CHAPTER XVI

ALYAR AND AGARYAS
time falls from the 7th to the 9th century A.D. Their hymns were collected and canonised by about the close of the 10th century A.D. by Nāthamunī, the first of the great succession of Vaiṣṇava Ṛgvas. Following him, his grandson Īlayandār also called Yamanēśārya (11th century A.D.) and Kāśmīrī, the greatest Vaiṣṇava reformer of the 12th century A.D., occupy an important place in the succession, besides the later Āryas such as Pillai Lokāśārya (13th century) and Nārāyaṇā Kāśmīra (14th century).

The above great names in Vaiṣṇava tradition became revered ones in the Tamil country from the time of Nāthamunī and Kāśmīrī. It is generally believed that the introduction of the images of the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs in separate shrines was an innovation of the time of Kāśmīrī and the later Vēdāntadēśika. On the contrary, the existence of images of some at least of these saints of an earlier period, shows that the practice of setting up their images dates at least from the time when their hymns were canonised by Nāthamunī i.e. 10th century A.D.

According to Vaiṣṇava tradition as embodied in the hagiological works like Dvēpaśācarā, Prinparamarī Prabhāvan and Vaitālīa-Palgāvan, the Ālvārs are considered to be the śāsīra of God Vīṣṇu and his various attributes. The first three Ālvārs, P Poygai, Mīdan and Pēy are said to be the śāsīra of the Prabhaśāya (śāṃkha).

kumār (nephew) and pandaka (sword) respectively. Their images are
treated simply. They are shown usually in anjali pose, either
standing or seated. The figures wear a topknot or a small tuft
and few ornaments. The dress is shown down to the middle of the
thigh or down to the ankle. The illustrations given in figures
187 and 188 are late medieval bronze images respectively of Poygaí
from Anandamangalam and Pey from Kejalangudi in the Tanjāvūr dis-
trict. The image of Poygaí is a standing one in anjali, with a
topknot and a double mūlā of beads. The figure wears a short dress
and has the marks of the ṣankha and sakra on the left and right
arms respectively. The figure of Kejalāyār is also in anjali and is
shown standing with a slight bhuma arms (flexion) at the right
hip. In the place of a knot, there is a small tuft of hair and the
figure is also adorned with a necklace and hāmvalavas and kankaras.
The dress, which reaches down to just above the ankle, is treated
schematically with incisions. The two leg ornaments (kejal) are
seen above the ankles. This figure also carries on its arms the
marks of the ṣankha and sakra. Though the two images are of late
medieval period, they may be taken as illustrative of the mode of
representation of the early Āḻvār. Kādattāyār is also represented
in the above manner.

The setting up of the images of all the Āḻvār and a gift made
for their worship are recorded in a Pāṇḍya inscription of Tribhunama-
sakravartin Sundara Pāṇḍya (probably Jayēśvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya I
1231-70 A.D.) from the Vijayāgāvade Perumāḷ temple in Tirupparṅkūḷ in the Chingleput district. Earlier in the 9th year of Vikrama Čēla (1127 A.D.), the two saints Rādam and Poygai are mentioned in an inscription from the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple in Kāṇḍapūr, as those “who were pleased to compose hymns in praise of the God of Thiruvaṭṭiyūr” (Varadarāja). Images of ten of the thirūvarśi Āḻvārs were set up in the temple of Karivarada Perumāḷ in Komāralingam in the Coimbatore district in 81180 = 1231 A.D., in the reign of the Tribhūvanacakravartin Konerirmālokopāya.4

A study of the images of the Āḻvārs shows that the earliest among them is that of Tirumangai, who was perhaps the first to be represented in sculptures of stone and metal. Not much later, the other members of the Bhakti movement also came to be included as the subsidiary deities in the Vaippava pantheon in the Tamil country. This view seems to obtain confirmation from the extent images of Tirumangai all over the land, due to their numerical superiority as well as their artistic merit. This will be amply born out by the discussion of Tirumangai’s images to follow in its proper place.

Tirumalaiśai, the āṭṭa of Vippu’s sakram, takes his name from the village of his birth in the Chingleput district. He is represented either seated in parvāṭīkāmas or standing with symbols 3. All., III, 20.
4. 125 of 1900.
in his hands or in śāñdaś hasta. His figure is shown either wearing a topknot or with a shaven head with a fillet of beads. In the stone image illustrated in figure 199, he is represented as seated with symbols in his hands, clean shaven head and a few ornaments adorning his person. The image is a late medieval representation of the Āḷvār but may be said to exhibit the features usually found both in the early as well as late images of Tirumalirai.

