

Chapter Two

Sri Andal: Srivaishnavite Woman Alvar Saint and Her Path of Bhakti

In the first chapter we were trying to create a context for understanding the two poets in this study. Through the religious background, we reached the beginning of *Bhakti* movement in Tamil Nadu. In *Bhakti* movement, however, there are two streams which have to be looked into before we arrive at Andal's path of *Bhakti*.

It is here, that we have to understand the distinction between *Nirgun* (without attributes) *Bhakti* and *Saguna* (with attributes) *Bhakti*. While most Vaishnava and all Srivaishnava poets are steeped in *Saguna Bhakti* (*Bhakti* of God with a specific form), Veershaiva poets from Karnataka were steeped in *Nirgun Bhakti* (God without any specific form). For *Madhurya* 'bhava' (sentiment), which involves thinking of God as one's Lover, *Saguna Bhakti* is the natural way of being. However, there have been saints who could relate to the Divine principle without subscribing to a specific form. Saint Kabir is the foremost example in this category. The poets under study belonged to both the *Saguna* as well as *Nirguna* kind of *Bhakti*. That is to say, while Andal was a *Sagun Bhakta*, Akka Mahadevi was a *Nirgun Bhakta*.

Bhakti as Conflict and Reconciliation between Form and Formless

The entire history of the Indian religious tradition foregrounds two aspects of the Supreme reality simultaneously viz. an awareness of the Absolute as a mystical state of being and a perception of it as a personal god. In other words, the Absolute is perceived both as *Nirakaar* as well as *Sakar* (formless as well as in a form), *Nirguna* as well as *Saguna* (without attributes as well as with attributes). The Shastras and classic religious texts including **Vedas**, **Upanishads**, and **Bhagwad Gita** generally project supreme reality in both the aspects. However, **Upanishads** primarily focus on the first aspect and epics and most *Bhakti* literature focus on the second aspect of the Supreme. This does not, however, mean that there is absence of the elements pointing at the mystical,

incomprehensive Absolute in *Bhakti* literature. On the contrary, *Bhakti* poetry, throws up a wonderful amalgamation of both of the above-mentioned aspects. *Bhakti* poetry while making the personal God its subject, transcends it and foregrounds the mystical aspect in all its intensity. A. K. Ramanujan makes a significant observation in this context. In his essay on “The Myths of Bhakti: Images of Siva in Saiva Poetry”, he says:

All devotional poetry plays on the tension between *saguna* and *nirguna*, the lord as person and the lord as principle. If he were entirely a person, he would not be divine, and if he were entirely a principle, a godhead, one could not make poems about him.The Vaishnavas, too, say that the lord is characterized by both ‘*paratva*, ‘otherness’ and *soulabhaya*, ‘ease of access’ ;he is both here and beyond, both tangible as a person and intangible as a principle—such is the nature of the ground of all being. It is not either/ or, but both/ and; myth, bhakti and poetry would be impossible without the presence of both attitudes. [Dharwadkar: 1999:295]

The Alvar Emphasis on Form

It is interesting to note, that in Alvar songs, the *Nirakaar* and *Nirguna* (without form and attributes) aspect of god is not taken up at all. Their *Bhakti* is ‘*Saguna Bhakti*’. And it is only in the doctrines of Srivaishnavism that evolved later, that the personal god and Absolute God merged into each other.

Often saints pour out emotional *Bhakti* poetry and scholars create religious cults out of their poetry. History has witnessed this phenomenon in *Bhakti* all along. All *Bhakti* cults, be it Srivaishnavism, Veershaivism, Chaitanya Sampradaya or Kabir Pantha etc. are an outcome of this process of emotional outpouring by saints and later indoctrination by the scholars and critics and religious enthusiasts.

The framework of all the Alvar poetry compiled in **Nalayiradivya Prabhandham** including that of both of Andal’s poems, **Tiruppavai** as well as **Nachiar Tirumoli**, is based on the concept of Vaishnava *Bhakti*. This *Bhakti* has a theological base supported by Bhagwad Gita, and an emotional base supported by Vishnu Mythology as given in

major Purana-s like **Harivansh Purana**,²² **Vishnu Purana**, and **Brahama Purana** and epics like **Ramanayana** and **Mahabharta**. The following three stanzas from **The Bhagwad Gita** are significant from the theological viewpoint and from the point of view of later evolution of Krishna *Bhakti*:

Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharat
Abhyuthanamdharmasya tadatmanam srajamyaham
[Hey Bharata whenever the righteousness is on the decline and
unrighteousness is in ascendant then I take upon a body]

Paritranya sadhunam vinashaya cha dushkritam
Dharamsansthapanarthaya sambhavani yuge yuge
[For the protection of the virtuous, for the extirpation of the evildoers, and
for establishing dharma on a firm footing, I am born from age to age]

Janam karamcha me divyamevam yo vetti tattavatah
tyaktava deham punarjanam neti maameti soarjuna
[Arjuna my birth and actions are Divine. He who knows this in reality, is
not reborn after leaving this body, but comes to Me]
[Bhagwad Gita ch.- iv. 7-9.]

