ENCOUNTER WITH THE DIVINE - A STUDY IN TIRUTTONȚAR PURĂṆAM
ENCOUNTER WITH THE DIVINE - A STUDY IN TIRUTTONTAR PURĀṆAM

By

SOBANA HARIHAR, M.A.

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AUTHOR: Sobana Harihar
        B.A. (University of Madras)
        M.A. (University of Madras)
SUPERVISORS: Dr. K. Sivaraman
            Dr. Paul Younger
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ABSTRACT

The Tiruttoṭṭar Purāṇam is a late medieval Tamil hagiography that is venerated as the last of the Śaiva Tirumūrai(s) - the sacred literature of the Tamil Śaivas. It was composed around the twelfth century by Cēkkiḷār, who was minister in the court of Kulōttuṅka II (1133 -1150). The hagiography narrates the stories of the sixty-three nāyaṇmār - Śaiva saints, who lived between the sixth and the eighth centuries.

This thesis examines the stories of five nāyaṇmār who are drawn to our attention by the fact that their devotion expresses itself in unusual and violent forms. While all the stories revolve around the 'encounter' between the devotee and his Lord, these five exemplify encounters with God that seem to violate all normal human values. In the tension between human and divine ties, their bhakti in its extremity leads them towards acts of violence which raise serious moral questions for most readers.

The concept of toṇṭu (service) is identified as the over-arching principle used by Cēkkiḷār to provide a
rationale for these stories. This thesis centers on the way he uses that concept in the five stories in order to explain the occasionally violent or antinomian nature of bhakti. Recounting the stories in Cēkkilār's words, this thesis traces the way in which he handles the story, and his skillful introduction of the idea of tonṭu. The later tradition had to accommodate these antinomian saints within its system. Its attempt to come to terms with these episodes offers an interesting perspective on the tradition itself and so this thesis examines Tirukkaḷiṟṟupāṭiyār's thirteenth century assessment of these saints as a concluding note.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Extending appreciation to one's teachers seems to me as an Indian an unseemly attempt to dismiss with words, the bond between a teacher and the student. For the guidance and patient understanding that my teachers have demonstrated, I shall not therefore attempt to thank them. All that I can say is:

ॐ नमः
**TRANSLITERATION**

The method followed in transliterating Tamil words is set out below:

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Scope and Aim

The aim of the present study is to analyze some of the key concepts in the south Indian devotional or bhakti tradition with particular focus on the Tiruttōṇṭar Purāṇam popularly known as Periyapurāṇam, a twelfth century text, written by Cēkkiḷār. The Tiruttōṇṭar Purāṇam (hereafter TTP) is the last of the Śaiva Tirumūrai(s), the sacred literature of the Tamil branch of Saivism. It is a hagiographic presentation of the lives of the sixty-three nāyaṇmār (leaders), saints of the Tamil Śaiva tradition, who along with the twelve āḷvār (lit. 'drowners') of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, are generally credited with being forerunners of the bhakti movement in early medieval south India. The focus of this thesis will be on a select number of stories of the nāyaṇmār that present bhakti expressing itself in unusual and violent forms that disrupt accepted codes of behaviour.

Historically, the verbalisation of bhakti occurs first in the Śvetasvatāra Upaniṣad while the Bhagavad-Gītā has been widely acclaimed as a 'gospel of bhakti' (Dhavamony, 1971:38). It is, however, a widely acknowledged
fact that in the religious history of India, the actual inspiration for the bhakti tradition came from the South.

It was the Bhagavad-Gīta that set in motion the transformation of Hinduism from a mystical technique based on the ascetic virtues of renunciation and self-forgetfulness into the impassioned religion of self-abandonment to God, but the strictly religious impulse which gave momentum to the whole bhakti movement stemmed from the Tamil lands of south India (Zaehner, 1962:176).

The bhakti movement in the South was given shape and impetus by the devotees of Śiva and Viṣṇu, the nāyānrmār and the āḻvār whose period spanned roughly the sixth to the tenth centuries of the Common Era. The āḻvār because of their smaller number and their direct contribution to the Vaiṣṇava hymns,¹ have been relatively better studied and their contribution to the bhakti tradition more clearly established. With regard to the nāyānrmār, on the other hand, the focus of scholars has mostly been on the illustrious trio namely, Tirunāvukkaracar (Appar), Tirujñānacampantar and Cuntarar. The rationale behind this is that these three were the authors of the Tevāram hymns which constitute seven of the twelve Tirumurāi(s). And these hymns which were composed in praise of different temple-sites in south India have played a significant role in the dissemination of bhakti in south India through the ages. So prominent has

¹All the 12 āḻvār have sung hymns in praise of Viṣṇu, which are collectively known as the Nālāyira divyaprabandam (The Four Thousand Divine Compositions). Among the nāyānrmār on the other hand only seven of them are known to have composed hymns.
been the place of these three that it has led almost to a complete neglect of the other sixty saints. And this neglect becomes serious when we recall that the growth of the bhakti movement owes to them as much as to the above-mentioned three. The need to study the message conveyed by the lives of these saints before coming to any definite conclusion about the nature of bhakti tradition is therefore undeniable. The study would not only add more details to our picture of the movement but also bring some new perspectives to our understanding of the roots of the bhakti tradition.

The neglect of these saints in south Indian religious studies cannot be attributed to a paucity of information on their lives. Apart from the illustrious trio mentioned earlier, four others have left us hymns that are records of their personal encounter with the divine, and these too are part of the Śaiva Tirumūrai. And from about the eleventh century, paintings and sculptures depicting incidents from the lives of these saints were sponsored and are still extant in temples in the heart-land of bhakti i.e. the Cōla country which comprises of present-day Tanjavur and Tirucirapalli districts. The information and inspiration for these artistic representations came chiefly from the magnum opus of Cēkkilār, a Tamil poet of the twelfth century. His work, the TTP being the twelfth and the last, is the capping

2They are: Tirumūlar, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār, Aiyaṭikāl Kāṭavarkōṇ, and Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ.
stone of the Śaiva Tirumūṟai(s). Described as the 'national epos of the Tamils' (Zvelebil, 1973:186) and as 'a tremendous epic . . . which had universal appeal and an enormous influence in the Tamil country and outside' (Zvelebil, 1973:187) the TTP is a hagiographic narration of the lives of the sixty-three saints. These sixty-three Śaiva devotees are known in the tradition as the samayācārya(s) and are considered to have been blessed by the Lord himself. Cēkkilār is indebted to two others who wrote brief accounts of the saints earlier. Yet, it is undoubtedly to the sole credit of this author that we have detailed information on the lives of the sixty-three nāyaṇmār. In his magnificent epic, Cēkkilār has not only clothed with flesh and blood the bare skeletal information that was available to him, but has breathed the spirit of bhakti into it. A silent testimony to the magnitude and impressive nature of his work is the fact that after him no one else within the tradition has attempted to give another account of the lives of these saints. There are a few works that give an account of some of the nāyaṇmār but these are either prior or contemporaneous to Cēkkilār. Many of the stories have become very popular. The story of Tirunālaipōvār, for example, is celebrated in folk songs and

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3The most significant of these is Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi's works on Campantar and Appar, and the two works on Kaṇṭappar called the Tirukkaṇṭappattēvar Tirumaṟam, all part of the Tirumūṟai.
popular dramas, testifying to the universal interest and popularity of the stories. The TTP has been rendered into Kannada and Sanskrit though these versions occasionally differ from the original.4

The study of TTP is significant because it records at the peak of the bhakti period what the author thought went into the making of that movement i.e. the experiences of the nāyānḍmār and the events they are embedded in. Though almost four centuries had elapsed since the last of the nāyānḍmār - Cuntarar, Čēramān Perumāl etc., Čēkkilār's account need not be faulted on account of the time lag. He was a man of the same tradition, and belonged to the prime period of Cōla and Šaiva glory. These political and religious systems were at this point almost synonymous and interchangeable. In a century the tale would be different with Cōla hegemony slipping rapidly while the Šaiva religion underwent significant transformations at the hands of the teachers (Santāṅācārya(s)), of the philosophical tradition. Čēkkilār was, therefore, at the period of the fruition of bhakti, if the period of the nāyānḍmār can be called the flowering of bhakti. It can be seen as the natural culmination of a period of intense devotional fervour and

4Not much information is available on these works. The Kannada version of the TTP by Hari Hara appeared in 1200 C.E. The Sanskrit version called Upamanyu bhakta vilāsa by Śrīnivāsa Yajña was written in 1532 C.E. in the reign of the Vijayanagara king, Aćcyuta Rāya. Evidence for this is available from inscriptions in the Kaṇḍipuram Ekāmbaranātha temple (Duraiswami Pillai, 1970:55).
active wide-spread dissemination of a new message - that "however poor, insignificant and helpless a human being may be, nothing can prevent him from having an ideal; the meanest of the mean can rise to the highest spiritual level - in the life of service and love" (Zvelebil, 1973:187). The TTP was a celebration of these spiritual savants, devotees who embodied in their lives bhakti/tontu (devotion/service). Standing at a crucial point Cēkkilār was looking back, and looking into the fervent, emotional outburst of activity of the earlier period. Not so far removed in time for the details to be obscured nor so close that his vision was blurred, his coherent account is crucial for any study of what went into constituting the bhakti period. His account is also important from the point of view that here, we have the Śaiva tradition's own view of the movement, immediate in time, place, feelings and ideas. On these counts alone, a study of TTP can be considered essential and of immediate need, but as a record of the society of it's time, its customs, beliefs, arts, religious practices etc., as an important historical document that is used to fix the contemporaneity of many important figures in Tamil religious history, as a literary master-piece, as one of the sacred canons of the Śaiva(s), as a precursor and inspiration to the philosophical stream of Śaiva thought in South India-as all of these too the TTP deserves to be critically studied.
In view of the necessarily brief nature of this study though, only a small task is proposed to be undertaken. This study will address certain interesting and puzzling issues that the TT presents. Even a slight acquaintance with the stories of the nāyānṃār as presented in it reveals anomalies embodied in the lives of these saints. The image of bhakti as gentle, peace-loving and sweet suffers a serious shock when the reader comes across episodes which are gruesome, violent and bordering on the fanatical. Of course not all stories have this character. There are undeniably stories that portray appealingly the bond of love that unites the human with the divine, but it is the other kind that are the focus of the study here. How does bhakti accommodate crude and violent behaviour that goes against all accepted norms?

Another interesting question that a study of these devotees brings up, is what is the common factor, apart from the obvious one of devotion to Śiva, that binds them into a homogeneous group? The heterogeneity that characterises them is multi-faceted. Not only are they drawn from all walks of life, professionally as well as socially but even in expressing bhakti, they differ radically. Čekkiḷār gives the rationale behind this bewildering variance, though he does not do it very explicitly. As will be shown in the succeeding chapters, his identification of the devotees as tontar (servitors) in the beginning of the work can and will
be used as a key-concept to unravel the problems that have been posed. It is this concept that invisibly runs through the entire epic as the connecting link, stringing what could have been a loose and haphazard collection of stories into a single, continuous explication of the many facets of bhakti. We will also make an attempt to explain the concept of tônṭu in Tamil bhakti tradition in general, and as set out by Cëkkilär in particular. The concept will be used as a tool to analyze a few selected stories of the saints.

The TTP is also an important source for the philosophical school that was formulated in Tamil Śaiva tradition in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. It would be illuminating to examine the stand-point of the philosophers-teachers of the tradition on the issue of the violent votaries. Particular focus will be laid in this context on the Tirukkalirruppatiyär, which is one of the earliest of the fourteen Meykanṭa śāstras (the philosophical literature), and in which there is some discussion on the issue of the violent devotion of some of the devotees.

Cëkkilär's rationale for the presence of violence in worship will be examined in the light of these select stories, and the later tradition's different approach will be used to show the continuing reflection given to the issue.

We shall begin with a brief account of the author and the work.
Cēkkilār

The source for the life-account of Cēkkilār is the Tiruttanţar Purāṇa Varalāru, also known as the Cēkkilār Purāṇam attributed to Umāpati Śivācārya, (c.1313 A.C.E.), one of the teachers (Santānācārya(s)) in the Meykāntār tradition. The Cēkkilār Pillai Tamil is another but fairly recent work celebrating the childhood of Cēkkilār, in the poetical genre of piḷḷaittamil by the nineteenth century scholar Mīnakshisundaram Pillai.

Popular tradition ascribes to the poet a child-hood marked by precocity (in the general manner of most celebrated figures). Umāpati however, shows no knowledge of such an incident. Cēkkilār, according to Umāpati, was the chief minister in the court of a famous Cōla king,

5According to the story, (M.Arunacalam, 1973:114-115) Cēkkilār’s father, employed in the royal court, returned home one day in a thoughtful mood. The child, questioning him found that the king had posed three questions to his courtiers, demanding an answer by the next day. The questions were: "What is mightier than the mountain; what is bigger than the earth; what is more vast than the ocean?" Hearing these riddles from his baffled father, the child answered them with three couplets from the Tirukkuṟaḷ:

The stature of him, resolute and calm, is immeasurably mightier than a mountain. (124)

Service, timely rendered, though small it may be is more vast than this earth. (102)

The worth of help rendered without expectations, when measured, is more vast than the ocean. (103)

The father related these kuṟal(s) to the king who was greatly pleased.
identified as Kulöttuňka II (1133-1150) by most scholars. From his account we learn that the poet whose given name was Arunmoli, was born in Kunṟattur in Toṇṭainātu in a Vēḻāḷa family of the Cēkkilār kuti(clan). He had a younger brother by name Pālaṟavāyar. Umapati further tells us that the Cōla king made Arunmoli his chief-minister and bestowed on him the title Uttama-cōla-pallavan. We also learn that Arunmoli, who was an ardent devotee of the deity presiding over Tirunāgesvaram, i.e.Śiva, had a replica of that temple built in Kunṟattur.

The story of how the chief-minister became the author of the hagiography makes interesting reading. Arunmoli was an ardent Saivaite in line with his family tradition. Finding the Cōla monarch absorbed in 'Cīvakacintāmaṇi' - a Jain epic of 'questionable morality' (in Arunmoli's eyes, at least), the chief-minister chided the king and pointed out the availability of Śaiva stories that would benefit him in this world as also the next. "This false mendacious work of the Jains is of no benefit for the future life as also the present; Śaiva stories are of value for this life as also the next." (21) The Śaiva stories were the stories of the sixty-three saints - as related by Cuntarar in his Tiruttoṇṭar Tokai and expanded by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi in his Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti. Impressed by the

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6The Šamājam edition of TTP gives the Tiruttoṇṭar Purāṇa Varalāru as an appendix and this account is being followed in the thesis.
account of the lives of these saints, the king requested his minister to relate these stories in full in the form of an epic, and to facilitate the venture he relieved him of his ministerial duties and gave him much wealth. Arunmoli, now known as Cēkkilār in recognition of the fame he had brought his clan, retired to the temple at Cidambaram to write the epic *Tiruttoṭṭar Purāṇam*. Divine approval of the venture was signified when Lord Śiva himself provided the first word, *ulakelām* (lit. 'all the world'), with which Cēkkilār started the epic.\(^7\) Meditating on this sign of grace, Cēkkilār seated himself in the 1000 pillared hall in the precincts of the temple of Cidambaram and composed his work.

Umāpati describes in detail the royal and public reception that was accorded to the work and its author on its completion. The king who had kept track of the progress of the epic through his messengers reached Cidambaram when it was completed. A divine voice commanded the king to listen to the epic. The entire city of Cidambaram took on a festive appearance as Cēkkilār expounded the work to his royal and public audience. The narration lasted a whole year. Then, placing the poet and the work on the royal elephant, the king fanned him with his own hands, and led him in a procession through the streets of the city. The *TTP* was then declared to be the twelfth *Tirumuṟai* and the poet

\(^7\) The word was *ulakelām*. By coincidence or design Kampan uses the word *ulaku* to start his epic *Irāmavatāram*. 
was acclaimed by the name 'Toṇṭarcīrparappuvār' - 'one who spreads the glories of saints'. Čekkilār stayed on at Cidambaram after that, spending his time in the company of other devotees. The king called for Pāḷaṟavāyar, Čekkilār's brother, and appointed him as the chief-minister.

Date

The general consensus of scholars places Čekkilār in the reign of Kulōttuṇka II (1133-1150). The basis for the dating is that Čekkilār himself refers to a Cōla king in ten different verses who appears to have been a contemporary. The king is variously called 'apayaṇ' (TTP 22), 'anapāyaṇ' (TTP 8, 22, 85, 98, 404, 552, 1218), 'cenni apayaṇ kulōttuṇka cōlaṇ' (TTP 1218), 'the Cōla who gilded the Pērampalam with gold' (TTP 1218), 'the Cōla Anapāyaṇ who gilded the streets of Tillai with gold' (TTP 3954). Of these verse 1218 is crucial for it not only mentions the name of the king but also gives a clue as to which Kulōttunka is being referred to. The description of his gilding the Pērampalam with gold finds corroboration in the Kulōttuṇka-cōlaṇ-ulā, a court-poem composed by Oṭṭakūṭtāṇ who lived in the court of Kulōttuṇka II. Oṭṭakūṭtāṇ recounts how Kulōttuṇka carried out elaborate reconstructions on the Cidambaram temple and covered with gold various parts of the temple and the city. The same facts are recorded briefly in the Rājarāja-cōlaṇ-ulā and the Takkayāgapparaṇi both composed by the same poet. These descriptions coincide with
that of Čekkiliär noted above.\(^8\) And Anapāya, according to Nilakanta Sastri (1955:349), was the most characteristic name of Kulōttuṅka II as evidenced by both his inscriptions as well as the Kulōttuṅka-cōlan-ulā.

The few scholars who disagree with this identification place Čekkiliär only a century earlier or later.\(^9\) These details, however, need not detain us here because whether Čekkiliär lived a century earlier or later than Kulōttuṅka II is not of any significance to the problems discussed in the thesis.

The Text and its Status

*TTP* is the twelfth and last of the Śaiva *Tirumuṇai(s)*. As recounted earlier, the inclusion of *TTP* as a *Tirumuṇai* was immediate and spontaneous and the king and other scholars present there are presumably to be credited with it. There is, however, no corroboration of this by external evidence, and the exact period in which the *TTP* and the five *Tirumuṇai(s)* that precede it were brought into the

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\(^8\) For more information on the identical references in Čekkiliär and Otṭakūţṭar, see Rajamanickam (1978:21-22) and for similar references in inscriptions, Rajamanickam (1978:24-25). For a recent analysis of the various stages in the construction of Cidambaram see Younger (1986:205-226).

\(^9\) These scholars variously identify the king as Rājendra I (1012-1044), Kulōttuṅka I (1070-1120), Kulōttuṅka II (1133-1150) and Kulōttuṅka III (1178-1217). For a discussion of these arguments see Rajamanickam (1978:15-29), Arunacalam (1973:122-150) and C.K.Subramania Mudaliar (1933:12-23).
canon is yet to be determined. Nor is there any explanation forthcoming as to why the collection was closed with TTP and no other work was later accepted as Tirumurai. Since Umāpati knew of the collection in its complete form, the period preceding him would be the upper limit and the period following Nampi, the compiler of at least seven of the Tirumurai(s), would be the lower limit, for the time frame in which the last six Tirumurai(s) were brought into the Tirumurai canon.

The Tirumurai(s) form the devotional literature of the Tamil Śaiva tradition.10 They are the bedrock on which the later philosophical tradition of Meykanṭar is raised. And they are, in a more general sense, the most important material for understanding the history of the Tamil bhakti tradition. The Tirumurai-kaṇṭa-purāṇam, again credited to Umāpati, gives an account of the compiling of the first eleven Tirumurai(s) by Nampi at the behest of the Cōla king, Rājarāja. While scholars agree on the identification of the king who ordered the compilation as Rājarāja I (985-1014 C.E.), much doubt has been cast on the veracity of the statement that Nampi compiled the eleven Tirumurai(s). The most serious question is how the poems of Karuvur Tēvar, which include one on the temple, Gaṅgaikonṭa cōlīsvaram built by Rājendra I the son of Rājarāja, could have been

10For a list of the works and authors of the Tirumurai, see Zvelebil(1973:188-189).
included in the eleventh Tirumūrai if either Nampi or Rājarāja were involved. The exact dating of the compilation is obviously unclear.

The TTP is in a sense very different in nature from the other Tirumūrai(s). The Tēvāram and Tiruvācakam (books 1-8), as also the miscellaneous hymns in Tirumūrai eight and eleven, are hymns or songs that are composed on God. They can be described as the outcome of the encounter that happens between the human devotee and the divine. The TTP on the other hand does not directly deal with the divine. It is a hagiography of the nāyanmār and as such describes the encounter with the divine. It is not a paean of praise of God but of his devotees. But when seen in the light of Śaiva tradition, where the devotee is perceived as a form of God, TTP becomes the logical finale to the earlier works of devotion. In a very interesting manner it becomes the bridge between the devotional hymns and the later philosophical works. By being a work in praise of atiyār it partakes in the nature of the former, and by including reflective thought on many key-concepts of theology, it becomes a forerunner of the later philosophical thought.

Sources

Cēkkilār acknowledges as his sources for the TTP the Tiruttōntattokai of Cuntarar which he calls mutal nūl (primary work), and the Tiruttōntar Tiruvantāti of Nampi which he describes as vali nūl (guide work). His own work
thus falls in the category of virinūl (full-blown version). Cuntarar's Tiruttontattokai (11 verses) is as the name implies an anthology or collection of the names of sixty saints. While Cuntarar has descriptive epithets for many nāyanmār, on the whole his work does not provide much detail on their lives. Nampi's work (86 verses) is a definite improvement on this. Since Nampi's work is based on the tokai, the order of the nāyanmār is the same, but Nampi devotes at least one verse to each of them and he gives such details as their birth-place, deeds etc. It is these verses that are expanded into a full-blown epic by Cēkkilār. We may illustrate the process by citing the case of Tirunīlakaṇṭanāyanār.

Cuntarar declares: "I am the servant of the potter Tirunīlakaṇṭar as well."

Nampi elaborates: "An oath on the pure name of Śiva being uttered by his wife, he renounced immediately desire for the pleasures of the flesh. Upon growing old, by the grace of Umā's lord, he became young along with his wife, and rejoiced. He is the blessed potter, Tirunīlakaṇṭar of Tillai."

Cēkkilār narrates the story of this saint in forty-four verses.

The number of verses in TTP is a matter of debate. Scholars believe that there are interpolations and so editions vary in the number of verses - from 4253 to 4286.
The *Tiruttoṭṭar Purāṇa varalāṛu* describes the number of verses as 4253, while the *Samājam* edition has 4286 verses.\(^\text{11}\)

The work contains thirteen *carukkam(s)* and is divided into two parts. With the exception of the first and the last *carukkam*, all the *carukkam(s)* take their name and structure from Cuntarar's classification in the *tokai*. Each *carukkam* derives its title from the first line of a verse from the *tokai*, and they follow his sequence. For example, the title of the second *carukkam* 'Tillai vāḷ antañar carukkam', is from the first line of the *tokai* - 'Tillai vāḷ antañar tam aṭiyāṛkkum aṭiyēn' (chart I). And the *nāyanmār* dealt with in the first verse of the *tokai* - Tillai vāḷ antañar, Tirunīḷakāṇṭar, Iyarpakai, Iḷayāṇkuṭīman, Meypporul, Viṟaṇmīṇṭar, and Amarnīṭi are dealt with in the same order in the second *carukkam* by Cēkkilār.

The first and the last *carukkam* form the frame-work within which the stories of the *nāyanmār* are narrated. They deal with the story of Cuntarar. The first *carukkam* brings the story to the point where Cuntarar composes his *Tiruttoṭṭattokai* in praise of the sixty *nāyanmār*. This becomes the take-off point for the narration of the lives of the *nāyanmār* listed in the *tokai*. Cuntarar's two marriages are described in the account of Ėyarkōṅ kalikāmar, in the course of which his enmity to Cuntarar and its resolution is

\(^{11}\)All citations and numbering of the verses in this thesis follow the Samājām edition.
described. The last \textit{carukkam} describes the ascent of Cuntarar to Kailāsa. Ĉekkilār reveals his mastery in the deft handling of the structure of his epic, which while following the earlier work is yet novel enough to show his capabilities as an author.

