

Studies in Indian and Asian Civilizations

Indian Movements : Some Aspects  
of Dissent Protest and Reform



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## Bhakti Movement in South India

M G S NARAYANAN AND VELUTHAT KESAVAN

### Introduction

#### Definitions

THE TAMIL bhakti movement represents primarily a religious phenomenon with a valuable social content—a new wave of Aryan or Hindu influence among the Tamil people.<sup>1</sup> During its life-span of three and a half centuries, beginning from the middle of sixth century A.D.,<sup>2</sup> Shaiva and Vaishnava saints and their followers practised and propagated the cult of bhakti in the countryside, and went to pilgrim centres singing and dancing. They received royal patronage, clashed with Jains and Buddhists in open debate and defeated them, presumably healed the sick, and performed other miracles. Their hymns addressed to several deities constitute the cream of Tamil literature. Although the elements of dissent, protest, and reform are clear in the movement, these aspects are subordinated to the overall pattern of a greater movement—the consolidation and extension of classical Hindu society in early medieval India.

The bhakti movement in South India, in fact, had a two-fold character, i.e., its two main currents of Shaivism and Vaishnavism which flowing in parallel ways also mingled occasionally; the Vaishnava saints being known as *Alvars* and the Shaiva saints, *Nayanars*. It is doubtful whether the movement started as a conscious one. It is likely that several bhaktas appeared simultaneously in different centres, and the movement developed its conscious identity by the ninth century. By this time, Sundarmurti Nayanar, the last of the Nayanars, and Nammalvar, one of the last Alvars, indicated in their works a comprehensive understanding of the literature in the respective fields.<sup>3</sup> For the first time an awareness of the group identity

of saints and temples has been explicitly mentioned and treated in their compositions. This was carried forward by Nathamuni (10th c.) who edited the Tamil Vaishnava canon and Nambi Andar Nambi (11th c.) who was the earliest compiler of the Shaiva hagiology.

How the terms *nayanar* and *alvar*, employed by their contemporaries, came to refer to the leaders of the Shaiva and Vaishnava movements respectively remains a puzzle. The word *nayanar* may be Tamilized form of Sanskrit *nayaka*, meaning 'a leader', probably suggestive of the Shaiva belief that the sixty-three leaders were incarnations of the *bhutasanas* of Shiva. The term *alvar* has been derived from the root *al* which could imply the act of plunging or immersing oneself and, as such, it has been suggested that the Alvars were persons who delved deeply into devotion. The change from *l* to *ḷ* is linguistically admissible, and the term *āl* means 'to rule' or 'to preserve'. In that case the Vaishnavā saints may be said to have enjoyed in bhakti literature the chief attribute of Vishnu, whose function is preservation and this is quite different from creation or destruction. A third possibility, which we would support, is that *alvar* is the literal translation of the Sanskrit word *bhakta*. Since *bhakta* is derived from the root *bhañ*, meaning 'to divide', 'to apportion', *bhakta* literally means one who enjoys a share.<sup>4</sup> Thus, since the term *bhakta* was originally employed to denote a servant or retainer who shared the wealth of his master, in the course of time the same word must have been used for a devotee in view of his *dasyabhava* or attitude of service. Perhaps the Tamil word may have this meaning since the root *al* also means 'to possess', 'to enjoy', etc.

### Historiography

Until recently, most of what has been written about this twin movement, concerns itself with chronology, the identity of individual saints, and with some literary and philosophical appreciations. Early scholars treated it chiefly as a literary movement or, at best, an ideological phenomenon with religion as the source of inspiration. The very label, 'Bhakti Move-

ment', conferred by modern writers was based on this literary-philosophical conception, because they had no clear notion about either its chronological sequence or the social significance. Historical studies, initiated by scholars like S Krishnaswami Aiyangar, R G Bhandarkar, T A Gopinatha Rao and K A Nilakanta Sastri in the twenties, were able to approximately fix the chronological framework, and with it came the inevitable scholarly disputes about the identity and date of individual saints. Mainly because of the uncertainty of its historical outline, and partly due to the lack of emphasis on social history, the correlation between religio-literary aspects and the socio-political background of the movement was not highlighted. Moreover, it was viewed as a pure Tamil movement and, consequently, never in the larger context of Indian civilization. Even today, due to a lack of theoretical perspectives in South Indian historiography, historical works have not yet been able to assess the Tamil bhakti movement from an all India viewpoint. Hence, the present study attempts to analyze the movement not only within the larger framework of the development of society and culture in India, but also in its socio-economic context with special reference to the elements of dissent, protest and reform.

### Source Materials

Historical evidence for an analytical study are chiefly found in the literary works of the Nayanars and Alvars themselves, which are in the form of devotional songs addressed to deities mostly with reference to particular temples. These works which reflect the elegance of classical Tamil verse became the model for much of Tamil poetry in subsequent periods. The source materials may be classified as follows :

1. Songs of the Nayanars and Alvars.
2. Later compositions by their followers in the form of chronicles and hagiologies.
3. A few references in contemporary and near-contemporary epigraphs to devotional works and the temples connected with them.<sup>5</sup>

4. A few sculptured panels, painting and images representing the incidents in the lives of these personalities.<sup>6</sup>

### Movement in space and time

A study of the bhakti movement suggests that it had its origins on the east coast, in and around such famous temples as *Tiruppati* and *Kanchi*.<sup>7</sup> Tiruppati, the seat of Tirumal or Vishnu, otherwise known as *Venkatam*, is mentioned as the northernmost point of *Tamilakam* in early Tamil Sangam literature.<sup>8</sup> In the Sangam period there was a chief called Pulli at Venkatam, probably a remote ancestor of the Pallavas, who seem to have used a Sanskritized tribal name as their dynastic title.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between Venkatam and the process of Aryanization of Tamilakam is significant. The northernmost point of Tamilakam was also the point of contact between the Aryan and Tamil ways of life. Since Venkatam, the earliest northernmost centre of Vaishnava bhakti cult, appears to be closely associated with the Pallavas, we feel that the bhakti movement was a byproduct of the Aryanizing or Sanskritizing influence. The same point is underlined by the relative precedence and importance of Kanchi, the later capital of the Pallava kingdom. It is well known that the Pallavas were one of the early Dravidian dynasties which were thoroughly Aryanized. For instance, by the close of A.D. third century to the middle of the sixth century, Pallava rulers of the Prakrit and Sanskrit charters acted as the protagonists of Aryanization in the 'Far South'. They adopted the same role as the Satavahanas of the Deccan. The new Pallava line of Simhavishnu, established in the second half of the sixth century continued the patronage of brahmins and Brahminical culture on a much larger scale than before.<sup>10</sup>

