

## Deathbed, Breathing the Last, and Funeral Procession: Musing under the canopy of history

R.K. K. Rajarajan

School of Tamil, Indian Languages and Rural Arts, Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram – 624 302. Email: [rkkrajarajan@yahoo.com](mailto:rkkrajarajan@yahoo.com)

---

### Abstract

“In Nature’s book of infinite secrecy/ A little I can read”. These words of the soothsayer in Shakespeare’s ‘Antony and Cleopatra’ (Act I, Scene ii) is symbolic. It is uttered in the company of Charmian and Iras, maidens attending on Cleopatra (Hutchinson n.d.: pl. facing p. 39); perhaps designed to foretell the end of Mark Antony<sup>1</sup> in the near future after the battle of Actium. Everything existing on this earth must pass through nature to eternity that is denoted by the common word “death”. But, death at a young age is cruel whether natural, volunteered, accidental or due to any injunction. The brilliant Tamil woman-mystic Āṇṭāl<sup>2</sup> and the versatile English poet, John Keats<sup>3</sup> died at a young age that was a great loss to the world of literature. The Buddha as a novice-monk was in pursuit of death but gave up the unnatural process of suicidal mortification (Le-Bon 1974: fig. p. 55, Yiengpruksawan 2007: 44-63, Ahuja 2013: fig. 6, pp. 21-24) and resorted to *yoga* to realize cosmic realities under the *Bodhi* tree at Sāranāth (Parimoo et al. 1991: I, pls. 50-45, 106-107)<sup>4</sup>. Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Gallico 1999: figures on pages 111, 20 & 42, Ahuja 2013: fig. 39) and Muḥammad of Mecca (cf. Stewart 1980: figures on pages 36-37) died at a relatively young age; otherwise the history of world’s greatest religions would have been different. If they had lived long [...]; this “if” factor in history is difficult to answer. Neither Jesus nor Muḥammad “invited” nor “pursued” death (Settar 1986, 1990); one was crucified by Jewish treachery of those times and other of some other malady. Preachers of terrorism do not die under a peaceful environment. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed for in the image of God made he man” (Genesis 9.6).

**Keywords:** Death, Tamil, bhakti, Vaiṣṇava, Periyālvār, Āṇṭāl, *tirumoḷi*

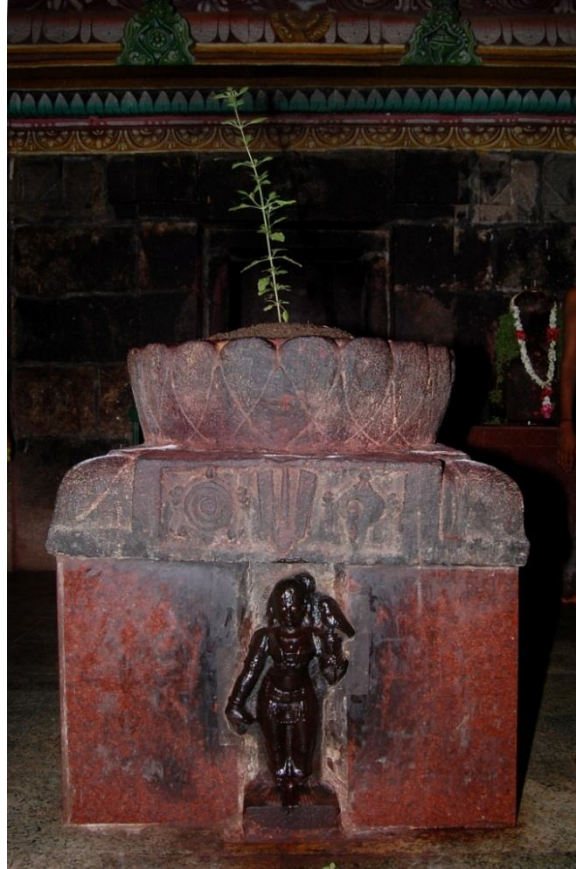
Death or the process of death is not the main concern of this brief communication.<sup>5</sup> Death and mummies have a long story to tell from the Egyptian pyramids (Hutchinson n.d.: 20, 39) to the *mahāstūpa* of Borobudūr (Ariswara 2008: 2 fig) in Indonesia, including the several hundreds of ruined funerary from Gandhāra in the northwest of South Asia to Sañchī in central India and Amarāvati in peninsular India; new reports of such dilapidated monuments and other artifacts coming to light from time to time (Shah 2011: 111-30, cf. Verardi 2012: 153-72 and Ahuja 2013: 21-23, fig. 5).

The present article is a summary of ten hymns, the work of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava mystic Periyālvār, author of the most melodious among the *bhakti* hymns<sup>6</sup> bearing on the devotional cult that swept over the Tamil country from the 5<sup>th</sup> (e.g. the Tamil work *Paripāṭal*, cf. Zvelebil 1974: 49) to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Quite unusually, deviating from the central theme of the story, i.e. *bhakti* “devotion” Periyālvār (Fig. 2) talks of the agony of death<sup>7</sup> (*Tirumoḷi* 4.5.1-10), which it is not clear, has anything to do with the death or apotheosis of Āṇṭāl (Fig. 3). Of course, the death-motif is artificially linked with devotion to Viṣṇu in a bizarre locale.<sup>8</sup> The cited *tirumoḷi* (“sacred saying”) may be interesting from the anthropologist’s point of view that may be examined by trained scholars for further investigation. I am just summarizing the thoughts in an orderly pattern keeping track of the contemporary death-bed conventional treatment and ceremonies. *Śrāddha* again is an extensive field

for research as regulated in Sanskritic lore (Basham 1971: 157, 171, 178), and the pains of hell enumerated in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* ('Dharma-preta-kāṇḍa', chap. 3)<sup>9</sup>.



