CHAPTER FOUR

ĀLVĀR BHAKTI: SA VIDHĀPA

Sri Ramanuja as the founder of the Viśiṣṭadvaita school of philosophy, also inherited the vast lore or tradition of bhakti as practised by the Ālvārś. The Ālvārś as already pointed out especially the first three showed that bhakti has three stages such as para-bhakti, para-jñāna and paramabhakti. Poigai, Śrītattār and Pey, represented the three forms of bhakti and their union really expounded the integral bhakti. The bhakti myth thus was shown to lead to the fourth Ālvār who was known as Bhaktisarā - the essence of Bhakti.

Kulasekhara revealed the nature and scope of bhakti as well as prapatti in his great work perumal Tirumoli. In one sense it can be shown that he was the adept of the bhakti - rasa. He showed how bhakti could be dramatised and exhibited as containing the rasas - Sringerā, virāha, adbhuta, bhayanaka, vatsalya and madhurya and so on. Bhakti as a rasa- aesthetic sentiment was perfected by him and he expounded this aspect with great power of spiritual psychological insight. Though clearly he knew the six angas of Saranāgati as propounded by the Pāṇināttra āgama he secured for himself the spiritual approach of aesthetic enjoyment and sādhana or rather rasa became a sādhana at his hands. In this he
was but following the path of nārada and bānālyya, who related themselves with God in all who manifold ways that humanity has devised in its social life. The metaphysical approach of Viśistādvaita is not so clear. Kulasekhara's Mukundamāla— for it is attributed to the saint by some and denied by others in as much as St. Kulasekhara devotes some of his tirumolis to the experiencing of the vātsalyabhāva of Kausalya and Vasaratha as the peak of divine attachment to God through virāha-vātsalya, also mentions the need for the total dedication of all the functions of the sense-organs to God's service, even as the motor organs and minds have to be, dedicated to God's service alone.

The Bāsa-bhāva which Kulasekhara developed for Bhakti later on was carried over by the traditionalists on the Bhāgavata lines. St. Namālavir in fact seems to have experienced the several bhāvas, but with a significant difference as pointed out by Professor Varadachari in his article on Kulasekhara. The dramatic element in paradoxical inversion of characters God is made to play the part of the child when in fact He is the father of all.  

\[1, Kulasekhara's philosophy of Devotion. J.S.V.O.I.\]


(Sharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966)
Sri Visnu Citta developed the Mother-child and father-child relation in full in his Periya Tirumoli. The four hundred and odd verses reveal the classic or Vītsalya bhava in divine enjoyment. Vītsalya - kasa is very important. It makes for tenderness and love that has none of the possessiveness of the brīṅgāra. As a matter of fact the separation (vīrāna) in each of these sthāyi-bhavas is important poetic musing in literature.

The Approach of Āndal develops the Sṛṅgāra-bhava along with the Vīra-bhāva. As lover approaches the beloved she delineates her ardent passion for the Divine beloved. Her Tiruppavai the divine lady - is a supreme tender approach to God as beloved. However it is not for the sake of the beloved as merely beautiful (sundarapurusa) but as the great Hero - the avatar who had descended to save the Good, punish the wicked and as the establisher of the Real order (Dharma) that she conceives of her Beloved. This is unique for it reveals how the woman adores the Vīra-purusa as Nāyaka - diroddhata. In the whole range of Hero worship among the Divine God-heads this role was taken by Visnu as the one deity who incarnates again and again when called for by the decline of the dharma and increase of adharma.

1.3. ĀNDAL IV - 9

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Tirumangai Alvar approached the Divine in a variety of ways even as Kulasokkara did. His main approach is service of God. His mystic bridal approach is revealed in Madras. But it is he who showed that direct approach to God is possible and his own saranācārti (self-surrender) was direct, unmodinted.

Tondar-adi-podi as well as Tiru-ppan Alvars devoted themselves to the approach of dāsya-bhāva and amabhava. Tondaradip-podi reveals his suprenmen gratitude to God who brought him to the straight path. He knew the saving power of God even from the jaws of Death. He himself knew that the love of God extends to the love of His devotees. Humanity should realise the value of God in its life. Service of man of God (bhāgavatas) is shown to be greater than any other kind of service.

