CHAPTER III
several ways indistinguishable from the ways and practices of ascetics of Brahmanical religions.\footnote{Ibid.}

Buddha’s own renunciation is usually traced to the legend of the Four Signs (\textit{Nimitte}). The legend of four signs – the sick man, the dead man, the old man and finally and most importantly, a wandering almsman (\textit{Bhikku}) – are the guiding points in Buddha’s renunciation.\footnote{Dutt, 1962, \textit{op. cit.}, p.36. Also it can be understood from the legend that the ‘wandering almsman’ is pre-Buddhist in origin.} Soon Buddha’s philosophy attracted a group of people, who then formed the \textit{Sangha}. Buddha became their Lord and Master (\textit{Bhagava} and \textit{Sattha}) of the group and propounded the following mission to the Union: “...go forth and wander about for the good of the Many (\textit{Bahujana}), the happiness of the Many – in compassion for the World – for the good, the welfare and happiness of gods and men.” The group came to be called as ‘the union of \textit{Bhikkus} (\textit{Bhikku-Sangha}).\footnote{Ibid., p.35.}

From ‘wandering almsmen’ to a settled Order was a complex and long evolution in history. It had its origin in the ‘annual break’ during the monsoon season, when the wandering almsmen were forced to suspend their wandering and settle down in one place for three months. The Buddhists call it \textit{Vassa}. The Jainas call it \textit{Pajjusana} and the Brahmanical religions call it \textit{Dhurvasila} or \textit{Chaturmasya}. C.N. Venugopal writes, ‘the practice of a monk staying stationery in one place for four months –
"chaturmasya - during monsoon' was institutionalised from the earliest times.\(^7\)

This 'living together' for three months slowly established comradeship among the inmates and soon followed specific customs, practices and all the trappings of an institution. The institutionalisation of religious orders also had the following corollary developments: initiation of new members, training, probationary period, coronation, debates and seminars, collective rites and ceremonies.\(^8\) However, unlike the Christian monasteries, where the underlying principle is 'isolation from the society', where even the monks kept aloof among themselves and contact with the outside world was bare minimum, the monasteries of Indian religions are actively engaged with the society. The development of monasteries was characterised by a dynamic relationship with the society. So, it is no wonder, that the religious orders in India, throughout history, influenced society's life and culture.\(^9\)

The other important aspect that should interest us is the patronage offered by kings of various dynasties to the cause of monasteries. The royalty had a specific function with regard to religion, 'Protection'; while India never had anything analogous to 'State religion', religious institutions were however, richly endowed by the State and kings, as it was the 'king's

\(^8\) Dutt, 1962, *op. cit.*, p.92.
primary and traditionary constitutional duty in ancient India...to protect' the religious institutions as self-governing bodies and keep them that way from internal and external disruption.\(^\text{10}\)

The above discussion on the origin and development of religious orders during ancient times is sketchy, but it could hardly be otherwise, as we have tried to trace the history in a few paragraphs, of what is essentially a development spanning nearly a thousand years. But it is believed that it would serve our purposes in gaining a general and preliminary understanding of the origin of religious orders in India. However it is better to summarize the developments, as it is likely to help us in understanding the later developments: (a) The concept of 'wandering almsmen' was popular during Upanishadic times. It was a necessary prerogative for people who are in search of the ultimate reality, the "Brahman". (b) Buddha was influenced by the concept of 'wandering almsmen' and decided to become one. Soon a group attracted by his outlook joined him and the group became the *Sangha* – followers of *Buddha Dhamma*. (c) The 'Rain Retreat' gave the opportunity for the evolution of a collective life and an institutional structure, which in course of time became monasteries or religious orders. (d) Since most of the monasteries in Indian religions were coenobitical in character, they gained widespread influence in the society. (e) Following the Indian tradition, the

\(^\text{10}\) *Ibid.*, p.81, Apparently the pattern was an all-India one and well spread into South India too. Arjun Appadurai uses the very term 'protection' apart from 'endowment' while discussing the primary duty of king vis-à-vis temples in medieval South India. See Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 70-1.
kings and state offered ‘protection’ to these institutions, which in course of time became well endowed and very powerful. This pattern was well established by the fifth century A.D., at least in the case of Buddhist and Jaina monasteries.

