

Vañcaikkaḷam Past and Present
***Rāmāyaṇa* Panels in Kēraḷa-Mahādeva Temple**

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Abstract

Vañcaikkaḷam is a Śiva-*sthala* in the Kuṭṭanāḍu region of Kēraḷa. It is one among the ± 280 *sthalas* extolled in the *Tēvāram* (7.4) hymns. Noted for the typical Kēraḷa temple-type, it is unique in several respects. Saints Cēramāṇ Perumāl and Cuntarar are associated with the venue, and they are supposed to have visited the Kailāsa on the Himālayas in person, a rare honour that Śiva confers on the Nāyaṇmār. This may be a metaphor for considering Vañcaikkaḷam as the Śiva-*loka* on earth or the *Dakṣiṇa*-Kailāsa. Research on the architecture and iconography of the temple is scanty excepting the tidbits in Sarkar 1978 and Paramesvaran Pillai 1986. The present article presents an account of the temple from literature, and field-based study of architecture and iconography with special reference to the rare *Rāmāyaṇa* wood-carved sculptures.

Keywords: Vañcaikkaḷam/Vañchikkuḷam, Vañci, Śrīkōvil, Cēramāṇ Perumāl, Cuntarar, *Tēvāram*, *Tirukayilāyaññaulā*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāmāṣṭottaram*, Rāma, Viśvāmītra, Paśupati, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Kailāsa, wood-carved images.

Vañcaikkaḷam (Malaiyāḷam Vañchikkuḷam) is a famous Śiva-*sthala* in the Kuṭṭanāḍu (Lowlands) region of Central Kēraḷa. Saint Cuntarar, a contemporary of Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ c. 800 CE (TAS II-I: 8-14, Sarkar 1978: 21, 59) has composed a *patikam* (collection of ten hymns) on the venue. The *sthala* is one among the ± 280 (Spencer 1970: 232-44, Kalidos 2006: II, 292) listed from the hymns of the *Tēvāram*-trio (Sathyanathaier 1980: 408)¹. The venue has been identified with the metropolis of the ancient Cēras, Vañci (Sarkar 1978: 13), and where Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ of *Patirruppattu* (5th Ten, *Patikam*) and *Cilappatikāram* fame erected a temple for Pattiṇi-Kaṇṇaki (Rajarajan 2014: chap. V). The temple for Bhagavatī-Kaṇṇaki of Koṭuṅkallūr² is about a km from the Mahādeva at Vañcaikkaḷam. Of the two temples, Koṭuṅkallūr seems to be the earliest. The existing temple for Pattiṇi (also Bhadrakālī) is likely to have been erected on the debris of an early structure built by Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ (c. 150 CE), and dated since the sixteenth century CE. Vañcaikkaḷam emerges into the picture as a center of Śivaism (Gonda 1970) by about the time of Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ and Cuntarar in the early ninth century CE. The place-name is a pointer of its link with Vañci of the ancient Cēras. It has been the subject-matter of Cuntarar's *patikam*; cf. Kulacēkara Āḷvār on the Viṣṇu temples in Kēraḷa³. It is not clear why Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ Nāyaṇār is silent about the *sthala*-Vañcaikkaḷam⁴. He was a devoted

¹ The three are Nānacampantar, Nāvukkaracar and Cuntarar (seventh-ninth centuries CE). Other sources list a total of 274 *sthalas* (*vide*, temple.dinamalar.com). Vañcaikkaḷam is the only Śiva-*sthala* in Kerala extolled in *bhakti* hymns (*Tēvāram* 7, *Patikam* 4).

² The structure of the temple and the rituals has undergone thorough ramifications during the past millennium and a half (Gentes 1992, cf. Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2014: chap. V).

³ The Vaiṣṇava hymnist, Kulacēkara Āḷvār has composed the *Perumāḷ Tirumōḷi* in about 100 hymns that encompasses *divyadeśas* such as Araṅkam (cf. Kalidos 1993-95: 136-52, Jeyapriya 2001: 612-15, Rajarajan 2013: 70-71), Cittirakūtam (Kalidos 1997: 17-24), Vēṅkaṭam (Jeyapriya 2014*), Kaṇ[ṇ]apuram (Kannan 2006: chap. I)**, and Vittuvakkōṭu (modern Miṭṭakōḍē in Malaiyāḷam; *vide*, Rajarajan 2013a).

* Presents a brief summary of c. 200 Āḷvārs' hymns. All the saints have contributed their share excepting Maturakavi and Toṅṅaraṭṭipōṭi.

** Presents a summary of 128 hymns.

⁴ Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ is credited with three works that come under the 11th *Tirumūṟai* (Zvelebil 1974: 197-98). They are *Poṅvaṇṇattiruvantāti*-PTA (100+1 quatrains), *Tiruvārūr-mummaṇikkōvai*-TMK (29 poems in ll. 4 to 20) and *Tirukkailāyañāṇulā*-TKN (long poem in ll. 304). These works do not spell out Vañcaikkaḷam. Tillai [later Citamparam] (PTA 77), Ārūr (TMK 1, 8, 10, 16, 22) and Kaṭavūr (TMK 24) are

Śiva-*bhakta* and *rāja-yogi* that is attested by the TKN. His alleged conversion to Islam (Sastri 1971: 162) is due to Šūfī concoction of the post-ninth century⁵. Highly orthodox in ritual performances within the sacred precincts, temples in Kēraḷa were not accessible for field-based research until the last generation, and photography was and is in certain parts of temples strictly prohibited. Therefore, no illustrated account of the temples may be found in any published work, excepting a bird's eye view (see plates and plans in Kramrisch et al. 1970, Sarkar 1978, Noble 1981, Pillai 1986, Jayashanker 1997).

The present study brings to light a brief account of the Vañcaikkaḷam temple with special reference to the wood-carved *Rāmāyaṇa* sculptures. It hopes to add to our existing knowledge on the temples of Kēraḷa. It may be of concern to scholars interested in Kēraḷa studies that are not permitted to enter the sacrosanct parts of the Hindu temples. The aim is three-pronged:

1. A brief description of the Vañcaikkaḷam temple (cf. Pillai 1986: 189)
2. Examination of the *Rāmāyaṇa* wood-carved images
3. A summary of the hymns bearing on Tiruvañcaikkaḷam (Attachment)

The Temple

The temple, called *Mēl-tali* (Upper Temple)⁶ is east facing and is in two *prākāras*. Entry into the oblong temple is provided in the east and

notified. It is likely the Civalōkam, Civapuram and Tirukkōyil appearing in TKN 5 is a metaphor for Vañcaikkaḷam. Several sacred centers of worship in the south are considered *Dakṣiṇa-Kailāsa* (e.g. Tillai and Ārūr), and Vañcaikkaḷam is one among the choicest.