Following the first phase of the movement in the late sixth and the early seventh century under the patronage of the Pallavas, we find other temples like Tillai or Chidambaram further south and Tirunallur, Tiruvarur and Srirangam to the south-west in the interior acquiring prominence. These were located in the traditional Chola territory.<sup>11</sup> The *raison d'etre* of this rapid and smooth extension is brought out by the fact

that the Cholas were feudatories of the Pallavas.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, the movement spread further south from the Pallava-Chola territories to that of the Pandyas during the eight century where temples in Madurai, Tirunelveli, Kumbakonam, etc. became active centres.<sup>13</sup> It is only during the final phase in the ninth century that the movement took roots in Malainadu or Kerala on the West Coast and temples like *Tiruvanjaikkalam*, *Tirunavay*, *Tirukkatkarai*, *Tirumulikkalam*, etc., became the chief centres of devotion.<sup>14</sup>

The spread of the movement created active cultural links among the various people, by cutting across the political boundaries of different kingdoms. It promoted a new Tamil consciousness which has significantly contributed to the Tamil heritage. In castewise distribution, we find some Alvars like Tondaradippodi, Madhurakavi, Nammalvar, and Periyalvar hailing from the brahman community while Kulashekara was a kshatriya and the other Alvars belonged to *kallar* (Tirumangai), and even *pana* (Tiruppana) communities of the shudra caste. A similar composition of different castes may also be found among the Nayanars.

By the end of the ninth century, the bhakti movement had traversed the full range of Tamilakam and conquered the three major kingdoms—Chola, Pandya and Chera. By this time, the lists of the Nayanars and Alvars were completed and the first edited volumes of the Shaiva and Vaishnava canons were prepared for use in temples.<sup>15</sup> By the tenth century the movement had already come into fruition, realising its early social objectives. But as it became a part of the established religion and culture, it began losing its original character of dissent, protest, and reform.

### Parallel and Related Developments

There being a close interrelationship between religious activity and socio-political and economic trends, the bhakti movement cannot be understood in isolation. At that time in South India there were several significant, parallel and interrelated developments taking place. These may be enumerated here :

1. The growth and consolidation of new brahman-backed feudal monarchies first under the Pallavas, and then under the Pandyas, Cheras and Cholas of the post Sangam period.
2. The flowering on the landscape of the early temple movement, especially the rock-cut and structural temples of Shaiva and Vaishnava deities. The temple complex included vast landed property, that was administered by brahman trustees who lived in settlements organized around the temples, where most of the tenants were non-brahmans.
3. The emergence of prosperous guilds of traders and artisans in several district headquarters and in the semi-autonomous brahman settlements.
4. The eruption of acrimonious Brahman-Buddhist-Jain disputes which came to a close with the establishment of brahman supremacy and the triumph of Hindu religion; this relegated the non-Vedic creeds into the background.
5. The establishment of an all-embracing caste system which attracted all the original clans and tribes of South India. These were then placed in a feudal hierarchical order in which the brahman was the point of reference for fixing ritual and social status.

The above developments indicate that in South India these three and a half centuries constituted a formative period of society. But an understanding of the processes involved in this formation in which the movement played a crucial role requires the interlinking of diverse phenomena and factors. But not all the data is easily available, especially that of the guilds. However, indirect clues for one field are often revealed from another to provide us with an overall pattern of mutual relationships. To illustrate, leading personalities of this period played diverse roles in more than one sphere of action; King Mahendravarman I (580-630 A.D.) of Kanchi, the founder of Pallava greatness, was the patron-disciple of Appar, one of the early saint-preachers of Shaivism.<sup>16</sup> By birth a Jain, he became a severe critic of Jain-Buddhist monasticism in the period of his post-conversion proselytizing zeal as reflected in the Shaiva literature. He was also the author of a Sanskrit burlesque called *Mattavilasa*<sup>17</sup> In addition, he

was a distinguished pioneer in building temples, with large endowments.<sup>18</sup> Although not to the same extent, a multiplicity of roles may also be observed in the case of the Pandyan king Varaguna I (765-815 A.D.) of Madurai<sup>19</sup> and the Chera king Kulashekharā (844-883 A.D.) of Makotai.<sup>20</sup> Both of them laid the foundations of their great dynasties, and promoted the bhakti movement in their respective kingdoms. They also built and endowed a large number of brahminical temples. That the Chera king Kulashekharā took direct interest in fostering the trade guilds, called *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam*, is endorsed by inscriptional evidence.<sup>21</sup>

### Evolution of bhakti in the North

Historically, we may suggest that the ideas and institutions which flourished in the more advanced civilizations of the Gangetic Valley, as represented in the Gupta Empire, were gradually spreading to the South. It is interesting to note that the emergence of a feudalized monarchy with graded systems of *samantas* or feudatories, chartered brahman settlements and trade corporations, temples of Shiva and Vishnu, the hierarchical order of caste and a spate of devotional literature centred on personified gods, was characterized not only during the Gupta period of the North, but also during the Chalukya period in the Deccan and the Pallava-Pandya-Chera-Chola period in the 'Far South'. Therefore, it is surprising that a bhakti movement was not clearly identified in the Hindu revival of the North under the patronage of the Guptas, variously called 'Hindu Renaissance' or efflorescence, 'Classical Period' of Hindu art and literature, etc. Nevertheless, scanning through the Sanskrit literature of that period, with the redacted *Puranas* dedicated to particular deities like Vishnu, Shiva, etc., and the standardized text of the Mahabharata with the *Bhagavad Gita* as its epitome, one gets the impression that bhakti as a distinctive movement had indeed manifested itself there. It must have probably originated in the post-Mauryan period, as exemplified by the famous Heliodorus pillar inscription of Vidisha, recently identified as part of a temple complex.<sup>22</sup> The great cult-centres which developed at such pilgrimage places like Mathura and

Varanasi must have given birth to the institution of the temple, an institution that was destined to be the carrier and the rallying point of the cult of devotion. The *bhagavata* movement with its *agamaic* form of worship appears to have reached a climax in the Gupta period, with emperors claiming titles like *parameshvara*, *bhattaraka*, *paramabhagavata*, etc., is suggestive of their attachment to the cult of devotion.<sup>23</sup>

In the North, brahman intellectual monopolists had already accepted the path of philosophical awareness or *inanamarga* almost exclusively for themselves. This they did while chalking out two alternative paths; one of unquestioning *dharma*-based activity or *karmamarga*, and the other of blind faith and surrender or *bhaktimarga*. The path of karma according to one's dharma was generally ordained for all of the castes. The path of bhakti representing a sublimation of the spirit of slavery or *dasyabhava* was, paradoxically enough, especially meant for the exceptional souls in all groups who sought liberation from social restrictions. It was congenial to the psychology of the lowlier groups in a caste-oriented social structure. This vulgarized picture of the three paths, justified by providing a philosophical outlook to the caste order with safety valves, has been most succinctly enshrined in the compromise formula contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>24</sup> If theoretically the three paths were equal, the path of *bhakti* was considered crude, simple and comparatively easy to follow. It was thought to be well suited to the thousands of uneducated and undeveloped people who were condemned to take up menial work but also required an aspiration for some form of escape.

