

The Tamil Flood-Myths and the Cankam Legend

DAVID SHULMAN

Tamil tradition has long been famous for an origin-myth based on the idea of a destructive flood. The story first appears in the commentary attributed to *Nakkirar* on the *Iraiyanār akapporul*.¹ There we learn that the ancient Pandiya kings established three *Caṅkams* or literary ‘academies’ for three times at three different places, to judge the compositions of the early Tamil poets. The first *Caṅkam*, in which the gods Śiva and *Murukan* were included, sat for 4440 years in “the Maturai which was flooded by the sea” (*kaṭal kollappaṭṭa maturai*). The second (*iṭaiccaṅkam*) sat for 3700 years in *Kapāṭapuram*, and “it seems that at that time the sea flooded the pandiya land” (*akkālattuppōlum pāṇṭiyānāṭṭaikkaṭal konṭatu*). The third *Caṅkam* studied Tamil for 1850 years in Upper *Maturai* (*uttara maturai*). This tradition is repeated with some elaboration in the commentary by *Atiyārkkunallār* on *Cil.* 8.1-2. *Atiyārkkunallār* informs us that the sea swallowed up 49 provinces (*nāṭu*) of the old Pandiya land from the *Pakruṇi* River to the north bank of the *Kumari* River. In other words, the medieval tradition of the commentators regards the ancient, antediluvian Tamil land as stretching far to the south of the present southern border at Cape Comorin.² The story of the three *Caṅkam* as it appears in our sources is suspect on many counts,³ and there is no geological evidence of and deluge affecting the area in historical times.⁴ Nevertheless, the *Caṅkam* legend is by no means the only instance of the flood-motif in Tamil literature : the epic *Maṇimekalai* describes the destruction of the ancient Chola port-city *Pukār* (*Kāvirippūmpaṭṭinam*) by a flood⁵ — although *Pukār* exists today as a village by the seashore, near the spot where the *Kāviri* pours into the Bay of Bengal. And, as we shall see, nearly every Tamil shrine claims to have survived the *pralaya*, the cosmic flood which puts an end to the created universe.

All of these flood-myths may well go back to a single archetype. Already in the story of the three *Caṅkam* we may detect the conflation of two basic elements — the idea of a complete destruction (of the ancient cities of *Maturai* and *Kapāṭapuram*), out of which a new creation emerges; and the belief that something (here the *Caṅkam*, the institution which symbolizes the beginning of Tamil culture) survives the deluge. These ideas are, of course, somewhat similar, for even the notion of rebirth out of a total destruction implies a degree of continuity. I will argue below

that it is this concept — the renewed creation which follows upon the deluge — which underlies both the *Caṅkam* legend and the corpus of flood-myths attached to the shrines. Tamil mythology depicts the creation of the world as a recurrent moment in the cosmic cycle, a moment which arrives after the universal deluge and is always linked to the shrine as the center of the cosmos, hence the proper site from which to create; the connection between this conception and the *Caṅkam* story emerges in the local tradition of *Maturai*, the probable source of the *Caṅkam* legend and the home of the third, possibly historical *Caṅkam*.⁶

Before we turn to the *Maturai* flood-myths, let us survey the two broad categories of Tamil flood-myths, which correspond to the two basic ideas isolated above—myths of creation and myths of survival. We begin with the latter category, which seems at first glance to be more prevalent in Tamil. Most Tamil *purāṇas* contain a myth describing the shrine's survival of the cosmic flood. The idea of surviving the deluge may go back to the earliest flood-myth in India, in which Manu, the progenitor of the human race, is saved from the flood by a fish :

A fish warned Manu of an impending flood. Manu built a ship and, when the waters began to rise, tied it with a rope to the horn of the fish. The fish carried him over the northern mountain and instructed him to bind the ship to a tree. The waters gradually abated. Manu offered ghee, sour milk, whey and curds into the water, and, in a year, a woman was born. She came to Manu and told him to use her in a sacrifice, and by her he had offspring.⁷

This myth has been much discussed, often in the light of the well-known Middle Eastern parallels; the possibility of borrowing cannot be ruled out.⁸ Eventually this myth becomes the background to Viṣṇu's fish-avatar.⁹ It is interesting to note that two *purāṇas* place the beginning of the story in South India : the *Matsyapurāṇa* begins with Manu practising *tapas* on Mount *Malaya*,¹⁰ and the *Bhāgavata* gives the role of Manu to *Satyavrata*, lord of Dravida.¹¹ Perhaps these identifications reflect an awareness of the hypertrophy of the motif in South Indian mythology; or they may indicate no more than the provenance of these particular versions. In the version quoted above as well as in later purāṇic texts, Manu's survival is a key element, for the flood is the reason for a repetition of the creation story, a second creation similar to the first (note the appearance here of the incest theme) and also to some extent dependent upon it. The same pattern appears in many tribal flood-myths in India : no sooner is creation accomplished than it is threatened with disaster.¹² Note the idea of sacrifice in the text quoted above: the postdiluvian creation is connected with a sacrificial rite; the horn of the fish which saves Manu may be a

multiform of the *yūpa*, the sacrificial post.¹³ A deep level of meaning may be hinted at here : the universe is created anew out of the havoc of the deluge, just as new life is attained through the violent act of sacrifice.¹⁴

Other Sanskrit accounts of the flood include among the survivors the Seven Sages with the seeds of creatures,¹⁵ Brahmā, the sage *Mārkanḍeya*, the *Narmatā River Bhava* (Rudra), the fish-Viṣṇu, and the Vedas, *purāṇas*, and sciences.¹⁶ The *Matsyapurāṇa* mentions a "boat of the Vedas" in which the survivors escape; this motif is developed in an important Tamil flood myth, in which the survival of Manu and the others is replaced by two related elements — the escape of Śiva and Umā in a boat fashioned from the *pranava* (the syllable *Om*), and the continued existence of the shrine :

All creatures except Śiva, who is the First Principle, perished in the deluge which covered the universe. In order to create the worlds anew by the power of his grace (*arul valiyān*), Śiva, clothed only in the 64 arts, without his serpent ornaments, his crescent moon, his garland (of *konrai* flowers), or his tiger-skin, made the *pranava* which is the sound of the Vedas into a boat (*tōṇi*). With *Pēriyanāyakan* ('the great lord') together with Umā he entered the boat and sailed through the waters. They found a shrine standing firm as *Dharma*, undestroyed by the flood. 'This shrine is the "root" of the universe (*mūlātāracettiram* = Skt. *mūlādhārakṣetra*)', cried Śiva in joy, and he remained there in the boat. The guardians of the quarters found him there and said, 'He has dried up the waters with his third eye.' *Varuṇā*, the lord of the sea, came there and worshipped the god who saves those without egoism from the sea (of rebirth).¹⁷

This story provides the explanation for one of the names of *Cikāli* — *Tōṇipuram*, city of the boat. The shrine is not destroyed by the flood because it is the center of the world, the "root" or base of the spine of the cosmic man whose body symbolizes the created universe.¹⁸ Śiva arrives at this spot with his bride, without his usual attributes, in a boat made from the sound of the Vedas; the indestructible shrine becomes the god's refuge from the flood and the spot from which he can begin the work of creation once more. The sound of the Vedas will guide the god in this work, for sound (*śabda*) is traditionally an important instrument of creation. The first step in this process is taken when Śiva burns up the waters with the fire of his third eye. Water must give way to land, so that creation can take place ; elsewhere, however, Śiva's third eye creates not land but the flood — in the form of ten rivers — from the sweat of Pārvati's hands when the goddess covers his eyes.²⁰

The myth from *Cikāli* clearly reveals the link between the shrine's survival and its role as the site of the new creation. The progression is not, however, always so clear; many texts content themselves with the first notion and say nothing of the cosmogony. The shrine is eternal and has never been destroyed (hence the use of such common epithets as *maṇnum īr*,²¹ *mūtūr*,²² *palaiyapati*²³ *nirantarapuri*,²⁴ etc., all indicative of the shrine's antiquity and indestructibility). All the holy places near Maturai disappeared during the deluge except that worshipped by *Kupērā* at *Uttaravālavīy*.²⁵ Gaṇeśa at *Tiruppurampayam* is known as *Piralayam kātta viṇāyakar* because he saved the world from the flood.²⁶ A folk etymology explains the name of a shrine mentioned in the *Teyāram*, *Paravaiyūpmaṇṭali*, as the temple (*maṇṭali*) which swallowed (*uṇ*) the sea (*paravai*) sent by Varuṇa.²⁷ The *Nākakiri Tirucceṇkōṭu* is never destroyed during the deluge,²⁸ and the inhabitants of *Tiruvāñciyam* need not fear the end of the world—for all the worlds come to *Tiruvāñciyam* and enter into the goddess there.²⁹ Similarly, the Vedas and other holy scripture-enter into the *linkā* at *Vetāraṇiyam* at the time of the universal destruction, for that *linkā* is never destroyed.³⁰ Śiva surrounded *Tiruttenkūr* with a great rampart so that the waters of the flood could not overwhelm it.³¹ The motif is known in other literatures as well: Palestine is higher than other lands and was therefore not submerged by the flood.³²

An unusual development of the motif of surviving the flood is found in the story of the sand-*linkā* at *Kāñcipuram* which is one of the most popular of all Tamil myths :

The goddess Umā came to earth to expiate the sin of hiding the eyes of her husband Śiva. She worshipped the god of *Kāñci* in the form of a *linkā*, and he, in order to test her, gathered all the waters of the world into the river *Kampai*, which flooded the town of *Kāñci*. Umā embraced the *linkā* to save it from the flood, and the *linkā* grew soft in her embrace. Śiva arrested the flood, and ever since the *linkā* at *Kāñci* bears the marks of Umā's breasts and the bracelets she wore on her arms.³³

Here the flood-motif is put to the service of the myth of Śiva's marriage to the goddess at *Kāñcipuram*. Other versions state that the *linkā* was fashioned by *Pārvati* from sand on the bank of the river,³⁴ and this idea brings us even closer to one of the possible sources of the myth, the mention in the *Cilappatikāram* of a woman who embraced a sand image of her husband on the bank of the *Kāviri* to protect it from the flood.³⁵ V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar notes in this connection that "even today it is a custom among some classes for the chaste wife to go to the river bank, make an image of her husband in sand and after making offerings to it, to cast off the clothes she was wearing and to put on new ones."³⁶ The

