Controversy still surrounds the identity of the Āḻvārs. At one time, they were considered lower caste. FRIEDHELM HARDY challenged this thesis by arguing that they had a strong elite component as indicated by their use of the terms kō, kōn (which mean head/chief/king), and ālvār (noble person/saint). Some of them (such as Toṇṭaṭāppoto, Periyālvār, and his daughter Āṇṭāl) were Brāhmaṇas according to the hymns themselves; others (such as Kulacakaraṇ and Tirumāṅkai) might have been chiefs. Whatever their social identity, these bhakti poet-saints developed a distinct religious identity based on Tamil hymns with early caṅkam poetic tropes; a northern deity (Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa); and concepts of refuge and service. How that happened remains obscure.

1 I would like to thank LESLIE ORR for generously showing me her published and unpublished work on South Indian inscriptions and discussing several drafts of this essay. I am indebted to her recognition of the historical patterns and changes suggested by these inscriptions. Although my analysis builds on these, I have introduced my own interpretations of how they might be linked with the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. MARION RASTELLI, too, has facilitated my thinking by correcting some misperceptions I had of early Pāñcarātra texts, drawing my attention to some important sources, and challenging me to think more about some of my positions.

2 NARAYANAN/VELUTHAT 1978.


4 Murukan had been the main Tamil deity before the bhakti period. We have some scattered references to other northern deities, however, including Kṛṣṇa (known as Māyōṇ), Nārāyaṇa, and Śiva (Civan) from late caṅkam times.

5 The same could be said for the Nāyanmārs, poet-saints who worshipped Civaṇ (Śiva); this was a parallel movement, even more popular in Tamilnadu, and demands a separate study to detect similarities to and differences from the Āḻvārs.
Controversy still surrounds the Pāñcarātrins, too, in Tamilnadu. Scholars have generally assumed that they were priests in the temples that are mentioned in Āḻvār hymns or that some Āḻvārs themselves were Pāñcarātrins, but concrete evidence for those theories is meager. In fact, the role of Pāñcarātrins in Tamilnadu is obscure, with virtually no insessional evidence about them as temple priests, let alone a well-institutionalized priesthood, between the seventh century and the fifteenth.

Finally, controversy still surrounds the early Ācāryas. Were they a different Brāhmaṇa group altogether from those associated with the Āḻvārs? Did they have Pāñcarātra connections? In this paper, I will try to clarify relations between Brāhmaṇas, including some of the specific Brahmanical groups likely involved in the Āḻvār tradition, and Pāñcarātrins in connection with the formation of Śrīvaishṇavism (and its philosophical counterpart, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta).

In the first part, I will present diagnostic features that characterize religious aspects of Śrīvaishṇavism from the Āḻvārs to Rāmānuja: (1) accepting Nārāyaṇa as the sole supreme deity, one with many names and forms, (2) surrendering and taking refuge, (3) making God fully present by the devotee’s “command,” (4) mentally and physically seeing God, (5) worshipping and serving, (6) singing stotras to attain mundane and supramundane goals, and (7) integrating Sanskrit and Tamil traditions. In the second part, I will revisit the diagnostic markers that scholars have used to identify Pāñcarātrins as central to Āḻvār temple culture. But these lack specificity, predate the Āḻvārs, and are found in non-Pāñcarātra texts. This opens the door for consideration, in part three, of other possible influences on the Āḻvārs — Atharvavedic, Yajurvedic, Rgvedic, and Mahāyāna Buddhist. In the fourth section, I will focus on references to Pāñcarātra in the works of early Ācāryas — especially Yāmuna’s Āgamanaprāmāṇya, a text that defends Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who have become involved in Pāñcarātra temple ritual. And I will examine inscriptions for clues to the formation of Śrīvaishṇavism. Throughout these discussions, I will pay special attention to the varied understandings of image worship, because these are central to the formation of religious identity.

My Tamil sources include early works, called caṅkam, which were written between the first century BCE and the third CE; transitional ones, which were written between the fourth century and the sixth; and bhakti hymns of the Āḻvārs, which were written between the seventh and ninth. In Sanskrit, major sources include the Vāstu-
Brāhmaṇas, Pāñcarātrins, and the Formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism

sūtra-Upaniṣad, the Vaikhānasasmṛtasūtra, the Ṛgvidhāna with its Puruṣasūktavidhāna – all of which were written between the fourth century and the sixth – and the works of Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas (along with Maṇipravāla ones), which were written between the eleventh and the fifteenth.

I: THE DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVISM

A set of diagnostic features is a generalization based on the clustering of traits that are detected by systematic examination of a phenomenon (here, the religious orientation named Śrīvaiṣṇavism). By identifying a set of commonalities but noting that all need not appear in any given example, I will define a “family of resemblances,” a concept first introduced by LUDWIG WITTMENSTEIN. I will use this hypothetical aggregate as a provisional definition of Śrīvaiṣṇava religious identity. Because my perspective in this chapter covers many centuries, I will have to do without extensive discussions of the varieties, complexities, and anomalies of individual texts.

Nārāyaṇa as the Sole Supreme Deity with Many Names and Forms

This identification of the most important Āḻvār deity has gone unnoticed due to the popularity of Kṛṣṇa and many other names or forms associated with the semantic field of pan-Indian Vaiṣṇavism. Āḻvār references to local names and epithets in Tamil have contributed to this obscurity. Careful examination of the hymns, however, reveals that most names used by the Āḻvārs for this supreme deity connote his dark colour: Māyōṉ/Tirumāl, Māyāṉ, Māyāppirān, Māyāṉ, Māṇikkam, Maṇivaṇṇan, Mukilvaṇṇan, Kārvaṇṇan, Kaṭalvaṇṇan, Kāyāpūvaṇṇan, Nīrvaṇṇan, and Koṇṭalvaṇṇan. These occur hundreds of times – Māyōṉ/Tirumāl alone, for instance, 334 times. The reference to dark colour can refer to Kṛṣṇa; the Tamil equivalent Kaṇṇan occurs 219 times, Hari 14 times, and Vāsudeva 11 times.6 The deity of dark colour can refer also to Viṣṇu. The Tamil orthographic equivalent of Viṣṇu occurs 3 times along with his avatāras such as Rāma (21 times), Vāmana (23 times), and Trivikrama (7

6 These statistics are based on the catalogue of references to names and epithets in the Divyaprabhandam, found in NARAYANAN 1987: 166-169.
times). But many of these references to the dark deity indicate Nārāyaṇa; they refer to the one with the colour of the ocean, say, or the characteristic reclining posture of this deity. Whether the Āḻvārs favoured Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, or Nārāyaṇa as the predominant “dark deity” might provide a clue to their sectarian identity. I find this clue in mantras that they mentioned.  

1. *namo nāraṇa*:
   Poykaiyālvār: Mutal-tiruvantāti 57, 95
   Periyālvār: Periyālvār-tirumoli 4.5.2; 5.1.3; 5.1.6

2. *namo nārāyaṇa*:
   Periyālvār: Tiruppallāntu 3, 10, 11
   Poykaiyālvār: Mutal-tiruvantāti 91

3. *namo nārāyaṇāya*:
   Periyālvār: Tiruppallāntu 4; 12
   Āṇṭāl: Nācciyār-tirumoli 5.11

4. *tiruveṭṭu eluttu*:
   Tirumalicaip: Tiruccanta-viruttam 77, 78
   Tirumaṅkaiyālvār: Periya-tirumoli 1.8.9; 5.8.9; 6.6.9; 6.10.1; 8.10.3
   Periyālvār: Periyālvār-tirumoli

The name Nāraṇa, I think, is an abbreviated version of Nārāyaṇa. As a five-syllable mantra, it would parallel the popular five-syllable *namo sivāya*. The dative case is used in version three of the

---

7 All references to the Āḻvārs are from the Tamil text Nālāyiratvīyappirapantam (Nāḷ) unless otherwise noted.

8 A key stotra of the Taittirīya tradition, from the Yajurveda, is the Śatarudrīya (the hundred names of Rudra). Along with the five-syllable mantra that it contains – *namo sivāya* – it became extremely important in later Tamil Śaivism and was closely connected with the important ritual of bathing the image (*abhiṣekha*). These connections are intriguing, because the Viṣṇusahasranāma (the thousand names of Viṣṇu) found in the Mahābhārata and thought to be modeled on the Śatarudrīya, had considerable influence on Tamil Vaiṣṇavism – as did the five-syllable mantra *namo nāraṇa*. The shortened form of the name Nārāyaṇa was created, I think, to fit the need for a five-syllable mantra to parallel the Śaiva one. The Taittirīya tradition worshipped both Śiva and Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa (along with several other deities). See discussion in the Yajurveda section below.
mantra, which is merely a grammatical variation (salutations to Nārāyaṇa) of the second version. Even the fourth version refers to Nārāyaṇa, because it is Tamil for the “sacred eight syllables.” The latter term refers to the tirumāṇtra (om nama nārāyaṇāya). But it is an allusion, because the mantra contains the sacred Vedic syllable “om,”9 which should not be uttered in public. It is striking that these mantras use or allude to only the names Nāraṇa and Nārāyaṇa, even though the hymns themselves use many other names and epithets.

A study of the Āḻvār hymns suggests that some of the most popular temples were Nārāyaṇa ones. All of the Āḻvārs refer to Śrīraṅgam, and they do so more often than to any other temple. The Tiruveliṅka shrine in Kāṇcī was popular with the early Āḻvārs. The city of Kāṇcī was the third most popular place, in fact, when you consider all hymns about its many temples. Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai was the fourth most popular place by count.10 Nārāyaṇa was the main image in all these places. I assume this, because it is described as reclining, and that is the characteristic form of Nārāyaṇa. In addition, many epithets associate him with the ocean of milk or other cosmogonic imagery. And the images in these temples today are those of Nārāyaṇa. At the same time, it is important to note that this Nārāyaṇa tradition integrated all the names and forms of Viṣṇu, including his avatāras; integration was characteristic of regions to the north of Tamilnadu between the third century and the sixth. Along with Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa is highlighted in the Āḻvār hymns – no doubt because of his early presence in the region of Maturai and references to him in caṅkam literature.11

The Āḻvār emphasis on Nārāyaṇa continued with the early Ācāryas. Nārāyaṇa was often a synonym for brahman. In his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, Yāmuna says: “It is the doctrine expounded by the Bhagavadgītā that Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Brahman, can only be attained by means of bhakti which is brought

9 Young 2002: 84-121.

10 The later tradition claimed that Tirunārāyaṇapuram, in what is now Karnataka, was the fourth most popular place. But if you actually count the number of hymns that mention places, the fourth is Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai.

11 See Hardy for a discussion of several caṅkam allusions to Māyōn as Kṛṣṇa and possible links of the name Pāṇṭiya with Pāṇḍava, and Maturai with Mathurā (Hardy 1983: 151; 155-156).
about by observance of the dharma, acquisition of knowledge and renunciation of passion.”  

12 In his Stotratna, he first mentions the deity’s name in verse 11: “O Nārāyaṇa, which knower of the Vedas does not admit your real nature (svabhāva) endowed with unsurpassable excellences…”  

13 The Āgamaprāmāṇya attributed to him, however, refers usually to Viṣṇu.

Rāmānuja frequently identified brahman with Nārāyaṇa. Consider the following: “He is the internal self of all beings, is devoid of sins, is the divine lord, the one Nārāyaṇa. By the Subāla [Upaniṣad 7.1] statement, it is clearly declared that all tattvas are the body of the supreme soul.”  

14 In addition, the Śrīraṅgagadāya (of disputed authorship but in my estimation a genuine work, probably written late in his life  

15) expresses the unequivocal identity of the supreme brahman (parabrahman), the supreme person (puruṣottama), and the one who is reclining at Śrīraṅgam – that is, Nārāyaṇa as Raṅganātha. According to JOHN CARMAN, “It is one of Rāmānuja’s constant polemical objectives to establish that this Supreme Brahman defined in the Upaniṣads is none other than Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. I must prove two main propositions: (1) that the one ultimate principle or reality of the Vedānta is the personal Lord, and (2) that the proper name of the Lord is Nārāyaṇa. We can arrange the four most significant names in an order of increasing specificity: Brahman, Puruṣottama, Bhagavān, and Nārāyaṇa.”  

J.A.B. VAN BUITENEN notes that Rāmānuja rarely uses the name Vāsudeva: “When it occurs in the texts

---

12 VAN BUITENEN 1953: 179.

13 Stotratnā 11ab: svābhāvikān avadhikātiśayeśitṛtvāṁ nārāyaṇa tvayi na mṛṣyati vaidikāḥ kah|. All references to the stotras of the Ācāryas are from Stotramālā.

14 Śrībh 1, 225,5f.: ... eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātmā apahatapāṃ divine eka nārāyaṇa iti subālaśrutiā sarvatattvānm paramātmāśaṃsitvam sapṣāt abhidhiyate.


16 CARMAN 1974: 159.
he comments upon, it is translated into Nārāyaṇa, which is his favourite name for God."\textsuperscript{17}

The first reference to mantras by the Ācāryas appears in Rāmānuja’s Śaraṇāgatigadya, which mentions the word dvayam (pair). He alludes, no doubt, to śrīmānmaṇḍhāyaṇacaraṇau śaraṇam prapadye and śrīmāte nārāyaṇāya namaḥ, which were explicitly identified as the dvayam in later times. And the Nityagrantha, a work attributed to him but of disputed authorship, mentions recitation of the mūlamantra (the tirumāṇa: om namo nārāyaṇaḥ) while bathing or performing pūjā. After Rāmānuja, these – along with the Caramaśloka from BhG 18.66 – became important and were the subject of many commentaries and treatises, beginning with Parāśarabhaṭṭar’s Aṣṭaślokī. This suggests that the sect continued to define its identity primarily by Nārāyaṇa rather than Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, or some other form of the deity – even though the Caramaśloka refers indirectly to Kṛṣṇa and the Āgama-prāmāṇya attributed to Yāmuna mainly to Viṣṇu.

By contrast, the Pāṇcarātra texts contain many mantras. The earliest reference to the tirumāṇa might be in the Sanatkumārasaṃhitā\textsuperscript{18} or the Lakṣmītantra,\textsuperscript{19} but that awaits further investigation.

\textsuperscript{17} \textsc{van Buitenen} 1953: 290.

\textsuperscript{18} This suggestion was made by Rastelli: personal communication. In addition, she provided the following information on Pāṇcarātra mantras: A list of the mantras of the Jayākhyasaṃhitā is included in the introduction to the published text. The mūlamantra of the Jayākhyasaṃhitā is om kṣīṃ kṣīṃ namaḥ, and the mūrtimāṇa belonging to it is nārāyaṇaḥ visvātmane hṛṣīṃ svāhā. The list includes additional mantras but not the ones that the Āḻvārs cited. Similarly, the mantras of the Śātvatasaṃhitā, furnished by Rastelli, contain none of the Nārāyaṇa mantras that I have discussed. The earliest Pāṇcarātra reference to the aṣṭāksara (the eight-syllabled mantra, i.e., the mantra om namo nārāyaṇaḥ) could be SanS brahmarātra 9.10c-11b and the earliest reference to the dvādaśaṅkṣaramantra om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya could be SanS brahmarātra 9.10c-11b.

\textsuperscript{19} LT 17.19ff. and 24.68-74 cited by Mumme 1987b: 10.
The theme of refuge runs through the Āḻvār hymns and the works of the early Ācāryas. As Nammālvār observed, “He is our father and mother, becoming our [refuge] …” Yāmuna referred several times to taking refuge or shelter (āśrita) with God, as in this passage: “You are [my] father, mother, beloved son, dear friend, confidant, preceptor and refuge of the worlds.” In his commentary on BhG 4.11, Rāmānuja interpreted prapadyante (which denotes approach) as samāśrayante (which connotes “take refuge with”). He thereby provided scope for linking the Gitā expression prapadyante with the popular Āḻvār phrase “taking refuge in” (aṭaikkalam). Like the Āḻvārs, but unlike his own disciples and the later Ācāryas, he did not refer to the technical word prapatti, only to the linguistically related verb prapadyante. His Śaraṇāgatigadya describes his surrender to the mercy of Śrī and requests her blessing as he surrenders to the Lord. And his Śṛīraṅtagadya describes his desire to become an eternal servant of Lord Raṅganātha (Nārāyaṇa).

The themes of surrender and refuge are often connected with unworthiness and utter destitution: Kulacēkarālvār says, “O Lord who dwells in Vittuvakkoṭu, surrounded by fragrant flower gardens. Even if you remain without removing my ills given by you, I have no other refuge. I am in the position of a child who continues to cry and hope for its mother’s kindness even if she becomes angry with him and seems to despise

---

20 For instance, Tirumāṇkai, Periya-tirumoli 8.10.4; Periyālvār, Periyāḻvar-tirumoli 4.2.6; 5.3.4; and Āṇṭāl, Nācchiyār-tirumoli 9.4.


22 TVM 3.6.9: … tañcam ākiya tantai tāy.

23 StR 60ab: pitā tvam mātā tvam dayittanayava tvam priyāsuhṛt tvam eva tvam mitraṃ garur asi gatiś cāsi jagatām |; see also StR 10.

24 The following discussion is from YOUNG 1978: 150-155; 289-293.

him.”  

Yāmuna makes a similar point but in a Brahmanical and Vedāntic idiom: “O Thou worthy of being sought as refuge! I am not one established in dharma, nor am I a knower of the self! I have no fervent devotion for Thy lotus feet; utterly destitute and having no one else for resort, I take refuge under Thy feet.”

In his Śaṅkaraṅgagadāya, Rāmānuja, too, prays for the forgiveness of his many sins. In his Śrīraṅgaṅgagadāya, moreover, he admits that “he does not deserve the privilege of service that he has requested, since he is unable to practice bhaktiyoga and possesses no other good quality. Therefore he takes refuge at Nārāyaṇa’s lotus feet.”

Rāmānuja’s disciples developed the themes of surrender and refuge in their commentaries on the Āḻvār hymns and their other works.

God’s Full Presence by the Devotee’s “Command”

The supreme Nārāyaṇa graciously shows himself fully in his image incarnation however and whenever the devotee desires in order to provide accessibility. bhakti poets presented pen-sketches of deities as if alluding to paintings or statues, but they provided few specific details of these “visions” – they often move from one iconic form to another – and few technical terms. Several important

26 taru tuyaram taṭāyēlē |
un caraṇ allāl caraṇ illai ||
virai kuluvūm malarp peraḷil cūl |
vittuvakkōtu ammānē ||
ari cinattāl inra tāy |
akarrittimum marṟu avaltaṇ ||
arūṃ ninaintē alum kulavi |
atuvē pōnru iruntēnē || (Perumāl-tirumoḷi 5.1).

27 StR 22: na dharmanīṣṭho ’smi na cāmadeṇa bhaktimāṃs tvacca-

nāravinde | akiñcana noṇyanagati śaranyā tvatpādamūlaṇā śaranaṇaḥ pra-


28 CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 54.


30 Sometimes, according to detailed internal evidence, the Āḻvārs actually visited the places that they described. At other times, though, they described them in formulaic ways. This suggests that they did not know
passages, however, include more technical descriptions of images. Here is one from the earliest Āḷvār, Poykai: “Some praising (etti) him according to their understanding, others calling out ‘our Lord’ (em perumān), drawing (cāṛttutal) him on the wall or placing (vaīttu) [him as statue], they worship (tōluvar). That very form (uruve) is primordial (mutal) and is the [same] form (mūrtti) that measures the universe.”

This stanza suggests that the devotees are important, not temple priests. It implies that devotees should not only conduct worship but also make and place the image. The final statement provides the image’s ontological status: it is primordial, not merely a material object; as such, it can be understood as a full incarnation of the deity. The same Āḷvār illustrates these points in the following stanza: “Whatever form (uruvm) they enjoy with deep affection (ukantu), he himself becomes that form (uruvm). Whatever name (pēr) they desire, he himself becomes that name. Whatever colour (vaṇṇam) they think about constantly, the one who bears the discus will become that colour (vaṇṇam).”

Again, this stanza suggests that devotees – not priests – decide the form, name, and color of the image. They choose on the basis of enjoyment: “with deep affection” (ukantu). The same stanza comments on the ontological status of forms desired by devotees. Indian philosophy often refers to material objects as nāmarūpa (name and form). Here, the poet uses the Tamil equivalent, pēruruvm, thereby indicating that the object offered has name and form – and therefore might be an ordinary material object. But this is qualified immediately. If devotees offer it with deep affection or focus their minds on these places first-hand (YOUNG 1978: 329-340). See also RICHARD DAVIS’S idea of the “Devotional Eye” (DAVIS 1997: 23, 28).

31 This discussion is based on YOUNG 1978: 150-152.
32 avaravartāntōṃ ajiṇtavarētti | ivaṃsimperumānēnru cuvarmiccai ||
cāṛttutal vaīttum tōluvar ulakālanta | mūrttīuruveṃtual || (Poykaiyāḻvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 14).
33 tamarukantatevuruvaṃ avvuruvaṃ tānē | tamarukantateppērmaṟṟappēr tamarukantu ||
evvaṇṇamcintiiyaiyāṭirupparē | avvaṇṇamāḷiyāṅam || (Poykaiyāḻvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 44)
it, as if in meditation, God *himself* becomes that very form. Listen to Nammāḻvār: “O people of the world, don’t be afraid and doubt whether he is this one or that one. Whatever one thinks in one’s heart, that he becomes! He is our refuge! Our father and mother! Yet not like them too! Primordial among the three who are first in the family of flawless deities.”

This stanza, too, refers to the ontological problem of how people can accept the idea that a lifeless, material object is the supreme god of the universe. The poet tries to remove doubts by affirming that this one or that one is the supreme god. This idea, that the supreme deity can be fully present in what appears to be mere material objects, is the strongest ontological statement possible for the status of the material image as the very incarnation of God. It reverses the usual relationship between deity and devotee, moreover, because the devotee can now command the deity’s form of presentation, as it were, thanks to the latter’s graciousness.

This presents an intriguing problem. One would think that words for the image would be Tamil, but they are all Sanskrit – *uru-vam* (*rūpa*), *vaṉṇam* (*vāṇa*), and *mūrti* (*mūrti*). This suggests that these authors might have drawn from a Brahmanical or at least northern tradition of image worship, not a Tamil and non-Brahmanical

34 *taṅcam ākiya tantai tāy oṭu | tānum āy avai allaṅgay || eṅcalil amarar kulamutal | mūvar tam muḷḷum ātiyai || aṅci nir ulakattatulīrkal | avaṇṇavān enru kūl ēṅ mēn || neṅcināl niṅaippān | evaṇ evaṇ akum niṅ kaṭal vaṇṇane ||* (Nammāḻvār, Tiruvāyumoli 3.6.9).

35 **HARDY 1983: 543.**

36 *uravam* is the Tamil orthographic form of the Sanskrit word *rūpa*: shape, visible form, beauty, colour, image made of clay or brick, and statue. *vaṉṇam* is the Tamil orthographic equivalent of the Sanskrit word *vāṇa*: colour, natural beauty, decoration, nature, character, virtue, form, figure, caste, and manner. And *mūrti* is the orthographic equivalent of the Sanskrit word *mūrti*. It denotes any solid body or material form made by human beings, an embodiment, a manifestation, an incarnation, a personification; therefore, it connotes anything with definite shape or limits – such as an image or statue.
one. We have little evidence in any case of statues of Tamil deities before the time of the Ālvārs. Murukan, the main Tamil deity during the caṅkam period, was represented by a post, tree, or mountain, and only a few Tamil texts allude to statues.

