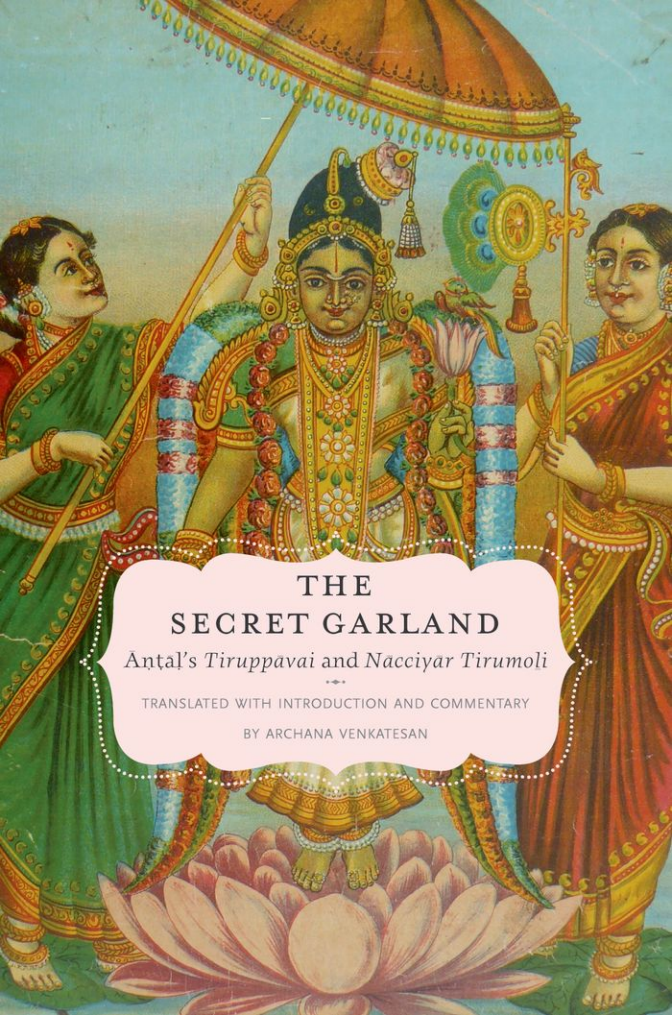

THE SECRET GARLAND

Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppāvai* and *Nacciyār Tirumoḷi*

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

BY ARCHANA VENKATESAN

The Secret Garland

AAR RELIGION IN TRANSATION

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2010

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
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Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

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Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Venkatesan, Archana.
The secret garland : Āṇṭāḷ's Tiruppāvai and Nācciyār tirumoḻi / translated with introduction and commentary by Archana Venkatesan.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-19-539174-9; 978-0-19-539175-6 (pbk.)
1. Āṇṭāḷ. Tiruppāvai. 2. Āṇṭāḷ. Nācciyār tirumoḻi. I. Āṇṭāḷ.
Tiruppāvai. English. II. Āṇṭāḷ. Nācciyār tirumoḻi. English. III. Title.

PL4758.9.A58T5339 2010
894.8'1111-dc22 2009046234

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

For Amma and Appa

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Acknowledgments

I first encountered Āṇṭāḷ and her poems in the winter before I began graduate school. Through all these many years, friends, family, colleagues, and mentors have helped me make sense of my fascination with Āṇṭāḷ, and have gently guided my great love for her poetry to productive ends. I take great pleasure in acknowledging their wisdom and compassion that have seen this book to its completion.

