

Vedanta Ammanai: An Advaitic Interpretation of Play

KANCHANA NATARAJAN

Introduction

Avudai Akka is a little-known woman sage who lived in Tamil Nadu between the 17th and 18th centuries, and achieved self-realization, a sublime attainment that liberated her from all narrow and constrictive social categories. Akka belonged to Chengottai in the Tirunellveli district of Travancore principality. A child widow, during adolescence she received formal initiation into the practice of Advaita Vedanta from Shridhara Ayyaval, a great Advaitic master of her time. She composed a large number of songs that describe this metaphysical journey and the experience of final freedom, which involved the breaking down of/breaking away from all social constructions. Most of her songs are addressed to women, and were preserved by women in general and widows in particular. The songs thus circulated orally till the beginning of the 20th century, when some of them began to appear in printed form. Her song entitled *Vedanta Pallu* was published as early as 1896 by Sarada Vilasa Publication in Tamil Nadu. In 1910, some attempts were made to publish her work. In 1953, a major endeavour was made by A. Venkatarama Sastri to personally collect many songs from widows of Chengottai (Akka's birthplace) and print them. All of Akka's extant songs were printed in 2002 by Swami Nityananda Giri of Gnanananda Tapovanam, Tamil Nadu, in the text *Chengottai Shri Avudai Akkal Padal Tirattu*.¹ Anyone familiar with even colloquial Tamil can access these powerful utterances. Akka's poems are public songs, addressing the Tamil women community. Akka explains the terse metaphysical truths in a simple yet unique way, using familiar motifs available to women of those times.

Akka draws upon folk tradition for her imagery, and includes singularly feminine tropes/motifs/frame stories as a conduit for the transmission of Vedanta. She thus moves away from the prescribed 'high' tradition, in which

conventionally, Vedanta texts may utilise examples, metaphors, parables, etc., in a particular way to describe the Reality which otherwise cannot be bound within the parameters of language. The normative mode of Vedanta scholars is to use erudite discourse that has a standard format (wherein they state and critique/counter their opponents' position prior to establishing their own argument). The great metaphysician and philosopher Samkaracharya is a classic example here. The audience for such debate is a select one, and the assumption is that it is already informed about all other schools of philosophy and the narrative strategies of the texts.

Akka's literary feat is that she brings the abstract philosophy of Vedanta into the existential realm through a unique mode of vernacular poetry, thus enabling it to be assimilated within the *desi* or 'little' tradition. The fact that she chooses to compose not formal written verses in chaste Tamil (*cenntamilz*) but instead render 'songs' that circulate orally (up to the present day), suggests her commitment to making the lofty principles of Vedanta accessible to all serious aspirants. This also orients her work toward the democratic tradition of Bhakti, where saint-poets completely rejected class paradigms and used dialect in their compositions, sung to the public in a spirit of ardent non-discrimination.

In her composition entitled *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka gives a compelling account that draws upon Samkhya and Advaita philosophies and its cardinal notion of Prakrti and Maya as an analogy of the skilful player successfully realizing the Self. To the skilfull player, the three stones/the three gunas/maya are no longer an external impediment to be mastered but part of one's organic being, negotiated as effortlessly as a physical reflex.

I

Ammanai-Anmanai is an indoor game played by girls

Kanchana Natarajan is a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

and adult women in Tamil Nadu. This game has inspired much poetry in Tamil literature through the centuries. The *ammanai* are round stones, finely crafted wooden balls or sometimes molucca beans, thrown up in threes, using both hands; the floor is patted before the hands catch the *ammanai* as they fall; the rhythm increases with the songs accompanying this action. The songs are also known as *ammanai*. If one player fails to catch the stones, her partner then initiates a round. In the literary manifestation of *ammanai*, one voice would set up a question, the second would counter this with another question, and the third would solve the riddle thus posed with a conclusive line.²