**Buddhism and Jainism in Tamil Region**

It is clear that Buddhism and Jainism were present in Tamil Nadu during early Sangam period and asceticism was not unknown. Writing about the religious culture in South India during the period between c.200 B.C. to c.250 A.D., Nilakanta Sastri observes that,

...Vedic religion had struck root, and monarchs performed costly sacrifices. Brahmans devoted to their studies and religious duties held a high position in society. The followers of the Veda had often to engage in public disputations with rival sectarians, and many are the references to such disputations proclaimed by the flying of flags and carried on with much gesticulation of the hands. The rival sects are not named, but doubtless they were Jainism and Buddhism which became more prominent in the succeeding age.

And by the fifth century there was a multiplication of Buddhist and Jaina monasteries endowed with land grants and probably had control over land tolls also. The position of these Jaina Monasteries was very powerful and this enabled them to "organise the fourfold charity of food, medicine, education and residence on a large scale and thereby consolidate the social basis of the sect in the locality."

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BHAKTI MOVEMENT AND MONASTRIES IN TAMIL LAND

In view of the conflict that was emerging between the Saiva and Vaishnava devotional cult, and Jainism, no wonder this consolidation proved to be extraordinarily disadvantageous to non-Jaina sects. This led to the emergence of Saiva-Vaishnava monasteries in South India. The emergence of the bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu during the sixth and ninth centuries paved the way for a spurt in temple-building activities. Temples are one of the most important institutional structures for the evolution and preservation of religious culture in Tamil country. At one level, temples preserved arts like dance and music, while at another level, it allowed an enriching synthesis of Sanskritic and distinctly Tamil features of religion.\textsuperscript{14} This was very much facilitated by the bhakti movement in the aftermath of the glories of Sangam literature. It also saw Tamil emerge as one of the literary media through which religious ideals were expressed with a rare felicity, a quality that had a profound impact upon the religious life of the people. Romila Thapar writes, “The development of Tamil was furthered by a popular religious movement propagated by groups of hymnologists and popular preachers who are often called the Tamil ‘saints’...”\textsuperscript{15} The movement had important social consequences. Regarding the relation between temples and bhakti movement, Narayanan and Kesavan observe, “bhakti not only started from the temples, but it

\textsuperscript{14} Romila Thapar, \textit{A History of India 1},Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.184.
connected one temple with another through pilgrimages; and in turn this led to the proliferation of temples."\textsuperscript{16}

Already temple-building has been one of the hallmarks of South India and it became easier to build monasteries near the temples. Nilakanta Sastri opines that the origin of Saiva and Vaishnava mutts is some centuries anterior to the reign of Raja Raja I (tenth century circa) and slowly spread all over the Tamil speaking land “until almost every important temple came to possess one or more mathas functioning in close proximity to it.”\textsuperscript{17} As was the tradition with temples, the religious orders were also richly endowed with land and other grants made by kings and other local notables.\textsuperscript{18}

Ideally bhakti movement is regarded as anti-caste in character and a resistance to the influence of Brahmins in the region. Though quite a few Brahmins were influential in the movement, many of the ‘saints’ were from lower castes. Thapar writes,

Although Tamil culture eventually rejected Buddhism and was not particularly loyal to Jainism, the impact of both of these religions is evident in the Tamil devotional cult, which in its social approach leaned towards rejecting the established order of society as stratified in the caste structure, and received support from the lower castes.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{17} Sastri, 1963, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 117-18.

\textsuperscript{18} The rich endowments made to the religious orders testify their growing influence and power in the society and their importance to political authority. To know the profusion of grants made to the religious orders, for example see, Nandi, 1973, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.76-107.