Periyapurāṇam expressly states that the image embraced by the goddess became the wedding form of the god (*maṇavāla nar kōlam*), although *Pārvati* leaves the imprint of her breasts and bracelets not upon sand but upon stone which is melted by her love.³⁷

In one variant of this myth, *Dēvi* at *Kāñcipuram* is aided by *Durgā*, who wins the name *Pralayabandhini*, ‘she who holds back the pralaya’, by forcing the flooding river into a skull (*kapāla*).³⁸ The goddess is associated with the flood in other sites as well :

The gods praised the goddess *Kanyākumāri* after her defeat of *Bāṇasura*; they asked her to remain forever at the site of the battle, on the shore of the sea. They wanted fresh water, not salt water, to pour over her image, so the goddess split the earth with her spear, and a great flood welled up from the seven *Pūtālas* and covered the earth. Alarmed, the gods prayed for help, and the goddess made the water remain in the cleft of the earth: that is the *Mūlagāṅgā* at the shrine of *Kanyākumāri*.³⁹

Dēvi first creates and then controls the flood. Note that the *Mūlagāṅgā* at this shrine emerges from the nether world, the zone of chaos. The raging river is then contained within the borders of the shrine by the goddess, just as *Durgā* swallows up the flood at *Kāñci*. The goddess creates order from the materials of chaos, through the imposition of limits; at *Kāñci* she herself braves the flood in order to save the image of the god. In these myths we observe the importance of *Dēvi* as a source of *pratiṣṭhā*, the firm ground in which the deity and the shrine built around him are anchored.

The idea that the shrine must survive the flood found its way into the post-epic versions of the story of *Dvārakā*, the city carved out of the sea by Kṛṣṇa. According to the *Harivāṇśa*, Kṛṣṇa — who is known in another context as an enemy of the sea⁴⁰ — requested the sea to recede in order to make room for the building of *Dvārakā* (‘the Gate’ — to the nether world?).⁴¹ After the Bhārata war and the deaths of *Balarāma* and Kṛṣṇa, *Dvārakā* was submerged by the sea.⁴² But the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* explicitly excepts the shrine (*gṛha*) of Kṛṣṇa from the destruction: “On the day *Hari* (Kṛṣṇa) left the earth, strong black-bodied Kali came down (*avatirṇo ‘yam kālakāyo bali kaliḥ*). The ocean covered the whole of *Dvārakā* except for the temple of *Vāsudēvā*. The sea has not been able to violate (*atikrāntum*) it; *Keśava* (Viṣṇu) dwells there always.”⁴³ The *Bhāgavata* repeats this statement: “The sea submerged in a moment *Dvārakā*, which was abandoned by *Hari*, except for the temple (*ālayam*) of the lord; *Madhusūdana* (Viṣṇu) is always present there.”⁴⁴ Kṛṣṇa’s death is thus the prelude to the destruction of his city and to the beginning of the Kali

Age, the corrupt, unhappy period which is our present moment in time; but the god remains even now in his shrine, which no doubt offers its pilgrims an immediate salvation. *Dvārakā*, of course, is said to exist still today in Gujarat.⁴⁵

There seems little reason to believe that the idea of the shrine's survival belongs to the earliest layer of the *Dvārakā* story; more probably, it was simply introduced by the *purāṇas* into the older legend. In the *MBh*, the destruction of *Dvārakā* is complete; indeed, this episode in the epic seems to revolve around the idea of a total devastation — it follows immediately the story of the Yādavās' fratricidal massacre — and raises the question of the god's responsibility for the existence of death.⁴⁶ This version of the story has a parallel in Tamil tradition in the myth of the flooding of *Pukār*.

King *Neṭumūṭikkili* fell in love with a girl he saw one day in a garden. She lived with him for a month and then disappeared. The king learned from a messenger that the girl was *Pilivalai*, daughter of the Nāga king *Valaivaṇan* and that she was to bear a son to a king of the solar dynasty. When *Pilivalai*, had given birth, she sent her son to his father on a merchant's ship, but the ship foundered and the baby was lost. In his grief the king forgot to celebrate the festival of *Indrā*, and as a result the goddess *Maṇimēkalai* destroyed the city by a flood.⁴⁷

As in the *MBh* version of the *Dvārakā* story, the destruction of the city is complete, although *Pukār* like *Dvārakā*, is still pointed out today. In this myth the flood is attached to the important theme of the king's marriage to a Nāga princess; ultimately it is the king's love for the Nāgini which brings ruin to the city. Union with the Nāga serpent-deities, who represent the indigenous possessors of the earth, may legitimize a dynasty, but it is very often a source of danger as well: a Kashmiri legend tells of a king who burns a Nāgini in an oven in order to free himself from her magic control.⁴⁸ The basic pattern of the *Pukār* myth survives in a number of popular variants from northern Tamilnāṭu, especially the *Tonṭai* region: for example the purāṇic tradition of Mahābalipuram near Madras describes the destruction of the site through, a flood sent by *Indrā*, who becomes jealous of the splendour of this city of men.⁴⁹ In the Mahābalipuram tradition, the role of the serpent-tempress is given to a celestial *apsaras* — the usual accomplice of the gods in their attempts to corrupt powerful mortals.⁵⁰ Another variant from this region retains the Nāgini and reverses the whole force of the myth: the *Tonṭai* ruler *Tiraiyan* is said to have been born from the union of a Chola king with a serpent-maiden, who tied a *tonṭai* creeper to her son as a sign of his lineage and sent him on the waves (*tirai*) to receive his kingdom.⁵¹ This attempt to explain the name *Ilantiraiyan* retains the Chola hero of the *Pukār* myth.

and thus hints at the provenance of the story; but here the infant prince is carried safely by the water, and there is no violent deluge. Other variants support the positive role of the water, which now brings a ruler instead of destruction.⁵² The king rises from the ocean like the goddess *Sri* from the ocean of milk⁵³ and like the daughter of Manu after the flood recedes; the appearance of the dynasty may replace the motif of the *city* won from the sea. Order, in the person of the king, replaces the inchoate powers of the ocean, and the flood provides the background to the dynastic foundation — or, in other words, to a renewed creation. Again we are led back to the theme of creation from the water. We must now examine in more detail the Tamil cosmogonic myths, which begin at the moment of the universal deluge.

The Creative Flood : The Kāviri and the Lord of the Pot

For a typical example of a shrine's picture of creation, we may turn to the tradition of *Tiruyorrijūr* :

Brahmā was born on a lotus growing from the navel of Visṇu during the universal flood. The lotus swayed under his weight, and he fell into the water. He prayed to Śiva and Dēvī, and the goddess interceded on his behalf with Śiva. The lord agreed to his request not to be reborn and then disappeared with the goddess.

Left alone, full of sadness, Brahmā performed yoga to burn his body with his inner fire (*mūlattin kanal*). This fire burnt the world and dried up the flood, and by the grace of Śiva the waters gathered in a heap. To grant Brahmā release, Śiva appeared as a square painted plank (*caturaccirpam ākiya palakam*) in the midst of the fire, and he dwells in that form to this day at that spot, which is known as *Ātipuri*, since the lord came there at the beginning (*ātiyil*). The waters of the deluge became a deep lake to the north-east of the *liṅkā*⁵⁴.

The beginning (*ādi*, Tam. *āti*) celebrated in this myth in the start of creation, the re-emergence of the world after the flood is burned away. This is a process which must involve the shrine : Brahmā dries up the waters with his internal fire, thus causing the shrine, the site of creation, to be revealed through the appearance of the *liṅkā*-plank. Ironically, Brahmā, who traditionally performs the actual work of creation, here initiates the creative process while seeking release from existence and from the sorrows of having a body ! Brahmā is, in fact, said to have gained his wish: Śiva appears to grant him release. In this case, however, release seems

to be identified with the divine epiphany itself; here it is not the old goal of *mukti* which is praised but the 'release' which comes from worshipping the god in his local home, in this very real world. Brahmā thus attains his desire without ceasing to exist in his present incarnation; the salvation he achieves in the shrine on earth presumably obviates any future births, so that Siva can promise that he will not be reborn. The same immediate salvation is, of course, offered to all who come to worship at *Tiruvorriyūr*. In the eyes of the Tamil author, creation is thus a positive, beneficent process leading to the possibility of happiness in the circumstances of our life on earth.⁵⁵ The waters of the flood out of which the world is created persist in a controlled, circumscribed form near the central image of the shrine — an eternal reminder of the creative act which has taken place at this spot.

