religious groups in India of those times engaged in *vātu* (Skt. *tarka*) to establish the supremacy of one over the other. Here is a clear notation of sectarian dispute. Indian religions never engaged in armed conflicts as it happened in the West, e.g. the Crusades and Hundred Years or Thirty Years War, cf. today's protracted war between Israel and Palestine.

auspicious maid, Śrī, *nilamāmakal tirumakaḷ* (MOLI 6.5.10). Experts in the scriptures inhabited the *kṣetra*, *nāṇmaraiṅṅar vāḷ Tolaiyillimaṅkalam* (MOLI 6.5.4). They fostered the refined *Vedas* and performed sacrifices, *tiruntu vētamum vēḷviyum* (MOLI 6.5.8). All the time the noise of festive celebrations reverberated on the venue, *viḷavoli* (MOLI 6.5.2).

Cīvaramaṅkai

Nam has a *patikam* MOLI 5.7 on the *kṣētra*. The place is called Cīvaramaṅkai-*nakar* (Śrī -*varada* [boon offering] -*maṅkai* [maid], MOLI 5.7.1, 3-4). The Lord is called Cīvaramaṅkalanātar (MOLI 5.7.5), Vāṇamāmalai “the Celestial Big Hill” MOLI 5.7.6), Cīvaramaṅkaivāṇaṅ (MOLI 5.7.8), Teyvanāyakaṅ (Skt. Devanāyaka, “Hero of the Gods” MOLI 5.7.10, 11) and Tirivikkiramaṅ (Skt. Trivikrama MOLI 5.7.11). The Lord is supposed to be seated, *vīṇṇirunta* (MOLI 5.7.1, 4) or *irunta* MOLI 5.7.9). Today the *mūlabera* is seated and the *utsvabera sthānaka*. The Lord is invoked with other pet epithets such as Aravintan (the flower, *aravida* MOLI 5.7.1), Ammāṅ (the Father, MOLI 5.7.1), Karumēṅṅiyammāṅ (the black-hued Father, MOLI 5.7.5), Vāṇanāyakaṅ (the celestial hero, MOLI 5.7.6), Maṅimāṅṅikkaccutar (light of the great black stone, MOLI 5.7.6) or Karumāṅṅikkaccutar (light of the black gem, MOLI 5.7.9), Vāṇavarkoḷuntu (sprout of the gods, MOLI 5.7.7) and Tāyantai (Mother-Father, MOLI 5.7.7). The Lord’s attributes were the *caṅku* (*śaṅkha*), *cakkaram* (*cakra*) and *puṭkoṭi* (*pakṣidvaja* or *Garuḍadvaja*) (MOLI 5.7.2–3).

The ecological setting of the venue is told in few hymns. The muddy fields were full of lotus, paddy and sugarcane; *cēṇṇuttāmarai cennel* (MOLI 5.7.1), *karumpum cennelum* (MOLI 5.7.11). The urban status of the venue is pointed out with reference to the gem-like palatial buildings, *maṅimāṅṅam* (MOLI 5.7.8).

Few references note the mythological setting. Kṛṣṇa conducted an illusionary war to curb the pride of the 100 Gauravas, *nūṇṇuvar maṅka... māyappōr paṅṅi* (MOLI 5.7.4). The Lord cleaved the mandibles of a bird, *puḷḷiṅṅvāyppilanta* (MOLI 5.7.8–9). He dislodged seven fierce bulls, *erutēḷaṅṅarnta* (MOLI 5.7.9).

Cīvaramaṅkai was a sacred venue as it was inhabited by so many experts in *Vedas*, *maraiṅṅavallavar palarvāḷ* (MOLI 5.7.3). The

Vedas and *yajñas* were endlessly cultivated, *vēta vēļviyarā* (MOLI 5.7.4, 7) by the experts in the four *Vedas*, *nāṇmarai vallār* (MOLI 5.7.9).

