I. The political unity of the major part of India under the Nandas and Mauryas resulted in a large-scale flow of ideas, beliefs and practices current in central and northern parts of the country into the Deccan and the south. About the 2nd cent. B.C., the progress in this direction had been considerable, so much so that a consistency is observed in the nature of Vaisnavism throughout the country. Epigraphic evidence purports the simultaneous existence of a set of variety of strata of intermingled beliefs among the followers of that religion. The two principal strata which can be distinguished are (i) the Bhāgavatic and (ii) the Vedic.
The main features of early Bhāgavatism may be summarised as follows: (a) the worship of the deified Pāñchavīras of the Vṛṣṇis, viz., Samkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Sāmba and Aniruddha, who were originally heroes as well as propagators of a religious system culminating into Bhāgavatism. Both in the North and the South, their worship was in vogue. Its deep influence in the South is evidenced not only in the Sangām literature but also by the fact that the Vaikṛṣṇasāgama records their iconography. Their worship continued in the South as late as the 5th cent. A.D. The growing emphasis on Bhakti entailed upon image worship and, as a necessary extension, the temple worship which was brought about in the Vaishnava fold as a result. Obviously, with the temple worship was nurtured the formulation of ritual worship (pujā) and its consolidation into regular religious performances. (b) Simultaneously, the rise of the two viras, viz., Samkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva is noteworthy in the beliefs. This is reflected in the Deccan by the Nanaghat record of 2nd cent. B.C. (c) Further, the rise of one of these two viras, viz., Vāsudeva, as god of gods mentioned in the Besanagar record is also noteworthy. In the Deccan, however, the feature is first evidenced in the China epigraph of 2nd cent. A.D. as well as in the popularity of the name 'Krishna'. The Māhūṣa Vāsudeva image found in Kantapala is also a pointer to the same fact. The significance of the rise of 'Vāsudeva' lies in the fact that he is accorded the highest status in the modified Pāñchāratra (Bhāgavata) cosmology, rele-
gating the remaining vīras to a subordinate position of subsequent emanations (vyuhas) and deleting Samba from the list.

The second, more ancient and, accordingly, deep-rooted stratum of Vaishnavism, distinguished as essentially 'vēdic' derives from 'Vishṇu-Nārāyana' of the Vēdic literature. In epigraphs it is first evidenced in the Nagari record wherein the enclosure around the object of worship (Samkarshaṇa and Vāsudēva) is called Nārāyana-vatikā. The mention of Bhāgavatic gods in the set of deities invoked in the Naaghaghat epigraph (which records Vēdic sacrifices also) and, to some extent, the Vadagaon-Madhavapur (Yadugrāma) record, tend to show that Bhāgavatism had exercised its strong influence in a society which had not dispensed with the Vēdic rituals. Thus the position was that, while a section of the society was not ready to discontinue the ancient Vēdic practices, it was also not averse to absorb a new and influential element of religion into its fold. As a consequence, Bhagavatism took to the path of 'assimilation' and 'accommodation' rather than 'reaction.' The concept of a single deity par excellence having manifold forms for the benefit of the world fostered the 'accommodation' of various deities into 'Vaishnava' pantheon. Alongside this process, it goes without saying that the beliefs and practices of the new element also tend to get adapted in the dominant religious circle, while to a certain extent the 'new element' is also likely to retain its individuality.
The outcome of the influence of Bhāgavatism in the region was the temple worship. In Nagarjunakonda an Ashtabhujaśvāmi image was set up in a temple by various kings among whom was a king of Karnataka. The inscription recording the event begins with invocation to 'Nārāyaṇa'. The Bhāgavata stress on tyāga is underlined in the beliefs reflected in the record. Similarly, there was a temple of 'Nārāyaṇa' to which grants were made by a Pallava queen. An image of Vāsudēva was set up in Karnataka obviously in a temple.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that 'Vishṇu' was the dominant deity of the 'Vaishṇavas' who gave importance to house-hold worship. The archaeological evidence is lacking in this regard because 'house-hold worship' has little to do with "community worship", a feature of "temple worship". And obviously it was into this 'Vaishṇavism' that 'Bhagavatism' was getting assimilated. Interestingly, in this context, no record describes the temple to be of 'Vishṇu', although this name was considerably popular. The dominance of 'Vishṇu' worshippers within a short time is demonstrated in the succeeding period.

