A First Look at the two *Bhāgavatam*s in Tamil: Cevvai Cūṭuvār's *Pākavatapurāṇam* and Arūḷāḷa Tācar's *Makāpākavatam.*

Suganya Anandakichenin
Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg

Introduction

One of the most popular and influential Purāṇas, even in the 20th c. is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhP). Although it was presumably composed in the Tamil land (or at least in South India), possibly under the influence of the Āḻvār poetry (Hardy 1983) around the 9th-10th centuries, a fully-fledged Tamil version of the Purāṇa[1] was relatively slow in coming.[2] And yet, when it did come in the 16th c., it was not once but twice, within the same century, namely Cevvai Cūṭuvār's *Pākavatapurāṇam* (CCBh) and Nellinakar Aruḷāḷa Tācar's *Purāṇapākavatam* (ATBh).

A few questions rise at this point: why did it take so long for someone to render the BhP into Tamil? Why did two poets undertake the task at around the same time? Who were they? Were they aware of each other's works? How close are their works to the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhP)? Do they even claim to closely follow the Sanskrit work? Why are these two Purāṇas relatively unknown nowadays, and not part of mainstream Tamil literature?[3] I will seek to address these questions in this note. For that purpose, I shall give some details on these two works, and then examine select passages from these two *Bhāgavata*s to see whether they are more like vernacular retellings of the BhP or rather fully-fledged works with an identity of their own.

1. Purāṇa literature in Tamil

The Purāṇas in Tamil were mostly were based on a Sanskrit Purāṇa (e.g. *Kantapurāṇam* based on the *Skandapurāṇa*), but sometimes could also be original works (like the very first Purāṇa in Tamil, the *Periyapurāṇam*).[4] Hundreds of Purāṇas celebrating the glory of a sacred place, like a temple-town, were also produced, and that too, well into the 20th c. Verse was the favoured medium, although the 20th c. saw a rise in the use of prose for this genre (Aruṇācalam 2005 [1977]: xlvii).

The Jains were the first to compose Purāṇas in Tamil,[5] but these are not extant anymore. The Śaivas were the next (ca. 12th c.), and they are also by far the most prolific. The Vaiṣṇavas began later, and did not produce as large a number as the Śaivas did. Mu.

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[1] For more on the definition, the types and the writing of the Purāṇas in Tamil, see Zvelebil 1974: 170-192.

[2] Bammera Pōtana's *Andhramahābhāgavatamu* (15th cn.), for example, was at least a century earlier. For more on the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas in Tamil, see Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: 227-232).

[3] There are no new reprints of the standard edition of the CCBh by U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar since it was first published in the middle of the 20th c. As for the ATBh, the 1989 edition is out of stock, and not reprinted since. It is hard to get a copy of either work.

[4] For more on the topic, see Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: xliv-lxxii).

[5] There were two of them, *Cāntipurāṇam* (possibly about the 16th Jain *Tīrthaṅkara*) in the 8th c. (?), and *Purāṇacākaram* composed in the 9th and the other, (Aruṇācalam 2005 [1977]: xlv).

Arunachalam (2005 [1977]: 227-8) explains that this phenomenon was caused by the fact that the vast majority of Vaiṣṇavas after the Āḻvārs (6th-9th c.) wrote mostly in Sanskrit and Manipravalam between the 9th and the 16th centuries, relegating Tamil to the mere composition of stotras.[6] He also believes that because Tamil literature thrived at the hands of the Śaivas, who wrote widely popular Purāṇas like the *Kantapurāṇam*, and great poetry like Aruṇakirinātar's *Tiruppukaḻ*, the Vaiṣṇavas slowly began to be interested in writing in Tamil again and produced big-sized works in Tamil, like CCBh, but also a few *sthalapurāṇa*s, e.g. Tirukkurukai Perumāḷ Kavirāyar's *Tirukkurukai Māṉmiyam* (16th c.).

As far as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is concerned, a few scholars who have worked on the Tamil versions (e.g. Aiyar & Piḷḷai 1891: iii-iv, repeated by Aruṇācalam 2005 (1977): 235) suggest that there exist seven types of *Bhāgavatam*s in Sanskrit, namely, the *itihāsa-*, *purāṇa-*, *saṃhitā-*, *upasaṃhitā-*, *viṣṇurahasya-*, *viṣṇuyāmaḷa-*, and *gautamasaṃhitā- bhāgavata*s,[7] and that the two Tamil *bhāgavatam*s correspond to the first two types in this list. Whatever the authenticity of this classification, the two works in Tamil are different from each other, as we shall see.

2. Cevvai Cūṭuvār's *Viṇṭu-bhāgavatam* (CCBh)

2.1. The question of authorship and date

The author of this work does not say anything about himself or give many clues as to his identity, so this created a confusion when it was first published, as it was attributed to a non-existent Āriyappa Pulavar.[8] U. Vē. Cāmiṉātaiyar (U. Vē. Cā.), who was fond of the text since

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[6] While this may have some elements of truth, it may be pointed out here that whatever they wrote, the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas wrote mostly to establish and/clarify their theology, or to savour the experience of reading texts related to God and of discussing favourite themes. And this, they could do directly using Sanskrit texts, because the Acaryas were perfectly bilinguals, and they could render the difficult parts of their discourses into Tamil, if necessary, for their audience. So they did not need to produce full-length renderings/translations of works such as the epics or the Purāṇas. They even quoted them in Sanskrit, in the Manipravalam commentaries and the *sampradāya grantha*s.

[7] This is supposed to be based on the first *adhyāya* of the *Gautamasaṃhitā*, which spells out the *bhāgavatalakṣaṇam* ('the types of the *Bhāgavata*[s]', which I have not been able to trace, since the first chapter of this *saṃhitā* rather deals with the investiture of the sacred thread, and is devoid of any mention to the BhP. For more details on these different types, see Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: 246-7).

[8] The first editor of this work, Kōmaḷapuram Irācakōpāla Piḷḷai (1881), a Tamil scholar who had written commentaries on the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, *Naḷaveṇpā*, *Nālaṭiyār*, and so forth, attributed it to a certain Āriyappa Pulavar. This apparently was due to a confusion caused by either a spelling mistake or a corrupt line in a floating verse:

கம்பனென்றும் கும்பனென்றும் காளி ஒட்டக்கூத்தனென்றும்

கும்பமுனி என்றும் பேர் கொள்வரோ – அம்புவியில்

மன்னா வளர்புடைசூழ் வாழ்குடந்தை யாரியப்பன்

அன்னாளி லேயிருந்தக் கால்.

kampaṉ eṉṟum, kumpaṉ eṉṟum, kāḷi oṭṭakkūttaṉ eṉṟum
kumpamuṉi eṉṟum pēr koḷvarō – am puviyil
maṉ nāvalar puṭai cūḻ vāḻ kuṭantai āriyappaṉ
a- nāḷilē irunta kāl.
Would they take the names of Kampaṉ, Kumpaṉ,
Kāḷi, Oṭṭakkūttaṉ, and Kumpamuṉi,[8] during the times
when Āriyappaṉ of the flourishing Kuṭantai
was [still] on [this] beautiful earth, surrounded by great poets?

childhood,[9] later learnt the name of the original author, thanks to the following verses which he found in some manuscripts, and worked on a proper edition of the text:[10] [11]

கதிக்குமறு பிறப்பொழித்துக் கதிகொடுக்கும் பாகவதக் கதையை முன்னம்
மதிக்குமுயர் வடமொழியாற் புனைந்தருளவ் வியாதமுனி வரனே மீள
உதிக்கும் நிம்பை மாதவபண்டிதச் செவ்வைச் சூடியென உலகு போற்ற
விதிக்குமறை யவர்குலத்தில் தோன்றியருந் தமிழாலும் விளம்பினானே.

katikkum maṟu piṟapp' oḻittu, kati koṭukkum pākavata kataiyai muṉṉam
matikkum uyar vaṭamoḻiyāl puṉaint' aruḷa viyāta muṉi varaṉē mīḷa

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On the one hand, Kaṇṇaṉ Cuvāmi (1989, vol.1: 24) states without giving exact references that (presumably Ra.) Irākava Aiyaṅkār (who published an edition of the *Cuntarapāṇṭiyam*, about which we will see) has written that this was the result of a copying error, with *ātiyappaṉ* being mispelt as *āriyappaṉ*. On the other hand, Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: 232-4) more convincingly argues that the third line of the above verse is corrupt, with the proper variant being *maṉ nāvalar paravum aṉatāriyappaṉ* ('Aṉatāriyappaṉ from Vāyal with great poets'), which is quoted by U. Vē. Cā. (7) in his preface to *Tiruvālavuṭaiyār Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. And Aṉatāriyappaṉ is the composer of a Purāṇa called *Cuntarapāṇṭiyam*, one of the three *sthalapurāṇa*s on Madurai.

