CHAPTER I

BHAKTI CULT IN SOUTH INDIA – A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bhakti needs no introduction to the students of Indian history and culture. The nineteenth century Western scholars considered Bhakti as the Indian counterpart of Protestant Christianity in medieval Europe. At the same time the Orientalist scholars found the roots of Bhakti in Bhagavad Gītā. The saint poets all over India praised Bhakti through their hymns in all regional languages, thus firmly establishing Bhakti in the scholarship in Indian religions.\(^1\) Regions were defined by the Bhakti poets who say about the places and its deity in their compositions.

In this chapter an attempt is made to look at the historical background of Bhakti, through a consideration of the distinctive representations of Bhakti in the medieval period. In this chapter, my study begins with the seventh century when the Bhakti hymns were composed in praise of god Vishnu and Siva by the Aḻvārs and Nāyanaṃārs. These hymns were collected and codified in two large compilations called Tēvāram and Nālāyira Divyaprabandham which formed the Bhakti corpus of hymns. In the sixteenth century Bhakti became a Pan-Indian movement and Peninsular India witnessed the compositions of Haridāsas like Kanakaḍāsā, Purandaradāsā and the compositions became a written canon in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Many scholars have studied this regional tradition of Bhakti using many excellent translations of Bhakti poems in a variety of regional languages including such as Kannaḍa, Tamil, Marāṭhi, Telugu. These poems have been translated into English and they have located the poems in the literary history of regional cultures. Had the poems been left in the diverse regional

\(^1\) Karen Pechillis Prentiss, The Embodiment of Bhakti, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.3
languages of their compositions, then it would not have been possible for a broad comparative study of Bhakti.

In Indian literary culture, the first text to use Bhakti as a technical idiom to designate a religious path is the Bhagavaṇḍ Gītā. In the Gītā, Bhakti denotes a method of religious experience that leads to liberation. In the case of Southern India, the early Tamil text Tirumuruṅguruppadai probably date to the early centuries A.D, we find glimpses of the concept of personal devotion centering around the circulation of pilgrims or devotees to the sacred centres associated with the worship of Muruga whose cult centered around the six sacred centres – Ārupadaivīdu – was the earliest manifestation of intense personal devotion to a deity imagined as a personal god (Ishtadēvathā). Among the diverse paths or mārgās prescribed for attaining the goal variously called as liberation or mōkshā, bliss and heaven, the Bhakti mārgā is the most simple and easy way to attain mōkshā or liberation.

The Bhakti poems of early medieval India presuppose that the poet has intense devotion to a personal deity and this experience is transformed into a literary corpus which is a bhakti poem. The poems associated with the bhakti tradition encapsulate information about the poet’s feeling of intense identification with the lord about whom he/she sings together with a wealth of collateral information about his/her social status, family background, socio-economic situation and status in the society. There is an important dynamic at work in the poems, as the authors join together transcendent and local themes. The poems are personal, yet the authors encourage listeners to participate in their worldview in which the transcendental god is perceived as local deity.

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2 R Champakalakshmi, Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre Colonial South India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.71

3 George A Grierson, ‘Bhaktimarga’ in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Edited by James Hastings, New York: CharlesScribner’s Sons, 1910, p.44
The agency of the poet is high-lighted in the Bhakti poems. Poets openly refer to themselves in their poetry, either through the first-person voice or through the mention of their names. Human voice in the poetry is important for our understanding and definition of Bhakti. Bhakti is essentially the realization of religious bliss through devotional acts of adoration which include singing songs and sometimes ecstatic dances. The Bhakti poets invested their poetry with feelings of intense devotion in order to communicate a personal religious experience to a wider audience. It was this aspect of Bhakti which was inherited by the Vārkari saint- singers of the Deccan region and Purandaradāśā essentially followed this path.

An important theme in the regional-language Bhakti traditions is that the anthologizers and interpreters focused on representing Bhakti poets as saints. Later interpreters thus worked creatively within Bhakti’s tradition of embodiment. This theme is so all-encompassing that it is not an exaggeration to suggest that saints became the primary incarnation of Bhakti. The result was extensive biographical literatures written in regional languages. In contrast, the biographies detailed the specific embodiment of each bhakta, including caste, family, hometown, and deeds. Generally speaking, it was an issue of concern to biographers who wrote in regional languages to represent the diversity of those on the path of Bhakti, through their texts, they asserted that in spite of their differences all bhaktas are on the same religious path.⁴

Paṭikams or poetic compositions contain the biographical details of the composers/poets. What unites them is their attempt to represent devotion or Bhakti to their personal god in their works which involves a conscious intertextual perspective with regard to the works of other poets and hymnists. In the early period stretching from the sixth to the seventh century the poems were circulated freely among the community of believers, who are

⁴ Karen Pechillis Prentiss, op.cit, p.7
called Māhēswarās in the case of the Saivites and Srivaishnavās in the case of Vaishnavites. However during the reign of Rājarāja I (985-1014 A.D), the emphasis shifted to the saints themselves and the tradition of installing images of the Nāyānmārs was initiated by the Chōḷās. This trend culminated in the elaboration of a full fledged Hagiography which is found represented in Sekkilār’s Periyapurāṇam, then in the period from sixth to twelfth centuries, Bhakti tradition had passed through two distinct phases – first when the emphasis was on the compositions per se and later on to the hagiographical literature pertaining to the saints. In medieval South India, from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries A.D. there were far-reaching transformations in different fields of culture, including poetry, art, kingship, ritual and philosophy. A thread of continuity through this great time period was Bhakti, a path of participation in the worship of a personal god. This period saw the active participation of royal houses and dynasties in the construction and patronage to temples. The Chōḷās seem to have made the policy of pādalperaṭṭalās, places that have received a song, and building elaborate shrines for the deities. As Champakalakshmi argues Bhakti got underpinned by the Chōḷā state and kingship through temple construction. All these contributions helped in the construction of a distinctly Tamil mode of religiosity. The religious tradition unfolded by a complex interaction between different agents – the hymnists, the priests, the kings and philosophers in turn influenced religion, temples and the ideological superstructures as George W Spencer puts it. All these agents –hymnists, kings and priests—had different agendas and represented their Bhakti in different styles and modes.
The interpreters of Bhakti have in common the praxis of representation. The concept of representation involves the intersection between private and public, the real and imagined and the image and the reality. Representation therefore can be viewed as a method by which agents participate in the public sphere and use their literary works as vehicles for their expression of their subjectivity and their subjectivity is invested with the authenticity of personal experience.

The bhaktas by their literary creation translated abstract ideas of religion society and individual into a text which was easily accessible to laymen, and thus the worldview of the intellectual reached the masses. In this sense the Bhakti poets were the unacknowledged ‘legislators’ as P.B Shelley put it. The study on Bhakti opens the door to the understanding of how the Bhakti poets represented their visions of Bhakti in their historical contexts. Representation is the creative space in which cultural agents act. The main issue of concern in the development of Tamil Siva Bhakti was to define Bhakti as a religious path that related to the conditions of embodiment as they were understood by different agents in different historical periods.5 The meaning of Bhakti as participation was not an issue of discussion, for it was presumed so by all authors; what was more important was the way to understand its significance for their era.