Tirup-pan Alvar is unique in his approach. His is not aringāra rasa. Nor could it be said that it is vātsalya. It is not a kind of ramelial relationship that he sought of God. He wanted to merge himself in God, to become one with Him. This is seen by his last utterance which other Alvars also had said but not realised: 'O God, These eyes that have beheld thee now they have none eye to see". Onnai kanda kangel marrorum kāṇāye.
This is mystical mergence in the Divine without even considering for a moment as to what would happen to him after that. The rasānumbhāva in the case of Tirumānṉaṉ Alvar was not for the sake of rasa as such of enjoying the wonderful beauty of God but also to get liberation in God. Obviously he had in his mind to realise how the Divine opens up His body to his devotee.

This is unique phenomenon and really shows that the Lord can be experienced or experienced as Bŗi-ghtman speaks of this knowing of Gopāl inwardly. It reveals that mergence into God by the soul is possible. This experience is also mentioned about Gopāl or Āndal who seems to have merged into the idol of the Lord when she was married to Him (It). This mergence of Āndal into the divine is a mystic fact testified to by all those who witnessed her marriage. The Visistādvaīta has to recognise this.

1. Katha, Up. II, 35: Nāyam ātmā pravacanaṁ labhyah
na medhayā na bahumāśrutena,
Yam evaisa vṛṇute tene labhyas
tvaisa ātmā vṛṇute te tanūgāvāṁ.

of Bṛ. XI. 55
of Mund. Up. III - 3

(...85)
aspect of our existence is the body of God - who has ceased to live in his body to the individual soul. Then he has elected to enjoy or accept an enjoyment of God as he is in himself rather than his creation. This way so called Ananda or the enjoyment or bliss of the Infinity and Transcendent God through his iconic representation.

This is a unique unexplainable phenomenon in mysticism: how the icon connects the soul with the Transcendent through its form (vijraha) made up of the sacramentalised matter, stone or metal or wood as the case may be in the different temples. We have a similar phenomenon in the case of Jnanasmita in Saiva literature.

In any case, it is clear that emancipation means union with or merger into the Icon, who is deemed to be the Supreme Transcendent Being.

In the case of St. Sathakopa the Rasamahvaya proceeds on the basis of a fourfold understanding through his four works through concentric meditation on the glories of the Lord, through the vision of the cosmic form of the Lord, through His supreme nearness and infinite possibilities of the human-divine relationships. Undoubtedly the supreme ecstasy is touched when the lover-beloved relationship is said to induce the supreme felicity leading up to the understanding of God for the sake of
one's liberation and union.

St. Sathakopa has emphasized certain fundamental principles in his concept of bhakti. Absolute renunciation of worldly dualism is seen to be the condition for monism, and it is to be followed up by surrender to the Ultimate Godhead — the God of gods.

The understanding of God and His nature is to come and by the knowing of the name of the Ultimate Lord, His exploits and other connotative names as given in the ancient texts, and repetition of these names continuously in order to get the full meaning and culminate in the vision of God. The names of God are given to be about a 1008. It is shown by Vedanta Desika in his Brahmopanishad sāra and ratnavali how St. Sathakopa has brought all these 1008 names to express the supreme infinite auspicious qualities of God. In bhakti it is necessary to realize the personal relationships into which God had entered into in His various descents, both partial and full. For meditation and contemplation, for singing and for remembering, the historical exploits of God are very helpful. They illustrate the dramatic necessity which brings the individual soul into contact with God in His incarnations.

The iconic reliefs or Avatars in the temples are also for the purpose of contemplation and meditation, in singing and so on the divine Lord.

The alvars were so devoted to God that they renounced all and went on pilgrimage to the different shrines which represented different forms of the One deity—forms which brought to mind the divine exploits of God. Pilgrimage which was one of the most important institutions of religion was made to cover the whole area of religious itinerary. At each shrine the alvars used to sing about the glories of the avatar represented therein. But they did not confine themselves to that form for they realised that all other forms are also reflected or related with the one before them. The transcendent deity was present in the immanent icon, and in the heart of the worshipper and as was verily the Here who brought about the salvation of the people devoted to religious Godhead. Alvars were in a sense the wandering minstrels, pilgrims who went about spreading the love of God and godliness and in a sense converting the materialists and others to religious experience. Theirs was the language of experience of God in the temples rather than a philosophy of israelism. They like the prophets carried the message of God to every hearth and home in South India. Their songs were infusive of spiritual elevation.