I turn now to the Ācāryas. In his ninth lecture on the Bhagavadgītā, Yāmuna “treats of the eminence of God and his divine superiority in human embodiment, of the excellent character of the mahātmans and of the bhaktiyoga.” And in the eleventh, he “describes the immediate presentation of God and teaches that the quiddity of God can only by bhakti be known and attained.” These two comments are terse but allude, I think, to the human incarnation (avatāra) and the image incarnation (the “immediate presentation”) of God respectively. Both forms, according to Yāmuna, reveal the deity’s divine superiority – that is, his real nature as fully divine. This is the same ontology that the Ālvārs describe.

Rāmānuja had far more to say about image worship than Yāmuna did. Because this fact has been ignored by scholars, I will

37 VAN BUITENEN 1953: 180.

38 VAN BUITENEN 1953: 180.

39 Contrary to the conviction of Śrīvaisṇavas, ROBERT LESTER has argued that Rāmānuja represented a break in the development of Śrīvaisṇavism. He wonders why “worship of the image form of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, so important in the Ālvārs’ hymns and Pāñcarātra Āgamas, ‘finds very little commendation in the writings of Rāmānuja’” (CARMAN 1974: 231; citing LESTER). The absence of any reference to the arca is a case in point. Although he does not accept LESTER’s whole thesis, JOHN CARMAN wonders why “Rāmānuja has nowhere mentioned the concept of arca specifically” (CARMAN 1974: 181). And in his discussion of Rāmānuja’s theology, JULIUS LIPNER makes no reference at all to the important problem of image worship. He prefers to stay with the explicit meaning of Rāmānuja’s commentary on texts such as the Bhagavadgītā. Even in his discussion of whether we can attribute the Gadyas to Rāmānuja (and he has serious reservations), LIPNER avoids the image form and thus dismisses its significance for Rāmānuja (LIPNER 1986: 116f.).

It could be argued, however, that Rāmānuja cleverly created scope for a theology of the image but did so cryptically. Why? Because he wanted to lay the Vedāntic foundation for bhakti in a way that would appeal to orthodox Brāhmaṇas. This was necessary because of a debate in Brahmanical circles over the legitimacy of temple worship and the Vedic basis of texts
discuss it in some detail. Rāmānuja’s main contribution to this topic is his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 4.11. This verse might have been one inspiration for the Ālvārs, in fact, given their other references to the Bhagavadgītā. If so, then it would have provided Rāmānuja with an opportunity to make this connection in his commentary – albeit indirectly in deference to his task of establishing Vedāntic foundations for bhakti. At the outset, I should note the importance of the Gītā for Rāmānuja. He quotes it 140 times in the Śrībhāṣya. Here, then, is the verse to be discussed: “Those who approach (prapadyan-

such as the Pāñcarātra. Indeed, this problem of Rāmānuja’s lack of explicit reference to image worship was non-existent until historical criticism was superficially applied to the texts. The lesson to be learned from this exercise is that the absence of a technical term need not mean absence of a concept, especially if the author has a motive for avoiding the term.

Another explanation for the lack of explicit references to image worship in his Śrībhāṣya is that Rāmānuja, even though he had many connections with the temple culture, became personally more devotional only later in life, the time when he probably composed the Gadyas and wrote his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā. In these works, Rāmānuja evokes the mood of enjoyment (bhoga). Hardy (1983: 480; 581) has suggested that the Ācāryas removed the emotional component of Ālvār tradition altogether, but Nayar has challenged that view. Although the Ācāryas incorporated the Sanskrit, intellectual tradition to establish ubhayavedānta (both vedāntas, both Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural traditions), they nonetheless had deeply emotional relationships with God. They expressed these especially in their Sanskrit stotras, hymns of praise that drew on Ālvār emotionalism (see Nayar 1992: 10-13; 259; Nayar 1994: 186-221).

The ease with which his very own disciples discuss image worship in temples suggests that at the very least, he did not disapprove of it. Surely, tension would be evident somewhere in the Śrīvaisṇava literature if Rāmānuja had disapproved of image worship in temples.


discuss it in some detail. 

Rāmānuja’s main contribution to this topic is his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 4.11. This verse might have been one inspiration for the Ālvārs, in fact, given their other references to the Bhagavadgītā. If so, then it would have provided Rāmānuja with an opportunity to make this connection in his commentary – albeit indirectly in deference to his task of establishing Vedāntic foundations for bhakti. At the outset, I should note the importance of the Gītā for Rāmānuja. He quotes it 140 times in the Śrībhāṣya. Here, then, is the verse to be discussed: “Those who approach (prapadyan-

such as the Pāñcarātra. Indeed, this problem of Rāmānuja’s lack of explicit reference to image worship was non-existent until historical criticism was superficially applied to the texts. The lesson to be learned from this exercise is that the absence of a technical term need not mean absence of a concept, especially if the author has a motive for avoiding the term.

Another explanation for the lack of explicit references to image worship in his Śrībhāṣya is that Rāmānuja, even though he had many connections with the temple culture, became personally more devotional only later in life, the time when he probably composed the Gadyas and wrote his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā. In these works, Rāmānuja evokes the mood of enjoyment (bhoga). Hardy (1983: 480; 581) has suggested that the Ācāryas removed the emotional component of Ālvār tradition altogether, but Nayar has challenged that view. Although the Ācāryas incorporated the Sanskrit, intellectual tradition to establish ubhayavedānta (both vedāntas, both Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural traditions), they nonetheless had deeply emotional relationships with God. They expressed these especially in their Sanskrit stotras, hymns of praise that drew on Ālvār emotionalism (see Nayar 1992: 10-13; 259; Nayar 1994: 186-221).

The ease with which his very own disciples discuss image worship in temples suggests that at the very least, he did not disapprove of it. Surely, tension would be evident somewhere in the Śrīvaisṇava literature if Rāmānuja had disapproved of image worship in temples.


discuss it in some detail. 

Rāmānuja’s main contribution to this topic is his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 4.11. This verse might have been one inspiration for the Ālvārs, in fact, given their other references to the Bhagavadgītā. If so, then it would have provided Rāmānuja with an opportunity to make this connection in his commentary – albeit indirectly in deference to his task of establishing Vedāntic foundations for bhakti. At the outset, I should note the importance of the Gītā for Rāmānuja. He quotes it 140 times in the Śrībhāṣya. Here, then, is the verse to be discussed: “Those who approach (prapadyan-

such as the Pāñcarātra. Indeed, this problem of Rāmānuja’s lack of explicit reference to image worship was non-existent until historical criticism was superficially applied to the texts. The lesson to be learned from this exercise is that the absence of a technical term need not mean absence of a concept, especially if the author has a motive for avoiding the term.

Another explanation for the lack of explicit references to image worship in his Śrībhāṣya is that Rāmānuja, even though he had many connections with the temple culture, became personally more devotional only later in life, the time when he probably composed the Gadyas and wrote his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā. In these works, Rāmānuja evokes the mood of enjoyment (bhoga). Hardy (1983: 480; 581) has suggested that the Ācāryas removed the emotional component of Ālvār tradition altogether, but Nayar has challenged that view. Although the Ācāryas incorporated the Sanskrit, intellectual tradition to establish ubhayavedānta (both vedāntas, both Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural traditions), they nonetheless had deeply emotional relationships with God. They expressed these especially in their Sanskrit stotras, hymns of praise that drew on Ālvār emotionalism (see Nayar 1992: 10-13; 259; Nayar 1994: 186-221).

The ease with which his very own disciples discuss image worship in temples suggests that at the very least, he did not disapprove of it. Surely, tension would be evident somewhere in the Śrīvaisṇava literature if Rāmānuja had disapproved of image worship in temples.


40 Young 1978: 150-155.

41 Van Buitenen comments that Rāmānuja, in his Gītābhāṣya, readily “enlarges upon the devotional passages of the Gītā and then his style often approaches that of the ardent devotee who glorifies his God in fervid litanies. More than in his other works it is here the priest of the temple of Śrīraṅga who rises before our minds in the prose hymns of many passages” (Van Buitenen 1953: 18). I doubt that Rāmānuja was a priest at Śrīraṅgam (see discussion of priesthood later in this chapter). But he might well have been a devotee, at least late in life.
te) me in whatever way, in the same way I reach them. People follow my path, O Pārtha, in every way.\textsuperscript{42}

Rāmānuja comments on it as follows: “Not only having incarnated in the form of gods, men, and so forth, do I give protection to those who desire refuge in me (matsamāśrayanāpekṣānām), but also I show myself (māṁ darśayāmi) to those who desirous of my refuge, having portrayed me in their imagination (saṁkalpya) in whatever way (yathā) according to their own desire, seek refuge in me. There is no need to say more. All people, with the sole desire of following me – having experienced (anubhūya) my own nature (svabhāva), which is imperceptible even to the yogins by means of speech and mind through their own sense organs such as eyes, and so on, in every way desired by them – follow me.”\textsuperscript{43}

This commentary is important as a transition from the concept of incarnation in the form of gods, men, and so on – vibhava, which is to say, avatāra – to that of the “image,” a transition that parallels Yāmuna’s commentary. Neither word is found in BhG 4.4-11. Nonetheless, the context furnishes scope for the introduction and elaboration of these two key concepts.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy aham | mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ || (BhG 4.11).

\textsuperscript{43} na kevalaṁ devamanuṣyādirūpenāvatīrya matsamāśrayanāpekṣānām parirūpam karomi. api tu ye matsamāśrayanāpekṣā māṁ yathā yena prakāreṇa svāpekṣānurūpam maṁ saṁkalpya prapadyante saṁṣārayante; tāṁ prati tathaiva tanmaniṣṭaparāreṇa bhajāmi māṁ darśayāmi. kim atra bahunā. sarve manuṣyāḥ madanuvartanaikāmaṇorathā mama vartma matsvabhāvam sarvaṁ yogināṁ vānmanasāgocaram api svakiyais cakṣurādi-karaṇais sarvasas svāpekṣitaṁ sarvaprakāraṁ anubhīyānuvartante (GBh 138,3-7).

\textsuperscript{44} In his commentary on BhG 4.4ff. (this discussion is based on YOUNG 1978: 289-291), Rāmānuja cleverly introduces the Vaiṣṇava concept of vibhava (avatāra). An allusion to the birth of the Supreme God in 4.6 gives Rāmānuja an opportunity to bring out conceptual nuances in vibhava. Glossing the line, “I am born by my own māya,” he converts ordinary expressions into sectarian ones. His gloss is important: prakṛti is svabhāva is svam eva svabhāvam adhiṣṭhāya is svena rūpena. prakṛti usually means matter consisting of the three guṇas that are characteristic of samsāra. BhG 4.6 could be interpreted as the Lord’s birth with prakṛti as his
temporary receptacle (*adhiṣṭhāna*), which implies that *prakṛti* is not transformed because of his presence but rather remains physical matter.

But Rāmānuja explicitly replaces the common denotation of *prakṛti* as “matter” with “God’s own essential nature” (*svabhāva*) — that is, “depending on his very own essential nature” (*svam eva svabhāvam adhiṣṭhāva*) or “by his own form” (*svena rūpena*). Subtly explicating vibhava, he describes *samsthāna* as the shape, plan, or blueprint. God already has his own form but adjusts himself to the shape of gods, men, and so on, by his own will. To do that, he does not share material nature with other human beings (*purusas*) but uses his own essential nature (*svabhāva*) when “born.”

BhG 4.7 defines the time of birth as wherever there is a decline of righteousness (*dharma*) and the emergence of unrighteousness (*adharma*). In Rāmānuja’s comment on BhG 4.8, which describes the purpose of God’s birth — to protect good people — he interprets “good people” as “prominent Vaiṣṇavas.” Taking this opportunity to emphasize God’s visibility and accessibility through incarnation (*avatāra*), he says that God comes into the world for those who are not able to bear and nourish their own person without his *darśana*. *Darśana* occurs by means of accessibility to his name, action, and form through speech and mind. This grants the devotees his form, actions, vision, speech, and so on, for their protection, for the destruction of those who are contrary to them, and for the establishment of the Vedic *dharma* — which is of the nature of the worship of him — by exhibiting his worshipful form (*ārādhyā svarūpa*).

Once again, in BhG 4.9, Rāmānuja affirms that God’s birth is unique (*asādhrāna*), non-material (*aprākṛta*), and thus divine (*divya*). A few centuries later, Vedāntadesīka would use the full scope of Rāmānuja’s Vaiṣṇava- and Āylvār-nuanced commentary on BhG 4.6: God’s nature (*prakṛti*) is his *svabhāva*, which is his body (*vigraha*), his divine body (*divyavigraha*), his non-material (*aprākṛta*) body.

Rāmānuja’s interpretation of BhG 4.6 describes, although it does not name, the category of vibhava (*avatāra*). God protects those who take refuge in him; he shows himself to them; and he allows his entire nature (*svabhāva*) to be experienced by the ordinary physical eyes of those who follow him. The description of God’s birth in BhG 4.11, which does not name as the image-incarnation (*arcā*), parallels the description in verse 4.6. Because of these similarities between BhG 4.6 and 4.11, later Ācāryas have often made vibhava an inclusive category for *avatāra*, *arcā*, and antaryāmin. But Rāmānuja points out significant differences between BhG 4.6 and 4.11. This is most important here. The latter verse is addressed to a second group of people under a second set of conditions: “Those who seek my protection after they have portrayed me in [their] imagination” and “I show myself … in the form that is desired by them …” In contrast, God conforms himself to
How did Rāmānuja introduce the image-incarnation and its nuances? BhG 4.11 itself contains ideas that contributed to both. It is no surprise, then, that Rāmānuja recognizes the significance of this verse, which appropriately follows the discussion on God’s incarnation (BhG 4.4-10). He selects significant components of the verse to provide scope for the image-incarnation, extends their semantics, enhances their theological application, fills in conceptual gaps, and thereby presents a harmonious exposition of the concept. In his commentary on BhG 4.11, Rāmānuja presents ten theological concepts that can be detected in ĀLVAR poetry: (1) God shows himself as the image incarnation; (2) the image-incarnation is fully God; (3) the devotee initiates the transformation, which is then done directly by God; (4) God provides accessibility as the image-incarnation, so the appearance of God is unrestricted by time, space, and eligibility; (5) God displays noblesse oblige in the sense that he graciously accepts whatever name and form the devotees offer; (6) mutuality or reversal characterize the relationship between God and devotee; and (7) the salvific means (upāya) and goal (upeya) are identical.

Rāmānuja’s sectarian perspective is evident, especially when you compare his commentary on BhG 4.11 to that of Śaṅkara. For, the shape (samsthāna) of gods, men, and so on however and whenever he wants (as in BhG 4.6).

45 In his commentary, Śaṅkara tries to find a connection with the previous verse (this discussion is from Young 1978: 291-293). He begins by posing a question that Arjuna is likely to ask, which links 4.10 with 4.11: “Then you [Krṣṇa] must have attachment and hatred, due to which you reveal yourself to some people only and not to all?” [If this is the question], then [Krṣṇa] says: ‘Those who approach me in whatever manner, that is, with whatever purpose, that is, with the desire of whatever fruit, I worship them, that is, favour them in the same manner, that is, by giving them that fruit [which they wanted] because they have no desire for mokṣa. One cannot possibly have simultaneously the desire for mokṣa and the desire for fruit. Hence, I favour (1) by giving fruits to those who desire fruits; (2) by giving knowledge to those who act in the prescribed manner but have no desire for fruits, and are seekers of mokṣa; (3) by giving mokṣa to those who are knowers, renouncers, and seekers of mokṣa, [and] in the same manner afflicted ones by removing [their] affliction. Thus, those who approach me in whatever way, I worship them in the same manner. I surely do not worship (favour: bhajāmi) them because of my attachment and hatred or
Śaṅkara the word *māyā* connotes “illusion.” Rāmānuja paraphrases this word as *jñāna* (knowledge), thereby maintaining that God’s birth is *real*. For Śaṅkara, moreover, the word *prapadyante* has no philosophical or theological significance. For Rāmānuja, it expresses the key concept of surrender (*prapatti*). Rāmānuja begins with an extended analysis of *ye yathā māṁ prapadyante* (those who approach me in whatever way). Into the Gītā verse, he inserts the word *samkalpya* (from the verb *sam klp*, meaning to imagine visually, conceive of, portray in the imagination, or desire explicitly), which he interprets as *svāpeśānurūpam* (according to their own expectation or desire). Moreover, he gives a sectarian interpretation to the correlatives *yathā … tathaiva*. Śaṅkara sees in the syntactical correlation of these adverbs of manner, namely *yathā – tathā*, the reciprocity of God and the devotee in assigned proportion. He extracts the sense of just apportionment of reward by God to the devotees’ actions. By contrast, Rāmānuja derives a sense of equality (mutuality and intimacy) through the syntax of these correlatives. By means of elaborate paraphrases or explanatory comments, he overinterprets the Gītā verse in order to develop an Āḻvār standpoint. To make his commen-

infatuation. People follow the path of me, the God who is immanent in everything, in every manner. Those who endeavour with the desire of whatever fruit in the action which is legitimate for them are described here by the word *māṇusya*, O Pārtha, in all manners (*sarvaśaḥ*).” (BhGBh 116,11-117,8: *tava tarhi rāgadvesau staḥ, yena kebyaścid evātmabхāvaṃ praya-cchasi na sarvebhyaḥ ity ucyate – ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy ahām | mama vartmānuvartante manusyaḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ || 4.11 ye yathā yena prakāreṇa yena pryojanena yatphalārhitayā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathaiva tatphaladānena bhajāmy anugṛhnāmy ahām ity etat. teṣāṁ mokṣam praty anarthitvāt. na hy ekasya mumuksam prayaścitam prahārhitavitam ca yugapat sambhavati. ato ye phalārthinas tāṁ phalapradānena, ye yathok-takārinās tv aphalārthino mumukṣavaḥ ca tān jñānapradānena, ye jñānāh saṃnyāsīna mumukṣavaḥ ca tān mokṣapradānena, tathārōtāvān prapadaṇena ity evam yathā prapadyante ye tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy arthaḥ. na puna rāgadvesānimittam mohanimittavām vā kāmic bhajāmi. sarvātapi sarvāva-sthasya māmeśvarasya vartma mārgam anuvartante manusyaḥ – yatphalārthitayā yasmin karmany adhiṭṭhā ye prayatante te manusyaḥ atra ucyante he pārtha sarvaśaḥ sarvaprakāraḥ.).

---

46 I could not capture the correlatives in the English translation, but they are extremely important in the Sanskrit.
tary appear non-parochial and therefore attractive to orthodox Brāhmaṇas, however, he refrains from using sectarian terms. Their significance for other devotees, however, must have been obvious. Rāmānuja thus devised textual leeway for a sectarian interpretation but was careful not to appear too sectarian himself. Once Rāmānuja had provided a Sanskrit foundation for Ālvār ideas in his commentary on BhG 4.11, his immediate disciples (such as Kūresa, Parāśarabhaṭṭar, and Pīḷḷāṇ) made his position explicitly sectarian by direct appreciation of God’s image in the beloved places described by the Ālvārs. 47

The first reference to the five forms of God (para, vyūha, vibhava, antaryāmin, arca) – which became common – appears in Kūresa’s Varadarājastava. 48


48 Kūresa’s Varadarājastava 18. Rastelli (personal communication based on her forthcoming manuscript “Die Tradition des Pāncarātra im Spiegel der Pārameśvarasamhitā”) points out that the earliest references to these five forms in the Saṁhitās are in Īśvarasamhitā and Śrīpraśnasamhitā: “The Īśvarasamhitā was certainly not written before the thirteenth century. The Śrīpraśnasamhitā was probably written after the Pādmasamhitā, perhaps at the same time as the Īśvarasamhitā. The Śrīpraśnasamhitā says that the five mūrtis are taught in the Upaniṣads (ŚrīprŚ 2.54cd: manmūrttayah pañcadhā vadanty upaniṣatsu ca ||). Raṅgarāmānuja and Maṇavālāmānumi give a quotation from a Visvakesnasamhitā (not the one that is edited), which says that those who know the Vedānta teach this doctrine (NySV 394,8: mama prakāraḥ pañceti prāhur vedāntapāragaḥ |; for Maṇavālāmānumi cf. Amaladass 1995: 183). Because of these two passages and because the teaching does not appear in the early Saṁhitās, I think that this teaching rather comes from a Vedānta tradition and not from the Pāncarātra. The earliest reference that I could find in a Viśiṣṭādvaita text is in Kūresa’s Varadarājastava 18. This does not mean that the early Saṁhitās do not know these five forms separately. Of course, they mention the forms para, vyūha and vibhava; images; and sometimes the antaryāmin. But they do not mention the teaching of five divine forms.”

I would add that like the early Saṁhitās, the Ālvārs, too mention the equivalent of para (either as Viṣṇu in Vaikuṇṭha or Nārāyaṇa reclining on the Milk Ocean), vibhava (which are the avatāras), the images, and the antaryāmin without using technical terms. They do not, however, refer to the vyūha.
Mental and Physical Seeing

Although the context is ostensibly temple-image worship, the terms used by the Āḻvārs suggest mental visualization and meditation. “Whatever colour (vaṇṇam) they *think about constantly,*” says Poykaiyāḻvār, “the one who bears the discus will become that colour (vaṇṇam).”49 And Nammāḻvār comments as follows: “Whatever one *thinks in one’s heart,* that he becomes!”50 According to FRIEDHELM HARDY, “The following stanza similarly combines traditional yoga ideas with Kṛṣṇa bhakti and the mythical realm of Viṣṇu: ‘Those who harness in their bosoms the five senses and their objects, so that they cannot stir – the senses which are never satisfied –, will see with unwinking eyes, while darkness recedes, and they will reach the town of him who reclines on the serpent with thousand mouths.’ [1st Ant 32: Poykai] … The actual *locus* where Kṛṣṇa abides and is realized is styled variously; most frequent are maṇam, cintai, neṅcu/neṅcam, and uḷḷam. The denotations seem to flow into each other, and together they demarcate an area which we would describe as ‘soul, intellect, mind, consciousness, self’. … The process of realizing Māyōṅ in the heart is referred to by verbs like uḷ-, ōṛ-, ninai-, all meaning to ‘to think, meditate, ponder’. Again, it is impossible to decide in each case whether ‘yoga’ is referred to in its technical sense, and thus I have treated these words indiscriminately as pointers towards (intellectual) bhakti. … Thus we hear indeed: ‘he is inside those who meditate on him’, ‘those who meditate properly will see his beauty’. But on the other hand we are told that ‘constantly thinking of him’ is the *result* of experiencing him: ‘Having placed Māl into my heart, I shall never put his being there out of my mind.’”51

HARDY characterizes this ambiguity of mental and physical seeing as the juxtaposition of bhaktiyoga and pūjā. The former fuses with an emotion such as love, desire, or melting in bliss. Summariz-

49 tamarukantatevvuruvaṁ avvuruvaṁ tāṅē |
    tamarukantateppērmaṟṟappēr tamarukantu ||
    evvaṉṇamaṁciṁittimaṟṟyēṭiruppārē |
    avvaṉṇamaṁḻiyyaṁ | (Poykaiyāḻvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 44)

50 Tiruvāyumolī 3.6.9: neṅcuṇal ninaippēn evaṇ avaṇ akum.

ing evidence in the Āḻvār poems, he concludes that “a number of possible relationships are implied in various stanzas: (a) yoga and pūjā as complementary acts … leading to ‘seeing’; (b) meditation leading to worship … pūjā leading to meditation.” Hardy suggests that this religious attitude was a new element in Tamil religion, even though the Āḻvārs were otherwise “deeply Tamil, not only in their language, in their poetic style, in their mythological repertoire, and in their geographical references, but most pronouncedly in their emotional and sensuous worship…” The overlap, he thinks, had something to do with yoga in the Bhagavadgītā, a text well known to the Āḻvārs. I agree that it had something to do with yoga, but I think that the Gītā was not the only source. More about this shortly.

