Chapter : 6

Comparative analysis of Mahatmyam and Talapuranam

A. Common features

There are many common features in Mahatmyam and Talapuranam. The first is the content. Many times they are translations of each other. They explain three things to the worshipers; why the temple came to be located in that particular place, what are the unique features of the deity or the deities of the temple and who are the model saints or devotees associated with that temple. Both Mahatmyam and Talapuranam deal with the greatness of the temple concerned. They contain anecdotes of persons who had bathed in the Tirttam and worshipped the deity and got their desires fulfilled, ailments cured and got relieved of their sins. The category of persons who had worshipped in the temple consists of Gods other than the presiding deities, Devas, Asuras, Kings, common people and some times animals too.

Both are in the form of dialogue taking place in the Naimisa forest, between Rishis, residing in the forest and a senior sage like, Sanatkumara or Narada. visiting them. There may be shorter dialogues between Gods like Civa and Parvati or Vishnu and Lakshmi within the bigger dialogue. The Mahatmyam will also contain a number of Stotras addressed to various deities made by the characters in the anecdotes. Some of them contain
certain specialized information like mantras, description of Yantras, and description of various forms of deities to mark their uniqueness.

Though they are named after a place like Chidambara Mahatmyam, Tiruvarur p puranam, Dakshina Kuti dwipa Mahatmyam, the contents of the Mahatmyam/ Talapuranam are temple specific in that particular place. Even though there may be many other temples in that place, the Mahatmyam/Talapuranam will not even make any mention of them, but speak of only one temple it discusses about. The Kanci p puranam is an exception in this regard.

Another peculiar common feature in them is that they declare that they are not original. Whereas the Mahatmyam claims to be extracted from one section of a Mahapurana or Upapurana, the Talapuranam declares that it is an adaptation of a Mahatmyam written on that Talam.

Further, even though Mahatmyam is in Sanskrit and Talapuranam is in Tamil, both go by the Tamil tradition of Murtti, Talam and Tirttam of that divine place, as Mahatmyams appear to have originated from Tamilnadu only. Though the works are called Talapuranam or Sthala Mahatmyam they discuss the greatness of the Murtti, Talam and Tirttam as per the Tamil tradition.
B. Chidambara Mahatmyam and Koyil Puranam – a specific analysis

Chidambara Mahatmyam comprises of 26 chapters whereas Koyil puranam comprises of Five chapters apart from Payiram.

We have discussed at length about the structure, content and the special features of Chidambara Mahatmyam in Chapter-4 and those of Koyil Puranam in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Both the works contain three traditions, those of Vyaghrapada, Patancali and Hiranyavarman. Vyaghrapada episode deals in the first half of the penance performed by him near a tank in Chidambaram. In the second half, the narrative shifts its focus to the baby Upamanyu crying for milk, Vyaghrapada praying to Lord Nataraja, who miraculously produces an ocean of milk for him in a nearby tank.

The Patancali episode contains the Devadaru forest episode of Bhikshatana, Nataraja adorning himself with the tiger skin, serpent bangle and stood on the powerful demon sent by the sages of Devadaru forest., it contains description of Ananda Tandava of the Lord witnessed by Vishnu.

Hiranyavarman episode narrates the story of the Prince Simhavarman of Gauda Desa who was suffering from a skin disease. He was wandering from place to place in search for a cure. He gets cured by taking bath in the temple pond in Chidambaram. Cured of his disease, Simhavarman is renamed as Hiranyavarman.

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The common factor of all the three, i.e, Vyaghrapada, Patancali and Hiranyakarman is that they were blessed to witness the dance of bliss, *Ananda Tandava*, of Nataraja.

Umapati Civam, the author of Koyil Puranam, adapts the Chidambaram Mahatmyam faithfully in his work. He maintains the same sequence of narration. But, he has added two new chapters, Nataraca c carukkam and Tiruvila c carukkam. In Nataraca c carukkam, Umapati describes the Ananda Tandava of the Lord, beautifully and in Tiruvila c carukkam, he gives details of the various festivals celebrated in the temple throughout the year. It is to be noted that almost all the festivals described by Umapati continue to be celebrated in the temple today also.

Umapati, being one of the four Santanacaryas of Saiva siddhanta school of philosophy incorporates the salient features of Saiva siddhanta and uses the terminology in the Koyil Puranam. This set the trend for authors of other Talapuranams like Kanci p puranam, Tanikai p puranam, Kalatti p puranam, Tiruvilaiyatal puranam and Mahavidwan Minakshi Sundaram Pillai, author of about a score of Talapuranams to emulate.

The *Chidambara Mahatmyam* is clearly a pilgrim guidebook written for the use of North Indian pilgrims to Cidambaram, in Sanskrit, the language of all-Indian religious discourse.¹ It has given the basic prototype which was adopted by authors of other Mahatmyams on Kshetras in the following centuries

¹ YOUNGER PAUL ;The Home of Dancing Sivan : p 166
The tradition of Citampara Rahasyam is a popular one which has got into the popular usage of every common man, to mean something held secret, but known to everyone. There is a reference to a mystic yantra installed in the sanctum sanctorum, "Cirrampalam" of Citamparam. This is contained in the second chapter of the fourth Tantiram of Tirumular’s Tirumantiram, titled "Tiruvambala Cakkaram". It consists of 89 verses. The word "Tiruvambala Cakkaram" means, "the cakram where, the Lord who dances in the Cit akasa void resides along with Sakti, in the form of Mantra." It contains description of many Yantras. Of these, the most important one consists of 121 cages. There are two more important yantras made up of 25 cages. It is to be noted that all the yantras contain different combinations of Panakshara, the five lettered mantra of Civa. It is reported that it was Tirumular, who installed Tiruvampala Cakram in the sanctum sanctorum, on the right side of Nataraja, decorating it with Vilva leaves made of gold, which came to be known as "Citampara Rahasiyam."²

Though some scholars believe that the worship of rahasyam is a development of Vijayanagara kings period, 15th -16th century, indicating influence of Sankara’s Vedantic interpretation of worship,³ it does not seem to be reasonable, as we know that Tirumular mentions and discusses in detail Tiruvampala Cakkaram in Tirumantiram and Tirumular is believed to belong to 3rd Century.⁴ Further, The possibility of the presence of a large dark chamber under the shrine and the porch and the association of Patancali, the founder of a well known Yoga school, indicate a well established Yoga cult

² VAIDYANATHAN.K. Tirumuralikalil Caiva cittantam: pp356-357
³ YOUNGER PAUL ;The Home of Dancing Sivan; p 43, pp112-113
⁴ Ibid ; p 88
being part of the Citamparam tradition. The association of Cittars and yogis like Tirumular, Manikkavacakar are said to have entered the temple never to return.