\textsuperscript{19} Thapar, 1966, \textit{op. cit.}, p.188.
However, opinion is divided upon such notions. According to Narayanan and Kesavan, the movement "represents a new wave of Aryan or Hindu influence which was basically a religious phenomenon albeit with a social content that reflects the elements of dissent, protest and reform."\(^\text{20}\)

Another feature of the bhakti movement in South India that should interest us is the extreme reaction it exhibits against Jainism and Buddhism. While there is no doubt that Jainism and Buddhism were looked upon with hostility by Tamil hymnists and their construction of alternate focus of identity through devotional songs of Saiva and Vaishnava orientation was important, only feeble attempts have been made to contextualise the conflict. While it is generally acknowledged that the rise of Buddhism and Jainism was due to the patronage of political authority of the times, it is important to situate the political authority in socio-economic terms. Burton Stein regards Jainism

...as an ideological element in the critical period of struggle between the militarily formidable non-peasant people of South India and...peasants of dry, and mixed dry and wet ecotypic situations in South India against the increasingly agricultural people of the riverine plains.\(^\text{21}\)

In the Tamil speaking land, the agricultural people are called 'Vellalas', who were to perform an important role not only in the establishment of non-Brahman religious orders, but also in the identity politics of nineteenth and twentieth century Tamil Nadu. During the seventh and eighth centuries,

indicative of the struggle between Saivism and Jainism, Pallava king Mahendravarman I converted to Saivism by the hymnist Gnana Sambhandar persecuted the Jains (the king was a Jain till the other day!) and it was reported that Nandivarman II Pallavamalla too, a Vaishnavite, persecuted the Jains and Buddhists.22

How do we situate religious orders here? We have already noted that before and during the initial phases of the bhakti movement, Buddhism and Jainism were holding sway in the Tamil speaking regions. It is important to understand the kind of services provided by the religious orders to the public – an understanding which exemplify their popularity: religious orders provided food to the poor and pilgrim (they do it even today), medicine (the healing powers of the monks and saints were legendary), education, and residence to the destitute and pilgrim, apart of course from religious propaganda. It is also clear that to provide such wide-ranging services, religious orders need to be well endowed. Also such services bring power and influence to the Order with local people – power and influence which the kings and local powers ever willing to tap. On the other hand services provided were important for recruitment and consolidation of the respective sects. With regard to Jaina monasteries, Ramendranath Nandi astutely observes that the “charity, however, was meant for the Jaina believers. Members of non-Jaina sects were carefully

22 Ibid.
excluded from the enjoyment of such benefaction. Even the Jaina laity was strongly advised against entertaining non-believers."\(^{23}\)

However, the main function of the religious orders was education. In one sense they functioned as ‘seminaries’ – kind of residential schools. In view of the multiple functions performed by religious orders, a digression to analyse the meaning of the word ‘mutt’ – a Tamil/Sanskrit term for religious orders is not out of place. In the ancient days ‘mutt’ signified a dwelling place of an ascetic. Later it came to denote a place/hut where a group of ascetics lived. In Sanskrit ‘mutt’ denotes a place where a group of students reside and study. It also meant ‘a place where life-long celibates (\textit{Nyshtika Brahmacari} – Skt.) live’. Further, ‘mutt’ also means ‘a place where the poor/pilgrim are fed’.\(^{24}\) It is clear that India’s monasticism encompasses a wide range of meaning. William Pinch writes that,

\[\ldots\]...

\ldots while frequent pilgrimage, alms and tests of physical endurance are and have long been important aspects of the lives of many Indian monks, Indian monasticism cannot be reduced to itinerancy, begging and asceticism. Many monks are and have long been devoted to careful study and spiritual contemplation, conducted entirely within the walls of a sanctuary in an attempt to create a paradise on earth. Still others were expert in the arts and science of warfare...many Indian monks were respected as able healers, and service (seva) remains a central ideal of most Indian religious traditions.\(^{25}\)

However, our focus of interest in this study would be the ‘monastic order’, an institutional arrangement having a ‘monastic head’ or

\(\textit{Ibid.},\ p.76.\)

\(\text{The analysis of the word ‘mutt’ is given in K. Sundaramoorthy, “Thiruvavuduthurai Adheenathin Samaya Ilakkiya Panigal”, (Socio-literary Activities of Thiruvavuduthurai Adheenam), Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Madras, Chennai, 1982 p.10.}\)

