
CHAPTER-III: ARYO-DRAVIDA CULTURE AS REFLECTED
IN SOUTH INDIAN RELIGION

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Religion has generally formed one of the most important factors in the life and history of all nations. In India it has animated social life in an exceptional measure and the concept of Dharma has commanded universal allegiance throughout the sub-continent in all its history.¹

Religion is the term generally used to describe man's relation to the supernatural powers and the various organised systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed. There are no peoples, however primitive, who are without religion.²

Religion means, man's relation to that which he regards as holy. The "holy" need not be thought of as supernatural, much less as personal, and if the word "god" be defined in personal or supernatural terms, it follows that religion includes for more than the relation to God. Worship is probably the most basic of these, moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious institutions are generally also constituent elements of the religious life as practised by believers and as commanded by religious sages and scriptures.³

Religion from times immemorial had played an important role in moulding the human path of progress from his mere satiation of beastly thirst and lust to a much higher plane of

living and ultimately by showing him the path leading to a place far beyond the mundane and materialistic world.

India always has been a land of many religions and wonderful gods and goddesses. And as India conspicuously is a country of creeds, so is its literature pre-eminently priestly and religious.

There is a general belief that all the best elements in Hindu religion and culture are derived from the Aryans. But this view is untenable now as we have plenty of evidences regarding the religious beliefs, customs and ceremonies of the proto-Austroloids and Dravidians prior to advent of the Aryans. On the strength of evidences discovered at various sites of Indus Valley civilization, we can safely infer that the Dravidian speaking people perhaps excelled the Aryans, and in any case they must be regarded as partner of the Aryans in building up the great structure known as Hinduism. On the other hand, Aryan religion, thoughts and beliefs have been profoundly modified by those of the proto-Austroloids and Dravidians with whom Aryans came into contact in India.⁴

The religion of South should have had an independent existence in the beginning, though subject to Aryan influences in later times. It is even possible to demonstrate that the Dravidians in certain respects remain unaffected by Aryan religious influences and have even produced an appreciable effect upon the Aryans themselves.

According to the general belief of modern scholars, the first occupants of the soil of India were Negritos, and the Austric or the Southern race people next invaded India. The Dravidians are believed to have later on immigrated into India and they were by a certain round-headed people of the Alpine race, which is supposed to have come from the Pamirs. The advent of the Aryans is said to have taken place after. The early settlers, including the Negritos and the Austroloids, must have brought with them worship of the Linga (Phallus), tree and some other minor objects. Birth rites, marriage rites, funeral rites, human sacrifice, witch-craft, worship of ancestors, divination and demonology are almost universal, throughout the world tribes.

A great peculiarity of India is that everything endures while everything changes, so that even today all three elements, i.e., Negroids, Dravidian and Aryan, exist side by side, at one distinct and yet intermingled in an infinite number of amalgams. Thus, at the theoretical starting point of Indian mythology, one must insist on the different factors, Munda, Dravidian and Aryan. But the first two have left no direct traces in very times, they only appear through the medium of Brahmanic literature.⁵ The aborigines are, to some extent, involved with Totemism. But the Dravidians were less gross. They excluded blood sacrifices and eating of raw meat and were limited to the veneration of idols. The effigy of a divinity was sprinkled, perfumed and hung with

garlands. This pious and peaceful veneration remained in India under the name 'Puja'. Still, they offered animal sacrifices to deities. Even in our days, in Deccan piety is shown to hideous she-ogress such as Kali and Durga, ferocious deities of Hinduism which show a Brahmanical separation.

The fusion of Aryan with non-Aryan cults began immediately after the Aryans entered India; and the process had a long course lasting over many centuries before the new culture crossed the Vindhya to continue the same process in the South, probably by much milder methods evolved by long experience in the North.⁶ By this time, the ancient Dravidians reached a high stage of development in the domain of religion.

Religion has been a major pre-occupation of the peoples of South India. Since early times different strands of racial types and cultural layers formed one above the other chronologically, it was but natural that different religious expressions should have characterised different periods in their history.

(I) Gods and Goddesses of Dravidian and Aryans

Dravidians, as we know, were the inhabitants of India before the advent of the Aryans. Pre-Dravidian aborigines were conquered by the Dravidians what Aryans did the same thing in the North. Then Aryans poured into India and fanned the whole North. But they followed peaceful methods on the aryanisation of South. It was inevitable to the incoming Aryans into South

to adopt the local customs and traditions of the non-Aryans.

Thus, C.R. Reddy says, "We Dravidians, are proud to be shown that as between Aryan and Dravidian, if there has been borrowing on the one hand, there has been giving on the other, that if we received, we also gave, that what assimilation, there has been, mutual and not one sided, and that the Hindu civilization of today is the common heritage of both."⁷

After settlements of the Aryans in India, their homa was greatly influenced by the non-Aryan Puja. In all likelihood, Puja is the Dravidian form of worship, while the homa is the Aryan. In present day texture of Hindu culture and religion the warp appears to be Dravidian and the weft Aryan.⁸

The Dravidians had their own gods and goddesses. The forms of worship and their religious ceremonies are also peculiar to the Aryans. We can trace the high antiquity of these gods and goddesses to the Indus culture. The non-Aryan god called by very peculiar name Sisna-devah, which according to us refers to God Siva, who is represented nude in the Indus valley period. The archaeological evidences obtaining in the proto-Indian sites throw light on the different aspects of Siva. In fact, that later notion of Siva as a Pashupati, Trimurti (Trinity), a prince of Yogins, a Dancer and other ideas - all find their origin here in these early days.⁹ The forms of worship and their religious ceremonies are also peculiar to the Aryans. We can trace the antiquity of these goddesses and gods to the Indus culture. The

discovered figurines and statues at various sites of this culture give us very well idea of the cult of Mother-Goddess and Phallic God Siva. These figurines similar to those in the Indus Valley have been discovered in many countries in Western Asia between Persia and the Aegians, and also round wayside trees and village shrines in South India. These figurines are rightly taken to represent Mother or Nature Goddess.¹⁰ This Mother Goddess is represented in every village as the tutelary deity (grama devata) and is known under various names, such as Mata, Amma, Kali, Karali, etc., some times to be dreaded, sometimes warding off evil spirits, imparting fertility. To this goddess the worshipper brings a goat, probably for sacrifice and a number of people standing in the lower register seem to be taking part in the sacrifice.

