

# Vaishnavism as Fine Literature

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*À propos Vedānta Deśika's theological verses in Tamil*

Claiming that Vedānta Deśika (traditional dates: 1268–1369), one of the most renowned and influential Śrīvaiṣṇava Acāryas, is an accomplished poet would be stating the obvious, for he has masterfully composed over 6,000 verses in three different languages. And he chose his mother tongue Tamil either to write maṅgala verses for his rahasyagranthas in Manipravala, or to compose independent poems mostly for dealing with key theological points, such as the hidden meanings of the three chief mantras, in a succinct manner. And combining theology with poetry is no easy task, especially if it involves “translating” a conceptual world that is Sanskritic in nature into proper Tamil, along with all the constraints imposed by the Tamil poetic system. But Deśika pulls it off with aplomb, producing astounding results as is his wont. This paper will explore Vedānta Deśika's theological verses in Tamil and show that while the theologian remains accurate to a fault vis-à-vis the theological precepts that he expounds, the poet in him never compromises with the quality of his poetry, as he composes verses in 20 different metres, and plays with various poetic devices, reminding one that Deśika is both a product and the most striking proponent of the ubhayavedānta tradition.