     Although U. Vē. Cā. did not initially know about the authorship of the CCBh, as he had never seen any references in any of the manuscripts he had accessed throughout his life till then, he spotted the wrong attribution, as well as dubious verses in Piḷḷai's edition. However, when he confronted Piḷḷai, the latter simply denied being the publisher of the edition at all (Cāmiṉātaiyar 2019 [1950]: 631-2). Explaining this (based on other scholars' writings), Mātavaṉ (1993: 8) adds that Piḷḷai was a staunch Vaiṣṇava who was known to tamper with the texts that he edited when he found verses not to his taste, including those of the *Villipāratam* (from which he removed verses in praise of Śiva), and allegedly changed some old variants found in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* for replacing them with his own.

[9] U. Vē. Cā. mentions his appreciation of the CCBh thus:

செவ்வை சூடுவார் என்னும் வித்துவான் செய்யுள் நடையில் இயற்றிய பாகவதம் இருக்கிறது. நல்ல வாக்கு. அவர் சங்கப் புலவரைப் போன்றவர். இப்போது நல்ல பதிப்பாக இல்லை. ஏறக்குறைய 5,000 செய்யுட்களை யுடையது. சிந்தாமணியைக் காட்டிலும் பெரியது. கடிதப் பிரதி என்னிடம் உள்ளது. பல ஏட்டுச் சுவடிகளோடு ஒப்பிட்டுச் சோதித்து வைத்திருக்கிறேன். குறிப்புரை முதலியவற்றோடு சேர்த்துப் பதிப்பித்தால் படிப்பவர்களுக்கு மிகவும் உபயோகமாக இருக்கும்.

cevvai cūṭuvār eṉṉum vittuvāṉ ceyyuḷ naṭaiyil iyaṟṟiya pākavatam irukkiṟatu. nalla vākku. avar caṅka pulavarai pōṉṟavar. ippōtu nalla patipp' āka illai. ēṟakkuṟaiya 5,000 ceyyuṭkaḷai uṭaiyatu. cintāmaṇiyai kāṭṭilum periyatu. kaṭita pirati eṉṉiṭam uḷḷatu. pala ēṭṭu cuvaṭikaḷōṭu oppiṭṭu, cōtittu vaittirukkiṟēṉ. kuṟippurai mutaliyavaṟṟōṭu cērttu patippittāl paṭippavarkaḷukku mikavum upayōkam āka irukkum (Mātavaṉ 1993: 8).

There is the *Bhāgavatam* composed in verse by a scholar called Cevvai Cūṭuvār. [His] capacity to compose poems is good. There is no good edition now. It contains around 5000 verses. It is larger than even the *Cintāmaṇi*. I have a paper copy [of it] in possession. I have compared and examined [it] with many palm-leaf manuscripts. If [we] publish [it] along with glosses and so forth, it will be very useful for those who read [it].

[10] U. Vē. Cā.'s edition was published by the TTD around the middle of the 20th c. after many obstacles: Aiyar (1949: vii) narrates how the project came to happen, with Mātavaṉ (1993: 19-21) taking up the narration where he leaves off: the CCBh was published in two volumes after many misshaps, including the outbreak of the second world war, the consequent moving of the TTD printing press from Ceṉṉai to Tirupati, the scarcity of paper, U. Vē. Cā.'s death, and Aiyar's eventual death in 1949 and 1953, respectively.

[11] Probably not knowing U. Vē. Cā.'s edition nor his son's preface to it, Kamil Zvelebil (1974: 191) not only fails to spot the authorship issue (which leads him into further error), but states that there are three retellings of the BhP in Tamil, namely, Cevvai Cūṭuvār's, Varatarāca Aiyaṅkār's, and Āriyappa Pulavar's. The fact that the number of verses for the first and last works are exactly the same (4970) does not seem to have made him wonder. He dates the last one to the 18th c., and states that the author was a *vēḷāḷa* (a caste) from Kumbhakonam, without supporting evidence.

utikkum nimpai mātava paṇṭita cevvai cūṭi eṉa ulaku pōṟṟa
vitikku(m) maṟaiyavar kulattil tōṉṟi arum tamiḻālum viḷampiṉāṉē.

He appeared in a family of ruling Brahmins[12] and narrated [the *Bhāgavatam*] in
      precious Tamil
in such a way that the world praised saying, 'Vyāsa, the best among ascetics, who
      had previously
graciously composed, in the superior and revered northern language, the story
      of the *Bhāgavatam*
— which destroys another angry birth and gives mokṣa—himself appeared again
[as] Mādhava-paṇḍita/a scholar with great penance, Cevvai Cūṭi from Nimpai!'

So this poet was a Brahmin, possibly a Smārta-Cōḻīya one,[13] and his name may have been
Mādhava. And Cevvai Cūṭuvār sounds like a title that he acquired for his poetic prowess.[14] He
was from Nimpai, which is synonymous with Vēmpaṟṟūr/Vēmpattūr, a town near Madurai,
which seems to have produced many poets since the Caṅkam age (Cāmiṉātaiyar 1927: 15-6):

திரு மருவு பஞ்சலக்கண வேலை பொங்கி
    செழிக்கும் இரு நிதி கொழிக்கும்
தென் நிம்பை நகரமதில் வாழும் அந்தணரில்
    சிறந்த செவ்வைச் சூடுவார்
சுருதிபுகழ் பாகவத பௌராணம் ஓதினர்

tiru maruvu pañca lakkaṇa vēlai poṅki
    ceḻikkum iru niti koḻikkum
teṉ nimpai nakaram-atil vāḻum antaṇaril
    ciṟanta cevvai cūṭuvār
curuti pukaḻ pākavata paurāṇam ōtiṉar; [15]

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[12] Please note that *vitikku(m) maṟaiyavar* can also be understood as 'Brahmins who perform [sacrifices]', or even
as 'those of the Vedas that command'.

[13] In his preface to his edition of the *Tiruvālavāyuṭaiyār Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, U. Vē. Cā. (1927: 16-7) lists the
famous, scholarly Cōḻīya Brahmins from Vēmpattūr, in which he includes Cevvai Cūṭuvār. Vēmpattūr was also
known as Kulacēkara Caturvedimaṅgalam because of its being a *brahmadeya* dedicated to Cōḻīya brahmins by
Kulacēkara Pāṇṭīyaṉ (for more on this, see Cāmiṉātaiyar 1927: 15-7). Aiyar (1949: v-vi) also adds that Cevvai
Cūṭuvār belonged to the Kauṇḍinya Gotra, according to a Tamil magazine called *Tamiḻaracu* 1(2), p.67, which I
have not been able to trace.
      Zvelebil (1974: 191) suggests that Cevvai Cūṭuvār was a Vaiṣṇava Brahmin, of which I am not too
convinced as, unlike Aruḷāḷa Tācar, he freely sings in praise of deities other than Nārāyaṇa, as we can see from
the invocatory verses, as well as the 12th *skandha*. But then, he could have been less strict in his views than his
fellow poet. However, the fact that he does not mention his Ācāryas, or any Ācārya for that matter, is a little
disconcerting, as this is an established practice among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, as can be seen from ATBh's work.