Among the male gods the most remarkable is a three-faced deity wearing a horned head-dress, seated cross-legged on a throne and surrounded by elephant, tiger, buffalow, and rhinoceros, with deer appearing under the seat. This represents three concepts which are usually associated with Siva viz., he is (i) trimukha (three faced), (ii) Pasupati (lord of animals), and (iii) Yogisvara or Mahayogi.¹¹ Thus, it appears that Siva was one of the principal deities of the people along with the Mother Goddess. His worship was iconic but also phallic, as would appear from the presence of a large number of conical and cylindrical stones; small ringstones suggest that the worship of the Yoni, the female

symbol of generation. The conical and cylindrical stones probably symbolise fertility and are connected with the cult of Siva as Lingas. The vedic religion may be observed, was originally aniconic, the worship of icons arising at a later stage.

In Tamil Sivan (Siva) means red, the divinity was known to the early Aryans as Nila-lohita "the Red one with blue" (throat). Again, common epithet of Siva Sambhu has been compared with Chempu or Sembu of Tamil word and Dravidian god Siva is identified with the Aryan Rudra. This name was easily identified with an existing Aryan storm God, the father of the Maruts or the storm winds, whose name Rudra in Aryan meant quite a different thing, the Roars.¹²

The name Uma recalls Ma, the Great Mother of the Asianic and Mediterranean peoples, and Durga, as one of the common epithets of the Mother-Goddess Uma.¹³

Krishna (in Prakrit Kanha, in Tamil Kannan) is a demon opposed to Indra in the Rigveda, represents, partially at least a Dravidian God of youth who has later been identified with Vishnu as an incarnation of his. Another Dravidian God of youth was Murukan, who in the composite Puranic mythology became Kumara or Skanda, the son of Siva. Elephant headed god Ganesh seems to be pre-Aryan origin. The Phallic symbol of Siva, the Linga appears to be both in its form and name, of Austric or Proto-Austroloid origin.¹⁴ The submerged totemism of the Proto-

Austroloids possibly was the oldest and most powerful source of the Nagas or Serpentine deities and water spirits would appear to have come from the Proto-Austroloids.

Garuda, vehicle of Vishnu, is partly divine eagle of the Aryans and partly of Dravidian or Mediterranean. The monkey God, Hanuman was pre-Aryan and his worship was slowly started by the Aryans through their contact with the Dravidians. Thus, the Aryan religion has been modified by Austric and Dravidian contacts can be seen in the evolution of Hinduism.¹⁵

In culture, speaking in the Indian way, one may say that over twelve annas in the rupee is ^{of} a non-Aryan origin.

The animal worship formed part of the religious belief of the South Indian people. Dravidians were worshipping devils, and that they were tree-worshippers and serpent worshippers. Their religion is said to have consisted largely of magical superstition and demonolatry.¹⁶ Among the most ancient elements of Indian religion, we may place the worship of the Cobra, the 'good snake'. All over India cobras are exceedingly abundant, and Indian folk-lore is full of stories in which the cobra deity plays a benevolent part. That cobra worship was dominant among the Dravidians in the Vedic period is shown by the term Naga gradually superceding the other names used in Sanskrit literature for the Dravidians.¹⁷ Among the Indian snakes the cobra is pre-eminent and it is believed that the Dravidians brought snake

worship with them into India from Persia or the Persian borders.

The deity possibly older even than the cobra, and a deity who appears to be purely Dravidian, is Muniswami - "angry deity", who haunts certain trees and houses. Muniswami is much in evidence all over South. Besides these, Dravidians worshipping village popular Goddess which bears innumerable names, the commonest perhaps being Gangamma in Telugu villages, Mariyamma or Mariyattal in Tamil villages.¹⁸ The worship of village deities is most ancient form of South Indian religion.

In addition to the gramadevata, who are in a special sense the village deities, there are a large number of spirits of all kinds, male and female, who are worshipped by the villagers. The worship of departed ancestors played an important part in the old Dravidian religion and is still universal all over South India. So, men and women, boys and girls, who have died violent or untimely deaths, or who have been notorious for their power or even their crimes, are frequently worshipped after death.¹⁹

A male deity, called Kuttandavar, is worshipped in many parts of the Tamil country. Annamma, Chandesvaramma, Mayesvaramma, Maramma, Udolamma, Sukhyajamma, were worshipped in Mysore.²⁰ Bisalamariamamma (Sakti) Mahadeva-amma, Huliamma are also popular in Mysore. It is quite probable that originally in South India, the village goddess had all been quite simple. The Sangam people knew and preached both the ritualistic and

supplicatory aspects of religion and their rituals were related to animism. The whole philosophy of reincarnation, hero-worship, ancestor-worship, Sati-worship etc. related to death was known to them. Animist worship and their notions of rebirth, heaven and hell were integrated into a primitive religio-cultural base on which alien ideas like the worship of the personified elements and the apotheosis of the dreadful forms of nature were superimposed. In Tamil religion, tree worship, stone worship, water worship, animal worship, worship of stars and planets were all supposed to be divinely animated. The trees themselves, being totems, developed into religious institutions and particular trees came to be attached to particular Gods and their temples like Kadambu for Murugan, Kayambu for Tirumal, Konrai and Vilvan for Siva etc.