The earliest *ammanai* poetry was composed by the saint Manikkavacagar (tenth century). There also exist *ammanai* sung by legendary medieval poets such as Ottagakuttar and Pugazhendi. During the 17th century, *ammanai* assumed the form of historical ballads such as *Ramappaiyan Ammanai*,³ composed to extol the war fought by Talavai Ramappaiyan, the general of Tirumalai Nayakkar of Madurai. *Ammanai* poetry became increasingly popular from the 17th century onwards – for instance, *Sivagangaiseimai ammanai* again narrates the final wars of the valiant Marudhu brothers of Sivagangai. There is also a solitary extant manuscript of unknown authorship titled *Jnana-ammanai* in Tanjore's Serfoji Sarasvati Mahal library, consisting of 32 verses describing a spiritual aspirant's experience of non-dualism.⁴ In this text, each line of the verse ends with the refrain "*ammanai*", a Tamil word connoting the imaginary audience of girls, as well as the stones used to play the game, and the players of the game. Most *ammanai* songs are composed by male poets, and they are all addressed to the young female audience, also referred to as *ammanai*.

Avudai Akka, the author of the song *Vedanta Ammanai* uses the game/play of *ammanai* as a tool for constructing a critique of *maya/prakrti*, regarded as the cosmic creative power embodied in existential divisions and differences. In this lengthy song, Akka deploys the formal structure of *ammanai* game as a simile for understanding the energy of cosmic creation and subsequent dissolution. Akka's poems do not merely end with the refrain "*ammanai*". The *ammanai* game, the capricious *ammanai* stones and the exceptionally astute and judicious *ammanai* player, the excited spectators, the self-realized singer are all emblematic of the cosmic *leela* or play that engenders the world of division, desire, action, their results, the experience of pleasure and pain; and finally ends with an aspiration to achieve a dispassionate withdrawal from the game itself by penetrating the matrix of creation and multiplicity. Akka uses the structure of the game as both metaphor and methodology to conceptualize various metaphysical nuances in the system of advaita. This strategy is offered as an alternative to the hegemony of

reason and textuality as means for arriving at advaitic knowledge and experience. This unusual device of communicating Vedanta philosophy through non-pedagogic, oral compositions centering on the theme of a common game played by preliterate women, is both intriguing and tantalizing, and radically challenges the high literary tradition adopted by upper-caste male claim to the privileges of authorship.

Though the frames and tropes that Akka uses for explicating Vedanta are unconventional and unorthodox, they effectively demonstrate her familiarity with the central questions and polemics of mainstream Advaita. In particular, what distinguishes her songs from the textual tradition is her audacious choice of frameworks within which she effortlessly drives home the central advaitic philosophy of non-duality. Though Akka draws largely from folk and vernacular traditions, her songs are completely informed by metaphysical considerations nourished by her transcendent intuitive experience of the Self, and an understanding of philosophical polemics that she probably gained through accessing the canonical texts in some manner, though we have few biographical details. The central motif of all her songs is non-dualism, the oneness of being, where all differences and divisions are rendered absurd, false and without ontic status.

II

The Philosophical Notion of Play⁵

The central theme of the song *Vedanta Ammanai* is play, the game of *Ammanai* played by young girls and adult women. It will be worthwhile for us to examine the nature of play here. The concept of play contains an inbuilt notion of leisure, carrying within it the sense of ease, effortlessness and freedom. A child, for instance, plays for the sake of play itself, and because it is in the child's very nature to play. Adults in non-competitive contexts too play for fun. The notion of play is singularly important in the context of Advaita Vedanta. This philosophical school uses *leela* or play in the context of creation. Badarayana, the author of the *Brahma Sutras*, and Samkara, the advaita master, in his subsequent commentary on this text, claim in the sutra *lokavattu leelakaivalyam*⁶ that god/*isvara* manifests this world through *leela*, the energy manifested as mere play. The feminine term *leela* derives from the root *li+kkvip*, and signifies play, sport, child's play, a semblance, an appearance, pretence, a game, etc. Central to the lexical meaning are the two connected notions of effortlessness and pretence involved in such play.

