

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Religion and art experience cannot be reduced to an epiphenomena in society with its economic, politic patterns. The dynamics and diffidence of the psyche if stressed upon too much may perhaps vitiate the understanding of the two. A healthy approach is taking in equal measure those factors which provide us with a clue to understand religion and its manifestations in the Chōla period. A conscious empathy which Roper calls "historical imagination (with) the capacity to migrate into distant foreign minds" has to some extent guided the choice of areas which are explored in this section.

"The Chōlas not only extended Tamil political power to an unprecedented degree, but also built the great temples and patronised the now renowned works of art whose inspiration is rooted in the Bhakti hymns of the Śaiva poets and Ālvars" - Glen Yocum.

II.1 RELIGIOUS TRENDS, THEIR PATTERNS AND DEVELOPMENT

The fundamental features of religious and spiritual culture in Medieval South India saw the blossoming of Puranic Hinduism in sharp contrast to Buddhism and Janinism.

Secretarianism had pushed the Vēdic pantheon almost into reverential background and obscurity. Buddhism in relation subsisted, beaten by its own interpretations of austerity and excess. The rigorous discipline and non-flexibility, saw the waning of Jainism. The content of Purāṇic Hinduism - Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism rose, not by rejecting life, but in accepting and going along with the masses. The mass appeal lay between both the polarities of realisation and revelation; and the composite Purāṇa were the 'tour de force' sustaining religion in India. Without destroying or freeing themselves from centuries of carefully built beliefs, they evolved the same pantheons suited to time and place. Sanction and encouragement of worship and meditation through manifest form and ritual was known. Apprehension of the Divine and Invisible forces by corporeal beings was recognised as difficult and debatable. Recognition and apprehension were of more individual experiences, divine madness or vision, imbued or endowed with a presence they were expressed in very cognisable and imaginative terms. With inbuilt mythic memories they formed concepts and abstractions which were given flesh and tangible shapes, carved out in different vocabulary. At the same time the gross and material were taken beyond their physicality into the realms of the abstract. Both the icono-

graphic and spiritual revolution were established. Around these began an evolution of distinct forms, traits and ideas, or patterns in religion.

With both Buddhism and Jainism more or less ousted by the 'humanising factor' of Hinduism, myth and iconography ushered in a phase of prolific creativity. The survival instinct inculcated the spirit of tolerance and enquiry. A catholic view saw the period as, "that (which) brings into prominent relief the reciprocal influence of different religious sects upon one another. Both Buddhism and Jainism had already begun to develop the theistic tendencies on an analogy of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. A fundamental unity of ideas underlying these changes not only explains the characteristics of religious transformation in general, but gradual assimilation of Buddhism with Brāhmanical religion in particular(1).

South India saw from about the mid eighth century A.D. compulsive Śaiva Nāyanmars who sang the royalties into conversion. Be he Kūn Pāṇḍya converted by Sambandar, or Mahēndra Pallava by Appar, the warm sensuous outpourings appealed to both the royalty and masses. The accessibility to religious experience saw its florescence. The Ālvars, their songs replete with love, longing and

poetic licence together with their Saiva counterparts extracted the subtler traits and ambrosia of Bhakti. Adopting the same four fold dāna of Jains - āhara, abhaya, bhaisājya and sāstra with liberal views and altruism, they also canonised the saints and won over the royalty. Apart from this, an appreciation for and towards the local tradition of village gods or grama-devatas was extended. Although not recognised as supreme cosmic forces, they were focal to the village and its jurisdiction. This gave them a unique and individual status. Sharing a similarity with west Asian primitive cultures, the agronomic society favoured the fertility cult most of all. Dieties of the feminine biologic principle predominated. Besides this, worship of serpents, spirits and sprites who presided over arts, crafts, ancestors, boundary stones, hills, rivers, trees and forests are well known. These were represented or commemorated by thatch or brick shrines, mre reliefs, spikes, or a slab of stone under the tree.

Perusal of the more philosophic nature of religion can be gleaned from the Saṅgam. In 'Maṇimēkhalai', Kāñci was the centre of culture par excellence. There were institutions that taught systems of Vēdas, Saiva, Vaisnava, Sāṅkya, Vaisēsika and Lōkāyata. K.A.N. Sastri sets

forth saying, "in the sphere of religion, as generally in all matters of spiritual culture, South India began by being indebted to the North, but in the course of the centuries it more than amply repaid the debt and made signal contributions to the theory and practice of religion and to the philosophic thought in various aspects"(2). This is exemplified in the Bhakti movement in the South cast by fervent emotional sympathy and empathy, with a total willingness to surrender to 'His Grace;' aptly called 'Śaraṇa gatārthi'. This finds a prominent expression in the Bhāgavata, Tēvāram, Nālāyira divyaprabhandham with variegated meanings and easy accessibility to the masses: Simultaneously there also arose philosophic exegesis and queries in the Vēdic Mimānsa of Kumārillabhatta and Prabhākara, the Vēdāntic trio-Śaṅkara Ramānuja and Mādhava, and the new system of Śaiva Siddhānta. The period from the mid seventh to tenth centuries A.D. was filled with the flavour of a religious renaissance.

II.2 RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS - SECTARIAN EMPHASIS

It can be likened to a historical miracle, when one sees the sudden and simultaneous rise and growth of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Bhakti with the rise of Vijayālaya Chōla. Visual evidence in the nature of temple architecture and sculpture show a heavy predilection towards Śaivism.

Inscriptional evidence from the Tiruvallam Bilvanāthēśvara refers to the recitation of the Tiruppatikam as early as Pallava Nandivarman period. The Parāntaka I inscriptions from Lālgudi and Allūr mention the singing of hymns by Brāhmins(4). There are numerous inscriptions that captured the savoured recitation of Vedas side by side by both sects(5). Śaivism was a living, pulsating religious force.