In the meantime, it is important to examine references to bhaktiyoga in Yāmuna and Rāmānuja. Yāmuna’s view is linked closely with his emotional surrender to God. Scholars have noted that Rāmānuja was more interested in bhaktiyoga than in prapatti as a path to salvation. In his commentary on BhG 18.66, he says that devotees must begin bhaktiyoga by taking “refuge in me [i.e., God] alone (mām ekaṃ śaraṇam prapadyasva) who am supremely merciful (paramakārṇīkam), who am the refuge of all the people without taking into consideration their differences” (GBh 492,28f.). In his commentary on BhG 18.54, Rāmānuja places emphasis on the observance of the duties of caste and stage of life, which would be transformed by an attitude of desirelessness (naiṣkāmyakarma) and viewed as acts of worship. In the commentary on the next verse, he says that this leads the devotee to perceive God and completely enter into him. He elaborates on this in his commentary on 18.56: one who takes God as refuge and directs all actions to him attains through his grace the supreme goal.

In his Śrībhāṣya, Rāmānuja says that the devotee should practice meditation (dhyāna) in the sense of worshipful contemplation (upāsana), resulting in a state of steady understanding (sthitaprajñātā) by withdrawing the senses from their object as a tortoise does

52 Hardy 1983: 295.
53 Hardy 1983: 308.
54 Hardy 1983: 291.
its limbs. Knowledge of the soul (ātmajñāna), gained through intelligence, is transformed into the living reality of direct vision (ātmāvalokana) and experience (ātmānubhava).

This mental visualization of the supreme God is described in scripture. It is a vivid and immediate experience of a specific form of the deity (such as his supreme form in Vaikuṇṭha). Mental visualization could be fluidly connected with an image such as Raṅganātha in the temple at Śrīraṅgam as represented by Rāmānuja’s Śrīraṅga-gadya (assuming that he wrote the Gadyas). Seeing leads to awareness of freedom from the bonds of samsāra. Ultimately, however, it is God’s grace that grants salvation. M. DHAVAMONY observes that for Rāmānuja, “meditation (upāsana) is the means to release. This is accomplished with the help of the Lord which is secured by taking refuge in the Lord.”57 In the final analysis, DHAVAMONY is “inclined to think that, although he explicitly does not propose prapatti as a direct means to liberation in these works, he nonetheless implies that prapatti is an alternative means to mukti, especially when we consider his treatment of different types of meditation (vidyā) for different aspirants, though all of them are meant to obtain the same goal (mukti).”58

Worship and Service

Taking refuge with God was closely connected with worship and service. LESLIE ORR and I have examined the Āḻvār hymns to detect any explicit references to rituals.59 According to the hymns, worshippers do several things in temples. One is menial service (kuṟreval, from the word kurumai for shortness or defect). This refers to cleaning the temple floor and smearing it with sandal paste, decorat-

56 LIPNER 1986: 114-115; citing Śribh 1.1.1 and Rāmānuja’s commentary on BhG 2.60. See also WOODS 1994: 44 for a discussion of the experience of the highest reality according to Rāmānuja’s commentary on BhG 1.25-47; 2.11-30; and 2.39-53 and KASSAM-HANN 1994: 377 discussing BhG 18.54-55; 11.39-43; 11.47.


58 DHAVAMONY 1994: 73.

59 ORR/YOUNG 1986.
ing the doorstep of the temple, and picking and plaiting flowers – after snāna, according to one verse. In addition, worship involves bowing, calling out the name of the deity, offering garlands at his feet, bringing pots of water, and holding incense or lamps. If temple-ritual priests existed, they are not mentioned in these poems. In his Stotraratna, Yāmuna refers to bowing, sometimes with folded hands (añjali), toward the Lord’s lotus feet. Doing so, he says, ends saṃsāra and bestows supreme bliss. In his commentary on BhG 9.14 and 12.9, Rāmānuja mentions many acts of worship. He alludes to the worship of images without naming pūjā as such (although we do not know if this took place in a home shrine or a temple). His Śrīraṅgagadya implies image worship of Lord Raṅganātha in the Śrī-raṅgam temple. Several external sources refer to Rāmānuja’s connection with temple worship.

60 See Poykai Mutal-tiruvantāti 1.37; Tiruvāyūmoḷi 10.2.7; Tevāram 7.30.3; 7.30.8; 7.6.5.

61 This does not rule out the possibility. ORR and I argue that if one kind of expertise – such as playing the yāl or singing the Vedas – contributed to the life of the temple, then these performers were preferred to others (ORR/YOUNG 1986).

62 See StR 21, where he repeats namo namo four times.

63 StR 28-29.

64 It is possible that after Rāmānuja’s death, there was an attempt to link him more explicitly with the beloved places as part of the consolidation of the Śrīvaiṣṇava sampradāya. In Irāmānuca-nūr Śrīraṅgam, Amutanār associates him with places mentioned by the Ālvārs in stanzas 60, 76, 91, and 106. In Raṅganāthastotra 8, Parāśarahaṭṭar mentions, for instance, many places where Rāmānuja enjoyed himself worshipping. In Rahasyatraysāram, Vedāntadesīka mentions Rāmānuja’s commandments to his disciples at the time of his death. The third commandment is to provide rice, sandal paste, lamps, and garlands, for the beloved places (ukantu-aruḷinaḍi-vyadeśāṅkal) (YOUNG 1978: 287). The Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000, too, mentions this as well as numerous holy places that Rāmānuja visited while on pilgrimage (YOUNG 1978: 341).
Stotras for Mundane and Supramundane Goals

Vedic stotras are based on the divine origin of speech, mediated by gods to the hearts and minds (dhī) of poets. Consisting largely of epithets that allude to the deity’s nature, actions, functions, and qualities, and set to melodies from the Sāmaveda, stotras have had two functions: to reveal imperceptible truth and to fulfill boons.65

Tamil bhakti poets wrote about God’s direct revelation to their “hearts.” Their poems came to be considered divine speech, the Tamil Veda, although they themselves only allude to this idea. Like the Vedic stotras, these hymns consist of many epithets and many are sung. Each decade of stanzas concludes with a verse that promises mundane and supramundane boons (the phalaśruti). Some stotras eulogize the deity’s body. Tiruppānālvār’s Amalanātipiran, for instance, praises the body of Nārāyaṇa at Śrīraṅgam. The stotra tradition continued, though in Sanskrit, with the Ācāryas. NANCY NAYAR has noted Ālvār influence on these.66 The first ones, she points out, were Yāmuna’s Stotraratna and Śrīśūkta (Catuḥśloki). Rāmānuja’s prose Gadyas are hymns in praise of the deity and have been compared to stotras. Kūreśa, his disciple, wrote five stotras and Kūreśa’s son Parāśarabhaṭṭar four.

Integration of Tamil and Sanskrit Traditions

The bhakti poems are in Tamil, but they contain many Sanskritic religious elements. They commonly mention the Vedas in general or the “four Vedas” in particular. The four Tiruvantātis of Poykai, Pūta, Pey, and Tirumalīcai refer, for instance, to the Vedas as the speech of Māyōn and Māyōn as the melody of the four Vedas, one who is of the Vedas, one who recites well the four Vedas, one who becomes the Vedas and their hidden meaning, one who is the foremost essence of the Vedas, and the austerity that is found in the four Vedas.67 Pūta asks for grace so that his garland of composition

67 See Tiruvantāti 1.5; 1.68; 2.45; 3.11; 3.39; 4.13; 4.72 in YOUNG 1993: 89-90.
might become the Vedas (*marai*) (2.83). Kulacēkaran wonders when he will praise “the Lord who is the northern language (*vaṭamoli*) and the poem of sweet joy in Tamil.”

And Tirumaṅkai mentions the Lord “in the form of the sound of Tamil … and in the form of the northern language (*vaṭacol*) … which is the *antañar* (Brāhmaṇas).”

The Ācāryas carried on this tradition of the two traditions, Sanskrit and Tamil, although authors did not always write in both languages.

These diagnostic features of religious Śrīvaiṣṇavism suggest that we are dealing with a group that identified itself mainly with Nārāyaṇa. Specific mantras were important for identity. These included both mantras without *om* and one with *om*. The latter is only an allusion, however, which implies a secret (*rahasya*). If receiving the mantra belonged to a secret tradition, then that would imply initiation. If so, because the community of devotees and their equality were stressed, I assume that every devotee would have received it. And it would have included a mantra with *om* (even though that would have been against Vedic orthodoxy, at least in Smārta circles, because *om* was the sacred syllable par excellence, the very essence of the Vedas, and to be uttered only by Brāhmaṇas or the twice-born). But this group viewed the Vedas as identity or status markers and therefore looked favourably on Brāhmaṇas, whether or not all of the devotees were Brāhmaṇas themselves. This might suggest leadership by a “liberal” Brāhmaṇa group. Spirituality was defined by surrender, refuge, extreme humility, inclusion of all devotees whatever their social standing, and specific acts of worship (cleaning the floor, bowing, offering flowers, incense, and lamps, bringing pots of water, singing *stotras*, and so forth), which promised the fulfilment of all desires, worldly and other worldly. In addition, worship combined mental and physical visualization of an image of God.

---

68 Perumāl-tirumolī 1.4: *tam talaivanai am tamiśin inpāvinai avvaṭa moliyai parrārrārkal.*

69 Young 1993: 90.

70 Young 2002: 84-84.
II: THE QUESTION OF PRIESTS
AND THEIR IDENTITY IN ĀLṉĀR HYMNS

Most scholars have assumed that Pāñcarātrins were either priests in temples mentioned by Ālñārs or that the Brāhmaṇas, who were Ālñārs, were also Pāñcarātrin priests. But the Ālñār hymns do not mention priests. And we have no inscriptive evidence of Pāñcarātra presence in the temples of Tamilnadu at that time (from the seventh century to the ninth). This provokes questions about the presupposition of major Pāñcarātra influence on the Ālñārs. In this section, therefore, I will provide two types of explanation for the absence of priests in Ālñār hymns. Either priests were there but of no importance to the Ālñārs (a question of perspective) or priests were not there or not there in any significant way (a question of historical circumstances). I will then discuss what other scholars have considered evidence for the presence of Pāñcarātrins in bhakti hymns.

One argument is that priests were there but of no importance to the Ālñārs. First, the bhakti poetic tradition associated God pre-eminently with a caṅkam poetic tradition that connected the hero as ruler or lover with the five types of landscapes that characterize a kingdom (aintiṇai), although the caṅkam concepts of heroic ruler and lover were transformed into God and the five landscapes into the deity’s beloved places (the terms used in the later commentaries are ukanta-ruṇānilaṅkāḷ and divyadeśāḥ).\(^71\) Second, this use of concrete imagery could be attributed, as in caṅkam poetry, to good poetic composition: graphic, lively description. Third, because many temples were small and insignificant until monumental stone architecture became prevalent due to Śilpaśāstra or Āgama expertise and enhanced patronage, bhakti poems did not feature references to temples.\(^72\) Fourth, the rhetoric of devotion and meditation focused on the relationship between devotee and God, not on the temple as God’s resi-

\(^{71}\) Young 1978: 37-66.

\(^{72}\) The names of places that bhakti poets described often end with ēr, which means small village. About four hundred of the temples that they praise are located in the agriculturally rich Kaveri delta. Many others are located elsewhere along the Kaveri or along rivers such as the Vaikai, the Tamraparni, the Pennai, and the Palar. Fame of place is related to the fertility of its fields and the prosperity that it provides (based on Young 1993: 98).
dence. And fifth, if the instigators of this Tamil bhakti genre were Brāhmaṇas, they might have focused in their poems on the deity or the landscape of the place and avoided the topics of priests and rituals because of the controversy in orthodox Brahmanical circles over image worship and priests who lived off temple income.\textsuperscript{73}

The other argument is that priests were not there or not there in any significant way. bhakti hymns tell devotees to paint or make images and to do services such as cleaning the floor, picking and plaiting flowers, and bringing pots of water, incense, and lamps. Because devotees themselves did these ritual activities, according to the hymns, we could argue that priests did not officiate at formal rituals in temples. These activities look more like worship done in home shrines or in temples that belonged to individuals. When you remember that many of the temples praised by bhakti saints were minor structures in villages, the gap between home shrine and temple narrows. This lack of references to priests might indicate that traditions of household worship were gradually extending to temple worship and that no organized sectarian group with an identity of “temple priests” had yet emerged on a local level.\textsuperscript{74} And if there were “unofficial” temple priests, the poetic rhetoric ignored them.

Some scholars of bhakti literature have assumed the presence of formal Pāñcarātra ritual in temples of the Tamil bhakti period.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} GRANOFF 1998a. See also GRANOFF 1998b.

\textsuperscript{74} See my discussion of inscriptive evidence later in this chapter, which supports this position. Even the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000, the fourteenth/fifteenth-century hagiography, describes how Rāmānuja’s mother “advised him to go to the non-Brahmin disciple of Yāmuna, Tirukacci Nambi, a fervent lay devotee in Lord Varada’s temple, and seek his advice. Tirukacci Nambi told him to carry a pot of water every morning from a certain well to the temple and offer it for the morning service of Lord Varada. (Such service was one of the characteristic forms of lay worship to the temple image form of the Deity permitted those who were not the temple priests)” (CARMAN 1974: 29). Again, the inscriptions do not mention an institutionalized priesthood but rather the participation in temple service or work (such as carrying pots of water).

\textsuperscript{75} See NARAYANAN 1987: 11-14 for Āgamic ritual in the temples of the bhakti period. There are some dissidents. HARDY is cautious. In general terms, he suggests, we can assume that Vaikhānasas and Pāñcarātrins were involved in Tamil temple worship. But he adds that the history is obscure.
Their assumption is based on the following kinds of evidence: \(^{76}\) (1) references to the number four or to the four divine forms in bhakti hymns refer to Pañcarātra’s four vyūhas: Vāsudeva, Saṅkaraṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha; (2) the list of twelve divine names mentioned by several Āḻvārs is found in Pañcarātra texts; (3) the mode of worship described in the bhakti hymns is that of the Pañcarātra tradition; (4) branding mentioned by Periyāḻvār is characteristic of Pañcarātra; (5) the tirumantra, mentioned by some Āḻvārs, is mentioned in Pañcarātra texts as well; (6) the number five, in the hymns, can refer to either the name pañcarātra (five nights) or the pāncakālika (the

The Āḻvārs do not mention characteristic features of these groups, the five mūrtis and the five [sic: four] vyūhas respectively. “But what is more important: it would appear that the Early Āḻvārs, deriving some general information from these schools, are unique in fusing the temple worship with theistic yoga as a unified form of devotion. Although both schools cultivate yoga and pūjā, their literature shows that they were kept separate. Both schools being representatives of Northern forms of religion, the synthesis of the Early Āḻvārs thus appears as a typically Tamil response which manifests itself in the mysticism of union and expresses itself through Tamil poetic structures” (Hardy 1983: 301-302). I think that Hardy has missed the southern Brahmanical traditions in which this fusion had already occurred.

\(^{76}\) Here is Narayanan’s summary of what she considers to be the Pañcarātra evidence. “Periyāḻvār, Tirumalai, and Nammāḻvār … refer to the ‘three forms’ or the ‘four forms’ of Viṣṇu. In Pañcarātra terminology, the ‘four forms’ are Vāsudeva, Saṅkaraṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, but the Āḻvārs do not use these names. The Pañcarātra also gives the names of twelve emanations: Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhu-sūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara. Periyāḻvār mentions these twelve names … in this Tirumoli (2.3.1-13), and Nammāḻvār weaves them into his Tiruvāyoli (2.7.1-13). The Tirumoli of Periyāḻvār and the Tiruvāyoli of Nammāḻvār consist of sets of eleven verses, but in sets where the twelve names are mentioned there are thirteen verses, one devoted to each name and the last indicating the happy consequences of chanting them” (Narayanan 1987: 11). In addition, she mentions worship of Viṣṇu in a temple; exortations to offer flowers, sandalwood paste, and incense to him; chanting the tirumantra; branding with marks of discus and conch; and the five vēḷvis (sacrifices) as in “He, who I think is the three fires, the four Vedas, the five sacrifices, the six limbs of the Vedas, the seven notes of a melody (Periya Tirumoli 2.10.1)” (Narayanan 1987: 12).
five daily rituals in a Pāñcarātra temple); and (7) temple architecture during the Ālvār period follows Pāñcarātra prescriptions.

I suggest that these assertions provide extremely thin evidence for the presence of Pāñcarātrins in Ālvār temples, at least the kind of Pāñcarātrins described in extant Āgamas. 77

(1) Playing with numbers is common in bhakti hymns. Four, for instance, could allude to the Lord in the form of the four Vedas – especially given repeated references to the four Vedas as in Periya-tirumoli 2.10.1, which mentions the three fires, four Vedas, five sacrifices, and so on.

(2) In some Pāñcarātra texts, the twelve deities are the tutelary deities of the months. 78 In others, they are known as the vyūhāntaras. 79 Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, and Mādhava arise from Vāsudeva; Govinda, Viṣṇu, and Madhusūdana from Saṃkarṣaṇa; Trivikrama, Vāmana, and Śrīdhara from Pradyumna; and Hṛṣiṇeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara from Aniruddha. This list of twelve is expanded to twenty-four in the Pādmasaṃhitā (where they are called mūrtis rather than vyūhāntaras). 80 It seems to me that the list of twelve names associated with the twelve months was the original idea. The list appears in the Puruṣasūktavidhāna section of the Rgvidhāna, which, as I will argue, probably existed independently by the fourth or fifth century. In any case, the list appears also in Brḥatsaṃhitā, 81 which belongs to the sixth century. The fact that it is found in these texts means that it belonged to a more general Vaiṣṇava tradition. More importantly, the Rgvidhāna and Brḥatsaṃhitā are earlier than the Ālvārs. This means that Pāñcarātra texts need not be the source. Besides, according to ALEXIS SANDERSON, the extant Pāñcarātra texts can be dated not earlier than 850. 82

77 For some time, I thought that Pāñcarātra might have influenced Periyālvār and Āņṭāḷ, but I no longer think so.


79 See AS 5.46-49b, LT 4.27-28, PauṣS 36.145-168, and NārS 1.55c-56. I would like to thank RASTELLI: personal communication, for providing these references.

80 PādS jñānapada 2.21-28.

81 BS 105.14-16.

(3) We do not need Pāñcarātra for references to temples of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. First, many temples had been built throughout India between the third century and the seventh, including South India. Second, offerings of flowers, incense, lamps, and so forth were extremely common in image worship among Buddhists, Jainas, and Śaivas.³³

(4) Branding with conch and discus was generally associated with Vaiṣṇavas and need not refer specifically to Pāñcarātra. It is alluded to in the Viṣṇusahasranāma of the Mahābhārata: kṛtalakṣaṇa (one who has a mark).³⁴ According to RASTELLI, the “pañcasamāskāras are only described in later Saṃhitās (see the Index of SMITH 1980 s.v. pañcasamāskāra). In prescriptions for the dikṣā of the early Saṃhitās, branding is not mentioned. One verse in the Sātvatasamhitā (22.9) describes a samayin as having a body that is branded with a cakra (cakrataptatanu), but it does not say when and where he has received this branding. Perhaps the word cakrataptatanu is a later variant. Branding is certainly not distinctive, therefore, of Pāñcarātra.”³⁵

(5) The tirumantra had been popular since the time of the Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad (from approximately the fifth BCE to the first century CE), which was connected with the Atharvaveda and Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda³⁶ and need not be attributed to early Pāñcarātra texts. In this context, it is important to recall that the latter include many mantras. If Pāñca-

---
³⁴ YOUNG 2002: 96. Parāśarabhaṭṭar in his Śrīviṣṇusahasranāmabhāṣya comments on the name Kṛtalakṣaṇa. “He cites several passages. According to the Śrī Harivaṃśa, those who have the marks (lakṣaṇa) of discus and conch may come to God; those unmarked may not. According to the Viṣṇudharma [Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa], those who wear the signs of having taken refuge in God – that is, the discus and conch – and obey his commands do not harm other devotees. And according to the Viṣṇutattva, just as women wear ornaments to indicate their marital chastity, devotees wear the discus and conch as ornaments to indicate their marital faithfulness to God” (YOUNG 2002: 98). The Harivaṃśa was probably written about the fifth century, certainly before the time of the Āḷvārs, although the Viṣṇudharma was later (between the seventh century and the tenth).
³⁵ RASTELLI: personal communication.
rātrins had been the primary influence on Ālvār hymns, we would expect to find more types of mantra, including ones directed to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.

(6) The five sacrifices belong to a formulaic description of Brāhmaṇas that Manu mentioned (3.67-72); these five mahāyajñas include the study and teaching of the Veda, offerings to the ancestors, offerings to the fire, bali oblations to all beings, and honouring guests. Therefore, it is unnecessary to connect the number five with the five nights (pañcarātra) or temple rituals at five times (pāncakālika).

(7) Which came first, features of temple architecture or their description in Āgamic texts, is a chicken and egg problem. DENNIS HUDSON has argued that the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temple, built in 770 in Kānci by the Pallava Nandivarman II, is a Pāñcarātra temple. But the authors of Pāñcarātra texts could have based their descriptions on this temple or similar ones. In any case, HUDSON’s identification of the four vyuha figures lacks iconographical specificity.87

In short, alternative and more convincing explanations can account for all the evidence proposed by scholars who argue that Pāñcarātra priests performed rituals in Ālvār temples. As a result, I do not think that Ālvār hymns were influenced directly by Pāñcarātrins. There might have been some Pāñcarātrins, however, in other Tamil circles. The Bhāgavatapurāṇa, assigned by HARDY to the ninth century in Tamilnadu, integrates Pāñcarātra elements (although scholars think that Pāñcarātra was not a major influence even on this text).88 But many questions remain regarding the date and place of this text. And if it were a ninth century text, composed in Tamilnadu, why did Śrivaisnava Ācāryas ignore such a major Nārāyaṇa-oriented work? The Bhāgavata’s author might have introduced the Pāñcarātra element by way of textual knowledge, in any case, and not because Pāñcarātra priests were officiating in Tamil temples. Or integration of the Pāñcarātra element into that Nārāyaṇa perspective might have occurred outside Tamilnadu.


