Abstract  This paper presents an English translation from the original Tamil of the canonical Saivite hagiographical work, the Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi. The date of this work is disputed, but it was probably composed at some point between 870 and 1118 CE. This classical Tamil poem gives in summary form the lives of the sixty three Saivite saints of the sixth to ninth centuries known as the Nāyaṇmār, or Tiruttoṭṭar ("holy servants", sc. of the Lord Siva). The paper also includes an Introduction, setting out the context of the poem and its place in the Saivite literary tradition from which the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy subsequently developed, and Notes which explain the mythological and other references which the poem contains.

Keywords  Siva · Saivite · Tiruttoṭṭar · Nampi · Cuntaramūrtti · Tēvāram · Periya Purāṇam

Introduction

The Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi is included in the 11th of the 12 volume collection of Saivite canonical works known as the Tirumurai. It contains 89 stanzas of classical Tamil poetry in the kaṭṭalai kalittūṟai metre.¹ A particular characteristic of the form in which the poem is composed is that each stanza begins with the same word as that with which the previous stanza ended. The technical term in Tamil prosody for this form of verse is antāṭi.

The subject matter of the poem consists of hagiographical information concerning the lives of the 63 Tamil Saivite saints known as the Nāyaṇmār, or

¹ For an explanation of this metre, see Zvelebil (1994).

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Tiruttonṭar (“holy servants”, sc. of the Lord Siva), who lived between the sixth and ninth centuries CE. So the title of the work literally translated means “The holy antāti of (or concerning) the holy servants”.

In this poem, the author devotes one stanza to each saint, except for Cunta-ramūrtti, to whom 12 stanzas are devoted, and four other important saints who have two stanzas each (viz. Tirunāvukkaracar, Tiruṇāṇacampantar, Kalariṇirarivān and Köcceṅkan). There are also nine groups of saints, who are described in one stanza for each group, e.g. the Brahmins of Tillai, whose praise is sung in the first stanza after the Prologue.

The author of the poem was a Brahmin called Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi. The first Nampi was his given name, and Āṇṭār was a caste name of Saiva Brahmins. The second Nampi seems to have been bestowed on him as an honorific title, with the meaning of “lord”, or “illustrious person”.

In the Prologue to the poem, Nampi describes how he was inspired in his writing by the god Gaṇapati, under the name of Pollā Pillaṟiyār, the presiding deity of the Saiva temple at Nāraiyūr on the banks of the Kaṟerī river. This town lies within the territory ruled by the monarchs of the Cōla dynasty.

There is not a generally agreed date for Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi. However, Nampi’s reference to the activities of the Cōla king, Āṭittan, who reigned from 870 to 907 CE, is important internal evidence. It gives us a firm terminus post quem for Nampi’s date: he cannot have died before Āṭittan came to the throne in 870. On this basis Meenakshisundaran argues that Nampi belonged “to the last part of the ninth and early part of the tenth century”. However, the evidence of this reference to Āṭittan alone does not support Meenakshisundaran’s conclusion, because it does not exclude Nampi’s living well after Āṭittan’s time. That is to say, it does not give us a terminus ante quem as well.

External evidence concerning Nampi’s date is provided by a later puranic work, the Tirumurugaikanṭa Purāṇam of Umāpati Sivam (c. 1306 CE). This work tells how the Cōla king, Apayakulacēkaṇṭa, instructed Nampi to compile a collection of the hymns of the Saivite saints, which presumably before that time were not in general circulation. Guided by the god Gaṇapati, Nampi found the manuscripts of the hymns in a sealed room in the great temple at Citamparam, half-eaten by white ants. He rescued the surviving fragments, and classified them according to their musical modes. These hymns were thus edited into the first seven volumes of the Tirumurai collection.

Unfortunately, however, this evidence is not conclusive, because there is disagreement among scholars concerning the identification of the king Apayakulacēkaṇṭa. Zvelebil identifies him with the Cōla monarch Kulōttunga I, who reigned from 1070 to 1118 CE. This would place Nampi at the end of the eleventh century or early in the twelfth. Sastri on the other hand states that Nampi was working in the

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2 Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti 65.
3 Meenakshisundaran (1965, p. 130).