Of the Early Chōla period the best examples of Bhakti came in the form of Maṅṅikavāçakar who was the minister of Varaguṇa Pāṇḍya II (862-85 A.D.). The Tiruvāçakam and Tiruçcirrambalakōvai are ascribed to him. The close of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth centuries A.D. saw a number of Ālvārs like Periyālvar who supposedly won a religious dispute in the court of Śrī Māra Vallabha Pāṇḍya between (815-862 A.D.). His adopted daughter was Āṇḍāl (also Kōdai or Gōda). Tirrupān was followed by Kulasēkhara, and Madurakavi. The key to their religious success was the use of colloquial or popular speech, soul stirring compositions in easily catchy tunes. Bhakti expressed itself as a creative and vocal manifestation. Simplicity, ardour and a cascade of lyric upon lyric had a profound influence on the masses as a whole.

The philosophic intellectual attitude was already in evidence. Much earlier than the ninth century A.D. the champions of Brāhminism - Kumārilla and Śaṅkara advocated the ritualistic and philosophic aspects of the āśrama . Kumārilla advocated the Mimāmsa and Śaṅkara Advaita.

Cases of religious extremity were seen in the minor Śaiva sects of the Kāpālika, Pāśūpata and Kālamukha cults. There are inscriptions relating to the Tantrics of Śaivism in Kāñci, Mēlpāḍi and Koḍumbāḷūr.

The seeds of Śaiva Siddhānta were sown as early as in the Āgamas, as has been even observed by Sundarar and specially Tirumūlar in his Tirumandiram, pondering the āgamic theology. Similarly Maṅṅikavaḇ akar's works extol the Śiva Āgamas in sharp contrast to the Vēdantic monism of Śaṅkara.

Instinctive, emotive and intellectually philosophic, the sense of 'awareness' in the period was strong. Through the language of art - literary and visual, news vistas were opened up for challenge.

The religious 'ethos' was apprehended by those who could perceive the differences in thoughts, belief, feelings

and approach. There was the overall ethos, and there was the personal pride. Every village had its own interpretation of myth and reality, to preserve its own identity. This is seen in its sthala-purāṇa, and yet it belonged to a larger matrix with which it shared in the corpus of myths, beliefs and rituals. Often times the content of myth made the temple or the village a place of great sanctity; like the Vīra Kshētra, Puṇya-kshētra or Saptasthāna or the earthly abode of a deity. The fervor with which a god or goddess was extolled, usually saw its manifested form. Vijayālaya, to commemorate this victory over Tañjāvūr installed the Niśumbasūdani image which embodied the female principle Śakti. The Pallavas neglected Jyēsthā dēvi as inauspicious, while the Early Chōla relegated and then made her one of the aṣṭa parivāra dēvata. Parāntaka I made Naṭarāja or Ādavallan, the Lord of Cidambaram, his Kuladeiyvam. Āditya I period possibly saw the earliest Saptamātrika shrine, as an independent one according to epigraphists. This is the temple of Kālapidāri. Controversy regarding a separate shrine for the goddess Umā Bhaṭṭāriyār in the Tiruvērumbur Piplisvaram or Ālvār temples is well known. Utsava bhera of the goddess called Bhōgeśvari were found in many Early Chōla temples, usually in the ardhamāṇḍapa. The conse-

creation of Umā Bhattāraki was seen in the 15th year of Uttama, in the Agniśvara temple at Kumāravayalūr.

With an increase in the number of deities, the different temples with aṣṭa and śōdasa parivārālaya and pañcāyatana types were seen both within and outside of Chōla land; as at the Mūvar and Aivarkōyils at Koḍumbālūr, Nārttamalai, Vijayālaya Chōliśvara, Naṅgavaram Sundarasvara etc. The unique examples of the 'mada kovil' are seen at Nallūr, Pāpanasam etc. which are the realisation of myth and architecture together.

II.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF BHAKTI

"Historical development is never wholly rational or organic, so a perfect end in the context of such a process is difficult. Nevertheless there is an undeniable logic of development within the ideal process of Cultural History".

- Fisher H.A.

The seedling of Bhakti was sown in antiquity, but became phenomenal in Medieval India. Fervid emotionalism laced with miracles was climatic. The telos or end towards which the process leans was a must for its development. Bhakti is and was both a means and

end in spiritual life. As a means it becomes the *sādhana*, *gaṇi* or *aparā* Bhakti. Etymologically, it derives from 'bhaj' to serve or 'sēvana'. The expressions of these were through worship with names and forms; either by rituals-*vaidhi* or by meditation-*ragātmika*. This involved a certain code of conduct or *acāra* and *upāsana* or *pūja*. The humane aspect is brought into religion where amenesty could be sought through such conduct. Intent or ignorance, proper penance through devotion exonerated these. The willingness encourages one to go faithfully through this selfless devotion, which is basically therapeutic and leading to self-realisation. One of the major characteristic of self realisation is the acceptance of the self and the world with no anger and no hate. The object of faith and worship are not merely veiled behind a symbol any more but are experienced or perceived through the self. Once this stature has been achieved, it is *para* Bhakti or pure experience. The 'will to serve' gives us a share in the divine experience .

This 'willingness to serve' makes Bhakti a personal relationship with god. This personalisation allows for the god to be perceived in any other form. There is a compulsiveness about this, a kinship that gets

established between man and god based on love and service. "The structure of Bhakti is at once theoretical, emotional and practical. It is a unity of knowing, feeling and willing in a growing integral being which culminates in direct communion with the divine^d(6).