1. Peiyālvār finds Āṅṭāḷ, Āṅṭāḷ-Vaṭapatraśāyī temple, Śrīvilliputtūr © Villiputtūr Temple & R.K. Parthiban



2. Āṅṭāḷ, Balibera, Āṅṭāḷ-Vaṭapatraśāyī Temple, Śrīvilliputtūr © Villiputtūr Temple & R.K. Parthiban

## Method

A word regarding the method for utilization of the Tamil hymns in the present essay may be added. The original text in any published work may not deviate from one another. Interpretations may differ as the hymns were analyzed by traditional scholars known as Ācāryas from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. The text and translation followed for the present study is the commentary of Periyavāccāṅ-piḷḷai (c. 1167-1262 CE). For Roman transcription the *Tamil Lexicon* method is assiduously followed. Citations from the Tamil hymns are presented in Roman transcription (cf. Rajarajan, Parthiban & Kalidos 2016 & 2016a) with the nearest English translation that could better be a summary of the ideas. Certain societal practices in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century are beyond comprehension of dictionary meanings. The *tirumoḷi* under study in its tenth hymn adds: *cettuppōvatōr pōtuniṅaintu ceyyūñceykai* “the rites that are performed at a time when human beings are nearing death”. The mystic’s advice is to give up desires for mundane properties and pleasures, and “Praise the Lord” that offers everlasting bliss.

## Hymns on Death

Ācaivāyc ceṅṅa cintaiyarāki yaṅṅai yaṅṅaṅeṅ puttiraṅ pūmi

Vācavārkuḷalāl eṅṅu mayaṅki māḷum ellaik kaṅ vāy tirāvātē (*Tirumoḷi* 4.5.1)

At the time of death human beings are directed by passionate attachment and are under a never-ending spell thinking of their mother, father, children, landed properties and wife and call out each one by their names. Death in this hymn is *māḷ* (*māḷutal* “to die”, to be finished TL V, 3181); PVP says “give up *prāṇa* (breath, respiration; Apte 2012: 375)”.

Do not waste time at the verge of death. Think of Keśava, Puruṣottama and the Lord Varāhaṃurti and mutter the sacred names if to be redeemed.

Ciyiṅār ciṅantēriya puṅmēr ceṅṅalērik kuḷampirunt eṅkum

Īyiṅāl arippuṅṅu mayaṅki ellaivāyc ceṅṅu cēr ... (*Tirumoḷi* 4.5.2)

The decaying body is swarmed by flies that lay eggs on mortal wounds, further worsened by oozing pus that leads the dying person to swoon and knock at the doors of death; it is the *carama-kāla*, time of death (PVP)<sup>11</sup>.

Before you reach the end-point think of the Lord, utter the sacred *aṣṭākṣara-mantra* (i.e. Om NaMoNārāYaṅaYa), and fold the hands up above the head in reverence.

Cōrviṅār poruḷ vaittatūṅṅākī collu colleṅṅu curṅumiruntu

Ārviṅālum vāytirāvātē yanta kāla maṅai... (*Tirumoḷi* 4.5.3)

You had concealed all the riches underneath the earth, and forgot where these properties are<sup>12</sup>. Your kith pester you to tell where the hidden riches are? Your physical status is such even if your favourite youngest wife demands<sup>13</sup>; you are unable to open mouth at the *antama-kālam* (time of breathing the last).

Build a *mānasa-mandira* [*ārvameṅpatōr-kōyil* for *kuṅbhābhiṣeka*], consecrate the image of Mādhava [*prathiṣṭha*] and offer flowers of love [*prema-puṣpāñjali*]<sup>14</sup> if you are to be redeemed from the clutches of the messengers of Yama<sup>15</sup>.

Mēl eḷuntatōr vāyuṅ kiḷarntu mēṅmiṅṅarṅṅai yuḷḷeḷa vāṅkik

Kāluṅ kaiyumu vitirvitirttērik kaṅṅurakka māvataṅ (*Tirumoli* 4.5.4)

At the time of death gas [*vāyu*<sup>16</sup>] in your body moves upward and attacks the heart naturally resulting in hands and legs jerking to and fro in epileptic attack<sup>17</sup>.

The remedy is to inhale the *praṇava-mantra*, i.e. ‘Om’ for three *māttirai*<sup>18</sup> unit of time inside the heart and practice *yoga* meditating on Viṣṇu, the Black<sup>19</sup>.

Maṭi vaḷi vantu nīrppulaṅ cōra vāyil aṭṭiya kañciyum miṇṭē

Kaṭai vaḷi vāraḱ kaṅṅa maṭaiṅṅaḱ kaṅ uṛakkam (*Tirumoli* 4.5.5)

Water pours in between the thighs through the penis<sup>20</sup>, and the gruel<sup>21</sup> fed into the mouth automatically drops out and stops heart-beat, the grains of food peeping out at either end of the mouth leading to *kaṅṅurakkam* (*parama-nidrā* “eternal sleep”).

If you have the will-power to win the battle against death keep the Lord that reclines on the Ocean of Milk in your mind<sup>22</sup>.

Aṅkam viṭṭavai yaintum makarṛi yāvi mūkkiṅiṅ cotittu piṅṅaic

Caṅkam viṭṭavar kaiyai maṛittup paiyavē talai cāy ... (*Tirumoli* 4.5.6)

The vital five-winds (*pañca-prāṇa* PVP, cf. the *Gītā* 7.4 *bhūmi* “earth”, *āpaḥ* “water”, *anala* “fire”, *vāyu* “air”, *kham* “ether”) in the human body had subsided when the senior men nearby test the corpse by placing fingers on nose to declare “He is dead”<sup>23</sup>, and they pose the question “what to do next?”

If you keep Madhusūdana in mind, it is possible to avoid any catastrophe. The breath may not stop if surrendered at the feet of Viṣṇu.

Teṅṅavan ṛamar ceppamillātar cēvatakkuvār pōlap pukuntu

Piṅṅum vaṅkayirṛār piṅṅit terrip piṅṅ muṅṅākav ilu ... (*Tirumoli* 4.5.7)

The servants of Yama (repeated in *Periyālvār-Tirumoli* 4.10.2-4, 9) are merciless. When the life-span of an individual is over, they arrive with tight ropes (*pāśa* “noose”) to bind the departed soul<sup>24</sup> as bulls are tied by servants (*nīcayonin* “low born” PVP) working in the cowshed; turn the dead person’s face upside down to drag him to the *naraka* “hell”.

