

CONCLUSION

The Ālvārs prefer to deal with the personal aspects of the deity. The various currents of the Viṣṇu cult got reconciled in their compositions. The traditional dates of these saints are not acceptable in the face of literary, epigraphical and other evidences to the contrary. The concept of God as Śrīyaḥpati owes its development entirely to the compositions of the Ālvārs. Bridal mysticism gives a unique stamp to the devotional aspects of the teachings of the Ālvārs. The *Vedic* ordinances were developed into the concept of *kaiṅkarya*, and thus the cult of the Ālvārs both retained and acquired religious sanctity. Through the paths of devotion and self-surrender God is brought close to mankind giving relief to the suffering humanity, otherwise at sea without any hope of protection. The concept of the shrines as '*pāṭal peṇṇa talaiṅkaḷ*' gained supreme significance for daily visits of the devotees to offer their service. More than the spirit of doing *kaiṅkarya* the principle of offering blessings to God (*maṅgalāśasana*) become the moving force for the visit of the spiritually great to such shrines. A bold step was taken by the Ālvārs in using the Tamil language for conveying the *Vedic* and religious truths and glorifying the deity. The devotional element reached the stage of perfection in the Ālvārs' compositions to such a degree as to become the source for influencing the rise of many

theistic schools of Vaiṣṇavism through the length and breadth of India.

CONCLUSION

The aspects of religion and philosophy in the compositions of the Ālvārs which are dealt with in the preceding chapters may now be reviewed with reference to some important features that characterise Vaiṣṇavism in the post-Ālvār period. That the growth of Vaiṣṇavism at this period is mainly due to the compositions of the Ālvārs needs no exaggeration. The chief features of this religion, though traceable to the epics and *Purānas* in the pre-Ālvār period, assumed a full and orderly development as a result of the influence exerted by the *Nālāyira Dtvya Prabandham* on the leading exponents of this religion. The impact of the teachings of the Ālvārs on the *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* school has been immense that from Yāmuna, whose works represent the earliest ones now available, the basic doctrines of the Ālvārs' compositions got incorporated into tenets of this school of *Vedānta* as they were then handed down from earlier expositions such as *Drāmiḍa*, *Tānka* and others. Thereafter the *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* became a pronouncedly theistic school of Vaiṣṇavite philosophy and religion. The synthesis of the two became complete at the hands of Rāmānuja whose followers enriched what their master had taught them, by their valuable literary contributions.

The fundamental tenets such as belief in a personal deity who is the creator and protector of the world, in the Divine Grace which alone saves the living beings from distress and in God Who becomes the object of devotion are common to many theistic religions of India and also those of foreign origin. Several streams of thought have been flowing from time immemorial. Some of them are traceable to the *Vedic* sources. Some are recorded in the epics and *Purānas* while others are dealt with in the *Āgamas*. There were also

versions of anecdotes and incidents in the ancient Tamil literature which were different from those recorded in the Sanskrit sources or which deviated from them. In the case of some religious beliefs of India, only one of these courses of thought formed the basis for the development of a particular faith, the other courses were availed of for support and interpretation of that faith.

The Vaiṣṇavite school of religious thought is found to have been the result of a reconciliation effected between the various currents of doctrines taken from all the sources mentioned above. The ideas of God as conveyed by the words 'brahman', 'viṣṇu', 'nārāyaṇa', 'vāsudeva', and 'bhagavan' in these sources got coalesced to yield the concept of Godhead which on grounds of theology and philosophy proved itself to be acceptable to the exponents of this theistic school of Vaiṣṇavism. In this context, a reference is required to be made to the question of the period of the Ālvārs. The tradition, as recorded in the *Guruparamparās*, place most of the Ālvārs in the period ranging from 4200 B.C. to 2702 B.C.¹ Almost all these Ālvārs refer to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His exploits both as a child and as a warrior who took part in the war between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas.² From the evidences which are available in the *Mahābhārata*, it is found that Kṛṣṇa left His mortal coil on the day when the *Kaliyuga* started.³ This was in 3101 B.C. Poykaiyālvār, Pūtattālvār and Pēyālvār, Tirumalicaiyālvār and Maturakaviyālvār lived before this date. Nammālvār was born on the forty-third day after *Kaliyuga* started. To suggest that the Ālvārs could not have had direct vision of Kṛṣṇa's exploits and that they had to learn about them from the *Mahābhārata* and other source books on Kṛṣṇa's activities is sheer impudence. The incidents which are found recorded in the *Purāṇas* are mentioned and described by the Ālvārs, as if they were eye witnesses of

1. Vide. Appendix VII.

2. cf. M. Tv. 8, 11, 18, 23, 24, 54, 83, 87; I. Tv. 10, 15, 19, 92; MU. Tv; 28, 41, 51, 54, 92; Nan. Tv. 33, 57; Tc. V. 19, 31, 37, 38, 53, 71, 107. K.C. 1. T.V.M. 5.10; 6.4; Perum. Tm. 6, 7; Periyā]. Tm. 1.1, 2.9; 3.5; 3.6 etc.

3. Bhag. P. 12.2: 30.

such acts. Reason demands a critical view of this matter. In Vyāsa⁴ or Parāśara⁵ could predict the royal dynasties which could have come into being far later, it would not be preposterous to suggest that the Ālvārs had a provision of the doings of Kṛṣṇa at a period posterior to theirs. But the admission of an explanation of this kind would throw chronology out of gear. An impartial study requires the recognition that certain events must precede their being made known to people. All the *Purāṇas* are attributed to Vyāsa who was at least their compiler. Vyāsa's period⁶ having been contemporaneous with that of Kṛṣṇa, a considerate view about the probable date for the release of the *Purāṇas* could have been about 3042 B.C. It would be prudent to admit that about or after this date, the stories of Kṛṣṇa became well known to such an extent that those who listened to the recitation of the Ālvārs' compositions could have ready understanding of the references to Kṛṣṇa's exploits contained in them without any need for the narration of the anecdote in the context. Admission of this explanation would not show that Kulacēkarālvār and Periyālvār were fully conversant with the stories of Kṛṣṇa, if they are admitted to have lived at a period which tradition fixes for them. It is therefore difficult to agree with these traditional dates for the Ālvārs mentioned above. Āṭṭāḷ, Toṅṅaraṭṭip-poṭṭiyālvār, Tirup-pāṇālvār and Tirumaṅkaiyālvār are stated in the *Guruparam-parās* to have lived after 3000 B.C. One need not intend to subscribe to the traditional accounts of the dates mainly to affect their sacrosanctity. There are overwhelming evidences which militate against the acceptance of these traditional dates. It is idle to look down upon these evidences which are supported by linguistic, literary, epigraphical and historical

4. Vay, P. 2.37: 409.

5. V.P. 4.24: 34. A similar prediction is said to have made by Nārada about the descendants of Karikālī Cōḷa (Vide: *Kālikattup-parāṇi*, Ch. 8).