Bhakti was established as part of Tamil culture through many centuries, from the time of the Bhakti hymns’ composition in the early medieval period (seventh through ninth centuries) through their active interpretation in later medieval times (to the fourteenth century), and it is accepted today as a major contribution to a distinctive Tamil cultural heritage. Tamils today appreciate the Bhakti hymns as a classical element of Tamil history, along with the Sañgam poems, the Tirukkural, Vaishnava Bhakti poems, and the poetry of Manikkavachakar, among a wealth of writings in Tamil.

5 Karen Pechilis Prentiss, op.cit
Tradition understands Tamil Bhakti to have begun with hymns composed by the three famous hymnists, Sampantar, Appar (Tirunāvukkarasar), and Suntarar (Nampi Arurār), referred to as “the three” (mūvar). There is no apparent reason to doubt the historicity of these poets and that they lived during the seventh to ninth centuries A.D although a minority of scholars would date them either earlier or later. Their hymns participate in a shared discourse of praise to Siva, with similar language and poetic techniques, yet there are also difference among the three in terms of content and tone, which are alluded to in various popular characterizations, including “Sampantar and Appar sang of the god, while Sunṭarar sang of himself,” and “Sampantar is the child of the Lord, Appar His servant and Suntarar His friend”.

The hymnists’ emphasis on place was a key feature by which they distinguished Bhakti from other Hindu practices. The poets identified their ishtadēvathās as belonging to a place. Through their pilgrimages, they established a community of bhaktas.6

In defining Bhakti as a religious path, the mūvar represented Bhakti as a theology of embodiment. The mūvar expressed their Bhakti in their own experiences, their visions of Siva, their pilgrimages to Śaiva sites, and their interaction with a community of bhaktas. Representations of Tamil Śiva-Bhakti were from the beginning, concerned with issues of embodiment i.e. the poet’s corporeal realization of god not only in the imagining of god but also in the embodiment of humanity and the questions it raised. Issues of embodiment constituted a rhetoric that informed the composition and development of Tamil Śiva-Bhakti in the works of Tamil authors. Later interpreters understood the hymns of the early Bhakti poets to be authentic and original Tamil expressions of Bhakti and this courses of inspiration for various

understanding of the path of participation in the worship of god. Yet, each group also brought its own perspective to Bhakti, their perspectives understood Bhakti to be an autonomous religious path yet related it to developments in their time including imperial temple worship and philosophical writing in Tamil.

In the tenth through twelfth centuries, the development of imperial stone temples both symbols and actualizations of the potent material and spiritual powers of kings reached a summit with the Chōḷā dynasty. The hymns which were unabashedly regional in comparison with the increasingly systematized modes of priestly worship in these temples came to be an established part of worship. It was in this context of imperial temples that a principal stream of Tamil Siva-Bhakti’s development became stories of the Bhaktās themselves, which were depicted in paintings and sculptures and written in verse. These stories explored details of caste, family, employment, actions of worship, and salvation. Detailed knowledge of these practitioners of Siva-Bhakti thus became knowledge of Bhakti; Bhakti became embodied as saints (nāyānmar). Telling stories of the nāyānmar culminated in the twelfth century Periyapurānām (Great Traditional Story), a multivolumed text attributed to Sekkilār. In contradiction to earlier biographies, Sekkilār firmly contextualizes the nāyānmar in imperial temple culture by reasserting the access to Siva, certainly of salvation and diversity of bhaktās on the same religions path that characterize Tamil Siva-Bhakti but that had become negotiated in the imperial temple culture.

Although some might view these historical developments as additions on the original formulations of Bhakti by the three poets, they are, in fact, all original understandings of Bhakti. Later interpreters of Tamil Siva-Bhakti drew upon Bhakti’s thesis of embodiment while they contextualized the mūvar’s hymns and stories of the nāyānmar in their distinctive world views.
Bhakti and its votaries created a number of trends in the intellectual history of medieval Tamil country. The place sanctified by a song became a temple site patronized by the chōḷa kings there by linking Bhakti with the royal kingly ideology. The imperial temple cult was furthered when the ṛgamic strands of Saivism began to surface in imperial temples as shown by R.Nāgaswāmy in his work on Brihadēśvara Temple.7 The Nāyancīr saints were composers on a pilgrimage, singing the praises of Siva. Their followers – Srīmāhēswarās hoped for liberation by actively engaging in temple worship whose grammar was elaborated in the ṛgamic literature. The message bearers of Bhakti conveyed the sense of Bhakti as participation in the worship of divine. For all of the Tamil poets, Bhakti is the idea that encourages active participation in the worship of Siva and Vishnu and life itself was regarded as a worship offered to god. Bhakti became embodied, then, in the words, actions, and images of agents who gave it distinctive representation, based on their engagement with their own historical contexts and rhetoric.8

Krishna Sharma in her book Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, defines Bhakti generically as “devotion,” rather than as “devotion to a personal deity.” “Devotion” has been successfully discussed cross-culturally, in an encyclopedia article by David Kinsley. Bhakti subsumes in addition to the devotional aspects of religion like praise(stōtra), prayer(mantra), meditation(dhyāna), self-discipline- all these practices were regarded as leading to embodiment with Śiva and Vishnu.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term devotion originated in Latin and in its earliest sense denoted that which was consecrated to something either good or evil. Then the term took on a positive sense of devotion to something good, implying loyalty, it was in this

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8 Ibid, p.66
sense that the term passed into Christian ecclesiastical usage, meaning ‘devoted to God, piety, service, and religious zeal’. Significantly only the Christian meaning of devotion entered Middle English from old French which derived its usage from ecclesiastical Latin. So our use of the term in English is historically derived from Christian usage. But the conceptual limitations of Bhakti as religious piety did not last in the Romance languages, for during the sixteenth century its semantic range expanded to include reference to secular persons and things. In contemporary usage the term devotion is generally regarded as a synonym for Bhakti.

The delinking of the meaning of devotion from its original ecclesiastical usage has consequences for our understanding of the word as a religious term. Some of the issues are raised in the contemporary study of the term; for example, Charles Hallisey has eloquently described the term’s long and difficult history in the scholarship of history of religions. He notes that two main branches of academic thought have developed to investigate the meanings of devotion. One is to emphasize an esoteric context for devotion, equating it with mysticism. The other is to stress a popular context, in which devotion is the religious response of the common folk. In both cases, the image is one of devotion flowing through the borders of established religion; it is not a central premise for organized religious worship.9

Hallisey’s emphasis on active self-involvement is important and relevant to the study of Bhakti. Poets who write or sing Bhakti poems in regional languages are involving themselves or taking part in the worship; they are making god their own. This does involve emotional commitment. For example, there are images of uncontrolled love for god in the Tamil poems, which convey a sense of the bhakta’s longing or even madness for god.10 At the same time, however, these poems situate this state of mind in the context of knowing about god: who god is,

10 Ibid, p.23
and how we can participate in the realization of god. When the lives of the ālvārs and nāyanmārs were written in the twelfth century, their lives were imagined to be circumscribed by the circle of devotion that encompassed the poet, the deity and his community.