Somewhat more complex is the cosmogonic myth at *Kumpakōṇam*, where Siva is *Ātikumbhēśvarā*, 'lord of the pot' :

When the time of the universal deluge drew near, Brahma came to Siva and said, 'Once the world has been destroyed, how will I be able to create it anew?' Siva instructed him to mix earth with *amṛta*, fashion a golden pot (*kumpam*, Skt. *kumbha*), and put the Vedas and other scriptures into the pot along with the Seed of Creation (*ciruṣṭipijam*). Brahmā made the pot and decorated it with leaves and, when the flood began to rise, he put the pot in a net bag (*uri*) and sent it off on the waters. Pushed by the wind and the waves, the pot floated southwards; the leaves fell off and became holy shrines, and the pot came to rest at a spot proclaimed sacred by a heavenly voice. Lord Aiyanār tried to break the pot with an arrow, but his arrow missed. Siva took the form of a hunter and shot an arrow, which hit the pot and let loose a flood of *amṛta*. When the waters of the deluge receded, Brahmā fashioned a *linkā* from earth mixed with *amṛta*, and Siva merged into the *linkā* in the presence of the gods.⁵⁶

Once again Siva's appearance at a shrine after the cosmic flood marks the start of a renewed creation. The god frees the seed from its container and thus allows the world to be formed afresh. Note that Siva's action is violent one : the hunter-god shatters Brahmā's pot with his arrow. The basic images of this myth—in particular that of the creative seed carried in a pot—are drawn from well-known Sanskrit myths. In one version of *Prajāpati's* creation, Dawn appears before the gods in the form of an *apsaras*; they shed their seed at the sight of her, and Prajāpati fashions a sacrificial vessel out of gold in which he places the seed, from which *Rudrā* is born.⁵⁷ In one of the classic myths of the creative sacrifice, *Prajāpati*, who is identified with the sacrificial victim, lusts for his daughter; to

punish him, the gods create *Rudrā* from their most fearful forms, and *Rudrā* pierces *Prajāpati* with an arrow. The seed of *Prajāpati* pours out and becomes a lake.⁵⁸ In later versions Brahmā spills his seed "like water from a broken pot."⁵⁹ *Rudrā*, the archer and sacrificial butcher, has become the hunter - Siva at *Kumpakōṇam*; the pot which holds the seed is, in the Tamil myth as well as in the Sanskrit sources, a symbol of the womb.⁶⁰ This conjunction of seed and the pot/womb is implicit in the *kumbhābhiseka* ritual of consecration, in which a shrine is bathed in water from a pot. *Kumpakōṇam*, of course, derives its name from the pot (*kumbha*). Siva is also known as *Kumbhēśvarā* in Nepal, where he is said to have been established by *Agastyā* the sage whom we have seen to be prominent in traditions about the origin of Tamil culture;⁶¹ *Agastyā* is himself called *Kumbhayōṇi*, 'born from a pot', because of the following myth: *Mitra* and *Varuṇa* saw *Urvaśi* at a sacrificial session; they spilled their seed, and it fell into a jar containing water that stood overnight. *Agastyā* was born from the seed in the jar.⁶² As we shall see in a moment, Tamil tradition connects *Agastyā* with another pot, and one Tamil myth explains his title *Kumbhayōṇi* not by the above story but by the 'survival' motif: *Agastyā* was given this epithet because he escaped from a pot during the universal flood.⁶³

In the myth from *Kumpakōṇam*, the seed which Brahmā places in the pot may be understood in two ways—either as the actual seed of the creator (and thus a multiform of the *amṛta* which is used in fashioning the pot), or as the creative sound (the 'seed-mantra') which helps to give form to the universe, like the *prajava* in the myth from *Cikāli* cited above. The sound of the Vedas becomes the boat which carries Siva and Umā to *Cikāli*; in the myth from *Kumpakōṇam*, the Vedas and other scriptures are carried with the seed in the pot. When the pot is broken, a stream of *amṛta* pours forth, so that we have in effect a second, creative flood which contrasts with the destructive *pralaya* covering the earth. This motif is developed further in a popular myth about the origin of the *Kāviri* River:

When Siva sent *Agastyā* to the south, he gave him at his request the river *Ponni* so that he could have water for his ablutions. The river protested that it was not right for her, a woman, to follow a man, but Siva assured her that the sage was in complete control of his senses. *Agastyā* put the river in his water-pot (*kunṭikai*) and headed south.

Indrā, who was hiding from the demon *Sūrapadmā* and his brothers, had taken the form of a bamboo in a pleasure-garden he had created for the worship of Siva at *Cikāli*. *Sūrapadmā*'s spies were unable to find him, so the demon king sent a drought to devastate the world. The garden at *Cikāli* shrivelled up in the

blazing heat of the sun. Indra, distressed at the loss of flowers for worship, was advised by *Nāradā* to worship *Vināyaka*, who would bring the waters of the *Ponni* to *Cikāli*.

Indra worshipped the elephant-headed god, and *Vināyaka* took the form of a crow and perched on *Agastyā*'s water-pot. The sage raised his arm to drive the bird away, and the crow upset the pot. The *Ponni* poured on to the earth with tremendous force, shaking the worlds.

Vināyaka took the form of a Brahmin lad and fled from the enraged sage, but at length he revealed to him his true form. The sage asked forgiveness but complained that he was now without water for his worship. The god took some water in his trunk and poured it into the pot, which immediately overflowed again. *Agastyā* thanked *Vināyaka* and proceeded southwards, and the *Ponni* flowed toward *Cikāli* where it revived *Indrā*'s garden.⁶⁴

This story bears a superficial resemblance to that of the descent of the Ganges from heaven to earth; *Indrā*'s worship of *Vināyaka-Gaṇeśa* ultimately brings the river to earth to revive his garden, as *Bhagiratha*'s worship of Brahmā and Siva brings the Ganges to cover the ashes of the sons of *Sagarā* and gain them entrance to heaven.⁶⁵ A further connection is the episode of the sage *Jāhnu* who, seeing the Ganges sweep over his sacrificial site, drank up the water of the river, just as *Agastyā*, the central figure of the Tamil myth, is said to have drunk the waters of the ocean.⁶⁶ There is, however, an important difference between the stories of the two rivers: *Bhagiratha* must persuade Siva to sustain the Ganges in its descent, since the earth could not bear its violent force; but although the *Kāviri* descends violently, shaking the worlds, the sacred ground of the Tamil land can bear it. The text makes this point by recalling the flood at *Kāñcipuram*, which we discussed above: "The *Ponni* fell to earth in a flood like the *Kampai*, which our lord called to *Kāñci* to demonstrate the love of the Lady who gave birth to the world"⁶⁷ by implication, the earth can survive as did *Kāñcipuram*.

The *Kāviri* myth has, however, borrowed more significantly from other sources. Its basic image is once again that of the creative seed/flood carried in a pot. *Agastyā*'s appearance in the myth is natural for at least two reasons: firstly, *Agastyā* is himself born from a pot (*Kumbhayōṇi*); and secondly, this sage is the major figure in the Tamil myth of cultural origins and thus belongs by right in other myths of creation—especially creation from a flood. Both the *Caṅkam* and *Kāviri* myths seem to belong to this category, as we shall see. *Agastyā* figures already in a much older version of the *Kāviri* myth: at the request of *Kāntaman* the *Cōlan*

Agastyā tipped over his pot (*karakam*) and Lady *Kāviri* flowed eastwards to the sea; she joined the sea at the spot where the ancient goddess *Campāpati* was performing *tapas*, and the goddess declared that the city would be known thereafter by the name of the river (*Kāvirippūmpaṭṭinam*).⁶⁸ Here the Saiva veneer of the *Kantapurāṇam* is lacking, and Indra's catalytic role is fulfilled by the Chola king; yet both *Agastyā* and the origin of the river in the water-pot are mentioned. They might be said to be the primary constituents of the story and to suggest in themselves the identification of the river with the divine seed. This identification is strengthened in the *Kantapurāṇam* by the addition of several elements drawn from the myth of *Skandā*'s birth. There too the seed (of Siva or Agni) is often put into a pot (or pit);⁶⁹ or it is placed in the Ganges,⁷⁰ or in a golden lake⁷¹ or in a clump of reeds.⁷² In the Tamil myth the clump of reeds appears as the bamboo in which *Indrā* hides⁷³ until *Cikāli* is flooded by the river. The bamboo and other trees of *Indrā*'s garden are burnt — not by the fiery seed of Siva, which burns any vehicle or receptacle in which it is placed, but by the sun, which consumes them "as the Triple City was once burnt by Siva".⁷⁴ *Indrā* instigates the descent of the river, just as he interferes with Siva's *tapas* to seek the birth of Siva's child. The very name of the river which appears most often in this account — *Ponni*, the Golden, "the *Kāvery* river, as having golden sands"⁷⁵ — recalls the constant recurrence of gold in the *Skandā* birth-myth: the seed itself is golden⁷⁶ (an inheritance from the Vedic *Hiranyaagarbha*), as are the pot,⁷⁷ the mountain on which it is placed,⁷⁸ the reed forest or lake (with trees or lotuses),⁷⁹ the twins born by Agni's wife *Svāhā*,⁸⁰ the cup with which *Pārvati* nurses the infant *Skandā*⁸¹ and all that the brilliant seed illuminates (grass, creepers, shrubs, mountains and forests).⁸² Moreover, the *Ponni* is compared to "amṛta drunk by starving men";⁸³ amṛta or Soma is a common equivalent for seed in Saiva symbolism,⁸⁴ and let us recall that the Seed of Creation flows from the broken pot at *Kumpakōṇam* as a river of amṛta.

Gaṇeśa's appearance in the myth, first as a crow and then as a Brahmin boy, also has important precedents. The first image goes back to the ancient concept of the fire-bird carrying ambrosia;⁸⁵ the conjunction of birds and seed is common in Hindu mythology.⁸⁶ Birds are usually present in the *Skandā* myth: Agni takes the form of a parrot,⁸⁷ turtle-dove (*pārāvata*),⁸⁸ or goose⁸⁹ to interrupt Siva and *Pārvati* in their lovemaking; *Kāmā* comes in the form of a *cakravāka* to wound Siva,⁹⁰ and *Svāhā* as a *Garuḍa* bird carries the fiery seed to the mountain peak.⁹¹ In the *Kāviri* myth, the crow-*Gaṇeśa* liberates the seed/river from the pot. *Gaṇeśa* then takes the form of a young Brahmin and flees from *Agastyā*; this element in the myth may be related to the following, somewhat unusual account of *Gaṇeśa*'s birth:

opposite, a drought.⁹⁹ The flood-myths relating to the first two *Caṅkam* also belong here, as we shall see. Let us begin with the first of the flood-myths in *Perumparrappuliyūrnampi's Tiruvālavāyūṭaiyār Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam*:

Varuṇā, the lord of the sea, wished to test the greatness of Siva, so he ordered the ocean to flood the world. The gods, men, Nāgas, and others took refuge with the lord of Ālavāy (*Maturai*), to whom the panic-stricken Indra called for help. Siva sent the doomsday clouds (*Puṣkalāvarta* and three others) to drink up the waters of the ocean. *Varuṇā* was incensed at this action, so he sent his own clouds to destroy the city with their rain. Siva made the doomsday clouds into buildings and sent them to protect *Maturai* from the rain. They towered over the city until *Varuṇā*'s clouds dried up, and they then remained in *Maturai* as four buildings (*mātam*). Hence *Maturai* is known as *Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal* ('the junction of four buildings').¹⁰⁰