If you think of Madhusūdana you shall be gifted to be commanders in the world of Viṣṇu, the Vaikuṅṭha.

Kūṭikkūṭi yurṛarkaḱ iruntu kurṛa nīrka narṛaṅkaḱ paṛaintu

Pātip pāṭiyōr pāṭaiyiliṭṭu narip paṭakkoru pākuṭam pōlē

Kōṭi mūti yeṭuppataṅ ... (*Tirumoli* 4.5.8)

The kith and kin of the departed person arrive in several groups to extol his fame (see note 1), keeping under check the misdemeanors committed by him, and cry aloud singing his glories<sup>25</sup>. They place the corpse in a stretcher<sup>26</sup>, offer new garment<sup>27</sup> as though feeding a herd of jackals with pots of the juice of jiggery so that the journey to the crematorium or burial-ground begins (*Dallapiccola* 2010: fig. cat. 3.1).

You may skip over the world of Yama if you find time to sing and play with Govinda (see note 23) that is decorated with the *kaustubha*<sup>28</sup>.

Vāy oru pakkam vāṅki valippa vārtta nīrk kuḷik kaṅkaḱ miḷarṛat

Tā yoru pakkan tantaiyuru pakkan tāramoru pakka malattat

Tī yoru pakkañ cēr ... (*Tirumoḷi* 4.6.9)

Due to the epileptic attack, the mouth is deformed at either end, the words fail to appear and tears pour through eyes. Mother on one side, father on the other side and wife standing nearby; they are dejected and looking round. Before the corpse is mounted on the funeral-fire, think of the Lord.

You may escape from the punishments of the servants of Yama<sup>29</sup> if you tightly catch hold of the red-eyed Black, CeṅkaṇMāl.

The tenth hymn says the man is on his death-bed; the mourning of which is retold by Viṣṇusiddha of Villiputtūr, i.e. Śrīvilliputtūr (Fig. 2). It seems the man on last-bed is round the age of sixty so that his mother, father, wife and children are gathered melancholically to see how he suffers. He had hidden his treasures in an underground vault, which worries the kith and look at him pathetically to say where the riches are hidden. The dying man is unable to speak. His mouth and legs are attacked by epilepsy inhaling the last life-wind, *vāyu* or *prāṇa*. Another old man has come, places his fingers on the nose of the dying person and declares he is dead. The corpse is placed in a stretcher, taken to the crematorium and burnt. He is ultimately conveyed to heaven or hell determined by the good or evil done during lifetime. The mind is its own place and in itself can make a hell of heaven or heaven of hell (John Milton). Some say life is impermanent, and death brings the final solace and everlasting bliss in heaven.

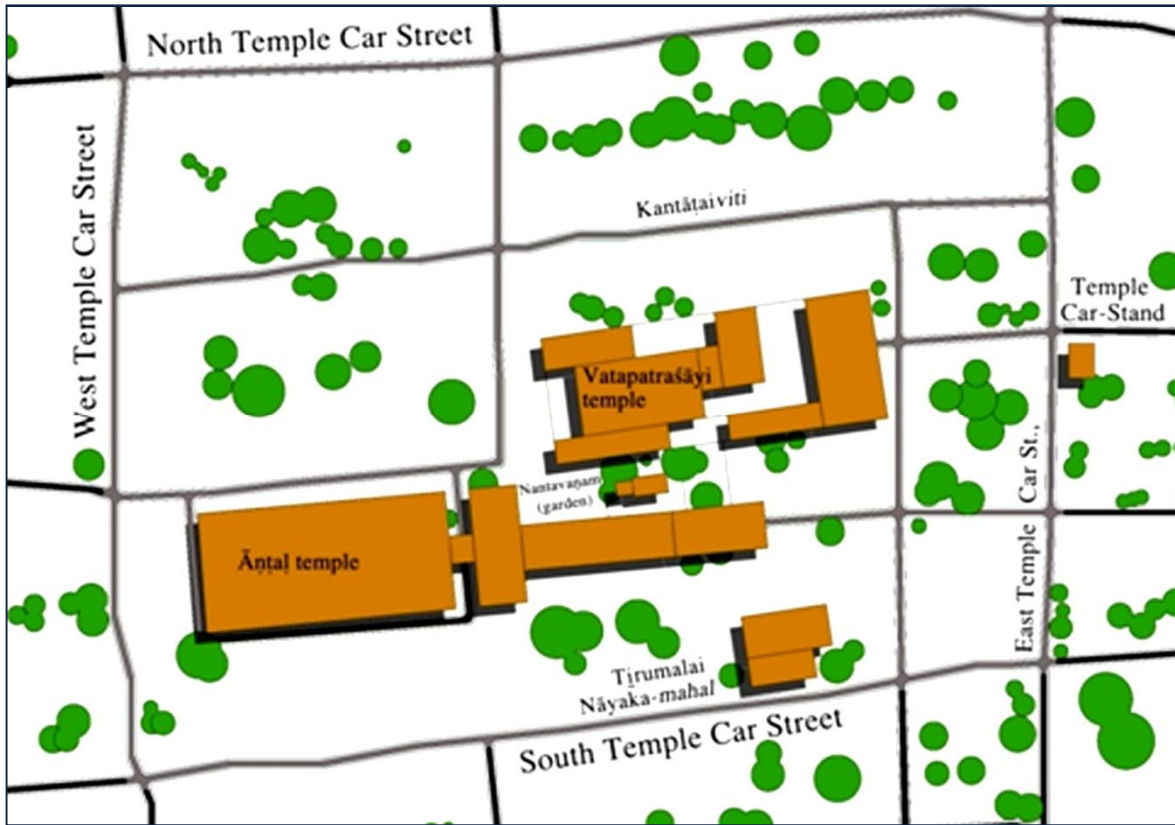
The Ālvārs have recorded the notions of old age, disease and death<sup>30</sup> that were turning point in the life of the Buddha (Arnold 1949: Book II) who renounced princely life and took to *sannyāsa*. A detailed description of the death process is new in case of the Tamil *bhakti* hymns as reported in *Tirumoḷi* 4.5. Naturally, the question is why Periyālvār presents such a minute description? It is not clear whether the Ālvār mourns the demise of his beloved daughter, Āṅṅāḷ (Fig.3) at a young age viewing death in its broad context of the biography of a Vaiṣṇava savant, the Bhāgavata. However, this could only be a vague gesture for which we have no definitive clues from the other hymns of either Periyālvār or Āṅṅāḷ<sup>31</sup>. *Tirumoḷi* 3.8.4 is important. To quote,