Cuntarar's story, as indicated above, is narrated in three stages (in 986 verses), and is spread through the epic. Besides this, Ĉekkilār pays homage to Cuntarar in a verse at the end of every \textit{carukkam}. Campantar's story is recounted in 1256 verses and is by far the longest, occupying a little less than a third of the entire epic.\textsuperscript{12} Appar, the third of the illustrious trio, has 429 verses devoted to him. While the causes of the uneven distribution of verses could be many, one reason can be identified as possibly significant. It is very clear that Ĉekkilār is meticulous in his narration, and that the nature of his description is very closely tied to his sources. Wherever he has access to the works of the saints, as in the case of the trio mentioned above and those of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār and Ĉēramāṉ Perumāḷ, he generally has a longer narrative. And these same sources are at times useful in the references they make to other saints. Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar have referred to many of the other \textit{nāyaṉmār} and Ĉekkilār builds on these accounts to bring to life the interaction

\textsuperscript{12}Hence the popular saying "\textit{pillai pāti, purāṇam pāti}" (half is (of the) child, half is the \textit{purāṇam} viz. \textit{TTP}.\)
between these saints or the veneration in which they were held. Caṇṭīcar, for example, is referred to by Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar, Māṇikkavācakar, Tirumūlar, Nakkīrar and Paṭṭinattār. Kaṇṭappar has not only been referred to by Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar but has two works composed in his honour, both going by the same name—

*Tirukkaṇṭappattēvar* Tirumaṟam, and both part of the *Tirumuṟai*. Similarly Campantar has been the subject of six of the works of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi, while Appar is the subject of another work of his. Cēkkilūr makes full use of all these sources (chart II).

The popular traditions that must have been current in the villages and local regions of the respective saints is another possible source for Cēkkilūr. While the Čōla rulers were on the whole responsible for depicting in stone the lives of the *nāyamār*, the possibility of earlier representations of at least some of the saints in stone (or folk-poetry) cannot be ruled out. A case in point is that of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār, who was often depicted in sculpture, some of which has been identified as pre-Čōla in date. Similarly the popularity of the story of Caṇṭīcar is attested by a beautiful representation in a panel at Gaṇgaikoṇṭa Čōlisvaram temple.

In general we assume that wherever Cēkkilūr’s sources were more abundant the narration of the life account is correspondingly longer. And, presumably, in those stories
that are brief and rather short on information about the person, Cēkkilār's sources were wanting. As a poet of considerable talent he fills in gaps with description of particular regions, temples and so on. It is also clear that Cēkkilār must have travelled over all the area that he describes since the descriptions of sites and regions are accurate even now (Rajamanickam, 1978:190-194).
## Chart I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Carukkam(s) in TTP</th>
<th>I Canto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tirumalaiccarukkam</strong></td>
<td>(349 verses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tillai vāl antanar carukkam</strong></td>
<td>(201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ilaimalinta carukkam</strong></td>
<td>(422)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mummaiyāl ulakāṇṭa carukkam</strong></td>
<td>(298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tiruniṇa carukkam</strong></td>
<td>(633)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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13 The figures in brackets in the right column indicate the number of nāyānmār while those in the left column indicate the number of verses they are dealt with in the TTP.
II Canto

6. Vampaṟāvarivaṁṭumāṇam Vampaṟāvarivaṁṭucarukkam
nāṟa malarum (6) (1737)

7. Vārkoṇṭa vaṇamulaiyāḷ Vārkoṇṭa vaṇamulaiyāḷ
umaipāṅkaṇ kalalē (6) carukkam (303)

8. Poyyaṭimai illāta Poyyaṭimai illāta pulavar
pulavarkkum āṭiyēn (6+1) carukkam (116)

9. Karaikanṭāṇa kalalatiyē kāppuk Karaikanṭa carukkam (41)
koṭirunta (5)

10. Kaṭal cūḷnta ulakellāṁ- Kaṭal cūḷnta carukkam (51)
kākkiṇṭa perumāṇ (5)

11. Pattarāip paṇivārkal Pattarāippaṇivār carukkam
ellārkkum āṭiyēn (7 groups) (24)

12. Māṇniyacīr maraināvan Māṇniyacīr carukkam (58)
niṟṟavūrp pūcal (4)

13. Vellāṇaic carukkam (53)
Chart II

Tiruttonṭattokai

\[ \rightarrow \]

Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti

Tirumurai(s)

local traditions

inscriptions, sculptures

Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam
CHAPTER II
LOYAL SERVITORS

Terms and Concepts

In the Tamil Śaiva tradition, the terms nāyaṉmār, atiyār, bhakta, and tonṭar are quite commonly and inter-changeably used to denote the saints. Nāyaṉmār is, of course, specific to the Śaiva tradition, and its counterpart in the Śrivaishnava tradition - āḻvār - is not being considered here merely because our interest is in the Śaiva tradition. The primary clue to understanding the meaning of any word is its etymological meaning, although one should keep in mind that in the course of time each word acquires layers of meaning that need to be taken into consideration in any investigation. This is especially true in the case of the above-mentioned words which do not seem to share in etymological meaning but are used almost inter-changeably by the tradition. The richness that these terms gain in usage is very closely linked to the special tradition, viz. bhakti, in which they are used.

The etymological root of the term atiyavāṅ, atiyāṅ- 'slave, devotee' is atī - 'foot, foot-print, source, origin' DED (1984:72). Though generally atiyavāṅ is roughly translated as 'slave' and by extension 'devotee', its
specific meaning would be 'one attached to the feet (of ....)' or 'who follows in the foot-step'. Atimai which describes the nature or status of the atiyavan means 'slavery' or 'servitude' and is also used to designate 'slave, servant, devotee'. A corresponding term in this context is āntān or ālpavan which is derived from the root āl and means 'one who governs' or 'rules'. Atkoḷpavan denotes 'the one who takes over'. The term is used both in the secular sense of master and in the religious sense for God.

Nāyanmār\(^1\) is generally understood to mean 'leader' or 'leaders'. The DED does not list it and it seems that its origins are now lost.\(^2\) The term is used specifically only

\(^1\)According to the rules of Tamil grammar, the suffix ar and ār indicate plural and are also used as honorific suffix. So both nāyaṉār and nāyaṉmār, are already in the plural form. But later usage, treats them as the honorific singular and adds the suffix 'kaḷ' to indicate plural. The other usage, which seems to be established by Cēkkilār, is to treat nāyaṉār as the singular form and nāyaṉmār as the plural form. This last practice is proposed to be followed in this study, for purposes of clarity. Similarly tonṭar and atiyār indicate plural as also the honorific singular and will be used in both these senses in the thesis.

\(^2\)Though the word has no usage outside the context of Tamil Saivism, it is possible to suggest a link with a Sanskrit root. The basis for this suggestion is the existence of kindred words, with identical meaning. Nayaḥ means a leader, guide. Nāyakaḥ stands for the same and also means a paradigm or leading example. The root nī, nay - to lead, is the root for these nominal forms. It is possible to suggest from its current usage that nāyaṉmār may have been derived from naya or nāyaka. Nāyakaḥ is quite commonly used in Tamil and denotes the Supreme Being, God, or husband or hero - the talaivaṉ. Nāyaṉmār can then therefore be understood to mean 'leaders' or 'paradigms'. The Tamil Lexicon (1982:2222) suggests 'nāyaṉ' as the root and the
for the sixty-three saints of the Śaiva tradition. It is also a term that is used to address Lord Śiva.

The term ṭoṇṭu has at least five meanings, according to the DED. But the sense that is of interest to us derives from the verb toḷil - 'act, calling, profession, order, command' (DED, 1984:3524). Toḷumpu is 'slavery, servitude, drudgery, devotion to the service of God'. Toṇṭu means 'slavery, devoted service' and also denotes 'a slave' or 'devoted servant'.

Bhakti and bhaktaḥ are Sanskrit terms and the latter stands for 'a worshipper, adorer, devotee, votary, faithful attendant'. Bhakti is 'devotion, attachment, loyalty, faithfulness, reverence, service, worship, homage'. The root for bhakti is bhaj which means 'to apportion' or 'share'. In the Ātmanepada, middle voice, it signifies 'to share, partake in, resort to'.

So atiyān is 'one who is in servitude' or 'one who holds onto or is attached to the feet' (presumably the feet of a master but also perhaps a model); nāyaṅār means a 'leader' or 'paradigm'; toṇṭaṅ is 'one who is in devoted service'; a bhakta is 'a faithful attendant' - one who 'participates in God'. The different images that these meanings evoke are paradoxical when they are used to denote meaning to be lords, masters.

one and the same person. How could one who stands in the relation of a slave to God participate in his nature or be a leader at the same time? How could he be a leader and yet be in servitude concurrently?

The wealth of meaning that these words have acquired is, as has already been observed, a result of their usage in the bhakti context. An atiyān is a slave not in the secular or more common sense of the term. He shares with the ordinary slave the characteristic of not being his own master. God as āntān or ātkolpavan has taken suzerainty over him. But the most important difference is that the atiyān's surrender of himself is unlike the secular one not simply because of misery or passiveness. There is a joyful celebration of the surrender and it is done in the mood of love. God too is involved in this enterprise, not as a grim master but as a loving participant. Therefore, it is not difficult to see how the transition from atiyān to bhakta, flows naturally from the one to the other. The bhakta is a votary, a faithful attendant who resorts to God. He shares in or partakes of God. The hierarchy of master and servant is being replaced with equality here. Such participators in God are without question paradigms for the lesser masses. They are, therefore, nāyanmār - leaders, who show the way to the rest of the world.

In a very fascinating manner, the hierarchy is brought a full circle when God is described as "being
accessible to devotees"—toṇṭark keḷiyar (Tirumūraiy V.27.5) or "one who is imprisoned by devotion"—bhakti ciṟaiyil paṭuvōn (Tiruvācakam, Tiruvanṭappakuti, 42).

Toṇṭu, in the light of the above, may be understood as devoted service to a master that is born of love. The service rendered is born of a 'calling' and is to be understood as a true vocation. Such an understanding would underscore the nature of the servitude. It implies a unilateral loyalty, and a bilateral love. So toṇṭu may be understood as loyal service that is informed by love.

Toṇṭu in the Tirumūraiy(s)

The idea of toṇṭar both singly and as a community, is present in the thought of almost all the hymn-singers. From the references in the Tēvāram, Tiruvācakam etc., we are led to infer that the phenomena of the toṇṭar not only predates them, but had long been a very significant part of the society. Since the toṇṭar are not described as a new phenomenon, it may be said that the bhakti tradition does not start with these saint-singers but that they give voice through their hymns to an existing tradition of devotion and sainthood. Of the many descriptions by the saint-singers some of the recurring and important ones must be noted.

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār:

The chronology of the nāyamār is not fully established but almost all scholars agree that Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār can be dated in the sixth century. That date makes
her one of the earliest, if we exclude from consideration Tirumūlar, whose date has been the subject of much controversy. In her Āṟputa Tiruvantāṭi (40), Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār very clearly advocates association with the tonṭar of her Lord, and repudiation of those who were not tonṭar.

Repeatedly, O my heart, uttering with the mouth, and thinking, worship the feet of the tonṭar as thy goal. And shun the society of those who do not think of Him, who possesses the crescent moon.

Tirumūlar:

The very powerful and striking identification of love and God (aṟppē civam [270]) is made by this saint, often called a siddha, whose cryptic poems are contained in the Tirumantiram. He celebrates the devotee as the walking temple of God. The Lord's residence within the heart of the devotee makes him sacred and a temple or locus for God. Any offering to the devotee is an offering to God, both within and without (naṭamāṭak kōyil nampark koṇ rīyil paṭamāṭak kōyil pakavarka tāmē [1857] - when something is offered to the Lord of the walking shrine, it is an offering to the Lord of the storeyed shrine).

Māṇikkavācakar:

Māṇikkavācakar, the mystic in the Śaiva tradition, is not included in the group of sixty-three nāyagmār, but he is usually considered as important as the trio of Appar,
Campantar, and Cuntarar.\textsuperscript{4} His \textit{Tiruvācakam} is one of the \textit{Tirumūṟai(s)} and so we are well within our rights to examine his statements on \textit{tonṭar} or \textit{atiyār}. The \textit{Aticayappattu} (Wondrous Decad) in the \textit{Tiruvācakam} is an expression of wonder at how a lowly person like himself, who had none of the characteristics of an \textit{atiyār}, had been made one of them. The \textit{Pirārttanaippattu} (Decad of Supplication), refers to the love of God that is present in \textit{atiyār(s)}, and the lack of it in the saint. All the ten verses in this decad, carry the recurrent plea for love while all the ten in the former are in praise of the grace of God. Calling himself a \textit{tonṭan} Māṇikkavācakar says: "You who chose and ruled me, out of grace, amidst the true devotees who longingly desire you" - \textit{vēṇṭum vēṇṭum meyyatīyārulē virumpi eṇai arulāl āṇṭāi} (\textit{Pirārttanaippattu}, 4). He refers to the devotees as ancient - \textit{ug pala atiyār kūṭṭam} (\textit{Ācaippattu}, 9) and requests God to make him one of them - \textit{nīṇ tonṭarir kūṭṭāy} (\textit{Cettilāppattu}, 8).

Describing God's relation to the devotees, he says: "He makes as his abode the hearts of the \textit{tonṭar}, in the form of an ineffable flood of joy" - \textit{ōrigpa veḷḷatturuk koṇṭu tonṭtarai ullāṅkoṇṭār} (\textit{Tiruppāṇṭippatikam}, 3). The \textit{tonṭar} are those "whose eyes like fresh flowers are bedewed (with

\begin{footnote}{The exclusion of Māṇikkavācakar by Cēkkiḷār is based on purely technical reasons. As Māṇikkavācakar's name does not appear in Cuntarar's list of nāyaṅmār, Cēkkiḷār could not include him in his work.}\end{footnote}
Tirunāvukkaracar:

Tirunāvukkaracar, or Appar as he is fondly called, describes the Lord as one who is easily accessible to devotees. God's 'otherness' is true only in the case of people other than the toṭṭar - piṛarkkelām ariyar toṭṭarkkeliyarai yārare (Tirumurai V.27.5). The Lord is ever present in the heart of devotees who unfailingly praise his qualities - maṟavāṭē taṇṭīramē vālṭṭun toṭṭar maṇṇattakatē anavaratam mappi niṟṟa (Tirumurai V.68.8). Appar often calls himself a toṭṭar - ēkampāṇ toṭṭanāit tiriyāytyar tiravē (Tirumurai V.47.1), pāṅkilāt toṇṭa nēṉmaran τυvono (Tirumurai V.2.10). He instructs his heart to offer service to the Lord at all times in order to be redeemed and to eat only that he may serve - uyypōntu ni toṇṭu ceyteṇruhi cōṟru tuṟaiyarkē uṇṭu niṉari cey maṭa neṉcamē (Tirumurai V.33.10). Appar is seen in the tradition as representing the daṇa mārgam (path of servant) and his life is considered to exemplify service to God. He is always portrayed as uravārapaṭtaiyāli - 'the one with a hoe' and is said to have travelled from temple to temple with it, clearing away weeds that covered the pathways. The idea of paṇi as active physical service is therefore closely associated with him.

Appar, like the others, refers to the community of devotees. Addressing the agents of the God of Death, he
says: "You who hold in your hands the trident and the noose! Thou shalt not approach our Lord's servants. Maintaining your distance, render homage to the community of devotees of the one with the bull as his mount, and depart safely"-aṭaiyan minnana티canaṭiyārai vīṭaiko lūrtiyi ṇāṇatiyār yārkulāṁ puṭaiyu kätunīr pōṛiyē pōmiṇē (Tirumurai V. 92.7).

Campantar:

Campantar refers to the group of saints as the 'bhaktar kaṇam' - the host of devotees. He says of Kulaccirai Nāyaṇār: "Whether they come in group or singly, when he sees the devotees, Kulaccirai, duly informed by excellence, renders them homage" - kaṇāṅkaḷāy variṇum tamiyarāy variṇum aṭiyavar taṅkaḷaik kaṇṭāl kuṇaṅkoṭu paṇiṇyum kulaccirai (Tirumurai III.378.4). Campantar does not advocate worship of just the toṇṭar. He goes a step further and says: "Worship and serve our īcan's servitors' servitor. The pure path becomes easy to tread" - emmīcar toṇṭar toṇṭarait toḷutaṭi paṇiṁṅka ūneri yeḷitāmē (Tirumurai II.240.10). Their society is very desirable because of the benefit that accrues. "Our powerful karma fell to pieces because we were happily in the company of those devotees of the Lord who perform the true service" - viṇṭolĩntaṅa nammuṭaivalvinai . . . nātaṅmeye tōḷipuri toṇṭarō tiṅgitiruntamaiyāle (Tirumurai II.242.2). The service that these toṇṭar render are varied. "Controlling the five elephants i.e. the senses, the devotees stringing bee-laden
flowers into garlands, perform worship" - *tonṭaraṇcu kalīrum maṭakkic curumpārmalar inṭai kaṭṭi valipāṭu ceyyum* (*Tirumūrai* II.250.1). The devotees sing songs - *tonṭar icai pāṭiyum* (*Tirumūrai* I.38.6) or "melting with love, tears flowing, they recite" - *kātalākkī kacintukan niṟmalkī ōtu vār* (*Tirumūrai* III.307.1) and they are distinguished by their service - *tolilān miku toṇṭaravār* (*Tirumūrai* II.172.2).

Cuntarar:

Like the others Cuntarar has prolific references to 'tonṭar' and their activities, but his most important pronouncement on the greatness of *tonṭar* is seen in the *Tiruttontattokai*. It is this particular hymn that forms the base for the 'cult of saints' or the veneration of a group of devotees, later called *nāyanmār*. Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi in his *Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāṭi*, and in a more grandiose manner Cekkilār in the *TTP*, build upon the frame-work that this hymn sets out. The circumstances that prompted Cuntarar to compose this hymn throw considerable light on the role and status of *tonṭar* in the tradition. The story as we have it is the account given in *TTP*.

Cuntarar, after his marriage to Paravaiyār, took up residence in Tiruvārūr. One day, as was his wont, he entered the temple of Tiruvārūr, and going past the *Tēvāciriya maṇṭapam*, (the hall of the divine teachers), inwardly reflected: "When will the day come, when I can be their

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5For a detailed discussion of the *Tiruttontattokai* as also the idea of 'the cult of saints' in Cuntarar see Dorai Rangaswamy (1959:936-1141).
devotee? " And he entered the sanctum. Meanwhile, Virañminṭar, a tonṭar from Kerala, who was present there, observing that Cuntarar did not pay his respects to the assemblage of tonṭar concluded that he was arrogant and did not consider the tonṭar as worthy of respect. Believing that Cuntarar had deliberately ignored the assemblage of saints, and that his act had its roots in being the privileged and chosen devotee of God, (vide Lord Śiva's earlier act of forcibly accosting Cuntarar and making him his devotee), Virañminṭar flew into a rage and declared that Cuntarar was to be excommunicated. And since the Lord by extending patronage to Cuntarar, was an accessory to the crime, Virañminṭar declared him to be excommunicated too. Lord Śiva, considering it an opportune moment to acquiesce with Cuntarar's desire to be made one of the atiyavar, appeared before Cuntarar. Extolling the virtues (vaḷittonṭu) of the devotees, he instructed Cuntarar to become one of them.

In their greatness, they are beyond comparison; through cherishing me, they obtained me; by their single-mindedness, they will conquer the world; they have no faults; they remain in the unique state; they rejoice in love; they are beyond all duality - You shall become one of these. (TTP 342)

When the Lord thus blessed him, Cuntarar, paying homage responded: "I have obtained here, the path that will dispel grief." And when the Lord instructed him, to worship and praise the saints by composing a song on them, he entreated the Lord to give him a lead. Lord Śiva, then responded with a line - the line that now forms the first line of Tiruttonṭattokai: "Tillai vaḷ antaṇar tam atiyārkkum atiyēṇa" - I am the servitor of the servitors of the antaṇar (brahmin priests) of Tillai. Saluting them again and again, Cuntarar reaching their vicinity, composed the Tiruttonṭattokai, proclaiming himself to be a servitor of each of the saints present there (TTP 334-349).

Some very interesting information is presented in this story. We learn that acceptance into the community of devotees is by election, in Cuntarar's case it is the Lord himself who selects him. And according to the story it was a custom at least in Tiruvārur to offer homage to the
assemblage of saints first, and only then to the Lord. The power that a devotee wields over his Lord and the privileges he can take with him is another important facet to the story. And by ascribing the first line to Lord Śiva another point is being underscored. The Lord proclaims that he is the servitor of the servitors of the antanar of Tillai. The implication is that he is the servitor of all those who worship or serve the toṇṭar, in this case the priests of Tillai. In a very striking manner, then, the importance of the toṇṭar is being established.

We see, then, certain views about the toṇṭar emerging in the Śaiva tradition. The toṇṭar are those who are absorbed in the love of God. They form a very special group, special because they are beloved by God. All the saint-singers pine to join the special group or coterie—the toṇṭar kujām. And they acknowledge their miserable pettiness when compared to the greatness of these toṇṭar. It is the grace of God that can and does make them one among the toṇṭar. The physical and mental manifestations of love by these toṇṭar is a way to recognise and identify them. These toṇṭar are to be venerated as the Lord himself. Service to God and service to his toṇṭar are identical and undifferentiated. The service that these toṇṭar do is sometimes physical work, quite often worship and praise, but

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6It is noteworthy here that Appar during his visit to Tiruvārur, first pays obeisance to the Tēvāciriya manṭapa and then proceeds to the sanctum.
most of the time their devotion is their toṭṭu. Their love itself is their service.

Before examining Cēkkilār's magnificent consolidation of these ideas in his work, we should note here that the idea of toṭṭar is not exclusive to the Śaiva tradition. It is equally important in the Śrīvaisṇava tradition. The conspicuous occurrence of the idea is seen in the name of one of the Āḻvār - Toṭṭaraṭippoti Āḻvār - the Āḻvār who is the dust of the feet of the toṭṭar. The name is illustrative of the utter humility of the saint and the reverence in which he held all the devotees of the Lord. And the fascinating paradox is that this saint who considers himself dust beneath the feet of the devotees (the idea of ātiyāṉ as 'clinging to the feet', we should note, is brought out powerfully by this image) becomes a model i.e. one of the Āḻvār in that tradition.

Periyāḻvār refers to the toṭṭar kuḷām (Tirupallāṅṭu, 5) and Kulacēkara Āḻvār sings about the toṭṭar explicating their importance and the benefits of reverencing them. We may cite two examples:

In verse II.2 of the Perumāḷ Tirumolī, Kulacēkara exclaims: "If we were to enjoy ablutions in the dust of the feet of those toṭṭar (toṭṭaraṭippoti yāṭa nām peṟil) who sing and dance and call out 'Raṅga', what will happen to the desire to immerse in the Ganges?" (It would be rendered redundant.) In verse II.4, Kulacēkara further declares: "My
heart will honour and praise the feet of the toṇṭar, who
rejoice in worship, their body scarred through prostrating,
their tongue raw through crying out 'Nāraṇa', they who are
the servants of my Lord, my Raṅga . . . ."

Toṇṭu - the cornerstone of TTP

It was suggested earlier that the concept of toṇṭu
is the base upon which Ĉēkkilār builds his work, and that he
uses it as the rationale to understand the events
surrounding the life of the devotees. We have in the last
section attempted to present the understanding of this
concept by different bhakti poets. And in a later chapter we
will have occasion to refer to the understanding of the
teachers of the philosophical tradition who chronologically
follow closely on the heels of Ĉēkkilār. In this section we
will try to identify Ĉēkkilār's understanding of this
concept through the various references in TTP.

Apart from making references to the toṇṭar and their
activities in several places, Ĉēkkilār in the initial part
of the epic gives a pen-picture of these people in a section
entitled 'Tirukkūṭṭacciṟappu' - 'the glory of the holy
throng'. This section has attracted attention from the angle
of literary convention too, because in introducing this set
of verses Ĉēkkilār was deviating from the traditional
structure of a kāvya. His earlier descriptions of the
country and the city in which the main events of the
narrative are set are all within the literary conventions of
a kāvyā, whereas the section on Tirukkuṭṭacciṟappu is not so. But we find that Cēkkilār feels the need to introduce this set of people, important to his work and for the sake of whom he makes innovations in the traditional formal structure.

The country or region that was the locus of action for the germinal event of the narrative was the Cōla country. The city was Tiruvārur and more specifically the temple. Here the Tēvāciriya maṇṭapam where devotees gathered is the focal point for the events culminating in the composition of the tokai by Cuntarar, the details of which were given already. We also pointed out how the tokai was the source for Cēkkilār's epic. It is, therefore, no surprise that Cēkkilār chose to describe Tiruvārur and the Cōla country under the Nakarappaṭalam and Nātuppaṭalam. After describing the city of Tiruvārur in which he narrates the story of Manunīticcolā who punished his son for having caused grief to a cow by running his chariot over its calf as evidence of its greatness, Cēkkilār in a short section of about ten verses describes the Tēvāciriya maṇṭapam and the devotees whose abode it was. The verses directly describing the tonṭar are given below. They encapsulate the core of Cēkkilār's perception and understanding of the nature of these devotees.