88 For Pāñcarātra elements in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa see SHERIDAN 1986: 63-65. SHERIDAN attributes this to the eclectic nature of the text. For arguments that this Purāṇa was written in Tamilnadu in about the ninth century, see HARDY 1983: 488, 490, 492, 526, and appendix XI.
Yet another argument is that Yāmuna lived in the tenth century and wrote a defence of the Pāñcarātra in his Āgamprāmāṇya. This implies that Pāñcarātra temple priests must have already been established in the temples of Tamilnadu. When I compare the Āgamprāmāṇya with Ālvār hymns, though, I find some major differences. (1) The deity is called Viṣṇu (24 times); Vāsudeva (17 times), and Nārāyaṇa (12 times). Given the number of citations and the fact that the opening verse pays homage to Viṣṇu, it is reasonable to conclude that the author preferred Viṣṇu. But given the mantras and many references to the dark deity and the popularity of the reclining form, it is reasonable to conclude that the Ālvārs preferred Nārāyaṇa. (2) There are several references to dikṣā. The Ālvārs say nothing specifically about initiation, however, aside from one reference to branding by Periyālvār. (3) The text refers only once to refuge, although this is a common Ālvār theme. (4) The Āgamprāmāṇya refers to the consecration ritual (pratiṣṭhā) for transforming a material image into the deity, but Ālvār hymns refer only to the devotee’s initiative for making him fully present in a form according to their imaginations. (5) The Āgamprāmāṇya is concerned about temple ritual and the status of Brāhmaṇa priests. Ālvār hymns, however, are concerned about their personal experiences of God, both mental and physical. (6) The Āgamprāmāṇya does not refer to asceticism, even within a householder orientation, as an important part of the Brāhmaṇas’ identity. But Ālvār hymns allude often to a yogic-devotional dimension. (7) The Āgamprāmāṇya describes worship as the pāñcakālika rituals performed by Brāhmaṇas in temples. This focus on five established times of worship, performed by a specific Brahmanical group with a particular initiation that makes them eligible for this task, is very different from the lack of references in Ālvār hymns to any priests and the focus on personal worship by all devotees. (8) As for service, the Āgamprāmāṇya distinguishes between service done by Brāhmaṇas and that done by mere servants who work for the temple. This introduces a hierarchical element. But Ālvār hymns stress that all devotees are servants not only of God but also of all other devotees, which emphasizes equality. (9) The work sees ritual as central. But the Ālvārs thought that hymns (stotras) were the most important offerings to God. (10) The Āgamprāmāṇya refers nowhere to Tamil tradition, much less to the integration of Tamil and Sanskrit traditions. But this is of central importance in Ālvār hymns. (11) For these reasons, it is problematic to document continuity from
Āḻvār hymns to the Āgapaprāmāṇya and to argue that its defense of Pāñcarātra in the tenth century (the date that is often assigned to Yāmuna) can be read back into Āḻvār hymns as proof of Pāñcarātra priests in the temples that are mentioned in Āḻvār hymns.

The point here is that we have no convincing evidence that Pāñcarātra informed Āḻvār hymns or that Pāñcarātra priests were involved in the temples that the Āḻvārs described. This opens up the question of who the Āḻvārs were and whether Yāmuna came from a different tradition altogether.

III: OTHER INFLUENCES ON THE ĀḻVĀRS

Scholars of Śrīvaisṇavism have seldom examined possible antecedents, aside from Pāñcarātra and Tamil caṇkam poetic motifs, to Āḻvār hymns. Nor have they examined the possibility of Brahmanical influence on them. This might have occurred because of the integrative appearance of these hymns, which include every type of person in the community of devotees, because of egalitarianism in the Śrīvaisṇava sampradāya, especially that of the Tenkālai sect, or because of the prevailing anti-Brahmanism in modern Tamilnadu. In this section, I will examine several texts that probably existed between the fourth century and the sixth. I will link these with the Atharvaveda, Yajurveda, and Rgveda. In addition, I will look for a Mahāyāna Buddhist link with the Āḻvārs.

An Atharvavedic Influence?

The Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad is an intriguing text for thinking about possible Atharvavedic influences on the Āḻvārs. It mentions cave temples and image halls (called pratimāśālā, rūpaśālā, śailaguhā, and mahāśaila) as well as image worship (called saparyā and pūjana). According to the commentator, the practices of this text were known from the Vaitaraṇi to the Kāvērī – that is, throughout South India. This text is of interest here, because it links the Atharvavedins with temple traditions, legitimizes temple worship in Vedic terms, and links mental visualization of images in meditation with worship of physical images.

89 See BÄUMER 1996: x.
Several manuscripts of this Upaniṣad composed in defective Sanskrit were found during the twentieth century in remote Atharvavedic villages in Orissa. These refer to the Atharvavedic sage Pippalāda. Although scholars debate the work’s authenticity, several sections are indeed old; deities such as Rudra, Sūrya, Ambā, and Īla are Vedic. But others are more recent; deities such as the consorts (Śaktis) of major Vedic deities (Viṣṇu is associated with Bhū and Lakṣmī, for instance, and Rudra with Ambā and Ambālikā) are Tantric. Besides Tantric elements, Sāmkhya has been integrated into this theistic context. According to ALICE BONER, parts of the text that focus on the general principles of form-formation might have preceded the Śilpa sections of the Māstyapurāṇa, the Viṣṇudharmottara, and the Brāhmaṇa, which date from the fourth century to the sixth. DIPAK BHATTACHARYA notes that the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad distinguishes between the sūtras (which say nothing explicit about the Atharvaveda) and an explanatory text (which contains references to Pippalāda and his disciples, although its content is probably more in the tradition of Śaunaka). BHATTACHARYA concludes that, despite inconsistencies (including many late terms) and few obvious connections with the Atharvaveda, it could have emerged from a long-standing Atharvavedic interest in architecture.

Whatever its origins – the sūtras might be earlier than the Pippalāda explanations – the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad places image-construction firmly within the Vedic tradition. It refers to the Vedic origins of an underlying sacred geometry (śulva) of sacrificial altars, anthropomorphic images, and image-panels that were made by the sthāpaka (the Brāhmaṇa who oversaw the work of artisans) as rit-

---

90 BONER 1996: 3.
91 BHATTACHARYA 1996: 35-42.
92 Śaunaka is the reputed author of the Rgvidhāna (and the Bṛhat-devatā). Because the subject matter of the Rgvidhāna is Atharvavedic – magical formulas – it has been connected with the latter in popular imagination. The parallel text for the Atharvaveda is the Kauśikasūtra (BHA 1987: 16).

93 See JACOB 2004: 52ff. The Mānasāra was written sometime between 750 and 1750, probably in the second half of this period (JACOB 2004: 10) in Śaiva circles of Tamilnadu: “The sthāpati is said to be the source (‘maker’) [of the image]; the sthāpaka is regarded as its life-princi-
ual acts to simulate the process of creation. But first, the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad presents a case for the image’s legitimacy and importance. (ALICE BONER thinks that a controversy might have been raging.⁹⁴) This is introduced by having Pippalāda’s disciples, Vedic sacrificial priests who are ignorant of the topic, ask their guru basic questions. Drawing on the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads, he compares the primal form with the primal word (vāc) and the concrete form with the spoken or written word. He compares the power of the sacrifice to that of the image as a means of liberation. And he equates the status of the sacrificial priest with that of the sthāpaka, calling the latter śilpahotṛ or vāstuhotṛ. His disciples address the sthāpaka in several ways: as master, incarnation of the branch of action constituting form production (vāstukarmāṅgāvatāra); as a person of sixteen parts (śoḍaśakalapuruṣa), which refers to the pañjara or geometric diagram used to draw a person/deity; and as a righteous person (dharmaapuruṣa).

Pippalāda describes how brahman without qualities (nirguṇa) became brahman with qualities (saguṇa) and also produced mind in order to create infinite forms. Yet brahman remains one, the life-force (prāna) of all that exists, including images. Interestingly, Pippalāda considers the yūpa (a wooden post for tying the sacrificial animal) the key symbol of this creative process. It embodies not only the primary line (the post) and circle (the spherical top of the post) but also the primary man (who is sacrificed to become the universe as in the Puruṣasūkta). After explaining this fundamental shape, Pippalāda discusses stones, geometric diagrams, carvings, disposition of limbs, portrayals of character, gestures, postures, ornaments, armaments, vehicles, and so forth. Finally, he mentions that images inspire, elevate, purify, and delight; create faith, steadfast devotion, and supreme knowledge (parā vidyā); and lead to liberation (mokṣa). Images that arise in the minds of rṣis, who can see the essence of all manifestations, guide devotees by removing false images and providing true ones.⁹⁵

Therefore, from the beginning of the operation, one should work in company of [the other], at all times” (Mānasāra LXX, 3-4 translated by JACOB 2004: 53).

⁹⁴ BONER ¹⁹⁹⁶: 5.
⁹⁵ BONER ¹⁹⁹⁶: 10-11.
Also of interest here is the commentary on the Vāstusūtra-Upa-
iṣad by Nigama Diṇḍima. It looks like a product of the Taittirīya
branch of the Yajurveda (see the Yajurveda section of this chapter)
with its introduction of two key deities – Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and Rudra-
Śiva – and its combination of worship and meditation focused on the
inner breath (prāṇa) of life and form.

Several aspects of this text and commentary could have con-
tributed to the ethos that created the bhakti hymns. It is an Atharva-
vedin text, which might explain why the Ālvārs consistently men-
tioned four Vedas. Its link between cave-temples and image-halls
might allude to a tradition of contemplating paintings and statues,
one that fuses yogic and devotional contexts with mental and physi-
cal visualization – which is what we find in Ālvār hymns. Its legiti-
mation of image worship in a Vedic context might account for the
juxtaposition of image worship and Vedic imagery (Vedas, sacri-
fices, and so forth) in bhakti hymns. Its idea that God is one but has
many forms is like the Ālvār view of divine ontology. Also germane
to bhakti poems is the link between image worship and faith, stead-
fast devotion, supreme knowledge, and liberation. The idea that rṣis
see the real essence of all forms is Ālvār-like. One example would be
Nammāḻvār’s pronouncement that this form and that form are the one
primordial god. 96 Finally, the link between making an image and the
Puruṣasūkta connects this text not with the Ālvārs per se but with
several texts that I will discuss in a moment, ones that might also
have influenced the Ālvārs.

In the meantime, I want to draw your attention to the fact that
Brāhmaṇas were already associated with the four Vedas in Tamil
cāṅkam poetry, the earliest Tamil literature. There they are referred
to as “sages” (muṇivar), seers (pārppār or antanar97), and as “those
who know the four Vedas” (naṉmarai). 98 These references to sages

96 See Tiruvāymoḻi 3.6.9, which I have already discussed.

97 The etymology of antanar is problematic according to the Tamil
Lexicon 1982-83: 80, 94. It might be from am (the instrument of seeing) or
anta (end; therefore Vedānta). I think that it is derived from am, because
that would make it a synonym of pārppār and be a Tamil equivalent of rṣī.

98 CLOTHEY summarizes the evidence on Brāhmaṇas and Vedas in the
cāṅkam texts as follows. “In the Purāṉāṉuru … the Vedas are termed ‘old
work’ (mutunūl) and are said to be of four kinds and to have issued from the
and seers in caṅkam works suggest Brāhmaṇa rṣis or visionaries.\textsuperscript{99} Several caṅkam references connect these seers with kings and warrior rituals.\textsuperscript{100} Because some Brāhmaṇas in the caṅkam period worked for royal courts or chiefdoms, moreover, they might have become involved in Tamil literary culture. We have at least one explicit reference to this kind of Brāhmaṇa in caṅkam texts: Kapilār, poet for the famous chieftain Pāri, who composed the Kurincippaṭṭu.\textsuperscript{101} The hypothesis of considerable (although possibly indirect) Brahmanical involvement in Tamil poetic traditions might help account for the creative adaptation of caṅkam genres and tropes to Vedic imagery as well as the bhakti allusions to religious possession and emotional ecstasy.

“Four Vedas” is an important diagnostic marker. We now assume that the concept of Veda refers to four Vedas. But it took many

\textsuperscript{99} Misra 1978: 83; 107.

\textsuperscript{100} See Puraṇāṇuṛu 224 and 372.

\textsuperscript{101} Zvelebil 1974: 44.
centuries for the fourth one, the Atharvaveda, to be accepted.\textsuperscript{102} In the Buddhist Jātaka tales, for instance, Brāhmaṇas are still referred to as those who know the three Vedas. In Orissa, moreover, inscriptions from before the seventh century almost always mention only Brāhmaṇas of the three Vedas.\textsuperscript{103} Atharvedins were experimental in their attempts to spread Vedic culture. In the process, they participated in local traditions. They were well known for integrating local deities into the Vedic pantheon and were instrumental in popularizing Śiva, Skanda, and Nārāyaṇa. They linked sectarian Upaniṣads, such as the Nārāyaṇopaniṣad and the Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad, with the Atharvaveda. In addition, they introduced new kinds of expertise – such as Ayurvedic medicine, architecture, and dance – into Vedic circles.

Atharvedins, too, were often the purohitas of kings and might have spread the aśvamedha ritual for coronations into new regions beyond the Gangetic heartland. According to ARVIND SHARMA, the Atharvaveda has been associated with Śūdras, Śūdra kings, and a reversal symbolism: the Atharvaveda has been called, for instance, the Veda of the Śūdras (and the first among the Vedas according to the Mahābhārata\textsuperscript{104}). SHARMA notes that Atharvedins were closely associated with the sūtas or bards in Sanskrit texts. This suggests that they might have had close connections with court poets in other regions. Atharvedins were famous for prognostication, moreover, and used the word muni.\textsuperscript{105} Some scholars, says SHARMA, think that the dāsas of the Rgveda were transformed into the Śūdra varṇa and might have had a connection with the vrātyas. A “people on the margins of orthodoxy,” they spoke the same language but did not have the same lifestyle or undergo upanayana (through neglect

\textsuperscript{102} See WITZEL 1997: 275-284 for the early history of the Atharvaveda and 284-287 for the development of the concept of four Vedas.

\textsuperscript{103} In Orissa, for example, inscriptions from before the seventh century mention only Brāhmaṇas of the three Vedas (SINGH 1994: 292).


\textsuperscript{105} MONIER-WILLIAMS 1964: 823.
or ineligibility) and became associated with Śūdras and rājanyas (kings). \(^{106}\)

Given this description, we should not find it surprising that Atharvavedins were active in Tamilnadu during the caṅkam period (some bards possibly belonging to the vrātya/dāsa groups on the fringes of Vedic society), developed royal connections, acted as bards or munis, and made prognostications. They continued to be active, moreover, into the bhakti period. Because of their presence in Andhra, they might have been involved in the development of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu (and Śaiva) sectarianism there as well. If so, then the link between Atharvavedins in Tamilnadu and their counterparts coming from the Deccan would make sense as a dynamic merger of several religious streams: Nārāyaṇa sectarianism, proselytism, temple worship, and caṅkam religious motifs of possession and emotional ecstacy.

Later Atharvavedin history is especially obscure. Some scholars have suggested that they gradually died out as a major cultural force. If so, what might have happened to them in Tamilnadu? One possibility is that they gradually lost their Vedic expertise. (The Cilappatikāram, from the sixth or seventh century, refers to a village with Brāhmaṇas who still wear the sacred thread but have taken to singing, because they no longer recite the Vedas. \(^{107}\)) People like this might have become the singers of bhakti hymns at temples, a group that is mentioned in Tamil inscriptions from the eleventh century. Another possibility, although it is beyond the purview of my texts and inscriptions, is that Atharvavedins sought power in military circles. Instead of being the poets who sang the praise of rulers and their lands, they became militant Brāhmaṇas \(^{108}\) or petty rulers them-

---


\(^{107}\) Parthasarathy 1993: 131.

\(^{108}\) Veluthat 1978: 102-115. Veluthat refers to an inscription of 866 in the copper plates of an Āy king. It mentions a śalai, attached to a Vaiśṇava temple at Ulakkūṭivila, for ninety-five student caṭṭas (Sanskrit: chātra) who belonged to the Pavalīva (Bahriva), Taittirīya, and Talavakāra Vedic traditions. These Brāhmaṇas, who learned the Vedas and how to fight with arms, were honoured. Sometimes, they were classified with revered teachers, or bhaṭṭas, and they served as a para-military troops not only for
selves. If so, this might help to explain Ālyārs such as Kulacēkaraṇ and Tirumankai, who used not only religious metaphors but also military ones. Or Atharvavedins might have become the Brāhmaṇa experts who oversaw the making of images and temples, a subject called rūpāvatāra, in eleventh-century inscriptions (see below). All this might indicate why the Atharvaveda was taught much less often than the other Vedas during the eleventh century.

A Yajurvedic Influence?

Three traditions were associated with the Yajurveda. One was the “black” (Krṣṇa) Taittirīya tradition of the Yajurveda. This included the Kāṇḍikeya school, which was divided into the Āpastamba and Baudhāyaṇa schools. Two others belonged to the “white” Yajurveda tradition: the Vaikhānasa and the Vājin (Vājasaneyin).109 Scholars have associated the Taittirīya and Vaikhānasa traditions

the king but also for religious communities.” See also his references to the ghaṭika in Kāṭcī.

109 According to COLAS, “no Vedic śākhā is so closely and exclusively connected with Vaiṣṇavism as the Vaikhānasa śākhā is” (COLAS 2003: 236). The Ṛgveda contains references to a sage by the name of Vaikhānasa. The Brāhmaṇas and the Taittirīya-Āranyaka contain equations of the words vaikhānasa, rṣi, and muni. The Rāmāyaṇa contains a few references to the Vaikhānasas. The Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata refers to their exclusive connection with Hari-Nārāyaṇa and the Dharma of the Ekāntins (those who worship only one deity, that is, Nārāyaṇa). And the Nārāyaṇīyaparvan includes a description of them as forest hermits (COLAS 1996: 13f.). The Baudhāyaṇadharmasūtra (composed between 600 BCE and 300 BCE) refers to Vaikhānasa dietary rules, robes, ascetic practices, fire rituals (according to the śrāmanaka rite), ten initiations (dikṣā), and so forth (COLAS 1996: 14). Many of these appear also in the Gautamadharmasāstra (COLAS 1996: 14). Somehow, all this gave rise to the tradition of a Vaikhānasa Vedic śākhā, one that was associated especially with the third āśrama (va-napraṣṭha) but more broadly conceived as the classic four āśramas (and therefore encompassing a Brahmanical householder tradition). The Baudhāyaṇadharmasūtra refers to Skanda, Sanatkumāra, Viṣākha, Śaṅmukha, Mahāśena, and Subrahmanyas. If this text was known in Tamilnadu, it might have been one reason why Murukan eventually became identified with the deity known by the names Skanda and so forth.
especially with South India (dakṣiṇapatha). Despite these divisions, though, they often overlapped. According to SHARMA, the Śūdras were associated with the White Yajurveda. “The following pieces of evidence,” he says, “point, in that direction. (1) The ŚuklaYajurVeda contains a verse (26.2) which has been interpreted as throwing open Vedic knowledge to all varṇas, including the śūdras. The exact significance of the verse is unclear but its inclusiveness has not been questioned. (2) The Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra is attached to the ŚuklaYajurVeda and con-

---

110 According to one Vaikhānas tradition, Baudhāyana originally belonged to the white Yajurveda but left to join the Taittirīya. See COLAS 1996: 18 note 3; citing Ānandasamhitā XIX, 21. KANE distinguishes Baudhāyana from Kāṇva Bodhāyana, an earlier sage (KANE I: 40). After discussing all the evidence for the home of Baudhāyana, KANE concludes that he was a southerner (KANE I: 48) – which could mean that he lived anywhere south of the Nārmadā but possibly in Maharashtra or Andhra – and wrote between the sixth century BCE and the third.

As for sources, KANE notes that Baudhāyana mentions all four Vedas by name in Baudhāyanadharmasūtra II.5.27 and refers to the Atharvaveda and Atharvāṅgirasas (which stands for the Atharvaveda in the Upaniṣads). See Baudhāyanadharmasūtra II.6.7-9; III.2 and 22 (KANE I: 44f.). In addition, Baudhāyana often mentions the Puruṣasūkta; the Taittirīyasamhitā, the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa, the Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka, and the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (KANE I: 44). And Baudhāyana “mentions a Vaikhānasas-śāstra in II.6.16, which appears to refer to the work of Vikhanas on hermits and speaks of Śrāmanaka (the rites prescribed by Vikhanas for initiation as hermit)” (KANE I: 45). These sources are of interest here, because they link a southern Brahmanical tradition with the four Vedas, the Puruṣasūkta, the Taittirīya tradition, and the Vaikhānas tradition. These are precisely the diagnostic features that I have found in Tamil and Sanskrit texts from Tamilnadu.

Finally, the Baudhāyanadharmasūtra refers to attaining powers through japa, homa, iṣṭi, and yantra (KANE I: 40). It is striking that chanting the names of the deity (japa), oblations and vegetarian ritual offerings (iṣṭi), and meditation (yantra) are already linked with Vedic fire rituals (homa) that were performed by Brāhmaṇas. It would be a small step to move them from homa in the home, for instance, to homa in temples (once they became popular) or to image worship or image meditation as an addition to or substitute for fire worship.

111 SHARMA 2000: 239.
tains an explicit provision (2.6) for the initiation into Vedic studies of śūdras of good character. This qualification is not unusual as Āpastamba forbids initiation of brāhmaṇas of bad character. (3) In some smṛti texts the following statement is found: śudrāḥ vājasaneyīnāḥ. ‘This is explained as meaning that the śūdra should follow the procedure prescribed in the grhyasūtra of the Vājasaneyya Śākhā and a brāhmaṇa should repeat the mantra for him’ … P.V. Kane points out that in the Harivaṃśa (Bhaviṣyat-Parva, Chap. III, 13) we find verses he translates as follows: ‘All will expound brahma; all will be Vājasaneyins; when the yuga comes to a close śūdras will make use of the word ’bhoḥ’ in address (sarve brahma vadiṣyanti sarve vājasaneyinah).’

Śūdras are sometimes associated with light along with the other varṇas; SHARMA thinks that this is a sign of their equality in the Yajurveda tradition. In addition, some passages suggest a reversal of hierarchy based on the symbolism of four: Śūdras as the fourth varṇa is the highest, the anusṭubh, the meter based on four lines is the best one and therefore that of the epics, which are accessible to Śūdras and women. Connections are made, moreover, between royalty and supremacy. SHARMA points out that horses are now the highest of animals; the aśvamedha, or horse sacrifice, is performed by kings and therefore the most important rite. (I would add that given its connections with royalty and caste-inclusiveness, the Yajurveda tradition is similar to the Atharvaveda.) He adds that the symbolism of feet, too, becomes important. Viṣṇu is the foundation of the universe; as Trivikrama, he takes three great steps across the cosmos; Śūdras are linked positively with the Lord’s feet.