6. Vyāsa was present when the *Mahābhārata* was practically released to the Public by way of exposition on the occasion of the sacrifice which was performed by Janamējaya. The latter's coronation took place in 3042 B.C. cf M.Bh, Adi. 49: 17.

facts.⁷ Till evidences to the contrary are to be obtained, the dates between 700 and 850 A.D. appear to be acceptable.

Regarding the Godhead it must be noted that the Ālvārs follow generally the account given in the *Purāṇas*. Either Viṣṇu is treated as the Supreme Deity amidst the hosts of gods or as one among the Trinity constituted by the other two Brahmā and Śiva and yet holding the supreme place over the other two.⁸ At the same time, there are references to show that according to the Ālvārs,⁹ Viṣṇu is not merely of the form of the other deities but is superior to the Trinity composed of Brahmā, Śiva and Indra. This is in accordance with the *Upaniṣadic* passage¹⁰ which has been of late changed in its reading to provide a room for Viṣṇu (called Hari) here in order that Viṣṇu could be on a par with the three deities Brahmā, Śiva and Indra. The earliest reading seems to have been without the word 'hari' and receives support for its authenticity from the citation of this *Upaniṣadic* passage by Tirukkōṇēri Tāṣyai in her *Tiruvāymoḷi Vācakamālai*.¹¹

Another significant contribution which the compositions of the Ālvārs have made is that the Lord is Śrīyaḥpati¹² and not mere Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. This concept of Godhead which is referred to in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*¹³ had given rise to the name 'Śrīnivāsa' as applicable to Viṣṇu. In fact, Rāmānuja used for the first time in the field of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy the word 'śrīnivāsa' as an epithet of Brahman.¹⁴ This name *Śrīnivāsa* has become all too common a name for the Lord at Tirumalai where He was known as the Lord of Vēṅkaṭam

7. Vjde. Section III, Chapter IX of this thesis where a detailed discussion of this matter will be found.

8. T.V.M. 3:6: 2; 7.6: 4; 8.3: 9; 8.4: 6.

9. ibid. 2.2: 10; 3.1: 10; 3.6: 4; 10.10: 3; Periyal. Tm. 5.3: 6.

10. Nārāyaṇa Up. 13.

11. On T.V.M. 9.3: 2.

12. M.Tv. 67; I.Tv. 52; Mū. Tv. 16; Nan. Tv. 53; Peri. Tm. 4.5: 5.

13. V.P. 1.18: 17 and 35.

14. *Śrī Bhāṣya, māṅgaḷaśloka* 1.

before the period of Rāmānuja. The Āļvārs refer to Him as 'Tirumā',¹⁵ 'Tiruvāļmārpaṇ'¹⁶ etc.

Bridal mysticism is a remarkable trait enlivening the devotional spirit of the Āļvārs. The relation of the bride and lover (*nāyaka-nāyaki bhāva*) which subsists between a devotee and God is nothing new to the writers of lyrics of the religious type. But it appears that before the period of the Āļvārs this aspect of devotion did not get the treatment which it should have had. The sublimation of the love of men for women and *vice versa*, complete removal of carnality from the domain of sexual references and man transforming himself into a woman for purposes of devotional love are the marks that characterise the poems of the Āļvārs¹⁷ as some of the outstanding devotional lyrics, perhaps the only ones of its kind to influence the writing of similar lyrics in other languages during the post-Rāmānuja period. It is true that 'Akam' type of poetry exerted some influence on the Āļvārs, but the contribution of the Āļvārs to this kind of poetry and the various modes adopted by them to express the surging love according to the occasions and situations are so unique and charming that it seems as though the Āļvārs had themselves invented this mode of treating divine love. There were poets in a large number who had successfully delineated this love on the material plane. They would not have felt any difficulty to depict this love, as they were dealing with love with which both the writes and readers or spectators as the case may be were quite familiar. On the other hand, the Divine Person, with no trace of blemish of any kind, presents Himself enchantingly to the Āļvār who was much aware of carnality like any other mortal but who has to banish it and at the same time not speak in a language that is foreign to erotic love. To transform himself into a woman at the mental level and have the lust aroused and controlled puri-

15. M.Tv. 8, 64; 1.Tv. 30, 32; Mu. Tv. 30, 93; P. Tv. 10, 69 etc.

16. Peri. Tm. 7.6: 3.

17. cf. I feel a creeping sense come over me
when I utter the name of my beloved.
I feel a delicate movement
running through my skin and bones

fyng it of carnality is something which lies beyond the ability of even a scholar who is endowed with much discretion. The Ālvārs, however, succeeded in depicting their bridal love for the Lover, the Lord, basing it on the external stature of the Lord and the subdued but animated figure of the woman. This method of delineation has deeper moorings. The psychological aspects of the woman are then aroused in the Ālvār's mind. They operate at the conscious level when acted upon by the handsome and bewitching beauty of the *aracā* form of the Lord. The Ālvār then is only a bride in the physiological frame of man. He is then totally unaware of his masculinity and treats the Lord as her lord and pours out her heart to him. God-experience which is then had is presented by the Ālvār in a language with which he is quite familiar and which could be easily understood by others.

The concept of '*maṭalūrtal*' is not known to the Sanskrit writers, but Tirumaṅkaiyālvār speaks of the approach of the Sanskrit writers to this aspect of love-representation. The motif of '*maṭalūrtal*' is however known to Sanskrit writers as also the adventurous and courageous approach by woman to take the initiative in achieving their purpose is likewise well-known to them as shown by this Ālvār through numerous instances from the ancient sources. '*Maṭalūrtāl*' is only a public display of one's unrequited love which could be adopted by women also. This touch of erotic element purified and sanctified by the element of devotion gives a unique stamp to the compositions of the Ālvārs, particularly Nammālvār's. The method of sending a message to the Lover is also adopted by Āṇṭāl and Nammālvār adding variety to the treatment of devotion. Besides, the parental affection and endearment evidenced in the poems of Periyālvār and Kulacēkarālvār have few parallels elsewhere to outshine them.

