Chapter 4

“Whose God is the Greatest of All?”

Engaging with other Faiths

i) Hypothesis

The mutual rivalry between the followers of Viṣṇu and Śiva, with each set claiming preeminence for their own Lord is too well-known to be elaborated. The sectarian Purāṇas abound with legends in which the deity revered in each case is shown to have humbled the other beyond recovery. This is a running theme in the Tamil Vaiṣṇava literature too, whether it be the texts produced by the ācāryas, or the earlier hymns of the saints. A reflection of the same can be found in the Śaiva canon, i.e., the Tevāram hymns and Tirumurai as well. In fact, the ninth verse of every poem of ten verses of the Nāyaṇār, Sambandar, mocks Brahma and Viṣṇu by referring to the myth wherein Śiva assumed the form of a fire-linga without beginning or end to humble the two gods who were apparently engaged in a vain contest to establish their relative superiority.⁵ Champakalakshmi has meticulously elaborated the relationship of the Cola state with developments in Śaivism.² I have considered above³ that the contemporaneous development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the Cola age when royal patronage was directed largely towards Śaiva institutions centred particularly on the temple at Chidambaram, does suggest the possibility that it was circumstances on the ground which actually dictated royal policy rather than imperial agency unilaterally influencing developments in the religious sphere. It would however be interesting to examine whether this rivalry in the Tamil case can be shown to be directly affected by the Colas’ adoption of the Śaiva faith as a legitimating factor. A comparison of the contexts and ways in which Śiva and his devotees are mentioned in the Āḻvār’s hymns and in the later texts can provide a clue to any shift in this imaging. While a detailed study of the Śaiva canon to reconstruct the image that Śiva’s followers had of Viṣṇu and his bhaktas is beyond the scope of this work, I will try and examine some of the better known Śaiva legends peculiar to the Tamil region.

Almost as well known as the stories illustrating the contests between Śiva and Viṣṇu is the legend of the defeat of the Buddhists by Śankarācārya, a Nambūdiri brāhmaṇa,⁴ in a scholarly debate.⁵ It is of course impossible to establish whether Śankara met and debated with the

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³ See Chapter 1, Introduction.
⁴ TV Mahalingam, Readings in South Indian History. BR Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1977, p. 226.
Buddhists, leave alone whether he ‘defeated’ them. However that may be, what is crucial in this legend is the fact that the brahmānas and the Buddhists were involved in a critical battle for patronage. The later history of the subcontinent reveals that the former were largely successful in this attempt, but in the middle and in the second half of the first millennium CE, when merchant groups were lavishly patronising the sangha, this could well have seemed a desperate battle for survival for the brahmānas. Consequently, it is not surprising that Śrīvaisṇava literature is replete with vituperative comments on the Bauddhas and the Śramaṇas.

It has been suggested that the ideology of bhakti was suited to the needs of state formation and was used extensively by the important reigning houses of Tamil Nadu during the period of this study. The fact that the efflorescence of the bhakti movement coincided with the rise of the Pallava state in the 6th-7th centuries does suggest the possibility of some relationship between the two. It has also been argued that “the Jaina conception of authority and kingship was less adequate than the ritual kingship of the brahmanical tradition”. However, unless it can be convincingly demonstrated that Buddhism and Jainism (as against brahmanical Hinduism of which bhakti is said to be an agent, and which is said to have been the religion of the towns as against brahmanical Hinduism which was dominant in the agricultural zones, were in any way unsuitable to the rise of states, the hypothesis will remain questionable. It is not our concern here to determine whether or not Buddhism and Jainism were actually unsuited to serve as instruments of consolidation for emergent state systems. What I shall attempt to do is to carefully examine exactly how the Jainas and the Buddhists are pictured in the saints’ hymns and in the later Tamil and Mani-pravāla texts, and compare them. This exercise will be contextualised by the inscriptive evidence for patronage to Buddhists and Jainas in both periods. I will try to discover if the diminished ‘threat’ of the Buddhists by the early centuries of the second millennium in any way diluted the hostility in their representation in contemporary Śrīvaisṇava literature, and, if not, why this was so. It is important to remember

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6 Here I am simply using ‘shorthand’ for the Ālvārs’ hymns and the Tamil and Mani-pravāla texts of the ācāryas.
8 Burton Stein, All the King’s Mana: Perspectives on Kingship in Medieval South India, New Era Publications, Madras, 1984, p. 27.
9 See Chapter 3-ii.
that by the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the greatest challenge to the Śrīvaiśṇavas came not from the 'heterodox' faiths but from the Śaivas.

Lastly, I will also look at the representation of Muslims in Śrīvaiśṇava literature. Arab traders are known to have established trade links with the Malabar Coast as early as the middle of the first millennium CE; indeed the name, Malabar, itself seems to have been derived from Ma'bar, Arabic for passage.\textsuperscript{11} Settlements of Arabs in the littoral tracts of the Tamil region and of native converts to Islam date to at least the seventh century.\textsuperscript{12} Our examination of the hymns of the Āḷvārs has failed to produce any reference to Islam, but the same cannot be said of the later literature. I suggest that in the \textit{bhakti} period, the presence of Islam in the Tamil region was too marginal to claim attention. In the early half of the second millennium however, some negotiation with this new faith was called for. An important story in the hagiographies gives us a clue to these tensions and the resultant accommodations.

\textbf{ii) Historiography}

Ronald Inden has suggested that Buddhism was the religion of the "Indian imperial kingdoms from the time of Aśoka until the end of the seventh century, during which time Buddhism also became the major cosmopolitan religion of much of Asia".\textsuperscript{13} Further, he attributes the change from the seventh century to external causes at least as much if not more than to internal developments.\textsuperscript{14} The expansion of imperial polities in West Asia under the aegis of nascent Islam, and the displacement of Buddhism by Islam as the great cosmopolitan religion of Asia are said to have precipitated internal changes such as the contraction of India’s horizon in the north and west and consequent expansion into South East Asia. The ascendance of south India and the rise of five new imperial polities, viz, the Pāla, Pratihāra, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, Pallava and Pāṇṭiya, and the establishment in all of these (save the Pāla) of forms of Hindu image worship as the central cults of their empires are said to have followed.\textsuperscript{15} I find it difficult to accept the deterministic approach evidenced here,\textsuperscript{16} or to be able to class the period from Aśoka down to

\textsuperscript{11} S Krishnaswami Aiyangar, \textit{South India and her Muhammadan Invaders}, S Chand & Co. (Pvt) Ltd, New Delhi, 1921, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{12} Aiyangar, ibid, pp. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{13} Ronald Inden, \textit{Text and Practice}, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{14} Inden, ibid, pp. 95-96.
\textsuperscript{15} Inden, ibid, pp. 95-96.
\textsuperscript{16} Interestingly, the running theme of Inden’s work seems to be an attack on the determinism of both Orientalist and Positivist writing on Indian history, both of which he suggests are mirror images of each other.
Harṣa as the Buddhist age on the pattern of an earlier generation of Indian historians who divided the history of India into Hindu, Muslim and British ages. Inden further suggests that the earlier śrauta rituals such as aśvamedha were replaced by the practice of granting agrahāras to brāhmaṇas by rulers, and that the latter practice evolved as a parallel to the Buddhist concept of the mahādāna. There is reason to question this assumption since land grants to brāhmaṇas have been linked to the attempt to extend the cultivated area, besides which, land grants were by no means limited to brāhmaṇas/āgrahāra aimed towards the acquisition of religious merit. There is evidence of land grants being made by the Sātavāhanas and Kuśāṇas to officials, and for the establishment of kaṭakas or military camps. Champakalakshmi has pointed out that brahmadeyas were a major institution of agrarian expansion and organisation, and have therefore been the focus of all studies in agrarian history, particularly in south India. However, Inden’s arguments provide some insights into our problem. If the grant of land to brāhmaṇas can be seen as a parallel to gift-giving to the Buddhist monk/ sangha, a practice recommended by Buddhism in opposition to the violent and destructive Vedic sacrifice and, as productive of religious merit, then the struggle for patronage seen in our period of study takes on a doubly interesting colour. In a study of the Raichur Doab area of Karnataka between the 10th-11th centuries CE, it was noticed that whereas the main ruling family members were patrons of Jainism, the local chiefs were strong patrons of Śaivism. Another study of the western Deccan that compared a sample of inscriptions from the reign of the Cālukyas of Bāḍāmi (6th-8th centuries) with one of the Cālukyas of Kālīyānī (10th-12th centuries) found that in the earlier phase, the royal family were prominent as donors while in the second phase, the names of local chiefs and mercantile communities were significant.

17 Inden does not use such a term but the above reference does point in the direction, despite his modification of the meta-framework with 'regional polities wherein Hinduism was dominant'.
18 Ronald Inden, Text and Practice, op cit., pp. 93-94.
22 Aloka Parasher-Sen. Personal communication, based on her ongoing, unpublished research.
take on roles traditionally associated with the state, i.e., they began to assign taxes, collect revenues, and get land cultivated.\textsuperscript{24} The growth in the politico-economic power of the temple is thus clearly not limited to establishments of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava faiths, but is something that, in the period of our study, cut across sectarian considerations.

Hart believes that the Pallava kings must have been impressed by the power and the reach of control of the Guptas, and seeing that traditional South Indian organisation gave them no opportunity to acquire such power, attempted to pass over control of the nuclear areas to brāhmaṇas and landlords.\textsuperscript{25} The reasons he gives for this choice is that the brāhmaṇas not only were a non-militaristic group with a vested interest in stability, but that they were universally respected as Hinduism was coming to be increasingly adopted by the common people and that the brāhmaṇas represented an alien element among the extremely militaristic native aristocracy.\textsuperscript{26} It is however difficult for us to see why other cultivating groups would not have a similar vested interest in stability. Nor is it clear why alien elements should be patronised by rulers trying to build stronger bases. More crucially, brāhmaṇas could scarcely be considered an alien element in the Tamil society of Pallava times, considering that they are mentioned frequently in even the Sangam texts.

Champakalakshmi has suggested that though the bhakti movement was often characterised as a protest against caste hierarchy, it was primarily pitched against the ‘heterodox’ Buddhist and Jaina sects’.\textsuperscript{27} Further, ‘Appar and Sundarar were propagating bhakti in a situation of conflict and rivalry for patronage against the Jainas and Buddhists who were influential in royal and urban centres’.\textsuperscript{28} She locates the centres of this conflict between the ‘heterodox’ and ‘orthodox’ faiths in the Tamil land in Kāṇcipuram and Madurai, the capitals of the Pallavas and Pāṇṭiyas respectively.\textsuperscript{29} Dehejia too notes that that Tamil Śaiva saints, in addition to living a life engrossed in Śiva, worked actively for the growth of Śaivism and Śiva bhakti. This

\textsuperscript{24} A Aruna, “Religious Patronage and Identity Formation” op cit, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{26} Hart, ibid, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{29} Champakalakshmi, ibid, pp. 204-205.
involved them in a strenuous debate with the Jaina and Buddhists.\textsuperscript{30} MN Rajesh suggests that the emergent \textit{bhakti} cults appropriated some Buddhist and Jaina ideals such as that of equality of all before God and salvation for all irrespective of caste and creed.\textsuperscript{31} While it is debatable whether Jaina or Buddhist preceptors ever spelled out the notion of equality of all, leave alone the very notion of ‘God’ or of ‘salvation’, it is indeed worth considering that the spread and prevalence of the heterodox faiths in the populace must have made it incumbent upon any competing religious system to jettison, or at least modify, the exclusivity and hierarchy that characterised brahmanical Hinduism. We have already seen—in the case of Śrīvaiśñavism—that this was, however, as much a function of the later development of the sect as of the \textit{bhakti} movement itself.\textsuperscript{32}

George Spencer has argued that one can find in the ‘fanciful lore’ around the \textit{bhakti} saints, an ‘authentic core of these sectarian traditions which preserves memories of a spiritual crisis... centred upon the Pallava and Pāṇḍya royal courts where rivalries among religious elites for royal patronage were most intense’.\textsuperscript{33} Selecting from the Śaiva hagiographies stories where one or the other Nāyānār was involved in conflict with the Jaina, Dehejia argues that the period of the ‘\textit{bhakti} movement’ in Tamil Nadu saw the gradual growth of an aggressive and overbearing attitude on the part of the Jaina.\textsuperscript{34} Analyses like the latter—apart from overlooking the aggression that the \textit{bhakti} saints in these tales palpably display towards the JAINA and Buddhists—assume that the hagiographies are ‘true’ accounts which, I have argued, is far from the case. Rather, I suggest that these stories depict the anxieties of the brahmanical composers of the \textit{Gpp} and the \textit{Pēriya Purāṇam} regarding the influence of the JAINA which, considering the circumstances on the ground, were, as I shall demonstrate, very likely considerably disproportionate to the actual threat.

\textbf{iii) Evidence from the hagiographies}

\textbf{a) An episode from the Tirumankai Ālvar \textit{vaibhavam}}

In Chapter 3, we saw how Tirumankai Ālvar abstracted a golden image of the Buddha from the \textit{vīhāra} in Nāgapatṭīnām. The \textit{Divya Sūri Caritam} account, while less involved in the

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\textsuperscript{32} See Chapter 3-iv.
\textsuperscript{34} Dehejia, \textit{Slaves of the Lord}, op cit., p. 27.
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controversies between the Tēnkalai and Vaṭakalai sects, seems to us, more deeply disputatious with regard to non-Vaiṣṇava, and especially, ‘heterodox’ faiths. Thus, when the Tamil hagiographies close their accounts with the Āḻvār’s success in procuring the image, the DSC elaborates the legal dispute that ensued when the Buddhists returning after a year to claim their property against the promissory note, got a mere finger of gold. The Buddhists are said to have dragged Parakāla to the king of Niculāpuris35 who was displeased with him and feared that his kingdom would not prosper (if he allowed injustice). Parakāla however convinced him that no sin incurred on one who destroyed an image in a temple established by non-Vedic means. When the king countered that it was the Lord who had appeared in an avatāra as the Buddha, Parakāla agreed that He had indeed done so, in order to destroy the mandala of Tripūrasura.36 The Lord, he stated, inheres in everything even as oil inheres in tila (sesame seed). Further, the relationship of the Lord to Vedāhyā mata, i.e., faiths outside the pale of the Vedas, was as that of a household fire to a corpse and of a menstruating mother to a son. The Lord, Parakāla continued, had said that those who worship Him in temples made by non-Vedic means disobey His command37—a rare (and significant) display of assertion indeed, from an otherwise easy-going and forgiving God! Finally, Parakāla engaged in debate with the Buddhists and routed them using the sharp weapons of pure sāstra.38

The account of Rāmānuja is by far the longest in all the three hagiographies, in fact longer alone than the stories of all twelve Āḻvārs put together. I will naturally present it here in a highly condensed form.

b) Ilaiyāḻvār39 Vaibhavam

One of the close disciples of Yāmunācārya, Pēriya Tirumalai Nampi, had two sisters. The elder of them, Bhūmi Pirāṭṭiyār was married to Āsuri Keśava Pērumāl of Sripurumbudur, a

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35 Site of Uttamar Koyil, one of the Vaiṣṇava divya deśas, just outside Tiruccirāpaḷli.
36 The reference is unclear; it is Śiva who is supposed to have destroyed Tripūrasura. Not only are no Vaiṣṇava associations known, these hagiographies come too late in the day for the Hari-hara amalgam that is seen occasionally in the hymns (Mūtal Tiruvantādi 5, Mūnṟām Tiruvantādi 63, Tiruvāyūmōli 1.3.7 etc), where the deeds of both gods are praised, Śiva being seen as a manifestation of Nārāyaṇa, and his glories, therefore, devolving on the latter.
37 DSC, sarga: 14, verses 79-86.
38 DSC, sarga: 14, verse 87.
39 Rāmānuja. The hagiographies refer to the greatest of the Śrīvaiṣṇava preceptors by a number of names, but Ilaiyāḻvār and Uṭaiyavar are the commonest. Ilai means younger, and Āḻvār, as we have seen above, is a term of reverence; the name is a reference to Lakṣmaṇa, the younger brother of Rāma, literally, Rāma+ anuja, who is also believed, in Tamil tradition, to have been an incarnation of Śeṣa/Ananta. Uṭaiyavar is one who possesses.
dikṣitar (Vedic brāhmaṇa), of the Somayāji branch and the younger, Pēriya Pirāṭṭiyār,40 to Kamalanayana Bhaṭṭar of Madhuramangalam.41 Just as the Lord was born to Kausalyā and Devaki, so Ananta, the serpent in whose coils the Lord sleeps in the milk ocean, was born to Bhūmi Pirāṭṭi to destroy the darkness of the Kali age, in Saka 939 (1017 CE). All the prescribed samskāras were performed for the child who was named Lākṣmana. Meanwhile, Pēriya Pirāṭṭi gave birth to a baby boy too, named Govinda Bhaṭṭar. The cousins began their study of Vedanta in Kāṇcipuram under a reputed Advaitin scholar called Yādava Prakāśa. Once, explicating the phrase, “satyam jīnānam anantam brahma” from the Taittiriya Upaniṣad, the tutor said satyam was that which denied momentary nature, jīnānam, that which was not soul-less, anantam, that which was not limited, and that these were characteristic of the cetana vyāvratti, i.e., sentient beings. He was offended when Rāmānuja asked him for the meaning of brahma. Another time, when Rāmānuja was massaging his guru with oil, Yādava, in explaining the phrase, “yathā kapyāsam puṇḍarikam evam aksini” bisected the conjugate word, kapyāsam to mean ‘monkey- like’. Rāmānuja was deeply grieved, and his hot tears fell on the guru’s thigh. On being asked what the matter was, he offered that the correct padayojana, (division of phrase), was kam+ pibati= kapi (i.e., the drinker of water= sun), and that āsa was an upavesana, so that the word kapyāsam meant, “lotus dependant on the sun”.42 The teacher was angered at the student’s questioning his omniscience and ordering Rāmānuja to leave, collected his other disciples to plot Rāmānuja’s end. This was imperative as Rāmānuja’s interpretation would threaten the very basis of Advaita. Though many plans were proposed for doing away with Rāmānuja, they were all attended with sin. Hence, Yādava decided to take his students on a pilgrimage to the north and have Rāmānuja drowned in the holy Mānikiṣa Ghat in Benaras. During this journey, the disciples of Yādava made sure that Govinda did not get to speak with his cousin, Rāmānuja, alone. But the opportunity did present itself at some point while they were crossing the Vindhya forests, and Rāmānuja accordingly managed to separate himself from the group. Alone in the wilderness, he found himself facing a daunting prospect. Just as he was beginning to despair, a hunter couple appeared and said they were going to Kāṇcipuram. That night, the huntress was thirsty, but her husband said he would show her a well of sweet, flawless water the next morning. Rāmānuja was saddened at not being able to help immediately. When he woke the next morning, he found the couple gone, but walking on, soon reached a well and a grove with some people. On

40 Bhūmi Pirāṭṭiyār and Pēriya Pirāṭṭiyār are Tamil forms of Bhūmi devi and Śrī devi.
41 Both Sríperumbudur and Madhuramangalam townships are close to Kāṇcipuram and Madras.
42 I am elaborating the details of this argument because it forms the basis of the Viśiṣṭadvaita understanding of the divine; indeed, it marks what Śrīvaiṣṇavas consider their crucial point of difference with Advaita.
asking them where he was, they pointed ahead and asked if he did not know the famous Puṇya koṭi vimāna.⁴³ Rāmānuja was as delighted as Rāma on hearing Hanumān’s words, “Sītā drṣṭā” upon his return from the exploratory trip to Lanka.⁴⁴ He realized that the hunter and his wife were none other than the Perarulālar and Pērundevitāyār.⁴⁵ From that day, he began the kainkarya (service) of taking water from the well near which he had found himself,⁴⁶ for the Lord’s ritual bath each morning.