It appears to be the case that the terms devotion in English and bhakti in Sanskrit may have developed in two different ways: as devotion took on more secular meanings, Bhakti increasingly became a technical religious term. Bhakti poets in both Sanskrit and regional languages associated Bhakti with knowledge of God and a religious path to salvation. Philosophers who wrote in both Sanskrit and Tamil in medieval Tamilnādu attempted to analyze the knowledge within Bhakti and to relate it to other ways of being religious. Thus, the English word devotion does not accurately convey the issues at stake in Bhakti. And yet we cannot perform a redescription every time we translate the term into English. Increasingly, the term participation is appearing in scholarship as a gloss for Bhakti. This gloss can be derived from the Sanskrit root of Bhakti, bhaj, meaning “partake, participate.” Participation signifies the bhaktās relationship with god; it is a premise of their poetry that they can participate in God by singing of God, by saying God’s name, and in other ways.

The use of vernacular languages for Bhakti poems have been interpreted by many scholars as a protest against Sanskrit literary culture. If we look at all ancient literature in Indian history, Sanskrit was the pre eminent medium for religion, philosophy, commentary, poetry, epics and even for the gods to speak to one another. Sheldon Pollock, in his Language of the Gods in the World of Men has discussed the evolution of vernacular languages in poetry and politics of the early medieval period. He says that the Sanskrit cosmopolitan and the vernacular have been largely taken as two modes of literary communication directed toward two audiences-

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the elite and the common mass respectively. He also differentiates between the two as the language that travels well and the one that does not.\textsuperscript{12} It was in this background that regional languages were used for composing poems, to take the classical literary culture to the common men in an intelligible manner. Some scholars interpret this voice in regional languages as the voice of protest. But this voice of protest in the poems was only one aspect of Bhakti’s encompassing role of participation. The vernacular poems highlight the voice of the poet. At the same time the devotional texts in Sanskrit are aphoristic in nature. In Bhakti poems both the author and the language he speaks are important. In Tamil Bhakti of the early medieval period, poets believed that god is as important as one’s own mother tongue. They believed that god would listen to their praise and pleas when offered in their mother tongue. In this context I would like to quote A.K Rāmānujan’s translation of nammalvar. In his view, god lives inside as a mother tongue does and we live in god as we live in a language- a language which was there before us, which is still around us in the community and which will be there after us. To lose this first language is to lose one’s beginnings”.\textsuperscript{13}

The poets not only composed poems in regional languages but also offered reflections on the social, and historical milieu in which they lived. They were good observers, they used the images of every day life and in their compositions they also described the images of god, the institutional base of Bhakti- the temples and its rituals. Very often the bhakṭī’s voice was highlighted in the poems either in the form of first person or through third person. One can find the poet expressing his own voice in the first person, particularly the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs of early medieval period. This invocation by devotion to god through first person narrative was


inherited by Purandaradāsā from the early Tamil Bhakti compositions. North Indian poets like Kabir preferred to express his voice in the third person. It is said that the Bhakti poets used what they knew and what they observed to supplement their poetry, but it has to be taken into consideration that they composed from 500 to 1200 years ago. Their hymns may vary in style, but the poems shed light into their historical contexts.

Bhakti found in poems are in a sense, the bhaktā’s response to the world around them. They at times admire the people around them and the society in which they live. At times they shower criticisms upon the surrounding culture through willfully jerky lyrics. The degree of criticism represented in their poetry differ from one poet to another. Some times they used sophisticated and graceful language that emphasized the beauty of their respective languages. The Tamil Saivās and Vaishnavās belonged to this category. But there were other groups whose poems were strong enough to criticize the surrounding culture - the Vīrāsaivās of Karnātaka belonged to this category.

The poetry of the Bhaktas refashioned in the vernacular languages their imagining of the divine together with their perceptions of god, man, society and the mutual symbiosis between them. Bhakti is the frame within which the Bhakti poets determine appropriate acts of participation. The Saguna bhakṭās i.e those who represented the divine in an anthropomorphic form, the tradition to which the vārkari poets of Mahārāshtra belonged framed their acts of participation in Bhakti using elements drawn from popular religions, myths, legends and worshipped their gods by offering flowers lamps and singing hymns.14 They acknowledged their connection with these traditional methods by using epic and purānic images in their poetry. For

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14 Karen Prentiss Pechilis, op.cit, pp 27-28
the nirguna Bhakti poets, ritualized acts performed outside the temple context, such as the recitation of the mantra of god’s name at any time or place, are illustrative of the Bhakti path.

Scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were correct in associating Bhakti with change and with a critical perspective; that they characterized Bhakti as “reform” in naming these changes depended at least in part on the comparison with Christianity that provided the context for scholarly writings on all other religions at that time. Later scholars have been critical of the tendency to use Christianity as a yardstick, yet many of the early ideas are important and did provide a catalyst for issues discussed in contemporary scholarship. In any case, their excesses should not prevent judicious and carefully thought-out comparisons with Christianity.

**Pilgrimage and its significance in Bhakti**

Pilgrimage is a prominent feature in Indian religious traditions. The popularity of pilgrimage whether in honor of a natural site, a founder figure, or a god has incited many to consider it as a pan-Indian phenomenon; for example Stella Kramrisch asserts that “the sacred Geography of India recognizes the whole country as a field of more than human activity. It is carried by the rivers, from the celestial region where they have their prototype and origin, down to the earth”.\(^{15}\) In defining the place or landscape, the Bhakti poets drew their ideas, motifs and conceptual horizon from the vernacular tradition as pointed out by Sheldon Pollock.\(^{16}\) The example of the Varkaris is particularly germane due to the fact that Jnānēswar in his Jnānēswari composed in Marāthi emphasized the vernacular medium as having the same status as Sanskrit. One may therefore argue that by singing about the place and landscape the Bhakti poets created a sense of cultural identity and regional consciousness. When traditions of pilgrimage are taken

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\(^{15}\) Stella Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, p.3

\(^{16}\) Sheldon Pollock
collectively this is an accurate impression. In the eyes of a pilgrim, all parts of India are not equal; it matters where one stands. The concept of ṭīrtha by which we mean the circulation of pilgrims to sacred centres was further strengthened by the Bhakti poets who linked act of worship to the physical movement in space.

If we go back to the classical Sanskrit tradition, we can see the usage of the term ‘ṭīrtha’ to designate pilgrimage in the Vedic and Upanishadic sources. The word ‘ṭīrtha’ is derived from the verb meaning “to cross over” associated with the powers of rivers. Diana Eck proposes that the symbol of crossing river as a place where all the elements of this world are brought together in symbolic microcosm for the vertical crossing of the sacrificer to heaven”.\(^{17}\) In this context river is said to have purifying, perhaps even confessing powers; it is an auspicious place to begin a spiritual journey, containing all successful elements within it. Journey to a ‘ṭīrtha’ is called pilgrimage or Tīrthayātra, the concept often expressed in the Puranic literature. Many Puranic texts refer to several sacred places; ‘Tīrthayātra Parvā’ is a separate section devoted to pilgrimage in Mahabharata.

