
UNIT 14 DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGION ¹

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14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the religious geography of the landscape;
- the emergence and the integration with the political milieu, the role of the temple;
- the socio-religious movements based on the ideology of bhakti mainly from the ninth to the twelfth century;
- development of religion and ideas of bhakti in south India from fourth to the sixth century; and
- the popular devotional movements from seventh to the eleventh century.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we would be looking at religion in the context of early medieval society. We will be discussing religious geography of the landscape. Subsequently

the issue of the emergence and the integration with the political milieu will be taken up. We will also discuss the role of the temple and later will draw some conclusions based on the discussions. Certain socio-religious movements will also be studied.

14.2 GEOGRAPHIES OF RELIGION

Buddhism and Islam became most prominent along routes of trade and migration that ran from one end of Asia to the other. In the sixth century, Buddhists received most of the patronage available in Afghanistan, the upper Indus basin, and Himalayan regions from Kashmir to Nepal. They then moved eastward across Central Asia and established themselves firmly in Tibet, China, and Japan. After the eighth century, the eastward and southern migrations by Arabs and Turks from West and Central Asia forced a shift in the pattern of religious patronage towards Islam. Nevertheless Buddhist monks had a permanent base in Sri Lanka, and from the eighth century onwards, they received state patronage in Burma. This pattern changed as Islam advanced through trade and the earlier religious patronage now shifted in favour of Islam. Buddhism receded in the background. In fact this kind of scenario can be visualised elsewhere as well. For instance in Bengal in the east. Vijayasena (1095- 1158) defeated the Palas, pushed Sena armies west across Bengal and northern Bihar, patronized Vishnu worship, and paved way for a patronage of Vaishnavism in the Sena domains. The last Sena *raja*, Lakshmanasena, patronized the most famous Bengali Vaishnava poet, Jayadeva, who wrote the widely influential devotional poem, *Gita Govinda*. The Sena ruler's patronage to Vaishnavism came to an end in the 13th century as the political patronage shifted again. This shift was towards Islam in the eastern regions of Bengal, where the Senas had earlier uprooted Buddhists; while Vaishnavism received support from merchants, landowners, and local rulers in the western regions.

The Kathmandu valley was a Buddhist stronghold ruled by Hindu kings. Kingdoms around Kathmandu became a melting pot for Hindus from the south and Buddhists from the north.

In the western plains — in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Malwa, and Bundelkhand — medieval dynasties of Kalachuris, Chalukyas, Paramaras, and Candellas patronized Jains, who were prominent among the merchants. One Chalukya king is said to have become a Jaina. Jaina temple worship and Hindu-Jain marriages became common.

In the peninsula, medieval worshippers of Siva and Vishnu displaced Buddhism and Jainism from cultural prominence they enjoyed in early medieval times, especially in Madurai and Kanchipuram. Pockets of Jainism remained, however, and all along the peninsular coast, most prominently in Kerala, kings patronized diverse merchant communities, including Jains, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Arab Muslim settlements received patronage from non-Muslim rulers all along the peninsular coast, as they did across the Palk Strait in Sri Lanka.

14.3 INTEGRATION AS A PROCESS

In the far south, in the land of *Dakshinapatha*, from the eighth century onwards,

Bhakti movement centred around Shiva and Vishnu worship spread as a reaction to the orthodox brahmanical religion. This was manifested in the new tradition of devotional (bhakti) worship that valued emotion above knowledge, discipline, and ritual; by composing vernacular verse in Tamil, not Sanskrit; by promoting women saints and mass participation in deity worship; by giving devotees a direct relation to god independent of Brahmanical mediation; by making low caste status respectable in the eyes of god; and by creating pilgrimage places rooted in local traditions. Devotionalism made divine frenzy and passion for a god a high virtue, and by the tenth century, these energies had been turned against religious competitors. Several texts indicate massacres of Buddhists and Jains. Under Chola kings, worshippers of Shiva (Shaivites) prospered at the expense of Vishnu worshippers (Vaishnava), triggering conflicts among sectarian forces.

