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**Reading Theology Across Genres: Maṇikkavācakar's
Tiruvācakam and *Tirukkōvaiyār* in Conversation**

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Reading Theology Across Genres: Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* in
Conversation

A dissertation presented

by

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to

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Reading Theology Across Genres: Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* in Conversation

Abstract

This dissertation examines two ninth-century Tamil Śaiva texts of different genres attributed to the poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar: the *Tiruvācakam* (“The Holy Utterance”), a collection of devotional hymns, and the *Tirukkōvaiyār* (“The Holy Garland”), a narrative about two lovers. *Tiruvācakam* is a beloved work still engaged by contemporary audiences, but *Tirukkōvaiyār* remains largely absent—peripheral at best—in both scholarship and practice. Thus, although these two texts are canonized together as a single volume in the Tamil Śaiva canon (*tirumurai*), Māṇikkavācakar’s contributions to Śaiva theology are predominantly understood through *Tiruvācakam* alone. This dissertation reintroduces *Tirukkōvaiyār* to larger discussions of theology and reads *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* together, framing them as related projects and significant Śaiva literary interventions in their period. I argue that despite disparate formal features and divergent reception histories, these texts use shared rhetorical strategies and poetic forms to construct a mutually constitutive Śaiva theology, the contours of which differ from previous Śaiva works. First, taking two large analytic categories—time and place—I demonstrate how these texts are in conversation with one another as they offer reflections on the hardships of human life and Śiva’s enduring grace. By looking at the use of shared grammatical forms, tropes, and poetic devices in expressions of time and place, I reveal a

deeply intertextual relationship and recover shared conceptual territory between them. Second, considering the theological implications of this shared territory, I then demonstrate that these texts are more than the sum of their parts. Reading them in tandem, I show that they are generative of an affect *karuṇai* (compassion) that contributes to a theological vision that places new emphasis on compassion, a previously underdeveloped concept in earlier Śaiva devotional literature. Casting aside the Śiva whose character is defined by chaos or paradox, I suggest instead that Māṇikkavācakar's Śiva is defined by compassion that is both reinforced and mirrored in the generative affect of compassion created for the reader by both texts' explorations of suffering. This dissertation is the first of its kind to approach these works as related projects and argues that not only should they be read together, but their theological message is understood more fully in doing so.

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Dedicated to Mom and Anne

Introduction

Māṇikkavācakar (“he of jeweled speech”) is a beloved Tamil Śaiva saint who composed devotional poetry in the ninth century CE. His words are still actively engaged with today, recited in worship and even printed in secondary school textbooks. Renowned for their sweetness, it is said that those who don’t melt at the sound of his words have hearts made of stone. Among his Śaiva contemporaries, Māṇikkavācakar stands out as a unique figure for composing in multiple genres. Two texts are traditionally attributed to him: the *Tiruvācakam* (“The Holy Utterance”) and the *Tirukkōvaiyār* (“The Holy Garland”). *Tiruvācakam* is considered a work of *bhakti*, or devotional poetry, grouped along with earlier Śaiva canonical texts like the *Tēvāram* (“Songs of the Lord”). *Tirukkōvaiyār*, on the other hand, is referred to as a literary text, or *ilakkiya nūl*, conceptually grouped with works like the early Caṅkam anthologies. While *Tiruvācakam* is comprised of multiple hymns set in the first person that recount ecstatic encounters with Śiva, *Tirukkōvaiyār* is a single continuous narrative that tells the tale of two lovers. Together, these texts comprise the eighth volume of the Śaiva canon, the *tirumurai* (“The Holy Collection”). Both are sophisticated poetic achievements that contain some of the most evocative devotional language in Tamil. However, due to their vast formal differences, their reception histories diverge significantly. From an early period, *Tiruvācakam* found its home in temple liturgy and continues to have ritual significance at present. *Tirukkōvaiyār*, on the other hand, fell into relative obscurity and is only mentioned in passing in literary commentaries. These works are so different in form that there has been a prolonged (often heated) debate in secondary scholarship over whether they share the same author.

As early as the seventeenth century, missionary scholars noted the centrality of the *Tiruvācakam* in religious life in Tamil Nadu. In the early eighteenth century, Bartholomäus

Ziegenbalg of Saxony, a member of the first Pietist mission to India, named it as one of the four primary texts of South Indian Śaivism in his *Genealogie der malabarischen Götter*.¹ In the nineteenth century, G.U. Pope, a Canadian Anglican missionary, commented on the degree to which it is cherished by wide audiences.² These types of observations about *Tiruvācakam* coupled with the lack of documentation of Māṇikkavācakar's other text, *Tirukkōvaiyār*, reveal something about the historical reception of these texts as well as the state of contemporary scholarship on them. While there have been numerous monograph-length works on Māṇikkavācakar that address *Tiruvācakam*,³ those that explore or even mention *Tirukkōvaiyār* can be counted on one hand.⁴ No study to date has attempted to account for these works as

¹ Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg places *Tiruvācakam* alongside the *Tēvāram*, *Śivajñāna Bodham*, and *Civavācakam* as one of the four foundational texts of Śaivism in South India. *Genealogie der malabarischen Götter* (Madras: Christian Knowledge Society's Presse, 1867), 35-36.

² G.U. Pope notes: "The fifty-one poems which are here edited, translated, and annotated, are recited daily in all the great Caiva temples of South India, are on every one's lips, and are as dear to the hearts of vast multitudes excellent people there, as the Psalms of David are to Jews and Christians." IX, "It is quite certain that the influence of these poems in South India is like that of the Psalms among Christians, and that they have touched for generations the hearts of the vast majority of the Tamil-speaking people." *The Tiruvācakam or 'Sacred Utterances' of the Tamil Poet, Saint, and Sage Māṇikka-vācakar*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), xxxiv.

³ See Glenn Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Śiva* (New Delhi: Heritage, 1987); Radha Thiagarajan, *A Study of Mysticism in Tiruvācakam* (Madurai: Madurai Kamaraj University, 1983); Ratna Navaratnam, *Tiruvachakam: The Hindu Testament of Love* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963); G. Vanmanikanathan, *Pathway to God Through Tamil Literature Volume I-Through the Tiruvācakam* (New Delhi: Delhi Tamil Sangam, 1971) and *Maanickavaacagar, poet and mystic: an original interpretation of the Tiruvaacagam* (Tiruchirapalli: Tirukkural Prachar Sangh, 1970); Baskaran Pillai, "The religio-spiritual experiences of Māṇikkavācakar" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1989); Anthony Garnder Harris "Obtaining Grace: Locating the Origins of a Tamil Śaiva Precept" (PhD diss., The University of Texas, 2008), and Mā Caṇmukacuppiramaṇiyam, *Tiruvācakat Tēṇamutam* (Ceṇṇai : Tirunelvēli Tēṇṇintiya Caivacittānta Nūṛpatippuk Kaḷakam, 1983).

⁴ These include but are not limited to: Leah Comeau, *Material Devotion in a South Indian Poetic World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Norman Cutler "Four Spatial Realms in Tirukkōvaiyār," in *Tamil Geographies: Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South*

related projects in close conversation with one another.⁵ Thus, Māṇikkavācakar's contribution to Tamil Śaivism is largely understood through *Tiruvācakam* alone.

This dissertation reads *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* together, framing them as related projects and significant Śaiva literary interventions in the ninth century. I argue that despite disparate formal features, these texts use shared rhetorical strategies and poetic forms to construct a mutually constitutive Śaiva theology, the contours of which differ from previous Śaiva works. First, taking two large analytic categories—time and place—I demonstrate how these texts are in conversation with one another as they further the *bhakti* project of drawing Śiva closer, both to the speaker and to the reader. By looking at the use of shared grammatical forms, tropes, and poetic devices, I reveal a deeply intertextual relationship and recover shared conceptual territory between them. Considering the theological implications of this shared territory, I then demonstrate that these texts are more than the sum of their parts. Through tandem reading, I show that they are generative of the affect *karuṇai* (compassion), a new point of focus in Tamil Śaiva theology. In Māṇikkavācakar's texts, “compassion” gains prominence as a qualifier of Śiva's nature which is then reflected in the texts' overall emotional affect. These observations illuminate the unique theological contributions of *Tiruvācakam* and reintroduce *Tirukkōvaiyār*, a largely obsolete text, to larger discussions of Śaiva theology.

India, ed. Martha Ann Selby and Indira Viswanathan Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 43-58; and David Shulman, “Tirukkōvaiyār: Downstream into God,” in *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 131-149.

⁵ Cutler (2008) gives brief suggestions as to how these two texts should be situated in relationship to one another in their respective literary domains. A. Susaimani takes up a singular theme in both texts, but does not construct a strategy to read widely across them (“The beauty of God: the feminine aspect of the divine in Hindu religious traditions with special reference to *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* by Māṇikkavācakar” [PhD diss., Institute of Philosophy and Culture, 2011]).

Tiruvācakam and *Tirukkōvaiyār* display genre innovation and transformation by breaking from extant literary traditions and playing with established tropes and poetic devices. By taking extant literary categories and expanding their parameters they also push the boundaries of their audiences' horizons of expectation. Māṇikkavācakar uses newly created discursive paradigms to create a vision of Śaivism that is also new. Given this foray into uncharted discursive territory, two questions arise: who was conversant with these new paradigms and where were they operational? While not the central focus of this dissertation, in considering *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* as related projects, I engage Norman Cutler's compelling proposition that *Tiruvācakam* is geared toward a devotional public, and *Tirukkōvaiyār* toward a literary elite.⁶ Observing their vast formal differences, Cutler argues that they were geared toward different specialized readers. This dissertation contributes to this conversation and offers material for thinking through how experimentation with genre may have allowed Māṇikkavācakar to claim new cultural space for Śaiva communities.

The ninth century was a fluid period during which sectarian groups were just beginning to establish new relationships with larger institutional power structures. During this period there was both a proliferation of new forms of literature and new connections between sectarian religious groups and state formations. In the case of Tamil Śaivism, the relationship between Śaivism and the imperial Cōḷa court would fully crystalize a few centuries later. If we take Cutler's assertion seriously—that by inserting themselves in new discursive domains, access to new audiences became possible—we can think more broadly about the significance of multi-genre authors, their commitments, and the legacy of their works. In the history of Tamil Śaivism, Māṇikkavācakar's texts stand out as a unique set of materials for thinking through these issues.

⁶ See Cutler, "Four Spatial Realms."

Though Māṇikkavācakar is unique amongst his temporally proximate Śaiva peers, he is in good company in the larger literary landscape. In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional realm, saint Nammālvār is a close analogue whose works *Tiruvāymoḻi* (“The Holy Word”) and *Tiruviruttam* (“The Holy Viruttam”) closely approximate the formal differences seen in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. Similarly, famed Southern poet Vedāntadeśika is known for his oeuvre’s internal diversity of both form and language. This dissertation thus contributes to our understanding of multi-genre authors and their works and has wide purchase for the study of South Asian literary production and religious history.

Māṇikkavācakar

What we know of Māṇikkavācakar comes primarily from a hagiographical tradition which began hundreds of years after his time. The name Māṇikkavācakar does not appear until very late, adding to the complexity of tracing him as a single author. Māṇikkavācakar is not mentioned in Cuntarar’s eighth-century *Tirutoṇṭattokai* (“Anthology of the Holy Servants”), an omission often cited as evidence for a ninth-century dating.⁷ By the tenth century, Māṇikkavācakar is mentioned alongside the *mūvar* of the *Tēvāram* as “*peruntuṟai piḷḷai*,” the child of Peruntuṟai, in the *Tiruviṭaimarutūr mummaṇikkōvai* (“The Garland of Three Gems of

⁷ The list of saints which Cuntarar provides becomes immutable once established and is not edited or added to in Nampī Āṇṭār Nampī’s subsequent tenth-century *Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti* (“The holy *antāti* of the Saints”). *Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti* contains narrative elaboration on the lives of each saint. In it, Nampī opens his text by indicating that he follows Cuntarar’s text (thus explaining the absence of Māṇikkavācakar): “On the Northern bank of the Kāveri in Nāraiṇ, Nampī, the brahmin, created that *antāti* which expounded upon the manner of the collection of slaves created in the work of the lineage of the sixty-three by the king of elephants. Let us take his golden feet as our guide” (*poṇṇi vaṭakarai cēr nāraiṇṟil puḷaikkai mukamaṇṇaṇ aṟupattu mūvar patitēm marapu ceyal paṇṇa toṇṭa tokai vakai palkum antāti taṇai coṇṇa maraikkula nampī pon pāta tuṇai tuṇaiyē*) (verse 1).

Tiruvīṭaimarutūr”) of Paṭṭiṇattatīkaḷ.⁸ The eleventh-century *Kōyil tiruppaṇṇiyar viruttam* (“The *viruttam* of the Holy Dancer of the Temple”) mentions a figure by the name “*civa pāttiyaṇ*” (devotee of Śiva)—presumably Māṇikkavācakar—and a text, “*tirukkōvai*,” likely *Tirukkōvaiyār*.⁹ By the twelfth century, he is mentioned similarly in the *Tirukkaḷiṟrupaṭiyār* (“Temple Servants of the Holy Elephant”) of Tēvanāyaṇār as *tiruvātavūrār*, “the one of Tiruvātavūr.”¹⁰ There is no mention of him in Cekkīlār’s twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam* (which follows Nampi, following Cuntarar). In all, there are few early textual sources in which we find reference to Māṇikkavācakar.

Similarly, in terms of early material evidence, there are few inscriptional accounts which refer to Māṇikkavācakar. Rather, there are a number of inscriptions which record temple donations for the singing of hymns from *Tiruvācakam*. An eleventh century inscription at Tiruvorriyūr (North Chennai) records a donation for the recital of *Tiruvempāvai*¹¹ and for a *pūja* lighting lamps to Māṇikkavācakar, given the title chief of the *āṇṭar*.¹² An eleventh-century inscription at the Virattānēcuvāra temple (Tirukōvilūr, Viḷuppuram district) refers to *Tiruvempāvai*, and a twelfth-century inscription from Iḷavanācūr temple (South Ārkāṭu district)

⁸ *vittaka pāṭal muttiram aṭiyarum tiruntiya aṇṇil perunturai piḷḷaiyum* (28, lines 30-31).

⁹ *varu vācakattiṇil murru uṇarṇṭōṇai vaṇ tillai maṇṇai tiruvātavūr civapāttiyaṇ cey tiru ciṟrampala poruḷār taru tirukkōvai kaṇṭēyum maṟru apporuḷai teruḷāta uḷḷattavar kavi paṭi cirippipparē* (verse 58).

¹⁰ *pāypariyōṇ tanta paramānanta payaṇai tuya tiruvāy malarāl col ceytu māya karuvātai yām ariyāvāru ceytāṇ kaṇṭāy tiruvatāvūr āḷuntēn* (verse 73).

¹¹ Kamil Zvelebil, *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, Handbook of Oriental Studies (E.J. Brill, 1995), 143.

¹² Rajeshwari Ghose, *Tyāgarāja Cult in Tamilnāḍu: A study in Conflict and Accommodation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1996), 147.

refers to the singing of *Tiruccālal*.¹³ Apart from these epigraphical sources, there are a number of bronze figures of Māṇikkavācakar, the earliest being from Citamparam, dating to the tenth century.¹⁴ Another unique specimen, forged out of copper alloy, dates to roughly the early twelfth century.¹⁵ From the twelfth century onwards, there is a proliferation of Māṇikkavācakar bronzes, most appearing in the thirteenth century and after.¹⁶ The iconography is remarkably similar across them: he is depicted wearing a loincloth (*vēṣṭi*), strings of *rudrākṣa* beads or pearls around his neck and wrists, a sacred thread (*upanayana*)—a sign of his *brahmin* status; he has elongated earlobes adorned with earrings, and curly hair, occasionally with top knot. His distinguishing features include his right hand elevated in *upadeśa*, or *cinmudrā*, and his left holding a palm-leaf manuscript which is inscribed with *nama civāya*. In many of these figures, Māṇikkavācakar stands on a lotus seat (*padmapīṭha*) with holes or hooks for bearing poles indicating use in processional worship.

While none of these individual pieces of evidence are enough to firmly date him, literary and material sources listed here offer enough evidence to see a constellation of references which share a common saintly figure emerging earlier than the eleventh century. Māṇikkavācakar as a figure becomes more fully realized in three hagiographical works that contain accounts of his life and deeds. These are the thirteenth-century *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam* (“The *Purāṇam* of the Holy Games”), a place tale (*talapurāṇam*) of Maturai which recounts the holy sports of Śiva written

¹³ Zvelebil, *Lexicon*, 143.

¹⁴ Dr. Vedachalam, Personal correspondence, 12/14/17.

¹⁵ See *The Hindu Saint Manikkavacakar*, ca. early 12th century, copper alloy, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Accession Number: AC1997.16.1.

¹⁶ See for example, *Indian and South East Asian Art, London* (London: Spink & Son Ltd. 1978), 32, figure 69.

by Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi; the fifteenth-century¹⁷ *Tiruvātavūrapurāṇam* (“The *Purāṇam* of the One of *Tiruvātavūr*”) by Kaṭavul Māmuṇivar which is an account of Māṇikkavācakar’s life; and Parañcōti Muṇivar’s seventeenth-century *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam*,¹⁸ a later version of Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi’s original text. Each of these contain the same basic outline of his life story: Māṇikkavācakar was born just outside of Maturai in Tiruvātavūr under Pāṇṭiya rule to brahmin parents. A gifted child with a penchant for learning, he gained the attention of the Pāṇṭiya king and became a minister in the court. The rest of his life is populated with stories of his contrasting commitments to both the king and to Śiva.

Each of these hagiographical works is uniquely historically situated. Rajeshwari Ghose addresses the earliest *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam* in her discussion of the “symbiotic relationship” between *bhakti* religiosity and formations of kingship under Pallava rule.¹⁹ This text, she argues, emerged at a time in which Pāṇṭiyas were re-entering the political arena in a significant way and helped to establish power through the alignment of royal and mythical families: Mīṇāṭci becomes a Pāṇṭiyan princess in this iteration of Śiva’s sports, and upon their marriage, Śiva, Maturai’s divine king. Ghose writes, “The superimposition of royalty on divinity led to a situation whereby Mīṇākṣi and Cuntarēśvara were virtually treated as owners and proprietors of Madurai with the Pandyas treated as their representatives.”²⁰ While the *Tiruvātavūrapurāṇam* is the only text of the three to be devoted solely to telling the life of Māṇikkavācakar, there is considerable episodic

¹⁷ Alternatively dated to the 18th century.

¹⁸ Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms,” 56.

¹⁹ The declaration of this symbiosis, later deemed “court-temple,” is related to Ghose’s discussion of Dirks’ argument that *dāna* replaced sacrifice in forms of ritual kingship starting in the middle of the eighth century with Nandivarman Pallavavarman. *Tyāgarāja Cult*, 295.

²⁰ Ghose, *Tyāgarāja Cult*, 296.

overlap between it and both versions of the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam*. The later *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal Purāṇam* revivifies the earlier version during Vijayanakara rule under the patronage of Tirumalai Nāyakkar. Each version of the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam* is, as William Harman argues, a history, in that it is a “careful, systematic, and passionate statement about the past of Madurai and the deities presiding there.”²¹ These texts also generate histories of Māṇikkavācakar that are passionate statements about him as a religious figure and his role in Maturai’s mythic and narrative landscape.

The existence of these later hagiographies has created an image of Māṇikkavācakar which is read back onto the texts attributed to him. These characterizations, the stories of his life, and the contours of his mythology have significantly influenced interpretations of both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. One of the dominant approaches to interpret *bhakti* literature, across sectarian lines, is to read it autobiographically. Given the ubiquitous use of the first-person voice, the long and detailed hagiographical traditions attached to saint composers, and the traditional reception of these texts, it is easy to see why this approach remains a mainstay. It is indeed common in the study of Māṇikkavācakar whose soulful expressions voiced predominantly in the first person are read as personal accounts of ecstatic religious experience in almost every available study to date.²² Stories of his *dīkṣā*, debates with Jains, travels in the

²¹ William Harman, *The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992) 24; Following in the vein of the intense localization that occurs in the *Tēvāram* hymns, in these *purāṇas*, properly classed as *talapurāṇa*, Śiva’s sports take particular place and time within the realms of namable kings.

²² Anthony Gardner Harris pushes back against this mode of reading in “Gracious Possession, Gracious Bondage: Śiva’s *Aruḷ* in Māṇikkavācakar’s *Tiruvācakam*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44 (2016): 411-436. For further problematization of reading the first-voice in a documentary manner see Anne E. Monius, “From foolish ascetics to enemies of Śiva: The fate of Jains as religious others in Tamil Śaiva literature,” in *Regional Communities of Devotion in*

Tamil countryside, and experiences at Tillai are all mapped back onto the *Tiruvācakam* by later readers of the text who seek to place particular songs at critical moments in the hagiographical narrative of his life.²³ While these mappings tell us much about the development of traditions of worship of Māṇikkavācakar as well as something about the reception history of these texts and how they are read, this dissertation offers an alternative reading strategy that does not discount the validity of autobiographical readings but adds to our understanding of these texts by focusing on poetics and rhetoric.

The Texts *Tiruvācakam*

Like *Tēvāram* composers Appar, Cuntarar, and Campantar's works, *Tiruvācakam* is a collection of hymns. Totalling 51 cantos which range in length from 10 to 100 verses, these hymns are not organized according to *paṇ*, or melody, like those of the *Tēvāram*, though they have been set to music and are sung widely in practice. The organization and ordering of the hymns is a matter of some debate. Influenced by the hagiographical tradition, both traditional and scholarly accounts attempt to read the events of Māṇikkavācakar's life onto the order of the hymns, but it is likely that a fixed order may not have been formalized until much later than their original composition. There is accordance between extant palm leaf manuscripts and early print editions of the text with little variance in the order of hymns, though even the palm leaves are likely not older than a hundred or so years.

South Asia Insiders, Outsiders, and Interlopers, eds. Gil Ben-Herut, Jon Keune, and Anne E. Monius (New York: Routledge, 2019), 12-30.

²³ See for example, Sivapriya, *True History and Time of Māṇikkavāsagar from His Own Work* (Delhi: Thiruththondur Veliyeedu, 1996).

While *Tiruvācakam* is grouped with other *bhakti* texts like those of the *Tēvāram*, it is unique in particular ways. It deploys fourteen varieties of meter, the most numerous being variations of *viruttam*.²⁴ This range and use of metrical variants is more complex and diverse than that found in the *Tēvāram*. Further, *Tiruvācakam*, more than any of the other *Tēvāram* collections, displays a wide variety of what one might call types of songs which range in content. There are strings of praise dedicated to Śiva's qualities and exploits line *Kīrtittiruvakaval* ("The Holy *akaval* of Glory"), and *Pōṛṛittiruvakaval* ("The Holy *akaval* of Praise"); outpourings of joy or sorrow over the speaker's state of being as in *Nīttal viṇṇappam*, ("The Petition on Abandonment") and *Arputappattu* ("The Wonderous Decad") that details Śiva's acts of mercy toward the speaker; songs that replicate visions of life in the form of games, or daily activities— notable examples include *Tiruttōṇōkkam* ("The Holy *tōṇōkkam*"), a girl's game involving the intertwining of hands, *Tirutteḷḷēṇam* ("The Holy *teḷḷēṇam*"), a clapping game, and *Tiruvuntiyār* ("The Holy *untī*"), a game much like badminton. Others like *Tirupporcuṇṇam* ("The Holy Gold Dust") tell of the preparation of powders for ritual bathing of Śiva, and *Tiruppūvalli* ("The Holy Creeper") details picking flowers for Śiva's worship. This dissertation views the diversity of songs as articulating and exploring distinct theological visions of Śiva's acts, qualities, and proper domains. As with speculation over his authorship of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, this dissertation seeks to provide an alternative reading of the internal diversity of *Tiruvācakam*—to see it as carefully crafted and intentional, rather than random or a case of mistaken attribution.

²⁴ Indira Peterson describes how *viruttam* comes from Sanskrit term *vr̥tta*, developed out of *kali* and *akaval* meters, and was used extensively by *Tēvāram* hymnists, then became specifically associated with narrative poetry of epics and *purāṇas*. *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 64.

The voice this text is written in, like its hymns' contents, also ranges widely. While the most recognizable of these songs are those set in the first person detailing individual experience or directly addressing Śiva, there are a number of songs which are sung in the voice of a female, or a group of women, and others which are set up as a dialogue. Singing in the voice of a female is not unknown to the *Tēvāram* hymnists and is also not uncommon in the hymns of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava saints. Hymns set in the female voice are read as exchanges between the lover, hymnist, and their beloved, the lord, though that is but one mode of interpreting this configuration. Directed hymns are not only addressed to Śiva as there are a number which speak to other figures including *Tirkkōttumpi* ("The Holy King Bee") which is addressed to a bee messenger, and *Kuyil pattu* (Decad of the *Kuyil*) which is addressed to a cuckoo messenger. Messenger poems have a long history in the poetic literatures of South Asia across languages. In the Tamil case, Caṅkam poetry is replete with such examples, the forms of which are later taken up by *bhakti* hymnists. Dialogic examples of hymns include *Tiruttacāṅkam* ("The Holy Ten Constituents"), an exchange between a devotee and a parrot, and *Annaippattu* ("Decad of the Mother"), a conversation between a girl and her mother. These dialogic hymns also have precedent in the earliest Caṅkam literature and in Sanskrit *kāvya*.

When considering this text in light of current definitions of *bhakti* that are based on other collections of South Indian devotional literature, it is immediately clear that Māṇikkavācakar does not participate in the intense localization that figures prominently in the works of the other saints, but rather frees Śiva of the particulars of place, creating an entirely new landscape in which Śiva dwells. This is not to say that he does not mention places—towns like Tillai in particular, Uttirakōcamāṅkai, and Tiruvaṇṇāmalai all find mention, among others, but the familiar refrain of *Tēvāram* hymns, "Śiva did this," or "dwells in this place" is not found as

frequently. Due to the fact that Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* is identified in contemporary scholarship by its heavy emphasis on particulars of place and localization of Śiva's cosmic acts, *Tiruvācakam* opens productive space for questions about the nature of Śaiva *bhakti* materials and the range of forms used to articulate Śaiva ideas.

While Śiva of the *Tēvāram* shows compassion toward his devotees and even towards those outside the fold, Māṇikkavācakar's Śiva is an intensely compassionate figure whose graciousness is emphasized throughout. The speaker's lowest states, in which they disparage themselves and their unworthiness, are constantly contrasted with both Śiva's magnificent cosmic form as well as his tenderness and love for such forlorn characters. The hymns in which Śiva displays radical mercy toward even the lowest of humans are some of the most beloved—they are what gain *Tiruvācakam* the description “*tēṇ*” (honey). Anthony Harris argues that in the *Tiruvācakam* there is an expansion of the semantic range of *aruḷ* (grace) that is used to describe Śiva's acts in the world from its initial use in Caṅkam poetry.²⁵ I here demonstrate how the proliferation of *karuṇai* follows suit and becomes a core theological concept. This dissertation considers what other literary and theological sources this radical compassion may have taken inspiration from.

Tirukkōvaiyār

Along with *Pāṇṭikkōvai*, *Tirukkōvaiyār* is one of the earliest of two surviving *kōvai*. While *Pāṇṭikkōvai* survives only in small fragments cited in *Iraiyaṇār akapporuḷ*, *Tirukkōvaiyār* survives in full. The term *kōvai* means string or sequence, like beads in a necklace or flowers in a garland. In the Tamil literary realm it refers to the stringing together of independent love scenarios from *akam* (love poems of the interior) poetry and arranging them into a continuous

²⁵ See Harris, “Obtaining Grace.”

narrative of four hundred stanzas. *Kōvai* are composed in *kaṭṭalaikkalitturai* meter, first employed by Śaiva saint Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and recognizable by each line of five feet (*cīr*), and initial rhyme known as *mōṇai*.²⁶ The *kōvai* remains one of the most understudied genres of Tamil poetry,²⁷ though early theoretical works like *Iraiyaṇār akapporuḷ* provide critical apparatus that seems to be designed to analyze the genre explicitly.

Kōvai track the unfolding relationship between a familiar pair of lovers, the hero (*talaivaṇ*, also known as *kiḷavittalavaṇ*, the hero of a situation) and heroine (*talaivi*) found ubiquitously in *akam* poetry. What sets this genre apart is the introduction of a new figure to the *akam* ethos, the patron of the poem (*pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*) who is referenced or inserted into each verse. In the case of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Pāṇṭiyan king Varakuṇa is mentioned in verses 306 and 327 and said by many to be the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*. The true *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ* of this text, however, is Śiva. The three characters who populate each verse are the unnamed hero and heroine and Śiva himself. The manner in which Śiva is inserted into every verse varies throughout the text, though his connection to the two lovers is almost always achieved by simile or metaphor wherein the heroine, for example, is likened to the women of Śiva's place. This conspicuous and repetitive insertion of Śiva into the trials and tribulations of a pair of lovers represents a radical shift in the Caṅkam narrative ethos, and as such must be investigated as a significant reimagining of the

²⁶ Niklaus Ulrike notes, "It is composed of four *netiḷaṭi* (i.e. line having five *cīr*). The first four *cīr* of each line should preferably be *iyaṛcīr*, and they must be connected in the *veṇṭaḷai* manner (cf. 4.6 and 4.5.). The fifth *cīr* of each line must be *kūviḷaṅkāy* or *karuviḷaṅkāy*. A *kaṭṭalaikkalitturai* should have as its last letter and –ē. "Introduction to Tamil Prosody," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* Volume 77 (1988): 189.

²⁷ With exceptions of Es Cauntara Pāṇṭiyan, *Tamiḷil kōvai ilakkiyam* (by Es. Cauntara Pāṇṭiyan (Ceṇṇai: Pāraṭi Puttakālayam, 2000) and P. Muttapaṇ, *Kōvai Ilakkiyam* (Ceṇṇai: Uma Pathippakam, 2007).

Caṅkam universe. This dissertation attends to the ways in which *akam* poetic strategies fundamentally alter or change Śaiva theology.

If *Tiruvācakam* lets go of the intense localization found in the *Tēvāram* hymns, *Tirukkōvaiyār* takes a laser focus on Tillai. Here Śiva's home as the cosmic dancer, Citamparam, becomes embedded in and illustrative of each of the five Caṅkam landscapes in which the love story between hero and heroine unfolds. In this text, we find echoes of the kinds of localization that takes place in the *Tēvāram* only in so far as any of Śiva's mentioned acts are tied or closely associated with Tillai by virtue of the structure of the verses. The close aligning of the *talaivi* and both Śiva and his earthly abode, Tillai, will be the subject of a Chapter Two.

Like the vast majority of *akam* poems, the love scenarios or themes which receive the most attention throughout this text are those of trysting and the various phases of separation. While marriage occurs relatively early in the text, it is quickly followed by separation of the hero and heroine. In true *talaivaṇ* fashion, the hero of the poem is off on various conquests soon after the marriage takes place. Allegorical readings of *Tirukkōvaiyār* hold that the *talaivaṇ* is representative of the soul, questing after its beloved, the lord, who is represented by the *talaivi*. While this configuration of lover and beloved has resonance across *bhakti* literature throughout South Asia, no extant allegorical reading of this text has adequately been able to account for the presence of Śiva in each of these verses. I hold that his addition throughout the text is not simply a matter of nods of praise, but rather, Śiva must be understood as an integral character to this newly reimagined Caṅkam love landscape. Thus, readings must be able to robustly account for Śiva's place in the triangulated relationship between each verse's three protagonists.

Literary Theorization in Tamil

By the ninth century, genre had not yet been robustly theorized in Tamil, though Sanskrit works such as Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* ("Mirror of Poetry") and Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaḷamkāra* ("Ornaments of Poetry") had already begun the work of formally addressing the question of genre with regard to *kāvya*. In the Tamil literary realm, *Tolkāppiyam* gestures towards theorizing types of poetry based on both form and content in the *ceyyuḷ iyal* (qualities of poetry) portion of *poruḷ atikāram* (section on meaning), though the focus is on Caṅkam poetry. *Iraiyaṇār Akapporuḷ* ("Iraiyaṇār's Meaning of Interior Poetry"), c. 4-6th centuries CE, which contains the earliest pieces of Tamil prose, theorizes aspects of *akam* poetry. By organizing its theorization around stolen (*kaḷaviyal*) and chaste (*karpu*) love (i.e. love before and after marriage), *Iraiyaṇār Akapporuḷ* takes the independent love scenarios of Caṅkam *akam* works and creates a narrative love story, one which later *pirapantam* run with.²⁸ *Iraiyaṇār Akapporuḷ* marks a significant moment in Śaiva literary production and represents a sectarian intervention into the world of grammar and literary theory; this text places itself as a composition of Śiva himself, drawing the practice of writing grammars and analyzing literature into the Śaiva domain.

In the twelfth century a genre of theoretical literature known as the *pāṭṭiyal* emerged. *Pāṭṭiyal* are treatises or grammars of praise poetry, the earliest of which is *Panṇiru pāṭṭiyal* wherein we find a list of seventy-four genres of *pirapantam*. *Pāṭṭiyals* begin in earnest to formalize genre distinction with their primary focus being on genres of praise such as *meykkīrti*, praise poems of kings. In the thirteenth century, a Nāṅkavirāca Nampi produces a treatise on *akam* poetics called *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* ("Illumination of *Akapporuḷ*") and is becomes

²⁸ Takanobu Takahashi conjectures that this short piece was written to make more accessible the nature and demands of *akam* poetics because *Tolkāppiyam* was not accessible as such and was too complex. *Poetry and Poetics: Literary Conventions of Tamil Love Poetry* (Leiden: EJ Brill (1989), 33.

significant source for the study of *kōvai* for two main reasons: it introduces a third, intermediary stage between *kaḷaviyal* and *karpu*, that of *varaivu* (marriage), and it separates love poetry into 32 distinct *kiḷavi* (situations)—these are further subdivided into *vakais* (types) and *viris* (sub-themes/events).²⁹ This text shifts from a “speaker-based” interpretive lens to a “theme-based” lens, thus continuing to theorize *akam* poetics in narrativized form, rather than as individual vignettes organized by person.³⁰ Though it is unclear when, *kiḷavi* were eventually adopted as labels for each verse of *Tirukkōvaiyār* and inform the way that the text is currently read; these situation titles persist in contemporary readings of the text and are heavily relied upon when the language is ambiguous or difficult to parse. The application of these titles to verses which, I argue, are deliberately ambiguous, preclude possibilities for interpretation and must be suspended when they limit range of meaning.

With the exception of *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ*, the bodies of theoretical texts mentioned above are all produced well after the ninth century but have lasting and significant influence on the reading of both of Māṇikkavācakar’s texts. They must be referenced and used judiciously, with keen attention to their own unique historical context.

Traditional Reception History

In the history of the Śaiva tradition, Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi is remembered as one of the earliest compilers of the Śaiva canon, the legendary account of which is found in Umāpati’s 14th-century *Tirumuṛaikantapurāṇam* (“The story of the Discovery of the *tirumuṛai*”). This text

²⁹ Takahashi, *Poetry and Poetics*, 35.

³⁰ Takahashi, *Poetry and Poetics*, 36.

details how Nampi collected the first seven books of the *tirumuṛai*³¹ (collectively the *Tēvāram*), then (depending on whether one agrees that verses 25 onwards are indeed part of the original text and not a later addition)³² added *Tiruvācakam* as the eighth, *Tiruvicaippā* as the ninth, and *Tirumantiram* as the tenth.³³ Even if the attestation of Nampi adding *tirumuṛais* 8-10 is from a later addition to the text, *Tirukkōvaiyār* is conspicuously absent.³⁴ This omission should be noted, for whatever Umāpati or a later editor's project was in constructing a history of canonization, the *Tirukkōvaiyār* does not have a proper place in the new narrative. It wasn't until the 14th century that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* were specifically labeled *tirumuṛai* proper alongside *Tēvāram* by the poets Irattaiyar.³⁵

It is perhaps with this early omission that we need to start when thinking about how these two texts have been received over time. After the ninth century, a consensus began to emerge in which *bhakti* poetry and literature were considered to be categorically separate. Commentators on grammatical treatises contrasted *bhakti* texts, calling them “not of this world,” to other genres

³¹ Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 186.

³² Karen Pechilis rejects Rangaswamy's assertion that the verses in question, due to their stylistic difference, are likely a later addition. Rather, she argues that the stylistic shift is intentional and signals to the reader that the added volumes are of a different type than the *Tēvāram*. “A Tamil Lineage for Saiva Siddhānta Philosophy,” *History of Religions* 35, 3 (1996): 251.

³³ For a more thorough discussion of the remembrance of canonization in Umāpati's works, see Karen Prentice, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 134-152 in which she makes an argument about the role of Umāpati's canonizing project in the formation of a Śaiva Siddhānta lineage.

³⁴ Dr. V. Ponniah Dr. V. Ponniah conjectures that Nampi excluded the *Tirukkōvaiyār* from the *tirumuṛai* because of its focus on “erotics.” *Saiva Siddhanta Theory of Knowledge* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1952) 49.

³⁵ Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature Volume 2 Part 1* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 134.

of praise poetry that were more closely connected to the realm of the court (i.e., through the praise of a king) and were thus considered “this worldly.”³⁶ The hymns of the *Tēvāram* saints along with Māṇikkavācakar’s *Tiruvācakam* were not used as sources for examples in the larger commentarial tradition as they were not deemed to be appropriate materials for such a project. *Tirukkōvaiyār*, on the other hand, was considered fair game and finds mention in a number of commentaries on other texts. In the greater Tamil Śaiva universe, unlike what was happening in the realms of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, *bhakti* texts were also not seen to be appropriate subjects for specific types of literary analysis and commentary. For these reasons, *Tiruvācakam* did not receive any commentarial treatment in the premodern period, though *Tirukkōvaiyār* did.

The two extant premodern commentaries on *Tirukkōvaiyār* are attributed to one Pērācīriyar, and to an unnamed “old commentator.” As evidenced from the earliest print editions of the text, there has been disagreement about who Pērācīriyar is—whether or not he is the same Pērācīriyar who famously wrote a commentary on *Tolkāppiyam* in the 13th century, or a later Pērācīriyar. This commentary has also been attributed variously to Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar and to a Jain named Maṇakkuṭavar. There is a standing disagreement over which of these two commentaries is older, though no thorough linguistic analysis exists to substantiate any claims; it is likely that both commentaries are relatively late.³⁷ These commentaries are fairly conservative in that they focus exclusively on literary aspects of the text and do not contain any exposition of its theological dimensions. In contrast, commentaries on *Tirukkōvaiyār* written in the modern period consider the text solely through the lens of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, reading the

³⁶ See Jennifer Clare, “Canons, Conventions and Creativity: Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India,” (PhD diss., University of California, 2011): 84-114.

³⁷ For the most in-depth discussion of the “old commentary,” see Irā Kumaravēlaṇ, “Cīrampalak Kōvai: Paḷaiya Urai,” *Arimā Nōkku* 5, 2 (2011): 20-32.

narrative of the hero and heroine as an extended allegory of the relationship between a devotee and Śiva. Neither of these two groups of commentaries cross disciplinary boundaries in that the earlier literary commentaries do not consider the religious aspects of the text and the later commentaries, which focus on theology, do not closely consider its literary merits. This perhaps indicates shifting attitudes to the text over time and shifting approaches towards devotional and literary texts in the modern period amongst Śaiva communities.

A text entitled *Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai* (“The Truth of *Tirukkōvaiyār*”), first edited and published by Swāminātha Paṇḍitar of Jaffna, appeared in the late 1800s. This text, written by an anonymous author and unable to be dated with certainty, attempts to distill a deeper meaning out of each of *Tirukkōvaiyār*’s verses. It offers a new theological gloss on the anonymously contributed *koḷu* (“gist” glosses) from an earlier period. Building upon this work, in 1965, Dandapāṇi Dēsikar, published *Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai Viḷakkam*, “Light on the Truth of *Tirukkōvaiyār*” that elaborates upon and unpacks the short glosses provided in *Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai* from the perspective of Śaiva Siddhānta. Though in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world commentators had been reading devotional texts using allegory as an interpretive tool for some time,³⁸ it seems that the allegorical reading of *Tirukkōvaiyār* gained momentum only in the modern period. There is no evidence for a historical antecedent, at least in realm of Śaiva literary exegesis.

In the contemporary period, *Tiruvācakam* has been the subject of a vast number of commentaries, many of which are theological expositions or *eḷiya urai* (easy commentaries) designed to give the lay reader access to the text. The creation of these commentaries, like those

³⁸ For more on the tradition of allegory in exegesis and commentary, see A.K. Ramanujan and Norman Cutler, “From Classicism to Bhakti,” in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1983), 204-214.

of *Tirukkōvaiyār* mentioned above, indicate shifting attitudes towards categories of texts amongst Śaiva readers which merits more attention than there is space for here.

In the current period, it is difficult to overstate the degree to which *Tiruvācakam* is beloved and ubiquitous and *Tirukkōvaiyār* is largely unknown. *Tiruvācakam* holds a prominent place in worship in both public and private domains and is often incorporated into daily prayer routines for devout Śaivas. *Ōtuvārs*, the ritual specialists responsible for singing *tirumurai* in temples each day, can recite long stretches of *Tiruvācakam* from memory (some know the entire thing). Though they are required to be able to draw from each of the 12 *tirumurai*, a formal *ōtuvār* education only covers about ten verses of the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, starting from verse one. This is largely to ensure that if a *tirumurai murrōtal* (full recitation) occurs, they are able to pull from each and every text. While scholars laud *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s literary finesse, they also lament its lack of coverage in academic publications. *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* exist in almost entirely separate universes. I was implored on more than one occasion during my fieldwork to leave *Tirukkōvaiyār* behind and simply focus on *Tiruvācakam*. Reasons for this varied, but many cited the text's complexity and difficulty as reasons that it has not been studied in depth. That this text is somehow of an altogether different category than its overtly devotional counterpart, *Tiruvācakam*, is reflected in the fact that to this day, *kōvai* is considered an "essentially secular genre."³⁹

Māṇikkavācakar in Secondary Scholarship

³⁹ Abhinava Venkatesa Subramanian mentions this explicitly in *Literary genres in Tamil: a supplement to a descriptive catalogue of palm-leaf manuscripts in Tamil* (Institute of Asian Studies, 1993), 309.

In extant scholarship, Māṇikkavācakar's significance is characterized in two main ways: he is taken an example of *bhakti* poetry *par excellence*—the culmination of a tradition that started with *Tēvāram* hymnists, and as a philosophical savant—a precursor to the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. With relative scholarly consensus dating Māṇikkavācakar to the ninth century, his *oeuvre* is imagined as a bridge between *bhakti* devotionism and Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, a system which would only formally emerge around the twelfth century.⁴⁰ The popularity of *Tiruvācakam* and its heart-melting hymns is partially responsible for common portrayals of Māṇikkavācakar as the crown of the *bhakti* movement in the South. Sole focus on *Tiruvācakam* for this characterization has caused scholarship to overlook *Tirukkōvaiyār* as a valuable source for expanding our understanding of devotional poetry written in Tamil.⁴¹

Not only is Māṇikkavācakar seen as the pinnacle of *bhakti* devotionism, he is also considered to be more mystical or philosophical than his predecessors. These arguments are again, based on readings of *Tiruvācakam* alone, and are made on thin grounds: most cite an increased use of Sanskrit terms or superficially map the ascent of the soul onto the hymns.⁴²

Since the beginning of its circulation in print, and likely before, those who attempt to interpret *Tirukkōvaiyār* have done so solely through the lens of Śaiva Siddhānta, reading it as a complex, extended allegory of the soul's search for god, despite the fact that using the formula of

⁴⁰ I refer here to the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta system, 12-14th ct. CE, formalized in the works of the *Meykaṇṭa Cāttiraṇkaḷ*. Śaiva Siddhānta schools of thought existed in other areas of India as early as early as the 6th ct. CE.

⁴¹ This has also precluded us from thinking of texts after him—specifically early Śaiva Siddhānta works—as properly *bhakti*. Leah Comeau addresses religious dimensions of the *kōvai* in her work. See *Material Devotion*.

⁴² See for example, Baskaran Pillai, “The Religio-Spiritual Experiences,” and M. Cuppiramaṇiyan, *Māṇikka Vācakar* (Cennai: Tolkāppiyar Nūlakam, 1967).

an allegory is both foreign to the text itself and to reading strategies for *kōvai* in general.⁴³ These characterizations reify Māṇikkavācakar and his work as an artificial divide between earlier *bhakti* and later philosophy and preclude us from seeing an evolving continuum of form and content across these genres and literary periods.

Scholars have consistently relied on exegetical strategies born out of readings of the *Tēvāram* hymns which came before and Śaiva Siddhānta texts which came after to read *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. However, these strategies do not account for the kinds of literary innovation found in Māṇikkavācakar's works themselves or their significant differences from these chronologically proximate bodies of literature. Furthermore, extant reading strategies do not account for the intertextuality between these two works and between them and other literatures which lie beyond *bhakti* or Śaiva Siddhānta texts, namely those of other religious communities. This dissertation expands the discursive parameters in which Māṇikkavācakar's texts are situated and understood. Across contemporary scholarship, singular focus on one text and reliance on narrow models of reading have limited our ability to understand what is at stake in the production of these two diverse texts. The remedy for this is twofold: to produce a rereading of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* which attends to the ways these texts innovate and play within their respective genre categories, and to consider them together as a pair of related literary interventions which articulate new Śaiva ideas in their period through the use of shared rhetorical strategies.

Two Debates

⁴³ See for example Taṇṭapāṇi Tēcikar, *Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai Viḷakkam* (Tiruvāṇṭūṭurai: Tiruvāṇṭūṭurai Ātīṇam, 1965).

Before turning to the texts themselves, there are two debates which have followed the study of Māṇikkavācakar for some time. Naming them sheds light on some of the problems this dissertation touches upon and its proposed solutions. The two debates which rage over Māṇikkavācakar's work concern attribution⁴⁴ and dating. The primary reason for calling into question Māṇikkavācakar's dual authorship is the significant formal difference between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. Some even question single authorship of *Tiruvācakam* itself given the heterogeneity of hymns contained in the collection. These arguments do not take into consideration stylistic range in the works of poets like Appar who also uses Caṅkam forms, for example, to express devotional sentiment in some of hymns and not in others. Though Māṇikkavācakar is unique amongst his Śaiva peers for having written in two distinct genres, looking beyond Śaiva materials one finds him in good company. Poets like the above-mentioned Nammālvār or Vedāntadeśika are rarely challenged over attribution of hymns, though they too write across genres.⁴⁵ Genre diversity is not unprecedented, however it has not been robustly theorized in the history of literary production in South Asia. In extant discussions of Māṇikkavācakar, it is clear that *Tirukkōvaiyār* cannot be accounted for in extant formulations of Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* and does not fit the characterization of Māṇikkavācakar as it has been

⁴⁴ The marked difference between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* has caused a few historians and literary critics to question whether these two texts belong to the same author. One need only to look to *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s entry in GRETIL to see its label, "authorship disputed." Perhaps most notably, literary historian M. Arunachalam does not acknowledge *Tirukkōvaiyār* as a work of Māṇikkavācakar. In his monograph *The Śaiva Saints* in which there is a dedicated section for Māṇikkavācakar, it is not mentioned. *The Śaiva Saints* (Tiruchitrampalam, Gandhi Vidyalayam, 1985) 192-198.

⁴⁵ Steven Hopkins provides a helpful overview of Vedāntadeśika's works in all of their diversity while leaving room for productive questions about the nature of this diversity and its function in Vedāntadeśika's larger project. *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedāntadeśika in their South Indian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

structured thus far—its formal difference seems insurmountable. Because it does not look like other *bhakti* materials, it is almost written out of the *bhakti* narrative altogether.

By considering both form and content, my readings of these texts demonstrate a consistent hand across both texts that allows us to see their deep interrelation and mutually constitutive relationship. Looking beyond textual difference, from a relatively early period (from at least as early as the *Kōyil tiruppaṇṇiyar viruttam* of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi, c. tenth century) it appears that these texts were attributed to the same author and widely accepted in the tradition to belong to Māṇikkavācakar.⁴⁶ Even if we accept multiple authors (as is the case with many other *bhakti* figures like Kabir, etc.), these texts arise in the same time period, making them conspicuous moves on the part of either Māṇikkavācakar or multiple Śaiva authors to intervene in the literary landscape in a particular way.

Alongside authorship, the dating of Māṇikkavācakar has been hotly contested for over a century.⁴⁷ He has been placed variously from the first century CE all the way to the fourteenth.⁴⁸ By 1909, K.G. Sesa Aiyar already lists thirteen authors engaged in debate starting as early as 1895 with Sundaram Pillai.⁴⁹ In the beginning of the twentieth century, placing Māṇikkavācakar, who was to become emblematic of Tamil Śaivism, in earlier centuries as a poet saint *par excellence* gave historical weight to the tradition in the face of European scholars who identified

⁴⁶ In the following verse 58, *vācakam* is interpreted as *Tiruvācakam*, *civappāttiyaṇ* as Māṇikkavācakar, and *tirukkōvai* as *Tirukkōvaiyār*: *varu vācakattiṇil murrū uṇarṇṭōṇai vaṇ tillai maṇṇait/ tiruvātavūr civappāttiyaṇ cey tiruc ciṇṇampalap/ porulār taru tirukkōvai kaṇṭēyum marru apporuḷait/ terulāta uḷḷattavar kavi pāṭic cirippipparē*.

⁴⁷ For an excellent overview of dating debates and the various scholars involved, see Auvai Cu Turaicāmi Piḷḷai, *Caiva Ilakkiya varalāru* (Aṇṇāmalainakar: Aṇṇāmalaip Palkalaik Kalakam, 1958), 298-314.

⁴⁸ K.G. Sesa Aiyar, “Manikka Vacakar and his Date,” *Tamilian Antiquary*, 1, 4 (1910): 10-11.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Sanskrit materials as the original texts of Indian religion. Scholars who placed him in later centuries used a teleological model to demonstrate the development of religion over time; Māṇikkavācakar's work (only considering *Tiruvācakam* in these cases) deemed more “philosophical” than that of earlier poets and thus more sophisticated theoretically, became a marker on a road of progress. These characterizations have influenced our understanding of Māṇikkavācakar's texts and limited possibilities for reading them together in an integrated way.

As a ninth-century date gained popularity, Māṇikkavācakar was increasingly described as a transitional figure arriving on the heels of the *Tēvāram* hymnists and before the canonical works of Śaiva Siddhānta, and his works a bridge between *bhakti* poetry and philosophical literature.⁵⁰ This placement has reified an artificial divide that has obscured the study of texts which come both before and after him, allowing us to gloss over the “philosophical” elements in the *Tēvāram* as well as the devotional elements of early Śaiva Siddhānta texts. This narrativization of the Śaiva tradition has also precluded the inclusion of other bodies of literature in discussions of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. For the purposes of this dissertation, I accept

⁵⁰ Archana Verma writes, “Manikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam* shows a more philosophical leaning than the emotional devotion of the *Tēvāram* trio. Māṇikkavācakar uses various styles from *Sangam* poetry but the theme is usually the philosophical exposition of Śaivism,” and, “We can see the shift from the emotional poetry of the earlier three saints where such descriptions were always iconographic and were located in a religious centre. In contrast to that *Tiruvācakam* introduces the idea of providing a philosophical base to Śaivism, an element which had not existed before. Instead of attaining love for god, here the emphasis is on gaining knowledge and thereby deliverance.” *Temple Imagery for Early Mediaeval Peninsular India* (Surrey: Ashgate. Publishing Limited, 2012) 27-28. Kamil Zvelebil writes, “It represents the peak of Śaiva *bhakti* poetry and, apart from many autobiographical elements, one may discern the ripening of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy.” *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, 144. This characterization is also applied to the *Tirukkaḷṟuppaṭṭiyār* by Ranganathan Balasubramanian in his work “The *Tirukkaḷṟuppaṭṭiyār*: Transition from *Bhakti* to *Caiva* *Cittāntam* Philosophy,” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2007).

the view that has now come to be widely held that Māṇikkavācakar and his texts should be placed sometime in the ninth century.

We know relatively little about the time period occurring after the Pallava heyday and before the triumphant rise of the Cōḷa empire. Burton Stein comments on the transitional nature of the sixth through tenth centuries noting that during this period, alongside the development of Śaiva and Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* sects, there was a marked increase in monumental building as well as the establishment of *brahmin* centers of learning in rural areas.⁵¹ He further notes that models of kingship changed during this period.⁵² While Stein points out these examples of large and sweeping societal change, Nilakanta Sastri characterizes the period of three hundred years starting from the mid-sixth and extending to the mid-ninth century as being dominated by conflict between Cālukyas, Pallavas, and Pāṇṭyas, with the Cōḷas only beginning to emerge around 850 ce.⁵³ Daud Ali notes that from the sixth to ninth centuries, devotees responsible for the production of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotional hymns in Tamil “attempted to win over royal courts of the Pāṇṭyas and Pallavas.”⁵⁴ It is in the eighth and ninth century, he posits, that Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were gaining hegemony in royal courts across India as evidenced by the proliferation of large-scale temple construction.⁵⁵ This time period also sees the emergence of the

⁵¹ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 64.

⁵² *Ibid*, 88.

⁵³ K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 141.

⁵⁴ Daud Ali, “Regimes of Pleasure in Early India” (Phd diss., University of Chicago, 1996) 137.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 149-50. The relationship between sectarian groups and ruling bodies during this time period is not entirely clear.

maṭam (*maṭha*), or monastery, as central locus of religious activity, scholastic engagement, and literary production.⁵⁶ With regard to Māṇikkavācakar's period, M. Arunachalam puts it thus:

“...we should remember that this period was one in which the Pallava empire of Kanchipuram was collapsing and other princes under the Pallava supremacy were just trying to regain their territory and monarchy. By 846 A.D. Vijayalaya re-established his Chola dynasty which was to become in the next hundred years one of the greatest empires South India had seen. The Pandiya Prince at Madurai should also have been struggling for his suzerainty over Madurai. So the post of Chief Minister for our young man had with it considerable responsibility in consolidation and development.”⁵⁷

Whether we put weight in the last statement about Māṇikkavācakar's position as chief minister (a title only gleaned from much later hagiographical sources) matters little. What should be noted is that this time period is one in which widespread changes in societal organization, religious institutions, and governing bodies were underway. The close connection between the royal court and Śaivism as a state religion had not yet been established, and thus conspicuous moves like those made by Māṇikkavācakar in the creation of these two texts must be looked at accordingly. The nature of this historical period also raises questions about the relationship between courts, temples, and *maṭams* as loci for literary and cultural production which are germane to my discussion of Māṇikkavācakar's works and their potentially diverse audiences.

The ninth century also comes after what is often imagined as a period of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava domination of Jain and Buddhist factions in the Tamil-speaking region. The *Tēvāram* hymnists are painted as victorious vanquishers by the time of the *Periyapurāṇam*. In an oft-referenced episode, Campantar is said to be responsible for the impalement of thousands of Jains at once.⁵⁸ Māṇikkavācakar's one moderately disparaging mention of Buddhists in *Tiruvācakam*

⁵⁶ For more on the relationships between *maṭhas* and temples as institutions, see N. Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and P. Shanmugam, "Maṭhas and Medieval Religious Movements in Tamil Nadu, An Epigraphical Study," *Indian Historical Review* 37.2 (2010): 217-234.

⁵⁷ Arunachalam, *Śaiva Saints*, 192.

⁵⁸ See *Periyapurāṇam* 2497-2540, 2780-2824.

becomes fuel for hagiographical tellings of his victory in debate with 3,000 Sri Lankan monks and by extension, historical conjecture that he too was part of a militant Śaiva revolution despite the fact that Jain and Buddhist factions had largely disappeared from the Tamil country by his time. There is little historical evidence for these larger-than-life events, though they do have bearing on the understandings of these saints' works and deserve analysis as a type of polemical language deployed to achieve certain ends. The *Tiruccālal*, traditionally placed as the twelfth song of *Tiruvācakam*, is read as a script of the aforementioned debate between Māṇikkavācakar and the Buddhist monks, though the text itself gives no indication that the discussant is a Buddhist, nor that it is such an account.⁵⁹ His characterization as a minister to the Pāṇṭiyan king Arimārttaṇār (this also sourced from later hagiographies) imagines him as an emissary and politician, an arm of a Hindu royal court. As such, his works are martialized as further evidence of Śaiva domination in his period. Though Jains and Buddhists were not present in large numbers in the ninth century, by the time *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyar* were composed, Jain and Buddhist literature had already been firmly established in Tamil-speaking regions, the two factions producing some of the most well-known pieces in Tamil literary history.⁶⁰ Texts like *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and *Tolkāppiyam* are attributed to Jains. Early didactic works from *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkaṇakku* ("The 18 Lesser Works") like *Nālaṭṭiyār* ("The Four Hundred Quatrains"), *Paḷamoḷi nāṇūru* ("The Four Hundred Proverbs"), and *Elāti* ("Cardamom, etc.") are all of Jain authorship. In the

⁵⁹ For more on this see Glenn Yocum, "Buddhism through Hindu Eyes: Śaivas and Buddhists through Medieval Tamilnad," in *Traditions in Contact and Change: Selected Proceedings of the XIVth Congress* edited by Harry M. Buck and Glenn E. Yocum (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 143-162.

⁶⁰ For more info on Jain literature in Tamil see A. Chakravarti, *Jaina Literature in Tamil* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Gyanpith, 1974).

class of *kāvya* known as *aimperumkāppiyam* (the five great *kāvyas*), *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi* (Cīvaka, the Wish-fulfilling Gem”), *Cilappatikāram* (“The Tale of the Anklet”), *Maṇimēkalai*, *Vaḷaiyāpati* (“The Upright Man”), and *Kuṇṭalakēci* (“The Maiden of Curly Locks”), all save *Maṇimēkalai* and *Kuṇṭalakēci* are Jain; *Maṇimēkalai* and *Kuṇṭalakēci* are Buddhist. No study of Māṇikkavācakar to date has rigorously looked for non-Hindu interlocutors of his works. This remains an issue in the study of Hindu *bhakti* materials across sectarian lines. Aside from the fact that Jain and Buddhist literature was prolific by the ninth century and thus should be brought into conversation with *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyar*, Jain and Buddhist epic literature in particular is responsible for the first continuous narrative available in Tamil—as such it should be considered, especially in relationship to *Tirukkōvaiyār*, which is the first Śaiva devotional work to use continuous narrative.

In the realm of textual production, around the eighth moving into the ninth, and on through to the twelfth centuries, there was a proliferation of new forms of literature, later classified as *pirapantam* or *cirrilakkiyam* (minor literature).⁶¹ This category, eventually encompassing ninety-six distinct genres, includes those such as *kōvai*, *ulā*, *kuṛavañci*, and later *piḷḷaittamiḷ*. *Cirrilakkiyam* as an organizational category runs an incredibly wide gamut though the vast majority of genres it includes display a common feature of “connected discourse” on a given topic.⁶² *Pirapantam* classification is based on various criteria: some *pirapantam* genres are organized on the basis of form and others on the basis of content. For example, *antāti* and *mālai* are classified based on form, whereas *piḷḷaittamiḷ* and *ulā* are classified based on content.

⁶¹ The term *pirapantam* is first used by Śaiva commentator Aṭiyārkkunallār.

⁶² Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 193.

Jennifer Clare notes, “Beginning in the eight century, and expanding significantly in the period of the *pāṭṭiyals*, the praise genres developed by the *bhakti* poets transition from temple to court literary forms, and begin to be applied to kings.”⁶³ These developments were also concurrent with the production of new works entitled *kāppiyam*, which Clare glosses as “courtly epic.” These epics, coming after *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, were largely produced by Jains and Buddhists and were clearly conversant with Sanskrit epic genres as well as their theorization.⁶⁴ Both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* stand at the cusp of this wave of literary newness and must be looked at, not just in relationship to *bhakti* works like *Tēvarām* or later Śaiva Siddhānta *śāstras*, but also in terms of the multitude of new forms of praise literature which began to arise around the same period. They are part of a larger phenomenon of literary innovation in this particular moment in the history of Tamil literature. Daud Ali observes,

“The authors of this [Śaiva] poetry continued to write in older *patikam* form, but increasingly used new verse-genres heavily influenced by ornamental courtly modes...The *pirapantam* genres themselves, as we shall see in the chapters ahead...attempted to suture many earlier themes and motifs drawn from ‘Caṅkam’ literature with the new exigencies of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theology.”⁶⁵

Māṇikkavācakar’s works have been described as “more literary” than his *Tēvāram* counterparts; though they are more complex in certain ways, rather than seeing them as more “literary,” we should ask what new modes of discourse they are conversant with, or what old modes they are engaging in new ways. Furthermore, we must ask what the nature of the relationship between courtly modes of discourse and those arising outside of the court is if we are to think of the intended audiences of these texts. As mentioned above, it has been suggested that *Tiruvācakam*

⁶³ Clare, “Canons, Conventions,” 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 65-66.