Oru makaḷ taṅṅai uṭaiyēṅ ulakam niṛainta pukaḷal

Tirumakaḷ pōla vaḷarttēṅ CeṅkaṇMāl tāṅ koṅṭu pōṅṅāṅ ...

“I have one daughter; I have brought up the maiden as Tirumakaḷ/Śrīdevī to deserve the appreciation of the people of world. The red-eyed Black took her away...” *Koṅṭupōṅṅāṅ*<sup>32</sup> is an important phrase that is subject to speculation. In folk parlance it denotes death.<sup>33</sup> True Vaiṣṇavas believe they breathe the last at the feet of Govinda (see note 23). Probably, Āṅṅāḷ died at a young age (cf. Keats dying of tuberculosis) that is camouflaged in the *Guruparamparā* mythologies as a wedding with Raṅganātha; the maid merging with eternity. Darwinian historians will never accept this. It is important to note Āṅṅāḷ had to face an honorable end because Periyālvār says her fame was universal, *ulakam-niṛainta-pukaḷ*; maybe she was the only woman mystic in Vaiṣṇava lore. Nappiṅṅai and Rādhā are of a different genre; later came Mīrābāī (Santhana-Lakshmi-Parthiban 2015). Āṅṅāḷ came to be identified with Bhūdevī (cf. *supra*. Tirumakaḷ, Ramanan 1989: 53) and was a cult icon installed in separate chapels in Tamilnāḍu, a status that Mīrābāī and Rādhā could not reach. Viṣṇu in middle, Śrī to the right and Āṅṅāḷ to the left is the established architectural setting (e.g. Kūṭal Aḷakar at Maturai) in most Viṣṇu temples of Tamilnadu since the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period (Rajarajan 2006: II, plans II, VI, IX, XI, XIV)<sup>34</sup>. It is significant to observe the architectural design of the Śrīvilliputtūr temple and rituals accord a place of eminence to the Feminine Principle (Fig. 3); a subject matter that is investigated by R.K. Parthiban (cf. Parthiban and Rajarajan 2016: fig. 2). The efforts of Periyālvār are

directed toward Māl-Viṣṇu to assure protection for the craving soul in its relentless pursuit of righteous living: *nī yeṇṇaik kākka vēṇṭum* “Thy bounden duty is to protect me (from terrors)” (TM 4.10.3-9).



3. Plan of the Śrīvilliputtūr Temple (by Vijaya-Raghavan Vira-Visodhana)

Indomitable souls never die<sup>35</sup>, e.g. the transformation of Kaṇṇaki from mortality to divinity (Rajarajan 2015: chap. V)<sup>36</sup>; they live long by virtue of the heritage (Indian *dharma*, Tamil *aṛam*) they had bequeathed for humanity; *takkār takavilar eṇṇpatu avaravar eccattār kāṇappaṭum* “a fit person’s legacy is estimated by what he had left” (cf. Pope’s translation of *Tirukkuraḷ* 114). France had undergone disastrous experiences with the Bourbons after the death of Napoleon (cf. Hutchinson n.d.: pl. facing p. 1), his statue brought back to Paris that was acclaimed by the blind mother of Bonaparte “Once again the Emperor is in Paris” (Nehru 2004: 455). Cleopatra in Shakespeare is a formidable personality living long in the pages of history. Death cannot wither immortal souls.

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have  
Immortal longings in me (‘Antony and Cleopatra’ V, ii)

<sup>1</sup> Cleopatra and Octavius Caesar mourn the suicidal death of Antony that has gone deeply recorded in dramatic verses of Shakespeare in ‘Antony and Cleopatra’:

Cleopatra speaks: “... a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished... Noblest of men... O, wither’d is the garland of war, / The soldier’s pole is fallen... / we have no friend” (IV, xv)



Octavius Caesar speaks: “A greater crack. The round world/ Should have shook lions into civil streets/ And citizens to their dens/ The death of Antony/ Is not a single doom; in the name lay/ A moiety of the world” (V, i)