Some of the devotees were sought out by the Lord to receive His grace; some out of the love that filled their very being, felt the divine thrill; some dedicated themselves to
manual labour in the service (of the Lord) and there were countless others besides these. (TTP 140)

Like the ash donned on their bodies decked with flawless beads, they are pure within; with their effulgence they brighten all quarters; they remain in their indescribable greatness. (TTP 141)

Though the five elements were to swerve in their path, they do not forget the blossom-like feet of the One who has the Lady as His half; they remain (unswervingly) in the path of love that is praised; they are great rocks of blameless character. (TTP 142)

Decay and growth are destroyed for these holy ones; they view alike shard and gold. They worshipped because of the love that welled forth in them. They were of a heroic mould that cared not even for release. (TTP 143)

Their ornaments are the wooden beads; their garments rags; their burden is not anything other than service to the Lord; of tender love they have no defects; Am I capable of describing their valour? (TTP 144)

Cēkkilār makes significant observations in these verses that reflect the rationale that is essential for understanding the stories. The first verse describes the variety of tonțar that are to be found. The tonțar are not a homogeneous unit exhibiting uniform qualities. The ramifications of this verse and some ideas that it brings in its wake need to be studied a little more extensively. So we will reserve examination of it and take up the other verses first.

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7The translation of the verse is from Devasenapathy (1963:60).
These devotees do not forget the feet of the Lord even if the order of the universe is disturbed. They unswervingly walk the path of love. The troubles that life is fraught with do not disturb them in any way. They do not succumb to human frailties. We find later in the stories that again and again the devotees come successfully through the tests, whatever form they may be, by their steadfast and single-minded interest in only one thing - love of God. We shall have occasion to note this factor in all the stories which will be examined below in detail. Another important characteristic of these toṭaṛ is that they are neither elated by prosperity nor unnerved by poverty. Quite often the Lord as a preliminary to his test would render the toṭaṛ poor in wealth and then proceed to enact a drama requiring the toṭaṛ to perform his toṇtu in an almost impossible situation. The impossible though becomes possible for them because of their love and their faith in it. The toṇtu performed by Iḷayāṅkuṭimāṇ was to feed a Śaiva devotee everyday. Faced with a guest when he was financially at the lowest ebb, he gathers all the freshly sown grain and cuts down the rafters of his house for fire-wood. Another instance of a poverty-stricken toṭaṛ who finds a way to keep up his toṇtu is Kaṇampullar. When he could not earn money to light lamps in the temple of the Lord, nor find other means to keep them alight, he resorted to burning his hair.
The *tonțar* worshipped out of love and not because they sought release. Their love was heroic and noble. It was not a love that sought to ingratiate itself with the master and thus seek favours. The *tonțar* took delight in just loving and could therefore dare to challenge the Lord himself. We have already seen how Viṟāṃninṭar castigates the Lord for favouring Cuntarar, whom he believes to be arrogant. Another classic case is that of Ėyarkōŋ kalikkāmar who also is affronted by the actions of Cuntarar at a later stage. He is unable to bear the idea that Cuntarar had used the Lord as a go-between in his love intrigues, and remonstrates the Lord, and, when afflicted with colic pains that could be cured only by Cuntarar, he chooses to kill himself rather than be cured at his hands.

The only commitment of the *tonțar* is to the Lord. They acknowledge only one concern - service to the Lord. This implies that they do not consider the ties of family etc. to be binding on them. The complete indifference that characterises the actions of some of these devotees are rooted in this quality of theirs.

The first verse informs us that some of these *tonțar* were chosen and enslaved by the Lord; some were tuned to the divine through the love that filled their being; some manifested their love through acts of manual labour and there were those who were yet different from all these. The *TTP* is full of instances that illustrate all these varieties
of *tonṭar*. The classic examples for the first type would be Cuntarar, Campantar and Appar. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyyār would be of the second kind, for from early childhood she is filled with love for the Lord. Most of the *tonṭar* who perform services such as feeding the devotees etc, would be of the third kind. This classification does not mean each *tonṭar* can be labelled as belonging to one or the other because these qualities are found simultaneously in a number of *tonṭar*. Appar, for example, is brought back into the fold by the Lord by inflicting him with colic pains. His verses stand testimony to his constant reveling in love. And he is the best exemplar for those who did manual labour in the service of the Lord. He fits in all three kinds.

What this classification implies, however, is that some *tonṭar* more than others exemplify these characteristics. The life of Cuntarar, for example, illustrates best the idea of the Lord taking the initiative and forcibly enslaving the devotee. The expression 'taṭuttāṭkoṇṭarulal' is pregnant in this context. It signifies that the ongoing life is arrested and the devotee's life is taken over by the Lord and that this stems from grace. The implication is that even when the devotee forgets his bond to the Lord on account of his involvement in the world, the Lord comes to remind and reclaim him. The timeless bond of love is activated by the latter at the right time.
In his many references to the *toṇṭar*, Cēkkilār draws a comprehensive picture personifying *toṇṭu*. He describes Appar as being seen by Campantar as 'the ideal sacred guise of a *toṇṭar*'.

With unfaltering love in his heart, his sacred frame trembling, considering his rags superfluous, holding the instrument of hoe, with a rain of flowing tears and with the sacred ashes glowing on his form - in such eternal guise, Arasu (Appar) came in front of him. (TTP 2173)

We find that this verse encapsulates all that has been set out in the 'Tirukūṭṭacciṟappu'. And interestingly this image of Appar, with the hoe that he uses to clear away the weeds, is the standard one that finds representation in sculptures. The service that the devotees do are varied and different. Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ before his ascension to the throne engages in doing needful services in the temple. But when he is required to take up the throne, he is able to do it as a form of worship to the Lord. He takes it to be a gracious act of God. The *toṇṭar* do not take it upon themselves to question the worthiness of the recipients. Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ finds a washerman worthy of his salutations as his body covered with white mud reminds him of the sacred ash. And Cēkkilār observes of Kulacciṟai:

Were they to be virtuous so as to be celebrated by the world; or were they to be of evil stature - if they were devotees of the One with red locks on which dwells the moon, his nature was to prostrate himself on the ground, praising them. (TTP 1704)
Similarly of Čćmācimāṛar, he observes: "Be they of whatever stamp, if they were the beloved of the Lord, he would hold that 'such (ones) are those that rule us'" (TTP 3637). So the tontar do not inquire into the genuineness of their sacred guests nor do they evaluate the 'propriety' of the request. We will have instances of preposterous demands being treated as in no way different from ordinary requests. The only concern is to satisfy the holy guest.

Interestingly, in the story of Cākkiyar, the emphasis is on the inner attitude rather than on the garb. Cākkiyar, originally a Buddhist, realises that the worship of Lord Śiva, is the highest Truth. He further decides that there was no need to discard his Buddhist robes to worship Lord Śiva:

"Whatever be one's station, whatever garb one may assume, what matters is never to forget the feet of Śankaran of abiding glory," thus not repudiating the guise he had assumed, he stood foremost, with welling love in his unforgetfulness of Pure Śivam. (TTP 3646)

The tontar has to have genuine love for the Lord and then the externals do not matter. He, on the other hand, on account of this deep and loyal love accepts anyone in the guise of a Śaiva ascetic as genuine whatever be their true pretensions. So what permeates all these attitudes is the devotee's unilateral and unequivocal love for the Lord. It is a love that permits no suspicion or betrayal of the loved one - represented in the stories by the actions of the
toŋtar directed to Śiva in his iconic form or in the form of other devotees. And this is what is celebrated by Cēkkilār in his magnificent work TTP.
CHAPTER III
ENCOUNTERS

He who is difficult to be realised and spoken about by the world; he with locks bearing water and the wandering moon; he of immeasurable radiance - the dancer in Ambalam, let us praise and salute his flower-like anklet bearing feet. *(TTP 1)*

The first line of the *TTP* declares forcefully the otherness of the Lord - he is difficult to be realised and spoken about *(ulakelām uṇarṇtōtaṅ kariyavaṅ)*. In a paradoxical manner, Cēkkilār sets this verse right at the beginning and then proceeds to relate the stories of the *tontār* that contradict it in a delightful manner. The lives of the *nāyaṅmār* stand testimony to the accessibility of the Lord, the shared love that blossoms in the absolute participation of the one in the other. If the *tontār* is lost in an unbroken expression of love for God, the Lord on the other hand is ever willing, out of love, to be bound in the shackles of love. The mutuality of love permeates all the stories and though the expressions of it are varied and sometimes even seem bizarre, its presence is never in doubt.

All the stories in *TTP* involve one or the other kind of *tontu*. It was already observed that the *tontu* need not always take the form of active service or manifest itself in an overt, readily recognised form of serving others. It is
the presence of love of God that makes these people *tonṭar* and the love expresses itself in adoration as well as service. The service that is undertaken here has to be clearly distinguished from the more commonly understood sense of social service as their base is not the same. *Tonṭu* is not undertaken in a spirit of charitable help to brethren in need. In all the stories of the *TTP* the *tonṭu* is directed only to Śaiva *atiyār* or *tonṭar*. This re-emphasises the point made earlier - that the *tonṭar* are the most important or perhaps the only focus of *TTP*. Not only is this true of the subjects of each story - the 63 *nāyanmār*, *tonṭar(s)* - but even the other central characters of each story most often take the form of *tonṭar*. The point is further underscored when we find that in the encounter between God and his devotee, God too puts on the guise of a *tonṭar* to meet his *tonṭar*. The typical form that the path of *bhakti* takes in *TTP* is as the 'cult of *tonṭar*'.

The Śaiva tradition lays down as a mandate that one is to view the devotees of God as God himself. "The sanctified souls shall dwell in the company of the devotees of Śiva and will adore their fellow-ship and their form, as well as the very site of Śiva's temple as Śiva himself" (*Śivajñānabodham*, 12). It is this attitude that is expressed in the lives of the *nāyanmār*. We find that their *tonṭu* is most often rendered to other *tonṭar*, and that these
tonтар are viewed simply as God. So there is in truth only one dimension to the whole set of relations - love of God.

What is the motive behind doing tontu then? If it is not charitable service to the suffering masses, and if it is not any kind of prescribed service to God, why is it done? And what is the need to attach special significance to these acts of tontu? An analysis of the different kinds of tontu that colour the stories in TTP, may throw some light on these questions. Worship of the Lord is performed in many ways - it ranges from pūjā in the accepted sense through flowers, garlands etc. to occasionally unusual forms such as when a tonтар substitutes stones in the place of flowers. Likewise there is offering of food as part of worship - here again it ranges from the usual kind of offering of cooked food as is customary in a ritual to offering of special rice and tender, unripe mango, as well as in extreme cases offering choice morsels of flesh. Tontu as we observed earlier is often done to other devotees. It takes different forms such as offering of clothes, offering to wash clothes, donating mud-utensils for use, feeding and providing water for the devotees and so on. Respect for the form of the atiyār, and for the five lettered mantra of Śiva are some of the other forms of tontu. What unites this bewildering variety together is that all of them are expressions of love for God. Tontu, then, is an opportunity for the devotee to affirm and reaffirm the sense of warm, close personal
relationship with God - to deepen, to delight and immerse himself in the love for God. It is an attempt to grow further in love.

Any analysis or examination of the stories will have to keep this important fact in mind. And so bearing this in mind, we will take up the stories of a select few of the tontar namely Caṇṭīcar, Ciruttoṇṭar, Iyarpakai, and Kaṇṇappar for examination. The selection of these four stories from among the sixty-three rests upon a certain characteristic form their tontu takes making it not a mere case of typifying bhakti.

The picture of bhakti that one sees in the stories of these four saints is grim and even bizarre in its expression. In Caṇṭīcar's story the son cuts off his father's legs; in Ciruttoṇṭar's story, the parents slaughter their son to feed a guest; in Iyarpakai's story, the husband gives away his wife to a stranger who asks for her; and in Kaṇṇappar's story he plucks his eyes out to stop the bleeding of the eyes on the Śivaliṅga. In different ways they involve someone breaking with familiar norms - social and moral with absolutely no qualms and apparently with no reprimand from God. They are, in fact, rewarded with the highest honour - of being blessed by the Lord himself. The pattern in general is the same - profession of love by the individual saint - the Lord disguised comes to test/testify the superiority of this love - the nāyaṇār's victorious
emergence from the encounter and his being crowned with the blessings of the Lord.

The end is always a happy one. But the gruesomeness that suffuses the incidents is not entirely alleviated by the happy ending. In spite of knowing that these incidents are tests, in spite of knowing that the bizarre demands are wiped out in the end by the revelation of their true nature as the gracious act of God, the stories infuse the reader's mind with an uneasiness, a distress that grips and haunts the very soul. This angst is caused by the questioning by these stories of the basic values of life. All the relationships that are held to be sacred - parent, child, husband, wife and the very person of oneself are rendered value doubtful. The basis of a moral order that rests upon the ultimacy of human relationship as found in the units of marriage, family, society, state etc. is given a rude shake. In a very shocking manner, bhakti instead of merely affirming the positive relationship between man and God, challenges all the accepted norms - man's frame-work for living in the world is trampled upon - the moral is suspended in answer to a call to tread the path of God.

Having said this much, it should be pointed out that such problems arise only for the onlooker. To the participants themselves, there is absolutely no awareness of conflict of any kind. The dynamics operating within each event, sees the characters proceeding in accordance with
their own perception of right and wrong. The pattern of events that may seem bizarre and perhaps deviant to the outsider is viewed as a natural and consistent progression in the life of the saint. This paradoxical nature of the event is highlighted by Cēkkiḷār whose slant is not that of an onlooker attempting to write a biography but preeminently that of an insider who skillfully weaves the idea of tontar into the given set of events. This chapter will attempt to trace in the case of the four saints the progression of events that culminate in the incidents mentioned above and the rationale for them that Cēkkiḷār supplies in the handling of the story. We start with Caṇṭīcar, the child-saint who hacked off his father's two legs, and was eventually made the son of God and the 'chief of all tontar'.

Caṇṭīcar

The setting for the story is Cēynallūr - 'the good settlement of the son.' The son here referred to is Cēntan (Lord Murukaṇ), and the village had been a settlement of Brahmin priests from days of yore, when "having torn asunder the mountain, Cēntan had established the valour of his sharp spear and destroyed the fierce enemy of the host of gods." This settlement was on the southern banks of the River Māṇṇi, in the riverine region of Pōṇi (Kāvēri). Since it was a settlement of brahmin priests all the activities there
reflected their prime concern: That of performing sacrifices to the accompaniment of the chanting of the Vedas. There were schools for young boys to learn the Vedas; streets through which the Hōma cows, reared for providing the most important offering in a sacrifice i.e. clarified butter, wandered. This was one of the five places where the Cōla king traditionally crowned himself. And there—

In that glorious settlement, among the priests, in the lineage (gotra) of Kaśyapa of virtuous family life, in a leading family, like the serpent that gives the precious gem and also deadly poison, came Eccatattan (Yajñadatta), a single embodiment of the two kinds of action (good and bad). ¹

(TTP 1220)

Eccatattan's wife was born similarly in a noble lineage and her virtuous conduct in the family sphere was commended by all the relatives. Her name was Pavitirai and she was firmly attached to that which destroys all attachment i.e. Lord Śiva. On account of her blessed nature, she was to bear a son who was to be a support in life, and by whom she would attain the highest bliss. To her, Vicārarcamaranār(śarma) was born so that 'the Brahminical way of life may flourish, the seven worlds be liberated, the veracity of worship to the Lord who dances in the hall be established and to mark the triumph of those who perform austerities' (TTP 1222).

¹The reference is in anticipation of the story wherein the Eccatattan who had the privilege of fathering the saint, became the perpetrator of a sacrilegious act.
When Vicārācarumāṇ reached the age of five, as a continuation of his former knowledge, like the latent fragrance of blossoms becoming manifested, the six-limbed Vedas and the Āgamas proclaimed by the Lord, were clear in his mind, and he was distinguished by his maturity. At the age of seven, he was initiated through the rituals of upanayana, and though he knew all the sacred lore, in accordance with his family's tradition, he learnt to recite the Vedas.

The brahmin teachers were surprised at his capacity to grasp even before it was 'lit' the illuminating Vedas and the numerous arts. The 'little eminent one' (ciiriya peruntakaiyār) settled clearly in his discriminating mind that the ultimate end of all the various arts was the dancing feet. (TTP 1225)

"He of the glorious feet that ever dances, he owns us" - this truth being realised, in the wake of the awareness, welled an incessant and unbroken love and as a duty involving natural endeavour, the love swelled further and further; while thus the young one steadfastly stood in such thinking, one day. . . . (TTP 1226)

Vicārācarumāṇ was going with the band of students reciting the Vedas, when a herd of cows, accompanied by the cow-herd passed him. And just then, one of the cows that had recently calved, reluctant to leave its young one behind, lowering its horns, lunged at the cow-herd. At this, without compunction, the cow-herd started thrashing it with his staff. Moved by compassion, Vicārācarumāṇ becoming furious, broke in and separated the cow-herd from the cow.
In the world that existed through the pervasive arts and the vast collection of Āgamas and the great Vedas, he with a mind that knew clearly the true nature of all things, knew as it was the greatness of cows and proceeded to enlighten the cow-herd. (TTP1227)

Cows were the noblest of all creatures and in them resided for ever all the holy waters; in them, inseparably located were the various gods. They gave pañcagavāya for the ablutions of the Lord who danced in the Hall;² they were the source for the ash that the dancing Lord wore; they were of the same family as the bull that bore the Lord and his consort. Reflecting in this manner on the nobility of cows as supplying all the ingredients for the adoration of Śiva and the virtues of grazing them with gentle care, he decided: "There is no duty greater than this; and this is the path of cherishing the feet of him who dances in the Hall." (TTP 1233) And he instructed the cow-herd: "You refrain from grazing the cows. I will henceforth herd them." (TTP 1233-34) And while the cow-herd fearfully withdrew from the scene, Viĉāракarumāṇ, the divine Brahmin-child, obtaining the permission of the seniors, took up the task of herding cows, offering protection to those cows that gathered in a huge crowd, like the clouds to green grass.

²Pañcagavāya means the 'five of the cow'. It stands for five products of the cow viz. milk, coagulated or sour milk, butter, and the liquid and solid excreta used ritually in worship.
The story at this point is all set to explode into rapid action that finds its culmination quite dramatically. Already, at this point we can identify some very interesting developments that are unique to the tradition to which the story belongs i.e. bhakti. Vicāracarumāṇ, hailing from an orthodox priestly family, has taken up the task of herding cows, a task that was inappropriate to his station in life. It neither accorded with his varṇa dharma or his āśrama dharma. And the reason he takes up this task is that he can perceive no higher toṇṭu than this to his Lord. Here without any outright condemnation of the ritualistic and prescribed life of the Brahmins, life is yet being subjugated to a higher form of approach to the Lord - that of loving and serving him. Cēkkilār, we should note, has already brought in the motif of service (kaṭaṇ - here a synonym for toṇṭu), legitimising the deviance from varṇāśrama dharma by making it a higher if not the highest dharma. And in line with the nature of the tradition, he also introduces quite early, devotional and Saivaite elements in the orthodox setting. So Vicāracarumāṇ, who is distinguished in the manner of a prodigy, knows not only all the Vedas but also the Āgamas. And to him, all these find their end in knowing the dancing feet to be the sole refuge. The discernment of Vicāracarumāṇ takes the form of intuitive knowledge. It is not an intellectual exercise that finds its end in dry, logical answers. It is an intuitive realization on the heels of
which follows an upsurge of love that is incessant and naturally spontaneous (TTP 1225). And it matures into making the Lord the sole attachment or concern. Another interesting revelation, in the story so far whose significant contrast with the events that are yet to come will be noted later, is that the drama in the story is sparked by the compassion of the child who could not bear to see a cow thrashed. To continue the story -

The little saint dressed as usual in the traditional way of a child of the priestly clan - the sacred thread with the deer-skin gracing the chest, his little tuft wind-blown, clad in loin-cloth - and with a staff and rope took the cows to regions where grass grew abundantly, and to spots where the water was limpid and sweet, and with tender care relieved them of distress and fear, and at the hours of milking duly brought them to their homes. And so the days went, and the cows content and happy with good grazing, grew sleek, and day and night their udders heavy, yielded sweet milk in greater quantities than before. The priests were delighted, and lauded the love of the little celibate, who they believed was responsible for the rich yield of the cows.

The different cows, attaining boundless joy, even though they were parted from their calves in the houses (sheds), looking at this young calf of the priests and going near with tenderness assuming the state of mother-hood, grunting began to discharge milk even without their teats being milked. (TTP 1240)
Perceiving the cows that had approached him, discharging milk of their own accord, he whose mind was oriented to the pure path, saw in it an indication for the holy ablutions (of the Lord). When he, . . . thus reflected and concluded, the great desire and preference for the true worship of Śiva rose in him. (TTP 1241)

There, in a measure as a continuation of former worship, with spontaneously welling love, on the sand-banks of the River Manni, under an Ātti tree, he created out of sand, the holy form of Him who possessed the red-eyed bull, and made a temple of Śiva with rising tall towers and surrounding niches. (TTP 1242)

Plucking the flowers of the Ātti tree and new shoots and flowers that were appropriate for adorning the braided holy head of the Pure One, he placed them in a leaf-basket, carefully preserving the fragrance. And then seeking and collecting new pots, he approached the cows, grazing in the rushes and grass-banks nearby, and one after the other, he milked and they discharged rich milk.

Filling the pots completely and bringing it, due to his creed of love, he established them in front of the temple of white sands of the Lord of the celestials and collecting bee-laden flowers of worship in the proper order, led by his former regard, worshipped and performed the holy ablutions. (TTP 1245)

Again and again, as he, in this fashion, pouring the white milk, performed the ablutions, the Lord who possessed him, became embodied in the love of his devotee and when the love matured into rapture, residing in that symbol (śivaliṅga), he accepted that worship. (TTP 1246)

And (so) that illustrious son of Cēynallūr, with single-minded thought in his mind, performed the worship that was pleasing to
the Lord of the Gods with holy ablutions and
the like and filling with love the
unobtainable items, in such fashion
blissfully acted and rejoiced. (TTP 1247)

Though the cows yielded milk in large quantities for
the little saint to perform ablutions for the Lord, yet
there was no decrease in their yield in the homes of the
priests. As he continued in this fashion, divine sport
enabling him to perform this highest form of worship
naturally, a stranger noticing it informed the priests of
the settlement. The priests of the council hearing this
observed: "Saying that the cow-herd is ignorant and that he
would graze the cows to their content, he now milks our cows
and deceives us. Call his father Eccatattan, so that we can
tell him of this deed." (TTP 1250) And those standing near-by
went to his house and fetched the father and the elders of
the council informed him of his son's misdeed of willfully
wasting the milk on the sands of the Manni. On hearing this
the father was upset, and pleaded: "This act of the little
student was not known to me earlier. O Noble Brahmins! Bear
with what happened earlier." Admitting the fault of his son,
he added: "If it is repeated, then the blame will be mine"
(TTP 1253).

Taking leave of the Brahmins, he did his
evening worship and entering the house
thought: "A blame has befallen" and not
telling his son (reflected) "I will learn
the nature (the truth)." And when the night
passed and the son had left to graze the
herd, the elderly priest stealthily
followed. (TTP 1254)
Beholding his son taking those fine cows of the priests to the sand-banks of the Manni the father, concealing himself, took his position on a near-by Kurava tree, so as to observe the happenings.

The child-saint excelled in the performance of his unusual task, and his predilection for the worship of Śiva leads him to read the voluntary discharge of milk by the cows, as a pointer or call for abhiṣekam of the Lord. Though not apparently trained in the proper worship of the Lord, yet by virtue of his innate knowledge of the Āgamas, a carry-over from his earlier lives, he performs the worship, builds the temple, altar, etc. with no fault. The devotion he bore his Lord finds its maturity in this worship which absorbs his attention completely. This single-minded interest in worship is going to play a key-role in the sequel to come. The other important character of the story, Vicāracarumāṇ's father has just entered the stage. His actions so far indicate that his conduct is guided by considerations of righteousness. He is abject and apologetic for his son's error and takes on responsibility for his actions past and future. And though he promises to prevent a

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3This is in stark contrast to the worship of Kaṇṇappar, who engages in it spontaneously too but his love is uninformed by ritualistic knowledge. And so he offers flowers that had been borne on his head; ablutions with water carried in his mouth; meat that had been tasted by him etc. Vicāracarumāṇ on the other hand takes care not to defile the objects of worship, such as the care he takes over the flowers.
repetition of the act, he does not hastily denounce his son. He is willing to wait and discover for himself the truth behind the accusations. Vicāracarumaṇ in turn was acting in consistence with his own perception of events. He has no qualms about using the milk for worship, because he does not consider it a crime. The milk was voluntarily discharged by the cows in the first place. And to him, who had all his thoughts oriented towards only one thing, it could mean only one thing—that it behoved him to utilise it in worship of the Lord. He was the occasion for the maternal reaction of the cows and it was his tender care that was responsible for their richness. And there was absolutely no decrease in their yield at home. But interestingly, he does not reflect and rationalise his actions thus. His intuitive reading of the event is enough to set him in action.

The position of the father is, as has been noted earlier, in accordance with righteousness. The priests are justly incensed at what was to them theft of the milk. Though the yield did not decrease, it did not mean that the excess milk was not for their disposal. And the voluntary discharge of milk, quite probably ought to have been reported to them by Vicāracarumaṇ at which they would have instructed him about its disposal. The father rightly shares the view that his son had no business to use the milk at will. He could not condone his son's action which had its
roots in something he was ignorant of. And so it seems there is no absolute dharma at play.