This story is in explanation of one of the old names of the city, *Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal*, which probably derives from four ancient temples (to *Kanni*, *Kariyāmāl*, *Kāli*, and *Ālavāy*) in the town. The name appears in the classical sources,¹⁰¹ and the identifications of the four temples given by *Naccinārkkiniyar* (on *Kalittokai* 92.65) survive in the names of the protecting divinities cited in the introduction to *Perumparrappuliyūrnampi's* text.¹⁰² This, then, is an origin myth: the four great temples of *Maturai* were the doomsday clouds sent by Siva to defend the city from the flood. The doomsday clouds, which are said to have been born from the seed shed by Brahmā at the wedding of Siva and *Sakti*,¹⁰³ connect this story with that of the Pandiyan who imprisoned the four doomsday clouds in response to a drought caused by *Indrā*.¹⁰⁴ In our myth the flood is checked by the doomsday clouds, which then protect the city from the flood of rain sent by the angry *Varuṇā*; here the clouds are analogous to the mountain (Govardhana) which Krishna holds upto protects *Kōkulām* from the torrential rains of *Indrā*.¹⁰⁵ In the slightly expanded version of the flood myth in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal* of *Parañcōti*, *Indrā* is also the instigator of the flood at *Maturai*:

Once when *Indrā* came to worship in the temple at *Maturai*, he found *Apīṭekapāṇṭiyan* engaged in worship there. *Indrā* had to wait to offer his devotion. When he returned to heaven, *Varuṇā* came to visit and found him feeling sad because his prayers had been delayed. When *Varuṇā* saw how devoted *Indrā* was to *Cokkaliṅkam* (Siva at *Maturai*), he asked if the god of *Maturai* could cure the pain in his stomach. 'Try him and see for yourself', said *Inarā*, so *Varuṇā* sent the sea to destroy *Maturai*. The

Pandiyān sought the help of Śiva and Śiva sent four clouds from his matted locks to dry up the sea. Furious at this check and unable to understand the amusement of the lord of *Maturai*, *Varuṇā* sent seven clouds to destroy the city with rain. Rain fell in streams like crystal pillars, and the inhabitants of *Maturai* thought the end of the world had come. To remove their distress Śiva commanded the four clouds to cover the four corners of the ancient city in the form of four buildings. The clouds of *Varuṇā* exhausted their rain on these buildings, and *Varuṇā* became ashamed. He worshipped the lord of *Maturai*, and the pain in his stomach disappeared.¹⁰⁶

Here it is specifically *Maturai* rather than the world as a whole (*nālam*) that the sea attacks. Note that the stock idea of the rivalry between *Indrā* and a virtuous mortal (king or sage) is transferred to a competition in devotion to Śiva: *Indrā* must wait until the king finishes his prayer. Moreover, as in the earlier version, the idea of testing the devotee is reversed, and *Varuṇā* tests the god. *Indrā*'s inspiration of the test might be seen as an interesting extension of his role in opposing Śiva in other myths, for example by sending *Kūmā* to disturb the god's meditation—an action which, like *Varuṇā*'s trial by water, is ultimately benevolent in intent. There is also an echo of the myth of churning the ocean, which in any case shares several motifs with the cosmogonic flood (e.g. the emergence of *amṛta*, a multiform of the divine seed, from the waters): there Śiva neutralizes the poison which rises from the depths of the sea, as at *Maturai* he heals the pain in the sea-god's stomach.¹⁰⁷ The idea that *bhakti* can cure stomach pains is a common motif in Saiva hagiographies.¹⁰⁸

The second flood story is a multiform of the first:

Once the sea rose against the ancient city of *Maturai*. The gods were alarmed and, seeing this, Śiva appeared to *Ukkirapāṇṭiyān* in dream and told him to throw the lance which he (as his father, *Cuntarapāṇṭiyān*) had given him against the fearsome sea (*nām alitta velaiy aṇa nām alitta velaiy eri*). The *Pāṇṭiyān* awoke and, after being urged again by the god, threw his spear at the sea, which became calm and lapped at his feet. *Tamilccokkan* (Śiva) appeared, erected a *māṇṭapā*, and said, 'This will be the site of the first and second *Caṅkam*; the third will be on the bank of the Ganges'.¹⁰⁹

Āravamuthan has shown that the notion of the sea lapping the feet of the king became a cliche of the commentators.¹¹⁰ The bank of the Ganges is taken to be a reference to the *Porrāmarai* Tank at *Maturai*.¹¹¹ The *Tiruvilai* adds a pretext for the flood: *Indrā* became jealous of the

Pandiyan, who was ruling virtuously and had performed ninety-six horse-sacrifices, so he told the lord of the sea to flood *Maturai* as if it were the time of the universal deluge.¹¹² Instead of the god's building a *maṇṭapa* for the *Caṅkam*, the *Tiruvilai* has the king consecrate to Siva all the area of fields and villages between the walled ancient city of *Maturai* and the retreating sea (verse 20).

It is this last element, the consecration of the land relinquished by the sea, which, one might suggest, is the focal point of the myth. Not only does the city *survive* the flood; it is in part (fields and villages or, in *Tiruvāl.*, the site of the *Caṅkam*) created from the flood by the casting of the spear. The same motif occurs in a number of other myths. *Āravamuthan* has suggested that the idea of throwing a spear at the sea goes back to *Agastyā*'s drinking the ocean¹¹³ or, more convincingly, to *Kārtaviryā*'s showering arrows at the ocean¹¹⁴ and *Skandā*'s hurling his lance at Mount *Krauñca*'s¹¹⁵ There is also the story of *Bhiṣma*, who dries up the Ganges by shooting arrows at it.¹¹⁶ But the idea of a creative attack upon the ocean is perhaps most clear in another well-known origin myth in South India : *Paraśurāmā* created the land from *Kōkarṇam* to *Kanyākumāri* by throwing his axe at the ocean.¹¹⁷ The prototype of this tradition appears in the *MBh* :

Paraśurāmā cleared the earth of Kṣatriyas and gave it to *Kāśyapā* as a sacrificial fee. *Kāśyapā* said to him, 'Go to the shore of the southern ocean; you must not dwell in my territory'. The sea measured out for *Paraśurāmā* a country called *Sūrpārakā*. *Kāśyapā* made the earth an abode of Brahmins and entered the forest.¹¹⁸

The *Koñku* and *Tuluya* regions have a similar myth of origins.¹¹⁹ We may recall here *Krishna*'s war against the ocean and his building of *Dvārakā* on land relinquished by the sea.¹²⁰

Another variation of this theme is the myth of the bridge at *Irāmeccuram* : Rāma asked the sea to help him cross to *Lankā*; when the ocean did not appear in answer to his appeal and three days had passed, Rāma, began to shoot arrows at the sea. The sea came up from *Pātāla* and sought refuge with Rāma, begged not to be forced to transgress the laws of creation by drying up its waters, and suggested that instead the monkey *Nala* build a causeway.¹²¹ Like *Paraśurāmā*, *Rāmacandra* attacks the sea ; and, although the sea does not recede, it provides the means of crossing over it by land.

Perhaps the most important parallel is found in the Tamil myths of *Murukan*. *Ukkirapāṇtiyan*, who casts his spear against the sea in the *Maturai* flood-myth, is himself an incarnation of *Skandā / Murukan*, for he is the son of *Siva/Cuntarapāṇtiyan* and *Pārvati/Minākṣi*.¹²² In Tamil mythology, *Murukan*, casts his spear twice—once against Mount *Krauñca*, as in the Sanskrit sources, and once more against the demon *Cūr* (*Sūrapadma*), who has taken the form of a huge mango-tree in the midst of the sea. It is this latter episode which is particularly celebrated in Tamil literature: “We praise the wielder of the spear which killed the mango-(demon) in the ocean”.¹²³ Moreover, *Murukan*’s war against *Cūr* may be part of an ancient myth of creation: the spear dries up the waters of the ocean as it flies toward the mango, and the destruction of the mango creates space for the world and liberates the sun from the darkness of chaos.¹²⁴ In casting his spear in the ocean, the god thus overcomes the forces of disorder and uncontrolled violence, just as the king of *Maturai* subdues the threatening sea with his spear.

There is another set of references in ancient Tamil literature to throwing back the sea. The hero of the fifth decade of *patiruppattu* is *Ceṅkuṭṭuvan* ‘who drove back the sea’ (*kaṭal pirakk ṭiṭṭiya ceṅkuṭṭuvan*). He too is said to have lifted his spear (*vēl*) against the sea,¹²⁵ but the old commentary takes this to mean he fought against people whose stronghold was the sea (*taṇṇul vālvārkku aran ākiya kaṭal*). Probably the verses refer to pirates, although this is not stated explicitly.¹²⁶ There remains a strong possibility that the epithet *kaṭal pirakk’ṭiṭiya-* contributed to the later flood myths from *Maturai*.

Let us return to the *Maturai* myths. We have seen that both *Tiruviṭai*, end the second flood-myth with an act of creation after the deluge, and *Tiruvāl*. (the earlier of the two) connects this with the story of the *Caṅkam* *Ārāvamuthan* has argued that the last verse of *Tiruvāl*. 21, which tells us that the site established by the god served as the home of the first two *Caṅkam*, is spurious.¹²⁷ Certainly the verse presents difficulties if one is to attempt to put together a chronology based on the *Tiruvāl*.; this, in effect, is what *Parañcōti* (or rather his probable source, the Sanskrit *Hālāsyamāhātmya*) has done,¹²⁸ and it is perhaps significant that he speaks throughout of only one *Caṅkam*. However, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* follows the earlier tradition in this case and mentions three ‘academies’, the first two in the city saved from the flood and the third on the bank of the Ganges.¹²⁹ Evidently *Parañcōti* has replaced this tradition with a more consistent scheme, based on the existence of a single *Caṅkam*. Perhaps he was closer to the original *Caṅkam* legend than he knew.