Meanwhile, Yādava and his party reached their destination. One day, when bathing in the Ganga, Yādava floated a linga towards Govinda. Suddenly finding a linga in his palm, he naturally felt he had been specially graced. Upon their return to the south, Govinda went first to his birthplace to establish the linga there and then proceeded further to serve Śiva at his great temple in Kālahasti. Yādava on the other hand, returned to Kānci, and was astonished to see Rāmānuja there. He had assumed Rāmānuja had lost his way in the forests and died. Hearing Rāmānuja’s account of his miraculous delivery by the divine couple, he invited him to rejoin his gośṭhi (group of disciples).

At this time, two Śrīvaiṣṇavas from Srirangam happened to visit Kānci on pilgrimage. On their return home, they told Āḻavatār,⁴⁷ the current darśana pravartaka, (preceptor of the faith)⁴⁸ about the Lord having bestowed his viṣeṣa katākṣa (special grace) on Rāmānuja. Yāmunācārya rejoiced, and wondered if Rāmānuja was intended by the Lord to be the next darśana pravartaka. Taking permission from Pēriya Pērumāl,⁴⁹ he went with his retinue to Kānci to worship Perarulālar. While in the temple precincts, he saw Rāmānuja in Yādava Prakāśa’s party, and though refraining from speaking to him then as he was with his teacher, he gazed at the tall, well-formed youth with his lotus-eyes.⁵⁰ He then prayed to Perarulālar to bring Rāmānuja to the Vaiṣṇava fold.

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⁴³ Every temple tower has a ‘proper’ name; Puṇya koṭi vimāna is the name of the Kāñcipuram–Varadarāja Pērumāl temple’s tower. Whether the temple tower existed at the time of Rāmānuja is a moot question.
⁴⁴ Agpp, Ilaiyāḻvār Vaibhavam. The Mgpp says Rāmānuja rejoiced as Sītā had in the Aśoka vana when she saw Rāma’s signet ring.
⁴⁵ Name of the Lord and His consort in the Kānci Varadarāja Pērumāl temple.
⁴⁶ This is the well to which the hunter presumably meant to lead his wife in the morning.
⁴⁷ Honorific for Yāmunācārya.
⁴⁸ See Chapter 1, Introduction.
⁴⁹ Literally, Great God, name of the Lord of Srirangam, also called Ranganātha.
⁵⁰ This point is stressed by all the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies. Since Rāmānuja was not a direct disciple of Yāmuna, and the continuity of the lineage of preceptors is crucial, this physical link between the two preceptors is of great significance.
Around this time, the ruler’s daughter was possessed by a *brahma-rākṣasa*\(^{51}\) which refused to budge despite the efforts of the best sorcerers. Hearing that Yādava Prakāśa was a great master of *mantra*, the king sent for him. Yādava sent the royal messengers back with the message, “Tell the *brahma-rākṣasa* that I command him to leave.” When this was relayed to the *brahma-rākṣasa*, he retorted that he ordered Yādava Prakāśa to go away instead. The enraged Yādava then set out for the court with his retinue and chanted *mantras*. The *brahma-rākṣasa* replied that he was not to be frightened off by *mantras* he knew well himself. “You don’t know your previous birth or mine.” Yādava asked him if he knew, and the demon replied, “You were a reptile living on the banks of the Madhurāntakam *eri* (pond). Some Śrīvaiṣṇavas from Srirangam on their way to Kāncī stopped there to bathe and eat. You consumed their leavings spilt on the ground, and were thus blessed with birth as a *brāhmaṇa* with some *vidyā*. I was a *brāhmaṇa*. An error during the performance of a *yajña* caused me to be reborn as a *brahma-rākṣasa*.” Yādava asked him then whose word he would obey, and the demon said that he would leave if so commanded by Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja did so on Yādava’s instruction, and the demon fell at his feet saying his sins had now been removed.

When Rāmānuja again objected, some time later, to some Advaitic explanations of the Vedanta given by Yādava, the teacher told him to leave. Rāmānuja went home and asked his mother for advice—one of the rare instances where the hagiographies give such importance to a mother.\(^{52}\) Feeling that he had studied enough, she instructed him to perform *kainkarya*, service, to Perarulālar. The *Agpp* adds that his mother told him to take guidance from Tirukkacci Nampi, a *vaiśya*: a detail that the *Mgpp* naturally omits.\(^{53}\)

About this time, Āḷavantar fell ill, and anticipating his end, summoned his immediate disciples, Tiruvarangap Pērumāḷ Araiyyar,\(^{54}\) Pēriya Nampi and Tirukkoṭṭiyūr Nampi and instructed them to be steadfast in their discipline. He asked some pilgrims from Kāncī for news of Rāmānuja and was pleased to learn that the latter had quit Yādava Prakāśa and was now engaged in the service of the Lord. Grateful that the Lord had granted his wish, he despatched Pēriya Nampi to Kāncī to fetch Rāmānuja to Srirangam.

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\(^{51}\) A demon who was a *brāhmaṇa* in his previous birth.

\(^{52}\) We can safely assume Rāmānuja’s father was no more. Another such example of a strong woman is Kūrattālvān’s wife, Āṭḍāl, not to be confused with the saint-poetess.

\(^{53}\) See Chapter 3 for discussion on the relative positions of the *Agpp* and *Mgpp* on the caste question.

\(^{54}\) Āḷavantar/ Yāmunācārya’s son.
Periya Nampi placed himself strategically on the route from the sacred well to the shrine and as Ramanuja came along, he recited the Catuḥśloki and the Stotra Ratna of Ālavarār. Moved, Rāmanuja asked Nampi who had composed such extraordinary songs and expressed his desire to pay obeisance to him. Nampi immediately offered to take him to Srirangam to meet Ālavantār. When they reached Srirangam however, they were deeply grieved to find that Ālavantār was no more. Prostrating before the body which the disciples were preparing to lay in samādhi, Rāmanuja noticed that three of the master’s fingers were bent. He asked the disciples if they had always been so, and on learning that they had not, inquired further if he had had any unfulfilled wishes. The disciples said they he had been devoted to the works ofVyāsa and of Parāśara and had wanted to render homage to them. They had also heard him speak of his wish for a vyākhyāna (commentary) of the Brahmasūtras. Rāmanuja pledged that with the grace of Perarulālar and Yāmunācārya, he would fulfil these wishes. The three fingers immediately straightened. Rāmanuja returned to Kāñce to resume his kainkarya there.

Noticing Perarulālar’s particular fondness for Tirukkacci Nampi, Rāmanuja wished him to put his questions before the Lord. The Lord answered in six points, five of which constitute some of the fundamental philosophical beliefs of the Śrīvaiśñava community. The sixth was an injunction to Rāmanuja to take Periya Nampi for his guru.

We have already seen in Chapter 3 how Rāmanuja, having taken sannyāsa, came eventually to reside in Srirangam, and began to acquire the teachings that Yāmunācārya had entrusted to five of his disciples.

Meanwhile Yādava Prakāśa’s mother decided to take refuge at Rāmanuja’s feet. Her decision was attended by good omens which she communicated to her son, urging him to do the same. Yādava was dismayed knowing that as an ekadānḍa sannyāsi, lacking śikhā and yajnopavita, he was unfit. The atonement for these sins, he knew, was bhū-pradakṣina. Perarulālar

55 Rāmanuja’s major works are these commentaries that he is said to have promised at this time. This is another way by which the Śrīvaiśñava tradition links the two preceptors.  
56 The Lord is supposed to have favoured Tirukkacci Nampi with viśesa katākṣa and krpā drṣṭi  
57 The details of the interaction between Rāmanuja and Tirukkacci Nampi and the different representations of the incidents in question in the Aggp and Mgpp have been discussed in Chapter 3.  
58 Chapter 3-iv.  
59 Śrīvaiśñava ascetics are tridāṇḍi sannyāsīs, i.e., their staff is three- forked, unlike Advaita sannyāsīs’. Advaita sannyāsīs moreover, give up all marks of caste, such as the forelock of hair and sacred thread, whereas Śrīvaiśñava sannyāsīs continue to wear the same.  
60 Bhū-pradakṣina: circumambulation of the earth. Note the sanctity of the marks of brahmanism to the Śrīvaiśñava faith such that giving them up should be considered such a grave sin.
however appeared in his dream to say that circumambulating Rāmānuja was equivalent to going around the earth. Rāmānuja accepted Yādava as his disciple and gave him the new name of Govinda Jiyar. Eventually, Govinda Jiyar composed the Yatidharma Samuccaya reconciling the statements in the śāstras which are apparently but not actually contradictory.

Established as the pontiff at Srirangam, Rāmānuja sent some messengers to TiruMalai with a mission for his uncle, Pēriya Tirumalai Nampi, who was engaged in the worship of Tiruvenkaṭamunṭaiyān. Nampi immediately left for Kālahasti with a group of disciples, and came upon Govinda Bhaṭṭar, now known as Uḷḷankai Kōṭunta Nāyāṇār, collecting water from a tank for rudrākṣa abhiṣekha, reciting hymns in praise of Śiva. Nampi asked Nāyāṇār what fruit could be obtained by worshipping the one with matted hair, but Nāyāṇār only smiled in reply. A brief debate proved inconclusive too. The next day, Nampi placed himself strategically where Nāyāṇār, up in a tree plucking flowers for Śiva’s worship, could hear him recite and explicate the Tiruvāyāmōḷi to a group of his disciples. The hymns chosen were those that described Nārāyaṇa’s creating the worlds including Śiva, Brahma and Indra. Moved, Govinda threw away the linga and rudrākṣa beads and fell at Nampi’s feet regretting that he had wasted his time worshipping the one with a stinking skull in his hand. Though the other priests at the shrine of Kālahasti tried their best to dissuade him (presumably with warnings about the consequences), Govinda replied that he had no need to fear mere pīśācas when the great magician himself was beside him. After serving Pēriya Tirumalai Nampi for some years, Govinda became devoted to Rāmānuja, and was known by the name of Ḭempār.

Rāmānuja commenced studying the esoteric learning Āḷavantar had commended to five special disciples with instructions to eventually pass them on to him. From Pēriya Nampi, Rāmānuja acquired the darśārtha, i.e., the essence of the (Viśiṣṭādvaita) philosophy. We have already seen how Rāmānuja learned the rahasya granthis, or esoteric texts from Tirukkoṭṭiyūr

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61 Another name for Tiruppati.
62 He who ‘owns’ the holy mountain, Venkaṭam, i.e., the Lord of Venkaṭam.
63 Kālahasti is fairly close to Tiruppati; about an hour’s journey today. It may have been a day’s journey in older times.
64 Literally, the leader who found (a miracle) in the palm of his hand.
65 Ritual bathing of rudrākṣa, beads sacred to Śiva.
66 For want of a more suitable word. We get an exchange of esoteric phrases, on Nampi’s part intended to impress Govinda with the superiority of Viśiṣṭādvaitic principles; on Govinda’s rather non-committal. Scarcely a debate.
67 Pīśācas and pretas are the anvucaras (followers) of Śiva in the śmasāna, i.e., cremation grounds; the great magician would be Rāmānuja.
Nampi. From Tiruvarangappērumāḷ Araiayar, skilled in the recitation with music of the Tiruvāyumōḷi, Rāmānuja learnt Nammālvār’s hymns, and Tirumālaiyānṭān expounded the meanings of the same. Eventually, he made a pilgrimage to Tīrumalai where Pēriya Tīruvalai Nampi taught him the Rāmāyana.

Once a brāhmaṇa called Yajñamūrti who had debated with and defeated various scholars in Kāśi, came to Srirangam in pursuit of digvijaya. He challenged Rāmānuja to debate, saying that if the latter could establish his siddhānta (philosophy) against his own, he would become Rāmānuja’s disciple. If not, Rāmānuja would have to become his. They debated for eighteen days without either giving a quarter. On the seventeenth day, Yajñamūrti’s side seemed stronger. At night, Rāmānuja worshipped his grhārca (personal icon) of Perarūḷar, saying, “This darśana gave birth to me, will it be defeated because of me? Oh Lord, You were saguṇabrahma. If you now wish to wipe away, through this perpetrator of falsehood, all the proofs and engage in līlā, it is Your will.” He fasted that night. The Lord appeared in his dream and asked him why he despaired and if he had forgotten Ālavaṇṭār’s compositions. The next morning, Rāmānuja brought to the debate what he had learnt from Ālavaṇṭār, and easily trounced his opponent. Yajñamūrti recognized the superiority of Rāmānuja’s system, and became his disciple, assuming the name of Aruḷālap Pērumāḷ Ėmpērumāṅār. His Jñānasāra and Prameyasāra are said by the Agpp to have made the essence of the entire Vedānta comprehensible even to women and the illiterate.

Rāmānuja continued to expound the darśana in the temple at Srirangam, and composed the Śrībhāṣya, the Gitābhāṣya, the Vedāntadīpa, the Vedārtha Samgraha, the Gadya Trayi etc. The hagiographies describe a number of pilgrimages that he made. One of his earlier pilgrimages was to Kashmir where he was able to read Bodhāyana’s Vedānta Sūtras, which his disciple Kūrattālvān memorized within a day and thus helped Rāmānuja write his commentary on the same. An interesting pattern emerges from one of the most important of these pilgrimages. He is said to have worshipped the Lord in the divya deśas of

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68 See Chapter 3-iv.
69 When he left Tīruvalai, Pēriya Tīruvalai Nampi ‘gifted’ Govinda to Rāmānuja.
70 World conquering.
71 I.e., “You were to this day, recognized as being... Because of my defeat in debate, it may not be recognized any longer...”
72 The Supreme Lord with attributes. This is the fundamental difference between Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita; the latter denies that the Supreme Being has any qualities, i.e., It is nīrguṇa.
73 Proofs of being saguna
74 The accessibility of sacred knowledge for these groups is hereby underlined. See Chapter 3-iv.
TiruMāliruṇicolai, TirukKūṭantai etc in Coḷaṇāḍu, proceeded to Pāṇṭiyaṇāḍu where he visited not only the shrines of the Lord but also the birthplace of Nāṃmāḷvār in Āḷvār Tirunagaragāri, and thence to the sacred spots in Malaiṇāḍu. He is said to have journeyed along the western coast to the north where he worshipped the Lord at Mathura, Śāligrāma, Dvārāvatī, Ayodhya, Uttara Badarikāśrama, Naimiśāraṇyam, Puṣkaram, Ayppaṭī (literally, cowherd hamlet), Govardhana giri, Vṛndāvana etc. He is also said to have visited the Sarasvatī bhandāra where the goddess herself graciously received him, and after getting from him a satisfactory answer to a query on the meaning of a stanza of śruti that had long puzzled her, honoured him with the title of Bhāṣyakāra and presented him with an idol of Hayagrīva. He returned via Varanasi where he bathed in the Ganga. The Agpp adds that his bathing in the river rid her of kapāli-sparśa-dosā (the sin of having been touched by the skull-bearer). From Devaprayāg he went to Puri where he worshipped Jagannātha. Returning by way of Śrīkūrma, Ahobila and Venkaṭāma, Rāmānuja stopped with his retinue at Tiruppayṭi. Here the Śaivas were claiming that Tiruvenkaṭamʿutaiyān was actually a form of their God. Rāmānuja had the symbols of both deities, i.e., the conch and discus of Viṣṇu, and the trident and drum of Śiva, placed inside the God’s chamber at night and the doors securely locked. In the morning, the Lord was found wearing the sankha and cakra, while Śiva’s symbols were lying at His feet. Back in the Tamil land, he worshipped at the sacred shrines of Toṭaināḍu and Naṭunāḍu before returning to Srirangam. One can distinguish that this clockwise route charts out a pradakṣīṇā patha in a pan-Indian context. The texts stress the dual purpose of these extensive peregrinations: pilgrimage and debate with scholars of other faiths, often specified as Māyāvādīs (Advaitins), Śākkiyars (Buddhists) and Śramaṇas (Jainas). Needless to say, Rāmānuja is said to have defeated all his opponents.

Envious scholars of other persuasions who lacked the courage to debate with Rāmānuja carried tales to the Coḷa ruler who was himself a staunch Śaiva. He commanded all the

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75 In Śrīvaisṣṭava understanding, this is the form of Viṣṇu that gave the Vedas to the world.
76 See footnote 62 above.
77 The idol at Tiruppati is probably an anthropomorphic deity of pre-Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva origin. It was probably claimed by the early bhakti saints. Peyālvār has praised the Lord in Tiruppati as the one bearing both discus and axe, wearing both snake and sacred thread, matted hair and crown. Ref.: Muniṟam Tiruvantadi 63. This can be seen as proof either of is being a composite image, or as an instance of a bhakti saint praising his Lord as One encompassing the other, rival deity.
78 One cannot help feeling that if this incident in the hagiographies is based on the memory of an actual one, some manipulation must have been at work to prove the Vaiṣṇava identity of the idol.
79 See Chapter 5-iv.
80 Unidentified so far. Since Rāmānuja is said to have lived for 120 years, this could be any of several rulers. KAN Sastri, The Colas, University of Madras, Madras, 1935, (revised edition, reprint, 1975), p.
644, identifies the ruler as Adhirajendra (reign: CE 1068-1070), the last Cola ruler of the Vijayālāya line who, he says, lost his life in a popular revolt. He himself has however pointed out (The Colas, p. 643), on the basis of inscription SII 205 of 1904, the rebuilding in stone in the short reign of Adhirajendra, of the brick shrine of Varadarāja Pērumāl in Tiruvakkārai originally built by Koccola.

It has also been suggested that the ruler who persecuted the Śrīvaiśāṇavas could have been Kulottunga I or II, though the most widely accepted dates for Rāmānuja’s life (CE 1017-1137) make it unlikely that the latter king (who only ascended the throne in CE 1133) could be the cause of his troubles. Secondly, inscriptions dated to the reigns of both kings have been found in several temples attesting to patronage and thus belying this tale of persecution. An inscription in the Srirangam temple dated to the 15th regnal year of Cōla Kulottunga I = c. CE 1085 registers a gift of land by purchase, by Rājarāja Madhurāntakan, alias Vatsarājan, for worship and offerings to the god Alakīya Maṇavāḷa Pērumāl on the day of his natal star Mṛgasīrśa, and for feeding Śrīvaiśāṇavas in the Madhurāntakan matha during two festival days. (Ref.: TV Mahalingam, A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States, ICHR, S. Chand and Co. Ltd, Delhi, 1985, Vol. VIII, p. 182, Tp 849. Ref.: ARE, 1892, no. 15; SII xxiv, no. 58). An inscription of CE 1091, dated to the 21st regnal year of Kulottunga I from the Ranganātha temple at Srirangam registers a gift of a cauri with a gold handle for service to the god, Anantanārāyaṇavāṁini, by the Malayāḷa officers belonging to the Pēruṇṭaṇam and Ciraṇṭaṇam of the king. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. VIII, p. 184, Tp 856. Ref. ARE, 1938-39, no. 130; SII, xxiv, no. 66). Rājarājan Arumōliyar, alias Tennavan mādevi, queen of Kulottunga I, endowed in CE 1095, the 25th regnal year of the same king, land towards feeding bhagavatar in the temple of Srirangam. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. VIII, p. 186, Tp 863. Ref.: ARE, 1947-48, no. 126; SII xxiv, no. 73). Another inscription in the Aruḷāḷa Pērumāḷ temple, Cinna Kāṇcipuram, of CE 1113 registers a gift of a perpetual lamp to the god Tiruvattiyūr Āḷvār in Eyil nāḍu in Eyil kotṭam by Alakīya Maṇavāleni Mantaiyāḷvār who was the wife of Karuṇākaraṇa, alias Tōṇṭhāṁānaḷ Vaṇḍalāṇcēri, the latter being known to us as the generalissimo of the Cōla army who led the expedition to Kalinga in CE 1110 on behalf of the king, Kulottunga I (accession date, CE 1070). (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. III, p. 158, Cg 644). Two other records (CE 1090 & 1104) from the same temple are actually orders of the king himself for grants of land to the temple of TiruVeṅkāḷ. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. III, p. 156-7, Cg 640-1). Yet another grant from the Varadarājā/ Aruḷāḷa Pērumāḷ temple in Kāṇcipuram dated to Kulottunga II (accession date, CE 1133) registers a sale of land for maintaining a lamp in the matha attached to the temple and a gift of land for feeding Śrīvaiśāṇavas who come to witness the festivals of Māci and Vaikāci. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. III, p. 161, Cg 657, Ref.: ARE, 1919, no. 406). And in CE 1129, the Cōla ruler Cakravatarī Vikramacōlaḍeva set up the image of Vikramacōla-viṇṇagara-āḷvār in the same temple and made provision for its daily worship by a gift of land as devadāna in the village of Vilvalam. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. III, pp. 160-161, Cg 654, Ref.: ARE, 1919, no. 590). These sample inscriptions alone cover most of the rulers contemporary to Rāmānuja. Such patronage seems incompatible with the tale of persecution. On the other hand, it seems difficult to believe that such a detailed story involving royal personalities and harm to senior ācāryas could be entirely fabricated. Even the DSC, believed to be contemporary to Rāmānuja, speaks of the persecution of Vaiṣṇavas and of Rāmānuja’s fleeing to the western country.