It is baffling that the worship of Rahasyam does not find any mention in Chidambara Mahatmyam or Koyil Puranam.

The Nandan tradition is noteworthy for its uniqueness. His yearning to visit Citamparam and have darsan of Nataraja, his ultimate visit to the Nataraja temple, where he was received by Tillai Muvayiravar at Nataraja’s bidding, his fire ordeal of purification before entering the temple and his ultimate merger in the jyoti of Nataraja on his entry into Citsabha are the highlights of the tradition.5

Similarly, The Manikkavācaekar tradition pertaining to Citamparam and Tiruvannamalai is also quite powerful. In the later part of his life, Manikkavācaekar settled down in Citamparam. He entered into a debate with Buddhist scholars, healed the dumb daughter of the Sri Lanka king and as a result of the success converted all concerned to Saivism. His two great works Tirukkōvaiyar and Tiruvācakam were composed here. It is believed that Nataraja wrote down these two works in palm leaf in his own hand, affixed his seal at the end with the citation” written by the resident of Cirrampalam “Alakiya Cirrampalamutaiyar Elutiyatu” and left the manuscript at the Pañcātēcara steps of Cirrampalam.” When Manikkavacakar was asked by others to give an authoritative exposition of the meaning of the whole, he proceeded to the Golden hall and pointed to the

5 Periya puranam written by Cekkilgar in 12th Century deals with the story in detail.
image of God, adding The Lord of the Assembly himself (Sabhapathi) is the meaning and then disappeared melting into the image of his Master.  

In return for his devotion, the temple has given a place of prominence to Manikkavacakar in both grand ten day festivals that fall in the months of Ani and Markali of the Tamil calendar. During the morning processions, the image of Manikkavacakar is carried ahead of the images of the deities, facing them. During the Markali festival, there is an elaborate ceremony each evening accompanying the recitation of all the twenty verses of his Tiruvempavai hymns in the presence of Nataraja. When the hymn is sung, the image of Manikkavacakar is brought into the presence of the deity, and as the recitation ends, the image of Manikkavacakar is honoured by Nataraja with garland and Naivedya.

The other traditions associated with Citamparam are those of Tiru Nilakantar, Kurruvar and Kanampullar, all of them are nayanmars mentioned in Periya Puranam.

The Chidambara Mahatmyam and Umapati Civam’s Koyil Puranam do not contain any mention of the traditions of “Chidambara Rahasyam “ Manikka vacakar, Nandan, Tirunilakantar, Kanampullar or Kurruvar.

Umapati Civam includes a verse in praise of Manikkavacakar in the Payiram of Koyil Puranam, but does not mention about the traditions of Manikka vacakar, Nandan or Tirunilakantar.

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6 AIYER V.G.RAMAKRISHNA; The economy of a South Indian Temple; pp46-47
7 YOUNGER PAUL; The Home of Dancing Sivan; p201
Similarly, Cuntarar traditions are very powerful and inseparable part of traditions of Thyagaraja temple of Tiruvarur. Cuntarar treated the deity as an endearing companion, and the mystical import of his devotion moved the Lord to take an active interest in the delight and tribulation of the devotee and making his life a pleasant one in all respects. The deity took initiative to have Cuntarar married to Paravai an accomplished dancing girl at Tiruvarur and also to Cankili at Tiruvorriyur.He also admits that, as a friend, Aruran, even abetted some of his misdeeds.\(^8\)

The most important tradition of Cuntarar, associated with Tiruvarur is his composing *Tiruttonta t tokai*, where he enlists the name of 63 *Nayanmars*, which lends the basis and plot for Cekkilar’s monumental work *Periya Puranam*.\(^9\)

The traditions of *Eyar kon Kalikkamar and Viranminter* are connected with Cuntarar as well as Tiruvarur. *Viranminter* tradition is connected with the *Tiruttonta t tokai* tradition.

Similarly, the traditions of *Cetuttunai, Kalar cinkar, Dandiyatikal Naminanti and Somasimmar* are also closely associated with Tiruvarur.

Marai nana campantar’s *Kamalalaya c cirappu ennum Tiruvurur p puranam* does not contain traditions of Cuntarar, *Eyar kon Kalikkamar* and *Viranminter*. It makes a passing reference to the traditions of *Eyar kon*

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\(^8\) CUNNARAR: tevaram: VII.10
\(^9\) PONNUSAMY.S: Sri Thyagaraja Temple Tiruvarur: pp15-16
Kalikkamar Viramintar and Naminanti and Tyagaraja acting as Cuntarar’s emissary to Paravai. There is mention of two anecdotes about Cuntarar in this work which is not found in Periya puranam. According to the anecdotes Cuntarar cures a hunchback of his disability and restores vision to a blind devotee. These are dealt with in just one stanza each in Tiruvarur cirappu carukkam, Relatively less known traditions as that of Narayanittai or Kamalini are discussed elaborately in separate Carukkam each, dismissing traditions of Cuntarar, Eyar kon Kalikkamar Viramintar and Naminanti in one stanza each and it is quite disturbing.