Devotion, which is the name of one of the various aspects of affection and endearment subsisting between two persons, takes several shapes under the influence of awe and wonder, filial attachment, parental endearment, friendly affection and love of a bride for a man and *vice-versa*. The literature before the period of the Ālvārs contains a vivid de-

piction of all these features of devotion. The compositions of the Ālvārs also depict all these but they have outshone the earlier sources by the singularly superb treatment given in them of the filial, parental and bridal features of love. Even there, the bridal one gets the delicate treatment.¹⁸ While there is a twofold course for the flow of love, that is from the Lover to the Beloved and from the Beloved to the Lover and therefore the treatment of devotion on both these courses could be justified, most of the mystical religions preferred the devotional approach from the aspect of the bride¹⁹. Tenderness, charm, delicacy and such other feminine traits of love could be found in God but God is very powerful, omniscient and formidable and hence manly traits could be better associated with Him. The ulterior purpose which is sought by being in love or devoted to God is reunion of the aspirant who is the self with God. To achieve this end, the womanly approach is more suited to the self which is weak and ignorant. The manly approach, which is marked by the fatherly affection, is apt when God is treated as a son who becomes the object of all the endearment and affection of the father.²⁰

The doctrine of worship (*pūja*) taking the form of *kainkarya* is not peculiar to those who adopt the path of self-surrender nor is so the concept of *śeṣātva* or service to the *ācārya* or *bhakta*. All these have been from early times the aspects of religious experience particularly that of worship which forms part of *bhakti*. In the post-Rāmānuja period of Vaiṣṇavism these aspects gained more importance as a result of the preaching of the doctrines of the Ālvārs and come to be closely associated with the path of self-surrender. Both the Ālvārs and Rāmānuja enjoin these practices mainly with service to God, that is worship.²¹

18. The Ālvārs' treatment of these features might have served as a source of inspiration and of the best models to adapt them for the treatment of these features and few others, by Bārathi in his poem 'Kannan Pattu'.

19. cf. *Love of God*.

20. Perum. Tm. 9.

21. cf. Peri. Tm. 6.3: 2; Ramanuja: *Śaranāgatigadya*-last varse.

It would have been preposterous, if the Ālvārs had decried openly the performance of the sacred rites which are enjoined by the *Vedas* and *Kalpasūtras*. A clever way of reconciling the performance of the *Vedic* rites with the duties which a devotee could discharge to his deity was envisaged in the *Purāṇas* and epics. It was in the *Bhāgavad-gīta* that statements are found enjoining the performance of the duties without the entertainment of the desire to get the rewards of them.²² According to the *Purāṇas* an act of devotion came to be viewed as a religious rite (*karma*) which could conveniently take the place of *Vedic* rite.²³ The *Gītā* idea of renouncing the result of the acts gets promoted when it is considered that God being supreme, there is no need for the doer to saddle himself with the responsibility of getting the results of his deeds. So any act of devotion came to be looked upon as *śevā* or *kainkaryā* to the Lord, which was to be done to please Him Who would surely bestow on his devotee the fruit of it according to His own liking. Moreover, the *Vedic* deity remains invisible when invoked on occasions of the ritualistic performances and so there will always be the apprehension regarding the getting of the result when the offering is not made personally to the deity. Here, however, there is God Himself in *arcā* form whom it is easy to propitiate in his very presence. This idea of service involves also the relation of master and servant between God and man. Fully alive to the limitations imposed on him and being conscious of his forlornness and incapacity to do anything by himself, the devotee chooses to do what the Lord bids him to do. He is ever ready to be the servant of God and this is the purpose and goal of life.²⁴ This service is known as *kainkarya* or *aṭimal* to do which even other gods feel the sense of rivalry and competition. The spirit of service could be further extended to the devotees of God who are to be served by another devotee. In

22. Bh. G. 18 : 2.

23. Kūr. P. 2. 18.

24. cf. "The urge of life is to serve Thee alone,
For the God. Conscious a moment without
Thee is verily a sin".

a sense, this attitude seeks to eliminate the rather wide gap that separates man from man socially and also materially.

Kaiñkarya or rendering service to the deity in a shrine has become the chief trait that governs the life of a Vaiṣṇavite. The development of this trait has been there even before the period of the Āḷvārs in some form. It was definitely in relation to the life of an individual who is devoted to his Lord. It is the compositions of the Āḷvārs that gave a definite shape to this concept in favour of rendering service to the deity in a shrine. The words '*neṣumārku aṭimai*'²⁵ show that service is to be rendered to Viṣṇu. That service is to be rendered to the Lord at the Tirumalai Hills is actually mentioned by Nammāḷvār.²⁶ This makes it clear that the *arcā* form is to be preferred for rendering service. This explains why Rāmānuja refers to himself as having been directed by the Lord at ŚrīRaṅgam to stay there comfortably.²⁷ References to the Yādavādri²⁸ and others also support this interpretation of worship. Again, this explains why Yāmuna was taken to Śrī Raṅgam by Maṅakkāl Nampi, Rāmānuja and Tirumalai Nampi rendered service at Kāñci and Tirumalai respectively, Rāmānuja had his pontifical seat at ŚrīRaṅgam, Vedānta Deśika and Maṅavāḷamāmuni spent most of their time at Śrī Raṅgam. It is in the light of this concept of *kaiñkarya* that gave rise to the institution of group of enlightened people as Ācārya Puruṣas for rendering service in the temples and of persons well trained in the *Vedas* and *Prabandhams* as part of their *kaiñkarya* in such shrines. In and around each shrine, there arose a band of workers who included the priests, cooks, pipers and others, all of them having, for their life's purpose, only service to the Lord. This principle for rendering service came to be applied to the Āḷvārs and Ācāryas in places where pontifical seats are established and also in the houses where the Ācāryas dwell. The development and prevalence of this concept, as practised, is undeniably due to the Āḷvārs' compositions.

25. T.V.M: 8.10: 1.

26. *ibid.* 3.3.

