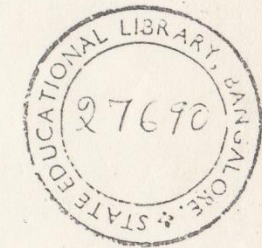


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Madras. Though they refer their origin to the teaching of the Saiva missionary, Sankarāchārya, they are not exclusively Saivite in their beliefs. They teach the identity of man's spirit with the One Spirit (Ātman, Brahma), which is cognizable only through meditation. They recognize the orthodox triad—Brahmā, Vishnu, Siva—as coequal manifestations of the one Eternal Spirit, and destined ultimately to be reabsorbed into this Spirit. They thus represent the highest form of Brāhmanic pantheism. Brāhmanism in Southern India has always claimed to preserve a higher standard of orthodoxy than that which prevails in other parts of the country. Its activity is shown by the fact that the reforming mission of Sankarāchārya had its origin there, and at the present day the Brāhman of Madras exercises an influence much greater than that of his brethren in the North. The explanation of this is that the South was not involved in the struggle with the Kshattriyas and Buddhism, and was beyond the reach of the persecution which accompanied the early Muslim invasions.

The Lingāyats.

On a much lower level are the Lingāyats, 'wearers of the *lingam* or phallus.' The founder of the sect was Basava, the southern form of the Sanskrit Vrishabha, a title of Nandi, the bull on which Siva rides. He was a Brāhman of Bijāpur, and prime minister of Bijjala, one of the Kalachurya kings of Kalyāni (circa 1145-67 A.D.). The story of his career is overlaid with a mass of legend, the Lingāyat account being embodied in the Basava Purāna, while the Jain narrative contained in the Bijjalarāya Charita is very different. From the Lingāyat account it would seem that Basava and his nephew took advantage of their official position to persecute the Jains and other enemies of the new faith. But Bijjala himself was a Jain, and a reaction occurred, which culminated in the death or abdication of the king and the murder of Basava.

The sect is chiefly found in the Southern Deccan, where they call themselves Vira-Saivas, 'brave or fierce Saivas,' but are popularly known as Lingāyats or Lingavants. The chief characteristics of the sect in its early days were adoration of the *lingam* and of Nandi, Siva's bull, and disbelief in the transmigration of the soul. They rejected infant marriage, and permitted widows to remarry. Their chief seat is in the Kanarese country, and it is mainly due to their influence that this powerful and polished language has been preserved. The main body of the community, who are initiated by what is known as the 'eightfold sacrament' (*ashṭavarṇa*); are known as Panchamsālis, descendants of the original Brāhman converts.

To these has been added a group of later converts. At the outset caste distinctions were abolished, but, as is so often the case with religious movements of this kind, a reaction set in. The original, or high-caste section, introduced a more elaborate form of worship, framed on the Brāhmanic model. The new converts were forced to take a lower place, and only the Jangamas, or priests, being a privileged class, deigned to share their food. This schism, which began at the close of the seventeenth century, has continued, until at the last Census the higher group claimed to be recorded as Vira-Saiva Brāhmans, and proposed that the others should be placed in three classes according as they sprang from castes ranking as Kshattriyas, Vaisyas, or Sūdras.

According to the view of most foreign students of Hinduism a sharp line is to be drawn between the beliefs of the Saiva and Vaishnava sectarians. But Hinduism is wonderfully eclectic, and the two sects are regarded as complementary, rather than antagonistic. While Siva, the god of destruction and reproduction, is associated with many practices at once grotesque and repellent, the faith of the worshippers of Vishnu is more human, impersonating the 'higher evolution,' the upward tendency of the human spirit. It leads the believer back to the graceful worship of the early gods, while it has included in its pantheon the forms of national heroes, who live among men, and furnish an ideal of manliness, beauty, and the delights of love. In his highest form Vishnu is in a state of repose, not activity, which is the note of Saiva beliefs. He occasionally deigns to revisit the earth in human or animal shape by a succession of Avatāras or incarnations. This theory of successive divine embodiments is one of the most effective doctrines of the later Hinduism. In it the eclecticism and adaptability of the faith are most fully realized. In the animal incarnations we may see either an indication of the absorption of the totemistic or beast gods of the lower races, or, from the esoteric point of view, the pantheistic idea of the divine spirit immanent in all the forms of creation. In the deification of heroes we have a development of one of the main principles of the Hindu renaissance, which first begins to show itself in the Mahābhārata.

The forms of Vishnu are manifold. In Travancore, where he is the state deity, he is worshipped as Padmanābha, 'he of whose navel springs the lotus.' But, as popular gods, his most important incarnations are Krishna and Rāma.

Both Krishna and Rāma may, in their earliest conception, Krishna.