[14] *cevvai* means 'correctness, fitness, abundance, evenness, sound condition' and *cūṭuvār*, a participial noun,
'one who wears, one who is crowned'. So we may roughly translate the title as 'he who is crowned with
smoothness/fitness [of words]'. Please note that the *Tamil Lexicon* (TL) has an entry for his name ('A native of
Vēmpattūr in Ramnad District, author of the Tamil Pākavatam, wrongly ascribed to a fictitious poet Āriyappa-p-
pulavar').

[15] Aiyar (1949: vi) claims that this *ciṟappu pāyiram* verse ('a special invocatory verse') was found in the *Bhāgavata*
MSS of the Tamiḻ Caṅkam of Maturai.

Cevvai Cūṭuvār, the best among the Brahmins who lived in the city of
Nimpai in the South, where the sea --- of five qualities, which is endowed with riches --- swells
and thrives, and wafts ashore the two treasures,[16]
uttered the *Bhāgavata paurāṇa* of Vedic fame.[17]

As for his date, the poet is claimed to have lived at the beginning of the 16th c., around 1500-25 CE[18], hence earlier than Aruḷāḷa Tācar (Arunachalam 2005 [1977]: 232). However, a closer scrutiny at the text is needed to firmly establish his date.

2.2. Cevvai Cūṭuvār's *Bhāgavatam*

His work, traditionally known as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇam*, *Itihāsa-bhāgavatam* or *Viṇṭubhāgavatam* (*viṇṭu* <Skt.- *Viṣṇu*[19]), is composed of 4973 verses divided into 155 *adhyāya*s, which themselves are —very much like the BhP that it follows closely— divided into 12 *skandha*s. This work has very few descriptive passages as it sticks to the essential, so that the story keeps moving forward.[20]

After the five initial verses (four invocatory stanzas and an *avaiyaṭakkam* one,[21] as we shall see in some detail at present), the CCBh shifts to Naimiśāraṇya where the ascetics address Sūta, and from there the story proceeds very much like (and in the same order as) the BhP.[22] The 10th *skandha* is the central one in terms of both importance and size, with 1682 verses,[23] and it, too, stays very close to the contents of the Sanskrit original.

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[16] i.e. *śaṅkha* and *padmanidhi*s, two of Kubera's nine treasures.

[17] This verse is quoted by Aiyar (1949: vi), and repeated by Arunachalam (2005 [1977]: 232-3).

[18] Cevvai Cūṭuvār's date has not been established without a doubt, to my mind at least. U. Vē. Cā., who edited the work, does not date it, simply because he may have died before writing a preface to his book. In his preface to the 1949 (p. vii) edition Kaliyāṇa Cuntara Aiyar (from now on Aiyar), U. Vē. Cā.'s son, explicitly indicates that the author's date is unknown. However, because the Tamil Vaiṣṇavas were apparently not interested in composing Purāṇas in Tamil till about the 16th c., Arunachalam believes that Cevvai Cūṭuvār must have lived around 1500-25 CE. His dating also seems to take into account his hunch that CCBh seems older than Aruḷāḷa Tācar's version, which gives its date (mid-16th). While there is no reason to dismiss the date suggested by Arunachalam, we need to establish it in a more solid way, thanks to historical clues, linguistic features and intertextual references found in both works.

For some unexplained reason, Amaresh Datta (1987: 61) places Aruḷāḷa Tācar ('about 350 years ago') earlier than Cevvai Cūṭuvār ('he lived about 200 years ago'). It is worth noting that Datta gets many facts wrong, e.g. he claims that the CCBh was first published in 1908 (as opposed to 1881), that the first volume of U. Vē. Cā.'s edition was published in 1944 (as opposed to 1949), and he is not aware of the publication of the second volume. And perhaps most of all, his dating the ATBh to 'about 350 years ago' is taken from 1891 publication of that work, to which he seems to have omitted adding an extra century, when he published his own work in 1987. I thank S. Bhuwaneswari for pointing me towards Datta's work.

[19] I thank Naresh Keerthi for drawing my attention to the fact that referring to this *Bhāgavatam* as *Viṇṭu/Viṣṇu Bhāgavatam* could be in order to distinguish it from the *Devībhāgavatam*, which some saw as "the" *Bhāgavatam* par excellence.

[20] Mātavaṉ (1993: 7), in fact, points out that the poet is not interested in descriptions or *alaṃkāra*s, and that in that sense, it is more like an *itihāsa*, not merely a *kāvya* or Purāṇa.

[21] 'Expression of modesty by a speaker in a public assembly, apologetic preface' (*Tamil Lexicon* s.v. *avaiyaṭakkam*).

[22] I am yet to find any major difference with the Sanskrit work, except for the changes and restrictions imposed by the smaller size of the Tamil work.

[23] This corresponds to 35% of the whole work.

2.3. Sample passages – the invocation verses

To get back to the initial verses of the CCBh, it begins with one verse each for Tirumāl-Nārāyaṇa, Śuka, the greatness of the book, and Sarasvatī. The first verse gives the *viṣaya-vailakṣaṇyam* – the distinction of the subject-matter:

> 1. சீர்பூத்த பரஞ்சுடராய்ச் சித்தாகிக், கானலிடை
> நீர்பூத்தெதென வுலக நிறைந்தொளிர் தன் பாற்றோன்ற,
> ஏர் பூத்த முத்தொழிலு மினிதியற்றித் தனிநின்ற
> கார்பூத்த திருமேனிக் கடவுண் மலரடி நினைவாம்.

> *1. cīr pūtta param cuṭar āy, citt' āki, kāṇaliṭai*
> *nīr pūttat' eṉa ulakam niṟaint' oḷir taṉ pāl tōṉṟa,*
> *ēr pūtta mu toḻilum iṉit' iyaṟṟi taṉi niṉṟa*
> *kār pūtta tiru mēṉi kaṭavuḷ malar aṭi niṉaivām.*

> We shall meditate upon the lotus feet of the god with a lustrous form
>   of flourishing blackness,[24]
> who — being the graceful Supreme Flame, and knowledge [itself] —
> stood apart, having nicely performed the three beautiful acts,
>   as the worlds appeared from Him, fully resplendent,
> as if water appeared amidst the mirage.

U. Vē. Cā. (in Aiyar 1949: 1) rightly points out that this verse is reminiscent of Kampaṉ's first *kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu* ('invocatory stanza'), in which Nārāyaṇa is described as creating, maintaining and destroying the worlds. But it also echoes the first verse of the BhP, which incorporates the metaphor of the mirage (*tejovārimṛdāṁ yathā*).[25]

In the next verse, Cevvai Cūṭuvār claims that Sarasvatī herself speaks through him:

> பூமடந்தை புணர்ந்தவன் மாக் கதை
> நாமடந்தை நவின்றனள் ஆகலான்
> கா மடந்தை! யென்றோர் கவி யான் சொலின்
> பாமடந்தை தற் பாடியதாகுமே.

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[24] Another possible way of interpreting this: "that had bloomed in the monsoon".

[25] Although this verse is translated differently by scholars (e.g. Gupta and Valpey 2017: 49), here is one that brings out the similarities between this BhP verse (I.1.1) and the CCBh verse above:

> *janmādyasya yato 'nvayāditarataścārtheṣvabhijñaḥ svarāṭ*
> *tene brahma hṛdā ya ādikavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ |*
> *tejovārimṛdāṁ yathā vinimayo yatra trisargo 'mṛṣā*
> *dhāmnā svena sadā nirastakuhakaṁ satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi ||*

> We meditate on that transcendent Reality (God) from whom this universe springs up, inwhom it abides and into whom it returns—because He is invariably present in all existing things and is distinct from all non-entities—who is self-conscious and self-effulgent, who revealed to Brahmā (the very first seer) by His mere will the Vedas that cause bewilderment even to the greatest sages, in whom this threefold creation (consisting of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas), though unreal, appears as real (because of the reality of its substratum) —even as the sun's rays (which are made up of the element of fire) are mistaken for water (in a mirage), water for earth and earth for water—and who ever excludes Māyā by His own self-effulgentglory (tr. Goswami and Shastri 2010: 49).

pū maṭantai puṇarntavaṉ mā katai
nā maṭantai naviṉṟaṉaḷ ākalāṉ
'kā, maṭantai!' eṉṟ' ōr kavi yāṉ coliṉ
pā maṭantai taṉ pāṭiyat' ākumē.