Vedanta contends that the countless names and forms of this varied and complex universe forms are manifested by the supreme principle through a sportive *leela*. According to Samkara,

Just as in the ordinary world, in the case of a king who has attained all his desires or of his minister, their activities in sports and pastimes are merely of the nature of a sport and are indulged in without any particular aim in mind, or just as the inspiration or expiration etc. (of a man) takes place naturally, without any extraneous purpose, even so may the Lord also engage in such sportful activity without any purpose, and merely as the result of his nature. It is not possible to explain on the ground of reasoning or the scripture that there is any other purpose on the part of *Ishvara*/god.⁷

The notion of *leela* is crucial for creation in Advaita ontology. Play is best exemplified in a child playing and not so much in an adult game, even if all the desires of the adult are satisfied. The child plays a game for the sake of playing, it is her very nature to play, and she devotedly dives deep into it. The child plays with playthings, real or imaginary. If they are imaginary she projects them all, her toys and her playmates, through her imagination. She creates her play-world, engages with it, and with other players in it, and when tired she withdraws from them all. The world she imaginatively creates, or the themes around which she plays, clearly do not have any real status. Interestingly, the child perceives this fact, that the world that she projects has no external existence. Yet she willingly inhabits that world till she tires of it.

Similarly, according to Advaita the world with all complexity is projected by *Ishvara* through play. The world or *jagat* is defined by Samkara in the second *sutra* [*Janmadhyasyayatah*] thus:

the transient world which is distinguished by names and forms, and which is connected with diverse agents and enjoyers' which is the basis of the fruit of actions depending upon a particular environment, time and cause, and even in mere thinking about which, imagination boggles and is unable to comprehend, the arrangement...⁸

Such a world is obviously not any individual's projection but that of the omnipresent and omniscient Being called Brahman/the Absolute. However, just as a child wills to play, Brahman the Absolute does not will this creation or its dissolution. Brahman is the ground for such projections to manifest, just as a rope is the ground for the (illusory) projection of a snake or a garland. The complex world is projected in *leela* by *Ishvara* who is associated with *maya*, his creative power. This process of creation and dissolution takes place in the substratum of non-dual consciousness called Brahman.

A dominant ontological claim of Advaita is that there is no transformative creation or *srsti*. The Samkhya school of thought, for example, holds the view that this world has evolved from a transformation within *prakrti*, the matrix evidenced through material plenitude. *Prakrti* undergoes change, initiating the evolution of intellect, ideation and ego. For *advaitins*, there can be no transformation in consciousness, since it is the originary and only non-dual principle. Nor is creation like a potter exercising effort, desire, will and a plan to shape a pot in a process wherein each of these distinct aspects asserts itself individually as well as collaboratively. Further when the pot comes into existence, the duality between the pot and the potter is maintained through a process of connection, production and created object. The cause and the effect are cemented through a relation. Thus the doctrine of creation as expounded by the theistic Naiyaikas leads us to a tripartite division of cause, effect and a cementing relation. According to Vedanta, there is no actual creation involving desire, will and an effort like a potter, in creating this world or *jagat*. The universe with all its characteristics is a mere appearance, a pretence, a manifestation of cosmic consciousness, just as a child's play-world is a manifestation of her imagination, summoned and dispatched at will. This world of multiplicity and transience conceals, veils and shrouds the underlying non-dual principle that is inviolate and inviolable.

The *advaitic* argument is that there can be no ontological transformation, because if the 'real' lends itself to change, it vitiates its immutable and indivisible nature. The world is therefore not a creation but a projective manifestation. This arises and falls back into its source, the non-dual Brahman. The metaphor of *leela* may be applied usefully here. This projective play has no specific aim, nor does it involve effort. Samkara cites the example of breathing in and breathing out to elucidate this effortlessness in manifesting the world.⁹ A child while playing effortlessly projects a temporary world and imagines multiple episodes within that world, regarding them all to be true. Yet, simultaneously being a spectator of the game, the child is aware that her projected world is illusory. Regardless, the child plays on, untiringly creating and dissolving her projections, performing without the aim of achieving any special goal, simply involved in activity natural to her. The *jagat* too, manifested by the projective *leela* of the Absolute, has no substantial existence. The world in its entirety is dissolved when the player detaches from the ceaseless game.