Professor Maraimalai, Visiting Professor at U.C. Berkeley (1997–98) patiently read the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* with me, along with innumerable commentaries. George Hart, an exemplary translator and wonderful mentor, encouraged my first tentativeattempts at translation, showing me how to improve my work without making me feel foolish or discouraged. Kausalya Hart was always generous with her encyclopedic knowledge of Tamiḻ language and literature, as well as with her time. Professor Steven Hopkins, a precious friend, gave me the gift of his sensitive translations of Vedānta Deśika, and inspired me to do better by Āṇṭāḷ. Professors Indira Peterson and Vasudha Narayanan have supported this work since its nascent stages and their comments on Āṇṭāḷ in general and these two poems in particular have enriched my understanding of the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* immeasurably. I am grateful to Davesh Soneji for his friendship and for his enthusiasm and support for this project. Frank Clooney helped me take the initial steps toward publication by suggesting the American Academy of Religion's Texts and Translation Series as a possible home for this book. Anne Monius, the editor for the series,

shepherded me through the entire process with patience and kindness. I am immensely thankful to both of them for having faith in the value of a new translation of Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppavai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* . The incisive and thorough comments from the anonymous reviewers for Oxford University Press have shaped this into a much better book. I thank them for the care and the attention they gave my work.

Katherine Ulrich and Gwen Colvin, with their keen editorial eye have done a magnificent job in preparing this manuscript for publication. My heartfelt thanks to Molly Balikov and Anastasia Aizman, the designer not only for designing a beautiful cover, but for also so patiently listening to all my many concerns, and for accommodating them. Gayatri Devi Menon, graduate student at UC Davis, copy-edited the manuscript and prepared the Index. Without her help, it would have taken me twice as long to complete this book.

The people of Śrīvilliputtūr added enormously to my understanding of Āṇṭāḷ. Extemporaneous discussions of a particular verse, or its use to make a subtle point in a story about her, never failed to deepen my appreciation of the intricacies of her poetry. In particular, I would like to thank Raghurama Bhattar, Govindaraja Bhattar, the late Vedappiran Bhattar, Tiruvenkatammal and Srinivasa Araiyar for sharing their knowledge and their time so freely. Mr. M. Kannan of the French Institute of Pondicherry was an invaluable resource during my year of dissertation research. I would also like to thank Narendran and Ramanujam, librarians at the French Institute of Pondicherry for their able assistance in procuring me a wealth of books and photocopies. Sri Varadadesikar of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient patiently clarified my many questions on Śrīvaiṣṇava theology, and steered me through innumerable Sanskrit and Maṇipravāḷa tellings of the Āṇṭāḷ story. It is through his deeply felt expositions of *āḻvār* poetry that I came to appreciate the subtle and delightful craft of the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentator.

My sister Aarathi dragged me out of my dimmest writing moments with her usual good humor and zest for life. Her twenty questions, asked and pondered during our many long walks, forced me to reexamine some of my most basic presumptions about Āṇṭāḷ. My uncle S.Raghunath has been an unshakeable and quiet source of strength through all the many years of graduate school.

My husband Layne, fellow scholar and translator, read through these translations too many times to count. His suggestions were always insightful and his gentle criticisms were unerringly accurate. His unwavering support and belief in this project has been instrumental in bringing it to fruition.

There are two extraordinary artists, whose mastery of their crafts emboldened me in a task that often appeared insurmountable. The first is the great

English poet John Keats, whose letters and poems impressed me even as a young girl. Little did I know that I would have the great fortune to discover another poet who captured my imagination with the same intensity that he had. This translation owes as much to the lyricism of Keats' great works as it does to Āṇṭāḷ's. Like Keats' nightingale, the beautiful, crisp music of the late, great Karṇāṭak musician K.V. Narayanaswamy kept me company in the lonely night hours. His renderings of the *Tiruppāvai* brought Āṇṭāḷ alive for me every day, and with this gift imbued every moment of the laborious task of translation with beauty.

Āṇṭāḷ ends the *Tiruppāvai* and almost every decad of the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* with a reference to Viṣṇucittaṉ, the person she identifies as her spiritual guide, and the one she regards as instrumental in the fulfillment of her greatest desire. He is her teacher, her initiator, and her mentor. My parents Krishna and Jayashree Venkatesan have played just as pivotal a role in my life. It is their infectious love for music, for reading, and for learning seeped into every corner that set me on this path. But without their unflagging faith and their loving encouragement, I know that I would never have been able to finish it. It is in their honor that this book is dedicated.