We find in the Payiram of Kamalalaya c cirappu ennum Tiruvarur puranam a verse in praise of Cuntarar. But when we go through the works, we are shocked to find no mention of these traditions.

Manikkavacakar is reported to have stayed in Tiruvanamalai and composed his Tiruvempavai. Caiva ellappa Navalar also has included a verse in praise of Manikka vacakar in the Payiram of Arunacala Puranam, but has excluded the description of the tradition in the work.

Similarly, the traditions relating to the 63 Nayanmarś including the quartet, Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar and Manikka vacakar do not find a mention in the Mahatmyams and Talapuranas, the expections being The Tiruvilaiyatal puranam and Talapuranas composed by Mahavidvan Meenakshisundaram Pillai.

When we probe into the probable cause of this peculiar feature, we observe the following.
After the compilation of various oral traditions into various puranas was completed it was found that the puranas had become extremely popular among people, becoming an inseparable part of their socio religious life. Then the task of compiling popular local traditions into various Mahatmyams and Talapuranas, was undertaken. (P29-Ch3.)

We observe that the authors of Mahatmyams and Talapuranas were selective in assimilating the local traditions into their works. We would like to illustrate this point in more detail.

We are aware that the traditions about the 63 Saiva saints popularly known as “Nayanmars” were quite popular throughout Tamilnadu for quite a long time. Of the 63, 17 devotees belong to pre- Campantar/Appar times as is evident from a mention in Campantar/Appar’s songs. 11 devotees are contemporaries of Campantar/Appar as mentioned in Periya puranam; 22 devotees belong to the period between Campantar/Appar and Cuntarar’s time; While 13 have been mentioned as contemporaries of Cuntarar.10 We also find that the images of Nayanmars were installed and worshipped in temples during the Pallava period, even before the rise of Cola power; People were named after the Nayanmars. This became more marked during the Cola reign.11 These traditions have been recorded accurately in Periya Purānam of 12th Century.

On its part, Periya Purānam also totally ignored the very powerful traditions about Manikkavacakar belonging to 7th century. While going into the

10 RAJAMANIIM KANAR. Dr. Ma. Periya Purana Arayci: p.81
11 ibid.; pp 85,95,101
probable reason for this, the scholars are more or less unanimous that Cekkilar went strictly by the list given by Cuntarar and that Cuntarar had not included Manikkavacakar in the list of 63 devotees in his Tirut tonā t tokai.

"Out of the sixty three devotees mentioned by Cuntarar in Tiru t tota t tokai, eighteen people attained that exalted position only on account of their steadfast adherence to some facet of temple maintenance/temple worship and their anecdotes are connected with the respective temples. They are,

1. Eripattar killed an elephant that desecrated a garland being taken for Civa’s worship in Karur.
2. Kunkiliya k kalayar regularly burnt incense in Civa’s temple, in Tiruk katavur.
3. Arivattayar regularly offered cooked cennel (a special type of rice) cenkirai side dish, tender mango pickles to Civa in the temple in Kanamankalam.
4. Murti was offering sandal paste for applying on Cokkanathar of Madurai on a daily basis.
5. Tiru nalai p p p var nurtured life time ambition to visit Nataraja temple in Citamparam.
6. Muruka Nayanar was regularly collecting flowers, making, and offering different types of garlands for Civa in Tiru p pukalur
7. Nami nanti was regularly lighting lamps in the temple of Civa in Tiruvarur Araneri
8. Dandiyatikal was born blind; yet he undertook the task of desilting the temple tank (Tirttam) in Tiruvarur
9. Gana Nathar was taking care of the personal requirements of temple servants in Cirkali and ensured that all the activities of the temple took place regularly.

10. Kaliyan was regularly lighting lamps in the temple of Civa in Tiruvotriyur

11. Aiyatikal Katavar Kon was a king of Pallava dynasty. He undertook pilgrimage, visited various Civa temples and composed songs in praise of Civa in Venpa metre which are contained in “Kshetra Venpa” forming part of Eleventh Tirumurai. Only 24 poems on 23 Kshetras are available now.

12. Kanam Pullar regularly lighting lamps in the temple of Civa in Irukku Velur and Citamparam

13. Kari constructed temples for Civa

14. Kalar Cinkar cut the hand of his wife for picking up a flower in the temple, meant for offering to Civa in Tiruvarur.

15. Pukal t Tunai was an Adi saiva temple priest performing regular worship of Civa in the temple in Ceruvili puttur.

16. Pucalar undertook construction of temple for Civa, in his heart in Tiru ninavarur..

17. Muppotum Tirumeni Tintuvar are Civacaryas performing worship of Civa in temples.

18. Koc cekat Colan was the Cola king who constructed a number of temples for Civa”.  

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12 Ch-3 ;p4
The traditions of Kannappar, Karaikal Ammaiya, Ciruttontar, Apputi, Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar, Manikkavacakar, Nandan, have been exerting powerful influence on the psyche of devout Hindus in this part.

All these traditions belong to a period much earlier to the time when Mahatmyams and Talapuranams were written. Whereas the traditions of Manikkavacakar and Cuntarar may be of 8th Century A.D, the traditions of Karaikkal Ammaiya and Kannappar might be placed before 5th century A.D. The earliest Mahatmyam, Chidambara Mahatmyam can be placed in 12th century whereas the first Talapuranam” Koyil Puranam” was composed in 13th Century. It is evident that the above mentioned traditions were well established and popular well before these Talapuranam/Mahatmyams were composed. Therefore, we are quite puzzled and perplexed to find that these traditions have not been recognized or recorded in them.

It is an accepted fact that the Talapuranam/Mahatmyam were composed by persons who were themselves convinced of the greatness of the Murtti, Talam and Tirttam of that place and were great devotees of the presiding deity. They meticulously collected all the oral traditions connected with the kshetra from elderly residents. While passing on the oral traditions, they narrated certain traditions which were of comparatively later origin.