⁶⁵ Ali, “Regimes of Pleasure,” 163-164.

and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are geared towards a devotional public and a courtly/literary elite respectively. Ali takes aim at this formation and encourages readers to avoid seeing a strict divide between courtly/literary and devotional (and thus “secular” vs. devotional). Rather, he suggests we acknowledge that there is significant “overlapping of poetic domains.”⁶⁶ Emerging discursive regimes in which these new forms of literature were a constitutive part came into being in courts, temples, and realms in between.⁶⁷ The reception history of Māṇikkavācakar’s texts indicates a conceptual divide between the devotional and the literary; *Tiruvācakam* enjoys wide circulation in practice, but *Tirukkōvaiyār* persists as a kind of literary object, something meant for textual study but not much beyond. This dissertation suggests that if we are to look at these texts in the context in which they arose, we may find a more complex picture of the relationship between their respective domains.

Methods

It is clear that new reading strategies will be necessary in order address *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* together in this manner. There are a number of interlocutors who are instrumental in my approach. In the field of South Asian studies I rely on Norman Cutler who, through close poetic analysis, questions interpretations of *bhakti* literature as documentary accounts of the past.⁶⁸ Cutler’s close reading strategies allow us to better understand the rhetorical dimensions of texts as well as their historical situatedness. By looking at content and form, he explores possibilities for relationships between audience and text and by extension, texts and their

⁶⁶ Ali, “Regimes of Pleasure,” 165.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 172.

⁶⁸ There have been many scholars since Cutler who have expanded the field of *bhakti* studies and problematized documentary readings, however my methodology in this work most closely approximates Cutler’s close focus on rhetoric.

communities of reception.⁶⁹ His short article on *Tirukkōvaiyār* analyzes the ways that Caṅkam poetics and Śaiva devotional elements are interwoven and juxtaposed in order to make larger statements about its possible performance contexts.⁷⁰ I also employ close reading strategies with particular attention to poetic elements like voice, figurative language, and imagery in each text. Tracking these elements across both texts will demonstrate constellations of rhetorical strategies and poetic forms which tie the two texts together and offer insight into Māṇikkavācakar's broader project.

In thinking through *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* and their relationship to other bodies of literature, it is important to note that I will be addressing issues of genre in a historical context in which genre was not robustly theorized in Tamil. While I take into consideration the way that genre is theorized in broader South Asian intellectual history, particularly regarding classification divisions between “devotional” and “literary” texts, I also look to outside theorists to help me navigate these waters. In order to establish the nature of the relationship between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the dialogic dimensions of intertextual relationships is informative.⁷¹ Bakhtin's observations are particularly useful for thinking through textual production during Māṇikkavācakar's period in which many new literary forms emerged and genre as such was not fixed. David Duff explores the relationship between the ways Bakhtin and Kristeva navigate issues of genre and intertextuality. Duff calls for looking

⁶⁹ See Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁷⁰ Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms.”

⁷¹ Clive Thomson, “Bakhtin's ‘Theory’ of Genre,” *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 9:14, (1984).

at Bakhtin and Kristeva in order to distinguish inter- and intra-textual forces at work in and between texts.⁷² It is clear that both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are in complex relationships with other bodies of texts and modes of discourse as well as with each other. Attention to the specificities and contours of these conversations figures into my analysis. I look for ways in which each text exemplifies, rejects, or merges genre markers taken from external sources and how they reflect or refract compositional elements between each other. Keeping track of these dynamics allows for a deeper understanding of the multiple ways genre functions in larger South Indian discursive contexts.

This dissertation also sheds light on relationships between genre and power, broadly construed. As my work contributes to conversations concerning how Māṇikkavācakar's literary choices may be geared towards audiences belonging to distinct cultural domains, I draw from the works of Vijay K. Bhatia who approaches genre and politics with attention to the dynamics of a text in its socio-rhetorical context. Bhatia writes,

“Genres...are socially authorized through conventions, which, in turn, are embedded in the discursive practices of members of specific disciplinary cultures. These discursive practices, to a large extent, reflect not only conventions used by specific disciplinary communities, but also social conventions, including social changes, social institutions and social knowledge.”⁷³

Bhatia explores the ways in which genre can be a means of gaining or restricting entry to particular socio-rhetorical and cultural domains. He also considers the dynamics of privilege, accessibility, and membership to disciplinary communities. For Bhatia, genre use is a complex practice of negotiating various discursive expectations and possibilities. Rigorously engaging Cutler's argument that Māṇikkavācakar's use of multiple genres allowed his two texts to access

⁷² David Duff, “Intertextuality versus Genre Theory: Bakhtin, Kristeva and the Question of Genre” *Paragraph a Journal of Modern Critical Theory* (25:1, 2002) 68.

⁷³ Vijay K. Bhatia, “The Power and Politics of Genre” *World Englishes* (16: 3, 1997) 360.

both the realms of popular devotion and those of the literary elite will necessitate thinking through Bhatia's suggestions about how genre use is deeply inflected with dynamics of power. This will also allow me to point to questions about how religious communities might generate mobility, cultivate relationships with other communities, and establish authority in a given socio-rhetorical and historical context.

Finally, in thinking about how these texts might indicate something about their contexts and vice versa, I turn to Dominick LaCapra and his work on literature and history. His distinction between documentary and work-like aspects of a text demonstrates that texts simultaneously “reflect” or point towards historical realities and also supplement them through aspirational imagining which in itself is transformative of those realities. One of LaCapra's most helpful contributions is his rethinking of context which, in his view, had for too long been mined as a static and fixed entity able to provide a more stable version of reality than texts which were mere “abstractions.” Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic approach, LaCapra strove to show first that context too is fundamentally “textual” and requires the kind of critical reading practices one brings to texts, and second, that texts can be in dialogic relationship with their contexts.⁷⁴ In a similar vein, Ronald Inden and Daud Ali discuss how texts participate and shape ongoing debates about the order of the world as they are in turn being articulated by it; for them, texts and their contexts “remake and rework one another.”⁷⁵ This dissertation addresses developments in the history of Śaivism in Tamil Nadu achieved through literary production, and therefore, nuanced the ways that Śaiva texts and their contexts interact. As many scholars have read *bhakti*

⁷⁴ Aletta Biersack and Lynn Avery Hunt, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 114.

⁷⁵ Ronald Inden and Daud Ali, *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 4.

literature in a strongly documentary fashion, reading Māṇikkavācakar's texts for their work-like capacities will offer new perspectives on the nature of devotional poetry and its capacities for communities' creative self-fashioning.

Contributions

At the most specific level, this dissertation contributes to the field of Tamil studies by offering new reading strategies for a genre of literature that is notably understudied, the *kōvai*, and for the *bhakti* genre which has been studied in depth, new critical perspectives. As the *kōvai* genre belongs to the larger, understudied category of *cirrilakkiyam*, it provides insight into the emergence of this field of "minor literature." It also has implications for our understanding of the history of Śaivism in South India during a formative time before it became closely tied to forms of Cōḷa state power. This work has broad application in the field of South Asian studies wherein genre as a mechanism of cultural production has not yet been fully explored, particularly in the case of figures who wrote in multiple genres, of which there are many. Finally, it has implications for the study of religion by offering new ways to think both about how religious communities articulate identity and create relationships with other communities through practices of textual production. My work here furthers our understanding of Tamil Śaivism by offering fresh insight on a pivotal figure who remains a mainstay of religious life in contemporary Tamil Nadu.

Chapters

Chapter one takes on the analytic category of time. In it, I explore temporality in three ways: The first looks at the collapse of the ancient or distant past with the proximate present of the speaker. For example, when the actions of "purāṇic" versions of Śiva are brought into close temporal relationship to the speaker, normative temporality is altered. This collapsing of time,

seen in both texts, participates in the larger *bhakti* project of drawing Śiva nearer to the speaker and thus reader (vis-à-vis Cutler’s triangulation). The second exploration of temporality looks at patterns of verb tense use. The temporal situation and quality of Śiva’s actions and interventions in the life of the speaker is recorded and the theological implication of this placement considered. This includes Śiva’s past actions of gracing and enslaving the speaker. Attention then shifts to the speaker’s treatment of themselves and their enduring poor qualities; reference to their faults and weaknesses are often expressed using the future/continuous tense, problematizing readings of either text that posit a linear, developmental telos. This section also looks at the ubiquity of suffering, a central feature of both texts, as expressed in the speaker’s own present moment. Finally, this chapter zooms out to consider narrative temporality across the entirety of *Tirukkōvaiyār* and in individual songs of *Tiruvācakam*. Thinking expansively about larger patterns of time and the flow of events within each text allows us to see something of the nature of human life as observed by the poet, as well as the nature of the relationship between the devotee and their lord.

Chapter two addresses the analytic category of place in a manner similar to how chapter one addresses time. Regarding place, both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are indebted to earlier bodies of literature that came before them including Caṅkam poetry, the *bhakti* poetry of *Tēvāram*. This chapter is organized into two sections loosely deemed “particularizing place,” and “freeing place.” The first of these focuses on the ways place is qualified with particulars borrowed from earlier literary traditions. These particulars include the named landscapes of the *tiṇai* system and named cities and towns of the sacred landscapes of *bhakti* poetry. My reading shows how the rhetoric of named place is transformed in a Śaiva *bhakti* context. The second section of this chapter investigates how particularities are put aside in favor of ambiguity and

spatial flexibility. While *Tiruvācakam* approximates the *Tēvāram*-style invocation of named towns in some of its poems, the vast majority do not make use of proper nouns to refer to specific places. This results in a phenomenon of “freeing place” wherein a new conceptual terrain in which Śiva functions is created. Similarly, while *Tirukkōvaiyār* operates exclusively within the *tiṇai* (landscape) system of *akam* poetry to which it is heavily indebted, it also plays with landscape expectations as individual *tiṇai* bleed into one another and come in and out of focus. I conclude by looking at the productive dialectic between named and unnamed, near and far, and particularized and freed. These oscillation between these poles produce tensions that is related to the pathos discussed in chapter one and contributes to the generation of affect in both texts.

Chapter three builds on the observations of chapters one and two and elaborates on the theological significance of the poetic strategies observed in the first two chapters. It investigates the sentiment of *karuṇai* (compassion), a unique focal point and one of Māṇikkavācakar’s significant contributions to Śaiva theology. After briefly introducing the term in the broader South Asian literary and historical context, this chapter tracks the way this concept (in conjunction with concepts like *aru!* [grace]) manifests in earlier Śaiva devotional works like the *Tēvāram*. In doing so, I establish a genealogy of *karuṇai* in the Tamil context we can use to understand the term’s appearance in *Tiruvācakam*. Addressing *Tiruvācakam*, this chapter establishes how *karuṇai* becomes both a central feature of Śiva’s nature and a key qualifier of his interactions with his devotees. It also illustrates how *karuṇai* is generated for the reader when they witness both the abject state of the speakers of many of these poems *and* the compassionate actions of Śiva toward them. In exploring *karuṇai* in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, this chapter picks up the discussion of generative affect in *Tiruvācakam*. I demonstrate how the vocabulary of *akam*

poetics and its relative focus on separation and hardship between lovers is similarly productive of an affect of compassion. Ultimately, this chapter shows the shared emotional territory between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* and argues that *karuṇai* is a central component of their mutually constitutive theological vision.

My conclusion sheds light on the significance of formal differences between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* and the role of genre diversity in Māṇikkavācakar's larger theological project. While reflecting on extant theorizations of genre in Tamil, I conclude by considering gaps in traditional reception histories and in secondary scholarship on the nature of *bhakti* poetry and of the *kōvai* genre. This conclusion builds upon literary and poetic analysis done in chapters one through three and considers the potential audiences of reception for each of these texts. It situates the various strategies used by Māṇikkavācakar in broader literary and historical contexts in order to further shed light on the contours of his Śaiva project.

Chapter One

On Time

To date, few have considered the nature of time and temporality in devotional poetry.⁷⁶ This chapter calls into question extant readings of Māṇikkavācakar's works by using the analytic category of time. Early scholars of *bhakti* poetry interpreted songs of the saints to be ecstatic, spontaneous outpourings of direct experience. This is partly due to frequent use of the first-person voice within the songs and the lasting influence of hagiographical traditions. When *bhakti* poetry was read as autobiographical, it was understood to capture an authentic moment of union or emotional connection with god, straight from the mouth of the experiencer, reported in real time.⁷⁷ These types of readings are no longer mainstream in secondary scholarship though some of their assumptions persist, particularly in the study of Māṇikkavācakar. While it is easier to see how *Tirukkōvaiyār* falls outside of the “spontaneous expression” paradigm because of its form, close readings of *Tiruvācakam* demonstrates that it too does not quite fit, even given the fact that

⁷⁶ Anne Monius addresses temporality in the *Periyapurāṇam*, “*Purāṇa / Purāṇam*: modes of narrative temporality in Sanskrit and Tamil,” in *Passages: relationships between Tamil and Sanskrit*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry) 217-236.

⁷⁷ This characterization is so pervasive that it enters conversations about both historical language development and grammar. Given the significant shifts in grammar between the Caṅkam period and that of later *bhakti* poets, scholars including L.V. Ramaswami Aiyar posit that the ecstatic language of the poets must have approximated a more popular or colloquial form of speech, moving away from the more refined “literariness” of Caṅkam literature. He writes, “It is the language of the *Śaivite* and *Vaiṣṇavite* hymns (5th to 9th centuries A.D.), that evidences these sharp differences. The *Kāvyas Cilappadigāram* and *Maṇimēgalai*, though marked by many linguistic divergences from the *Saṅgam* texts, do not show all the striking developments associated so numerously with the works of the *Śaivites* and the *Vaiṣṇavite Āzwars*. The ecstatic religious fervour of these hymnists perhaps led them to use in their compositions language of a more popular and less literary type than that of the *Saṅgam* works—a language that was probably well established already in the colloquial speech of the people.” “The Morphology of the Old Tamil Verb,” *Anthropos* 33, 5/6. [1938], 748.

its first-person narrative focuses more heavily on Śiva's interventions in the life of the speaker. In the case of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the ubiquitous presence of the past tense used throughout to refer to Śiva's interventions in the speakers' lives does not support the assertion that this is an expression bursting forth in a moment of rapture. Rather, it suggests a careful—even nostalgic—looking back, a recounting of these interventions and their effects. The reader gets a sense that the speaker is somberly reflecting on a time gone by rather than recounting jubilantly in song that which is occurring in real time. Similarly, *Tirukkōvaiyār*, though indeed a love story, focuses overwhelmingly, as much of *akam* poetry does, on moments of separation. The cumulative impression is not one of joyous union, but of doleful separation. What this does to the Śaiva theological message of each text warrants further attention.

Shedding any assumption of spontaneous expression, this chapter calls into question the widely held notion that both texts display linear temporality or singular directionality. It has been argued that both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* have a *telos* with ultimate union or salvation as their goal. They are read as documentation of the speaker's movement toward Śiva and toward the attainment of freedom. *Tiruvācakam* has suffered under readings of linear temporality due to many attempts to fit it into a framework of mysticism in which it is seen to be an analogue for the ascent of the soul in its quest for union with god.⁷⁸ The order of *Tiruvācakam*'s songs, though

⁷⁸ Mysticism, as an interpretive lens, permeated earlier studies of *bhakti* literature and South Indian *bhakti* literature more specifically. In the first English translation of *Tiruvācakam*, G.U. Pope writes, "The *Tiruvācakam* is a veritable Pilgrim's Progress, and surely reveals the experience of a devout and godly soul." *The Tiruvācakam*, 308. *Pilgrim's Progress* was a wildly popular Christian allegorical novel written in 1678 by John Bunyan that documented the soul's various trials and tribulations on its ascent to heaven. It notably did not have separate chapters but read as one continuous story, a formal analogue for the soul's journey. That this text serves as Pope's primary comparison is telling and his characterization of Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam* as a teleological journey of the soul has persisted. Over a half a century later, Kamil Zvelebil says, "...the *Tiruvācakam* is in fact an autobiographical poem of a great mystic." *Tamil Literature*, 100. Yocum speaks of Māṇikkavācakar as a mystic in his 1982 *Hymns to the*

likely not fixed until a later period, was taken to be evidence of this. It is not even clear, upon close reading, that the speaker does much striving at all. Rather, *Tiruvācakam* is a meditation on being a flawed human being in Śiva's domain, suffering and imperfect. It is not a motivated quest. *Tirukkōvaiyār* has also been read as displaying linear temporality and having an inherent *telos*. Because the *kōvai* genre sequentially narrativizes individual *akam* love scenarios, there is an assumption that works of this type tell a single story with a unidirectional narrative. This is further amplified by later Śaiva Siddhānta readings of the text which take it as an allegory of the soul's search for Śiva.⁷⁹ All of the text's modern commentators read it using the soul and god as analogues to the narrative's protagonists. Though *Tirukkōvaiyār* strings together *akam* vignettes in a way that had not been done before, it does not evenly march through its narrative. Inordinate amounts of time are spent on periods of mourning or loss, leaving an overall impression that the protagonists make little headway in their own relationship. In other words, this is not a march of progress, and it is not clear that the text's main players ever experience improvement of state, as in *Tiruvācakam*.

This chapter opens with three introductory notes that establish a foundation for speaking about time in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* that address: 1.) the challenges of dealing with temporal ambiguity in Tamil grammar; 2.) explicit mentions of time as an independent entity in both texts; and 3.) genre expectations for setting a temporal scene. After discussing these preliminary issues, this chapter refines our understanding of the shared theological vision of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* by paying close attention to three main aspects of time in each

Dancing Śiva, (1). So too does Radha Thiagarajan throughout *A Study of Mysticism in the Tiruvācakam* (Madurai: Madurai Kamaraj University, 1983).

⁷⁹ These are most clearly distilled in Taṇṭapāṇi Tēcikar, *Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai Viḷakkam*. (Tiruvāṇṭuturai: Tiruvāṇṭuturai ātīnam, 1965).

text: layers of time, patterns of verb tense use, and flow of narrative temporality. This chapter ultimately calls into question longstanding assumptions about the structure of these works as well as their overall emotional affect. Ultimately, I argue that both texts' treatment of time is generative of an altogether different affect than what has been posited thus far. Looking at layers of time, patterns of tense use, and narrative temporality, it is clear that both texts are not tales of progress, directional and uniformly developmental, but are reflective, at times mournful meditations on the cyclical patterns of human suffering. This sustained attention on hardship is successful at generating pathos and from that an affect of compassion.

The first section of this chapter considers layers of time and the relationship established between remote and distant pasts. In exploring the nature of Śiva's actions and praising him variously, each text invokes multiple "ancient" manifestations that range from the burner of the triple cities to the *linga* of light. These Śivas, all of which might be deemed "*purāṇic*," are mentioned in connection to their respective *purāṇic* feats. When the cosmic past in which these activities take place is situated in close proximity to the human past of the speaker, it shapes both the reader's understanding of time and the overall theological implications for Śiva's presence and activities in the world. It is shown that both in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Śiva's "*purāṇic*" past is brought into close relationship with the speaker's present moment thus participating in a larger, shared, *bhakti* project of drawing Śiva closer. Collapsing of pasts is but one way that these texts can be seen to be participating in the same kinds of rhetorical activities and demonstrates how they might be conceptualized together as devotional works with shared aims.

The second section considers the temporal nature of Śiva's operations in the world, specifically his interventions in the life of the speaker. Focus remains on moments of direct

interaction between Śiva and the speaker and the way their relationship unfolds in and over time. I argue that understanding *when* Śiva's actions take place with respect to the movements and actions of the speaker of a given poem (at times representative of a devotee or humanity writ large), is key to understanding its overall theological message. For example, if meting out grace is a central feature of Śiva's operations in the world⁸⁰ in the Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* context, when exactly does it take place? Is it a singular, fleeting, event, suspended in a past gone by, or does it persist, having initiated a new state of being in the present and into the future? This section thus explores the qualities of various actions' temporal moments. While looking at Śiva's actions and temporal situatedness, I also consider how the speaker is described in terms of time; how they themselves describe their emotional states and their changes over time. I demonstrate that Śiva primarily acts upon the speaker in the past, and that the speaker's present persists as an attestation to prolonged suffering that characterizes embodied human life.

The third section of this chapter builds upon these observations and investigates the way that patterns of tense usage in conjunction with the flow of narrative temporality contribute to the overall affect of a given work. *Tiruvācakam* in particular has for some time been characterized and defined as an outpouring of spontaneous ecstatic expression; *Tirukkōvaiyār* as a triumphant love story. Readings of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* provided here suggest that this is not the only way, and perhaps not the most accurate way to characterize either of Māṇikkavācakar's works or their overall emotional valences. While these texts necessarily deal with linear time differently due to their genre expectations, extended attention on episodes of suffering and the timing of episodes of exuberance point toward a cumulative focus on the tragic rather than the

⁸⁰ For more on the semantic range of *aru!* in Māṇikkavācakar, see Anthony Gardner Harris Jr., "Obtaining grace: Locating the origins of a Tamil Śaiva precept," (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2006).

celebratory. This is, I argue, evidence of an aesthetics of compassion, *karuṇā*, a key and programmatic term for Māṇikkavācakar, over and against one of exuberance.

A Note on Grammar

It is necessary to briefly consider some limitations and challenges of tense analysis in the premodern Tamil case. Many Tamil verb forms are not explicitly inflected with tense. Even when a given form's tense is determinate, there is significant flexibility and semantic overlap between recognized tenses and the range of temporality they imply.⁸¹ These factors pose a challenge for the reader or translator because there is often a choice between determining when a given action should be temporally located and maintaining that it is inherently ambiguous and should be understood as such. In many cases, both possibilities are technically present. While there are circumstances in which surrounding grammatical cues or context clues can help to determine likely tense, they are not always sufficient to determine a specific tense to the exclusion of other possible interpretations. This fluid tense dynamic is present in much of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, making the use of temporally definite verb forms conspicuous and worthy of note. Finite verbs, for example, occur infrequently, but when they do, represent significant choices on the part of the author to definitively mark a point in the narrative. Misinterpreting or mistranslating a finite verb in terms of its tense can have significant ramifications for understanding the overall meaning of a given passage.

By the ninth century, there are three tenses found in Tamil literature: past, present, and future. Despite this relatively straightforward tripartite categorization, distinction between tenses is not always clear. Some perceive more pronounced semantic difference between past and non-

⁸¹ See Susan Catherine Herring's summarization of some of the historical conditions which underlie semantic tense overlap in the development of the Tamil language in "Functions of the Verb in Tamil Narration" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 1991) 267-274.

past verbal forms than between present and future verbal forms. Furthermore, the use of the present tense marker *-kinra* is still found infrequently at this time. In the case of the past tense, there is no separate perfect, imperfect, or aorist available in order to differentiate qualities or relative periodizations of past action. Rather, past is simply marked off from present, continuous, or future. Layers of past or nuances of past action can only be intimated by using supporting grammatical cues or determined based on context. The present tense has two dominant senses: simple present, “I do,” and gerundive, “I am doing.” The future tense also contains within it two possibilities: that something will happen at a later time, or that something continuously happens as a force of habit. Present and future have significant semantic overlap, as both can imply states of being.⁸² Auxiliary verbs, or verbal extensions help to establish aspect and qualify the action of the primary verb to which they are appended. In some cases like *viṭu/iṭu* or *pō*, auxiliary verbs help establish temporality by definitively marking completed actions or indicating that an action is simultaneously occurring.

Given that finite verbs that carry definitive tense are often few and far between, auxiliary verbs including adverbial participles and infinitives play key roles in allowing for longer, more complex sentence or thought formations between their occurrences. Adverbial participles, or converbials, are formed by suffixation to a bare verb stem or past stem. As such, they signal that a given action has been completed, though their ultimate tense must be established by reference

⁸² Herring notes, “Indeed, there is some evidence that Tamil employs the three-way formal distinctions available in the categories of tense and aspect to express the three situation types: past tense correlates strongly with events, future tense at least in one of its senses, that of static description—correlates with states, and present tense, although used with all situation types, correlates most strongly with activities...”. Though this is a simplification of much more complex phenomenon which Herring explores throughout the dissertation, these characterizations ring true for much of the verb use in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. “Functions of the Verb,” 256.

to the finite verb with which they correspond. This means that the audience of these texts may be listening or reading for quite some time before tense can be determined with any surety. In some cases, songs are dominated by use of adverbial participles whose subject is merely implied but never explicitly stated, and for which there will never be a tense-determinate finite verb. In Śaiva *bhakti* literature, the implied subject of these subjectless verbs is often Śiva, and the nature of his actions and their temporal location must be intimated by a well-versed reader familiar with a text's underlying theological assumptions. Having a sense of the parameters of Śiva's situation in time and the temporal nature of his actions in the world is important in a textual setting where it is not always easily discernible from the available grammar itself.

Verb tense ambiguity is integral to the aesthetic of Tamil *bhakti* poetry and Tamil literature more broadly. Though significant room for interpretation is built into the form of these texts, when it comes to meaning, it is not the case that anything goes; this is not a grammatical free for all. There are multiple ways which a reader can be attuned to tense and to dimensions of narrative temporality using grammatical cues and context clues. To begin, though flexibility is inherent in many grammatical forms, there are also rules that are not often broken. For example, as mentioned, adverbial participles generally follow in tense the finite verb to which they correspond. Finite verbs can act as road markers throughout narrative to give the reader referents with which they can read surrounding materials and organize temporal periods. Outside of verb markers, one might also glean clues about tense by tracking the use of words like before (*munpu*), now (*inpu*), today (*inru*), or then (*anru*). These cues, though also not used frequently, can at least help to place events in an order, if not more specifically locate them in a specific time period. Perhaps requiring a bit more engagement is becoming familiar with cumulative tense use in a given song or that used in association with a particular character or action. A knowledgeable

reader would know that Śiva exists eternally, for example, and that, in the case of both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, enslavement is an event which (in many cases) has already occurred. Given these tools, one also must, as mentioned above, account for possibilities of ambiguity in a text's theological whole.

Time

It is with these challenges in mind that I now turn to discuss time itself. No discussion of temporality can begin without considering explicit references to time as an independent entity. Time is not given significant attention in either *Tiruvācakam* or *Tirukkōvaiyār*. The term, *kālam*, meaning time or used as an epithet of Yāma (alt. *kālan*) is found sparingly in both, along with *ūli*, used to indicate either the cosmic eons (*yugas*) or more specifically the time of universal destruction (*pralaya*). *Ūli* is also used to reference *karma* (*viṇai*). Time's cyclical movement along with the repetitive process of universal creation, preservation, and destruction are accepted throughout both texts though not discussed in any depth. Instead, it is a given that Śiva, being the prime cause and mover, is responsible for all universal unfolding. He is time's operator, and ultimately is time itself. Take for example, the following excerpt from *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiruvaṇṭa Pakuti* verse 15: “he is the creator, the ancient one who continually creates, he is the protector of those created things and the lord who always protects, he is the destroyer of those protected things” (*paṭaiṇṇ paṭaikkuṁ paḷaiyōṇ pataittavai kāppōṇ kākkum katavul kāppavai karappōṇ*). In this excerpt, Śiva operates the cyclical unfolding of time and thus is the cause of its effects in the world. Along with his role as creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, Śiva is also given the title destroyer of time. This invokes the myth of both Dakṣa's sacrifice wherein Yama, amongst other gods, receives Śiva's wrath, and the narrative in which Śiva takes the name

Kālāntaka (the end of time) by protecting Mārkaṇḍeya, his devotee, from Yama’s advances.

Śiva, as time’s destroyer, is categorically beyond it but also operates through it.

In *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiruvempāvai*’s speaker describes Śiva as follows: he is the singular one who stood as the chief at the time of destruction (*uḷi mutalvaṇṇāy ninṇra oruvaṇṇai*).⁸³ This passage could alternatively be translated as the one who is the primary of all ages (*yūga*). *Tiruvācakam Porṟi tiru akaval* praises Śiva as follows: “victory, victory to the prime lord of the ages/of the time of destruction” (*uḷi mutalva caya caya*).⁸⁴ This title is again found in *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiru tōḷ nōkkam*: that prime of the ages/the time of destruction (*uḷi mutal*).⁸⁵ Setting Śiva up as *muṇṇōṇ*, the first one, or *mutal*, the primary one at the beginning of all worlds and ages, helps to establish that Śiva’s time is cosmic and universal. This is then contrasted with his functions as the operator of time within human lifespans. Śiva is timeless, and eternal, yet performs and acts within the boundaries of specific human lifetimes and their temporal realities. The speaker of these poems has a relationship to the ebbs and flows of both Śiva’s universal and human time. They are bound to their present body by through the karmic deeds of past lifetimes, are living in a current state of suffering bound in a human body, and will potentially experience this same predicament in future foreseeable lifetimes. Śiva stands as the only liberation from the ravages of time, both cosmic and human, and it is through him alone that one might escape it.

⁸³ *Tiruvempāvai*, verse 8. Māṇikkavācakar, *Māṇikkavācaka cuvāmikaḷ aruḷicceyta tiruvācakam eṭṭām tirumuṟai poḷippurai, viḷakkak kuṟippuraikaḷuṭaṇ* (*Ñāṇacampantam patippakam: Mayilāṭuturai*, 1997), 268.

⁸⁴ *Pōṟṟittiruvakaval*, line 8.

⁸⁵ *Tiruttōṇṇōkkam*, verse 12.

There are a few notable mentions of time which help to situate Śiva's relationship to it and its fundamental nature in these texts. To start, take the following verse eight from

Tiruccatakam of Tiruvācakam:

*uḷitaru kālum kaṇalum puṇalotu maṇṇum viṇṇum
iḷitaru kālam ek kālam varuvatu vantataṇ piṇ
uḷitaru kāl attā uṇ aṭiyēṇ ceyta val viṇaiyai
taḷitaru kālamum āy avai kāttu emmai kāppavaṇē*

Which time will come when the wandering wind, fire, water, earth, and ether are degraded? After that, father of wandering feet, make that time the one which destroys the past evil deeds of your servant too. Protect those, o our protector!

In this verse, the speaker invokes the cyclical nature of the universe (though the term *yūga* is not used) by speaking of universal destruction when all elements find their dissolution. They implore Śiva to make the time of universal destruction the end of their past negative deeds too. By phrasing their question as such, the speaker indicates something of their desperation in that the end of the *yūga*, something not within a human's conceptual grasp, can't come soon enough for their own salvation. Putting the destruction of personal karmic mire alongside universal destruction also indicates that both actions are core to Śiva's operations in the world. Śiva's liberating grace is as much of a guarantee as is the destruction of the universe at the end of a cosmic cycle. This juxtaposition of the speaker's own freedom and the deluge at the end of an aeon draws universal time closer to human time, collapsing the macro and the micro in the heightened and prolonged experience of suffering and in the glimpse of its resolution. In calling out to Śiva, the speaker names him "protector" with a future participial noun with a vocative affix (*kāppavaṇē*). From this nominal form, the reader infers that Śiva is and will always be the protector of those like the speaker, despite their previous negative deeds.

Through every renewing era, Śiva persists in his role as protector and savior of those trapped in karmic mire. In the same song, in verse 43, the speaker praises Śiva as follows:

mēlai vāṇavarum ariyātatu ōr

*kōlamē enai āṭkoṇṭa kūttanē
jñālamē, vicumpē, ivai vantū pōm
kālamē! unai enru kol kāṇpatē*

O beauty unknown to the devas above!
O dancer who enslaved me!
O Earth, O Sky, O Time [to which] these two having come, will go,
Will there be the sight of you? When will I see you?

In this verse, Śiva, the great one who is unknown to even the heavenly ones, enslaves the lowly speaker. That his identification as the enslaver of the speaker, a line which moors his actions in a discrete human lifetime, comes before the final lines detailing his cosmic identity as both the limits of the physical universe and also the unstoppable force which acts upon them (time itself) is significant. As in the previous example, human time and cosmic time are brought into close relationship with one another in both the content and structure of this verse.

Tirukkōvaiyār verse 75 plays on these ideas in the following verse:

*viṇṇai maṭaṅka viriṇṇirparantu verpukkarappa
maṇṇai maṭaṅka varum orukālattum maṇṇi nirkum
aṇṇal maṭaṅkal ataḷ ampalavaṇ aruḷ ilarpōl
peṇṇai maṭalmicai yāṇavarai paṇṇirru ṍr peṇ koṭiyē⁸⁶*

Like those who are without the grace of the one of the *ampalam* who wears a lion's skin and will endure, even when the sky diminishes, expansive waters spread, mountains are uprooted, and the land folds in on itself, a young woman has caused me to come riding the palmyra horse!

The previous verse identifies Śiva as the entity to which all things return in the time of universal dissolution. Here too, Śiva is beyond time's ravages and remains standing at time's end. In this example, he is described using a future adjectival participle, *nirkum* (standing/existing) which indicates that he will stand/exist in the future when the *yūga* comes to an end, is continuously standing/existing, and will forever do so. The chaos of the hero's mad lust for the heroine as he rides the palmyra horse through town is thematically linked to the chaos which rains at the end of

⁸⁶ Māṇikkavācakar, *Māṇikkavācaka cuvāmikaḷ aruḷicceyta tirukkōvaiyār eṇa vaḷankum tirucciṇṇampalak kōvaiyār eṇām tirumurai pēṇācīriyar uraiyum paḷaiya uraiyum* (Mayilāṭuturai: *Ṇāṇacampantam patippakam*, 1997), 221.

the world detailed in the first two lines, displaying yet another example of the way in which tropes from *akam* literature are refigured in a Śaiva discursive context.

Tirukkōvaiyār, in invoking Śiva as its patron, favors mentioning his heroic deeds and thus contains multiple descriptions of Śiva as time's destroyer. In 277, he is designated as the one who killed death who could destroy and degrade anything (*muḷutum citaya teruvala kālaṇai cerravan*). Verse 150 describes him thus: "the dancer of cool Southern Tillai filled with honeyed branches made Kālaṇ cry out and killed him" (*kālaṇi ōlam iṭāṭartta kōl tēṇ kuḷir tillai kūttan*). In verse 350, Śiva's role in the cyclical destruction of the universe is drawn into relationship with the time of the protagonist in a different manner:

*yālīṇ molī maṅkai paṅkaṇ cirrapalattāṇ amaitta
ūlīṇ valiyatu oṇru eṇṇai oḷimēkalai ukaḷum
vīḷum varivaḷai mellīyal āvi cellāta muṇṇē
cūḷum tokuṇṇitiyōtu aṇṇar tēr vantu tōṇṇiyatē*

Is there anything with the force of the destruction of the eons enacted by Śiva, the one of the small *ampalam* whose half is a woman with a voice as sweet as the *yāl*? Bright bangles slip down and her long girdle falls; just before the tender one's breath leaves, the chariot of her lover, bedecked with gathered treasures, appears.

Like the previous example in which the hero was riding the palmyra horse, in this verse the deleterious force of Śiva's ultimate destruction of the universe at the end of a cycle of *yūgas* mirrors, both structurally and thematically, the effect of the hero's absence on the heroine, thereby amplifying the emotional weight of her sorrow. This elegantly illustrates one of the poetic mainstays of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, that is, the making parallel of emotional situations of the protagonists with elements of Śiva's role in the verse.

The few explicit mentions of time in both texts support a vision of Śiva who is both omnipresent/omnitemporal and immanent, who stands eternally outside of the bounds of time but also acts intentionally within them, specifically in the lives of the speaker and in their communities. He is both the operator of time and its ultimate dissolution. Time is under Śiva's

purview and it is subject to his whims. Beyond these fundamental truths, one learns more about time and temporality from looking at other factors.

Setting a Temporal Scene

If time as a named entity is not given considerable attention in *Tiruvācakam* or *Tirukkōvaiyār*, how does each text establish a temporal setting or context in which primary narrative action takes place? The goal of answering this question is not to exhaustively catalogue the ways that temporal landscapes are imagined, as vast and varied as they are, but to highlight a few key elements about how the poet establishes a time frame for the speakers' narrative actions in both texts.

To start thinking about this, one must consider the voice in which each text is spoken. *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are both recited in the first-person voice of a speaker who participates directly in the narrative as it unfolds. Neither text has an omniscient or third-person narrator, and neither have embedded layers of narrative like those found in Sanskrit *purāṇas*.⁸⁷ Like much *bhakti* literature, the speaker's time is the constant temporal referent for the narrative as it is told, and the reader encounters the narrative in that context alone. Though the speaker reflects on their past and conjectures about their future, by virtue of their telling their own tale, they anchor each poem in the present moment. The reader is then tied to that same present moment as they read the text through the first-person voice. In his work on the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, Greg Bailey speaks of a kind of temporality that is established in the *reading* of a text: "Each recitation of a *purāṇa* confirms the view of the narrative as having a timeless value and that is

⁸⁷ For more on *purāṇic* temporality/temporalities see Greg Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995).

has a relevance for every generation.”⁸⁸ Both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* draw the reader continuously into the present moment, and thus exhibit a timelessness akin to what Bailly observes in his reading of *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*. Bailey elaborates on this and identifies elements of narrative which he deems demonstrate omnitemporality. He writes, “These passages...in their content and their mode of deliverance invoke a kind of continuous present which seems beyond temporality because for their audience the relevance they have is valid for all time.”⁸⁹ This same type of timelessness has precedent in the Tamil literary tradition; Caṅkam poetry is often seen to stand outside of time, to be “ahistorical,” and temporally unplaceable due to its lack of identifying proper nouns or particulars. Both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* follow in the vein of this type of timelessness, in a way that the *Tēvāram* hymnists do not. The ability for these texts to reach beyond time is part and parcel of their theological message. Monius discusses the immediacy that the *Periyapurāṇam*’s treatment of temporality lends to its narrative by way of drawing players into an omnitemporal and enduring Tamil landscape, accessible to any reader in any period of time.⁹⁰ This is key, she argues, to the text’s core theological vision in which Śiva, the only salvation from time’s destructive reach, is infinitely benevolent and available to his devotees. Similarly, these texts, in breaking down temporal barriers through their firm footing in the present moment, allow Śiva to be forever accessible to their readers.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 86.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 102.

⁹⁰ See Monius, "Purana/Puranam: Modes of Narrative Temporality in Sanskrit and Tamil," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Interaction of Sanskrit and Tamil* (Pondichery: French Indological Institute, 2009).

Apart from voice, the contours of temporal settings must be approached slightly differently in each text given their significant formal differences. In the case of *Tiruvācakam*, composed in multiple *patikams* diverse in form and content, one encounters the temporal situation anew in each. For *Tirukkōvaiyār*, theoretically one continuous story, the temporal setting of the entire text can be considered as a whole. In order to expand on the observations above, I now look to how songs begin in order to demonstrate in further detail how they situate their narrative action in time.

The following opening verse from *Tiruvācakam Kuyil pattu* provides a useful entryway into this discussion:

*kītam iniya kuyilē! kēttiyēl eṅkaḷ perumān
pātam iraṇṭum viṇaviṇ pātālam ēlinukku appāl;
cōti maṇi muṭi collin col irantu ninra toṇmai
āti kuṇam onṇum illān antam ilān vara kūvāy*

O sweet-voiced cuckoo! If asked where the two feet of our lord are, they are beyond the seven netherworlds.
If you were to speak of his shining bejeweled crown, its antiquity is such that it existed beyond words.
He is without beginning, quality, or end. Tell him to come!

The first verse establishes the form of all subsequent verses of this decad in which the speaker repeatedly asks a cuckoo bird to call Śiva closer. This song falls into the category of messenger poem (*tūtu*), of which there are many varieties in earlier Caṅkam poetry. We may think of the opening verse as an opportunity for the poet to create a temporal mood or establish a temporal scene. In this case, the use of the conditionals, “if you were to ask” (*kēttiyēl*), “if questioned” (*viṇaviṇ*), and “if you say” (*collin*), the imperative, “come!” (*vara*), and the negative, “he is not” (*illān*), all contribute to a sense of timelessness. None of these verb forms are temporally determinate. Though the negative is non-future, it could either be past or present—he wasn’t or he isn’t. Thus, the reader, entering into this song, is not able to determine if this verse is taking place in the past, present, or future. The one tense-determinate verb here is *ninra*, a past

adjectival participle modifying antiquity (*toṇmai*). The inclusion of this verb, however, serves to place Śiva's antiquity into a deep or primordial past and emphasize his primacy in the universe.

It does not give significant temporal sway to the verse's main narrative action.

Tiruvācakam Aruṭpattu verse one, abounding with praise, also resists temporal location:

*cōṭiyē! cuṭarē! cūḷ oḷi viḷakkē!
cari kuḷal paṇai mulai maṭantai pāṭiyē
paraṇē pāl koḷveḷ nīrrāy
paṅkaiyattu ayanum māl ariyā
nīṭiyē celva tirupperunturaiyil
niṭṭaimalar kuruntam mēviya cīr
āṭiyē! aṭiyēṇ ātarittu aḷaittāl
atentuvē eṇru arulāyē*

O Light! O Radiance! O Lamp which surrounds [all] with light!
O Half of the woman with large breasts and beautiful locks!
O Lord! You are smeared with milk white ash!
You are the *nīti* unknown to Brahma on the lotus and Viṣṇu!
O Excellent One! In opulent Perunturai, you are the excellent one abiding under the *kurunta* tree filled with flowers! O Primal One! If I, the servant, implore you, graciously say, "What is it?"

In this verse the reader can determine temporal location by the first finite verb they encounter, *nīrrāy*, which describes Śiva being adorned with beautiful white ash. The other verb which modifies Śiva is *ariyā*, a negative participle (behaving like an adjectival participle in this case) which, as in the previous example, is not temporally determinate. As the verse culminates in the use of the tenseless conditional, *aḷaittāl* (if I were to implore), and the imperative, *arulāyē* (graciously do x), its temporal situation remains ambiguous, allowing for the possibility of its proximity to the reader's present time.

As a final example, *Tiruvācakam Valāppattu*'s first verse displays similar lack of definitive tense:

*pāroṭu viṇṇāy paranta em paranē
parru naṇ maru ilēṇ kaṇṭāy
cīroṭu polivāy civapurattu aracē
tirupperunturai urai civaṇē
āroṭu nōkēṇ? ārkku eṭuttu uraikkēṇ
āṇṭa nī aruḷilaiyānāl
vār kaṭal ulakil vāḷkilēṇ kaṇṭāy
'varuka' eṇru aruḷ puriyāyē*

Oh my lord who suffuses the earth and sky!
 Behold: I have no support other than you!
 You blaze with excellence, oh king of Civapuram!
 Oh Śiva who abides in Perunturai!
 Who can I complain to? Who can I appeal to?
 If you who ruled me do not grace me, behold,
 I won't live in this vast ocean of a world.
 Please graciously tell me to approach you!

The speaker explicitly places themselves in the present by using present finite verbs to complain (*nōkēṇ*) and tell/appeal (*uraikkēṇ*). When they make their requests to Śiva, they use the tense-indeterminate imperatives come (*varuka*), behold (*kaṇṭāy*), and tell/make known (*purīyāyē*). These three examples demonstrate the endurance of the present moment by both the use of ambiguous/temporally indeterminate verb tenses and the explicit use of the present tense.

If we turn now to *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s first verse, it locates the narrative action of the subject squarely in the present but maintains elements of an eternal landscape, echoing the above cited notions of omnitemporality from Bailey and the *Periyapurāṇa*'s enduring ethos as observed by Monius. Verse one begins with a very lush and sensorily evocative verse whose meaning hinges on a double entendre. Its subject is a *valli*, translated simultaneously as a creeper and a young woman. Here, the creeper is observed by the hero (though he goes unmentioned) and thus the reader, shining brilliantly, studded with various types of flowers, each of which simultaneously represent one of the five traditional Caṅkam landscapes and one of the heroine's facial features:

tiruvaḷar tāmarai cīrvaḷar kāvikaḷ īcartillai
kuruvaḷar pūṇkumiḷ kōṇku paiṇkāntaḷ koṇṭu ṇṇkuteyvā^[SEP]
maruvaḷar mālaiy ōr valliyiṇ olki aṇa naṭai vāyntu
uvaḷar kāmaṇṭaṇ venṇirikoṭi pōṇ oḷirkinṇratē

A swaying creeper garlanded with beautiful fragrant lotuses, excellent *kāvi*, bright *kumiḷ* which grow in the gardens of Tillai, and lovely *kāntaḷ*, has a gait like a swan, and is gleaming bright like the white flag of Kāma.

The mention of these five flowers functions dually: it indicates to the reader that this tale will wind its way through all five traditional landscapes with their corresponding love situations and places the entire world with all of its narrative possibilities and emotional scenarios within Śiva's

domain. The finite verb used to describe the action of the creeper/girl is in the present (*oḷirkinratē*) and could be taken as either “she shines” or “is shining.” Thus, we must also take the two adverbial participles which hinge on this finite verb, *olki* (hangs) *vāyntu* (excels), to be in the present. The flowers are each modified with a verbal form as well; most are qualified with the stem *vaḷar* from the verb *vaḷartal* which means to grow or increase. In these cases, the verb has not been modified or declined but remains in a form which has no specific tense. The reader may presume that it is a truncated adjectival participle, but with the absence of modification or declension, it must remain timeless. These flowers were, are, and will forever be growing all the more brilliant and beautiful as evidence of the fecund perpetuity of the Tamil landscape in which any number of love scenarios unfold and in which Śiva’s play is also continually unfolding.

Its second and third verses continue in this vein:

*pōtō vicumpō puṇalō paṇikaḷatu patiyō
yātō aṛikuvatu ētum aritu yamaṇ viṭutta
tūtō aṇaṇkaḷ tuṇaiyō iṇaiyili tollaittillai
mātō maṭamayilō eṇa niṇṇavar vāḷpatiyē*

“Earth? Sky? Water? Nākalōka?
Which is it? It is difficult to tell. Is she a messenger sent by Yama?
An aid of Kāma?
Is she a woman of ancient Tillai without compare? A young woman?
Where does she belong?” says the one standing there.

*pāyū viṭai araṇ tillai aṇṇāl paṭaikkaṇ imaikkum
tōyū nilattu aṭi; tūmalar vāṭum tuyaram eyi
āyū maṇṇē aṇangu allaḷ ammā mulaicumantu
tēyū maruṇkul perum paṇaittōḷ icciruṇutalē*

She is like the lord of Tillai who rides a bounding bull; her javelin eyes wink,
her feet rest on the earth and her flowers wilt. O my mind which anguishes over these details,
this fine-browed one with bamboo shoulders, tiny waist, and broad chest is not one of extraordinary
power (a goddess).

In continuing the timeless sense of the first verse, verse two contains no finite verbs. The hero asks, in real time, who the object of his gaze is. The repetitive use of the dubitative suffix *-ō* reinforces his sense of wonder. Finally, the third verse contains a number of future finite verbs which echo notions of the enduring landscape mentioned previously. In the first line, Śiva’s bull

is modified by the future adjectival participle *pāyūm* (bounding), indicating that this bull is bounding and will forever bound. To say this of Śiva makes good sense in that he is eternal and can forever be identified in that form. The remainder of the verse however shifts to describing the heroine and uses habitual future forms: blinks (*imaikkum*), trails (*tōyūm*), withers (*vādum*), becomes (*āyūm*), and diminishes (*tēyūm*). These futures can refer to her state of being at the time the hero witnesses her. However, their form also indicates future pervasive action. Thus, like the timelessly blossoming flowers of Tillai that are used to describe the heroine's face in verse one, her other magnificent qualities are also timeless, as is their tale.

Thus, in setting a temporal scene, both texts connect to the present moment of the reader. This is achieved through the use of the first-person voice as well as through temporally indeterminate and non-past verbal forms.

Layers of the Past

In *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* speakers oscillate between narration of their personal lives and praise of Śiva's many forms which range from the burner of the triple cities to the *līṅga* of light. These para-*purāṇic*⁹¹ or cosmic forms are typically invoked alongside their corresponding heroic deeds. Given the emphasis on the "pastness" of these deeds in other textual sources like *purāṇas*, whose very name means ancient, one might expect Śiva's cosmic acts to be situated in a past that is far removed from the speaker's present. However, neither *Tiruvācakam* nor *Tirukkōvaiyār* generate such temporal distance. In both texts, if a less proximate, more ancient past is invoked, it is done so in order to establish Śiva's role as the beginning of all beginnings. These more ancient visions of him generally do not coincide with their *purāṇic*

⁹¹ For the purposes of this section, I refer to these actions as Śiva's *purāṇic* deeds, though these tales likely circulated beyond the *purāṇas* where they are compiled.

references, but rather, occur in general descriptions of universal primacy—they establish the reality of a cosmic past to productively contrast a human present. When cosmic deeds are narrated, they are marked using the same verbal forms used for Śiva’s actions in the life of the speaker. There are rarely additional grammatical cues to qualify their temporal distance. Descriptions of Śiva in his various manifestations are so intermixed with descriptions of him as an interlocutor in the speaker’s present life that these roles begin to blend. Where his time as the burner of the triple cities ends and his gracing of the speaker begins is made deliberately unclear. The presence of these cosmic episodes in the speaker’s own narrative disrupts linear temporality, transforming the very nature of time itself. This new configuration of time carries significant theological implications. By collapsing layers of past action, both texts draw Śiva’s cosmic manifestations closer to an immediate present and into intimate relationship with the speaker. Collapsing of pasts is but one significant way these texts participate in the larger project of *bhakti* devotional poetry, namely, drawing nearer of divinity.

This section highlights ways that temporality is played with in service of creating proximity between the cosmic and the human in Māṇikkavācakar’s works: one is through verbal ambiguity, that is, the exploitation of certain verbal forms’ range of temporal meaning and lack of temporal specificity. The other is through syntactic ambiguity achieved using temporally indeterminate linking terms like “then,” and the embedding of cosmic episodes in the speaker’s present time. In these texts, grammar is integral to enabling a different experience of time. It envisions and creates a different kind of cosmos. Reading with an eye to the minutia of grammar allows for a clearer picture of the relationship between these two long-estranged texts to emerge, and similarities that transcend their substantial formal differences to be brought to light.

Tiruvācakam Nīttal viṇṇappam verse 10 provides a helpful illustration of how Śiva's *purāṇic* past and the past of the song's speaker brought into relationship to one another and into proximity in a single verse:

*polikiṇṇa niṇ tāl pukunta perṛu ākkaiyai pōkka perṛu
melikiṇṇa eṇṇai viṭuti kaṇṭāy aḷi tēr viḷari
oli niṇṇa pūm poḷil uttarakōca maṅkaikku aracē
vali niṇṇa tiṇ cilaiyāl erittāy puram mārūpattē*

Allowing entrance to your shining feet and release from the body,
you left me withering. O King of Uttarakōcamāṅkai whose gardens of flowers
resound with the hum of bee's chariots, you burned the enemy cities with your strong bow.

There are two finite verbs in this verse: one which ends the first clause midway through line two that details Śiva's actions to the speaker, and the other in the final clause that closes the verse in line four regarding his destruction of the triple cities of the *asuras*. Both his leaving of the speaker (*viṭuti kaṇṭāy*) and his burning of the triple cities (*erittāy*) are declined in the second-person singular past tense. Between these clauses is a vocative exclamation that describes Śiva in his form which resides in Uttarakōcamāṅkai. This invocation of a localized form of Śiva, placed as it is in the middle of the verse, links the opening and closing actions together in a proximate form. In this verse there is no qualification of the time periods in which Śiva performs both actions; there are no grammatical cues or particles that indicate the depth of the past in which they occur. The intermediary image of him standing in the middle of the verse as the subject of both finite verbs further draws them closer together in time. In other words, multiple manifestations are not invoked in order to distinguish which ones achieved particular ends at particular times. In this way, throughout much of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, layers of the past and Śiva's actions therein are not substantially differentiated.

Tiruvācakam Puṇarccippattu, verse 5 neatly illustrates how Śiva's cosmic past and that of the speaker converge:

tikaḷa tikaḷum aṭiyum muṭiyum

*kānpāṇ kīl mēl ayaṇum mālum
akaḷa paṇantum kāṇa māṭṭā
ammāṇ im mā nilam muḷutum
nikaḷa paṇi koṇṭu eṇṇai āṭkoṇṭu
ā ā eṇṇa nīrmai ellām
pukaḷa peruvatu eṇṇu kollō eṇ
pollā maṇiyai puṇarntē*

Even though Brahma and Viṣṇu flew up and down in order to see the brightly shining feet and head, as the father not seen [by them] though they measured and flew far illuminates this whole wide world, he made a servant and enslaved me. When will I gain the fame of having declared, “Ah, ah” [an ecstatic utterance] after joining with my unblemished gem?

This excerpt generates proximity by playing with the inherent temporal ambiguity of verbal forms like the infinitive. If we proceed through the verse from the beginning, we can map how its verbal use plays with linear time. The first clause in which Viṣṇu and Brahma are digging and flying uses a concessive of fact, *paṇantum*, which can yield two readings: past—“even though they flew and dug”, or present—“even though they fly and dig.” There is no way to know which is indicated and though one might be tempted to place this episode in the past, the verb form defies definitive determination. When Śiva is then qualified as being unseen by Viṣṇu and Brahma, the form used is a future continuous (*kāṇa māṭṭā*)—Śiva is, and will remain unseen by them, forever. The next verb, the infinitive “to shine” (*nikaḷa*) shifts focus back to the speaker. Infinitives do not carry implicit tense; as such, they can indicate a wide range of temporal relationships between the clauses they link. Most often, they are used to indicate simultaneity or, at the least, temporal proximity of action. Because of the infinitive’s temporal ambiguity, one could conceivably interpret this verse as saying *while* Brahma and Viṣṇu struggle to see him, Śiva, continuously shining as that form of the *liṅga* of light, enslaved the speaker. In this reading, the gracing of the speaker is but a punctuation within the larger story of the *liṅga* of light. A cosmic event overlaps with events in the life of the speaker, and its temporality must be reimagined in the new conceptual context of the speaker’s present time. In a similar way the following excerpt from *Puṇarccippattu* verse three uses the infinitive absolute: “he enslaved me

who was without any desire for that tall flame” (*nīṇṭa mālum ayaṇum veruva nīṇṭa neruppai*).

The use of the infinitive *veruva*, from the verb *veruvu*, to be frightened, as in the above example, does not have a definitive tense. The reference to Śiva’s manifestation as the *linga* of light and Brahma and Viṣṇu’s futile attempts to find its limits is contrasted with the speaker’s own utter lack of desire for the flame; despite their imperviousness, they, without striving, are graced nonetheless.

Tiruvācakam, *Tirukkōtumpi* 20 also uses an infinitive absolute in a similar manner to draw together temporal planes:

pūmēl ayaṇoṭu mālum pukal aritu enru
ēmāri nīrka adiyēṇ irumākka
nāy mēl tavicu iṭṭu nanrā poruṭpaṭutta
tī mēṇiyānukkē cenru ūṭāy kōttumpī

King bee, go and buzz to the one whose body is fire, who, as Brahma on the lotus and Viṣṇu stood beguiled, in order to make me the slave elated, offered a seat to a dog and made me well fit.

In this verse, *nīrka*, the infinitive of *nil*, is used to mark off the clause in which Viṣṇu and Brahma stand confused and transfixed, from the rest of the verse in which Śiva acts on the speaker. Another infinitive, *irumākka*, follows *nīrka*, and can be taken in one of two ways: it can be taken as another indicator of simultaneity—as Viṣṇu and Brahma stood transfixed, and as I became elated, Śiva offered a seat to the dog, etc. As I have noted above, and I argue more likely the case, it can also be interpreted as an infinitive of purpose; for the sake of the speaker becoming elated, they were so transformed by Śiva. As in the other examples, the use of the infinitive, though relatively ambiguous temporally, draws two events into a close relationship. The implication in this particular case is that even the great gods, standing waiting for Śiva, are ignored when Śiva pays attention and lavishes his grace on a lowly dog. As a final example of the use of the past alongside the infinitive, *Tirutteḷḷēṇam* 12:

muttikku uḷaṇṇu muṇivar kuḷām naṇi vāṭa
attikku aruḷi aṭiyēṇai āṇṭukonṭu
patti kaṭaluḷ patitta parañcōti
tittikkumā pāṭi teḷḷēṇam koṭṭāmō

Singing sweetly of the holy light which caused me to be immerse in a sea of devotion, [of the one] who graced the elephant and enslaved me while groups of sages wandered seeking liberation, let us clap and play *teḷḷēṇam*.

The infinitive, *vāṭa*, from *vāṭu*, is used to separate the clause speaking of the wandering sages from the rest of the narrative action and to change subject; these sages and their fruitless wanderings are no doubt invoked, as in the previous example, to contrast the speaker's fortune of being enslaved despite minimal to no effort. Against a backdrop of sages searching in vain, Śiva graces an elephant, marked off with the adjectival participle *aruḷi*, then enslaves the speaker, again with an adjectival participle *āṇṭukonṭu*; both indicate completed action. He is finally qualified with the past adjectival participle, *patitta*. The gracing of an elephant invokes the myth in which Indra's elephant Airāvata was cursed by Durvāsa for accidentally trampling a lotus he planned to offer to Śiva which we could place in Śiva's *purāṇic* past. That this is listed alongside enslaving and not temporally marked off in any significant manner is significant.

The lines between temporal planes are blurred not only by taking advantage of ambiguity inherent in verbal forms but also by playing with verses' syntactic organization. The following excerpt from *Tiruvācakam Tiruvaṇṭappakuti*, lines 157-161 illustrate this phenomenon:

... avayavam cuvai taru
kōḷ tēṇ koṇṭu ceytaṇaṇ
ēṇṇār mūtūr eḷil nakai eriyiṇ
vīḷvittāṇku aṇṇu
aruḷ perum tītiṇ atiyōm ati kutil
oruttarum vaḷāmai oṭukkiṇaṇ...

He gave to my limbs the taste of sweet honey,
then, there on that day, he caused the opposing cities to fall with the blaze of his beautiful smile, and
without fail he dissolved each and every one of our base huts (bodies) with the great flame of his grace...

This excerpt comes after a longer passage in which the speaker goes mad during the intense process of becoming Śiva's servant. In the wake of this transformative experience, Śiva suffuses the speaker's limbs with honey to soothe them. Immediately after, a clause detailing Śiva's destruction of the triple cities is interjected, and then followed by the conclusion of the speaker's narrative when they are freed from their flawed body. Two key and programmatic terms, *āṇku* and *aṇru* separate these discrete moments of felling the triple cities, and dissolving devotees' bodies. *Āṇku* is both a spatial referent, "there," and a temporal one, "then." *Aṇru* is used more specifically to refer to time and marks off actions from the present. These terms fall directly between the felling of the cities and the dissolving of bodies, capaciously linking the cosmic to the human through syntax. Though they mark off the action of burning the triple cities from Śiva's actions upon the speaker, their temporal distance is still ambiguous. One could feasibly read "having burned the triple cities, *then and there* he dissolved the bodies of us devotees." In the second interpretation, there is less temporal distance between the burning of the cities and the destruction of the bodies—in fact, one immediately precedes the other. Looking to the overall structure of this excerpt, we see that an action of a cosmic past is embedded between two explicitly past actions in the life of the speaker. This interceding act of burning the triple cities is described using an adverbial participle which suspends its ultimate temporal location until finally determined by the finite verb "he dissolved," which concretizes Śiva's action in the life of the speaker. In reading this verse, the cosmic action's resolution hinges on the human's, implying that they belong to the same temporal plane.

Tirukkōvaiyār verse 112 also plays with the ambiguity of *aṇru*:

*tavaḷatta nīru aṇiyum tadantōḷ aṇṇal taṇ orupālavaḷ
attaṇām makaṇām tillaiyāṇ aṇru utittatu aṇṇa
kavaḷatta yāṇai katintār karatta kaṇ āṇ taḷaiyum
tuvaḷa takuvaṇavō curumpu āṇkuḷal tūmoḷiyē*

He subdued the rutting elephant like the flaying done then by the one of Tillai, both father and son to the one who is his half, Śiva whose broad shoulders are ornamented with white ash. Is it appropriate that the leaves in his hand are fading, oh woman with fragrant locks full of bees?