There are three strands of religion clearly marked of from each other during the Sangam period: (1) the indigenous gods, system of worship etc., (2) the exotic Hindu Gods, system of worship etc. and (3) the exotic non-Hindu religious faiths, functions etc. All the three undoubtedly co-existed and till the very end of the Sangam age, no serious and open clash among them occurred, though the tendency for the protagonists of each religion was to promote the cause of one's own religion.²¹

Nachchinarkkiniyar states that Mayon's son Kamam was also worshipped as a pastoral God by the cowherds. The hunters of the hill tracts worshipped Murugan as the God of the hillock. The

worship of Murugan was normally in the hands of the devotees' priest who also carried a spear or a Vel like Murugan Himself and so was called a Velan. The primitive way of worshipping Murugan was practised, while the more advanced method of worship was practised by the Brahmins.²² Other Gods and Goddesses of the hill-side were also recognised and worshipped. From the aryanisation all the cults of Siva, Vaishnava, Mother Goddess, etc. were brought into systematic practice in the South.

In the South Indian inscriptions, the following six cults of Saivism are mentioned: (1) Bhairava, (2) Vama, (3) Kalamukha, (4) Mahavrata, (5) Pasupata, and (6) Saiva. The first two may be identified with the Kapalikas. The last four cults are the same with slight differences in principles.²³ Saivism of a purely devotional character flourished in South India from about 500 A.D. A large number of saints, called Nayanars, poured forth, in devotional hymns, some of the highest spiritual sentiments that religion can offer, and set up Saivism on a strong foundation. The highly sectarian character of Saivism may be inferred from the statement of Tirumular that "to feed a Siva-jnanin once is more meritorious than the gift of a thousand temples or the feeding a crore of Brahmins versed in the Vedas." Among the important Saiva sects of South India, the Virasaivas or Lingayats, whose philosophy was influenced later on by Sankara and Ramanuja and who gave great prominence to the Linga (Phallus) and the Nandi or Bull. The Saiva religion became very popular

in the South under the patronage of the Rashtrakutas and the Cholas.²⁴ A male deity, called Kuttandavar, is worshipped in many parts of the Tamil country. Annamma, Chandesvaramma, Mayesvaramma, Maramma, Udolamma, Sukhyajamma were worshipped in Mysore. Bisalamma (Sakti), Mahadeva-amma, Huliamma are also popular in Mysore. It is quite probable that, originally in South India, the village goddess had all quite simple names.²⁵

The village female deities spread all over the South are called by different names. In the Telugu country, they are called Mutyalamma (pearl goddess), Chinnitamma, Challalamma, Ghantalamma (Bell goddess), Yaparamma (business goddess), Mammilamma (sits under a mango tree), Gangamma (water goddess), Addankamma, Pandilamma, Wanamalamma, Balamma, Sitalamma etc. Farther in the West of Ellore District deities worshipped are chiefly Gangamma who is some times called Mahalakshmi, Chammalamma, Paleramma (boundary goddess), Ankamma (Cholera and disease goddess), in Cuddappa and Kurnool districts called Peddamma, Chinnamma, Ankamma, Nukamma, Ellamma, Arikamma etc. Sapta Kannigai (seven virgins or Akasa Kannigai) are the titular deities of tanks in North Arcot.

As already mentioned in previous chapter, the Aryan tribes came to India with few womenfolk. Out of necessity, they were compelled to take the indigenous wives and follow certain customs and traditions of non-Aryans. Dravidian element when entered the

domain of Aryan tribes made definite impression upon them. Though Dravidian beautiful material culture was destroyed, Aryans were not able to root out their culture. After their settlement, Aryans composed first religious literature called Rigveda. The main aim of such literature was to encourage the Aryans to spread their culture in all directions. Gradually, their cultural gravity was shifted to Madhya desa. The seers and Princes were quite busy in the spread of their own culture. As a result, they penetrated South India and completed the aryanisation by 4th century B.C. However, they brought their gods and goddesses, customs and traditions and religious practices to South India. Their deities were Indira, Agni, Varuna, Surya, Mitra, Brahaspati, Ushas, Soma, Prithvi, Savitri, Rudra, Vishnu, Aditya, Vayu etc.²⁶ But some of the Vedic deities must have been originally Dravidian deities.

It is interesting to note that the Aryan God Varuna, was probably the God of the Dravidian tribes being on the borders of the sea, to whom the Aryan rishis accorded a place in their Pantheon. The Aryan Rudra is another God of the Dravidian tribes. He is essentially a mountain deity. His name Rudra meaning the 'Red one' seems to be a translation of the Dravidian name Siva. The Aryan God, Tvashta, was perhaps the Dravidian God of artificeries. The God of the Dravidian agricultural tribes was merged in the personality of the Vedic Indra. The Vedic God, Krishna corresponds to the God of the Dravidian pastoral tribes.²⁷

According to Dr. Slater, Kali, Siva and Vishnu are Dravidian deities, though their worship now forms the innermost essence of Indian culture.²⁸

"Indian religion" says Sir Charles Elliot, "is commonly regarded as the off-spring of an Aryan religion brought into India by invaders from the North, and modified by contact with Dravidian civilization."

R.G. Bhandarkar has rightly pointed out that Rudra-Siva was a deity whose worship was not at first a sectarian god.

The cult of Vishnu, in the form of various incarnations, has some frail links with Vedic mythology. He there appears as a Solar god who traverses the three worlds in three steps. They are heaven, air and earth and he prefers to live in heaven.²⁹ The Vaishnav religion revolves round the worship of the Supreme God Narayana-Vishnu and his numerous manifestations. In epics and Puranas Narayana-Vishnu was not differentiated. He is considered highest by his worshippers, described variously as the Bhagavatas, Pancarattras, Evariantis, Satavatas and Vaishnavas.³⁰