27. *Śaraṅāgatigadya*,

28. G.P. p. 190.

The *bhāgavata* cult which has been in existence from very early times, even before the period of the Ālvārs, got a fillip under the inspiration of the teachings of the Ālvārs. The basis for this attitude is not difficult to explain. Since God is dear to the devotee, God's men too should be equally dear. They owe respect at the hand of the devotee being related through devotion to God Whom they worship. If God could not be offended on moral grounds, God's men too ought not to be offended. *Bhakti*, as the path of salvation, is a moving force for bringing God's men for congregational prayers²⁹

Whether the Ālvārs used the word 'avā', 'kātal' or 'anpu', it is very clear that they were much drawn to the Supreme Person by the spirit of devotion.³⁰ It is true that they frequently refer to this path and speak of the act of meditation³¹ as a sure method of God-realization. Tirumalīcaiyālvār and Nammālvār did adopt this means. However, the Ālvārs do not appear to have been in favour of practising devotion in all its eight limbs.³² Control of the sense-organs³³ relying upon God as the sole refuge and doing service to God through thought, word and deed appear to have been preached by the Ālvārs. Though these could not be held to form part of path of devotion as preached by the *Upaniṣads* through the *Brahmā-vidyas*, they are yet part of the act of devotion which any soul could adopt when it is aroused to God's presence and gets attracted to Him. This attraction interprets effectively that the bond connecting that soul and God is nothing but the bond of devotion.

The path of self-surrender which is treated as an independent means of *mokṣa* and which preserves the essential features of *bhakti*, is well expounded in the *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*

29. cf. "I pray for Thy Love and for the Love of Him who loves Thee".
- *Love of God*, p. 20.

30. Section IV, Chapter XVIII of this thesis deals with this matter.

31. Nāg. Tv. 61; Mu. Tv. 79.

32. Peri. Tm. 3.2; Nāg. Tv. 13.

33. cf. Peri. Tm. 5.6: 9.

and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The words used in this connection are 'nyāsa' which means placing one's burden at the Feet of the Lord, 'prapatti' conveyed by the verbal forms such as 'prapādye' which really means proceeding and going and 'sarana' which means house and protector. Entrusting something to another or keeping it as a deposit is the general sense conveyed by the words 'nyāsa' and 'nikṣepa'. Any one who requires protection or safety from some source of insecurity would naturally proceed to a place of refuge (*saranam*) or seek refuge under a protector (*saranam*). Though the *Bhagavad-gītā*³⁴ contains references to these words, it is only the *Carama-sloka*³⁵ that could be held to convey the idea of *prapatti*. It is highly difficult to aver that the *Bhagavad-gītā* preaches primarily the path of *prapatti*. In fact, it preaches the path of *bhakti* in clear terms.³⁶ The *Carama-sloka* could as well be taken to imply the position of *prapatti* within the framework of *bhakti*. The verse of Nammālvār means that the Ālvār had sought shelter under the Feet of the Lord of Tiruvēṅkaṭam.³⁷ This is a clear proof that *prapatti* was adopted as the means by the Ālvār and so he is declared to be at the head of all people who seek shelter under God (*prapanna janakūṣṭha*). The traditional interpretation of this doctrine through the *Carama-sloka* and the *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār was handed down to Rāmānuja by Tirumālaiyāntān. In this context, it is necessary to refer to a criticism on the interpretation of the second decad of the first centum of the *Tiruvāymoli*. According to a line of interpretation, Yāmuna interpreted this decad as conveying the essence of *prapatti*. Rāmānuja too held this view before he wrote the *Śrī Bhāṣya*, but after writing it, he was in favour of *bhakti* as the import of this decad. Nānciyar and Vatakkut-tiruvṅṅip-piṅṅai adopt this line and the latter writer mentions Empār as having given his assent to this interpretation.³⁸ Curiously enough, Piṅṅān, the spiritual son of Rāmānuja and the first commentator of *Tiruvāymoli* which he

34. Bh. G. 4: 11; 8: 20.

35. *ibid.* 18: 66.

36. *ibid.* 9 and 18.

37. T.V.M. 6.10.

38. *Thirty-six Thousand on T.V.M.* 1.2.

interpreted according to the instruction of Rāmānuja, mentions *prapatti* (*bhāra-nyāsa*) as the import.³⁹ This is very delicate point on which criticism could not be offered except with great caution.

The second decad of the first centum begins thus: "Renounce all things. After doing so, you offer your souls to Him Who is the master of *mokṣa*".⁴⁰ The Ālvār then asks the selves to give up all thoughts of *ahaṅkāra* and *mamakāra* (the feelings of 'I' and 'Mine') and to have no connection with the world.⁴¹ The entire existence is under His control.⁴² All the activities, mental, verbal and physical, should be directed towards Him for His service:⁴³ His Feet which are the only support of the selves should be held firmly.⁴⁴ Giving up the ideas of possession and egoism and reaching or holding to the Feet of the Lord are acts which could be practised also by those who are devoted to God and who adopt the path of devotion. The doctrine of self-surrender has, for its fundamental concept and trait, the placing of one's own self at God, Who is the refuge. The basis for this act of self-surrender lies in the realization by the self that it cannot take care of itself and that God alone, Who is its master, can give protection. These are conveyed by words such as 'I reach or proceed to shelter' (*saraṇam prapādye*). The line⁴⁵ 'offer your selves unto Him' is a clear indication of the act of self-surrender which the Ālvār asks people to adopt. The other contingent aspects of this doctrine are clearly conveyed in this decad. In a similar strain, the Ālvār mentions his act of self-surrender in another line: 'I do not have any refuge. I take refuge under Thy Feet'.⁴⁶ The word '*aṭiyān*' is used significantly conveying the sense that he is a servant of Him Who is the Lord of the three worlds and Who governs them.

39. Pillāṅ on T.V.M. 1.2: 1.

40. T.V.M. 1.2: 1.

41. *ibid.* 1.2: 3.

42. *ibid.* 1.2: 7.

43. *ibid.* 1.2: 8.

44. *ibid.* 1.2: 10.

45. *ibid.* 1.2: 1.

46. *ibid.* 6.10: 10.