Above verses from **Bhagwad Gita** are the classic reference points, which are inherently present in the collective unconscious of all the Bhakta-s. These verses point at the concept of '*Avatara*' (lit .descension). God takes an '*Avatara*' whenever there is need to protect the virtuous. The idea of God coming down to earth and live among human beings is at the centre of all *Bhakti* literature. Nevertheless, this scriptural reference to *Bhakti* as found in **Bhagwad Gita** is more of an intellectual nature and is very different from the emotional *Bhakti* that prevails in Alvars' poetry. Intellectual *Bhakti* as

²². **Harivansha Purana** and Hala's **Sattasai**(Skt.Saptashati) are two important texts that were known to South Indians. *Harivansha* with its typical beginning appears to be a later addition to epic tradition of Mahabharata. Probable dates for *Harivansha* are considered to be before fourth century A.D.,much before *Bhagwad Purana*, which is supposed to have been composed in 920 A.D. or so. Sattasai was a second centuryA.D. Prakrit text compiled by a Satvavahana ruler Hala. These two texts i.e. **Harivansh Purana** and **Sattasai** were well rooted in the South Indian culture by the time Alvars began singing their songs of Krishna. All the chief motifs of mythical landscape that colour their poetry were supplied by such texts much before **Bhagwat Purana** came into picture.

expounded in **Bhagwad Gita** has its roots in **Upanishads** and presupposes Yoga. Yoga here is understood as withdrawing all the senses from their objects and focusing them along with Mind (*manas, buddhi, chit, ahamkar*) on to the Supreme Being. This process is supposed to be instrumental in attaining the state of *Moksha* i.e. liberation.

This process of withdrawal of senses, presupposed in intellectual *Bhakti* is certainly a yogic state named as *Pratyahara* in Patanjali's **Yogasutra** and is exactly in opposition to emotional *Bhakti*, which involves intense participation of the senses. A.K. Ramanujan attributes "Being in Touch" among the chief characteristics of *Bhakti*:

The alvars (and the nayanmars) thrive on contagion, communion in community. Nammalvar says that all the five senses are "the bodies of god" and he strains all of them to realize god. Yet the sensory modes he favors in his poetry are the "near senses": touch, taste, smell. The vedic poets were "seers"; philosophy is a "seeing" (*darsana*); and the word "see" occurs in the Gita scores of times. The Vedas are "heard" (*srutis*), as earlier classical Tamil poems were "things heard" (*kelvi*). Both sight and hearing are senses of distance. But the favourite bhakti sense is the sense of touch; bhakti is contact, contagion. The devotee's heart or hands touch, not just the feet of god, but his entire body. [Ramanujan: 1981: 146-7]

Senses require objects to engage themselves. In *Bhakti*, the senses are focused intensely on one single object, a personal god. In the final stage of *Bhakti*, however, this focus becomes so intense, that all other objects are dropped off automatically. This state in *Bhakti* is similar to the other classical form of Yoga known as 'Raja Yoga'. In these stages, senses are withdrawn completely from everything else and are brought to focus on one's *Ishta* (chosen deity). These processes of complete withdrawal and then intense focus are in fact advance stages of Yoga defined as *Dharna, Dhyana* and *Samadhi* by Sage Patanjali in his text **Yoga Sutra**. Therefore *Bhakti* in the beginning serves as the stepping stone to '*Bhakti Yoga*' and *Ishta* or the chosen personal god serves as a stimulus to attain those heights of *Bhakti Yoga* which lead to *Samadhi* or a complete union with the Absolute.