The first complete account of the three *Caṅkam* and the two destructive floods appears, as we saw earlier, in the commentary ascribed to *Nakkirar* on *Iraiyanār Akapporul*. But there are still older allusions to an

ancient flood in the Pandiya land. *Kalittokai* 104 tells us that when the sea rose and took his land, the Pandiya king (*tennavan*) carved new lands for himself from the territories of his enemies, removing the (Chola) tiger and the (Chera) bow and substituting the (Pandya) emblem of the fish.¹³⁰ Does this not confront us again with the familiar motif of land created in opposition to water? Perhaps not. The *Cilappatikāram*, which also knows the flood legend in relation to the Pandiyas, reverses the usual order: "May the *tennavan* prosper who ruled the South and took the Ganges and the Himalaya of the North when once the sea, refusing to bear the prowess he demonstrated to other kings by throwing against it his sharp spear, swallowed the *Kumarikkōṭu* together with the *Pakruli* River and several nearby mountains".¹³¹ According to the old, anonymous commentary (*Arumpatavurai*), *Kumarikkōṭu* refers to the bank of the *Kumari* River, while *Aṭiyārkkunallār* takes it to mean a mountain peak. This text is unique in explaining the flood as revenge for the casting of the spear rather than its occasion, although it also implies that the Pandyan conquered new lands because of the flood. *Aṭiyārkkunallār* supports this: the *tennavan* ruled *Muttūrkūrram* in the *Colanāṭu* and *Kuṇṭūrkūrram* in the *Ceramānāṭu* in exchange for the lands he had lost in the flood.¹³²

What, then, is one to conclude about the legend of the three *Caṅkam* and the lost lands of the Pandiyas? We have seen that the *Tiruvāl* connects the origin of the *Caṅkam* with the flood, while the references in *Cilappatikāram* and *Kalittokai* suggest that the flood is used, as in much later, *purānic* myths, to explain the origin of the present boundaries of the *Pāṇḍiya* land. The commentators' information on the lands which were allegedly lost in the deluge hardly inspires confidence, and early references in the literature¹³³ know only one *Caṅkam*, that which is said to have been situated in present-day *Maturai*. Given the prevalence of the flood motif in South Indian mythology, its particular prominence in *Maturai*, its association with the idea of creation, and the absence of any geological evidence of a real flood, it would seem that the story of the first two *Caṅkam* is an expansion of an early origin-myth centered in *Maturai*.¹³⁴ Like other Tamil shrines, *Maturai* sees itself as the indestructible centre of the universe, the site of creation, the survivor of the *pralayā*; to these notions *Maturai* has added its claim to be the ancient home of Tamil poetry and the site of the 'academy' linked by a persistent tradition to the first flowering of Tamil culture. Literary origins have been described in terms borrowed from the cosmogonic myth; the flood which precedes the creation of the world has been used as the background to the establishment of the *Caṅkam* as well. But creation in India is not a unique event at the beginning of time but an ever-recurring moment, a repetition of something already known; and thus the academy of poets in historical *Maturai* is not, in the view of the tradition, the first of its kind - but rather a rebirth of an earlier model after a cataclysmic flood. The institution which symbolizes

the crystallization of an ancient, classical Tamil civilization inevitably emerges from the background of inchoate and violent forces which are, in the Hindu view, implicated in *any* act of creation — be it the construction of the ordered universe in which we live, or the limited holocaust of the sacrificial ritual out of which the victim is reborn. Poetry, like life itself, is won from disorder and death.

To sum up: The Tamil flood-myths are essentially myths of creation. At the end of each cycle of time, a flood destroys the world — except for the shrine situated at the world's center and linked directly to the transcendent worlds above and below. At this spot God creates the universe once more by throwing back the waters of the flood, or by substituting for them a creative flood of seed or *amṛta*. The cosmogony implies the institution of order in the face of primeval chaos; hence the close connection between the Tamil flood-myths and the legend of the birth of Tamil poetry and culture. Civilization and order oppose the forces of chaos out of which they are born. Yet these forces are never wholly conquered; the violent flood will one day return to destroy the world, and it may survive inside the shrine in a limited, bounded form as part of the idealized, ordered microcosm at the centre of the universe.

NOTES

1. *Iraiyanār Akapporul* (Madras, 1953) aphorism 1.
2. The commentators always define the southern boundary as the *Kumari* River; see, e.g., the ancient commentary on *Puṇanāñṇū* 6.1-2; 17.1; 67.6. Cf. the discussion by S.B. Bharati, "The Pre-deluge Pandinad and her Southern Frontier," *Journal of Anna-malai University* 5 (1935), pp. 64-88; M.A. Thiagarajah, *Cēranaṭu during the Caṅkam and the Post Caṅkam Period*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of London, 1953, pp. 8-9, 12-13, 81-82. This tradition conflicts with Ilaṅkō's description of the southern border as *totiyōl pavuvin*, 'the sea of the maiden', (*Cilappatikāram* (hereafter *Cil.*) 8.1-2); hence *Atiyārkkunallār*'s lengthy gloss, which explains that the great flood which devastated the old Pandiya land happened long before Ilaṅkō's time, so that it was natural for the poet to describe the present, postdiluvian border. This ingenious explanation conveniently fits all references to the sea as the southern border and leaves intact the story of the old capitals swallowed by the flood.
3. *Atiyārkkunallār*'s description of the 49 lost provinces (*nāṭu*) of the old Pandiya

land shows the weak points of the tradition. The provinces are listed in groups of seven which appear to reflect in a formalization akin to the conventional division of the Tamil land in *akam*, poetry: there were 7 coconut provinces, 7 *Maturai* provinces, two groups *pālai* provinces, 7 hill provinces, 7 *kārai* provinces of the east, and 7 *kurumpantai* provinces. (The last group appears in *Pērācīriyar*'s commentary to *Tolkāppiyam Porul*, 649 as "palmyra province"). With the exception of the "Maturai provinces," the only names which look like authentic place-names in *Atiyārkkunallār*'s description of the lost homeland follow immediately on the above list: "Kumari, Kollam, and many other mountain provinces, forests, rivers and towns." It is noteworthy that the first of these names is shared by the historical southern boundary of the Tamil land, while *Kollam* exists today as Quilon! That the present-day *Kollam* was not unrelated to the "lost" *Kollam* was recognized by the medieval commentators: see M.A Dorai Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tēvāram* (Madras, 1958), Vol. I, p. 131. Note also that the number of provinces in *Atiyārkkunallār*'s list—49—is a formula-

- laic number which appears again in the *Cañkam* story: 48 of the 51 characters which make up the body of *Sarasvati* became the poets of the *Cañkam*; their number was completed when they were joined by Siva, who inheres in the world as the vowel ā inheres in syllables (*Tiruvilaiyātātpurānam* of *Parañcotimunivar*—hereinafter referred to as *Tiruvilai*. — Madras, 1955, 51.1-39). All this casts doubt on the account of *Atiyärkkunallar*.
4. See P Joseph, *The Dravidian Problem and the South Indian Culture Complex* (Madras, 1972), pp. 3-4.
 5. *Manimekalai* (Madras, 1951) 24.27-74, 25.178-200.
 6. On the question of the historical *Cañkam*, see Kamil V. Zvelebil, "The Earliest Account of the Tamil Academies," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 15 (1973), pp. 109-135; J.R. Marr, *The Eight Tamil Anthologies with special reference to Puranāñūru and Patiruppattu*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of London, 1958, pp. 2-15.
 7. *Satapathabrahmana* of the White Yajurveda, *Bibliotheca Indica* (Calcutta 1903-1910), 1.8.1-10.
 8. See Suryakanta Shastri, *The Flood Legend in Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi, 1950), *passim*; Paul Regnaud, *Comment naissent les mythes* (Paris, 1897), pp. 59-151; Gustav Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India* (Westminster, 1893), pp. 311-328. In Iran the flood-theme and the survival of man attaches to Yima—whose Indian counterpart is in this case not Yama but Yama's half-brother, Manu! Dumézil is oddly silent on this point, surely relevant to the comparison of Yima and Yama: see G. Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, Vol. II (Paris, 1971), pp. 246-9; *idem*, "La Sabhā de Yama," *Journal Asiatique* 253 (1965), pp. 161-165.
 9. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 179-81; and cf. *Rgveda* 7.88.3; F.B.J. Kuiper, "Cosmogony and Conception: A Query," *History of Religions* 10 (1971), p. 104.
 10. *Matsyapurāna*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series no. 54 (Poona, 1909), 1.11-12.
 11. *Bhāgavatapurāna*, (Bombay, 1905), 8.24.13.
 12. Verrier Elwin, *Myths of Middle India* (Madras, 1949), pp. 20-26, 30-32, 37, 41, 46-48. (1976)
 13. See Michael Defourne, "Note sur le symbolisme de la corne dans le Mahābhārata et la mythologie brahmaïque classique," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976) pp. 17-23.
 14. See D. Shulman, "Murukan, the Mango, and Ekāmbaresvara - Siva : Fragments of a Tamil Creation Myth?" *Indo-Iranian Journal* (in press).
 15. *Mahābhārata* Bori, 3.185.29-30, 34.
 16. *Matsyapurāna* 2.10-12.
 17. *Cikālittalapurānam* of Aruñacalakavirāyar (Madras, 1887), 2.15-41. In the interests of economy, I have summarized rather than translated myths throughout.
 18. For this symbolism, see K. Zvelebil, *The Poets of the Powers* (London, 1973), p. 42. The same image, expressing the shrine's identification as the centre of the universe, occurs in *Śrināgeśaksetramāhātmya* (Madras, 1935), 1.4-6 (with reference to Tiruppālālīccaram) and in *Tiruvārūppurānam* of Campantamujivar (Madras, 1894), 5.17.
 19. This idea is said to be symbolized by the drum (*damaru*) carried by Naṭarāja-Siva in his upper right hand. See H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton, 1972), p. 152.
 20. *Kantapurānam* of Kacciappacivācāiyar (Madras, 1907), 6.3. 364-370.
 21. *Kāñcipurānam* of Civaññayokikal (Kāñcipuram, 1937), 58.37; cf. *Tiruvilai*, 13.4.
 22. *Cil.* 15.6; *Tirukkūvappurānam* of Turaimānakalam Civappirakācacuvāmikal (Madras, 1908), 2.53.
 23. *Palanittalapurānam* of Pālacuppiramāṇiya kkavirāyar (Madras, 1903), 13.48; cf. *Tiruccenikkottuppurānam* of Tenkāci Kavirājapāṇitar (Tiruccē-kotu, 1932), 1.1.2
 24. *Tiruov̄riyūrpurānam* of *Tiruvorriyūr Nānappirakācar* (Madras, 1862), 2.37.
 25. *Tiruvilai*, 56.27.
 26. P. V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines* (Madras, 1920), p. 75.
 27. Dorai Rangaswamy, Vol. I, p. 6; cf. *Cuntaramūrtti*, *Tevāram* 96.
 28. *Tiruccēnkottuppurānam* 1.2.6.
 29. *Tiruvāñciyakṣetritapurānam* (Kumpakōṇam, 1939), 14 (p. 55).
 30. *Vedāranyamāhātmya* (Kumpakōṇam, 1912), 2.65-67.
 31. *Tiruteñkūr talapurānam* (Cikālī, 1914), 2.1-13.
 32. *Bereshit Rabbah* (Tel-Aviv, 1956), 33.6.
 33. *Periyapurānam* of Cēkkilār (Madras, 1916), 4.5.62-70; *Kāñcipurānam* 63. 364-401. See the analysis of this myth in my forthcoming article.
 34. *Skandapurāna* (Calcutta, 1959), 1.3.1.4. 21-36 (part of the *Aruñacalamāhātmya* on Tiruvaññāmalai).
 35. *Cil.* 21.6-10.
 36. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *The Cilappadikāram* (Madras, 1939), p. 251 n. 4.