Pilgrimage is especially stressed in biographical texts of regional language Bhakti leaders. Often the pilgrimages are transregional, but the texts tend to suggest that one particular region is most efficacious. The stories of regional-language bhaktās also include tales of bhaktās who meet each other on the path of pilgrimage and on the path of Bhakti. They are kindred spirits, and in some cases the texts suggest a lineage of Bhakti saints. For example, the Tamil Periyapurāṇam (Great Story, ca twelfth century) tells of bhaktās on pilgrimages, mainly the area traditionally associated with the Tamil language and somewhat in the neighbouring areas of


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Kerala and Karnataka. The three most famous Tamil Śaiva bhaktas, Sampantar, Appar, and Suntarar, are described in the later biographies as meeting en route in the Tamil lands; for example, it is from the child saint Sampantar that Tirunāvukkarasu is said to have been given the name Appar, “Father.” The Hindi Bhaktamālā by Nabhadās (c.a seventeenth century) describes the meeting of bhaktas in various areas. For example, Ramānanda (fourteenth or fifteenth century) is said to have studied under his guru, Raghavānanda, who was himself a guru in the Vatakalai (northern) school of Ramānuja’s Śrī Vaisnavism. Ramananda became the fifth leader and teacher of this school and is said to have proceeded from south to north India, where he began to write Bhakti texts in Hindi. In the north, he had twelve disciples, including Kabir. Chaitanya is said to have made the trip from Bengal through the South and back to Puri in Orissa; he brought with him from the south two influential texts, the Brahma-Samhita and the Krshna-karnāmṛta. The biographies of Vallabha and Chaitanya describe pilgrimages they took across northern India, including Gujarāth, Banāras, Vrindāvana. Other texts that tell of the lives of the bhaktas include the Marathi Bhakta-vijaya and the Bhaktalilāmṛta by Mahipati (ca eighteenth century). Perhaps the Bhakti poets eschewed social reform as they viewed the praxis with god as one based on complete devotion without expectation.18

When we look into the hymns of medieval Bhakti poets, we find that their pilgrimage was highlighted by naming the places or towns in which they found their god. For example Purandaradāsā sang on god Krishna of Udiipi, describing the whole topographical features of the place and to him Krishna of Udiipi was the world famous god.

“Kandēna Udiipiya Krishnana

18 Bhattacharya N.N, Medieval Bhakti Movements In India, NewDelhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, p.32
Bhoomandala Dolage Uddanda Mohipana”¹⁹

This song like the majority of the Bhakti poets’ hymns, locates the poets identification of god Vishnu (in case of Purandaradasa) in a named town – here, Udipi.

Karen Pechillis Prentiss has discovered in her study that the pilgrimages of the Bhakti hymnists of early medieval South India brought what is inside out and what is outside in.²⁰ through their lyrics and through their journey that have brought out their internal elements i.e. their love to their personal god, their constant meditation upon Him, and their yearning to be in close to Him. The external element is the god himself, who is brought inside the poets’ hearts, who is concerned about the people of the place where he belongs to. Thus the poets are personified as bhaktas and the god is alive in everything, including the poets, Karen says. The poets sing from experience, the range of their emotions encourages identification with them as imperfect people, bound by the limits of human condition. They identify themselves as ordinary human beings working against numerous limitations in order to reach god. The theme of human failing is most prominent in almost all poets’ hymns. When these internal feelings become expressed in poetry, changes occur: the feelings of agony and distress become words in honor of their god, and their colloquial language becomes sacred Tamil, Kannada or Telugu according to the regional identity of the poet.

In the Tamil Bhakti poems of Siva and Vishnu, the Alvars and Nayanmars address their very human problems by doing more than involving themselves in the praise of their gods, they also presuppose that god comes to them. In many of the Saivite hymns, images of Siva are

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²⁰ Karen Pechillis Prentiss, op.cit p.50 , para 2
placed in Tamil towns, through a variety of techniques including the naming of Tamil towns to localize the vision which Indira Peterson has identified as “blending technique”.21

The poets identified several different types of places as sacred and that built structures (temples) in the pilgrimage sites are often a secondary development. In the Tamil country the process converting the sacred sites sung by the Nāyanmārs and Ālvārs began with the early Chōḷās and continued until the end of the early medieval period. Chōḷā inscriptions particularly the copper plate records situate the practice of Chōḷā kingship in the context of the patronage extended to temple sites sacralised by the songs of the Bhakti poets. In the Vijayanagara period however singers like Purandaradāsā visited such temples which by that time had become prominent worshipping centres. The poets designated both natural place as well as social space which they crossed as home to their god. Natural place refers to the physical geography and the social space refers to the social components i.e. various sections of the society stretching from the king in the court to peasants in the farm lands. The poems give the impression that the hymnists were free to wander and offer their songs of praise to their ishtadēvathās.

As my study deals with the 16th century Kannada poet Purandaradāsā, I would like to highlight him as a singer saint who wandered in the nook and corner of Vijayanagara Empire as a part of his spiritual journey. He associated Vishnu as the god who was encapsulated with in the Vijayanagara territory. Vishnu whom he identifies as Viṭṭala his Ishtadevatha is in the hearts and minds of the people of Vijayanagara, Viṭṭala is in Vijayanagara towns and he is in Vijayanagara temples. Through his peregrinations he created a region of efficacy based on a network of diverse places that embodied Bhakti. The varieties of ideas and expressions in his poems suggest

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21 Indira V Peterson, ‘Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as metaphor and motif in the Tevaram hymns of the Tamil Śaivite Saints’ in Journal of the American Oriental Society Vol.102, no.1, 1982. p.77
that during his pilgrimage he mingled with different kinds of people, places and came across different ideas. In general it is said that the Bhakti poets of medieval India used anything and everything they could in their poems. In this way Purandaradāśā also intertwined fragments of ancient and contemporary, mysterious and esoteric, sacred and mundane, and bits of realism and imagination to create an interconnected discourse of Bhakti. The message of Bhakti provided through the songs of Purandaradāśā was that Vishnu is not only the source of everyone and everything but also the contrary- all elements of this universe should make one think of Vishnu actively taking him into one’s heart and minds. Purandaradāśā’s firmness on the path of Bhakti – the specific way that they constituted that path – means that although he drew upon many intellectual heritages like Kannada, Sanskrit, textual, ritual and so on, none of them was simply adopted in its own right. He used pieces to create their own unique whole - the Vishnu Bhakti.

The Bhakti movement in the Tamil south represents primarily a religious phenomenon with a social content. It began in the mid 6th century A.D and had a life span of three and half centuries. The cult was propagated by the Vaishnava and Saiva saints and their followers in the countryside through pilgrimages, singing and dancing. These saints received royal patronage, presumably healed the sick and performed other miracles. Their songs constitute the cream of Tamil literature in which several deities were addressed (most important being Siva and Vishnu). A comparative perspective may help to clarify the importance of the Bhakti saints in the cultural and religious life of medieval peninsular India. Peter Brown in his Cult of Saints has drawn attention to the fact that the saints of early Christianity were essentially martyrs whose graves became the centers for an expanding narrative of martyrology which linked the earth and heaven. Christian memoria meant the transformation of a grave or site of martyrdom lieu de memoir. Saints were invested with the power to intercede with god and Peter Brown suggests that this
feature was the sin-qua-non for the maintenance of the cult of saints until the challenge during the Reformation. Thus there was a sharp difference between the pre-Christian cult of heaves and its memorialization and the cult of saints and martyrs. In the case of early medieval South India, however the cult surrounding saints of the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions (Parampara) were brought into the framework of temple centered memorialization only during the reign of Rājarāja I who instituted worship of sixty three Nāyanmārs. We may consider this development as an apotheosis of sainthood, though more work needs to be done using a comparative perspective. Peter Brown significantly remarks:

“Every device of architecture, art ceremony, and literature was mobilized to ensure that holy graves and relics were made more eminent and more available”.22 The saints of medieval South India had to be content with the canonization of their earthly life and the interpretation of their songs in the liturgy of temples. They were not viewed as intercessors between the divine and the living. Sacrality inhered more to the temple and image (mūrti) installed there in, than to the saints per se.