The idea of a personal god, which is the founding stone of emotional *Bhakti*, is colored by Indian mythological tradition. Indian mythology is based on the concept of God's *Avataras*. The word '*Avatara*' is related to '*Avataran*' meaning 'to descend down'. As observed in the *shloka* from **Gita** quoted above, God takes birth in the form of a living being on earth to protect the world when evil begins to pervade it or when the cause of the good is annihilated by the evil ones. **Vishnu Purana** relates twelve '*Avatars*' of Lord Vishnu, and **Bhagwat Purana** relates no less than twenty two *Avataras* of the Lord. Most famous Indian epics are legends of God's '*Avatars*' and their feats on earth. The **Ramayana** is story of Ram-*avataara* and **Mahabharata** relates the story of Krishna-*avataara*. It is the life story of Krishna, which captured the imagination of a whole civilization that witnessed generations and generations of poets and saints singing and writing about marvelous multifaceted Krishna- the God in a man's body.

The concept of "*Avatara*" is very significant for understanding the evolution of Vaishnava *Bhakti* poetry. The whole of Alvar saints' poetic corpus refers to human form, "*Avatara*" of the Absolute God (here Vishnu) especially as found in the *Puranic* lore. Among the important puranas of Vishnu are Vishnu, **Harivansha** and **Bhagwat Puranas**. All of them narrate the story of Krishna from his birth to human parents and his divine play on earth through various stages of his life- as a child (in Gokul), as an adolescent (in Vrindavana), as a youth (in Mathura), as a man (in Kurukshetra) and as a king (in Dwarka).

It should be noted, that the historical authenticity of *Puranic* literature is debatable. Yet it is quite probable that Krishna was a historical figure whose deification in later eras could have strengthened popular faith in his '*Avatar*' status. However, the question of whether the character of Krishna is historical or mythical, is besides the point, as the image of his character, which emerged through *Puranic* lore provided highly intense material for poetic imagination. The idea of a God, who came down to earth and lived among the mortals as one of them, who was loving and could be loved as a mischievous son , a mysterious lover, a brave warrior, a divine friend and a kind king, is thoroughly fascinating. This visibility of the Absolute Supreme in human form is almost necessary for any kind of emotional relationship with Him.

Alvar saints imagined this God in various relations to themselves – sometimes He is a little child, sometimes a lover, sometimes a friend and sometimes Lord and the master. Their poetry is an attempt to establish a relation with God in human form in order to experience His Divine Being with human urgency.

While theology and religion make an attempt to comprehend the Supreme Being through intellect and faith respectively, *Bhakti* is a way to comprehend the Supreme Being with all human faculties-be they higher (relating to mind) or lower (relating to senses). *Bhakti* is complete surrender of the whole being, intellect as well as emotion, mind as well as senses, to God and works through faith and wisdom. Thus, while theology uses only one faculty, that of the mind, to connect to God, *Bhakti* path uses the mind, body and emotion –all three aspects of the human being to experience Him. Hence, the path of *Bhakti* is considered as superior to the path of *Jnana* (knowledge) and that of *Karma* (detached action). Sutra 25 of classical **Narada Bhakti Sutra** describes this supremacy of *Bhakti* over other paths of attaining the Divine:

“*Sa tu KaramJnanayogebhyopyadhiktra*” (The Supreme Devotion (*Bhakti*) is indeed, as a technique even superior to Path of Action (*Karma*), the Path of Knowledge (*Gyana*), and the Path of Disciplined Contemplation (*Yoga*.)
[Chinmayananda: 1968: 41.]

Bhakti Marga: The Way of Divine Love

Shashtras on *Bhakti* prescribe many ways of relating to God. Narada’s **Bhakti Sutra**, one of the classic texts on *Bhakti*, puts down not less than eleven ways of reaching God. These are depicted in Sutra 82 as:

Gunmahatmyasakti rupasaktipujasakti
smaranasakti
Dasyasaktisakhyasaktivatsalyasakti
kantasaktiatmanivedanasakti
Tanmayasaktiparamvirahasaktirupa
ekdhapyekadashdha bhavati.

(Love for glorifying His Qualities; Love for His Divine Form; Love for worshipping Him; Love for remembering Him; Love for doing service for Him; Love for friendship in Him; Love for the Lord as one's own child; Love as that to a beloved; Love for a total self-offering at His Feet; Love for complete absorption in Him; Love as expressed in the pang of separation from Him -- thus though Love is one only, It is expressed in eleven different modes.) [Chinmayananda: 1968:159]

If we look at this *sutra* closely, we will find that some of the attitudes mentioned here overlap each other. And *Navdha Bhakti*, mentioned in the **Bhagwat Purana**, which gives nine ways of *Bhakti*, seems to be a reordering of the eleven ways given by the ancient Sage Narada. The stages of *Navadha* (nine fold) *Bhakti* are depicted as follows:

Shravanam Kirtanam Vishnoh Smaranam Padasevanam
Archanam Vandanam Dasyam Sakhyamatmnivedanam.