Because the Lady of Speech uttered the great story
of Him who embraced the Lotus Lady,
if I compose a verse saying, 'Lady, protect!'
it will be as if the Lady of the word sang about her[self].

And this goddess is probably added to the list of those who are praised at the beginning, following the BhP itself.[26]

The third verse, dedicated to Śuka, the main narrator of the *Bhāgavatam*, speaks of the *vaktṛ-vailakṣaṇyam*—the distinction of the speaker:

பிறந்த பொழுதே துறந்து, பிறைக் குழவி போனடப்பப், பின் போய்த் தொன்னூரல்
அறைந்த புகழ் வியாதமுனி யாதரத்தான், மதலாயென் றழைப்பச், செவ்வாய்
திறந்து நறை பொழியு மலர்ச் செழுந் தருவும் ஏன் னென்ன, உயிர்கள் யாவும்
நிறைந்துறையும் சுகமுனிவன் னிரை யிதழ்த் தாமரை மலர்த் தாணினைதல் செய்வாம்.

piṟanta poḻutē tuṟantu, piṟai kuḻavi pōl naṭappa, piṉ pōy toṉṉūl
aṟainta pukaḻ viyāta muṉi ātarattāl 'matalāy!' eṉṟ' aḻaippa, cem vāy
tiṟantu naṟai poḻiyum malar ceḻum taruvum, 'ēṉ?' eṉṉa, uyirkaḷ yāvum
niṟaint' uṟaiyum cuka muṉiva! nirai itaḻ tāmarai malar tāḷ niṉaital ceyvām.

As you walked like a baby moon renouncing [everything] the moment [you] were
    born,
[and] as the ascetic Vyāsa, famous for uttering the Purāṇas, went behind and
    called [you] 'O child!' out of affection,
even the verdant trees with flowers that pour honey opened [their] good mouths,
    and said 'Yes?'!
O ascetic Śuka, whom all the living beings pervade and dwell in! We shall meditate
    upon [your] feet that are lotuses with crowding petals.

This, of course, is inspired by the BhP 1.2.23 itself:

yaṁ pravrajantam anupetam apetakṛtyaṁ dvaipāyano virahakātara ājuhāva |
putreti tanmayatayā taravo 'bhinedus taṁ sarvabhūtahṛdayaṁ munim ānato 'smi ||

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[26] Cevvai Cūṭuvār seems to praise all the people that the original BhP does (see verse below), except perhaps Nara:
nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya naraṁ caiva narottamam |
devīṁ sarasvatīṁ vyāsaṁ tato jayam udīrayet ||
After offering homage to Nārāyaṇa, to Nara, the best of men, to Goddess Sarasvatī, and to Vyāsa, one can rise toward victory. (I.2.4; tr. Gupta and Valpey 2017: 50).

As Śuka was departing home, unschooled and free of obligations, his father, Dvaipāyana (Vyāsa), called out, "Son!," afraid of losing him. But only the trees echoed in return, for they were absorbed in the same feelings. I offer obeisance to that seer who is within the hearts of all beings. (BhP I.2.23; tr. Gupta and Valpey 2017: 50)

The same incident is narrated with the same characters, with but a few changes. The following verse deals with the *prabandha-vailakṣaṇyam* – the distinction of the work, not his own, but of the original, i.e. the *Bhāgavatam*:

சுழித்து நல்லமு தொழுகி யஞ் சுகமுகஞ் சேர்ந்து
தழைத்த நான்மறைத் தடஞ்சினைக் கற்பகத் தருவிற்
பழுத் துதிர்ந்தது பரமபா கவதமென் றிசைக்கும்
விழுப்பெ ருங்கனி நுகர்ச்சியே விரும்புவார் மேலோர்.

cuḻittu nal amut' oḻuki am cuka mukam cērntu
taḻaitta nāl maṟai taṭam ciṉai kaṟpaka taruvil
paḻutt' utirntatu paramapākavatam eṉṟ' icaikkum
viḻu perum kaṉi nukarcciyē virumpuvār mēlōr.

The superior ones will desire solely the enjoyment of the great, sublime ripe fruit called[27] the eminent *Bhāgavatam*, the good nectar, which,
—garnering, trickling down, reaching Śuka's/the parrot's pretty mouth, [and] ripening upon the Kalpa tree with large branches that are the four flourishing Vedas
—dropped from [it]!'

And this once again echoes the BhP's own words:
nigamakalpataror galitaṃ phalam
śukamukhād amṛtadravasaṃyutam

"The fruit of the Vedic desire tree, containing ambrosial juice, has issued from the mouth of Śuka. O knowers of rasa and people of taste in the world! Drink again and again this reservoir of rasa—the Bhāgavata." (BhP I.1.3; tr. Gupta and Valpey 2017: 49)[28]

Comparing the *Bhāgavatam* to a fruit and nectar, tracing its origin to Śuka and the Vedic tree that is wish-fulfilling, but also suggesting that the audience is a certain set of people with superior taste — all these elements are comparable in the two versions.

We can thus see that the poet has stayed very close indeed to the BhP, while not quite translating from the Sanskrit original. The following verse that expresses the poet's humility is, however, not part of the BhP:

உறைபடு மங்குல் வானுருவ வோர்திறம்
சிறைபடு புள்ளெலாஞ் செல்ல வல்லவோ?

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[27] More literally, *icaikkum* means 'sung, sounded'.
[28] I thank Naresh Keerthi for reminding me of this BhP verse and David Shulman for explaining verse 3 above.

இறைவனூ லறிவின ரெடுத்தி சைத்ததென்
அறிவின தளவுமே யறைவன் யானுமே.

uṟai paṭu maṅkul vāṉ uruva ōr tiṟam
ciṟai paṭu puḷ elām cella vallavō?
iṟaivaṉ nūl aṟiviṉar eṭutt' icaittatu— eṉ
aṟiviṉat' aḷavumē aṟaivaṉ yāṉumē.

Are all the birds alike capable of going to and
piercing through the sky with raindrop-yielding clouds?
The book of God that the knowledgeable people took up and sang [about] –
I shall speak [it] to the extent of my [own] knowledge.

This is reminiscent of a floating verse (*taṉippāṭal*), which compares Nammāḻvār/Garuḍa with the other poets/houseflies.[29]

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[29] The following verse is given in a footnote of the 1909 edition of the *Kōyil Oḷuku* (p.7):

ஈயா டுவதோ கருடற் கெதிரே
இரவிக் கெதிர் மின் மினியா டுவதோ
நாயா டுவதோ உறுவெம் புலிமுன்
நரிகே சரிமுன் நடையாடுவதோ
பேயா டுவதோ அழகூர் வசிமுன்
பெருமான் வகுளா பரணன் அருள்கூர்ந்து
ஓவா துரையஆ யிரம்மா மறையின்
ஒருசொற் பெறுமோ உலகிற் கவியே?

ī āṭuvatō karuṭaṟk' etirē?
iravikk' etir miṉmiṉi āṭuvatō?
nāy āṭuvatō uṟu vem puli muṉ?
nari kēcari muṉ naṭai āṭuvatō?
pēy āṭuvatō aḻak' ūrvaci muṉ?
perumāṉ vakuḷāparaṇaṉ aruḷ kūrntu
ōvāt' urai āyiram mā maṟaiyiṉ
oru col peṟumō ulakil kaviyē?