Theoretically this implies the personal nature and kinship of man and god; on the emotional, an awareness of divine personal relationships, modes and sentiments appropriate to it. "On the practical side, forms of worship of a moral and social conduct which would express the ideal of the devotee and correspond to the stage of his progress". Pande writes of Medieval Bhakti as monotheistic and not monistic. Monotheism is a belief in a supreme soul or divine being whom the human soul seeks and believes in, but does not realise its true spiritual nature. This sense of non-realisation leads the human soul to a 'wanderlust' from birth to birth in quest of the infinite spirit. By Divine Grace comes the awakening. 'Love' was the central theme, Bhakti had to contend with extremes of naturalism and polytheism with its unquenching thirst for love, and on the other a monistic pluralistic intellectualism. The former appealing to the senses and natural impulses was gratified as Kāmabhōga; and latter extols negation and man's destiny with ultimate dispassion-parā Vai-

ragaya(7). Part of their philosophy came from the Vēdic sources like the Bṛhatāraṇyaka Pañcadesī from where it was gleaned that the "notion of the self is the source of all values and seekings, or in all seekings man merely seeks the self. In all experiences of values man experiences the self". There is something very practical and honest, perhaps a profound truth in this. At the empirical level the object of seeking an experience is vielded by finite natural forms. The infinite essence underlies all finite manifestations. Bhakti tried its own perfecting of the notions of god, man, ritual and conduct appropriate to their relationship(8). The Bhagavat Gīta enhances for example, the idea of god himself born as man. Humanity became worthy of such a divine manifestation. Arjuna brings out the qualities of Kṛṣṇa in the human form with perfect lucidity. Furthermore, this descent of a god to become man is a morpic humanising concept, which also hints at the inaccessibility of the absolute. Bhakti became the infinite outpouring of love in the personal relationship between man and god.

Medieval Bhakti is replete with descended gods - avarohaṇa, to assume the human form, he was for example, the Siddha - a perfect being of Sāivism. The Ālvārs and

Nāyanmārs lent a new dimension to this by their intense personal appeal. They popularised love as an uninterrupted flow of the mind towards the lord, with all its elements of emotion, surrender and obstinacy. The Ātmanikṣepa - Surrender of self to god was seen in Rāmabhakti, extreme love of Viṣṇu in his avatāra, the Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna relationship, and Kṛṣṇa-Leela itself.

The Pañcarātra also offers relief from misery, by different manifestations of the lord, objects of worship and meditation. The five fold manifestations of parā, vyūha, vibhāva, antarayāmin and arca forms. The arca form made by the human hand is formalised by the 'prāṇa pratiṣṭā' whereby the god is invoked to reside in the image. Here again is the continuation of pre-Vēdic belief tempered by the ages, but given more prominence. The austerity of the Early Pallavas gave place to the 'Laissez fair' of the Later Pallavas, and was then distilled in the Early Chōḷa period. Homilies with candid simplicity caused an aura and power that held people spell-bound. "The history of Bhakti is the history of growing spiritualisation of religion i.e. a movement away from external ritualism in practice and a growing sense of nearness to the deity of experience..... changes repeat themselves at

different levels..... the Vēdic Upanishadic interiorised gnosis spiritualised the notion of a dēity..... In the Gīta the Supreme Spirit is humanised in the concept of an incarnation. This naturally placed the establishing of the human relationship between man and god in the centre of religious worship. If communication between the two required a humanisation of god it also required a divinisation of man..... the Pañcarātra formulates the detailed course of action for the worship of god⁽⁹⁾.

The Ālvārs and Nāyanmars brought out the first extant literary expressions of religion, through love and tangible expression closest to the human senses. There is no deliberate binding to philosophic or theologic precepts. We are taken into a world of experience, sensuality and spontaneity. Bhakti is a metaphor for love and vice versa. They reveal rāgāt mika, parā and sādhya Bhakti, a new expression of love in the 6th to 9th centuries A.D; and from then on as a philosophy so subtle that all and sundry could grasp it. The most human factor of all that emerges is the powerful and primal urge to love and be loved in return, and this was its 'fait accompli'.

II.4 VARIATIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF BHAKTI - THE ĀLVĀRS

The period from sixth century A.D. saw a renaissance in the Tamil language emerging as a powerful instrument of faith and religious communication. Language as a medium of expression and tool went beyond itself into the realms of speculation and experience. The Ālvārs, wandering minstrels sans inhibitions and conditions were bards of love and tales of mythic yore. The historical causes for this springtide in Tamil Bhakti came in the form of hymns as reaction against the attributeless absolute of Buddhism and Jainism, which excluded all forms of attachments and emotions. Ethics minus shades of emotion was swept away by a warm pulsating human approach. Hseun Chwang in South India sums it as "The theistic and pietistic religion of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Saints could be a reaction against an impersonal and atheistic tendencies of the two ascetic religions"(10).

The close of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries A.D. marks the time of Periyālvār, a contemporary of Śrī Māra Śrī Vallabha Pāṇḍya. Periyālvār's daughter Āṇḍāl only understood one form of Bhakti, the mystical union with Viṣṇu. Her arduous outpourings find a secret yearning and sensitivity in every person, often not expressed due to various reasons. Her allusions

to Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu and the avatāra are distilled and flow from the coarse or sensual to the subtle.

Religious oratory and the fine art of relating life and religion, was the blessed gift of other Ālvārs like Kulasēkhara and Madurakavi. Blessed by the Muse the quest itself is a metaphor. Yearning, for example through a woman's love lorn heart. Nammālvār in a nutshell says that the lord is unknowable, even to immortals, it is this which is his, infinitude and mystery. Yet it is this same lord who came down to earth, to face all trials and tribulations, taking us through levels of experience. He came to endure reproach when he stole the butter(11). The vibhāva aspect we realise was greatly popular because it gave scope for expression. A.D. Raghavan says these lyrics are a mixing of symbol, what is symbolised - the extension of the symbol beyond the limits of the logic of symbolism, the coming in of other symbols, entering into direct utterance and becoming altogether a mystical experience(12), a poetry of intuition. There existed a belief that god was the Ultimate Reality, and none could be independent of Him. Thus all phenomenal world is not a mere illusion but his transient 'Leelā'. This cosmic 'Leelā' is his 'Virāṭsva-roopā' and his infinite form. He is the world. To

Nammālvār the avatāra, were then historical truth, with an ever recurring metaphysical validity. Importantly, they are real to the human mind where they can evolve and transform themselves. He could thus manifest himself in any place and form.