- <sup>2</sup> It is not known under what circumstances Āṅṅāḷ died. Her marriage with Raṅganātha (Tamil Araṅkaṅ) takes place in the Śrīraṅgam temple (cf. Rajarajan, Parthiban and Kalidos 2017: 15-17). After this event she disappears from the pages of history, and is supposed to have merged with “eternity” (Āṅṅirappaṭi-Guruparamparāprabhāvam, 49-50). How? The Guruparampara hagiographers do not seem to reply this question. Merging with the Lord is a fantastic hallucination (Ceṅkaṅmāltāṅ koṅṅupōṅṅāṅ “the red-eyed Black-Viṣṅu carried her away” *Tirumoḷi* of Periyāḷvār 3.8.4); Āṅṅāḷ must have died due to some malady or other means hook or crook, volunteered or forced (cf. Tirunāḷaippōvār in *Tiruttoṅṅar Purāṅam*). For further reading on premature death, cf. Blackburn 1985: 260-271.
- <sup>3</sup> Keats must have been of the age of Āṅṅāḷ just twenty-six while breathing the last. He had a premonition of death (see note 24); cf. “... life is but a day; / A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way” (‘Sleep and Poetry’, *Selected Poems*, p. 43).
- <sup>4</sup> Images illustrating the *parinirvāṅa* of the Buddha (Gadebush n.d.: 33; Ahuja 2013: fig. 6) are laid up in *pretāsana* (symbolic of breathing the last); a hand touching the earth, *bhūmisparśamudra* (to symbolize the impermanence of worldly life). Is it particularly related to Bodh Gaya? (Ahuja 2013: 194).
- <sup>5</sup> For a recent on study on death, see Ahuja (2013: 14-49). Naman P. Ahuja has systematically made a chapter ‘Death: The Body is but temporary’, with thirty-nine illustrations covering a period over ancient to modern with an array of literary analysis.
- <sup>6</sup> Known as Paṅṅarpirāṅ-Vittucittaṅ (lord of *bhaṅṅas*, Viṣṅusiddha), he is the author of 473 hymns, mostly quatrains brought under the *Tiruppallāṅṅu* and *Tirumoḷi* (cf. Rajarajan, Parthiban & Kalidos 2016 & 2016a). The names Paṅṅarpirāṅ (cf. Kalidos 2015: 139) and Viṅṅicittaṅ appear in the *Tiruppāvai* (30), *Nācciyār Tirumoli* (1.10, 5.11) and *Tirumoḷi* (3.1.11, 3.3.10).
- <sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the subject in Kulacēkara Āḷvār’s *Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi*, see Anandakichenin 2014: 167-201. It is interesting note the Islamic *Marsiya*s tradition are poems of tribute and lament upon the death, in Iraq. This genre of poem narrates the whole series of experience encircling the qurbani-e ‘azim “great sacrifice” offered by Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muḅammad (cf. Bard and Ritter 2009: 21-53).
- <sup>8</sup> It is not about mere understanding of the biography of the Tamil mystics, but the transformation of epitome of those mystics into literature and art. It is combination of two-fold theories, the mystics’ real life and their re-embodiment in the folk imaginative narrations regarding death. It is pertinent to realize the factual course that links the folklore and the hagiography that pinpoints the mysticism of the Tamil mystics (cf. Prentiss 1999: 109).
- <sup>9</sup> Dated in c. 900 CE (O’Flaherty 1994: 18), the work is posterior to Periyāḷvār by about fifty years.
- <sup>10</sup> This phase covers the Ācāryas from Rāmānuja to Maṅṅavāḷa-māmuṅikaḷ; the forerunner Nātamūṅi is dated in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Zvelebil 1974: 91), last in the line being Aṅṅaṅgarācārya.
- <sup>11</sup> *Carama-tacai* is the “moment of death” and *carama-kiriyai* “funeral rites” (TL III, 1314). Cf. *śramana* is a Jain trained in *sallekhanā* “ritual-death” (Settar 1986: 271, 273).
- <sup>12</sup> Misers earning wealth by illegal transactions such as money-lending is common in any part of the world; e.g. Shylock in Shakespeare’s ‘Merchant of Venice’. Such people in those times buried “black-money” in secret vaults never to see the light again. News reports of the discovery of hidden treasures are quite common in the vernacular dailies in South India.
- <sup>13</sup> With rich men, aristocrats and nobles’ polygamy was common. This was a living tradition some fifty years ago. I am told my grandfather and great-grandfather had more than one wife and several concubines; e.g. Mātavi, the dancing girl in *Cilappatikāram*.

- <sup>14</sup> These cult practices are retold in the *Cilappatikāram* (28.224-233); i) expert architects, *nūṇeri-mākkaḷ* erecting a Temple for the Goddess of Chastity, *Kaṇṇaki*, ii) installation of an image by those proficient in *prathiṣṭha* ceremony and iii) offering *puṣpāñjali*, *pūppali* (cf. Rajarajan 2016: chap. V).
- <sup>15</sup> *Yama-dūtas* ('Yamapaṭārar' PVP) are called 'Aravar'. They inflicted punishments such as taking away life with a noose. *Pāśa* is *taṅṭam/daṅṭa*; therefore, *Yama* is *daṅṭanāyaka* "rod-applier", a judge (Monier-Williams 2005: 466).
- <sup>16</sup> *Vāyu* (wind or gas), *pittam* (bile) and *kapam* (phlegm) are supposed to be present at a balanced ratio in the human body. If any one goes up or subsides abnormally that results in ailments and death (cf. *Uttara-Rāmāyaṇam* cited in TL II, 722).
- <sup>17</sup> Contemporary medical technology says this is "high temperature" or "heart-attack" resulting in paralysis leading to death.
- <sup>18</sup> *Māttirai* is a unit of time, the fracture (2/5) of a second (TL V, 3153).
- <sup>19</sup> Scholars have discussed the impact of *haṭhayoga* in the iconography of Indian images of the gods and goddesses (Goldberg 2002: chap. 2).
- <sup>20</sup> This is called *amuri*, also known as *civa-nīr* (Śiva's water) or *vīra-maruntu* (medicine of chivalry) in the *Tirumantiram* (3.20.1-6) that is considered either urine or semen. The Tamil *siddhas* had a belief in urine-therapy.
- <sup>21</sup> *Kaṅci* is the breakfast; lunch and dinner for the proletariat in the Maturai region among the *piramalaikkallans* (cf. Dumont 1986: field work in 1920s). These people are today MLAs, MPs and million-dollar ministers. Once *kaṅci*-eaters, they are today dining in five-star hotels. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This subject is worth investigating keeping in reserve Dumont's work.
- <sup>22</sup> This hymn goes on to add when the messengers of *Yama* drag the victims' dogs of infernal regions bite thighs, strike the sinners with lances and they are deprived of garments on the way. To an Indian, it appears the penal tortures of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* are portrayed in the High Renaissance paintings of the Vatican (Gallico 1999: figs. pp. 98, 100-101, cf. 54-55), which means religions of the world share some common thoughts concerning natural or human disasters.
- <sup>23</sup> Tribal and folk population today has their own country doctors to test the status of dying persons. Fingers are placed on nostrils to find out whether he breathes or not and decide the future course of action.
- <sup>24</sup> See images of *Kālāri* in Indian art through the ages; when *Yama* attempts to cast the noose on *Mārkaṇḍeya*, Śiva kicks the Lord of Death to protect the devotee (Rajarajan 2006: II, pls. 83-84; Kalidos 2006: II, pl. XVIII.2; Ahuja 2013: 31-32, fig. 12). The images illustrated in Kalidos, Rajarajan and Ahuja range from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>25</sup> Particularly women sing a death-song, called *oppāri* in Tamil that recollects the greatness of the dead person (Nabokov 2000: 155). On this occasion evil deeds are forgotten and the person's noble qualities are remembered (see note 1); cf. Mark Antony in 'Julius Caesar' (I, ii; III, ii). While singing, these women beat their chest with hands known as *māraṭittal* (chest beating). Now-a-days such professional singers do the job paid for their labour.
- <sup>26</sup> The stretcher called *pāṭai* is new of bamboo poles and coco leaves and decorated with flowers. At the graveyard it is broken and discarded. While lifting the corpse to mount on the stretcher, they shout "Govindā, Govindā"; *Tirumoḷi* 4.6.5 adds if the name "Govindā-Govindā" is muttered the evils of hell never haunt a devotee. When the procession moves dancing and merry-making by drinking arrack is very popular; particularly among the down-trodden communities.
- <sup>27</sup> The new garments are known as *kōṭi* (means the last or end of the garment). *Āṅṭāḷ* talks of the *kōṭi* (*Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* 6.3) offered at the time of her wedding. The garment offered at the time of death is *kōṭi* (also known as *cītēvi-cēlai*, sari of Śrīdevī for women) by the nearest kin (e.g. uterine sister or brother).