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Note on Transliteration

Transliteration posed some difficulty as I was dealing with Tamiḻ, Sanskrit, and Maṇipravāḷa words. I have transliterated Tamiḻ words according to the conventions of the *Tamiḻ Lexicon*. Sanskrit words used in a Tamiḻ context are transliterated as such. So, I use *Nālāyira Diyva Prabandham* instead of *Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam*, *utsavam* in place of *uṟcavam*, Raṅgamaṉṉār and not Raṅkamaṉṉār Sanskrit words have generally been transliterated according to the conventions of the Monier-Williams *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. All place names have been transliterated throughout the book. I have spelled the names of contemporary authors and informants as they choose to render them in English, and have not used diacritical marks. I have transliterated the names of all historical personalities.

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The Secret Garland

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Introduction

Kōtai of Viṣṇucittaṉ
lord of Putuvai
city of towering mansions that rise like mountains
sang this garland of sweet Tamiḻ
to plead with Kāmadeva
with his sugarcane bow and five-flower arrows
to unite her with the lord
who broke the tusk of the elephant
as it screamed in agony,
who ripped apart the beak of the bird
that one dark and lustrous as a gem.

Those who sing this soft song of plea
will remain forever at the feet
of the supreme king of the gods.

Nācciyār Tirumoḻi 1.10

If one goes by Kōtai's lavish descriptions in her *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*, the town of Putuvai was a wealthy metropolitan hub, overflowing with abundance, populated by perfect priests and incomparable mansions. It was a blessed land, mythical in its scope, for it was here that Kṛṣṇa sported and played. Today, Putuvai is identified with Śrīvilliputtūr, a dusty town about seventy-five kilometers south of the bustling Tamiḻ cultural capital, Maturai. Surrounded by lovely hills, their crests tipped with dark clouds, the Śrīvilliputtūr landscape is

dominated by an imposing temple tower that rises colorful and majestic, audaciously confronting the neighboring hills. The temple is this otherwise ordinary town's claim to fame, for it marks the birthplace of the celebrated ninth-century Tamiḻ Vaiṣṇava poet, Kōtai, who a few centuries later was apotheosized into the goddess Āṇṭāḷ. It is her remarkable legend, her beautiful love poems, and the temple she shares with her immortal husband, Viṣṇu (locally known as Raṅgamaṉṉār) that command the landscape and contour the experiences of local devotees and visiting pilgrims alike. It is her *caritam*—her story—that forms the backdrop against which medieval commentators and contemporary devotees alike express their enjoyments (*anubhava*) of her two poems. So we begin here, with the story of her miraculous and improbable love for Viṣṇu.

Speak Not of Mortal Men: Āṇṭāḷ's Story

One day Viṣṇucittaṉ, a humble, Brahmin garland maker at the Vaṭapatraśāyi temple of the reclining Viṣṇu at Putuvai, found a lovely baby girl under a sacred *tulasī* plant. A voice from the heavens instructed him to take the little girl home and raise her as his own. Viṣṇucittaṉ named the child Kōtai and lovingly brought her up, inculcating in his adopted daughter a deep love for Viṣṇu. As she grew older, Kōtai resolved to marry Viṣṇu and no one else. Every morning, she enacted her fantasy as Viṣṇu's divine bride by ignoring the rules of ritual purity and donning the sacred garland meant for him. One morning, Viṣṇucittaṉ inadvertently caught her in the act, chastised her for the ritual transgression, and refrained from offering the polluted garland to the deity in the local temple. But to his astonishment, Viṣṇu appeared in a dream that same night to reveal his attachment to the special garland that Kōtai had first worn, earning her the epithet, *cūṭikkoṭuttavaḷ*—she who gave what she had worn. Still Viṣṇucittaṉ remained oblivious to Kōtai's adamant desire to become Viṣṇu's bride, even as she grew more pale and feverish. When her father mentioned marriage, she rejected the very notion saying, "if there is even talk of mortal men . . . I will not live."[1] It was in the throes of her overwhelming passion and the subsequent crushing disappointment that she composed two poems, the *Tiruppāvai* (The Sacred Vow) and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* (The Woman's Sacred Words). Viṣṇucittaṉ finally comprehended the full scope of her longing and anxiously inquired: "Which of the many forms of Viṣṇu do you wish to wed?"