'matadhipathi' – who is regarded as the spiritual descendant of the founder in Saiva parlance, *Guru Mudhalvar*, literally 'first teacher' or 'first preceptor'. (In Vaishnava parlance, generally they are called as *Acharyan* or *Mudhal Acharyan* – carrying very much the same meaning). The first known established Orders in South India, apart from Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, are the religious orders founded by Adi Sankara during the eighth century A.D. Inspired by the model of Buddhist monasteries in India, Sankara, founded religious orders in the four corners of the sub-continent in Sringeri (South), Dvaraka (West), Badrinath (North), Puri (East) and Kanchi (also South).\(^\text{26}\) The Orders became vehicles of propagation or Advaita philosophy in the country.

**SAIVA AND VAISHNAVA MONASTRIES**

Literature credits the flourishing of mutts, especially Saiva mutts to at least fifth century A.D. Thirumoolar, author of *Thirumandhiram*, one of the twelve Saiva canonical works called *Thirumurai*, in his book speaks about *Gurumatha Varalaru* literally meaning 'History of Chief Religious Order'. It mentions that there were seven religious orders in the lineage of Thirumoolar. Tamil scholars aver that these were the forerunners of later day evolution of religious orders of Saiva tradition.\(^\text{27}\)

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\(^\text{26}\) The mutt at Kanchi, presently the most influential in the country, became a focus of controversy regarding the antiquity of the order and also whether the mutt was originally founded by Sankara.

From the above, it can be generally concluded, that religious orders were originally of Buddhist and Jaina origins, but were adopted at a later date by the various sects of Hinduism in order to spread their own philosophies and influence the society. While land grants and other wealth accrued to these religious orders since their inception, it was during and later than the period of Raja Raja I, the Chola king, religious orders became a force to reckon with in South India.

With the bhakti movement nearly wiping out Buddhism and Jainism in the Tamil speaking land, both Saivism and Vaishnavism asserted themselves with liberal patronage from kings and local leaders. It was also the period of an extremely fruitful relationship between the agricultural castes, mainly Vellalas and Brahmans, who together can be regarded as joint custodians of the temple culture of South India. This was also the period when the Saiva Canonical works, known as Thirumurai and the devotional hymns of Vaishnava poet-saints of the bhakti movement, now known as Naalayira Divya Prabandham were compiled by Nambi Andar Nambi and Nathamunigal. It is an important event in the history of Saivism and Vaishnavism, for in the later years, they became the basis around which the Saiva Siddhantha and Vishishtadvaita philosophies were propounded. Religious orders of Saiva tradition and Vaishnava tradition during the succeeding centuries emerged as the custodians of the above philosophies.
It is also to be noted the hymns of the bhakti saints came to be sung in the temples during this period and it emerged as one of the key links that integrated common people into temple worship – for the songs were in Tamil and as such had emotional value to the people. It also brought to relief a consciousness of a collective tradition with a religious content in a language other than Sanskrit.28 Interestingly, the Vaishnava tradition calls the Naalayira Divya Prabandham as ‘Dravida Vedas’ and is brought out in four sections – a symbolic identification with the four Sanskrit Vedas. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism entrenched themselves firmly during the Chola period (from tenth century onwards), spread their influence in the Tamil country and beyond through their sectarian leaders and institutions.

The role of the sectarian leaders/Gurus/Acharyas in imparting knowledge to the shisyas/followers/students became important during later Chola period. According to Burton Stein, "...these led to religious orders...sectarian education conducted in a seminary (mutt or ghatika) provided comprehensive studies necessary for the maintenance of Brahmanical traditions of the age..."29 He further observes that all but Brahman students were excluded from the seminaries. This may be true about the Vaishnava tradition, but the position of non-Brahmans, especially Vellalas, in Saiva tradition should have been better. This would provide us

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28 For an excellent idea to understand the importance of the compilation, see, K. Sivathamby, Tamizhi Ilakiya Varalaru, (Literary History in Tamil), Madras, 1988, pp.80-85.

