

RESEARCH IN TIRUVACAKAM

In Nature's infinite book of secrecy

A little I can read.

SHAKESPEARE, Antony and Cleopatra

As I was studying Tamil Literature and works relating to Saiva Siddhanta, I was drawn to Manickavacakar's *Tiruvacakam*. I used to listen to Kalaithanthai reciting the verses every morning and the verses cast a spell on me. I began reading it closely. The *Tiruvacakam* has a special place in Tamil Bhakthi literature. It would move even the hardest heart. The more I read it, the more was my feeling that the book embodied the profound spiritual experience of Manickavacakar. It is not only a record of his spiritual experience but also a source of a similar experience for the right kind of reader.

The book touched strange chords in my heart. I saw it described the different stages in the experience of a seeker. I tried to relate the different strands of that experience to Western mystic literature. I remembered Wordsworth's description of a mystic experience, in his Tintern Abbey Lines. While reading *Tiruvacakam*, I was "laid asleep in body" and became "a living soul".

I made a close study of Manickavacakar, and the result was a dissertation, A Study of Mysticism in *Tiruvacakam* in English, which I submitted to Madurai-Kamaraj University for my Ph.D. degree. It was a 'highly commended' thesis of the university. The university published it as a book and the vice- chancellor released it at a special function.

Fascinated by the reception of the book, I ventured on a Tamil translation, with the title, *Tiruvacakathil Aruliyal*, which was published by Vanathi Pathippagam. The Tamil edition was released at a function presided over by the Hon'ble Minister of HREC, Thiru

RM. Veerappan. His Holiness Sundara Swami gave his blessings. Many Tamil scholars offered felicitations.

All these distinctions, I owe to my mentor, Kalaitanthai.