The concept of manifold forms of the supreme deity upheld the avatāra aspect which began to emerge in this period. It is first evidenced in the Kondamotu Narasimha relief, which also indicates the secondary status allotted to the Pañchāvīras and explains their subsequent disappearance.

To sum up, in the period between 2nd cent. B.C. and 4th cent. A.D. the 'Vishṇu' worshipping 'Vaishnavas' were dominant,
following house-hold worship essentially in the framework of Vedic ritual. They were influenced by the Bhakti cult of Bhāgavatas (worshipping Vṛṣṇivirās and 'Vāsudēva') who introduced temple worship into the 'Vaishnava' fold. At the close of the period, the avatāra concept of Vishnu dominated the scene, and among 'Vaishnava', Vāsudēva probably was deemed only as an avatāra. Narasiṁha avatāra was the first to have drawn attention and worship, relegating the Pāñchavīra worship to the background. In iconography, Narasiṁha was conceived as a 'lion' and Vishnu's two-armed, four-armed and eight-armed images were current. Chakra, śankha and gada were his attributes; and khadga, khetaka, dhanus and bāṇa were also associated with him.

II. In the period from 4th cent. to 6th cent. A.D. when the Kadambas and Gangas held sway over Karnataka, the process of 'assimilation' of Bhāgavatism into 'Vaishnavism' progressed considerably. 'Vishnu-Nārāyaṇa' now dominated the scene (Simha-Vishnu, Vishnu-Gopa, Vishnu-skanda, Vishnu-śarma, Nārāyaṇa-Charanānudhyāta, etc.). In Karnataka proper the epithet paramabhāgavata is not noticed yet (save in Pallava records). 'Bhagavat' is now the epithet of 'Vishnu-Nārāyaṇa'. There were invocations to 'Vishnu', 'Hari', 'Achyuta', etc., but not particularly to 'Vāsudēva'. The single-minded devotion was now to 'Vishnu'. It appears as though what was inherently dominant (Vaishnavism of Vedic back-ground) in the preceding period is now coming to the fore, not of its own, but because of the 'assimilation' of
new beliefs (Bhāgavata-Pāñchārātra) into Jt Perhaps these dominant Vaishnavas may be identified in this region with the Vaikhanasas, who gave importance to Vishṇu-Nārāyaṇa and to household worship, but who had been slowly coming under the spell of Bhāgavatic influence. The archāmurtis of 'Vishṇu' and 'Nārāyaṇa' (Ananta-śāyin), ascribed to this period may also indicate this. The Vaikhānasas probably began the codification of iconographic aspects and ritual practices in their āgama about this time. Already, the Purāṇas (essentially Pāñchārātra works) had attained the sanctity of sacred works.