One text of the Vaikhānasa tradition is the Vaikhānasasmṛta-sūtra. Scholars date it to the fourth or fifth century and describe

---

112 SHARMA 2000: 246.

113 SHARMA 2000: 247; citing Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā XVIII.48 and other texts.


115 SHARMA 2000: 259.

116 COLAS notes that the Vaikhānasapravaraṇaḥ, attached to some manuscripts of the Vaikhānasamsṛtasūtra, is very close to the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda school of Baudhāyana (COLAS 1996: 23) (which worshipped both
it as Tamil-influenced (even though it is written in Sanskrit). If so, it might shed light on early Tamil literary allusions to Brāhma and image worship. It refers mainly to Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu being associated usually with ritual acts and Nārāyaṇa with meditation and spiritual life), but it is by no means narrowly sectarian.

The Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra is striking, because it not only discusses image worship in the home but also alludes to image worship in temples. Worshippers should show devotion (bhakti) morning and evening after the homa in the fire at home (grha). This implies devotional meditation either by mentally visualizing the deity at the end of the homa or by worshipping an image in a home shrine or in the deity’s house (devāyatana). COLAS notes references to making an image (kalpayati) but not specifically to who makes and installs it (pratiṣṭhā). Because the text refers to no rituals for purification, he thinks that the maker is probably the householder himself.

The text provides no detailed instructions on cutting the stone, wood, and so on. This means that it is not as exclusively Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in its orientation as the later Vaikhānasa tradition (or the Āḻvār hymns). The same text honours other deities, too, perhaps in image forms (COLAS 1996: 24 note 2). It refers to the ritual in a temple to Guha (Skanda), for instance. Nevertheless, COLAS thinks that this text is more monotheistic and sectarian than the Baudhāyana-aghryaparīśīṭasūtra, which treats Viṣṇu and Rudra both separately and together. COLAS argues that a part of the Vaikhānasa school, even at the beginning of the ninth century, worshipped deities other than Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and only gradually became purely Vaiṣṇava, although some had become so by the end of that century (COLAS 1996: 63). “Several passages of the Vaikhānasasmṛtasūtra [which was written after the Śmārtasūtra] reveal a strong tendency towards devotion to Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. Meditation on these two divine aspects accompanies the performance of several ritual acts.” (COLAS 2003: 236)

COLAS follows KANE and CALAND on this (COLAS 1996: 22-23).

COLAS 1996: 22.

Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra IV, 11, p. 64, l. 7-8; IV, 12, p. 65, l. 7-9 cited by COLAS 1996: 24 note 3.


As in the Baudhāyana-aghryaparīśīṭasūtra (COLAS 1996: 25).
forth, however, only instructions on “awakening” the deity and installing the image.\(^{122}\)

This work, too, describes four stages of life for the twice-born (the last, saṃnyāśa, is for Brāhmaṇaṣ alone). It has considerable material on nivṛtti, or disengagement, and yoga. In one passage, the yogin sees and meditates on a form of the deity (devatākāra), which could be a concrete representation.\(^{123}\) Renouncers may live in a temple, a matha, or under a tree.\(^{124}\) Even householders, when concentrating on Nārāyaṇa with devotion (bhakti), may practice yamas and niyamas. These consist of bathing, purification, study, tapas, gift, sacrifice, fasting, suppressing sexual desire, resolution, and silence. This could be a kind of renunciation for householders, possibly as vānaprasthins. The text considers Nārāyaṇa the supreme brahman, and union with him (sāyujya) occurs in Vaikuṇṭha. Meditation, according to COLAS, oscillates between an exterior perception of the divine image and mystic contemplation of it. In short, the Vaikhānasasmārta has fused an ascetic Nārāyaṇa tradition with a Vedic sacrificial one. It has fused meditation on a mental image, moreover, with wor-

---

\(^{122}\) Here are the main steps of this three-day process. On the first day, the maker pours libations of clarified butter into the domestic fire, then other libations on the arms and legs of the image, and finally opens its eyes with a golden tool. Overnight, he immerses the image in a pot of water. On the second day, he honours the deity (abhi arc) with perfumed water and other ingredients. Then, he meditates on the deity as formless and on the image in the pot (with its vestments, ornaments, and so forth) as form. He chants a mantra, naming Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, places offerings into the fire, and so forth. On the third day, he takes the image to its residence, uttering “I install Viṣṇu” and directing the words svar, bhuvas, bhūḥ and om to the image’s (bimba) head, the navel, the feet, and the heart. Next, he showers “powerful water” (saktiyuta) from the pot on the image’s head while saying, “I invoke Viṣṇu.” Finally, he performs worship and offers a cooked oblation. The Vaikhānasasmārta then describes the daily ritual. It consists of several offerings, including flowers, accompanied by mantras, meditation on the deity as the recipient of the sacrifice (yajñapurūsa), recitation of the Puruṣasūktā, and a salutation. Devotion (bhakti) to Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa should accompany the practice of ritual and meditation (COLAS 1996: 25-26).

\(^{123}\) COLAS 1996: 23; citing VIII, 11, p. 120, l. 10-13.

\(^{124}\) COLAS 1996: 23.
ship of a physical one in home shrines and possibly temples. This is similar to ideas in the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad.

As I have noted, some branches of the Yajurveda tradition had long been associated with the south. It is conceivable that caṅkam references to the muṇivar (from Sanskrit muni: silent one or ascetic) and pāṛppār or antaṇār (seers), and their fire rituals could allude to this tradition. Two prevailing images of Brāhmaṇa ascetics in northern Brahmanical texts, in contrast to those of Buddhist and Jaina ascetics, are their matted hair and their fire rituals. The Brāhmaṇas mentioned in one caṅkam text have these features.125 These southern Brāhmaṇa ascetics or ascetic-householders might have been forerunners of the community that produced the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra.

Links could be made between this text, too, and the Āyattra tradition. I am thinking here primarily of the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra’s focus on Nārāyaṇa and the ways in which it links mental and physical visualization of the image, its view of the deity as having many forms, its link between temple worship and Vedic rituals, its link between visualizing images and chanting stotras, its style of worship (including the offering of flowers, mantras, and salutations), and its inclusion or fusion of both ascetic and householder traditions – all of which are diagnostic features of bhakti hymns.126

A Rgvedic Influence?

Śaunaka’s Rgvidhāna (literally, the sacred precepts or sorcery practice of the rc) might be yet another antecedent to the Āyattra hymns, but probably a more indirect one than the works that I have already mentioned. It belongs to a tradition of simplifying the rituals of the Śrauta- and Gṛhyaśūtras and promoting the magical effects of chanting mantras (the attainment of prosperity, long life, peace, progeny, and so forth). It is difficult to date this work. M.S. Bhat thinks that the oldest stratum might have been pre-Pāṇinian (that is, before the fifth century BCE) and that its Smṛti and Tantric sections might have been added hundreds of years later, between the first cen-

---

125 Narraṇai 141.3-5; see also Bronkhorst 1993: 35; 51.

126 Colas 1996: 60; 63.
tury and the fifth. The extant text dates from some time between the fifth century and the eighth (although BHAT argues that one section – the Puruṣasūktavidhāna by Viṣṇukumāra, which is of particular interest here – probably existed independently and was added only by the ninth century).128

According to the Puruṣasūktavidhāna, “in water, in fire, in the heart, in the sun, in the altar (sthaṇḍila) and in images (pratimā) – in these, the proper worship (arcana) of Hari has been declared by the munis.”130 This section states that its topics are worship (arcana), hymns of praise (stotra), chanting the divine names (japa), sacrifice (homa), and asceticism (yoga) – an intriguing juxtaposition, from my historical perspective. Worship includes the application of nyāsa, first to the body of a worshipper and then to that of the deity. This is followed by offering a seat, water, cloth, sacred thread, sandal wood paste, flower, incense, lighted lamps, and food, salutation, and circumambulation. A worshipper might offer these to a mental image, rather than an actual one, because he may mentally conjure up (kal-payet) a lotus-seat for Nārāyaṇa in the midst of fire and meditate (cintayet) on the chief god among gods.

The Puruṣasūktavidhāna makes several striking references to fearing samsāra and to attaining refuge (śaraṇam prāpya) at the feet of the deity – ideas that later became popular among both the Āḻvārs and Śrīvaisṇavas.

“The wise, on attaining the refuge in thee alone, cross over the awful and endless (ananta) ocean of existence which is a [veritable] receptacle of afflictions (kleśabhājana).”131

---

127 On the problem of authorship, stratifications, and date see BHAT 1987: 7; 14; 16; 19; 95; 146-149.
128 BHAT 1987: 149-152. All translations of the Rgvidhāna are by BHAT unless otherwise noted.
129 Rgvidhāna 3.155-170.
130 YOUNG translating from the Sanskrit text of Rgvidhāna 3.150: apsv agnau hrdaye sūrye sthaṇḍile pratimāsu ca | śatsv eteṣu hareḥ sam-yagarcanam munibhiḥ smṛtam ||.
131 Rgvidhāna 3.177: samsārasāgaram ghoram anantam kleśabhājanaṃ | tvām eva śaraṇam prāpya nistaranti maniṣiṇaḥ ||.
"I am afraid of this formidable existence (samsāra), O chief among the gods! Protect me, O Lotus-eyed one! [for] I do not know [thy] highest abode. Thou pervadest, O Acyuta!, in all periods and in all directions [and even] in [my] body. A great fear is [in store] for me even in my future lives since there is no [refuge] other than thy lotus-like feet. After gaining this discernment and acquiring this abode, let this not fail me, O Lord! even in my next life [for this] wish of mine, who am born in misfortune, belongs to Thee. I shall always remain contented with that much provided it [discernment or abode] does not get lost [for] I exclusively pine indeed for the … [two] feet of Viṣṇu in all [future] lives."

The Puruṣasūktavidhāna goes on to describe ascetic practices in the forest, such as muttering the Puruṣasūktva, and then mentions that a virtuous person should remain a householder (gr̥hastha) but get up after midnight to meditate. (This suggests that the householder need not wait until becoming a formal vānaprasthin to get on with the business of yoga.) After this, the Puruṣasūktavidhāna expounds on more yogic practices with their mundane and supramundane results. As if yoga were too onerous a task, the text has a strong bhakti message, which, in fact, trumps other spiritual practices and promises the fulfilment of all desires. One should not “lessen bhakti even if one does not [fully] accomplish [one’s object, for] the Highest Person, the Divine One is known to be sympathetic to His devotees."

In fact, this bhakti element dominates the conclusion of the Puruṣasūktavidhāna:

“After adoring the adorable feet of Nārāyaṇa, whoever merely recites this hymn [of praise] attains the abode of the ever-lasting

132 Ṛgvidhāna 3.181-185: ahaṁ bhīto ’smi deveṣa saṁsāre ’smin mahābhaye | trāhi māṁ punḍarīkākṣa na jāne paramam padāni || 181 kāleśv api ca sarveṣu dikṣu sarvāsu cācyuta | śarīre ca gataś cāsi vartate me mahādbhayam || 182 tvatpādakamalaḥ anyaṁ na me janmāntaresv api | vijnānaṁ yad idam prāpya yad idam sthānam arjitaṁ || 183 janmāntare ’pi me deva mā bhūd asya parikṣayaḥ | durgatāv api jātasya tvadgato me manorathāḥ || 184 yadi nāśaṁ na vindeta tāvatāsmi kṛtī sadā | kāmaye viṣṇupādau tu sarva-janmasu kevalam || 185.


134 Ṛgvidhāna 3.219: anāśādayamāno ’pi bhaktim na parihāpayet | bhaktānukampi bhagavāṇi chṛūyate puruṣottamaḥ ||.
Viṣṇu, free from old age and death, by means of that excellent recitation. The wise regularly worship[s] Hari by means of a burnt-offering in the fire, by means of flowers in the water, by means of meditation in the heart and by means of a muttered prayer in the orb of the sun. A *bilva* leaf, a śamī leaf, a leaf of the *bhṛṅgāraka*, and the [flowers of] the jasmine *kuśa* and lotus – [all this …] instantly gratifies Hari.”

“When [the means of gratification such as] leaves, flowers, fruits and water which [can be] obtained free (*akṛtalabdha*) are always existent and when the Primaeval Person who is attainable by mere devotion [is in existence], why [is] no effort … made for the sake of deliverance [from births and deaths]?”

Even though the dating and provenance of the Puruṣaṅkañkāvatīdāna are problematic, its general ethos is like that of the Vaikhānasasmārtas. At least as an independent text, before being added to the Ṛgvidhāna, it could date from the same period (between the fourth century and the fifth). It has the same juxtaposition of Vedic *homa*, Nārāyaṇa asceticism, and meditative *pūjā* within its framework of the four āśramas. Just as daily worship in the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra includes recitation of the Puruṣaṅkta, so does the Puruṣaṅktavidhāna. It, too, links the Puruṣaṅkta with Nārāyaṇa.

In addition, though, it has some elements that are strikingly similar to those of the Āḻvārs. The text alludes to the *avatāras*, for instance, when it remarks that God has no colour, form, weapons, or abode yet appears in human form for his devotees. The concept of attaining refuge (*śaraṇam prāpya*) links chanting hymns of praise (here, the Puruṣaṅkta) with mundane and supramundane rewards. “The hymn of the Puruṣa [in praise] of Hari is conducive to heaven

---


136 Ṛgvidhāna 3.229: *patraṁ ca puṣpaṁ ca phalaiṁ ca toyair akṛtalabdhaiṁ ca sadaiva satsu | bhaktyaikalabhviye puruṣe purāṇe muktyai kimartham kriyate na yatnaiḥ.||*

137 Ṛgvidhāna 3.178.
and wealth and productive of fame [for] this is [in itself] the sacred knowledge of the soul and the highest knowledge of yoga.” As I have already said in my earlier discussion of the stotra as a diagnostic feature of religious Śrīvaishṇavism, the same thing is said in bhakti hymns in what are known as phalaśrūtis: concluding stanzas that encourage devotees to chant hymns of praise as a kind of mental devotion for any purpose. The Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra’s reference to conjuring up (kalpayate) the image form is strikingly similar to the language used by Rāmānuja in his commentary on BhG 4.11, which I have already discussed: “after they have portrayed me in [their] imagination (samkalpya) in whatever way (yathā) suits their own desires (svāpeksā), they too, take refuge (prapadyante/samāśrayante) in me.” Finally, this text makes bhakti superior to yoga by virtue of its easy accessibility, although it maintains deep links with meditation and asceticism.

**A Mahāyāna Influence?**

I cannot explain some key aspects of Āḷvār poems by any Vedic or Tamil caṅkam oriented text. I am thinking here of their intense proselytism: telling devotees to worship this one deity by any of his names and forms, travel about to his shrines, memorize his hymns, and invite everyone to become a devotee. I am thinking also of sectarian exclusivity; even the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra had included worship of other deities, although Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa was the focus. I think that prosyletism and sectarianism are influences that entered Tamilnadu by way of the region directly north of Tamilnadu, what is known today as Andhra and Karnataka, or the Deccan. And I think that they developed there in rivalry with Mahāyāna Buddhism (but also Śaivism, which was emerging as a popular, temple-oriented religion at the same time).

These Ālvār hymns invite ordinary people to take refuge with Nārāyaṇa and worship in order to fulfil all desires and attain heaven as well. Taking refuge had long been a major theme in Theravāda Buddhism as with the key phrase: I go to the Buddha (buddha), his teaching (dhamma), and his community (saṅgha) for refuge (sāra-

---

138 Ṛgvedhāna 3.186: puruṣasya hareḥ sūktaṃ svargyaṃ dhanyam yaśaskaram | ātmajñānam idaṁ puṇyaṃ yogajñānam idaṁ param ||.
Mahāyāna Buddhism conferred similar importance on taking refuge. Although scholars debate today whether monastics or lay people began this movement (with scholarly concensus building around the former), the latter certainly grew in importance. Even at the time of the early Buddhist Saṅgha, the word upāsaka, for lay person, meant one who serves; in contrast, the word bhikkhu meant one who begs. Mahāyāna emphasized compassion (mahākaruṇā), which promises refuge, protection, and service to all beings – ideas that were attractive to ordinary people. A third-century work, Vimalakirtinirdeśasūtra, “The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti,” became massively popular among all Buddhists during the following centuries. In it, the bodhisattva assumes the guise of a layperson and tirelessly serves all human beings. Buddhists linked taking refuge with the Buddha and service to all.

In the fourth century CE, members of the Viṣṇukumādra dynasty in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa were devotees of Nārāyaṇa. Hanumantta Rao argues that “the Śrīpārvatāsvāmi of the Viṣṇukumādra records [is] none other than the Buddha, who has already become a Bhagavān, and is probably in the process of becoming an incarnation of Viṣṇu.” And one Mahāyāna work, the Lalitavistara, calls the Buddha Nārāyaṇa, Mahānārāyana, and Mahāpuruṣa. Evidence indicates that Viṣṇukumādras competed with Buddhists not only by integrating aspects of Buddha into Nārāyaṇa but also by converting Buddhists using the hiranyagarbha ritual. It indicates in addition that Viṣṇukumādras were influenced by Vaiṣṇavism under the Gupta dynasty. The Vaiṣṇava Gupta kings of Mathurā (319-415), who popularized the avatāras, had direct influence in the Deccan via marriage into the Vākāṭaka dynasty and via that dynasty into the Viṣṇukumādras. The latter were connected, in turn, with the Pallavas.

This might explain some of the overlap that links Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and his avatāras, with Buddha. An inscription from the same...

---

139 See summary of the discussion in Sasaki 1999; see also Williams 1989; Hirakawa 1990.

140 Rao 1973: 250 [I have changed the verb tenses].

141 Rao 1973: 128 citing in notes 130 [sic 139], 140, 141 on p. 136 Lalitavistara Ch. XV.202; XXI.221; XV.229; XXII.353; XXVI.426.

142 Majumdar/Altekar 1986: 64-73; 93-126; 229-234.
century (the fourth) and region (Andhra) refers, for instance, to a devakula (a “family” of the god) of Bhagavat Nārāyaṇa.143 The concept of family here, a community of devotees, is similar to the Buddhist upāsakasaṅgha (the order of lay people). Mahāyāna had lay organizations, too, called bodhisattvaganas; these made a link between acts of charity and enlightenment.144 Could these ideas, that of a lay community and that of service as a path to liberation, have entered the Nārāyaṇa cult in the Deccan and eventually influenced the Ālvārs? After all, the latter did make a link between serving – the deity and other devotees – and reaching heaven. Other possible links include iconographical features of both Nārāyaṇa and Buddha: the reclining posture, say, or the emphasis on their feet.

Before leaving the Buddhist connection, one other observation is in order. stotras that praise the body of Buddha were already present in the Lakkhaṇasutta of the Dīghanikāya of the Pāli Canon (ca. third century BCE) and, somewhat later, in the Catuḥśatakastotra and the Śatapañcāṣatikastotra of Māṭṛceta (third century CE); the latter gained popularity all over India within the next several centuries. During the fourth century, the Hindu king Hastivarman of the Śaṅkāyana dynasty (in what is now the Godavari and Krishna districts in Andhra) granted land for “meeting the expenses of the worship of the God Nārāyaṇa…. The inscription describes Bhagavat Nārāyaṇa as one who lies on the seven seas, is sung in the seven Sāman hymns, and is the sole possessor of the seven worlds.”145 The “seven Sāman hymns” allude probably to the Sāma Veda and to Vedic stotras, which are sung to the deity in the temple.

Although Nārāyaṇa worship might have entered Tamilnadu from many parts of the Deccan, one portal was certainly from this same area of eastern Andhra. The first reference to Māyōn as Nārāyaṇa in Tamil literature occurs in the Perumpāṅṟṟuppaṭai (ca. 190-200 CE). It focuses on the city of Kānci and its environs and provides a divine genealogy for the Toṇṭai man ruler, who might have migrated from eastern Andhra. (In Tamil legends, he is an outsider.)

145 All three divine epithets occur in Raghuvamsa 10.21. This suggests that Nārāyaṇa motifs were entering several poetic traditions. See Jaiswal 1967: 206.
This work alludes not only to Nārāyaṇa’s association with the cosmic ocean but also to his presence in a temple, where a Tamil bard sings his praises, accompanied by the yāl. This is the first caṅkam work in which a bard eulogizes a deity instead of a human ruler and is therefore an extremely important antecedent of the Āḻvār hymns. It is conceivable that the hymn in praise of Māyōn is directed to the deity of the Veṅka temple in Kāṇcī; it has a reclining Nārāyaṇa image, which was mentioned by the earliest Āḻvār, Poykai. The Pallavas, who might also have migrated to eastern Tamilnadu from the area of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, had connections with both Buddhism (two kings were named Buddhavarman and Buddhyaṅkūra) and Nārāyaṇa (the wife of Buddhavarman gave land to a temple of Nārāyaṇa at Dalur). The Pallavas took control, it seems, from the Toţai rulers in the area of Kāṇcī in the fourth century.

This tentative connection between Mahāyāna Buddhism and a Nārāyaṇa community of devotees helps to account for the popularity, though not necessarily the origin, of various themes in Āḻvār poetry: refuge, service, feet, stotras of the body of the deity, image worship, the ordinary person (lay or devotee), and the community of devotees. Because emphasis on sectarianism and proselytism were new elements in sixth-century Tamilnadu, their immediate source was probably outside Tamilnadu – although immigrants might have already introduced some Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa worship (the latter in the region of Maturai).

But what made these themes of enough interest in Tamilnadu to spark a major religious movement, the bhakti movement? I can think of three explanations. The most important one is that newcomers from the Deccan, such as Buddhists or Digambara Jainas, converted a king or two and provoked fear among local Tamil Brāhmana of losing political influence – especially if these new Buddhist and Jaina rulers abrogated some customary privileges, which might be at the heart of the story of the Kalabhra Interregnum.

---

146 The similarity of names, Mathurā (the city where Kṛṣṇa was born) and Maturai (its Tamilized equivalent), suggests a migration or at least an interest in linking the two places.

147 In the seventh century, the Pallava king Mahendravarman and the Pāṇṭya king Kūn-Pāṇṭya (Neṭumāraṇ) were Jainas. Although a long-standing Jaina community already existed in Tamilnadu, Digambara Jaina mi-
ñas living in Tamilnadu might have been receptive to a new proselytizing movement, therefore, with Vedic connections. Another explanation is that Tamil society had long enjoyed a cosmopolitan integration of its many communities and social strata; the bhakti movement was in tune with this Tamil ethos. Still another explanation is that Tamil caṅkam poetry provided a key component for a proselytizing movement: tropes that praised Tamil language, culture, and land. I suggest that some Tamil Brāhmaṇas approved of this effort to end the political influence of recently arrived Buddhists and Jainas by amalgamating their knowledge of caṅkam poetry and their style of meditation and worship of Nārāyaṇa in homes and temples with the Buddhist-influenced Nārāyaṇa cult from the north. The resulting fusion was a new devotional genre and proselytizing movement.