⁵ Kēraḷa being midway between Rome and China was the meeting place of Semitic, Greek, Roman, Jew, Syrian Christian, Chinese (early settlements), Arabs (pre- and post-Islamic) from time immemorial. Conversion to the alien religions either voluntary or at the point of gun and Inquisition went on unabated (Kumar 2013: 21-29). R.K.K. Rajarajan (2014: chap. V, note 14) reports a depressed community of Cērumāṅs (Thurston 1909: II see under Cheruman) has apparently disappeared from the anthropological map of Kēraḷa due to conversions. Interestingly, Thurston 1909 cites Indian informants that say the Cerumāṅs (cf. Cēramāṅ) were the ancient Cēras.

⁶ *Kīḷṭali* and *Mēḷṭali* stand for temples on the lower and upper part of a venue; cf. Kacci-*mēṇṇali* (*Tēvāram* 4.62, 7.21) and Kuṭantaik-*kīḷkkōṭṭam* (ibid. 6.289). *Tali* and *kōṭṭam* mean “temple”.

west by *gopuras* in the typical Kēraḷite mode. Both the inner and outer *prākāra* entrances accommodate *gopuras* that is supposed to be unique feature in Kēraḷa⁷. Pillai (1986: 169) adds the following note:

“Noted for its structural peculiarities, the most noteworthy feature is the presence of more than one *gopuram*. Srikovil [*śrīkōyil*]⁸ has a porch in front, a feature not commonly found in other temples. Numerous shrines are there within the sacred enclosure. The statues of Ceraman Perumal Nayanar [Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ Nāyaṇār] and his spiritual preceptor Sundaramurti Svamikal [Cuntaramūrti Cuvāmikaḷ] are set up and worshipped. In the temple precincts are found a pair of konna trees (Cassia fistula [Tamil *konrai* Cassia fistula])...Mural paintings... 100 sq. ft. (tenth and eleventh centuries) could be seen. Two Malayalam inscriptions... [of] Ravivarma, King of Cochin [Kocci], are dated 1801 and 1831...” [Box parenthesis mine]

During a recent visit to the temple we were able to do some photographic job in the outer *prākāra*. A vast tank, *kuḷam* is found nearby after which the Malaiyāḷam place-name, Vañcaik-*kuḷam* takes root⁹. The Lord was known Añcaikkaḷattappaṇ (see Attachment), Vañchuleśa (early 19th century) and presently Mahādeva.

A brief account of the layout is presented hereunder to better understand and locate the *Rāmāyaṇa* wooden sculptures that seem to have been added during the 17th-18th century. Casually it may note, the *Rāmāyaṇa* sculptures from the wooden temple cars (Tamil *tēr*, Sanskrit *ratha*) have received an adequate treatment (Kalidos 1988: 104 [figs. 1-10], 1989: 349-57, 1991: figs. 1-14, cf. Rajarajan 1998: 329-48 [figs. 1-20], cf. 2006: figs. 119-123, 231-233, 238, 2010: 101-105 [figs. CP XIV-XVII 1-15]; Jeyapriya 2010: 113-16, figs. CP XIX.1-XXII-2). Raju Kalidos 1989 has registered 200+ wood-carved

⁷ Massive *rāyagopuras* at the cardinal directions appear in temples of Tamilnadu (Auboyer 1994: plans 1-2, Rajarajan 2006: II, pls. Maturai-1, Śrīraṅgam-10; Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2013: pls. 1-2, cf. Harle 1963) reaching the apogee in Śrīraṅgam. For early dwarf-*gopuras*, called *dvāraśobha* see Rajarajan 2012: figs. 14, 46-47).

⁸ Cf. *tirukkōyil* in *Tirukkailāyañāṇaulā* [v. 5] of Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ. The author's name is Cērarkōmāṇ (PTA 101) that is supposed to have travelled on a *vellānai* (white elephant) to the Kailāsa. This event is illustrated in the Cōḷa murals of the Rājarājeśvaram at Tañcāvūr (Sriraman 2011: figs. pp. 181-882).

⁹ *Kaḷam* means “field”, maybe also *kṣetra* or *sthala* that appears in the hymns of Cuntarar (see Attachment). *Kuḷam* is “tank” or “water reservoir”. The vast tank close to the temple seems to have been enlarged during the later medieval period that was originally a pond (cf. Cuntarar's hymns in Attachment).

images on the subject (Dallapiccola 1994: 11-24, cf. Dallapiccola et al. 2005: 253-308, Kalidos 2006: II, pl. VIII). The present article demonstrates how the hidden temples of Kēraḷa open new avenues of research on Hindu iconography in general and the Rāmāyaṇa imagery in particular. Sarkar 1973 and 1978 has not illustrated any wooden sculpture on the Rāmāyaṇa theme¹⁰. Therefore, the present article is rewarding on Kēraḷa studies and the Rāmāyaṇa.

The temple is provided with entrances in the east and west on the outer and inner *prākāras* (Fig. 1, Plan). The entrance on the east is fitted with a Kēraḷa-type *gopura* that is *dvitala* (Fig. 2)¹¹. The outer wall on the west is fitted with a *dvāraśobhā* (detailed in *Kāyapaśilpaśāstra* and *Mayamata* chap. 24, Dagens 1985: 163; Ramakrishnan 1993-95: 91; Fig. 3). Tall *gopuras* appear on the entrances to the outer *nāḷambalam* (Jayashanker 1997: pl. 13, Rajarajan 2014: figs. 5-6). The Brahmasthāna, i.e. *śrīkōvill/garbhagr̥ha* is encased in the inner sacred core of the temple. Spoken with reference to the majestic *gopura* on the east¹², it could be presumed the main entrance to the temple is east¹³.

Entering the east *gopura* and moved in *pradakṣiṇa* chapels for Dakṣiṇāmūrti (south Fig. 4) and Paśupati (southwest Fig. 5) are viewed on the southern sector. The western sector provides for a *dvāraśobhā-gopura* and *ānapandal* “porch”. On the northwest the well is found (Fig. 6). In between the porch and tank two more chapels are accommodated. The northern sector houses two *konnai* trees¹⁴, hypaethral Liṅga and votive *nāgas* (Fig. 7). The interlaying

¹⁰ A mural relating to the Paṭṭābhīṣeka of Rāma is inserted from the Pallimanna Śiva temple, Kumblanāḍ (Sarkar 1978: pl. LIII.B). Very few wood-carvings are reported in this work. See illustrations in Sarkar 1973.