(Listening to the names of God; singing the names of God; continuous remembrance of God; serving at the feet of God; worshipping the God; praying to the God; relating to Him as a servant; relating to Him as a friend; (finally surrendering the ego to Him.)²³

However, as has been said earlier, it might be true that Alvar *Bhakti* poetry was composed before the theorization happened. Alvar saints might not have been familiar with any of the above mentioned texts at all. They might not have known eleven ways of *Bhakti* given by sage Narada or the nine ways of *Bhakti* ('*navadha Bhakti*') expounded in the **Bhagwat Purana** as **Bhagwat Purana** is later than Alvars. To quote Vidya Dehejia:

It appears certain that the *Bhagavat Purana*, which is the main text for the legend of Vishnu, is later than Alvar poetry since it makes selective use of themes from the poems of these saints. The relationship between Tamil Alvar

²³Navadha Bhakti as mentioned in **Bhagvat Purana** involves nine ways which are:
Shravanam Kirtanam Vishnoh Smaranam Padasevanam
Archanam Vandanam Dasyam Sakhyamatmnivedanam
Bhagwat Purana.vii.5.23-24.

poetry and the Sanskrit *Bhagavat Purana* has been explored by Friedhelm Hardy, who points out that the *Purana* was composed in South India in the ninth century, and that it combined themes from the poems of Alvars (600-900) with the input of the northern Sanskrit *Brahama* and *Vishnu Puranas* (500-700).

She further relates:

From the perspective of Antal's (Andal's) poetry, an important reason for concluding that the songs of the Alvars must predate the *Bhagvat Purana* is the fact that two episodes prominent in the *Purana* are not mentioned by Antal (Andal). The celebrated *Rasa* dance of Krsna (Krishna) with the *gopis*, and the theme of their intense longing for Krsna (Krishna) combined with the pain of separation from him once he leaves Gokula for Mathura, are given specific treatment in independent chapters of *Bhagvat Purana* ... If Antal had known of these two Krsna (Krishna) themes through the *Bhagvat Purana*, she would undoubtedly made use of them in her poems. With Krsna (Krishna) as her chosen lord, and the anguish of separation as the personal theme of her Nachiar Tirumoli, Antal would surely have made reference to the agony of the gopis when Krsna (Krishna) departs. [Dehejia: 1990:21-22]

However, Vidya Dehejia's statement about Andal, relating that Andal does not use episodes of *gopikas'* ecstasy in *Rasa* dance and their pining anguish when Krishna departs to Mathura from the **Bhagwat Purana**, is true only to the extent that **Bhagwat Purana** was not compiled in Andal's time. Although as we see that in the poem **Tiruppavai**, Andal recreates the spectacle of a Gokul street and the cowherd girls (*gopis*) living there as its chief motif, it is very clear that Andal was familiar with the earlier *puranas* (**Vishnu** and **Harivansha**) and knew about the *gopikas'* intense love for Krishna.²⁴ Another significant point in this context is that 17th Canto of famous Tamil

²⁴Also I do not agree with Vidya Dehejia when she says:

The subject matter of **Nachiar Tirumoli** suggests that it might have been her later work, since the **Tiruppavai** is written in a much lighter vein, showing Andal as a carefree girl surrounded by companions. [Dehejia: 1988:121.]

In fact **Tiruppavai** is not written in lighter vein at all. It is a very serious work. The only place, where one finds humour, is in the dialogue between the *sakhi*-s or *gopikas*. Here we have to remember that this dialogue is a part of the technique which helps the poetess to unfold some nuances of a very mature undertaking. For instance, it is in **Tiruppavai**, that one witnesses a range of *rasas* - *Karuna*, *Hasya*,

epic **Cilappatikaram** from Sangam period, that certainly predated Alvars, contains an entire episode on the *Raas Nritya* enacted as the

“Round Dance of the Herdswomen”. To quote from the Canto:
Among them, Pinnai (Radha) puts the garland of rich basil
On Mayavanand begins the flawless round dance.

It is our own Pinnai, her arms ringed with bangles,
that turned the gaze of the lord, renowned for striding
All the three worlds, away from his consort,
Laksmi, ensconced on his chest, Ha! Ha!”
[R. Parthasarthy: 1993:173]

There is very high probability that Andal knew this episode from the epic, which was like a popular cultural document of the Tamil land.