That a fly should play before a Garuḍa!
That a firefly should play before the sun!
That a dog should play before a mighty, roaring tiger!
That a fiend should play before the beautiful Ūrvaśī!
Will the verses of the world be worth one word
from the great Vedas that are the thousand [verses]
spoken unceasingly and abounding with grace
by the Lord who wears bakula-flowers?'

The *Kōyil Oḷuku* (in the part called "Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam") claims that Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār established Nammāḻvār's supremacy as poet by placing his work on the Caṅkam plank, and thereby defeating Kampaṉ. There exists another variant of the story, as captured by Aruṇācalam (1990 [2005]: 16), in which Madhurakavi Āḻvār replaces Tirumaṅkai, and many unnamed *pulavar*s replace Kampaṉ. And the plank tipped over the other poets' compositions into the water, while Nammāḻvār's remained upon it. And when the humbled poets, the story goes, praised the Āḻvār, the same verse came out of all their mouths:

சேமம் குருகையோ, செய்யதிருப் பாற்கடலோ
நாமம் பராங்குசனோ, நாரணனோ? - தாமம்
துளவோ, வகுளமோ? தோளிரண்டோ, நான்கும்
உளவோ, பெருமான் உனக்கு?

It is also worth noting here that throughout his work, the poet uses types of verses that had already disappeared in his time, e.g. *kāppiyaturai, vañcitturai, vañciviruttam* and *kaliviruttam* (Mātavaṉ 1993: 5).

Now that we have caught a quick glimpse of the CCBh, let us now turn our attention to the other *Bhāgavatam*, not just to learn more about it, but also to examine its eventual closeness to the BhP and the CCBh

3. Nellinakar Aruḷāḷatāsar's *Purāṇa-bhāgavatam*

3.1. Authorship and Date

Aruḷāḷadāsar, also known as Varadarāja Aiyangār,[30] composed what is known as the *Purāṇa-bhāgavatam*.[31] For unknown reasons, his work is even less known than Cevvai Cūṭuvār's.[32] But at least, the identity of the poet and the date of his work are beyond any doubts thanks to these two verses from the *Tiruvaraṅka paṭalam* of the ATBh:

எதுகுலத்து வருமுறையோன் சரிதையையநற்சுகன் இசையால்
உதவு சொலைத் தமிழினால் உரைத்தவன்வண் திருவரங்கம்
பதியமர் வேத்திரக்கரத்தோன் மழமறையோன் வரதன் நெல்லிக்

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cēmam kurukaiyō? ceyya tiru pārkaṭalō?
nāmam parāṅkucaṉō? nāraṇaṉō? tāmam
tuḷavō? vakuḷamō? tōḷ iraṇṭō? nāṉkum
uḷavō, perumāṉ uṉakku?
Is [your] stronghold Kurukai? Or the perfect milk ocean?
Is [your] name Parāṅkuśa? Or Nārāyaṇa? Is the garland
[made of] tulsi? Or of bakula-flowers? Do you have two,
or four shoulders, O lord?

Please note that this strinkingly similar image is also used by Aruḷāḷa Tācar (v.1.147, given in 3.3. Sample passages: the invocatory verses).

[30] Varadarāja is probably just a translation of the Tamil name 'Aruḷāḷar', as pointed out to me by Thillaisthanam K. Parthasarthy in a personal communication. As for Aiyaṅkār, Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: 250) opines that the poet was probably simply known Varataiyar (as he calls himself in his verses, e.g. ATBh 14.5), and the suffix Aiyaṅkār (which is a title adopted by the Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmins), must have been attached to his name later, as the suffix did not come into being until later.

[31] This work seems to have been published by the end of the 19th c., in two parts, by different editors. Aiyar, Piḷḷai and Nāyakkar (1891: iv) describe how the first part was published: having worked upon the project for about 25 years, a certain Puṅkattūr Kantacāmi Mutaliyār got the first 4664 verses published 'four, five years ago' (which takes us to the 1880s), but passed away before publishing the remaining verses. Aiyar, Piḷḷai and Nāyakkar seem to have published the rest, and possibly the whole work (in the scanned book that I have used here have letters from both sides cut off, making it difficult to fully read the contents). I am yet to get hold of Mutaliyār's edition.

[32] Even U. Vē. Cā. does not mention this work: maybe he did not know of it. Or, maybe did he not think it quite as good as CCBh, and therefore ignore it? It is hard to say, because he passed away before he wrote an introduction/preface to his edition. We may also wonder whether Aruḷāḷa Tācar's work was considered as exclusively Śrīvaiṣṇava, hence not taken up and studied by the others; or whether the Śrīvaiṣṇava have kept it to themselves. But then, it is not clear if the Śrīvaiṣṇavas themselves read it, and I personally have never heard it mention —let alone quote from— in the numerous *upanyāsam*s that I have listened to. Besides, the editor Cuvāmi (1989: 29) marks the stops at the appropriate locations of the text to enable the reciting of the work in seven days for a *Bhāgavata-saptāham*. But we may wonder whether he is trying to revive an old practice or create a new one.

கதிபதியாய் உயர்ந்திடுபே ரருளாள நாதன ரோா.

etukulattu varu(m) muṟaiyōṉ caritaiyai nal cukaṉ icaiyāl
utavu colai tamiḻiṉāl uraittavaṉ vaḷ tiruvaraṅkam
pati amar vēttira karattōṉ maḻa maṟaiyōṉ varataṉ nellikk'
atipati āy uyarntiṭu pēraruḷāḷanātaṉ arō. (153)

The man with the **staff in hand** who dwells in the fertile **Śrīraṅgam**,
the young[33] **Brahmin Varadaṉ, Pēraruḷāḷanātaṉ** who rose as the chief of **Nelli**,
is the one who rendered in Tamil, the words that the good Śuka gave in verse,[34]
the life-story of Him whose birth happened in the Yadu clan.

Varatarācaṉ, also known as Pēraruḷāḷanātaṉ (see fn30 above), was a Brahmin (originally?) from Śrīraṅgam, whose hereditary duties included service at the temple.[35] He may have moved to a place called Nelli, [36] also mentioned in the following verse, in which he gives a precise date of "publication":

ஆயும் மறையோ ரென்ன வரும்ச காத்தம் ஆயிரத்து நானூற்றோ டறுபத் தஞ்சாம்
தூயசுப கிருதுதனின் முதன்மா தத்தில் துலங்கு குருவாரத்துத் திராட நாளில்
நேயமுடன் நெல்லிநகர் வரத ராசன் நிகரிலரங் கத்திலர வணையின் ஓங்கும்
நாயகன்முன் அறிஞர் மகிழ்ந் திடவே வாசு தேவகதை அரங்கேற்றி நலனுற் றானே.

āyum maṟaiyōr eṉṉa arum cakāttam āyirattu nāṉūṟṟōṭ' aṟupatt' añcām
tūya cupakirutu taṉiṉ mutal mātattil, tulaṅku kuru vāratt' uttirāṭa nāḷil,
nēyamuṭaṉ nellinakar varatarācaṉ - nikar il araṅkattil arav'aṇaiyiṉ ōṅkum
nāyakaṉ muṉ, aṟiṉar makiḻntiṭavē, vācutēva-katai araṅkēṟṟi nalaṉ uṟṟāṉē. (154)

On the Uttirāṭam day of a bright Thursday in the first month of the holy Cupakirutu
        [Śubhakṛt] year,
in the Śaka year[37] one thousand four hundred sixty-five [whose greatness is] hard to
        speak of by the examining Brahmins,
Nellinakar Varatarācaṉ attained excellence by **presenting** with love the story of
        Vāsudeva **before the Lord who [lies]** exalted upon a serpent-bed in the
        matchless Raṅgam
in such a way that the learned people rejoiced.