Characteristic of the child's games is her devotion to the activity of playing, her total surrender and immersion of self in the dynamic process. Mesmerized, captivated

and driven by this engendered *leela*, temporarily committed to belief in the totality of this *jagat* (the world) all its components and truth-conditions, unable to resist its addictions, the child plays till fatigue claims her. If creation is an act of play, so too is dissolution: the suspension of play. The child now makes an effort to reclaim her lost subjectivity and exerts her agency in order to withdraw from the act of playing. Once this occurs, her playthings, playmates and constructed events disappear as effortlessly as they arose, leaving no trace. The child loses her status as a player—and thus, the play too loses its significance. Transposing the metaphor to *advaitic* terms, it might be said that when one withdraws from *leela*/the cosmic game, the termination of the manifest physical and psychical worlds is inevitable. All projections come to an end, and this state of being is called liberation. What remains is the equivalence of all significations within the matrix of the non-dual self, with nothing to lose and nothing to gain, nothing to achieve and nothing to perform.

In the song *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka uses the *ammanai* stones, implements of the game, to denote *prakrti/maya*. She uses two terms for the stones: *mulaprakrti* and *maya* (even though they belong to two different schools of Indian philosophy, namely Samkhya and Advaita). She characterizes *ammanai* stones as made up of three *gunas*, manifesting the five subtle elements followed by five gross elements. A retrogression or cosmic involution occurs during withdrawal: everything manifest is withdrawn into *prakrti*. According to Samkhya, *prakrti*, the creative power, is real and it contains the dynamism to manifest this world. The created world is not a projection but a result of true transformation in *prakrti*. With the first pulse of cosmic evolution begins the series of immaterial and material strata: *mahat*, *ahamkara*, the *tanmatras* and *mahabhutas*, the intelligence, ego, the five subtle elements and five gross elements and mind. The five gross elements and mind then expand to 96 principles¹⁰. In the song of *Vedanta Ammanai*, Akka introduces us to *ammanai* stones, i.e., the *mulaprakrti* hidden from both player and spectator because it is safely kept under lock and key in an ornate treasure box called the *mahat tattva* (intelligence principle). This is clearly a Samkhyan idea. But as the game proceeds there is a change in terminology as well as in the song's underlying philosophical notions. *Mula prakrti* becomes *maya*, the delusive power whose exact nature defies categorical analysis. Akka apparently begins the song by invoking the normative and common-sense belief in matter/*prakrti* as the source of this world, but as the play advances, with the player able to penetrate the structure and logic of the game and the moves of the other players, she unravels

the mystery, identifying the *ammanai* stones as *maya*, the magical and delusive power of manifestation. Thus there is a clear and deliberate shift from Samkhyan notion of *mulaprakrti* to the delusive *maya* which according to Advaita philosophy does not have an ontic or metaphysical status. Since it does not have an actual existence, its creative manifestations too are thereby 'unreal'.

The two feminine creative principles, *mulaprakrti* and *maya*, are also prominent in Tantra. These principles become central to the goddess cults in Tantra literature¹¹. A prominent instance is the classic text *Tantraloka* (Light on Tantra) of Abhinavagupta, the famous ninth-century Shaiva Tantric philosopher. The metaphysics of Abhinavagupta's Shaiva Tantrism include elements of both Samkhya and Advaita. Teun Gourdiaan in his work *Hindu Tantrism* discussing the Samkhyan influences along three lines, asserts that:

1. The dual principle of Shiva and Shakti is reminiscent of the Samkhyan Prakrti and Purusha; the relation and functions of these dual principles are also similar to Samkhya. However, there is a crucial difference: the non-identity of the two in Samkhya as against the transcendental unity of Shiva and Shakti usually held by Shaakta and Shaiva philosophy.
2. The Samkhya evolutionary series of 25 categories: *purusha*, *prakrti*, *buddhi*, *ahamkara*, *manas*, the ten senses, ten subtle and gross elements, often recur in Tantra; the series is, for instance, still clearly recognizable in the *srichakra* system with a notable absence of Purusha.
3. The Samkhya doctrine of the relation between cause and effect as one of transformation (*parinama-vada*) is repeatedly offered by Shaakta authors to prove their doctrine of the reality of the objective world. The Advaita doctrine of identity of the self with the Absolute is central to Tantra. The self, none other than the supreme, appears to be limited, but when the limitation is removed the self discovers its unity with the supreme. However, Tantra diverges from Vedanta in one significant way. According to the former, the creative process is a transformation: the world emerges from Shakti and is also reabsorbed back into Shakti by Sakti. For Samkara and *advaitic* philosophers, there is only projective manifestation, a "pseudo-evolution."¹² From the point of view of the individual self, the chief cause of bondage and suffering in the world is *maya*, an aspect of the goddess or Shiva's eternal Shakti. The beguiling nature of *maya* in Tantra is two-fold, limiting, disruptive/dispersive. It is incomprehensible, like the agile deception of magic. But the fundamental paradox that an aspirant must