Apart from references contained in the contemporaries of Nañciyar and others to the effect that Rāmānuja revised his opinion regarding the import of this decad in favour of the path of devotion, what remains inexplicable is the motive for this revision of opinion. It is true that there are far more numerous evidences in favour of the path of devotion than for the path of self-surrender. If Rāmānuja felt that *Vedānta* doctrines preach and uphold the path of devotion, it must be admitted that there is justification for it. This must have been Rāmānuja's view while commenting on the *Brahma-sūtras* in the *ŚrīBhāṣya*. According to the *Gupuparamparā*, Rāmānuja was taught by Tirumālaiyāntān that the import of the second decad of the first centum of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* was in favour of adopting the path of self-surrender. This was the traditional view handed down from Yāmuna. As far as his discourses of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* were concerned, Rāmānuja should have taught his disciples only the doctrine of *prapatti* as the import of this decad. When he directed his disciple Piḷḷān to write a commentary on the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, he must have had confidence that Piḷḷān would be writing in accordance with what he was taught by him. Rāmānuja did approve of this commentary *Ārāytrap-paṭi* and commanded his disciples to look upon Piḷḷān as the master of both *Vedāntas*.⁴⁷ If Piḷḷān's mentioning *prapatti* as the import of this decad were not traditionally correct or were contrary to his own opinion, Rāmānuja would not have given recognition to this commentary or would have at least forced Piḷḷān to change the version in favour of *bhakti*. What really could have happened seems to be an incorrect understanding of the situation. That the *Tiruvāymoḷi* preferred to enjoin the path of self-surrender is to be admitted without reservation, but it would be presumptuous on the part of Rāmānuja to attribute this concept directly to the *Vedānta* tradition as propounded by the *Brahma-sūtras* and *Upaniṣads*, particularly when he strained every nerve to advocate in favour of the doctrine of devotion being not in any way different from that of knowledge. The traditions in the two *Vedāntas* were thus slightly different. Piḷḷān had given thus the import of the decad as it was taught by Rāmānuja.

47. *Yatirāja-valbhavam*, 108.

He must have been fully aware of the difference in Rāmānuja's approach. Whether Empār held a converse view as stated by Nānciyar cannot be verified. The difference in the two approaches was not probably realised. Nānciyar mentions that the import of the decad is in favour of devotion and also attributes this view to Rāmānuja and Empār intending to cite them for his support. Besides, Nānciyar and his followers could not also explain what made Rāmānuja revise his opinion and thus made him preach against the tradition handed down to him from Yāmuna. In fact, there is no contradiction between the import of this decad and the contents of the *Śrī Bhāṣya*. From this it does not follow that Nānciyar and his followers were against the spirit of the preachings of the Ālvārs. That the Ālvārs taught the path of self-surrender as the only means of salvation is readily admitted by both the lines of teachers who trace their descent from Rāmānuja.

It is really interesting in this context to note that Rāmānuja did not anywhere in his works mention that *prapatti* is an independent means of *mokṣa*. He makes references frequently to the path of devotion. In one context⁴⁸ he mentions that the act of self-surrender is the means to win God over to the side of the devotees. It is not stated here that it is the direct means of *mokṣa*. However, the *Gadya-traya* and the *Saṅgāgati-gadya* in particular, show that Rāmānuja adopted *prapatti* as the means. Similarly it could be said, of course with some reservation, that the Ālvārs preached mainly *bhakti* as the method of reaching God but referred to *prapatti* far more frequently than Rāmānuja did in his works. What Rāmānuja taught through his works and practice became incorporated in the commentary of Piḷḷāṅ. The *ubhaya-vedānta* concept to which Āndhrapūrṇa⁴⁹ refers in a way should have formed the main tenet of the Vaiṣṇavite school from the time of Piḷḷāṅ with the result that *prapatti* assumed more significance than before. After this period, it came to be treated as an independent means. Objections should have been raised

48. *Śrī Bhāṣya* on 1.4: 1.

49. *Yatirāja-valbhavam*, 1.

for this status offered to *prapatti*, as it is known from the *Nikṣāparakṣā* which was written by Vedānta Deśika to vindicate the validity of the doctrine of *prapatti*.

If the Ālvārs make frequent references to the path of self-surrender, it may be taken that it is devotion that made them seek refuge when they were forlorn unable to bear the sufferings of separation from Him. These sufferings prove only that it is devotion which the soul has for God that makes it feel the separation from Him keen and making it miserable. The helpless self can do nothing to overcome it. The only thing which it can do is to seek shelter under God. In this sense alone, the Ālvārs seem to have used the words '*tiruvaṭṭi aṭṭal*'.⁵⁰ There is nothing wrong if this is taken to mean the doctrine of self-surrender which is supported by devotion. To suggest that the Ālvārs had their *prapatti* as the only method, giving up or without reference to devotion is too much straining the issue. Thus devotion seems to have entered into the doctrine of self-surrender at least as its main ingredient. It is only then that the concept of *bhāgavata* worship could be explained as meaningful.

The principle of *Arthapañcaka* may also apply to the path of devotion, although the later writers adopt it in support of the path of *prapatti*. Some of the exponents in the post-Rāmānuja period apply this principle to the *Tiruvāymoḷi* and seek to show that this work of Nammālvār is in reality an exposition of this principle.⁵¹

In the state of release a liberated soul could choose any one pattern of existence such as identity of abode (*sālokya*), proximity (*sāmiṇya*), similarity of form (*sārūpya*) and intimate union (*sāyujya*) and can enjoy all the perfections of Vaikunṭha. To have the appearance of the Lord and to be ever near Him are to be desired by a self. Immense delight could be derived by these states. However, the Ālvārs preferred to have only *sāyujya*, that is, close communion, a state which need not be

50. T.V.M. 5.10. 1, 3; 9.10: 6.

51. *Twelve-Thousand* - Introduction.

distributed thereafter. Feeling of oneness with God and the awareness that he is part of Him would give greater delight to the self who adopts the *sāyujya* aspect of existence.⁵²

The temples which were already reputed during the period of the Āḷvārs were visited by these saints who sang in praise of the deities there.⁵³ While Nammāḷvār sang for the most part of the shrines situated in the Tirunelveli District and the Southern part of the Kerala State, Tirumaṅkaiyāḷvār sang in particular the deities in and around his native place in Tirunakari in the Thaṅjavūr District not to speak of the innumerable shrines in the whole of India which he alone visited. But for these two Āḷvārs, most of the shrines would have passed into obscurity. Tiruvaraṅkam, Tirumalai and Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai are the three important shrines which were popular at the time of the Āḷvārs and were visited by most among them. Subsequent to the period of the Āḷvārs and probably after Nāṭhamuni's arrangement for the recitation of the compositions of the Āḷvārs, a shrine in whose honour an Āḷvār composed at least a verse came to be held in greater respect in comparison to the one which did not receive such an attention from the Āḷvārs. Such shrines came to be designated as '*pāṭal peṇṇa talaṅkaḷ*' (shrines celebrated by the hymns of the Āḷvārs). One hundred and eight holy shrines are brought under this head.⁵⁴ It is quite possible that Nāṭhamuni was responsible for the formulation of this idea of treating a shrine as '*pāṭal peṇṇa talam*' although there is no means of verifying it. This suggestion could be admitted in view of the fact that Śrī Raṅgam became the seat of the Vaiṣṇavite Acāryas since his time. It is perhaps during the period of Rāmānuja that the important shrines got enumerated in the order of Śrī Raṅgam, Tirumalai and Kāṅcīpuram. The

52. *Jitānte Stotra* 2: 36.