The two fold character of the Bhakti movement was its two currents- Saivism and Vaishnavism. The Vaishnava saints were known as alvars and the Saiva saints- the nayanmars. Whether the movement started as a conscious venture is doubtful, it is assumed that many devotees or Bhaktas appeared in different centres simultaneously and the movement developed its identity gradually in the 9th century. The term nāyanmār is derived from the Sanskrit ‘Nayaka’ which also represents the 63 Bhutaganas of Siva. The term Alvar means one who delves deep into devotion. The term is derived from the root al- which means ‘to immerse’. The term also

means ‘to rule’ ‘to possess’ ‘to preserve’, as the chief function of Vishnu is preservation which is rather different from creation and destruction.

The early scholars viewed the movement from a literary perspective or as an ideological phenomenon with religion as its source of inspiration. Later, historical studies were carried out by scholars like R.G Bhandarkar, T.A Gopinath Rao who could fix a chronological framework to the movement which later became subject to scholarly disputes about the identity and dates of individual saints. Whatever the disputes may be, the sources to study the history of Bhakti movement are many and varied. The works of ālvārs and nāyammārs themselves constitute historical evidence for an analytical study of Bhakti. These works are in the form of devotional songs addressed to deities mostly with reference to particular temples. Songs of the Tamil Bhakti saints, chronicles and hagiologies composed by their followers, epigraphical references to the devotional works and the temples, sculptures, paintings and images representing the incidents of their lives are the various sources for the study of Bhakti as a movement.

In the light of previous studies on Bhakti movement, it is suggested that the movement had its origins on the east coast in and around such famous temples as Tirupati and Kānchī. Tirupati- the abode of Vishnu (Tirumāl) is mentioned as the Northernmost point of Tamilakam in the early Tamil Sangam literature. Venkatam was under the royal patronage of the Pallavās between the 3rd and 6th centuries. The new Pallava line of Simhavishnu established in the second half of the sixth century continued to patronize the Brāhmin and the brahmanical literature on a large scale during the next phase of the movement i.e. in the late six and early seventh centuries the Pallavās patronized other temple like Chidambaram, Thiruvārūr, Srīraṅgam etc, which were

located in the traditional Chōḷā territory. The main reason behind this smooth extension is brought out by the fact that the Chōḷās were the feudatories of the Pallavās. During the eight century, the Bhakti movement spread further south to Madurai, Thirunelvēli, Kumbakōnam etc, which were essentially the Pāṇḍyan territories. It was only during the final phase in the ninth century that the movement entered the south western coast and the temple like Thiruvanchikulam, Thirunāvai and Mūzhikulam became centres of devotion.24 The movement had deep cultural links among various people, traversing the political boundaries of many kingdoms. The movement also brought out people from various social backgrounds for example we can see ālvārs and nāyānmārs belonging to different communities taking part in the movement – nammālvār and periyaālvārs from the Brāhmaṇ community, Kulasēkara ālvār himself belonging to a ruling class, ālvārs like Tirumāṅgai and Tiruppāna belonging to the shūdra caste of Kallar and Pāna. A similar composition of different castes may be found among the nayānmārs also.

Thus by the end of the ninth century the Bhakti movement could cover the full territories of tamilakam spreading across the three major kingdoms – Chōḷā, Pāṇḍya and the Chēra. By this time the Śaiva and Vaishnava canons were prepared for the first time by Nāṭhamuni (10th century) who edited the Vaishnava canon and Nambi Āndar Nambi (11th century) compiled the earliest Śaiva hagiology.

**Tevaram and Nalayira Divyaprābandham**

The Tēvāram, Tēvā means "God", aram means "garland" denotes the first seven volumes of the Tirumurai, the twelve-volume collection of Tamil Śaivite devotional poetry. All seven

24 Ibid, p.385
volumes are dedicated to the works of the three most prominent Tamil poets (known as Nayanars) - Sampanta, Appar and Suntarar. Appar and Sampantar lived around the 7th century, while Suntarar lived in the 8th century. During the Pallava period the mūvar travelled extensively around Tamil country offering discourses and songs characterised by an emotional devotion to Śiva and objections to Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism. In the tenth Century AD, during the reign of Suntarar Chōlā I, a collection of these songs was found abandoned in the Chidambaram temple, along with other religious literary works, and collated by Nambiyaṇdar Nambi. All the songs in the Tēvāram (called patikam in Tamil) are believed to be in sets of ten. The hymns were set to music denoted by Panns and are part of the canon of the Tamil music. They continue to be part of temple liturgy today.25 Sheldon Pollock has pointed out that in the eleventh century under the aegis of Rājarāja, the Bhakti poems of the Tēvāram were assembled after being rediscovered in the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram. The incorporation of these poems into the newly formulated temple liturgies marks an important step toward the integration of Bhakti into the unfolding temple centred worship and ritual. The vernacularisation of canonical texts also accompanied the use of languages such as Tamil, Kannada and Marāthi in the emerging political dynastic centres of the Chōlas, the Chālukyas and the Rashtrakutas.

Champakalakshmi’s description of Bhakti hymnists as Paṭikam Pātuvar sheds light on the changing socio political context of early medieval period. In the early medieval period ritual singing of Bhakti hymns had more than a religious function. The first inscriptional evidence of the institutiuon of ritual singing by Patikam Pātuvar appears in the late 9th century pertaining to

25 N.Subramaniam Social and Cultural History of Tamilnad (to AD 1336), Udumalpet: Ennes Publication, 1975, p.43
the Pallava period. It became a regular activity in the 11th century during the reign of the Chōḷās-a pre eminent socio-religious activity of the temple in the Tamil region. Patikam pātuvar or the singers of verses appear in the inscriptions as Paṭikam Vinnappam Seivar i.e those who offer hymns in worship. Paṭikam singing represents a regional cultural form in the evolution of temple as the channel of social communication. Temple became the institutional base for Bhakti movement and" Bhakti ideal was consciously adopted and promoted by the cholas to integrate the Tamil macro region into a regional polity with a distinct regional culture".26

The hymns of three Śaiva saints called mūvar were known initially as Paṭikam from the 9th century and its collection was made for the first time in the period of Suntarar land was known as Tēvāram. The term Tēvāram has been interpretd as ‘private ritual worship’. There are inscriptions of the late 12th century which mentions Tēvāram as the ‘hymns sung infront of a shrine’.27 Tēvāram itself originally meant a shrine. Tēvāram consists of 796 hymns, among which roughly about 300 have been translated.28 The Tēvāram singers mediated between Siva and his devotees, interpreting, elaborating and emphasizing on the context and content of the text. The poet speaks about himself, the characteristic features of his poems, the benefits of rendering and listening to it. It was established as a part of communication process. The first stage in the evolution of these hymns was its composition by three saints in the 7th century, the second stage was its inclusion in the temple ritual and festivals and in the last stage appeared the canonization and conscious structuring of the text. The text was communicated to the public for