37. *Periyapkrānam* 4.5.67. For the motif of *bhakti* melting stone, see *Tiruvaiyārrupurānam* of *Nānakkūttar* (Madras, 1930), 3.18-19.
38. *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (Bangalore, 1968), 8.55-70.
39. *Kanyāksetramhātmya*, India Office Library, London, Burnell Manuscripts, IO.B. 458, 6. Cf. *Cevantippurānam* of *Caiva Ellappanāvalar* (*Tiruccirappalli*, 1927), 5.1-18.
40. *Harivāsā* (*Vārānāsi*, 1964), 2.133. 31-8. Cf. J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viśnuism* (Delhi, 1962), p. 155. In this, as in other ways, Krishna is strongly reminiscent of *Skanda/Murukan*: see below at notes 121-124.
41. *Harivāsā* 2.59.31-38. Cf. *Visnupurāna* (Bombay, 1866), 5.23:13. We will return to the motif of the city reclaimed from the sea. On *Dvārakā* as the gate to the nether world, see F.B.J. Kuiper, "The Bliss of Asa," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 8 (1964), p. 113.
42. *Mahābhārata* 16.8.40-41.
43. *Visnupurāna* 5.38.8-10.
44. *Bhāgavatapurāna* 11.31.23-24.
45. H. H. Wilson, *The Vishnu Purana, A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition* (1840, reprinted Calcutta, 1972), p. 482 n. 4.
46. See *Vyāsā's speech to Arjunā* in the sequel to the myth: *Mahābhārata* 16.9 25-36. And cf. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 260-271.
47. *Manimēkalai* 24.27-74, 25.178-200.
48. Veronica Ions, *Myths and Legends of India* (London, 1970), pp. 77-83.
49. William Chambers, "Some Account of the Sculptures and Ruins at Mavalipuram, a place a few miles north of Sadras, and known to Seamen by the Name of the Seven Pagodas," in M.W. Carr (ed.), *Descriptive and Historical Papers relating to the Seven Pagodas on the Coromandel Coast* (Madras, 1863), pp. 13-15. See summary and discussion of the myth in O' Flaherty (1976), pp. 270-271.
50. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 87-89. At Mahabalipuram the king falls in love with an *apsaras* who smuggles him into heaven; upon returning to earth, he constructs his city in imitation of the splendors of heaven; this excites *Indrā's* jealousy and leads to the city's destruction.
51. *Naccinārkkiniyar* on *Perumpānrrupapatāi* 30-37 (pp. 213-214 in *pattuppāttu*, ed. U. Ve. Cāminātaiyar, *Tiruvāgmīyūr*, 1974).
52. Oppert, pp. 250-252; cf. *Tiruvorriyūrpurānam* 12.2. One wonders if the famous relief of "Arjuna's Penance" at Mahabalipuram, with the serpent figures issuing from its central recifice, is not in part connected to this story of dynastic origins (*tontai* presumably giving us the Sanskrit dynastic title 'Pallava')
53. *Mahābhārata* 1.16. Recall the birth of Aphrodite from the sea.
54. *Tiruvorriyūrpurānam* 2.1.36. Cf. *Bhāgavatapurāna* 3.8.10-33,
55. This is also the view of Śaiva Siddhānta see *cīrrurai* of *Civāñānacūvāmikāl* on *Civāñānapōtam* (*Aṇpā malainakar*, 1953), cu. 1, 1 (pp. 8-10)
56. *Kumpakōnam kṣettirapurānam* (*Kumpakōnam*, 1933), pp. 35-38; cf. *Kumpakōnapurānam* of *Cokkappappulavar* (*Tāñcavūr*, 1971), verse 106; *Kumbha-ghonamhātmya* (*Kumpakōnam*, 1913), 1.70-77; *Tirukkutantaipurānam* of *Tiricirapuram* *Mināṭcūntaram* *Piṭṭai* (Madras, 1.83), 7-8.
57. *Kauśitakibrāhmaṇa* (Wiesbaden, 1968), 6.1-2.
58. *Aitareyabrahmana*, *Bibliotheca Indica* (Calcutta, 1895'6), 3.33. Cf. *Matsyapurāṇa* 158. 35-38.
59. *Saurapurāṇa*, Ānandasrama Sanskrit Series no. 18 (Poona, 1889), 59.54-55.
60. See D. D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality : Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 72-74. For other examples of the motif, see J. J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India* (London, 1930). Vol. I, pp. 262-263. For a *tirtha* formed from the water in Brahmā's pot, see *Tiruvaiyārrupurānam* 7.1.
61. Pradapaditva Pal, *The Arts of Nepal* (Leiden, 1974), p. 48.
62. *Bṛhaddevatā* attributed to Saunaka. Harvard Oriental Series no. 5 (Cambridge, Mass., 1904). 5.148-153.
63. Jagadisa Ayyar, p. 103.
64. *Kantapurāṇam* 2.23.17-28, 2.27.9-66, 2.29.1-27. For other versions of the descent of the Kaviri (Ponni), see *Tulakaverimanmiyam* of Ma. Ti. Panukavi (Madras, 1917), 5.6: *Kaveripurāṇam* of *Tiruccirappalumunivar* (Madras, 1871) 4.1-49; *Tiruvaiyārrupurāṇam* 4.1-25; Stanley Rice, *Occasional Essays on Native South Indian Life* (London, 1901), pp. 153-161.
65. *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki (Baroda, 1960-), 1.42-44.
66. *Mahabharata* 3. 102.16-23, 3.103.1-29. The story of Jahnū appears in verses added by some mss. after *Ram.* 1.42. 25 of the Baroda edition.
67. *Kantaupurāṇam* 2.27,37. See above at n. 33.
68. *Manimēkalai, patikam*, 1-31.
69. *Mahābhārata* 3.214.12; *Skandapurāṇa* 1.2.29.106; *Śivapurāṇa*, *Dharmasāṃhitā* (Bombay, 1884), 11.30.