Āṇṭāḷ talking of [*mantirak*]-*kōti* “blessed garment” is enigmatic. Is it a premonition of her nearing end? I am told the new garment offered at the time of marriage is called *kūrai* (cf. *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* 3.2, 4, 8-9; *Tirumoḷi* of Periyālvār 4.6.1-2) which is tucked to the braid at the time of tying *tāli* (marriage badge in gold) and nuptial ceremony.

- <sup>28</sup> *Kaustubha*, Tamil *kauttuvam* is a celebrated *ratna* (jewel) of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa that was obtained from churning the Ocean of Milk (Liebert 1986: 132).
- <sup>29</sup> *Arava-taṇṭam* is the cruel punishment meted out to inhabitants of the hell by servants of Yama. *Taṇṭam* is *daṇḍa* (see note 12). *Tirumoḷi* (4.6.1-9) declares if the names of Viṣṇu are uttered the evils of *naraka*[*m*] do not afflict a devotee.
- <sup>30</sup> See *Tiruvāymoḷi* 2.3.10: *piṛappup-piṇi-mūppu-piṛapparu* “birth, disease, old age and give up birth, i.e. death”.
- <sup>31</sup> The *Guruparamparā* mythologies could not be taken into serious account because they are later medieval fabrications.
- <sup>32</sup> *Koṇṭukiṭṭupōka* (taking away), *tūkkikiṭṭupōka* (lift the stretcher and go) and *cettuppō* (“go and die” *Tirumoḷi* 4.5.10) are imprecatory phrases current in folk circle to denote “death”.
- <sup>33</sup> See Blackburn (1985: 255-274) for analysis of death concepts in folk and classical Hinduism. The work clearly demarcates the deviation of death between the classical and folk Hinduism. Death metaphors in folk and classical have similarities, continuity and differences, but folk is divergent also coherent to understanding. One interesting factor in folk worship is the oral performance for the deified dead, as they trace the indigenous mode of Hinduism. Further these folk factors are fundamentally courageous; simple and earthly, non-celestial, the characters are human, and finally the theme is human struggle between love and death. The Tamil literary sources carry ample evidences for the female struggle and their deification, good examples are Kaṇṇaki (Rajajaran 2000: 401-14, Lefèvre 2011: 86-87), Kāraikkālamaiyār (Pechilis 2008: 24) and Āṇṭāl (Rajajaran 2017: 55-56). In folk cult, the male characters are deified just for their heroic deeds, while female characters undergo differential ordeals of audacity, gallantry, and exoticism. The feminine folk is equally powerful and sometimes extremely violent.
- <sup>34</sup> R.K. Parthiban (Research Scholar in Design Department, IIT, Hyderabad) is working on the architecture vis-à-vis woman intangible heritage with focus on the Śrīvilliputtūr temple. He is a student of (Brandenburg Technical University, Cottbus) of World Heritage Studies, UNESCO sponsored. His search is to locate the “woman-power” in the architectural history of intangible heritage in the Indian context. The photographs added to the present article go to his credit, shot in 2015 during *Mārkaḷi* Festival.
- <sup>35</sup> The *Bhagavat Gītā*, scripture of the Hindus includes sermons on death. A brief note may be added here citing the original.

Antakāle ca māmeva smaranmuktvā kalevaram| yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvaṃ yāti nāstyatra saṃśayaḥ|| (*Gītā* 8.5).

“When one breaths his last thinking of Me, he reaches Me. He acquires my form.”

Yaṃ yaṃ vāpi smaranbhāvaṃ tyajatyante kalevaram| taṃ tamevaiti Kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ|| (*Gītā* 8.6).

“Whichever one thinks of that which is dear to him at the ‘end-time’ (Tamil *kaṭaici-kālam*) and melts his body (cf. *nīrāy urikki* ‘Civapurāṇam’ l. 69 of Māṇikkavācakar’s *Tiruvācakam* see Pope 2003: 6) he reaches the desired end.”\*

\* Āṇṭāḷ was all the time thinking of the Lord of Āraṅkam/Śrīraṅgam, and so the myths say she reached the Lord ultimately.

Kaviṃ purāṇamanuśāsītāra maṇoraṇīyāṅsamanusmaredhyaḥ| sarvasya dhātāramcintyarūpa mādiyavarṇaṃ tamsaḥ parastāt|| Prayāṇakāle manasā'calena bhaktyā yukto yogabalena caiva| bhṛvoṛmadhye prāṇamāveśya samyak sa taṃ paraṃ puruṣamupaiti divyam|| (*Gītā* 8.9-10).