27 SII, Vol VIII, p.675
the first time by saints themselves, then by the ritual singers in the temples and finally by the cult leaders who established Maṭhās and schools for discourses.29

Composed before the 8th century A.D. by Vaishnavaite saints called Alvars, the Nalayira Divya Prabandham is a compendium of more than 3000 devotional songs. Though the names of the panns for most of the songs are missing in the printed versions, the pāsurams are known to have been rendered musically rather than merely recitation, and have been passed down the ages in this fashion. The present form of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham was compiled somewhere during the 9th and 10th centuries by Nāṭhamuni. The Prabandham sings praises of Śrīman Narayana or Vishnu and his many forms. The Alvars used to sing these songs of devotion at various sacred shrines known as the Divya Dēsams. The Nālāyira Divya Prabandham refers to the beginning of the canonization of the 12 Vaishnava poet saints, and these hymns are still sung extensively even today. Most of the works were lost before they were collected. However they were organized in the form of an anthology by Nāṭhamuni. The Divya Prabandam soon came to be regarded as the Tamil Vēda or Drāvida Vēda, so much so that the people stopped singing them and simply started reciting them. Among the 4,000 verses of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham are some 1,100 verses known as the Thiruvāymozhi, which are said to have been composed by Nammāḻvār of Thirukkurugoor.30

Important alvars are Periyāḻvār, Āndāḷ, Kulasēkhara Āḻvar, Thirumalisai Āḻvār, Thondaradippodi Āḻvār, Thiruppanāḻvār, Madhurakavi Āḻvar, Thirumangai Āḻvār, Poigai Āḻvār,

29 R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit. p.57
Bhootathālvār, Peyālvār, Nammālvār, Thiruvairangathamudhanar. ‘Nālāyira’ means four thousand in Tamil. It denotes the appropriate number of devotional hymns in Nālāyira Divya Prabandham. Chanting the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham forms a vital part of the daily activities of many South Indian temples especially Srīraṅgam.

Exemplar of Sainthood

The study of saints and saintliness and the concept of mysticism has increased over the past decades. Historians have given new insight into the role of holy men and women in society, holy sites and holy objects making the subject an important part of history. The central fact of the bhakṭā’s experience is an overwhelming consciousness of god and his own soul, a consciousness which absorbs or casts a shadow on all other centres of interest. However pantheistic the mystic may be on the one hand, however absolutist on the other, his communion with god is always personal. In Indian tradition the concept of Prapaṭṭi or total immersion in devotion to god is the fundamental concept of Bhakti. Mysticism of the Bhakti saints, the communion with god achieved through the medium of song, prayer and devotion was regarded as a pathway to salvation. The central importance of prayer, both individual and collective stems from its efficacy as a method for achieving mōkshā. The Bhakti saints propagated this idea through their compositions and Purandaradāsā innovated on the tradition of oral compositions which he inherited from the varkaris. The mysticism of the Bhakti tradition as argued by Vidya Deheija was based on the dual consciousness of godhead - - as the formless supreme on the one hand
and on the other as friend, a father, the lover or the child who is the object of personal love and adoration. The ultimate aim of a mystic is the union between God and the soul.

While the Bhakti ideology was not radical in its social orientation its mystical dimension was undoubtedly radical. The Bhakti saints emphasized the ecstatic realization of god a process that was predicated upon the distinction between the Absolute and the object of intense devotion which was the theme of the Bhakti saint’s devotion. The poet hymnists were not motivated toward social reform a criticism, nor were they enamored of corporate life and institutional modes of religious experience like the shamanic religions. As mystics, the Bhakti poets/singers may be termed as religious individualists in whom personal religion is raised to the highest level. As mystics, they speak to and of god as individuals not as member of a corporate group. A mystic’s social consciousness stems from his spiritual and religious knowledge and he tends to educate his followers to be in harmony with society rather than be in a state of conflict. In the early medieval period of Indian history, Bhakti provided a platform for all sections of the society to come together. At the same time Bhakti did not bring about any radical change in the existing social hierarchy. It brought all people together on a common platform at the same time making all of them understand what actually their place in the social ladder was.

**Bhakti as ideology**

The strength and momentum of Bhakti movement seem to have been intensified by means of royal patronage. Many rulers of the sixth and seventh centuries turned away from Jainism and Buddhism which illustrates the process by which Bhakti as a popular movement won over the rulers. The alliance between the Bhakti movement and emerging dynastic states has been the theme of several recent studies. As we have pointed out earlier royal patronage

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32 Ibid
extended to the shrines sung by the Nayanmars had two significant results. First the place sung by the saints was used by emerging kingships such as the Chōḷās to find legitimation to their kingdom. Medieval dynastic legitimacy was underpinned by systematic patronage to Siva and Vishnu temples, a process attested to by the Ambil Copper plate records of Sundara Chōḷā which speaks of the construction of tirukkaṟṟalai. Second, Bhakti forms of devotion, adoration and worship interacted with and influenced the agamic forms of religion with temples coming under the influence and control of Saivite monastic groups such as the Kāpālikas, the Pāṣupatas and the Kālamukhas. The Bhakti undercurrent survived the institutionalization of āgamic forms of worship. There are numerous references to temple construction between the seventh and seventeenth century.

Any study of Bhakti movement and its political and intellectual background must take into consideration the social bases of the movement and the process of state formation which was taking place almost in tandem with the movement. Alongside the emergence of the Bhakti movement, we also see the rise of dynastic states such as the Pallavas whose history is depicted in contemporary Śaivite hagiographical works as being steeped in violence against the Jains. Burton Stein in his Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India has argued that the Brahman peasant alliance i.e the hierarchical subordination of peasants to Brahmanas was the key feature of early medieval social formation in Peninsular India. As Burton Stein has shown, the Bhakti poets presented a hymnal tradition which celebrated the supremacy of the peasants over the non-peasants. Stein goes on to argue that the Brāhmin peasant alliances, the very social base of the Bhakti movement as well as of the emerging state was based on the convergence of interests between those who cultivated the land, and those who by their sacral functions
possessed a powerful ideological capability. This alliance lasted till the end of the medieval period. The Bhakti hymnal sacred geography underpinned the legitimation of their sacral kingship of both the Pāṇḍyas and the Chōḷās.33

The close relationship between the Bhakti tradition and temple networks stimulated under royal influence and patronage led to the gradual development of pilgrimage centres linking shrines, gods, devotees and temples in circulatory path which later became the tirthayathra. Medieval poet singers such as Purandaradāsā spoke of and sang about the pilgrimage centres that had developed out of the early Bhakti cult centres. The chief advocates of Vaishnava Bhakti were the devotees of Vishnu temples such as Tirupati, Kanchi and Srīraṅgam. Similarly the Siva temple worshippers of Chidambaram, Tiruvārūr etc were specially attached to Saivism and its propagation. They often undertook a pilgrimage of all important sacred centres of South India by singing and dancing. This created a big stir in the countryside. Periyapurāṇam gives an account of the joint pilgrimages undertaken by saints like Appar, Sampantar and Sundaramūrti. Such grand pilgrimages were undertaken by Nammālvār and Kulasēkhara Ālvār.