The *puranic* ideology of bhakti appears to have percolated to the South through the temple-centred brahman settlements where the study of sacred and quasi-sacred literature was taken up as a religious duty by large numbers of priests. This process of study was institutionalized in the post of the *Mahabharata Bhatta* created in the temples for the purpose of expounding the *Mahabharata* and popularizing it among the common people.<sup>25</sup> The development in the South of a Sanskrit theatre fostered the caste of *Cakkaiyars*. They specialized in transmitting the message of puranic literature through a particular form of dance-drama.<sup>26</sup> Again, the puranic myths and legends were portrayed in sculpture and painting, all of the

fine arts were employed to make the system of Hindu beliefs palatable to the common people. The way in which Brahminism was transformed into Hinduism through temple-centred bhakti in the North seems to have been repeated in the South.

### Translation to the Tamil Idiom

#### *Myths and Miracles*

These processes imply that there was the mutation of Aryan-brahman ideology in the course of its translation into the Tamil idiom, and thereby its popularization among the Tamil people. It took roots in the Tamil soil by creating its own mythology and legends. For instance, there are several legends about Tirunavukkarasu (literally, Master of the Tongue) better known as Appar (a term of respect signifying literally 'father'). To start with, he was a Jain Vellala from Tirunumur village. A miraculous cure through the intervention of his sister who was a devotee of Shiva converted him to Shaivism. The Jains complained to their patron, King Mahendravarma Pallava who then persecuted him severely. The punishments included throwing him in to a kiln, administering poison, placing him in the path of a murderous elephant and pushing him into the rough sea with a heavy stone tied on to his neck. He escaped miraculously, whereupon the king surrendered, embraced Shaivism, pulled down the Jain monastery and built a Shiva temple in its place. Appar is also credited with curing the sick many times and bringing back to life a boy who died of snake bite. Another story about him says that he sang open the closed doors of the temple of *Tirumaraikaadu (Vedaranya)* with the magic of his devotion. This may be symbolic of the opening of the Vedic lore by means of the key of bhakti and throwing it open to the common people. This is significant because Appar openly proclaimed that caste and class were nothing to him and that he was prepared to worship even an outcaste and a leper because God dwells in them.

Sambandhar, a brahman from Kaundinya Gotra from Shiyali, is represented as a divine child whose disputation with the Jains converted the Pandya king to Shaivism. He described Lord

Shiva as being both Aryan and Tamil; and is said to have drunk the milk of Parvati at the age of three, received a pair of divine cymbals and all the royal paraphernalia, later, *en route* to *Tiruvaratturai*. Then, a divine canopy descended from the heavens to protect him from the sun. He is said to have wrought the largest number of miracles.

In the case of Sundarar, who claimed to be a friend of Shiva, the latter himself is said to have mediated his marriage proposal twice. Shiva played the role of a messenger of love at Tiruvarur, his birthplace. When Kalikkama Nayanar, another devotee, protested against Sundarar for having dared to employ Shiva in this manner, there was another intervention by Shiva. In the end Sundarar is believed to have disappeared from the temple of Shiva at Tiruvancaikkalam in a mysterious manner. The Shaivas interpret this event as his ascent to Kailasha on the back of a white elephant sent by Shiva. On hearing this report, his friend and master Ceraman Perumal Nayanar is also stated to have proceeded to Kailasha on the back of a horse.

Similar stories are woven around the names of the Mudal Alvars or Early Alvars—Poygai, Pudam and Pay who are stated to have come out of flowers in a tank; a creeper and a well respectively. There is also the legend of all the three of them casually getting together in the dark corridor of a house and being joined by Vishnu himself as the fourth in the company.<sup>27</sup> Again, Tiruppana Alvar, the member of a low caste of wandering minstrels playing on the *yal* went about singing the praise of Vishnu. His devotion was conveyed to the temple priest in a dream by Vishnu himself who ordered the priest to carry the Alvar to the temple on his shoulders.<sup>28</sup> Or, Andal, the only woman among the Alvars, chose Krishna Ranganatha himself as her bridegroom. Since her love was so intense Ranganatha called her into the shrine where she disappeared.<sup>29</sup>

### Literary Style

Thus, it is through such myths and legends, charged with emotion and drama, that the personalities and places in Tamilakam were sanctified. The cosmic forms of Vishnu and

Shiva became humanized and localized, playing the roles of a companion, child, bridegroom, and a mother, etc. In this way they endeared themselves to hundreds of devotees around the chief centres of worship. There were new stories of short term avatars of Vishnu and Shiva who help their devotees in times of crisis. These deities were endowed with a local habitation and a name in temples. Each important temple was associated with the lives of the saints in some way or other; both temples and saints gained popularity and respectability by this mutual relationship. Stories of local miracles and tales connecting mythical heroes with historical sites were fused into the accounts of temples, thus giving rise to a new genre of literature, the *sthalapurana*.

The saints, both Nayanars and Alvars, popularized their creeds not only with the help of miracles, myths and legends but also with that of innovations in literary style. They used new forms of poetry like *antadi* (a poem in which the last word-syllable recurs as the first in the next), *irattaimanimalai* (a poem using two different metres alternatively), *mummanikkovai* (a schematic poem of ten groups of three stanzas, each in a different metre), *ula* (a song of victory), *pollandu* (a song in the form of a ritual to remove the evil eye), *tarattu* (lullaby), etc. They were also responsible for reviving old metres and forms employed in the Sangam literature. Combined with simple and forceful diction, romantic imagery and the music of words, this new literature captured the imagination of the people on a large scale. Incidentally, so much has been written about this literary aspect of the movement that the social content and institutional background has been generally lost sight of.

### **Bhakti and the New Monarchy**

It is significant that the growth of the bhakti movement took place at a time of the rise of the new feudal monarchy in South India. In the stories about the early Nayanars we find that the royal patronage given to Jainism is now being converted to Hinduism, especially in the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms. What this suggests is that at the level of the ordinary people the Hindu movement had to contend with the already establish-

ed Jainism. But with the growing strength of Shaivism kings turned away from these heretical creeds. This illustrates the process whereby popular creeds won over the rulers—a repetition of the history of the Roman empire and the Mauryan empire though on a much smaller scale.

Royal patronage seems to have intensified the tempo of the bhakti movement. Mahendravarman is alleged to have destroyed a Jain monastery and built a Hindu temple in its place. These seem to have followed a temple building spree which spread from the Pallava-Chola territory to the Pandya and finally the Chera territories. These are the areas where the bhakti movement also spread. Hundreds of inscriptions from the seventh to the tenth century bear testimony to this brisk activity of temple construction.<sup>30</sup> Which naturally could not have been possible without the active support of kings. In turn, those kings and chieftains who supported Brahminical groups became more powerful than those who opposed them.