In this case, though *anru* is used to set apart temporally Śiva's killing of the elephant it does not necessarily tell us much about the temporal situation of that act. It could have been yesterday, or one thousand years ago; most simply it just means then, i.e., not in the present moment. This verse plays on the ambiguity of the term *anru* and leaves it as indeterminate as possible allowing for the potentiality that these two actions take place in the same relative temporal universe. The comparison of the hero's conquest of his own elephant, described so similarly in his angry rut to the fearsome Gajasura defeated by Śiva, also draws them into closer conceptual relationship.

Apart from embedding, that is the insertion of a single cosmic event between two in the life of the speaker, another method for collapsing pasts is seen in the oscillation between temporal planes over the course of a single song. Take for example *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiruppūvalli*.

Its 14 verses are topically split as follows:

1. Speaker is rid of poor qualities
2. Speaker redeemed, *līṅga* of light
3. Story of Kaṇṇappar
4. Speaker's heart melts
5. Describing Śiva as vast
6. Śiva pervades speaker's mind
7. Story of Caṇṭēcurar
8. Speaker thinks of Śiva
9. Fate of three demons and other gods
10. Viṣṇu gouges eye out
11. Dakṣa's sacrifice
12. *Līṅga* of light
13. Speaker rid of fetters
14. Speaker speaks of Śiva entering soul

In verse one, the focus is solely on the speaker, but by two, half of the verse is dedicated to the speaker and half to Śiva as the *līṅga* of light. Stories of Tamil saints Kaṇṇappar and Caṇṭēcurar are interspersed with verses about Dakṣa's sacrifice and Viṣṇu gouging out his eye. Verses 9-12

focus on Śiva’s cosmic manifestations, but the song starts as it finishes with attention on the speaker. It is significant that this song goes back and forth between Śiva’s actions in the life of the speaker and those in the broader universe without *any* indication that different strata of time are being invoked. No supplementary words like “before” or “after” are used to set apart cosmic deeds from others. The cumulative effect of this oscillation is a blurring of temporal boundaries between actions; events from a deep past rise up to the surface of the speaker’s present.

The following verse, *Tirupporcuṇṇam* 18, is my final example of one of the ways in which time is collapsed by playing with tense in *Tiruvācakam*:

ayaṇ talai koṇṭu ceṇṭāṭal pāṭi
 arukkan eyīru parittal pāṭi
 kayam taṇai koṇṭu uri pōrttal pāṭi
 kālaṇai kālāl utaittal pāṭi
 iyaṇṭana muppuram eytal pāṭi
 ēḷai aṭiyōmai āṇṭu koṇṭa
 Nayam taṇai pāṭi ninṭu āṭi āṭi
 nātarku cuṇṇam iṭittum nāmē

Singing of making a ball game of Brahma’s head,
 singing of knocking out the teeth of Arukkan (Sūrya),
 singing of killing and wearing the skin of the mean one (rutting elephant),
 singing of kicking Time with his foot,
 singing of discharging arrows at the three joined cities,
 singing of his goodness which enslaved us poor servants,
 let us pound the powder for the Lord!

In this verse, each successive subject matter is listed using a verbal noun which, apart from being non-past, does not carry specific tense. In this list of temporally indeterminate exploits, enslaving the speaker is nestled comfortably alongside cosmic acts like destroying Kālaṇ. In all of these examples from *Tiruvācakam*, Śiva’s cosmic past is brought into close proximity with the speaker’s present through the exploitation of both verbal and syntactic ambiguity.

I now turn to *Tirukkōvaiyār* to explore its treatment of the proximate and distant pasts. Like *Tiruvācakam*, *Tirukkōvaiyār* uses similar techniques to collapse layers of past action. To explore these, I start with verse 286:

*vēlaṇ pukuntu veri āṭuka; veṇmaṛi aṟukka
kālaṇ pukuntu aviyak kaḷal vaittu eḷil tillai niṇra
mēlaṇ pukuntu enkaṇniṇṛāṇ irunta veṇkāṭu aṇaiya
pālaṇ pukuntu ippariciṇiṇ niṇpitta paṇpiṇukkē*

Let Vēlaṇ enter and dance in frenzy, as the young goat is slaughtered (or let the young goat be slaughtered), having entered Kālaṇ and extinguished him with his foot, the lofty one who dwells in Tillai entered me. With respect to this ongoing state (of the hero), it is due to the manner in which the young one (heroine) who is like his Veṇkāṭu entered!

Lines one and four which bookend this verse refer to the present predicament of the hero who is mad with lust for the heroine. His mother, the speaker, calls for a priest to come to their aid and curb his erratic behavior through sacrifice. The middle two lines refer to Śiva's past actions on the speaker and on Kālaṇ, another name for Yama, death, or time itself. The killing of Kālaṇ, that references the story of Mārkaṇḍeya, is marked by an adverbial participle whose corresponding finite verb ends the clause in which Śiva enters the speaker. Though the syntactic order of these two past actions helps establish the order in which they may have occurred, little else serves to distance them in terms of time. Furthermore, because adverbial participles rely on finite verbs to resolutely determine their tense, the act of slaying Kālaṇ is drawn toward the present by the fact that its temporal situation hinges on the finite verb for Śiva's act on the speaker, in much the same way as was seen in my first example from *Tiruvācakam*. We might also take the structure of this verse as a version of the syntactic ambiguity via embedding that was seen in the last two *Tiruvācakam* examples; past actions in lines 2 and 3 are wedged between invocations of the present moment in lines 1 and 4. Temporal ambiguity between acts is also achieved through repetition of the adverbial participle, *pukuntu*, having entered, in the opening of each line: in one, the priest enters, in two, Śiva enters Kālaṇ, in three, the speaker, and in four, the heroine enters the heart of the hero; the repetitive rhyming of these participles in a single verse which contains multiple players makes it difficult for a reader to distinguish who does what, when, further contributing to the blurring of temporal boundaries.

There is another strategy by which pasts are drawn closer together in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, taking place far more often but in a less straightforward manner, and it has to do with how one understands the project of the *kōvai* more generally and the relationship between place and time.

Take the following verse 55:

*oruṅku aṭi mū eyil orrai kaṇai koḷ ciṟrampalavan
karuṇ kaṭam mūṇru uku nāl vāyk kari urittōṇ kayilai
iruṇ kaṭam mūṭum poḷil eḷil kompar aṇṇīrkaḷ iṇṇē
varuṅkaḷ tam ūr pakarntāl paḷiyō iṅku vāḷpavarkkē*

You are like a beautiful creeper from the garden of Kailāsa surrounded by dark forests that belongs to the one who flayed the elephant with gaping mouth flowing with rut threefold, the one of the *ampalam* who destroyed the three fortresses with a single arrow. Come here. If you tell of your town, will there be any reproach from those who live here?

This verse is split into two “temporal zones,” connected in the center by the physical locus of the speaker’s narrative action. The first half of this verse is dominated by the use of the past tense, while the second half tense becomes less clear, and then finally culminates in the future continuous. Śiva’s acts of slaying the rutting elephant, presumably a reference to his slaying of Gajāśura, and conquering of the triple cities, are located firmly in the past by the use of the past finite verb, *urittōṇ* (flayed). The locus for the action of the speaker is the garden outside of Kailāsa where the hero asks the heroine to join him. The first half of the verse which details Śiva’s previous exploits is linked to the second half by way of this mention of this locale. By position, grammatically we understand that Kailāsa belongs to Śiva. Śiva is omnitemporal as he is the supreme lord, but in this poem, his placement as the patron draws him closer to the present time as the patrons of *kōvai* are not mythical kings of bygone eras but kings who rule specific geographical locations in present time. His implied present rulership over Kailāsa and Tillai, two places in which much of the narrative of the speaker takes place, coupled with the fact that past, *purāṇic* actions are no further demarcated as past when compared to other protagonists’ past actions bridges a gap between space and time in the physical locus of Kailāsa.

The following literal translation of an excerpt from *Tirukkōvaiyār* verse 114 illustrates another way that the temporal ambiguity inherent in certain verbal forms is used advantageously to create a possibility for proximity: “having burned the enemy hills with his bow, he whose body is like a red hill is the one who ruled me” (*tevvarai mey eri kāy cilai āṇṭu eṇṇai āṇṭu koṇṭa cevvarai mēṇiyaṇ*). Here, the clause referencing Śiva’s act of burning the triple cities is marked complete by an adverbial participle *āṇṭu*, having ruled, which expects a finite verb to help establish its subject and tense. This verse however contains no finite verb, thus creating a problem for resolutely determining *āṇṭu*’s temporal situation. In such instances, the verb “to be” can be supplied to render the following translation: “Śiva exists having burned the triple cities and he is the one who ruled me.” But in the absence of a supplied “to be,” the only recourse one has to determine the tense of his ruling the cities is to look to the other verb that modifies Śiva, the past adjectival participle *āṇṭu koṇṭa*, “ruled”—a participle that references the action done on the speaker. Thus, both of these actions can be loosely placed in the past, but we have no grammatical cues to significantly separate them in terms of time. Based on the syntactic order in which these actions appear, the burning of the triple cities comes before the speaker’s enslavement. However, in this verse, the burning of the triple cities is grammatically and thus temporally left hanging, so to speak, by the use of a finite-verbless adverbial participle. That the temporal location of Śiva’s *purāṇic* past remains ambiguous and indeterminate creates space and possibility for proximity to the speaker’s present time. Whereas the previous verse took advantage of the presence of a finite verb to draw Śiva’s cosmic acts closer to the time of the speaker, this one plays on the absence of one, but achieves the same effect.

Verse 73 follows this pattern closely:

*poruḷā eṇai pukuntu āṇṭu purantaraṇ māl ayaṇpāl
iruḷāy irukkum oḷiṇṇra ciṇṇampalaṇ eṇalām
curuḷ ār karum kuṭal veṇ nakai cevvaṇ tuṭi iṭaiyīr*

aruḷātu oliyiṇ oriyātu aliyum eṇ ār uyirē

The one who abided in *cirṟampalam* as the light which glitters and remains darkness to Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Indra entered me, gave me substance, and ruled me.

Oh you who are *tuṭi* waisted with a red mouth, white teeth, and black locks, you are like that—
if you don't grant your grace, surely my very life will waste away and perish.

Like the previous example, this verse creates ambiguity by leaving adverbial participles hanging.

Pukuntu (having entered) and *āṇṭu* (having ruled) are adverbial participles that describe Śiva's actions on the speaker and have no corresponding finite verb. The only other verb linked to Śiva, the subject of these adverbial participles, is a past adjectival participle *niṇṇra*, “the one who abided,” which is linked syntactically to Śiva's actions toward Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Indra. In English translation, the smoothest way to approximate the relationship between these clauses might be, “the one who did x to them, did y to me.” However, this does not capture the order of operations in reading the verse. Instead, the reader *first* encounters the actions of Śiva on the speaker, and only secondly those which are relevant to the other gods. The elision of a finite verb leaves ample room for temporal flexibility in which the speaker's own experience can precede cosmological events. This verbal construal intentionally frustrates the reader's ability to resolutely determine the nature of temporal relationships between actions. Further complicating this scene, Śiva, who acts on the gods and the speaker in the past, is also equated with the light, *oli* which is modified by a future continuous adjectival participle, *iruḷāy irukkum*, that indicates he will both forever shine and forever be dark—thus unavailable—to his fellow gods. This makes it even more significant that he is so present in the life of the speaker as indicated by his completed action of entering and ruling them. As in my first example from *Tiruvācakam*, the gracing of the speaker is but a punctuation in this larger cosmic tale. These examples from *Tirukkōvaiyār* perhaps display less formal range than those from *Tiruvācakam* though they achieve similar ends. Given the constraints of its genre, *Tirukkōvaiyār* must capitalize on the ambiguity inherent in Tamil verbal constructions to maintain its economy of words.

By paying attention to the minutia of grammar, I demonstrate that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* draw Śiva's cosmic past into close temporal relationship with the speaker's time by collapsing layers of the past. Both texts rely on the ambiguity of verbal and syntactic formations to continually create opportunities for the generation of proximity between Śiva and the speaker. In addressing issues of temporality, I offer a reading that allows for us to see that these formally disparate texts share a mutually constitutive theological vision whose project of drawing Śiva near relies on the use of shared rhetorical strategies. Grammar is a critical tool and a means by which alternative temporalities are brought into being and by which distant pasts may be drawn closer to the present.

Patterns of Verb Tense Use

This section considers the theological significance of patterns of verb tense use. I first look at Śiva's past, completed actions performed on behalf of the speaker. Focus then shifts to the implications of these completed past actions on the speaker's present. In doing so, I investigate the effects Śiva's actions have on the life of the speaker, as well as the degree to which they are transformative. These observations help us to think about how each text imagines the contours of human life, the trials and tribulations of being mired in karmic muck, and the implications of entering into a relationship with Śiva. Observing cumulative use of tense also helps to illuminate the affective dimensions of each text.

Lists of Śiva's primary operations found throughout Śaiva literature beginning with the *āgamas* are generally five in number and include creation, preservation, destruction, concealment, and revelation. All these functions are found in both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, though rarely in list form. *Śivapurāṇam* groups them as follows: "you create the whole world, protect it, destroy it, bestow grace, cause [me] to go, and enter into your service"

(*aṇaittu ulakum ākkuvāy kāppāy alippāy aruḷ tiruvāy pōkkuvāy eṇṇai pukuvippāy niṇ toḷumpil*).⁹²

In this excerpt, all verbs are in the future continuous tense, indicating that these actions are eternal, states of being, or habitual functions. They have been and will always be part of Śiva's universal role. The list provided here includes not only grand-scale responsibilities for the cyclical maintenance of the cosmos, but also microcosmic, personal interventions in the life of the devotee. True to both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Śiva operates on large and small scales, in infinite and finite time.

In both texts, Śiva's main interventions in the speaker's life are enslaving (*āṭkoḷ*) and gracing (*aruḷ*, *aruḷ cey*, *aruḷ tā*, *aruḷ vai*, etc.). These two operations receive by far the most attention out of all of Śiva's acts. While his large-scale activities like creating and destroying the universe are acknowledged, enslaving and gracing are the speakers' central concern. When gracing and enslaving are mentioned as functions or eternal operations integral to Śiva's nature and character, the future/continuous tense is used, either by way of a future finite verb or future participial noun (in some cases these are identical in form). Take for example the following excerpt from *Tiruvācakam kīrtti tiru akaval* verse 110: "he is one who enslaves without taking on defect" (*aḷukku aṭaiyāmal āṇṭu koṇṭaruḷpavaṇ*). In this line, enslaving takes the form of a future participial noun which implies that it is an eternal part of Śiva's role in the universe. The verse in which it is found contains no specific reference to the speaker of the poem, and thus, the description of the enslaving function is placed in the future to indicate Śiva's enduring state/role.

Though gracing and enslaving are eternal functions, they are encountered primarily in the past tense when they take place in the life of the speaker. They are events which have already transpired, though they may occur repeatedly. One of *Tiruvācakam*'s speaker's greatest desires is

⁹² *Śivapurāṇam*, lines 41-43. It's possible that *Śivapurāṇam* is a later addition to *Tiruvācakam*.

entrance into the idealized group of Śaiva devotees whom he observes to be perfect and closest to Śiva, the *aṭiyār*, or *mey aṭiyār* (slave, true devotee). This community is one which the speaker imagines themselves to stand outside of and represents all they strive to attain. One way to gain access to this community and a signal that one is taken into the Śaiva fold is through Śiva's act of enslaving (*āṭkoḷ*). Once enslaved, one becomes an *aṭiyār*. This act of enslavement is a significant marker in the life of a devotee and indicates the initiation of a new kind of relationship with Śiva, his communities, and the world. For the speakers in each text, enslavement is a singular and discrete temporal moment located firmly in the past. Take the following examples from *Tiruvācakam*: “oh lord, my father, having drawn me close, you enslaved me” (*īrttu eṇṇai āṭkoṇṭa eṇṇai perumānē*)⁹³ (*āṭkoṇṭa*= past adjectival participle); “Behold! Having enslaved me, he graced me/he graciously enslaved me” (*avaṇ eṇṇai āṭkoṇṭu aruḷiṇaṇ kāṇka*)⁹⁴ (*āṭkoṇṭu*=adverbial participle, *aruḷiṇaṇ*=past finite verb); “Śiva, my lord, despite seeing my lowness enslaved me” (*civaṇ em pirāṇ eṇṇai aṇṭukoṇṭaṇ eṇ ciṟumai kaṇṭum*)⁹⁵ (*aṇṭukoṇṭāṇ*=past finite verb); “the nature of having enslaved me to you” (*eṇṇai uṇakku āṭkoṇṭa taṇmai*)⁹⁶ (*āṭkoṇṭa*=past adjectival participle); “He is the hero who ruled us who are like dogs...he is the one of Aṇṇāmalai who ruled me who is like a dog” (*nāyāṇa nam tammai āṭkoṇṭa nāyakaṇṇai...nāyēṇai āṭkoṇṭa aṇṇāmalaiyāṇai*)⁹⁷ (*āṭkoṇṭa*=past adjectival participle); “He

⁹³ *Śivapurāṇam*, line 74.

⁹⁴ *Tiruvaṇṭappakuti*, line 63.

⁹⁵ *Tiruccatakam*, 13.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

⁹⁷ *Tiruvammāṇai*, 7-10.

enslaved me so that I not be plunged into birth and death forever” (*enrum pīrantu īrantu ālāmē āṇṭukoṇṭāṇ*)⁹⁸ (*āṇṭukoṇṭāṇ*=past finite verb); “you are the rare gem who enslaved me” (*eṇṇai āṇṭukoṇṭa eṇ ār amutē*)⁹⁹ (*āṇṭukoṇṭa*=past adjectival participle); “the compassionate one who enslaved [me]” (*āṇṭukoṇṭa karuṇālayaṇai*)¹⁰⁰ (*āṇṭukoṇṭa*=past adjectival participle); “my father, I too he enslaved...he ruled us” (*eṇ attāṇ eṇṇaiyum āṇṭu koṇṭaṇ...nammai āṇṭāṇ*)¹⁰¹ (*āṇṭu koṇṭaṇ* & *āṇṭāṇ*=past finite verb). The past mood of enslaving is maintained in almost all other descriptions of this event. For example, take the phrase “below the ankleted feet which enslaved little me” (*ciṛiyēṇai āṭkoṇṭa peykaḷal kīl*).¹⁰² This refers to the placement of Śiva’s feet on the devotee’s head which is an initiatory moment synonymous with enslaving. The verb *āṭkoḷ* is declined as a past adjectival participle and describes a discrete action done to the speaker. In the same song the speaker notes, “This indeed is the manner in which you enslaved me” (*eṇṇai nī āṭkoṇṭa vaṇṇam tānē*)¹⁰³ (*vaṇṇam*, manner, takes the past adjectival participle of enslaving). These are but a few examples taken from a number of different songs in *Tiruvācakam*, but there are many more.

While *Tirukkōvaiyār* speaks less frequently about the act of enslaving, given that much of its narrative hinges on the central love story unfolding between the hero and heroine, the few instances where it is mentioned also place the event squarely in the past. Take for example this

⁹⁸ *Tiruttōṇṇōkkam*, 2.

⁹⁹ *Acaippattu*, 5 (256).

¹⁰⁰ *Puṇarccippattu*, 1, (267).

¹⁰¹ *Tirupponṇūcal*, 7-8.

¹⁰² *Tiruccatakam*, 22.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 28.

excerpt from verse 114: “he whose body is like a red hill is the one who enslaved me, having ruled with his bow burning his enemies” (*tevvarai mey eri kāy cilai āṇṭu eṇṇai āṇṭu koṇṭa cevvarai mēṇiyaṇ*).¹⁰⁴ Śiva is modified by the past adjectival participle for ruled, *āṇṭu koṇṭa*.

Here is another example using the past adjectival participle in 166: “in the field of Tillai which is surrounded by shining gardens and belongs to the one who is rich honey and who came and ruled me as I lamented that I was weeping in hell” (*aḷuntēn nakarattu yān eṇṇu iruppa, vantū āṇṭu koṇṭa ceḷuntēṇ, tikaḷpoḷil tillaippuṇṇavil*). This excerpt sets the scene for the action of the love story to unfold in Tillai, which is then qualified as belonging to Śiva who is qualified by his past action of enslaving. Both Śiva and Tillai act as a bridge between past and the present narrative action. In each of these selections, the initiatory moment in which the speaker or protagonist is “brought into the fold” is an event which has already transpired and reported by the speaker as a past memory. While the speaker of *Tiruvācakam* may spend a lot of time wringing their hands about not being worthy of Śiva’s attentions, the text’s attestations of enslaving suggest that indeed, they are. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the speakers do not share the same anxieties about worthiness, but their enslavement too has already transpired.

Beyond the act of enslaving, it is clear throughout much of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* that the speaker recounts Śiva’s other interventions in their lives as having already occurred. Before and after the moment of becoming an *aṭiyār*, there are several other ways in which Śiva interacts with or acts upon the devotee, looked back on, and memorialized in these songs. Take the following examples: “he dispelled the fear of two things, virtue and sin, and enslaved me” (*aṇṇam pāvam eṇṇu iraṇṭu accam tavirttu eṇṇai āṇṭukoṇṭān*)¹⁰⁵; “he snapped my

¹⁰⁵ *Tirutteḷḷēṇam*, 8.

fetters” (*eṇṇuṭaiya pantam aruttu*)¹⁰⁶; “he was the one who abided in Tillai in order to destroy my births” (*eṇ piṛappu keṭa tillai niṇṇōṇ*)¹⁰⁷; “you made a place of my body” (*ni eṇ uṭal iṭam koṇṭāy*)¹⁰⁸; “oh meaning of all who destroyed both this birth and the next, you looked upon me to destroy the *māya* of my mind, I who am so confused” (*maḷanēn maṇattai mayakku ara nōkki maṇumaiyōṭu immaiym keṭutta poruḷanē*)¹⁰⁹; “after my deeds began to thin out, you came and showed your holy form which is without limit...you revealed yourself to me without fail” (*eṇ viṇai otta piṇ kaṇakku ilā tirukkōlam nī vantu kāṭṭiṇāy...kalakāmalē vantu kāṭṭiṇāy*)¹¹⁰. Each of these cases demonstrate that the nature of Śiva’s interventions in the life of the speaker are done to alleviate suffering in some way. Śiva breaks the bonds of karma, reveals his beautiful form, resolves all confusion, and even enters one’s body taking residence within their hearts and minds. These acts are often framed as being performed *for the sake* of the devotee or speaker. *Kaṇṭa pattu* verse 9 illustrates that there is, if not explicit intentionality, a purposeful force to these interventions:

*pāṇkinoṭu paricu oṇṇum aṇiyāta nāyēṇai
ōṇki uḷattu oḷi vaḷara ulappu ilā aṇpu aruḷi;
vāṇki viṇai malam aruḷi vāṇ karuṇai tantāṇai
nāṇku maṇai payil tillai ampalattē kaṇṭēṇē*

He lifted me, the dog, who didn’t know anything of the gift of companionship, so that light would grow in my heart. He graced me with love without limit, took me in, destroyed the impurities of my past deeds, and gave me great compassion. I indeed saw him in the *ampalam* of Tillai where the of the four Vedas are recited.

¹⁰⁶ *Tiruppūvalli*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Tirukkōvaiyār*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ *Koyil tiruppatikam*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Aruṭpattu*, 9.

¹¹⁰ *Tirukkalukunṛappatikam*, 1.

Here, almost all verbs are construed in the past: *aruḷi* (graced), and *vāṇki* (severed), the two adverbial participles which tell of Śiva's actions are temporally resolved in the past finite verb *tantāṇ* (gave/bestowed) at the end of line three. The speaker has witnessed these things, as evidenced by the use of the past finite verb *kaṇṭēṇ* (I saw) at the end of line four. In each verse of this song, the refrain repeats emphatically that the speaker caught a glimpse of Śiva at Tillai. The bodies of the bulk of these verses detail Śiva's qualities and doings, particularly his interventions made on behalf of speaker. The direct acts of destroying *māla* and giving compassion are qualified by the use of the infinitive *vaḷara*, from the root *vaḷar* which means to grow. *In order* that there be the growth of light within the speaker Śiva took said particular actions in the past. The cumulative effect of these past refrains is that of looking back. This song reads not as an ecstatic outpouring of direct experience in the present, but of an almost wistful remembrance of times gone by. While the majority of verbs in this excerpt are in the past, aside from the use of the infinitive, there is one other verb which is in the negative and therefore carries no explicit tense but tells us something important about the speaker's understanding of themselves. In line one, the speaker describes themselves as a dog who knows nothing of the joys of companionship (*pāṅkinoṭu paricu oṇṇrum aṛiyāta nāyēṇai*). *Aṛiyāta* is a negative adjectival participle from the verb root *aṛi*, to know. There are two ways to interpret this negative which carries no definitive tense; one would be to take it in line with the tense context that dominates the rest of the verse and read it as a past, "I didn't know." The implication of that reading would be that the speaker knew nothing of friendship *before* being graced by Śiva and thus has undergone a change in status due to Śiva's intervention. If we take that reading, it would have to be by implication only; the rest of the song gives no indication that the speaker has had a fundamental change of state. The other way to interpret this negative is in the present/continuous sense: "I don't know

anything,” and by extension “I won’t know anything.” This reading is also grammatically possible and gives a different overall impression of the verse. The implication now is that there isn’t a radical state change when Śiva grants his grace, but rather, Śiva grants his grace continuously regardless of the persistence of the speaker’s poor qualities.

The preceding observation helps to get at a core question regarding the theological assumptions of these texts that concerns the effect of Śiva’s interventions on an individual and the nature of being a human, embodied in this world, and in a relationship with him. To explore this further, I will look at excerpts that contain the speakers’ perception themselves in the present moment. *Tiruvācakam Accōppatikam* verse one provides a useful starting point:

*mutti neri ariyāta mūrkkaroṭum muyalvēṇai
patti neri arivittu paḷa viṇaikaḷ pārum vaṇṇam
citta malam aruvittu, civaṇ ākki eṇai āṇṭa
attaṇ eṇakku aruḷiya āru ār peṇuvār accōvē*

To me, who remains with ignorant ones who do not know the way of freedom,
he made known the way of devotion.
He destroyed the filth of my mind in a manner which scattered my old *karmas*.
He made me auspicious.
Who will gain the gracious nature that was shown to me by the father who ruled me? What a wonder!

Each of the actions done by Śiva on the behalf of the speaker are indicated as complete in this verse. In order, first, he made known the path of devotion (*arivittu*) then he destroyed the accumulated filth of the mind from past births (*aruvittu*), and then made (the speaker) auspicious or created auspiciousness (*ākki*). Two past adjectival participles qualify both himself, *āṇṭa* (he who ruled) and the way he did so, *aruḷiya* (graciously) (this modifies *āru**, the manner/flood of his action). The future/continuous tense in this verse and throughout the *patikam* is reserved for describing three things: the state of the speaker and his imperfections, the manner in which Śiva acts when it relates to his larger cosmic functions, and the type of recipients who are granted Śiva’s grace. This paradigm is maintained throughout the entire song. In the first one or two lines

of each verse the speaker uses the future/continuous tense to describe their sorry state, then attention shifts to Śiva's mediating actions, and the refrain questions who deserves such grace. In this verse the speaker's fault, declined using a future/continuous tense, is that he sticks around with the wrong crowd (*mutti neṛi aṛiyāta mūrkkaroṭum muyalvēnai*). There are a few ways to interpret the use of the future/continuous here. One would be to take it in a present sense "I hang out with the wrong crowd," which may or may not imply a continuous sense, "I am always hanging out with the wrong crowd." It can also be taken as a future, "I will hang out with the wrong crowd" at some point in the future—it is a surety. Finally, the future/continuous declension can imply that the speaker will and always do these things as habitual action. As a more peripheral possibility it can also indicate a past habitual state "I always hung out with the wrong crowd." Because the bulk of the surrounding verbs are in the past tense detailing things that Śiva did to the speaker, it could be assumed that the description of the speaker also follows suit yielding the following possible gloss: I hung out with the wrong crowd but then Śiva saved me. In other words, the speaker says, "I was this type of person but now I am not." This could make sense given that the form *muyalvēn* is made into an accusative as the object of Śiva's past action. I argue that though this reading leads to an interpretation which emphasizes the efficacy of Śiva's grace (as fundamentally transformative), the choice to use the future/continuous tense where a past tense would not have any metrical effect must be accounted for. This particular use of the future/continuous contains within it a range of meaningful possibilities. It must be maintained that while the speaker is "x" type of person, they may very well *stay* that type of person, or revert to being that type of person in the future. A past tense verbal form would have distinctly indicated that there was definitive change of state, but the past is not used here. The use of the future/continuous tense to describe the speaker is also part of the poetics of contrast

noted previously. In many of these verses, the qualification of Śiva's action takes a future adjectival participle implying continuity; his acts continue to be of the nature that they dispel karma, or that they cause the joining of grace (*tiru aruḷē cērum*). Even though Śiva's action on the speaker is in the past, the nature of such action is that it will persist into the future, and it will persist into the future even for one who is predisposed to future negative action. The speaker's unfit state is outlined in the first half of the verse and remedied, at least momentarily, in the second half. This example introduces us to the perpetually problematic state of the speaker and raises the question of whether or not they experience forward momentum on their path to attaining Śiva.

Another example that follows this paradigm is *Tiruvācakam Arputtappattu*, verse 10:

*ceṛiyum ip pīrappu īrappu ivai niṇaiyātu ceṛi kuḷalār ceyyum
kiṛiyum kīḷmaiyeum keṇṭai am kaṇkaḷum uṇṇiyē kiṭappēṇai
īraivaṇ empirāṇ ellai illāta taṇ inai malar kaḷal kātti
arivu tantu eṇai āṇṭukoṇṭu aruḷiya arputam aṛiyēṇē*

Not considering these things, life and death, that continuously hinder,
I am in a state of meditation on the beautiful eyes of women and their mischief and lowliness.
I can't comprehend the gracious wonder that is the lord, my lord, showing me his flowered feet without
limit, giving knowledge, and enslaving me.

In this verse the speaker also uses the future tense to refer to themselves. They do not think (*niṇaiyātu*)— are not thinking, will not think—about birth and death, despite their dangers, and instead remain distracted by of women (*uṇṇiyē kiṭappēṇai*). Birth and death are described with a future adjectival participle *ceṛiyum*. It is clear that birth and death are a certain fixture of the speaker's reality—they always will be. Given the use of the future declension in their description of themselves, it seems that the same could be said for the speaker's wanton ways. This gives the end of the verse two possible meanings: it could indicate incredulity—I can't believe that you graced (in the past) the sight of your holy feet, etc., to me who is so prone to wantonness. It could also simply mean: I don't understand that wonder which was your gracing—I truly can't

comprehend it because I am one who is so wanton and do not have the cognitive capacity to comprehend it. True knowledge of the way (*neri*) might be out of the speaker's grasp for all foreseeable time, but this does not stop Śiva from gracing them in the first place, or even repeatedly. Other verses in this song use the future/continuous to emphasize the persistence of the speaker's sorry state: in three he says I roam about afflicted with karma (*tirivēṇ*), and in five, states "I am in a state of being afflicted by women" (*tuyar kūra nirpēṇ*). The following excerpt from *Arputtappattu* verse seven further supports these observations, though in this case, by way of a temporally indeterminate form, the non-future negative:

*ip pirappiṇil inai malar koytu, nāṇ iyalpotu aṇcu eḷuttu ṭi
tappu ilātu poṇ kaḷalkaḷukku iṭātu nāṇ taṭa mulaiyār taṇkaḷ
maippu ulām kaṇṇāl, ēruṇṭu kiṭappēṇai...*

In this birth I did not (/do not) make flower garlands, I did not (/do not) chant the five letters which are prescribed, I did not (/do not) serve the golden feet without fault. I am waylaid attending to the blackened eyes of those with expansive breasts...

Here, the negatives are non-future and can thus be construed in the past: "I did not do these things" (and yet you graced me). However, they can also be construed in the present which has semantic overlap with the future, given that it can indicate a force of habit: "I don't do these things" (and yet you graced me). This is further supported by the speaker temporally locating themselves in *this* birth; they describe their current state in *this* lifetime. The habitual reading is further reinforced by the later use of the future/continuous form (*kiṭappēṇ*) at the end of this excerpt. These examples serve to illustrate how problematic the speaker's poor qualities are in their own lifetimes; they, like karmic mire, have a way of sticking. In each case, though Śiva is capable of relieving these faults, Śiva doesn't seem to ever fully remove them, given their persistence.

Thus, despite Śiva's interventions, the speakers of these works continue to experience the highs and lows of human life. They are not suddenly absolved of their faults. Gracing and enslaving are not an "instant out."

The above examples look at the nature of past and future or habitual actions. My final examples in this section consider what the explicit present moment looks like for these speakers. While future/continuous forms explored above have semantic overlap with the present, the present tense marker *-kinra* is also used Māṇikkavācakar's texts and has less semantic flexibility: it references the present moment. While the present tense *kinra* is somewhat of a rarity in earlier *bhakti* literature, it gains momentum from the ninth century onwards. Still, in Māṇikkavācakar's works it is not the most popular auxiliary suffix, perhaps given its metrical weight. Thus, we must observe its occurrence with the knowledge that in these texts it is not yet the standard mode of referring to the present. However, I contend that the use of *-kinra* to place an action squarely and definitively in the present moment must be marked with attention given its rarity. Take for example verse 10 of *Tiruvācakam Kuḷaittuppattu*:

aḷakē purintiṭṭu aṭi nāyēṇ ararrukinrēṇ uṭaiyāṇē
tikaḷā niṇra tirumēṇi kāṭṭi eṇṇai paṇikoṇṭāy
pukaḷē periya patam eṇakku purāṇa nī tantarūḷātē
kuḷakā kōla maraiyōṇē kōṇē eṇṇai kuḷaittāyē

O Possessor! Desiring beautiful things, I, your dog servant, am crying sorely.
Having shown me your shining body and taken me as a servant, you, the ancient one, do not give me your famous feet.
O Beautiful Brahmin, O King, you have troubled me indeed!

The speaker sobs in the present tense, *ararrukinrēṇ*. Their enslavement happened in the past but their suffering continues regardless. They tell Śiva that they are not being given, in the future/continuous tense (*tantarūḷātē*), gracious access to the holy feet and this is the cause of their suffering. Finally, they call out to Śiva in the past tense, "You have truly troubled me by your acts!" (*kuḷaittāyē*). The contrast here between the fact that they have already been graced in

the past and their persistent present moment of suffering is evocative. Though we are told many times over that during the process of enslavement karmic bonds are broken and shortcomings erased, this seems to have little bearing on the daily lived reality of the speaker. They continue to cry and are crying out in utter anguish. In an ironic end to this verse, the speaker says that Śiva didn't give him access to his feet, though the reader knows that Śiva has already shown his holy form and enslaved him. This damning vocative exclamation is perhaps meant to emphasize the direness of the speaker's emotional situation as experienced by them. In other words, they can't possibly imagine having already been graced, given that they suffer so profusely in the present moment.

Take as another example verse 10 from *Tiruvācakam Aṭaikkalappattu*:

*vaḷaṅkukinṛaykku uṇ aruḷ āṛ amutattai vārikkonṭu
viḷuṅkukinṛēṇ vikkinēṇ vinaiyēṇ eṇ viti iṇmaiyaḷ
talaṅku arum tēṇ aṇṇa taṇṇīṛ parukat tantu uyyak koḷḷāy
aḷuṅkukinṛēṇ uṭaiyāy aṭiyēṇ uṇ aṭaikkalamē*

With regard to you giving your grace, rare nectar, I snatch it with both hands and devour it (/am devouring it); I, the karmic-ridden one hiccupped, without fortune.
Give water like rare honey that I may imbibe, do so that I may be saved.
I am crying out. O Possessor, you are my refuge!

In this verse, the speaker is guzzling the grace that Śiva metes out but has the misfortune due to the burden of his karmic past to choke on it as he greedily imbibes. The giving of grace is in the present tense declined in the second person (*vaḷaṅkukinṛaykku*), referring to Śiva, and suffixed with the dative case— “with regard to your state of giving,” i.e., with regard to you giving. This indicates that Śiva is meting grace in the present moment and or continuously doing so; *vaḷaṅku* means to give but it also has the sense of habitual practice. The speaker then says, again in the present tense, I devour it/am devouring it (*viḷuṅkukinṛēṇ*), then switches to past, I choked/hiccupped (*vikkinēṇ*), and finally back to the present saying I suffer/am suffering (*aḷuṅkukinṛēṇ*). This verse ends the decad with an image of the speaker continuing to implore

Śiva for help even as Śiva pours forth floods of his rare honey-like grace. The speaker guzzles it yet still suffers and the repetition of the present tense marker has significant euphonic resonance. While this might seem like a tragic take on reality, I argue that this sad view of the present is in fact evocative of pathos in the reader who can experience empathy for the speaker in their moments of hardship. This tragedy is also lined with the assurance of Śiva's enduring generosity.

A present moment filled with suffering is also found in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, but manifests in the telling of the hero and heroine's separation. The speakers do not elaborate on their own personal relationships with the lord, but rather focus on the emotional vicissitudes of human relationships, the majority of which are predominated by suffering and hardship. While some read the trials and tribulations of the lovers as an analogue for the relationship between Śiva and the soul, there are alternatives. We can see that both texts focus on difficulties of human life and that candid expressions of hardship are emotionally resonant and contribute to the affective power of a text. The focus on suffering need not always be read as allegorical; rather we can take it as contributive to an overall affective ethos of a text. While in *Tiruvācakam* the speaker is in anguish over their lack of fitness as a devotee, in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, hardships of an interpersonal nature play out in real time. For example, in verse 13, the hero observes the heroine upset over his absence:

*kōṇkiṇ poli arumēy koṇkai paṇkaṇ kuṟukalar ūr
tīṇkil pukac cerra korraṇ ciṟrampalam aṇaiyāḷ
nīṇkil puṇarvu aritu eṇṇō neṭitu iṇṇaṇē iruntāl
āṇku il paḷiyām eṇavō ariyēṇ ayarkinratē*

She is like the small *ampalam* of the one who inflicted injury, destroying the cities of the enemies, whose half is a woman whose beautiful breasts are like buds of the *koṇku*. Does she think that if departed, reunion is difficult? Or if delayed here, there will be slander there? I don't know. She is wearied indeed.

Seeing the grieving heroine, the hero wonders about the cause of her suffering (though it is clearly him). The dubitative *-ō* affix in lines three and four is somewhat ironic. When he asks

whether she thinks that separated lovers don't reunite (*nīṅkil puṇarvu aritu eṇṇō*) the reader knows full well that in the *akam* context, there are many times that the heroine is left with no intimation of the hero's return. In many ways, the *kōvai* introduces an expectation of reunion that didn't exist before, but as will be discussed elsewhere, it isn't a joyous or uncomplicated one. Further, when he asks whether she thinks there will be gossip if she sticks around waiting for him (*neṭitu inṇaṇē iruntāl āṅku il paḷiyām eṇavō*), again, a reader well-versed in *akam* poetry knows for certain what rumors await a heroine whose behavior does not follow strict protocols when it comes to courtship and marriage. The final word of this verse leaves us with an image of a wilting, wearied heroine who is suffering in this very moment (*ayarkinṇratē*). The emphatic affix *-ē* drives home both the degree of her suffering and the hero's astonishment at seeing her in such a state.

In verse 24 the tables have turned, and the confidante observes the usually steadfast hero:

vilāṅkalaik kāl viṇṭu mēlmēl iṭa viṇṇum maṇṇum muṇṇīrk
kalaṅkalaic ceṇṇra aṇṇum kalaṅkāy kamaḷ koṇṇrai tuṇṇum
alaṅkalaic cūḷntu ciṇṇamapalattāṇ aruḷ illavar pōl
tulaṅkalaic ceṇṇu itu eṇṇō vaḷḷal uḷḷam tuyarkinṇratē

Even when the winds were increasingly cast about the mountains from their roots, and the earth and sky were muddled by the three waters, you would not be confused. Like those without the grace of the one of the small *ampalam* surrounded with garlands of tightly tied fragrant *koṇṇrai*, you have become scared; what is this?! The fortitude of your heart languishes indeed!

This example follows verse 13 with the final word being a present tense finite verb (or verbal noun) with the emphatic affix *-ē*. Here the confidante contrasts the hero's usual state of steadfastness in the face of adversity mentioned in the first half of the verse (*vilāṅkalaik kāl viṇṭu mēlmēl iṭa viṇṇum maṇṇum muṇṇīrk kalaṅkalaic ceṇṇra aṇṇum kalaṅkāy*) with his discombobulation detailed in the final line (*culaṅkalaic ceṇṇu itu eṇṇō vaḷḷal uḷḷam tuyarkinṇratē*). They incredulously refer to his agitation asking, "what is this?!" (*tulaṅkalaic*

cenru itu enṇō). Finally, the verse concludes with the emphatic comment that the one who is usually stable of heart/mind (*vaḷḷal uḷḷam*), is now grieving sore (*tuyarkinratē*).

In 41, the hero continues to pine for the heroine:

*kāvi ninru ērtaru kaṇṭar vaṇtillaik kaṇārkamalat
tēvi enṇē aiyam cenratu anrē ariyac ciṛitu
mā iyanratu anṇa meṇ nōkki niṇ vāy tiravāviṭṭin
eṇ āvi anrē amiḷtē inru alikinratē*

There is a doubt! [You look like] the goddess of the lotus full of beauty that belongs to cool Tillai of the one whose throat is given beauty by the blue lotus. One of soft eyes like those of a small antelope, if you do not open your mouth my life, oh nectar, will surely perish!

As in the previous two examples, the emphatic affix is added to the final finite present tense verb that concludes the verse (*alikinratē*). The opening two lines of the verse refer to a past event: the hero was confused whether or not the heroine was the goddess Lakṣmī (given her exquisite beauty). This is marked with a past tense verbal noun phrase (*aiyam cenratu*) and the noun *anrē* (*anru + ē*), “then.” In the final line, tense shifts to the present to detail his current state of exhaustion/wilting. The use of *inru* (today/now) further emphasizes this shift to the present moment.

In my final example, verse 146, the hero observes the landscape shifting before his eyes:

*potuviṇil tīrttu enṇai āṇṭōṇ puliyūr araṇ poruppē
itu eṇil eṇ inru irukkinravāru em irumpolilē
etu namakku eytiyatu eṇ urraṇir arai iṇṇu aruvi
matuviṇil kaippu vaittāl ottavā maru ivvāṇ puṇamē*

If this is the mountain of the Lord of Puliyūr, the one who enslaved me as I was at the crossroads, why is it like this now?

O my beautiful garden, what have we become? What has happened?

The plot which was flooded with honey appears bitter now. This dry land is other now.

“Now/today” (*inru*) is used again in this verse in line 2 as the hero questions why Śiva’s mountain is suddenly looking less than stunning (*araṇ poruppē itu eṇil eṇ inru irukkinravāru*). Similarly, both the hero and heroine have lost their luster. In the final two lines, the hero observes their immediate surroundings, once lush and fertile, now a barren wasteland. Each element of this verse reflects the others; Śiva’s mountain, the hero, heroine, and the field he

looks over are each languishing in their own ways. These are all observable in the present moment as emphasized by the use of *inru* and present-tense verb constructions.

Thus, although *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s present moment doesn't dwell on the contours of the speakers' relationships with Śiva like that of *Tiruvācakam*, it does share a focus on the hardships of human life. Exploration of the various phases of lovesickness and separation mirrors the emphasis on the unstable nature of the speakers' present predicament in *Tiruvācakam*. This meditation on the present state of suffering as it manifests across vast swathes of both texts provides ample material to further consider the affect generated from such cumulative emphasis on suffering.

One of the assumptions that is often made in reading Māṇikkavācakar's works is that after the speaker is graced by Śiva, he is saved. This causes modern translators and commentators to gloss over or change tenses in order to reinforce this interpretation. When either text is read teleologically, the assumption is that there is eventual betterment on the part of the speaker: Śiva's gracing is seen to be fundamentally salvific in nature and the songs of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are then read as a mystical ascent of the speaker's soul toward the lord, and toward perfection. In this section, I demonstrate that paying close attention to patterns of tense use problematizes this reading. The example from *Accōppatikam*, a song often read as the speaker's moment of union or enlightenment, is not a testament to the absolution of all hardship but to both its and Śiva's persistence in the speaker's life. Śiva and the speaker seem locked in an endless cycle of falling and gracing. Harris suggests that receiving Śiva's grace represents an initiatory moment after which there is much work to be done for continued

improvement over time.¹¹¹ Given that the speaker's personal defilements and flaws naggingly persist despite the veritable flood of grace shown to them by Śiva, what is the reader to make of the role of Śiva's interventions in the life of the speaker? How might we understand the implications of being graced, or being one of Śiva's servants in this context?

One comforting takeaway from these texts is the absolute surety that once Śiva has entered the life of the speaker, he will remain there forever. Take for example the following excerpt from *Tirupponṇūcal*, verse 6: "having enslaved me, the dog, he is the one that continually severs my births, shining in a manner that destroys the evil of my ancient births" (*nāyēṇai āṭṭiṇṇu eṇ tol pīravi tītu ḍīā vaṇṇam tikaḷa pīrappu aruppāṇ*). In this excerpt, the action of destroying births is in the future/continuous tense (*aruppāṇ*). Thus, once enslaved, the speaker gives the assurance that Śiva will destroy the ties of all past births, this birth, and any subsequent births to come. *Koyil muttattiruppatikam* verse 8 reveals the danger of not having such surety in one's life:

*aruḷātu oḷintāl aṭiyēṇai
aṇcēl eṇṇār ār iṇku
poruḷā eṇṇai pukuntāṇṭa
poṇṇē poṇṇampala kūttā
maruḷ ār maṇattōṭu uṇai pīrintu
varuntu ēṇai vā eṇru uṇ
teruḷ ār kūttam kāttāyēl
cettē pōṇāl cīriyārō*

If I, the slave, remain graceless
who will say "Fear not!" here?
O golden one who entered me as substance and enslaved me!
O dancer of the golden *ampalam*!
With a mind full of bewilderment, separated from you,
I suffer. If you don't call me to come
and reveal your group of those who know,
and if I die, won't they laugh at you?

¹¹¹ A. Gardner Harris Jr., "Gracious Possession, Gracious Bondage in Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44 (2014): 433.

In this verse, the implications of Śiva's interventions in the speaker's life are made clear. The speaker, without Śiva, is lost in utter confusion, suffering, and their very survival is at stake in his absence. *Accappattu* verse three echoes this sentiment:

*vaṇ pulāl vēlum aṅcēṇ vaḷai kaiyār kaṭai kaṇ aṅcēṇ
eṇpu elām uruka nōkki ampalattu ādukiṇra
eṇ polā maṇiyai ētti initu aruḷ paruka māṭṭā
aṇpu ilātavarai kaṇṭāl amma nām aṅcum ārē!*

I do not fear all of the spears whose tips reek of flesh,
or the welcoming eyes of women wearing bangles.
If I see those who are without love, not drinking the sweet grace or hailing the unblemished gem of mine, the one who dances in the *ampalam* and melts bones my bones with one look,
then we are afraid!

Here, neither fierce weapons covered with blood nor the entrancing eyes of sirens (both stock images from *akam* and *puram* poetry) are legitimate causes for fear in this life. Rather, the thought of being without love for Śiva or his grace is that which is truly terrifying. Every verse in this song follows the same pattern: all maladies (*piṇi elām*), the shining snakes of anthills, (*puril vāḷ aravum*), blazing fires (*vāl ulām eriyum*), the enraged rutting elephant (*tari ceru kaḷirum*)—none of these frightening things are cause for concern compared to the thought of having no care for Śiva.

Tirukkōvaiyār spends considerable time speaking of the implications of being outside of Śiva's fold. Take for example the following excerpts:

Speaking of the hero's affliction of born of infatuation:

pal ilaṇ āka pakalai venrōṇ tillai pāṭalar pōl elilaṇ (Verse 60)

“he lacks brightness like those who do not worship the lord of Tillai who beat Sūrya and knocked out his teeth”

ampalavaṇ aruḷ ilarpōl peṇṇai maṭal mīcai yāṇ vara paṇṇirru ōr peṇ koṭiyē (Verse 75)

“I am like them who are without the grace of the one of the *ampalam*; the slender creeper has caused me to come riding atop this palmyra horse”

Speaking of the heroine's affliction/pain in separation from her beloved:

poṇ ār caṭaiyōṇ puliyūr pukaḷār eṇa purinōy eṇṇāl arivillai (Verse 89)

“I do not know the twisting disease that affects me like those who do not worship the one of Puliyūr with the beautiful golden locks”

puliyūr varivātavarin uḷnoy (Verse 189)

“this disease that afflicts me is like that internal disease of those who do not praise the one of Puliyūr”

In each of these, the pain of being like those who are without Śiva is put in its closest approximation in the Caṅkam context, that is, the pain of being without one’s lover, or the trials and tribulations of courtship. Being a devotee of Śiva is translated into the idiomatic love language of the *akam* hero and heroine. This pattern of comparison often achieved through the use of comparative particles like *iṇ*, *pōl*, or *pōnra* is found throughout the text. While there are instances in which the perks of being in Śiva’s good graces are expressed in the positive, these negative examples are more frequent and coincide with the text’s overall narrative preoccupation with periods of separation and hardship.

The discussions in this section have thus far made it clear that the speaker has persistent character flaws and that Śiva graces them regardless. Śiva’s grace is the only comfort in an otherwise difficult world in which progress seems unattainable for the ordinary, imperfect human being. It is the only surety of something better. We can see that being within Śiva’s fold, regardless of whether one is able to overcome their negative attributes substantially over the course of their lifetime, is far better than being outside of it. However, the present moment persists as one of extreme suffering, and the prolonged attention to that suffering in both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, though expressed differently, leads to a cumulative emphasis on said suffering and contributes to the cultivation of affect in these texts. Tense use helps to sustain an ethos of suffering and ultimately generate compassion.

Narrative Temporality and Affect

Another way to think about how time functions in these texts is to consider narrative temporality or the cadence and pacing of narrative events in order. This concerns the placement of plot points within a given sequence, their frequency, and the way that they are described as unfolding in time. *Tiruvācakam* has tremendous internal diversity when it comes to narrative temporality considering that it is composed of multiple types of songs. Some of its songs are ten verses each, while its longest is one hundred. Thus, each must be taken as a distinct narrative unit unto itself. Formally, these *patikams* are not narrative, but they do have narrative qualities and play with time in sequence. *Tirukkōvaiyār*, on the other hand, has long been understood as one continuous, self-contained narrative unit and is read as such. This section addresses select songs from *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* in its entirety in order to think about the theological implications of the flow of narrative time. I ultimately argue that the narrative pacing of these songs emphasizes separation and suffering. Moments of joy or elation are only highlights or punctuations on a broader backdrop of hardship. This refigures extant understandings of the emotional import of *bhakti* poetry and turns attention toward a new aesthetic of compassion and affective reality for the reader.

In its historical reception, *Tirukkōvaiyār* has long been understood to be a unitary whole and is read as a complete narrative unit. From its earliest theorization, the *kōvai* is said to take individual episodes of *akam* poetry and string them together into a complete story which covers all facets of human love. *Tirukkōvaiyār* creates a loosely linear narrative flow by elaborating upon and placing in tandem particular love themes from familiar *akam* scenarios. For example, take the following cluster of verses from 110-115 whose content is split topically as follows:

110: commenting on which leaves are an acceptable gift for the hero to present the heroine as a sign of his intentions

111: the heroine's friend, seeing the leaves he presents, decides she can't put him off any longer given his

earnestness and suffering

112: the heroine's friend asks her, given the hero's great deeds including taming the rutting elephant, if she should allow the leaves he brings to present her to wilt by putting off his query any longer

113: heroine speaks to her friend asking what the stakes are for accepting or rejecting the leaves

114: the heroine's friend again asserts the hero's excellence and urges the heroine to accept the gift in good faith

115 (concludes this section): intimation that the heroine's friend has given the leaves to the heroine on his behalf

As can be seen from this selection of verses, what might have been a singular moment in an *akam* poetic context, perhaps only indicated by the mention of a particular plant, has been significantly expanded in *Tirukkōvaiyār*.¹¹² Aspects of plot and narrative that in *Caṅkam* literature remain in the realm of suggestion, achieved by the deft use of *tiṇai*, are here spelled out more clearly and in further detail. Because each verse is spoken in the voice of either the heroine's confident or the heroine herself, the reader is not privy to the moment in which the leaves which stand at the center of this transaction are finally given over. The friend's reportative

¹¹² For more on the theme of *cēṭpaṭai*, the heroine drawing out the hero's advance to shed good light on the heroine, see Indra Manuel, "Literary Theories in Tamil: With special reference to *Tolkāppiyam*" (PhD diss., University of Kerala, 1984) pgs. 321-333. This particular element is called *talai koṭutal*—giving a love token. The bringing of gifts from the hero to the heroine is a standard trope in *akam* poetry. Take for example, the following verse 80 from *Nāṛṇinai* attributed to Pūtantēvanār: *maṇṇa erumai malartalaik kārāṇ/ intīm pālpayṇ koṇmār kaṇṇuviṭṭu/ ūrkkuru māṅkaḷ mēṛkoṇṭu kaḷiyum/ perumpular viṭiyaliṇ virumpp pōttantu/ talaiyūṇ tāruṇ tantāṇaṇ ivāṇ eṇa/ ilaiyaṇi āyamoṭu takunāṇ taṭai ī/ tai ī tinkaḷ taṇ kayam paṭiyum/ peruntōl kuṇumakaḷ allatu/ maruntupīri tillaiyāṇ uṇṇa nōykkē//*. "The little boys of the village drive the female buffalo, dusky, with expansive heads/ seated on their capacious backs from the stalls to the grasslands leaving their calves behind/ that the village may enjoy the benefit of their sweet milk, early/ at the rise of the sun with the darkness slinking away/ that is the time when she, in the company of her mother and all her fond playmates/ repairs to the bathing ghat, a happy, eager bevy with her, to herself saying, 'this is the place where he gave me leaves and a garland!' But placing a restraint on herself with the aid of her bashfulness she undertook the austerity of bathing in the ice-cold water in the month of *thai*, with the others/ I am ill, o heart of mine, and she is the only cure for the malady that afflicts me. I know it for certain o heart, she is the remedy no other." A. Ve Cuppiramaṇiyaṇ, *Narrinai: An Anthology of Amour* (Department of Tamil Development-Culture, 1989), 89.

speech wherein she attests to their final transferal is all the evidence we have of that significant moment, and this perhaps preserves some of *akam* poetry's hallmark poetic ambiguity.

Due to the fact that *Tirukkōvaiyār* is thought of as a unitary whole, its narrative temporality must be considered as such. The story arc is loosely organized as follows: hero and heroine spy each other from afar, they meet through a friend, take part in various dalliances, are separated and suffer ongoing hardships, the hero then rides the palmyra horse, the two remain at a distance from one another, they reunite to tryst in various places and times, then depart together from the heroine's hometown to traverse the desert; surrounding players urge them to marry and forgo the hardship that is elopement, the hero suddenly leaves on his own to quest after wealth, study, and fulfill his duties to king; finally, the heroine reflects on the hardship of the hero being with public women. Over time, the sections of this text have been given titles and technical designations based on later theorizations of *akam* poetry found in works like *Tolkāppiyam*, *Īraiyanār akkaporuḷ*, and *Akkapporuḷ viḷakkam*. For example, the first section which deals with the initial meeting and union of the hero and heroine is now called *iyarkai puṇarcci* (natural union), the second wherein the hero and heroine are set up by a friend, *pāṇkar kūṭṭam*, and so on. The application of these section titles can be helpful in figuring out where in the narrative one is as the text's terse language often makes it unclear. However, it has also generated assumptions about how the narrative functions and what is happening in certain verses, a point which will be dealt with later. Returning to the major plot points, what is most significant for my discussion in this section is the cadence in which certain groups of events transpire, and the length of time that certain themes are explored within the context of the entire narrative unit. As Comeau notes, there are several places in the text when particular themes are repeated over and over; these places, she conjectures, provide an opportunity for the speaker to riff on a given theme, perhaps a

popular one for which there are many familiar options.¹¹³ I suggest that if we consider the content of these elongated sections and repetitive themes we might glean something of the larger theological implications of the work as a whole.

The opening of this text focuses on the lovers' first meeting and their union covers eighteen verses, though they are not explicitly together in each one. This section includes, for example, the initial sight of the heroine by the hero and his ruminations about who she is. Their union itself is only evident in five verses. These 18 opening verses are followed by 30 which detail the meeting of the hero and heroine through a friend, though, as in the previous thematic grouping, the majority of these verses focus not on the meetings themselves, but on the confidant's discussions with the hero or heroine *about* their meetings. Over these 30 verses, there is not much narrative action taking place; the "meeting through a friend" section is less about meeting and more about establishing the conditions and parameters in which they might understand each other better and potentially meet. There are several interceding themes but the next prolonged thematic series on a single love phase starts at section twelve, called, "being at a distance" (*cēṭpaṭai*) in which the hero and heroine are separated. This section consists of 26 verses. This is followed by two sections on trysting, one during the day (*pakar_uku_{ri}*), of 32 verses and "trysting at night" (*iravukku_{ri}*) of 33 verses. The longest single stretch of continuous thematic verses comes in section 16, "departing together" (*uṭaṇpōkku*) wherein the heroine and heroine set off to make a life together—this consists of 56 verses. This section begins at roughly the halfway point of the entire text, at verse 194, marking a significant shift in the narrative. For the remainder of the text, altogether 151 verses, the hero and heroine remain in separation. What is perhaps most perplexing is that the final 49 verses are dedicated to the heroine's lament over

¹¹³ Comeau, "Making Devotion Beautiful," 64-65.

the heroine spending his time with other women, particularly courtesans. In the text's final verse, the heroine is spurred by her friend to recall the hero's good qualities instead of focusing on his dalliances with other women. Though her descriptions of his virtue are beautiful, they do little to erase the cumulative force of the preceding 48 verses that detail the heroine's distress at watching his infidelity unfold while she suffers alone at home. This text ends far from happily ever after. How might we understand the implications of the cumulative focus on separation and in its conclusion, infidelity? Some have suggested, by way of allegorical reading, that this represents the temporary separation of the devotee from their lord. That is one possible interpretation. Bracketing the allegorical reading that sees the hero and heroine as analogues for the soul and for Śiva, we can further explore the affective dimensions of this focus on tenuous separation. Coupled with Śiva's structural remove from the narrative, this culminating moment of separation has the potential to generate emotion for the reader and this affect must be considered if we think about the project of the text as a whole.

I now consider how the cadence of events and the length of time that particular themes are explored within the context of the entire narrative unit play with time in ways that are productive affectively. Using the theory of "slowed scene" borrowed from Bal, Chatman, and Fludernik, I analyze the ways that *Tirukkōvaiyār* elongates, stretches, and suspends narrative time. For these theorists, Hannah Courtney aptly summarizes, a *slowed scene* is a "combination of character consciousness and scene action" in which action continues but is stretched or slowed to account for the characters' experiences of time. Courtney notes,

"*Slowed scene* is one way in which this different form of time—the mental experience of time—can be explored within the moving moment...allows the author the 'abnormal' narrative means through which to reveal and emulate the extraordinary slow-motion feeling of time as experienced by a character under pressure in his or her moment of crisis."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Hannah Courtney, "Narrative Temporality and Slowed Scene: The Interaction of Event and Thought Representation in Ian McEwan's Fiction," *Narrative* 21, 2 (2013): 195.

Narrative slowing in *Tirukkōvaiyār* contributes to the text’s overwhelming emphasis on separation and is productive of theologically significant emotion. To demonstrate this, I first establish the disproportionate distribution of scenes of separation in the entire narrative unit, then investigate the pacing of repeated narrative elements. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, I argue, narrative slowing produces a pathos, or *karuṇai*, which has specific meaning in Māṇikkavācakar’s context. By considering narrative temporality in this text, we glean something of the affective dimensions of its temporal realities and the larger theological implications of the work as a whole.