If my historical reconstruction is correct, southern Brāhmaṇa spirituality was already imbued with religious expressions of humility and equality (or reversals of the usual varṇa hierarchy). This might have proved useful in the Ālvar temple milieu, a proselytizing tradition that was eager to reach people across the social spectrum. This helps me explain why “service” in the hymns is linked with expressions of humility. Nammālvār’s Tiruvāy骡li mentions being “lower than even a cantāla” and often mentions being the “servant of the servant of the servant.”

Because Brāhmaṇas were at the top of the caste system elsewhere, and because they had been criticized for centuries by Buddhists and Jainas for their exclusivity and arrogance, Tamil Brāhmaṇas had an advantage when popularizing their religion by presenting it as inclusive and egalitarian – a tradition that they came to genuinely thanks to Atharvaveda and Yajurveda traditions.

grants – perhaps from places in the Deccan during the fifth and sixth centuries – might have disturbed the status quo. And Buddhist migrants at that time might have contributed to this perception that outsiders were taking over. Clues in the Vēlvikti grant in the Pāṇṭya kingdom – legends about the Buddhist ruler Accutavikkanta, who locked up the southern kings – allude to an intrusive power linked with the Kalabhras (who have never been precisely identified). If they did indeed exist, they might have abrogated some Brahmanical rights and therefore prompted a reaction. See PETERSON 1989: 10-12, 19-20, 122, 141, 164-165, 231, 244, 259, 276-281, 289-296; HIKOSAKA 1989: 21-22.

148 See Tiruvāy骡li 3.7.9 and 6.9.11.
This helped them contribute to an atmosphere of *communitas* and counter the pan-Indian Brahmanical reputation for being exclusive and hierarchical. Toward this end, they might have tried to keep the Vedas as a general (Hindu) symbol of status but not associate them explicitly with temples. Hence their praise for *villages* where Brähmaṇas chant the Vedas. *brahmadeyas* (Brähmaṇa villages), also known as *caturvedimaṅgalams*, were often located near temples. Still, it might not have been easy for all Brähmaṇas, especially newcomers, to take the radical step of serving non-Brähmaṇa devotees, especially after the political tide had turned by the thirteenth century (Jainas and Buddhists no longer being threats).

**PĀṆCARĀTRA AND THE ĀCĀRYAS**

How and when did Pāṇcarātra become established in many Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu? Assuming that it did not exist in the Āḻvār temples, the easy answer is that Yāmuna established Pāṇcarātra, at least at Srīraṅgam, because he defends it in his Āgamaprāmāṇya. Once this tradition was established there, so the argument goes, it spread to other Vaiṣṇava temples in Tamilnadu.

But this answer presents several problems. (1) The Āgamaprāmāṇya itself does not describe its author as a founder; rather, it suggests that this kind of temple worship was already well established by royal decree. (2) It does not refer to Tamilnadu aside from a final passage honouring Nāthamuni,149 who was traditionally the first Brähmana Ācārya in the Śrīvaiṣṇava lineage. But it does refer once to the Treatise on the Validity of Kāśmīrāgama,150 which might have been used by the author as a source for many of his ideas and might imply a link with Kashmir. (3) We have hardly any inscrip- tional evidence of Pāṇcarātra temple priests in Tamilnadu before the fifteenth century (although there is one eleventh-century reference to Mahā-pāṇcarātrin students in a Vedic college connected with a Vaiṣṇava temple and one to Śrībhāgavata *nampis*, who might be Pāṇcarātra priests).151 We have a growing number of references, however, to

149 *Van Buiten* 1971: 121-122 para 139.
151 The influence of the Āgamas on Śaiva temples in Tamilnadu needs to be studied separately and compared to the influence of the Āgamas on
specific Pāñcarātra-Āgamas by Śrīvaisṇava authors from the twelfth century. It is therefore difficult to know when Pāñcarātrins became an established priesthood in Tamil Vaiṣṇava temples. (4) The Āgamaprāmāṇya refers to a context of intense competition, even animosity, between Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Pāñcarātra temple priests and Smārta Brāhmaṇas, but the inscriptions in Tamilnadu indicate harmony among Brāhmaṇas and other groups between the tenth century and mid-thirteenth. There could still have been conflict, but that possibility goes against the inscriptive record and is, once again, an argument from silence. (5) Even to this day, there are more Vaikhaṇasas than Pāñcarātra ones, even though both are associated with Śrīvaisṇavism.¹⁵²

Nāṇamuni and Yāmuna: Some Background

In this section, I discuss the date of Yāmuna (and his grandfather Nāṇamuni);¹⁵³ describe references to Brāhmaṇas in the Āgamaprāmāṇya; and compare its depiction of Nāṇamuni to that of the Stotraratna, another work attributed to Yāmuna.

The question of dating: We have no internal evidence for dates in the works ascribed to Nāṇamuni and Yāmuna or those of other early Ācāryas. According to K.A.-nilakanta sastri, “If Śrīnātha who seems to be mentioned in the Anbil plates may be taken to be the same as the Vaiṣṇava Saint Nāṇamuni, his age would be the end of the ninth and the beginning of the ten centuries A.D…”¹⁵⁴ For further substantiation he points out that Nāṇamuni’s birthplace is called Vīranāraṇaṇapuram; this recalls a surname of Parāntaka I. He then mentions the Divyasūrīcarita and other hagiographies about how Nāṇamuni collected the hymns. But this identification has several problems. We do not know whether Śrīnātha is Nāṇamuni or wheth-

Vaiṣṇava temples. Despite the similarities of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva hymns, the Āgamic influence on both could have led to quite different trajectories.


¹⁵³ Yāmuna refers to pitāmahaṁ nāthamunim in Stotraratna 65.

¹⁵⁴ Nilakanta Sastri ²1955: 638.
er Śrīnātha of the Anbil plates even lived at Vīrānāryaṇapuram. If Aniruddha of the Anbil plates is the grandson of Śrīnātha, then this should make him a brother of Yāmuna but there is no connection made between the two. Moreover, if Vīrānāryaṇapuram is named after Parāntaka I who ruled 907 to 955 and Nāthaguni was born in a town by that name, then he must have been born some time in the first half of the tenth century at the very earliest but could have lived in the second half of the tenth century instead. Because according to some hagiographies, he was not alive when Yāmuna was born, he likely died before 1050. This might place Nāthaguni in the latter part of the tenth century and first part of the eleventh, possibly 980-1040.

The modern scholar ROQUE MESQUITA dated Yāmuna to the tenth or early eleventh century because of one reference to a Cōla king in his Saṃvitsiddhi. Because the word samrāj refers to a king who reigns over many other kings, he thought, the reference might be either to Rājarāja, who reigned 984/985-1012, or to his son Rājendra I, because the Cōla kingdom began to decay after his time. But according to ORR, this is very weak evidence. Such a powerful king could have been Parāntaka I, who ruled from 907 to 955 over the Pāṇṭyas, Bāṇas, Vaidumbas, and others. Or he could have been any of the kings who ruled after Rājarāja. Kulottunga I (r. 1070-1120), for instance, is said to have conquered the Western Cālukhyas, Pāṇṭyas, Cēras, and Kaliṅgas. Vikrama (r. 1118-1135) is called the overlord of a long list of kings and chiefs in the Vikrama-cōḷaṇ-ūḷa. Even his successors, Kulottunga II (r. 1133-1150) and Rājarāja II (r. 1146-1173), notes ORR, were major kings despite some weakening of power. If we do consider the word samrāj significant for identifying a Cōla king as Yāmuna’s contemporary, I conclude, the latter could have lived at any time between the early tenth century and the mid twelfth.

WALTER NEEVEL assigned Yāmuna to the first half of the eleventh century. According to a hagiography, he defeated the chief priest (purohita) of the Cōla king in a debate, and his queen granted Yāmuna land as a prize. NEEVEL then suggested that this king was

---

156 Saṃvitsiddhi 38-40.
157 ORR: personal communication.
Rājendra I or Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōla (1012-1044),\textsuperscript{158} that the land was near his capital at Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōla, presumably the village Vīranārāyaṇapuram (Kāṭṭu-māṇār-kuṭi) that has been associated with Yāmuna until this day; and that the name Yāmuna was derived from the local deity (Māṇār: Kṛṣṇa), who is associated with the Yamunā river.

But this historical reconstruction, too, presents several problems. First, based on comparative studies, it is a common feature of hagiographies to associate a “saint” with a king,\textsuperscript{159} and this is true of the hagiographical genre in India as well. Second, Hindu hagiographies often refer to intellectual competitions in the courts of kings; these establish the intellectual supremacy of Brāhmaṇas. For this reason, stories connecting Yāmuna with the Cōla king, and stories about an intellectual competition should probably not be taken literally. Third, it is just as possible that Nāthamuni lived during the period of Rājendra I or Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōla (1012-1044), as some hagiographic accounts suggest. Keep in mind that the hagiographies were produced much later. The extant Guruparamparāprabhāvams 6000 probably dates from late fourteenth or fifteenth century and the Divyasūricarita about the thirteenth.\textsuperscript{160} In any case, CARMAN has

\textsuperscript{158} NEEVEL 1977: 83; he says that his account is based on the Guruparamparāprabhāvams 6000 and 3000.

\textsuperscript{159} “Māṇikkavācakar was associated with a Pandyan king, Tirumaṅkaiyāḻar with a Pallava king, Śaṅkara with a Kerala king, and Caitanya with a Muslim ruler of Bengal. In fact, so important was the association of saint and king for lateral legitimation, that Nabhaṇi, who wrote about the life of Mīrābai, noted that both Emperor Akbar and the saint Tulṣī Dās came to pay homage to her. We know, however, that Akbar and Tulṣī Dās were contemporaries of Nabhaṇi and lived nearly a century after Mīrābā’s birth.” (YOUNG/MILLER 1990: 140).

\textsuperscript{160} HARDY 1983: 243 argues that most of the hagiographies such as the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 are based on the Divyasūricarita. This point was originally argued by T.A. GÖPINATHA RAO in his History of Śrī Vaisnavas (see B.V. RAMANUJAN 1973: 14 n. 4); he noted that the author must have been a contemporary of Rāmānuja, for the text does not mention Rāmānuja’s life. RAMANUJAN (1973: 113-118) examines the whole problem of hagiographical chronology, concluding that the Divyasūricarita was not written by a contemporary of Rāmānuja. Because the author describes a paramparā and adds his name at the end, RAMANUJAN believes that the
rightly noted that the traditional dates presume that “leaders” of the early *sampradāya* lived to the age of 120 and are therefore suspect.\(^{161}\) These hagiographies, moreover, do not always agree with each other. Some connect a Cōḷa king who ruled at Gaṅgaiṅḍacōḷapuram with Nāṭhamuni; others connect him with Yāmuna.

CARMAN suggests that Rāmānuja lived between 1077 and 1157, because several verses in the *Divyasūricārīta* provide specific dates for events in his life: 1137-1138, when he left Śrīraṅgam, a sojourn that lasted eleven years; and 1155-1156, when he completed the Śrībhāṣya. CARMAN suggests that Rāmānuja’s commentary on the Gitā was later but also that Rāmānuja died in 1157.\(^{162}\) He offers no reason, though, for his quick demise. It certainly did not leave

author is later than Rāmānuja and trying to legitimate his own lineage by linking it with Rāmānuja as if he, the author of the *Divyasūricārīta*, were a contemporary of Rāmānuja (27). But if the *Divyasūricārīta* were indeed later than the time of Rāmānuja, this does not rule out the possibility that it was earlier than the Guruparamārāprabhāvam 6000 or that both of these texts had a common source. My own view is that: the *Divyasūricārīta* is probably the earliest hagiography because its main story of canonization refers only to Nammālvār’s four prapandhas and not the 4000 hymns (first mentioned explicitly by Vedāntadeśika). The latter were probably compiled by Periyavaaccān Piḷḷai who writes a commentary on them (or by someone just before him). In the Guruparamārāprabhāvam 6000, Piṇḍalakiya Perumāḷ Jiyar includes a quote from the Ācāryahārdayam of Aḷakiyamanavāla Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār (thirteenth century), one from the Saṅkalpaśūryodaya of Vedāntadeśika (fourteenth century), and one from Lakṣmī Kāvyā (fifteenth century). RĀMANUJAN dismisses these as interpolations, but given other evidence that suggests a date after Vedāntadeśika’s time, these references might be an important clue for the dating of the Guruparamārāprabhāvam 6000 (see RĀMANUJAN 1973: 49-50). The Periyatirumuṭi-alaiyvū, which is assigned to the fifteenth century, mentions the Guruparamārāprabhāvam of Piṇḍalakiya Perumāḷ Jiyar. It is conceivable that the extant Guruparamārāprabhāvam is a work of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. The Guruparamārāprabhāvam 6000 might have an early strata because its stories of the lives of the Ācāryas end with Nampillai. In any case dating their lives is problematic because the author Piṇḍalakiya Perumāḷ Jiyar presumed that the Ācāryas lived to the age of 120.

\(^{161}\) CARMAN 1974: 27.

\(^{162}\) CARMAN 1974: 62.
much time for writing his commentary on the Gītā and perhaps the Gadyas, which are closer to the Gītā than the Śrībhāṣya in spirit, and might also have been composed about the same time. Moreover, CARMAN offers no reason for his assertion that Rāmānuja was born in 1077.  

Granted, Rāmānuja would have been a mature scholar when he wrote the Śrībhāṣya (three-fourths of it was purportedly completed by the time he left Śrīraṅgam in 1137). But he could have been forty rather than sixty. If so, he could have been born about the turn of the century and died by about 1180 or 1190. It is claimed that an image of him was placed in the Kāñcī temple by 1191. I would now date Rāmānuja between 1100 and 1170 or 1180. This could mean that his predecessor, Yāmuna, died in about 1125 – if indeed he did die before meeting Rāmānuja, as some hagiographies claim – and could have been born about 1050. This would place Nāthamuni in the late tenth and eleventh century, perhaps between 980-1040. Yāmuna likely knew of Rāmānuja’s reputation as a brilliant young scholar because of connections between Śrīraṅgam and Kāñcī, including family

\[163\] CARMAN, too, wants to align Rāmānuja with a persecuting Śaiva Cōla king. But because it has been difficult to make Kulottunga I into this figure – we have no record of him persecuting Vaiṣṇavas; in fact, he supported them along with Śaivas – the next ruler Vikrama-Cōla is said to be the mean Śaiva Cōla king. But we have no evidence that even this Cōla king persecuted Vaiṣṇavas. Rather, I think that Rāmānuja might have become embroiled in a conflict between Hoysālas and Cōlas. Hoysālas began to invade Tamilnadu in the twelfth century and established a capital just outside Śrīraṅkam. For a history of the Hoysālas, see DERRETT 1957. Hoysāla king Viṣṇuvardhana reached Kāñcī in the early twelfth century (DERRETT 1957: 49-53); there is a fragmentary inscription of Viṣṇuvardhana at Śrīraṅgam in SII 24.258. Hagiographies refer to the fact that Rāmānuja fled to a Hoysāla kingdom. If Rāmānuja had sided for some reason with the Hoysālas, he might have had trouble with a Cōla ruler and had to flee. Because control of the Śrīraṅgam area shifted periodically from one dynasty to another – sometimes, Hoysālas also supported Cōlas, whose names appear in inscriptions, against chiefs in northern Tamilnadu – Rāmānuja might have been able to return after eleven years or so. But it is also possible that rivalry among groups in the Śrīraṅgam temple caused Rāmānuja to leave.

\[164\] See note 230 for details.
connections of people within the circle of disciples. When he was dying, according to one hagiography, Yāmuna instructed his disciples to persuade Rāmānuja to move to Śrīraṅgam.

There is an extremely important verse by Kūreśa, a contemporary of Rāmānuja, which reveals that he not only had a rudimentary concept of a lineage (kula, vanśa), which we could understand as a sampradāya, but also one that explicitly named the figures in this lineage going back in time: Rāmānuja to Yāmuna to Nāthamuni to Nammālvar to Śrī: “I have taken refuge at the feet of Rāmānuja the foremost light of the sage Yāmuna’s lineage (kulapradīpaḥ ... yāmu-
namuneḥ). Yāmuna is from the line of Nātha[muni] (nāthavamsyaḥ) and Nāthamuni is of the lineage of the sage Nammālvar who is the servant of [Śrī] Your Queen. That’s why, O Varada, You look upon me as Your very own!” Although this verse establishes the relative succession of teachers, it does not indicate that Kūreśa (or his son Parāśarabhaṭṭar) knew Yāmuna personally and does not mention the works of Yāmuna. It seems reasonable to conclude that Yāmuna had died before Kūreśa and Rāmānuja were at Śrīraṅgam. Kūreśa (and later his son Parāśarabhaṭṭar), not Rāmānuja, was likely the one interested in lineage. In any case, I believe that the following are reasonable dates: 1100-1170 or 1180 for Rāmānuja, 1050-1125 for Yāmuna, and 980-1040 for Nāthamuni.

The authorship and date of the Āgamaprāmāṇya: With this provisional dating of the early Ācāryas in mind, I turn now to the Āgamaprāmāṇya, which is an explicit defense of Pāṇcarātra temple Brāhmaṇas. It has been attributed to Yāmuna. Does it provide us with any clues to the development of a Pāṇcarātra priesthood in Tamilnadu and its connection with Yāmuna?

---

165 According to the hagiographies, Periyatirumalai Nampi, one of Yāmuna’s disciples, had a sister who was Rāmānuja’s mother (Carman 1974: 26-27). If this story is based on fact, he could have provided an indirect link between Yāmuna and Rāmānuja.

166 Kūreśa, Varadarājastava 102: rāmānuja jaṃghriśaraṇo ’smi kula-
pradīpas tv aśi sat yāmunamunes sa ca nāthavamsyaḥ | vamsyaḥ parāṅku-
samunes sa ca so ’pi devyāḥ dāsas taveti varadāsmi tavekṣaṇīyaḥ ||, translated by Nayyar 1992: 104.
Vedāntadeśika (circa 1268-1369) twice quotes a passage of the Āgamaṃṇya (the one that mentions the Kaśmirāgamaṃṇya), and so we know that it existed in Tamilnadu by his time.

The Āgamaṃṇya defends Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa temple priests who perform Pāncarātra rituals against criticism by Smārtas (Mimamsakas, Naiyāyikas, and Vedāntins). The latter are associated with the three Vedas, scripturally required rituals such as agnihotra, pūrṇadarśamāsa, and jyotiṣṭoma (elsewhere described as rituals such as the aindragneya), and rituals such as aṣṭaka, ācamana, and samdhya.

The author claims that Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas are similar to these Smārtas, because they have gotras and “are connected with the dharmanas of the three Vedas, like the sāvitrī recitation.” These Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas, he says, are learned ācāryas who study scriptures and teach; wear sacred threads, upper garments and hair-tufts; sacrifice; and receive priestly stipends. They have a ritual tradition in addition to scriptural rituals, like the Smārtas, but it is a different one: “the means of attaining to the Bhagavān, viz. knowledge, cleansing the way to the Lord, preparation of worship and oblation, as enjoined by the Ekāyana scripture.” Elsewhere, the author elaborates on this: “And in the present day we can also observe how exemplary persons of great learning, believing that these rites are most effective in attaining bliss, perform the rites of temple-building, erection of idols, prostration, circumambulation and par-


169 VAN BUITENEN (1971: 123 note 2) observes that “In the pūrva-pakṣa the principal opponents introduced are what one may already call smārta brahmins, and among them especially the orthodox followers of Mimāṃsa.”


171 VAN BUITENEN 1971: 9 para 12.


175 VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121 para 138.
ticular festival ceremonies, just as they perform the *agnihotra* and other rituals enjoined directly by Scripture.” 176 A similar list includes “the cleaning of the way to the idol, the preparation for worship, offering, daily study, and meditation.” 177 On one occasion, the author calls this daily ritual *pāncakālika*. And on several occasions, he mentions *dikṣā* 178 as the initiation that makes people eligible to perform this daily ritual. He identifies these Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas as belonging to the Vājasaneyasākhā of the White Yajurveda; they perform *saṃskāras* in the tradition of Kātyāyana’s *Grhyasūtras*. 179

The author mentions an additional group of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas, also belonging to the Vājasaneyasākhā. They perform *pūjā* only for themselves, not for others in the temple as a livelihood. 180 He makes this observation to enhance the orthodox status of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who are involved in temple worship, because there can be no question about the status of orthodox Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who are *not*. He implies that they are virtually Śmārtas. Thus, there are two groups of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins: those who perform rituals for others in the temple and those who do so for themselves alone.

This author acknowledges that the word “Bhāgavata” refers also to a general orientation. It is a synonym of Ekāyana. As I have said, he associates temple rituals with the name of a scripture: Ekāyana (which he does not describe with any specific markers but does say that its status as scripture has been defended in the Treatise on the Validity of Kāśmirāgama – a text that modern scholars have not identified). 181 Ekāyana is a synonym of Pāncarātra (at least in

176  **VAN BUITENEN** 1971: 100 para 119.

177  **VAN BUITENEN** 1971: 109 para 129.

178  **VAN BUITENEN** 1971: 15 para 17; 77 para 92; 79 para 94; 113 para 133.

179  **VAN BUITENEN** 1971: 120 para 138. “Kātyāyana (…) was not only the founder of a ritual school of the White Yajurveda, but also the main organizer of the learning of the Vājasaneyin” (GONDA 1975: 331).


181 It is difficult to know from this work who the Ekāyanas were. The author of the Āgamparāmānya sometimes refers to the Ekāyana as a distinct group within the general definition of Ekāyana, which was also called
Pāñcarātra. Some passages allude to their identity as Brāhmaṇas, but they were no longer able to maintain a Vaidika lifestyle and probably belonged to no recognizable school of the Vedas (alluding only to a “lost” branch). RASTELLI (forthcoming) provides evidence from the Pāñcarātra-Saṃhitās that two groups existed: the Ekāyanas and “Vedic-orthodox Pāñcarātrins” belonging to the White Yajurveda. The authorship of some Pāñcarātra-Saṃhitās (or sections of them), she argues, can be assigned on the basis of these differing perspectives. She thinks that the Pārameśvarasamhitā and at least the first chapter of the cāryapāda of the Pādmasamhitā were written by the Ekāyanas, for instance, whereas most of the Pādmasamhitā was written by the Vaidikas. According to the Pārameśvarasamhitā, “initiated non-Ekāyanas” are also allowed to perform “the ritual for the sake of others.” The category “for the sake of others” is very close to the wording to the Vaidikas.

RASTELLI, in the Pādmasamhitā. According to both texts, Ekāyanas do not need dīkṣā and belong to the Āgamasiddhānta (one of four divisions of the Pāñcarātra, which was the dharma of the kṛtayuga in the form of śruti and the teaching of “those who worship Vāsudeva exclusively”). By contrast, the Vaidikas say that they belong to the Mantrasiddhānta, which “traces back to 8,000 Brahmmins who belonged to the Vedic schools (śākhā) of the Kāṇvas and Mādhyandinas of the White Yajurveda.” They perform the ritual that is “connected with the visualisation (dhyāna) of Viṣṇu and is characterized by His worship.” The descendents of these Brāhmaṇas are “called Bhāgavatas … they possess … the exclusive authority to perform the ritual for the sake of other (parārtha) persons by their order, meaning, in practise, the right to perform public temple worship.” RASTELLI suggests that the Pādmasamhiṭā was written before the thirteenth century, whereas the Pārameśvarasamhiṭā was probably written in South India between the twelfth century and the fourteenth. Vedāntadesīka, traditionally dated to 1270-1369, quotes from it. But to claim that it was from Tamilnadu I would want to see substantial documentation of the diagnostic features of Śrīvaiṣṇava religiosity that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter along with the distinctive features of Viṣiṣṭādvaita philosophy. (Of course, it could have been composed elsewhere in South India). Whether composed in Tamilnadu or not, I suspect that the Pārameśvarasamhiṭā largely drew on a pan-Indian genre rather than a specific Tamil milieu.