the logic with Ramanuja’s activities with temple administration. He carried out major reforms and included several non-Brahmans as temple functionaries. No doubt, the reforms were very popular with the general populace and a large-scale expansion of Vaishnavism took place during that time.\(^{30}\) Ramanuja called the non-Brahman temple functionaries as \textit{Sathaadha Vaishnavas} or ‘Vaishnavas without thread’, a term still popular in Tamil Vaishnava parlance. While the arrangement became diluted during the late fourteenth century, the arrangement still persists in many of the Vaishnava temples.\(^{31}\)

While the Vaishnava tradition, under the influence of bhakti movement and reforms of Ramanuja became more accommodative of non-Brahman interests, Saiva non-Brahman mutts started flourishing since the early years of the thirteenth century. M. Rajamanickam has listed several Saiva non-Brahman religious orders from that period. \textit{Thiruchathiramurrathu Mudaliar Santhanam, Thirvidaimaruthoor Maligai Madathu Mudaliar Santhanam, Thirvaroor-Aasara Mazhagiyar Thiru Madam, Marudha Perumal Santham,} and \textit{Shenbaikudi Mudaliar Santhanam} were some of the famous lineages associated with Mudaliar (Vellala caste) mutts of the period.\(^{32}\)


\(^{31}\) Burton Stein, 1994, \textit{op. cit.}, p234.

\(^{32}\) M. Rasamanickam, 1958, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.172-3.
FLOWERING OF SAIVA SIDDHANTHA PHILOSOPHY

Thirteenth century is also an important period for Saiva Siddhantha philosophy, for Meikandar wrote the most important Tamil work of the philosophy, *Sivagnana Bodham* (circa. 1223 A.D.) during that period. Meikandar was also the spirit behind many of the religious orders of Saiva tradition, which have survived till date. This was also the period of the growth of Saiva Siddhantha, essentially in Tamil language. It also may not be a coincidence that this is the period when non-Brahman leaders rise to influential positions in temples and religious orders. Meikandar's *Sivagnana Bodham* is the first of fourteen canonical texts of Tamil Saiva Siddhantha. The texts are called *Meikanda Sastras*. The authors of the texts include both Brahmans and non-Brahmans, specifically high caste Vellalas. While it is clear that Sanskrit education was not barred at least for high caste non-Brahmans, the fact that the distinct feature of the *Meikanda Sastras* is that they attach more importance to knowledge (Skt. Gnana,) than rituals, may indicate a desire to de-emphasise Brahmanical notions of religion and to create an alternate locus of philosophy,\(^{33}\) based on Tamil language. Sivathamby writes that the *Meikanda Sastras* differentiate the 'Siddhanthins' from the 'Advaitins' (followers of Brahman Sankara) on the basis of philosophy and the fact that the texts form the ideological foundation of non-Brahman religious orders makes them an important milestone in the flowering of 'Tamil Consciousness'.\(^{34}\) He further observes


\(^{34}\) Sivathamby, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp.84-85.
that the interest shown by non-Brahman religious orders in the preservation and commentating this literary tradition was an attempt in furthering this tradition in Tamil\(^{35}\) (presumably as an alternative or in competition with Sanskrit).

Meikandar’s *Sivagnana Bodham* became a locus of controversy in the twentieth century. Though Burton Stein writes that the work was a translation from Sanskrit,\(^{36}\) Saiva scholars have however maintained that the Tamil work was indeed the original – a bone of contention reflecting the contestations over the basis for collective identity.\(^{37}\)

Even before Meikandar, one Thiruviyalur Uyyavadha Deva Nayanar wrote *Thiruvundiar* and his student Thirukadavoor Uyyavadha Deva Nayanar wrote *Thirukallittru Padiyar* – both works of Saiva Siddhantha.\(^{38}\) It is clear from the above that Saiva Siddhantha as a coherent philosophical system was taking shape in the thirteenth century. The Saiva teacher of Meikandar’s father was from Thiruthuraiyoor Saiva religious order and he, in his old age, became a student of Meikandar, underscoring the importance of Meikandar for Saiva Siddhantha philosophy.