Consequently, Brahminism with its institutional base in the temple centred agrarian settlements, had emerged as the most dynamic progressive force. For example, forests were cleared, fertile river valleys developed, and a communication system with the courts and marts that linked South India with other parts of India. Brahman leaders had succeeded in organizing the indigenous people as tenants and temple servants, grading them into castes and subcastes with infinite variations of economic and ritual status. They were in a position to mobilize the manpower of the vast tenant class to royal military service. The kings and the brahmins patronized each other.

In time, being a member of the movement of bhakti, gave a passport for entry into the enchanted world. This was true for kings, merchants or ordinary people; on all of whom it could confer a special brahman status through proximity to gods and "gods of the earth". It served as a popular sacrament of initiation. The status of a person arose in proportion to his readiness to submit to the brahman oligarchy. What became the hallmark of greatness in an age of growing Brahminical power, was the surrender of pride in the self and the voluntary acceptance of the position of "the servant of the servant of the servant of the Lord", as Kulashekhara Alvar and Tondaradippodi had proclaimed. In this way, if kings derived greater

socio-political power, brahmins themselves acquired not only better protection but popularity through this alliance. To give the benefit of doubt, even though this materialist calculation might not have been a conscious one on both the sides, the mechanism of social power worked in promoting simultaneously the power of Hindu kings and the prosperity of brahmin settlements.

The ideology of bhakti served as the cementing force bringing together kings, brahmin priests and the common people in a harmonious manner. The intoxication of bhakti could enable the high to forget their pride and the low their misery. This provided an illusion of equality while retaining the stubborn walls of inequality in the feudal system of production and distribution. In short, the bhakti movement contained all the ingredients of the popular form of Hinduism; the ancient classical Brahminical creed of the Vedas and the shastras acculturated with the non-brahmin and non-Aryan population of South India.

Some kings and chieftains like Mahendravarman and other unidentified Pallavas and Cholas, like Kalarcingam, Cengatchola and Anapaya, and even a chieftain of Venadu called Venattadigal are among the patrons of the movement besides the two Chera kings of Kerala. However, the earliest saints did not come from the ranks of royalty. This may be explained by the fact that when the bhakti movement had become popular, the kings also patronized it both for making use of it and for the sake of enhancing their own prestige and power. Mahendravarman's destruction of a Jain monastery and Nedumaran's alleged implement of several thousand Jains under the influence of the movement indicates clearly that some of the early Nayanars had at least influenced the rulers in order to use state power for the promotion of their creed even through the use of violence. With the changing order of society this may have helped the rulers to consolidate the power of monarchy as an institution.

### **Projection of the temple cult**

If the bhakti movement is viewed beyond the abstract spiritual

ideas of the culture heroes as has been done until recently, and examined at the functional level, we are bound to take a close look at the relation between the saints and the temples. Significantly, because most saints came from the precincts of, or got affiliated to, great Brahminical temples like those at Venkatam, Kanchi, Srirangam, Chidamabaram, Kumbakonam, etc.,<sup>31</sup> it is implied that elements of temple propaganda and Brahminical missionary enthusiasm were inseparable components of the movement. Bhakti not only started from the temple, but it connected one temple with another through pilgrimages; and in turn this led to the proliferation of temples. Further analysis indicates that these temples owning large estates as *devasvam* and *brahmasvam* property with brahmans as their trustees, inspired the movement. In other words, Aryan brahman pockets in the midst of the Tamil population were already well established under royal patronage with the temple as the nucleus for the dissemination of culture, which appeared long before the arrival of the Alvars and Nayanars on the social scene.

It is plausible to assume that the movement originated on the fringes of brahman settlements as an unmediated by-product of the temple; it was partly the fulfilment of their mission and partly an antithesis in the form of non-brahman reaction. In this way there was an interaction between the brahmans and the non-brahmans, the latter were generally hereditary temple servants, tenants, guards or soldiers and lay worshippers; all constituting the Aryanised section of society. This represents the second stage in the process of Aryanisation, i.e., the socialization of Brahminical ideology.

As noted earlier, the literature of the bhakti movement is mostly centred on the temples and many details are available. For example, the chief advocates of the Vaishnava movement were the devotees of the main Vishnu temples such as Venkatam, Kanchi, Srirangam, Tiruvittuvakkod, Tirumulikkalam, etc. Similarly, the chief Shaiva devotees were specially attached to Chidamabaram, Tiruvarur, Tiruvancaikkalam, etc. Moreover, devotees often undertook a tour of all the important centres of pilgrimage in South India, by dancing and singing with large groups of followers across fields and forests. This programme is what must have created a big stir in the countryside. The *Periyapuranam* gives accounts of how joint pilgrimages were

undertaken by Appar and Sambandhar in the early phase and Ceraman Perumal Nayanar and Sundara in the later phase.<sup>32</sup> Kulashekara Alvar and Nammalvar also undertook such grand pilgrimages in their time.

Besides the processions and pilgrimages, the institution of temple festivals may be cited as a by-product of the bhakti movement, as it linked the temple cult with the movement. For instance, the asterism of Sravana in the month of *Sravana* was considered to be the birthday of Vamana, an avatara of Vishnu. This day came to be celebrated in Tiruppati, Tirukkatkarai and Tiruvallaval, three of the *divyadesams* of the Alvars. A late Sangam work called *Maduraikkanchi* sings praises about this *Sravana* or *Onam* festival. Among the Alvars, Periyalvar has composed two exquisite hymns on this festival. Perhaps it was during the reign of Kulashekara Alvar in Kerala (9th century) that the Onam festival was introduced. Inscriptions of the tenth century from *Tiruvalla* and *Tirukkatkarai* demonstrate the popularity of the festival.<sup>33</sup> In the course of time this Vaishnava sectarian festival was transformed through royal and Brahminical patronage into the national festival of Kerala. This is an important instance where the interests of the temple cult and the bhakti movement coincided in the establishment of a popular festival, and it is reflected in literature. Similar festivals, observed in particular temples or in a general way, had a major share in reforming the sectarian creed of Brahminism and developing it into the popular Hindu religion.

A specific consequence of the movement was the encouragement it gave to devadasis or handmaids of gods, *tevadiccis* in Tamil. As bhakti spread through the media of songs, dance, and beauty, *devadasis* played a significant role in the popular appeal of the temple. Thus, Sundaramurti Nayanar was involved with a devadasi.<sup>34</sup> Cheraman Perumal Nayanar notes the reception given to Shiva by devadasis of all ages while he went out in procession around the streets in Kailasa,<sup>35</sup> and Andal was herself a devadasi who lived and died in the Srirangam temple.<sup>36</sup> There is a tradition that Kulashekara Alvar's daughter, Nila, was presented to Srirangam temple as a devadasi. She is called Cerakula Nacciya, and a shrine dedicated to her is found in this temple.