Bhakti devotionalism and sectarian competition challenged the Brahmanical proponents of traditional orthodox religion as it attracted more patronage from ruling dynasties. To cultivate a popular following, many rulers in the south supported Vaishnava (*Alvar*) and Shaivites (*Nayanar*) bhakti poets. The most celebrated Hindu intellectual of the early medieval age, Shankaracharya (788-820), made his name during his short life by developing a Sanskrit high-culture rendition of Tamil devotional poetry, by reconciling Shaivism and Vaishnavism through a non-dualist *advaita* philosophy that drew on the Upanishads and incorporated elements from Buddhism, and by travelling from Kerala to Kashmir and back again to establish monastic centres. Shankara helped to absorb and normalize popular devotionalism in elite brahman high culture.

A powerful regional sect of Virashaivism attracted royal patronage and many adherents from merchant communities and became regionally dominant in northern Karnataka, where Lingayats remain predominant till today. Similarly in the Deccan the worship of Viththala at Pandharpur can be ascribed to a rise of a new polity and its support to a new cult that later legitimized the rule of the new elite.

Popular devotionalism attracted thousands of passionate believers to temples and pilgrimage sites. This made public patronage increasingly complex because sects could provide decisive military and financial support to dynastic contenders. Thus the rise of the sects and the consolidation of the new polities went hand in hand.

14.4 TEMPLE AND ITS ROLE

The temple as a ritual and architectural complex emerged in its glory in the later Gupta period. Its elaboration and spread from the sixth to the fourteenth century provide a legacy for us to study from Mahaballipuram to Khajuraho. Local cults were woven into Puranic traditions and temple rituals as local communities came under royal authority. We come across a number of inscriptions referring to temples and the grants given there along with the rituals performed. Gifts by kings, landed elites, merchants and others to brahmanas and temples increased the spiritual stature of the donor. Rising bhakti devotionalism enhanced the virtue, volume, and commercial value of pilgrimage, as it increased temple donations and investments. Donations became increasingly popular as a means and marker of social mobility as temples became commercial centres, landowners, employers,

and manufacturing centres. Increasing participation in temple rituals made them more effective sites for social ranking, as temple honours were distributed according to rank and all worshippers were positioned in ranked proximity to the deity. Rulers came first. Rich donors came in the order of the value of their temple endowments. Popular bhakti movements made sovereign gods ever more central in everyday social life, even for the poorest people who did all the hardest manual labour but were prohibited from even setting foot in the temple, whose exclusion marked them as the people of the lowest social rank. Some powerful bhakti saints came from the lowest of the low, whose devotion was so strong that gods came out of temples to return their love.

Thousands of brahmanas were granted rights to hitherto uncultivated land. The Rashtrakutas gave a gift of 8,000 measures of land to 1000 brahmanas, and 4000 measures to a single brahmana. In such contexts a non-brahmana power was aiming to enhance its status and that of its local allies. In other cases, brahmanas were appointed as the local representatives of the state authorities in what are described as *agrahara* villages where brahmanas presided over small peasants, who in Bihar were mostly landless sharecroppers or bonded labourers. These *agrahara* villages were typically small villages or satellites of bigger villages that included members of several castes and bigger land-holders. In Bihar, such *agrahara* villages proliferated and it is quite likely that in such *agraharas* oppressive social relations and some of the most egregious patterns of caste-centered discrimination and exploitation may have developed.

But these developments took time to spread elsewhere in India, first spreading to Bengal and eastern UP, and very gradually elsewhere in India. However, this pattern was not necessarily replicated in identical form throughout India and some parts of India virtually escaped this trend. In *agrahara* villages in other parts of India, brahmanas did take on the role of local administrators and tax collectors, but the status of the small peasantry was not always as miserable as in Bihar. The degree of exploitation and oppression appears to be related to the extent of alienation from land-ownership.

