

had taken root to such an extent in south India, the advent of the Aryans to south India must have taken place at least two or three centuries prior to this period. The Nambūtiris of Kerala are called Malayāla Brahmins. Between them and the Brahmins of other countries there are differences in manners and customs. They are given below:—

- 1) The Brahmins of other parts of India do not perform agnihotra rites (maintaining the holy fire by burnt offering) so elaborately as the Malayāla Brahmins.
- 2) Among the sixteen purificatory rites, Agnisvikāra (or taking up of sacrificial fire) is an important item in Malabar. From Vedic period Agni (Fire) had become a prominent God. Most of the verses in Rgveda are concerned with fire. The attachment of the Brahmins of Kerala to fire shows their antiquity.
- 3) Much importance is attached to the learning of scriptures and priest-hood in Kerala. There were 18 Maṭhas and residential institutions in Kerala for giving religious education.
- 4) The peculiar type of recitation of the Vedas of the Malayāla Brahmins and the accompanying gestures of their hands and the movements of the head at the time of recitation are considered by them to be ancient. Even today certain sounds are produced by them in the Vedic way. (For instance Samrāl—Samrāt; Vaṣar—Vasaṭ; Iḍe—Ile etc.).
- 5) In Malabar there is a customary atonement or expiation called Vrātyastoma for those Brahmin boys who had not undergone investiture with the sacred thread within the stipulated time. This shows the stress laid on the need of religious education.
- 6) The custom that all the male members of the family except the family chief should be engaged in 'Snātaka-vṛtti' (should remain celibates even after education) is prevalent only in Malabar.
- 7) Much importance is attached to evening worship in Kerala. At that time the Vedic gods are not hailed. But Brahmins of other places do not seem to attach so much importance to this practice.
- 8) The Brahmins outside Kerala repeat the mantras uttered by the priest and perform the functions, at the time of meditation and worship. But in Kerala for meditation and worship with or without incantations a priest is not necessary. This indicates the practice in vogue during Vedic period before the priestly class became predominant.
- 9) The Nambūtiris have recognized only three Vedas.
- 10) The Kerala Brahmins wear only one sacred thread. The Nambūtiris became predominant in Kerala and began to have a hand in the various spheres of activities. Thus the Aryan civilization shook the customary faith and religion of Kerala from top to bottom and the Aryan religion hoisted its flag of victory here. Aryan literature also found its way into Kerala. The authors and scholars in Kerala began to imitate it. The Nambūtiris erected temples in Kerala with the help of local chieftains. The sounds of alphabets, sentence pattern, grammar, poetic tradition etc. of Malayālam language underwent a thorough change. Sanskrit education spread far and wide. They spread Aryan civilization through 'Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭtam (Narration of mythological stories with gestures etc. and collective dance) Pāṭhaka and Saṅghakkali (Musical lectures and dramatic performances), in connection with festivals in the temples.

They absorbed many of the customs and manners of Kerala. The Nambūtiris who had adopted priest-hood as their career had amassed wealth and landed property in the capacities of priests and authorities of the temples. Some of them became Kings (e.g. King of Idappally, King of Campakaṣṣeri etc.). They kept up the contact with the people of the locality by means of morganatic marriages and made their positions secure. Thus these people, though a small minority, were able to hold sway over the people of Kerala for a long time.

NAMMĀLVĀR. The first of the twelve great Ālvārs. The Śaivite devotees of South India are called Nāyanārs and the Vaiṣṇavite devotees, Ālvārs. The word ālvār means, a devotee of God. The Vaiṣṇava religion says that the twelve ālvārs are the incarnations of Ādiṣeṣa and Garuḍa the followers and the embodied deities of the Conch and the discus the weapons of Viṣṇu. It is mentioned in Śrīmad Bhāgavata that divine persons who are followers of Viṣṇu will incarnate on the earth in Kali-yuga and that their native places will be the banks of the holy rivers in Drāviḍa such as Tāmraparṇī, Kṛtamālā (Vaigai), Payasvinī (Pāpanāṣinī) and Kāverī. It is stated about these divine persons in Viṣṇumāhātmya that they would take birth in any caste and compose Drāviḍa songs and thereby propagate lofty truths. The collection of Drāviḍa songs thus composed by the ālvārs is called 'Divya Prabandha' (Divine Composition).

There are four thousand songs in four parts in the Divine composition and hence it has the name Nālāyira Prabandham 'Four thousand composition'. The theme of the 1st and 2nd thousands is a secret known as 'Tirumantra' (the divine spell). The third thousand is concerned with the "Caramaśloka" (the verse of death) and in the fourth "Dvayamantra" is dealt with. The Tirumantra (the divine spell) is the collection of three words Om, namaḥ and Nārāyaṇa. 'Om' and 'namaḥ' are explained in the first thousand and the word Nārāyaṇa in the second thousand of the composition. The Caramaśloka (the verse of death) is the last utterance of the songster-priest. It is a propagation of the theme of seeking refuge. The individual soul has to seek refuge under the universal soul, unconditionally. This is what is called 'Prapatti'. Dvayamantra (the two fold mantra) deals with the aim and the ways for the realisation of that aim. It would be possible only by the help of Lakṣmī Bhagavatī (the goddess Lakṣmī). It is a verse of only two lines.

The first and foremost among the ālvārs is Nammālvār. 'Tiruvāymoli' is his work. It had been predicted in Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa that at the beginning of Kaliyuga. Viṣṇu Senānī named Viṣvaksena would incarnate as Nammālvār and that he would reinstate the Vaiṣṇavite religion. It is hinted in Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa that Nammālvār would incarnate in Śrīnagarī (Tirunagarī) on the banks of river Tāmraparṇī in the Kingdom of Pāṇḍya. As was fore-told Nammālvār was born in Tirunagarī. The present name of this place is 'Ālvār tirunagarī'.

There is a traditional lore about the birth of Nammālvār. There was a ruling chief named Kāriyār in Tirunagarī. Udayamaṅkayār was his wife. The couple once went to the Vaiṣṇavite temple near Mahendra mountain known as Tirukkuruṅkuṭi temple and prayed to the