A hint of troubled times—though of an entirely different nature from that indicated in the hagiographies—may be had from an inscription in the great temple at Srirangam dated to CE 1080 (Cola Kulottunga I, regnal year 11). It states that the temple of Mummuḍicōla Viṇṇagāralvār at Rājamahendra caturvedimangalam, a brahmadeya in Kāntāra nāṭu, a subdivision of Nittavinoda valamāṭu, was unable to safeguard its property owing to burglary of its treasury during the conflict between the right and left hand castes in the 2nd year of the king’s reign. The assembly of
scholars in his realm to sign, on pain of death, the declaration, "śivāt parataram nāsti" , i.e., nothing is greater than Śiva. Some signed from fear, others from greed. But a court official named Nālūrāṇ impressed upon the king that unless he could make Rāmānuja and Kūrattālvān\textsuperscript{81} accept it, the signatures of all others were worthless. When the king’s messengers reached Koyil,\textsuperscript{82} Kūrattālvān, who was drawing water from the well for Rāmānuja’s bath heard the news first. Dressing himself in his master’s kāśāya\textsuperscript{83} and tridaṇḍa,\textsuperscript{84} he prepared to leave with them without informing Rāmānuja. Periya Nampi accompanied Ālvān. When Rāmānuja emerged from his bath and asked for his tridaṇḍa–kāśāya, Mutaliyāntān\textsuperscript{85} told him what had happened and urged him, as did his other disciples, to flee Srirangam. Rāmānuja donned the householder’s white clothes Kūrattālvān had left behind, and fled with a group of disciples to the western country. At the foot of a mountain, the party came across a group of hunters who were disciples of Tirumalainallāṅ, himself a disciple of Rāmānuja. We saw in Chapter 3 how these forest dwellers looked after Rāmānuja’s party.\textsuperscript{86} Eventually, the travellers reached Tōṇṭañūr, where the daughter of the king, Viṭṭhala Deva Rāya, was possessed by a piśāca that none had been able to drive away. The king proclaimed that he would become the disciple of whoever cured his daughter. Tōṇṭañūr Nampi\textsuperscript{87} told Viṭṭhala Deva Rāya of Rāmānuja’s success with the brahma-rākṣasa, and he immediately invited Rāmānuja. Needless to say, the girl was soon well. Rāmānuja gave the king the new name of Viṣṇu Vardhana Rāya.\textsuperscript{88} At that time, 12,000 Jainas, the former teachers of the king, appeared to rebuke Rāmānuja for having lured away their follower and to

Rājamahendra caturvedimangalam therefore received a lump sum of 50 kalāṅcu of gold from the temple and exempted certain lands belonging to it from paying taxes. (Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. VIII, pp. 180-81, Tp 843. Ref.: ARE, 1936-37, no. 31; II, xxiv, no. 53).

\textsuperscript{81} One of Rāmānuja’s intimate disciples, but a householder, not a sannyāsī.

\textsuperscript{82} Literally, temple, but also used in Śrīvaśīva parlance to mean Srirangam, Viṣṇu’s temple town par excellence. I have followed the traditional Śrīvaśīva texts such as the Gpps in using this word here to convey both meanings simultaneously.

\textsuperscript{83} The saffron robes of an ascetic.

\textsuperscript{84} Three pronged staff characteristic of Vaiśīṣṭa sannyāsīs, as against the single staff of Śaiva ascetics.

\textsuperscript{85} Another of Rāmānuja’s intimate disciples; also his nephew.

\textsuperscript{86} Chapter 3-iv.

\textsuperscript{87} Presumably, the priest of Tōṇṭañūr.

\textsuperscript{88} Viṣṇuvardhana was king from CE 1110 to 1152. He seems to have had this name from the beginning of his reign. See John Braisted Carman, The Theology of Rāmānuja, An Essay in Inter-Religious Understanding, Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, Bombay, 1981, p. 45. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that an inscription belonging to the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana, the Hoysala king, found at the Laksmi-Narayana-svāmi temple in Tōṇṭañūr mentions a grant to the Rāmānuja matha and, in his early inscriptions, Viṣṇuvardhana is called Bitti Hoysala Deva, the name found in the guruparamparā. See KV Raman, “Srī Rāmānuja in Epigraphy”, Studies in Rāmānuja: Papers Presented at the First all-India Seminar on Śrī Rāmānuja and his Social Philosophy at Śrīperumbudūr, Śrī Ramanuja Vedanta Centre, Madras, 1979, p. 134.
challenge him. Going behind a screen, Ramanuja assumed the form of the thousand headed Ananta and answered all their questions simultaneously. Some of them converted to Srivaisnavism; Ramanuja had the king grind the rest in a stone mill.

Soon afterwards, the Lord Tirunarayana Pērumāḷ appeared in Ramanuja’s dream to tell him that he was languishing in a pit in a corner in the tulasi grove there. When the pit was dug, the golden shrine appeared from the earth. This was in the Śaka year 1012. After consecrating the temple with great pomp (and devotion) under the auspices of Viṣṇu Vardhana, Ramanuja found that the utsava mūrti (processional idol) necessary for celebrating temple festivals was missing. Pērumāḷ appeared in a dream again to tell him that the utsavar, named Rāmapriya, was then performing līlā in the Turushka rājageha, and asked him to fetch it. Ramanuja immediately proceeded to Dillipuram (Delhi) where the Turushka ruler honoured him and invited Ramanuja, on the ascetic’s asking for their kuladeva (family deity) to be returned to them, to look for it in their stores. When their search proved fruitless, Ramanuja learnt, again through divine agency, that the idol was in the princess’ chambers. The king conducted him therein. On Ramanuja’s beckoning, the idol jumped into his lap in the presence of all, all its ornaments tinkling. The astonished Dilli-puriṇḍra presented the idol to Ramanuja with all due honours. Returning to the south, Ramanuja established the utsava vigraha in the temple,

89 Ramanuja is supposed to be an avatāra of Ananta.
90 This episode in the hagiographies is traditionally believed to mark the penetration of Śrīvaiṣṇavism into Karnataka. However, there is evidence of the presence of the sectarian faith in Karnataka before the time of the great preceptor. Two inscriptions of Rājarāja I’s reign dated to CE 1014 and CE 1021 from Chennapatna near Bangalore district and Mysore district respectively mention Śrīvaiṣṇavas. (Epigraphica Carnatica, IX, Ch 129-1014 AD and EC XIV, Tn./ 34-1021 AD). Ref: R Vasantha, “The Colas and the Introduction of Śrīvaiṣṇhnavism in Karnataka”, in Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, no. 64, 1973, pp. 32-33.
91 Agpp and Mgpp; Ilaiyālvār Vaibhavam. While the DSC does speak of the wicked ‘Cola’ ruler and of Ramanuja’s flight to Tirunarārayana puram and his establishing a temple therein, it makes no reference to the episode that follows. Indeed it has Ramanuja propound the darsana for a while in Tirunarārayana puram and then return to Srirangam soon after the evil Cola king’s being struck by disease and dying. See Chapter 1 for discussion of dates of the hagiographies.
92 Gives us an almost accurate date, i.e., CE 1090. Needless to say, several historians have tried to match the events related in the hagiographies with known political ones, without any success. Besides, the first Muslim invasion of South India, by Malik Kafur, general of Allaudin Khilji, took place in CE 1309-1311. Almost every single aspect of this anachronistic story defies credibility.
94 Ramanuja is said to have fondly addressed the icon as ‘Cēlvapiḷḷai’, i.e., ‘my dear boy’—the name by which the utsavar is known to this day.
95 King of Delhi.
and named the town TiruNārāyaṇapuram. He gave the candālas who had helped him during his crisis the name of Tirukkulattār (those belonging to a holy clan), and the rights to bathe in the temple tank, circumambulate the temple and receive tīrtha (consecrated water) on the occasion of the chariot-procession-festival.

A significant annexure to this story is found in the Mgpp, the Rāmānujārya Divya Caritai, a later hagiography, the Koyil Īluku, the remarkable chronicle of the Srirangam temple, and several other later texts. Equally significant, and perhaps decisive, is its absence from the Agpp and the DSC which, I have argued, are older than the Mgpp. In the Mgpp and the Rāmānujārya Divya Caritai, the princess, whose plaything the idol had been by day, and lover by night, could not bear the separation and followed Rāmānuja to Melkote, while in the Koyil Īluku and later chronicles, the princess does follow the idol but Rāmānuja does not feature in the Delhi/Muslim ruler episode. Besides, it is to Srirangam that she comes, not to Karnataka in the latter texts. It is various local people—whose tribal/community identities are specified—who are involved in the recovery of the idol.

It is important to add that the DSC, which is believed to be the oldest hagiography and indeed perhaps contemporary to Rāmānuja, makes no mention of the preceptor’s travelling to Delhi though it does speak of his ‘exile’ to Sri Nārāyaṇapurī in Karnataka, establishment of a temple there, and his eventual return to Srirangam.

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96 In the state of Karnataka. Also known as Melkote.
98 Īluku means a record or register. The Koyil Īluku that weaves in details of ritual and practices in the Srirangam temple with older myths and ongoing records of donations to the temple belongs to the larger category of sthalapurāṇas.
100 Ranjeeta Dutta, ibid, pp. 157-184.
101 In the 17th century Prapannāṃtra, for instance, the setting for the Tughluk attack on Srirangam is the period of Piḷḷai Lokācārya.
102 The sthalapurāṇa of Tirunārāyaṇapuram and some late poetical works from Karnataka understandably bring the princess to Melkote.
103 See Dutta above for a discussion of this narrative.
104 See discussion in Chapter 1, Introduction.
105 DSC’s Sanskritised version of Tirunārāyaṇapuram.
According to the *Mgpp* and the *Agpp*, Rāmānuja's exile in Karnataka lasted twelve years. A visiting Śrīvaiśnava from Srirangam once brought him news of events back in Koyil. Kūrattālvān and Pēriya Nampi had been dragged to the Coḷa court where the wicked ruler had demanded that they sign the statement proclaiming the greatness of Śiva. The Vaiśnava saints gave numerous proofs to show the proposition was untenable, but finding the Coḷa ruler unwilling to listen to reason, responded by recourse to pun. Accordingly, they countered the original statement, i.e., “śivāt parataram nāsti” with one of their own, “dronam asti tataḥ param”: a clever interpretation, since śivam in Tamil also means a measure, which is a fraction of another called dronam. The enraged Coḷa ordered the ācāryas to be blinded before being thrown out. Pēriya Nampi, already ripe in years, died of the pain, while the blinded Kūrattālvān made his way back to Srirangam with the help of Pēriya Nampi’s daughter, Attulāy. Deeply saddened, Rāmānuja performed Śrīcūrṇa paripālanam (a rite for the deceased) for Pēriya Nampi, and sent a disciple, Ciriyāntān, to Srirangam to comfort Kūrattālvān. At this time, the wicked Coḷa was struck by a mortal disease—worms infested his neck—and died. (In Śrīvaiśnava texts such as the *Gppps*, the ruler is consistently called Kṛmikanṭha Coḷa, literally, the worm-necked one.) Ciriyāntān took this news back to Rāmānuja who then returned to Srirangam. Both the Tēṅkalai and Vatakalai hagiographies elaborate the steps he took to standardise worship at the temple he had established at TīruNārāyaṇapuram, besides leaving, for his soon-to-be-bereaved disciples there, an image of himself invested with his very essence. As is often the case with these narratives, the texts also lay down in detail, the roles and rights of various groups of people, belonging to separate caste groups, in the daily and the annual ritual cycles of the temple. This is also the first record of the apotheosizing, in iconic form, of any of the ācāryas. Upon his return to Srirangam, Rāmānuja is said to also have enshrined images of Nammāḻvār, the other Āḻvārs and some venerated early ācāryas. The texts of course frequently speak of the ācāryas venerating the images of the Āḻvārs, but since they reflect the circumstances of the late thirteenth-early fourteenth centuries at the earliest, it is not to them but to archaeological evidence that we must look for confirmation of the worship of the Āḻvārs in images. Rāmānuja is also credited with standardising the practices, rituals and organisation of the Srirangam temple. This was, understandably, productive of conflict especially where Rāmānuja’s arrangements interfered with established practices and older interest groups. Some of these find reflection in the hagiographies in stories of some jealous temple priests trying to poison Rāmānuja, and in the oral tradition preserved by the family of Pēriya-Koyil Nampi, the arcaka displaced by

106 śivāt parataram nāsti. See above.
107 Coḷa ruler.
108 See Chapter 5-iv for inscriptional evidence for worship of the Āḻvārs.
Rāmānuja’s reorganization. Pēriya-Koyil Nampi himself, however, seems to have finally become a disciple of Rāmānuja’s with the name of Tiruvarangattu Amutanar and is credited with composing a 100-stanza poem in praise of his preceptor, the Rāmānuja Nūrrantādi, which is, according to some calculations, considered part of the NDP.

About this time Rāmānuja also made a trip to Tiruppati whence the utsava mūrti of TiruCitrakūṭa had been secretly transferred when the evil Colan had gone about desecrating the Vaiṣṇava shrine of TiruCitrakūṭa. Rāmānuja formally established the displaced utsavar in the shrine at the foot of the hill, and laid down the order of worship at and the administration of the temple.

Since Rāmānuja had innumerable disciples, he wished to impose some nibandhanam (arrangement), to which end he established 74 simhāsanādhipatis (leaders) and various functionaries (of different castes) to take care of different aspects of the temple administration.

110 ‘The holy nectar of Srirangam’.
111 This poem devotes a verse each to the Ālavārs and the earlier ācāryas in the line of preceptors. It is possible that the germ of some of the elaborate stories of the Ālavārs may be found in the Rāmānuja Nūrrantādi. As the poet is said to be one of the disciples of Rāmānuja, the poem may be considered contemporary with Rāmānuja. On the other hand, it has also been argued that it must be a later composition, not contemporaneous with Rāmānuja at all. See Hardy, Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 250, footnote no. 9. The poem is mentioned in the DSC, but if the DSC itself is considered a later work as has been argued (see introduction), this work could be later too. On the other hand, the accounts of Rāmānuja found in the Rāmānuja Nūrrantādi and the DSC are comparatively believable, being less replete with miracles. Rāmānuja himself is considered an avatāra of Ananta—but it can be argued that in a developing tradition of venerating preceptors as incarnations of Viṣṇu’s appendages and attendants, the same could be done of a living preceptor as well. The Gpps are not only generally very careful about the lineage of preceptors, they were also composed in the context of establishing the rival lineages of the Tēnkalai and Vaṭakalai traditions respectively and ‘meddling’ with chronology would have attendant complications. The teachers who feature in both Gpps are likely to be early ācāryas, not rejected by either sect. It appears unlikely, therefore, that a later ācārya could have been made a contemporary of Rāmānuja. Finally, it appears unlikely that the NDP, which had acquired canonical status by at least the 12th-13th centuries, would have been modified later by the addition of a new poem, especially in so prolific a scriptural tradition.
112 The Vaiṣṇava shrine at Chidambaram. See further discussion below.
113 KAN Sastri, The Colas, op cit., pp. 644-645 believes the ruler involved in displacing Govindarāja from Chidambaram to have been Kulottunga II on the basis of inscriptions.
114 There are two temples in Tiruppati: one on top of the hill and another at its foot, known in Śrīvaishnava parlance as upper and lower Tiruppati(s). Though only the mountaintop shrine is counted as a divya ksetra, the pilgrimage to the shrine is considered incomplete without a visit to the lower one.
115 Rāmānuja is credited with the establishment of the formal procedures of temple ritual and administration in several places including Srirangam.
The Tēŋkalai and Vaṭakalai Gpps diverge vastly from this point regarding the succession; sometimes even important preceptors of a sect, whose works, compositions and biography are elaborated in great detail in the sectarian Gpp fail even to find mention in the Gpp of the rival sect.

After 120 years of untiring service to the Lord, Rāmānuja renounced the world and returned to his original form as Śeśa so as to be forever united with Him in Vaikuṇṭha.

c) Incidents from the Account of Apparl Tirunavukkaracar in the Pēriya Purānam

The saint Appar was born Maruṇikkiiyār in a vellāla family. As a young man, he became a Jaina monk, took the name of Dharmasena and became the head of a monastery in TirupPātiripuliyūr. A terrible colic which the medicines and ministrations of his fellow monks could not cure made him turn to with his elder sister, Tilakavatiyār. A devout worshipper of Śiva, she bade him take refuge in the Lord. Filled with remorse for his years of apostasy, Appar prayed to Śiva at TiruvAtikai Virattānam and was cured miraculously. Pleased with the hymn he sang, the Lord bestowed upon him the title, Tirunāvukkaracar. The Jainas of the place accordingly instigated the (Jaina) Pallava ruler Mahendravarman to torture Appar by having him incarcerated for a week in a limestone kiln, poisoned, bound with a granite boulder and flung into the sea and trampled underfoot by a mad elephant. Needless to say, Śiva protected his devotee all along and indeed, the elephant instead of crushing him bowed and garlanded him and turned its fury on the hapless Jainas. Mahendravarman, after his re-conversion to Śaivism under Appar’s influence, destroyed the Jaina monastery and with that material had a temple to Śiva built at TiruvAṭi.

Eventually, Appar embarked on pilgrimage in the course of which he met the child saint, Sambandar, who is said to have addressed him as ‘Appa’ and thus given the older Nāyaṇār the name by which Tamil Śaivas have since referred to him. At one point, Appar is supposed to have visited Paḷaiyarai where the temple of Śiva had been walled up by the Jainas. He pledged to fast till he could worship Śiva there upon which the Lord directed the king of the land in a dream to his temple which had been falsely converted into a Jaina shrine. After restoring the original temple, the king too worshipped the Lord with proper ceremony.

117 King of the holy tongue/ lord of speech.
118 C Minakshi, Administration and Social life Under the Pallavas, op cit., p. 230.
d) Incidents from the Account of Tirujñānasambandar\(^{119}\) in the *Pēriya Purāṇam*\(^{120}\)

The Pāṇṭiya king Kūn Pāṇṭiyan\(^{121}\) had strayed from the righteous path and had become a Jaina. His queen, Mankaiyarkkaraci, and minister, Kulaicciraiyār, both ardent Śaivas, (in fact, the minister is one of the 63 Nāyaṇmārs) requested Sambandar, one of the three major Nāyaṇmārs, to bring the king back to the true faith. When Sambandar arrived in Madurai, the Jainas tried all kinds of vile tricks and black magic to destroy the child-saint,\(^{122}\) but without any success. Instead, the king was gripped by a deadly fever which the Jainas, despite their best attempts, failed to cure. Sambandar (naturally) succeeded but the Jaina monks, not wishing to concede defeat so easily, challenged him further. Accordingly, the Nāyaṇār and the Jaina monks submitted their respective faiths first to a fire ordeal, and then to a water-test. While the palm leaves containing the essential principles of the Jaina creed were burnt, Sambandar’s, needless to say, emerged unscathed, and while the Jaina manuscript was washed downstream by the torrential river Vaigai, Sambandar’s hymn on Śiva floated gently upstream. Realising that their game was up, the Jaina monks impaled themselves *en masse* as the royal party and the Nāyaṇār looked on.\(^{123}\) The ruler’s hunched back miraculously straightened. Sambandar proceeded to Kāraikkāl where the abbot of a Buddhist monastery at Bodhimankai challenged him to a debate—in which he was routed. At Talicceri near Kōṭṭappāṭi, he debated with and converted Buddhanandi and Sariputta.\(^{124}\) In TiruOrriyur,\(^{125}\) a humble Śaiva complained that he was the object of ridicule for the local Jainas as all the palm trees in his grove were male and didn’t yield any fruit. Sambandar sang a hymn which, to the delight of Śiva’s devotees and the consternation of the Jainas, miraculously transformed the palm trees into fruit-yielding female ones. In Mailāpur,\(^{126}\) a rich merchant named Śivanesa was hoping to arrange a wedding between his only daughter and Sambandar. The girl however died from snake bite just before Sambandar’s arrival. The fond father however preserved the girl’s ashes in an urn, convinced that the Nāyaṇār would be able to revive her. The residents thronged to watch, the denizens of the heavens crowded the skies, and the faithless Jainas jeered as Sambandar had the merchant place the urn outside the walls of the temple of

\(^{119}\) Tiru+ jñāna+ Sambandar.