The father hid himself in a tree - the little boy proceeded in his usual fashion. Cēkkilār's account of the climax is being translated verbatim and given here.

And the loving celibate bathed and as before built a temple for Hara (Śiva), plucked the blossoms and soft flowers and then brought the brimming pots of milk, spurted by the cows' udders, to the proper spot, established them (ritually), and collected the other needful objects. \(\text{TTP 1256}\)

In the established manner, he began the flawless worship, like a sport and with a mind that was truly absorbed, he placed fragrant flowers of worship on the sacred head of the Lord who possessed him, and with great rapture took the pots filled with sweet milk and bathed (the Lord). \(\text{TTP 1257}\)

As if to show the greatness of that eminent one in whom the rapture, increasingly spreading, was blended with the virtuous conduct of former births; as if it were the grace of the Lord with braids bearing serpents, the old priest on the Kurava tree, his mind bemused, with anger mounting saw this. \(\text{TTP 1258}\)

The moment he saw, he quickly descended and hastened forward and with the staff in his hand smote hard, the sacred back of his son and spoke cruel words; but the 'little eminent one' \(\text{ciṭiya peruntoŋralār}\) who was performing service, his mind suffused with love being placed on the worship of the Lord, knew nothing else. \(\text{TTP 1259}\)

When the excellent great one, though hit several times by the enraged one, without any awareness of it, continued unflaggingly in his act of performing the holy bath with milk, the bemused priest, highly incensed, tripped with his foot and spilt the milk-pot placed there for the ablutions; and with
that act he became the foremost of the vile. (TTP1260)

Even as it spilt, the son beholding it, in a split second discerned that the wicked one was his father, but still by reason of his legs having spilt (the milk), picked up the staff that was lying beside and that through propriety becoming an axe, he threw it. And the priest fell on the ground. (TTP 1261)

The self-same tossed staff became the weapon to remove the obstruction; having cut the hindering father's two legs, the son now rid of the obstacle to his worship, as before began his worship, when the Lord with thick, long locks, along with the Goddess, mounting the bull. . . (TTP 1262)

Surrounded by the host of demons and hoary sages and the Deva(s) praising with the songs of the Vedas, the Pure One, with love in his heart manifested (himself), and observing it the child matured in devotion, saluting with a rejoicing heart, fell on the flower-like feet. (TTP 1263)

And the one who bore the chaplet of Konrai flowers on his locks picking up him who had fallen at his twin-feet that was a refuge, looked and graciously said: "For our sake, you struck down the father who begot you; from now on, we are your next father." And he embraced and blessed him, and with welling compassion, caressed and kissed him on the crown with delight. (TTP 1264)

That youth who was touched by the holy flower-like hand of Him who rode the red-eyed bull, immediately with his gross body transformed into a divine one, immersed himself in the surge of grace and appeared in an aura of light while the noble Deva(s) beginning with Brahma seated on the lotus, sang praise. (TTP 1265)

The Lord of the celestials making him the chief of all tonṭar, and saying: "All our left-over food and all that we wear and adorn (and discard) we grant you in the status of Caṭīcaṇ," took the chaplet of Konrai from his locks adorned with the
crescent moon and placed it on his (Vicāracarumaṇ) beautiful head.\(^4\) *(TTP 1266)*

While all the worlds cheered "Hara! Hara!" showering flower's everywhere, many thousands of the godlings (kaṇāṇa) sang and danced and rejoiced and praised with the words of the Vedas and with many instruments resounding, and with the good path of Saivism flourishing, he the Lord, who is our chief, worshipped and merged. *(TTP 1267)*

He, (the priest) who erred in the world's sight and by the Lord's grace, was punished by the beautiful axe, flung by the holy hand of the son of Cēynallūr, whose conduct was according to the four Vedas, with his fault now removed, along with his kith and kin, reached the Śivaloka of the Primal Source. *(TTP 1268)*

That little Brahmin boy who cut with the axe the feet of his father that committed an excess, became with that body itself, Hara's son. Who can fathom the nature of this? To tell (the truth) aren't the acts of devotees who love the Infinite, themselves true ascetic? *(TTP 1269)*

The father kicked the milk over and was deprived of his legs by his own son; the son hacked away his father's legs and yet gained the privilege of being made a son by the Lord himself and was in addition given the status of Caṇṭīcar. This is the resolution of the conflict involved between the dharma of the two. Before commenting on this resolution, let us look at how the father and son proceeded towards the climax. The young Vicāracarumaṇ, in his usual

\(^4\) Caṇṭīca is a position wherein the occupant has the sole right to the all the offerings made to God. The cultic practice of worship of Caṇṭīca is found in temples of Śiva although according to the Agamas there are Caṇṭīcaṇs for other Gods and Goddesses too.
fashion, started his worship very methodically and had completed the preliminaries. Cēkkiḷar stresses again the rapturous absorption that marked his worship and the sportive ease with which he engaged in it. His absorption was such that the distinctions of subject-object were transcended and so he was unaware of his father beating him up. His total identification with the worship is immediately disturbed when his father kicks the milk-pot over. His father fell, mutilated to the ground, and without any further ado, the son returned to his worship. The incident had no impact on him. The sequel to the act is God's gracious acceptance of him as his son, his ascension to the heavens, and elevation to the status of Cantīcar with his own blessed body.

The father, who had waited to see whether the complaint made against his son was true, is shocked to see that it was true. Watching his son pour the milk on what he considered was a mere heap of sand his anger breaks its bounds, and he wishes to stop the wastage immediately. He rains blows on his son, and yells curses at him. Finding that he could not catch his son's attention, he resorts to kicking the pot of milk over.\(^5\) The father loses both his

\(^5\)It seems a little surprising that he who was interested in stopping the milk from being wasted, ends up doing the same himself. It could be that his anger blinded him. Or perhaps the other version of the incident, that seems to be suggested by Campantar, Tirumūlar and other bhakti poets, that he kicked at the crown of the Śivaliṅga is the correct version. We may note that this version would
legs and because he loses them at the hands of the saint, he
gets absolved of his sin and so reaches heaven.

By any standards, a son's act of punishing or
killing his father is, to say the least, considered a very
grave transgression. And by the standard of his own
tradition, Vicārācaruṇāṇ had committed patricide and
brahminicide - one of the Five Great Sins - Paṅcamahāpātaka.
And as we have seen the father cannot really be faulted for
his actions. Even his final act, which could be considered
sacrilegious, is from his stand-point free from any such
intention. His perception is that the child was playing and
he sought a way to get his attention. Therefore the gravity
of the entire incident becomes serious. The son with no
compunction cuts the father's legs and his task done, the
obstruction removed, he turns back to his worship. The
degree of involvement he has in his task - toṇṭu, is of
course highlighted by this drama. But it also raises
questions about a bhakti that would demand such grim loyalty
that overrides all other ties. Ironically it is loving
compassion, as observed earlier, that leads Vicārācaruṇāṇ to
herd the cows. And yet the child-saint unhesitatingly cuts
down his own father!

suit us in explaining Vicārācaruṇāṇ's fury. And also
Vicārācaruṇāṇ, as we observed was at one with the loved
object. And so an attack on the loved one would be more
likely to disturb his absorption than one on an instrument
i.e. the milk. Cēkkilār is of course hesitant to even say
that Eccatattan 'kicked' the liṅga.
Cēkkilār has, even as he relates the story, tried to provide his own rationale or understanding of the inexplicable drama. He, of course, very clearly states that it is very difficult to fathom the nature of this incident whereby, he who cuts his father's feet became the son of Lord Śiva (TTP 1269). And he adds that whatever a tonṭar might do - even if it were against all prescriptions - they are in fact truly tavam (ascesis). And again he says, in a verse that concludes the story of Tirukkuṛipputtoṇṭar, the story that precedes Caṇṭīcar, that he is going to narrate the actions of him who was adored by the world for his act of cutting off his father's legs. And then he goes on to say that it is difficult to gauge the truth behind the act of true devotees like the one who called the Lord, 'Madman' (TTP 1205). This refers to the fact that the Lord lovingly enslaved Cuntarar, who disparagingly called him a 'madman' and further graciously commanded him to sing addressing him with the same word. Cēkkilār is therefore saying that just as there is a mystery about that incident, so also there is one about Caṇṭīcar. It is not given to ordinary minds to fathom these actions.

Apart from these two verses, there are scattered allusions in Cēkkilār's descriptions which represent his own understanding of the situation. While describing Vicārarumāṇ's love and worship of the Lord, he repeatedly says that it was due to a continuation of his earlier births
(muntaī aṟīvaṅ toṭarcciyyāḷ TTP 1223), (munnaī arccapaiyin
alaiṅ toṭarcci TTP 1242), (pañṭaipparivāl aruccittu TTP
1245), (palaiya paṇmaī mikum paṇpu TTP 1258). He calls the
worship spontaneous and effortless (vilaiyatū TTP 1242),
iyalpil puriyum TTP 1249). The effect of these descriptions
is not to make Vicāraracarumaṇ just a tool - a sort of
participant who has no control over his moves. Rather, it
hints at the fact that this drama is not just here and now.
It had its antecedents now not visible, and similarly it
will have consequences that are to be effected. The finale
shows that it is an act of grace and that no one really
suffers. On the contrary everyone is rewarded. So Cēkkilār
tries to create an awareness that there is more to these
incidents than meets the eye.

And he explicitly declares Vicāraracarumaṇ's worship
to be a divine sport (tiruviḷaiyaṭṭāka TTP 1249). Similarly,
Eccatattan's loss of discrimination and anger is also
according to Cēkkilār instigated by Grace. The Lord used
this as an occasion to bring out the greatness of
Vicāraracarumaṇ's rapturous absorption (TTP 1258). And the
most crucial part of the story, Vicāraracarumaṇ's cutting off
his father's legs is handled in a similar fashion by
Cēkkilār. Describing the incident, he says that even as the
milk spilt, the son beholding, recognised in a split second
that the perpetrator of the foul deed was his father. Since
his legs had spilt the milk, he picked the staff that 'by
propriety' became an axe and he threw it. The staff becomes an axe 'through propriety' or 'appropriately' (muṟamaiyināl). Appropriately because that was the punishment that the father deserved for his sacrilegious act. It is difficult to say whether a higher power deemed it just that he lose his legs and hence turned the staff into an axe or whether it did so because that was the intention of Vicāracarumaṇ. Whatever be the alternative, the truth remains, that Vicāracarumaṇ was very much aware that he held an axe when he threw it. And so the grimness remains as does the inscrutability of Vicāracarumaṇ's blessed status in the sequel.

Cēkkilār's answer to this issue is indirect. Vicāracarumaṇ is made the 'chief of toṇṭar' because his absorption in service and his utter disregard of all other values or the willingness to sacrifice all ties - here, the father, makes him exemplary. Quite early in the narration, we find Vicāracarumaṇ observing that all things find their end (or source) in the feet of the Lord and later he reflects that the best form of service to the Lord is by herding the cows. And in the voluntary spurting of milk by the cows, he reads a sign indicating the need to worship the Lord by bathing him with milk. His whole being is geared to only one thing i.e. the Lord. The worship which is his paṇi - service - toṇṭu, absorbs all his attention and is an expression of love that wells incessantly and which makes
the Lord embodied in it. When the test comes he proves that he has no bond apart from the One and the very seriousness of the drama highlights this effectively.

Cañticar's story, as also that of the others to be noted below, shows that the toñtar live in the world, participating in everything and subjecting themselves to all earthly bonds. Yet at the crucial point when the crisis comes, they reveal that they themselves do not believe in the validity of any bond but one. They have only one 'loyalty', and all else is worthless before it.

Cিruttoñtar

The story of Cিruttoñtar is probably the most awesome and grisly of all the stories in the TTP. Unlike the violence in the story of Cañticar, that is sparked by an incidental act and can even be described as born of anger with no time for reflection, the violence in Cিruttoñtar's story is born of a stark and grim decision that is carried out in a mood that is contrary to all natural human emotions. If the story of Kaññappar which we will discuss soon is elevated by the nobility and romance that pervades it, the story of Cিruttoñtar is remarkable because of the absence of that kind of nobility. The sacrifice of the son is not attended by any lofty sentiments. Though the sacrifice is the climatic event in the story, it is not a real climax to the participants themselves, and it is their
indifference that leaves the reader with an eerie feeling of the bizarre. And at the pinnacle of our moral outrage is the fact that it is God himself who puts forth this dreadful request.

The story is again set in the lands of the Kāvēri. In the village of Cēṅkāṭṭāṅkuṭi lived Paraṅcōti, who was of the clan of Māmātras, and who was by profession a warrior. He did his job it is said 'by the strength of his belief in the sacred ashes of the Lord'. He had learnt the art of Āyurveda (classical Indian school of pharmacology) and many Sanskrit texts, in addition to the art of weaponry, and he was skilled in handling of rutting elephants and horses.

He learned to heart's content, the discipline of arts, without residue and from them realised, "The true quintessence of all these is to be lovingly united to the feet of Śiva." And in the wake of this awareness, it was his nature to constantly practise love for the feet that triumphed over Death. And that (love) came to him like water running through a ditch in a valley. (TTP 3668)

Doing service to the devotees of the Lord spontaneously everyday, he served close to the king of unblemished fame. For the latter, he led the troop of elephants to the battle-front and winning many battles, took many lands of opposing kings and found favour with his charioted monarch. (TTP 3669)

He took an army for the king, and leading the elephants of long-hollow trunks, he reduced to dust the ancient city of Vātāvi in the north. From there he took many gems, money-chests, herds of male elephants,
horses and numerous other things and brought them before his just king.\textsuperscript{6} (TTP 3670)

The king with the radiant crown, amazed at his power over the elephant-troop, praised him. The ministers who knew, explained: "By the might he possesses through doing holy service to the Lord who wears the crescent moon, there is none that can oppose him in this world." (TTP 3671)

The garlanded king on hearing that 'he is the holy servant of our Lord', said: "Not realising he was the servant of our Lord, I erred terribly, sending him to the fierce and heated battle-front." Thus distressed he begged: "My lord, you should bear with this." (TTP 3672)

As the king thus supplicated, he (Paraṅcōti) quickly saluting replied: "I acted in accordance with the demands of my rightful profession! What harm will befall by that"? The king who wields the sceptre righteously, giving him many heaps of treasures and tax-free lands, worshipped him and said: (TTP 3673)

"You acted in such a way that your true nature was not revealed. Now graciously accede to my heart's desire, and engage in the glorious path of holy service so that your true vocation be established," and he gave him leave. (TTP 3674)

Taking leave of the king and reaching his village, Paraṅcōti of renowned fame, worshipped in Kanapatīccaram, the Lord with red hair on which the cool moon dwells, and continued to lovingly do holy service.

\textsuperscript{6}This verse is of significance to historians for on the basis of it are established the dates of many major figures. With data culled from inscriptions this Pallava king is identified as Narasimhavarman I(630-668 C.E.). This means that Citruttontar and Campantar lived in the seventh century. It also confirms the thesis that Appar lived in the times of Mahendravarman, whose inscriptions testify to his change of faith. For a discussion see Rajamanickam (1978:73-76).
without slipping from his former state of excellence. \textit{(TTP 3675)}

Parãṇcõti dwelt there as a house-holder, along with his beloved wife, Tiruvenkåṭṭunaṅkai, (lit. lady of Tiruvenkåtu) born of a blemishfree family, in order to perform true service to the devotees of Lord Śiva.

Everyday, in accordance with propriety, he would first feed the devotees of him who wears the honey-laden Koṇrāi flowers on his head and then eat afterwards. Out of a overwhelming desire they made this a vow and remained foremost in this pure labour without slipping in its observance. \textit{(TTP 3677)}

He served the devotees delicious food, fruits, and tasty sweet-meats etc. and they were delighted with him.

Lovingly worshipping the devotees of the Lord with the cool moon and serpent on his red locks, the great one acted before them as a very small person and so he was known as Ciruttoṇṭar (the small servitor) in the world. \textit{(TTP 3679)}

With his thoughts rooted on Him who has an eye in his fore-head, and who dwells in \textit{(the temple of) Kaṇapatićcaram}, his entire being filled with love, he performed service and without shortage countless great devotees came without a break, and ate, and in the days, when he rejoicing greatly, lived there. \textit{(TTP 3680)}

By the grace of the Lord, a son was born to them and they named him Cīrāḷa Tēvana. The child's birth was celebrated with great rejoicing by the parents and they performed the rituals that were customary. They also gave immeasurable wealth to the devotees of Lord Śiva. And as the child grew up, they marked his first steps etc.
appropriately with protective charms and ornaments, and did rites such as tonsuring of his head. When he reached the age of three, the parents put their son in the school (as the biographer says that they felt that the child) “came to release (them) from (their) bondage.” At this time, the saint Campantar visited their village and Ciruttoṭṭar paid him homage with great love. The Lord of Cāṇpai i.e. Campantar, also graciously stayed with them and returned the regard. He treated Parancōti as a friend and praised him in his hymns.

While he (Parancōti) continued in this fashion, his holy services, reached the realm of the divine feet of the Lord, who resides in Kailāsa. The Lord, who possesses the Bull wishing to experience his true love and bless him came from the mountain as a Bhairava ascetic, his heart filled with glee. (TTP3689)

His hair, decked with Koṇraí flowers, dark as the rain-bearing clouds was spread out, and, like stars amidst dark clouds, he wore fragrant Tumpai flowers humming with bees on these locks. The round spot of sacred ash glistened, as if he had taken the waxing evening moon, and making it full, had worn it on his beautiful fore-head. His divine ears, with the beautiful conch-shell earring that had a red Aratta flower in it, appeared as if the radiant sun, the lustrous moon, and the brilliant fire had come together. He wore on his neck a crystal bead chain that seemed as if he had strung together the specks of nectar that appeared on the ocean of milk to graciously disguise the mark of poison
in his neck. He had wrapped his handsome coral-red body with the black elephant hide that was like the night surrounding the setting sun. And on his limbs and neck and feet he wore bracelets, necklaces etc. made of white skulls that looked as if they were the love of devotees.

Observing the nature of the overflowing grace in coming to earth to bless that incomparable devotee, it seemed as if the anklets on the holy feet resounded in all directions, embracing the Vedas and proclaiming "Cherish the grace of the Lord. Stand in the path of his love." (TTP 3697)

With a trident set against his shoulder, held by his left hand and with the right hand holding the kettle-drum, he came and the earth was blessed to bear his feet.

The smile on his grace-bestowing face shone like moon-beams. The sharp trident that shatters the deluding three impurities glowed fierily; he reached Čēkāṭṭaṅkuṭi in Tamilnāṭu where true knowledge thrives so that the great love that exudes the Supreme Truth may flourish and that the world may praise it. (TTP 3699)

As if he were one who was insatiably hungry, asking directions of those he met, for the house of Čiruttoṅṭar, he reached it quickly and demanded: "Is that devotee wearing beeladen garlands, who serves food daily to the devotees at home"? (TTP 3700)

One of the most important points to emerge from the story so far is the lack of conflict in the activities of Čiruttoṅṭar. He could apparently perform services to the devotees of the Lord everyday and also continue to serve his king faultlessly. His profession involved waging battles which entailed the destruction of life and cities as well as
looting and plundering which are deemed legitimate part of conquest. As he himself informs the king, he 'did his job' and so he could see no wrong in it. He did his job as a dedication to the Lord. He intuitively held that all arts ultimately taught love and dedication to the feet of the Lord - that love of the Lord's feet is the *alpha* and *omega* of all knowledge. The conviction results in one's life being an inculcating of love and a translating of it into actions. The actions spring forth naturally and do not bring about any conflict with his profession. And as the quintessence of all arts, including warfare, was to be lovingly united with the feet of the Lord, he could do war and yet not be affected by the atrocities that it involved. This understanding of action is a feature that is common to the stories of the different *nāyapmār* and in Ciรุท-toντar's story it becomes the focus of a moral argument in the later half. Everything stands sanctified subject to the condition that it was impelled by love of Śiva and therefore even violence ceases to be evil in itself but becomes acceptable as a way of life if it reflected love for Śiva. All questions of right and wrong based on the normally accepted norms becomes subject to transvaluation from the perspective of devotion to God.

The *tontu* that Ciรุท-toντar adopted as fully expressive of his true vocation (*toli*) was to serve food first to a devotee of the Lord every day and only then
attend to his needs and his family. The encounter between the devotee and his Lord is set within the framework of the performance of the *tontu*. The Lord comes in disguise not to check the limits of endurance of the *tonṭar* and the sincerity with which he carried out his promise, but in Cēkkilār's words "to himself experience his true love and bless him." The sincerity and excellence that the *tonṭar* brought to his *tontu* was a reflection of the love that he bore his Lord. And so the Lord comes to experience his love rather than to test him in his *tontu*. The rest of the story in which the encounter is set will be presented in Cēkkilār's own words.

"The one who seeks to know is a holy devotee," thus thought the maid-servant Cantaṅattār coming forward, and saluting his feet she said: "He has gone out in search of the devotees of unlimited glory. O thou who rules us, please enter the house." (TTP 3701)

Looking at the face of the woman, he said: "We shall not enter unaccompanied, the place where women alone are there." Hearing that and, afraid that he would leave, Tiruvaṅkāṭṭunaṅkai, who held the household duties, swiftly came to the door. (TTP 3702)

"He who serves the devotees of the Lord of the Ampalam did not find any of (them) today and so has gone in search. If he were to perceive thy holy form who has newly come, he would consider it a great blessing. He will delay no longer. (TTP 3703)

He will come instantly. Please remain here." she said. He replied: "You who lead an incomparable house-hold life. We are from a city in the north (Uttarāpati). We came to see Ciruṭtonṭar of indescribable fame. On no
account will we stay here without him." (TTP 3704)

He who did not disclose the eye in his forehead, said: "In the temple of Kanapaticcaram, under the Āttī tree with beautiful flowers, we will stay. If he comes, tell him where we are." And the Lord reached the sacred Āttī tree, and sat under it. (TTP 3705)

Having searched for the devotees of Him who has locks bearing water, and not finding them anywhere, Cīruttoṭar of great fortune, returned to his prosperous home. When he dejectedly informed his wife, she related the arrival of one with a form cherished as holy by the world. (TTP 3706)

"I am saved! Where is he? Tell me"! he demanded, and she said: "He with the sharp trident and skull, said that he was a northerner. He is a Bhairava with a loud hand-drum. Though requested to do so, he would not stay but went and is now seated under the fragrant Āttī tree in Kanapaticcaram." (TTP 3707)

When his wife thus related, with surging desire, Cīruttoṭar quickly went there and seeing the God, he saluted and stood there. Addressing the toṭar who stood, the Lord graciously said: "So are you the great 'Little devotee'." Worshipping, he replied: (TTP 3708)

"Though I am not worthy even to worship those who wear the sacred ash, the followers of the Lord, out of compassion, call me thus. I earlier searched with love but could not find any faultless devotee to feed in this village. It is my fortune that I am seeing you. (TTP 3709)

Thou shouldst come to my house and partake of food," said he, and He who could not be discerned by the Tall One (Viṣṇu) said: "You of great austerities. I came only to see you. I am from the North. It is not possible for you to feed me satisfactorily. It is a difficult act. It is impossible." (TTP 3710)
"I do not speak without thought (reflection). Thou of brimming austerities and beautiful form. Graciously inform me of the nature of thy preparation of food, that I may quickly perform it. If the devotees of the Lord with the cool Komra flowers on his locks deigns to visit even the impossible can be obtained. It is not impossible," he said. (TTP3711)

When the ascetic in the garb of a great Bhairava, exuding charm, heard him say, "It is not impossible" he said: "O loving devotee! Every six months we kill and eat an animal. And this is the day for it. It will be impossible for you to feed me." (TTP 3712)

"Very good! I have all three kinds of herds and there is no dearth for me. If thou, who art a devotee of Him who drank poison, were to tell me what animal would be suited for thy food, I would go and swiftly arrange it and return with no loss of time." Saying thus, he folded his hands in worship. (TTP 3713)

Observing the regard of Ciruttoñtar of virtuous conduct, the Bhairava said: "O You of exceeding friendly disposition! The animal that is to be killed for our eating is a human animal. We eat one that is less than five years with no blemish in its body. There is one more thing that I have to say, that may be like driving a spear in a festering wound." (TTP 3714)

"Nothing is difficult for me. Tell me quickly." As he said the Lord replied: "It must be a good child in a good family, an only son. The father should cut while the mother holds and both of them must rejoice at heart. Then if they faultlessly make a curry of the child, I will eat." (TTP 3715)

As the Primal One said this too, the tontar who heard it, replied: "This too shall not be impossible for me, if my Lord graciously consents to partake of food." Quickly obtaining his consent, he lovingly bowed
before the feet soft like fragrant lotuses and reached his house. (TLP 3716)

The Lord comes to bless his devotee but he comes in disguise. And he does not merely hide his true form. He clears the stage for the final act of grace by staging a bizarre drama. Ciruttoṇṭar, unusual for one who normally had no problem in securing devotees for his tonṭu, could not find anyone even after searching all over the village. As he himself says, even though he had lovingly looked everywhere, he had not found anyone. And the Lord who had assumed the guise of a Bhairava ascetic, in line with the terrible demands he was to make later, similarly searches for the house of his devotee and then proceeds to wait for him under the tree in the temple. So the encounter is preceded by a search by both parties.