The earliest and the most remarkable among the sculptural representations of the Āḷvār are those of Tirumangai. Tirumangai, one of the most celebrated among the Āḷvār was a petty chieftain who ruled over Mināḷa in the Tanjāvūr district. He is believed to have turned a highwayman in order to carry away and marry the daughter of a Vaippava doctor of a higher caste, for whose sake he also changed his religion. He is also said to have stolen from the vihāra of Nagapattinam an image of the Buddha in solid gold to pay for the renovation of the great temple in Śrīrangam. The largest number of the hymns in the Divya Drabandham collection were composed by him. Incidentally, he is the only one among the Āḷvār in whose information of a historical nature is available. He was a contemporary of Nandivaranam II, Pallavanalla, whose military campaigns seem to be referred to in his hymns.

Tirumangai is believed to be the āsīt of the Śrīnagār or bow. In sculptural representations, he is more often depicted with the characteristics of a warrior with a sword in the right hand and a shield in the left. Such representations are obviously based on
his status as a petty chieftain, who became a Viṣṇu bhakta and sang the praise of the God in beautiful poetry. He is also occasionally shown as the humble devotee, standing with his hands folded in sūdāli. In the latter type of images he is shown very simply, without any ornaments and with an elaborate knot at the back of his head. One of these images in a bronze comes from Perumāṭṭam in the Tanjāvūr district. It is one of the finest Cōla bronzes and may be dated in the first half of the 11th century A.D. and has no parallel among the images of the other Ṣivaśa. The figure is standing with a slight flexion, hands in sūdāli, distended cyan earlobes and an elaborate knot at the back. A forehead plate is the only ornamentation in this figure, which wears a short lower garment, kept in place by a girdle with a knot in front (Fig.190 - The girdle is hidden by the shadow of the right hand in the figure illustrated). Sometimes the figure of his wife Kumudavalli is also represented by his side as in the present instance.

The other type of Tirumangai images shows the celebrated saint as holding a sword and a shield, sometimes wearing a kirīṭa and other rich ornaments but often with only a few decorative details. The bronze image illustrated in figure 191 hails from Vijanagar in the Tanjāvūr district, a place specially rich in Cōla bronzes of the early and middle Cōla style. This figure is shown with a number of ornaments such as forehead plate, karṇa mukha.

necklaces, shoulder tassels, bāṇumalayas, bracelets, udarabandha and elaborate girdle with a simha sukha in the centre, a short dress reaching down to the middle of the thighs as in the peruntōṭṭam bronze. An elaborate knot adorns the back of the head. There is a pleasing flexion in the body and the two hands are shown in the posture of holding a sword (right) and a shield (left). The distended earlobes are characteristic of such early images. This image may be assigned to about the same period or perhaps slightly later as indicated by the form of the torso and the treatment of the anatomical details, showing an emphasis in the treatment of the stomach. But that the image is executed in the Cōḷa style cannot be disputed.

The apotheosis of this celebrated saint must have taken place quite early in the Cōḷa period as evidenced by the above images. This is further supported by the definite mention of the recitation of his hymns from the Tirunāṟutaiṇḍākam for which provision was made during the time of Cōḷa-Kēraḷa, a son of Rājendra (II) in the third quarter of the eleventh century A.D. in the Trivikrama temple in Tirukkōyilūr. 6 Again, a Śaiva inscription of the 11th year of Tribhūvanachakravartin Kōnerimaiyōṭtiṉ (13th century A.D.), refers to the consecration of the shrine of Tirumangai in Tirukkaḷappāpuram in the Tanjavūr district. 7

6. 128 of 1900; 139, VII, 139.
7. 510 of 1922.
Two Tamil verses quoted in the Perumtsovai, representing a
collection of verses from various sources mainly of the 10th-13th
centuries A.D., are addressed to Tirumangai and describe him as the
chieftain of ïlinäñu, holding the sword or the spear, the devotee
of Vippu, singing his praise and receiving dikä from the God him-
sell, who taught him the eight sacred letters (Om nama mäväräña).

Periyälvär or Vippucitta was the sñä of Gaväga. He was the
Brahman saint from Srivilliputtør and the foster father of Godä or
Äppäi and attained fame as the devotee of the God of Srivilliputtør
for whose päññä he regularly supplied flowers and garlands. He
was most probably a contemporary of the Päpäya king Bräma
Srivallabha (815-858 A.D.). This pious devotee is invariably
represented as seated or standing with the hands in the sñälä-
pose. The images show him as wearing a small tuft on the top of
the head. Occasionally, he is also shown with cymbals in his hands,
-a feature common to most of the Älvärs, emphasising the nature of

3. kaśiyäñha nákuyäli karivi-yannak-
    kavyätsirin-jañancämal viñuñhird daiva
    agiyäñha äyñár tänçäñ pañäättäñ náman
    aläiyäñha yäliäsidäñ yälinäñu,
    kaśiyäñha näränäñin-näriäñin-näciy-
    nädäm náyä-näyanäñu, karivi náyä-
    koñi námar nihavanik-kädirä äyñu
    kumäññä jivaśnavu-kocurandöñu

-Perumtsovai, v.60.