70. *Mahābhārata* 13.84.52-54; *Rām.* 1.36.12-17; *Vāyupurāṇa*, Ānandaśrama Sanskrit Series No. 49 (Poona, 1905), 72.28-31; *Skandapurāṇa* 1.2.29.88; *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* (Delhi, 1973), 2.3.10.30-34.
71. *Kantapurāṇam* 1.11.89191; *Kañcipurāṇam* 25.44; cf. *Matsyapurāṇa* 158.28.
72. *Skandapurāṇa* 1.2.29.104-106; 6.70.65; *Vāyupurāṇa* 72.32-3.
73. Cf. *Satapathabrahmaṇa* 6.3.1.26 and 31; *Mahābhārata* 5.16.11.
74. *Kantapurāṇam* 2.27.29.
75. J. P. Fabricius, *Tamil and English Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Tranquebar, 1972), s.v. *poṭi*.
76. *Mahābhārata* 13.84.68; *Rām.* 1.36.18, *Vāmaṭapurāṇa* (Vārāṇasi, 1967), 31.9.10; *Līṅgapurāṇa* (Bombay, 1906), 1.20.80-82.
77. See note 69 above.
78. *Sīvapurāṇa* (Bombay, 1953). 2.4.22.39; *Mahābhārata* 9.43.14; *Skandapurāṇa* 1.1.27.63; *Saurapurāṇa* 62.19.
79. *Matsyapurāṇa* 158.28-29; *Padmapurāṇa*; Ānandaśrama Sanskrit Series No 131 (Poona, 1894), 5.41.112; *Mahābhārata* 9.43.18; *Vāmaṭapurāṇa* 31.15-19; *Skandapurāṇa* 3.3.29.23.
80. *Brahmapurāṇa*, Ānandaśrama Sanskrit Series no. 29 (Poona, 1895), 128.24-27.
81. *Kantapurāṇa*, 1.13.23 and 31; cf. *Raghuvamśa* of *Kālidāsa* (Bombay, 1891), 2.36; *Periyapuṇam* 6.1.68.
82. *Rām.* 1.36.21-22, and the line added by many mss. after verse 22; *Mahābhārata* 13.84.70.
83. *Kantapurāṇam* 2.29.12.
84. See O'Flaherty (1973) pp. 277-278
85. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
86. See, e.g., *Mahābhārata* 1.57.39-46; *Manasākāvya* of Manakar, cited by Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā* (Calcutta, 1966), p. 120. For another instance of the crow upsetting a pot (which in this case contains milk, another multi-form of the divine seed), see *Tiruvāṭ pokkippurāṇam* of *Kamalai nākar*, *Vaittināṭatēcikar* (Madras, 1911), 1.21-17.
87. *Brahmipurāṇa* 128.16-23; *Matsyapurāṇa* 158.24-26.
88. *Skandapurāṇa* 1.2.29.83.
89. *Vāmaṭapurāṇa* 28.41.
90. *Brahmapurāṇa* 38.1.5.
91. *Mahābhārata* 3.213-214; *Skandapurāṇa* 1.2.9.194.
92. *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, Ānandaśrama Sanskrit Series no. 102 (Poona, 1935), 3.8.17-43. 83-89; 3.9.1-37.
93. *Tiruviṭai* 13.18-19; *Tiruvālvyutāiyār tiruviṭaiyātarapurāṇam* of *Perumpārapuliyūrāṇi* (hereafter cited as *Tiruvāl.*), edited by U. Ve. Cāminātaiyar (Madras, 1905) 21.12.
94. *Tiruviṭai*. 49; *Tiruvāl.* 47.
95. *Tiruviṭai*. 16; *Tiruvāl.* 64.
96. *Tiruviṭai* 9; *Tiruvāl.* 8.
97. *Tiruviṭai*. 56; *Tiruvāl.* 20.
98. *Tiruviṭai*. 61; *Tiruvāl.* 30.
99. *Tiruviṭai*. 14, 15, and 31; *Tiruvāl.* 44, 61.40.
100. *Tiruvāl.* 12.
101. *Kalittokai* (Madras, 1938), 92.65; *Cil.* 21.39; *Paripāṭal* (Pondicherry, 1968), Fragment 1.3 and Fragment 7.4.
102. *Tiruvāl*, *tirunakaraccirappu* 12-15. On the name 'Nāgmāṭakūṭal' for Maturai, see F. Gros, *Le Paripāṭal* (Pondichery, 1968), pp. xxvii-xxviii; and cf. *Tiruñāṇacampantar*, *Tevarām* (Tarumapuram, 1953), 7.5 with commentary 'Kūṭal', 'junction', may well be the original title.
103. *Sivapurāṇa* 2.2.20.21-24.
104. *Tiruviṭai*. 14.41; *Tiruvāl.* 44.36-37; *Cil.* 11.26-29. The same motif of imprisoning the clouds is used in the battle between *Śūrapadma* and *Virabāhu* in *Kantapurāṇam* 4.6.52-67.
105. *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5.11.1.25.
106. *Tiruviṭai* 18.1-9, 19.1-26.
107. For the myth of churning the ocean, see *Mahābhārata* 1.15-17; *Ram.* 1.45. This myth is also linked to the *Maturai* tradition through another story: *Tiruviṭai*. 28.1-23; see D. Shulman, "The Murderous Bride: Tamil Versions of the Myth of Devī and the Buffalo-Demon," *History of Religions* 16, no. 2 (1976), pp. 141-2; *idem*, "The Serpent and the Sacrifice: An Anthill Myth from Tiruvāṭūr," *History of Religions* (in press).
108. E.g. the case of Appar: *Periyapurāṇam* 5.1.49-71.
109. *Tiruvāl.* 21.1-9.
110. T.G. Aravamuthan, "The Maturai Chronicles and the Tamil Academies," *Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras 6 (1932), pp. 291-292.
111. See the note by Cāminātaiyar on *Tiruvāl.* 21.9; the possibility that the Ganges is actually intended can be ruled out.
112. *Tituvīṭai*. 13.1-20; cf. *Cuntarapāṇtiyam* of *Anatāri* (Madras, 1955), 3.6.11-12. Compare Indra's theft of the sacrificial horse of Sagara (sometimes by a wave of the ocean) in the myth of the descent of the Ganges and the filling of the sea: *Mahābhārata* 3.104-8; Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty,
113. *Mahābhārata* 3.102.16-23, 3.103.1-28
114. *Ibid.* 3.216.29; 14.29.1.7.
115. *Ibid.* 3.214.31. See Aravamuthan, *op. cit.*
116. *Mahābhārata* 1.94.23-24.
117. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*, 3rd ed. (Bombay, 1966), pp. 71-74; K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala* (Ernakulam, 1924-1933), Vol. I, pp. 17-20; Raghuvamśa

- 4.53 and 58; *Keraṭateca varalāru*, Madras Govt. Oriental Manuscript Series No. 56 (Madras, 1960), pp. 33, 41; *Kanniyākumarittalapurāṇam* of Caṅkaranāvalar) Maturai, n.d.) 18. 66-75; *Periyapurāṇam* 2.6.1; *Skandapurāṇa* 6.68.6-16; for the version of the *Keralotpatti*, see Thiagarajah, pp. 120-121.
118. *Mahābhārata* 12.49.53-60; on *Sūrpāraka* see Pargiter's note on *Markandeyapurāṇa* (translation), *Bibliotheca Indica* (Calcutta, 1904), p.333; Kuiper (1964), p. 113. Elsewhere *Paraśurāma* is said to have retreated to Mount Mahendra. Cf. *Mahābhārata* 3.117.14; Wilson, p. 323 n. 21.
119. Nilakanta Sastri, p. 74; Bhasker Anand Saletore, *Ancient Karnāṭaka*. I. *History of Tuṭṭuva* (Poona, 1936), pp. 9-38. in Assam *Paraśurāma* creates not land but a flood by cutting a channel for the Brahmaputra River: *Kālikāpurāṇa* (Bombay, 1891), 84-86.
120. See above at notes 40-41.
121. *Skandapnrāṇa* 3.1.2.54-96 (from the *Setumāhātmya*); *Cētupurāṇam* of *Nirampavalakiyatēcikar* (Madras, 1932), 5.27-41.
122. See *Tiruvilai*. 11.19, which plays on this identification.
123. *Cil.* 24, *pāttumatai* 6. Cf. *Tirumūrkārruppaṭai* 45-46, 59-61 (*Pattuppāṭtu*, pp. 7-8); *Kalittokai* 104.13-14. The battle with the sea and the casting off the spear against Grauñica combine in a myth about the worship of the spear: *Colarājentirapūram ennum ilaiyanāā velūrppurāṇam* (Madras, 1921), 6.2-8.
124. I have discussed this myth at length in a forthcoming article see note (14 above)
125. *Patiruppattu* (Madras, 1957), fifth decade, 46.11-13; cf. 41 21-23; 48.3-4; *Akanānūru* (Madras, 1965), 127.3-5; 347.3-5. 212.15-20.
126. Marr, p. 308.
127. Aravamuthan, *JORM* 5 (1931), pp. 203-205.
128. *Ibid.*, pp. 209-14; (1932) 97-103.
129. *Hālasyamāhātmya* (Maturai, 1870), 17.46-47.
130. *Kalittokai* 104.1-4.
131. *Cil.* 11.17-22.
132. *Atiyārkkunallar* on *Cil.* 11.17-22
133. E.g. *Tiruñānachampantar*, *Tēvāram* I.7.2; cf. K. Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugān, on Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden, 1973), p. 45 n. 1.
134. This seems to have been recognized by Filliozat, Dessigane and Pattabiraman in their introduction to the *Tiruvilai*: *La légende des jeux de Civā à Madurai d'après les textes et les peintures* (Pondichéry, 1960), p. xi. They note that the flood at Maturai was the *pralaya*, not a "cataclysm local." Was the expansion of the story assisted by the existence of the name 'Southern Maturai' *tenmaturai*, as in *Tiruvāl*, *kaṭayūl vālttu* 14; or *daksiṇī mathurā*, as in *Bhagāvātāpurāṇa* 10.79.15), presumably to distinguish the present city of Maturai from the northern town of Mathurā? Cf. *Vatamaturai* for Mathurā: *Tiruppāvai* of Āṇṭai (Pondichéry, 1972), 5.1.

Sri Aurobindo's Influence on Tamil Poetry

Prema Nandakumar

In the uncertain glow of human mind,
Its waste of unharmonied thronging thoughts,
Carve thy epic mountain-lined
Crowded with deep prophetic grotts.

Let thy hue-winged lyrics hover like birds
Over the swirl of the heart's sea.
Touch into sight with thy fire-words
The blind indwelling deity.

— *Sri Aurobindo in 'Musa Spiritus'*

When Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry in 1910, he was already a legend in Tamil Nadu. The Partition of Bengal had produced an unprecedented wave of political unrest all over India. The impact was greatest in Tamil Nadu because the Partition coincided with the articulation of Subramania Bharati's poetic genius. The bold stand of the Bengalis against the Partition enthused Bharati to bless Bengal that had given birth to leaders like Sri Aurobindo. One of his earliest poems is on Bengal :

My sweet Mother Bharat !
Weep no more ! Smile benignly !
Your sorrows are a thing of the past.
Your sons have become great.
Doth not a mother rejoice
When her sons achieve fame ?
Let us bless Bengal that has paved the way
For your fame all through this earth !

As an Assistant Editor of *Swadesamithran*, Bharati was in charge of translating into Tamil select political speeches by the Congressmen. He distinctly favoured the extremist view-point and hence greater importance was given to speeches by Bepin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. As Bharati was the favourite journalist of the Tamils, the ground was already prepared for the coming of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo, when he reached Pondicherry was no stranger to the Tamils.

However, Sri Aurobindo's stay for four decades in Tamil Nadu could not provide a wide-spread impact on Tamil literature. During the first decade he was still considered an 'exile' and police inquisitiveness discouraged large-scale contact with him. For the rest of his presence in Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo remained in seclusion. Thus, only a select band could come to be influenced by his genius. It is a matter of historic good-luck that the finest poet of the Tamil renaissance happened to be one of this select band.

Subramania Bharati's claim to fame is based on his many-sided achievements in Tamil literature. Chiefly, he liberated Tamil style from punditry. By his bold translations he paved the way for a two-way traffic between Tamil and English. He took the Tamils to the original pure springs of Vedic poetry and wrote a mass of Tamil lyrics that have stood the test of time very well. Two rich streams flowed together into his poetic make-up. One was his ardent love of English poetry, especially the work of the Romantics. The second was the poetry of the Vedic seers and Sanskrit classics interpreted intuitively by Sri Aurobindo. Scores of critics have mentioned the influence of Sri Aurobindo on Bharati's poetry. Shri P. Mahadevan writes :

The impress of Sri Aurobindo upon Bharati may be studied in his Preface to the *Gita*, in his translations of one chapter of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* with comments of his own, and above all, in the pervasive influence of Shakti or Mother or *Parashakti* which has become the theme of a considerable body of his devotional poetry.