53. Appendix V gives the list of shrines exclusively sung by one Āḷvār only.

54. The list of such shrines start with Śrī Raṅgam and end with Paramapadam. They are grouped according to the regions where they are situated. (Vide the list contained in Sri P. Krishnamācharyar's edition). cf. *Nūrreṭṭut-tiruppati Antāti of Piḷḷaip-perumāḷ Ayyengar*.

first one is also known simply as *kōyil* and its presence at the head should have been due to the largest number of verses sung by the Ālvārs on the presiding deity there. The Tirumalai comes next. Kāñcipuram is also known as Perumāḷkōyil in order to distinguish it from the Śiva Kāñci, with its innumerable temples of Śiva. How Kāñci or Perumāḷkōyil came to occupy the third place is not known. According to the general understanding, the temple at Tirukkacci has only two verses from Pūtattālvār.⁵⁵ Nammālvār who mentions only the three shrines Tiruvarāṅkam,⁵⁶ Tirumalai⁵⁷ and Tiruvehkā (at Kāñci),⁵⁸ did not take note of this temple. To some scholars the first decad of the first centum of Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi* is in honour of the deity at Tirukkacci.⁵⁹ This contention is perhaps intended to justify the mentioning of Tirukkacci or Perumāḷkōyil as the third in the list. The shrine at Melkote known as Yādavādri in the Karnataka State grew in importance after Rāmānuja and is generally enumerated as the fourth shrine after Perumāḷkōyil. There are of course temples as in Mannārgudi, Maturāntakam, Śrīmuṣṇam and other places which are important in their own way, but are not known by the designation '*pāṭal peṇṇa talaiṅkaḷ*'.

It was Rāmānuja that created a new kind of atmosphere in and around the temple where the Ālvārs and the singing of their compositions came to attain much importance. This was done in the first instance at Śrī Raṅgam and was perhaps adopted by others in other shrines. The recitation of the whole or part of *Nālayiram* has become obligatory in all shrines dedicated to Viṣṇu and situated at least in the Tamil Nadu and at Tirumalai, Ahōbilam, Badrācalam, Nellore, Maṅgalagiri and others in the Andhra State and also at Yādavādri at Melkote and other places in the Karnataka State.

55. I Tv. 95-96. The word 'kacci' is taken to refer to only this shrine. cf. *Nālayira Divya Prabandham* p. 286. (Ed.) by Mayilai Mātava Tāsan (Madras. 1962).

56. T.V.R. 28.

57. *ibid.* 8, 10.

58. *ibid.* 26.

59. Vide : Candragiri Venkatesa's commentary on Vedānta Deśikā's *Draṁidopaniṣat-sāram* verse, 5.

The act of *maṅgalāsāsanam* (celebration by hymns) which the Āḷvārs performed is in reality not exactly a prayer in a plaintive tone for the redressal of personal or human misery in general. Nor is it a glowing description of God's grandeur which very often defies expression. It is not also the narration of anecdotes or episodes which recount His exploits. The word '*maṅgalāsāsanam*' means hoping or wishing well, welfare or auspiciousness to another. Periyāḷvār stands at the head of those who could do this form of prayer. When he was taken on the elephant through the streets of Madurai, there appeared the Lord before him. He did not at once begin to praise Him, but wished that the Lord's presence should continue to flourish for hundred of years. He wishes at first that there shall be no separation between God and His devotees. The true spirit of an ideal religion or religious experience cannot be anything other than this aspect. What has happened is reunion with or coming together of God and His men. This is the ideal of religious experience. This communion shall never get disbanded. The prayer is therefore an ideal. Then the Āḷvār wishes for the welfare of Lakṣmī discus and conch, all of which show that the most Supreme Person shall have this *maṅgalāsāsanam*:⁶⁰ Other Āḷvārs also do this.⁶¹

Another factor that must be noted is that elders talk of doing *maṅgalāsāsanam* while they go to offer worship in the shrines. They do not go to fulfil any vow or observance as most of the shrine-goers do nowadays as in the case of Tirumalai, Shōḷingar (Coḷasimhapuram) and others. The real spirit underlying these could be easily guessed. The sight of the Lord in a particular pose is extremely exhilarating. The Āḷvārs do not become haughty that they alone deserve to have that sight. They wonder as to how they alone were chosen and offer an explanation for this on the ground that their good deeds done in the past should have brought God's person before them. Such a sight they wish to last for all times un-

60. *Pallāṅṭu*

61. Periyal. Tm 1.9: 5; TVM. 7.6: 11

tainted by worldly defects. Anṭā] remarks exquisitely that each limb, foot etc., of God deserves the *mangalāsāsanam*.⁶² The Lord Who has come down shall remain for the welfare of humanity.

A very bold step, which is never known in any religion, was taken only in Vaiṣṇavism and that is, rendering the principles of theistic faith which is found fully developed in the ancient sources into Tamil, a language which like the languages other than Sanskrit, was not envisaged to become as vehicle for conveying religious ideas. The entire matter that could be gathered from the sources down from the *Vedas* is retained in toto in these Tamil *Prabandhams*, as though testifying to their inheritance to the *Vedic* religion. The compositions of the Ālvārs are not translations of the *Vedas* or *Purāṇas* nor are they the Tamil renderings of portions of the *Vedic* texts or anecdotes recorded in them. They are in the literal sense of the word representations of what could be described as the sum and substance of the theistic teachings available in the Sanskrit sources.

It was Vedānta Deśika that offered a convincing justification for the adoption of the Tamil language for purposes of religious and philosophical preachings. The essence of what is taught in the *Vedas* is presented by the Lord Himself through a language which all the inhabitants of the region occupied by Sage Agastya could easily adopt and understand.⁶³ The substance of the *Vedānta* is more easily grasped when it is presented in the medium of Tamil.⁶⁴ Both the Ālvār's presentation of the *Vedic* truths and principles and Vedānta Deśika's support of this adoption could be taken as presaging the present day trend of adopting the regional or mother-tongue as a medium better suited for the purpose of learning. This is indeed a democratic element in the religious and philosophic sphere.