Kōtai replied, "Sing their praises to me."

And so Viṣṇucittaṉ began describing all of them in loving detail, but when he described the lord of Śrīraṅgam, he noticed the faraway look in Kōtai's eyes and the sheen of unrequited desire.

He despaired: "How can I fulfill my daughter's mad desire?"

Once again Raṅganātha, the lord of Śrīraṅgam appeared in his devotee's dream and directed him to bring Kōtai dressed in full bridal regalia to his temple. Viṣṇucittaṉ promptly did as directed and arrived with his daughter in Śrīraṅgam. And there, witnessed by devotees, kings, Viṣṇu's attendants, and her father, Kōtai boldly strode into the *garbha gṛha*, climbed atop the beautiful image of the reclining Viṣṇu, and simply disappeared. From that point on Kōtai was known as Āṇṭāḷ—she who ruled—for she had won her lord's heart like no other before her.[2]

The Historical Āṇṭāḷ and Her Place Among the Āḻvār

The remarkable legend of Āṇṭāḷ recorded in oral and written hagiographies since the eleventh century reveals very little that is historically verifiable about her.[3] The sparse biographical information contained in the *phala śruti* verses (benedictory verses) that close the *Tiruppāvai* and each of the fourteen sections of the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* offer nothing more than a silhouette of the poet who called herself Kōtai.[4] She probably lived in a town called Putuvai (lit. New Town) that she also referred to as Villi's Putuvai[5] and which she praised for its beauty and prosperity. She was related in some way to the *āḻvār* poet Viṣṇucittaṉ (commonly referred to as Periyāḻvār), who is identified in the hagiographic traditions as her father. Based on a verse like this,

> Viṣṇucittaṉ has heard
> these words of truth spoken
> by the mighty and righteous king
> of Tiruvaraṅkam:
> "Those who love me
> I will love in return."
> If even his words are proved false
> what is there left to believe?
> *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* 11.10

the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentarial literatures on the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* also assert that Viṣṇucittaṉ was Āṇṭāḷ's teacher (*ācārya*).[6] Viṣṇucittaṉ does not mention Āṇṭāḷ by name in his composition, the *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, while Āṇṭāḷ herself only obliquely alludes to their relationship in the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* by using a generic possessive such as "Viṣṇucittaṉ's lovely Kōtai" (*Viṣṇucittaṉiṉ viyaṉ Kōtai*). However uncertain the exact nature of the relationship between these two, the internal evidence of Viṣṇucittaṉ's

Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi (Sacred Words of Periyāḻvār) reliably places him in the ninth century, making Āṇṭāḷ his contemporary and part of the devotional milieu of the Tamiḻ *bhakti* poets.[7]

Āṇṭāḷ is the only woman of the twelve *āḻvār* poets (600–900 C.E.), whose devotional poems comprise the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* (The Divine Collection of Four Thousand), the Tamiḻ canon of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. But Āṇṭāḷ's position as one of the *āḻvār* is tenuous, and she is sometimes excluded from this list. By the eleventh century, and dovetailing with the systematic development of Śrīvaiṣṇava theology under the direction of Rāmānuja (traditional dates, 1017–1137 C.E.), the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* became a revealed text, with a place of primacy reserved for Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* (ca. 9th century), which is revered as the Tamiḻ Veda. The apotheosis of the Tamiḻ canon activated a reciprocal apotheosis of its composers, who by the thirteenth century are transmogrified into various divine emanations (*aṁśa*) of Viṣṇu. Within the parameters of this new scheme, Kōtai the poet was recast into the role of the secondary consort Bhū Devī, placing her in a position of intimacy with Viṣṇu that for the Śrīvaiṣṇava theologians and commentators was far superior to that of the other male *āḻvār*.