The ascetic seems to prepare the mind of the devotee for his preposterous demand. He tells Ciruttoṇṭar at the outset that he could not feed him. He uses three negative that seem to be genuine problems, but he is actually egging the devotee on to make a commitment to feed him without any reservation. He first says that he eats an animal every six months, and when questioned further declares that it has to be a human one - a child of five years, perfect in all limbs.\(^7\) The final shattering demand is that the child should be killed by the father while the mother holds it, 

\(^7\)For any religious ritual, the participants in the rite must be faultless - in their limbs and disposition.
and that both should do this in a state of shared felicity. And a curry made of such a child, would be the meal that he would partake.

The response of Cîruttoṇṭar reveals his single-minded devotion to the task undertaken. His only interest is in feeding the ascetic and all else is of no consequence. And so he patiently overcomes all the hurdles that the ascetic throws in his path, with just the same answer - that he could do it, whatever the cost. The lack of doubt or later, shock in the wake of the gruesome demands, sheds light on the state of his mind which was that to him killing and cooking a child or cow, or simply cooking grains and vegetables were basically no different. They all seemed ennobled as serving the same end, that of feeding the devotee. He does not pause and consider the rights and wrongs of what he would have to do. Nor does he conclude after reflection that the child would be sacrificed in a good cause or that keeping his promise was more important than the life of his child. As described earlier, his pani (service) was spontaneous (iyalpāṇa). And so there is no room for debating the pros and cons of the step he was to take. It was a thrill to him to be able to feed his Lord's devotee, and he proceeded quite naturally about it.

It is also important to note that the entire family including the servant is involved in the toṇṭu. The maidservant and Cîruttoṇṭar's wife participate fully in serving
the āṭiyār as is evident by their actions on the arrival of
the guest. This situation only heralds their later
involvement, an involvement even more remarkable and
unbelievable than his.8

The lady of great chastity and vast love,
Tiruvenkāṭṭunaṅkai, waited for the arrival of Ciṟuttoṇṭar,
standing at the front door, and when he came in, seeing his
beaming face, she worshipped his feet and questioned him
about the great one's actions.

The great giver addressed his wife and said:
"the great sage who has come, has agreed to
dine to our heart's pleasure, if the only
son of a family, being of an age below five
with no blemish in his body, held by his
mother, cheerfully cut by the father, is
cooked. (TTP 3718)

His wife of rare virtue, looking at him,
said: "We will cook in the appropriate way
so that the great Bhairava devotee will eat
here, but how are we to obtain that child
who is the only one in the family"? As she
thus said and saluted . . . (TTP 3719)

Looking at his wife's face, he said: "Even
if we give a fortune to their hearts'
content, who would give such a son. And
there are no parents who would themselves
standing right there, slaughter their son.

8A recent translator commenting on the reason the
Lord/ascetic, came to the house when Ciṟuttoṇṭar was away
observes that the Lord was preparing the mother for the
grisly demand to be made later. His caḳṣu dīkṣa - initiation
with a gracious glance - makes her already blessed, and so
she is able to fulfill her part, a supremely unnatural one
for a mother, in the drama (Vannikananthan, 1985:359). While
it is an interesting interpretation, it robs the incident of
its incredible aspect and renders it less effective.
Besides it makes Ciṟuttoṇṭar the only one on trial but as
the sequel reveals the entire family is rewarded and so the
involvement of all of them has to be a real one.
So without delay let us call him, whom you bore that I might be saved." (TTP 3720)

As the husband said agreeing, she the good one thought (moved): "By feeding the devotee of our Lord without delay, we will be able to see here his (the husband's) pleased face" and said: "Go and bring from school that precious gem who has come to save us." (TTP 3721)

Hearing his beloved wife say thus, the husband, as if he had achieved all the faultless rewards, left quickly to fetch the son, who lisped sweetly, from the school where he had gone to learn to recite, so as to make food for the Lord. (TTP 3722)

When he reached the school, the son with his anklets ringing, came running in front. Picking him up, he embraced him as was his wont and as he re-entered his home, the mother meeting that munificent one,9 received the son. (TTP 3723)

Rearranging his curls, wiping his face, cleaning his earstuds and waist-string of dust, rueful that the turmeric had faded, pushing the collyrium to the rim of the eyes, the lady with soft feet that even cotton fears to vie with, lovingly bathed and decorating him incomparably, gave him into the hands of her husband. (TTP 3724)

Fearing that he was (meant for) divine food, he would not kiss him on the head or embrace him around the chest and receive his kisses. The faultless devotee, wishing to make a curry for the holy one, with a delighted heart, did not go into the kitchen but went elsewhere. (TTP 3725)

The two of one heart thinking "the world will not understand" went to a secret place.

9The use of the expression 'munificent' (vaḷḷal) is appropriate here. The term is used in classical Tamil works to refer to the act of benefaction on the part of the hero, divine or human. In the present case, the 'curry of child' is the highest form that generosity can take and so the appropriate use of the term.
The mother who had borne the son, washed the utensils and brought them, while the father, who had conquered the world, took the good son and held his head. And quickly the true mother . . . (TTP3726)

Gripping between her thighs the two feet with sweetly tinkling anklets, she held with her hands the two hands of the son with a mouth (tender) like a ripe fruit. And as the beloved (son) thought, "they are very delighted," and happily laughed, the father cut the head of the great and incomparable son with an implement. (TTP 3727)

"The matchless illustrious son gave me the state of truth," thus rejoicing he (the father) was happy and the wife too, her face radiant, reflected, "He gave me my husband's precious life." Greatly pleased in mind they together did the inimitable deed. (TTP 3728)

Thinking: "The meat of the sawn-off head will not do for the holy food," she, discarding, gave it in the hands of Cantanattār to dispose of. Carving out the flesh from the other limbs and cutting and opening the bones, she removed the marrow and ground together swiftly the necessary spices for the curry. (TTP 3729)

The lady of fragrant flower-adorned tresses, with a joyful heart, placed the curry on the stove. Determining when it was ready, she took it down and in another special pan, fried the seasoning with fragrant smoke (arising). Then cooking other dishes, she cooked quickly the rice and informed the husband. (TTP 3730)

Becoming happy, even more than before that he could feed the Lord, who possessed him as instructed, his increasing eagerness turning ecstatic, the tonṭar of him who rides the bull, hastened quickly and came in front of the Pure One who was seated below the Āṭṭi tree with delicate flowers that hummed with bees. (TTP 3731)

Coming in front of the Lord and bowing to him, the loving devotee said: "I requested lovingly that you should come to my house
and partake of food; though because of that time lapsed and you remained hungry, I have cooked as commanded; May you fulfill my desire and come." He went on . . . (TTP 3732)

"Without any more delay, please come and partake of food," he pleaded. He who hid the stain on His throat and also concealed the eye in His fore-head said: "O Ciruttoñtar of increasing fame. Let us go." Like a needy man obtaining the two (kinds of) treasure, he took him and entered his house.¹⁰ (TTP 3733)

The child trustfully plays with the parents, and the parents rejoicing carve up the child and make a dish out of it for their guest. This unnatural act is done, with only a single thought - that at no cost, should the devotee go hungry. The couple seem to think and act without conflict of interest. Ciruttoñtar, of course, is the one with the explicitly confessed motive. His toñtu is to feed a devotee, every day, before eating his meal. He had never failed to carry out the vow in all the days since he had taken up the vow. Therefore, his reaction to a lapse of his vow, although not explicitly stated so far is hinted at through his reaction to not finding an aţiyār that day. And the fact that he does not even need to pause and consider, but straightaway decides on his son as the right choice, shows the single-minded determination that characterises the performance of his toñtu. The attitude of the wife also suggests that Ciruttoñtar would have been more than just

¹⁰The two kinds of treasure referred to are the mythological Sanga Nidhi and Paduma Nidhi.
disappointed if he had not been able to fulfill his vow. When her son is carved up, she reflects that her the son had given her the life of her husband. In other words if we are to take her literally failure in his self-appointed task would have meant death to the \( \text{tontu} \).

The motives of the wife seem particularly complex. As a virtuous and loving wife, she shares in the \( \text{tontu} \) of her husband. It seems, however as if her interest in the vow is only because of her husband. When her husband informs her of the demands of the ascetic, she replies that they would cook appropriately so that the ascetic would eat there. But she questions her husband, as to where they would get the child indicating that at the point the thought had not crossed her mind that her son would be a good choice. It indicates that there is a world of difference in the attitude of the husband and wife towards the \( \text{tontu} \). When her husband tells her that their child was to be the intended sacrifice, she thinks that they would be able to feed the devotee and that she would then see the cheerful face of her husband. And later on, when the child is being carved up, she rejoices because the son had given her back her husband's life. So her immediate concern embraces her husband and his feelings. Her involvement in the \( \text{tontu} \) is an extension of this concern.

Cëkkilär highlights the grimness of the entire event in his presentation. The child is lovingly embraced by the
father when he brings him from school. The mother takes him from her husband, and like mothers everywhere, rearranges the child's ornaments and tenderly wipes away the dust and so on. But once she bathes him and decorates him, he is ready to become divine food and so Ciruttoŋtar refrains from kissing or embracing him.

Both the husband and the wife are well aware that what they are doing is, not a normal act. Ciruttoŋtar reminds his wife that even for a fortune, no one would give their son to become an ascetic's meal. He adds further that there were no parents in the world who would themselves stand and cut up the child etc. That is his argument for using his own child as the sacrifice. Again, at the time of slaughtering the child, they go to a secret place rather than the kitchen because they think that the world would not understand their act. They suffer no grief at the death of their child or the grisly use he is put to. The father while carving up the child is happy because his son helped him keep his word. When his wife informs him that the curry is ready, he is delighted more than ever because now he could redeem his pledge. This continues to be the prevailing attitude of the husband and wife in the rest of the story too.

As they entered the house, the wife came forward and saluted his feet and in that house decorated completely with fragrant flower garlands and pearl strings, showed (him) the flower bedecked seat, and picking
up the pitcher with scented water, held it and . . (TTP 3734)

With the pure water, Ciruttoṭṭaṭar washed the feet of the Effulgent One, and that sacred water they sprinkled to their satisfaction on their heads, and worshipping with soft-smelling flowers, sandal-mixture and incense and lamp-light, they bowed . . (TTP 3735)

The lovely damsel and her husband, saluting, asked the holy one, who as a Bhairava had made his flowing locks bearing the snow-white moon into a tuft with flowers, the proper way to serve the rice and curry. He said: "Serve together with the sweet rice, all the curries." (TTP 3736)

After rinsing they placed the dishes on a cloth. They served the rice of red grains and curries, in a row so that they could all be seen and placed them on the steady table that was covered with a white cloth and the Faultless One graciously looked . . (TTP 3737)

and asked: "Did you, as I said, kill the sacrificial animal and with all the parts make a fine curry, in the proper way"? When the swan-like lady said: "We left out the flesh of the head as unsuitable for the sacred food," he who dispels all suffering said: "That too we will eat." (TTP 3738)

As Ciruttoṭṭaṭar and his wife, their hearts distressed, were stunned and at a loss, the maid called Cantagattār said, "Thinking that the devotee might think of the flesh of that head, when he was eating, I have already made a curry of it," and she gave it and they became cheerful . . (TTP 3739)

and they took it and joyfully served it too. Addressing Ciruttoṭṭaṭar, who then saluted him, the Lord said: "It is not possible for us to eat alone. Fetch any devotee of the Lord who might be around." And Ciruttoṭṭaṭar dejected, thought: "I am lost. Will this be a hindrance to his eating"? (TTP 3740)

Going outside the house, and by grace not seeing anyone, he returned dejected, his
face extremely down-cast and bowing to that Primal One, he worshipped and said: "I could not find those who are dear in this world and the next. I too, wear sacred ash if only imitating those who wear it." (TTP 3741)

"Are there any who wear the ash as you do? Eat with me." Thus saying, he addressed the Lady of Tiruvenkāṭu of superior chastity: "Prepare a dish and serve the desirable rice and curry in it too." And when served, as Ciṟuttenṭar wishing to make him eat, started to eat, the ascetic stopped him out of grace. (TTP 3742)

"We eat after six months. Why do you who eat everyday, start eating before me, as if you cannot bear to lose time. If you have a faultless son to eat with us summon him." To that One without beginning and end, who said this, he replied: "He is of no use now." (TTP 3743)

"We shall eat only if he comes. Seek him and call him," the Lord graciously said. Upset Ciṟuttonṭar reflected: "How are we to make the Lord eat"? Quickly he went outside, accompanied by grace and her whose tresses had fragrant flowers, to summon. (TTP 3744)

Ciṟuttonṭar, who was renowned in the world, called out: "0 Son come" and the lady too, standing fore-most in the Lord's service, called: "(My) Precious Gem! Ciṟāḷa! Come! The Lord's devotee calls you to eat with him, so that we may be redeemed." (TTP 3745)

And then as if he were coming running from school, by the grace of the Lord, the matchlessly handsome son came. She picked him up and embraced him and gave him into the arms of her husband, who delighted thought cheerfully: "We will now be able to have the holy devotee of the Lord who burnt the three cities, to eat." (TTP 3746)

With the son who had returned, he hastily returned to make the devotee eat. The Lord who had come as the Bhairava had already disappeared. So his mind perturbed at not seeing him, he fell down aghast, his head
whirling. Then not perceiving the cooked flesh curry, he became alarmed. (TTP 3747)

"The Bhairava of ruddy skin, black hair and lovely garment, where did he disappear without eating so that we may be saved," they thought. Searching, and confused, they came out and he who had disappeared, came along with the Daughter born of the mountain and the Child of the thickets of Sara grass (Saravana - Skanda). (TTP 3748)

On his unique bull in the heavens, the Lord who is praised by those beginning with the hosts of demons, godlings, sages, gods and the celestials, appeared to them who had made the sweet curry and rice, and with the cool white moon adorning his crown, he blessed them with his glance, wide with compassion. (TTP 3749)

The devotee, who had conquered through love along with his wife and son, seeing in his fullness the Lord who appeared before them, was ecstatic, and with bones and mind melting fell down. Arising they praised, and the Lord blessed the great ones as befitted them. (TTP 3750)

The Lord with the Konrai flowers on his locks and the noble lady who was half of him and the son with the victorious spear went, and took with them the devotee, his wife, the illustrious son and maid, who stood prostrated at their feet that were like fragrant lotuses, to abide without separation with them in worship. (TTP 3751)

Not content with his dreadful and macabre requisition, the ascetic proceeds to tease the devotee torturously. He declares that the head of the child should be part of his food too, and when that is resolved satisfactorily by the timely act of the maid-servant, he demands the company of another devotee. He knows, of course, that no one could be found that day since Cirtutotitar had
informed him of his earlier efforts at the outset, and so his demand is a ploy to make Čiruttoṅtar volunteer to share the meal. The unnatural father volunteers to eat the meal, consisting of his own son, and desiring to make the ascetic eat, he starts on the food when the ascetic with a taunting remark stops him. He (the ascetic) then requests Čiruttoṅtar to call his son to join in the meal and though told he was not of any use, he persists in his request and refuses to eat until the child joins them. When the child miraculously returns, the ascetic with his harsh demands has vanished leaving his devotees grief-stricken. The sequel to this grim drama is the vision of the Lord with his consort and child, revealing the whole trial to have been his gracious act to bless his devotee.\footnote{This is the only occurrence in TTP where the Lord manifests himself as a family along with his child. All the other manifestations involve only the Lord and his consort, representing his grace. Here, there is a beautiful almost one-to-one correspondence in the bestowal of grace, and it also very effectively affirms the family as a unit.}

Before looking at the actions of the ānatarāhimsēlf, we may first examine the actions of the other actors in the episode. Tiruveṅkāṭṭunaṅkaṅkai, the mother, has tastefully cooked up the child, made other dishes, decorated the house in a befitting manner, and, when the guest arrives, she goes ahead to receive him. After determining from the guest the method of serving the food etc., she serves him his meal. She is as distressed as her husband when the ascetic delays...
eating. When her husband in obedience to the ascetic's command to call for his son goes out and does so, she follows him. Cēkkiḷār, describing her actions at this point, says that the lady, standing fore-most in the master's service called for the son. While 'master' here could be either the Lord himself or her husband, it is more likely to be the latter in view of what has been pointed out earlier. Of course, in as much as her husband's service is for the Lord, hers becomes for the Lord too. She calls out to the child that the Lord's devotee calls him so that "we may be saved." This statement too could be interpreted as requesting the child to come so that her husband may be saved from breaking his promise and she saved from having to lose her husband. When the child returns, she, embracing him, hands him over to her husband so that the meal may start. When they find the ascetic has vanished, she searches with her lamenting husband only to be rewarded with the beatific vision of the Lord.

The maid-servant, Cantaṇattār, though a minor character in the play, shows how the entire house-hold is oriented towards the tônṭur. Just as in the beginning she welcomes the guest hospitably, knowing he would be an occasion of great joy to her master, she likewise anticipates that quite possibly the guest may relish and ask for the flesh of the head. So she of her own accord prepares it and when the situation she had visualised does arise, she
brings forth the curry made of the head. Her identification with the master and mistress's interest earns her the final beautide along with them.

Ciruttoṭṭar, as we observed earlier, has only one interest - feeding the devotee. He is delighted when he thinks that he has met the demands of the ascetic to his satisfaction, abjectly apologetic when he considers how the ascetic's hunger had not yet been satiated, and very much distressed when the ascetic uses delaying tactics. He is at a loss when the ascetic claims that he will eat the head too, for to his knowledge the head was discarded. His composure is restored by the maid-servant's timely action, only to be disturbed by the Bhairava's demand to bring another devotee to keep him company. Though well aware, through his earlier search, that he will not find anyone, he obeys the command helplessly. Now, as later when he calls the child, his attitude is that of one ready to undertake the unlikeliest request just to satisfy the guest and get him to eat. In his desire to have the ascetic eat, he offers himself as a candidate for giving the ascetic company, tacitly describing himself as a tontar. He describes himself as one who wears the sacred ash in imitation of true devotees who wear it. When the ascetic invites him to join in eating, he does so without the least reflection that he would in effect be eating his own child. His eagerness to feed the guest impels him to start on the food, so that
thereby the guest would feel comfortable about eating. Reprimanded sharply, he refrains from eating and is stunned to hear the new demand of the ascetic. He informs the Bhairava that the son could be of no purpose but when the persistent ascetic commands him to call forth the child, he complies. The child returns and the father rejoices that now the guest will eat. He is distraught to find that the ascetic has disappeared and alarmed when he notes that the curry of flesh alone has vanished as well. He is not the least disturbed by the miraculous return of his son, but extremely upset to find the Bhairava gone without partaking of the meal. His ecstatic reaction to the vision of the Lord, takes him to the final reward—being blessed to abide without separation in worship, beside the sacred feet.

It is obvious in the presentation of the story that Čekkilār is well aware of the grim nature of the event and that he does not indulge in apologetics or become defensive about it. Rather, his delineation of the characters points clearly to his own understanding of the whole drama. The vocation in the devotee's life, his toṇṭu, is the sole concern that truly motivates him. It has no conflict with the other spheres of life as long as they do not interfere in his execution of it. Therefore, Ciruttontar, is sincere when he informs the king that being a general involved no transgression for him. Since however, it is no longer of central importance to him, he accepts the king's dictum and
retires from military service. In his village, he sets up his house-hold and chooses a particular form of service as his own, that is every day feeding a devotee before he eats his mid-day meal. His behaviour after the arrival of the Bhairava, can be described as Cēkkilār's presentation of how the psychology of a toṇṭar operates. He lives, acts, and breathes through his toṇṭu. Ciṟuttoṇṭar may seem to be shown to be indifferent and apathetic to the killing of his only child, but it should be noted that he is not described as dead to feelings. On the contrary, he suffers all the emotions of fear, anxiety, despair but these are only with regard to the ascetic and his meal. His feelings towards his child and all else that does not bear directly on the performance of the toṇṭu do not exist. Cēkkilār does not describe the process by which Ciṟuttoṇṭar arrives at the conclusion that his son would fit the bill; and apparently there is no process involving deduction here. It is no different to him from confidently knowing that he had the necessary vegetables, and groceries etc. Interestingly, Cēkkilār does not project Ciṟuttoṇṭar as either a callous father or a devotee blind to the values of the world. He seeks the collaboration of his wife rather than just commanding her, and he points out the improbability of obtaining such a child at any price or of parents engaging in such an enterprise. He wisely retires to a secret room to
kill the child because he knows that the world would not comprehend or approve of his actions.

The entire drama is described as an act or occasion for grace. This is, of course, true of all the stories as seen in the eyes of Cēkkīlār. He brings this idea into play at all the crucial points. The Lord puts on the form of a Bhairava, so that he can experience the true love of his devotee and graciously bless him. On both occasions when Ciṟuttoṇṭar cannot find any other devotee, it is because the Lord graciously wills it so. The presence of any other devotee would create complications because it is Ciṟuttoṇṭar whose devotion is being tried. The story would not achieve its objective if Ciṟuttoṇṭar did not show himself capable of volunteering to eat with the ascetic. To achieve his goal of feeding the devotee, he is shown capable of doing the inconceivable - eating the flesh of his own child. The harsh demands that the ascetic makes serve to highlight the attitude of the devotee towards the task he has undertaken. The gruesomeness of the drama notwithstanding it remains essentially an act of grace.

Iyaṟpakaiyār

The story of Iyaṟpakaiyār, like the majority of stories in TTP, and unlike the two presented earlier, is one in which Cēkkīlār launches directly into the dramatic encounter between the devotee and his Lord. There is a
paucity of information on the background of the devotee, but as our interest in this analysis is in the encounter, it does not affect our thesis. While the story itself is a short and rather simple presentation of the events, the antinomian character of the toṇṭar is no less than that of Caṇṭīcar and Ciruttoṇṭar. The name of the toṇṭar is a descriptive one - 'he was contrary to the natural' or Iyarpakai. This descriptive title is used as a proper name in the story. The main part of the story will be translated directly from Cēkkilār, while that part of the narration which involves descriptions not central to the thesis will be summarised.

In the riverine regions of marutam of ancient fame and long-lasting greatness, due to having increased the renown of the royal clan of Anapāya Cōḷa with the upright white parasol, where, flowing naturally that the fields may yield bounteously, the pure waters of the Kāvēri plunge into and purify the salty ocean, there is the city of Puṅkār, great on account of the holy waters.12 (TTP 404)

In that prosperous city, in a leading merchant clan was one with an affluence born of unlimited wealth. He was foremost in the practice of servitude to the One with the white crescent on his locks ruddy like the evening (sky). To the peerless devotees of the One with the Vedas as his anklets, whoever they be, he would give all that they sought, without saying "No." He was famed in this sea-girt earth by his offering even

12 This is one of the key verses used to date the TTP. The Cōḷa king is called Anapāya and is referred to in the present tense (nīṭanapāyan) and so it is argued that Cēkkilār is referring to his patron. This patron is identified by most scholars as Kulōttuṅka II (1133-1150).
before he was asked. (In this munificence) he was Ulakiyarpakaiyar (contrary to the nature of the world). (TTP 405)

Through genuine allegiance to the Lord wearing the stream, his fathomless heart was filled with grace, and so he, translating into action the thoughts in the minds of those who wear sacred ash on their body, stood in the peerless good path of a householder. He cherished the fame of doing their (devotees') bidding believing it to be its (household life) the joyful blessing. (TTP 406)

Though subtle, requiring much discernment, He who (out of grace) dances outside in the hall - whether with the knowledge of the Goddess or without the inseparable lady's knowledge - we do not know! with the pure ash adorning his golden body, in the guise of a lecherous Brahmin that hid his true form, came to show his devotee's nature of never withholding. (TTP 407)

Reaching Pukār, he entered the house of Iyarpakaiyar that was on the side of the street where merchants lived. "My father, my lord's servitor has come," thus with a blissful regard, he went forward, his heart filled with love. Receiving him, Iyarppakai bowed and after performing elaborate worship said: "It is perhaps by virtue of the great austerities of my ancestors, that thou, O ascetic, hath graciously come here." (TTP 408)

To Iyarppakaiyar who spoke thus, that Brahmin of evil deportment who stood before him, replied: "Having heard your unequivocal quality of giving joyfully, without any denial, construing as unexceptionable whatever the devotees of the One with locks adorned by the Koṇṇai flowers, set their mind on and ask, I came here today, seeking something of you. If agreeable to it, you will be told." (TTP 409)

On hearing those words, Iyarppakaiyar said: "Whatever is at my disposal is the possession of my Lord's devotee; there is no doubt; graciously command me." "Your wife,
the abode of your love, desiring her, I came." Thus said the beautiful-eyed one to his face, but, delighted more than ever, the pure toṉṭar, saluting, said: (TTP 410)

"By asking me something I already possessed, my Lord has greatly blessed me," saying thus, he swiftly went to his beloved, his life-mate, eminently chaste and said, "O lady of noble clan, wedded to me by the ordained rites, today I have given you to this truly austere one." The wife, with tresses decked with honey-laden flowers, perturbed (at first), her mind becoming serene later, said: (TTP 411)

"If this is what you command me today, O thou who art the sole lord of my life, other than to do that which you say, is there any other obligation for me?" and as she saluted her uniquely great husband, he bowing down in turn, saluted her and she who was greater than Tiru (the goddess of Fortune) went and paid obeisance to the sacred feet of the sage and stood dazed. (TTP 412)

That great one who had given away the lady, with heartfelt joy, was most pleased and enthusiastically asked: "What is the next task for me?" As he stood saluting, that Lord who came in caste as a Brahmin, looking at him, said: "Escort me so that I can pass your loving relatives and this village, when I take this lady alone with me." (TTP 413)

The toṉṭar's unique nature was to give without denial whatever a devotee may desire or request. His disposition to proffer even before the devotees could formulate or articulate their desires, made him contrary to the ways of the world. Iyarpakai's servitude to Lord Śiva was the occasion for this gesture of generosity to his devotees. The genuineness of his devotion results in a welling up of grace within his heart and by virtue of it he is able to translate into action the intent of the devotees.
Iyaṇpakai, like Ciṟuttonṭar and other tonṭar in TTP, is filled with ardour every time he gets an opportunity to perform his tonṭu. When the lecherous-looking ascetic arrives, the tonṭar goes forth to receive him, with a blissful regard that fills his heart with love. His feelings hinge around his tonṭu alone. He promises the ascetic that whatever he possesses, would be his for the asking. He would be in the position of giving a negative reply though, if the ascetic were to ask for something he did not have. So he is delighted when the ascetic asks for his wife – something already in his possession. He not only gives away his wife but compounds it by defending his act when he later strikes down his kinsmen.

The attitude of the wife to this unusual request of the visitor and her husband's willingness to comply with it is interesting. Though stunned at first she rallies immediately, as her speech reveals, and after a little hesitation she accepts it on the basis that she has no higher duty than to obey her husband unquestionably. That she does not understand his actions is seen by her perplexity when he salutes her. He acts thus, because he perceives her as belonging to the ascetic. Cēkkilār delineates the wife's character very sensitively as it would be a strain on our credibility, if Iyaṇpakaiyār's wife had acceded cheerfully to her husband's command. Her feelings
and susceptibilities as revealed by the events make the drama real.

The Lord puts on the garb of a libertine, to highlight the nobility and limitless generosity of his devotee. He prods his devotee into making a blanket statement, (icayalāmenil iyampalām) thereby clearing the ground for his preposterous demand. To add to the injustice, he requests Iyaṛpakai to provide a safe escort out of the village, knowing fully well that the tonṭar's kinsmen would not tolerate such a vile act and would come armed to the rescue.

When the ascetic thus requested a safe escort, Iyaṛpakai reflected: "This is a small task that I ought to have thought of doing myself. It is my fault that I needed to be told by the great one who owns me." He quickly went into another room, donned splendid garments and arming himself with a sword and a shield, proceeded to escort the ascetic. Making the ascetic go ahead, he followed ready to defend him. The kinsmen of the wife and of the tonṭar saying: "Who would do a similar thing? If Iyaṛpakai has lost his mind can (we permit) one to take away his beautiful wife"? and so wishing to avenge the ignomy, armed themselves variously, and surrounded him.

With the escorting attendant following, he who is 'the companion of the journey' went with the lady, exhibiting overt signs of his love. Then they (the kinsmen) said: "Villain! Proceed not! Leaving here, this rare family creeper of ours, go free of
blame," and closed in on him in a crowd. (TTP 418)

The Brahmin-sage, as if afraid looked at the lady and the lady said: "O Lord! Fear not! Iyarapakai will subdue." The great one who wore the anklet of prowess, hearing (this) said: "I will fell them all to the ground. Please do not despair." (TTP 419)

Turning to the crowding kinsmen, he furiously warned them to remove themselves from the way and escape with their lives, for if they did not do so their bodies would become victim to his sharp sword. The angered relatives replied that since he was not moved by either the shame that would befall his friends or the ridicule of his foes and instead flaunted his valour by giving his wife to a stranger, they would die rather than permit this atrocity. Thereupon, the tontar launched an attack on the kinsmen who avoiding him, were converging on the ascetic and the lady. In the fight that ensued the valorous nayagar cut to pieces all his opponents, and except for those who ran away, there were no survivors.

Before we proceed to the climax of the story, it is necessary to note that the kinsmen, like the father of Cañticar, are operating within the norms of what they perceive to be right. They rightly believe that a man cannot give away his wife to a stranger (or anyone else for that matter). The base from which they proceed is the accepted mores in the social and moral sphere, and so their reaction
is fully righteous. They view Iyarpakai as mad since he has done something that violates all values.

The portrayal of the wife makes an interesting study. Since she accepts her husband's commands, she makes no appeal to her kinsmen but serenely proceeds with the ascetic. She fully accepts the ascetic to be her Lord, and treats her husband as a stranger. This is reflected by her referring to her husband by name and in the third person. (*Iyarpakai vellum*)

Having given his blessed wife and in the interim becoming angry, he who had hacked to pieces and killed the many kinsmen who had come, addressed the sage and said: "O Servitor! I will accompany you past this incomparable grove, so that you are not apprehensive" and went along. (*TTP* 428)

As the One who could not be known by the two (Brahma and Vishnu), followed by the lady, with the valorous hero behind, going forth, reached the vicinity of Cākāṭu, the brahmin-sage told the one with shoulders of prowess: "Return." (*TTP* 429)

When that holy sage commanded him to return, placing his head, lovingly on the flower-feet of Him, folding his hands, standing before and praising that god-on-earth who had come to save the three worlds, Iyarpakai said: "I was able to obtain his grace," and returned. (*TTP* 430)

The one who did that singularly rare act, that good torajar, left, and He of the neck with the dark stain, with eight shoulders and who is spoken of in the Vedas (*maraiyavag*), was pleased, and looking reflected: "He has no deceit in his heart, he is going without looking (back)," and commenced to recall that one with a true heart. (*TTP* 431)
"O Sage Iyarpakai! Help! Please return! Help! O you who knows no fatigue, Help! O devoted one, Help! Help! O hero who did that act that is inconceivable. Help!" cried He whom the Vedas that destroy ignorance hail, and whom Māl and Ayan had sought (unavailingly). (TTP 432)

Hearing that loud bidding to return, and saying: "I am there. I am there. If there are any more survivors, they will be cut by the big strong sword in my hand," Iyarpakaiyār reached there when he with the conch-earring adorning his ears vanished to assume (his true) form. (TTP 433)

He who reached there did not find the sage; he found the lady; then like a golden mountain resplendent atop a silver mountain, he saw the Lord in the sky, along with his companion, on the bull. He did not stand, but he fell down worshipping. Then he got up from the ground and attempted (to worship). (TTP 434)

"I do not know how to praise thee. Hail! Hail thou who caused this form to be! Hail to thee who came out of grace swiftly and took me in service! Hail to thee who blessed me with an unlimited flood of joy! Hail to the sacred feet that dance in the hall in Tillai." (TTP 435)

The lord of the white Bull standing in the sky, addressed his devotee, and said: "In this world, we are delighted to see this loving act of yours that was born of a devotion to us. 0 flawless one. Along with your blessed wife, come with us." (TTP 436)

To that holy devotee with a greatness due to the increasing grace, and to the wife of divine chastity who had achieved serenity, having given suitably the blessed state of dwelling in grace, praised by the gods, the Lord who rides the Bull, re-entered his abode of the golden hall. (TTP 437)

The celestials rained flower-showers; the great Vedas resounded; the great, wise sages praised, and in the sublime Sivaloka the blemishless toṭṭar obtained the fortune of
abiding in worship near (the Lord); and the other kinsmen obtained the pleasures of the heaven. (*TTP* 438)

The Lord, disguised as the ascetic, notes when Iyarpakai leaves them that he had no deceit in his heart because he left without looking back. This is the crucial point in the story. The *tontar*'s gift of his wife has parallels elsewhere.\(^{13}\) But the remarkable thing about him is that he has no lingering attachments. As the ascetic observes, he does not even look back. And this is the same wife who is earlier described as his beloved (*katali*). From the moment the ascetic asks for her, Iyarpakai considers her as no longer belonging to him. The manner in which he detaches himself from one who until then had been dear, is of course what brands him as singular - he is antinomian because he does the inconceivable act of giving his wife to a stranger. Cêkkilâr puts this comment in the mouth of the Lord himself. The ascetic calls out - "0 hero who did the act that is inconceivable. Help" (*ceyaɾkaɾuŋj ceypad ceypatirane olam*). His immediate response to the ascetic's cry of distress, is to jump to the conclusion that some of the kinsmen must have attempted to re-attack. This attitude reflects his passionate involvement in his *tontu* and his determination to let nothing come in the way of its successful execution. The Lord when he bestows his grace,

\(^{13}\)The story of Hariścandra for example, has similar overtones.
acclaims this act of his devotee, as a demonstration of love born of devotion.

Cēkkilār clearly spells out the problems that beset the story. The wife has problems, at least initially in accepting her husband's decree, but consistent with the way she perceived her duty, she abides by his decision. While Cēkkilār does not dwell on her actions in the later part of the story, her reaction to the ascetic's fear, wherein she treats her husband as a stranger, is revelatory of an interesting similarity with Iyaṟpakaiyār. Once she accepts her husband's commands, she seems to shed all her feelings for him. There is no lingering attachment and she is able to refer to him as a stranger quite calmly. So husband and wife share in this rather unusual trait of instant detachment.

Another interesting feature is that Iyaṟpakai addresses his wife as vitimaṇa...maṭantai "lady...wedded to me by the ordained rites." He does this to remind her of her duty to obey him implicitly. But the question arises as to whether the same description ought not to remind him of his own obligations towards her. He was forgetting the responsibilities and promises he had assumed at the time of his wedding, when he consented to give her away. Cēkkilār's use of this epithet at this point is a significant reminder that he had in fact not forgotten. His obligations to his wife, of which he is seen to be well-aware by the significant use of this term, are of no import before his
significant use of this term, are of no import before his tonťu. This reiterates the thesis that the tonťar have no compunction about discarding anything and everything, where their tonťu is involved. Nothing is too dear or too sacred in the face of the requirement of the tonťu and it is not as if the tonťar are unaware of the world around them of which they are part when they do this. Their actions cannot be justified with the simplistic explanation that the world in which they live and move is another one.

The relatives who died trying to prevent the unrighteous act reached the heavens. While they are highly critical of Iyaţpakai's action, they do not try to reason with him. Instead, considering him to have lost his mind, they try to stop the ascetic from taking the lady away. So their primary interest is to prevent the unrighteous and shameful act rather than engage in a confrontation.

The Lord disguises himself as a libertine in order to show his devotee's nature of never withholding anything. Cēkkilâr very capably indicates indirectly through a verse that this drama is motivated by grace. He first describes the Lord as one who is very subtle requiring much search but who yet dances out manifestly in the Hall. It is his graciousness and love for his devotees that makes him manifest himself voluntarily. The next few lines make a significant comment couched in humorous terms. Because the lord took on a disguise to solicit another man's wife the
it. Being his inseparable half, she could not but be aware and yet if she was aware, how could she permit this philandering? Significant, of course, is the fact that it is the goddess who personifies the Lord's grace and so her involvement in the drama signifies that this is an act steeped in grace. The drama is therefore to Čekkišar, only an occasion for grace and a revelation of the tonţar's excellence in his assumed task.

Kaţţappar

The story of Kaţţappar is acclaimed as a panegyric of love par excellence, in all quarters. Mânîkkavâcakar laments on his own lack of love in comparison to Kaţţappar. The author of Tirukkaţîrţupaţiyar (52) points out that the incomparable love personified by Kaţţappar could be comprehended by Kaţţappar and Kâḻattiyâr (Lord Šiva) and by no one else. It has been pointed out earlier that almost all the early hymn-singers, as well as all later day saints, have sung about the bhakti of Kaţţappar.

For our own thesis, Kaţţappar's story represents the culmination point of the fervent devotion that finds expression in tonţu. It is the apogee of tonţu, especially of the kind we have been analyzing so far. This is not to suggest that there is a gradation in tonţu or among tonţar. Each devotee is unique and as important as the other. The reason, however, that Kaţţappar's story is described by
others and by us as the apex of the stories under analysis is that here toṭu is most clearly shown as love and nothing else. Toṭu is freed of all the layers of socio-religious and ritualistic ties that cloak it in other stories, and is set out in its purest form as love. In this story too, there is toṭu in the form of service. But as Lord Śiva himself acclaims, all actions of this devotee become his toṭu. Kaṇṇappar lives and moves in a world that is of the stuff of love = toṭu. If the actions of Caṇṭicar, Ciruttoṇṭar and Iyarpakai appear to be incomprehensible, Kaṇṇappar's actions should be placed in a plane beyond that. As the Tirukkaḷirruppaṭiyār aptly sums up, only the devotee and the Lord can probably comprehend this incredible love.

Cēkkiḻar makes use of Kaṇṇappar's story to present a lot of picturesque details about the locale, practices and life style of the hunters. These details are useful in reconstructing the culture of this particular group of people but as this does not directly pertain to our thesis, we will skim over these descriptions and focus mainly on the events leading to the encounter between God and the hunter. The encounter itself, like those in other stories will be narrated closely following Cēkkiḻar's rendering.

The land of Kaṇṇappar, who was blessed by the Lord of Kāḷatti, is Pottappi surrounded by groves and lakes praised by the poets. In this country, his home was the ancient town of Uṭuppūr that was in the midst of the
mountains and was guarded by fences of elephant-tusks. Hunters lived there in the company of animals like boar, deer, bear, tiger etc., that were tamed and used to help capture wild animals. The cubs of these animals ran free in the village and were the playmates of the hunters' children. These hunters lived by robbing travellers and by capturing the herds of their neighboring enemies.

The chief of this martial tribe that knew neither fear nor compassion, whose garments were raw hide and whose diet consisted of honey and meat mixed with rice, was Nākaṇ. Though he had merit enough to bear the son who was to be the greatest of devotees, yet by virtue of his birth, "he lived holding violence as virtue, fore-most in cruelty." Skilled in archery, he was like an infuriated lion and his wife Tattai, of an ancient lineage, was likewise like a fearful lioness. They were childless and though it was said that it would be improbable for them to have a child on account of their great desire, they supplicated the Lord of the hills, (Murukaṇ) for a child. By his grace a son was born to them; an occasion of joy to those hunters as well as the celestials. Because it was difficult to hold the husky child they called him Tiṇṇanaṛ. Growing up amidst children of his tribe, each stage of his life was celebrated by his doting parents, and Tiṇṇanaṛ reached the age when he could handle the bow. His father invited the chiefs of all the tribes who came with gifts. Having offered sacrifices to the deities of
the mountains, they tied charms to the bow that was Meru, "that had (earlier) churned poison from the sea for Him and was (later) to make the flesh nectar." After seven days of festivities and revelries, the most skilled archer of the tribe taught Tiṃṇañ to handle the bow, and beginning that day he practised every day until he could masterfully handle the bow. Learning the art of archery and other weapons in the best possible manner, his handsomeness also increased, like the growing digits of the moon, until he reached his sixteenth year, when he appeared as if he were "the measureless merit growing into efflorescence."

While he grew thus, Nākaṇ, who had for years led the hunting expeditions in the forests, hills and neighboring territories, with the onset of old age, became feeble. When the hunters came and complained that the wild animals were straying into the villages and fields, Nākaṇ informed them that the feebleness of age made him incapable of leading any hunting expedition and that they should now take his son as their chief. When they joyfully assented, he sent for his son and also Tēvarāṭṭi, the old priestess of the clan. When the priestess came, he told her of his son's impending chieftainship and requested her to make offerings to the different deities so that "he would be more successful than him (Nākaṇ) in his hunting activities." The Tēvarāṭṭi replied that she had seen omens that day, better than any other day, and so his son Tiṃṇañ "would excel, even more
than him - not stopping at his level (of excellence)." After she went, taking with her the necessary offerings for the gods, in plenty, Tīṇṇāṇ came into the presence of his father. When Nākaṇ informed his son and instructed him to take up the chieftainship and lead the hunters in conquering the enemies and in their hunting expeditions, Tīṇṇāṇ, at first grieved, but finally accepted the chieftainship, realising the pressing need for it. Taking on the insignia of rule blessed by his father, Tīṇṇāṇ began his preparations for his maiden hunt (*kappivēṭṭai*). Dressed and adorned appropriately, accompanied by the host of hunters, armed with necessary equipment, hunting dogs etc., Tīṇṇāṇ left for the hunt. His venture was blessed by Tevarāṭṭī who prophesied "even for your father and his father such goodness did not obtain. Your valour is great; it cannot be measured by us." (*TTP* 715)

That great one who was going (ahead) to cut the meshes of the timeless bonds, externally (seeming) to go to engage in archery and trapping with nets for the hunt, was preceded by the hunters who carried different nets and ropes to trap the animals of the cloud-bearing hills and forests. (*TTP* 719)

Making a loud noise with their hands, drums etc. they surrounded the thick forest on the southern hill that abounded in deer, boars and wild buffaloes and that had been tracked by their expert trackers. Laying their traps with nets and ropes, they set their dogs on and followed them
with their bows. As the animals, disturbed from their hideouts, ran helter-skelter, the hunters began their slaughter.

While the hunters were engaged in their killing, a boar, black as rain clouds, eyes glowing wickedly, throwing sparks like lightning, grunting with a noise like thunder, breaking through the nets, ran swiftly. In an instant, Tiṇṇanagara was at its heel, unnoticed by all but two of his fellow hunters, Naṇaṇa and Kāṭaṇa. These two followed their chief as he gave chase to the wild boar, that escaping the dogs was running through the thick forests on the slopes of a hill. Coming upon it, Tiṇṇanagara avoiding use of his bow and arrows, drew out his hand-sword and in direct combat killed it.

The account so far has been the preliminary to the most important event in the life of Tiṇṇanagara. It is interesting to note that this long description of the hunter's life-style, with violence being the key-note, provides a backdrop to the saint's life to come. To continue the story in Cēkkilār's words.

Perceiving the boar that had fallen nearby in two pieces, when cut swiftly by that dark-hued, red-eyed, bow bearing hunter, Nāṇaṇa, said: "O Kāṭaṇa! We were exhausted following this boar so many leagues today. Ah wonder! This man just killed it." And they bowed before his feet. (TT 741)

They further told Tiṇṇanagara: "By having come this far extreme hunger has come upon us. So frying this meat that we have obtained, after you partake a little, we too would like to eat and drink water, before we
slowly return to the victorious hunting forest." (TTP 742)

As they said this, Tiññanăr looked at them and asked: "Where is good water in this forest?" Nănañ replied: "If you go past this great grove of Teak (Tectona grandis) that stands near the high hill, there the cool Ponnukali runs." (TTP 743)

Then the hunter with the fiery bow, said: "Let us go there. Take this (boar) with you." Thus saying he (Tiññañ) too went towards the river and after half a league he saw the grove on the slopes of the holy hill where resided the One with the red-eyed bull. (TTP 744)

"O Nănañ! Let us approach that hill that we perceive," said he and Nănañ replied: "If you are going there to look a good sight awaits you. In this Tirukkāḷatti hill that towers to the sky, rising majestically, stays Kūtumi Tēvar, who sets to naught all faults. We can worship him." (TTP 745)

"What is happening? As I behold this hill and approach it, it feels as if the burden on me is slipping away. And in that heart in which a fervour has been springing up more and more, another longing has manifested itself. Where is the Lord here? Lead." said Tiññanăr. (TTP 746)

As he spoke thus and hastily went ahead, they too went along and reached the Tirumukali river which had deposited on the sand-banks everywhere, pearls from the bamboo that grew high on both sides of the bank, fragments of ahir wood, and sandal wood, and other gems, gold and diamonds that were yielded by the hill. (TTP 747)

There near that bank, under the calm shade of a tree, setting down the boar, he instructed Kātañ of the bent bow: "Preparing the fire-sticks out of wood, create a fire here. We will climb this hill and after looking will return." And along with Nănañ, he went. (TTP 748)
Entering the clear waters of the river that swept with it flowers from the bee-covered groves on the banks, Tiṇṇaṇār, whose mind was becoming clear, with ecstatic joy welling up, gazed at Kāḷatti hill, crossed the cool river, and reached the slopes of the lofty hill. (TTP 749)

As the sun reached its zenith, on the peak of that grand, divine hill, the five (divine instruments) that gave reverberating noise, resounded like the uproar of the ocean. "What is this Nānā?" To him who asked, Nānā replied: "This must perhaps be the sound of bees that surround this big sweet hill. Settling on the honey-laden flowers, they now fly away." (TTP 750)

The store of austerities, done previously, then became manifest as unlimited rapturous love, with immeasurable longing arising and condensing into a strong ardour, with bones dissolving and a great passion surfacing in his heart, towards the mountain of the Lord (the great giver). . . (TTP 751)

When with Nānā and his love climbing ahead up the cool mountain, he (Tiṇṇaṇā) too, as if one who climbs the multitude of steps that are principles that support (the soul) to reach the grace of Śivam, ascended the lofty hill of the Lord to encounter . . . (TTP 752)

Before the one who went up could see the One with locks bearing the moon, the Lord's compassion charged gaze descended on him. And with the remnants of the holds of his birth detaching and drifting away, he became an incomparable embodiment of love for the feet of the ever-expanding Effulgence. (TTP 753)

He saw the One Lord arising like a sprout on the Tirukkāḷatti hill that filled the sky; with the drive of the great aroused delight of love going ahead of him, with increased speed, he ran as if enamoured, and embraced Him and kissed Him on the crown of His head. (TTP 754)
For a long time standing like that, with all his hair standing on end, tears streaming from his flower-eyes, reflecting: "Ah! For me, such a one was obtainable here," and he appeared (like) a personification of incomparable love. (TTP 755)

"Like one of the cruel, killing hunter tribes, in this forest where elephants, bears, tigers and lions roam, with no one to bear you company; alas! are you to stay here alone," he lamented. (TTP 756)

Unaware of the bow slipping, the youth again said: "Who did the good act of plucking and offering these green leaves and flowers and pouring water"? And the bow-bearing Nāṇaṉ who stood near-by said: "I know this." (TTP 757)

"Along with your valorous father, after hunting animals, once we came to this hill. After bathing this one with cool water, adorning Him properly with leaves and flowers, feeding and saying (something) was a Brahmin. He did this then, so now too it must have been done by him," he said. (TTP 758)

Though arising, it (the sense of worship) had filled his heart, Tinnanār with a love that was insatiable" and ceaseless, reflected: "These are probably the acts that have been determined as pleasing to the Lord of Tirukkāḷatti," and held onto them. He did not want to part from the Lord and his attachment increasing (he thought:). . . . (TTP 759)

"Except for me who found Him, he would remained alone! Alas! There is no one to bring meat for Him to eat. I cannot bear to part from Him. What will I do? I have now to fetch and bring Him meat, as much as he wants." thus . . . (TTP 760)

He would start to leave; then return; embrace (the Lord); leave again; stop and gaze with love; like a cow recently calved trying to leave its calf he would behave. Then he said: "My Lord! For your meal, I will myself fetch tender good meat checking
that it is free of fault and return." (TTP 761)

"'Who is to give you company while you are here,' thus thinking I do not depart; nor can I bear to stay here, while you remain hungry"! thus with tears flowing profusely, drawing courage to leave, he picked up his bow, worshipped with his flower-like hands, and departed. (TTP 762)

Leaving the 'presence' with great difficulty, descending the hill with jutting peaks, with Naṉṉaṉ following, abandoning his interest in earlier concerns, he who was propelled by the love that possessed him, climbed the other bank of Tirumukali, adorned by gold, and entered the grove of fresh flowers. (TTP 763)

These verses portray for us the transformation of the hunter, whose background is that of a rough and cruel tribe, into one of the foremost devotees of the bhakti tradition. The hunter tribe, as has been described, was one that 'knew neither compassion nor fear'. But the compassion and love that Tiṉṉaṉaṉ was to manifest, indicates that the potential was there, needing only to be activated. In Tiṉṉaṉaṉ's case, the very mention of the Lord's name was sufficient to awaken those feelings. Even as he approaches the hill of the Lord, he notes the arousal of emotions that were new to him. An inexpressible delight accompanied by fervent longing impels him to go towards this Being that he was told about. He experiences a feeling of lightness as if all his burdens had slipped away. The love and joy that he feels are hyphenated - they are not different from each other. As he nears the hill, the immense love that he
experiences gets its focus. It becomes more and more concrete. And on the negative side, he becomes disassociated from all the worldly ties. The ensuing result is that he becomes the very image of love for the Lord.

If this description is taken as an exposition on the manifestation of love in all the tontar, we would be able to see that concurrently with love for the Lord, a silent disinvolve with the world takes place in the psyche of the tontar. In the tradition of sannyasa, there is a conscious effort at self-control and withdrawal from involvement in the world. But here in bhakti, the process is reversed. By making himself an embodiment of love for the Lord, by becoming the locus of love and nothing else, the tontar leaves no room for any other tie. Instead of an emptying out, there is a filling in. Čekkiľar, therefore, describes that as he became 'the embodiment of love for the feet of the ever-expanding Effulgence', the remnants of the holds of his birth, detaching drifted away. So it is not by any conscious effort of his but rather by a lack of nourishment that these holds drop away. Čekkiľar, in deference to his tradition, describes it as the consequence of the onset of grace. In all the stories then, when the love for the Lord is described, a simultaneous disassociation of ties has to be assumed even when it is not explicitly mentioned if we are to understand the attitude and actions of the tontar.
The overwhelming love that Tiṅnaṅār experiences brings in its trail a whole set of emotions. When Tiṅnaṅār beholds the Lord, he is overcome by his passionate love. Immediately following that, he is moved by a sense of his own unworthiness and the mysterious awesomeness of the Lord. The loneliness of the Lord makes him despondent. Beholding signs of worship and learning their origin he decides that this must be pleasing to the Lord and that he should do something similar. He desires to satiate the hunger of the Lord but finds it difficult to part from him. The beautiful and touching description of his indecision and longing reveals the 'reality' of the Being for him. His concerns stem from his perception of the Lord as such. If we continue in our attempt to understand the actions of other toṇṭarāṁ in the light of Tiṅnaṅār's actions, this attitude of his to the Śivaliṅga can be identified with the attitude of the other toṇṭar to the devotees. In both kinds of situations, the toṇṭar themselves see only the Lord and not his representation in the liṅga or the devotees. It is only to the outsider that these seem to represent or stand for God. The toṇṭar often reveal this attitude of immediate worship in their mode of address to the devotee.

Tiṅnaṅār leaves the hill of the Lord, on an errand for the Lord himself. He is propelled by the love that possessed Him and sheds all his interest in earlier concerns. As has been noted earlier, the simultaneity of the
two is what makes him unique and completely given over to the Lord.

And Kāṭaṇ going in front and bowing, said: "I made the fire. Check from all sides the limbs of this tusked boar in accordance with your memory of it. How is it that you tarried, delaying the time of our departure." Nāṇaṇ who stood there . . . (TTP 764)

Said: "There on the hill he seeing the God (Tēvar), and embracing would not, like a iguana (varanus bengalensis) holding onto a hollow (vaṅku), let go. Here too he has come only to take the meat for that Lord to eat. He has given up the chieftainship of our tribe. He has given himself to the God."

"What did you do Tiṇṇā! What infatuation did you assume? Are you not our great chief"? thus said Kāṭaṇ, but he did not look at him, but roasted the huge, strong boar in the fire and with an arrow, carved and collected tasty morsels of flesh . . .(TTP 766)

Stringing them onto a skewer, he roasted the fat meats to tenderness and, desiring to check their sweetness first, he put them in his mouth and chewed and the most delectable of them, he put together in a container made earlier of leaves. (TTP 767)

Those who stood nearby, went on: "His infatuation is deepening. Alas! This rare to obtain meat, he frying chews and spits; though of great hunger, he does not seek to talk; he does not remember to give us our reward; he discards the rest of the meat. (TTP 768)

This Tiṇṇāṇ is possessed by God; we do not know the way to cure him. We should return home and fetch Tēvarāṭṭi, along with Nākaṇ and heal him. (So) taking from the hunting forest the other servants we will go." Thus reflecting they went. (TTP 769)

Unaware of the departure of the foresters, and quickly arranging the meat-dish in the
bowl, wishing to perform the sacred bath, storing in his pure mouth, the good water of the great river, he placed in plenty on his hair the fragrant fresh flowers he had plucked. (TTP 770)

Along with the sharp arrows, holding the bow in one hand, and carrying in one hand the bowl containing good food of pure tender meat, mourning: "My dear lord will be extremely hungry," with tenderness, very swiftly did Tiṇṇaṅār reach the Lord's mountain. (TTP 771)

Reflecting that the Lord was fatigued, quickly going and beholding the Primal One sprouting from the mountain, removing with the beautiful slipper worn on his feet, the flowers on the crown (of the Lord), he poured on the Pure One's crown, the water for ablutions, as if he were discharging the love that had welled up. (TTP 772)

Placing the flowers that he bore on his head on the crown of the Lord on top of the lofty hill, Tiṇṇaṅār, whose lovely hand rested on the bow, placed the dish of meat that was in a bowl of stitched together leaves, in front and . . . (TTP 773)

Said: "Examining (and finding) the fat-meat and stringing it onto a skewer, roasting it to tenderness, munching it with my teeth and testing the sweetness with my experienced tongue, this food that is offered is very tasty, My Lord! Please eat graciously." (TTP 774)

Saying such words, the king of hunters, caused the Lord to eat and with rising love thought: "For Him of the Tirukkāḷattī hill, more sweet, good meat is needed." Beholding this (love) the sun folding his many long hands, set behind the hill. (TTP 775)

Following the fall of dusk and fearing, "There are fierce animals that prowl in night," and bearing a great love that knew not anything apart from Truth, and holding in his sacred hand the bow, like a black hillock, he stood without leaving the side of the Lord. (TTP 776)
He who could not be seen by those ascetics performing arduous penances, dwelling in cloud-surrounded mountains and forests, or by celestial gods; was seen through a love that knew no satiety and that overflowed in its longing, as he stood looking directly, waiting for the long darkness to end. (TTP 777)

Tinnanār's worship of the Lord seems to be a parody of the worship of the priest. He is, of course, ignorant of the ritualistic mode of worship. And having heard about the worship of the priest from Nana, he tries to follow it as best as he can. Though stemming in love, to all appearances his actions seem to make a mockery of Āgamic worship. He carries the water meant for the holy ablutions in his mouth, thereby rendering it polluted. Similarly, he carries the flowers for worship on his hair, which is again prohibited. And the naivedya or offering of food that he makes, is firstly meat, an forbidden item in Āgamic ritual, and is secondly chewed by him before being offered to the God. He clears the flowers strewn on the Lord's crown with his slipper-clad foot, a desecration of the worst kind. All his actions undercut at the very base of worship of the formal ritualistic kind. He acts with no awareness of 'the sacrosanct' nature of the Lord. The intimacy he displays defies the conception of the Lord as 'Other' and 'master'. It is love that bridges the gap between the devotee and the Lord. This is not to say that there is a lack of love when the gap is felt, for later in the story we come across
Civakōcariyār, who represents a different kind of devotee but whose devotion to the Lord is also quite undeniable. The interesting twist to all of Kaṇñappar's actions is the acclaim that it receives in the words of the Lord, to be seen in the sequel.

With twilight passing and the dark hours that followed elapsing, hearing the sounds of the chirping birds that announced the shortening of the night, the hero, who stood like the dark sea, his eyes unclosed, wished to fetch food for the Lord he had dearly obtained... (TTP 781)

Considering the best time to kill by the hunters' ploy the short-legged boars and the antelopes and deer and other animals to be the hours when forms are indistinctly perceived (dawn) he took the bow that destroys all foes and worshipping the Lord, left. (TTP 782)

Removing the dense darkness, the Sun who comes on a chariot showing his face, arose, as if (aiding) the bow-bearing one with a love that manifests truth, in his lone hunt to ambush the animals that lived in the forest, by unveiling the curtain of darkness and pointing out with his rays (the animals). (TTP 783)

In accordance with the (mode of) worship set out in the Āgamas, with plucked flowers, water etc. came Civakōcariyār, a sage of austerities, who worshipped regularly that Elixir of the Hill, with the neck stained dark. (TTP 784)

Ascending the hill and going near the Lord of the celestials, with mental propriety, he beheld in the holy presence roasted flesh and bones. Leaping over them and running, he lamented: "O this blasphemy, alas, who did it"! (TTP 785)

"The hunters who fear no restrictions, it is they who did this. O Lord of Lords! In thy holy presence can they do this and go scot-
free! And for such a thing to happen, does thy divine will permit"? Thus, shocked, crying, he fell down, his head reeling. (TTP 786)

"Delaying the worship of that flaming sprout that rises on the hill, what am I doing, staying here," thus reflecting and sweeping away the flesh and the bones with the leaves, and the prints of the slippers and the dog, with eagerness, he plunged into the Tirumukali river and quickly returned. (TTP 787)

A defilement having occurred, to redress it performing acts of reparation and worship, collecting what he could get (flowers etc.) and beginning his pure worship, he performed completely and undeviatingly the worship beginning with faultless holy ablutions, and bowed to the feet of the Primal Lord. (TTP 788)

Prostrating and getting up and praising with the words of the Vedas that affirmed in diverse ways "He is the sole, transcendent Reality," and taking leave of the Beautiful-eyed One whose locks of hair bear the glowing moon, with a pacified heart the holy sage returned to his hermitage. (TTP 789)

Thus the great sage went. Now here (in the forest), (says the poet) I will relate the feats of the dark-hued, black-tufted, lord of the forest-hunters in bending the beautiful bow and hunting alone in the forest. And doing so I will overcome any evil inclinations. (TTP 790)

Going away from the sacred hill, Tiṇṇaṇār, amidst the valleys of huge mountains with jutting rocks, slaughtered the big boars that grazed on fields and were returning. Concealing himself, he killed graciously also the deer herds that were moving in a certain route in the forest. (TTP 791)

Mimicking their call he called the antelopes and shot (them with) cruel arrows with sharp tips that pierce painfully. Following the foot-prints of the deer he shot them while they slept and then killing the wild
buffaloes, he finished his solitary hunt as the heat radiating blazing rays deepened. (TTP 792)

Laying together the slaughtered animals, in a shady place in the dense forest, drawing his hand-sword, he cut the fire-sticks and plucking sweet wild honey combs, he made with Teak leaves big round bowls with a broad base. (TTP 793)

Breaking up and piling small pieces of wood, he made a fire out of Araṇi sticks. Fanning it into a blaze, cleaving the animals with the sharp side of the arrow, he carved out the fat-meat and frying it as needed he obtained (in such manner the meat) . . . (TTP 794)

With the sharp arrow cutting and chopping it, he cut out the flesh of the different organs and placed them in a bowl. He hung them onto a skewer and roasted them in the fire until tender. He then made the pure sacred food and proceeded to check its sweetness. (TTP 795)

As if placing in the beautiful mouth of the fire that conveys and feeds the food that is offered to the many numerous gods, Tinnanār, as if checking the suitability (of the offering) for the Lord of Tirukkāḷatti, placed in his mouth the sacred food of meat. (TTP 796)

Depositing tenderly cooked flesh that he had placed in his mouth, in a bowl and squeezing honey (on it), he carried it very quickly, collecting speedily the flowers of worship and pure water as before . . . (TTP 797)

Arriving, he, the chief of the foresters ascended the hill, and reached the chief of the gods. He then removed as before the (remnants) of worship of the Brahmin-priest, and completed his worship in the manner (he had done) earlier. (TTP 798)

Placing the bowl with the flesh-food before the deity, he said: "This will be better than the earlier one. Along with the flesh of boar, those of antelope, deer, and
buffalo have gone into this food; I too have tasted it; it is also mixed with honey; it will be delectable." (TTP 799)

In this manner offering sacred food, he continued in the path of performing the matchless worship. With ever-increasing love, in the presence of the Lord of Kāḷatti, he would not sleep during the night and by day he would hunt. (TTP 800)

The great sage, daily arriving and beholding the worship of the king of hunters, becoming very despondent removing it as foul, worshipping in the right manner in accordance with the Āgamas continued in his path. (TTP 801)

On Kāṭan, along with Nānaṅ, going and informing, Nākaṅ, without food or sleep he, bringing the one with divine possession (Tēvaratī), reaching his cherished son, tried to distract him in diverse ways. Not succeeding in bringing him to the path they were familiar with, he gave up. (TTP 802)

Formerly, by the gracious glance of the Lord of Kāḷatti, like iron being transmuted into gold by alchemy, he who was joyously transformed, with the nature of his body, the dual actions and the three mala(s) that colour the soul being cut, and who roamed about as a 'blaze of love' - is he within the grasp of them? (TTP 803)

Three paths are being identified and brought into play here. The hunter continues in his worship and offering of food in the manner set out earlier. This incomparable worship is the path that he forges for himself, being untaught in the formal ritualistic mode of worship. Out of his ever-springing love, he thus worships and does not sleep in the night, while by day he goes hunting.

The priest, on the other hand, regularly arrives at the appointed hour to perform his worship. The worship of
the hunter causes him to become despondent and he removes what he considers a sacrilege and performs his worship in accordance with the prescriptions of the Āgamas. This is the path that he has been trained in and which he treads.

The father of Tiṇṇañār knows only one path - his own life-style. He believes his son to be possessed and therefore comes along with the Tēvarāṭṭi - the priestess. When they find that their efforts to distract him and bring him around to their way of thinking as unsuccessful, they give up and leave him alone.

The path that Tiṇṇañār treads, may be different from that of the priest and the hunters. But each of them is acting within the frame-work of his perception of what is the right path (nerī). It is important to note that while for Tiṇṇañār neither of the other paths exists, their value is not being absolutely abrogated. Only for Tiṇṇañār are they non-existent. For the others they are very real and of existential concern as well.

The reaction of Civakōcariyār stems from his ritualistic back-ground. His approach to God was one of awe, since he perceived the 'highest reality' to be a noumenon. To find, then, that someone was acting with scant respect in the holy sanctum fills him with the utmost despair. The sacrilege is daily redressed by him with acts of reparation. His inability to bear what he deems to be evil and polluting
is to lead him to appeal to the Lord to intervene and put a stop to these actions of the unknown person.

Another interesting detail that is revealed in the last verse, is a condensed form of the Śaiva Siddhānta theory of the onset of grace and its consequences. The descent of the gracious glance of the Lord transmutes the gross form of Tinnanār into an embodiment of love. The 'grossness' was due to the nature of the body, the two kinds of actions and the 'dirt' (mala) that clings. In the language of Śaiva Siddhānta, the first would be māyā mala, the second karma mala, and the third ānava mala. These three are the mala(s) that cause the forging of the bonds that keep the soul in bondage. The nature of these bonds become dysfunctional at the time of saktinipāta or the descent of grace. The quintessence of the doctrine of grace of the Śaiva school is thus being propounded by Cēkkilār in a verse. It should be noted that it is verses like these that are acclaimed as important source-material to the philosophical school that was soon to come.

In this state as the devotee worshipped in the way he knew, the great sage, worshipping according to the rules of the excellent Āgamas, said: "O my Lord! I don't perceive the one who does this! By your grace, you should put a stop to this." (TTP 804)

That night, graciously appearing in the dream of the blessed sage, the One of the Vedas, with a crown of matted hair that shines said: "Do not think of him as just a cruel strong hunter. Listen as I tell you of the good actions of him." (TTP 805)
"His very frame is of the form of love unto us; all his thoughts are that which knows us; all his actions are dear to us; know his stature to be thus," the Lord graciously said. (TTP 806)

"The touch of the slippered feet is as if the torrent of love overflows when he after ascending the hill and before doing his worship, lovingly wishes to remove the flowers that were strewn earlier with regard, is dearer to me than the tender feet of the young child (Skanda) (TTP 807)\textsuperscript{14}

As if it spills from the mouth of the overflowing receptacle that is his body filled incessantly with molten love, purer than the sacred waters of the great Gaṅgā that spouts from the ears of a sage, and purer than other sacred waters for me is the water spilt from his mouth. (TTP 808)

As if the naturally blossoming genuine love of the forester, who has reached me on this hill, flowering forth, has fallen, none of the flowers offered me by the celestials beginning with Brahmā on the red lotus and Māl are comparable to the flowers that he offers me with his head. (TTP 809)

In the hot fire, doing it to a turn, and desiring out of love to see whether it is cooked, as he with a tender affectionate heart chews it to tenderness, sweeter than havīs offered by the sacrificial priests is the flesh offered by the bowed one. (TTP 810)

Of the joyfully pronounced words of the renowned Vedas by the great sages, of sweetly worded hymns or mantra(s), the words of him who stays in front with a rejoicing face and a brimming heart, and thinks in love, of nothing but me - they are the good words! (TTP 811)

\textsuperscript{14}The five verses beginning with this are considered to be interpolations by some editors. See C.K.Subramaniya Mudaliyar (1933:207-224) for a detailed discussion of the verses considered doubtful.
Tomorrow, if you hide yourself, I will show you his actions and you will see the nature of his love for me. Cast aside your heartache," thus graciously informing the Brahmin sage, the Lord with the river on his locks disappeared. (TTP 812)

His dream-state ending, waking up and realising, the great sage of austerities did not sleep through the night until dawn, his heart filled with great wonder and awe and as the one who comes on a single chariot with quick horses, showed his rays... (TTP 813)

As in former days, arriving and bathing in the waters of the Tirumukali, reflecting repeatedly on the revelation of the Lord, ascending the high Kālatti hill, worshipping the Lord as before, he then hid. (TTP 814)

The one with the bow who stood like a black cloud, without sleeping as the sixth day approached, in the morning as night departed and before the unique Brahmin sage arrived left as before to perform his lone, great hunt... (TTP 815)

With the matchless meat-food and good water for ablutions and fresh flowers that were to adorn the head - arranging differently, he moved towards the One of Tirukkālatti who was a refuge to the river, the Dear One who is nectar to the discerning, in order to become one with Him. (TTP 816)

"I delayed too long" he thought. To him who thus (thinking) hastily went, many omens appeared all indicating evil. "These evil omens reveal before me signs of blood. What could have happened to my Father? Alas! I am lost" as he thought thus and neared... (TTP 817)

The lord, the great one of Tirukkālatti, to show to the sage, the love of Tīṇṇaṇār, remained with blood gushing forth from one of his sacred eyes. Seeing this from afar, the one with the beautiful bow came running swiftly. (TTP 818)
He came and he saw the blood. Losing consciousness, with the good water from his mouth spilling, the meat and the bow from his hands scattering and falling and the bunch of flowers of worship, on his tuft, disturbed, drooping, he of the chest with a garland of fresh flowers fell on the ground, upset. (TTP 819)

He who collapsed got up, and going near wiped away the blood. He could not see the flow of blood ceasing and he did not know what to do. Sighing he again, fell dejected. Gathering himself he thought, "Who did this"? and getting up, he looked in all directions and picked up his bow . . . (TTP 820)

Choosing arrows, he reflected, "Was this done by strong hunters (dwelling) on this hill who are my foes? Or was this done by some kind of animal like a lion? I do not know." He searched in many ways on the slopes of the huge ranging hills. (TTP 821)

He saw no hunter. Searching near and far, he found no cruel animals. Coming once again to the Lord's presence, with prolonged grief, he held onto the flower-feet, embracing them closely and bewailed with tears flowing . . . (TTP 822)

"To the Lord, who as sinner that I am I beheld, what happened? To our father who is dearer than life, what happened? He who forsakes not those who seek him - to that Pure one, what happened? I do not know what needs to be done, what shall I do"? and then further . . (TTP 823)

"What needs to be done to heal this? I do not see the ones who did this kind of an injury to my Lord earlier. I will search in the valley of the beautiful hill for the sure medicine which the hunters with anklets (of valour) regularly use to cure the injuries caused by the long, shining arrows and bring it." Saying thus, he left. (TTP 824)

Thinking thus, going to the different dense forests, apprehensive like a red-eyed bull
parted from its kind, he went amidst the fields and plucking, returned faster than his mind that was placed on the Lord of the demons and mixing the medicine he applied. (TTP 825)

Perceiving that by the medicines he mixed and applied, the oozing in the injury of the eye of the king of Tirukkāḷatti, still flowed, without decrease, he reflected: "What is to be done now," and the dictum 'Flesh is the cure for the disease of the flesh' came to him. (TTP 826)

"Now for this, if I scoop out my eye with an arrow and apply it to my Lord's eye, it may serve as medicine for it and stop the blood-flow from the eye," and with a heart brimming with joy in the holy presence, he inserted an arrow in the base of the eye and taking it applied to the Lord's eye . . . (TTP 827)

When he saw the flow of blood stop, he leapt up from the ground; he clapped his shoulders that were huge like hills; and dancing he gleefully thought: "Great was this idea of mine." With abiding ecstasy, he behaved like a mad man. (TTP 828)

The Lord, in order to show further the greatness of the munificent one (Tiṇṇapār) who had applied his eye in the sacred right eye, in the other eye too, caused a ceaseless flow of red blood. Then he who had come among hunters by their tribes' great merit and who by his principle was greater than the celestials . . . (TTP 829)

Having seen this he thought: "I am lost! While the blood from the injury of one eye of our Lord of Kāḷatti, has been stopped, from the other eye blood flows profusely; but I am not afraid of this for I found the cure through experience. I have one more eye and scooping and applying that, I will stop (this flow)." (TTP 830)

Reflecting on the way he would see to apply his eye to the eye of the 'one with an eye on his fore-head', he planted his left foot on the holy eye of the Lord, and with a
heart filled with longing, took that uniquely great arrow. As Tiṇṇaṇār inserted it in his eye, the Lord of gods, unable to bear it . . . (TTP 831)

He who rides the bull, the beautiful-eyed one who possessed Tiṇṇaṇār, that Wonder of Tirukkāḷatti's divine hand, caught the hand of the devotee that was about to scoop out his eye and as the One with serpent as bracelet, said thrice with nectar-like words: "Stop Kaṇṇappa"! . . . (TTP 832)

When the Lord of hunters, scooped and applied his eye and when the Lord who relished the meat-dish, caught (his hand) before (he could do so) - the wise sage beheld; the celestials beginning with Brahmā showered flowers, with the Vedas resounding. (TTP 833)

Is there any greater blessing? Beholding and upset by the injury to the eye of his Lord, he scooped his eye and applying it with a hand that was caught by the hand of the Lord, whose flag has the bull, was blessed forever by Him who said: "Peerless One! Stand on my right." (TTP 834)

The very form of Tiṇṇaṇār, is love; all his thoughts are centred on the Lord. His actions, therefore, whatever they be are pleasing to the Lord. In five verses these actions are praised by the Lord, with a set of contrasts. The key-word in all this is 'love'. The actions are all transmuted and receive enviable praise because of their base. The climax reveals the incredible form in which love could manifest itself. Not only does Tiṇṇaṇār perform an act that is self-destructive in nature, but he does it as a joyful celebration of his love. He suffers no pain or anguish at his loss, which is extremely unnatural. Or at least, if he does suffer, it does not cause concern to him.
Interesting is the fact that the verse uttered by the Lord - "avathqay" (TTP 805), is mirrored in the actions of Tīṇṭanār. He acts only for God and all his thoughts are geared towards Him. He remains on guard without sleep because he fears that animals of prey may visit the area. And by day, he hunts food to appease the Lord's hunger. Only the best would do for his Lord and so he hunts a variety of animals and chooses delectable morsels which he first checks to see if they were cooked and tasty. He chews them to tenderness, like a mother catering to her young one, and then mixes it with honey and feeds the Lord with encouraging words. When he sees bad omens indicating blood, his immediate thought is that something must have happened to his Lord. The normal tendency would be to perceive any omen as indicating evil for oneself. But since there is only one thing that he is aware of, he immediately concludes that the evil is to the Lord. Ironically what the omens indicate, applies to him as much to the Lord.

In the story of Tīṇṭanār, as in many others, the devotee's perception of the Lord is one of pure anthropomorphism. Tīṇṭanār's tender care of his Lord and the manner in which he feeds him point to the fact that the Lord is as real to him, as would be any human being. Rather perhaps, here the 'reality' turns everything else to naught. He is unaware of the activities of the other two hunters and later of his father and the old priestess. It was not that
they were unreal but that his total absorption and identification with the Lord, makes him dead to the world around him, except as it affects his Lord. He is nevertheless aware of himself as a hunter as when he wonders whether it was hunters inimical to him who had done this to the Lord.

Cēkkilār delineates carefully the two characters Tiṇṇaṇār and Civakōcariyār. Without question, the nāyagār is the focus of the account. The aim of the narration is to bring out the love of the devotee and the sublime nature of its expression, however gross it may seem on the surface. Cēkkilār however does not disparage the worship of Civakōcariyār. This is partly because being himself of the same tradition, he cannot scoff at the prescriptions of the Āgamas. A more important reason is that the priest does not lack in love for the Lord. He is meticulous in his observance of the prescriptions and his love for the Lord is unquestionable or in no way of a lesser calibre than Tiṇṇaṇār's. Cēkkilār therefore treats this subject quite carefully. At no point are the actions of the priest portrayed in a manner that could make him appear inferior to Tiṇṇaṇār. There is no comparison between the two, of course, because the Tiṇṇaṇār's love is unique. The lack of similar greatness in the priest is not the issue for when the Lord acclaims the love of Tiṇṇaṇār, he only speaks about the
uniquely great love of Tiṇṇaṉār - he does not decry the priest's love.

Tiṇṇaṉār's worship seems to be a parody of the Āgama worship. Untaught in the proper mode of worship, he tries to perform worship, interpreting whatever he had heard from his companion Nāṇaṉ. But it is interesting to note that while, he is ignorant of the ritualistic worship, yet unconsciously he follows it. He removes the old flowers before offering fresh ones, albeit with his slippered foot, but this is not something he had learnt from Nāṇaṉ. This though is a part of the Āgamic worship wherein the nirmālyā or old offering of flowers are first removed before the new worship is begun. And so it may be seen that Cēkkilār suggests the presence of a semblance of ritual worship, not so much to sanctify Tiṇṇaṉār's worship as to affirm the value of Āgamic worship.

Tiṇṇaṉār becomes the paradigm of love. Cēkkilār makes him a 'reification of love'. The simple, uncomplicated love that he exhibits, uninformed by anything from 'without' such as rituals, reveals the quintessence of bhakti. The love borne by all the toṉṭar is the same. But it is cloaked in different forms in different cases. Since the toṉṭu of the various nāyaṉmār are different, there may be a genuine confusion as to their base, especially so when the manifestation is quite extreme. But as the story of Kaṉṉappar shows, it is the same love which impels the devotee to worship the Lord in the best way known to him.
that also inspires him to scoop his eyes out. All his actions are dear to the Lord, and this is the rationale that applies to all the extreme cases under examination. Being rooted in love, the gruesome twist that they receive makes no difference to them. All the tonțar exhibit this quality. They are unaware of doing anything special or out of the ordinary. Such reflections and considerations are not part of their mental make-up. Knowing only One thing, they live in their love of it.
CHAPTER IV
MODELS AND IDOLS

Saints are recognised by their religions as both subjects for imitation and objects of veneration. The tension between imitability and inimitability, between likeness to us and otherness to us, lies at the core of the saint's identity.


Treatment in the Śāstra(s)

In the Śaiva Siddhānta literature, the fourteen Meykaṇṭa Śāstra(s) form the companion volumes to the twelve Tirumūraī(s). Following closely on the heels of the Tirumūraī(s) in terms of chronology, they are apparently quite different in content. They do not continue in the trail blazed by the authors of the Tirumūraī(s). Their interest on the other hand centred on the preconditions or prerequisites that led to the state of a jīvan-mukta, exemplified by the nāyaṇmār, thereby marking a shift in pattern from experiential expressions to intellectual theorization. The TTP blazes forth the glory of nāyaṇmār some of whose unique experiences are recorded in the other Tirumūraī(s) while the fourteen śāstra(s) supply a theological rationale. For the authors of the śāstra(s):

Bhakti is not the path, but the prize, standing at the end rather than at the beginning of spiritual life. Devotion is no
mere discipline . . . The lives of the Śaiva saints portrayed in Periya Purāṇam illustrate not the devotion as a disciplinary value (sādhana bhakti) but devotion descriptive of the nature of released (sādhyā bhakti) (Sivaraman, 1973:387).

It is therefore not surprising that there is hardly any reference in the śāstra(s) except obliquely to the authors of the Tirumurai(s) or the texts or the incidents surrounding them. Just as grammar generalises usage, these śāstra(s) create norms from the events by developing purely general concepts. It has to be noted though that in the counter-part literature of Śrīvaishnavism, there is a constant linking up of the theological concepts with concrete incidents from the lives of the Āḻvār. In the Śaiva tradition this is not the case. This neglect on the part of the Śaiva philosophers has resulted in a rather loose link-up with its wonderful heritage i.e. the Tirumurai(s). There are however two exceptions to this. The first is the Tirukkalirruppatiyār (hereafter TKP) chronologically the second of the śāstra(s) but not accorded the same attention by the Meykaṇṭār lineage as is given to the others. The other work that alludes to the Tirumurai(s) particularly the TTP is the Sivajñānabodham. The references in both these works will be evaluated to observe how the tradition viewed the activities of the saints. The TKP needs a more detailed discussion as it grapples with the activities of the saints
under study and so we will reserve it for later and take up the Sivajñānabodham first.

The Sivajñānabodham, the most important text among the fourteen śāstra(s), is said to have been composed by Meykaṇṭār in about 1221 C.E. Though chronologically the third of the fourteen śāstra(s), being preceded by Tiruvuntiyār and Tirukkaḷirṟuppatiyār, the Sivajñānabodham is acclaimed as the first systematic exposition of the theology of Tamil Saivism. The other śāstra(s) are commentaries or elaborations of it. The Sivajñānabodham consists of twelve aphorisms that assert the existence, nature and inter-relation of God, bondage and soul. The twelfth aphorism in which Meykaṇṭār describes the nature of release is generally described as a paraphrase of the twelfth Tirumurai viz. TTP. It has to be borne in mind that the śūtra itself makes no explicit reference to TTP but the above understanding is found in the interpretations of the tradition. Gordon Matthews (1948:27) translates the aphorism as follows:

When having washed away the Impurity which prevents it reaching the sustaining Feet that are like the red-lotus flower and having joined the company of those who love the Lord, the soul is rid of delusion, it worships as Hara Himself the habit of those who abound in devotion and his shrines.

The enlightened soul abides with those that love the Lord and it worships as Śiva the very form of his devotees as also his temples. This statement makes it clear as to why
the śūtra is considered a paraphrase of TTP. It describes in a nutshell the activities of the nāyaṇmār. We have already seen how the nāyaṇmār excel in offering respect and worship to any guest bearing the stamp of a Śaiva atiyār. Similarly we have seen that service and worship can be directed to the enshrined God as well. The important point is that icons and devotees are not taken as representing God but as God himself. Meykañṭār makes this point when he says aran ena tolumē - "will worship as Hara". The nāyaṇmār apprehended God in the atiyār and the significance of this will be shortly noted. Apart from being a paraphrase of TTP, and a brief one at that, this śūtra does not offer much information on the later tradition's view about the saints. One more point can be adduced from the aphorism. Its position as the last śūtra illustrates the point made earlier - that the philosophical school considered the state of these nāyaṇmār as the goal. Being interested in explicating the methods to achieve that state, they do not perhaps feel it incumbent to discuss or comment on the activities of the nāyaṇmār.

An Uneasy Resolution

The TKP offers more in the way of explanation of the actions of the nāyaṇmār. These references are very important for us, as they directly discuss the lives of the saints studied in the previous chapter. It may be mentioned that of the fourteen śāstra(s), TKP enjoys less of the limelight.
The **TKP** consists of 100 quatrains and is said to be a commentary on the *Tiruvuntiyär* (hereafter *TV*) of Uyyavanta Tēvanāyaṇār of Tiruviyalūr. The *TV* has 45 verses and they are in the form of aphorisms in an attractive metre called the *untīpara*, which it is said children employ while singing to the butterfly. The authors of the two works are said to have been related as teacher and disciple. Tradition recounts a story, which indicates that the **TKP** was accorded its scriptural status only through divine intervention. The work was placed by its author Uyyavanta Tēvar of Tirukkaṭavūr (c.1177 C.E.) on the steps leading to the sanctum of Naṭarāja in Cidambaram. The steps are known as the *Tirukkaliruḷappati* (*Tiru*-sacred; *kaḷiṟu*-elephant; *paṭi*-step), because of the elephants adorning the sides of the steps. The work was reputedly picked up by the trunk of an elephant and placed at the feet of the Lord. The story, though of doubtful historicity, unquestionably conveys the sense that there was initial resistance to the reception of the work, and it appears that the resistance was never really overcome. It is interesting to note that direct and explicit mention of the *nāyanmār* is made in a work that had problems in its inclusion.

In examining verses from the **TKP** we will have occasion to refer to a few verses from the *TV* too. At the point at which we enter the text, a discussion of the soul
being enlightened by the teacher and its consequent 
behaviour is under progress. The TV describes the teacher:

HE who is One and became Many also became 
the Lord. Fly aloft Unti! He took hold of 
us. Fly aloft Unti! (TV 5)

The Lord comes as a teacher to enlighten the 
devotee. The most celebrated example of this is 
Māṇikkavācakar who was redeemed by Śiva in the guise of a 
teacher. Though the Lord does not always appear as a 
teacher, in all the stories of the nāyanmār the idea behind 
his appearance is to signal bestowal of grace on the devotee 
and bestowal of grace is always a mode of imparting the 
saving teaching. The encounter between the devotee and his 
Lord is varied in each case, but whether it is the form of a 
Saiva aṭiyār or an iconic form, the 'divine' remains the 
same. The word for 'took hold of us' in TV is nammaiye 
āntān. We have already touched on the concept of āntān in 
our discussion of aṭiyār but it may help to remember that it 
connotes a complete take-over.

The TKP does not directly comment on this verse of 
the TV. Verse 11 of TKP which the tradition holds to be a 
commentary, actually talks about the psyche of one blessed 
by the Lord-teacher. It holds that just as the water of the 
river rushes forth into the sea and is transformed in nature 
i.e. becomes salty, and then flows back into the mouth of 
the river without changing its quality (losing its saline 
nature), so also the toṇṭar who have had union with God take
on the nature of God. Their realization transforms itself into actions that become exemplary for the world as models. The implication of the analogy is that just as the backwaters do not lose their salineness so also these devotees, though functioning once more in the world, do not lose their divineness.

The next verse of *TV* elaborates this idea:

> When 'my actions' (*mamakāra*) is destroyed and 'I' (*ahaṅkāra*) is destroyed, then the Lord makes (all) our actions his own. Fly aloft *Untī!* He gives himself (to us). Fly aloft *Untī!* (*TV* 6)

This sums up the nature of the enlightened who continue to live in the world. The *TKP* developing this idea describes how their senses are unlike those of ordinary people. By virtue of their senses being steeped in grace, they perform acts that are hailed as miracles. In this category would fall incidents such as Campantar transforming waste-land into fertile land; Appar countering the poison of the serpent; and Cuntarar restoring to life the boy swallowed by a crocodile. When the grace of the Lord touches them, their actions are brought in line with God. Having been given this disposition they go further into grace by their own momentum.

Contemplating this grace, their hearts melting, they become one with the Lord with no awareness of being so.

Their hearts melting, they become conjoined (one). They do not apprehend distinctly (thus). Fly aloft *Untī!* They possess the
treasure of transcendent Śivam. Fly aloft
Unti! (TV 7)

It is important to note that while all their actions are in total conformity with the grace of the Lord, and they have no sense of agency, they are not conscious of being conjoined with the Lord. The presence of any such consciousness would imply that they stand distinct from God and that their actions would then become their own. Commenting on this, the TKP observes that the Lord cannot be apprehended by the aspirant who seeks to know him since the sense of egoism would then be present. But to him whose sense-organs fuse together as he melts in love, the Lord presents himself inseparably.

If through good Śiva-dharma, through good Śiva-yoga, through good Śiva-jñāna, capable of destroying the sense of 'I' — whosoever shows love, there Hara(Śiva) will appear; He who can be known by none. (TKP 15)

These three categories of action are traditionally explained as caryā and kriyā which together constitute Śiva-dharma, and yōga, and jñāna. The underlying idea, though, is that all efforts, whether in the form of deed or thought, if directed towards Śiva become the means of reaching Him. If the base is love and the end Śiva, then anything born of that love becomes a means of reaching Him. It is this that is illustrated by each story of TTP.

The next few verses of TKP make a very intriguing statement. Explaining what actions are Śiva-dharma the TKP declares:
In this wide world are two kinds of action: gentle (soft) acts and difficult-to-perform hard acts. Both are Śiva-dharma. Enter any of these and perform (them) for getting rid of the karma that leads to birth. (TKP 16)

The third line of the text has a variant reading. Instead of celvāy, the second person imperative of the root 'cel' (lit. 'to go'), the text has celvār, the third person plural.¹ According to the variant reading, it would mean that the verse is continuing the description of the actions of the enlightened. While this reading maintains the flow of discussion, it gives rise to an objection. The enlightened need not perform any acts to be rid of karma. It has already been stated that their actions are intended to be models for the world. So it would be more consistent to maintain that it is meant to be an instruction. And to support this interpretation the next few verses are in the form of direct speeches and so the whole set of verses may be taken as instruction to the student with illustrations.

The author is stating that there are two kinds of actions – one designated gentle and therefore easy to perform, the other hard or violent and so difficult to perform. Elaborating further, he says:

The various limbs of worshipping the Primal One and the other faultless supporting tasks – O Wise One! these good actions that are easy for us we mentioned separately as gentle action (melvipai). (TKP 17)

¹civatanman āmavārrir cennatilē celvār pavakanman nīnkum paṭi (Meykaṇṭacāttīram, 1942:9).
That which we called hard acts \((\text{valvinai})\) are the cruel acts such as the act of slaughtering without compunction for making with their own hands curry for the boon-giving ruddy Bhairava. \((\text{TKP 18})\)

Regardless of the iniquity (that it was forbidden) or the infamy, he cut the two feet of his father, a Brāhmin - the Lord beholding this act of Čaṇḍi Čar, gave Himself as reward. Do you comprehend this? (O student) \((\text{TKP 19})\)

The next verse refers to the story of Arivāṭṭāyanāyanār and classes his act as \(\text{valvinai}\) too.\(^2\)

These devotees who perform \(\text{valvinai}\) are united in all their senses and act in line with grace.

Performing acts as acts of the Lord they who slowly give themselves unto Him are rid of their burden (of agency). O disciple! If the ploughman and the land-lord are united in thought will there be any loss? \((\text{TKP 21})\)

This bifurcation of gentle acts and hard acts indicates an isolation of those saints who violated the norms. Not only does the author bifurcate the two kinds of actions, he also calls the gentle acts good acts \((\text{nalvinai})\) and describes them as easy for 'us' the ordinary people, to do. These gentle acts on the whole are the prescribed acts such as worshipping ritually etc. The act of Čiruṭtoṅṭar is called a cruel act. The emphasis given to the word \(\text{kotuvinaiyē}\) separates it out and places it in a class of its own.

\(^2\)His extreme poverty drives him to starve himself and attempt to keep up the regular offering of food to the Lord. When the offering is spilt to the ground, he frustrated put a scythe to his throat upon which the Lord ate the food off the earth.
own. The story of Cánticar is presented as a puzzle - an infamous act being rewarded by the Lord.

The author offers a two-pronged resolution of these antinomian acts. First, he describes how the enlightened act through grace. All their actions are in alignment with the Divine for they are blessed. The Lord makes their actions His and replaces their sense of 'I' with himself. The second part of the rationale is that certain acts are hard to be performed and certain saints are known to have done them. They are not meant for the ordinary. Since those who do valvinai do it with no sense of agency all their acts are in total conformity with the will and grace of the Lord.

There is still no satisfactory explanation of the actions of antinomian saints, but something else has been achieved. Those who performed acts that violate the norms have been silently ousted from their role as models and converted to rather remote, unapproachable idols.

That the author of TKP finds these acts not only inimitable but also inexplicable can be seen from his statement on Kañnappar and his love, quoted earlier in our discussion of him. It would be worthwhile citing it here again as a closing note of the views of TKP. Commenting on the TV's statement that when there is no consciousness of the inner self and outer organs as distinct, the immeasurable bliss would overflow, TKP brings in the example
of Kaṇṇappar. Citing Māṇikkavācakar's statement on a lack of love similar to Kaṇṇappar, the author says:

Since it was said "a lack of love comparable to that personified by Kaṇṇappar"; that love personified by Kaṇṇappar - Kaṇṇappar can comprehend and Kāḷattiyār (Śiva) can comprehend - by no one else can that love be comprehended. (TKP52)

Love personified is Kaṇṇappar and to comprehend it is beyond human capacity. It needs to be accepted as inexplicable. We may understand from this that the actions of the other devotees of valvīṇai fame are likewise inexplicable. Just as Kaṇṇappar is reified as love the others are reified - idolised as the performers of rare acts.

Cēkkilār's rationale revisited

We have had occasion in the course of our analysis of the four stories to draw out Cēkkilār's rationale for each of them. Having posited that the concept of tontu is the over-arching principle that unites the diverse narratives into an epic, if not homogeneous in content at least homogeneous in theme, we have pointed at the appropriate places to how Cēkkilār skillfully weaves the idea of tontu into each story. It may now be fruitful to evaluate how well he succeeds in supplying a rationale for the stories, especially the ones chosen for study. To recapitulate: tontu is service or an act expressive of the love of the devotee to his Lord. The manner and mode of tontu varies with the individual, but as a rule it is an
action directed towards Śaiva āṭiyār or devotees or to the enshrined Lord.

It is important to remember that in the stories as presented by Cēkkilār the tonṭar are repeatedly said to render service to the devotees of the Lord. There is no clear mention as to whether service to the devotees of the Lord was to the exclusion of others, but it is evident that humanitarianism or social service in the sense of uplift of the unfortunate is not the key-note. We have therefore to remember when Zvelebil (1974:176) remarks: "... the highest ideal preached by Cēkkilār is life spent in love and service: social and divine service are one" that the dimensions of the 'social' are expressly confined to the world of Saivaites in TTP. Nānacampantan, (1987:261-264) trying to establish the fact that tonṭu occupies the position of 'hero' (the central character) in TTP, strains the facts beyond the clearly stated intent; he tries to establish that the service is meant for all and sundry and is not confined to the devotees or followers of Śiva. His desire to find universalism in the TTP by saying that the text is infused with the spirit of humanitarianism is far-fetched and strained. Such apologetics are unnecessary. The TTP in its loyalty to Saivism is sectarian, and it would be vain to expect anything else from Cēkkilār whose mission is not just to recount the stories but to firmly entrench in the mind of his reader the importance of devotion to Śiva.
In another sense, of course, by its very nature of being a narrative of the lives of those who have had the encounter with the divine, the TTP carries a universal appeal to all those of a religious disposition.

_Tōṇṭu_ as an expression of love is exemplified in all the stories, but the story par excellence in this respect is that of Kaṇṇappar. The story illustrates the ideal of a complete equation of _bhakti_ and _tōṇṭu_. In fact Kaṇṇappar's life is an allegory for love in its ultimate manifestation. We have already observed that Kaṇṇappar's story can be used as the key to unravel the mystery of the other stories because in him we have love and its expression as identical. The very mention of the name of the Lord suffices to awaken the dormant love in him. With the rise of love there is a simultaneous shedding of all mortal bonds. His reaction on beholding the Śivalinga defies us to believe that he perceived anything other than the 'divine'. And this apprehension seems to be 'pure anthropomorphism', in the sense that his feeding the Lord and the tender care he lavishes on Him are indeed anthropomorphic, and yet his actions are hailed by all as the most perfect and profound form of mystic love. Impelled to perform some kind of service he imitates the actions of the priest. Though all his actions take the form of prohibited or sacrilegious acts, they are acclaimed as dear to the Lord. As the culmination of his unique acts he engages cheerfully in an
incredible act of self-mutilation. In the span of six days in which the entire drama is encapsulated, he does not for a moment heed his own wants. He neither eats or sleeps, but lives, breathes and moves for Lord. This is his toṇṭu, or rather 'he' is the toṇṭu.

In the stories of Çañṭicar, Ciṟuttoṇṭar and Iyarpakai we encounter toṇṭu in a more specific form. Though the form may be different, the spirit in which it is done is identical in each case. Out of love for the Lord they choose to perform some service or other. They brook no interference in its performance, not because it would mean a breach of their vow but because it entailed curtailment of the expression of their love. Unlike Kaṇṇappar's story other people are intimately involved in the episodes of these three, and this raises certain problems. Each of these stories undercuts the familiar values of family in a brutal manner. The gruesomeness of Ciṟuttoṇṭar's story arises from the fact that an innocent child becomes the hapless pawn. Çañṭicar's story is grim because the father is mutilated by the son almost indifferently. The story of Iyarpakai needs no comment as in a moral sense it is probably the most difficult to accept. Family love is in all these stories sacrificed at the altar of love for God.

It may be granted that the notion of toṇṭu does serve to link all the nāyaṇmār into one unit, and explains their point of view quite satisfactorily. It is not
difficult to see why these tonţar act in the way they do. Their vision is neither truncated nor distorted. The question of ethics that an outsider raises does not arise for either them or Cekkilăr as everything is conditional on only one thing for them i.e. Śiva. Violence or violation of any accepted norms is ethically neutral to them. It may even become sanctified if demanded by the love of God. Owing loyalty to only 'One', they do not recognise any other demands and so do not see any transgression of them.

In all the stories of the TTP, and more particularly so in those under examination, the devotees give their loyalty to God. And so their ascription of value to anything else - human relations, social behaviour, and so on, is dependent on this loyalty. In every incident, the crisis arises when this loyal love is tested. And whether it is a gentle or violent way of demonstrating their loyalty, they do it without being in the least disturbed by it. From such a perspective questions of ethical behaviour do not arise. On another level we can identify a similar attitude between human beings. In the course of the stories, we have noted that the other individuals involved also exhibit extraordinary courage and perseverance in helping the tonţar keep his word. The wife of Ciruttoţar, and the maidservant, and the wife of Iyarpakai, perform acts that are strikingly unusual to say the least. In their loyal love to their husbands/master, and channeled through him to God,
they engage cheerfully in these acts. If we understand the acts of the tontar in a similar vein, it becomes clear that their actions stem in reply to the demands of an undivided loyalty/love.

It may help if we try to decipher the difference between the two kinds of love at this juncture. Love in the family sphere has its centre in the individual and its circumference in the other members. Since the egoism of the individual determines its limit, as in the expression 'my family', it is a limited love. On the other hand, love for God circumscribes nothing in particular or what is the same - everything. It has no limits. We see again and again in the stories that love knows no satiety or limit. It can be argued that God being by definition egoless and unlimited in his love, the devotee who tries to approximate God in nature, develops a similar love. And in bhakti, the very basis for limitation, the family, is itself transformed into an occasion for the unlimited.

The Religious and the Ethical

The general intent of this thesis was to identify the problem posed by the inclusion of antinomian saints in the list of nayamär and the treatment they received at the hands of Çekkilär. Through an analysis of his presentation of the stories we have tried to discover his attitude as a man of the tradition. To bring out other possible resolutions we have looked at the treatment in TKP as an
interesting and important attempt of the later tradition to deal with the issue. It remains for us who live in a still later era, to come to terms with these episodes that subvert the accepted norms in the course of achieving a religious goal.

The narratives that we have examined deal with a particular kind of experience - the encounter of the devotee with the divine. Since they pertain to the individual's attempt to apprehend the Absolute or God, they belong to the sphere of the religious. This religious sphere is at once universal and particular; universal because the experience is accessible to everyone, and particular in the sense that it is always experienced at the individual level. While the individual may follow a traditional understanding, she or he has to internalise it and find her or his own relationship to God. The 'religious' does not strictly belong to the human sphere, even if one were to consider it a mere human creation, because it includes the involvement of a supra-human element. While the stories thus belong to the 'religious' sphere, the questions we have been asking are really ethical in nature. Is it ethical to give away one's wife? or slaughter one's child? Is it right to mutilate one's parent? or commit sacrilegious acts in the name of love? And most importantly, how can God be involved in this subversion of the ethical? If God himself acts immorally how can one expect man to act differently? And what sort of
religion is it that not only permits but also hails such atrocities as marvels.

The paradox in the story of Abraham is that God who had commanded "Thou shalt not kill" was himself instructing Abraham to contravene and sacrifice his child. The stories here are of a different vein, because not only does God permit but in a sense induces the deed to be done. And there is no binary opposition of 'good' and 'evil', with God being conceived the source and substance of good itself. This is often brought out by saying that God is beyond the opposition of good and evil. Śiva is hailed as the one in whom all oppositions find their dissolution. This gives us a clue as to how the 'religious' needs to be handled. An attempt to impose ethics in a seemingly absolute or uniform sense does not seem valid. Even in the ordinary events of life the ethical is not comprehended in the manner of civic law. Every individual receives a sense of the 'ethical' and gives it his value. That is to say that what a person calls 'good' or 'bad', whether in accordance with tradition or self-perceived, gains its sanctity only at the hands of the individual. It is the person who gives sanctity to an action in the light of a perceived relationship to God or to other human beings.

While the ethical operates in the world of the human, the religious does not. When persons become involved with the idea of 'holy', they attempt to grapple with the
divine, and questions belonging to the human sphere are left behind. The ethical needs more than one human being for its operation. The 'religious' at any given time involves only one individual. It is true that when the individual sacrifices the child there are two people involved, but that is not the way the issue is perceived. Repeatedly in the stories we have seen how at the crucial point the saint regards the wife, the child or the self with no awareness of their own separate individuality or interests. When we, in our day accuse them of callousness or brutality, we are doing it from the point of ethical values. Coming to grips with what they consider a truly religious perspective will probably never be possible for us because we cannot help but see the issue as ethical. To impose a perspective that gains value only in terms of meaningful interactions among human beings on an individual who has stepped 'without' results in our misunderstanding. Çeşkiliçar chose to tell the story in a way which left the different perspectives intact, and thus he enabled his readers to seek inspiration in examples they themselves would never follow.
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