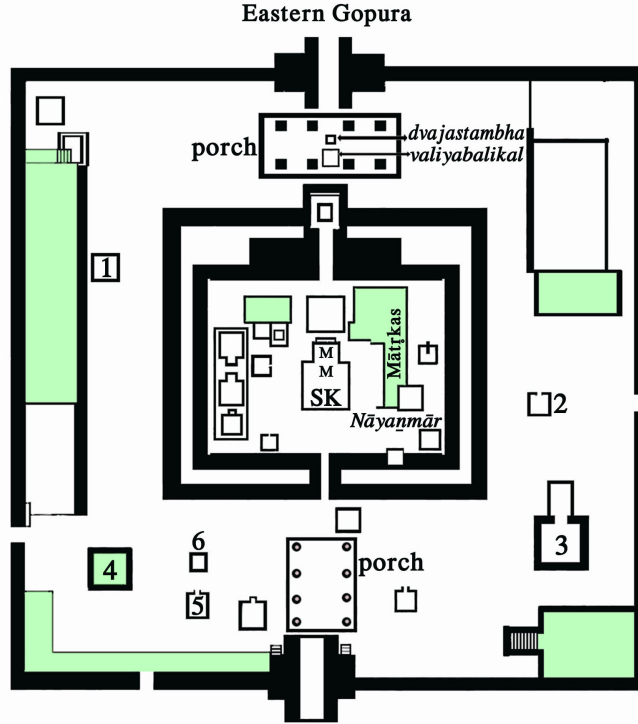
¹¹ Some try to find Chinese influence (see note 5) on the architecture of Kēraḷa and at the same time admit it “is doubtful” (Mitter 2001:73, fig. 48).

¹² When we visited the temple sometime in January 2014, we proceeded from the Kaṇṇaki-Bhagavatī temple through the main streets of the twin-city, Vañcaikkūḷam-Koṭṭūnkallūr, and were compelled to get into the complex by the western gateway.

¹³ Gateways to Maturai and Śrīraṅgam temples are found on four cardinal directions. However, in Śrīraṅgam the pilgrims usually get an access to the temple through the south. The popular entry points in the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple are east and south.

¹⁴ Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ in his hymns repeatedly notes the *konrai* (Cassia fistula), the favourite of Śiva (PTA 35, 39-40, 49-51, 63, 90; TMK 18). Cf. Cuntarar (*Tēvāram* 7.24.1) adds: *Miṇṇār ceñcaṭaimēl miḷirkonrai yaṇintavanē* “glittering *konrai* decks the shining tiara”.

space in between the two eastern *gopuras* is occupied by a porch; tall brick and mortar pillars fitted with a tiled superstructure. The *dvajastambha*, *vāliyabalikal* and *agramaṇḍapa* are affixed in this venue.



Approximate sketch of the Temple

ŚK: 'Śrīkōvil'

MM: mukhamaṇḍapa

1. 'Konnai' trees, Liṅga and Nāgas

2. Dakṣiṇāmūrti

3. Paśupati

4. Well

5. Caṇḍikeśvara

6. Upadevatās

Figure 1: Plan of the Mahādeva Temple, Vañcaikkaḷam

The *garbhagr̥ha* for Añcaikkaḷattappaṇ-Mahādeva is located in the inner enclosure of the temple facing east (cf. Sarkar 1978: pls. LXXIII-LXXV). The images of Cuntarar and Cēramāṇ Perumāl are installed in this sacred zone¹⁵. They are supposed to have moved to the Kailāsa, and so there is every reason to suggest the venue is the *Dakṣiṇa*-Kailāsa (*supra*). Furthermore, Cēramāṇ Perumāl in TKN (ll. 8-9) makes a note of Civalōkam (also PTA 5)¹⁶, Civapuram and Tirukkōyil (Malaiyālam *Śrīkōvil*) thereby suggesting Vañcaikkaḷam is the Kailāsa¹⁷. Maheśvara or Mahādeva and his abode in the Kailāsa

¹⁵ Separate *prathīṣṭha* of Sapta Mātṛkas, Aṇupattumūvar (Nāyanmār-63), Naṭarāja, Caṇḍikeśvara, Unnideva, and other *upadevatās* are present. Totally twenty-five such installations are identified.

¹⁶ Cuntarar and Cēramāṇ Perumāl are supposed to have visited the Śiva-loka with their mortal coil. Cf. Varaguṇa Pāṇḍya taken to the Śiva-loka (*Tiruvilaiyāṭar Purṇam* of Perumparappuliyūr Nampi, Episode 48). *Vide*, Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2013: 7, 11, 33-34, fig. 66.

¹⁷ The TKN visualizes the *ulā* “procession” of Śiva on the Kailāsa decorated with all royal paraphernalia and a host of attendant-gods*. The *ulā* is meant for the *darśana* of women belonging to seven-age groups such as *pētai* 5-8 (age), *petumpai* 9-10, *maṅkai* 11-14, *maṅantai* 15-18, *arivai* 19-24, *terivai* 25-29 and *pēriḷampeṇ* 30-36 (Zvelebil 1974: 199). Presumably, they are in love with Śiva (TKN l. 85 notes *Kāmaṇṇūl/Kāmasūtra*?). In those times pre-puberty marriages (down to the early twentieth century) were common. Kaṇṇaki was married at the age of twelve as *maṅkai* (*Cilappatikāram* 1.24). Now-a-days, a woman getting married at the age of 30 as *pēriḷampeṇ* is common.

* They are Nanti (Nandi), Vacukkaḷ (Vasus 8), Eḷuvar-Iruṭikaḷ (Sapta-Ṛṣis), Paṇṇiruvar-Ātittar (Dvādaśa-Āditys), Akattiyaṇ (Agastya), Yamaṇ, Niruti-*mutalōr* (Nairṭti, the *dikapālakas* – Wessels-Mevissen 2001: 98-100), Varuṇaṇ, Vāyu, Cōmaṇ (Candra), Īcāṇaṇ, Accuṇi (Aśvins), Tūya-Uruttirarkaḷ (Pure Rudras), Kupēraṇ (Kubera), Kaṅkai-Yamuṇai...*tītaṅkaḷ* (Gaṅgā, Yamunā and other *tīrthas*), Nākam-eṭṭu/Aṣṭa-Nāgas (Nāgas eight), Tumpuru-Nāratar (Tumburu-Nārada), Cēṇāpati (Devasenāpati-Skanda), Intiraṇ (Indra), Ayaṇ (Brahmā), Karuṭaṇ (Garuḍa), Kāmaṇ, Vāmaṇ (Arhat or the Buddha), Viāyakaṇ, Maṅkai-eḷuvar (Seven Mātṛkas or Pattīṇis), Nīli riding lion, Viccātarar (Vidyadhara), Iyakkar (Yakṣa), Kiṇṇarar, Kimpuruṭar, Kiṅkarar, Kaṇam (*ganas*), Arakkar-Acurar (demons), Vālakilyar (Valakhilyas) and so on. The TMK adds Nāyīru/Sun (PTA 26), Tīṅkaḷ/Moom and Pāmpu “snakes” (Rāhu-Ketu? PTA 90), and Cevvāy/Mars (l. 5) an early vision of the Navagrahas, the Nine Planetary deities (cf. Tēvāram 2.221.1: Nāyīru Tīṅkaḷ Cevvāy Putaṇ Viyāḷam Veḷḷi Caṇi Pāmpiraṇṭu “two serpents”; Rajarajan 2006: 104, 2015:169-96). It is only in the hymns of Cēramāṇ that such a cavalcade of minor gods is obtained, supposed to attend on the Cosmic Man, Puruṣa-Śiva who pervades through the celestial bodies in the Milky Way, Aṇṭattukkappāḷaṇ (TMK 4) as the Sthāṇu/Tāṇu “Pillar/Liṅga” (PTA 38), the Ādimūrti/Ātimūrti “Primeval Lord” (TMK 10) on the Axis mundi, Mēru (PTA 88).