So the date of the *araṅkēṟṟam*,[38] which apparently took place in Śrīraṅgam—very much like Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* is claimed to be—, is 1543 CE.[39] In a handful verses of the same

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[33] *Maḻa* can also be a reference to his belonging to the *maḻa-nāṭu* ("Region north of the Cauvery on the western side of Trichinopoly" TL).
[34] *icai* can mean 'song, music, [metrical] foot' (TL) inter alia.
[35] The "staff in hand" refers to *vetrapāṇi* (cf. TL: vēttira-pāṇi (p. 3827) < vētra-pāṇi. Attendant who, with a cane in his hand, maintains order in a crowd). This may have been the hereditary duty of the author's family.
[36] It is not clearly where this place is located, but probably in the deep South.
[37] s.v. TL - *cakāttam/cakāptam*: "Šāli-vāhana Era commencing from 78 A. D."
[38] "Presentation of a new work for acceptance before a learned assembly" TL.
[39] For more on his date, see Aruṇācalam 2005 (1977): 274.

chapter, he also mentions his Ācārya Āyaṉār, about whom we do not know much, as we shall see.

3.2. Aruḷāḷatācar's *Bhāgavatam*

This *Bhāgavatam* is twice as long as the CCBh, being composed of 9147 verses divided into 130 *paṭalam*s ('chapter, section' TL).[40] And the poet often refers to his work as "Vāsutēva katai" ('the story of Vāsudeva/Vasudeva's Son'; see v.154 above), probably because it focuses more on Kṛṣṇa than on any other *avatāra* of Nārāyaṇa. And he claims that it is a Tamil rendering of Śuka's words through the following verse,[41] although we shall see that he diverges from the original work quite often.

The ATBh begins with six invocation stanzas,[42] and what is striking is that that all of them are dedicated to Nārāyaṇa or one of His forms, unlike the more diverse CCBh, which somehow is hardly surprising for a staunch Śrīvaiṣṇava. Also, the first *paṭalam*, called after Śrīraṅgam, praises the Kāveri, the different parts of Raṅganātha's body, the other deities of the Temple, but also the other *divyadeśam*s,[43] the Āḻvārs, the Ācāryas belonging to the Rāmānuja *sampradāya* from Rāmānuja himself to Kūrattāḻvāṉ, Nampiḷḷai, Maṇavāḷa Māmuni, and so forth, with the latest probably being Kantāṭaiyaṇṇaṉ. Also, each of the 132 *paṭalam*s begin with a praise of Tirumāḷ. Aruṇācalam (2005 [1977]: 251-2) points out that no other work in Tamil has so many *kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu*s ('invocation verses') verses, with over 300 of them.[44] And the last *paṭalam* (the 'Vainateya *paṭalam*'), apparently not found in all the manuscripts, is supposed to be a Tamil version of a part of the *Garuḍapurāṇa* that speaks of the greatness of Raṅganātha.[45]

In this way, the first and the last *paṭalam*s are directly linked to Śrīraṅgam, and the whole structure of the ATBh is different from the BhP, hence from the CCBh. As we mentioned earlier, there are no *skandha*s divisions but only *paṭalam*s. And the framing story in a way is that of Rukmiṇī, and a large part of the work is presented in the form of stories (of Nārāyaṇa's

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[40] This work has no *skandha* divisions, unlike the BhP or the CCBh.

[41] இதுவலால் உருக்கு மணிக்குநா ரதன்தான் இசைத்ததை நைமிசா ரணியத்து

அதிற்சவு நகனே முதல்வரெண் பத்தெண் ணாயிரர் முனிவர் கேட்பச்

சதுர்மறைச் சூதன் உரைத்திடும் நூல்சுலோக மாம்பதி னெண்ணா யிரமும்

விதிதமிழ் நெல்லி வரதையன் சொன்னான் – விருத்த மொன்பான் சகசிரமே.

itu alāl urukkumaṇikku nārataṉ tāṉ icaittatai naimicāraṇiyatt'

atil cavuṇakaṉē mutalvar eṇpatt' eṇṇāyirar muṉivar kēṭpa,

catur maṟai cūtaṉ uraittiṭum nūl culōkam ām patiṉ eṇṇāyiramum

viti tamiḻ nelli varataiyaṉ coṉṉāṉ – viruttam oṉpāṉ cakaciramē.

Other than that, Varadarāja from Nelli rendered —in nine thousand *viruttam* verses,
    in proper Tamil —
the eighteen thousand slokas [from] the composition, [in] which Sūta of the four Vedas utters
what Nārada narrated to Rukmiṇī, as eighty-eight thousand people headed by Śaunaka listened in
    Naimiśāraṇya.

[42] One each for the Infant on the banyan tree, the Supreme Lord, the Lord of the supreme abode, Rāma, Vāsudeva and Āyaṉār, his Ācārya.

[43] These are 'divine lands' that found mention in the Āḻvār poetry. For more on the topic, see Ramesh 1996.

[44] He also points out that Aruḷāḷatācar changes the *yāppu* as much as he can for every verse.

[45] The first editors of this ATBh added this *paṭalam* and gave it its current name. Cuvāmi (1989, vol. 5: 2) considers this part as a "*Śrīraṅgamāhātmyam*" in Tamil, the sole work in Tamil including such material.

various incarnations, for example, as well as Kṛṣṇa's birth and exploits) that Nārada tells Her.[46] In addition, the ATBh also contains many stories that are not present in the BhP, like those of Nappiṉṉai and Tatipāṇṭaṉ.[47]

A few highlights of this work[48] are that while describing the incarnation of the *Nācciyār* (Rukmiṇi), the poet shows influence of Periyalvar's *piḷḷai tamiḻ*,[49] and of the Tamil age-based classification of women as *pētai*, *petumpai* and so forth (6th chapter); when he describes nature, he lists trees for example (7: 32-5); he has also included whole *prabandha*s within the work, like *tiruppaḷḷiyeḻucci* (poem sung to wake up a deity), *ūñcal* (swing-songs) and so forth; and he also describes the different wedding rites in each of the fifteen weddings that the poet describes in his work. The poet has also produced *citrakavi*s[50] (Cuvāmi, 1989 vol.3: 5).

Let us know read some verses, and compare them with the ones from the CCBh.

3.3. Sample passages: the invocatory verses

1. பொன்னிறமாம் எனப்புவனம் படைத்துக் காத்துப் புயல் நிற மாய்த் தழல் நிறமாய்த் துடைத்துப் போந்து
முந்நிறமாய்த் திளைத்துயர்ந்து முழங்கு நாரம் முடிகிடவே நீண்டவட இலைமேல் முந்தித்
தொன்னிறமாம் அண்டரண்டம் எண்ணில் கோடி துலங்கிடவே வயிற்றமைத்துத் தூய தாய
தன்னிறமாம் குழவியெனப் பொலிந்து தோன்றும் தலைவனிரு தாளிணைஎம் தலைமேல்
வைப்பாம்.

poṉ niṟam ām eṉa puvaṉam paṭaittu, kāttu puyal niṟam āy, taḻal niṟam āy tuṭaittu pōntu,
munniṟam āy tiḷaitt' uyarntu, muḻaṅku nāram muṭukiṭavē- nīṇṭa vaṭa ilaimēl munti,
tol niṟam ām aṇṭar aṇṭam eṇṇ il kōṭi tulaṅkiṭavē- vayiṟṟ' amaittu, tūyat' āya
taṉ niṟam ām kuḻavi eṉa polintu tōṉṟum talaivaṉ iru tāḷ iṇai em talaimēl vaippām.

We shall place upon our heads the large pair of feet of the Master, who appears
 resplendent as a holy Child of His own nature,
  creating the worlds as the gold-hued one;
  protecting [them] as the cloud-hued one;
  going on to wipe [them] off as the one with a fiery form;
  being exalted having played [with them] adopting the three hues;
  taking the lead upon the long banyan leaf

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[46] Following the belief that other types of *Bhāgavata*s existed in Sanskrit (see XXX), Aiyar & Piḷḷai (1891: iii) seem to insinuate that in the *Mahābhāgavata*, the framing story of Nārada narrating all these stories to Rukmaṇī is itself framed by Śuka telling them to Parīkṣit (*i- carittiraṅkaḷai kūṟiṉār nāratapakavāṉ. kēṭṭār urukkumaṇi pirāṭṭiyār. itaṟkuttāṉ makā pākavatam eṉṟu peyar. piṉṉar itaṉai cukamuṉivar kūṟa parīkṣittuk kēṭṭaṉaṉ eṉpar*).