(...)
Pilgrimage and labour are mutually the means. The vision of the marvellous is a reward by the sacred wish. I should say to divinity. The image which was also indwelling in the icon proved that the Divine was only accessible in life. The images in the temples were not just statues but pulpits which spoke to the devotees but personalities which again and again testified to their liveliness. Whereas in other arts of the old religion and fallen into the hands of the priests and astrologers and other such intermediaries the area of the South Indian Vaishnavism was capable of being directly oriented and in drama - svayamabhūgaṇgâya. We see it in the case of Pan Ālvār who was carried on the shoulders by the priests of the temple who was instructed in his sleep to bring the saint into the sanctum sanctorum.1

It is therefore a phenomenon of religion or bhakti. The faith in the icon was restored after it was fully criticized by the Buddhist and Jain schools who held the worship of the Transcendent or Śīlātī and the human jīva as ways to salvation. The Ālvārs were critical of both Buddhists (sākyas) and Jainas (śramanas). The ascetic yoga of the śramanas (jaina) was as much

1. cf. Story of Pan - Ālvār; cf. Ālvārs of South India pp. 103

(...3a/)
criticised as the sakyan sūnya. In addition the Ālvār were very critical of the nirguna and nirakāra Brahman of the Māyāvāda. There is no question of illusoriness of the world or the icon or the saguna forms of God and they were anxious to firm the reality of all the incarnations and descents and interventions of God.

The Ālvār combined the several ways of aesthetic enjoyment in terms of the icon, antaryāmi and transcendent and the vyūha and vibhava. Therefore the area worship is unlike the idol worships of the Western religions or the primitives. The Bhāgavata lore was fully known to all those Ālvār, and they rejoiced in vicariously experiencing the eternal past.

The first verse of the Tiruvāyımoli reveals the scope of his vision:

The abode of bliss that destroys all fatigue,
The abode of knowledge that annuls all ignorance,
The Lord of all the eternal gods, who have conquered all slumber. His sorrow — dispelling feet do thou seek refuge mind.

1. Tiruvāyımoli I,i,1. Uyāvāraya uyārale mem udayavan evan avan
Māyāvārya medinalem arulinev evan ava
Ayarvāraya amaragal adhipati evan ava
Tayarvāraya sudar adi toltuelu yen

manasa.
The approach to reality is thus aesthetic and spiritual. The constant presence of God was practised everywhere. In everything they beheld the Divine and for them this world is for the manifestation of the grace of God. This is the līlā vibhūti where the experience of God in all His supreme multiplicity is to be had in all types of relations. The temple was a miniature city and sangha, it was also like the body of God. This metaphor is not overworked for it is the common symbol of all religions - the Church is the body of God. The God here is one whom surrender will make real and reciprocatory.

However we know that certain writers on the Ālvār Bhakti have mentioned the distinguishing features of St. Satbakopa's Bhakti.

The Veda Bhakti or that which is inculcated in the Upanisads or Veda consists of Vedāna, upāsana, dhyāna, Seva and all these are in the relation of sādhana and sādhyā. God is the Sādhyā and these are sādhanas. They have no element of surrender as such as a means (sādhanā). The prapāmas are those who have renounced all other means and as such they are said to belong to the Siddha-sādhanā group.

In the Veda bhakti it is necessary to possess knowledge of the means and so on. But in the state of ignorance itself the alvār bhakti flowers and makes one entranced
In it - it is just all other words and more to understand it.

In fact, bhakti is in all life in its form. It is seen that bhakti is old and new in the form that it does all.

In the Vaishnava and Vaisnavism are not only the means to devotion to God or to his devotees or prior good karma. We are born in a caste or social group, which helps the growth of bhakti. We should give some good karma, secured good or right knowledge and bhakti through the three types of Yona, known as karunya, jeevanam and bhakti yogan. The alvars on the other hand did not do any such good karma disinterestedly, nor did they follow the precepts of the scriptures, nor did they give up the company of the bad people and indeed they claimed that they had wasted their lives without thinking of God, but without any known cause, God had been pleased to choose them and lead them to his devotion and to liberation. The prepauna bhakti or Alvar bhakti does not need many lives for maturation. For it is stated that the Juna is who has gone several lives and finally arrived at the notion that God is all (Vasudevasamravan iti). Bhakti of the Alvar is such that one attains the goal within one life itself and in the shortest possible time.

1. Bhak16Tas, VII.19: Sabhunam jnanam ante suhnavân iti

prepayate.
They have been led by God on the path of devotion. The Lord who is the Master of all taking hold of their mind has controlled all its movements and regulated and moulded it even like a farmer who ploughs and tills the land, fences it all round so that other animals could not trespass into it, and protects it and then seeds it and makes them grow without pests and so on. The purpose of God behind all this is to prepare the soul for His own enjoyment. The soul is after the fruition of the world taken up by Him upward and discarding its subtle body by bathing it in the River Vireja and donning it with a suddha-sattva body leads it to the divine damasels who prepared out of the six qualities make the food with six fold taste for the soul, it is led to the company of the gods and the eternals and the freed souls so as to increase the devotion of the soul to the Lord. Bhakti on the part of the soul towards God is itself an enjoyment for the Lord.

The Journey of Devotion is accomplished by God for His own enjoyment though it appears to be for the individual soul's emancipation.

Says the author of the Isaryakhyādaya (Yadikesari Alakṣyamanavālaapparamal Mayanar) that it is difficult to what the criteria are for God choosing one soul in preference to the other, for it reveals God's partiality, that it is

\[\text{(...92/)}\]
incomparable on his throne. In the case of the ruler or the elephant, one cannot say what the ruler or the elephant could do. An elephant may till the king's field of oil and water nor to the throne on any one's rock even as a deer may Nonetheless anyway a vizd his successor. There is real art of whim or fancy or unpredictability in this. Even the election of one to dis grace us as entirely on God's will which is independent all working on its own divine law.

One cannot therefore say that election to God's grace mentioned however in the Katha-sūtra (yad evainā vrata tava labhaya) is not due to one's merit or good deeds done before in one's life or previous lives. These could be just vyāja reasons given by man. God's grace alone is the means to attain devotion to God. It is both the first means and continues to be necessary till the attainment of the goal (siddhi.)

In the context of bhakti the individual's dependence on God does not get distorted either in the state of jñāna (enlightenment) or ajñāna (ignorance). It is the basic metaphysical relationship in all conditions. In other yogas without devotion there is every possibility of its getting distorted or even annulled. God provides in the bhakti-experience that subtle jñāna which grants faith and inflexible will to attain God. God is like
the Mother who Zoe the soul with the will of God's name
and protects the soul and orders it to God who is the Father
and the Guru. God indeed becomes every thing to the soul.

Sāthakopa's bhakti makes him experience his simi-
arity with the great devotees of the past. Thus in the
bystre one can discover his similarity with the celestials
like Śrīdevī, Bhūdevī and Śīlavati, the three spouses
of God Visnu. He finds his similarity with Śri Rama, Lak-
manā, Sārā and Sārāgna, the four brothers of the Pāndyā, 
He finds his similarity with Śri Kṛṣṇa, Yāco, and the
gopīs. He discovex his identity with Prahlāda, Vibhisana
Hanumān and Arjuna. In all these persons or parts he enjoys
the Divine as they had enjoyed Him. His dependence on God
he experiencex in the triple statues of Laksmi, (in the
Milk Ocean), as Śīlōsa and as Hanuma (in Tāmāyana).

The Kṣaṇyahrdaya-kāra further writes certain
points regarding the psychology of the Bhakti in St Sāthakopa.

Firstly, it was a uniform conception among the
alvers to lay stress on the first fact that the mind abandons
the individual and cleaves to God from the first moment of
the dawn of divine grace or devotion. Mind having beheld
God no longer clings to the soul but drags it along with it
to God. As they paradoxically put it, though the mind is
nouter gender (in Sanskrit), it went to God (the one attractive being to all sons of nature) and cleaves to Him dragging the individual along making it move from one pilgrim centre to another looking for God. This is the divine samkalpa whose dawn is heralded by the stirrings of the heart towards God—devotion.

Secondly he mentions that bhakti has three prajña avasthas. Prajña means in this context the awareness of one's relation to God. This has three stages namely sambandha-jñāna which begins as the feeling of companionship with God. It develops into the state of Adhyavasāya jñāna-rūpam typified by the feeling that God is acting as the Mother inducing in the soul the optimism in respect of attaining the Godhead. The patience counselled by the Mother can be seen in the episodes of the devotional lover. The last is tvara-avastha or impatience and urgency or intolerance of delay. This condition is of the daughter in love who has begun to feel the immediate vicinity of the Beloved or God.

These three stages of the prajña avasthas are not called jñāna-avasthas or jñāna-bhūmikas because prajña is threefold (prajña traikālika-sata). This obviously has reference to the conception of the three-avasthas jāgrat, svapna and susupti, of the Māndukya Upanishad.
These three stages as referred to by the Ācaryāhrdaya as exemplified in the Tiruvāyulī 6-5-1, (saṅkhi-bhāva) 6-7-1 and others as Mother or Mātrī-bhāva, and Tiruvāyulī in 6-8-1 and a host of others as Daughter-putri-bhāva.

This shows that the growth of the ātman as prajna proceeds from the deep unconscious faith that companion-ship entails (sawpto), to the waking awareness of the Divine near by and before oneself in jñātā-puṭrī-bhāva) through the mediating Mātrī-Guru-bhāva of the Sāṇā. This is expounded by the Pranava itself. A U M.

Ācaryāhrdayaḥkāra also mentions in his work the mystic symbology of the Ālvaras generally but more especially St Sathakopa.

- **Peacock**: Expansion of Jñāna
- **Moon**: Freedom from all faults.
- **Dhanus**: (bow) Conquest of the senses.
- **Arrow**: Jñāna
- **Pearl**: Ananda.
- **Coral**: Prama or love.
- **Chandan**: Bhakti
- **Vidhūt**: Lightning: Soul's immortality
- **Ratha**: Soul's bhogyanus.
- **Hansa**: Activity according to one's nature, (Śvarūpa and avadhānas)

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Srnyamsandhyā : Rajasa, jñāna
Rātri : Tātaca jñāna
Usas : Sattvika jñāna
Abas : Suddha-sattva jñāna
Nilamurrum : Prajñā Purusaśātiḥ jñāna
Kalai (part) : Abhimāraṇa
Valai (not) : Mamanārā

Sirusilaku (small winnow) Tyājya (that which has to be renounced)

Sirar Silaku : Full winnow : God-knowledge (upādeya)

The Ālvār's hymns are modelled on a pattern of concentric meditation or dramatization. The individual soul is taken step by step on the pattern of beginner who wonders at the Divine. Naturally the process is one of attention to the object of one's attraction or wonder. Ālvār always try to fix their object of devotion, as the highest Godhead, the causal prin or beginning, the perfect omnipotent creator. All those that help the worship and attainment of that object (upādeya) are sought to be gained and all those that hinder are renounced (tyājya). This is the basic psychological and practical necessity not only with regard to mundane affairs but also in regard to God-realisation, which is an awakening awareness of the necessity or imperative of one's spiritual life.
All those individuals who help are received with gratitude and are associates and companions and all those who hinder are accused as enemies and foes and so on. One seeks the society of those likeminded souls and renounces the company of those who have other interests are even those who are asleep to the need to know their future happiness.

The second stage is when one fixes the goal (gṛptṛtvā varanam) and has faith that it can be attained. Though God is very far and distant and is everything that one is not, the faith as mother sustains the whole journey. Mahāvisvāsa develops slowly nourished by the mother-counsel and the Guru's skill in training the mind to attach itself to God or the goal. The mind is then followed without hesitation till God is reached.

The third stage is when one is ready for the total surrender of all one's parts to God who is recognized as one's Lord (Śvāmi) and Husband (pati). This is Ātmā-nikṣepa. One's extreme urgency or impatience is shown by the collapse of the individual falling at the feet for mercy of God - the Beloved. This is the consummation of the egolessness (kṛpanya) or one who has made God her very life and breath and ago.
Those three stages covered by Kāñcarātra in its six-fold or six limbed Ārṇaṇjati are revealed by the Ālvār as the stages of Prajña.

This approach is characteristically the contribution of the Anubhava of the Ālvār in regard to Spiritual Religion and Poetry. Ālvār is the culmination of this poetic revelation of the Bhakti as God-given Gift (Divyn-prasāda).