At the same time it is interesting to note, that in their way of worship (*Bhakti*) all the Alvars make use of almost all the *Bhakti bhavas* (sentiments) mentioned in the classical texts referred above in relation to their chosen God. Some scholars precipitate down these nine sentiments in classical *Navadha Bhakti* to five important sentiments or *bhavas*.

Dr. P.Jairaman, in his study on Tamil Alvar saints and Hindi Krishna *Bhakti* literature, brings out five modes of relating to the God which he says are very commonly used by Alvars in their poetry. These, according to him, are: *Dasya*, *Sakhya*, *Vatsalya*, *Madhurya* or *Kanta*, and *Nirved* or *Shanta Bhava*.²⁵

Vatsalya, *Madhurya*, *Veera* and *Adbhuta* - all in the thirty stanzas, while **Nachiar Tirumoli** focuses exclusively on *Madhurya bhava* (and corresponding *rasa* called as *sringara*). Also the images and metaphors used in **Tiruppavai** are pregnant with a range of references that encompass a whole cultural and religious tradition. **Nachiar Tirumoli** also presents spectacular imagery but the metaphorical framework is not as rich as that of **Tiruppavai**.

²⁵Jairaman, Dr. P. **Bhakti ke Ayam: Krishna Bhakti Sahitya**. New Delhi: Vani Prakashan. 2003. Page 339-340. (Hindi Text)

Here I would like to propose, that ‘*Nirved*’ or ‘*Shanta Bhava*’ need not be taken up and pointed out in exclusion. According to Acharya Abhinavgupta ‘*Shanta rasa*’ pervades and underlies all the other *rasas* and that the experience of all *rasas* in their intensity finally leads to an experience of the *Shanta rasa*. What the Acharya says about *Shanta rasa* should be true of ‘*Shanta bhava*’ as well. ‘*Shanta bhava*’ is a *bhava* which lingers behind all forms of *Bhakti bhavas*. In fact this *bhava* can be described as a pre-requisite or preparation for *Bhakti*. *Shanta Bhava* has its source in the feeling of ‘*Vairagya*’ (detachment) from the transitory situations of life and a developing sense of omnipresence of the Divine. Rise of this *Bhava* leads

'*Dasya bhava*' is a way of relating to one's Lord and Master. In feudal set up and monarchy, the status of the king and the feudal lord is considered to be next only to God and it is the '*Dharma*' (religious obligation) of all the subjects to serve their sovereign and the master. This same sentiment when projected towards God becomes *Dasya Bhakti*. Almost all the Alvars use this sentiment to express their intense love for the '*ishta*', the chosen one. Nammalvar calls out, probably to his own self, to surrender at the feet of none else but Krishna:

Quick, think of the fragrant Tulsi-wreathed Krishna's feet.

They who ruled over other kings who touched their feet, with great
kettledrums rumbling in their porticos, have become
pulverized to dust.

[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 487]

'*Sakhya bhava*' is a way of relating to God as a friend, where sharing, sacrifice and surrender all are involved. Krishna relates to Arjuna in **Mahabharata** as a '*Sakha*' (friend). And Arjuna also takes Him to be his most intimate friend and shares every desire and aspiration with Krishna. In Alvar poetry *Sakhya bhava* is mentioned in relation to other *bhavas*. This is not found as a dominant *bhava* in any of the poems by Alvar saints. Vishnuchitta Alvar or Periyalvar refers to Krishna's support to Arjuna as a *Sakha* (friend) in the battle field as follows:

If you are in
search of him, there are many who saw him by Arjuna's side
where he hid the sun with his discus, when Arjuna rained
arrows that rolled Jayadratha's head into a pit.

[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 65]

'*Vatsalya*' and '*Madhurya*' are the two most frequently used '*bhavas*' in *Bhakti* poetry.

