

DATE OF PERIYĀLVĀR

BY

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I have gone through the article on "The Contemporaries of Periyālvār" by M. R. Ry. K. G. Śaṅkar Avl., B.A., B.L., which appeared in Volume I Part IV of the Journal of Oriental Research wherein he has criticised my article on 'The Life of Śrī Āṇḍāl' which appeared in Volume I Part II of the same Journal. The age of Ālvārs is freely discussed in my Tamil work 'ஆழ்வார்கள் காலநிலை' which is issued in parts in *Tamilar-nēśan*, Madras, of which I am the Honorary Editor. Since I wanted to invite criticisms on the Life of Śrī Āṇḍāl in particular, I wrote the article on the same and I heartily thank Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar, for his criticisms.

On careful scrutiny, the only point of difference between us is that he ascribes Śrī Āṇḍāl to 9th century while I place her in the 8th century. His decision is based only on the mention of the name Śrīmāra Śrīvallabhaṅ as a Pāṇḍya king who ruled before 862 A. D. The same point engaged my attention many a time but I had to give it up for many strong reasons. The 9th century date as given by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar does not suit us for the following (1) astronomical, (2) historical and (3) traditional reasons.

ASTRONOMICAL.—*Mārkaḷi Nōṇṇu* as mentioned by Śrī Āṇḍāl in Her *Tirupphāvai* must have taken place on the full-moon day in the month of *Mārkaḷi* and the same is mentioned as *Tainīrāṭal* in Śaṅgam works ; for the full-moon day following the new-moon day in the month of *Mārkaḷi* is taken to be the full-moon day in the *lunar* month of *Tai*.¹ Hence, it must fall only in the latter half of the same month (*Mārkaḷi*). The position of the planets at the time when Śrī Āṇḍāl celebrated the same festival is mentioned by

1. Vide my article "Tai-nīrāṭal or Mārkaḷi-nōṇṇu" in the *Śen-Tamil* (Vol. XX).

her and the date when such could have occurred is clearly 731, the reasons for which I have already stated in my previous article. I am glad to mention that Mr. K.G. Śaṅkar has admitted that 731 is one of the dates when such a thing could have occurred. But, he opines that 850 is another date for the same and it suits better than 731, since 850 happens to be during the reign of Śrīmāra—Śrī Vallabhaṅ. On this, I requested Mr. S. Sōmasundara Dēśikar of the Tamil Lexicon Office to verify when the full-moon day as mentioned by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar, in the year 850 falls and he writes to me that it does not fall in the month of Mārkaḷi, but on the 30th of Kārttikai. This cannot be the full-moon day in the lunar month of *Tai*, when alone it could have been celebrated. Of the six possible dates mentioned by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar, he himself has admitted that the other four are unsuited. Since 850 too does not suit us now, 731 is the only possible date.

HISTORICAL.—The latter half of the 8th century which I have ascribed to Śrī Āṇḍāḷ is the period when both the northern and southern part of Tamiḷakam was in the hands of staunch Vaiṣṇavite Kings. The most powerful of them were Pallava Mallan of the Pallava dynasty and Parāntaka Neḍuñcaḍaiyaṅ of the Pāṇḍyaṅ dynasty. That Parāntakaṅ had the name of Śrī Vallabhaṅ also has been clearly proved on stronger grounds than those of mine by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar himself. Hence, this Śrī Vallabhaṅ must be the same as Śrī Vallabhaṅ mentioned in Guruparamparai as a disciple of Periyālvār. So is it not better to take this Śrī Vallabhaṅ of the 8th century who is proved to have been a Vaiṣṇavite in Madras Museum Plates than Śrī Vallabhaṅ of the 9th century mentioned by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar of whom it is not known from inscriptions whether he was a Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite ?

The statement “ குருசரிதங் கொண்டாடி ” in the same plates has been interpreted by Mr. Veṅkayya as ‘having followed the footsteps of his ancestor’. The same is referred to by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar : this would have been very appropriate if *anucrarittu* were in the place of *koṇḍāḷi*. ‘கொண்டாடி’ evidently means ‘having celebrated or adored’ and not ‘having followed’. Hence if we take “ குருசரிதங் கொண்டாடி ” to mean ‘having adored the deeds of his preceptor’, it can well fit in since it is mentioned in *Manudharma-śāstra* as one of the duties of kings. Here, we may note with satisfaction the parallel statement in a *taniyan* of Periyālvār as “ பாண்டியன் கொண்டாடப்பட்டர்பிரான் வந்தானென்று ”.

Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar says that, since Śrīvallabhaṅ or Parāntakaṅ mentioned by me came to the throne in 770 A. D. and Neḍumāraṅ, his father who lived at the time of Śrī Āṇḍāḷ was a Śaivite, 731 is not a suitable date. He took him to be a Śaivite only on the strength of the statement found in Vēḷvikuḍi grant “பாண்டிக்கு கொடுமுடி சொன்னெறய்திப் பசுபதியதூபாதம் பணிந்தேத்தியும்”. It seems to me that this decision is based on his present-day experience, that a Śaivite does not worship Viṣṇu nor a Vaiṣṇavite Śiva. But, do we not see even now that among Smārtas, there are some who are staunch devotees of either Śiva or Viṣṇu but at the same time pay their obeisance to both whenever there is any need for it. I hope the same was the case then with all people in general and with kings in particular. Otherwise, could it have been possible for Neḍumāraṅ to have under him Māraṅkāri a staunch Vaiṣṇavite as his minister and allow his own son to become staunch Vaiṣṇavite also? Hence, we cannot safely conclude only on the strength of the statement quoted above that he was a Śaivite. Besides the fact that kings in those days viewed with favour co-religionists and erected temples for their duties is evident from the Śaivite kings Kō-c-ceṅkaṅ and Mahēndravarmaṅ erecting temples to Viṣṇu and worshipping Him; and the Vaiṣṇavite kings Dantivarmanṅ and Kṛṣṇa Dēva Rājā of later date erecting temples to Śiva and worshipping Him.