are detailed in the *Śivapañcākṣarī* (*Śrītattvanidhi* 1.3.1). The Lord in this account is presumably Paśupati ('Pacupati' PTA 30, 61 "Lord of Creatures") full of compassion for *bhaktas*. The two chapels for Paśupati¹⁸ and Dakṣiṇāmūrti¹⁹ in southern *nāḷambalam* would confirm the benign aspect of Śiva²⁰. Śiva's basic ethos is *tāmasa*, and thereby the God of Destruction (Jeyapriya 2009: chap. I). He is viewed as a sustaining principle in the Vañcaikkalam tradition; cf.TKN:

Ariyākik kāppāṅ Ayaṅāyp pataippāṅ

Aranāy aḷippavanun tāṅē...

Evvuruvil yāroruvar uḷkuvar vuḷḷattu!

Avvuruṅvāyt tōṅṅi aruḷkoṭuppāṅ... [ll. 5-10]

"The protector as Hari, the creator as Brahmā

The destroyer as Hara, He is...

Whoever those imagine in whichever form appears in their mind

(The Lord in) such a design confers his grace..."

It is to suggest Śiva compresses Viṣṇu and Brahmā within his own mega-personality as the Cosmic [Virāt-]Puruṣa (cf. the *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*; *Irukku* in TKN l. 24; Viśvarūpa in *Śivasahasranāma* 44, 95; Maxwell 1983: 213-34). Śiva is supposed to be foremost among the Trimūrti:

Mēvarāya viraimalarōṅ ceṅkaṅmā ḷcaṅṅeṅṅum

¹⁸ It stands to be verified whether independent chapels for Paśupati (cf. Lorenzetti 1996) exist elsewhere; the earliest imagery is of the Indic culture (Basham 1971: pl. 5f).

¹⁹ Dakṣiṇāmūrti normally appears in a *devakoṣṭha* in temples of Tamilnadu since the Pallava period, e.g. Takkōlam, Tiruttani, Kaḷukkuṅṅam, and Puḷḷamaṅkai (Kalidos 1996: fig. 8) and not in a separate chapel (Kalidos 2006: II, pl. LXXVII.2, cf. LXXVIII.1, CIV.1). Interestingly the Lord is *mūlabera* in the Irunilāṅkōḍu/Kēraḷa rock-cut cave (Ibid. pl. CV, Sarkar 1978: pl. IV.B).

²⁰ Dakṣiṇāmūrti (cf. the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* of Śaṅkara) and Paśupati (*Śivasahasranāma*-409, 869 in the *Anuśāsanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*) are the cumulative essence of Śiva's total personality. Śaṅkara in the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* in ten stanzas (commented by Śrī Sureśvarācārya in *Mānasollāsa*) invokes (Vasanthakumari 2003: 12-13, 15): Tasmai Śrīgurumūrtaye nama yidaṃ Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrtaye – "Extol the great Auspicious Teacher, He is Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti". The Vaiṣṇavas claim the same status for Viṣṇu as Guruḥ and Gurutamaḥ (*Viṣṇusahasranāma* 209-210).

Mūvarāya mutaloruvaṅ... (*Tēvāram* 1.53.1)

“The three are He-on-flower (Brahmā), the red-eyed-Māl (Viṣṇu) and Īśvara; One, He is three ...”

That is to say Śiva is perceived as Paśupati in the Vañcaikkaḷam tradition (*vide*, Attachment v. 7). He is the Mahādeva “Lord Great”, an epithet that is shared by Śrī Rāma (cf. ‘Mahādevāya namaḥ’ in *Rāmoṣṭottaram*-58).

Rāmāyaṇa Sculptures

What is significant in the architectural setting is that *Rāmāyaṇa* sculptures are inlaid on the ceiling of the eastern porch at the level of *prastara*. These are bracket motifs as though supporting the roof with the *prastara* appearing on the four-pillars. The events illustrated are mostly from the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the epic. The reason for the selection of episodes from the first *kāṇḍa* and not the other seven is obscure²¹; may be arbitrary and random. Early narrative sculptures on the *Rāmāyaṇa* (e.g. Kailāsa of Ellora, Upper Śivālaya of Badāmī, Durgā temple of Aihole and so on) do not present a continuous array of episodes from the *Bāla-* to the *Uttara-kāṇḍas* (cf. Gail 1985: 177-86, Rajarajan 2001: 783-97, Kalidos 2006: II, chaps. II & III). The events are also not continuous as it may be found in Vālmīki or any vernacular version, and jump from one event to the other without any link. This strange phenomenon could not be explained (cf. Dehejia 1998: 80-106). We find both these paradoxes meeting in the portrayal of Vañcaikkaḷam-*Rāmāyaṇa*²². For the sake of continuity in narration the sculptures are rearranged as follows:

1. Rāma and Daśaratha, 2. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, 3. Rāma as *dhanurdhara*, 4. Daśaratha, Sumantra and Viśvāmitra, 5. Viśvāmitra

²¹ The other *kāṇḍas* are named *Ayodhyā-*, *Āraṇya-*, *Kiṣkinda-*, *Sundara-*, *Yuddha-* and *Uttara-*. Vernacular versions of the epic have selected few of these *kāṇḍas* for rendering in Tamil, Malaiyāḷam, Telugu, and Kannaḍa. For example, Kampar in his Tamil *Irāmāvatāram* omits the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Kōṇa Buddharāja’s (fourteenth century) sons wrote the *Uttara-Rāmāyaṇa* in Telugu. The anonymous *Rāmācaritram* (c. tenth-thirteenth centuries) in Malaiyāḷam deals with the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (Sastri 1971: 418).

²² Bhaṭṭakal in coastal Karnāṭaka on the upper fringes of Kēraḷa illustrates incomplete *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs (Dallapiccola et al. 2005: 253-308, Jeyapriya 2010: 112-16, Kalidos 2014: 113-38).

teaching archery to Rāma, 6. Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, 7. Tātakā-*vadham*, 8. Viśvāmitra's *yajña*, 9. Redemption of Ahalyā.