The spread of Brahmanism into South is associated with Sage Agastya. Along with him came presumably the Northern culture especially associated with Brahman. The pre-historic deities were absorbed in the Pantheon of Brahmanical Hinduism. It is possible that the worship of the female principle in Hindu ritual was derived from Dravidian ideas of the Earth-Mother, but

the earliest historical records of South Indian religion are connected with Aryan propoganda - Brahmanical, Jaina or Buddhist. Civilized Dravidian society gradually adopted the religion, including the social and political organisation, of the Aryan village communities.³¹ The process of assimilation and adoption of popular religious notions had been going on for many centuries in the rival Brahminical schools, ever since the philosophers of the Upanishads had formulated the doctrine of the One in Many. The ancient Aryan worship of the One God, in its different ritualistic aspects according to different positions of the Sun, formed the symbolic frame work into which both the individualism of the Upanishads and the primitive beliefs of the masses were fitted.³²

Both Saivism and Vaishnavism were penetrated to the extreme South of India after the revival of Brahmanism in the North during the fourth and fifth centuries. Buddhism and Jainism had been introduced earlier and were in possession of the field when the two later systems of theistic beliefs were introduced into the Southern country.³³ So, Indian theistic religious thought belonged to the Dravidians and all the Pantheistic to the Aryans. The Vratya or Dravidian Pantheon consisted of the Divine Triad of Siva, Amma and Kartikeya or Murugan, the later Ganapati, Linga, Sun, Nagas, fish, tree etc. The Aryans gradually assimilated all these gods and goddesses, their came into being the various sects and philosophical systems of the non-Aryans. The Yatis, the

Arhatis, the Garagirs, and Pasupatas came into vogue almost since the Proto-Indian times. The cult of the Linga and Yoni as symbolising the generative and reproductive aspects of nature had come into vogue during this time. Moreover, both these elements were identified with the Supreme Being Siva and Amma, the Mother Goddess. A Snake is often found enclosing the Linga in Hindu mythology. In some Southern temples, two erect serpents have their heads together above the Linga or they may appear on either side of it as if in an attitude of worship.³⁴ Various accounts are also given, how the bull (Nandi) came to be associated with Siva. Both Serpent and Nandi associated with Siva in a number of South Indian temples are noteworthy. The cult of human sacrifice belonged to non-Aryans. Both the Mohenjodaro inscriptions and later writings prove beyond doubt one factor, namely, that cult of human sacrifice must have been originally practised by the non-Aryans and that if the Aryans have mentioned instances of the same, it must have been on account of gradual flow of the non-Aryans into the fold of Aryanism itself.³⁵

The primitive forms of Dravidian religion have been greatly modified by Brahman influence. For the most part, the same people in town and village worship the village deities and the Brahman gods. There are a few aboriginal tribes in some of the hill tracts who are still unaffected by Brahman ideas or customs but in the vast majority of the South Indian districts, the worship of the village deities and the worship of Siva and

Vishnu go on side by side. The number of different gods and goddesses worshipped all over South India is enormous and the variety of local customs almost infinite. For example, the Parihas of South India, who were originally a leading clan among the Dravidians, had been dethroned from their position and reduced to a state of servitude and degradation by Brahman influence. But it seems that the worship of the grama devatas and the buffalo sacrifice belongs to a very much older, and go back to days long before the Aryan invasion, probably to the time when the Dravidian class first came to India and settled down to an agricultural life.³⁶

During the Sangama period, the Tamils worshipped various gods, e.g., 'Mayan', 'Vendan' or Indra and Varuna. The Sangam literature further refers to the building of the temples or Kottams. People then used to perform sacrifices. The name Siva as Mudumudalvan occurs in the Purananuru. The author of the Puram compares King Ilavandigaippallittunjiya Nanmaran to Siva, Balarama, Vishnu and Subrahmanya. The Silappadikaram and Manimekalai show the popularity of Saivism during those days. New impetus was given at the hands of the Saiva Nayanmars. The great work done by these holy Nayanmars and Alvars (Vaishnava saints), who traversed the whole Tamil land several times over singing, preaching, organising, has ever since been treasured by a grateful posterity in beautiful legends which are significant even in their anachronism.³⁷

The village deities, with a few exceptions, are female whereas Siva and Vishnu, and the principal deities of the Hindu Pantheon are male. They are almost universally worshipped with animal sacrifices. Buffaloes, sheep, goat, pigs and fowls are freely offered to them. In the Tamil country, this system is curiously modified by the influence of Brahmanism, which has imbued the villagers with an idea that the shedding of blood is low and irreligious and it is remarkable that no animal sacrifices are ever offered to Iyenar.

Vaishnavism too made rapid progress in the South. The doctrine of Vaishnavism underwent some important changes later on. In the first place the theory of Avatars or incarnation assumed great preponderance. The origin of this conception may be traced to a fairly early period of its history. The number and nature of these Avatasas are variously given in different treatises. Rishabha, Buddha, Krishna, Rama, Dattatraya etc. are mentioned as Avataras of Vishnu.

In addition to these Saivism and Vaishnavism, other minor religious sects of more or less the same general character flourished. These were the followers of Sakti, Ganapati, Skanda, Kartikeya, Brahma and Surya. In order to complete the picture of religious condition, it is necessary to add that primitive belief in the spirits of the earth and mountains, in Yakshas, Gandharvas, and Nagas, and worship of all these as well as of animals like elephant, horse, cow, dog etc. still retained a

hold on the popular mind.

Brahmins lived peacefully and pursued their religious practices and followed social institutions unmolested by the people. The influence that they exercised upon Tamil society was the influence more of example than of compulsion by authority. It was at this time that the Aryan Brahman was fairly well-established at the head of the society in Tamil culture and was much respected and looked upon for various purposes. This evident of the fact that the influence of the Aryan culture was in full swing in the period of Asoka.