The avatāra aspect of Vishṇu attained more popularity in this period. The bias, however, appears to have been for worship of Narasiṁha avatāra. It was the most popular one in this period and retained its popularity in the succeeding periods in various forms. The aspect of 'protection' is implied in contemporary sculpture. The popularity of Narasiṁha worship considerably explains the elaborate treatment the Narasiṁha myth received at the hands of the composers of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa later on. At the same time, the identification of Śrī as the consort of Vishṇu and her residing in his breast had been widely recognised in this region. Epigraphs also indicate the popularity of Krishṇa as an avatāra of Vishṇu. To some extent, the rise of chakra as a weapon par excellence of Vishṇu is also noticed. The competition between the Vaishnavas and Śaivas introduced sectarianism and, to harmonise the unhealthy fanaticism, the concept of 'Harihara' was developed as indicated in sculpture.
So far as iconography is considered, sthānaka and śayāna mūrtis and avatāra (Narasimha) have the representations. The sthānakamūrti was conceived of with the attributes of phala, chakra, śankha and katyavalambitahasta, a feature which became an established norm for two more centuries to come. Narasimha's iconographic aspects were developed from the 'lion' to the 'man-lion' and he was depicted only two-armed (reflecting transition from zoomorph to zoanthropomorphic stage) at the beginning and at a later stage with four arms. The images recall the 'Girija-Narasimha' of the Vaikhānasāgama. Thus iconographic evidence also purports the possibility of Vaikhānasas being dominant in the region among Vishnu worshippers. The syncretic form of Harihara also found expression in iconography. The conformity in prescription is found to be with the Matsya Purāṇa. It will be of interest to note in this context that one of the icons distinctly reveals Gupta influence, thus indicating that the spread of beliefs conceived elsewhere were flowing into this region.

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III. At the time when the Chālukyas of Vatāpi rose to power in Karnataka, much of the 'assimilation' process had materialized. For the first time the epithet paramabhāgavata is met with, and for the last time also. 'Vishnu-Nārāyana' continued to be the dominant deity. The Chālukyas believed that 'Nārāyana' had given them the 'Varāha' lāṃchchhana. They erected a 'Vishnu griha' at their capital and the offering to the deity, of the
temple, was called 'Nārāyanabali'. Yet 'temple' worship among the Vaishnavas had not attained much popularity. The temple ritual had considerably grown. There was a sattra attached to the temple at Badami, implying regular staff attending to temple administration. There was provision for paying the 'garland-maker' of the god. Again ritualism had grown among the 'Vaishnavas'. Maṅgalēṣa, for instance, made, after observing fast on Kārtika ekādaśi, a grant to a Brāhmaṇa on the dvādaśi, the day of waking of Viśnu from hās yogamidra (having duly worshipped Viṣṇu). The dominance of Viṣṇu beliefs is indicated partially by contemporary iconography.

Of Viṣṇu's avatāras, Varāha, Nerasiṅha, Viṁana and Rāma-Kṛishṇa were popular. Rāmāyana and Kṛishṇa-charita were well known. In the Viṣṇu fold, Kṛishṇa's recognition as an avatāra was prominent. One of the temple erected by the Chālukyas at their capital (upper Śivalaya) was possibly dedicated to Kṛishṇa-Gōpāla. The rise of Rāma and Kṛishṇa (as avatāras) in the estimates of the Viṣṇu beliefs is especially implied in the sculpture of last phase in this period, when Kṛishṇa is represented prominently and individually in his different feats on the pillars of temples and Rāmāyana representation is also prominent on the walls of temples.

In the far south, the influence of Bhāgavatism as indicated in the Tamil literature had been considerable and it nurtured the elaboration of Viṣṇu myths to fit into south Indian
context, resulting in the 'Southern versions' of the myths which ultimately crystallised into the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The regular contacts of Karnataka with that region introduced these versions here, especially in the second half of the early Chālukya period. Among them were the Kṛiṣṇa stories as known to Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the 'Gajendramokṣha', Narasimha emerging from the pillar, etc.

Meanwhile, the developments in Vaishṇava religion in the north had been considerable. The vyuha concept of the Pāñcharātras (which itself appears to have been a new feature in the Pāñcharātra beliefs, introduced about the beginning of the Christian era, and as such describable as Neo-Pāñcharātra concepts) had already crystallised and it is reflected in Gupta iconography. Its elaboration involved Prakārīti-Purusha (Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa) and vyuhāntara concepts. However, their spread into the Deccan was rather slow. The contacts of Karnataka indicated in contemporary epigraphs and sculpture, must have considerably furthered the process of the introduction of neo-Pāñcharātra concepts. In this context, the concept of 'Sriman' Nārāyana and depiction of Śrī in accompaniment with Vishṇu especially in seated images revealing the role of Śrī is noteworthy. These concepts come to lime-light in the succeeding period.