Vālmīki's narration of the epic would add Daśaratha begot four sons through his queens after a *putrakāmeṣṭi-yajña*. Rāma grew up to manhood trained in archery by his *kulaguru*, Vasiṣṭha. Sage Viśvāmitra approached Daśaratha to take Rāma to the forest in order to do away with the menace of *rākṣasas*. The reluctant Daśaratha consoles himself, and permits Rāma to accompany the *brahmaṛṣi*-Viśvāmitra to the forest. Lakṣmaṇa follows his brother. Rāma kills the demons in forest, including the ogress, Tātakā. Viśvāmitra completes his *yajña* for peace of the world. He conducts Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Mithilā. On the way Rāma sets his foot on a stone that was cursed Ahalyā, wife of sage Gautama. She is redeemed²³. The wooden sculptures on the east-porch of the Mahādeva temple at Vañcaikkaḷam mostly pertain to these events. It may add these are unreported in any scholarly study.

1. Dāśarathi-Rāma and Daśaratha appear together that may show the love of the *mahārāja* for his son (Fig. 8). Rāma is not armed, which means both the father and his beloved son discuss the question relating to the need of sage Viśvāmitra. He had arrived at the palace in Ayodhyā (contextually Vañcaikkaḷam temple²⁴) seeking the help of Daśaratha. Both the king and prince are crowned and wear apparels in the Mughal fashion that is a clue the date the sculptures in the eighteenth century (cf. Jeyapriya 2009a: pl. VIII²⁵). They are *sthānaka* (standing mode). The rich ornaments on both the persons display Kēraḷa exuberance imbedded partly with *Kathakali* influence. It is a set pattern in all illustrations under study. The right hands of both the personalities are in

²³ All these events take place in *sargaḥ* (canto) 18 to 51 of Vālmīki-*Rāmāyaṇa*.

²⁴ Considering a south Indian *sthala-kṣetra* the venue of *Rāmāyaṇa* event is not unpopular. For example, the Mātaṅga-*parvata* in Vijayanagara/Hampi is treated the Kiṣkinda of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Settar n.d.: 24). The Viṣṇu temple of Citamparam, the Cillai-Cittirakūṭam is considered the Citrakūṭa of *Rāmāyaṇa* in Kulaśekhara Āḷvār's hymns (see note 3, Kalidos 1997: 22). Kulaśekhara was a genius who compresses the *mahā-Rāmāyaṇa*, including the *Uttarakāṇḍa* in eleven hymns (*Perumāḷ Tirumoli* 10.1-11).

²⁵ This is a wood-carved image from the temple car of the Rāma temple at Vaṭuvūr, Tañcāvūr district. See R.K.K. Rajarajan, 'Rāmāyaṇa Paintings of the Tirukōkaraṇam Temple' MS (Alexander von Humboldt post-doctoral report of the Free University Berlin, Berlin 2002 – Unquoted in References).

vismayamudra, expressing wonder; perhaps at the warrant of Viśvāmitra and dismay of Daśaratha.

2. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are *sthānaka* (Fig. 9). Lakṣmaṇa appears behind Rāma. They perhaps discuss the prospects of war with demons in the forest that hinder the sacrifices of ṛṣis. A frieze of couchant peacocks with folded plumages extending backwards appears at the bottom to add to the aesthetics of composition. The apparel and ornaments are rich.
3. Rāma in Indian tradition is celebrated for three *uttama-guṇas* (cf. *Rāmāṣṭottaram* epithet 37 ‘Triguṇātma’); viz.,
 - i) *Puruṣa-lakṣaṇa*, ii) *Dhanurdhara* (expert archer) to uphold *dharma*, and iii) *Rāma-rājya*, champion of the best administered best government; the dreamland/utopia of Mahātma Gāndhī²⁶.

The present image shows Rāma majestically holding the *dhanus*, and so *dhanurdhara* (Fig. 10). It suggests he is equipped to go with Viśvāmitra to accomplish his manifest duty in the *araṇya* “forest”. The image is slightly *tribhaṅga* and royally decorated. The *dhanus* in the right hand is broken. The left is in *kaṭihasta*.

4. Daśaratha, Viśvāmitra and Sumantra are present (Fig. 11). Viśvāmitra is annoyed at the refusal of Daśaratha to depart with Rāma. Sumantra perhaps persuades Daśaratha to yield to the request of Viśvāmitra. It is only afterwards that the heroism of Rāma is let known to the world. Rāma’s association with Viśvāmitra not only led to the rendition of demons but also taking the hand of Śītā in Mithilā. The image shows Viśvāmitra holding a *chhatrāvali*, and moving away. Daśaratha follows him and is inclined to yield to the request of Viśvāmitra.
5. Viśvāmitra and Rāma are perhaps discussing how to do away with the demons that cause sacrilegious harm to the sacrifices. Viśvāmitra is seated in *mahārājatilāsana* on an ornamental wooden pedestal. Rāma stands nearby meekly listening to the discourse of the sage (Fig. 12). He is perhaps teaching *dhanurśāstra* to Rāma. Vālmiki says the sage taught him how to obtain divine missiles, *bāṇa* and how to employ these in time

²⁶ Cf. the following epithets of the *Rāmāṣṭottara*: Mahāpuruṣa-70 “Great Man”, Purāṇapuruṣottama-73 “Primeval Best Man”, Dhanurdhara-90 “Wielder of the Bow”, Harakodaṇḍakhaṇḍana-27 “Wielder of the bow of Hara/Śiva” (Śivadhanus broken in the *svayamvara* at Mithilā*), Rājivalocana-5 “Face of (best) Administration” and so on.

* The confrontation between *kṣatriya*-Daśarathi-Rāma and *brāhmaṇa*-Paraśurāma led to the breaking of Viṣṇudhanus (*Bālakāṇḍa*, *Sargas* 75-76).

of need²⁷. The *Rāmāṣṭottaram* invokes the Lord with the epithet, Viśvāmitrapriya-13 “(Rāma) the beloved of Viśvāmitra”.

6. The illustration presents Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa standing in a row (Fig. 13). Having learnt the intricacies of *dhanurśāstra* from the sage, Rāma entreats the same be taught to Lakṣmaṇa (*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 28).
7. The next scene pertains to the slaughter of Tāṭakā by Rāma. Vālmīki says Rāma was reluctant to kill a woman. At that time Tāṭakā rushed toward Rāma lifting her arms and roaring. She threw a huge cloud of dust and rocks. Angry at these insinuating acts of Tāṭakā, Rāma cut off her arms. Lakṣmaṇa deprived her of her ears and tip of nose (*Bālakāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 26). She and her brothers were killed. The wood carving shows a gruesome creature of short and clumsy stature. The mouth is wide agape and canine teeth protruding (Fig. 14). She is covered with *kaupīṇa*-like garment. The ornaments consist of thick circular iron fittings such as *kaṅkaṇa*, *keyūra* and anklets. The *Rāmāṣṭottara* adds the epithet, Tāṭakānta-31 “Destroyer of Tāṭakā (the evil-monger)”.