Certain traditions of very early days were narrated and told that the same have been included in some puranas. These were accepted to be true, without any question, as the bona fides of persons narrating the traditions was unassailable. Further, most of the Puranas had more than one version and were mostly in oral form only. The veracity of any statement or anecdote
attributed to any Purana has to be ascertained only by reference to Pundits/scholars who were credited with mastery over the Purana. Therefore, the author of Mahatmyam had gone ahead with recording the oral traditions subject to certain accepted positions.

1. The Mahatmyam (Oral traditions being recorded) form part of and extracted from a certain Mahapurana or Upapurana.

2. The Mahapurana or Upapurana and therefore the Mahatmyam extracted from them, are of antique origin, the antiquity equaling that of Vedas/ Upanishads/ Itihasas. Therefore the authors had no difficulty in recording those traditions prevalent from very early period and incorporating them in the Mahatmyam.

We have already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that the period between 500 B.C and 600 A.D is considered as the age of Puranas and Dharmasastras and the 6th century A.D. may be roughly regarded as the lower limit of the age of authority and composition of sacred texts which formed the theoretical basis of Hindu society for all time to come. It was the accepted boundary line between the age of new creation and blind acceptance, and marked once for all the period after which, theoretically atleast, nothing new could be authoritatively added to the frame work of Hindu society. Therefore, the traditions which can be placed within the boundary line of 6th century A.D were included in the Mahatmyam and the rest were discarded. Even though they were very devout and were having great regard for the devotees whose lives and miracles were being considered, they did not include them in the Mahatmyam as they could not be placed within the boundary line. Similar hard decisions were taken and precedence was established by authors of Puranas who did not admit
traditions about later kings in the Puranas because they belonged to later times.\(^{13}\)

The authors of Talapuranas had no dilemma what so ever. Having declared that their work is based on a Sanskrit Mahatmyam, they did not want to add any new material that would not have found place in the Sanskrit Mahatmyam. Thus the omission of traditions relating to the 63 devotees from the Mahatmyam/Talapuranam is based on sound reasoning and conscious decision. This norm was firmly laid down by the author of Chidambara Mahatmyam and Umapati Civam, the author of Koyil Puranam, to be followed by authors of Mahatmyams and Talapuranams in the following centuries.

The Tiruvilaiyalpuranam is unique in this respect also as it has included traditions connected with six out of the 63 devotees, Ninra Cir Netumaran, Kula c cirai, Mankaiyar k karaci, Manikka vacakar, Campantar and Murttiyar(Only in Nampi Tiruvilaiyatal ),. The reason being, Tiruvilaiyalpuranam obviously was originally written in Tamil only and subsequently translated into Sanskrit as Halasya Mahatmyam.

C. Forms of Worship

In Tamilnadu, people were practicing many forms of worship from very old days. Worship of deity in the Murtti form, Linga form and also in the

\(^{13}\) PARGITER.F.E.:Ancient Indian Historical Tradition:p22
formless state, Sunya were prevalent from early days. This was discussed earlier.

"The people were familiar with the form of Siva as is evident from detailed description of His form available in a number of poems in various works. Siva was also worshipped in a form close to what is known in later period as Lingam, which is spoken as Kandu and Tari. The Kandu had a wide base and sharp upper portion" "In some other temples, the God’s murti was installed inside the Garbhagraha, in the form of a beautiful painting and worshipped."

Kannappan episode where he transplants his eyes in the place of the bleeding eyes of the Lord confirms that it was Siva’s murtti that was worshipped in the temple at Kalahasti and not the Linga form..

People were familiar with worshipping Siva in a formless state, Sunya or \( \bar{P}al(\ \nu \pi \ \u0995\ ) \) as mentioned by Tirumular. Saktam or worship of Sakti, Worship of Muruga, Worship of Panca vrishnis were all practiced here from pre – Cankam days.

The uniqueness of Chidambaram is that the God is worshipped here in the Linga form as Tirumulattana Nathar, in the murtta form as Nataraja and as Sunya or Void or Akasa in the Chidambara Rahasyam. All these exist side by side without any contradiction.

Similarly in Tiruvarur also Siva is worshipped in all the three forms simultaneously, as Tirumulattanar in the linga form, as Tyagaraja or

\(^{14}\) GNANASAMBANDAM.A.S. Periya Puranam Or Ayvu pp65-67

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Somaskanda in the murtta form and as Hatakeca in Hatakeswaram, a separate temple within Thyagaraja temple complex in a formless state. Manikkavacakkar, who is associated with the tradition of Worshipping Siva in a formless state (worshipped as Avutaiyar in Tirupperunturai, without a lingam, as Rahasyam in Chidambaram) sings about Cemperuman of Atakeswaram.¹⁵

The speciality of these two temples is that the murtta form of Nataraja and Thyagaraja are given utmost importance. In the course of development of Siva temples in Tamilnadu the establishment of separate places (*Sannadhis*) for Nataraja and Somaskanda (*Thyagaraja*) is a major step in giving a place of importance to worship of murtta form along with linga form in the sanctum sanctorium. Likewise, the primitive trends in religious beliefs such as tree worship and Ophiolatry (worshiping snakes) were assimilated into temple traditions in Tamilnadu, by including the concept of SthalaVriksha and worshipping anthill- *Purru*, as sivalingam, as done in Tiruvorriyur, Vadatirumullaivayil, Tiruvarur etc.

**D. Halasya Mahatmyam and Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam – a specific analysis**

We have discussed at length about the structure, content and the special features of Halasya Mahatmyam in Chapter-4 and those of Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁵ MANIKKAVACAKAR: Tiruvacakam, Tirut tacankam: I
Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam narrates the leela, vilaiyatal or sport of Cuntaran," the handsome" also called “Cokkan” “ Captivating beauty”. It is interesting to recall that the Vishnu of nearby “Tirumal irun colai” who rushes to attend the divine wedding of “ Cokkan” with Minakshi is called “Kallalakan” or “Soundara rajan” both meaning handsome.