Here I turn to look more closely at the narrative arc of the text and the thematic distribution of events therein. I previously deemed the narrative arc “loosely” linear. It is not clear whether or not the anonymous *talaivaṇ* and *talaivi* are indeed the same throughout the work. Additionally, while the progression of their relationship follows convention (trysting before marriage→elopement→separation), the distribution of verses dedicated to each love situation is far from equal, as noted above. Shulman comments:

“The linear sequencing of these themes should not mislead us; it is highly unlikely that we are seeing a singular evolving process with a distinct goal, even if the hagiography we have cited moves toward such a conclusion.”¹¹⁵

Comeau adds,

“...the repetition of themes suggests that they are variants of a popular theme, rather than sequential scenarios....in the case of the six separations, taken literally and individually, the hero would have to leave the heroine ninety-three times to fulfill every verse!”¹¹⁶

Thus, while the love themes follow a prescribed order, some repeat internally over and over; others stretch for long verse runs and some seem to flit by. *Tirukkōvaiyār* follows in the footsteps

¹¹⁵ Shulman, “*Tirukkōvaiyār*: Downstream,” 144. Rather, the enormous diversity of well-defined love-situations (*turai*, *koḷu*) suggests a series of variations on the manifold textures of “presence.”

¹¹⁶ Comeau, “Making Devotion Beautiful,” 38, 98.

of the majority of *akam* poetry in so far as the love themes which receive the most attention are those of trysting and the various phases of separation. While formal marriage occurs relatively early in the text, it is quickly followed by separation of the hero and heroine. In true *talaivan* fashion, the hero of the poem is off on various conquests soon after their union.

Tirukkōvaiyār's story arc can be distilled as follows: the hero and heroine spy each other from afar, meet through a friend, take part in various dalliances, are separated and suffer ongoing hardships, the two remain at a distance, reunite in tryst, then depart together from the heroine's hometown to elope; surrounding players urge them to marry and forgo the hardship of elopement, then the hero suddenly leaves on his own to quest after wealth, study, and to fulfill his duties to king. Finally, the heroine reflects on the hardship of watching the hero dally with public women. While this configuration creates a somewhat cohesive plotline, the periodization of each love theme deserves closer attention.

The longest single stretch of continuous thematic content comes in the section, "departing together," wherein the hero and heroine elope—this consists of 56 verses. This section begins at roughly the halfway point of the entire text and marks a significant shift in the narrative. Verse 200, the true halfway point of the text, reads as follows:

*māvai vantu āṇṭa melnōkki taṇ paṇkar naṇ tillai mallal
kōvai vantu āṇṭa cevṭāyk karuṇkaṇṇi kurippu ariyēṇ
pūvai tantāl poṇ am pantu tantāl eṇṇaip pullikkoṇṭu
pāvai tantāl painkiḷi alittāl inru en paintoṭiyē*

I do not know the intention of the maiden with dark eyes and red lips that rival the elegant *kōvai* of fertile Tillai whose lord has a partner of soft looks that rival deer.
Today my girl with the golden bracelets
gave me her myna bird, her gold ball, embraced me, gave me her doll, and her green parrot.

This verse is spoken by the heroine's nursemaid. It is foreboding. In it, the heroine gives the nursemaid her toys. This both represents her departure from childhood and a formal goodbye to her closest companion, though it dare not be spoken aloud. The nurse reports not knowing the

intention behind this act of gifting, but the reader certainly does. One well-versed in Caṅkam poetry would be painfully aware of the hardships that await the heroine as a result of her choice to elope.

Hardship is immediately confirmed in the following verse, 201, which is spoken in the voice of the hero:

*melliyal koṇkai periya miṇ nēriṭai mellaṭi pūk
kaliyal vemmaikkaṭam kaṭuntīk kaṭṭuvāṇam ellām
colliya cīr cuṭart tinkaḷ amkaṇṇit tollōṇ puliyūr
alli am kōtai nallāy ellai cēyṭtu em akal nakarē*

Her breasts are large, waist lightning small, feet
as soft as flowers.
The harsh forest made of stones is aflame.
Friend of the beautiful woman who is like a lotus
shoot of Puliyūr whose lord wears a spectacularly shining crescent
moon as a garland and is praised by all of the
celestial ones, my town is far away indeed...

Here, the hero is made aware of the heroine's desire to elope. His first thoughts are the hardships that she will inevitably endure. She is young and green, not fit for such a journey outside the familial home and one that transgresses the bounds of propriety no less. The image of her feet burning on the fiery desert floor is a common *akam* image from the arid *pālai* tract¹¹⁷, the site of most elopements.

At the halfway point exactly, the narrative takes a sudden and ominous shift. For most of the rest of the text, the hero and heroine remain in separation. *Tirukkōvaiyār* ends on a note that is far from happily ever after; it is certainly not a triumphant love story. Looking at the distribution of love themes and their respective lengths, we can see that the majority of this text focuses not on union but on separation; and that its cumulative effect is hardly one of joyful romance, or intimate love. It is both the case that the love phase of separation is the longest in

¹¹⁷ The *pālai* tract is not a "tract" proper. Rather, any landscape in which hardships are endured can become a desert.

terms of the “story time” (Genette’s “story,” Bal’s *fabula*)—that is the sequence of events in the story—and in terms of the “narrative time”—their “pseudo-temporal ordering” and position in the narrative. Further, it is the longest in the case of “discourse time” (Chatman), that is the time of telling/reading.¹¹⁸ *Tirukkōvaiyār* thus becomes a meditation on the vicissitudes of absence and its concomitant suffering; the reader must sit with these themes and their often unsatisfying resolutions and experience time under duress as do the characters.

I now turn to the cadence of elongated sections and repeated themes in the initial phases of elopement and separation. Here we arrive most closely at an approximation of the “slowed scene.” In the following excerpts, time is suspended through the inclusion of the detailed inner dialogues of each of the protagonists as they process what is happening outside of the “story” time. Throughout the section on elopement, we hear most from the heroine’s confidante, her former nursemaid, and her mother. The hero and heroine have in fact, eloped, so their voices are seldom heard as others around them wonder about their wellbeing. Verse 228 spoken by the heroine’s former nursemaid provides a useful example:

*tāmētamakku oppu marruillavar tillait taṇ aṇiccap
pūmēl mitikkiṇ paitattu atipoṇkum naṅkāy eriyum
tī mēl ayil pōl ceṛi paralakāṇil cilampu aṇi pāy
ā mē naṭakka aruviṇaiyēṇ peṛra ammaṇaikkē*

O beautiful maiden, your foot would burn in agony if you tread on even a cool *aṇicca* blossom of Tillai whose lord no one compare to—who is his only compare.
Little mother whom I bore, my hard *karma* is that you should walk with ankleted feet in that harsh forest thick with stones like spear points ablaze.

The nurse’s concern for the heroine’s tender feet echoes the hero’s initial concerns we observed in verse 201, immediately after the elopement. We hear similar remarks in 230 from the mother

¹¹⁸ For more on these terms see Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form* (New York: Palgrave 2003), 90-98.

of the heroine who laments that her daughter went away with a stranger (*ētilaṇ*). In 238, the nurse again voices concern for the safety of the heroine by invoking her tender feet:

*pāl otta nūru ampalavaṇ kaḷalpaṇiyār piṇivāyk
kōlat tavicil mitikkiṇ pataittu aṇi koppuḷ koḷḷum
vēl otta vemparal kāṇattiṇ iṇru uruviṭalaiṇiṇ pōm
kāl ottaṇa viṇaiyēṇ perṛa māṇ ilai kāl malarē*

Like the pain of those who do not worship the feet of the one of the *ampalam* who is smeared with milk-white ash, her feet would blister stepping lightly on a beautiful mat.
Today, along the gravel forest with rocks as sharp as spearpoints, that pair of flowered feet born to me of harsh *karma* follow along behind a youth.

In this way, the text successively layers the inner concerns of the onlookers, one after the other. They echo one another, repeat, and elaborate. They are not in explicit conversation but rather their comments arise spontaneously like a pastiche of concerned voices. The elopement is concurrently running through the background; the hero and heroine intercede briefly in this chain of commentary, but the scene is slowed by the layered and repetitive voicing of concern from the onlookers. Their experience of slowed time, as they wonder furtively after their dear ones, is evoked through this configuration. They don't know when they might see the couple again or what the outcome might be and are "stuck." The reader intimates this as the narrative dwells on their expressions.

This continues after the hero and heroine are separated once more, but the focus shifts to the suffering of the ailing heroine. As Comeau noted above, the hero leaves numerous times, each under a different pretense. I argue we ought not to take this as a narrative account of him leaving countless times, but as a narrative strategy of elongating time and then emphasizing the emotional import of this love theme. Verse 282 spoken in the voice of the mother is one example of a concerned voice in separation:

*vēy iṇameṇ tōḷ melintu oḷivāṭi viḷi piritāyp
pāyina mēkalai paṇṭaiyaḷ allal pavaḷaccelvi
āyina īcaṇ amararkku amaraṇ ciṛrampalattāṇ
cēyinaṭu āṇciyil paṭṭaṇalām it tiruntu ilaiyē*

Her fine bamboo-like shoulders are slimming, brightness diminishing,
eyes changing;
the one who wore a wide girdle before is someone else now.
The one ornamented with beautiful jewels has gone to the place of the
son of the Lord of the small *ampalam*, the god of gods, the lord of coral
hue.

Many other onlookers observe the heroine withering away in these repeated vignettes of
departure and separation. The heroine herself also interjects her own concerns in 345, speaking
in the third person about herself:

*teḷnīr ari civaṇ ciṛrampalam cintiyātavarin
paṇṇīrmoli ivaḷaip paiyuḷ eytap panittaṭaṅkaṇ
uḷ nīr uka oḷi vāṭiṭa nīṭu ceṇṇār ceṇṇanāl
eṇ nīrmaiṇiṇ nilaṇum kuḷiyum viraliṭṭu aṇavē*

She of melodious speech suffers like those who do not praise
the Lord of small *ampalam* who is adorned with a clear river.
Her cool wide eyes shed tears. Her light fades.
Tracing the floor to count the many days he's been gone,
the floor and her finger wear away.

Through the repetition of scenes, the layering of voices, and the divulgence of inner mental
processes of each character, narrative time stretches and slows. This both emphasizes the
suffering present through separation and intimates something about the temporal experience of it
to the reader.

Allegorical readings of *Tirukkōvaiyār* hold that the *talaivaṇ* is representative of the soul,
questing after its beloved, the lord, who is represented by the *talaivi*. While this configuration of
lover and beloved has resonance across *bhakti* literature throughout South Asia, no extant
allegorical reading of this text has adequately been able to account for the presence of Śiva in
each of these verses; he becomes a kind of third wheel that must be left out of the allegory. If this
text is not read through this lens, how are we to understand its theological import? Further, what
are of the theological propensities of the *kōvai* as a genre distinct from the earlier *bhakti* forms?
The above readings demonstrate a temporality that gives insight into the nature of suffering and
allows readers to see it from multiple angles. This extended temporal focus on hardship is

generative of a poetic pathos and an affect of compassion that is similar to that generated by witnessing *Tiruvācakam*'s protagonist and their plight.

Turning to *Tiruvācakam*, I have chosen two songs as examples that illustrate the way temporality functions in this text. The first is the longest, *Tiruccatakam*, and the second is a shorter *patikam* composed of just ten verses, *Cettilāppattu*. As in the case of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, *Tiruvācakam*'s longer songs have, in their reception histories, been broken down into smaller units, each given technical titles based on their content. These titles do not belong to the original text. *Tiruccatakam* is *Tiruvācakam*'s longest song, as its name, “the holy hundred” is composed of 100 verses. It has been broken into the following groupings of 10 verses each: realization of the truth (*meyyuṇartal*), instruction (*aṟivuṟuttal*), severing attachments (*cuṭṭaṟuttal*), purification of the *āṇma* (*āṇma cutti*), giving return (*kaimmāru koṭuttal*), purification of bliss (*aṇupōka cutti*), praising compassion (*kāruṇiyattu iraṅkal*), immersion in bliss (*āṇantattu aḷuntal*), the ecstasy of bliss (*āṇanta paravacam*), and bliss of transcendence (*āṇantātītam*). Given these subject headings alone, one might infer that this song contains a linear narrative with transcendence as its ultimate goal and result. Indeed, this is how G.U. Pope takes this decad of decads when he writes, “This cento is intended to exhibit the progress of the soul through the successful stages of religious experience till it loses itself in the rapture of complete union with the Supreme.”¹¹⁹ Pope goes on to recite the oft-told story associated with this particular song wherein Māṇikkavācakar sits down in Tiruperunturai under the *konrai* tree then spontaneously produces this song, the sum total of his life's work, thus beginning his compilation of *Tiruvācakam*. Pope, however, in his introduction to this song acknowledges that it is the form of an *antāti* wherein the last word of each section must match the first of the following—so too the last word of the entire

¹¹⁹ Pope, *Tiruvācakam*, 152.

piece must link back to the first. Though the song begins with the “realization of truth” and ends with the “bliss of transcendence,” these titles are misleading because it must, by the demands of its genre, begin again at “realization.” I want to look closely at the first verse and the last before considering the song’s intermediary content more closely. Verses one and 100 read as follows:

*meytāṇ arumpi vitir vitirttu uṇ virai āṛ kaḷarṅku eṇ
kai-tāṇ talai vaittu kaṇṇīṛ tatumpi vetumpi uḷḷam
poy-tāṇ tavirtntu uṇṇai ‘pōṛṛi caya caya pōṛṛi eṇṇum
kai tāṇ nekiḷa viṭēṇ uṭayyāy eṇṇai kaṇṭukolḷē*

Budding in truth, shaking and quivering, I raise my hands to my head to your fragrant ankleted feet, tears flow, I wither, from my heart lies perish, I do not relent from praising you with the words, “Praise, victory, victory, praise!” O Possessor, please know me!

*pāṭa vēṇṭum nāṇ pōṛṛi niṇṇaiyē
pāṭi naintu naintu uruki nekku nekku
āṭa vēṇṭum nāṇ pōṛṛi ampalattu
āṭum niṇ kaḷal pōṭu nāyinēṇ
kūṭa vēṇṭum nāṇ pōṛṛi ip puḷa
kūṭu nīkku eṇai pōṛṛi poy elām
vīṭa vēṇṭum nāṇ pōṛṛi vīṭu tantu
aruḷu pōṛṛi niṇ meyyar meyyaṇē!*

I should sing. Praise! Singing of you, softening and softening, melting, melting, I should dance. Praise!
I, the dog, should join the pair of your flowered ankleted feet which dance in the *ampalam*. Praise!
Cause this worm-filled body of mine to be free. Praise!
I should leave all falsehood. Praise! Graciously give me release. Praise! O You, the true of the true!

The image of the first verse depicts the moment the speaker is graced and is familiar to anyone well-versed in *Tiruvācakam*. These types of interventions in the life of the speaker are often described using terms like melting (*uruku*) or shaking (*vitir*). They are fundamentally destabilizing, and though read by later translators, like Pope, as moments of bliss, in the Tamil literary context, the specific vocabulary chosen does not necessarily intimate such a positive association. Rather, these moments are often chaotic. The speaker loses all sense of their body and are seen by others as stark raving mad. Vocabulary that conjures heat, like wax melting, is the opposite of what in the Tamil canon is thought of as soothing, that is, coolness. The song starts with this tumultuous moment in which the speaker begins their relationship with Śiva. It ends, not with a declaration of a final achievement, but rather with a list of necessary further

actions. Before reflecting on what happens when this final verse is linked to the last, I now turn to the song's intermediary content.

The body verses of this *cento* sing praises of Śiva as the speaker's sole salvation in a harsh world. The speaker admits that they have done no *tapas* (*tavamē purintilaṇ*) (5), that their karma is cruel (*kal viṇaiyai*) (8), that they are unfit to enter the throngs of his devotees (*pukavē takēṇ uṇakku aṇparuḷ yāṇ*) (10). They ask when they will be a recipient of grace, despite the fact that in earlier verses the reader has seen it granted (*un aruḷ perum nāl enru*) (12), and admit that their heart doesn't melt, though the reader had seen it do so earlier (*uṇ tiruvaṭikkē akam kuḷaiyēṇ aṇpu urukēṇ*) (13). These sentiments are repeated throughout each successive decad, interspersed with admissions that Śiva graces even the lowliest dog (*viṇaiyilē kiṭantēṇai pukunti niṇru*) (22). Even as far as 89, the speaker still describes themselves as hard-hearted as bamboo (*tiṇ ār mūṇkil aṇaiyēṇ*). Thus, the entire piece reads as an extended meditation on the nature of the speaker's falsehoods and lack of fitness. It is difficult to overlook the fact that they do indeed return to their hard-hearted state, despite all of Śiva's compassionate actions.

Returning to the final verse, the speaker identifies all those things which they should do to cultivate their relationship with the lord but does not say they are doing them. If, per the *antāti*, one goes from a list of those necessary actions back to the beginning, a larger pattern emerges: the speaker, despite their faults, is graced by Śiva, they carry on struggling to do the right thing but are unable to, and inevitably they are graced again, nevertheless. This is the working of the world according to *Tiruvācakam*. The speaker strives in their own, flawed way, but even if they are unable to achieve a modicum of devotion compared to the paradigmatic service of others, Śiva deigns to bestow his grace on them. Instead of understanding this song to

display linear narrativity, temporality, or telos, it is better characterized as illuminating a repetitive cycle. The formal structure of the entire song, replicates what is reflected in its content.

Cettilāppattu, a song of only 10 verses, displays considerable overlap with *Tiruccatakam*. This song is in the form of a *pattu* (“ten”), or decad. *Pattu* is the preferred genre of *Tēvāram* hymnists and is present in a wide variety of Tamil literatures. There is considerable range in content and relatively loose “genre” expectations. Though in *Cettilāppattu* there is not necessarily a discernable “cycle” because it does not carry with it the expectation of the *antāti*, there is significant thematic and affective overlap. In this song, we see a speaker who has been graced by Śiva and is aware of this fact. However, they continue to suffer. Their predicament is outlined in the first verse:

poyyēṇṇēṇ akam neka pukuntu amutu ūrum
putu malar kaḷal iṇai aṭi pirintum
kaiyaṇṇēṇ iṇṇum cettilēṇ antō
viḷittiruntu uḷḷa karuttiṇai ilantēṇ
aiyaṇṇē aracē aruḷ peruṇ kaṭalē
attaṇṇē ayaṇ māṇku aṇi oṇṇā
ceyya mēṇiyaṇṇē cey vakai aṇiyēṇ
tirupperunturai mēviya civaṇṇē

I am the false one; Though I was separated from the pair of ankleted feet bedecked with new flowers
oozing nectar that entered my interior; I, the ignorant one, still don’t die! Alas!
Waking from sleep, I lost my inner purpose.
O Lord! King! Great ocean of grace!
Father! One whose form is unknown to Ayaṇ and Māl!
I do not know what to do! O Śiva who dwells in Perunturai!

The first word of the first line of this verse opens with the speaker calling themselves false (*poyyēṇṇēṇ*). Then they go on to qualify that even though they are separated (*pirintum*) from Śiva’s feet which continually cause them to melt (*ūrum*, future continuous), they don’t perish (*cettilēṇ*). This statement is somewhat incredulous: how can someone who has been separated from the feet survive in this world? They go on to state that they have lost their purpose (*uḷḷa karuttiṇai ilantēṇ*) and in second to last line call out to Śiva that they don’t know what to do (*cey vakai aṇiyēṇ*). Thus, this verse participates in a dynamic that I previously highlighted and that is

evident in the discussion of *Tiruccatakam* above: namely, that the speaker, despite having been graced, remains in a state of suffering, totally bewildered, and feels separation from Śiva acutely. The verb forms in this verse indicate that Śiva's grace is unfailing, and that it will always and forever melt as nectar when entering the speaker's interior (*akam neka pukuntu amutu ūrum putu malar kaḷal iṇai aṭi*). The speaker, however, is perpetually one who does not die (*cettilēṇ*), and they continue to not know what to do in the moment of suffering (*ariyēṇ*).

Verse two continues in this pattern:

*purrumāy maramāy puṇal kālē
uṇṭiyāy aṇṭa vāṇarum pīrarum
maṇru yārum niṇ malar aṭi kāṇā
maṇṇa eṇṇai ōr vārttaiyuḷ paṭuttu
parrināy pataiyēṇ maṇam mika urukēṇ
parikilēṇ pariyā uṭal taṇṇai
cerrilēṇ iṇṇum tiritarukiṇrēṇ
tirupperuntuṇrai mēviya civaṇē*

Those who become ant hills and trees,
consume water and air as food, the heavenly dwellers,
and others have not seen you. Oh king!
You caught me with one word, seized hold of me;
I do not grieve, my mind does not melt, I am not troubled,
And have not killed this loveless body; Still, I roam about,
Oh Śiva of Peruntuṇrai!

In this verse, though the speaker has been graced by Śiva (*ōr vārttaiyuḷ paṭuttu*= ruled by a single word), they go on to say that they do not shake (*pataiyēṇ*), their inner heart/mind doesn't melt (*maṇam mika urukēṇ*), they are not devout, they have not conquered their affectionless body, and they still (*iṇṇum*) wander aimlessly (*tiritarukiṇrēṇ*). The present tense marker *kiṇru* on the verb for wandering (*tiri-tal*) which is also the last finite verb of the verse places the speaker's continued woes squarely in the present moment.

In verse three they again mention being graced as a past action (*aruḷ purintaṇai...*) and by the end of the verse plead for Śiva to end their lives, (*eṇai cettiṭa paṇiyāy*) implying that their current state is unbearable to them. In four, they say that their mind is hard like a knotty tree (*vaṇ*

parāy maruṭu okkum eṇ cintai), eye like (senseless) wood (*marak kaṇ*), and ear like dull iron (*eṇ cevi irumpiṇum valitu*). These poor qualities compared to those of the heavenly ones who do receive Śiva's grace further confound the speaker. In five, the halfway point of this song, the tone shifts slightly from focusing on the speaker's sorry state or unworthiness. Instead, they declare that having left the purview of other gods (*āṭṭut tēvar tam viti oḷittu*) they have lovingly joined Śiva's gracious way (*uṇ aruḷvaḷi iruppēṇ*). The use of the future continuous tense implies that they are remaining on Śiva's way and will do so in perpetuity. Immediately following however, in verse six, the speaker is once again plunged into suffering that results of their ignorance. They state that they haven't conquered the body ("severed", *arukkilēṇ uṭal*), haven't entered the fire to end suffering (*tuṇipaṭa tī pukku ārkilēṇ*), don't know the manner of Śiva's holy grace (*tiruvaruḷ vakai ariyēṇ*), and can't bear their body but don't see any way to escape (*porukkilēṇ uṭal pōkku iṭam kāṇēṇ*). And thus, even after a definitive statement of their enduring commitment to Śiva's way in verse five, in six, the speaker is back to being bewildered, entrapped by their body, and ignorant of a way out. Śiva is their only hope, and the speaker implores him to tell them what to do (*eṇ ceykēṇ itu ceyka eṇru aruḷāy*). In verse 7, they call themselves a dog, completely unable to even think of Śiva (*nāyiṇēṇ uṇai niṇaiyavum māṭṭēṇ*). In 8, they recount being shown Śiva's feet (*niṇ kurai kaḷal kāṭṭik*), but then soon after not knowing what to do (*yātu ceyvatu eṇru iruntaṇaṇ maruntē*) and then quickly admonishing Śiva over whether a devotee should suffer in such a way (*aṭiyaṇēṇ iṭarppaṭuvatum iṇitō*). Nine follows this formula: the speaker recounts being graced (*āṇṭāy*) then later in the verse implores Śiva to bid him whose eyes are unseeing like wood to come (*marakkaṇēṇaiyum vantaṭap paṇiyāy*). The image of unseeing eyes is repeated from verse four. Finally, verse ten concludes the decad and reads as follows:

aḷittu vantu eṇakku āva eṇru aruḷi

accam tīrtta niṇ aruḷ peruṇ kaṭalil
tiḷaittum tēkkiyum parukiyum urukēṇ
tirupperunturai mēviya civaṇē
vaḷaik kaiyāṇoṭu malaravaṇ ariyā
vāṇavā malai mātu oru pākā
kaḷippu elām mikka kalangiṭukinṇen
kayilai mā malai mēviya kaṭalē

You came and mingled, called me to come, and graced me,
 In the great ocean of your grace which overcomes fear,
 Having played, imbibed, enjoyed, I do not melt.
 Oh Śiva of Perunturai!
 Lord unknown to Brahma on the lotus and the one who wears the conch!
 Partner of the woman of the mountain!
 I'm so inebriated and confused!
 Oh great ocean of Kailāsa!

The speaker says that they are immersed (*tiḷaittum*, from *tiḷai-ttal* “to dive”) in the great ocean of Śiva’s grace (*aruḷ peruṇ kaṭalil*). The sea of grace is qualified with past adjectival participles “removed” (*tīrtta*) and “graced” (*aruḷi*), again indicating that the act of Śiva’s grace occurred in the past. The qualifications of the speaker’s actions in this clause are all construed in the future continuous: being immersed (*tiḷaittum*), satiated (*tēkkiyum*), consuming (*parukiyum*). Thus, the speaker continues on indefinitely in a state of being subsumed in grace and suffering nonetheless. The verse concludes with the speaker using the present tense, “I am very confused” (*kalankiṭukinṇen*) as they stand immersed in the sea of Śiva’s grace.

Like *Tiruccatakam*, *Cettilāppattu* details the tumultuous nature of human life, even one in which Śiva has intervened. The speaker bounces back and forth between being graced and being utterly confused, desperate for further help, and unable to worship effectively. The brief moments of respite are but punctuations in long line stretches that often end with furtive pleas for relief. Whether the “gracing episodes” referred to by the speaker all refer to the same past event or whether the speaker is graced again and again is up for interpretation. Regardless, the temporality of this mere ten verse song is still able to approximate that of the *catakam*, even though there is no expectation that it be read as an *antāti*. Both songs, in their repeated return to

the speaker's suffering approximate the experience of being "stuck" in a persistent state. They stretch the time of conflict, illuminating many facets of its experience and allowing the reader to observe suffering almost in slow motion, as if from many angles. Despite this, Śiva's grace remains a punctuating certainty and this is established through both the use of future/continuous verb forms as well as through recurrence.

The preoccupation with the speaker's defilements discussed above is found throughout *Tiruvācakam*. In fact, the text is characterized by the speaker's insistence of their lowness and self-exclusion from groups of ideal devotees. Contrary to the dominant readings of *Tiruvācakam*, given the discussion thus far, this text cannot be read as an exuberant expression of ecstatic devotion alone. Attention to its focus on suffering and hardship must be included in larger discussions of its theological agenda and inform our understanding of what kind of emotional affect such preoccupations create for the reader of this text. This is also true of *Tirukkōvaiyār* which demonstrates many techniques for elongating and vivifying various states of separation and hardship. It cannot be taken as a triumphant love story though the lovers do reunite in the end. Rather, if we view its emotional landscape as a whole, we get a very different picture.

Conclusion

Though these texts are considerably different in form, they display remarkable overlap in poetic and rhetorical techniques. By paying close attention to the way they layer temporal planes, their patterns of verb tense use, and the cadence of events as they transpire in narrative time, we can recover significant shared territory between them. This territory goes far beyond shared epithets for Śiva or inherited tropes from *Tēvāram*. Read side by side, these texts demonstrate the creation of entirely new affective dimensions. Their extended explorations on suffering introduce

a new emphasis pathos and thereby compassion which becomes theologically significant and will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Chapter 2

On Place

This chapter continues the project of reading *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* in tandem by focusing on thematic and rhetorical invocations of place. Both texts contain lush imagery from the varied terrains of the Tamil-speaking region. They also locate Śiva by naming his cities, towns, and temples of residence. In doing so, they draw on longstanding poetic traditions of engaging with the particularities of place in Tamil literature but transform and play with extant “languages of locale” in new, innovative ways. While invoking familiar places, both texts simultaneously free Śiva of the confines of named or identifiable place and experiment with expanding the boundaries of his conceptual domain. In this chapter, I explore how place is invoked in several different ways as part of an illustrative imagining of a Śaiva world. I then investigate how its inclusion contributes to a mutually constitutive theological vision between texts. I ask how extended engagement with place aids in the *bhakti* project of drawing Śiva near, and consider the ways that place contributes to the generation of emotion and to a reader’s affective experience of these texts.

This chapter is separated in three sections: the first addresses a diverse array of phenomenon that fall under a category I deem “particularizing place.” This includes both the invocation of specific Caṅkam landscape tropes and the use of proper nouns for naming cities, towns, or geographical regions. Both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* qualify place through the use of landscape vocabulary in a manner similar to that found in Caṅkam poetry. However, they also demonstrate significant divergence from these works’ use of named place given that place’s import must be refigured in the context of praising Śiva. For example, *Tirukkōvaiyār*, being closely modeled on *akam* poetry, engages the *tiṇai* system widely throughout its 400 verses, but

the five landscapes' concomitant emotional states are reapplied in a Śaiva terrain, thus expanding both their semantic and affective range. *Tiruvācakam* also demonstrates *tiṇai* transformation, particularly in service of illuminating the experience of being a devotee and living in a Śaiva world, subject to Śiva's grace. This section also examines how named cities and towns are situated and invoked, not just as geographically mappable locations or markers in a larger Śaiva sacred landscape, but as rhetorical tools that give readers a chance to rest in their deep intertextuality.

The second section is dedicated to phenomena that fall under a category I call "freeing place." While named places are found with some frequency in both texts, in this section I suggest that the treatment of place, viewed in the context of these two works as totalities, is far less constraining than that seen in *Tēvāram*. While *Tiruvācakam* nods to the emphasis on place seen in earlier *bhakti* hymns and knows intimately the "lay of the land" of Śiva's sacred places, it spends the majority of its time *avoiding* the need to cite named location and this represents a significant departure from *Tēvāram*. Instead, *Tiruvācakam* creates a broader, more fluid conceptual terrain in which Śiva thrives and operates, one which does not rely on the use of proper nouns or *tiṇai* landscapes. In the case of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, though it takes laser focus on a few specific locations like Kailāsa and Tillai, it still finds ways to maintain the hallmark ambiguity of the *akam* poetry it is so indebted to. In its dedication to said ambiguity, even the text's named locations resist being mapped in the way that they drift between familiar *tiṇai* landscapes and fade in and out of focus in a larger Śaiva geographical *milieu*.

Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I explore the dialectic between strategies of particularizing and freeing place. The juxtaposition of poles like placed and unplaced, near and far, or universal and local produces a tension running through both texts that is related to the

generation of pathos discussed in chapter one. Is Śiva near, or is he far? Can the devotee attain him, or will he remain inaccessible? In much the same way that the treatment of time oscillates between doubt and surety—the reader knows of Śiva’s enduring grace but the speaker does not experience it in real time—these texts’ treatment of place approximate the destabilization of being a flawed human in Śiva’s universe unsure of his presence. The reader, on the other hand, is always privy to Śiva’s pervasive nature.

The analytic category of “place” has become increasingly important in the study of literature and religion in recent years, the field of South Asian studies notwithstanding.¹²⁰ Place is a key and programmatic entity in Tamil literature, and as such receives a considerable amount of attention in secondary scholarship.¹²¹ One of the earliest bodies of Tamil literature, *akam* poetry, is characterized by the invocation of landscape elements which help to generate affect and meaning. This landscape vocabulary remains one of the most significantly consistent literary elements from the Caṅkam period onwards. As such, it is a primary lens for approaching questions of place for Tamil poetry. Coming on the heels of the Caṅkam period, Tamil *bhakti* literature focuses on place in a different way. It is perhaps most well known for its inclusion of proper names for cities and towns where poets encounter the lord and recount his sports therein. The inclusion of place names that are geographically mappable has spawned voluminous

¹²⁰ For a summation of some significant moments in the “spatial turn,” see Kim Knott, “Religion, Space, and Place, The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion,” *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 1 (2010): 29-43. Recent monographs on place in South Asia include Alex McKay, *Kailas Histories* (Brill, 2015), and Elizabeth A. Cecil, *Mapping the Paśupata Landscape: Narrative, Place, and the Śaiva Imaginary in Early Medieval North India* (Brill, 2020).

¹²¹ See for examples, Prakash V., *Tiṇai: uṇarvum poruḷum* (Cennai: Parical puttaka nilaiyam, 2016) and Takanobu Takahashi, *Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics* (Brill, 1991).

discussion on processes of localization and about the historical spread of sectarian groups.¹²²

Examining strategies of qualifying and freeing space, I situate Māṇikkavācakar's works in terms of continuity, disruption, and innovation of form in the longer literary history of Tamil poetry.

This chapter documents these texts' creation of new emotional and devotional terrains and how place is critical in the development of Śaiva theology.

Place and Tamil Literature

Tiruvācakam and *Tirukkōvaiyār* draw from multiple Tamil literary traditions of place which have persisted for generations and are the subject of robust scholarly reflection. Beginning with the earliest, the poetic system of *akatiṇai*¹²³ is one of the primary ways that emotional resonance is generated in Caṅkam era *akam* poetry. The five landscapes *kuriñci* (mountain), *mullai* (forest), *marutam* (agricultural tracts), *neytal* (seashore), and *pālai* (desert) each have corresponding emotional valences, love situations, and affective qualities. Elements of these landscapes like flora and fauna are invoked, intermixed, and played with by poets to generate the greatest suggestive force with the fewest possible words. In *akam* poetry a tree is not just a tree, but rather, depending on its species and context, a node in a larger network of meaning-making signs that can evoke a host of emotional resonances to a well-versed reader keyed into these environmental cues.¹²⁴ *Akatiṇai* reemerges in later periods though not in its totality and not

¹²² See for examples, George W. Spencer, "The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Hymns," *Numen* 17, 3 (1970): 232-244, and Indira V. Peterson, "Singing of Place as metaphor and motif in the *Tēvāram* songs of the Tamil Śaivite Saints," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1982): 69-90.

¹²³ For a discussion of the development of readings of *tiṇai* in historical perspective, see Manu V. Devadevan, *Living on the edge of the burning ground: Rethinking Tinai*, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, 2 (2006): 201-202.

¹²⁴ Selby describes the *tiṇai* system as follows, "The composers of these poems foisted this desire outward upon environmental elements and incorporated those elements into a multilayered

without significant change. It is clear that early Buddhist and Jain epics like *Maṇimēkalai* and *Cilappatikāram* invoke these landscapes¹²⁵ but their poetic project in creating long narrative poetry is largely different than that of the earlier poets. The Śaiva and Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* saints who followed in their wake also took up bits and pieces of these familiar terrains and their concomitant emotional valences but did so in the service of a new devotional telos. Each successive generation found ways to adopt and acknowledge the robust world of *tiṇai* landscapes in new and evolving ways. In a trope repeated by poets across the ages, even Kampaṇ says that his Śūrpaṇakhā episode of *Kamparāmāyaṇa* weaves its way through the five landscapes:

“And the heroes saw the river Godavari
Which was like the poems of the great poets,
A sublime ornament for the earth
With fields of profound wealth
And its episodes that are watering places
For rescue from the heat, with its flow
Through the five landscapes of poetry,
Clear and lovely and sweetly running.”¹²⁶

When Kampaṇ says his poem will flow through the “five landscapes of poetry,” the word used is the technical term, *aintiṇai*. This conspicuous reference to the *akatiṇai* system primes a reader to expect familiar poetic conventions to follow. He asserts that this episode, like those of the great

semiotics. In the poems, *tiṇai* becomes more than a ‘landscape’ or poetic ‘gesture.’ It becomes an actual language—the constant repetition of *tiṇai* symbology gives it a ‘congruity,’ locking it into articulations of convention that are requisite for a full-blown rhetoric.” *Grow Long Blessed Night Love Poems from Classical India* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 53.

¹²⁵ Paula Richman provides a compelling *tiṇai* analysis of *Maṇimēkalai* drawing upon which Monius concludes “...Manimēkalai relies primarily on classical Tamil literary conventions, using the poetic themes of inner love (*akam*) and outer heroism (*puram*), as well as landscape (*tiṇai*), in new and interesting ways.” *Imagining a Place*, 15.

¹²⁶ George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz, trans., *The Forest Book of the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampaṇ* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 84. *puviyīṇukku aṇiyāy āṇṇa/ poruḷ tantu pulattiṇṇu āki/ avi akat tuṇaikaḷ tāṇki/ aintiṇai neṇi aḷāvi/ cavi uṇa teḷintu taṇ enṇu/ oḷukkumum taḷuvi cāṇṇōr/ kavi eṇa kiṭanta kōtā/ variyīṇai vīrar kaṇṭār*

Caṅkam poets of the past (and arguably, many poetic generations in between), will wander through multiple landscapes, each lending their own suggestive force and emotional valence to a story whose earlier iterations may not have had. Even in the contemporary period, Tamil cinema classics like *Uyarntu maṇitaṇ* starring Sivāji Ganēśan depict their love scenes following the famed trysting conditions found in Caṅkam *kuriñci* landscapes to a T.¹²⁷ That these images have had such staying power is evident, but no significant study of their periodic transformations has yet been completed. Scholars have noted how the five landscapes persist far past the Caṅkam period in which they first arose, but while persistence has been acknowledged, specific ways this system is deployed to new ends and significantly changes in later Śaiva and Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* material are underexplored.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ For a discussion of this phenomenon see Samuel Moses, *Tinai Reading of the Film Godavari*,” in *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* (2014), 157-168.

¹²⁸ A. Kandiah explores how expressions of love are taken from Caṅkam *akam* poetry and adapted in the *Tēvāram*. *Akam Elements in the Tēvāram* (Kelaniya, University of Kelaniya, 1980). C. Jakannāthāchāriār notes a few ways that *tiṇai* landscape elements are used in Āṇṭāl’s poetry. *The Tiruppāvai of Śrī Āṇṭāl: Textual, Literary and Critical Study* (Tiruvallikkēṇi: AruLmigu Pārthasārathy Swami Dēvasthānam, 1982), 287-289. Perhaps the single clearest distillation of the way *tiṇai* persists in later devotional literature is A.K. Ramanujan, “Form in Classical Tamil Poetry,” in *The Collected Essays of AK Ramanujan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 197-217. Steven Hopkins discusses how thoroughly *Tirumaṅkaiyālvār* takes up *tiṇai* imagery in his *Tirumoli* which praises Tiruvahīndrapuram. “Parakāla links the place and its landscape to the four classical *tiṇai* of the *caṅkam* corpus in ways never matched in Veṅkaṭeśa’s later work. When we hear of the *mātavi*—a type of jasmine blossom—we can be confident that the poet wants us to think of the *mullai tiṇai*, or ‘jasmine landscape,’ whose corresponding emotional state is ‘patient waiting’; when we hear of ‘cool paddy fields, / wetlands slushy / with sweet mud,’ we hear the *neytal tiṇai*, ‘anxiety in love’; or when we hear of the river overflowing its banks and drenching the paddy, we hear *marutam tiṇai*, ‘the unfaithfulness of lovers.’ Parakāla actually works very hard to name the specific flowers connected with the *caṅkam* landscapes—*kuriñci*, *neytal*, *mullai*, *marutam*—throughout his *tirumolis*.” *An Ornament for Jewels: Love Poems for the Lord of Gods by Vedāntadeśika* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119-120. Elaine Craddock comments on the invocation of *tiṇai* in Karaikkāl Ammaiār, “Many of Karaikkāl Ammaiār’s poems take place in a *pālai* landscape.” *Śiva’s Demon Devotee: Kāraikkāl Ammaiār* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 9. HS Shiva Prakash calls the intersection between poetry and geography as “poetryscape” and after expounding on the Tamil

In detailing the rhetorical function of place in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, this chapter furthers our understanding of the continuance of the *akatiṇai* system in *bhakti* materials with an eye to the theological implications of its invocation. Here I expand our understanding of the ways in which landscape elements from earlier Tamil literature are invoked and transformed in the new context of devotional poetry.¹²⁹ How and when landscape vocabulary is invoked and whether or not its concomitant emotional states are those borrowed from a Caṅkam universe or imagined anew is of chief concern. I ask how a Śaiva devotional poet, writing after the epic period, uses familiar landscape elements to generate emotion and praise their lord in service of a new devotional telos? My discussion illustrates that Māṇikkavācakar fundamentally transforms these rhetorical components and harnesses the power of thematized imagery to new ends. Elements of the natural landscape help to establish emotional networks of meaning, but these networks are necessarily altered in the context of Śiva *bhakti* wherein much of the emotional labor is performed not between human agents, but between the human and divine. Given that the five landscapes of Caṅkam literature act as far more than environmental backdrops for narrative

tiṇai system writes, “This poetryscape expanded during *bhakti* period. In Andal’s *Tiruppavai*, the actual geography of a Tamil cowherding village merges with the mythical Mathura of the North. Appar, the great Shaivite poet, praises Lord Shiva thus: *vadamozhiyum tenmozhiyum aanavanaikkaan* (‘look at him, the Sanskrit of the north, the Tamil of the south,’ translation mine). Further Shaivite poetry painted the Tamil landscape with the mythical colors of Kailasa, the Shaivite utopia. The *bhakti* poetry of Tamil Nadu, like elsewhere in India, created a sacred geography of Shiva temples, which became the *tinai* of devotional imagination.” “Extension of the Poetic Landscape/Rabindranath Tagore’s Contribution to Drama,” in *The Politics and Reception of Rabindranath Tagore’s Drama: The Bard on the Stage*, eds. Arnab Bhattacharya and Mala Renganathan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 184-5.

¹²⁹ This is thoroughly addressed by Norman Cutler in “Four Spatial Realms.” For an introduction to place in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, see Leah Comeau, “Making Devotion Beautiful in Medieval South India: Literary Methodology for the Pleasure and Praise of God” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013) 82-121.

action, when stock Caṅkam imagery or tropes crop up in Māṇikkavācakar's texts, I ask, how exactly do they function? This analysis pushes beyond the application of *akatiṇai* as a static system, and instead sees it as dynamic and evolving through new conceptual and historical contexts.

Apart from recognizing the indebtedness of *bhakti* to the *tiṇai* system, scholarship on Tamil Śaiva literature makes much of the use of proper nouns for place. Place names for temples, cities, or larger geographical regions abound in early Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* poetry have often been read as evidence of the historical rise of Śaivism in the Tamil country during the formative period after the “dark age of the Kalabhras” or the “Kalabhra interregnum.”¹³⁰ As Tamil history is narrativized in secondary scholarship, the localization found in *bhakti* materials is martialed by some as proof of the triumph of Śaivism over Jains and Buddhists, and of the spread of a newfound devotional creed throughout the Tamil-speaking country.¹³¹ The robust hagiographical tradition that has grown around *bhakti* saints, persisting into the contemporary period, contributes to the notion that these poems represent the formation of a new Śaiva sacred geography created through pilgrimage. The songs of *Tēvāram* hymnists, in particular, are read as the spontaneous emotional outpouring of individual saints at named sites, and as travelogues of

¹³¹ For example, in the introduction to his discussion of Campantar, F. Kingsbury notes, “In the first half of the seventh century A.D. the worship of Śiva was at its lowest ebb, overpowered by Jainism and Buddhism which prevailed throughout the Tamil country...He [Campantar] grew up to a pilgrim poet, who visited most of the Śaivite shrines...in each place singing the praise of Śiva whom there he worshipped...This is about all that is known of a man who helped to sing Buddhism right out of Southern India.” *The Tamil Śaivite Saints* (Association Press: Calcutta, 1921) 10-11. Later, George W. Spencer's aligns Tamil Śaivism in line with other “revitalization movements,” echoing the notion that Śaivas gained dominance after a period of religious and cultural stagnation (the Kalabhra interregnum). See “The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Hymns, *Numen* 17, 3 (1970), 232-24.

spiritual experience.¹³² The hymns of Campantar, Cuntarar, and Appar can be mapped across Tamil Nadu with relative ease; tales of their specific exploits or transformative experience in each location are well known, memorialized, and recounted. Contemporary Śaiva devotees participate in lengthy pilgrimages to these sites today, now referred to as *pāṭal peṇṇa sthalam* (places which have songs composed about them), and tours are organized so that one might reach all in a given region on a single trip. The inclusion of geographically mappable locations is also identified as part of larger processes of “localization,” wherein Śaiva ideas are transposed into a Tamil idiom and through which devotional landscapes are imagined and created.¹³³

In Tamil studies, the concept of localization is favored to approach *bhakti* literature given the preponderance of Tamil place names found therein. One of my principal goals in this chapter, however, is to pivot away from a focus on localization which has come to dominate discussions of place and is a primary interpretive lens for understanding the use of proper names in *bhakti* literature. The last century has given rise to increased interest in historical notions of the Tamil nation and socio-geographical awareness of a Tamil-speaking region. When these are searched for in *bhakti* materials, possibilities for reading invocation of place as a literary or poetic strategy concerned with projects other than creating or maintaining geographical boundaries among

¹³² For more on this see Indira Peterson, “Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tēvāram Songs of the Tamil Saivite Saints,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, 1 (1982), 69-90. Leslie Orr problematizes the notion that set pilgrimage routes or networks of sacred sites ever existed or operated in the way some have purported. See “The Sacred Landscape of Tamil Śaivism: Plotting Place in the Realm of Devotion,” in V. Gillet (ed.) *Mapping the Chronology of Bhakti: Milestones, Stepping Stones, and Stumbling Stones—Proceedings of a workshop Held in Honor of Pandit R. Varada Desikan* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry/Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 2014), 214.

¹³³ Shulman elaborates on phenomena of localization which include mooring of the divine in local, named places wherein, for example, a given shrine becomes the center of the universe and a link to the divine. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 40-77.

sectarian communities are occluded. I do not seek to diminish the unique use of place in Tamil literature, but to expand the disciplinary parameters in which it is investigated.

While there is merit to considering the spread of Śaivism in historical perspective by thinking about these named, mappable places both politically and geographically, few have considered the rhetorical dimensions of place and the use of specific place names as poetic ornaments, strategies, or tools in the aspirational imagining of a Śaiva world at the time of these texts' composition.¹³⁴ Addressing the rhetorical dimensions of place in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, containing altogether different orientations to place than the literature that came before, allows us to better understand not only a Śaiva attempt to organize the world spatially, but also the greater theological project at stake in the composition of these two very different works. *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are indeed indebted to the Caṅkam, *akam* tradition, and to the *bhakti* poetry of *Tēvāram* with regard to their treatment of place, but my ultimate argument will rest on how Māṇikkavācakar diverges from these literary predecessors by freeing Śiva of the particulars of place and reimagining its landscape particulars in a new Śaiva idiom, something which his use of diverse genres helps him to accomplish.

A note about Literary Theory and Setting a Scene

Analysis of place in either text must begin with a recognition of how their respective genres contain inherent formal expectations which govern the inclusion of place. To do so, it is perhaps easiest to start with *Tirukkōvaiyār* given that it is closely modeled on *akam* literature for which the role of place has been considered in great depth by commentators and scholars alike. In later literary theory, minor literature, otherwise known as *cirrilakkiyam* or *pirapantam* are

¹³⁴ Most notably Norman Cutler has produced a compelling reading of the ways in which multiple spatial paradigms come into complex relationship with one another in "Four Spatial Realms."

catalogued, and the numerous genres which fall into these categories are defined. These definitions help modern readers understand genre expectations of texts like *kōvai*, *ulā*, *venpa*, or *kuravañci*, though these theorizations have their own limitations in practical application.¹³⁵ The tenth-century theoretical treatise *Pannirupāṭṭiyal* is likely the earliest extant *pāṭṭiyal*, or theoretical treatise on *pirapantam*. Its definition of the *kōvai* genre states that *kōvai* does not deviate from the five landscapes of *akam* poetry: it is said that the four hundred verses are *kalitturai* which are established in *akapporul* without deviation from *aintiṇai* (*aintiṇai tiriya akapporul taḷi muntiya kalitturai nānūreṇpa*).¹³⁶ Thus the *akam* scenarios and landscapes from Caṅkam literature are recognized in an early period by both theoretical and commentarial communities to be a constituent feature of the *kōvai* genre.¹³⁷

This is evident when we revisit *Tirukkōvaiyār*’s richly evocative first verse which primes the reader with critical information about what is to come in the rest of the text:

tiruvaḷar tāmarai cīrvaḷar kāvikaḷ īcartillai
 kuruvaḷar pūṅkumiḷ kōṅku painkāntaḷ koṇṭu ṇṅkuteyvā^[SEP]
 maruvaḷar mālaiy ṇṅ valliṇ olki aṇa naṭai vāyntu
 uvaḷar kāmaṇṭaṇ venṇirikoḷi pōṇ oḷirkinṇratē

A swaying creeper garlanded with beautiful fragrant lotuses, excellent *kāvi*, bright *kumiḷ* which grow in the gardens of Tillai, and lovely *kāntaḷ*, has a gait like a swan, and is gleaming bright like the white flag of Kāma.

¹³⁵ For more on the form and function of *pāṭṭiyal*, see Clare, “Canons, Conventions,” 59-83.

¹³⁶ See *Panniru pāṭṭiyal* verse 221: *kōvai eṇpatu kūrum kālai/ mēviya kaḷavu karpeṇum kiḷavi/ aintiṇai tiriya akapporul taḷi/ muntiya kalitturai nānūreṇpa*. Kā. Ra. Kōvintarāca Mutaliyār, *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal: Mērkōḷ cūttiraṅkaḷuṇaṇum* (Tirunelvēli: Tiruvelvēli Tennintiya Caivacittānta Nūṇpatippuk Kaḷakam, 1970), 147.

¹³⁷ As Comeau notes, “Situated between the sequential love scenarios initiated by the Iraiyanar *Akapporul* and culminating with the *Akapporul Viḷakkam*, the *kōvai* is designed to tell the progression of a love drama within the parameters of the *tiṇai* system.” “Making Devotion Beautiful,” 62.

This verse hinges on a double-entendre. Its proper subject is a *valli*, translated simultaneously as a creeper and a young woman. Here, the creeper is observed by the hero (though he goes unmentioned) and thus the reader, shining brilliantly, studded with various types of flowers, each of which represent one of the five *tiṇai* landscapes.¹³⁸ The descriptions of these flowers border on hyperbolic, and each is used to metaphorically represent parts of the heroine's face. Their beauty, brightness, and fragrance are described with gusto—the natural imagery bursts off of the page in its first two lines. Śiva makes his obligatory appearance in the description of the tender *kumil* flower, a species of teak tree whose buds “brim with effulgence” and belong to or are found in Śiva's Tillai (the absence of a case marker on Tillai allows for either reading): *īcartillai kuruvaḷar pūnkumil*. Śiva is only present indirectly, linked in this case through his place, Tillai, of which he is the presiding lord. This indirect connection, which Cutler names “embedding,”¹³⁹ is a poetic mainstay for most verses in the text and will be addressed in more detail. The mention of these five flowers functions dually: it indicates to the reader that this tale will wind its way through all five traditional landscapes with their corresponding love situations, and it simultaneously places the entire world, with all of its narrative possibilities and emotional scenarios, within the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*, Śiva's, domain. The *kumil* flower which is the only one directly linked to Śiva's Tillai corresponds to the *mullai tiṇai*, or pastoral tract. *Mullai tiṇai* has as its time of year the rainy season and time of day the evening; its landscape is the forest or rural area, and its emotional situation is that of patient waiting. In *mullai* scenarios, waiting occurs when the hero and heroine are separated from one another. Though it is not as pathos evoking as

¹³⁸ Citing five flowers belonging to each of the five landscapes in the beginning of a text can be seen in other works including *Paripāṭal* and later *Kamparāmāyaṇa*.

¹³⁹ Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms,” 86.

the waiting which occurs in the *neytal*, or seashore, tract, it still evokes a time of separation. This small detail linking Śiva to the *mullai* flower primes the reader to expect a great deal of separation in the text, not only as one of the many love situations between the hero and heroine, but also in the text's overall generative affect. If, as a devotional work, this text hinges on Śiva being central to every verse, it also approximates the experience of separation from him, as will be explored in further depth.¹⁴⁰

When we turn to *Tiruvācakam*, there are no extant theorizations that might give us clues about the ways that this text engages place, and specifically *tiṇai*. In the Śaiva context, *bhakti* poetry was not seen by early commentators or literary theorists as appropriate material for such analysis, and therefore, any definitions of *bhakti* as a genre of poetry from an earlier period are considerably short or underdetermined.¹⁴¹ In the Śaiva and Śrī Vaiṣṇava literary context, invocation of place gained preeminent status as a means for praising the lord in the works of the saints who preceded Māṇikkavācakar. It is in comparison with their texts that we might most productively consider the use of place in *Tiruvācakam*. However, the *Tēvāram* hymnists were also indebted to Caṅkam predecessors. *Tiruvācakam* inherits *Tēvāram* inheriting Caṅkam, so to

¹⁴⁰ This opening verse detailing the sight of a young woman/creeper comes to be a standard in the *kōvai* genre and remains remarkably consistent in successive generations. The other earliest extant *kōvai*, of which we only have parts, *Pāṇṭikkōvai*, also uses this image. Observe the following translation from Buck and Paramasivam: “I took her two eyes like blossoms to be honeybee her two young breasts to be flower buds/ Her scarlet mouth like honey, to be the bud of a leaf/ When I first saw this beautiful alluring flowering vine in that grove by the Vaikai river of his majesty who conquered Ceṇṇilam with his army of elephants/ both my eyes rejoiced!” (*pūmaru kaṇṇiṇai vaṇṭā puṇar meṇ mulai arumpā/ tēmaru cevṇāy taḷirā ceru ceṇṇilattai veṇṇra/ māmaru tāṇai eṇ kōṇvaiyai vār poḷil ērkalanta/ kāmaru pūṇkoṭi kaṇṭē kaḷiṇṇa em kaṇṇiṇaiyē!* Nakkīraṇār, *The Study of Stolen Love: A Translation of Kaḷaviyal eṇṇa Akapporuḷ with Commentary by Nakkīraṇār* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 35.

¹⁴¹ For more on the exclusion of *bhakti* materials from certain types of literary analysis see Clare, “Canons, Conventions,” 111-112.

speak; its treatment of place cannot be fully understood without understanding how *Tēvāram* uses place.

An additional challenge lies in the immense internal formal diversity of *Tiruvācakam*. *Tirukkōvaiyār* is a continuous narrative, and can easily be viewed as a complete, textual whole that is uniform in genre throughout. *Tiruvācakam*, on the other hand, contains multiple types of songs. These range from the short ten verse *pattus*, to the 100 verse *catakam* written in *antāti* form. It contains *akavals* of praise like *Kīrtittiruvakaval*, and “game songs” like *Tiruvuntiyār*. There are songs which very clearly mimic in style and content those of the *Tēvāram*, like *Kōyil Tiruppatikam* in which Śiva’s link to Perunturai is established, modified, and expounded upon in each verse. Others however, like *Accōppatikam* contain no explicit reference to place. These “placeless” songs are also found in *Tēvāram* but represent just a small fraction of the entire corpus. This range allows for *Tiruvācakam* to contain within it a number of orientations towards and treatments of place. While some points of continuity will be focused on in this chapter, it will not be possible to account for this range in this context.

Particularizing Place

This section theorizes the use of proper place names in *Tirukkōvaiyār* and *Tiruvācakam* through the analysis of explicit inclusions of *tiṇai* vocabulary with its concurrent emotional valences, and through the inclusion of proper place names. It is clear that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are indebted to the particularities of Caṅkam landscape systems. *Akam* tropes and rhetorical techniques are found in both. At times, these manifest as the inclusion of familiar suggestive images like herons protecting their young. At others, cumulative use of specialized landscape vocabulary invokes a given *tiṇai* over time and plays with its emotional valence in new narrative contexts. Here I ask: What is the effect of invoking *akatiṇai* conventions in a Śaiva

bhakti context? In what ways does *tiṇai* heighten the affective force of the texts' devotional sentiments? In considering how proper nouns are used to qualify place, I ask how citations of well-known cities and towns function in the broader narrative structure of both works. What happens when names are listed? What happens when familiar cities are used as a backdrop for primary narrative action? Does place serve as a kind of localizing punctuation mark in longer, more generalized passages? Or are they rhetorical elements around which specific constellations of meaning hinge?

Tiṇai in a New Domain

I begin this discussion with an excerpt from *Tiruvācakam Tiruvāṇṭappakuti*, a song which describes Śiva's cosmos and his universal nature. *Tiruvāṇṭappakuti* is loosely divided into five thematic units. The first describes the magnitude of the cosmos and Śiva's pervasive nature. The second and third, his role in it as creator, animator, preserver, and destroyer. The fourth and fifth describe his physical form with various epithets that intimate expansiveness. The following excerpt starts at line 66, roughly a third of the way through the song:

*param ānanta paḷam kaṭal atuvē
karu mā mukiliṇ tonṇi
tiru ār peruntuṟai varaiyil ēri
tiruttaku miṇ oḷi ticai ticai viriya
aim pula pantaṇai vāḷ aravu iriya
vem tuyar kōṭai māttalai karappa
nīṭu eḷil tōṇṇi vāḷ oḷi miḷira
em tam piṇaviyil kōpam mikuttu
muracu eṇintu mā perum karuṇaiyiṇ muḷaṅki
pū purai aṅcali kāntaḷ kāṭṭa
eṇccā in aruḷ nuṇ tuḷi koḷḷa
cem cuṭar veḷḷam ticai ticai teviṭṭa varai uṟa
kēta kuṭṭam kaiyara ōṅgi
iru mu camayattu oru pēyṭṭēriṇai
nīr nacai taravarum neṭum kaṇ māṇ kaṇam
tava peru vāyiṭai paruki taḷarvoṭum
ava perum tāpam nīṅkātu acaintaṇa

āyiṭai vāṇa pēr yāṟru akavayin
pāyntu eḷuntu iṇpa perum cuḷi koḷittu
cuḷittu em panta mā karai porutu alaittu iṭittu
ūḷ ūḷ ōṅkiya naṅkaḷ*

iru viṇai mā maram vēṇ parittu eḷuntu
 uruva aruḷ nīr ōṭṭā aru varai
 cantin vāṇ ciṇrai kaṭṭi, maṭṭu aviḷ
 vēṇ malar kuḷavāy kōḷi nīrai akil
 mā pukai karai cēṇ vaṇṭu uṭai kuḷattin
 nī koḷa mēḷ mēḷ makiḷṭalin nōkki
 aruccaṇai vayaluḷ aṇṇu vittu iṭṭu
 toṇṭa uḷavar āra tanta
 aṇṭattu arum peral mēkaṇ vāḷka

He is that ancient ocean of great bliss
 that appeared as a great dark cloud,
 ascended the mountain of holy Perunturai
 as sacred lightning spread in all directions
 and the bright snakes—the bondage of the five senses—fell away,
 the punishing summer heat became concealed,
 long beautiful *tōṇṇi* (Malabar lily) shone resplendently,
kōṇṇam (cochineal) proliferated in numbers greater than our births,
 drums sounded, immersing [all] in great grace,
kāṇṭaḷ flowers appeared as if in *aṇṇali*,
 fine drops of limitless sweet grace formed,
 a red lustrous flood filled every direction,
 touching the mountains and rising to exceed the lakes,
 the ghost chariot of the six sects
 causes thirst for the group of long-eyed deer,
 who grow weary imbibing, and faint,
 exhausted by the great unrelenting heat,

Then from the sky the great river
 leapt, ascended, and great eddies of sweetness washed over,
 whirled, crashed on the great shore of my ties, shook them, and roared;
 it plucked from the root the great trees of our twofold *karma*—
 us, whose *karma* only increases—
 piercing, the gracious water ran to that great mountain
 where a large dam stood at the pass and consolidated it,
 into a pool filled with honey-fragranced flowers;
 on those banks the smoke of tall eagle wood rose, and beetles gathered,
 seeing the waters rise, those servant farmers sowed love in the fields,
 performing *aruccaṇai*;
 Long live the cloud-like one who is difficult to gain in this universe.

Just before this selected excerpt, the voice of the speaker breaks through a long string praise (in list form, “Śiva does x”) and recounts Śiva’s act of graciously enslaving them. Immediately after the quoted excerpt, the speaker returns to strings of praise via a list of various epithets, each focusing on a particular quality. The selection above thus stands out as stylistically different from the surrounding text and the song as a whole. I argue that embedded in this excerpt is an

obligatory nod to the five *tiṇai* landscapes. In a Tamil Śaiva context, any account of the universe, as this song endeavors to provide, is not complete without them.