Temple also served as a source of livelihood for many people such as drummers, musicians, garland makers and dancers. A specific impact of the movement was the encouragement given to Dēvadāsis whom Leslie Orr refers as ‘the Daughters of God’. These dancing girls played a vital role in the popular appeal of the temple, as Bhakti spread through the media of songs, dance and hymns.34 Āndāl herself was a dēvadāsi who lived and died in Srīraṅgam. There is a tradition that Kulasēkhara Ālvār’s daughter was presented to Srīraṅgam

33 Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.84
temple as a dēvadāsi. She was called Chērakula nācciyar and a shrine is found in this temple specially dedicated to her. Leslie Orr has shown that the term dasa bore devotional connotation while the term dasi did not have any religious significance.

The Brahmans and the Brāhmin saints with their spiritual patrons in the courts and temples constituted only the elites of the Bhakti movement. There were a large number of devotees who were not involved in any form of productive labour, but moved from temple to temple in a cross-country religious campaign. They too received support all along their route. This was because of their service mindedness, not only in the major centres but also in a network of temples in the countryside. They considered themselves blessed by the opportunity for casual contact and service and still remained anonymous. It was these people who provided a popular base for the movement.

Bhakti attained popularity in the Kannada speaking regions of South India, when it assumed a new shape in the form of Vīrāsaiva movement. The Vīrāsaivas were devotees of Śiva, who under the leadership of Basavanna started a radical movement called Vīrāsaivism. They spread their teachings in the form of Vachanas and the composers of Vachanas were called as Vachanākāras. They opposed the existing classical literary tradition and adopted regional dēsi mode of writing. The regional dēsi registered its beginnings in the Kannada region through the Vachanākāras. They tried to build a tradition by opposing the very idea of tradition. The term Vachana also signifies prose in earlier Kannada which was written in a folk style. The use of such prose represented the poet’s liberation from a humiliating dependence on the state with its

35 M.G.S Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, op.cit,
36 Leslie Orr, op.cit, p.55
courtly pomp. The significance of Vachanākāras lies in their stubborn insistence on bringing the common folk into literary culture and using them for sophisticated intellectual purposes – even the courtly culture slowly entered into a process of exchange with such practices. The Vachanākāras found vachanas as a form that gave them freedom to display traditional learning on their terms. Viṅgashaivism became a major force in the production of cultural texts at court or in powerful monasteries in the 12th and 13th centuries. They adopted a regional style of writing not because they were ignorant of classical literary tradition. Inscriptions of the period create a genealogy of the vachanākāras by equating them with great Sanskrit writers of the past. They had great command over the metrical intricacies of tradition forms and it was this that they considered as a burden to be shaken off. They were deeply influenced by the ascetic ideals of their religious traditions, and they wanted to use their poetic talent to celebrate the god precisely by sacrificing their literary training.38 Sheldon Pollock has argued quite pertinently that the movement launched by Basavanna(1132-86A.D) represented a transformation in vernacular literary cultures in that religious identity was tied to sectarian and linguistic identities.39

**Bhakti in the Vijayanagara Empire**

The cult of Bhakti attained new heights in the heyday of Vijayanagara Empire since the fourteenth century. The rāyās of Vijayanagara extended patronage to Bhakti with temples as its institutional base. This was done for political legitimization. They patronized a large array of ideological strands within the fold of medieval Hinduism. These included patronage to Jaina temples (Basadis), Vishnu temples, Śiva shrines, Puranic deities such as Ānjanēya, Narasimha and Vīrabhadra and Sakta cultic shrines. The overarching armature under which the acts of

38 Ibid, p.363
patronage took place may be taken as the Bhakti ideology with its institutionalized base of temples. The rulers of Vijayanagara in the early days were patrons of Siva, whom they worshipped as Virupaksha, the principal deity. The Virūpāksha temple at Hampi testifies the fact that they were Saivites in their early days. The Sangama rulers and their successors adopted Virūpāksha as their sign manual. At some point of time in history, i.e in the 15th century the rulers of Vijayanagara began to show much affinity towards Vaishnavism, when the mythological ideas inherent in Ramayana epic and its association with the landscape of Vijayanagara influenced the rulers to shift their religious identity from Saivism to Vaishnavism. The Rama shrine known as Hazara Rama temple due to large number of sculptures depicting battle scenes from the Ramayana has been attributed to Dēvarāya I by George Michell. Given the architectural features with pronounced borrowings from the Drāvida tradition of temple architecture, their attribution may be accepted. The presence of this intricate with bold relief carvings may be taken as evidence of the gradual shift to Vaishnava religion, transition that began even in the early fifteenth century. The patron deity of Virupaksha was eclipsed with that of Lord Rama. The construction of the Rāmachandra temple at Vijayanagara Hampi signified a shift from Śaivism to Vaishnavism in the politics of temple patronage and construction. Earlier scholars such as Longhurst argued that the temple was constructed by Krishnadēvarāya as the temple carries two inscriptions of the king. More recently George Michell and Anna Dallapicola in their book *The Ramachandra temple at Vijayanagara* on the basis of the mention of the king Dēvarāya that the temple may have been constructed during the reign of Dēvarāya I (1406-22). While the exact date for the construction of the temple is not

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germane to our purposes, the epigraphical reference to Dēvarāya suggests that the shift to Vaishnavism predated the advent of the Sāluvās and the Tuluvās. The typically Dravidian style of temple construction following the pattern of the Chōḷās can be seen as an attempt of replicating in the royal centre of Vijayanagara, the imperial claim of being the Chōḷā Sthāpanāchārya.\textsuperscript{41} Here I find relevant the discussion on a distinctive tradition of Bhakti that became prominent in the Vaishnava context of Vijayanagara in the 15\textsuperscript{th} – 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

Worship of Vishnu became a remarkable feature of Vijayanagara religion when a group of Bhaktas or devotees of Vishnu, began to spread the philosophy of Madhvāchārya through their songs in praise of god Hari (a name of Vishnu). These Vaishnava Bhaktas belonged to the tradition of Haridāsas who upheld the supremacy of god Hari, an important tenet of Madhvāchārya’s philosophy of Dvaita Vēdanta. In Madhva’s Dvaita system, Bhakti meant the ceaseless flowing of love for god, based on understanding the divine glory, power and wisdom of the supreme on whom all creation depends; attached always to the intended one, the Bhakta holds him as ultimate.\textsuperscript{42} For the Haridāsas who belonged to this school Vishnu was the central form of the sacred, the focus of their devotion and rituals.\textsuperscript{43} The Haridāsas belonged to the sampradaya of dasakutas. Dasakuta was a forum of Dasas or school of servants of Vishnu started by Vyāsarāya. The important dāsas like Jagannātha Dāsā, Purandaradāsā, Kanakadāsā and Vijayadāsā sang songs on Vishnu. Their songs were not merely rhetorical structures but individual personal insights, experienced in the soul and kept alive in poems as R.D Ranade

\textsuperscript{41} Anna Dallapicola, \textit{The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara}, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1992, p.33
\textsuperscript{42} William Jackson, \textit{Vijayanagara Visions- Religious Experience and Creativity in a South Indian Empire}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.65, para.1
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, p.65
The songs were circulated in the nook and corner of the Vijayanagara Empire by the disciples of the dāsas. The songs left by dāsas like Purandaradāsā become a means to grasp the Haridāsā religious way of life in a comprehensive manner.