Nāthamuni who is conferred the honour of compiling the Vaiṣṇava hymnology could be the Śrinātha who appears in Sundara Chōḷa's Anbil plates, and belonging to the Parāntaka I phase. The same source also mentions Parāntaka II's minister and family were great followers of Raṅganātha and endowed much to its charities(13). A unique character was that "the mystical experience was the direct experience of the presence of the divine being. It involves a simplicity, a certain passivity in the sense that the mystic experiences it effortlessly"(14). According to Venkatachari's interpretation it is the 'experience of god by the individual as god is for the individual in his fullest plenitude(15). It is this intimate union without negation and the object of experience which are all bound by 'Love & Grace'; without loss of personal identity.

The 'personal identity' factor resulted in not meditated outpourings. The luxury of expression needless to

say found channels in allied fields; and most of all versatility was encouraged.

The Ālvārs conceived their 'largesse of love' in very humanly apprehendable terms of Vātsalya, the mother and child, Sākhya, - Slave and master, Sṛṅgara or Mādhurya - Samyoga lover and beloved, and to Virāha - separation. The Pañcarātra Āgama further, proved to be conducive to this, for in the arca form the icon became from mere symbol the thing or form itself. The Tiruccanda Viruṭṭam is replete with the sensuality of Bhakti in its third verse. It clearly advocates the joy and pleasure made by the five bhutas or tanmatras. The five sense organs are through which one can realise, see his form, manifest and unmanifest. Fervence of such literature played on the senses and to a large extent gave release to the earthy sensuality of man. The audio, the tactile, and the visual were perhaps finely sharpened. Each art flowered due to this keen sense and urge to create.

The Nālāyira Prabandam and the other texts suggest that aspiration and the melting of mind and soul 'citta druti' unites us with the lord. This is Divine Intoxication. Even as early as Tirumalaisai, of the Mahēndra

Pallava period, the Tiruvandādi and Tiruccanda Viruṭṭam extol the Vyūha form and the path of Śaraṇagathārthi. Periyālvār Vātsalya and Sākhyā, Āndāl's Mādhurya in the Tiruppāvai and Nācciyar Tirumōli, both emphasise the arca form of worship. Tonḍaradippoṭi Vipranārāyana, Kulaśēkhara Nammālvār, Madurakavi etc. all perpetuated "the culture of the feeling of love and devotion for Viṣṇu or Narayaṇa....."(16). The Chōla: it is apparent were lenient and tolerant with a zeal for religion and life.

II.5 VARIATIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF BHAKTI - THE NĀYANMARS

The Tēvāram, almost simultaneously was the manifestation of Śaiva Bhakti. The trio Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar, together created the contents of the Padikam. There are eleven in number, divided into three parts, for example, the third and the seventh are by Sundarar, the 8th Tiruvāccakam by Māṇṇikavāccakar, the 9th Gōndaraditya's Tiruvissaippa, the next Tirumūlar's Tirumandiram and the 11th Padigam by Nambi Āndar Nambi.

Śaṅkara's Siddhāntaśāstra, fourteen in number claim that the Śaivism that prevailed in the Tamil country was of the ordinary kind singing the praises of Śiva and exhibiting a fervent devotion. But there must

have been a darsána or system of philosophy besides this. The inscription in Rajasimhesvara at Kañci, says that Atyañtakāma (Rajasimha) was proficient in the system of Śaiva Siddhānta also called Siddhānta Śāstra composed by Santāna Ācarya . "These must be the philosophical works of Śaivism..... and the system therein taught in all likelihood to be the same as Saiva darsána(17).

The two important centuries in Medieval South India were the eighth and ninth centuries as we are aware. In these times two important developments took place in society. The change in concept of the temple and the matha. 'It was under the Chōlas that these institutions entered on a process of gradual expansion and adaption which attracted the populace benefactors and thus reached a secure position of ascendancy over the Buddhist Vihāra and Jain Palli Heretic conflicts, de sanctifying and questioning the existence of a diety caused the theists to foster a religious syncretism, which made room within its fold of orthodoxy for all forms of theistic belief. The syncretism was based on the conception of the Trimūrti, the three fold manifestation of the same god head(18).

Kumārilla and Śaṅkara fought against heresy. However, their Brāhmanism absorbed much of the speculative systems of latter day Buddhism, just as their perceptive wisdom. 'Śiva Bhakti' was only regenerated and resuscitated by the Nāyanmārs. As a tradition it dates back as far as the 2nd century B.C., sung in the Tōl-kāppiyam. His epithet as 'Śiva' however, is not observed even in the earliest Tamil epics. The Tirrukuṟṟaḷ refers to him as a personal being, transcendent, immanent, gracious and granting deliverance while his epithet occurred earliest in the Maṇimēkhalai. "Bands of wandering minstrels, bards moved from place to place singing, dancing and debating the glory of god, reaching a feverish pitch in the 7th century A.D. and still as unabated till the end of the 9th century A.D." (19) Pictorial lyrics replete with mysticism gained terra firma for the Tamil mysticism; freeing itself from the shackles of caste, creed and sex.

The corpus of Nambi Āndār Nambi's Tēvāram and Tirumūrai reveal the sum total of the Nāyanmār approach to god, which they claim from the Āgamas. There is a unanimous agreement to the 36 tattva seen therein. These importantly include the dual doctrine of Siva Śakti, cārya, jñāna, arca, yōga, kuṇḍalini and mythology.

Their object was that of realisation and love, the pathway to god and union with him without ones loss of identity. Bhakti was the pathway, the 'mārga' when compared to the Advaitic mysticism of jñāna, which says saṁsāra was the result of ignorance. The Bhakti of the Nāyanmars was like a breath of fresh air. Positive in tone and in harmony with man's basic belief in 'hope' their works illustrate 'anupaya and praptti' within the Śaiva tradition. This dimension was not a theoretical formulation alone but became an experience in practical religious life. While involving oneself in the same day to day life there comes a time when attitudes and expressions would take a different shape and change.