(Corn'd,)
their worship through music. The bronze image of Periyāḻvār illustrated in figure 192, shows him standing with the hands folded in ausīli. The figure belongs to the Kṛṣṇaśvāmi temple in Ambu- samudram in the Tirunelveli district and is, perhaps, a product of the medieval Pāṇḍya art of the 13th-14th century A.D.

Tiruppāḻvār, who belongs to about the same time, is considered to be an ausī of the Śrīvatsa. He was born as a minstrel of low castē. He was not permitted to enter the temple of Śrīrangam and worshipped the God for many years from outside the precincts of the sacred shrine. He is said to have been ultimately miraculously absorbed by the deity of Śrīrangam. Being a minstrel, his invariable accompaniment was the vīṇa or lute which is usually found represented in the crook of one of his arms, resting on the shoulder (Fig.193). In the stone image of this Īḻvār from Tirumayyam (Pudukkottai) he is shown as standing with ausīli hastā and the vīṇa held on the left. The figure wears a cylindrical coiffure with a forehead plate. It may be of the late medieval period as indicated by the treatment of the lower garment in schematic folds. Inscriptional evidence of the setting up of the image of Tiruppāḻvār is found in the temple of Vaiṅṭighā Peraṅāl in Tiruvappānaiḻḷūr in the South Āravī district. The epigraph is dated

8 (contd.)

Yeḻapitta māṁsu yeḻanu tiruvaiḻaluttal
māṁsaiva黏黏valasaeviyamkāleppitta
kappita√vaiṅkālivaie√kālayam yāparalam.
kappu kajikku māṭrā kaṭa

Ibid., v.1963.
in the 33rd regnal year of the Kṛṣavaṇa chieftain Kopperunjiśa, who rose to prominence in the first half of the 13th century A.D. 9

The early Vaishnava Śvērās included among them a king of Keralā, who was proficient alike in Sanskrit and Tamil. He renounced his throne and spent his last days in Śrīrangam. He was the author of a Sanskrit work called the Kukumālā, besides being the composer of a number of hymns in Tamil later included in the Vaishnava canon. His compositions attained such widespread popularity that a Sanskrit verse from the Kukumāla is found engraved in Grantha characters of the 13th century in an inscription from Pagan (Burma). The rest of the inscription is in Tamil prose and records that a native of Malabar by name Kulaśekhara Nambi made a grant to the Kukumēśu Vidipagar (Vīṇam temple of the Kukumēśas) in Pukka or Pagan. The name of the temple shows that the temple of Vīṇam was built in the heart of the Buddhist country of Burma, in the 13th century by Vaishnava merchants from various parts of the Indian peninsula. The name of the donor Kulaśekhara also proves that he was a devotee of the saint Kulaśekhara whose Sanskrit verse he got engraved along with the Tamil inscription. 10 The fact that in the 13th century the hymns of Kulaśekhara had been carried by his devotees to a distant land like Burma presupposes a considerably

9. 500 of 1921; XII, XII, 242.
10. NER., 24th July 1903, p.6.
long period of Kulašekhara's popularity even before the 13th century. In the Ranganatha temple in Srirangan one of the hymns of Kulašekhara beginning with "Karjamundira" was recited from the time of Balottunga I who made a provision for it in his 13th year i.e. 1088 A.D. An image of Kulašekhara was set up and provision for worship made in the reign of Naravarman Sundara Pandya I (1216-1236 A.D.) in the Gopalswami temple in Mannarköyil in the Tirunelveli district.

Kulašekhara is said to be an aśīna of the kaustubha. Images of this saint show him like a prince well attired and wearing elaborate ornaments including the kirāṇa. But his position as the bhakta is indicated by the hansis folded in anjali. The figure of Kulašekhara, like those of the others, is also shown as seated or standing. The present image (Fig.194), which comes from the Rajaśekharam temple in Mannarköyil in the Tirunelveli district, represents a standing figure with the usual features. It may be dated in the 13th-14th centuries A.D.

Vipremaśayana or Toppāraçippödi (the dust of the feet of the devotees) was a Brahman from the Tanjavur district, and worshipped

11. 68 of 1922; III, III, 70.
12. 397 of 1919.
the God of Sri Ranganath. He is represented like the others, either as standing or seated with hands in anjali. The stone image illustrated in figure 106 shows the Ayyar standing with hands in anjali, with a small tuft above the head. The figure, on the basis of its style, may be assigned to the 14th century or later, yet may be accepted as a typical example of the images of Topdarapoppadi of the earlier period as well. Rarely, the figure of this Ayyar is also shown as seated in nayamahasana with the left palm turned upwards on the lap and the right hand in the jñana mudra. This saint is known as the anōa of the yanmala.