Hence, it seems to me that Neḍumāraṅ was a Vaiṣṇavite and Periyālvār was taken as a preceptor both by him (Neḍumāraṅ) and his son (Śrī-Vallabhaṅ Parāntakaṅ) and Śrī Āṇḍāḷ lived at the time of the former. The son was called Māraṅ Ceḍaiyaṅ or Māraṅ Vallabhaṅ, which meant Vallabhaṅ the son of Māraṅ but, by some confusion latter day scholars took the whole to be his name without reference to that of his father.

Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar says that Parāntakaṅ ought to have become a Vaiṣṇavite in his 17th year since an invocation to Śiva alone is found in an inscription written in his 3rd year. If that be the case, there should have been no invocation to Śiva in inscriptions after his 17th year. But, there is one in the Madras Museum Plates. Similarly, there are invocations to Śiva in the inscriptions of Pallava-mallaṅ though he was a Vaiṣṇavite. Hence, it is not safe to assume that a Vaiṣṇavite king would never invoke Śiva in his inscriptions. But, it seems to me that they used to invoke any one, two or all the *trimūrtis* and it depended, to a certain extent, on the author of the *praśastis*. Though Neḍumāraṅ might have

been a Śaiva at the beginning and become a Vaiṣṇavite later, yet his son, Parāntakaṅ should have been a Vaiṣṇava from his birth since he allowed his father's minister Maṅkaṅkārī to be his minister also and then his brother, both of whom were staunch Vaiṣṇavites.

From the arguments cited above with the help of epigraphical records, I think it is safer to ascribe 8th century to Śrī Āṅḍāl, when there were Vaiṣṇavite kings than the 9th century, as done by Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar when there was a king Śrī Vallabhaṅ by name of whom whether he was a Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite, nothing is definitely known.

TRADITIONAL.—Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar says that Nāthamunikaḷ the first Vaiṣṇava Ācārya received Tiruvāymoḷi from Nammālvār himself. If so, Periyālvār, the contemporary of Nammālvār and his daughter Śrī Āṅḍāl ought to have lived at his time. So, he (Nāthamunikaḷ) ought to have known them and also the history of Āṅḍāl and her merging into Raṅganātha. If so, he would surely have given expression to it with great wonder as a staunch devotee of Śrī Raṅganātha. Besides he would have gone to Śrīvilliputtūr, the native place of Periyālvār, on his way to Ālvār-Tirunagari and given us all details about him. *Dīvyasūricaritam* which was written at the time of Śrī Rāmānuja the contemporary of Nāthamunikaḷ's grandson Āḷavantār and which almost gives all the details about Nāthamunikaḷ would never have failed to make mention of the wonderful life of Periyālvār and his daughter if they had lived at his time. But it definitely says that a long time elapsed between Ālvārs and Nāthamunikaḷ.

It is said that Nāthamunikaḷ heard a fragment of Tiruvāymoḷi for a Vaiṣṇava way-farer who told him that the Ālvār's works were not in vogue and so they could not be got anywhere except perhaps at Ālvār Tirunagari. Had he lived at the time of the Ālvārs, this would never have been the case. Hence some time must have elapsed between Ālvārs and Nāthamunikaḷ.

But, Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar himself admits that Nāthamunikaḷ was expounding Tiruvāymoḷi before 883 A. D., the 3rd year of the Cōḷa King Āditya I. Guruparamparai says that he was born in 823 A. D. and went to Ālvār Tirunagari with his elderly son to receive the Tiruvāymoḷi. He might have been about fifty at the time when he went there and might have been expounding Tiruvāymoḷi for ten years from 873 to 883. Hence, what is found in Guruparamparai about his birth is fairly correct.

If Periyālvār lived in the middle of the 9th century as Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar says, he should have been a contemporary of Nāthamunikal. The facts stated above may clearly show that it could not have been the case.

Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar says that Ālvārs followed the path of devotion, Ācāryas the path of knowledge and so, they might have lived at the same time, as Kūrattālvār lived at the time of Śrī Rāmānuja. This is quite against the principles of Vaiṣṇavism. *Prapatti*, the most important feature of Vaiṣṇavism was first taught by the Ālvārs and expounded by the Ācāryas. It is quite strange to hear that there was difference in their methods of devotion. Kūrattālvār is not at all recognised as an Ālvār but is recognised as an Ācārya though he has the name of Ālvār.

Hence, tradition also is totally against the views of Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar.

I have thus given here the salient points to meet the arguments of Mr. K. G. Śaṅkar. I request that other points may be cleared from my Tamil work *Ālvārkaḷ-Kūla-nilai*, where I have dealt with everything in detail.