Even at the peak of influence of Christianity and Islam, India's brahmanas were never quite able to impose any comparable sort of rigid uniformity in the practice of Hinduism on a national (let alone, international) scale. In some localities, the lower castes did without the brahmanas entirely while elsewhere, especially in the south, or in Central India and Odisha — brahmanas often felt obliged to give due deference to dissenting and heterodox cults, and incorporated their belief systems into mainstream Hinduism.

In Andhra, folk religions played a powerful role in mediating Brahmanical influences, and a vibrant example of the deep penetration of folk influences in popular religion is to be seen in the sculpted array of folkloric panels in the temple of Srisailem (sponsored by the Vijayanagar rulers in the 14th-15th Century.). In neighbouring Karnataka, the bhakti ideals and Jain influences put their stamp on prevailing religious practices. Religion in India thus developed in a much more organic fashion than is commonly realized, and it was never completely divorced from popular inputs. Both male and female deities drew followers, and while goddesses were sometimes displayed in demonic warrior roles, gods were

sometimes displayed with feminine qualities. In the Yogini temples, all the deities were women and although today, there are only a handful of surviving Yogini temples, (mostly in Odisha and Madhya Pradesh) it is not unlikely that many more may have been in existence.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Write a note on geographies of religion.

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- 2) Did the temple play any role in shaping of religion in early medieval India?

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14.5 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

In this section various socio-religious movements that were inspired by the idea of bhakti will be discussed. Although bhakti has a general meaning, derived from the root word, bhaj in Sanskrit, implying, 'partaking (of god), participation, and loving devotion to a personal god', there are variations in interpreting bhakti that forms the basis of several devotional communities. There will also be a discussion of the historical context in which these movements were situated, the developments within the context and their individual responses to them.

14.5.1 Development of Bhakti in *Sangam* Texts

The religious developments in south India in the medieval period can be traced to the trends in religion from the fourth to the sixth century. The information for this period is obtained from the texts which are largely called the *Sangam* texts. The concept of the sacred was expressed in terms like *katavul* and *ananku*, both probably implying the divine form to be worshipped and *kantu* and *potiyil* (a pillared hall), probably a prototype of a temple implying sacred space. The term *koyil* signified the house of a chief and not a temple, which was a later development. However, by the end of the fourth century, a systematic development of the divine took place with the association of religion with the *tinai* tradition in the famous grammatical treatise, the *Tolkappiyam*. The notion of *tinai* comprised of five eco-zones, each with a distinct populace, subsistence pattern and a divine form. They were:

- 1) *Mullai*, a collective term for the pastoral tracts, inhabited by the *maravars* (warriors) and the *itaiyar* (pastoralists) was the divine locale for Mayon.
- 2) *Kurinji*, a general term for the hilly eco-zone comprising of *vetar* and *kuravar* (the hunters) with shifting cultivation as the main occupation. The people here worshipped Murukan as the god.

- 3) *Marutam* was the wetland between the river valleys, and a focus of agrarian activities by the *ulavar* (agriculturists). Ventan was the god of *marutam*.
- 4) *Neytal* implied the area around the sea, populated by *paratavars* (the fishing community). Varunan was the god of the *neytal*.
- 5) *Palai* representing dry arid zones with the hunting-gathering tribes who worshipped the female divine form, Korravai.