The worship of the village deity, as it is called in Sanskrit and Tamil, forms an important part of the conglomerate of religious beliefs, customs, and ceremonies which are generally classed together under the term Hinduism. In almost every village and town of South India may be seen a shrine or symbol of the gramadevata, which is periodically worshipped and propitiated. As a rule this shrine is far less imposing than the Brahmanical temples in the neighbourhood. Siva and Vishnu may be more dignified beings, but village deity is regarded as a more present help in trouble and is more intimately concerned with the happiness and prosperity of the villagers.³⁸ In addition to the gramadevatas, who are in a special sense the village deities, there are a large number of spirits of all kinds, male and female, who are worshipped by the villagers. The worship of departed ancestors played an important part in the old Dravidian religion

and is still universal all over South India. So, men and women, boys and girls, who have died violent or untimely deaths, or who have been notorious for their power or even their crimes, are frequently worshipped after their death. Then, again, there is the spirit of the boundary stone, the spirits of hills and rivers, forests, and trees, the deities of particular arts and crafts, who are worshipped by particular classes of the population. All these religious practices were quite popular non-Aryan features of South India. Another important feature of the religion existed in the South was tantric cult. There are numerous examples of the observation of this cult. Many rulers and chieftains performed the sacrifice at the temples of Kali, Durga, etc. The custom was popular among the Dravidian tribes of Chota Nagpur plateau, by whom human sacrifice offered to Kali. Malcolm states that Karhad Brahmins used to sacrifice to their deities a young Brahmin every year.³⁹ The Tamils of Ceylon and the Banjaris and Koils of the Telugu country practised the cult until recently. The practice of offering one's own blood to Kali is in vogue since ancient times.

The ruling dynasties of Southern India were quite generous and they patronised almost all the religions. As a result of this religious tolerance, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism flourished side by side. The Nanaghat cave inscription of Queen Nayanika begins with an invocation to the deities Dharma, Indra, Sankarashana, Vasudeva, the Moon, the Sun and the four guardians

of the quarters (Lokopalas), Yama, Varuna, Kubera and Vasava, and then goes on to record the huge amounts of sacrificial fees paid to the people and the presents for the performance of a number of Vedic sacrifices for the benefit of the donor.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Nasik cave inscription of A.D. 149 compares Gautamiputra Satakarni to Rama that is Balarama and Kesava in prowess.⁴¹ A large number of religious sects were prevalent in the South. Mattavilasaprahasana, a drama written by Mahendravarman-I, mentions sects like the Kapalikas and the Pasupatas. After the conversion of Mahendravarman-I to Saivism, Kanchi became a stronghold of the Saivas. He built temples in honour of Siva and his successors too encouraged Saivism.⁴²

The Saiva saints, famous as the sixtythree Nayananars flourished during the Pallavas and because of them Saivism became even more popular.

The worship of Siva took a new form in the Chola dominion. Besides images of Siva in his various aspects like Kiratarjuniya, Bhiksatana, Kalyanasundara, Panchdeva, Ling-Puranadeva, Umasahita, Nataraja, Dakshinamurti, Srikanta and so on, the icons presented to the great temple at Tanjore by its royal patrons included images of Ganapati, Subrahmanya, Maha Vishnu and Surya. Among the goddesses are mentioned Kalapidari, Durga, Paramesvari and Emalaltu, Durgaiyar, Omkarasundari and forms of Pidari, Settaiyar, Nakkinar, an early Tamil poet of the 3rd

century A.D. compares his patron, a Pandya King, to Siva, Baladeva, Krishna and Subrahmanya in various qualities. This shows that in the South the worship of Sankarsana flourished unabated down to the 6th century A.D.⁴³

BHAKTI CULT

The doctrine of Bhakti means complete devotion and surrender to personal god. Bhakti is the true record of mystical experience and of ecstasies of moments of light when the devotees perceive the vision of God personally. Worship is prescribed in forms suitable to the conception of the deity. Voteries of Bhakti were going to the temples and worshipped the image in common. All this made religion well-defined and organised in particular forms for devotion and partical worship. The Bhakti movement which has its genesis the worship of the gods, Siva and Vishnu, had its beginning in the South. The movement had two wings - one Saiva and the other Vaishnava. They were contemporary and cooperative and had many close resemblances.

Till the 5th century A.D. worship of primitive godlings with offerings of blood and toddy, and worship of deities like Muruga, Siva, Vishnu, Indra, Krishna, etc. and performance of elaborate Vedic sacrifices were prevailing in South. But Buddhism and Jainism gained upperhand in different parts of South. People in Tamil country began to entertain fears of the whole land

going over to Jainism and Buddhism. Though we find a marked hatred shown against Jainism and Buddhism, there was no jealousy between the two creeds of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Under the Cholas of the line of Vijayalaya may be said to commence the Silver age of South Indian Saivism.⁴⁴ Therefore, there appeared an outspoken hatred of Buddhist and Jains in Tamil land. In such a critical situation, champions of orthodox Hinduism appeared in many Saiva Nayanars and Vaishnava Alvars, who were simple hearted Bhaktas or devotees and traversed the country often and often, singing, dancing, debating and expounding their faith all their way. These God-intoxicated saints were always on move, transmitted their divine faith to millions of people. This kind of Bhakti movement began in 6th century and attained its peak in the early 7th century.

As a result of the missionary activities of these saints, their personal gods and their songs and hymns made orthodox Hinduism overshadow both Jainism and Buddhism by 7th century. Orthodox Hinduism became the dominant religion in the South and gave rise to the Bhakti cult. The most famous Saiva saints (Nayanars) were Appar, Sambandar, Sundaramurti, and Manikkavasagara and the most famous Vaishnava saints (Alvars) were Tirumanagai, Periyalvar, Andal, Tiruppan and Nammalvar. The songs and hymns of these saints were remarkable for depth and devotional feelings and piety.⁴⁵

It is to be pointed out that if Bhakti cult had its origin in the South, its protest also originated there. The advent of Islam made North India no longer peaceful for the Brahmanism. This led to a considerable influx of Brahmins Southwards, carrying with them certain peculiar developments of Brahmanism as then practised in Northern India. They brought with them Tantricism, a debased form of Saktism which is a rigorous form of one aspect of Saivism. This led to the development of the worship of a supreme goddess in one form or other. In addition to this, Pasupata and Kapalika sects, Voteries of more rigorous form of Saivism, also developed in the South. This ultimately led to the rise of another form of Saivism called Virasaivism or Lingayatism.