Nammāyār, was born of a Vellāla family of Ayyar, Tirumangai, apparently so-called after him and originally known as Kurugār, in the Tirunelveli district. His personal name was Māra and he seems to have got the title śaptakopa (hater of rogues) at his initiation. His hymns are also numerous though next only to those of Tirumangai, and are rightly regarded as embodying the deepest religious experiences and philosophic thought of one of the greatest seers of the world. He is believed to be an anōa of Vaisakhaṇa. His images are also as numerous as those of Tirumangai. They usually represent him as seated in nayamahasana, with the left hand on the lap or with a book and the right hand in the teaching attitude nyākhyāna (Fig.106). He is occasionally shown with his hands in

In his images, he is represented with elaborate coiffure and a few ornaments. The earliest evidence of the popularity of Nammāḻvār's hymns occurs in the name of the God of the Vígaya temple at Ukkal in the Chingleput district. Here the God is called Tiruvāḷvomīléeva in an inscription of the 19th year of Nājāraja I (966 A.D.). The provision was made for the recitation of the Tiruvāḷvomīl in the Alagiyasāngappirumāḻ temple in Eppayiram in the South Arcot district in the reign of Nājendra I 2 (1012-1046 A.D.). The shrine of Nammāḻvār in the Mīnāṭha temple in Āḻvāṟ Tirunagari, the place of his birth, exists from the period of the Pāṇḍya ruler Jaṅgavarnāma Ekaḷeśhvara (1190-1220 A.D.), whose inscription is the earliest found on the walls of the Nammāḻvār shrine.

Madhavakavi, was the aṭṭā of Vainadeya. He was a contemporary and pupil of Nammāḻvār and is represented in image as a seated figure in aṭṭā, wearing a long beard and an elaborate knot of hair (Fig.197).

Most of the early Vāḻyāḷ Āḻvārs are closely associated with the great temple of Ranganāṭha in Āḻrangaṉam. This temple represents a veritable treasure house of medieval sculptures, especially bronzes. Some of the metal images of the Āḻvārs and Asāryas found

14. All., III, 2.
15. 339 of 1917.
16. 338 of 1939–49.
in this temple belong to the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

A noteworthy feature in the Vaishnava temple complex of medieval times is the addition of an independent shrine for Nārāyaṇa, the great reformer of the 12th century A.D. Two Pāṇḍya inscriptions dated in the 8th and 11th year of a Tribhuvanacakravartin Kondermaikoppya refer to the shrines of Nārāyaṇa in Tiruvannāmālai in the South Arcot district and Tirukkāppappuram in the Thanjavūr district. Both the records register the provisions made for worship and offerings to the respective shrines. 17 That the image of Nārāyaṇa in Tirukkāppappuram was enshrined much earlier during the period of another Pāṇḍya ruler is known from an inscription of a Pāṇḍya king "who took all countries" (probably Jayāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya - accession 1251 A.D.) referring to the setting up of the image. 18

Images of the Bhāsyakāra, as Nārāyaṇa is commonly called, invariably show the teacher in a seated posture (parvakaśaṇa). The hands are seen folded in śūlali with a flag in the crook of the right arm and resting on the shoulder. He is also represented in the teaching attitude, seated with the right hand in viśākṣaṇa mudrā and the left one holding a palm leaf manuscript. The marks of Śankha and cakra are also seen impressed on the left and right arms respectively. The hair is usually worn in a top knot or sometimes completely shaven.

17. 34 of 1943-44 and 326 of 1922.
18. 592 of 1923.
Fig. 187 — Poygai Aiyār — bronze Anandamangalam — 13th c. A.D.

188 — Pudattālvār — Kadalgudi — 13th-14th c. A.D.
Fig. 189  — Tirumaligai Alvar — Kumudi estate

Late 15th C.A.D.

190.  Tirumangai Alvar with his wife

Kumudavalli  — Peruntōṭṭam  — Early Cōla

C. 10th C.A.D.
Fig. 191  Tirumangal -- Vijayanagar -- Early Cōla -- 10th C.A.D.

192 -- Periyāḻvār. -- Ambāsamudram -- Pāṇḍya -- 14th C.A.D.
Fig. 193  --  TiruppâṆālvâr  --  Tirumayyam  --  15th c.A.D.

194  --  Kulasēkhara  --  MâṆârkkoyil  --  Pâṇḍya  --  14th c.A.D.
Fig. 195 -- Tondaraḍippoḍi Iyār -- Tirumayyam -- 15th c.A.D.

196 Nammāḷvār - bronze -- 15th C.A.D.
Fig. 197  Madurakavi - Koğumuğl - Late 15th c. A.D.
Fig. 197.
CHAPTER XVII

THE WEAPONS OF VISHNU