\(^{35}\) *Ibid.*
It was a period in which the various philosophies were competing with each other to gain people's acceptance. Sankara's Advaita, Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita and Madwa's Dvaita were the prominent philosophies in competition with Saiva Siddhantha. The growing influence of Tamil Vellalas in general, in the socio-economic structure of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries and in particular, in temples as temple functionaries and donors perhaps made it easier for the Vellala Meikandar's works to gain currency and influence among the upper-caste non-Brahman elite. Rajamanickam points out that Meikandar's disciples spread all over Tamil land and established religious orders. The liberal patronage offered by the kings, the local Vellala patron came in very handy for the spread of Saiva religious orders. It is also clear that religious orders, apart from propagation and recruitment, were now firmly in control of the administration of the most important institution of the society - the temples.

Also, Rajamanickam points out that Saivism did not get wide acceptance among the Brahman population. Also during the thirteenth century, the growing influence Saiva Siddhantha seems to have created latent tensions between Brahmans and non-Brahman elites. This is reflected by the incident called Gugaiidi Kalagam - where the non-
Brahman *Gugais* (another name for religious orders) were alleged to have been attacked by Brahmans in Thiruthuraipoondi.\(^{39}\)

Pulavar Rasu, however told this student that while it could not be taken as an indication of serious rift nor is there an evidence for it, it could however be construed that the Brahman-Vellala alliance was not without its tensions. This view is reinforced by another incident in the history of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. The following legend finds a major place in its history: It regards the supremacy of feeding Saiva followers (generally non-Brahmans) over the feeding of Brahmans, which was usually the more prevalent practice. During the reign of the eighth pontiff, Masilamani Desikar, both Brahmans and non-Brahmans were fed in Thiruvenkadu and the food remnants were thrown into two separate wells. The legend pointedly notes that while the water of the well where the remnants of non-Brahman feeding was thrown, became crystal clear and as pure as the water of the holy Ganga, the water in the other well remained dirty and worm-worn. This well is preserved even today. It also notes that the then Maratha king granted lands for the feeding of Saiva followers.\(^{40}\)

It is clear from such references, that the Saiva non-Brahman religious orders had latent tensions with Brahmans and also the fact that an alternate centre of sacredness was located in non-Brahman Saiva


Adheenams on par or superior to those of the 'sacred Brahman' endowed with religious qualities. The prestige and power enjoyed by these religious orders were well-documented and brought to relief by the activities of the various sectarian leaders.

**Religious Orders and Political Power**

Religious orders played another cardinal role with regards to kingship in South India. They established vital links between the society and the political authority in consolidating and legitimising the rule of the king. The role played by the Vaishnava religious orders is excellently illustrated in Arjun Appadurai's article, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India". He writes, "Temple endowment was a major technique for the extension of royal control into new areas, and transactions involving both material resources and temple 'honours' permitted the absorption of new local constituencies..." By the large number of inscriptions available, it is clear that the predominant norm was to operate the endowment through local sectarian leaders, preferably the leaders of religious orders who were in control of the administration of the temples.

In the case of Vaishnavism, this phenomenon is of interest to us in two different contexts: the role played by the religious orders in legitimising royal authority in the hinterlands and the competition between

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42 Ibid., p.49.
two schools of Vaishnavism. The developments took place in the context of Mohammedan invasion of the Tamil country during the thirteenth century and their defeat by the Telugu warriors of Vijayanagara Empire to consolidate their position in the Tamil country. The following inscription from Thirukkatakuti in the Ramnad district illustrates how the process unfolded,

...the times were Tulukkan (Mohammedan) times and that Kampana Odeyar came on his southerly campaign, destroyed the Mohammedans, established orderly government throughout the country and appointed many Nayakkanmars for the inspection and supervision in order that the worship in all temples might be revived and conducted regularly as of old.43

This is one of the many typical inscriptions where the Telugu warriors restored temple worship and richly endowed them. The range of activities included the establishment of monasteries.