\(^{121}\) Hunchbacked Pāṇṭiyan. Identified with Nēṭumāran.

\(^{122}\) Sambandar.

\(^{123}\) KAN Sastri, *The Culture and History of the Tamils*, Firma KL Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1964, p. 110, “Even now Madurai conducts an annual festival in the temple commemorating the incredible impalement of eight thousand Jainas at the instance of the gentle boy-saint”.

\(^{124}\) Minakshi, *Administration and Social life Under the Pallavas*, op cit., p. 225.

\(^{125}\) A suburb of modern Madras/ Chennai.

\(^{126}\) Mylapore in modern day Chennai/ Madras. Site of the temple of Kapāliśvara.

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Kapālīśvara and sang a hymn to the Lord. Even as he sang, “The unbelieving Jaina and Buddhist monks will declare such a deed impossible”, the girl’s hand decked in bangles rose out of the pot.  

e) Account of Mūrți Nāyaṉār from the Pēriya Purāṇam

Mūrți, a vaiśya who lived in Madurai, ground sandal paste for adorning the body of the temple image. At this time, the country was invaded and conquered by the Vaṭūka Karunāṭar, a tribe from Karnataka. Their chief, now king of the Pāṇṭiyāṇḍu began, under the influence of Jainism, to harass the devotees of Śiva in every way possible. Declaring all sandalwood forests the property of the state, he sought to impede the proper worship of Śiva. Mūrți however proceeded to rub his own arm against the grinding stone to obtain paste for the adornment of the Lord. Even though blood flowed out, and his bones split to the very marrow within, he did not shrink from his task. Touched by his devotion, Śiva caused the wicked Jaina ruler and his dynasty to die out. When the people sent an elephant around the country to pick out a successor, it chose Mūrți Nāyaṉār who ruled with the sacred ash for his anointment, rudrākṣa beads for jewellery and a coil of matted locks for his crown.

f) Account of Tanti Atikal Nāyaṉār from the Pēriya Purāṇam

In the holy city of Tiruvāṟūr the Jainas, who were very numerous, had trespassed into the very temple of Śiva and encroached upon the banks of its tank, the Kamalālayam. A blind devotee called Tantiyaṭikal decided to compensate for the loss of the tanks’ width by increasing its depth. Having groped his way to its centre, he erected a pole there which he tied with a rope to another planted on its bank. Making his way to and from the centre of the tank by way of this rope, Tantiyaṭikal began to dig at the centre. The alarmed Jainas raised an uproar about the innumerable creatures buried in the soil that would be killed by this action. They pulled up the

127 The legend seems to have been inspired by a hymn of Sambandar’s describing the festival cycle in the temple of Kapālīśvara in Mailai (Mylapore). In every stanza in this hymn, Sambandar addresses a beautiful girl (Pūmpāvai), asking her if she would go [presumably die—though it could simply mean go elsewhere from Mailai] without seeing the (different) festivals of the temple. The tenth verse, as is customary in Sambandar’s hymns, refers to the great festival of purification in the said temple as the one ‘slandered by the naked Jainas and base Buddhists in voluminous robes’. Tevāram, Book II, no. 47, verses 1-10, cited in Vidya Dehejia, The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India, American Federation of Arts, New York, in association with Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2003, p 240.

128 Sambandar didn’t marry the girl finally, claiming that he stood in the relationship of a father to her, having brought her to life.


130 Vanmikanathan, ibid, pp. 476-479.

131 Variant spelling. Taṭṭi+ Aṭikal= Taṭṭi-y-aṭikal.
poles and rope and abused Taṇṭiyaṭikal, mocking him for being blind and asking if he had
gone deaf too that he refused to heed their righteous words. The enraged ‘slave of the Lord’
responded by calling the Jainas men of uncertain dogma and devoid of perception, and saying
that it was they who were blind; he could see the Lord who burnt the three cities,132 which was
all that was worth seeing. The Jainas challenged him saying that if his god could restore his
sight, they would leave the city. In response to his devotee’s prayer, Śiva not only restored his
eyesight, but also caused the Jainas to lose theirs and who then shamefacedly tottered out of
Tiruvārūr.

g) Account of Naminandi Nāyanaṅ from the Pēriya Purāṇam133
Naminandi, a brāhmaṇa devotee from Emapperūr, walked to the holy temple town of
Tiruvārūr,134 prayed awhile, and as evening came on, wished to light lamps for the Lord. The
house from which he happened to beg for some ghee was a Jaina one; the inhabitants mocked
him saying he should burns lamps for his Lord with water. Chanting the names of Śiva,
Naminandi filled lamps with water from the temple tank, and lit them. Lo and behold! The
lamps burnt all over the temple with a bright flame.

iv) Evidence of Jaina and Buddhist presence in Tamil Nadu
Though both the ‘heterodox’ faiths rose in northern India in the 6th century BC, both seem to
have come to the Deccan by at least the 3rd century BC, if not earlier. The presence of Aṣokan
edicts in several sites in Karnataka and Andhra would also suggest the interchange of ideas
between the regions north and south of the Vindhyas by at least this date. Legends take this
history further back: Bavari, a disciple of the Buddha from Kośala is believed to have settled
in the Aśmaka region, which is in present day Andhra, and brought the teachings of the master
to the region. The Mauryan emperor Chandragupta is said to have renounced his throne at the
instance of his mentor Bhadrabāhu and retired as a Jaina ascetic to Śravaṇabelagola in
Karnataka.135 Even if these legendary accounts are dismissed as ahistorical, other evidence
points to Jaina presence in southern India at an early date. Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions of the

132 Śiva as Tripurāntaka.
134 About two and a half hour’s walk, says Vanmikanathan, ibid, p. 463.
135 A ninth century inscription from Śravaṇabelagola graphically describes the advent of Jaina monks
to the south. According to it, the last of the Śruta Kevalins, Bhadrabāhu, is said to have foretold a
famine in Ujjain and led the whole sangha to the south. The Brhat Kāthā Kośam, written in the 10th
century by Harisena relates that Bhadrabāhu sent out emissaries under the leadership of Viśākhamuni
to the Cola and Pāṇṭiya lands to spread the faith. Ref.: KV Raman, “Jainism in Tondaimandalam”,
2nd-1st century BCE from Sittanavasal in Pāṇḍiya Nadu refer to donations made to a Jaina monk;\(^\text{136}\) indeed, the earliest inscriptions from Tamil Nadu are probably Jaina inscriptions.\(^\text{137}\) Verse 72 in the Nārrinai, a Sangam work, was composed by Ijam Bodhiyar.\(^\text{138}\) The two late Sangam epics, Cilappatikāram and Maṇimekalai, abound in references to Buddhists and Jainas. In fact, the protagonist of Maṇimekalai, a courtesan’s beautiful daughter whose favours are sought by the prince of the land himself, rejects a life of ‘empty worldliness’ to become a Buddhist nun. It also speaks of a caitya built by the brother of Kiḻlivāḷavaṇa of the Cola dynasty who ruled in Kāṇcī in the second century.\(^\text{139}\) Ilanko Atikal, the composer of the Cilappatikāram, was very likely a follower of Jainism. Buddhadatta, author of the Buddhist work, Abiddhammāvatāra, who lived in the fifth century in the Kaveri delta, tells us that he enjoyed the patronage of Acyuta Vikkanta of the Kālavhira dynasty.\(^\text{140}\) The Kundalakesī, composed by a Jaina teacher Nādagutta is a kāvyya dated to the fourth century; the fifth century Nilakesī is yet another Jaina work that concerns itself mainly with refuting the former.\(^\text{141}\) The tenth century Jaina work Amritisāgara also quotes verses in praise of the same king.\(^\text{142}\) The names of the Buddhist philosophers and logicians Dīgavaga, Dharmapāla and Bodhidharma are connected with Kāṇcī.\(^\text{143}\) The Mattavilāsa Prahasana (early seventh century CE) would not have ridiculed the Buddhists and Jainas if they were not a significant and familiar presence in the social landscape. Indeed, it mentions a Buddhist vihāra in the environs of Kāṇcī and Buddhist monks in the city.\(^\text{144}\) The third verse of the concluding stanzas of Lokavibhāga, a Digambara Jaina work, says that it was completed in Saka 380 (CE 456) in the 22nd regnal year of king Simhaviśṇu, lord of Kāṇcī.\(^\text{145}\) The ruler has been identified with Pallava Simhaviṣṇu II. The Viracolīyam, a curious work on Tamil grammar conceived on ultra-Sanskritic lines\(^\text{146}\) and apparently composed at the request of Vira Rājendra Cola (accession

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\(^\text{139}\) Ramachandran, ibid, p. 10.

\(^\text{140}\) Raman, “Jainism in Tondaimandalam”, op cit., p. 16.

\(^\text{141}\) Ramachandran, The Nagapattinam and other Buddhist Bronzes, op cit., p. 4.

\(^\text{142}\) Raman, “Jainism in Tondaimandalam”, op cit., p. 16.

\(^\text{143}\) Minakshi, Administration and Social life Under the Pallavas, op cit., p. 222.

\(^\text{144}\) Minakshi, ibid, p. 223.

\(^\text{145}\) Minakshi, ibid, p. 229.

CE 1070), was the work of a Buddhamitra who calls himself the chieftain of Pönperī. Legend has it that Cekkilār was goaded into the composition of the Pēriya Purāṇam, the hagiography of the Nāyaṇmārs, by Kulottunga II seeking literary enjoyment in the Jivaka Cintāmani, a secular kāvya in Tamil attributed to a Jaina author. Guṇavira Paṇḍita, another Jaina author, dedicated his work of grammar, Neminātham, to Neminātha of Tenmayilāpurī. Avirodālvār, a Jaina poet of the 14th century, has composed 103 verses in praise of the same Lord, known also as Mayilaināthar. It is evident that Mylapore in the heart of modern-day Chennai was an important Jaina centre of worship.

Architectural remains also tell a parallel story. Though monumental evidence for the presence of Jainism and Buddhism is scarce in Tamil Nadu per se—with only a few Jaina temples and practically no Buddhist vihāras, stūpas or caityas surviving—it is abundant in the Deccan. Construction of stone edifices, which had begun under the Cālukyas of Bādāmi (mid 6th – mid 8th centuries) became common under the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (mid 8th-end of the 10th centuries CE) and their successors, the Gangas and the Santaras, some of whose members were followers of Jainism. This trend reached its zenith between the 11th and 13th centuries under the Cālukyas of Kalyāṇi and the Hoysalas of Dvārasamudra. From the middle of the 12th century, however, Jainism experienced persecution at the hands of the Śaivas in northern Karnataka and Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the southern part of the state.

The most important Buddhist epigraphic record in Tamil Nadu is undoubtedly that on the Leiden plates. The Larger Leiden plates dated to the 21st year Rājarāja I, i.e., CE 1005, refer to the (ongoing) construction of the Cūḍāmanivarma vihāra by Kafferattaraiya (the king of Kaṭāram) in Nāgapatītinam and a large grant of tax free lands (the village Āaimangalam) by the Cola ruler for the said vihāra and the pali in it. Though the grant came into effect from the year 1005, the construction of the vihāra seems to have taken nine years. The Lesser Leiden Plates were apparently issued by Kulottunga I in favour of the sangarattār (Sangha members/monks).
administrators) in response to a request by the king of Kaḷāram to record the grants on copper plate. While a Rājendracolaperumpalḷi is mentioned besides the Rājāraḷaperumpalḷi, the grants seem to pertain only to the former. It is interesting to note that there is no further inscriptionsal evidence pertaining to this palḷi. How long did it continue in existence? A ruined tower-like structure near the seashore in Nāgapaṭṭinam served as a guide for ships in the nineteenth century. In the last quarter of the century, the structure was pulled down by the Jesuits (after several letters had been written to the British government of India for permission, many of the earlier ones being rejected) to build a school with the material. However, pictorial documentation of the structure is available 156 and all that can be said with certainty about it is that it does not conform to any known architectural pattern of either a Hindu temple or of a mosque. More to the point is the fact that on demolition, there was found a bronze idol of the Buddha 157 (which was eventually presented to Lord Napier). 158 Can there be any connection between the vihāra constructed in the early eleventh century and Tirumankai Āḻvār? Evidently not. But what leaps to the eye is its connection with the story of the Āḻvār which was ‘constructed’ by the hagiographers. It seems likely that the Buddhist shrine was built by a foreign ruler (the kingdom of Kaḷāram has not been located, nor has Śrīvijaya with any certainty 159—the king of the latter kingdom is known to have made some donations of jewellery through his agent to the temple of Nāgai-y-alakar 160 and has been thought to be the same ruler who had the vihāra built 161 for the merchants of his realm. 162 It is possible that the vihāra lost influence and importance under the later Colas but continued to exist and function as an ‘eyesore’ for the proselytizing Śrīvaishṇava (and Śaiva) hagiographers and inspired their stories of Tirumankai Āḻvār and Tiruvijāna Sambandar. 163

156 Epigraphica Indica, Vol. XXII, Illustrated plates.
157 Epigraphica Indica, ibid, Illustrated plates.
159 KAN Sastri, A History of South India, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1955, pp. 173-175, parentheticals Śrīvijaya as Palembang in the Malay Peninsula.
162 Champakalakshmi, ibid, pp. 51-52.
163 Sambandar’s contest with the Buddhist monks is set in Kāraikkāl, geographically very close to Nāgapaṭṭinam. See account above.
Specifically Buddhist inscriptions are extremely rare in Tamil Nadu. One epigraphic reference in archaic characters of the 7th century on the pillars of a Śiva temple in Rājendraṇātanam, a village in the Vṛddhācalam tāluk of South Arcot district, refers to Sariputta being the disciple of Buddhavarman, Śrī Śāntimati and so forth.¹⁶⁴ Excavations in Kāveripāṭṭinam uncovered a Buddhist monastery and temple (with several archaeological layers of activity) dated to the period between the third and eighth centuries; a Buddhapada and some small bronze icons of the Buddha have been recovered from the site but no inscriptions.¹⁶⁵ A beautiful copper gilt image of the Javanese type, probably of Maitreya, dated to the 9th century, that was found from Melayūr in the Shiyali tāluk of Tanjavur,¹⁶⁶ is also said to have been originally collected from Kāveripāṭṭinam.¹⁶⁷ An inscription of CE 1241 from the Varadarāja/ Aruḷāla Pērumāl temple in Kāncīpuram refers to an order of Madhurāntaka Pottāppi Cōḷan according to which taxes were levied on all oil merchants in Mummuṭi Coḷa Perunteruvu in Kāncīpuram. Stones with the insignia of Gaṇḍagopāla were apparently set up to mark the jurisdiction and Buddhapatli is mentioned as one of the places exempted from this tax.¹⁶⁸ Another glancing reference comes from Pallankoyil in Tanjavur district. A set of six copper plates discovered from Vedāranyam on the east coast of the Tanjavur district record, in tenth century Tamil characters, a gift of land in Tanavalippūṇḍi as bhogam to the Jaina temple called Sundaracoḷa Pērumpalli with the interesting stipulation that ¼ of the grant should be assigned to female disciples and the rest for male disciples. Among the boundaries of the land is mentioned a Śākkiyapalli and the Śākyapalliyaappidari temple of Kūṭalūr.¹⁶⁹ Navalūr, a village in the Chingleput district is said to have been a pallicandam of the Kaccikkū Nāyanār temple of Buddha Kāṇcī.¹⁷⁰ A stone slab found on the roof of the maṇḍapa of a Śiva temple in TirucCopuram in the North Arcot district bears a Pāṇṭiya inscription recording the gift of land by a Buddhist monk, Sariputra

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¹⁶⁶ PR Srinivasan, “Buddhist Images of South India”, in Aiyappan & Srinivasan (eds), Story of Buddhism with special reference to South India, op cit., pp. 79.
Paññita, in the presence of the Sanghattar of the place, for worship and offerings on new moon and full moon days.\textsuperscript{171}

It must also be remembered that Hsuan Tsang, who visited the Tamil country around CE 630, lamented the decline of Buddhism in Kāṇcīpuram which he had heard spoken of as a great Buddhist centre in the past.\textsuperscript{172} It has been conjectured on the basis of the find of four Buddha figures in the round\textsuperscript{173} that the present Kāmākṣi\textsuperscript{174} and Kaccapesvara temples in Kāṇcī were once Buddhist shrines. Three Buddha figures at Paḷḷūr, about eight miles northwest of Kāṇcī, are said to have been brought therein from a nearby mound called Buddhameḻu or Puthumeḻu.\textsuperscript{175} A Buddha figure and a dharmacakra have also been found in Kaṅkiluppai, a village adjacent to Pallāvaram.\textsuperscript{176} Two headless Buddha images were unearthed in the 1970s in Mylapore in the heart of Madras city.\textsuperscript{177}

Among the sculptured panels of the Vaikuntha Pērumāl temple in Kāṇcī is one of a caitya, which has been assigned to the period of Buddhavarman.\textsuperscript{178} A few Buddhist images belonging to a later period testify to the tenacity of the Buddhist faith in the Tamil land through the second millennium. A Buddha figure, exquisitely modelled but for the flame on the head which has been left unfinished as a lump, found from a modern temple in Tyāganār in the

\textsuperscript{171} Ekambaranathar, ibid, p. 20; SII Vol. 17, no. 131. Sambandar is said to have debated with and defeated a Buddhist monk named Sariputta. I have argued with the Śrīvaiśāpava evidence that the hagiographies were carefully constructed using available evidence. The choice of the name Sariputta, for instance, by the Śaiva hagiographers of the 1\textsuperscript{st}-13\textsuperscript{th} when Buddhism was practically invisible in the Tamil land, demonstrates the validity of the argument in the Śaiva case as well.


\textsuperscript{173} Ekambaranathar, “Buddhist Vestiges in Tondaimandalam”, op cit., p. 21, footnote - Annual Reports of Epigraphy 1908, 1934-35.

\textsuperscript{174} TA Gopinatha Rao discovered, in 1915, an imposing Buddha image in granite, 7'10" in size, in the innermost prākāra of the Kāmākṣi temple at Kāṇcī. It is tentatively attributed to the early 7\textsuperscript{th} century. The statue can be seen in the Buddhist sculpture gallery of the Government Museum, Madras. Ref: Aiyappan & Srinivasan (eds), Story of Buddhism with special reference to South India, op cit., pp. 70-71. On the basis of the discovery of the above mentioned figure and four other Buddha images, Gopinatha Rao was inclined to believe that the temple itself, or a part thereof, had been originally a Buddhist one. Ref: TN Vasudeva Rao, “Buddhism and Kanchi”, in Journal of Indian History, Vol. 53, 1975, pt 1, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{175} Ekambaranathar, “Buddhist Vestiges in Tondaimandalam”, op cit., p. 18.

\textsuperscript{176} Ekambaranathar, ibid, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{177} Ekambaranathar, ibid", p. 19.