Of all the *Sangam* deities, Murukan followed by Mayon have maximum textual references. Both Murukan and Mayon were associated with a specific form of worship, *veriyatu* and *kuravai* respectively, which were emotionally charged ritual dances involving the participation of all the men and women. Literally meaning the one who symbolizes youth and beauty, Murukan was worshipped in threshing grounds, forests, market places, trees, battle grounds and so on, indicating a strong degree of localization. By third century, Mayon was associated with northern Krishna cult/ Vaishnavism, though adapted to the southern milieu. For instance, the texts equated Mayon with Krishna and river Yamuna, one of the important locales of Krishna episodes with Tolunai. Mayon was also the royal symbol of the two ruling lineages in this period, viz., the Pandyas of Madurai in the southern part and Tondaiman of Kanchi on the northern part of the ancient Tamil region. Further, the *Sangam* texts referred to a sophisticated place of worship of Mayon, which was the temple at Vehka in Kanchi. However, after the fifth century, new religious ideas were expressed in the late *Sangam* (or post *Sangam*) texts, viz.; the *Cilappadikaram*, *Kalittokai*, *Paripatal* and *Tirumurukarruppatai*. These texts depicted the influence of the northern Epics (i.e. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*). The deities localized in the *tinai* framework were transformed into universal transcendental (i.e. abstract and not localized) godheads due to this influence. Murukan was fused with Skanda, the Aryan god of war. Mal/Mayon was identified with Vishnu. Ventan and Varuna of the *marutam* and *neytal tinai* were gradually marginalized and in the subsequent period do not find any mention. Korravai, the goddess of the *palai* was important but the process of her absorption in the Shaiva pantheon as Durga, the consort of Shiva already began. The interaction between the *Sangam* and *Puranic* elements introduced various themes from the *Puranic* myths. The various heroic deeds of Skanda now identified with Murukan. By the sixth century, Mayon with his incarnation myths was the god, cowherd hero and the lover of the *gopis* (cowherdesses) and once again emerged as the royal symbol of the Pandya and the Pallavas.

The *Paripatal* and the *Tirumurukarruppatai* articulated for the first time a new devotional milieu. The notion of a personal devotion, i.e. *bhakti* to the transcendental God appeared in the poems dedicated to Murukan and Mayon in these texts. The characteristics of the *bhakti* as expressed in these texts were:

- 1) The devotion to the god was expressed in Tamil, thus providing for the first time an alternative to Sanskrit as the religious language.
- 2) This idea of devotion was not yet a personalized experience that characterised the later *bhakti*. The references in the texts were objective and impersonal, as if concerning the second person.
- 3) The idea of *bhakti* became the basis for introducing the temple for the first time. The deity was situated in the temple symbolizing the presence of god

on this earth amongst the people to remove their sorrows. However, the temple had not emerged as the institution of formal worship. Hence, the ideas about the temple evolved that became central to the various socio-religious movements from seventh century. The temple was now referred to as the *koyil*.

- 4) The temple situation also marked out a sacred geography for the first time. This sacred geography comprised of various places of worship of one god, in this case, Mayon and Murukan. This also provided a network for future religious interaction. For instance, the *Cilappadikaram* and the *Paripatal* referred to temples of Mayon worship at Vehka (Kanchi), Tirumaliruncholai (near Madurai), Atakamatam (the Golden Hall in the Cera region), Puhar (Manivannan), Turutti (future Srirangam) and Vengadam (future Tirupati). The *Tirumurukarruppatai*, on the other hand, presented a sacred geography of the Murukan temples at Parankunram (Madurai), Tiruvavinankuti (Palani), Tiruverakam (Swamimalai), Palamutircholai (Tiruchchendur), Cenkotu and Erakam. Therefore, this new religiosity of the fifth-sixth centuries adapted and integrated the Sanskritic culture to the Tamil one. Although the *Sangam* texts refer to other religious traditions, viz., Jainism and Buddhism flourishing in the urban centers with the merchants as the main followers, the *Puranic-Tamil* paradigm provided the basic structural framework for the development of the communities.

14.5.2 Popular Devotional Movements: the Bhakti of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* (CE 600-1000)

From the seventh to ninth century, bhakti evolved as a personalized religious attitude that focused on intense devotion to a single god, Shiva or Vishnu. This theistic belief was expressed in the hymns of the early Shaiva and Vaishnava saints, the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* respectively. According to respective community tradition, *Shaivite Nayanars* also known as *Samayacharyas* are sixty three in number, including a woman saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar and the *Vaishnava Alvars* are twelve, including a woman saint, Andal. Collectively known as the *Tevaram* and the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, these hymnal corpuses inspired the philosophy of the Shaiva and Vaishnava religious communities in the medieval period. Several meanings are attributed to the *Tevaram*. It has been generally accepted that *tev* is from *devagrha*, i.e., house of the god and *varam* is a song addressed to a deity, hence *tevaram*.