During the fourteenth century, the Sriranganarayana Jeeyar Adheenam was formed, which became one of the leading monastic organisations of the Tengalai School of Vaishnavism. Before we go into these developments, it is important to understand the philosophical and sociological foundations of the two schools of Tamil Vaishnavism, the southern school (Tengalai or the Prabandhic school) and the northern school (Vadagalai). Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite leader, formulated the Vishishtadvaita philosophy, by judiciously combining the Sanskrit texts of Vedic tradition and the Tamil devotional poetry of Alvars (Naalayira Divya Prabandham). The philosophy was also a counter to the strict metaphysics

43 Quoted in Ibid., p.57.
of Śankara’s Advaita, with its strong orientation towards worship of a personal God in a temple. He further gave importance to the technique of devotion for the achievement of moksha (liberation) and insisted on the reality of phenomenal existence (unlike Śankara, for whom the worldly existence is a mere epi-phenomenon). These factors were the cornerstones of his Sri Bhāshya, the work that elucidates his philosophy of Vishishtadvaita or qualified monism.\textsuperscript{44}

N. Jagadeesan has summarised thus,

The essential contribution of Ramanuja to Indian thought was to have developed a coherent philosophical basis for the doctrine of bhakti to god in sharp contradistinction to Śankara’s Advaita philosophy. Ramanuja reconciled the mystic bhakti of the Alvars, the older Vedic tradition which included the inerrant Vedas, the prestigious Gita and the socially inescapable Smīritis and the philosophy of the Brahma Sūtras as interpreted by himself into one movement and one thought, in short, in one way of life.\textsuperscript{45}

Having achieved fair success in synthesising the Sanskrit tradition and Tamil traditions, he operationalised the same through the institution of Acharya Purusha (Spiritual Guide) and worship in the temples. However, Ramanuja’s synthesis showed its fragile character, when in the later centuries, his followers interpreted his teachings differently and subsequently it became a formal division as southern and northern schools. The differences between the two schools were religious, metaphysical and sociological and they are enumerated as eighteen, known as Ashtadasa.


The main intellectual difference was the greater reliance on Sanskrit tradition by the Northern school and on Tamil *Prabandham* by the Southern school. It is also true that the Southern school, with its emphasis on Tamil poetry, was more open to participation of non-Brahman castes in sectarian life.

Also, the Southern school placed a greater emphasis on the role of Acharya Purushas in attaining salvation – an emphasis that has important consequences for the recruitment practices of the school. All this becomes important for us in the context of the linkages that evolved between the religious leaders and the kings of the Vijayanagara and later Nayaks. The following references are completely taken from Appadurai’s work on temples, unless otherwise stated.

(i) The Telugu warriors took enormous interest in reviving/expanding the Tamil temples by allocating resources to groups and people favoured by the local chieftains to establish links between these warriors and the chieftains. This is to a large extent mediated through local sectarian leaders, including heads of religious orders

(ii) Such mediation of the local sectarian leaders and their subsequent popularity not only led to consolidation of the Northern and the Southern

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46 *Ibid.*, p.196. Also see p.204 for an easy understanding of the differences between the two schools.

schools, it also helped in the formation of various Vaishnava religious orders.

(iii) Thus, religious orders and various religious leaders enhanced their control over local resources and almost reproduced the royal functions within the local contexts.

It is very clear that by the eighteenth century, Sri Vaishnavism has firmly spilt into two schools and the two were now in conflict over the control of Vaishnava temples and hence local control. Obviously, the Southern school, with its emphasis on Tamil and a more inclusive approach towards caste, had control of the majority of the temples in the Tamil-speaking region. Even today, the Vaanamaamalai religious order in Nanguneri remains the richest of the Vaishnava Orders and also the most vibrant one, with clientele and patronage spread right across the sub-continent from the extreme south to Nepal in the north.

The above analysis of the role of the religious orders, both Saiva and Vaishnava, sketchy though, rich in details over certain periods and not so in others, reflects the kind of historical material that is available. References about religious orders and sectarian leaders remain scattered over a vast pool of complex data in multiple languages – inscriptions about temples, copper plates, royal grants, Guruparampara Prabhas and oral traditions.
For the purposes of our study, an overall and general historical understanding of the role of religious orders is just about sufficient. To understand clearly and unambiguously the niche that religious orders have carved for themselves in Tamil country, a more rigorous and thoroughgoing historical research is required and as such remains out of scope of the purposes of our study.