The numerous Nayanars and Alvars, together with their

secular and spiritual patrons in the courts and temples, constituted only the elites of the bhakti movement. There were a large number of devotees who formed the retinue of each distinguished devotee. All of these people, no longer involved in any form of productive labour, had to be fed, clothed, and so on. Therefore, when they moved from temple to temple in a cross-country religious campaign they received food and support all along their route. This would not have been possible but for the sympathy and serviceability of a large class of temple servants and tenants not only in the major centres but even in a network of temples in the countryside. It is these people swelling the ranks of bhaktas (because they considered themselves blessed by the opportunity for casual contact and service and still remained anonymous) who provided strong popular base for the movement. This is an important factor that has to be noted because it explains the force and validity of the cult of bhakti and its social relevance.

### Bhakti and the Guilds

In spite of the fact that guilds of traders like *Valanjiyar*, *Nandesikal*, *Anjuvannam*, and *Manigramam* flourished in Tamilakam during this period, merchants and artisans are conspicuous by their absence in playing any prominent role in the movement. Occasionally we come across an oil merchant like Kaliya Nayanar of *Tiruvorriyur* who served the Lord with oil lamps,<sup>37</sup> a fisherman like Adipatta Nayanar of Nagapattinam who consecrated all his catch to the Lord and starved himself,<sup>38</sup> a few general merchants like Iyarpakai of Pumpukar,<sup>39</sup> Amaranidhi of Tirunallur,<sup>40</sup> and Karaikkal Ammaiyar, the daughter of the Dhanadatta of Karaikkal.<sup>41</sup> But these persons have not been considered among the most important of the bhaktas. Perhaps one reason for this is that during the period the bhakti movement took roots among the rural agrarian settlements while the influence of heretical sects like Jainism and Buddhism continued to be strong in the centres of trade. Prior to the ninth century, this kind of polarization is also apparent from such Jain literary works as *Chilappadikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Jivaka cintamani*, etc. The conflict between the heretical sects and the

neo-Hindu cult of bhakti is clearly discernible in the literature. It is not improbable that, at least partly, this reflects the implicit rivalry between the trading classes and the land owning classes for socio-political dominance. Explicitly, there was no confrontation of religious creeds in these terms, but one cannot ignore the agrarian-feudal bias of the bhakti movement as well as the trading class bias of Jainism and Buddhism.

### **Rivalry with Jainism and Buddhism**

In the hands of converted monarchs the movement fulfilled the historical function of promoting Hindu revivalism with the aim of checking the spread of Jainism and Buddhism. In order to command public support, this neo-Hindu movement had to out do the Jain-Buddhist rivals both in terms of mass appeal and by providing such incentives which were stronger than any rational codes of conduct. Against this background, it is easier to understand how and why the movement adopted the media of song and dance to invoke popular enthusiasm. It even assumed a relatively egalitarian and democratic approach, unfamiliar to the rigidity of classical brahman discipline. Thus, it may be seen that the Jain-Buddhist challenge which had extended to South India, produced this new form of Hindu response.<sup>42</sup>

The success of the bhakti movement signified the victory of Hinduism against the non-Vedic creeds of Jainism and Buddhism. The story of Tirunavukkarasu or Appar who was a Jain converted to Shaivism and who was instrumental in the conversion of Mahendravarman has been narrated earlier. About Tirujnanasambandar, it has been stated that on the invitation of the queen Mangaiyarkkarsi, he proceeded to Madurai the Pandyan capital, in order to undertake the historic mission of saving the city from the clutches of Jainism. He had to undergo a series of trials and he performed a number of miracles. With the assistance of the minister, Kulaicirai Nayanar, he eventually succeeded in winning over the king Nedumaran to the Shaiva fold. The occasion of the king's conversion was celebrated by the impalement of 8000 Jains, and the story goes that a temple festival at Madurai commemorates

this event to this day. Leaving a possible margin for exaggeration, we do have to take into account the grim reality of Jain-Shaiva conflict which engendered such intolerance on both sides. All the four characters involved, namely, the saint, the queen, the minister, and the king are eulogised as devotees and included in the list of the sixty three Nayanars. Tirujnan-sambandhar dedicates a hymn to the minister in which the whole story is recited. All this evidence suggests that importance was attached to this conflict with Jainism, as seen in the bhakti literature.

Parallel stories of such conflicts are found in the case of Vaishnava saints also. Tirumangai, one of the most celebrated of the Alvars is said to have stolen a golden image of Buddha from a monastery in Nagapattinam; to pay for renovating the temple at Srirangam. His hymns, full of good poetry, are equally full of venom against Jainism and Buddhism. Periyalvar, a brahman saint, is stated to have won a religious dispute in the court of Srimara Srivallabha. The intolerance of Tondaradippodi Alvar, another brahman saint from Tanjore, towards Jainism and Buddhism was nearly as strong as that of Tirumangai. However, by the middle of the ninth century, when the movement achieved maturity and stabilized its position, this element of rivalry with Jainism and Buddhism had disappeared from the scene. Evidently, the non-Vedic sects had lost the battle in South India, as they had already lost it elsewhere. The hymns of the Nayanars and Alvars of the later period are clear streams of devotion unsullied by the muddy waters of controversy.

By now the saints were no longer anxious to win over new section of people. The earlier spirit of generosity and cosmopolitanism which invited or tolerated bhaktas from the lowest ranks like Tiruppana Alvar (Pana), Nantanar (Paraiya), Viranminda Nayanar (Vellala), Tirumangai Alvar (Kallar), etc. gives way to a new sense of discipline. The whole movement appears to have closed its ranks and consolidated its position after its victory over the non-Vedic sects. There is a new emphasis on the attitude of subservience to brahmins and temples in the hymns of Kulashekhara Alvar and Nammalvar among the Vaishnavas and Ceraman Perumal Nayanar and Sundaramurti Nayanar among the Shaivas. To quote one

instance, Sundaramurti opens his *Tiruttondattogai* claiming himself to be the "slave of the slaves of the brahmans of Tillai."<sup>43</sup> Instances may be multiplied by quoting extracts from the devotees of the later period. Thus the first phase of castelessness, which has sometimes been interpreted by scholars even as a protest against the caste system, is followed by a second phase of conformity to caste rules.

Thus, it may be inferred that the tendency towards reform inherent in the neglect of caste rules had been at least partly necessitated by the strength of heretical sects like Jainism and Buddhism which refused to recognise these barriers. In this period of its conflict with the heretical creeds, Brahminical Hinduism apparently borrowed the tenets of its adversaries. But it was a very shortlived phenomenon, a moment of aberration or lapse from which Hindu society recovered as soon as the point of danger had passed.