negotiate is that the illusory functions of *maya* are in fact as real as *maya* itself is from the metaphysical standpoint.

Thus Indian philosophy, with its three main strands, has *prakrti* or *maya* as a very important power that brings this world—real or illusory—into being. To some extent, it is evident that Akka uses all three perspectives, Samkhya, Tantra and Vedanta, in the song *Vedanta Ammanai*. The female player involved in the game, creating the world and also withdrawing/dissolving it through the power of *mulaprakrti*, is both Samkhyan and Tantric. Seeking metaphysical unity and oneness through ultimately penetrating the false entity of the existent world/rejecting its delusive power is Advaitic. Because Shakti worship is said to exist in all Advaita Maths¹³ and Akka had direct access to the Sringeri Sharada Matha, it is likely that she was exposed to the Srividya¹⁴ tradition of Shakti worship. This becomes obvious in her other long song titled *Srividayashobhanam*.

Vedanta Ammanai articulates a definite metaphysical doctrine woven through the metaphor of play in general and the game of *ammanai* in particular. Just as in play the child “pretends” to be someone other than herself, Akka the singer plays the metaphysical game, personifying herself as the protagonist who is a skilful player of the game—one who uses the *ammanai* stones (symbolic of *gunas*) to achieve the metaphysical goal of triumphing over *maya*, to attain emancipatory plenitude, the experience of non-duality. This is the player’s final and permanent victory, the player’s prize, the player’s attainment, which cannot be bettered. Akka introduces the player as “one lady” (*orutti*) possessing equanimity. This *orutti* is Akka herself, who having transcended all categories of name and form, is without self-referential parameters. This is not unusual in the context of the knower of the self. In his Sanskrit work *Atmavidyavilasa*,¹⁵ the well-known *advaitic* sage and Akka’s contemporary Sadashiva Brahmendra describes the state of the realized seer. The subjectivity of the knower of the self is obliterated; the sage in full abandon refers to the joyous experience of the knower of the self, here none other than himself, as *kopi*, “someone”. Akka chooses a similar mode of articulation in *Vedanta Ammanai*. This song’s *orutti* is depicted as longing for liberation: she now desires and decides to play the game with the single motive of seeking *moksha* (release) from the endless cycles of grinding turbulence that characterize *samsara*. To win such a game, her strategy is based on the perfected deployment of a skill she fortunately possesses—equanimity—that enables her to catch and throw and catch the three stones in the required order and with the required speed, as they fall.

This entails exquisite control the levels of intellect, emotions and body.

Before commencing the game, the player is gripped by anxiety and fear of losing the game and thus becoming an object of ridicule. Additionally, she hopes she will win the game, despite the doubt and astonishment of the spectators. Such terror is inevitable when one enters the field of the arduous spiritual quest, elsewhere compared to walking on the edge of a razor.¹⁶ According to Samkara, just as the birds flying in the sky leave no footprint, people who have tread the spiritual path have left no foot mark behind.¹⁷ There is a very high risk of losing one’s way. But once the rules of the game are understood, the anxiety and fear vanish. Once the player submits to the rules, the seductive dynamics of play overwhelm her.