By the time of the important Śrīvaiṣṇava philosopher, poet, and theologian, Vedānta Deśika (1268–369 C.E.), lists of the *āḻvār* begin to omit Āṇṭāḷ, indicating her already-contested place as a poet, saint, and goddess, although her two poems (especially the *Tiruppāvai*) continued to occupy a central place in the religious and ritual imagination of the community. By the mid-sixteenth century, the ninth-century poet Kōtai is distinctive enough to merit an important temple site dedicated to her, counted as one of the 108 sacred sites (*divya deśa*) of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas.[8] Once a part of the devotional milieu, by the late medieval period in South India she herself has become the recipient of *bhakti* songs -are composed for her, temples are built in her honor, and endowments are made in her name.

The ambiguity of Āṇṭāḷ's position as an *āḻvār*-goddess and the well-integrated position of her texts into the Tamiḻ canon are most clearly in evidence at Śrīraṅgam's annual *Adhyayanotsavam* (Festival of Recitation) celebrated in the auspicious month of Mārkaḻi (December–January). During this festival, the sacred space known as the "Hall of Thousand Pillars" is imagined to recreate a divine court where Viṣṇu, accompanied by his consorts Śrī and Bhū, enjoys a liturgical recitation and on occasion dramatic enactments of the entire *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*. Bronze images of the *āḻvār*—except Āṇṭāḷ—and the *ācāryas* are hierarchically placed in the sacred arena for the duration of the Festival of Recitation. Āṇṭāḷ's marked absence among the *āḻvār* is explained away because of her eternal presence beside Viṣṇu as his secondary consort Bhū. As the

Tiruppāvai and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* are ritually recited during the first ten days of the *Adhyayanotsavam*, while Āṇṭāḷ's image is excluded from Viṣṇu's devoted retinue of poet-saints, this festival enunciates her dual identity as both an *āḻvār* and a goddess.[9]

Āṇṭāḷ and Other Women Poet-Saints of India

Women's literary compositions in India, particularly in the pre-colonial period, have largely been in the realm of devotional or religious literature. The sixth-century B.C.E. Buddhist *Therīgāthā* is the earliest compilation of women's writing in India. In these early poems, the domestic drudgery of a woman's duties becomes an effective metaphor for life as suffering. The Buddhist nun Muttā makes the point eloquently in the poem below:

> So free am I, so gloriously free,
> Free from three petty things—
> From mortar, from pestle, and from my twisted lord,
> Freed from rebirth and death I am,
> And all that has held me down
> Is hurled away.
> (Trans. Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy)[10]

In the Tamiḻ context, the earliest female poets are contributors to the secular Caṅkam anthologies (first–third century C.E.). Of the 2,381 Caṅkam compositions, at least 154 in both the love (*akam*) and war (*puṟam*) genres bear female signatures. Because, like their male counterparts, these women poets composed poems that were strictly governed by the conventions of Caṅkam poetics, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to discern a distinctively female voice in this early corpus of secular Tamiḻ poetry.

By the beginning of the late fifth century, secular literature and the massive literary accomplishments of Tamiḻ Buddhists and Jains gave way to the newly emergent *bhakti* ethos. One of the earliest participants in this new poetic and religious world was the female *bhakti* poet and devotee of Śiva, Kāraikkālammaiyār (ca. 6th century). Although she was neither a contemporary of Āṇṭāḷ, nor a poet with a similar poetic temperament, as the only woman among the sixty-three canonized Śaiva saints (*nāyaṇmār*), Kāraikkālammaiyār is often regarded as Āṇṭāḷ's Śaiva counterpart. According to her hagiography, her husband, awed by her mystical powers, released Kāraikkālammaiyār from her obligations to him, thereby enabling her to devote herself completely to Śiva. Her move away from the normative social order is marked by a radical transformation that remakes