This broad definition of Bhāgavata (= Ekāyana = Pāñcarātra = Tantra = Sātvata) creates some difficulties for the author, because some groups belonging to the general orientation – for instance, the vaiśya vrātyas or sātvatas\textsuperscript{185} – have often been considered low in status.\textsuperscript{186} They clean the temple or guard it,\textsuperscript{187} by royal decree.\textsuperscript{188} The author’s hermeneutic is twofold. He defends them as legitimate members of this Bhāgavata-Pāñcarātra-Ekāyana-Tantra-Sātvata tradition but also distinguishes them from the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa group. The latter is a subdivision with differences, including most of the diagnostic features of orthodox Śmṛta Brahmanism and, as I have mentioned, Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇaśas are subdivided, in turn, into those who do rituals for others and those who do rituals only for themselves. Occasionally, the author indulges in word plays to achieve this goal. Thus, there are Sātvatas – i.e. Pāñcarātras in general but also a special group of Brāhmaṇa Sātvatas –, so called because they are pure (sattva) and therefore unlike those (lower status) Sātvatas who clean the temple.\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{183} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 1-2, para 4; 74 para 87; 95 para 115.

\textsuperscript{184} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 122 para 139; 124 note 11.

\textsuperscript{185} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109, para 128.

\textsuperscript{186} Remember, SHARMA connected the vrātyas and dāsas with the Yajurveda; if they were on the margins of Vedic society, they might well have been a group that was remembered as Brāhmaṇa but that no longer practiced a Vedic orthodox life-style (SHARMA 2000). It is conceivable that some of them had contributed to the development of the Pāñcarātra temple traditions. Those among them of higher status might have claimed to be Ekāyanas of the lost Vedic śākhā, and those of lower status might have been viewed as temple servants.

\textsuperscript{187} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129.

\textsuperscript{188} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 12 para 15.

\textsuperscript{189} VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129; see also 11-12 para 15, 16. NEEVEL 1977: 30-37 divides the Bhāgavatas into four classes: servants; professional, initiated, priests (arcakas); Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who perform worship only for themselves; and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who follow both Pāñcarātra and Vedic karma.

I disagree with NEEVEL’s distinction between professional initiated priests (arcakas), presumably the temple priests who have dīkṣā, and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who follow both Pāñcarātra and Vedic karmans. I see
Rastelli thinks that Yāmuna was likely an “orthodox” Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa, who belonged to the Vājasaneyaśākha. She bases her view on the common assumption that Yāmuna is the author of the Āgamaṇa and the author’s identification of himself with the Vājasaneyins. I agree with her that the author of the Āgamaṇa can be identified as a Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyin. I also think that Yāmuna authored this work. Although the Āgamaṇa does not reflect the social and temple milieu of Tamilnadu as known from the inscriptions and texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, I am convinced that he was the author of the Āgamaṇa, for the following reasons.

Comparing several verses of the Stotraratna and the Āgamaṇa, I find some important similarities. First is the fusion of yoga and bhakti: The Āgamaṇa says, “May Nāthamuni be victorious, he to whom the Three Principles are immediately evident by virtue of his own miraculous power … he whose spirit is for ever the abode of the feet of Mukunda.”

The Stotraratna contains the following:

them as the same in the temple context and distinguish them from the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who perform worship only for themselves (a home worship).

Rastelli points out that “Neevel does not see that this group belongs to the White Yajurveda (Yāmuna calls it Vājasaneyaśākha); he thinks that the Ekāyanaśākha, the other group mentioned by Yāmuna, is a part of the Vājasaneyaśākha” (Rastelli: personal communication). She identifies four groups: (1) temple servants who are not true Bhāgavatas, because they have no dikṣā and merely work in the temple; (2) temple priests who have dikṣā; (3) Ekāyanas who have abandoned (Brahmanical) trayādharma and follow their own sākhā; and (4) Vājasaneyaśākha Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas.

I differ from Rastelli, however, by identifying one branch of the Vājasaneyaśākha Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas with her dikṣā Brāhmaṇas who perform temple rituals. But I recognize another branch of Vājasaneyaśākha Brāhmaṇas who do not perform temple rituals (i.e., they perform only home pūjās and consider themselves even more orthodox, virtually Śrāvastas). In sum, I think that there are four groups: (1) Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas (= Vājasaneyins), who have dikṣā and perform temple rituals for others; (2) Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas (= Vājasaneyins), who perform pūjā only for themselves; (3) Ekāyanas (Brāhmaṇas – or those claiming Brāhmaṇa status – of unknown Vedic sākhā, who have some temple involvement; and (4) temple servants.

190 Van Buitenen 1971: 121-122 para 139.
lowering phrases: “Homage to the sage (muni) Nāṭha … In whom dwells the fullness of both knowledge and dispassion (vairāgya) beyond imagination, wondrous and unstained” and “Homage to him who has attained the ultimate in the greatness of his love for and knowledge of the lotus-feet of Madhujit (Viṣṇu), to the lord Nāthamuni, whose feet are my eternal refuge in this world and even in the other;” and “Again, I bow to Nāthamuni, the best of Yogis (yamīnām) in whom complete and ultimately true bhaktiyoga has descended among men, through words that are as pleasing as surging streams from the ambrosial ocean of unlimited knowledge of and devotion to Acyuta (Viṣṇu).”¹⁹¹ These passages allude to the yogic powers of Nāthamuni that consist of the ability to see into the nature of reality, knowledge, and dispassion or vairāgya. But they allude also to showing love (bhakti) for the Lord’s feet. The similarity in these images of Nāthamuni suggests that the author of the Āgama-prāmāṇya is the same as the author of the Stotraratna.

The language of respect paid to Nāthamuni is hyperbolic. He is not only the best among yogins but also, as Stotraratna 3 implies, an avatāra who has descended among men. He “possesses the highest and most complete bhakti-yoga that has descended (avatīrṇa) into the world by means of words (vacobhi).”¹⁹² This is high praise indeed for one’s grandfather and rivals descriptions of ācāryābhimāna (devotion to the Ācārya) in the works of later Ācāryas. Kūreśa and Parāśarabhaṭṭar wrote several verses about this topic. According to NAYAR, these include “(1) personal references to the Ācārya generally, and to Rāmānuja specifically, often expressive of a deep emotional bond between disciple and teacher; (2) introductory verses containing some type of guru-paramparā listing, either in a single verse or in several consecutive verses; and (3) two verses of Bhāṭṭar which suggest a distinct intercessory role for the Ācārya(s).”¹⁹³ Kūreśa, for instance, says “I take refuge with Rāmānuja, my revered preceptor.”¹⁹⁴ NAYAR suggests that “the Śrīvaisṇava understanding of the Ācārya was undoubtedly influenced by Pāṇcarātra. The initial

¹⁹¹ From Stotraratna 1-3 translated by NEEVEL 1977:195.
¹⁹⁴ Kūreśa, Śrīvaikuṇṭhastava 1.
chapter of each Pāñcarātra text narrates the story of its transmission from Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa through a line of sages.” But I think that the concept of Ācārya in Yāmuna’s work could have been inspired by Maturakaviyālār’s description of taking refuge with Nammāḷvār in his Kaṇṭhinuṇ Ciṟuttāmpu. There, Nammāḷvār is described as if he were the supreme deity himself. He destroys sins, has eternal grace, is devoted to all his followers, and saves everyone. The hyperbolic praise of Nāthamuni is also a poetic device by which Yāmuna contrasts his own abject unworthiness with the greatness of his grandfather. In any case, the link between Yāmuna and Nāthamuni aligns with the early lineage described by Kūreśa discussed above.

Several other important arguments favour Yāmuna’s authorship of the Āgamaprāmāṇya between the mid-eleventh century and early twelfth. Neevel has documented similar phrases in the Ātmasiddhi attributed to Yāmuna and the Āgamaprāmāṇya. In addition, “Rāmānuja’s first dedicatory stanza to the ŚBh [Śrībhāṣya] is clearly patterned after that of the AtS [Ātmasiddhi] and that, in the second dedicatory verse to Rāmānuja’s more independent and more sectarian work, the Vedārthasaṁgraha (VAS), Yāmuna is referred to by name and in precisely the same connection, i.e., as a protector of the true teaching against erroneous viewpoints.” In view of these references by Rāmānuja and his reliance on Yāmuna’s summary of the Gītā, I conclude that Yāmuna lived before Rāmānuja and was the author of those works, including the Āgamaprāmāṇya, that have been attributed to him. Neevel thinks that Yāmuna was “building upon a long and substantial tradition that was attempting to work out a harmonization between Pāñcarātra and Vedānta.” More specifically, this was a tradition that sought to overcome Bādarāyaṇa’s rejection of Pāñcarātra and included figures such as Drāmīḍabhāṣyakāra, Śrīvatsāṅkamīśra (ca. ninth century), and Rāmamīśra, who was Yāmuna’s immediate teacher. This seems plausible. I suggest, more-

196 Maturakaviyālār, Kaṇṭhinuṇ Ciṟuttāmpu 7, 10, 11.
197 Neevel 1977: 72.
199 See Neevel 1977: 73 for further evidence of this link in the works of Vedāntadeśika.
over, that this was a Vājasaneyin tradition of the Yajurveda. NEEVEL sees Rāmānuja’s lineage as somewhat different, stemming from the Bodhāyanāvṛtti. And this makes sense to me, too, because it puts Rāmānuja in the Taittiriya tradition, which had been particularly strong in the south, and helps me to explain his preference for the name Nārāyaṇa and his reticence in endorsing Pāṇcarātra. But all this still leaves me with the problem that the Āgamarāmānya does not seem to reflect that temple milieu in Tamilnadu during this period.

Before turning to the inscripational evidence, I want to note two new elements in the works of the early Ācāryas, ones that distinguish them from the Ālvārs: devotion to the goddess Śrī and an emphasis on three Vedas rather than four. Yāmuna was the first to dedicate an entire hymn to Śrī (the Catuhśloki). Rāmānuja, Kuṛesa, and Parāśara-bhaṭṭar, too, had a special fondness for Śrī – a history that others have documented.²⁰⁰ And separate shrines to Śrī had become common by the thirteenth century.²⁰¹

Scholars have noted this departure from the Ālvārs and pointed to influence from Pāṇcarātra (ritual passages) or late Vedic passages such as the Śrīsūkta,²⁰² which are found in Pāṇcarātra works. But

²⁰⁰ NAYAR 1992: 222-252

²⁰¹ ORR 2000: 25.

²⁰² According to PRATAP KUMAR, Yāmuna selectively incorporated aspects of Pāṇcarātra into his Vedāntin perspective. But he thinks that references to Śrī (and Lakṣmī) are found mainly in a ritual context and not in a creation context. This ritual connection is common in the Pāṇcarātra texts according to KUMAR 1997: 2, 31, 52-53, 156, because the Pāṇcarātrins were arguing with the Mīmāṃsakas. He suggests that Śrī might have become important only after the Lakṣmītantra, which was probably written in the twelfth century. According to NAYAR, the earliest Pāṇcarātra texts refer to Śrīsūkta (Ṛgveda 5.87) as a mantra (NAYAR 1992: 23-24). CARMAN and NARAYANAN think that “This genre of hymns, directly honoring Śrī, the consort of Viṣṇu, owes more to Sanskrit models found, for instance, in the later appendices of the Vedic literature (Śrī Sūkta) as well as in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, than to earlier ālvār works” (CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 52). OBERHAMMER thinks that the influence of Śrī comes from the Purāṇas. “Den Glauben an die Göttin (Śrī, Lakṣmī), die mythologische Gattin Viṣṇus, hat es in der viṣṇuitischen Orthodoxie, in den Texten der Purāṇen überliefert, immer schon gegeben. Dies gilt auch für jene Tradition, die in der Folgezeit zur Rāmānuja-Schule werden sollte.” (OBERHAMMER: 2002: 11).
RASTELLI notes that Śrī is not a major figure in early Pāñcarātra. I think that if some of these early Ācāryas were Vājasaneyins, then their interest in Śrī likely came from a key text for that tradition: the Vājasaneyasamhitā. There, Śrī and Lakṣmī are consorts of Puruṣa. Given this early Vājasaneyin reference, the importance of the Puruṣasūkta for the Vaiṣṇava tradition, and Śrī’s emergence as Viṣṇu’s consort during the Gupta period, Śrī must have been particularly significant for the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins. Thus, the significance of Śrī for the early Ācāryas might point to a Vājasaneyin influence.

Although we need more research, another clue to an intrusive element might be the fact that some of the early Ācāryas refer often to three Vedas instead of four. Yāmuna, for instance, mentions Garutmat “who consists of the three [Vedas]” (trayīmaya). Küreśa and Parāśarabhaṭṭar refer consistently to three Vedas rather than four. If there was a change from four Vedas (the Ālavārs) to three (the Ācāryas, or at least some of them), this might indicate a change in the Brahmanical groups involved.

I turn next to inscriptional evidence that provides more information about Śrīvaiṣṇavas, sampradāyins, temple personal, and Brāhmaṇas associated with temples in general and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins in particular.

---

203 RASTELLI: personal communication. She notes that the Jayākhya-samhitā does not mention her at all. The Sātvatasaṃhitā (25.54) and the Pauṣkarasaṃhitā (42.17) mention her once, the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā three times (15.171, 188, 17.31), but the Pādamasaṃhitā twelve times (kriyāpāda 5.72, 24.53, 28.14, 29.49, 30.12, 173, cp 8.89, 9.126, 11.212, 217, 14.180, 15.87). It might be relevant that the latter text was partly written by Vājasaneyins.

204 See Vājasaneyasamhitā 31.22 (GONDA 1969: 223).


206 StR 41.

207 Küreśa, Śrīvaikuṇṭhastava 11; 17-18; Varadarājastava 6; Sundara-bāhustava 100; Parāśarabhaṭṭar, Śrīraṅgarājastava I.13.
We have inscriptional references to the recitation of Nammāl-vār’s Tiruvāymoḻi in the eleventh century at Uttaramerur, Enṇāy-īram, and Tribhuvane. We have inscriptions from the same century, moreover, that mention the general singing of hymns. Inscriptions of the twelfth century mention bronze images of the Ālvārs being worshipped in temples and taken out in processions.

Only one inscription refers to the word sampradāya, however, and that is in a very general sense. It mentions (daily) offerings to the deity on festivals and feeding pilgrims and sampradāyins. sampradāyin can simply mean “teacher,” however, one who hands down knowledge; it need not mean a sectarian teacher. Given Kūreśa’s references to lineage, it is striking that no inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam refer to sampradāya. And no inscription from the eleventh century or the twelfth refers specifically to Nāṭhamuni, Yāmuna, or Rāmānuja.

But some inscriptions refer explicitly to the existence of Vaijjasaneyins, and one refers explicitly to Mahāpāncarātrins in the context of Vedic colleges in eleventh-century Tamilnadu. Because these reveal the connection between various Brahmanical traditions and Vaiśṇava temples, I will examine them in some detail. By way of introduction, several features are common to these inscriptions. First, these Vedic colleges were connected with both a Vaiśṇava temple and a caturvedimaṅgalam (a village of Brāhmaṇas who specialize in the four Vedas). Second, they were established by royal decree (whereas kings had little to do with most temple affairs at this time) and were in northern Tamilnadu.

According to S.R. BALASUBRAHMANYAM, the first inscription, which “cannot be earlier than 1023 CE,” during the reign of

---

209 ORR 2004a: 237.
210 BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 355 referring to ARE 202 of 1919: date lost.
211 See ORR 2000: 28-29; 67-69; 85-86; 207-208 note 53.
212 I thank LESLIE ORR for bringing these similarities to my attention.
Rājendra I, refers to a donation by the king’s order to the Āḷakiya-
narasiṃha-perumāḷ temple in Ennāyiram – in what is now known as
South Arcot district – by the mahāsabha of the Rājarāja-caturvedi-
maṅgalam. This donation provided for the establishment of a Vedic
college on the temple premises. More specifically, it provided sup-
port for recitation of Nammāḻvār’s Tiruvāymoḷi in the temple, food
for twenty-five Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the matha (more like a food hall than
an ascetic establishment at this time214), food for one thousand
Vaiṣṇavas and Dāsas at the Āni-Anulam festival, expenses related to
worship, food for students, support for teachers, and support for a
hostel where Vedic scholars and Śrīvaiṣṇavas lived. Of interest here
are the subjects taught in this Vedic college.215 We learn that there
were three teachers and seventy-five students for the Ṛgveda, three
teachers and seventy-five students for the Yajurveda, one teacher and
twenty students for the Chāndogya, one teacher and twenty students
for the Talavakārasāma, one teacher and twenty students for the Vā-
jasaneya recension of the Yajurveda, one teacher and ten students for
the Baudhāyaniya Grhya- and Kalpasūtras, and one teacher and forty
students for the Rūpāvatāra (I take this word to mean expertise in
making “form-incarnations” – in other words, expertise in iconogra-
phy and architecture).216

These numbers suggest that the Ṛgveda and Yajurveda were
the most important texts, followed by the Sāmaveda. It is striking
that the inscription refrains from mentioning any teacher for the
Atharvaveda but does mention that ten students were studying it. It
refrains from mentioning the Vaikhānasas, moreover, although it
mentions that two other subtraditions of the Yajurveda were taught
(the Vājasaneya and the Baudhāyana, the Vājasaneya being slightly
more popular). The Atharvaveda might have been popular in earlier
Tamil history, but it was now probably in decline (unless its adher-
ents had changed their expertise to iconography and architecture).
Given the prevalence of the Vaikhānasas in Tamilnadu, according to
inscriptions from the ninth century to the eleventh,217 their absence is

216 According to COLAS, there were Vaiṣṇava works about architec-
ture and iconography in the twelfth century (COLAS 1996: 63).
difficult to explain. Perhaps they were so closely associated with the Yajurveda that they needed no separate mention. From this inscription, we know now that some orthodox Brāhmaṇas were associated with Vaiṣṇava temples, at least indirectly via Vedic colleges on their premises during the eleventh century, and that some of these were Vājasaneyin Brāhmaṇas. But we do not know if the latter were also temple priests. And who were the Śrīvaiṣṇavas who are distinguished from Vedic scholars yet lived in the same hostel? They must have played some daily key role in the temple such as singing hymns or making offerings.

The word śrīvaiṣṇava might have originally referred simply to the good, or holy, Vaiṣṇavas; śrī or tiru (its Prakrit equivalent) is a common honorific adjective, as in Tirupati, the auspicious, or holy, place.218 Inscriptional references from the eleventh century refer generally to holy workers (tevarkanmikāl from devakarman: therefore workers of the god) or to performers of sacred work (śrīkāriyam cevār) in temples219 but not to priests. If they refer to functions, these include hymn-singers, gardeners, and garland makers. They indicate also that temple management was in the hands of the Brāhmaṇa sabhai. The word śrīvaiṣṇava appears in inscriptions as the name of a sectarian group along with the Vaikhānasa, Śivabrāhmaṇas, and Śrīmaheśvaras (devotees of Śiva). But, says ORR, this became more

218 According to ORR: personal communication, “the very earliest inscriptions (late ninth century to early tenth) conclude with the expression ‘itu vaiṣṇava rakṣai’ (may the Vaiṣṇavas protect this [grant]) (SII 24.1,2,4). But by the second half of the tenth century, the phrase ‘itu śrīvaiṣṇava rakṣai’ began to appear (SII 24.11,12). This becomes standard in the eleventh century and onward. At Tirupati, inscriptions from the tenth century (TDI 1.8) and the eleventh (e.g. TDI 1.19) include this expression. But this does not necessarily mean that there was an organized group whose members regard themselves as ‘Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ in some specifically sectarian sense. I would expect that śrīvaiṣṇava in this expression means ‘devotees of Viṣṇu’ in quite a loose sense; the expression finds its exact parallel in Śaiva temples – ‘itu panmaheśvara rakṣai’ – when panmaheśvara certainly does not correspond to any particular group. I do not read anything more into the prefixing of śrī to vaiṣṇava, in this case, than into the addition of pan (from paḷ = ‘many’) to maheśvara, to produce the meaning ‘all the devotees of Śiva.’”

219 ORR 2004a: 232.
common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when references to the śrīvaiṣṇava committee (vāriyam) and śrīvaiṣṇava supervisors (kaṅkāṇi) also increased.\(^{220}\)

We have several similar eleventh-century inscriptions. One,\(^{221}\) dated 1048, during the reign of Rājendrā I, was located in Tribhuvane (now in the territory of Pondicherry). The gift was made by a general to secure the health of Rājendra Cōla I and was executed by the mahāsabha. It provided for temple worship, festivals, feeding Śrīvaiṣṇavas, and supporting reciters of Nammāḷvār’s Tiruvāymoḻi, Vedic teachers, and their students. The latter consisted of three teachers and sixty students for the Rgveda, three teachers and sixty students for the Yajurveda, one teacher and twenty students for the Chāndogyasāma, and one teacher and a total of one hundred twenty students for the following: the Tālavakārasāma, Aṉūrva, Vājasaneyā, Baudhāyaniẏa, and Styaṣṭa(adha)sūtras, Vedānta, Vyakaraṇa, Rū-pāvatāra, Rāmāyaṇa, [Mahā]Bhārata, Manusāstra, and Vaikhānasa-śāstra. Again, the list does not refer to the Atharvaveda – But it does refer explicitly to the three branches of the Yajurveda – Vājasaneyā, Vaikhānasa, and Taittiriyā (Baudhāyanīya) along with the Rgveda and Sāmaveda.

Finally, an inscription\(^{222}\) at Tirumukkūṭal (in modern Chingleput district), dated 1069, during the reign of Viṉa Rājendra Cōla, provided for temple worship; festivals; offerings on the king’s birth-day; feeding Śrīvaiṣṇavas on festivals; supporting singers of the Ti-ruvāymoḻi, cultivators of flower gardens, Vaikhānasa tevakanmikal, and other temple personal; and providing for a Vedic college with an attached hostel and hospital, all of which were within one structure. This college was considerably smaller than those mentioned in the other inscriptions, having only one teacher and ten students for the Rgveda, one teacher and ten students for the Yajurveda, and one teacher (bhaṭṭa) and twenty students to explain Vyākaraṇa and Rū-pāvatāra. In addition, there were ten Mahāpāṇcarātriṇ students along with three Śivabrāhmanas, five Vaikhānasas, and two others (details have been effaced) in the hostel. The inscription does not mention

\(^{220}\) Orr 1995: 115-118; 123.