A few examples of the stories that Nārada tells Her are the liberation of Gajendra and His incarnation as Narasiṃha. These go up to *paṭalam* 78, which includes the 42 *paṭalam*s on Kṛṣṇa from His birth onwards (23 to 64), which culminates with their marriage in 79. And Kṛṣṇa's story proceeds with His various exploits and marriages, and His involvement in the Mahābhārata war and so forth.

[47] Nappiṉṉai is considered by the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas to be an incarnation of Nīḷā, Nārāyaṇa's third consort. She was born as Kṛṣṇa's cross-cousin, to marry whom He subdued seven bulls. For more on her, see Edholm and Suneson 1972.

[48] These are based both on my perusal of the work, as well as Aruṇācalam 2005 (1977): 252-3.

[49] "A poem describing the various stages of childhood of two kinds" TL.

[50] These are verses produced thanks to "various modes of writing or arranging verses in the shape of mathematical or other fanciful figures" (MW).

so that the thundering *nāra*s (souls) meet [Him],
placing in the belly the countless crores of [cosmic] eggs
of the celestials of an ancient nature so that [they] shine.

Similar to the first verses of the CCBh is the reference to Nārāyana the creator, protector and destroyer. And the Āḻvār influence is unmissable, for they often mention Nārāyaṇa's form as the Child on the banyan leaf that swallows the whole world in order to protect it during the *pralaya.*[51] The following verse is almost an extension of this, in the sense that it shows His being God.

2. வான் ஆசு கன் பாவகன் நீர்நிலம் மற்றும் ஆகி
ஊனார் உடலாய் உயிராய் உயிர் தோறும் மேவும்
கோனாகி மூவர் செயலாய் அக் குணங்கள் யாவும்
தானாகி நின்றதலை வன் திருத் தாள் துதிப்பாம்.

vāṉ, ācukaṉ, pāvakaṉ, nīr, nilam maṟṟum āki,
ūṉ ār uṭal āy, uyir āy, uyirtōṟum mēvum
kōṉ āki, mūvar ceyal āy, a- kuṇaṅkaḷ yāvum
tāṉ āki niṉṟa talaivaṉ tiru tāḷ tutippām.

We shall praise the sacred feet of the Master, who,
— becoming the sky, wind, fire, water, earth and other [things],
becoming the body full of flesh, becoming the soul [inside], becoming the lord
who dwells in every soul, undertaking the acts of the three people, —
Himself stood as all those qualities.

In this case, too, Nārāyaṇa's omnipresence, especially in the elements, is reminiscent of similar Āḻvār verses.[52] The following stanza focuses on Nārāyaṇa's incarnations and divine deeds:

3. கரமதனால் கடல்கடைந்தும் அமுதளித்தும் கனகன் உரம்
உர உகிரால் வகிர்ந்தளைந்தும் உலகிடந்(து) உண்டு உமிழ்ந்(து) அளந்தும்
சரமதனால் தசமுகனார் ஒருபதுக மறந்தடிந்தும்
பரமபதத் தொளிகொள் அரி பதுமமல ரடி பணிவாம்.

karam ataṉāl kaṭal kaṭaintum amut' aḷittum, kaṉakaṉ uram
ura ukirāl vakirnt' aḷaintum, ulak' iṭant' uṇṭu umiḻnt' aḷantum,
caram ataṉāl tacamukaṉār oru pat' uka maṟam taṭintum,
paramapatatt' oḷi koḷ ari patuma malar aṭi paṇivām.

We shall bow to the lotus feet of Hari in the Supreme Abode who shines
having churned the ocean with [His] hands and offering [gods] the nectar;
having enjoyed ripping up Hiraṇya[kaśipu]'s chest with [His] strong nails;

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[51] See for example Tiruppāṇ Āḻvār's *Amalaṉ āti pirāṉ* 9 or Kulacēkara Āḻvār's *Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi* 8.7.
[52] See for example, Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* 6.9.1 or 7.8.1. The Śaiva Nāyaṉmārs, too, have expressed similar concepts. See for example, *Tēvāram* 6.79.4 by Tirunāvukkaracar.

having dug out, swallowed, spit out and measured the worlds;
and having destroyed adharma so that the ten-headed one's singular ten [heads]
      dropped off thanks to [His] arrow.

Here the poet links up the *para* form of Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha to His *vibhava* (*avatāra*) forms. As a matter of fact, because he mentions His three acts in v.1, he may have had His *vyūha* form in mind.[53] The next verse is exclusively reserved for Rāma:

4. சுசரதச் சரபங் கற் கருள் செய்து சுரர்கோன் ஈந்த
வசரத மிசையினேறி இராவணன் மாளவேமிக்
கசரத வாளி ஏவிக் கமலனோ (டு) இமையோர் போற்றத்
தெசரதன் அடியில் வீழ்ந்த செம்மல் தாள் சென்னி வைப்பாம். 4

cucarata carapaṅkaṟk' aruḷceytu, curar kōṉ īnta
vacaratamicaiyiṉ ēṟi, irāvaṇaṉ māḷavē mik-
ka carata vāḷi ēvi, kamalaṉōṭ' imaiyōr pōṟṟa,
tecarataṉ aṭiyil vīḻnta cemmal tāḷ ceṉṉi vaippām. 4

We shall place upon our heads the feet of the great Son who fell at the feet of Daśaratha,
      —so that the unblinking gods praise along with the one on the lotus
      (Brahmā)—
having blessed Śarabhaṅga of good conduct,[54]
climbed upon the mighty chariot bestowed by the king of gods, and
dispatched a much effective arrow so that Rāvaṇa died.

This singling out Rāma, especially when aiming to tell (mainly) Kṛṣṇa's story, shows that this incarnation of Nārāyaṇa's may have been Aruḷāḷa Tācar's *iṣṭadevatā* ('beloved', chosen deity), as He was for many a Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācārya, especially of the Teṉkalai (southern) branch. And it is only after Rāma does Kṛṣṇa make an appearance as the object of an invocatory stanza:

5. யாதவர் குலத்துள் தோன்றி இமையவர்க் (கு) இடர்கள் செய்யும்
பாதகர் மடியவே பார் பாரம(து) ஒருவப் பார்த்தன்
தூ தனாய் ஐந்தூர் வேண்டிச் சூதனாய்த் தேரும் ஊரும்
சீதர னானவாசு தேவனை வணக்கம் செய்வாம்.

yātavar kulattuḷ tōṉṟi, imaiyavarkk' iṭarkaḷ ceyyum
pātakar maṭiyavē pār pāramat' oruva, pārttaṉ
tūtaṉ āy, aint' ūr vēṇṭi, cūtaṉ āy tērum ūrum
cītaraṉ āṉa vācutēvaṉai vaṇakkam ceyvām.

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[53] The Pāñcarātra Āgamas mention five different manifestations of Nārāyaṇa: *para* ('supreme'; Paravāsudeva in Vaikuṇṭha), *vyūha* ('emanation', Nārāyaṇa in the milk ocean), *vibhava* (incarnated/*avatāra* form), *arcā* ('icon', 'deity') and *antaryāmi* (inner controller, who resides in the human heart). For more on this, see Chari 1997: 91 and Klostermaier 2007: 206.
[54] In a personal communication, Victor D'Avella suggested the emendation *sucarita*, but it seems to me that the poet opts for *sucarata* for the sake of *etukai* (second-syllable rhyme).

We shall bow to Vāsudeva, Śrīdhara, who, having appeared in the Yādava clan,
      so that the heinous sinners who give trouble to the unblinking gods die,
became Pārtha's messenger desiring five villages,
turned into a charioteer and drove a chariot
      in such a way that the earth was rid of [its] burden.