### Reflection and legitimization of the feudal order

This victory of Hinduism in South India, spearheaded by the bhakti movement registered, firmly established, the agrarian feudal order supported by a graded system of hierarchy in caste. In many ways the new jargon of bhakti literature is suggestive of the new feudal class relationships and the corresponding ideology. For instance, if the deity in the temple, which is the central concept, is equated with the king, then a parallel world of authority is also reconstructed on the spiritual plane. Similar words, like *ko* and *perumal* are employed to denote the deity and the king; the term *koyil* is used to denote both the temple and the palace, and the ritual of worship is conceived on the same pattern as the ritual of service to the king. Ceraman Perumal Nayanar's *Adiyula* or *Tirukkayilayanana Ula* brings out in vivid form the daily routine of worship in the temple followed by the deity's procession through the streets around the temple.<sup>44</sup> The same procedure may be traced in the epigraphic records of the age, like the Tiruvalla Copper Plates;<sup>45</sup> the god is awakened with music and dance (*rajopacara*), bathed (*snapana* or *nirayupali*), dressed and fed and taken in procession (*pavani* or *Agara-*

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*pradaksina*). While every day is a festive day in the temple, there are special feasts and celebrations to mark the birth asterism of the deity, or other auspicious occasions. Then, the image of the deity has a *mukuta* like the king, payment to the temple is mentioned as *irai* (tax) and *tirai* (Tribute), and like a palace the temple is also constructed with *mandapas* (halls) and *prasadas* (mansions) surrounded by *parkaras* (fortress walls) and guarded by *dvarapalas* (gate keepers). The chief deity of the temple is accompanied by his consort and his relatives and served by a whole army of musicians, dancing girls, story tellers, actors, garland makers and priests-in-attendance.

It is this elaborate parallelism between the deity and the king that was to authenticate and legitimize the new monarchy in the different regions of the peninsula. However, although the terms employed pertain to royalty, yet the connotation is not exactly royal but feudal. This happens because the same terminology was used for king and lord in feudal society in spite of the difference in status. The plurality and co-existence of different deities, each deity occupying the position of the lord for his devotee, was as much recognized in the bhakti movement as the plurality and co-existence of the lords; each lord singularly commanding loyalty from his immediate vassal.

Society in South India may thus be represented by the typical feudal pyramid, i.e. the king at the apex, great landlords, big tenants, magnates, priests, merchants princes, etc. forming the middle portion, and the small tenants, serfs and slaves constituting the base. The governing principle in this order was the feudal contract, explicit or implicit in the relationship of castes, and the cementing force was supplied by the spirit of loyalty in service. The complete surrender of individual initiative formed the credo, which had to be followed by the majority of the people. There is a surprising resemblance between the lord-serf relationship at the core of feudal society and the deity-devotee relationship idealised and celebrated in bhakti literature. As noted earlier, interestingly, Sanskrit words like bhakta, bhakti, bhagavan, etc. have originally been derived from the root *bhaj* — 'to share', 'to apportion', etc. Gradually, the term bhakta came to denote the servant

who shared the wealth of his master in return for his personal service.<sup>46</sup> While this was the case in the North, the terms used in the South are also directly borrowed from the terminology of the feudal social structure. The devotee habitually addresses the deity as *udaiyar*, *tambiran*, etc.—all meaning 'lord' or 'master' and describes his own position as that of *adiyan*, meaning 'slave'. Thus, a king of permanent, unquestioning unconditional obedience towards the master forms the badge of the devotee. A large number of songs composed by the Nayanars and Alvars praise this bondage as the highest desirable objective in life, in contrast to wealth, and even deliverance.<sup>47</sup>

It is in this manner that the bhakti literature created an aura of sentimental romance around the feudal institutions of the age. Both slavery and serfdom in India were sublimated by this equation with the divine order, not only through the intellectual appeal of karma and punarjanma theories but also through the emotional appeal of the bhakti doctrine. Suffering was sweetened by its voluntary acceptance exalting it to the level of sacrifice. The intoxication of bhakti gave the lowliest of the low a chance of escape or at least a chance of pride in the exalted fellow-members of the community. This conferred on the entire community of the *paraiyas* the dignity of Nantanar, and the entire community of *panas* the dignity of Tiruppana Alvar. It was an indirect form of acceptance into the fold of Hinduism for the lower castes and tribes though, strictly speaking, only the brahmins had the ritualistic right to be religious in the full sense. Sentiment replacing ritual, this extension of membership had a double effect; one, of closing the ranks of Hinduism against the non-Vedic creeds of Jainism and Buddhism and two, to some extent, bringing outsiders within the sphere of an Aryanized society. Nevertheless, the brahman remained the brahman, and the pana or paraiya remained the pana or paraiya. The communities never mingled, though exceptional individuals from both the sides crossed the boundary with immunity, as in the well-known stories of Tiruppana Alvar Nantanar, etc. In short, an inclusive outer circle was drawn around the Hindu community, in which every member had a common right to participate in the cult of devotion or bhakti,

### Dissent, protest and reform

The bhakti movement, though a product of the temple and a causative factor behind its proliferation, had deviated a good deal from the orthodox philosophy of Brahminical Hinduism. This was an age of vigorous intellectual activity at both secular and spiritual levels. For example, Mahendravarman of Kanchi, in the beginning of the seventh century, who was a patron of the movement incisively delves in his *Mattavilasa prahasana* into the decay of the established religions, both Buddhist and Hindu; and, makes fun of the extreme forms of asceticism. The court of Kanchi also patronised Dandin, the many-sided genius, and, probably in the beginning of the ninth century, the great Shankaracharya who propounded the highly intellectual philosophy of Advaita and, more important for our theme, also synthesised the different intellectual and emotional strands of Hinduism including the cult of devotion. Against this background, the rejection of abstract metaphysics by the bhaktas denotes a spirit of strong dissent. Their general indifference to caste regulations carried a mild form of protest against the established social order. But there was no direct attempt at social reform, though the recognition of saints among outcastes amounted to a relaxation of caste rules. Here is a faint approximation to the principle of the potential divinity of man.

In terms of historical evolution the very concept of the shrine, whether it is considered to be progression or regression, it was a deviation from the concept of the abstract and amorphous powers—natural or supernatural—worshipped in Vedic rituals. Vedic ritualism itself came to be replaced by agamaic ritualism by the beginning of third century A.D. in the North and by the beginning of the sixth century in to the South. In fact, there was a ludicrous and syncretic combination of Vedic and agamaic elements.<sup>48</sup> Thus, while Vedic-agamaic ritualism was applicable and relevant for only the brahmins who followed it inside the temple, non-brahman Hindus participated through bhakti much as spectators vicariously participate in games.