Bharati must have met Sri Aurobindo at the explosive Congress session at Surat. By then Sri Aurobindo was the acknowledged extremist leader of Bengal and Subramania Bharati had gained a measure of notoriety as an extremist journalist of Madras. Rishi Bankim's *Bande Mātaram* was transmuting the youth of the country into shining rebels. Bharati's many songs on this theme of *Bande Mātaram* were composed at this time.

Men, women, gods
Of Aryavarta
Sing in chorus
The exultant chant

— *Vande Mātaram !*

Anguished in mind,
Shrивelled in body,
The patriots still
Cry from the depths

— *Vande Mātaram !*

Be victory ours
 Or defeat and death,
 We stand united
 And raise the chant

— *Vande Mātaram!*

It is not surprising, therefore, when Bharati welcomed Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry with happy excitement. For a few years he was in daily contact with the Master. Grinding poverty and forced idleness resulting from his self-exile were bitter to Bharati. The coming of Sri Aurobindo was a blessing to him and he began to study Vedic poetry under the Master's guidance. Vedic poetry and Vedantic concepts discussed with Sri Aurobindo brought a great change into Bharati's poetry. T.V. Kapali Sastriar writing on his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo reports a conversation between himself and Subramania Bharati. When Bharathi sang a poem on Muruga Sri Sastriar was surprised by the imbedded Vedantic thought which referred to Muruga as Agni, the Will that lives inside man's cave-heart. Bharati told Sastriar that he learnt about Vedic gods and Sukthas from Sri Aurobindo. Bharati's English writings have the phraseology of one who has learnt from Sri Aurobindo. He quotes Sri Aurobindo when using Vedic Riks in his articles. This was no doubt because of his high regard for the Master's genius. Writing about 'Dawn' Bharati says :

All truth comes of inspiration. If you ask any scientist how he made his best discoveries, he will tell you that they just come to him from somewhere. It is a common experience with poets that they receive their best songs from Above. A few days ago, I asked Sri Aurobindo Ghose how he got his new and marvellous theory of vedic interpretation. It was shown me' he said, and I knew that he meant it in a very literal sense.

This "new and marvellous theory of Vedic interpretation" had as its direct outcome the Tamil translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sūtras; *The Poetry of the Vedic Rishis*; *Introduction to the Vedic Rishis*; *Introduction to the Bhagavad Gita*; and a considerable volume of prose poetry. While translating and explaining Patanjali Bharati refuses to accept Shankara's Miya theory and like Sri Aurobindo finds this world a real thing. *The Poetry of the Vedic Rishis* contains translation of many Vedic Riks based on Sri Aurobindo's interpretation. He re-iterates (like Sri Aurobindo) the importance of absolute self-surrender to the divine before one can begin proceeding on the path of yoga.

If Prakriti is worshipped direct, the Vedic
words will be illumined.

Self-surrender is the only way.

The Samhithas do not mention any other path

The Samhithas do not mention any other path
shown by the Vedic Rishis.

Bharati strengthens his argument with a poem appended to his argument. It is a prayer to Parashakti in five stanzas :

We have decided upon
The path of utter faith.
My heart ! I shall bless you
If you pray to Shakti always.
Shakti is the word
That quells our fear of the dart,
Fire, poison and illness ;
That gives prosperity
To gods and men.

Sri Aurobindo says in *The Mother* :

The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses.

Biarati speaks in identical terms in his *Introduction to the Bhagavad Gita* giving experiential moments from our traditional lore.

Sri Ramanujacharya taught that, while one is caught in this sea of samsara, one should surrender to the Divine with hands uplifted, just as the drowning person holds his hands above the water (that is, abandoning all movements of his hands). This self-same truth is revealed also in the lives of Prahlad and Droupadi. It is only when she removed her hand from the robe that she was wearing, and lifted both hands above her head, that through the grace of the Lord Krishna her honour was saved and robes grew on her and tired the hands of Duhshasana.

In his epyllion *Panchali Sapatham* Biarati projects this idea dramatically when his Panchali is outraged in the Kuru Court :

The doe-eyed Panchali
Shining with the glow of knowledge
Knew no way to safety.
She clasped her hands together.

Was Bharati aware of *Savitri* a growing? Did that prompt him to try an epic in Tamil and like Sri Aurobindo choose a legendary heroine for his epic? At any rate when we watch the lonely struggle of Panchali and her glorious victory by the coming of Grace we are reminded of Savitri as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

A day may come when she must stand unhelped
 On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
 Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
 Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
 To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.
 Alone with death and close to extinction's edge,
 Her single greatness in that last dire scene,
 She must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
 And reach an apex of world-destiny
 Where all is won or all is lost for man.

The prose poems of Bharati fall into six groups: *Spectacle*, *Shakti*, *Wind*, *Ocean*, *Earth-Scene* and *Freedom*. These free-verse experiments, were done during his Pondicherry days when he was turning into a Vedantin by drinking deeply from the springs of the Vedas. By temperament a nature-lover, contact with Vedic poetry brought out the best in him. Though his external life at Pondicherry was one of unrelieved hardship, Sri Aurobindo's "new and marvellous theory of Vedic interpretation" released Bharati into the joy of creative experience. The *Spectacle* evokes the Sun and Agni. The *Shakti* group expresses Bharati's ideal of the Universal Mother. As seen in the conclusion of his book on the poetry of the Vedic seers Shakti is for Bharati the supreme reality. Even the Sun is but a "bubble in Shakti's flood", a "blossom in Shakti's pool", — for Shakti is everywhere, ether-like. She is fierce and destructive, kind and creative. *Wind* praises the Vedic Marut and Vayu. *Ocean* gathers into a knot the sea, the wind, and Shakti as powers to be gazed at and worshipped in all humility. The *Earth-Scene* has a parable of how the "cloudy dark Satan destroyed all the good we had designed for man". The gods out of pity, decide to rejuvenate mankind by sending them down a young man to re-interpret the inspired words of the past. This is Vasupati who sings to the Moon from the Pondicherry (Vedapuri) beach. His words strikingly convey the philosophy of divinisation of earth-life.

Showering nectar on the earth,
 Infusing joy into human sight,
 Crystallising mundane life
 Into blissful forms;
 Come, moonlight, come!

If Sri Aurobindo's intuitive interpretation of Vedic poetry resulted in the translations and prose-poems mentioned above, contact with Sri Aurobindo's yoga finalised the Shakti tattva of Subramania Bharati. Both had begun their creative life as journalists in the realms of politics. The song *Bande Mātaram* had had its effect on these two with a Mother Bharat rising as Kali, the Mother of Strength, one who called upon her children to give all. Sri Aurobindo expressed this idea in one of his *Bande Mātaram* articles thus :

Regeneration is literally re-birth, and re-birth, comes not by the intellect, not by the fullness of the purse, not by policy, not by change of machinery, but by the getting of a new heart, by throwing away all that we were into the fire of sacrifice and being reborn in the Mother. Self-abandonment is the demand made upon us. She asks of us 'How many will live for me? How many will die for me?' and awaits our answer.

She received her answer from Bharati. In a series of poems hailing the Mother Bharat as Shakti, Bharati expressed the readiness for total sacrifice.

Although divorced from the joys of the hearth
 And consigned to dungeons dark ;
 Although forced to exchange
 A time of cheer for days of gloom ;
 Although ten million troubles raged
 To consume me entire ;
 Freedom ! My Mother ! I shall not cease
 To worship Thee.

Mother Bharat, Mother Freedom, Mother Shakti Herself is now in charge of India's welfare :

Whose was the dread bow
 That laid low the Lanka hordes ?
 It was our terrible Mother's —
 The Aryan Queen, Mother Bharat.

Again, —
 Can Bharat's war be fought at ease ?
 She gleams in Partha's bow.
 Let ten million warriors come —
 In a moment she will bathe in their blood.

His patriotic poems written in this vein electrified Tamil Nad and convulsed the Tamils into patriotic frenzy. But there was a definite change in Bharati's view of Shakti after a few years' stay in Pondicherry. The Kali aspect of the Mother was still present but the enemies were not politi-

cal leaders or foreign exploiters. The Mother was now invoked to destroy illusion and ignorance as the Vedantins did at the dawn of Hindu civilisation. Bharati was greatly impressed by the yogic adventures of Sri Aurobindo and no doubt considered him equivalent to his guru in certain ways. He addressed the Master in a six stanzaed poem.

O Truth-visioning cobra in yogic trance,
 Fashion the dance to beat the worlds anew ;
 O puissance crested Cobra divine,
 Hasten to reveal your godhead to our view.
 O crown of Shiva, primordial Lord,
 O Aravind-named Cobra auspicious made,
 Come now and dance with shining uprisen hood
 And receive us within its sheltering shade.

Amrita, an eye-witness, a friend of Bharati and disciple of the Master has said in this connection,

Bharati's source of inspiration was from this efflatus of Knowledge and Power that ushered in a fresh Age. He recited and sang all his songs and poems — almost all of them — each as it rose from his soul, to Sri Aurobindo before releasing them to the public. Times without number Bharati could be seen coming out of Sri Aurobindo's room, his face beaming with a heavenly glow.

Would he not have discussed with the Master his *Shakti tattva* and received inspiration from the latter's conversations and writings? The many aspects of the Mother — Mihakali, Maheshwari, Mahalakshmi and Maha-saraswathi? These aspects are dwelt upon by Bharati in his 'Three Loves'. Indeed, he follows exactly the description of Sri Aurobindo when the latter describes the aspects of Shakti in *The Mother*. Maheshwari is an ocean of wisdom, Mihalakshmi a figure of beauty and joy; and Maha-saraswathi exists in the perfection of arts and crafts. Bharati's *Ulakkūtu* is a powerful dramatisation of Sri Aurobindo's views on the *bhayankara* aspects of Mahakali.

There is in her an overwhelming intensity, a mighty passion of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle. All her divinity leaps out in a splendour of tempestuous action; she is there for swiftness, for the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it.

And thus Bharati :

As the words mightily clash
 And crash in resounding thunder,
 As blood-dripping demon-spirits
 Sing in glee amid the general ruin,