The player uses three stones as implements: symbolic of *prakrti*, the creative power, with all of creation constituted by the three *gunas*—*sattva* (subtle and purified intelligence), *rajas* (robust and energetic dynamism) and *tamas* (grossness/density and apathy).¹⁸ Here Akka brilliantly incorporates Samkhyan and Vedantic notions of *prakrti* and *maya* respectively. She regards the stones as (1) *prakrti*, the tripartite Samkhyan material matrix of which the world is an evolute; and (2) *maya*, the ineffable power of projection that brings the world into being, as postulated by Advaita. *Prakrti* is real and can manifest this world through undergoing transformation, while *maya* illusorily manifests this world. The rising and falling *ammanai* stones, thrown and caught by the hands of the skilled player, engender, sustain and dissolve this world of innumerable names and forms, differences and divisions. Only the true adept, established in equanimity in all situations and contexts, can manipulate the creative force itself, resist its seductions, withdraw from the cosmic game in order to experience the sublime state of unity/non-duality instead of the ceaselessly looping multiplicity, frenzy and distortion that characterize human existence.

The play does not consist simply in mechanically throwing and catching the stones, or merely possessing the dexterity to sustain the cycle of this action, but also requires an intelligence that is able to identify and know the nature of the three stones. This is called *vichara* (practice of deep and sustained thinking in order to understand). Akka’s adept player offers a philosophical critique of *maya* during the game. When *maya* is understood, it moves away from the player as *prakrti* moves away from *purusha*.¹⁹ The strategy adopted here for gaining victory over *maya* is through the repudiation of *maya*.

Significantly, the play is also between the stones and the anonymous player, even more than it is between the

player and an opponent/partner. Either the three stones or the player will win the game. From the *advaitic* perspective, one is either caught in the web of *maya* which creates the world, or one is intelligent enough to negotiate and thus escape the *gunas*, and thus attain freedom. The moves of the game intensify in an almost sexual rhythm. Just as a lustful man tirelessly makes advances to his beloved only to be reproached and rejected, the three stones return to the player determinedly, only to be spurned and once again thrown in the air. Insolent *maya* pursues the struggling *jiva* (soul) with the same resolve. The adept who desires emancipation, however, with greater tenacity and virtuosity overcomes the advances and such seductive entrapment. One of the strongest ties that can bind a *jiva* is sexual desire, hence Akka's choice of the erotic metaphor of a *sarasapurusha's* sexual advances.

This mesmerizing contest between the resolved, audacious adept and crafty, experienced *maya* with her infinite and ageless guile attracts mortals as well as celestial onlookers. As the game progresses, masses of spectators arrive. Gods, demi-gods, legendary as well as ordinary men and women, Vedic seers, philosophers, throng to watch this extraordinary act. The crowd is so dense that there is no space even for a sesame seed to fall on the ground. The audience speculates and bets on the winner, whispers, sighs, hoots, cheers, chatters. Some are gripped with intense anxiety about the anticipated failure of the adept. Some take on the role of commentators and describe earlier games, adding that the supernormal efforts of Vishnu as Krishna, balancing Mount Govardhana on the tip of his little finger, or the majestic serpent Adishesha bearing the weight of the earth on his head, cannot compare with the power of the ongoing game of *ammanai* in the theatre of *samsara*: this is the first time a player has dared to engage in combat with *maya*. Onlookers wonder who will win. Overwhelmed by the sight of the adept's courage, some witnesses shower her with fragrant petals and prostrate before her.

Thus Akka creates three frames of spectators: those within the song, witnessing the game; those outside the song, i.e., her female audience; and those who perform the song, either specifically for an audience or informally and collaboratively while doing household work. Almost all her songs have as their central figure a woman/women who aspire to self-realisation. This knowledge has always been an upper-caste male prerogative, a privilege of men versed in the *shastras* and trained in the *devabhasa*, Sanskrit. Women were not entitled to this intellectual pursuit; *jnanam* (the path of knowledge) required *viveka* (the capacity for discrimination) and *vairagyam* (dispassion), and it was believed that women lacked these

attributes. Akka violates this scriptural and cultural rule by addressing her songs to women, and composing them in a vernacular, spoken Tamil. Invoking the gender-segregated, homo-social spaces and way of life common to all of India, she uses tropes centered on female experiences. Her articulation focuses on these confined spaces that could not be entered and appropriated by men, radically inverts or subverts all the established codes.