Conceiving Godhead as “beauty personified” is quiet common to all parts of India and all branches of our religion from time immemorial. The common thread we find in the stories of Rama, Krishna and Muruga is that all the three names are synonyms of beauty; Rama, meaning the enchanter, Krishna, meaning the one who attracts and Muruga meaning the youthful beauty. Their beauty haunts even their sworn enemies.Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata, Gitagovinda, Sur sagar, Tirumurais, Kanda puranam, Divya prabandham and all the devotional literature in various Indian languages have captured this divine beauty as experienced by the devout. This was not confined only to literary outpouring. This was taken forward by all the artists in their fields as all artistic expressions were basically capturing spiritual experiences through various media for the sake of posterity. The paintings and sculptures apart, the bronzes of Chola period and post chola period are standing testimonies to this. It is this beauty that is housed and worshipped in the temples of Tamilnadu as the deities.

The discussion of Beauty of the Godhead in the Tamil devotional literature is not of physical beauty but of divine Grace, Arul. The innumerable ways of God showering His grace on the deserving souls is His sport or leela or Tiruvilaiyatal, which is performed in the state of divine bliss” or Ananda. ” Thus, we find that the Tiruvilaiyatal of Somasundara or Cokkan, symbolizes
divine beauty, Grace and eternal bliss. Tradition terms the earth as Karmabhumi. Devas Rishis and other celestials also were directed to the earth, and more specifically to Bharathavarsha, to perform penance, divine worship and other sacred acts- Punya Karmas- as no other place offered scope for such acts. The divine literature, Itihasas, Puranas and Talapuranams emphatically state that Gods and deities also chose the earth, and more specifically to Bharathavarsha, and not the Deva loka or Indraloka to perform their leelas, Tiruvilaiyatal.

The quint essence of Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam is given in the invocation in the beginning of Kutil kantam as the first stanza of Nan Mata k kutal ana patalam

\[
\begin{align*}
Pūtaṅkal alla poriyalla vēru pulanalla ulla matiyin \\
Petaṅkalalla ivaiyanți nirra piritalla venru peru nūl \\
Vētaṅ kitantu tatumārum vañca veḷiyenpa kūtañ marukir \\
Pātaṅkal nova valai intaṅāti pakarvarai ayum avarē.
\end{align*}
\]

The one,  
Whose aching feet trod  
the streets of Kutil,  
Vending bangles and firewood,  
About whom,  
The great scripture Veda fumbles  
That He is

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Not the elements,
Not the organs
Nor the sense organs,
Not the illusions of mind,
Nor any other thing beyond these;
yet Discerning ones,
hail Him as the mysterious void.

Apart from Madurai, Tiruvarur and to a lesser extent, Chidambaram lays claim for the Tiruvilaiyatal of the lord. In Tiruvarur, Tyagaraja’s leela form an inseparable part of Cuntarar’s life history. Cuntarar is called “Tampiran Tolar” meaning “The Lord’s friend” and Cuntarar boasts that the lord is not only his friend who has tolerated his mistakes but has also abetted his wrong doings.

_Piṇṇai en pilaiyai p poruppanai_ (7.59.1) meaning ‘Him, who tolerates my mistakes’

_Emmutaiya tōlanumāy yān ceyyum turicukālukku utanāki_ (7.51.10) meaning ‘Him, who is my friend and who abets my wrong doings’

The leelas of Tiruvarur detail the various errands carried out by Him for his friendly devotee Cuntarar.

One of the fourteen Mahatmyams on Tiruvarur, Thyagaraja leela is reported to describe 360 leelas performed by Lord Thyagaraja in Tiruvarur. While the leelas performed by Somasundara in Madurai are 64, the leelas performed by Thyagaraja are reported to be 360. (The full text of the work, Thyagaraja leela is not available)
The last part of Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam is Tiruvalavay k kantam consisting seventeen patalam. This narrates anecdotes highlighting the greatness of Tamil language. The Tiruvilaiyatals of the Lord narrated here depict his love and concern for Tamil and Tamil literature.

He founds the first Tamil Cankam in Madurai, with 48 scholars and He becomes the 49th member of the Cankam. The Lord installs a divine seat, Canka p palakai, capable of recognizing genuine poets and literary works. When the Poet members of the Cankam grow arrogant of their poetic skills, the Lord gets their works properly appreciated and removes their arrogance (Cankattar Kalakan tirtta patalam).

Tarumikkup por k kiliyalitta patalam and Kiranai k karaiyarriya patalam depict the highest form of the self esteem of a great poet Nakkarar, crossing its boundary and the same being corrected by God in time and in a graceful manner.

The people with lesser understanding exclaim with awe the bold assertion of Nakkarar that the tress of hair of women does not possess natural aroma and the celestial women including the Goddess Parvati are no exception to this rule. Lord Civa appearing as the poet owning authorship of the poem.
“Konku ter valkkai ancirai t tumpi”16 challenging Nakkirar over this claim reveals His identity showing His third eye. Nakkirar reiterates the statement and asserts that what he told is the truth and he is reduced to ashes by the third eye of the Lord.

On the face of it, it looks as if Nakkirar is the victim and he is the fearless votary of truth. But it turns out to be a wrong understanding of the issue. When Nakkirar said that the tress of hair of women does not possess natural aroma, he should have made the statement, a conditional one. One can safely assume that Nakkirar being a human being can emphatically claim so in respect of human female. When God questioned Nakkirar as to whether the statement holds good in respect of celestial women, about whom Nakkirar had no personal knowledge, he should have conceded his lack of personal knowledge. On the contrary, he emphatically repeated his assertion. God gave one more opportunity to Nakkirar to correct his position, by asking him about the tresses of Goddess Uma whom he worships. In this case also Nakkirar had no personal Knowledge and he should have conceded lack of personal knowledge; but Nakkirar maintained his statement. God gives one more opportunity to Nakkirar to retract his wrong statement by showing his third eye and revealing his identity, thereby hinting to Nakkirar, that He being Lord civa and having personal knowledge of the fragrance of the tresses of Parvati, is the only competent person to comment on the tresses of Parvati and not Nakkirar. Still the poet is adamant and is turned into ashes.