The Pallavas could boast of the General Sirrutonḍar. The period marked the conflict between Jainism and Śaivism, persecution miracles, trials and tribulations of the saint, till the king himself was convinced of the power of Śaivism and gave it royal patronage. A psycho analytical study, which is out of our scope would make an outstanding contribution to the mind and ethos of these saints. The best we can do here is just touch upon some of these aspects. Appar for instance in his Bhakti was always penitent. Repentance together with sin, abasement and profound humility

find expression and release by the flicker of hope and Divine Grace. His love was the mystic state of union drawing from similies and metaphors. These are in different forms of the lover, beloved, man, woman, child etc. An advantage Appar had was being of the lower Vellāla community, he was close to nature, and tempered by the ups and downs of life. The protagonists in his verses were animals, birds and nature herself besides the humans. His emphasis on the Pañcāksāra as man's right and common heritage, minus caste and creed was a great relief.

Piety must belong to the Bhakta. He believed in expression and manifestation encouraging the mantra, tantra and Āgama, which teach upāsana (worship) and Bhakti. He uses the example of the Dakṣayagña showing the difference between worship and sacrifice. Dakṣa only performed a sacrifice, not worshipped Śiva, because he only knew the mantra and not the tantra, and in the process his sacrifice was destroyed.

Tiru Jñāna Sambandar saw too the total surrender to god in the form of conjugal love. His rhetoric defeated and vanquished the Jain monks in which he was aided by the Chōḷa queen (then a Pāṇḍya princess) Śiva was

the beginning, the middle and the end. Yet he is formless, for even Brahma and Viṣṇu had to rise and penetrate in their quest for Him. There are two Śiva for Sambandar. The higher Śiva, the Ultimate Being from whom even Brahma and Viṣṇu originate. The lower form of the functionary Śiva or Rudra who helps Jīva, or embodied souls by liberating them from bondage and leading them to 'Mōksā'. The logic here is convenient. The epics and purana come in handy, while the realisations of the higher Śiva becomes a personal experience, one which does not call for any explanation to anyone. For this experience is non-definable and unconditional. One Śiva gives scope for abundant manifestations. The Tiruvilimalai says, that life is the beginning, middle and end, he is both male and female, he is the three guṇa, the four Vedas, the six tastes, the seven notes and the eight directions. The one god in his multiplicity is the central idea.

Tirumūlar in Anḍa Lingam, the Viśvapurāṇam in common parlance shares this idea of the 'one and many'. He refers to the lower Śiva as the 'Mudal uru' the first form, and beyond this is the Formless or higher Śiva 'Śivam' which Siddhāntists call the 'Aravam'. And because everything is Śiva, was there a joy in negating

Brahma and Viṣṇu? For behind, their uruvam was the Śivam or Aruvam.

Sundara followed the Sākhya mār̥ga, the path of a friend. His love for the dancer form Tiruvālūr and the Śūdra from Tiruvorriyūr are well known. Unlike human madness turned Divine, Divine madness is turned human. God is madly in love with his devotees. Deep love involves a reciprocal possession between god and devotee.

The Chōla period was blessed by Māṅṅikavāccakar who was initially a minister in the court of Varaguṇa II Pāṇḍya. The Chōla period was in the mainstream of the two centuries of continuous and gradual change in the attitude of the communities sharing certain common traits and heritage. Unlike the varied hues of light and dark, Māṅṅikavāccakar was like a cloud burst - exuberant, outspoken impassioned. He was intoxicated by the sound of the Pañcākshara. 'Sivāyanamah' as the way of release. Tiruvāccakam and Tiru-arambalakovai takes us from darkness and ignorance to Divine Illumination. The abode of Śiva was not the temple alone but every heart. The Tiruvāccakam could be traced to the Gīta where immanence and god's activity is motivated by love in the form of mercy and grace(20).

According to Māṅṅikavāccakar Śiva not only pervades all phenomena but also endows them with the finest essence(22.7). Poetic description of Śiva - and Pārvati are sheer lyrics. Pārvati was the model woman upon whose cupped breasts and creeper like waist, verses are written, which sets, the code of aesthetic taste. He viewed god not as the 'one or many' but one which apprehended a relationship between two distinct entities. An eclectic with discernment he responded to the beauties of the world as a stage set to enact the drama of love between two players, devotee and the divine lover. When phenomenal world is discerned as mystic, it is by apprehension through 'ecstasy that melts of devotional love'. The eternal and divine are apprehended and given form.

The Tiruvāccakam shows the curious blend of nature and woman that can set the heart beats racing. They are mediations between the sacred and the profane. The sensitivity of Māṅṅikavāccakar to natural environment where the phenomenal world and the women are positive qualities is reflected in his verses(21). In his concept of the phenomenal world, both the sensory experience and nature are important. Thus when a lyric or object is made tangible it is imbued with the sacred. It

is "not because they are transcendent but rather, immanent powers present in objects encountered every day and involved in every aspect of ordinary life"(22).