“If you think with devotion the all-knowing, the antediluvian, the all governing, the minutest particle of atom, the bearer of all; he is for not cognizable, shining as sun, beyond darkness at the time of death with determination keeping the Lord in between your eye-brows, you (*ātma* “self”) certainly reaches the Parama-Puruṣa (Eternal Self).”

The *Gītā* says death is end of the existing body. The soul, *ātma* never dies (*Gītā* 2.18, 20). It migrates to another body according to the *karma* done in previous birth. The *divyātma* of sages and seers (differently known as *muni*, *ṛṣi*, *yogī*, *siddha* and so on) ultimately merges with Eternity that differs from religion to religion, Brahman in case of the Hindus; the Holy One, Jehovah, Yahweh, Ahura Mazda, Zeus and so on.

<sup>36</sup> Kaṇṇaki's end is also mysterious. She appears on the hill west of Maturai and is transported to the other world in an aerial chariot. A temple was built for her and a cult image consecrated; then she appears on the sky as a lightening figure and says (Rajajaran 2016: chap. V):

VeṇVēlāṇ kuṇṇil viḷaiyāṭṭu yāṇakalēṇ (*Cilappatikāram* 29, v. 13)

“I shall continue to play on the hill of Vēlāṇ/Murukaṇ, and never depart from here”.

Ardent Vaiṣṇavas dogmatically believe Aṅṅāḷ is proverbially living in the Śrīvilliputtūr temple. R.K. Parthiban has spotted a living *paṭṭar/bhaṭṭa* that is considered a descendant of Periyālvār (Parthiban & Rajajaran 2016: fig. 21). The *utsavabera* of Aṅṅāḷ is taken out for procession from his house during the *Mārkaḷi* (December-January) Festival. Thanks to R.K. Parthiban for the information.

## References

- Anandakichenin, Suganya (2012) “Kulacēkara Ālvār's ‘The Lament of Daśaratha’”, *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, Vol. 22.2: 167-201.
- Antony and Cleopatra, In ‘Shakespeare Complete Works’.
- Apte, V.S. (2012) *The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Poona, 1890) reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Āṅṅiyirappaṭi-Guruparamparāprabhāvam, ed. S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar, Family Trust (editor's), Tiruchi: Puttūr.
- Ariswara (2008) *Borobudur and Temples of Java*, Magelang: Indonesia.
- Arnold, Sir Edwin (1949) *The Light of Asia*, Bombay/Calcutta: Jaico.
- Bard, Amy and Valerie Ritter (2009) “A House Overturned: A Classical Urdu Lament in Braj Bhasha”, In Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan eds. *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia*, New York & London: Routledge.
- Basham, A.L. (1971) *The Wonder that was India*, Calcutta: Rupa.
- Blackburn, Stuart H. (1985) “Death and Deification: Folk Cults in Hinduism”, *History of Religions*, Vol. 24.3: 255-274.
- Cilappatikāram*, (2008/2011) ed. Na.Mu. Vēṅkaṭacāmi Nāṭṭar, Chennai: Rāmayya Patippakam.
- ‘Civapurāṇam’, see *Tiruvācakam*.
- Dallapicola, A.L. (2010) *South Indian Paintings A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, Ahmadabad: Mapin.

- Dumont, Louis (1986) *A South Indian Subcaste. Social Organization and Religion of the Piṛmalai Kaḷḷans*, (reprint) Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gadebush, Raffael Dedo et al. (n.d.) *Museum of Indian Art Berlin*. Munich, London, New York: Prestel.
- Gallico, Sonia (1999) *Vatican*. Roma: Edizioni Musei Vaticani - Arts Italia Editrice.
- Garuḍa Purāṇa*, (1986) Part II, Board of Editors, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- 'Genesis', In *The Holy Bible* [Old and New Testaments], (n.d.) London: Trinitarian Bible Society.
- Gītā: Bhagavat-Gītā* 1. Svāmi Citbhavānanda transl. Sri Rāmakriṣṇa Maṭha: Tirupparāyṭturi 1977; 2. Gita Press: Gorakhpur 1984/1996.
- Goldberg, Ellen (2002) *The Lord who is Half Woman Ardhanārīśvara in Indian and Feminist Perspectives*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Albany: State University of New York.
- Gustave, Le-Bon (1974) *The World of Ancient India*. (transl. David Macrae), New York: Tudor.
- Hutchinson, (n.d.) *History of the Nations*, I. London.
- Julius Caesar*, In 'Shakespeare Complete Works'.
- Kalidos, Raju (2006) *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Iconography: Early Medieval, II Śiva*. Delhi: Sharada.
- . (2015) "Bhatkal or Bhaṭkal: Some Thoughts for Consideration", In J. Soundararajan, *Glimpses of Vijayanagara-Nāyaka Art*, Delhi: Sharada. 135-60.
- Keats, John (1996) *Selected Poems*. et alii., reprint London: Penguin.
- Lefèvre, Vincent (2011) *Portraiture in Early India Between Transience and Eternity*, Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Liebert, Gösta (1986) *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions Hinduism-Buddhism-Jainism*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Delhi: Sri Satguru.
- Monier Monier-Williams, (2005) *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1899], reprint Delhi: Sharada.
- Nabokov, Isabelle (2000) "Deadly Power: A Funeral to Counter Sorcery in South India", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 27.1: 147-168.
- Nācciyār Tirumoḷi of Āṇṭāḷ*, In 'Nālāyiram'.
- 'Nālāyiram': *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam* (2010/2014) ed. Pulavar Ta. Tiruvēṅkaṭa Rāmāṇucatācaṅ, 4 vols., Chennai: Umā.
- Naman P. Ahuja, (2013) *The Body in Indian Art and Thought*. Brussels, Ludion, Antwerp: Europalia International.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal (2004) *Glimpses of World History*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy D. (1994) *Hindu Myths A Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Parimoo, Ratan et al. (1991) *The Art of Ajanta: New Perspectives*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., New Delhi: Books & Books.
- Paripāṭal*, ed. Pō.Vē. Cōmavcuntaraṅār, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. [1957] Chennai: Kaḷakam.
- Parthiban, R.K. & R.K.K. Rajarajan 2016. "Nāyaka chefs-d'oeuvre: Structure and Iconography of the Śrīvilliputtūr Tēr", *Acta Orientalia*, 77, 145-91.
- Pope. G.U (1900/2003). *Tiruvācakam* (text and translation). University of Madras: Chennai.
- Prentiss, Karen Pechilis (1999) *The Embodiment of Bhakti*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PVP: Periyavāccāṅ-piḷḷai, Commentary on the 'Nālāyiram' other than the *Tiruvāymoḷi*: maran'sdog@org.
- Ramanan, Mohan (1989) "Āṇḍāl's "Tiruppāvai", *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 24 (1989), no. 2, pp. 51-64.