16 "Kohnu ter Vakkai Ancirai t tumpi!
Kān'm am eqppāf, kaŋ'atu moljim:
Payiliyatu keji iya natpin, mayli iyal,
Çeri eyirru, arvai kūntelin
Nariyavum ułavo, nq ayiyum ṣe? (Kurun tokai:2)
(O the discerning bee! Tell not to please me. Tell the truth. Have you found among the flowers you have known, any flower, more fragrant than the tresses of this damsel, dear one of peacock’s grace?)
When all the other poets request the Lord to forgive Nakkirar, the Lord readily agrees and brings him back to life.

The obvious sin committed by Nakkirar is not blasphemy, but holding something of which he had no personal knowledge, as truth and that too to a person who had personal knowledge to the contrary. According to God, a person who has no respect for truth, has no place in the Cankam. Incidental side story of this main story is the help rendered to the poor Brahmin Tarumi, by the Lord, in the form of a poem containing solution for the doubt of Canpaka Pantiyan. The moral of this anecdote is that human beings should know that their knowledge has got its own limitation and to assume omniscience is a sin.

The logical conclusion should be that Nakkirar’s knowledge of the grammar of Porul\(^7\) is not very sound and hence deserves to be corrected. Kiranukku Ilakkanam upatecitta patalam narrates the story of the Lord giving Nakkirar his lessons on grammar so that he is perfected.

The next anecdote details the empathy shown by Lord Somasundara to the indifference and insult suffered by the poet Itaikkatan at the hands of the King Culeca Pantiyan.\(^8\)

\(^7\) There are three divisions of Tamil grammar: Elutu (letters) Col (Word) and Porul (meaning/subject matter of literature). Here Nakkiran’s lack of knowledge of the subject of discussion, because of which he made wrong assertion is hinted.

\(^8\) The story is like this. When the poet Itaikkatan approached the king with his poem with an intention of presenting it before him, he was insulted by the king and returned. Itaikkatan poured his heart before Somasundara before leaving. The Lord left the temple to go with Itaikkatan to reside outside the city. He returns to the city only after the king repents and make amends to Itaikkatan.
The episodes connected with Vatavūratikal are most moving. Vatavūratikal attains the pinnacle of learning and the most coveted post of Chief Minister of the powerful Pantiya dynasty at a very young age only to realize that they are of no value for one’s spiritual attainment. This realisation turns into powerful yearning for a Guru, the sincerity of which finds its reciprocation with Lord Civa assuming human form to be the Guru. Once initiated into spiritual life, Vatavūratikal’s values undergo a radical change. The Lord performs his Tiruvilaiyatal to propagate the greatness of his disciple, initiated with a new name, Manikka vacakan. It is not a single Tiruvilaiyatal, but a series of Tiruvilaiytals. God proves that Jackals can be turned into horses, the dry riverbed of Vaikai can be submerged in a flashflood, He comes to the rescue of an innocent destitute woman, Vanti, assuming the form of a coolie, He proves his presence in the heart and soul of every being in the world by making them feel the pain of being caned, when the king caned the lord in the guise of a labourer doing Vanti’s errands.

The episode of Campantar narrates the victory scored by Saivism over Jainism. The lord through Campantar infuses into Tamil, the power of Mantra and exhibits the greatness of vibhuti and Pancatcara in this episode. The Tamil poem cures the scorching fever of the Pantiya king, it straightens the hunch back, the fire is unable to burn the palm leaf bearing the Tamil poem of Campantar, another palm leaf bearing the Tamil poem of Campantar swims against the current of the river Vaigai. This episode bears testimony to the miracle wrought by a pativrata, Mankaiyarkkaraci, the Pantiya queen, whose prayers succeeded in getting her husband reconverted to Saivism. this episode narrates the greatness of Tamil language, Vibhuti, Pancatcara, and the chastity of Mankaiyarkkaraci. The greatness of chastity
and the God’s standing by the chaste women is underlined in the final chapter *Van niyum kinarum linkamum alaitta patalam* wherein the *Vanni* tree, a well, and a *linkam* appear to give evidence in favour of a helpless lady.

*Kutar kantam*, being the biggest of the three kantams, consisting of thirty patalams is almost the heart of Tiruvilaiyatal puranam. Civan is grace personified; both are inseparable. There is no use of Grace, Arul, if it does not flow towards the human beings. It does flow and all scriptures and religious literature bear proof of this. The grace of God does not differentiate between human beings and other creations of His. The episodes in this kantam describe the boundless love God has for His creations, the good, bad, sinner and devotee; His grace flows towards them in equal measure. His heart melts when He sees any of His creations in difficult situation. He rushes to their help without waiting for a formal call. It is *Avyaja Karuna-Grace without reason*. The wages of sins visit the sinners with equal force. The time of repentance comes for the sinner. The change of heart comes over him. He loathes not only the sin he has committed, but himself too. He repents and seeks redemption. People around him detest and discard him. He sees no hope around him and turns to God. God desires that the repentant soul should not be wasted. He is *Karuna Sāgara*, full of grace. His heart goes for the repentant soul and He rushes out to help the soul in distress. *Maipatakam Tīrta Patalam* narrates the Tiruvilaiyatal, where the Lord rescues a soul repenting over the most detestable sins committed for which the Dharma Sastras are unable to prescribe any way of redemption. When the Lord Soma sundara, out of His boundless Grace, shows the way of redemption to the great sinner, *Maipatakan*, Uma, His consort, wants to
know the reason for His extreme act of Grace. The Lord replies” Vituvakai yinri ve̊ru kalaikanu minri iyak katavanai k kappataṇro Kappėrran Karuṇai mūrtti.” (Saving in true sense happens only when we save a person who finds no way of redemption anywhere else and who has no one to help) This is the pinnacle of God’s Āvyaja Karuna.