The language or literary cadence of this feature can be caught from his prototype of the woman. She is usually described as fecund, voluptuous with rich black hair and eyes, full breasts and narrow waist. To be more precise the Tiruvāççakam Poṭri-th-Tiruvāhaval (4.30 to 37) describes rich black tresses and red lips, pearly teeth, tender breasts - close set, buxom, flourishing, brimming over, irradiant thrust forward, the waist wearying with the weight of carrying them. Upturned but coming to the waist so closed together that not even the rib of a palm leaf could go between them(23). Her wiles are compared with fawn like glances(5:40). By the time one takes a pause the sensitive minded surely crosses over from human anatomy into the realm of the extraordinary idealised form - which becomes worthy of worship. Such a form is placed in conjunction with Śiva. For instance while composing the Gajasamhāra image, he places a very frightened goddess likened to a delicate creeper in contrast to the violent horrific form of Śiva. The drama is accentuated and shows the misappropriateness of such violence

in the presence of such a delicate feminine being (6:19). This again brings to mind the peculiar Tamil term 'Anāñku' which denotes the basic power that resides in the mature females specially her breasts and 'loins. Hart calls this the 'immanence of the sacred' in Tamilnāḍu. The Tamils sensed a 'numinous quality' surrounding the female fertility. Anāñku is potentially dangerous and has to be kept under control(24). An extension of this thought is made possible by (86:251) which it makes it quite possible that in early Tamil literature man corresponds to nature whereas woman to culture(25). The ninth hymn extols the virtue grace and even ornament of the woman. Goddess - in her - abundant swelling breasts(9:8) eyes streaked like flowers.....Venus like mounds resembling cobrahoods(9:12); waists like lightening.....gold ornamented breasts(9:13). An amazing sense that defines the 'classic' that essentially belonged to a period.

In Parvati he saw the ideal feminine and in Śiva the male - but of various forms. The myth provides a lesson here. As Tripurāntaka he releases one from bondage. Gaṅgādhara is the saviour aspect, Andhaka the aruḷ-grace, Lingōdbhava - the external quest for Śiva, Dakṣināmūrti and Mahāyōgi the teacher ascetic

aspect. An importantly Ardhanāri visualises Śiva as the mother to the Śaiva Siddhānta notion of Aruṣākti. i.e. god's grace conceived as a feminine power. As 'ammai and appan' he is androgynous. Here he is one in whom all the polarities co-inhere "the coincident oppositorium par excellence. As Ardhanāri he integrates the basic human polarity, that of sexual difference. The god is integrated and not a fragmentation. He is unity and ultimate possibility - Experience of man's original nature, his essence an essence which includes both the masculine and feminine dimensions"(26).

Lingōdbhava highlights the sectarian hierarchy. For Śiva who could even reveal and continue his gracious manifestation even for undeserving bhaktas, is emphasised. If he could reveal willingly to even Brahma and Viṣṇu(27). And in the process he is the 'Universe! Both this and the Ardhanāri aspect find a prominent place in the Chōḷa temples during the Āditya I and Parāntaka I phase onwards.

The kernel in Maṇikavaṇṇakar is the Bhakti that melts one in his love of Śiva. This 'uruku' perhaps was transmuted in stone and bronze to ripe perfection.

II.6 ŚAIVA SIDDHĀNTA

The quintessence of Śaiva Siddhānta is found in the hymns of the Nayanmars. The Chōḷa period saw in the Periyapurāṇam and Tirumūrai a mature efflorescence of the Siddhānta philosophy. What we have thus far seen as the relationship between man and god simplified, but was a school of thought. They were the Bhakti, Gñāna and Śivagñāna Bōdham. The same relationship was metaphorically the Paśú, Pati and Pāsam - the animal souls, Śiva and the human bondage. The world is 'real' and avers that it requires a material cause - Śakti, and an efficient cause-God. This god is not an abstraction but one who has chosen to enter into intimate relations with the human soul. This approach is seen in, "the problems of philosophy(as) not accidental but necessarily grounded in the nature of human experience"(28). The Siddiyar theory in its every first sutra observes the constituent parts of the universe as he, she and it. These are subject to states of emergence, stay and absorption in regular order. There is a creator who causes all this. The diverse and finite require this creator who is responsible for the manifestation, maintenance and withdrawal. The universe is cognitive and conative. There are also two types of creators - the directed and directing i.e. the example

of potter and the one who directs the potter. Experience need not be contrary to reason, but rather in conformity with it. This stand of the Siddhanta is a positively encouraging factor, whereby the devotee is made to feel in a relatively comfortable position. The only major condition that brooks no question is will, faith and spiritual vision must be uninhibitedly followed by the devotee. This is important because in the final sense - he is beyond scripture, word, mind and logic. Only grace leads us to realisation. The 'personal' plays a major role here; and so does ones help to oneself.

Unlike the Advaitin he feels god is not a mere logical formula or disinterested spectator but is approachable. By prayer, worship and spirituality; through lower, middle and higher prayer; through prayer for the self-intercessory and the perfect surrender to his will; he will respond to a devotee. Siva the formless will manifest himself for his devotees. Thus his manifestations as Umā Mahēśvara and Kāmāri represent bliss and anger; Dakśināmūrti and Nāṭarāja the yogic teacher and the one with the five fold function - of creation, maintenance, destruction, obscuration and grace (release). These are symbolised by the damāru, abhaya hasta,

agni, the foot pressing down and then the lifted foot. The Śiva Linga too is both form and no form. As a mark it is form and otherwise the formless. With such belief release is possible. The Tamil tāl (feet) and talai (head) combine as tāḍ ai - which is the infinite union between god and soul. Realisation is a religious experience, charged with emotional distress. To reach spiritual realm it may and usually does tread through the gross or tactile. The progress of a being from the physical to the spiritual plane are best described as indriyakkāṭchi - the vision of the senses, mannadukkāṭchi - vision of the mind, yōgakkāṭchi - vision by yoga and jñānakkāṭchi - vision by jñāna. This is a progress from the level of sense intellect-control - concentration and communication - wisdom or realisation.

The personal god who is Nirguṇa by grace falls within the sphere of guṇa and thus shows his different apparitions of the personal forms of the formless. The chief apparition that have evolved in the cosmic universe are nine - the Śivam, Śakti, Bindu, Nādam, Sadāśivam, Māhēśvaram Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahma each more subtle than the other and comprehensive too, with other aspects.

II.7 VYAVAHĀRIKA

The nature of religious experience and enquiry was varied. A branch of philosophic enquiry which was popular specially between the seventh and tenth century was the Vyavahārika. A very limited explanation is that Vyavahārika means 'real' as opposed to pratibhāsika - or illusion, or the real as opposed to the ideal; or practical existence as opposed to paramārthika which is Advaita Vēdānta making room for no second reality. It was empirical usage and all that related to or constituted the empirical world. The world of phenomena is useful because it provides a location, means for striving and gaining release from the root cause 'nescience' (avidhya).