Tēṅtiruppēreyil

Nam has a *patikam* on the *kṣetra* MOLI 7.3. The place name is Tiruppēreyil (*pēreyil* means “big fort”, MOLI 7.3.1–2), now called Tiruppērai. The Lord is called Maṇivaṇṇaṅ-Kaṇṇaṅ (MOLI 7.3.2), Kaṇṇapirāṅ (MOLI 7.3.9) and Accutaṅ (Skt. Achyuta MOLI 7.3.11). He is in the seated mode, *vīrṛirunta* (MOLI 7.3 all hymns). Today the *mūlabera* is seated (see fig. 10).

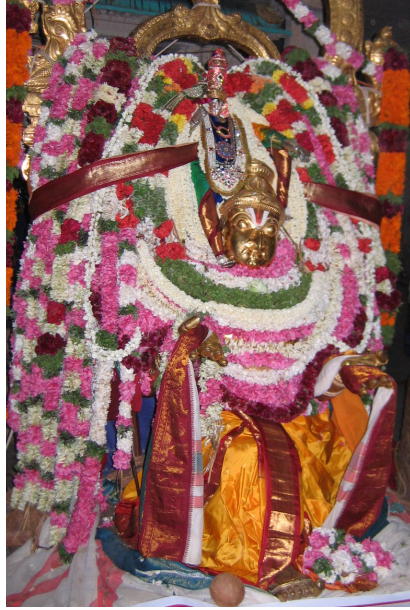


Figure 10: Tēṅtiruppēreyil, *utsavabera* on *Garūda vahana*.

vētavoliyum viļāvoliyum (MOLI 7.3.1). The festivities were ongoing every month and every day without fail, *tiṅkaḷum nāḷum viļāvārāta* (MOLI 7.3.3).

Palm trees surrounded the place, *taṅpaṇaicūl* (MOLI 7.3.2). Paddy plants in the fields toss like *cāmaras*, *cennelkavari vīcum* (MOLI 7.3.6). Towering buildings added an urban status to the venue, *cikaramaṇi neṅumātam* (MOLI 7.3.10).

The Lord wore the *makarakuṇḍalas* in his ears, *makaraneṅkuḷaik kātu* (MOLI 7.3.10). He was armed with the disc in a hand. His colour was the same as the primeval ocean (MOLI 7.3.11).

The experts in four *Vedas* were present to perform sacrifices, *nāṇmaraiyāḷarum vēļviyōva* (MOLI 7.3.6). The voice of the *Vedas* and festivities were resounding endlessly,

Vaikuntam

Nam has noted the *kṣetra* in two verses (MOLI 9.2.4, 8). Nam says the Lord is reclining at Puḷiṅkuṭi, seated at Varakuṇamaṅkai and standing at Vaikuntam. Today the *mūlabera* is standing. The Lord's posture was so enrapturing that the congregating devotees created a scene by presenting a dance recital, *nāṅkaḷ kūttāṭi niṅṅārppa* (MOLI 9.2.4). The mystic adds the Lord is present at Tiruvaikuntam (Skt. Śrīvaikuṅṭham), *tiruvaikuntattuḷḷāy tēva* (MOLI 9.2.8).

Puḷiṅkuṭi

Nam has a *patikam* MOLI 9.2 and few stray verses on the *kṣetra*. The mystic adds the Lord is pleased to slumber at Kōḷūrakam and Puḷiṅkuṭi, *Kōḷūrakattum puḷiṅkuṭiyum nī tuyin mēvi maḷiṅntu* (MOLI 8.3.5). Today the *mūlabera* is reclining. The place name is Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi (MOLI 9.2.1–3, 5–7). Repeatedly, it is added the Lord is reclining, *kiṭantāy* (MOLI 9.2. 3, 5. 7). The mystic adds: For how long a time did you recline? *kiṭantanāḷ kiṭantāyettaṅṅai kālam kiṭatti* (MOLI 9.2.3). Palm trees and fertile fields surrounded the place, *paṅaicūḷ, kalivayal* (MOLI 9.2.1, 6). Golden forts surrounded the venue, *poṅmatilcūḷ* (MOLI 9.2.2). The Lord's tiara resembles a bunch of paddy crop, *katirmuṭi* (MOLI 9.2.6). His consort was seated on a lotus, *tāmaraimaṅkai* “Maid (seated on) Lotus” (MOLI 9.2.3). The Lord was one who churned the ocean, *kuraikaṭal kaṭaintavaṅ* (MOLI 9.2.11). He measured the three worlds, *ulakammūṅṅaḷantāṅ* (MOLI 9.2.11).

Varakuṇamaṅkai

The venue is practically not described. Nam notes the Lord seated at Varakuṇamaṅkai (Skt. Varakuṇamaṅga? “Maid whose ethos is to grant boon”), *varakuṇamaṅkayiliruntu* (MOLI 9.2.4, *supra* Vaikuntam). Today the *mūlabera* is seated (see fig. 11).



Figure 11: Varakunamaikai, utsavaberas.

Kuḷantai

Earlier notified in the *Paripāṭal* (*supra*), very little is told of the venue. Teṅkuḷantai was fitted with a fort in the tower of which a banner was flying, *māṭakkoṭi matiḷ* (MOLI 8.2.4). The Lord is called Māyakkūṭṭaṅ, one who performs an illusionary dance. He rose high in a war as a dancing bird, Āṭalpaṛavai.²³ He was driver of a chariot, bearing the disc. This is likely to be a reference to Pārthasārati. The *mūlabera* is *sthānaka* (see fig. 12).

²³ This subject has been earlier discussed Kalidos 1999: 229. According to Raju Kalidos, Āṭalpaṛavai “the Dancing Bird” is *Garuḍa*, one among *aṃśāvātāras* of Viṣṇu (Kaidos 1999: Fig. 5).

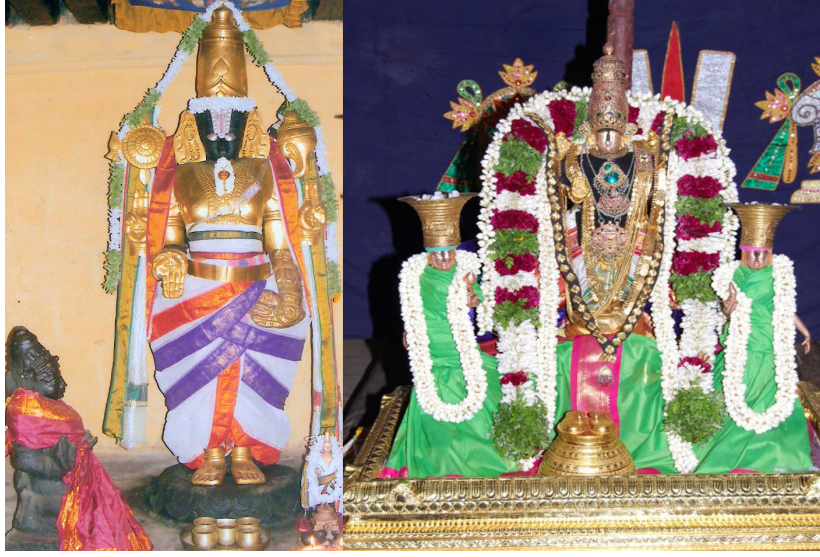


Figure 12: Kūṛantai, mūlabera and utsavabera.

Kūṛuṅkuṭi

The *kṣetra* figures in the hymns of Maḷicai, Nam, Periya and Maṅkai. The place name is Kūṛuṅkuṭi (CAN 62; MOLI 1.10.9, 3.9.2; MPT 1.6.8, 5.6.2, 6.3.3, 9.5.1, 3; PTML II. 228–29; TNT 14), Tirukkūṛuṅkuṭi 5.5.1–2) or Teṅkūṛuṅkuṭi (MOLI 1.10.9). The Lord is standing, *ninra* (MOLI 1.10.9) or reclining, *tuyilum* (MPT 9.6.2). Today the *mūlabera* is *sthānaka* (see fig. 13). The Lord’s epithets are Tirumūrti “Sacred Lord” (MOLI 1.10.9), Ātiyañcōti “Primeval Light” (MOLI 1.10.9), Kaṅṅaṅ (MOLI 3.9.2), Kūṛuṅkuṭinampi “Darling of Kūṛuṅkuṭi” (MOLI 5.5. all hymns), Poṅmuṭi “Golden Crown” (MOLI 5.5.4), Māl-Manivaṅṅaṅ (MPT 9.5.3), Pēraruḷāḷaṅ “Giver of Eternal Bliss” (MPT 9.5.4) and Kōvalar-Kūṭṭaṅ “Dancer-*gopa*” (MPT 9.5.8).



Figure 13: Kuruṅkuṭi, utsavabera.

Something is told of the ecological setting. Fertile fields surrounded the place, *kaḷaṇicūḷ* (MOLI 3.9.2). It was filled with groves, *cōlai* (MOLI 5.5.2, 4, 6). Peacocks were practicing dance, *mayil payilum* (MPT 9.5.3). The sweet smelling *mullai* flowers were abundant, *mullai pulku* (MPT 9.5.6). The red-legged stork was in search of food for its partner, *ceṅkāl ittuṇai nāraikkiraitēṭi* (MPT 9.6.3). Parrots were training to talk, *kiḷḷai pēcum* (MTM 9.6.5)

Few references note the mythological feats of the Lord. He was the Lion who cleft Hiraṇya into two halves, *Irāṇiyaṇ...iraṇṭukūru ceytukanta ciṅkam* (CAN 62). He devoured the seven seas, seven mountains and the seven worlds, *kaṭalēlum malaiyēlivvulakēḷuṇṭu* (MPT 5.6.2). He was the first to stand, having crossed the frontiers of the three worlds, *mūvulakuṅ kaṭantappāl mutalāy niṅra* (TNT 14).

The Lord's attributes are described. He bears the *caṅku/śaṅkha* and *nēmi/cakra*, and the eyes are lotus-like, *tāmaraiḱkaṅ* (MOLI 5.5.1, 5, 8). He wears the shining sacred thread, *kuṇḍalas* on ears and bears Śrī on chest, *miṅṅunūlum kuṇṭalamum mārviḷ tirumaṇu* (MOLI 5.5.2). He wears a golden tiara, *poṅmuṭi* (MOLI 5.5.4). It was tall,

nīṇmuṭi (MOLI 5.5.9). His body itself was shining like gold, *poṇṇmēni* (MOLI 5.5.7). The hip was slender, *cirriṭtai* (MOLI 5.5.8).²⁴ His face resembled the moon *matipōlmukam* (MTM 6.3.3).

Kōḷūr

Nammālvār has a *patikam* on the *kṣetra* MOLI 6.7. The place name is Tirukkōḷūr (*kōḷ* is a planet, *graha*, *ūr* residential zone, MOLI 6.7.1–2, 4-5, 7).²⁵ The Lord is in reclining mode, *kiṭanta* (MOLI 6.7.4, 7). Today the *mūlabea* is reclining (see fig. 14).



Figure 14: Kōḷūr, mūlabera and utsavabera.

²⁴ This is an attribute of maids usually in Tamil literary tradition.

²⁵ Those on the banks of the River Tāmiraparaṇi are collectively called *Navatiruppati* (Nine Sacred Venues) and held in high esteem in the region (Ganeshram 2010 – deals with select six temples). The *Navatiruppatīs* are Kurukūr, Tolaivillimaṅkalam (called *Ṭṛaṭṭaitiruppati* “Twin Temples” that lay on the northern and southern banks of the river), Cīvaramaṅkan, Pēreyil, Vaikuntam, Puḷiṅkuṭi, Kōḷūr, Kuḷantai and Varakuṇamaṅkai. Each one of the *sthala* is linked with a *kōḷ/graha* “planet” among the *navagrahas*.

The Lord is called Kaṇṇaṇ (MOLI 6.7.1) and Matucūtaṇṇaṇ/Madusūdana (MOLI 6.7.11). The Lord's face was soft as the *aravinda* (a lotus, *Nelumbium speciosum* or *Nyphaea nelumbo*) flowers, *aravintalōcana* (MOLI 6.7.10). With tears in eyes, the devotees throng to the temple (MOLI 6.7.5–6). The Lord is the food that they eat, water that they drink and the betel that they chew, *uṇṇum cōru parukunīr tiṇṇum verṛilai* (MOLI 6.7.1). The parrots on the venue do nothing but to sing the *nāmāvali* of the Lord and get up (early in the Morning), *kiḷikaḷ ...Tirumāl nāmaṅkaḷē kūviyeḷum* (MOLI 6.7.3).

Argument

Of all the 18 *divyadeśas* in the Pāṇḍya country, Māḷiruñcōlai is the earliest, getting back to the 4th century AD. The data bearing on it is abundant in view of its cult value, increasing through the centuries. At the pan-Indian level, the first Vaiṣṇava *divyadeśa* is Vēṅkaṭam that fell within the modest limits of the Tamil country of those times. Its antiquity gets back to the early centuries of the Christian era or even still earlier in the BCEs. The poetic imagination of the mystics would permit them to place Cōlai on a par with Pārkaṭal and Vēṅkaṭam with Vaikuṇṭha. Kuḷantai comes next as it is notified in the *Paripāṭal*. Meyyam and Taṅkāl follow suit with earlier rock-cut temples (figs. 4, 5 are rockcut images of the 7th century CE). It is perplexing to note what happened to these *deśas* during the 5th–7th century. It is a mystery as they reappear only in the hymns of Nammāḷvar and Maṅkai. Taṅkāl figures in the hymns of Pūtam in the late 5th or early 6th century and may be the rock-cut temple emerged around the end of the 6th century, falling in line with Meyyam. Kōṭṭiyūr first appears in the hymns of Pūtam. Kuṟuṅkuṭi may be dated in the 7th century as it is notified in the hymns of Maḷicai. Kurukūr, Tolaiyillimaṅkalam, Cīvaramaṅkai. Pēreyil, Vaikuntam, Pulinṅkuṭi, Varakuṇamaṅkai and Kōḷūr gained popularity with the versification of Nammāḷvar in the 8th century. Pullāṇi may be dated in the late 8th or early 9th century as it appears only in the hymns of Maṅkai.

An important dimension of the data gleaned from the *bhakti* hymns is that some of the later names appear in early hymns, e.g. Kāḷamēkam (Mōkūr), Vāṇamāmalai (Cīvaramaṅkai), Aḷakartaṅkōyil

and Meyyamalai (Skt. Satyagiri [Sanskrit *satya*, Tamil *mey*]). Scholars proficient in the *bhakti* hymns must have given these names in later times. Another important dimension is that in most of the places the Lord is associated with dance and called Kūttan who performed the pot-dance. The dancing aspect is overwhelmingly linked with Viṣṇu in the Pāṇḍināḍu zone that adds credit to the thesis of Raju Kalidos (1999) whose “Dance of Viṣṇu” gets further strengthened. The Lord’s performance was so enrapturing that the devotees imitated the same to propitiate the Lord as it was done in early times by the *āyar* in *Cilappatikāram*. Since the *āyar* are said to be founders of the festivities at Māliṛuñcōlai, in all probability the sojourn of Kaṇṇaki in the *Cilappatikāram* on arriving at Maturai was close to the hill of Aḷakar where the famous *āycciyarkuravai* took place.

Why the stance of the Lord should alter in later times while the early tradition was something different? E.g. in Tirumeyyam the original reclining Lord made to sit in later times. The following is the picture of what the Āḷvārs have to say on the stance and how they appear today:

Place	Āḷvār’s perception	As it is Today
Māliṛuñcōlai	all three (<i>sthānaka</i> , <i>āsana</i> and <i>sayana</i>)	<i>Sthānaka</i>
Kōṭṭiyūr	none of three, simply <i>urāiṅṇa</i>	<i>aṣṭāṅgavimāna</i> all three, <i>balibera: sthānala</i>
Pullāṇi	nothing told	<i>Āsana</i>
Meyyam	<i>sayana/āsana</i>	<i>Sayana, sthānaka</i>
Taṅkāl	nothing told	<i>Sayana, sthānaka</i>
Mōkūr	<i>Sayana</i>	<i>sthānaka</i>
Kūṭal	nothing told	<i>Aṣṭāṅgavimāna</i> , all three
Villiputtūr	<i>āsana</i> or <i>urāiṅṇa</i>	<i>sayana</i>
Cīvaramāṅkai	<i>Āsana</i>	<i>āsana</i>
Tiruppēreyil	<i>Āsana</i>	<i>āsana</i>
Vaikuntham	<i>Sthānaka</i>	<i>sthānaka</i>
Puliṅkuṭi	<i>Sayana</i>	<i>sayana</i>
Varakuṅamaṅkai	<i>Sthānaka</i>	<i>sthānaka</i>

Kuḷantai	Kūttan “Dancer” ²⁶	<i>sthānaka</i>
Kuṟuṅkuṭi	<i>Sthānaka, sayana</i>	<i>sthānaka</i>
Kōḷūr	<i>Sayana</i>	<i>sayana</i>

Among these Māḷiruñcōlai, Meyyam regarding *sayana* (instead of *āsana*, *sthānaka* appears), Villiputtūr (if *urāikiṅṅa* is *sayana*), Cīvaramaṅkai, Tiruppēreyil, Vaikuntam, Puliṅkuṭi, Varakuṅamaṅkai, Kuṟuṅkuṭi and Kōḷūr agree with the original programme of the Āḷvārs. Out of eighteen, ten agree with the original visuvalization while in eight the mode differs. This may be due to cult need and the willingness of a donor who wants to see the Lord in a mode suitable to his taste at a time when the temple was rebuilt. Śiva-Naṭarāja in the Cōlanāḍu circle lifts the left leg while in Pāṇḍyan tradition it is the right. To this effect a myth was inserted as recorded in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭarpurāṇam* (episode 32) wherein a mythical Pāṇḍya king requests the Lord to alter the usually lifted left leg lest the right may ache. The truth behind may be that the Pāṇḍyas did not want to imitate the Cōla model. Similarly, there should have been some compelling reason to alter the stance of Viṣṇu in later times in certain circles. This may apply to other regions such as Cōlanāḍu and Toṇḍaināḍu.

The Āḷvārs were lovers of nature. They had a fascination to highlight environmental and ecological setting of the *deśas*, the flora and fauna, in unequivocally eloquent terms. No *kṣetra* is exception to this common genre. The delightfully dancing peacocks and pet parrots’ mutterings the *nāmāvali* of Viṣṇu are aesthetic poetic vividities. The bees or beetles are *gaṇas* and the Cilamaḷpāru flows with honey. The Āḷvārs were not only in a frantic-ecstatic search for the beauty-Aḷakaṅ but also the *aḷakiya* “beautiful” setting of his abode in the then temples. All the places were the homes of experts in the *Vedas* who nurtured the Vedic sacrifices. *Pūjās* and festivals were busy all the time in addition to offerings, both vegetarian and carnivorous, to the gods as it is told in case of Māḷiruñcōlai. Āṅṭāḷ calls the *brāhmaṇa* lads *pārppanacciṭṭārkaḷ* and the folk were *bhūtas*

²⁶ Pioneers in iconographical studies note three modes such as *āsana*, *sthānaka* and *sayana*. Raju Kalidos (1999a: 226, 2006: 17) notes several more from the Tamil Vaiṣṇava hymns. The stances noted are *kiṭantu* (recline), *iruntu* (sit), *eḷuntu* (stand), *naṭantu* (walk), *paṟantu* (fly), *kuṇintu* (stoop, contextually dance). This is from the MPT 5.2.4. The MOLI 6.9.3 notes *naṭantu*, *kiṭantu* and *iruntu*. The latter account fails to note *sthānaka*.

that offered the *kutippali* “blood sacrifices”. Therefore, there was no inhibition in either offering the *akkāravāṭicil*, a delicious vegetarian dish, or *cenkuruti* “(cold) red blood”. To be brief, the Ālvārs open new avenues of the *divyadeśas* and religious mysticism and traditions of their times. Those were the halcyon days as in the later half of the 14th century Gaṅgādevī talks of the foul smell of beef roasted by the vadalistic Muslim at Citamparam, Śrīraṅgam and Maturai (cf. Kalidos 1997a: 20, Rajarajan 2006: 5).