62. T. Pv. 24.

63. *Guruparamparāsāra*, p. 3.

64. *Seventeen Cillarai Rahaśyaṅgal*, p. 1.

The objections which were noted by Nañciyar and others regarding the adoption of a profane language for religious and devotional purposes, show that the reception which was accorded to the *Divya Prabandham* was not uniformly a favourable one. It is to build up a strong defence that Nāthamuni, Yāmuna and Rāmānuja sought to raise the compositions of the Āļvārs to the status of a religious text. These compositions, at the time when Piļļān was directed by Rāmānuja to comment upon, were held to be sacred like the *Vedas*, in spite of the non-Sanskrit language in which they were composed. The followers of Rāmānuja maintained by all means at their disposal the holy nature of these compositions and went to the extent of arranging for the recitations of these both in temples and houses on occasions of worship. Not only did Vedānta Deśika defend⁶⁵ and establish the obligatory recitation of these on the festive occasions in front of the deity but also recorded in a suggestive manner to the respect one should show for their reciters⁶⁶ Perhaps it was about this period that the *Āgamas* recommended the recitations of these hymns in praise of God composed in 'bhāṣa', a word which then meant a language other than Sanskrit.⁶⁷

The Lord Himself is described to have been come down in descent for the sake of humanity. While He took ten main *avatārās* under the vibhava kind, He came down in a new kind of ten *avatārās*.⁶⁸ Vedānta Deśika, who made this statement, sought to establish that the composers of the *Nālayiram* were men of no mean merit. They were master-minds that came down with divine elements. This may perhaps point to a tradition which Vedānta Deśika was aware of during his time,

65. He took part in disputes with those who did not agree upon this and came out victorious and established the practice of reciting the *Prabandhams* on strong grounds (Vide : Introduction to the *Saṅkalpasūryodaya*. Part I. p.63).

66. R.T.S. Chap. I, Introductory verse. 2.

67. Is. S. 11 : 36, 37, 13: 246.

68. *Guruparamparāsāra*, p. 3. There are actually twelve composers. Āntāl is treated as part of Periyāļvār and Maturakaviyāļvār as part of Nammāļvār.

or even if he should take credit for this description, there is justification for the worship of the Ālvārs in temples and conducting festivals to them as are done for God. While God came down and displayed His greatness to His men who expressed their love, gratitude and admiration for His exploits, here the Ālvārs did make notable achievement in glorifying God and God alone, Maturakaviyālvār being an exception worthy of note. If God came down to satisfy the God-hunger of men, the Ālvārs demonstrated through their compositions what God-hunger is. Men of ordinary abilities could not achieve this and therefore is the suggestion that is made here that God himself came down in the form of the Ālvārs to achieve this purpose. In fact, even God cannot do this by Himself. He could do it only in the garb of His men who are endowed with His divinity for which purpose He had to come down as the Ālvārs.

In this connection, Vedānta Deśika offers an apt analogy.⁶⁹ The salty waters of the sea are taken in by the clouds and are released as pure water which is fit to be drunk. Even so, the contents of the *Vedas* are beyond the understanding of the ordinary people and therefore could not be realized through the direct study of the *Vedas*. The Ālvārs, like the clouds, grasped the *Vedic* doctrines, and conveyed them through Tamil medium which is not only sweet (palatable) but is also fit to be drunk like rain water. As it is holy to take bath in the sea on occasions of sacred days, the *Vedic* texts have to be respected for use on occasions. Like the rain water, the compositions of the Ālvārs could be stored in reservoirs and used for various purposes. None is forbidden from using these compositions like the water which all can make free use of. The compositions of the Ālvārs are thus readily understandable even to ordinary men. It will be no exaggeration if it is suggested here that just as the nature and good conditions of the containers like the tanks, reservoirs and pipes are responsible for keeping the water drinkable, so also, only such individuals could be taken to have grasped the truths

69. *Guruparamparāsāra*, p.3.

of these compositions by being sincere in their doings, honest in intentions and good by temperament. The unworthy in both cases are not only dependable but harmful also and therefore are fit to be discarded.

Like the *Vedānta* system which is mainly concerned with a disquisition about Brahman's nature and the means of attaining it, the compositions of the Ālvārs reveal the interest of their authors in depicting God's perfection and their personal experience of Him. While the *Vedānta* system seeks to demonstrate that Brahman's eminence could not be questioned or affected, the Ālvārs, on the other hand, seek to draw attention to their experiences which reveal beyond the shadow of doubt God's eminence. The *Vedānta-sūtras* begin with the statement that there is a keen desire to know Brahman. Existence of Brahman is an already admitted fact which requires no proof. The marks for this assumption lie in the world owing its origin, maintenance and disappearance to Brahman. This is all known from the scriptures. The Ālvārs too treat of the Supreme Person as too well-known and thus requiring no proof to demonstrate His existence. Without exception, He is referred to as the creator of the universe which He maintains and preserves during deluges. There is of course more of the logical aspect in proving God's relationship to the world. Visualizing God everywhere in the black sea, blue cloud and others is really an experience which could not be explained away. God chooses to reveal Himself to His men through Nature. "Nature, which is the time-vesture of God and reveals Him to the wise, hides Him from the foolish".⁹⁰ Metaphysical discussions have the places of their own. They dissect the ultimate Reality into parts which become abstract having no attraction for the man with God-hunger. The deeply devout man, with his unshakeable faith in God, does not need any proof for God's existence. "There is nothing more real than what comes from religion. To compare facts such as these with that comes to us in outward existence would be to trifle with the subject. The man who

90. Passage from Carlyle cited in the *Ideas of God*. p. 172.

demands as reality more solid than that of the religious consciousness knows not what he seeks".⁷¹