The process of Bhakti taking shape of devotion to a personal deity becomes very clear in the Vijayanagara period when Vishnu as a deity was perceived in various forms by the devotees. Prominent among them were Annamācharya who found his Ishtadevatha in Venkatesvara of Tirupati, profusely composed praises on him, Kanakadāsa who found his personal god in Krishna of Udipi and Purandaradāsā who identified Viṭṭhala of Pandharpur as his Ishtadevatha. The songs of these poets were well used by the rulers as channels of communication, which helped them to spread their political message to a wider public. In this way Bhakti was assuming a new shape in the form of an ideology that the rulers used for state legitimization. A prominent example to be quoted in this context is the devotional cult of Viṭṭhala which was made popular in South India during the Vijayanagara period. The main reason why the kings extended patronage to this cult is the fact that it had a pastoral context. Viṭṭhala was worshipped by the pastoral communities of Deccan, whose help was sought by the Vijayanagara kings in times of external aggressions. Since the pastoralists were known for their martial qualities, they were incorporated into the Vijayanagara polity as soldiers. They were pleased by the patronage extended to their religious beliefs and practices which further served the political interests of the Vijayanagara kings. The strategy of incorporating pastoral deities into the framework of Vijayanagara state sponsored religious ideology can be seen in a variety of different situations. Anila Verghese has studied the Mailāra cult in Vijayanagara and has suggested that the cult incorporated folk

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elements which were Sanskritized by identifying Mailāra with pastoral deities worshipped in the dry region of Rāyalaseema and Bellary. The cult of Viṭṭhala too followed the same pattern in that the pastoral communities of Western Deccan, the Danghars whose presence in the Vijayanagara army was of considerable importance were brought into the framework of the empire and the identification of Viṭṭhala the form of Vishnu made the Dhangar pastoralists ritually a part of the incorporative society of the empire.

Bhakti came to be more institutionalized during the Vijayanagara period with the subsequent development of Maṭhās or religious orders which took over the control of the temples which gave an institutional base for the Bhakti movement. It created a wide social base and a strong community consciousness among the followers of the Puranic sectarian religions of Saivism and Vaishnavism from the early medieval times. Epigraphical references to Maṭhās are available from the 9th and 10th centuries onwards. Though mathas named after the Bhakti saints are found in the early poems of Tamil, there is no evidence of the institutionalization of the monastic organization until the Chōḷā period, especially from the period of Rajendra I (A.D 1014-1044).

The Vijayanagara period is marked by a significant increase in the Saiva Maṭhās in all regions of South India. The mathas of this period evolved parallel authority structures for the respective religious communities such as the Vaishnava, the Saiva and the Jaina. All branches of saivism continued to exist as influential forces in the Vijayanagara period. The Pasupatas and Kalamukhas were two branches of Saivism who were the preceptors of the Sangamas, the founders of the Vijayanagara Empire. Similarly, the Virasaivas had their major centre at
Srisailam. A compilation and codification of the hagiographical works of this tradition began in the Vijayanagara period.

The Vijayanagara period also promoted the cause of Vaishnavism, particularly Sri vaishnavism. The sacred centres of the Srivaishnavas such as Kanchi, Tirupati and Srīraṅgam were patronized and richly endowed with. They also extended support to the two sub sects of Sri Vaishnavism namely Vatakai and the Tenkalai. The schism which occurred among the Srivaishnavas in the fourteenth fifteenth centuries is often attributed to Ramanuja who propogated the philosophy of Visishtadvaitha. This split became evident only in the Vijayanagara period when a large number of non-brahmana elements were brought into the realm of temple worship, rituals and practices.

Though the rulers were initially patrons of Virupaksha, dynasties such as the Saluvas which succeeded the Sangama were strong Vaishnavas, at the same time were tolerant towards other religious faiths. Krishnadevaraya a great Patron of Vaishnavism, adopted god Venkateswara of Tirupati as his tutelary deity. He has emphasized the importance of the Bhakti saints called Alvars in his work Amuktamalyada. His successors Achutharaya and Sadasivaraya are also said to have richly endowed the Vaishnava temples of their times. Srivaishnava tradition credits Ramanuja with the establishment of Yatiraja Matha at Melukote, which became an important centre of Srivaishnavism, during Ramanuja’s sojourn at Karnataka. Vedanta Desika succeeded him in the 14th century took special interest in preserving the philosophical texts of Ramanuja. A Srivaishnava Matha was established at Kanchi and Mysore at 1360 and 1370 A.D respectively. At Ahobilam was founded another Matha by Adivan Sathakopa, who received royal patronage under Devaraya II. The Ramānuja darsana was promoted by these mathas. Srīraṅgam.
Tirupathi-Tirumala and Kanchi were prominent centres of Srivaishnavism – in these centres both schools of Srivaishnavism were represented by their Maṭhās. Vaishnava families like the Tatacharyas of Tirumala, the Bhattas of Srīraṅgam, Tallapakkam poets of the fourteenth and sixteenth century and members of the Kandadai family were all believers in the Vishistadavaita of Ramanuja and belonged to Tirupati and Srīraṅgam.

Another important school of Vaishnavism was propogated by the Madhva philosophy of Dvaita Vedanta. Vyasaraya was considered as the greatest among his successors in the 15th and 16th centuries i.e. during the reign of the Saluvas and Tuluvas. Krishnadevaraya accorded a place of honor to Vyasaraya as his guru and is said to have granted a village called Bettakonda in 1526 confirms his patronage of acharyas and spiritual masters of his times. Inscriptions record that Vyasaraya himself has endowed gifts to Venkateswara and Govindaraja temple at Tirupati. The Madhva tradition was carried forward by the saints of the haridasa sect such as Vijaya Tirtha, Vadiraja Tirtha, Narahari Tirtha, Jagannatha Dasa, Purandaradāsā, Vijayadasa and so on.

Ashta Maṭhās or eight mutts of Madhva lineage were established at Udipi. The Dasa saint Purandaradāsā sings that he has seen all the eight Madha Maṭhās during his visit to Krishna temple at Udipi. Among the eight Maṭhās, the Pejavara Matha seems to be very prominent. Among the others are Sosale and the Uttaradi Maṭhās, of which Vyasaraya matha at Sosale received great patronage under Krishnadevaraya. Vyasaraya is said to have received all privliges and honours at Govindaraja temple, when he built a matha at Tirupati in the 16th century.45 While the Dvaita of Madhva was confined to the Karnataka region, under its

45 TTD, Vol III, Nos 157, 158, 159
influence saints of other regions such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal and other parts of North India carried forward the Bhakti tradition.⁴⁶

Thus Maṭhās took over the control of temples in the Vijayanagara period and played a very significant role in establishing a religious authority over the society. The sectarian leaders formed a link between the temple and the state in Vijayanagara period. There existed constant struggle for supremacy in the temples and Maṭhās for control over the rituals and temple resources as well as the larger community.

⁴⁶ R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit, p.310, para.2