Before concluding few relevant questions could be raised and answered. How historically/geographically accurate these praises of the *sthalas* by the Ālvārs might be? This is something like asking what we read in the *Psalms* and how we view Jerusalem today. There may be some euphemism in what the Ālvārs view each of the *sthala*, added with poetic imagination. But a *sthala* should be a reality. The Ālvārs consider those not on earth *sthalas*, e.g. Pārkaṭal and Paramapatam, due to intuition. They are genuine imaginations. One could be a Ālvār to undergo such a mystic inspiration. Mortals could not imagine those god-given revelations. All the *sthalas* came to be attested by epigraphical sources in due course (see Meyyam, Mōkūr and Cittirakūṭam in Rajarajan 2006). To be crisp the Ālvārs’ vision is hazy. We do not find a Meyyam today of what Tirumaṅkai saw in the 9th century. The visual we have presented (photographs and plans; figs 4, 5 are early medieval rockcut images, contemporaneous with the Ālvārs) are as we find them today. The Ālvārs had no knowledge of the modern visuals. Today’s Jerusalem is not what the *Psalms* view but Jerusalem should have been a reality at the time of the *Psalms*. Saint David would not believe his own eyes if he were to come alive and say today’s Jerusalem is not the pilgrim center that he saw in his time. The same should be the experience of a Ālvār if he visits Mōkūr or Meyyam today. The artistically built tank of the Tirumeyyam temple was in those times a natural water reservoir. Many of the structural additions did not exist in the Meyyam of those times.

We may ask whether the Ālvārs talk of a real temple or idealized vision of a temple that is Viṣṇu’s home on earth. This carries weight because there could have been no Pārkaṭal (Ocean of Milk) or Paramapatam (the Vaiṣṇava heaven, Vaikuṅṭha). As a devotee of Viṣṇu I may have a faith these and believe they exist but as a professor could not establish the reality of these imagined *sthalas* in a classroom with visual aids. The same yardstick need not be applied to

historical venues such as Kurukūr and Vaikuntam. Another problem is could the Ālvārs have visited Ayodhyā, Dvārakā and Mathurā in their time. Even if they did not visit, their accounts may be based on what they heard from pilgrims coming from those distant places. It might be “oral history” in a sense. Did not pilgrims visit Rāmeśvaram in the 9th century or did not pilgrims from the south visit Kāśī. If a Śaṅkarācārya could visit Kāśmīr and Kāśī, why not Tirumaṅkai visit Vatariyācciramam (Badrinatha)? Eric Issac 1960 called the sacred venues “the landscape of myth”, which may or may not be applicable to all the *divyadeśas* or *tiruttalams*. The Ālvārs and Nāyaṅmār have not told us a fairy tale. They may say 50% is 100% but nobody dare say it is 0%.

Another important question is how the *sthalas* came to be canonized in the Ālvār tradition and Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. In fact there is no such two “Ālvār tradition” and “Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition”. The Ācāryas in their Sanskritic or *maṅḍipravāḷa* lore commented on what the Ālvārs earlier said. What was told by the Ālvār in two lines might have been interpreted by the Ācāryas in 200 pages. We may even add imagination flies at a bullet-train speed in the Ācārya accounts (e.g. Āṇṭāl taking the hand of Raṅganātha who refers to this *sthalā* in her hymns – *Ārāyirappaṭi* pp. 45–50). But, if there were 108 *divyadeśas* in Ālvār literature, it was not 1,008 in Ācārya literature. One thing is certain, the Araṅkam (Śrīraṅgam) of the time of Toṅṅaraṭippoṭi as told in his *Tirumālai* (8th century CE) was not the Araṅkam of Rāmānujācārya (12th century CE). The Araṅkam of Rāmānuja’s time is not what we find today. After the Islamic depredations of the 14th century, the temple had undergone drastic changes at the hands of the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka rulers of South India. The same must have been the case with several other *sthalas* such as Kūṭal/Maturai and Cittirakūṭam. The Cittirakūṭam did not exist during the 12th–17th century due to fanatical activities of a mythical Cōḷa called Kṛmikaṅṭha as told in the Ācārya *guruparamparāprabhāvam*. It was rebuilt during the time of Achyutarāya (CE 1529–42) in the 16th century.