This kind of description of the origin of the compositions raises another important issue. The *Vedas* are admitted to be *apauruṣeya*, that is, not of human origin. The compositions of the Āḷvārs, being designated as the *Drāvīda Veda*, should be considered also as *apauruṣeya*. This matter was raised by some scholars in the post-Rāmānuja period who held that these were not of human origin.⁷² Such a view does not stand to reason. Whether Nammāḷvār is stated to have rendered the *Vedas* into Tamil,⁷³ or the compositions are given the name *Drāvīda Veda*, the fact remains there that these compositions contain the essential teachings of the *Vedas*. In this respect, they are in no way different from the epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhagavad-gītā*.⁷⁴ The *Rāmāyaṇa* which is the work of a human being Vālmīki, is stated to be only an edition of the *Veda* in the form of the *Kāvya*. It is only the *Veda* of Vālmīki who refers to it as *samhitā*.⁷⁵ The *Mahābhārata* which was composed by Vyāsa in its nuclear portion is hailed as *samhitā*⁷⁶ which is open to all, irrespective of their social standing. It is also called the *Veda* of Kṛṣṇa.⁷⁷ Its author is admittedly the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.⁷⁸ With all this both the epics are admitted to be of human origin. The *Bhagavad-gītā* which contains the quintessence of the teaching of the *Upaṅśads*, is the song of the Divine but yet is treated not as a *Veda* of no human origin but as a *smṛti*, that is which reminds us of the *Vedic* truths. The designation *Veda* which is given to the *Nāḷayiram* must be taken to convey only this sense

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71. Passage cited from Bredby's *Appearance and Reality in the Idea of God*. p. 449
72. Evidence is wanting to identify the person or group of persons who held this view.
73. K.C. 8.
74. cf. *ibid.* Sūt. 189 to 194.
75. Rām. 6. 128 : 120.
76. M.Bh. Ādi. 1: 78.
77. *ibid* 1:294; 62: 20.
78. Bhāg. P. 1.3 : 21.

of revealing the truths in a medium different from that of the *Vedas*. Like the epics and *Purāṇas* these are verily the supplements to the *Vedas*,⁷⁹ still retaining the names *Veda* and *samhitā*.

Mention must be made here about the work known as *Bhagavannāmasahaśram* recently prepared by Pandit V. Anantacharya and A. Srinivasaraghavan. It is based on the *Drāmidopaniṣat-tātparya-ratnāvali*. This work summarises the gist of each decad in a *śloka* which contains at least ten words conveying the sense of each verse in that decad. The *Tiruvāymoli*, which is considered to be dealing with the Lord's attributes is thus held to contain at least thousand qualities of the Lord. Those who composed this work took each word which deals with the gist of verse and turned it to suit the formation of a name of the Lord. So there are thousand names prepared from Vedānta Deśika's work but based on the contents of each verse of the *Tiruvāymoli*. This is another *sahasranāmam* for Viṣṇu like *Viṣṇusahasranāmam* which is included within the Anusāsana parva of the *Mahābhārata*.

No better tribute could be paid to Nammālvār and his compositions than repeating Vedānta Deśika who said of him thus : "We worship the toe of Saṭha, whose literary outpourings bearing the fragrance of Vakuḷi flowers made the *Vedas* take rest".⁸⁰ This means that the *Vedas* felt that Brahman lies beyond thought and expression.⁸¹ The *Tiruvāymoli* proceeded further where the *Upaniṣads* left by dealing at great length about God and His perfection. In another context, he remarks that the utterances made by those preceptors who are the recipients of Nārāyaṇa's favour are more authentic than and superior to those of the sages even though their hearts are pure.⁸² Again he emphatically asserts that it is only through the grace of Saṭhakopa that all the Vaiṣṇavites have found it

79. cf. *Drāmidopaniṣat-tātparya-ratnāvali*. 4.

80. *Yatirōjasaptati*. 4.

81. Taitt. Up. 2.

82. *Amṛtāsvādinī*, 27.

possible to bow with their heads at the Feet of the Lord, rather reach His Feet with bent heads.⁸³

It may be concluded that the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism during the period of Rāmānuja has been mainly due to four features which characterized the tenets of the school. The difficult and arduous paths of *karma* and *jñāna* were replaced by the path of devotion, not that which is enjoined in the *Upaniṣads* but practical life filled with the emotion of love for God. Abstractness, rigidity, idealism and inaccessibility which mark the *Upaniṣadic* concept of God-head gave room for emotional appeal, tenderness, realistic approach and easy accessibility of God which made the course of devotion very attractive and practicable coming within the reach of common man irrespective of social status, and equipment. That God would overlook the guilt of man and would surely help in times of distress personally or through agency gives strength to the weak-minded and makes them feel much drawn and attached to him. *Prapatti* has played an important role in this respect. To seek refuge under God is welcome measure so as to be rid of the responsibility for looking after one's own interest and also others. The concept of service to God and His men is more endearing to humanity than the mere practice of devotion. The meeting together of persons who are devoted to God is welcomed with their differences rid of them and enjoy communion with God. Hereby the spirit of tolerance gets full scope for development.

It is clear that the preachings of the Ālvārs influenced Yāmuna and Rāmānuja to develop a system of Vedāntic thought based on the *Vedas* and the *Nālāyiram*. The courses of *bhakti*, *prapatti* and the concept of *katṅkarya* and the cult of the *bhāgavatas* had far-reaching effect on many a religious school all through India. The *Kṛṣṇabhakti* of Nimbārka and Vallabha owes its rich development to the devotional hymns of the Ālvārs whose spirits were reflected in the *Gadyatraya* of Rāmānuja, *Pañcastava* of Kūrattālvāṇ and the *Stotras* of Parācara Paṭṭar. Not merely did these two schools adopt *bhakti*

83. *ibid.* 25.

as the main course for *mukti* and for propitiation here but the emotional element of devotion brings to our mind much of what is contained in the hymns of the Ālvārs, whose sweet and intensely sincere contributions which are outstanding and unique in their poetic and devotional content are universally acclaimed.

The practical influence of the compositions of the Ālvārs made itself felt on the masses of people in no small measure and played an important role during the great revival of Hinduism in the period between the fifth century and the twelfth century which spelt the end of the vogue for Buddhism and Jainism. Apart from acting as a shaping factor in the quotidian religious consciousness of the Hindu, no matter whether he be a Vaiṣṇavite or not, the general spirit and influence of the hymns of the Ālvārs have had a deep and long lasting extra-religious effect on the sensibility and culture of the Indian people. The emotional approach, and the ready, human appeal of the hymns have through the centuries of their popular dissemination successfully educated and cultivated the modes of feeling and outlook of the people in general, besides carrying the message of *bhakti* far and near. It may not be exceptional to claim that the Ālvārs take credit for their contribution through these hymns not only to the cause of religion but also to the enrichment of the main stream of Indian culture.