In the attitude of *Vatsalya*, the bhakta adores the God as his /her own child in order to experience the wonder of His '*Bal Lilas*' (i.e. His divine childhood). Vishnuchitta Alvar's

to a sense of calm in all situations and the Bhakta surrenders his/her self completely to the will of God. Except for *Shanta Bhava*, the other four *Bhavas* viz. *Dasya*, *Sakhya*, *Vatsalya* and *Madhurya* have their source in common human relations.

songs elaborately deal with Krishna's childhood, adopting the perspective of mother Yashoda, Krishna's earthly (foster) mother. There are cradle songs,²⁶ lullabies, songs about giving bath to child Krishna, songs of gentle chiding, songs about sending the child to cow grazing for the first time and so on.²⁷

'*Madhurya Bhava*' is considered to be the most intimate and mystical relation between the Bhakta and the Bhagwan (God). Here God is conceived as the beloved or as the husband regardless of the gender of the Bhakta. Krishna's relation to *gopikas* and vice versa is the ultimate example of *Madhurya Bhakti*. *Madhurya Bhava* can be experienced in the state of separation from the beloved or in the state of union with the beloved. Love of God experienced as a state of separation from Him is called as *Viraha Bhakti* and Love of God experienced as complete union with Him is called as '*Madhurya Bhakti*'. The term 'Bridal Mysticism' is popularly used for this same concept. *Sambhog Sringar* also refers to this relationship in classical poetic vocabulary.

In the same framework, Alvar saints fondly take on the role of Krishna's beloved to express their deep longing to unite with Him in an eternal embrace. They express their *Bhakti* through their songs in state of *Viraha* (separation) as well as in state of *Sambhoga* (union). Though all the eleven Alvars use this *bhava*, Tirumangai Alvar, Nammalvar and Andal stand out in their use of 'Bridal Mysticism'. As a result, a unique urgency and intensity runs through their songs.²⁸

²⁶O, Great Moon! My dark hued little child ,
my sweet ambrosia, my master calls and
beckons to you with his wee hands.If you
wish to play with him, do not hide behind the
clouds. Come running here happily.

[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 11]

²⁷If you catch insects and let them into
the calves' ears, they will go helter skelter
and run away. Let me see how you gobble butter
thereafter. O Lord who shot through seven trees,
it is your birth star, Sravanam today. You must
have your bath. My master, do not run away,
come hither!

[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 29]

²⁸Saint Nammalvar sings:

O Gregarious bees go drink the nectar from
the Tulasi flowers worn by the lord,—
he steered the chariot for the Pandavas against
the great army in war—come back quickly and

Before we take up an analysis of Andal's Madhurya *Bhakti*, it should be noted at this point that *Bhakti Shastra*-s including Narada's **Bhakti Sutra**, Shandilya's **Bhakti Sutra** and **Bhagwat Purana** etc. exposit *Bhakti* not only as a means (*Sadhan Rupa*) but also as a goal (*Sadhya Rupa*). This goal is worth pursuing for the eternal joy it ensues in the Bhakta. The Bhakta is not aiming to achieve anything else but *Bhakti* itself.

This particular theme runs through the entire Alvar corpus also. Jeev Goswami in his famous text *Durgam Sangamni* distinguishes between '*Sadhanrupa*' *Bhakti* and '*Sadhya-rupa*' *Bhakti*. '*Sadhanrupa*' *Bhakti* (relating to the means) is further divided into '*Vaidhi*' *Bhakti* and '*Raganuga*' *Bhakti*. In '*Vaidhi*' *Bhakti*, Bhakta takes up the means as laid down in *Shastras*. '*Shravan*', '*Kirtan*', '*Poojan*', '*Archan*' and '*Padasevan*' etc. fall under this category. '*Raganuga*' *Bhakti* is marked by the fundamental human tendency to love. *Dasya*, *Sakhya*, *Vatsalya* and *Madhurya* come in the category of *Raganuga Bhakti*. In this kind of *Bhakti*, the Bhakta is able to transform the base emotions of *Kama* (lust) and *Vasana* (desire) into a purer emotion towards *ishta*, the chosen God. In a way, when a Bhakta takes first steps of '*Vaidhi Bhakti*' i.e. *Shravan*, *Kirtan*, *Manan*, *Archan*, *Padasevan*, then these steps serve as a means to a higher form of '*Raganuga Bhakti*' which finally leads to '*Prema Bhakti*' which is a state of pure joy and love. Sage Narada defines this *Bhakti* as "*Sa Tvasmin Param Premsvarupa*", which means that "it (*Bhakti*) is of the nature of ultimate Love for the Divine". It is complete merging with the Divine and a state of self realization or *Moksha*.

Andal's Madhurya Bhakti

Andal was born in Srivelliputtur in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu in mid-ninth century A.D. According to the legend associated with her life, Vishnuchitta Alvar, the head priest in the Srivelliputtur temple found this baby girl in his *tulsi*-grove (basil-garden). He brought up the girl with enormous affection and care, thinking of her to be a gift of God.