\(^{221}\) ARE 176 of 1919 cited by Balasubrahmanyam 1975: 350; 354.

their teachers; some Vedic scholars, presumably, had sectarian affiliations. The Mahāpāncarātrins were likely Brāhmaṇas, because they were attending a Vedic college. The word mahāpāncarātrin (“great” Pāncarātrin) reminds me once again of the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas or Vājasaneyins of the Āgama-prāmāṇya, who were identified with the Pāncarātra tradition but saw themselves as a distinct and superior group. But we do not know whether these Mahāpāncaraṇtrins went on to become temple priests or were just Brahmanical textual experts.

Unlike the arguments presented by the author of the Āgama-prāmāṇya to defend the orthodox status of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas against Smārtas (Mīmāṃsakas, Naiyāyikas, Vedāntins), these three inscriptions portray southern Vedic and sectarian identities as harmonious. Various kinds of orthodox Brāhmaṇa and sectarians taught at one Vedic college, and their subjects were viewed as textual specializations rather than doctrines of competing views. Vaidika or Brāhmaṇa identity was central, not sectarian identity. Even Śiva-brāhmaṇas went to one Vedic school that was attached to a Vaiśṇava temple. This is quite different from the obvious rivalry between the Āḻvārs and Nāyānmaṁśar of the previous period, which must have subsided, and the temple personal and sectarian rivalries (Pāṇcarātrin/Vaikhānasa) of later periods in Tamilnadu.

Why were all these Vedic colleges connected with Vaiśṇava temples? Perhaps because of royal requests. They were all located in northern Tamilnadu on the border with rival kingdoms. Because the deity of two temples was the fierce Narasīṁha, kings might have wanted Brāhmaṇa establishments to create buffer zones – thinking that invaders would leave Brāhmaṇa villages alone. To entice Brāhmaṇas there, kings might have promised them not only lands but Vedic colleges as well. Because orthodox Brāhmaṇas of various types had had long associations with Vaiśṇava temples in Tamilnadu – see my discussion in this essay of Atharvavedic, Rgvedic, and Yajurvedic texts and traditions with home and temple worship from the fourth century – kings likely saw no real clash between temple and Brahmanical perspectives. Vedic colleges associated with Vaiśṇava temples were among the results.

To me, this Brahmanical solidarity and harmony indicate a tradition of Brahmanical temple worship that must have been deeply embedded in the Tamil milieu (although some new groups, such as Vājasaneyins, might have been integrating themselves into it. We
have no evidence of a large, recently arrived group of sectarians, such as Pāñcarātrins, who gained the right to be temple priests by royal decree or took over control of temple rituals on a large scale. And even though these colleges were established by royal decrees, inscriptions do not indicate that kings were importing northern Brāhmaṇas to teach Vedic subjects in the temples.

Three important inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam allude to the role of temple personnel in the thirteenth century. In 1225, says ORR, “We find a first reference to another group, the bhaṭṭar – whom we assume are Brāhmaṇas since they are residents of the temple’s Brāhmaṇ settlement (akaram) – who are party to an agreement about revising śrīvaiṣṇavas to serve in the temple (SII 24.292) … This inscription also mentions several types of temple authorities whom we have never heard of previously in the inscriptions, including Śrībhāgavata nampis, hymn-singing (viṇṇappāṅca-yyum) nampis, āriyar of the holy gate (tiruvācal), and jiyar. None of these, except for the jiyar, is named.”

The reference to Śrībhāgavata nampi is relevant here. The word nampi had several meanings. According to ORR, it occurs in 274 inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam; it often refers to Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, but “is also found as an element in the names of gardeners, members of treasury committees and sabhaiṣ, bhaṭṭar, shepherds, and merchants. As was the case for the name Bhaṭṭar, this name is clearly not borne exclusively by members of any particular group…” She concludes: “[t]he absence of emphasis on caste status in the inscriptions is very consistent and very striking.” But nampi can mean something more specific, such as priest. The words Śrībhāgavata nampi could refer to Vājasaneyin Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas. Therefore, this might be our first explicit reference to Pāñcarātins priests in a temple. Still, it is odd to find only one inscription in Tamil Vaiṣṇava temples that mentions consecrating the image (pratiṣṭhā), a common activity of Pāñcarātra priests. It is odd, moreover, that the inscriptions describe donors as causing dei-

---

223 ORR 1995: 121.
226 ORR 2004b: 460.
ties to appear (*eluntaru*) graciously in image form.\(^{227}\) This is in keeping with the Āḻvār language of spontaneity and Rāmānuja’s theology of the *arcā* as God’s response to the devotee’s desire for a particular form.

This first inscriptive reference to *araiyar* (one who sings the Āḻvār hymns accompanied by interpretive gestures) is significant, because hagiographies attribute the founding of the tradition of *araiyar* to Nāthamuni. If it had been in existence since his time, why do we have no references to it in inscriptions and texts? The word *jiyar*, too, is interesting, because we have no inscriptive references to *jiyar* from the time of Rāmānuja. And the ones that we have from the thirteenth century refer to servants (*dāsa*), not heads, of ascetic groups.\(^{228}\) And yet the hagiographies would have us believe that Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, and Rāmānuja were great ascetics. ORR notes the following: “There are two inscriptions of the mid or later thirteenth century … which resemble the inscription of 1225 inasmuch as they indicate the reorganization of temple personnel … These two inscriptions refer to the *āriyar*, but not to *nampis* or *jiyar*. Instead, according to these inscriptions, the managing committee of the temple included representatives from, among other groups, *kovaṇavar* (‘loin-cloth wearers’), *kuṭavar* (‘those of the water pot’?), *talaiyiṭuvār* (‘those who present leaves’), *rāmānuja uṭaiyār* (‘keepers of Rāmanuja’), *akampaṭiyār* (‘those who serve within’), *pāṭuvār* (‘singers?’), and *totavatti tūmaraiyār* (‘those of the clean clothes and pure Veda’).”\(^{229}\)

Several of these categories interest me. The term *rāmānuja uṭaiyār* (literally, possessors of Rāmānuja) might refer to the priests of a shrine at Śrīraṅgam, which housed an image of Rāmānuja.\(^{230}\)

---

\(^{227}\) ORR 2004b: 460.


\(^{230}\) It has been claimed that an inscription dated 1191 (641 of 1191) refers to an image of Rāmānuja in the Kāṅcī temple (NAYAR 1992: 103 note 39 citing RAMAN 1975: 167). But ORR (personal communication) has challenged RAMAN’s claim, saying that the reference is very vague. Extrapolating from a line in Parāśarabhaṭṭar’s Śrīraṅgarājastava 1.48 – “Let me circumambulate [the Inner Sanctum of the temple], having taken refuge in the series of glances [emanating from my] Gurus who are seated on the
And the word *akampaṭiyār*,

“those who serve [alternatively, chant/sing] inside,” presumably in the sanctum, might refer to priests of some kind.

Orr notes that we have references to only one of these groups, the twelfth-century *kovaṇavar*. And even between 1280 and 1344, we have only one or two inscriptions for each group. So Śrībhāga-vata *nampis* (if indeed they were the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Pāñcarā-tra temple priests), presumably mentioned by the 1225 inscription, might not have been prevalent in the temples of Tamilnadu until after the fourteenth century. Or they had a low profile as simply one group that served within the temple. And neither the *araiyars* (singers of hymns) nor the *jiyars* (ascetics) were prevalent. According to Orr, “three quarters of the inscriptions of the last sub-period [1280-1344] concern the donation of land by various people (including a number of dāsanampis, and people who themselves bore the name Bhaṭṭar) to *bhaṭṭar* who had been settled in several *brahmadeyas* at Śrīraṅgam through the sponsorship of a local chief named *brahmadeyas* and the Pandya king Jatavarman Sundara III. Most of the inscriptions refer to the *bhaṭṭar* simply as a group … These inscriptions mark a significant change in the distribution of land among members of the community at Śrīraṅgam. While there had been a Brāhmaṇ settlement at Śrīraṅgam from the time of the earliest extant inscriptions, as we know from the references throughout the early medieval period to the *sabhai*, it is only at the end of this period that we find evidence of massive Brāhmaṇ landholdings around the temple. Whereas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries land was granted – typically for flower gardens – to *srīvaisṇavas* and dāsanampis, in the fourteenth century *srīvaisṇavas* and dāsanampis were not recipients but were rather donors of land.”

Some of these *bhaṭṭars*, who were responsible for reciting Veda and Purāṇa, practicing medicine (*vaidya*), and performing sacrifices (*yajña*), might not have been involved with temple ritual, says

Blessed Lord’s left side …” – Nayar thinks that images of the Ācāryas existed at the time of Bhaṭṭar (Nayar 1992: 97).

> 233 Orr 1995: 123.
But the inscriptions describe other bhāṭṭars as providing “offerings and other services to deities, or as receiving portions of the food prepared in the temple. The appearance in such force of these bhāṭṭar at Śrīraṅgam in the last years of the early medieval period, with their claims to lands, their specialized Brahmanical skills, and their connection with temple affairs, is likely to have had a decisive influence on the subsequent evolution of the Vaiṣṇava community at Śrīraṅgam.”

We do not know what kind of Brāhmaṇas these bhāṭṭars were. But we do know that, by the fourteenth century, the bhāṭṭars were taking over from the śrīvaiṣṇavas in temple management. And we do know that conservatism was simultaneously affecting Śrīvaiṣṇavism; visible in works by Vedāntadeśika, and provoking reactions by Maṇavālamāmuni.

Some of these bhāṭṭars were Smārtas. They considered themselves more orthodox than those belonging to the Tamil temple traditions, including the Vājasaneyin Śrībhāgavata Brāhmaṇa nampis, who had integrated into the southern temple tradition. This could have led to tensions among temple personnel. And it could have led to new worries about hierarchy (caste and sub-caste), which threatened the old egalitarian ethos of Tamil Vaiṣṇavism. The hagiographies mention that problem. In this new and competitive climate, it would have made sense to legitimate equality by attributing it to an early figure, for instance, attributing the idea that the tirumantra should be given to every devotee to Rāmānuja, and so forth.

Even though we still have no concrete evidence of an established Pāṇcarātra priesthood in the temples of Tamilnadu, therefore, one hypothesis is worthy of consideration. Over several centuries (inscriptions suggest that this began in the eleventh century), there was enough Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vāyasaneyin influence, which had some connection with Pāṇcarātra, to facilitate the gradual development of an interest in Pāṇcarātra texts by the Ācāryas and some low-keyed participation by Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vāyasaneyins in temple

---

235 ORR 1995: 115-118; 123.
ritual. The inscriptive reference to Śrībhāgavata nampis in the inscription of 1225 is a case in point. With the entrance to areas surrounding major temples of another Śmārtta type of Brahmanical group, generally called bhattars, tensions likely grew among temple personal. This was probably true of the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins, for instance, who were involved in temple ritual. By the time of the Kōyil-olūku, which can be dated any time between the fifteenth century and the eighteenth, there were attempts to legitimate this Pāṇcarātra priesthood by attributing it to Rāmānuja.\textsuperscript{238} And these might have increased tensions between Pāṇcarātrins and Vaikhānasas, a sectarian tension that was occurring throughout the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{239} Before this picture is complete, though, we need a study of

\textsuperscript{238} Orr 1995: 121.

\textsuperscript{239} Two Vaikhānasas works, which could be dated as late as the eighteenth century, reflect these tensions. The Ānandasamhitā refers to three branches of the Yajurveda: the pure Vaikhānasa, the impure Taittirīya, and the pure Vājasaneyaka (Ānandasamhitā II.74-77; cited by COLAS 1996: 160). Each of these has many subdivisions, with the Vaikhānasa having the most (fifty-nine) and the Vājasaneyaka having the fewest (fourteen). The Ānandasamhitā puts the Pāṇcarātra into a list of six sects: Buddhist, Jaina, Śaiva, Pāśupata, Kāpāla, and Pāṇcarātra (COLAS 1996: 164). The Ādisamhitā says much the same thing, providing details about these groups (Ādisamhitā II.49-50; cited by COLAS 1996: 161). It purportedly shows the late Vedic world, says COLAS, but he suggests that this view might be artificial and anachronistic. One section (Ādisamhitā III.4-17; cited by COLAS 1996: 162) describes the Vaiṣṇavas as the Vaikhānasa, Sāttvata (Pāṇcarātra; Eka-yana), Tirthaka, Ekāntika and Mūlaka. Pāṇcarātra is further divided into either two categories – pure (śuddha) or mixed (miśra) – or three – Bhakta, Bhāgavata and Pāṇcarātra. According to COLAS, this resembles a list in the Viṣṇusamhitā (Viṣṇusamhitā 2.26-33; cited by COLAS 1996: 162 and note 4). Lists such as these suggest that we are dealing with a pan-Indian profile, which need not have reflected a precise situation on the ground in Tamilnadu. This makes my historical reconstruction of the relation among Brāhmaṇas, Pāṇcarātrins, and the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism especially difficult.

Classifying Pāṇcarātra with the heterodox sects was obviously a putdown by the Vaikhānasas. The Vaikhānasa, says the Ānandasamhitā, is the cult for cities and villages, royal palaces, and private houses, especially those of Brāhmaṇas; those Brāhmaṇas with right expertise (adhi-kāra) were born Vaikhānasa and have received the rituals of the Vaikhānasasūtra. By contrast, the Pāṇcarātra is called tāntrika, secondary (gaṇaṇa), and cruel (āg-
inscriptional evidence between the fifteenth century and the twentieth. That is likely the period when Pāñcarātra became institutionalized in some Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu (although to this day, as I said, there are more Vaikhānas temples than Pāñcarātra ones in the list of the 108 divyadeśas).

Listen to K. RANGACHARI on the early twentieth century: “Amongst Sri Vaishnavas God is worshipped in two different ways. One way is worshipping God in one’s own house and it is called Svārthayajanam. This domestic worship of God or Svārthayajanam has already been described under Panchakāla observances of an orthodox Sri Vaishnava Brahman. The other method of worship or Parārthayajanam is meant for all people. This is the form of worship that is usually adopted in all temples. All the temple rituals … have all to be carried out by men especially trained or initiated for these purposes. These men constitute the Archakas or Bhaṭṭar Sri Vaishnavas” even though any kind of Brāhmaṇa may do the Pāñcarātra style of domestic worship, says RANGACHARI, but only those who have had dīkṣā should perform temple worship (although the priests [arcakas] following the sūtras of Bodhāyana and Śaunaka may do so as well). arcakas of the Bodhāyana and Śaunaka Sūtras are usually initiated, though, having dīkṣā instead of prapatti. RANGACHARI’s description follows in many ways the description of the Pāñcarātra priests in the Āgamarāmānya and that of pan-Indian texts as well. But there was one difference. Those who did temple ritual were now considered inferior to the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, and these groups no longer intermarried. It is interesting that RANGACHARI does not mention the Vaikhānas in this context.

neya). It must not be practiced in the homes of Brāhmaṇas but only by ascetics in remote places for liberation. As sectarian tension increased, all the old stereotypes were reintroduced. We are told that the Bodhāyana tradition from the Black Yajurveda is wild (krūra) and the Kātyāyana (Vājasaney) is tāmasa. Despite these putdowns, the Vaikhānasas sometimes accepted assistant priests from these circles (COLAS 1996: 62-63).

240 RANGACHARI 1931: 99.
According to GERHARD OBERHAMMER’s essay in this volume, a Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy – “a religious and philosophical tradition that was bound to its Vedic origin, that was moulded by a Brahmanic style of thinking and living, and that manifested itself by the Brahmanic ritual … [and that] had to a great extent already become monotheistic … was probably … the seed of the religious movement of the Āḻvārs” and the later Śrīvaishṇavas. “These religious and theological aspects can also not be traced back to the Pāñcarātra,” says OBERHAMMER, “but rather point to an independent stream of tradition.”

OBERHAMMER points to the Taittirīya tradition, the Puruṣāsūkta in the Rgvedhāna, and the Mahānārāyanaopāniṣad to show how this stream was absorbed into Viśiṣṭādvaita and Pāñcarātra texts. I think that this independent stream emerged mainly from the Yajurveda but also that it was linked with the Atharvaveda and Puruṣāsūkta traditions in South India. As I have shown, this stream emphasized the spirituality of taking refuge with God (called saraṇāgati in the later Śrīvaishṇava tradition), a bhakti spirituality, a lamentation of life within samsāra, expressions of humility, and reinterpretations of asceticism. From the research presented here, I concur with OBERHAMMER’s general historical reconstruction, but I think that there were several influences on the Āḻvārs.

More specifically, I think that several Brahmanical traditions connected with Nārāyaṇa contributed to an evolving Brahmanical tradition in Tamilnadu. The early ones were mainly Atharvavedins and Yajurvedins (Taittirīya and Vaikhānasa branches), both of which were prominent in South India, but perhaps some Rgvedins too. Their religiosity combined the following: taking refuge with the deity; chanting stotras (such as the Puruṣasūkta) and divine names; and meditating with deep devotion on a mental image or worshipping a physical one in connection with homa or with pūjā in a home shrine (or temple), and adopting an ascetic lifestyle as a householder or vānaprasthin. The Atharvavedins were entrepreneurial southern Brāhmaṇas, working hard to synthesize ascetic, Vedic, and popular religiosity. They had close relations with other southern Brāhmaṇas,

---

242 See pp. 37f. in this volume.
243 See p. 38 in this volume.
which contributed to the emergence of a Vaidika devotional religiosity that focused on creating an image of the supreme deity and making him present through imagination or ritual.

Added to this mix, I suggest, was a community that originated in the Deccan, perhaps initiated by branches of these same Brahmanical groups (although the texts say nothing about that). This community integrated aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a robust, exclusively monotheistic Nārāyaṇa cult, albeit one that included the avatāras and local deities as many forms of the one God. This community emerged out of competition with Buddhists, Jainas, and Śaivas as a proselytizing and therefore competitive sect. It entered Tamilnadu (along with a similar Śaiva group) because of migrations that began in the third century and proselytism that began in the sixth. At the same time, new groups such as Digambara Jainas and some Buddhist sects entered Tamilnadu and might have won the favour of several Tamil rulers. Because their rights had been abrogated on several occasions by these newcomers (or they feared that they would be), Tamil Brāhmanas looked for a way to stem the tide. Some of them joined forces with the new proselytizing sectarian group, knowing that they had to broaden their cause by appealing to Tamils across a broad section of society. Already familiar with Tamil poetic literature, they helped rework the akam and puram genres of classical Tamil poetry (caṅkam) – especially motifs that praised Tamil language, region, and culture – into a compelling new Tamil bhakti framework. They urged everyone to join the movement and protect both Tamil and Vedic traditions. This was part of a larger Pan-Indian “Brahmanical/Hindu” revival, which had been underway since the Śuṅga dynasty in other parts of the subcontinent. Even though southern Brāhmaṇas made a major contribution to the bhakti movement, which is my thesis here, it is important not to reduce this complex movement, one that integrated many Tamil communities, to a purely Brahmanical phenomenon. This aspect of the complexity is beyond the scope of my essay, however, which has focused on Brāhmaṇas and Pāñcarātrins.

By at least the eleventh century, some Vājasaneyins were established at Vedic colleges in Tamilnadu and probably elsewhere.

---

244 SINGH points out that Orissan inscriptions include many references to Yajurvedins and especially Vājasaneyins between the fourth century and
Their erudition, their references to the three Vedas, and their Śrī connection – which is prominent neither in the southern Brahmanical texts of the fourth to sixth centuries nor in the Ālvār hymns – point to this new element. These Vājasaneyins had integrated bhaktic and yogic traditions as had other branches of the Yajurveda tradition. Nāthamuni might have belonged to this tradition, to judge from Yāmuna’s description of him as a great bhakta, a yogin, and a learned person.

Some in these Vājasaneyin circles belonged also to a Vedānta school that sought to integrate it with Pāñcarātra in the tradition of Dramiḍabhāṣayakara and Śrīvatsāṅkamiśra. This was the case of Rāmamiśra, who seems to have been the teacher of Yāmuna and perhaps (according to some hagiographies) a disciple of Nāthamuni. Because this defense had been developing over many centuries, we can assume that its history, including its many debates with Smārtas, would have been known to those in the lineage throughout the subcontinent (that is, wherever this Vājasaneyin tradition had spread). I assume that, when Yāmuna wrote his Āgamaprāmāṇya in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, he drew on these well-known debates as passed on orally by Rāmamiśra (perhaps drawing on the Treatise on the Validity of the Kāśmirīgama). In other words, he could have written his Āgamaprāmāṇya without any specific reference to temple life in Tamilnadu at the time. Thus, we need not assume any actual conflict between Smārtas and Vājasaneyins in Tamilnadu at the time for that to have occurred. This analysis helps me to account for the discrepancy between the Āgamaprāmāṇya’s description of a temple milieu (competition and hierarchy verging on animosity),245 which might have drawn from Kashmiri or other pan-

245 Yāmuna, who attributes the inspiration to Nāthamuni, says: “May, for the length of this Aeon, play on the pious, enchanting and irreproachable sayings of the extensive collection of prose and verse compositions which eclipse the cleverness of the befuddled, conceited and witless assembly of the evil crowd of the rivals of the Sātvata doctrine, whose spirit has been increased by the glorious Nāthamunindra, and by which all the unholy powers are cleansed” (Āgamaprāmāṇya 139 translated by VAN BUITENEN 1971: 122).
Indian sources, and what inscriptions or other texts reveal about the interaction of Brähmaṇaṣ, temple personal, and sectarians in Tamilnadu at the end of the thirteenth century (cooperation and harmony under the rubric of service and holy work).

Despite the Āgama-prāmāṇya’s rhetorical flourishes of combativeness, early Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins probably integrated without fuss into the prevailing Tamil temple culture. As disciples of a Yajurveda tradition, many Yajurvedins would have had some affinity with other long-standing Yajurveda traditions in Tamilnadu, especially the Vaikhānasa, which belonged as well to the White Yajurveda. From 1225, for instance, we have a brief reference to Śrībhāgavata nampis at Śrīraṅgam. They might have been priests, but they probably belonged to only one among several groups in temple service. And we hear nothing about their dīkṣā or about worship five times daily (pañcakālīka) by royal decree as described in the Āgama-prāmāṇya, Pāncarātra-Āgamas, or sectarian classifications found in other texts. But because inscriptions mention offerings and festivals, too, I assume that they were involved in some ritual activities even though the identity of officiants is hidden by the general nomenclature: Śrīvaiṣṇava, holy worker, and nampi. These words allude to various groups, which serve in several capacities. This description reminds me of Ālvār religion: service, the community of devotees, equality, and the diagnostic features that I identified at the beginning of this chapter. We have only one reference to the consecration of an image (pratiṣṭhā) but many to donors (ordinary devotees) making the deity “appear” or rise up. That, too, suggests continuity in the religious idiom.

By the fourteenth century, however, the status quo might have been disturbed by the arrival of another Brahmanical group (or several), generally known as bhaṭṭars, who pulled rank as more orthodox. Increasing hierarchy and competition over temple honours and rights explain the rise of charter myths in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hagiographies, which legitimated families or groups by association with early Ācāryas. In the Köyil-öluku, the Śrībhāga- vata nampis legitimated their temple role as priests by association with Rāmānuja. With this development, the Pāncarātrins must have become more firmly established in many Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu.