CHAPTER I

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

TO

RĀMĀNUJA, PĀṆCARĀTRA

AND

ĀLVĀRS
Prolegomena

The object of the present thesis being a comparative study of the metaphysical doctrines of Ramanuja, the Pāncarātra school and the Ālvārs, we propose to start with an introduction to each of these three.

I

Ramanuja as a Vedantic Acarya

To start with Rāmānuja, it can easily be discerned that his philosophy has its roots in the Vedantic tradition. Ever since the dawn of thought the Indian mind has been distinguished for its natural inclination for Philosophical reflection, the culmination of which is reached in the Vedānta system. So much was the prominence attained by the Vedānta that most of the distinguished thinkers of India took pride in being the commentators on the basic Vedānta texts.

Prasthāṇa Trayā as the foundational texts of Vedānta

The philosophy of Vedānta is enshrined in the Upaniṣads, the Gitā and the Brahma-sūtras, technically known as 'Prasthāṇa-trayā', teaching the same philosophical truth respectively in mystical, moral and metaphysical forms. These three together constitute its foundation as well as supreme authority. The Upaniṣads are the pioneer works of the Vedānta system. Since the Upaniṣads superficially seem to teach contradictory doctrines, a need was felt to attempt to systematise their teaching, as a result of which the Brahma-sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa and the Gitā came into existence.
Commentators on Prasthāna-trayī

The ambiguity which prevailed in the Upaniṣads, and which necessitated the composition of the Brahma-sūtras and the Gītā, was also found to prevail in the latter two. Consequently all the subsequent Vedāntic ācāryas were obliged to write commentaries on the Prasthāna-trayī, specially on the Brahma-sūtras, which was regarded to be the most systematic and authoritative exposition of the Vedānta Philosophy. The chief commentators, whose works are known to us, are Śankara, Bhāskara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, Vallabha, Śrīkantha and Baladeva. All these ācāryas attempt to expound the Sūtras in a coherent and systematic way, claiming to satisfy the triple tests of scriptural support (śruti), logicality (yukti) and experiential certainty (anubhava). Starting with different philosophical stand-points, all of them interpreted the Sūtras differently, so much so that commentators agree with each other. Each commentator professes that he alone has arrived at the true and genuine meaning of the Sūtras. Śankara and Rāmānuja as the most outstanding commentators

Among these commentators Śankara's Advaita, also known as Kevalādvaita, and Rāmānuja's Viśisṭādvaita are the most popular and ingenious expositions. Śankara, as has been universally recognised, has evolved one of the most compact and finished systems of thought that have ever come out of human brain. But Rāmānuja's Panentheistic interpretation of the Vedānta philosophy offers a bold, and in no way less important, contrast to the absolutistic interpretation of Śankara. There are differences of opinion among the scholars
as to who is nearer to the true spirits of the Upaniṣads and the Śūtras, yet it remains indisputable that Rāmānuja's system is an equally significant expression of the Vedāntic thought. Dr. Keith remarks that Rāmānuja's attempt in the Śrī Bhāṣya 'in substantial merit and completeness far outdid any previous effort to find in the Brahma-sūtras a basis for monotheism'.

The Viśistādvaita of Rāmānuja

The system of philosophy associated with the name of Rāmānuja is known as Viśistādvaita. Though this word does not occur in his works, it truly represents the central panentheistic idea of his system. He has not developed any new system of thought, nor does he claim originality. He accepts the authority of an ancient and weighty Vedāntic tradition, established by his Viśistādvaitic precursors like Bodhāyana, and developed by the 'ancient teachers' like Tanka, Dṛmaṇa, Guhadeva, Kapardin, Pāruči and others. His genius lies in the systematic and masterly presentation of the Viśistādvaita and thereby controverting the Advaita, at a highly needed time. He does so by emphasising the spiritual experience without ignoring the critical requirements of philosophy. He provides the love of God with a convincing philosophy, and philosophy with a sublime love of God. The doctrine of devotion and the idea of grace of God, adumbrated in the Vedic hymns and developed in the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, blossom forth fully in Rāmānuja through the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.
Criticism of Advaita by Yamuna before Ramanuja

The polemic against Advaita by Ramanuja is not the first of its kind. It seems that Yamuna, the author of 'Siddhi-traya' and 'Gitartha Samgraha', was the first thinker of the Visistadvaita school of thought who sought to controvert the views of the Advaita school by dialectical method. In his Siddhi-traya, under Atma Siddhi—which is devoted to a comparative and critical discussion of the individual self and the supreme Self from different stand points—Yamuna subjects to a critical examination the Advaitic theory of the self as pure consciousness set forth in the Ist-Siddhi of Vimuktatman. Under SamvIt-Siddhi he criticises other important doctrines of the Advaita school, such as the unity of the self, the illusoriness of the universe, and the concept of avidya. After Yamuna, Ramanuja carried forward this task with greater fervour as Mayavada had become more pronounced in his time.

Ramanuja's polemic against Advaita

The chief aim of Ramanuja, as is evident from the very first adhikaraṇa of the Śri Bhāṣya and the second introductory verse of the Vedārtha-Samgraha, which is to controvert the doctrines of the Advaita school, with a view to establish the teaching of the Visistadvaita school on a sound logical basis. He, at the outset, briefly states the general position of the Advaita school which is named as 'laghu pūrvapakṣa' and mad 'mahā pūrvapakṣa'. He, then, subjects the arguments of the pūrvapakṣa to a severe critical examination and refutes
them with his dialectics. His polemic is directed mainly against the central doctrine of the Advaita school, that Brahman, which is pure attributeless consciousness devoid of all determinations, constitutes the sole reality and the manifoldedness of the world and everything other than Brahman are not real. The doctrine of māyā, which is unique to the Advaita school, suffers the heavy brunt of his attack.

Why Rāmānuja centres his polemic against Advaita?

It is not difficult to find an explanation as to why Rāmānuja devoted greater attention to the refutation of the Advaita school, than to that of any other school of thought. It was not only because the philosophy of Advaita was holding an unquestionable sway at his time, but also because its absolutistic ideologies, which appeared to be on the verge of agnosticism, were thought to have endangering the existence of theism. The absolutistic ideology, the germs of which are not indiscernible in the early Upaniṣads, had reached its culmination in Śankara through Gauḍapāda, perhaps under the influence of Buddhism. Soon after Śankara, his followers wrote independent works, and thereby strengthened the teachings of their master. Suresvara's 'Vārtika' and 'Naigkarma-siddhi', Padmapāda's 'Pañca-pādikā', Prakāśātman's 'Vivaraṇa', Vimuktatman's 'Iṣṭa-siddhi', Sarvajñātma Muni's 'Saṃkṣepa-sāriyakā', and Vācaspati's 'Bhāmati' are some of the important Advaita classics that sprang up in the early part of the post-Śankara period. By the 11th century to which period Rāmānuja belongs, the Advaita Vedānta had reached full growth and prominence. This
A position becomes evident to us by the second opening verse of the Vedārtha Samgraha of Rāmānuja.

Works ascribed to Rāmānuja

The first work that Rāmānuja composed was the Vedārtha Samgraha where he tackled the principle upaniṣadic texts, which, as the Advaitins alleged, lent themselves to advaitic interpretation. He established the unsoundness of their advaitic leaning and expounded them in accordance with the teaching of Viṣiṣṭādwaita. Then he addressed himself to his magnum opus, the Śrī Bhāṣya, a commentary on the Brahma-sūtras. His interpretation, as he claimed, was based on Bodhāyana-vṛtti, a very early gloss on the Brahma-sūtras. After this he wrote two epitomes of the Śrī Bhāṣya, the Vedānta Sāra, a short and simple gloss, and the Vedānta Dīpa, a work on the same model but fuller in discussion and more exhaustive in exposition. Rāmānuja then composed a commentary on the Gītā, a work of great merit and a result of considerable thought.

Apart from the above works two other works—'Gadya Trayam' and 'Nitya Granthas'—are also ascribed to him, but the authenticity of this ascription is highly doubtful. I feel very much reluctant to accept the traditional view that Rāmānuja was their genuine author, mainly because they vary in style as well as in subject matter from his other works. The Nitya Granthas, which deals with the routine of a devotee and with devotional lyrics, contains no philosophy. The three Gadyas, described as 'exercises in bhakti' seem to be an imitation, by some later hand, of Rāmānuja's introduction to the Gītā Bhāṣya. The oft-recurring expression 'Ekāntikātyantika parabhakti parajñāna paramabhakti' is not only unknown to his
other works, but its idea is also in flagrant contradiction to
with his manifestly declared teachings in other works. I,
however, find it hard to believe that Rāmānuja might have
undergone a change of thought in his old age and then composed
these works.

Sources of Rāmānuja's philosophy

The main sources for the philosophy of Rāmānuja are
the Prasthāna-traya. Unlike Śankara, he makes unsparing use
of illustrative and corroborative evidences from the Mahābhā-
rata, Rāmāyana and Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Sometimes he also derives
support from Śārītras, Dharma Śāstras, Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas,
which are all strictly brahmanical works.

Some scholars allege that Rāmānuja has fabricated
scriptural evidence, i.e., made room in Vedānta for a
great many śrutiś and smṛtiś which Śankara either ignored
or relegated to the rank of relative truth. Those who pass
such criticism commit the fallacy of taking Śankara's sele-
cction of scriptures as normative.

Similarly, it has often been said, rather taken
for granted, that Rāmānuja was essentially and substantially
influenced by the Pāñcarātra Śamhitās and the works of the
Ālvārs, and was very much inspired by them. Our comparative
studies in the present thesis will show that this view
does not seem to be valid. It will suffice here to quote
a very significant line from J.A.B. Van Buitenen in this
connection. He writes, 'Taking all positive and negative
evidence of all his works together we may say that the Āgama,
albeit recognized in passing as an orthodox system of thought,
is not at all utilised as a source of knowledge in its own
right to corroborate Rāmānuja's system of Vedānta". Some scholars further opine that Rāmānuja has made a bold attempt to force an old work of great authority (i.e. Brahma-sūtras) into the service of the sect to which he is said to belong. In one of my papers published in 'Philosophical Quarterly' I have tried to disprove such a contention. Some scholars also allege the influence of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa on Rāmānuja, but this is far from truth.

II

The Pāñcarātra school as a branch of Āgama

Now we come to the Pāñcarātra school. In the history of Vaiṣṇavism the Pāñcarātra school (also known as Bhāgavata, Sāttvata, Ekāntika etc.) occupies a unique and very important place. It forms an important part of the Hindu Āgama religion, which has wielded an unmitigated influence all over India, and has contributed a lot in the making of the living Hindu religion in the different parts of India, under different names. Perhaps it may come as a surprise to most of us that the working faith and actual opinions held and the religious practices performed by the devoted Hindus are taken entirely from the Āgamas. The Hindu Āgama religion has branched off into three, viz., Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta, with Viṣṇu, Śiva and Śakti as the 'Presiding Deities' or 'Sole Supreme' respectively. The votaries of these sects believe that their Āgamas are revealed by their respective Deities. The Āgama literature bears the stamp of purely theological works, and teaches the technicalities of the cult of these sects together with their metaphysical and mystical principles.
The origin and antiquity of the Pāñcarātra School

From the material available to us it is very difficult to decide precisely the antiquity of the Pāñcarātra as a school of thought and a body of people practising a mode of religion in conformity thereto. Though many conjectures have been put forth to trace its antiquity, we can, at this stage, say only this much that it seems to be of considerable antiquity, and its earliest literature must have been composed, perhaps in the North, long before the great epics. Though we have no literary evidence as to the train of reasoning by which the doctrines of this school came to be formulated and reached the present form, yet we may believe with all probability that there must have been a body of the Pāñcarātra teaching, handed down from teacher to pupil, and practised, more or less, generally by the people, before the general teachings got formulated in the handbooks.

The sources and extent of the Pāñcarātra literature.

The earliest available record of the Pāñcarātra thought is contained in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Śanti Parvan of the Mahābhārata. But there it does not seem to appear in its original form, because the sectaries have preserved for us not so much the opinion they wished them to hold. Dr. Schrader is of the opinion that it does not give an impression of being based on first-hand knowledge.

Apart from the Nārāyaṇīya, we find an exposition of the Pāñcarātra doctrines in a voluminous literature variously named as Pāñcarātra Upaniṣads, Pāñcarātra Tantras,
Pancharatra Agamas, but popularly known as Pancharatra Samhitās, a major portion of which has fallen now into oblivion or extinction. The extensive nature of the Pancharatra literature can be gauged from what Dr. Schrader has said that 'the Samhitā literature of the Pancharatras must have once amounted to not less but probably more than one and a half million slokas'.19 The Śrī Praśna (II.41), Viṣṇuitilaka (I.140, 145) and other texts mention that the original Pancharatra had an extent of one and half crores of verses.19 Traditionally 108 Samhitās are mentioned. Dr. Schrader enumerates 216 and suggests that there may be many more.20 The Laksāmi Tantra gives the number as 219.21

The principal subjects treated in the Pancharatra literature

The teachings of the Pancharatra school, and in general of the whole Āgama literature, generally fall into four sections, according to the four main themes treated, which are as follows:22

(i) Jñāna- It comprises of philosophical doctrines regarding God, nature, individual soul, process of creation, means of liberation etc. It also includes occultism containing the knowledge of the secret powers of letters, syllables, formulas and figures.

(ii) Yoga- It means meditation or concentration, especially with a view to acquire magic powers or to attain release.

(iii) Kriyā- It includes the rules to be followed in the making of idols, and in the construction and consecration of temples.

(iv) Carya- It deals with the rules of conduct regarding worship, rites, festivals and social duties.
Dr. Schrader mentions twenty-three ten principal subjects, but suggests that the name Pāñcarātra must have come from the five principal subjects treated in it, which are tattva (ontology), muktiprada (Liberation), bhaktiprada (devotion), yasugika (yoga) and vaiṣayika (objects of sense). This suggestion we meet with in the Nārada Pāñcarātra and Abhirudhnya samhitā.

The major part of the Pāñcarātra literature, however, comprises of Kriya and Caryā. Though all the principal topics, mentioned above, are not treated in every single work, all the Samhitās somehow contain a medley of philosophy and occultism, mysticism and magic, rituals and ethics. As a matter of fact there is very little philosophy in them, because their main concern is to describe the rules of initiation, holding of Vaiṣṇava marks, ablutions and purificatory rites, offerings and religious festivities, sacrificial oblations, expiation of sins, methods of remedy by incantations, funeral sacrifices, meditation and the methods of self-control, description of images, rules regarding the making of images, installation of images, forms and ritualism of worship, uses, chanting and efficacies of mantras, and many other rituals. Inter-spersed with these are philosophical doctrines which form the basis of the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava philosophy and religion of the followers of Rāmānuja.

The nature of the Pāñcarātra philosophy

The Pāñcarātra philosophy in the Nārāyanīya is comparatively less complicated. It is free from the ritualistic and tāntric details. The Caryā and the Kriyā portions, which occupy more than the three-fourth part of the Samhitā literature, are conspicuous by their absence in the Nārāyanīya. This is perhaps due to its early origin. Whatever little rituali-
The primary concern of the Pāncarātra school in the Samhitā literature seems to be the sāchānā or the practical method of realising the ultimate reality. Their aim is not to establish any definite system of thought. That is why abstract metaphysical speculation could not find prominence in them. The philosophical portions introduced here and there with a view to explain the various practices and rituals, could not successfully do so, and they are not always relevant to them. The Samhitās incorporate the fundamental tenets of other darśanas, mainly of Vedānta and Sāmkhya-yoga, and apply them to the practical effort for the realisation of the supreme goal.

The Pāncarātra school, like other tantras, believes in one ultimate non-dual reality, which possesses, in its fundamental nature, two aspects, viz., static (nivṛtti) and dynamic (pravṛtti), represented respectively by Brahman and His Śakti. In the description of the former we find an unmistakable influence of the Advaitic tendency, and in the latter that of Sāmkhya. The ultimate reality is described in the manner of the Upaniṣads, as an attributeless conscious substance, always escaping the grasp of intellectual comprehension and verbal expression. This attitude of silence and
ineffability is perfectly in line with its predominating advaitic tendency. We cannot, therefore, but believe (though it would be quite unpalatable to a Viśiṣṭādvaitin) that the philosophy of the Pāṇcarātra school is much nearer the Advaita than the Viśiṣṭādvaita. Another striking feature of the Pāṇcarātra philosophy is that here all the metaphysical doctrines are stated in a cosmo-ogonical context.

The prevalence of Tāntric element in the Pāṇcarātra

The most dominant element and a notable feature of the Pāṇcarātra Samhitās seems to be the prevalence of tāntrism. It is not yet definitely known how and when tāntrism arose, but that it is of considerable antiquity, no one can deny. It seems purely of non-Vedic origin. Its ideas and practices are frankly anti-Vedic. In its early character it does not seem to have recognized the authority of the Vedas, though in later times it could not ignore them.

The extent Samhitās, perhaps, are the earliest available records of the tāntric influence. How deeply tāntric ideas and practices influenced the Pāṇcarātra could be seen from an examination of the contents of the Samhitās like Jayākhya, Pārameśvara, Ahirbudhnya etc. which are the most ancient and authoritative Pāṇcarātra works. 27

The Ahirbudhnya Samhitā is full of lore on the tāntric mantras. 28 Chapters 51 to 59 are full with the explanations of Vaiṣṇava mantras and the linguistic occultism from gross, subtle and the highest stand-points. This Samhitā clearly says that the Pāṇcarātra is based partly on the Vedic and partly on the tāntric system. 29 It therefore believes in the esoteric nature of the mantras. It regards the world as created through
the mantras. The world has come into being from the Sudarśana power. All the natural, physical things in the world are but the manifestations of the Sudarśana. All the animate and inanimate beings are its manifestations only. There the creative tattvas are said to proceed from their respective consonants of the alphabet.

The Ahirbudhnya Samhitā describes the mantras as the energy of Viṣṇu which is pure consciousness. This energy is called variously as Kriyā-sakti, Śāmartya, yoga, pāremēṣṭhya, mahātejasa, māyā etc.

The Pāñcarātra school and the Vedic authority

Before we conclude the historical survey of the Pāñcarātra school it will not be out of place to discuss here the time-honoured controversy regarding the relation between the Vedic and the Pāñcarātra teachings. There has been considerable discussion as to whether the Pāñcarātra is Vedic or non-Vedic in origin and pro-Vedic or anti-Vedic in attitude. From the ambiguous pronouncements of the authors of the Pāñcarātra works on this problem, it cannot be ascertained whether they based their teachings on the Vedas or gave their own views and passed them over as being based on the Vedas. Most of them regard the Pāñcarātra as in conformity with the Vedas, but, curiously enough, sometimes they regard the Vedas as the roots and sometimes as the shoots of the Pāñcarātra.

From the contents of the Samhitā literature I find it difficult to agree with Dr. S.N. Das Gupta's view that the Pāñcarātra doctrines are associated with the Puruṣa-sūkta of the Šatapatha Brāhmaṇa (XIII.6.1), mainly because except the philosophical portion which is borrowed from the Upaniṣads and the Śāmkhya, the major part of the Pāñcarātra
literature is manifestly non-Vedic. The anti-Vedic attitude of the Pañcarātra is also manifest at some places, where Vedas are regarded as inferior to the Pañcarātra. Among the writers of Smṛtis, Purāṇas and Dharmaśāstras, it is curious to find that while some of them are fanatically in favour of the Pañcarātra, others, perhaps more orthodox, are quite outspoken and vehement in their condemnation of the Pañcarātra. There is also a long array of Śrī-Vaiṣṇava and later Pañcarātra writers who have undertaken the strenuous effort to advance defence against the charge of unorthodoxy on the Pañcarātra. We shall review some of these various views in brief here.

There are some Purāṇas like Viṣṇu, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma and Vārāha, called sattvika Purāṇas, which are strongly in favour of the Pañcarātra. The Pramāṇa Sargraha takes up some of the most important doctrines of the Pañcarātra and tries to prove their authoritativeness by a reference to the above purāṇas, and also to the Mahābhārata, the Gītā, Viṣṇudharmottara, śṛṣṭis like Pṛajāpatya, Sāndilya, Vaiśīṣṭha, Hārīta, Vyāsa, Pārśāra and Kāśyapa, Itihāsasamuccaya, Harivamsa, Vṛḍḍamany, and the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa. Śrī Emār Kaṇṭhācārya in his introduction to the Jayākhya Ṣamhitā has tried to prove the Vedic basis for the Pañcarātra by quoting verses from Yoga-Yājñavalkya, Jamadagni Śṛṣti, Uttara Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Vārāha, Bhāgavata, Brahmāṇḍa, Kūrma and Skandā Purāṇas.

In the Vārāha Purāṇa Nārāyaṇa is found to recommend, next to the Vedas, the study of the Pañcarātra scriptures, as a means of realising Braham, especially for those who are unable to acquire the knowledge of the Vedas. It gives importance to everything Pañcarātra. The gifts made to the Pañcarātra ācāryas are said to be productive of immense good. Viṣṇu is brought in to say that by the rise of the Pañcarātra,
Vedas have become futile.\textsuperscript{43} It elsewhere says that being remembered or talked of, or seen or touched by a devotee of Bhagavata even a cāndāla is purified.\textsuperscript{44} It also recommends that in all religious ceremonies preference should be given to the Pāncarātrins over the brāhmaṇas.\textsuperscript{45} Nṛsimha and Vāmana Purāṇa declare that the recitation of the mantra 'Om namo nārāyaṇaya' leads to the absorption into Viṣṇu.\textsuperscript{46} The Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa also regards the Pāncarātra method as one of the five methods for seeking liberation.\textsuperscript{47}

Some of the Śrutis and Purāṇas, on the other hand, denounce vehemently the Pāncarātra as 'against the scriptures' (śrutismṛtiviruddha). The Kūrma Purāṇa regards the Pāncarātrins as great sinners, born as a result of killing cows in the previous birth.\textsuperscript{48} The Skanda Purāṇa says that one initiated in the Pāncarātra becomes the most derogatory (brāhmaṇādhamah).\textsuperscript{49} Some Purāṇas go to the extent of advising complete social ostracism on the followers of the Pāncarātra. Thus Kūrma Purāṇa writes that one should not honour even by words the Pāncarātrins who are heretic, following prohibited avocations and left-hand practices.\textsuperscript{50} Some of the Purāṇas declare that the Pāncarātra was composed for deluding those who dissented from or reviled the Vedas.\textsuperscript{52}

The Pāncarātrins, however, were more conciliatory to the members of the orthodox Vedic sects. They were the minority sect which had always to be on the defensive, and did not dare revile the orthodox Vedic people. On the contrary they took great pains to reconcile contradictions between Vedic and Pāncarātra teachings. In order to seek Vedic basis for the
non-Vedic Pāñcarātra they traced the origin of their school to
an unknown Vedic school called Ekāyana. This Ekāyana school,
said to have been derived from the Vedic passage, 'Nānyah panthā
ayanāya vidyate', was identified with the Ekāyanaśāstra mentioned
in the Chāndogya Upanisad. This Ekāyana was further
mentioned as a sect of Kāṇvaśākhā of the Śukla yajurveda.

A similar attempt was made to get association with the 'Pāñca-
rātra Sattra' of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (XIII.61) and with Rāmānuja.

As a consequence of the above attempts of the Pāñcarā-
trins, some of the Smṛtis and Purāṇas do not take the extreme
attitude of outrightly condemning the whole of the Pāñcarātra.
For example, the Vāyu Samhitā and following it the Vīranītkro-
daya divide the Pāñcarātra into śrauta and aśrauta.

Uttapādacārya mentions three classes of the Pāñcarātra liter-
ature—Pāñcarātra śruti, Pāñcarātra Upaniṣads and Pāñcarātra
Samhitās. From the indications given there it appears that the
three are treated as different. It may be that the first one
or the first two are regarded as Vedic and the remaining non-
Vedic. The general view in the medieval period was that the
Pāñcarātra is authoritative only in so far as it is not opposed
to the Vedas. This is also the view of Śaṅkara and Bhāskara,
the great Vedānta philosophers.

Under the influence of such tendency there arose a
particular school of brāhmaṇas who accepted both Vedic
and tāntric practices. In the Sāttvika Purāṇas, therefore, we
find three kinds of dharma, Vedic, tāntric and misra. It is,
however, interesting to note that this composite dharma was
never accepted by the orthodox śrauta brāhmaṇas.

From the foregoing it appears that the prescriptions
of the early Pāñcarātra were not at all favourable to the
brāhmanic tradition, and that because of their non-Vedic origin and anti-Vedic attitude they were vehemently condemned and deprecitated. But later on when they altered their attitude and amended their doctrines and practices, they were given a place under Vedic orthodoxy, but it was inferior only.

III

The Ālvārs as passionate devotees of Viṣṇu

Now we turn to the Ālvārs. The rise of the series of Ālvārs, Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, is one of the most notable facts in the history of Vaiṣṇava religion and bhakti movement. The Ālvārs, twelve of whom obtained canonical recognition, were mostly low caste people, but pure in heart and intensely devoted to Viṣṇu. They were in the real and the fullest sense God-intoxicated, God-enamoured and God-absorbed mystics. The word 'Ālvār' itself means 'one who is lost in the ineffable splendour and mystery of the Lord'. As Dr. DasGupta has put it, 'The word 'Ālvār' means one who has a deep intuitive knowledge of God and one who is immersed in the contemplation of Him.' The Ālvārs were the divers in the ocean of God-consciousness. Their intense religious fervour, 'fervent glow of emotion' and passionate devotion to the Deity are reflected in a collection of verses called 'Nālāyira Prabandham' which even today is revered as a sacred Tamil Vaiṣṇava canon, and used in worship in South India. These verses are valuable not for any new philosophical conception of the Deity, but for the fact that they reveal the depth of religious feeling to which the view of the Deity as incarnating Himself out of love for His creatures and desiring their whole-hearted devotion, gave rise. They may be described as welling with a genuine and
devoted love of an intense degree bordering on a maddening intoxication and ecstasy. The unalloyed devotion of the Ālvars finds vent and is exhibited to the fullest in these poems of artistic merit which speak of the soul's indissoluble affiliation to the Supreme.

Chronology of the Ālvars

The traditional dates ascribed to the Ālvars are quite fanciful and varied. Modern researches on the subject bring down their dates from 4203 B.C. to a period not earlier than 7th or 9th century A.D. The first estimate of modern scholarship regarded them as the disciples of Rāmānuja, but later on it was contended that the reverse should be the case. As it is not possible with the material available and the facts at our disposal to determine with any exactitude the dates of the Ālvars, we may think with Bishop Caldwell and Prof. Sesagiri Sastriar that in all probability the Ālvars have been the successors of Rāmānuja, or even some of them his younger contemporaries. This may be supported by the fact that the 'Prebandham' includes in it a centum on Rāmānuja by one who calls himself in the course of the work as a disciple of Rāmānuja's chief disciple Kurutṭalvār. This may further be supported by the findings of R.G. Bhandarkara (if it is true, since it is contradicted by S.K. Aier) that Kilaśekhara in Mukundamālā has quoted a passage (XI.2.36) from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which was finally composed in 12th century A.D.

The Ālvars as devotees and not philosophers

The main feature of the Ālvar movement is that it is emotional and not contemplative. Their's is a religion and not a philosophy. It is not the philosophic spirit but the reli-
gious need that is strong in them. As a matter of fact they knew no line of demarcation between the domains of philosophy and the dreamlands of practical religion. It is therefore quite natural that philosophical speculation concerning the nature of reality or an investigation into the logical and epistemological position of the religion preached by them, cannot be found in their works. Since their works have only a literary and devotional value, it is difficult to utilise them for philosophical purposes. Of all the Ālvarṣ Nammālvar appears to have a philosophic approach. In his hymns we find, but not in much detail, an exposition of the philosophical conception of Deity.

The mysticism of the Ālvarṣ

The Ālvarṣ, as we have said, are the mystics par excellence, in whom the 'mystic germ' is fully developed. The main features of the Ālvar mysticism are its emotional nature and the mingling of the erotic and mystic elements which find expression in an amorous language. In the deliverances of the mystic consciousness of the Ālvarṣ we find three characteristics. The first is the maddening divine intoxication which turns them into 'sick-souls' suffering 'mystic pains', a state which is technically known as 'dark night of the soul'. The second is imaginary identifications with the legendary associates of the Lord, their beloved. This element is peculiar to the Ālvarṣ and is rare in the other mystics of the world. The last is their devotion resulting in total surrender. Here we shall deal with the first two characteristics and the third one shall be described in the chapter on the means of emancipation.
Maddening divine intoxication of the Ālvārs

The Ālvārs, like other mystics, wish to experience a constant companionship with God in a state of delirious and rapturous reciprocation of ravishing love. Their hearts overwhelm with a constant whirling emotion of love. They are like the love-sticken lovers who cannot afford to lose sight of the beloved, and who are ready to fight the world, and to endure all privations, poverty and persecution, for the sake of the beloved. They forget everything that arouses the sense of separateness, and always occupy themselves with the Lord. They feel helpless and restless, and experience extreme uneasiness and great misery when they lose the presence of God, because nothing else can satisfy them. In many of their hymns we find the longing and the cry of their hearts for union with God, the pangs of separation and the consequent sense of devastating desolation, and the anticipated joy of reunion. Hammālvar in a pathetic language portrays the melancholy and miserable condition of the devotee who like a loveapining for his beloved Lord steals into the darkness of the night, when all the world is asleep.

We find the best exposition of such an attitude in Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's poem, 'The Flute-player of Vrindaban', where the devotee, even if, is sundered from the Lord, through many insurmountable difficulties, and is obstructed with innumerable and unsurpassable hindrances, so that the reunion may seem remote, yet he cannot afford to lose the Lord, and at the risk of losing everything keeps alive the eternal link of love which cannot be broken even by the Deity Himself. Hammālvar also under a different context declares,

'God! I have now clapped Thy feet firmly
Try if Thou canst spurn me and shake Thyself off from me.'
In this way the passionate devotion in the Alvars is realised as a maddening intoxication, associated with tears, cries, pining and languishing.

The Imaginary identifications

In the intensity of devotion and exuberance of feeling the Alvars are so absorbed that in pondering over the incidents connected with the life of Kṛṣṇa, as described in the Bhagavata Purāṇa, they identify themselves with those who had deep love for Kṛṣṇa, and they behave with, and address, the Deity accordingly. Thus Nammāḻvār regards himself as a gopi, lover of Kṛṣṇa and expresses his concern lest Kṛṣṇa should come to grief at the hands of demons. He represents himself as a maiden disconsolate and pining for Kṛṣṇa, her absent lover. Then, like a gopi, he ardently desires to be embraced by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, Andal, the lady Alvar, imagines herself a gopi, who rising in the morning wakes up other gopis and goes with them to arouse the sleeping Kṛṣṇa. This identification is further extended to Yaṣodā, Kṛṣṇa's foster mother. Thus Periyāḻvār requests the moon to come to his infant Kṛṣṇa who longs to play with it.

This sort of emotional identification is something peculiar to the Alvars. Regarding the novelty of this identification Dr. Das Gupta remarks, "Even in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (XIII XII) we hear of devotional intoxication through intense emotion, but we do not hear of any devotees identifying themselves with the legendary personages associated with the life of Kṛṣṇa and expressing their sentiment of love as proceeding out of such imaginary identification. We hear of the Gopi's love for Kṛṣṇa, and expressing their sentiment of love as proceeding out of such imaginary identification."
but we do not hear of any person identifying himself with Gopi and expressing his sorrow of separation.\textsuperscript{76} He further writes, 'But the idea, the legend of Kṛṣṇa should have so much influence on the devotees as to infuse them with the characteristic spirits of the legendary personages in such a manner as to transform their lives after their pattern is probably a new thing in the history of devotional development in any religion.'\textsuperscript{77} Again he writes, 'It seems fairly certain that the Āḻvārs were the earliest devotees who moved forward in the direction of such emotional transformation.'\textsuperscript{78}

The devotional songs of the Āḻvārs show an intimate familiarity with the various events of the legendary life of Kṛṣṇa. They vividly describe His pranks, amusements and frolics. All these betray the intimate knowledge and the influence of the Bhāgvata Purāṇa, where devotion has an unrestrained tendency of extravagant enthusiasm, of a surging emotion which thrills the body, chokes the speech and leads to trance.
References and foot-notes:

1. See for the life history of Rāmānuja the following books
   (a) A. Govindeacarya- The Life of Rāmānuja, Madras, 1906.
   (b) S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar- Śrī Rāmānuja, Madras, 1908.
   (c) T. Rajagopalacarya- The Vaiṣṇavite Reformers of India, Madras, 1909
   (d) Svami Ramakrsnanananda- Life of Śrī Rāmānuja, Madras 1959.


3. See infra PP... also, the first line of Śrī Bhāṣya; and Vedārtha Samgraha Section 93.

4. See infra PP... 

5. This Yāmuna should not be confused with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Yāmuna to whom the works like 'Āgama Prāmāṇya' are ascribed. See my paper 'Did Rāmānuja Advocate Pāñcarātra and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism?' Philosophical Quarterly, Amalner, April, 1963.

6. See Dr. S. N. DasGupta's A History of Indian Philosophy-PP.139ff Cambridge, 1939.

7. See my paper 'A New Approach to the Philosophy of Ramanuja' Indian Philosophy & Culture, Vrindavana, March, 1964.

8. See Buitenen- Vedārtha Samgraha-Introduction P. 32.


11. See my paper-April, 1963 issue

12. In the Pādma Tantra- a sacred canon of the Pāñcarātra school- the following synonyms of the Pāñcarātra are given:-

   cf. Mahābhārata-XII.335.19; 348.4 etc.
13. The word ‘Agama’ from the root ‘gam’ with prefix ‘a’ means ‘that which has come’, i.e., a revealed text.

Quoted from the Prastavana of Parama Samhitā P. 29, Gaekwar's Oriental Series Vol. LXXXVI. The Agamas are styled by their followers as ‘Śruti’, and are regarded as equally, or even more, authoritative than the Vedas. See infra foot-Note No.37

14. Buddha and Jain religions also have their own respective Agamas.


16. See Foreword to the Jayākhya Samhitā, Loc. cit, PP. 13-16; Prastāvanā PP. 42-47.


18. Ibid P. 15

19. Ibid P. 14

20. Ibid PP. 6-12.

21. Introduction PP. 249


23. Ibid P. 26

24. शार्म - शार्म बार्तने शार्म | अक्षिप्रय \ आचारु शार्म भार्तयाय। शार्म बार्तने शार्म


Mengar-‘Outlines of Indian Philosophy’ Benaras and London, 1909, P. 184.
27. Interested readers may go through the Cakras, mandalas and other details in the Published volumes of the Jayākhyā and Pārameśvara Samhitās.

28. जयाक्ष्याणने देश अत्यन्तनागिनादिः द्रष्टाः।
कहाँतो मधुकरं नागान्नमात्रेष्वरं || LIX. 70

29. केदारनाथसिद्धांतं नामामुखालिभले।
VI. 9

30. Ibid XVI 4 and 6

31. Chapters VI. 9 to 17, 226 to 228. See the details of the process of creation through the mantras in the Ahiroṣudhyāya Samhitā in Das Gupta. III. PP. 57-58.