Attūr taluk of Salem district is dated to the 10th century. The Buddha seated in padmāsana found in Madagaram in Tanjavur district seems to have the characteristic features of Coḷa figures dateable to about CE1000. The seated Buddha found near the police station in (Śiva) Kānchi, and dated to the first half of the 11th century is however of the Javanese type rather than the indigenous Coḷa. A slightly damaged, seated Buddha figure from TiruvAtti in South Arcot district may belong to the middle of the 11th century or slightly later. The Buddha from TiruvAlanjuli in Tanjavur district, of about the same period is a rare standing Buddha figure in stone found in the Tamil country. Besides, this figure shares many stylistic features with the bronzes found from Nāgapaṭṭinam. The figure erected on a platform on the bund of a tank called Paḷupparāni in Jayākōḍaṇalapuram in Tiruccirāppalli district is noteworthy for a beautiful umbrella carved in high relief above the halo representing Śākyasimha Buddha, (i.e., suggesting his royal status). This umbrella recalls the umbrellas occurring in some seals of the copper plate grants of the time of Rājendra Coḷa I and the figure is consequently assigned to the later half of the 11th century. Even more interesting is the local name of the figure—Paḷuppar, meaning, one who is ripe. The term is the exact equivalent of Samyak Sambuddha who was the ‘most ripened among the wise’. A twelfth century specimen of Buddha in the dhyāna posture has been found from Arikkamedu south of Pondicherry. Of a similar date are two figures, one damaged and another in the bhusparśa mudrā in the Karukkilamarnanda Amman temple in Kānchi, another in bhadrāsana from Māṇampāṭi in Tanjavur and the seated figures from Karaṭikuppam, north of Pondicherry, and from Kūvam. The dharmacakra found along with the two Buddha images in Kūvam is now worshipped locally as the Sudarśana cakra of Viṣṇu by the local populace. The only inscribed stone Buddha—though the writing in the Grantha script is too weathered to be read—comes from Manikandi in Ramanathapuram district and is dated to the 13th century. On the inner side of the southern wall of the Ekāmreśvara temple in Kāṇcipuram are found, carved in relief, seven seated Buddha images in their respective niches, dated to approx the 14th-15th centuries. Even

180 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 93.
181 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 93.
182 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 94.
183 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 94.
184 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 95.
185 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 95.
186 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 98.
187 Srinivasan, ibid, p. 98.
188 The two images in the Karukkilamarnāta Amman temple are from the Kāmākṣi temple, originally discovered by Gopinatha Rao. See footnote above.
more interesting is a reclining Buddha carved on the outer side of the eastern wall of the same
temple which is considered the only specimen of the representation the Buddha’s parinirvana
in South India.191 An image of Buddha in the *anjali hasta* pose is also found in the outer
prākāra of the Viṣṇu temple at TirukKaṇṭhāmankai in Colanādu.192 Scenes from the Buddha’s
life are also depicted on the balustrades of the great Rājarājeśvara temple at Tanjavur.193

We do know that Buddhist monasteries flourished in the Deccan. Epigraphic evidence points
to widespread Buddhist presence in the Andhra region and Buddhist cave shrines and vihāras
are among the most notable historical–archaeological features of the Western and Eastern
Ghats. The rarity of Buddhist monumental remains in Tamil Nadu may therefore be more a
function of the neglect of Buddhist institutions from lack of patronage in the second
millennium, and from the destruction and building over of Buddhist shrines194 and monasteries
from latter-day indifference to history and from simple pragmatism as much as due to active
hostility. The archaeological record from Tamil Nadu that I have surveyed also clearly shows
that Buddhist motifs and images were incorporated in Puranic worship and in temples
dedicated to Puranic gods and goddesses.

The evidence for the existence of Jainism is comparatively abundant. Several historical Jaina
shrines remain in worship,195 and a number of Jaina sculptures of *tīrthankaras*, *yakṣas* and
*yakṣīs* have been discovered,196 usually in association with epigraphic evidence. Bronze

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191 A Aiyappan & PR Srinivasan, (eds), *Story of Buddhism with special reference to South India*, 1960,

192 A Eitirajan, *108 Vaiṉava Divya Deśa Stala Varalāru*, Vaiṉava Siddhānta Nūrpatippuk Kalakam,
Karaikkuti, 2003, pp. 127-133. Since this source is essentially a pilgrims’ manual, it does not give any
information regarding the date of this sculpture.

193 Kenneth Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980,
p. 25.

194 This seems the likeliest explanation for the absence of Buddhist shrines in the Kāñci puram region
which in Hsuan Tsang’s time seems to have been a flourishing centre of the religion. The apsidal
Durgā Temple in Paṭṭaḍakal in Karnatakā is a good example of the taking over of a Buddhist shrine for
Puranic deities. Even though it is commonly held that apsidal shrines were Buddhist, and this shrine
has tiny Buddhas carved in low relief along the length of the shrine wall, it is considered to be
dedicated to Śūrya since its inner walls and ceiling are extensively carved with Puranic motifs. The
temple takes its name not from any association with the goddess, Durgā, but from a nearby fort, durga.
Source—personal visit to the shrine.

195 Tiruparuttikkurum near Kāñci puram, for instance. Ref: S Gurumurthy, “Jaina System of learning in

figures such as those of Parśvanātha, Dharmadevi, Mahāvira and Brahmadeva dated to the twelfth- thirteenth centuries have been discovered at TiruNarunkōṇṭai in the South Arcot district. More than 500 Jaina inscriptions—from the earliest down to those inscribed in the 20th century—have been recovered from Tamil Nadu, distributed over the entire state. Forty three inscriptions dated to the pre-Christian era have been found, all but twelve of them in one district. Nine of the latter ten are in one cluster besides. It is of course important to remember that these are probably the earliest inscriptions found in the state. Just over thirty inscriptions pertain to the first seven centuries of the Christian era; the distribution of these is however slightly wider. One of these is of particular historical interest. A first century CE Tamil Brāhmi inscription found on a rock inside a cavern in TirukKōyilūr in the South Arcot district states that Satyaputo Atiyamāṇ Nēṭumāṇcī caused an abode to be donated. Satyaputras are mentioned in Asokan records, and have been identified with the Könku country. Atiyamāṇ Nēṭumāṇ Aṇcī has been celebrated in Sangam poems by Paraṇār and Auvvaiyār, and has been described as a worshipper of Śiva. It is easy to read this as evidence of ‘tolerance’, or of ‘kings patronizing different religions as a matter of policy’. I believe it is amenable to a different interpretation, which will be discussed shortly.

The number of inscriptions climbs dramatically from the eighth century onwards; what is true of the larger picture holds for specifics as well. Of the 125 Jaina inscriptions believed to have been engraved in the eighth century, 95 (of the total of 106) found in one site in Kalukumalai in the Chidambaranār district do not bear any date but may be ascribed to this period owing to the dates of the inscriptions before and after them. It is significant that while this clustering of records in one site indicates the great popularity of this shrine/ monastic residence in this period, it also suggests the relatively narrow spread of the religion. The ninety odd records belonging to the ninth century are distributed comparatively widely across the state. Interestingly, two of them mention the exploits of Nandivarman III Pallava (846-869 CE) but neither any contribution nor reference to the temple of Kuntu Tīrthānkara despite being

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197 T Ganesan, “Jaina Vestiges of Tirunarungondai in South Arcot District, Tamil Nadu”, in Y Krishan (ed), Essays in Indian History and Culture, Indian History and Culture Society, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 148-150.

198 Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu, op cit. All figures that follow are collated from the said book.

199 The break-up is: 1st- 2nd centuries: 5. 3rd-4th centuries: 18. 5th-6th centuries: 3. 7th century: 3. See Jaina Inscriptions Topographical Charts in the appendices.

200 Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu, op cit., p. 360.

201 Sastri, The Colas, op cit., p. 643, “Not only did the kings as a rule tolerate religions and sects other than their own, but they often patronised all persuasions in equal measure”.

182
inscribed on the inner wall of its gopuram near the entrance. In the tenth century, only forty five inscriptions pertain to Jainism/ are inscribed close to Jaina palli. The number of epigraphic remains with relation to Jainism is just twenty seven in the 11th century, nineteen in the twelfth, and thirty five in the next two centuries. The situation remains much the same in the 15th and 16th centuries: a score mentions in the first case and a dozen in the latter.

A very interesting inscription of the early eight century203 of the Pallava Narasinga-p- potaraiyar Narasimhavarman II Rájasimha from the Kámáksi Amman temple in Pěriya Káñci must be mentioned here. The epigraph recording a gift of land to the temple of ariver (arhat) mentions that the queen Lokamahádevi was possessed by a brahmárañšasa. It appears that an ácārya of the Ājivika persuasion played some part in alleviating the affliction.204 Though this does not have a direct bearing on our argument, it is very significant evidence of the continuity of the Ājivika darśana well into the first millennium CE in the deep south of the country.

v) Analysis and Comparison with Evidence from the hymns

It would be interesting to examine how the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava belief systems came to dominate the cultural landscape of the Tamil region, all but eliminating Jainism and Buddhism. We have seen that the hagiographic literature of both the orthodox sects feature stories of conversions, particularly of prominent conversions of rulers from the reviled heterodox systems, as also stories of contestations between their own saints and monks of Buddhists and Jaina persuasions. Perhaps it is the story of Appar’s conversion of the Pallava ruler Mahendravarman (accession CE 610), that is reflected in an inscription of the same ruler in a pillar of the rock- cut cave near the summit of the rock- fort hill in Tiruccirappaři. The Sanskrit epigraph in florid Pallava Grantha characters states that the river Kaveri is beloved of the Pallava king Guṇabhara (also called Puruṣottama and Śatrumalla in the inscription), who was a worshipper of the linga and who ‘left hostile conduct to embrace Śaivism.’205 Mahendravarman Pallava is also known to have composed a satirical play in Sanskrit, Mattavilāsa prahasana, where he ridicules the grasping habits and licentiousness of the monks of the heterodox faiths.206 We have seen that in the tales told in the hagiographic texts, the bhakti saint or ácārya invariably trounces his opponent, and in some cases also goes on to

203 CE 708- 709.
inflict cruel punishment through the agency of his patron-ruler. It has been noted that the 
Mahābhārata is obsessed with the threat of the ‘nāstikas’ i.e., those who deny the authority 
of the Vedas. The hostility of the bhakti saints and ācāryas towards Jaina and Buddhist monks 
can be said to have had the weight of tradition behind it. Indeed, in a system where ‘tradition’ 
was revered to the degree that innovations were frowned upon and where new ideas—for new 
ideas did arise—were claimed to be actually the original interpretation of the ancient texts but 
which had been clouded by the passage of years, this rivalry had absolutely perfect credentials.

As historians, we have the advantage of hindsight, and can trace, through texts and 
inscriptions, the rise to prominence of Śaiva and Vaishnava bhakti cults. But how does one find 
the answer to why an oil presser of Kānčī or a stone cutter from Srirangam transferred his 
allegiance from Jainism/ Buddhism to Śiva or Viṣṇu? Could one of the reasons be the 
fundamental atheism of Jainism? Despite the development of the practice of veneration of the 
Jinas, the emphasis in Jainism remained on self-discipline to avoid the accretion of bad 
karma. More pertinent, was it a question of transferring allegiance from one faith to another 
as the hagiographies of both the Śaivas and Vaishnavas seem to imply? It has been noted that 
all Hindu worship is not soteriological in intent. “In fact, most Hindus perform worship out 
of devotion to their god, not out of deference to the theology of samsāra”. Perhaps the 
bhakti focus on a benevolent God, willing to intervene in the lives of His devotees when 
appealed to, was more comforting for the lay worshipper? This loving God was moreover 
easily approachable in shrines throughout the Tamil land.

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207 Appar’s conversion of Mahendravarman Pallava; Rāmānuja’s conversion of Bīṣṭideva of Karnataka and subsequent impaling of several 1000 Jainas; Sambandar’s conversion of Kūn Pāṇṭiya and impaling the Jainas.
208 Personal communication from Naina Dayal. (Dayal is currently working on her doctoral dissertation, Tellers of Tales: Sūtas, Paurāṇikas, Kuśilava and Vālmiki).
209 Speaking of the 9th century Rāṣṭrakūta ruler Amoghavarṣa, KAN Sastri, A History of South India, op cit., p. 155 says, “By temperament, Amoghavarṣa was a religious man who loved literature more than fighting. He is said to have retired from his court more than once to spend time in the company of Jaina monks. It is doubtful, however, whether he formally renounced Hinduism, though a small Jaina catechism entitled Praśnottara-ratna-mālikā is attributed to him”. It is unclear how one can ‘renounce’ Hinduism unless one specifically adopts some other religion which prescribes exclusive initiatory rites. I will argue that one did not need to be exclusively Jaina or Bauddha but could combine worship of Puranic deities with revering Buddhist and Jaina ones.
211 Smith, ibid, p. 351.
212 See Chapter 5.
There was of course the important factor that the bhakti hymns were composed in the language of the ordinary folk. Drawing on a classical tradition of literature, which continued to carry prestige in the Tamil land, the poetry of the bhakti saints moved however from the rather erudite idiom of the Sangam anthologies to the vernacular, and incorporated folk motifs to enhance its appeal. That the bhakti hymns were not ‘written’ for an elite readership but were intended to be sung is clear from literally hundreds of the hymns. The signature verses of the majority of the poems, which double as phalasrutis, claim to bring special blessings—here and hereafter—to those who recite, or better still sing, the said verses in praise of the Lord.

Tirumankai Āḻvār claims, “Those who sing this lovely garland of words of Kaliyan, ruler of Mankai, in praise of the Lord of TiruMaṇiṅkūṭam in Nāṅkūr where mansions touch the moon will rule this earth surrounded by the oceans and reach the heaven crossing sūryaloka (the abode of the sun).”213 Elsewhere he says, “Kaliyan, lord of Mankai of rich fields surrounded by strong ramparts has praised the Lord of Kaṇṇapuram in sweet Tamil. Those who sing it with music will have no sorrow.”214

Or Āṇḍāl: “Those who recite this decad of verses in pure Tamil of Kotai, daughter of the lord of Villiputtūr of the Veyar clan, describing her dream of marriage to the cowherd Lord, will rejoice with good offspring.”216 And, “Those who sing without fault this garland of thirty songs—which describes the boons that maidens lovely as the moon received on singing the praises of the beautiful, red-eyed, four-armed, auspicious Tirumāl, of Keśavaṇ, Mādhavan who churned the Bay of Bengal,217—by Bhattar-pirāṇ’s Kotai of Putuvai where lotuses bloom in cool waters shall find eternal joy everywhere”.218

Nammāḷvār: “Those who recite these ten hymns of the flawless thousand of Cāṭakopāṇ on the Lord Mādhava will be freed from rebirth.”219

213 Pēriya Tirumōli 4.6.10.
214 Pēriya Tirumōli 8.7.10.
215 Sanskritised to Godā.
216 Nacciyar Tirumōli 7.10.
217 Vanga katal literally means the Bengal Sea. As a resident of the Śrīvilliputṭūr, almost equidistant from the three seas, Āṇḍāl may have been familiar with all three, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, and thus made this distinction. May I add on an irreverent note that if the ocean that was churned, i.e., Tiruppārkāṭal, is not a mythical one but the prosaic Bay of Bengal, perhaps Vaikūṭtha can similarly be located on a map.
218 Tiruppāvai 30.
219 Tiruvāyūmōli 1.6.10.
And the song with which the NDP opens, the *Pallāntu*, the benediction that Periyāḻvār calls upon the gem-hued Almighty Lord Himself: “These words blessing the pure Lord who wields the invincible Sārnga bow (are) lovingly spoken by Viṣṇucittan of Villiputtār. *Pallāntu!* Blessings in this good year on them too who sing (this) with joy and surround the Lord at all times chanting ‘*namo Nārāyaṇa!*’.220

Cutler has pointed out that *phalasrutis* relate the audience of the poems, i.e., the devotees, with the preceding text, much of which documents the poet’s personal experiences and relationship with the Lord. Through this concluding stanza, the poet sets himself up as a model for other devotees, whom he invites to relive his own experience.221

Who were these devotees? If the Āḻvārs and Nāyaṉmārs were struggling to establish their respective Gods as the only one(s) worthy of worship, were they addressing an audience composed largely of Buddhists and Jainas? Is that the reason why their comments on the preachers and mendicants of these faiths are so much harsher than their references to each other? I will address the second question a little later. Noting that Sambandar set aside the tenth verse of each of his extant four hundred hymns for denouncing the Buddhists and Jainas, Dehejia concludes that such constant censure and condemnation could only have been occasioned by the “obvious power and influence of these sects in the era of the Tamil saints”.222 We have already seen that Jainism and Buddhism were well established in the Tamil region by the early centuries of the Christian era. It remains impossible, in the present state of our knowledge, to even guess at the numbers of followers of the two ‘heterodox’ faiths, or even their approximate percentage in the entire population. Numerous references in the Sangam poems make it evident that *brāhmaṇas* and brahmanical ways of worship were known in the Tamil land by the beginning of the Christian era, but it is equally clear that indigenous forms of worship, of Murukan/ Cēyyon, and Māyon were far more deeply entrenched. The early centuries of the Christian era saw the emergence of Puranic religion as an outcome of a complex dialogue between the Vedic/ Sastraic religious complex and hundreds of local cults across the country.223 The absorption of Murukan into Śiva’s ‘family’,

220 Periyāḻvār *Tirumōli* 1.1.12 Owing to this remarkable poem where the human Āḻvār blesses the Lord and each of his aspects with everlasting glory, he is described in the hagiographies as having become father to the great Lord himself, due to his overflowing parental concern. *Pallāntu* literally means ‘live long’. See Chapter 5-ii-b.


and identification of Māyōṅ with Krṣṇa, the cowherd god of the Vṛndāvan region, and the identification of both these with the overarching deity Viṣṇu- Nārāyana, their brahmanisation as it were, was part of this same process. This ensured the acceptability of the new Puranic gods to the Tamil populace. New forms of worship would have followed in its train. While these new forms of worship would have sought to establish the brāhmaṇa priest as the central intermediary between worshipper and deity, it would be erroneous to assume that these changes emanated from any one source. Rather, these methods of worship themselves evolved over centuries, affecting and in turn being affected by socio-political developments. With the older method of legitimising kingship, such as the public sacrifice, losing currency, partly due to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism with their stress on ahimsa, new mechanisms of legitimation developed, such as fabrication of genealogical tables for emerging ruling dynasties, and royal patronage to temples. Kings established authority not merely by conspicuous ‘Gifts of Power’, but also by establishing themselves as the chief or first worshipper and thus establishing their proximity to the divine. The three-pronged relations of ruler, priesthood and laity evolved through complex interactions with differences in every part of the country reflecting specific regional socio-political circumstances.

We have already seen that the Kālabhras were supposed to have been patrons and followers of the heterodox faiths. The ascendancy of Brahmanical religion from the sixth-seventh centuries led to them being pictured as fanatics who abrogated devadāna and brahmadeya rights. I do not accept that the specific religious persuasion of the ruling dynasty can lead to a complete eclipse of other religious belief systems in society at large. In fact, development, change and evolution in the ‘other’ belief systems would have also continued apace irrespective of the availability of patronage or lack thereof from the rulers. It remains true, however, that active intervention of the ruling class in the affairs of a particular religion or sect can have significant consequences as is seen in the case of Śaivism under the Coḷas.