(II) Religious Institutions

The organised religious institutions are best and the sole instruments for the spread of any religion. Ancient India was not lacking in religious institutions like temples and Mathas and Tirthas or places of pilgrimage where crowds gather in the interest of religious life. Among such institutions temples and Mathas are prominent.

TEMPLE

Temple is basically an expression of religion besides being multi-dimensioned in its expression, is an integrative

experience.⁴⁶ Man can create culture. As an aspect of this culture, he creates images in his mind and fashions icons by his hands. Man has been an image creator and an icon fashioner throughout his career on earth. Therefore, religion and art have always been with him. The temple presents a combination of religion and art, and its roots go back to a very remote past, in fact to the earliest stages of his career. Thus, he has been homo-religious. And he has built temples and worshipped in them since that time.

Prof. Ramachandra Rao writes that 'The temple may be regarded as descendent of the Stupa which in its turn had been evolved from the primitive funerary mound. The custom of installing a stone-block linga in the spot where the burial has taken place is even now prevalent in all over South India.

The growing desire of religious orders to reorganise their systems on the basis of new social values and materials needs shows through the large-scale construction of temples and allied institutions. In the Deccan, the process started about the fifth-sixth centuries and reached fulfilment in the tenth century. The temples which gradually developed as the symbols of a religious authority and awareness were built with equal zeal by the old Brahmanical and new Jain sects.⁴⁷

Traditionally, the first systematic attempt to spread the temples was made in pre-Pallava times by King Koccenkanam,

who is described in literature as the proud builder of 78 temples. But archaeological evidence regarding large-scale construction of temples is not available before the 5th century. Between 450 and 650 the Chalukya kings built as many as 70 temples at the capital city of Aihole.⁴⁸ The Chalukyas of Badami, Pallavas of Kanchi and Rashtrakutas of Malkhed started temple construction with mixed style of both Aryan and Dravidian. South Indian dynasties no doubt welcomed the Aryan Nagara style but refined with their architecture called Dravida style. Some temples are purely Aryan Nagara style, some are purely Dravidian whereas a few are mixed styles.

The Silppadikaram mentions the temples at Venkatam, Alagarmalai, Tiru Anantapuram and Puhar. The temple of the Kalpaka tree, the temple of white elephant, Vellai Naga's temple (Baladeva temple), the Sun temple, the Kailasa temple, the temple of Vel (Murugan), the temple of Vajra (Indra), the Satavahana or the Sattan temple, the Aruhan temple, Nilakottam are clearly mentioned in the Tamil literature. In addition to the Sun and Moon, Agni was also worshipped by the Brahmins. The temple was Koil or Kottam or Purai. God was Kon, Iraivan, Kadavul. The particular place in the temple where offerings were placed for Gods i.e., the altar, was called Balipidihai. Flags were waving on temple. The art of installing an idol in a temple was called Kadavul Mangalam.⁴⁹

The new classes of temple builders like officers, feudatories, district headmen, village headmen, military officers, tradesmen, saints, and ascetics came into practice. Free-feeding of devotees, worshippers, monks and destitutes was quite popular. In the reign of the Rashtrakuta King Dhruva 30 villages were asked to supply rice and ghee for feeding a thousand people.⁵⁰

The regional distribution of temples in the Deccan can be studied from the 7th century, when inscriptions start pouring in information regarding construction, renovation and maintenance of the sanctuaries. The charters issued by Pulikeshi-II refer to several important Saiva and Jaina temples.⁵¹ In the 8th century Siva temples were built at Pattada Kal in Bijapur district, at Gundlpet taluk of Mysore district, and at Kolar of Kolar district.⁵² A temple of Vishnu was constructed by the widowed mother of Balarjuna to perpetuate the memory of her husband.⁵³

In the 9th century temples were built in new areas. The temple of Mahadeva at Shiggaon taluk of Dharwad district, Gavagenesvara temple at Challakere taluk of Chittradrurg district, Mahendresvara in the Sira taluk of Tumkur district, Saiva temple also built in large scale. A temple of Siva belonging to the Pasupata monks was situated at Udiya Vara, modern Udipi in South Kanara. At Shikarpur in Shimoga district the Kalamukha

sect came into prominence. The Srinivasapur taluk in Kolar district possessed a large number of temples belonging to the Kalamukha monks.

The process reached its climax in the 10th century when a large number of temples were constructed with land grants and benefices all over the country. In 929 a temple and its monastery were /in flourishing condition at Ereyana-Kadiyur in the Lakshmesvara taluk.⁵⁴ In 951, temple of Siva at Saratavur (modern Soratur) in Gadag taluk of Dharwad district, has been constructed.⁵⁵ In Chitradurga, Mysore, Shimoga and Dharwar, a large number of Saiva temples belonging to Kalamukh sects have been constructed.

In Andhrapradesh temples appeared on a large-scale in the districts of Mahabubnagar, East-Godavari, Kurnool, Cuddapah, Kasimanagar and Guntur. Under the early Chalukyas attractive shrines flourished at Satyavolu in Kurnool district. Of these, the Bhimalingesvara and Ramalingesvara deserve special mention. The depiction of Kannappa, who was an early Nayanar saint, on a pillar of the temple indicates the Bhimesvara temple was a popular centre of the Saiva cult in the 7th-8th centuries. An inscription of Govinda-III found in the courtyard of the modern temple of Ramalingesvara reports the construction of 3 Sky-kissing temples of Siva, the Ramesvara, the Kalesvara and the Masiyankadhavala.⁵⁶

A large number of temples were also built in Maharashtra.

The Kharepatan grant of 1008 A.D. speaks of the temple of Avvesvara and its monastery in Ratnagiri district. The Rashtrakuta King Krishna-III made certain gifts for the benefit of the monastery attached to temple at Karhad.