Andal grew up in Vishnuchitta's household in a very pious and devotional atmosphere. In Andal's time *Bhakti* (devotion) had already captured the imagination of the people as

blow his fragrance over my coiffure flowers.
[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 539]

senior Nayanmar and Alvar saints had already been singing in rapture the songs of love for God. According to Prema Nandkumar:

Andal grew up at a time when the *Bhakti* movement was in its noon-day glory. The first group of Alvars had sung of the Lord in manifold ways, and the general public fondly repeated these songs as though they were the Tamil versions of Vedas, for the songs were musical, literary and above all, embedded with the wisdom of the ages. To Andal and her companions singing the pasurams must have been a favourite pastime. [Devotional Poets and Mystics: 1978 rpt. 1991:47]

Andal's foster father Vishnuchitta was a great poet and saint (one of the Alvars himself) and under his tutelage Andal must have received knowledge about the legends of Vishnu and his *Avataras*. Myths about her say that her consciousness was so infused with the '*sanskaras*' of *Bhakti* and devotion from a very tender age, that when she precociously fell in love with Krishna '*Avatara*' of Vishnu, she adored herself with the garland that her father kept for the temple deity. She must have felt that she had all the right to wear it. This act, which according to the sacred injunctions would be considered as an act of grievous sin, was given a legitimate sanction by the Lord himself who appeared in Vishnuchitta's dream and commanded him that henceforth only the garlands worn by Goda (Andal) would be acceptable to Him. After this sign of confirmation of reciprocation of her love from the Lord, Andal now was immersed in emotion of intense love for Him and craved for a union with her *Ishta*. In her life Andal achieved this goal of union with her chosen Lord at Srirangam. Vishnuchitta Alvar is directed in a dream to prepare for Andal's marriage with the Lord. Accordingly, Andal decked up as a bride, is taken to Srirangam in a procession in a palanquin. After reaching Srirangam, when she sees her Lord's figure lying on Ananta, she goes forward and disappears into the figure.

This is in short the story of her life as it comes down to us through various myths and legends. She attained the status of an Alvar saint and was the only woman Alvar. She is considered to be a reincarnation of Vishnu's consort Bhudevi. Hence her statue finds place next to that of Vishnu in the sanctum sanctorum of many of the Srivaishnava

temples while all the other Alvars find their place in a different space assigned together to all of them.

Andal's **Tiruppavai** and **Nachiar Tirumoli** are two beautiful garlands of thirty and one hundred and forty three songs respectively. These two poems reveal that a very evolved consciousness is at work here. **Tiruppavai** is a single narrative poem with thirty song stanzas and **Nachiar Tirumoli** is a song - sequence of fourteen poems with ten 'pasurams' or stanzas each. In **Tiruppavai**, the theme is a journey to the house of Lord for a meeting with him (union with the Chosen One), in **Nachiar Tirumoli** the theme is more openly 'viraha -bhava' (separation in love sentiment) for the chosen one (Krishna). **Tiruppavai** songs can be conventionally categorized as *Madhurya Bhakti* because here the poetic personae are none else but 'gopikas' and Krishna (the classical source and reference point of *Madhurya Bhakti* begins with them). However, the songs in **Nachiar Tirumoli** sequence are a standard example of 'bridal mysticism' or *Viraha Bhakti* (which is often not distinguished from *Madhurya Bhakti*) because these songs describe the anguish of a beloved /bhakta/bride from her ishta. *Viraha -Bhakti* is the chief sentiment that runs through most of the *Bhakti* poetry. Here, the bhakta (devotee) in the role of God's beloved/bride expresses her deep anguish due to the separation from her Lover/God.

Nachiar Tirumoli is a poem where the *bhakta* Andal treats god as her Husband/Lover and exercises her exclusive rights as a wife/loved on Him. She chides Him, abuses Him, pleads to Him and wants Him intensely. But in **Tiruppavai**, compassion for the community is privileged over individual passion and the *bhakta* feels the bond with her friends and wants all of them and finally the whole community to partake of the grace that flows after the ritual (*Pavai*) is undertaken.