NOTES

1. Sw Nitayananda Giri, ed., *Chenkottai Sri Avudai Akkal Patal Tirattu* (Thapovanam: Sri Gnanananda Niketan, 2002).
2. *Ammanai* is a type of poetry belonging to the family of "*taravu kocchaga kalippa*". This is a type of poetry associated with a game of the same name that was popular with teen girls and often assumed the form of questions and answers. *Ammanai* generally follows the rules of a *venpa*, but can occasionally have *kalitalais* and belongs to the *kalippa* family. In Tamil poetics there are four types of *pa* (poems) *venpa*, *asiriyappa*, *kalippa* and *vanchippa*. These classifications were based on musical considerations such as rhythms, temporal aspects related to rhythm (timing of beats) and cadence the rhythm of sound. *Venpa* is a form of classical Tamil Poetry. A set of well defined rules define the grammar for *venpa*. All 1330 couplets from *Tirukkural* composed by Tiruvalluvar are examples of *venpa*. A set of well defined metric rules define the grammar for *venpa*. One set of rules constrains the duration of sound for each word or *cheer* while another set of rules for the possible sounds at the beginning of a word that follows a given sound at the end of the preceding word. A *venpa* has to conform to both these sets of rules. Every *venpa* consists between two to twelve lines.
3. According to M.Ramalingam, *Ramappaiyan Ammanai* is the oldest historical ballad available. This is the story of Ramappaiyan's invasion against Sadaikkan Setupati. (p. 532, *Medieval Indian Literature*, Volume 1, Chief Editor, Ayyappa Paniker, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi)
4. Ms no 543, *The Journal of the Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library*, Volume xxi, no 1, 1967, pp 1-6, ed O.A Narayanswamy.
5. I have drawn the philosophy of play from two divergent traditions: Samkara's commentary on the *Brahmasutra* and *The concept of play in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. See *Brahma -Sutra Shaankara- Bhasya*, Badarayana's *Brahma-Sutras* with Shankaracharya's Commentary, Translated by V.M Apte, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1960, Sutra No, 2.1.33, pp 338-39 & *The Concept of Play in Hans Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics: An Educational Approach*, Kjetil Steinholt & Elin Traasdahl, pp73-96, in *Theory in Context and Out*, Volume 3, Edited by Stuart Reifel, *Play and Culture Studies*, Ablex Publishing Westport, Connecticut, 2001
6. *Brahma -Sutra Shaankara- Bhasya*, Sutra No, 2.1.33, pp 338-39
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Sutra I.i.2 p.10
9. Ibid, Sutra II,i.33 p338
10. *Tattvas* are energies at a lower level that of *kala*. According to

- Ksemaraja, *tattva* is what expands itself (*tanannat tatvam*) which means; that which causes manifestation to appear,. See *Hindu Tantrism*, Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, Teun Gourdriann, Leiden, E.J Brill, 1979, p101. "No less than 70 categories were admitted by the karma system of Kashmir while also the number 94 seems to have been known. *Saktisangamatantra* returns to the Samkhya system in so far that it holds that prakrti was evolved immediately from Parabrahman" *ibid.*, p.53.
- 11 "Tantrism seems to be inspired by a genuine awe for the female as the seat of reproduction, the source of all life. But it would again be wide of the mark to the state that it acted as a liberating force which aimed at the improvement of the social status of women." *ibid.*, p.34.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 13. *Saundaryalahari* ascribed to Samkaracarya, edited and Translated by W.N. Brown, (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 'Introduction,' p 27.
 14. Srividya is an example of one esoteric Tantric tradition that is widely prevalent amongst the *smarta* brahmans. It has a Veda-oriented origin with classical gods and sages in prominence. For further information see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1996).
 15. *Siva Mansika Puja, Kirtani & Atma Vidya Vilasah of Sri Sadasiva Brahmendra* (in Sanskrit with English translations); published by Sri Kamakoti Koshsthanam, 1947.
 16. Katha Upanisad, 3.14, in Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upanisads*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt1998), pp. 390-91.
 17. Mandukya Karika, IV, 95, in *Eight Upanisads*, Vol Two, Tr By Swami Gambhirananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1958), pp. 308-09.
 18. S.S Suryanarayana Sastri, ed., *The Sankhyakarika of Isvara Krsna* (University of Madras, 1973), Verses, 12-14, pp.36-43.
 19. *Ibid*, Verse 66, pp.115-16