If the Kālabhras have been abused as evil kings for their apparent patronage of Jainism and Buddhism, the Coḷas have been extolled for their broad vision. The inscriptional evidence relating to the heterodox faiths has been cited frequently and in exhaustive detail to speak of

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224 See above, reference to Ronald Inden.
225 I have borrowed the phrase from the title of James Heitzman’s monograph.
227 See Chapter 1, Introduction.
the ‘communal harmony’ or ‘tolerance’ in Cola times,\textsuperscript{228} or to stress the importance of the heterodox faiths in the Tamil land.\textsuperscript{229} They have been used to argue that the bhakti saints were fighting the challenge of the heterodox sects.\textsuperscript{230} While the latter claim is indisputably borne out by the evidence, I believe that it needs to be refined. The first matter to be considered is that compared to the several thousands of inscriptions\textsuperscript{231} pertaining to the orthodox faiths, the number of Jaina and Buddhist inscriptions is miniscule indeed. A careful perusal reveals that even this numerical data can be misleading; many of these inscriptions are classified as Jaina for no other reason that they have been found in the vicinity of some Jaina \textit{palli} (shrine). Nor do all the others indicate patronage—many are, as in the case of Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava temple inscriptions too, records of sale of land or repair of dams, inscribed simply in the most prominent place in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, we have seen that the presence of Śramaṇas\textsuperscript{232} and Baudhās is distinctly marked in Tamil literature. This suggests that along with the brāhmaṇas and indigenous elite, monks subscribing to either of the two faiths may have constituted the majority of the literate section of the populace. It is again this literate section that would have distinguished the different philosophical bases of the different religious systems. For the common people, however, who were by and large inherently polytheistic, Śiva and Viṣṇu as much as Buddha and the Tīrthankaras might have been welcome additions to the older pantheon of Māyōn, Cēyyōn, Vendan, Varuṇa, Kōrravai and the numberless martyred heroes whose memorial stones were regularly worshipped. Thus, the \textit{Cilappatikāram}, an epic with a pronounced Jaina inclination, includes songs in praise of Murukān and Kṛṣṇa.\textsuperscript{233} It is our contention that it was the religious elite which recognized the fundamental differences between the brahmanical and the non-Vedic religious systems, foresaw the possibility of polarisation, and eventually contributed to it, while also making adjustments whenever necessary. This recognition would underlie the integration of traditional and folk forms of worship by both brahmanism and the heterodox faiths in an attempt to

\textsuperscript{228} V Balambal, “Patronage of the Imperial Colas to Jainism”, in Aloka Parasher- Sen (ed), \textit{Kevala Bodhi}, pp. 285-290; also KAN Sastri, \textit{The Colas}, op cit., p. 643, “A progressive king like Rajaraja even made it a point to give clear expression to his general attitude to religion by including in decoration of the Great Siva Temple at Tanjore themes from Vaisnavism and even Buddhism”.


\textsuperscript{230} R Champakalakshmi, “\textit{Patikam Patuvar}”, op cit., pp. 199- 215.

\textsuperscript{231} Mahalingam, 1985. A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States. ICHR, S. Chand and Co. Ltd, Delhi. Vol. I, p. vii, informs us that at least sixteen thousand inscriptions dated from the earliest times up till CE 1300 have been recovered from the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. (The number is naturally likely to be substantially larger if we count the inscriptions from the 14th to the 19th centuries as well).

\textsuperscript{232} Generally used in Tamil to refer to Jaina monks.

concentrate support and patronage in their own hands. This absorption, albeit in altered forms, of indigenous forms of worship and cults, was to alter the 'great traditions' as we well know. More crucial in our present context is the fact that the leaders of the different religious systems self-consciously exalted their own god(s) over that/ those of the others. However, even as late as the early 11th century, it was possible for a person to simultaneously make substantial gifts of land to a Jaina temple and to those of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Uttarādevi and Durgā, and to consecrate the images of the deities in all these shrines to 'ensure the protection of the city of Salukki'.

I believe this is an instance not merely of 'tolerance', but of deep-set polytheistic suspicion that the neglect of any deity can lead to calamitous consequences irrespective of the blessings of others. An offended god can wreak vengeance, and the best that another god, however powerful and however well-pleased with the devotee's worship, can do is to mitigate the suffering. Curses, as anyone who is familiar with Hindu mythology knows, are irreversible; they can merely be softened. Since the wrath of supernatural beings is best avoided, it is advisable to not ignore any godling, unless known to be specifically subordinate to a higher god and thus automatically propitiated when the overlord is worshipped. Thus, the Pallava, Pāṇḍya and Cola rulers may have made their gifts to different religious establishments partly in order be seen as patrons by all sections of their populace, but also because of what I shall term ideal polytheism.

A corollary of our hypothesis is that new, and at least semi-independent, gods must regularly emerge to explain away the minor and major tragedies that inevitably visit every individual despite the most dutiful performance of all prescribed rituals. Some recent examples are the emergence of the cult of Santoshi mā in the sixties, and the brand new, 21st century ritual of appeasing Saturn on Śani amāvasya. The new gods are, however, usually given a cloak of immense antiquity; their worship is supposed to have been merely reinstituted after having been inexplicably forgotten over the ages.

The brahmanical religious elite, however, did not subscribe to ideal polytheism. Perceiving the fundamental agnosticism, if not actual atheism, of the heterodox faiths, despite the worship of the Tirthankaras and eventually yakṣas and yakṣīs in the Jaina case, that of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas in the Buddhist, and numerous goddesses in both, the brahmanical religious elite rejected the possibility of accommodation of their deities even as inferior gods in their pantheon. Already by the seventh century, they were asking their followers to reject those they...

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234 Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasam, Jaina Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu, op cit., p. 250. Ref: ARE, 474/1920; South Indian Temple Inscriptions, Vol. 1, pt 1, no. 123.
termed 'false gods'. Related to this was the fact that a number of deities came to be considered subordinate to certain 'great Gods', (such as the ganas and the family of Śiva), or to be considered their avatāras (especially in the case of Viṣṇu), or forms other than avatāras (such as Mohini).

The heterodox religious elites, with their more clearly defined philosophical systems, seem to have exercised greater discretion in the adoption of deities. A clear distinction can be drawn between 'indigenous' cult practices without brahmanical sanction that were absorbed in the emergent pantheons of Buddhism and Jainism, and the patented high Gods of brahmanical Hinduism. The Cilappatikāram features an episode where a Jaina nun, Kavunti Aṭikal, listens patiently to a discourse by a brahmāṇa about gods to be worshipped and the benefits that would accrue. She finally replies, "O Brahmin of good conduct learned in the Vedas! I have no desire to go on your path for realising the ends you have described... You go ahead and worship the gods you love. We shall also go on our way."235

The brahmanical religions were self consciously Vedic, however different their actual praxis were from the older system which they claimed to inherit. As a result, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism revered a common body of sacred texts, though each sect claimed to be the only true interpreter. Thus, while competition was inevitable between the two, it was formulated in very different terms from the way it was articulated with reference to the heterodox faiths. While Indra, Brahma, numerous other named and clusters of unnamed deities could be easily subsumed under the overarching power of the Supreme God, Śiva or Viṣṇu, it was important to show that the God claimed as Supreme in His own right by the rival sect was not quite so. In fact, the growth of bhakti, deep, emotionally charged devotion to a personal God, can also be related to this complex meshing of 'monotheism'236 with polytheism. Unflinching devotion to the chosen God came to be considered superior to worshipping sundry divinities.

Pēriyāḻvār sings, "Becoming the supreme Lord of all creation, He came as Hṛṣikeśa to churn and destroy the clans of asuras and rākṣasas. Come, break your old clannish ties and join the groups of devotees, revere His feet, chant His thousand names, and sing 'Pallanṭu.'"237

235 Cited in Dehejia, Slaves of the Lord, op cit., p. 25.
236 Here we are using monotheism with rather different connotations from what it means in the Semitic religions. It is the overarching superiority of one God over all others—who are recognized as gods. LSS O'Malley, Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses, 1935, says, "...the great majority of Hindus are theists believing in one personal god, though they are at the same time polytheistic in their religious observances". Cited in Kunal Chakrabarti, Religious Process, op cit., p. 53.
237 Pēriyāḻvār Tirumōlī 1.1.5.
And Kulaśekhara Āḻvār says, “I do not mix with those who are not [His] devotees, nor do I wish to live like a great lord. My Lord of Arangam,[238] the Lord of the immortals,[239] is my master for seven lives.”240

Tirumālicai Āḻvār says that though the devotees of the Lord may forget His names, they would never stoop to worship godlings.241

Tirumankai asks if there is any god— the three eyed one [Śiva], the four headed one [Brahma], or the one with a white elephant [Indra] who aren’t formed of the matter He swallowed and emitted.242 “Devotees! When the dark ocean swelled and the worlds disappeared, all were contained in the stomach of Him who bears the discus. Don’t you know? How can you worship another god? Do not waste your good deeds, worship Him alone.”243

The rewards of such devotion are frequently stressed in the hymns.

In Pēriyāḻvār’s words, “He gives me good rice with ghee, excellent attendants, ornaments for my hands, neck and ears, fragrant sandal paste and cleanses my soul. I sing Pallāntu (glory) to Him who has the foe of snakes, Garuḍa, on His banner.”244 And Nammāḻvār rejoices, “My red-lotus eyed, sugar-like Lord, my mountain of nectar entered me on my merely calling, ‘Mādhava’, and promised to protect me forever. Govinda destroys my sins.”245 And very simply, “Uproot all thoughts of you and yours. Merge with the Lord; there is no greater fulfilment.”246

I must add a caveat here. While a number of verses do speak of the grace of the Lord and the blessings that flow from devotion to Him, the poems do not by any means constitute a ‘promotional campaign’. Much of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham is simply rich poetry and, as in any good poetry, a range of emotions finds expression.247 In fact, though many hymns in the mode of lover speaking to/ of her beloved, and a great number of the ‘pilgrimage

238 Srirangam.
239 Reference to the devas who have drunk the nectar of immortality.
240 Pērumāl Tirumōli 3.5.
241 Naṇṭukaṭa Tiruvantādi 68.
242 Pēriya Tirumōli 11.6.3.
243 Pēriya Tirumōli 11.6.1.
244 Nai̇ṟiyāḻvār Tirumōli 1.1.8 Pēriyāḻvār’s specific advantages may stem from his having been the priest of the temple at Śrīvillipūṭṭūr.
245 Tiruvādmōli 2.7.3.
246 Tiruvādmōli 1.2.3.
247 Friedhelm Hardy, Viraha Bhakti, op cit., p. 245, says, “It is only to be expected that in a large corpus like the Prabandham, we should find much poetry that is no better than mediocre. Yet some of the poems found here belong to the best that were written in India in connection with Kṛṣṇa bhakti”.

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poems are stacked with stereotypical imagery, many of the *viraha* (separation) poems are startlingly intense. We have seen in Chapter 2, the Śrīvaiśñava insistence on the salvific power of the Lord and indeed His ardent desire to save His devotees. The legends of Nārāyaṇa descending to save the world from tyrannical *asuras* in his many *avatāras* or of coming to the assistance of his devotees when summoned (as by Draupadi in the well-known episode of her disrobing by Duhsāsana in the *Mahābhārata*) reinforce the grace of the benevolent Lord.

The story of Tirumalaićai Āḻvār’s fire-raising contest with Śiva—underlined by the Āḻvār’s doing so from his toe in contrast with Śiva opening his famed third eye in the middle of his forehead—is a fairly naked myth demonstrating the rivalry between the Vaiśṇavas and the Śaivas. It is also interesting to remember that this ‘fiery’ battle is sparked off by Śiva’s offer of a boon to the Āḻvār, who is initially disinterested and then asks to be granted *mokṣa*. Significantly, in this Vaiśṇava myth, Śiva is reduced to admitting that the desired boon is beyond his powers; only Viṣṇu is capable of granting liberation. A much later source, the *sthalapurāṇa* of Tañjai-mā-manī-k-koyil quoting the authority of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* tells of three *asuras*, Tañjakan, Danḍakan and Gajamukhan, who meditated upon Śiva to acquire immortality. Śiva, appearing before them, promised that he would not be the agency of their death, but that their wish could only be granted by Pērumāl. This notion was expressed earlier by Pēriyāḻvār, “Not the bull-bannered one (*Śiva*), not Brahma, Indra nor anyone else knows the cure for the sickness of rebirth. Oh dark-gem coloured Lord, who appeared as the healer [Dhanvantari who rose from the milk ocean when it was churned for nectar] cut asunder my bonds of rebirth and lead me to your temple, oh my father in TiruMāḷiruṇcolai!” And Peyāḻvār asks if even fair-faced Indra, lotus-seated Brahma, and mat-haired Śiva can fully

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248 Most of the *Pēriyā Tirumōli* can be considered pilgrimage poetry.
249 See Chapter 3-iii-a, Tirumalaićai Āḻvār *Vaibhavam*. Verse 25 of *Nāṁmukan Tiruvantādi*, attributed to this Āḻvār, says, “That I worship none else will be borne out by the mat haired Śiva”. In verse 66 from the same work, he says he would never contemplate on nor circumambulate Śiva or Brahma. And in verse 84, he declares that Śiva is no match for him. These might have formed the basis for the story of Tirumalaićai refusing to acknowledge Śiva as he passed overhead, and the contest between them that followed.
251 Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, op cit., pp. 44-72, has shown that such quotations from supposedly authoritative sources may be entirely fictitious but were frequently used to bolster the claims being made in the said text.
252 The myth follows the usual pattern whereby the three *asuras*, drunk on their newly acquired power, start harassing people including devotees of the Lord, to protect whom, Viṣṇu finally finishes them off. In this case, the dying wish of Tañjakan was that the site should take his name, thus, Tañjakan-ur = Tanjavur.
253 *Pēriyāḻvār Tirumōli* 5.3.6.
comprehend the glories of the Lord who bears a lotus on his navel. Tirumālcai Ālvār declares, “Nārāyaṇa created the four-faced Brahma who in turn created Śankara”.

The Agpp carries the following story about the preceptor Nāthamuni who is credited with having rediscovered the hymns of the Ālvārs. Once the ruler in Gangaikōndacolapuram (incidentally a town which came into existence more than a century after the purported time of Nāthamuni) came to Viranārāyaṇapuram to worship at the temple of Mannanār, where Nāthamuni served as priest. When leaving, the king placed his foot on the head of his sāmanta (feudatory) to climb onto the royal elephant. Nāthamuni watching this wondered if that was how Pērumāl stepped on Brahma and Rudra to climb onto Garuḍa’s back. This entirely gratuitous episode—for it bears no relation to the tale before or after it—needs no explanation.

Chidambaram is a sacred site for both Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, both the Ālvārs and Nāyaṇmārs having sung of their respective god enshrined therein. While this is true of many towns such as Kāñcipuram and Kumbhakonam/ Kuṭantai, there being numerous temples dedicated to different gods in these sacred sites, both gods in Chidambaram are enshrined in the same temple. There is no gainsaying the fact that Chidambaram is almost the greatest of all Śiva temples in Tamil Nadu, even if one discounts the special patronage of the Colas to this temple. Śiva in Chidambaram is Naṭarāja who dances the ānandatiirā and is, too, the Unseen One. Did the Ālvārs sing of Viṣṇu in this site to assert Vaiṣṇava presence in the holiest of Śiva sites? Or, was it in order to establish the independent sovereignty of Viṣṇu here? The Purāṇarākapura Mahātmya is said to mention the visit of Viṣṇu to Chidambaram to witness Śiva’s delightful dance; as a sthalapurāṇa, however, it is likely to be a late source. Māṇikkavācakar refers to Viṣṇu lying in front of Naṭarāja, absorbed in the contemplation of

254 Mūnram Tiruvantadī 97.
255 Nāyūrkaṭ Tiruvantadī 1.
256 Agpp, Nāthamunkaṭ Vaibhavam, pp. 120-125.
257 This is, however, not unique. One of the 108 divya kṣetras of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas is a small shrine of Viṣṇu in the Ekāmbaranāthar temple in Kāñcipuram. Viṣṇu is called Nilā-tunkaṭ-tuntam here. Source: Personal visit. Also, KAN Sastri, The Colas, op cit., p. 643, tells of a brick shrine of Vardaraja Pērumāl (originally built by Koccola and rebuilt in stone in the short reign of Adhirājendra), in the precincts of the temple of Candramaulīśvara at TiruvAkkārai which was, according to inscription SII, 205 of 1904, rebuilt in stone by Cēmпиyaṭ Mahādevi.
258 Naṭarāja is the utsava mūrti in Chidambaram. The mūla deity is the ākāśa linga, i.e., the linga of ether and, consequently, invisible. If Śiva’s dance is celebrated in legend and poetry, it is not more so than the Cidambara rahasya—the palpable and yet unseen presence of Śiva.
259 Pēriya Tirumōlī 3.2.1-10; 3.3.1-10 and Pērumāl Tirumōlī, 10.1-10.
Śiva’s foot raised in cosmic dance and supplicating him for a vision of his other foot as well. And earlier, Appar singing of him in Tillai-Cirrambalam is ecstatic at having seen Him whom even Ayan (Brahma) and Māl (Viṣṇu) could not see despite worshipping Him everyday with flowers, incense and sandal paste. It is significant that the Āḻvārs (and following them, orthodox Śrīvaigalas to this day) speak of the site neither as Cirrambalam nor as Chidambaram, but as Tillai-Tirucitrakūṭam, i.e., Citrakūṭa of the Rāmāyaṇa. Equally significantly, they entirely refrain from any mention of Śiva in the context of Tirucitrakūṭam, as though he did not exist.

The sthalapurāṇa of TiruNaraiyūr, a divya deśa to which Tirumankai Āḻvār has devoted a hundred verses, gives an interesting story about the Cola king whom Tirumankai mentions worshipping in this shrine. The king Koccēnkaṇān, a Cola ruler credited by the Āḻvār with raising seventy temples to Śiva, is said by the sthalapurāṇa to have been exiled from his kingdom after defeat in war. As he was wandering about in despair, he was advised by some sages to worship Pērumāḷ on the banks of the river Maṇi-Mukta. He did so, and as he emerged after a bath in the holy river, there appeared his hands, a divine sword with the help of which he was able to defeat all his enemies and regain his kingdom. He then became a Viṣṇu bhakta as well, granted land to the temple, and had a tirumaṇa maṇḍapa and a vimāṇa built for it. It is significant that the ruler Cēmpiyan Koccēnkanān, portrayed as a devotee of Viṣṇu by Tirumankai Āḻvār, is also known from the hymns of the Tevāṛam trio and is

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261 Tirukkovaiyūr, verse 86. The composer of the Tirukkovaiyūr is the 9th century saint-poet Māṇikkavācakar, not included in the list of the 63 Nāyaṇmārs, being later than Sundarar whose Tiruttōṇṭat-tōkai forms the basis for the list elaborated by Cekkilār in the Pēriya Purāṇam, but highly revered as a saint-poet among Tamil Śaivas. His compositions are included in the Śaiva canon, the Tirumurai.

262 Chidambaram may be derived from the Sanskrit cit+ ambaram, or may be a corruption of the Tamil Cirrambalam= cirru+ ambalam i.e., little hall. The reference may be to the hall of Śiva’s dance. See Peterson, Poems to Śiva, op cit., p. 99 and p. 145 where it is read in the latter sense. See also BGL Swamy, Chidambaram and Nataraja: Problems and Rationalization, Geetha Book House Publishers, Mysore, 1979, pp. 15-16, where the etymologies are discussed and the latter disputed.

263 Appar, IV.80. Translated by Peterson, Poems to Śiva, op cit., p. 107.

264 The very name Chidambaram indicates the character of the deity here, i.e., of the essence of space/sky.

265 Tillai, another Tamil name for Chidambaram, seems to derive from the tree tillai, Latin: Exoecaria agallocha, that grows profusely around here. But this etymology is disputed. BGL Swamy, Chidambaram and Nataraja, op cit., p. 18.

266 Pēriya Tirumōli 6.6.3-9.

267 See Chapter 1, Introduction, discussion on sources.

268 Pēriya Tirumōli 6.6.8.

269 The name of the river near Nācciyar Koyil/ Tirunaraiyūr.

associated with the Śaiva sacred shrine of Ānaikka;²⁷¹ indeed, he is one of the 63 canonised Nāyaṇmārs. All three Tevāram poets celebrate the king for his temple building activities. The central motif of the tale in the sthalapurāṇa is, of course, that of a bhakta of Śiva turning to Viṣṇu in his time of need, and finding succour from the latter. Tirumankai’s words express the recognition that Koccēnkanān’s patronage extended to both Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. One wonders, however, if the Tevāram poets were aware of this king’s catholicity of faith when they were claiming him for their own, or believed him to be as single-minded as themselves in his devotion to their chosen deity, Śiva.