The practice of building temples was adopted by all the major religious sects. It was as much popular with the theistic as with the atheistic sects. Although, the Saivites and Vishnavites fell out with each other on doctrinal differences, they appreciated one another's desire to perpetuate and popularise their religion by constructing temples and establishing the ritual service of the deities. The rulers helped mutual understanding by extending patronage to rival religious groups. The Kadambas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Chalukyas of Vengi, the Rashtrakutas, the Somavanshis of Orissa encouraged the building of Saiva, Vaishnava and Jaina temples and endowed them with grants of land and benefices.⁵⁷ Similarly, the Pallavas, the Cholas, and the Pandya rulers also made an attempt for the construction of temples. Generally, the convention set up by the Kings was followed by the commoners. Members of the same family practiced different religions, but each member co-operated with the other in upholding his religion. For example, Akaladevi, the Jaina wife of a Saiva general built temple at Sravanabelgola, her husband promptly requested his overlord to donate a village in favour of the temple.⁵⁸

The spirit of toleration was shown by the people. Thus, Divakar, the chief of the Brahmanas of the Isvara agrahara, granted land for the alms-house of the Jaina temple built by one Padmoja, a member of the Sarasvatigaccha order of the Jainas.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Brahmana burgesses of the town of Sedimba built a temple in honour of the Jaina goddess Jvalamalini and made provision for her ritual worship.⁶⁰

The cult of devotion (bhakti) largely explains the widespread popularity of the temples. It gave all persons, high or low, an opportunity to serve the god and aspire for liberation. The Periya Puranam speaks of many low-born devotees who attained salvation by serving the god in various capacities.⁶¹ Service to the gods could be rendered by constructing and renovating temples, cleaning their premises, collecting flowers for ritual worship, singing in honour of the deity and dancing for his entertainments.

The Chalukyas of Badami, though Hindus, did not lag behind the rest in supporting Jainism. Ravikirti, the Jaina author of famous Aihole inscription, is said to have constructed a Jaina temple, now known as the Meguti temple. Rulers like Vinayaditya, Vijayaditya, Vikramaditya gave rich grants to Jaina acharyas and for the building of Jaina temples.⁶² The Konnur record of Amoghavarsha-I and Surat Plates of Karka record grants made to the Jaina temples and monasteries for performing

ceremonies.⁶³ The work and achievements of a number of important saints, philosophers and poets were responsible for making Jainism popular.

The preachings of the nayanar saints also popularised the temple system. Tirumular forwarded that the fighting power of the King would diminish if ritual service (Puja) was not properly conducted in Saiva temples. Tirumular was an unequivocal champion of the temple cult. The Saiva agamas also contributed to the popularity of the temples. They usually contained a section called Kriyapada dealing with the construction of temples, installation of images and other related matters.

The popularity of the temples owed much to the munificent patronage of the imperial Chalukyas of Badami, who were greatly inspired by the magnificent Pallava temple at Mahabalipuram and Kanchipuram to build smaller structures in their own country. In 601 A.D. Durlabadevi induced her son Mangalesa to grant 10 villages to the temple of Mahakutesvara. Again, Lokamahadevi, queen consort of Vikramaditya-II, caused the construction of Lokesvara temple. The popularity of the practice of temple-building owed much to Jaina initiative in this direction. Since the Jainas lived surrounded by the Saivas who constructed numerous temples, they also built temples.

MATHAS

Another important religious institution is Math, which played very important role in the South Indian life. The development of Matha cult is a special feature in the South. 'Mathas' as religious institutions have their existence from the beginning of Indian civilization. According to Amarakosha, Mathas are, choultries or philanthropic abodes. Math is defined as the hut of an ascetic or student, a monastic school or a college and a Mathadhipati is defined as the head of such monastery or school.⁶⁴ The word Matha means the hut of an ascetic or a small cell or room, also a monastery and convent, seminary, college, or place of learning.⁶⁵ In any view Matha is a house of spiritual teacher or master wherein it accommodates those who came to him for learning and practice. Those institutions were once universal and they changed into religious centres of ecclesiastical teaching. In legal parlance a Matha connotes a monastic institution presided over by superior and established for the use and benefit of ascetics belonging to a particular order, who generally are disciples or co-disciples of the superior.

The Matha is an institution resembling to a certain extent, the Buddhist and Jaina monastery. The first stage naturally starts with the Gurukula of ancient days. The Matha did not at first take the shape of regular institution of a permanent nature. Agamic literature, which is equated with Vedic

literature in antiquity, also refers to some important Mathas. The Buddhist practice of establishing systematic monasteries requires special mention, though they were influenced by ancient Indian institutions like Asrama, the Gurukula, etc. Buddhist gave a new orientation to the monastic order. The later Hindu Mathas were modelled on the lines of Buddhist monasteries.⁶⁶

The highest effort of ancient Indians was directed towards training human beings for a state of spiritual perfection. India has been the centre for the spread of the truth in the world all through the ages, through a galaxy of spiritual personalities who have inspired and guided mankind with sublime vision of the Divine and also to achieve Moksha. To achieve Moksha, or deliverance, a very high degree of morality was insisted upon. This can be seen in the asrama theory of ancient times, which later on became the model for monastic institutions of all other religions of India. Thus, the idea of asceticism has its source in Brahmanism. Such spiritual leaders are known as sages, saints, ascetics, mystics, gurus and the dwelling-places of these holy men are called Asramas or Mathas among Hindus, Vihara and Chaityas among Buddhists and Basadis among Jains.⁶⁷

Jainism claimed great antiquity in certain parts of Southern India. It received warmest hospitability and sincer^e devotion. It is said that the age of the Ganga rule was the golden age for the Jainas, when Jaina ascetics and Mathas received

many grants from the Ganga rulers. On the same line Buddhist monastic order was developed. The Buddhist education and learning centred round monasteries as Vedic culture centred round the sacrifice. The Buddhism was a popular religion in the Deccan under the Satavahan Kings who carved a number of caves and restored to Buddhist monks. Monastery, belonging to the Rashtrakuta period can be found at Kanheri, Kampil and Dambal.