It may be pointed out at this stage that the agamaic form of worship in temple had its own separate existence apart

from the bhakti movement. A certain element of devotion or bhakti was involved in its routine, too. However, in the movement this element of bhakti grew out of all proportions. It exceeded all limits of rules and regulations, ritualistic or social, and proved its eccentricity by subjugating every aspect of life to this one principle; an intoxication of over development which claimed its own right of existence. Of course, no qualitative change took place, though they made the temple immensely popular through the promotion of songs, dance and story. This led to the creation of several temple servants rendering artistic service. Consequently, even after the decline of the movement though there were isolated cases of individual bhaktas yet in most cases they did not rise beyond the status of local celebrities. Theirs remained essentially an individual pilgrim's progress towards salvation devoid of any social implications, as was the case earlier. Therefore, it was the peculiar social background which transformed bhakti from an esoteric creed into a dynamic social force.

The starting point of the bhakti cult was the system of offering material objects like land, cattle, utensils and lamps.<sup>49</sup> In the place of the material objects, one could offer one's own self in the spirit of service in the same way in which commendation took place. This meant that devotion was offered in return for the assumed guarantee of protection, i.e., just as the small landlord or the free peasant wanted protection from the fluctuation of fortune and encroachments of powerful neighbours, the ordinary devotee wanted protection from death, poverty and disease. A step higher, in the full intoxication of bhakti, the ideal devotee was not concerned with wealth and poverty or power and insecurity; and this is the attitude which nurtured the pure flame of devotion. When the movement was at the peak of its development, the most sublime and sophisticated expression of sentiments represented a spirit of equality. This was clearly against the caste system, and the spirit of renunciation was also counter to the gregarious instinct of the brahman-kshatriya power elite.

It is a truism to state that between precept and practice there is often a gap, while the former is confined to literature, nevertheless, the very formulation of these concepts contains a streak of dissent, protest and reform. Even if it did not

change society altogether, this deviation from the tenets of orthodox philosophy, accompanied by a sense of liberation from the rigid code of ritual, certainly contributed towards the refinement of society. The shining ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity—liberty from ritual, equality of caste and fraternity in devotion—were placed before the people. Of course, untouchability for the paraiya and the miserable state of poverty of lower classes continued. But all this was made more acceptable, and even more dignified, in the light of the ideal of renunciation. Besides, there was at least some exposure and criticism of the evils of greed, licentiousness and sensuality. Thus, there was some deviation from the unbridled course of vanity and worldliness due to the spontaneous evolution of a code of moral conduct among the community of devotees who propagated a new set of values in life. It was almost a revolutionary idea that Nantanar, the paraiya, could be admitted to a temple even after a series of ordeals and that Tiruppana Alvar was counted as a favourite devotee of Vishnu, and worthy of being carried on the shoulders of the chief priest of the temple. A king's readiness to forget his pride and mix with commoners, apologies to the lord and priest for offences committed, and be a humble slave at the feet of the deity was in itself a spectacle that chastened the minds of the people. The freedom which the devotees enjoyed from all rituals, and even rules of society, was a step forward in establishing the individual's inherent right to rebel, provided rebellion was legitimised by devotion. These devotees mixed freely and fearlessly with kings and brahmans, assuming equality and even superiority at times. In this way they set up a parallel spiritual-social authority, different from royal courts, and brahman councils, which derived its power from the conscience of the people. The badge of bhakti, in the form of the sacred ashes or the sandal paste of the forehead and chest, gave a certain immunity from punishment in this period, serving the same purpose as the sacred thread through the ages.

The same deviation from social norms may be noted in the case of the status of women. Notwithstanding the injunctions of Manu and other lawgivers, the eligibility of woman for the highest honour of direct communication with god was admitted

in the case of Mangaiyarkkarasi, Andal, Karaikkal Ammayar, etc. This departure from orthodoxy occurred at a time when brahman domination was responsible for suppressing women by keeping them at home and away from education, except in the case of devadasis or courtesans of the temple. The recognition of the equal status of women with men before god implied that her spiritual inferiority and inherent wickedness were momentarily set aside. In fact, the devadasi system which raised a number of educated and dedicated women to high status through renunciation was a by-product of the movement. It had a progressive content to begin with, though in later times the devadasis degenerated into common prostitutes. The readiness to dispense with rituals, priests and the restrictions of sex and caste brings out the importance attached to the individual self with its infinite capacity for development. This is what highlights those of bhakti elements which dissented from the orthodox creed, protested against the *varnashrama* code—including restrictions of sex—and reformed the social order. It is partly out of a misunderstanding of its exclusive Tamil context and partly out of a desire to discover modern ideas in early Indian society, that some scholars have exaggerated these elements to the extent of identifying the part with the whole.

### Return to orthodoxy

These deviations were, it has to be remembered, partial, temporary and counterproductive. As the popularity of Jainism and Buddhism waned, and many more kings, landed magnates, patronised Hinduism through the bhakti movement, the openness and flexibility of the movement gradually disappeared, i.e., it became a part of the establishment. Intellectual dissent—anti-ritualism, anti-caste protest, etc.,—came to an end by the beginning of the tenth century. The Alvars and the Nayanars no longer exist, instead their place is taken up by the *acharyas*; all of whom were brahmans and scrupulous ritualists. Naturally, with the threat of heretical creeds disappearing and with the achievement of social harmony, the forward urge of the bhakti cult came to an end. There was

a return to orthodoxy in all walks of life, especially in the field of culture. The temples with enormous landed property and established position in society became the conservative custodians of power and wealth. In the new context, there was no place for the aberrations of the devotee although the exploits of earlier saints continued to be sung and cherished. *Mathas*, headed by brahman *acharyas* increased in numbers and championed the cause of the *varnashrama dharma*. Kings depended no more on the prop of bhakti for consolidating their political power. Even the Tamil language was increasingly replaced by Sanskrit in the field of religion. The living spirit of the bhakti movement which rebelled against many things now gave place to the decorative charm of its myth and literature.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. An earlier wave could be identified in the *Vedic-Shastraic-Puranic* influences in the literature of the Sangam. For details, see M G S Narayanan, "The *Vedic-Shastraic-Puranic* elements in Tamil Sangam Literature" *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1975, Aligarh, pp. 76-91.
2. The identity and chronology of individual saints have been subject to much controversy among scholars. We have adopted the dates as given by K A Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 1976, 3rd edn., Madras, pp. 368-72.
3. Sundaramurti's *Tiruttondattogai* shows a comprehensive understanding of the Shaiva saints. See K Subrahmanyam, ed., *Periyapuranam*, 1974, Srivaikuntam, pp. 54-7. Nammalvar's knowledge of the temples of South India is again an index to this fact. See *Tiruvaymoli*, K Gopalacharyar, ed., *Nalayira Prabandham*, 1959, Madras, Part 24, 1-196.
4. For a discussion of the Sanskrit terms *bhakti*, *bhakta*, *bhagavan*, *bhagavata*, etc., see Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaishnavism*, 1967, Delhi, pp. 37-9, 110-11. This point is strengthened by the fact that in the Indonesian language; possessing a large number of Sanskrit words borrowed in the ancient period, the word *bakta* (*bhakta*) is used in the sense of a servant. See Venugopala Panikkar, "Bahasa Indonesia", *Sarani*, 1977, Calicut University, p. 32.
5. A large number of inscriptions from early medieval South India pertain to temples. T N Subrahmanyam, *South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, 1954, Madras, 4 Vols. especially No. 8 of 1918, *ARE*,

1918, II, 34 which records an otherwise unknown of Tirujnanasambandar.