If the Lord’s help is available for a great sinner, will it be denied to the deprived, helpless and unfortunate souls? His grace, Arul, flows out to all, without discrimination, when they are in distress and find themselves helpless and hopeless. Virutta kumara palaraṇa patalam, Icai vatu venra patalam, Palakai itta patalam, Ankam vettina patalam, and Mamanaka vantu valakkuraitta patalam, infuse in the minds of the devout, the conviction that God surely showers His grace on the helpless and hopeless poor souls.

God is Beauty and Grace personified, but His ways and the unwritten laws of the universe are inexplicable, which are beyond human understanding. Pali ancina patalam explains the inexplicable. His grace helps in understanding these. His ways of helping soul vary with the requirements of the souls in need.”Icai vātu venraṭu (Winning a musical competition), Palakai yittatu (Producing the seat), Tirumukam Kotuttatu (Giving a letter), Viraku viṇḍatu (vending fire wood) —These Tiruvilaiyatal is some of His ways. Before Him, who is the only man, all the souls are women and this mystic experience has moved all the devout. Valaiyal virra patalam explains this eternal love.

The Pantiya kingdom of Madurai is divine. Whoever may be the ruler, it is the divine power that rules the country and protects its people. It is this power that works the miracles in Yanai eyta patalam Aṅkam vettina
It is the belief of a majority of Hindus that the soul, Atma, has to go through the cycle of endless births and deaths before it is born as a human being. It can attain salvation or Mukti only as a human being. But Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam differs and negates this concept. According to it, the kingdom of God has place for not only the Siddhas, kings and other human beings. It is comprised of all His creations, humans and non-humans alike. Then, how salvation, Mukti, can be denied to non-humans? Kutar Kantam establishes firmly that the purpose of God’s creation is salvation, Mukti, and all His creation, both humans and non-humans alike, be it the pig lings, the black bird, or the crane, have equal right to have it. This is spiritual socialism and it comes as the conclusive declaration of this Kantam in Panrik kuttikkal mulai kotutta patalam, Panrik kuttikalai Mantirikalakkiya patalam, Karik kuruvikku upatecitta patalam, Naraikku mukti kotutta patalam. The peculiar feature in this kantam is that while the lord, only shows Civalokam to Varakunan, He readily gives salvation, Mukti, itself to the crane.

The first Kantam of Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam is Maturai k kantam has a speciality. Here, God himself comes to Madurai, not as an avatar, but as God himself, marries the princess Minakshi, resides there for many years and rules that place as the king in flesh and blood. This has no parallel in any religion or in any other religious literature. Maturai k kantam has 17 patalams narrating anecdotes connected with either the Lord Somasundara, his consort Minakshi or their son Ukkira pantiyan.
The 64 Tiruvilaiyatal narrated in this puranam are those of Lord Somasundara. The question arises as to who are the beneficiaries. There is no clear cut answer for this. Many times the beneficiaries are not even aware that something great has happened or some miracle has happened. It is just as natural to them as their own faith in Cokkan.

Take the case of the Tiruvilaiyatal in *Maṇ Cumanta patalam*. On the face of it, this Tiruvilaiyatal was intended to save the prestige of Vatavuratikal and help Vanti fulfill her obligation to the royalty, but the beneficiary of having darsan of divinity is the King and his courtiers. The common people of Madurai who rubbed shoulders with Cokkan in flood control work and enjoyed His pranks are also the beneficiaries of His Tiruvilaiyatal as much as the Gopis of Bhagavata.

Take the case of the Tiruvilaiyatal in *Pali ancina patalam*. The Brahmin, his wife, the babe in arm, the hunter and the Pantiya king are the dramatis personae in the anecdote. The victim is the Brahmin’s wife who dies of an arrow, the bereaved Brahmin and the babe and the innocent hunter accused of murder. None of them appealed to the Lord Somasundara. It is the Pantiya king who appeals to the Lord to solve the mystery. Now the Lord solves it too. This Tiruvilaiyatal signifies the flow of God’s grace to not only the Pantiya king, but in equal measure to the Brahmin, his wife, the babe in arm and the hunter.

The same applies to other Tiruvilaiyatals also. Thus, we find that the Tiruvilaiyatals are multi beneficial with a number of beneficiaries.
Thus we find that the Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam is unique in content, style and structure. It can be boldly claimed that it has no parallels.

The above mentioned remarks, no doubt, have been made on the basis of Kantam wise arrangement of the 64 Tiruvilaiyatal s made by Parancoti in his work which is at variance with Nambi’s Tiruvilaiyatal. But, the remarks equally apply to Nambi’s work also as basically both contain all the 64 Tiruvilaiyatal with minor variation only. We should add that Parancoti’s re arrangement has sharpened the impact of the Tiruvilaiyatal s.

After going through Halasya Mahatmyam\(^{19}\) and comparing it with Parancoti’s Tiruvilayatal Puranam, the conclusion arrived is that the date of Halasya Mahatmyam is subsequent to that of Parancoti’s Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam and in all probability is its Sanskrit version. The reasons for our coming to this conclusion are as follows:

1. *The sequential arrangement of the 64 Tiruvilaiyatal s*: As was already mentioned in Chapter 5, *Tiruvalavayutaiyar Tiruvilaiyatar Puranam* was written in 12\(^{th}\) Century A.D. whereas *Parancoti Munivar’s Tiruvalavay Manmiyam enum Tiruvilaiyatar Puranam* was written in the beginning of 18\(^{th}\) Century. Nampi’s Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam is the first work to narrate all the 64 Tiruvilaiyatal of Lord Somasundara. These anecdotes have been recounted with minor modifications in Parancoti’s work. The sequence of the 64 Tiruvilaiyatl in Parancoti’s work is not the same as in Nampi’s work. Parancoti’s reorganizing the sequence and dividing the puranam into

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\(^{19}\) While searching for the Sanskrit work”Halasya Mahatmyam” none was available in Devanagari Script. We could get only in Grantha script. It was got transcribed in Devanagari script.
three Kantams is a well thought out, meaningful and purposeful exercise. The sequential arrangement of the 64 Tiruvilaiyatal in the Halasya Mahatmyam is exactly the same as in Parancoti’s Tiruvilaiyatal puranam.