The excerpt in question opens with imagery of Śiva's vast roaring ocean of bliss and conjures impressions of the seashore (*neytal*) tract in its fiercest form. Tirupperunturai is then called a *varai*, hill, introducing the mountainous *kuriñci* landscape. Following, mention of Malabar lily (*tonṇri*), signifies the forest (*mullai*) tract, along with the cochineal (*kōpam*). The image of folded hands like *kantal* blossoms, goes back to *kuriñci*, immediately before explicit reference to another mountain is made. The last lines of the first half of this excerpt see long-eyed deer (antelope) pursuing a mirage, thirsty from the overwhelming heat. This image conjures the arid desert *palai* tract. In the second half of this excerpt, the pastoral tract (*marutam*) is referenced by the dam that leads water to agricultural pools. These conspicuous mentions of a number of classic *tiṇai* markers in close proximity to one another approximates the phenomena seen in verse one of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, or from the example from Kampan. When we turn to look at the theological content of this verse, a new dimension is added. The poet did not stop at placing Śiva in each of these terrains or describing his pervasive presence therein. Rather, there is an overlay throughout this excerpt of the speaker's experience of being mired in karma and graced by Śiva. The contours of the human predicament and Śiva's answer to them are deftly interwoven with the images of the five landscapes. The elements of nature bring added emotional depth to each developmental passage they are attached to. Ultimately, we see that every landscape and emotional possibility therein is brought into the conceptual context of Śiva *bhakti* and supports the text's larger focus on his compassionate intervention in the life of a suffering devotee.

In *Tiruvācakam*, this type of comprehensive address of all five landscapes is not commonplace, but there are many instances in which individual landscapes or landscape elements are invoked in a single verse or song to achieve certain ends. *Tiruvācakam*, *Pirārttaṇaipattu* provides an instructive example of how the emotions of the *tiṇai* system are invoked through the use of selective images, and then reoriented toward illuminating the nature of Śiva and his workings in the world. This song, entitled “the decad of praise,” opens with the speaker dismayed over their sorry state, despite having mingled with Śiva’s prized devotees. The remaining verses detail the speaker’s desire to be graced by Śiva as well as his direct calls for attention. Woven through many of these verses are references to the sea which I argue are cumulatively suggestive of the *neytal* tract, whose main emotional situation is furtive pining for the beloved in times of separation. The following is an example of a *neytal* song from

Kuruntokai (290):

kāmaṇ tāṇ kumati yeṇ pōr tāmaka
taṇṇiyalar kollō aṇai matu kaiyar kol
yām eṇ kāṭalar kāṇē māyiṇ
ceṇṇituṇi perukiya neṇcamoṭu peruṇṇir
kal poru ciṇṇururai pōla
mella mella illā kutumē

Those who tell me to bear my love: don’t they know about love, or are they that strong?
 Since I can’t see my lover, my heart swells with hidden sorry and like a flood in spate
 Turning to a streak of foam as it dashes against stones,
 Slowly, slowly, I turn to nothing.¹⁴²

Selby calls the *neytal* landscape fundamentally destabilizing; like standing on shifting sands wet with surf.¹⁴³ In many ways, *neytal* is one of the most pathos-evoking *tiṇai*. While *mullai*

¹⁴² Martha Ann Selby, “Dialogues of Space, Desire, and Gender,” in *Tamil Geographies: Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 30.

¹⁴³ Marth Ann Selby, *Tamil Love Poetry: The Five Hundred Short Poems of the Aiṅkuruṇūru* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 53.

indicates patient waiting, *neytal* is waiting in pitched distress. As this *Kuruntokai* example illustrates, *neytal* starkly shows the deleterious effects of love in separation.

In verse two of *Tiruvācakam Pirārttanaippattu*, the speaker mentions Śiva’s ocean of compassion: let the ocean of your compassion swell (*uṇ karuṇaikkaṭal poṇka uṭaiyāy*). In three, the other servitors are likened to that sea of Śiva’s nectarian grace: “having entered the group of all of those servants who are the bounding sea of the nectar that is your grace, Oh lord behold, I have grown weary sustaining this body which is full of decaying darkness” (*aruḷ ār amuta perum kaṭalvāy aṭiyār ellām pukku aḷunta iruḷ ār ākkai itu poruttē eyttēṇ kaṇṭāy emmāṇē*). In verse six, description of Śiva’s female half in his form of Ardhanārīśvara is achieved using terms which are particularly evocative of the *neytal* tract:

*mēvum uṇ taṇ aṭiyāruḷ
virumpi yāṇum meymmaiye
kāvi cērum kayal kaṇṇāl
paṅkā uṇ taṇ karuṇaiyiṇāl
pāviyērkum uṇṭāmō
param āṇanta paḷam kaṭal cērntu
āvi, yākkai yān eṇatu eṇru
yātum inri aṇutalē*

O One who shares a half with the woman of carp eyes like blue lotuses, I desire to be amongst your true servants (who are joined with you). By your grace will it be so, regardless of my sins? Having joined the great ocean of your supreme bliss, will everything of breath, body, and “I,” (ego) be destroyed?

In this verse, the ocean of Śiva’s bliss is again invoked. Additionally, his lovely female half is described using two *neytal* mainstays: blue nelumbo (*kāvi*), and carp (*kayal*). There are seemingly endless ways that the beauty of Śiva’s female half is described throughout

Tiruvācakam but the confluence of these two particularly oceanic terms seems a conspicuous choice given the material that surrounds it. This description reinforces the seashore imagery that has to this point been dotted throughout the entire song. Verse seven follows with additional oceanic imagery: “you are the great sea of happiness, which is without change, indestructible, without division, unforgettable, unknowable, without limit, and ceaseless” (*mey aṇpu pērā oḷiyā*

pirivu illā maravā niṇaiyā aḷavu ilā māḷā iṇpa mā kaṭale). In eight, again Śiva’s bliss is referred to as being like the sea (*kaṭalē aṇaiya āṇaṇtam*). A single reference to the ocean in any one of these songs would not be enough to conjure the *neytal tiṇai* as *tiṇai* is a complex system of meaning making, not reducible to a single item. Rather, the context in which these terms appear and the way that they are brought into relationship with one another dictates their significance. In this song, I argue that there are enough of these references and specific terms to productively conjure *neytal*. Furthermore, as this song is about the speaker’s continued frustration of being an “outsider” and feeling devoid of Śiva’s grace despite their proximity to other true devotees, *neytal* seems a particularly productive *tiṇai* to invoke. The roaring ocean of Śiva’s grace being so overwhelming and undeniable stands in contrast to the speaker’s perception of his own ungraced state. While the reader knows that the speaker has indeed been graced, they themselves are unaware of it. In *neytal* songs, the heroine is often tormented by the sound of crashing waves against the shore; kept up by both the noise and her loneliness. Here Śiva’s resounding ocean of bliss is but another form of torture for a devotee who cannot imagine themselves ever being worthy. If my first example showed *Tiruvācakam*’s nod to the *tiṇai* system as a whole, this one demonstrates how *tiṇai* emotional registers from single landscapes are used evocatively in the service of a new devotional ethos.

Tirukkōvaiyār also invokes *tiṇai* by using familiar images to heighten the emotional impact of its verses. For example, verse 99 reads as follows:

*āntiyiṇ vāy elil ampalattu emparaṇ, ampon verpil
pantiyiṇ vāy palaviṇ cuḷai paintōṇoṭum kaṭuvaṇ
pantiyiṇ vāy koṭuttu ompum cilampa maṇam kaṇiya
muntī invāymoḷi nīyē moḷi ceṇru am moy kuḷaṇkē*

The male monkey protects and generously feeds [his mate] with the fresh dripping honeyed seed of the jackfruit in the group of monkeys on Śiva’s mountain. Our father of the beautiful *ampalam* with the beauty of the sunset, oh mountain hero, go and tell the one with curly locks these sweet words that will soften her heart.

This verse is a straightforward adoption of a familiar *kuriñci* love scenario. The poet uses stock mountain imagery to hint at the lovers' impending union. At this point in the *kōvai*, the hero is looking for ways to invite the heroine to a secret trysting spot. Rejections are made on various bases: impropriety, surveillance, timing, etc. Finally, the friend tells the hero he should approach the heroine himself and try to approximate the sweetness observed between monkeys. Union between the hero and heroine has already occurred at this point in the narrative. This verse and its surrounding verses detail a playful later tryst, where less is at stake than in their fateful first meeting. There are numerous indications that the *kuriñci* landscape is invoked. The first is that Śiva's mountain in line one is referred to by the term *verpu*, and not identified by the use of a proper noun like Kailāsa (as it is frequently elsewhere). The monkey's own drama unfolds on the slopes of Śiva's mountain just as the hero and heroine's secret trysts. The hero, for whom there are many titles throughout the work, is called with the vocative *cilampā*, from *cilampan* which means the chief of the mountain tract, a technical term which refers specifically to *kuriñci* heroes. Monkeys (*kaṭuvan*) who make their homes on the forested slopes of mountain ranges too belong to the *kuriñci* tract, as do jackfruits (*palavu*).¹⁴⁴ Taken separately, any one of these terms, *verpu*, *cilampan*, *kaṭuvan*, and *palavu*, might not be enough to invoke the trysting ethos of the

¹⁴⁴ Jackfruits are a favorite subject of *kuriñci* landscapes and are prized in early Tamil poetry alongside mangos. Take for example the following poem of Kapilār from *Kuruntokai* translated by AK Ramanujan: "Once: if an owl hooted on the hill/ if a male ape leaped and loped/ out there on the jackfruit bough in our yard/ my poor heart would melt for fear. But now/ in the difficult dark of night/ nothing can stay its wandering/ on the long sloping mountain-ways/ of his coming." *The Interior Landscape: Classical Tamil Love Poems* (New York: NYRB, 1967), 114. In this example, the mention of the hill, the male monkey, the jackfruit (though in the yard), the night, and the sloping mountain path all evoke *kuriñci*. The implication is that, as a girl, these elements of the natural landscape would have frightened her, but in the new context of her love for the hero, these things are all signals of his potential return. Since she speaks in the context of his absence, the *kuriñci* elements heighten the emotional impact—they all expect and imply union, but that union has yet to occur as she speaks of his pending arrival.

kuriñci. However, as in the previous example, when taken together they are clearly an invocation of this environment and its concomitant emotional valences. Though *kuriñci* evokes the joy of union, when referenced in its absence, it makes the desire for it more vivid or pressing.

Tirukkōvaiyār Uṇmai provides the following short gloss for this verse: “you will gain that happiness due to your own knowledge” (*uṇ arivāl inpu aruvai nī enratu*). Thus, the Śaiva Siddhānta allegorical reading holds that the jackfruit represents happiness that is already within the soul’s possession. The soul (hero), being timid in the presence of the lord (heroine), should find the courage to gain happiness through approach by its own means. This is one way to interpret how that *tiṇai* functions in this verse. But we can also see that Śiva, though removed from immediate narrative action, is still present in a significant way. The entire *kuriñci* environment *belongs* to him as the one who presides over the mountain. Not only is *kuriñci* his domain, but all of the emotional scenarios that occur within it happen in his context. Thus this example illustrates Cutler’s argument about the “Śaivatizing” of *akam* poetic elements.¹⁴⁵

If the preceding example displays the effect of *tiṇai* from a single image in a single verse, the following discussion considers the impact of the invocation of *tiṇai* over longer verse runs. At just about the halfway mark of the text, the hero and heroine elope and set out on a journey away from their native towns. This is a favorite scene of Caṅkam poetry and predominantly takes place in the harsh and unforgiving *pālai*, desert tract. According to convention, any given landscape can become *pālai* if the situation between lovers therein is dire enough. Even cool ponds of the *marutam* region can become scorched if a big enough quarrel takes place. Though any landscape can become *pālai*, *pālai* is also its own discrete tract with corresponding flora and fauna that belong exclusively to it. From verses 192 to 249, *pālai tiṇai* is established, both

¹⁴⁵ Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms,” 50-51.

through the inclusion of *pālai* landscape markers and through the coverage of the couple's trials and tribulations during elopement. This 57-verse spread is the longest run of a single *tiṇai* in the entire work, and coming at a central moment, has significant impact on the emotional import of the piece as a whole. To begin looking at this section's evocation of *pālai*, I take the following verse 202:

*piṇaiyum kalaiyum vanpēyttēriṇai peruṇṇir nacaiyāl
aṇaiyum murumpu nirampiya attamum aiya meyyē
iṇaiyum aḷavum illā iraiyōṇ urai tillai taṇpūm
paṇaiyum taṭamum aṇṇē niṇṇoṭu ēkiṇ empaintoṭikkē*

Oh lord, the rough way full of hard ground in the harsh wilderness, where the doe and buck approach out of great thirst, will be as suitable as the cool watery agricultural fields of Tillai, where the Lord without comparison dwells, if my one of the golden bangles goes with you today.

At this point in the narrative, the couple have not yet eloped, but the desert imagery (complete with thirsting deer also present in the *Tiruvācakam* example above) gestures toward the increasingly unavoidable act's place on the narrative horizon. Just as any landscape can become a desert in the right conditions, a desert too can be made to be like Śiva's cool fertile agricultural fields if the lovers traverse it together. Here again, we see that Śiva is largely removed from the verse, his presence intimated only through the mention of the lush fields around Tillai. As is the case throughout the majority of the text, there is little forward momentum of narrative action. In this extended section characters spend most of their time speaking about the states of the hero and heroine and the conditions for elopement. This extended meditation on the hardships of elopement heightens the reader's empathy for the couple. Each passing verse further emphasizes the perils which await the young, naïve pair as they plan to leave everything of their known worlds behind them. The elopement does not begin until verse 212 when the rest of the town slumbers: the old fortress continued slumbering (*tuyilum im mūtu eyilē*). Though others rejoice at seeing the young lovers together on their journey as in 219, concerned voices break through

frequently to remind the reader of the true treachery of the path they have chosen. In 228 her old nursemaid bemoans the fate of the heroine:

*tāmē tamakku oppu marṛu illavar tillai taṇ aṇicca
pūmēl mitikkiṇ pataittu aṭi poṇkum naṅkāy eriyum
tī mēl ayil pōl cērī paral kāṇil cilampu aṭi pāy
āmē naṭakka aruvinaiyēṇ pērṛa ammaṇaikkē*

O Beautiful Lady, even if you tread on a cool *aṇicca* flower from Tillai which belongs to he who has no comparison, your feet will bubble up in agony!
It is my hard *karma* that this little girl who was given to me is now walking with ankleted feet in a forest of rocks that are like lances set ablaze.

The image of a cool *aṇicca* blossom from the fertile agricultural tract around Tillai is contrasted with the blazing stones of the desert the heroine now traverses. This verse, spoken by the nurse out of concern for her former charge, is extremely pathos evoking and sets off a chain of verses that run until verse 233 wherein others' concerns over the lovers' plight escalate. This section is then followed by another string of verses wherein the family pursues the lovers in an attempt to bring them home and save them from the desert. This section builds anticipation as each relative asks passersby for some intimation, any clue, as to the whereabouts of the lovers. Interspersed in their frantic search are further verses wherein family members again voice their grief at the present predicament. Similarly, images of the dusty desert, its scalding sands, twisted scrub pine, and unrelenting sun, are peppered throughout to reinforce the severity of the lovers' plight. A short 33 verses follow this *pālai* section which contain appeals by various family members for the hero and heroine to wed properly before in 266, the hero is off to pursue his own quests, never to be reunited formally with the heroine again.

For the purposes of speaking on place, reflecting on this extended journey through the *pālai* landscape at a critical point in the narrative before prolonged separation occurs can tell us something of the overall affect of the text. As is discussed in chapter one, *Tirukkōvaiyār* cannot be taken as a triumphant love story but must be understood in light of these long explorations of

love's pitfalls. In this extended section, landscape is used to highlight and reinforce the emotional contours of separation. Coming at the halfway point of the work, it also marks a shift that sets the defining mood for most of the rest of the text. This invocation of *pālai* is not about centering the desert tract as land that belongs to Śiva (though by default it is within his domain), nor are the elements of the landscape linked with him. Śiva's town of Tillai punctuates the landscape as a contrasting element (to be discussed further below), but this use of place differs from the example of the monkeys and jackfruits discussed above in which Śiva's mountain is the backdrop of narrative action.

The above discussion demonstrates how both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* pay homage to the *tiṇai* system and engage extant rhetorical techniques that constellate around landscape elements. In both cases, classical tropes and techniques are refigured and repurposed in a new *bhakti* context wherein place is imbued with new meaning. Simultaneously, extant languages of locale offer new depth to devotional sentiments.

Proper Nouns

Having discussed some of the ways that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* qualify place by invoking particularized Caṅkam landscapes and their concomitant emotional valences, I now turn to each text's treatment of named place. This section specifically addresses the use of proper nouns for towns, cities, and landmarks. Both texts draw from a reservoir of mythic and local locations that belong to a broader Śaiva literary universe including the puranas; by volume, most of these references are taken directly from *Tēvāram*. *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* insert familiar, canonized place names into new discursive contexts. *Tiruvācakam* introduces named place into a variety of types of songs not yet seen in *Tēvāram*. Similarly, *Tirukkōvaiyār* weaves them into the *kōvai*, setting new precedents for the invocation of place in *ciṟṟilakkiyam*. I first

explore the ways that *Tiruvācakam* expands the parameters for the use of named place, particularly through lists, as it builds off of a *Tēvāram* model. I then give an overview of place names in *Tirukkōvaiyār* and zero in on how Tillai functions in several different capacities as a favored place name throughout.

Proper Nouns in Tiruvācakam

Given that *Tiruvācakam* is heavily indebted to *Tēvāram*, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the use of named place therein. In the vast majority of *Tēvāram* hymns, place names are included in each and every verse. Named locales are described in their natural splendor, surrounded by lush paddy fields, or brimming with blossoming flowers, and they are squarely identified as belonging to Śiva; places where he lives, wanders through, has made an appearance, and/or rules. Take for example Appar’s hymn of Tiruvorriyūr (6:45) wherein Orriyūr (what likely refers to the modern city of Tiruvorriyūr just North of Cennai) is mentioned in each verse. In the first verse, Śiva is praised as the one who belongs to Śivalōka and described as the brilliantly shining one of Orriyūr:

*vaṇṭu ṍṇku ceṅkamalam kaḷunīr malkum mata mattam cēr caṭaimēl matiyam cūṭi
tiṇ tōḷkaḷ āyiramum vīci niṇru ticai cēra naṭam āṭi civalōkaṇār
orriyūr mēya oḷi vaṇṇanār ulakku ṍr uṇuti vēṇṭi naṅcu uṇṭār kaṇṭēṇ
nāṇ kaṇavakattil kaṇṭēṇku eṇ taṇ kaṭum piṇiyum cuṭum toḷilum kai viṭṭavē*

Wearing red lotuses surrounded by buzzing bees, water lilies, and other blossoms above matted locks crowned with a crescent moon, swinging a thousand strong shoulders, and dancing to reach the directions is the god of Civalōka—he who is the true color of Orriyūr. In my dream, I saw him. With regard to this seeing, my burning disease and desire for him disappeared.

In this opening verse, Śiva is located in his cosmic abode, Civalōka, but also in an intensely local one, Orriyūr. The song continues its emphasis on Orriyūr, and in verse two, Śiva abides there, in three, he is Orriyūr’s king, in four he himself says Orriyūr is his dwelling place, in five he says that Orriyūr is the place where devotees reside, in six, he enters Orriyūr, in seven he reiterates that Orriyūr is his town, in eight he is described as a wanderer in Orriyūr, in nine, he is again the

king of Orriyūr, and finally in ten he reiterates that Orriyūr is his place. This gives but a small glimpse of just how thoroughly place punctuates *Tēvāram* songs and how its relationship to Śiva is reemphasized and reinforced through repetition—Śiva’s connection to place becomes an expected refrain in this body of *bhakti* literature, indeed it can be seen as a hallmark of the genre. One of the ways of organizing *Tēvāram* hymns is by the places that they refer to.

When we turn to *Tiruvācakam*, it does contain songs which very closely approximate those of the *Tēvāram* with regard to named place. If we look at a song like *Tirupponñūcal*, we can see something that looks quite similar to how Appar treats Orriyūr in his hymn discussed above. Take for example its first verse:

*cīr ār pavaḷam kāl muttam kayīru āka
ēr ārum poṇ palakai ēri iṇitu amarntu
nārāyaṇaṇ aṟīyā nāl malar tāḷ nāy aṟiyēṛku
ūr āka tantaruḷum uttarakōcamaṅkai
ārā amutiṇ aruḷ tāḷ iṇai pāṭi
pōr ār vēḷ kaṇ maṭavīr poṇ ūcal āṭāmō*

Alight the swing whose stands are made of excellent coral, ropes are strings of pearls, and seat is beautiful gold. Happily rest there, singing of the pair of feet which are unknowable to Nārāyaṇa, full of grace, and are nectar without end that belong to Uttarakōcamaṅkai which was granted to me, the dog slave, as my town. Young women whose eyes are like spears of war, let us swing on the golden swing!

Uttarakōcamaṅkai (southwest of Rāmaṇāthapuram) is mentioned in every verse of this song and Śiva’s relationship to it modified slightly each time. In verse one, Uttarakōcamaṅkai is framed as a gift from Śiva to his lowly devotee; a place where both Śiva and the speaker can dwell, and in which idyllic and playful swinging can take place. In verse two, Śiva is described as the town’s king (*uttarakōcamaṅkai kōṇ*). In five, he is called the dancer of Uttarakōcamaṅkai whose wears on his head a cool sliver of the moon (*uttarakōcamaṅkai kōṇ ār piṛai ceṇṇi kūṭṭaṇ*). In verse 7, he is said to abide there forever: the one of the great Vedas resides enduringly in Uttarakōcamaṅkai whose greatness is inconceivable (*uṇṇaṛku ariya tiru uttarakōcamaṅkai maṇṇi polintu irunta māmaṛaiyōṇ*). Throughout the song, Śiva’s relationship to

Uttarakōcamaṅkai changes, but the place itself remains a constant in each verse. Śiva is identified for his acts and abiding status there in much the same way as in Appar's song to Orriyur.

Tiruvācakam Tirukkalukkuṇṇrappatikam provides another example of a song which approximates the style of *Tēvāram* hymns. Its first verse reads as follows:

*piṇakku ilāta peruntuṛai perumāṇ uṇ nāmaṅkaḷ pēcuvārkkku
iṇakku ilātatu ōr iṇṇamē varum tunṇamē tuṭaittu em piṛāṇ
uṇaikkku ilātatu ōr vittu mēl viḷaiyāmal eṇ viṇai otta piṇ
kaṇakku ilā tirukkōlam nī vantu kāttiṇāy kaḷukkuṇṇilē*

Oh lord of Peruntuṛai which is without conflict, to those who speak your various names, unparalleled happiness comes and their sorrows destroyed. Oh our lord!
Having sown something without compare, after my *karma* stopped growing further,
you came in great beauty without quantification, and showed me your form in Kaḷukkuṇṇam.

This song participates in a similar type of localization but mentions two places: Peruntuṛai and Tirukkalukkuṇṇam. Peruntuṛai is used as an extension of Śiva's epithets throughout, as in this verse where he is the lord of Peruntuṛai (*peruntuṛai perumāṇ*). In contrast, Tirukkalukkuṇṇam is the locus of narrative action for the speaker. It is the context in which they witness Śiva's presence in this world when Śiva chooses to reveal himself. This dual invocation of place, one being used as a codified epithet, and the other as a locus of narrative action, demonstrates one of the ways that *Tiruvācakam* takes up *Tēvāram* poetic strategies and builds upon them in new ways.

While songs which closely approximate the formal expectations of the *Tēvāram* are present in *Tiruvācakam* (pattus referencing a single location in each verse), they are outliers. Additionally, *Tiruvācakam* songs which repeat the use of singular places often focus on Peruntuṛai alone (including *Uyiruṇṇippattu*, *Aruṭpattu*, *Vālāppattu*, *Koyil Tiruppatikam*, and *Cettiḷāppattu*). Many songs do include proper nouns for place but change the parameters for their

use. *Tiruvācakam*’s *Kīrtittiruvakaval* offers a long list of Śiva’s feats as accomplished in different locations in the following excerpt of lines 54-70:

tiru āṛ peruntuṛai celvaṇ āki
karu āṛ ṭiyil karanta kaḷḷamum
pūvalam ataṇil polintu iṇitu aruḷi
pāvam nācam ākkiya paricum
taṇṇīṛ pantar cāyam pēra vaiṭṭu
nal nīṛ cēvakaṇ ākiya naṇmaiṇum
viruntinaṇ āki veṇkāṭu ataṇil
kuruntin kīl aṇru irunta koḷkaiyum
pattamaṇkaiyil pāṇkāy iruntu ṇkku
aṭṭa mā citti aruḷiya atuvum
vēṭvaṇ āki vēṇṭu uru koṇṭu
kāṭu atu taṇṇil karanta kaḷḷamum
meykkāṭṭiṭṭu vēṇṭu urukkoṇṭu
takkāṇ oruvaṇ ākiya taṇmaiṇum
ōriyūril ukantu iṇitu aruḷi
pār irum pālakaṇ ākiya paricum
pāṇṭūr taṇṇil iṇṭa iruntum
tēvūr teṇpāl tikaḷṭaru tī ...

In auspicious Peruntuṛai he took on a guise of the shining one,
hidden in the great flame.
In Pūvalam he flourished and graciously granted the sweetness of destroying my sins and flaws.
He victoriously placed a well there and did [us] the goodness of providing sweet water as a servant.
He became a feasting guest at Veṇkāṭu and there,
under the *karanta*, on that day, took residence.
There in Pattamaṇkai he stayed,
and graced his eight great powers;
in the forest he took on a guise,
revealing the truth he took the needed form,
as the singular one.
In Ōriyūr he was overjoyed and graced his sweetness as a wonderful young boy.
At Pāṇṭūr he ruled. In Tēvūr his form was the glittering fire....

This is but a short passage in a longer song wherein place is a poetic device around which praise is organized. In this sample, a number of proper nouns are used for place: Peruntuṛai, Pūvalam, Pattamaṇkai, Ōriyūr, Pāṇṭūr, and Tēvūr. This goes against the conventional use of proper nouns for place in the *Tēvāram* wherein the usual practice is to cite one place per verse/song. In this example, the frequency and diversity increase, but descriptive details decrease. Each place is named in but one line and given no further qualification other than Śiva’s actions in said place.

Pōṛṛittiruvakaval similarly mentions multiple places in brief list form without significant additional descriptive detail in the following excerpt from lines 153-158:

pāytturai mēviya paraṇē pōṛṛi
cirāppaḷḷi mēviya civaṇē pōṛṛi
maṛru ōr paṛru iṅku ariyēṇ pōṛṛi
kurrāḷattu em kūttā pōṛṛi
kōkaḷi mēviya kōvē pōṛṛi
īṅkōy malai em entāy pōṛṛi

Praise the lord who resides in Pāytturai!
Praise Śiva of Cirāppaḷḷi!
I know of no other here, praise!
Praise the king of Kōkaḷi!
Praise our father of Īṅkōy mountain!

In the previous example, though place did was not garnered with significant detail and acted instead as a backdrop for Śiva’s actions, in this example, it receives even less attention. In longer songs of praise like *Kīrtti* and *Pōṛṛittiruvākaval*, place is acknowledged in these “list sections” that compile Śiva’s known connected places from earlier poetry; it does not approximate the style or form in which these places are invoked in the earlier literature but instead makes a kind of compendium. The poet acknowledges the many well-established connections that Śiva has with the named locations of the Tamil countryside before moving beyond them to focus on praising him in other ways.

In many *Tiruvācakam* songs, clusters of proper nouns at times read as an homage. Lists of Tamil towns or temples reference a constellation of places that, by the ninth century, was already well known. Thus, how can we understand their function in this text, apart from being a nod to literary predecessors? 17th-century philologist Keichū investigated the term *utamakura*, “pillows for poems,” which refers to the use of place names in traditional Japanese poetry.

Edward Kamens writes of Keichū’s theorization,

“...both the pillow and the place-name are facilitating agents, loci of contact through which rich potentialities may be realized, while also reminding the reader of what the head does on a pillow (‘rest,’ ‘nestle’) and what the poet does with place-names in a poem (‘refer,’ ‘rely’)...For the poets whose work of poem-making was the subject of Keichū’s study, the voices of their predecessor poets, and the people and

things and, especially, the places that were named or described in poems were almost always those that had previously been inscribed in other poems. And to a great extent, the work of the poet in this tradition, was the ingenious rearrangement of materials into new poems that transparently displayed their points of contact with, as well as departures from, earlier poems.”¹⁴⁶

Place names act as “pillows” which give a well-versed reader a chance to “rest” in their established webs of meaning. They also give the poet an opportunity to make connections to the past while reimagining the present, offering the creativity, Kamens suggests, that one can access in a dream. Place names as poetic convention can also further political agendas, creating new geographic imaginaries tied to particular communities or structures of power.¹⁴⁷ This has been argued for *Tēvāram*, and it’s possible that Māṇikkavācakar’s works, in their frequent mention of Tillai, are centering the city in a new way, but that is outside the scope of this discussion. Rather, more germane to my argument is how place names function rhetorically and affectively for a reader and how they contribute to a text’s theological vision. Ultimately, I suggest that part of the reason Māṇikkavācakar invokes these established places (while adding a few) is to establish a firm foundation through reference to *Tēvāram* that then allows for the possibility to free place.

Proper Nouns in Tirukkōvaiyār

To further address the function of place name as both deeply referential and creatively capacious, I turn to *Tirukkōvaiyār* which, like *Tiruvācakam*, includes several place names from

¹⁴⁶ Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Japanese Poetry* (Yale University Press, 1997) 2.

¹⁴⁷ Dean Anthony Brink writes of place names in Japanese poetry, “The poetic resonance in a place name (or any word in poetry) usually emerged out of an accumulation of intertexts, use in phrases in public discourse such as remain recorded in newspaper articles, and in poems, which are often designed to reflect precise relations of chosen words and their orchestrated associations and emotional hues. Many of the poems of the early period of Japanese rule were not-so-subtly propagandistic in the sense of attempting both to apply the Japanese poetic matrix to Taiwan and to situated places in Taiwan within the existing realm of poetic place names so as to insinuate an assumed overdetermined imperial space.” *Japanese Poetry and its Publics: From Colonial Taiwan to Fukushima* (New York: Routledge, 2018) 56.

the Tamil region. While *Tirukkōvaiyār* conforms to *akam* poetry's hallmark anonymity for the poem's main protagonists who remain unnamed throughout, Śiva, the poem's patron, is frequently named in association with his sacred places. Further, Śaiva sites become significant loci of narrative action. Śiva's famed temple city of Tillai, just North of where the Kāveri meets the sea, is invoked in well over *half* of the song's 400 verses. Twenty additional towns or regions are mentioned explicitly by name, many of them with *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam* overlap. *Tirukkōvaiyār* shares Paḷaṇam, Kūṭal, Iṭaimarutūr, Ēkampam, Veṅkāṭu, Cīrkāḷi, and Tillai with both *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam*, and Kurṛālam, Peruntuṛai, Kaḷukkuṇṇam, Īnkōy, Tirupparaīyūr, Kaṭampai, Vañciyam, and Pūvaṇam with only *Tiruvācakam*. It introduces Paraṅkuṇṇam, Koṭunkuṇṇam, Ampar, Mūval, Civaṇakar, and Cuḷiyal. While *Tiruvācakam* displays a great diversity in the frequency of place name use—some songs contain a veritable torrent of names while others only a few mentions—*Tirukkōvaiyār* uses them more evenly and constantly throughout. Over the entire text, the longest verse run that does not feature a proper noun place name is from 324—329, a mere six verses. Even within this short stretch, the *ampalam* of the Tillai temple, essentially synonymous with Tillai itself, is mentioned five times.

The intense focus on place in *Tirukkōvaiyār* aligns with *akam* poetry's reliance on the natural environment to generate meaning. Cutler suggests that invocation of place in *Tirukkōvaiyār* not only gives a “Śaiva cast” to *akam* poetics, bringing them into the Śaiva domain, but that qualification of place is also a Śaiva approximation of *akam* poetic elements like *mutarporuḷ* (“first elements”).¹⁴⁸ *Mutarporuḷ*, time and space, are the foundational elements

¹⁴⁸ Cutler notes, “In some instances, the Śaiva elements in *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s verses are melded with or function similarly to the ‘primary elements’ (*mutarporuḷ*) or to the ‘germinal elements’ (*karupporuḷ*) in classical *akam* poems...For instance, in verse 31 Śiva presides over the *akam* mountain landscape; in verse 222 the Śaiva sacred site of Puliyūr becomes the town that the talaivan and talaivi choose as their destination when they elope together; and in verse 20, the

of *akam* poetry. Within them, the flora and fauna (including humans), or *karupporuḷ*, are configured to generate the emotional resonances of a poem, called *uripporuḷ*. While *akam* poetry does not make frequent use of proper nouns for people or towns, it *does* have a specialized vocabulary for elements of the natural world; the mention of a specific species of tree, for example, can contribute to the creation of a particular emotion. It seems likely that Śiva’s place names are included in at least a structurally similar fashion, as another facet of *tiṇai* and part of a Śaiva refiguring of *akam* poetic forms. A useful example of this comes in verse eight:

*corpāl amutu ivaḷ yāṇcuvai eṇṇat tuṇintu iṇṇaṇē
 naṇpāl viṇaitteyyam tantinru; nāṇ ivaḷ ām pakutip
 porpu ār aritār puliyūrp puṇitaṇ potiyil verpil
 kal pāviya varaivāyk kaṭi tōṭṭa kaḷaivuakattē*

This is the word: She is nectar and I, the taste—in this way it is clear!
 This now is the good fate enacted by the lord of fate. I am a part of her;
 Who knows this magnificence? Our union, that clandestine union, was on the stony hill in the Potiyil mountains which belong to the pure one of Puliyūr.

This verse is spoken in the voice of the hero who states that secret trysts with his lover occur in the Potiyil mountains (*potiyil verpil*). In *akam* poetry, mountainous landscapes of the *kuriñci* tract make for excellent trysting spots, but in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the mountain range is now one sacred to Śiva. When maidens are playfully bathing, it’s not in any mountain stream, but in one that courses down the slopes of Śiva’s Kailāsa. Millet fields are watched over by young women in the shadows of its towering peak. Qualifications like this are significant beyond their ability to inscribe geographic space (in fact the Potiyil range is mythic) or as a mere function of localizing Śaivism in a Tamil context. These given examples are also about making Śaiva what particulars are possible in an otherwise anonymous *akam* landscape.

reference to Kūṭal (Maturai) is especially apt because it is both the traditional center of classical Tamil literary culture and a site sacred to Tamil Śaivites.” “Four Spatial Realms,” 50.

There is another important function of named place in *Tirukkōvaiyār* that helps shed light on its theological project. The city of Tillai functions as the central point in a simile wherein narrative action is linked to Śiva through comparison with his many places. This type of simile is found frequently in *akam* poetry and allows for disparate entities to be brought into intimate relationship with one another in a single verse; it is a “collapse of place” akin to the “collapse of time” noted in chapter one. Tillai and the description of the heroine remain in constant syntactic connection throughout the entirety of the text. There are various poetic tools used to establish the heroine’s connection to Tillai and thus to Śiva. Take for example the following excerpt from verse 14: “O One whose locks are filled with fragrant flowers, in the lush garden of *cīrrampalam* you are the ornament” (*cīrrampalam aṇi moypolilvāy pūvaril perṛa kuḷali*). This excerpt can be read in one of two ways: the flowers in her hair could be ornaments from the gardens of Tillai but the phrase can also read that the heroine herself is the ornament of the garden. In verse 60, she is described using an explicit term of comparison and said to be like Tillai itself: *tillai annāl*. In verse 80, the connection is made even more explicit; she is not *like* Tillai, or *like* one who belongs to Tillai, she *is* one who belongs to Tillai: she with dark curly hair of Tillai (*tillai kār vāy kuḷali*). In verse 81, she is described as the gold of Tillai: *puliyūr poṇ*. Other times this link is made with more elaborate imagery as in verse 109 where the hero describes her eyes as follows:

*īcarku yān vaitta aṇṇiṇ akaṇṇu, avaṇ vāṇkiya eṇ
pācattiṇ kār eṇṇu, avaṇ tillaiyiṇ oḷi pōṇṇu avaṇtōḷ
pacu attiruṇṇu eṇaveḷuttu āṇku avaṇ pūṇkaḷal yām
pēcu at tiruvārttaiyiṇ peru nīlam peruṇkaṇkaḷē*

Growing like the love I place on the lord, dark like my *pācam* that he eliminated, shining like the light of his Tillai, bright like the holy ash smeared on his shoulders, long like holy words we speak for his flowered feet are the large eyes (of the heroine).

Here, blurring between elements of the hero’s devotion for Śiva, elements of Śiva’s holy form (his ash-smeared shoulders), and the heroine’s eyes is extensive. Each member of this verse is

inextricably woven together.¹⁴⁹ Verse 193 utilizes a similar structure: her bright forehead is like Puliṃr, the lord of which wears a matted crown which shines with a great white crescent moon (*veṇmā mati niṇru oḷirum caṭaimutiyōṇ puliyūr aṇṇa oḷṇutalē*). Here, the image of her bright forehead resonates with the shining crescent moon in Śiva's matted locks. Though she is directly likened to Tillai, proximity between her and Śiva is generated by the use of these parallel images. In other instances, this proximity lessens. In verse 200, the heroine forms the connection to Śiva by way of her description which matches that of the natural elements of Tillai: the maiden of dark eyes whose red mouth rules over those *kōvai* which grow abundantly in Tillai (*vaṇtillai mallal kōvai vantu āṇṭa cevṇāy karuṇkaṇṇi*). In each of these cases, the connection between Śiva as the poem's patron and the present narrative actions of the hero and heroine is established through the careful placement and comparison to place. Named place is the locus in which these two worlds of the human and divine collide and intermingle. In this way, Tillai's specific mention serves as a crucial syntactic tool and narrative bridge. Tillai functions far beyond its significance as an important Śaiva pilgrimage site, and its rhetorical force speaks to one of the larger projects of both Māṇikkavācakar's texts, that is, the drawing nearer of Śiva and the blurring of boundaries between human and divine.

To conclude this survey of *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s use of proper nouns to designate place, I return to the above discussed *pālai* section that begins at the halfway point of the text. As noted, the *pālai* landscape isn't explicitly linked to Śiva as is the case with other tracts like *kuriñci*. Instead, throughout the *pālai* section of the text, Tillai is used in several evocative ways that have

¹⁴⁹ For more on some of the complex structural relationships between clauses in *Tirukkōvaiyār* see Lucetta Mowry, "The Structure of Love in Manikka-vacakar's Tiruvacakam," in *Structural Approaches to South India Studies* eds. Harry M. Buck and Glenn E. Yocum (Chambersburg: Wilson Books, 1974).

little to do with its geographic location. To begin, we can revisit verse 202 in which the lush ground of Tillai acts as a metaphor for the heroine's stability in the presence of the hero:

*piṇaiyum kalaiyum vaṇṇpēyttēriṇaiṇ peru nīr nacaivāḷ
aṇaiyum murampu nirampiya attamum aiya meyyē
iṇaiyum aḷavum illāiraiyōṇ urai tillait taṇṇūm
paṇaiyum taṭamum aṇṇē niṇṇōḷu ēkiṇ empaintoṭikkē*

O Lord, the rough way full of hard ground in the harsh wilderness, where the doe and buck approach out of great thirst, will be as suitable as the cool watery agricultural fields of Tillai, where the Lord without comparison dwells, if my one of the golden bangles goes with you today.

This verse uses a familiar Caṅkam trope wherein any landscape can be transformed into another depending on the behavior of the protagonists therein. Even the desert is bearable when one traverses it in the company of a lover. Here, the harsh desert terrain (*vaṇṇpēyttēriṇai*) mentioned in line one, is transformed to the cool and flooded agricultural fields of line four (*taṇṇūm paṇaiyum taṭamum*). The lush fields are not just any fields but those which skirt Śiva's Tillai. Tillai is thus conceptually tied to greener pastures and idealized landscapes and emotional situations are refigured as belonging to Śiva. As the lovers make their way through the desert, Tillai becomes not just a metaphor for an idealized place/emotional situation but the literal destination of their journey. In 214 the confidante addresses the lovers thus: go together to the distant great city of Tillai (*cēṇ tillai māṇakarvāy cenṇru cēr*). Here the city is qualified as being distant (*cēṇ*) indicating that the lovers have far more hardship to endure before they are able to end their journey. In 217, the hero goes on to provide a thick description of Tillai, here called Puliyūr:

*muṇṇōṇ aruḷ muṇṇum muṇṇā vinaiyiṇ muṇakar tuṇṇum
iṇṇākkaṭaṭaru ipṇōḷtē tadantu iṇṇu kāṇṭum cenṇru
poṇ āṇ aṇi maṇi māḷikait teṇṇpuliurp pukaḷvār
teṇṇā eṇa utaiyāṇ naṭam āṭum ciṇṇampalamē*

At this time, we will cross this desert, thick with mean persons whose previous *karma* was such that they did not think of approaching the grace of the ancient one, and now see the Southern one of great fame who belongs to Puliyūr, full of mansions ornamented with gold and gems, the possessor, the one of the small *ampalam* who dances his dance.

In this verse, the desert is further painted as a forlorn wasteland, only fit for those who have not received Śiva's grace. Conversely, Puliyūr is described as scintillating vision of a city replete with gold and bejeweled mansions. Puliyūr is not only an oasis in the desert but it is also the home of those within the Śaiva fold. In this example, the “insider/outsider” dichotomy that is emphasized in *Tiruvācakam* whose speaker perpetually stands outside of the group of ideal devotees is written across the landscape. In verse 219, Tillai is used in a simile as onlookers notice the infatuated couple noting: their aim is something other than going across this great desert, like the bees which consume the fragrance from out of the thick flower of gold-filled Tillai where the lord lives, they perform a radiant drama (*ipperuñcuram celvatu anru poṇ paṇaittaṇṇa irai urai tillaip polimalarmēl naṇpaṇait taṇ naravu uṇ aḷipōṇru oḷir nāṭakamē*). In verse 221 the onlookers continue to describe Tillai in its splendor:

*mintanku itaiyoṭu nī viyaṇ tillaic ciṟrampalavar
kuṇram kaṭantu ceṇṛāl niṇru tōṇrum kurū uk kamalam
tuṇram am tiṇṅkum tuṛai tuṛai vaḷḷai veḷḷai nakaiyār
ceṇṛu aṅku aṭai taṭamum puṭaicūḷ taru ceṇ nakarē*

If you cross the hill of the one of the *ampalam* of Tillai with the one with the lightning waist and stand, there will appear the lofty city, surrounded on all sides by moats filled with bright lotuses, ghat after ghat, and along the shores, women with white smiles who sing *vaḷḷai* songs.

Then in 222 upon seeing the city, the hero observes:

*minpōl koṭi neṭu vāṇakkāṭaluḷ tirai virippap
ponpōl puricai vaṭavarai kāṭṭap poli puliyūr
maṇpōl pīrai aṇi māḷikai cūlattavāy maṭavāy
niṇpōl naṭai aṇṇam tuṇṇi muntōṇrum naṇṇiḷ nakarē*

Young beauty, this is the great lofty city appearing before you,
Where lightning-like flags billow in the waves of that vast long ocean (sky)
and golden walls appear [as high as] Mēru in the North.
Where mansions are ornamented with the crescent moon and tridents like the king of thriving Puliyūr,
And swans with gaits like you are thick.

The Tillai described in both verses is idealized and its descriptions border on hyperbole. The city is teeming with life, dripping in gold, and full of mansions. The vision of Tillai's effulgence

serves as a productive contrast with the harsh and barren desert. Even though the heroine and hero are at times impervious to the treacherous nature of their surroundings, onlookers, family members, and the reader know their true dangers. Tillai is both Śiva's sacred city *and* the site at which the lovers might find their lasting happiness once traversing the desert/trial of elopement.

Finally, in verse 239 there is a return to the oft used convention which links the heroine to Tillai by way of a simile: she is like Tillai (*Tillai aṇṇāl*). These are but some of the invocations of Tillai found in a single section of the text. As has been demonstrated, Tillai is invoked in a variety of ways both literal and figurative.

There is more work to be done to illuminate how a Śaiva refiguring of the *tiṇai* system transforms the generation of affect and opens up new possibilities for theological content. In the examples above we can see how both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* qualify place by invoking, albeit with significant alterations, the *tiṇai* system they inherited from earlier poetry. In *Tiruvācakam*, already written in an established devotional mode, it is used to enhance the emotional experiences of the speaker and also to signal the ubiquity of Śiva's presence in real and imagined terrains. *Tirukkōvaiyār* utilizes *tiṇai* in a more conventional manner that is in line with classical poetry but its *tiṇai* is reimagined in a definitively Śaiva domain that inflects landscape elements with new meaning. Both texts also qualify place through the use proper nouns for several locations that are largely borrowed from a known constellation of locations from *Tēvāram*. By the ninth century, the Śaiva landscape was already studded with familiar towns and temples whose names had accrued meaning. In these qualifications of place, they are both forging new conceptual territory in continuing to make place idiomatically Śaiva, *and* creating “pillows” for knowledgeable readers to repose in deep referentiality and intertextuality.

Freeing Place

I now turn to address how both texts “free” place. “Freeing” here refers to two distinct but related rhetorical phenomena. The first is the complete exclusion of explicit mention of named place, and the second is the loose and interchangeable reference to it. *Tiruvācakam* significantly detours from the *Tēvāram* in its use of proper place names. Across its many types of songs, it displays great diversity in the frequency of proper noun use. It then offers spatial qualifiers for Śiva that are freed from being mappable making a more comprehensive universal vision. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, as touched on above, Śiva’s sacred places, namely his cities, become another facet in the Tamil landscape and new elements of the *tiṇai* system. Thinking through the relative lack of place names and place particulars can help us see how both texts are expanding our understanding of place and simultaneously moving away from the place precedents of *Tēvāram*.

Freeing Place in Tiruvācakam

As highlighted above, *Tiruvācakam* contains songs that look almost identical in form to those found in the *Tēvāram*. Though these songs show continuity between *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam* regarding the inclusion of named place, they are truly outliers amongst the other 51 songs of *Tiruvācakam*. Out of the approximately 800 hymns collected in the *Tēvāram*, 48 (6%) do not make explicit mention of place (these are called *potu*, or general songs). Out of the 51 songs in *Tiruvācakam*, 13 (25%) contain no explicit reference to place: *Aṭaikkalappattu*, *Aticayappattu*, *Puṇarccippattu*, *Pirarttaṇaippattu*, *Kuḷaittappattu*, *Accappattu*, *Tiruvuntiyār*, *Piṭittappattu*, *Arputappattu*, *Eṇṇappatikam*, *Yāttiraippattu*, *Tiruppataiyelucci*, and *Accoppatikam*. Beyond these explicitly “unplaced” songs, many contain only one or two mentions of specific places like *Tiruvempāvai* or *Tirukkōttumpī*. Further, songs which do contain

explicit reference to place often do so unevenly throughout. For example, *Tiruccatakam* references Tillai a handful of times, Ārūr once, and Civaṇakar once. Out of a hundred verses, these named places represent brief and fleeting references.

How is Śiva situated spatially in the many songs of *Tiruvācakam* that do not engage named place explicitly? One of the ways *Tiruvācakam* opens up Śiva’s conceptual terrain is by using metaphors of place to describe the vicissitudes of a relationship with the divine when the narrative actions of verses do not hinge on localizing or praising his places of residence. Take for example *Puṇarccippattu*. In verse one, Śiva is described as an abode of compassion (*karuṇālayaṇ*); *ālayam* is a generic term for a dwelling place, residence, or even a town. In two, the speaker describes their experience living on Earth:

*ārrakillēṇ aṭiyēṇ aracē avaṇi talattu aim pulaṇ āya
cērril aḷuntāc cintai ceytu civaṇ emperumāṇ enru ētti
ūrru maṇal pōl nekku nekku uḷḷē uruki ōlam iṭṭu
pōrrip pukaḷvatu enru kollō eṇ pollā maṇiyaip puṇarntē*

I, your slave, cannot stand it, oh king!
Here on Earth, sinking in the muck of the five senses,
will my heart soften and melt like the sands in a spring,
as I cry out, praising [you], joined with my flawless gem?

Here, the speaker uses a metaphor to describe the experience of living on earth in a human body that is subject to the whims of the five senses as being stuck in a quagmire (*cērril*). [*Cērru*] refers to wet muddy ground that has been primed for planting. They go on to say that their mind melting in Śiva’s presence would be like (this time via a simile using the particle of comparison *pōl*) sand in a spring (*ūrru maṇal*), what T.N. Ramachandran translates as “soft and yielding.”¹⁵⁰ While these invocations of a muddy quagmire and soft shifting sands conjure images of the rich agricultural landscape of the Tamil countryside, they remain general or anonymous. Reading this

¹⁵⁰ T.N. Ramachandran, *Tiruvaachakam* (Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 2001), 268.

does not require specialized knowledge of *tiṇai*, nor access to a database of Śiva’s sacred places. In verse six, the speaker again locates themselves on the great and vast Earth (*peru mā nilattil*); not of a particular region or town, but just as a human of this Earth. In verse seven, Śiva is described as the constitutive elements of the universe: fire, water, earth, air, earth, and ether (*neruppai, nīrai, kālai, nilaṇai, vicumpai*). His descriptions in this song speak more to his ubiquity and cosmic preeminence and less to his immanence in a particular place or time.

Arputappattu displays a similar opening up or anonymizing of place. In verse one the speaker describes sinking into the sea of life on Earth:

*maiyaḷ āy iṇṭa maṇṇiṭai vāḷvu eṇum āḷiyuḷ akappaṭṭu
taiyaḷār eṇum cuḷittalaiṭ paṭṭu nāṇ talai taṭumārāmē
poy eḷām viṭa tiruvaruḷ tantu taṇ poṇ aṭi iṇai kāṭṭi
meyyaṇ āy veḷi kāṭṭi muṇ niṇṇratu ōr arputam viḷampāṇā*

Maddened, deep in the sea of life on this Earth,
caught in the whirlpool that is women,
I was truly deranged.
So that all my lies leave, he granted holy grace,
and revealed the pair of his golden feet.
The true one revealed himself and stood before me—
I will keep proclaiming this wonder!

As above, the speaker does not situate this song in a specific town or region, but instead speaks generally about life on Earth (*iṇṭa maṇṇiṭai vāḷvu*). They also speak metaphorically about the “whirlwind” (*cuḷittalai*) of women (*taiyaḷār*) that contribute to their state of confusion (*nāṇ talai taṭumārāmē*). In the final revelation of this verse, the speaker recounts Śiva’s miraculous appearance before them (*muṇ niṇṇratu ōr arputam viḷampāṇē*). This wondrous occurrence is unplaced. Śiva appears before the speaker without any spatial context. This contrasts songs like *Kaṇṭa pattu* wherein the refrain of each verse reports the speaker’s sight of Śiva at Tillai specifically (I saw his/this greatness at Tillai: *aṇi koḷ tillaik kaṇṭēṇē*). *Arputa pattu* speaks broadly about life on Earth and invokes place in terms of near and far or proximity and distance. In many of the verses of this song, the speakers say that they roam about (*tirivēṇai*). In some

verses, this seems to be a metaphor for their suffering on Earth; in others, they roam about in the company of women who are a source of distraction. In either case, this roaming is unplaced and the song contrasts the “displaced” state of the speaker, suffering in a human body, with Śiva’s immanent act of gracing, appearing, or revealing his presence.

Tiruvuntiyār provides another example of a very different kind of “unplacing.” This song is not spoken in the voice of a suffering human protagonist who has direct interactions with Śiva. Rather, the speaker addresses or observes a shuttlecock flying back and forth through the air. The refrain “rise up and fly” (*untī para*) punctuates short, three-line verses that detail some of Śiva’s mythic exploits. Where other songs localize *purāṇic* acts throughout the Tamil countryside, all of those mentioned in *Tiruvuntiyār* remain uncontextualized. The first verse helps to demonstrate its lack of attention on the specificities of place:

vaḷaintatu villu viḷantatu pūcal
uḷaintaṇa muppuram untī para
oruṅku uṭaṇ ventavāru untī para

The bow bent, a clamor was produced.
The three cities were destroyed, rise up and fly!
They were immediately burned, rise up and fly!

Here, even Śiva, the actor who bends the bow and destroys the triple cities, is only implied. Neither he, nor the events reported are placed. The verses continue recalling Śiva’s divine acts including burning the triple cities and disrupting the gods’ sacrifice but pays no attention to qualifications of place. This song doesn’t demonstrate the “collapse” of human and *purāṇic* time referenced in chapter one. Given that the speaker does not delve into their own spiritual or emotional lives, it also does not play with a sense of “near or far” like in the examples above.

The song concludes in verse twenty with a glimpse of Śiva’s transcendent nature:

ēkācam iṭṭa iruṭikaḷ pōkāmal
ākācam kāval enru untī para
ataraku appālum kāval enru untī para

He is the protector of the heavens where the sages who wear loose garments do not go, rise up and fly!

He protects that which is beyond that, rise up and fly!

Here, Śiva is the protector of the ethos (*ākācam*), perhaps the broadest and most nebulous spatial category—it is not easily visualized or placed, but rather, remains ubiquitous and imperceptible.

The handful of places with proper names mentioned in *Tiruvācakam* pales in comparison to the over four hundred places which populate the *Tēvāram* hymns. Verses, whole songs, fly by in *Tiruvācakam* with little to no such reference to named place. *Tiruvācakam*'s great internal diversity of song type has not yet been robustly theorized, but it is clear that its formal diversity has allowed for a range of treatments of place, from songs which are completely “unplaced,” to those which mention place in each and every verse. The minority of these treatments is represented by songs like *Tirupponṇūcal* which approximate the *Tēvāram* in their inclusion of proper nouns to identify places where Śiva dwells and acts, but the majority of these treatments free Śiva of the particulars of place. Instead, taken cumulatively, these songs offer a more spatially and poetically ambiguous vision of Śiva's orientation to place. If *Tēvāram* takes laser focus on named locations, named place being the hallmark of their construction of a Śaiva world, *Tiruvācakam* expands the parameters of Śiva's spatial presence by essentially skirting the obligation to constrain them by name. In *Tiruvācakam*, Śiva is certainly a dweller in Uttarakōcamaṅkai, but by being offered long poetic stretches where he is not known by reference to space or place, he occupies a much vaster conceptual domain.

Freeing Place in Tirukkōvaiyār

Having suggested that *Tiruvācakam* is characterized by a more flexible or free orientation to place, I now turn to *Tirukkōvaiyār* to see what might be gleaned of its “freeing” strategies. Despite the conspicuous frequency of named place in this *akam* work, it is not the case that *Tirukkōvaiyār* limits place by their inclusion. I argue that the naming of place in this text functions in a similarly free or fluid manner as the lack of place names does in *Tiruvācakam*. The

first verse of *Tirukkōvaiyār*, now familiar, indicates by way of a metaphor that the poem will engage all five traditional landscapes; as the hero gazes upon a beautiful woman who is likened to a creeper covered with blossoms, one type of flower belonging to each landscape is described in its individual splendor and brilliance. The term *valli*, which refers the object of his gaze, means both young girl and creeper. The figurative language used in this verse approximates the trick of the eye experienced by the hero: am I seeing a creeper, or am I seeing a woman? This moment of slippage between the two images primes the reader for the rest of the text in which the ambiguity so prized in *akam* poetry can be maintained in a new Śaiva context.

We can begin thinking about “freeing” by returning to the recent discussion of the multiple poetic uses of Tillai in the last section. This diversity of proper noun use, both semantic and syntactic, can be understood to be a type of “freeing.” These strategies free place conceptually, from being strictly mapped/geographically conscribed places, to those with deep inter- and intratextual meaning. We can look at a short verse run from 218-222 to further explore how flexible the invocation of Tillai is even in successive verses. In 218, the onlookers observing the hero and heroine on their elopement comment thus:

*viṭalai urrār illai cemmaivēṭar tamiyai menpū
maṭalai urru ār kuḷali vāṭiṇaḷ maṇṇu ciṭṭampalavarkku
aṭalai urrāriṇ erippu oḷintu āṇku arukkaṇ curukkik
kaṭalai urrāṇ kaṭappār illai iṇru ikkaṭuṇcuramē*

Young man! There are no friends here. Only hunters accustomed to fighting. You are all alone.
The young woman with locks full of petals from soft flowers is exhausted. Like them who don't have the power of [being associated with] the one of the enduring small *ampalam*, the light is gone, and the sun has sunk into the ocean. None cross this forest of a desert now.

Here, Tillai is alluded to by the use of the term *ciṭṭampalavar*, “he who dwells in the small hall.”

As mentioned, the *ampalam* of the temple at Tillai becomes metonymous with the town itself.

The invocation of Tillai here does not center it as a place of comparison but rather focuses on those who do not worship its lord. Immediately following in verse 219, Tillai is used in a simile

about the lovers resembling the bees of flowers of Tillai; unlike in the previous verse, Tillai’s spatial qualities—namely its lush and fecund gardens—are emphasized. In 220, Tillai is mentioned for its explicit connection to Śiva:

*kaṇkaḷ tammāl payaṇ koṇṭaṇam kaṇṭu iṇik kārikai niṇ
paṇṭaka meṇmoḷi ārapparuka varum iṇṇē
viṇkaḷ tam nāyakaṇ tillaiyiṇ melliyaḷ paṇkaṇ eṇkōṇ
taṇkaṭampait taṭampōḷ kaṭuṇkāṇam taṇ eṇavē*

I have seen the pleasantness of your eyes, sweet woman!
That I may imbibe your melodious soft speech, come here now.
This desert will be cool like the pools at Kaṭampai that belong to the lord of the heavens, the one whose half is the oft one of Tillai, my king.

This verse mentions Tillai in a similar manner to 219: the focus is not on Tillai as a place, but rather, it is used as a qualifier for Śiva who is listed in a more universal form as the lord of the heavens (*viṇkaḷ tam nāyakaṇ*). In this example, Kaṭampai, mentioned in line four, performs the semantic work that Tillai does in 202 wherein the desert becomes like the cool fertile grounds if the heroine traverses it with her lover. This is one way we see an echo of the “slippage” or ambiguity apparent in verse one mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. Some of Śiva’s places can stand in for one another and perform the same type of semantic or syntactic work. Verses 221 and 222 focus on Tillai as a physical location (with metaphoric resonance as an ideal resolution to the lovers’ trials) providing thick description of the city’s splendorous mansions glittering in the light as seen by the hero and heroine upon approach displaying yet another type of invocation of place.

Thus, even over a short verse run, a single location like Tillai is invoked in a multitude of ways to achieve different ends. As Cutler notes in his discussion of the four spatial realms in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, there are several ways that space/place functions in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, and no one

formula that determines how invocation of place generates meaning.¹⁵¹ To add to this, Tillai is often invoked as Śiva's place, whether or not primary narrative action is occurring near there or elsewhere. It becomes calcified as an epithet that is significant in the context of the narrative but is not necessarily invoking place in a way that is resonant for the primary narrative of the text.

Another way that place is “freed” is in its interchangeability. This is similar to the way that Kaṭampai stands in for Tillai poetically above. One conspicuous case of place's interchangeability is the heroine's place of origin. In verse 23 the speaker says that the heroine dwells in Kailāsa: my peacock from Kailāsa of the far North (*vaṭa vāṇ kayilai mayilai*). Later in 100, he says she is from Paraṅkuṇṇam: my sweet voiced one is from that smallest of hamlets where lions tread after great elephants like mountains (*paraṅkuṇṇil kuṇṇam aṇṇa māpataippa ciṅkam tiritaru cīrrūr ciṇṇum emtēmoḷiyē*). Briefly after, in 104 she is called the one of beautiful locks of Perunturai: the young one of Perunturai (*perunturai piḷḷai*). Is she from Kailāsa, or Paraṅkuṇṇam; somewhere in the Potiyil ranges, or from Perunturai? The text switches back and forth. Though she is always from a small hamlet, it becomes difficult to tell which one. This begs the question: are we speaking of one woman, as has been assumed in most readings of this text? Or does this fluidity of place call into question our very assumptions about the way narrative functions in the text as a whole? Even in providing particulars (of people and places), the text resists pinning them down—its named places resist being mapped.

In looking at the text as a whole, the five landscapes are encountered in bits and bursts. Thick description of the natural world is interjected in varying frequency and length. Named Śaiva places which dot these landscapes also become soft around the edges; they blur into one

¹⁵¹ Cutler notes, “There is no one-to-one correlation between spatial realms and poetic functions.” “Four Spatial Realms,” 51.

another and are at times interchangeable. Even when they are described in detail, they have considerable characteristic overlap. For example, Kailāsa is Śiva's lofty mountain dwelling place but it also harbors the small unassuming hamlet of the heroine. It is lushly forested for secret evening trysts, and a provider of shade to the parrot-filled agricultural fields where young women tend crops. It contains elements of all five landscapes but can be placed in no single one exclusively. Tillai, similarly, though a sea-girt town, is described as if it belongs to all landscapes and in fact can become any landscape depending on what happens within its boundaries. Thus, though *Tirukkōvaiyār* is far more "placed" than *Tiruvācakam*, it retains a significant degree of both freedom and ambiguity in its treatment.

A Dialectic between Placed and Unplaced

This chapter has thus far highlighted select ways that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* address place through rhetorical strategies of particularizing and freeing. In this final section I now address the productive dialectic between these two orientations to place. Here, I look at how poles of qualified and freed, placed and unplaced, near and far, immanent and transcendent participate in the text's generation of affect. In both texts, Śiva is placed in complex and multitudinous relationships to place. These diverse orientations to place are not randomly compiled but rather put in productive conversation with one another. Many of these juxtapositions hinge around Śiva's location with regard to the speaker. Śiva is often both universal, unknowable, and transcendent, and simultaneously immanent, local, and indwelling in the hearts and minds of his devotees. In *Tiruvācakam*, his enduring presence is known by the reader but rarely felt by the speaker. Similarly, Śiva's structural remove in *Tirukkōvaiyār* creates distance between him and the narrative of the main protagonists though the reader sees him as centrally embedded in each verse. The oscillation or play between poles of near and far produces

a tension that runs through both texts and contributes to the production of pathos discussed in chapter one.

Between Placed and Unplaced in Tiruvācakam

As noted above, *Tiruvācakam* contains multiple types of songs in which place is used in many different ways. *Kuyil pattu*, a song of merely ten verses, provides a good example of the varied invocations of place, the oscillations between these invocations, and the tensions produced therein. This song is addressed to the cuckoo (*kuyil*) and in each verse the speaker asks the bird to call Śiva closer. Verse one reads as follows:

*kītam iṇiya kuyilē kēṭṭiyēl eṇkaḷ perumāṇ
pātam iraṇṭum viṇavin pātālam ēḷinukku appāl
cōti maṇi muṭi collin col irantu ninra toṇmai
āti kuṇam oṇrum illāṇ antam ilāṇ varak kūvāy*

O sweet-voiced Cuckoo! If asked where the two feet of our lord are, they are beyond the seven netherworlds; if you were to speak of his shining bejeweled crown, its antiquity is such that it existed beyond words, he is without beginning, quality, or end. Tell him to come!

Śiva's feet are described as being beyond the seven hells (*pātālam ēḷinukku appāl*) and his crown of indescribable antiquity (*muṭi collin col irantu ninra toṇmai*). The cuckoo is asked to go to that one who is without beginning, end, or characteristic (*āti kuṇam oṇrum illāṇ antam ilāṇ vara*).

Thus, the song opens with a universal vision of Śiva that emphasizes his supreme transcendence.

His feet reach beyond even the outermost limits of the known universe; his head transcends time—is older than words can describe. Further, without beginning, end, or quality, he is formless. This verse indirectly references the myth of the *liṅga* of light wherein even Brahma and Viṣṇu cannot reach his head and feet. How then will the little cuckoo approach him? What form might he approach the speaker in? Even in the first verse a tension is generated between formed and formless, accessible and inaccessible. Verse two pivots from a spatially ambiguous version of Śiva to one which is localized:

ēr tarum ēḷ ulaku ētta ev uruvum taṇ uruvāy

*ār kali cūḷ teṇ ilaṅkai aḷaku amar vaṇṭōtarikku
pēr aruḷ iṇṇam aḷittu peruntuṟai mēya pirāṇai
cīriya vāyāl kuyilē teṇ pāṇṭi nāṭaṇai kūvāy*

Praised by the seven beautiful worlds, every form is his own.

The true lord of Peruntuṟai granted gracious joy to lovely Vaṇṭōtari (Mandodarī) of Lanka, surrounded by the sea. Oh lovely-voiced *kuyil*, call the one of the south Pāṇṭian country to come!

The first line picks up the theme of the preceding verse in deeming Śiva one who embodies every form (*ētta ev uruvum taṇ uruvāy*). In this description he moves from being formless and quality-less to being the possessor of every form. This vision is still expansive, but it inches closer to being conceivable to the speaker. The second line continues the movement from an abstract/distant Śiva to a concrete/local version through a reference to Mandodarī from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Mandodarī is qualified as the one of southern Lanka (*ilaṅkai*) which is surrounded by the ocean (*ār kali cūḷ*) drawing the reader from the seven worlds to South India specifically. In the third line, Śiva is placed deep in the Tamil countryside as the lord of Peruntuṟai, and in the fourth, the lord of the entire southern Pāṇṭian country (*teṇ pāṇṭi nāṭaṇai*). Verse three introduces another familiar place, Uttarakōcamāṅkai, as an abode of Śiva and the goddess.

Uttarakōcamāṅkai, as in the above discussed mentions in *Tiruvācakam*, is here described as being full of tall mansions encrusted with gems (*nīḷ maṇi māṭam nilāvum*).

Verse four continues to shorten the distance between Śiva and the speaker:

*tēṇ paḷac cōlai payilum ciṟu kuyilē itu kēḷ nī
vāṇ paḷittu im maṇ pukuntu maṇitarai āṭkoṇṭa vaḷḷal
ūṇ paḷittu uḷḷam pukuntu eṇ uṇarvu atu āya oruttaṇ
māṇ paḷittu āṇṭa meṇṇōkki maṇāḷanai nī varak kūvāy*

O *Kuyil* who resides in groves of honey-sweet fruits, you listen to this!

Reproaching heaven, the benevolent one entered this Earth and enslaved mankind.

Censuring the body, he entered my interior and the singular one became my consciousness.

Call the husband of the one of soft looks that rival the antelope's to come here.

The speaker states that Śiva was the one who arrived on *this* Earth and enslaved mankind (*im maṇ pukuntu maṇitarai āṭkoṇṭa vaḷḷal*). Further, he became the one with the speaker's

consciousness having entered their interior most heart/mind (*uḷḷam pukuntu eṇ uṇarvu atu āya oruttan*). This verse details Śiva's presence in the innermost landscape.

Taking the song as a whole, there is incredible range in the invocations of space and place. In verses 2, 3, 6 and 7, three specific towns are named: Perunturai, Uttarakōcamaṅkai, and Kōkaḷi. In verses 2 and 7, Śiva is the lord of the Pāṇṭia, Cōḷa, and Cēra lands. In verse 1, his feet are beyond the seven hells, and in two he is praised by the seven worlds, then in 6 he is the ruler of the seven worlds (*ēḷ ulakum muḷutu āḷi*). In 4, the speaker recalls Śiva entering their mind and heart. In four and five, Śiva is said to have come down from the heavens to Earth for the sake of the speaker and his devotees (*vāṇ paḷittu im maṇ pukuntu/ antarattē niṇru iḷintu inṅku aṭiyavar ācai aruppāṇ*). In 4, 9, and 10, the *kuyil* is described as being in a lush grove. In four this grove is full of sweet fruits (*tēṇ paḷac cōlai payilum ciṟu kuyilē*), in nine it is fragrant (*kaṭi poḷil*), and in ten there is a garden within the grove (*poḷil cōlai*). There is no discernable pattern over the whole song in terms of how place is invoked where. Rather it is a veritable riot of place condensed into a very small number of verses.

In *Kuyil pattu*, a play emerges between Śiva's transcendence and immanence. The song oscillates between expansive, cosmic versions of Śiva to those residing in local towns and temples. Śiva pervades the expansive universe but also traverses the innermost space of the speaker. The *kuyil*, closest to the speaker in both time and space, invokes yet another type of fecund garden space, reminiscent of both the rich gardens of Śiva's cities and also secret trysting spots of *akam* lovers. This song is organized around a request wherein the *kuyil* is asked to go call Śiva to come. Though Śiva has been localized in a number of ways throughout the song, including in the speaker's own heart, the song makes his ultimate location ambiguous. Is he, the one beyond all words and worlds, accessible to the *kuyil*? Will he be able to come, and if

so, in what form? He has been close before, as documented throughout the verses, but the reader does not know where he is in the time of the speaker's request. This is the productive tension that is built throughout this song. Śiva is both placed and unplaced, near and far. Will he approach at the *kuyil*'s request, or not?

This tension is echoed in many of *Tiruvācakam*'s songs in which there is variability in reference to place. While many songs alternate between place and unplaced, cosmic and universal, near and far, songs like *Pirārttanaippattu* introduce another dialectic in focusing on membership to a group of ideal devotees. The speaker recounts being placed amongst the true devotees by Śiva in the past, yet continually reports being on the outskirts, or unable to maintain membership. Thus, a dialectic of inside/outside is found in many of the songs in which the speaker is recounting their own hard *karmas* or inadequacies.

Between Placed and Unplaced in Tirukkōvaiyār

Though *Tirukkōvaiyār* relies more on the particulars of place than *Tiruvācakam*, its diverse orientations to place create room for play between them. One of the central dialectics that runs throughout the entirety of the text is Śiva's simultaneous presence and absence. Though praised in every verse and intimately tied to the Tamil countryside by way of Tillai (and a handful of other cities), he is structurally once removed from the narrative of the main protagonists. Śiva's praise predominantly enters each verse by way of comparison to places associated with him or their attributes, and he not the object of direct address. In this way, a sense of distance is generated that is very different from the intimacy created through direct address seen in *Tiruvācakam*. This structural distance is then juxtaposed with Śiva's intimate connection to a known locale or to his residence in the hearts of the *akam* hero and heroine.

In the opening verse of *Tirukkōvaiyār* that sets both the frame and the tone for the rest of the text, Śiva is only indirectly present. He makes his obligatory appearance in the description of the tender *kumil* flower found in Tillai (*īcartillai kuruvaḷar pūnkumil*). His presence is indicated only through his association with Tillai as its ruler (*īcar*). This indirect connection is the most frequent way Śiva is kept at a distance for the rest of the text. The invocation of Śiva both maintains a remove from the main narrative of the lovers and introduces a place around which much of the narrative will be organized; a place which belongs in the domain of the *pāṭṭuaittalaivaṇ*. Ultimately, the reader gets a small glimpse of Śiva in this first verse but he remains syntactically important, and central nonetheless.

Śiva is “glimpsed” again in verse two through a similar invocation of place.¹⁵² Musing on his doubts, the hero wonders what creature he beheld in the first verse and where this divine woman could hail from. In this moment of confusion, the hero wonders if the girl could be a woman of Tillai whose lord is ancient and incomparable (*iṇaiyili tollaitillai māṭō*). This verse is dotted throughout with the dubitative affix *-ō* which fills the reader with curiosity and heightens a desire to hear more. Verse three provides further qualification of Śiva as the lord who rides a bounding bull (*pāyūm viṭai araṇ*) though he is still not an active participant in the main narrative. With another example of Cutler’s embedding, in this verse the heroine is said to be like his Tillai (*pāyūm viṭai araṇ tillai aṇṇāḷ*). In this way, Śiva remains once removed. The text refers to him, but more specifically refers to his place, while the true subject of the primary narrative remains the heroine.

Verse four continues to play with presence and absence, only this time, the heroine is compared to Śiva’s agricultural lands (*paḷaṇam*). The verse provides the following details: Śiva

is described as the lord of Tillai who destroyed the cities of his enemies with a bow made of a strong mountain, the hero's personal lord, and the one who scattered the diminished teeth of the enemy opposing him (Sūrya) (*aṭaiyār purankaḷ ikalkunṛa villil cerrōn tillai īcan emmāṇ etirnta ikal kunṛa palukuttōn*). In this expanding vision of Śiva, verse 4 introduces two favorite *purāṇic* myths: the burning of the triple cities, and Dakṣa's sacrifice wherein Śiva knocks out Sūrya's teeth. Directly between these two cosmic-scale myths, the speaker (here the hero) succinctly adds *emmāṇ*, our lord. From the universal to the intensely personal and back again, Śiva's character, which moves between both of these domains, begins to take shape before the reader's eyes but remains at a structural remote.

In verse five, the reader is awarded even more detail when the hero elaborates upon characterizations found in verse four and speaks of Śiva's role in his own life:

*aṇiyum amiḷtum en āviyum āyavaṇ tillai cintāmaṇi
umparār aṇiyā maraiyōṇ aṭi vāḷttalarin
piṇiyum atarku maruṇtum piraḷa piraḷa miṇṇum
paṇiyum puraimaruṅkul peruntōḷi paṭaikkakaḷē*

The eyes—weapons shining bright—of the one whose waist resembles snakes and lightning darting, are both the disease and its cure; the disease is like that of those who do not worship the feet of the lord who is unknown to the gods, the one who is my ornament, nectar, life breath, the crest jewel of Tillai.

The hero holds little back in expounding on the glory of his lord who is his very life breath. His close personal connection is again contrasted by the references to a cosmic Śiva, unknowable to the gods, then to a more proximate version who can be located in the Tamil countryside as the wish fulfilling jewel (*cintāmaṇi*) of Tillai. The evocative imagery of the heroine's weapon-like eyes which inflict harm echoes classic Caṅkam tropes of the deadly glances of females and the power they hold over suitors. It is an image familiar to anyone well versed in classical poetry, but the afflicted state of those looked upon by such a woman is cast in a new light in its comparison to the state of those who do not worship Śiva. This is an example of the way in which familiar Caṅkam tropes are given a new valence, having been “translated” into a Śaiva

idiom. In the previous verses we saw Śiva invoked through a simile which connected the heroine to his place. Here, the case ending *-in* serves a comparative function indicating “like” or “as,” and is used to link the two diseases which carry the same emotional weight.

In these opening verses, Śiva is slowly revealed to the reader as aspects of his character, nature, and deeds accrue verse by verse. The image builds first with reference to his form, then to his nature, his *purāṇic* deeds, and finally to the contours of his relationship with the protagonist/speaker, the hero himself. The remaining verses of the text continue in a similar manner, oscillating between brief and fleeting references to Śiva, at times only by name or in reference to his places of residence, and then more detailed descriptions of his body, deeds, and role in the lives of individual characters or devotees. Images of his cosmic or universal scale are consistently countered by local or personal connections. In all of these oscillations, Śiva is present but absent—one step removed from the primary narrative action. He is the closest, the hero’s very breath, and the farthest, both literally as the one unknowable to the other gods and in terms of the poetic structure. Verses 1-5 serve as an illustrative microcosm of some of the literary and poetic strategies which are found in the entirety of this text and aptly demonstrate the use of an evocative dialectic between near and far, cosmic and local, in orienting a reader to Śiva’s situatedness.

Conclusion

In the above discussions of dialectics of place in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirrukkōvaiyār*, I have demonstrated how place variability often oscillates between two poles. This is evident by way of content when Śiva is described as both transcendent and immanent, and by way of structure when Śiva is syntactically central but removed from primary narratives. In his monograph on *Tiruvācakam*, Yocum argues that Māṇikkavācakar uses a “language of paradox” which connects

opposite poles like universal and local, or abstract and concrete.¹⁵³ Instances when the speaker contrasts Śiva's vast universal form with their own sorry human one are examples of this language of paradox. By using the term paradox, Yocum supports his larger argument that Śiva's nature's is characterized by contradiction and absurdity, his actions by chaos and unpredictability. Instead of using the term paradox, in this chapter I have instead explored a productive language of contrast; the dialectics highlighted above are rhetorical strategies which generate tension and contribute to the texts' overall emotional affect. I don't read Śiva in either *Tiruvācakam* or *Tirukkōvaiyār* as characterized by chaos or unpredictability. Rather, as will be explored further in chapter three, Śiva is ultimately compassionate, and the reader is always aware of the consistency of both his actions and whereabouts. Despite this firm knowledge, both texts operate with underlying tensions from which pathos emerges. From that pathos then comes compassion. There is a continuity in the emotional implications of the high and low that characterizes the speaker's tumultuous lives (spiritual or personal) and the simultaneity of proximity and distance.

An oscillation between poles is also cited by Yocum to argue for a fundamental characterization of Śiva based on the concept of *līlā*, or play. I agree that play is operative but argue that it manifests on a structural level. In my readings, play manifests as more of a rhetorical strategy to generate emotion in the reader and not as a fundamental part of Māṇikkavācakar's construction of Śiva. Furthermore, *līlā*, when operative, must not be taken as a function of randomness or chaos. In the case of the *Tiruvācakam*, Śiva's acts of continuously

¹⁵³ Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Śiva*, 157-160. For more on paradox, see John Braisted Carman, *Majesty & Meekness, A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994).

saving a creature meaner than the lowliest dog demonstrates first and foremost the strength and degree of compassion towards those mired in karmic suffering. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the various ways in which Śiva is linked to the song's protagonists and to its central place, Tillai, emphasize his enduring proximity despite the fact that he is removed both structurally and syntactically. While the text carefully warns of the pitfalls of not worshipping Śiva, it is also replete with characters who describe the sweetness of being a devotee, and the kinds of care that Śiva lavishes upon them.

Both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* build on the expectations of the genres which they are indebted to. *Tiruvācakam*, most closely aligned in its reception with the devotional hymns of the *Tēvāram*, sheds one of its most prominent and defining features in choosing to free Śiva of the particulars of place and offers a broader conceptual terrain in which he is encountered by the speaker and the reader. *Tirukkōvaiyār*, closely modeled on *akam* poetry, is happy to transgress norms of anonymity as it names, again and again, Śiva's sacred cities and sites. Though they do so in slightly different ways, both texts invoke extant understandings of place and then abandon them or adapt them to new ends, thereby opening up new spatial paradigms and possibilities. *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* accomplish something similar through their shared practice of "freeing" Śiva; *Tiruvācakam* by skirting the obligation to situate itself in named places and *Tirukkōvaiyār* by its commitment to ambiguity. In addressing issues of place similarly, albeit through different poetic strategies, these texts create a mutually supportive vision of Śiva who cannot be pinned down but is forever accessible. In their shared practices of "particularizing place" by invoking landscape particulars of earlier poetry, they capitalize on the emotional valences of terrains which emphasize separation and longing, contributing to a heightened sense of tension between Śiva's proximity and distance. Furthermore, they use proper place names as

rhetorical markers and critical syntactic tools to connect disparate conceptual domains, drawing the human to the divine in the larger project of drawing Śiva near.

Chapter 3

Toward a Theology Across Texts

Discussions from the previous two chapters establish grounds on which we can bring Māṇikkavācakar's two disparate texts into productive conversation with one another by using the interpretive categories of time and space. In chapter one, I argue that collapsing cosmic and human time highlights Śiva's unique immanence in the world of the speaker and via the speaker, the reader. Looking at patterns of verb tense use, I consider the theological implications of gracing (*aruḷutal*) as a past, completed event that still leaves speakers in a present state of distress. Finally, addressing narrative temporality, I show how focus on the continuous nature of suffering in *Tiruvācakam* and on the harshness of separation in *Tirukkōvaiyār* results in a generation of the sentiment of pathos, or *karuṇai*. In chapter two, I explore how Śiva's transcendence and immanence are kept in delicate balance through rhetorical strategies of freeing and constraining space. In *Tiruvācakam*, he is freed from the confines of the named, mappable places so prized in earlier *Tēvāram* poetry and resides as both a supreme being and an intimate actor in the speakers' lives. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Śiva takes on the structural role of the *akam talaivaṇ* but remains removed from narrative action while simultaneously semantically central to each verse as *pāṭṭutaittalaivaṇ*. In both texts, this play between near and far is generative of tension that contributes to the generation of pathos.

Building on observations of these shared dynamics, this chapter turns to consider the broader theological vision of these two texts and to flesh out the implications of their shared rhetorical strategies. To date, no one has rigorously accounted for the Śaiva theology created between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. While there has been some work done on Māṇikkavācakar's characterization of Śiva in the *Tiruvācakam*—most notably by Glenn Yocum in *Hymns to the*

Dancing Śiva—it is not exhaustive.¹⁵⁴ Harris explores the degree to which Māṇikkavācakar expands the semantic range of the central term *aruḷ* in *Tiruvācakam*.¹⁵⁵ No one has provided a robust account of Śiva’s nature in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, though brief suggestions have been made by Comeau about his role as the poem’s patron.¹⁵⁶ Still, there is little to no scholarly discussion of the Śiva shared by *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, his relationship to the texts’ speakers, nor to their theologically significant affective dimensions.

This chapter addresses this lacuna by focusing on one of the major features of Śiva’s nature, his compassion, or *karuṇai*. Though there is substantial continuity in the characterization of Śiva between the *Tēvāram*, *Tiruvācakam*, and *Tirukkōvaiyār*—his expansiveness, incomparability, sovereignty, etc.—what is striking, in *Tiruvācakam* particularly, is the introduction of a notion of radical compassion, indicated by the use of the term *karuṇai*, from the Sanskrit *karuṇā*. This term adds another layer of depth, or shade of meaning to the oft-used *aruḷ* (grace) to describe Śiva’s actions and his nature. There is a relationship between *aruḷ* and *karuṇai*, and furthermore *aṇṇu* (love) that has yet to be fully explored but is introduced in Māṇikkavācakar’s texts and represents a significant shift in the Śaiva theology of the period. While *karuṇai* is explored as a direct qualifier for Śiva and his actions in *Tiruvācakam*, it manifests quite differently in *Tirukkōvaiyār*. In the *kōvai*, Śiva is removed from narrative action; the reader does not get to see how he behaves toward any of the text’s protagonists or speakers. His qualities are not robustly described like they are in *Tiruvācakam*. Instead, I suggest that *karuṇai* is cultivated in this text by

¹⁵⁴ Yocum argues for a fundamental character of *līla* (play) and emphasizes unpredictability as an organizing principle. *Hymns to the Dancing Śiva*, 157-160.

¹⁵⁵ Harris, *Obtaining Grace*, 27.

¹⁵⁶ See Comeau, *Making Devotion Beautiful*, 114-120.

slightly different means. Being structured as a continuous narrative and one that focuses on separation and the trials of two lovers, the *karuṇai* generated by this text is closer to the aestheticized emotion theorized by those like Bharata. Thus, though formally very different, both texts are engaging a shared central theme and one that has great implications for their overall theological message. Ultimately, I argue that both texts are generative of a qualified *karuṇai*, one that is undergirded by firm knowledge (in the reader) of Śiva's unfailing grace.

In order to illustrate how these texts engage with the central theme of *karuṇai*, I continue with close analysis of poetic and rhetorical techniques, but diverge from the strategy of concurrent reading of the two texts performed in chapters one and two. Instead, I will address each text separately, paying attention to the specificities of each genre. In this way, this chapter will contribute to a theorization of their differences and add to our understanding of how these genres and texts, as projects, are related and work together. After a brief introduction of the term *karuṇai* and its genealogy in Indian literature and literary theory, I cover its early manifestation in Tamil literature. After this discussion, I turn to survey the frequent use of the term *karuṇai* in *Tiruvācakam*, showing that it is used as a central feature of Śiva's nature and as an aestheticized emotion generated by a focus on suffering. After discussing *karuṇai* in *Tiruvācakam*, I turn to consider its manifestation in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, where the term is found only once. This section considers how *karuṇai* is manifest as an aestheticized emotion through the text's preoccupation with suffering. Finally, I bring the texts back together to consider how they might be related, and what kind of composite theology emerges when these works are read in conjunction that is not apparent when read alone.

In analyzing the texts separately and attending to their exploration of the emotional theme of compassion, I generate questions that allow us to think further about the function of genre and

the relationship between genres. I ask, does one text shed light on the other, or act as a useful hermeneutic tool? Do these texts fill in gaps that the other leaves open? In his analysis of the conceptualization of place in the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Cutler observes that the text shares a vision of Śiva’s ubiquity in the world with the *Tiruvācakam*. Given this overlap, Cutler questions whether we should simply call *Tirukkōvaiyār* a “designer version” of the *Tiruvācakam*.¹⁵⁷ He ultimately suggests not, and this chapter will contribute to this discussion by expanding our understanding of the different types of projects being undertaken in each text. One is not simply a “version” of the other, rather they do different, mutually supportive things in the service of a shared theological vision.

Tracing the Roots of Karuṇā/ Karuṇai

Before turning to the texts themselves, this section provides a brief genealogy of the term *karuṇā* as it pertains to its use in Māṇikkavācakar’s works. *Karuṇā* finds its earliest mention in the *R̥g Vēda* but is more frequently found in later Buddhist literature beginning with the Pali canon in which it is listed as one of the four *brahmavihārās* (developed from an Upaniṣadic context). *Karuṇā* becomes a central organizing principle in later Mahayāna traditions where it is a type of *upāya*, skillful means, used to navigate a world of suffering and uplift other beings. *Karuṇā* concurrently solidifies as an aesthetic concept through drama and poetry, later theorized in aesthetic treatises, the first of which is Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* (“Treatise on Drama”). Through the emergence of *bhakti* including with early examples in the *Bhagavad Gīta*, *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, and later *bhakti* devotional poetry, a compassionate god who bestows grace on his

¹⁵⁷ Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms,” 55.

devotees by way of a close relationship emerges.¹⁵⁸ This is a significantly oversimplified and incomplete picture of *karuṇā* simply meant to illustrate that by the ninth century, there are diverse understandings of the term spread across multiple traditions and disciplines.

The Tamil approximation of the term *karuṇā*, *karuṇai*, appears relatively infrequently before the ninth century in the Tamil literary corpus. Thus, apart from its emergence in a handful of *Tēvāram* hymns, it is difficult to draw a direct line from earlier Tamil usage of the term to Māṇikkavācakar's. The goal of this section is not to establish a one-to-one referent from Māṇikkavācakar to other literary, theoretical, or doctrinal works. Additionally, I will not use extant aesthetic theory to assign a single dominant *rasa* to either text (as would be done in the traditions of aesthetic theorists like Ānandavardhana, a possible contemporary of Māṇikkavācakar, or the later Abhinavagupta). Rather, I look at references to *karuṇā* from earlier sources in order to shed light on the term's use in *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*.

Where do we first glimpse *karuṇai* in the Tamil literary context? An initial survey finds a surprising scarcity of the term in the major bodies of Tamil literature before Māṇikkavācakar. It is not found in any of the contemporaneous or preceding work of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *ālvārs*, and is not a noted quality of Viṣṇu or his operations in the world as it is for Śiva in *Tiruvācakam*. It is not found in major Caṅkam works, nor in the majority of the five epics including *Cilappatikāram*. Based on extant literature in Tamil, it would seem that the term only emerges significantly in *Tiruvācakam* itself. The following discussion will trace some of the possible

¹⁵⁸ Srilata Raman succinctly notes, "Vedic/Dharmaśāstric conceptions of *dharma* were challenged and sometimes explicitly subordinated to an ethic of compassion (*kāruṇya*), the idea being that the devotee emulates his compassionate and paternal God who is ready to forgive and confer grace on the erring human." "Justifying Filicide: Ramalinga Swamigal, the 'Periyapurāṇam', and Tamil Religious Modernity," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 18, 1 (2014): 48.

antecedents of the term *karuṇai* to contextualize its meaning in Māṇikkavācakar's works, where it proliferates.

One of the earliest uses of *karuṇai* in the Tamil literary corpus occurs in the *poruḷ atikāram* (section on meaning) of the grammatical treatise *Tolkāppiyam* (c. 4-5c CE). In the subsection entitled *meypṭāṭṭiyal* (manifest emotions), the author identifies the eight dominant emotions expressed in poetry:

paṇṇai tōṇṇiya eṇ āṇku poruḷum
kaṇṇiya purāṇē nāl nāṇku eṇpa

“...as the literate men say,
Thirty-two are the sources
That represent spheres of human sport
Wherein are born the eight emotions
With each emotion having four sources,”

nāl iraṇṭu ākum pālumār uṇṭē

“These sixteen poetic sentiments come down to emotions of eight kinds,”

nakaiyē aḷukai iḷivaral maruḷkai
accam perumitam vekuḷi uvakai eṇru
a pāl eṭṭē meypṭaṭu eṇpa

“These eight kinds of manifest emotions are laughter, grief, disgust, wonder, fear, pride, anger and joy.”¹⁵⁹

The eight emotions listed here are close parallels to the eight *rasas* identified by Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In the eight emotions listed by Tolkāppiyar, *aḷukai* is that which is most closely aligned with Bhārata's *karuṇā*. *Aḷukai* is also glossed as *avalam* (suffering, pain, distress // sorrow, care, anxiety) in the Tamil tradition. Pēraciriyār, a later commentator on *Tolkāppiyam*, defines *aḷukai* with both the terms *karuṇā* (compassion) and *avalam* (grief/sorrow).¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁹ V. Murugan, *Tolkāppiyam in English: Translation, with the Tamil text, Transliteration in the Roamn Script, Introduction, Glossary and Illustrations* (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000), 516.

¹⁶⁰ P.S. Subrahmanya Sastri adds the following note: “Pēraciriyar classifies *avalam* into two: *karuṇa* and *śōka*.” *Tolkāppiyam: The Earliest Extant Tamil Grammar with a short commentary in English* (Chennai: The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002), 136.

Tolkāppiyam itself does not use the term *karuṇā*/*karuṇai*, and gives very little elaboration on the poetic sentiment or emotion of *aḷukai*.

While the systems of *meypāṭu* and *rasa* are not entirely congruent, there is considerable overlap and we might learn something from the more detailed description of *karuṇā* given in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Bhārata describes *karuṇā rasa* as follows:

“The Pathetic Sentiment relates to a condition of despair owing to the affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death or captivity...”¹⁶¹

“Now the pathetic (*karuṇā*) Sentiments rises from the Dominant State of sorrow. It grows from Determinants such as affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death, captivity, flight [from one’s own place], [dangerous] accidents or any other misfortune. This is to be represented on the stage by means of Consequents such as, shedding tears, lamentation, dryness of the mouth, change of colour, dropping limbs, being out of breath, loss of memory and the like. Transitory States connected with it are indifference, languor, anxiety, yearning, excitement, delusion, fainting, sadness, dejection, illness, inactivity, insanity, epilepsy, fear, indolence, death, paralysis, tremor, change of colour, weeping, loss of voice and the like.

On this point there are two Āryās:

62. The Pathetic Sentiment arises from seeing the death of a beloved person, or from hearing something very unpleasant and these are its Determinants.

63. This is to be represented on the stage by Consequents like weeping loudly, fainting, lamenting and bewailing, exerting the body or striking it.”¹⁶²

Here, *karuṇā* is translated as “pathetic” and alternatively glossed as pathos or compassion. It is a *rasa* that is evoked through sadness or lament. Notably, *karuṇā* manifests frequently in cases of separation between family members or loved ones. The *sthāyibhāva* (durable or enduring emotions) of *karuṇā rasa* is sorrow or *śoka*. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* we see listed observable signs of *karuṇā rasa* in characters through the *anubhavas* (consequents) like weeping, shaking, or fainting. One can recall the opening scene of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: in its frame story, Vālmīki, the text’s mythic composer recalls seeing a *krauñca* bird coupled with its mate, tragically killed by a

¹⁶¹ He continues, “...while the Erotic Sentiment based on separation relates to a condition of retaining optimism arising out of yearning and anxiety.” Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*, trans. Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951), 109.

¹⁶² Ibid, 111-112.

hunter. The hunter's outpouring of grief, *śoka*, gives rise to *śloka*, versified poetry, and thus the *Rāmāyaṇa* is born. Later theorists argue that the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s dominant *rasa* is, in fact, *karuṇā*.

Returning to Tamil poetic theory, Tolkaṇṇiyār gives us little details on the emotions listed in the category of *meypāṭu*. His final comment on *aḷukai/karuṇai* lists its sources as follows:

iḷivē iḷavē acaivē vaṛumai eṇa
viḷivu il koḷkai aḷukai nāṅkē

“The source of genuine *aḷukai* is four:—contemptible treatment, loss, change for the worse and poverty.”¹⁶³

This excerpt indicates some conceptual overlap in the sources or causal factors of *karuṇai* with those found in the foundational description in *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Moving from aesthetic theory to religious literature, by the ninth century, the Buddhist canon has much to say about *karuṇā* and the term is well established in Sanskrit and Prakrit Buddhist texts. *Maṇimēkalai* (c. 6th ct. CE), one of the only extant Buddhist texts in Tamil, is thus a worthwhile source to consult on *karuṇai*. The term itself, however, is largely absent in the work. *Karuṇai* appears but once at the very end of the text. The final canto sees Maṇimēkalai, the epic's protagonist, surrendering herself to the three jewels (*muttiraṇai*) at which time the sage Aravaṇaṇ gives a sermon on the doctrine of interdependent origination. The following excerpt is his final quote to her just before she performs the necessary austerities and becomes a renunciate:

aṇittam tukkam aṇāṇmā acuti eṇa
taṇittu pārṭtu parṛu aruttiṭtal
maittiri karuṇā mutitai eṇru aṇintu
tiruntu naḷ uṇarvāṇ cerraṇ arriṭuka
curuti cintaṇā pāvaṇā taricaṇai
karuti uyttu mayakkam kaṭika!
iṇ nāl vakaiyāṇ maṇattiruḷ nīṅku

“All that we described as above are caused by desire, anger and illusion.
To snap attachment by recognizing

¹⁶³ Sastri, 137.

Impermanence, pain, soullessness and dirt;
May your anger cease by good consciousness
Of friendship, compassion and joyful thought.
[knowing love, compassion, and bliss]
Give up illusion by reading scriptures,
By meditation, contemplation and
Realization. Be freed from mental
Darkness by these four!”¹⁶⁴

In these parting words, Aṛavaṇaṇ offers Maṇimēkalai a path to sever the bonds of *karma* and attain freedom from mental constructs. *Karuṇā* is listed along with *maittiri* “friendship” (from skt. *maitra*), and *mutitai* “joy/bliss” (from skt. *mutitā*) as one of three means of shedding anger. It is significant that *karuṇai* is crowned at the finale of this work as a means to ultimate salvation. Although the term is only used once, it manifests in multiple ways throughout the work. As Monius argues, *karuṇai* is a key feature of both narrative action—evident in the way that characters interact with and treat one another—and in the affect of the text as a whole. She argues that *karuṇai* is indeed a central organizing principle in the narrative of the protagonist, Maṇimēkalai, and a valued quality, demonstrated through action. Monius writes,

“The *Maṇimēkalai* ...presents the doctrine of interdependent origination in the context of a narrative that compels its audience to experience the reality of that doctrine’s underlying complex causal processes; on the other, it also elicits from its audience a heightened emotional experience (*rasa*) of compassion or pathos (Tamil *aḷukai*, Sanskrit *karuṇa*),...an emotional experience that is also suffused with an atmosphere of profound devotion to the Buddha. Human life, defined by suffering, is conditioned by the complex interplay of ignorance, karma, craving and the rest, insists the *Maṇimēkalai*. In the context of that ever-changing scene of transience and misery, one must feel pity for one’s fellow beings and empathize with their constant and profound suffering.”¹⁶⁵

From these observations of *Maṇimēkalai*, we can see that *karuṇai* serves to highlight human suffering in way that is evocative of compassion in a witness or reader. It is not simply a qualification of character’s natures or behaviors but is also an aestheticized emotion with theological significance.

¹⁶⁴ *Manimekalai*, trans. Dr. Prema Nandakumar (Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1989), 186.

¹⁶⁵ Monius, *Imagining*, 45.

Karuṇai in bhakti

These fragments from *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Tolkāppiyam* coupled with observations on *karuṇai* in *Maṇimēkalai* give a fragmented foundation upon which to understand the term and its semantic valences in Māṇikkavācakar. *Karuṇai* in drama, then literature and literary theory, was an emotion founded on grief and sadness, generative of pathos. In Buddhist literature more broadly and in *Maṇimēkalai* specifically, witnessing the grief of the human condition is generative of pathos and necessitates the cultivation of a compassionate disposition that results in caring action; compassion is both a virtue and a means to freedom. But what of *karuṇai* in other devotional sources in South India? Apart from the above selected works, texts of the *bhakti* tradition offer further understanding of Māṇikkavācakar's inheritances. In his work on *viraha bhakti* (love in separation), Friedhelm Hardy offers some helpful clues. His exploration of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. 6-10th ct. CE) suggests *karuṇā* is a central theme in the theology of Kṛṣṇa. It is both a causal, motivating factor in Viṣṇu's manifestation in the world and in his actions towards his devotees. It also qualifies Kṛṣṇa's affection and care for his devotees. Hardy notes its inclusion in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, "Kṛṣṇa's motives for revealing his beauty to the *gopīs* and for granting them physical satisfaction are grace and compassion: 'Bhagavān manifests himself for the sake of people's final beatitude'; 'out of compassion he had his sport with the *gopīs*'; 'full of compassion and out of affection'; 'he takes a human body in order to favour all beings'."¹⁶⁶ Thus, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, we see explicit qualification of god's actions and motivations as compassionate or fundamentally caring in nature. Outside of the Śaiva materials, this is perhaps the closest analog to the description of Śiva's actions in *Tiruvācakam*.

¹⁶⁶ Friedhelm Hardy, *The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 536.

While the term *karuṇā*/*karuṇai* does not appear in the early works of the Tamil Śrī Vaiṣṇava saints compiled as the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, Hardy’s observations mentioned above about Viṣṇu’s qualities are operative. Though not explicitly described with “*karuṇai*,” there is ample discussion of Viṣṇu’s salvific nature and acts which are qualified with descriptors of loving care. Terms like *takavu*, *dayā*, and *kṛpā* have semantic overlap with what we might gloss in English as “mercy” or “compassion.” These terms appear in *Nālāyiradivyaṇḍam* with some frequency.¹⁶⁷ The theme of god’s compassion is taken up with some gusto by later Śrī Vaiṣṇava commentators who identify it as a key element of the relationship between god and their devotees.¹⁶⁸

The term *karuṇai* appears in earnest in the Śaiva *bhakti* hymns of the *Tēvāram*. It is in the works of the *mūvar* where *karuṇai* first emerges as a significant qualifier of Śiva’s nature, appearing 16 times. Cuntarar uses the term seven times, Appar follows with six, and Cuntarar with three. Given this relatively sparse occurrence (in the greater context of the almost 800 *Tēvāram* hymns), it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about its meaning and semantic range, however in looking at a few key instances we may gain some insight. The following section addresses *Tēvāram* occurrences by composer.

Appar

In many ways, Appar’s hymns share the most conceptual overlap with those of Māṇikkavācakar. His hymns, as well as many in *Tiruvācakam*, showcase speakers who express significant distress and detail the hardships of being stuck in cycles of *samsāra* or karmic birth.

¹⁶⁷ Conversation with Francis X. Clooney, September 16, 2021.

¹⁶⁸ See Srilata Raman, *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism Tamil Cats and Sanskrit Monkeys* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 89-91.

Appar's speakers position themselves as fundamentally unfit for true servitorship, a theme that is amplified in Māṇikkavācakar's self-denigratory verses. Śiva's compassionate nature is productively contrasted with these depictions of acute suffering. Thus the use of *karuṇai* in Appar is an instructive starting point for exploring its use in *Tēvāram*. To begin, Appar 6.62.5 illustrates the above discussed phenomena clearly:

*im māyap piṛappu eṇṇum kaṭal ām tuṇpattu
 iṭaic cuḷippaṭṭu iḷaiṇṇai iḷaiyā vaṇṇam
 kaim māṇa maṇattu utavi, karuṇai ceytu
 kātal aruḷ avai vaittāy kāṇa nillāy
 vem māṇa matakariyīṇ urivai pōrtta
 vētiyaṇē teṇ āṇaikkāvuḷ mēya
 ammāṇ niṇ poṇpātam aṭaiyapperrāl
 allakaṇṭamkoṇṭu aṭiyēṇ eṇ ceykēṇē*

You aided my mind like a helping hand, to quell my weariness, I who was fatigued, trapped in the suffering of an ocean of these illusory births.
 You were compassionate toward me and bestowed loving grace unto me.
 Now you are not seen.
 Oh you who are disguised in the skin of a vicious rutting elephant,
 if I approach your golden feet, what should I do, your servant, suffering from this affliction?

After describing their imperiled state, mired in a whirlpool of karmic muck, the speaker details the gracious action Śiva performs in order to ameliorate their suffering. The word *karuṇai* is used to modify this act. *Karuṇai* is used with the verb *cey*, to do, perform, or act. The act of compassion is then followed by the gracious giving of love: *kātal aruḷ avai vaittāy*. Having acted compassionately by lending aid, Śiva then graciously bestows his love. *Kātal* here denotes love that encompasses a broad spectrum of attachment including that of familial relationships, lovers, etc. It does not have the overtly sexual overtones of the term *kāmam*—this distinction is evident even in early *akam* poetry.¹⁶⁹ The linking of the terms *karuṇai*, *kātal*, and *aruḷ* in the context of

¹⁶⁹ Va. Cupa Manikkam, *The Tamil Concept of Love* (Tirunelvely: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1962), 253-254.

Śiva's intervention in the speaker's suffering is significant and points toward similar constellations in Māṇikkavācakar's works.

6.90.10 introduces another frequent construction, the inclusion of *purāṇic* source materials that mirror, highlight, or illustrate Śiva's compassionate nature:

*maṭal āḷit tāmarai āyirattil onru
malarkkaṇ iṭantu iṭutalumē mali vāṇ kōlac
cuṭar āḷi neṭumālukku aruḷceytāṇai*

*tumpi uri pōrttāṇai tōḷaṇ viṭṭa
aṭal āḷit tēr uṭaiya ilaṅkaik kōṇai
aru varaikkīḷ aṭarttāṇai aruḷ āṛ karuṇaik
kaṭalāṇai kañcaṇūr āṇṭa kōvai
kaṛpakattai kaṇ ārak kaṇṭu uyntēṇē*

The one who graciously gave Māl a scintillating, beautiful discus, great and full as soon as he plucked and his eye that looked like a flower when one 1,000 petal lotus [was missing];
The one who covered himself with an elephant skin;
The one who squashed the King of Ilaṅkai—who had a chariot with strong wheels from Tōḷaṇ—under the rare mountain;
The ocean of compassion suffused with grace;
The king who rules Kañcaṇūr; The wish-fulfilling tree;
Having seen him, I saved myself as my eyes filled.

This verse recounts various episodes in which Śiva intervenes in the lives of other cosmic figures. The first example comes from the *Śiva Purāṇa* and references the story wherein Māl is tested by Śiva who later grants him a boon. The second references the disciplining of Rāvaṇa wherein Rāvaṇa is granted pardon and a boon after appeasing Śiva. This verse is roughly broken into two parts: the first half contains references to *purāṇic* materials, the stories of Māl and Rāvaṇa. It then shifts to a more local manifestation of Śiva as the king of Kañcaṇūr, and finally concludes with the speaker's direct encounter. Bifurcating the *purāṇic*/universal and the human/local, is a description of Śiva as an ocean of compassion filled with grace, *aruḷ āṛ karuṇai kaṭalāṇai*. Śiva is compassionate in both his cosmic interventions with Māl and Rāvaṇa, and in his gracious presence that is salvific to the speaker. This verse points to a continuity between the characterization of Śiva's actions as fundamentally compassionate (even when “violent”) in both

cosmic and divine realms that continues in Māṇikkavācakar. Of note is the connection between compassion and grace; compassion is qualified as being full of grace (*aruḷ āṛ karuṇai*).

4.51.4 contains another *purāṇic* episode that illustrates Śiva's compassion:

kālaṇaik kālāl cerṛu anṛu aruḷ puri karuṇaiyāṇē
nīlam āṛ kaṇṭattāṇē nīḷ muṭi amararkōvē
ñālam āṁ perumaiyāṇē naḷir iḷantiṅkaḷ cūṭum
kōlam āṛ caṭaiyiṇāṇē kōṭikā uṭaiya kōvē

O One whose compassion abounds with grace, who in the past killed Kālaṇ with his foot!
One with a blue throat!
King of the heavenly ones with a lofty crown!
Lord whose greatness comprises the world!
One with beautiful, matted locks on which there is a cool young crescent!
King of Kōṭika!

This verse references the myth of Śiva destroying time/death (Kālaṇ) on behalf of Mārkaṇḍeya:

kālaṇai kālāl cerṛu anṛu aruḷpuri karuṇaiyāṇē, the compassionate one filled with grace destroyed time with his foot. This action was both compassionate toward Mārkaṇḍeya, but also toward Kālaṇ, who, though destroyed, was also graced by Śiva. Like 6.90.10, Śiva's destructive acts are given a valence of love and care, here perhaps more explicitly. We also see the explicit connection of *aruḷ* and *karuṇai* as in 6.62.5 and 6.90.10. In 6.52.7 Appar similarly invokes another *purāṇic* reference, this one the slaying of the *āśura* king Calantaraṇa: Behold! he is the compassionate one who graciously bestowed the discus to dark Māl in order to destroy the strong-shouldered Calantaraṇa (*kaṛpolitōḷ calantaraṇai piḷanta āḷi karumālukku aruḷ ceyta karuṇaiyāṇ kāṇ*). Compassion and grace are linked again in this excerpt in which even the “violence” actions are part of gracious action.

6.42.5 further illustrates how compassion is used as a qualifier of Śiva's nature:

tiṇaittaṇai ōṛ porai ilā uyir pōm kūṭṭaip
poruḷ enṛu mika uṇṇi matiyāl inta
aṇaittuulakum āḷal āṁ enṛu pēcum
āṅkāram tavir neṇcē amararkku āka
muṇaittu varu matilmūṇṛum poṇṛa anṛu
muṭukiya veṇcilai vaḷaittu, centī mūḷka

*niṇaitta peruṇ karuṇaiyaṇ neyttāṇam enru
niṇaiyumā niṇaintakkāl uyyal āmē*

Oh heart, closely considering the body from where the soul leaves without staying for even a small measure of time,
leave that ego that says you can rule the whole world with your mind!
You can be saved if you think appropriately of his *neyttaṇam*, the one of great compassion who, back then, bent his cruel bow and thought to engulf the three attacking enemy forts in flames.

Addressing their wily mind, Appar’s speaker offers a way out of suffering by contemplation of one of Śiva’s many places of residence, Neyttaṇam. Here, compassion is again a marker of Śiva’s fundamental nature—the noun *karuṇai* is directly appended by the masculine third person singular affix *-aṇ*. We will see shortly the adoption of *karuṇaiyaṇ* as a frequent epithet in *Tiruvācakam*.

6.77.6 adds an important qualification about the recipients of Śiva’s compassion:

*aṭi ār cilampu olikaḷ ārppak kaṇṭēṇ
av avarkkē īnta karuṇai kaṇṭēṇ
muṭi ār caṭaimēl aravam mūḷka
mūrip pīrai pōy maraiyak kaṇṭēṇ
koṭi ār ataṇmēl iṭapam kaṇṭēṇ
kōvaṇamum kīḷum kulāvak kaṇṭēṇ
vaṭi ārum mū ilaivēl kaiyil kaṇṭēṇ
vāymūr aṭikalai nāṇ kaṇṭa ārē*

I witnessed as the anklets on the feet resounded with sound.
I witnessed the compassion meted to each one.
I witnessed as the crescent moon went and descended into the coiled serpents above his matted hair.
I witnessed the bull emblazoned on the flag.
I witnessed as the loin cloth and waist band glimmered.
I witnessed in his hand a sharp trident with three blades.
This is the way I witnessed the lord in Vāymūr.

In this hymn to Tiruvāymūr the speaker gives a list of Śiva’s wonders that he witnessed first-hand. Referencing Śiva’s acts toward his devotees, and perhaps indirectly to the panoply of *purāṇic* references noted above, the speaker says: *avvavarkkē īnta karuṇai kaṇṭēṇ*, I saw the compassion granted *to each and every one*. Śiva’s compassion is that which is bestowed to individuals according to their need. This theme, that Śiva meets all individuals “where they are,” or “according to their need” continues through Māṇikkavācakar’s works where even the lowest dog is deserving of grace and indeed granted it happily.

In Appar we see a constellation forming between terms for compassion, grace, and love. Compassion characterizes Śiva’s nature and his interactions with his devotees. These interactions include those more “violent” *purāṇic* episodes in which he destroys other figures and in the softer interventions made on behalf of the speaker. In Appar, *karuṇai* is an action that can be undertaken and something that can be bestowed. I now turn to Campantar to review his usage of the term.

Campantar

1.22.8 is a useful segue from Appar to Campantar, given that he too uses *purāṇic* narrative to reinforce ideas:

*caṇam veru uṛa varu tacamukaṇ orupatumuṭiyoṭum irupatu
kaṇam maruviya puyam neri vakai, kaḷal aṭiyil orviral nīruviṇaṇ
iṇam mali kaṇa nicicaraṇ makiḷvu uṛa aruḷceyta karuṇaiyaṇ eṇa
maṇa makiḷvoṭu maṇaimuṛai uṇar maṇaivaṇam amartaru paramaṇē*

He was the one who took one toe of his ankleted foot and crushed the solid twenty shoulders of Tacamukan who frightened the community;
The compassionate one who graciously touched the night walker of many *gaṇas* with joy;
He is the supreme lord who flourishes in Maṇaivaṇam, where the wisdom of the Vedas is happily known.

This verse references the story of Rāvaṇa’s penance from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In it, Śiva crushes Rāvaṇa, who had been terrorizing sages, with his toe. Only after Rāvaṇa sings Śiva’s praises over many years does Śiva eventually bestow his grace and grant him both freedom and a boon. Here, the first two lines document the harsher act of crushing. This act is then qualified in the third line which says he is the compassionate one who graciously touched the night walker (Rāvaṇa) with joy (*nicicaraṇ makiḷvu uṛa aruḷceyta karuṇaiyaṇ*). Whether this refers back to the myth and to the eventual act of freeing or whether it refers to the act of crushing detailed in lines one and two is not clear. However, his actions toward Rāvaṇa are described with both of the terms *aruḷ* and *karuṇai* further substantiating a link between the two terms I noted above in Appar. Analyzing the application of the Rāvaṇa story in Appar, Monius notes, “The story of

Ravana exemplifies, in condensed narrative form, the journey from everyday disordered, meaningless action and language to the cohesion of creative speech (in this case, song) and embodied gesture (in Ravana's instance, the literal use of his own body to create music) that in turn generate a true love (*aṇṇu*) for the lord."¹⁷⁰

Śiva's defeat of Rāvaṇa is mentioned again in 2.32.8:

*irakkam il kuṇattoṭu ulaku eṇkum nali vempōr
arakkāṇ muṭipattu alai puyattoṭum aṭaṅkat
turakka viraliṇ cīritu vaittavar iṭam cīr
varak karuṇaiyāḷar payil vaṇ tiru aiyyāṇē*

Civaṇ placed his toe upon Arakkāṇ of ten heads and full shoulders who was mercilessly waging harsh wars across the world in order to completely diminish his strength;
His place is cool Tiruvaṇyāru which is full of people of great compassion.

This time, *karuṇai* is used not to describe Śiva directly, but the people who live in his fertile town of Tiruvaṇyāru. This is the only instance of such usage in all of the *Tēvāram*. However, *Tirukkōvaiyār* spends a considerable amount of time qualifying Śiva's people as being virtuous; this is a point of reference to note.

3.76.8 again mentions Rāvaṇa (Arakkāṇ):

*muṭit talaikaḷpattu uṭai muruṭṭu uru arakkāṇai nerukki virālāl,
aṭittalam muṇ vaittu alamara, karuṇai vaittavaṇ iṭam palatuyar
keṭuttalai niṇaittu aṇam iyaṇṇutal kiḷarntu, pulavāṇar vaṇṇumai
viṭuttalai matittu, niti nalkumavar malku pativēṭavaṇamē*

The place where Śiva crushed the reckless Arakkāṇ of ten crowned heads with one toe and gave his compassion when he (Arakkāṇ) was confused is Vetavaṇam, the place which abounds with loving people who are wealthy, who think of destroying many [kinds of] suffering, who become great at performing virtuous deeds, and who think about alleviating the poverty of bards.

This time, the place where Śiva granted his compassion (*karuṇai vaittavaṇ*) is Vetavaṇam. An epic myth is again rooted in the named Tamil countryside. *Karuṇai* becomes something that can be given directly and is used with the verb *vai*, to give/bestow. As in 2.32.8, the people of

¹⁷⁰ Anne E. Monius, "Gesture and Emotion in Tamil Śaiva Devotional Poetry," in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Emotions in Classical Indian Philosophy*, eds. Maria Heim, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Roy Tzohar (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 184.

Vetavaṇam, another of Śiva's abodes, are described with a number of virtues. Their virtues indirectly reflect the compassion of Śiva mentioned in line two.

3.123.7 continues the pattern of invoking Śiva's interaction with Rāvaṇa:

*eṭuttavaṇ tarukkai iḷittavar viralāl ēttiṭa āttam ām pēru
toṭuttavar celvam tōṇriya pīrappum irappu ariyātavar vēḷvi
taṭuttavar vaṇappāl vaittatu ōr karuṇai taṇ aruḷ perumaiyum vālvum
koṭuttavar virumpum perum pukaḷāḷar kōṇamāmalai amarntārē*

He is the one who gave a boon, the wealth of not known when he would be born or die, as Tarukkai who had picked up [the mountain] and been crushed by one finger praised him.
He is the one who interrupted the sacrifice.
He dwelled in Kōṇamāmalai where live the very famous who adore the one who grants life and the greatness of compassion which is given out of grace.

In this verse, compassion is linked to again to grace—it is that which is given by him to his devotees—and also semantically to *perumai*, excellence or greatness. The boon giving of the first two lines which detail his cosmic actions is mirrored in the life-giving gracious compassion bestowed on the devotees detailed in the second two lines.

2.40.2 expands upon the conditions in which Śiva, as the compassionate one, takes care of his devotees:

*tām eṇrum maṇam taḷarāt takuṭiyarāy ulakattu
ām eṇru caraṇ pukuntārtamaik kākkum karuṇaiyiṇāṇ
ōm eṇru maṇai payilvār pīramapurattu uṇaiṇra
kāmaṇtaṇ uṇal eriyak kaṇal cērnta kaṇṇāṇē*

The compassionate one protects those who have entered into the protection of he who protects the whole world, the ones who are fit of mind and not slacking.
He is the one whose fiery eye lit the body of Kāmaṇ ablaze, who abides in Pīramapuram where those who practice the Vedas chant “ōm.”

This verse introduces the concept of *caraṇam* “refuge” from the Sanskrit *śaraṇa*. This concept is important to Śrī Vaiṣṇavas for whom it is closely linked with *prapatti* “surrender.” Specific language for seeking refuge or surrendering is not common in the Śaiva materials, so this instance is of interest. Māṇikkavācakar plays with the notion of refuge in *Tiruvācakam*, though not always with these specific terms. Further investigation of the connection between *karuṇai* and *caraṇam* warrants further attention in the Śaiva context.

2.23.5 is an altogether different style of poem from those explored above. It is written in the style of an *akam* poem in which a mother laments for her daughter who is enamored with a young gentleman. In this poem, instead of a gentleman, Śiva has taken the place of the object of her affections:

*ceṇkaṇ peyar koṇṭavaṇ cempiyarkōṇ
am kaṇ karuṇai peritu āyavaṇē
veṇ kaṇ viṭaiyāy veṇṇāval uḷāy
aṇkattu ayaṛvu āyiṇaḷ āyilaṇṇē*

The one who granted *karuṇai*
like that which belongs to the good eyes of
Ceṇka Cōḷa, the king of the Cōḷa,
has a bull with white eyes
and sits under the rose-apple tree.
My ornamented one's body languishes [thinking of him].

It is curious here that *karuṇai* is the chosen qualifier for Śiva as an object of attraction. The use of the term also complicates the *akam* formula it borrows so heavily from. The mother laments for her daughter who is usually after the town playboy. In this verse, she laments that her daughter is after the compassionate one. Monius comments on the use of Caṅkam poetics in Appar writing, “More than merely reworking Caṅkam language and tropes to grant authority or heighten certain literary qualities, such imagery emerges as truly new and creative speech in Appar's work.”¹⁷¹ She states, “The emaciation wrought by sexual longing, the disobedience to parental figures in pursuit of satisfying desire, and the pining for the beloved hero in classical literature are here transformed into a verbal gesture that generates love (*aṇṇpu*) of a very different sort, one not focused on frustrated sexuality but instead on a gracious god who will eventually satisfy the girl's desires.”¹⁷²

3.77.7 returns to a more familiar invocation of the term *karuṇai*:

*eṇ periyā vāṇavarkaḷ niṇṇu tuticeyya iraiyē karuṇai āy
uṇṇu ariya naṇcu ataṇai uṇṇu ulakam uyya aruḷ uttamaṇ iṭam*

¹⁷¹ Monius, “Gesture and Emotion,” 182.

¹⁷² Monius, “Gesture and Emotion,” 184.

*paṇ payilum vaṇṭupala keṇṭi matu uṇṭu nīrai paimpoliṇvāy
oṇ palaviṇ iṇkaṇi corintu maṇam nāru utavimāṇikuḷiyē*

The place of the ultimate one whose grace saved the world by compassionately consuming that rare poison as food when the other gods stood praising him, the supreme one, is sweetly perfumed Utavimāṇikuḷi, where sweet ripe fruits of the jackfruit tree from the fertile gardens full of melodiously buzzing bees who gather honey and drink, scatter.

Śiva's act of drinking poison churned from the ocean is, in the Śaiva tradition, viewed as a fundamentally compassionate one. The choice of myths used in verses which also highlight Śiva's *karuṇai* is not random but both mirrors and amplifies the theme.

Thus, Campantar continues in the vein of Appar, linking specific *purāṇic* episodes that productively highlight Śiva's compassionate nature, linking *karuṇai* to other concepts like *aruḷ*, and using *karuṇai* as both an object given and as a qualifier for Śiva's nature or actions.

Cuntarar

The term *karuṇai* appears only three times in Cuntarar's *Tēvāram*. In 7.26, the hymn to Tiru Kāḷatti, Cuntarar praises Śiva in his cosmic manifestation as a dazzling light “*ceḷuṇcuṭarē*,” and lord of *gaṇas*, “*kantār kātalikkuṁ kaṇa nātaṇ*,” the lord of the *gaṇas* who adore him and see him. Verse two then shifts to focus on Śiva's actions toward the speaker:

Verse 1

*ceṇṭu āṭum viṭaiyāy! civaṇē! eṇ ceḷuṇcuṭarē!
vaṇṭu ārum kuḷalāl! umai pākam maḷiṇṭavaṇē!
kaṇṭār kātalikkuṁ kaṇanātaṇ! em kāḷattiyāy!
aṇṭā! uṇṇai allāl aṇintu ēttamāṭṭēṇē.*

Śiva with the bounding bull! My dazzling light!
One who rejoices with his half, Uma, whose tresses are swarming with bees!
Chief of the *gaṇas*, beloved by those who know you! My lord of Kāḷatti!
Universal one! I won't praise or know any other than you.

Verse 2

*imaiyōr nāyakaṇē iṇaivānē eṇ iṭarttunaiyē
kamai ār karuṇaiyiyāy karu mā mukil pōl miṭarṇāy
umai ōr kūru uṭaiyāy uruvē tiruk kāḷattiyu!
amaivē uṇṇai allāl aṇintu ēttamāṭṭēṇē*

Lord of the heavenly ones! Lord! My aid in affliction!
One who is compassion and full of forbearance, whose neck is like a great dark cloud,
The one who has Uma as one part, whose form is visible! The beauty in Kāḷatti,

I won't know or praise anyone other than you.

This two-verse run contains a significant shift. As attention turns from Śiva's cosmic manifestations toward the relationship between Śiva and the speaker, Śiva's tolerance, availability in times of need, and compassion are linked together thematically and emphasized. Compassion, while highlighted by *purāṇic* episodes, is most strongly linked to Śiva's attitudes toward the speaker of these poems. It characterizes and defines the relationship between Śiva and the speaker. This remains true in *Tiruvācakam* and less explicitly in *Tirukkōvaiyār*.

Verse 7.67.8 echoes patterns noted above in Campantar and Appar:

*ev evar tēvar iruṭikaḷ maṇṇar
eṇ irantārkaḷa maṇṇa eṇkum niṇru ētta
av avar vēṇṭiyatē aruḷceytu,
aṭaintavarkkē iṭam āki niṇṇāṇai
iv avar karuṇai em karpakakkaṭalai
emperumāṇ aruḷāy eṇṇa piṇṇai
vavvi eṇ āvi maṇam kalantāṇai
valivalamtaṇil vantu kaṇṭēṇē*

Whosoever, be they gods, sages, or kings,
when they praise him he graciously grants their needs.
That one who stood as a place for those who take refuge,
who grants compassion like our wish giving tree,
after imploring my lord grace me,
he mixed in my life breath and mind and
I saw him in Valivalam.