her beautiful body into that of a skeletal ghoul. The climactic moment of the hagiography occurs when she climbs sacred Mount Kailāśa on her hands, so as to refrain from defiling its hallowed ground with her feet. Upon seeing such dedication, Śiva, lauded as one who has neither beginning nor end, is said to have welcomed Kāraikkālammaiyār to his celestial abode by addressing as her as "Mother!" As Norman Cutler points out, "Kāraikkālammaiyār's story . . . expresses an underlying tension between the saint's intuitive calling to serve Śiva and her responsibilities in the social realm."[11] But this tension between social responsibility and service to Śiva does not dominate the tone or content of Kāraikkālammaiyār's *Aṟputatiruvantāti*, *Tiruiraṭṭaimaṇimālai*, and the two *Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūtta Tiruppatikams*. Instead, like the poems of the earliest *āḻvār* poets, Kāraikkālammaiyār's compositions are uncomplicated in form and even content, but are nonetheless profoundly speculative. A wonderful example is from *Aṟputatiruvantāti* 61:

I became your slave
even though I couldn't see you,
and now your image still eludes my eyes—
when people ask me
"how does your lord appear?"
what can I say?

which among all these forms is yours?[12]
(Trans. Norman Cutler)

In contrast, Āṇṭāḷ's *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* is replete with vociferous rejections of marriage to a mortal, an attitude that eventually becomes the centerpiece of her hagiographic narrative. As Āṇṭāḷ's story develops, her bold assertions are subsumed into a theological position that implies that only a divine being—Āṇṭāḷ as Bhū Devī—can achieve something as extraordinary as marriage to Viṣṇu.[13]

In an article on women saints in India, A. K. Ramanujan suggests that unlike men, women often have to reject normative family life to pursue their spiritual goals.[14] In some instances, like that of Kāraikkālammaiyār, the husband or family sanctions such a rejection. In the case of the twelfth-century Kannada poet Mahādevīyakka, the transgression of social norms is extreme—she walked naked—and is sanctioned by no one. Āṇṭāḷ falls somewhere in between these two figures—her poetry, especially the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*, is radical for its frank eroticism and disturbing images of violence. But her mythic life, enshrined in the hagiographies, presents a more comfortable picture, where the father aids in securing his daughter's impossible goal of marriage to Viṣṇu.

It is no surprise that the story of Āṇṭāḷ's love for Viṣṇu and her eventual marriage to him has invited parallels to Mīrā, the sixteenth century North Indian poet-saint. Hagiography tells us that Mīrā rejected her royal husband and her duties as a daughter-in-law for Kṛṣṇa, the divine lover with whom she eventually merged. Such superficial similarities aside, there are significant differences between these two female poets that nonetheless speak to the difficulty that Āṇṭāḷ and Mīrā present to their respective religious communities. Whereas we are reasonably certain that the poet Kōtai composed the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*, the same cannot be said of Mīrā. John Stratton Hawley suggests that "it is much harder in Mira's case than in that of her male rivals to have any confidence that she actually composed a substantial portion of the poetic corpus attributed to her."[15] There is a Mīrā tradition in which poems are composed in her name and are used to embellish the legend of the Mewar princess. The closed and canonical nature of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* disallowed the kind of organic production of poetry for Āṇṭāḷ, or any of the *āḻvār* poets, that is the hallmark of the Mīrā traditions. There is no evidence of poets appropriating Āṇṭāḷ's name (or indeed that of any of the other *āḻvār*) to add to her fairly slim contribution of just 173 verses. But there are plenty of verses in praise of Āṇṭāḷ, beginning with the laudatory verses, known as *taṉiyaṉs* that are appended to the *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*.[16] Undoubtedly, this important distinction between the Āṇṭāḷ and Mīrā traditions has much to do with two very different systems of producing and transmitting knowledge. Nevertheless, it also says something important about the ways in which widely divergent religious communities deal with problematic female poets. In point of fact, it might be said that Āṇṭāḷ and Mīrā are mirror images. The legend of Mīrā is shocking in its dramatic rejection of wifely and royal duties, while those poems attributed to her are not, even when they allude to the abuses she withstood. Her poems tend to be meditative and enigmatic, and her persona in these poems is as much lover as ascetic.[17] Here is a good example of a poem from the Mīrā tradition:

My dark one has gone to an alien land.
He's left me behind,
    he's never returned,
        he's never sent me a single word,
So I've stripped off my ornaments,
    jewels and adornments,
        cut the hair from my head,
And put on holy garments,
    all on his account,

seeking him in all four directions.
Mīrā: unless she meets the Dark One, her Lord,
she doesn't even want to live.[18]
(Trans. John S. Hawley)

On the other hand, Āṇṭāḷ's poetry, especially the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*, is transgressive, sensual, and bold. Below is an example from one of the later sections of the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*:

My breasts seek the gaze of the one
whose beautiful hand lifts the discus.
Bound tightly in a red cloth, their eyes
shy away from the gaze of mere mortals
desiring none other than Govinda.
I cannot live here a moment longer
Please take me to the shores of the Yamunā.
Nācciyār Tirumoḻi 12.4

Thus what cannot be added to or excised from her poetry is mapped on to her story. Āṇṭāḷ's stories multiply, keeping pace with her growing fame and popularity, and with each new version, this troublesome and vexing female poet becomes more divine, and her love more innocent, asexual, and nonthreatening.

Āṇṭāḷ's Garlands of Perfect Tamiḻ: The *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*

You were born the son of one woman
    and that very night
you became the son of another,
to be nurtured in secret.
O immeasurable lord
    when Kaṁsa fearing you
    plotted evil things
    you foiled his plans
    inflamed himand burnt like a fire in his belly.
We have come to beg you:
If you give us the *paṟai*-drum
We will sing of your wealth matched only by Śrī.
We will sing of your bravery.
Our sorrows will end.
and we can rejoice.
ēl ōr empāvāy

Tiruppāvai 25

You escaped Kaṁsa's savage net
in the midst of that deep dark night
only to torture the hearts of hapless maidens
stranded here.
Yaśodā lets you stray, bold and unpunished.
O you who suckled the milk
    from the breast of the deceitful demoness
Shameless one
Please return our clothes to us.

Nācciyār Tirumoḻi 3.9

The *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* are included in the first thousand verses (*mutal āyiram*) of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*. Āṇṭāḷ's two compositions follow Viṣṇucittaṉ's (Periyāḻvār's) *Tiruppallāṇṭu* and *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*. The *Tiruppāvai* consists of thirty eight-line verses in *kalippa* meter and describes

a vow known as the *pāvai nōṉpu*.[19] Young, unmarried girls observed this vow during the month of Mārkaḻi (December–January) in order to secure a virtuous husband. In the context of the *Tiruppāvai*, the girls are the cowherd maidens of Kṛṣṇa's land of sport, Āyarpāṭi (lit cowherd town), and Kṛṣṇa himself is the desired husband. The *Tiruppāvai*, narrated in an enthusiastic plural voice, is a poem of community and documents a group of girls vigorously rousing each other to join in a festive and joyous communal endeavor. Jointly the girls approach Kṛṣṇa's house to awaken him and his family. In the poem, Āṇṭāḷ's Putuvai is transformed into the mythic world of Āyarpāṭi (Tamiḻ for Gokula/Vṛndāvana) and in the commentaries, she herself is understood as being one of the *gopī* girls. The turning point of the poem comes in the penultimate verse (*Tiruppāvai* 29), when the company of girls reject the central symbol of the quest, the enigmatic *paṟai*-drum, and instead declare that they only wish to be eternally beholden to Kṛṣṇa. Although the poem employs a plural voice, traditional interpretations insert Āṇṭāḷ into it as either as the sole protagonist or as the leader of the group of *gopīs*. The *Tiruppāvai* ends on an optimistic note, with a clear sense that the quest has successfully come to fruition.