2. Halasya Mahatmyam contains a discussion of The 32 anga lakshanans of men (male) in the 15th Adhyaya titled Ugrajananam. The anga lakshanans of women are discussed in the 16th Adhyaya titled Valayadyayudhatraya pradanam. The Mahatmyam contains detailed instructions for observing Soma vara vratam and concluding it in two Adhyayas 19 and 20( In Parancoti’s Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam also detailed instructions are given for observing Soma vara vratam exactly in the same place between14th and 15th Tiruvilaiyatal)

Adhyaya 22 titled Vedarthopadesah describes the cosmic science of creation in relation to the Tattvas as detailed in Hindu philosophy, more specifically in Saiva Siddhanta School. It includes a discussion on the structure and intent of the Vedas.

Adhyaya 23 titled Ratna vikrayah deals at length on the science of nine gems, their physical qualities, their astrological significance, their effect on the users, the traditions about these nine gems etc.
Adhyaya 39 titled Ashta siddhyupadesah contains elaborate discussion on the eight siddhis popularly known as Ashtama siddhi.
Adhyaya 65 titled Mayasva vikrayah contains exhaustive and expert discussion on Aswa lakshanam giving an account of different categories of horses and discussing their special features.

All these features are present in Parancoti’s Tiruvilaiyatal exactly in the same place in the same tiruvilaiyatal. Further, the discussion of these features in the Halasya Mahatmyam very much looks like translation of the discussions in Tiruvilaiyatal of Parancoti and not an original work.

3. Liberal use of Tamil idioms and names in Halasya Mahatmyam is another feature worth remembering. In Yanai Eyta patalam, the Jains perform a yaga and produce a deadly elephant. It charged ferociously to decimate the city of Madurai. Seeing the ferocious elephant advancing, Vikkirama Pantiyan, the king of Madurai prayed to the Lord to save Madurai city from the fury of the deadly elephant. The Lord wanted the King to build an Attalai Mantapam for his use. The king built the mantapam and the Lord staying there slayed the elephant. The lord in the mantapam is called “Attalai Sundarar”. Halasya Mahatmyam, while narrating the incident uses the same names calling the mantapam as Attalai Mantapam and the Lord as “Attala sundara”. Such usages are found throughout the Mahatmyam.

It describes contents of the Mahatmya in Ch-3 as done in Patikam in Tiruvilaiyatal puranam, Tamil version of Mahatmya. The composition of Patikam in the beginning of the work, giving contents of the work in brief, is the tradition followed by Tamil poets in their works. We find Patikam in both Cilappatikaram and Manimekalai. This is a novel feature not to be found in any other mahatmyam. This
makes one suspect the Halasya Mahatmya to be a translation of the Tamil Tiruvilaiyatal puranam into Sanskrit.

4. As discussed in the earlier part of this Chapter, Sanskrit Mahatmyams were selective in recording the local traditions. Traditions connected with 63 Nayanmars or that of the four Saiva Acharyas were not recorded in the Mahatmyams and the probable reasons for this feature have also been listed in page 6 of this chapter. The Tamil Talapuranams, authors of which had no hesitation in claiming that their work is only a translation of the Sanskrit Mahatmyam, also did not include these traditions. But, the Tiruvilaiyatal puranam is unique in this respect also as it has included traditions connected with six out of the 63 devotees, Ninra Cir Netumaran, Kula c cirai, Mankaiyar kkaraci, Manikka vacakar, Campantar and Murttiyar (only in Nampi Tiruvilaiyatal), the reason being, Tiruvilaiyatalpuranam obviously was originally written in Tamil only and subsequently translated into Sanskrit as Halasya Mahatmyam.

E. Literary merits

We have analysed in this chapter two sets of Sanskrit Mahatmyam and its counterpart Tamil Talapuranam. They are A) Chidambara Mahatmyam in Sanskrit and Koyil Puranam in Tamil and B) Halasya Mahatmyam in Sanskrit and Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam in Tamil.

We observe that the two sets have incomparable features.
Though Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam also describes the uniqueness of the Talam Madurai, it is not in the accepted format of Talapuranams. Whereas in other Talapuranams, there are one or two central episodes and other supplementary episodes, in Tiruviliaiyatal puranam, all the 64 episodes are of equal importance, explaining the unreserved showering of Arul by the Almighty.

Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam in Tamil, as has been established above, is the original work and Halasya Mahatmyam is a later Sanskrit translation. It is to be noted that Halasya Mahatmyam also is of high literary value as a faithful translation.

Chidambara Mahatmyam and Koyil Puranam are trend setters in their respective spheres of Mahatmyam and Talapuranam. The norms set by them for selecting local traditions for incorporating or the format, features etc have become the accepted format for the other Mahatmyams and Talapuranams that followed later.

Though restricted to the analysis to six Mahatmyams and seven Talapuranams in this study, it can be noticed that Mahatmyams and Talapuranams have contributed a large number of works. The number of Talapuranams available today is close to 400 in verse form and about 500 in prose, whereas the number of Mahatmyams will be about 50 if not less.

They have well set formats which have been accepted and followed by authors of Mahatmyams and Talapuranams in the successive seven or eight centuries. In content, format or literary merit, the Mahatmyam and
Talapuranam do not have anything common with other literary genre in Sanskrit and Tamil respectively.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Mahatmyam is to be treated as a special and separate literary genre in Sanskrit and similarly Talapuranam should be treated as a special and separate literary genre in Tamil. And a conclusion that the Mahatmyams discussed in the preceding chapters were produced in Tamilnadu and as such spoke the glory of the sthalas of this region will not be far from truth.