Tirumankai Āḻvār has devoted ten hymns to a shrine called Nandipura Viṇṇagaram.²⁷² We know that the Vaikunta Pērumāḷ temple in Kāncī was built by Nandivarman II Pallavamalla; it is probable that this shrine was also built by the same ruler.²⁷³ The sthalapurāṇa of TiruNandipura Viṇṇagaram,²⁷⁴ however, recounts the following myth to explain the etymology of the site. Śiva’s vāhana, Nandi, in his usual arrogance²⁷⁵ bypassed Viṣṇu’s dvārapālakas on his way to meet the Lord. The slighted dvārapālakas cursed him to suffer with agni constantly burning within him. The distraught bull sought Śiva’s help, but he said that the word of Viṣṇu’s dvārapālakas was equivalent to that of the Lord himself. He advised Nandi to meditate on Viṣṇu and obtain his grace. Nandi performed penance and was finally rid of his suffering by Tirumāl who also granted that the site would take his name.²⁷⁶ Clearly, the contestation between the two sectarian religions did not abate with time. The latter myth might, however, be of greater antiquity than the hagiographies, and may have evolved at any time after the original reason of the shrine’s name had been forgotten.²⁷⁷

In the hagiography of Tirumankai Āḻvār, it is not the gods who are pitted against each other, but their devotees. Kaliyan’s vanquishing Sambandar in a poetic contest in the latter’s birthplace²⁷⁸ is clearly another attempt to establish the superiority of the Vaiṣṇavas over the

²⁷¹ Peterson, Poems to Siva, op cit., p. 147 & p. 196.
²⁷² Pēriya Tirumōḻi 5.10.1-10.
²⁷³ Tirumankai has devoted Pēriya Tirumōḻi 2.91-10 to the Kānci temple which he calls Parameccura Viṇṇagaram; in fact, this strengthens the possibility of Nandipura Viṇṇagaram taking its name from the same ruler.
²⁷⁴ Viṇṇagaram can be translated as nagara of Viṣṇu. It is also translated as heavenly nagara, viṇ in Tamil meaning the celestial realm.
²⁷⁵ Traditionally called ‘Adhikāra Nandi’ as one is supposed to take permission for entry from Śiva’s bull.
²⁷⁷ See discussion of site myths in Chapter 5-iv.
²⁷⁸ See Chapter 3-iii-d, Tirumankai Āḻvār Vaibhavam.
Saivas. The DSC version which pictures the meeting of the two saints in a more friendly spirit than the Gpps also however takes care to establish the superiority of the Āḻvār’s merit for Sambandar is said to have honoured Parakāla with a poem in his praise while Parakāla sings only of Viṣṇu. The said legend is however equally significant in its accent on this meeting having been brought about by Sambandar’s desire to meet the Āḻvār who was apparently covered in glory after vanquishing the Bauddhas.279 Clearly, Sambandar’s reputation as a foe of Bauddhas and Jainas was well established and familiar in Vaiṣṇava circles as well.280

If Sambandar’s and Tirumankai’s was a mere contest of poetic talent, the hagiography of Rāmānuja leaves no room for doubt that it is the philosophical system of Viśiṣṭādvaita that is to be considered superior to Advaita. The stories of the conversions of Yādava Prakāśa, Yajñamūrti, and Rāmānuja’s cousin, Govinda Bhaṭṭar, are framed very carefully. Yādava is shown to have repeatedly erred in his interpretation of Vedānta. Moreover, these errors are shown to be fundamental to his belief system.281 He is also portrayed as a fairly unprincipled character, capable of plotting a disciple’s death, rejoicing inwardly when Rāmānuja disappears in the forest, though shedding crocodile tears, and then drawing Rāmānuja’s cousin into the Śaiva fold though a trick, presumably to estrange him from his cousin’s beliefs and prevent his publicising his evil intentions. His conversion is thus not merely philosophical/religious, but also of character for, after taking ‘refuge in Rāmānuja’s feet’, he devotes himself to serious scholarship.

Govinda is passionate. He wholeheartedly embraced the Śaiva faith on receiving what he clearly perceived as an omen, just as he had previously been devoted to Rāmānuja. He remained steadfast in his adopted faith despite the engagement with Pēriya Tirumalai Nampi on scholastic matters, but dramatically moved to the Śrīvaiṣṇava fold on hearing the emotionally charged hymns of Nammāḻvār. Here, it is the richness of the Tiruvāyumōli that is the catalyst, underlining the special character of bhakti that can triumph over intellectual beliefs.

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279 See Chapter 3-iii-d, Tirumankai Āḻvār Vaibhavam.
280 KAN Sastri, The Colas, op cit., p. 636 says, “Impossible as history, this beautiful legend enshrines the belief in the common mission of Saivism and Vaisnavism, entertained by the Tamil Vaiṣṇavas of the 11th–12th centuries. In stemming the tide of anti-Vedic heresy, the Alvars and Nayanmars had laboured together in the past, and what was more natural for their successors than to bring together the great Śaiva antagonist of Jainism and the equally great Vaiṣṇava opponent of Buddhism”.
281 Note that he fears Advaita would be endangered by Rāmānuja’s interpretations.
Yajñamūrti is said to have been on his way to digvijaya, establishing his philosophical system without rival. To trounce such a scholar was undoubtedly a matter of great prestige. An inset within the story is telling. Rāmānuja praying to Perarulālar asks if the Lord wishes to engage in lilā (sport) to wipe away, through a falsifier, the (only) correct darśana. This echoes Śrīvaiṣṇava, and indeed, brahmanic understanding of the Buddha. It has been shown that the incorporation of the Buddha as an avatāra of Viṣṇu was a brahmanical device to undermine the popularity of Buddhism. Śrīvaiṣṇavas explain that the Lord took birth as Buddha to spread falsehood and hasten the end of the world so that He could come to redeem it as He did in His previous births. Indeed, the Advaitins are often reviled as pracchanna Baudhais (Buddhists in disguise) by Śrīvaiṣṇavas, for denying the qualities of the Supreme Brahman.

There are numerous instances of these attempts at mutual one-upmanship that the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas were constantly engaged in. One of the most familiar motifs in the Āḻvārs' hymns is the grace of Viṣṇu towards Śiva. As Brahma was growing excessively vain, Śiva cut off one of his five heads to humble him. But this brought upon him the grave sin of brāhma-hatya (decapitating a brāhmaṇa) as a result of which the skull stuck to Śiva’s palm. Śiva wandered across the worlds looking for someone who could bestow enough grace on him to relieve him of his curse. It was finally Śri, consort of Nārāyaṇa, who filled his begging bowl and released him. Just as the Śaiva saints emphasize the greatness of their Lord whom Rāma prayed to at Rāmeśvaram before setting out across the sea to Lanka, and to Brahma’s and Viṣṇu’s humbling by the infinite fire-linga, the Āḻvārs frequently refer to the above legend to establish the greatness of their own god.

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283 Personal communication from Śrīvaiṣṇava scholars, Profs NS Sadagopan and (late) J Parthasarathi.
284 Personal communication from Profs (late) NS Sadagopan and J Parthasarathi. Also see, Paramata-bhangam of Vedānta Deśika, stanzas 22-23.
285 Carman, The Theology of Ramanuja, op cit., p. 53, says “The four later Vaiṣṇava commentators, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Vallabha and Madhva, all insisted on the heterodox character of Śankara’s interpretation and sometimes (especially Madhva) charge him with being a crypto-Buddhist. There is no doubt that Śankara, like his predecessor Gaudapāda, made use of the weapons of the later Buddhist logic in order to challenge the dominant intellectual position of Buddhism”.
286 Śiva is thus known as Kapāliśvara, the Lord with a skull.
287 Pēriyāḻvār Tirumōli 1.9.9; Tirucchanda Viruttam 11, 53, 113; Amalanadipiran 6; Pēriya Tirumoli 1.4.8, 1.5.8, 2.3.1; Iranṭam Tiruvantādi of Pūtattālvār, 17, 63; Nāmukam Tiruvantādi 31, Tiruvāyumōli 4.10.4 etc.
Another popular legend that is frequently alluded to in the hymns is Krṣṇa’s contest with Bāṇāsura. The asura, having obtained the boon of protection from Śiva, proceeded to tyrannise all creatures. The story reaches its climax with Aniruddha, grandson of Krṣṇa, falling in love with and wishing to marry the asura’s daughter Usā against the wishes of her father. In the ensuing battle, Krṣṇa proceeds to cut Bāṇa’s thousand arms, but graciously spares his life and that of Śiva and his retinue who were committed to protecting the asura. Besides demonstrating the greater might of Nārāyaṇa, the myth also clarifies that He takes care to not falsify a promise made (rashly) by Śiva to his devotee, and crucially, is a Lord of mercy.

The great deeds of the ‘other’ god are sometimes attributed to one’s own. Nammālvar speaks of Viṣṇu as the one who burnt the three cities.

Peyālvār sings that the Lord reclining on the serpent bears the bull-rider, Śiva, on his frame. Tirumalicai proclaims, “You are the entire universe with all its sentient beings. You are Brahmā, the austerity-practising Śiva, fire, the mountains, the eight quarters, the sun and the moon.” Tirumankai sings, “The kāyā flower-coloured One himself became the three (Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva).” Often of course, the Ālvārs state in various ways that Śiva, Brahma, Indra and the hordes of celestials offer worship to Nārāyaṇa. Equally common is the claim that Brahma and Śiva (and sometimes Indra) specifically, and ‘all the gods’ generally, bow to Nārāyaṇa in a designated shrine (Venkaṭam/ Srirangam etc) to obtain some boon or favour, or his intervention against some rākṣasas.

Sometimes the contest is expressed more subtly: “The city of Khaṇḍam of my Lord Puruṣottama who grew and touched the sky and filled the sun and moon with awe stands on the banks of the Ganga whose waters sparkle with the konrai flowers from Śiva’s matted hair and tulasi from the feet of Narayana.” Or: “The city of Khaṇḍam of my Lord Puruṣottama—who wields the sonorous conch and radiant discus and who makes the heads of asuras roll—stands on the bank of the Ganga whose water flows from Brahma’s hands, over

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288 Nānmaiyaí Tiruvantādi 56; Tiruccanta Viruttam 70, 71; Pēriya Tirumōli 5.1.7 etc.
289 Tiruvāymōli 1.1.8. The reference is to Śiva as Tripurāntaka.
290 Muṇrām Tiruvantādi 31.
291 Nānmaiyaí Tiruvantādi 20.
292 Pēriya Tirumōli 2.2.8.
293 Pēriyālvār Tirumōli 2.8.1, 4.1.5; Pērumāl Tirumōli 1.6, 4.3; Pēriya Tirumōli 2.10.9, 5.7.2; Tirucchanda Viruttam 7, 9; Nānmaiyaí Tiruvantādi 42, 43, 89, etc.
294 Numerous sites derive their sanctity from such legends. See, for example, the sthalapurāna of Kanṭiyūr where Viṣṇu is said to have rid Śiva of the curse of the kapāla (skull) attached to his hand, or of Taṇjai-mā-manjī where he appeared to defeat three asuras who were getting out of hand.
295 Pēriyālvār Tirumōli 4.7.2. The verses are from a poem praising one of the sacred sites of Viṣṇu.
Trivikrama’s feet and through Śiva’s matted hair, washing radiant gems along its course. And: “Was it not beautiful when the lotus- born Brahma washed the feet of the Lord with the waters which became the Ganga?” Further: “Praising Him with Vedic chants, Brahma washed His lotus feet with water from his pot when He measured the world. This was the water that flowed down onto the head of Śiva.” These stanzas would have immediate resonance for devotees familiar with the practices of offering obeisance by touching the feet of elders with their foreheads/ hands, prostrating before the deity enshrined in the temple, and reverently drinking the pāḍaṅṭha, water with which the Lord’s feet have been washed in the temple. The superiority of Nārāyaṇa is doubtlessly established.

Tōntaraṭippōti Āḻvār avers that Śiva and Brahma perform penance in age after age to see the Lord and stand disappointed. But the Lord took pity on the elephant who called out to Him in distress, and appeared to save him from the jaws of a crocodile. Apart from of course extolling the majesty of Viṣṇu with respect to Śiva, this hymn underlines the important point that the great Lord is accessible to the humblest devotee if only approached with love—perhaps the most distinctive feature of bhakti.

Nammāḻvār asks if he should address Kṛṣṇa as crescent bearing Śiva, as four-faced Brahma, or as the Lord who made them and is worshipped by them. While the second half of the stanza seems to suggest the Āḻvār’s wish to establish the superiority of Viṣṇu over Śiva and Brahma, the first section actually expresses a deep monotheism— the one Lord taking numerous forms, and yet remaining undiluted in His essence. This monotheism, which seems almost a foundational belief for Nammāḻvār, finds reflection in some hymns of Tirumankai too. In a poem celebrating the deity enshrined in Aḻuntūr, the Āḻvār addresses the Lord as Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Lord of Naraiyūr,[302] Mādhava, Madhusūdana, Hara[303] and Ādivarāha. In another hymn, he says, “He becomes everything and everyone, the Vedas, the Three and the first One”. Nammāḻvār says, “Let each one worship as he deems fit, and each shall attain his

296 Pēriyāḻvār Tirumōlī 4.7.3. The reference is to Viṣṇu’s avatāra as the dwarf, Vāmana who grew to straddle the universe in three strides, hence Tri-vikrama. Brahma is said to have washed the Lord’s feet after this cosmic act with water from his kamaṇḍala (ritual pot).
297 Peyāḻvār Tiruvantādi 6.
298 Nāṭiyāḻvār Tiruvantādi 8.
299 Tirumālai 44.
300 Tiruvāyāmōli 3.4.8.
301 Tiruvāyāmōli 1.3.6; 1.3.7; 1.1.1-10; 1.5.4; 9.3.2; 10.10.11.
302 Both Aḻuntūr and Naraiyūr are temple towns.
303 Śiva.
304 Pēriya Tirumōlī 7.7.4.
305 Pēriya Tirumōlī 4.1.2.
Our Lord, who stands above all these gods accepts the offerings made to them and bids them deliver the fruit”.  

In another hymn, he declares that the Lord worshipped by Brahma, Śiva and Indra is father, mother and self, and yet apart from all. The identification of the Self with the Lord is telling—the Lord is One, apart, but simultaneously the entire known universe too. This idea finds repeated illustration in the motif of the Lord who swallowed the worlds and lay as a baby on a banyan leaf floating in the boundless ocean. But the Ālvār warns his fellows, in the same stanza as above, to not fall into fear and confusion by worshipping unworthy godlings. Clearly, there is an unresolved tension between competing notions of an all-embracing God and a pantheon with gods ranged hierarchically. The Ālvārs reflect it by using sharply polemic language sometimes and granting at others that prayers addressed to any god reach Tirumāl. This is remarkably in consonance with the Gītā’s pronouncement that even those who worship other gods with devotion are in reality worshipping the bhagavat.

This leverage was evidently impossible with respect to the deities of the Buddhists and Jainas. Tales of contest between any two religions invariably end with the defeat of the ‘other’ by the party whose followers are the authors of the particular text under consideration. But while in the contests between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, the defeated party merely accepts the superiority of the other faith, in the outcome of contests with Śramaṇas or Baudhhās, the hapless monks are usually impaled, burnt or ground to powder en masse. In the Vaikuṇṭha Pērumāl temple in Kāṇći, there is actually a sculpture portraying a person being impaled. Clearly, the religious policy of the later period of Pallavamalla was not one of uniform tolerance. It can be seen quite clearly from the Pēriya Purāṇam examples that most of the stories featuring Jainas are simply gratuitous—the stories of the three minor Nāyaṇmārs featured above seem to have no purpose other than reviling the Jainas. Again, the episodes from Sambandar’s hagiography seem excessively vituperative. There are fewer mentions of the Buddhists—and this is interesting. We have already seen that Sambandar pours abuse on the heterodox faiths in every one of his hymns; the stories in the Pēriya Purāṇam may therefore have been designed to explain the same. The Ālvārs seem to have comparatively lesser to say of the followers of the heterodox faiths, though the scattered verses where they do speak of them are drenched in

306 Tiruvāyumōli 1.1.5.
307 Tiruvāyumōli 3.6.9.
308 Tiruvāyumōli 3.9.6.
310 Agpp, Mgpp, Ilaiyālvār Vaibhavam; also see above, accounts from the Pēriya Purāṇam.
abhorrance. Tirumälicai Ālvār declares, “The Śramaṇas are ignorant, the Baudhās are confused, and the Śaivas small minded. Those who don’t praise the adorable wonder-Lord, Mādhava, are insignificant now.”

Töŋṭaratăppōṭi Ālvār says to the Lord of Arangam, “The Śākkiyars who do not believe in destiny and the hate-filled Śramaṇas and Munḍas shall suffer for their irresponsible words about you. I shall chop their heads off if I get the opportunity.”

Tirumankai Ālvār, whom hagiography credits with a ‘victory’ over the Buddhists, having sung, in a hymn to the Lord of Venkataṁ, with assurance, “In the temples of the Baudhās and Śramaṇas who worship the pipal and asoka trees, our Lord of beautiful eyes became their god”, goes on, in the very next stanzas of the same poem, to heap scorn. “The shaven-headed, saffron-robed Śramaṇas fall over each other to gobble food and grow fat”, and “Steer clear, O heart! of the curd-rice-gulping Śramaṇas who have nothing but arguments”.

He extols his listeners to Visnu worship, “The Velliyaṁ (Pāṣupatas) Pintiyār (Jainas) and Bodiyār (Baudhās) quote false texts. If you realize that, then learn to sing the glory if Tiruvallavāl”. In another poem, he says, “The Lord of grace has none for the saffron-robed Baudhās and impure Śramaṇas...” And in yet another, “They roam about without shame, without fear or knowledge, with peacock feather in their hand, like corpse-eating piśācas”.

The Digambara practice of going naked was clearly revolting to the saint, but to compare the ahimsa-devoted Jaina monks to corpse-eaters is evidence not just of disgust but also perhaps of ignorance of the tenets of the other faiths. Nammāḷvār calls upon “those who quote the Linga Purāṇa, Baudhās and Jainas” to cease arguing endlessly and offer, instead, praise to the god of Kurukür, assuring them that “He is you and all your gods”. Indeed, he suggests that those who “desolately worship lowly gods” have been relegated to this only because if liberation were given to all—no doubt a certainty for all Nārāyaṇa- worshippers—there would be no world for the Lord’s sport. While the ācāryas might take up fine philosophical points of debate, it seems that in the popular realm, the heterodox faiths were scorned and reviled less

312 Nāyamukam Tiruvāntâdi 6. This kind polemic may be responsible for the hagiographic account of this Ālvār having studied the ‘other’ philosophies for considerable lengths of time and rejecting them in favour of Nārāyaṇa bhakti.

313 Tirumāḷai 8.

314 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 2.1.5.

315 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 2.1.6.

316 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 2.1.7.

317 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 9.7.9.

318 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 5.6.8.

319 Pēriya Tirumōḻi 2.4.8.

320 Tiruvāyōmōḻi 4.10.5.

321 Tiruvāyōmōḻi 4.10.6.
because of what they actually stood for than for the simple ‘sin’ of not worshipping the Puranic gods.

While Jaina presence in Tamil Nadu continued in the second millennium, the Buddhists had in all likelihood disappeared. Interestingly, Jaina accounts also claim ‘credit’ for this; apparently a Jaina monk, Akalanka, confuted the Buddhist monks of Kāñcī and procured their expulsion from South India.\(^{322}\) It was thus important for the hagiographers to concentrate on the Jainas who by their very existence, however marginal, seemed to pose the threat of potential expansion while a passing mention of the Buddhists may have sufficed to gloss, as it were, their share of abuse in the Nāyānār’s or Ālvār’s hymns.

In the Śrīvaiṣṇava Gpps, however, one of the important stories about Tirumankai Ālvār has to do with his robbing a Buddhist shrine. The difference in texture is however noteworthy. There is no contest of superiority or any attempt to humiliate the Buddhists; they are simply cheated. Evidently, the authors of the Gpps saw no need to justify a blatantly dishonourable act though, like Krṣṇa in the Mahābhārata, Tirumankai of the hagiographies regularly acts on the premise that the ends justify the means. The Buddhists clearly are fair game. It is in fact the DSC which comes out, in this context, strongly against worship of non-Vedic deities.\(^{323}\) Can it be argued that as an earlier text, it was more familiar with the actual practices of Buddhism unlike the Gpps, for whom perhaps, Buddhist practices, in the Tamil region specifically were more a matter of memory?