So far as iconographic aspects are considered, it may be noted that sthānaka mūrti was preferred for worship in shrines. The attributes of Vishṇu are standardized: phala, chakra, śankha.
and katyavalambita hastas. The asana and sayana-murtis were also popular to a lesser degree. These appear to reflect on the prevalence of Vaikhanasa tradition in the region. Of the avatars popular were Varaha, whose four-armed variety reached perfection in iconography at the close of the Chalukya phase; Narasimha, whose two- and four-armed seated images as Girija Narasimha were preferred, but other forms were also considerably popular; Vamana-Trivikrama and Krishna-Gopa. In the last stages, Rama also appears on temple walls prominently. The representation of ayudhapurushas was commoner in early phases, but it was abandoned with in the last phase. Many of the above images show the Vaikhanasagama 'tradition' in depiction. Thematically, the influence from the 'southern' quarter is apparent, especially in the latter half of the Chalukya rule, when Bhagavata Puranava versions of the myths found expression in Chalukya sculpture. Of the influence from the north, the introduction of padma as an attribute of Vishnu is noteworthy. In the last phase, in sthanakamurtis, gada is introduced as a regular attribute in 'weapon' form. The continuation of the syncretic concept of Harihara with much popularity is evidenced in the numerous varieties of his depictions in sculpture. The introduction of the Traipurusha worship is also a noteworthy feature of this period.

**IV.** The evidence of the Rashtrakuta period shows the continuation of certain trends noticed in the previous period. Prominent among these are the neo-Pancharatra concepts of Lakshmi-
Nārāyaṇa and Vyūhāntaras (Chaturvimsatimūrtis). Epigraphs expressively indicate the prominence of Śrī Lakṣmī in the contemporary concepts. Similarly the concept of chaturvimsatimūrtis and the rise of 'Kesava' as an archāmūrti is discerned in epigraphs, especially of the second half of the period. Iconography also indicates the same trend. Temple worship was on the ascent, but Viṣṇu temples are called 'Viṣṇugrihas'. On the whole the impression is that, the neo-pañcharātra concepts almost sweepingly dominate the scene, although a slight aversion of the Viṣṇukāṇṭhas to the new beliefs appears possible.

No wonder, the Pāncharāträgamas (representing neo-pañcharātra concepts) came to be regarded as sacred and authentic religious documents. The installations of Viṣṇu's sthānakamūrtis (other than chaturvimsatimūrtis), however, continued with considerable popularity. Among the avatāras, the worship of Varāha, Narasimha and Kuṭunāra continued. Kuṭunāra's popularity as Gāṇeśa is implied in his prominent depictions in the caves at Ellora as well as by the image of Veṇugopāla found in South Kanara. Another feature of the period is the slow progress of Tripūru worship in temples, indicating the popularity of syncratic approach. It conceived into Dattātṛtya form of the iconography of the succeeding period.

In iconography, apart from the earlier types of sthānakamūrtis with phala, chakra, śāṅkha and gadā as attributes (Katyavalamabhitahasta also is regular), noteworthy is the interchange of attributes in the upper two hands of Viṣṇu, implying the
transformation towards 'Kēśava' form (as in the Ellora image) is noteworthy and it supports the trend noticed in epigraphs. The attribute of padma as a small flower on the palm of the deity in certain examples is also of similar significance. For want of evidence, the development of iconography in respect of avatars is not clear in this period. However the iconographic conception of 'Veṇugopāla' is already evidenced. Also certain new iconographic ideas, such as Yōgēśvara form of Vishnu were already conceived and the dasavatāra list was standardised. In theme, Bhāgavata Purāṇa versions of the myths attained popularity throughout Karnataka. The survival of certain early religious elements, like the cult of Ekanamsa, is also noticed.