Although the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* were contemporaries, there were differences in the ways in which they conceptualized the sacred. Characterized by intense emotional devotion and strong desire of mystical union with the god, the hymns emerged as the first concrete expression of religious sectarianism in Tamil. In both sets of hymnal compositions, the *Nayanars* and the *Alvars* condemned each other and attempted to demonstrate through various accounts that their respective gods were superior to the other. The hymns elaborated upon certain ideas, which had never evolved earlier. These ideas became the basis for the future religious developments of both the communities. These ideas were:

- 1) A highly personalized religious attitude that focused on an individual's relationship with the god.

- 2) The hymns projected a *strong sense of community*. It is obvious that the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* were addressing primarily a group of devotees and attempting to impress upon them through ideas of devotion.
- 3) The image of a community was associated with the attitude of the hymnists towards the *caste hierarchy*. The hymns of these early saints reflected hostility towards the ritual dominance of the Vedic brahmanas, i.e., the *Chaturvedins*. These *Chaturvedins*, by virtue of their high status in the caste hierarchy had monopolized the worship. The saints criticized this monopoly and strongly advocated that everybody, irrespective of their caste and economic status should have an equal access to the divine. The non- Brahmanical background of the hymnists generated dissent against the notion of domination by the brahmanas. For instance, some *Alvars* and *Nayanars* were Vellalas (primarily a peasant caste), low caste minstrels, the chieftains of the tribal clans and so on. However, some of these saints were brahmanas and their dissent against caste hierarchy reflected the presence of a hierarchy amongst the brahmanas themselves.
- 4) However, it was not a total rejection of the caste system. It is only in the hymns of Tirunavukkaracar, (popularly known as Appar) the Shaiva saint one can read a direct rejection of caste. (Champakalakshmi, 1993, p.145). Rather an alternative to the caste hierarchy was provided in the concept of a community of *bhaktas*. In order to be a part of this community of the *bhaktas*, the most important criteria was devotion to god and caste was secondary. Therefore caste status was never given up. The hymns restated that the devotion to Shiva and Vishnu was much superior to the Vedic recitations and a *Chaturvedin* was inferior to a low caste devotee of Shiva or Vishnu.
- 5) The *notion of pilgrimage* further contributed to the sense of belonging to a community. The hymns of the *Nayanars* referred to two hundred and seventy four Shaiva sites. All but six are located in the Tamil region. These six are, Srisailam in Andhra, Gokarna in Karnataka and Kedara, Indranila, Gaurikunda and Kailasha in the Himalayas in north India. The Alvars mapped more than ninety odd places, though the traditional Vaishnava holy places are one hundred and eight, which was a later development. In this case, the greater majority are in the Tamil region and the rest are in Kerala, southern Andhra, Karnataka and north India, in places like Mathura, Badrinath, Ayodhya, Naimisharanya, Dwarka and so on.

14.5.3 Shankaracharya and Advaita Philosophy (CE 788-820)

While the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* represented popular devotional movements with a broad socio-cultural base, there was a growth of another religious tradition called the *Smartas* in the eighth century, under Shankaracharya, the famous *advaita* philosopher. The *Smarta* tradition was primarily based upon inquiry and speculation of the philosophy of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* and was therefore, highly intellectual with a limited social base confined mostly to the Vedic brahmanas. However, the ideas of *advaita* were influential in shaping the ideas of post-eleventh century philosophies of Shaiva Siddhantas and Vaishnava saints like Ramanuja and Madhvacharya. The various biographies of Shankaracharya illustrate that

Shankara was a Nambudri brahmana from Kaladi which is in North Travancore region of Kerala. He lost his father at an early age and became an ascetic or a *sanyasin*. Shankara travelled all over India, participating and winning in numerous debates on *Vedantic* philosophy and propagated his ideas. According to the biographies, he reorganized the ascetic order of the *sanyasins*, perhaps influenced by the Buddhist *Sangha* or the monastic orders and founded a number of *mathas* for the study and propagation of his doctrines. Shankara wrote several works and commentaries on the *Vedanta-sutras*, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, all in Sanskrit. His major contribution was the commentary on Badarayana's *Brahmasutra*, which was a significant attempt to systematize the various strands of the *Upanishadic* thoughts. He acquired numerous disciples who carried on the *Smarta* tradition. Thus, Shankara's philosophy was highly intellectual and religious organization was essentially ascetic.

In south India, the term *Smarta* means not only the worship of the five gods, but also following Shankara's philosophy of the *Vedanta*. According to Nilakantha Shastri, the *Smarta* religion evolved a religious opinion and practice that reconciled the Shaiva and Vaishnava sectarianism as seen in the hymns of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. The religious practice is based on the principle of *Panchayatana puja*, i.e. the worship of five shrines, viz., Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti (mother-goddess), Surya and Ganesha. This worship is done at home with the help of symbols representing the deities. (K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 1963, *Development of Religion in South India*. Madras: Orient Longmans, p.61). Shankara's philosophy had its roots in *Vedanta* or *Upanishads* and represented a brahmanical/ Sanskritic alternative to Buddhism. According to him, both Shiva and Vishnu signified the supreme *Brahman* or the universal soul. He systematically developed the monistic tendency of the *Upanishads*, emphasizing that the unqualified Brahman is *Nirguna* Brahman. Brahman is one and eternal beyond the duality of subject and object. Shankara in his *Advaitic* philosophy of non-dualism explained that god (*ishvara*), the individual soul (*jiva*) and the world (*jagat*) are mere illusions due to the principle of *maya*. True liberation or *moksha* can only be attained through *jnana*, i.e. knowledge. Therefore, Shankara advocated renunciation of worldly life and adoption of ascetic mode of living. He also stated that the devotion to god and the observance of the *varnashramadharma* (that is the rules of the caste system) as described in the scriptures were important for acquiring competency for the study of the *Vedanta*. As has been stated earlier, the philosophy of Shankara's *advaita* influenced later *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva Siddhanta* philosophy after the eleventh century and emerged as an important theological basis for the respective communities. (Konduri Sarojini Devi (1990). *Religion in Vijayanagar Empire*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, pp.58-59).

14.6 CONSOLIDATION OF THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: CE 1000-1300

With the consolidation of the Cholas in the tenth century, the centre of political activities shifted from Tondainadu (with Kanchipuram as the capital) to Cholanadu with the capital at Tanjavur. The Pandyas continued to rule from Madurai and provided a formidable opposition to the Cholas. Both the Cholas and the Pandyas continued with the Pallava system of utilizing the *brahmadeyas*, and temples for

political integration. Both the *brahmadeyas* and temples due to their overarching ideological framework of the *varna-jati* paradigm integrated various sections of the society. However, it was the temple that emerged as an important institution of integration in three ways:

- 1) The ritual of gift giving to the deities in the temples created a network of political alliances. The kings gifted to the temples that in turn were recirculated and often sold in the society in the form of ritual goods, for instance the *prasadam* (food offering), generating economic transactions. The local chiefs also made gifts to the king or donated to the temples in the name of the king and received titles and honours that enabled them to become the members of the royal alliance network. Thus, this ritual of gift giving created loyalties and alliances for political purposes and imparted political stability to the medieval south Indian states. However, one cannot ignore the notion of religious merit, which was an important aspect of ritual gift giving.
- 2) The temple further provided the 'ideological apparatus' for the medieval south Indian states, bringing together the religion of various social groups. The political dynasties realized that the bhakti cults of Shaivism and Vaishnavism with their broad-based ideologies would be effective in integrating the society and consolidate the political network. Hence, the popular socio-religious movements with elements of protest now influenced the political ideology of power and dominance. (R. Chamapakalakshmi, 1996). Consequently, the hymns which were full of poetic descriptions of power and strength of various forms of Shiva and Vishnu became the source of inspiration for the construction of several canonical temples with elaborate iconography. The various cosmic and heroic representations of the *Puranic* deities in the temple iconography were related to the image of a monarch and his absolute power.
- 3) The temples also provided the avenue for the rulers, especially the Cholas to 'divinise' themselves. The Cholas constructed images of their rulers and members of the royal family and consecrated them by situating the images in the temples. Apart from this, the construction of monumental temples became a part of the royal project. Several such imperial temples were named after the Chola rulers who sponsored them. The Brihadesvara temple at Tanjore constructed by Rajaraja the Great (CE 985-1014) in CE 1003 illustrates this trend. Huge temple complexes with elaborate architecture, a pantheon with multiple divinities represented a continuous process of integration of different sections of the society in a hierarchical manner. At the top of the hierarchy was the royal family, followed by the ritually pure brahmana priests performing worship. Below them were the administrative elites, dominant agrarian and mercantile groups involved in temple administration and finally at the bottom were the lower categories of agricultural worker, craftsmen and menials in the temple service/(R. Champakalakshmi (1995), p. 309.) By the end of the eleventh century, there was a gradual marginalization of the *brahmadeyas* due to their exhaustion as an institution of integration. Consequently, the temples further emerged as important organizations that had an impact on the religious communities. The Pandya and the Chola records of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cite several instances of the *brahmadeyas* being converted into non-brahmana villages or being donated as *devadanam* to the temples.

14.7 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: THE ROLE OF THE *ACHARYAS*

In the absence of any challenge from the heterodox sects viz., the Jainas and the Buddhists, the religious communities focused on the expansion of their resource base by competing for patronage from the royalty and the local chieftains. The *acharyas* or the ideologues and theologians organized the ideas of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. This was done primarily in three ways:

- a) The *acharyas* evolved a textual tradition that comprised of certain kind of texts like the commentaries, the hagiographies and temple texts such as the *Agamas*. In all these texts, the ideology of the religious communities was articulated.
- b) The *acharyas* consolidated the community by creating an institutional framework. This comprised of strengthening their base in the temples by gaining access to various privileges, for instance, the right to performing the rituals. Another institutional innovation was the emergence of the *mathas*, which were probably an influence of the Smarta tradition.
- c) The notion of pilgrimage expressed in various sites in the hymns of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* was elaborated upon by fostering the local, regional and pan-Indian network. In this way, a collective consciousness of the community was highlighted.

14.8 VIRASHAIVISM

Virashaivism, literally meaning heroic Shaivism was based on intense and unconditional devotion to Shiva. This socio-religious movement was influenced by the bhakti of the Tamil *Nayanars*, who were also regarded as the spiritual guides of the Virashaiva teachers. Virashaivism is also considered to be 'a reformist schism of the Kalamukha sect in Karnataka.' (Champakalakshmi, 1996, p.159). The founder of the movement was supposed to be Basava, a minister in the court of the Kalachuri king, Bijjala of Kalyana in north Karnataka in the twelfth century (CE 1160). Bijjala and Basava were said to have had numerous differences. However, with the establishment of Yadava control in the Deccan, especially in northern Karnataka and the Hoysala regimes in southern Karnataka, Virashivas received considerable royal patronage. The growth of trade in Karnataka provided the support from the merchants and the artisan communities, especially the *Banajigas*. This movement was hostile to Jainism and remained so after the twelfth century and was chiefly responsible for the decline of Jainism in Karnataka.

According to the Virshaiva tradition, the community had an ancient origin, when the five ascetics sprang up from the five heads of Shiva and founded the five mathas. They were Kedarnatha in the Himalayas, Srisailam in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh, Balehalli in west Mysore, Ujjaini in Bellary and Benares. According to Nilakantha Sastri (p. 64) evidences show that these ascetics were contemporaries of Basava in the twelfth century. Since they rejected most of the Brahmanical practices and institutional organizations like the temples, they created their own priesthood, the *jangamas*. The *jangama* was the *guru* or spiritual guide