6. There are many temples in which the saints are defied. See 400 of 1916 which records the consecration of a temple to Kulashekhara Alvar in *Mannarkoyil*. Bronze status of Ceraman Perumal Nayanar and Sundaramurti Nayanar are set up in the temple at *Tiruvancaikkalam*. Events from the lives of the Shaiva saints are depicted in temple paintings in Tanjore. R Champakalakshmi, "New Light on the Chola Frescoes of Tanjore", *Journal of Indian History*, Golden Jubilee Volume, pp. 349-60. For Shaiva sculptures, see *Annual Reports of South Indian Epigraphy*, 1908, para 65 and 66 and *id*, 1920, pp. 102 ff.
7. K A Nilakanta Sastri, "Hindu Renaissance of the Pallava Period", *The Hindu*, 25th May, 1961.
8. See V Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, 1904, 1966, Madras, p. 10.
9. Kalladanar, *Akananuru*, 209. There are different theories regarding the origin of the Pallavas but there is no certainty about their early history. This view is put forward by the authors as a possible solution to the riddle.
10. C Minakshi, *Administration and Social Life Under the Pallavas*, 1938, Madras, passim. See also Sastri, *A History of South India*, pp. 146-50.
11. See S R Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Temples*, 1971, New Delhi; *Middle Chola Temples*, 1975, Faridabad.
12. Sastri, *A History of South India*, pp. 174-5.
13. K A Nilakanta Sastri, *The Pandyan Kingdom*, 1929, London.
14. M G S Narayanan, "Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Kulashekhara Empire". Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1972.
15. See n. 5 above See also K A Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, 1955, Madras, 2nd edn. pp. 635-40. There is the case of Manikkavasagar, one of the greatest names in the history of Tamil Shaivism who belongs to c. 9th century but who is not, strangely enough, counted among the Nayanars. However, his *Tiruvacakam* embodies all the qualities characteristic of the bhakti movement including the superb form of ecstasy, opposition to Buddhism, attachment to the temples, and complete surrender to the master. For a recent study of the saint, see Glenn E Yocum, "Maikkavacakar's image of Shiva", *History of Religions*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 20-41.
16. T V Mahalingam, *Kanchipuram in Early South Indian History*, 1969, Bombay, pp. 64-76.
17. N P Unni, ed *Mattavilasa*, 1974, Trivandrum.
18. Mahalingam, *op. cit.* pp. 71-3
19. Sastri, *Pandyan Kingdom*, pp. 59-66.

20. Narayanan, "Kulashekhara Empire", op.cit. pp. 620-36.
21. Ibid. also M G S Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 1972, Trivandrum, pp. 31-7.
22. For the inscription, see D C Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. I, 1942, Calcutta, pp. 90-1. For the identification of the Pillar in a temple complex, see John Irwin, "The Heliodorus Pillar : A Fresh Appraisal", *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, No. 6, Dec. 1974, London.
23. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicalum*, Vol. III.
24. Jaiswal, op. cit. pp. 112-13; D D Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, 1965, London, pp. 114-15.
25. Minakshi, op. cit. p. 176; Narayanan, "Kulashekhara Empire", pp. 556-9.
26. See No. 250 of 1926; No. 154 to 1895, *South Indian Inscriptions*, III, No. 202; No. 120 of 1925; Narayanan, "Kulashekhara Empire", pp. 568-71.
27. K C Varadachari, *Alvars of South India*, 1966, Bombay, p. 1.
28. Ibid., p. 105
29. Ibid. pp. 133-4.
30. T N Subrahmanyam, loc. cit.
31. The songs of the saints testify to this. For example, there are only six hymns of eleven or twelve verses each by Sambandhar, thirty-nine by Appar and four by Sundarar which are not dedicated to particular temples. Even many of these eulogise the temple cult. With regard to the Shaiva Nayanar's relation to specific temples, see George W Spencer, "The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Hymns", *Numen* 17, December, 1970, pp. 232-44. Kamil Zvelebil also points out the importance of the cult of sacred places to both Shaiva and Vaishnava saints. See *This Smile of Murugan*, 1973, Leiden, pp. 198-99.
32. *Periyapuramam*, op. cit. pp. 229-68, 665-73.
33. *T A S*, II, i No. 9 (3) pp. 85-6, No. 7 (L) pp. 46-8; pp. 131-207.
34. Sastri, *A History of South India*, p. 425.
35. *Ceraman Perumal Nayanar, Adiyula*, in M Raghava Aiyangar, ed *Caravantar Ceyyutkaval*, 1951, Trivandrum, Vol. II pp. 136-64.
36. T A Gopinatha Rao, *The History of Sri Vaishnavas*, 1923, Madras, p. 5.
37. *Periyapuramam*, op.cit. p. 629.
38. Ibid., p. 625.
39. Ibid., p. 66.
40. Ibid., p. 81.
41. Ibid., p. 271.

42. Nilakanta Sastri has pointed out how Cekkilar's *Periyapuram* is indebted to Camundaraya's *Trisastilaksanamahapurana* for its title. So also, even the number 63 for the Nayanars is an imitation of the 63 Jaina saints of the *Mahapurana*. See n. 7 above.
43. *Periyapuram*, op. cit. p. 54.
44. Aiyangar, ed., loc. cit.
45. *T A S*, II, III, pp. 131-207. See also other *South Indian Temple Inscription*. Subrahmanyam, op.cit.
46. See n. 4 above.
47. See for example, *Perumal Tirumoli*, IV, 2; *Mukundamala*, V. 3. Here is a free rendering of a hymn of Sundarar, given by K R Srinivasa Iyengar which offers another typical illustration of this sentiment :
- I'm the slave of all His devotees true,  
The slave of all the laureates of the spirit,  
The slave of those whose minds do rest in God,  
The slave of all the inhabitants of Tiruvarur,  
The slave of the priests who daily conduct the divine  
service thrice,  
The slave of the ascetics anointed all over,  
The slave of the *bhaktas* beyond Tamilakam's confines,  
The slave for ever of Tiruvarur's Lord.
- See R C Majumdar ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*;  
Vol. III, 1954, 1962, Bombay, pp. 331-2
48. See Sastri, *The Cholas*, pp. 635-6.
49. T N Subrahmanyam, op. cit. passim.

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