V. The evidence obtaining in the period between the rise of the Chālukyas of Kalyāna and the fall of Śeṇas and Hoysalas only elaborates with more profundity the establishment of the neo-Pāṃcharātra beliefs and concepts in the beliefs of Vaishnavas and their evergrowing popularity in Karnataka. The region is swept by the concepts of chaturvīṃśatimūrtis, of primary and secondary emanations, and of Lakṣmī-Nārāyana. The followers of the religion are called 'Vaishṇavas'. The 'Bhagavatas' as a separate sect possibly feebly survived, but their amalgamation in 'Vaishnava' fold was almost complete. The household worship was not and never dispensed with, but the temple worship spread in an evergrowing magnitude even to the interior villages and became an additional established norm in mode of
worship. With it also grew the mathas. Temple staff was maintained for regular worship. Temple worship ritual developed to its magnitude. The fact that the Pāñcharātra beliefs pervaded is also indicated by the recognition given to the Pāñcharātra works by the two great Vaishnava āchāryas.

The sthānakamūrti was now usually one of the chaturvimśati- mūrtis, especially 'Kēsava', Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, or Janārdana. Āsanamūrti comprised Yogeśvara and Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. The saṣayamūrtis were called Jalaṣayana. Of the avatāras, Nārāsiṁha's was the most popular and his worship in the forms of Sthāna, Lakṣmī-Nārāsiṁha and Yōga-Nārāsiṁha was common. Varāha worship continued but it is only scantily evidenced. Kṛṣṇa's Venugopala form was the most popular one, especially in south Karnataka, under the Hoysalas. Rāma also began to be enshrined in temples for worship, in South Karnataka. Hanumān worship also slowly started. The feature which is noteworthy in north Karnataka is the popularity of Traipurusha worship. It possibly resulted in the syncretic Dattātreya images. Noteworthy is the replacement of Brahmā by Sūrya in the Traipurusha group. In south Karnataka the feature is adopted for exclusively Vaishnava dedication, by enshrining three deities of the Vaishnava pantheon in triple-shrined temples. The worship of Viṭṭhala and Jagannātha also rose to prominence. Thus most of the elements which attained popularity in post-14th cent. period are already traced in this period. In lower Karnataka, the influence of Rāmānuja's
Śrīvaishṇavism was considerable from the 12th century. Prior to that it appears that advaita of Śankarāchārya was popular among the Vaishnavas in Karnātaka. At the close of the Hoysala period the new system of Vēdānta was propounded by Madhva and became a most influential sect of Vaishnava during Vijayanagara period.

So far as iconography is considered, the dominant feature is that of chaturvīṁśatimūrtis, identified on the basis of the order of four attributes in the hands of the deity—chakra, śāṅkha, padma, and gada, the more prominent among them being 'Kēśava! However, in lower Karnatak the Varadāra image also appears to have been popular. In seated images Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇa was common, and the concept was extended to one of the avatāras—Narasiṁha also (Lakṣmi-Narasiṁha). Of the others, Yōgēśvara form, Vīshnu as a yōgin, is noteworthy. Images of Jalāśayana were also known. Among the avatāras, in iconography the Varāha, Narasiṁha, and Rāma-Kṛiṣṇa were popular. But Kṛiṣṇa with Lakṣhmaṇa and Śītā in a group was also conceived in iconography. Kṛiṣṇa's Vēnu-gōpāla form was common. Apart from there, some of the other manifestations of Vīshnu, listed in Pāncharātra works like Aḥi-ṛbudhyasāṁhitā and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, such as Hayagrīva, Dhanavantari, Mōhini, Gajēndrālokāṇa, etc. were also iconographically represented. The strong influence of Vaikhāṇasa tradition now relegated to the background, is evidenced in iconography, as for instance in the Trīvikrama images of Hoysala land. As such,
though the Pancharatra ideas became popular and accepted in the beliefs, the Vaikhanasa traditions continued. In the succeeding period of Vijayanagara only extension of the already established traditions noticed in this period are noticed in iconography too.