32. साधुविद्वानि द्विवाकि स्विनिविनिविनितः।
XVI. 10

33. Ibid XVI. 32.

34. ‘अत्यन्तनागिनि आलामस्’ नन्देश्य शेषत।
‘रुद्रदलाल ालामस्’ रघुवर्धनश्च शेषत– आनाय, I. 18

35. ‘लुप्तमुद्रेय श्रीलोकां विनिमयम्’ इत्यंश्च शेषत।
I. 50

36. Cf. विन्दुनन्दनं जनमीय विनिमयम्।
II. 61


39. For example,

41. 66.10-11.
42. 50.16.
43. अलोक वैदमन्त्रयास्म प्रयत्नकोविन रि। (LXVI.)
44. 211.88
45. 181.20, 183.25, 186.23. cf. Brhadshahita of Vārāhamihira. 60.19.
46. Nṛṣimha. 63.5-6; Vāmanā 94-58-59.
47. 1.74.34.

50. पाऴरितयाः प्रकेशां शल्य शलवीरस्त्रान्तरः प्रकेशाः।


and, असुरदेशित्तिथिति कैशिकतिथिलिपिः।
अप्रकृत तत्तवं शैवधिनतिथिलिपिः।
quoted in K.B. Pathak Memorial volume. P. 216.

52. (a) आध्यात्मिकम् वेदम् शस्त्रमण्यायो संयोगः।

(cf. Śrīva śāstra I. 153) परिवेशने शंकारे I. 56-7

53. See कृष्णास्मित्व अत्ममुक्तिस्वतः of Nāgêśa, Madras Government oriental Library, Triennial Catalogue III.I.B.P.3299.

55. Spanda Pradipika— see Schrader P. 18.

56. (३) तत्सदृष्टः लिङ्गादिकषुः सत्यविद्यात् केनियत् / बैरोग्यसंपायतं भीष्म न भवति कार्यिन्यम्।: ।

(४) परमाश्रयं अभिन्नानि विनिध्विपायम् ते दिशामित् अनुभविते परमिताः /

Pārijāta quoted in Kṛtyaratnakara P. 37.

57. They were, perhaps, called 'Saṁśta' and 'Vaikhanasa' as Vṛddhagotama (chpt. VIII. P. 564) seems to indicate. In the Ācārakarnā (P. 379, Mīṃḍaya Sāgar Ed.) three kinds of Vaiṣṇavas are mentioned, viz., following Vedic cult, following Tantric cult and following both. The composite character of the paurānic Vaiṣṇavism is originally due to the third type of brāhmaṇa adherents of Vaiṣṇavism.


59. cf. Vṛṣṇiha Purāṇa 66.II; Kulluka's commentary on Manu II.I. Bhāgavata Purāṇa xi. 27/7; Visṇu Purāṇa xi. 77 etc.

60. cf. Devibhāgavata XI.I.21-3. The Vyayehāramayukha (P.98) also points an accusing finger to these non-vedic elements in the Purāṇas— पुराणम् सुतिस्विकृतानां कृतं वधितात।

Here it may also be noted that the advocates of the composite Paurānic dharma could not but revolt against this derogation and they tried to enhance the superiority of the Purāṇas over the Vedas. For example, Nārādya says,

अद्वोद्ध वदि कैवेषु तल्लोकं देवतं स्तस्तं /

अष्टमान्त मोह एको न तत्तुस्मिं फूलोति। ॥ ॥ २४.५॥
60. See the following books for the life of the Ālvārs:
1. A. Govindacarya—The Holy Lives of the Āzhvārs, Mysore, 1902.
2. S. Krsnasvami Aiengar—Ancient India, Madras, 1922.
61. Loc. cit. P. 68.
64. See T.A.Gopinath Rao—History of Śrī-Vaisnavism (Sri Subramanyā Lectures, 1923) pp. 23-31; also the Presidential address of L.D.Swami Kannu Pillai, pp. 60.
65. This is the date ascribed to the first Ālvār in the Guru-paramparas.
66. DasGupta Loc. Cit. p. 64.
68. Ibid P. 13.
69. See J.S.M.Hooper 'Hymns of the Ālvārs' pp. 61-88. See also DasGupta Loc. cit. pp. 78f.

It would suffice here to give two instances of the same.
The mistress’ friend dispaies at the sight of her languishing—

(a) Day and night she knows not sleep.
   In floods of tears her eyes do swim,
   Lotus-like she weeps and reels,
   Ah how without Thee can I bear;
   She pants and feels all earth for Him.

(b) ... Ah as she sobs and lisps
   The cloud-hued’s names; know not if she’ll live
   Or if her frame and spirit mild must pass.
71. See the further description and analysis of, and remarks about, this element of the mysticism of the Alvars in DasGupta loc. cit. pp. 79, 83-84.

72. He prays, 'O My Lord Go not Thou to tend the cows. Many asuras set up by Kamsa take alluring forms and wander about in Thy meadows and entice Thee. If they succeed many evils will come upon Thee. I implore you to listen to me.' (C.10.3.9)

73. See Tiruvâyoli c. 10.3.5 and 6—quoted by Kumarappa, loc. cit. pp. 129-130.

74. Kumarappa ibid pp. 130,131.

75 I ibid p 130.

76. Loc.cit. p. 81.

77. Ibid. p. 81.

78. Ibid. p. 82.