Of all the images examined so far, the figure of Tāṭakā is most striking from the iconographic point of view. Thematically, it purports to illustrate whatever may be thrust with which terrorism [*dharmadroha*] rock at a high pitch *dharma* wins the race in the long run. This is the basic message that Indian religion, philosophy and art teaches to the global community of peace-lovers [*dharmātma*].

The sculptors and poets of the Vañcaikkaḷam *sthala* (*vide*, Attachment) do tell us the manifest purpose behind the *avatāras* and manifestations of Devī-Bhagavatī, Viṣṇu and Śiva are annihilation of evil and installation of *dharma*.

8. The most striking illustration in the *Rāmāyaṇa* series is the *yajña* of Viśvāmitra. We do not know in which part of proto-historic India and at what point of time the sage conducted the *yajña* for global peace (*infra*). We find him readily present in the Vañcaikkaḷam temple in a corner performing the much-praised sacrifice, sanctified in literature since the

²⁷ Certain miraculous missiles are supposed to be not invited under ordinary circumstances. Such missiles, e.g. *Brahmāstra* should not be solicited and once obtained they could not be kept in abeyance, and must be released; e.g. Karṇa and Aśvatthāma and in both the cases Kṛṣṇa had to intercede and save the victims, Arjuna and Parikṣit from impending catastrophe (Mani 1996: 159, cf. Dowson 1998: 29). In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Bālakāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 76, vv. 15-20) the problem arises when Rāma mounts a missile on the Viṣṇu-*dhanus* when challenged by Paraśurāma. It was released to curtail the pride of the *brāhmaṇa-ṛsi*.

Ṛgvedic time. The sage is seated facing a fire-altar from which the combustion rises up. The sage is found pouring ingredients to cultivate the fire. Fire and illumination dispel darkness and evil, and usher in a paradise regained (Fig. 15).

9. Another illustration pertains to the redemption offered to Ahalyā, wife of sage Gautama forged and raped by Indra. The image shows Rāma standing majestically decorated in royal garments and ornaments. Ahalyā is already recovered from the cursed stone, and stands lifting the hands lifted up in *namaskāramudra* (Fig. 16). She is shown with full breasts not tugged with any upper cloth. The *Rāmāṣṭottaram* adds the epithet, Ahalyāśāpavimokcana-44, the Lord that confers grace to Ahalyā. Rāma was the friend of the unfriended poor. He went to the help of the needy and the destitute but stands on crossroads in contemporary politics.

There may be several hundreds of sculptures and paintings on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in South and Southeast Asia (e.g. Prāmbanan in Central Jāva)²⁸ but those in the Vañcaikkalam temple constitute a genre. They exhibit visible traits of the culture of Kēraḷa in as far as the coiffeur and ornamental details are concerned, and thematically Vālmīki. Kēraḷa is the homeland of the art in wood that is richly available in the hilly abode of the gods and goddesses. In fact, originally the temples of Kēraḷa were set against the background of the woods and water. However, a systematic survey of the temples in Kēraḷa is needed in spite of the pioneering efforts of Sarkar 1978. Jayashanker 1997 is an excellent work in respect of “rituals” but lacks in temple architecture and iconography. The history of art in Kēraḷa stands behind the veil and efforts are taken to bring the hidden treasures to the limelight.

By way of conclusion the selection of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sculptures in a Śiva temple may be explained. To begin with the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* by Tuñcat Rāmānujaṅ Eḷuttaccaṅ is an explication of the philosophy of the epic and glories of Rāma related by Śiva to Pārvatī²⁹. At the pan-Indian level, the *Rāmāyaṇa* sculptures appear in temples of all sectarian lineages (e.g. the Chenna-Keśava and

²⁸ The author had an occasion to visit the island (July 2012, International Conference of the Association of Historians of Asia) and collected photographic materials that are pending publication.

²⁹ The poetic works in Malaiyālam are *Rāmakathāp-pāṭṭu* by Ayyipiḷlai Āśān, *Rāmāyaṇa-campu* by Punam Nambūdiri and *Kaṇṇaśśa-Rāmāyaṇam* by Rāma Paṅikkār (fifteenth century).

Hoysalesvara at Bēlūr and Halebīḍu, cf. Settar 1992: II, pls. 188-189, 261). Therefore, it is no wonder if such heritages are imprinted in the Mahādeva of Vañcaikkaḷam. Two pan-Indian cultural idioms find a harmonious confluence in the art of Vañcaikkaḷam. They are Paśupati equated with Rāma-*rājya*³⁰ and the Rāmeśvaram tradition in which Rāma is said to have instituted the Īśvaram at Setu (*vide*, the seventh century *Tēvāram* 3.268, 3.359; 4.61)³¹. Mythology says Vañcaikkaḷam was the *prathiṣṭha* of [Paraśu-] Rāma.

The choice of themes from the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by the Kēraḷaputras (attested since the third century BCE³², cf. Aśoka's Girnār Rock Edict in Mookerji 1972: 223) is unique because the *kāṇḍa* is full of joy and play, humour and seriousness at work³³, and the great sages Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha bringing up the children of Raghu-*kula* to the full magnitude of martial splendor to safeguard *dharma* "righteousness" *patritrāṇāya sādḥūnām*, and destroy evil *vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām* (*Bhagavat Gītā* 4.8). By the way it proclaims the message of India to world thought by emphasizing the purpose of *yajña* (sacrifice) and result of *siddha* (accomplishment) directed toward cosmic peace:

Om Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ, the invocatory verse in *Upaniṣads*
(Gambhīrānanda 1995: I 2, 34, 98)

³⁰ A popular Rāma-*kīrti* (or *bhajan*) song avowedly declares Rāma is Paśupati: "Daśaratha nandana Rāma Ram/Daśamukkha mardana Rāma Raṃa... Paśupati... Rāma Rām".

³¹ Cilaiyaṇṇal ceytavi rāmēccuram "Rāmeśvaram established by Master-*dhanurdhara*" (*Tēvāram* 3.268.2).

³² Early authorities date the epic "before 500 B.C." (MacDonell 1979: 200). Modern research and theatrical formulae are subject to controversy (cf. Brockington 1998: chap. 7). These scholars strive to bring down the two mega-epics down to 500 CE due to interpolation of later ideas, syntax and style. Even in such a case the epics may have to be dated during the pre-500 BCE to a convenient later date. Cf. Wendy Doniger (1994: 18) assigns the *Skanda Purāṇa* to 700-1150 CE. Doniger's date for the *Rāmāyaṇa* is 200 BCE to 200 CE. In her scheme the *Rāmāyaṇa* is post-Buddha, which could not be historical. Again, Doniger and "her children" (Tailor 2011: 149-68) are controversial authors. Two of Doniger's (2009, 2013) books have been proscribed in India.