- Rajarajan, R.K.K. (2000) *Dance of Ardhanārī as Pattinī-Kaṇṇaki: With special reference to the Cilappatikāram*. *Berliner Indologische Studien*, Vol. 13/14: 401-14.
- . (2006) *Art of the Vijayanagara-Nāyakas: Architecture & Iconography*, 2 vols. New Delhi: Sharada.
- . (2016) *Masterpieces of Indian Literature and Art - Tears of Kaṇṇaki: Annals and Iconology of the 'Cilappatikāram'*. New Delhi: Sharada.
- Rajarajan, R.K.K., R.K. Parthiban and Raju Kalidos [Principal Investigator] (2016) *Hymns for Cosmic Harmony 'Nālāyirativviyappirapantam' Four-Thousand Divine Revelations (Roman Transcription, English Summary and Transcendence)*, 4 vols. (MS circa 2,300 pages), New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- Rajarajan, R.K.K., R.K. Parthiban and R. Kalidos [Principal Investigator] (2016a) *Concise Dictionary of Viṣṇuism based on 'Nālāyirativviyappirapantam'* (MS circa 2,200 pages), New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- Rajarajan, R.K.K., R.K. Parthiban & Raju Kalidos (2017) *Samāpti-Suprabhātam – Reflections on South Indian Bhakti Tradition in Literature and Art*. New Delhi: Sharada.
- Santhana-Lakshmi Parthiban (2015) “Nappiṇṇai, Rādhā and Mīrābāi in the Historical Vortex”, Paper presented in the National Seminar on ‘Classical Tamil’, Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram.
- Settar, S. (1986) *Inviting Death, Historical Experiments on Sepulchral Hill*, Dharwad: Institute of Art History.
- . (1990) *Pursuing Death, Philosophy and Termination of Voluntary Termination of Life.*: Dharwad: Institute of Art History.
- Shah, Julia (2011). “Monasteries, Monasticism, and Patronage in Ancient India: Mawāsa, a Recently Documented Hilltop Buddhist Complex in the Sanchi Region of Madhya Pradesh”, *South Asian Studies*, 27.2: 111-30.
- Shakespeare Complete Works*, (1964) Peter Alexander (Ed.), London & Glasgow: ELBS.
- Stewart, Desmond (1980) *Mecca*. [photographs by Mohamed Amin] New York: Newsweek.
- Tirukkuraḷ*, (2005) G.U. Pope (Transl.), Umānūl: Thanjavur.
- Tirumantiram* (n.d.\*) vols. 14-16, under ‘Paṇṇiru-Tirumuṛaika!’ (totally 24 volumes), Chennai: Vartamāṇaṇ Patippakam, (\* released in 2015).
- Tirumoḷi* of Periyālvār, In ‘Nālāyiram’.
- Tiruppāvai* of Āṇṭāl, In ‘Nālāyiram’.
- Tiruttoṇṭarapurāṇam* [Tirunāḷaiappōvār] (2007) In Ca. Vē. Cuppiramaṇian, ‘Paṇṇirutirumuṛai’, 1125-1134. Chennai: Maṇivācakar Patippakam.
- Tiruvācakam*, see Pope (2003); Kaḷakam ed. Chennai (1948).
- Tiruvāymoḷi* of Nammālvār, In ‘Nālāyiram’.
- TL: *Tamil Lexicon*, (1982 reprint) 7 vols. University of Madras: Madras.
- Verardi, Giovanni (2012) “The Brāhmaṇisation of Gandhāra and Greater Gandhāra”, In Tiziana Lorenzetti & Fabio Scialpi eds. *Glimpses of Indian History and Art Reflections on the Past, Perspectives for the Future*, Rome: Sapienza University of Rome. 153-72.
- Yiengpruksawan, Mini Hall (2007) “The Interstitial Buddha: Picturing the Death of Śākyamuni”, *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 44-63.
- Zvelebil, Kamil V. (1974) *Tamil Literature*. Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden.

**About the Author**

R.K.K. Rajarajan, Assistant Professor in Fine Arts at the Gandhigram Rural University, Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu. He has worked as Associate Professor in Visual Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and in the Eritrean Institute of Technology, Asmara. He was an Alexander von Humboldt Post-doctoral Fellow, in the Institut für Indische Philologie und Kunstgeschichte, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany. He is a prolific contributor to international journals and published works from Netherlands, Cluj-Napoca, Rome, Naples, Berlin, Reinbeck, Oxford & IBH, Routledge and several more in India (International: 27 & National 39). His works on *Masterpieces of Indian Literature and Art - Tears of Kaṇṇaki: Annals and Iconology of the 'Cilappatikāram'* (2016), *Rock-cut Model Shrines in Early Medieval Indian Art* (2012), *Art of the Vijayanagara Nāyakas: Architecture and Iconography* 2 vols. (2006), and *Minākṣī-Sundareśvara: Tiruviḷaiyāṭar Purāṇam in Letters, Design and Art* (2013) in collaboration are norm-setting.