It is evident that while **Nachiar Tirumoli** celebrates intense personal emotion for the God, **Tiruppavai** celebrates the common human bond within the community and then of the community with the God. **Nachiar Tirumoli** is exclusive in approach, **Tiruppavai** is inclusive in approach. **Tiruppavai** is generally treated as an earlier composition and **Nachiar Tirumoli** follows thereafter. However, a close reading indicates that since **Tiruppavai** is a poem about a rendezvous with Krishna and **Nachiar Tirumoli** is one

about the desire to have a meeting with Him, **Nachiar Tirumoli** could easily be sequenced as a composition written prior to **Tiruppavai**. Also song compositions of **Tiruppavai** are more intricate and esoteric in nature. The later part of this study discusses in detail various elements that go into making **Tiruppavai** a highly complex yet a very refined act of creative poetic expression.

To say it differently, songs in **Tiruppavai** and **Nachiar Tirumoli** are about an intense desire to merge with God physically as well as metaphysically. In **Nachiar Tirumoli** she depicts various episodes of her love affair with God Himself. In the fourteen decads of **Nachiar Tirumoli**, the sixth one is extremely popular where Andal is depicting the dream of her marriage to the Lord Himself:

I had a dream O Sister! The town was decked
with festoons and golden urns.

Sorrounded by a thousand caparisoned elephants
our lord Narayana came walking towards me.

[Srirama Bharti: 2000: 112]

The sequence called "*Varnamayiram*" is considered very auspicious in Tamil Nadu and is sung at the time of weddings by the priests. This particular sequence is significant, as Andal describes every rite and ritual of marriage in minutest detail revealing the divine bridegroom in all His Glory. In this song, she is actually describing the vision of the Lord as seen in her dream. She is sharing her revelation with us through her song. Thus, the entire poem then becomes a medium of expression of an experience of *Bhakti*, that for a *bhata* is the ultimate goal.

The poem **Tiruppavai** is also about the significance of living in higher realms of awareness. The entire poem is a complex work of art which enjoins in itself a highly symbolic design of a theological base. *Bhakti*, as it has been conceived in Vaishnavism is expounded in the scheme of a poem in all its subtlety. Apparently the poem is a simple song of celebration, among the *sakhi-s*, *gopika-s* or friends, of a ritual which is a portent of prosperity and fulfillment for all of them. However, just a closer look at the structure and one can see the subtle message of the poem which is to dissolve lower forms of desires into the highest desire – to become one with the Lord. Dr. Eric J. Lott in his essay

“The Divine Drum: Interpreting a Primal Symbol” describes how the girls in **Tiruppavai** ask for ‘*parai*’ (the drum) along with other material graces from Krishna as a consequence to successful realization of their Margali bath ritual. The ‘drum’ signifies the meaner desires. It is understood as “what we desire” or as a “paltry thing”. The etymological meaning of ‘*parai*’ (= lowly, mean) thus being brought out.” [Sri Andal: 1985:35]. In stanza 26 of **Tiruppavai**, Andal says: “We have performed the Margali rites as our elders decreed. Now hear what we want: conches like your milk-white *Panchahjanya* which reverberates through all creation with its booming sound, a big wide drum and singers, who sing *Pallandu*, a bright lamp, festoons and flags,---O Lord, grant us these.” But as the poem progresses, this desire is taken over by a single overriding desire which is to be with Krishna and be with Him in all the births. “Know that these goods are not what we came for. Through seven lives and forever we would be close to you and serve you alone. And if our desires be different, you must change them.” (Stanza 29.). Dr. Lott comments in this regard:

The more usual Vaisnava position is (that) the lesser life – goals (e.g. the pastoral concerns of verses 3 and 4) are not in themselves evils; they are rather good and valuable. Yet what is needed above all is the vision of everything in life utterly dependent upon the grace of the Lord.... God’s gracious aid is essential, therefore (we are) to move from one level of life-goal to this highest level in which all the lesser goals eventually become included. To use more traditional language, *sadhana*- (means of worship) *Bhakti* needs to be transposed into *sadhya*- (that which is the goal of worship) *Bhakti*; God as *upaya* (means) is to be experienced as final *Upeya*. [Sri Andal: 1985: 39]

It is important to note, that in Andal’s *Bhakti* scheme *Madhurya Bhava* was predominant as it fell into place naturally due to her gender. To experience this *bhava* (sentiment) might have been primarily an act of pure imagination for other Alvars as all of them belonged to the masculine gender. For *bhaktas* like Andal, it was extremely important to ascribe a specific form to God, as without conceiving the form they could not relate to Him.

What transformations Andalus effects in inherited conventions and materials through her *madhurya*-centred compositions and how other genres of art and culture integrate Andalus's life and works will be dealt with in chapter four.

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