We may also consider whether these are the main temples or a sporadic listing of temples. Dr Jeyapriya Rajarajan 2012 has worked on this question and communicated an article to the IAHA, Java. She says during the Early Ālvār Period (6th–7th century) only 16 *sthalas* are listed. During the Middle Ālvār Period (7th–8th centuries) 42 were

added, total $16 + 42 = 58$. The total 108 reached fruition at about the 9th century by the time of Tirumaṅkai. It is added that the *Śrītattvanidhi* of Kṛṣṇarāja Uṭaiyar (19th century) of Mysore presents a list of 117 *divyadeśas*, citing the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (CE 350–950, O’Flaherty 1994: 17). The total 108 seems to have risen to 117 in the 10th century. Today it might be incredibly more.²⁷ So, what the Āḷvārs chose to extol were the choicest venues. This as well applies to the cult of Murukaṅ. Prof. Raju Kalidos raised this question in an international conference at Mauritius. The Tamil *Tirumurukāruppatai* (c. 3rd century CE) talks *aruṇṇaivītu* (six houses or *sthalas*) of the Murukaṅ cult in Tamilnadu. Were they only six? Definitely it was not. What the poet, Nakkīrar, did was to extol the most prominent among the various other *sthalas*. The same applies to the Āḷvārs.

The vital point for consideration is: what kind of history we deal with? What kind of information we get? And how we learn by the larger import? The data I have presented is based on the Āḷvār literature. This kind of data is not known to the scholars in the west and North India. While talking of Vaiṣṇavism, they go either to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or *Gītagovinda* (Bhandarkar 1995). Why not consider the roots of these two Sanskritic sources that we find in the Tamil *Nālāyiram* (cf. Hardy 1983, Kalidos 1999a). My emphasis is on the Tamil source that is very much neglected in North India and the west. Few scholars in the United States, e.g. A.K. Ramanujam 1981, who work on Śrīvaiṣṇavism do not compliment their presentations with authentic art historical material, which I have done. Prof. George W. Spencer, writing in 1970 on Śaiva “sacred geography”, said a similar work on Vaiṣṇavism is warranted. To quote: “a study of Vaiṣṇavite sacred geography... is obviously feasible” (Spencer 1970: 233). This is what exactly I have done after 40 years of the dream of a learned Tamil scholar. This in a way is a pioneering study and more work could be done on Cōḷanāṭu, Malaināṭu, Toṅṭaināṭu, Vaṭanāṭu (cf. Jeypriya 2010).

²⁷ For a survey of the temple cars of Tamilnadu, Raju Kalidos (1989: 261–73) listed 64 Viṣṇu temples of which 18 were extolled in the hymns of the Āḷvārs. That means 45 were not canonized.

Abbreviations

ANT	Nācciyār Tirumoli of Āṅṅāḷ
CAN	Tiruccantaviruttam of Tirumaḷicai
CTML	Ciriyatirumaṭal of Maṅkai
MOLI	Tiruvāymoḷi of Nam
MPT	Periya Tirumoli of Maṅkai
NTV	Nāṅmukaṅ Tiruvantāti of Tirumaḷicai
PAL	Tiruppallāṅṅu of Periyālvār
PTM	Tirumoli of Periyālvār
PTML	Periyatirumaṭal of Maṅkai
Skt.	Sanskrit
T.	Tamil
T I	Tiruvantāti I of Poykai
T II	Tiruvantāti II of Pēy
TKT	Tirukkuṅṅuntāṅṅakam of Maṅkai
TNT	Tiruneṅṅuntāṅṅakam of Maṅkai

Note: The author's have slightly modified the abbreviation scheme of Hardy 1983 and Kalidos 1999.

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