³³ See the modern paintings in the 'Rāmacaritamanas Temple' at Vāraṇasī where the children of 'Raghuvamśa' are found happily playing tops (Kalidos 2010: 9-12, figs. BW 30-31).

This meritorious act is projected in the wood carvings of the Kēraḷa-Mahādeva temple (Fig. 15), which again emphasizes the *gunāmsā* of Paśupati-Śiva. Paśupati is a cherished theme in the hymns of the Nāyaṇmār that Cēramāṇ Perumāl celebrates. Pantaṇainallūr (*Tēvāram* 3.379, all hymns) in the Cōlanāḍu was a *sthala*, the hymns on which commemorate the celebrity of Paśupati. The same credit is shared by the hymns on Potu “Common-[Tillai/Citamparam]” (*Tēvāram* 4.111, all hymns). Paśupati is the Lord that eradicates *karma*, inheritances of the past; Pacupati-pāvanācaṅ³⁴ (ibid. 4.51.10). The Lord is above all the Eternal, Pacupati-paramēṭṭi (ibid. 7.92.1). He is the creator, and sustains the worlds (Noble 1981: 2). To our knowledge no temple in South India accommodates a chapel for Paśupati. This architectural setting and philosophical input is important to understand the cultural value of Vañcaikkalam.

Justifying the value of *yajñas*, Vālmīki in the *Rāmāyaṇa* says “The name of Siddhāśrama has been justified by being able to perform the *yajña* (without molestation from terrorists such as the *asuras*)”. The purpose of *yajña* is cosmic peace and prosperity. Śiva-Paśupati is Vedamaya and Yajñapriya³⁵. Vālmīki unequivocally adds³⁶:

Atha yajñe samāpte tu Viśvāmitre Mahāmuniḥ/
Nirītikā diśo druṣḍvā Kākusthamidamabravīt//
Kṛtārtho’smi mahābāho kṛtaṃ guruvacastvayā/
Siddhāśramidaṃ satyaṃ kṛtaṃ vīra mahāyaśaḥ/
Sa hi Rāmaṃpraśasyaivaṃ tābhyāmsandyāmapāgamat//

Vālmīki-*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 30, vv. 25-30)

³⁴ ‘Nārāyaṇa’ (*Viṣṇusahasranāma*-245) gets closer to the concept of Paśupati who pervades through the *naras* (*nara* + *ayaṇa*); cf. Nara-Nārāyaṇa (Williams 1983: fig. 206). Viṣṇu is Viśodhanaḥ (ibid. 637) that “destroys sins”.

³⁵ Cf. the *Śivasaharanāma* epithets: Vedakārāya-426, Yajñāya-275/529, Siddhbhūtārtha-99, Siddhārthacchandovyākaranottara-677 (accomplished end of the *Veda* and *vyākaraṇa*).

³⁶ Kampa-*Irāmāyaṇam* (*Pālakāṇḍam*, 8.38) adds: Vētanūl muṛaimaiyāl vēlvi murruvōrkku, Ītu avātu illai... – “No evil haunts one that performs the Vedic sacrifice as told in the *Vedas*”. The same advice was given to Kēraḷaputra-Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ, supposed to be the uterine brother of Iḷaṅkō, author of *Cilappatikāram* (28.176-78): Perunal vēlvi nī ceyal vēṅṭūm – “You must perform the good great sacrifice”. It is a pointer of the fact that Kēraḷa was the sacred venue of sacred sacrifices from time immemorial.

An optimistic scholar steeped in pan-Indian heritage may add Vañcaikkaḷam is the Siddhāśrama where the great sage, Paraśurāma set his footprints in the creation mythology of Kēraḷa, and again he was the legendary founder of *Mēltaḷi*-Vañcaikkaḷam.

Attachment

Transcription and Summary of Hymns bearing on Vañcaikkaḷam
(*Tēvāram* 7.4, Cuppiramaṇiyaṅ 2007: 510-11)

1. Talaikkut talaimālai aṇinta tēṇṇē*/Caṭaimēṛkaṅkai veḷḷan tarittatēṇṇē
Alaikkum pilittōḷkoṅ ṭacaitta tēṇṇē/Ataṇmēṛ katanākam kaccārta tēṇṇē
Malaikku nikarop paṇavaṅ tiraikaḷ/Valitter ṛimuḷaṅ kivalam purikoṅ
Ṭalaikkuṅ kaṭalaṅ karaimēḷ makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṇē

* It is exclamatory alliteration and suggests “What a wonder?” “How marvelous a tour de force?” “How wonderfully done?” and so on.

“How nice it is to deck the head with a tiara! How nice it is to hold the waters of Gaṅgā on the ochre-hued matted locks! How nice it is to put on the tiger’s hide! How nice it is to fit in the black snake! The abode of Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam is amid a landscape of pools where the waves of the sea rise up above the hills circumambulating the venue”.

2. Piṭṭāṭṭi yornākat taippūṇṭa tēṇṇē/Piṛaṅkum caṭaimēṛ piṛaicūṭiṛ renṇē
Poṭit tāṅkoṅ ṭumeymuṛ rumpūciṛ renṇē/Pukarēṛu kantēṛal purinta tēṇṇē
Maṭit tōṭṭan tuvaṅtirai yerriyāṭa/Vaḷarcaṅkam aṅkāttu muttaṅ coriya
Aṭittār kaṭalaṅ karaimēḷ makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṇē

“Caught, tossed and ornamented a snake (on Thy mien [cf. Kalidos 2012: 43-48, fig. 4])! How nice to put on the crescent on hanging locks! How nice to smear the dust [*bhasma*] all over the body (cf. *Tēvāram* 1.202, Kalidos 2006: II 68-70)! How nice it is to mount the celebrated Bull! The abode of the Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam on the seashore is full of pools where waves of the sea dash on the shore and pearls pour from mature conchs”.