In this verse, Śiva's compassion is meted to the speaker and to the implied group of ardent devotees. Śiva is called the wish giving tree and in the first three lines we see that anyone who praises him will receive his gracious affection or care. Interestingly, Cuntarar also invokes the notion of surrender or refuge (*aṭaintavarkkē iṭam*). The term *caraṇam* is not used but seems to be suggested.

In Cuntarar's final use in 7.87.6, Śiva is referred to as the "great ocean of compassion": the great ocean of compassion praised by those of Cōḷa Nātu which is surrounded by the Kāviri (*kāviri puṭai cūḷ cōṇāṭṭavartām paraviya karuṇai amkaṭal*). Thus, his few uses of the term continue in the vein of both Appar and Campantar.

The term *karuṇai* has a long history in Indian literatures belonging to various religious and aesthetic traditions. Its manifestation in each is not necessarily consistent though there are significant points of overlap. In this brief and limited overview, I have highlighted a few key elements which are relevant to a discussion of its manifestation in Māṇikkavācakar's works. Monius' observations of Tamil Buddhist literature offer possibilities for imagining how *karuṇai* may have been a site for notions of *rasa* (aestheticized emotion) to be coupled with the active ethical imperative of *karuṇā* from Buddhist traditions. Missing from my discussion is the Śivadharmā corpus (beginning in the 6th ct. CE) which may offer more material to trace how *karuṇā* became a salient idea in the south and a newly important theological construct.¹⁷³

Karuṇai in Tiruvācakam

As noted above, the overall occurrence of the term *karuṇai* across all *Tēvāram* hymns amounts to less than two percent. Strikingly, the term is used in 21 out of 54 songs of the *Tiruvācakam*, bringing its occurrence up to forty-one percent. This is similar to the significant increase in the use of the term *aruḷ* between *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam* as documented by Harris.¹⁷⁴ *Tiruvācakam* contains a proliferation of both of these terms for describing Śiva's nature and actions, and as seen in the *Tēvāram* examples above, *karuṇai* and *aruḷ* have thematic overlap. Now that some of the relevant features of *karuṇai* in historical context have been explored, the rest of this chapter considers how the term is used and how the concept of compassion functions in both texts. I begin by looking at *Tiruvācakam* in which *karuṇai* as a

¹⁷³ For more on the link between this corpus and the development of *jīvakāruṇyam* in Śaivasiddhānta traditions see Srilata Raman, *The Transformation of Tamil Religion Ramalinga Swamigal (1823-1874) and Modern Dravidian Sainthood* (New York: Routledge, 2022) 77-107.

¹⁷⁴ Gardner Harris, "Obtaining Grace."

term and concept is explicitly engaged with. In this section, I first look at *karuṇai* as a direct descriptor for Śiva and his nature. I will then move on to describe *karuṇai* as a qualifier of Śiva's actions and more specifically, his actions toward or on behalf of his devotee. After doing so, I will compare these compassionate actions to the speaker's perception of their own states, during and after these acts are performed. Finally, I will think about what affective powers witnessing these may have for the reader.

Śiva's Nature as karuṇai

To start addressing the use of *karuṇai* in *Tiruvācakam*, I will look at a few examples of how the term is used to describe Śiva's nature. Following the conventions introduced in *Tevāram*, in *Tiruvācakam* *karuṇai* is used to qualify Śiva's nature alongside other descriptive terms like *aṇpu* or *aruḷ*. For example, in *Civapurāṇam* 1.66, the speaker uses the metaphor of a river to address Śiva directly: "O bountiful river of great compassion that does not diminish" (*pērātu niṇra peruṅkaruṇa pōrārē*). The term for river, *pōr*, stands in for Śiva and gains the honorific affix *āṇ* plus the vocative affix *-ē* to indicate Śiva as the subject of direct address. In *Tiruccatakam* 95, the speaker also uses the image of a flood: "O great flood of compassion without change" (*māru ilāta mā karuṇa veḷḷamē*). Similarly, in *Nīttal viṇṇappam* line 117, the speaker calls Śiva an ocean of compassion (*karuṇa kaṭal*). In *Tiruvamṇai* line 179, the flood imagery is again invoked to call Śiva a flood of compassion (*karuṇa* veḷḷam*). Each of these examples echo the natural imagery used by Appar in 9.90.10 and Cuntarar in 7.86.6. In *Pōṇṇittiruvakaval* 204, the speaker introduces another metaphor from the natural world saying praise the mountain of compassion so close (*maruviya karuṇa malaiyē pōṇṇi*). Śiva here is not the sea of compassion but the mountain of compassion which is in immediate proximity to the speaker.

If the above examples give brief glimpses of *karuṇai* as a descriptor of Śiva's nature, the following excerpt, lines 92-109, from *Kīrtittiruvakaval* begins to contextualize the term's use:

*āntam il perumai aḷal uru karantu
cuntara vēṭattu oru mutal uruvu koṇṭu
intira ṇālam pōla vantarūḷi
ēvevar taṇmaiṇṇu tanvayin paṭuttu
tāṇē ākiya tayāparaṇ em irai
cantira tī pattu cāttiraṇ āki
antarattu uḷintu vantu aḷaku amar pālaiyul
cuntara taṇmaiṇṇu tutaintu iruntarūḷiyum
mantira mā malai mayēntira meṇpaṇ
antam il perumai aruḷ uṭai aṇṇal
emtamai āṇṭa paricu atu pakaril
ārṇal atu uṭai aḷaku amar tiru uru
nūṇru kōḷi nimirntu kāṭṭiyum
ūṇam taṇṇai oruṇku uṭaṇ arukkum
āṇantammē āṇ aruḷiyum
mātil kūru uṭai mā perum karuṇaiyaṇ
nāta perum paṇai navinṇu kaṇkavum
aḷukku aṭaiyāmal āṇṭu koṇṭarūḷpavaṇ*

He concealed himself as a flame whose greatness is without end,
taking the first form, beautifully disguised,
he graciously came like magic,
made the qualities of each one his own;
He is indeed the merciful lord—our lord—
who became the *śāstric* one, bright as the moon;
he descended from the sky and came to Pālai, of abiding beauty;
Gracious and replete with all of the qualities of beauty,
He is the king of Mount Mayēntira (Mahendra), the mythic mountain,
The lord with great grace without limit;
If speaking of the manner in which he ruled us,
He showed his beautiful holy form which possessed that ability
and raised his ash-white flag;
He graciously gave the river of bliss which
reduces and severs our flaws;
He is the one of great compassion whose half is a woman;
As the great *nāta* drum sounds out,
He is the one who takes and rules us without defect.

Kīrtittiruvakaval is a long form poem that weaves together descriptions of Śiva's *purāṇic* feats with his manifestation in Tamil towns and accounts of his interventions in the lives of his devotees in a seamless stream of praise. *Akaval*, one of the two oldest meters, is the meter in which the vast majority of Caṅkam poems are composed so it is significant that Māṇikkavācakar chooses this as one expressive mode among many, including forms that more closely approximate the *patikam* of the *Tēvāram*. Writing on *Pattuppāṭṭu*, also in *akaval*, M.S.

Purnalingam Pillai writes, “All of them are in *akaval* metre and must be read as wholes, for the thought leaps from line to line, and no cuttings can be made without impairing the run of the labyrinthine thought.”¹⁷⁵ This description rings true for *Kīrtittiruvakaval* in that there aren’t clear stopping points in the narrative-like flow. The excerpt above captures all three of the themes listed and thus I have chosen it to see how the content that immediately precedes and follows the use of the term *karuṇai* can inform our understanding of it. The opening lines of this poem refer to Śiva’s manifestation as the *liṅga* of light. The poet then shifts to indicate that Śiva takes into his being the nature of each and everyone (*ēvevar taṇmaiym tanvayin paṭuttu*) and that he is the giving lord (*tayāparaṇ*). Following is mention of his manifestation in the Tamil countryside at Pālai. The speaker then qualifies Śiva further: “he is the supreme being whose grace is great and without end” (*antam il perumai aruḷ uṭai aṇṇal*); then the river of bliss (*āṇantammē āṛā*). Finally enters the term *karuṇai*: “the one of great compassion whose form is half woman” (*mātil kūru uṭai māpperum karuṇaiyaṇ*). Here, *karuṇai* is given the masculine singular third person affix *-aṇ*, in describing Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara. After this, the effects of his interventions are mentioned: “he rules us that we may be without faults” (*aḷukku aṭaiyāmal āṇṭu koṇṭaruḷpavaṇ*). In this flowing section, *karuṇai* is nested in amongst other notable aspects of Śiva’s nature. We see that grace (*aruḷ*) and bliss (*āṇantam*) are also listed as fundamental characteristics of Śiva’s being, and further, that *karuṇai* is the nature of a lord who works to remove flaws and to enslave, i.e. draw one into an unbreakable relationship. *Karuṇai* is here contextualized in a larger picture of Śiva’s broader nature and deeds.

Tiruccatakam offers another shade of *karuṇai* as it highlights the disparities between the speaker, often described as lowly and unvirtuous, and Śiva who is the highest, most perfect

¹⁷⁵ M.S. Purnalingam, *A Primer of Tamil Literature* (Madras: Ananda Press, 1904) 21.

being. This productive contrast is found throughout *Tiruvācakam* and emphasizes how significant Śiva’s interventions in the life of the speaker are. That the supreme being deigns to stoop down and aid the lowest creature is a running motif throughout the work. This dynamic emphasizes Śiva’s compassionate nature, and the term *karuṇai* is often used to qualify interventions in the life the speaker when they describe themselves as an unworthy dog. Verse 97 provides a useful example:

uṭaiya nātaṇē pōrri niṇ alāl
parru maru enakku āvatu onru iṇi
uṭaiyaṇō paṇi pōrri umparār
tam parā parā pōrri yāriṇum
kaṭaiyaṇ āyinēṇ pōrri eṇ perum
karuṇaiyālanē pōrri eṇṇai niṇ
aṭiyaṇ ākkiṇāy pōrri ātiyum
antam āyiṇāy pōrri appaṇē

Praise the lord who possesses me! Other than you,
 O Possessor, do I have any one other connection?
 Praise supplication [to you]!
 Praise the pre-eminent of the heavenly ones!
 I was lower than everyone; Praise!
 Praise my one of great compassion!
 You made me your slave; Praise!
 Praise you who became the beginning and the end! O Father!

Much of the *catakam* follows a similar pattern: the speaker details their hard state while also praising Śiva’s gracious acts of salvation or enslavement. The final decad is no different. In this verse, the speaker refers to themselves as a lower than everyone else: “I was lower than everyone” (*yāriṇum kaṭaiyaṇ āyinēṇ*). Immediately following this statement, they declare: “praise my one of great compassion” (*eṇ perum karuṇaiyālanē pōrri*); and immediately following, “praise you who made me your slave” (*niṇ aṭiyaṇ ākkiṇāy pōrri*). Śiva’s act of enslaving the lowest one is linked by way of grammatical location to Śiva’s intervention. In verse 100 the speaker states: “my lord your compassion is without limit, you made me a lover at your feet” (*eṇṇai niṇ kaḷarṅku anpaṇ ākkiṇāy ellai illai niṇ karuṇai empirāṇ*). *Karuṇai* indicates

something about the *degree* of compassion that Śiva demonstrates in tending to even those who appear not to deserve it.

In *Tiruvempāvai*, a song generally grouped with the other game songs of the *Tēvāram*, the speaker uses *karuṇai* amongst other descriptors that make Śiva an object of attraction for a group of young women. Take for example verse 8:

*kōḷi cilapa cilampum kuruku eṅkum
eḷil iyampa iyampum veṇ caṅku eṅkum
kēḷ il parañcōti kēḷ il paraṅkaruṇai
kēḷ il viḷumpporuḷkaḷ pāṭiṇōm kēṭṭilaiyō
vāḷi itu eṇṇa urakkamō vāy tiravāy
āḷiyāṇ aṇṇuṭaimai ām ārum invārō
ūḷi mutalvaṇāy niṇṇa oruṇaṇai
ēḷai paṅkāḷaṇaiyē pātu ēl ōr empāvāy*

As the rooster crows, birds sound everywhere;
When the seven notes sound, white conches everywhere join;
We sang of the supreme flame without compare, the one of great compassion without equal,
The highest object without compare—did you not hear it?
May you flourish! What is this slumber? You do not even open your mouth!
Is this the manner of her love for the king?
Sing of the singular one who stands as the prime being at the time of dissolution, the one whose partner is a woman! Wake up, our young lady!

In this verse the speaker sings about Śiva as the supreme light without compare, his supreme compassion without compare, and as the highest object without compare (*kēḷ il parañcōti kēḷ il paraṅkaruṇai kēḷ il viḷumpporuḷkaḷ pāṭiṇōm*). It is this Śiva that the speaker that the young woman being addressed is in love with (*āḷiyāṇ aṇṇuṭaimai ām ārum invārō*). Throughout this song, the speakers sing of Śiva's more endearing qualities, framing him not only as a supreme being but also referring to him with language that would be used to describe a handsome young *talaivaṇ*. *Karuṇai* fits in with other “sweet” qualities and also in the greater narrative of the song in which intimacy is prized. The notion of enslaving finds overlap with the veiled language of infatuation, or lovers.

Tirukkōtumpī 9 demonstrates a similar invocation of *karuṇai* as that explored in the *Tēvāram* examples above: it uses the term in conjunction with *purāṇic* references which mirror its sentiment.

*karāṇaṅkaḷ ellām kaṭantunīṇra karai miṭarṇaṇ
caraṇaṅkaḷē cenru cārtalumē tāṇ eṇakku
maraṇam pīrappu enru ivai iraṇiṇ mayakku arutta
karuṇai kaṭalukkē cenru ūtāy kōttumpī*

The one with a stain on his throat stands beyond all senses,
Upon reaching his feet, for me he severed the delusion of the two: death and birth;
Go to that ocean of compassion and hum oh king bee!

Here, Śiva's salvific act of drinking the ocean of poison is referenced in line one with the phrase he whose throat is black (*karai miṭarṇaṇ*). Immediately following the speaker uses the word *caraṇam*, as also seen in *Tēvāram*, to indicate a place of salvation, the place in which the speaker is freed from the fetters of birth and death. *Caraṇam* declined in the plural refers to Śiva's feet. The verse concludes with the speaker addressing the bee: go to him he who is the sea of compassion (*karuṇai kaṭalukkē cenru ūtāy kōttumpī*). Thus, here there is a link between a cosmic act done on behalf of others, the salvific nature of taking refuge in Śiva's feet, and in the description of Śiva with the term *karuṇai*.

Tiruvammāṇai verse 1 is my final example of the use of *karuṇai* as a direct descriptor of Śiva's nature. This verse invokes the *purāṇic* episode of the *liṅga* of light, but this invocation functions in a manner similar to the above cited *Tiruccatakam* 97—as a means of highlighting or emphasizing the compassionate actions of Śiva toward devotees. It reads as follows:

*cem kaṇ neṭumālum cenru iṭantum kāṇpu ariya
pōṇku malar pātam pūtalattē pōntaruḷi
eṅkaḷ pīrappu aruttiṭṭu em tarāmum āḷkoṇṭa
teṅku tiraḷ cōlai teṇṇaṇ peruntuṇaiyāṇ
am kaṇaṇ antaṇaṇ āy aṇaikūvi vīṭu aruḷum
am karuṇai vār kaḷalē pāṭutum kāṇ ammāṇāy*

Even though tall Māl with red eyes dug deep for the sight of the precious budding flowered feet, it evaded him; those feet graciously came on *this* earth;
He is the one of Southern Peruntuṇai, filled with coconut palm groves;
He became a brahmin with kind eyes, and uttered words, graciously granting release;

Let us sing of the elegant feet of great compassion! Behold, *ammāṇāy*!

In this verse, the speaker opens by referencing the story of the *liṅga* of light which Māl, try as he might, cannot get to the bottom of. The verse says that Māl cannot reach the feet (*pātam*) and then goes on to say it is those feet which graciously walked the Earth (of the speaker) (*pātam pūtalattē pōntaruḷi*) and enslaved them (*āṭkoṇṭa*). The verse then recounts Śiva approaching in the guise of a brahman to confer release, *vīṭu*. The speaker proclaims let us sing praise of the long ankleted feet which are mercy itself and play (*am karuṇai vār kaḷalē pāṭutum kāṇ ammāṇāy*). Śiva's feet, the feet that graciously enslaved and conferred freedom from worldly fetters, are described as deeply compassionate.

Karuṇai as an action and a thing bestowed

If the above section demonstrates how *karuṇai* is used to directly describe Śiva, this section turns to look at *karuṇai* as a qualifier of action performed. In order to do so I pick up in the same song just cited, *Tiruvammāṇai*. The following, verse 6, refers to *karuṇai* as revealed:

*kēṭṭāyō tōḷi kiṛi ceyta āru oruvaṇ
tīṭṭu ār matil puṭai cūḷ teṇṇaṇ perunturaiyāṇ
kāṭṭātaṇa ellām kāṭṭi civam kāṭṭi
tāḷ tamarai kāṭṭi taṇ karuṇai tēṇ kāṭṭi
nāṭṭār nakai ceyya nām mēlai vīṭu eyta
āḷ tāṇ koṇṭu āṇṭavā pāṭutum kāṇ ammāṇāy*

Friend, did you hear about the that play done by the singular one,
The Southern one of Perunturai which is surrounded by painted walls?
He showed me all that is not shown, revealed his goodness,
his lotus feet, revealed the honey of his compassion,
as worldly ones laughed, we were gaining release
and he took us as his slaves—let us sing! Behold, *ammāṇāy*!

In this verse, *karuṇai* comes in a string of revelations: first Śiva reveals those things not usually seen (*kāṭṭātaṇa ellām*), then his goodness (*civam*), his lotus like feet (*tāḷ tamarai*), and finally his honey-sweet *karuṇai* (*taṇ karuṇai tēṇ*). *Karuṇai* is something that Śiva reveals to devotees and, as above, is connected to acts of enslaving and freeing. In the final two lines of this verse, the speaker juxtaposes the worldly ones who judge them (*nāṭṭār*) and their own group which has

been awarded freedom (*vītu*) and been enslaved (*āl tāṇ koṇṭu āṇṭavā*). Thus, the use of the term *kāṭṭi* from *kāṭṭu-tal* (to show, reveal, make known) emphasizes the special nature of the speaker's position. They have been chosen by Śiva and awarded his *karuṇai*, brought into the fold. Though others may not understand, the women singing have been awarded a special privilege. Thus, *karuṇai* is something that is revealed through action, which is not evident to all, and which also characterizes the nature of Śiva's disposition toward those he enslaves.

Civapurāṇam lines 17-22 emphasize the revelatory aspect of *karuṇai*:

*civaṇ avaṇ eṇ cintaiyuḷ niṇṇa ataṇāl
avaṇ aruḷālē avaṇ tāḷ vaṇaṅki
cintai maḱiḷa civapurāṇam taṇṇai
muntai viṇai muḷutum ōya uraiṇṇai yāṇ
kaṇ nutalāṇ taṇ karuṇa kaṇkāṭṭa vantu eyti
eṇṇutarku eṭṭā eḷil āṇ kaḷal iraiṇci*

Because Śiva stays in my mind
By his own grace I praise his feet;
My mind elated, I will tell the *civapurāṇam*
That my previous deeds may completely perish;
As the one with an eye on his forehead revealed his compassion
I came to gain it; I adored his beautiful feet that are beyond the reach of thought...

Here, as Śiva makes his *karuṇai* known to the speaker (*kaṇ nutalāṇ taṇ karuṇa kaṇkāṭṭa*) and the speaker gains it (*vantu eyti*). *Karuṇai* here is *his* (Śiva's) compassion (*taṇ karuṇa*)—it is not a descriptor of Śiva's nature but something that can be gained via his actions toward the devotee. In line two of this verse, the speaker states: “by his grace I praise his feet” (*avaṇ aruḷālē avaṇ tāḷ vaṇaṅki*). By Śiva's operative grace, the speaker has the ability to, and is afforded the privilege of, praising his feet. This reinforces the somewhat privileged nature of both Śiva's *karuṇai* and *aruḷ*.

Tiruvantappakuti further establishes *karuṇai* as a revelatory action. In lines 58-63 the speaker states:

*kaṇṇāl yāṇum kaṇṭēṇ kāṇka
aruḷ naṇi curakkum amutē kāṇka
karuṇaiyiṇ perumai kaṇṭēṇ kāṇka*

puvaṇṇiyil cēvaṭi tīṇṭiṇaṇ kāṇka
civaṇ eṇa yāṇum tēriṇaṇ kāṇka
avaṇ eṇai āṭkoṇṭu aruḷiṇaṇ kāṇka

Behold, I saw him with my eyes!
Behold, he is the nectar which gushes forth grace!
Behold, I witnessed the greatness that is his compassion!
Behold, his red feet touched the earth!
Behold, he is known, even to me, as Śiva!
Behold, he graciously enslaved me!

In this verse the speaker sees with their own eyes (*kāṇka*) a number of Śiva's benevolences.

Among them are again, *aruḷ*, his grace, and *karuṇai*, compassion. The final line of this run which ends with the imperative *kāṇka*, behold, documents Śiva's gracious action of enslaving of the speaker (*avaṇ eṇai āṭkoṇṭu aruḷiṇaṇ*). If we read the lines in order, we can interpret that the revelations of grace and compassion precede or are part of the act of enslaving. In order to be enslaved, Śiva must reveal himself to the speaker, demonstrating grace and compassion in the process. This example likens Appar's 6.77.6 in which the speaker beholds the very sight of compassion itself.

Tiruccatakam 67 continues the connection between the act of enslaving and the meting of compassion. The speaker praises Śiva thus: "praise the new sweetness of your flood of compassion" (*porri niṇ karuṇai veḷḷam putumatu*); and as an extension of this, "praise the benevolence of enslaving such a liar as me" (*porri eṇ pōlum poyyar tammai āṭkoḷḷum vaḷḷal*). Śiva's compassion is closely tied with his action toward the speaker, the greatest of which is enslavement of one who to any outsider would seem unfit.

In *Tiruvantappakuti* lines 177-181, a new level of understanding is added:

oḷḷiya kaṇṇal kaṇi tēr kaḷiru eṇa kaṭaimurai
eṇṇaiyum iruppatu ākkiṇaṇ eṇṇil
karuṇai vāṇ tēṇ kalakka
aruḷoṭu parā amutu ākkiṇaṇ
piramaṇ māl ariyāp perriyōṇē

Like an elephant that eats bright sugar cane,
he made even me, of a lowly order, continue existing;
In me he mixed the good honey of his compassion

and created supreme nectar with grace;
He is the one whose nature is unknown to Brahma and Māl.

Here, compassion is something that Śiva “mixes in” or instills in the speaker. The use of the infinitive at the end of line 179 can also indicate simultaneous action: “as he mixed the ambrosial honey of compassion in me, he, the unknowable to Brahma and Viṣṇu, made nectar supreme with his grace” (*eṇṇil karuṇa vāntēṇ kalakka aruḷoṭu para amutu ākkinan piraman māl ariyā perriyōṇē*). Śiva suffuses *karuṇai*, a quality which, as demonstrated, is one of his own qualifying features, into the very heart and soul (*uḷlam*) of the speaker. That it is described as honeylike differentiates the experience of receiving Śiva’s *karuṇai* from some of the other more destabilizing or disorienting experiences of his grace.¹⁷⁶ The experience of *karuṇai* is benevolent, as opposed to inherently chaotic (like the act of enslaving can often be).

Nīttal viṇṇappam 1 also uses an image of mixing to describe the reception of Śiva’s *karuṇai*:

kaṭaiyavan eṇai karuṇaiyiṇāl kalantu āṇṭukoṇṭa
viṭaiyavanē viṭṭiṭuti kaṇṭāy viṭal vēṇkaiyiṇ tōl
uṭaiyavanē mannum uttara kōca maṇkaikkū aracē
caṭaiyavanē taḷarntēṇ empirāṇ eṇṇai tāṇkīk kollē

O Bull Rider! Mixing with me, the low one, you enslaved me;
You have left me, O One who wears the skin of a fierce tiger!
O King of enduring Uttarakkōcamāṅkai!
O One of matted locks, I perish! My lord stay with me!

The first line of this verse mirrors the dichotomy of high and low noted above—a dichotomy which further serves to emphasize the degree and uniqueness of Śiva’s interaction with the speaker. The conditional affix *-āl* is affixed to *karuṇai* producing “through” or “by means of” compassion (*kaṭaiyavanēṇai karuṇaiyiṇāl kalantu āṇṭukoṇṭa*). In each of these last instances

¹⁷⁶ This is also the case in *Tiruvamṇai* 180 in which we see “honey of compassion,” *karuṇattēṇ*.

Śiva's compassion is heightened by his willingness to enslave the speaker who so thoroughly establishes his baseness throughout the text and who here calls themselves *kaṭai*.

As a final example, in *Tirukkōtumpī* 4 the speaker states: “oh king bee go to him who wears the holy ash as fragrant gold dust and hum, he whose *karuṇai* great is such that he bade me come” (*vā enṛa vāṇ karuṇai cuṇṇa poṇ nīrrarkē ceṇru ūtāy kōttumpī*). In this excerpt, *karuṇai* is modified by the adjectival participle *enṛa*, from *enṛu*, to say. Thus, the compassion is that which says, or is the act of bidding the speaker to approach him.

Instrumental Uses

The following examples look at another common use of the term *karuṇai* in which it is joined with the instrumental affix *āl*. In these verses *karuṇai* becomes a means or mechanism through which Śiva intercedes in the speaker's life. The first example comes from *Tirukkōtumpī* 11:

val neñca kaḷvaṇ maṭavaliyaṇ eṇṇātē
kal neñcu urukki karuṇaiyiṇāl āṇṭukoṇṭa
aṇṇaṇ tiḷaikkum aṇi tillai ampalavaṇ
poṇ am kaḷalukkā ceṇrūtāy kōtumpī

Not calling me a hard-hearted thief or stubborn,
he melted my heart of stone, enslaved me by his compassion.
Go the golden feet of the one of the *ampalam* of Tillai which is
ornamented by throngs of swans, and hum king bee!

Here, Śiva looks past the speaker's low stature, melts their heart (*kal neñcu urukki*), and by way of his compassion (*karuṇaiyiṇāl*), enslaves them (*āṇṭukoṇṭa*). This verse plays on the speaker's usual characterization of themselves. Elsewhere in *Tiruvācakam*, the speaker refers to themselves in harsh terms, as “hard hearted” or one whose interior is made of iron or hard wood. There are numerous times in which the speaker laments over not being able to melt in the presence of Śiva. This verse takes this image and offers Śiva's response: Śiva does not see in the speaker a “hard heart” and is able to melt them nonetheless. In this verse, *karuṇai* is the

mechanism by which enslaving occurs and comes just before the verb “to enslave” (*āṭkoḷ*) and after the Śiva sees the speaker as other than they see themselves.

Verse 9 or *Tirutteḷḷēṇam* plays on similar notions of hard-heartedness:

kal nār urittu eṇṇa eṇṇaiyum taṇ karuṇaiyiṇāl
poṇ āṇ kaḷal paṇittu āṇṭapirāṇ pukaḷpāṭi
miṇ nēr nuṭaṅku iṭai cem tuvar vāy veḷ nakayīr
teṇṇā teṇṇā eṇru teḷḷēṇam koṭṭāmō

Like peeling flesh from a stone, by his compassion he made even me
bow at his gold ankleted feet, and praise him, the ruling lord;
Oh you with the lightning waists, red coral lips and white smiles,
Let us sing “Southern one, Southern one,” and clap *teḷḷēṇam*.

Akin to the image of the hard heart (*val neñca*), the image in this verse of peeling flesh from a stone is also found elsewhere in *Tiruvācakam*. Śiva is capable of doing the impossible through his compassion. Here the act of making the speaker a worshipper (*paṇittu*) is accomplished by way of compassion.

Tiruttōṇṇōkkam verse 4 provides another example in this vein:

kal pōlum neñcam kacintu uruka karuṇaiyiṇāl
niṇpāṇai pōla eṇ neñciṇ uḷḷē pukuntaruḷi
nal pāl paṭuttu eṇṇai nāṭu aṇṇi tāṇ inṇaṇ
col pālatu āṇavā tōḷ nōkkam āṭāmō

He caused my stony heart to melt and ooze;
The one who is mercy incarnate entered my heart
and put me on the salvific way thus he graced me
and made it known to the world which is talked about by all.
This we will praise and play *tōḷ nōkkam*!

Like *Tirukkōṭumpī* 11, this verse also sees its speakers heart melt. Here *karuṇai* is used in a slightly different way though still with the instrumental affix. The verse reads from the beginning as follows: he softened my stone like heart (*kal pōlum neñcam kacintu*), and while causing it to melt (*uruka*), the one who exists through compassion (*karuṇaiyiṇāl niṇpāṇai*), graciously entered into the very interior of my heart (*eṇ neñciṇ uḷḷē pukuntaruḷi*). The combination of *karuṇaiyiṇāl* + *niḷ* intimates that *karuṇai* is Śiva’s abiding state or nature. It could further be read as he who exists by [the fact of] his *karuṇai*. This offers a further layer to our understanding of the term.

Tirupponñūcal 5 is my final example taken from the game songs and reads as follows:

*āṇō aliyō arivaiyō eṇru iruvar
kāṇā kaṭavuḷ karuṇaiyiṇāl tēvar kuḷām
nāṇāmē uyya āṭkoṇṭaruḷi naṇcu taṇai
ūṇ āka uṇṭaruḷum uttarakōca maṇkai
kōṇ ār piṇai ceṇṇi kūttaṇ kuṇam paravi
pūṇ ār vaṇa mulaiyīr poṇ ūcal āṭāmō*

In order to save the group of gods from shame, the lord who the two gods did not see, who is neither male, neuter, nor female, enslaved them by his compassion and graciously made poison into food; He is the king of Uttarakōcamāṇkai, the dancer with the crescent crown; Praising him, oh you with breasts ornamented with jewels, let us swing the golden swing!

In this verse we see echoes the high/low dichotomy I mentioned earlier in this chapter. The speaker contrasts themselves to the crowds of devas (*tēvar kuḷām*) who also receive Śiva's grace.

Karuṇai is linked, as above, to the act of graciously enslaving (*āṭkoṇṭu*).

The following examples come from a range of songs outside of the “game song” grouping but all constructively add to our working knowledge of *karuṇai*. *Kaṇṭappattu* verse 3 contains my first example:

*uru teriyā kālattē uḷ pukuntu eṇ uḷam maṇṇi
karuttu irutti ūṇ pukku karuṇaiyiṇāl āṇṭukoṇṭa
tirutturutti mēyāṇai tittikkum civa patattai
aruttiyiṇāl nāy aṭiyēṇ aṇikoḷ tillai kaṇṭēṇē*

At the time I had no form, he entered my interior, stayed in my heart,
Gave me sense, caused me to enter a body, and by his compassion enslaved me;
I, the slave, a dog, through my desire for the sweet feet of the true one of Tirutturutti,
saw him in ornate Tillai.

In this verse the speaker reflects on a time before they were embodied or before they took form (*uru teriyā kālattē*). Even at this juncture, Śiva intervened by entering within them (*uḷ pukuntu*), immersed in their inner being (*eṇ uḷam maṇṇi*), bestowed discrimination (*karuttu irutti*), caused me to enter a state of karmic enjoyment (*ūṇ pukku*), and by his compassion ruled me (*karuṇaiyiṇāl āṇṭukoṇṭa*). Compassionate enslaving is here part of a chain of events which occurs far before the speaker is even born into a human body. In fact, being born into a human body and entering into *samsāra* seems to be part of a larger process; part of Śiva's divine plan, or

perhaps play. While in many of these songs, the speakers lament their sorry states, lack of knowledge, etc., in fact, they have been initiated by Śiva into servitude before they could have been aware. This entire chain of events is enabled and achieved through his *karuṇai*.

Pirārttaṇaippattu 6 provides yet more insight:

*mēvum uṇ taṇ aṭiyāru!
virumpi yāṇum meymmaiye
kāvi cērum kayal kaṇṇāl
paṇkā uṇ taṇ karuṇaiyināl
pāviyērkum uṇāmō
parama āṇanta paḷam kaṭal cērntu
āvi yākkai yāṇ eṇatu eṇru
yātum iṇri arutalē*

O One whose half is the woman with carp eyes like blue lotuses, I desire to be amongst your true servants (who are joined with you). By your grace will it be so, regardless of my sins? Having joined the great ocean of your supreme bliss, will everything of breath, body, and “I,” (ego) be destroyed?

This verse is framed as an open question. The speaker wonders whether they will gain the grace of Śiva. As in other songs, the reader knows that speaker has already been graced. The above example from *Kaṇṭappattu*, though from another song, even indicates that the gracing occurs before the speaker takes bodily form. However, the speaker, while mired in *karma*, is unable to perceive this. A running tension through the text is whether or not Śiva’s act of gracing qualitatively shifts the speaker’s life enough to notice. Here the speaker refers to themselves as *pāvi*, a “sinner”—it is only through compassion (*karuṇaiyināl*) that they may escape *samsāra*.

Tiruvēcaravu verse 8 flips back to a sure awareness on the part of the speaker of having been graced:

*mūttāṇē mūvāta mutalāṇē muṭivu illā
ōttāṇē poruḷāṇē uṇmaiym āy iṇmaiym āy
pūttāṇē pukuntu iṇku puraḷvēṇai karuṇaiyināl
pōrttē nī āṇta āru aṇṇē emperumāṇē*

O Ancient one! The first one who does not age!
Singular one without end! The one true meaning!
Who appears as existence and non-existence!
Your way is such that by compassion, you entered,
broke, and ruled me then, oh our lord!

This verse records the compassionate saving as having happened in the past with the use of the term *anrē*, then, or on that day.

Yāttiraippattu verse 1 contains my final example of the use of *karuṇai* with the instrumental, as a qualifier and mechanism of action:

*pū ār cenni maṇṇaṇ em
puyaṅka perumāṇ cīriyōmai
ōvātu uḷḷam kalantu uṇarvu āy
urukkum veḷḷa karuṇaiyiṇāl
ā ā eṇṇa paṭṭu aṇpu āy
āṭpaṭṭīr ventu oruppaṭumiṇ
pōvōm kālam vantatu kāṇ
poy viṭṭu uṭaiyāṇ kaḷal pukavē*

By way of the surging flood of compassion,
the king whose head is covered with flowers,
the lord of serpents, unceasingly mixed inside of we small ones,
becoming our consciousness.
By that compassion pronounce “ah, ah,” and lovingly become a slave.
Come and become one; let’s go! Behold, the time has come!
To leave our lies and reach the feet of the possessor!

Here, the speaker, speaking for the group undertaking pilgrimage, says that it is Śiva’s flood of compassion (*veḷḷa karuṇai*) by which they are melted and mixed with Śiva-consciousness.

Karuṇai directly bifurcates the verse and can be construed with both halves. The compassion is both the means by which Śiva graciously mixes with the speaker and what enables the speaker and their group to accept the Śaiva way.

In the above discussion, Māṇikkavācakar’s use of the term *karuṇai* expands on that found in *Tēvāram*. It is used as a fundamental qualifier of Śiva’s nature, along with terms like *āṇantam* and *aruḷ*. As a primary characteristic, it is predominantly linked to acts of *aruḷ*, and to Śiva’s function as a liberator. When used as an adjective, it is associated with salvific acts like snapping fetters, removing flaws (karmic defects), and enslaving. His compassion is also qualified as being without limit, meted to even the lowest beings, and flood-like in its magnitude.

Compassion is not only a description of Śiva’s essential nature, but also something which is

conferred to those devotees who are taken into the fold through his acts of grace. It is something which is revealed, particularly in the process of enslaving, and not only revealed but *mixed* into the speaker's very being—something fundamental to Śiva's character is imbued into the speaker. Whether or not this means it becomes an enduring quality for the speaker or is merely a momentary experience is yet to be explored. This act of mixing is also linked to Śiva's gracious act of enslaving; to be shown or granted Śiva's compassion is also to be taken into the fold. The picture of *karuṇai* expands through the many uses of the term coupled with an instrumental ending. *Karuṇai* begins to function much like *aruḷ*, as a mechanism by which or through which Śiva acts in the lives of his devotees. Through his *karuṇai* alone they gain entrance into the privileged group of Śiva's *aṭiyār*, they are freed from the karmic ties that bind them earthly embodiment and to the cycles of *samsāra*, and attain Śiva's feet, the ultimate symbol of refuge (*caraṇam*) and release (*viṭu*). Thus we see that Śiva is not only one whose nature is pervasive compassion without measure, but one whose actions, particularly enslaving, are suffused with *karuṇai*. In fact, *karuṇai* is the means by which Śiva graces the speaker and performs the critical act of enslaving.

The *karuṇai* that is explicitly mentioned in *Tiruvācakam* looks somewhat similar to that found in the closing verses of *Maṇimēkalai*, that is, it is a mechanism for salvation. Further, it echoes the use of the term in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as a qualifier for the interactions between god and their devotees; it is missing the overtly playful element but nevertheless is a critical aspect of the lord/devotee relationship. In neither *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* nor *Tiruvācakam* is it suggested that the lord *feels* compassion for his devotees and is thus motivated from a place of being moved emotionally. This is not the compassion that we understand in common English parlance as

com+passio, “to feel together.”¹⁷⁷ In fact, we get no intimation of how Śiva feels anywhere in Māṇikkavācakar’s works; he is the mover, not moved himself. Thus, his compassionate intervention in the life of the speaker is not motivated by seeing the speaker suffering as far as we know. Rather, acting on behalf of another is *karuṇai*. As Garfield observes, *karuṇai* comes from the Sanskrit root *kr*, to do.¹⁷⁸ Thus, in the Buddhist context, *karuṇā* becomes an act of care, and is not predicated on a *feeling* of care. Similarly, here in the Śaiva context, *karuṇai* characterizes a type of action or intervention done for the sake of another’s well-being.

The above summation only covers the explicit mentions of *karuṇai*, however, it does not give a total picture of its manifestation in the text. As Monius observes in *Maṇimēkalai*, the other side of the “*karuṇai* coin” is the aesthetic sentiment that is generated out of observation of suffering. This harkens back to definitions of *karuṇā* in dramatic and theoretical texts like *Tolkāppiyam*. Thus, while Śiva may not directly experience the pathos of *karuṇai* when observing his lowly devotees, the reader may. Here I turn my discussion to both the speaker’s perception of being compassionately graced and the readers affective reception of witnessing both the acts of compassion and the speaker’s perceptions. I contend that witnessing the speaker be graced, suffer nonetheless, and simultaneously lament their state is generative of pathos or *karuṇai* for the reader. Whether or not the reader experiences this pathos, or simply appreciates it aesthetically is not the focus of this discussion, but rather, instead I aim to show the suggestive force of *karuṇai* outside of its explicit mentions. In order to do so I will consider the dichotomy

¹⁷⁷ See Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 289-290 for a discussion on reworking a definition of *karuṇā* in the Buddhist context.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

between Śiva's lofty nature and the speaker's flawed one, how the speaker perceives Śiva's actions in their life, and the perpetuity of suffering the text presents.

Perhaps some of the most evocative illustrations of Śiva's gracious compassion in the *Tiruvācakam* are found in Māṇikkavācakar's exploration of the relationship between his own lowness and Śiva's greatness—between the utterly destitute and the divine. When the speaker continually highlights his own negative qualities, yet is still repeatedly graced or adopted by Śiva, it makes Śiva's interventions seem all the more significant. Episodes in which the speaker details his relationship to other Śaiva adepts who “do everything right” while he can't seem to escape his persistent defilements are also important sources of our understanding of the immense *degree* of Śiva's compassion.

I have elsewhere noted that the torrent of epithets present in the majority of *Tiruvācakam* serves not only as a means of praise but also as a hyperbolic emphasis on Śiva's greatness in contrast with the speaker's relative lowness. In *Tiruvēcaṟavu* the speaker repeatedly details how Śiva enslaves them, but their description of themselves doesn't paint a picture of one fit to be saved. The speaker laments that they have a mind made of iron (*irumpu taru maṇattē*) and that they do not melt (*kacintu urukēn*) like other devotees in their love for Śiva. *Tiruccatakam* 39 mirrors this formula wherein the speaker says: “to me who is lower than the class of dogs he showed the good way” (*nāyil ākiya kulattiṇum kaṭaippaṭum ennai nal neṟi kāṭṭi*).

Māṇikkavācakar, though not the first *bhakta* to do so, is famous for using a dog to illustrate low status and this is found throughout the text; here, he the speaker imagines himself as somehow even lower than a dog. In *Tiruccatakam* verse 52 the speaker states:

*ceyvatu aṟiyā ciṟu nāyēn cem poṇ pāta malar kāṇā
poyyar perum pēru attañaiyum perutarṅku uriyēṇ poy ilā
meyyar veṟi āt malar pātam mēva kaṇṭum kēṭṭiruntum
poyyaṇēṇ nāṇ uṇṭu uṭuttu iṅku iruppatu āṇēṇ pōr ērē*

I, the lowly dog, do not know what to do!
I am not fit to gain even that which is gained by the liars who do not see the golden flowered feet!
Oh martial bull, I, a liar, abide here just getting dressed and eating, even after having heard and seen, in
order that I may join, the abundant flowered feet of those true ones without lies.

The predicament of the speaker's lowness is further complicated by the fact that regardless of being compassionately graced countless times by Śiva, they are still somehow mired in karmic muck, unable to break the cycle of previous births and escape the defilements that have manifest in their present birth. Despite constant backwards motion or regression, Śiva still deigns to grace the speaker again, further emphasizing the degree of compassion Śiva has for his wanton devotee. This formula highlights not only degree of Śiva's compassion through the high/low dichotomy, but because gracing is a repeated action, how fundamental compassionate acts are to Śiva's nature and operations in the world.

In *Tiruvantappakuti* 55-58 the speaker offers a glimpse at the rarity of being bestowed Śiva's compassion: "Behold! he is the lord who is attainable to everyone, behold, he is Śiva who even the gods don't know, behold, he is male, female, and neuter, behold, even I have seen him with my own eyes!" (*yāvarum peravurum īcaṇ kāṇka tēvarum aṛiyā civaṇē kāṇka peṇṇāṇ ali eṇum perriyaṇ kāṇka kaṇṇal iyāṇum kaṇṭēṇ kāṇka*). This excerpt aptly summarizes the nature of the relationship between Māṇikkavācakar and Śiva; though he is the lowest of the low and Śiva is the highest of the high, even unknowable to the gods, he has been graced. The use of the affix *-um* is both inclusive and an expletive indicating "even."

We learn about Śiva's degree of compassion not only through the speaker's denigration of themselves, a dog, a low one, a liar, a wretch, but also through their acute sense of place in relationship to other devotees. One of the most pathos-evoking and salient images woven throughout *Tiruvācakam* is the speaker's juxtaposition of himself to groups of perfected devotees who joyfully partake in the love of Śiva through worship. The speaker's criticism

seems to reach its height in these self-flagellatory verses wherein they describe themselves as utterly devoid of good qualities and as an outsider looking “in” to these groups of model devotees. Take for example the following verse one from *Pirārttaṇaippattu*:

*kalantu niṇ atiyārōṭu anru
vālā kaḷittiruntēṇ
pularntu pōṇa kālankaḷ
pukuntu niṇratu iṭar piṇ nāl
ularntu pōṇēn uṭaiyāṇē
ulavā iṇpa cuṭar kāṇpāṇ
alantu pōṇēṇ aruḷ ceyyāy
ārvam kūra aṭiyērkē*

That day, mixing with your devotees, I rejoiced, lack luster.
Time passed, affliction entered and stayed in me.
Days after, I withered, O Possessor!
I suffered to see your unending light of joy.
Grant me that grace that I may have desire!

This verse demonstrates a recurrent theme. Though the speaker receives Śiva’s compassionate grace, there is a constant movement “backwards” in that they still seem to be suffering from the afflictions of their past negative deeds, accrued imperfections, or the pitfalls of pleasure. Here, they recount being amidst rejoicing devotees, but it almost seems as if they are faking it; they rejoice but the implication is that they do so without any real gusto, without true feeling. Even after having done so, they slip back into their sorry state. They still call themselves a devotee at the end of this verse, but in totality it suggests that they don’t fit the mold, that they are a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Verse two builds on this sentiment:

*aṭiyār cilar un aruḷ perṛār
ārvam kūra yān avamē
muṭai āṇ piṇattiṇ mutivu iṇri
muṇivāl aṭiyēṇ mūkkirēṇ
kaṭiyēṇuṭaiya kaṭu viṇaiyai
kaḷaintu uṇ karuṇakkaṭal poṇka
uṭayay aṭiyēṇ uḷlattē
ōvātu uruka aruḷāyē*

In excessive love some of your servants gained your grace;
I, a servant, useless, am immersed in suffering without end in this reeking corpse.
O Possessor, remove the thorny karma from me, the base one,
and grace me that your ocean of compassion may swell,
and my interior may melt unceasingly.

This verse further emphasizes the difference between the speaker and other devotees. While bountiful love allowed select few to achieve Śiva's grace, the speaker stresses that they are still tied to a burdensome body of rotting flesh. This is very reminiscent of Appar, who uses more colorful language to describe his body as a putrid bucket of pus. In verse 3, the speaker states, "Oh our lord, see that I have grown weary sustaining this body which is full of flaws while all of the servants weep, entering into the great sea of nectar which is your grace" (*aruḷ āṛ amuta perum kaṭalvāy aṭiyār ellām pukku aḷunta iruḷ āṛ ākkai itu poruttē eyttēṇ kaṇṭāy emmāṇē*). The use of the absolute infinitive *aḷunta* heightens the pathos the reader feels for the speaker who, as they are stuck in this state, witnesses others simultaneously obtaining release. In verse 7 the speaker states, "O Possessor, I, the dog, lament being placed *outside* of your lovers whose hearts melt endlessly" (*niṇ aṇṇar aṇṭam iṇṇi akam nekavum puṛamē kidantu pulaināyēṇ pulampukiṇṇēṇ uṭaiyāṇē*). Here the empathic particle *-ē* on the word *outside* makes clear their position as firmly not a part of the group. In *Tiruccatakam* 5, they state: "I have not gained the blessing which is gained, beautiful goodness, amongst those that love you" (*unakku aṇṇar uḷ āṁ civamē perum tiru eytirrilēṇ*). The phrasing here is left ambiguous; though the speaker again calls themselves a slave at the end of the verse, we do not know if they are amongst the group of slaves here, still not receiving the blessing, or if they consider themselves outside of group, not gaining that thing which is gained within it. Later in verse 10 they attest, "I am not fit to enter amongst the ones who love you (*pukavē takēṇ unakku aṇṇaruḷ yāṇ*). Thus, contrast manifests again, not only in Māṇikkavācakar's relationship with Śiva, but also with his devotees; the state or status of a devotee has almost no bearing on whether or not Śiva will mete his blessing, further solidifying the nature of his kind compassionate grace.

Yocum has argued that Śiva's grace being meted out to a dog and an unfit outsider but not to the celestial gods is an indication of its ultimate "arbitrariness."¹⁷⁹ This is related to his arguments about *līlā* being a fundamental aspect of Śiva's nature. Yocum considers the use of epithets calling Śiva a madman and episodes wherein Śiva's possession of Māṇikkavācakar reaches raucous heights as indications that we are entering into a Śaiva world in which normal conventions don't matter—anything goes. In this view, Śiva's compassionate gracing and enslaving of his devotees is seen to be on par with his other wayward actions like dancing in the funeral ground or confounding Dakṣa's sacrifice. While Śiva is known for flouting convention and in his universe—even dogs are graced—I argue that it is not arbitrariness which is emphasized by Māṇikkavācakar but rather a *degree* of compassion, and one that is pointed and specialized. In juxtaposing a Tamil Śaiva theology with that of Judeo-Christian traditions, Yocum emphasizes,

“Śiva acts not out of purpose, not out of a sense of justice or righteousness...Śiva is an end in himself; he serves no outside ideals. In popular idiom I suppose we might say ‘he does what he damn well pleases, just for the hell of it.’ That kind of total spontaneity can be an enormously powerful and attractive image of what God is like—and by extension, of what it must be like to be possessed by, saved by, transformed by, such a god.”¹⁸⁰

It is useful to note this major difference between traditions for indeed, justice does not seem to be operative in the construction of this particular worldview. However, I argue that imagining his bestowal of grace as arbitrary, or that Śiva acts for the hell of it, does not adequately take into account the radical compassion that has been illustrated above and is woven throughout the majority of the text. I agree with Yocum who notes that freedom and unpredictability are major

¹⁷⁹ Yocum, 147.

¹⁸⁰ Yocum, 160.

elements in a “religion of grace” and are tied to the use of paradox in this theology.¹⁸¹ However, I argue that his bestowal of grace, even to a low one like Māṇikkavācakar’s speaker, does carry with it a level of “intentionality” (though we are never privy to Śiva’s intentions explicitly), and that it is not necessarily unpredictable if one considers Śiva’s nature holistically. Play is also operative here and it is part of the larger picture, but it does not make Śiva’s actions random, particularly his enslaving.

To extend this line of inquiry I will look at a few excerpts beginning with

Tiruppāṇṭippatikam verse 3 which reads as follows:

*nīr iṇpa veḷḷattuḷ nīnti kuḷikkinra neṇcam koṇṭīr
pār iṇpa veḷḷam koḷa pari mēṇkoṇṭa pāṇṭiyaṇār
ōr iṇpa veḷḷattu uru koṇṭu, toṇṭarai uḷḷam koṇṭār
pēr iṇpa veḷḷattuḷ pey kaḷaḷē cenru pēṇuminē*

You whose hearts swim and bathe in a flood of joy that is mere water—
to create an expansive flood of sweetness,
he came as the Pāṇṭiyaṇ riding a horse,
taking the form of a flood of bliss,
and possessing the hearts of his servants—
Go worship the ankleted feet within the flood of that great happiness.

In this verse, worldly sweetness enjoyed by average people who bath their hearts in mere water is contrasted with the great or true sweetness which is under the purview of Śiva. This verse hinges on the use of the infinitive in the clause which describes him assuming the form of one of the Pāṇṭian realm; the choice of the infinite, “in order that,” is significant because an adverbial participle could have also taken this place and still fit metrical requirements. There are numerous such small indications that there is indeed something purposeful and intentional to Śiva’s acts, particularly in contexts such as these when he grants his grace and compassion to his devotees or the world. Similarly in verse four of the same song the speaker says *in order that* severed births of those that oppose him slip off [or roll, i.e., on the ground], he rides [a steed of] bliss and

¹⁸¹ Yocum, 144.

slashes a brightly shining sword of bliss (*aṛivu oṇ katir vāl̥ urai kaḷittu āṇanta mā kadavi eṛiyum pīrappai etirntār puraḷa*). Here, he frees even his enemies from the trappings of birth and assumes a valiant form in order to do so. In verse six the same infinitive construction is used again: *in order that* there be the end of thick darkness of delusion and *in order to* reveal all meaning (*tīṇṭiya māya iruḷ keṭa epporuḷum viḷaṅka*). In each of these cases, Śiva’s interventions are performed for the sake of another, and for the sake of their eventual and greater wellbeing.

Kīrtittiruvakaval 120 contributes to this discussion on “intentionality” with the following excerpt: “he graciously enslaves everyone of whatever nature and quality according to their nature, in the beauteous *ampalam* within Tillai full of goodness, he said to me, the dog, come” (*epperum taṇmaiyum evevar tīraṇum apparicu ataṇāl̥ āṇṭu koṇṭaruḷi nāyinēṇai nalam mali tillaiyuḷ kōlam ārtaru potuviṇil varuka eṇa*). That he approaches each on their own terms, according to their station and qualities further suggests that meting compassionate grace is not random but highly specified and fine-tuned according to given needs; this gracious bestowal is in fact skillful and designed. In *Tiruccatakam* 55, the speaker notes that Śiva’s feet are gained by those who join, are fit for, or agree (*kūtu-tal*) with Śiva’s intention or motive (*kuṛippu*). In *Pirārttaṇaippattu* 4, the speaker states: “you graciously ruled me, *desiring* that I be amongst your true servitors” (*mey aṭiyār uḷḷē virumpi eṇai aruḷāl̥ āṇṭāy*). The use of the verb *virumpu* indicating want or desire further supports the argument that Śiva’s compassionate actions are not random.

If we shed the “random” designation and embrace instead the notion of “play” regarding Śiva’s grace, we can look to songs like *Tiruvāṇṭappakuti*. This song contains some of the best material for arguing for Śiva’s playful nature as it relates to his instrumental gracious acts. This structure of this song juxtaposes Śiva’s actions in the remote, *purāṇic* past, with those actions

done to present protagonists, including this song's speaker. In lines 120-160 he details the many instances in which Śiva hid himself from those trying to attain him in various ways (via study of the Vedas, tantras, performance of *tapas*, etc.), then punctuates these moments of obscurity by noting that “we have seen him today!” (*inrē kaṇṭaṇam*). Following this, the speaker describes how Śiva enslaved him though in doing so caused him to become a madman (*pittar, mittar*). Just when they can't bear the rapturous enslavement, Śiva suffuses their limbs with honey.¹⁸² The back and forth between hiding and revealing may say something of Śiva's playful nature, but this play ultimately has a purpose, that is to refigure the speaker into something better than they were before. In lines 177-178 the speaker states, he made for me a body suffused with strength (*enakku alḷūru ākkai amaittaṇaṇ*). The play must be placed within a larger context, and keen attention must be paid to small grammatical cues and word choice when his deeds are described and modified in order to piece together the nature of his action. Śiva plays, but his gracious compassion within that play is not random. Rather, it is part and parcel of his loving action toward devotees—action which ultimately benefits them.

Beyond the emphasis on compassion created through the dichotomy of high/low and the pointed or instrumental nature of Śiva's compassionate play, the text generates pathos by focusing on the persistence of the speaker's flaws and their longstanding suffering. As demonstrated extensively in chapter one, even though Śiva's act of enslaving takes place in the past, the nature of his actions of intervention is such that they will persist into the future. This is due to the fact that the speaker/devotee is predisposed to future negative action and perpetually flawed. The persistence of the problematic state of the speaker raises the question of whether or

¹⁸² *kaṭa kaḷiṇu ērrā taṭa peru matattiṇ ārrēṇ āka avayavam cuvaitaru kōl tēṇ koṇṭu ceytaṇaṇ* (155-157).

not they experience *any* forward momentum on their path to attaining liberation. Śiva and the speaker seem to be locked in an endless cycle of falling and gracing. This tumultuous cycle during which the reader is audience to the speaker's laments and hardships, I argue, is generative of *karuṇai* as an aestheticized emotion to be appreciated by a reader. One cannot help but to, at the very least, appreciate the pathos evoked by the focus on hardship, so emotionally expressed by an imperiled speaker.

The image of a loving god, acting on behalf of the speaker who is destitute and struggling dominates *Tiruvācakam*. In *Pitittappattu* 9, the speaker drives home the emphasis on his loving care for the helpless by referring to Śiva as a doting mother: “you caused my bones to melt, me with the sins, having been well affectionate, even more so than a mother who thinks of milk and immediately feeds [her baby]” (*pāl niṇaintu ūṭṭum tāyiṇum cāla parintu nī pāviyēṇuṭaiya ūṇiṇai urukki*). While the term *karuṇai* is not used in this excerpt, the act of making the speaker melt elsewhere is deemed compassionate by nature. The illustration of a mother tending to a need of a child, immediately and without hesitation, as a function of her being a mother and as a means of alleviating suffering is an analog to Śiva's compassionate acts of salvation. Thus, throughout *Tiruvācakam*, *karuṇai* manifests, both as a central feature of Śiva's nature, and as an emotional affect that is generated for the reader (whether felt or simply aesthetically relished) when they witness the persistent hardships of the speaker.

Karuṇai in Tirukkōvaiyār

I now turn my attention to *Tirukkōvaiyār* to explore how *karuṇai* manifests across its verses. In this text, unlike *Tiruvācakam*, *karuṇai* appears only once. In verse 195 it is used to describe Śiva in his act of drinking poison on behalf of the gods: “the lord who bestows compassion (via this act)” (*karuṇa tarum paraṇ*) . Like the above discussion of *Tiruvācakam*

demonstrated, the evocation of *karuṇai* is not achieved through descriptions of Śiva's nature alone. *Karuṇai* is also an aesthetic affect that can be generated throughout the text by focusing on certain themes. *Tirukkōvaiyār* falls much closer to the “aestheticized emotion” side of the “*karuṇai* spectrum.” This makes sense given its genre in that it is a “literary text” that only tangentially refers to Śiva. It simply does not have room to discuss the contours of Śiva's nature in depth, nor his intimate interactions with and interventions on behalf of the devotee. It has other poetic commitments that must be fulfilled. The following discussion will begin by parsing what the text does tell us about Śiva's relationship with his devotees. I then shift to consider its overall focus on hardship, and the ways that suffering are thematized and emphasized throughout in order to generate pathos and produce an affect of *karuṇai*.

One way that *Tirukkōvaiyār* expounds upon Śiva's nature given the constraint of space is in by describing the positive and negative things that befall those who worship him and those who do not worship him. In verse 11, the heroine, pining lovesick over the hero, is described as follows: “her waist is well small like those who don't sing of the *ampalam* of Tillai” (*tillai ampalam pāṭalarin tēmpal am ciṛṛiṭai*). The implication is that she grows skinny as she languishes away from the hero, suffering in a state like that of those who don't worship Śiva. In Verse 229, the heroine's nurse details how the lovers' elopement causes her great pain: “that thing she did caused me to languish like the disease of those who don't worship the beautiful feet of the one who dances in the *ampalam*” (*ampalattu kuṇikkum pirāṇ celuvina tāḷ paṇiyār piṇiyāl urru tēyvittatē*). In 250, the heroine's confidant implores the hero to marry her to relieve her of her sorry state due to their separation: “like those that don't think of the *ciṛrampalavar*, she whose eyes are like forged spears suffers, is this the kind of grace you give to her?” (*tirucciṛrampalavarai unṇalar pōl alunku ulai vēl aṇṇa kaṇṇikku eṇṇō niṇ aruḷ vakaiyē*).

Similarly in 278 the heroine laments being alone: “is it due to my present deeds or the ones I did in the past that my life has become a difficult burden like [that of] those that don’t adore Tillai?” (*tillai urāriṇ porai aritām muṇ ceyta tīṅkukol? kālattu nīrmaikol?*) In verse 337, the heroine’s maid reports on the hero going out to the desert in a quest for wealth: “our lover has gone to the fiery desert like the hell where those who do not praise the excellent one of the *ampalam* abide” (*tillai ampalam cīr vaḷuttāppāvar cenru alkum narakam aṇaiya puṇai aḷalkāṇ pōvar namkāṭalar*). In each of these cases, the speakers’ plights are likened to the difficulties faced by non-worshippers.

Though the above examples all illustrate what awaits those who don’t worship Śiva, there are numerous positive examples of what Śiva does for his true devotees. In verse 22, the heroine’s confidant describes Śiva as follows: “in order to save the celestial ones, the ancient one of Tillai made the vast poisonous waters into nectar, he came and enslaved us in order that we be saved, becoming the very nature of our inner selves” (*uḷam ām vakai nammai uyya vantu āṇṭu cenru umpar uyya kaḷam āmviṭam amirtu ākkiya tillai tollōṇ*). In verse 73 the speaker states: “he is the light abiding at *cīrrampalam* who is dark to Indra, Viṣṇu and Brahma, he enslaved and entered me as my very essence” (*poruḷā eṇai pukuntu āṇṭu purantaraṇ māl ayaṇpāl iruḷāy irukkum oḷi ninra cīrrampalam*). This construction is reminiscent of the way in which the myth of the *liṅga* of light is used in *Tiruvācakam*—the hero contrasts the unknowable god with the one who enslaved him, and who abides in Tillai, making the cosmic universal god into a proximate, intimate one. In verse 76, the hero also concedes: “the feet of the one of the *ampalam* have destroyed my births today!” (*eṇ pīravikeṭṭu inru aḷikinratu ākkiya tā ampalavaṇ*). In 104, Śiva abides as light in the *ampalam* and the hearts of those who melt for him: “he is the light of the *ampalam* in each of the inner selves of those who melt” (*urukutalai cenra uḷḷattum ampalattum*

oḷiyē). In 148 the speaker states: “the cure for the disease that is our birth, he abides as nectar in the *ampalam*” (*maruntu nam allal piṛavi piṇikku ampalattu amirtāy iruntaṇar*). These are but some of the examples of Śiva’s gracious action for his devotees. While his compassionate actions do not take place within the primary narrative action of the text, nor are they accounted for by speakers in “real time,” they are taken as a given, and calcified into epithets. In much the same way that the speaker of *Tiruvācakam* is understood to have been graced in the past, so too do the speakers of *Tirukkōvaiyār* live in a world already having been touched by Śiva’s loving grace.

Finally, in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the people of Śiva’s countryside become a local, devotional public. They are the *bhaktas*, the *aṭiyārs*, that the speaker as outsider compares himself to in *Tiruvācakam*. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, none of the characters stand outside of the fold, though they are acutely aware of the consequences of doing so as detailed above. The people of Tillai and the Tillai countryside become a part of Śiva’s extended family and constituents within his domain, conjuring associations of him as a father, and also as a ruler or king. Everyone is somehow connected in the greater web of Śiva, either by their connection to his place or their likeness to him, or because they are already taken to be his slaves. In verse 83, the confidante of the heroine, upon seeing the hero’s lovely form asks incredulously, “is he the son of Puliyūr’s lord of matted strands of hair?” (*puliyūr puricērcāṭaiyōṇ putalvankol*). This verse mirrors verse 2 in which the hero doesn’t know where the heroine comes from, and whether or not she is a woman of Tillai. Similarly, in verse 82 the hero is described as follows: “he is the one with an angry spear like Tillai’s son” (*tillaiyōṇ cēy eṇa ciṇavēl oruvā*). In this case *eṇa* is used to make a comparison between the hero and Murukaṇ. I have elsewhere noted some of the ways in which the heroine is connected to Śiva through Tillai above; throughout the text it is often left ambiguous whether she

belongs to Tillai or not. Eventually, the hero also becomes closely aligned with Tillai and towards the end of the text he is even referred to as *tillai ūraṇ*, the one whose town is Tillai.

The people of *Tirukkōvaiyār* explicitly describe themselves as ardent devotees. The hero's best friend describes him thus in verse 119: "my friend who is like me is [dedicated to] the holy feet of the dancing lord who enslaved me in the *ampalam*" (*ampalattu! āṅku eṇai āṇṭukoṇṭu āṭum pirāṇ aṭi tāmaraikkē pāṇkaṇai yāṇ aṇṇa*). The hero himself is, in his own words, *tillai civantāḷ ām poṇ taṭamalar cūṭum*, he who wears the flowered golden feet of the one of Tillai as a crown. In 67, the hero further describes himself thus: "I am a servant of his feet" (*taṇ poṇ kaḷaṅkē aṭiyēṇ*). Others also publicly declare their dedication. In verse 96, the confidante asks in jest whether they would ever worship any other god given Śiva's greatness.

Thus, *Tirukkōvaiyār* is set in a context in which a close relationship between Śiva and all players has already been established. It is written from "inside the fold." The benefits of Śiva's compassionate grace are well known, as are the pitfalls of not receiving it. Thus, while the term *karuṇai* does not appear anywhere near as frequently as it does in *Tiruvācakam*, Śiva's closeness to his devotees, his compassionate nature and actions are, I argue, assumed. I now turn to look at the way that compassion is generated as an aesthetic sentiment in the text through its emphasis on suffering and grief. *Karuṇai* as an emotion grounded in grief, separation, and hardship, is emphasized in much the same way that *Tiruvācakam* does when it focuses on its speaker's persistent flaws.

In chapter one, I argue that looking at *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s narrative structure and temporality reveals an overall focus on suffering that is pathos-evoking. In doing so, it follows in the footsteps of the vast majority of *akam* poetry in so far as the love themes which receive the most attention are those with pitched emotion and high stakes: trysting and separation. Various phases

of separation play over and over or stretch for long periods of time across the text. While formal marriage occurs relatively early, it is quickly followed by separation of the hero and heroine. In true *talaivan* fashion, the hero of the poem is off on various conquests soon after their union. Through the repetition of scenes of separation, the layering of character voices as they navigate hardship, each suffering in their own way due to the separation of the central hero and heroine, and the divulgence of their inner mental processes, the narrative generates an affect of compassion for its reader. *Tirukkōvaiyār* is a meditation on the vicissitudes of absence and its concomitant suffering; the reader must sit with these themes and their often unsatisfying resolutions. In much the same way that the reader can't help but to pity *Tiruvācakam*'s speaker in their ongoing tribulations, *Tirukkōvaiyār* presents its audience with weeping heroines and heartsick heroes whose stories tug at the heartstrings. The pathos of this text is part and parcel of a thematic emphasis on *karuṇai*. The following discussion picks up where the structural analysis of chapter one leaves off and turns to close readings of the variety of expressions of suffering divulged by different characters.

My first example comes from verse 41 which we saw in chapter 1, spoken in the voice of the hero as he pines for his beloved in one of their early phases of separation:

*kāvi niṇru ērtaru kaṇṭar vaṇṭillai kaṇ ārkamala
tēvi eṇrē aiyam cenṇratu aṇrē aṇiya cīritu
mā iyaṇratu aṇṇa meṇ nōkki niṇ vāy tīravāviṭiṇ eṇ
āvi aṇrē amiḷtē aṇaṅkē iṇru aḷikinṇratē*

There is a doubt! [You look like] the goddess of the lotus full of beauty that belongs to cool Tillai of the one whose throat is given beauty by the blue lotus. One of soft eyes like those of a small antelope, if you do not open your mouth my life, O Nectar, will surely perish!

This verse falls during the “cat and mouse” phase of the love story, wherein the hero and heroine have had initial meeting but are between trysts and longing to see one another again. In fact, in many of the surrounding verses the hero and heroine can actually see one another, though they may not, for a variety of reasons, be able to approach. Thus, this verse falls not in a period of

prolonged separation or true heartbreak at extended absence. However, the hero and heroine both refer to the effects of their beloved's absence as being threatening to their very life, as in the above (*eṇ āvi anrē amiltē aṇaṅkē inru alikīratē*). Thus, very early in the text, the stakes of the lovers' separation start quite high. The emotional impact of even short bouts of separation is heightened, paving the way for more impactful phases of separation to come later in the narrative.

The hero speaks again in verse 51 when he makes his grief over her absence known:

*kuvaḷai karuṅkaṇ koṭi ēriṭai ikkoṭi kaṭaikkaṇ
uvaḷai taṇatu uyir enṛatu taṇṇōṭu uvamaiyillā
tavaḷai taṇpālvaṭtu cīrrampalattāṇ aruḷ ilarpōl
tuvaḷa talaivanta iṇṇal innē iṇi colluvaṇē*

Her eyes are like blue nelumbo and waist creeper-thin.
This creeper is the very life of the side-glancing girl over there.
Now, trouble befalls me as I languish like those without the grace of the one of the small *ampalam*,
who shares a half with the without compare. I'm going to say something.

This is an example of the above-named phenomenon of comparing or contrasting the speaker's hardships with the state of those who do or don't worship Śiva. The ten verses which intercede between the previous example and this one are dotted with similar divulgements from him about his distress at the heroine's absence. While much of the rest of the text focuses on the suffering of the heroine, this verse run gives us a glimpse of the hero's internal landscape.

In verse 60, the confidante comments on the hero's lack of luster (*el ilaṇ*) in the heroine's absence. Then in 62 turns their attention to the state of the heroine:

*niruttam payiṇṛavaṇ cīrrampalattu neṛṛi tanikkaṇ
oruttaṇ payilum kayilai malaiyiṇ uyar kuṭumi
tiruttam payilum cuṇai kuṭaintu āṭi cīlampu etir kūy
varuttam payiṇru kollō valli melliyaḷ vāṭiyatē*

He is the dancer in the *ampalam*, the singular one with an eye on his forehead;
In the clear water of the mountain pond on the lofty peak of his Kailāsa,
She bathes, plays, and calls out across the mountain;
Is this why she suffers? This soft creeper is truly wilting.

The confidante, though knowing full well why the heroine suffers, asks an obtuse question to protect the heroine's public image. The reader is of course aware that her wilting, *vāṭiyatē*, is due to her lovesickness over a forbidden tryst.

Verse 73 begins the section on “riding the palmyra horse”—where the hero of the poem rides a toy horse fashioned of palmyra leaves in a public show of both his affection and anguish. Here, the hero speaks again of the stakes of acquiring the heroine's love: “if you continue to withhold your grace, my very life will surely perish in separation” (*aruḷātu oḷiyil oriyātu aḷiyum eḷ ār uyirē*). The language used here, *aḷiyum*, from the root *aḷi*, to perish, be ruined, decay, suffer, is somewhat stronger than that used in the preceding verses. It mirrors the hero's heightened distress as he prepares for his act of public humiliation.

Verse 89 continues in this trend of escalating language of distress and is spoken in the voice of the heroine. She continues the familiar pattern of comparing hardship to the sorry state of those who do not properly worship Śiva (*pon ār caṭaiyōṇ puliyūr pukaḷār eṇa puriṇōy*) and describes her heartache in the absence of the hero as a twisting disease (*puriṇōy*). This language is reminiscent of Appar's frequent reference to his human embodiment as a foul, stomach-twisting disease (though he does not use the qualifier *puri*). She also uses the term *turicu* (sorrow, affliction, distress) to describe what it is like for her to not know how the hero is getting on without her.

The text continues in this manner, dotted with divulges of the hero, heroine, and their friends concerning their difficulties in each other's absence. The couple briefly reunites in tryst beginning in verse 116, but by 130, the confidante is already urging the couple to marry to avert an impending social fiasco. By the end of this section, the couple are apart again, and the hero offers this gloomy observation in 146:

potuviṇil tīrttu eṇṇai āṇṭōṇ puliyūr araṇ poruppē

itu eṇil eṇ iṇṇu irukkiṇṇavāru em irumpolilē
etu namakku eytiyatu eṇ uṇṇaṇṇir aṇai iṇṇu aruvi
matuviṇṇil kaippu vaittāl ottavā maṇṇu ivvāṇ punamē

If this is the mountain of the Lord of Puliyūr, the one who enslaved me as I stood at the crossroads, why is it like this now? Oh my beautiful garden, what have we become? What has happened?
The plot which was flooded with honey appears bitter now. This dry land is something else now.

The landscape, which had, until this point in the text, been described as lush, green, and brilliant, has suddenly taken on a different appearance. This is a classic Caṅkam poetic technique of using the landscape to support, reflect, or emphasize the emotional situations of the main narrative.

When a landscape begins to change, appears in a way that subverts normative expectations, or takes on qualities of another landscape, it can indicate a time of distress or disharmony. The following verses continue documentation of the effects of separation on the hero and heroine.

In verse 147, the hero addresses his own heart as he looks toward the heroine's hometown but is totally unable to act: "I'm not able to do a thing," (*ceyyalāvatu illai*); "my good heart! I'm a troubled one, and so are you!" (*nāṇum taḷarntaṇai nīyum taḷarntaṇai nal neṇcamē*). The verb *taḷartal*, to suffer, be troubled, also has the connotation of drooping, languishing, or weakening. It is found five times in *Tiruvācakam* (3.85, 4.170, 6.1, 24.413, 31.46) and in all but one of these instances, 3.85, is used by the speaker to describe their state of suffering. Take for example the following excerpt from *Tiruvācakam* 6.1: "One of matted locks, I suffered; my lord, stay with me!" (*caṭaiyavaṇē taḷarntēṇ em pirāṇ eṇṇai tāṇkikkoḷlē*). The image of drooping or languishing is also found throughout *akam* literature wherein the lover wilts in the absence of their beloved. Similes or metaphors of flowers or plants drooping are used to indicate speakers' loss of vigor in separation. This can happen not only to the hero and heroine but also to their family members and friends. In 150, the hero addresses his heart again: "Perishing heart, I can't bear the love you placed on this fine young woman," (*meliyum neṇcē, āṇṇē ariya arivaikku nīvaitta aṇṇiṇukkē*).

While we get intimations of the hero's suffering, the heroine's is even more pitched. In 170, the friend relays the heroine's hardships to the hero in order to urge him to do something about it (ideally wed her to avoid public scorn and further suffering): "King, this little one whose blossom eyes are like a dark blue lily sheds tears like long chains of pearls" (*icciriyāl perumalar kaṇ maivār kuvaḷaiviṭum maṇṇa nīl mutta mālaikaḷē*). In 172 the confidante speaks once more on the occasion of a missed tryst, but in veiled terms:

*miṇ aṅku alarum caṭaimuṭiyōṇ viyaṇ tillai aṇṇāy
eṇ aṅku alamaraḷ eytiyaṭō eḷil muttam totti
poṇ aṅku alar puṇṇai cēkkaiyivāy pulampurru murrum
aṇṇam pularum aḷavum tuyilātu aḷukkiṇavē*

You are like excellent Tillai that belongs to the one with matted locks shining with lightning;
What is the commotion over there? From their roosts in *puṇṇai* trees with clusters of pearls and
gold blossoms, the swans cry out, becoming weak without rest—oh what lament!

Here they observe swans, crying from their nests, languishing without the ability to rest and wonder what the commotion (*alamaraḷ*, confusion, perturbation) is all about. The untimely sounding of birds in this verse is what classical Tamil poetics calls *allakuṛi*, a sign that a lover mistakes to be one left by the beloved. This device is first noted in *Tolkāppiyam* 1077: the heroine does fall a victim of missed trysts too, when casually happening signs bewilder her mind into taking them for the marks prearranged to be given by the hero (*allakuṛippaṭutalum avaḷvayin urittē, avaṇ kuṛi mayāṅkiya amaivoṭu varinē*). This is later attested to in *Akapporuḷ viḷakkam*. *Iraiyanār akapporuḷ* provides an example of swans sounding at night from verse 138 of *Pāṇṭikkōvai* in its coverage of *allakuṛi*.¹⁸³ The *allakuṛi* works two ways in 172. First, birds aren't supposed to be sounding at night. The description of their sounding indicates their distress so this is a transgression of normative behavior signaling conflict. It indicates to the reader that

¹⁸³ Buck translates: "Here in our fresh shore grove, not one *aṇṇam* bird, with pure, delicate feathers has slept a wink tonight." (*nammai painkāṇaliṇvāy tūy ninra meṇ cīraku aṇṇam inru onrum tuyinrilavē*). *Study of Stolen Love*, 151.

something is not quite right. Second, the distress of the swans mirrors that of her heroine though she is not mentioned explicitly in the verse. The image is conjured by the confidante to emphasize the heroine's hardship.

Verse 173 continues in the voice of the confidant, but this time she turns her address to ocean. The confidante admonishes the sea because it too has suffered loss—a reference to the *purāṇic* myth of Śiva churning the ocean of milk, producing from it nectar, Lakṣmī, and the moon (*ārttu un amiḷtum tiruvum matiyum iḷantu*)—but continues to roar boisterously (*ārttu*), impervious to the fact that it heightens the heroine's distress (*ivaḷtuvaḷa*). The image of an unsteady sea with its cacophonous din is evocative of the *neytal* (seashore) tract whose dominant love phase is that of pining in separation. Abraham Mariaselvam notes, “The bewailing waves which form part of the *mutarpporuḷ* of seashore region is the fundamental symbol denoting the restlessly and anxiously pining heroine.”¹⁸⁴ In this verse, while we have the explicit mention of the heroine suffering (*ivaḷ tuvaḷa*), the simultaneous roaring of the ocean with its matrix of meaning heightens the pathos of this verse.

The confidante is not the only one who paints a picture of ongoing struggles. The heroine too voices her plight as in 177 when she addresses the moon: “round moon who shimmers in the dark throughout the night, you won't say [whether you have seen him]? Please, a word for me, the lonely one” (*kaṅkul ellām maṅkulvāy viḷakkum maṇṭalamē paṇiyāy tamiyēṛku oruvācakamē*). In much *akam* literature, the heroine's loneliness is emphasized by her address to elements of the natural environment. She does not reach out to her confidante but is presumed grieving by

¹⁸⁴ Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1987), 142.

herself with no one but the moon, sea, or the occasional animal to converse with. Verse 179

returns to image of rough seas cited in verse 173:

*pūṇkaṇai vēlai poṭiyāy viḷa viḷittōṇ puliyūr
ōṇku aṇai mēvi purṇṭuviḷuntu eḷuntu ōlam iṭṭu
tīṇku aṇaintu or allum tērāy kalaṅki ceṇi kaṭalē
āṇku aṇaintār niṇṇaiyum uḷarō ceṇru akanṇavarē*

He is the one who felled and destroyed Kāma, the wielder of flowery arrows, to dust;
O mighty ocean that reaches the banks of his Puliyūr,
you roll, fall, rise, and roar;
You abide in distress the whole night, agitated;
Is it that your lover has also left you?

The invocation of Śiva’s obliteration (*viḷutal*) of Kāma in the beginning of this verse signals that the love phase of infatuation is squarely over. Further, the heroine describes, as above, a raucous ocean which won’t stop its tumult. The return to this image aids in a continual building of pathos as the text moves to its critical midway tipping point. The reader is given intimations, both through explicit mentions of suffering and the recurrent landscape markers that have specific emotional valences, of how the rest of the text will go.

In 187, the heroine addresses not the ocean but the sun as it begins to set: “setting sun, his leaving and the words—oath—he spoke in the flowered garden of Tillai of the one ornamented with the bones of pure ones, make me like those ill ones who cry out—what can I do to survive [this]?” (*tampōkku mikka tīrttar aṅkaṇ tillai palpūm poḷil ceppum vaṇciṇamum ārttar aṅkam ceyyumāl uyyumāru eṅkol āḷ cuṭarē*). The setting sun indicates that evening has arrived. Evening is the time of day associated with the *neytal* tract when outward responsibilities have been completed and protagonists have time to dwell on their inner states. Sunset also portends a long, sleepless night. Sure enough, in 188, the heroine’s mood turns as the night wears on. In the first line she states: “the sun has set, my savior (the sun) is far” (*pakalōṇ karantaṇaṇ kāppavar cēyar*). Daylight hours which might have provided her with busy work or social distraction are now far behind her and the dark night stands before her with all of its grief. This verse continues

to invoke the imagery of the lonely *neytal* tract with its mention of swans (*aṇṇam*) dining on *koḷu* fish (a kind of saltwater fish) in the dark waters (*iruṇkaḷivāy*).

The remaining five verses of this section expound upon the heroine's troubles and continue in the tract of *neytal*. In verse 189, the heroine observes ibises feeding happily (*makiḷntu*) in the back waters while meanwhile, she, the poor thing (*pāvam*) suffers with a disease like that who don't worship the one of matted locks of Puliyūr (*caṭaiyōṇ puliyūr viravātavarin uḷṇōy iṇṇum aṇṇilavāl eṇṇai pāvam*). Her discomfort is now elevated to the level of disease. The carefree ibis, happily grazing without a care, contrast the heroine's worsening state. In 190, even the lotus flowers of the backwaters shed honeyed tears, *kaḷṇīr* in response to her plight.

In 191, the heroine lies awake in the middle of the night:

mūval taḷī iya aruḷ mutalōṇ tillaiccelvaṇ muṇṇīr
nāval taḷīya iṇṇāṇilam tuṇcam nayanta iṇpa
cēval taḷīi ceṇṇru tāṇ tuṇcum yāṇ tuyilā ceyir eṇ
kāval taḷī iyavarkku ōṭātu aḷiya kaḷi aṇṇamē

The primal one is the lord of the *mūval*; the Lord of Tillai;
The four lands surrounded by three waters which belong to him are sleeping;
The roosters sleep in loving embrace; I am afflicted, sleepless.
Saying nothing to my protector, the swans go on happily.

This verse continues in the pattern of observing a carefree or peaceful world that contrasts the heroine's state of distress. The heroine notes that all four regions of the land (the whole world) surrounded by the three waters (ocean) are sleeping (*tuṇcum*) as are the roosters happily cozied up in their coops (*nayanta iṇpa cēval taḷī ic ceṇṇru tāṇ tuṇcum*). The swans are also described as joyful (*aḷiya kaḷi aṇṇamē*). The heroine, on the other hand, is wide awake (*yāṇ tuyilā ceyir*). The sight of others slumbering soundly is a painful reminder of that which keeps her awake.

By 192, the heroine starts to show outward signs of her heartbreak. The confidante beseeches the moon to behold the heroine's sorry state reporting: her bangles won't stay [up], her

heart melts, those long eyes that don't shut to sleep put forth gleaming pearls (tears) (*nillāvaḷai neñcam nekku urukum, netuñkaṇ tuyila kallā katir muttam kārrum*). In 193, the confidante addresses the hero to apprise him of the heroine's situation describing her thus: "her whole body pales, she falls, gets up, sighs, and continues languishing (suffering/weakening from *meli-tal*)" (*taṇatu aṅkam eṅkum viḷarum viḷum eḷum vimbum meliyum*).

The following verses see the confidante pushing for the completion of a wedding to put an end to the heroine's suffering. She points toward the heroine's readiness to leave behind her family as in 199 where she tearfully hugs all of her friends (*kaṇṇīr koṇṭu...nallārai ellām pullināḷ*) as if to say goodbye. In 200, the turning point of the text cited in chapter one, the heroine is giving away her childhood toys, ready to leave the house—a pointed and emotional moment for both her and those attached to her. Not only is a young women's departure from home a momentous occasion in her life and those of her family unit, it also carries with it significant danger, particularly if, as in this narrative, marriage is off the table and a path of elopement is chosen. In verse 203, the confidante calls the heroine a red carp (*ceṅkayal*), and the hero an expansive tank filled with the green leaves of lotuses (*paṅkaya pācaṭai pāy taṭam nī*). The implication is that the heroine cannot survive without the hero, and the stakes are indeed quite high if he does not make her his wife. 205 hints at the language of the arid *pālai* tract, dashing any hope that a community-sanctioned wedding is possible. Instead, the elopement of the lovers is all but certain with the mention of *kōṅku* and *pāṭalam* flowers which flourish in arid climates. 206, spoken in the voice of the heroine confirms a definitive shift to the *pālai* tract: they say that the shady place is now ablaze, there's no water, the jackals of the forest cry out and hot stones burn (*niḷaltalai tīṇeri tīr illai kāṇakam ōrikattum aḷaltalai vem pararru eṇpar*). In moving from an indirect to a direct invocation of *pālai*, the text moves more clearly toward the

next phase of hardship that the pair will face. In verse 211, the hero voices his concern for the heroine's beautiful small feet that are like *aṇicca* blossoms (*aṇiccam tikaḷum amcīraṭi*) in light of the fact that they will be treading the harsh desert floor.

Despite impending challenges in the desert, the pair of lovers do elope in the interceding verses. In 218, bystanders issue a warning that they are without family, *urrār illai*, and should mind the tough people of the region. They emphasize that at night, no one passes the forest of the desert (*kaṭappār illai inru ikkaṭuñcuramē*). Though in the following verse, 219, they are rejoicing at the sight of the lovers, 218 serves as a reminder of the possible dangers that come with their elopement. The hero and heroine continue on in 220-223 but 224 shifts to the voice of the heroine's confidante's mother, the nurse, who wonders where the heroine could be: "Where is she my child?" (*em kuṭṭaṇ eṇku urratu*). Looking at her daughter she presses: "Your eyes, sharp as spears, wander; what is the reason you grow weary today?" (*ayil eṇa pērum kaṇṇāy eṇ kolām inru ayarkinratē*). The confidante begins to outwardly show her distress in this verse. This follows the pattern of including internal mental processes of various speakers as they worry about the hero and heroine as discussed in chapter one. In 227-229, the nurse continues to grieve the missing heroine. In 229 she speaks directly to the heroine's mother:

*taḷuviṇakai iraicōriṇ tamiyam eṇrē taḷarvurru
aḷuviṇai ceyyum naiyā am col pētai arivu viṇṇōr
kuḷuviṇai uyya nañcu uṇṭu ampalattu kuṇikkum pirāṇ
ceḷuviṇa tāḷ paṇiyār piṇiyāl urru tēyvittatē*

If my embracing hand which was joined to her relaxed a bit,
the girl of lovely words would be so lonely,
weeping and distressed.
Like the disease that afflicts those who don't worship the beautiful feet of the Lord
who dances in the *ampalam*, who, in order to save the group of heavenly ones, made food out of poison,
I waste away.

At the end of the verse, the nurse too begins to show the effects of her grief upon losing the heroine: "I grow thin suffering with the disease that afflicts them who don't worship the

beautiful feet [of Śiva]” (*tāl paṇiyār piṇiyāl urru tēyvittatē*). The mother begins to share her own sorrows in 230, and in 231 tries to veil her distress by saying that she is worried about the heroine’s abandoned parakeet: “other than her leaving me, the parrot is breaking my heart!” (*eṇ aṇai pōkku aṇṇi kiḷḷai eṇ uḷḷattai īrkkīratē*).

Much of the grief expressed by the confidante, the nurse, and the heroine’s mother focus on the juxtaposition of the heroine’s tender youth with the adult act of elopement as in 233 wherein the mother says: “seeing a *kāntal* thick with blossoms she will think it’s a snake, hide, cover her eyes with her flowery hands, and shake,” (*moymmalar kāntalai pāntal eṇṇu eṇṇi tunṇeṇṇu oḷittu kaimmalarāl kaṇ putaittatu pataikkum*). These notes about her youth, innocence, and lack of experience in the real world coupled with the reminders of the very real dangers that await in the desert serve to continue a trend of heightening pathos as the narrative goes on. Despite any momentary glimpses of the pair’s happiness, voices continually punctuate the flow of their journey with voices that remind us that despite any enjoyment had by the two, their choices still produce suffering for others.

In the above discussion I included examples of verses in which speakers address elements of the natural landscape in their solitude and out of desperation. Verse 241 follows in this pattern as the nurse speaks to a *kuravu* tree:

*pāyūm viṭaiyōṇ puliyūr aṇṇa eṇ pāvai muṇṇē
kāyūm kaṭattiṭtai āṭi kaṭappavum kaṇṭu niṇṇu
vāyūm tīravāy kuḷai eḷal vīca vaṇṭu ōl uṇṇutta
nīyūm niṇṇāvaiyūm niṇṇu nilāviṭu nīḷkuravē*

My doll is like Puliyūr that belongs to the Lord who rides a bounding bull.
Before this, you saw her [her] wandering in passing across the hot forest, and you stand there
not opening your mouth!
Oh great Kuravu, you’re happily there, full of beautiful leaves and buzzing bees, with your dolls.

The *kuravu* tree belongs to the dry desert tract. The nurse accuses it of having seen the pair of lovers go by, but doing and saying nothing about it (*niṇṇu vāyūm tīravāy*). In line one, the

speaker refers to the heroine as *pāvai*, a young woman. This term is also used for dolls and emphasizes her youth. Later in line 4, she says that the *kuravu* abides with its dolls (using the same term *pāvai*), presumably referring to either the buds or leaves. The implication is that the *kuravu* is cruel, living happily with its own children but doing nothing to help the nurse find her separated charge.

In 250, the confidant begs the hero to put an end to the elopement and marry the heroine properly. She admonishes him: “the one whose eyes are like forged spears grieves, is this the nature of your grace to her?!” (*aḷuṅku ulai vēl aṇṇa kaṇṇikku eṇṇō niṇ aruḷ vakaiyē*). In 263 the confidante pivots to address the heroine and reiterate her outrage at the callous behavior of the hero:

*tēmām poḷil tillai ciṟṟampalattu viṇṇōr vaṇaṅka
nām ētarikka tadam payilvōṇai naṇṇātavariṇ
vām māṇ kalai cellaṇiṇṇār kidanta nam allal kaṇṭāl
tāmā aṟikilar āyiṇ eṇ nēm collum taṇmaikaḷē*

Like them who are not attached to the one who dances in the *ampalam* of Tillai of fragrant gardens as we praise him and the heavenly ones worship,
her lovely girdle has fallen; if he sees this affliction of us, downtrodden,
he doesn’t really understand it. Of what power would our words be?

This turn continues to salt the wound: the hero, as the heroine perceives him, wouldn’t do anything even if he truly understood the extent of the heroine’s grief. In this verse we see that she continues to waste away, her girdle slipping (*kalai cellaṇiṇṇār*). The heroine phrases her declaration with two conditionals, *kaṇṭāl*, if he sees/witnesses, and *āyiṇ*, he will become one (who doesn’t know). There is semantic overlap within the conditional verbal construction so that conditionals can indicate both “if,” and a more factual statement of “when.” This admonishment by the confidante can be read as an assumption about the hero’s nature given his absence. It can also be read as a definitive observation that the hero truly does not care and even seeing the heroine’s distress is indifferent to it.

In 264, the heroine speaks directly of her suffering and then in verse 265, the confidante continues to note her deteriorating condition: “[she is] a beautiful exuberant dark beauty, why is she in such a state as this?” (*ēr ī kaḷi karumññai innīrmai eṇ eytuvatē*). The description of the heroine, her beauty and joyfulness is an invocation of a person who is now a shadow of their former self. In 273, the heroine addresses her heart, an echo of the hero’s address to his own heart cited earlier in this discussion: “my heart went after his chariot [when he left], what is it doing here now?” (*tērppinnai cenra eṇ neñcu eṇ kol ām inru ceykinratē*). She assumed her heart left with the hero but as she continues to suffer, she wonders how it remained. In 278, the heroine gives an extended lament:

*maṇ ceyta munṇāl molivaliyē aṇṇa vāymai kaṇṭum
eṇ ceyta neñcam nīraiṇum nillā eṇatu iṇ uyirum
poṇ ceyta mēṇiyaṇ tillai urāriṇ porai aritām
muṇ ceyta tīṇkukol kālattu nīrmaikol moy kuḷalē*

Even knowing the truth of the words spoken in the past by him,
What to do? The state of my heart persists, along with that of my very life,
The difficult burden like that of those who don’t adore Tillai [of the one] whose body is guilt of gold,
Is it because of deeds done in the past? Or because of present conditions, O One of dark locks.

She grasps at strings as she tries to figure out the root cause of her current ongoing distress. In

279, the confidante shifts from direct dialogue to remark on the strange weather:

*karuntiṇai ōmpa kaṭavul parāvi namarkalippa
corintaṇa koṇmū curanta taṇ pēraruḷāl toḷumpil
parintu eṇṇai āṇṭa ciṇrampalattāṇ parankunṇil tunṇi
virintaṇa kāntaḷ veruvaral kāreṇa veḷvalaiyē*

As clouds flow down,
there is a murmur of our family as they praise the lord to preserve the black millet.
In the hill that belongs to the one of the small *ampalam* who rules me affectionately
in servitude by way of his great and expansive grace,
kāntaḷ flowers grow thick seeing the fearsome clouds, O white-bangled beauty!

The clouds described as fearsome (*veruvaral*) indicate the coming rains. The thickly blossoming *kāntaḷ* flowers mentioned in lines three and four, coupled with their location in the mountain (*kunṇil*), place this verse squarely in the *kuriñci* landscape, that of lover’s union via tryst. The landscape behaves as if it is the rainy season, a time that usually portends the hero’s return, but

here he has not returned. The subversion of normative landscape expectations heightens the aesthetic and affect of this verse. Even when suffering is not spoken of directly, the poet uses the suggestive force of *akam* devices to continue developing the narrative's emotional nuances.

In 282, the mother-in-law observes the daughter's emaciation:

*vēy iṇmeṇ tōḷ melintu oḷivāṭi viḷi piṛitāy
pāyina mēkalai paṇṭaiyaḷ allal pavaḷac celvi
āyina īcaṇ amararkku amaraṇ ciṛrampalattāṇ
cēyinaṭu āṭciyil paṭṭaṇḷām it tiruntu ilaiyē*

Her fine bamboo like shoulders are slimming, brightness diminishing, eyes changing.
The one who wore a wide girdle before is someone else now.
The one ornamented with beautiful jewels has gone to the place of the son
of the lord of small *ampalam*, the god of gods, the lord of coral hue.

That the heroine is a shadow of her former self—no longer who she was (*paṇṭaiyaḷ allal*)—echoes and reinforces the sentiments of 265 discussed above: the heroine is deeply in another love phase, no longer are the happy shores of wedded bliss within sight.

Verse 266 begins a cycle or series of separations in which the hero departs for various reasons including questing after wealth or to pursue his studies. Though reunion is briefly hinted at from verses 299–307, verse 308 returns to a theme of separation (due to study) and the remainder of the text follows suite. While there is a glimmer of hope between 299–307, it is quickly dashed. In 310, the confidant once more remarks on the heroine's struggle:

*kalpā matil ciṛrampalam atu kātal ceyta
vilpā vilaṅkal emkōṇai virumpalar pōla aṇṇar
colpā virumpiṇar eṇṇa mel ṭi cevippurattu
kolpā ilaṅku ilaivēḷ kuḷittāṅku kuṛukiyatē*

Like those who do not adore our king who bent the mountain into a bow out of love, the one of the *ampalam* whose walls are stone,
hearing that he wanted [to pursue] poetry
was like the piercing of murderous, shining spear blades
to the one of soft locks; she is truly declining now.

Lines three and four contrast the softness of the heroine's locks (*mel ṭi*) with the harshness of the hero's words and their effects on her. The description of his news of departure landing as murderous shining spear blades that pierce the heroine's ears (*cevippurattukolpā ilaṅku ilaivēḷ*

kuḷittāṅku) is particularly troubling and continues to increase the pathos of this section. In 313 the heroine again laments at hearing new of his parting. This pattern repeats in 315, and 317. Then from 318-331, the heroine goes back and forth, lamenting upon the changing of the seasons and on hearing news of the hero yet remaining in separation. The heroine continues her grieving, as noticed by the confidante in 335: pearls (tears) proliferate from her blossom eyes (*malarckaṇkaḷ muttam vaḷarkkum*). In 338, the confidant again comments on the harshness of the night, which seems to stretch on for an eternity, invoking a common *akam* theme of sleepless nights in separation (often indicative of the *neytal* tract).

After an abundance of verses which focus on the hardships of the heroine, spoken in her own voice and in those who observe her, in verse 343, the hero's voice returns to offer insight into his side of the story:

*nāyvayin uḷḷa kuṇamum illēṇai naltonṭu koṇṭa
tīvayin mēniyaṇ ciṟṟampalam aṇṇa cilmoḷiyai
pēy vayinūm aritu ākum pirivu eḷitu ākkuvittu
cēyviyin pōṇta neṇcē aṇcattakkatu uṇ cikkaṇavē*

I don't even have the qualities of a dog and the one with the body of flame made me a good slave.
The one of few words is like his small *ampalam*.
The wilderness is difficult.
O Heart that's become distant, you have made separation easy!
Your hardness is truly dreadful.

The first line nods to Māṇikkavācakar's frequent use of the dog metaphor to illustrate lowness. This image is found throughout *Tiruvācakam* and often considered one of its hallmarks. Though the hero invokes this trope in the context of being graced by Śiva, also a frequent link in *Tiruvācakam*, taken in the context of the narrative and given the rest of the verse, we can also take it to refer to his complicity in the heroine's heartbreak, connected to his admonishment of his own heart in lines three and four. His heart is a traitor in this verse and its hardness something to be lamented. Themes of being saddened by seasons return again in 343 upon the site of cattle returning home at night, and in 347, when the rainy season returns.

As soon as the hero returns home from his many excursions, in verse 351, 352 immediately pivots to see him part ways with the heroine in order to be with courtesans. In 355, the heroine dreams of being with the hero, but then wakes up to her cruel reality. In 356, she admonishes her lamp for not warning her appropriately. Even when briefly reunited with the hero in 365, the heroine immediately laments in 366 that he has been with other women. In 372 and 373, the concubine speaks derisively of the heroine, a cruel addition.

Even when the heroine rests her head on the chest of the hero in verse 397, she is still inconsolable as the text draws to its conclusion:

*cilaimali vāḷ nutal eṅkaiyatu ākam eṇa ceḷum pūṇ
malai malimārpil utaiṇṇa tantāṇ talai maṇṇartillai
ulai mali vēṇṇai uṇṇai kaḷvar il eṇa uṇṇi
kalai malikārikai kaṇ muttamālai kaluṇṇaṇavē*

My little sister with the long bow-like forehead is here.
As I spurn the mountain-like chest adorned with beautiful jewels,
he offered his head;
thinking that there is no thief like him, the chief who holds the forged spear of the king's Tillai,
garlands of pearls fell from the eyes of the woman with bright dress.

Garlands of pearly tears (*kaṇ muttamālai*), an image seen in many of the verses cited above, are here mentioned again in line four. Though the hero is in her presence, the heroine knows of his deceit and thus cannot enjoy his company. The final verse of the text is not much brighter. It is spoken in the voice of the confidant to the heroine:

*kār aṇikaṇpakam kaṇṇavar naṇṇuṇai pāṇar ōkkal
cīr aṇi cintāmaṇi aṇitillai civaṇ aṇikku
tār aṇi koṇṇaiyaṇ takkōrtam cankaṇiti viti cēr
ūruṇi urṇavarkku ūraṇ maṇṇu yāvarkkum ūtiyamē*

He is a rain cloud, the great *kaṇṇa* tree, a good friend to wise ones,
kin to bards, the excellent wish-fulfilling jewel,
a beautiful *koṇṇai* wreath for the feet of Śiva of ornamented Tillai,
cankaṇiti to those who are fit, fate, a tank for his relations,
and a benefit for all others.

At first pass, this verse reads as exuberant and celebratory. It lists some of the hero's many lauded qualities. As one reads through them however, these qualities begin to border on

hyperbolic. Taken in the context of the many preceding verses in which the hero has been dallying with courtesans while the heroine suffers alone, it is difficult to feel like he is the prince that the confidante describes. She implores the pouting heroine to focus on the hero's good qualities as opposed to those which he has most recently been exemplifying.

Thus, *Tirukkōvaiyār* comes to its less than satisfying conclusion with a heroine still sulking and her friend's attempt to gloss things over. In the examples above, pathos is generated by many means. The high stakes of the couple's dalliances are hinted at early in the text then reiterated in 41. By 73, less than a quarter of the way into the text, the hero is already riding the palmyra horse, publicly embarrassing himself while desperate for the heroine's attentions. Within the first hundred verses we also observe the heroine languishing in separation as in 60 and 61, the use of increasingly evocative languages of suffering, as in the "twisting disease" that is loneliness. The text uses many Caṅkam tropes and poetic strategies in order to mirror, emphasize, or build on certain narrative themes. In 146, the landscape subtly shifts in appearance, signaling that trouble looms on the horizon. Similarly, devices like *allakuṛi* are woven throughout and used in verses that most closely approximate the suggestive force of *akam* poems. Speakers also address elements of the natural environment directly as in 127, 187, and 241, trying to make sense of their predicament. *Tiṇai* imagery is harnessed to support the narrative as it moves through significant love phases. The *neytal* tract is invoked to explore love in separation, and *pālai* enters around the halfway point as the lovers depart from the safety of their family units to elope. Many characters add to the building of pathos as they observe, from different positionalities and commitments to the heroine, just how much she suffers. Figures like the mother and the confidante also remark on their own hardship, seeing the heroine in such a difficult state. Verse 266 starts a repeating cycle of the hero leaving and the reader witnesses the

utter dismay and heartbreak of the heroine experiencing this over and over again. The last hundred verses of the text follow with combinations of all of these strategies. From 318 to 331 the heroine laments sorely, then from 355 onwards the hero is off with courtesans, initiating the final phase of love in separation in the text.

Where does this multi-layered and cumulative examination of suffering leave us as readers? *Tirukkōvaiyār*, a text that highlights the pearl-like tears of the heroine, whose characters openly voice lament to elements of the natural environment, and that lingers on the perils of love paints a picture that is far from celebratory. Instead, through pathos-evoking scenes of separation and hardship, it builds an affect of *karuṇai* slowly and cumulatively across the entire text. What is the significance of this aestheticized form of *karuṇai* in a text dedicated to Śiva? How do we understand it as part of a theological vision and not just a poetic sentiment? In order to answer this question, I first need to make an important caveat: *Tirukkōvaiyār*, for all of its scenes of heartache, is not a tragedy in the sense most often evoked by the term. The lovers remain married at the end of the text, however unhappily. Śiva too remains in each verse, though at a distance.

Conclusion: Qualified karuṇai

Both *Tirukkōvaiyār* and *Tiruvācakam* display what I argue is a qualified *karuṇai*: though the speakers of these poems undergo great suffering and hardship, the reader is always aware of both Śiva's unfailing grace and the hero and heroine's inevitable reunion. The hardships, though perceived as intractable by the speakers, are ultimately non-issues to the reader. This does not mean that they are any less evocative. To this day, people still speak of the heart-melting qualities of *Tiruvācakam*. Though *Tirukkōvaiyār* fell out of popularity, my close readings demonstrate that it too has a deep propensity for tugging at the heartstrings of a sensitive reader.

The qualified nature of tragedy in the Indian poetic context is explored by Bihani Sarkar in her discussion of *kāvya*:

“Where Western tragedy would regard pathos only as utter hopelessness, the Indian view presents an alternative, subtler, but no less important type—pathos rooted in ambiguity wherein the inner death wish grapples with and is reined in by hope... This kind of tragedy aligns with what George Eliot called ‘the unwept, hidden sort’ because it is a type of ‘everyday grief’ that arises from, and constantly confronts, uncertainty (will he? won’t he? will she? won’t she? will I? won’t I?). Fundamentally it is philosophical in nature, rooted in doubt (*sandeha*), because given that it is not easily resolved, such grief shapes the self as it searches for answers. Though without an inevitable prospect of doom, it has its own gravitas and conflict, born from a severe oscillation between hope and despair.”¹⁸⁵

The oscillation that Sarkar points out is evident in the trials of the speakers of both texts. In *Tirukkōvaiyār* and *Tiruvācakam* this oscillation is productive of pathos and thereby an affect of *karuṇai*, both direct and suggested. But this *karuṇai*, born out of the tug between, as Sarkar puts it, hope and despair, near and far, is also tempered by the well-versed reader’s ultimate knowledge of certitudes. Even the most hopeless of protagonists, *Tiruvācakam*’s own “lowly dog,” is not doomed outright, a truth that the reader knows with confidence.

What might this indicate about how Māṇikkavācakar understands being a Śaiva in the world or about his larger theological vision for both texts? Monius’ work on emotion in Appar’s *Tevāram* offers helpful observations. For Appar, she writes:

“Ordinary human life is misery; the only relief from pain lies with Śiva... Appar’s emotional register alternates consistently between extreme, self-abasing despair and joyful, loving hope that *karma* can be eradicated, and true bliss found in Śiva’s presence.”¹⁸⁶

Here, Appar displays a similar oscillation between the lows of “extreme” sorrow and the highs produced via Śiva’s interventions, or the promise of them. It is clear that Māṇikkavācakar is deeply indebted to Appar in this regard as he takes thematic polarities of emotion and applies

¹⁸⁵ Bihani Sarkar, *Classical Sanskrit Tragedy: The Concept of Suffering and Pathos in Medieval India* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021) 19-20.

¹⁸⁶ Monius, “Gesture and Emotion,” 176.

them, not only in the speaker's experiences but also in the exploration of time and space as demonstrated in chapters one and two. As Yocum notes, "The *Tiruvācakam*, more so than the songs of the Nāyaṇmārs, presents a coherent and consistent picture of the struggles and triumphs, the tribulations and ecstasies, of one devotee."¹⁸⁷ We need not employ an autobiographical reading as Yocum does in order to appreciate his comment on the degree to which Māṇikkavācakar captures the vicissitudes of human emotion and how contrast between high and low is so utterly thematized to the point of being a central identifying feature of his works.

Yocum further comments on the contrasts or "oppositions" found within *Tiruvācakam*:

"...an opposition whose appearance will be noted again and again in the *Tiruvācakam*, viz. the polarity between Śiva and release, on the one side, and the state of ordinary reality, on the other. Śiva is without limit as contrasted with the innumerable forms of birth, which are confined and conditioned by space and time."¹⁸⁸

Thus, Māṇikkavācakar's speakers demonstrate a core crisis of human emotional life in Śiva's universe. They are awarded glimpses of Śiva's transcendence, moments of divine grace, brushes with the absolute, but they remain bound by karmic entanglements that cling throughout their lifetime.¹⁸⁹ Returning to Appar, Monius elaborates:

"The love and happiness that Appar seeks are ever emergent, neither fully achieved or lasting; the nexus of bodily action and verbal utterance that results in moments of love (*aṇṇu*) and joy (*iṇṇam*) remains forever ephemeral, fragile, always tinged with the anxiety that such precious moments of loving bliss will not last. Appar repeatedly exults in moments of joyous cohesion, only to worry in the next line that such love cannot hold. 'There are those who say that days we do not worship you are days of sorrow,' he worries, for example, 'and those who say that days we worship you are days of joy.' Each stanza of a song to Śiva enshrined in Tiruppaḷanam ends with a dubative -ō. Will Śiva neglect me? Will he abandon me? Will time not pass for me? Such doubt never leaves the poetic narrator entirely, as each verse of a hymn to the lord of Tiruvānaikkā closes with a desperate question: 'Will I who am your servant suffer more affliction?' ...Emotions, throughout Appar's corpus, are forever unstable, transitory, arising only in the particular moments of verbal articulation, bodily gesture, and setting."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Yocum, 2.

¹⁸⁸ Yocum, 70-71.

¹⁸⁹ A. Gardner Harris Jr. discusses the nature of the tumultuous bond between Śiva and the speaker in "Gracious Possession."

¹⁹⁰ Monius, "Gesture and Emotion," 187.

The ephemeral, transitory nature of human emotions is on full display in both *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*. That life is mostly comprised of suffering of one sort or another is evident. The precarity of rare moments of joy set against a backdrop of hardship and sorrow contributes to both text's pathos-evoking ethos. As Monius argues, Śiva is held as one's only hope of any sort of relief.

This formula, that Śiva offers relief from the difficulties of embodied human life, albeit momentary, is demonstrated clearly in *Tiruvācakam*, but what about *Tirukkōvaiyār* in which he is a figure on the sidelines? While many, if not most, read *Tirukkōvaiyār* as an allegory in which the ups and downs of the lovers' tale are meant to mirror the trials of separation from the lord as found in *Tiruvācakam*, I here move away from an allegorical interpretation of *Tirukkōvaiyār*'s love story. Instead of understanding the lovers to represent Śiva and the individual soul, as is tradition in later Śaiva Siddhānta readings of the text, there are other ways to think about what the text is doing as it explores human emotions.

As I have demonstrated by close reading throughout this chapter, both texts engage and produce *karuṇai* as a key sentiment. However, they do so in slightly different ways.

Tiruvācakam's structure allows it to explore *karuṇai* as a central feature of Śiva's nature and demonstrate how it functions in the life of the text's speakers. This central aspect of Śiva's grace is taken as a given in *Tirukkōvaiyār*, his benevolence frozen in epithet form, not demonstrated directly in narrative. Its evocation of *karuṇai* is achieved primarily through its focus on suffering as a central poetic theme. This method is shared by *Tiruvācakam*, but perhaps to a lesser extent. Despite their differences, there is a resonance between the compassion that Śiva demonstrates for his lowest devotees in *Tiruvācakam* where he is a direct actor in the lives of the speakers, and that generated in the mind of the reader observing those speakers falter repeatedly. *Tirukkōvaiyār*

is similarly productive of an aesthetic or affect of compassion; the result of beholding the heroine's lament over her husband's infidelity is an upswell of empathy in the reader. Compassion, both human and divine, is undoubtedly the hallmark of a Śaiva world in Māṇikkavācakar's vision and represents a significant departure from the Śaiva *bhakti* saints that preceded him. By looking at narrative quality and rhetorical strategies, we can bring these texts into productive conversation and think more deeply about the contours of Śaiva theology and its manifestations in a multiplicity of genres.

Conclusion

This dissertation began as an exercise in reading texts side by side. I designed the project with two goals in mind: Given that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are traditionally attributed to a single author, I first wanted to find out if we could deepen our understanding of the relationship between them. Second, their great formal diversity provided an opportunity to generate new sets of questions for each text that might not be asked if only investigated in the light of their respective genre categories. There is no roadmap in either the Tamil Śaiva tradition or in scholarship for thinking about *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* together. Both traditional reception histories and secondary scholarship have kept these two texts in separate discursive domains due to their formal differences. In this way, genre categorization has been a means of separation. The lack of precedent tandem reading is further complicated by the fact that *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* have almost no relationship in contemporary practice. My approach highlights what readings are possible if we bracket both the limitations of genre boundaries and later interpretive frameworks and read the texts first in the context of one another, and then in their immediate literary milieu.

By using the thematic categories of time and space to recover shared poetic and conceptual territory between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, I have argued that these texts build mutually constitutive theological visions. In chapter one I break down the analytic category of time to address issues of periodization, cumulative tense use, and narrative temporality. One might expect that analyzing such diverse manifestations of time in two already formally disparate texts would reveal significant incongruities. Instead, I demonstrate that despite major differences, both texts display remarkably consistent treatments of time throughout. Looking at the contours of time in *Tiruvācakam* reveals a fundamental tension between Śiva's immanence

and the persistent suffering that characterizes speakers' lives as devotees. In *Tirukkōvaiyār*, this tension is generated by a cumulative focus on themes of separation between lovers. These tensions, while produced in different narrative contexts, are generative of theologically significant and congruent pathos in both works.

Chapter two takes up the thematic category of place, an analytic which has already been applied to Tamil literature with rigour. I first survey some of the ways that these texts use strategies of qualifying space developed from earlier bodies of Caṅkam and *bhakti* literature. These include the use of proper nouns to designate towns or regions and the invocation Caṅkam *tiṇai* systems of imagery and emotion. I then demonstrate how these qualifications of place are loosened or dropped as place is “freed” in order to create a more open conceptual terrain for Śiva to roam and space for grammatical and thematic ambiguity. Finally, I explore to the dialectic between “qualified” and “freed” place and argue that pathos is generated by an oscillation between poles of near and far, placed and unplaced. This discussion calls into question extant understandings of Śiva's nature that are predicated on chaos or paradox. Instead, I argue that contrary to many extant readings, Śiva's divine play cannot be understood as purely paradoxical and rather, the tension generated from seeming paradox in these texts is in service to an affect of pathos.

My final chapter shifts from thinking through broad analytic categories to investigating a single concept—*karuṇai*—as it manifests in both texts. Tracing the roots of *karuṇai* in earlier literature and aesthetic theory, I establish grounds for understanding how the term is deployed in Māṇikkavācakar's works. I argue that both texts are generative of an affect of *karuṇai*. This affect is theologically significant as *karuṇai* is a newly introduced qualifier for Śiva's essential nature throughout *Tiruvācakam*. The proliferation of this term in *Tiruvācakam* is mirrored by a

strong evocation of an emotional sentiment of *karuṇai* through the exploration of speakers' suffering. While the term *karuṇai* is not found ubiquitously throughout *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the text evokes an affect of *karuṇai* that is very similar to that seen in *Tiruvācakam*. This is achieved through the exploration of themes of separation and hardships between lovers. The *karuṇai* evoked in each text is one that I argue is qualified. It is tempered by the ultimate knowledge of Śiva's enduring presence and unfailing grace. For whatever hardships the speakers of these poems face, the reader always knows that they will be graced regardless. Exploring *karuṇai* as a new point of emphasis as well as an important affective quality generated by both texts allows us to think about the evolution of Śaiva theology. This work contributes to charting changing characterizations of Śiva at the "culmination" of the *bhakti* period.

By the ninth century, genre had not yet been theorized in Tamil and thus, Māṇikkavācakar was working in a genre-fluid period in which he had relative freedom to draw from and innovate with many styles and forms. It is only in the later reception history of *bhakti* literature in South India where a conceptual divide between the devotional and the literary arose—and after it appeared, persisted. These genre divisions inform lingering debates on attribution. The immense formal disparity between *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* has been cited in arguments against shared authorship for over a century. Those who reject shared authorship use exegetical models that cannot adequately account for both texts when read together and thus conclude that it is not possible that they are the product of a single hand. Scholars seeking to locate Māṇikkavācakar as a bridge or transitional figure between earlier *bhakti* literature and a later Śaiva Siddhānta tradition also fail to account for the particularities of Māṇikkavācakar's historical period that facilitate experimentation with form. Instead of taking formal diversity as grounds for questioning authorship, this dissertation suggests that it is both

intentional and integral to Māṇikkavācakar's project. Further, literary experimentation and innovation allows Māṇikkavācakar emphasize new themes and participate in recontouring Śaiva theology. My project has asked us to understand genre diversity in a way that goes beyond considering it as either a case of mistaken attribution or of a demonstration of poetic bravado. Rather, thinking deeply about the implications of writing across genres reveals the power and potential in diversified literary production.

Reading *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* together allows for us to see a “more”—that they are not just Śaiva examples of older works, but they accomplish and are generative of something new that is best understood when they are accounted for together. Further, if we account for the literary and historical context in which Māṇikkavācakar's texts were created, we may find a more complex and integrative picture of the relationship between them. By shifting focus from single texts to multiple texts, I have also tried to open up new possibilities for reading across genres within the context of a single canon. While there are some studies that track single concepts over multiple *tirumurai*,¹⁹¹ they are in the minority and often sacrifice depth of reading in order to achieve a comprehensive review of all works in a collection. The vast majority of scholarship on Māṇikkavācakar focuses on *Tiruvācakam* alone. Reintroducing *Tirukkōvaiyār* to larger theological discussions allows us to both understand its contributions to the development of Tamil Śaivism and to rethink *Tiruvācakam* in the process.

There are multiple areas of inquiry to pursue that build off the work accomplished here. One of these is a further investigation of the historical implications of Māṇikkavācakar's literary

¹⁹¹ For example see Arumugam Kandiah, “A Critical Study of Early Tamil Saiva Bhakti Literature with special reference to Tevaram” (PhD diss., University of London: 1973) and V.C. Sasivalli, *Mysticism of Love in Saiva Tirumurais* (Madras: International Institute of Tamil Studies), 1995.

and theological innovations in the ninth century. Arriving after four hundred years of formally cohesive devotional literature, Māṇikkavācakar's works differ significantly and stand at the cusp of a great wave of literary novelty. This literary newness transcends secular and religious literary domains. While indebted to both classical Caṅkam poetry and earlier devotional literature, *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are also conversant with novel literary genres included under the umbrella term *ciṙrilakkiyam* that arose in the same period. We have yet to understand the contours of this wave of literary innovation and the impact of Māṇikkavācakar's literary legacy in the following centuries. Further, *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* are informed by literary traditions belonging to other religious communities, including Buddhists and Jains, and other languages like Sanskrit and Prakrit. These networks of relationality have yet to be fully explored.

Given their high level of sophistication and engagement with other literary, religious, and literary domains, Māṇikkavācakar's texts deserve further attention as pointed Śaiva interventions in their period. While my dissertation indirectly addresses Norman Cutler's question about audience, further work needs to be done to see how the composition of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* expands the parameters of Śaiva discursive practice, and in doing so, its possible audiences. What kind of literary elite do these texts presuppose and what arenas are they operative in? A study of this nature would allow us to think broadly about loci of literary production and the relationships between arenas of the temple, court, and monastery as sites of cultural production. In robustly contextualizing these works in terms of time period, intersectionality, literary milieu, and loci of production, we can also shed light on the development of Tamil Śaivism during a formative period in the centuries leading up to the solidification of Śaivism as a religion of state under Cōḷa rule. These observations extend beyond Śaiva sectarian realms and can shed light on Jain and Śrī Vaiṣṇava, literature as well.

This dissertation invites us to examine reception histories of overlooked Tamil Śaiva texts. The fate of “lost” works like *Tirukkōvaiyār* is caught up in historical narratives produced by medieval commentators, late nineteenth century missionaries, and early twentieth century scholars. Around the thirteenth century, commentators began to separate texts considered to be “devotional” from those considered to be “literary.” These types of categorizations may have contributed to works like *Tirukkōvaiyār* gradually becoming divorced from mainstream theological discourse. During the colonial period, missionaries like Pope and Ziegenbalg arrived in South India and surveyed religion on the ground, making their own choices about what texts were “core” or authoritative; what texts became representative of Tamil religion. Then, in the twentieth century, Śaivism was embraced by Dravidian nationalist public figures, including scholars and politicians, who championed certain works as representative of a true religion of the Tamil people. In each of these “moments,” Śaiva canonical texts were situated and resituated in narratives of Tamil literary and religious history; moves that have significantly impacted our understanding of these texts as well as our access to them. Consciously tracing these modes of reception, we can shed light on marginalized texts and in doing so, offer alternative theological histories. My dissertation marks the beginning of rethinking the characterizations of these works in order to draw new conclusions about their projects.

This dissertation sheds light on the development of Tamil Śaivism during the period following the composition of *Tēvāram*. While much has been made of the *bhakti* period of the 5th through 7th centuries, the period from the 7th through 9th centuries which precedes the rise of the Cōḷas and sees the nascent crystallization of a relationship between Śaivism and forms of state power remains relatively understudied. Guided by Cutler’s question about the potentially different audiences of these texts, I further his brief suggestion that *Tirukkōvaiyār* is not simply a

“designer version” of *Tiruvācakam* but rather, that these texts represent pioneering engagements in new discursive domains. Thus, this dissertation offers more material with which we can begin to flesh out the scope of Tamil Śaivism in a formative period before the spread of Śaiva Siddhānta by providing fresh insight on a pivotal figure.

My work with *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* also contributes to the study of Tamil literature by offering new reading strategies for a genre that is vastly understudied, the *kōvai*. As *kōvai* belong to the larger and also understudied category of *cirrilakkiyam*, I also provide insight into the emergence of this field of “minor literature” during a period in which these forms began rapidly multiplying. Simultaneously, while the *bhakti* genre has been studied in some depth, I offer new perspectives on the emotional contours of *bhakti* literature that subvert extant expectations of the genre. Putting these texts side by side provides an opportunity to question our assumptions about individual genre categories. Is *Tirukkōvaiyār* a *bhakti* work? While we have no problem identifying it as Śaiva, the tradition would say it is not categorically *bhakti*, nor would most contemporary scholars of Tamil literature. However, my reading of the text reveals *Tirukkōvaiyār*’s deep engagement with many of the themes and rhetorical techniques that make *Tiruvācakam* a *bhakti* work. Thus, comprehensive intertextual work can generate questions about inherited genre categories and the way they influence our interpretations of texts over time.

In addition to region-specific contributions, this dissertation has broad application in the field of South Asian studies wherein genre as a mechanism of cultural production has not yet been fully explored. This is particularly true for figures who wrote in multiple genres, of which there are many across traditions and time periods. This includes figures like Manikkavacakar’s close Śrī Vaiṣṇava counterpart, Nammālvār, or famed “poet-philosopher” Vedāntadeśika. Finally, my work has implications for the study of religion by offering new ways to think both

about how religious communities engage in practices of textual production. Considering genre provides us with an opportunity to interrogate implicit expectations and the power dynamics of cultural formations they bely. Genre is not simply categorization based on characteristic; it is a testament of shared normative beliefs and a tool by which they may be dismantled and refigured.

I conclude this chapter by returning to two excerpts from *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār* that ring out in harmony:

nāyvayin uḷḷa kuṇamum illēṇai naltonṇu koṇṭa
*tīvayin mēṇiyan*¹⁹²

The one whose body takes the form of flame enslaved me, *me* without even the qualities of a lowly dog

ciṭṭaṇē civalōkaṇē ciṟu nāyin uṇkataiyāy veṇkaṭṭaṇ ēṇayum
*āṭkoḷvāṇ vantu kāṭṭiṇāy kaḷukkuṇrilē*¹⁹³

Oh highest one! Oh you of Civalōka! You revealed yourself at Kaḷukkuṇru, having come as the enslaver of even me, the mean one, lower than the lowest dog...

The first time I read *Tirukkōvaiyār*, I did a double take when I came across the above phrase.

Does Appar's speaker call themselves a dog in a similar manner? Yes. But calling oneself a dog becomes Māṇikkavācakar's hallmark in *Tiruvācakam*. This easy parallel between texts was just the first of many that I found while reading with a goal to shed assumptions about what form is and can achieve. This dissertation barely scratches the surface of the deep and complex relationship between the two texts but it marks a beginning from which fruitful further investigation can grow.

¹⁹² *Tirukkōvaiyār*, verse 342.

¹⁹³ *Tirukkaḷukkuṇrappatikam*, verse 2.

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