One departure from the usual pattern of Śaiva–Vaiṣṇava rivalry is the story of the persecution of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas at the hands of Kṛṣṇaṇa Cola. We have seen that the inscriptions at Srirangam do not reveal any marked break in patronage that might correspond to the reign of any particular Cola king.\(^{324}\) Yet, the prominence given to this narrative in all accounts, and Rāmānuja’s long exile to Karnakata, which is not of a piece with the general tenor of the hagiographies, makes it impossible to dismiss the whole account. I believe that there must have been a period of severe sectarian tension at the very least for such a tale to have arisen. Moreover, if the temple at Tīrūnārāyanapuram had merely to be sanctified by association with Rāmānuja, he could have been sent there (by the hagiographies) in the course of his several pilgrimages. That the Śrīvaiṣṇavas do not emerge with any particular credit after this confrontation, except perhaps the Pyrrhic satisfaction of knowing that the evil king died

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\(^{322}\) KV Raman, “Jainism in Tondaimandalam”, op cit., p. 15.

\(^{323}\) DSC, sargaḥ 14, verses 79-88.

\(^{324}\) See footnote 80 above.
suffering, reinforces the likelihood of their being some historicity to the narrative. It is to the period of this king’s reign that the destruction of the Vaiṣṇava shrine at Chidambaram is also imputed. Cola adoption of Śaivism as a ‘royal cult’ has been mentioned before. It is possible that there was a period of severe polarisation. It might also explain the fervour with which the Vijayanagara rulers, who succeeded the Colas, patronised Vaiṣṇava temples.

Some residues of the hostility of Rāmānuja’s period seem to have coloured Śaiva–Vaiṣṇava relations in the subsequent period as well. At least one long inscription of the 13th century (from Pudukkottai district) gives indisputable evidence of disharmony between a Śiva and a Viṣṇu temple and their eventual reconciliation. The epigraph has been found on a rock-cut shrine in the Satyagiriśvara temple in Tirumēyyam village, Tirumēyyam taluk. The record of 1245 CE enumerates various points of settlement arrived at by a grand assembly comprising the nāḍus, the nagarams, the villages and samaya mantrīs of Kāṇanādu alias Virudarajabhyankara valanādu, the araivyakal who policed the nāḍu, the Śrī Rudramaheśvaras of the same nāḍu, Śrīvaisnāvas of Pāṇṭinādu, Śrīvaisnāvas and Śrīmaheśvaras of Tirumēyyam, Śrī Rudramaheśvaras of the temple of Tirukkoṭṭunakram in the Tirumalai nāḍu and the Vaiṣṇava Anusandhāṇam in the presence of Appanā Daṇḍanāyaka, brother-in-law of Ravideva Daṇḍanāyaka, who was one of the daṇḍanāyakas of the Hoysala Vīra Someśvara. The first item of settlement was the long standing quarrel concerning the sharing of the kaṭamai dues from the village between the Śiva and Viṣṇu temples in the village. It was resolved that 2/5ths of the kaṭamai should go to the Śiva temple and the remainder to the Vaiṣṇava temples. The other items were a mutual exchange of devadāna lands of the two temples, the compound wall common to both temples, the fixation of boundaries by Tiruculakkal and Tiruvalikkal, the sharing of a tank and a well, the lands belonging to each temple, the habitation sites belonging to the two temples, and proprietary rights of individuals and the erasure and re-engraving of old inscriptions of both the temples. Many officials attest the record. Another inscription, from the Vaikunṭha Nārāyaṇa Pērumāl temple in Akkūr in Māyavaram taluk, seems to indicate strained relations if not actual discord with the local Śiva temple. This epigraph of CE 1231 records a grant by the kūttapērumakkals (officers) of the village administration of tax free land for opening a road to the river Kaveri to carry the image of Rājaraja Viṅgaṅār Ėmpērumāl for the sacred bath on festive occasions as the authorities of the temple of Tiruttāṅtoni–māṭamūṭaiyār refused permission for the deity’s sacred bath as

usual in the tank belonging to the latter temple. 327 An interesting inscription of CE 1160 in the Amritaghaṭeśvara temple in TirukKaṭaiyūr in Māyavaram tāluk records a decision of the mahāsabhā of TirukKaṭavūr in Akkur nādu, assembled in the Kulottungacolam—tiruvaṭutukkattī (hall) of the temple of Kālakāladevar, to confiscate to the temple, the properties of those maheśvaras who, contrary to their tenets as the custodians of the Śiva temple and its observances, mingled freely with the Vaiṣṇavas and wore (or sold) lotuses grown for the god. 328 One wonders if the rule to avoid mingling with Vaiṣṇavas was a general one or specific to this temple—or perhaps to this period. Can we see in this, a reflection of the hostility that according to the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies led to Rāmānuja’s fleeing to the western country? Or was this injunction passed essentially because of the misconduct of the maheśvaras with regard to temple property—the flowers meant for the Lord in this case—where the solecism of socialising with Vaiṣṇavas was elevated to the status of a crime? From Srirangam itself, however, an inscription dated to CE 1198 in the Ranganātha temple that refers to a negotiation with the important neighbouring Śaiva temple of Tiruvāṇaikkā seems untouched by hostility. It seems that the river Kolli<;lam had eroded into the lands belonging to the two temples. Resettlement of the proper boundaries was carried out by arbitration under orders of the king Annāvayilutaiyān Gangeyarāyar (Kulottunga III) in his 20th year and 213th day through the puravuvāri nāyakan cēyyār officers in consultation with the representatives of both temples, representatives from the sabhā, accountants of the two villages, and the superintendents of both temples. Account was taken of the holdings of the two temples as they were before their erosion in the 19th year of the king [CE 1197] and the actual enjoyment rights of both the parties and by suggesting suitable exchange of lands in some cases. It is recorded that the award satisfied both parties and they demarcated their respective portions by planting tiruvāḷi (cakra) and śūla. 329

Last, I shall consider briefly the sole episode which indicates familiarity and negotiation with Islam. The absence of the account in the earlier texts, i.e., the DSC and the Agpp, is as significant as its featuring in the later texts. Let us first look at the variations in the texts. The DSC is entirely innocent of Muslims and Delhi. Its ambit does stretch to northern India—after all, nearly ten of the 108 places of pilgrimage elaborated in Śrīvaiṣṇava scriptures are in Vaṭanāḍu or the northern land. Besides, Yādava Prakāśa is said to have taken his disciples to

327 Mahalingam, 1985, Vol. VII, Tj 947. Ref.: ARE 1925, no. 231. The latter temple was dedicated to Śiva. It is also clear that the village administration stepped in to avoid or resolve a confrontational situation.
Kāśi. On the other hand, the Agpp, which is believed to have been composed in the late 13th – early 14th centuries, does send Rāmānuja to Dillipuram to recover the lost idol. Clearly, Malik Kafur’s invasion of Srirangam had made a deep impact. Stray stories about the general’s other campaigns and possibly those of other ‘Turushka’ rulers of Delhi to other parts of the Deccan must have contributed to the making of legends that were then posited back to Rāmānuja’s times. All the same, the Agpp and Mgpp draw a very civil picture of the Sultan, a man who, despite having looted these icons, (in the eyes of the Śrīvaiśṇava hagiographers, possibly from ignorance of their sanctity?) is perfectly ready to return them to the faithful, and even to escort Rāmānuja to his daughter’s chambers where the ascetic believes the icon to be present. Clearly, the image of Muslims as iconoclastic marauders had not yet developed. The later versions of the story are equally interesting. It is in later texts that the story of the Muslim Goddess, known as Tulukka Nācciyār or Sultāni, is elaborated, which suggests that though the presence of Muslims was not significant in the early days of the development of the Śrīvaiśṇava community, it had become important enough by the fifteenth century to call for engagement.

Ranjeeta Dutta has considered the phenomenon of the Muslim Goddess in Śrīvaiśṇavism in some detail, in order to show how different communities were integrated into the ritual framework of the temple through this legend. It is true that the Maḷipravaḻa texts were consciously engaged in building a community, and this tale, like several others, was important for constructing a community wherein the privileges and rights of different groups in the temple and its ritual, usually commensurate with their wealth and status as patrons, was spelt out. A question which has however not been addressed is, “Why a Muslim Goddess?” Why couldn’t a low caste one, or a ‘tribal’ woman do as well? After all, in a very great number of Viṣṇu shrines, the Lord is married to a girl from a prominent local community besides his principal, brahmanical wives. It is also clear from the evidence Dutta presents that the rituals into which the different groups that are drawn in through the Tulukka Nācciyār myth

330 The hagiographies do not use the word, Sultan. It is used here in a general fashion, as these hagiographies are contemporaneous with the Delhi Sultanate.
331 Davis, Lives of Indian Images, op cit., p 119, points out that “Hindu literature engaged with the threat of Muslim rule in India... denotes the invaders as ethnically distinct turuškas (Turks) or pārasikas (Persians), and classifies them in terms of foreign origin, mleccha and yavāna... Never do Hindu texts of this period use terms denoting religious affiliation for the Turks, who understood themselves to be members of the Islamic community”.
334 Dutta, ibid, pp. 157-184.
are not involved in worship at this goddess’s shrine. Rather, they come to participate in the wider ritual structure of the temple. Such general incorporation and legitimation could have been easily achieved by very different narrative strategies than the one actually adopted. What, then, are the possible sources of this particular legend and the reasons for its significance?

Arab trading settlements are known from the seventh- eighth centuries onwards at several places on the Indian coast. By the late thirteenth century, a number of ports flourished on the east coast, among them Kāyal, an agency for a booming trade in horses. These ports became the nuclei of various Muhammadan settlements of Arabic character in all the sea port towns. Over the next few centuries, some Muslim settlements seem to have come up in the interior as well. I quote S Krishnaswami Aiyangar: “In the course of his description of Malik Kafur’s campaign in the Tamil country, Amir Khusru says that the army met near Kandūr, some Mussalmans who were subjects of the Hindu ‘Bir’ [Vira Ballala]. They were half Hindus, but as they were able to repeat the kalima, the Malik of Islam spared their lives.... This shows that at Kandūr, which I have identified as Kaṃṇaṇūr, near Srirangam, there was a settlement of Mohammedans quite different from the northern Mussalmans who came with the invaders.”

The shrine of the Tulukka Nācciyār or Bibi Nācciyār in Srirangam is located in the north eastern corner of the Rājamahendran enclosure of the Ranganātha temple. The Srirangam temple has seven concentric enclosures and the Koyil Īluku details the construction of the same. Tirumankai Ālvār is said to have undertaken the repair and construction of the gopuram some prākāras (enclosures), mandapas (pavilions), a kitchen, and a storehouse. However, it must be kept in mind that the Īluku’s record of events before the thirteenth century do not

335 Krishnaswami Aiyangar, South India and her Muhammadan Invaders, op cit., pp. 69- 71.
336 Aiyangar, ibid, pp. 69-71.
337 Aiyangar, ibid, p. 73.
338 Aiyangar, ibid, p. 72.
339 The shrine itself is rather unique: essentially a mural on the far corner of the shrine wall depicting a stylised female form in a long, full skirt—the attire itself supposedly ‘northern’. While murals and paintings are seen in a number of temple walls and roofs, some dating from the Cola period and others from the Vijayanagara, this one derives its special character from the consciousness among the temple functionaries that it is a substitute for an idol. During a visit to the temple, on enquiring for directions to this particular shrine from temple priests, I inadvertently asked—in Tamil—where I could find the vigraha of the Tulukka Nācciyār. Some shocked priests carefully corrected me explaining that it was forbidden to make idols of Muslims, and that the Nācciyār was therefore represented only by a citra (painting)!
340 Hari Rao, Köil Olugu, op cit., pp. 11-12. Agpp & Mgpp, Tirumankai Ālvār Vaibhavam also speak of Tirumankai’s building activities at the Srirangam temple.
stand up to historical scrutiny. Clearly, the texts wished to endow the very walls around the temple with sanctity by attributing their construction to the most enterprising (in legend) and prolific (in fact) of the Ālvārs. It is evident, however, that the temple complex continued to grow through the centuries around the central shrine of which eleven of the twelve Ālvārs sang.\textsuperscript{341} and \textsuperscript{342} In the course of this expansion, it is likely to have laid claim to an area which might have been sacred to local Muslims—perhaps a grave- shrine of a local saint of a type common throughout the sub- continent. It is possible that this shrine was thus incorporated within the temple structure not only in a physical sense, but also in its ritual and its body of myth, albeit in a fashion that accommodated various other groups of stakeholders. There is evidence for such practice from the scriptures too. Apparently the garden that Tōṇṭaṟatippōṭi Ālvār used to tend fell in the line of the prākāra that Tirumankai Ālvār was constructing around the temple. He accordingly moved the wall to accommodate the garden from which tirumālai\textsuperscript{343} had been prepared.\textsuperscript{344} I am not suggesting that this was historically true; what is clear from the story is that both accommodation and inclusion were envisaged in the creation of the larger physical and ritual spaces of the temple.

It must be remembered that the Muslims of south India in this period were largely traders, and social and political stability is of utmost importance to the mercantile class. It has been pointed out that acceptance of some local beliefs and practices makes it easier for traders to be accommodated in the local trading diaspora.\textsuperscript{345} It can be postulated that the ‘surrounding’ community similarly adopts aspects of the beliefs and practices of the newer settlers. A hypothetical reconstruction of the situation, when the temple walls came to encroach on a local Muslim shrine can give us a picture of tensions which were perhaps sought to be contained by the more powerful local community, i.e., the Śrīvaśṇava. It allowed the worshippers of the grave- shrine continued access, and also accorded to the object of their reverence, the so-called Muslim Goddess, a place of privilege within the ritual of the temple. Scriptures eventually

\textsuperscript{341} There is evidence in some places, for example, at Mahabalipuram, that the shrine which is today considered the divya kṣetra is probably not the one of which the Ālvārs sang. See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion. In the case of Srirangam, however, it appears that the central shrine is very old as the stucco image of the reclining Lord in the sanctum sanctorum is mentioned in the Cilappatikāram among others.

\textsuperscript{342} Madhurakavi Ālvār is the only one not to speak of any shrine of Viṣṇu. His entire devotion is directed towards Nāmmāḻvār.

\textsuperscript{343} Tirumālai literally means holy garland—which Tōṇṭaṟatippōṭi Ālvār used to prepare daily for the Lord; it is also the name of one of Tōṇṭaṟatippōṭi’s two compositions.

\textsuperscript{344} Agpp, Tirumankai Ālvār Vaibhavan.

\textsuperscript{345} Romila Thapar, Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History, Viking- Penguin India, New Delhi, 2004, p. 36.
sought to legitimise it by elaborating on a ‘lost and found’ motif, weaving in aspects of the remembered history of the temple with fantasy and simultaneously bringing in diverse local groups into the larger ritual functioning of the temple.

vi) Some Conclusions

It need hardly be pointed out that the socio-political situation of the sixth to ninth centuries in Tamil Nadu was vastly different from that of the eleventh to the fourteenth. The first period was one of consolidation of Pallava rule after an era of relative political instability of which little is known. While kings/kingdoms are spoken of even in the Sangam period—the Cera, Cola and Pāṇṭiya mūvendar—as ruling in the fertile tracts of the Kerala region and the plains irrigated by the Kaveri, Vaigai and Tamralipti, even though the more general political structure was of chieftains at war with one another for control of prosperous regions and for booty capture, establishment of kingdoms on a mature basis seems to have begun only with the Pallavas. This period of early state formation contrasts strongly with the second phase, one of established state structures, with the Cola state in particular extending its reach in terms of both external expansion and internal consolidation. Again, the first period was one where several religious systems of northern origin—brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism—all of which had been known in the Tamil country for some centuries, were all represented to a greater or lesser degree, and were negotiating in their different ways with the older Tamil religious complex. As has been shown above, the development of these cannot be seen to have caused sharp distinctions to emerge in terms of lay followers of each of these faiths among the populace. It is also likely that patronage was not restricted to anyone or two of the several religious ideologies, though contestation for the same seems to have developed, undoubtedly for the lion’s share if not the sole one of this patronage. This can explain the derogatory references to the Śrāmanas and the Baudhhas in the hymns of the Ālvārs and Nāyān mārs.

It might have been interesting to see if the Jainas and Buddhists in Tamil Nadu also produced such literature condemning the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, or for that matter, each other. But what has survived of the pens of the Buddhists and Jainas are epics like the Cilappatikāram and Manimekalai, Tiruvalluvar’s famed book of aphorisms, the Tirukkural, the grammars

346 The so-called dark ages of the Kālabhras.
347 It is far from clear however which aspects of what is loosely called Hinduism are ‘brahmanical’ in their inspiration (other than those that can clearly be traced to the Vedas and their appendices) and which may actually be of Dravidian origin. While KAN Sastri would argue for most aspects of this religious system, especially those that in the perspective of the Hindu nationalist historian would count as ‘positive’ being ‘brahmanical’ in origin, George Hart sees the same complex as owing far more to Dravidian than to northern elements.
Nannūl and Tōlkāppiyam etc; indeed, even these were only re-discovered in the nineteenth century after ages of having been consigned to oblivion. It remains true even today when a variety of sources are being tapped to understand the past, that most if not all history is that which was written by the victors.

For reasons that are yet to be fully explained, the brahmanical religions seem to have succeeded in establishing themselves in a dominant position in the emergent socio-political framework. Was it because the gods of the Buddhists and Jainas didn’t lend themselves to the kind of intense personal devotion characteristic of bhakti that they were gradually marginalised in the age of the singing saints? The prestige of brahmanism in the north, its established role as a legitimiser of political authority and its capacity to absorb local cults are of course important factors. Certainly by the ninth-tenth centuries, the brahmanical religions fashioned through the medium of bhakti had come to dominate the religious landscape of Tamil Nadu. While Buddhism seems to have nearly died out, Jainism continued rather quietly. In 610 CE, The Pallava king Mahendravarman I had a rock-cut shrine inscribed, “This brickless, timber-less, metal-less and mortar-less temple which is a mansion for Brahma, Iśvara and Viṣṇu was made by king Vicitrācitta”. This was a king who in his famous satirical play, Mattavilāsa-prahasana, ridiculed the Śramanas. Some centuries later, Śaivism, as is well-known, achieved pre-eminence as the royal cult of the Colas.

The hagiographies are a product of this second period, and while they mirror the concerns of their age, they are careful to weave in the hymns of the saints. Thus, Jainism with its continuing visibility and popularity came in for much greater vilification in the Gpps and in the Pēriya Purāṇam, whereas Buddhism which was perhaps all but forgotten except for its tenets which might have been taught in āśramas for the express purpose of refuting them, had ceased to be a real enemy. So Sambandar’s equal condemnation of the Jainas and Buddhists gets a very unequal treatment in the hagiographies, while Tirumāḷcāi or Tirumankai Āḻvārs’ scornful mentions of the monks is woven into their ‘life-stories’ in the form of creeds that they studied and discarded as false, or as shrines they plundered and believers they fooled.

But the ‘heterodox’ faiths had a much greater contribution to make to the social landscape of Tamil Nadu than their strictly religious intervention might suggest. Familiarity of the populace with these religious systems which did not place any great premium on caste status would

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have been a barrier for the growth of brahmanic religious ideology with its sharp hierarchies. RS Sharma refers to 'some heterodox sects such as Vaiṣṇavism' which tried to improve the position of the lower orders.\(^{349}\) Whether the Buddhist and Jaina monks themselves did try to improve the lot of the lower castes or not, they did certainly offer a glimpse of a world which was not as strictly exclusive as the brahmanical, and made it incumbent upon the leaders of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious movements, as they consolidated themselves in the early second millennium, to negotiate the demands of caste orthodoxy with a comparatively egalitarian societal framework to create a more inclusive community.\(^{350}\)


\(^{350}\) See Chapter 3.