3. Cintit teḷuvārkkku nellik kaṇiyē/Ciṇiyār periyār maṇattuēra lurrāl
 Muntit toḷuvā riṇavār piṇavār/Muṇikaḷ muṇiyē amarark kamarā
 Cantit taṭamāl varaipōḷ tiraikaḷ/Taṇiyātu iṭaruṇ kaṭalaṇ karaimēl
 Antit talaiccekkar vāṇē yottiyā/Vaṇiyār poḷilaṇ caikkaḷat tappaṇē
 “Thou are the *nelli** (Phyllanthus emblica) fruit for those meditate on
 Thee! Thou ascend into the minds of the big and the small beings! They
 do not die and are not reborn! Sage among sages! God among gods!
 Thou Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam! Thou resemble the black-hill where the
 red-hot sun descends and that is dashed by waves of the sea”.
- * Believed to endow immortality (Subrahmanian 1990: 512).
4. Iḷaikkum eḷuttuk kuyirē yottiyāl/Ilaiyē yottiyā luṇaiyē yottiyāl
 Kuḷaikkum payirkkōr puyalē ottiyāl/Aṭiyār tamakkōr kuṭiyē yottiyāl
 Malaikku nikaṇop paṇavaṇ tiraikaḷ/Valitter riṇuḷaṇ kivalam purikoṇ
 Ṭalaikkuṇ kaṭalaṇ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṇ caikkaḷat tappaṇē
 “Thou are the soul of letters. Though are the rims of the wheel, which if
 extolled offers grace even to the grass. The waves of the sea rise up as a
 hill and dash on the shore where the Lord Añcaikkaḷattappaṇ finds his
 resort”.
5. Vīṭiṇ payaṇeṇ piṇappiṇ payaṇeṇ/Viṭaiyē ruvateṇ matayāṇai niṇkak
 Kūṭum malaimaṅkai yoruttiyuṭaṇ caṭaimēṇ/Kaṅkaiyālai nīcūṭiṇ renṇē
 Pāṭum pulavark karuḷum poruḷeṇ/Nīṭiyam palace takalac celavil
 Āṭuṇ kaṭalaṇ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṇ caikkaḷat tappaṇē
 “What use is a house? What use is with a birth? How nice (the Lord) to
 unite with the hill-maid, and mount the she-Gaṅgā on matted-locks! The
 rhyming poets are richly rewarded. Añcaikkaḷattappaṇ is present amid a
 venue of pools where the sea dances on shore”.
6. Iravat tiṭukāṭ ṭeriāṭiṇ renṇē/Iṇantār ta;aiyir palikōṭa lenṇē
 Paravit toḷuvār peru paṇṭa menṇē/Parmā paramēṭṭi paṇintaruḷāy
 Uraṇan toṭucaṅka mōṭṭippi muttam/Koṇarnterri muḷaṅki valampuri koṇṭu

Aravak kaṭalaṅ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikaḷat tappaṅē

“What an awful bliss is to dance in crematorium during midnight! How wonderful to seek alms in skulls of the dead! What gratification do the intense prayers derive? Thou the Eternal Being do assure eternity! The Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam is on the shore of the sea that is scattered with conchs, pearls and the right-warped shells.”

7. Ākkum aḷivum amaivum nī eṇṇpavaṅ nāṅ/Colluvār coṅporu ḷavai nī eṇṇpaṅ nāṅ

Nākkum ceviyum kaṅṅum nī eṇṇpavaṅ nāṅ/Nalaṅē iṅinā ṇuṇaināṅ kuṅarntēṅ

Nōkkum nitiyam palavet taṅaiyuṅ/Kalattir pukappeytu koṅṭura nunti

Ārkkum kaṭalaṅ karaimēl makōtai aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṅē

“I say Thou are creation, destruction and the established order! I say You are the meaning of the words uttered! I say Thou are the tongue (that speaks), the ears (that hear) and the eyes (that see)! I have experienced Thou amply! Thou are the Lord of Añcaikkaḷam full of pools where on the shore of the sea riches are accumulated”.

8. Veruttēṅ maṅaivāḷk kaiyaviṭ toḷittēṅ/Viḷaṅkum kuḷaikkātuṭai vētiyaṅē

Iṅuttāy Ilaṅkaik kiṅaiyā yavaṅait/Talaipattoṭu tōḷpala iṅru viḷak

Kaṅuttāy kaṭalnaṅ cumutuṅṭu kaṅṭam/Kaṭukap Piramaṅ talaiaṅ tiluṇoṅ

Ṛarittāy kaṭalaṅ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṅē

“I have discarded family-life and am detached. Thou! The *Veda*-incarnate wears the shining ear-pendant. Thou took to task the King of Laṅkā and severed his ten-heads and strong shoulders. Thou chopped off one of the five-heads of Brahmā. Thou are Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam of waves dashing against the shore that is full of pools”.

9. Piṭikkūṅ kaḷiṅē yottiyā yempirāṅ/Piramaṅkum pirāṅmarrai māṅkumpirāṅ

Noṭikkum aḷaviṅ puramūṅṅeriyac cilaitoṭ/Tavaṅē uṅaināṅ maṅavēṅ

Vaṭikkiṅ ṅaṅapōṅ cilavaṅ tiraikaḷ/Valitterri muḷaṅki valam purikoṅ

Ṭaṭikkūṅ kaṭalaṅ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṅē

“My Lord is the bull-elephant, *kaḷiru* that mates the cow-elephant, *pīti* (cf. *Tēvāram* 4.3.1). He is the Lord of Brahmā, and the Lord of Māl/Viṣṇu. By the stroke of a moment, he mounted the bow to topple the triple-forts, *tripuras*. I will not forget you. Thou are the Lord of Vañcaikkaḷam on the shore washed by the oceanic waters and are full of enchanting ponds*”.

* Cuntarar says Vañcaikkaḷam was located on the sea-shore. The notation relating to “pools” or “ponds” maybe the backwaters in addition to the water-stores close to the temple meant for temple rituals (Fig. 6). Such a tank is also found close to the Kaṇṇaki-Bhadrakālī temple of Koṭṭukallūr.

10. Entam aṭikaḷimaiyōr perumā neṇakkeṇ/Rumaḷik kummaṇi miṭarraṇ

Antaṇ kaṭalaṅ karaimēl makōtai/Aṇiyār poḷilaṅ caikkaḷat tappaṇai

Mantam muḷavuṅ kuḷalum iyampum/Vaḷarnāva larkōṅ Nampiyū
raṇcoṇṇa

Cantam mikutaṇ Tamilmālai kaḷkoṅ/Ṭaṭivīḷa vallār taṭumār ṛilarē

“The Lord is the Mater of His servants, whose throat is smeared with the poison of the ocean. He is the Master of Vañcaikkaḷam. The venue resounds with the music of drums, flutes and other instruments (*mattam*, *muḷavam* and *kuḷal* cf. Kalidos 2006: II, 73). If one sings the hymns of Nampiyūraṅ of Nāvalūr, he is blessed.”

Figures



Figure 2: East *gopuras*



Figure 3: West *dvāraśobhā*



Figure 4: Dakṣiṇāmūrti shrine



Figure 5: Paśupati shrine



Figure 6: Temple tank and shrines nearby



Figure 7: *Konnai* trees and Linga



Figure 8 Daśaratha and Rāma



Figure 9: Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa



Figure 10: *Dharmurdhara*-Rāma



Figure 11: Daśaratha, Viśvāmitra and Sumantra



Figure 12: Viśvāmitra and Rāma



Figure 13: Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa



Figure 14: Tātakā-vadham



Figure 15: Viśvāmītra's *yajña*



Figure 16: Ahalyā Redeemed

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