and commanded veneration in the community. He was identified with Shiva himself. The *jangamas* were both householders and celibates and were based in the Virashaiva *mathas*. The Virashaivas rejected the worship of fixed large stone *lingas* (*Sthavara linga*) in the temples. Temple and temple building was condemned as an activity of the rich. It was a static symbol, as against the body, especially the moving body, wandering from place to place. Hence, it was a denunciation of the stable establishment. The saints came from diverse non-brahmanical background. The Virashaiva saints were considered as *Nirguna bhaktas*, relating personally to the infinite absolute, who may bear the name of Shiva, but did not have any attributes or mythology. The scriptures of the Virashaivas comprised of the *vachanas*, which were exclusively in Kannada. A *vachana* is a religious lyric in Kannada, literally meaning, 'saying things said' (A.K.Ramanujan, (1973). *Speaking of Siva*. Baltimore: Penguin Books).

From the tenth to the twelfth century, there were prolific *vachana* compositions of the Virashaiva saints like, Dasimayya, Basav, Allama and Mahadeviyakka. None of them were brahmanas. The saints had an antipathy towards the Sanskritic tradition and scriptures. This is reflected in the *vachanas* of Basava and other Virashaiva saints. The Virashaivas right from the beginning had a broad social base, where the followers came from different castes and class. Their practices brought them into conflict with other Shaiva religious traditions. Their social practice advocated the remarriage of the widows, no restrictions on menstruating women, inter-caste dining, no ritual purification for the family of the deceased and they buried their dead.

Simultaneous with the development of Virashaivism was the growth and expansion of another movement of similar beliefs. This was the Aradhya Shaiva movement in Andhra (Cuddapah and Kurnool district mainly) and Kannada region (Mysore). It was started by Mallikarjuna Pandita Aradhya, who was a contemporary of Basava in the twelfth century. Aradhya is a Sanskrit word meaning adorable. The followers were mostly brahmanas. They wore the sacred thread along with the *linga* around their neck. They adopted the Virashaiva forms of worship but did not interline with other Lingayats and intermarried with the Smartas.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Discuss the development of Bhakti in *Sangam* texts.

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- 2) To what extent were the socio-religious movements a protest against the contemporary social structure?

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14.9 SUMMARY

In this unit we looked at the overall perspective on the religion in the context of early medieval society. We traced the development of religion and ideas of bhakti in south India from fourth to the sixth century. We studied the popular devotional movements from seventh to the eleventh century. The twelfth century represented a crucial phase in the evolution and construction of the religious communities and their respective consciousness. A stiff competition for acquiring the devotees set in. The theological orientation of the communities was aimed at incorporating the non-brahmanical elements thereby broadening the social base of their respective community organization. The Shaiva and the Vaishnava traditions drew legitimacy from their respective hymnal tradition and projected a broad base. Amidst such an intense religious development, sectarian rivalries became common, especially in the context of competitive control over the patronage of economically and politically diverse powerful social groups. This was further reflected in the subsequent period, with the migration and the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire in the fourteenth century.

14.10 KEY WORDS

<i>Agrahara</i>	: Land or village gifted by king to brahmanas in the Deccan region
<i>Alvars</i>	: The Vaishnava saint-poets of early medieval south India
<i>Brahmadeya</i>	: Land gifted to brahmanas, generally by kings in south India
Celestial Ancestries	: This is the practice of tracing geneologies of kings and queens to mythical forms of planets, sun and the moon.
Popular Devotionalism	: Here we mean the faith and love of ordinary people towards god which developed as forms of Bhakti cults in various parts of the country.
<i>Linga</i>	: A phallic emblem of the god Shiva.
<i>Matha</i>	: Monastery.
<i>Nayanars</i>	: The Shaiva saint-poets of early medieval India.
<i>Tevaram</i>	: A collection of hymns, part of the canon of south Indian Shaiva bhakti.
<i>Tirumurai</i>	: The canon of south Indian Shaiva bhakti.
<i>Tiruttondar-Tokai</i>	: A work by Sundarar, which lists 62 <i>Nayanmar</i> saints.

14.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 14.2
- 2) See Section 14.4

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See Sub-section 14.5.1
- 2) See Sub-section 14.5.2

14.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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