The development of monastic institution or Matha is traced back to the 8th century to the time of Sankaracharya, the great reviver of Hinduism against Buddhism and Jainism. Though opposed to Buddhism, he was in favour of Buddhist monastic order. The Mathas founded by him were all modelled on the Buddhist Viharas.

However, there is ample evidence for the existence of Gurupithas and Mathas in Agamas. The Mathas appearing right from 6th century rose to prominence with the rise of Kalamukha sect of Saivism. The structural and functional features of the Matha received its final shape under the acharyas of the Pasupatha-Kalamukha sect. Till then, temples were the predominant venue of all religious-social activities. Gradually, the Mathas came to assume the foremost importance and became centres of activities side by side with the temples.

Shri Sankara's contribution to the development of the monastic order among the Hindus seems to be striking. He is said

to have founded four Maths at the four corners of India, viz., (1) Dwaraka Kalik Math in the West, (2) Badarikaasram in the North, (3) Jagannatha Govardhana Math in the East, and (4) Sringeri Matha in the South. There were large number of Saiva and Vaishnava Maths. A Vaishna Matha/^{is} constituted by learned Brahmins. The Kodiya Matha at Belgam and Golaki Matha are few best examples of their later development.

AGRAHARA SYSTEM

Agrahara was an educational settlement or a colony of learned Brahmanas. Many families of learned Brahmanas were invited and settled down at certain places. Agrahara villages in South India were just like an island in the domain of the non-Aryans (Dravidian). Agraharas definitely developed the further activities of Aryans in the South. On special auspicious occasions, South Indian rulers used to invite learned Brahmanas, settle them in villages and assign their revenues to them for their maintenance. Such villages are called Agrahara villages, and they naturally became centres of learning, where higher education was imparted free in different branches of Sanskrit studies.⁶⁸ Belgam, in Karnataka, commenced as a Brahman settlement probably in the first or second century of the Christian era, as revealed by Satavahana King's front. In the 3rd century 32 Brahman families were imported and settled in the Agrahara of Talagunda near Belgam. Gradually, Agrahara rose in

prominence and possessed 144 villages for their maintenance. They were the endowments of the Kadamba Kings, specially Mayuravarman. Kodiyur Agrahara, modern Kalas, in Dharwad district, was made Agrahara in 10th century by the Rashtrakuta administration and assigned to 200 Brahmanas.⁶⁹ In Sarvainapura Agrahara, modern Arasikeri in Hassan district, Brahmanas were reading the Vedas, Sastras etc.

(III) Festivals

Fasts and festivities occupy a very considerable part of an orthodox Hindu life. The real origin of these is uncertain. The traditional explanations, however, of these usages are to be found scattered in different books.

Festivities are most important in mass life. Festivities provide the occasions for all the people to meet in one place and to take part in the cultural programmes, native games. They provide a man with an opportunity to discharge his religious duties. The social contact also increases by participating in the activities of the festivals. All the members of the family take part in the religious activities and assemble at one place for prayers. These festivities, fasts and fairs are very important for the community life. Through festivals, religious and social relationships are well established among the people of the local community. Moreover, an individual can develop his sociability by mixing with other people on the occasion of fairs

and festivals. South India from time immemorial, is the land of such traditions.

The religious festivals are clearly connected with the systems of astronomy and chronology by which their periods are determined.⁷⁰ As certain Planets were known to the Tamils, their festivals follow the Solar computation. Here an attempt is made to mention a few festivals:

(a) Shree Rama Naumy

This is the birth day of Dasaratha Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. It is observed chiefly by Mahratta Vishnavites but also to some extent by the Canarese and Telugus. It is not a Dravidian festival and introduced into the country by the Mahrattas. Such festivals are also observed in Vishnu temples, especially in the shrines dedicated to Rama.

(b) Narasimha Jayanti

In honour of the lion-man, the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, in which he destroyed the giant Hiranya Kashyapa, is again an Aryan festival.

(c) Garuda oastavam at Conjeevaram, is display of Vaishnavism against the old Saivism.

(d) Vara Lutchmee Vratam

It is a festival attended by women only, who make offering to Lutchmee, the wife of Vishnu, and invoke her aid in preserving them from being widows, clearly shows the Brahmanical tradition.

(e) Gokulashtami and Shree Javanti

Another Vaishnava festival celebrated on the birth day of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu. It is particularly observed by the class of cowherds who are dominated Yadavas. It is a fasting day for Brahmins. Lord Krishna was worshipped by offering tulsi on this occasion.

(f) Vinayaka Chatoorthy

This festival was celebrated in the honour of Vinayaka, son of Siva. This deity worshipped by all Saivites, is called by different names like Vignesvara and Ganesh.

(g) Sarasvati Pujarambham

It is celebrated principally in the honour of deceased ancestors. It corresponds to the Durga Pooja of Bengal. Both Brahmins and non-Brahmins participated on this occasion.

(h) Vaikunta Ekadasy

It is a special festival of the Vaishnavas and fasting

for both Brahmins and Sudras.

Thus, every village has a temple and people circumambulate it. The use of turmeric powder with lime water to cast off the influence of evil eye, is a common sight during the marriage occasions. It clearly indicates the Dravidian influence.

The Hindu festivals and Vratas were designed by the great sages of old. They were full of wisdom and capable of understanding and utilising the forces of nature in the universe.

In Manimekalai the festival in the honour of god Indra is mentioned. The commencement of the festival of Indra (Vila Kalkol) was proclaimed by beat of drums placed on elephant back.⁷¹

In Sinnamanur Plates mention is made that Nedunjelian celebrated a festival in his country in honour of Indra.⁷² Karikal instituted festival of Indra at ^uPhar. The cities of Madura and Puhar and perhaps Vanji too witnessed many festivals.

Beating of drums, breaking of coconut before the deity, offering bali, playing on musical instruments with leather strings, wearing of Vermilion, and tali clearly indicate the non-Aryan influence.

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