Indian philosophy has the triple doctrine of reality 'satta trāividhya' which are paramārthika - Absolute Reality, Vyavahārika - Empirical Reality and pratibhāsika - Apparent Reality. "Vyavahārika" is a recognition of the efficient character of the realm of duality. It is the scene of natural activity as well as the field of preparation for release from bondage(29).

The scope of Vyavahārika constituted the personal god (Īśvara), the individual soul (jīva) and the physical

world (jagat) and their relationship. But there is 'avidhya' everywhere, which must be overcome. According to T.N. Ramachandran "the natural man has his limits of vision. The motives which commonly guide his urges are hardly conducive to his emancipation. He chooses his ends for their outward glamour and not for the real inner..... A man may worship God for the sake of such ends as wealth and progeny. His object in seeking knowledge may be to increase his creature comforts. And he may look upon art as a means to personal delictions. Ends such as these constitute what the Upanishads call prēyas (what is pleasing) as distinguished from śrēyas (what is good)"(30).

To achieve and satisfy these urges upasana or meditation is recommended. This intellectual training through a deity or scripture, uninterrupted till one identifies with it is well known. Meditation - steady worship - continuous thought is a must. The object of meditation may be anything from a blade of grass to some deity or Brahman. Upāsana is thus a preparation for both 'prēyas and śrēyas'. Since it consists of kinship with an object, an apparent conflict is that anything that is object oriented is desire. Desire was bondage and personal gratification. Thus a requisite is the renounce-

ment of desire. The penultimate stage is upāsana on the Saguna Brahman, and the Ultimate is on the Nirguna Brahman. It is obvious the Saguna aspect is more accessible. Since the ultimate notion of Brahman is abstract symbols 'pratika' and images 'pratima' are recommended to aid meditation. This is reflected in Śaṅkara's "Ekāṃpe he Brahma vibhūti bhedaḥ anēkadha upasyate....." Brahman is one but can be meditated in several ways(31). These are basically religious concessions, common to both Vyavahārika and Bhakti. Both recommend the constant indwelling in the mind, and contemplation of the object of love, desire and reverence. Their difference is, one is exercise of will, the other suffusion of love and emotional attitude. One is volitional effort the other instinctive and spontaneous. Various Upanishads tells us meditation of Saguna Brahman become close to Bhakti(32). In the Purāṇa specially Śrīmad Bhāgavata three types of Bhakti, symbolic (pratika), image (pratima) and pure (śuddha) without any of these can be traced to their corresponding upasanas.

Vyavahārika defines religion in two senses - one as an entire course of practical discipline 'sādhana' to attain moksa..... and the popular to Bhakti or devotion to a personal god..... the devotional and aesthetic

discipline train the emotional side of man's nature, just as the ethical discipline trains his active nature, meditative, the imaginative and the intellectual"(33). Love too has two levels of the finite and infinite—from the gross to-sublime. However, the masses generally belong to the realms of the physical. The Saguna aspect and personal god leads to the 'chosen diety' or 'ista devata'.

Thus Vyavahārika does say god is formless, infinite and Nirguṇa but can be brought to the personal or Saguna through upāsana and Bhakti. Love for the Saguna is the aparā or lower bhakti or vaidhi bhakti following regulations or vidhi . These could be through icon, festival, ritual ceremony prayers etc. with the aid of a pratika or pratima.

The significance of aesthetic experience in Vyavahārika becomes important. How does one respond to the Nirguna and Saguna aspects of religion. Pañcadesī of Vidhyāraṇya had coined Visayānanda - the lowest degree of pleasure derived from the senses and vāsanānda - the higher pleasure resulting from the residual impressions left by a non sensuous enjoyment. The content of aesthetic experience consists of certain types of things

in nature and art. They are parts of the physical world or ideal creations based on the facts of nature. They lose value if they do not imply a subject distinct from them to appreciate them. Avidya can be nullified only by vidhya or jñāna - which is the sole reality of Brahman. Brahman leads to beatitude and peace. Art and nature although in the empirical plane act as symbol of the Brahman. Being perceivable by the senses they evoke 'ānanda' beyond which the inward eye can realise(34). The object provides the stimulus, there is a continuity of fulfilment or a cessation occurs which again puts us back into the realm of gross existence. The final experience leaves no barriers, no stimuli, no response, nothing else but 'Ātman'(35). And for the one who has tasted this there is no return to the 'vortex of desire activity and disappointment'. Thus aesthetic enjoyment falls just short of the state of Mokṣā in degree only and not in kind.

Be it Vyavahārika, Advaita, Sāṅkhya one thing that stands out clear is that art experience is something more than common life which is dominated by our narrow selves, it is alaukika - not of this world, but causes one for that moment to become sahr̥daya - compassionate and willing. It was man's urge for a fulfilment partial or total.

II.8 MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION

In its broadest sense mythology is :

"A dramatic short hand record of certain memorable occurrences, invasions, migrations, dynastic changes, admission and propagation of foreign cults and social reforms"(36). It is a great store house of knowledge historical, geographical and anthropological. The word implies the existence of supernatural and superior forces which differ from ordinary mortals. These forces exercise directly or indirectly either a malavolent or benign experience. Keesing with remarkable perception states that "humans not only weave intricate webs of custom that regulate and order their social lives. They also spin out wider designs of the universe, the forces that govern it and their place in it. Religious beliefs and rituals are basic in these designs. So too are fundamental premises about the way things and events are interrelated; the nature of time and space, the way the world is and the way it should be"(37).

In common parlance religion and myth go side by side. Tyler's belief in spiritual beings, Spiro and Goody's extension of social relations to super human beings or forces and Durkheim's special quality of sacredness are markers that separate the religious from the secular.