Again, we see that once again, Vāsudeva (at least the name in this case) becomes prominent in this verse, being the direct object of the main, finite verb. Kṛṣṇa's acts of humbling Himself (being born, and that too, in the Yādava clan, becoming a messenger for the Pāṇḍavas, and driving a chariot for Arjuna) stand in contrast with the first two verses which clearly indicate that He is the omnipotent, omnipresent God.

    And finally, the last invocatory verse is dedicated to Aruḷāḷa Tācar's Ācārya, the praise of one's Ācārya and the lineage of the Ācāryas (which is done in the first *paṭalam*, as mentioned earlier) being a standard feature among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas:

6. தீயனார் எழு பிறப்பினும் செய்ததீ வினைகள்
மாய நாரணன் எட்டெழுத் தினைவழி யொழுகச்
சேய வாய் அரங் கேசனார் மகிழ்திருப் பணிசெய்
ஆயனார் திருத் தாளிணை போற்றுவம் அறிவால்

tīyaṉār eḻu piṟappiṉum ceyta tī viṉaikaḷ
māya, nāraṇaṉ eṭṭ' eḻuttiṉai vaḻi oḻuka
cēya vāy araṅkēcaṉār makiḻ tiruppaṇi cey
āyaṉār tiru tāḷiṇai pōṟṟuvam aṟivāl.

We shall praise with knowledge the sacred feet of the honourable Ā[cār]yaṉ
who performed reparation works[55] that the red-lipped Raṅganātha delighted in,
so that the bad deeds committed by the evil people over seven births are
      annihilated,
and act in accordance with the eight-lettered [mantra] of Nārāyanā!

Although this does not tell us much about his Ācārya (as this is a standard description that could fit most pious Śrīvaiṣṇavas), this verse definitely places him in or near Śrīraṅgam, unless it is another temple-town where the main deity was also called Raṅganātha.

    Although the introductory verses end here, as mentioned earlier, more verses in praise of various sacred places and people are found in the first *paṭalam.* Tācar has also included there five *avaiyaṭakkam* verses, like the following ones:

திசைசெவிடுபட நெடிய சிகரமுடி இனமுடிய
விசைகொடு எதிர்வரு கருடன் நிகரெனவே விரிநிலன்வாய்

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[55] Lexicalised, *tiruppaṇi* means 'reparation works', which could refer to repair works of temples and shrines. But separately, it simply means 'sacred work' that the field is larger, as it could refer to anything from reciting sacred verses to teaching them to children.

மசகம் இடுசி றகசை யவரு செயலை ஒத்தனவால்
இசைகொள் சுகனருள் மொழியை யான் தமிழால் இயம்புவதே (1.147).

ticai ceviṭu paṭa, neṭiya cikara muṭi iṉa(m) muṭiya
vicai koṭu etir varu karuṭaṉ nikar eṉavē viri nilaṉvāy
macakam iṭu ciṟak' acaiya varu ceyalai ottaṉa āl!
icai koḷ cukaṉ aruḷ moḻiyai yāṉ tamiḻāl iyampuvatē.

My uttering in Tamil the musical words graced by Śuka
is like the act of the mosquito coming fluttering [its] wings[56]
upon this wide earth, as if equal to Garuḍa, who comes forth with impetus
      so that the ears of the quarters turn deaf,
      so that the species of the long, gem-headed [snakes] end!

This verse is similar to Cevvai Cūṭuvār's *avaiyaṭakkam*, as well as the floating verse given in fn29. As these are standard comparisons, this may not indicate that the poets knew each other, or that one of them knew the other.

சம்பரனை வதைத் துயரும் தசரத ராமன் சரிதை
கம்பன்மொழி கவித் திறன் காட்சி கண்டும்
அம்புயங்கள் அலர்ந்தெழும் நீர் இலஞ்சி தனில்ஆம்பலும்த
தும்பிய போலவே வாசுதேவர் கதை சொல்லினனால். 148

camparaṉai vataitt' uyarum tacarata rāmaṉ caritai
kampaṉ moḻi kavi tiṟaṉ kāṭci kaṇṭum,
ampuyaṅkaḷ alarnt' eḻum nīr ilañci taṉil āmpalum ta-
tumpiya pōlavē vācutēvar katai colliṉaṉ āl. 148

Despite seeing the nature of the poetic prowess of Kampaṉ's words
[narrating] the story of Rāma, [son of] Daśaratha, superior [for] killing Śambhara,
I have told the story of Vāsudeva, like the water-lily sways/spills over in a water tank
where lotuses bloom and grow!

While again mentioning Vāsudeva, the poet goes back to referring to Rāma's story, but most probably to indicate his source of inspiration, i.e. Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*.

We can see from reading these sample verses by Aruḷāḷa Tācar that he was influenced by the Āḻvār poetry, and that his *Bhāgavatam* is more of a Śrīvaiṣṇava work than Cevvai Cūṭuvār's is. Moreover, given the nature of his work, it is more of an encyclopaedia of various stories, poetic genres and so forth than,[57] say, an *itihāsa*, which is what CCBh purports to be.

But did Cevvai Cūṭuvār and Aruḷāḷa Tācar know each other? And this point of my research, it is still too early to say whether they did or not. But one element *might* point at Aruḷāḷa Tācar probably being aware of the CCBh: there is a set of verses in the BhP traditionally known as the Nārāyaṇa kavacam (BhP VI.8.12-42) – hymns supposed to protect Indra. And these are rendered into Tamil in CCbh, in a chapter that is called *nārāyaṇa kavacam uraitta*

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[56] More literally, 'as [its]/so that [its] wings move'.
[57] I thank David Shulman for pointing this out to me.

attiyāyam (6.4.3-26), with the last lines (often the second lines, too) of the quatrains ending with the word *kākkavē/kākka*. But the ATBh (vol.5, p.35, v.165) only mentions the word *nārayaṇa kavacam* but does not dedicate a single verse to it, which is surprising for the otherwise very loquacious poet. We may wonder whether it is because the poet knew that the *kavacam* was already rendered into Tamil in the other *Bhāgavatam*? It is hard to say.[58]

4. Conclusions

We have thus seen that Cevvai Cūṭuvār sticks closer to the Sanskrit BhP, while Aruḷāḷa Tācar diverges considerably and seems more inclined towards collecting in one place different poetic genres, stories, and so forth, so that their works are distinct from each other, but also serve different purposes. Aruḷāḷa Tācar was also clearly producing a Śrīvaiṣṇava work. But both scholars were erudite, and knew their epics and Purāṇas, as well as Kampaṉ's *magnum opus*, very well indeed. But we need to look deeper into their works to detect further influences, like the *Villipāratam* and the Tamil classics, but also the minor literature (*ciṟṟilakkiyam*).[59] Both their works are incredible feats, and yet they are hardly known. Why is that so? A lack of interest for such works in the modern days are due to, as David Shulman (2016: 564) points out, "severe disjunction, a massive break in the cultural and literary tradition linked largely to the insidious and demoralizing impact of a newly dominant colonial culture; the colonial modernity…"

In order to revive interest in such works and to make sure that they are transmitted to the future generations, much work needs to be done. There is the need to produce an electronic, word searchable text, a proper edition (at least for the ATBh) and a translation. And given the size and the levels of difficulty of these works (and the lack of commentaries), this will require a team of scholars many years of work. Therefore, it is time to get started.

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[58] Further questions arise here: did Cevvai Cūṭuvār know of Tācar, or was he older in time? If so, how much older? If Tācar indeed knew of the other *Bhāgavatam*, why did he compose his? Was it because he learnt of it too late to turn back? Or did he always know of its existence but still went on and composed his version because he had different stories to tell? These questions are worth digging into.

[59] Cuvāmi (1989 vol.3: 5), for example, has pointed out that Aruḷāḷa Tācar's description of war is similar in style to Cayaṅkoṇṭār's *Kaliṅkattu Paraṇi.*

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