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**Bhakti Movement in the South**

**(The Alvaras and The Nayanaras)**

The word Bhakti is derived from a Sanskrit word 'Bhanj' which means coordination and charity. Which means that a disciple is one who not only worships God but also does charity? The Bhakti movement was begun by Shankaracharya in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. According to Bhagwat Purana Bhakti was born in Dravida areas of Indian Territory. It developed in Karnataka and later reached to Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The Shaiva and Viashnava saints during the rule of Pallavas began the Bhakti Movement. It also received patronage of the Chola rulers. As a result of Bhakti movement idol worship, concept of incarnation spread in extreme south. There occurred a widespread of religious rituals. Moreover, the rulers and their subjects in South India began to gradually replace Buddhism and Jainism with Shaivism and Vaishnavism. In this way there occurred the decline of Buddhism and Jainism in South India. The Bhakti movement later divided into two parts:

1. Alvaras – followers of lord Vishnu.
2. Nayanaras- followers of lord Shiva.

These Alvaras and Nayanaras used both Sanskrit and Tamil languages in their hymns.

**The Nayanaras:**

The Tamil Shaiva saints were called as Nayanara saints. They were total 63 in number. This idea of Shaivism began in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century a Nayanara saint Nambi-andar-nambi wrote a song which was named as 'Tiruktatotar tiruvantati' which produces a detailed information about the lives of the 63 Nayanara saints.

## Significant Nayanara Saints:

- **Appar:**

His another name was 'Tirunavukarrashu'. He was born at Tiruvallur in a vellal family. He initially lived his life as a Jain saint under the name of 'Dharmasena' in a monastery located at Patliputra. It is believed that he got free from a severe ailment by the grace of Lord Shiva as a result of which he adopted Shaivism having left Jainism. He also gave the lessons of Shaivism to his contemporary Pallava ruler named 'Mahendravarman'.

- **Tirugyansambandar:**

He was contemporary to Appar. He was born in a Brahmin family at Shiyali village in Tanjore. Among all the Nayanara saints he was famous as the 'most pious saint'. His contemporary Pandya ruler was Manvarma Avni Shulpani and contemporary Pallava ruler was Narsighavarman. He is also famous as 'Dravida shishu'.

- **Sundarmurti:**

He was born in a poor Brahmin family at Navllur. He was brought up by a commander-in-chief 'Narshingha Muvedaryana'. He adopted Shaivism only at an age of 18 years. He called himself as the 'saint of the saints'. He remained a less controversial character in the list of Nayanara saints.

- **Mannikavachkar:**

He was born at Vaduvur(Madurai). Thus, he was called as Tiru-vaduvur. He was appointed as the prime minister by the Pandya ruler. His songs mainly consisted of love themes.

The above mentioned four Saints were collectively called as Samyacharya. The idols of Tirugyansambandar and Sundarmurti were established in the temples and were worshipped. Many times the statue of Mannikavachkar was also found along with them. His bronze statue is found in one of the national museums.

- **Tirumular:**

It is believed that he was the first saint among the other Nayanara Saints. He is considered as a great mysterious saint and also the pioneer of spiritual reforms.

The connection of females with Bhakti movement was a complicated turn in the movement. Thus, a Tamil text 'Periyapurana' condemns the entry of women in this movement.

A few female saints:

- Karaikkal Ammeiyar
- Isaignaniyar

Karaikkal Ammeiyar was a great shaiva saint. She worshiped Lord Shiva in the form of Virupaksha. She called Lord Shiva as 'Appa' i.e, father.

### **Nayanara Literature:**

In 11<sup>th</sup> century Nambi-ander-nambi the court poet of Raja Raj Chola compiled the songs of the Nayanara saint in 11 Tirumurai. Which is considered to be one of the greatest text of Nayanara saints . Due to this Nambi-ander-nambi is called as 'Vedvyas of tamil' or 'Tamilvyas'. Besides this text another text is that of 'Shekkilar' written in 12<sup>th</sup> century named as 'Periyapurana' which displays a picture of life of 63 Nayanara saints. This is considered as the last Tirumurai. The first name of a female Bhakti Saint mentioned in Tirumurai is that of Karaikkal.

### **The Alvaras:**

Along with Shaivism, Vaishnavism too prospered during the Pallava rule. In South India the Vaishnava saints were called as Alvaras. Alvars means a person who attained ultimate knowledge who is completely lost in his thoughts. The total number of Alvara saints is 12. They worshipped Lord Vishnu, Naryana, Shrirangnath, Rama, Krishna, etc. They did not believe in performing any religious rituals rather focused only on worship of God.