Mythology posit agencies or powers in the universe, and how they relate to humans. Their intervention in all human activities become subjects of narration in oral, musical, scriptural or visual modes. In short they govern specific beliefs and conduct of mankind.

Mythology functions as a part of religion to explain the whys, hows and whereofs. They validate human action, and reinforce the mind to cope up with practically all eventualities. They give a sense of order and meaning to an otherwise complex social structure. It is an important factor that intensifies and heightens the shared experience of a society of beings. Clifford Geertz calls this "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic"(38). The temple was most conducive for the perpetuation of mythology which are but examples created out of and for the benefit of man. The temple is 'a model of' and 'a model for' the people, and is central to human experience. They codify the present, a complete and stable view that sustains life.

Since mythology support human beliefs and are projections or distortions of the human psyche. They give ample scope for and facility to the freedom of expression. One can translate, extend and adapt. It is a language, a communication which was orally transmitted and visually recognised. Its operational value is timeless its substance intact. Any change in style or syntax does not null it. Infact an advantage is its capacity to function at various levels which is thus effectivel for mass communication. Depending on the level and stature of human needs it has the power of metamorphosis, "its growth is a continuous process while its structure remains discontinuous". To perpetuate and preserve the myth is ritual which is its dramatic illustration whereby they repeat the pattern again and again. If myth is at the conceptual level, the ritual on the level of action.

Tamiḷ Nāḍu has a fountainhead of local myths and legends. Deriving from pan-Indian myths, they are a regional variant, with a predeliction for localisation. Diachronic as well as synchronic in structure they become historical and time bound.

The peculiar trait of the Tamil psyche perhaps was the partial abjectness to the corpus of mythology and

culture that came down as a part of the Dravidian accretion. A crisis in identity was best overcome by the imaginative reconstruction of these same things locally and attached to individual shrines. The levels change, and usually revolve round the 'locale'. It may depend further on eco-geographic, cosmologic and psychological reconstructions. This is transformation and making both the myth and its parent place unique for each other. Shulman calls these the subcategories of the Mahāpurāṇa. "Often a pattern will be general throughout South India, while its individual expressions will be specifically located, thus the idea that the deity must have a second..... Brāhmanism by its unifying and fertilising force created a single and distinctive system of Tamil mythology incorporated in literary texts composed over a period of years"(39).

Puranic and autochthonic in nature they combine and intermingle as the great and little traditions together. In his study of myth Franz ~~Boas~~ says it would seem that the mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again and that the new worlds were built from fragments. The dichotomy, caused by contradictions of nature, culture and experience imply a continuous evolution of it, and the Chōḷa period is only somewhere a spot in this movement or evolution.

It was specially in the Chōḷa period that along side the Bhakti movement the potential of myth and mythology was exploited. The narrative and abstract levels of the myth were brought into sharp focus in every individual shrine and local cult. The poets often allude to prominent features of the local cult, and in this way they sometimes offer clues to the original basis of the local myths. In case there is a very forceful change seen in a symbol which is in conflict with the other factors one can suspect some sort of a historical change.

The Bhakti movement oriented towards life in this world preserves a sense of balance and order. It encourages the extolling of the 'Divine Cosmic' drama. It saw the hand of the divine in all aspects of life; and the temple was sacrosanct. The power of the shrine and its site becomes absolute, a locus of release. A place 'apart' timeless and idealised opposed to Kālī, the personification of time and evil. The Chōḷa phase saw a sprouting of numerous temples to fulfil this deep urge. Henotheistic in nature, every temple and its deity was supreme. It saw a plurality of the gods.

The Chōḷa just emerging as a forceful political power possessed by an acute religious and aesthetic sense

saw it befitting for their land to abound in temples. Tracts of land were already worshipped from the Early Saṅgam. Land was eulogised as a source of life and livelihood. The spirits as Mēyon, Sēyon Koṛṛavai etc. inhered in a place and were immanent. With the local and the purāṇic intermingling it was not surprising to see a crop of temples in its countryside. An interesting aspect which is more special to Chōḷa is that besides its oral tradition the local sthalapurāṇa was given maximum prominence. It was like a proclamation, irresistible to the devotee. By word of mouth the fame spread far. However, it appears that as small village temples they possibly needed publicity for support. The use of visual mythology was perhaps scant for economic reasons, and thus often times a temple may represent certain features of ornamentation that involved less economic expenditure. Perhaps lack of funds, donation and employment of craftsmen have added to this quiescence in style. Often times we come across lesser known temples which have very little narrative sculptures. Apart from a fixed iconographic programme, there are no mythological aspects of the deity represented. These will be seen in the sculpture section. It can also be added that the mainstay of mythology was more oral in tradition, because of which the nuances of spoken

language emerged with greater force and clarity. Ambivalent, lyrical and carried from place to place by spiritual bards they had a unique and privileged status. They were perhaps on the tip of every tongue - man, woman, and child. Awareness did not need further elaboration of a myth. The devotee stepped into the temple carrying with him the memory of myth. Infact he was conditioned and thereby conducive to relating the narrative content of his myths to the related symnopic sculpture. To preserve its aura of dignity, semi detachment and visual mystery, the sculptures were never so flagrant. The level of temple sculpture naturally changed. It can be seen and related with; it can be seen and pondered over; it can be most importantly perceived beyond its visual quality. This is the overflow of the audio and the restraint in the visual. The nature of the oral tradition was repetition, and could over a period of time and the singer's will keep on variating. The sculptor with his medium could effect within all the limitations imposed on him. A Chola sculpture in my opinion is a subtle solution. In its form its resolves "the devious statements of the myth people can recognise indirectly what it would be difficult to admit openly and yet what is patently clear to all and sundry that the ideal is not attainable.

Myth makes explicit their experience of contradictoriness of reality"(40). The conjecture is that a sculpture, by the way it stands in poise balances the total religious fervour from falling into a suffocating excess. It was once in a lifetime creation, that could not be made and remade, and thus required great caution in its execution. If effected in infinite interplay between the mind and itself.

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