The *Tiruppāvai* leads seamlessly into the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi,* in that it chronologically and thematically picks up where the former poem ends. The *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* begins in the Tamiḻ month of Tai (January–February) and opens with another vow—this one to Kāmadeva, the god of desire—undertaken as a solitary endeavor. While friends and companions make intermittent appearances in the poem, the quest in the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* is largely a lonely and friendless one. The poem balances a full-bodied sensuality with a savage violence, a disquieting admixture that represents a radical departure from the comforting sweetness of the *Tiruppāvai*. The erotic sentiment is not entirely absent from the *Tiruppāvai*; rather, it is ensconced in comfortable images of domesticity—Kṛṣṇa at play with his wife, Nappiṉṉai, charming allusions to Kṛṣṇa's mischievous pranks, and Yaśodā's protective indulgence. It may be said that the desire of young *gopī* girls who inhabit the *Tiruppāvai*'s imaginal world has blossomed, but not yet gone to seed. Desire in the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* on the other hand, is terrible, full-blown and unremitting. The experience of such a desire is essentially an isolating one, where there are neither friends nor companions to alleviate the suffering. If there are companions, be they friends, birds, clouds, or a conch, they are always positioned as antagonists, for the speaker (identified in the commentaries as Āṇṭāḷ) sees herself vying enviously with them for the position of proximity to Viṣṇu that she believes rightly belongs to her.

The *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* is further distinguished from the *Tiruppāvai* and other similar poems composed by male poets by Āṇṭāḷ's use of shifting female

voices, a dizzying non-linearity, and a strange, unsettling violence; images of profound sensuality are often jarringly juxtaposed with its violation.[20] For instance, late in the *Nāccіyār Tirumoḻi*, the heroine has this to say:

> O bright *karuvai* blooms and dark *kāyā* flowers,
> you have assumed the brilliant form of my Tirumāl.
> Show me how to endure my agony.
> The master of Tirumāliruñcōlai,
> whose broad shoulders are for Śrī's pleasure
> entered my home and wrested my beautiful bangles.
> Is this right?
>
> *Nāccіyār Tirumoḻi* 9.3

In the above verse, the poet uses conventional poetic tropes to sketch the contours of her/the heroine's unbearable and unfulfilled love. She sees her beloved everywhere—the dark flowers remind her of his lustrous skin; the crimson blooms of his red lips; the fragrant jasmine of his pearly teeth. But they are unable to provide any succor for her illness, because the lord of Māliruñcōlai, (literally, the lord of gardens) has not only refused her, but the union he enjoys with his eternal companion Śrī mocks the poet's (heroine's) own doomed love. While at first glance this verse might seem unremarkable within the canon of Tamiḻ *bhakti* poetry, the final assertion of physical violation done to her body—"he entered my home and wrested my beautiful bangles"—marks a substantial deviation from the ways in which these familiar *bhakti* tropes are usually deployed.[21] Instead, the common motif of the heroine growing pale and thin until her bangles slip off is inflected with a strident note of violence and violation, and the god's possession is characterized as intrusive and unwelcome.

It may well be argued that in the *Nāccіyār Tirumoḻi*, violence is Āṇṭāḷ's dominant means of expressing an impossible desire and the fleeting nature of her encounter with the divine. Violence and violation are seeded throughout the poem, manifesting in unexpected places and in unexpected ways, with each occurrence building on an evocative past reference. First, there is the predicating violation that breeds all else: Viṣṇu's relentless and unsolicited violation of the heroine's person, and his cruel disregard of his word to her. The god invades the intimate space of her body and her home, overwhelms her despite her fervent and repeated refusals. In *Nāccіyār Tirumoḻi* 10.9, the heroine says:

> O oceans! He entered you, churned you
> and stole your nectar from your depths.
> Just so, the cunning one entered me
> and deprived me of my life.