#### **Names of Alvara Saints:**

- **Poigai**
- **Bhoodath**
- **Pei**
- **Thirumazhsai**
- **Nammalwar**
- **Madhurakavi**
- **Periyalwar**
- **Sri Andel**
- **Thondaradippodi**
- **Thiruppaan**
- **Thirumangai**
- **Kulasekhara**

### **Significant Alvara Saints:**

- **Nammalwar:**

He was the greatest saint among the Alvaras saints. He was born in a Vellal family at Tinneveli. His four works are- Tiruviruttam, Tiruvashirium, Periyatiruvantadi, Tiruvaymeli. These works are collectively called as the four Vedas of South. He is

considered as the incarnation of feet of lord Rama. His poetic style was based on the style of the Agama literature of Sangam age. In which the relation between the God and disciple is that of lovers. He also produced a picture of connection of Lord Krishna with his Gopies

- **Madhurakavi:**

He was the student of Nammalwar. He had a great devotion in Lord Shri Rama. It is said that he lived for a few months in Ayodhya. In his work Prapannamrita he wrote about his travel to Ayodhya, bath in the river Saryu and worship of Lord Rama.

- **Thirumangai:**

He belonged to the category of robbers of the Chola army. He devoted his life to the construction of Srirangam temple due to his inclination towards Vaishnavism. He began a campaign of spreading discontentment against Buddhism and Jainism. His most famous work was Periyatirumoli. His six poetries were six vedangas of Tamil.

- **Andal:**

She was the only Female Alwar saint and was the daughter of Alvara saint Vishnuchita(Periyalwar). She was born in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. she was considered as the pioneer of worship of Lord Krishna and the Gopis in South India. Her songs were based on the themes of love and departure. She was considered as the incarnation of 'Sita' because her birth story was similar to goddess Sita. Her famous works were- Nacchiyar Tirumoli, Tirupave. She is considered as the 'Mirabai of South India'.

- **Vishnuchitta:**

He was born in a Brahmin family of srivillipur. His most famous work is Tirupallad. He influenced the Pandya rulers to accept Vaishnavism. Krishan Dev Rai , the ruler of Vijaynagar empire wrote in his book 'Amuktamalyad' about the life of Vishnuchitta and also about the love story of Andal and God Ranganath.

- **Kulsekhar:**

He was a chera ruler of Kerala. He left his throne and got fully devoted to the worship of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. His famous works are Perumal, Tirumoli and Mukundmala.

- **Thiruppan:**

He was born in a lower caste. It is believed that he once came in the dream of the priest of Ranganath temple and ordered him to establish Tirupanna in the Garbhagriha of the temple. This led to the entry of an untouchable enter in the temple for the first time. It is also believed that he sang his last hymn and merged with the idol of Lord Vishnu.

- **Poigai:**

Poigai is considered to be the first and Madhurakavi the last Alwar saints among all. The hymns of all 12 Alwar saints were compiled in the work of Acharyanathmuni (contemporary of Rjandra Chola) named Naliyar divya prabandhanam. This was the last pious text of the Tamil Vaishnavas. It is also called as 'Tamil veda'.

### **Alwar Literature:**

In 12<sup>th</sup> century 'Garudavahana' wrote 'Divyatrucharitam' which is the first most significant book producing the life history of the Alwar saints. Historian Uma Chakravarti is of view that the way males are allowed to worship God and also maintain their normal family life (Grihstha) together females are not allowed to do the same as their beauty, youthfulness, etc turned out to be a great obstacle in the path of they worship. Thus, it was a great challenge for the women to be a part of it. Moreover, they were tied to the responsibilities of their families in order to keep them away from Bhakti. According to D.D Koshambi this movement of devotion and faith was all feudal in nature as it was temple centered which meant that it fulfilled the feudal demands of the state. But, it cannot be denied that Bhakti Movement did away the concept of high and low caste as it was easy for all the caste to follow. Moreover, many of the Alvara and Nayanara saints themselves did not belong to upper caste or mainly Brahmin caste. Hence, this Bhakti movement brought a revolution in the religious belief of the Indians in the same way as the Buddhism and Jainism brought centuries back and was later replaced by Shaivism and Vaishnavism mainly in South India.